

## Create safe options to walk, bike

Posted at 2:01 AM

Improving roads should not mean we have to choose between more efficient vehicle travel and sidewalks and bike paths. Along with designated off-road greenways, these amenities improve public health and safety by allowing people to walk rather than forcing them to drive.

Hendersonville, Henderson County and village of Flat Rock leaders recently chose not to include bike paths and sidewalks in plans to improve Kanuga Road to appease residents who don't want large old trees along the road destroyed as part of a road improvement project. But fortunately they did not completely abandon plans for more pedestrian and bike facilities.

On Monday, county commissioners voted to apply for a greenway feasibility study of an off-road path along Mud Creek between the new Publix at Greenville Highway and White Street and Erkwood Drive. The path would follow an easement the city of Hendersonville has for a sewer line along the creek.

Commissioner Bill Lapsley said he believes pedestrian and bike traffic should be separated from roadways. He suggested the county take the lead in securing grant funds for the feasibility study from the French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization to see if a greenway is feasible and cost-effective.

The feasibility study is projected to cost \$50,000 with a 20 percent local match. Applications are due to the French Broad River MPO by Dec. 31.

Greenways hold tremendous economic, health and recreation benefits, as we have noted in advocating for years for the proposed Ecusta Trail between Hendersonville and Brevard. As Suzanne Hale of Friends of the Oklawaha Greenway said at Monday's meeting, greenways attract tourists and encourage them to stay longer and come more often. People need easily accessible places to exercise, she said, noting a study that found \$3 saved in health care costs for every \$1 spent on paths.

The longer and more connected pedestrian and bike paths are, the more attractive they are to tourists, and the more options they provide for residents to walk and bike to and from work and shopping and to enjoy the outdoors with their families during their time off.

Connectivity is the key. A greenway along Mud Creek between Erkwood and the new Publix would give walkers and bikers a south side connection to downtown. It could be expanded north along Mud Creek to connect with the Oklawaha Greenway and perhaps someday the Ecusta Trail, or possibly south along the creek to Flat Rock.

Lapsley and the Board of Commissioners have taken a good step in supporting the study of a southside greenway. Sidewalks and bikeways such as the ones the N.C. Department of Transportation proposed along Kanuga Road can be controversial when retrofitted on existing roads. Residents along routes may object to the state acquiring rights of way for pedestrian and bike amenities.

This does not mean local leaders should abandon plans for sidewalks and bike paths when roads are widened. But if there are opportunities to redirect funding toward off-road paths, all the better for health, safety and the economy.



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