

\$1.4M grant will aid Colebrookdale Railroad effort

By **Evan Brandt**, *The Mercury*

POSTED: 03/09/14, 6:51 PM EDT | UPDATED: 3 DAYS AGO



\$1.4 million grant from PennDOT will help repair and upgrade track and equipment on the 8.6-mile Colebrookdale Railroad. (Photo Courtesy of the Colebrookdale Railroad Preservation Trust)

The Colebrookdale Railroad will benefit from \$1.4 million in funding made possible by a PennDOT grant aimed at repairing and upgrading the line's rails, equipment and infrastructure.

The 8.6-mile line between Pottstown and Boyertown recently began carrying freight again and will also be home to The Secret Valley Line historic excursion railroad, opening in the fall.

"Seventy percent of the funding was provided by the state and we had to raise the other 30 percent," said Nathaniel Guest, president of the non-profit Colebrookdale Railroad Restoration Trust, which oversees the line.

The non-profit group has a for-profit subsidiary, Eastern Berks Gateway Railroad, which oversees the freight traffic and was the recipient of the grant.

“This will allow us to make track improvements to a Civil War-era railroad which has among the oldest and tallest wooden trestles in Pennsylvania, all of which are in good shape,” said Guest, a Pottsgrove High School graduate.

He said independently owned short-line railroads are on an up-swing nationally as gas prices rise. They work as feeder lines to freight giants like Norfolk-Southern, which runs a major freight line that runs through Pottstown.

“It’s really business development at the grass roots level,” he explained.

“So many communities the size of Pottstown and Boyertown are losing rail access, even today. We want to make sure Boyertown and Pottstown don’t fall into that trap,” said Guest.

“Whether its the excursion line, or the freight line supporting local businesses, people need to remember that reviving this rail line is ultimately about economic development,” said Guest.

However, as a non-profit owner, “we can make investments and plans which a for-profit enterprise might not be willing to make. We want to preserve the options for this rail line for the future. We’re here for the forever business.”

Gov. Tom Corbett agrees.

“Pennsylvania has more operating railroads than any other state, and investing in our rail freight network keeps these invaluable assets in prime position to generate economic growth and jobs,” Corbett said in a release from PennDOT announcing grants of \$33.4 million for 15 rail projects.

“Improving rail networks not only spurs our economy, it also increases safety by helping to ease traffic on our highways,” Corbett said.

The work planned on the Colebrookdale includes replacing 10 percent of the line’s roughly 24,000 railroad ties.

“We can also start to put back some of the sidings and re-build our switches, as well as subsidize the bridge maintenance work,” Guest said.

One of the sidings that may be extended as part of the work is a 1,000-foot extension of the siding in Pottstown in Memorial Park just north of where the line crosses King Street.

That extension will help with the establishment of a station and platform for the Secret Valley Line excursion railroad in Memorial Park, “as well as better handling of larger freight trains at the Pottstown end of our line,” said Guest.

“We were very, very lucky with out application,” he said. “We pretty much got everything we asked for, thanks in part to the fact that we are a multi-county, multi-community project which has the support of our local officials.”

Follow [Evan Brandt on Twitter @PottstownNews](#)