

Minnesota River Valley Strategic Plan

Compendium of Emails Received

Timeframe: After Planning Commission public hearing (Dec 17, 2015) through January 20, 2016

Dear council members,

Please vote **NO** to paving a trail in the Minnesota River Trail.

I am an avid cyclist/runner both road and off-road and would like to voice my opinion against a paved trail along the Minnesota River. There are plenty of paved trails throughout the metropolitan area, the true problem is a shortage of natural trails for cyclist/runners like myself and daughters who frequent the river trail to get away from pavement, buildings etc.

I would think the taxpayer cost of maintenance and repairs that would follow spring flooding would be enough to prevent such a plan from even being considered.

Thank you and have a good day

Brandon Reynolds

Jon,

Thank you for responding to my email concerning the development of the Minnesota river bottoms area in Bloomington. Please note I am not a biker and am concerned that mostly all of the conversation by those who are advocating for this development is directed toward bikers currently using the area.

I attended the city planning meeting this past week and was taken aback by the central theme of those supporting development in the river bottoms. All of these speakers made statements equating the development of a paved trail system as being beneficial to the environment, in some way or another. The reality is there will be significant negative impact to the environment by the construction of a 10' wide paved trail with an additional 2' of compacted gravel on either side, for a total width of 14' along a 13 mile stretch of the only undeveloped wilderness of this size in the metropolitan area. When hearing of a paved trail I imagined something along the lines of the paved trail on Nine Mile Creek in Moir Park, but this trail is about 6' wide. 14' is the width of a narrow road and it's not a stretch to think a swath of 20' or greater will need to be cut in order to construct this 14' trail/road.

And what about the ongoing maintenance this paved trail will require through the years? What magnitude of heavy equipment will be needed to clear and repair this trail after a major flood event compared to what is being done in Moir today? It's not hard to imagine heavy equipment working in the area for an entire season over back to back years. Has the impact to the environment for this type of work been considered?

Another of the main arguments made by the trail supporters was that invasive species and drainage issues have significantly damaged this area over the years, making the property out to be some sort of environmental wasteland. These statements are extremely misleading, as aside from the current natural surface trail made by the bikers I see no significant changes to the area from the 1970's to today. I'm also missing the argument of how construction of a paved trail addresses either invasive species or drainage.

The only reasonable argument favoring a paved trail is that of attracting more people to the area. But I see little to no concern by those organizations in support, either private or government, on how this development impacts the environment nor the aesthetics/natural beauty this property currently possesses. I find it astounding the only group taking a pro-environment position is the bikers. To my knowledge there is not a single person directly involved in making this decision among the DNR, US Fish & Wildlife, State of MN or the City of Bloomington who has taken a pro-environment position.

This is not to mention the logic of constructing a paved trail within a major flood plain, cost to the taxpayer or a user study showing existing paved trails in the city and surrounding areas are overcrowded.

Sincerely,
Todd Lynch

I was wondering if i could get an idea of what Bloomingtons opinion/angle is, of the possible paving of the river bottoms trail. example: for it, against it, etc...

I understand that it runs through numerous jurisdictions and Bloomington is just one of those.

Thanks

Matt

Timeframe: Between distribution of Planning Commission packet (Dec 10, 2015) and Planning Commission public hearing (Dec 17, 2015)

Dear Council,
Please vote against the proposed river flat trail on Dec 17, 2015.

This area cannot support an asphalt trail. It will be washed away at the next flood.

I would encourage council members to walk or ride on the trail below Shepherd road in St. Paul. It is in very poor repair and nearly unusable due to roots and poor maintenance. I am concerned that this would be the condition of any trail placed in the Bloomington river bottom as well.

The current natural trail is highly valued by a shared group of hikers, runners, dog owners, and bikers. It is a treasure to be preserved.

Thanks for your consideration.

John Mielke,
Minnetonka

Concerned citizens.

Please vote No for Minnesota River Valley strategic plan. Why you may asked, as a user of the unpaved trails along the Minnesota River bottom it would be a sad day to loss this natural area of Bloomington.

I use both paved and unpaved trails within Bloomington and the metro area. This is a rare opportunity to have both types of travels within a metro area. The unpaved portion is a wonderful and peaceful area within the city offering something for hikers, walkers, bikers, bird watchers and others. Plus there is a paved trail to the west that offers a hard surface for other users.

I'm originally from Iowa, I had the privilege of servicing on the Dickinson County Trails Board. As a board we helped plan, develop and raise money for recreational trails. On average, for installation of a standard paved trail, in an area that was easily accessible we budgeted \$250,000.00 for every mile of trails. The cost to install a paved travel within a flood plain will be a great experience. Plus annual maintenance of the trail system. What happened if it does flood? Where will the funds come from to repair the trails?

