



The Furnace to Furnace group advocates for a full motor-free shared-use trail connecting the Eliza Furnace Trail to Carrie Furnace and beyond

## TRAILS IN SOUTH HAZELWOOD

Paul S. Heckbert  
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A trail connection from Hazelwood to the Duck Hollow Trail and other points upriver along the Monongahela River is vital for several reasons:

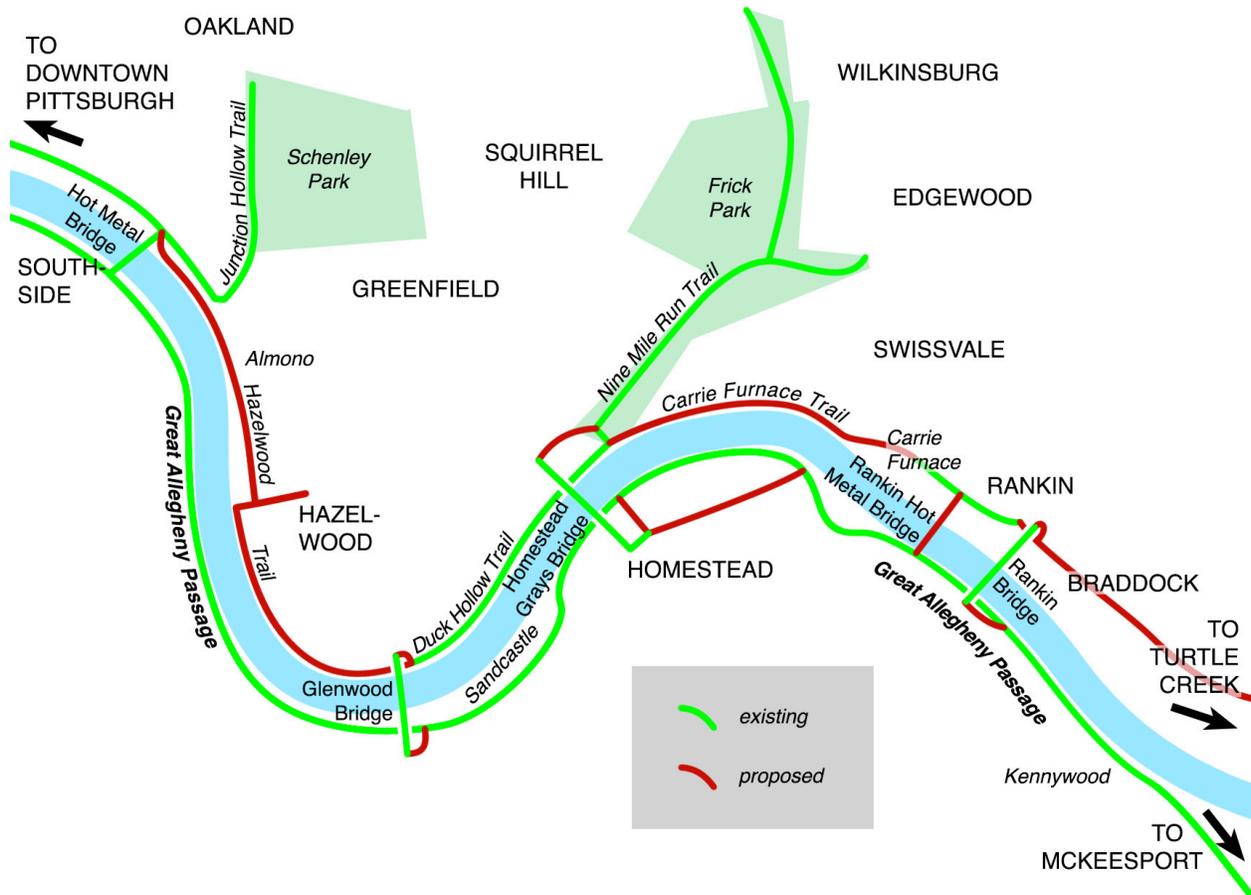
- the hilly topography makes the river the natural route;
- hills are more of an impediment for cyclists than for cars; to get between Hazelwood and Frick Park, say, most cyclists would prefer to stay low and bike along the river, rather than take the shorter, but slower route over Squirrel Hill;
- it would help revitalize Hazelwood and other Mon Valley communities, such as Homestead, Rankin, and Braddock;
- Hazelwood is hemmed in by the river on the west and by Greenfield's hill to the east. Without a connection to the south, the only good way for cyclists to get in and out of Hazelwood is to the north!
- Many Hazelwood residents lack a car. Walking and cycling trails are a good alternative and augmentation to transit.

