



LOCAL PLANNING, THE REGIONAL BICYCLE TRANSPORTATION NETWORK & REGIONAL TRAILS

Presented by Steven Elmer, Jan Youngquist
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12:00 – 1:00 PM

Webinar Summary: The Regional Bicycle Transportation Network (RBTN) is a new designation adopted into the 2040 Transportation Policy Plan. It defines prioritized corridors and conceptual alignments that create a “backbone” bicycle network for the region. Local agencies are encouraged to implement this network (in part with the potential allocation of regionally-administered federal transportation dollars) and to connect it with local bicycle transportation networks. The regional trail system is designated as part of the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan and is implemented by ten regional park implementing agencies in partnership with communities. As a regional system, communities are required to plan for regional trails in their comprehensive plans. *Questions and Answers:*

1. Do any of the RBTN alignments already exist?

(Steve) Yes, there are many existing trails or bikeways that coincide with an RBTN alignment. We will be able to show where these overlaps exist more effectively using the newly created Regional Bicycle System Inventory that I spoke about in detail. Existing regional trails that are RBTN alignments can be determined with the on-line interactive maps that are available.

2. Who is in charge of maintaining RBTN trails when they cross jurisdictional boundaries?

(Steve) Trails and on-street bikeways that are on the RBTN are maintained by whatever city, county or parks agency that has ownership of the trail or roadway, unless a specific maintenance agreement delegates the maintenance function to a partner agency.

3. What is the difference between RBTN Tiers 1 and 2?

(Steve) The assignment of tiers was based on the corridor analysis factors I described earlier, which included bicycle travel demand, employment density, population density, proximity to transitways and bus routes, among other factors. The corridors with the higher composite scores resulting from that analysis were designated as ‘Tier 1’. The only practical difference in the tiers is in the level of priority in regional bicycle planning and investment, with Tier 1 alignments and corridors assigned the highest priority for planning and investment.

4. When RBTN and Regional Trails overlap, who is in charge? Is it the Park Implementing Agency or the Local Government? And what about the funding source in that situation?

(Jan) If it is a Regional Trail, the regional park implementing agency with jurisdiction will have the lead in planning, constructing, and maintaining the trail. Any other trail or on-street bikeway that is on the RBTN will be implemented and maintained by the local trail or roadway authority. Funding is somewhat complex and was discussed in the webinar; but the bottom line is that Regional Trails are eligible for regional parks funding and only trails and bikeways used for transportation purposes are eligible for federal transportation funds.

5. What is the advantage of planning trail and bikeway projects to implement segments on the RBTN?

(Steve) Most significantly, there is a funding advantage for RBTN projects applying for federal transportation funds through the Regional Solicitation that's allocated by the TAB. Projects that implement Tier 1 segments, Tier 2 segments or direct connections to the RBTN receive more points than other projects that are only found in local plans; the significant amount of points they receive is regional priority. In addition, and from a planning perspective, by connecting local bikeway networks to the RBTN, you will be enhancing the biking connections of your city to neighborhoods and commercial centers to other nearby cities and to the major destinations across the region.

6. Are there any funding mechanisms available if a community wants to construct a local bike trail system?

(Steve) Funding, in general, is much more available if the trails or bikeway projects will play a regional role. Projects that incorporate segments of the RBTN, or connect to the RBTN, are prioritized in the Regional Solicitation to award federal transportation dollars. In addition, Safe Routes to School is another funding category through the Regional Solicitation, so those funds could be used if the school district or local agency has a bikeways plan to improve connections and/or safety for children biking (or walking) to school. Use of state aid funds is another possibility along county or municipal state aid routes in your community; that option would not increase the amount of state aid funding, but funds could be applied for trails along those roadways. And of course, the city's property tax base is another option which would have a higher level of flexibility in the type of trail or location where projects could be funded.

(Jan) As mentioned during the webinar, regional trails with a Council approved master plan are eligible for regional parks funding. The Minnesota DNR has a local trails connection program that provides grants to local units of government for short trail connections between where people live and desirable local destinations, however the program is not intended to help develop significant new trails. Another option may be some local park dedication ordinances allow park dedication fees to be used for trail development.