Bloomington already offers miles and miles of paved trails and bike lanes. Within Bloomington, I only know of the River Bottom area that offers a natural trail system that can be used by multiple types of users. I believe it would be a very sad day if we lost this natural area.

Please vote No for Minnesota River Valley strategic plan.

Thanks,
Joe Miller

To you,

Just not enough sidewalks for walkers, not enough concrete and asphalt already? Walkers can't find any trails in the woods that are already paved? I can share a few with them if they don't already know, how about the board walk on the Cedar Ave end of the river trail (where bikes are prohibited), the trail that leaves from the same parking lot and crosses the river from the ferry bridge location and goes to savage/Shakopee, Theodore wirth park, the Arboretum, bla, bla, bla, (the point,,,,,there are plenty of paved paths), don't let them complain that they would have to drive there to walk any of these paved trails, I have to drive to anywhere I want to ride a mountain bike, what's the difference! Bottom line, leave the trail dirt, how much sense does it make (not that common sense ever enters into the equation with respect to governing) but it floods every year, (especially now that the water levels will be rising all around the globe due to climate change (insert sarcasm here)), where is the money going to come from? for the continual maintenance of the blacktop trail vs the public dollars required to maintain the current system (which is,,,,,, ZERO!), just add/increase a tax I guess, who cares, right? I think it makes you central planners feel un-necessary when people can enjoy an activity without the need for public money/support to build/maintain the coliseums and infrastructure (stadiums and light rail to them from all 4 corners of the state). I was one of the original users of the trail back in the early 80's when there were no off road bike trails, we MADE THAT TRAIL!, now you want to take it over. Just like everything else you know better than all of us as to what's best. I have been to these meetings where the public has the opportunity to speak out against a proposed project, they might as well have card board cut outs representing the city council because the decision has already been made, the meeting is just a formality in the process of letting the lemmings think they have a say. This has been talked about for as long as I can remember and it is no different than the stadium issue, the proponents keep bringing it up every couple of years, beating back the opponents ever so slightly every year, eventually the public gets wore down and just gives in, you will always win, won't you? I will be interested to see just how this plays out.

Craig Kouba

Ladies and Gentlemen

I support the paved riverbanks trail now under consideration.

My family has enjoyed the trails for the past 20 years since moving to Minnesota. The area is beautiful and we have many fond memories. I feel opening the trails to other user groups beyond the few hundred of us that love the trails will maximize the use of the area without compromising the experience.

In this day of social media, it seems all too easy to mobilize the “against” groups; I have been inundated by “sign the petition” emails from many of the groups that I normally support. Please do not be dissuaded by them. The trail will be a wonderful addition to an already great multi use area.

Tim Walsh - Apple Valley MN 55124

As a Bloomington resident of 58 years and someone who respects and enjoys the beauty of the Minnesota river bottom daily. I find it difficult to embrace a project that is this destructive to what make the river bottoms special. Besides the cost of the plan and the amount of maintenance it will require, a 100 Foot clear cut! As the refuge is today, it's traffics has increased immensely with the trail that now exist. From runners, hikers and bikers this trail is maintained mostly by volunteers! I ask the folks pushing this plan take the time to enjoy this special place for what it offers as is. Thanks

Dear Bloomington City Council

Please do not proceed with the Minnesota River bottom trail. A paved trail down a 100' clear-cut corridor in a flood plain at the cost of millions of dollars is an irresponsible plan and should be voted down.

I love road biking in the Twin Cities and Minnesota generally. We have more than enough paved trails, so please protect the natural-ness of the MN River Bottom.

Thank you,

Jeff Brown

Dear Representatives,

Thank you for your hard work improving the infrastructure in our natural spaces. Minnesotans are very blessed to have some of the best parks in the country. I am concerned however about a plan to pave segments of trail between the bloomington ferry bridge and fort snelling.

I run on the existing dirt trails often, and while I fully support expanding trails and infrastructure I do not think this area would be a good fit for major renovation. The existing trails are low maintenance and have very little impact on the surrounding natural beauty, but a paved trail will require much destruction to build and will be costly to maintain. Paved trails must be plowed and salted in the winter (a concern in this sensitive wetland environment) and because the proposed area is a floodplain I worry

that there will be much more maintenance required than a comparable trail in a different location. If a paved trail is put in I would encourage you to locate it as far from the river bank as possible, and leave the existing dirt trail as-is.

