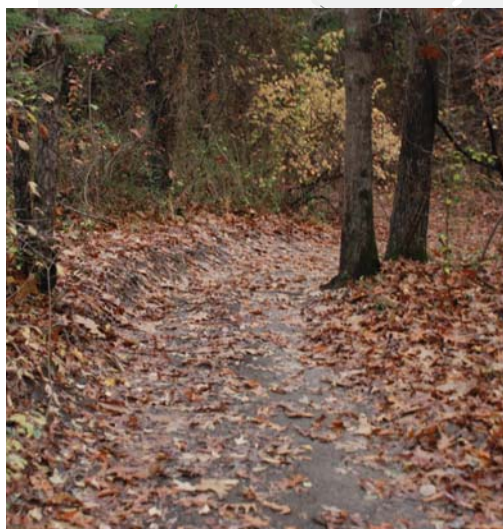
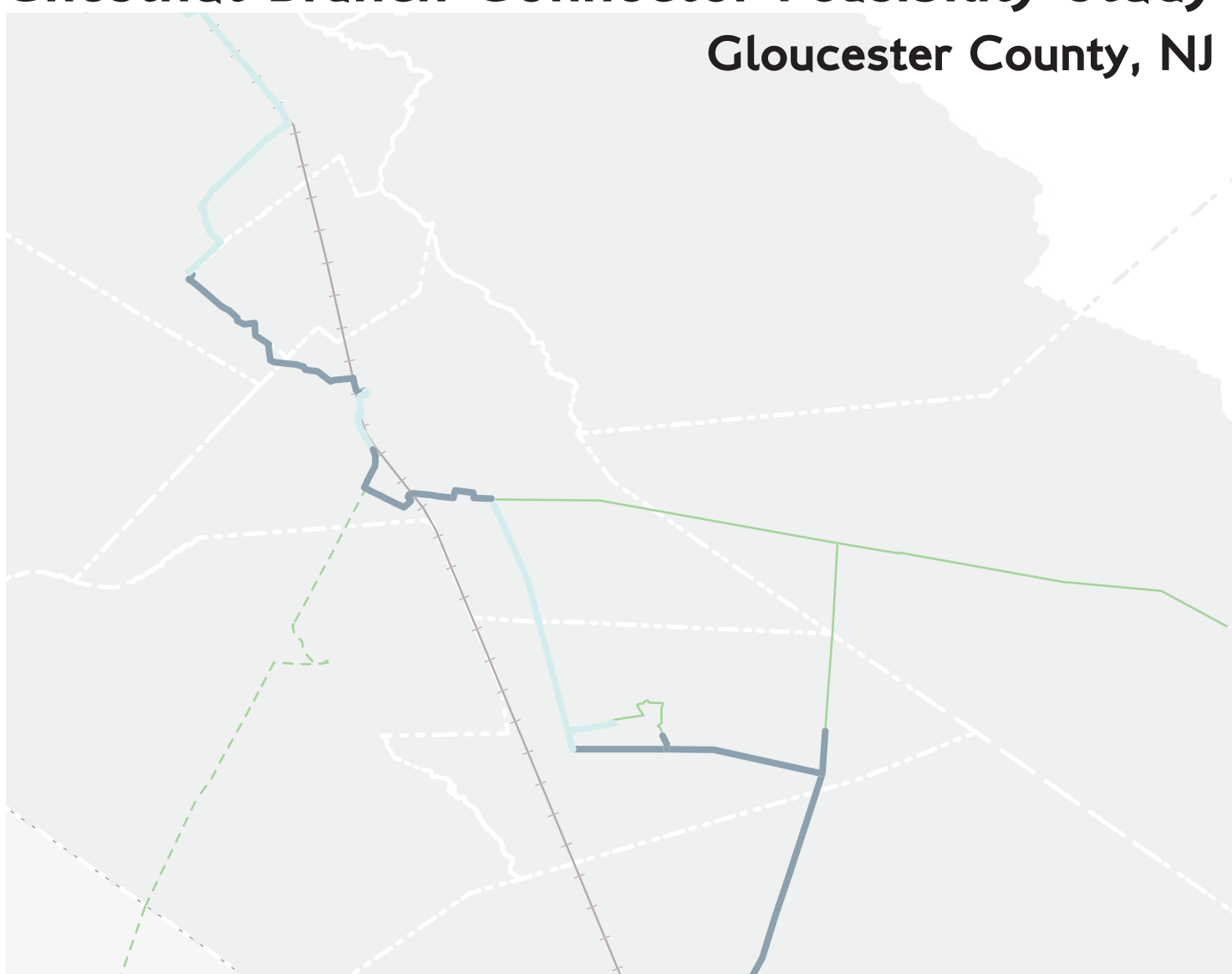


Chestnut Branch Connector Feasibility Study

Gloucester County, NJ





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The symbol in our logo is adapted from the official DVRPC seal and is designed as a stylized image of the Delaware Valley. The outer ring symbolizes the region as a whole while the

diagonal bar signifies the Delaware River. The two adjoining crescents represent the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the State of New Jersey.

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Introduction

Project Purpose

The purpose of this project is to evaluate a proposed trail alignment, detailed in GIS files provided by Gloucester County planning staff, spanning several municipalities in central and southeastern Gloucester County. The alignment, referred to tentatively as the Chestnut Branch Connector, would link parks and open space with existing and proposed trails (like the Monroe Trail and Bridgeton Secondary). Towns such as Glassboro (and Rowan University's campus) and Pitman are also located along the trail alignment.

To determine the feasibility of this trail, DVRPC staff conducted several field visits to evaluate the alignment, locate barriers to implementation, and determine alternatives, where appropriate. To supplement these field views, staff examined parcel information to determine property ownership, when relevant, and provided traffic counts to facilitate informed decision making.

Report Structure

Because of the length of the proposed trail and the wide variation in its condition, it was necessary to divide the alignment into segments. Table I lists each segment, its origin, and its terminus. Each segment is displayed on the map on the following page (Figure I).

Table I: Segment Descriptions

| Segment | Name | From | To |
|---------|--|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | Mantua Portion Alternative 1 via NJ 55 and Atlantic Ave. | Chestnut Branch Park (Mantua) | Lambs Road (Pitman) |
| | Mantua Portion Alternative 2 via Main St. | Chestnut Branch Park (Mantua) | Lambs Road (Pitman) |
| 2 | Looney Trail | Lambs Road (Pitman) | Bowe Boulevard (Glassboro) |
| 3 | Active Conrail Line I | Bowe Boulevard (Glassboro) | Sewell and Ellis Roads (Glassboro) |
| 4 | Glassboro Portion | Sewell and Ellis Roads (Glassboro) | Monroe Trail and NJ 47 (Glassboro) |
| 5 | NJ 47 Connector | Monroe Trail and NJ 47 (Glassboro) | Academy Street (Clayton) |
| 6 | On-Street Portion | Academy Street (Clayton) | Fries Mill Road and NJ 47 (Franklin) |
| 7 | Active Conrail Line II | Fries Mill Road and NJ 47 (Franklin) | West Boulevard (Newfield) |
| 8 | Franklin Township and Newfield | West Boulevard (Newfield) | Atlantic County line (Franklin) |

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This report includes a description of each segment that details points of interest and existing conditions. A parcel analysis is included for each section, except for segments that are entirely on-road. Road characteristics (AADTs and speed limits) are included for any portion where on-road routing is proposed or recommended.

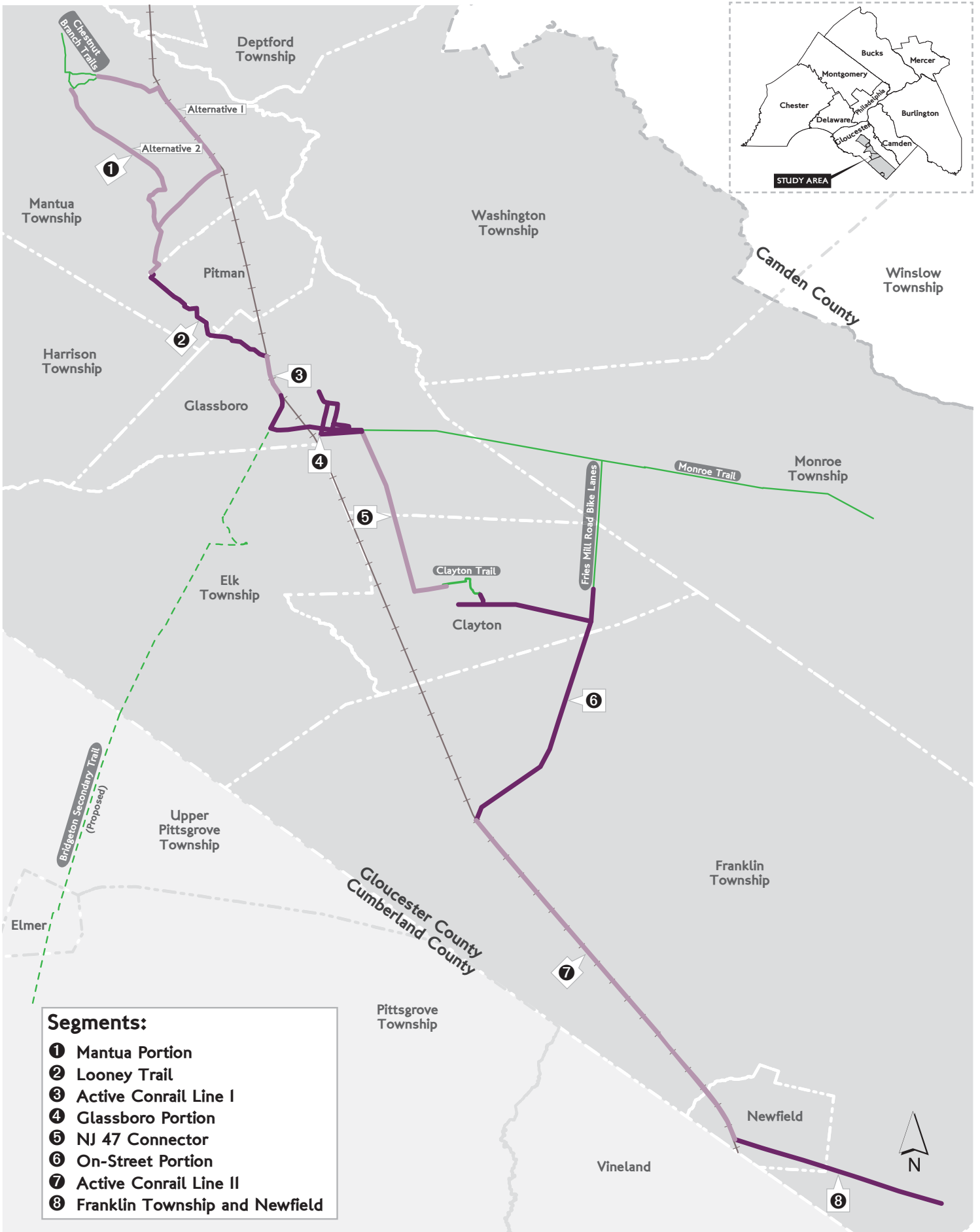


Figure I: Proposed Alignment for Chestnut Branch Connector

Segment Analyses

This section describes each of the eight segments that comprise the proposed trail alignment. Each analysis has three component parts:

1. Segment Description and Existing Conditions

The segment, its limits, and points of interest are described and presented in an accompanying map. Pictures are included to illustrate current conditions.

