

Notes on proposed realignment of MRT through La Crosse Region

Prepared by the La Crosse Area Planning Committee's
Committee on Transit and Active Transportation, for the Mississippi River Parkway Commission
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Beginning in September of 2017, members of the LAPC CTAT began discussing a realignment or re-routing of the Mississippi River Trail through the city of La Crosse, on the eastern shore of the Mississippi river channel. The opportunity to re-align the route follows the introduction of new regional bike routes, designed by the regional Metropolitan Planning Organization, and intended to be successively rolled out in coming years to better link the many exurban, suburban, and inter-state communities of the La Crosse region.

The five central purposes of this new routing of the Mississippi River Trail are:

1. To take advantage of new bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure completed since the previous layout of the MRT.
2. To make the new Regional Route #1 and the MRT route concurrent.
3. To re-align the MRT as close as possible to the Mississippi River itself, so that touring cyclists maintain the proximity to the scenic Mississippi and historic riverside communities.
4. To make the routing as direct as possible, without extensive detours. This will support *both* regional bicycle touring *and* daily bicycle commuting trips by providing direct north/south commute options.
5. To update and refresh the current MRT signage, which is currently quite small and difficult to see, and lacks wayfinding elements.

At present, the north-to-south alignment of the MRT proceeds from Onalaska, south through the City of La Crosse and down to the county line. It begins with the unpaved Great River Trail, rejoining city streets at the new Great River Landing trailhead at Main Street Onalaska. At that point, the alignment departs from the Mississippi River, proceeding south through a light industrial park and the La Crosse River Marsh, avoiding North La Crosse entirely before offering a few separate routes that briefly loop through downtown La Crosse and then detour to the east to follow the edge of the bluffs southward. It eventually reconnects with State Highway 35 / the Great River Road, south of the city of La Crosse.

<https://wisconsindot.gov/Documents/travel/bike/bike-maps/grr/lacrosse.pdf>

The new routing of the MRT would follow the new Regional Route 1, laid out by the LAPC. Regional Route 1 is the first of several proposed routes that will use new bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure to link the communities of the region; at least five routes are envisioned, with Routes 1, 3, and 5 on the north/south axes and Routes 2 and 4 on the east/west.

<http://www.lapc.org/Content/Agendas/CTAT/2019/Additional%20Materials/January%2010%202019/documents/RegionalRoute1January102019.pdf>

The realigned MRT will follow the new Route 1, which (out of routes 1, 3, and 5) will be the furthest west and closest to the Mississippi River. It will take advantage of new bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure, and proceed through historic downtown La Crosse (of interest to regional cycle tourists, providing food, rest, and maintenance stops).

The following is a north-south description of the existing and planned Regional Route 1, with an explanation of the reasoning behind major choices in the alignment. Bicycle/pedestrian facilities are in **bold**.

Northern section (Onalaska-Riverside Park), currently signed as “Regional Route 1” in Summer 2018, with wayfinding directional signage:

1. From North to South, the realigned MRT will depart the newly-completed Great River Trailhead at Main Street in Onalaska, proceeding south down recently-completed **on-street bicycle lanes** along Oak Street.
2. In the first major departure from the previous marked MRT, the new alignment will proceed right from Oak onto the newly-completed **bicycle-pedestrian bridge** and onto the **Bud Hendrickson Trail**, neither one of which existed when the MRT was previously laid out.
3. From the Bud Hendrickson Trail (a paved multi-use path), the new MRT continues South down **bike lanes on Ranger Avenue**.
4. From Range Avenue, the new MRT alignment turns right on Clinton Street to reach Avon Street, which is a **planned neighborhood greenway** in the 2012 city of La Crosse Bicycle-Pedestrian Master Plan. This section of Clinton Street does not have marked bike lanes, but does have **sharrows** and is marked with Regional Route 1 wayfinding signage.
5. From Avon, the MRT follows **new bike lanes on Monitor Street**, which recently underwent a lane realignment. It then turns right onto a **new multi-use path**, the paved North Shore Trail, which did not exist when the previous MRT route was created. Crossing Copeland Avenue at an **RRFB**, the route then follows the **new paved multi-use path** through the Riverside North development, crossing the La Crosse River on a **rebuilt railroad trestle** and entering Riverside Park at the north end. It is at this point that the Regional Route 1 wayfinding signage comes to an end, as of spring 2019.

Southern section to be signed as Regional Route #1 in coming years, currently known as Regional Route 1 “extension” or Regional Route 1 Phase 2:

1. Continuing south, the newly-realigned MRT will continue on the **low-traffic, low speed Front Street** along the eastern edge of Riverside Park. Beyond the southern edge of Riverside Park, it will turn left on King Street to take advantage of that street’s **future**

design as a neighborhood greenway, and to avoid the light-industrial area, truck traffic, and largely-unused at-grade railroad tracks on Front Street from King to Market.

2. The route then follows Second Street to Market Street in order to reach the **pedestrian bridge** to Isle La Plume. It will follow the existing, paved multi-use path south on the island. That routing stays much closer to the Mississippi River than the previous routing, and follows **existing paved multi-use paths** on Isle La Plume, to the Green Island Path, and to **recently-completed VIP trail** behind Gundersen Hospital.
3. At this point, the route returns to city streets, climbing a **paved multi-use path completed in 2018** with Transportation Alternatives Program funding. There is a zig-zag section on residential streets here, which is unfortunate but necessary: with no bicycle facilities on the diagonal South Avenue / Mormon Coulee Road, cyclists are better served staying on the grid of residential streets. There is no continuous street connection west of the busy arterial Mormon Coulee Road, so this section of the route zig-zags on Maple, West, 13th, Thompson, Gladys, and Gladys streets, before meeting up with **existing bike lanes and traffic-calming installations on East Avenue**. Those bicycle facilities continue south all the way to Shelby Road.
 - a. Here at Shelby Road, the **preferred routing continues south**, but optional routes will be considered, should a crucial easement on that preferred routing prove elusive. The preferred routing again maintains the proximity to the Mississippi River and its backwaters, staying to the west of Mormon Coulee Road, and continuing south beyond the boundaries of the City of La Crosse, here crossing into Shelby Township.
 - b. The preferred routing **continues south on residential streets, staying west of the busy Mormon Coulee Road**, crossing Pammel Creek on an **existing pedestrian bridge** before entering a privately-owned trailer park; an easement for the right-of-way on the private property designated as "Rivercrest Drive" will be required here.
4. If necessary (because of a failure to secure the Rivercrest Drive easement), optional routing will turn left at Shelby Road to cross the high-traffic Mormon Coulee Road. The optional routes, now on the east side of Mormon Coulee Road, will follow the existing multi-use path alongside Pammel Creek, or the **existing bike route** along 33rd Street South (with **sharrows and traffic-calming signage, speed humps, and speed radar displays**). The Pammel Creek trail option will eventually proceed under an overpass to return to the west side of Mormon Coulee, while the 33rd Street South option will return to the west side of Mormon Coulee at an unsignalized intersection of 33rd and Mormon Coulee. (The existing 33rd Street South bike route will eventually be designated and signed as Regional Route 3 and/or 5, when regional planning reaches that juncture.)
5. The route joins an **existing concrete / asphalt multi-use trail** on the west side of Mormon Coulee Drive here, continuing southward out of town (and avoiding the

complexity of the 14/61/35 intersection) to eventually use the eight-foot-wide shoulders on both sides of State Highway 35. An **RRFB on STH 35 near Riverview Drive** allows bicycle and pedestrian traffic to cross at this location.
