

In 1971, King County identified the need for a corridor to connect the Burke-Gilman Trail with the John Wayne Pioneer Trail (Iron Horse State Park). The Burlington-Northern/Santa Fe (BNSF) rail corridor was identified as a future urban trail corridor and was included in the *King County Urban Trails Plan* (1971). The growing demand for public recreation venues, including trails, has been continually identified in county and city planning documents since 1971.

King County owns and manages a number of local and regional trails. Currently, there are over 100 miles of paved and nearly 70 miles of unpaved regional trails in King County (King County, 2004). Additional miles of trail are proposed for development, which will connect to existing trails in the region and create a continuous network of non-motorized transportation corridors.

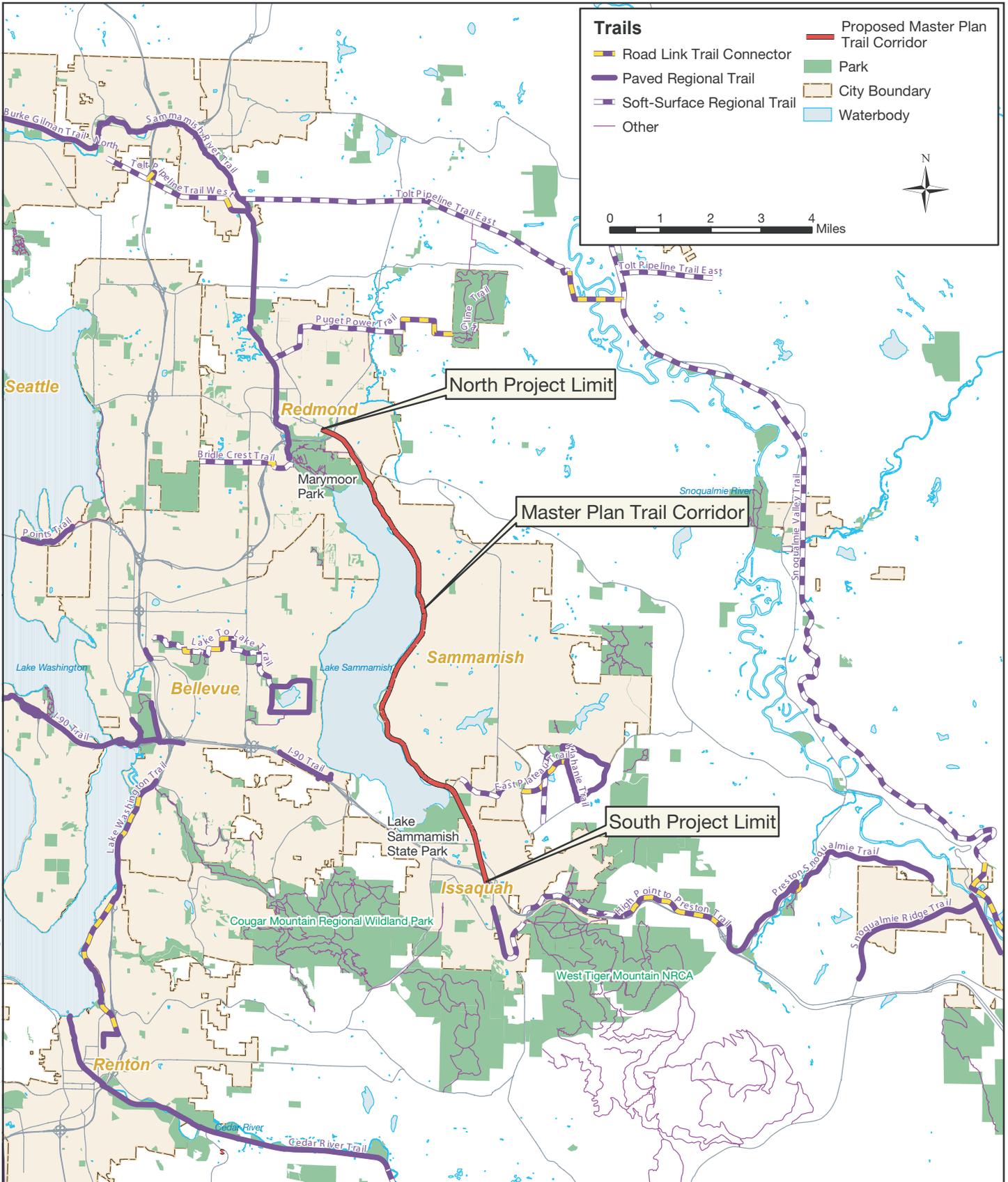
The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and King County Department of Executive Services, Facilities Management Division (KCFMD) propose to develop a non-motorized multi-use trail along approximately 11 miles of former railroad corridor on the east side of Lake Sammamish. The trail would extend from Gilman Boulevard in the City of Issaquah north to approximately 300 feet beyond Bear Creek in the City of Redmond (see Figure 1-1 (pg 1-2)). Portions of the railroad corridor have already been developed into an Interim Use Trail, which has been evaluated in previous environmental documents. The ~~Draft~~ Draft Environmental Impact Statement (~~Draft~~ Draft-EIS) evaluated ~~alternatives~~ alternatives for developing a safe, ~~permanent~~ long-term, multi-use Master Plan Trail.

