

Norfolk Southern : GREENWAY SUPPORTERS SEE PROGRESS

06/07/2018 | 07:19am EDT

How does an idea that looks great on paper become a reality? Over time, starting with small victories.

That's the case for the Essex-Hudson Greenway.

Formerly the old Boonton Line, this 11-mile railroad segment could become a traffic-free trail for walking and biking that would cut through Montclair, Glen Ridge, Bloomfield, Belleville, Newark and Kearny on the way to Jersey City.

But for this to become a reality, the line would have to be purchased from its owner, the Norfolk Southern Corp. The last trains ran on it in 2002.

A Norfolk Southern representative said in April that the old Boonton Line was not for sale, as "it retains significant value as a corporate asset," but did not rule out that Norfolk Southern might consider a fair offer.

The supporters of the Greenway - also known as the Ice & Iron Greenway - recently made progress in their quest.

Last week, the New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition, a Montclair-based organization that has advocated for years for the Greenway, received a \$7,500 grant from the North Carolina-based Rails-to-Trails Conservancy to build support for it.

And last month, a collaboration was announced that could allow the Essex-Hudson Greenway to become part of the proposed 1,350-mile 9/11 Memorial Trail.

Essex County Freeholder President Brendan Gill, a New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition board member, announced the partnership between the coalition and the September 11th National Memorial Trail Alliance.

In a statement, Gill said the collaboration "will not only serve as a fitting tribute to the innocent lives we lost in the 9/11 terror attacks, but also take an important step in the development of the Essex-Hudson Greenway."

Cyndi Steiner, the executive director of the coalition, said these developments were advancing an important mission.

"We're dedicating a good portion of time on an ongoing basis to this project," Steiner said. "Call it our number one, or top three, priority, and these recent developments definitely help."

The path forward Steiner said the Bike & Walk Coalition will use the \$7,500 grant to build up support on the state level. The Greenway has already received endorsements from the the towns that it runs through, and Essex and Hudson County governments. "Getting the New Jersey DOT, New Jersey DEP, and the NJTPA [North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority] to support the project," Steiner said, "that's where our advocacy will be directed now."

The DOT is the state Department of Transportation, the DEP is the state Department of Environmental Protection.

Steiner said the grant money, which the coalition has not received yet, will go toward preparation of materials to showcase the project and communications with the state agencies and with supporters of the project.

Steiner said the coalition will meet with DEP officials in mid-June about possible funding for acquisition of the rail line and environment issues regarding the path.

In May, she was part of a small group that completed a bike ride of the mapped route for the proposed 9/11 Memorial Trail, which would link the 9/11 crash sites at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the Flight 93 National Memorial in Pennsylvania.

This trail runs through a good part of North Jersey, including Morristown.

Steiner, who serves a board member on the the September 11th National Memorial Trail Alliance, said connecting the Greenway to the 9/11 Memorial Trail is important.

"What it does is gives the trail national significance," Steiner said. "It's no longer just a local trail that many of us would like for recreation and commuting. It puts on the map of a national effort."

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