

# N. Portland dreams of its own river trail

By [Allan Brettman, The Oregonian](#)

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Bruce Ely/The Oregonian

The North Portland Willamette River Greenway would provide access to and along the Willamette River, enveloping the north riverfront from the Steel Bridge in downtown Portland to Cathedral Park and extending to Kelley Point Park. Trail sections along the north Willamette have been constructed here and there, such as this segment on Swan Island near North Port Center Way and Anchor Street.

The North Portland Willamette River Greenway has Springwater Corridor Trail envy.

They have at least two things in common: Close proximity to the Willamette River and urban wildlife.

But the Greenway is more of an idea than a trail.

And the big idea is that the Greenway could do for North Portland what the Springwater has done for Southeast.

A group of North Portland advocates hopes that one day a riverfront trail will stretch between St. Johns, or points north, to the Vera Katz Eastbank Esplanade and the Steel Bridge.

It's tempting for Greenway advocates to make the dreamlike comparisons because the Springwater Corridor has provided such a boost to the Sellwood area, says Steph Routh, director of the [Willamette Pedestrian Coalition](#).

"It's just a love story between Portland and bicycling and walking and

active living," Routh says. "Imagine what can be done with North Portland."

But the Greenway is indeed just a dream for now, though it does have a Web site, [www.npgreenway.org](http://www.npgreenway.org), and a handful of reports and studies supporting its creation.

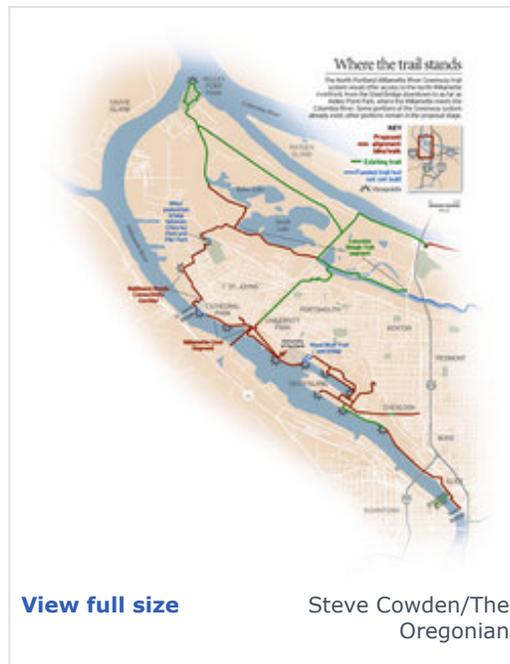
Even its lead advocate, however, sets 10 years as an optimistic timetable for the Greenway to receive funding and be fully constructed.

"I want to be able to walk on it in my lifetime," says Francie Royce, co-chairwoman of npGreenway, a nonprofit group supporting the trail.

The North Portland Willamette River Greenway would extend from the Eastbank Esplanade to Cathedral Park under the St. Johns Bridge through Baltimore Woods and beyond -- up to Kelley Point Park at the confluence of the Willamette and Columbia rivers. It's about seven miles from the northern tip of the Esplanade to the St. Johns Bridge and another three miles to Kelley Point Park.

It would add to the existing Willamette River trail system, providing another place for people to reconnect with the water that, north of downtown, has long been viewed mainly as an industrial highway. It also will be a place for walking, running, cycling, skating, skateboarding, fishing, boating and wildlife viewing.

It could provide a safe alternative for bicyclists seeking a route from the St. Johns, Portsmouth, Overlook, Bridgeton, Arbor Lodge and University Park neighborhoods and avoid existing bike lanes on treacherous roads. With the proper alignment, it could provide an alternative path for people reaching industrial and office jobs on Swan Island to the south and Rivergate to the north.



Several government documents say a trail along the northern portion of the Willamette is needed: the **Metro Regional Trail Plan**, the St. Johns/Lombard Plan, the **Portland Comprehensive Plan** and the **Portland Bicycle Plan for 2030**.

But the draft of the Portland Bicycle Plan, issued in early October, appeared to slight the Greenway when it rated the trail as "Tier 2," seemingly relegating it to a lesser status. Advocates were upset at public comment hearings and in e-mails.

