TRAIL ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT

Overview

Greenbelts, greenways, and trails have been identified for many years as one of Columbia's most valued recreation resources. The 2010 citywide citizen survey revealed that 70% of Columbia households use the trails provided by Parks and Recreation. Trails also ranked number one as the recreation facility Columbia households have a need for and the recreation facility that was most important to them. (See Chapter 6 - Public Input.)

MKT Trail

From 2001-2011, Columbia's population increased by 27 percent, University of Missouri's enrollment grew by 43 percent, and Columbia added about 10 square miles to its boundaries. As Columbia's population continues to grow and city limits expand, the need to connect more residential areas, schools, and businesses to the trail system will also increase.

The need to continue trail acquisition and development in Columbia can also be seen by the *existing* trail mileage deficiencies identified in Chapter 5 - Facility Standards. According to the State of Missouri Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) standards, Columbia is actually 93 miles short of meeting the bike/pedestrian trail standards of a city with the same population of Columbia. (See Chapter 5 - Facility Standards for more information on the trail type definitions, recommended mileage for each type of trail, and how Columbia's trail system measures up in comparison to the SCORP standards.) There are residential areas, schools, and businesses in Columbia that currently do not have access to the trail system, leaving many citizens underserved.

Columbia is 93 miles short of meeting SCORP bike/pedestrian trail standards.

This chapter evaluates needs and priorities for future trail acquisition and development. The development of a Trails Plan is key to achieving the overall goal of having a trail system that serves recreational to nonmotorized travelers and connects citizens with parks, neighborhoods, schools and businesses. The 2013 Trails Plan proposes an approximately 30 mile long trail loop around Columbia, consisting of the MKT Trail, Hinkson Creek Trail, Bear Creek Trail, and the proposed Perche Creek Trail. In addition, the plan includes multiple connecting trails that link back to this main loop so that the trail system can be accessible to the majority of Columbia residents and resolves many of the current underserved areas.

70% of Columbia households use the trails.

Early Planning Efforts

The long term planning and identification of the recreation trails and greenbelt network officially began with the 1935 Columbia Land Use Plan which showed a greenbelt in portions of the city.

The 1935 plan, using the term "parkway" to identify greenbelt areas, described parkways as "usually elongated park areas, often preserving a natural stream valley, and usually providing, either through the area, or on the borders, roadways for pleasure driving." This plan also recognized other values to parkways citing benefits including, but not limited to, "preserving natural water channels, thus often avoiding the cost of storm sewers; and also providing local recreation areas for adjacent property."

In the early 1970's, the national Rails-to-Trails movement and the desire to preserve open space received further attention when the city adopted a comprehensive greenway plan. This plan inventoried all available open spaces, concentrating on undeveloped watersheds and laid the ground work for the future MKT Trail. From the late 1970's through the 1980's various citywide land use plans were created that included greenbelts and trails. It was during this period that the MKT Trail was constructed and completed, with the final phase officially dedicated in 1991.

In 1993 and 1995, the City of Columbia passed policy resolutions on greenbelts that provided further protection assistance to stream corridors. The resolution states, "The primary goal of the greenbelt plans is to maintain and preserve open space along major stream corridors. This goal should be accomplished preferably by private ownership or action, or by public acquisition of land or flood plain regulations." Another stated goal was the construction of trails within specific portions of the greenbelt corridor where "appropriate and feasible."

In 1994, the Parks and Recreation Department contracted with Landplan Engineering of Missouri to produce a comprehensive Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan. In addition to parks, recreation facility and staffing recommendations, this 1994 plan evaluated and recommended a 1994 Trails Plan. This plan emphasized further MKT Trail-type development on property owned by the University of Missouri and promoted a trail connection between Columbia Cosmopolitan Recreation Area and Albert-Oakland Park.

