

## Trail Funding

### Financial Challenges

The Thurston Regional Trail Network will require phased construction of individual segments over a long period of time. This long term investment will provide great value to the region and its citizens, but it will be costly. This plan describes the shared-use path network as an integral component to the multimodal network, but it is no more significant than sidewalks, bike lanes, transit services, roads, bridges, tunnels, and other transportation infrastructure. This plan does not prioritize shared-use trail development above any other component of the transportation system.

Local agencies prioritize their capital facilities plans and transportation improvement programs to meet the needs of their jurisdictions. Projects that require much needed safety improvements for all system users are a priority. *The 2025 Thurston Regional Transportation Plan* projects that over the next 20 years, the region will invest 43 percent of its transportation revenues on maintenance, preservation, and operations. Twenty-seven percent will be spent on locally significant transportation projects, and another 16.5 percent will go towards regionally significant investments. The remaining 13 percent will be spent on transportation administration.

### Implementation

Most of the 50 miles of existing trails that were developed over the last decade were constructed within the right-of-way (ROW) of a single owner. Their construction was managed by the individual municipal or State agency that owned the ROW. It is economical and efficient for a single agency to plan and develop its trail projects independently with this condition. However, some trail sections must cross water bodies, challenging topography, or arterials, highways, and railroad tracks. Some trail corridors also traverse multiple jurisdictions and the ROW may be owned by multiple public or private entities. These types of trail projects are expensive because of the high cost to acquire the necessary ROW, coordinate the planning, conduct environmental reviews, complete extensive permitting processes, and design and build. Due to their high cost, trail segments with these conditions are often the last sections of a corridor to be developed.



Project Prioritization generates community support and creates leadership to champion critical projects and secure the funding necessary to complete them. Photo by Thera Black.

The proposed Thurston Regional Trail network includes several trail segments that will require multiple partners and stakeholders (see Table 3-4 in Conditions and Recommendations). Implementation of the Regional Trails Plan will require collaboration between the cities, Thurston County, Thurston Regional Planning Council, multiple State agencies, Federal recreation and transportation agencies, Tribes, and other public and private entities. The development of the regional trail network will require partnerships not just between all of the organizations mentioned throughout this plan, but the intradepartmental staff from parks, public works, and planning departments of the municipal governments. A coordinated and joint agency implementation of the Regional Trails Plan offers these benefits:

- Common vision unites all partners
- Common goals guide all projects
- Project prioritization generates community support and creates leadership to champion critical projects and secure the funding necessary to complete them

### **Development Strategy**

The Technical Advisory Committee and the Regional Citizens Trails Advisory Committee both proposed the following strategy for prioritizing trail development in the Thurston Region:

1. Acquire the additional ROW that is required for any trail's future development;
2. Prioritize investments in paving paths over construction trail amenities. In other words, more miles of trails without bathrooms are preferred than less trail miles with bathrooms; and
3. Add amenities over time as funds become available.

### **Project Prioritization**

This plan does not prioritize shared-use trail development above any other component of the transportation network. In general, local agencies take responsibility for prioritizing all of their own transportation projects and forge partnerships with other agencies and stakeholders necessary to construct their facilities. Trails are no exception. Competing capital facility improvements and other demands direct local governments' attention and priorities.

Construction of a municipality's portion of trail using local general funds will compete against other projects including much needed sidewalks, bike lanes, and reconstruction of deteriorating local roads and collectors. External transportation funding sources also have limitations. Grants and funding programs often dictate what types of projects local governments can apply for based on the source's eligibility criteria, i.e. habitat restoration, safety,

maintenance, recreation, etc. Transportation infrastructure, particularly trails, is frequently funded opportunistically. External funding authorities do not own or manage the facilities they chose to fund, and local project prioritization and ranking may be irrelevant when competing for revenue with other municipalities. Because of this, a local government will submit a project with the attributes they believe will stand a chance of receiving funding rather than a local high priority project that is less likely to be funded. However, projects that are regionally endorsed with multi-lateral municipal support tend to score well with State grants. In addition, regionally significant projects have more visibility at the national level and are more likely to gain congressional representation. The Chehalis Western Trail's "Bridging the Gap" project is an excellent example of a regional priority project with broad community support that benefited from multiple partnerships. This project received substantial federal funding because of the spirited efforts of many.



