

TAKE THE GREENWAY

by
James R. Ellis

Remarks delivered to
Downtown Seattle Rotary Club

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TAKE THE GREENWAY

In the centennial year of 1876 a group of Seattle businessmen, led by Henry Yesler, organized a territorial lottery for the purpose of building "a grand territorial road from Seattle via Snoqualmie Pass to Walla Walla". Tickets worth \$300,000 were sold and Henry donated his Seattle sawmill as the grand prize. However, before a drawing could be held the courts declared the lottery unconstitutional. Henry and his friends refunded the price of the tickets and their grand dream remained mired in a few rutted tracks along an Indian trail.

For most of its early years the Snoqualmie wagon road was used primarily to drive cattle to market. Private companies collected tolls for each animal and for each emigrant wagon. Forging rivers was more common than crossing bridges on this muddy roadway. As late as 1909 only 105 road vehicles crossed the Cascades at Snoqualmie Pass during the entire year.

What a difference a few score years can make. The old route is still a storehouse of history, but the rutted tracks have become an interstate freeway. In 1990, 10 million vehicles, 15 million people and 45 million tons of goods crossed the cord on line on I-90 at Preston. The ancient Indian Trail has become our primary land route between East and West and one of the most beautiful regional gateways in the nation.

**"History, scenery
and transportation
make Interstate 90
a national treasure."**

Some of us believe that this special combination of history, scenery and transportation is a national treasure.

We are suggesting that the corridor along Interstate 90 in upper Kittitas County and all of King County become a multi-purpose greenway. We have formed a nonprofit Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust to flesh out this idea and help make it happen. A list of the initial Board members is on your tables.

Like most good ideas the I-90 Greenway has many parents and gets better as more people work on it. New synergies emerge at every meeting as well as exciting ways for civic groups to share in this regional enterprise. I'd like to talk with you about the nature of this developing idea, who its advocates are and why we believe it can succeed.

Take a moment and drive with me along I-90 from Cle Elum to Seattle. Beginning at Elk Heights on the dry-pine eastern slope of the Cascades we follow the Yakima river close to lakes Cle Elum, Kachess and Keechelus, pass through two national forests and skirt the Alpine Lakes wilderness. At the summit we pass the state's most popular skiing area, then descend into the moist green of the Western slope. Following the South Fork of the Snoqualmie River we drive by the Forest Service's Ashael Curtis natural area, and travel below the old Milwaukee railroad right of way which is now used as a utility corridor and as the Iron Horse Trail. Driving along Weyerhaeuser's Snoqualmie Tree Farm and skirting Seattle's vast Cedar River watershed, we pass Twin Falls State Park, Mt. Washington, Rattlesnake Ridge, Mt. Si and nearby Snoqualmie Falls. Then Tiger Mountain State Forest rises on our left, followed by King County's Cougar Mountain Regional Wildland Park, state parks at Squak Mountain and Lake Sammamish and local parks at Coal Creek, Newcastle Beach, Mercer Slough and Luther Burbank. On across beautiful Lake Washington we see Leschi and Seward Parks before reaching the Puget Sound waterfront. On this drive we have crossed two counties and touched close to the communities of Cle Elum, Roslyn, Easton, North Bend, Snoqualmie, Preston, Fall City, Issaquah, Bellevue, Mercer Island, and Seattle. It has taken us less than 90 minutes.

THE GREENWAY IDEA

The goal of the Greenway Trust is to preserve and enhance the scenic heart of this familiar route. The Greenway corridor would vary in width from a few hundred feet in cities to the distance between the nearest visible ridge lines in open country. In scenic areas natural beauty would be protected and in developed areas parkway landscaping would become standard. Similar treatment should also extend to State Route 18 from Snoqualmie to Auburn and include the scenic and historic byways to Renton, Redmond, Woodinville and Bothell which were part of the original Sunset Highway.

The Mountains to Sound Greenway was inspired by the pioneer work of Harvey Manning, Jack Hornung, Ted Thomsen, and other members of the Issaquah Alps Trail Club and the

"A multi-purpose Greenway would preserve and enhance the scenic heart of this route."

RIGHT TIME, RIGHT CAUSE

When asked how she knew a community cause was right, a wise civic worker once answered "If the result makes life better or the effort pulls us together, you can usually figure that the cause is right."

Judged by this standard the Greenway Trust and Rotary are on the right track. The Greenway will mean that the peace of a walk in the forest or the thrill of active outdoor recreation will stay within reach for people of all conditions and incomes. It will enhance the safety and pleasure of millions of motorists. The Greenway will create productive jobs while caring for the environment. It will secure an awesome natural heritage for the next generations.

