

I2 Walk Audit at Nature Park/Benton Trail Connector

July 22nd 8am-9:30am

Attendees: James Szerwo (NMTAC member), Greg Wirth (NMTAC member), Sarah Sandau (Lewis and Clark Public Health and walk audit facilitator), Lucas Wallace (NMTAC member and Neighbor), Wilbur Rehmann (NMTAC Chair), Craig Marr (Parks and Recreation), Taylore Dinsdale (Lewis and Clark Public Health)

Emailed in opinions from Lowell Chandler (NMTAC member)

Summary and Background:

The Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Council to the Helena City Commission (NMTAC) requested that Lewis and Clark Public Health assist in coordinating an Inclusive Interdisciplinary Walk Audit (I2 Walk Audit) at the parking lot of Nature Park and Batch Fields (off of Benton).

In that area of town, there are numerous houses that range from larger one family homes, to fourplexes, to Carroll College housing. There are elementary schools, Carroll College, the Lewis and Clark Fairgrounds, softball fields, golf course and restaurants.

This route includes ownership by the City of Helena, Parks and Recreation, and MRL (railroad).

Benton trail is about 50% complete currently. The highway department hired a consultant to help finish the remaining bit that will connect the trail to the sidewalk at Carroll College. This is planned to happen in the next year or so. With finishing the trail, NMTAC wanted to see how the connection of Benton Trail to the trail at Nature's Park could connect.

While we were there, over 20 individuals biked, walked, or ran on the trail near us. It is a well-used trail year-round.

Route:

The walk audit went from one side of the parking lot on Benton to the start of Nature's Park Trail.

The map of the route:



Observations, questions, and ideas from the I2 Walk Audit are as follows:

The undesignated parking lot creates barriers for cars and non-motorized individuals alike. With the extension of Benton Trail, there should be a connector from trail to trail, that allows for safe connection and parking. Going through the parking lot for the most direct bike/walk path would be ideal, but that would only be safe with a full parking lot redesign. In the meantime, connecting to the softball fields might be the safest and with least complications (not needing a railroad approval). Connecting to the railroad side would lead to needing MRL approval. No bike racks, benches, bike racks, or water fountains close by.

City Parks and Recreation has put in for some ARPA money for Centennial Trail.

Emailed in comments from Lowell:

“I tend to think that a connector trail would be best placed directly adjacent to the railroad tracks on the south side of the line of vehicles that are parked and at the bottom of the above picture -- see my incredible drawing below for more details ;). That way the path is out of the way of any vehicle traffic as that parking lot can get quite busy during baseball/softball tournaments. However, for the most part, that overly large and disorganized parking lot is generally empty so taking 10-12 feet of the existing pavement for a shared use path would not be problematic.

In an ideal world, this trail would be constructed as a raised path that is separate from the parking lot, however, given the City's chronic revenue issues, I would recommend that the proposed path use the existing pavement in the parking lot and be separated by jersey rails or some other cheap barrier (i.e., flexible delineator posts)”

Summary suggestions:

1. Highway Department: add in a trail connection when creating the rest of the Benton Trail
2. Create a Capital Project for the rest of the connector- whether city or parks.
 - a. Jersey barriers (or something similar) that stick out of the ground would be preferred
 - b. Paved path would be ideal



Next Steps:

This summary account will be provided to all participants in addition to NMTAC. This will be discussed at the next NMTAC meeting on Tuesday, August 9th. If NMTAC decides, they might make a recommendation to the Helena City Commission.

Community members can always make requests to the City of Helena on their own through the My Helena App.