Rainy skies didn't stop Congressman Brian Baird and members of the community from turning out for the ribbon cutting ceremony of the first phase of the Bridging the Gap Project. Photo by Paul Brewster.

### Evaluation Criteria

Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) is responsible for providing continuous, coordinated, comprehensive long-range transportation planning in urbanized areas, and serves as a forum for decision making. TRPC also ensures that regional transportation planning is consistent with county-wide planning policies and growth strategies for all of Thurston County and its cities towns and communities. Regional transportation planning includes shared-use trail planning. The Thurston Region views shared-use trails as non-motorized transportation facilities that are integral to the multi-modal transportation network.

The region's policy makers must sometimes choose between or prioritize trail projects competing for limited Regional Surface Transportation Program and Enhancement Grant Program funds. Policy Makers attempt to assess the overall quality of a project's deliverables. This plan offers generalized prioritization criteria to assist Policy Makers with their trail project selection process. These criteria are applicable to both undeveloped and incomplete trail corridors. Policy Makers should evaluate future candidate trail projects with the following criteria when prioritizing or selecting trail project proposals for funding (the list of criteria is not presented in a hierarchal order):

1. **Existing Facility.** Is the proposed trail project part of an existing trail facility? Does the project proposal complete the corridor or add significant length to the proposed corridor?
2. **Connectivity.** A useful trail does not lead to nowhere. Does the project link directly to other trails? Does the project create connectivity between common origins and destinations such as neighborhoods with parks and recreation facilities, community centers, employment sites, schools, libraries, and retail centers?
3. **Safety.** Does the project provide a safe non-motorized route through a high traffic volume or high speed traffic corridor that lacks non-motorized facilities like sidewalks and bike lanes? Does the route connect neighborhoods with children to schools and other essential community services that are not effectively linked by on-street facilities?
4. **Greenway/Open Space Network.** Does the project preserve critical habitat or preserve greenway corridors that could protect native flora and resident and/or migratory fauna. Does the trail corridor provide a scenic trail use experience not afforded by other trail corridors?
5. **Lost Opportunities.** Does the project seize an opportunity to secure ROW for a shared-use-trail that may not present itself again in the future? Is the ROW in jeopardy of future development? Does postponing developing the proposed trail corridor become more difficult or add significant more expense in the future as adjacent properties develop or surrounding land uses change?
6. **Project Readiness.** Has the project applicant completed ROW acquisition, design and engineering phases, environmental review, and /or permitting processes? Does the project include a substantial local revenue match? Does the project include multiple stakeholders? Does it have broad community support?
7. **Level of Use.** Is the proposed trail in a more urban setting or surrounded with more dense development that may generate higher levels of use than other trails? Will it offer a variety of trail use experiences for a significant number of users?

## Cost Estimates

Constructing trails is much like constructing roads. At a minimum they require a subsurface base of gravel, a layer of asphalt, signing, and access and traffic control devices. They also must include provisions for stormwater drainage and infiltration. But trail users desire additional amenities like trail heads, kiosks, benches, landscaping wayfinding signs, restrooms, bicycle racks, picnic tables, drinking fountains, and garbage cans. All of these features add to a trail's overall costs.

The regional trails planning process did not formulate detailed assumptions and generalized cost estimates to project future expenditures for trail construction. Reviews of previous bicycle and trail plans revealed that cost estimates don't prove accurate when projects become construction ready. Rising real estate prices, double digit inflation in the cost of asphalt over the last three years, and multiple variables associated with site design make it difficult to predict how much the entire 140 miles of the regional trail network is going to cost to build. Basic cost estimates for an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible, one mile linear stretch of a 10 foot wide asphalt-paved trail with access control devices range as high as \$750,000. Trails with more street crossings require more signs and access control devices and will increase design and construction costs. The additional trail amenities that users come to expect will add additional costs.