And the scale of the task is enough to challenge anyone. Indeed, some say it is more than can be practically done. However, the time is right and enough progress has been made to be encouraging. The longer we work on this dream the more opportunities we find for doable tasks, for practical projects, for broad participation and for win-win solutions.

If we understand each others' interests and keep legacy thinking foremost in our minds, good things will continue to happen along Henry Yesler's grand territorial road - and the effort will lift us all.

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Last year Brian Boyle and Charles Bingham negotiated a major timberland swap between Weyerhaeuser and the State Department of Natural Resources. Taken together with a prior conservation appropriation, the Boyle-Bingham agreement added 6,000 acres on Mount Si to state forest preserves. This means that essentially all of Mount Si has now been preserved.

With funds from a revolving grant by the Bullitt Foundation, the Trust for Public Land has obtained an option from Weyerhaeuser to purchase 1,800 acres along the top of Rattlesnake Ridge across I-90 from Mt. Si. The option was signed just before that parcel was scheduled to be logged. The legislature has appropriated \$1 million toward the exercise of this option and the County Council is considering a local match.

With leadership from Doug McWilliams and Sonny O'Neal, the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie and Wenatchee National Forest Plans have placed their forest lands along the Greenway in a visual management regime. This means that further harvesting will be selective and no more clear cuts will occur on slopes which are visible from the Greenway.

In the less glamorous realm of housekeeping, the Greenway Trust has organized itself as a 501(c)(3) corporation. As of this week two-thirds of the operating budget of the Trust for the next three years has been pledged. Donna McBain has been appointed Executive Director and Kathleen Smith is her assistant.

Thanks to Bob Rose and his technical committee, the first draft of a general plan for the Greenway is being prepared. Of course, the Greenway Trust has no governmental powers and will rely on the quality of its work to persuade local governments to act in harmony with its goals.

The leadership of Jeanne Bluechel and Ron Dunlap have made the Greenway a District wide project for Rotary Clubs. This is an exciting commitment and will bring active participation by hundreds of people.

Mountaineers. During the last two years people who believe in this idea have been meeting, assembling facts, raising money and sharing thoughts with government agencies. Most of the heavy lifting is now being done by a large technical committee with a wide range of special skills, chaired by Bob Rose of the State Department of Natural Resources. They are being assisted by landscape architects Jones & Jones who have been retained by the Greenway Trust. The Trust itself is funded by gifts of time and money from individuals, business firms and private foundations. The National Trust for Public Land and the Bullitt Foundation are major partners. The Greenway program has a four year operating budget of \$900,000, works out of a small office in the Smith Tower and holds its board meetings in the Preston Community Hall.

The first year's study process has brought to the table the special perspectives of transportation, parks, environment,

wildlife protection, outdoor recreation, farming, private commercial forestry, public trust forestry, economic development, education, tourism, water conservation and historic preservation. Six state and two federal agencies have joined more than a dozen local governments in this work.

Everyone engaged in the Greenway effort is spurred by a unifying fear that the power of an

interstate highway to generate urban development could cause the towns along I-90 to spread into each other and create a congested highway surrounded by wall to wall buildings. None of us want to see this beautiful green gateway become a strip city.

The first tasks have been collecting data for the preliminary map which you saw as you entered. The Technical Committee has identified and cataloged wildlife habitat, historic places, working farms and forests, trail routes, parks and recreation areas, scenic vistas, highway view points and highway rest areas. This work is being coordinated with the regional growth management planning now under way.

Even at this preliminary stage our collective effort is beginning to reveal some of the special values that will come from thinking about this corridor as a multi-purpose greenway.

"Spurred by fear that the cities will spread into each other and create an urban strip."

It is clear that the worth of properties in developed areas will be increased by the preservation of scenic vistas and the presence of an entry highway which will be permanently attractive. The desirability of working, living and visiting in this area will be enhanced. Natural science education, environmental protection and resource productivity can reinforce each other. A high capacity parkway for vehicles and a network of trails for walkers and bikers work well together in the framework of a beautiful landscape.

At first glance this multipurpose Greenway may seem like a tall order to undertake, but it becomes more understandable and attainable when we realize that major building blocks of regional parks and protected farm and forest lands are already in place. Today most of the land in the corridor is either in public ownership or in compatible private tree farm use.

