



Department Source: Parks and Recreation

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: September 16, 2024

Re: Report – COLT Trail Capital Improvement Project

## Executive Summary

At the July 15, 2024 City Council meeting, Mayor Barbara Buffaloe requested a report updating the City Council and Columbia citizens about the planning and construction of the COLT Trail. Phase I construction from Rogers to Brown Station Park was funded as part of the 2021 Park Sales Tax ballot issue. The discussion section of this report outlines key planning items, project timing, staff involvement and project goals.

## Discussion

### **Trail Overview:**

As shown in the 2013 Trails Plan as a proposed primary trail, the development of the COLT Trail provides the city with an opportunity to create a safe non-motorized connection for citizens, businesses and organizations in northeast Columbia to travel to the center of Columbia, accessing key components of the city including the University of Missouri, downtown Columbia and Columbia College. The trail eliminates a key barrier for pedestrians and cyclists by creating trail access over Interstate 70 and there is the potential for the trail to become a connection for citizens throughout northern Boone County to the City of Columbia.

### **Current Funding and Timeline:**

Funding for phase I development of the COLT Trail was included in the 2021 Park Sales Tax ballot issue. The phase I development includes \$3,000,000 for the design and construction of the trail from Rogers Street to Brown Station Park. The funding includes \$150,000 in FY2027 for the initial planning and design of the trail. The funding for the construction of the trail, totaling \$2,850,000, is identified in FY2030 and FY2031 in the 2021 Park Sales Tax Implementation Plan.

### **Key Design Aspects of the Trail:**

City staff has initiated multiple discussions related to the design and construction of the COLT Trail due to the current state of the COLT Railroad, condition of the existing railroad bridges, necessary improvements at roadway intersections and the Route B/Paris Road safety audit. Staff is anticipating the need to start design well in advance of the trail construction to provide City Council with necessary information related to design of the trail, use of the railroad and coordination of infrastructure improvements.



## 1. Existing railroad tracks and use:

City staff will start to gather information for potential plans for the existing railroad tracks from College Street to Brown Station Park. The design of the trail could be parallel to the existing railroad tracks or could occupy the space of the existing railroad tracks. Information will need to be gathered related to railbanking, the Rails-to-Trails Act, potential removal of the tracks and salvaging the railroad ties if removed. The decision related to parallel trail to the railroad versus removal of the railroad tracks on a portion of the trail will have the greatest budget impact on the project.

## 2. Condition and replacement of railroad bridges:

The Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) is currently in the design process for the widening of Interstate 70 from Blue Springs to Wentzville. As part of the Improve I-70 project, the existing railroad bridge over the interstate will be replaced during the construction process. City staff has had an initial discussion with MoDOT concerning the replacement of this bridge and its use as a railroad and trail bridge. Future discussions with MoDOT representatives will include design capacity to support the need for a railroad and pedestrian trail in Columbia. Staff will continue to update the City Council regarding the planning process for this section of the I-70 improvement project. At this time, MoDOT plans to award the project in winter 2026 a completion date of fall 2029.

## 3. At-grade road crossings:

The Public Works, City Utilities and Parks and Recreation Departments will need to have extensive discussions related to the multiple at-grade road crossings associated with the trail design and construction. A traffic study may need to be conducted and an engineer hired to evaluate each crossing. Major intersections, such as College Avenue, Heriford Road, Vandiver Road and Brown Station Road, and additional crossings at Park Avenue, Fay Street, Wilkes Boulevard and Wabash Drive, will need to be studied to determine the optimal design to handle the different types of traffic at each intersection.

## 4. Connecting multiple trails in northeast Columbia:

The renewal of the Park Sales Tax in 2021 also included funding for trail projects associated with the Hinkson Creek Trail and Bear Creek Trail in northeast Columbia. The Hinkson Creek Trail will extend from Conley Road to Alspaugh Park. Funding for the Bear Creek Trail will include a section of the trail from Lange Park to Northeast Regional Park. The funding for the design and construction of these two trail projects is identified between FY2026 and FY2030 in the Park Sales Tax implementation plan. The construction of these two trails will include connections to the COLT Trail creating a trail network that provides safe travel throughout this area of Columbia that connects to the central portion of the city. Park staff will have discussions with Council over the next two years to discuss the implementation schedule for these trails to evaluate the timeline for funding and construction of the three trail projects.



