

focus on trail planning FOR RECREATION TRAILS



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Recreation trails have many important benefits, both for local communities and for individual users. They strengthen communities, they contribute to local economies, build pride and put places 'on the map'. They offer users a wide range of rewards, physically, mentally and emotionally, many of which are directly transferable into both work and home environments. The benefits of recreation trails are well researched and documented.

This Focus paper provides Trail enthusiasts, local government authorities and community groups with information on how to plan and develop recreation trails.

It describes the trail planning process in a 'step by step' format, and suggests further relevant reading material on the topics covered.

This Focus paper also outlines the importance of good planning in trail development, to ensure that trails are well designed and that they support relevant trail master plans.

THE TRAIL PLANNING PROCESS

DEVELOPMENT PLAN

- 1 Establish a Steering Committee
- 2 Local Government Endorsement
- 3 Review of existing Trail provision
- 4 Develop project brief/proposal
- 5 Community Consultation

DECISION

Abandon proposal
Upgrade existing trail
or develop new trail

FEASIBILITY STUDY

- 6 Land Tenure and Environmental Clearance
- 7 Management and Maintenance Plan
- 8 Concept design
- 9 Financial viability and funding sources
- 10 Landowner and community consultation

FINAL DECISION

Implement / amend or / stage
or abandon the Trail proposal

STEP 1 Establishing a Steering Committee

A steering or advisory committee, should be formed to help manage and co-ordinate the Trail planning process. The committee should provide a focal point for the key individuals who are keen for the trail project to proceed.

It should represent a wide spectrum of community interests, including land managers, trail user groups, local cultural groups and local businesses and service groups, depending on the size of your project. Wide representation will result in more effective and successful trail planning and greater community ownership of the final project.

You should identify an enthusiastic individual to be the chairperson of your committee. This person should be a good organiser and be able to delegate. You should also elect a secretary, and other committee members. Each position should have a clear job description.

The steering committee should liaise closely with the relevant local government authority (preferably as an advisory committee to Council). For liability reasons you should seek sponsorship from another Incorporated trail group. There may be a regional or local Trail association formed in your area, which will save you going through the incorporation process. To find out contact Trailswest.

You should also consider setting up an 'advisory group' of prominent local citizens, who are interested in your project. Showing that prominent citizens and elected officials support your project, could be of assistance with the promotion of your trail.

In Western Australia the Local Government Act (1995) requires local Government to undertake strategic planning for service areas (including recreation) and consult closely with the community. Trail groups should link in with local and regional planning, to ensure that 'LGA plans' include recreation trails. Preference is given in Trailswest funding submissions for those projects which are identified as high priorities in Regional Recreation Plans or Trail Master Plans.

The following Ministry publications may be of assistance in establishing your steering group:

- *Recreation Planning Guide, First Edition, 1997* (see Chapter 2)
- *Focus on Recreation Planning*
- *Focus on Facility Planning*
- *How to Establish Your Constitution and Become Incorporated*
- *Volunteer Involvement Program 'club officials brochures'*

These publications are available from your nearest Ministry of Sport and Recreation Regional Office or Trailswest.

STEP 2 Local Government Endorsement

While the Local Government Authority may have been involved in discussions about the project, it is preferable that you gain 'official' municipal endorsement for the project. The council's endorsement could include a resolution endorsing the project, or take the form of a broader agreement concerning the development and maintenance of the Trail. In either case, it is preferable to gain Council support for the project. The overall success of your trail project will be aided by developing strategic alliances and effective partnerships with Council.

STEP 3 Review of Existing Trail Provision

It is important to get a comprehensive picture of the existing recreation trails in the area, prior to developing your trail proposal. There are currently many organisations you may approach to source information on existing trails. You should firstly approach the land managers (CALM, Local Government Authority, Water Corporation etc). There may be a Management Plan for the proposed trail area, or a Local or Regional Trails Master Plan, which will identify exist-

ing Trails. Alternately you could contact Trailswest who publish a Statewide Trails inventory.

Step 4 Develop Project Brief / Proposal

It is necessary to write a clear brief so that everyone involved in the project has a clear understanding of the proposed project. The project brief should cover the following areas:

- *The background and the perceived need for the trail;*
- *The overall trail purpose, aims and objectives;*
- *The intended user groups (eg: Bike, Walk, Horse Ride);*
- *The community consultation approach to be taken;*
- *Any background studies or reports relating to the proposed location;*
- *The scope of the planning;*
- *The timing and possible staging of the development of the trail;*
- *Any possible agency or community support available*

Step 5 Community Consultation

As with any community project it is best to involve the public and interested stakeholders in as many ways as possible. The investment of time and energy in community consultation is necessary to develop community support and ownership of the project. Ideally the steering group will have developed a clear message regarding the proposed trail and prepared answers for any possible questions. It is now time to take your message to the wider community via a number of different forums or presentations. In your community presentations you should highlight the following benefits that recreation trails can provide:

- *Valuable local recreation resources, for use by all the community*
- *Purposeful non-motorised transport resource*
- *Economic benefits to the community (e.g. Business opportunities, Job opportunities and Tourist attractions)*
- *Health and personal well-being*
- *Promote an understanding of, and respect for, our natural environment*
- *Local, state or regional links, via a Trail network*
- *Compatibility with any local, state or regional Trail master plan*

It is important to ascertain the specific needs of stakeholders, user groups and landowners.