2. Parcel Analysis

When appropriate, a parcel analysis was done to identify the parties whose cooperation is necessary for implementation and to further illustrate possible barriers to implementation. No parcel analysis was done for on-road segments.

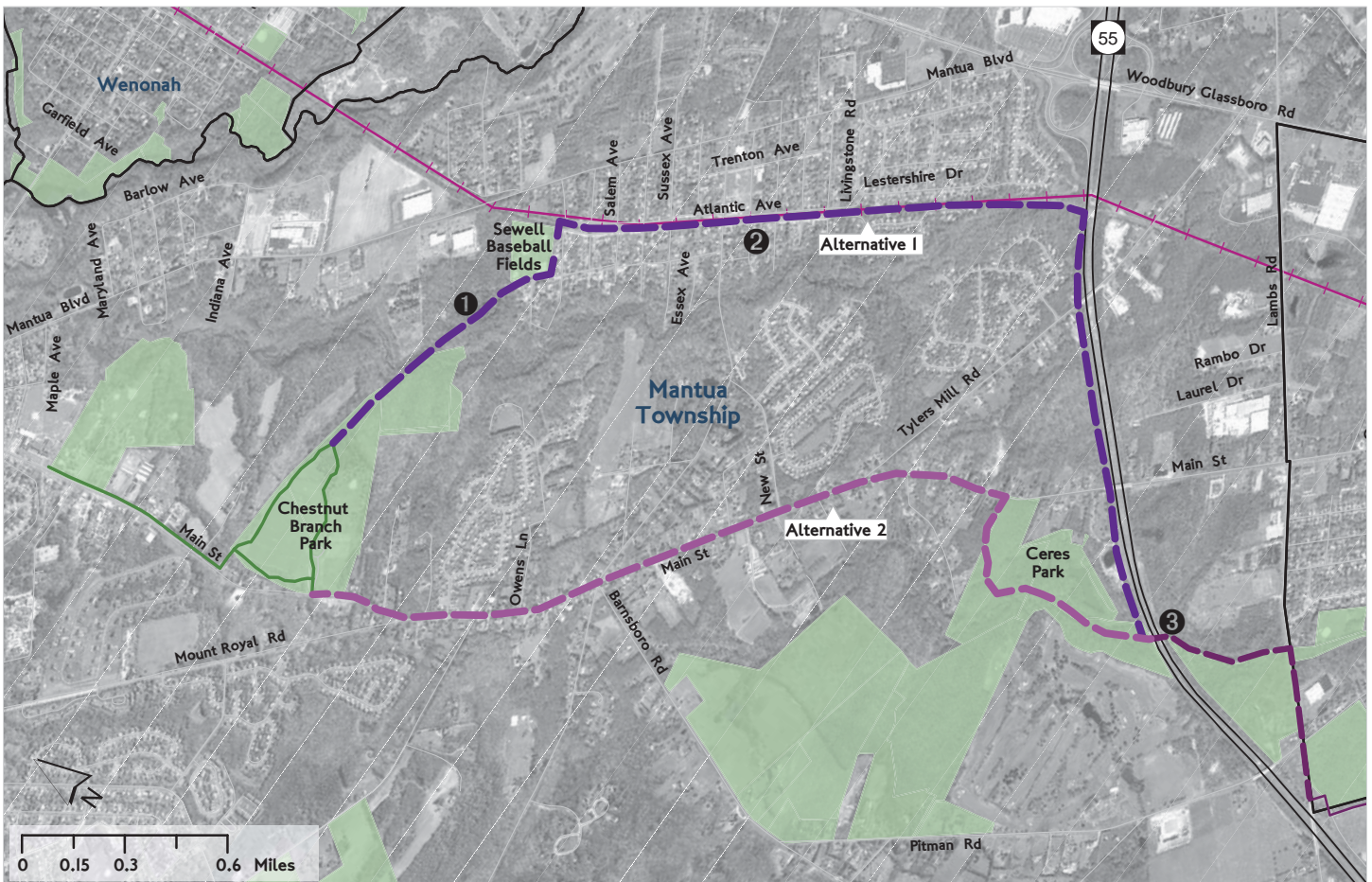
3. Recommendations

Recommendations for problem areas and issues, as well as alternatives (when necessary), are made.

Segment I: Mantua Portion

The proposed trail originates in Chestnut Branch Park (and connects to park trails) in Mantua Township. From there, two alternatives are presented. The first alternative alignment would head north through wooded land adjacent to Chestnut Branch Park (❶), circle the Sewell Baseball Fields, and then travel east along active Conrail right-of-way (❷). At NJ 55, users would head south along the western embankment of the highway until reaching a culvert that crosses under NJ 55. Then, users would travel south through a wooded area that parallels NJ 55 (❸) before coming out along Pitman-Barnsboro Road, where they would go east a short distance and then south along Lambs Road until the end of this segment.

In the second alternative, from Chestnut Branch Park, the alignment heads east on Main Street past Barnsboro Road. Users would turn south into Ceres Park and use existing pathways in the park to reach the same culvert detailed in the first alternative, and then follow Pitman-Barnsboro Road until the end of the segment. Figure 2 depicts both of these options.



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❶

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❷

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❸

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Figure 2: Mantua Portion Proposed Alignment and Existing Conditions

Mantua Portion Parcel Analysis

Figure 3 depicts the parcel analysis for this segment. For the first alternative, the land just north of Chestnut Branch Park is largely owned by Mantua Township, whereas the Sewell Baseball Fields and adjacent lands are privately owned. Conrail owns the active rail line along Atlantic Avenue, and NJDOT owns the culvert and the land in the right-of-way along NJ 55. On the east side of NJ 55, the county owns the land just north of Pitman-Barnsboro Road, where this segment would end.

Looking at the second alternative, Ceres Park and much of the land adjacent to it are publicly owned (by either the county or Mantua Township). The rest of the alignment is on-road.

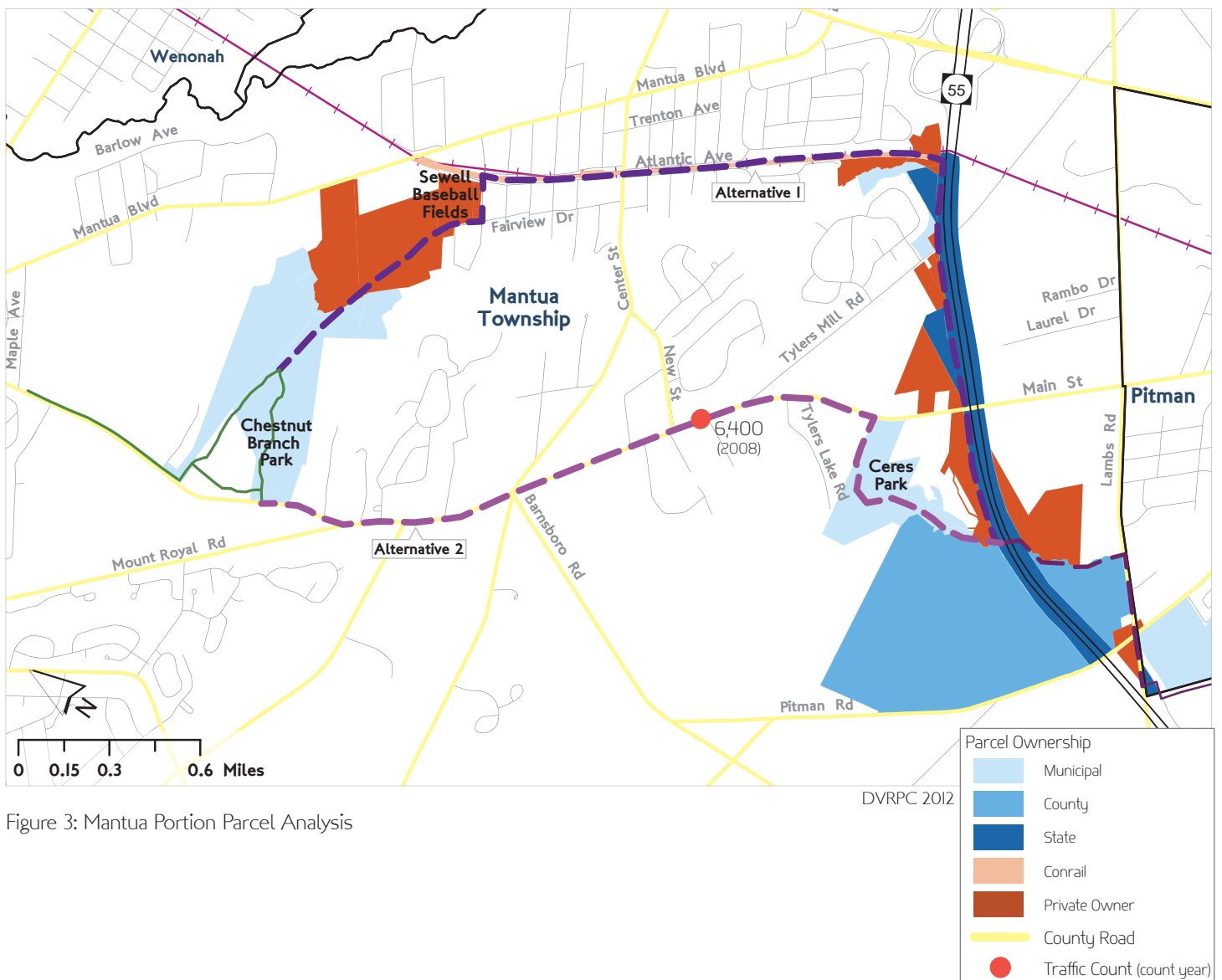


Figure 3: Mantua Portion Parcel Analysis

Mantua Portion Recommendations

There are complications with both alternatives. In regard to Alternative 1, grade issues are present north of Chestnut Branch Park, and there may be issues with the rail right-of-way, particularly when it separates from Atlantic Avenue east of East Morris Avenue. There are crossing issues with any path that would run parallel to NJ 55 at Tylers Mill Road and Main Street. Alternative 2 has potential issues with the narrow cartway of Main Street as well as environmental issues in Ceres Park that make paving trails an unattractive option.

