

Neighborhood Greenway Route Scouting

This document is designed for, and maintained by, the **route scouts** of the Seattle Greenway Organizers. We believe that scouting happens **on the ground, by locals**, for locals.

Prepare the mind

- Start with a clean slate and a fresh mind.
- Read the University Greenways [FAQ](#).
- Watch the [Portland Neighborhood Greenways video](#). Learn it, love it, live it, share it.
- Read Sally Bagshaw's [blog post](#) on Neighborhood Greenways.
- On a long dark winter's night, read the Alta Design [Bicycle Boulevard Planning & Design Guidebook](#). The route evaluation checklist at the end is great. That document is big on detail.
- Routes should connect local destinations, particularly parks, schools, and businesses. Contemplate where these are. For some help, zoom into your [neighborhood on the overview map](#). At the closest levels, all common points of interest will become visible. Consult with neighbors to find the undocumented key local destinations (like the Mosaic coffeehouse in Wallingford).

Choose your wheels

- Choose a bike, rollerblades or walking shoes so you know what your users will feel like on them. Most scouts will probably use a bike in order to crisscross all of their neighborhood streets quickly.
- Print off a few Google Map pages without any overlays. Bring these and a Sharpie with you. Having a touch based phone with GPS and mapping software onboard is great.
- Trail recording apps such as EveryTrail are superb at recording routes and can even be [annotated with geotagged photos and video clips](#) (thanks Dylan A). Of course not everybody will be that technical, and that's OK.

Do

- Pick some routes one or two blocks off important arterials through your neighborhood and ride them.
- Choose routes that connect where people live to where they need to go (high density housing developments and bedroom communities to schools, parks, play fields, libraries, business districts, transit centers)
- Make it cheap and easy:
 - Choose quiet streets that take advantage of natural traffic calming.
 - Locals know the quiet streets and best routes, incorporate the knowledge of those already biking and walking in your neighborhood.
 - Look for arterial crossings that already have crosswalk lights and protected islands in the middle of the road. Or find crossings where such a solution could be implemented.
 - Choose routes that already have 25mph speed limits, ideally ones where a 20mph limit would make more sense such as narrow neighborhood streets with parking on both sides.
 - Parked cars can act as effective traffic calming agents, especially if parking alternates sides along the block. If the roadway is a tight squeeze for cars, it's perfect for a neighborhood greenway.
 - Stay away from wide roads where possible. Wide roads encourage speeding.
- Ride or walk the route at different times of the day, evening at commute hour, when school lets out, at night, in bad weather. One lovely route I found through a pretty park turned dangerous at night when it became clear that gangs congregate at the exits. Seemingly calm streets can become high volume unsafe streets at rush hour when commuters use the neighborhood streets as cut-through routes or when school lets out and platoons of distracted SUV drivers swarm the area.
- Be safe. Dress to be overly conspicuous. Light yourself up. Bringing others with you increases safety (for you) and fun. While these routes are intended to be inclusive of all abilities when finished, scouting new routes is an inherently dangerous activity. Proceed at your own risk, or find volunteers in your committee to scout the routes.
- Integrate existing multiple use trails and short cuts. Ask kids in your neighborhood, they will know all the shortcuts.

Avoid

- Avoid roads with existing **bike lanes**. The presence of a bicycle lane is a good indicator that a road is NOT appropriate for use as a Neighborhood Greenway. By choosing a route one or two blocks parallel to that road, you might find a much safer street.

- Avoid **main roads** except where there is a physically separated cycle track such as on Alki.
- Avoid **steep hills**. Choose grades that can be ridden up with a fully loaded cargo bike, with a child trailer, or by an 8 or 80 year old rider. However, if an otherwise great route has a steep block two that requires walking, it still might be worth using if there are no better options to get to the higher grade.
- Avoid road with **center lines**. They are generally too wide and fast to make good greenways.
- Avoid routes that are too **convoluted**. Long linear routes are the best and easiest to follow.
- Avoid **bus routes**. Watch for overhead trolley wires which indicate high volume bus routes.
- Avoid **emergency response routes** where possible.

