



Frequently Asked Questions

Lowell Area Recreation Authority (LARA) - Proposed Rail Trail Connection Project Updated March, 2020

- What is the purpose of this proposed project?** - For the Lowell Community, this project extends the existing LARA trail system and provides non-motorized connections to three existing park facilities, and allows for safer walking and cycling options for all types of users. This project will provide a connection of two dead-end rail trail sections that currently terminate on east and north ends of the City of Lowell. As a regional trail, this connection will complete the 125 mile Fred Meijer Mid West Michigan Trail network, allowing for uninterrupted use from Owosso to Ionia to Saranac to Lowell to Belding to Greenville to Alma. Lowell has been designated as Trail Hub on the 125 mile network and will be a destination location for visiting trail users to the benefit of area businesses.
- What trails will this project connect to?** - The proposed trail segment connects to the Fred Meijer Flat River Valley Rail Trail that goes to Belding, Greenville and Alma, the Fred Meijer Grand River Valley Rail Trail that goes to Saranac, Ionia, St. Johns and Owosso, the North Country national hiking trail and the LARA Phase 1 Trail that goes from Cherry Creek Elementary to Lowell High School and connects to the Cooper Woodland hiking trails and the hiking trails at the Wittenbach-Wege Nature Center.
- What is the scope of the project?** - Here is a link to a map showing the proposed route. In order to connect the two rail trail end points through Lowell, we have to cross M-21 and Hudson St. as well as the Grand River. ([Click on map for link to zoomable and downloadable pdf version](#)).



- **When is the proposed schedule for completion?** - Grant applications are being submitted in March, 2020. The project would most likely be completed in 2022 or 2023.
- **Why is this route different than the one presented in 2018 and 2019?** – In prior years, the proposed route for the east end of the trail anticipated going through the fairgrounds, crossing the Flat River with a new bridge, going under an existing rail trestle that serves King Milling and then crossing the Grand River with a new pedestrian bridge on S. Jackson St. After formal application to the railroad was made, it was determined that crossing the active spur using the existing trestle could not be allowed for safety, security and liability reasons. Both MDOT and the railroad agreed that the only safe location to cross the rail would be south of the Hudson. St. bridge via an expansion of the existing at-grade crossing.
- **How long will this new project be?** - This new trail project will start at the new Lowell Township park at Bowes and M-21 on the west end and go to the existing dead-end rail trail at S. Division on the east end and will add approximately 2.9 miles to the system. The total length of existing and new trail between the two Rail Trail connection points is 4.2 miles.
- **Will the trail connect to downtown?** – The route will include Recreation Park (the fairgrounds) that is a two block walk on existing sidewalks from Main Street and the downtown area.
- **How much will it cost ?** - The preliminary cost for all components of this project is \$5,200,000. This includes the design and construction of the trail, a new pedestrian crossing over the Grand River at S. Hudson St., benches, signs and landscaping.
- **How will the project be funded?** - The LARA and the City of Lowell are applying for MDNR Trust Fund and MDOT Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grants that will total approximately 63% of the costs. The other 37% is being raised from smaller regional grants and private sources. Total contributions from the City and the Townships are currently requested at \$35,000 (total, not each). Otherwise, no local tax dollars are to be used.
- **Why are we building bike trails when our roads are falling apart?** – The federal and state funds available for non-motorized trails are separate from the funds available to communities for road maintenance. The MDNR Trust Funds are derived from royalties received on the sale and lease of State-owned minerals (primarily oil and gas) and are dedicated to recreational projects. The MDOT TAP grant uses federal transportation funds designated by Congress for specific activities that enhance the intermodal transportation system and provide safe alternative transportation options. These funds cannot be used for vehicular street projects.
- **Why isn't the trail using the new Lowell Township park bridge, then continuing east on the shoulders of Grand River Dr. to the rail trail?** - This route was considered, but was not selected for several reasons. First, one of the desired goals for this trail requires the placement of a fully independent non-motorized trail that would provide the safest access to all types of users. Placing bicycle riders on a narrow road shoulder, while legal, was not considered to meet the safety goals for this trail and requires the construction of a separate walkway for non-cyclist. Second, the City of Lowell was named as one of the designated Trail Hubs by MDNR and the National Park Service in their 2012 masterplan for this 125 mile trail network. A Grand River Dr.. route totally bypasses the City of Lowell and access to the businesses and amenities in the downtown area. Last, the selected route provides access to the Township's North Grand River Riverfront Park as well as the City's Stoney Lakeside Park Recreation Park, all important features necessary to be considered for maximum scoring points with the MDNR grant programs.