1.1 Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the proposed project is to design and construct an alternative non-motorized transportation corridor and a multi-use recreational trail along the former BNSF railroad corridor on the east side of Lake Sammamish. A multi-use trail is synonymous with a “shared use path or trail” as defined by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). It is also defined as a “multi-purpose trail” in the *King County Regional Trails Plan* and as a “Share Use Path” in the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) *Facilities for Non-Motorized Transportation*.

The trail would provide access to recreation, employment, and retail centers in the Cities of Redmond, Sammamish, and Issaquah and complete a link in the King County regional trails system. The trail is intended to safely accommodate a variety of user groups such as bicyclists, pedestrians, runners, wheelchair users (including those with motorized wheelchairs), in-line skaters, and equestrians, and different ages and skill levels within those groups.

Federal, state, and local design guidelines would be considered in order to design a multi-use trail to safely accommodate the anticipated uses (AASHTO, 1999; King County, 1992, 1993, 2004; WSDOT, 1995). Physical and spatial separation between the trail and vehicle traffic is important to provide a safe environment for trail users. In addition, trails need to provide adequate operating space for bicycle riders and other users (including equestrians); adequate width to avoid conflicts with other users of a two-way trail; appropriate surfaces in good condition; appropriate bicyclist speed limit for the conditions; grade changes that comply with requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); controlled crossings; safe alignment; and adequate stopping sight distances.



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1.2 Need for the Project

The need for the Master Plan Trail is driven by three factors including: (1) the regional need for alternative transportation corridors between major business centers, (2) the need for non-motorized recreational trails to support a growing multi-use population, and (3) the need to make connections between other existing trails in the regional trails system. These needs are discussed below.

1.2.1 Need for Alternative Transportation Corridors

Population growth to the east of Lake Sammamish has resulted in the development of new retail, commercial, and office centers at both the north and south ends of the project area. However, north-south linkages between these centers are constrained by both the natural and built environment. Traffic congestion has increased substantially in recent years on East Lake Sammamish Parkway and connecting arterial streets in Issaquah, Sammamish, and Redmond. Several intersections adjacent to the trail corridor experience high levels of traffic congestion, especially during peak periods. Approximately 2,000 to 4,000 users are anticipated to use the proposed East Lake Sammamish Master Plan Trail on a peak day, based on user counts from the nearby Sammamish River Trail. Daily recreational use is expected to be lower during inclement weather and shortened daylight hours. However, commuter use is expected to remain fairly constant throughout the year. An alternative transportation corridor is needed to provide a commute option to the local roadways. A survey conducted in May 2005 on the Burke-Gilman/Sammamish River Trail, another well-used trail in King County, indicated that 33 percent of trail users were commuters (Moritz, 2005).

1.2.2 Need for Non-Motorized Recreational Trails

The increase in population has put pressure on existing recreational facilities in the area. Furthermore, the existence of other trails and parks in the area attracts many recreational users and heightens demand for additional facilities suitable for walkers, runners, wheelchair users, bicyclists, in-line skaters, and equestrians of all ages and skill levels. Demand for passive recreational opportunities and access to Lake Sammamish from existing publicly owned property is also increasing. A trail is needed to accommodate the expected range of users in a safe manner.

1.2.3 Need to Provide Links in the Regional Trails System

The Master Plan Trail would also provide critical links in the regional trails system (Figure 1-1 (pg 1-2)). Local trail connections are shown on Figures 3.7-1 (pg 3.7-3) and 3.7-2 (pg 3.7-4) in Section 3.7, Recreation.

