

River to Sea Bikeway hinges on cross-city trail

by Keith T. Barber

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On Monday, Mike Wilson got a glimpse into the future of the proposed River to Sea Bikeway. Wilson, a Goldsboro resident who owns a home in Wilmington, braved temperatures in the mid-90s to bike along the 10-foot-wide multi-use path recently installed at Autumn Hall.

"It's great, particularly if they take it all the way to the beach," Wilson said.

That's the idea, said Wilmington transportation planner Joshua Mello.

The Autumn Hall multi-use bike path, which runs parallel to Eastwood Road, is just shy of a mile long and will eventually be lighted, said Autumn Hall publicist Margee Herring. The internal bike trail, which is 3.77 kilometers in length, is still under construction. The internal trail, along with the multi-use path, will provide a key part of the cross-city bike trail currently being developed by the city of Wilmington. The cross-city trail could ultimately build the foundation for a River to Sea Bikeway, Mello said.

Phase one of the project — a bike path from Halyburton Park to Cameron Art Museum — should be completed by the end of the year. Phase two

should begin early next year. The entire project could take up to seven years to complete, Mello said.

Ultimately, the cross-city trail is designed to go all the way from Halyburton Park to the base of the Heide Trask drawbridge. Therefore, a proposed bike path that would service the north end of Wrightsville Beach could serve as the final leg of the bikeway.

Last month, the Wrightsville Beach Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee received good news on its request for \$5,500 in county parks bond referendum money to pay for signage and lane striping on Pelican Drive — a first step toward completing the Wrightsville Beach portion of the bikeway.

The next step would require installation of a crosswalk at the Banks Channel bridge on East Salisbury Street.

The N.C. Department of Transportation would first have to approve the crosswalk. The Wilmington Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) plans on conducting a bicycle/pedestrian



Staff photo By Joshua Curry

Mike Wilson of Goldsboro bikes along the new multi-use path in the Autumn Hall development on Monday. Wilson, who owns a home at Inland Greens, said he supports the completion of the River to Sea Bikeway.

count at that location. If they count 25 people in an hour or 100 people in four hours, DOT will approve a crosswalk at that location, said Mello.

The Wrightsville Beach portion of the bikeway is only one piece of the big puzzle. Last week, Mello and project manager Andrea Talley met with Dr. Roger Shew, chairman of UNC Wilmington's Campus Environmental Stewardship Committee, to try to overcome the university's objection to the trail cutting through a 110-acre forest on campus. University officials may have misunderstood the proposed alignment of the cross-city trail, and the MPO is planning to set up a committee at the university next year to study the viability of having the trail cut through the campus.

"They actually don't oppose the bike path completely. They oppose it bisecting those 110 acres, which we would respect their wishes," Mello said. "Our stance is we want to be as flexible as possible."

Mello said the Autumn Hall multi-use path will ultimately connect to Mallard Street, near the UNCW campus, which is why the UNCW segment of the trail is so pivotal to the success of the cross-city trail.

"It's the keystone — it's the only true greenway section of the cross-city trail that's away from the roadway," Mello said.