

6. Regional Trails Plan

Overview

Trails provide opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to recreate and connect to nature. Trails drive recreational tourism and enhance the county's economy. Well-designed, well-connected trails serve as active transportation routes that connect people to parks, schools, businesses, services, and community destinations, making it safe for folks to get around without a car. A robust regional trail system helps to build communities that are safe, welcoming, and connecting, giving residents and visitors the ability to get from place to place, access the outdoors, and enjoy the vibrant communities and cultures that make Pierce County a great place to live, work, and raise a family.

Goal PR-11 of the 2025 Pierce County Comprehensive Plan directs the County to “provide a connected system of trails that link communities and community destinations and provide active transportation and recreation opportunities.” Pierce County Parks seeks to improve the regional trail system by adding miles to the existing network in unincorporated areas, building partnerships to ensure connectivity within and between local jurisdictions, and finding new opportunities to connect destinations throughout Pierce County and beyond, consistent with the Comprehensive Plan (Goal PR-11, see sidebar). This expansion is driven by the local knowledge, advocacy, and on-the-ground support brought by local jurisdictions and non-profit trail groups that guide development of a strong network of trails that serves Pierce County residents and visitors.

This Regional Trails Plan (RTP) is an update to trail planning efforts from the 2020 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan. This chapter includes the following components:

- Updated regional trails vision
- Overview of the existing trail system in Pierce County
- Future trail projects
- Implementation strategies

How does the Regional Trails Plan relate to Pierce County's Comprehensive Plan?

Goal PR-11 of the 2025 Pierce County Comprehensive Plan directs the County to “provide a connected system of trails that link communities and community destinations and provide active transportation and recreation opportunities.”



Coordination with the PROS Plan

Though parks often include trails, hiking paths, and nature walks, regional trails traverse the boundaries of both parks and jurisdictions. Furthermore, regional trails serve as both recreational resources and active transportation routes for everyone who bikes, walks, and rolls. As such, a regional system necessitates collaborative action that includes elements of both recreation and transportation planning.

Due to the unique considerations around trail development, the RTP warrants a standalone chapter in the PROS Plan. The RTP planning process occurred in parallel to the County's PROS Plan and shares the same vision and goals as the PROS plan. Trail planning elements that differ from the broader PROS planning effort include engagement, project prioritization, and development strategies specific to trails.

Regional Trails Plan Vision: Planning Context

Chapter 4: Demand and Needs Assessment defined walking and trail use as one of the activities most desired by county residents and visitors. Other public engagement opportunities have consistently identified investment in regional trails and expanding walking and biking opportunities as high priorities.

This 2026 RTP supports the goals of the Comprehensive Plan¹ and the larger PROS Plan:

- GOAL PR-3 Support healthy urban areas by promoting strategies, programs, or considering capital projects that provide a park, publicly accessible open space, or trail within a half-mile of all urban residents.
- GOAL PR-7 Manage the park system in a sustainable and environmentally beneficial manner that contributes to a healthy, livable community, with opportunities to connect with nature.
- GOAL PR-11 Provide a connected system of trails that link communities and community destinations and provide active transportation and recreation opportunities.

¹ Pierce County 2025 Comprehensive Plan:

<https://www.piercecountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/140621/Pierce-County-Comprehensive-Plan---2025-02-15?bidId=>



- GOAL PR-12 Develop regional and connector trail routes, crossings and trail facilities that are safe and accessible to all and that may provide value for recreation, active transportation, or both.
- GOAL PR-14 Provide trail maintenance that is responsive, cost effective and resourceful for the long-term success of the regional trails system.
- GOAL PR-16 Explore opportunities to develop trails as a means to improve the level of service for pedestrians or bicyclists.

The RTP is also supportive of the County's Sustainability Plan 2030, which lists active transportation as one of the plan's objectives and greatest opportunities and includes several related actions:

- Action T-2: Active Transportation Plan: Evaluate Pierce County's active transportation network in the urban unincorporated area and create an active transportation plan.
- Action T-6: Transportation Planning: Implement land use and transportation strategies, including multi-modal transportation investments, that reduce vehicle miles traveled and advance equitable outcomes for underserved and historically disadvantaged communities
- Action T-11: Accessible Walking and Biking: Significantly increase amount of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure with a focus on creating accessibility in the urban area and connections to cities and trails.

The RTP envisions and plans for a system of interconnected regional trails that:

- Provide safe, accessible, and seamless trails for people of all ages and abilities.
- Enable cross-county connectivity, as well as links to regional trails beyond the county's boundaries.
- Connect major developed areas, population centers, and community destinations.
- Expand opportunities to communities with limited access or that are disadvantaged, as identified in the PROS Plan Demand and Needs Assessment (see **Chapter 4: Demand and Needs Assessment**).
- Provide opportunities for recreation and transportation that promote active lifestyles and reduce reliance on the automobile.
- Allow safe and comfortable active transportation options that support and encourage commuting.



To ensure the regional trail system provides the connectivity envisioned within this plan, the system will traverse jurisdictional boundaries and include both separated shared-use paths and on-road active transportation facilities. As such, portions of the regional trail system will be built and maintained by local city governments, state agencies, Tribes, neighboring counties, and multiple Pierce County departments, necessitating extensive collaboration and coordination.

Program Framework

Guidelines

The RTP is designed to be consistent with federal, state, and local guidelines and policies. The following section describes the guidelines that Pierce County relies on when designing the trail system.

Federal

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) regulates trail design through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Guidelines and American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Design Guidelines. The FHWA also publishes the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), which provides consistency in standards for traffic control devices.

ADA guidelines require that facilities be readily accessible and usable by individuals with disabilities. The guidelines outline minimum dimensions and standards for width, passing space, headroom, surface textures, slope, and other design considerations for all publicly accessible areas.

Because some facilities were developed prior to ADA guidelines, Pierce County Parks developed an ADA Transition Plan in 2017. The ADA Transition Plan provides a phased retrofit schedule for the deficits identified in the access audit reports. The Department uses the ADA Transition Plan to prioritize ADA improvements to bring the park system into compliance with the ADA.

AASHTO design guidelines for bicycle transportation facilities and shared use paths provide parameters for facility development. Compliance with AASHTO guidelines for improvements is required by most grantors.



State

The Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA), originally enacted in 1990, requires cities and counties to develop multi-modal transportation options (Revised Code of Washington [RCW] 36.70A.108), and to set aside land for recreational uses such as trails (in RCW 36.70A.160) as Pierce County's population and the need for housing increases. In addition, trail planning and design should closely follow the Washington State Regional Trails Plan and Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) guidelines and specifications.

Washington's Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) develops statewide recreation policy including the Washington State Trails Plan. The Washington State Trails Plan is an element of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Planning (SCORP) program and was adopted by the National Parks Service (NPS) in 1991. Washington State Trails Plan recommendations include:

- Expanding Trail Access: Locate and build trails for populations with limited access; connect more people to trails; provide trails where people like to use them; address safety.
- Linking Trails with Transportation: Ensure recreational trails complement and link with multimodal transportation systems to provide a seamless experience.
- Creating Regional Partnerships to facilitate a connected trail system across jurisdictions.

WSDOT provides two primary publications related to federally funded transportation projects.

- Local Agency Guidelines (LAG) Manual: This manual identifies specific design standards related to bicycle and pedestrian facility installations.
- Construction Manual and Standard Specifications for Road, Bridge and Municipal Construction: This manual provides information and advice on public works project design and construction management.

Both documents are based on federal transportation guidelines. Consistency with WSDOT guidelines is also important for securing grant support for project development.

Regional

The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) developed the Regional Open Space Conservation Plan in 2018. The Plan addresses regional trails as a type of open space:



Regional trails are active transportation corridors that provide access to the region's open spaces and connect communities and other important regional destinations. Often, trails are interconnected with rivers, floodplains, and farmlands.

The PSRC Plan is designed to document information and work by multiple entities toward open space conservation and to guide collaborative efforts.

Local

Though Pierce County has not yet developed a stand-alone Non-Motorized Transportation Plan (NMTP), the Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan includes policies and projects designed to facilitate development of on-road active transportation options that reduce conflicts between users, provide alternatives to travel in a single-occupant vehicle, and improve air quality. In April 2025, Pierce County Council adopted the Vision Zero Action Plan which includes strategies to improve safety and accessibility of active transportation routes.

Pierce County Parks also incorporates the plans of other local entities, such as park districts, cities, towns, and neighboring counties, when planning connections for the regional trail system.

