

CHAPTER 1 — INTRODUCTION

Trails have been important in Alaska throughout recorded history. Today there are more miles of trails in the state than roadways. As communities have developed, the need for all modes of transportation has increased. The trails upon which people first traveled by foot later became narrow dirt roadways that they shared with horses and then cars and trucks. Eventually, sidewalks and walkways were constructed to separate pedestrians and other trail users from faster traveling vehicles.

Trails are a basic part of the infrastructure in the Municipality and they serve many functions. They are an integral part of the total transportation system, providing mobility and accessibility to areas and facilities, and they also serve aesthetic and psychological functions. They are recreational facilities from which a variety of leisure time enjoyment is derived. Trails, also known to some as “greenways” and “linear parks”, aim to bring the outdoors to the people. Beyond providing a physical connection, trails are a way of creating community. Sometimes the very speed that we travel through life disconnects us from our neighbors. Trails allow an opportunity for people to slow down, connect, and revitalize.

Trails also provide an important economic resource for the community. Economic benefits are found in the sale of equipment, private construction and maintenance of trails, conventions featuring trails in their entirety and specific trail user conventions. Trail races, such as the Fur Rondy and Iditarod races, bring tourism dollars into the community.

The residents of the Municipality of Anchorage have expressed their desire for trails shown in every public survey taken since the 1960s and was reconfirmed in the public survey done in 1993 as part of this Plan development. There is further evidence in the large number of residents and visitors alike use the existing trail system.

Trails, like other transportation facilities, have both associated benefits and costs. Costs for design, construction, operation, and maintenance are important factors in trail development. The majority of these costs are supported by municipal, state, and federal resources, as well as some private participation, such as volunteer efforts.

Some landowners may not want trails to cross their property or object to being required to provide trails as a part of the subdivision process. This impact has been addressed and mitigated, to an extent, by locating most trails in public lands along rivers and streams and along streets and highways. However, some necessary trails, such as those providing connections to the trail system, can only be provided through trail easements across private land.

This Plan evolved through a long and extensive two-year public participation process and it represents a compromise between competing interests. Although it is not possible to accommodate all the wishes of every interest, some of every interest groups’ needs have been included. (See Appendix 1 for a discussion of the public participation process.)

I. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF PLAN

A. PURPOSE

The Areawide Trails Plan is the basic planning and policy document for the development of trails in the Municipality. It serves as the trails implementation tool of the Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Development Plan, the Chugiak-Eagle River Comprehensive Plan, the Turnagain Arm Comprehensive Plan, the Girdwood Area Plan, and the Long-Range Transportation Plans of the Anchorage Bowl and the Chugiak/Eagle River Area. This Plan replaces the 1985 Anchorage Trails Plan, as well as trails identified in the 1985 Anchorage Park, Greenbelt and Recreation Facility Plan, Volume IV “Eagle River-Chugiak-Eklutna.”

This Plan, which is based on a 20-year planning period, will achieve an integrated trail system that encourages travel by many means and offers a variety of recreational opportunities. The plan will be reviewed periodically, allowing for modifications of preferences or priorities and for focused planning at a neighborhood scale.

B. NEED

The areas of Chugiak-Eagle River, Turnagain Arm, and the Anchorage Bowl are in different stages of growth. The Bowl has the greatest population and also the greatest number of developed trails. There are fewer developed trails in the Chugiak-Eagle River area, and even fewer in the Turnagain Arm area. Thus, the need for trails, and current users of trails, are different in each of the different areas.

C. SCOPE

1. Trail Uses

One of the major objectives of the Areawide Trails Plan is to identify the wide spectrum of trail user needs and to develop recommendations for each of these users. Anchorage’s diverse population, climate, latitude, and heritage combine to provide a broad mix of trail needs and opportunities. The Areawide Trails Plan addresses the following trail users and activities:

- Pedestrians
- Bicyclists
- Interpretive Trail Users
- Running/Jogging/Physical Fitness
- Snowmobile and Other Motorized
- Cross-country Skiing
- Equestrians
- Sled Dog Mushing
- Skijoring
- Natural Trail Users
- Water Trails

Wherever possible, different types of uses should take place on a single trail. In the summer, hikers and joggers can use cross-country ski trails. In the winter, dog mushers and cross-country skiers can use summer hiking trails. Waterways can be used as winter dog mushing, cross-country skiing, or snowmobile trails.

