

American Trails

The Business of Trails: A Compilation of Economic Benefits

An analysis of studies and research on the economic benefits of trails: tourism, events, healthcare savings, and community development.

by **Terry Eastin** (<https://www.americantrails.org/presenters-and-authors/terry-eastin>), Executive Director, **Mississippi River Trail, Inc.** (<https://www.americantrails.org/organizations/mississippi-river-trail-inc>)

[Google Bookmark](#)[Facebook](#)[More](#)

Case statement

Trails and their users generate substantial economic benefits. With minimal research, a plethora of case studies and economic impact statements are available for review and analysis. The economic impacts of comprehensive trail systems exemplifies the proven assertion that trails bring new business and economic life to American cities, towns, and communities.

Providing alternate transportation routes and easy commuting to and from work via active transportation helps individuals and families offset impacts of gasoline inflation and soaring healthcare costs. With increased financial resources due to transportation and healthcare savings, other purchases that fuel retail spending, home buying and associated economic development projects return to the private sector.



()

For more than 20 years, states, cities, and national organizations across America have been documenting the economic impacts of trails. Studies, as early as 1974, began asserting the economic value of such resources. In recent years, 2000–2008, the number and quality of those studies have increased dramatically.

The following quote typifies the importance placed on trails based on studies conducted by the U.S. DOT, Federal Highway Administration in 1994 after the establishment of the Transportation Enhancements Program as Part of the U.S. Federal Highway Administration Transportation Budget.

This is the vision—to create a changed transportation system that offers not only choices among travel modes for specific trips, but more importantly presents these options so that they are real choices that meet the needs of individuals and society as a whole. Making this vision a reality must begin now. – USDOT Federal Highway Administration.

Economic Impact of Trails – 2002 Consumer Survey by the National Association of Realtors and National Association of Homebuilders

Other organizations whose economic development are impacted by the inclusion of trails and trail systems include the National Association of Realtors (NAW) and the National Association of Homebuilders (NAHB). With no bias and an agenda to determine what most appeals to new homebuyers, these organizations united in 2002 to conduct a Consumers Survey. The Sample of 2,000 households was derived from a national panel of respondents who purchased a primary residence within the last 48 months.

Survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of the following community amenities that would seriously influence you to move to a new community, realizing that these features, in varying degrees, may increase the cost of the home or involve higher homeowner association fees or local taxes. 2 Out of eighteen categories, 44% of respondents listed highway access as the most important amenity, followed by walking/jogging/bike trails at 36%. Sidewalks on both sides of the street ranked third at 28%, with parks areas and playgrounds following at 26% and 21% respectively. Shops within walking distance of home ranked 6th, at 19%. Amenities like golf courses, tennis courts, club houses, and baseball/softball fields ranked less 8%.

When asked “Which of the following statements about homes and neighborhoods do you agree with?” Twenty-seven percent (27%) of respondents agreed with the statement I wish I could walk more places from my home. The only category with a larger rate of agreement was “I wish my home were larger” with 64% of respondents in agreement.

The demographic make-up of the study included 79% over the age of 35; 60% with incomes higher than \$50,000; and 64% married couples. In a follow-up **Growth and Transportation Consumer Survey** in 2007, findings concluded that:

"Three-fourths of Americans believe that being smarter about development and improving public transportation are better long-term solutions for reducing traffic congestion than building new roads, according to a survey sponsored by the National Association of Realtors® and Smart Growth America. "

The 2007 *Growth and Transportation Survey* details what Americans think about how development affects their immediate community, and traffic congestion was a top concern. Nearly half of those surveyed think improving public transit would be the best way to reduce congestion, and 26 percent believe developing communities that reduce the need to drive would be the better alternative. Only one in five said building new roads was the answer.

An earlier report conducted by the University of Nebraska entitled ***Omaha Recreational Trails – Their Effects on Property Values and Public Safety*** in June 2000 reported similar findings. The results indicated that 65% of respondents felt their home would be easier to sell and 42% of respondents reported that their homes were easier to sell because of the nearby trail's presence.

A clear majority of residents (63.8%) who bought their homes after the construction of trails reported that the trail had positively influenced their purchase decision. Seventy-five percent (75%) of respondents identified a correlation between trails and a positive impact on the quality of life in their neighborhood.

Economic Impacts of Bicycling Tourism

Des Moines Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa (RAGBRAI)

The Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa (RAGBRAI) is an event sponsored by the Des Moines Register since 1973. The Annual Bicycle Ride has become, in some cases, the largest economic impact event for towns and cities in the state.

Due to the popularity of the event and the large number of registrants, a lottery was established to select applications for ridership limiting the number of participants to 8,500 with an additional 1,500-day riders for each of the consecutive 6 days of the event. In 2007, alone, more than 800 applications (over the 8,500 rider limit) were received. Since its inception, there have been more than 255,650 riders covering 15,535 miles at RAGBRAI. Seven hundred sixty one (761) Iowa towns or 78% of all towns in Iowa, have enjoyed substantial economic impacts due to RAGBRAI since the first event in 1973.