Other trail developments are happening along the Monongahela River. As of 2019, Allegheny County is doing a feasibility study of trail extending from Braddock up the Turtle Creek Valley. In Trafford, it could connect to the existing Westmoreland Heritage Trail, which runs east to Monroeville and beyond. Allegheny County needs to catch up to Westmoreland County in trail-building. Also in 2019, Swissvale is beginning a feasibility study of connector trails from its neighborhoods to the proposed Carrie Furnace Trail along the Mon.

Currently, there is no legal connection for cyclists to bike from Hazelwood to the Duck Hollow Trail, because the Duck Hollow Trail dead-ends into a fence erected by Allegheny Valley Railroad just east of the Glenwood Bridge. This means that the only cycling route out of Hazelwood's south end is Route 885 over the Glenwood Bridge. Cyclists currently have two poor choices: either ride in the roadway with the speeding cars and risk their lives, or ride on one of the sidewalks of the bridge and encounter long staircases at the south end of the bridge. And if their desired destination is somewhere north of the Mon, such as Frick Park or Braddock, they will have to cross the river twice. The bridges upstream of Glenwood are either very high (Homestead) or quite

dangerous (Rankin) for cyclists. Because of the poor connections at the south end of Hazelwood, few people cycle here.

The broad goals for trails along the north bank of the Mon were outlined in an op-ed that appeared in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette in 2017, included below. <http://www.post-gazette.com/opinion/Op-Ed/2017/01/29/Let-s-complete-trails-on-both-banks-of-the-Mon/stories/201701290147>



## Let's complete trails on both banks of the Mon

January 29, 2017 12:00 AM

By Paul S. Heckbert

Seven years ago, the Great Allegheny Passage trail did not go past Kennywood and Sandcastle, so it did not reach Pittsburgh. That trail has since been completed, so today trails connect 320 miles from Downtown Pittsburgh to Washington, D.C.

The GAP trail is enormously popular with bike commuters, recreational cyclists, joggers, dog walkers and rollerbladers. Tourists come from around the world to

bike the trail to Washington. Cyclists from Downtown use the city's Healthy Ride shared bikes to pedal across Hot Metal Bridge and venture out on the GAP trail to watch the bald eagles in Hays.

The GAP trail sits on the Monongahela River's left bank (the left bank from the point of view of a boat floating downstream). The GAP trail is a great success. On the right bank, however, between Hazelwood and Braddock, there is no such continuous trail. It is difficult to travel along the river there by bike or foot and difficult to get over the river to the GAP trail on the other side.

To encourage all Pittsburghers to stay active and rediscover their rivers, particularly for the large number of people in the East End, it's time to complete the network of trails on the right bank of the Mon and provide easy connections to the GAP trail across the river.

Trails in Pittsburgh, especially along our rivers, have been a huge success. And, given how much they improve our region's quality of life, they are a great bargain.

People are cycling more to save money, to combat obesity or diabetes, to reduce pollution, to get some exercise while commuting, to avoid the expense of parking a car, or just because cycling is fun and relaxing. For some trips, it's quicker than driving.

But, on the right bank of the river, if you were to bike today from Hazelwood to Braddock, you would endure the following: Sharing a road with speeding cars, rough gravel near Glenwood Bridge, an illegal portage across railroad tracks, skirting a railroad fence and several miles of a gravel and mud service road. It is unpleasant, so few do it. But if a proper trail were built, we'd have 100 or 1,000 times more people biking, walking, rollerblading and otherwise enjoying this route.

Let me tell you what's needed between Hot Metal Bridge and Braddock, which is illustrated by the accompanying map.

A road with an adjacent bike path is under construction at the ALMONO redevelopment site in Hazelwood; it should open in a couple of years.