WORKING FORESTS

In fact, Interstate 90 east of Issaquah passes through a blanket of forest dotted with farms and towns. This is why the Greenway Trust encourages working forests to continue where they now exist. This strategy is born out of a combination of environmental necessity and economic value. Trees in varying stages of growth cover two-thirds of the land in the corridor and create the Greenway character, but less than a quarter of these trees are in protected parks or preserves. The remaining three-quarters are in second and third growth stands being managed for commercial harvest on cycles which can be sustained over time. To buy all of this commercial forest land and put it into public preserves would be an extravagant use of money and resources.

There are other reasons to keep these forests in production. They are a source of lumber and fibre which serve important human needs. Housing the homeless requires wood. Building for a growing economy requires wood. We live in a place which is blessed with good soils and a fine tree growing climate. It can be fairly argued that we have a responsibility to supply our reasonable share of society's need for wood fibre.

Commercial forests in the corridor also strengthen our local economy. Weyerhaeuser alone employs a thousand people in King County to operate its tree farms and mills. These

"The Greenway requires high standards for highway development."

bridges. Rest areas on this scenic highway would refresh motorists and also provide secure transit stops and trailhead parking for people who travel the highway to reach a walk in the woods. Greenway signage and appropriate entranceways into adjoining communities should be designed to enhance the Greenway theme and identify its attractions. We hope to tempt recreational travelers to try adjoining byways with their lower speeds and their own historic and natural landmarks. Recent federal and state legislation authorizes our Department of Transportation to take a leading role in these highway and byway enhancements.

The Greenway Trust believes that the communities along the Greenway should each be able to keep its own individual identity and to determine its own future. We support growth management planning which encourages permanent open space between these communities. If these cities spread along the freeway and merge together you won't be able to tell one from another and the region will have lost its view of forest and farmland surrounding a mosaic of individual communities.

Hiking and biking trails are major goals of the Greenway and we are working with King County, its cities and key activist groups to achieve a magnificent trail network. One of the backbones of the Greenway will be the Iron Horse Trail which parallels much of the route from North Bend to Cle Elum. The Burke Gillman and Sammamish trails are already nationally recognized models, but they can be made safer and better.

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

In the last year there has been tangible progress on the Greenway front. Here are a few of the most significant items.

Jerry Johnson, Carol James and the Citizens Oversight Committee are making strong headway in helping King County and its cities carryout the 1989 Open Space Bond issue projects located in the corridor. These include major park and trail expansions and connections.

Aubrey Davis, Duane Berentson and Ron Anderson are creating a beautiful urban freeway in the Mercer Island - Seattle section of I-90 and are planning for landscape improvements in the dismal stretch from I-405 to Issaquah.

"Trees create the Greenway character."

Just as environment and economic growth can complement each other, enhancement and preservation will have to go hand in hand to create the Greenway we want. The natural wonders will need careful protection, but some of the man-made environment will need sensitive improvement.

ENHANCEMENTS

Possible enhancements can include a wide range of actions. There are places for thousands of trees to be planted to screen unsightly development and to produce a connecting theme through urban areas.

We have begun to identify dozens of historic places along the route, but have yet to develop a system for marking and preserving them or visibly telling their stories to travellers on the Greenway or its byways.

The location of I-90 cuts through a cross-section of the geology, plant species and wildlife habitats of King and Kittitas counties. Its short travel times create outdoor classrooms next door - natural science laboratories which can be reached in minutes. Interpretive centers and field trip itineraries will need to be developed for children and adults to better describe and explain the human history and natural environments of the corridor, the good manners of hiking and cycling, the ethics of conservation and the husbandry required for sustained yield forestry.

With a grant from the Bullitt family we are producing a Greenway book "Snoqualmie Legends", but there will need to be a variety of pamphlets and guide books describing everything from day hikes and nature walks to historic places.

MODEL SCENIC HIGHWAY

In partnership with the Department of Transportation we hope to make I-90 a national model scenic highway. Ideally both landscaping and new construction on this route should complement and show off our best natural and man-made scenery. A model scenic highway would visually separate oncoming traffic and would open protected paths for hikers and bikers along the way. Migration routes for wildlife would be safeguarded with necessary highway crossings under wide

"Outdoor classrooms can be reached in minutes"

"Skilled forestry can make commercial tree growing a good neighbor."

are high paying jobs which permit one wage earner to support a family. Washington exported \$2.7 billion of forest products in 1991. Twenty years ago 80% of these exports were raw logs. Today 60% of all wood exports are finished products.

