

New island trail to be open soon

Construction work on the Amelia Island Trail, a 6.2-mile, multi-use path running alongside A1A from Peters Point Park south to the Amelia Island State Park, will be completed "very soon," according to on-site representatives of J.B. Coxwell Contracting, which is building the trail for the Florida Department of Transportation.

Once FDOT officials inspect and certify the work, it will then become available for public use, probably in a matter of weeks.

Work began on the project on Oct. 15, but the trail was in planning long before then, says Mike Pikula, president of Friends of the Amelia Island Trail, a nonprofit group formed to add trailside amenities and help maintain the trail. Island residents and visitors have dreamed about such a trail on Amelia Island for decades, envisioning a paved traffic-free trail along scenic A1A which can be safely used by walkers, runners and cyclists. Visions of the trail were turned into action in recent years by the Amelia Island Trail Team, which focuses on building sidewalks and trails.

By working with representatives from various city, county and state offices, including the North Florida Transportation Planning Office, \$2.3 million in federal transportation enhancement funds were dedicated to this project.

The AIT, as it is being called, will link across the Nassau River with other trails being built in segments in adjoining Duval County including Talbot Islands State Park and Fort George Island, eventually offering users over 15 miles of continuous trails.

A Nassau County connecting trail will also soon be built along approximately 700 feet of Julia Street from the American Beach Community Center to the AIT.

Pikula says the AIT will be



MIKE PIKULA/FOR THE NEWS-LEADER

A completed section of the Amelia Island Trail along A1A near the Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort. An opening celebration of the new trail for bicyclists, runners and walkers is scheduled for May 11.

the best thing that has happened to quality of life for the general public on Amelia Island since the creation of public beach accesses.

Although the AIT will be opened by FDOT for use very soon, Friends of the Amelia Island Trail is planning an "Opening Celebration" in May which will include a ribbon-cutting and recognition for public officials who worked with citizens to make the AIT a reality. The event is planned for Saturday, May 11 at the northern trailhead inside Peters Point Park beginning at 8:30 a.m.

The celebration is open to the public; all walkers, runners and bicyclists are encouraged

to attend and show support for this new "linear park" by using it that morning. Representatives from local walking, running and bicycling clubs will be present to help attendees learn

about their club.

Readers can find more information about the AIT, the celebration and Friends of the Amelia Island Trail at www.ameliaislandtrail.org.