Staff recommends pursuing Alternative 1 because of the connections to the baseball fields in Sewell as well as to the proposed Gloucester County Community College Connector Trail and the potential siting of a future train station. Further, the majority of the alternative is off-road and publicly owned.

Remaining Issue Areas for Recommended Alignment:



Grade issues north of Chestnut Branch Park



Providing access to the trail along the active rail line east of Atlantic Avenue



Crossing issues at Tylers Mill Road and at Main Street

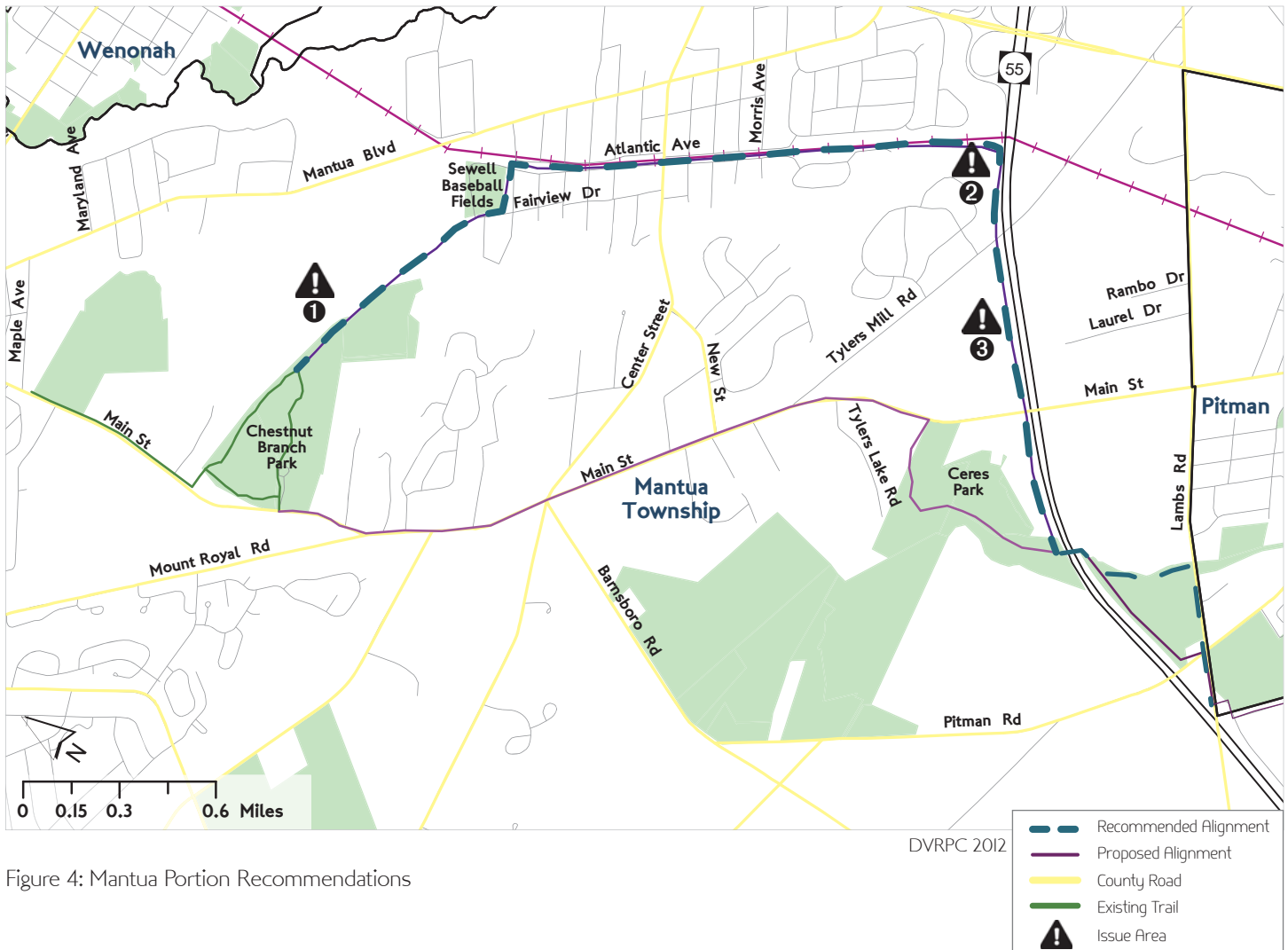
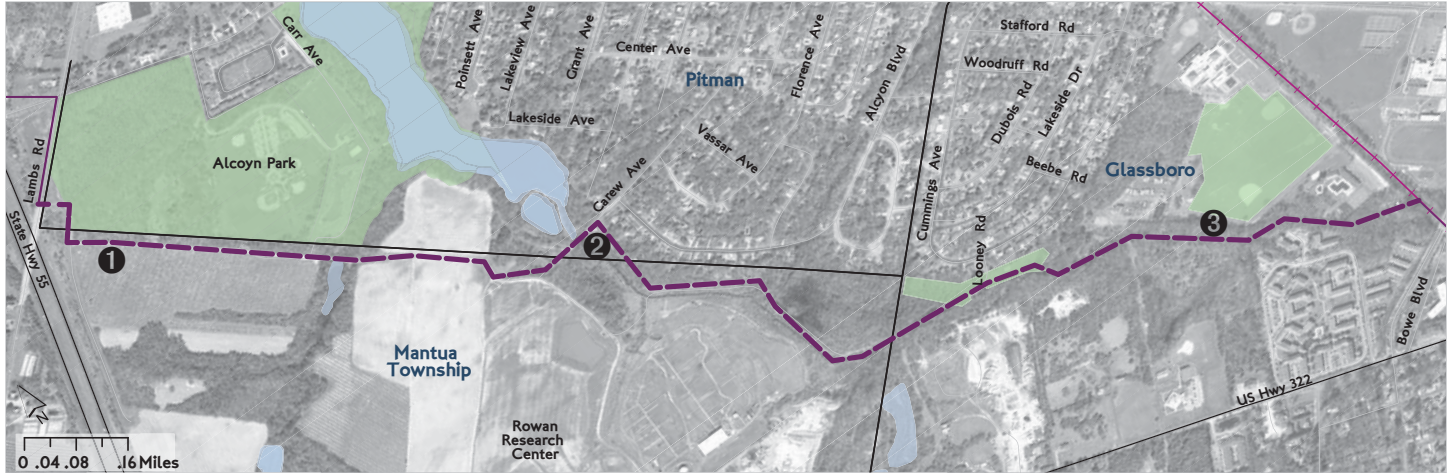


Figure 4: Mantua Portion Recommendations

Segment 2: Looney Trail

Figure 5 depicts the proposed alignment and existing conditions of the Looney Trail. West from Lambs Road, there is an unnamed dirt road (1) that travels behind Alcoyn Park and the Rowan Research Center. The trail would then cross over a small bridge into Pitman (2) and continue along a clear path (3) to the playground at Looney Road. East of the playground the pathway is overgrown and inaccessible until it re-emerges behind an apartment complex before ending near Bowe Boulevard in Glassboro.



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Figure 5: Looney Trail Proposed Alignment and Existing Conditions

Looney Trail Parcel Analysis

Figure 6 depicts the parcel analysis for the Looney Trail segment. From Lambs Road east, the alignment traverses property owned by Rowan University and then by the state's New Jersey Educational Facilities Authority. The presented alignment continues east through privately owned parcels until it enters Glassboro, where it crosses onto municipal property. The segment ends at a privately owned apartment complex near Bowe Boulevard.



Figure 6: Looney Trail Parcel Analysis

Looney Trail Recommendations

Staff found this segment, as presented by the county, to be feasible. However, Figure 7 depicts two small deviations the recommended alignment makes from the proposed alignment. These deviations would avoid several private properties and instead traverse land owned first by Rowan University and then publicly. From Lambs Road until the playground at Looney Road, the alignment would use an accessible, existing path. East of the playground, the path is imperceptible through the dense growth. However, there is room for a multi-use trail, and some flexibility may exist in planning the alignment because of the amount of publicly owned land in this segment. Finally, the recommended alignment would connect to the Conrail tracks farther north in order to stay on public land and to connect to the next segment.

A trail in this location would make a great local amenity. With potential connections to Alcoyn Park, the Rowan Research Center, the playground at Looney Road, Glassboro High School, and the neighborhoods surrounding Alcoyn Lake, it could be targeted for near-term implementation.

Remaining Issue Areas for Recommended Alignment:



Clearing and constructing a path through the overgrown area east of the playground at Looney Road

