

To: BPAC

From: Steve Pilcher

Re: Additional information regarding establishing a speed limit for multi-use trails

I didn't have a lot of success hearing back from other jurisdictions. However, I received a lot of good information from Spokane, Washington:

Spokane River Centennial Trail

The Spokane River Centennial Trail is a state park, so the WA State Parks & Recreation Commission established all rules, safety, and etiquette for the trail, including the 15 mph speed limit. The Friends of the Centennial Trail group has donated speed limit signs for the trail and highly recommends they be placed about 150 feet from trailhead access points in both directions. Enforcement is done by park rangers. Cyclists in pace lines training for rides are always the biggest obstacle to speed limit enforcement, and trail users complain the most about them. E-bikes are second highest for complaints. Dogs off leash or leashes too long and people who walk more than 2 abreast bring the third most complaints.

The 15-mph speed limit was established as this is a multi-use trail, and it is managed as a recreational trail. The speed limit considers that bicyclists will be sharing the trail with pedestrians and horse-users and hence the speed limits are designed to foster a safe experience for all. Speeds in the highly congested downtown portion of the trail are further limited to 7 mph.

The underlying rationale is that the Spokane River Centennial Trail is first and foremost a recreational trail, not a commuter trail. In essence, both in its construction and management it prioritizes recreation over transportation. That is not to say it is not used by commuters on bicycles, but it is managed with a recreational mindset to allow for the safe interaction of various users in a natural environment. Some trail sections are narrower (with a 12 ft tread-width), with curves and vegetation creating some line-of-sight issues; a trail developed primarily for commuting purposes would have a wider tread-width and cleaner line-of-sights.

Enforcement is done via signage, and with law enforcement patrols to encourage compliance. The focus is primarily on education. There are also volunteer groups (Sheriff community-oriented civilian volunteers) who patrol this 40-mile trail to educate and provide support. Some large groups of bicycle riders consistently riding at speeds near 25 mph have been stopped by park rangers and warned (very few are cited). Typically, they are aware of the speed limit and simply need a reminder. Frequent patrols are likely the best tool to gain compliance.

Although there will never be 100% compliance, with consistent messaging and education, it has been noticed that when trail-users experience unsafe practices, they remind each other of the trail restrictions. As a result, when it comes to speeding on the

trail, it most often occurs in wider sections of the trail and where there is very little other traffic, in a way partial success.

A “Share the Trail” messaging campaign has recently been implemented, using mobile sandwich boards (with that large header on every sign). The sandwich boards have a general “Share the Trail” message that applies to all users on one side, and a targeted message on the other to remind each type of user of their responsibilities: pedestrians, horse-users, dog walkers, bicyclists. That way no particular group is singled out and it conveys the idea that all users have a role to play in creating a safe multi-use trail. The sandwich boards are moved about every six-weeks and placed along the trail (not at trailheads) in a new location to keep the message fresh.

City of Santa Fe Parks

Parks appears to at least be open to the idea of installing signs. They would need to know the number of signs being requested, their proposed locations and whether this is an approved project of BPAC. Any installation will need approval from the Parks Division and Department Directors and will need budget allocated to it.

Code Enforcement would be responsible to enforce a speed limit if one were to be set, though it doesn't seem likely that this would be a high priority for the short-staffed division.

Recommendation

Based upon the research I've done, there doesn't appear to be a “best practices” answer to the question of establishing a speed limit. BPAC should first decide whether it wishes to do so; or simply have additional “trail etiquette” signs installed; or leave things as they are. If a decision is made to install some type of signage, BPAC will need to work on finding funding.