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### Linking Rails-to-Trails to 444 Hebron Road

As you look to your left driving south down Route 79 in Heath, you will eventually come across an enormous property covered in the remnants of a demolished building. This was once a Meritor manufacturing plant, and the 80 acres it sat on are now for sale. The future of 444 Hebron Road has been explored and contested at length, yet no matter what is to come of the site, the presence of a space to support the Hopewell Earthworks has been deemed necessary. These earthworks across route 79 are full of two-thousand-year-old mounds built by the Hopewell people. It is on track to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site within the next couple of years, but the location at the moment has not reached its visitor-oriented potential. For that reason, I believe that developing the railway that goes through the 444 Hebron Road site into a multi-use recreational pathway would provide a space for more people to visit the earthworks. This trail construction would connect the entire metropolitan area between Newark, Heath, and Granville by linking three different Rails-to-Trails pathways in this community together.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, developing the trail could be very beneficial for what is to come of the 80-acre site. Plans for a solar-powered solar manufacturing plant or a multi-use project supplementing the earthworks with a visitor's center and museum have been proposed. Therefore, I believe that a trail connecting the community through recreational travel would have the capability to benefit

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<sup>1</sup> Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's TrailLink Map.

both site proposals, as more people could have access to either completed site design through an easy and environmentally-friendly commute.

In order to demonstrate how this pathway would boost the number of people having access to 444 Hebron Road's new development and the earthworks across the street, I first explore the design of this community through the lens of traveling by bike or foot. Next, I explain specifically how completing this trail would be a great decision for the Newark Earthworks and the potential buyer of 444 Hebron Road. Subsequently, I lay out the design for making this new trail accessible to these properties. This community is not taking advantage of its neglected spaces, and revitalizing the Meritor property alongside the Rails-to-Trails transition would do just so.

To better understand the current trail system of the Newark, Heath, and Granville metropolitan area, I have attached a map of four main trails created from past railways in the area (*Figure 1*). All of these trails are made from asphalt, so they can support walking, running, biking, and other similar forms of travel. The Buckeye Scenic Trail goes 5.5 miles south from Heath to Jacksontown and the 9.8 mile-long T.J. Evans Panhandle Trail goes east of Newark all the way past Hanover. The 3.3 mile-long Newark Trail connects Newark to the 14.3 mile-long T.J. Evans Trail that goes through Granville, Alexandria, and Johnstown. The first two trails and the combined latter two trails all end at the eastern, western, and southern ends of Newark, but do not fully connect. This lack of interconnection between these trails could be solved by continuing The Buckeye Scenic Trail north through the 444 Hebron Road property to downtown Newark. Once in the downtown area, the trail continuation would have to break off from the

railway because the unused line links with The Panhandle Line, which is used every day.<sup>2</sup>

Because this area is the densest urban section of the city, creating a pathway to connect to the two T.J. Evans trails would be very difficult. Therefore, I propose that bike lanes can be constructed on several downtown streets that will bring travelers to any of these trails. I have attached another image that demonstrates my plan for new trails and bike paths in yellow (*Figure 2*). The connection of these trails and bike lanes would not only connect Newark, Heath, and Granville, but it would also connect these cities to the smaller neighboring towns miles away, like Johnstown and Hanover.

The existing trails in this community are well-established and used for recreational purposes, but driving cars on highways and roads still is the primary method of travel by far. I am not proposing to get rid of traveling by vehicles by any means, but instead I am advocating for more support of other traveling options. Being able to bike or walk throughout this community instead of driving would not only prove beneficial for environmental reasons, but also for both the Newark Earthworks and for the developer of the old Meritor site. Being able to reach these properties other than from driving would make it more accessible to the residential community, and could even have the opportunity to decrease traffic on Route 79 between the two sites. This would be of great importance, since the earthworks land cannot be renovated for a bridge or tunnel to connect to the new development on the former Meritor property, and people will have to cross the road on foot. Furthermore, a study done in Australia claims that people who commute to work on foot or bike are happier during their travel, which in turn makes them more productive at work. On the other hand, driving a car is claimed to be the most stressful way

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Johns, Mayor of the City of Heath.

to commute to work.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the connection of these trails can not only make the two sites more accessible, but can be a way of travel for people who work at Newark Earthworks and the hundreds of people that will be working on the redeveloped site across the street.

