



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Trail Concept Plan Headed Out for Design Considerations**

**Dayton, WA** – After a weekend of workshops, a semester of design work, and several virtual review sessions, the Touchet Valley Trail Concept Plan is ready for the next steps in the planning process. After reviewing the plan and the accompanying recommendation from the Touchet Valley Trail Steering Committee, the Port of Columbia Board of Commissioners agreed to forward the document of ideas to the consultant for use as they work on a preliminary design of the project.

All public comments received during last year’s survey, adjacent landowner meeting, individual meetings, two public meetings, Port Commission meetings, and the design charrette workshop were given to the design teams that worked on the concept plan. Effort was taken to develop a concept plan that incorporated ideas from potential users as well as solutions to concerns that were raised. The concept plan can be viewed on the Port of Columbia website at <https://www.portofcolumbia.org/economic-development/touchet-valley-trail/>.

“We received some really constructive comments during the public process last year that we worked to address in the conceptual plan,” stated Glen Mendel, a long time Dayton resident that serves on the Touchet Valley Trail Steering Committee. “The conceptual plan is intended to help shape the design as it progresses and provide a visual representation of the ideas generated thus far.”

A concept plan is just that – a concept, or an abstract idea or general notion. It has no funding or construction attached. Concept plans are preliminary documents planners use to describe possible design solutions addressing project goals, opportunities and challenges. They are written using the best information available at the time, understanding that some of the concepts could get modified and adjusted as more detailed analysis, design and engineering occurs. Concept Plans are a useful starting point in planning projects, helping to promote consensus among community leaders and stakeholders by articulating goals for development and use of the property. They are also useful documents for securing grants, appropriations and assisting in other fundraising efforts.

A technical assistance grant from the National Park Service (NPS) Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program helped the Port of Columbia and its partners complete the Concept Plan with minimal spending at the local level. Design professionals from the Washington Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects (WASLA) volunteered their time to facilitate an intensive two-day workshop with community stakeholders on October of 2019, and ten students from Washington State University and one student from University of Washington participated in the process and helped shape the concept plan.

Student participants were excited about the great connections that could be made along the proposed trail route between two communities, a winery, and a state park.

““One of the goals of Washington State Parks is to provide a better connection between our parks and the communities they serve, stated Clara Dickinson-McQuary, a Washington State Parks employee who is a member of the steering committee and worked on one of the design teams during the charette process. “We estimate that 30% – 40% of the families camping at Lewis & Clark Trail State Park bring their bicycles and don’t have anywhere safe to ride. This trail would literally provide that connection and offer a wonderful recreation experience.”

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is funding the preliminary design of the trail. The Port of Columbia has contracted with a private consultant firm who is currently working on surveying the rail corridor and sifting through title records and other documents to verify the location of the Port-owned right of way.

“Bicycle and pedestrian connectivity and safety are a concern in the Highway 12 corridor,” stated Paul Gonseth, a Washington State Department of Transportation Planner who is serving on the steering committee. “Our agency is helping fund this portion of the design to provide multimodal alternatives along this corridor.”

One area of particular concern has been the industrial area near Huntsville that also happens to be one of the narrower portions of available space between the railroad and the highway. Between the design teams, the steering committee, and the rail operator, a potential solution has been proposed. Shift the actual railroad to the north, creating enough space between the highway and the railroad to locate the trail and keeping the recreational trail users separated from the industrial uses.

“Moving a railroad isn’t something most people would think of when planning a project like this,” explained Paul Didelius, owner of Columbia Rail, the company that leases the rail corridor from the Port of Columbia and operates the Walla Walla Columbia Rail Line. “By shifting about 1,300 feet of rail, we can create better passage for the railroad, more security for the adjacent industrial users, and maintain an enjoyable recreation experience for trail users.”

The next milestone in the trail planning project will be the 30% design stage, which is described as a preliminary alignment and grading plan that is prepared after surveying, aerial photos, base map preparation, and supplemental survey and right of way work is undertaken. This stage in the design is expected to be reached in late 2020. At that time, Port of Columbia Commissioners plan to hold a public hearing to receive comment on the design in process.

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#### **Touchet Valley Trail Steering Committee Members:**

- Meagan Bailey, City of Dayton
- Trina Cole, City of Dayton
- Dena Martin, Columbia County Planning
- Charles Eaton, Columbia County Public Works
- Paul Gonseth, Washington State Department of Transportation
- Clara Dickinson-McQuary, Washington State Parks
- Randy Hinchcliffe, City of Waitsburg
- Joy Smith, Waitsburg Commercial Club
- Glen Mendel, community member (Dayton)
- Terry Lawhead, community member (Waitsburg)
- Genie Crowe, community member (Dayton)
- Paul Didelius, Columbia Rail owner
- Adam Schmidtgall, Anderson Perry
- Brian Hansen, Anderson Perry
- Shaun Darveshi, Palouse Regional Transportation Planning Organization
- Jennie Dickinson, Port of Columbia
- Alexandra Stone, National Park Service
- Lucia Portman, National Park Service