Engagement Process

Engagement Goals

The goals of the RTP align with the PROS Plan goals (see **Chapter 2: Vision, Goals, and Objectives** for PROS Plan goals). Given the implementation role of other agencies and vital engagement from advocacy groups, the RTP developed additional engagement goals that focused on intergovernmental and advocate stakeholder groups, including:

- Communicate to stakeholders about the project.
- Discuss priority projects with other trail providers.
- Generate agreement on trail prioritization criteria.
- Consult and collaborate with trail advocates to create buy-in for implementation.



Engagement with Stakeholders

The project team met with stakeholders at several key points during plan development, starting in Spring 2024 with requests for local data to update the database of existing trails and future projects.

In September 2024, the project team held a Regional Trails Kick-off Meeting. During this meeting, the County and project team:

- Introduced the project, updated stakeholders about the project and presented current project data;
- Identified how priority trail projects have changed since the 2020 PROS Plan;
- Sought feedback from jurisdictions and other stakeholders on trail project prioritization criteria; and
- Engaged with trail advocates.

Following the Regional Trails Kick-off Meeting, the project team conducted geographically-focused working groups with local jurisdictions, state agencies, regional partners, grouped by geography. See [Exhibit 6-1](#).



Exhibit 6-1: 2024 Trail Working Groups

Date and Group	Jurisdictions
November 25: Foothills West	Puyallup, Sumner, Edgewood, Fife, Milton, Auburn, Federal Way, Tacoma, Pierce County PPW, King County, WSDOT
November 26: South County	Pierce County PPW, Tacoma, Eatonville, Thurston County, WSDOT, Roy, Yelm, Mt. Rainier National Park, US Forest Service
December 4: Central Unincorporated County	Pierce County PPW, WSDOT
December 4: Foothills East	Orting, Bonney Lake, South Prairie, Sumner, Buckley, Wilkeson, Carbonado, Mt. Rainier National Park, US Forest Service, Enumclaw, Pierce County PPW, King County, WSDOT
December 5: West of the Tacoma Narrows	Gig Harbor, Pen Met Parks, Key Pen Parks, Kitsap County, WSDOT
December 16: West Mainland	Tacoma, University Place, Ruston, Fircrest, Lakewood, Steilacoom, Dupont, Metro Parks, JBLM, Anderson Island Park District, WSDOT, Thurston County





The project team hosted a meeting with all stakeholders in April 2025 to review a draft version of the regional system and solicit feedback.

What We Heard

The regional trails system presented in this plan reflects the input of stakeholders throughout the planning process. For a summary of the stakeholder engagement process, see **Exhibit 6-2**.

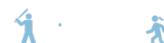


Exhibit 6-2: Engagement Touchpoints, Key Questions, and Outcomes.

Engagement Touchpoint	Key Questions	Outcomes
April & May 2024: Data Collection	What does your local trail system look like?	Updated snapshot of existing and planned trails.
September 2024: Regional Trails Plan Kick-off Meeting	- What are your trail investment priorities? - What trail resources (mapping, design, implementation, funding) does your organization have? - What trail support do you need from Pierce County?	Many agencies indicated they do not have staff capacity, funding, technical expertise, or equipment needed to properly route and design trails. Adequate funding often limits implementation. Local agencies rely on outside funding opportunities to support trail development.
Fall 2024: Trail Working Group meetings		Conversations defined local capacity to plan, design, and build trails, and opportunities for Pierce County to fill those resource gaps.
April 2025: Gap Analysis Review & Discussion	Is there anything missing from the draft regional trail system?	Refined the regional trail system and project prioritization criteria.

Exhibit 6-3: Soundview Trail, Chambers Public Golf Course



Source: Pierce County Parks



Trails Today: Regional Trail Inventory

To build out the regional system, it is critical to define the extent and condition of the existing trail system.

Trail Classification System

To define the broader system, the Regional Trail plan classifies individual trail segments into three groups: Regional, Community, and Intrapark trails. Regional trails, like the Foothills Trail, make up the spine of the trail system, connect residents to neighboring towns and counties, close gaps to community services, and provide alternative transportation options. Community trails provide convenient access through neighborhoods or urban areas. Intrapark trails, like those in Chambers Creek Regional Park and Spanaway Regional Park, provide recreational access to forests, creeks, and marine environments within park boundaries.

This classification system informs project prioritization and clarifies Pierce County Parks' role as a regional coordinator. The project team aligned the classification system with definitions used by local agencies to streamline data collection and standardize planning language.

Regional Trails

- Serve as the primary multimodal, active transportation routes that form the spine of the system.
- Provide cross-county connections between cities, towns, neighboring counties, and destinations of interest.
- Serve both recreation and active transportation functions.
- Are typically separated, shared-use paths but include on-street connections to ensure adequate connectivity, especially through urban areas.
- Connect with a broader network of active transportation infrastructure within the road right-of-way, such as bike lanes, sharrows, greenways, and transit to create transportation options.
- Are generally longer, wider, and paved, providing easy access for all ages, abilities, and users.



Community Trails

- Are multimodal, active transportation routes within community boundaries.
- Provide convenient connections through neighborhoods or urban areas.
- Typically connect to the regional trail system but are not as critical to overall connectivity.
- Serve both recreation and active transportation functions.
- May be paved or unpaved and are typically shared use.

Intrapark Trails

- Include all trails within park boundaries, such as soft surface trails in natural areas or paved trails in developed areas.
- Are generally used for passive recreation.
- May be paved or unpaved.
- May be user-specific (e.g., only for hiking or equestrian use).

On-Road Connections

In a built-out urban environment, true connectivity in the trail system may require use of the road right-of-way. The Regional Trail Plan identifies necessary connections to complete the trail system, including bike lanes, buffered or protected bike paths, bike boulevards for cyclists, and sidewalks for pedestrians.



Exhibit 6-4: Regional Trail: The Foothills Trail between Orting to South Prairie



Source: Pierce County Parks

Exhibit 6-5: Community Trail: The Nathan Chapman Trail



Source: Pierce County Parks



Exhibit 6-6: Intrapark Trail: The Naches Trail Preserve



Source: Pierce County Parks

Existing Trails

The Regional Trail Network Today

Existing regional trails are scattered throughout the County. Overall, Pierce County has 58.7 miles of regional trails managed by multiple jurisdictions. Currently, none of those miles travel through Urban Unincorporated Areas. There are 33 miles of community trails as well. See [Exhibit 6-7](#) and [Exhibit 6-8](#).

Today's regional trails do not provide consistent connections to communities with limited access. For more information on trail connections and historically disadvantaged communities, see the Demand and Needs Assessment section in this chapter.



Exhibit 6-7: Existing Pierce County Regional Trails

Trail Name	Jurisdiction	Miles
Foothills Trail	Pierce County, Puyallup, Orting, South Prairie, Buckley	21.2
Scott Pierson Trail	Tacoma	6.6
Cushman Trail	PenMet Parks, Gig Harbor	6.6
Sumner Link Trail	Sumner	3.4
Interurban Trail	Pacific, Edgewood, Milton, Fife	4.7
Pipeline Trail	Tacoma, Pierce County	5.3
Riverwalk Trail	Puyallup	3.5
Lakeland Hills Trail	Auburn, Sumner	1.9
Ruston Way Path	Ruston	3.5
Point Defiance Promenade	Tacoma	1.1
Water Flume Trail	Tacoma	0.9
Trail Total		58.7

Exhibit 6-8: Existing Trails in Pierce County

Classification	Existing
Community Trail	33.0
Regional Trail	58.7
Trail Total	91.7

Sources: Pierce County, BERK Toole Design, 2025.