## Funding Sources for Trail Development

Local governments are already creatively stretching what limited funds they have available for trail development. Current trail projects include a variety of local, state, and federal sources of funds. Private developers could also contribute to trail development through the State Environment Policy Act (SEPA) mitigation process. The Thurston Region has demonstrated what is possible with partnerships through the "Bridging the Gap Project." Developing the Thurston Regional Trail Network will require more of these kinds of commitments and partnerships.

### Federal Funding Sources for Trails

The following sources of funding may be used for shared-use trails or their supportive on-street facilities (some of this information was provided courtesy of the Rails to Trails Conservancy):

#### **Thurston Regional Surface Transportation Program (STP), Federal Highways Administration (FHWA)**

STP funds are made available through the federal transportation bill known as the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). These funds may be used for construction of non-motorized transportation facilities like shared-use trails, sidewalks and bicycle lanes among other things.

These funds are available to all local government agencies and non-traditional transportation partners. Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) administers the Regional STP Grant Program. Projects are reviewed by the Transportation Policy Boards and must be approved by the Regional Council. Depending on the type of applicant, a local match between 13.5 to 40 percent is required. For more information, contact Thurston Regional Planning Council at 360.956.7575.

**Transportation Enhancements (TE) Program, Federal Highways Administration**

The source of these federal funds come from SAFETEA-LU and include 12 categories of projects related to surface transportation, including pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and safety programs, scenic and historic highway programs, landscaping and scenic beautification, historic preservation, and environmental mitigation. TE investments benefit communities through rehabilitation of historic facilities related to transportation, renovated streetscapes, rail-trails and other transportation trails, transportation museums, and scenic and historic highway program visitor centers.

These funds are requested through TRPC and are prioritized by the Transportation Policy Board and the Regional Council. The Washington State Legislature makes the final selection. For more information, contact Thurston Regional Planning Council at 360.956.7575.

**Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Grants, National Park Service**

The LWCF program provides matching grants to States and local governments for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities. The program is intended to create and maintain a nationwide legacy of high quality recreation areas and facilities and to stimulate non-federal investments in the protection and maintenance of recreation resources across the United States. LWCF grants can be used by communities to build a variety of parks and recreation facilities, including trails and greenways. LWCF funds are distributed by the National Park Service to the states annually. Communities must match LWCF grants with 50-percent of the local project costs through in-kind services or cash. All projects funded by LWCF grants must be used exclusively for recreation purposes, in perpetuity. Projects must be in accordance with each State's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.

Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) manages the state program for these federal funds. For more information, contact IAC at 360.902.2000

**Economic Development Grants for Public Works and Development of Facilities, U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA)**

This program provides grants to states, counties, and cities designated as redevelopment areas by EDA for public works projects that can include developing trails and greenway facilities. There is a 30-percent local match required, except in severely distressed areas where federal contribution can reach 80 percent.

**National Scenic Byways Program, Federal Highways Administration**

This grant program can fund planning, safety and facility improvements, cultural and historic resource protection, and tourism information signage. Bicycle and pedestrian facilities can be developed in conjunction with scenic roadway projects.

This program is administered through Washington State Department of Transportation's Scenic Byways Program. For more information, contact 360.705.6822.

**Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Program, FHWA and Federal Transit Administration (FTA)**

The CMAQ program was created to reduce congestion on local streets and improve air quality. Funds are available to urban communities designated as "non-attainment" areas for air quality, meaning the air is more polluted than federal standards allow. CMAQ, FHWA and the FTA. Funding requires a 20-percent local match. The Thurston Region has recently become eligible to use these funds. Although trail projects are eligible, they would need to demonstrate a measurable improvement in air quality in the region's PM-10 Air Quality Maintenance Area.

TRPC has recently developed a CMAQ sub-committee to define a grant process for these limited funds. For more information, contact Thurston Regional Planning Council at 360.956.7575.

