

Editorial: Regional walking and biking network progress is worth celebrating

The Virginian-Pilot And Daily Press Editorial Board, August 21, 2025 at 6:15 PM EDT

Judith Lowery / Daily Press

The Virginia Capital Trail, here as it parallels Greensprings Road in Williamsburg, is popular for both walking and riding. (Judith Lowery / Daily Press)

Those who enjoy walking know that every step matters. One by one, those steps they may log on their phone or watch add up to exercise that keeps them healthier and happier.

Those anticipating the progress of the long-distance Trail757, which someday will enable people to walk, run or bicycle across the greater Hampton Roads Region, are realizing that steps — as in stages in a process — are key to that project too. The trail is an ambitious vision requiring a lot of planning, coordination, work, time and money, and it's making progress, step by step.

With connections to other trails in the region, Trail757 is eventually supposed to make it possible for people to walk or bike all the way — or any part of the way — from Richmond to the Virginia Beach Oceanfront or to Fort Monroe in Hampton.

Plans are for Trail757 to have two main routes: one on the Peninsula that connects Williamsburg, York County, Newport News, Hampton and Fort Monroe, and one that includes a ferry ride across the James River to Surry County, Smithfield and Suffolk, eventually joining with the developing South Hampton Roads Trail through Suffolk, Chesapeake, Portsmouth, Norfolk and to the Virginia Beach Oceanfront.

The South Hampton Roads Trail should run 41 miles, along the way connecting with Norfolk's 10-mile Elizabeth River Trail. In Chesapeake, the South Hampton Roads Trail will link with the Dismal Swamp Canal Trail, which heads south into North Carolina.

Plans also call for Trail757 to connect to the 52-mile Virginia Capital Trail, which goes from Jamestown to downtown Richmond.

This summer's latest news in the trail progress includes the announcement of a planned 7.5-mile link from the Virginia Capital Trail in Jamestown to Colonial Williamsburg. That, planners say, will be a key element as Trail757 connects the entire region, from the state capital to Fort Monroe in Hampton, on the Chesapeake Bay, and to Virginia Beach on the Atlantic Ocean.

As the trail network gradually grows, it offers more opportunities for people who live in or visit Hampton Roads to improve their quality of life in many ways, including, of course, through the health and happiness benefits of exercise.

Along the way, the work relies on support from municipal and regional governmental agencies, government grants, donors and private foundations. On the Peninsula, the project is expected to cost between \$240 million and \$300 million.

And along the way, there have been some delays and temporary setbacks. Some delays were due to the need to coordinate with state and federal agencies. Some involved taking time to listen to opinions from local residents.

The steps keep adding up, however. The region can be thankful that thoughtful people saw value in a project that will allow travel through this wonderful area, so rich in history and natural attractions, without motorized vehicles on crowded highways.

The South Hampton Roads trail, for example, got its start back early in this century when the cities involved secured rights-of-way from Norfolk Southern and other rail companies. Much planning, fund-raising and work followed and is still under way.

All the effort, money and vision that have gone into the greater Trail575 project, and into the trails that link to it, are well worth it. All that is yet to be needed will also be a worthwhile investment. The trails offer more affordable opportunities for residents to enjoy the outdoors and nature, while getting exercise. They make it easier for people to interact with their neighbors. They boost physical and mental health and generally improve quality of life.

And, as they link to historic sites and beaches, they should draw tourists who value hiking and bicycling. That should be a plus for businesses that rely on tourism, an important part of the region's economy.

So, let's applaud the latest developments. And let's make sure there is continued support for these invaluable trail projects that can do so much to connect us and improve our lives.