Lithia Park Low Angle Climb and Descending Trails

Location: Upper Lithia Park, between Glenview Road and the Eastern slope of Ashland Creek.

Primary issues addressed: Neighborhood Connectivity, Beginner Trails, Environmental impact, Tourism

Secondary: User Experience

Current status: The outer Lithia Park trails are closed to all bikes. Within the area bordered by Glenview Road, the Swim Reservoir, Ashland Creek, and the Pioneer Street dirt access road, there is a myriad of user-created trails open to hikers only. A few of these trails lead to the creek itself, and along the steep hillside. According to maps from the City of Ashland most of these user-created trails have been adopted into the current trail system. Access points exist off of Glenview Road in several locations improved with stairs (and some without), and onto the Pioneer Street fire road.

Assessment: This area holds the key to a major connectivity and traffic flow issue stemming from bikes leaving the watershed trails of BTI and Jabberwocky, and being forced to exit down the heavily used Winburn Way and into the Plaza downtown area. The current preferred route of travel negotiates quiet park space in the upper regions, transferring into one of the most congested traffic areas in all of Ashland, the Lithia Park Playground parking area. Riders are forced to navigate through a gauntlet of cars pulling in and backing out (many of these drivers are tourists who may not know that bikes frequent the route) as well as the many walkers in the area around the Duck Pond and Bandshell. Due to riders not wanting to ride with cars in an impacted area, unsanctioned use of the current trail by bikes has become more prevalent.

The upper area near the Quarry parking lot is one of the heaviest auto traffic areas in Lithia Park. On most weekends, and even some weekdays, the parking lot fills to capacity. This means dozens of cars are driving through the park and from downtown to ride bikes in the watershed, then returning to their cars and driving out. Moving up the hillside, there are neighborhoods just above Glenview road, and Glenview road itself, that point to major ecological and environmental impact on the hillside existing. The spaghetti of user-created trails create hideouts for homeless, who have been found to be living in camps in the area over the years. As the site lies in the bottom of a box canyon, user-created trails leading to homeless camps creates one of the highest fire risks in Ashland, in one of the most geographically susceptible locations to fire. The current area in question is highly used and just underwent a major clearing/thinning project to reduce fire hazard, but if ignition sources (homeless camps) still exist, fires can and will start. The area hosts the best terrain on city owned land to provide beginner, low angle trails. Thanks to the recent thinning, very few if any trees would need to be removed for trail construction.

Project History: RVMBA created a proposal for this project and presented to the Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission (APRC) for consideration in the 2019-2021 goals process. Exploring the potential for a trail is currently the #8 goal on the APRC goals list, but has failed to move forward in any official capacity. Neither the Forest Lands Commission nor the City of Ashland have produced a clear pathway to proposal for RVMBA. Therefore, the project has been stalled until RVMBA can identify a way to get the project on the table. Because the project will take place on APR land, the APRC will be the primary decision makers for this particular project.

Proposal: RVMBA would like to build two trails running parallel from the Quarry at the end of Glenview Road to the Pioneer Street Fire Road just above downtown. One trail would serve as a bike only uphill trail, while the other would be a bike only downhill trail. RVMBA originally proposed a multi use, bike/hike shared uphill trail. Due to concern from APRC and City staff in mixing trail users, the proposal will be a bike only alignment for both trails. This effectively eliminates any shared use concern in the park.

To address the concern of unsanctioned trails (which are in abundance from historic foot travelers in the area), RVMBA would offer volunteer services to decommission non-essential routes of traffic in the area. RVMBA would work to use dead/down materials to block off old trails that are erosive and non connective. Redundant trails also would be eliminated, leaving a clear, workable and connective system in place both for connective travel and leisure hiking/riding. This would also eliminate potential homeless camp paths and areas by creating a main thoroughfare of traffic both on foot and by bike. RVMBA would continue to monitor and report on any illegal or unsanctioned trails that reopened after this exit.

One can look at current city trails BTI and Jabberwocky to see what they could expect in terms of short cut or illegal trails to and from the main trails. With thousands of yearly riders, there are 0 illegal cut ins or cut outs of these two trails. The uphill trail would consist of a gentle grade not exceeding 7% slope, meandering across grass/oak woodland for approximately 3/4-1 mile.

