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## City gears up to link trails

Last two sections to be designed soon

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The final two major sections of the "Louisville Loop" -- a system of walking, jogging and bike paths and trails ringing Jefferson County -- soon will be mapped out, in hopes of completion within the next five to 10 years, according to city leaders.

Parts of the 105-mile loop, which Mayor Jerry Abramson says "will connect all parts of our city, from Prospect to Valley Station, the waterfront to the waterfalls of Floyds Fork," already are in place and being used, or under construction.

Most recently, Metro government hired consultants to design the course of two large sections that will all but complete the loop.

The consultants, who will be paid a total of \$500,000, will work on:

The Northeast Trail Corridor, which will run from the area of U.S. 42 in Prospect to Miles Park, which is near Shelbyville Road and the north end of the Floyds Ford Greenway.

The Southwest Trail Corridor, which will stretch from the bottom of the Floyds Fork Greenway through the Jefferson Memorial Forest, before arriving at Riverside, the Farnsley-Moremén Landing.

Some parts of the loop, including the 7-mile RiverWalk from the downtown riverfront to Chickasaw Park and the 14-mile Levee Trail along the southwest floodwall, are completed and in use.

Metro Parks Director Mike Heitz said the rest of the trail will be developed as federal, city and private money becomes available, probably over the next five to 10 years.

So far nearly \$4 million has been spent on developing the first 25 percent or so of the Louisville Loop.

City spokesman Chris Poynter said completion of the loop will cost millions of dollars more. But he said the total cost is hard to estimate, because it will depend on whether decisions are made to buy land for the trail or to primarily use public property such as shoulders of roads and utility easements.

Here's a closer look at the two sections about to be designed:

### **Northeast Trail Corridor**

The consulting firm HNTB is being paid up to \$200,000 to plan the Northeast Trail Corridor. Funding includes \$100,000 from the city, with most of the rest federal aid, coming through the regional planning agency, KIPDA.

The general corridor for the trail should be proposed by July, Heitz said.

Metro Parks spokesman Jason Cissell said the corridor could be inside or outside of the Snyder Freeway. Point to point, the distance is about 20 miles. But the path's route could weave through heavily developed areas, officials said.

Cissell said some suburban cities, including Prospect and Anchorage, have expressed interest in developing offshoot paths into their communities. Heitz said E.P. "Tom" Sawyer State Park near Anchorage is expected to be a major trailhead for that part of the path.

HNTB has been asked to recommend recreational opportunities along the trail, including suggesting types of signs, benches and lighting. A public meeting on the project will be held Wednesday at "Tom" Sawyer Park.

HNTB's Louisville office will do the work. It recently recommended a 10-mile pathway system along the city's parkways linking the Olmsted parks. Nationally, the firm, which is based in Kansas City, has designed convention centers for Boston and San Diego and numerous sports facilities, including INVESCO Field in Denver.

David Wicks, a Prospect biking enthusiast, said a path to Miles Park "would be wonderful."

Heavy development in the northeast area of the county, much of it along narrow roads, has made biking there dangerous, he said. The Louisville Loop, he said, "would be a way to link neighborhoods to larger parks and would encourage more people to ride bikes."

## **Southwest Trail Corridor**

The consulting firm Jones & Jones will be paid \$300,000 to design the Southwest Trail Corridor, one of the largest sections of the loop -- probably 30 miles or more from Bardstown Road through the forest to Farnsley-Moremen. The money includes \$200,000 from the Metro Parks Foundation and the rest from the city.

Jones & Jones is a Seattle-based architectural and design firm that has done a master plan to reclaim the 300-acre Sand Point Peninsula in Seattle and trail systems for the cities of Minneapolis and Spokane, Wash.

The southern Jefferson corridor, which could be north or south of the Gene Snyder Freeway, will likely include a link of some sort with McNeely Lake Park, Cissell said.

In addition to designing the path, Jones & Jones will develop a master plan for the 6,200-acre Jefferson Memorial Forest. Metro Parks planner Lisa Hite said it will include recommendations for improvements, such as campgrounds and parking and an internal trail system. It also may suggest future land acquisition in the forest, she said.

The Southwest Trail Corridor study, including the forest plan, is expected to be completed by late summer, Cissell said. Public meetings on the project will be announced later.

If routing the Louisville Loop through the Jefferson Memorial Forest isn't feasible for some reason, the trail could end up farther north, or somewhere near the Outer Loop. A \$160,000 study of some environmental issues in that area, including a look at possible recreational facilities such as bike paths, is being managed by the Army Corps of Engineers.

In addition to the Northeast and Southwest corridors, there are two other sections of the proposed loop already in various stages of planning:

The nonprofit 21st Century Parks, working with the consulting firm Wallace Roberts & Todd, should have a design by late spring for the portion of the loop along a 27-mile stretch of Floyds Fork between Shelbyville and Bardstown roads. The path will be incorporated into a linear park along the stream. More than \$38 million in federal aid has been set aside for the linear park's development.

In a move that has generated some controversy, city officials are considering letting 21st Century Parks manage the linear park, even though some of it will be on Metro Parks land. The nonprofit has already reached an agreement with a group named Future Fund to manage the trail where it goes through some of the fund's holdings in the Floyds Fork Greenway.

The other section of the Loop will be a 7-mile path along River Road from near Zorn Avenue to near Hays Kennedy Park and U.S. 42 at Prospect. The city has rounded up about \$2 million, much of it federal aid, to study the feasibility of the trail. Some of the money could be used for construction or for acquiring right of way.

Jon Villines, the city's bike-pedestrian program coordinator, said the schedule for a final design and for construction is uncertain.

## **RiverWalk and Levee Trail**

The Louisville Loop was adopted as a top priority by a bicycle task force Abramson created two years ago.

But its physical beginnings date to the 1990s when the city developed the RiverWalk in western Louisville.

Another section of the loop, the recently completed Levee Trail, links the RiverWalk with the Farnsley-Moremén Landing.

Fairdale residents Harold Senior and his wife, Louise, both in their 80s, say they plan to ride their bikes two or three days a week on the new Levee Trail when summer arrives. They've already tried it several times, stopping for picnics at Riverview Park. "You can't find any prettier scenery," Senior said.

He said he'd love to see a bikeway through the memorial forest. With the trend toward fitness and the serenity of the forest setting, "I'm sure it would get a lot of use."

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