"We've seen towns that get 20,000 – 30,000 people associated with RAGBRAI," said T.J. Juskiwicz, the ride's director. "That's a lot of dollars. The economic impact has been reported at \$2 million per town." Because of the economic impact, more than 200 other rides have been established throughout the years taking their inspiration from RAGBRAI, including bicycle rides in Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Georgia, Tennessee, Florida, Colorado, Oregon, Maryland, Ohio, Maine, Missouri, Illinois, Virginia, Rhode Island, Minnesota, Delaware, New Mexico, Michigan, North Dakota, New York, California, Washington, Arizona, Wyoming, Mississippi, Texas, Kentucky, Utah, Wisconsin, Indiana, New Hampshire, District of Columbia, Massachusetts and North Carolina.

In studies conducted by the Maryland Department of Transportation, a \$191,893 investment in Maryland's Northern Central Rail Trail increased state revenues by \$303,750 the same year the trail opened. ***Analysis of Economic Impact of the Northern Central Rail Trail***, Maryland Department of Transportation (1994).

In another important 1999 study, it was determined that the the Great Allegheny Passage brought in \$14 million in direct economic benefit (rentals, meals, lodging, trinket purchases) even as it was only half completed. (*Stephen Farber, University of Pittsburg and Pennsylvania Economic League, "An Economic Study for the Allegheny Trail" (1999).*)

Case studies

Washington and Old Dominion Trails in Virginia – Prepared for the Virginia Department of Conservation (2004)

The Washington and Old Dominion Trail (W&OD) is a 45-mile long transportation and recreation corridor running from Arlington, Virginia, west to Purcellville. This report focuses on the Washington and Old Dominion Trail (W&OD). The first section includes statistical information about user demographics, trip

profiles, attitudes and management preferences. The next part of the results section explores the economic benefits accruing to trail users and the 4 economic impacts on the region stimulated by trail use.

A representative sampling procedure described above was used to obtain 1,426 completed questionnaires from trail users between May 2003 and April 2004. Information from completed questionnaires was combined with on-site summer visitor counts at various trail segments to arrive at an annual estimate of adult visits (aged 16 and older) of 1,707,353. Of this number 5.24% or 89,807 of the visits, amounting to 33,262 group trips were from users living outside the northern Virginia area. The remainder of the visits, 1,617,546, were from local residents.

An estimated 1.7 million adult W&OD users spent in total about \$12 million annually related to their use recreational use of the trail. Of this amount, about \$7 million was spent directly in the northern Virginia economy by locals and non-locals using the trail. The estimated 1.6 million local visits accounted for about \$5.3 million of spending directly related to the use of the W&OD.

Trail users were primarily white (85%) and evenly split along gender lines. Asians were the leading minority group at 6 percent. The largest two age cohorts were those aged 36- 45 and 46- 55. Average annual household income for users was just under \$100,000. About 84 percent of users reported being employed, 63 percent in the private sector. The average user group size for all visitors was 1.7, but more than 57 percent of visitors were using the trail alone. Finally, while access to the trail is "free," there is nevertheless considerable economic value that accrues to W&OD users. This net economic value or consumer surplus is a dollar measure of the amount of welfare that users would lose if the trail were unavailable. Using conventional economic methods, it was determined that, on average, a trip to the W&OD was worth between \$9 and \$14 dollars per person more than the average cost to use the trail.

Extrapolating this net economic benefit across 1.7 million adult visits, of which 93 percent were for the primary purpose of visiting the W&OD, leads to an annual net economic benefit of trail access to users of between \$14.4- and \$21.6 million. Because the W&OD is primarily a local resource (95% of visits are by locals) rather than a destination trail, the vast majority of these net economic benefits accrue to northern Virginia residents. *Source: J.M. Bowker, USDA Forest Service Southern Forest Research Station; John C. Bergstrom and Joshua Gill, University of Georgia Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics; Ursula Lemanski, National Park Service.*

Maximizing Economic Benefits from a Rails-to-Trails Project in Southern West Virginia: A Case Study of the Greenbrier River Trail

A recent report from West Virginia provides more data on the economic and tourism benefits of trails. It presents the results of a 10-month project designed to inventory the recreation opportunities in the Greenbrier River Trail corridor, to assess the level of trail use and its economic impact, and to generate broad-based cooperative efforts to expand marketing and promotion.

"The results of this project clearly indicate that there are opportunities to enhance the economic impact of the Greenbrier River Trail on the area."