The trail would begin just off the Pioneer Street fire road area, and would terminate near the intersection of the Ashland Loop Road and Glenview, where the existing main hiking trail exits. The trail would be optimized for uphill bike travel, with a tread of approximately 36 inches. The trail would be built to standards found in the IMBA trail building handbook. The trail would be hand-built by volunteers, and have no crossings with the downhill trail. For reference, the trail would be built similarly to Wonder, also partially in the city trail system. The downhill trail would be built using natural terrain features, swales, rolling dips and grade reversals to maintain a 4.85% slope descent average along the entirety of the trail. The trail alignment would be roughly .75 miles, and drop 185 vertical feet. (Please see Fig 1 for where this fits on the “flow trail calculator”). This trail would be built in a way using natural speed controls and trail building techniques to keep speeds at lower levels.

The primary function of this trail is connectivity to downtown, but a close second is providing beginners and youth an opportunity to ride low-angle trails to hone skills before venturing to the more difficult city and forest service trails. This idea will play throughout the creation of the downhill trail experience component of this project.

The trail would be hand built, by volunteers, saving costs and creating a true community project. The proposal will call for shared entrances and exits at both ends of the trail. The shared entrance will be approximately 50 feet long before branching into the downhill/uphill loop option. Some engineer/design work would be needed to ensure proper construction of this short section, which RVMBA would pay for. The shared exit will consist of a few switchbacks, exiting onto the Pioneer Street fire road away from the main pedestrian area. Again, a professional would be consulted to ensure proper building and stability techniques. Traffic flow in this area will be carefully coordinated to ensure hikers would never be between either trail, and can have a safe hiking/running experience similar to the current alignment. In fact, for the majority of the alignment (.03 miles to .62 miles) the bike trail would be nearly out of sight from the main hiking trail, and significantly closer to Glenview Road than the hiking trail.

The impact of bikes on the current hike trail would be nonexistent, with the main hike trail never crossing either bike trail. Crossings of current pedestrian trails would only occur in areas with appropriate grade and sightlines. Signage should be placed at the intersections to alert trail users of traffic patterns. There are four to five trail crossings that will be necessary to accommodate the climb/descend trails. Since these trails will be parallel to one another, it will eliminate the need for additional signage — each crossing will be denoted by one sign. While close in proximity to the watershed trails, the Lithia Park hillside trails still do not see the traffic as other city trails such as Bandersnatch and Red Queen.

Existing examples of trail crossings are easy to find: Jabberwocky crosses Snark, and BTI crosses Bandersnatch in two places. BTI and Bandersnatch, two of the most used trails in the watershed, have not seen any major problems regarding trail use/crossings in their existence. This can be attributed to good signage and respectful trail use. The crossings for the Lithia Trail would be at much lower speed and have much better sightlines than the Bander/BTI crossing. In fact, on a recent hike, it was determined that the shortest sightline on any of the road crossings is roughly 60 feet — more than enough time for any hiker or biker to see an opposite user in the area and slow down, especially given the low speeds and gradients. This distance is also more than double the distance between the BTI/Bandersnatch crossings, and bikes are traveling at a much higher rate of speed at these crossings.

Red Tape:The APRC and APR Staff have expressed some concerns in moving this proposal forward. Below are some of the concerns, accompanied by RVMBA's response to how these will be mitigated under the proposal:

Potential of bikes cutting into the official trail from Glenview. RVMBA believes with a well created trail, the likelihood of cutting into official trails from Glenview is low. APR doesn't need to look far for working examples — there are no cut-in trails to Jabberwocky or BTI, and no places where bikes are leaving either of those trails to ride or shortcut nearby trails. RVMBA doesn't believe that there is any current example of this occurring on any bike legal trails anywhere in the city property boundaries. It's proven time and time again, in practice and theory, that a well-built trail will keep riders on the trail. If the trail doesn't offer riders the connectivity or experience they are looking for, there is potential for user created pathways and trails, or the use of trails closed to that user group. This is especially the case if connectivity and safety are factors driving users to use non-bike trails for biking, as has been the case in the area in question. Looking at traffic patterns, it would not make sense for riders to cut in from Glenview. 90% of the traffic would be exiting the watershed, putting riders at the top of the trail. There would be no incentive to ride down the road and cut in, thereby missing much of the singletrack.

One additional thought is that since the climb and descend trails are so close together, there would be ways to add connectors to the downhill trail along the way. This would give novice riders an opportunity to do shorter loops, and not over commit to a long climb. As riders got older/stronger and built skills, they could complete the entire climb. Another way to remedy this concern would be to open one of the several (there are three to four) entrances along Glenview to bike traffic. This would be done at an area with the best sightlines, and least amount of grade. If it is truly a concern of APR, giving riders a legal, well-built option to cut in would be a solution.