Lake Sammamish State Park, at the south end of Lake Sammamish adjacent to Issaquah city limits, is a major recreation destination, and formal and informal paths connect with the proposed trail corridor in this area. The East Plateau Connector Trail begins about 0.25 mile east of the proposed trail corridor along SE 43rd Way. Portions of the East Plateau Connector Trail are yet to be completed. King County is working with Lake Sammamish State Park, the City of Issaquah, and private parties to complete the missing links. Once completed, the East Plateau Connector Trail would provide a connection between the Master Plan Trail and the East Plateau Regional Trail.

Also at the south end, the Master Plan Trail would connect with both the planned and developed local trail system within the City of Issaquah, including the Pickering Trail and the Rainier Multiple Use Trail, which provides a connection with the Issaquah-Preston Regional Trail, the Preston-Snoqualmie Trail, and

the Snoqualmie Valley Trail. The Snoqualmie Valley Trail ultimately connects to the John Wayne Trail/Iron Horse State Park (not mapped on Figure 1-1 (pg 1-2)). The John Wayne Trail traverses the state and provides numerous recreation opportunities through the Mountains to Sound Greenway program.

The 7-mile middle section of the Master Plan Trail is within the City of Sammamish where several east-west trail connections are planned, as well as other local trails identified in the City's current trail planning process.

King County's Marymoor Park is located in Redmond near the north terminus of the Master Plan Trail. Trail users would be able to connect to the regional multi-use Sammamish River Trail at the park. From the Sammamish River Trail, the Burke-Gilman Trail would connect non-equestrian trail users to Bothell, Kenmore, Lake Forest Park, and through Seattle to the terminus of the Burke-Gilman Trail in Ballard. Also from the Sammamish River Trail, trail users would be able to connect to the Tolt Pipeline Trail and the Puget Power Trail. Connections to the Bear Creek Trail and the Bike 520 Trail at Leary Way at the north end are also possible. The partially completed Bike 520 Trail along SR-520 will eventually route users across Lake Washington to Seattle. Equestrian connections include the Sammamish River Trail, Marymoor Park, the Bear Creek Trail, and the Evans Creek Trail and Greenway segments, and Bridle Crest Trail from Marymoor Park east to Bridle Crest State Park.

1.3 Background and History

1.3.1 National and Regional Context

The growing demand for public recreation venues, including trails, has been continually addressed in county and city planning documents for the last three decades. As early as 1971, the *King County Urban Trails Plan* identified a trail on the East Lake Sammamish railroad right of way as a future urban trail corridor (King County, 1971). The East Lake Sammamish Trail has been consistently identified as an important link in the County's regional trail system because it would not only provide recreational opportunities and open space but would also function as an alternative transportation corridor between Issaquah, Sammamish, Redmond, and areas connected through other regional trails.

Following its inclusion in the 1971 *King County Urban Trails Plan*, the proposed East Lake Sammamish Trail was included in the 1975 *King County General Bicycle Plan*, which emphasized the County's desire to identify and acquire rail corridors for trail use (King County, 1975). The trail was also specifically included as part of the *King County Regional Trail Plan* (1992), *King County Non-motorized Transportation Plan* (1993), *King County Comprehensive Plan* (1994), and *King County Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan* (1996). The trail has also been included in other city and county planning documents including the *City of Redmond Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan* (2004), the *City of Issaquah Final Comprehensive Plan* (2004), and the *City of Sammamish Draft Parks, Recreation and Open Space Comprehensive Plan* (2003). These documents identify the proposed East Lake Sammamish Trail as an important recreational facility as well as a transportation corridor.

In 1983 Congress adopted amendments to the National Trail Systems Act (P.L. 90-543, 16 USC 1241 et seq., as amended through P.L. 102-461) to preserve railroad corridors through what has become known as "railbanking." Railbanking is a process that preserves rail corridors for future railroad use, and allows interested trail sponsors the opportunity to negotiate agreements with rail carriers to use these rights of way for trails (16 USC 1247).

In 1991, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) directed states to plan for bicycling and walking trails as an important element of the transportation system and made funds

available for enhancement activities. ISTEA included in its definition of transportation enhancements preservation of railroad corridors through use as pedestrian and bicycle trails.

A recent survey (May 2005) conducted on the Burke-Gilman Trail indicated that a minimum of 33 percent of the trail users were commuters. Trail use in general has increased since a survey conducted in 2000. Weekend use increased by more than 850 users, and weekday use increased by 1,250 users. The weekday users are likely to be largely commuters (Moritz, 2005).

