



CURRENT CONDITIONS REPORT
JANUARY 2024

THURSTON REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL



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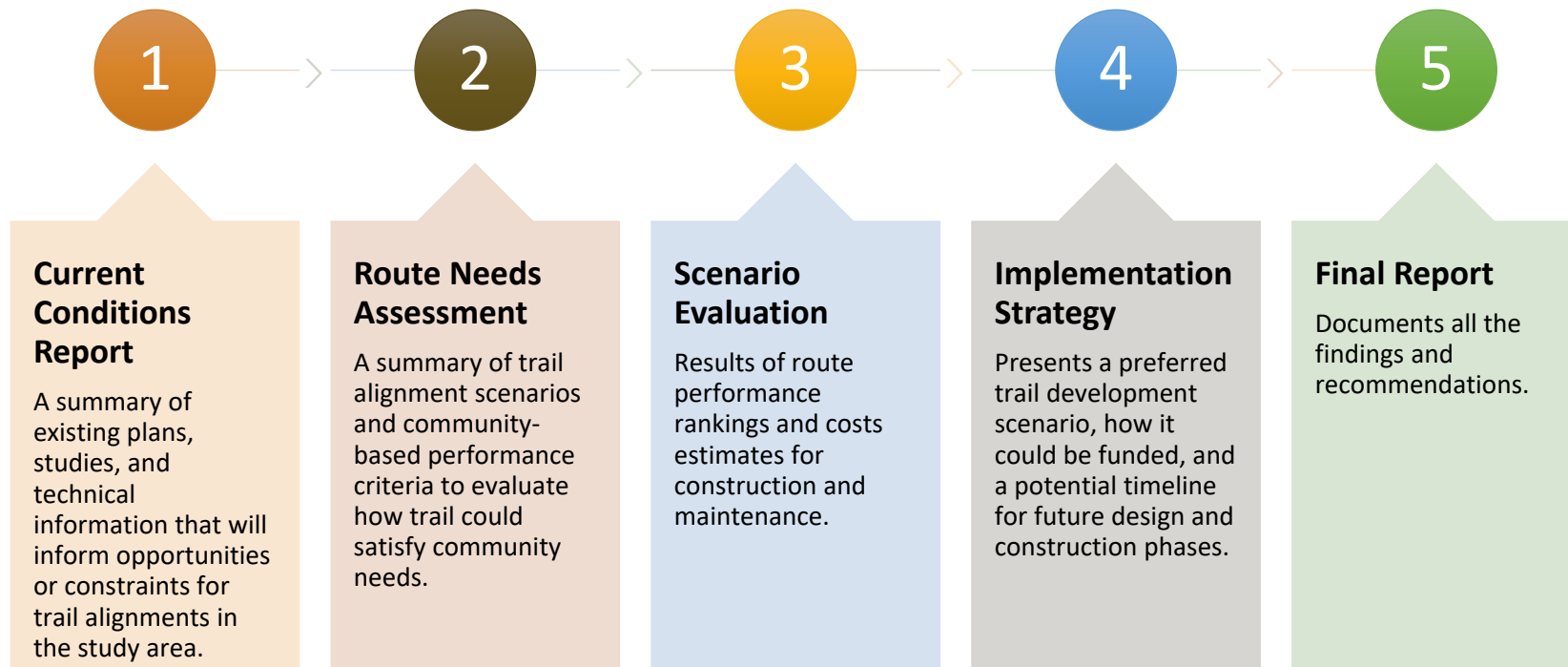
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Introduction

In 2018, Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) awarded Thurston County a \$150,000 Federal Highway Administration Transportation Alternatives Grant to perform a trail feasibility study. Thurston County in partnership with TRPC are conducting a feasibility study to explore the potential location, needs, and implementation options for establishing a shared-use trail in southwest Thurston County. This trail would connect the communities of Grand Mound, Rochester, and the Chehalis Reservation and could provide a variety of recreation and transportation options such as walking, jogging, bicycling, equestrian uses, and more.

This report, produced by TRPC for Thurston County, will summarize previous trail planning efforts in the area, existing traffic conditions and safety issues, and public input. Deliverables in the feasibility study include a Route Needs Assessment to identify important destinations and features of the trail, a Scenario Evaluation to assess various routes based on criteria developed with stakeholder input, and an Implementation Strategy to identify preferred routes, a funding strategy, and a phasing plan. These deliverables and a summary of the planning process will be included in the project's final report.



Background

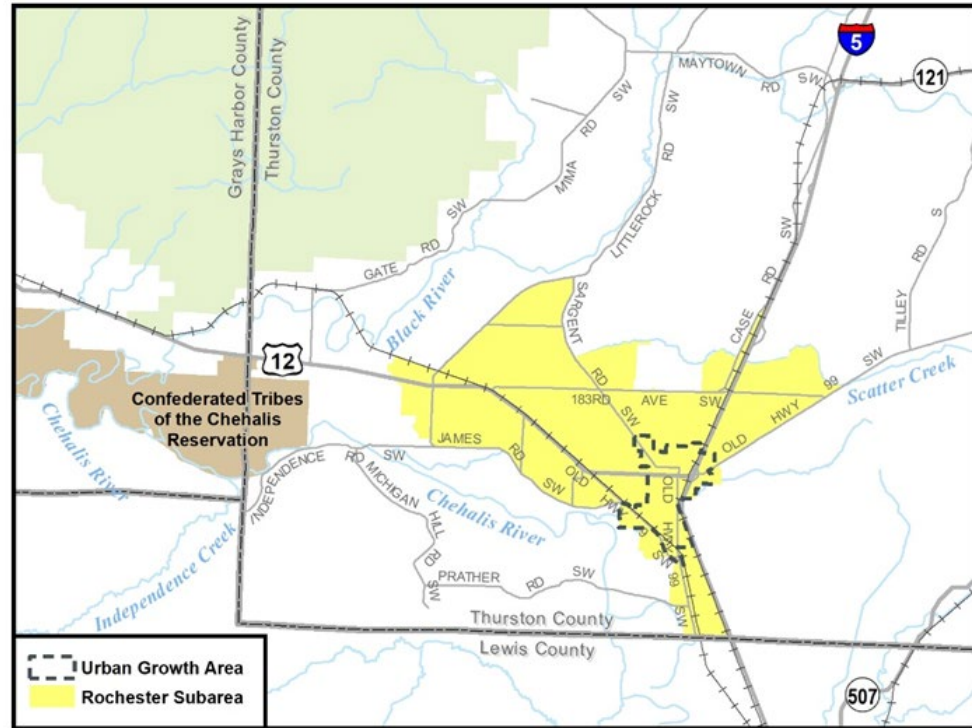
The unincorporated southwest Thurston County communities of Grand Mound and Rochester and the neighboring Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation are socially and economically linked along US Highway 12.

US-12 crosses Interstate 5 and is considered a highway of regional significance with upwards of 15,000 Annual Average Daily Trips serving both local and cross-state trips. It also serves as an important freight route with a T2 freight corridor state classification. The Puget Sound and Pacific (PSAP) Railroad, owned by Genesee & Wyoming, extends from Centralia to the Port of Grays Harbor and runs parallel to the highway between Grand Mound and Rochester.

Nestled throughout this busy corridor are homes, schools, businesses, and community gathering places. Individuals wanting or needing to travel in and around these growing communities by walking, bicycling, or by other means of active transportation are hindered by the highways and the railroad and lack of separated sidewalks, bike lanes, and trails. These major transportation routes also pose barriers to both local circulation and longer-distance mobility along the corridor. Despite the presence of a wide shoulder along US-12, most people feel unsafe walking or riding on the shoulder and crossing the highway due to traffic volumes and speed. The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) Active Transportation Programs identifies US-12 as an active transportation gap, as it is poorly suited for walking and bicycling. The corridor has a documented history of pedestrian and bicycle injury collisions.

The 2007 Thurston Regional Trails Plan first identified the need for a shared-use path to serve the communities within the corridor. The Grand Mound Urban Growth Area and Rochester Subarea are both growing rapidly, and now is the time to plan for a regional trail corridor to support safe active transportation in southwest Thurston County. This study will identify opportunities to connect the Grand Mound - Rochester corridor with a regional trail similar to the Chehalis Western and the Yelm-Rainier-Tenino trails. A trail will attract people away

Figure 1. Grand Mound Urban Growth Area within the Rochester Subarea of Thurston County.



from higher volume and higher speed highways and arterials and reduce the risks of bicycle and pedestrian collisions. Support for a trail was reinforced in the recently completed Rochester Main Street planning process community surveys.

The study will examine potential trail routes and associated connections between key origins and destinations. The study will also lay the groundwork for the future development of a shared-use path system and any associated local road improvements and crossing treatments to serve the needs of the communities within the study area. This planning project will:

- Summarize current traffic conditions, existing and planned transportation facilities, right-of-way, environmental conditions, safety data, zoning and development regulations, critical areas, and policy issues
- Conduct community outreach including technical meetings with transportation and community stakeholders to ascertain the feasibility and effectiveness of pathway alignments, connections, and basic design considerations
- Evaluate route opportunities
- Develop recommendations
- Develop cost estimates
- Identify implementation strategies including potential funding mechanisms; and
- Document all key findings and publish a final report that summarizes the project including all the above components.

Why a Trail?

Shared-use paths—also called trails, multi-use paths, greenways, or bike paths—bring many benefits to their communities. By providing safe and accessible transportation and recreation opportunities separated from motor vehicle traffic, shared-use paths benefit the individuals using them and can also contribute to the economic development and other goals of a community. Trails can contribute to a community's sense of place and people will travel great distances to use trails. The Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office estimates that outdoor recreation contributes \$21.6 billion to the state's economy each year through the cost of trips, fuel, food and beverages, equipment, and lodging. Planning for and investing in trails, parks, and open space today establishes positive economic and public health opportunities for the future.

