

Introduction

A Brief History of Trails – Past to Present

Before Cars, Natural History and the first inhabitants

The South Puget Sound landscape was shaped by the retreating ice sheet of the last major ice age of the Pleistocene era that ended about 10,000 years ago. The melting glaciers left large swaths of shallow gravel deposits that over time inhibited the spread of coniferous forests into parts of the South Puget Sound Country. These deposits led to the formation of prairies around present day Fort Lewis, the cities of Yelm, Rainier and Tenino, and the Grand Mound and Rochester communities. These prairie landscapes made travel on foot more accessible than traveling through the dense forest (Kruckeberg, 1991). Although water was the preferred method of travel for the native peoples, trails were a necessity in the South Puget Sound area. Salish Indian groups known today as the Nisqually, Squaxin, and Chehalis foraged for camas bulbs, fished the Sound and area rivers, and hunted in the prairies and upland forests for game. Land trails were important to the economic and social intercourse for the Thurston Region's earlier human inhabitants (Kruckeberg, 1991 and Gunther, 1988).

The Pioneers

As American pioneers of European descent settled into the South Puget Sound area, they also used the existing trails for transportation. Later, logging operations, saw mills, and other industries brought a demand for rail service. The Northern Pacific Railroad reached Tenino in 1872. William Buckley, Samuel Colter, and J. B. David selected a site for a railroad depot and named it Bucoda after their own names. In 1873 the railroad ran through Yelm. In 1907 the Milwaukee Road Railroad extended its rails from Tacoma through McKenna, into Maytown, south to Centralia, and then west to Grays Harbor. In the 1920s, a logging operation began at Vail in the south County and a new railroad known as the Chehalis Western Railroad opened and provided rail service between Vail and Henderson Inlet. The Chehalis Western Railroad shipped logs from Vail to the Sound from 1926 to the mid 1980s.

Before the automobile became the dominant form of transportation, people traveled primarily by foot, waterways, trains, horseback or drawn cart, and during the late 19th and early 20th century, the bicycle. The automobile had not caught on yet, and several citizens appeared to recognize the value of bicycle travel. Historical archives indicate that there was an organized effort to develop a regional system of bicycle paths during this period. On April 21, 1899, the *Washington Standard* published the following story:



Hewitt Ashley Bicycle Shop in Tumwater, circa 1900. Courtesy of the Henderson House Museum, City of Tumwater. Copyright, use is restricted.

The Thurston County Bicycle Path Association met at the Owl club rooms Saturday evening, and adopted measures for immediate improvement of the paths throughout the county. To promote concert of action the following gentlemen were appointed supervisors to superintend the construction of paths in the several districts; John Bush, at Bush Prairie; Fred Albee, South Union; Seth Jennings, Tumwater; Peter McKenzie, Mud Bay; James Durgin, Nisqually; George Langridge, Jr., South Bay, Cal. Stull, Little Rock; Wm. Warner, Tenino, and Henry Mize at Bucoda. A committee was appointed to look after the entertainment of our city's guests on Dewey Day, consisting of Lee Malleur, L. B. Faulkner, Sam'l Percival, Chas. Hewitt and R. G. Shore.

The citizens were earnest in their efforts to finance their bicycle paths. On May 26, 1899 the *Washington Standard* published the following news:

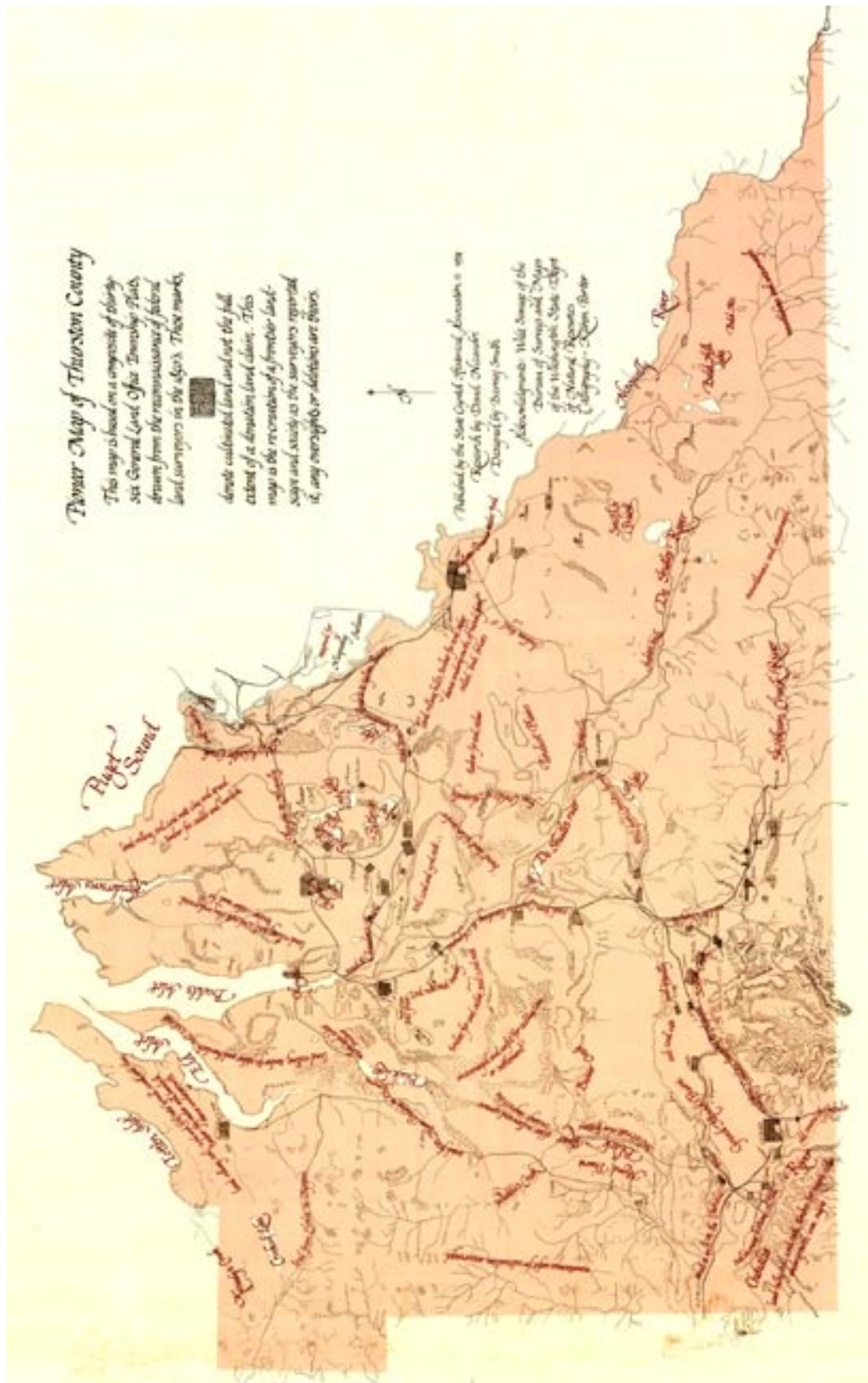
The citizen's committee appointed to solicit subscriptions for construction of the bicycle path to Little Rock, succeeded in raising \$300 the first day, and there is no doubt but that a couple of hundred dollars more will be added to it, which, with the amount pledged by residents of Little Rock, and the bicycle organization will be ample to construct a first-class path the whole distance.

No historical evidence was available to research the outcome or fate of the bicycle paths in Thurston County. However, over a short period of time, travel with combustion powered vehicles became very popular. It is possible that these bicycle paths were usurped by the more popular motor vehicle.

