Construction on the Ma and Pa Connector Trail segment three continues with the arrival of one of the trail bridges. **HARFORD COUNTY GOVERNMENT**

Construction resumes on Ma and Pa Trail, connecting Forest Hill with Bel Air

By Brennan Stewart

Construction is under way this week on the Ma & Pa Heritage Trail as workers install a prefabricated bridge near the Bel Air Bypass, connecting the Bel Air and Forest Hill sections.

The Harford County Department of Parks and Recreation shared photos on social media Saturday of a bridge installation, announcing that as warmer weather continues, construction on segment three of the Ma & Pa Connector Trail is progressing. Construction activity will soon be increasing on both sides of the bypass, the post said.

"There has been interest in preservation of the Ma & Pa for recreation and transportation in Harford County for many years," Angela Hoover, project manager for Parks and Recreation, said in a statement Monday. "Completion of this final segment of the Ma & Pa Trail will bring a 30-year vision to fruition!"

A 1.5-mile connector trail is being built as the final section of the trail, linking the North Avenue trailhead parking lot to the Melrose Lane trailhead at Blake's Venture Park, according to Hoover. The project includes five elevated wooden boardwalks, two bridges, a retaining wall and a paved trail, and will require contractors to relocate fire hydrants and install additional signage and fencing.

Hoover stated that when the work is complete the trail will extend 8 miles, stretching from Edgeley Grove Park in Fallston, through Bel Air, to Friends Park in Forest Hill. The department received written authorization to begin construction in July, and it is expected to be completed by July of next year. A community input hearing was held Oct. 23 which gave residents the opportunity to comment on the project.

On social media, numerous commenters criticized the county's allocation of tax dollars for the project, with many highlighting the need for road improvements or addressing the public school system's budget deficit. "Another thing Harford County is using my taxes to pay for that I will never use!" one user wrote.

Hoover said that the connector trail cost more than $8 million to complete, with funding coming not only from Harford County government but also from the Maryland Department of Transportation, the Federal Transportation Alternative Program, and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

County Executive Bob Cassilly defended the connector trail construction work on Friday, stating, "The Ma & Pa Trail project began 30 years ago when I was a newly elected Bel Air Town Commissioner. All these years later, it's gratifying to serve as County Executive, overseeing the completion of its final phase."

Have a news tip? Contact Brennan Stewart at bstewart@baltsun.com, 443-800-5902, or @BrennanStewart_ on X.

MARYLAND

COMMENTARY

Ma and Pa Railroad may be gone, it remains forever on time

Jacques Kelly

Baltimore reveres its railroad traditions, yet its smallest lines have captured an outsized emotional attachment.

The old Maryland and Pennsylvania Railroad, called the Ma & Pa or just the M&P, physically disappeared here in 1958.

It's a case where time only burnished the affection for the train line that made so many friends. Today, people who were not alive when its smoke-spewing coal-fired trains passed through Remington, Wyman Park, Roland Park, Woodbrook, Armagh Village, Rodgers Forge, Towson and Glen Arm, Fallston and Bel Air on to York, Pennsylvania.

Yet, the Tuscany-Canterbury neighborhood webpage features an illustrated history of the line.

The engines, rails, and bridges may be gone, but Harford County officials announced the progress on the Ma & Pa Heritage Trail where workers placed a prefabricated bridge near the Bel Air Bypass, connecting Bel Air and Forest Hill former track sections. The Baltimore Streetcar Museum operates on its former Falls Road headquarters and announced plans to refurbish the line's roundhouse.

Why the reverence for a commercial enterprise that quit Baltimore and Maryland in 1958? The Ma & Pa was different. It was the line you could get up close and personal with.

As a schoolboy, I saw its locomotives cross what was the Belvedere Avenue, now Northern Parkway, along what is now the Stony Run Trail, the recreational path that replaced the rails.

Stan Heuisler, a former Baltimore Magazine editor and one of the line's fans, recalled a Saturday ritual for Roland Park boys.

"We would get together — Chick Lord, Bo Grimes, Chris Scott, Emanual Canevaro and I — and ride our bikes up Roland Avenue to ... a Melrose Avenue bridge over Ma & Pa tracks. We would get on the bridge when a northbound steam engine was coming, close our eyes and mouth, and let the smoke and ashes and cinders and steam EXPLODE all over us as the train went under the bridge.

"Our parents would bawl us out when we got home.

Maryland & Pennsylvania Railroad steam engine No. 6 in Bel Air in 1946.
CHARLES T. MAHAN JR.

("You did it AGAIN!") Sometimes, there were little holes burned in our clothing. We had to shower, and if the weather was warm, my Dad would hose us down."

The Ma & Pa never seemed to throw anything away, and by the 1950s, it was a kind of rolling museum. My father would drive me to the Falls Road roundhouse where the old steam engines were arrayed in their stalls in contrast to the fast and sleek new trains at the nearby Pennsylvania and Mount Royal stations.

The old Ma & Pa plant on Falls Road became a natural, if unpromoted, family destination.

"It was the '50s 'cause I was a little kid, but with my brother Phil, we would ride down on weekend mornings early (often Sundays before getting dressed for 10:30 Mass because dad went to work most Saturday mornings," Heuisler recalled. "My dad would have a six-pack of beer in a kind of tin wire holder, and we would park the Plymouth on Falls Road by the tracks.

"The small switcher engine, No. 29, would pull up and stop, and we would climb up the ladder steps and into the cab and take a steam engine ride and I got to pull the bell cord (not the steam whistle because that was a signal) while the engineer and fireman chugged the beer.

"I don't know how my father had gotten to know the switcher yard engine crew, but we did it quite a few times. We never went onto the roundhouse turntable, but we were chuffed by it and saw how it worked. It was a busy working rail yard, and above and behind the decrepit station house was a coal shuttle in the hillside. We took both the guys on the engine, a ham and turkey for Christmas. Smalltimore."

For some reason, on August 31, 1954, my father and I happened to be there on Falls Road. We had just been chased out of our Dewey Beach vacation home by Hurricane Carol.

Falls Road was unexpectedly filled with extra rail passenger cars, and people seemed to be all over the place. The commotion? It was the Ma & Pa's final passenger run, and its legion of fans tuned out for the occasion. The line's freight operation struggled for another four years (the line hauled the stone to build the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen), and then they pulled up the tracks in Maryland.

We lost the steam engines to metal scrappers, and thankfully, a few of its antique passenger cars and diesel equipment went to museums. There's a preserved Ma & Pa Heritage Village at Muddy Creek Forks in York County, Pennsylvania, as well as a historical society of fans who just won't let go.

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