2. Definition of Trail Types

Trails are intended to be multi-purpose facilities that allow for means of transportation other than automobile or bus. Trails may either complement or replace other modes of transportation. The primary function of trails is to provide for many users, including bicyclists, walkers, joggers, hikers, rollerbladers, dog mushers, snowmobilers, equestrians, and skiers. Trails may be surfaced with pavement, recycled asphalt pavement (RAP), or gravel, or left in a natural, unpaved state.

For the purposes of this plan, the different trail types are defined as follows:

- Multi-Use Paved Trails are for pedestrian type uses to include bicycling, jogging, skating, cross-country skiing and skijoring. These trails are not typically used by motorized vehicles, or sled dog mushers except when reserved for special events following appropriate public notice.
- Multi-Use Unpaved Trails are also used for pedestrian type activities to include bicycling, jogging, cross-country skiing, skijoring, and also equestrian, natural and interpretive types of uses.
- Bicycle Routes are facilities that provide for bicycles to share roadways. These routes are striped and/or signed and are intended to serve commuters and cyclists. Note: Many of the existing multi-use paved trails are signed as “bike route” when located in a road right-of-way.
- Cross-Country Ski Trails are part of the Multi-use Paved and Multi-use Unpaved system. Those trails that are intended exclusively for cross-country skiing or are groomed for cross-country skiing are identified in Figures 2.2-2.6 and 3.1
- Snowmobile Trails are trails to be used by snowmobiles.
- Skijoring Trails are part of the multi-use paved and unpaved systems. Those trails that are groomed for skijoring (i.e. skiing while attached to a harnessed dog) are located primarily in Connors Lake Park/De la Vega Park, Far North Bicentennial Park and Edmonds Lake Park.
- Sled Dog Mushing Trails are trails used primarily by sled dog mushers. Trail that are groomed for dog mushing are primarily located in Far North Bicentennial Park and Beach Lake Park.
- Water Trails are streams or rivers designated for water based movement.
- Natural Trails are unpaved, unlighted, ungroomed trails in a natural setting.

Maps that illustrate the general location of trails for the Anchorage Bowl, Chugiak-Eagle River, and Turnagain Arm areas are to be found in the back. Trails are identified either as existing or as planned facilities. Existing trails are those that physically exist and are legally protected. Planned trails are trails that may or may not physically exist, but are not legally protected.

In addition to these primary types of trails, there are several other pedestrian or trail type facilities including sidewalks, walkways, and paths (see figure 1.1).

- Sidewalks are concrete surfaces or otherwise improved areas for pedestrian use. They are located within public street rights-of-way that also contain roadways for use by vehicular traffic.
- Walkways are rights-of-way, dedicated to public use, which cross within a block to facilitate pedestrian access to adjacent streets and properties.
- Paths are separated trails that may or may not be in a road right-of-way. These paths are traditionally and predominantly signed Bike Routes throughout the municipality. This Plan refers to these paths as multi-use paved trails when adjacent to roadways.

