

MEMO

To: Jennie Dickinson, Executive Director, Port of Columbia
From: Brian Hansen, P.E., Anderson Perry & Associates, Inc. *BKH*
Re: 30 Percent Design Plans – Executive Summary
Date: April 12, 2021
Job/File No.: 7008-621-02

Touchet Valley Trail Improvement Executive Summary

A trail connecting the communities of Dayton and Waitsburg has long been a dream in the region. In 2015, the trail was listed as a top economic development priority in the annual Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy meeting. The trail was then included in the Blue Mountain Region Trails Plan as one of the top priority projects in a bi-state area. The project is led by the Port of Columbia who owns the rail corridor in which the trail will be located.

In 2019, the Port of Columbia (Port) partnered with the National Park Service - Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program, members of the Washington Society of Landscape Architects, and Landscape Architecture students from Washington State University in a design charette for the Touchet Valley Trail improvements. The charette identified ideal trailhead locations, themes to include in interpretive signage, and forms to inspire the design of the trail. The charette yielded a concept plan that not only illustrated what this trail may physically look like, but also demonstrated the recreational, economic, and social benefits an alternative transportation project like this could bring to the valley.

Also in 2019, the Port of Columbia was awarded a Pedestrian and Bicycle Grant from the Washington State Department of Transportation to complete a 90 percent design of the project. With a blueprint of the concept in hand, Anderson Perry & Associates, Inc., and SPVV Landscape Architects was hired to complete the 90 percent design and began work to progress this concept to 90 percent construction plans. The Port also engaged a number of stakeholders to ensure the project is aligned to the shared vision of the valley. The combination of the concept plan and guidance from the stakeholder group has been used to prepare 30 percent design plans.

Touchet Valley Trail Narrative

The Touchet Valley Trail project aims to provide a pedestrian connection through the valley between the cities of Waitsburg and Dayton. Below is a description of the various improvements proposed to maximize trail usage, safety, and enjoyment.

The trail will generally consist of a 10-foot wide asphalt path adjacent to the existing railroad tracks, connecting multiple trailheads from Dayton to Waitsburg. Throughout the corridor the trail will alternate from one side of the existing railroad track to the other and may vary in width for specific stretches due to site-specific constraints. These constraints include property ownership, proximity to existing uses, and topographical and physical features. The trail and vehicular crossings are being designed for pedestrian safety while allowing the vehicles to continue their current movements. Unique trail

improvements include the sharing of road rights-of-way with Commercial Street in Dayton, two crossings of the Touchet River, multiple crossings of lesser waterways, and crossings of roads within Columbia County, Walla Walla County, and the cities of Dayton and Waitsburg. North of Waitsburg, the installation of large diameter culverts will be required to allow the trail to be constructed south of the railroad where an existing drainage course is located. Due to multiple site constraints near the unincorporated community of Huntsville, a portion of the existing railroad tracks are proposed to be relocated, to better accommodate the shared use of the existing railroad right-of-way. The intent is to construct all improvements within the existing Port of Columbia, City of Waitsburg, and City of Dayton rights-of-way.

The proposed trail will include four trailheads as primary access points. These trailheads will be located in Waitsburg, Blue Mountain Station, Lewis and Clark State Park, and Dayton. Each trailhead will have a trailhead kiosk with an overview map of the entire trail that identifies points of interest and distances, as well as the trail's code of conduct. These kiosks may also include a brief history of the trail and the significance of the trailhead location. The Waitsburg, Blue Mountain Station, and Lewis and Clark Trail State Park trailheads will also receive parking improvements, including Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant stalls and signage, portable restroom enclosures, picnic tables, shade trees, and boulders to serve as informal seating and direct traffic flow. Since the Dayton trailhead borders the city park and amenities, improvements will focus on parking improvements along Commercial Street and a new sidewalk separating parking from the railroad tracks, increasing accessibility to the trail and the park.

Along the trail there will be several improvements to address safety concerns at crossings and provide educational opportunities through interpretive signage. Where the trail crosses the Touchet River new pedestrian bridges will be installed. These crossings will consist of prefabricated steel pedestrian bridges with approximately 200-foot spans. The bridges will allow users to cross safely while remaining separate from all vehicle and rail traffic and maximizing views of the river. At the multiple locations where the trail crosses roads and railroad tracks, warning signage along with a 1-foot wide paver band will give trail users plenty of time to slow down and prepare to cross safely. At each mile there will be a signage post indicating the distance to the nearest trailhead in either direction; these signage posts may also include small plaques calling out nearby points of interest. There are several locations where the trail will pass by locations of historical, cultural, and ecological significance. At these locations there will be a wayside kiosk that explains the significance of the location in the greater context of the Touchet Valley's history. Ecological restoration and native plantings are also being proposed along identified sections of the trail to increase visual interest and ecological function.

The Port of Columbia and stakeholder group both acknowledge and supports the fact that both Columbia and Walla Walla Counties are right-to-farm counties. Signage such as "no trespassing" and "stay on the trail" will be installed along the length of the trail, along with "agricultural spray area" signs, to remind trail users of adjacent private property and farming practices.

It is intended that all improvements and furnishings be consistent, clear, and fit the aesthetic of the valley and the communities it connects. All signage will follow a set of graphic standards that are modeled after the Walla Walla Valley Regional Wayfinding Program and furnishing types will be consistent across all trailheads. Materials found elsewhere in the valley such as brick and river rock, along with forms inspired by the valley's rolling hills and railroad history, can be found in the design of the kiosks, bridges, and other furnishings.