Please instead consider leaving the trails in their rougher state, and spending our resources on other improvements such as trail bridges, bathrooms, and paved trails further from the river floodplain. Thank you for your hard work!

-Jude Burgoyne

To the City Of Bloomington Council,

CASE FILE NUMBER: 10001A-13

As an active trail runner and a resident of the city of Bloomington, I am actively against paving the River Bottom trails, it is irresponsible to spend money on resurfacing natural trails to lay down a toxic path that is harmful to the existing nature. Natural paths bring a peace and solitude that not many can find on paved trails. Paving trails makes the community of mountain bikers and trail runners have to seek other parks to pursue their passions. In the proposal, it states, "however, many residents have limited awareness of this gem of natural beauty, located literally in Bloomington's backyard". I think the money (tax payers money, have you) should be used to make aware of the park systems Bloomington has to offer, and maintaining the natural beauty of our own back yard, not paving trails and cutting down trees, that seems to be moving backwards.

Also, part of Bloomington's Parks and Recreation Division Mission Statement says, "health and wellness of our patrons through innovative and diversified parks". This should include the patrons who have hobbies and lifestyles revolved around trail running, mountain biking, hiking, etc.

It also states in the plan that "the River Bottoms are a escape from the man-made urban environment. It is a place where visitors can be immersed in the landscape surrounded by an array of plants, animals and natural features, many of which are not found anywhere else in the region." With this in mind, why would the city or its council members try and degrade this notion? If anything, the efforts should be put towards preserving this, on park singe and information regarding the parks history and trail routes.

The statistics also show that the trail is mostly used by hikers and/or walkers, trail runners. This is the biggest percentage of users for the river bottom trail. Why decrease this number when a large percentage use it?

Kind regards,

-Michelle Stolz

Dear City Council,

First, let me state that I am not a resident of Bloomington, so I do not have a financial stake in this. However, I am a frequent user of the trails at the river bottoms for running and commuting. I wholeheartedly believe that a paved trail down a 100' clear-cut corridor in a flood plain at the cost of millions of dollars is a very irresponsible plan and should be voted down.

Not only will there be a great financial cost, but it will cost us thousands of trees - uprooted and destroyed underneath the tread of heavy equipment. It will also cost us a beautiful, natural and wild area destroyed in the name of "progress". Not to mention that bituminous material (pavement) is also toxic and polluting. There is no guarantee the US Fish and Wildlife will allow two trails, and likely the focus will be on a paved trail. Being that this is a flood plain, it will likely be very expensive and unsustainable to maintain a paved trail.

I respectfully urge you to vote against this bill.

Cheers and Happy Holidays,

Justin Kruse

To whom it may concern,

I wanted to email you in response of the MRVSP (Minnesota River Valley Strategic Plan) - that you want to pave down a trail of 100' clear cut corridor in a flood plain at the cost of millions of dollars.

I want to express respectfully, that this is not a good idea at all. Trees would be uprooted which the foliage and trees in itself make that path beautiful. The cost of upkeep due to it being in a flood plain does not make it cost effective.

Also, the bituminous material (pavement) is toxic and polluting to the surrounding environment. Which, being so close to a water source is absolutely concerning as well. We need to protect our habitat and wildlife.

We should put these costs to restrooms at the entrance of the paths (parking lot), and maintaining the bridge.

I would like you to please, hear my voice in expressing that I, as a previous Bloomington resident of two years vote against this MRVSP.

Sincerely,

Amanda Abramson

Please do not waste money and preserve the existing trail system by not paving trails in the river bottoms.

Sent from my iPhone

Dear Julie, I have been a resident of Bloomington since 1988 and I have spent of lot of time in the MN River Valley Watershed both here in Bloomington and up river. I am an avid birdwatcher so it would be easy for me to say "Keep Your Hands Off My Favorite Birding Spot". But I believe that this would be a very narrow and short-sighted view. I may not agree with every detail of the Minnesota River Valley Strategic Plan, but I strongly endorse the stated mission. The Minnesota River is a treasure, not just for the residents of Bloomington, but for the state as a whole and for all who visit. The more people that are introduced to the river and are offered opportunities for a rewarding experience the better. I believe that this plan will help to further that process and help to create enough political will to protect and preserve this asset for years to come.

I support this plan and urge the Planning Commission to vote in favor of it.

Thank you for your consideration.

Bob Williams

I really need to know why this project has managed to steamroll forward so quickly and with disregard to the people's voice. Nearly 4000 people have signed a petition to advise you that this is not the way to go. These same people - who actually use the existing natural trail - have pointed out that the proposed paved trail will be in the (nearly annual) floods that hit in the spring. I have run the trails for several years and the floodwaters are nothing to disregard!

