

**Location:** Metro COG Office

**Client:** Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Council of Governments

**Date:** May 22, 2024

**Subject:** Heartland Trail Study in Clay County – Study Review Committee (SRC) Meeting #2

**Attendees:** Dan Farnsworth, Chelsea Levorsen, and Ayden Schaffler, Metro COG; Jonathan Atkins and Forrest Steinhoff, City of Moorhead; Peyton Mastera, Dilworth; Justin Sorum, Clay County; Isabella Valenzuela, PartnerSHIP 4 Health; Rosemary Bruce-White, MnDOT D4; Matt Jacobson, Clay County; Kent Skaar, MnDNR; Nick Gulden, MnDOT; Cleone Stewart, Detroit Lakes; Zakcq Lockrem, Mend Collaborative; Tom Natwick, Alta Planning + Design; Stewart Crosby, Luke Champa, Mike McGarvey and Jonathan Fillmore, SRF

## Summary of Meeting

### Introductions and Project Updates

- The planning team summarized engagement activities for the project. To date, there have been over 500 visitors to the project site, with additional comments rolling daily.
- We reviewed precedent images for the trail.
  - Adding a trail along a railroad would be helpful.
  - Winter – consider state trails are authorized for snowmobile use (for example boardwalks wouldn't be used in state trail).
  - It was noted that it may be easier to keep the trail within public ROW.
  - Dust conditions along township roads can be bad in dry conditions. Consider placing the trail on the north or west side of gravel roads.
  - Showed an image of the Heart of the Lakes Trail by Perham that has a paved trail adjacent to a gravel road.
  - Paved trails along gravel roads can result in gravel being thrown on the trail, which poses user and maintenance challenges.

### Segment 1 Alignment Discussion (Moorhead to Glyndon)

- A route along the Buffalo River would be challenging because of floods, floodplain issues, and private property.
- North/south routes are challenging because of private property impacts and the need to cross highways, and the railroad.
- The South route along 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue will have a challenge crossing MN 336. This will require grade separation (underpass).

- Access to downtown Dilworth would likely be along Highway 10.
- Crossing the railroad would be best near MN 336. It will be very challenging anywhere else near BNSF Yard in Dilworth.
- There may be an overpass at 14th Street in Dilworth, which may provide another option for getting over the railroad.
- The route along the Buffalo River would take a lot of effort to make usable during most of the season consider corridor that has to be closed. The DNR is building a trail in Bloomington along the Minnesota River that is in the floodplain and will be closed when flooding occurs.
- Trails built in floodplains have special considerations for maintenance due to flooding. There are design characteristics for where and how a trail is sited that can help minimize flooding impact.
- It was suggested that a paved trail in the river buffer zone may still comply with sediment control requirements, but this would need to be verified.
- It was suggested that we look for the preferred corridor for the trail. Where do we want it to go? Use this as a guide.
- It is likely to cost a minimum of half-million dollars per mile, which bridges and tunnels costing about \$1 million.
- The DNR has not yet been successful in developing trails within railroad right of way, passing through railroad property. This could be a major barrier for the project.
- The question was asked how far will a casual biker go?
  - Two miles in either direction outside of town is typical, if a trail goes through town.
  - Trail access and specific destinations for shorter trips should be considered.
- Engagement results so far indicate that people are interested in connecting with nature, which speaks to what people want to experience on the trail.
- People like having separation from roadways, which is better with a wider right of way.
- One other trail alternative that was suggested is the Moorhead HS drain alignment north of 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The Buffalo River Watershed owns this drainage. Construction might be difficult, and expensive.

### **Segment 2 Alignment Discussion (Glyndon to Buffalo River State Park)**

- This is the most popular segment, based on the number of public comments received thus far. People seem to be interested in connecting to the state park.
- It was suggested we look for alternatives that cross narrower locations of the Buffalo River.
- It was noted that The Nature Conservancy will not allow a paved trail through the prairie preserve, which is a very pristine prairie remnant.
- The 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue alignment with the spur that extends east into the park (tan/yellow connection) was noted as desirable because it enters the park just north of the campground. This could be a unique selling point for Buffalo River State Park users, providing out and back trips.
- The trail may need to follow 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue, southeast of the park to keep away from private property.

### **Segment 3 Alignment Discussion (Buffalo River State Park to Hawley)**

- It was noted that there may have been right of way set aside near the Bison Estates area in Clay County, north of the river and east of Muskoda, along 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue.
- There are options to connect up to Highway 10 further east from 190<sup>th</sup> Street, at 220<sup>th</sup> Street, east of Lake Maria.
- Along Highway 10, there are some areas with snow fences, which are outside of the right of way. It may be that there is a higher chance of success getting a trail on private property in those areas.
- Along snow fences, snow will be deposited on the path, if the path is on the downwind side of the fence.
- It was noted that a trail along Highway 10 would be less enjoyable, but potentially easier to develop.
- It was noted that the Heartland Trail near Akeley has winter use with snowmobiles on one side and cross-country skiers on other side. The trail is groomed for these uses.

### **Segment 4 Alignment Discussion (Hawley to County Line)**

- The route that extends north along 230<sup>th</sup> Street would be easiest to access Hawley because there is a signalized crossing of Highway 10 with trail and pedestrian elements incorporated.
- Options southeast of Hawley would still provide a connection through Hawley but would require an underpass under Highway 10.
- It is important to coordinate with Becker County on trail connections. Becker County is looking at route options that connect Dunton Locks south of Detroit Lakes, and one option that continues further west toward Cormorant.
- The question was asked how you phase the east section of trail which ends at the County line? We may need to propose a temporary terminus in Hawley until connections into Becker County can be realized.
- It was noted that planning has been underway for 15 years and nothing has yet been developed. It was noted that starting development in Moorhead and working east could help get momentum, spurring more rural development of the trail. Starting near population centers/destinations would be helpful. The population in the Fargo/Moorhead area could be the biggest draw to build west to east.
- The question was asked how do we address trail concerns with landowners who may be vehemently opposed to spending money on the trail?
  - People using it on a regular basis, making it known that they want to go further.
  - It was noted that no eminent domain will be used to develop the trail.
  - Nearly every bike facility is opposed because people don't see the vision, until it's done.
  - This planning effort is an exercise in communication to listen to different perspectives and provide input on options.
  - There are funds available specifically for trails that do not impact road or highway improvements.
- It was noted that getting feedback from other trail corridors where there has been success would be beneficial.

- One idea is to invite some landowners along proposed segments of the Heartland Trail to tour the Heart of the Lakes Trail in Otter Tail County to talk with farmers and adjacent landowners to show an example of a trail along rural roadways.
- It is important to note that all input will be posted on website. This is a very transparent process.