A trail-user survey was developed to assess both user preferences and trends and, at the same time, to amass basic economic impact data on trail use. During October 2000, trail-side surveys were conducted, while several state agencies, commercial businesses, and travel and tourism offices solicited survey responses from the trail users they encountered.

Survey analysis showed that trail users tend to be highly educated with family incomes over \$60,000 per year, and that more than 60% were residents of other states. It was also found that the amount of money spent by out-of-state visitors far exceeded that spent by West Virginia residents. Ninety percent of the out-of-

state visitors indicated that they were highly likely to plan a return visit to the area. This has profound implications for expanded promotion and marketing opportunities. The overall economic impact on the area by trail users was significant. Out-of-state visitors purchased the broadest range of goods and services and made the greatest total expenditures. Visitors were very pleased with the quality of their trail experiences, the trail itself, and the surrounding environment.

The project began with an inventory all leisure industry providers, points of interest, and infrastructure. Next, a survey of trail users was conducted, followed by public meetings in an effort to create a broad-based support group for economic enhancement. The final step was to produce the documentation of trail user demographics and economic impact.

Trail user survey results show economic benefits

The following is a summary of some of the findings of the West Virginia economic impacts study of the Greenbrier River Trail:

- *Sex and group size of visitors*

Trail users were almost evenly divided between male (53%) and female users (47%). This may have positive implications for future marketing and promotion efforts. If use were skewed heavily toward one gender, marketing and promotion would be more challenging in many respects. The most frequently reported group size was two people (42%), followed by four.

- *Age*

The age classes representing the greatest trail use were 25-39 (34%) and 40-59 (44%). Only 10% of users were in the 16-24 age class, and 12% were 60 and over. Of particular interest is that West Virginia has one of the highest senior citizen populations in the country, and an increasing percentage of out-of-state visitors are retired. Opportunities abound to market the Greenbrier River Trail to this age class. During summer vacation periods the proportion of younger users is probably be much higher.

- *Education Level*

The results of this survey strongly suggest that there may be a high correlation between use of the Greenbrier River Trail and the 6 education level of the users: 90% of the trail users hold college degrees or have attended college.

- *Profession and family income*

Of those surveyed 52% were white-collar workers. Only 9% were retired, indicating this group may be a prime target for marketing. Incomes were consistent with education level and profession: 54% reported family incomes over \$60,000.

- *Residence*

The fact that 63% of the respondents were from out of state has profound implications for marketing strategies, as does the discovery that only 16% were residents of the two trail corridor counties. Virginia zip codes accounted for 37% of the out-of-state visitors, indicating that Virginia would be a prime target market for promotional campaigns.

1. *Principal type of trail activity*

The most popular type of trail use reported was overwhelmingly bicycling (75%). Future marketing and promotion strategies should attempt to focus on this user group. While walking and jogging are significant uses (20%), they are probably restricted to relatively short sections of the trail near trailheads while bicycle

use extends over much longer sections.

- *Items for which visitors spent money in the area*

Food, travel, and lodging headed the list of items on which visitors spent money. As expenditures on equipment rental or purchase, guide services, and clothing were almost non-existent, it is obvious these are areas that require more effective marketing and promotion efforts. Only souvenirs showed a moderate level of expenditure outside of the top three, perhaps because of limited opportunities for such purchases.

- *Duration of visit*

The duration of visits was about evenly distributed among one-day (34%), overnight (27%), and multiple-day visits (39%). Of the reported visits, 93% occurred during a one- to four-day period; and only 7% of the reported visits occurred during periods longer than five days. Marketing and promotion strategies, from a cost effectiveness perspective, might be best focused on the one- to four-day visitor.

- *Estimated total expenditure for this trip*

58% spent between \$100 and \$500. Those who reported spending less than \$100 were those who lived within the corridor. Of the 39% who spent more than \$500 on their trips, virtually all resided outside West Virginia.

- *Is this your first trip to the Greenbrier River Trail?*

The 47% who indicated "yes" is an extraordinarily high first-time visitor figure. Any tourist-related industry would cherish a first-time attendance rate of 47%. Perhaps this can be attributed to the fact that almost half of the visitors indicated that word-of-mouth was the greatest influence on their decision to visit the Greenbrier River Trail.

- *What influenced your visit to the trail?*

More visitors (47%) were influenced by word-of-mouth than were by electronic and print media combined (39%). The fact that 54% of the visitors did not seek or receive printed or electronic information about the 7 trail is further evidence that a broader marketing and promotion effort could positively influence visitation in the corridor.

- *Quality of trail, surroundings, and experience*

When viewed together, scenic quality, physical condition, quality of experience, and likelihood of planning a return visit provide excellent opportunities for future marketing and promotion efforts. An overwhelming percentage of the respondents ranked these items very highly. It is clear that visitors appreciated and enjoyed their trail-related activity and that almost every one of them plans a return visit. An expanded promotion activity should obtain mailing addresses of trail users in order to mail printed information to them within a few months after their visits.

