

East Penn Railroad awarded \$626,000 to install pedestrian trail crossing in Kennett community, rehabilitate and construct rail sidings

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Kennett Township, Chester County — The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) announced today that it has awarded East Penn Railroad, LLC (ESPN) a \$626,000 state grant to rehabilitate and construct two rail sidings and a pedestrian crossing to improve rail safety and bolster ESPN's logistical operations.

The \$895,000 project is a collaboration between ESPN, the Kennett Trails Alliance (KTA), and Kennett Township to solve a longstanding problem — how pedestrians and cyclists can safely cross ESPN's mainline in the area of Herb Pennock Park. After a year of planning, the group determined that if ESPN relocates its parked trains off the mainline and constructs a pedestrian-only crossing, KTA will be able to connect the Kennett borough and township sections of the Kennett Greenway, creating a safe, non-motorized multimodal path for residents. Kennett Township has pledged \$268,500 in match funding to make the project feasible.

"Receiving this award is a very exciting for us," Al Sauer, president of ESPN, said. "We are most thankful for the collaboration of so many key stakeholders and their help in bringing the project concept to fruition."

ESPN will rehabilitate one 1,200-foot rail siding and construct an 800-foot extension to another rail siding. The additional siding space will allow ESPN to tie down its trains off the mainline between Kennett Borough and Kennett Township. Doing so increases car storage and switching capacity and reduces the risk of vandalism and rail-related accidents.

"Rep. Sappey and Sen. Kane were critical in solidifying this partnership and advocating for its success," Kennett Township Manager Eden Ratliff said. "ESPN and KTA's joint problem-solving capabilities were recognized and championed by our legislators, and we are very pleased to have their investment and make one of our own. These community partnerships are critical in allowing for the advancement of community projects that serve all of us."

Kennett area residents often walk along the tracks or cross over them in the area around Herb Pennock Park. Given the mainline is an active railway and is used regularly for car storage, pedestrian activity around the tracks is suboptimal -absent a safe crossing opportunity.

"This is a commonsense solution that benefits thousands of residents while improving the local economy," Kane said. "I was very happy ESPN, Kennett Township, and KTA approached me with this idea, and I look forward to seeing construction start."

ESPN will construct the at-grade, pedestrian crossing on the northeast side of the park. In a separate project, the Kennett Greenway will be extended from Kennett Borough to the crossing and then connected to an existing paved path at the park. With the Parrish Trail located immediately south of the park, Kennett

area residents and trail users will be able to travel freely between the township and the park with a dedicated, non-motorized rail crossing.

“We are immensely grateful to Al Sauer and ESPN for considering the needs of the local community and realizing that in addressing our concerns they are improving their own logistics,” said KTA Executive Director Christina Norland. The project is a critical next step in closing gaps in the Kennett Greenway — a long awaited goal for this area for the highly anticipated 14-mile continuous loop trail.

“This project is the epitome of how business, government, and nonprofits can form partnerships to improve the lives of our local communities,” Rep. Christina Sappey said. “I am happy to lend my support to it, and I applaud ESPN, KTA and Kennett Township for their ingenuity. Let it serve as an example of how we solve problems in our community in the future.”

The grant funding to construct the rail sidings and crossing comes from PennDOT’s Rail Transportation Assistance Program.

“We are pleased that PennDOT saw the many benefits of this project to Chester County residents and businesses and provided us with this support,” Sauer said, “and we are grateful for Kennett Township’s contribution to support the project. It will be an investment well made.”