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**CAMPAIGN TO OPEN THE BURKE GILMAN TRAIL,  
BALLARD "MISSING" LINK: SPRING/SUMMER 2002**

**The Short History of the Burke-Gilman Trail**

In 1885, Judge Thomas Burke, Daniel Gilman, and ten other investors set out to establish a Seattle-based railroad so that the young city might win a place among major transportation centers. Their Seattle, Lake Shore and Eastern Railroad never got past Arlington, WA but was a major regional line serving Puget Sound logging areas. Northern Pacific acquired the line in 1913, continued its use until 1963, and merged with the Great Northern and Burlington lines in 1970 to become the Burlington Northern Railroad (BNR).

As rail use dwindled, it became clear that BNR would "abandon" the northern portion of the rail line (from Gas Works Park to Kenmore). The first efforts to secure the rail right of way for a multi-use trail were undertaken by the Burke-Gilman Trail Park Committee in 1968. Encouraged by Sen. Warren Magnuson, the Committee lobbied Seattle Mayor Wes Uhlman, King County Executive John Spellman, and the BNR to donate the land to the City and County for a trail.

*If firm future plans for the region are considered, then this track is an indispensable piece of a pattern to provide eventual trails from Golden Gardens, around Lake Union, north on Lake Washington to connections with the Eastside trail system, the imminent Lake Sammamish circuit, and routes into the Cascades.*

Burke-Gilman Trail Park Committee Pamphlet, 1968.

In 1978, the Gas Works-to-Kenmore portion of the Burke-Gilman Trail (BGT) was completed. In 1993, a 3-mile gap between the BGT and the Sammamish River Trail was completed, thus providing a continuous 27-mile long, separated multi-use facility from Gas Works Park in Seattle to Marymoor Park in Redmond. Trail usage on the facility jumped 65% from 1990 to 1995.

During the '70s, '80s, and '90s, citizen and official efforts moved the BGT forward. In 1989, the BNR entered into an agreement with the City of Seattle giving the City rights to any "railbanked" rail corridor in the event BNR terminated service on the line. In the mid-90s, BNR classified the Ballard shortline section as a probable candidate for abandonment prompting City staff to obtain federal funding to complete the BGT to its natural terminus at Golden Gardens Park. In 1996, amidst strong community support on the one hand, and strong opposition and concern from a group of businesses and industrialists along the corridor on the other, City Council directed staff to study route options and engage in a public input process to determine how and where to spend the federal funding.

After a lengthy public process in 1996, the Seattle Engineering Department recommended continuing a separated trail adjacent to NW 45<sup>th</sup> as far as 12<sup>th</sup> NW, then making street improvements to get users to the Ballard Bridge. However, instead of approving Engineering's recommendation, the City Council's Transportation Committee, and later the full City Council, stated their "preferred alternative" in Resolution 29474, proposing a "compromise" solution: complete the trail segment between 8<sup>th</sup> NW and 11<sup>th</sup> NW, and between the Chittenden Locks and NW 67<sup>th</sup>—thus creating the "the Missing Link." Resolution 29474 did not authorize completion of the Burke-Gilman Trail within the publicly owned, rail corridor right-of-way. The resolution only approved these two trail segments—stopping short on either side of the Ballard industrial zone and calling for trail users to use an unpopular street route and incomplete sidewalks to bridge the missing link.

Rail shipments around this time were under 200 cars per year and the track was in disrepair. Consequently, BNR decided to discontinue its use. They then sold the line to Sea Lion Railroad, a non-profit organization, which in turn railbanked the line under the National Trails Act. However, the City granted a franchise to a railroad started by a local businessman—the Ballard Terminal Railroad Company (BTRC)—in Oct. 1996 and in the fall of 1997 approved a BTRC franchise to operate a short-line railroad on the Ballard Spur line (Ordinance 118734). Subsequently the City purchased all the land formerly owned by BNR and opened the door for completing the BGT as rail-with-trail. After fifteen months of lying dormant, the Ballard spur line tracks were used again by BTRC.