Trail Types

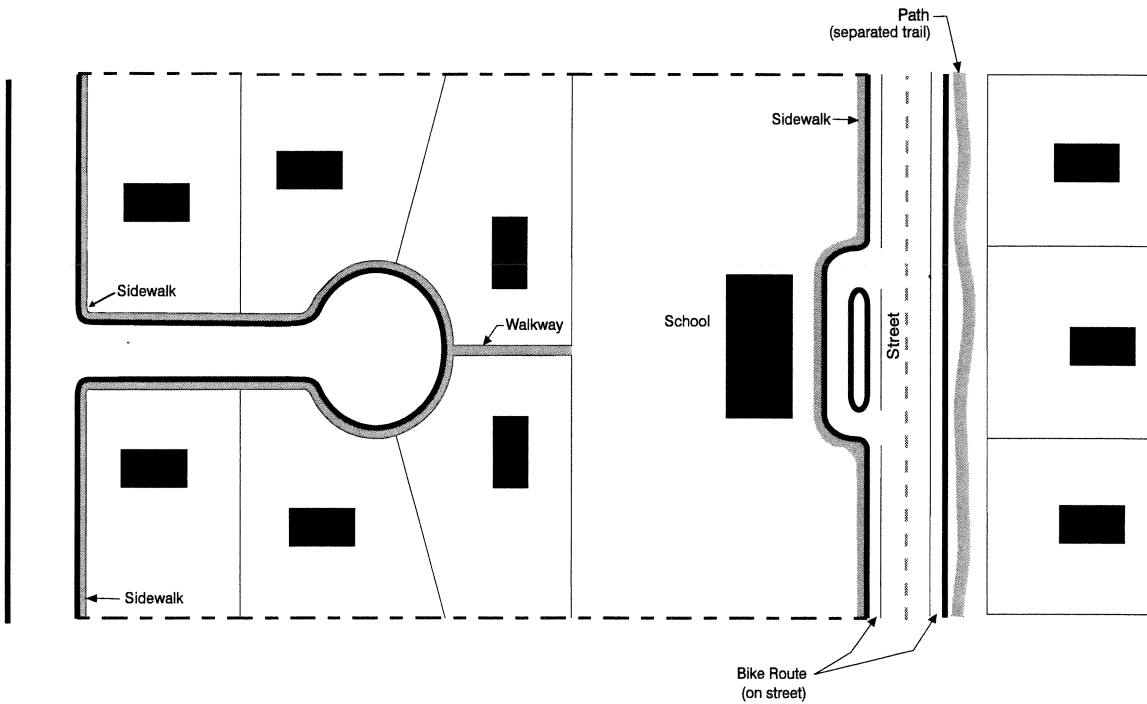


Figure 1.1

3. Intended Plan Users

Several agencies will implement the various aspects of the Plan. The Municipal Assembly, through its approval of the Areawide Trails Plan and through its approval of the budgeting process, is ultimately responsible for the overall planning and development of trails within the Municipality. The Planning and Zoning Commission is generally responsible for ensuring that areas designated for eventual park and trail developments are protected from other types of development.

If a proposed subdivision plat encompasses a trail officially adopted in the Plan, the Platting Authority shall, pursuant to Section 21.80.060 “Dedication—Trails” of the Anchorage Municipal Code, require that such land be dedicated as trail easements, unless the trails are demonstrated to be provided in the right-of-way.

The Parks and Recreation Commission, the Eagle River-Chugiak Park and Recreation Facility Advisory Board, and the Girdwood Board of Supervisors all make recommendations to the Municipal Assembly and the Planning and Zoning Commission regarding trail programs, policies, projects and budgets.

The Department of Cultural and Recreational Services (DCRS) assumes the primary role for implementation of trails in parks and greenbelts. Other municipal and state departments must work in close coordination with DCRS when reviewing and commenting on subdivision plats and site plans.

The Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS) is an organization that brings together municipal and State the transportation-related agencies that develop projects, provides a forum for comprehensive and cooperative planning efforts. AMATS establishes the priorities for federally-funded transportation improvements in the Anchorage and Chugiak-Eagle River areas.

