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Brandy Baker / The Detroit News

Geri and Doyle Brown bike with their sons Nolan, 10, left, and Brennan, 7, along a stretch of the Macomb Orchard Trail.

Macomb bike trail to expand

Path's extension to Shelby Twp. is one of three new federally funded county transportation projects.

By Edward L. Cardenas / The Detroit News

SHELBY TOWNSHIP -- Once Geri Brown and her family started riding their bikes on the Macomb Orchard Trail about three months ago, they were hooked.

The paved trail is smooth and makes crossing roads easy, unlike some of the gravel sections of the trail that run through Oakland County, she said. So Brown supports plans for an expansion of the Macomb trail from Riverbends Park to Stony Creek Metropark in Shelby Township.



Brandy Baker / The Detroit News

Angelo DeSimone bikes on the Macomb Orchard Trail, which will expand from Riverbends Park to Stony

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"We have a wonderful time," said the 40-year-old homemaker from Shelby Township. "It's great family time, and we really enjoy the trail and we'd like to see it expanded as much as possible."

The trail expansion is among three major Macomb County transportation projects moving forward thanks to recent approval of federal transportation funds. The roughly 24-mile trail begins in Shelby Township at 24 Mile and Dequindre and winds its way north to Richmond.

The Transportation Equity Act provides \$400,000 to extend the bike trail about five miles between the two Shelby parks. It also includes \$1.66 million to widen Van Dyke to five lanes from 23 Mile to 26 Mile in Shelby Township, and \$8 million to widen Romeo Plank from two to five lanes from M-59 to 23 Mile in Macomb Township.

Macomb's road funding is part of a \$286.4 billion multiyear transportation bill that will provide more than \$1.123 billion annually to fund transportation projects in Michigan and is estimated to create 61,500 jobs across the state, according to U.S. Sens. Carl Levin and Debbie Stabenow.

Projects in Macomb County may start in 2007, according to the Road Commission of Macomb County. The projects all must undergo engineering studies, right-of-way acquisition and bidding before they can begin.

For business owner Noe Baiz, traffic can be both a blessing and curse along the congested portions of Van Dyke in Shelby Township.

In the six years since he opened his Mexican restaurant, Taco Loco, on Van Dyke south of 24 Mile, he has seen business increase along with the traffic traveling on the vital north-south road in Macomb County.

"It's not so much (customers) pulling in but pulling out because the traffic is so heavy," Baiz said. "Oftentimes people are cutting through the back of the gas station and through my parking lot to get from 24 Mile to Van Dyke."

Baiz acknowledged he would be inconvenienced by the construction, but he believes widening the road from two to five lanes will be a big improvement.

Shelby Township already received \$1 million in federal funds for land acquisition along Van Dyke between 23 and 24 Mile. An estimated \$1.4 million is still needed to widen the roadway, which is five lanes from Hall Road to 23 Mile, and then narrows north of the 23 Mile.

"It is a north-south corridor that is vital to our community and neighboring communities," said Ralph Maccarone, Shelby Township supervisor. "By widening (Van Dyke), there will be enhanced accessibility to businesses and homes and (it will) relieve congestion."

Meanwhile, the Romeo Plank expansion is needed in fast-growing Macomb Township to keep up with the stress increased traffic has put on the community's roadways. The \$8 million in federal funds are expected to cover the entire cost of that project, officials said.

The township has grown from 50,478 in the 2000 U.S. Census to 70,782 in July, according to the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments. More than 26,000 cars travel the area of Romeo Plank proposed for expansion every day.

You can reach Edward L. Cardenas at (586) 468-0529 or ecardenas@detnews.com.

Creek Metropark in Shelby Township.

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County asks that village donate land for Orchard Trail

by **JENNIFER PRESTON**
Observer Staff Writer

Two members of the Macomb County Planning and Economic Development Department paid a visit to the Romeo Village Council at its meeting Nov. 15, in hopes of gaining access to a small piece of property for future use for the Macomb Orchard Trail.

The property is located on the far northeast corner of the village's Department of Public Works (DPW) site located on Powell Road just south of 33 Mile, technically in Armada Township.

Village officials said they would consider the idea and asked county officials to present a written proposal at the village's next meeting Dec. 20.

