King County Parks Your Big Backyard

www.kingcounty.gov/parks

Frequently Asked Questions: Stop Sign Usage

Will the stop signs that are currently on the gravel trail be removed?

Yes. The stops signs presently located along the gravel trail will be removed during construction and will not be replaced. Many homeowners who live adjacent to the trail have expressed concern about their safety and the safety of trail users if the stop signs are removed. The information below was compiled to provide more information about stop sign usage on the trail.

King County is required to follow applicable traffic engineering and design standards in order to develop the safest trail possible. The Federal Highway Administration sets the national standards for all traffic control devices installed on any street, highway or bicycle trail open to public travel. These national standards are set forth in the "Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices" (MUTCD) which includes a chapter addressing traffic control for bicycle facilities. State and local governments are required to substantially comply with these standards when developing roads and trails. The MUTCD references another set of guidelines - the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) "Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities." Both the MUTCD standards and the AASHTO guidelines incorporate the best traffic engineering practices for the construction of roads and trails.

King County has designed the ELST (East Lake Sammamish Trail) in accordance with the MUTCD and AASHTO standards and guidelines. Some of the stop signs that are currently on the trail will be removed because they are not consistent with this design approach. In particular, the 2012 AASHTO guidelines provide that stop signs and other intersection controls should follow the principle of providing the least amount of restriction that is effective. These guidelines explain:

> *Installing unwarranted or unrealistically restrictive controls on path approaches in an attempt to "protect" path users can result in path users disregarding the signs and other traffic control devices at the intersection. This can lead to a loss of respect for traffic control at more critical locations. A common misconception is that the routine installation of stop control for the pathway is an effective treatment for preventing crashes at path-roadway intersection. Poor bicyclist compliance with "STOP" signs at path-roadway intersections is well documented. Bicyclists tend to operate as though there are "YIELD" signs at these locations: they slow down as they approach the intersection, look for oncoming traffic, and proceed with the crossing if it is safe to do so.*

In a nutshell, what this guideline explains is that placing stop signs in locations where bicyclists are not required to stop does not enhance safety or prevent accidents. In fact, it may create a safety hazard in that it gives the roadway users a false sense of security when crossing the trail. All users of the roadway or private driveways that cross the trail have a duty to exercise due care when crossing a right of way, and a stop sign will not reduce or eliminate this duty of care. As the AASHTO guidelines referred to above state, there is a common misconception that the routine installation of stop signs makes a trail safer. It is well documented that it does not.

Roadway and intersection design principles give right of way priority to the higher volume/higher speed approach. In most cases, trail users will have priority right of way over users of private roads and driveways that cross the trail and are not therefore required to stop. Chapter 9 of the MUTCD addresses "Traffic Control For Bicycle Facilities." Section 9B.03 of the MUTCD states that "stop signs shall be installed on shared-use paths at points

where bicycles are required to stop." Since trail users are not required to stop at private roads and driveways installing stop signs at those locations would be inconsistent with MUTCD.

Since the ELST is being transformed from a lightly developed gravel pathway into a fully functional regional trail, it is now subject to uniform standards for traffic control devices. King County is required to apply the best engineering and traffic control practices available and this includes removing unnecessary stop signs. Our regional trails incorporate a number of physical features such as surface treatments to improve safety, including the use of visible concrete surfaces at crossings and the placement of alert bars on approaches to intersections to provide a visual as well as textural contrast to the asphalt trail. Other design elements include removing vegetation to increase sight lines, bollards, striping and consistent signage. Developing the trail in a manner consistent with these standards will enhance safety on the trail.

Safety is King County's number one priority. King County Parks works hard to make our regional trails as safe as possible for trail users and trail neighbors. Our facilities meet the most current professional engineering guidelines that specify safe sight distances and other best practices including location and placement of stop signs. These practices and features are now standard on new regional trail construction, and they have proven successful at creating improved trails and safer crossings. In addition, King County Parks works closely with the King County Sheriff's Department during peak use times to monitor trail use and improve use education.