

Northwest Tandem Rally 2015

Bellingham, WA - July 2-6, 2015

Post-Rally Followup, Survey Responses

Total number of attendees: 819

Survey respondents: 276

Housing:

- 49% stayed in Bellingham hotels
- 24% stayed in the NWTR campground (Civic Field rental from COB Parks Department)
- 10% in WWU Dorms (which paid the housing tax to the city for these rentals)
- 10% VRBO, rented house, Air BnB
- 7% stayed at home or with friends in Bellingham

Nights spent in Bellingham or nearby areas:

on average: 4 nights in Bellingham for the rally, then 3 additional nights per party (based on survey response, some parties stayed as many as 10 additional nights, others none).

Assuming 2 people per party, with 49% in hotels for the rally and 75% (hotelers plus campers) in hotels on average for another 3 nights, we estimate about 1500-1700 overnight hotel-room stays during July 2015.

51% of attendees reported it was their first visit to Bellingham.

Where did attendees travel from:

- 27% elsewhere in Washington
- 26% Oregon
- 16% California
- 10% Canada (mostly BC)
- 2% Idaho
- 11% other states west of the Mississippi
- 6% states east of the Mississippi
- 4% Bellingham (Whatcom or Skagit) local

Advertising: how did attendees first find out about the Bellingham rally:

- 70% knew of previous tandem rallies and searched for the information online
- 15% recommended by a friend, word-of-mouth at other tandem rallies
- 5% tandem email lists
- 3% Seattle Bike Expo
- 3% League of American Bicyclists ad (nationwide publication)
- 2% Recumbent and Tandem Rider magazine
- 2% NWTR's Facebook page
- fewer than 1% Out There Monthly (magazine in eastern WA and OR)
- fewer than 1% Bicycle Paper's annual Northwest Tour Guide
- fewer than 1% listed: Tandem Club of America website, Santana Tandem Event announcement, Tandemonium.com, Tandem bike store in Chilliwack BC, postcards in SEA and PDX bike shops.

Advertising that was NOT useful (all of these choices were listed and zero survey respondents picked any of them):

- Vancouver BC Bike Expo
- Bicycle Paper Rocky Mountain Tour Guide
- Adventures Northwest Magazine
- Cycle California magazine
- Mount Baker Experience
- Waterside Northwest Guide
- Bellingham Tourism Guide
- KAFE Radio advertising

Other than lodging, **where did people spend time/money in Bellingham?**

- 95% of respondents went to Restaurants
- 56% to Breweries
- 45% Shopping (non-cycling)
- 30% Bicycle Shops (both to purchase equipment and for repairs)
- 14% Recreation (kayaking, whale-watching, Bells Baseball, Artist Point, wineries, SPARK electric museum, Tour-De-France watching breakfasts at Mount Bakery, hiking)
- 13% Special events (Yes We Can beer fest, Zuanich Park 4th, Elizabeth Park concert, Downtown Sounds, etc)

Will you travel to Bellingham again for a getaway or vacation?

- 30% Definitely
- 22% Probably
- 35% Maybe
- 10% Unlikely
- 3% Live here!

A NWTR Mobile App (for iPhone and Android) was created for the rally.

57% of survey respondents said they downloaded and used the mobile app before they arrived and during the rally. The most-used features of the app were:

- 90% of respondents used the schedule feature
- 83% route maps
- 46% destinations in Bellingham
- 39% routemap cues directions listing
- 25% information about sponsors

Bellingham/Whatcom as a bicycling destination. We asked for comments on whether Bellingham is a bike-friendly city and we received overwhelmingly positive response. Specific questions:

- Good bike lanes, road shoulders: Excellent: 52%, Good 40%, Needs Improvement 8%
- I felt safe cycling city/county roads: Excellent: 55%, Good 39%, Needs Improvement 6%
- It was easy to get around Bellingham on a bike: Excellent 44%, Good 47%, NI: 9%
- Drivers were courteous: Excellent 53%, Good 40%, Needs Improvement 7%
- Road surfaces in good repair: Excellent 39%, Good 45%, Need Improvement 15%, Poor 1%

What could Bellingham have had that would have made your trip more enjoyable?

(very few responses here - most responses were "we loved Bellingham, everything was great") miscellaneous comments were:

- Later restaurant hours
- Bike shops open on July 4th
- We would move there if there were more downtown condos and if the waterfront project was finished
- More work on city cycling infrastructure: protected cycle paths and lanes, more bike parking...
- Better location for Farmer's Market such as in a park - we ate lunch leaning on concrete wall.
- Bellingham needs some "real" camping options rather than a field with no shade
- Bellingham needs more hotel choices close to downtown. Hotels by airport too far to cycle back and forth several times per day, and the hotels on Samish Way were in a sketchy area. Being far from the host hotel venue was inconvenient.
- Host hotel was on a busy street, traffic unsafe for cycling to/from the hotel, ended up using the car more than I would have liked.