## **Additional Discussions Items related to the COLT Trail:**

### 1. Development of North Village Park and the Greenway at Rogers Street:

At the July 15, 2024 City Council meeting, Tanner Ott spoke during public comment about the potential plan to develop the COLT greenway at Rogers Street. This would serve as the southern entrance/exit point of the trail. This portion of the railroad corridor is wide enough for the future improvements to this section of the proposed trail. The project is unfunded at this time and Council direction to move forward with initial planning would coincide with other trail development decisions such as trail and rail design and bridge improvements.

The Parks and Recreation Department is also in the engineering phase of the North Village Park capital improvement project. As part of the sidewalk design for the park, staff will work with the Public Works Department and engineering team to explore possibilities to identify connections between the park and Rogers Street entrance to the COLT Trail.

Both of these projects will provide functional and aesthetic improvements to assist with the transition from an industrial corridor to a restaurant/entertainment district. The projects also create potential public/private partnerships related to fundraising and future trail use.

### 2. Route B / Paris Road Safety Audit:

As part of the work to reach goals of the Vision Zero policy, the City identified Route B/Paris Road as the top priority transportation corridor where a disproportionately high number of serious injuries and fatalities occur. In 2022, the City retained CBB Transportation Engineers and Planners to conduct a Road Safety Audit (RSA) for Route B/Paris Road. While the RSA process focused on the existing conditions of the road for all users, it also considered the future needs of the corridor. The proposed conversion of the COLT Railway to a multi-use trail project was identified as infrastructure likely to increase bicycle and pedestrian traffic. The completed COLT Trail from Rogers to Brown Station Park, with improved intersection crossings, will provide safe, off-road travel for bicyclist and pedestrians, including many who are particularly vulnerable. City Council received a copy of the final Road Safety Audit Route B/Paris Road Report at the Oct. 2, 2023 pre-council meeting.

### 3. Business Loop Planning and Design:

In 2023, the federal Reconnecting Communities Pilot and Neighborhood Access and Equity program awarded funding to the I-70 Business Loop Corridor Study between Stadium Boulevard and Eastland Circle. The study will include improving safety for both motorized and non-motorized users, improving accessible multi-modal operations, providing aesthetics along the corridor, and improving economic vitality. The improvements strive to reinvigorate the corridor, connect a number of historically disadvantaged and underserved communities, and support a growing network of community services, education opportunities, and



commercial centers along the corridor. The proposed COLT Trail will provide a recreation corridor and a safe nonmotorized travel connection for residents who live or work in northeast Columbia to a future enhanced Business Loop. As funding allows, planning for the proposed COLT Trail will incorporate amenities, landscaping, and general aesthetics to complement an enhanced Business Loop.

#### 4. Reconnecting Communities Department of Transportation Grant Opportunity:

Local Motion and city staff are collaborating on a planning grant offered through the Department of Transportation Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Discretionary Grant Program. The grant application will request funding for design, bridge study and intersection improvements for the COLT Trail from Rogers Street to Brown Station Park. The grant request will also provide funding for a study of connectivity to Bear Creek Trail and Hinkson Creek Trail. If Local Motion and the City of Columbia are awarded the grant, staff will return to Council to seek authorization to have the City Manager enter into an agreement with the Department of Transportation.

### Fiscal Impact

Short-Term Impact: N/A

Long-Term Impact: N/A

### Strategic & Comprehensive Plan Impact

#### Strategic Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Reliable and Sustainable Infrastructure, Secondary Impact: Inclusive and Equitable Community, Tertiary Impact: Resilient Economy

#### Comprehensive Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Infrastructure, Secondary Impact: Mobility, Connectivity, and Accessibility, Tertiary Impact: Economic Development

### Legislative History

Date	Action
3/7/22	R32-22: Adopting an implementation plan for the expenditure of parks sales tax revenue.  <a href="https://gocolumbiamo.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5476431&amp;GUID=B59B0E6E-DBF7-410C-ACBA-76E6AB0E4095&amp;Options=&amp;Search=">https://gocolumbiamo.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5476431&amp;GUID=B59B0E6E-DBF7-410C-ACBA-76E6AB0E4095&amp;Options=&amp;Search=</a>



# City of Columbia

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## Suggested Council Action

This report is informational only. No action required at this time unless directed by City Council.