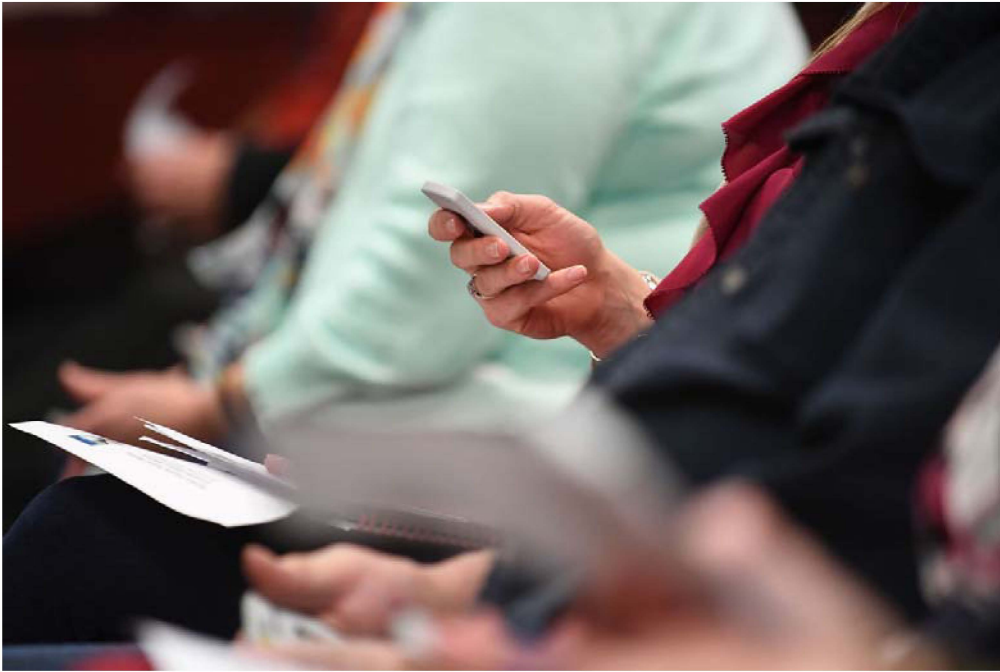


Community weighs in on bike path

BENNETT HALL Corvallis Gazette-Times Apr 5, 2017 Updated Apr 6, 2017



Anibal Ortiz, Mid-Valley Media

Bicyclists, residents, and concerned citizens use a remote control to share their input on proposed bike routes at the Benton County Public Works Corvallis-Albany Bikeway Community Open House on Wednesday.

Community members who've been waiting to weigh in on a proposed bike path linking Corvallis and Albany via the Highway 20 corridor got their chance Wednesday night, and they had plenty to say.

More than 50 people, including members of the Corvallis-Albany Bikeway Advisory Group, attended a two-hour open house at the Benton County Sunset Building to discuss the project, which is still in the conceptual stages. A previous attempt to put the bike path along the Union Pacific railroad tracks was shot down by the Benton County Planning Commission in early 2015 in the face of fierce opposition from farmers along the route.

Now, after about two months of vetting by the advisory group, four potential routes are under consideration:

- Highway 20 Route, a 9.3-mile path that would parallel the highway primarily on the south side, crossing to the north side somewhere near North Albany.
- Rural Only Route, an 11.6-mile alignment that would go north from Corvallis along the east side of Highway 99W, then loop toward North Albany via Elliott Circle, Pettibone Drive, Metge Avenue, Oak Grove Road, Gibson Hill Road and North Albany Road.
- Granger Rural/Highway 20 Hybrid Route, a 10-mile route that would go north along 99W from Corvallis and then follow Elliott Circle and Granger Avenue before crossing the highway and continuing along the south side of 20.
- Pettibone Rural/Highway 20 Hybrid Route, an 11.1-mile configuration that would also start out from Corvallis along Highway 99W and Elliott Circle, then follow Pettibone to Independence Highway, cross 20 and continue along the south side to North Albany.

Using an electronic voting system to tally their preferences, audience members gave the Highway 20 alignment the most support, with 40 percent rating it most preferred and 26 percent rating it least preferred. The Rural Only Route had the strongest opposition, with only 26 percent ranking it most preferred and 45 percent putting it at the bottom of their list.

The other two routes inspired a more lukewarm response, with the Granger/20 Hybrid getting a 10 percent most preferred/36 percent least preferred score and the Pettibone/20 Hybrid posting a 5 percent most preferred/33 percent least preferred rating.

Several steps remain before the county will decide whether to proceed with detailed design and engineering work for a possible bike path.

After a review of the conceptual routes by a technical advisory group, the Corvallis-Albany Bikeway Advisory Group will meet to recommend a proposed route. That meeting, which is open to the public, will be from noon to 2 p.m. April 25 at the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library, 645 N.W. Monroe Ave.

The Benton County Board of Commissioners will make the final decision on whether to proceed to the design phase. The board is scheduled to discuss the matter at a work session at 9 a.m. May 16 in the county boardrooms, 205 N.W. Fifth St. The board could vote on the matter at its June 6 meeting.

When the time came for public comment, 11 people took the opportunity to express their views more clearly.

Bicyclist Wendy Byrne spoke in favor of the Highway 20 route.

"I love the idea of an easier way to get to Albany ... or get from Albany to Corvallis," she said. "I think the most direct route is the best idea."

But several people who live along the highway spoke out strongly against that route.

Anna Goodhouse said the route would take some of her family's land.

"As far as the Highway 20 path goes, it may seem simplest but it impacts people significantly," she said.

Matt and Serene Mellenthin said the route would be a violation of their property rights.

"I'm honored that all the pro-bike advocates want to ride their bikes on my property — but it's my property," Matt Mellenthin said.

Serene Mellenthin said the couple felt "blindsided" when they learned the path might come through their land.

"We saved for 10 years to buy our little piece of heaven on Highway 20," she said. "Putting a bike path through it would destroy it."

Objections were also raised about the other potential routes, with speakers citing concerns about safety, loss of property and other issues. 🍷

"This isn't about farmers and bikers, it's about safety," said Karla Chambers, whose family owns Stahlbush Island Farms and has a distribution warehouse at Granger and Highway 20. "Let's find something that works for everybody."

Michael McGowen, who serves on the Corvallis-Albany Bikeway Advisory Group, reminded the audience that all the proposed routes are in the conceptual stage and that all the nitty-gritty details remain to be worked out.

"The real bottom line is we need a safe way to get from Corvallis to Albany. Right now we are in a very dangerous situation," he said. "I just encourage you to see if there is some way that we can find a path and not just (say), 'Ooh, we don't want to do it.'"

Brad Upton of Corvallis spoke in favor of the Highway 20 route - but he also cautioned that the obstacles to completing it are significant.

"I do think there's a need," he said. "Finding a route everybody can live with is a monumental challenge. Good luck."

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On the net

To take a survey on the four preliminary route proposals, go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/bikewayopenhouse>

For more information about the project, go to <https://www.co.benton.or.us/bikeway>

To send written comments about the project, email publicworks@co.benton.or.us

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