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New bike paths for region, courtesy of U.S. stimulus

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Ten new bike and pedestrian paths will be built in Philadelphia and South Jersey with \$23 million in federal stimulus funds, local officials announced today.

The trails will fill in some of the gaps in a planned 108-mile network that eventually will link Philadelphia, Reading, Chester, New Hope, Cherry Hill, and Trenton.

"This will transform the network we have and make it accessible to a much larger and more diverse segment of our population," said Sarah Clark Stuart, campaign director of the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia, which helped prepare the proposal approved by the U.S. Department of Transportation.

The three paths in Camden County and seven in Philadelphia will be constructed in the next two years, said Stephen Buckley, Philadelphia's deputy commissioner of transportation.

The Philadelphia paths will extend existing trails along the Schuylkill and Delaware rivers. The seven include new trails along the Delaware in North Philadelphia and Northeast Philadelphia, said Spencer Finch, director of sustainable development at the Pennsylvania Environmental Council. The council helped write the proposal.

The most expensive path is a 2,000-foot boardwalk to be built for \$10.6 million along the east bank of the Schuylkill, from the end of the current trail at Locust Street to South Street. Construction could begin in a few months.

One Camden trail will connect the Benjamin Franklin Bridge walkway to the Wiggins Park promenade along the Delaware waterfront, while another will link the waterfront to the Campbell Soup Co. headquarters and Cooper University Hospital. The third Camden trail will connect the waterfront to paths along the Cooper River.

Construction of the approximately eight miles of trails will provide 600 to 800 jobs, Finch estimated.

The Philadelphia-area trails were approved for funding today, part of \$1.5 billion allocated for 50 projects, as the Obama administration marked the one-year anniversary of the \$787 billion American Economic

Recovery and Investment Act.

"Not many bicycle or pedestrian projects got funded," Finch said. "These are relatively easy, quick, and cheap to do."

Buckley said, "We're really excited that we got this award. . . . Only 3 percent of the projects nationwide got funding."

Eight trails outside of Philadelphia and Camden in the local proposal did not receive funding.

In praising the award today, Mayor Nutter said he would support efforts to fill in the network's remaining gaps.

"I pledged," Nutter said in a statement, "that the city will support Delaware County, Montgomery County, Chester County, and Schuylkill County as they pursue state and federal funding to complete the regional trail network."