South of Hazelwood is Glenwood rail yard, a tough obstacle. To build a trail around it, we'll need cooperation from CSX and AVR rail-roads. Just beyond, a ramp up to Glenwood Bridge or a new bridge over the railroad tracks is needed.

Continuing upstream, we come upon Duck Hollow Trail. Between there and Carrie Furnace, the riverbank is nearly wilderness. At Duck Hollow, where Nine Mile Run flows into the Mon, the Nine Mile Run Trail branches left through Frick Park. If your destination is Squirrel Hill, Point Breeze, Homewood, Wilkinsburg, Edgewood, Regent Square or Swissvale, you turn off here. You also can cross the river using the Homestead Grays Bridge, but this entails a 160-foot climb.

Farther along, at the brownfield redevelopment site at Carrie Furnace, we find a prize of great potential, the Rankin Hot Metal Bridge. This bridge is low, and it could accommodate a lane that would connect directly with the GAP trail on the other bank. This would be the best trail connection across the river.

The Rankin bridge was sold to Allegheny County on the condition that it someday accommodate cyclists and pedestrians. Refurbishment is estimated to cost \$30 million, mostly to provide for cars and trucks.

Continuing upstream, we ride along the wide sidewalk of Carrie Furnace Boulevard in Rankin, and this connects us to the Rankin bridge or Braddock Avenue, which runs through the center of Braddock.

From Braddock, a natural route is to follow Turtle Creek upstream. If Allegheny County built bike lanes and trails up that valley to Trafford, they could connect with Turtle Creek Rail Trail, which goes out to Murrysville and which is scheduled to be completed this year by Westmoreland County. This trail soon will connect with trails that continue 75 miles east, most of the way to Altoona!

If we complete the Mon trail network, it would strengthen Pittsburgh's growing international reputation as a model of revitalization, while making Pittsburghers and our communities happier and healthier.

We should set a goal to build all of these trails within the next 10 years. To make this happen, we need support from residents, business owners and politicians. You can help by donating time or money to trail organizations such as the Steel Valley Trail Council and Friends of the Riverfront.

Paul S. Heckbert is past secretary of the Steel Valley Trail Council and former professor of computer science at Carnegie Mellon University.

If a trail connection from Hazelwood to the Duck Hollow Trail were made, and the Carrie Furnace Trail were built, many cycling and walking options open up:

- people commuting between Hazelwood and other Mon Valley towns
- people commuting between north bank Mon towns (such as Braddock or Swisshelm Park) and jobs downtown
- Hazelwood kids going to movies or shopping at the Waterfront or going to Sandcastle
- recreational cycling, walking, and jogging for all ages
- easier access between Frick Park and Hazelwood