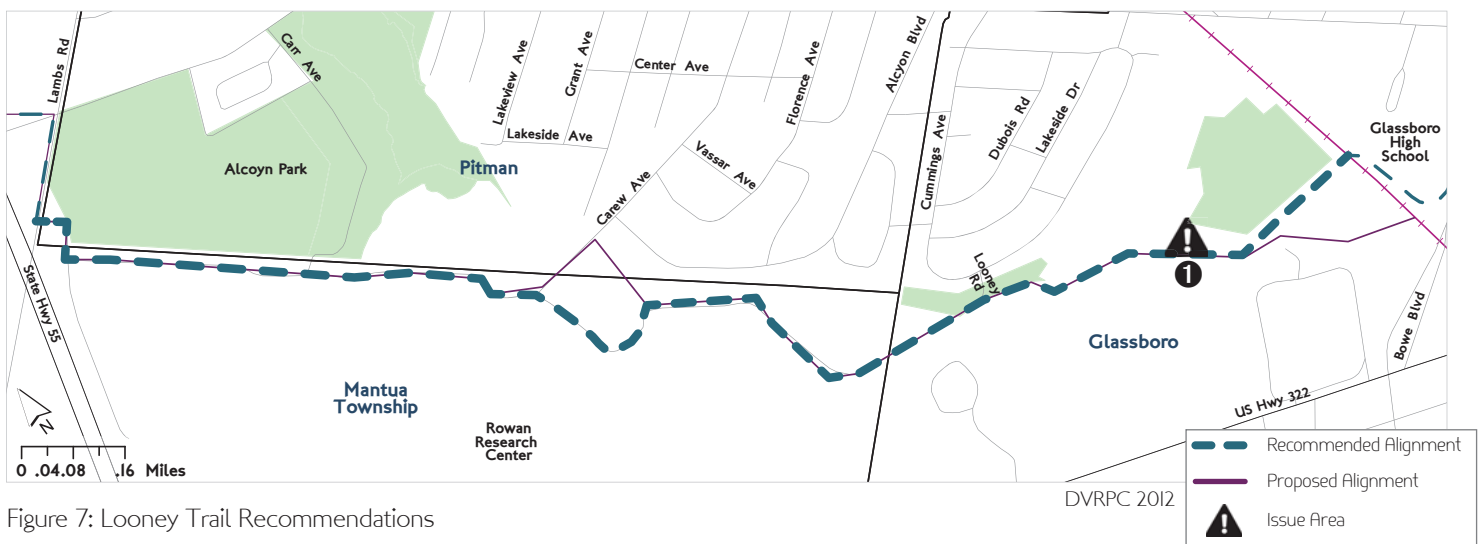
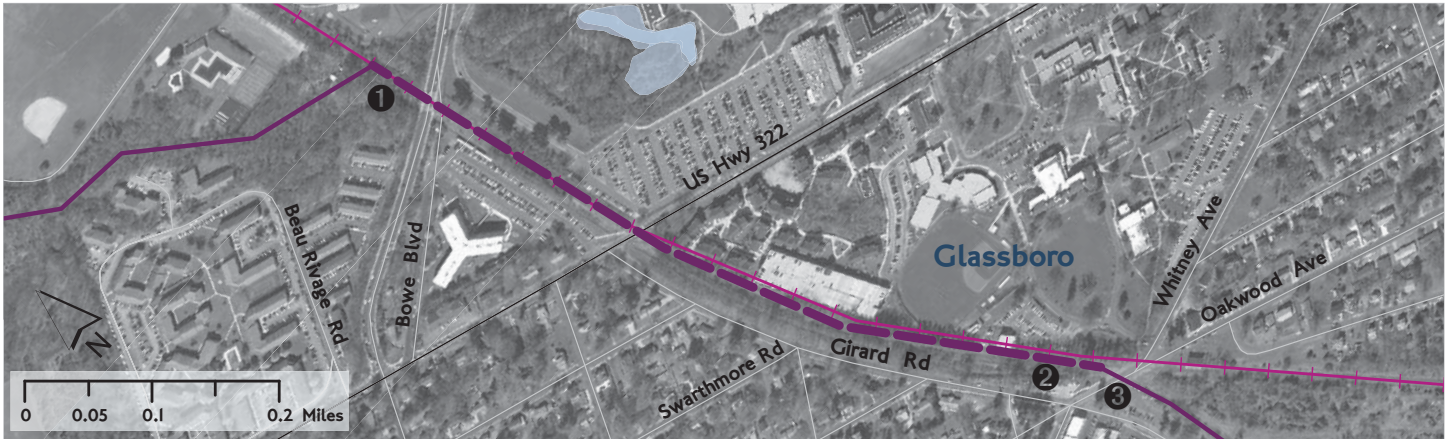


Figure 7: Looney Trail Recommendations

Segment 3: Active Conrail Line I

Figure 8 depicts the proposed alignment and existing conditions for the first portion of Conrail line. From the Looney Trail, users would be directed onto a rail-with-trail facility that would run south with the active Conrail line (1 and 2) and parallel Rowan University. The segment crosses two significant roads, Bowe Boulevard and US 322, before ending just north of Oakwood Avenue (3).



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Figure 8: Active Conrail Line I Proposed Alignment and Existing Conditions

Active Conrail Line I Parcel Analysis

Figure 9 depicts the parcel analysis for this segment. According to DVRPC parcel data, the rail tracks and land abutting it are owned by Glassboro Borough. Most of the land adjacent to the track is publicly owned, either by the state or the borough. Rowan University owns some of the land on the north side of this segment as well.

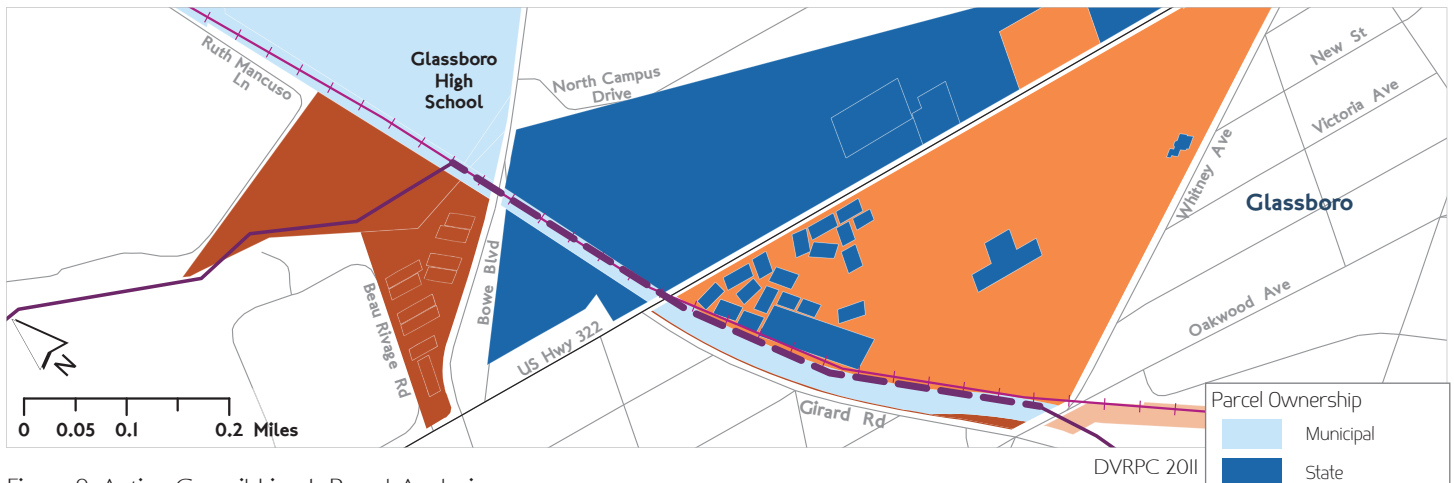


Figure 9: Active Conrail Line I Parcel Analysis

Active Conrail Line I Recommendations

The proposed alignment is feasible but challenging because the rail is active. Instead, staff recommends crossing the railroad tracks at Ruth Mancuso Lane onto Glassboro High School property and circling the perimeter of the school fields until reaching the intersection of Bowe Boulevard and North Campus Drive. Currently, this intersection is unsignalized, but a signal could be installed to create a safe crossing and regulate traffic. The alignment would cross Bowe Boulevard into Rowan's campus and turn south onto a service road that connects to a university parking lot (although the lot is state owned, as indicated in the parcel analysis above). Here, the alignment would continue south along the perimeter toward US 322. A ramp would be required to bring the trail level with the road.

The alignment would cross over US 322 and the railroad tracks again and onto Girard Road, where it would travel on-road until Oakwood Avenue.

Remaining Issue Areas for Recommended Alignment:



Bringing the trail to the same grade as US 322 as it exits the Rowan parking lot



Crossing US 322 due to traffic volumes and a lack of signalization

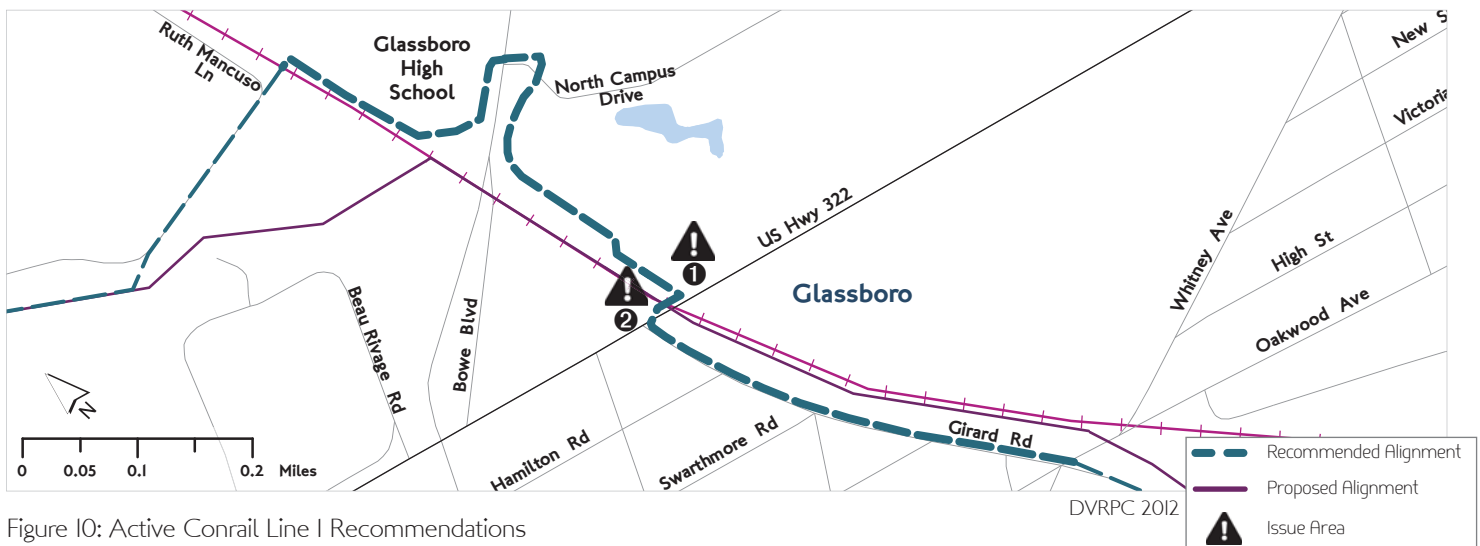
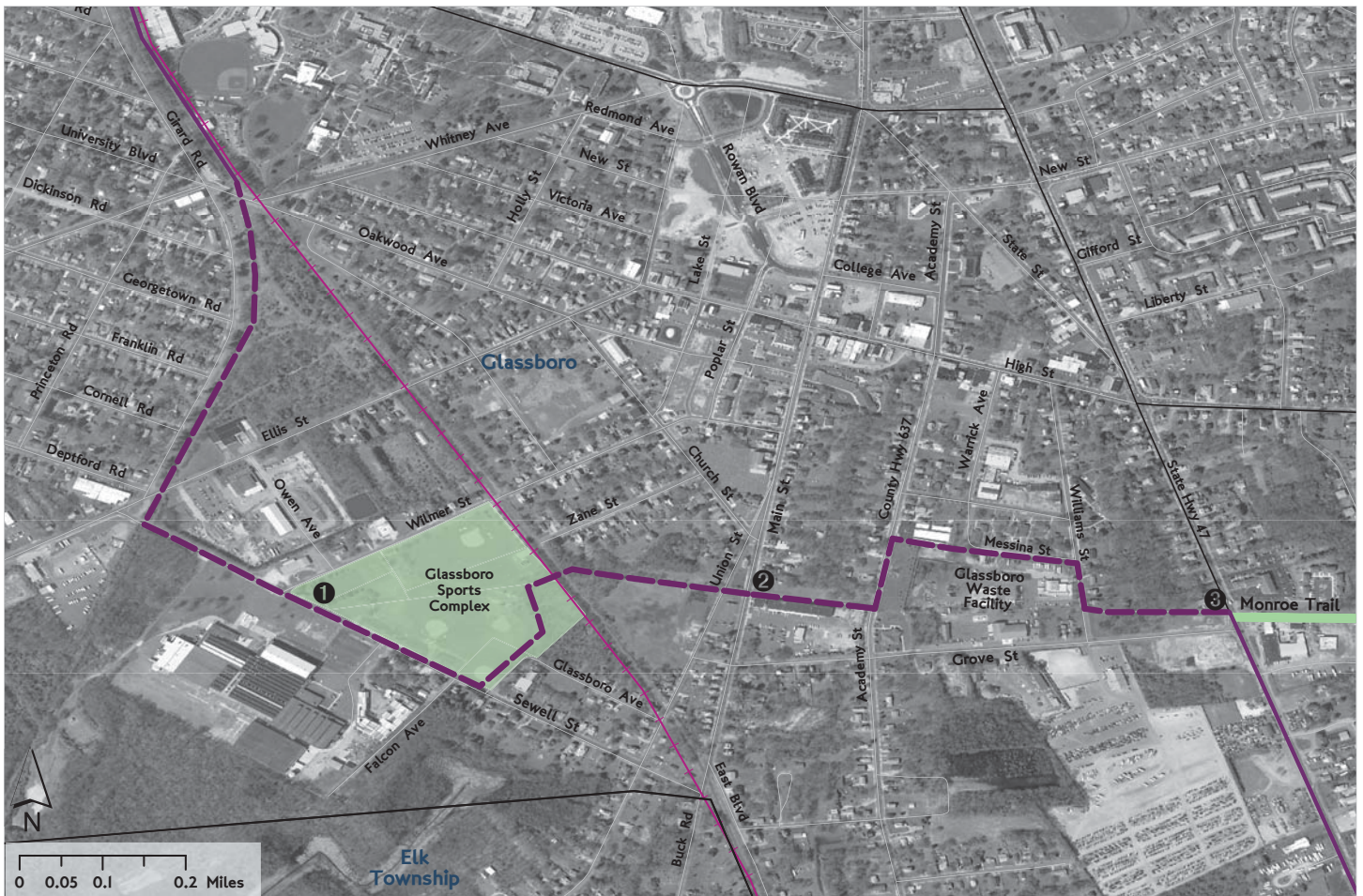