Existing trails in the Thurston County region support a variety of users who enjoy trails for walking, running, bicycling, skating, equestrian use, wildlife viewing and photography, or just unwinding from stress.

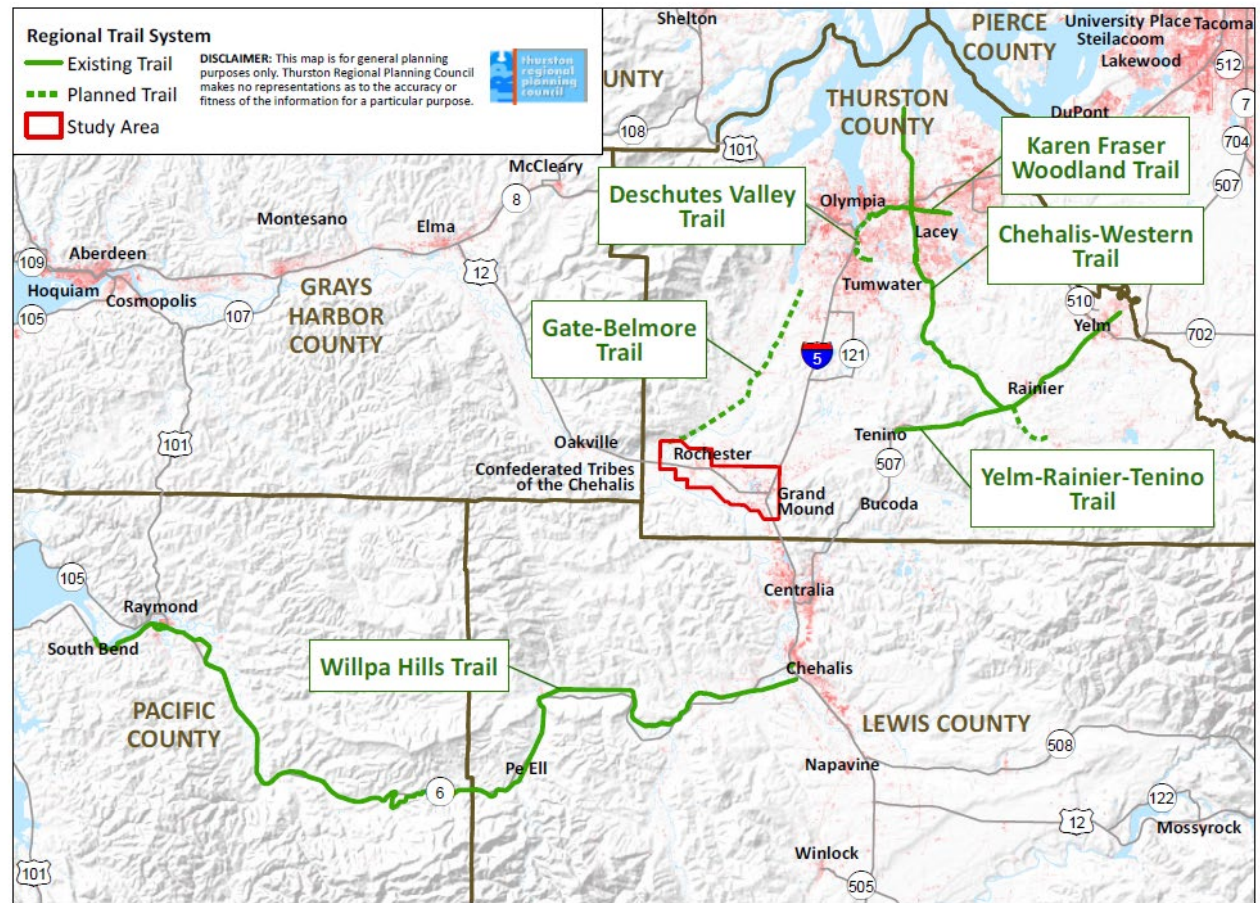
When examining the Thurston Region’s trail network, it is evident that southwest Thurston County residents do not have the same access to trails as those in other areas of the region. There are approximately 58 miles of publicly managed multi-use trails in Thurston County (Figure 2). The three major paved trails are:

1. Chehalis Western Trail (22 miles), which is listed in the top 10 trails in Washington State by the Rails to Trails Conservancy;
2. Yelm-Rainier-Tenino Trail (14 miles); and
3. Karen Fraser Woodland Trail (5 miles).

The first two trails are managed by Thurston County while Karen Fraser Woodland is managed by both Olympia and Lacey.

Tumwater’s Deschutes Valley Trail is the newest addition to the network stretching from Brewery Park to Tumwater Historic Park. Looking ahead, several trail feasibility studies have been completed in the last few years or are getting underway.

Figure 2. Regional Trails Networks in and around Thurston County.



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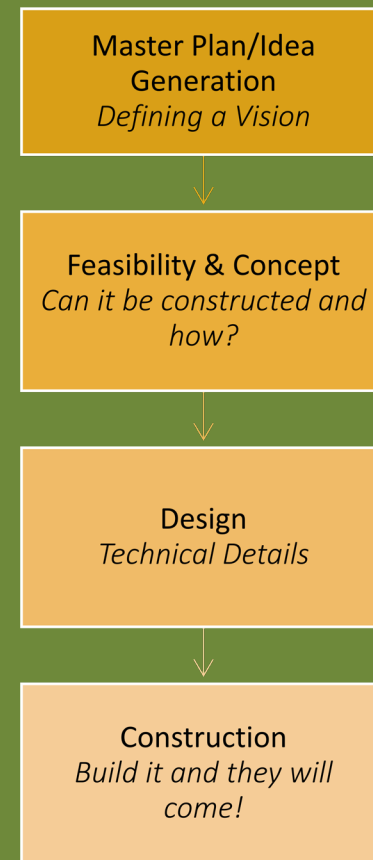
Trail Planning Process

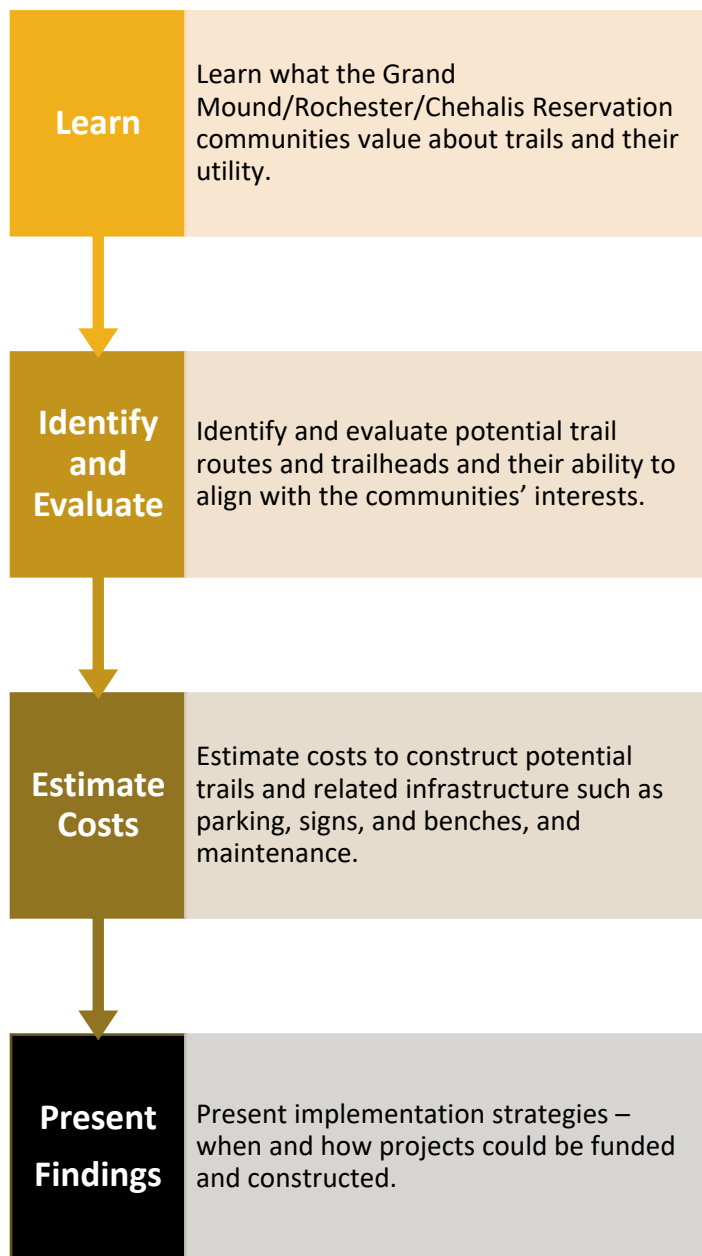
The Southwest Thurston County Trail Feasibility Study continues a conversation from previous planning activities about how shared-use trails can best serve communities in southwest Thurston County. This study combines elements of both a Master Plan and Feasibility and Concept phases of trail planning. The Master Plan process takes an idea and starts to develop a conceptual trail or trail system. It also identifies a vision, expresses community values, and provides high level guidance for future actions.

To date, there has been no comprehensive effort to convene a trail master planning or feasibility study for southwest Thurston County – until now. This project will engage communities and allow them to share input on opportunities for routes and other facilities like trailheads, activities that could take place on trails, how destinations are connected, and what types of trail-related infrastructure should be included in the planning process. This effort also dives into what the community vision of a trail corridor is and how it could come into existence.

TRAIL PLANNING PROCESS

Trail planning typically happens in four stages. This feasibility study will only cover the first two steps in this process.





The Feasibility and Concept stage is an investigative effort to define project objectives and potential outcomes. Over the course of the study, project partners seek public feedback to refine route scenarios and evaluate their performance to meet the communities' values and needs. The study will also consider if right-of-way and property acquisition may be necessary. The study will examine potential constraints such as developed areas, creeks and rivers, wetlands, utilities and other physical features. Community feedback will help select criteria that will be used to rank potential trail routes based on how they could meet community needs. For example, parents may want trails that connect to schools and parks so that children have a safe route to walk or bike to these destinations. In this case, a proposed trails' directness of route, its visibility from a security standpoint, and its separation from automobile traffic would be useful for criteria for evaluating a trail's safety characteristics for youth.