In addition, there are several other organizations that will be involved in implementing various aspects of the Plan:

- Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation
- Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
- Alaska Railroad Corporation
- Alaska State Department of Fish and Game
- Anchorage School District
- Bureau of Land Management
- MOA Department of Community Planning and Development
- MOA Department of Property and Facility Management
- MOA Department of Public Works
- MOA Department of Public Transportation
- MOA Heritage Land Bank
- Private consultants, contractors and developers
- Trail user and other advocacy groups
- Utility companies

4. Trail Priorities

The Plan contains recommended priorities for construction for each of the different types of trails, such as multi-use paved and unpaved trails, snowmobile trails, and others. While each of these trails is very important, funding for construction is limited. As a part of the process for determining funding priorities, the Trails Plan Review Group (see Chapter 10 for a discussion of the process and the list of priorities) developed a more limited number of funding priorities

II. STUDY AREA

The area covered by the Areawide Trails Plan includes the entire Municipality of Anchorage (see Figure 1.2). Portions of Chugach State Park and Chugach National Forest, both of which contain extensive recreational trail systems and are covered by their own master plans, are within the Municipality. The Areawide Trails Plan acknowledges these efforts and complements them by identifying important trail linkages.

This Plan does not attempt to fully address trail systems within individual park units such as Point Campbell/Kincaid Park, Beach Lake Park, Bird Creek Regional Park, or Far North Bicentennial Park. Planning of trails within those areas is done as an element of each area's overall park planning process. However, connections to these parks are shown on the maps, and maps of trails in some of these units are included in this Plan.

A. POPULATION OF THE STUDY AREA

The population of the Municipality of Anchorage has increased from 206,748 persons in 1983 to 250,006 persons in 1994 (MOA, 1994). The population of the study area in the year 2010 is projected to be approximately 265,439 persons (ISER, August 1994). This would represent an increase of almost 30 percent over 1983. A large percentage of this increase is projected to occur in areas of Anchorage where the existing trail system is inadequate, such as the southeast Bowl areas and Chugiak-Eagle River.

B. STUDY AREA CHARACTERISTICS

Anchorage trail needs of the 1990's vary greatly from those of Anchorage in the early 1900's. Anchorage trails must address the needs of a culturally diverse community and the problems and opportunities presented by this diversity.

Anchorage presents a broad spectrum of income levels. While Anchorage has a personal income level that is relatively high compared to the national average, it still has a sizable population that lives below the poverty level (7%).

