

Our Voice: Be prudent with CV Link spending

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The vision of CV Link — the proposed 52-mile parkway for hikers, joggers, cyclists and electric vehicles roughly following the Whitewater River — came into sharper focus last week with the release of new drawings accompanied by glowing rhetoric.

The public greeted the announcement with a mix of enthusiasm, skepticism and security concerns.

Concept drawings presented by Alta Planning + Design of Portland, Ore., showed colorful pavers, shade structures with undulating roofs and interactive kiosks where people could see real-time impacts on air quality and greenhouse gases. Passers-by would trigger laser light shows at night.

“This project is intended to be a game-changer,” said George Hudson, a principal with the design company. “It will change how people live in the valley. How they recreate. How they get around.”

Well, some. Those who live far from the wash won’t likely be frequent visitors. And in a valley that averages more than 100 days of 100 degrees or more a year, only the hardiest among us would make it a daily routine. You won’t see many tourists out there during our sizzling summers.

And motion-activated lasers? That seems over the top. The interactive kiosks sound intriguing, but they’re not a necessary expense. A simple sign with a website would do the trick. Those with smartphones could check on the spot.

Lighting the trail at night would be a problem for neighbors.

The Coachella Valley Association of Governments is pushing for a \$70 million investment, plus \$10 million in operation and maintenance. CVAG has collected \$45 million for the 10-year project and hopes to reach \$65 million soon through federal and state transportation and air quality grants, and a \$10 million grant from the Desert Healthcare District.

While \$80 million is a huge price tag, an analysis by economist John Husing predicts \$147 billion in economic benefits through 2035. Those include:

- \$152 million in medical savings from reduced obesity.
- \$137 million from tourists using the trail during annual events.
- \$136 million in savings from reduced cycling and pedestrian accidents.
- \$487 million from bicyclists drawn to local hotels.

Other economic benefits predicted by Husing include \$100 million in construction spending, \$28 million in gas savings, a \$21 million increase in the value of businesses within half a mile of the trail and a \$100 million increase in the value of homes along the trail.

We have great respect for Husing, but those predictions seem overly ambitious.

The biggest concern expressed in the meeting where the concept drawings were presented was security in places where the trail could cross golf courses and gated communities.

CVAG Executive Director Tom Kirk said bypass routes around gated communities will be considered.

The Desert Sun embraces the goals of the Whitewater River trail to reduce traffic on Highway 111, cut greenhouse gases, give tourists an interesting experience and improve the health of our citizens.

But the project is becoming grandiose. Some of the money could be used more effectively in parts of the valley far away from the river, such as adding sidewalks to make walking safe. Building bridges across every street for 52 miles will be an enormous expense. We don't need to add bells and whistles like lasers, lights and interactive stations that are not essential.