Blue Ribbon Committee For Trails
Situational Analysis

Civic leaders in the region have advocated an off-street trails for cycling and walking for over thirty years. Early advocacy for this topic included the first bicycle plans from the 1970's and the formation of the 40-Mile Loop Land Trust in 1983. In 1992, a vision for a regional system of trails and greenways was adopted in the Metropolitan Greenspaces Master Plan that expanded the trail system to 25 cities and four counties within the Portland/Vancouver metropolitan region.

Plans now call for an 950-mile network of regional trails; approximately 194 miles are complete. Over the past fifteen years $75 million has been invested in trails. Key funding sources include federal flexible funds administered by Metro through the Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program (MTIP), federal Transportation Enhancement Funds administered by ODOT, Metro natural area bond measures for land acquisition, and Oregon State Parks funding. Over the past fifteen years trail advocates and professional trail planners have met at "Quarterly Trails Meetings" to share information and progress on the regional trail system.

In June, 2007 elected, civic and business leaders convened at the Gerding Theater in downtown Portland to launch Connecting Green, an initiative to create the world's greatest system of parks, trails and natural areas in the Portland Metropolitan Region. The Blue Ribbon Committee for Trails is one of the first initiatives to emerge from Connecting Green. Local government planners, local officials, nonprofit groups and volunteers have worked for about eight months to set the stage for the committee's work. A central task has been to develop a set of twenty trails "packages". A trails "package" is a proposed trail or set of proposed trails that achieve a particular objective. For example, the "40 Mile Loop" is a trails package that completes a trail "hub" around the region.

Upcoming Dates of Note

June 30, 2008: Rails to Trails Conservancy deadline for submitting to "2010 Campaign for Active Transportation". Every six years Congress reauthorizes the federal transportation bill. The current bill, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), was signed into law on August 10, 2005. The next federal transportation bill, nicknamed "T4", will begin to be developed when Congress convenes in January 2009.

The Rails to Trails Conservancy (RTC) plans to advocate for a $2 billion program to increase mode share for walking and cycling in 40 metropolitan areas in the US (40 cities at $50 million each). As part of this "2010 Campaign for Active Transportation" the RTC has asked cities to send their proposals by June 30 so they can begin to develop their case

to Congress. Staff at the City of Portland and Metro are working together to submit a package to the RTC by the June 30 deadline.

The Portland/Metro package will be much larger than $50 million and will be a point of departure—not be the final package—that will be presented to the region's Congressional delegation as an agenda for the T4 reauthorization. The actual request will be developed with the Blue Ribbon Committee's help, and will be complete sometime before January, 2009.

January 2009: Oregon legislative session. The committee may help develop a regional legislative agenda for the session. This could involve seeking funding through an expected transportation finance measure and/or other sources.

January 2009: Congress convenes. The committee may help develop a federal agenda to be presented to our congressional delegation for consideration as part of the reauthorization.

March 2009: MTIP Allocation for 2010 to 2013. The Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program (MTIP) has been the major source of funding for trails to date.

December, 2009: State RTP Complete. Estimated date of completion of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The RTP establishes regional transportation policies for the region. The work is managed by Metro and work will be coordinated with the work of the Blue Ribbon Committee on Trails.

November 2010: Measure 66 Reauthorization. Oregon Measure 66, which allocates 15% of lottery proceeds to parks, beaches; salmon, wildlife habitat and watershed protection, will sunset in 2014. There is some preliminary discussion about going to the ballot as early as November of 2010 to reauthorize the measure. A clear regional agenda that includes recreational trails may be important in helping get the measure reauthorized.

Issues to Be Aware Of

Trails as transportation. Regional walking and bicycling trails have often been perceived as recreation rather than transportation facilities. Off-street trails are gradually being accepted as a legitimate part of the transportation infrastructure, but the institutional split between recreation planners (park departments) and transportation planners (departments of transportation), often remains.

Geographical equity. The committee is asked to consider the interests of the entire metropolitan region. These interests vary across the region and may become an issue from time to time in the committee's work. In particular, the needs of the central city often differs from those of other parts of the region.

Relationship with other committees. The Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation (JPACT) is established in the Metro charter as responsible for recommendations to the Metro Council on federal transportation projects. Federal and state funding agendas will need to be developed in close coordination with JPACT. Another committee established by the Metro charter, The Metro Policy Advisory Committee, advises the Metro Council on important policy matters.

Trails versus other cycling and walking infrastructure. There is some discussion and debate among walking and cycling advocates about the relative costs and benefits of off-street trails versus other walking and cycling infrastructure such as bike lanes and bike boulevards. Construction of trails is costly and benefits those on long trips who prefer to be out of traffic. Construction of on-street facilities is much less expensive and benefits cyclists through neighborhoods. The Blue Ribbon Committee on Trails has been convened with a primary focus on regional trails, but the issue of other walking and cycling infrastructure will likely arise. They must be all considered together on some level as elements of a comprehensive system.

Competing interests. Trails are often built along the linear corridors formed by streams, rail lines and utility lines. This creates the potential for conflict: for example, between conservationists who are concerned about preserving wildlife habitat in a stream corridor, and trails users, who prize such corridors as among the most scenic and enjoyable experiences available.

Neighbor concerns. Some residents express concern about trails attracting crime and undesirable activity to their neighborhoods. Experience and several studies show that attitudes tend to change after trails are built and that trails usually increase the value of property in the vicinity, but initial reactions are often not positive.

Trail safety. Mixed bicycle and pedestrian use can cause safety concerns along trails especially where bicycles move at fast speeds and approach pedestrians unexpectedly. There can also be concern about crimes to trail users, particularly in unlit or remote sections of trail.