



NEWS ADVISORY

July 13, 2018

For immediate release

Bitterroot Trail Golden Spike Grand Opening Set for July 18

Join the City of Missoula and Montana Rail Link on Wednesday, July 18, at 9 a.m. for a celebration and ribbon-cutting for the final link in the 50-mile stretch of world-class trail connecting downtown Missoula and the town of Hamilton, at opposite ends of the scenic Bitterroot Valley.

The nearly-half-mile section of trail is called the Golden Spike, a historical railroad reference to the valuable rail-fastening spikes used to commemorate the completion of a length of railway. It covers the area from Livingston Avenue to North Avenue and a new crossing of the railroad tracks at Central Avenue. Combined with the South Reserve Street Pedestrian Bridge, it provides bicycle and pedestrian connectivity from downtown Missoula to Fort Missoula Regional Park and areas west of Reserve Street. That connection is important for in-town commuters and for the growing number of cycling tourists visiting the Missoula area.

The link is made possible by the partial donation and sale by Montana Rail Link to the City of Missoula of 12 acres in central Missoula in 2016. The property is bounded by Johnson Street on the west, the Bitterroot Branch Rail Line on the east and North Avenue and South Avenue on the north and south. As well as providing the trail link, the property provided for MRL Park, now in development. The Missoula Redevelopment Agency has developed the trail.

“It’s a special honor for Montana Rail Link and our 1,200 employees to partner with the City of Missoula to provide this valuable community asset that will enhance our collective quality of life for generations to come,” said MRL President Tom Walsh. “The trail is more than a transportation corridor. It’s a link that connects neighborhoods and the community. We appreciate the hard work of the City’s staff that allows our rail corridor to operate in tandem with the bike and walking trail. The railroad has deep roots in Missoula. The Northern Pacific Railroad first reached Missoula in 1883, and the city grew around the lifeblood of the community. The City’s Missoula

Redevelopment Agency staff have done a wonderful job in capturing some of that history in the planning and construction of the bike trail and Montana Rail Link Park. We are excited for our 400 Missoula area employees, their families and all Missoula residents to enjoy the railroad-themed park and playground once construction is completed next fall.”

The trail will feature Missoula’s first Bicycle Signal Head, a separate traffic signal that provides bicycle-specific timing strategies:

<https://nacto.org/publication/urban-bikeway-design-guide/bicycle-signals/bicycle-signal-heads/>

“This key section of the Bitterroot Trail has been at the top of our Long Range Plan priority lists for the past few years,” said Ben Weiss, City of Missoula Bike/Ped Program Manager. “Completing the Golden Spike was only made possible by great collaboration among the MRA, MRL, Parks and Recreation and Transportation.”

The project construction budget was \$425,000, funded by Urban Renewal District III tax increment.

Speakers at the ribbon-cutting will include:

- Mayor John Engen
- Montana Rail Link President Tom Walsh
- Missoula Redevelopment Agency Board Chairman Karl Englund
- City Council Representative Julie Merritt
- Bike/Ped Program Manager Ben Weiss

The event will take place on the Bitterroot Trail at the new trail intersection with Central Avenue, mid-way between North Avenue and South Avenue. Limited off-street parking will be available off North Avenue at the former yellow GTS building west of the MRL tracks. Follow signs east on North Avenue sidewalk and south on the Bitterroot Trail to the ribbon-cutting site.

For interviews before the event, contact:

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