- *Other recreation activities in the area*

As 48% indicated their trip included other visits or recreation activities in the corridor, it is apparent that trail users who have a greater awareness of other activities and facilities in the area are more likely to extend their visit to take advantage of these opportunities. The 59 other outdoor recreation activities reported by trail users are clear evidence that many trail users are interested in other outdoor recreation opportunities when available. The economic impact of these other outdoor recreation opportunities could possibly be enhanced through expanded promotion and marketing efforts in the area.

Additional conclusions

Officials of state government agencies and convention and visitors bureaus have suggested that the results of the trail user survey are probably very conservative because use of the Greenbrier River Trail is considerably higher in the summer months. They have suggested that the economic impact results would be significantly greater if a similar survey were conducted during the summer. The results of this project clearly indicate that there are opportunities to enhance the economic impact of the Greenbrier River Trail on the area. The key to success will be to find ways to develop cooperative promotion and marketing agreements among all agencies and organizations that now promote and market in a more narrow focus.

Analysis of Impacts of the Northern Central Rail Trail – Prepared for the Maryland Greenways Commission, a division of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources – PFK Consulting (1994).

The NCRT is clearly recognized by residents as an asset for the region, especially the local community. As the survey findings demonstrate, nearly 100 percent of the Trail's users come from Baltimore County, and as a percentage of Trail users nearly 80 percent use the Trail at least once per week. While some greenways have diverse attendance segments and can significantly increase tourism, others like the (NCRT) are used primarily as a passive recreation resource (walking, biking) primarily by local residents. Not only did the surveys indicate this, but the visitor logs from Monkton Station from 1989-1993 all support this finding. The 8 reason for the NCRT's use primarily by residents can be attributed to both its location (in a suburban to rural bedroom market for Baltimore), it's relatively new presence in the market (10 years), limited signage to the resource from major travel corridors, and lack of commercial development along its length.

Consequently, there are relatively few establishments to capture tourism dollars. However, this market is beginning to grow as is shown by the emergence of tourist related businesses at Monkton Station and elsewhere along the trail. The NCRT's recognition as a local resource is a remarkable accomplishment. Before it was redeveloped as a greenway, the rail corridor was a "magnet" for illegal dumping, vandalism, and illicit uses by adolescents and others. Now, as a prized local resource, the NCRT is "policed" by residents and problems along the corridor have decreased dramatically.

With regard to user expenditures detailed in the economic impacts section of this report, Trail users who had purchased goods for use on the Trail spent an average of \$203 in 1993. Similarly, users who purchased soft goods (food etc.) before or after using the Trail spent an average of \$6.30 per visit. To understand the Trail's success one must recognize the forces that have led to its popularity. Two general areas of interest lead: safety and passive recreation. The interest in safety for walkers, runners and especially bicyclists (who together make up almost 98 percent of the Trail's users) reflects a lack of other safe areas to congregate. To that end, the NCRT fills a critical gap for the surrounding region. Tied into this need are some basic trends:

- 1) An aging population - in six more years, at the turn of the century over 40 percent of the U.S. population will be over 60 years of age - and already Baltimore County has the second oldest population per capita of any county in the U.S. (Dade County, Florida is number one.)
- 2) More bicycles are sold in the United States than are automobiles. Nearly all respondents mentioned there are relatively few places near their homes where bicyclists can safely ride. The most popular recreation activity in the United States is walking; over 100 million Americans participate in this activity 2 to 3 times per week.
- 4) Current land development and housing patterns remain focused outside urban core areas and center on rural and suburban areas. These areas provide relatively inexpensive land, good travel corridors, better schools, support facilities (shopping areas) and less crime than more urban settings.

Park Trail Usage Patterns and Public Sentiment Toward Maintenance and Operation Cost- From the East Bay Regional Park District Trail System ---- Alameda and Contra Costa Counties, California (2003)

Survey looks at public willingness to pay for trails

A large majority of voters in the East Bay Regional Park District (88%) agree that the system of regional parks and trails is a "valuable public resource." Most voters also recognize the need to properly maintain this public resource (86%). When asked directly whether they would support or oppose a special benefit assessment of \$5 per year on parcel owners in the district "in order to provide funds to operate and maintain a safe and aesthetically attractive system of trails and related facilities, which would include funds for park ranger services, safety patrols, fire suppression, and weed abatement," 77% indicated support for a \$5 special benefit assessment per year on parcel owners in the district, 5% indicated that they were unsure, and 18% indicated opposition to a \$5 assessment. "Voters are well aware of the valuable public resource that exists in the East Bay regional park and trail system."

