NORTH SOUND TRANSPORTATION ALLIANCE (NSTA)

TRAILS & ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION WORKSHOP REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

Final report date: August 8, 2019

INTRODUCTION

The North Sound Transportation Alliance (NSTA) is a coalition of citizens, elected officials, and agency staff from Washington State's five northwestern-most counties: Whatcom, Skagit, San Juan, Island, and Snohomish. NSTA strives to improve ways for people to travel in the region by pursuing the following objectives: 1) Collect travel and system data to identify needs; 2) Improve regional connections and sustain and expand services; 3) Enhance mobility through sustainable, equitable, and innovative transportation solutions; 4) Inform the public about transportation services to enhance awareness of the regional transportation network.

The first goal of the **April 26, 2019 Trails & Active Transportation Workshop,** held in Mt. Vernon, Washington, was to **develop a list of active transportation goals that are prioritized and can be used to identify future project strategies.** A second goal was to subsequently identify those regional trail and active transportation projects that have the potential to be a regional connector.

During the workshop, participants worked through a five-step exercise: *from purpose to practice*:

- Purpose: Why is active transportation and trail development important for our region?
- Principles: What are the key factors to successful multi-regional trail system planning?
- Participants: Who can contribute to achieving these goals and must be included?
- Structure: How must we organize and distribute responsibility to achieve these goals?
- Practice: What projects can we accomplish to achieve these goals?

BACKGROUND

Prior to the discussion, Justin Nawrocki, WA State Department of Transportation's (WSDOT) Active Transportation Coordinator, presented a quick introduction to active transportation and trails, and Brian Wood, WSDOT's Pedestrian and Bicycle Coordinator, introduced regional trail maps and trail linkages.

After the workshop the group also were given a presentation on the Statewide Active Transportation Plan update and toolkit by Barb Chamberlain, WSDOT's Active Transportation Director.

STRUCTURE OF THE BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Participants at the workshop were broken out by tables to develop top 3-5 answers to the questions listed above. They were reported out to the group. At the end of each round participants used a smart phone app to rank their top priorities for each question. The results of this exercise are explored here.
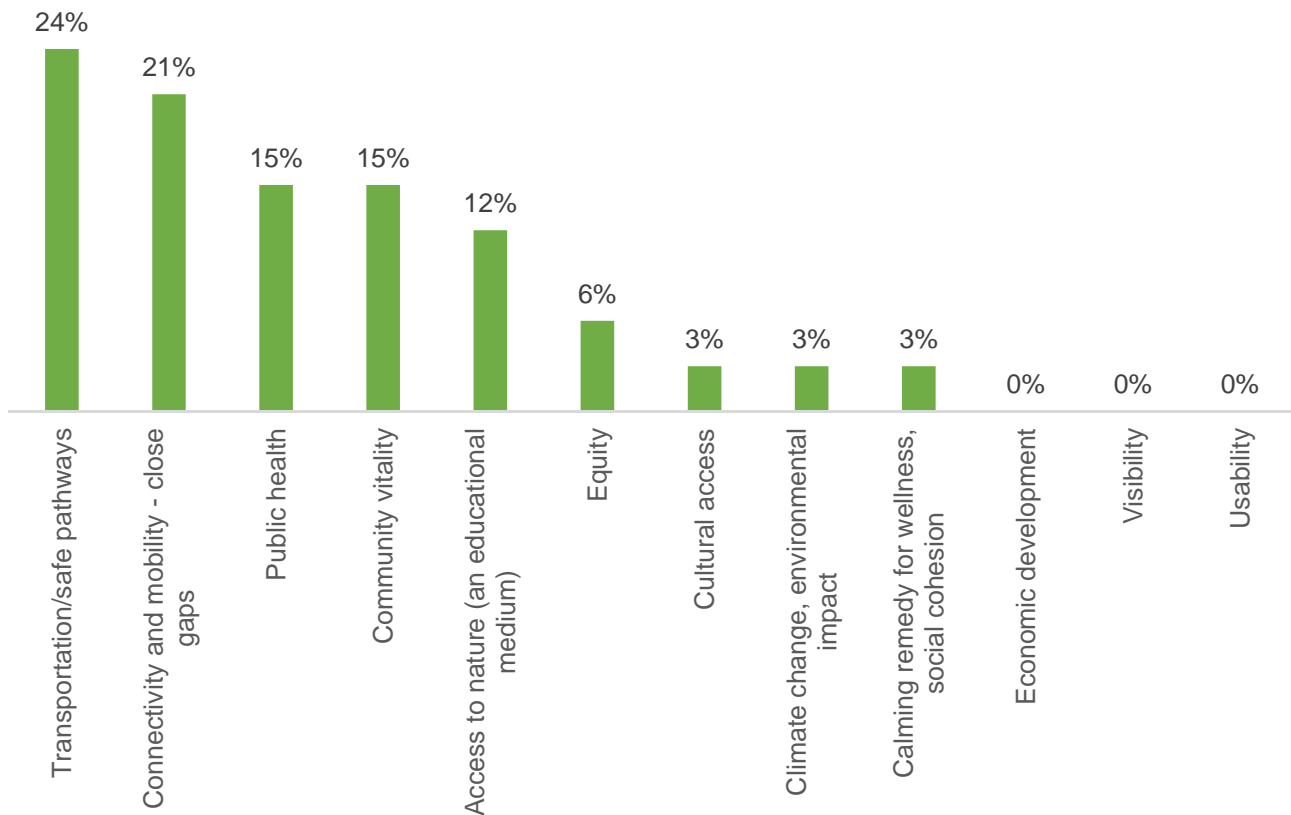
GOALS