Recent Planning History

In 1977, the Thurston County Parks Department developed the *Thurston County Comprehensive Bike Plan*. This plan recognized bicycle travel for both its transportation and recreational benefits. The plan proposed a bicycle network of 125 miles of bike lanes and wide shoulders, but no trails were included. Cost estimates for constructing and maintaining this network was estimated at \$645,390. In 1987, the Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) developed the *Thurston Metropolitan Area Bicycle Plan*. It identified 14 miles of Class I Trail: the present day Chehalis Western Trail north of Martin Way, the I-5 Bicycle Trail, the Evergreen Parkway Trail and a one-half mile segment of trail through the Tumwater Deschutes Valley. This plan also recommended the cities of Lacey, Olympia, and Tumwater, and Thurston County consider the institution of a bicycle licensing program.

Pioneer Historic Map



Published by the State Capitol Historical Association, 1974

The Dawn of Rail Trails

In the mid 1980s, rail service was on the decline and a national trend of railroad abandonment was occurring across the United States. In 1990, TRPC developed *The Railroad Right-of-Way Strategy* which evaluated the viability of rail corridors for their continued operations, service, and their feasibility as trail corridors. This strategy tasked local agencies to secure the acquisition of abandoned railroad right-of-way (ROW) to secure these corridors for interim trail use through Section 8(d) National Trails System Act. The *1993 Urban Trails Plan*, produced by TRPC, was the Region's first comprehensive shared-use trail planning effort. This plan focused on the greater metropolitan areas of the cities of Lacey, Olympia, and Tumwater. It identified nearly 78 miles of shared use trails in the Thurston Region.

Since 1993, the Region has seen significant shared use trail development activity. Access along the I-5 Bicycle Trail was improved with the construction of the Sleater Kinney Tunnel. Thurston County and Washington State Department of Natural Resources constructed the Chehalis Western Trail. The County acquired and constructed the Yelm-Tenino Trail, and acquired the abandoned Gate-Belmore railroad corridor. The McLane School Forest Trail was built. The cities of Lacey and Olympia acquired and began construction of portions of the Woodland Trail.

Bridging the Gap

In 2001, the Transportation Policy Board (TPB) identified the acquisition of additional ROW to connect the Chehalis Western Trail across Martin Way, I-5, and Pacific Avenue as a regional priority. TRPC awarded \$500,000 in federal Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds towards this project on two separate occasions; first in 2001 and again in 2004.



“Bridging the Gap” became a regional priority and former state Representative Sandra Romero helped to secure \$2.1 million to construct the bridge across I-5. In 2006, Congressman Brian Baird was instrumental in allocating \$4.1 million in federal funds through the passage of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). Local, regional, state, federal, and private stakeholder's efforts led to the opening of the first of three bridges on President's Day, Monday, February 19, 2007.

Breaking Ground on the Bridging the Gap Project. L to R: Councilmember Pete Kmet, City of Tumwater; Thurston County Commissioner Cathy Wolfe; former State Representative Sandra Romero; Councilmembers Doug Mah and Laura Ware, City of Olympia; former Secretary of Transportation, Douglas MacDonald; Congressman Brian Baird; Mayor Virgil Clarkson, City of Lacey. Photo by Thera Black.

The Regional Trails Plan

The momentum from the Bridging the Gap Project and other trail development activities demanded a more regional and collaborative approach to trails planning. TRPC and the Transportation Policy Board (TPB) recommended the development of a Regional Trails Strategy in the *2025 Regional Transportation Plan*.

This plan identifies the next steps in continuing past efforts and aligning current efforts. Unlike previous plans however, the *Regional Trails Plan* considers all of Thurston County and its cities, towns, tribes, and communities in the planning area. It also looks beyond Thurston County's borders to seek connections with other regional trail systems.

The Regional Trails Planning Process

Trails planning is an interdisciplinary, multi-jurisdictional, and public endeavor. The contents of this plan reflect the variety of perspectives and issues that the stakeholders of the planning process expressed and desired. All local municipal and tribal governments were invited to participate in this plan's development process. TRPC staff facilitated the Regional Trails Plan development process at the direction of the Transportation Policy Board. Two committees actively participated in the development of this plan, the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and a Regional Citizen Trails Advisory Committee (RCTAC). Both committees provided input on a variety of trail topics including trail connectivity, trail uses, design, safety and security, and operations and maintenance. Efforts were also made to contact neighboring counties to coordinate trails planning across county jurisdictions. TRPC staff also conducted public outreach during the planning process to community trail user groups.

