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Duluth has a plan to connect Munger Trail to the Lakewalk

The vision is clear: A paved trail for bicyclists and pedestrians that would run from one end of Duluth to the other. A key part of that route will be a seven-mile extension of the Munger State Trail in West Duluth to the Lakewalk.

By: **Sam Cook**, Duluth News Tribune

The vision is clear: A paved trail for bicyclists and pedestrians that would run from one end of Duluth to the other.

A key part of that route will be a seven-mile extension of the Munger State Trail in West Duluth to the Lakewalk.

Duluth city councilors will consider on Monday whether to authorize \$493,000 to determine precisely where that extension might run.

"We do have a sketched-out alignment," said Cari Pedersen, a city engineer. "The City Council action is to do the engineering study to find the best alternative."

The resolution, introduced by the city administration, proposes to hire the local firm SEH to do the engineering. Of the \$493,000, 80 percent would come from federal money that the city already has, said James Gittemeier, a planner with the Metropolitan Interstate Council. The remaining

20 percent will come from the city.

The council is the federal government's transportation planning agency for the region. For the past several years, its planners and engineers have led the effort to develop a route connecting the Munger Trail to the city's Lakewalk.

The Munger Trail extension would be a city

project. About \$2.3 million would be required to construct the first two to three miles of the trail, Gittemeier said. Construction on the first leg of the trail would begin in 2011, Pedersen said. The paved trail would be 10 feet wide with two-foot shoulders.

One of the toughest challenges will be finding where to put the trail. Parts of it might follow old railroad grades. But the trail would have to go over or under Interstate 35, around the NewPage Corp. paper mill and also around the ore docks, Pedersen said.

The city has a \$2.5 million federal grant for the project, which it secured as part of the 2005 federal transportation bill. U.S. Rep. Jim Oberstar, DFL-Chisholm, secured the federal money for the project.

"The goal is to eventually connect this to the Lakewalk and get the Lakewalk to Brighton Beach and to the North Shore," Pedersen said. "You'd have a network, and you could go a long way."

Gittemeier said the trail would not only provide recreation opportunities but a way for people to get to schools, shopping and other destinations.

"In Duluth, Skyline Parkway is probably the only transportation route that connects through whole city," Gittemeier said, "but it doesn't connect through the densest parts of city. The Munger Trail extension will connect to the densest parts of city."

Some think it would be a boon to downtown and Canal Park businesses.

"We're excited for it," said Tony Boen, president of the Canal Park Business Association. "We want to improve the connectivity of Canal Park to downtown and explore other modes of transportation for people to get down here."

The current 63-mile Munger State Trail from Duluth to Hinckley attracts 210,000 bikers, runners, walkers and inline skaters a year, according to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

Gittemeier cautioned that, so far, money is available to build only about half the trail. Securing money for the rest of it will require a lot of community support, he said.

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