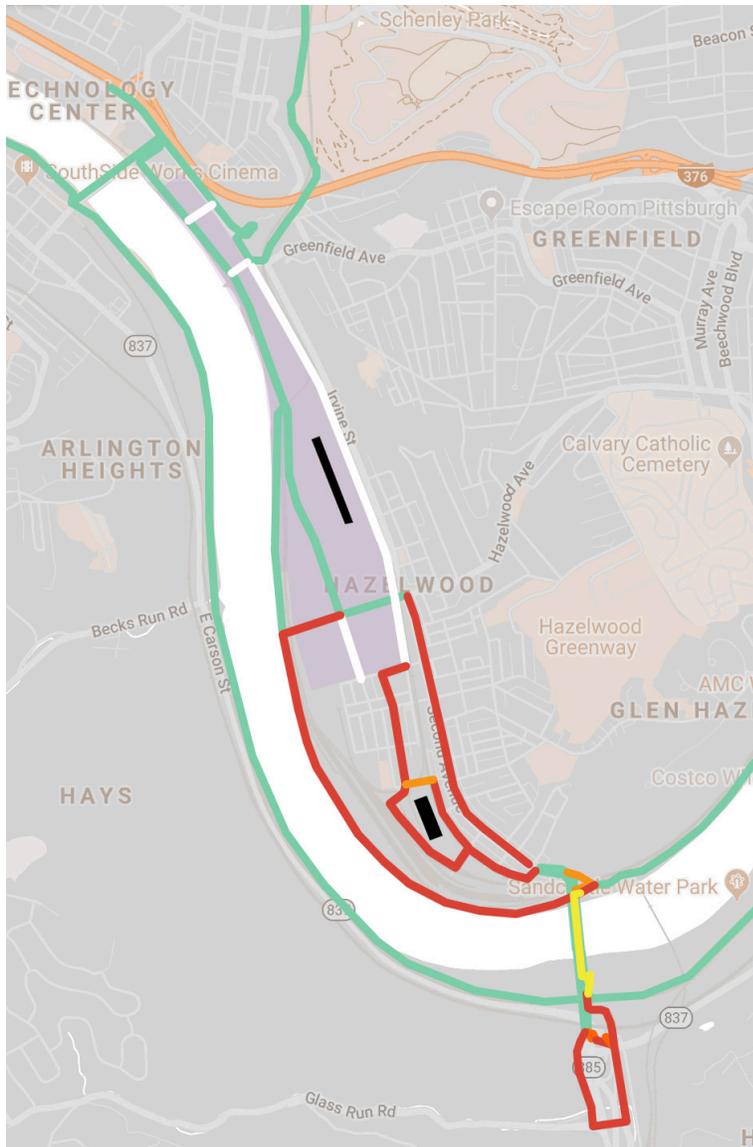
Relative to freeway building or building new bridges over the Mon (see Peduto's recent proposal), building trails is inexpensive and pays for itself through improvements to the city's reputation and property values. Good trail connections north and south through Hazelwood would help with Hazelwood's revitalization, benefiting both the existing and future residents.

### **What's needed at the south end of Hazelwood:**

- **trail connection from Hazelwood to Duck Hollow Trail**
