

CVAG offers specifics on proposed CV Link path

Written by K Kaufmann *The Desert Sun*
Dec. 2, 2013 |

mydesert.com

Initial plans for a 49.5-mile cross-valley bicycle, pedestrian and electric vehicle path show that a significant chunk of the project could end up running along or adjacent to roadways, including major arteries such as Highway 111, Bob Hope Drive and Monterey Avenue.

The first details of the potential route for the Coachella Valley Association of Governments' CV Link, as the project is called, appear in a notice posted on the project website in advance of a meeting Tuesday that will focus on the project's environmental impacts.

In a chart breaking the \$80-million project into 26 segments, nine segments totaling 6.8 miles are labeled either as adjacent to roadways or sharing roads in three west valley cities, Palm Springs, Rancho Mirage and Palm Desert. Heading east from Palm Desert, the chart has the trail running entirely along the top of the levee of the Whitewater River wash to Coachella and eventually the Salton Sea.

Segments of CV Link running along Highway 111, Bob Hope and Monterey total 2.7 miles, much of it in Rancho Mirage, where residents of some of the city's upscale country clubs have raised strong opposition to the trail going through their communities.

The other on or near road sections could run along less-traveled side streets. Preliminary drawings of what the trail might look like along these roads show 7-foot-wide lanes on either side to be shared by bicycles and electric vehicles and 6- to 8-foot-wide pedestrian paths, also on both sides of the street.

Steve Sims of Palm Springs, an avid cyclist who opposes the project, said the on-street lanes for bikes and electric vehicles may not be wide or safe enough.

"To a bicyclist, especially a beginner or an older person who likes to go out, they don't see an electric vehicle any differently from a gas-powered vehicle," said Sims, who expects to be at the meeting Tuesday. "You're going to be the recipient of pain if one of those things run into you."

But Gary Lueders, a cyclist who sits on a citizens' advisory committee CVAG has formed for the project, said on-street sections will be a small part of the project and doesn't foresee major problems. He already rides the Whitewater wash from Cathedral City to Palm Springs without having to hit the street, said Lueders, who also plans to be at the meeting.

Michael Shoberg, transportation program manager for CVAG, said the route laid out in the notice is preliminary, and part of the purpose of the environmental review is to look at alternative routes. Speed limits for electric vehicles on the path could be set at 25 mph or lower, he said.

Tuesday's meeting is the first step in a full environmental review of the project that CVAG will complete under the California Environmental Quality Act and is specifically aimed at gathering public input on the issues the review will cover.

The CVAG notice contains a list of potential topics, ranging from the trail's impact on the valley's flood plain and drainage systems to its possibly positive effects on air quality and greenhouse gas emissions.

LSA Associates of Palm Springs, an environmental consulting firm, is compiling the review, which is budgeted for \$250,000, Shoberg said.

The completed environmental impact report will be part of a draft master plan being prepared for the project, which the CVAG notice said will be completed and available for public review in October 2014. Two months later could be the final approval by the agency's Executive Committee.

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