Figure 10: Active Conrail Line I Recommendations

Segment 4: Glassboro Portion

Figure II depicts the proposed alignment and existing conditions along the Glassboro section. South of Oakwood Avenue, the alignment switches from the active Conrail line to an abandoned rail right-of-way until Sewell Street, where it travels east along Sewell until the Glassboro Sports Complex (1). From here, it travels around the perimeter of the park, crosses over active Conrail tracks, and traverses another segment of abandoned rail (2), crossing Union and Main Streets. At Academy Street, the alignment would shift briefly on-road and then turn east through a municipally owned lot connecting to Messina Street. It then turns south onto Williams Street before turning east again and traveling along the abandoned rail right-of-way north of Grove Street. Eventually, it connects to the Monroe Trail (3). This segment is already being designed, with some funding secured for its eventual construction.

At Academy Street, the alignment would shift briefly on-road and then turn east through a municipally owned lot connecting to Messina Street. It then turns south onto Williams Street before turning east again and traveling along the abandoned rail right-of-way north of Grove Street. Eventually, it connects to the Monroe Trail (3). This segment is already being designed, with some funding secured for its eventual construction.



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Figure II: Glassboro Portion Proposed Alignment and Existing Conditions

Glassboro Portion Parcel Analysis

Figure 12 depicts the parcel information for the off-road portions. The abandoned rail right-of-way is owned by Conrail. The Glassboro Sports Complex is publicly owned. East of the park until Academy Street, the right-of-way is owned by Conrail as well. From Academy Street until the junction with the Monroe Trail, the right-of-way is publicly owned.

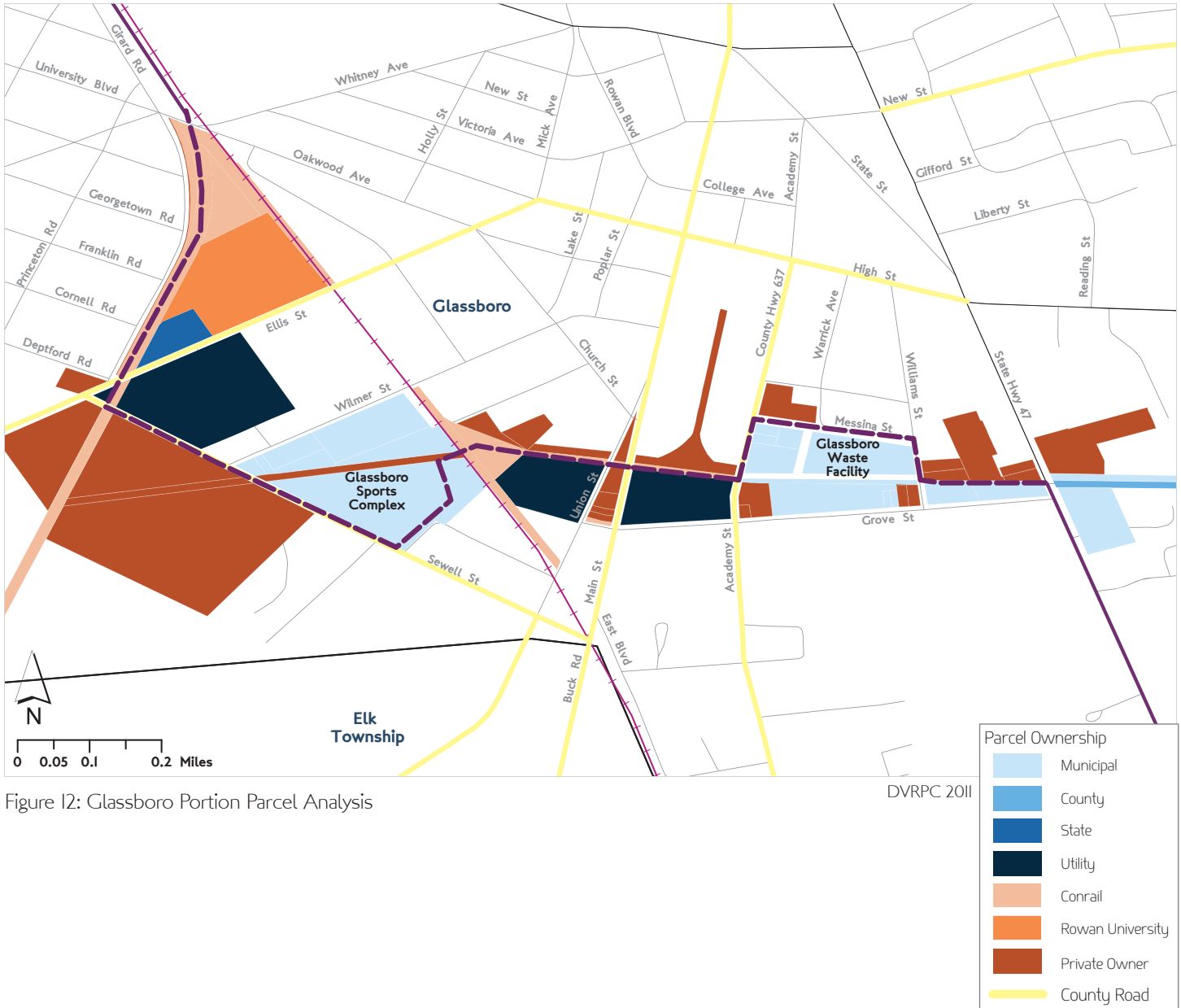


Figure 12: Glassboro Portion Parcel Analysis

Glassboro Portion Recommendations

Figure 13 depicts recommendations for this segment. As proposed by the county, this segment's alignment is feasible, but there are some significant issues. If the off-road option is pursued, the abandoned rail right-of-way is wide enough for a multi-use trail, although an arrangement with Conrail would be necessary, and significant work would have to be done clearing the area. This old rail line continues south as the proposed Bridgeton Secondary Trail that extends into Cumberland and Salem counties.

As in the previous section, an on-road alternative is proposed for short- to medium-term implementation. Users can ride on Girard Street (continued from the previous segment) until Ellis Street. From Ellis Street, it is a short distance until users would turn east onto Sewell Street. From Sewell Street, the alignment recommended here is the same as the county's proposal. However, two issues would remain. The trail will cross the active Conrail right-of-way just below Zane Street, a potentially dangerous situation for trail users. Also, the trail will cross busy NJ 47. Warning signs at this location would be necessary.

Remaining Issue Areas for Recommended Alignment:



Crossing active railroad tracks



Crossing NJ 47

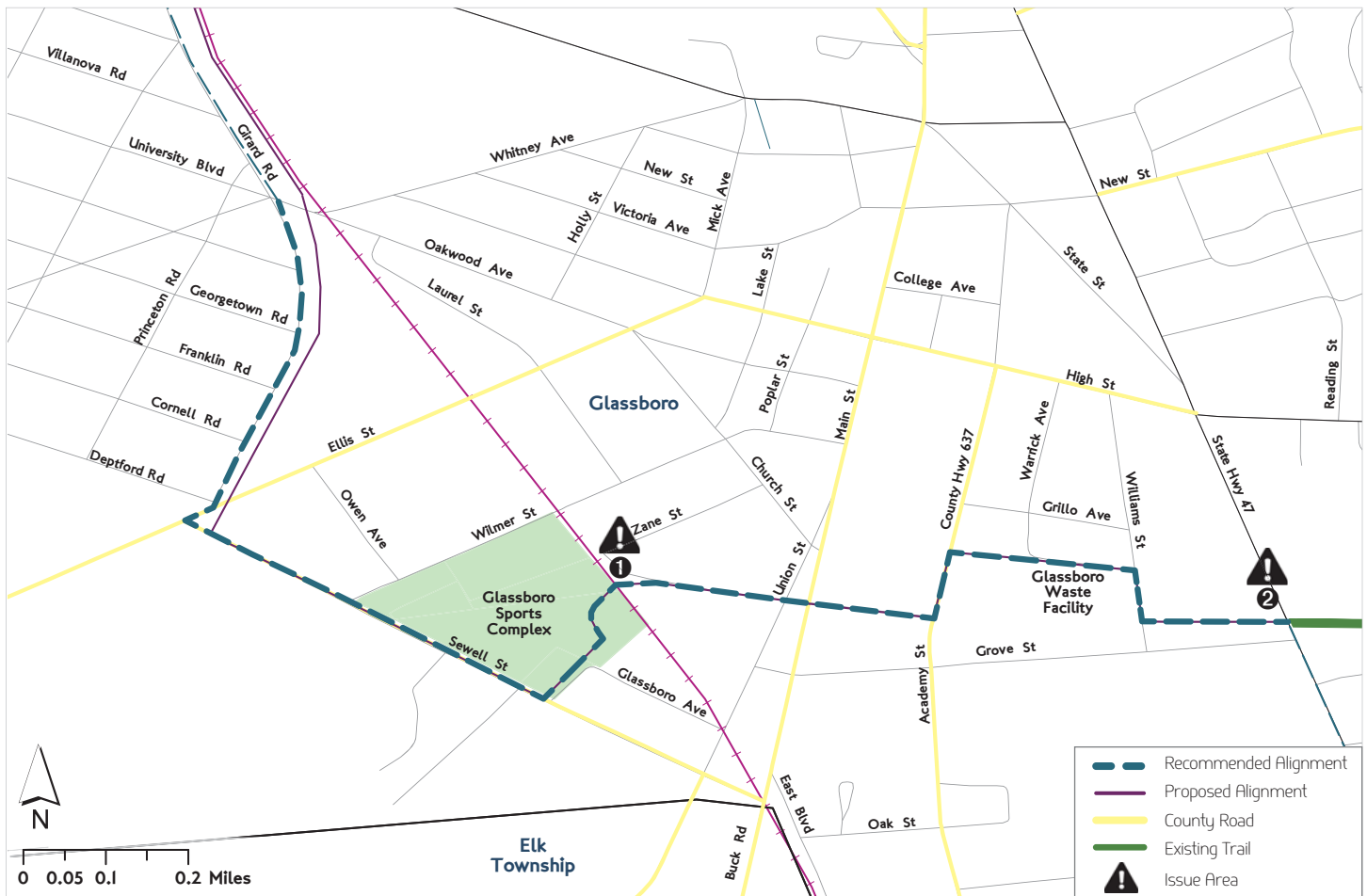


Figure 13: Glassboro Portion Recommendations

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Segment 5: NJ 47 Connector

From the intersection of the Monroe Trail and NJ 47, the alignment would continue south for two and a half miles via bicycle lanes on NJ 47. The alignment turns left onto Howard Street and then onto the Clayton Bike Path, which travels around the perimeter of Clayton High School, through a wooded area, and behind a subdivision just north of Academy Street. This segment would continue south onto Garwood Boulevard, either on- or off-road, until ending at Academy Street.



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Figure 14: NJ 47 Connector Proposed Alignment and Existing Conditions

NJ 47 Connector Parcel Analysis

Much of the alignment in this segment is on-road. NJ 47 has an AADT of over 10,000 cars per day and a speed limit of 50 miles per hour. The Clayton Bike Path is located on privately owned land.

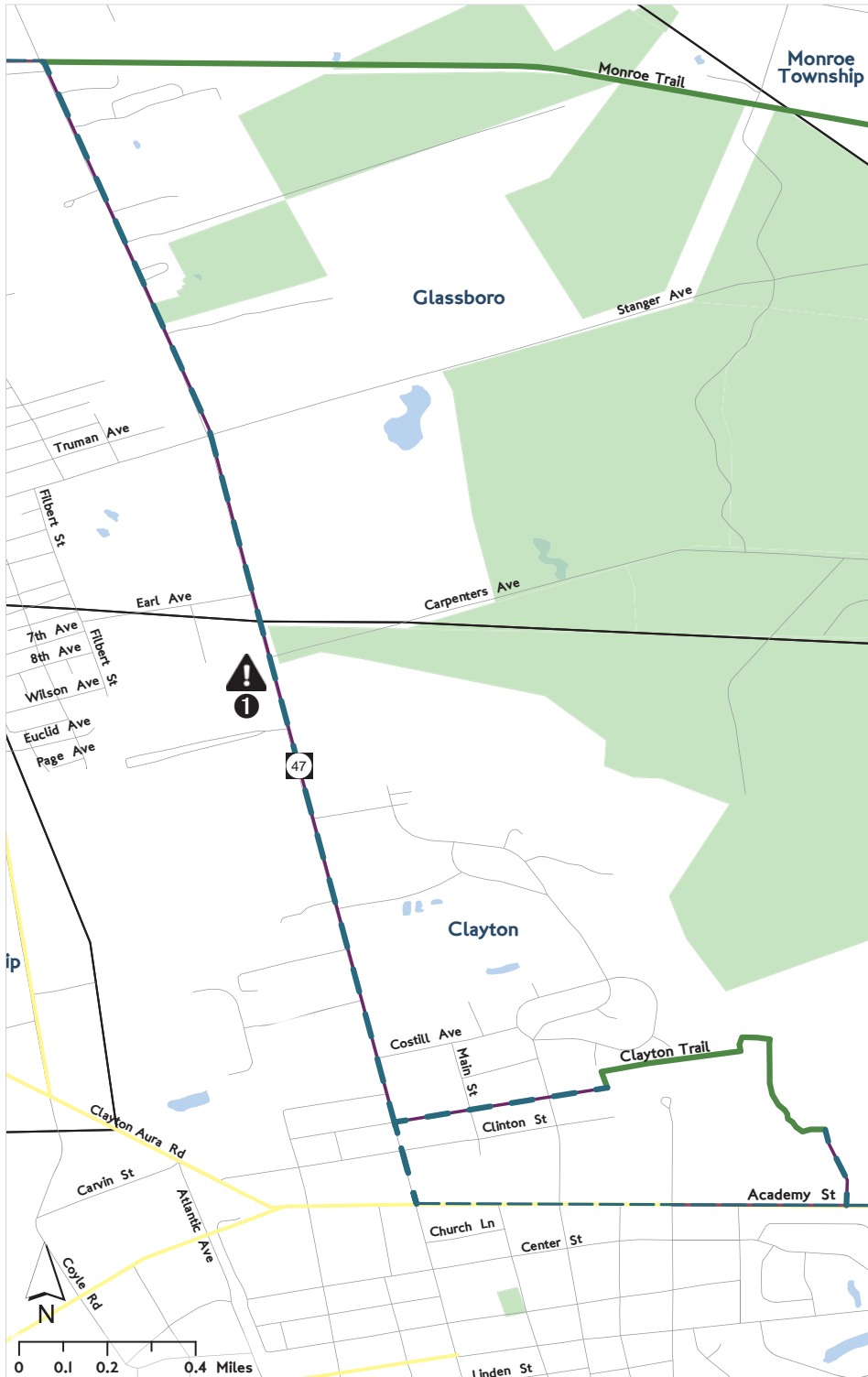


Figure 15: NJ 47 Connector Parcel Analysis

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NJ 47 Connector Recommendations

The alignment as depicted is feasible. NJ 47 has high traffic volumes and speeds, so bicycle lanes should be buffered physically or with striping, and/or they should be sufficiently wide (7–8 feet or more) to provide additional separation between cyclists and vehicular traffic. Speed limits should be lowered as well, if possible. Signage will be needed to direct people to the Clayton Bike Path. Staff also recommends striping bicycle lanes on Academy Road the entire way to NJ 47 to increase the connectivity of the bicycle network and to provide a less circuitous option.



Remaining Issue Areas for Recommended Alignment:



Creating a comfortable environment for bicyclists on NJ 47, despite high speeds and volumes.

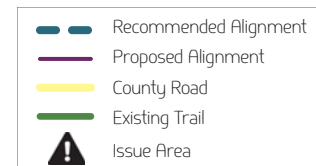


Figure 16: NJ 47 Connector Recommendations

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Segment 6: On-Street Portion

From the NJ 47 Connector, users would travel east on Academy Street (1) to Fries Mill Road, where they could continue east into Scotland Run Park (2). Bicycle lanes would be striped north on Fries Mill Road, connecting to existing lanes around Holly Road (3). Bicycle lanes would also be striped to the south until the junction of Fries Mill Road and Blackwood Avenue, where they would continue on Blackwood Avenue, past the library, until NJ 47, where users would then be directed off-road through a wooded area to an active Conrail right-of-way, where this segment ends.



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Figure 17: On-Street Portion Proposed Alignment and Existing Conditions

On-Street Portion Parcel Analysis

The properties just north of the Conrail right-of-way are all privately owned, as depicted on Figure 18. The rest of this segment is on-road, so no parcel analysis is necessary. Instead, traffic volumes along Fries Mill Road, Blackwood Avenue, and Academy Street are shown. Both Blackwood Avenue and Fries Mill Road are county roads.