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

The TAC is an advisory body to the Transportation Policy Board. The TAC convenes on an as needed basis to discuss regional transportation issues that are primarily technical in nature. In addition to providing recommendations to the TPB, the TAC is a forum that provides transportation managers and engineers the opportunity to exchange information and ideas between jurisdictions. It is made up of local and state government staff from public works and transportation departments of Thurston County, the cities of Lacey, Olympia, Tumwater, and Yelm, and Intercity Transit and the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) Highways and Local Programs Division, Olympic Region.

Parks departments typically manage trails, but public works departments often design and construct the projects. Because of the interdisciplinary requirements of trails planning, the TAC was augmented by non-transportation

staff for the development of this plan. The following agencies were involved during this process: City of Olympia Parks, Arts, and Recreation Department, City of Lacey Parks Department, Thurston County Parks and Recreation Department, Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department, WSDOT Olympic Region Roadside and Site Development Office, Washington State Department of Natural Resources Pacific Cascade Region - Recreation and Natural Areas, The Evergreen State College Facilities Services, and Puget Sound and Pacific Railroad. Representatives from the Lacey Fire District, City of Olympia Fire Department, Tumwater Fire Department, and the City of Olympia Police Department joined the TAC for one meeting to discuss trail safety and security issues and provide their recommendations.

Regional Citizens' Trails Advisory Committee (RCTAC)

The RCTAC was formed to serve as a temporary citizen advisory committee to the TPB for the development of a Regional Trails Plan. The committee was composed of 16 community trail users from throughout Thurston County. They included hikers, dog walkers, bicyclists, equestrians, and parents. Outreach for this committee was conducted by Climate Solutions as part of a related non-motorized Multi-Modal Access Transportation Study. The RCTAC provided a voice for trail users who provided input and recommendations based on their personal experiences using shared use trails. Their participation was voluntary and the term of their appointment was to expire with the adoption of this plan. Their ideas are collectively included in this plan's recommendations.

Public Outreach

Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) staff conducted public outreach throughout the development of this plan. Staff presented an overview of the Regional Trails Plan and solicited input from the following organizations or committees: Woodland Trail Greenway Association, Olympia Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, Wanderer's Hiking Club of Olympia, Capitol Volkssport Club, and the For Evergreen Council's Pierce County Trail Conference. TRPC staff also participated in Thurston County's First Annual Trails Day Event in May 2006.

Trail Route Selection Methodology

A considerable effort was employed to plan the proposed trail network. TRPC staff solicited data from all of the local agencies through the members of the TAC. Working maps were developed using TRPC's Geographic Information System (GIS). Multiple map iterations were created by combining several thematic features like land use zoning, buildable lands data, municipal boundaries, parks and open spaces, schools, roads, rivers, wetlands, steep slopes, railroads, utility ROW, and existing bicycle facilities and trails. TRPC

staff digitized proposed trail networks gleaned from local comprehensive plans, parks plans, and the proposed trails from the *1993 Urban Trails Plan*. Additional trails data was sought from the surrounding counties and Regional Transportation Planning Organizations to explore inter-county connectivity, but little data was available.

The TAC and the Regional Citizens Trails Advisory Committee spent several meetings reviewing available data. Trail corridors were selected for their ability to link to important destinations and their ability to close the gaps in the system. Many trails which were originally included in the *1993 Urban Trails Plan* were disregarded because they have or will be developed as on-street facilities. Although existing and future on-street bicycle facilities were referenced for overall system connectivity, the identification of new bicycle facilities was only considered where they provided critical connections to the regional trail network. Each proposed corridor was evaluated for its connectivity to destinations, environmental impacts, and ROW acquisition requirements. In addition, committee members identified planning issues and recommendations which are included in the narratives that accompany each of the trail maps in Chapter 3, Conditions and Recommendations.

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