Miscellaneous comments, positive and negative, regarding:

Host hotel:

- Large enough for all the NWTR events: 75% agree, 25% disagree
- Meals well prepared, good value: 61% agree, 39% disagree
- Staff helpful, courteous: 96% agree, 4% disagree
- Sunday morning breakfast in the hotel was a terrible value, \$8 should have bought more food.
- Host hotel was on a busy street, traffic unsafe for cycling to/from the hotel, ended up using the car more than I would have liked.
- There was incredible confusion about the Friday BBQ event. This was due to the 6 different event managers we worked with over the 2 years planning the event with the hotel and last-minute change in signup/registration policy from the hotel.
- The host hotel shuttle was inconsistent. Some desk people offered it, others said it wasn't available to us.
- Need much better food at the banquet. Also banquet shouldn't run out of food when they knew beforehand how many tables/people there would be.

Other accommodations:

- Guesthouse Inn has staff-training and service issues. Poor housekeeping.
- Guesthouse Inn elevator wouldn't fit bikes.
- Clarify bike storage with hotels.
- The dorms were grim.
- No air-conditioning at the dorms, they should have put us on lower floors where it was cooler.
- Campsite showers weren't open early enough and there was nowhere to put clothing etc.
- Include dorm parking costs in the dorm registration signup.
- Garbage cans at the campground were full by Saturday night and never emptied.
- Didn't realize campground wasn't a "real" campground with campsites and amenities. Wasn't expecting a field with no shade. If no suitable camping facility is available, let us know so that we will plan to get a room. We enjoy camping but only at a facility intended for that use.
- People were generally very happy with nicer and newer hotels: Bellwether, Chrysalis, Springhill

Suites, Hilton Home2 Suites - though they were disappointed that most of the nicer hotels were too far from downtown for easy bicycling access. Other hotels were overwhelmingly rated as "unremarkable."

- More hotel choices close to downtown. Hotels by airport too far to cycle back and forth several times per day, and the hotels on Samish Way were in a sketchy area. Being far from the host hotel venue was inconvenient.
- Loved the camping area and hanging out/meeting other riders there. I spent more fun times at the camping area with people than at the host hotel.
- Security presence at campground is appreciated.
- Wish there was more room for tent camping.
- Don't allow dogs at the campground. An off-leash dog pooped by my tent and owners didn't clean it up.
- Dorms and remote hotels made people feel like they were too far from everything going on. I missed a few events because I wasn't close to the center of things.

NWTR-provided amenities: what should future rallies continue to provide?

- Lots of high-value raffle prizes: Necessary, would pay extra: 11%; Nice but only if it's free: 70%; Don't need them at all: 29%
- Goodie-bags with product samples and coupons: Necessary: 6%; Nice but only if it's free: 85%; Don't need them at all: 9%
- Different lunch options/choices: Necessary, would pay extra: 56%; Nice but only if free: 40%; don't need at all: 4%
- Mass start celebration, music, presentations: Necessary: 17%; Nice but only if free: 69%; don't need at all: 14%
- Extra police escort during mass start: Necessary, would pay extra: 59%; Nice but only if free: 39%; don't need at all: 2%
- Breakfast included in rally price: Necessary, would pay extra: 45%; Nice but only if free: 45%; don't need at all: 10%
- Speakers, seminars: Necessary: 11%; nice if free: 74%; not needed: 15%
- Bike mechanics on-site every day: Necessary, would pay extra: 37%; only if free: 58%; not needed: 5%
- Bike mechanics on ride support and at rest stops: Necessary: 35%; only if free: 60%; not needed: 5%
- Souvenir rally bike socks: Necessary, would pay extra: 30%; only if free: 56%; not needed: 14%
- Souvenir enamel pins: Necessary: 10%; only if free: 50%; not needed: 40%
- Mobile app: Necessary, would pay extra: 30%; only if free: 57%; not needed: 13%
- Musical entertainment at rest stops, banquet, post-ride lunches: Necessary: 17%; only if free: 57%; not needed: 26%
- Loved all the optional events, vendor displays, seminars.
- The dancing band at the banquet was so much fun. Please have this every year.
- Loved the fireworks night and music and the juggler.
- Thanks for a short raffle event at the banquet, with the rest of the prize winners posted afterward.
- Ordering jerseys directly from Voler was a good idea.
- Please increase rally admission fees if you need to, in order to have better food. The events that were included in the rally registration price should be much better quality, otherwise just charge for the rides and we'll go out to eat and find decent food. For example, Saturday's lunch at Boundary Bay and Farmer's Market was very poor quality.
- Better crowd control - lineups and beer tasting and for banquet admission were too long.