1.3.2 Corridor Acquisition

In 1996, the BNSF railroad ceased operations along the proposed East Lake Sammamish Trail corridor. The Cascade Land Conservancy (formerly the Land Conservancy of Seattle and King County) purchased the active railroad corridor from BNSF in April 1997 and owned the corridor continuously until September 1998. In 1997, King County and the Land Conservancy requested that the federal Surface Transportation Board (Board) grant interim trail use/railbanking status to this corridor under 16 USC 1247(d). Railbanking is a method by which rail lines proposed for abandonment can be preserved through interim conversion to trail use in accordance with Section 8(d) of the National Trails System Act (16 USC §1247(d) and 49 CFR §1152.29). Once a line is railbanked, abandonment of the rail line is suspended and, accordingly, the corridor is treated as if abandonment has not been completed. Railbanked railroad rights of way are maintained as recreational trails or other approved interim uses. At a future date, if needed, the East Lake Sammamish Trail right of way could revert back to a railway. Action was deferred by the Board until August 1998 when BNSF notified the Board of its intent to act on its abandonment exemption authority and joined the requests for interim trail use of this corridor. The application to railbank the corridor was approved by the Board in August 1998 and a federal Notice of Interim Trail Use was issued (Decision Summary, September 6, 1998). The Board prepared a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Environmental Assessment (EA) prior to approving the railbanking and the Notice of Interim Trail Use for the rail corridor. No adverse impacts were identified from issuing the Notice of Interim Use and the subsequent salvage activity along the railroad corridor.

The Land Conservancy sold the railbanked corridor to King County on September 18, 1998. The County purchased the corridor with the intention of developing it into the East Lake Sammamish Trail. In 1998 the King County Council voted to keep the corridor closed to public use until a plan for an interim trail was submitted and approved by the Council. In August 2000, the King County Council adopted the Interim Use Trail and Resource Protection Plan, which selected the railbed alignment for the trail.

The corridor is 100 to 200 feet wide over 91 percent of the proposed trail length. The Land Conservancy retained the salvage rights and completed salvage of most of the rails, ties, and spikes after the purchase. As part of the salvage operation, gravel and rock were placed on the railbed for erosion and sediment control purposes. Currently, King County has developed the Interim Use Trail in Issaquah and Redmond, and recently received permit approval in Sammamish. This document addresses the use of the corridor for the Master Plan Trail.

1.3.3 Corridor Maintenance and Management

Under its railbanking agreement, King County is responsible for maintaining and managing the rail corridor to preserve the integrity of the former railbed in order to accommodate potential reestablishment of rail service. King County intends to fulfill this obligation by installing and operating a recreational and alternative transportation trail pursuant to the Notice of Interim Trail Use. However, even if King County ultimately develops a trail that is located partially off the rail corridor, the County may be obligated to maintain the entire former rail corridor.

In keeping with these management obligations, King County has initiated a program of restorative maintenance along the East Lake Sammamish Trail corridor. Since 1999, King County has repaired or restored nearly 40 drainage systems and culverts along the trail corridor. Approximately 50 more maintenance projects were completed in ~~are planned for~~ 2004. The County regularly mows, removes litter, replaces deteriorated driveway crossings, installs signage, and removes hazardous trees. In addition, County maintenance staff are often required to remove household waste, yard clippings, and construction debris left by others in ditches and elsewhere in the public right of way.

Pursuant to King County Code (KCC) 14.30, King County maintains a special use permit system to authorize the private use of County-owned property, including the East Lake Sammamish Trail corridor, consistent with policies outlined in current administrative guidelines. King County has issued special use permits recognizing established and historically used trail corridor crossings for access as well as utilities, new trail corridor crossings or new users of existing crossings. The many vehicular access crossings permitted along the corridor are hereafter referred to in this EIS as “residential driveways.” Other non-trail-related uses of the County-owned corridor include:

1. Temporary or permanent improvements or alterations to the County-owned corridor that would ultimately enhance the trail or protect natural resources. Examples are installation/donation of benches, signs, and vegetation.
2. Long-term or permanent alterations to the County-owned corridor not related to trail use or natural resource protection. Examples are retaining walls and docks.
3. Short-term or temporary use or alterations to the County-owned corridor not related to trail use or natural resource protection. Examples are removal, installation, or alteration of vegetation, temporary structures, and temporary roads.

These permits are typically issued for a 5-year period, except for crossing permits (both utility and access) which are issued for a 10-year term. King County reserves the right to revoke a special use permit.

