



Centre for
Trail Excellence

Signage Best Practices Guidelines





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Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

Trans Canada Trail acknowledges that:

The Trans Canada Trail is situated on the traditional territory of First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples from coast to coast to coast. We also acknowledge that the Trans Canada Trail includes land and water routes that were created and used, both historically and in some cases presently, by Indigenous peoples as seasonal travel and trade routes.

Our head office is situated on the traditional territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) Nation, part of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. We recognize the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation as the custodians of the lands and waters of Tiohtiá:ke (Montreal), which has long been a gathering place for diverse First Nations, including Algonquin-Anishinaabe, Atikamekw and Huron-Wendat.

We are thankful that we are able to collaborate, play and work on the Trans Canada Trail. We support community efforts to sustain a relationship with Indigenous peoples based on respect, dignity, trust and cooperation, in the process of advancing truth and reconciliation.

Trans Canada Trail

Connecting Canada from coast to coast to coast, the Trans Canada Trail (the Trail) is the longest multi-use recreational trail in the world. More than 28,000 km in length, the Trail traverses each of Canada's 10 provinces and 3 territories and many Indigenous peoples' traditional territories, and connects 15,000 communities across the country. Approximately 80% of Canadians can access a local section of the Trail within 30 minutes from their home. True to its name, the Trail is a national legacy that connects people living in and visiting Canada to the vastness of our country's landscapes and the diversity of our people. Trans Canada Trail inspires, thrills and contributes to the health, happiness and adventurous spirit of all people.

Mission

As the longest trail network in the world, the Trans Canada Trail connects Canadians and visitors to nature and to one another, from coast to coast to coast, through accessible and inclusive outdoor activities. Through collaboration and partnerships, we build, maintain and steward Canada's national trail, a unique system of connected urban and rural trails.

Vision

Building on the achievement of connection, the Trans Canada Trail will continue to inspire everyone to embrace the outdoors, to discover the diversity of our land and people, to enhance their health and well-being, and to share their stories along this globally significant and iconic trail network.

Introduction



Introduction

Importance of Signage

Signage is the most important part of any trail.

Every sign tells a story and is critical to the operation of a quality trail system. Signs are a highly visible representation of that quality and provide positive exposure to the trail, attracting more users. Signage is used to educate, provide reassurance, control usage, offer advice, provide safety information, and create a friendly and welcoming overall experience. It's the easiest way to leave trail users with a positive impression, which inevitably is the quickest way to increase the Trans Canada Trail's identity and boost public support.

The following guidelines will help as you create and implement a comprehensive sign plan for your trail network.

Purpose of these Guidelines

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide guidance for developing good signage practices across the Trans Canada Trail network. Signs are necessary, no matter what type of trail you manage and maintain.

It is important to have consistent sign programs to ensure safe travel and provide a positive user experience. Effective signage can change people's behaviour and visual information is often processed much faster than written text.

The scope of these guidelines is intended to cover trail signage that is specifically found on the Trans Canada Trail.

These guidelines will help you create sign solutions for the trail environment and the conditions that live in harmony with the trail you manage.

Note: The guidelines are updated regularly as needed to ensure it is up to date.

Signage Best Practices



Signage Best Practices

Accurate signage is critical for a trail and becomes of even greater importance when the scope of the Trans Canada Trail is taken into consideration. Without a consistent and predictable system of signage in place, trail users are, at best, hindered, and at worst, may find themselves lost. Whether trail users are travelling through forest trails or urbanized areas, there is an abundance of opportunities to lose the trail. By having a consistent signage system, the chance of such a scenario is dramatically reduced. Trail users will know when and where to expect signage, as well as the purpose of each sign.

Consistency within a signage system is often overlooked; an assumption is made that if instructions are placed, they will be found. To illustrate this point, imagine a roadway without consistent signage. In Canada, we know that stop signs are red, placed at the near-right corner of an intersection, and provide a specific instruction. Imagine if a stop sign was placed on the left side of the road instead; you can envision the problems it would cause. Likewise, if a stop sign were replaced with a yellow intersection sign, drivers would be aware of the intersection, but would lack the direction to stop. The same holds true for trail signage. If a directional indicator is provided, but in the incorrect location, there may be uncertainty of where or why to turn. If a trail blaze is provided but is positioned poorly, it may be missed.

In these guidelines, you will find resources and best practices on how to design and implement a successful signage plan. They are for guidance only, and all signage projects should be reviewed with local, provincial and federal authorities' requirements.