It is anticipated that one or more routes may emerge as preferred options by the end of the study. The results will inform Thurston County's future trail planning activities. This feasibility study will lay the groundwork – so that when the time comes to resume planning, the plan will orient the County to possible issues within the study area that the design phase will need to address.

Thurston County would need additional funding to perform the design and engineering. During a design phase, engineers perform more detailed assessments and prepare construction documentation to bring a project closer to a shovel-ready state. The design phase involves land surveys, stormwater analysis and design, a geotechnical report, traffic analysis, cultural resources study, and fish and wildlife mitigation plan. The design phase must also satisfy all the local, state, and federal permitting requirements for a project.

Prior to construction, Thurston County may need to secure right-of-way for a trail. This could involve private property acquisition, obtaining easements within utilities, and even acquiring railroad ROW. A variety of construction documents such as drainage and erosion control design, demolition, grading, signage and striping,

landscaping, restoration and mitigation, and cost estimates may be required before Thurston County could go out to bid for construction.

The implementation strategies detailed later in this planning process will look at practical approaches to phasing projects. Some considerations for prioritizing sections of trail could be looking at where the greatest trail network demand is located, or the number of trail users who would use a particular section. There may be some sections that are less complicated and less expensive to construct. Constructing a section could be opportunistic to align with grant funding and their project selection criteria. The County might also consider where there is the greatest public support and partnerships to drive decision making.

Past Studies

There are several studies and plans that have been previously conducted which provide useful background for this feasibility study. The relevance and short summaries of those documents follow.

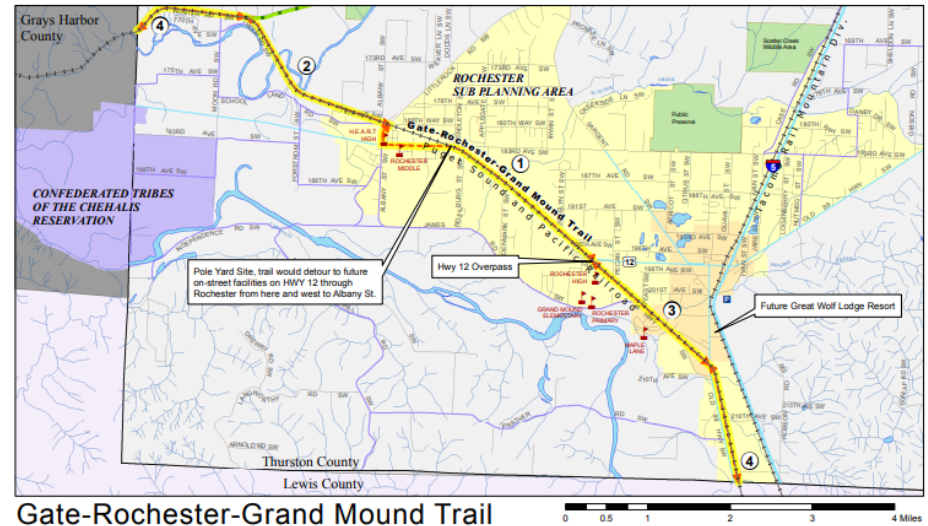
Thurston Regional Trails Plan (2007)

The Thurston Regional Trails Plan provides an overview of the trail network throughout the Thurston Region, and also outlines guidelines and recommendations for future trail planning efforts. This plan is currently in the process of being updated with an expected release date of 2023.

Interest in a trail route serving the southwest area of Thurston County was first captured in the 2007 Thurston Regional Trails Plan, which proposed a trail route parallel the Puget Sound & Pacific (PSAP) Railroad right-of-way (Figure 3). At the time, the railroad was involved in the planning process and open to exploring a trail. Since that time, however, the railroad has changed owners; evaluating this specific corridor for a trail alignment will require fresh conversations with the railroad operator.

The 2007 Thurston Regional Trails Plan calls for two trails in the greater Rochester area. The Gate-Belmore Trail is a planned shared-use trail to the north and west of the project area and would offer connections between Tumwater and the historic Gate townsite. The route follows an old rail corridor, the majority of which is owned by Thurston County.

Figure 3. 2007 Regional Trails Plan proposed Gate-Rochester-Grand Mound Trail.



Main Street Rochester (2019)

The Main Street Rochester Strategy was created to balance the dual role of US-12 as a regional highway and Rochester’s Main Street. Several Rochester area residents have expressed safety and mobility concerns in the area, challenges shared by many communities that also have a major transportation route running through their downtown core.

A community survey conducted in 2018 for the project saw 74% of respondents identify a Rochester-Grand Mound trail as a priority action. This public input was incorporated into Main Street Rochester’s Multimodal Action Plan, which identifies establishment of a shared-use trail between Rochester and Grand Mound as a priority project. The document also recommends that consideration should be given to establishing a trail hub at the community park and a connection to the planned Gate-Belmore Trail.

Rochester Subarea Plan (2020)

The Rochester Subarea Plan built on the work of Main Street Rochester and the 1996 Subarea Plan to provide a guide for future growth of the Rochester community over the next twenty years. The planning process involved significant outreach to residents to learn about their desires and vision for the community. This plan included a range of goals and actions that are supported by the addition of a trail in southwest Thurston County, which are listed below.

Multimodal Transportation (Roads, Walkability, and Bicycling)

- **Goal 1. Develop walkways, crosswalks, and bicycle routes to enhance the walkability, safety and economic development of Rochester.**
 - Action 1.3. Expand future connections to and from Rochester with county-wide multiuse trails to create “partner cities” for parallel Economic Development opportunities (Gate-Belmore and Yelm-Tenino Trails).
- **Goal 4. Work to improve safety for pedestrians, bicycles, and vehicles with the Rochester Subarea.**
 - Action 4.1. Coordinate with WSDOT to improve pedestrian and bicycle alternatives, including safety improvements, especially along US-12.
 - Action 4.2. Encourage connectivity between existing routes and future developments.
- **Goal 7. Provide transportation improvements that enhance Economic Development.**

Parks, Trails and Open Space

- **Goal 1. Coordinate an integrated network of spaces that could expand recreational opportunities for both residents and visitors and utilizes the open space amenities and natural environment.**
 - Action 1.2. As feasible, work with non-profit groups, the County, and other organizations to acquire land for open space conservation, trails network, and future parks.
- **Goal 3. Develop a more walkable community by supporting pedestrian pathways, sidewalks and trails that connect people to places.**
 - Action 3.1. Coordinate with county, state, Tribal, local organizations and residents to acquire land for trails, community connectors and open space corridors, such as the extension of the Gate-Belmore trail to Rochester and future trail expansion to Grand Mound.
 - Action 3.2. Coordinate maintenance and operation support for parks, trails and open space with other jurisdictions and supporting community groups.
 - Action 3.4. Encourage the establishment of a trails system sign program that identifies access points and destinations throughout the region.
- **Goal 4. Create bicycle routes and multiuse pathways to provide safe, secure, and efficient bicycle connections for commuter, visitor, fitness, and recreational riders.**
 - Action 4.1. Consult and coordinate with Rochester area community groups to define and prioritize local bicycle routes.
 - Action 4.2. Ensure that local bicycle routes connect with regional bicycle routes throughout the county and adjacent jurisdictions.
 - Action 4.3. Support and promote the Thurston County Trails Plan, the future Gate-Belmore and Grand Mound-Rochester trails, and any future trails to and from Rochester.

Grand Mound Subarea Plan (1996) & Grand Mound Transportation Study (2020)

Similar to the Rochester Subarea Plan, the Grand Mound Subarea Plan serves as the community's guiding document to serve the needs and desires of the residents as the community grows. The current plan in place was adopted in 1996, though the update process is ongoing now with an expected completion date of 2023.

Once complete, the subarea plan will incorporate the Grand Mound Transportation Study completed in 2020 by TRPC. The transportation study evaluated eight transportation projects that would improve safety, efficiency, sense of place, economic development, and opportunities for walking and biking within the Grand Mound community. The study proposed a nearly one-mile multi-use trail within Puget Sound Energy's right-of-way, an alignment known as the Power Line Trail. The route extends from Old Hwy 99 S to 198th Way SW, shown in Figure 4 as a grey line running North to South. The route would provide both transportation and recreation opportunities for the Grand Mound Area.

This proposed trail is an example of the types of routes open for consideration and evaluation in this study and could be a potential connector to an east-west trunk route.

Figure 4. Grand Mound Transportation Study map of projects



Thurston County Parks, Open Space, and Trails Plan and Gate-Belmore Trail Connectivity Study (2020)

The Thurston County Parks, Open Space, and Trails Plan helps County consider existing and planned parks and recreational facilities to ensure that the needs of the growing population are met. The plan includes an Action Program to list and prioritize projects in relation to the goals and objectives of the community. While the list does not specifically call out a southwest county trail, the plan does include a trail that could connect to the southwest country trail, the Gate-Belmore, and support for additional bikeways in south Thurston County.

The Gate-Belmore Trail (Figure 5) is identified as the highest priority planning and development project and is under consideration in the Southwest Thurston County Trail Feasibility Study planning process as a potential connection.

The planned 14-mile trail will link a planned urban trail system from Tumwater with the south county communities of Gate and Rochester. Thurston County plans to construct, repurpose, and connect unused rail lines, shared-use pathways, and bicycle lanes into this new regional trail improve the west county corridor over the next ten years. When developed, the trail will provide access to the Black River and will run adjacent to the Glacial Heritage Preserve and Black River Natural Area just south of Littlerock. It will also provide access to other sites of interest in Thurston County, including Black River Wildlife Refuge, Mima Mounds National Natural Landmark, Capitol State Forest, Scatter Creek Wildlife Area, and the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation. The Gate to Belmore railroad line was acquired in 1996 by the county and is currently unimproved.

