

Panel recommends county move ahead with bike path

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Godofredo Vasquez, Gazette-Times file photo

An advisory panel is recommending that Benton County move ahead with plans for a bike path linking Albany to Corvallis via the Highway 20 corridor. This file photo shows a cyclist riding on the shoulder of the highway in January.

An advisory panel is recommending that Benton County move ahead with plans for a bike path linking Corvallis and Albany via the Highway 20 corridor.

The Corvallis Albany Bikeway Advisory Group made its recommendation at a meeting on Tuesday. Specifically, the group gave its support to a modified version of a route proposed at an earlier meeting that met resistance from area property owners.

The proposal calls for a separated bike path that would hug the south side of the busy two-lane highway from Corvallis to Bowers Slough, where it would cross under the roadbed. From there, the route would continue on the north side of the highway to Scenic Drive, where it would connect with a proposed path that would continue to North Albany Drive.

An earlier version of the route, which would have stayed on the south side of 20 all the way to Albany, raised strong objections from property owners between Hyak Park and Tadena Landing.

The group also suggested that an alternate route be added to the county's transportation system plan for future consideration as funds became available. The so-called rural route would go north from Corvallis on the side of Highway 99W, then loop toward North Albany via Elliott Circle, Pettibone Drive, Independence Highway, Metge Avenue, Gibson Hill Road and North Albany Road.

The decision was not unanimous. While the recommendation received support from a solid majority of the 18-member group, several people voiced objections to proceeding with the Highway 20 alignment.

A final decision on whether to move ahead with the plan still must be made by the Benton County Board of Commissioners.

The board is scheduled to discuss the matter in a 9 a.m. work session on May 16 and vote at a noon meeting on June 6.

Both meetings will be held at the county boardrooms, 205 N.W. Fifth St. in Corvallis.

If the board does decide to proceed with additional planning for the proposed bike path, a new committee would take a closer look at the details of the route, including cost, right of way needs, environmental issues and impact on individual landowners, according to Benton County Public Works Director Josh Wheeler.

That process would likely begin in the fall and would include additional public engagement, Wheeler said. He also pledged that all landowners along the proposed route would be notified about the planning process from the outset.

"If it takes a knock on the door to get someone's attention, we're going to make every effort to talk to everyone," Wheeler said.

The Corvallis Albany Bikeway Advisory Group began its work in January by considering 10 potential routes. The list of alternatives was refined and narrowed down over the course of four meetings and one open house, with additional input from the public and a technical advisory group.