1.3.4 Phased Development of the Trail

In 1999, King County held three community meetings to discuss trail planning and formed a Citizen Advisory Group (CAG). A number of the decisions that needed to be made for the long-term, permanent trail were not yet ready for evaluation or decision (e.g., final alignment of the trail, ultimate users of the trail, trail configuration and width, and trail amenities and support facilities). Because such final trail decisions are complex, controversial, and require further public process and discussion in order to provide meaningful evaluations, the County developed a plan to implement the Master Plan Trail in phases. A phased plan would also be more responsive to public input and concerns regarding potential impacts. The first phase was the Interim Use Trail; the next phase is the Master Plan Trail. These phases are discussed below.

1.3.4.1 Interim Use Trail Phase

The first phase of the plan was to allow public use of the railbanked trail corridor as an Interim Use Trail. Along with allowing public use of the railbanked trail corridor, the interim use phase was designed to protect natural resources and human safety and fulfill railbanking requirements until the planning for a long-term, permanent trail could be completed and the permanent trail developed. The *East Lake Sammamish Trail Interim Use and Resource Protection Plan* (King County, 1999) encompassed the planning for this initial phase. The Interim Use Trail is a gravel trail, located on the former railbed, which varies in width from 8 to 12 feet wide.

Environmental evaluation and documentation of the Interim Use Trail was prepared in compliance with the State and National Environmental Policy Acts (SEPA and NEPA). In 2000, King County published a final SEPA environmental impact statement (EIS) for the *East Lake Sammamish Trail Interim Use and Resource Protection Plan* and selected the railbed alignment for implementation (King County, 2000). The East Lake Sammamish Trail Project was partly funded with Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) funds, which are administered by the FHWA. The proposed use of these federal funds triggered the requirement for NEPA review. Therefore, in 2002 FHWA and WSDOT published a NEPA EA for the *Interim Use and Resource Protection Plan* and subsequently issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

In order to meaningfully evaluate impacts of the Interim Use Trail, the SEPA and NEPA documents evaluated the first phase of the project, through 2015. In 2015, authorization for the trail would expire in the absence of additional environmental review.

In addition to completing SEPA and NEPA environmental documentation, development of the Interim Use Trail required obtaining permits from local jurisdictions along the trail corridor. All permits necessary to construct the Interim Use Trail within the Cities of Redmond and Issaquah were obtained, and construction of the Interim Use Trail in these areas was completed in early 2004. Permits were recently obtained for construction of the remaining segment of Interim Use Trail within the City of Sammamish. Construction of the Interim Use Trail was completed and open to the public in March 2006.

Construction of the Interim Use Trail involved various improvements to the existing railbed, such as removing the remaining rail ties; adding gravel to the surface of the railbed; installing fencing, signage, and litter receptacles; and repairing and maintaining existing ditches and culverts.

1.3.4.2 Master Plan Trail Phase

This EIS addresses the alternatives for the next phase of the project: development of a ~~permanent long-term~~ Master Plan Trail (refer to section 1.3.2 for a discussion of railbanking). As described further in Chapter 2, the Master Plan Trail would be a multi-use trail, with both paved and soft surfaces to accommodate pedestrians, non-motorized wheeled vehicles, and equestrians. The Master Plan Trail would be located in the same general corridor as the Interim Use Trail. For planning and evaluation purposes, the existing condition in the EIS is assumed to be that of the fully developed Interim Use Trail.

The Master Plan Trail would likely be constructed in segments due to the length of the trail and the multiple jurisdictions that would be affected. Because of local permitting requirements, the segments would likely be defined at least in part by city boundaries. These segments could be constructed simultaneously or independently, allowing for the flexibility to accelerate or delay the overall construction schedule.

1.3.4.3 Delayed Implementation

Should the King County council decide to delay implementation of the Master Plan Trail, the Interim Use Trail would remain in operation through 2015. No additional environmental impacts would result from this alternative. This alternative is described throughout the document as the No Action Alternative.

1.3.5 Terminology Used throughout the Document

The term “corridor” is used to describe the former railroad right of way. The term “railbed” is used in instances where physical studies or analyses were conducted prior to the construction of the Interim Use Trail. The “Interim Use Trail” is a gravel-surface trail that was completed in 2006 along the railbed corridor. The “Master Plan Trail” is used to describe the long-term, paved trail in the project area. The

“Corridor Alternative” refers to the preferred Master Plan Trail alternative that would be constructed in the general location of the Interim Use Trail.