

The Interurban Trail

by Eris L. Donner, SR/WA

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In the early 1970's Puget Sound Power & Light Company began participation in the planning and development of a multi-use recreational trail stretching through the Green River Valley south of Seattle, along the route of a 100 foot wide transmission line corridor owned in fee by the utility. Today this multi-use recreational facility, the Interurban Trail, is utilized by joggers, hikers

and cyclists, many of whom have contributed toward planning decisions related to trail development and use. The success of the trail refutes the view held by many parkland experts that recreational use is not compatible with electrical power line use.

The name "Interurban Trail" is directly related to the historical background of the right of way,

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which was once utilized by a successful and colorful electric railway that ran between Seattle and Tacoma. It originated in 1901 as the Seattle-Tacoma Interurban Railway until purchased by the Seattle Electric Company, and later by the Puget Sound Electric Railway. The railway carried both passengers and freight, operating successfully until the 1920's and the arrival of the automobile, at which time it lost popularity and declared bankruptcy in 1928. The railroad's right of way was subsequently purchased by Puget Sound Power & Light Company for power line use.

The idea of a multi-use trail utilizing the 100 foot right of way was an ambitious project. The trail would begin at Fort Dent, in Tukwila, then continue southward through King County and the cities of Renton, Kent, Auburn, Algonia and Pacific to the Pierce County line. Agreements, funding, community involvement, public relations, user characteristics, trail design and amenities all had to be considered.

On November 1, 1977, Puget Sound Power & Light Company and King County signed an agreement which granted King County recreational easement rights for the purpose of a public recreation trail over a 16 mile segment of the 100 foot wide corridor known as the Puget Sound Electric Railway Right of Way. The 25 year term of the easement, renewable at the county's option for a subsequent 25-year period,



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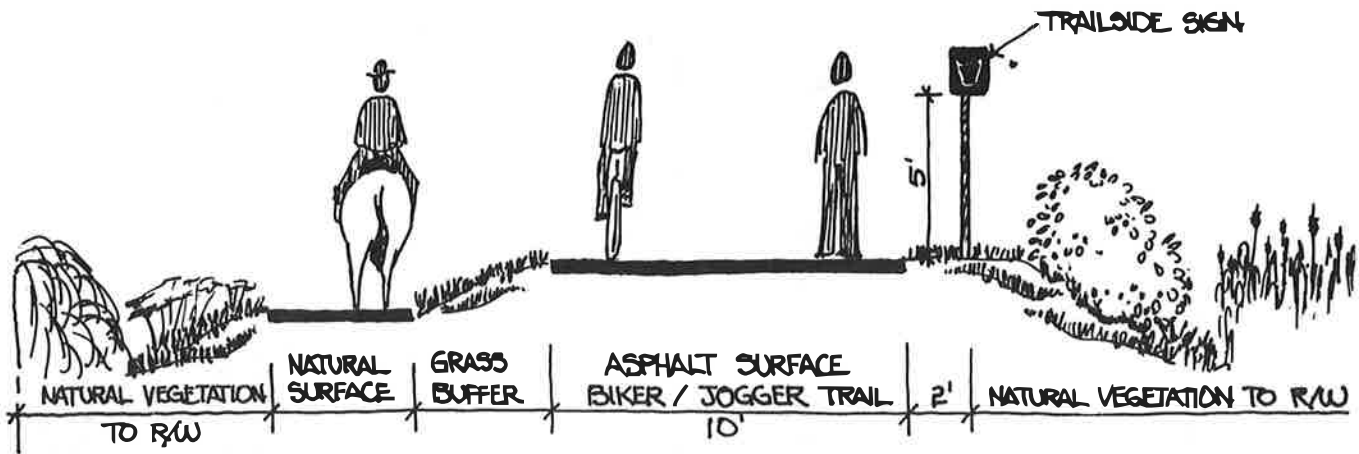
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Exhibits are from the King County Master Plan for the Interurban Trail.

TYPICAL TRAIL X SECTION

made possible the securing of state and federal matching funds.

Provisions of the agreement include stipulations that the trail be limited to non-motorized travel; that the county will not charge, collect or receive from the public a fee of any kind; that the power company shall not be deprived, because of anything contained in the agreement, of its use of the property as required by the operational demands of its system, or the demands of other utilities; and that the county hold the power company harmless from claims of liability which result from the operations of the county.

