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New multimodal path near YMCA to connect Tecumseh Road and Robinson Street

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Following the approval of an easement from the University of Oklahoma Board of Regents, the City of Norman will start the letting, or bidding process by February or March 2024, followed by a groundbreaking in May or June.

The project will run the city \$1.3 million. The Oklahoma Department of Transportation will kick in an additional \$200,000 from a Transportation Alternatives Program grant.

"This is technically a grant project that has a huge local match," said David Riesland, transportation engineer for the City of Norman. Jason Briggs, park development manager, said the trail has been part of the city's

master plan for about 20 years. "This will complete a loop around Max Westheimer airport, once the few gaps along 24th between Tecumseh and Rock Creek are filled in."

produce an 8-foot wide multimodal trail from Robinson Street to Tecumseh Road on the west side of Flood Avenue. The trail will also run along the south side of Tecumseh

He said the project will
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Road to 24th Avenue NW.

"Trails are always the top – or almost the top – request when we ask about recreation needs in the community," Briggs said. "We have wanted to add this airport loop for years to give people a safe route along the busy Flood Avenue that could connect shopping and dining along 24th Avenue and residential areas along Robinson and east of Flood."

He said the two-mile new construction will prompt an increase in recreational activity along Flood Avenue, including biking, jogging and walkers of all skill levels, especially since it will meet up with the YMCA.

"Inside the ring of this path, you've got the Young Family Athletic Center and the YMCA. There's a lot of reasons why people want to congregate in this area of Norman, and this gives them additional options to be able to get to those facilities who don't have automobiles," Riesland said.

The University of Oklahoma released a statement to The Transcript on the easement that said: "With increasing traffic at Max Westheimer Airport, the new path will allow for other ways to enter the airport if needed and is not connected to any other projects with the City of Norman. The university is happy to partner with the City of Norman on projects that enhance the

city and allow for alternate modes of transportation."

The university did not offer resources to the project, other than the easement.

The project is funded by the Norman Forward initiative, passed by voters in 2019. Riesland said he started planning the path in 2017, and that it has nothing to do with a proposed \$1 billion entertainment district with a new OU basketball and gymnastics arena.

"This is something that was vetted through the Parks [and Recreation] master plan. That's where people identified a need for multimodal transportation facilities," Reisland said.

Stephen T. Holman, Ward 7 councilor, chairs the council on the city's Transportation Committee, and said he has supported the multimodal path for years.

"I voted to fund this for connectivity reasons, including connecting the airport and the YMCA," he said. "Increasing connectivity around the city and allowing our residents to have multiple options for getting around is definitely something I am excited about and plan to keep pushing for as a matter of policy in the city of Norman."

Reisland said he estimates the project will be completed by the early months of 2025.

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