Potential of bikes cutting through Lithia Park. The sheer effort it would take to cut into Lithia Park is an example of the juice not being worth the squeeze. For a bike to cross from proposed trails into the park, the rider would have to wade through Ashland Creek at the top area. Below the top section, a 6-foot tall chainlink fence is in place. Riders would have to scale the fence to continue through the park. Both of these scenarios are extremely unlikely to

occur. With bikes riding Winburn Way in high numbers, crossing into Lithia Park is not a problem from that direction.

There's no reason to think that riders would go to such lengths to go off trail into the park, when that opportunity already exists and is not an issue. Furthermore, bikes are looking to get from point A to point B in a way that makes sense and is fun. There's simply no incentive nor reason to believe bikes would cut through trails to get to reaches of the park already off limits to bikes.

Environmental Impact. There has been some talk of environmental concern, including hillside stability from Parks staff, and wildlife diffraction from concerned citizens in arguing against the trail proposal. This is a two part response:

Hillside Stability. While RVMBA doesn't profess to be soils engineering specialists, it doesn't take a scientist to look at the area and understand that it is already highly impacted with roads, homes, foundations, traffic, vehicles, existing trails, and people — without issue. Unlike the Waterline reroute proposal, the Lower Lithia proposal travels through slopes in the 20% or less gradient region. This is also equal to an approximately 11.3 degree slope. To put this in perspective, BTI, Jabberwocky, Bandersnatch, Snark, White Rabbit, Mike Uthoff, and portions of Lower Wonder all travel through areas much steeper and vulnerable to erosion than this area. Because of the gentle nature of the slope, there would be less "benching" required to cut in a new trail. Instead, the natural terrain would be preserved in a much less invasive building practice than a trail requiring switchbacks, cribbing, and structural support. When looked at over the entirety of the trail, approximately 185 feet of elevation loss would occur over 3854 feet of distance. This equates to a 4.8% trail grade. This is best illustrated in Figure 1. As the visual shows, this puts the trail into the "sweet spot" for flow trails. The proposed hillside grade and trail grade make it hard to argue any hillside stability arguments against trails. Furthermore, the fact that so many trails already exist in this area, including fall line trails, is not consistent with the City of Ashland's level of concern on this issue.

Wildlife Diffraction: Ashland and the areas around it play host to many different species of wildlife. Many of these species thrive in an urban/suburban environment and are highly adapted to human presence. The hillside in question is sandwiched between two extremely high-use car and human activity areas. It is highly unlikely that the addition of trails in this area will negatively impact the current species assemblage that frequents the park.

User conflict due to shared use trails. Originally, RVMBA envisioned a shared use uphill trail (similar to Wonder and Snark) that would allow bikes and hikers to use the same trail in a suitable setting, and still separating downhill bikers from all uses. Due to concern from parks staff and commissioners, and out of respect for the hikers that do not want to see shared trails, RVMBA is now proposing this as a bike only alignment for uphill and downhill. This would leave a third pedestrian only trail in the area, which is already in existence and well out of the way of the trails proposed. The new trails would never cross this main route. This change in proposal essentially eliminates the user conflict argument/concern.

Trail crossings/signage in the upper Lithia Park area. RVMBA has been made aware that there is a policy for limited or no signage in upper Lithia Park, ostensibly in place to preserve a "wild" feeling with limited human impact. While well intentioned, RVMBA believes that Parks property should err towards user experience and user safety to provide the best experience for citizens and visitors alike. We greatly appreciate respecting the environment, and the experience of those in it. Wilderness areas and areas within our watershed already provide these experiences for citizens looking for them. Because this area is surrounded by roads, buildings, and people already, we would propose a change in the ordinance to allow signage at trail crossings in the upper lithia area, as well as trail designators at the start and finish

of both trails. We believe proper park management includes accommodating all users if possible and sustainable. Signage will not detract from the user experience of moving on a trail. Great signage is commonplace on city owned property adjacent to this area, and RVMBA would work with Parks staff and commissioners to make sure signage was in keeping with existing city and parks styles.