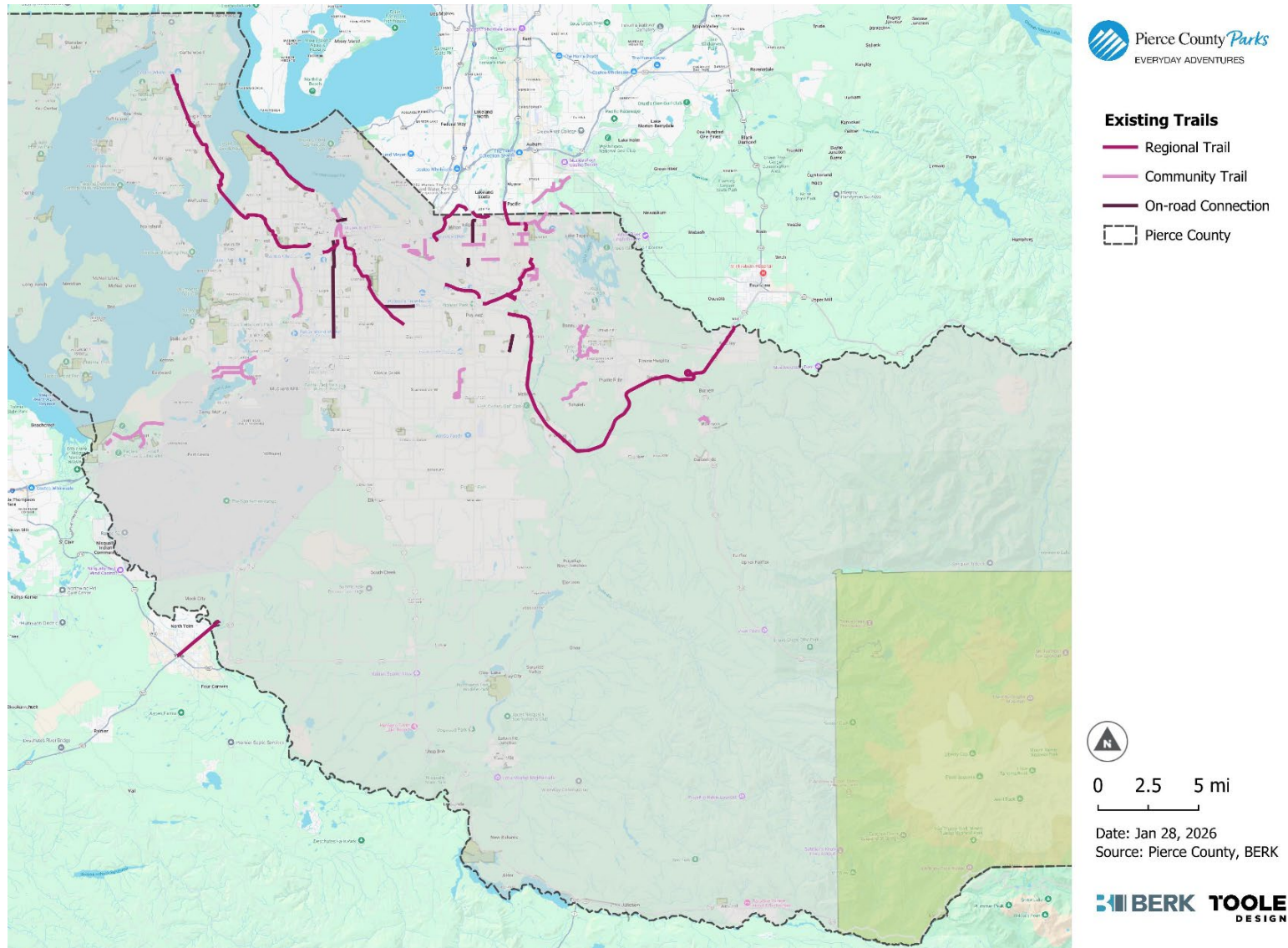
Data Collection Method

The project team gathered information from local jurisdictions in Spring 2024 to update the County's existing database. The project team verified an updated dataset with partners at the state, regional, and local level in Spring 2025. Existing data from Pierce County was supplemented with available GIS data or data from relevant parks, trails, or Comprehensive Plans maps created by local jurisdictions and parks districts. Two rounds of data collection and review were conducted.

The project team compiled and classified the data based on the County's trail classification system. Once compiled, the project team used the updated trails system dataset for the Demands and Needs assessment and gap analysis described in the following sections. See [Exhibit 6-9](#) through [Exhibit 6-12](#) for existing trails by regions.



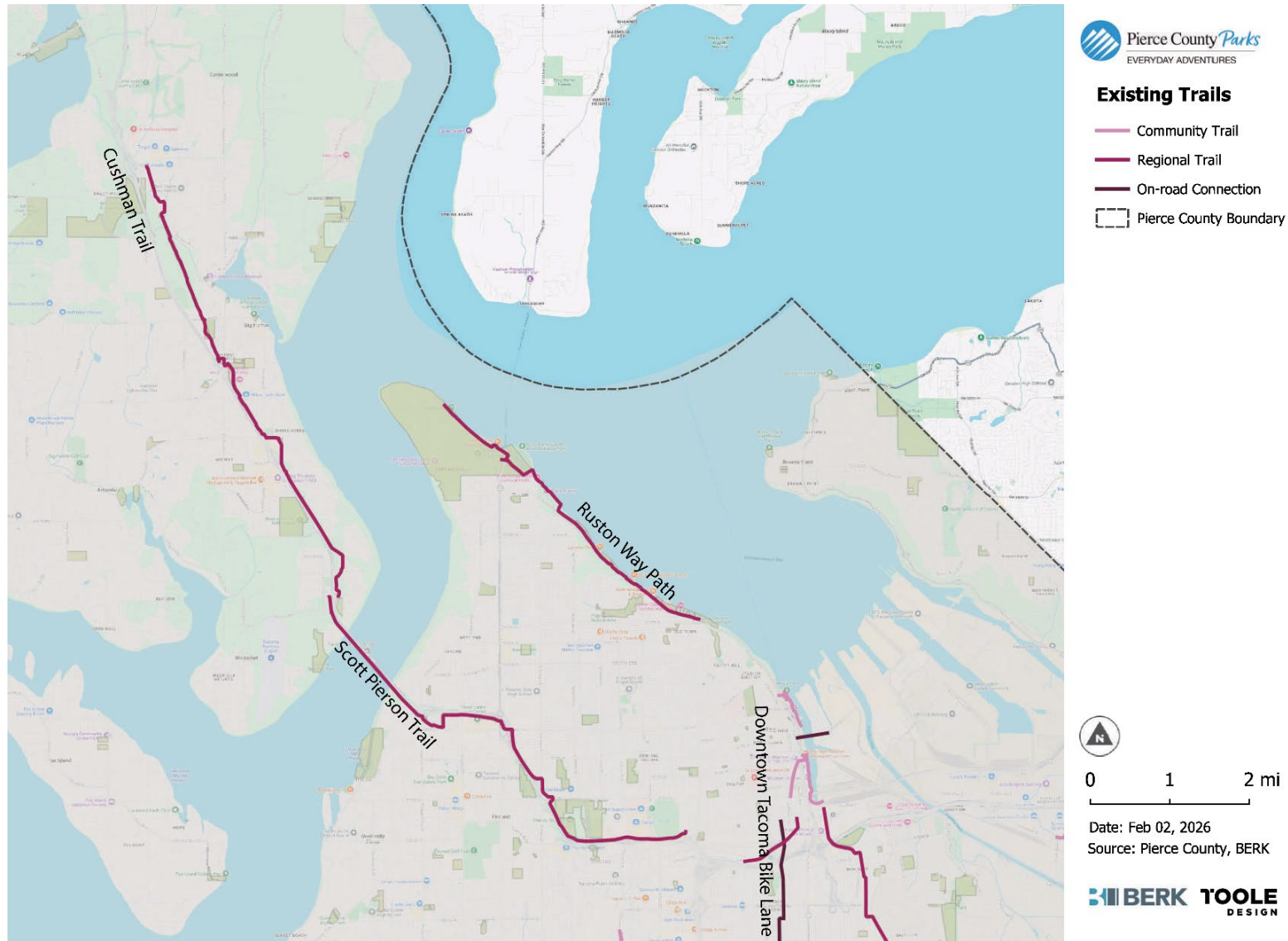
Exhibit 6-9: Map of existing regional trails, regional connectors, and community trails



While the Yelm Prairie Line Trail is Thurston County, it is shown on this map because it will extend into Pierce County, providing a key cross-county connection.