The following Ministry publications may be of further assistance with this topic:

- *How to Undertake Community Consultation and*
- *How To... Undertake a Needs Assessment*

These publications are available from your nearest Ministry of Sport and Recreation Regional Office or Trailswest.

FOR RECREATION TRAILS

DECISION

It is now time to make a decision on whether to proceed further with your trail proposal, and spend further time, energy and money on a feasibility study. You should not exclude the options of abandoning the proposal in favour of upgrading an existing trail before deciding upon developing a new trail.

FEASIBILITY STUDY SUMMARY

1/ INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

2/ COMMUNITY INPUT AND SUPPORT

3/ MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE PLANNING

4/ CONNECTIONS

5/ CULTURAL, HERITAGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

6/ TRAIL USER EDUCATION

7/ TRAIL ACCESS AND TRAIL SHARING OPPORTUNITIES

8/ PLANNING PROCESS

9/ PARTNERSHIPS, SPONSORSHIP AND VOLUNTEERS

10/ CONCEPT DESIGN

11/ CAPITAL COST

12/ CONCLUSION

FEASIBILITY STUDY

It will be easier to attract funds and other support for your trail if you have undertaken a well researched feasibility study. A feasibility study will refine the concept of the trail and then test that concept to determine if it will 'perform' both practically and financially. The final document should be a brief report. The key components of the feasibility study are listed in steps 6 to 10.

The elements that should be included in a trail feasibility study will depend on the size and scale of the project, but the following topic headings give a guide:

Introduction and Background: How did the project come about? what is the proposed location? Is there a need for this trail?

Community Input and Support: Can you demonstrate that the project has support from the local community, trail user groups, community leaders, service organisations, recreation and environmental groups, schools, businesses and other non-government groups. What methods have you used to gain knowledge of this support?

Management and Maintenance Planning: How will usage and maintenance issues be addressed. Is there a 'friends of' group for the trail or the potential to form/establish one. How will public access and operation be ensured in the long term. Who will undertake and pay for ongoing operation and maintenance costs (approx 10% of construction costs per annum).

Connections: How will the project provide linkages between towns or community facilities, other trails, greenways, and/or natural, cultural, historical, and recreation areas.

Cultural and Heritage Considerations: How will the project recognise and reflect any Aboriginal and other local cultural and heritage factors.

Environmental Education: How will the project contribute to knowledge of the environment and what interpretive material will the project provide.

Trail Access and Trail Sharing Opportunities: Does the project accommodate a range of trail users (e.g. hiking, biking, equestrian, fitness, the disabled and educational purposes). How will the different users share the trail?

Planning Process: Has the project been identified as a priority in any recreational plan (LGA) or local/regional/statewide trail master plan. Has the local government authority/land manager given their endorsement for the project.

Partnerships, Sponsorship and Volunteers: How will the project demonstrate cooperation or partnerships between trail users, trail groups, private interests within the area and public agencies.

Concept Design: What are the physical specifications of the trail: length, width, surface materials, drainage, trailheads, interpretive signage and trail markers. What are the required standards of construction?

Capital Cost: What is the expected capital cost for the construction of the Trail Project? Has the Local Government Authority/Land Manager promised to provide funds for the project? What other sources of funds have been explored for the project?

Conclusion: Why should the project proceed? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the project? What is required for the project to proceed?

For more detailed information consult “How To...” Undertake a Feasibility Study, available from your nearest Ministry of Sport and Recreation Regional Office or Trailswest.

STEP 6 Concept Design

In order to develop a concept design for the proposed trail, you will need to consult with the various potential trail users to identify any specific design requirements. Visits to similar trails and discussions with other trail groups will also assist you in the process of design. For further information please consult CALM’s publications *Field Guide*; *Recreation Facilities Construction Standards* and CALM’s *Sign Manual* available for viewing, from your nearest CALM office or Trailswest.

STEP 7 Management and Maintenance Plan

A trail management plan is a written document which outlines: the aims and objectives of the trail (including potential user groups); The strategies used to meet the objectives; The evaluation methods used to measure performance; Management structure; Maintenance of the trail and staffing; Any associated costs of the functioning trail; Programs and services offered by the trail and the Marketing strategy.

