Trail History and Description

The Chessie Circle Trail is an 11 mile long corridor that has been known variously as “the backside” of the Toledo Terminal Railroad (TTRR), and the Westside Corridor. This corridor has played a significant role in the city’s rich rail history. Construction on the TTRR began in 1902 when a group of roughly 10 railroad companies worked together to form the nation’s first complete beltline. The Toledo Terminal Railroad formed a loop within the city that allowed trains from surrounding railways to connect and transport freight to businesses located along the beltline. Corporations such as Libbey Glass, General Mills, and Owens Corning relied heavily on the delivery of goods via the TTRR. During its heyday, more than 170 rail cars per day delivered freight that supported the city’s booming industry.

As time went on, rail companies merged and traffic decreased as revenue generated from local businesses along the beltline declined. Eventually, the primary Class I rail company that had a need for TTRR was C&O, which became the Chessie System and finally CSX. CSX purchased the TTRR due to its connection to their Michigan rail system and the east or “front” side was CSX’s only access to Toledo’s automobile industry. In 1982, a derailment on the Upper Maumee River Bridge caused damage to the bridge that the railroad elected not to repair. Following the bridge derailment, CSX determined that the east or “front” side of the corridor could handle the reduced traffic flow and the loop was never complete again.

Norfolk Southern (NS) also had customers that accessed via the west or “backside,” so CSX leased that portion of the TTRR to NS. Following consummation of the Conrail sale in 1999, CSX chose to abandon the west side of the rail line in 2010 and lease a segment of the former “backside” to NS.

A consortium of local stakeholders purchased the property in October, 2011, using a combination of $7,665,275 of federal funds plus $1 million of local funds. Consortium members who now own the corridor are the Metroparks of the Toledo Area, University of Toledo, City of Toledo, Wood County Park District, Wood County Port Authority. Together the Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments these entities established a Coordinating Committee to oversee trail development. An early task of the Coordinating Committee was to settle on a name that would establish a separate identity and brand for future trail improvements. The chosen name, “Chessie Circle Trail” reflects the CSX heritage of the corridor and the fact that the Toledo Terminal Railroad was developed as a circular rail loop serving businesses located both east and west of the Maumee River.

Development of 11 miles of linear right-of-way for non-motorized transportation within an urban setting is a rare and exceptional opportunity. Once established, a dense network of surface streets and highways can make the creation of such a corridor impossible. The Chessie Circle Trail project represents an excellent opportunity to further regional transportation objectives related to walking and biking. It supports increased outdoor recreational opportunities and physical activity that can result in better health outcomes for trail users. Many studies have also shown that trails benefit economic development.

http://tmacog.org/Transportation/ChessieCircle.htm