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Bike path on California Avenue

Davis Bike Loop highlights route through town

Influential Davis architect calls it "one of the best-kept secrets in Davis"

By: GEOFF JOHNSON

Posted: 9/27/07

Davis makes no secret of the fact that it's the only city to be granted the platinum level by the League of American Bicyclists.

Now, it's also home to the 12-mile **Davis Bike Loop** - a route through many of Davis' key bike paths.

Though the loop itself is less than a month old, its origins can be traced back to 1988, when UC Davis landscape architecture professor **Mark Francis** proposed a series of interconnected parks and bike paths called the Davis Greenway Plan.

Along with the help of Kerry Dawson, who was director of the UCD arboretum in 1988, landscape architecture student Stan Jones convinced the city of the merit of his plan. Later they received help from then-graduate student Steve Greco in implementing the design.

Many bike paths and parks had been built in Davis before, Francis said in an e-mail interview, but his proposal was the first to suggest a connection amongst them.

"I often characterize it as a bicycle wheel with a rim trail where you could run a 26 mile marathon around the edge of the city of Davis without crossing a road," Francis said.

In the 1990s, much of the structure was completed, and now Francis estimates that the route is only about 60 percent (or 30 miles) complete.

But enough of the parks are connected that graduate student and Davis Bicycles! founder Ted Buehler took it upon himself to approach the city and ask that markers be added to the route.

Others made unofficial efforts in chalk and graffiti to tag the route, Buehler said, but none endured.

This time around, with the 2007 Walk/Bike conference coming up, Buehler said he found the city enthusiastic - and before long, crews were placing green stencils all over the route, along with signs to key overpasses and underpasses.

Altogether, the route includes nine miles of bike path, three miles of bike lanes, three bridges over the freeway, one tunnel underneath the freeway and six additional tunnels.

The route is the most efficient way to get through Davis that touches on the least road, Francis said.

"I think the city selected this part to mark, [since it's] the most continuous part of the system to date," he said. "Until the loop was marked this summer, it was one of the best kept secrets in Davis."

The loop covers a scant 20 percent of the Davis Greenway itself, bypassing the North Davis greenbelt and bike paths among other pathways and parks, Francis said.

However, this could one day be incorporated, Buehler said, by connecting the upcoming Wildhorse Ranch bike tunnel with a trail through farmland in Northeast Davis. But this hinges on the approval of the farmland owners.

While the new tunnel is scheduled for January of 2008, Buehler said that connecting Wildhorse and North Davis could take decades of negotiation.

In the meanwhile, reception to the Bike Loop has been positive, he said.

"We've had a ton of positive comments about the **Davis Bike Loop**, [and] we're hoping that more people will check it out," Buehler said. "It's a beautiful ride."

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