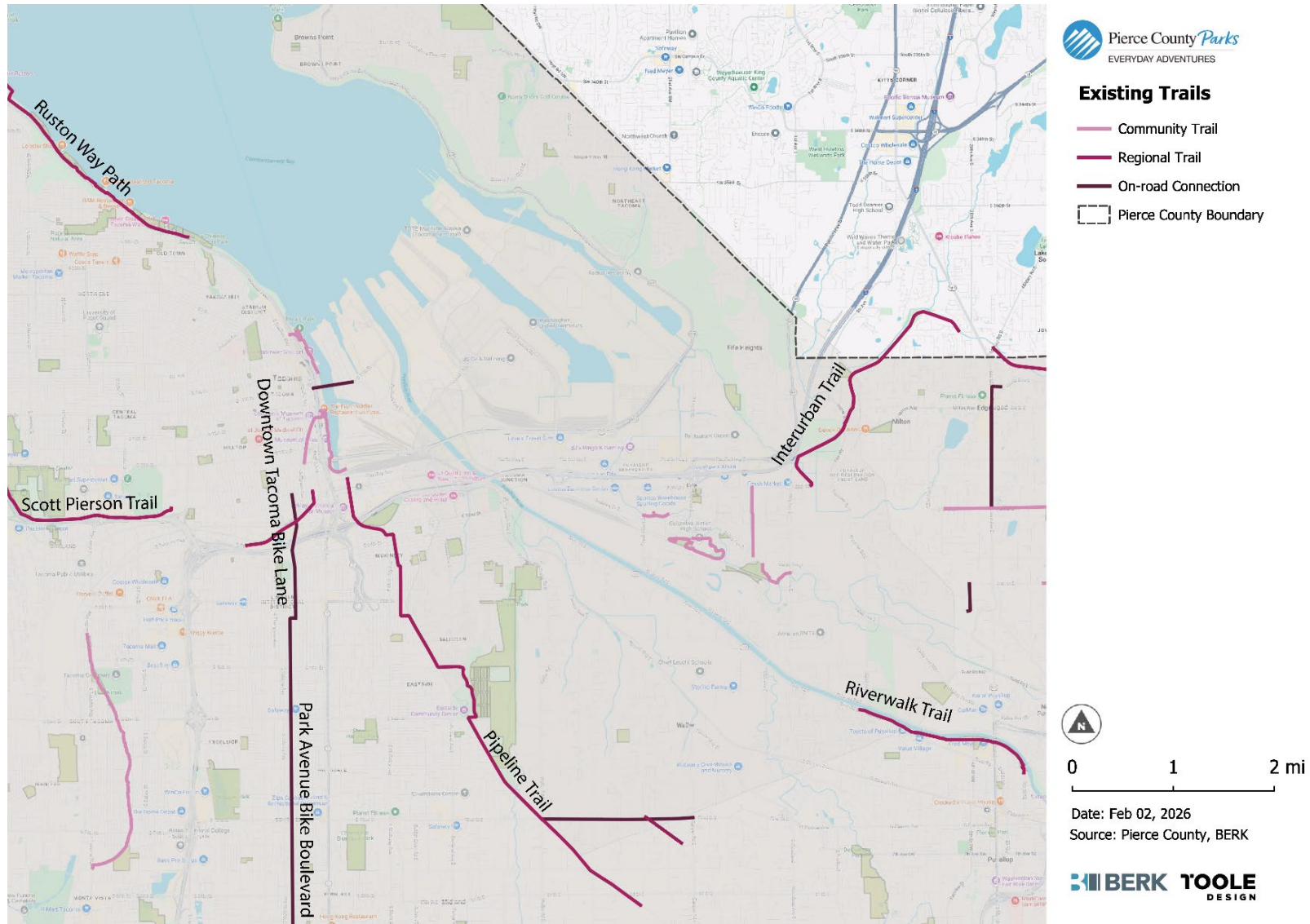
Sources: Pierce County, Toole Design, BERK, 2025.

Exhibit 6-10: Map of existing trails in the west region.



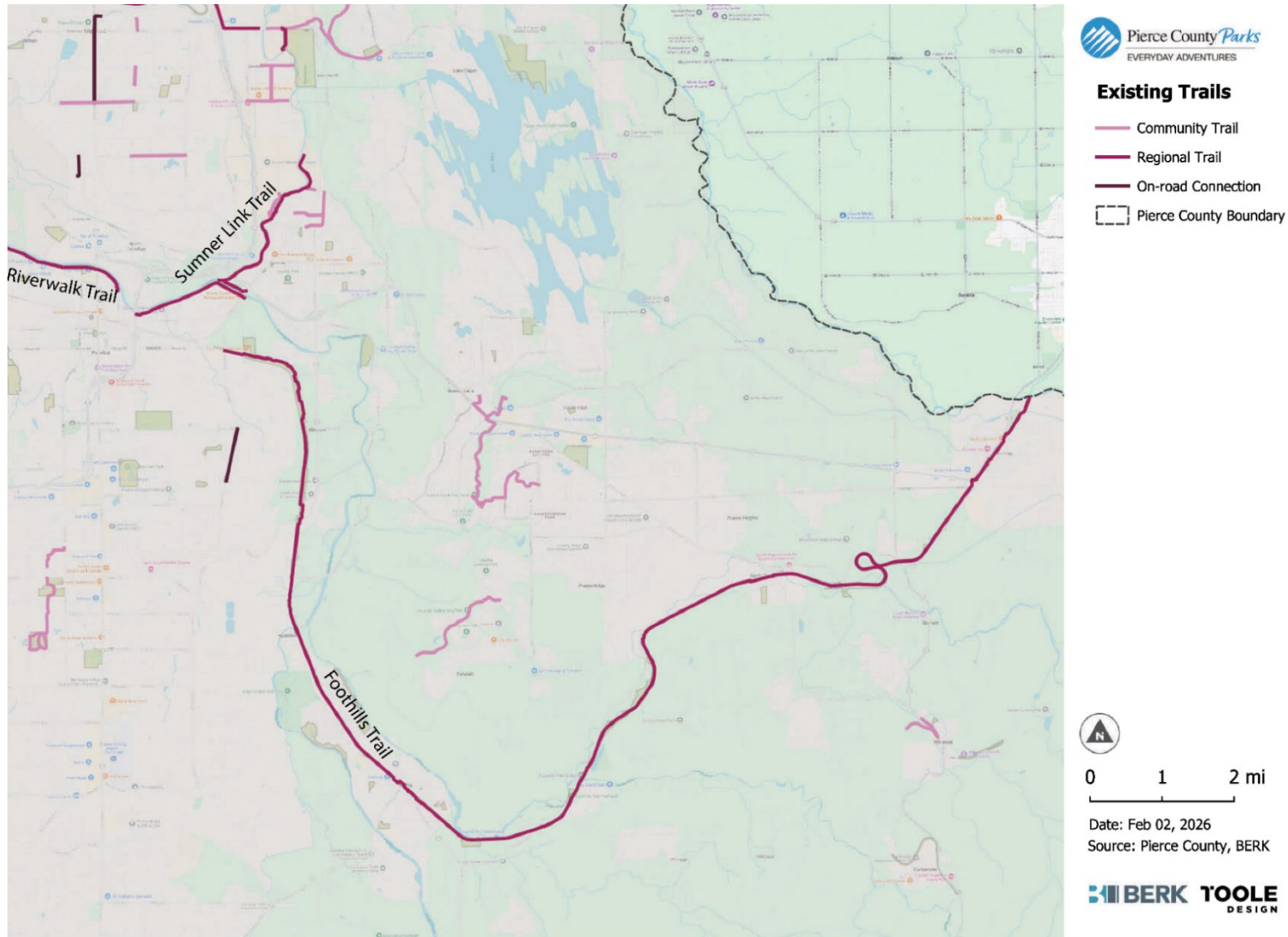
Sources: Pierce County, BERK, Toole Design, 2025.

Exhibit 6-11: Map of existing trails in the central/north region.



Sources: Pierce County, BERK, Toole Design, 2025.

Exhibit 6-12: Map of existing trails in the north region



Sources: Pierce County, BERK, Toole Design, 2025.

Demand and Needs Assessment

To understand where trail resources are most needed, the project team assessed Demand and Needs, building on the larger PROS plan efforts. For more detailed information on the overall PROS Plan assessment, see [Chapter 4: Demand and Needs Assessment](#).

The PROS Plan is informed by a robust Demand and Needs Assessment that has three components:

- **What?** Examines community preferences and trends.
- **Who and Where?** Reviews population and community characteristics and parks access.
- **How much?** Considers the ratio of facilities to population, compares the County system to peer communities, and considers the quality of facilities.

While the Demands and Needs Assessment for the overall PROS Plan analyzed the park system, community demographics, and environmental conditions, this Regional Trails Plan assessment was also informed by the locations of other potential community destinations that people may want to access by regional trails. Beyond the PROS Plan assessment, the RTP's assessment also included a connectivity lens, identifying where trails are located today and where there is a lack of trails. The bullets below reflect the overall PROS Plan assessment, with details on how trails were incorporated.

