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Group seeking \$152 million to revamp Wenatchee Valley transportation

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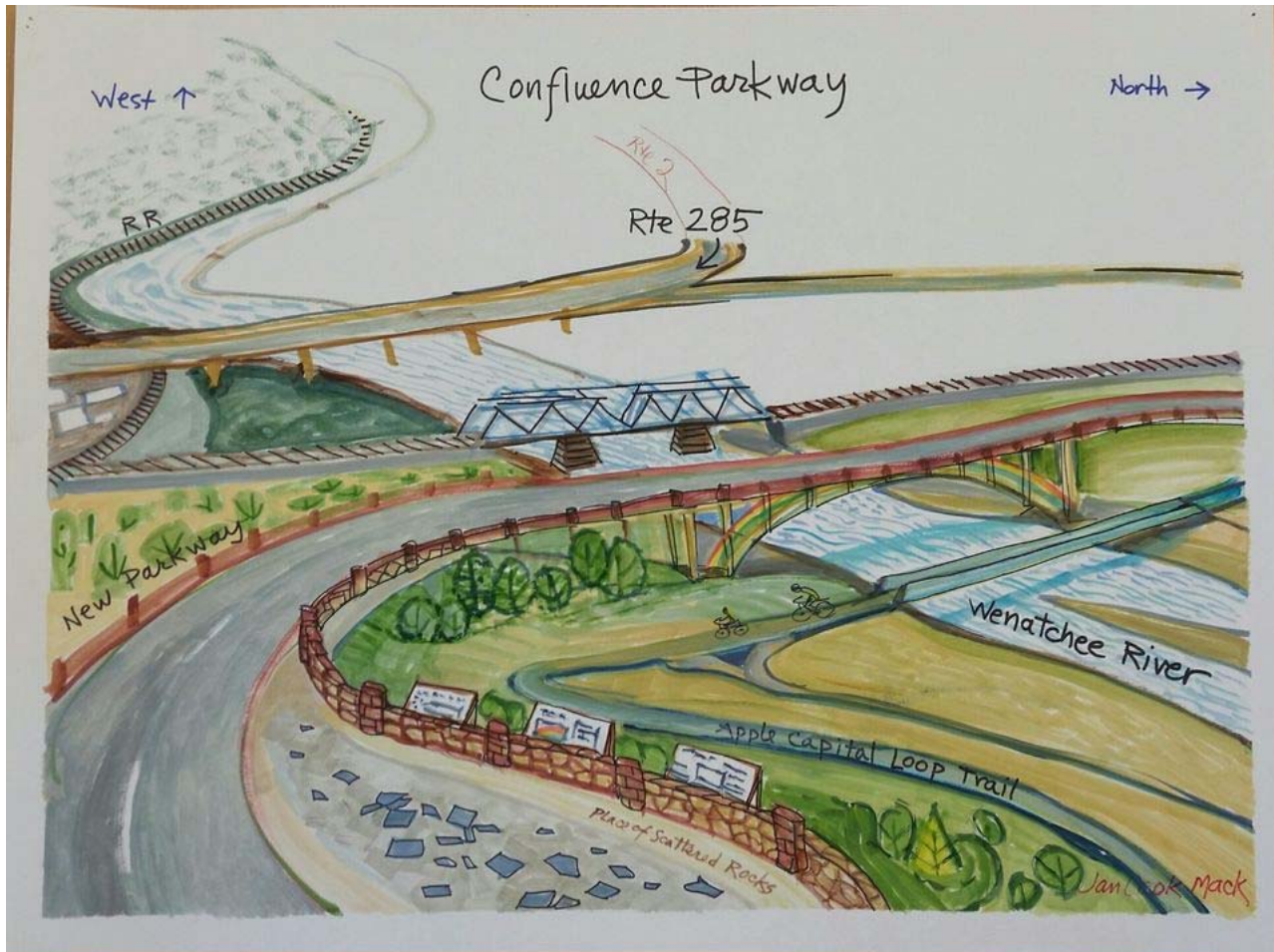


Photo provided

Provided illustration/City of Wenatchee The city of Wenatchee wants to add a second bridge for motorists over the Wenatchee River. It would be part of Confluence Parkway, a proposed two-lane road that would extend from Hawley Street to Highway 97/A. The conceptual drawings were done by artist Jan Cook Mack.

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They're all [projects that have been discussed](#) independently of one another in recent years on a loop of roads that connecting the Wenatchee Valley. A recent push by several local governments would put them under the same umbrella as part of a request for more than \$150 million in federal funding.



