

Bella Vista celebrates Razorback Greenway trail extension



Trail could be coming to Southwest Missouri

- By Rayna Karst rkarst@joplinglobe.com
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BELLA VISTA, Ark. — This community on the Missouri border celebrated an extension of the Razorback Regional Greenway bicycle trail on Saturday with a ribbon cutting, bike parade, food trucks and a ride.

"This is a momentous occasion for Bella Vista," said Mayor Peter Christie.

The Razorback Regional Greenway is a hard-surfaced trail open to pedestrians and cyclists. It extends now 37.6 miles from Bella Vista to Fayetteville and connects seven cities and many of the major attractions in Northwest Arkansas, including popular mountain biking areas.

The extension moving north from Lake Bella Vista, though only a half-mile long, is the first of several new projects planned for the trail, Christie said, and gets it one step close to Southwest Missouri.

"What you are riding on today is only the beginning," Christie added.

One long-term goal is to extend the trail into McDonald County, which is considered part of the Northwest Arkansas metropolitan area by planners and the U.S. Census Bureau.

Public meetings have been held in McDonald County to explore the possibility of bringing the Razorback into Missouri.

"My friend Gregg (Sweeten), who is the mayor of Pineville (Missouri), is already working with the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission and he's planning his trails in anticipation of linking up with our trail," Christie said. "So this is long-term and huge. This is the beginning."

Tim Conklin, assistant director of the regional planning commission, added: "Communities are working to plan those (trails) and build those key connections also."

Conklin also said he was grateful to the Walton Family Foundation for its donations toward the trail system.

"The Walton Family Foundation has just been key to getting these projects moving forward and advanced in their clear, generous grant making to the communities throughout Northwest Arkansas," he said. "It is very beneficial, and the results of it are very popular as you can tell from today, there are a number of people using it."

Ride the Razorback.

The Razorback Regional Greenway opened in May 2015, and the portion of the trail at Lake Bella Vista averages 18,000 trail users each month, according to the City of Bella Vista.



Bella Vista Announces 50-Mile Trail System Coming To

Central Part of City

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BELLA VISTA (KFSM) — Bella Vista is about to double its trail system mileage.

The city announced Tuesday it would add a 50-mile trail system to the central portion of the city.

The new trails would complement the Blowing Springs and Back 40 natural-surface trail systems already available in Bella Vista.

Construction is expected to begin this fall and is being funded by a \$3.9 million grant from the Walton Family Foundation.

The grant will also cover two years of maintenance costs, which will then be split between the city and the Bella Vista Property Owners Association.

“This is a huge milestone for Bella Vista, as our city will soon be home to 100 miles of world-class trails for mountain bikers, hikers, runners, birding enthusiasts, nature lovers and more,” Mayor Peter Christie said in a news release.

Bella Vista lands \$3.9 million Walton grant for trails

by Robin Mero (rmero@nwabj.com)

The Walton Family Foundation continues to super trail the region, announcing Tuesday (Aug. 28) a \$3.9 million gift to the city of Bella Vista for construction of 50 miles of new trails and two years of maintenance.

The new trail system will be built to meander through ravines and valleys, between neighborhoods in the central portion of the city, west of U.S. Highway 71. Construction, overseen by NWA Trailblazers, will begin this fall and should be complete by late 2019.

“This is a huge milestone for Bella Vista, as our city will soon be home to [a total of] 100 miles of world-class trails for mountain bikers, hikers, runners, birding enthusiasts, nature lovers and more,” Mayor Peter Christie said.

With this gift, about 100 of the 250 miles of soft surface trails in Northwest Arkansas will be in Bella Vista.

“We have a lot of land, but it’s primarily hills, valleys and deep ravines ... unusable and inaccessible. But it’s perfect for trails,” said Cassi Lapp, communications manager for the city of Bella Vista. “We found with the Back 40 trails, which were built in 2016, that by putting trails in these otherwise unused areas, we were able to reveal aspects of Bella Vista that even people who have lived here for decades knew nothing about –

waterfalls, bluffs, expansive rock outcroppings, etc.”

Bella Vista already has two soft-surface trail systems, Blowing Springs and the Back 40 (on the east side of U.S. 71). Both offer natural-surface, multi-use trails that appeal to beginner, intermediate and advanced users. The city’s master trail plan was created in 2015 and this new project will mark the second phase. The host land is POA-owned common property that is being leased by the city for this purpose. The city will lease land for the trail plus 10 feet on either side, Lapp said.

