

SAN JUAN ISLAND TRAILS COMMITTEE
Bike Trails Outreach

MEETING MINUTES
December 8, 2008

Present

Tracy Roberson, Leslie Viers, Shannon Dean, Tim Dustrude, Eric Adelberger, Liz Illg, Kyle Loring, Karla Sabin, Levi Ross, Sally Hawkins, Dick Coffey, Judy Packard.

Notice of upcoming events:

1. The Next Group Ride: January 3 at 10:30 am, Farmer's Market.
2. SJITC Bicycle Trails Meeting: January 12, at 5 pm Whidbey Island Bank.
3. SJI Trails Committee: January 14, at 5 pm, Whidbey Island Bank

Summary

Minutes of November 17 Approved without changes.

Tracy shared excerpts and addresses to a couple of online reports containing interesting and useful information for this group and to convey to town and county planners, the first Active Transportation for America at:

http://www.railstotrails.org/resources/documents/whatwedo/atfa/ATFA_20081020.pdf
www.railstotrails.org

And second Livable Copenhagen at:

http://www.sightline.org/research/sprawl/res_pubs/Livable_Copenhagen_reduced.pdf.

Karla also shared a site she has discovered: www.bicyclealliance.org.

Introductions around the table reiterated a wide range of bicycle interests as well as a lot of passion for increasing bicycle use opportunities on island. Unsafe and unpleasant experiences of riding along many island roads were repeatedly mentioned. Some folks have given up on trying to ride on main roads altogether. Frustration was voiced about the general lack of respect for cyclists. The question of "how we got here", how our local transportation system has advanced so far with such disregard for the safety of bicycles was also asked.

In attempt to answer this question from an historical perspective, the Island has experienced incredible growth in recent years, resulting in huge increases in traffic including large construction vehicles on the roadways. The safety of bicycles and pedestrians has come to the forefront only in recent years as a reaction to this growth. The Non-Motorized Transportation plan was developed as mandated by the State Growth Management Act and was adopted fairly recently in 2005. Members of the committee expressed the need for a new policy effort, given the obvious conflicts with the previously adopted Scenic Roads Manual.

Liz Illg (a Town Council Member) confirmed that currently both the County and Town have supportive councils that favor non-motorized uses. She suggested that active bike organizations like we have been forming should directly address specific issues with both councils at every opportunity. She feels that very specific questions posed in public testimony would be useful to raise awareness.

Improving the opportunities for cyclists to commute to work and errands in town is essential. The last group ride was very successful with 16 participants riding from the school to False Bay Road and return in spite of the inclement weather. There were a couple of moments of concern with passing traffic on narrow roads, however.

The concern over the potential legal liability of such rides if someone was to be injured was questioned by some who have participated in many rides elsewhere and felt comfortable with signing a simple “waiver”. Some think it very unlikely that the trails committee or any group would be held liable for accidents while riding in such informal events.

There was a recognition that the existing number of off-road trails for bikes is now pretty much limited to the Airport Trail, Saltchuck Properties network, and DNR land. There is a great interest in more lengthy multi-use trails and even single track trails. Naturally, connecting easements along roads to enable people to use bikes for commuting and longer rides is a common interest. A general discussion ensued about the various public agency policies toward bike use like the National Park Service and questions about the eventual multi-use policies for the DNR lands that may be added to the English Camp unit. Our understanding is that bikes are currently prohibited on trails in the two national park units but will be considered along with horse back riding and other current non-motorized uses on the DNR lands if added.

Several people spoke of the joys of great multi-use trail examples that sustain a lot of use in larger communities such as Seattle, Bellingham and Anchorage. Questions were asked about the design, seasonal uses and night lighting on those urban trails.

Several ideas for ways to bring more attention to safe bike use were mentioned including vests for “*Local Spokes of SJI*” and whether to consider something like the Tour de Lopez here.

Skills and experience within the group for elements of future needs such as single track trail design, large construction projects and education outreach were offered to further the goals of the group.