Should you seek additional assistance:

- Various signage guidelines are available, such as one published by Parks Canada. Please refer to [Parks Canada Exterior Signage standards](#) for further information.
- In large municipalities, there is often an active transportation plan and a government department(s) that handles trail elements, standards and regulations, including signage. If your trail is part of, or intersecting, a larger municipal trail system, it is recommended that you contact this department to discuss your trail signage plans. Most larger cities and towns have systems in place and will be a great resource, providing direction to ensure your signage plan is in keeping with the city's aesthetic look and needs. In small towns or within a rural trail network, it is suggested that local authorities be contacted so you can speak directly with Roadworks, Parks and Recreation, or any other applicable departments that handle trail signage in that area.
- It is also recommended that you speak with a local signage manufacturer who is up to date with local by-law building codes for signage. For extensive signage planning, contracting a signage consultant is recommended. Landscape architects are a great resource and may provide these types of services in your area.



How to Use Signs



How to Use Signs

When to sign

When marking trails, there are several situations where signage is required. Reasons for why a sign may be required include the following:

Decision Points

Decision points are any place on the route where the trail user is faced with one or more options of direction. The decision point is usually where a trail splits and the user needs to know which option will keep them on the Trans Canada Trail. In some situations, there may be more than one option to remain on the Trans Canada Trail. An example of this would be where the trail splits from the through-trail into a local loop or spur.

Reassurance

Reassurance signs are required along all trail segments. They are used to brand the trail and advise trail users that they are still travelling on a segment of the Trans Canada Trail.

Regulation Changes

Since every local trail group manages the rules and regulations for their own trail, when responsibility passes from one local body to the next, it may be required to indicate any changes. An example of a regulatory change is where a segment of trail crosses from a local trail that allows snowmobile use, to one that does not.

Always consult local authorities during your planning stage to discover this information. It is recommended that you start with your municipality to get direction on who best can answer your question.

Provincial transportation departments often provide an overview of what is traditionally used on roadways and highways.

When not to sign

While it is less common to over-sign an area than to under-sign, sometime an excess of signage can cause confusion or redundancy. For example, on a segment of trail where no deviation occurs, directional indicators (beyond a reassurance sign) are not necessary.

Likewise, providing a reassurance sign immediately after a decision point is redundant. If the decision point is properly marked, it replaces the reassurance sign.

Signage pollution

Signage pollution is the term used for excessive signage that clutters a trail. Signage pollution is problematic for several reasons:

- An excess of unnecessary signage increases the likelihood of an important sign being missed.
- Extra signage increases both the initial cost and the maintenance costs of signing a trail.
- Excessive signage can detract from the natural beauty of the trail.

To prevent signage pollution, ask yourself the following questions for the segment of trail you are signing:

- Which signs are necessary?
- Can the number of signs be reduced without affecting usability?
- Can any of the signs be consolidated?

For example, on a straight stretch of trail, choosing a larger sign (e.g., a 12×12 inch) instead of a smaller sign (e.g., 6×6 inch) will increase the visible distance, allowing you to place signs farther apart and therefore reducing the number of signs required.

Look for opportunities on your trail to consolidate messages.



Types of Signs



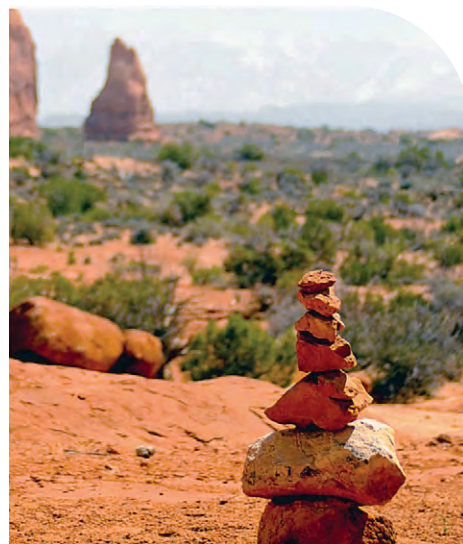
Types of Signs

There are different styles, categories and sizes of signs needed for the many situations that are encountered on the Trans Canada Trail. They can be categorized by the trail type they are intended for, and further into a sign function type. Examples include the following:

Blazes and cairns

Offset blazes were first adopted in the early 1970s and are common throughout North America. They perform a role similar to wayfinders and arrows.

Blazes are recommended in situations where the installation of an aluminum sign is not possible, such as outback, rural, or rugged trail. If using this system throughout your trail, it is important to communicate this method to your users. Providing a symbol reference on a main trailhead or website will assist your travellers in navigating successfully using this system.