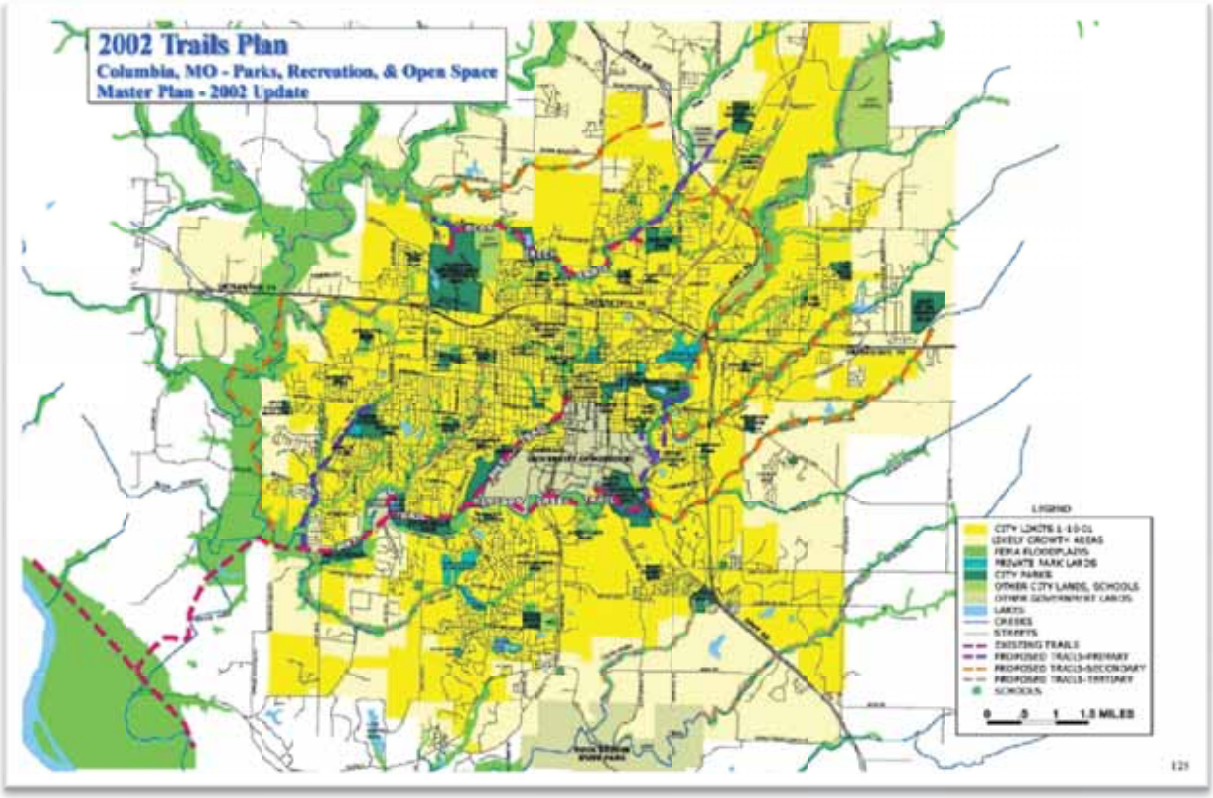
1994 Trails Plan by Landplan Engineering of Missouri

In their evaluation of future trails, Landplan proposed the development of a trail network encircling the city that would allow residents the opportunity to experience natural beauty and wildlife located in the stream greenbelts and provide a connection to Columbia's major parks.

In 2000, the 4.25 mile Hinkson Creek Trail was completed, connecting the Grindstone Nature Area in southeast Columbia to the MKT Trail. In 2001, the 4.8 mile Bear Creek Trail was completed, connecting Albert-Oakland Park in northeast Columbia with the Columbia Cosmopolitan Recreation Area in northwest Columbia.

In 2000 and 2001, the City of Columbia acquired the 90-acre Bonnie View Nature Sanctuary and the 116-acre Stephens Lake Park. The need to develop a master plan for these two sizable parks was the impetus for updating the "facility needs" portion of the *1994 Comprehensive Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan.* As part of this update, ETC Institute/Leisure Vision conducted a citywide survey in 2001 to assess the recreation facility needs and inventory the public's support for various recreation opportunities in Columbia. One area that consistently generated strong support was the development of more recreation trails that could be used for a wide range of activities. Results of this survey indicated that "walking/jogging" was the number one leisure activity of Columbia citizens with 69% of households reporting participation in this activity. Additionally, the highest used recreation facility was Columbia's trails with 67% indicating that they have used one of Columbia's walking or biking trails within the past 2 years.

It was during the development of the *2002 Facility Needs Update* that a comprehensive trails plan was developed. The 2002 Trails Plan laid out the basic route for the Columbia perimeter "loop" system.



Over the next three years, park planners updated this plan as sections of the trail were developed and as the geographical area of Columbia grew. In 2005, the City Council approved an updated Trails Plan. Five years later the revision process continued and a revised Trails Plan was approved by Council in 2010.

GetAbout Columbia, CATSO 2025 and PedNet

In 2006, Columbia was selected as one of four communities in the nation to participate in the Federal Highway Administration's Non-Motorized Transportation Pilot Program. Columbia's designation as a pilot city came with $22.4 million in federal funds over a four-year period to help build infrastructure and establish national standards for public awareness and willingness to use active modes of transportation. The City of Columbia Public Works Department was appointed to administrate the Federal Highway funds, and a separate program was created for that purpose. This program, GetAbout Columbia, consists of Public Works staff who works closely with members of the Parks and Recreation Department. Of the $22.4 million, approximately $8 million was set aside for trail development, with the remaining being used for street, intersection, pedway infrastructure improvements and educational programs. Pedways are wide paths (8'+) along limited access roadways, allowing for bicycle and pedestrian traffic separated from adjacent road traffic. In 2012, the Federal Highway Administration extended the highway bill to include an additional $5.9 million for Columbia, as well as the other 3 pilot communities, to continue non-motorized infrastructure and education projects. Columbia is in the process of determining how to spend the additional money.

