

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose

The Metro Council is being asked to select a trail alignment, in order to complete a missing link in the 40-Mile Loop and regional trail system in the vicinity of the Smith and Bybee Wetlands Natural Area (Natural Area). The four alternative alignments presented in this report were developed after many months of effort by a number of interested stakeholders. Key stakeholders that participated on a Technical Working Group for this study include: Metro Regional Parks and Greenspaces Department; Metro Solid Waste and Recycling Department; Portland Parks and Recreation; Smith and Bybee Wetlands Management Committee; the 40-Mile Loop Land Trust; the Friends of Smith and Bybee Lakes; and the St. Johns Neighborhood Association.

Years of previous effort have failed to produce a consensus on a single alignment. Conflicts between the desire for a user experience that interacts with a natural landscape and the desire to protect wildlife and habitat from further human encroachment have not been reconciled. However, there is agreement among key stakeholders who have engaged in this effort that the four alternative alignments under consideration represent an appropriate range of options, and that the facts and conclusions of this analysis are correct.

Overview

Each of the four alternatives has distinct advantages and disadvantages. Each has supporters and opponents. Any alignment selected for development would require further assurances prior to implementation (i.e. funding identified, property and ROW negotiations, permit approvals).

All four alternative alignments provide some level of aesthetic benefits, and make important connections between the Smith and Bybee Wetlands Natural Area and nearby parks, neighborhoods, and regional trails. Impacts to habitat vary from low to very high potential depending on the alignment. Railroad and Slough crossings contribute significantly to the cost of some of the alignments. The key variables for

Metro Council consideration are:

1. The trail user experience. Much research supports the intuitive assumption that people prefer to visit trails within or with views of natural scenery, including water, trees, wetlands, and green vegetation. This is not merely a matter of visual delight. Research shows that recreation and views of natural landscapes lower stress and blood pressure, and help urban residents lead more physically and psychologically healthy lives.
2. Impacts to fish/wildlife and their habitat. Research also supports the intuition that trails located within natural areas have demonstrated negative impacts and risks to wildlife. Nests may be abandoned, foraging disrupted, and habitat lost as a consequence of trail construction and regular use. These outcomes are not certain, but there is risk of one or more of them occurring with certain trail alignments.
3. Trail construction cost. The four options range from \$4 to \$7 million dollars to develop, exclusive of land acquisition.
4. Public sentiment. There is no clear consensus alternative alignment available. Those advocating one alignment or another have very good and sensible arguments in their favor based on their core values.

Elements Common to All Alternative Alignments

Each of the four alternative alignments links the east end of the Port of Portland Trail¹ through the Natural Area to neighborhoods, parks, and other regional trails. Each alignment has the potential to provide access for multiple trail users, including hikers, cyclists, and those with disabilities, although trail surface (hard vs. soft) has not been determined for some portions of some alignments. Each alignment includes

¹ The Port of Portland Trail (also known as the Rivergate Trail) refers to a 1.3-mile segment of the Columbia Slough Trail built by the Port of Portland in 2002.



Water control structure between Bybee Lake and North Slough



North Portland Road bridge over Columbia Slough



Wapato Wetland along the south side of the Columbia Slough

traveling the east side of the St. Johns landfill, and connecting the landfill to the St. Johns neighborhood through Chimney and Pier Parks.



