

Sunday, November 8, 2026
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The Philadelphia Inquirer

New trail connector lets bikers ride 70 miles from Philly to Reading. It's 'a really, really big deal.'

A new connector that took a decade to plan and build is open near Pottstown.

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by Frank Kummer
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Cyclists Alvin Morris and Rick Young departed Philadelphia via Shawmont Avenue on the Schuylkill River Trail on Tuesday morning for a heart-pumping, 75-mile round trip ride.

On previous trips, they, like thousands of other riders, had to stop at a gate where the trail abruptly ended near Pottstown and decide whether to risk traveling a busy alternate route.

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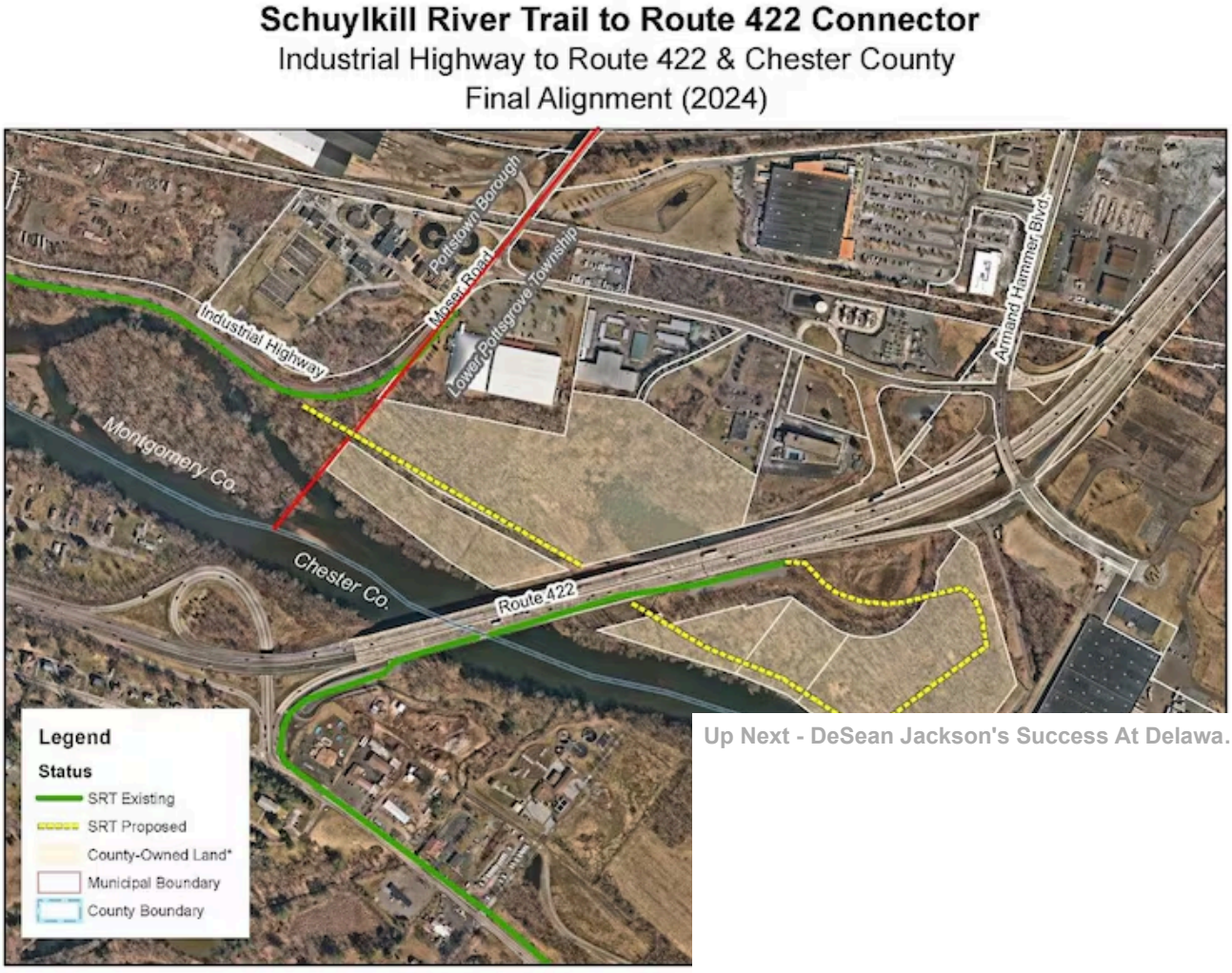
Schuylkill River Trail organizers are celebrating the completion of a nearly one-mile connector in Montgomery County that gives cyclists a clear 70-mile path from Philly to Reading. The connector took about 10 years from planning to its Aug. 19 opening.

