



December 28, 2008

## Valley should be creative to save money on bike path

A million dollars a mile for a bike path from one end of the valley to the other seems ridiculously expensive.

There has to be a way to build connecting bikeways across the valley without the astronomical cost.

We realize a potential cross-valley bike path, an 80- to 100-mile stretch, is impacted by properties already developed and privately owned. But if city and county officials and bike enthusiasts put their minds to it, they can come up with creative ways to get easements from property owners at little to no cost. Perhaps owners can get tax breaks for donations to the bike path. It's a thought. The point is that everyone put their heads together and come up with some creative solutions.

A valleywide bike path benefits us all. It cuts down on automotive usage, which reduces greenhouse gas emissions and traffic accidents. It provides another amenity for tourists. With the valley's climate and growth, a continuous bikeway only makes sense.

It should have been added as growth occurred, but it wasn't and this is the situation we're in now — \$500,000 to \$1 million per mile for up to 100 miles — depending on the amenities.

This is an early estimate from a recreational and open-space firm that will release a feasibility study to desert recreation officials, and there are others who agree with the price tag.

"It shocks people, but that is the reality, and the reason is because that includes money for architectural design, engineering and construction," said LeGrand E. Velez, director of the Coachella Valley Community Trails Alliance. "(The cost) depends on where you put the trail and what kinds of amenities you're going to include, like benches, if you're going to have a rest area, etc."

Velez said prevailing wage, which must be paid to workers who build any public project funded with federal money, also pushes up the costs because the requirement pays considerably more than nonfederally funded projects.

We admit that there are reasonable issues that contribute to the cost of a proposed valleywide bike path. But we also know that what is being discussed is a Class 1 path, a very specific CalTrans hard design that accommodates skinny-tired road bikes that can go 20 miles an hour. What we're talking about is a trail.

Another bike expert told us the majority of riders are recreational users who can use a decomposed granite trail, which would cost considerably less.

The valley must use its collective talents and creativity and come up with ways to make this bike path happen without the hefty price tag. It can be done.

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