The first task of participants at the workshop was to identify the top active transportation goals. The following list is ordered by how often the goal was prioritized by each working group.

1. Transportation & safe alternative pathways
2. Connectivity and mobility – filling in transportation gaps
3. Public health
4. Community vitality
5. Well-being/access to nature (an educational medium)
6. Equity – improving lives for vulnerable populations (age, income, disability)
7. Cultural access
8. Environmental impact and climate change
9. Calming remedy for wellness and social cohesion
10. Economic development and tourism
11. Visibility - creating a welcome community
12. Usability

Participants were asked to prioritize the list individually (not as a group effort). Results are shown below.

Prioritzed Goals for Active Transportation

Combining some of the listed goals above, the **top four active transportation goals for the NSTA region are**:

1. **Transportation** – safe and connected pathways
2. **Public health** – equitable access to nature (and cultural sites)
3. **Community vitality**
4. **Environment** – including positive climate change impacts

STAKEHOLDERS

Participants were asked to identify the key people and entities needed to complete a regional trail network that meets the goals stated above.
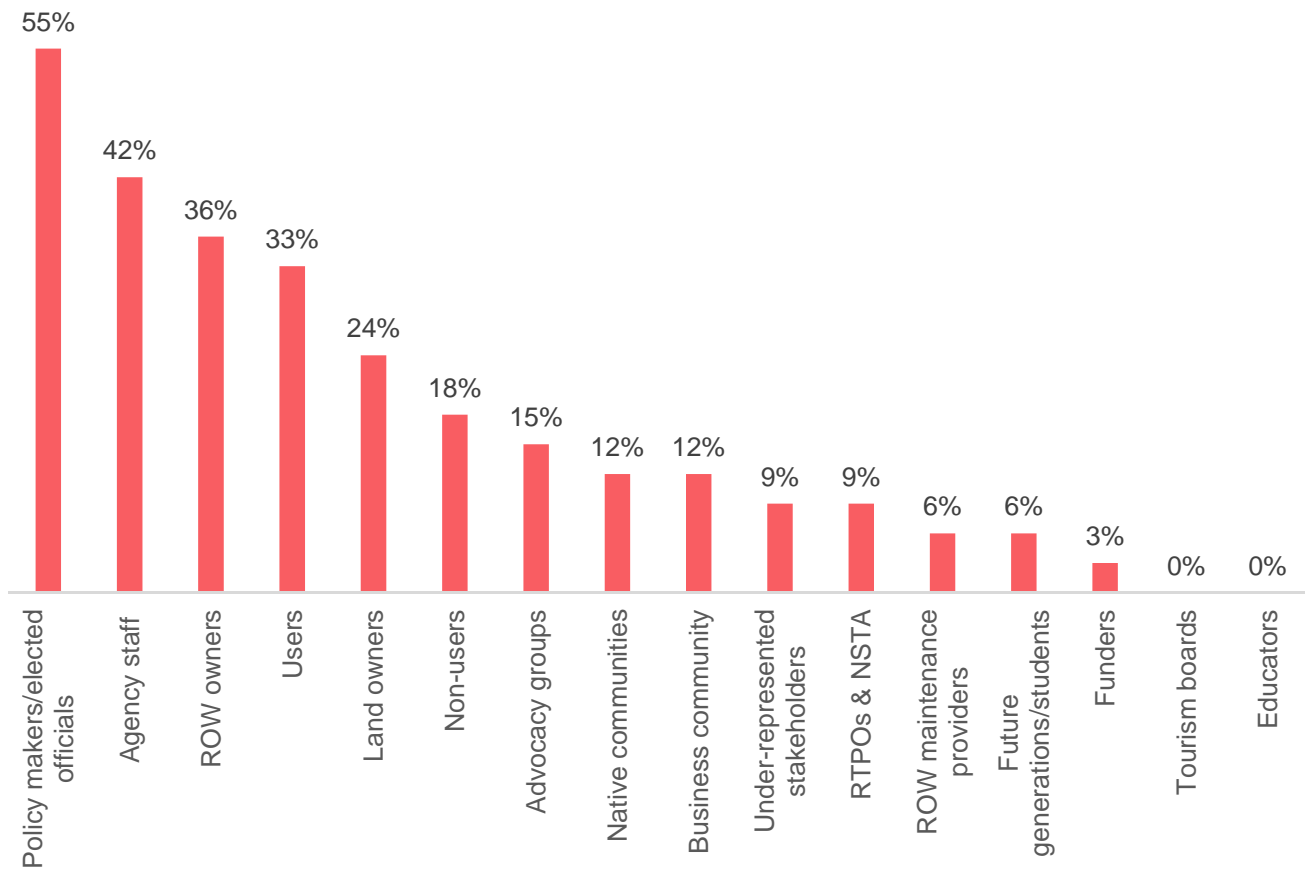
1. Policymakers/elected officials
2. Agency staff
3. ROW owners (especially with long stretches, like electrical companies)
4. Trail users
5. Landowners
6. Non-users
7. Environmental and activity advocacy groups
8. Native communities
9. Business community and developers
10. Under-represented stakeholders
11. Regional planning organizations (RTPOs, NSTA)
12. ROW maintenance providers
13. Future generations/students
14. Funders
15. Tourism organizations
16. Educators

Agency staff included:

- Public Health
- WSDOT
- RTPOs
- Counties and municipalities
- Parks departments
- Public Works
- Transit agencies
- Ports

Once again, workshop participants were asked to prioritize their top stakeholder for the purposes of achieving the identified active transportation goals. Results are shown below.

Key stakeholders

Given the responses and priorities listed above, the following five are the key stakeholder groups for advancing regional active transportation goals:

1. Policymakers/elected officials
2. Agency and jurisdictional staff
3. ROW and landowners
4. Environmental and activity advocacy groups
5. Trail users

