

Trail-a-Thon

February—The Helen Boosalis Trail

The Helen Boosalis Trail was born in 1980 as the Highway 2 bikeway. Of course that was before there were really “trails” as such. It was more of a glorified wide sidewalk from 56th Street to 27th Street. West of there it was not even that—just a left over asphalt path leading to the highway department parking lot. But in 2005 the trail acquired its present name in honor of Helen Boosalis Lincoln’s first female mayor who served from 1975 to 1983. A plaque and bench on the route were dedicated that November, designed to be a tribute to her unwavering community spirit.

The name was also designed to give the trail a new identity as major upgrades were undertaken. The Great Plains Trail Network addressed a major issue—the trail’s eastern end was 56th Street. It did not connect with the new Old Cheney Trail. The gap was only a block or two but it required runners to traverse the shoulder of Highway 2 dodging vehicles turning north onto 56th Street, a scary prospect. The project was surprisingly challenging in part because the terrain required retaining walls and curves and slopes because the elevation change. Today the connection is heavily used.

The Lincoln Track Club sought an upgrade of the trail from 48th Street to 20th, part of the first loop of the Lincoln marathon. The old trail was a bottleneck forcing runners onto the grass and mud. LTC persuaded city tourism officials to partially fund a new, wider trail allowing them to raise the number of entrants to the marathon. Today’s event which can accommodate 10,000+ runners is the result. Left out was the trail west of 20th Street and north to Burnham Street and the Indian Hills neighborhood. The city finally replaced the old asphalt with the new wide surface in 2017. Today an activist neighborhood association is pressing the city to find a safe crossing over 9th/10th Street to connect the Boosalis Trail to Van Dorn Park and the Bison Trail. Will it happen? Stay tuned.

Finally when you run the eastern part of the trail you will notice an ongoing flood control project along the Beal Slough. This area has been plagued by chronic flooding so major drainage work is being done on both sides of Highway 2. A new trail bridge over the Beal Slough will be constructed.