



Factors in the landscape-based greenway: a Mountains to Sound case study

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Abstract

This paper describes a case study of the 100 mile × 40 mile (161 km × 64 km) Mountains to Sound Greenway (MTSG) in Washington State, USA, as an example of an emerging greenway model that encompasses contiguous working, dwelling, recreational and protected landscapes and which is structured by an interstate highway. This “landscape-based greenway,” a large-scale, multi-objective greenway type, is defined and related to established greenway typologies and theory. The paper describes a framework of replicable planning, organizational and implementation factors that have contributed to the success of the MTSG, derived from study of the organization and supported by greenway and land planning literature. It presents methods used by the MTSG Trust to advance realization of this pioneering greenway concept, following the proposed planning, organizational, and implementation framework. Significant results in land acquisition, scenic highway status, trail network development, landscape restoration, cultural and educational resources, and preservation of small-town character, farms and forest resource lands are described, while challenges to the long-term viability of the accomplishments are raised. The author cites variations on the non-profit landscape-based greenway model and the corresponding need for replicative studies to further develop the framework of success factors, and notes its applicability to developing regions worldwide.

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1. Introduction

In 1990 almost a hundred citizens marched from Snoqualmie Pass in the Cascade Mountains to Seattle’s waterfront on Puget Sound, 55 miles (88 km) and 3000 feet (914 m) of elevation, to galvanize a vision of a Greenway corridor along Washington State’s major

east-west highway. In the summer of 2000 an enthusiastic group repeated the hike, this time to celebrate their accomplishments: significant lands assured to remain in forest and farm instead of suburban subdivision, and an almost-continuous network of trails between Seattle and the Columbia River 135 miles (217 km) to the east. Within 10 years, the Mountains to Sound Greenway (MTSG, or Greenway) had grown to a nationally-designated scenic corridor 100 miles (161 km) long and as much as 40 miles (64 km) wide, stretching from

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Puget Sound across the mesic Cascades to encompass dry forest landscapes of the Eastern Washington high plateau. Its success has been achieved through a host of significant initiatives including major land trades between private forestry companies and public agencies to consolidate lands for watershed-based management and public access; planting of hundreds of thousands of trees; and preservation of historic landscapes and small-town community identity. Moreover, the birth and development of the non-profit MTSG Trust (the “Greenway Trust”), and the scope of landscapes that it has stewarded, provides a greenway model for protecting large-scale, integrated landscapes, suggesting a “landscape-based” greenway typology that can be advanced through grassroots efforts. The purpose of this paper is to present a case study of the MTSG in order to illustrate that model, and to identify operational factors of success that can be applied to national and international greenway projects of this type.

1.1. The Mountains to Sound Greenway

The goals of the MTSG Trust encompass preservation of scenic beauty, provision of recreational lands with interconnected trail systems, protection of ecologically significant wildlife habitat and corridors, and preservation of and education about cultural and historical resources. In addition, the Greenway Trust’s central goal is to prevent suburban sprawl by supporting working farms and forests, thereby sustaining economic returns from the productive landscape, preserving verdant views, and bolstering small-town identities and economies. Pressure to convert resource lands for more lucrative housing and commercial development is a dominant force in urbanizing centers, rapidly and irreversibly destroying the productive capability of farm and forest land. In the MTSG, support of private forestry and public acquisition of farm and forest parcels have so far resulted in retention of these working landscapes, while simultaneously creating opportunities for a continuous network of parks, trails and habitat.

The MTSG differs from many greenways in its physiography and focus. Unlike the river spine of Oregon’s Willamette, H.W.S. Cleveland’s necklace of lakes in Minneapolis, the confines of an abandoned rail corridor, or greenbelts separating cities as advocated by

Lewis Mumford and Ebenezer Howard – though the MTSG includes all of these – the central artery is an interstate highway that structures the human experience and drives community economies. The corridor follows a transect from sea level to an elevation of six thousand feet, cutting through Seattle’s urban center, incorporating miles of suburban towns and foothills covered in fir and hemlock, through a bucolic agricultural valley, up the steep Cascades to the alpine slopes and glacier-scoured lakes of a mountain pass, and terminating in high desert pine parkland (Figs. 1 and 2a–d). In its width it encompasses contiguous territories, traversing and containing three major watersheds, and including two large cities and 10 small towns between Seattle and the historic town of Thorp. While the Greenway is an ecological corridor, its inclusion of towns, cities, trails and historic resources makes it something more: these are connected, whole landscapes. A landscape is a comprehensive functional entity that sustains human life and ecological relationships, as well as a visual scene. The Greenway itself is, therefore, not only a recreational network, a river’s edge, a watershed, a scenic highway or an ecological corridor. It is also a collection of working, living places, a spatial continuum of interrelated functions and meanings integral to the landscape as a whole: a “landscape-based greenway.” Designating this common-use, multi-jurisdictional territory to receive additional protection and advocacy while allowing it to evolve as a living cultural and natural landscape reflects an expanded definition of “greenway,” employing the greenway concept to accomplish comprehensive planning goals similar to those developed for regional, rural, and watershed-based planning areas.

A greenway’s spine is often a transportation route—a trail, abandoned rail corridor, or parkway; however the MTSG is unique in employing an interstate freeway (a high-speed, limited-access highway), as its primary connector. As such, this artery plays dual roles of “boombelt” and “greenbelt” (Roberts, 1991)—on one hand, bringing tremendous threat of sprawl and rampant development from the easy access it affords new suburbanites to the metropolis, and on the other, the datum reference by which viewsheds, towns, forests and farms acquire a protected identity. While streamlining this historic route crossing the Cascades has opened Pandora’s box, it has also provided the means to turn problem into opportunity, which has been the

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