- **trail connection from Hazelwood to GAP trail south of river**
- **trail connection from Duck Hollow Trail to GAP trail**

The following maps are snapshots of an interactive google map:

**<http://tinyurl.com/southhazelwood>**



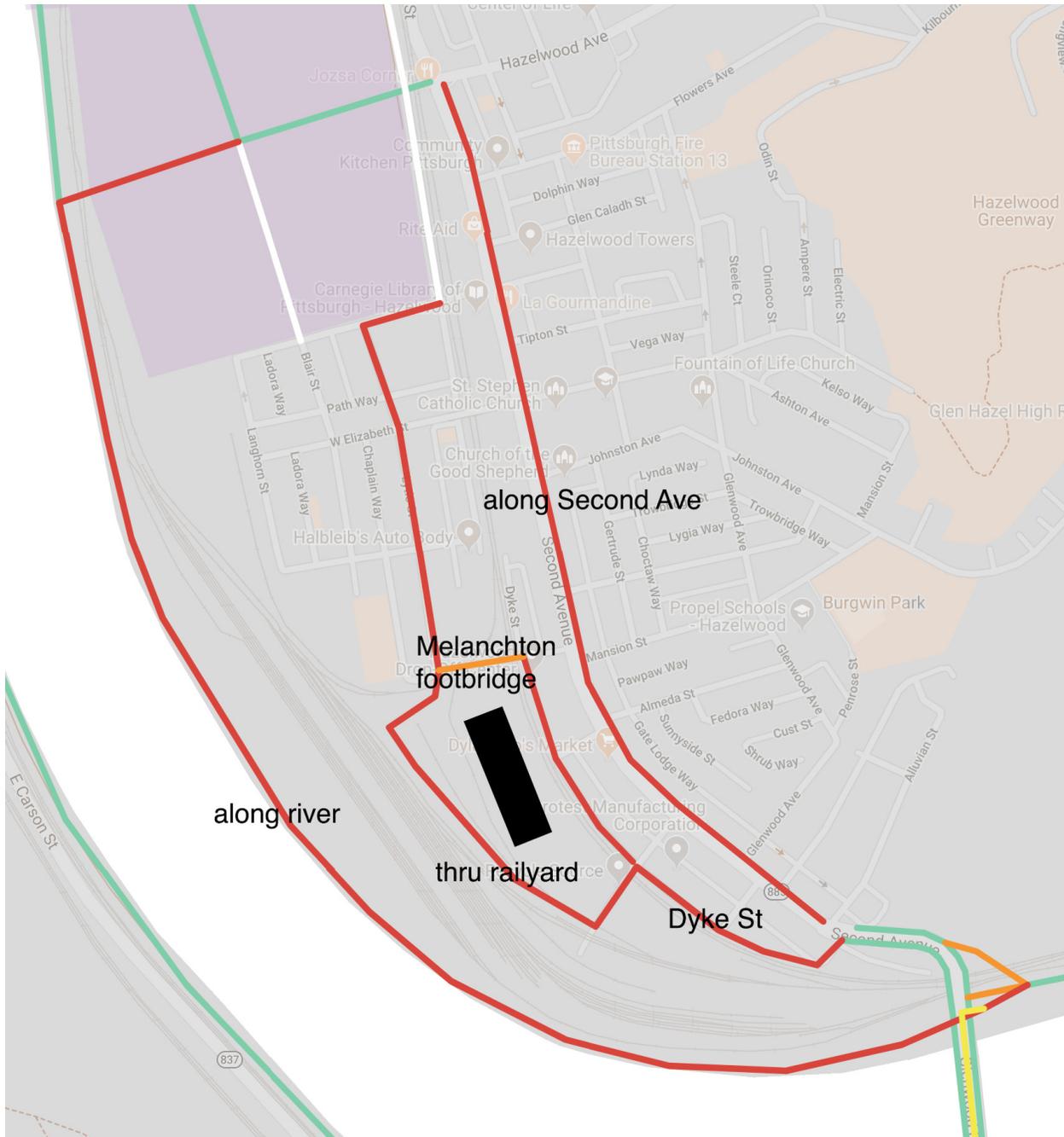
Map key:  
 green=existing trail  
 red=proposed trail  
 orange=proposed ramp  
 yellow=proposed catwalk  
 white=planned roads of Hazelwood Green