In addition, those voters who were initially uncertain, or who opposed the proposed \$5 benefit assessment, were given a short list of possible consequences to the trail system if additional funds were not raised for maintenance. After hearing the list of consequences to the trail system, an additional 4 percent changed from their initial position and indicated that they would support the \$5 assessment. Thus, when voters are reminded of the need, overall support for the proposed assessment increases to 81%.

Very few voters (17%) say that they never use the regional trails. About 18 percent say they use the trails rarely. The remaining 64 percent use the trails "sometimes" (34%) or "often" (30%).

Implementing Trail-Based Economic Development Programs: A Handbook for Iowa Communities - prepared by Iowa Department of Transportation Office of Systems Planning

This handbook outlines ways in which governments, businesses, chambers of commerce, tourism promoters, and individuals can help their communities develop and implement trail-based economic development programs.

As new recreational trails are developed throughout Iowa, many more people will benefit from additional outdoor recreation opportunities. The benefits of trails extend well beyond fitness and leisure pastimes. Trails hold tremendous potential for economic and community development. To make sure that Iowa's communities truly benefit from new trails, this handbook outlines ways to capitalize on the economic development potential associated with both new and existing trails. Its intended audiences are communities and agencies throughout the State of Iowa.

This handbook draws upon the histories of many trails and towns from all over the United States. In recent years, communities have come up with a variety of innovative and effective approaches to trail-based economic development. The case studies in this handbook describe programs from throughout the Midwest and examine these approaches in detail. "Trails generate economic impacts by delivering additional spending to businesses. As businesses become more productive, new jobs and tax revenues follow."

No two communities will approach trail-based economic development in the same way, as illustrated by the case studies found throughout this handbook. Communities that succeed at promoting community and economic development through trail recreation may approach the process from many angles, but all began with clear visions of how they wanted the trail system to help their communities.

Case Studies from the Iowa Handbook

In planning for trail-based economic development, it helps to be aware of the experiences of other communities. For this purpose, a number of "case studies" are included. These case studies document how different public and private entities use trail recreation as a tool for economic development. Three types of case studies are included: cities and towns; businesses; and festivals. The various perspectives provided by these different cases provide valuable insights for a wide range of community leaders.

How a city or town capitalizes on a nearby recreational trail depends on several factors:

- type of trail (motorized, non-motorized); size of community;
- existing physical character of community;
- existing visitor attractions in community;
- level of public support for trails;
- commitment from elected officials and business leaders;
- proximity to potential recreational users.

Since so many variables exist, cities and towns have taken a wide variety of approaches. Case studies for cities and towns examine three different ways in which towns have used recreational trails to promote development:

1. Regional Economic Development: packaging trails as a quality of life enhancement to retain or recruit businesses and residents.
2. Tourism Development: using trails as a way to attract hotels, restaurants and other tourism-related businesses.
3. Main Street Revitalization: linking trails with historic business districts in order to channel demand retail shops, restaurants, and services.

Businesses

Businesses profiled as case studies include outfitters, lodging places, restaurants, and other merchants. Although these businesses fill different needs, they share a common thread: they could not exist without the boost provided by being located on or near trails. Thus, the business case studies focus on enterprises that either opened as a direct response to demand created by trail recreation or that transformed themselves in response to new markets presented by trail users.

Festivals

Many cities and towns stage annual festivals in order to build and promote unique identities. In many cases, the festival itself becomes synonymous with the place, as with Sturgis, South Dakota, home of the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally and Races. The festivals profiled in this handbook do more than provide an annual boost to their local economies; they also help promote year-round activities in their surrounding areas. Both motorized and non-motorized recreation. The local visitor experience goes well beyond recreation, and local tourism promoters are careful not to just promote to niche groups like cross-country skiers or mountain bikers. Marketing strategies instead target families, packaging recreation with attractions like cherry orchards, festivals, arts and crafts, historic hotels and resorts, and natural scenery.

Top 10 Lessons from Case Studies

Reviewing the case studies in this handbook provides many insights to communities. The following list summarizes the top 10 considerations from the case studies, in no particular order:

1. Trails are one element of a larger visitor experience, and providing other opportunities (both recreational and non-recreational) draws a more diverse group of visitors. In turn, this allows for a greater variety of businesses.

2. Establishing a community as a viable trail destination mandates that individual businesses must take individual risks as entrepreneurs while simultaneously working together with other businesses to build critical mass.
3. Trail users pass along knowledge to others by word of mouth, as well as learning about destinations from travel articles, on the Internet, etc. To ensure outstanding peer recommendations, towns and businesses must provide a quality visitor experience to each individual trail user.
4. Year-round activity is crucial to the survival of many trail-related businesses. Even if recreational trail use is seasonal, communities can provide off-season attractions that provide different experiences.
5. Trail planning in urban areas requires cooperation and coordination not only from different political jurisdictions, but also among various public and private entities within each jurisdiction.
6. Slogans and marketing themes are meaningless unless the entire community buys into them. Building a true community identity requires the support of political leaders, businesspeople, and the public.
7. Recreation alone will not induce visitors to stay overnight. Communities must provide quality lodging, and dining activities to supplement the draw of recreation.
8. Different types of trail users behave differently. For example, snowmobilers are more likely to travel in larger parties, stay longer, and spend more money than bicyclists. As a result, the types of users on a given trail will go a long way toward determining the character of a trail community.
9. A festival only creates economic impacts for a few days each year. To be effective economic development tools, festivals must become points-of-entry for year-round experiences.
10. In the global economy, companies can locate just about anywhere and many will make location decisions based on quality of life. A community with ample opportunities for trail recreation can leverage this advantage for economic development purposes.