- **What?** Trails are an important community preference to connect to community infrastructure. The assessment also defines connectivity between communities, neighboring counties, and regional destinations (e.g., Mount Rainier National Park) as a desired resource for community members.
- **Who and Where?** Demographic information shows that the existing trail system underserves certain populations, including BIPOC populations and low-income populations.
- **How much?** Pierce County provides parks and trails, family activities, and special use facilities at a lower rate than peer communities and has a greater population per trail mile. The lack of local facilities in certain areas can lead to a higher demand on existing facilities elsewhere.

Serving Communities Across Pierce County

Today's regional trails do not provide consistent connections to communities with limited access. As illustrated in [Exhibit 6-13](#), 19 miles of regional trails travel through communities



rated as "Low" or "Very Low" on the County's five-tier Community Impact Index,² while thirty-five miles travel through "High" or "Very High" Census block groups. Of the 241 Census block groups that have a "Low" or a "Very Low" Community Impact Index, regional trails pass through 25, or about 10 percent, of those block groups. For more information on how County's Community Impact Index was incorporated into the PROS Plan, see **Chapter 4: Demand and Needs Assessment**. See **Exhibit 6-13** below for a map of index scores, and **Exhibit 6-14** for statistics summarizing trail access.

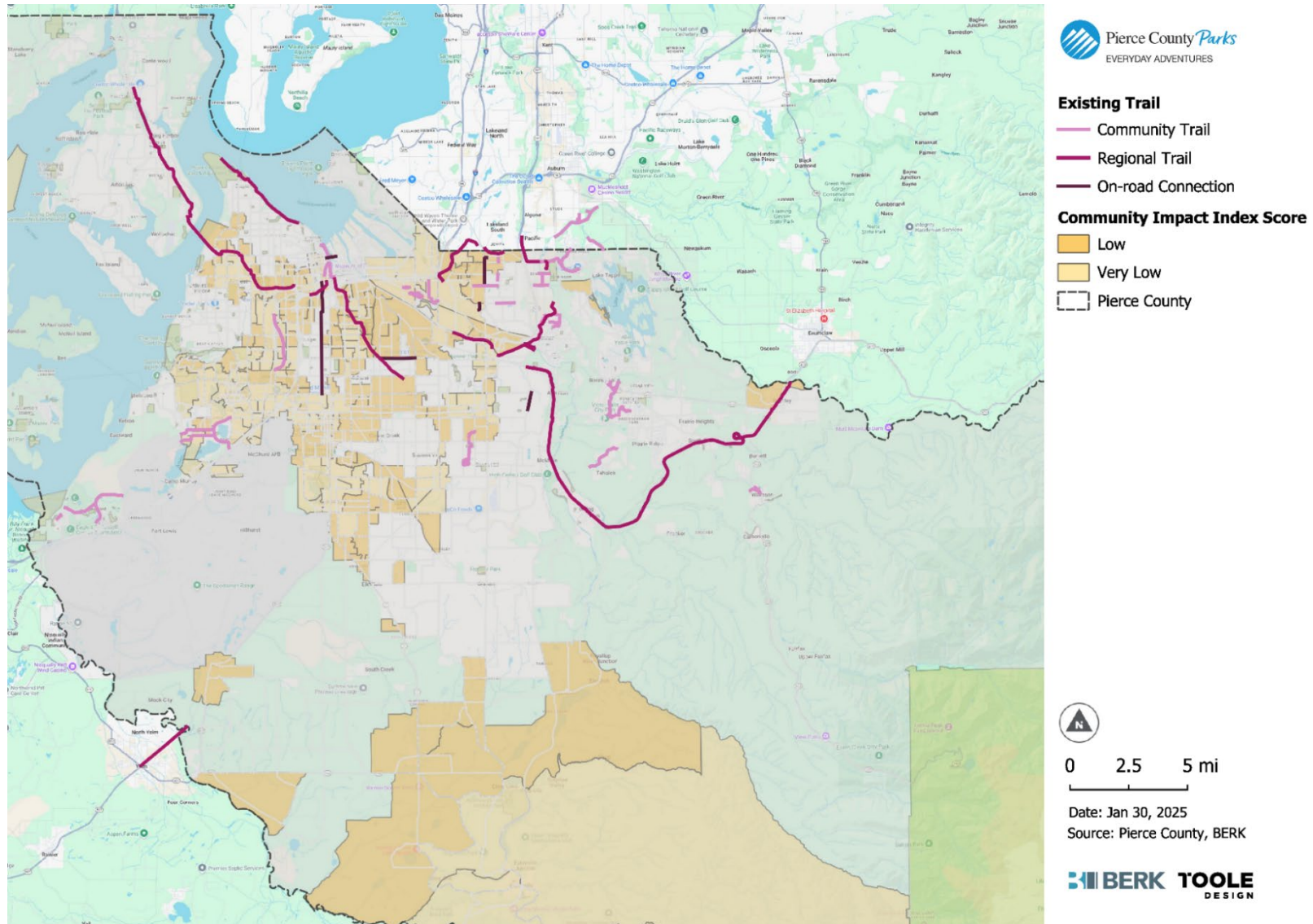
Exhibit 6-13: Summary of Trails Serving Community Impact Index Communities



Source: Pierce County, Toole Design 2025.

² The County's Community Impact Index is composed of indicators in Community Vitality, Education, Environmental Health, Health and Wellness, Housing and Infrastructure, and Jobs and Economy. For more information on the index, visit https://piercecounitywa.equityindex.econw.io/?geoLevel=blockgroup&dataType=index&scoreType=z_score_pct&indexGroup=Equity%20Index

Exhibit 6-14: Map of Community Impact Index scores (lighter shade = lower Community Impact Index).



Source: Pierce County Parks, BERK, Toole Design, 2025

Gap Analysis

Network development is a comprehensive look at the existing trails, planned trails, and what new trails are needed to make a robust system of regional trails. The project team conducted an analysis of gaps in the regional trail system based on the Demand and Needs assessment. This analysis compared existing and planned trails with the Demand and Needs assessment to identify gaps in connectivity to key destinations and to meet recreational and transportation needs in communities with limited access. This analysis was based on the following gap criteria:

- 1. Connectivity:** Where are the critical gaps in the overall system to unlock improved access, such as key east-west and north-south routes?
- 2. Access:** Where are trails needed to connect key destinations (e.g., transit, schools, parks), and areas of need (more densely populated communities, rapidly growing areas)?
- 3. Opportunity:** Where are trails needed to enhanced access for historically disadvantaged communities?

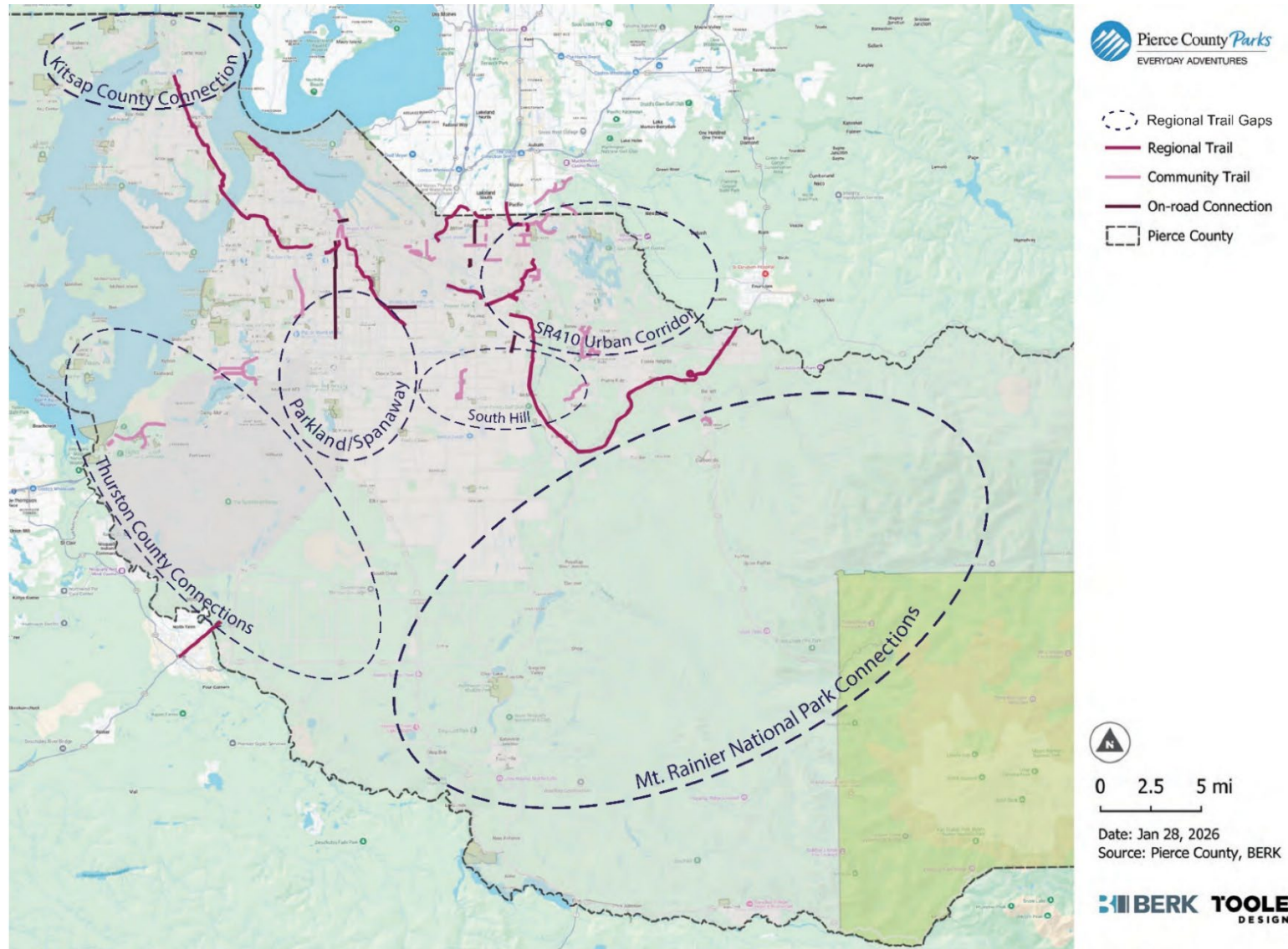
Although the gap analysis identifies areas and communities that need additional resources, this Regional Trail Plan also considers key missing links and smaller trail segments lacking in the existing network that will enhance connectivity.

