

OUR VIEW

GARDEN CITY GREENBELT

Garden City needs to accommodate bikes — and quickly

City, county and state officials have made a grand mistake by not insisting on a walking and biking path connecting the Boise and Eagle greenbelts.

Through nearly 30 years of sneaky paper shuffling, Garden City leaders finagled a way to keep bikes off a two-mile stretch of Boise River pathway in the middle of their city. The stretch is one of the few missing links on a riverside path that is supposed to connect Lucky Peak and Eagle Island for non-motorized recreationists and commuters.

Garden City officials banned riding bikes on the path because they say it is too dangerous and narrow for bikes and walkers to share. The dirt and gravel path is less than 12 feet wide.

We agree, the path is not comfortable for two-lane traffic. Overgrown tree roots make biking difficult. However, the poor construction of this path is Garden City's fault, and officials need to find and pay for an immediate remedy.

Basically, Garden City officials insist a quitclaim deed transferring the land from the state to the city absolved the city from building a bike path because the transaction used the phrase "greenbelt" and no longer specified a bike path.

But the state intended for the land along the Riverside Village subdivision to be a bike path, according to an Idaho Statesman review of public records. Current Idaho Lands Director George Bacon said the state used the terms bike path, greenbelt and pathway interchangeably.

We believe Bacon, and we believe Garden City is manipulating the words to accommodate Riverside Village residents who want to keep the path for walkers only.

This is unacceptable. Businesses, Ada County Highway District and state officials should pressure the Garden City City Council to act — immediately — to accommodate bikes. All three groups have a stake in forcing the issue:

► Business leaders use the Greenbelt as a recruiting tool to entice talented new employees to the area and should be able to brag about a con-

nected bike path.

► The ACHD encourages people to get out of their cars and onto buses or bikes. A usable path would give Eagle bikers a reasonable commute to Boise.

► The state can save face after allowing Garden City to pull a fast one. Where was the state oversight?

FIXING THE PROBLEM

Garden City needs to start by allowing bikes on the existing gravel path. This is not the best solution, given the path's shortcomings, but it is immediate.

Second, officials must build a new bypass — this month. Bikes are rerouted to State Street, which is too dangerous. The city has identified another route that cuts through neighborhoods and connects to a short trail, which was to be built this spring. Mayor John Evans said Wednesday construction is scheduled to begin on March 19, weather permitting.

Finally, the best solution is to connect the Greenbelt on the south side of the river. The path dead-ends and the connection would require building a bridge across the Boise River. Questions have been raised about whether the south side construction is even doable because of private property and wetlands issues. Let's find out now.

If it's not possible, Garden City has the financial responsibility to improve the north-side path for walkers and bikes as was originally intended.

Maybe Riverside Village residents should pay for construction of the south-side path and the bridge, if they so badly want to keep a "walking only" path.

Either way, the state should demand something be done in the best interest of all Idaho residents, not just those wealthy enough to reside along the river.

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