A Case Study of the North Carolina Northern Outer Banks Trail (April, 2004) By the Institute for Transportation Research and Education at North Carolina State University

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation (DBPT) commissioned a study to examine the value of public investment in bicycle facilities. The northern Outer Banks region was selected for the study because of existing high levels of bicycle activity and the presence of an extensive system of special bicycle facilities. Over the past ten years, an estimated \$6.7 million of public funds was spent to construct off-road paths and add wide paved shoulders to roads in the region.

The economic benefit study concluded that:

- Bicycling activity in the northern Outer Banks provides substantial economic benefits to the area: an estimated \$60 million annually.
- The bicycle facilities in the area are an important factor for many tourists in deciding to visit the region.
- Investment in bicycle facilities improves the safety of the transportation system for all users and also benefits health and fitness, quality of life, and the environment.
- 53% report bicycling as a strong influence in decision to return for subsequent visit.
- 43% report bicycling as an important factor in selecting this area for vacation.

"Mountain bicycling is a sustainable, environmentally sound type of trail use. Trail erosion can be effectively reduced by proper trail construction and maintenance."

"Bicycle Facilities Encourage Tourism and Boost the Economy"

The study determined that an estimated 680,000 tourists engage in some bicycling activity while in the northern Outer Banks area annually. This represents 17% of all visitors to the area. The quality of bicycling was an important factor in choosing to visit the area for 43% of bicyclists who were surveyed. While other tourists may not choose to visit the Outer Banks specifically because of its bicycle facilities, many may choose the area over another resort community because of these amenities. Bicycling visitors and tourists have a direct and substantial economic impact on the area, according to the study. A conservative estimate of bicyclists' expenditures in the northern Outer Banks is \$60 million annually.

These visitor expenditures are expected to produce many other widespread benefits to the local economy, including:

- 1,400 jobs are created or supported annually.
- Increased retail sales to local restaurants, lodging establishments and retail stores.
- Subsequent expenditures by local merchants to suppliers of materials and services.

"Bicycling Facilities Extend Vacations and Encourage a Return to Area"

The longer tourists stay in an area, the more they generally spend. This means that the duration of bicyclists' trips was an important economic factor to measure. Twelve percent of respondents reported that the duration of their visit was longer because of bicycling, by an average of four days. The average bicyclist surveyed on the facilities reported riding on 69% of the days of their trip while in the area. This high rate of bicyclist activity — as well as decisions to extend the duration of visits— may have been influenced by safety. Two-thirds of respondents reported that the bicycle facilities made them feel safer while riding. In addition to encouraging more bicycling and extending bicyclists' stays, the study found that the quality of bicycling was important in decisions to return to the area. In fact, a higher percentage of respondents said that bicycling would be more important in deciding to return (53%) than it was in their decision to come to the area (43%). The research suggests, therefore, that once exposed to the quality of bicycling in the region, visitors are more likely to come back.

"Bicyclists Tend to Be Well Educated and Earn Higher Incomes"

The northern Outer Banks study found that bicycling tourists may have a good deal of purchasing power: they tend to be well educated with fairly high incomes. And, they love to bicycle. Study findings revealed the following bicyclist characteristics:

Profile of a Bicycling Tourist

- 87% earn more than \$50,000 annually.
- 78% completed college.
- 73% rate themselves as an intermediate skill-level cyclist who rides 10-49 miles per month.
- The average person surveyed rode 14 miles per day on five days of his/ her trip.

Clearly, bicycle tourists drawn to the good bicycling opportunities on the northern Outer Banks are having a positive economic impact on this area.

"The Economic Benefit of Bicycle Facilities Outweighs their Costs"

The northern Outer Banks study found that bicycling tourists represent a high economic impact for the resort communities. But how does that compare against the cost of building the bicycle facilities? Approximately \$6.7 million of municipal, state and federal funds were used to construct the special bicycle facilities in the northern Outer Banks.

