



Days of safe pedaling could soon return

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Mooresville Tribune
Published: January 22, 2010

In the early 1990s, hundreds of area cyclists participated in the last charity bike ride that circumnavigated Lake Norman. As the region grew, the charity event was canceled due to increased vehicle traffic.

The Lake Norman Excursion Cycling Event returned in 2006 with help of Mooresville's Cool Breeze Cyclery and Lowe's, as a fundraising event for the American Red Cross. However, the route had to be changed. With more than 800 cyclists, navigating the region's heavily congested roads was dangerous for riders.

The new route was more heavily focused on N.C. 115 and the northern region of the lake. "With that many cyclists, we had to focus on safety," said Steve Doolittle, an owner of Mooresville's Cool Breeze Cyclery.

Doolittle and the hundreds of Lake Norman-area cyclists will be happy to know the days of safely circumnavigating the lake may soon be here again.

Last week, the Centralina Council of Government's (CCOG) Lake Norman Regional Bicycle Plan received an endorsement from the Mooresville Planning Board, moving it one step closer toward gaining the support of Mooresville commissioners and adoption by the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

"It's a really important step getting the planning board's endorsement," Doolittle said. "Our hope is this Lake Norman project will include greenways where families may ride their bikes without interacting with cars."

Although the plan is the culmination of years of work toward a bicycle path circumnavigating Lake Norman – a route of more than 100 miles – the current project was initiated in 2008 by the NCDOT's Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation. The division chose this region for the state's first multi-county, multi-jurisdictional bicycle route in part due to the previous planning efforts.

In December 2008, CCOG began its work with the project, identifying existing routes and the improvements necessary for the bicycle path and mapping out future segments that will become part of the 100-mile-plus route.

Prior to presenting the plan to the NCDOT in March – with approval anticipated in April – CCOG is seeking the endorsement of towns and counties directly affected by the Lake Norman Regional Bicycle Plan, including Mooresville and Iredell County.

Bjorn Hansen, transportation program coordinator for CCOG, said in the next couple weeks

the group will seek other town, county and parks and recreation endorsements before receiving the final opinion from the NCDOT.

"Overall, I think we're going to be fine (getting endorsements locally)," he said. "Some of the route improvements are already in place, including bike lane striping on Wilson Avenue and the Brawely School Road widening project. Ultimate approval though rests with NCDOT later this spring."

The plan will now move to town commissioners during their regularly scheduled meeting Feb. 1. This step in the process comes after significant work toward the project, including work directly with various regional transportation organizations around Lake Norman, such as the Lake Norman Rural Planning Organization and the Carolina Thread Trail staff.

The current plan identifies "initial" and "ultimate" routes for the future pathway. Later this year, NCDOT plans to install signage along the initial route, which includes segments of the bicycle path that are already appropriate for usage or require minimal improvement.

The ultimate route, however, will take several years to complete and require millions of dollars, according to memos submitted to the Planning Board. In the Mooresville area, the ultimate route includes portions of the future Carolina Thread Trail, N.C. 150 and Perth Road. Both of these routes are being submitted to the Planning Board as recommended routes.

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