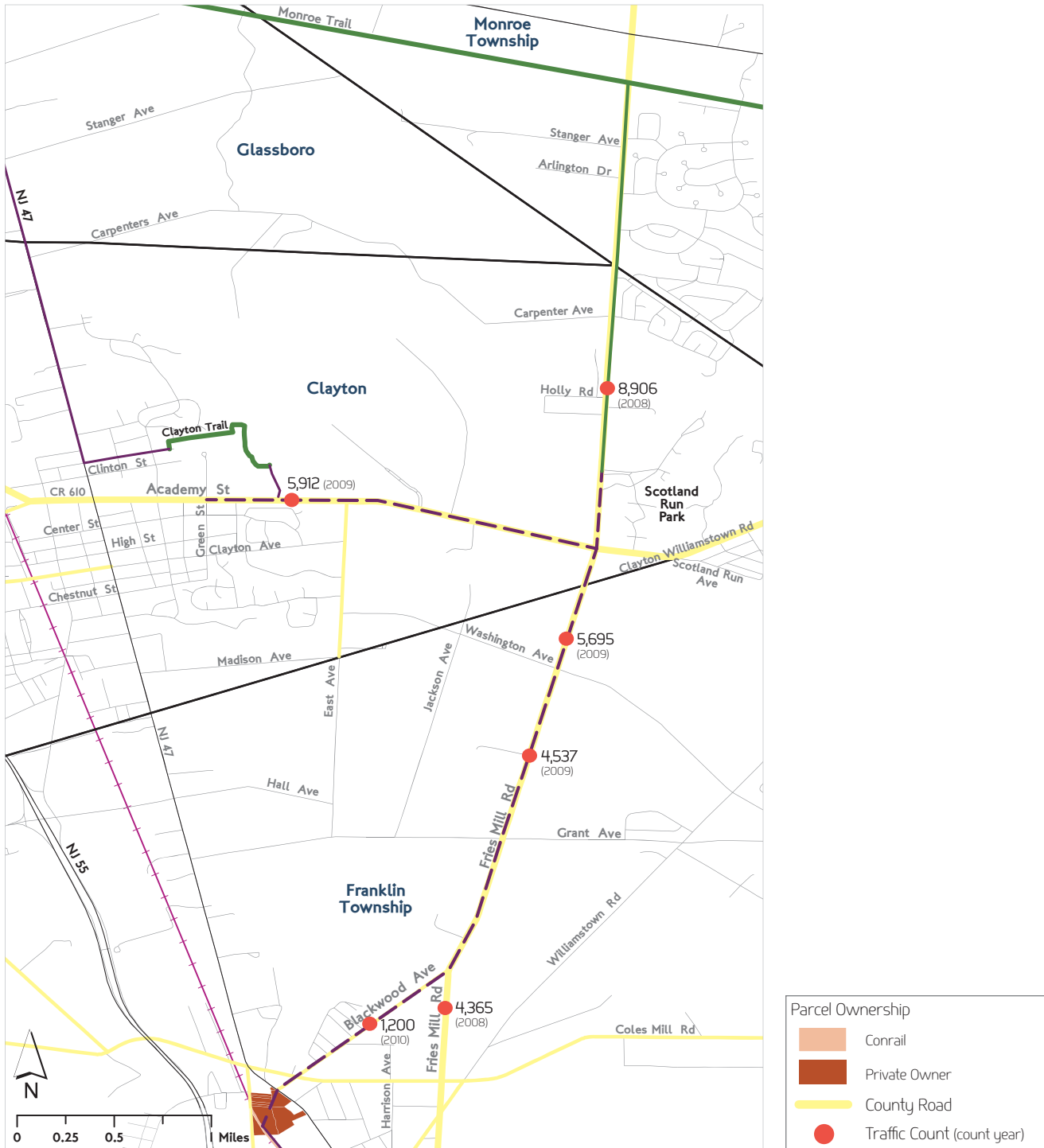


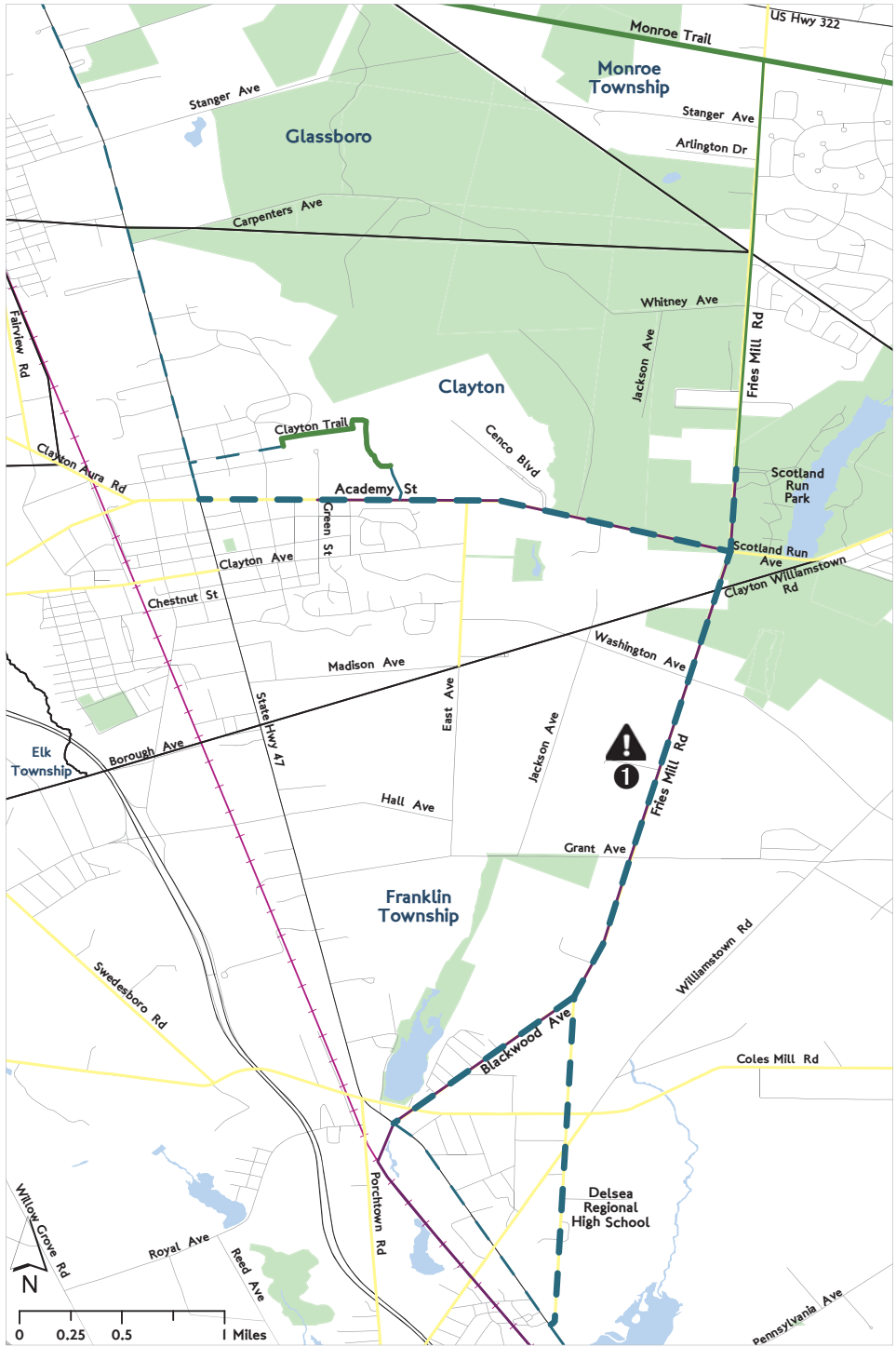
Figure 18: On-Street Portion Parcel Analysis

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On-Street Portion Recommendations

The on-road facilities proposed by the county are feasible. To enhance access to the new facilities along NJ 47 (Segment 4), bicycle lanes should be striped on Academy Street (AADT 5,900) all the way to NJ 47. In addition to using Blackwood Avenue, Fries Mill Road south of the Blackwood intersection should be striped with bicycle lanes to provide access to Delsea Regional High School.

To further enhance bicycling along Fries Mill Road, the speed limit (currently 50 miles per hour) should be lowered and a buffer should be painted onto the road between bicycle lanes and traffic lanes, creating additional separation between cyclists and vehicular traffic.



Remaining Issue Areas for Recommended Alignment:



Lower speed limit and paint buffer along bicycle lanes on Fries Mill Road and Blackwood Avenue to enhance safety and comfort for cyclists.



Figure 19: On-Street Portion Recommendations

Segment 7: Active Conrail Line II

The proposed alignment of this segment uses an existing, active Conrail line to travel east through Franklin Township. On average, the Conrail right-of-way measures about 50 feet with a single track in most parts (1, 2, and 3). The proposed alignment continues along this right-of-way for approximately four and a half miles (including under NJ 47) until N West Boulevard in Newfield Borough. Cumberland County



DVRPC 2011



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Figure 20: Active Conrail Line II Proposed Alignment and Existing Conditions

Active Conrail Line II Parcel Analysis

Figure 21 depicts the parcel map for this segment. The proposed alignment runs east along an active rail right-of-way owned entirely by Conrail. The only exceptions are parcels north of Porchtown Road in Franklin Township, along the far western portion of this segment, which are privately owned. The alignment crosses these parcels as the On-Street Portion connects to this segment.

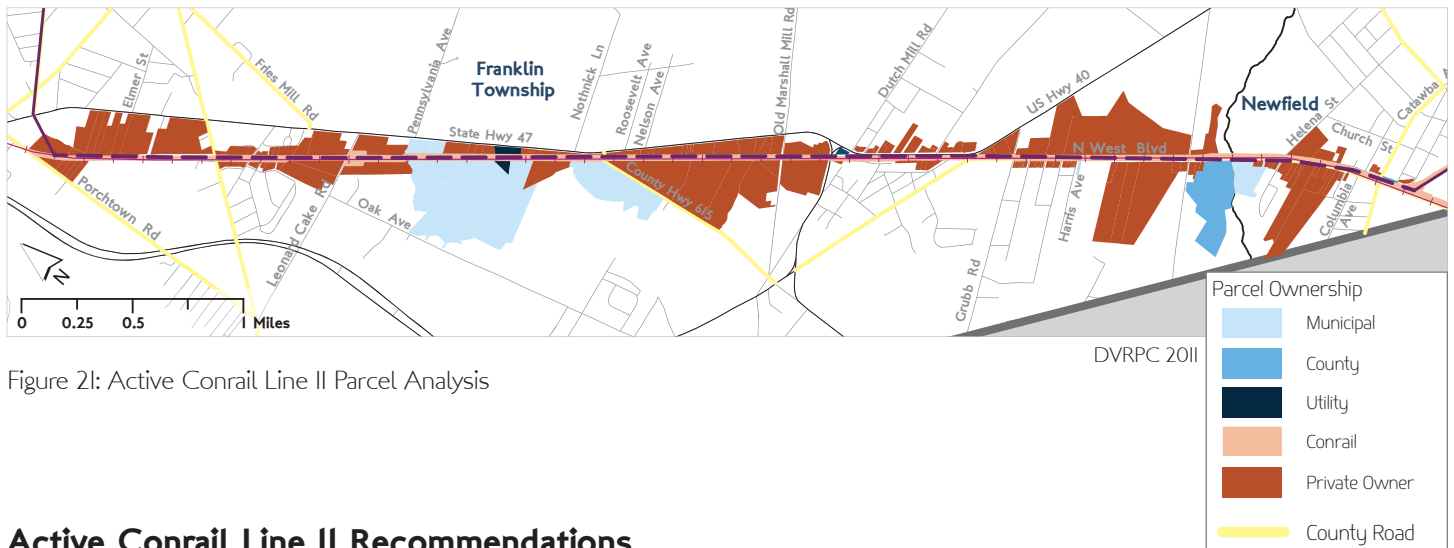


Figure 21: Active Conrail Line II Parcel Analysis

Active Conrail Line II Recommendations

While the right-of-way is overgrown and difficult to access at points, the proposed alignment is feasible (pertaining to infrastructure or available space). Additionally, some segments of the Conrail property run through publicly owned lands, giving some flexibility in the design of the trail alignment. The parcels north of Porchtown Road are privately owned, but the land is wooded, and there is room to build a short off-road segment without impacting existing structures or yards.

If rail-with-trail is impermissible, staff has recommended an on-road alternative. From Fries Mill Road (in Segment 6), bicycle lanes can be striped along NJ 47 for almost three miles. It would then continue south on NJ 47/NJ 40 briefly before turning onto N West Boulevard, which becomes County Road 615.