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“I just found out about the connector Sunday,” Young said. “I love it. I told Al about it. We’re preparing for the [city-to-Shore] MS ride, so we need to get in some distance.”

The duo planned to continue on the Schuylkill River Trail for a few more miles past the connector before returning to Philly.



A Montgomery County Planning Commission map of the new Industrial Highway and the Route 422 bridge near Pottstown

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‘A really, really big deal’

Elaine Paul Schaefer, executive director of the nonprofit Schuylkill River Greenways, says the connector is more than just a new trail segment.

“It’s a really, really big deal,” Schaefer said. “On many, many levels.”

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Schaefer and others believe the unbroken 70-mile stretch could be a tipping point for cycling tourism because it is long enough for cyclists to plan trips that allow them to linger in towns for brews and food, or overnight stays, she said.

“At that point, the economic impact to towns along the way really exponentially increases,” she said.

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Her group manages the Schuylkill River Gr connecting people to the river and trail. Sch office in Pottstown, but manages 40 miles o Counties, raising money to help maintain it.

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under the busy highway and continue into Pottstown Borough.

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“The trail now connects the population centers of Philadelphia to Montgomery County and Reading,” Schaefer said. “Soon, it will connect beyond that.”

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Elaine Paul Schaefer, executive director of the nonprofit Schuylkill River Greenways, speaks with Sue Shellman, foreground, and her husband, Bill Shellman, in yellow, both of Skippack, at the new cor ... **Read more**
Frank Kummer

A boost for Pottstown?

Schaefer believes the new connector will lure cyclists willing to stop and spend money in Pottstown, a former steel town whose sizable downtown contains restaurants, inns, and breweries. Pottstown's Riverfront Park along the trail is already widely used.

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Peggy Lee-Clark, executive director of the n
Development Inc., said it is too early to judg
there is "excitement."

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“I think that always any connection for the trail is an economic boost,” she said.

Commuting workers also use the trail, Lee-Clark noted.

“The river is an important asset to us, as is the trail,” Lee-Clark said. “The connector is just one more thing that brings people to the area and exposes them to all of the other opportunities here in Pottstown.”

When complete, the Schuylkill River Trail will run about 120 miles from Fort Mifflin near Philadelphia International Airport to Frackville, Schuylkill County. About 80 miles of paved and crushed stone trail are currently open. A swing bridge connecting Grays Ferry to Bartram’s Garden is nearing completion.

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Jason Brudereck, of the nonprofit Schuylkill River Greenways, rides new the Schuylkill River Trail connector as it crosses from Chester County into Montgomery County.

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How the connector got built

Montgomery County is planning a formal ribbon-cutting on Sept. 29 for the connector, which is already popular. On Tuesday, dozens of cyclists were riding at midday.

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Scott France, executive director of the Mont
Commission, said the county started trying
a decade ago.

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“We are super excited this is open,” France said. “It’s been a long time in the works. This has had its share of challenges, but the fact is that we got there.”

The connector cost $1.28 million, France said. Most of it was paid for from a $550,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and a $542,000 grant from the William Penn Foundation. The county funded the balance.

Although the connector is less than a mile, it was a challenge, France said.

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This is the sign cyclists and pedestrians once had to stop at before the connector was finished.
Frank Kummer

The county had to build around a state-owned bridge, work with Peco and Verizon to move utilities, and obtain permits to build in a flood zone. Additionally, crews had to stop work during the breeding season of the northern red-bellied turtle, a threatened species common in the area.

Bill Hartman, trails and open space planning manager for the commission, said the connector serves another key role.

