

Donated land will link Trinity Strand and Katy trail systems

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A "missing link" between the Katy Trail and the Trinity River is missing no more.

On Tuesday, Dallas Mayor Tom Leppert announced the donation of a key piece of property -- near the defunct Baby Doe's Matchless Mine restaurant off Harry Hines Boulevard -- to connect the Katy Trail with the Trinity Strand Trail, which is being developed along the old course of the Trinity River, just outside the river's eastern levee.



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The land where Baby Doe's Matchless Mine restaurant once stood was the only thing separating the Katy and Trinity Strand trail systems. Mayor Tom Leppert announced Tuesday that the property had been donated.

The Trinity Strand Trail, in turn, is someday supposed to hook up with two small spurs that will cross the levee, bringing hikers, bikers, runners and in-line skaters into the planned downtown Trinity River park.

When completed -- by 2010, supporters hope -- the combined Katy-Trinity Strand system will include more than 22 miles of hiking and biking paths. They will enable pedestrians to visit the river from as far away as the Knox-Henderson neighborhood without crossing a road at grade level.

"They won't encounter a single car," the mayor said. He spoke at a morning news conference under the landmark "waterfall" billboard that once marked the location of Baby Doe's. (The restaurant has been demolished.)

The trails are envisioned as a pedestrian gateway to the large downtown park that is a key element of the city's improvement plans for the Trinity River Corridor.

Because the river is cut off from the rest of Dallas by its 30-foot levees, providing appealing points of entry is viewed as crucial to making the planned park a success.

The donation of land to link the Katy and Trinity trails is valued at about \$2 million. It came from **Cienda Partners**, a development company that formerly owned the Baby Doe's site; Cienda principals Phil Wise and his wife, Melissa, and Barry Hancock and his wife, Margaret; and Dallas lawyer Russell Budd and his wife, Dorothy.

"This is a way to connect people with nature -- and to connect different neighborhoods of our city with one another," Mr. Wise said.

"The Katy Trail is enjoyed by people of all ages. On weekends, you see people on it jogging, walking, riding bikes, skating. It's a way to bring families together. These trails will literally, physically bring our city together."

The Katy Trail runs about four miles -- from just north of American Airlines Center to Airline Road, south of Mockingbird Lane near Southern Methodist University. It officially opened in 2000, along a railroad right of way donated to the city by Union Pacific Railroad. There are plans to extend the trail to Dallas Area Rapid Transit's Mockingbird Station and, eventually, to White Rock Lake.

The Trinity Strand Trail is still in the planning stages, with construction scheduled to begin next year. It's nestled between the Stemmons Freeway and the Trinity River levee, near the Dallas Design District, the Infomart and the Hilton Anatole. It will follow the old, meandering channel where the Trinity ran before it was straightened and enclosed in its levees decades ago as part of a major flood-control effort.

Completion of both trails depends in large part on private donations, as well as city bond money. Nonprofit "friends" groups have been created to oversee fundraising for both trail systems.

Mr. Leppert said the private-public partnerships that have made the trail system possible represent "the very best of Dallas ... volunteers working with the city and with donors" to build "a great linear park."