Based on this methodology, the following areas had major gaps within the regional trail network, as illustrated in the map in **Exhibit 6-15**:

- Parkland/Spanaway area
- South Hill
- SR410 Urban Corridor
- Connections to Mount Rainier National Park
- Connection to Thurston and Kitsap Counties

The following sections detail the County's planning and implementation strategies for filling the identified gaps in the trail network. This snapshot of the existing trails system in Pierce County provides a foundation for planning and implementing additional trails.

Exhibit 6-15: Gaps in the regional trail system.



Sources: Pierce County, BERK, Toole Design, 2025.

The Future Trail System

The proposed regional trail system builds upon the vision and values of the Regional Trails Plan, planning efforts throughout Pierce County, evaluation of the existing conditions, Demands and Needs Assessment, gap analysis, and community input. Based on these, the system focuses primarily on regional trails, recognizing opportunities for using the on-street active transportation infrastructure to enable connections to local communities.

Trail Status

As part of the network development analysis, trails were identified as existing, planned, or visionary, as described below. **Exhibit 6-16** categorizes the trail system as regional or community and by status as existing, planned, or visionary. Existing trails are defined as built and ready for use, as well as trails that are in construction as of spring 2025. Planned trails include those identified in an adopted plan, or have some level of official consideration. Visionary routes express an intent to make important connections but locations are unknown. (See text boxes.) Features of the system are highlighted in **Exhibit 6-17**.

The map of the regional trail system in **Exhibit 6-18** reflects the Plan's vision statement and the gap analysis and the Demand and Needs Assessment. These three plan elements influence the regional trail system because they reflect the messages that trails are important community infrastructure, demographics should not dictate who has access and where, and that access to trails across the County should be convenient.

Existing Trails	Planned Trails	Visionary Trails
Trails defined as either: ▪ Built, open, & ready for use OR ▪ Currently in construction as of spring 2025	• Identified in an adopted plan, either at the state, county, or local level • Have some level of official consideration: • Feasibility analysis & planning • Design • Permitting • Land acquisition • Grant application • Public engagement	• Express an intent to make important connections or meet critical needs in an area • Do not have a finalized alignment yet • Have not undergone an official planning process yet • Intended to serve as a starting place for additional consideration, analysis, and prioritization

Exhibit 6-16: Today's Regional Trail Plan mileage and future mileage

Miles of Regional and Community Trails				
	Existing	Planned	Visionary	Total
Regional	58.7	57.8	159.9	276.4*
Community	33.0	29.4	65.5	127.9*
Total	91.7	87.2	225.4	404.3*

*These figures will evolve over time as new projects emerge and routing analysis increases the specificity of visionary routes. Additionally, several segments identified as Community Trails may become Regional Trails as projects connect to the larger system (e.g., the existing paved trail in Wilkeson currently functions as a Community Trail but Foothills Trail extension projects will tie it into the regional system).

Sources: Pierce County Parks, Toole Design, 2026

Exhibit 6-17: Summary of the regional trail system in Pierce County


Sources: Pierce County, Toole Design



Visionary Trails

This plan includes visionary routes that express an intent to make important connections or meet critical needs in a particular area, but that may not have a finalized alignment or have not undergone an official planning process. They show a strategic connection to an area not currently served by regional trails. Though visionary trails do not have an initial level of feasibility to ensure constructability, they are intended to serve as a starting place for additional consideration, analysis, and prioritization. Thus, while visionary trails are shown on the map, the exact alignment may change as these trails transition from Visionary to Planned.

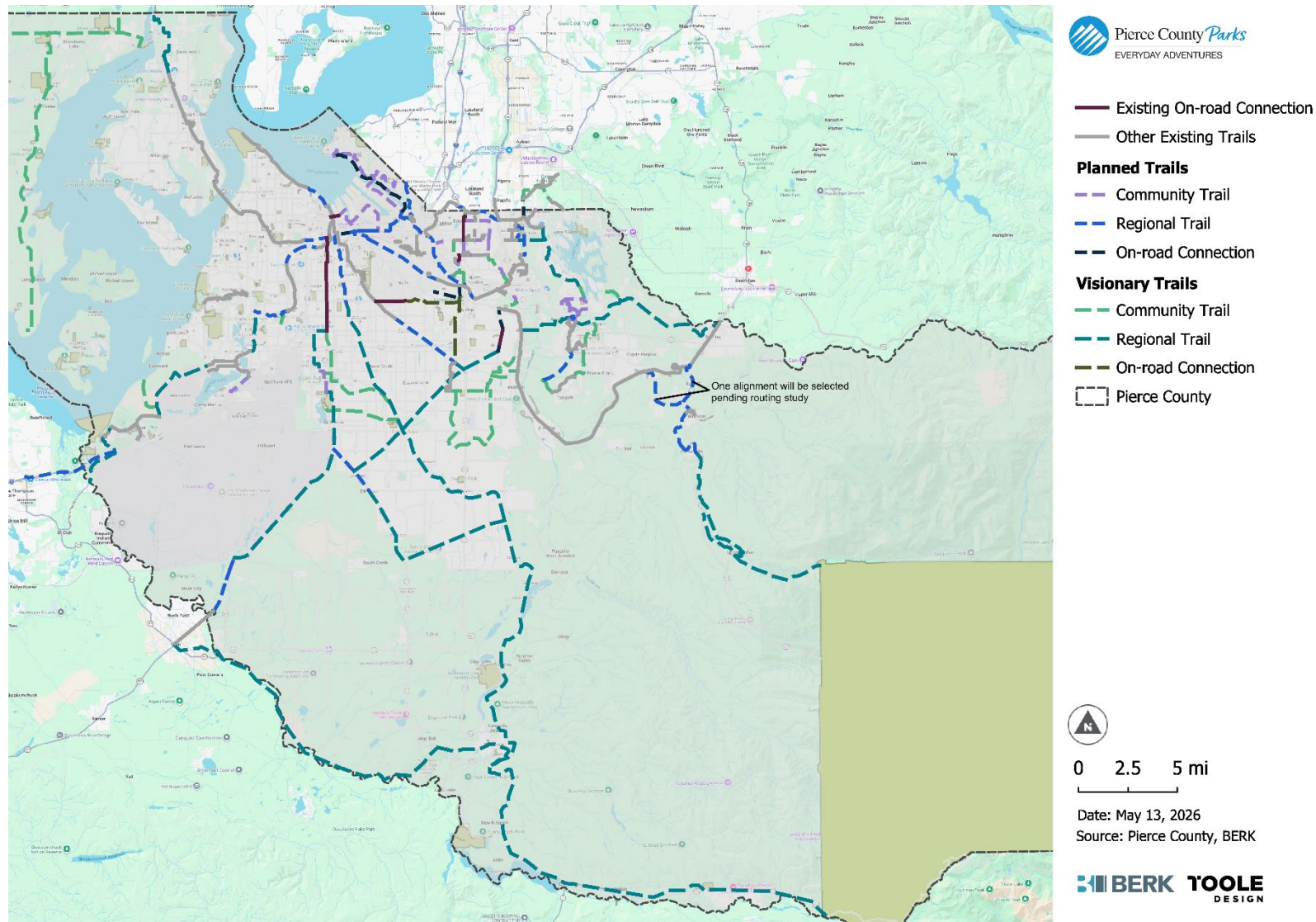
Visionary trails are typically long-term investment priorities. They may change to planned trails through forming significant partnerships and securing funding to study potential trail alignment.