In addition to establishing the recreational easement, this agreement served as a "parent agreement" from which interlocal agreements were drafted. The Interurban Trail was viewed as the backbone of a large, extensive recreational trail system. As lead agency for the Interurban Trail, King County was responsible for the coordination and development of these interlocal agreements between involved jurisdictions and agencies, and for design, implementation and maintenance of the project. The interlocal agreements strive to assure a full commitment, by all involved jurisdictions, to the overall design, improvement and maintenance of the trail. Parties to the interlocal agreements were requested to endorse plans, specifications and estimates for the first phase of construction.

Phase I is now completed (6½ miles are paved), using funds totaling \$402,000 from the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Bicycle Demonstration Program and from community block grants. In an effort to help bikeway projects of national interest, and promote bicycling as a safe and viable alternative mode of transportation for commuting as well as recreational use, the Bicycle Demonstration Program (part of the 1974 Federal-Aid Highway Program) made federal funds available for grants. On a one-time basis, for which 495 projects competed, only 41 projects received funding with the Interurban Trail receiving the third largest award.

Phase II has been designed, and two miles of additional paving will be installed in 1983, but lack of funding has postponed completion of this phase.

Even though portions of the Interurban Trail are not complete, alternate connection routes make the entire route available for present use. The trail user has the opportunity to experience a wide variety of urban and rural landscape on his North/South trip from the Tukwila area down through the cities of Renton, Kent, Auburn, Algona and Pacific. Parts of the trail pass through areas screened by trees and dense brush, which create suitable habitat for many birds and small animals.

The design of information shelters and trail signs is influenced by the

historical aspect of the electric railway era.

Planted vegetation, limited to a mature height of 15 feet due to overhead power lines, emphasizes edible fruit, nut-bearing trees and berry vines.

Points of scenic interest include views of majestic Mt. Rainier, broad expanses of planted fields and pasture lands, as well as numerous industrial complexes and small cities. It should not be overlooked that the trail also offers an excellent facility for commuting by non-motorized means.

The success of any project is dependent upon its acceptance and use by the communities in which it is located. During the planning of the trail, every effort was made to develop communication between the jurisdictions involved and anticipated users of the trail as well as community members adjacent to the trail. Numerous public meetings were held to provide an opportunity for input from all citizens. Cyclists, joggers and horseback riders contributed toward design decisions related to trail development and use.

King County and Puget Sound Power & Light Company have enlisted bicycle clubs, civic organizations, businesses and the news media for assistance in a cooperative program to provide a public awareness of the trail and its amenities. Use of the trail is expected to continue to grow as a result of this

photo by Charles M. Nishida, Puget Power.



collective effort.

As a private utility, Puget Sound has always been under pressure to provide recreational facilities for the public it serves. Although no real tax benefits are accrued through this project, the community goodwill that is promoted through the use of the Trail is substantial. Recreational facilities placed within our own corridor also eliminates the need to set aside other company land holdings to be used only as recreational facilities. Multiple use of the right-of-way is achieved in a positive, community supported facility.

In a survey of trail use, it was found that 65% of those using the trail are cyclists, 19% are walkers, 15% are joggers, and the rest use the trail for horseback riding and rollerskating, etc. During the week, seven out of ten users are men who have careers as professionals or skilled laborers. 37% of the bicyclists are using the Trail as a transportation corridor to work, another 57% for recreational purposes, while 6% use the trail to get to shops or schools. Recreational use increases to 83% on the weekends.

The Interurban Trail is a success that will grow with time and available dollars. As more cities within King County develop their own trail systems connected to the Interurban Trail, King County residents will have an urban recreational system they can be proud of, conceived and promoted by Puget Sound Power and Light Company.



The Way to Go: The Benefits of Quality Design in Transportation April 1983

Description: This 127-page report is a collection of case studies reviewing attempts to encourage quality design in the construction and rehabilitation of transportation projects and facilities. They range in scope from relatively inexpensive programs like the painted "Gus Bus" in Grand Rapids and the approachways program in Baltimore to large-scale projects like the design of Montreal's METRO and the upgrading of the Northeast Corridor rail lines. Chapters cover the role of design factors in promoting long-term investment, commercial revitalization, and economic development, as well as encouraging tourism, increasing transit ridership, and enhancing pedestrian circulation. The report is heavily illustrated, and includes cost data on the approaches discussed. It should be of special use to urban planners, and the staffs of top-level officials faced with decisions on long-term transportation choices.

Availability: Single copies of this document are available to state and local officials at no charge. Send a self-addressed mailing label to the Technology Sharing Program (I-30D), Office of the Secretary of Transportation, Washington, D.C. 20590. Please request the report by title when ordering.