

## Lincoln's bike trails getting updates

BY KENDRA WALTKE / Lincoln Journal Star

Nick Neary, 25, does not usually wear a dark suit and tie when he hits the Rock Island Trail. But last Sunday his muffler broke off his car, and Neary spent a few days hoofing it to work via the tree-lined trail in Antelope Park.

Fueled by Bruce Springsteen humming through his headphones, Neary said he didn't mind the 40-minute journey.

"It's usually a really nice walk," he said, gesturing to rows of lilacs blooming along the trail.

"But if I didn't have the trail, I don't know whether I would walk it. I'd probably bum a ride."

Neary lives near 33rd and South streets, close to the Rock Island Trail that provides an off-street path for much of his journey to The Cornhusker Marriott, where he's an audiovisual technician.

Not everyone is quite so lucky. But most residents might be closer to a trail than they think.

Lincoln aims to provide a trail within a mile of every home, said Terry Genrich, natural resources and greenways manager for Lincoln Parks and Recreation.

And getting across Lincoln by trail will get easier as key connectors are built in the next few years, Genrich said.

"We have a really cool future lining up with the new trails," agreed Rick Dockhorn, a member of the city's Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee.

Dockhorn bikes from his home in Capitol Beach to appointments all over the city and has commuted for nearly 20 years, he said.

Dockhorn said he has seen significantly more people on trails this spring, especially bikers who seem to be commuting.

"I'm a firm believer in 'if you build it, they will come,'" Dockhorn said. "And that seems to be what's happening."

Lincoln has about 100 miles of trails within the city, Genrich said.

Of those, 64 miles are commuter trails: wide, level paths paved in concrete or limestone that spread across Lincoln like a spider web. The rest are recreational trails that wind through wilder areas such as Wilderness and Pioneers parks.

The "footprint," or foundation and design, for the trail system was identified by the mid-1980s, Genrich said. That's a blessing because trails are very difficult to retrofit into an existing neighborhood.

"All of what we have has been in the works for a very long time," Genrich said. "The connections are starting to come together."

### **What's new in commuter trails:**

-- Rock Island Trail, south end. This trail ended at Old Cheney Road until a bridge was built across South 14th Street in late 2004.

The trail now continues south to Densmore Park, Cooper YMCA and Walt Branch Library. It connects with a streetside trail on South 14th Street that links to other trails and Pine Lake Road.

The connector creates a six-mile continuous loop on trails that go past Scott Middle School, Southwest

High School and Southpointe Pavilions, through Williamsburg and Tierra Park — which connects back to the Rock Island Trail at 27th Street and Nebraska 2.

-- 84th Street Trail. Work just wrapped up on the south part of this trail, which stretches 6½ miles from Mahoney Park and Adams Street down to Old Cheney Road.

The north end connects to the Murdock Trail, a west-east route across north Lincoln, and the MoPac Trail, which bisects east Lincoln from 33rd and X streets to about 98th and A streets before heading out of town.

**Plus, five trail segments will be built this year, Genrich said:**

-- Helen Boosalis Connector. The heavy machinery by the old K-Mart at the Edgewood Shopping Center is there for a reason.

Construction is under way for the connector, a link from the newly renamed Helen Boosalis Trail north of Nebraska 2 to the Old Cheney Trail adjacent to Old Cheney Road.

The two-block connector at the old K-Mart vexed planners for five years, mostly because of difficulty procuring the right-of-way. This connector allows trail users to cruise the Boosalis Trail from 17th to 70th streets.

-- North 27th Street Bridge. Construction will begin this fall on a new \$1.76 million pedestrian and trail bridge on North 27th Street south of Y Street. It would connect with:

-- MoPac West. A segment of MoPac West Trail will be built from near 19th and Vine streets to the MoPac trail at 33rd and X streets. This will link the University of Nebraska-Lincoln City Campus with the behemoth MoPac East Trail, which runs 25 miles out of Lincoln to Wabash.

-- Antelope Creek. The Billy Wolff trail that runs along Normal Boulevard to Holmes Lake will be extended.

The new trail will begin at the dog run east of Holmes Lake, head southeast and dip beneath South 84th Street through an already built underpass at Old Cheney Road.

This link, Phase I of the Antelope Creek trail, should be finished by fall. Later, Phase II of the project will extend this trail to Nebraska 2.

-- Jamaica North. Construction should begin this month on this large southwest trail. Work should be done by the end of the year.

The trail is on an abandoned Union rail line through Wilderness Park. When work is finished, this crushed limestone trail will stretch 6½ miles from the north end of Wilderness Park to a half-mile south of Saltillo Road. The trail will meet up with the Homestead Trail, a project of the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District.

**Also in the works, Genrich said:**

-- Antelope Valley Hub. Some trail work has been done through the Antelope Valley Project, which, among countless other missions, will connect many Lincoln trails.

Trails such as the Rock Island, Billy Wolff and MoPac will converge at Antelope Valley and spread out like spokes of a wheel. Some small segments of that network are in place, but most won't be built for a few years.

The hub will use underpasses below O, Vine and Y streets and beneath "The big T" intersection near 17th Street.

Genrich declined to assign price tags to the projects, because some are still in the bidding phase.

But the commuter trails that are 10-foot-wide, 5-inch-thick concrete paths cost from \$250,000 to \$300,000 per mile, he said. Bridges or underpasses tack on more dollars.

Most of the cost for building trails does not come from the city's coffers, Genrich said.

About 20 to 25 percent is financed by city taxes and private donations, especially from the Great Plains Trails Network. The rest is covered by grants from the federal government and state agencies.

Cost to maintain a trail is about \$2,600 per mile, Genrich estimated. About 956,000 people use the trail system each year, he said, and the average user will hit the trail about 47 times a year.

But not everyone is an athlete or commuter.

The Great Plains Trails Network holds a census on the second Sunday in July each year, said Dave Scoby, who coordinates the event.

Volunteers counted 6,042 people at 11 trail sites from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. during the 2005 census, an increase of 23 percent over the past year.

Overall, 63 percent rode bikes, 11 percent ran, 23 percent walked, 2 percent rode in strollers or other pull-alongs, 1 percent skated and the rest were miscellaneous users. Also, 266 pets used the trails (but 93 percent of them were on a leash).

"Today, people still want to get in the cars to go places," Genrich said.

"But in the future, that might change. I think we should feel very, very lucky that our city was thinking of these things 20 or 25 years ago and that we've put these (non-vehicle trails) in place."

That's a concept seconded by Nick Neary, walking a steady clip on his way home last week.

"It's nice. You don't have to walk two miles on a crappy sidewalk," he said.

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