Interconnect Challenge Wrap Up:

What did we learn?

1. **The primary use of parks and trails in the Gallatin County is for recreation.**

- The participants in the Interconnect Challenge were recreation users. Though some people said they would like to use trails for transit, they were the minority.
- Both the survey results and the Interconnect Challenge have shown that the primary use of trails in the County is for recreation, not transportation.
- A transportation plan for the County could address a broader range of issues.

2. **Long distances between communities and the rural nature of our towns make physical connections difficult.**

- Rural trails as a commuter type trail are unrealistic because of population density, large distances, and climate. Rural trails are therefore more likely to be destination trails with parking areas and "in-out" usage.
- Urban and Suburban Trails are trails for transit and recreation that connect nearby communities and area parks and spur trails. These types of trails may be appropriate in areas such as Manhattan to Three Forks or Belgrade to Bozeman.
- Criteria for Trail Establishment should be developed as part of the updated parks and trails plan. Some of these criteria may include:
  - Is the trail supported by area land owners?
  - What is the funding mechanism?
  - Is there a maintenance plan?
  - Does the proposed trail promote local businesses/tourism?

3. **Public Transit is critical.**

- Gallatin County's rural areas are potentially where transit systems are most needed. They are at a further distance from larger community resources, such as work, shopping, and services. In addition, rural areas tend to have lower costs of living making them more attractive to low-income populations. Finally, work can be scarce in rural areas forcing residents to commute to the valley's larger towns for employment. These populations may be well served by a rural public transit system.
- At the same time, many of the rural areas in the Gallatin Valley are where popular recreational areas exist (Big Sky, West Yellowstone, Three Forks). Tourism may also benefit from a rural transit system.
- Unfortunately, the large distances between towns could make a rural public transportation system prohibitively expensive. More information about ridership and

motivational factors would lead to a better cost/benefit analysis of a rural transit system in relation to both work and recreational users.

- Expanding the relationship between existing transit systems in the County may be one way to improve ridership, better accommodate tourists, and increase travel safety and cost effectiveness for commuters.
- Recreation should be part of transit planning-
    - It can increase access to recreation for youth and elderly and address health concerns.
    - It can potentially better serve tourism.
    - It could lead to less parking area requirements in subdivision and site plan review that may result in a higher net amount of land in parks/rec. areas.
    - If trails, parks, and transit are better integrated it could reduce traffic congestion and increase safety of pedestrian users.
    - It is likely that as the Gallatin Valley grows, offering park/trail/transit services on a level appropriate to each community's needs will continue to be important.
- Private sector benefits to recreation-oriented transit
    - Establishing Park 'n Rides at area businesses may be considered a perk?
    - Are businesses interested in having trail and car access to increase customers?
    - Is a recreation bus route to connect to trailheads/fishing accesses needed/feasible? Would it improve the tourist experience of the area?
    - More data on business needs and trends in the valley is needed to better address these possible relationships.

4. **Physical park and trail connections will not be achieved without first connecting user groups.**
    - One of the most useful aspects of the Interconnect Challenge was the collaborative nature of the event, which sought to involve as many user groups as possible.
    - The participants and the route allowed the specific needs of each user group to be highlighted and better understood.
    - Each user group also has their own specific impacts on the routes they use. The event not only showed some of the conflicts between user groups, but it also demonstrated ways they are complementary. One example is mountain bikers, who get frustrated by hardened horse hoof prints. It turns out dirt bikers actually help because they "buff" out the tracks.
    - It is unlikely there will be enough resources to build all the infrastructure and improvements needed to accommodate every user group's specialized demands. Facilities that accommodate a broad variety of uses will therefore be necessary. If

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user groups don't work together to ensure new facilities are built and maintained, the resources needed to complete them will most likely be unavailable.

- The Interconnect Challenge laid the foundation for a collective, concerted effort among different user groups to begin cooperatively planning for future recreation needs.
- The current lack of exchange between different users may be resolved by a yearly event to share concerns.
- Improving education, involvement, and information sharing could benefit both residents and visitors.

What did participants learn? (Taken from User Group Feedback Forms filled out by the participants)

- Pathway links between trail heads, curb breaks and signage would improve safety.
- Create trails along rivers.
- Be sure to think of trailers when planning parking areas.
- Trails along roads are noisy and unsafe. Trails should be located away from roads. If a trail must be located along a roadway it should have a wide enough shoulder.
- Trail maintenance and infrastructure like bridges and culvers are important. (A Volunteer Trail Crew was mentioned several times.)
- Having tree cover is a plus in some areas, other areas should remain open.
- Access in wilderness areas: It would be nice to have more access for everyone.
- Good maps improve navigation as well as adequate trail marking.
- Horse Traffic Signs would be great.
- Create a bike trail from Bozeman to Belgrade, even to Three Forks. Create a bike trail from Story Hill to the "M".
- It would be wonderful to have a bike/ped./equestrian trail from S. Cottonwood Road to 19th, then connecting to Hyalite. So many people use S. 19th, Cottonwood, Hyalite Roads for biking, horseback riding, running. This would be a perfect area to make trails for commuters or recreationalists. When driving Cottonwood Road to get to the trailhead I had to pass a least half a dozen bikes in a 6 mile stretch.
- A trail connecting all the canyons along the Sourdough, Hyalite, Cottonwood, Little Bear area would be awesome.

Areas of Concern
- Funding
- Maintenance

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- Safety standards
  - Location and design of trails and parks
  - Intersections
  - Parking
  - Vandalism & trespass
- Amount of current and projected future use of roads for recreation purposes
- Establishing a number value of demand for Parks and Trails

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