



St. Charles County going green for bicycle riders

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Area residents will have an opportunity Thursday to review plans for an expanded network of bicycle routes on roads and trails in St. Charles County and elsewhere in the metropolitan area.

Great Rivers Greenway will host the last of its four open-house informational meetings from 4:30-7 p.m. at St. Peters City Hall. Residents can learn about existing routes and provide feedback on a proposed network of regional on-road routes.

The 20-year plan would be implemented over time and provide new on-road routes for St. Louis, St. Louis County and St. Charles County. More than 100 municipalities have been involved in the planning.

"These meetings culminate a year and a half of extensive data collection," said Todd Antoine, deputy director for planning for Great Rivers Greenway. "Committees of public works directors put together a plan, then we went out in the fall of last year and introduced the project to the general public. Now, we have to discuss the barriers they face and flesh out goals and objectives to the plan."

Antoine said his organization's network map includes about 1,000 on-road miles. Identifying the interchangeability for all of those miles is the key to expanding.

"Our ultimate goal is to provide good, safe connections to get from point A to point B," Antoine said.

There are two greenways in the county. The Boschert Greenway runs from Fox Hill Park to New Town Boulevard Trail on the north side of St. Charles. The Busch Greenway route will connect August A. Busch Memorial Conservation Area to the Missouri Research Park near Weldon Spring.

Paul Wojciechowski, project manager for the planning team, said there are 250 miles of on-road bike lanes in St. Charles County. He said cities across the country that have established inter-connected bike routes offer their residents more commuting options and that leads to a better quality of life.

"When you live in a neighborhood and want to get to a trail, work or school and live in the county and work there too, when you walk out the door you can get in your car and drive to work or get on your bike and ride there," Wojciechowski said. "There won't be any loose ends, and there's not a line that goes out and stops."

Some municipalities have sent their public works directors to be part of Great Rivers Greenway's technical committees. Antoine said O'Fallon received funding from East-West Gateway Council of Governments to take part in the planning.

The O'Fallon City Council adopted a resolution this year to use the funds to complete the South Side Loop, a series of bike routes that connect Technology Drive, WingHaven Boulevard, the South Outer Road and Highway N, said city spokesman Tom Drabelle.

"I think we gave them momentum to go after those funds to get their project going," Antoine said. "We've been having conversations with public officials, alerting them to our plans and getting their feedback on how to approach it."

Antoine said that for the past 10 to 15 years, cities across the country have been implementing route plans similar to those proposed here. He said this is the first regional plan he's seen that is multi-county. Engineering designs and cyclist education are two keys to the plans' development. There will be training programs for people on how to ride bikes on the road.

"Part of what we're looking at is to talk about what type of facilities they'd like," Antoine said. "Will there be signage to alert motorists bikers are using the road? Is there enough capacity on the road for a bike lane?"

In St. Louis and St. Louis County there are currently 77 miles of on-road bicycle lanes and signage. Antoine said Great Rivers Greenway still has to bring officials with St. Charles County, St. Louis, St. Louis County and the Missouri Department of Transportation together to talk about the 20-year plan that would connect employment centers, transit stops, colleges, town centers and regional parks.

"The draft plan is ready; the network map is about as far as we can do with our existing network partners," Antoine said. "At the first two public meetings we've had, there were about 300 people combined."