



Montour Railroad abandoned its freight line, which once linked the Steel City's rural towns and coal mines with barge service on the Ohio River.

Over its first 35 years, Montour Trail Council's efforts focused on acquiring funding and rights-of-way, building infrastructure, paving pathways, engineering and rehabilitating bridges, joining Trail communities, adding access points, and promoting the Trail.



Completing **southeast trail** sections has been a complex process related to right-of-way acquisition, partnering with county and municipal governments, fundraising, and bridge-building. MTC's steady approach to closing gaps resulted in **36.5 miles of continuous off-road trail**.

Trail blazing requires equal parts fundraising, engineering, construction, and annual maintenance. To sustain these efforts, MTC receives **revenue** from utility crossings, shale gas deposits, and an active railroad lease. Revenue from memberships, grants, and gifts also helps pay the bills.

Montour Trail was named **Pennsylvania Trail of the Year**, recognized for implementing best practices to provide a consistently high-quality user experience while relying fully on volunteer leadership.



MTC's **volunteer governance model** started with its highly successful Engineering & Construction committee. The Board created additional committees to govern organizational operations, IT, membership, real estate, and more.

Montour Trail was designated a **National Recreational Trail** for connecting people to local resources and improving quality of life.

The Allegheny County public-private partnership was signed. MTC joined the **Allegheny Trail Alliance** as an original member; it has generated funds to complete the Great Allegheny Passage (**GAP**) into Pittsburgh and raised millions of dollars for trail development along both the Montour and GAP trails.

The first **fundraising event** on the Trail was the Half-Marathon/ 5K race & walk.

The **first trail segment** of 4.4 miles opened in Cecil Township. A year later, 5 miles opened near Moon. At that time, **Volunteers believed that it would take 3 years to complete the Trail**.

MTC purchased 38 miles of Montour Railroad **right-of-way** for \$220,000.

15 people attended the **first public meeting** to discuss creating a rail-trail. Some of them are still active MTC volunteers.



The founders envisioned a semicircular trail stretching 47 miles from **Coraopolis to Clairton**.

To gain support, regional public hearings and legislative sessions publicized plans for the Trail. Local legislators were quick to endorse the concept.

The response to a feasibility study — requesting input from municipalities, agencies, and foundations — was tremendous.

The group formalized itself with a **Charter**, Articles of Incorporation, federal 501(c)3 tax-exempt status filing, and **non-profit** certification. By its first meeting in November, membership had swelled to 325.

The **Montour Trail Council's** mission: Convert the abandoned RR rights-of-way into the Montour Trail.



The Vira Heinz Foundation committed \$200,000 for RR right-of-way acquisition. The Laurel Foundation and Pittsburgh National Bank contributed an additional \$47,500. Individual contributions increased the MTC's treasury to nearly \$300,000.

MTC's unique **7 Friends groups** were created starting to blaze trail while the Board focused on developing new sections. The Friends also offer Trail users an entry point for volunteering. An 8th group, the Montour Railroad Historical Society develops signage.

The first mile of trail opened on the **Bethel branch**.

The Trail's **Large-to-Clairton** section opened between Peters Creek and the planned Mon-Fayette Expressway.



The inaugural **Tour the Montour** bike ride was staged, quickly becoming MTC's premiere fundraising event.

Completion of the 970-foot-long **McDonald viaduct** extended the Trail's continuous section to 22.3 miles. Volunteers were key in restoring, preserving, rehabilitating, and resurfacing many other historical RR structures.



The **Montour-Panhandle connector** linked two noteworthy rail-trails, enabling travel from Weirton, WV, to Montour and then the GAP to Washington, DC.

Two notable **branches** opened: the 4.1-mile Westland section and the Pittsburgh International Airport connector. Future links include Coraopolis, Muse, and Houston.

The \$1 M **Greer tunnel rehab** was the largest renovation project for a trail structure already in use. Early work revealed defects that tripled the original cost estimate. The steel arch support system will keep the 100+ year-old tunnel in service for the long term.



The latest Montour Trail milestone is a 0.5-mile section in South Hills (Wood – Stewart streets) that eliminates the last on-road section of trail from MM 0.0 through Jefferson Hills Borough. Trail users now can enjoy **40 miles of continuous off-road trail**.

MTC's **endowment fund** with The Pittsburgh Foundation has grown to \$2.1 M.

Today, with just a few thorny gaps left to complete, MTC is planning for the next 25 years to expand and enhance one of the region's premier outdoor resources.