Study Area - Municipality of Anchorage

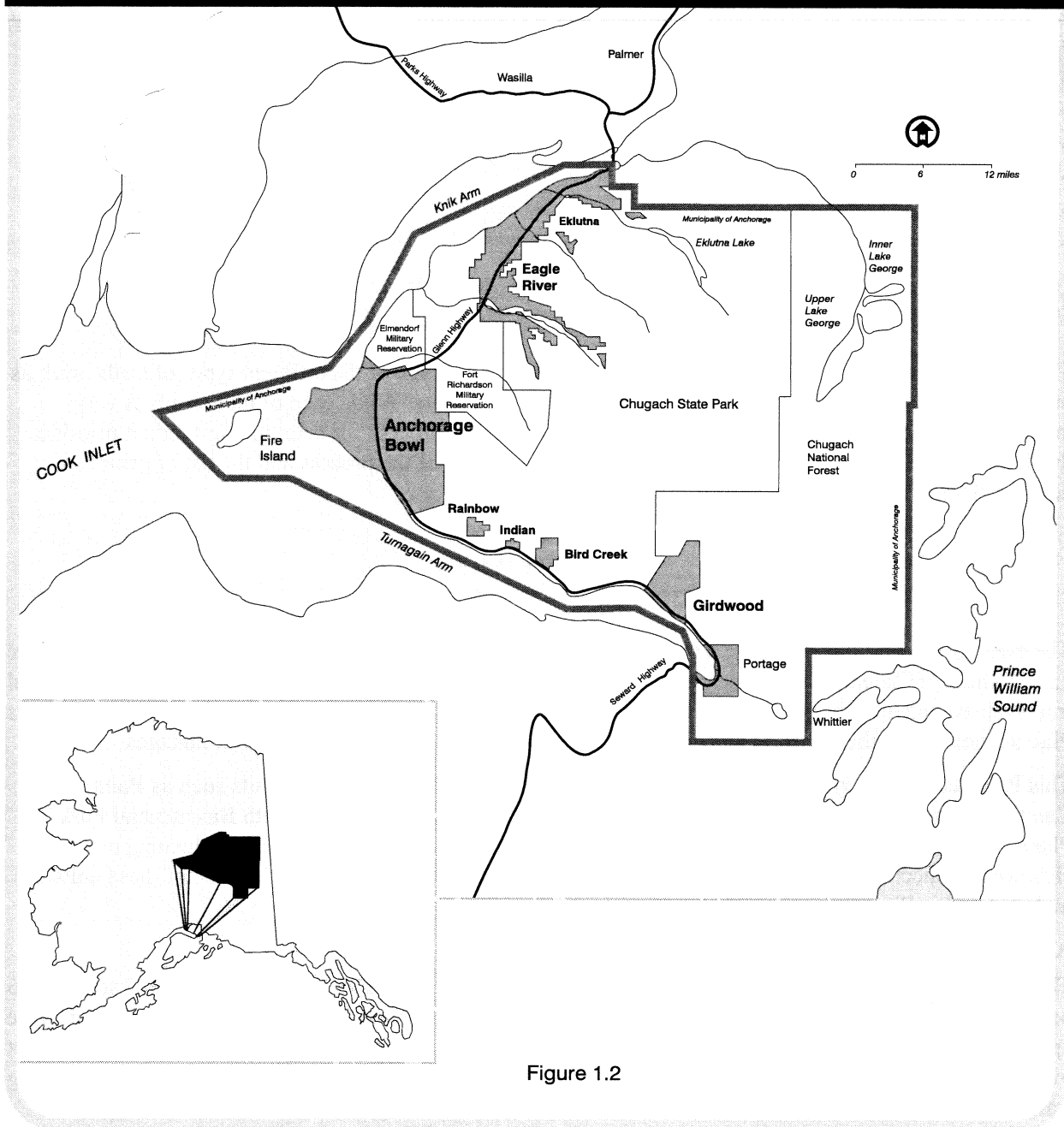


Figure 1.2

Some households in parts of Anchorage lack automobiles. Lack of an automobile can make shopping, job commuting, and recreating difficult in a city with significant sprawl, as is exhibited by Anchorage. The number of households without automobiles has increased from 5.3 percent in 1980 to 6.2 percent in 1990.

In addition to this, the transit system in Anchorage is limited in both the areas that it serves and the number of buses that are available for use. However, there is a greater need for transit than is presently available due to the cost of provision of the service.

Anchorage has a generally young population compared to the rest of the United States. This may mean an increased interest in active recreation needs. The public opinion survey conducted as a part of this plan indicated that the largest segment of the population that pursued active recreational interests were between the ages 30 and 44. Also those between 20 and 29 tended to use alternative means of transportation. This may place added need for a trail system that connects to mass transit, provides for commuter needs, and addresses a diverse active recreation interest.

A large population in child-bearing years may also suggest a need to address the transportation needs of a growing youth population in the future. This places an emphasis on the need to address connections to schools and recreation areas.

III. PUBLIC SURVEY

As a part of the public participation process a random telephone survey of 409 households in the Anchorage Bowl, Chugiak-Eagle River and Turnagain Arm was conducted by an independent research firm in February of 1993. (See Appendix 2, Public Information Survey Form). The purpose of the survey was to determine public concerns and garner suggestions about trails in the Municipality of Anchorage. The survey included consideration of trail use within the Municipality of Anchorage, including lands within Chugach State Park.

The survey revealed that most residents feel very fortunate to have a well-developed trail system in the Anchorage Bowl. At the same time, respondents expressed serious concerns about safety, user conflicts, maintenance, unleashed dogs and crime. Most respondents favored expansion of the trail system and many listed specific projects for consideration by the city.

The majority of households surveyed thought the trails in the Anchorage bowl were “good” in terms of cleanliness and convenience of location. However, high negative responses were received regarding personal safety and the pavement condition of the trails.