While only County Road 615/West Boulevard south of Columbia Avenue is currently wide enough for bicycle lanes (north of Columbia, the shoulders are six feet or less, and there is only one lane in each direction), parcel records indicate that there is extra space within the existing right-of-way to add bicycle lanes to remaining sections of County Road 615 and US 40 without having to acquire additional right-of-way.

Remaining Issue Areas for Recommended Alignment:



Pedestrians currently use the shoulders to travel along the corridor. If bicycle lanes were striped onto the road, pedestrians would have to find, or be provided with, alternative accommodations.



The intersection of NJ 47 and NJ 40 is challenging. Speed is a concern, and directional signage for trail users would be very important.

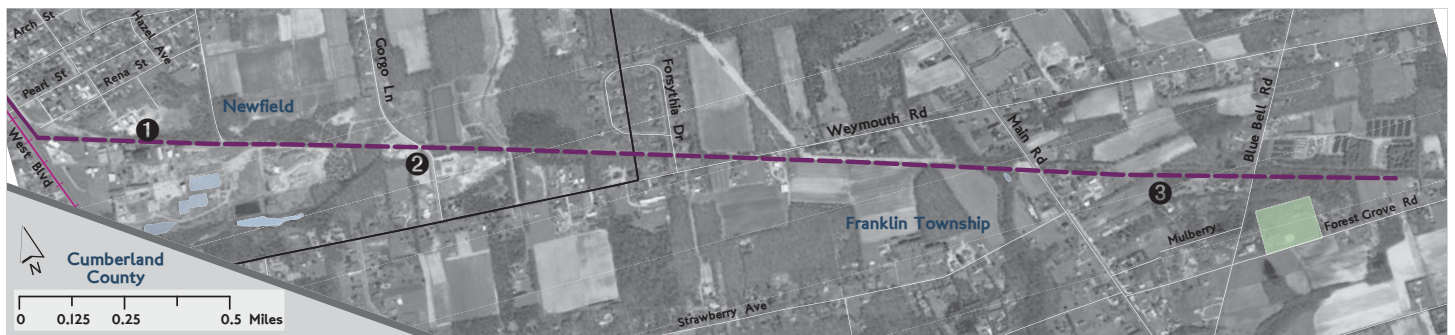


Figure 22: Active Conrail Line II Recommendations

Segment 8: Franklin Township and Newfield

Figure 23 depicts the proposed alignment of this segment and photographs of existing conditions. From the active Conrail right-of-way at Rena Street (Segment 7), the alignment continues along an abandoned, overgrown rail right-of-way headed east (❶). At Gorgo Lane, there are large piles of dirt and debris in the right-of-way (❷). The alignment continues past Forsythia Drive and over Weymouth Road. From here to Main Road, the alignment is clear and open (❸), although there is some evidence it is used by adjacent property owners. Once over Main Road, a driveway appears to have been built in the right-of-way, blocking access and further exploration between Main Road and Blue Bell Road.

East of Blue Bell Road, the alignment is impassible and difficult to find through trees and brush. Aerial imagery indicates that several buildings have been built in the alignment as well as several driveways.



❶

DVRPC 2011



❷

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❸

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Figure 23: Franklin Township and Newfield Proposed Alignment and Existing Conditions

Franklin Township and Newfield Parcel Analysis

As depicted in Figure 24, the majority of parcels in this segment are in private ownership, and some structures have been built in what was previously the rail right-of-way. A small parcel on Weymouth Road is owned by the South Jersey Gas Company. Newfield Borough owns several lots near Gorgo Lane.



Figure 24: Franklin Township and Newfield Parcel Analysis

Franklin Township and Newfield Recommendations

Despite property ownership issues, the proposed alignment is largely feasible. At Forsythia Drive, users would have to be directed on-road for a quarter of a mile along Weymouth Road because of structures in the proposed alignment. Some rerouting may have to be done around Gorgo Lane, depending on Newfield Borough's plans for those properties. East of Blue Bell Road, the alignment is undetectable through the woods, but aerial imagery indicates that homes and driveways have been built in the right-of-way, so some rerouting will have to be done to avoid these structures. These deviations can be seen in Figure 25.

It should be noted that across the Atlantic County line, a trail runs along this same right-of-way. However, as that trail approaches the Gloucester County line, it is diverted south. Connecting to this trail would link trail users into downtown Buena, Atlantic County, and the feasibility of such a connection should be studied.

Remaining Issue Areas for Recommended Alignment:




- 
 Rerouting may be necessary at Gorgo Lane, depending on future development plans
- 
 Alignment would have to shift on-road at Weymouth Road because of structures in the path of the proposed alignment
- 
 Private structures have encroached on proposed alignment



Figure 25: Franklin Township and Newfield Recommendations

Summary

A map of the recommended segments is shown in Figure 26. Many of the recommended segments coincide with the proposed alignment, demonstrating that much of what is proposed by the county is feasible. In particular, the following segments represent significant opportunities to improve access and could be short-term priorities.

The Looney Trail (Segment 2)

The Looney Trail would extend from Lambs Road in Mantua Township to Rowan's campus at Bowe Boulevard. It could provide access to the campus of Rowan University, Rowan Research Center, as well as to residents on the north side of the proposed alignment. Much of the trail could be built on publicly owned land, and there is some flexibility in its routing.

Extension of Monroe Trail through Glassboro (Segment 4)

Extending the Monroe Trail west from its current terminus at NJ 47 would improve access into Glassboro as well as create a link to the planned Bridgeton Secondary Trail, which will extend south to Salem County. Providing on-road facilities from the trail to Rowan's campus and downtown Glassboro, would further enhance these connections.

Some segments, while feasible, may be more complicated. Any trail proposed to run alongside active rail right-of-way would require negotiations with the owner to allay safety concerns. There is no single accepted standard for designing these types of trails, although it is accepted that there must be at least 10 feet between the center of the tracks and the trail. All of the segments that run alongside the active Conrail line meet this requirement, but there may be other concerns that arise.

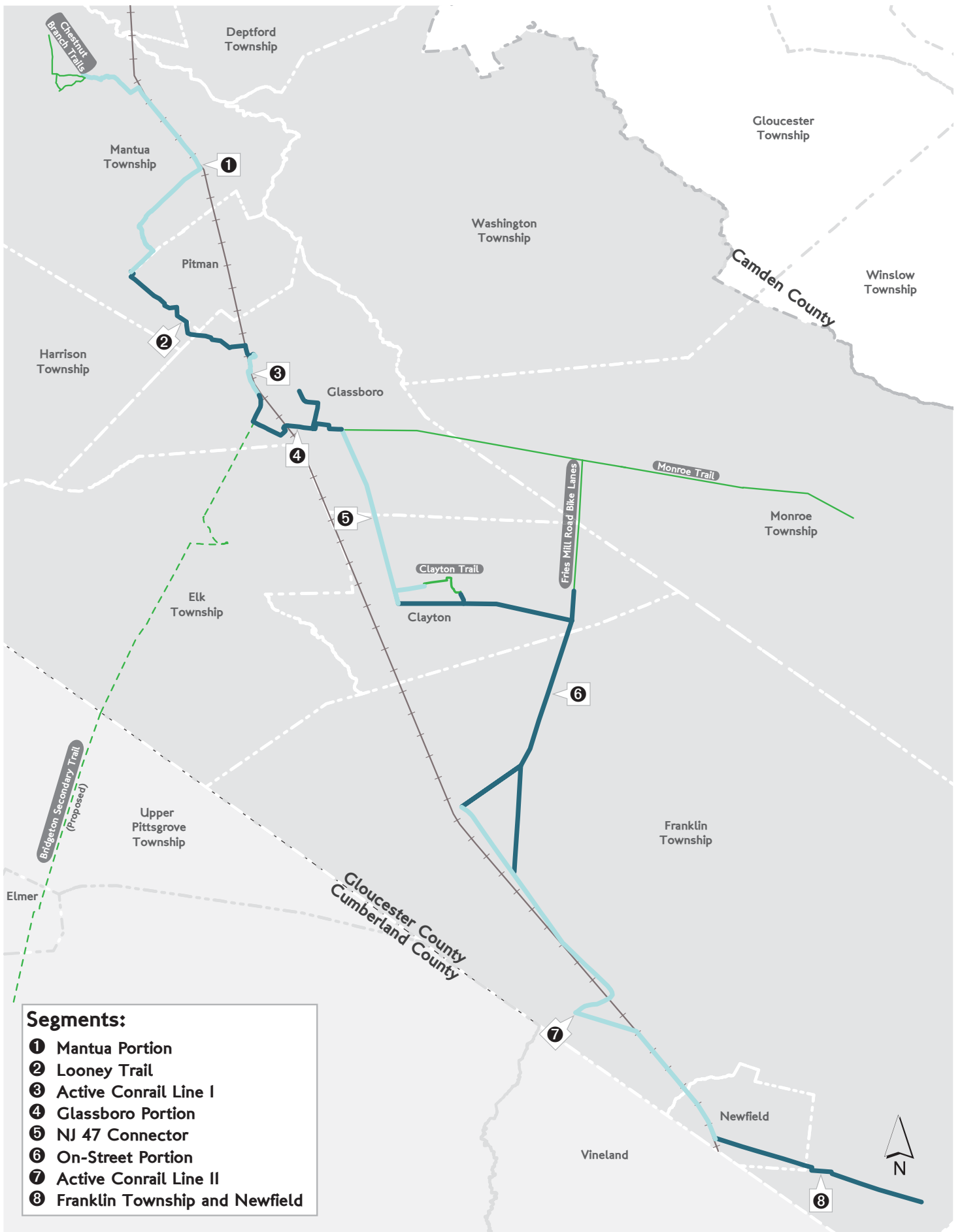


Figure 26: Recommended Alignment for the Chestnut Branch Connector

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|---------------------------------|---|
| Publication Title: | Chestnut Branch Connector Feasibility Study, Gloucester County, NJ |
| Publication Number: | I2022 |
| Date Published: | June 2013 |
| Geographic Area Covered: | New Jersey, Gloucester County, Clayton, Franklin Township, Glassboro, Mantua Township, Newfield, Pitman |

Key Words: Multi-use trails, feasibility studies, bicycles, pedestrians, bicycle facilities

Abstract: This project evaluates the viability of a multi-use trail spanning several municipalities in Gloucester County, New Jersey. Staff conducted fieldwork and analyzed parcel data throughout the study area to determine the trail's feasibility. Where on-road bicycle facilities are considered, traffic speeds and volumes were consulted. Alternatives are recommended when a particular segment of trail is determined to be infeasible or challenging.

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