Research has been conducted in several cities that had pre-existing trails and pathways and made the move to connect them. At North Carolina State University, transportation researchers studied the effects of two parts of a trail being connected in Durham, North Carolina. This connection led to a 133% increase in the use of the trail, which translates to 300,000 more trips than before the trail's completion. Now moving closer to our community of interest, the Alum Creek Trail in Columbus, Ohio went through a similar connection process to the trail in Durham. This trail goes through the eastern side of Columbus, and its completion resulted in a 40% increase of use.<sup>4</sup> I have attached a figure below that demonstrates this trail before and after its sections were completed (*Figure 3*). Because of these statistics, I find it reasonable to believe that connecting the four aforementioned trails in downtown Newark would significantly increase their activity. This is especially so because these trails would be connected in the densest urban area of the entire county. Additionally, The Buckeye Scenic Trail goes right past Heath High School, so this trail's continuation would make Newark Earthworks within walking distance to hundreds of students.

Now that the reasons for the continuation of the Rails-to-Trails project have been laid out, I now will describe how the trail can connect through the redevelopment site on 444 Hebron Road and then on to the Newark Earthworks. Because the current unused railway goes through

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<sup>3</sup> Ma, Liang and Runing Ye. "Walking and Cycling to Work Makes Commuters Happier and More Productive."

<sup>4</sup> Lazo, Luz. "Regional Coalition Wants to Grow its Trail Network to Nearly 900 Miles."

the redevelopment property, it will be easy to create a side path from the main trail. I think that having a small covered section set aside next to the railway for parking bikes would be great, along with a charging station for any electronic forms of transportation fitting for a trail, like a scooter or a skateboard. Depending on the number of funds would be available for this project, a bathroom and drinking fountain could also prove to make this pathway fit for long-distance use. A bike path can then move away from the section next to the former rail towards the earthworks property.

To conclude, a new trail on the former Heath railway has proven to have many benefits if constructed. First, it would connect the community through a trail system that meets right in downtown Newark. Second, it would create a space for people to commute to work on a bike or by walking, which would make them more productive at work, which should catch the attention of the developer of the Meritor site. Third, it would bring new visitors to Newark Earthworks, and make the future UNESCO World Heritage Site accessible within a large portion of Licking County through trails. Fourth, this pathway would reduce the amount of people driving to work at the redeveloped Meritor site or to the earthworks, which is healthier for our environment. Either project design for 444 Hebron Road will implement solar panels to power their buildings and activities within them, as making the property greener is a central focus to both proposals, and this pathway would only further that undertaking. In furthering this research, something that must be addressed is the cost of connecting these trails through another pathway and bike lanes in downtown Newark. The zoning requirements for this process would surely need to be addressed, as well. Community input on this project also seems to be necessary, as the path and bike lanes may disrupt some people more than others. Overall, however, this plan would increase

the productivity, sustainability, accessibility, and livability of this community, and the logistical process should not intimidate any developer from acquiring the benefits of this pathway.