Prior to the construction of any trail a maintenance plan should be written. The plan should outline the items that need to be maintained, by whom, how often and any associated costs.

The original design and alignment of the trail are the most important factors influencing ongoing trail maintenance. A well designed trail will be easier to maintain in the long term. There are many components which go into a well designed trail, the following section will look at these briefly from a maintenance perspective:

Gradient Generally speaking the gradient should be less than 10%. This is to reduce the erosion with water ‘run off’ down the slopes. In more highly erosive sandy soils a gradient less than 10% may be more desirable. Each situation is unique so you will need to take into account the local conditions and soil types.

Relationship to Contours A well designed trail will follow the contours of hillsides. Traversing the natural slope with as little height drop or gain as possible will reduce the speed of surface water, and therefore reduce trail erosion.

Outslope With your trail running, as far as possible, perpendicular to the slope of the hillside there is still a possibility of trenches developing in the centre line of the trail. The way to alleviate trenching is to have a slope of 3% to 4% across the trail width. This will give you a trail with an outslope, as the alignment follows the hill contours.

Switchbacks A ‘switchback’ can be described as any place where the alignment of a trail abruptly ‘switches back’ in the opposite direction to the direction of travel. Switchbacks represent locations for trail users to take short cuts across the corner, and therefore cause erosion over new routes off the trail.

Water Bars Water bars divert water run off at designated points of the trail and reduce water speed. They reduce water erosion and stabilise the trail surface.

Signs and Traffic Markings Ensure that all trail markings for both motorists (when the trail approaches roads) and trail users are clear and prominent and meet the Australian standards/legal requirements.

Sight Distance and Clearance Trails should be designed to meet sight distance requirements based on the expected speeds of the anticipated users. Trees, shrubs and tall grass should be trimmed to give clear lines of sight / overhead clearances, especially leading up to crossings and curves.

An “Adopt a Trail” or “Friends of Group” program is one way of providing for the maintenance of the Trail. The ownership that this gives members of the community is an important part of the success of any trail. Invite trail user organisations, community groups, civic organisations, and businesses to provide periodic maintenance work along the trail.

Many organisations today are realising the benefits of corporate involvement in positive community initiatives. Active involvement in recreation trails represents an ideal opportunity to realise those benefits. Improving trail safety, keeping maintenance costs down, and building goodwill with adjacent landowners to the trail, are just some of the positive outcomes.

“Friends of groups” provide many positive outcomes for trails including:

- *Physical labour, construction, repairs;*
- *Surveillance of any problems, like dangers or inappropriate activities;*
- *Fundraising: often “Friends of Groups” are eligible for funds for which the land manager is in-eligible;*
- *Information to educate users: maps, videos, newsletters;*
- *Promotion of the Trail: Statewide, national and international.*

STEP 8 Land Tenure and Environmental Clearance

An essential part of the trail planning process is land tenure approval for the trail corridor from the landowners and the necessary environmental approvals from the relevant land managers. In some cases the proposed trail will cross the management boundaries of several Local Government Authorities or several Government Land Management agencies. You should consult with these agencies for advice before you get too far advanced in the planning process. In many cases there will be an existing Management Plan for your trail corridor, and you should obtain copies of this document.

For more detailed information consult the Trailswest fact sheet *How To... Gain Environmental Approval for Your Trail*, available from your nearest Ministry of Sport and Recreation Regional Office or Trailswest.

STEP 9 Financial Viability and Funding Sources

During this stage of planning it is wise to investigate the trail's economic and social viability. You will be able to get an idea of the trail development cost from the concept design.

Questions to ask are: Can we afford it? Is there a market? If you build it will they come? What will be the budget? Is it worth it? Ways on finding answers to these questions is to talk to other trail groups, prospective trail users and then draw up an action plan to guide your approach. This task could be performed by a trail consultant or alternately an enthusiastic member of your Trail group.

There are numerous possible avenues for the funding and development of trails, even in the current times of shrinking expenditure. However if your trail has demonstrated wide community support, then it will be easier for your group to attract support for the project. The steering committee should seek to generate many different sources of support, and initial success will give the project continued momentum.

When utilities such as gas, roads, power, and telephone need to develop corridors for their services they have budgets for compensation of loss of amenity to the community. This is called mitigation and is used as a form of compensation, for the possible adverse effects of development. It is becoming increasingly popular as a source of support for trails.

Councils and Townscape planners have also realised the many benefits of Recreation Trails. They have started to build trails as an integral part of community housing developments and are then using them as a positive marketing tool. The active trail group, can lobby these areas for support to ensure their trail becomes a reality. Although the aforementioned areas may provide "in kind" support you will still need dollars. You may attract financial support through sponsorship and/or community grants programs. These need a focused and coordinated approach.

