

Albany Democrat Herald

Editorial: Build the bikeway, and they'll come

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You're familiar with that memorable line from the movie "Field of Dreams" – "Build it, and they will come?"

The line (which in the movie actually is "Build it, and he will come") would seem to apply to a proposed 72.6-mile Santiam-Calapooia bikeway, which would run along the South Santiam and Calapooia rivers.

But it sounds as if bicyclists already are coming. The designation, if approved by the state, would give official status to a route that bicyclists from around the country already know about.

The proposed route would loop cyclists from Brownsville through Sweet Home, Waterloo and Lebanon and then back to Brownsville. The route is basically the same as the Santiam Spokes Bicycle Club's annual Strawberry Century ride and overlaps a portion of the Willamette Valley Scenic Bikeway, so it's not as if the route is a particularly well-kept secret among bicyclists.

At a meeting last week before the Sweet Home City Council, councilors heard the case for the byway – and then unanimously voted to back it.

The case for the route was made by Ken Bronson and Doug Robin of the 110-member bicycle club, who noted that the area includes some of the state's finest bicycling, with terrific scenery and good roads. And, considering that riders have easy access to train stations in Albany and Eugene, it doesn't take much imagination to see how the bikeway could become a destination for bicyclists throughout the United States.

In fact, Linn County already is acquiring a reputation as a good location for this kind of bicycle touring – and if you wonder whether that has any economic potential for the area, well, go ahead and ask the hundreds of riders who are participating in the annual Tour DaVita, based out of Waterloo County Park.

Numbers from a 2012 survey suggest some of the potential here: The survey reported that cyclists spend more than \$400 million a

year in Oregon. Most of the money – about \$174 million – went for accommodations.

In some cases, those initial expenditures are just the start: Robin told the Sweet Home council that bicyclists on a tour often return later with their families to spend more time and money.

The men told the council that the only cost to participating communities could be for installation of directional signs, but in many cases, signs are provided. It's true that signage can be expensive, but our guess is that any required investment will be repaid many times over as the mid-valley attracts increasing numbers of tourists armed with their bicycles, their gear and plenty of cash. (mm)

Mike McInally is the editor of the Democrat-Herald. He can be reached at 541-812-6097 or mike.mcinally@lee.net