

## County delays bike path decision

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Godofredo Vasquez, Gazette-Times file photo

A man rides his bike on the shoulder of Highway 20 last January. The Benton County Board of Commissioners will consider whether to move ahead with plans for a bike path through the Highway 20 corridor between Corvallis and Albany at their Jan. 3 meeting.

The Benton County Board of Commissioners has delayed a decision about whether to move forward with plans for a bicycle and pedestrian path through the Highway 20 corridor between Corvallis and Albany.

At a work session Tuesday morning, the commissioners voted 3-0 to continue the discussion at their Jan. 3 meeting, saying they need to study the matter further.

That will give the board time to read through dozens of comments submitted at a Dec. 13 public meeting as well as review the results of stakeholder interviews and community surveys conducted by the Barney and Worth consulting firm.

Last week's meeting at the Corvallis Waldorf School, which drew close to 100 people, was the first effort to re-engage the public in discussing the project since an earlier proposal to route the path along the Union Pacific railroad tracks was shot down by the county Planning Commission in February 2015.

The meeting's main attraction was a set of maps showing the project area and outlining seven possible routes for a bike path that did not include the earlier alignment, which county officials have removed from consideration.

Those maps "really got the conversation going," Public Works Director Josh Wheeler told the commissioners.

"A common comment was, 'I didn't realize there were other options,'" Wheeler said.

Barney and Worth President Libby Barg said the meeting showed solid community support for going forward, with 48 of those who completed comment forms saying they supported a path, 16 opposed and 12 neutral.

The next phase of the project, if the board decides to move ahead, would be to create community and technical advisory groups to evaluate potential routes.

"I think there's a great opportunity right now, not to pick a route and move forward with it, but to create a community vision for this path," Barg said.

Commissioner Anne Schuster, who has opposed the path in the past, asked a number of pointed questions about the project, including whether Public Works staff is considering putting the path in some other part of the county.

Wheeler said that was not part of the discussion.

"My answer to that would be no," he said. "We really are focused on north Corvallis to North Albany."