Process: There are two potential processes for this proposal, depending on whether the trails are hand or machine built:

Hand built: Identify unsustainable user-created trails to decommission.
Develop exact routes for new trails, then walk the routes with APRC and staff.
Release final proposal for decommission and building for public input. Minor adjustments can be made as needed based on community feedback.
RVMBA volunteers to actively decommission user created trails.
Begin hand building of trails using RVMBA volunteers and trail leaders.
Build uphill/multi-use trail first, followed by downhill bike-only.
Install signage at beginning and ends of both uphill and downhill trails with beginner tips, cautions, and trail descriptions

Machine Built: If the trail was to be machine built, RVMBA would engage in a fundraising drive, and work with APRC to hire a contractor to carry out the work. The process would fall under Parks protocol, followed by contractor best practices to plan and complete the project.

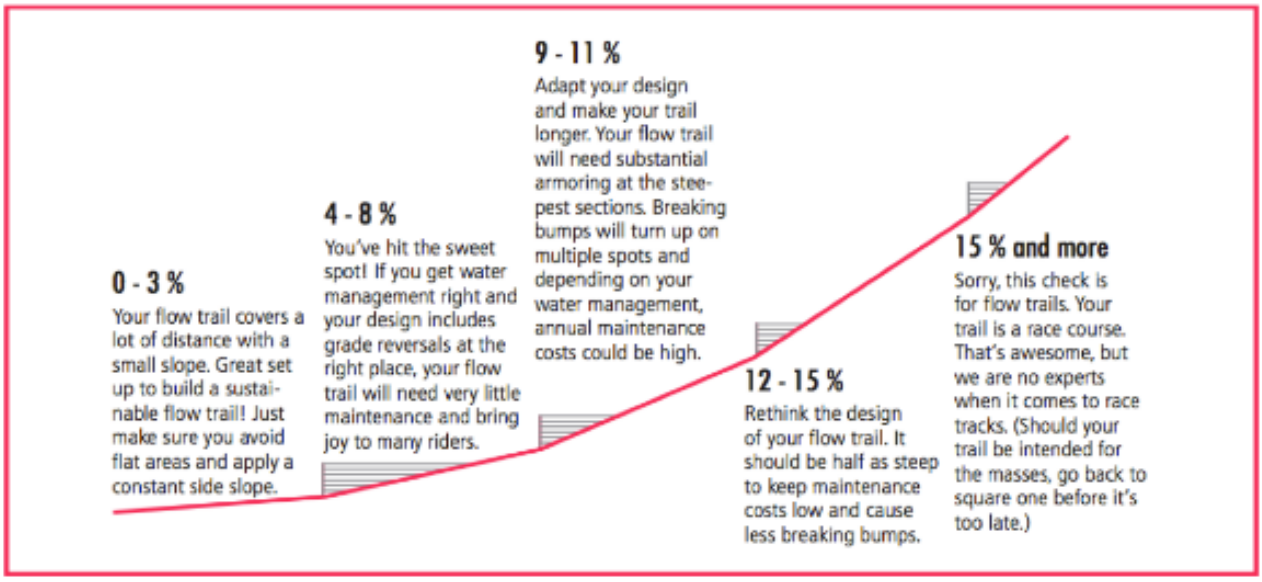
Estimated Build Time: 3-4 months
Estimated Project Cost:
Engineering work: $10,000.
Machine built $10,000.
Hand Built: $5,000

Final Outcome and Benefits: Completion of this proposed project would benefit the most users out of any proposed project contained in this document. Some of these benefits include:

