Case Study

Walkable Washington

The Walkable Washington program grew out of the Feet First Cities Program. It showcases exceptional pedestrian-oriented improvements, community groups, and outreach programs; maintains a statewide network for key contacts, and stakeholders including an annual symposium; and provides assistance with Safe Routes to School, walking audits, and other educational activities, and programs.

Centennial Gap Trail, Spokane
Spokane, WA

Description and purpose:
The Centennial Gap Trail has been a unique opportunity to extend the Centennial Trail to the west side of town, fulfilling a 100 year vision of the Olmsted brothers for the development of the Great River Gorge Park. In 1907, when John Charles Olmsted, a landscape architect, brother of Frederick Law Olmstead, Jr., and one of the founding fathers of the American Society of Landscape Architects, visited Spokane, he envisioned a natural park through and adjacent to the center of Spokane. As time passed, this vision has become a reality. With the 1974 World Expo, the rail-dominated center core of the city was transformed into Riverfront Park, one the most majestic parks in the country. Unfortunately, the improvements ended at Monroe Street just west of downtown. Railroad operations had left a large section of land between the Spokane River and College Boulevard vacant and contaminated. This west side of town was isolated without an adequate pedestrian access to downtown.
The West Central neighborhood, the oldest residential neighborhood in the city of Spokane, holds the oldest historic neighborhood designation in the state, and it had begun a long period of deterioration. It would take another 35 years before the area, now called Kendall Yards, would undergo a major environmental cleanup. This cleanup operation was made possible through funding from the Washington State Department of Commerce as well as private investment. The successful environmental cleanup operation was a step forward in achieving the Olmsted brothers’ vision of the complete Great River Gorge Park.

The extension of the Centennial Trail from downtown Spokane along the river gorge bluff to W. Boone Avenue has brought new life to the west side. Joint trail projects by Greenstone Homes, the developer of Kendall Yards, and the city of Spokane, have created access to west side neighborhoods as well as open space land for the community to enjoy. This opportunity was made possible by both state and city funding, along with private investment. This project is a true example of the opportunities achievable when the public and private sector work together towards a common goal.

The Centennial Trail extends 37.5 miles from the Washington/Idaho State line to Nine Miles Falls, WA. The Trail was built between 1989 and 1991 to celebrate Washington State’s centennial.

The path of the trail generally follows the contours of the Spokane River, allows for many non-motorized activities, and features Spokane as its urban center.

A two-mile section of the Trail in West Central Spokane (from the Bridge/Summit intersection to the Boone/Summit intersection) along the river gorge was completed in the summer of 2014. Before completion, the trail stopped at a residential area in Kendall Yards. Other added features include a park in this residential area where the trail continues to the west.

The Centennial Gap Project, completed in June 2014, allows for continuity of the trail through the installation of park benches, signage, and an outlook area at a historic bridge created over the river gorge area, offering spectacular views. The Gap Project also runs through a historic residential area in Spokane, and holds the oldest historic neighborhood designation in the state. Many bikers and runners have used this trail since its completion.

Costs and funding
Funds from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA, Surface Transportation Program) provided $471,500 for this project. The project funds were awarded in November 2013 and construction of the gap section of the trail was completed by June 2014.

Community involvement
The non-profit organization Friends of the Trail, in conjunction with the Kendall Yards residential development project, held public meetings in the West Central neighborhood of Spokane to propose the gap section of the trail, which was favorably received and supported by the community.

Challenges and solutions
Extensive environmental cleanup of an old railroad was instrumental in the development of the site and the extension of the linear park along what was formerly the gap in the Centennial Trail. As the cleanup required time and money,
the developers of Kendall Yards stepped in to clean up the scraps from the old railroad site. This action facilitated the city of Spokane to develop and complete the Centennial Gap Trail along the bluff of the Spokane River. The cooperation of the State and City Parks Department helped to extend the open space parkland into the trail.

Another challenge was the feasibility of constructing the trail on a steep side slope between a roadway at the top and a river at the bottom. About half of the trail was built on abandoned rail bed and the other half had to be cut in with walls for support. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodations were very challenging due to the naturally steep slopes. To meet ADA requirements, side slopes or walls were built where possible to match the proposed trail elevation with the existing ground surface level, such as at the intersection of Boone Avenue and Summit, where a wall was built.

Innovations

The completion of the trail has allowed this area to become uniquely situated with a university district close by, along with a medical community in the university.

Benefits and results

The combined section of the two miles of the Gap Centennial Trail is one of the most pristine and beautiful river gorge trails in the country, and it provides continuity from west Spokane to Coeur d’Alene along the Centennial Trail. From a pedestrian standpoint, the trail provides a viewpoint that had never been utilized before now.

Gentrification and the revitalization of West Central Spokane has been one of the major impacts of this trail. Previously, this area had high crime rates, but with the trail completion there has been a decrease in crime and a large increase in pedestrians and cyclists, including the university community. Residents are able to use the pedestrian route to go to work from all areas of Spokane’s West Central Neighborhood. The trail also adds an amenity to the Kendall Yards housing development, and more people are choosing to live in the West Central neighborhood with its walking and biking access to the downtown and the University District. Investment into the West Central neighborhood has greatly increased with the completion of the Centennial Gap Trail. The trail has allowed existing businesses to be more financially successful, and a new restaurant and bar has also settled into the area.

The completion of the Centennial Trail with the Centennial Gap Trail allows a 100-year vision by one of the founding fathers of Spokane to be realized - to see the river gorge developed.

Project Contacts

Julie Happy
Communications Manager, Business and Developer Services Division, City of Spokane

Resources

New section of Centennial Trail offers spectacular views