Ponder

- **Traffic islands**. Traffic islands in small neighborhood intersections in Seattle have been effective at reducing crashes, injuries and fatalities. However, poor driver behavior and impaired sight lines make traffic islands problematic on neighborhood greenways. It's not currently possible to prioritize bicycle and pedestrian traffic at traffic circles. The jury is still out on whether traffic islands are a benefit or a hindrance to creating truly comfortable and safe neighborhood greenways.

Develop Empathy

- Read this post by [Blake Trask on roadway empathy](#).
- Always view the route from the perspective of a variety of greenway users such as an 8 year old learning to ride a bike, an 80 year old going out for an errand or a mother taking her children on their own bikes to the park.
- If you are reading this, you are probably a stronger rider or walker who is not representative of the 60% "willing but wary" class of users. In order to grow your empathic capabilities, try some of the following techniques:
 - To simulate the vision and perception limitations of the very young, the inexperienced or the aging, [reduce your visual capabilities](#).
 - Wear an eye patch on one eye.
 - The very young and old can not ride or walk as far or as fast as you can. Hills that you don't notice may be significant to others. To simulate the range capability of your users, try removing one pedal and riding the entire route with one leg. Or, just go barefoot on your clipless pedals. Or, add an extra 50 pounds to your bike if you are riding or to a backpack if you are walking. You will quickly understand what your route is like for those less physically capable.
 - Walk the route pulling a large piece of luggage behind you. This will help simulate what the route would be like for the elderly, who often use walkers or pull grocery carriers, for wheelchair users, or for parents pushing strollers.

Map Your Route

1. Choose one person to put the routes into a Google Map and share it with your collaborators.
2. Send a link to Bob Edmiston (Lenswork64 at gmail dot com) so your Google map can be added to the Seattle Neighborhood Greenways collaboration map so you can see how your greenways connect up with those of your adjacent neighborhoods. Doing this sooner than later will help route scouts in adjoining neighborhoods plan their connecting routes.
3. You will make many adjustments over time and that's expected and fine.
4. Use the line drawing tools in Google maps to document your proposed routes. Draw the minimum number of points to describe your path to save data. The master map is a shared resource so saving data helps the map draw faster for all. Keep it as uncluttered as possible. Don't spend a lot of time coloring your lines and adding detail. Just rough in the routes and get people riding them for feedback.
5. Define the boundaries of your greenway network. You and your adjacent neighborhood route planners will jointly own the boundaries between you. Work together to clearly delineate where your boundaries meet and work to ensure that greenways routes connect key urban villages in other parts of the city. Logical greenway territories may not map cleanly to city defined neighborhood boundaries. For instance, Capitol Hill and Central District share a common plateau. Likewise for Delridge and West Seattle. It's best if your boundaries overlap just a block or two but not more.
6. Only put routes on your Google map after you or your route scout has personally ridden the route on a bicycle with the appropriate "willing but wary user" goggles on. If possible, walk the route too. You didn't use a car, right?
7. Do not draw out schools and parks or label them. The basemap has these and your adding them will just clutter the map and confuse your collaborators. All of these items and many many more are available as layers in the overview map.

Validate Your Routes

- Event 1: Simple, organize a group Ride and Walk event and include other route planners and interested parties. Be sure to include plenty of people with cargo bikes, bikes with kid seats and trailers, young and old riders, those who use a bike as their primary mode of transportation. Have a contingent of people walk the route too. Like the riders, be sure to include the young and the old, or follow one of the suggested adaptations from above. Ride or walk the routes and stop often to discuss the route, intersections, dangers, opportunities.
- It may be useful to have several "sample or prepared" routes for smaller groups of riders and walkers to follow that would mimic how the Neighborhood Greenway would be used, in the manner of a scavenger hunt. For example: have one group go to the grocery store and pick up bananas, then the dry cleaners, then the hardware store, then a coffee shop. Another group would have a different set of points to get between. This targeted ride or walk would help indicate what type of bike facilities (racks, etc.) or other improvements might be useful. In addition, the group discussion of how to get between points would directly point to the best routes for various daily activities.
- Incorporate the feedback into your mapped routes, change routes as needed based on the feedback.
- Note: Insurance is important, these routes are not safer greenways yet. Be sure to have a Cascade ride leader so you can be covered under their insurance policy. Plan in advance. Find out what kind of wine or beer your Cascade ride leader likes.
- Event 2: Organize another ride/walk event and ride or walk the route again to ensure that your changes from the last event addressed the issues without creating too many new ones.
- Solicit feedback. Publish your proposed routes to your community and have [everybody test the routes](#) at all times of the day, in all weather conditions, with all kinds of loads. Use the feedback from this to refine the maps.
- At some point, it will become obvious to all on your committee (including SDOT) that your routes are ideal and shovel ready.