Anyone who has visited Moir Park has seen the paved trail there that was heavily damaged by high water - THREE YEARS AGO - that remains un-repaired. So are we taxpayers expected to pay for a several million dollar trail along the river that will remain un-repaired for three years after the first flood? Or will we be throwing more taxpayer money at it year after year? Who exactly will benefit from this ill-advised plan? I can only suspect the construction company that builds and then repairs it.

Please put the brakes on this waste of money and total disregard for the voice of the people who actually use the existing trail.

Scott Shultz

Dear Planning Commission,

I have a few points I would like to make regarding the proposal for paving the MN River Bottoms:

The current plan is to spend 14+ million dollars, of which we only have 2.2M secured, to build a trail in an area that is not sustainable for a paved trail surface. A bituminous trail will not survive in an area that will experience heavy flooding seven out of every ten years.

When talking with City officials and the other Agencies represented at the open house this summer, it was shockingly evident that there was no plan in place for funding maintenance and repair on a trail that will require large amounts of both. I strongly believe that this is an intentional omission on the part of the agencies and former Rep. Lenczewski and other staffers who know that opposition to a paved trail would be exponentially greater, if people understood the cost involved in repairing and maintaining a trail in the MN River Bottoms.

Fact. Currently, the DNR has a 100 million dollar backlog in trail maintenance projects throughout the state. Given, that, a paved trail in this area will need extensive reparations on a frequent basis, it is irrational to assume this trail will be maintained properly and expeditiously. The MN River Valley trail in the Shakopee area took over a year to be repaired after the 2014 flood. How will the City of Bloomington handle massive delays in trail repair? Will our community have to absorb the cost of this ill conceived plan?

Paving an environmentally unfriendly trail in the MN Wildlife Refuge is also a grave concern. I would strongly urge that an environmental impact study be conducted to determine the affects of a bituminous trail in the Refuge, considering the impact of flooding and leaching of chemicals in to the MN River from a bituminous trail, the negative affects on the fish and wildlife should be weighed carefully.

I walk and run several days a week at the river bottoms, It is a wonderful thing that we have such a highly sought after natural trail surface in our city. This has become a trend nationwide when new trails are being considered as people see a more natural experience when enjoying the outdoors. I see families on bikes and nature walks, birders, hikers and runners. Off road bikers enjoy this special experience, of course too, but there are so many other people that seek this trail out because it is as close to true nature as one could get in the middle of a major metropolitan area.

I keep hearing the argument about accessibility for everyone. I want you to know, I have two family members afflicted with MS and two dear friends in Bloomington also battling this devastating illness. I get the accessibility factor. I see it first hand. My argument is not about accessibility but the idea that we also need to weigh that against fiscal responsibility. In this particular case, it is fiscally irresponsible to use a paved trail surface in this particular location. Thankfully there are an abundance of trails all over the metropolitan area that are already ADA compliant that those with mobility limitations can easily access.

Perhaps, the 2.2 million dollars that has been secured could be used to build a loop from the southern corridor down to the river that would be ADA compliant? This would allow access to the river for those that need an ADA compliant trail.

Please, consider my thoughts. As a concerned citizen of Bloomington, I have talked with people on both sides of the issue in order to be as informed as possible. A paved trail simply does not make sense.

Sincerely,

Amy Steigauf

A paved trail down a 100' clear-cut corridor in a flood plain is a horribly irresponsible plan and should be voted down.

Thank you.

Jeanne LaBore

Former PARC member Jim Goodermont stopped by the Civic Plaza today to express his support for the two trail proposal for the MN Valley State trail section in Bloomington.

Greetings,

I am writing today on behalf of myself and my history with the Minnesota Wildlife refuge. We live on the river bluff above the trails near the end of Lyndale Avenue. The proposal of putting in a paved trail along a 100 foot wide, cleared corridor absolutely horrifies me. I grew up playing and exploring in this wilderness sanctuary and still enjoy it the same way now 40 years later with my young son. The fact that the refuge in our area has remained essentially unchanged over four decades is the very thing that makes it so special to me and to so many others that currently love and utilize the woods and trails with a small footprint.

To me, the proposal of constructing an unsustainable, and expensive to maintain, paved trail down a 100' clear-cut corridor in a flood plain at the cost of millions of dollars is a horribly irresponsible plan and should be voted down.

Thank you for your attention to my opinion on this very important matter.

Sincerely,

Brian Halverson

Dear Bloomington Mayor, City Council members and Senior Planner,

I have reviewed the draft of the Minnesota River Valley Strategic Plan, and as I am unable to attend the public hearing, I am writing to submit my comments.

