

For the last few years, inline skaters, cyclists, walkers and runners have been taking advantage of the newest and finest trail in the area for inline skaters. Thanks to Mayor Tom Murphy and the other city fathers we have an off-road fitness and commuter trail from downtown Pittsburgh to Oakland. The Eliza Furnace Trail (EFT), affectionately called the "Jail Trail," runs from Grant Street at the new PNC building past the county jail and east along the old B & O railroad right-of-way. The trail is asphalt paved, 12 feet wide and extends 2.5 miles along the Parkway East and Second Avenue past the Pittsburgh Technology Center to near Big Jim's Tavern, a popular watering hole in Greenfield. It extends another mile from Greenfield up through scenic Junction Hollow into Oakland. Being fairly flat it is well suited for beginners and intermediates and also offers a good workout for fitness minded and inline speed skaters who frequent the smooth "black ice." There are also sections of new trail along the South Side of Pittsburgh that, when completed, will extend from Station Square to Sandcastle Park. This will be about eight miles in length and will be connected to the EFT Trail via the renovated Hot Metal Bridge over the Monongahela River.

Eliza Furnace Trail

The Eliza Furnace Trail run connects the edge of the Greenfield neighborhood, bordering South Oakland, with the Downtown area. This paved 2.6-mile trail is probably the City of Pittsburgh's most popular. Cyclists and inline skaters, as well as runners, relish the mostly-straight and smooth asphalt path, particularly during the warm months.

At the trail's entrance from the Greenfield parking lot is one of the many signs that are interspersed throughout the city's trail system telling passersby, should anyone stop to read them, of the history and wildlife of the surrounding area. As you head out of the parking lot, you get a waft of the fragrant honeysuckle that grows along that section of the trail.

Looking towards the south, various tech companies line the Pittsburgh Technology Center office park alongside the Monongahela River. Across the "Mon" lies the South Side section of town, where you can see the Riverview Park Trail following that side of the riverbank, as well as the steep hillside, dotted with homes, leading up to Mt. Oliver.

Continuing on your run, you may also hear the melodic songs of the birds perched on the shrubbery, or see the occasional hare scurrying away from you -- just as you were about to catch up to it. However, you are soon reminded of civilization as you pass MetalTech, Inc.'s steel factory, which hearkens Pittsburgh's 19th century Industrial Age glory days (as alluded to in those trailside signs), the deeply ingrained and molded image of which the city is trying so hard to break free from. Graffiti art adorns some of the concrete walls formed by the adjoining highway, the westbound lanes of I-376. During rush hour, one can let out a smug smile knowing that you are probably going to reach downtown faster than the vehicles stuck in traffic. But you probably won't enjoy their exhaust fumes.

Eventually, you'll reach the large parking lot of the Allegheny County Jail -- hence the trail's nickname, Jail Trail -- and the jail itself. There's no need to worry about facing any

hoodlums here. The building doesn't expose its residents to the outside, although the tiny windows were allegedly tinted to prevent us law-abiding folk from seeing the horrors of inmates mooning at you. Soon after escaping the jail area, you'll see the parking deck for the First Avenue "T" subway station. And, lo and behold, tucked away behind that is a bicycle and inline skate rental shop where you can also buy snacks and drinks. A public water fountain is nearby. If you want to see a much bigger fountain, and more breathtaking views of the city, continue on through the rest of downtown towards Point State Park.