

Proposed bike trail would go from Napa to Calistoga

Someday Napers may be able to walk or bike all the way to Calistoga on a trail just for them.

Trail boosters have completed a study on developing a Class I bike and walking trail stretching from Napa to Calistoga — and eventually south to the ferry terminal in Vallejo.

The Napa County Transportation and Planning Agency commissioned the study in the spring to consider a trail that would stretch 22 miles between Napa and Calistoga. The \$100,000 study was paid for by all the cities and the county and is more than 250 pages long. The concept is being called the Napa Valley Vine Trail.



A couple rides a tandem bicycle along Silverado Trail north of Napa on Thursday morning. Discussion has begun on a valley-long bike trail.

“We want to get our story out there ... lets make this a reality,” said Chuck McMinn of St. Helena, who has started a group, the Napa Valley Vine Trail Coalition. The group has a Web site, www.napavalleyvinetrail.org, and its goal is to gather support for the Napa Valley Vine Trail. The feasibility study looks at the challenges of constructing a Class I bike path, which will be physically separated from any roadway, said Eliot Hurwitz, program manager with NCTPA.

Three locations are being investigated — one scenario has the path paralleling Highway 29. A second version is near the Silverado Trail. The most ambitious route follows the Napa River through the heart of the Napa Valley.

“This is just a feasibility study. The next step would look at what it would take to build it and the challenges,” said Hurwitz. “It will be a big deal. It is a very exciting opportunity to let Napa show some real visionary leadership, while protecting our quality of life.”

The price tag for building a bike and walking trail would be around \$1 million per mile. Hurwitz envisions paying for it with a combination of private contributions, federal and state money.

Work on the Napa Vine Trail would be done in segments. Some pieces are already in place, such as a segment of the Bay Trail in American Canyon, Napa’s River Trail between Lincoln Avenue and Trancas Street and Calistoga’s path south of town to Dunaweal Lane.

“A good way to get a sense of what this could look like, go see the new path the city of Calistoga has done to Dunaweal Lane. It is beautiful. It’s used by joggers, bikes, walkers and moms pushing strollers. It’s not just a bike path. It’s something used by the community,” said Hurwitz. “Something like this has been on a lot of people’s minds.”

A public input session is scheduled for Oct. 21 at 6 p.m. at the NCTPA's conference room at 701 Randolph St.

Hurwitz said the long-range goal is to offer residents and tourists an alternative to driving.

He envisions guests coming to the valley from San Francisco via the ferry and biking to Napa, St. Helena and Calistoga. "There is a market for this ... there (are) people who are attracted to something like this."

McMinn said, "I have been thinking of something like this for a long time. I think it would be great to show off the beauty of our valley."

He and his wife own Vineyard 29 winery north of St. Helena.

McMinn said support is growing. Some of the supporters include Napa Valley Vintners, The Land Trust of Napa County, Friends of the Napa River, Napa County Supervisor Diane Dillon, the Napa Chapter of the Sierra Club and the Napa County Parks and Open Space District. "All these organizations agree with us to make this trail a reality."

McMinn prefers the trail option that runs down the center of the valley. "The challenge here is it crosses private lands. My goal is to make this a win-win situation for those landowners. I want to make this something they can be proud of and support. No vineyard land will have to be taken out of production. It is strictly voluntary. We want the property owners involved in the process."

He added that there are about 150 parcel owners to deal with to make this happen.

"This is an easy project to get behind. Everyone thinks it is a great resource," McMinn said. "Through this study, we've got everybody's eyes open that this is a possibility."

Bike enthusiast Dieter Deiss, of Calistoga, a member of the NCTPA bike advisory committee and the Calistoga Bike Committee, has "always dreamed of a bike route connecting the cities of the Napa Valley" — similar to his native Germany, where the concept was embraced at the end of World War II. He's lived Upvalley since 1987.

"Our primary reason for doing this is to improve the quality of life for the people that live here," Deiss said.

"I am convinced this is for the well-being of the citizens ... to be able to walk and bike. I'm optimistic."

Deiss also favors the trail option that runs the center of the valley "so everyone can experience the breathtaking beauty. You can't experience that behind a steering wheel on Highway 29. This will give you a whole different experience of the valley."

Deiss thinks the synergy behind the Napa Vine Trail is one of the better examples of government, businesses and citizens working together. In one year something that was only an idea has resulted in a completed feasibility report with three trail options.

"We want a route that is in total harmony with whoever is affected," Deiss said. He does not envision the trail being a straight line.

He thinks the timing is perfect for the trail as everyone begins to jump aboard the green movement, deal with high gas prices and try to reduce traffic congestion in the Napa Valley.

“With this trail we could become a known destination for having one of the most beautiful walking and bike trails in the country. We are years behind Marin and Sonoma counties and the Bay Area Trail,” Deiss said. “We just have to catch up.”

The Napa Vine Trail feasibility study is available at www.nctpa.net.