



Minnesota Department of Transportation

395 John Ireland Boulevard
Saint Paul, MN 55155

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Contact: Jessica Wiens
651-366-4272

jessica.wiens@state.mn.us

For Immediate Release

MnDOT receives national award for Mississippi River Trail planning

ST. PAUL, Minn. — The Minnesota Department of Transportation received a National Planning Achievement Award for Transportation Planning from the American Planning Association for its Mississippi River Trail bikeway. The 800-mile route closely follows the Mississippi River from the headwaters at Itasca State Park near Bemidji to the Iowa border.

“The Mississippi River Trail bikeway connects highways and off-road trails that already exist and repurposes them to provide a different opportunity for bicyclists,” said Tim Mitchell, bicycle and pedestrian coordinator. “This effort required contributions from private businesses, elected officials, bicyclists and state/local road and trail authorities.”

Minnesota is the first state to develop a comprehensive plan for bicycling along the Mississippi River. The MRT passes through about 70 cities, 20 counties, 90 townships and two reservation and tribal lands. The MRT extends 3,000 miles to the Gulf of Mexico.

The planning effort involved numerous meetings with dozens of stakeholder groups along the route. Planners joined bicyclists and community leaders to evaluate bicycle rides along the proposed segments of the bikeway to further explore alignment alternatives and confirm the route’s viability. Planners also hosted discussions, community meetings and workshops to create bicycle-friendly communities along the route.

MnDOT also developed an MRT marketing toolkit available to all communities and offered professional assistance to help local governments and businesses successfully promote the bikeway to visitors. The idea behind the bikeway is to enhance quality of life and promote economic development.

MRT signage is currently intermittent along the bikeway. A comprehensive sign plan is part of the larger MRT plan and is in the final stages. Additional signs will go up along the route during the next three years to further increase awareness of the bikeway and assist bicyclists with navigation.

In 2012, the MRT was legislatively authorized as Minnesota’s first state bikeway and a portion of the MRT became the state’s first contribution to the United States Bicycle Route system—designated as USBR 45.

For more information about the MRT in Minnesota, including printable and electronic maps, visit www.mndot.gov/bike/mrt.

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