Links

Watch the Portland Neighborhood Greenways video

[Seattle Neighborhood Greenways Site](#)

[Greenways Organizers Group](#)

[Seattle Citywide Neighborhood Greenways Map](#)

[Example Google Map](#)

Read the University Greenways [FAQ](#).

FAQ

Question from J. in Ballard

Sorry, I meant to continue that thought. Ballard has a grid of arterials that form barriers - 24th, 15th, 8th Ave NW running north-south and Market, NW 65th, NW 80th and NW 85th St. running east-west. Long term, I'd love to see each rectangle formed by these arterials to have access to a greenway as a safe route "out" to the larger neighborhood. This leads to proposed routes spaced from about 0.4 to 1 mile apart. How are other groups thinking about this aspect of the network?

Answer from C. in Wallingford

I think the way neighborhoods choose to space their greenways will differ from place to place. Portland is using the "every resident no more than 1/2 mile from a greenway" rule of thumb. That spacing is related to the distance the average person can walk in 10 minutes. You can get on and stay on a citywide system of safe ped/bike routes after no more than a 10-minute walk. Lovely.

Topography is important. Density plays an even more significant role -- more greenways/mile are needed when there are multiple business districts, schools, multifamily housing etc. that people want to get to and from. Your thinking about

crossing barriers makes a ton of sense -- you want to help Ballard people get between local quadrants cut off by fast-moving arterials. On Beacon -- with lower density than in Ballard, the U-District, or Wallingford -- the important thing is to funnel people between their lower density neighborhoods and parks into the dense spine of the business/light rail core. Each of our neighborhoods will present unique opportunities.

As we work collaboratively on a citywide greenway map, there will be disagreements about ideal route choices and greenway frequency. That disagreement is okay. In fact, that is the whole point of a collaborative map. Ideally, with back and forth discussion, we'll end up with "consensus routes".

In my Wallingford neighborhood, for example, we're arguing the merits of N-S routes at Sunnyside/Corliss on the east side of the neighborhood and Woodland Park/Midvale on the west side. It is okay that [our map](#) suggests there are four N-S routes right now when we only want and expect to end up with two in these locations.

Ultimately the routes we choose will be a collaboration between locals and SDOT. Our neighborhood groups can identify best local routes by topography and more importantly provide local knowledge about the destinations we want to get to, the adjacent neighborhoods we need to seamlessly connect to, and the arterial barriers we need help to safely cross to make these connections.

Question from C in West Seattle

What information do you have on your map and do I need to recreate points of interest such as parks, schools, etc?

Answer from B in Madison Park.

No you don't have to create those, only the routes and points where notes are relevant. The overview map has the following layers:

Map Contents

- Park Labels
- Traffic Circles in Seattle
- Traffic Signals in Seattle
- Trolley routes
- Churches
- Cities in KC
- Community Centers
- Farmers Markets (King County)
- Historical Landmarks (Seattle)
- Libraries
- Light Rail Stations (King County)
- Medical Facilities inc hospitals (King County)
- Neighborhoods of Seattle
- Park and Ride Lots (King County)
- Park Names
- Play Areas
- Retirement Homes
- Schools (SEA)
- Schools All (King County)
- Theatres
- Transit Centers (King County)
- Transit Corridors (SEA)
- Urban Villages in Seattle
- Metro transit routes
- Post Offices
- Rail Lines
- Ride Free Zone

- Staircases locations
- Zip Codes
- Staircases walking routes
- Park shapes