The Walton foundation was an integral part of creating the city’s master trail plan, Lapp said.

“This new trail system falls in line with that and their continuing commitment toward increasing the quality of life in the Northwest Arkansas region,” she said. “It’s no secret Bella Vista is really beautiful, but the trails highlight a new level of that and we are happy to be able to share it and provide residents and visitors a way to access that.”

NWA Trailblazers is a nonprofit organization that’s been developing multi-use and soft surface trails in the region since 1996. The group’s first project was an asphalt trail around Lake Bella Vista.

Executive Director Erin Rushing could not be reached for comment on Tuesday afternoon.

NWA planners apply for BUILD grant to pay for I-49 gap between Arkansas, Missouri

ARKANSAS TRANSPORTATION
REPORT BUSINESS

By **Jeff Della Rosa**
(JDellaRosa@nwabj.com) July 25, 2018

The Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission has once again applied for federal funding to complete a 4.8-mile segment of Interstate 49 in Missouri to the state line.

The segment is the only portion of the 18.9-mile Arkansas/Missouri Connector, or the Bella Vista Bypass, that doesn't have the needed funding identified to complete the project.

On Wednesday (July 25), the planning commission approved applying for \$25 million from the Better Utilizing Investment to Leverage Development (BUILD) program. On April 20, the U.S. Department of Transportation announced the \$1.5 billion BUILD program for fiscal 2018, and it replaces the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) program.

In applying for the BUILD program grant, the commission worked closely with the Northwest Arkansas Council to submit the application, and the Missouri Department of Transportation, Arkansas Department of Transportation, Arkansas and Missouri

legislators and businesses in both states support the project, according to the council. Northwest Arkansas Council is a private, nonprofit organization that has worked to advance regional infrastructure projects since 1990.

“U.S. Sen. Tom Cotton, in particular, has really gotten involved, contacting the Northwest Arkansas Council and encouraging us to work with the planning commission to seek this grant,” said Nelson Peacock, president and CEO of the council. “Having Senator Cotton’s voice in Washington in support of this project is helpful on so many levels.

“For the council, finishing I-49 in rural southwest Missouri to better connect it to our region is a never-give-up project, and we’re appreciative of the regional planning commission’s dogged pursuit of getting it done. It’s the single most important infrastructure priority to so many in southwest Missouri and Northwest Arkansas.”

The existing I-49 comes to an end north of Bentonville. From there, motorists take U.S. Highway 71 and drive through nine intersections with traffic signals in Bella Vista at average speeds of 20 mph or less at peak time before reaching the interstate again in southern Missouri, near Pineville.

“Reducing travel time and improving safety are both extremely important, but it also makes so much sense to do what we can to stretch the economic success of Northwest Arkansas into southwest Missouri,” Peacock said. “The Connector is part of accomplishing all of those goals.”

The 4.8-mile portion of the connector in Missouri would bring the project to the state line. The right of way has been purchased and design completed for that portion of the project. But if it’s not completed, a 2.5-mile stretch of the connector in Arkansas, between Benton County Road 34 and the state line, and a new interchange at I-49 and U.S. Highway 71B in northern Bentonville, won’t be built. Funding for those projects was already identified through the \$1.8 billion Connecting Arkansas Program — a program supported by a 10-year, half-cent sales tax that voters approved in 2012.

Tim Conklin, transportation programs manager for the commission, said nearly \$135 million in projects in Arkansas and Missouri will be delayed if the connector is not completed. On July 12, the Missouri Department of Transportation agreed to build the 4.8-mile segment to the state line if it were to receive the \$25 million grant. The segment is expected to cost \$48 million.

In early June, the planning commission learned it was not expected to receive funding from the \$1.5 billion Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) program for fiscal years 2017 and 2018.

In September, the commission agreed to apply for \$32.4 million grant from the INFRA program. Conklin explained the funding difference between the INFRA and BUILD grants would be covered by Missouri. On July 12, Missouri agreed to support the project. The planning commission applied for the project July 18, which was the deadline to do so.

The plan to complete the connector remains the same as before with completion in 2021 and an opening in 2022. Construction is expected to take a year, once work starts. The commission expects to hear about whether it would receive the funding in December. When the funding would be dispersed has yet to be determined.

“I think there’s a lot of momentum on this one,” Conklin said, adding he appreciated the support of the Northwest Arkansas Council on the grant.