I am an avid user of the present single-track dirt trail system, and I strongly oppose putting in a paved trail in the Minnesota River Valley. The Minnesota River Valley is a unique natural gem in the Twin Cities, and it is special precisely because of the lack of development there.

In the summers, I am a wilderness guide at a camp in Northern Minnesota. I have the privilege of taking teens on trips into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and showing them a completely undeveloped, untarnished place. Many of them have never been in a place where there is no pavement or city lights, and I love seeing them get excited about traveling in a wilderness area. Of course, in the Twin Cities, we don't have any places nearly as wild as the BWCAW, but when I'm in the River Bottoms, I have the same sense of being in a place ruled by nature, not by concrete.

If the development of a paved trail goes forward, not only will the trail corridor be clear-cut and pavement laid down, but there will be extensive cutting of trees and grading just to get construction equipment in. All of this will drastically change the character of a place valued for its rustic, natural feel. It will also further pollute the Minnesota River and damage the habitats of more than 330 animal species, including at least twelve endangered species, which reside there.

The existing dirt single-track provides a place for mountain biking, trail running and off-road hiking. These activities require a specific type of trail. Although the current plan calls for a natural surface trail in addition to the paved trail, I do not believe that the new natural surface trail will meet the needs of current users. The existing single-track trail meanders back and forth across the land, making use of interesting terrain features and branching off into multiple tracks. With a paved corridor, a natural trail's space would be limited and it would be forced to follow a straighter path. This would make the trail less appealing to mountain bikers and trail runners.

I also believe that it is fiscally irresponsible to put a paved trail in an area that floods so frequently due to the high costs of maintaining and repairing the trail. Many similar trails along the river have suffered from flooding damage and lack of maintenance, causing them to be closed or abandoned.

On any given weekend day on the river bottoms, I see hundreds of people enjoying the trail. There are bird watchers, hikers, mountain bikers of all experience levels, people on road and cross bikes, anglers and dog walkers. I have seen many families with small children. These children look happy and excited by the pristine nature that is there for them to explore, just like my campers in the BWCAW. Please, keep the River Bottoms in its natural state for generations to come. We have so many paved trails already; please let this one unique, wonderful place remain untouched.

Sincerely,
Heather Myers

Hello.

I am a cyclist from Minneapolis who enjoys riding the current unpaved trail along the Minnesota River.

I believe that a paved trail down a 100' clear-cut corridor in a flood plain at the cost of millions of dollars is a horribly irresponsible plan and should be voted down.

I am sure many people have explained the reasons for this and will do so again at the meeting today; I am unable to attend but simply wanted to voice my opinion to you.

Thank you for your attention and consideration,

Jenny Jenkins

THE VALLEY TRAIL

There is a trail I like to take
That side that River Warren* snakes,
Runs nigh a dozen floodplain lakes –
A beaten path that habit makes.
Runs through the horsetail, buckthorn weeds,
The cottonwood and maple seeds,
 The marigolds, bluebells, burdocks,
 The nettle, pulpit plants and phlox.
That crosses over numerous rills,
Perhaps on planks of pine, unmilled,
With downs and ups – to glacial hills,
And back and forth as passage wills.
Dynamic due to floods, deadfall,
The mud, the ice and leaves, et al,
The seasons changing fall to fall,
The people – some or none at all.
The fauna – fox to varied birds,
The smallest wren to trumpets heard,
The shrews, coyotes and all that's furred
And soaring eagles – not a word.
And on this path I prefer poles

With points – the ground to better hold,
And dirt for cushioning my soles –
To least disturb what's ages old.
But now this path they want to pave
For people who may never brave
This wilderness uniquely gave
As respite from what men enslaves.

G. Kittell

Dec 2015

* Minnesota River's old name

Esteemed members of the Bloomington City Council:

Please vote **AGAINST** the sections of the MRVSP affect the Minnesota River Valley Trail. The proposed clear cutting and paving plan destroys the character one of the last uniquely wild places in the south metro.

Currently, the existing trail system is used by amateur and championship level trail runners and cyclists, pedestrian hikers, bird watchers, and other outdoors enthusiasts. There are few places that fill all of these needs well anywhere near the city.

Paving and clearing creates:

- environmental issues (MRVT is a floodplain)
- ongoing cost issues (maintenance)

The cost of this project could be better spent in other ways by the city council. [1]

Gregg Lind

Minneapolis

The council should be reminded that there are numerous areas in the bottoms that have not a sufficiency of solid ground for the proposed 100' trail without degrading the wetland, engendering a legal challenge to the plan.