We could call the part of Hazelwood north of Hazelwood Ave “north Hazelwood” and the part south of that line (including Glenwood) “south Hazelwood”. At a high level, notice on this map that north Hazelwood is currently relatively well connected (several green trails), while Hazelwood is abysmally connected (no green lines!). This is sad, considering that most of the population of Hazelwood is in the south.

The trail issues in south Hazelwood break into three sections:

- A. getting around the Glenwood railyard
- B. connections at the north end of the Glenwood Bridge
- C. connections at the south end of the Glenwood Bridge

**A. Getting around the Glenwood railyard**



## Options:

1. **Along river.** This route would be very safe, as it's far from cars, and scenic, being close to the river. To stay out of the flood zone you'd probably need to be up high on the plateau at the level of the railyard, but there is not much unused land around the perimeter of the railyard. Extensive cooperation from CSX railroad / Allegheny Valley Railroad (AVR) would be necessary with this option. This route does not connect directly to the Hazelwood business district.

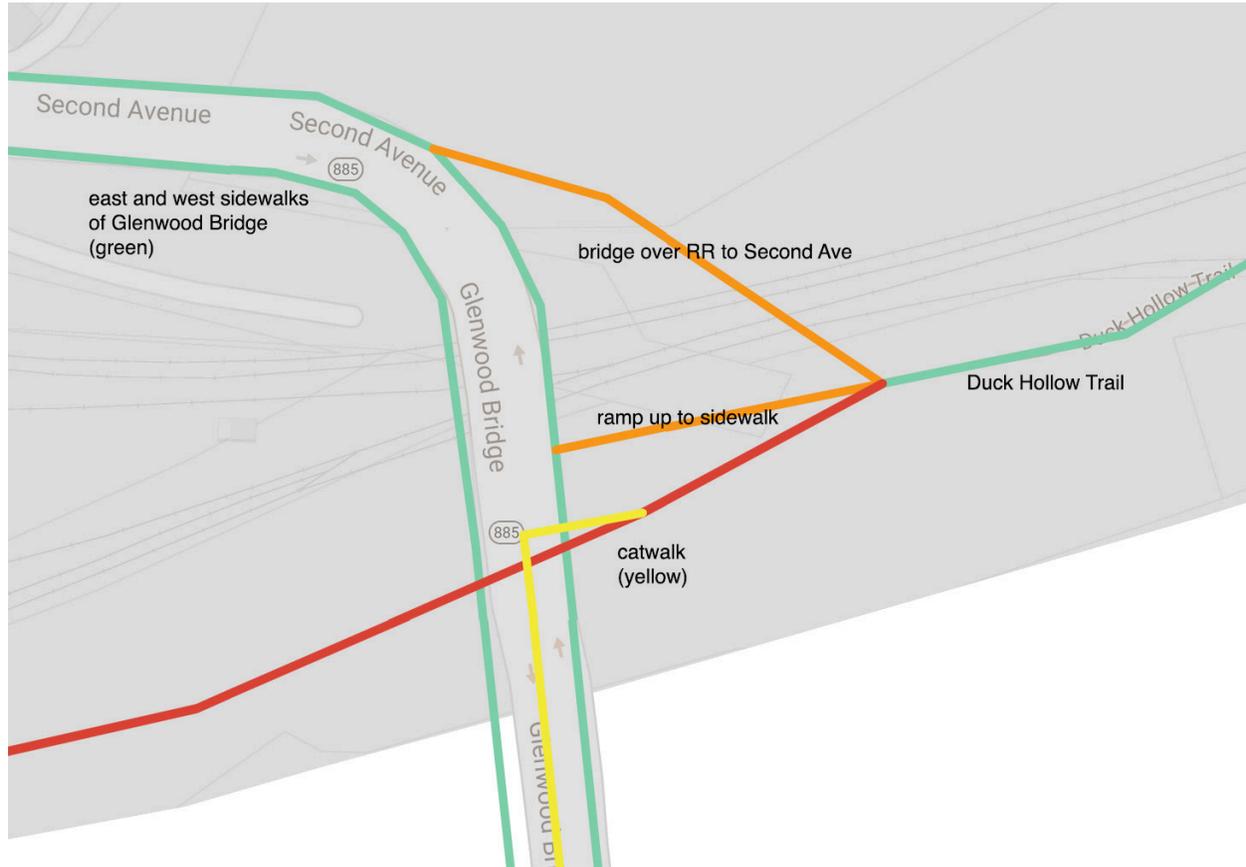
2. **Thru railyard,** around recycling building. This route is currently physically passable, but crosses CSX land and crosses several RR tracks, so it is probably unworkable.

3. **Dyke St and Melanchton bridge.** This route avoids level RR crossings, and it would be safe from heavy traffic, since it stays off Second Ave. It uses the existing Melanchton footbridge, which has stairs at each end. To make this a workable bike route, ramps would need to be built at each end of the footbridge. Part of the trail would need to be built on city-owned property between American St and Melanchton St where there is currently no road.

4. **Bike lane on Second Ave.** This option is conceptually simple, and has the benefit of connecting directly to the Hazelwood business district, so it might be best for Hazelwood locals (as opposed to cyclist thru-traffic). It is also inexpensive. To make it safe and popular, it would have to be a protected bike lane (cyclists separated from cars by bollards). If it were just paint on the road, cars would infringe on it, drive on the paint, the paint would disappear in a year or two, and very few would dare to bike there, defeating the purpose. It could be a bidirectional bike lane (similar to Penn Ave downtown). If there is sufficient road width, a *parking-protected* bidirectional bike lane could be added (bike lanes between parked cars and curb). Narrowing the existing car lanes some would help reduce car speeds (traffic calming), making the business district a more pleasant place to walk and bike. If there is insufficient road width, then car parking on one side of the street would need to be removed. (But bike racks should be added to compensate).

Overall, option 1 is the most attractive for recreational cycling and safety, while option 4 is the most attractive for neighborhood revitalization. If the "trail" through Hazelwood is in fact a bike lane, we should make sure to upgrade and maintain sidewalks, for pedestrians and wheelchair users. Currently, many sidewalks are badly cracked or overgrown.

## B. Connections at north end of Glenwood Bridge



Currently, there is no legal connection at the north end of the Glenwood Bridge! Some cyclists and pedestrians currently cross the RR tracks illegally to get between Second Ave and the Duck Hollow Trail. If a good connection were built here, the Duck Hollow Trail could become as popular as Eliza Furnace Trail.