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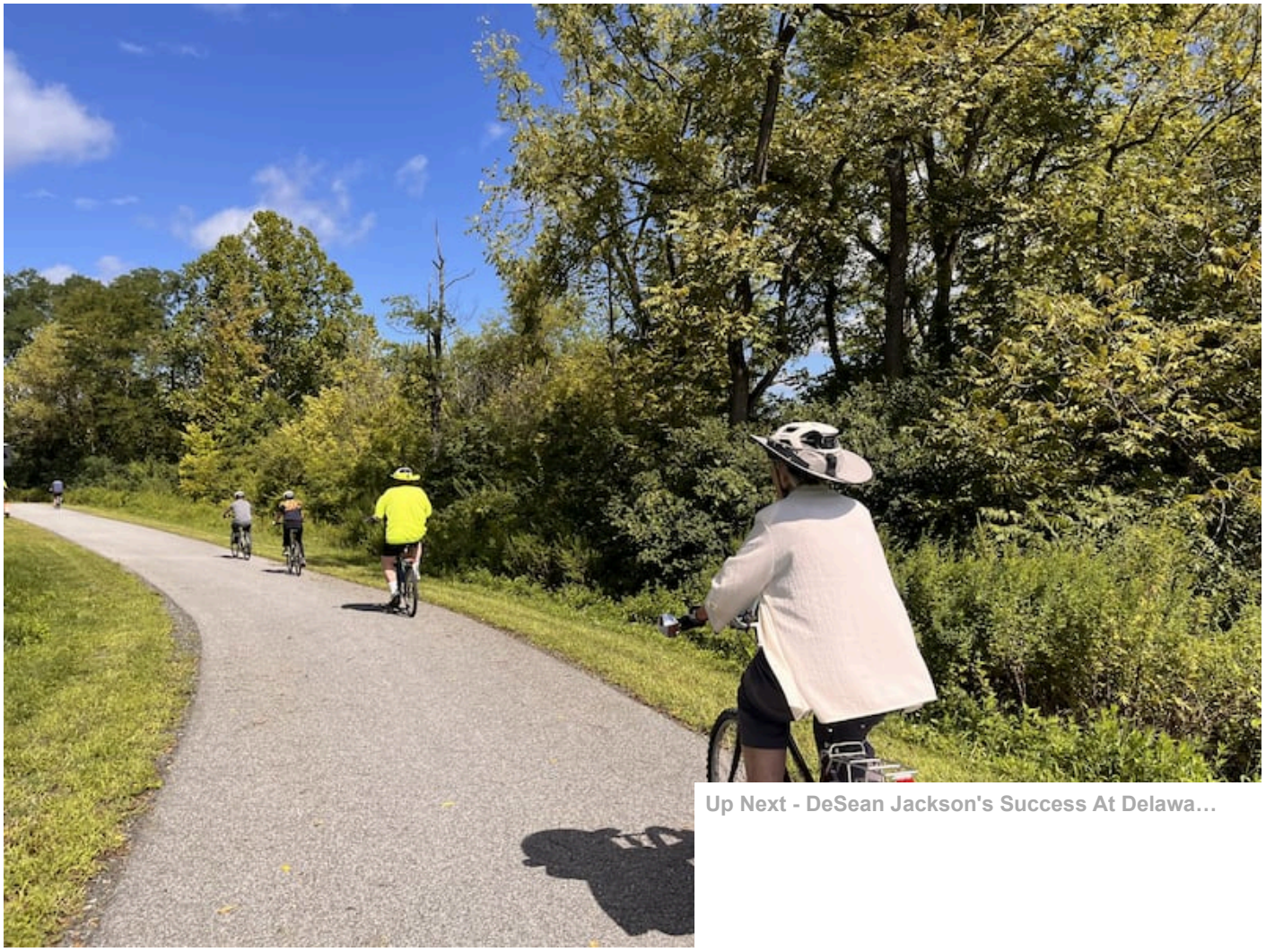
“It provides full access to a number of other
the Cross County and Perkiomen Trails.

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Trails network, a planned 850 miles of interconnected trails in the Philadelphia region, including South Jersey.

Makhija said he plans to celebrate his 40th birthday on Sept. 13 by riding the inaugural Tour de Montco, a 40-mile ride from Pottstown to Bala Cynwyd.

The new trail segment, Makhija said is, “not just a trail in the woods — it’s a connection, bringing us closer to Philly and Reading and connecting the two.”



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Sue Shellman, foreground, and her husband, Bill Shellman, ir
County onto the new Schuylkill River Trail connector into Mor

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