The Macomb Orchard Trail is a 24-mile hike and bike path through Macomb County, which starts at 24 Mile and Dequindre in Shelby Township and runs north through Washington Township. Eventually it will run also through Romeo, Bruce Township, Armada Township, Armada, Richmond Township and Richmond. The trail follows the path of the former Canadian National Railroad tracks. The first phase of the planned 10-foot wide path, from 24 Mile and Dequindre to 29 Mile and Van Dyke in Washington Township, was completed in July. The second and third phases are expected to be completed in the next year.

The planning and economic development department has been involved in plans for the Macomb Orchard Trail since the county purchased the \$3.5 million land for the trail in 2001.

Trail backers hope to use the Romeo land, called a "beautiful spot" by Village Clerk Marian McLaughlin, to make a possible stop-off point for users of the trail. Currently there is a small trestle bridge running over East Pond Creek in the spot.

"We want to make the bridge a highlight," said Gerry Santoro, senior planner for the county's planning and economic development department. "We'd like to place observation decks there, and also make it a resting spot. It's such a beautiful area < in certain spots, you can look

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out and feel like you're in New England. It's as natural as can be."

Other communities, specifically Shelby Township, Washington Township and Richmond, have given financial donations that have earned them seats on the Macomb Orchard Trail Commission, which oversees the construction and maintenance of the path. Each, along with the Huron Clinton Metropark Authority (HCMA), allocated \$25,000, along with a promise of a \$2,000 yearly donation.

Because Romeo is a village whose residents are actually residents of either Bruce or Washington Township as well, Romeo is in a unique situation, officials said.

"We as a village sit on two townships," said Village President Paul Reiz. "Washington Township has participated and we have applauded them for that. We have tried to encourage Bruce Township to do the same. We feel it wouldn't be fair to our communities to be taxed twice, and we have asked for an alternate way to participate. We do support the trail intellectually and emotionally."

Village Trustee Matt Edwards echoed the sentiments of Reiz.

"We're not cheap, we just don't want our residents to be double-taxed," he said.

McLaughlin said Romeo has been unfairly portrayed in terms of its support for the Macomb Orchard Trail.

"We've been accused of not supporting this, we've been purposely left off maps ..." she said. "We do applaud the trails."

John Crumm, program manager for the county planning and economic development department, told the village council the donation of the land would be a way for the village to show its support of the trails, and could earn it a voting spot on the trail commission as well.

"Our department wants all communities to be involved," he said. "Romeo is a destination, it's an area of the county that will benefit greatly from trails," he said. "We've been working out an alternate way for Romeo to be involved and get a voting seat on the board, and what we've come up with is this land swap."

Santoro said the area would most likely be developed as a small park, with the trail cutting through it.

"We hope that you as a board would look at donating this piece of land for a park," he said. "We are looking at it as something unique for the village of Romeo to do."

Romeo Village Council members said the idea seemed very workable to them.

"I like this idea a lot," said Trustee Ron Rossell.

The board asked Crumm and Santoro to come back to its next meeting with a more formal written proposal.

Also at the meeting, the village council:

- * unanimously approved an Industrial Facilities Tax (IFT) Exemption Certificate for Shelby Enterprises, Inc., following a public hearing on the issue.

- * scheduled a public hearing on issues surrounding the new Election Consolidations Law, including terms of

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office and a new ordinance. The hearing will take place at the council's next regular meeting, at 7:30 p.m. Monday, Dec. 20.

* approved non-union salaries for the 2004-2005 fiscal year by a 5-2 vote. Trustees Edwards, Margaret Feldhus, Michael Cregar, Russ Rinke and Reiz voted for the resolution to approve the salaries; Trustees Greg Jacobson and Rossell voted against.

There were no changes in the salaries of the Village President (which remained at \$1,398) or village trustees (\$1,200). Increases were approved for six positions. The salary of the secretary to the clerk will go up from \$27,958 in 2003-2004 to \$28,797 in 2005, an increase of \$839. The salary of the DPW secretary moves from \$24,569 to \$25,429, a \$860 jump. The salary of the DPW supervisor goes up from \$50,629 in 2003-2004 to \$52,148 in 2004-2005, an increase of \$1,519. The salary of police chief will increase \$1,376, from \$55,043 to \$56,419. The salary of the WWTP supervisor will increase \$1,236, from \$49,440 in 2003-2004 to \$50,576 in 2004-2005, and the salary of the village administrator will go up from \$16,152 in 2003-2004 to \$16,637 in 2004-2005, an increase of \$484.

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