

Could trans-valley bike path become reality?

Alliance looks at Whitewater Wash, Coachella Canal, sees possible route

MARCEL HONORÉ • THE DESERT SUN • APRIL 28, 2008

Scott McKelvey zips around the Coachella Valley on his bike every day. He knows all the local routes - and most of them make him nervous.

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"Even on the safer roads, it's real scary," said McKelvey, who works at the Palm Springs and Palm Desert Cyclery shops.

He recounts accidents and even a couple of bike-riding deaths on valley roads during his five years in the area.

"I don't want anyone riding (Highway) 111 unless they know what they're doing," McKelvey said. "It's not great out here for cyclists."

However, a single bike path traversing the Coachella Valley at the Whitewater River Wash could change that view, and it's an idea that's gaining traction.

Valley bike enthusiasts have floated the idea for decades, but the nonprofit Coachella Valley Community Trails Alliance is leading a new push to make a cross-valley bike path a reality.

It would encourage more residents to pedal beyond their immediate neighborhoods, McKelvey and others say.

Trails Alliance Executive Director LeGrand Velez called a route through the wash and the east-valley Coachella Canal his group's "prime directive."

The group is crafting a "Coachella Valley Master Trail Plan" to present to the desert cities for adoption, which would include the wash bike path.

The group has a May 8 meeting with transportation officials at the Coachella Valley Association of Governments, and members hope they can help their outreach to the individual cities.

"I've heard a lot of people complain about how there aren't enough bike paths," said Josh Lawson, a mechanic at Tri-A-Bike in Palm Desert.

Indian Wells Public Works Director Tim Wassil is familiar with the wash bike path proposal. "It sounds like a great idea," he said.

But Wassil wonders how it could work.

For starters, several golf courses scattered across the valley are built into the wash, and Wassil said golf balls hit near passing bikers could present a hazard. Further, sudden flash floods could put cyclists in danger, Wassil said.

"People are very skeptical, and understandably because there are a lot of challenges," said Velez. He added that flooding could create a "chronic maintenance problem" for the path.

"But it can be done," he said. "It just takes a lot of planning, true commitment and regional coordination."

An estimate on how much the complete bike path would cost is not ready, Velez said.

However, a mile-long bike path could typically cost between \$500,000 and \$1 million, he added.

The Coachella Valley Water District, which has jurisdiction over the wash, supports the Trails Alliance's efforts on the path, said Dennis Mahr, water district spokesman.

La Quinta, Indio and Coachella have expressed an interest in creating paths on their banks of the wash, regardless of whether the whole path is built.

"What's important is (for cities) to plan this out for undeveloped portions of the wash," Velez said. That way, future development would have to accommodate the path, he explained.

Palm Springs, Cathedral City, Rancho Mirage and Palm Desert also have plans to add more bike paths and lanes, Velez said.

La Quinta residents selected trails as their top priority in a Community Services survey last year.

"That's a big issue, Community Services Director Edie Hylton said. "Not only does it help with health and fitness, but it can also provide access to the (La Quinta) high school."

La Quinta officials are waiting for a Coachella Valley Recreation and Park District feasibility study on the wash bike path due by year's end before they proceed with their plan, Hylton said.

"We just think it's a great use of the top of the channel," she said.

Desert Sun reporter Marissa Willman contributed.

In your voice

READ REACTIONS TO THIS STORY

New est first



ffc313 wrote:

I agree that bikes should be off our roads and on bike trails. I was on Hwy 74 last week heading down from Anza. I could not believe there were bicyclists crazy enough to be riding down that hill. There is no bike lane up there so they were occupying the same lane as the cars, but going about 10 mph. They would not pull over and forced drivers to pass them on dangerous blind curves. If these idiots have a death wish, that's fine, but they should be endangering other drivers. To make matters even worse, they were giving the drivers the finger when they tried to pass them!

Is it even legal for them to ride bikes up there?

4/28/2008 10:48:39 AM

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Scanner wrote:

I say keep the bikes out of the left hand turn lane and stop blocking traffic. Put them in the wash, heck yea.

4/28/2008 10:18:04 AM

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K9K9K9 wrote:

My support all the way! Yep, I'll take the threat of golf balls and flood damage over the daily threat of motorists any day. Would love to once again cycle to work. Removal of bike lanes and increased traffic has had my bike collecting dust and my car emitting pollution.

4/28/2008 10:15:56 AM

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Romula wrote:

Absolutely! For an area known for outdoor activities, why wasn't biking a consideration in the first place!? Big, big mistake!! Another benefit of having a convenient bike route running through the valley would get some of these motorists off the roads and on a bike!

4/28/2008 9:43:02 AM

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frmfxr1 wrote:

i would like to see a bike way like the one in phoenix which can be ridden from glendale all the way to scottsdale.
I moved to the valley in 1985 and saw the potential immediately for a similiar one that could go from palm springs to coachella!.

4/28/2008 8:37:45 AM

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antyy wrote:

I am a cyclist that won't hold his breath for this trail to go in during my life time. CVAG and all the cities widening Hwy 111 including our state Caltrans (by the way they must include bike travel in their designs but didn't do it here because they gave the highway to the cities who decided not to include maximum safety for the cyclist and pedestrians including ADA) have failed miserably to include all modes of transportation on this highway and now they talk about another route, which will cost much more but I highly doubt if Indian Wells will allow it.

I feel these cities are still practicing discrimination to the non motorized public. Widening projects with the removal of bike lanes, signals that don't allow bike to be detected, unsafe grates, substituting ped/bike safety for soud walls and landscaping... etc.

It is so bad now that I have to video tape all my rides to work encase I get hit or prevent road rage which is truly out their.

4/28/2008 8:14:39 AM

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[ffc313](#) wrote:

Forget about a bike path. What we need is a tran-valley parkway for motorists. I believe the Whitewater River Wash is the perfect location. This would be a four-lane parkway, reserved for private vehicles only- no commercial vehicles, no trucks. Of course the road would be closed occasionally during rainy weather (two or three days a year), but having a speedy alternative to Highway 111 available 360 days a year would definitely be worth it.