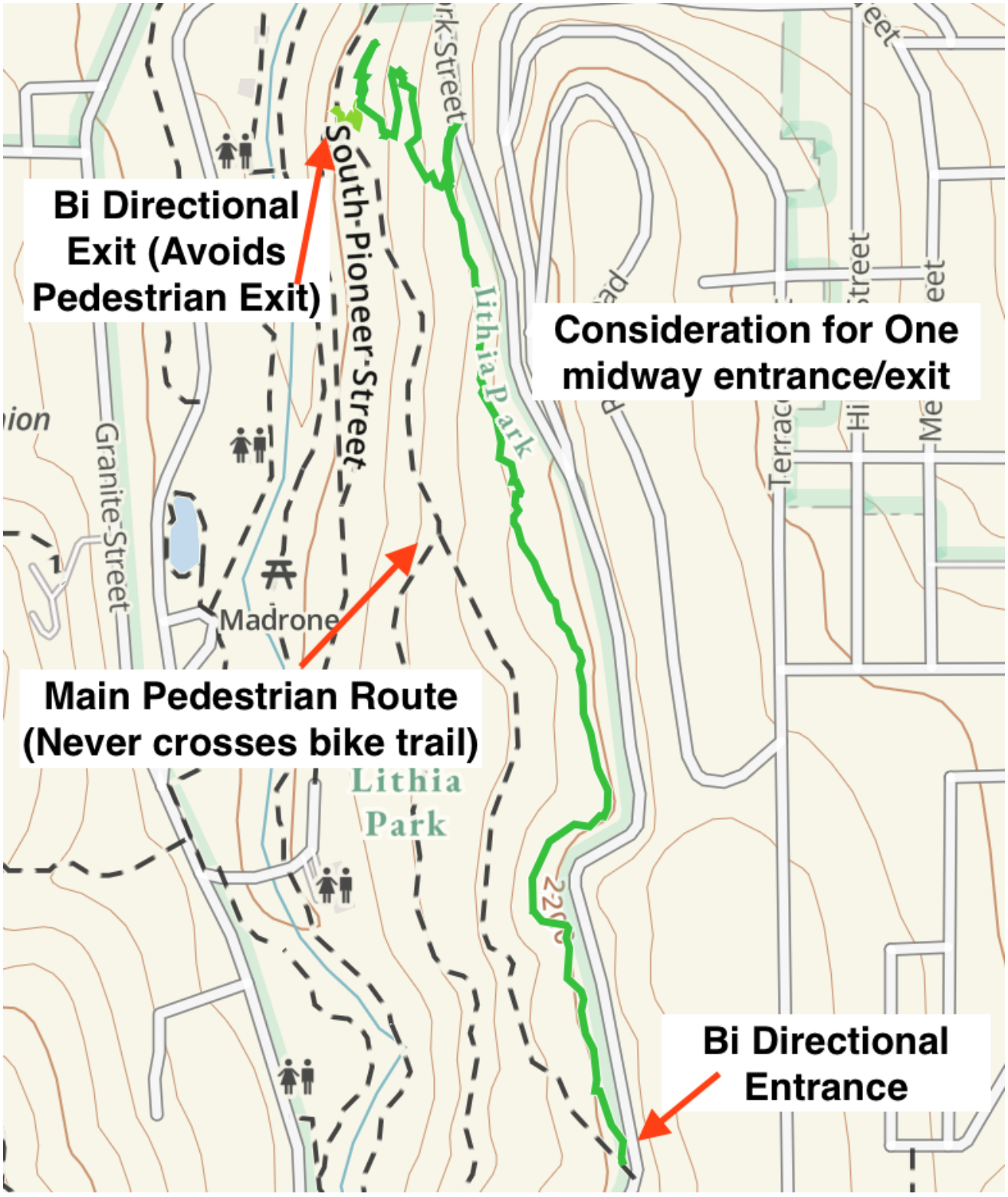
- Effectively removing bikes from Glenview fire road, eliminating a significant amount of downhill bike traffic from the lower Lithia Park/ Granite Street/Winburn Way area
- Adding a much needed low-angle trail experience geared towards youth and beginners
- Greatly reducing the carbon footprint of mountain bike users who no longer will drive to the Quarry parking area, or White Rabbit lot, but instead have a viable route to pedal from town
- Reducing the threat of fire and fire ignitions by decommissioning unnecessary trails and reducing opportunities for homeless to camp in high fire risk areas.
- Creating a loop option that gives access to mountain biking to a much larger demographic than can currently access trails.
- Creating a more equitable and approachable environment for those who wish to learn but have barriers to entry.
- Improving safety for bikers, by funneling bike traffic into areas designed to handle it (city streets and trail) rather than busy, congested parking areas where mixing of incompatible modes of transportation occurs.
- Filling in a missing, critical connection link for mountain bikers, connecting the Ashland Watershed with downtown via off-road trails.

THE SLOPE OF YOUR FLOW TRAIL IS:

5. CHECK YOUR PROJECT



Caterpillar: 7.5% grade
BTI: 10%
Jabberwocky: 9.5%
Upper Lithia: 4.8%


Bi Directional Exit (Avoids Pedestrian Exit)
Consideration for One midway entrance/exit
Main Pedestrian Route (Never crosses bike trail)
Bi Directional Entrance
South Pioneer Street
Granite Street
Madrone
Lithia Park
Lithia Park