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Thursday, July 8, 2010

Construction begins on major Bladensburg trail link

New path will connect Bladensburg Waterfront Park to Washington, D.C.

by Elahe Izadi | Staff Writer



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Pedestrians and cyclists will be able to bike through Prince George's County and into the District of Columbia once construction is complete on two miles of trail starting at Bladensburg Waterfront Park.

Work began last week on the two-mile link, which will cost \$1.3 million, and is expected to be completed by the end of the year. Once finished, it will connect 24 miles of existing Maryland trails that end near Bladensburg Waterfront Park, to 16 miles of planned trails in Washington, D.C.

"This is going to allow people to essentially get into the District, and link into going to work in D.C.," Maryland Department of Transportation spokeswoman Erin Henson said.

The missing link was identified as Maryland's highest-priority trails project in Gov. Martin O'Malley's (D) Maryland Trails Plan, released in February.

Requests for information as to the completion date for the District's trail were not returned by press time.

Henson said the area is particularly crucial because it's "where you've already got a great network but you can't link to it because of this one little [missing] piece," she said, referring to the other trails which lead to the area.

Once the trail is complete, Henson said she anticipates an increase in use of the trail, although she couldn't provide numbers on trail use.

"Essentially without these links you're not going to have the ridership because it's not going to take people to where they want to go," she said.

Brent Bolin is the director of advocacy for the Anacostia Watershed Society, a Bladensburg-based nonprofit that advocates for cleaning up the Anacostia River. He said his organization is excited that the trail will increase the public's exposure to the river.

"A big part of our mission is having people understand that the river is a resource. Right now between Bladensburg and the National Arboretum [in Washington, D.C.], there are basically no access points to the river. That means the great majority of people don't get to see it, and not all these additional people are going to get to come down to the river," he said.

In 2006, the state finished an \$8.5 million wetland rehabilitation project near the Anacostia River on a former dump site, but it's been mostly inaccessible to pedestrians and bikers, Bolin said.

The new trail, which will run alongside the wetlands, will allow hikers and bikers to enjoy the river and its nearly 22 acres of wetlands and wildlife, including bald eagles, Bolin said.

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"The more people that see the river and see what a beautiful resource it is, the more people that care about it. And the more people that care about it, the closer we can get to getting it restored," Bolin said.

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