FACTORS FOR REGIONAL TRAIL SUCCESSES

Participants in the workshop were asked to identify key principles that defined a successful trail system development project. The scope of the question was on *regional* trail planning across *multiple* jurisdictions and involving *numerous* stakeholders.
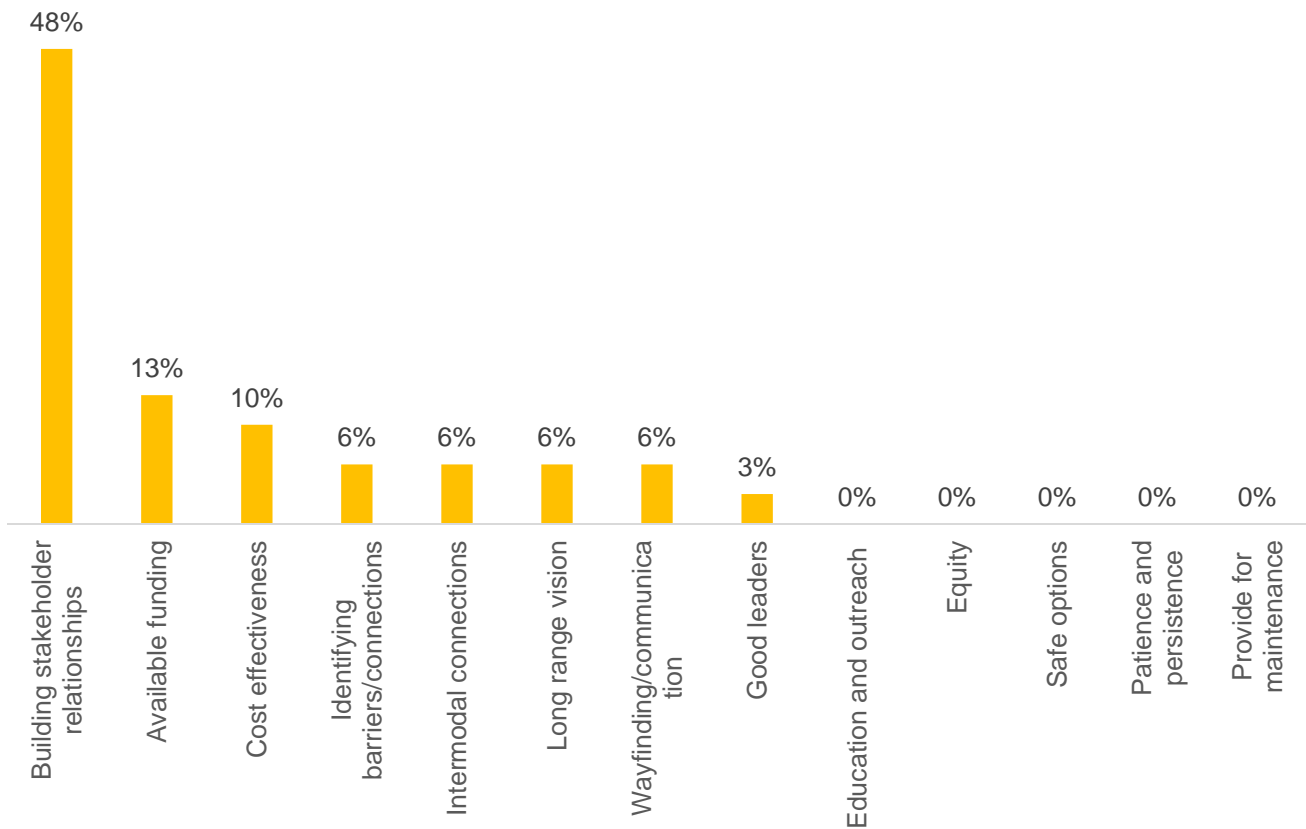
The following prioritized list was developed. Highlighted principles were ranked above 6 percent for being a primary factor for success:

1. **Build relationships early with stakeholders in differing jurisdictional boundaries**
2. **Consider available funding opportunities for all user groups (consider dedicated funding at a percentage level)**
3. **Have a pragmatic approach and look to cost effectiveness and feasibility**

4. **Identify barriers, connection points, and key trail destinations**
5. **Focus on intermodal connections**
6. **Have a long range vision and plan**
7. **Good signage and communication about the network**
8. **Have good leaders for the effort**
9. Education and outreach regarding benefits of trail networks
10. Focus on equity
11. Focus on safety
12. Have patience and persistence
13. Provide for ongoing maintenance of the network (revenue and partnerships)