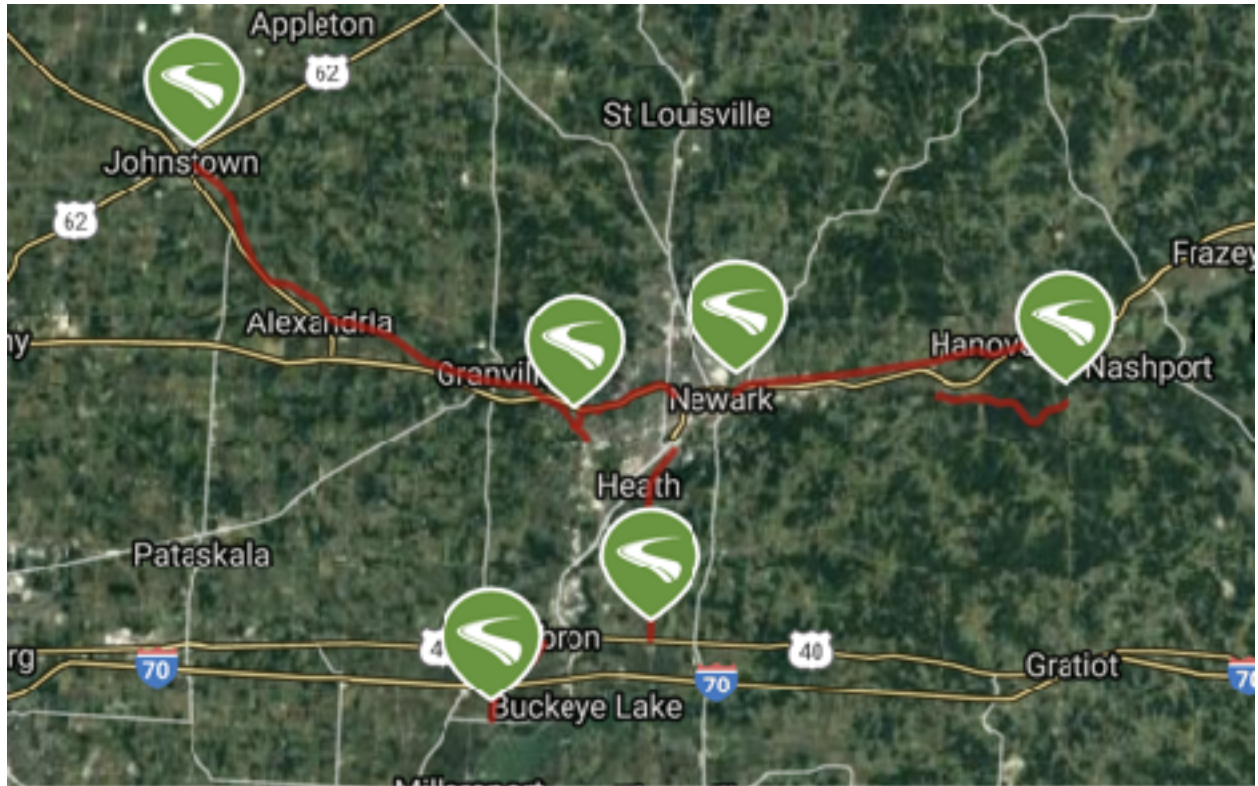


Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.

Works Cited



Lazo, Luz. "Regional Coalition Wants to Grow its Trail Network to Nearly 900 Miles." In *The Washington Post's* Transportation section, 2019. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/trafficandcommuting/regional-coalition-wants-to-grow-its-trail-network-to-nearly-900-miles/2019/12/07/c36ce7e2-0a23-11ea-97ac-a7ccc8dd1ebc\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/trafficandcommuting/regional-coalition-wants-to-grow-its-trail-network-to-nearly-900-miles/2019/12/07/c36ce7e2-0a23-11ea-97ac-a7ccc8dd1ebc_story.html)

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Mark Johns, Mayor of the City of Heath.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's TrailLink Map. [https://www.traillink.com/?gclid=Cj0KCQiA0NfvBRCVARIsAO4930nAfV42oudLldYu1hAelr5FtSUPM0vkN9fZEnAB0toWDyvsNocg9uEaAl8xEALw\\_wcB](https://www.traillink.com/?gclid=Cj0KCQiA0NfvBRCVARIsAO4930nAfV42oudLldYu1hAelr5FtSUPM0vkN9fZEnAB0toWDyvsNocg9uEaAl8xEALw_wcB)