Construction of the BGT from 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> NW has been completed. Design work is ongoing for the section from the Locks west to NW 67<sup>th</sup>.

## Community Involvement & Past Strategies:

Neighborhood Plan Supports Trail Completion: In 1997, The Ballard/Crown Hill Planning Association, charged with developing the master plan for Ballard's Hub Urban Village, recommended the completion of the Burke-Gilman trail within the rail right-of-way as their number two priority. The plan was approved by City Council but no further action has been taken to implement the community's plan.

Efforts of Friends of the Burke-Gilman Trail: In the fall of 1999, a group of Ballard residents formed the Friends of the Burke-Gilman Trail (FOBGT) to promote the completion of the BGT from 11th to Golden Gardens. Along with the Cascade Bicycle Club and the Bicycle Alliance, FOBGT has been able to turn out several hundred trail supporters to various City run hearings and meetings. Furthermore, recognizing the need to accommodate competing right-of-way users and neighbors, FOBGT hired **A Northwest Collaborative**, an architect and planning firm, to produce conceptual designs for completing the trail—focusing specifically on five identified 'difficult' areas. The project goal was to design solutions for a multi-use trail-with-rail within the city-owned railroad right-of-way connecting the Ballard Locks and the Ballard Bridge. With Susan Black and Associates, a regional landscape architecture firm, detailed drawings of routes were produced. These drawings, which won the "Merit Award for Landscape Planning and Analysis" from the Washington Society of Landscape Architects, have subsequently been reviewed with City staff, Councilmembers, businesses, trail opponents, and others.

To gauge business/industrial community support and opposition and encourage one-on-one meetings, Friends surveyed all businesses along the right-of-way corridor. Of 132 surveys sent out, 56 were returned, representing all sectors and sizes of businesses from all geographical areas along the corridor. Of those returned, 38% favored the trail, 16% were neutral and 46% were opposed. Subsequently, a Ballard consultant was hired to conduct a business outreach program. The goal of that project is to:

- (a) compile a list of business and property owners, particularly those along the missing link, who support trail completion (Business Friends of the BGT)
- (b) identify business owners who are willing to demonstrate tangible support for the trail
- (c) encourage other area businesses, both adjacent to and off the corridor, to complete the survey
- (d) Meet with business owners one-on-one to collect priority reasons for which businesses support and/or oppose the trail and to lobby the Friends' case

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### Cascade Bicycle Club

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## **The Situation Today**

FOBGT has also taken their message to City Hall, meeting with many Council members and the Mayor's office over the past few years. Because of their efforts, on Oct. 22, 2001, the City Council unanimously passed a resolution to study the completion of the Burke-Gilman Trail yet again. To address the compromise of Resolution #29474, the Council directed the Seattle Department of Transportation (SeaTran) to study alternative routes to complete the trail between 11th Ave NW and the Government Locks. The new resolution requires the study of at least three alternatives, one of which must be the publicly owned, railbanked rail right-of-way. Furthermore, the Resolution directs SeaTran "to determine where purchase of land may be necessary and undertaken to ensure construction of a well-designed and safe multi-use trail." SeaTran's study is expected out in the fall of 2002.

Today many demands are being placed on the precious public right-of-way that was preserved for the trail. If we do not make plans for completing the Burke-Gilman Trail now, other development could prevent the completion of the trail. Completion of the trail will facilitate bicycling and walking as viable transportation options and will complete a missing link in the regional non-motorized transportation network.

- Planned development by the railroad and adjacent businesses could make it impossible to complete the trail through Ballard.
- The Ballard Neighborhood Plan identifies completion of the Burke-Gilman Trail as one of its top three priorities.
- Completion of the trail will facilitate bicycling and walking as viable transportation options. Many area businesses rely on employees cycling and walking to work to meet Trip Reduction goals. The trail will complete a missing link in the regional non-motorized transportation network.

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