“If you think North Wenatchee Avenue is a major bottleneck, which I think it is, this might be a once in a 20-year opportunity to do something to help with that,” said Wenatchee Mayor Frank Kuntz.

The idea of lumping the projects came after a handful of local officials last year visited the U.S. Department of Transportation in Washington, D.C. Their intent was to apply for a \$28 million grant to build a railroad underpass as part of a McKittrick Street extension in Wenatchee.

As Wenatchee’s Economic Development Director Steve King tells it, the federal DOT turned them down and told them to reapply in 2017 with a bigger project. So bigger they went — to the tune of a \$253 million.

The project was dubbed “Completing the Apple Capital Loop.” The name could confuse residents as it refers to the circle of roadway that mirrors the popular Apple Capital Recreation Loop Trail. Officials said they went with the Apple Capital moniker because it’s synonymous with the valley and brings name recognition to the federal level.

If approved, the federal DOT would grant the project \$152 million and the local group would match it with \$101 million. The match comes from \$81 million in Connecting Washington gas tax, \$10 million from the city of Wenatchee and another \$10 million from Link Transit, according to King.

The Infrastructure for Rebuilding America grant program has a pot of \$1.5 billion, 25 percent of which must go toward development in rural areas — places like Wenatchee.

The program also has a few stipulations that has King feeling good about their chances. To be eligible for the grant, the project size must be at least \$100 million and the requesters would need to provide a 40 percent match. King thinks these stipulations give the Apple Capital group a good shot at securing the grant.

“It’s really hard for small urban areas to develop that kind of match — which is a lot of money,” King said of the \$40 million minimum.

He hopes to know by spring if the grant application is approved. Construction could begin as soon as 2020.

If they don’t get the grant, Kuntz said the city of Wenatchee would continue to chip away at the projects.

Preserving the Loop Trail and environment

An aspect of the Apple Capital Loop roads project that has caused some tension is a proposed new road that would span the Wenatchee River and reroute a portion of the Apple Capital Recreation Loop Trail near Hawley Street in Wenatchee.

On board with the proposal are the city of Wenatchee (the lead applicant), Chelan County, Douglas County, the state Department of Transportation, the ports of Chelan and Douglas counties, the city of East Wenatchee, the Chelan-Douglas Transportation Council, Link Transit and BNSF Railway.

Absent this list is the Chelan County PUD.

Not because it doesn’t support the project — “We appreciate the need to relieve traffic congestion in the north Wenatchee area,” said Jeff Smith, managing director of district services — but because there hasn’t been a public process to look at ways to limit the project’s impact on Wenatchee Confluence State Park and the Horan Natural Area. “We are encouraged and supportive of the Chelan-Douglas Transportation Council and its exploration of potential solutions to that problem,” Smith said. “By the same token, we do have serious reservations about the potential impact on Wenatchee State Park and the Horan Natural Area.”

Constructing a bridge requires work in the confluence wetlands and the proposal calls for a half-mile or so of the recreation loop trail that runs along Hawley Street and the railroad tracks to be shifted toward the Columbia River, putting it on the east side of a PUD facility. The city has already developed a number of concepts to mitigate effects on the environment, including the recreation loop trail, King said.

“Part of the reason (the project) costs a lot is we’re putting a lot of money in there for mitigation and enhancement of the trail,” King said.

"We're not doing this project if we can't make improvements to the loop trail," Kuntz said. "We think moving some of it away from the railroad track is an improvement."

Concepts include:

- Walls to limit noise from the roadway and railroad
- Shoreline and salmon restoration
- Horan Natural Area restoration
- Improvements to the trail
- Signs at the confluence explaining the significance of the area to local tribes
- Potentially an extension of the trail westward up the Wenatchee River along a canal

King said these concepts will remain just that until the city and its partners know whether their grant application is approved. And the PUD won't offer its approval until the concepts are in action.

Smith also explained that the PUD would like to see a more involved public process.

"The investment of millions of dollars could impact Wenatchee for generations," Smith said. He added, "We think it's only fair to have a very public process in the decision making."

A National Environmental Policy Act study by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency could address many of the PUD's concerns, Smith said. According to EPA.gov, the study requires government agencies to "use all practicable means to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in harmony."

If awarded the grant, King said the group would do a NEPA study, possibly starting as soon as 2018 and lasting about two years.

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