Figure 5. The Planned Gate-Belmore Trail Corridor.



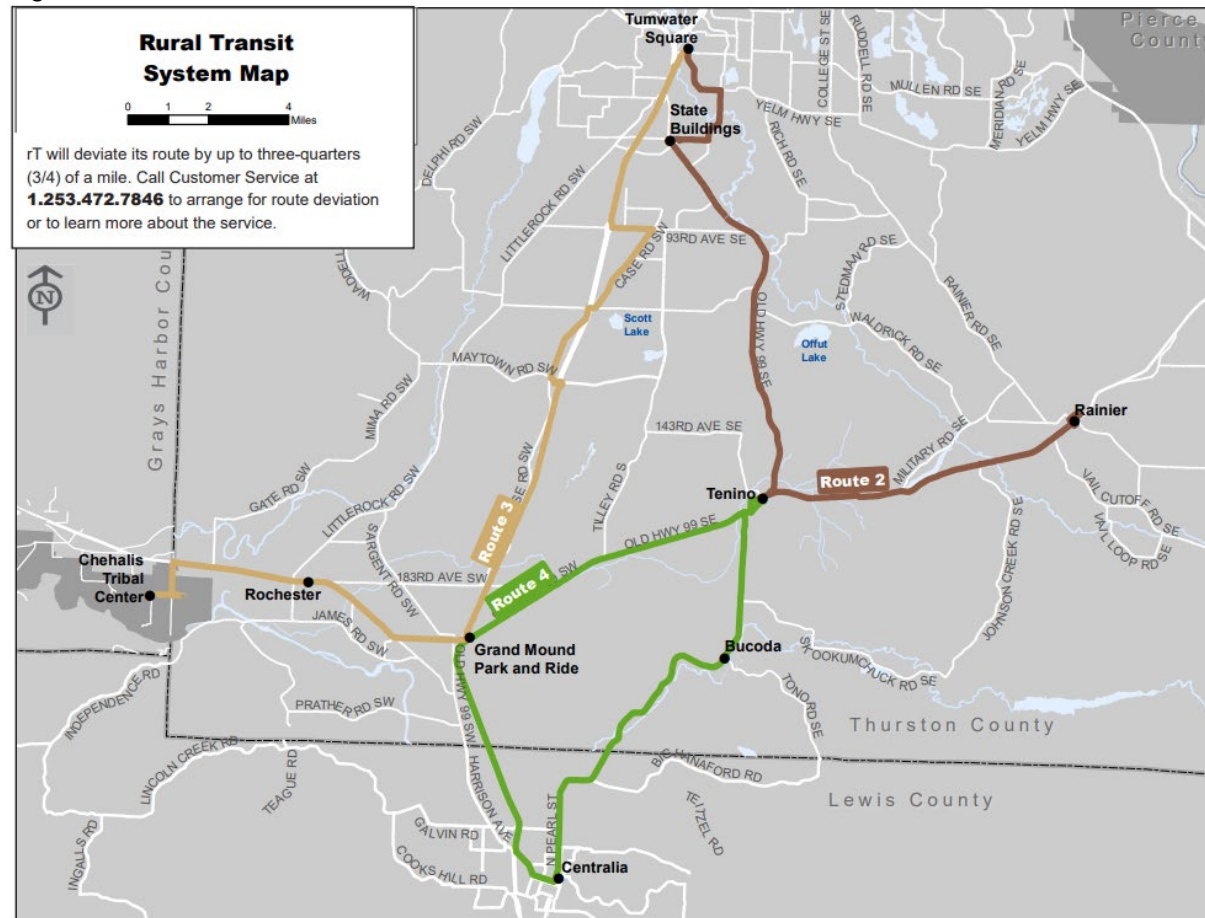
Transportation, Mobility and Safety

Transportation within Southwest Thurston County is principally served by Interstate 5, US-12, and multiple arterials and collectors. An active railroad line provides regular freight service between Centralia and Grays Harbor. The Grand Mound-Rochester area lacks active transportation facilities such as bike lanes and shared-use trails. Most travel must be fulfilled by driving personal vehicles.

Transit Service

RuralTransit, or rT, is a transit agency that serves the Grand Mound and Rochester areas with connections to Tumwater, Tenino, the Chehalis Reservation and Lucky Eagle Casino, Bucoda, Rainier, and Centralia (Figure 6). Service is planned to expand to Yelm, and begin on Saturdays, in summer 2023.

Figure 6. RuralTransit service routes.



RuralTransit connects to Intercity Transit in Thurston County, Twin Transit in Lewis County, and Grays Harbor Transit for longer trips. There are several challenges for transit users in the area. rT currently only offers weekday service between 6am-6pm and doesn't offer evening or weekend service. Many residents and visitors in the area may be unfamiliar with rT's service; most stops are unmarked and have little signage. Given the rural nature of this service, most users may need transportation to reach the bus stops as there is little housing within walking distance of the stops.

School Transportation

Rochester School District, which includes the entire study area, charters bus service for students. There is a lack of sidewalks, bike lanes, or trails that provides students direct connections between their neighborhoods and school properties in the district. rT public transportation in the study area supports connections to neighboring communities and students’ trips to school, but does not provide a service model to accommodate shorter distance trips within the community on a frequent schedule.

Motor Vehicle Traffic Volumes

The study area includes a range of road classifications with varying daily traffic volumes. I-5 and US-12 accommodate the most trips, with arterials and collector streets following behind. A trail could be located alongside any road type, though the design and separation from roadway should be influenced by the volume of motor vehicle traffic present and projected. Table 1 shows average daily trips for the most traveled routes in the Rochester and Grand Mound Areas. Maps with 2018 and 2045 forecast traffic volume estimates are shown in Appendix A.

Table 1. Estimated Annual Average Daily Trips for the Highest Volume Routes in Southwest Thurston County.

Route	Estimated Daily Trips in Each Direction	
	2018	2045* Projection
I-5	25,000	35,500
US-12	5,000	6,000
Old Highway 99	3,000	4,000
Sargent Road SW	2,000	4,200
183 rd Avenue SW	1,500	2,500
Case Road SW	1,200	1,200
Little Rock Road SW	800	1,100

**Source: TRPC Travel Demand Model*

Speed Limits

Posted speed limits on roads within the planning area vary based on their functional classification and surrounding land uses. The primary posted speeds are shown in Table 2. Routes such as US-12, Albany St SW, and James Rd SW, have lower posted speed limits in school zones (20 mph) and on approaches to developed areas greater with a greater frequency of driveways, turning movements, and pedestrian traffic.

Table 2. Posted Speed Limits for County Functionally Classified Routes in Southwest Thurston County.

County Functional Classification	Route	Posted Speed (mph)
State Highways	US-12	45 – 55
Arterials	Littlerock Rd SW	50
	Old Hwy 99 SW	40
	Sargent Rd SW	50
Major Collectors	Albany St SW	40
	James Rd SW	40
	Old Hwy 9 SW	50
	183rd Ave SW	50
	193rd Ave SW	35
Minor Collectors	Grand Mound Way SW	35
	Apricot St SW	40
	Carper Rd SW	30
	Denmark St SW	40
	173rd Ave SW	35
	201st Ave SW	35

Traffic Collision History

Between 2010 and 2021, 2566 collisions have been documented on state and local roads in the greater Grand Mound-Rochester area resulting in 30 fatalities and 839 total injuries (Figures 7 and 8). 21 collisions involved pedestrians and bicyclists. Of these 21 collisions, four resulted in pedestrian fatalities (three on US-12 and one on Old Hwy 9 SW). The remaining collisions injured eight pedestrian and nine bicyclists.

Figure 7. Total Collisions by Injury Type.

