

Public-private effort could pave way for Circuit, a loop of hike and bike trails



Photos by Ben Torres/Special Contributor

Isica Duncan, 23, relaxed after running the Katy Trail on Friday. The \$20 million Uptown trail is a training ground for officials because it is funded by public and private funds and a nonprofit, Friends of the Katy Trail, now looks after it.

THE MISSING LINKS

By **TOM BENNING**
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Dallas' network of hike and bike trails in 10 years could feature a grand, citywide loop — the equivalent, for exercise enthusiasts, of an LBJ Freeway.

In all, roughly 250 miles of trail, if not more, could snake through Dallas, providing connections to DART stations and neighboring cities. An ambitious user could traverse all 14 Dallas City Council districts while spending hardly a moment on a street.

That's the vision of Dallas Park and Recreation Department officials, who are rolling out an aggressive \$200 million plan to grow the city's trail network between now and 2024.

The effort — known as the Dallas

Integrated Trail Circuit, a nod to the pioneering invention from Dallas-based Texas Instruments — aims to build an additional 90 miles of trail by raising \$120 million in private contributions and securing \$80 million in public funds.

The plan — The Circuit, for short — will also use those funds to create a \$40 million endowment for trail maintenance. And it will look to develop an organization that could lead fundraising and outreach efforts for The Circuit and other city trails.

Implementation will be no small feat, given the money involved and the miles of trail to be built. But it all starts with a simple goal: fill in the gaps in the city's existing trail map.

"How can we start putting all the pieces together?" said Willis Win-

A bridge is under construction on the Five Mile Creek Trail in southern Dallas. Ten years from now, the trail could be part of the bigger picture.



Dallas seeking connections

Continued from Page 1B

ters, Dallas' park director.

When people in Dallas think of trails, they mostly focus on the paths around White Rock Lake, the White Rock Creek Trail and the Katy Trail. But the city's trail program has continued to expand beyond those offerings since 2005, when the first master plan for a hike and bike trail network was adopted.

There were 86 miles of trails in Dallas in 2002. Ten years later, there were 125 miles. Ten more miles of trail are in development, and construction of an additional 19 miles was recently approved. That will bring the total to more than 150 miles of trails.

To get a sense of what that means, just lace up some running shoes or hop on a bike.

It's easy, for instance, to travel from Far North Dallas to Deep Ellum by taking the Preston Ridge Trail, connecting to the Cottonwood Creek Trail, continuing on the White Rock Creek Trail, touring along White Rock Lake and then cruising down the Santa Fe Trail.

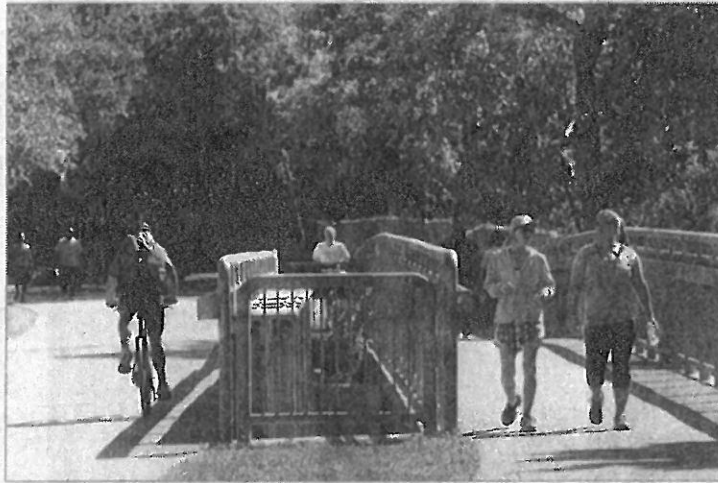
Other long trips can be accomplished with a little patience and creativity. Willis noted that enough trails are in place to "have an impact."

"But," he said, pointing to a map full of disconnected squiggles, "there's frustration that they don't really link up."

Much of the trail network has been built using bond money or other public dollars, especially through partnerships with Dallas County. To maximize those increasingly scarce funds, the city has focused on long, linear trails.

