



David Woo/Staff Photographer

The popularity of the Katy Trail in Uptown Dallas has spurred officials to do more. Since 1993, Dallas County has spent about \$16 million working with cities to complete about 38 miles of trails, with more in the works.

# An ambitious path

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Twenty years after launching a trail program, Dallas County leaders are eyeing the next generation of hike and bike paths.

The first 38 miles — trails typically built in partnership with cities — creat-

## Planners aiming to fill the gaps in network of trails

ed the starting blocks for a usable network. Another 30 miles are in various stages of planning or construction and will continue filling in gaps.

And in the next couple of decades, the county would like to help add an additional 80-plus miles. The goal is to ensure that all residents can enjoy a comprehensive

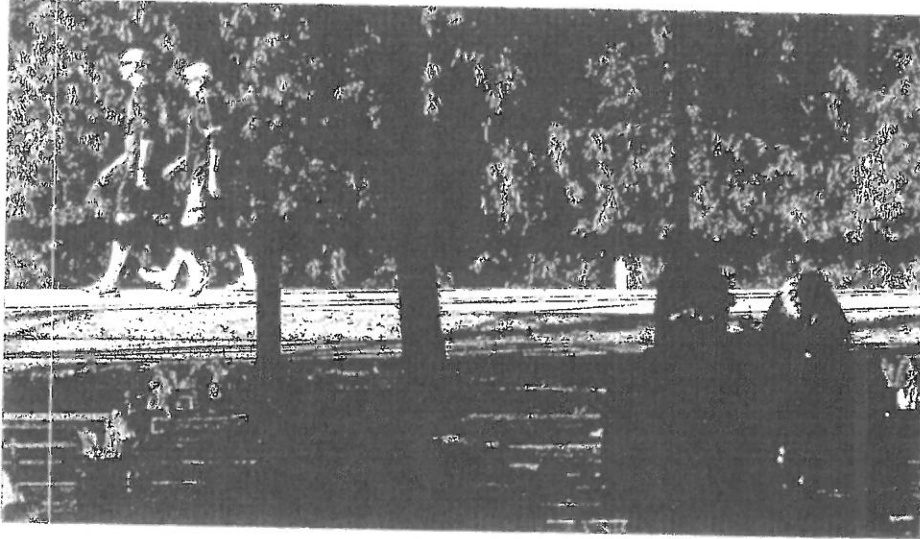
trail system — one that actually goes somewhere.

“We want the ... program to really create an alternative form of transportation,” said Rick Loessberg, the county’s planning and development director. “We want people to be able to walk —

See **PLANNERS** Page 8B

"We want the ... program to really create an alternative form of transportation. We want people to be able to walk — or ride their bike — from one end of the county to the other."

Rick Loessberg, Dallas County's planning and development director



David Woo/Staff Photographer

Dallas County officials say the trails, in partnership with cities, create benefits including higher property values, increased development, connectivity between parks and a more active population.

## Planners want to fill gaps in trail network

Continued from Page 1B

or ride their bike — from one end of the county to the other."

Loessberg on Tuesday briefed Dallas County commissioners about the trail program. The presentation marked 20 years since the county spent \$250,000 on its first trail project: the now wildly popular Katy Trail in Uptown Dallas.

Running and biking paths are almost commonplace in Dallas County, but that wasn't always the case.

However, early enthusiasm for the Katy Trail — even before construction began — spurred officials to do more. In 1997, the county adopted a formal trail plan. A year later, the county provided \$300,000 for its second trail project, the Roy Orr Trail in DeSoto.

And since 1993, the county has spent around \$16 million working with cities to complete about 38 miles of trails. Now, most county residents live within 15 to 20 minutes of a trail.

"We've taken a lot for granted," Loessberg said. "People have thought, 'We've always done this sort of thing.' But the reality is, 'No, we have not.'"

Even with its major investment, the county isn't the first entity that comes to mind when users think about hiking and biking paths.

That's because the county

### Completed and proposed projects

Dallas County often partners with cities to build hike-and-bike trails, such as the Katy Trail. Here are a few completed projects, and a few that are down the road.

#### COMPLETED

Trail	Location	Length	Description
Kiestwood Trail	Dallas	2.5 miles	One of the longest in southern Dallas County
Campion North	Irving	1.5 miles	Part of a major north-south trail
Red Oak Creek Trail	Cedar Hill	3 miles	Among the first in Cedar Hill

#### FUTURE

Trail	Location	Length	Description
Audubon-Arboretum Trail	Dallas	11 miles	Would connect White Rock Lake to the Trinity River
Crosstown Trail	Mesquite	2 miles	Would create a major east-west path
Inland Port Trail	Wilmer/Lancaster	11 miles	A new trail system

SOURCE: Dallas County

will fund, design and build a trail, but it won't own or maintain it. The county, for instance, chipped in \$432,000 for the Santa Fe Trail in East Dallas. The city, which also helped pay for the project, maintains the path.

County officials emphasized that those partnerships have benefited both the county and the cities.

Higher property values. A more robust tax base. A lure for prospective residents and businesses. Increased development around trails. Connectivity between parks, entertainment districts, DART stations, schools, and so on.

And a more active population.

"It's amazing. Healthier lifestyles come from trails," said County Commissioner Elba Garcia, who represents much of western Dallas County.

But the path now gets a bit

more difficult for the county and its partner cities.

Officials focused first on the easiest projects, to maximize return on investment. Finishing the next 30 miles — trails already "programmed" — is expected to cost about \$45 million. Then there are 83 miles of unfunded, proposed trails with an estimated price tag of \$114 million.

That latter group includes an 11-mile trail to connect White Rock Lake and the Trinity River; a 6.5-mile trail to connect pieces of the Campion Trail in Irving; an 11-mile trail in the Wilmer and Lancaster area; and many more.

Per-mile costs are higher going forward because the remaining projects feature more complicated engineering and planning. The planned Chalk Hill Trail in southwestern Dallas, for instance, calls for several bridges.

Given the price tag, County Commissioner John Wiley Price said he wanted to make sure there remained a strong focus on basic infrastructure. He said many people in southeastern Dallas County are more concerned about getting water and sewer connections.

"You could put the prettiest trail in the world out there, but no one is going to move out there" without adequate utilities, said Price, who represents most of southern Dallas County.

Still, he agreed that the trails have been a plus for the county. And Garcia, in particular, argued that trails and other amenities could be the impetus for growth across the county.

"In my mind, you have to work at different angles to solve the problem," she said.

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