Cairns are carefully arranged piles of stone, usually installed at higher elevations where trees are unavailable for blaze markings. They are also commonly seen in the Arctic region of North America. They too provide wayfinding along the Trail. Though interesting, cairns are not a reliable method for user navigation. Cairns are often altered due to vandalism, wildlife interference and weather, which can throw a traveller off course quickly.

Directional

Directional signs (typically arrows) give trail users information at decision-making points as to what direction the trail follows. These signs should be used in conjunction with Trans Canada Trail wayfinders.



Kilometre markers

Kilometre markers are used to inform trail users what distance they have travelled. These can simply be wayfinders, arrows or any reassurance signage. Some trails use square posts mentioning the kilometre measurement. These can also be painted onto paved trail where pavement marking can easily be done. GPS coordinates are also useful for many trail users.



Regulatory signs

Regulatory and warning signs should be placed throughout the trail in appropriate locations (i.e., crossings, areas with limited visibility, cliffs, etc.) and comply with local standards. Since excessive signage may cause trail users to feel restricted or overwhelmed with information, warning signs should be placed only where necessary. Locations for the signs should be identified in engineering studies and during the trail design phase.

Regulatory signs such as “Stop,” “Yield,” and “Do Not Enter” signs should conform to the standard (ISO) shape and colours used on roads, but they can and should be smaller than signs intended for roads. For reference, see: [Ministry of Transportation Ontario’s guidelines](#).

On roadway, reflective signage may be required. Be sure to inquire about the type of reflective material needed in the signs' specific area. These will differ based on grade of traffic. It is also important to confirm installation requirements on each section of roadway, which will differ based on grade, surface and speed of vehicular traffic. Signage on roadway is not necessarily for the trail user, but to inform vehicle traffic that they are sharing the road with slow-moving trail users.

Where land trail intersects with roadway, signage is important. As a traveller moves across a land trail, they are not always aware of an oncoming intersection with a busy roadway. It is vital to sign this appropriately. Many trails will use a simple stop sign, where others provide larger sign clusters indicating the road name, and all other necessary information like trail access points. Adding reflective tape is an added safety feature. These structures can also be used to mitigate traffic and block vehicles from entering the trail. Usually, a 4-in. x 4-in. metal post standing 6–8 ft. tall has over 10 sq. ft. of sign panel space to inform the trail user of all necessary information.

Regarding waterways or signage near waterways, significant markers are required that comply to provincial standards and may require special permits. Consult with jurisdictional authorities to ensure your water trail is properly signed. A trailhead near the portage advising of water safety is highly recommended. On this sign, it will be important to inform the user if emergency services are available and if there are any water hazards. For an overview of such signs, contact jurisdictional authority office for their current standard signage requirements and/or catalogue.

Warning signs should be either yellow or fluorescent yellow-green and diamond-shaped. Temporary construction warning signs may be orange. Sign companies will be familiar with applicable standards; however, final responsibility for accuracy rests with you.

It is vital that warning signs are posted to reduce risk and to minimize liability issues. It is recommended that a risk management audit be conducted, and any resulting signage suggestions be implemented.



Share the road sign.

Wayfinding signs

Aluminum wayfinding signs are used along the Trail to reassure users that they are still on a section of the Trans Canada Trail. They may also be paired with other signs to associate the pairing with the Trans Canada Trail network.



Trailhead and kiosk signs

Trailheads are used at major waypoints. These large-scale signs usually have a map, trail use icons, GPS location and any other pertinent information to ensure safe travel. Mapping should include a “You are Here” point, a compass rose, and it is suggested to give a 5 km reference and a 5+ km mapping reference if applicable. Additional regional mapping can be included if necessary.

Trans Canada Trail suggests that each trailhead sign include the following information:

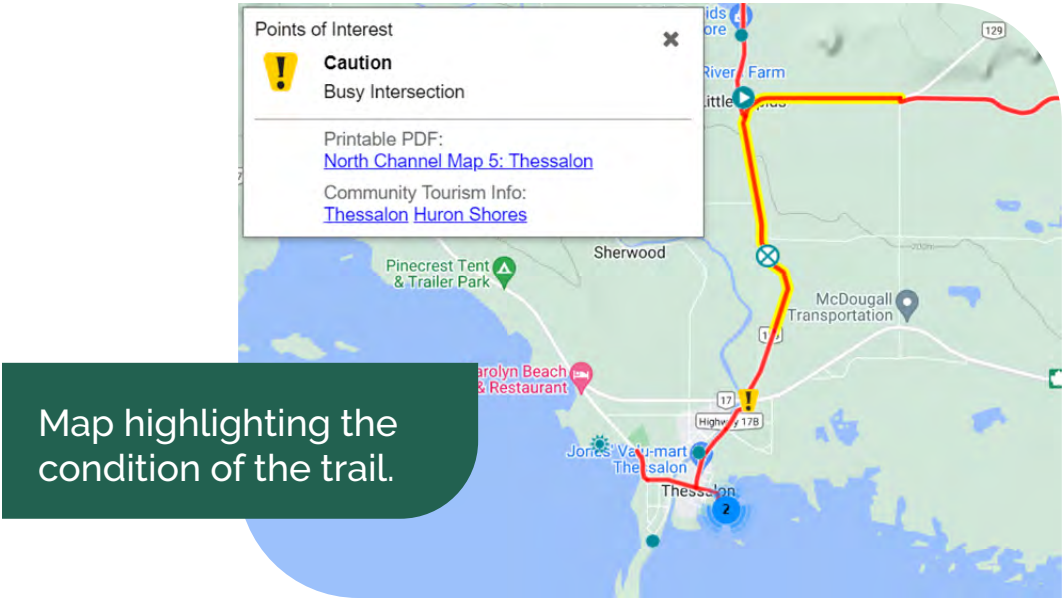
- The text “Use trail at your own risk”
- The text “Recreational Trail”
- Icons showing the activities that are permitted and not permitted on the trail (for example, walking, dogs on leash, etc.)

Trailhead kiosk with map of trail, rules and regulations, and other trail information.



Trailheads also include Indigenous Land Acknowledgements, when possible. Should you need assistance in researching this information, contact the local Indigenous community to confirm the correct wording for your area. Trans Canada Trail staff can also provide further direction on how to find this information.

For trail approaching the US border, it is recommended that a warning be included. This can be indicated on the trailhead map or within the content. To bring attention to this essential information, it is suggested it be highlighted in a visible way. If necessary, additional signage along the trail is recommended.



The term “kiosk” is often used when a trailhead has a roof detail. This overhang peaked roof provides shelter during inclement weather and should be considered in areas of the country that experience heavy rainfall. The roof also provides added protection to the sign graphic, often giving shade and reducing UV exposure.

Unique markers

There are some instances where Trail users benefit from additional information beyond the immediate information provided by standard trail markers. In these cases, unique markers should be considered.

Unique markers are custom signs that carry the Trans Canada Trail brand and provide context to the user's current location within a section of trail. The following are instances where unique markers should be considered:

- **Unsigned Segments:** occasionally you may encounter a segment of trail that cannot or does not allow for signage to be posted. A unique marker can be used prior to this situation to give the trail user vital navigational information.
- **Complex Segments:** unique markers can improve the experience of navigating winding, criss-crossing, or otherwise disorienting trails. A contextual view of the current section of trail can prepare a trail user so they can confidently navigate the confusing situation ahead.
- **Local Trail Loops:** unique markers can be used to help a user navigate a local loop, as well as provide a better experience when deviating from the main trail. In addition to navigation, the marker may provide information on local amenities or attractions.

When deciding on content for unique markers, priority must be given first to navigational aids, and then to any information that improves the trail experience. Below are some common components of unique markers that may be useful when choosing content:

- **Contextual Map:** a map can provide much more contextual information than text. When generating a map, ensure that the scope of the map is relevant to the context of the segment. I.e., do not use a provincial map for a regional trail. For mapping resources, its recommended to consult a mapping expert. Using graphics off Google will result in overly pixelated images that do not print well on a large scale.
- **GPS Coordinates:** GPS coordinates can be helpful in case of an emergency. They can provide a precise location to first responders for a quick response.

Additional Signage Considerations



Additional Signage Considerations

In addition to required information, it may improve the user's experience to provide some of the following:

Warning signs

Common sense is not always customary practice. Over and above standard regulatory and caution signs such as "Stop," "Yield" and "One way" signs, additional warning signs may need to be placed at access points to communicate information about specific issues.