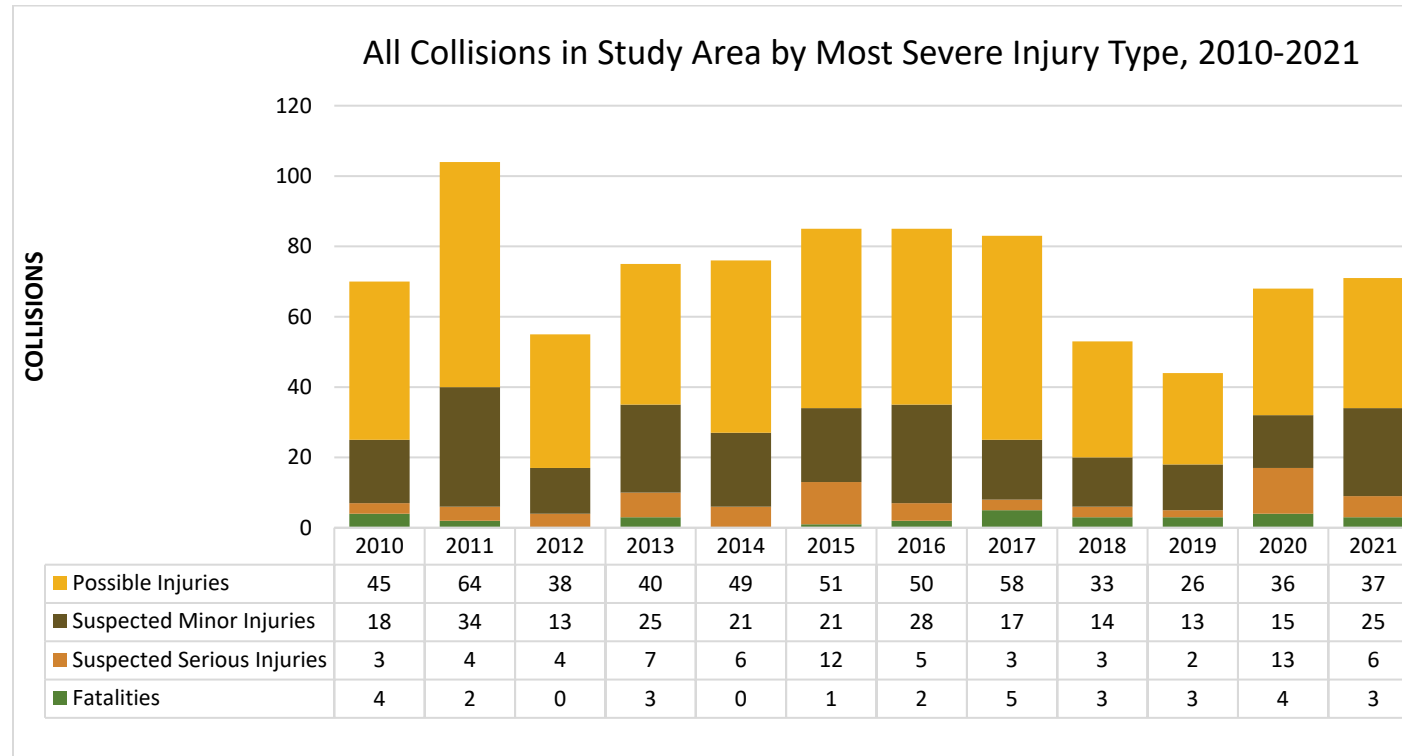
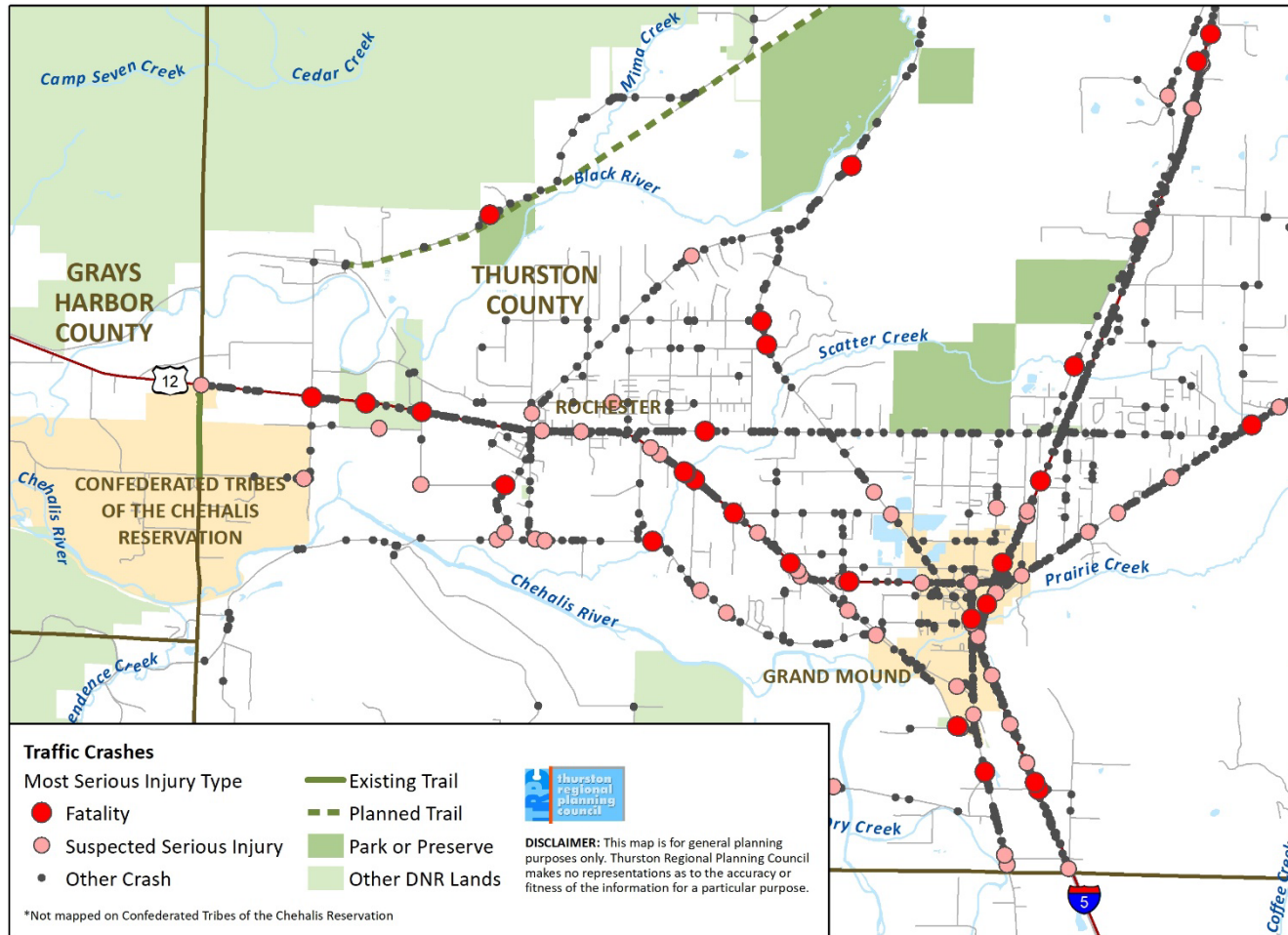


Figure 8. 2010-2021 Traffic Collision Locations and Casualties.



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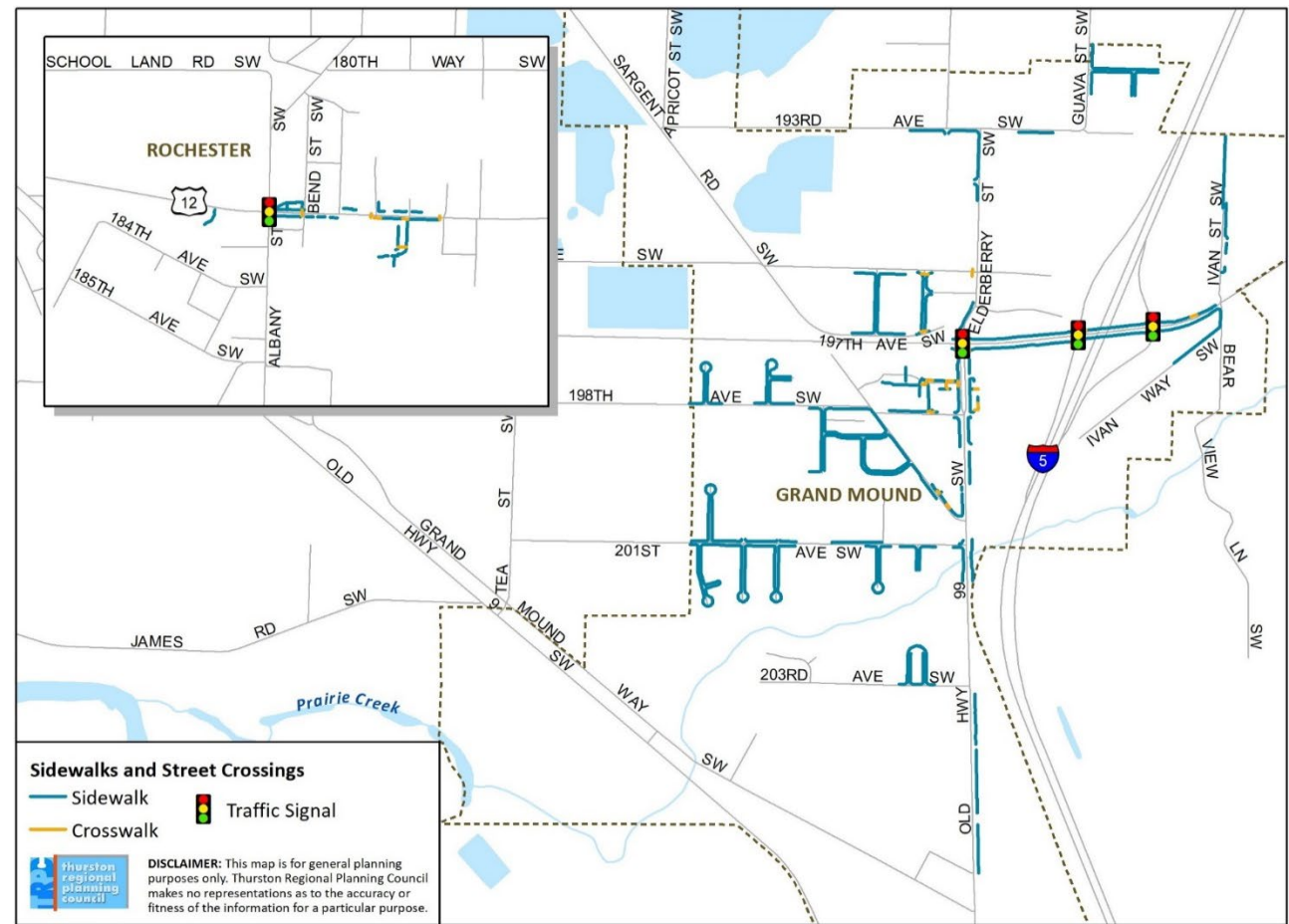
Sidewalks, Pedestrian Pathways, & Marked Crossings

Sidewalks, pedestrian pathways, and marked crossings are limited in the Chehalis-Rochester-Grand Mound area as the majority of the study area is designated rural land. Grand Mound has the greatest concentration of sidewalks due to its status as an urban growth area (UGA) where sidewalks are required. Figure 9 shows the location of sidewalks, crosswalks, and street crossings in Rochester and Grand Mound.

