

Towpath trail high in the sky

Bridge under construction will take hikers over traffic

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VALLEY VIEW — A 21st century bridge for a 19th century horse trail is taking shape inside a cavernous structural steel plant in Cleveland.

Workers are fitting, welding and grinding the custom-steel skeleton of two pedestrian bridges for the Towpath Trail along the old Ohio & Erie Canal.

What will start rising over

Granger and Warner roads in mid-March will be a sleek, modern-looking cable-stayed bridge. The design is similar to a suspension bridge, with two 65-foot-tall towers that support steel strands wrapped into a cable that holds up long, free-standing spans.

Though no one has been hurt crossing Granger and Warner roads to date, Cleveland Metroparks undertook the project, now estimated at

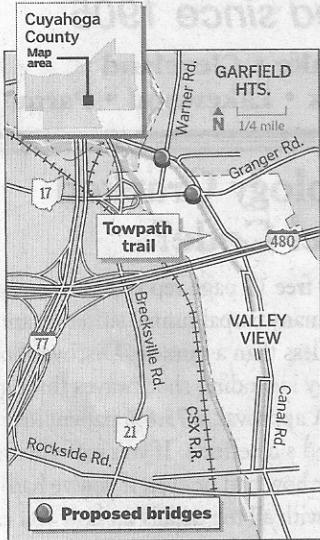
\$6.1 million, to move trail users safely across the five lanes of road.

"Anytime you build things like this, it's fun," said Michael Ciofani, vice president for Comm Steel Inc. of Cleveland. "This is not your ordinary project."

But not everyone is happy.

Three property owners who fall within the bridge's shadow tried last July to stop the bridges from being built.

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A Cuyahoga County Common Pleas judge rejected that effort, so they are now seeking damages.

The fight is over Cleveland Metroparks' right to build the bridges. The property owners gave Cleveland Metroparks access to a strip of land in 1997 so the park system could build the towpath trail along the Ohio & Erie Canal.

The easement allowed a paved, surface trail, not a bridge, said lawyer Kenneth Fisher, who represents Philip Londrico, owner of two office buildings along the trail, and Daniel Winer, owner of the Brooklyn Ignition Co. auto repair shop on Granger.

The bridges limit visibility of the buildings from the street and that will hurt the businesses and their marketability, they argue.

"These bridges are monstrous," Fisher said. "Once visibility is destroyed, it impacts the fair market value of the prop-

Towpath bridges, by the numbers

2 Number of steel pedestrian cable-stayed bridges being built for the towpath trail.

3 Lawsuits filed by nearby property owners against Cleveland Metroparks for building the bridges.

7 Number of 80-foot steel sections that will make one bridge.

580 Length in feet of steel portion of bridge.

780 Length in feet of bridge, which includes two concrete approach ramps.

\$2.1 Original 2000 construction cost estimate in millions.

\$6.1 Latest project cost estimate in millions.

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erty, and it hurts the Londricos from leasing or renting their property."

Lawyers for the property owners said there are better, cheaper alternatives to building the

bridges, such as synchronized traffic lights, to get trail users across the road.

Elliot Azoff, general counsel for Cleveland Metroparks, said the bridges fall within the usage the property owners gave the park system.

"We have a right-of-way on their land to build a towpath," he said. "We elected to put part of the towpath up in the air for the safety of the people. They gave us land for a towpath, and just as a turnpike is a turnpike, whether part of it is a bridge or on land, the towpath is still a towpath if it's 18 feet in the air."

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