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## Desert cities should adopt trans-valley trail plan

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The Desert Sun*

Creating a bike path that traverses the valley sounds like something people would enjoy.

So it is good to see a local nonprofit organization and other bike enthusiasts make a new push for a cross-valley bike path.

The lack of bike paths in the Coachella Valley is a common complaint, but it appears city governments also want to see more trails and are willing to add them. Palm Desert and Cathedral City are getting a leg up on their inner-city trails, which is positive and indicates a potential willingness toward a trans-valley trail. La Quinta, Indio and Coachella have expressed interest in creating paths on their banks of the Whitewater River Wash and east-valley Coachella Canal, regardless of whether the entire connecting trail is approved, which shows the desire and need for a more enhanced trail system.

The Coachella Valley Community Trails Alliance is working on a plan, the "Coachella Valley Master Trail Plan," which will be presented to cities for adoption. The group will present its findings to the Coachella Valley Association of Governments. While it's too preliminary to tell how much this particular path will cost, one-mile trails can run anywhere between \$500,000 to \$1 million. The length of the valley is about 60 miles. Whitewater and Interstate 10 to the Salton Sea is about 50 miles.

Bike paths certainly add to the quality of life. But that is a hefty price tag. Various nonprofit organizations that care about trails will have to work together on this.

Bike enthusiasts and pedestrians want more coordination. They could help by developing a fundraising effort to help build it. There is some tax money available, but that is limited to new roadways widened to include a bike lane, but it still can be used in some areas where the off-street path would be prohibited due to lack of easements or safety concerns. An impact fee to developers can be added, but that would likely be met with much opposition. Other than that, there are a number of federal and state grants that would help cover the costs.

The plan will replace and update an old non-motorized trail plan from 2000, if it is adopted. The Riverside County Parks and Open Space District allocated \$250,000 for a feasibility study, specifically of the Whitewater path, to be done by the Coachella Valley Recreation and Park District. The study will focus on easements and safety issues and will be taken into consideration with the Coachella Valley Master Trail Plan by the Trails Alliance.

The ultimate decision is in the hands of the cities. They control land use. City and county approval will be critical in the adoption of a new plan.

"I see a great value to the community," Cathedral City Mayor Kathy DeRosa said of the possibility of a linking bike path. "For the residents it's a great added value, and I hope my fellow council members would endorse it."

It's important to get cities to approve a new plan as soon as possible, even if funds are not yet

available. Adoption of the plan will ensure the land is set aside for the path and future development will have to take that into consideration. It's a good first step.

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