

CTRE helps plan Mississippi River Trail

TRANSPORTATION PLANNERS at CTRE have helped map out a section of one of longest north-south bicycle routes in the country. The Mississippi River Trail (MRT) is a bicycle trail that follows the Mississippi River from its headwaters in Minnesota to its mouth in the Gulf of Mexico.

The trail is part of the Millennium Trails program, a federal program devoted to trail development to recognize America's history and future. The MRT includes urban and rural trails over varied terrain. It also includes off-road bicycle trails and on-road bicycle lanes on highway shoulders. Planners have designed the trail to maximize bicycle use along the river while keeping cyclists as safe as possible.

Because funding is not available to complete an entirely off-road MRT project in Iowa, planners looked at the possibility of using lower cost bicycle lanes on existing highways or other low cost bicycle trails to get the project started. Planners used geographic information systems (GIS) to compile various road information data for analysis. The data included

- number of lanes,
- lane width,
- paved shoulder width (where the bicycle lane would be placed),
- annual average daily traffic counts,
- percentage of heavy vehicles, and
- speed limit.

Planners used the bicycle level of service (BLOS) algorithm to calculate which highway shoulders would be suitable and safe for a bicycle lane either now or with shoulder paving and widening. GIS showed the BLOS results graphically on a map (see figure). Based on these results, planners recommended safe MRT bicycle lanes and off-road trails and verified their recommendations with the public.

The planners also recommended that appropriate off-road bicycle trails be built to replace the bicycle lanes as funding becomes available.

For more information

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This study was requested by the Iowa Legislature and funded by the Iowa DOT. •



Signs like this are posted along the Mississippi River Trail.

The planned trail hugs the Mississippi River.



The trail passes through historic Iowa cities like Dubuque.



Cyclists will see scenic views of the Mississippi River along the trail.