

Location: Metro COG Office

Client: Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Council of Governments

Date: April 24, 2025

Subject: Heartland Trail Study in Clay County – SRC Meeting #5

Attendees: Dan Farnsworth, Metro COG; Peyton Mastera, City of Dilworth; Jonathan Atkins and Forrest Steinhoff, City of Moorhead; Patrick Hollister, PartnerSHIP 4 Health; Kent Skaar, and Shawn Donais, DNR; Will Hutchings, North Dakota DOT; Cleone Stewart, Detroit Lakes Chamber; Matt Jacobson and Justin Sorum, Clay County; Colin Harris, and Isaac Hase, Alta Planning + Design; Zakcq Lockrem, Mend Collaborative; Stewart Crosby, SRF

Summary of Meeting

- A casino is planned for the southwest corner of 12th Avenue and Highway 336 south of Dilworth. This may trigger additional planning and work along 12th Avenue.
- It was noted that the development of the casino could speed up implementation of a railroad overpass at 14th St.
- It was noted that any alignment or temporary routes outside the DNR corridor will not be eligible for funds for state trail development, unless the DNR master plan is updated.
- The project team should contact the managers at the MSUM Science Center to make sure they are brought up to speed on the study. Tony, the previous manager, retired.
- Becker County has an RFP out for a trail study around Detroit Lakes for their portion of the Heartland Trail. Becker County is also going to construct a portion of the Heartland Trail near Frazee this summer, if construction contracts are approved.
- It was noted that West Central Initiative has a new round of TAP funding this spring that is separate from the traditional fall round.
- It was noted that the Central Lakes State Trail is a good example of a trail that was transferred from a regional to a state facility, however The DNR may be resistant to additional transfers at this time because of the additional maintenance expenses that come with more trail mileage.
- Any new trail over ten miles will need an EAW during design, which can be a lengthy process.
- It was noted that most funding sources are the same for both regional and state trails. The exception is Legacy funding which is established for regional trails through the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission. The DNR has other avenues to get Legacy dollars.
- The Heart of the Lakes Trail is an example of a regional trail that passes through a state park at Maplewood State Park.
- LCCMR funding was used for the Maplewood State Park segment of the Heart of the Lakes Trail.

- It was suggested that we add a recommendation to conduct cultural, archaeological and environmental studies in and around Buffalo River State Park and the science center as a next step for the planning process.
- It was suggested that the process be open to the options and opportunities between a regional trail and a state trail when the plan is presented to communities, agencies and Metro COG.
- It was noted that the Clay County Board may be hesitant to take on the trail. Three options could be presented to the Board including a state, or a regional, or a combination of the two for trail development.
- It was noted that state trails are being implemented with local advocacy groups leading the effort. The DNR does not have funds for trail development and is spending a good portion of their budget on trail maintenance.
- It was noted that a coordinated approach for advocating for the future of the trail is very important.
- The comment was made that the report does a good job keeping the discussion about state versus regional trail informative and vague and not recommending one option over another.
- Local advocacy is needed for both state and regional trail development, especially in rural areas. Peyton Mastera suggested there should be something in the document about the need for advocacy.
 - It was noted that the report should more clearly label that county and township roads are by prescriptive easement on private property, to be clear. It was discussed which councils/committees/boards should be presented to once the final draft document is complete. The following were suggested: Moorhead City Council
 - Moorhead Parks Board
 - Dilworth City Council
 - Dilworth Planning Commission (if possible)
 - Glyndon City Council
 - Hawley City Council
 - Clay Co Board of Commissioners
- Patrick Hollister asked to be notified for council presentations when scheduled.
- It was recommended that because this is the last SRC meeting for the project, that this be a regular item in the Metro COG bike/pedestrian committee to keep the momentum moving forward.
- There was also discussion about the future composition of the Clay County Heartland Trail Task Force. Dan Farnsworth felt the Task Force is outdated and needs to be completely overhauled. However, Matt Jacobson noted that two of the Clay Co Commissioners have the Clay Co Heartland Trail Task Force on their portfolios. So, it still may be necessary to include both elected officials and technical staff on the future Task Force. Jon Atkins recommended discussing the future Heartland Trail Task Force at the next Bicycle/Pedestrian Committee meeting.

Additional comments received by email from SRC member Rose Bruce-White (MnDOT) after the meeting:

- Regarding state vs. regional: Due to some of my previous experience I usually recommend a trail seek regional designation, especially in areas where ROW/land acquisition is not 100% figured out. Also, the DNR budget is usually pretty slim making actual likelihood of obtaining funding lower, and difficult.
- If seeking state trail designation is still desired, it is possible to get a “best of both worlds scenario”. Although the trail itself would be a state trail, there is the possibility of getting potential spurs regional designation. Down in southwest Minnesota, we talked about this extensively with the GMRPTC as we saw an opportunity to connect the city of Luverne to Pipestone (and the Casey Jones state trail).
- DNR state trail designation does allow for snowmobile use through their outdoor recreational trails program, however, once this happens, it chokes up a project for being eligible for other sources (especially TAP). I would almost consider creating or mapping out an “alternative snowmobile route” to show a distinct separation of active vs. motorized transportation facilities.
- Regarding TAP, a lot of folks forget that TAP can pay for trail amenities such as trash cans, lighting trail heads etc. As segments get built/designed, it may be a good idea to encourage the local communities to apply for TAP money. For those outside the urbanized area, they can apply for the district money, while those on the inside boundaries can apply directly to Metro COG. This would take some coordination with the LUGs but would be worth it.