

EDITORIALS

Path to bike-friendliness

As one of only two cities that the state's Canalway bike trail will actually go through, Schenectady is in an excellent position to capitalize on it. Unfortunately, rather than being a destination for cyclists, the city now is a place to avoid. That could change, starting with a county project to improve the trail, which is the subject of a public hearing at Schenectady County Community College tonight.

The state envisions a trail that will eventually go all the way from Albany to Buffalo, in many places taking cyclists directly along the water, past old locks, parks, historic sites, etc. To complete it, certain obstacles will have to be overcome, such as Guilford Transportation's refusal to let bike riders cross its railroad tracks in Rotterdam Junction. (The state Legislature and governor have apparently solved this problem by including money for a tunnel in the budget.)

Other obstacles are breaks in the trail, as are found around the city of Schenectady.

The county project is designed to fix one of those breaks by extending the path from the

community college section to the Stockade. Right now, this passage is confusing and unsafe for cyclists, especially those headed east.

The plan calls for a clearly marked, safe, wide, attractive path — with decorative railing and lighting and a canal-style stone wall — which will also serve as a visual gateway to the city. In addition, a bike lane will be created on one-way Washington Avenue, making that street usable by cyclists going in either direction (at present, westbound cyclists are routed onto busy State Street in front of the YMCA). Most of the money for the \$600,000 project comes from state and federal grants.

This project has the support of the city, as it should. But the city also needs to make itself more inviting to cyclists by taking such steps as improving signage, creating safer intersections and establishing bike lanes where possible. As the Canalway develops, users will be looking for places to visit and to stay. A bike-friendly city should be seen not just as a quality-of-life issue, but as a means of economic development.