

## **Introduction**

Clay and Platte Counties have designed a comprehensive trail system for the Northland. The system includes on-road bicycle facilities and off-road trails for a variety of users. The trail system is intended to respond to broad and diverse community desires for increased opportunities for safe non-motorized travel and recreation.

Residents in both counties have expressed an interest in hiking, biking and equestrian trails in the Northland. A 1995 Clay County study projected a need for at least 165 miles of trails in that county alone. Platte County's 20-year strategic plan found that residents viewed increased parks and recreation opportunities as one of the county's biggest priorities. Platte County voters approved a sales tax in August 2000 for trails, parks and stormwater improvements. Through the Clay County Economic Development Commission, a task force drafted a trails concept plan for the Northland in 1998.

Given citizen and business interest, the two counties formed a partnership for the purpose of planning an extensive trails network. The counties hired Bucher, Willis & Ratliff Corporation (BWR) to assist in the design of the trail system.

The planning work was financed by federal transportation enhancement funds, as well as contributions made by each county. The plan includes facility recommendations, including priority segments; financing options; suggestions for support organizations; and possible changes in county plans and regulations.

## **Benefits of a Trail System in the Northland**

Nationally and locally, citizens are expressing interest in trails, parks, open space and recreation. Trails are viewed as opportunities to preserve important natural areas, to provide added recreational opportunities, and to connect residents and visitors to important historic and other destinations. Citizens have expressed their desires for a trail system that will:

- Provide social benefits by connecting people with neighbors and by building community pride and spirit.
- Provide broader transportation options for bicyclists and pedestrians.
- Provide economic benefits by improving the quality of life in the Northland and by helping attract residents and businesses. A top-rated trail system can be a competitive advantage for economic development.
- Provide benefits to the environment by connecting people with the natural environment, preserving important natural areas and habitats, and preventing urban development in floodplains or on steep slopes.
- Provide health benefits to individuals by offering opportunities for physical fitness. Walking is the number one fitness-related activity in the United States today.

## **Existing Conditions**

The unincorporated areas within Clay and Platte Counties do not currently offer trail opportunities outside of state and local parks. Many of the cities within the two counties have built on and off-road trails for bicyclists and pedestrians. Many experienced bicyclists use county and state roads and highways throughout the Northland, and increasing traffic is causing safety concerns.

## **Plan Development and Citizen Involvement**

A 9-person steering committee composed of representatives from both counties oversaw the plan's development. Eight public meetings were held to obtain input, review draft plans and collect feedback and present the plan findings. The first set of meetings held in March 2000 allowed residents the opportunity to identify important destinations and possible routes. The second round of meetings held in June 2000 allowed residents to provide feedback on possible facilities, recommend types of improvements for a variety of users and priorities for first projects.

Efforts were made to inform the public about the study and encourage their involvement. Press releases were issued prior to each round of public meetings. Three newsletters were distributed to residents in the two-county area, and the information was posted on the counties' websites.

A citizen survey was mailed to residents in the two county area, and approximately 1,000 responses were received. The surveys show overwhelming support among area residents for a Northland Trail system.

## **Planned Facilities**

The plan includes facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians or hikers, shared use trails, and equestrian trails. The plan offers a combination of on-road facilities, including wide paved shoulders and bicycle lanes, primarily along state and county highways. Stream corridors have offered trail opportunities throughout the Northland, and many shared use and equestrian trails follow the area's streams and the Missouri River. Finally, abandoned railroad lines and other corridors have been identified as possible trail facility locations. The overall system includes 306 miles in Platte County and 306 miles in Clay County.

## **Plan Implementation**

The two counties will take responsibility for carrying out the plan within their areas. Funding for construction and maintenance will likely come from a variety of sources, including local tax revenues, federal and state grants and private contributions. The counties will be evaluating changes to zoning and subdivision regulations that are expected to result in more trail opportunities within new development. Finally, gaining citizen support and involvement is an important part of a successful Northland Trails program. Both counties will be looking at establishing or supporting not-for-profit groups to assist with the trail effort.

## **Contact Information**

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