

Bike path choices narrowed

BENNETT HALL Corvallis Gazette-Times Feb 22, 2017 Updated Feb 23, 2017



Andy Cripe, Gazette-Times

Mac Gillespie, a member of the Corvallis-Albany Bikeway Advisory Group, uses a green sticky dot to vote for a route for the pro bicycle and pedestrian path through the Highway 20 corridor during a meeting Wednesday at the Corvallis library.

A stakeholders committee evaluating possible routes for a bike path between Corvallis and Albany was asked to cut the list of 10 alternatives in half on Wednesday, but in the end it did better than that, slashing the choices by two-thirds.

"I'm pretty amazed," said meeting facilitator Libby Barg of the Barney & Worth consulting firm. "The goal was five, and we have three."

The gathering at the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library was the second meeting of the Corvallis-Albany Bikeway Advisory Group, an 11-member citizen panel formed by Benton County to evaluate possible alignments for a bicycle and pedestrian path along the Highway 20 corridor. The project has been on the county's to-do list for a decade, but an effort two years ago to route the path alongside the Union Pacific railroad tracks collapsed in the face of landowner opposition.

At a public meeting in December, county officials announced the previous alignment had been taken off the table and unveiled a map showing 10 potential alternative routes for the path.

At Wednesday's advisory group meeting, those routes were divided up into three broad categories for discussion:

- Bike lanes or paths in the Highway 20 right of way.
- Bike lanes on various combinations of rural roads to the north of the highway.
- A path south of the highway that would hug the west bank of the Willamette River.

The group spent two hours poring over aerial photos and talking over the pros and cons of different alignments. Then they used adhesive-backed colored dots to indicate their preferences on large maps: green for a preferred alternative, red for a route that should be taken off the list.

In the end, the three alternatives that survived the initial winnowing process were the river route; a two-way separated bike path along the south side of Highway 20; and a hybrid rural route that would run east from Highway 99W on Grange Road, then either continue as a separated bike path on the north side of 20 or cross the highway and skirt the river through Hyak Park and Tadena Landing.

A number of questions remained unanswered about the three proposed routes, which are still considered "conceptual" at the time. Among them:

- Would a Granger Road route connect to Corvallis via bike lanes on 99W and Elliott Circle, on Highland Drive and Lewisburg Road, or some other way?
- If all or part of the path is south of 20, how would cyclists and pedestrians cross the busy highway?
- And how would a river or southside alignment link up with a proposed Albany connection, planned to run along the north side of 20 as far as Scenic Drive?

Members of the advisory group also raised other concerns about the three conceptual alternatives, including cost, length, the possibility of flooding, and conflicts with existing land use such as farming and gravel mining.

Benton County Public Works Director Josh Wheeler said all the concerns were valid but might not turn out to be insurmountable on closer inspection. Nine technical advisors representing state and local agencies (most of whom attended Wednesday's meeting), with help from a consulting engineering firm, will perform preliminary analyses of the proposed routes and report back to the advisory group next month.

"This is the first cut," Barg told the group. "When we come back to you next time, we'll be sharing much more information about what we know."

The Corvallis-Albany Bikeway Advisory Group will meet twice more, from noon to 2 p.m. on March 22 and April 25 at the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library, 645 N.W. Monroe Ave. The meetings are open to the public and will include a short public comment period at the end.

An open house on the bikeway project is scheduled for 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. April 5 at the Sunset Building, 4077 S.W. Research Way.

The advisory group is expected to recommend a route to the Benton County Board of Commissioners, which will then decide whether to proceed with engineering, design and construction of a path. The board is scheduled to discuss the matter at a work session on May 16 and could make a final decision on June 6.

Reporter Bennett Hall can be reached at 541-758-9529 or bennett.hall@lee.net. Follow him on Twitter at [@bennetthallgt](https://twitter.com/bennetthallgt).