

# Brilliant Line will provide a car-free route across Allegheny River, from Pittsburgh to Sharpsburg

90.5 WESA | By [Margaret J. Krauss](#)

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*Margaret J. Krauss / 90.5 WESA*

A partial view of the Brilliant Line from Aspinwall Riverfront Park.

After more than a decade, trail advocates have succeeded in buying [the Brilliant Line](#). The nearly four-mile stretch of railroad has [long been coveted](#) by biking and walking enthusiasts eager to cross the Allegheny River without tangling with fast-moving traffic on the Highland Park Bridge.

The purchase of the rail line will provide a car-free route all the way from Pittsburgh's Homewood neighborhood to Sharpsburg and into Aspinwall.

"It's staggering," said Trish Klatt, interim director of [Allegheny River Trail Park](#), formerly Aspinwall Riverfront Park. The group has led the effort to acquire the line. "It's very exciting."

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Allegheny Valley Railroad, or AVR, owns the rail line and [agreed in 2021 to sell it to the park](#). But there was no money to complete the sale until Allegheny County used \$4.7 million in federal pandemic relief to underwrite the purchase this year.

AVR did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

About 12 years ago, Allegheny River Trail Park mapped out a corridor to run from Millvale to Freeport, but the Brilliant Line wasn't originally part of the plan. Klatt said the acquisition simply didn't seem possible.

"It's just been kind of a dream," she said.

In addition to the main route, the purchase includes spurs into O'Hara Township, St. Margaret Hospital, the Waterworks Mall, and — back on the southern side of the river — Verona.

While the acquisition has been called a once-in-a-generation opportunity for trail development, Klatt is quick to note that converting it will be a complicated process. For

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“Those bridges were not designed in any way for foot traffic,” Klatt said. They don’t “even have a solid floor.”

The entire length of the line is wide enough to meet current trail standards, but Klatt said it will cost “several million dollars” to build solid surfaces and then cover them with asphalt to create a safe and accessible route.

In addition, the line crosses over other rail lines with which Allegheny RiverTrail Park will have to negotiate.

“We’re not anticipating any barriers,” she said. “But it is just more complicated because you have more people ... at the table.”

Still, it’s a critical win, said Matthew Galluzzo, who leads the nonprofit group Riverlife. Before that, Galluzzo led the Lawrenceville Corporation, which helped to create [a multimodal trail plan for the Allegheny riverfronts](#) upstream of the Great Allegheny Passage’s current terminus, just east of the Strip District.

While leading that work, Galluzzo said he learned that while lots of people ride bikes or walk for fun, many more have no other choice.

“It’s a need,” he said. “It is a true social equity issue to provide as many opportunities [as possible] for folks to ride on safe, accessible pathways to get around this city and this region.”

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## Margaret J. Krauss

Margaret J. Krauss is WESA's senior reporter. She covers development and transportation, and has produced award-winning podcasts on housing, work, and Pittsburgh's lesser-known history. Before joining the newsroom full time, she covered the challenges facing Pennsylvania cities as a statewide reporter, and spent another life as an assistant editor for National Geographic Kids Magazine in Washington, D.C. She can be reached at [mkrauss@wesa.fm](mailto:mkrauss@wesa.fm).

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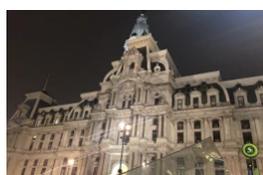
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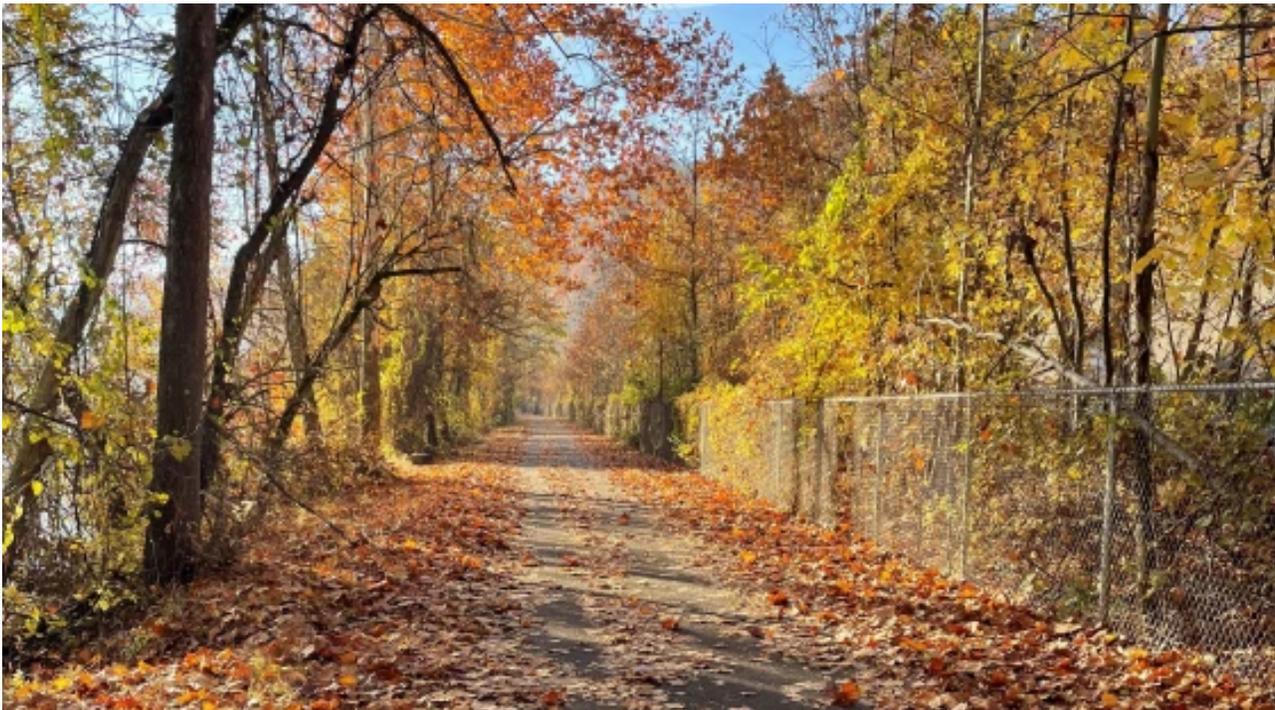
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