Topics can include:

- Parking regulations – do not leave valuables in car, lock car, park in designated areas, do not park
- Wildlife – do not feed, beware of specific animals, do not leave food in vehicles, bring a bear bell, insect warnings, avoid perfume
- Flora – beware of poison ivy/oak, endangered species
- Water – bring drinking water, do not drink from water features along trail, do not swim, do not fish
- Trespassing – do not trespass, private lands, noise violations
- Pack in Pack out – how to, disposal sites, washroom locations
- Weather warnings – Avalanche, rapid current, change in current, flood zones, heat exhaustion, thin ice, hypothermia, use of sunscreen/insect repellent
- Detours – due to fallen trees, washouts, landslides, floodwaters, ice, snow, construction

Points of interest

Local loops provide the opportunity to experience unique aspects of the local area that might be missed when travelling straight through. Identifying these points will help users reach interesting destinations that might otherwise be missed. Consider creating trail loops to viewpoints, natural ecological features and local trails.

Local amenities

After a long stretch on the Trans Canada Trail, it can be a relief to find a public washroom, fountain or park. Identifying these locations around a local loop could make someone's day.

Designing Signs



Designing Signs

The Trans Canada Trail brand

The [Trans Canada Trail brand identity guide](#) help to ensure the consistent use of elements that create the look and feel of the organization. These include items such as our logo, fonts and brand colours.

Once you have determined the items you need to create (for example, wayfinding signage), contact the Trans Canada Trail Signage Team so they can provide the relevant version of the logo and any additional resources you may require; they can be reached at signage@tctrail.ca.

Design

A well-designed sign is particularly important. There needs to be a good balance of artistic talent and technical functionality. Do you ever look at a very colourful, overcrowded, confusing sign and wonder, “What does it say?” The use of gradated backgrounds, multiple colours, too many words and poor planning makes a sign difficult to read and trail users will lose interest.

For sign design, it is best to keep it simple. This method should be followed for wayfinders and other small markers. Larger signs can include interpretive stories, maps, icons and other pertinent information.

You may need more than one sign should you have extensive copy, photos, and mapping. If your sign has multiple languages or additional content, the design may need to include a QR code or website address to direct the user to read this further information.

An environmental graphic designer, sign consultant or sign company with an in-house designer are great resources. These individuals are experts in all the factors of good sign design, taking into consideration height, distance, speed and lighting to determine the best layout. This may include adjustments in letter kerning and appropriate use of negative space so the sign can be read effectively.

Less is more when it comes to content. Be as brief and to the point as possible. Interpretive storytelling signs should be edited to reduce word counts to the best of your ability without losing the message. If in doubt after the sign’s preliminary design, a digital print can be brought to the site and placed into the planned position. Stand back and view. If you have difficulty reading the information, so will a trail user. Even though a sign looks beautiful and reads well on a computer screen, it may not be effective as a sign when placed in nature.

Size requirements

Viewing distance should be a key factor when determining letter size on a sign, which will impact how big your sign should be. If the sign ends up being too big for its intended location, content will need to be reduced. In some instances, a larger sign may be required due to site conditions or the surrounding environment. The size of the sign will also help determine the size of lettering that can be used in its design.

The charts below provide recommendations for signage size requirements.

| Size (mm) | Size (inches) | Viewer Distance (metres) | Viewer Speed (KPH) | Recommended Uses |
|-----------|---------------|--------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 200×200 | 8×8 | 5 | 0-10 | Very short distances, viewer at a standstill. This sign is limited in its uses. May be used near a stop sign at a short viewing distance, near parking spaces, or for cycling paths or footpaths. |
| 300×300 | 12×12 | 10 | 0-10 | Short distances, viewer at a standstill. May be used near a stop sign at a short viewing distance, near parking spaces, or for cycling paths or footpaths. |
| | | 5 | 20-40 | Very short distances, viewer moving slowly. May be used in residential zones with low speed limits, parking areas, or for cycling paths or footpaths. |
| 450×450 | 18×18 | 10 | 40-60 | Short distances, viewer moving at town speeds. May be used in urban or rural roads with low to moderate speed limits. |
| | | 25 | 20-40 | Moderate distances, viewer moving slowly. May be used in residential zones with low speed limits, parking areas, or for cycling paths or footpaths. |
| 600×600 | 24×24 | 25 | 40-60 | Moderate distances, viewer moving at town speeds. May be used near a stop sign, near parking spaces, or for cycling paths or footpaths. |
| | | 10 | 60-100 | Moderate distances, viewer moving at high speeds. May be used on rural roads or roads with higher posted speed limits. |

Trail use icons and other symbols

Icons and symbols are the best way to communicate with a traveller. These graphics get straight to the point and inform the user of necessary information. A variety of real-life examples are available that can help you plan your sign's design. You can find common symbols by searching "International Standards" or "ISO."

