

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION

The Areawide Trails Plan is the primary planning and policy document used in the development of a trail system throughout the Municipality of Anchorage over the next 20 years. Its purpose is to guide local and state agencies, organizations, and private citizens in establishing trail facilities as part of an overall transportation system.

Serving as the implementation tool for trail improvements, the Areawide Trails Plan is a component of the Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Development Plan, the Chugiak-Eagle River Comprehensive Plan, the Turnagain Arm Comprehensive Plan, the Girdwood Area Plan, the Anchorage Bowl Long-Range Transportation Plan, and the Chugiak-Eagle River Transportation Plan. This Plan, adopted by Anchorage Municipal Assembly Ordinance AO 96-140 on April 8, 1996, replaces both the 1985 Anchorage Trails Plan and the trails in the 1985 Anchorage Park, Greenbelt and Recreation Facility Plan. The Areawide Trails Plan has a dual focus: the development of integrated trails serving multiple recreational users and the creation of a trail system that facilitates alternative modes of transportation.

The eleven chapters that comprise this Plan establish the foundation, policies and recommendations for all trail improvements throughout the Municipality. Similar to the previously adopted 1985 Anchorage Trails Plan, this Plan begins with a discussion of the importance of trails to our transportation system based on history, public surveys and the input of numerous trail user groups, interested parties and agencies.

Formulation and discussion of key trail issues, existing conditions and recommendations for the Anchorage Bowl, the Chugiak/Eagle River areas and the Turnagain Arm are included in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, respectively. The Iditarod Trail, the Coastal Trail, and a trail connecting the Matanuska-Susitna Borough with the Kenai Peninsula are recognized in Chapter 5 for their regional significance.

Chapter 6 of the Areawide Trails Plan addresses areawide trail issues, such as user attitude, funding, right-of-way, compatibility, etiquette, enforcement, and education. Chapter 7 provides general guidance for design requirements when building trails within roadway rights-of-way and elsewhere. Chapter 8 contains important information about maintenance responsibilities and is based on extensive research.

Financing scenarios for trail improvements are outlined in Chapter 9. Chapter 10 discusses implementation of the recommendations of the Plan and specifically identifies right-of-way, the involvement of key agencies, implementation responsibilities of Municipal Departments, the creation of a Trails Plan Oversight Committee and other required studies. This chapter also includes a list, in alphabetical order, of the top 50 trail improvements to be considered in the future.

Chapter 11 concludes the Plan with three large-scale maps depicting the Anchorage Bowl, Chugiak/Eagle River and the Turnagain Arm. These maps illustrate all the primary trail types, including multi-use paved and unpaved trails, commuter bike routes, snowmobile trails and areas, ski-joring, cross country skiing, sled dog mushing, water, and interpretive trails. Many existing trails within parks or greenbelts are not shown in detail on these large-scale maps. In some cases, more detailed trail locations within parks are shown as separate figures within a chapter.

PLAN DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Municipal Department of Community Planning and Development coordinated the development of this Plan, in cooperation with other local and state agencies. An important component of the public process was the creation of a Trails Plan Review Group, which was comprised of a balance of various trail users. The Group provided guidance, performed a critical review of information, and offered recommendations. Extensive public participation was critical to the development of this Plan. Early identification of trail issues was accomplished through a random telephone survey and a series of public workshops. The public participation process formed the basis of the organization and recommendations of the Plan. Key issues identified through the public process included the importance of trail safety, maintenance, usage, convenience, and priorities for implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Areawide Trails Plan recommends improvements for both motorized and non-motorized trails. A comprehensive set of goals, objectives, and policies were crafted and refined to set the direction for trail planning. The goals for the Areawide Trails Plan were developed based on identified issues and the basic principles of safety, mobility, efficiency, aesthetics, and pleasure. Using the set of goals, objectives, and policies set forth in this Plan, planning evaluation criteria were developed to help further shape the Plan and its recommendations. To assess trail priorities and identify the top 50 trail projects for the Plan, planning criteria, to include but not be limited to, trail connections, changes in users populations, cost effectiveness, trails for multiple uses, safety, and accessibility were used.

SUMMARY

Residents of the Municipality feel fortunate to have a well-developed trails system, particularly in the Anchorage Bowl. The Municipality's trail system was nationally recognized by the American Hiking Society as the one of the "Top Trail Towns" in 1996.

Expansion of the system is favored by most of those who participated in the Plan survey, with the recognized need to enhance safety, reduce user conflicts, and improve maintenance.

The Plan recommends continued trail development throughout the Municipality from Eklutna to Portage. The Plan does not duplicate efforts of state and federal management agencies for the planning of state and federal lands within the municipality, but complements these systems by providing trail linkages and trailheads.

When fully implemented, the Areawide Trails Plan is intended to provide the Municipality with an integrated system of trails that permit and encourage travel by modes other than the automobile, and that offer a variety of recreational opportunities.

Questions about the plan (text or maps) can be addressed by contacting the Municipality of Anchorage, Department of Community Planning and Development, Transportation Planning Division by phone at 907-343-4262, by fax at 907-343-4100, or by writing to the at P.O. Box 196650, Anchorage, AK 99519-6650.