Participants ranked the identified principles by their top priority. Results are below:

FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

Bar chart values: Building stakeholder relationships 48%, Available funding 13%, Cost effectiveness 10%, Identifying barriers/connections 6%, Intermodal connections 6%, Long range vision 6%, Wayfinding/communication 6%, Good leaders 3%, Education and outreach 0%, Equity 0%, Safe options 0%, Patience and persistence 0%, Provide for maintenance 0%

PROJECT IDENTIFICATION

Stakeholders were asked what regional trail projects should be included in any mapping efforts to illustrate how a regional network could look – and to also show the missing links that would require completion. The projects listed below have been broken out by county, although some span county boundaries. These are initial ideas that will be mapped later.

Multiple regions
- Improved wayfinding and signage visible from water and land
- Connectivity to all regional ferry terminals
- Pacific Northwest Trail (Whatcom, Skagit, and Island) missing portions (307 of its 1,226 miles are in this region)
- Connections to U.S. Bicycle Routes

Whatcom
- WSDOT ROW along I-5 west side between Bellingham and Ferndale
- Bellingham to Mt. Baker trail
- Chuckanut Interurban Trail to Clayton Beach and on to Skagit County
- Birch Bay State Park to Peace Arch State Park (Bay to Bay)
- Birch Bay State Park to Ferndale
- Sr 548 Bay Road to Blaine along California Creek
- Deming to Everson-Goshen Rd
- Nooksack loop trail along the river
- Kendall/Columbia Valley connectivity trail on SR 547

Skagit
- Skagit County Centennial Trail (border with Snohomish County to SR 9 Border)
- Guemes Channel Trail - Burlington to Anacortes on Highway 20/Tommy Thomson Trail
- Res Road from SR 20 Anacortes to La Conner
- Connection of above trail to Tommy Thomson Trail up to Padilla Bay
- Chuckanut to Bay View for Skagit Trails
- Padilla Dike Trail - La Conner to Bay view
- Cascade Trail including extensions to Burlington
- La Conner to Conway
- Anacortes Community Forest Lands Trail System
- Tursi Trail – Fidalgo Island
- Kulshan Trail Mt Vernon
- Bayview/Port of Skagit Trails
- Baher Lake Trail connections to Cascade Trail

Island
- Island County Bridge to Boat Trail (Whidbey Isle Trail from Deception Pass Bridge to the Clinton/Mukilteo Ferry)
- Camano Island Books to Bridge Trail
- Whidbey Island's Ebey's Trail (8 miles to Coupeville ferry)
- Sharpe's Corner (SR 20) to Deception Pass
- Terry's Corner to Stanwood
- Stanwood to Camano
- Zimmerman Road to Langley

San Juan
- Link WA State Ferry terminals to trails on Lopez and Orcas
- WA State Ferry terminals to urban growth areas

- Connect marine and terrestrial trails to the BC Gulf Islands

Snohomish
- East-west connections between Camano and Stanwood on SR 532 (Centennial Trail)
- Interurban Trail between Everett, Lynwood, and Seattle
- Historic Mill Town Trail (N. Everett Peninsula to connect to Interurban)
- Tie into implementation of City of Everett Bike Master Plan and possibly to the King County Metro weekend bus service to trailheads

NEXT STEPS

Stakeholders acknowledged that this workshop is a good first step but a comprehensive map of needs and the development of a coalition to address those needs would be required to advance trail projects from a regional perspective.

Many of the suggested trail improvements are already seeking funding; some are new concepts that need to be further explored. Numerous projects can be seen as part of a larger trail project like the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail.

The Whatcom Council of Governments hopes to work with San Juan County and other jurisdictions to pull together a NSTA Regional Trails map that will illustrate what exists, what is being planned, and where there are gaps in the system.

MORE INFORMATION

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