The annual economic impact of cyclists (\$60 million) is estimated to be almost nine times greater than the one-time expenditure of public funds to construct the bicycle facilities. The measurable economic benefits of bicycle facilities may begin with increased tourist expenditures in the region, but further intangible results may be seen long after the visitors leave. In addition to the positive economic impact versus the cost of bicycle facilities, the study observed that other, less quantifiable, economic benefits may result from the bicycle facilities, including:

- Enhancement of nearby property values along areas that feature bike paths and trails.
- Reduced healthcare costs that may result from increased opportunities for healthful exercise.
- Less damage to roads and preservation of the highway infrastructure resulting from wider paved shoulders.

Trails and Tourism: The Missing Link Issues in Partnering with the Tourism Industry: A European Perspective -By Bernard Lane, Rural Tourism Unit, University of Bristol, UK and *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1999

The growth of the tourism industry has been one of the success stories of the post war world. International arrivals across the world have grown over 20 fold in the last fifty years. Globally, tourism now provides 10% of world employment, 12% of GDP, and is predicted to provide up to 100 million new jobs by 2010. Within that growth picture tourism is changing rapidly. There is an expansion in special interest tourism, in city based cultural tourism, in activity holidays and in rural tourism. The purpose built traditional resort is now paralleled by the concept of the world as a whole as a living resort.

"In Europe, tourism is increasingly seen as a possible partner for trail development and maintenance activities."

Trails can benefit from financial and political support from tourism and local / regional development agencies. Tourism benefits from additional product, from new market opportunities and from image building. The economic benefits of well- managed trails are now well documented: for the UK see Cope's 1998 paper in *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*: for the US see the 1998 publication by Roger Moore for the US Dept. of the Interior. This paper looks at how trail development has progressed in Europe, and why, from the 1980s onwards, trails and tourism development have begun to come together. It examines the key elements necessary for a successful relationship, and looks at issues for the future.

Trail Development: The 2 stages.

1930 - 1980: The Visionary Long Distance Routes

This period was characterized by the planning and realization by pressure groups and state agencies of a series of long distance trails - typically in excess of 60 miles - a length which requires more than a long weekend's walking. There are now 12 National Trails in Britain, with a total length of 2,000 miles administered by the Countryside Agency, a fusion of the conservation body, the Countryside Commission, and the Rural Development Commission: the new Agency began work on 1st April 1999. Many other European countries have similar systems.

These trails were never designed as tourist routes. They were essentially utopian creations designed to allow access across the countryside as a grand political gesture. They are challenge routes, used by a walking elite, typically middle aged professional men. They are not effectively marketed, few luggage transfer facilities are available, packaging of trail holidays does not go on. There is no agency responsible for increasing their use to boost tourism revenues to the areas they traverse. And the routes were not designed to be interesting, or easy to use. Long distance usage is small: they are symbols of freedom and hope rather than living usership reality. They are almost exclusively walking routes.

1980 - 2000 Short distance routes and trails as tools for development

This period has seen a boom in trail development, and in the whole concept of the trail. Growing demand for outdoor recreation and rural tourism has coincided with a period where European Union, national, regional and local public sector agencies have become active in creating new trails. The motives of those agencies have been many but include job creation, rural diversification, urban regeneration, and tourism development and management. Many of the new trails are short distance trails, and some of them are effective in tourism terms.

But new types of long distance trails are also being created. Some of these long distance trails have captured the market's mood and its dreams and have become successful tourism products. Examples include Austria's Danube Trail, Britain's coast to coast C2C Trail, and Spain's revived Santiago de Compostela Pilgrimage Trail. In Britain, a national charity, Sustrans, is developing an 8,000 miles national cycle trail. Its free market, company sponsored counterpart, the National Byway, is developing a 3,000 mile route.

Trails have become multi-user and multi-purpose concepts - covering a range of purposes, not just "simple" recreation. And the basic concept of a simple linear trail has changed. The 1980s saw the growing popularity of the circular trail, allowing users to return to their car or public transport. That concept was taken further by Tarka Trail in Devon, and Kingfisher Trail 16 in Ireland to cover the Figure Eight Trail - able to link two trails at once in a unity. Trails that use multi-modes - part train, part foot for example - have emerged. And the specialty themed trail has become a common place. Throughout there has been the strong idea of using trails as a tool: one of those key tools has been for tourism development. And behind that idea is that trails should be economically productive if at all possible. Only then can the public sector back trails with resources and political good will.

Tourism is a key to the economic productivity of trails. Walking as a leisure activity was estimated to comprise no less than 850 million trips in UK in 1996, generating visitor expenditure in rural areas of £2 billion. Utilitarian walking is declining: leisure walking is increasing.

Cycling is also a fast rising activity newly in fashion, with cycle sales outstripping car sales in most northern European countries in the early 1990s. Whole shelves full of new leisure activity magazines, specialty TV travel shows and travel channels, and bigger newspaper travel pages both reflect and spur this market.