View of the Columbia Slough from the south shore of Smith Lake

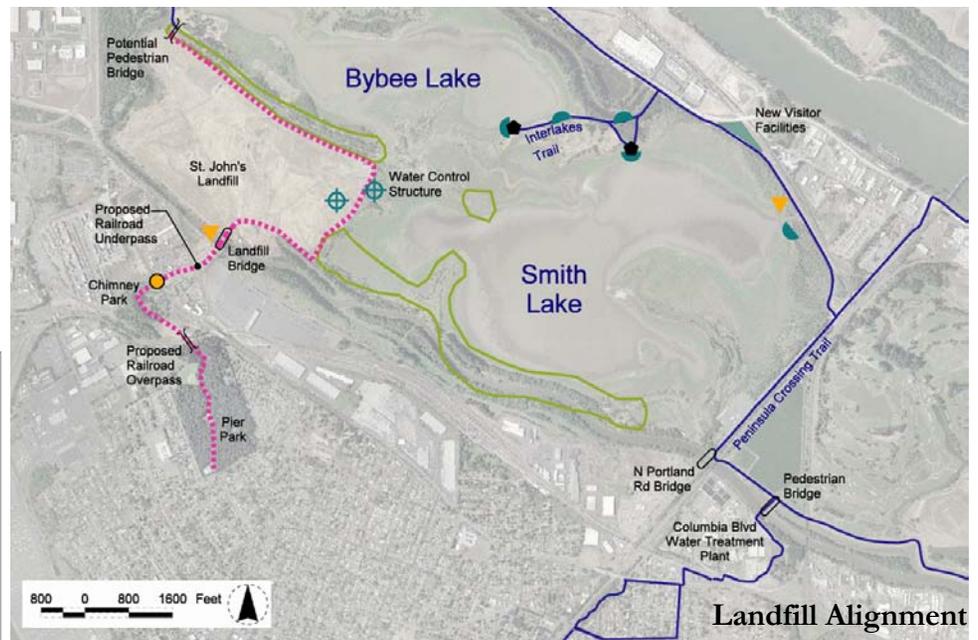
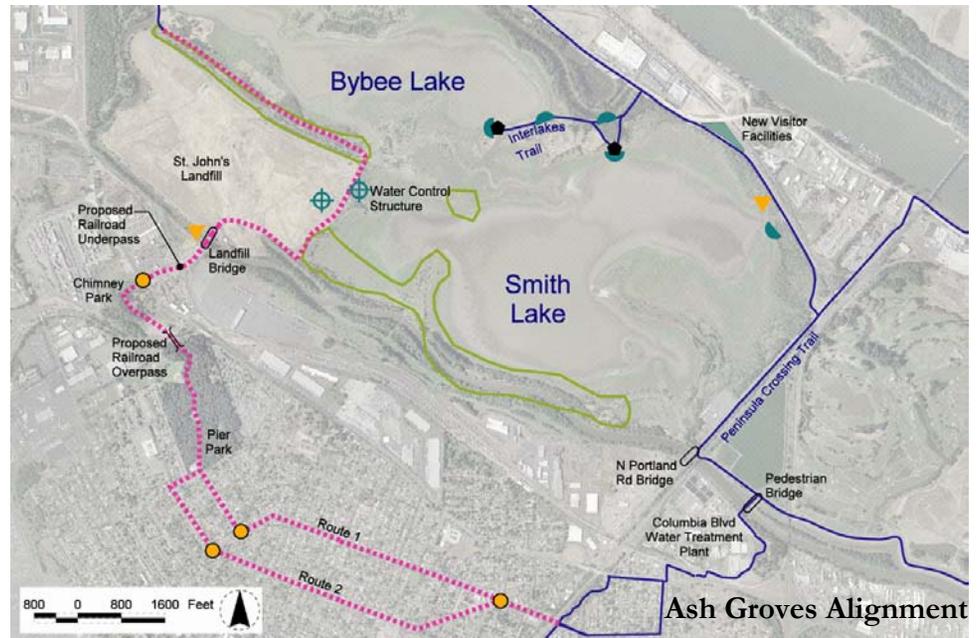
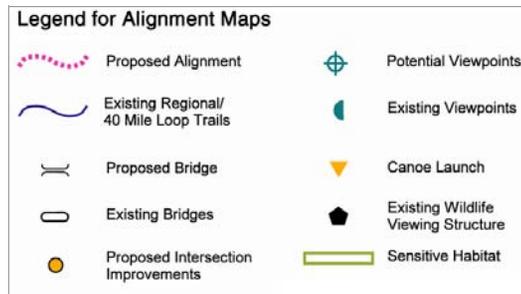
SUMMARY OF ALTERNATIVE TRAIL ALIGNMENTS