- Raffle prize selection process was great.
- There should have been unlimited access to the Saturday night banquet.
- Put more emphasis on the features in the mobile app. It's helpful to download before the rally to get ready and plan activities.
- The mobile app saved us when we had a mechanical on the Friday ride, we found Fanatik bike shop was the closest to us, thanks to the app.
- Sunday ice cream, even including dairy-free choices, was great.
- Great vendor area this year!
- Need more bike and especially tandem-focused vendors.
- I loved the Saturday breakfast especially the beans (and I'm not even vegan)! People who don't like beans don't have to eat them!
- From vendor perspective: we were led to believe people wanted lots of tandem and bike-related vendors, yet some of the vendors (such as guy with the patented drag-brake, and the people selling valve stem decorations) got no attention at all. A good vendor fair has to work both ways - with 800 participants, if NWTR wants to have good vendor participation the attendees have to visit and appreciate ALL the vendors.

Rides, Routes:

- Printed routes and cue sheets available the first day of the rally.
- Print directions from the end of the route back to the start, don't leave us at the lunch stop with no way back to the start.
- Highlight on the cue sheets (maybe in red) where the rest stops are and what their hours are.
- Loved the Friday "around the town" ride.
- Good routes, good food at rest stops. Variety of fresh fruit amazing
- Best mass-start escort I've ever seen.
- Routes nice mix of flat and rolling hills, plus ocean and forest scenery.
- The extended police escort all the way out of town was marvelous.
- Thanks for the cue-sheets printed in quarter-size.
- GPS tracks to download ahead of time, every rally should make these available and at least 3 weeks before the rally.
- Would have liked to know that there were groups doing fundraising at the rest stops. I don't carry cash when I ride and would have liked to support the Girl Scouts.
- Lunch at the end of the Saturday and Sunday rides started too late. We got to the end at 10am and nothing was set up yet.
- Better crowd control at rest stops. Signs so people would know where to find food vs water vs mechanic vs trash vs bike pumps.
- Proofread the cue sheets and maps before publishing. Make sure the GPX files and cue sheets match.
- Bike mechanics needed all day, every day.
- Provide lunch on the route, not at the end. (just one comment to this effect.)
- Have cold water (ice water) at rest stops.

Volunteers:

- Volunteers listed often in "what 3 things worked well at NWTR 2015."
- Excellent rest stops, volunteers did a great job.
- Volunteers were awesome.
- Loved seeing the orange shirts, you knew that was someone who could help you.
- Volunteers ran the registration very well.

- Bike storage at the hotel and constant volunteer security presence very much appreciated.
- Registration very well organized.
- Fantastic attitude for the bike riders coming from the general population of Bellingham and from the ride volunteers!
- Girl scouts were cute but had no idea how to deal with the massive crowd.

Information, Communications

- We liked the communications both on Facebook and often-updated website on how the project is evolving, these messages started many months before the event.
- Emails from event organizers during the months before the event and especially the weeks just before were helpful.
- Needed better communication that things were about to sell out. I have never been shut out of a banquet, very disappointed when it was suddenly full with no warning.
- Need a way for us to look up what we have registered for. Signed up at Pendleton and thought I had already signed up for the banquet there.
- People who registered online in January forgot what we signed up for by the time June got here, need a good way to go online to remind us what we registered for.
- Need better communication about how the raffle was going to run and when the drawings would be and how to see who won and pick up prizes. Confusing and inconvenient for people not staying at the host hotel.
- I liked seeing the list of names online of who is attending from where. But at the rally itself, how about a printed list of everyone by first and last name plus city and email address so we can contact our new friends later?
- Better communication on website about how to register for all the options.
- Better communication overall during the rally. We had no idea where the fireworks were going to be.

Other comments

- Bicycling is a great way to make a statement about caring for the environment, but when meals are served on disposable (not recyclable or compostable) plates, it goes against the grain of caring for the environment. I urge future rallies to put more emphasis on recycling and composting, even simple things like recycling pop cans!
- Consider adding a swap-meet area at the host hotel so people can bring extra bike items to sell or trade.
- Breakfast should have included oatmeal and bread.
- “Lunch at Farmer’s Market was terrible. Not enough choices for those of us with healthy eating habits.” (most other comments loved the Farmer’s Market - can’t please everyone.) *Along with this comment, we received 10X as many: “enjoyed Saturday farmers’ market. Really enjoyed the lunch at Boundary Bay Brewery.” (Sorry everyone, it’s tough feeding 800 people on the 4th of July, we came up with the best option we could!)*
- “Barbecue food was awful at the Friday evening meal.”
- Tandem riders were often riding 2 and 3 abreast, people need to behave and not aggravate the car drivers.
- Let people reserve tables ahead of time for the banquet so a large party can all sit together.
- Have an obvious lost-and-found area at NWTR registration table/area.