SPONSORSHIP

Sponsorship is becoming an increasingly common and important way of attracting support for many community projects. Trail projects can utilise sponsorship to attract 'in kind' support for their project as well as 'cash' contributions. Several Corporate sponsors have supported the development of trails in Western Australia including: utilities, mining companies, cleaning companies and recreation equipment retail stores. Gaining sponsorship is not a simple case of targeting a group and asking them for the money.

It is essential that a professional and planned approach is undertaken to ensure success.

For further information on how to go about obtaining sponsorship refer to the Ministry of Sport and Recreation's "How to..." kit on Sponsorship, available from your nearest Ministry of Sport and Recreation Regional Office or Trailswest.

GRANT SCHEMES

There is a wide range of grant schemes available at both the state and Commonwealth level which all trail committees are advised to investigate. These grants are aimed at a range of topics from providing employment, tourism and environmental/land management support. To access some of these grant schemes, you may need to review the constitution of your group or form a strategic alliance with another group.

THE TRAILSWEST TRAILS FUNDING PROGRAM

The Lotteries Commission of Western Australia, through Trailswest, have sponsored a funding program for recreational trails. The purpose of the Trails Funding Program is to encourage the planning, design and construction of trails throughout Western Australia. Funding is available for a range of trail projects including:

- *The preparation of trail plans;*
- *The construction and development of new trails and trail facilities;*
- *The upgrading of existing trails;*
- *The promotion and publicity of trails so as to increase the knowledge of and use of, recreational trails.*

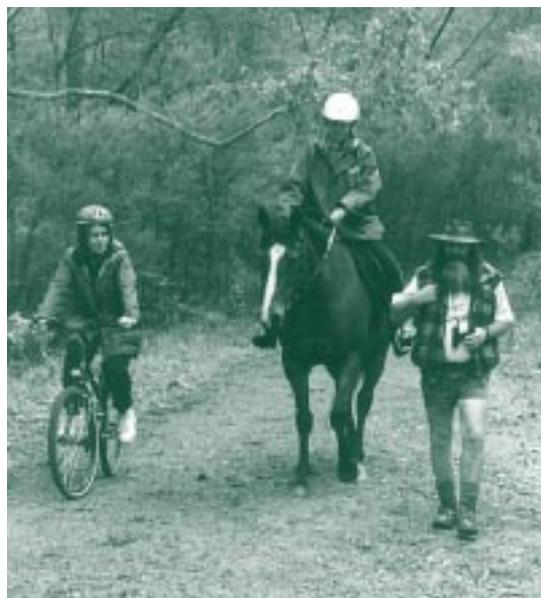
BIKEWEST

If your proposed trail is a 'dual use' (Bike/Walk) or specifically for Bike users or you intend your trail to have a bitumen surface and the location to be close to a municipal centre, then it may be eligible for Bikewest funding.

WA TOURISM COMMISSION GRANTS

If your trail has the possibility of wide tourism appeal then it may be eligible for WA Tourism commission funding, as they currently have discretionary funds and have previously funded trails in Western Australia.

For a list of Grant Schemes that may be applicable for your trail contact Trailswest or consult the "W.A. Grants Register" available from the Department of Family and Children's Services or Trailswest.



STEP 10 Landowner and Community Consultation

It is important to identify all of the landowners along your proposed trail route and those who live in close proximity to the trail to establish a line of communication early in the planning process. You must provide them with opportunities to express their fears and concerns. This gives you the opportunity to develop solutions to help develop a successful trail. You will be able to identify the adjacent landowner by contacting the Department of Land Administration (DOLA) or Local Government Authority.

To open the lines of communication it is best is to conduct face to face meetings with adjacent landowners. This allows personal contact to be made and shows that you are making a genuine effort to value their opinions. Listen carefully to the concerns made and determine what areas they may be willing to compromise. If possible, set up meetings with landowners along a nearby trail, especially those supporters who were once opposed. Speaking directly with other landowners can do more to win people over than any quoting of 'statistics'. Be prepared for potential landowner concerns such as liability, maintenance aspects of the trail, and privacy issues.

For more detailed information please contact Trailswest or consult the Fact Sheet: "The 12 most frequently asked questions by adjacent landowners".

THE FINAL DECISION

Upon reviewing your feasibility study you will need to weigh up the options and decide whether to: implement, amend, stage or abandon your trail proposal.

TRAILSWEST ASSISTANCE

There are a number of issues that arise simply in trying to form a group to get started on a trail project. It is Trailswest's mandate to assist you with this process. Having encountered the issues of trail group formation, public liability and maintenance, you will find that Trailswest guidance can be valuable as you prepare to undertake your trail project.

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