The downside of commercial forestry in scenic areas has been clear cut logging. This practice is the most efficient method of harvesting and growing douglas fir trees. But clear cutting leaves patchwork hillsides which look, to the hiker or sight-seer, like mange on a dog's back. This is a conflict we would like to resolve reasonably. I believe that good forest practices combined with a few strategic land transfers can meet the multiple goals of forests located in an intensely used Greenway. Skillful forestry

should be able to profitably grow and selectively harvest douglas fir trees and still protect important scenic vistas, safeguard water courses and enhance recreational values. In a few critical and steep places like Mount Si and Rattlesnake Ridge public acquisition by purchase or trade may be necessary, but it is neither feasible nor desirable to stop harvesting trees on all forestland in the Greenway.

Conservation minded people like me need to remember that if a tree farm located close to a metropolitan area becomes unprofitable it may be sold for development. Zoning has not proved to be secure long-term protection for open space. We know that tree farms conserve water and stream flows better than hard roofs, paving and storm drains. We know that a hill covered with young plantation trees is more scenic than a hill covered with buildings. We know that a working forest makes better wildlife habitat than most subdivisions. We know that a large tree farm like Tiger Mountain is a marvelous hiking area. The Greenway corridor is a place where we can and should keep most working forests in profitable production for a long time to come.

Another productive synergy we can expect the Greenway to deliver stems from the strong connection between tourism and the environment.

TOURISM

A study by the Travel Industry Association of America states: "The environment is the travel industries' base product.

The tangible product our industry sells depends on preservation and conservation of the natural and constructed environments which attract travelers."

"The environment is tourism's base product."

Interview studies of visitors to King County report that they associate this area with beautiful scenery, mountain ranges, green forests and coastlines. While most of these visitors arrive by plane, more than two-thirds use automobiles during their stay. Among the most successful promotions by our visitors bureau under Steve Morris has been a hub and spoke theme in which Seattle visitors are encouraged to spend additional time on day trips to nearby scenic destinations. Among the more popular of these trips are the several loops available from I-90. Seattle appeals to present day travellers because it is so easy for visitors to drive from the urban center to the great outdoors. There is a perception of virtually immediate access from urban to rural without the long trek through suburban sprawl experienced in other large urban centers.

There were an estimated 4.4 million overnight visitors to King County in 1990. They stayed an average of six nights and spent a total of \$1.8 billion. Tourism is a major industry by any test and it is growing.

Whenever the historic and scenic settings along I-90 have been highlighted by television programs like "Twin Peaks" and "Northern Exposure", tourists pour in. Full planeloads of visitors from Japan came to Snoqualmie for the Twin Peaks festival in August.

Approximately one-third of the visitors to the Washington State Convention and Trade Center meetings bring their families and extend their stays. They spend extra money to take side trips to Snoqualmie Falls or the summit ski area. For the large number of visitors who choose to do their sight-seeing from the comfort of their car, the Interstate 90 corridor itself becomes an attraction. For visiting hikers and bikers, it is the perfect takeoff point for dozens of day trips. More than 10,000 people a year climb Mt. Si, partly because it's only 30 minutes away from downtown Seattle.

The visitor industry thrives on attraction and accessibility. The natural environments along I-90 are powerful magnets and their accessibility is unique. And we have yet to scratch the

surface of visitor destination improvements.

In a time of public budget shortfalls it is worth noting that visitors spend money and pay sales taxes here, but they don't put their children in our schools or burden our institutions. If the Greenway is able to protect and enhance the visual and recreational qualities of the I-90 corridor, there will be a large tourism dividend of jobs, business opportunities and tax revenues.

LOCAL BENEFITS

There are, of course, environmental, educational and recreational dividends from the Greenway for our own residents.

"The Greenway connects urban life with nature."

Rooted in the genes of people who live in cities is a yearning for the woods and streams of the country. The Greenway connects urban life with nature by bringing waterfalls and forests within our easy reach. City people can be rested and restored by these unspoken reminders of their roots.

A Japanese research institute recently sent students out for afternoon walks of 40 minutes each in a cedar forest in Yakushima. Later the institute sent these same students to take 40 minute afternoon walks in an auditorium with the same temperature and humidity as the forest. The researchers found that a walk in the forest was four times more effective in reducing all measures of stress than a walk in the city auditorium.

We know that the collective skill and effort of people who work in cities drives the main engines of economic growth. But as Harvey Manning has said so well, "A city operates at high pressure in close quarters. It's the hot steam of the boiler room that blasts out the great ideas of civilization. However, too much heat boils the brains. Only by providing getaway space for a quick and easy cooling off can a city keep on cooking."

The residents of very few metropolitan areas can reach the tranquility of forests and mountains as easily and quickly as we can. And healthful year round outdoor recreation is available via a bus on I-90 to persons of all incomes and physical conditions. The summit ski area is the largest night skiing operation in the nation. It is something people can do after work.