

Managing Long Distance, Multi-Use, Urban Trails

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Long distance, multi-use, urban trails often have unique needs and challenges. They can be used for different purposes than shorter, local trails and may also have different users. A long trail may be a draw to tourists who will come to bike or hike and who will need help planning their trip and finding their way.

The following are things to consider when planning and operating a long distance trail.

Continuity of Standards - Whenever possible, maintain uniform standards. This is easiest when one agency or jurisdiction manages a long trail but when that's not possible, cooperation and communication are important. Some considerations include:

- Trail surface type. Trails that switch from paved to gravel along their length make it difficult for cyclists who might have a bike more suitable for one but not the other surface.
- Striping of paved surfaces.
- Width and grade of trail.
- Signage styles and language.
- Rules and regulations.
- Road intersection safety enhancements. This is important to both trail users and motorists, who should see the same crossing signage at all intersections with the trail.

Cooperation with local jurisdictions

- Trails can run through multiple counties, towns and cities. Trail management agencies need to work with their local jurisdictions on issues related to the trail. This can include assistance with maintenance, emergency planning and coordinating utility crossings of the trail.

Safety – There are a few important safety rules to follow on urban trails:

- Travel to the right, pass to the left.
- Give an audible warning before passing.
- Slow down when passing.
- Move off the trail when stopped.
- Pedestrians have the right of way.
- Wear a helmet.
- Stop at intersections.

Maintenance

- All trails need some level of regular maintenance for safety and convenience. This includes mowing, trimming branches along the sides, repairing potholes in the trail surface, litter control and more. The more infrastructure you have on a trail, the more maintenance is needed.

Staffing

- All trails need to be patrolled on a regular basis to look for safety hazards and maintenance needs.
- Regular maintenance should be performed using agency staff, contract labor, volunteers or some combination of the three.

Use of volunteers

- Popular trails can be a draw for volunteers. They can help with:
 - Special projects such as tree planting and trash cleanup.
 - Regular Adopt A Trail maintenance and supervision.
 - Trail Patrol.
 - Friends groups and advisory boards.

Make information available for trip planning by using websites and printed trail guides.

- Maps.
 - Maps can show cross roads, parking areas, food and drink locations, points of interest, bike shops and existing conditions which might be challenging to some trail users.
- Mileage charts.
 - An easy way to help visitors measure out a trip that's within their capability.
- Local information – what's around and beyond the trail.
 - This can include just about anything a trail user might want or need including overnight accommodations, food and drink, trail shelters and restrooms,
- Connecting trails.
 - Connecting your long distance trail makes it accessible to more people and more valuable as a transportation corridor as well. The 45 miles of the W&OD Trail links 150 miles of trail from half a dozen other trail systems in Northern Virginia.

Information Signage

- Intersecting road and trail signs.
 - Signs at roads and trails serve the purpose of helping trail users find their way on or off a trail and for emergency locating purposes.
- Town and county border signs.
 - These help in knowing where you are on a trail and for emergencies.
- Local amenities: Bike Shops, Restaurants, Playgrounds, Historic Sites, and Shopping Districts.
- Trail rules and safety tips.

Access

- Provide connector trails to neighborhoods, local parks, stores, and grade separated roads or your trail users will make their own trails.
- Provide parking lots or nearby parking information to keep neighboring communities and private property from being overrun with trail user cars.

Amenities and Fun – Trail users often want or need something from a trail other than just the exercise and relaxation.

- Drinking water fountains
 - An essential of long distance trails. Through websites and printed material, encourage trail users to bring their own water but most will need a way to replenish their supply, particularly on a hot day.
- Restrooms
 - Another essential amenity. In towns along a trail, public buildings and businesses will usually allow trail users to use their facilities. In more rural areas, restrooms can

be rented portable toilets, composting toilets or pump and haul pre-fab facilities. This will usually depend upon local ordinances.

- Shelters, Benches and Bike Racks
 - Can be simple structures providing shelter from rain and sun and someplace to rest. Opportunities for donations or volunteer projects.
- Playgrounds
 - Parents with children look for things to do when on the trail. Playgrounds are a great way to break up a long trip on a trail and provide exercise for young children who are often riding a tag along bike or in a trailer.
- Interesting and unique local features.
 - Most trails have some feature that can draw trail users. The feature can be fall colors; spring flowering trees...even a local industrial site. On the W&OD Trail in Loudoun County, an adjacent stone quarry built an overlook off the trail to the edge of their 200-foot deep pit so trail users could watch the operation at work.
- Natural and Historical Interpretation
 - Most trails, especially rail trails, have something historically significant about them or the area they pass through. Trails also usually offer a variety of natural environments for users to experience. Interpreting these things through trailside displays creates interesting diversions.
- Planet Walks
 - This is increasingly popular along trails, which are perfectly suited to host scale displays of the universe. These usually have an educational component and are valuable teaching tools for local schools.

Emergency Planning – Police, Fire and Rescue

- Provide police, fire and rescue with maps of the trail, locations of access points, lists of landmarks that can be referenced and warnings of areas that are inaccessible for large vehicles.

Budget and Funding

- Trail construction can cost \$50 or more per foot depending on the trail surface and other considerations such as bridges, culverts and grading.
- Maintenance and operating costs can vary widely depending on the level of care chosen.

Environmental Management

- Environmental management is a more recent concern as invasive plant species thrive along trail corridors. Removal of these species can be an expensive and time-consuming task but can sometimes be accomplished with volunteer groups.

Dealing with “Non-Trail” uses

- Most common in more urban areas, many trail management agencies must deal with “Non-Trail” uses. This can include utilities, new development and new roads. Trail agencies should have an encroachment policy in place to protect their facilities to the extent their property or easement rights allow.