Bike Lanes & Multimodal Trails

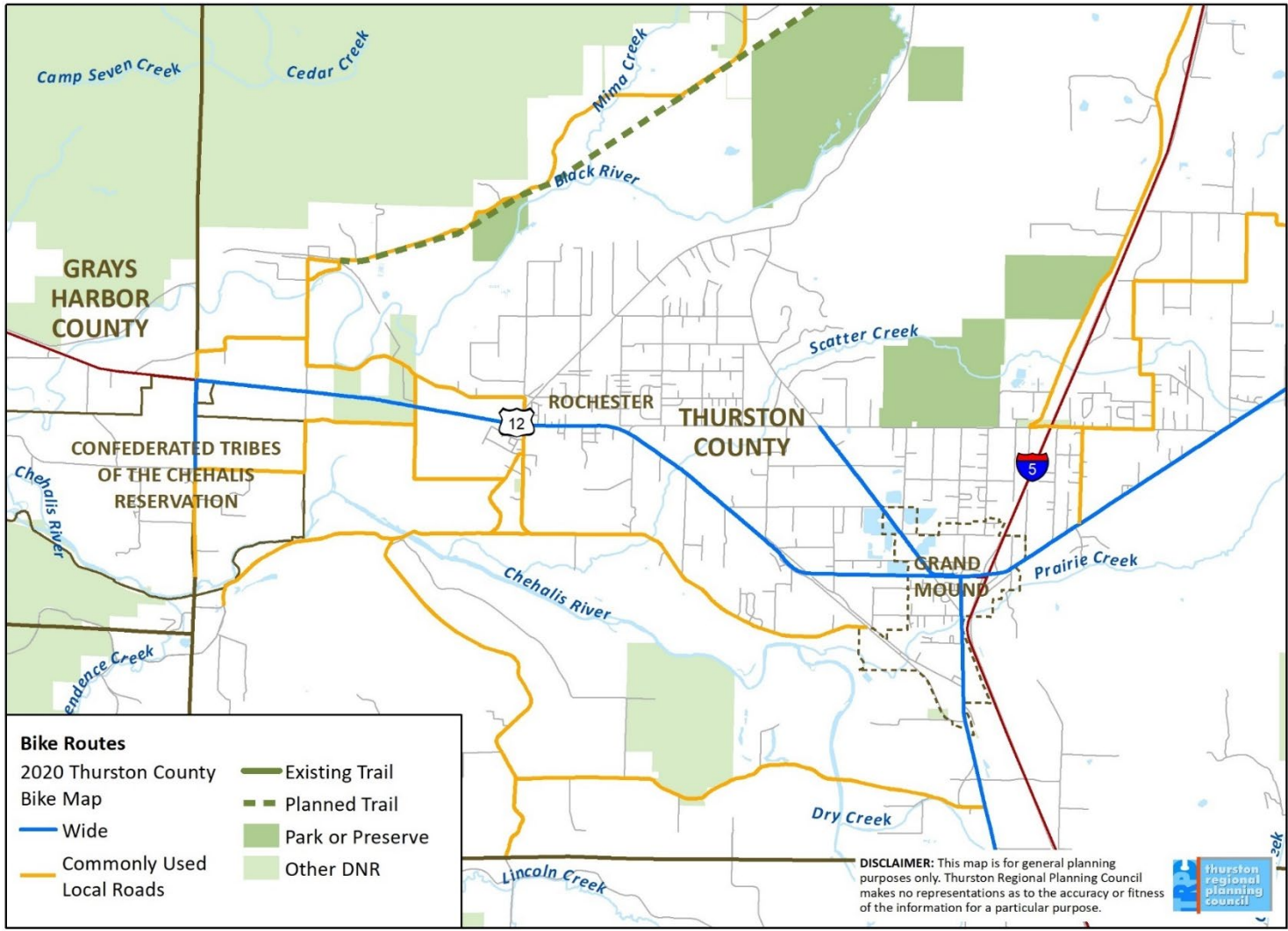
The greater Rochester/Grand Mound area contains no bike lanes or multimodal trails. Despite this, there are a number of routes in the area commonly used by bicyclists (Figure 10). US-12 and portions of Sargent Road and Old Highway 99 also offer wide shoulders but fast-moving vehicle traffic.

Figure 9. Sidewalks, crosswalks, and traffic signals in Rochester and Grand Mound.



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Figure 10. 2020 Thurston County Bike Map Routes for the Study Area.



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Existing & Planned Transportation Projects

Upcoming transportation projects in the study area will have an impact on the feasibility and constraints of a trail. The following projects are in the planning stage or beyond with Thurston County Public Works.

Table 3. Planned Thurston County Transportation Projects in the Study Area.

Project	Description	Status Project Start and End	Cost
US-12 Urban Improvements Phase 1 (Old Hwy 99 SW to W UGA Boundary)	Construct a single lane roundabout at the intersection of US-12 and Sargent Rd. Designed with the ability to expand in the future to two lanes on the east and west approaches.	Funded 2022-2023	\$3.1 million
Sargent Rd SW - US-12 to Old HWY 99 (Sargent Rd. SW Urban Upgrades)	Public Works is improving Sargent Road between US-12 and Old HWY 99 by widening the roadway, repairing the pavement, and adding safety features such as sidewalks, bike lanes and lighting. When this project is finished it will increase safety for walkers, cyclists and drivers as well as prepare for increased traffic as more homes and businesses are built in the area.	Funded 2023	\$4 million
Sargent Rd SW - US-12 to Old Hwy 99 SW (South Grand Mound UGA Improvements)	Widen and rehabilitate existing roadway, construct urban improvements such as lighting, sidewalks and bike lanes.	Funded. 2023	\$4,000,000
Old Hwy 99 at Intersections of Sargent Rd and 201st Ave	Construct a roundabout at the intersection of Old Hwy 99 and 201st Ave. Construct a right-in right-out intersection treatment at the intersection of Old Hwy 99 and Sargent Rd.	Planning and Design Phase	TBD
183rd Ave Phase 1 - (US-12 to Sargent Rd)	Widen and rehabilitate pavement, pave and widen shoulders, remove obstructions in the clear zone and replace bridge approach guardrail.	In Planning Phase	TBD
183rd Ave (US-12 to Old Hwy 99) Study	Public Works is doing a study to decide which road features would improve safety and traffic flow on this road. Work is yet to begin, and no date has been identified.		
Rochester Main Street Improvements	Public Works is building a 2 to 3 lane road with intersection improvements, bike lanes, parking, planter strips, medians and sidewalks through this section of US-12. These features create a Main Street for the businesses and residents of Rochester. Completing this project will increase safety for walkers, cyclists, and drivers and make space for emergency vehicles. Work is yet to begin, and no date has been identified.	Planned Timing TBD	TBD

Source: Thurston County Capital Improvement Program

Environmental and other Considerations

Route Barriers

The study area has several natural and manmade features that will restrict the location of a trail. US-12 runs east-west through the area, with the majority of Rochester residents on the north side, Chehalis Reservation residents on the south side, and Grand Mound residents dispersed on both sides. The highway has several pedestrian crossings, though the high volume of traffic and presence of heavy-duty vehicles on the roadway may make pedestrians feel unsafe crossing even at dedicated crosswalks. I-5 runs north-south along the east edge of the study area, with most residents and businesses located on the west side. The Grand Mound Park and Ride, which could serve as a trailhead or parking area, is located east of the interstate. The Puget Sound and Pacific (PSAP) Railroad runs along US-12 and I-5 through the study area, cutting from the northwest corner down to the southeast corner. The Chehalis River runs along the southern edge of the study area and Black River runs along the northern edge, and it is unlikely that this study will result in a trail proposal that would be hampered by the course of either of these rivers. The Black River may require a crossing to connect to the proposed Gate-Belmore Trail terminus.

Right-of-Way

Railroad

Shared-use trails are frequently constructed in corridors of former or abandoned railroad rights of way. In some communities, trails are constructed within utility corridors. Within the study area, there is no single continuous span of publicly owned right of way that could accommodate a shared-use trail facility between Grand Mound and Rochester. The Puget Sound and Pacific Railroad is privately owned by Genesee and Wyoming and spans north from Centralia through the study area and continues to the City of Elma. From Elma, the railroad forks. It continues west to Hoquiam, and continues north along the Hood Canal to Bangor (Figure 11). The line is operated by BNSF Railway and Union Pacific for freight, transloading, and port operations. Within the study area, the railroad right of way is approximately 100-feet wide. While rails with trails exist in the United States, the county would need to seek an easement or right of way from the owner if a trail were to be constructed alongside the railroad.

Roadways

Both Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and Thurston County own roadways that may have sufficient right of way ownership to accommodate an adjacent shared-use path. WSDOT owns approximately 150-feet of right of way along Highway US-12. Like the railroad, Thurston County would need to negotiate right of way or an easement from WSDOT for trail development.

Thurston County owns the most roads in the study area. In general, Thurston County owns approximately 60-foot right of way widths for most of its arterials and collectors. Siting a trail corridor within Thurston County’s existing roads right of way would not require substantive property acquisition.

Figure 11. Puget Sound and Pacific Railroad. Image courtesy of Genesee and Wyoming.



Topography and Hydrology

There are a variety of environmental conditions that may be inconducive to a trail or require specialized design features, including steep slopes, endangered species habitats, steep topography, and floodplains.