**The Federal Public Lands Highways Discretionary Fund, Federal Highways Administration**

The Public Lands Highways (PLH) Program was originally established in 1930 by the Amendment Relative to Construction of Roads through Public Lands and Federal Reservations. Funding was provided from the General Fund of the Treasury. The intent of the program is to improve access to and within the Federal lands of the nation. Cities, counties, tribes, and federal agencies are eligible to use these funds.

This grant program is administered through Washington State Department of Transportation. For more information, contact 360.705.7381.

**The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP), Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation**

This funding program provides assistance for a broad range of land protection, park development, preservation/conservation, and outdoor recreation facilities. Grants are available for trail acquisition and development. Grants require a 50 percent local match.

This grant program is administered through Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO). For more information, contact 360.902.3080.

### **State Funding Sources for Trails**

The following State sources of funding may be used to develop shared use trails. Other funding options may be available.

#### **The Safe Routes to School Program, Washington State Department of Transportation and Federal Highways Administration**

This federal and state program is funded through SAFETEA-LU and Washington State Department of Transportation. It can fund bicycle and pedestrian safety projects that create safer routes to school.

Washington State completed its 2006 grant program this year. For more information about future calls for projects, contact 360.705.7528.

#### **The Small City Sidewalk Program, Washington Transportation Improvement Board (TIB)**

The Sidewalk Program was established by the Legislature in 1995 to provide funding for pedestrian projects. The program is available to both small city and urban agencies and provides funding for sidewalk projects related to transportation. This funding source does not fund trails, but could be used to finance construction of sidewalks that connect to trails. The project must be on or related to a TIB Small City Arterial. Completed projects must be consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Cities with populations over 500 require a five percent match.

This competitive grant program awards projects from \$1 million to \$1.5 million on an annual basis. Applications are due at the end of August and projects are selected by the Board in November. For more information, contact TIB at 360.586.1140.

#### **Washington State Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Program, Washington State Department of Transportation**

This grant program aids public agencies in funding their cost-effective projects that improve pedestrian and bicycle safety through engineering, education and enforcement. Eligible projects may include engineering improvements, education programs and enforcement efforts that improve safety for non-motorized transportation users.

Washington State completed its 2006 grant program this year. For more information about future calls for projects, contact 360.705.7258.

### **Grade Safety Grant Program, Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (WUTC).**

WUTC has monies from its Grade Crossing Protective Fund (GCPF) to reduce accident frequency and severity at both public and private railroad crossings and to reduce pedestrian trespassing and the frequency of trespass-related deaths and injuries along railroad ROW. Any public, private, or nonprofit entity may submit an application to the commission for GCPF monies. Examples of projects in this category include fencing or other physical barriers that prevent trespassing on railroad ROW, pedestrian warning devices, channeling devices, media or public relations campaigns, and enforcement-related activities. Grants from the commission's Grade Crossing Protective Fund may cover up to \$20,000 of a selected project's costs without a cost-share/match requirement.

For more information, contact 360.664.1257.

### **Local Funding Options**

Local Agencies can fund trail projects through a variety of measures contingent on local approval. Some funding measures are available to local governments but have not been enacted or implemented in the Thurston Region. A more detailed summary of local transportation funding sources and their uses can be found in the *Guide to Financing the Regional Transportation Plan* (TRPC, 1999). This document can be found on TRPC's website: [www.trpc.org](http://www.trpc.org).

#### **Existing Options**

The following options currently exist to local governments:

1. General Obligation Bonds, RCW 35.45; 36.76; 39.36; 39.52
2. General Funds, RCW Various
3. Local Improvement Districts (LID), RCW 36.94.220-36.94.300; 36.88; 81.104
4. Public Works Trust Funds, RCW 43.155
5. State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) Mitigation, RCW 43.21C; 36.70B

#### **Options Not Enacted**

The following options are enabled by state law, but not enacted in the Thurston Region:

1. Commercial Parking Tax, RCW 82.80.030
2. Motor Vehicle License Fee, RCW 82.80.020
3. Transportation Benefit Districts, RCW 36.73

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