Although some adventurous cyclists use it, I don't discuss cycling on the roadway of the Glenwood Bridge, below, because car speeds are dangerously high here. We want bike routes that parents would feel comfortable taking their children on.

The options at the north end of the bridge are:

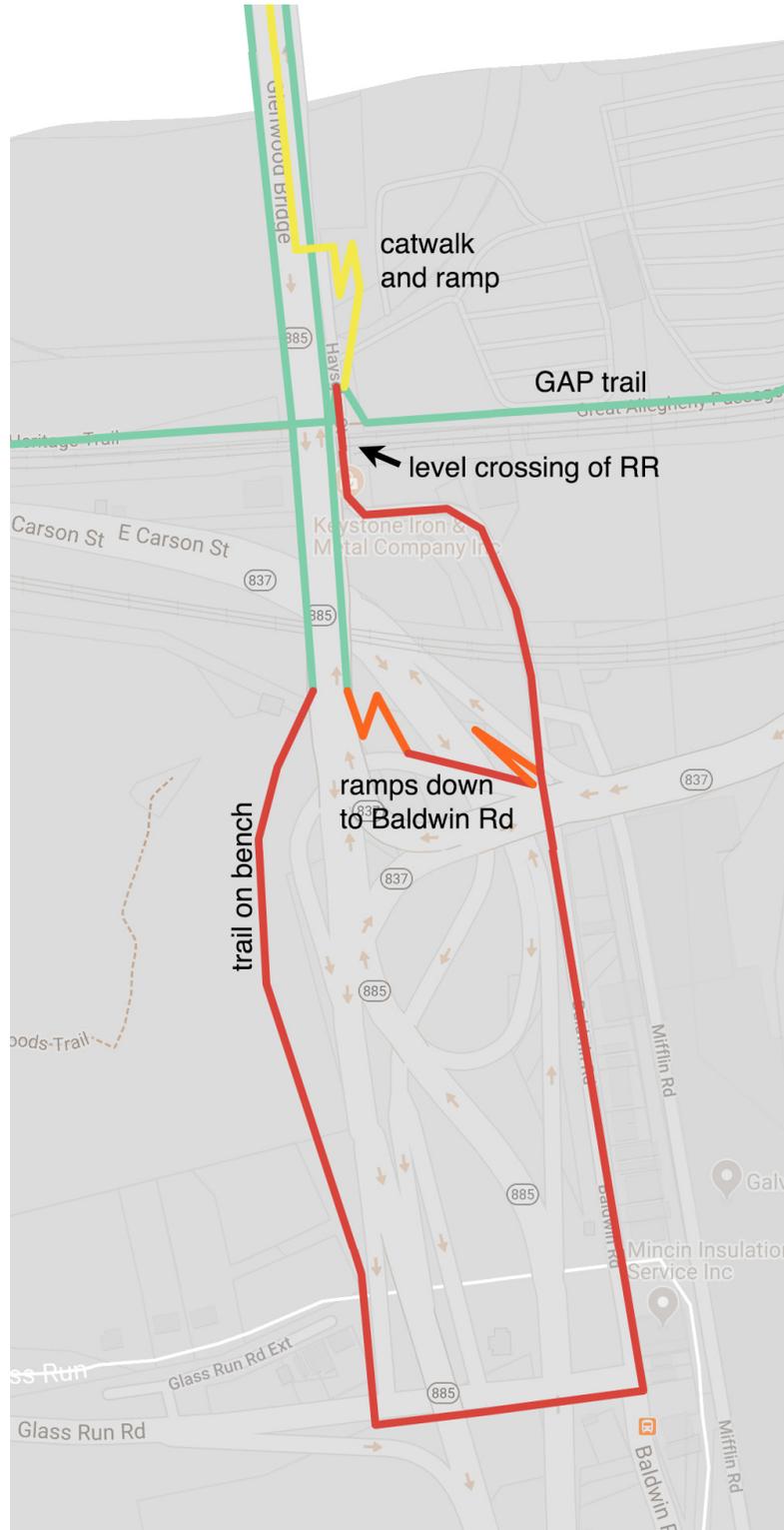
- 1. Ramp up from Duck Hollow Trail to sidewalk** (either east or west sidewalk). The ramp could be straight, like the ramp at the south end of the Fort Duquesne Bridge, or a switchback, as at the north end of the Fort Duquesne Bridge. This is probably preferable to option 2 because it does not involve construction over RR tracks. But it involves building a connection "in the air" similar to what was done recently at the Smithfield St Bridge. The sidewalk is narrow, so a platform to accommodate a wider junction would be desirable.
- 2. Bridge over CSX RR tracks from Duck Hollow Trail to Second Ave sidewalk** on