Future Trails

To facilitate the County's role as a regional coordinator, this plan focuses on regional trails. Although Community and Intrapark trails provide important network connections and recreational opportunities, they are not the focus of this plan and are often built/maintained by local jurisdictions. As such, the maps and implementation strategies focus on the regional trail system. It should be noted, however, that community trails could be classified as regional trails in the future if their extent and focus match regional trail characteristics.



Exhibit 6-18: The Regional Trail System



Source: Pierce County Parks, BERK, Toole Design, 2026

Updates from the 2020 PROS Plan

This vision updates the Regional Trails Plan included in the 2020 PROS Plan. Since the previous plan was published, Pierce County Parks, in partnership with other jurisdictions and local trail advocates, has executed several projects to expand the trail network:

- The Pipeline Trail is being built in partnership with Tacoma Public Utilities and the City of Tacoma. The County will extend the trail 5.5 miles from Tacoma city limits to connect with the Nathan Chapman Trail in South Hill. The first 1.3-mile phase opened in June 2025.
- The Parkland Community Trail is a partnership with Pierce County Department of Planning and Public Works and Pacific Lutheran University. The trail will be built in the road right-of-way, representing a new trail model for the County. Construction will begin in summer 2025.
- The White River Bridge, completed in 2024, was built by King County Parks in partnership with Pierce County Parks. The bridge extends the Foothills Trail into King County, connecting Buckley to Enumclaw.

These developments show the potential of inter-jurisdictional relationships and the importance of building coalitions to complete the regional trail network.

Additional updates from the previous Regional Trail Map include:

- Expansion of the trail map to include existing and planned trails within local jurisdictions to define a true county-wide network.
- Updated routing to match new construction, current planning, and visionary trails to close identified gaps.
- Several visionary routes were removed from the previous map. Routes were removed where there was a lack of feasible routing (e.g., Victor Falls, Puyallup River Trail to Orville Road, Clover Creek North Fork), where an on-road bike lane is likely most appropriate (e.g., Frederickson Community Trail, Midland Community Trail), or where jurisdictions have no plans to move trail planning forward (e.g., White River Canyon Trail, Puyallup to Alderton).



Implementation Strategy

To implement trails, projects should be prioritized based on a set of criteria, followed by strategic implementation. Implementing the regional trails network vision will require a diverse set of strategies that align with available County resources, partnerships, programmatic opportunities, and collaboration.

Project Prioritization within Pierce County Parks Jurisdiction

The future trail system requires a thoughtful decision-making process for which trails are implemented first due to limited County resources. As a local trail provider to unincorporated residents, investment is directed by County fiscal policies that direct County funding to unincorporated areas. Park Impact Fees and grants are the primary funding sources for these projects. Prioritization is necessary to match projects with partnerships and resources to ensure an achievable plan. While [Exhibit 6-19](#) below identifies Regional Trail Criteria that should be considered by anyone considering investing in regional trails, more robust criteria that guides County decisions is needed. As the primary trail provider in unincorporated areas, Pierce County Parks prioritizes trail projects in unincorporated areas based on the following:

- 1. Gap Analysis/Demand and Needs Assessment.** Prioritize projects where there is the greatest need for trail connections. From these exercises, there is a significant need for trails when considering connectivity, access, and opportunity.
- 2. County Policy.** Ensure projects align with adopted County policies that define investment. The Fiscal Policy directs 38% of revenue from Park Impact Fees to new trails and calls for investments in Parkland, South Hill, and Pipeline.
- 3. Capital Funding Availability.** Align projects that support growing demographics within fiscal constraints.
- 4. Regional Trail Criteria.** When the first three criteria above have been fulfilled, prioritize projects that invest in the regional trail system, as shown in Exhibit 6-19 below.
- 5. Strategic Partnerships.** Projects may move forward when strategic partnerships with other agencies, trails providers, and jurisdictions bring substantial financial and technical resources to projects.

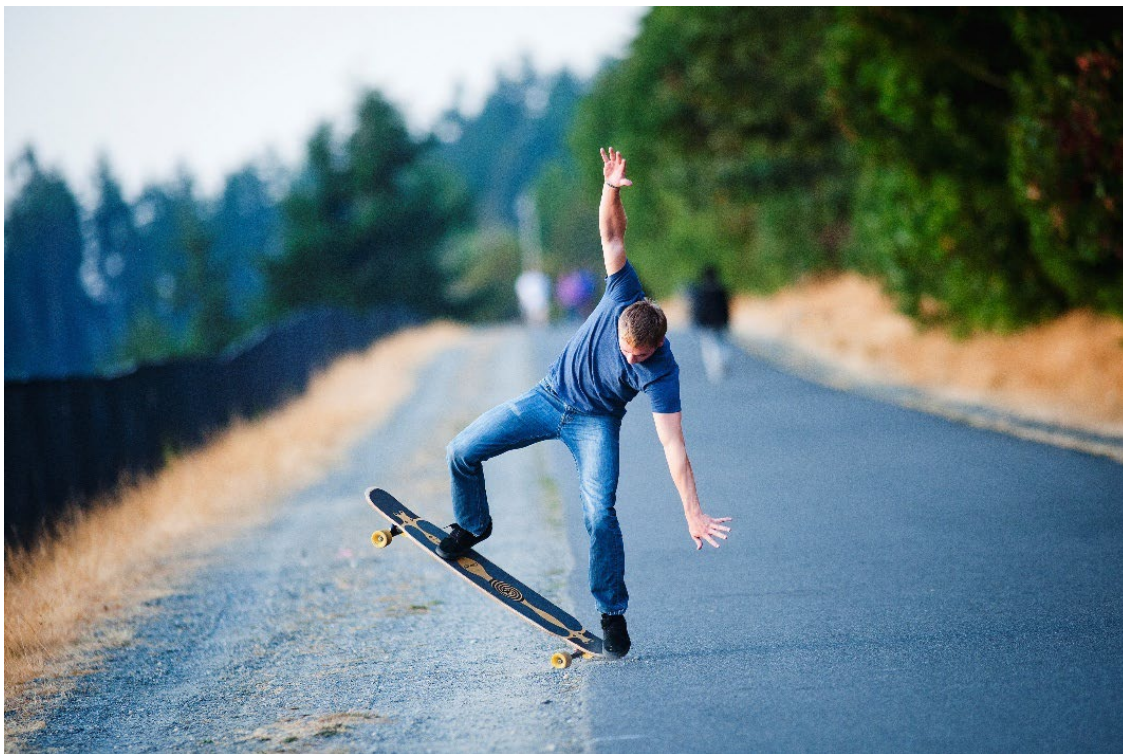


Exhibit 6-19: Regional Trail Criteria

Priority	Criteria
High	- Expands existing regional trail network to new jurisdiction, population center, or destination - Closes gaps and/or missing links in regional trail network to enhance connectivity - Facilitates strategic partnerships with jurisdictions & other trail providers - Enhances access and use for communities with limited access
Medium	- Expands existing trail network - Connects destinations
Low	All other trails
Additional Considerations	Constructability, cost effectiveness, land availability, grant potential, proximity to population and projected growth

Sources: Pierce County Parks, Toole Design, 2025

Exhibit 6-20: Skateboarder on the Grandview Trail.



Source: Pierce County Parks

Roles

Trails often have additional challenges in planning, design, permitting, construction, and maintenance, as compared to parks. These challenges require additional coordination with agency partners, landowners and managers, and other Pierce County departments.

