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TOP STORY

MAKING HER OWN PATH: Bisbee mom leading the way to safe cycling

By Shar Porier shar.porier@myheraldreview.com Aug 17, 2019

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Meggen Connolly goes for a ride with her daughter Larrea near their Warren District home recently.
MARK LEVY HERALD/REVIEW

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For the past eight months, permaculturist and Bisbee native Meggen Connolley has devoted much of her time to a cause beneficial to every hiker and cyclist in the city.

As a cycle enthusiast, Connolley wanted to ride around with her daughter Larrea, 2, in tow in a bike trailer. Though she chose cycling as a way to do her part to help the air pollution problem by not driving, she soon began to feel unsafe on Bisbee's narrow streets.

"We almost got hit," she said. "I looked around and saw the old railway through town and I thought that would make a great bike trail. This is a grassroots effort to fill in a gap the community needs."

She remembered riding her bike all over Bisbee when she was a child and noticed how few riders, if any, she sees now. Her primary intention to create the pathway was creating a safe route around Bisbee for everyone, and get them outside away from the abundance of screens which now capture so much attention.

"A lot of people told me they would bike around town if it was safe," she added. "Right now, it's not. I want to help people reduce their carbon footprint and be able to get to all the resources of the community, like Safeway."

Connolley, project manager for Bisbee Bikeways, called Freeport McMoRan, Inc., who owns the abandoned rail line property and much of the land around Bisbee, and talked with general manager Robert Quintinar.

"He said a hiking path had been considered for a while," Connolley said.

She then talked with Cochise Health and Social Services (CHSS) director Carrie Langley to ask about using some county property for the envisioned multi-use path for hiking and cycling. Langley offered to help and told her to call on county Development Services director Daniel Coxworth. He put her in touch with Jackie Watkins, director of highways and floodplains. The team to make the pathway a reality was almost in place.

"The creation of a multi-use path goes beyond physical activity," Langley noted. "A pathway creates a safe opportunity for non-motorized travel, to prevent or reduce the impact of chronic conditions and opportunity for economic development."

Coxworth saw the value of Connolley's energy and determination as well as the opportunity to meld it into a regional bike plan. "The reality is, to make this entire bike path network exist, this project needs the energy and determination of a resident like Meggen to continue to push this forward. Her next objective is to create a bike path planning document that I will oversee, which we will present to the Bisbee mayor and council to be adopted into the General Plan."

Since two major state highways, Arizona State routes 80 and 92, pass through the city and county, she contacted Bill Harmon, Arizona Department of Transportation southeast district engineer, and he got involved in the project as well, as did Arizona Department of Environmental Quality acting director Danial Czecholinski.

Chiricahua Community Health Centers, Inc., University of Arizona and the Bisbee Unified School District all provided letters of support, as did other residents.

"Many of us depend upon bicycles and wheelchairs as our main form of transportation, but for lack of safe transportation infrastructure, we are divided from our neighbors, friends, events and essential goods and services that are located in separate Bisbee boroughs," attorney Ann Carl noted in her letter of support.

The city, too, was in favor of the plan and offered support, as did the Southeastern Arizona Government Organization, which could provide funding through a Transportation Improvement Program grant.

Bisbee Mayor David Smith wrote in a letter of support for Bisbee Bikeways, "This project needs the energy and determination of residents like Meggen Connolley and the support and cooperation of the city to successfully create a Bisbee Bicycle master plan."

It is not just the governments offering support. Melanie Greene, from M. Greene Planning and Resource Development, has been helping with grant applications in a swap for some volunteer hours at the Bisbee Science Lab.

Attorney John MacKinnon is helping with legal issues and Tim Whipple with accounting. Graphic designers Larry Milan and Bridgette Shanahan provided the logo.

All these services count as in-kind matches for grants which are needed to develop the feasibility study and the master plan.

“This has been a big team effort,” emphasized Connolly. “We have a lot of momentum right now and are cementing our partnerships.”

She received a grant from Arizona Community Foundation to fund community outreach, which will start in October.

“We’ll have several meetings for the public. I want to hear their suggestions and incorporate them into the master plan,” Connolley added. “Some areas will be developed faster than others. And it depends on the funding we receive.”

More Information

Bisbee Bikeways will be a network of interconnected bikeways that will safely connect all residents of Bisbee to necessary resources and recreation, while increasing the overall health of the community, and lessening its carbon footprint. Feel safe while you bike, walk, run on multimodal pathways to your school, favorite events and grocery stores.

Meggen Connolley, project manager of Bisbee Bikeways

More Information

For more information, visit the website <https://bisbeebikeways.com/>.

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