The new Lowell Township bridge does provide an opportunity to someday allow for a trail connection to the Ada trail system to the west as well as being a nice stopping point for all trail users.

- **If I live by the trail, will my taxes go up?** - Property taxes are based on the value of your home. There will be no separate tax assignment or assessment to adjacent properties. No local taxes are being levied.

- **Won't the trail get flooded in the fairgrounds area?** The trail in that area will be impacted and unusable when the Grand River reaches flood stage. These are temporary situations and are unavoidable within the influence of the Grand River as demonstrated in our recent experience (February, 2018) that also impacted our other trail neighbors along the Grand River, including Ionia. This will require maintenance of the trail to remove debris and repair any impact to the trail. During the limited times of flooding, an alternate route will be signed.
- **Can't you just use the existing streets and sidewalks?** The study that looked at options for this trail connection did consider directing cyclist to use existing City streets and walkers to use existing sidewalks as opposed to installing a new, separate 10 ft. trail. While this is an available and legal option for short portions of the trail, the desire to provide the safest alternative for non-motorized users required that a separate trail be proposed as opposed to using Main St .(M-21) or Bowes Rd. for example.
- **Why does the trail have to be 10 ft. wide?** - The MDOT TAP grant identified earlier, uses federal funds and as such, must meet federal standards. For a non-motorized trail, that means a 10 ft. wide path with a 2 foot shoulder on both sides. In addition, both the MDOT and MDNR funding require the trail to be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (A.D.A.)
- **How are you going to cross Hudson Street?** – The proposed route is currently directed go under the Hudson St. Bridge near the river using an existing underpass.
- **Who will maintain the trail and who's paying for that?** - Maintenance for the trail will be the responsibility of the LARA in cooperation with the City of Lowell. As members of the LARA, the City and both Vergennes and Lowell Townships contribute financially to the maintenance costs of the trial. As a part of the Fred Meijer Mid-Michigan Regional Trail Authority, this trail is also eligible to receive funds from the maintenance endowment established by the Meijer Foundation for this 125 mile trail network. In addition, the LARA organizes periodic volunteer trail maintenance activities.
- **If it goes by my property, do I have to shovel it and patch it in the future?** - All maintenance will be performed at no expense to property owners.
- **Will the trail be paved or gravel?** - The trail is planned to be a 10 ft. wide paved path with 3 inches of asphalt. This is an approved surface for persons of all abilities to safely use in most conditions.
- **Will the trail be located on public property or will you need to get easements from property owners?** The majority of the trail will be located on property owned by the City of Lowell, Lowell Township and in City and County street right-of-way. There are portions of the proposed route where we will be seeking easements to allow the trail to be constructed entirely or partially on private property. In those areas, permission will be requested with those property owners and if allowed, just compensation would be provided to the property owner's satisfaction. This includes replacement of trees, landscaping, etc. The LARA Board is currently in communication with all affected property owners.
- **How can I provide my input to this project?** - There are several ways to provide input to the proposed trail project:
 - March 11, 2019 @ 6 p.m. - Lowell Area Recreation Authority meeting @ City Hall
 - March 16, 2018 @ 7 p.m. - Lowell City Council Meeting
 - Email – LARA - info@lowellareatrailway.org
 - On-line Trail Input Form - [Trail Input Form](https://goo.gl/forms/9QS7YHL5O7MzUytA2) <https://goo.gl/forms/9QS7YHL5O7MzUytA2>