Pierce County Parks as a Regional Trail Provider and Coordinator

Pierce County Parks acts as a regional and local trail provider in its dual role as a county-wide lead and as the primary provider for unincorporated areas. See [Exhibit 3-2](#). This dual role necessitates balancing projects that serve rapidly growing unincorporated areas with the demand for broader regional connections. To ensure sustainable management and expansion of the system, Pierce County Parks will support local jurisdictions and trail providers, and trail advocates in the following strategic actions:

- 1. Develop and update the Regional Trails Plan to define the system.** The Regional Trails Plan is a snapshot of a living system. The plan identifies gaps and missing links in the existing systems and coordinates a strategy to expand capacity. The plan must be regularly updated to reflect current priorities and best practices. Coordinated updates generate opportunities for partners and the public to provide input, define new priorities, and document accomplishments.
- 2. Update and maintain a countywide regional trails database.** Update existing trail data, including current classification, mileage, and alignments; compile jurisdictional data into Geographic Information System (GIS) layers and maps available to the community, partner agencies, and interested parties; and create a process for regular inventory updates.
- 3. Share resources to develop cohesive, countywide standards.** Continue to develop standards on design, maintenance, signage, wayfinding, safety, regulations, and other trail amenities. These resources will be available to partner organizations, creating a cohesive trail system that is easy to navigate.
- 4. Convene a Pierce County Trails Working Group.** Coordinate a regularly scheduled working group of trail providers in the County to discuss projects, issues, solutions, and partnership opportunities.
- 5. Create broad project coalitions to support project development.** Connect jurisdictions, trail providers, agencies, and advocates to strengthen applications for grants and other funding opportunities. Provide technical input and letters of support for grants and other funds.
- 6. Engage with transparency.** Continue to engage partners and community members during design and project development to ensure meaningful input on development of the regional trail system.



- 7. Additional resources.** When resources allow, provide additional support for local projects that connect to the regional trail system and meet high-priority criteria, as listed in **Exhibit 6-19** above. Pierce County Parks may be able to partner on major funding opportunities or provide a small match when funds are available.

As part of its role as Regional Trail Provider and Coordinator, the County will align its trail projects with its Capital Improvements Plan (CIP). See **Chapter 5: Capital Improvement Action Plan**.

Partnerships

Ongoing Coordination with Planning & Public Works

The Regional Trail System traverses built-out urban spaces, where land acquisition for separated, shared use paths is difficult or prohibitively expensive. To provide adequate connectivity, the system relies on bike lanes, protected bike lanes, sidewalks, and other active transportation infrastructure within the road right-of-way. The Department of Planning and Public Works (PPW) directs development within the right-of-way in unincorporated Pierce County. Parks will continue to partner with PPW to identify new opportunities that expand active transportation options throughout the County and provide the regional connectivity envisioned by this strategy through a network of on- and off-road facilities.

Parks will continue to facilitate conversations with other PPW entities to explore opportunities to expand trails and recreation resources on Pierce County properties such as levees and service roads.

As Pierce County grows, trails built segment-by-segment add up to a robust network. Pierce County Parks and PPW will coordinate to ensure that on-street facilities and trails are implemented in alignment with the Regional Trails Plan.

Partnerships with Jurisdictions, Trail Providers, Agencies, & Advocates

Cities, towns, and parks districts provide trails within their boundaries. State and federal agencies build trails on their lands and within their right-of-way. Expansion of the regional trail system and cross-county connectivity requires collaboration across jurisdictional boundaries. Pierce County Parks serves as a regional coordinator to bring partners together, leverage resources, and ensure connectivity between trail projects.

Working across jurisdictional boundaries creates complexity. Advocacy groups provide invaluable capabilities, including networking, outreach and engagement, volunteer resources, and legislative guidance. Advocacy groups assist and encourage Pierce County's



goal to create a convenient, accessible, connected trail system that meets the needs of all residents.

Pierce County Parks collaborates with jurisdictions, local trail providers, parks districts, partner agencies, and advocacy groups to apply for grants to the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO). Pierce County Parks acts as a coordinator and facilitator for trail project grants within their jurisdiction that represent regional interests. The Regional Trails Plan is intended to comply with all RCO requirements and serves as a foundation to seek additional regional, state, federal, and private funding opportunities for active transportation improvements.

There are also opportunities to meet multiple agency needs by working together, for example leveraging WSDOT's active transportation mandate to create new on-street or trail connections.

Opportunities and Actions

As regional trails are often cross-jurisdictional, taking action to implement regional trails requires strategic coordination and partnerships. Opportunities and actions often begin with land acquisition and aligning priorities across planning documents.

Land Acquisition for Trail Development

Land acquisition impacts trail development. Land acquisition includes ownership, easement agreements, or other mechanisms that allow for trail planning, construction, and public use.

Acquisition Challenges

Regional trail implementation projects that require the acquisition of land are challenging due to land costs, fragmented ownership, and potential conflicts with existing infrastructure and utilities. Construction of contiguous, multijurisdictional trails requires advanced planning and pointed negotiations. As such, the process of developing a trail through initial feasibility to construction takes many years.

Regional trails traverse multiple jurisdictions and private properties. Successful trail development requires negotiations and agreements with multiple municipalities and landowners. Disagreements between landowners and trail providers can stall projects, drive up costs, and extend construction timelines. Additionally, land values are high in desirable or populated areas, making outright purchase of land prohibitive. Though acquiring easements can be more cost-effective, easements require careful negotiations with individual property owners.



Simplifying Trail Implementation

To simplify the acquisition process, trail providers often build routes within existing linear properties. Though railroad lines, utility corridors, pipelines, and road rights-of-way present unique opportunities for trail development, trails may need to share space with existing infrastructure, creating design challenges and potential safety concerns. Accommodating trail users and existing infrastructure necessitates clearly defined partnerships and easements, potentially including subsurface or air rights.

Securing adequate funding for land acquisition and construction is challenging, often requiring a combination of funding sources or grant matches. Partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and community members build support for trail projects and improve project outcomes.

To successfully navigate the challenges with trail development, advanced planning is required to identify acquisition issues, assess alignment options, and develop strategies to mitigate conflicts. Though feasibility analysis adds time to the project schedule, these studies determine the ideal route, minimize environmental impacts, and identify funding sources.

Cross-State Trail Opportunities

There are opportunities to designate a cross-state trail route using regional trails across Pierce County. This route would likely connect from the Palouse to Cascades Trail which terminates in King County, through Pierce County, to Yelm-Prairie Line, Yelm Tenino Trail, and Willapa Hills trail systems to reach the coast at a different location. This will take additional advocacy by the County and partners to make it a reality. However, this designation could create additional funding opportunities for Pierce County and its partners.

Additional Implementation Actions

In addition to being a regional trail coordinator, the County leverages both its long-range planning and its short-range development efforts to implement trails. To support implementation on the local planning level, the County can encourage its jurisdictional partners to think about trails for long-range planning and short-range development.

Integrating regional trails into long-range plans reinforces their significance across multiple planning initiatives and advances a unified vision that strengthens future funding pursuits. The following plans are other long-range plans that should include the regional trail system:

- Comprehensive Plans
- Transportation Plans



- Capital Improvement Programs
- Community Plans
- Sustainability Plans

Furthermore, trails provide redundant transportation infrastructure and support resiliency during outages, natural disasters, or other emergencies. Pierce County Parks will continue to work with local partners to identify trail infrastructure and routing that enhance resilience.

Funding Sources

Trail funding comes from many sources. **Appendix E. Capital Revenue Projections** includes a robust list of grants and other funding opportunities related to funding projects in the PROS Plan. **Appendix G. Trail Funding Sources** includes more information. Leveraging multiple funding sources to address different aspects of trail design and construction is recommended.

Summary

Local and national surveys show that the most desired way for Pierce County residents to realize mental and physical health benefits and meet their recreational needs is provision of trails and facilities to walk, bike, and roll. The Regional Trails Plan vision:

- Establishes a network of trails that is accessible to people of all ages, abilities, and locations.
- Connects developed areas, population centers, and community destinations.
- Supports recreational and transportation trips.

In the near-term, Pierce County Parks will focus on coordination with trail providers and advocates across the County to advance the development of new trails and maintenance of existing trails. Capital investments by Pierce County will focus on providing regional trails in unincorporated communities and connections to the regional trail system across the County and beyond.

Pierce County Parks serves as a regional coordinator and a local provider in unincorporated areas. Building out of the future trail system will require partnerships with state, regional, local agencies, other Pierce County departments, Tribes, trail advocates, and the public.