Included are the sample standards for quick reference.



Using different languages on signs

In keeping with Canada's Official Languages Act, Trans Canada Trail-branded signage is bilingual (English and French), except for Quebec non-federal lands, where it is French only. Quebec has distinct signage laws which should be referred to when designing signage for that province.

Trans Canada Trail welcomes the inclusion of additional languages to its signage to meet local needs. It is important to make sure the translations are done by a certified professional who is accustomed to translating language for signage purposes. If including an Indigenous language, please consult with the local band office for accurate translations. Language errors on signs can be costly, and it is best to have your text double checked for accuracy.



GCHI MKINAAK
TRANS CANADA TRAIL^{TM/MC}

Example of the Trans Canada Trail wayfinding artwork with Anishinaabemowin language for Curve Lake area in Ontario. Gchi Mkinaak means Big Turtle.

Accessibility

Users require comprehensive instruction to ensure safe travel. This instruction is traditionally displayed on access, trailhead, and on-trail informational signs. This information can also be made available on web and print material. It is important for all users, including people with disabilities, to understand any challenges on a trail before starting their journey. To best serve all users, signs should include the following:

- length of the trail
- surface type (including changes in surface type)
- clear tread width (average and minimum)
- running slope (average and maximum grade)
- cross slope (if applicable) (average and maximum grade)
- known trail hazards and obstacles
- cumulative elevation changes (gain and loss)
- all trail uses
- trail rating
- points of interest and distances between points
- audio options

Solar-audio signage feature



Signage should also include any additional information that will help visitors decide whether or not to attempt a trail. Mapping should include major obstacles or barriers, hazards, notices of a detour, cautions during inclement weather, as well as the location of accessible washrooms and facilities. Adding contact information for the trail manager may also be useful. Trail groups are encouraged to consider a variety of communication formats, including tactile formats for signage content, raised lettering and braille where appropriate, audio tours and additional forms of communication.

The use of ISO icons (previously mentioned in the “Trail use icons and other symbols” section) is also key. The use of the international wheelchair symbol is often used to show which trails are accessible. Sensory gardens or accessible play structures should also be highlighted on maps, web and print materials to encourage trail use for all.

When text is used, it must be high contrast, low glare and sans serif font to ensure that the sign’s content is easy to read. Signs, especially those containing written content and maps, need to be installed at a height that can be viewed by visitors who are using wheelchairs and motorized scooters. Many provinces have, or are implementing, accessibility standards; please check with your local building department to make sure you follow all relevant standards and regulations.





Provinces are developing accessibility standards for outdoor public space. Consult with the appropriate department in your province to ensure that you are meeting its standards and regulations. An example is the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), and how it applies to recreational trails: aoda.ca/accessible-recreational-trails-in-ontario/

Click here to review our Best Practices for [All Persons Trail: Trail Navigation](#).

Trail classification

Many trails now indicate level of difficulty similar to the approach used on ski hills. The internationally recognized symbols being used are:

- green circle for beginner
- blue square for intermediate
- black diamond for expert
- double black diamond for experts only

| Trail Rating | Symbol | Level of Difficulty |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Green circle |  | Easiest |
| Blue square |  | Intermediate |
| Black diamond |  | Advanced |
| Double black diamond |  | Expert Only |

Trans Canada Trail offers an audit that can assist you in determining a trail's classification. For further information, please send an email message to project@tctrail.ca.

Approval of sign designs

Once complete, sign designs must be submitted to Trans Canada Trail for artwork review and approval. Please allow 24–48 business hours for artwork approvals. Artwork can be sent in low resolution JPG or PDF format via email to signage@tctrail.ca.



Sign Production and Installation



Sign Production and Installation

Sign Production

Sign materials

The majority of Trans Canada Trail signage is meant for long-term display and therefore aluminum is the recommended material. It is lightweight, durable and suitable for all traffic signage. It can withstand Canada's various weather systems and does not rust.

Other materials can include wood, plastics, plastic/aluminum composite, stone and other metals.

Materials selection

It is best to discuss your project with a signage consultant or manufacturer to choose what best suits your needs.

Installing Signs

Sign placement

Some aspects of sign placement are easily understood but there are many other factors that are not as obvious and need to be addressed.

Angling Signs for Visibility

To achieve maximize visibility, signs should be angled so that they are facing a point on the trail that is half the visible distance away.

Placement of Reassurance Trail Markers

Whenever possible, reassurance trail markers should be placed on the north side of the trail (when the segment of trail is oriented more east-to-west) or the east side (when the trail is oriented more north-to-south).