7. Who conducts master planning for RBTN and how are priorities determined within the Tiers?

(Steve) That's a good question, thank you. We don't have master planning process for the RBTN. The RBTN is already planned and is now a component of the Transportation Policy Plan which does set the overall priorities for planning and investment. Within the tiers themselves, the only thing that is prioritized is the funding allocated through the Regional Solicitation process by the Met Council's Transportation Advisory Board, and that occurs every two years. There are scoring prioritization criteria that have been incorporated for the RBTN, such that projects that are on Tier 1 or Tier 2 alignments and corridors get different points allotted to them through that process. So there is prioritization there through the funding that is made available through our Regional Solicitation.

(Jan) With regard to the Regional Trails System, as I mentioned before, master plans are developed by the Park Implementing Agencies in coordination with local communities. The implementing agencies set priorities for construction of regional trail alignments as funding becomes available.

8. What if a trail parcel is not yet in public ownership? Does it have to be guided as open space?

(Jan) With regard to regional trails planning we do not require that parcels identified with planned regional trail corridors that are not yet acquired be guided with the future land use of "Park." This is different than what we do with regional park master plans, because entire parcels are identified to be

within the boundary of regional parks, therefore we require the future land use of those parcels to be guided as “Park.” Regional trail corridors can be acquired in a number of different ways and do not necessarily require the acquisition of the entire parcel. An agency may acquire an easement, or the right to the use of a portion of a parcel without having to buy an entire piece of land. If the parcel is owned by the regional park implementing agency or another local government, and is part the existing regional trail corridor, that’s when we require existing and future land use to reflect the park and open space use of that parcel. We don’t require that for planned trail corridors.

9. Can you help describe how cities work across jurisdictional boundaries to implement regional planning for bicycle transportation? This could prove challenging if neighboring cities or implementing agencies have different priorities.

(Steve) I’ll start with RBTN that we coordinate here at the MetCouncil. That’s really the purpose of the RBTN in our regional plan, to get that inter-city coordination going if we need to. If there is an issue or problem or a conflict, or some level of inconsistency across the jurisdictional boundaries, then we might want to commence a meeting and have a discussion about it. Obviously we are kind of advisors to the process, because the local planners are the ones who determine what is good for and is needed in the community. But we want to make sure that everyone is aware of what the regional priorities are for that corridor and how we might problem solve is how that might come about in each of the cities.

(Jan) As far as regional trails that cross jurisdictions, that’s really the beauty of the master planning process, where regional park implementing agencies work with the local communities through which the regional trail will travel. Cross-jurisdictional planning happens upfront during the development of the master plan. After that planning process has been completed and adopted, that is when we want to ensure the local communities are showing these regional trails in their comprehensive plans. As far as operations and maintenance, our regional park implementing agencies collaborate with local cities, and a lot of times will have joint powers agreements outlining different roles and responsibilities in maintenance of regional trail corridors.

10. Does the RBTN or Parks Master Plan discuss trails maintenance during winter?

(Jan) Our Regional Parks Policy Plan does not specifically address maintenance of regional trails in winter. That is an operational issue that is determined by regional park implementing agencies. However, many of the agencies put a high priority on plowing these trails during the winter and some will work with local communities through joint powers agreements to ensure that the regional trails are plowed.

(Steve) For the regional bikeways or on-street bikeways or trails that are not part of the regional trails network, there is some language in the Transportation Policy Plan that indicates that these trails and bikeways that apply for regional funding must be maintained throughout the year. There is no specific mention of winter maintenance, but throughout the year certainly implies winter as well. That is something we’re considering for the future TPP to be a little more specific, and that is something to look out for. But generally speaking that is the expectation. Also, through the Regional Solicitation, in the qualifying criteria for multiuse trails and bikeway facilities, as an applicant for federal funds you have to provide a positive statement agreeing to maintain the facility throughout the year which implies winter maintenance.

Please send additional questions or comments to angela.torres@metc.state.mn.us.