



Artist Alec DeJesus worked on a mural along the Hi Line Connector trail on June 26. Six area artists were commissioned to paint two huge murals to transform the new trail into a showstopping gateway. The Hi Line links the Katy and Trinity Strand trails via a path through the Design District. (Elías Valverde II/Staff Photographer)

Update on The Loop Dallas

A portion of the Trinity Forest Spine Trail from Samueli Boulevard to its intersection with the Pemberton Hill Road Trail is in the planning and construction phase, along with a bridge over the Union Pacific rail line.



SOURCE: The Loop Dallas

Staff Graphic



I-beams line the newly open Hi Line Connector trail in the Design District. Thanks to a \$15 million upgrade, the formerly dank and unsafe highway passageway linking Victory Park and the Design District features colorful lighting, expanses of white rock and helpful signs. Soon to be activated are traffic signals designed to better separate pedestrian and car movements. (Photos by Elías Valverde II/Staff Photographer)



The next phase of the loop to be finished is the two-mile stretch from the Pemberton Hill Road Trail (pictured) to near the Second Avenue exit off C.F. Hawn Freeway.



Philip Hiatt Haigh, executive director of The Loop Dallas, said “public entities are so excited about these projects because they are aimed at so many different issues.”

SHARON GRIGSBY

50-mile trail loop comes into focus

It's never too hot to check out a fabulous new hike-and-bike trail, especially one where you might get the chance to see local artists at work on two huge murals celebrating all things Dallas.

The Loop Dallas' Hi Line Connector links the Katy and Trinity Strand trails via a path adjacent to the American Airlines Center and through the Design District. Its water fountains aren't installed, but you'll find pockets of shade along the wide medians through which the path meanders.

Most importantly, the 1-mile Hi Line allows you — whether on foot, bicycle, skateboard or scooter — to cross under Interstate 35E on safe wide pathways and connect to trails and new vistas you've likely never explored.

The Hi Line's opening, with a formal ribbon-cutting later this year, marks The Loop's most significant milestone in its plan for a 50-mile circuit around Dallas.

With two projects completed — the Hi Line and the East Dallas phase of the Trinity Forest Spine Trail — The Loop has delivered a contiguous 16 miles of trail from beyond White Rock Lake to the Trinity River. The finish line remains far in the distance, but it's coming into focus for the city's many trail users.

The project grew out of a conversation 10 years ago among a few well-connected bikers frustrated Dallas was home to many beautiful trails but few of them connected. Routes generally dead-ended at daunting impediments, some man-made and others created by nature.

A careful look showed if 11 miles of gaps — some big, some small — could be filled, the existing trails could create a seamless loop.

At then-Mayor Mike Rawlings' urging, the group of bikers, led by real estate executive Jeff Ellerman, created The Loop Dallas. The private-public partnership's work has been difficult, expensive — and worthwhile. With a little luck, they will wrap up the work in 2027.

The funding for the \$135 million loop will come from \$110 million in public money and \$25 million from private.

"It's bananas the way we have been able to secure public funding," executive director Philip Hiatt Haigh said as we walked under the I-35E and rail bridges. "The public entities are so excited about these projects because they are aimed at so many different issues like pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, health, the environment."

Dank to dazzling

The Hi Line's cost was \$15 million, which reflects the difficulties of installing new intersections, lights and other basics in a densely built-out urban environment. While much of that work is invisible to trail users, the Hi Line's amenities sizzle.

The formerly dank and unsafe highway passageway linking Victory Park and the Design District features colorful lighting, expanses of white rock and helpful signs. The day I visited, six area artists had begun to

paint two huge murals commissioned to transform the space into a show-stopping trail gateway.

Muralists Mariell Guzman, Mari Pohlman, Will Heron, Alec DeJesus, Sam Lao and Hatziel Flores created detailed elements capturing the spirit of Dallas, its landmarks and its trail users. Briefly removing their hot protective spray-painting masks and climbing down from their ladders, they told me Dallas' first brutal heat wave didn't diminish their excitement to be chosen for this work.

When The Loop team approached Guzman about the project, she felt it was important to collaborate with others on such a significant piece of art. "The work is a visual celebration of our city's cultural depth brought to life by the diverse interpretations of multiple artists," she said, "fueled by the vibrant essence of Dallas."

Next steps

Elsewhere on the Hi Line, runners, bikers and dog walkers navigated the last bits of intersection construction. Soon to be activated are traffic signals designed to better separate pedestrian and car movements.

Later this year, construction will begin on the Loop Plaza, a series of ramps and bridges that drop down from the Katy Trail at the intersection of Victory Avenue and Houston Street. While trail users will still be able to take the Katy all the way to the American Airlines Center, the plaza will provide a direct shot onto the Hi Line and points west and south.

Bicyclists and runners who wind their way onto the Trinity Strand Trail will soon begin to see construction at another spot on The Loop: the Sylvan Avenue bridge over the Trinity River.

The Dallas Park and Recreation Board will consider the construction contract in August to reduce the Sylvan bridge from six to four lanes and create a trail in each direction. A new trailhead, dubbed Discovery Gateway, will be built with a ramp to take bikers and pedestrians into the Trinity River trail system.

On the other side of The Loop sits the most arduous job, which involves filling in the remaining seven miles of the Trinity Forest Spine Trail from Interstate 30 through southeast Dallas.

The Loop has divided the project into segments and is working from both ends toward the middle. While decades of infrastructure — for instance, water pipes in a spot where no map showed them to be — complicated the Hi Line work, the floodplains of southeast Dallas challenge the east-side work. The goal is to build the trails in such a way that they aren't under water more than a few days annually.

Filling the gaps

The next phase to be finished is the two-mile stretch from the Pemberton Hill Road Trail just north of the Trinity River Audubon Center in southeast Dallas to near the Second Avenue exit off C.F. Hawn Freeway. Construction began in late June and will likely be finished in 18 months to two years.

The Loop partnered with the Texas Department of Transportation on the design and construction. An elevated trail will run in the green space alongside C.F. Hawn and connect into a much-improved Lake June Road bridge, with bike lanes and wide sidewalks. Also included in the plan is a short trail running east to the Lake June DART station.

Hiatt Haigh expects crews to start turning dirt before year's end on the third piece of the Trinity Forest Spine Trail, from Samuell Boulevard to the Lawnview DART station. This trail will provide the public's first access to the city's newly acquired Parkdale Lake, where a 110-acre park is planned.

The final sections to be designed and built are Lawnview to Second Avenue and a costly bridge over an existing Union Pacific rail line. The Loop Dallas is seeking a final \$10 million from private funders to help complete the project.

I was among the reporters who covered Ellerman's initial dream of The Loop's 50-mile circuit. Ten years ago, it seemed like a fine idea; today I have a far deeper appreciation for the gaps The Loop seeks to fill.

Not just gaps on trail maps but in Dallas transportation priorities. In a city where pedestrians and bicyclists and scooter users are at the mercy of automobiles, The Loop is the backbone of a city with safer trails for all of us.