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Prairie Pathways

Crawford County to begin installing signs marking tri-county bike route

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GIRARD, Kan. — Crawford County will soon join Bourbon and Allen counties in installing signs marking a bike route connecting Pittsburg, Iola, and Fort Scott.

Jody Hoener of the Healthy Bourbon County Action Team (HBCAT) introduced the discussion of the Prairie Pathways project, formerly known as ABC Trails, at Friday's Crawford County Commission meeting.

"I'm sure you guys probably don't remember, it's been a long time ago, since Covid and all that stuff, when you signed a resolution supporting the tri-county bike route, and so we're finally moving into implementation and seeing fruition of the signage and stuff like that," she said.

Hoener also introduced John Castellaw, outreach and advocacy coordinator for Thrive Allen County, and John Leahy, bike and trails coordinator for Thrive Allen County.

"Thrive Allen County is a health and wellness and economic development nonprofit organization based in Iola, Kansas," said Castellaw. He noted that in addition to his organization and HBCAT, local nonprofit Live Well Crawford County has also been working on Prairie Pathways, and all three county governments approved the plan in January 2019.

"The funding came from Blue Cross Blue Shield Pathways and the Sunflower Foundation," Castellaw said. "The three routes include Fort Scott to Iola, Iola to Pittsburg, and Pittsburg to Fort Scott."

Leahy also addressed the commissioners, providing some additional details about the bicycle routes.

"The starting point of the route between Pittsburg and Iola will be the intersection of Highway 126 and 89 in the middle of Pittsburg, and the end of the route will be at Thrive in Iola," he said. The 73-mile route will also pass through and connect several smaller communities, including Girard, Hepler, Uniontown and Bronson.

"The signs in Bourbon County and Allen County have already been installed, specifically from Uniontown to Iola," Leahy said. "The Crawford County signs are the last phase in completing this route, and we are here to request to work with the county works to approve sign placement and assist us with the installation of the signs. There will be about 50 signs in total that will be located in Crawford County."

Asked by Commissioner Tom Moody how soon those involved in the Prairie Pathways project would like to get the signs installed, Leahy noted that the bike route is set to officially open in September.

"I know our sign guy is currently changing all the signs out in the county," said Moody.

In response to a question from Commissioner Jeremy Johnson as to whether all of the signs and necessary materials for installing them had already been purchased, Leahy said they had.

"And we have already worked with the Allen County Commission and Bourbon County [Public] Works to get those installed," he said. "We know the process of actually flagging and locating all the signposts and then working with them to get those installed as well."

Moody asked County Counselor Jim Emerson to begin coordinating the next steps of the sign installation project.

"You guys might also earmark the date September 17, when we're having a big unveiling, too," said Hoener. "So we'll have a ribbon cutting in Pittsburg and Iola and then a big ride to Fort Scott, where we'll have a speaker and a couple bands and a big celebration."