Placement of Directional Indicators

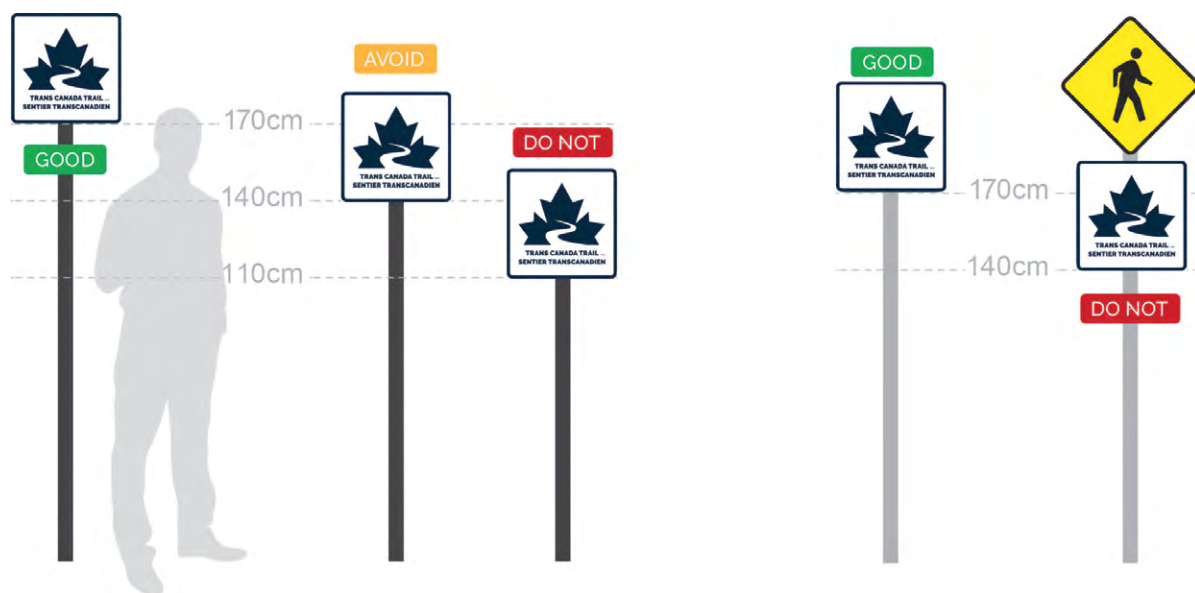
Directional indicators are most often found at decision points (intersecting points on a trail). Whenever possible, markers should be placed at the northeast corner of the intersection.

Environmental factors can play a role in the installation and positioning of signage. Some factors to consider are weather, precipitation patterns, dust, and foliage growth. These conditions may justify a change in installation position, more durable hardware or a distinct size of sign.

Installation

It is particularly important to install signage well. A falling sign can lead to damage and/or injury. It is vital to use an appropriate pole system with tamper-proof galvanized or stainless-steel fasteners.

With large sign structures, a base must be part of the construction plan, and in some cases, an engineering study must be performed to assure the sign complies with wind and snow load requirements. You must check with local authorities and research signage by-laws to ensure your installation conforms to building codes. Here is a suggested height installation recommendation when installing signs on telspar or u-channel, along trail or roadway.



Height installation recommendations when installing signs on telspar or u-channel.

It is also important to install signs in appropriate, easy-to-read areas. Installation should only be onto poles or structures that are approved. Some existing signage locations may be on private property or on poles specific for utility or other roadway signage and local authorities or private landowners do not allow additional signs on the same structure. It is also recommended that signage not be installed onto trees, since fasteners tend to cause disease to trees. Also, trees will grow, making the signage useless over time.



A sign manufacturer specializing in large installations can point you in the right direction as well as advise you on the appropriate pole system to use on smaller installations. If your area does not have a sign company, a local general contractor or landscape contractor may also be able to provide guidance.

Maintaining Signs



Maintaining Signs

Sign maintenance

Regular maintenance must be part of any trail plan. Signs are highly visible, and a lack of maintenance can leave a visitor with either a positive or negative impression. Well-maintained signs convey a sense of pride and may reduce vandalism, while poorly maintained signs may contribute to a diminished visitor experience, including disorientation of trail users.

