

Bike trail through Elgin's northeast side inching closer to reality

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By Tara Garcia Mathewson

The City of Elgin is plugging along in its quest to be more bike friendly.

Council members will consider partnering with the Illinois Department of Transportation Wednesday and approving a contract for engineering services in the second phase of a bike trail project that will run from the city's downtown toward Cook County on the east. Elgin received a grant to cover 80 percent of the work in 2008 but construction still could be a ways off.

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The \$85,000 agreement with TransSystems, which secured the original grant from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, will cover engineering. The total cost of planning, designing and constructing the 2.7-mile trail tops \$611,000, of which the city is responsible for 20 percent.

The original estimates for the work were \$457,600 but since part of Congdon Avenue is too narrow to allow for an on-street bike lane, a side path would be constructed at a higher cost.

Assistant City Manager Rick Kozal said a commitment to the separate trail is recommended because of the grant but likely will not be repeated in future projects. The 2008 Bikeway Master Plan included plans for four major trails in the city's quadrants, another of which is

already under way for Elgin's southwest side.

"The city has taken a step back from a desire to create dedicated bike lanes to something that's more cost effective," Kozal said.

And Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee member Tom Armstrong said the cheaper, on-street bike lanes are generally safer anyway, based on national crash data.

Armstrong said Elgin streets are, for the most part, very “bikeable” without any extra effort on the part of the city. The committee is wrapping up fundraising for a map that will highlight the most bike-friendly streets in the city and give riders tips on bike safety.

“It’s great to be able to put bicycle infrastructure on streets, but sometimes it’s not all that necessary if you can just identify streets,” Armstrong said, adding that signs on the best roads for bikes could be the most cost-effective option in the future.

But Congdon Avenue east of Dundee Avenue is an especially narrow, busy street on which Armstrong agrees the side trail is the best solution, short of widening the road itself.

The Illinois Department of Transportation will monitor the project — not the City of Elgin, Kozal said. Council members will have a chance to formalize the agreement with IDOT and contract with TransSystems for engineering services during their Committee of the Whole meeting Wednesday.

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