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Residents want bike-hike trails

Communities old and new find paths rate as a must-have

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On a warm summer evening, Dan and Jeannie Kroeger and four of their six children approach the Bartels Road entrance to the nearly completed Five Mile Trail in Anderson Township.

They walk past the large "Bike Trail Closed" sign and the orange and white pylons in the center of the hike-bike trail.

With Jeannie pushing 10-month-old Stephen in a stroller and two of the other children on bicycles, the Kroeger family happily starts down the two-mile long ribbon of asphalt bending into the woods.

"This gives you a place to walk," Jeannie says. "So many of the neighborhoods around here have no sidewalks."

Although the Five Mile Trail doesn't officially open until July 20, dozens of people of all ages have been biking, jogging and walking on the trail every day since the beginning of spring.

"At least we know it's going to be used," Steve Sievers, Anderson Township's director of development services, said with a laugh.

The demand for bike trails and walking paths in Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky has mushroomed in recent years.

- **Map: Major bicycle corridors**

Many suburban communities, including Mason, Montgomery, Newtown, Erlanger, Williamsburg and Anderson, Symmes, West Chester and Liberty townships have built or plan to build hike/bike paths, nature walking paths or sidewalk extensions designed to connect neighborhoods to each other and to parks, schools libraries and shopping areas.

Cincinnati officials see hike/bike paths as a way to attract and retain families and younger adults.

They're working on plans to complete an Ohio River bike trail from Lunken Airport to downtown and plan to make other parts of the city more conducive to bicycle travel.

Since 2000, communities in the region have spent more than \$10 million - most of it federal and state funds - on hike/bike trails and walking paths. The trend continues to escalate.

Proposed work on three major hike/bike trails alone - the Miami 2 Miami Trail system in Butler and Warren counties, the Williamsburg-Batavia Trail in Clermont County and the Ohio River Trail from Lunken Airport to downtown and to New Richmond - will cost an estimated \$67 million, according to John Heilman, technical services coordinator for the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI).

"A lot of people see hike/bike trails as a way to enhance their communities," said Robert Koehler, OKI deputy

executive director. "It's a big issue these days. We see it more as an evolution than a revolution."

Local planners view the popularity of hike/bike trails today as an outgrowth of the contemporary New Urbanism movement, which promotes pedestrian-friendly communities.

Many people like to walk or bike instead of drive for the health, aesthetic, social, safety and economic benefits, especially with fuel prices hovering around \$3 per gallon.

The five miles of trails needed to link Lunken and downtown will cost about \$20 million to build. The trails also pose difficult engineering and logistical challenges, City Engineer Donald Rosemeyer said.

Cincinnati must contend with the hilly terrain, unstable riverbanks, the existing commercial and industrial development along the riverfront and the need to negotiate a bike trail plan with five major parties - the Southwestern Ohio Regional Transit Authority, the Ohio Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Transportation Administration and Rail America.

The railroad tracks needed for the city staff's preferred route are owned by SORTA. Rail America runs freight trains on one of those tracks.

Eileen Enabnit, director of the city's department of transportation and engineering, said the city hopes to have the Lunken-to-downtown section built by the end of 2011.

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