

Project Goal

The Northland Trails Vision Plan outlines a non-motorized transportation system plan for Clay and Platte Counties. The plan will guide the development of a system of on-road facilities and off-road trails for pedestrians, bicyclists and equestrians.

Background

In 1999, the Clay and Platte County Commissioners agreed to work together on the development of a trail vision plan for the Northland. This cooperative action was the result of earlier planning efforts by the two counties. In Clay County, a group of concerned citizens working with the Clay County Economic Development Council developed a trail concept in 1998 in response to an interest in addressing the need for trail amenities. That effort led to the formation of a task force appointed by the Clay County Commission to continue the planning process.

Also in 1998, Platte County initiated a countywide strategic planning process. The citizen-driven process identified trails, as a priority needs within the county as well as additional open space and park development. In March 1999, the two counties applied jointly to the Missouri Department of Transportation for grant funds to support their trail planning efforts. Grant funds were secured in 1999.

The plan focuses on the unincorporated portions of the two county areas. Currently, there are few trails for bicyclists, pedestrians or equestrians in the unincorporated portions of Clay and Platte Counties. The existing trails are limited to state and county parks areas, such as Watkins Mill, Weston Bend and Smithville Lake. Bicyclists use existing county and state roads for utilitarian and recreational trips; however, increasing motor vehicle traffic is making their travel more difficult and less safe.

Benefits of a Trail System

The benefits of a Northland trail system will be greater mobility options, increased recreational opportunities, added environmental protection for habitat and wildlife and for urban development from flooding, and an enhanced economic climate through added community amenities and tourism. A Northland trail system will offer increased opportunities for safe non-motorized vehicular access to public, historic and cultural destinations in the two-county area. The system will assist businesses to attract and retain a skilled technical and professional work force by offering an enhanced quality of life. Residents will have additional opportunities for exercise and recreation. Finally, the system is expected to promote increased tourism by linking important historical, cultural and environmental assets in the two-county area.

Plan Elements

The plan includes:

- A multi-use corridor system plan for the two-county area that is linked to systems planned by cities within the two counties as well as connections to adjoining counties.
- The identification of priority projects with cost estimates for use by the two counties in seeking Transportation Enhancement, Congestion Mitigation Air Quality, or other federal or state resources, or to program local capital improvement funds.
- Design guidelines for all elements of the corridor system.
- Identification of specific financing options, including the possibility of land dedication, for each county to implement as it develops and maintains its system.
- Identification of institutional arrangements that each county might adopt to encourage public involvement and support for the trail system.
- Recommendations for adoption of the Plan by both county commissions and amendments to existing county regulations to aid in implementation of the Plan.

Planning Process

Our planning process has included:

- The involvement of a steering committee and the citizens of Clay and Platte Counties. Citizens were invited to offer input and advice through planning charrettes, a statistically valid citizen survey and public meetings. The involvement of both the steering committee and residents has ensured that the plan is designed to address needs, desires and priorities of the citizens.
- The collection of data and an inventory of trail locations. The plan builds on existing studies, information from cities within the two counties and field surveys and observations.

