

Work continues on path to Niles

By Amanda Gray South Bend Tribune | Posted: Tuesday, January 13, 2015 6:05 am

SOUTH BEND — The path for bicyclists to get from Mishawaka's dam to downtown Niles continues to take shape.

Partial funding for one of two final undeveloped sections of the 34-mile Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail was approved last week by the St. Joseph County Board of Commissioners.

The commissioners on Jan. 6 accepted \$141,000 from the Clay Township Benefit Trust to go toward the county's 20 percent match with a federal grant. The \$3.18 million project will be built in three phases and will complete the portion of the trail from Cleveland Road north to the Indiana-Michigan state line. Beyond this, just a small one-mile section is left to be built by this fall just south of the Niles city limits, according to a map from the Friends of the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail website.

Design work is currently underway for the first phase, which will go from Cleveland to Darden Road, Commissioner Andy Kostielney said. The second phase will go from Darden to Auten Road, with the third phase extending from Auten to the state line. The project will include at least one Hawk signal, which helps pedestrians cross high-traffic roads by alerting drivers with lighted signals.

According to St. Joseph County engineer Jessica Clark, the first phase will go to bid late this fall and probably will start construction in the spring of 2016. She added that the second phase also will be constructed in 2016, with the final phase built in late 2017, if all the funding comes together. Public support seems high for the project, she said, and she hasn't heard of any issues from nearby property

Proposed interstate bike trail



Source: Friends of the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail, St. Joseph County engineer Jessica Clark

Tribune Graphic JOHN STUMP

\$141,000 given for bike trail

Locater map of a prposed bike trail from South Bend to Niles. Jan. 13, 2015 Tribune Graphic/JOHN STUMP

owners.

Kostielney said Monday that the county is looking for more local partners to add to the county's match to limit the amount of taxpayer dollars spent on the project. The total needed for the match will be a little more than \$600,000. Clark said that the county parks department secured the matching funds for the first phase, and the money from the Clay Township Benefit Trust nearly covers what's needed for the second phase. Funds for the third phase still need to be secured.

Clay Township trustee Mike Dobson said the money from the trust needed to be spent by this month, before the trust was disbanded. The trust was created with a 2015 deadline in 2010 from funds from two anonymous groups in Clay Township.

Funds from the trust were used in 2013 to help with the Juniper Road bike trail. When the Niles Township Board puts funds down to build their path to the state line, Dobson said, the trust board of directors saw an opportunity.

"We don't want the money to just sit and for nothing to be accomplished," Dobson said by phone. "The money goes elsewhere if it's not done in a timely manner."

Dobson said that it will help keep bicyclists and walkers safe because it takes them away from the busy streets and highways and onto a path along the old railway.

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