Seventy-eight percent of the households surveyed included at least one member who had used trails in 1992, with most trips beginning in northeast and northwest Anchorage. Most of these trips were for recreation and fitness purposes, but 12 percent of those households surveyed included at least one member who had traveled to work on trails.

Walking for pleasure was by far the most frequent summer use of trails and 76 percent had biked on paved trails within the municipality. These groups voiced the highest concern for the quality of the trails. Cross-country skiing was the most frequent winter activity among the 43 percent of households surveyed that used trails in winter. Walking and jogging were the next most frequent type of winter trail use. Table 1 summarizes findings from the public survey.

Respondents also expressed concerns about safety related to user conflicts, such as collisions with other users, and crime. This was especially true in the north, south, and east Anchorage Bowl. Thirty-four percent of those surveyed said that they had experienced conflicts with other trail users, including bikers, rollerbladers, or unleashed dogs. There were many complaints about conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users. To a lesser degree, some were concerned about criminals or intoxicated persons.

Users in south Anchorage and, to a lesser degree, those in Chugiak-Eagle River rated convenient access to trails as high, indicating the need for better and more convenient access. Ninety-two percent of those polled have a trail within five miles of their home and 62 percent have a trail within one mile of their home.

Summer Activity	%	Winter Activity	%
Walking for Pleasure	78.7	Cross-country Skiing	43.0
Biking (Paved Trails)	76.2	Walking for Pleasure	38.9
Hiking	40.0	Jogging/Running	13.3
Biking (Unpaved Trails)	39.1	Dog Walking	11.7
Jogging/Running	30.8	Snowmobiles/ATV	9.5
Dog Walking	24.4	Snowshoeing	5.7
Interpretive	21.9	Ski-joring	2.5
Rollerblading	18.1	Dog Mushing	1.0
Off-Road Vehicle	8.9	Equestrian	0.9
Canoeing/Kayaking	7.0	Roller Skiing	1.9
Equestrian	1.6		

Of those surveyed, there was a slight preference for improving trails over expanding the trail system. Twenty-seven percent thought the trails should be expanded and/or connected to be closer to their homes or to enable them to make longer commuting trips around town. Sixty-seven percent indicated they were willing to pay higher taxes to expand the trail system.

IV. GOALS, OBJECTIVES, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

A. GOAL

The goal of the Areawide Trails Plan is to establish a comprehensive trail system that has the following benefits:

- serves as a basic component of a comprehensive supplemental transportation system for use by all citizens;
- provides safe, convenient, year-round access to transit, schools, shops, major employment centers, historical facilities, and parks and recreational facilities;
- strengthens the sense of community and neighborhood by linking neighborhoods and increasing the opportunity for people to interact;
- provides recreation for people of all ages, abilities, and financial status;
- provides new opportunities for outdoor education;
- enhances the visual quality of the Municipality;
- improves air quality;
- reduces crime by bringing responsible recreationalists into an area; and
- preserves important wildlife habitats and migration corridors through public education efforts at trail heads or information kiosks.

B. OBJECTIVES

1. Administrative Objectives

- a. Establish a Trails Oversight Committee responsible for overall coordination and implementation of the Areawide Trails Plan. This group would review trail design documents, resolve policies and procedures for trail users, including use conflicts, and establish user fees, where appropriate.
- b. Re-evaluate the Areawide Trails Plan every three years. If there are no significant deviations from the assumptions or conditions anticipated in this Plan, a complete revision of the Plan is not required. However, if major changes are noted in this re-evaluation, a complete revision of the Plan is warranted.
- c. Establish a campaign to inform and educate the public on the benefits and uses of trails.

2. Policy Objectives

- a. Consider trails to be integral to the Municipality of Anchorage transportation network.
- b. Promote construction of trails coincident with the upgrade or construction of a roadway where a trail is required, provided that such construction or upgrade does not eliminate or materially denigrate the usability of improvements on adjoining private property designed to comply with or meet the requirements of standards of the American with Disabilities Act, unless agreed to by the private property owner or approved by court order.
- c. Accept trail activities as legitimate uses within a road right-of-way and include such use during the planning, budgeting, and design for future road projects, particularly during right-of-way acquisition.
- d. Require that a trail easement be dedicated if a proposed private or public subdivision plat includes a trail designated in the Areawide Trails Plan that trail and is not shown in a right-of-way.
- e. Recognize the legitimacy of all trail users and establish priorities of use if conflicts arise.

