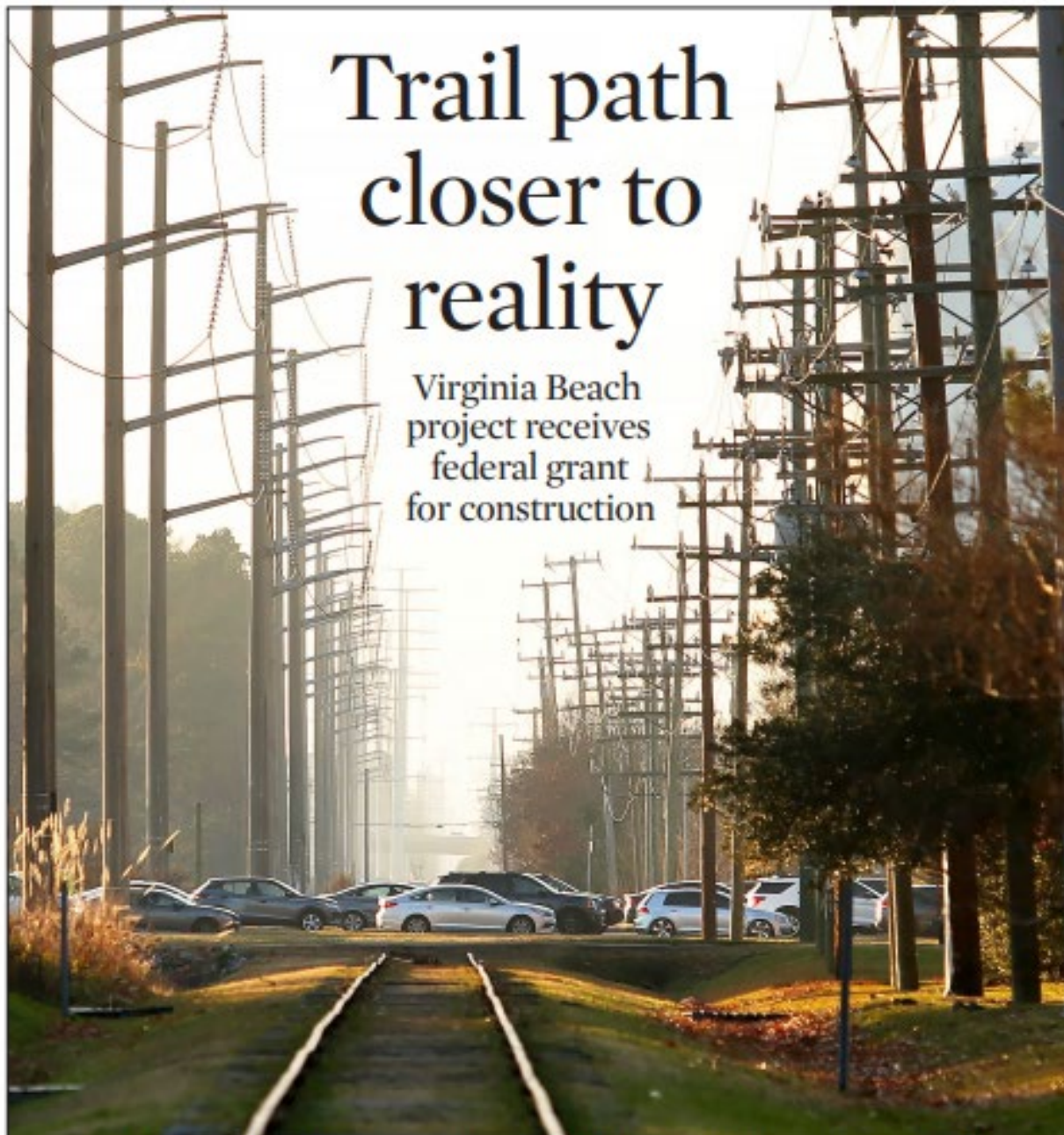


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Trail path closer to reality

Virginia Beach project receives federal grant for construction

Construction of a segment of the Virginia Beach Trail, from Newtown Road to Town Center, including a pedestrian bridge over Independence Boulevard at Constitution Avenue, is eagerly anticipated by locals. STEPHEN M. KATZ/STAFF

By Stacy Parker
Staff writer

VIRGINIA BEACH — After decades of planning, a former railroad corridor that runs through key areas of Virginia Beach has moved a step closer to becoming a dedicated path for pedestrians and bicyclists.

The U.S. Department of Transportation recently awarded the city \$14.9 million for the Virginia Beach Trail. The money will be used to build a 3-mile segment from Newtown Road to Town Center.

The trail in its entirety will eventually run the length of the city, a total of 12 miles. It will connect to an existing segment along Norfolk Avenue, between Birdneck Road and Pacific Avenue, at the Oceanfront. The path will be built along the same corridor where a light rail extension from Norfolk was proposed, but rejected by voters, in 2016.

Virginia Beach was one of hundreds of recipients of the Safe Streets and Roads for All grant program, which recently provided \$800 million to 385 communities. The multiyear

grant program began in 2022 and has awarded \$1.7 billion in federal funding to more than 1,000 communities in all 50 states and Puerto Rico.

To qualify, localities had to meet certain criteria including a plan to improve safety and help prevent deaths and serious injuries on roadways.

In Virginia Beach the money will be used to build one segment of the 10-foot-wide multipurpose trail, which will run along the former Norfolk Southern railroad alignment, now owned by the city. It will

extend from Newtown Road to Constitution Drive in Town Center and will include a pedestrian bridge over Independence Boulevard.

“Town Center is largely disconnected and difficult for pedestrians in surrounding neighborhoods and businesses to access,” the city’s grant application said. “The highest-risk crossing for pedestrians and cyclists lies in crossing the 10-lane Independence Boulevard — the most highly traf-

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A \$14.9 million federal grant will help fund construction of Phase 1 of the Virginia Beach Trail project, a 3-mile section of a shared-use path from Newtown Road to Town Center. **COURTESY**

Trail

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ficked corridor in the city with more than 80,000 vehicles per day.”

The trail will provide a safer alternative to crossing busy intersections along Virginia Beach Boulevard, a congested commercial area where pedestrian fatalities have occurred.

Originally conceived in the 1980s, the Virginia Beach Trail was first funded in the city’s capital improvement budget for fiscal year 2024 with a \$750,000 Housing and Urban Development grant. Following the city’s sale of an easement to Dominion Energy in November for an offshore wind project, an additional \$902,000 was appropriated for the trail project.

But Virginia Beach has been trying to find a substantial funding source to begin the construction phase.

A local 20% match is a requirement of the federal grant, and the City Council will likely appropriate the funds and accept it soon.

The Virginia Beach Trail



“This grant ... is a real shot in the arm for us getting going on this thing,” Charles Rigney, Virginia Beach’s interim director of economic development, said about the Virginia Beach Trail project getting a state grant. **STEPHEN M. KATZ/STAFF**

is the easternmost segment of the regional South Hampton Roads Trail, a proposed path that runs through Suffolk, Portsmouth, Norfolk and Chesapeake. The 3-mile segment will be completed within five years, according to the city’s grant application.

Charles Rigney, the city’s interim director of economic development, said his team is already looking at redevelopment opportunities along the corridor.

“This grant ... is a real shot in the arm for us getting going on this thing,” Rigney told members of the Virginia

Beach Development Authority Dec. 19. “Where we’ve seen these in the past in the country, there are real opportunities for development and enhancement.”

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