

RIVER'S EDGE TRAIL



TRIBUNE PHOTO/JULIA MOSS

Lance States peels wood forms from new concrete along the Sun River Wednesday.

Pressing on

River Drive realignment gets commission support; Sun River connector almost done

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City officials are looking at plans to realign a portion of the River's Edge Trail, which makes a convoluted jog along River Drive around Electric City Water Park and through the Great Falls Police Department parking lot.

Another trail improvement, the Sun River connector, is nearing completion along the 10th Avenue South Bridge, and could be open in July.

The River's Edge Trail Foundation is working with the city to build a new stretch of trail along the river from Broadwater Bay to the 1st Avenue North Bridge near the Great Falls Tribune.

Andrew Finch, city transportation planner, updated city commissioners on the project.

Foundation members said late last year that the project might be under construction this summer, but the project is complicated, and Finch said the project would likely take another five years.

Finch said the project was part of the original plan 25 years ago, but organizers ran into regulatory problems since the proposed

route would impact the river. Then it was meant to be built when River Drive was widened, but that never happened and that project isn't on the horizon, Finch said.

In recent years, the project moved back to the top of the priority list when an officer was hit by a car in the police department parking lot, Finch said. Safety is a major factor as city officials have seen people pushing strollers, walking, running and riding bikes along the narrow portion of River Drive where there's a dip and curve.

The RET Foundation paid for an engineering study and the proposed route would require adding about 1,900 feet of new trail and constructing a riverwall, which is the option preferred by staff.

That option would cost an estimated \$1.3 million.

Another option would be a combination of a retaining wall and piers with about 180 feet of bridging. That option is an estimated \$1.6 million and would be more vulnerable to damage in flooding or river debris, Finch said.

A protective canopy over the trail with solar lighting would protect trail users from debris from the railcars and the trail surface

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TRIBUNE PHOTO/JULIA MOSS

Kellee States places steel handrails to match the walking path across the 10th Avenue South bridge Wednesday.

Projects

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would dip two feet below the base flood elevations to allow for an eight-foot clearance under the bridge.

Constraints on the project include a lack of an easement for the trail from BNSF Railway; the low elevation would be prone to flooding; no funding sources have been identified yet; and the project will impact the river bottom, riverside vegetation and water flow. That involves regulatory agencies such as Fish, Wildlife and Parks, who would need to sign off on the project.

The benefits would be better trail connectivity; im-

proved safety on that trail segment; reduce unsafe crossings over the railroad; and eliminate the need to cross River Drive twice.

Staff met with the Montana Department of Transportation, and it didn't oppose the project, Finch said.

Commissioners told Finch and foundation members to move forward with the project but have not committed any funding.

Also along the River's Edge Trail, the Sun River connector is nearing completion. The segment was scheduled for completion around August, but might be open in July.

The project will connect 10th Avenue South at the Warden Bridge to 6th Street

Southwest on the south side of the Sun River and the north side of Country Club Boulevard.

The city conducted a special bike/pedestrian count in that area last summer to be able to measure the trail's impact once it's completed.

Earlier this year, Finch said they did a week's worth of counts in June 2015 and found that on an average weekday, there were 17 pedestrians and 28 bicyclists using the shoulder of the road on 10th across from the country club entrance. On weekends, the average daily counts were 29 pedestrians and 33 bicyclists.

The trail will be cantilevered a few feet over the sheet pile with a rail, Finch said.