

Massive bike, pedestrian trail connecting Niles to Mishawaka making progress



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NILES, Mich. -

Imagine, being able to ride your bike from Niles to Mishawaka without having to risk your life on a busy road. Soon, that may be a reality thanks to the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail.

When it's complete, there will be 34 miles of off-road bike and pedestrian trails connecting the two cities.

Much of the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail is complete, like Mishawaka and South Bend's river walks and the paved trail that runs through Niles. But work is still being done to connect all those trails to form the River Valley Trail.

And while it will be years before the entire trail is completed, work is being done right now.

Just west of M-51 in Niles Township, among trees and brush, construction crews are hard at work. Blacktop is being laid and leveled, a cross walk is being installed along US-12, landscaping is being planted and what will soon be the Indiana Michigan River Valley Trail is taking shape.

"So they are building about 3 miles of trail in Niles Township," says Marcy Colclough of the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission.

The trail she is referring to is being laid from US-12 to the Indiana state line. It will connect the paths in Niles to the LaSalle Trail in St. Joseph County which is also still in the works.

Ultimately, the entire trail system will lead bikers and pedestrians through Niles, South Bend and Mishawaka. There are off shoots that run through Notre Dame, past the St. Joseph River and by area parks and schools.

"This trail system is just really important for the communities along it. It is really going to bring attention to this area as a cool place to be. People want to live, work, near places that have trails and recreational opportunities," says Colclough.

There are other areas along the planned route that are still in the planning and fundraising stages. Still, the people who have been working to make the River Valley Trail possible are optimistic about what this will mean in the years to come.

"And the end product is hopefully is that this region gets known for its pedestrian friendly facilities," says Harry Thibault of the Niles Township Park Commission.

The portion being built right now on Niles Township is expected to be completed by end of July or early August.

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