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Iowa Data Bike looks out for future of paved trails

People working to preserve and promote the more than 600 miles of paved trails in Central Iowa have a new tool aiding their cause – the Iowa Data Bike.

The primary function of the Iowa Data Bike is to collect data on the pavement conditions of the trails – providing useful information to trail managers as they budget maintenance dollars.

A camera mounted on the back of the bike will take geolocated photos of every section of trail in the network and make them available online for trail managers for easy reference.

Additionally, the data bike will capture 360-degree images to upload to Google Street View, giving anyone with an Internet connection a panoramic, on-the-ground view of any trail at any point in Central Iowa.



“This is a powerful new tool for the many people, governments, and organizations who work together to make the paved trail network such a great asset for Central Iowa,” said Todd Ashby, executive director of the Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization. “Before now, we haven’t had a data-collection vehicle we can use for the trails. The data bike is an investment in the future – to assure the paved trails are here for decades to come.”

The Iowa Data Bike is a proof-of-concept project by the Des Moines Area MPO in partnership with the Iowa Department of Public Health and Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF).

A tool such as the Iowa Data Bike will become increasingly important as the trails of Central Iowa age and local governments prioritize spending to focus on the maintenance of existing trails. The paved trail network is a valuable regional asset, supporting public health, economic development, and workforce attraction.

“We’re lucky to have an extensive trail system in central Iowa. The more information we can give people about trails, the more likely they are to use them, and that’s the ultimate goal,” said Andrea Boulton, trails and greenways director at Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. “INHF is excited to be a partner in this project because we believe it will help get more people outdoors.”

ABOUT THE IOWA DATA BIKE PARTNERS



The Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) acts as a regional forum to ensure coordination between the public and local, state, and federal agencies in regard to planning issues and to prepare transportation plans and programs. The MPO develops both long- and short-range multimodal transportation plans, selects and approves projects for federal funding based upon regional priorities, and develops methods to reduce traffic congestion.



Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) is a nonprofit conservation group that works with private landowners and other partners to protect Iowa's land, water and wildlife. Since its founding in 1979, INHF has helped protect more than 150,000 acres of Iowa's wild places and establish more than 800 miles of trails.



The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) works with non-profit organizations, health care providers, policymakers, businesses, and many others to protect and improve the health of Iowans. Public health strives to improve the quality of life for all Iowans by assuring access to quality population-based health services related to the following goals: promoting healthy living; preventing injuries and violence; strengthening the health infrastructure; protecting against environmental hazards; preventing epidemics and the spread of disease; and preparing for, responding to, and recovering from emergencies.

Iowa Data Bike

The Data Bike is a proof-of-concept initiative by the Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization in partnership with Iowa Department of Public Health and Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. Using an app that senses the roughness of pavement, the Data Bike will generate data scoring the condition of trails. The Data Bike will also collect 360-degree imagery along trails for Google Street View.



1. Using a Yuba Spicy Curry electric bicycle, the rider will maintain a steady speed to collect consistent data on the trails.



2. A Samsung Gear 360-degree camera uploads imagery for Google Street View.



3. An iPhone running the rRuf App will measure the roughness of trails and helps score condition of pavement.



4. A rear-facing GoPro camera will take geo-referenced photos of the trail conditions.

