

# Multi-Use Trails – White Paper



**To:** Jim Olson, *City of Ashland*

**Cc:** Project Management Team

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**Re:** Task 7.1.K White Paper: "Multi-Use Trails" - DRAFT

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## Direction to the Planning Commission and Transportation Commission

Five sets of white papers are being produced to present information on tools, opportunities, and potential strategies that could help Ashland become a nationwide leader as a green transportation community. Each white paper will present general information regarding a topic and then provide ideas on where and how that tool, strategy, and/or policy could be used within Ashland.

You will have the opportunity to review the content of each white paper and share your thoughts, concerns, questions, and ideas in a joint Planning Commission/Transportation Commission meeting. Based on discussions at the meeting, the material in the white paper will be: 1) Revised and incorporated into the alternatives analysis for the draft TSP; or 2) Eliminated from consideration and excluded from the alternatives analysis. The overall intent of the white paper series is to explore opportunities and discuss the many possibilities for Ashland.

## Introduction

Multi-use trails are facilities separated from the roadway for use by cyclists, pedestrians, skaters, runners, and others. The definition of a multi-use trail can vary by municipality, but generally includes any trail paved or unpaved that can be used by multiple activities. These facilities are often viewed as recreational, but they can also be important corridors for utilitarian (work, shopping, or other functional) trips. The term shared-use path is associated multi-use trails that have paved or hard surfaces and sufficient width to allow pedestrians, cyclists, and other users the ability to use the trail.

Shared-use paths can provide a desirable facility particularly for pedestrians, novice riders, recreational trips, and cyclists of all skill levels preferring separation from traffic. They are important assets for a community, encouraging healthy and active lifestyles, promoting non-motorized transportation over longer distances, and making the area more attractive to visitors.

Studies such as the University of British Columbia's *Cycling in Cities* survey conducted in Vancouver BC have shown that off-street paths are the preferred cycling route type, particularly amongst the "interested but concerned" cycling group<sup>1</sup>. Targeting this group with an increased shared use path system has the potential to return significant increases in cycling participation.

This white paper focuses on the shared use path system and includes a review of the existing shared use path network as well as possible future shared use pathways that are elements of the 2006 *Ashland Trails Master Plan* (TMP).

## Existing Facilities

The City of Ashland has approximately 6.8 miles of shared use path (which represents approximately 23% of its bicycle network). In addition to facilities within the City, the Bear Creek Greenway is an 18.5 mile regional pathway that connects Ashland to Talent, Phoenix, Medford, and Central Point. There are also a number of recreational and natural surface trails (typically below shared-use pathway design standards) within and just outside the City boundaries.

Existing shared-use paths are described below along with a discussion on possible extensions to these systems. In general, the existing shared-use path system provides a high quality east-west connection through the northeast quadrant of the City as well as a number of recreational opportunities through Lithia Park and the Southern Oregon University campus. Extensions to the existing path network have the potential to enhance east-west connections along the northern and southern boundaries of the City.

Existing trails include:

- **The Bear Creek Greenway:** An 18.5 mile pathway that connects Ashland to Talent, Phoenix, Medford, and Central Point. Currently, the trail terminates at the Ashland Dog Park near the Nevada Street / Helman Street intersection. *Future Expansion:* the 2006 Trails Master Plan (TMP) identifies an opportunity to extend this trail further southeast to Tolman Creek, the Ashland Airport, and beyond. This extension would form the northern section of the TMP's proposed trail loop around the City of Ashland.
- **Central Bike Path:** A shared-use path running parallel to the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks between Tolman Creek Road and 6<sup>th</sup> Street. The path provides an active transportation spine on the northern side of OR 99 that links up with an extensive sidewalk system and a number of north-south on-street bikeways. *Future Expansion:* of most immediate value would be to extend the Central Bike Path west to Oak Street and in the longer term, through to Main Street near Wrights Creek. Extending the pathway to the east would provide a comfortable off-street connection for future redevelopment at the Croman Mill site and further east to Tolman Creek. The trail currently crosses five at-grade intersections. These crossings are generally provided as unsignalized marked crosswalks.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cher.ubc.ca/cyclingincities/survey.html>

- **Talent Irrigation Ditch (TID):** The TID is a 17 mile meandering corridor that follows approximately 6 miles of the southern City boundary. The 2006 TMP recognized approximately 2 miles of the trail as having public easements in place and a further four miles required to connect the White's Creek corridor (see below) to Tolman Creek Road. In the long term, it is envisaged that the TID trail would connect from White's Creek in the west to Tolman Creek and Emigrant Lake at its eastern end and provide the southern section of the TMP's proposed trail loop around the City of Ashland. This trail is proposed to be "as close to multi-use [path standards] as appropriate for the location", which means a 6-10 feet wide paved trail with 2-4 feet wide crushed rock shoulders.

