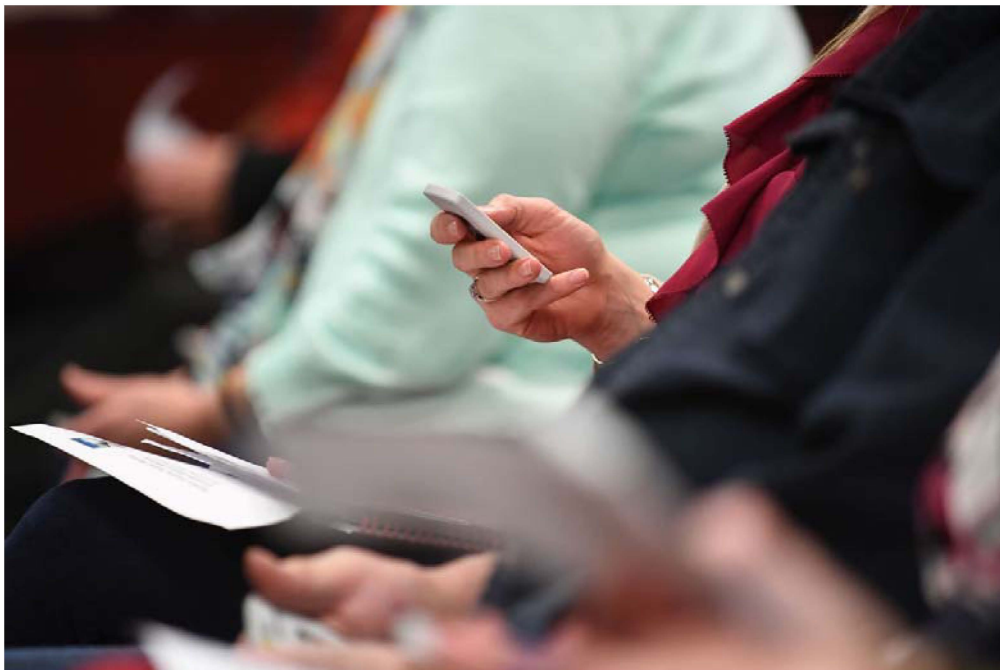


## Bike path moves to next phase

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Anibal Ortiz, Mid-Valley Media file

Bicyclists, residents and concerned citizens use remote control units to share their input on proposed bike routes at a Corvallis-Albany Bikeway Advisory Group open house in April.

The Benton County Board of Commissioners on Tuesday unanimously approved the next phase of work on a proposed bike path between Corvallis and Albany via the Highway 20 corridor.

The board OK'd spending nearly \$60,000 for consulting services on the next phase of the project, which will include a technical analysis of the preferred route's feasibility and some preliminary design work. It also will include a public engagement process and direct discussions between county staff and property owners along the route.

"We will make sure we talk to every property owner who is either directly impacted (by the route) or is adjacent to them," Public Works Director Josh Wheeler told the commissioners at their noon meeting.

Wheeler said he would report to the commissioners on the technical analysis next spring. If prospects for the route look favorable, he said, he would advise the board to seek funding for final design, right of way acquisition and construction. If not, the board could still walk away from the project at that point.

The proposed route would parallel the south side of Highway 20 from Conifer Boulevard in Corvallis to Bowers Slough, then cross under the roadbed and continue along the north side of 20 to Scenic Drive, where it would connect with a path to be built from North Albany Road by the city of Albany.

A previous effort to build the path along the Union Pacific railroad tracks fell apart amid staunch opposition from farmers who argued the route would disrupt their operations and said the county had failed to consult with them over the plan. The new route, which was arrived at after several meetings of a citizens advisory group and two open houses with the public, appears to have resolved at least some of those conflicts.

Board of Commissioners Chair Anne Schuster, who has voted against the project in the past, praised county planners and advisory group members before voting to move ahead with the plan.

"This process was so much more thorough than anything that came before," she said.

The bike path was the last item on a lengthy agenda at Tuesday's board meeting. Before considering it, the commissioners quickly disposed of a number of other matters.

In other action, the board:

- Agreed to vacate a right of way in the Anderson Colony Orchards subdivision.
- Approved the withdrawal of a piece of property from the Philomath Fire & Rescue District and the addition of that property to the Corvallis Rural Fire Protection District.
- Approved the formation of the Asbahr-Pilkington Special Road District.
- Signed off on the transfer of \$166,512 to the Information Technology Department budget.
- Adopted orders to formally create two taxing districts approved by voters in the May election, one for the Benton County Extension Service and one for the Happy Valley water system.

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