

Vision for Sound to Olympics Trail

Frequently Asked Questions

The Sound to Olympics Trail has been in the Bainbridge Island and Kitsap County plans for several years, but many people lack knowledge about the plans for the trail and its potential benefits to the island community. This fact sheet is intended to answer several questions that keep coming up about the trail.

What is the Sound to Olympics Trail? Where will it go on Bainbridge?

The Sound to Olympics Trail is envisioned as a regional trail system that will connect the Bainbridge ferry terminal with the Olympic Peninsula. On Bainbridge, it will generally follow the Highway 305 right-of-way for the seven miles from the ferry terminal to Agate Pass Bridge. It is a shared-use path, meaning it is intended to be shared by people biking, walking, running, skating and pushing strollers, as well as people in wheelchairs and using other assistive devices, moving in both directions.

Who is the trail intended for? Won't it mainly serve people who live off the island?

This is one of the biggest misperceptions about the trail. The answer to the first question is that it's quite literally for **everyone**. We anticipate that the trail when completed will serve a very wide range of users walking and biking for a range of purposes, and that the vast majority of the users will be island residents. Examples of potential users and use cases include the following:

- Island families out for a leisurely bike ride on the weekend
- People who live near the trail walking their dogs
- Bike commuters getting to and from the ferry
- Runners looking for a long, contiguous facility separated from car traffic
- People who like to bike 10-15 miles but prefer not to bike on roads next to cars
- People traveling to Sakai Park, Meigs Park or Manzanita Park for some time connecting with nature
- People traveling to the Farmers' Market on a Saturday morning
- Elderly people looking for a safe place with a smooth surface to walk for exercise
- People visiting the island to camp at a park or explore the Bloedel Reserve
- People doing a multi-day bike tour to the Olympic Peninsula

Why does the trail have to be so wide? I've seen bike trails in other places that aren't so wide, and they work just fine.

The STO Trail is not just a bike path. It's intended to be used by various different types of users going in both directions. The widely accepted [design standard](#) for shared-use paths of this kind calls for a minimum width of 10 feet, with greater width in areas expected to see particularly heavy use; trail width can be dropped to 8 feet for short distances where physical constraints exist or where use is expected to be light.

I've heard that the trail is so wide because it's funded with grant money from the federal government. Is that correct?

No, that's not correct. Regardless of funding source, the accepted design standard for shared-use paths of this kind calls for a 10-foot minimum width. In addition, a trail built within the State highway right-of-

way must meet State requirements for a shared facility, which require compliance with the accepted design standard. It is true that federal grant requirements include accessibility standards based on the Americans with Disabilities Act, but that standard applies more to trail steepness and surface than trail width.

Why would we want to build a trail next to the highway? Who thinks that is a good idea?

There are very good reasons to build the trail in the highway right-of way. The main ones are grade (steepness) and availability of land. The Highway 305 right-of-way follows the longest contiguous “hill-free” stretch of land on Bainbridge Island; while it’s not entirely flat, it is relatively flat compared to any other seven-mile stretch on the island. More important is the fact that the public already owns the space, and we don’t have to seek easements through private property. There is no other place on the island where building a trail of this length is possible without acquiring rights from private landowners, some of whom might not be willing to voluntarily provide a trail easement. These are the same reasons trails of this kind are often built in abandoned railway rights-of-way, but we don’t have that option on Bainbridge. Other highly-successful shared-use paths have been built along highways in other places.

I saw what happened with the first section of the trail, and I’m worried about impacts to the trees along the highway. Won’t building the trail change the character of the highway corridor?

We are very aware of the need to minimize impacts on trees and vegetation as the trail is extended to the north. The main reason for the visual impacts at the beginning of the trail is that the steep slopes there required significant regrading to accommodate the trail. That issue will not exist along most of the intended course of the trail. While some trees will need to be removed to build the trail, we will adjust the route to minimize impacts as much as possible, and will continue to plant more trees than are removed. Most areas along the route have a significant planting buffer so that trees and other vegetation will remain in areas where the trail is built, often on both sides of the trail. In addition, we can plan for future construction of the trail by planting additional trees and native plants now in anticipation of future trail construction, further minimizing the near-term visual impacts of construction.

Why would the City spend money on the STO Trail when we have other more pressing needs to address safety for walking and biking on the island?

This is an important question. It is true that there are pressing needs to improve conditions for walking and biking along many island roads, and addressing those gaps should be a top priority. And it is also true that the STO Trail is part of a regional trail system that can attract grant money for which many local projects would not be eligible. For that reason, the City intends to rely almost entirely on grant programs having a 13.5% City match for construction of the STO Trail, at least until other major local safety priorities have been adequately addressed.

How can we justify spending so much money on the trail when so few people are using it?

Only a very small portion of the trail has been built at this point. The utility of the trail will continue to grow as it is extended to the north and pathways and other facilities for walking and biking are completed to connect it to residential areas, commercial areas and parks along its route. Evaluating the use of the trail at this point is premature; it’s like evaluating the use of a subway system when only two stations have been completed. We need to envision what the trail will be like when it is completed and

connected to the residential areas and destinations along its route. Once the trail becomes part of a connected network of safe facilities for walking and biking across the island, it will be heavily utilized.

Why do we need a separated trail along the highway when we already have decent shoulders along most of the highway where people can ride?

Very few people feel safe or comfortable riding bikes along the highway next to cars traveling at 50-60 miles-per-hour. Several people have been very seriously injured or killed riding bikes along the highway on Bainbridge or in Poulsbo when they were struck by vehicles. Most people would choose a safer option to travel in the vicinity of the highway if it existed.