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Outlook 2019: Trains to Start Rolling into New Rail Park This Year

Delays at the park mean trains will still be running through downtown well into 2019

BY [JUSTIN FRANZ](#) // JAN 3, 2019



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The ribbon was cut, the golden spikes were hammered and the finishing touches were made on the new Glacier Rail Park in Evergreen, but officials say freight trains will still be rolling through downtown Kalispell well into the new year.

Although a grand opening event was held at the rail park in October, builders still had a few more projects to complete, including installing signage and finishing up the lift station, Montana West Economic Development (MWED) President and CEO Jerry Meerkatz said. Flathead County Economic Development Authority, managed by MWED, was expected to formally take over the 44-acre rail park from contractors in late December.

The Glacier Rail Park was the result of years of planning and millions in federal funding, all part of an elaborate plan to remove two miles of rail line through downtown Kalispell and replace it with a walking trail. Public officials say the Rail Park and trail have the chance to “transform” the community. The first two residents of the industrial park along Whitefish Stage Road will be CHS Kalispell and Northwest Drywall, the final two businesses that still use the rail line in downtown.

While CHS Kalispell is well on its way to completing its new grain elevator and fertilizer facility at the Glacier Rail Park, Northwest Drywall will not be able to break ground on its new facility until spring. Officials expect it to take six months to finish the 30,000-square-foot facility.

Meerkatz said trains would likely continue to run through downtown Kalispell until August or later.



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Once CHS and Northwest Drywall are established at the rail park, the county and city will be able to start looking at

removing the rails, possibly as early as 2020.

Another big task that will need to be completed in the coming months is the finalization of an operating agreement with a company to manage and operate the Glacier Rail Park. Whatever company signs on to the operating agreement will be responsible for switching freight cars around the rail yard and maintaining track, Meerkatz said. That agreement will likely be finalized during the first quarter of 2019.

Meanwhile, Alta Planning and Design and KLJ Engineers are continuing to work on designing the proposed Kalispell Trail that will stretch from Meridian Road to Woodland Park.

The trail itself will be anywhere from 12 to 16 feet wide with 25 to 100 feet of green space in some spots. Amenities along the trail could include lighting, benches, trashcans, bathrooms and way-finding signs. Playgrounds, skate parks and a water pad are also options under consideration. Designers also want to pay tribute to

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the area's industrial heritage and keep sections of railroad track to incorporate it into the path. There is also the possibility of acquiring an old railroad car or locomotive to put on display near downtown.

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