## Proposed Future Facilities

Future multi-use trail opportunities were identified as part of the 2006 *Ashland Trails Master Plan* (TMP). These consist of both urban and nature trail opportunities, all of which are described below and where appropriate considered in the context of their connection to the transportation system and in some cases, upgrade to shared-use pathway standards.

The plan generally calls for the creation of a loop trail system around the City of Ashland (consisting of the Bear Creek Greenway to the north, the TID Trail to the south, and future trails along Wrights Creek and Tolman Creek to the west and east). The loop would be sliced east-west with an extended Central Bike Path and north-south with several proposed trail corridors. Overall, the full plan delivers a comprehensive off-street walking and biking network that would provide essentially a grid system of local, regional, and recreational trail options.

The following trail corridors were considered in the 2006 TMP:

- **Wrights Creek:** a two-mile long corridor that would generally follow the western bank of the creek and connect the Bear Creek Greenway with the proposed TID Trail. This would form the western end of the proposed Ashland loop trail. Property access, bridging, and the use of on-street facilities for sections of the trail would need to be considered in a more detailed feasibility study. The trail was proposed in the 2006 TMP to be 3-feet wide surfaced with crushed rock. However, as part of the proposed trail loop, the opportunity to upgrade this to shared use pathway standards should be explored.
- **Ashland Creek:** a north-south corridor connecting the Bear Creek Greenway and Central Bike Path to existing trails within Lithia Park, this trail may provide an off-street alternative to Oak Street and Helman Street. This trail was proposed as a narrow crushed rock trail in the 2006 TMP; however, this corridor provides a central north-south connection to downtown Ashland that would be desirable particularly for cyclists coming off the Bear Creek Trail. Depending on physical, environmental, and other issues, this trail should be considered for upgrade to shared-use path standards.
- **Roca Creek:** a north-south corridor connecting the Bear Creek Greenway to the TID Trail through the Southern Oregon University campus. The proposed trail would be located within publically owned lands for most of its length and would need to treat several arterial road crossings. Similar to

the Ashland Creek corridor, this would be a good candidate for an upgraded shared-use path design standard.

- **Clay Creek and Hamilton Creek:** a combination of these drainages would be used to connect the Bear Creek Greenway to the TID Trail and Siskiyou Mountain Park entrance. The trail could form the eastern end of the proposed Ashland loop trail (as an alternative to the Tolman Creek corridor). Opportunities along this corridor are constrained and might switch between Clay and Hamilton Creek and also use on-street facilities for part of the trail. The 2006 TMP proposes this trail be constructed as an 8-foot wide paved trail.
- **Tolman Creek:** a two-mile trail corridor at the eastern end of the City boundary connecting the TID Trail to the Central Bike Path and further north to OR 66. The trail would need to cross the railroad tracks, I-5, and OR 66 – and may need to come on-street along Crowson Street to make these crossings. This trail is proposed as an unpaved 10-foot wide trail.

## Application in Ashland

The existing shared use path network performs not only a recreational function, but a valuable utilitarian function capable of attracting less confident pedestrians and cyclists. The extension of the Central Bike Path, initially to Oak Street and longer term to Main Street and to the Croman Mill site (upon its redevelopment) would provide a complete east-west off-street pathway connection on the north side of OR 99.

The concept of creating a trail loop around the City of Ashland would be positive in not only providing recreational and utilitarian active transportation connections, but could also be a popular attraction for the City of Ashland linking with regional corridors such as the Bear Creek Greenway. In fact, an extension of the Bear Creek Greenway would provide the northern extent of the loop with upgrade of the Talent Irrigation Ditch (TID) Trail forming the southern extent.

Currently, the shared-use path system is deficient in providing north-south connections. The potential to provide loop elements at Wrights Creek and either Clay/Hamilton Creek or Tolman Creek to complete the loops is important. However, even more important would be to provide north-south connections through downtown Ashland (possibly along the Ashland Creek Corridor) and the Southern Oregon University campus (possibly along the Roca Creek Corridor) would provide off-street alternatives to these important destinations and other destinations along these routes.