Those trails, often located in old railroad beds, tend to be cheaper to construct. They add lots of miles — and provide high-profile examples of progress.

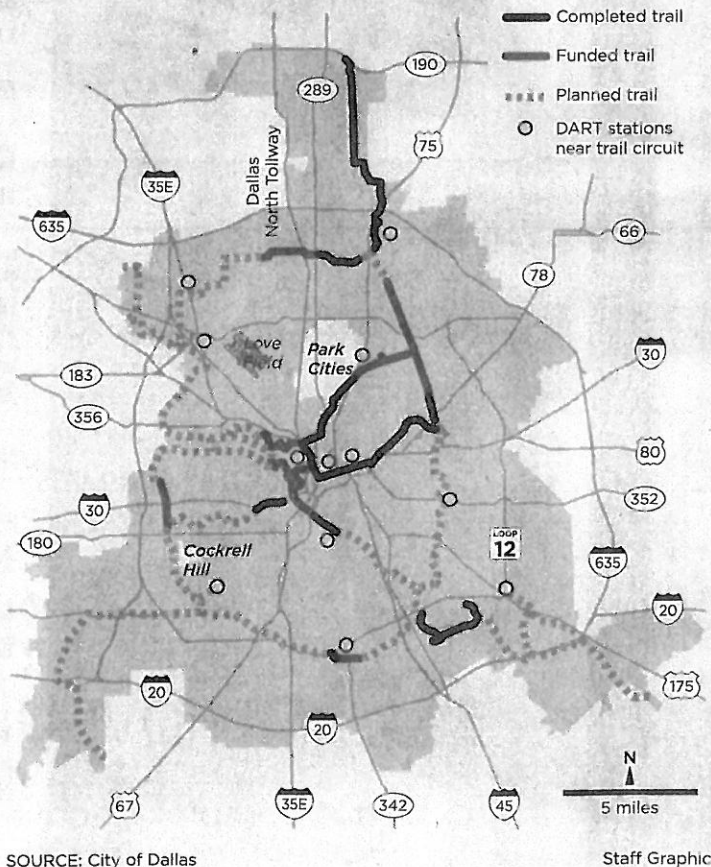
Trail connections, on the other hand, tend to be shorter and more expensive. But some might argue that they provide an even



Ben Torres/Special Contributor

Karen Barge (right) and Annie Knight walked the Katy Trail on Friday. Trail connections tend to be shorter and more expensive but offer a big benefit: a thriving network.

City's planned circuit of trails



greater benefit: a thriving network.

The Circuit, already approved by the Park Board, will help create such a network by highlighting a system within the city's large

er trail system. It will feature more than 140 miles of trail — 90 miles of new construction — focused on connectivity.

The Circuit won't come at the expense of other trails, officials

said. But it will help prioritize which trails to build next, with the goal of creating a hub-and-spoke system emanating from downtown Dallas.

"We've snowballed to the point where we need to go to that next level," said Michael Hellmann, an assistant parks director. "There's enough on the ground to actually visualize this."

To take on the massive task, parks officials are turning to the model that created one of their biggest successes: the Katy Trail.

Officials used a combination of public and private funds to pay for the \$20 million trail, which runs through Uptown. And now, the nonprofit Friends of the Katy Trail is quite successful in raising additional money for maintenance and improvements.

The Circuit aims to accomplish something similar, but on a much larger scale. So the city is teaming with Philip Henderson, a former chairman of Friends of the Katy Trail, and the Dallas Parks Foundation to get the project off the ground.

Public financing for the project is off to a good start, with \$47 million of the necessary \$80 million slated to come from the city's 2006 and 2012 bond programs. Finding the remaining \$33 million over the next decade shouldn't be daunting.

Raising \$120 million privately, though, might not be so easy.

Officials hope the plans for a \$40 million maintenance endowment will convince donors that their investment will be well managed.

They say their goal is to develop an umbrella organization of devoted supporters who can do for trails what the AT&T Performing Arts Center has done for fine arts.

"We have to find people who are interested in building the city," Henderson said.

Follow Tom Benning on Twitter at @tombenning.