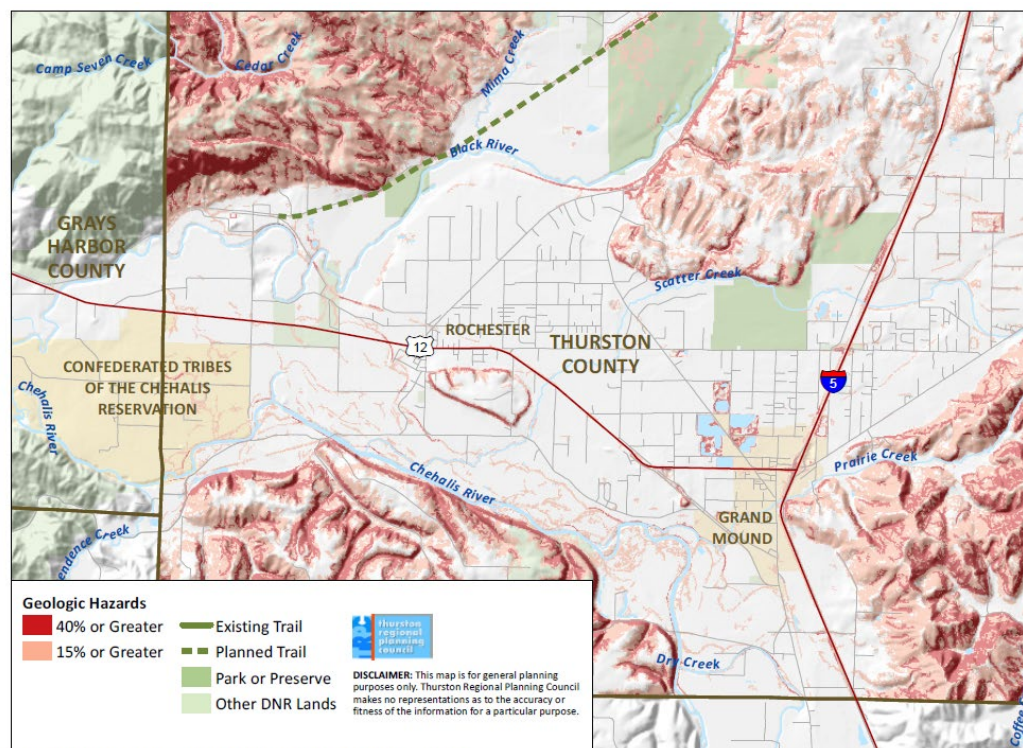
Flanked by the Chehalis River, Black River, and Capitol Forest, the majority of the area of the study area sits in the Mound Prairie. There are steep slopes surrounding the area, but the study area is relatively flat (Figure 12). The soils are well-draining, and the area is designated a critical aquifer recharge area.

The study area contains soils suitable to the Mazama Pocket Gopher, a subspecies listed as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act. Permitting for a trail will have to follow all applicable regulations.

Regulated floodplains and wetlands may restrict the location of a trail. Wetlands serve many important purposes, including ecosystem health and flood risk mitigation. The majority of wetlands in the area are located along Prairie Creek and Scatter Creek (Figure 13).

The study area is bounded on the north and south by flood zones, and the areas of US-12 between 183rd Avenue SW and 191st Avenue SW sit in the 100-year floodplain.

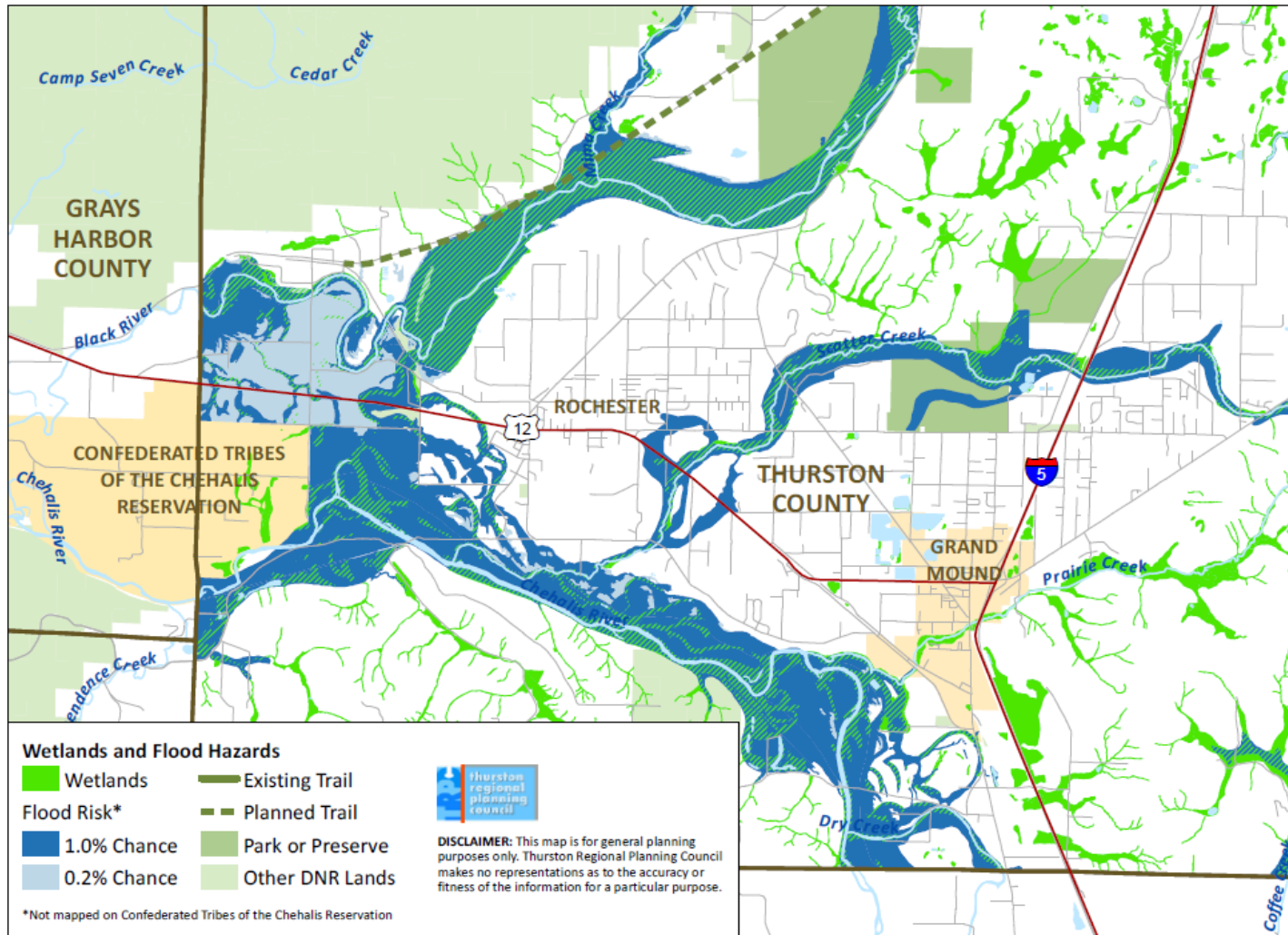
Figure 12. Steep Slopes in the Study Area



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Slopes of 40% or greater are generally to be considered at risk of landslide events.

Figure 13. Wetlands and Flood Plains Within the Study Area.

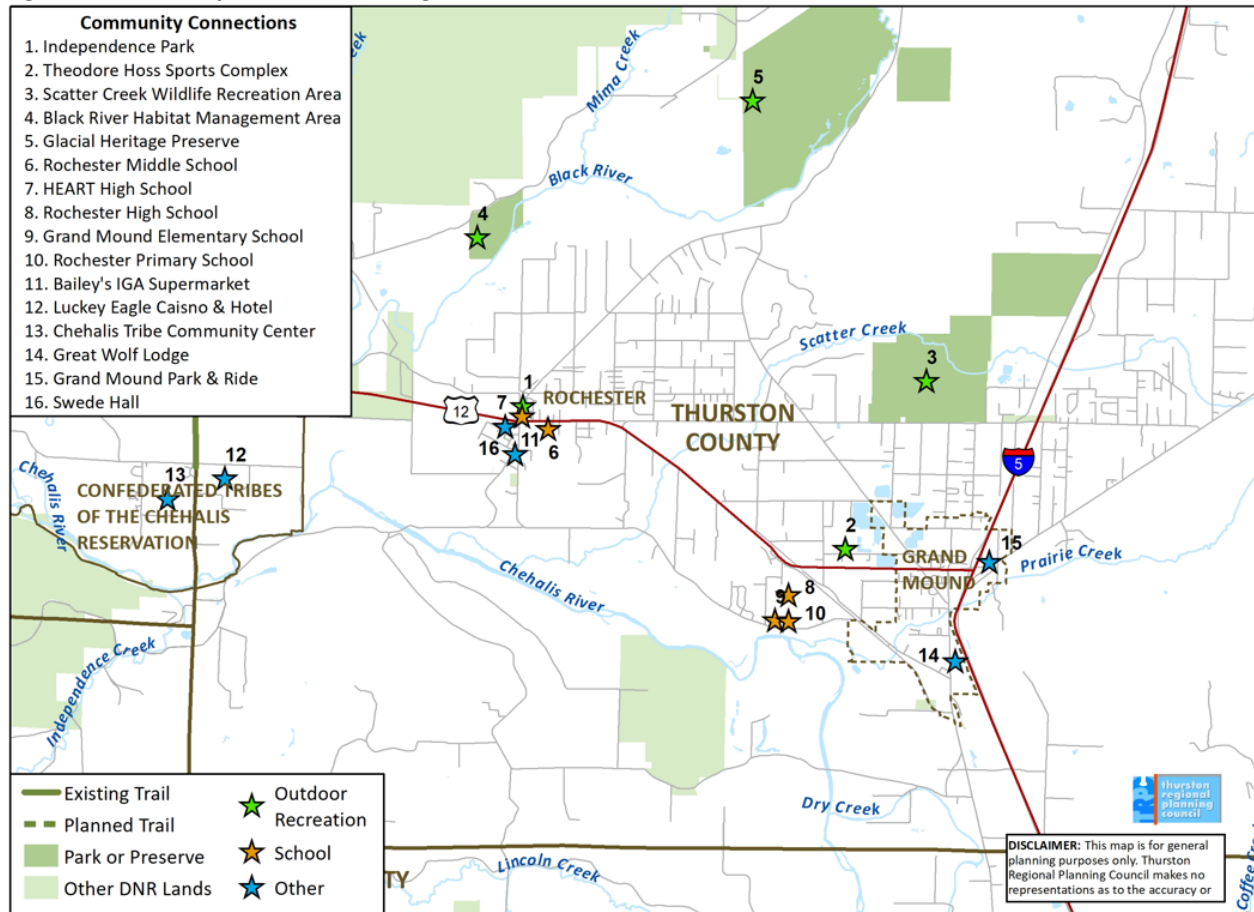


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Community Connections

There are a number of locations within and near the study area that attract residents and visitors either on a regular basis, or for special events (Figure 14). Development of a trail within walking or biking distance of these sites could provide an active transportation alternative to driving when visiting, and decrease short term-congestion and parking needs. Locating a trail near central businesses districts and other attractions would supports increased patronage from trail users.