3. Land Use Objectives

- a. Provide for the location of trails designated in the Areawide Trails Plan when dedicating creek maintenance, sewer, drainage, and stream protection easements.
- b. Identify utility easements within which trails could be developed.

4. Design Objectives

- a. Design trails used for transportation to meet the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG).
- b. Determine an appropriate “challenge level” for recreational lands throughout the municipality, based on the U.S. Forest Service “Recreation Opportunity Spectrum.” Determine the design standard for disabilities appropriate to each challenge level.
- c. Examine and, if necessary, amend the minimum right-of-way widths recommended in the Design Criteria Manual to ensure they provide enough room for trails, sidewalks, slopes, snow storage, and setbacks.
- d. Provide trail lighting, except for natural trails.

C. POLICIES

The following policy statements are intended to supplement the goals and policies of the Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Development Plan, the Chugiak-Eagle River Comprehensive Plan, the Turnagain Arm Comprehensive Plan, the Girdwood Area Plan, and the goals of the Areawide Trails Plan. They will help set a course of action to implement the recommendations in this Plan.

Policy Statement No. 1: The Department of Community Planning and Development, in cooperation with other municipal, state and federal departments, shall be the lead agency for trails planning. The Department of Cultural and Recreational Services shall be the lead agency for trail implementation in parks and greenbelts. The Department of Public Works shall be the lead agency for trail implementation in Municipal road rights-of-way. The State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities shall be the lead agency for trail implementation in State rights-of-way.

Policy Statement No. 2: Trails shall be considered integral to the Municipality of Anchorage transportation network and shall be provided to encourage convenient, healthful means of transportation as an alternative to automobile use.

Policy Statement No. 3: The Municipality of Anchorage shall provide a wide range of trail opportunities to accommodate varying activities, abilities, and users.

Policy Statement No. 4: The trail system should be geographically distributed to provide safe and convenient access to a maximum number of municipal residents.

Policy Statement No. 5: Community involvement and input shall be actively solicited to ensure a responsive and representative trail program and to ensure that trails are sited to provide maximum user benefit with a minimum of community disturbance.

Policy Statement No. 6: The municipal park and greenbelt system should facilitate development of an integrated trail system where it is appropriate to provide trail linkages between neighborhoods, school and park sites, and major areas of public activity.

Policy Statement No. 7: The Municipality of Anchorage shall actively pursue the dedication of rights-of-way and easements to facilitate access to, and continuity within, the system of trails, parks, greenbelts, and open spaces.

Policy Statement No. 8: In the subdivision process the Municipality shall require provision for trails and walkways, including direct access to adjoining trails when those trails are a part of this Plan and are not located in a dedicated easement or right-of-way.

Policy Statement No. 9: The Municipality shall develop a safe, healthy environment for trail activities by:

- Requiring separation from motorized traffic on existing roadways for pedestrians where appropriate.
- Establishing maximum separation of un-interpretive trail segments from moving traffic within new roadway facilities or improvements.
- Encouraging internal pedestrian circulation systems that minimize street crossings.
- Encouraging internal pedestrian circulation systems in commercial-retail districts.
- Providing crosswalks with signals wherever warranted.
- Encouraging the development of grade-separated street crossings (for example, overpasses or underpasses) where warranted by high trail user flow or other safety considerations.

- Providing artificial lighting along high use and poorly lit trail corridors and at hazardous street crossings where street lighting is inadequate.
- Accommodating those with disabilities by complying with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act as a minimum.
- Giving special consideration to potential pedestrian and bicycle problems in school areas.
- Prohibiting road snow from being deposited on trails, except for temporary storage.
- Encouraging cooperation between bicyclists and drivers to share the roadways.