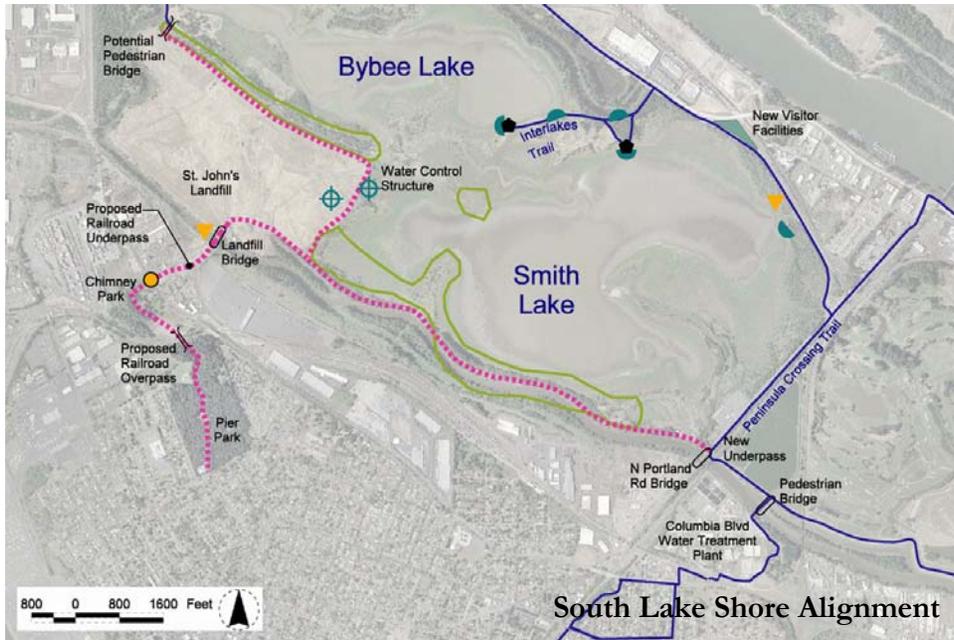
Ash Groves Alignment **\$4.6 million**

- Sensitive wildlife habitat will be impacted.
- No new bridge needed to cross Columbia Slough.
- High quality user experience through ash groves woodland.
- Crosses through western painted turtle nesting area yet avoids impacts to heron and Bald Eagles.
- Provides improved route through neighborhood to Peninsula Crossing Trail.
- May require crossing wetlands.
- Careful route selection can reduce impacts to old growth ash trees.
- Does not provide direct link to 40-Mile Loop trails along Columbia Slough east of the Natural Area.
- No land acquisition needed to complete.

Landfill Alignment **\$6.2 million**

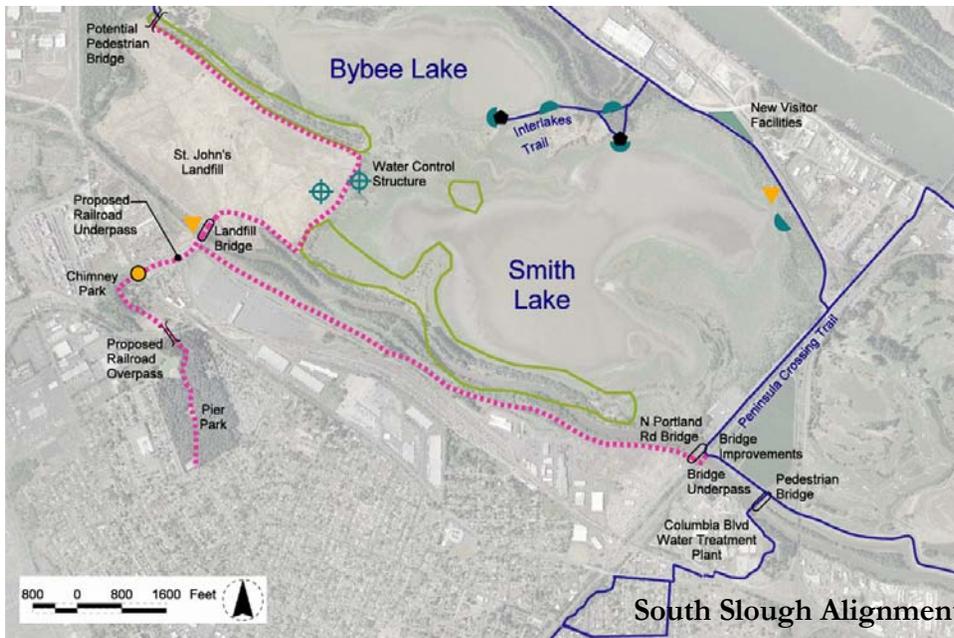
- Requires new bridge to cross Columbia Slough, bridge engineering studies required.
- ESA listed fish in Columbia Slough.
- Lowest environmental impact.
- User experience not as high as Ash Groves or South Lake Shore alignments.
- Does not provide direct link to 40-Mile Loop trails along Columbia Slough east of the Natural Area.
- No land acquisition needed to complete.





South Lake Shore Alignment **\$7.1 million**

- Trail would run close to a 70 nest heron rookery and four Bald Eagle (ESA listed species) nesting sites.
- Wetlands may be impacted.
- Requires new bridge to cross Columbia Slough, bridge engineering studies required.
- ESA listed fish found in Slough.
- Trail route used as a wildlife crossing between Slough and Smith Lake.
- High quality user experience.
- Provides a direct link to the 40-Mile Loop trails east of Natural Area.
- Route crosses two small parcels in private ownership – acquisition or purchase required.
- This alignment shown in 1990 Management Plan adopted by the City of Portland.



South Slough Alignment **\$7.6 million**

- Requires new bridge to cross Columbia Slough, bridge engineering studies required.
- Need major improvements to North Portland Road bridge to accommodate widened sidewalk.
- Provides direct link to 40-Mile Loop trails east of Natural Area.
- Wetlands may be impacted.
- User experience lower than South Lake Shore and Ash Groves, yet 'Wapato Wetland' provides high quality wildlife viewing opportunities.
- Most of the South Slough segment of trail in private or other agency ownership. Easements or acquisition required.