

Regional Wayfinding Sign Strategy - Thurston County Trails - 2017

Partners: Members and partnering organizations of the Thurston Thrives Community Design Action Team - City of Lacey, City of Olympia, City of Tenino, City of Tumwater, Intercity Transit, Olympia Safe Streets Campaign, Thurston County, Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC), and Woodland Trail Greenway Association

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I. Introduction

Thurston County's Regional Trails System is a set of shared use corridors that are major assets for community health, conservation, recreation, transportation and other public objectives. Trails form part of a network that, in combination with sidewalks, bike lanes, low-volume streets, and transit, supports active transportation – walking, bicycling, etc. – and therefore increased physical activity. When people can find trails, easily navigate through on-street gaps in the trail system, and locate trail facilities, they are more inclined to use them.

A. Kinds of Signage

People using trails rely upon signs for accurate and timely information on which to base their decisions along the trail. They provide important information and can promote increased use. There are several types of signs that may be used along a trail to advise or assist people using the trail system.

- Educational – This kind of sign usually appears as displays or kiosks at stopping places along trails in various locations and provides interpretation.
- Informational – These provide direct guidance on basic trail characteristics such as direction and distance to features on or near the trail. This category of trail sign is the subject of this plan, with a focus on the subset of wayfinding. These signs complement more information-rich educational signs. This can also include direction or distance information to nearby destinations.
- Regulatory – Signs that provide rules and operational requirements for using the trails, effectively indicating traffic control (includes speed, prohibited activities/uses and, stops).
- Advisory/Warning – Similar to regulatory, these signs alert users about trail conditions (e.g. upcoming intersections, sharing the trails as in the case of areas where horseback riding is allowed).
- Navigational –
 - Mileage markers
 - Street names
 - Directional signage guiding trail users through on-street gaps in the trail system.
 - Maps
 - Wayfinding to transit, rail, etc.

B. Signage as Evidence-based Practice for Increasing Levels of Physical Activity

Wayfinding signs along trails aid people using the facilities available to them and in knowing their location better should they need assistance. This can increase use, confidence of users and efficiency of our transportation system as more people are supported in choosing active transportation. Wayfinding signs on approaches to trails can help promote their use and also call attention to trails to inform motor vehicle drivers of the presence of people walking, bicycling or other active transportation nearby. By providing this information, they increase the sense of safety and security and allow people to be able to plan a particular outing, set goals for reaching specific destinations, or gauge their ability to accomplish recreation or transportation purposes by using trails. These signs are an encouragement to physical activity, recreation and healthy transportation (PBIC 2012).

II. Wayfinding Signage Current Conditions and Opportunities

A. Existing Signage

Existing wayfinding on the Chehalis Western, I-5, Woodland and Yelm to Tenino trails (the existing major regional shared use paths in Thurston County) is limited, with a couple of exceptions, to street-style (green-blade) informational signs that indicate direction and distances to main urban areas. These can be found at main trailheads and at junctions. In at least one location, the Eastside Street trailhead of the Woodland Trail in Olympia, wayfinding is provided along the adjacent street, helping people who are approaching the trail (and the I-5 Bike Path next to it) to find their way and know how far from particular locations they are before they access the trail.



City of Lacey:

The Lacey portion of the Woodland Trail has navigation through roundabouts at the Lacey Boulevard/Pacific Avenue couplet, and a "Future trail connection" sign at end of pavement (eastern terminus).

City of Olympia:

Olympia Woodland Trail at Eastside Street has street approach signs; monument signs are located on the Woodland Trail near the Boulevard St. SE and Dayton Street SE trail access points, indicating the direction to the I-5 bike path and other nearby streets.

City of Rainier:

There are a limited number of signs pointing out amenities adjacent to the trail and providing some interpretive information about the area's history.

City of Tenino:

In 2016, City of Tenino has proposed through the TRPC regional transportation funding process to construct additional wayfinding signs along its portion of the Yelm to Tenino trail.

City of Yelm:

There are a couple of green "miles to" signs in the city limits.

Thurston County:

Street-style signs, with distinctive font for the trail and referring to distances to towns on the trail system, are placed in several locations near trailheads in the southern section of the Chehalis-Western and Yelm to Tenino trails. Examples include: at the Lacey access from 45th Ave. SE, at the Fir Tree Rd. SE trailhead, and in the vicinity of the Yelm to Tenino and Chehalis Western Trail junction.

There is also regulatory and warning signage (trail connections) along these trails in the unincorporated areas of the county. Extensive street-style signage is in place at the 'Hub' junction where the Chehalis Western meets the Woodland Trail. Maps on low sign posts by the side of the trail (with 'you are here' indication of location) are posted along the section of the Chehalis Western north of 26th Ave. NE.