Policy Statement No. 10: Roadway planning and design shall, within reason, provide adequate rights-of-way to accommodate transit facilities, trail corridors, and landscaping, and to minimize air and noise pollution on adjacent properties.

Policy Statement No. 11: Park and Ride lots and other transit facilities shall be linked with adjacent neighborhoods and traffic generators by trails and/or pedestrian walkways.

Policy Statement No. 12: The Municipality shall provide secure bicycle racks at parks, Park and Ride lots, and other major public facilities, as funding permits.

Policy Statement No. 13: The Municipality shall encourage and assist in the provision of benches, drinking fountains, restrooms, litter receptacles, information kiosks, rain shelters, and patterned sidewalks in order to encourage pedestrian use. Arcades and passageways through buildings are particularly helpful in cold weather. The design of such facilities shall be compatible with adjacent land uses.

Policy Statement No. 14: Ramp curbing with minimal lips shall be provided at street crossings in order to facilitate the use of wheelchairs, bicycles and strollers.

Policy Statement No. 15: The Municipality shall eliminate or minimize obstructions within trail corridors.

Policy Statement No. 16: Designated, existing trails that are lost to development or other uses shall be replaced with similar quality trails to maintain the diversity and accessibility of the trail system.

Policy Statement No. 17: The Municipality shall provide continuing trail maintenance to protect the personal security of all trail users.

Policy Statement No. 18: Rights-of-way and easements established by other government agencies for other purposes shall not be abandoned unless the responsible agency first consults with the Department of Community Planning and Development to determine that they are not useful as trail corridors.

Policy Statement No. 19: The Municipal Department of Community Planning and Development should develop and keep current a set of large scale maps that identify recommended trail corridors.

Policy Statement No. 20: Trails and walkways shall be included from the very beginning of a new road project, except for projects that strictly involve pavement overlay or rehabilitation, particularly when the right-of-way issue is being settled.

Policy Statement No. 21: Where a trail is to be provided along a roadway that is to be upgraded or constructed, the trail shall be considered as an integral part of the transportation improvement and shall be constructed at the same time as the upgrade or construction. Costs of acquisition of rights-of-way and trail construction shall be integral to the cost estimate of the roadway.

Policy Statement No. 22: Public partnerships with individuals and user groups for trail maintenance shall be encouraged to promote cost savings to the Municipality and to enhance public commitment to trails.

V. CRITERIA FOR PLANNING TRAILS

In support of these goals, objectives, policies and public survey results a set of criteria were examined in the development of this areawide trails planning effort. The criteria include the following and are discussed in detail in Appendix 3.

- Trail Connections - trails need to be continuous to function as an adequate transportation system;
- Traffic Generators - consider where trail uses begin and end;
- Road Development - developed trails in conjunction with road improvements;
- Coordination and Cooperation - link public, private and/or voluntary resources;
- Population Characteristics - recognize that existing and projected uses are different throughout the community and are subject to changes;
- Different Skill Levels or Capabilities - recognize the difference in trail use experience and age of users;
- Environmental Concerns - evaluate the natural and man-made environments in trail corridor selection;
- Cost & Cost Effectiveness - current and anticipated construction and operating costs and their funding sources are important;
- Multiple Use - a single trail can accommodate multiple purpose and users;
- Non Dedicated Trails - trails do not legally exist unless they are dedicated as part of a planning or platting process;
- Safety - personnel safety and safety hazards should be anticipated and reduced;
- Land Use and Management Authority Conflicts - recognize the potential for trail conflict with neighboring land uses and between managing authorities;
- Road and Railroad Crossings - locate trails as to minimize road and railroad crossings;
- Accessibility - trails should be designed to recognize the American with Disabilities Act and planned with the understanding that all trail need not be designed equal to address the need for different challenge levels; and
- Compatibility of Trail Uses - compatibility between multiple uses on the same trail is another improvement criteria for trail planning.