

New bike route on Pittsburgh's West End unveiled

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By Len Barcoucky / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Municipal officials cheered plans unveiled Thursday for cycling and pedestrian routes designed to link up some of Allegheny County's western suburbs with bike trails in Pittsburgh.

"This is a big plus for the area," McKees Rocks Mayor Jack Muhr said of the proposals, which county Executive Rich Fitzgerald presented at an outdoor news conference in the borough.

Connectivity is key to getting more Allegheny County residents walking and biking, Mr. Fitzgerald said.

Developing safe routes that could be used by cyclists from ages 8 to 80 was just as important, Scott Bricker said. Mr. Bricker is executive director of Bike Pittsburgh, a nonprofit organization that supports development of a regional transportation network that includes bikeways and walkways.

The plan calls for both bicycle lanes and a share-the-road route that would connect Pittsburgh, McKees Rocks, Stowe, Neville and Coraopolis. At Coraopolis riders eventually will have access to the Montour Trail via a new county park along the Ohio River.

"Bike Anyplace" routes like the one proposed Thursday will connect places where people want to work, shop and go to school, Mr. Fitzgerald said.

Busy West Carson Street through Pittsburgh's western neighborhoods is part of the proposed route.

PennDOT's plans for reconstruction of the thoroughfare call for creation of a 14-foot-wide shared-use lane with new road signs and pavement markings, known as "sharrows." The shared-use section would extend from the West End Circle to Stanhope Street.

Mr. Bricker was disappointed with that element of the plan. "The community has spoken loudly on the issue and people want safe, separate bike lanes," he said.

The proposed shared lanes "are not the type of infrastructure that

Proposed cycling and pedestrian routes

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PG graphic: Proposed cycling and pedestrian routes

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will encourage anyone other than 20-something risk-takers to ride along West Carson Street," Mr. Bricker said. "We want facilities constructed that are welcoming and safe for everyone."

Thursday's event took place outside the Rite-Aid at the Shoppes at Chartiers Crossing on Chartiers Avenue. The strip shopping center would be a stop along a circular bike trail through McKees Rocks. Similar loops through business districts and residential areas are proposed at other points along the proposed biking route.

The proposed path would pass through the McKees Rocks Bottoms neighborhood via River Avenue and Helen Street. It then would rejoin Island Avenue and use the Fleming Park Bridge, Neville Road and the Neville Island Bridge on its way to Coraopolis.

Officials announced no timetable for putting up signs and designating bike lanes. Beginning in late summer, the county, Friends of the Riverfront and the Pennsylvania Environmental Council will begin working with the townships and boroughs to raise funds to carry out elements of the plan.

Len Barcoucky: lbarcoucky@post-gazette.com or 724-772-0184.

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