



GROUNDBREAKING OF THE BRIDGE TO BRIDGE BIKE PATH

On Monday, July 8th at 7:00 AM the county will break ground on a Bike Path at Beasley Park. The public is invited to attend. The ceremony will be brief compared to the work and effort that has gone into getting us to this point. The 12' wide path will go across Brooks Bridge and end at Destin (Marler) Bridge. The path will be on the South side running along the sand dunes. Construction costs will be paid with bed tax dollars, money from our State Legislature and a private donation.

Several constituents advocated for this project, including Kathy Foster and David Hancock, as they watched folks die on bicycles or while trying to exercise on what seemed like a straight road with clear visibility. The issue is that drivers pick up speed on that stretch and are often not paying attention to a cyclist or pedestrian. Statistics on crashes between motor vehicles and cyclists or pedestrians for Okaloosa and Walton Counties over the 5-year period between 2019 and 2023 are as follow:

- 730 crashes involved serious injuries or fatalities of vulnerable road users, including bicyclists and pedestrians
- 17% of all pedestrian crashes resulted in fatality
- 18% of all pedestrian crashes resulted in serious injury
- 4% of all bicycle crashes resulted in fatality
- 11% of all bicycle crashes resulted in serious injury

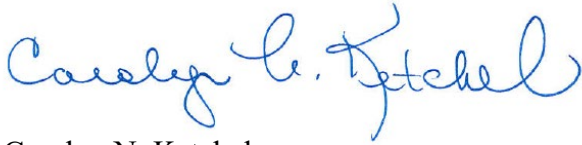
Eglin owns the property on which the bike path will be built. I began work on this effort with Eglin AFB 5 years ago. That was 3 Commanders ago. COVID intervened and disrupted our ability to work out solutions, but the military has been a wonderful partner in bringing it to fruition. Air Force personnel as well as residents and tourists will enjoy this 4 and ½ mile path when it is finished.

The path will be far from the roadway, but will not touch or harm the dune line. The current parking that is enjoyed on the gulf side will also be improved during this process. Once the work is underway, completion, (a.k.a. the Ribbon Cutting) is expected by the beginning of spring 2025, barring any weather delays. No motor vehicles will be allowed on the path. It is the hope that this path will be expanded further East and West in time.

A special thanks to Jason Autry, Okaloosa County Public Works Director, Dale Marks, Executive Director, 86th Test Wing, and Stephen Blalock, Design Engineering Project Manager who designed the path. HDR Engineering also deserves praise for the designed project expertise.

It is an honor and privilege to serve as your commissioner.

My Sincere Thanks,



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