Columbia was one of four cities in the nation to receive $22.4 million in federal funds for the Non-Motorized Transportation Pilot Program.

South Providence Trail - GetAbout Project

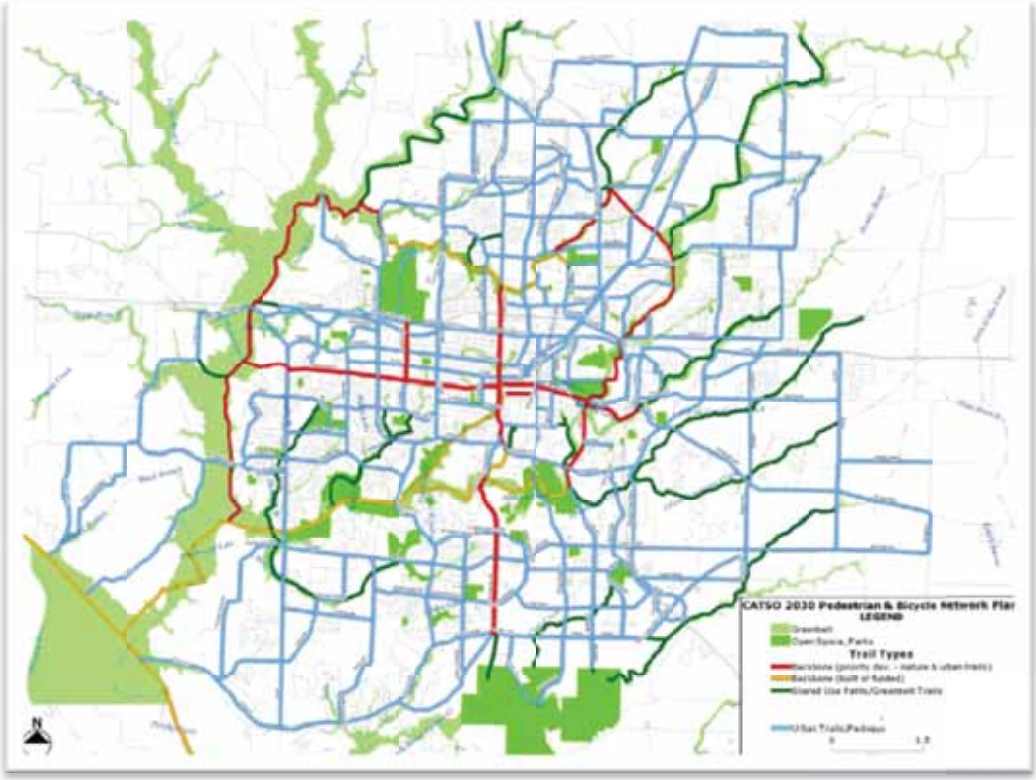
In addition to the development of trails citywide, city planners are placing an increased emphasis on providing space for non-motorized forms of transportation within the roadway corridors. City staff has proposed a comprehensive network of shared-use trails and urban pedways that blend the recreation trails with the development of the roadway bike lanes and sidewalks as one non-motorized transportation network. The goal is to integrate trails into the overall city's infrastructure planning, allowing for safe non-motorized transportation to all parts of Columbia. Park users generally prefer a trail route that is in a natural setting, along a creek corridor, with few if any road crossings. However, at times this is not possible. In these situations the pedway system can fill the gaps, allowing for a safe route along a roadway between trail sections.

This development effort is intended to provide an effective system of inter-connectivity between residential subdivisions, employment centers, businesses, parks, schools (including the University of Missouri and other local colleges), the public library, the Activity & Recreation Center (ARC), and downtown. It will enable pedestrians, cyclists, wheelchair

users, in-line skaters, and skateboarders to travel safely between these locations while enjoying a pleasant experience.

Various transportation plans have been developed for the Columbia area. These include:

- PedNet Master Plan - a transportation network for bicycle, pedestrian, and wheelchair use
- CATSO 2030 - a 20-year comprehensive intermodal transportation plan that contains elements covering roadways, transit, bicycles, and pedestrian facilities and incorporates the PedNet Master Plan



- GetAbout Columbia Plan - Federally funded additions and improvements to infrastructure and educational components to promote non-motorized transportation
- Trails Plan - Long-range plan for trail development for recreational and non-motorized transportation use

All of these plans are coordinated among the various city departments and incorporate trails as an integral part of the city transportation planning and can be found on the City's website at www.GoColumbiaMo.com. The potential benefits of this proposed comprehensive trail system are numerous. The pedestrian-friendly corridors offered by the Trails Plan will provide a more efficient and safe method for people to travel by non-motorized means within the city. The beautiful settings of the trail corridors along creeks and in wooded areas will promote healthy recreation and hopefully encourage residents to drive less and utilize active transportation more often.