Royce says she isn't overly concerned about the Greenway's status in the 2030 plan because the document was only a draft and she expects the Greenway to fare better in the final version.

Also, she points to a long history of government support for the trail, particularly with Metro's Blue Ribbon Committee for Trails.

NpGreenway, the trails group, has served as the core advocate for the past few years to push the trail idea along.

"A few of us recognized there needed to be a group of us championing this vision of a North Portland Greenway trail," Royce says.

Plenty of natural and manmade obstacles block the trail's construction. Part of the path would likely extend through areas designated as Superfund sites by the Environmental Protection Agency. Other parts would need permission from existing businesses and the Union Pacific Railroad to cross onto their property.

One of the biggest roadblocks would be money. A mere 0.67-mile section in the Willamette Cove would cost \$1.14 million, according to a Metro paper issued in July. The entire four miles examined in the document would cost \$7.8 million to develop.

"The only issue is funding, and that's a matter of political will," says Routh, the pedestrian advocate.

"When you look at other possible transportation developments under scrutiny in North Portland," Routh says, "and you look at the diverse population in North Portland, it becomes a social justice issue."

As Routh sees it, interstate highways inherently lead to poor health in surrounding communities.

The Greenway would help offset that impact.

"If you have the North Portland Greenway, a multiuse corridor where people feel it's safe, convenient and attractive to walk or bicycle," she says, "then those health concerns dissipate."

Royce hopes Metro's Executive Council for Active Transportation, formed this past summer, recognizes the Greenway's potential to encourage North Portland residents to take a more active role in getting around their neighborhood as well as neighborhoods nearby.

With a safe and convenient Greenway, "you get where you're going," Royce says, "and you've had your workout for the day."

As it is now, bicycle commuters have safety concerns about existing options, says Mark Pickett, a bicycling advocate and npGreenway member.

The typical north-south route from northern neighborhoods on the river's east side is: North Willamette Boulevard to North Greeley Avenue to Interstate Avenue to the Eastbank Esplanade. The sections along Willamette Boulevard can be harrowing.



Brent Wojahn/The Oregonian/2007

This section of the North Portland Willamette River Greenway on Swan Island offers clear views of Portland to the south. Supporters hope the Greenway is built someday soon and that it does for North Portland what the Springwater Corridor Trail has done for Southeast.

"You've got cars traveling 35 mph on both sides of you," says Pickett, and that's if they're obeying the speed limit.

On North Greeley, there are points on the north and southbound routes that feature uncomfortable interactions with semitrailers and delivery trucks headed to and from Swan Island.

Some bicyclists without much experience riding in such conditions opt to not ride at all.

"Most people fall into this interested-but-scared category about commuting," says Pickett, the owner of Revolver Bikes on North Interstate.

A motor vehicle-free alternative such as the Greenway trail may coax them to give bicycle commuting a try, Royce and Pickett say.

While Royce sees a finished Greenway at least a decade away, some trail milestones are closer:

- In March, Metro approved \$444,800 for a feasibility and engineering study on the Greenway.
- Earlier this month, **Alta Planning+Design** issued a draft study for the feasibility of a riverside trail running through Willamette Cove, a 27-acre, Metro-owned parcel. The trail would run from the St. Johns neighborhood at Richmond Avenue's intersection with the Union Pacific Rail line to the BNSF Railway line that crosses the Willamette. The study points out several hurdles -- years of toxic contamination, for example -- but also fuels the dream with things such as a cross-section drawing of a multiuse trail.
- NpGreenway is seeking an \$11,088, one-year Metro grant to pay for an intern whose primary function would be bringing public attention to the Greenway.

Royce says bike planners in the city seem to favor improving existing on-street options for bicyclists.

That's important, she says, but she doubts that will get the city to its desired levels of bicycle commuting participation.

To reel in bicyclists who are curious about commuting but terrified of passing motor vehicles will require a safe corridor, she thinks.

The Springwater Corridor Trail provided the model for bikers, hikers, walkers, runners and the nonmotorized rest. Now it's time for the Greenway to give that model a spin.

--**Allan Brettman**