Mileage Markers: Woodland Trail Greenway Association installed mileage markers for the Woodland Trail (Olympia Phase 1 & 2; Lacey) in 2015 and completed the I-5 bike path in early 2016. The markers, a simple white-on-green retroreflective road sign material mounted to a 6" x 6" post, are placed every ¼ mile along these trails. These mile posts also include a white jurisdiction sign with contact info and a QR code, and the intention is for them to become the trail mileage markers for the region's whole multi-use trail system.

The County's Chehalis Western north and south sections have mileage markers dating from the completion of those segments. These are expected to be replaced, at new locations, with the style of sign being used on the Woodland and I-5 trails when the planning for the latest improvements to trail alignment in the vicinity of the BNSF main line rail crossing is finalized in 2016. Mile markers on the CWT and Yelm to Tenino trail are placed every 1/2 mile. They will be replaced by the standard simple white-on-green retroreflective road sign material used on the other trails, with standard white jurisdictional sign.



B. Opportunities for Enhancement - Recommendations

Define a style or brand that local jurisdictions will follow for new signage design, as well as standards for where and how they will be installed, would greatly improve the perception of the trail system.

If wayfinding signs are added in a haphazard or variable fashion, trail users may deem them to be unreliable. Examples of branding would be a consistent font, set of symbols and color scheme (e.g. white-on-green for street and city directions and distance; blue for other facility direction/distance information) for the wayfinding signs.

This process would be carried out into 2018 in conjunction with the Regional Trails Plan update process.

Considerations:

- Create regional logo for developing a recognizable identity for the regional trails system.

- Allow for local identifiers.
- Adhere to MUTCD, with local adaptation.
- Research national recommendations for placement of signage (i.e. frequency)

Install new signage. On-trail wayfinding signage is needed:

- To indicate nearby facilities that support people using the trails, specifically indicating direction and distance to:
 - Food
 - Parking
 - Restrooms
 - Shelter
 - Water
 - Other destinations, to be defined: include parks, recreation opportunities, libraries, schools as well as some categories of commercial enterprises (food, shopping, services)
- For navigation:
 - Through on-street gaps in the trail system
 - Identifying names of intersecting streets
 - Transit stops

This kind of wayfinding could be indicated by a symbol system and could be either standing alone (blade on metal post) or attached to mileage markers.

Adjacent-street wayfinding signage is needed...

- To indicate location and direction to the trail access and indicate possible on-trail destinations such as parks, city centers
- At major trail crossings (e.g. collector streets, overpasses of arterials/highways)

III. Action Plan

A. Short-term Activities (2016-2017)

In the first year of this effort, the Community Design Action Team of Thurston Thrives (CDAT), using Healthiest Cities & Counties Challenge seed money and Transportation Enhancement grant resources awarded to Woodland Trail Greenway Association, will work on initial implementation of this strategy. This includes the following activities:

- 1) Inventory of existing Regional Trails System signage.
- 2) Development of branding and symbology for the Thurston County Regional Trails System so that wayfinding is both easily recognizable and reliable for people using the trail.
- 3) Designing and printing wayfinding signage, and install at priority locations.

Priority locations for the placement of on-trail wayfinding signs are:

- Direction and distance to the nearest restroom, especially near the HUB intersection.
- At major trail junctions or trail/street junctions (e.g., South Bay Rd. crossing)

- On segments that approach significant destinations (major park or activity center with facilities) or where there are 'oases' in the midst of significant gaps in facilities/services (e.g., near Monarch Sculpture Park)

*Priority locations for **adjacent-street** wayfinding are:*

- At major street crossings
- From neighborhoods of higher density housing to the trails

Note: Further refinement of the priorities above for installation locations of trail signs will be determined by trail walkshed analysis 2016-2017 being conducted by CDAT and TRPC.

B. Longer-term (2017 and beyond)

Additional development and implementation of this strategy will be needed beyond the next year.

- 1) Build out system of compelling wayfinding signs for all Thurston County trails, consistent with the style discussed here.
- 2) Explore the possibility of defining particular recreational routes or loops with wayfinding signage and accompanying guide (virtual or print)
- 3) Incorporate into a more comprehensive signage plan for Thurston County Regional Trails System that makes access to and using the trails easier and promotes their availability.

IV. Sources:

PBIC, 2012. Hunting, P., M. Balluff, K. Peterson, A. Haushalter. Communities Putting Prevention to Work. Pedestrian Bicycle Information Center: Livable Communities Webinar Series. Accessed at: http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/pdf/Webinar_PBIC_LC_091912_APHA_2.pdf. 2 March 2016.

TRPC, 2007. Thurston Regional Trails Plan (especially Chapter 4: Design, Operations and Maintenance, pp. 4-2 – 4-4). Thurston Regional Planning Council.