

Bike advocate seeks North Portland path

By [The Oregonian](#)

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A Swan Island path runs along the Willamette River but dead-ends on both ends. Backers of the proposed North Portland Willamette Greenway Trail want a path that starts in St. Johns, crosses Swan Island and connects with the Eastbank Esplanade.

Lenny Anderson hops on a beat-up cruising bicycle to show a visitor where a bike path could run through Swan Island. Over the din of diesel engines, he calls out what needs to happen to build a sidewalk here and a crosswalk there.

"You've just got to keep an eye out for cement trucks and for these trucks," Anderson says later as the tour continues south on Ash Grove Cement property. "Here comes a front loader."

Anderson is among the most ardent proponents of a path along the Willamette River in North Portland. Though he's a longtime cyclist, he has a more pressing reason: to get cars off the road to make more room for Swan Island tractor-trailer rigs.

"We're down here to move freight," he says matter-of-factly.

Anderson is the sole employee of the Swan Island Transportation Management Agency, and it's his job to reduce the number of people who drive alone to the industrial area.

Money is starting to flow for parts of the path project. But with complications such as Superfund sites and private property along the route, the North Portland Willamette Greenway Trail won't be done any

time soon.

A one-mile Swan Island path was finished in October 2006. But Anderson and other proponents want a path that runs from Cathedral Park in St. Johns to the Eastbank Esplanade.

The full path has been among city goals for decades. A June 2006 planning document optimistically set completion within 10 years.

Anderson, 61, a short, athletic man with a white beard and gravelly voice, has been lobbying for the path for about seven years, since starting his Swan Island agency after being laid off by a company there. He sits on the board of an advocacy group, npGREENWAY.

The path, he says, would offer recreation and could serve some of Swan Island's 10,000 daily commuters.

The city's Environmental Services Bureau has earmarked \$250,000 for sidewalks on Swan Island as part of the project. The city also has tagged \$1.4 million for another piece -- paving the Waud Bluff Trail from Willamette Boulevard south of the University of Portland to Swan Island. But calls for Waud Bluff construction bids won't go out until February 2009 because of delays in funding and environmental-impact studies.

North of Swan Island, the path would have to be cantilevered or floated on a dock to get around the bend at the university. The Superfund sites -- one at the site of the defunct McCormick & Baxter Creosoting Co. and the other at Willamette Cove -- lie farther north.

Kenneth Thiessen, who manages the Willamette Cove property for the state Department of Environmental Quality, hesitates to put a time frame on the cleanup.

Gregg Everhart, senior planner with the city's Bureau of Parks & Recreation, advises patience. The esplanade, she notes, evolved for more than 20 years before it was finished in 2001.

"Sometimes, you have to gain a little perspective," she says.

Back on the bicycle tour, Anderson heads south from his Swan Island office, past a spot where anglers hook sturgeon, through the Ash Grove property and onto a road owned by Union Pacific Railroad.

Back in 1995, Anderson helped bring the TriMet 85 bus to Swan Island. Now, 500 people ride the bus each day, and nearly a quarter of Swan Island commuters share rides. But bike routes, which thread through truck traffic, remain dangerous.

"Give people an option, and some of them will choose not to drive," Anderson says. "You can't ask people to take the bus if there isn't one."

As for the path, he remains hopeful but patient. "Who knows," he says with a shrug. "Maybe not in my lifetime."

Learn more www.npgreenway.org

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