Figure 14. Community connections in the greater Rochester - Grand Mound - Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation.



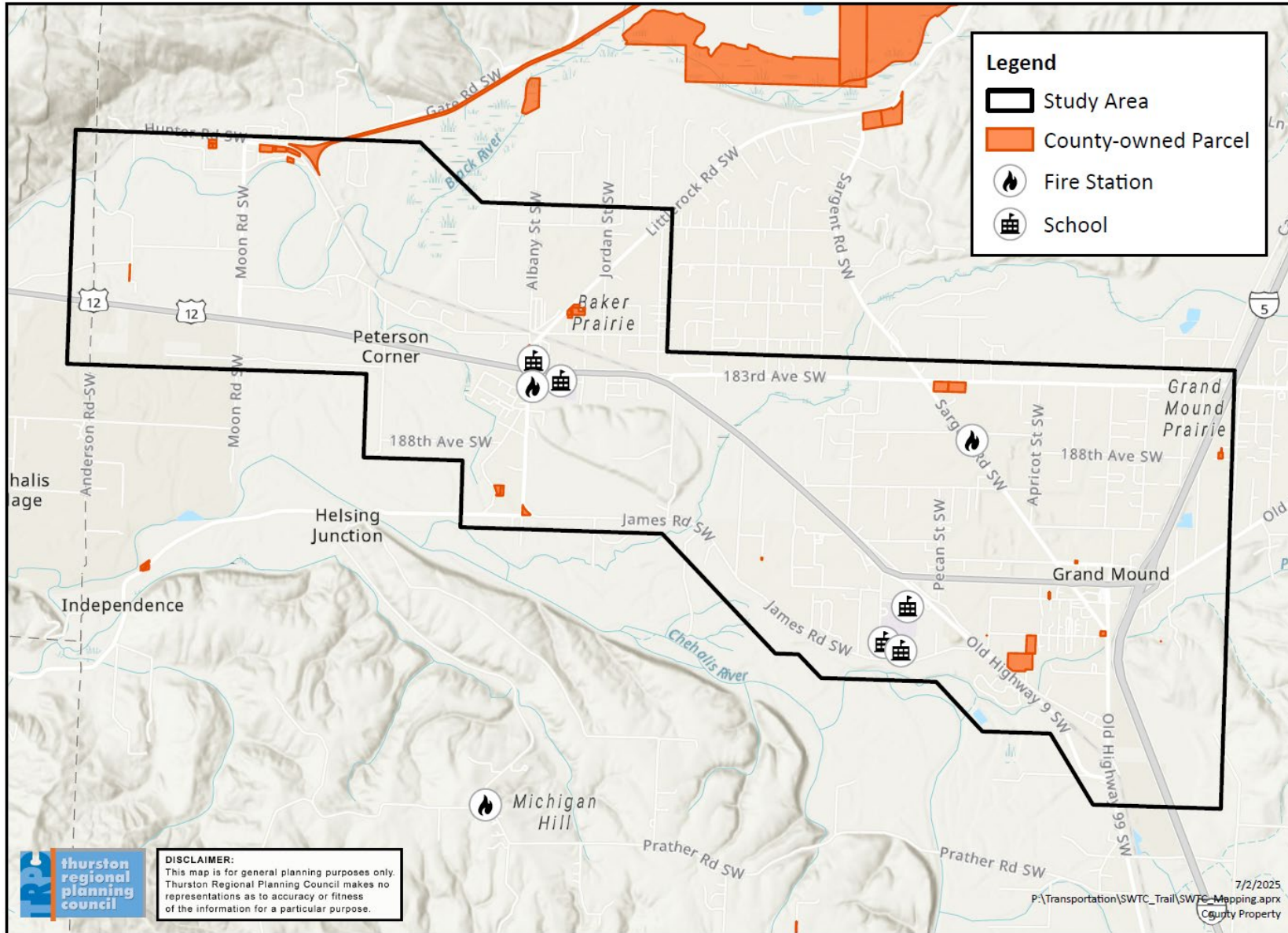
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Trailhead Needs and Benefits

Trailheads are critical access points that enhance the visibility, functionality, and usability of shared-use trail systems. For a shared-use trail, well-placed trailheads will provide essential amenities such as parking, wayfinding, rest areas, and opportunities for placemaking that support both recreational and transportation-oriented trail users. Strategically located trailheads also help disperse visitor use, minimize congestion at popular access points, and foster community ownership of the trail system through signage, landscaping, and public art.

Within the study area, Thurston County owns approximately 56 acres of land across several parcels (Figure 15). These properties offer potential opportunities for developing low-impact, cost-effective trailheads—especially where they intersect with the proposed trail corridor or serve as logical nodes for access. In addition to County-owned parcels, existing community destinations such as schools, community centers, and other public facilities could serve as valuable partners or locations for trailhead development. Leveraging these publicly owned sites may reduce costs, improve access for underserved populations, and strengthen the trail’s integration with everyday community life.

Figure 15. Thurston County properties in the greater Rochester- Grand Mound - Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation.



Public Input

Several public outreach efforts for previous projects in the study area captured the interest in a trail and led to the creation of this study. Reviewing the feedback gathered during these projects helps to understand community interests and priorities in the region.

Main Street Rochester (2019)

Main Street Rochester, finalized in 2019, developed a strategy to address the dual role US-12 serves as a regional highway and Rochester's Main Street. A community survey mailed to approximately 4,500 addresses in the Rochester area saw 43% of respondents indicate they are highly concerned about pedestrian and bicyclist safety in the study region. When asked what would benefit Rochester to improve safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and personal mobility device users, 32 percent of respondents said that the US-12 corridor would benefit most from a trail separated from the highway. Other response options included lower speed limits on US-12, sidewalks along US-12 (43 percent of respondents), and improved crossings for pedestrians. A survey conducted of Rochester Middle School students and parents found that 20 percent of students live one mile or less from school, while only 3 percent of students walk, bike, or use other active transportation modes to travel to school on most days and 6 percent use active transportation modes to travel home from school on most days. This disparity could be the result of safety concerns, before or after-school activities, or convenience.

Grand Mound Transportation Study (2020)

Community input for this project was gathered through a community survey and multiple in-person open houses. Participants were asked for their feedback on transportation, environmental, development, and land use issues influencing the area. When asked about their level of concern around various transportation issues in Grand Mound, 14 percent of respondents said they have high concern around sufficient bicycle lanes in the area and 36 percent said they have high concern around sufficient sidewalks. When given a range of options and asked which one would benefit the area's safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and mobility device users the most, respondents' top choice was building more sidewalks (42 percent) while 33 percent of respondents selected a walking/bicycling/mobility device trail separated from the highway and connected to regional trails.

Thurston County Parks, Open Space, and Trails Plan (2020)

Responding to the 2020 Thurston County Parks, Open Space, and Trails Plan, 78% of respondents selected paved walking and biking trails as their most frequently used type of recreational facility. Survey respondents also indicated the County needs more non-motorized trails, and emphasized that connectivity is important to allow users to travel and commute between primary destinations.

SW Thurston County Trail Feasibility Study Survey (2022)

Between October 2021 and January 2022, Thurston Regional Planning Council conducted a community survey in the greater Rochester-Grand Mound community about the feasibility of a trail within the community. A post card containing information about an online open

house and online survey was mailed to residents and businesses throughout the study area. 114 people participated in the online survey. An abbreviated student survey was provided to Rochester School District and received 111 responses.

Both the community and student surveys asked respondents how often they would use a shared use trail if one were constructed between Grand Mound and Rochester. Most students indicated they were unlikely to use the trail. However, one in three (31 percent) of the community survey respondents indicated they would use the trail at least once a week, and 67 percent of community respondents indicated they would use the trail once a month or more frequently. While only 73 percent of students indicated they would use the trail at least once a year or more frequently, 85 percent indicated they wanted to see a shared-use trail built in the area.

Most respondents envision they would bicycle, walk, jog, or run on a trail. Students were more interested in horseback riding or using other modes. While most respondents indicated they would use the trail for fitness or recreation purposes, about one in five respondents (21 percent) also indicated they would use the trail for transportation purposes.

Community survey respondents were asked about trail characteristics that were most important to them. Access to nature and separation from automobile traffic were the most important characteristic. A trail with a direct route was the least important characteristic.

SW Thurston County Trail Feasibility Study Route Alternatives Survey (2024)

Between June 17 and July 20, 2024, the public was invited to participate in an online open house and a companion bilingual online survey. The online open house featured an interactive story map that provided a detailed overview of all proposed routes in the study area. Each route was described comprehensively, including its alignment, a concept rendering of the built trail, cost estimate, and its evaluation criteria performance scores. The survey solicited community feedback on the significance of trails in the communities, preferences for the proposed alternative routes, and anticipated usage frequency if the trails were constructed.

Eighty-three percent of respondents rated a shared-use trail serving the area as important. The James Road Route ranked as the highest preference among five alternative alignments connecting Grand Mound to Rochester. Furthermore, the James Road Route had the highest proportion of respondents who would frequently use the route. In contrast, the US 12 Route ranked lowest for both route preference and its potential frequency of use.

From Rochester and the Confederated Tribes to the Gate Segment of the Gate-Belmore Trail, respondents had a slightly higher preference for the Moon Road Route over the Holm Road Route (37 percent vs. 30 percent).

Appendix A: 2018 and 2045 Estimated Traffic Volumes