The Doodle Trail meeting expectations

Collaboration represents unity between cities

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The Doodle Trail is off and running, and so far it is meeting or exceeding all expectations in terms of its popularity, the mayors of the two cities that own it say.

"Everybody that has rode the trail, been on the trail, has nothing but compliments for it," Easley Mayor Larry Bagwell said.

"It's working," Pickens Mayor David Owens said of the trail's ability to attract visitors who spend money downtown.

The cities opened the 7.5-mile recreational trail on Memorial Day weekend, and it has seen a steady flow of users ever since, the mayors said.

The trail, converted from an old railroad line that ran between the two cities, was expected to come short of Pickens on opening day, but King Asphalt managed to complete the job in time for the full route to be open when the ribbon was cut on May 23.

That gave a boost to businesses in Pickens, which were full of people with bikes, Owens said.

"We need to get some bike racks on Main Street," he said.

The city built a parking lot near the trailhead and both it and the nearby public works parking lot were full, he said..

Owens envisions building a snack bar and restrooms at the Pickens end. A kiosk with information about the Pickens area is already in the works, and signs directing trail users to various businesses in town are already up, he said.

Owens, a biker and jogger, already has explored the entire length of the trail.

"I rode to Easley and back (Thursday) and I probably passed about 50 people," he said.

The cities split the $500,000 cost of buying the old rail line and the $1.9 million for paving, building and designing the trail. The bonds they issued will be paid back out of hospitality taxes.

Easley's priority is creating an extension of the trail into downtown, Bagwell said.

A temporary route has been set up, running from the trailhead at Fleetwood Drive, down the hill past Baptist Easley Hospital and back up State 135 into downtown.

Signs to direct trail users along that route arrived too late to be in place for the opening, but they were up by the middle of the following week, Bagwell said.

The mayor has appointed a committee to choose between four options for a permanent route to downtown.

One of those would go through a low-income neighborhood near the Dream Center of Pickens County. The idea is that it could revitalize that area as well as make it more a part of the larger community.

"As you increase the traffic through the community I think it breaks down a lot of preconceived notions people have about the community," said Jim Wilson, president of the Dream Center, an organization that works to help people help themselves. "I see it as a huge benefit for that community to be connected to the trail."

Merchants in Easley saw an uptick in business during the first weekend the trail was open, even though the signs to direct trail users downtown weren't up, said Vicki Ciplickas, owner of the Starving Artist Café and president of the Easley Downtown Business Association. It should be much improved once an extension to downtown is complete, she said.

"We're being patient and we're hoping we can see the next steps through," she said. "Everything has been positive so far.

"I'm very thankful and happy that the administration and the city realize that bringing the trail downtown is imperative to its success."



Walkers and bicyclists enjoy the Doodle Trail on its opening day.

