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## DEP to complete missing link in 70-mile Delaware & Raritan Canal path By Veronica Slight/For The Star-Ledger

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TRENTON -- When the missing 1.5-mile link of the Delaware and Raritan Canal path in Trenton is completed, the 70-mile nature trail will run continuously from Frenchtown to New Brunswick. Work on the \$400,000 project will start soon, Mark Mauriello, acting commissioner for the state Department of Environmental Protection, said today.



David Gard/For The Star-Ledger

The Delaware and Raritan Canal path will run from Frenchtown to New Brunswick when the 1.5-mile missing link in Trenton is completed.

Currently, the D&R path ends in Trenton -- before Perry Street and picks up again at Mulberry Street. Cyclists and pedestrians - who must leave the trail and traverse city streets -- have long urged the DEP, the City of Trenton and Mercer County to bridge the trail's only gap.

"It's amazing how many people use this resource," John Watson, deputy commissioner for the DEP, said at today's groundbreaking. After this 1.5-mile connector trail is built, bicyclists will be able to travel from Frenchtown to Trenton and on to New Brunswick, and Trenton residents will have greater access to the path.

"Just think about it," U.S. Rep. Rush Holt (D-12th Dist.) said, "a 70-mile path in the most densely populated state — it's remarkable."

"And it's not just a path," he said, "it's also a nature preserve."

The path is the "backbone" of what is becoming a network of bike trails in the region, Holt said. His next goal is to connect it to the Princeton Battlefield.

"This is something that's long overdue," Jeff Tittel, director of the New Jersey chapter of the Sierra Club, said.

Tittel added that the project is important not only because it bridges the final gap in the trail, but also because "the city deserves it," he said. "Cities have been too long neglected in terms of recreation."

Samuel Frisby, Trenton's recreation director, also said re-connecting the D&R path will be good for the city.

"People use it to get to work," he said. "Kids use the path to walk to school."

Stephen Dilts, commissioner for the state Department of Transportation, said he believes this

section of path was buried underground in the early 1950s when the Route 1 highway was constructed.

“We’re here to make right,” he said.

The connector trail will be laid on an old railroad bed donated by Conrail, which is releasing its easement on 12 acres along the canal and giving the state two parcels of land. Conrail will continue operating on the remaining property.

The project is being funded by capital-improvement dollars dedicated for projects in state parks, forests and wildlife management areas.

The D&R Canal State Park is celebrating its 175th anniversary this year. The narrow strip of parkland that runs along the canal is used for walking, biking, canoeing, jogging, fishing and horseback riding.

The canal, built primarily by Irish laborers in the 1830s, was built across central New Jersey to provide a fast, safe route to transport freight between Philadelphia and New York City.

Ranging from 50- to 75-feet wide and six- to seven-feet deep, the D&R Canal still delivers drinking water to more than one million people in central New Jersey.