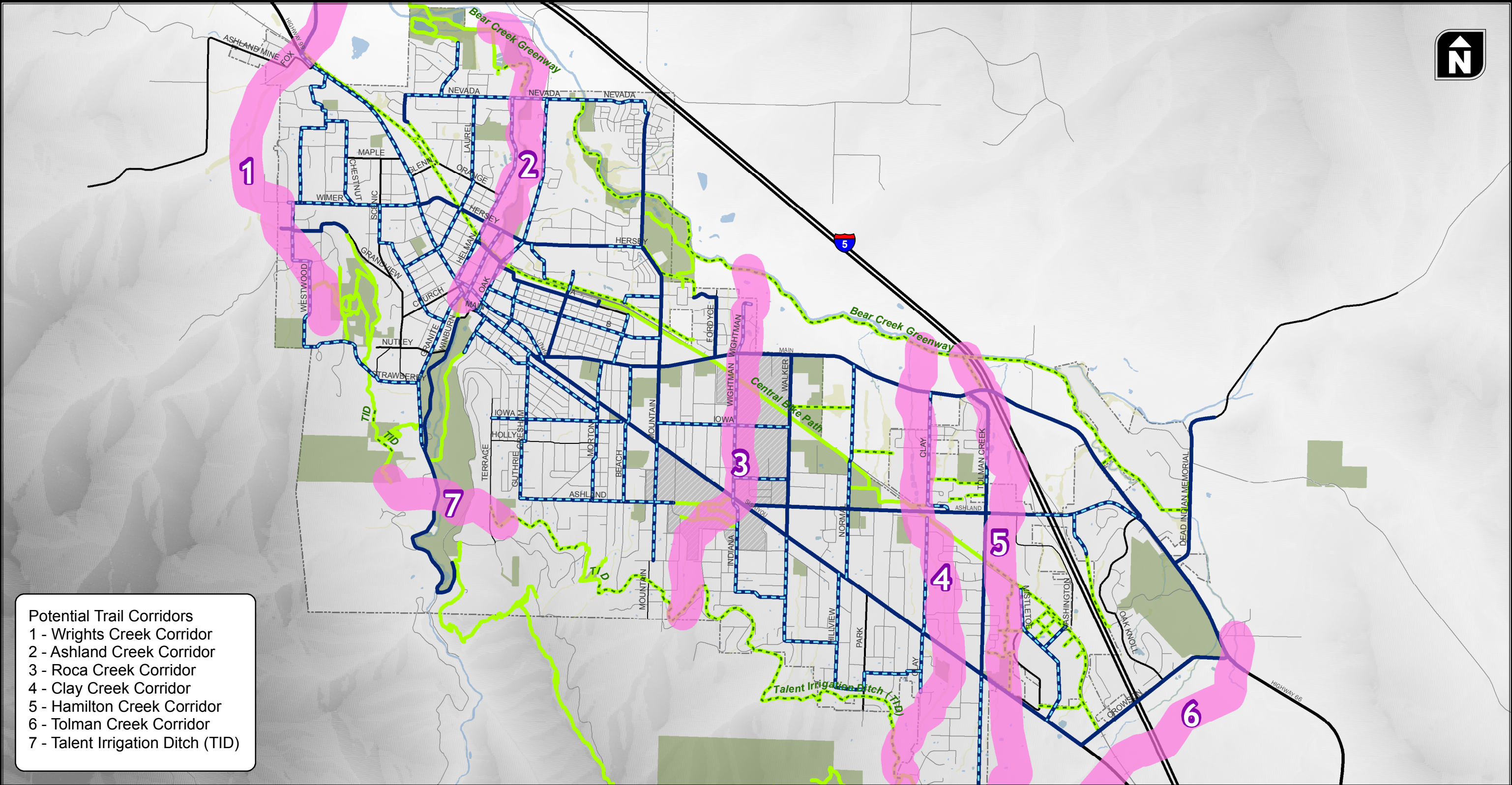
A list of possible implementation priorities is included below:

1. Explore feasibility of extending the Central Bike Path to Oak Street and Main Street.
2. Extend the Central Bike Path to Croman Mill Site (dependent upon development of site).
3. Work with other regional agencies to explore opportunities to extend the Bear Creek Greenway to Tolman Creek (and beyond).

4. Explore public access issues along TID Trail in City of Ashland boundaries. Work with other agencies and project stakeholders to explore feasibility of formalizing the TID trail within the City's boundaries and longer term from Wrights Creek to Tolman Creek.
5. Explore the feasibility of developing north-south shared use pathways along the Ashland Creek and Roca Creek corridors.
6. Explore the feasibility of developing shared use pathways or wide natural surface trails along the Wrights Creek and Clay/Hamilton/Tolman Creek corridors to complete a loop trail system around Ashland.

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- Potential Trail Corridors
- 1 - Wrights Creek Corridor
  - 2 - Ashland Creek Corridor
  - 3 - Roca Creek Corridor
  - 4 - Clay Creek Corridor
  - 5 - Hamilton Creek Corridor
  - 6 - Tolman Creek Corridor
  - 7 - Talent Irrigation Ditch (TID)

On-Street Bikeways		Off-Street Trails			
	Existing		Existing Shared Use Path		Rivers
	Proposed		Proposed Shared Use Path		Parks
			Potential Trail Corridor		Wetlands
					City Limits

# DRAFT - Existing and Proposed Off-Street Trails



Figure 1