the hillside. (See map). This avoids building a connection in the air, but it requires construction over railroad tracks, so it is probably inferior to option 1.

**3. Catwalk under Glenwood Bridge.** Instead of routing most traffic along the sidewalk, an alternative is to set a catwalk on the existing horizontal girders of the bridge's truss, under the roadway. This would be safe (away from cars), at a lower elevation than the sidewalks (so less climbing at each end of the bridge), and a shorter distance to traverse (see map). At the north end of the bridge, the ramp up to the catwalk would need to rise only 4 feet. Note that if a catwalk is built, you would still want a connection such as option 1 or 2 to get to the sidewalk, for those that are not headed over the river, but rather into Hazelwood's business district. Milwaukee has a catwalk (aka "marsupial") of this sort.



### C. Connections at south end of Glenwood Bridge



We want to connect to the Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) trail (it's one of the highest-rated bike trails in the world, and a vital trail for cycling in Pittsburgh). The current options are poor: bike in the road on Glenwood Bridge and risk your life, or bike the sidewalk until it turns into a staircase, then carry your bicycle down the many steps.

The principal options for making this bikeable and ADA-compliant are:

**1. Ramp-sidewalk-ramp from bridge down to Baldwin Rd.** I'll describe the route for the east sidewalk (see map). At south end of sidewalk, near where it currently leads to stairs, build a zigzag ramp into the hillside down to the existing sidewalk of the 837-to-885 car ramp. Follow this sidewalk east for a few hundred feet. Build a switchback ramp from there down to Baldwin Rd. Then bike on Baldwin Rd (light traffic) across the CSX tracks at the existing level crossing on Haysglen St. Alternatively, or additionally, something similar could be done from the west sidewalk. Clearly, this involves building two new ramps, one cut into the hillside and the other in the air supported by pylons. The bends in any zigzags or switchbacks should be broad enough to accommodate tandem bicycles, bicycles with trailers, senior citizens, and novice cyclists. (See notes on this issue by Mary Shaw). This could also be done from the west sidewalk of the Glenwood Bridge.

**2. Trail on bench to Glass Run Rd, and Baldwin Rd.** This only works from the west sidewalk of the Glenwood Bridge. From the southern end of that sidewalk, build a trail on the existing wide bench that is cut into the hillside above route 885. This slopes down gradually over a long distance to Glass Run Rd. Build a sidewalk along Glass Run Rd eastward to Baldwin Rd (crossing one or two intersections), then share-the-road along Baldwin Rd all the way north to the GAP trail. This is less expensive to build than option 1, but it is a long route. And it's also less safe, because cyclists would be crossing route 885.

**3. Catwalk under Glenwood Bridge.** Continuing the catwalk discussion from earlier: The ramp from the catwalk to the ground at the south end of the Glenwood Bridge will require some engineering. A natural spot to ramp from catwalk to the ground is where the truss ends at the bridge's first southern pier on land. The property owners in the area are Hays Land LLC and Festival Fun Parks (Sandcastle's parent). A ramp out the east side of the bridge could switchback down onto Sandcastle property, and connect quite directly to the GAP trail. An advantage of the catwalk design is its directness. Unlike options 1 and 2 above, it does not overshoot the GAP trail and then backtrack over a level railroad crossing.

The picture below shows that first land pier, viewed from Sandcastle property.



Acknowledgments: I was helped by ideas from Matt Smuts, Jim Richter, Stephen Quick, Sara Walfoort, Tom Baxter, Mary Shaw, Andrew Krizman, and Swain Uber.

This document available online at <https://furnace2furnace.org/>