It is important to:

- maintain a record of all signage (see [Auditing and Data Collection section](#))
- inspect signs regularly, especially after winter, to assess for weathering and visibility concerns
- repair or replace damaged and/or missing signs
- clear nearby vegetation to maintain sign visibility
- tighten any loosened bolts and fasteners
- remove any graffiti and stickers
- remove obsolete signs, recycling where possible

On average, a trail's signage will need to be replaced at a rate of 10% per year. The average lifespan of signage is 10 years before UV rays affect printed or painted information. When ordering signage, it is important to have a UV-protecting laminate applied, preferably with graffiti resistance, to extend the life of your new signs.

Though it is tempting to order signs made of lower quality materials due to initial cost savings, it is best to invest in high-quality aluminum signage that will stand the test of time. Lower-cost materials, such as composite or plastic, have a short lifespan in the Canadian climate. Consult your local sign manufacturer for their recommendation since they know the area well and can advise on the materials that will work best for your situation.

A close-up, shallow depth-of-field photograph of a person's hands typing on a silver laptop keyboard. The person is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be an office environment with a window. A dark green rounded rectangle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text 'Record Keeping' in white. A small yellow rectangle is visible at the top left corner of the page.

Record Keeping

Record Keeping

Auditing and data collection — records and accountability

The Trans Canada Trail is an enormous project, spanning the country, involving hundreds of trails and thousands of volunteers. Trans Canada Trail requires you to include a signage plan with all funding applications and have up-to-date signage-inventory records. For this reason, among others, we recommend that you keep accurate records of matters pertaining to the trail.

As signage is installed, it should be recorded and the information provided to the appropriate Trans Canada Trail representative, who will then log the information for future reference. Maintaining timely, updated records prevents backlog and helps with budgeting and audits. This can be done in a variety of ways; the following offers a few examples.

Using Excel

It is important to keep accurate information of your signage inventory including details, such as the following:

- the location
- the sign types
- the size
- the pole or structure
- direction the sign is facing
- information about cases where it was stolen or went missing

In rare cases where an insurance claim needs to be filed due to damage, this inventory will be required as proof of installation.

Data acquisition

With modern technology, data acquisition is a reasonably achievable task. While many methods exist, straightforward methods include the following:

Camera and GPS receiver

One method of collecting proof-of-installation information is by photographing the location and recording the GPS data manually. The only challenge with this method of data collection is keeping the photographs matched with their respective GPS locations. A simple method of doing this is recording a time along with the GPS location. Since cameras timestamp photos, you can easily look back after the fact and match the time a photo was taken with the time noted with the GPS data.

Smartphone

All modern smartphones are equipped with GPS receivers and cameras. Furthermore, most of the major phone brands allow you to geotag photos with GPS data. In optimal conditions, a phone can work as a complete solution. However, a phone's GPS receiver is less sensitive and may be inaccurate in poor weather conditions, near cliffs or in mountainous regions. In these cases, it is useful to have a dedicated GPS receiver to achieve an accurate result.

Online Mapping Platforms

Online mapping platforms are excellent free resources that can be used for both planning and capturing your signage inventory. The simple pin-drop method allows you to mark the position of your sign and add details such as its description, direction and other relevant information. Pin colours can be customized to represent different sign types. The data can then be saved as a KMZ or KML file, which Trans Canada Trail can overlay onto its internal map to log the information and confirm trail alignment, trail signage or amenity locations.

User Experience on the Trans Canada Trail



User Experience on the Trans Canada Trail

In addition to traditional trail signage, Trans Canada Trail welcomes projects that improve user experience such as murals, art installations, signage that engages travellers in physical activity, and functional alternative structures for resting. Trans Canada Trail is always interested in unique projects that enhance user experience.



Mural project in Waterville, Nova Scotia

Signage planning

Signage is a vital attribute to trails, and we are here to support your signage program's success.

Should you have any questions regarding these guidelines or wish to discuss or review your signage plan, please contact a Trans Canada Trail team member at signage@tctrail.ca.

Appendices

Appendices

Online References

- [Guidelines for Snowmobile Trail Signing & Placement; International Association of Snowmobile Administrators](#)
- [Signage Guidelines; Harbour Authority Guidebook, Maritimes and Gulf Regions](#)
- [Parks Canada Identity Program; Exterior Signage Standards and Guidelines](#)
- [Wayfinding Signs: Who, What, When, Where, and Why; American Trails](#)

Glossary

- [Trail Types and Definitions](#)

Signage 101

- [Wayfinding signs and directional arrows](#)
- [Trailheads and interpretive panels](#)
- [Customized signs](#)
- [Installation recommendations](#)

Webinar

- [Planning & Designing Signage for Recreational Trails](#)



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