



Local News

Berrien looking to Walk & Roll

TwinCATS seeks public opinion on best ways to build safe network for biking, walking

Print Page

By RALPH HEIBUTZKI / H-P correspondent

Published: Friday, June 25, 2010 1:07 PM EDT

BENTON HARBOR — Proponents of a bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly Berrien County will get their chance this summer to offer suggestions about how they want those goals accomplished.

Members of the Twin Cities Area Transportation Study, or TwinCATS, reviewed the progress this week during a meeting with Chris Cook, chairman of the Nonmotorized Transportation (Walk & Roll) Subcommittee that's looking into the issue. Cook is CEO of Abonmarche Consultants Inc., an engineering firm in Benton Harbor.

Formed last September, the subcommittee is looking at ways to build a safe transportation network for bicyclists and pedestrians.

As part of those efforts, the group is finalizing maps of existing nonmotorized trails in the TwinCATS metropolitan area, Cook said at the Monday meeting.

The TwinCATS area consists of these municipalities in Berrien County: the cities of Benton Harbor, Bridgman and St. Joseph; Benton, Lake, Lincoln, Royaltown, Sodus and St. Joseph townships; and the villages of Shoreham and Stevensville. Michiana and Grand Beach are satellite members.

The idea is to promote inclusion of bike and pedestrian trails into future road projects and to encourage local governmental agencies to do likewise, Cook said.

"We're also targeting certain areas where facilities could be provided," he said.

A logical outgrowth of that planning is connecting or extending current trails wherever possible – such as from South Haven to New Buffalo, or Niles to Berrien Springs, he added.

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission staff are doing the legwork of compiling the maps. The subcommittee meets monthly but is holding off until the maps are completed, Cook said.

Several key intersections already have been suggested for potential pedestrian trail sites, said Anna Rahtz, the commission's transportation planner.

"The big responses that we got were Red Arrow Highway, Niles Avenue and Napier Avenue," Rahtz said. "Quite a few people (also) said, 'extending the trail that goes from Lions Park Beach, to the pedestrian bridge.'"

Once the maps are finalized, a public meeting will likely be scheduled in late summer or early fall to get more comments, Rahtz said.

"If they (subcommittee members) get input from a lot of the stakeholders, that could eventually be amended into our long-range transportation plan – with the hope being that each government

agency would amend it on their end," she said.

Anyone interested in making suggestions can do so by filling out the "Walk & Roll Poll" on the commission's website, www.swmpc.org.

Any action is probably years away, but the final document should provide a reference point to help specific projects get funded, Cook said.

"We'll have documentation to apply for grants, and we'll be more focused in our project selection – to try to make sure that the roadway projects incorporate those facilities wherever it's practical," he said.

Cook hopes to see local bike clubs get involved, too.

"There's not many organized walking groups that I know of," Cook said. "But maybe some of these biking groups will get fired up about this and help us in our work, to expedite it happening."

Copyright © 2010 - Herald Palladium

[x] Close Window