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EDITORIAL

Hope for more happy trails

With the future of the Tri-Area Recreation Authority in doubt, it's encouraging to hear that the Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership is moving ahead with plans to extend a popular local hiking and biking trail.

Bob Skulsky, executive director of the partnership, said the organization hopes to finish the second leg of the Greater Hazleton Rails-to-Trails path this year.

The trail begins just off East Broad Street, near the intersection with the Heights Beltway. The goal of linking the path with the spectacular hiking and biking trail that runs through Lehigh Gorge State Park between White Haven and Jim Thorpe is still a long way off. Nevertheless, the existing four-mile trail offers a pleasant way for local residents to get some exercise in a natural setting. Each year, more people are discovering the pleasures of the trail, as evidenced by the growing number of vehicles on the parking lot and the number of hikers, bikers and dog-walkers encountered on the way.

The first mile, surfaced with hard-packed stone, winds through the scrubby woods east of Route 93. After crossing the Stockton Road, the trail leads past the Dreck Creek Reservoir, where a picnic table offers a comfortable resting spot with a nice view of the water.

Beyond the reservoir, the trail terminates at the old Beryllium Road. At this point, hikers and bikers have the choice of doubling back or heading west, where the crumbling asphalt road meets the Stockton Road again, just south of the Diamond Avenue intersection.

If the partnership completes its plans this year, travelers will have another choice. The second two-mile-long extension will link the old Beryllium Road near Ashmore with the village of Hazlebrook, passing over a new bridge that will span a railroad track.

That would put the trail's terminus closer to Eckley, the next connection point along the way to the Lehigh River near Rockport. While the final two legs may be years away, this year's planned extension gives outdoors enthusiasts hope for more happy trails in the future.