“Planning Meeting” Report and Discussion

Tracy asked Steve to summarize the November 24th bicycle trails “planning meeting” that resulted from the last bike outreach meeting. The hour long meeting at the library was attended by Jeff and Tracy Roberson, Kathleen Foley and Steve Ulvi. There was some agreement that exploring a simple planning document that would organize and focus the efforts of such a disparate group would be necessary. During the lively discussion at the library it became clear that at least for the four participants, multi-use trails that include bikes should be the primary focus of a SJI Trails sub committee. This interest is covered under the existing Trails Plan and

the express role and function of the Trails Committee. It soon became clear that to undertake a separate planning effort of any kind was largely and duplicative. The group then talked about the many interests that have been mentioned that might not fall clearly within the existing goals or interests of the standing Trails Committee. It was agreed that some kind of natural divide between multi-use trails and what might be best described as “bike club” activities should be sought. There was little doubt that all interests of residents concerning bicycling on the island could be entertained at subcommittee meetings but some would probably be beyond the core function of the trails committee and remain unaddressed. Tracy expressed her continuing interest in leading the trails subcommittee efforts but not the larger “bike club” kinds of interests including education for cyclists and motorists, group fun rides, road safety improvements and efforts to improve bicycle facilities downtown. She suggests that the “bike club” has much more freedom as an independent entity. As such it can advocate for a wide spectrum of improvements, without needing oversight or approval of the Trails Committee.

There were questions about the existing road cycling group and its goals if any. While little was known about this group, it is thought that their primary focus is fitness and recreation.

Naturally, there was a good deal of confusion and lively discussion around the table questioning the wisdom and need for a two-part bicycle strategy as Steve had explained it. There were strong views expressed that there is a growing strength in numbers and a sense of cohesion that might be lost. A division could weaken the longstanding efforts to publicize and elevate bike interests on the island. Others talked of past frustrations with the existing Trails Committee focus and feared that this strategy meant that bike interests would never be adequately addressed.

It was mentioned that the Trails Committee has been very active on broad fronts for trails and has gained a lot of respect from town and county officials especially in regard to stepping up with volunteer labor for projects. Broad partnerships have evolved that should be of benefit to bike interests, too. It was suggested that our groups should act similarly for the best results.

As the discussion evolved there was a loose consensus that there were many positive aspects in a cohesive but separate approach by a new “bike club” and focused multi-use trail effort. Two unique efforts and approaches to solutions could result in safer cycling opportunities for all. This idea has time for further consideration as the Trails Committee goals may be altered in 2009 depending upon the final terms of the ongoing discussions with the Land Bank and Island Rec. The Land Bank Commissioners may not decide until their January or February meetings.

Our current bike group was formed as an outreach of the Trails Committee. As such, Tracy acts as the liaison, communicating our activities for approval of the Trails Steering Committee. She reported on the feedback from the Steering committee on December 2 and an ensuing meeting with Lincoln Borman of the SJC Land Bank. The “King Sisters”, “Beaverton Marsh”, and newly acquired Wade Sundstrom properties along San Juan Valley Road were discussed. The potential for multi-use trails under the Land Bank umbrella remains to be defined since Land Bank stewardship policies require recreational use of their managed lands as “low intensity uses”. While the Steering Committee is supportive of most all the improvements listed in our past minutes, they agree that a multi-use trails sub committee and a separate “bike club” seems like a good strategy.

Bike Club leadership and role definition

The attendance sheet was sent back around so each person could prioritize their interest in the “bike club” or sub committee. Of the thirteen in attendance, four listed the club as top priority, and nine listed the Trails sub committee. More important is the fact that eleven of the thirteen expressed interest in being involved with both committees. Each person spoke for a couple of minutes giving their perspective on the issues. Shannon Dean volunteered to organize the “bike club” activities and meet after the next fun ride in January. Tracy will invite everyone on the existing mailing list to both the “bike club” and Multi-use trails subcommittee meetings so each member can decide which group best fulfills their particular interests. As indicated by tonight’s meeting, many may want to be active in both groups.

Several people wanted to list the bike issues that clearly fell in one approach or the other. Tim agreed to compile a list of all ideas mentioned to date from past meeting minutes and prepare them for future discussion. Due to lack of time at this meeting, it was suggested that the upcoming meetings of each group will focus on defining roles and priority action items.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:35 pm.