Economic Benefits of Greenways: Summary of Findings-Economic Impacts of Protecting Rivers, Trails, and Greenway Corridors - National Park Service, 1990. Adapted by The Conservation Fund's American Greenways Program

Real Property Values

Many studies demonstrate that parks, greenways and trails increase nearby property values, thus increasing local tax revenues. Such increased revenues often offset greenway acquisition costs.

- California's Secretary for the State Resources Agency estimated that \$100 million would be returned to local economies each year from an initial park bond investment of \$330 million (Gilliam, 1980).
- A greenbelt in Boulder, Colorado increased aggregate property values for one neighborhood by \$5.4 million, resulting in \$500,000 of additional annual property tax revenues. The tax alone could recover the initial cost of the \$1-5 million greenbelt in three years (Cornell, Lillydahl, and Singel, 1978).

Expenditures by Residents

Spending by local residents on greenway related activities helps support recreation related business and employment, as well as businesses patronized by greenway and trail users.

- Residents are increasingly spending vacations closer to home, thus spending increasing amounts of vacation dollars within the boundaries of the state (NPS 1990).
- In 1988, recreation and leisure was the third largest industry in California. More than \$30 billion is spent each year by Californians on recreation and leisure in their state. This amounts to 12 percent of total personal consumption (California Department of Parks and Recreation, 1988).

Commercial Uses

Greenways often provide business opportunities, locations and resources for commercial activities such as recreation equipment rentals and sales, lessons, and other related businesses.

- Along the lower Colorado River in Arizona, 13 concessionaires under permit to the Bureau of Land Management generate more than \$7.5 million annually, with a major spinoff effect in the local economy (Bureau of Land Management, 1987).
- Golden Gate National Recreation Area has contracts with ten primary concessionaires. Total 1988 gross revenues for these concessionaires were over \$16 million, over 25 percent of which was spent on payroll (NPS, 1990).

Tourism

Greenways are often major tourist attractions which generate expenditures on lodging, food, and recreation related services. Moreover, tourism is Maryland's second largest and most stable industry, and is projected to become its largest.

- The San Antonio Riverwalk is considered the anchor of the \$1.2 billion tourist industry in San Antonio, Texas. A user survey concluded that the Riverwalk is the second most important tourist attraction in the state of Texas (National Park Service, 1990).
- The Governor's Committee on the Environment reported in 1988 that the governors of five New England states officially recognized open space as a key element in the quality of life in their region. They credited that quality of life with bringing rapid economic growth and a multi-billion dollar tourism industry to the region (Governor's Committee on the Environment, 1988).

Agency Expenditures

The agency responsible for managing a river, trail or greenway can help support local businesses by purchasing supplies and services. Jobs created by the managing agency may also help increase local employment opportunities. Corporate Relocation Evidence shows that the quality of life of a community is an increasingly important factor in corporate relocation decisions. Greenways are often cited as important contributors to quality of life. The quality of life in a community is an increasingly important factor in corporate relocation decisions; greenways are often cited as important contributors to quality of life and to the attractiveness of a community to which businesses are considering relocating.

- An annual survey of chief executive officers conducted by Cushman and Wakefield in 1989 found that quality of life for employees was the third most important factor in locating a business (NPS, 1990).
- St. Mary's County, Maryland, has found over the last ten years that businesses which move to the county because of tax incentives tended to leave as soon as the incentives expire. However, businesses that move to the county because of its quality of life remain to become long term residents and taxpayers (NPS, 1990).
- Site location teams for businesses considering San Antonio, Texas regularly visit the San Antonio Riverwalk. A location on the river-walk is considered very desirable. A regional grocer, the HEB Company, relocated its corporate 18 headquarters to a historic building oriented towards the river (NPS, 1990).

- The Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Congress reports that a city's quality of life is more important than purely business-related factors when it comes to attracting new businesses, particularly in the high-tech and service industries (Scenic America, 1987).

St. Louis Today, Tuesday, June 24, 2008

St. Louis' All-America City Award Points the Way - Author, Neil Peirce. (Neil Peirce, "Citistates: How Urban America Can Prosper in a Competitive World (Seven Locks Press, 1993) Tuesday, June 24, 2008)

"Eleven Years ago, Washington Avenue in St. Louis was declining rapidly, the city's downtown prospects grim. And the rest of the St. Louis region didn't seem to care. On June 6, the yearly competition for one of the National Civic Leagues coveted All-America City awards. St. Louis received its first All-America City award since 1956. And, what was the top talking point St. Louis used to win? Downtown redevelopment. St. Louis, for decades bedeviled by deep population losses and widely scattered suburban sprawl, also won its award by pointing to a stunning regional advance: the new River Ring project, which will eventually be a 600-mile web of 45 biking trails and greenways designed to encircle and connect the entire region, a big 'green' advance and also a way to help metro St. Louis compete with other areas in environmentally friendly outdoor life.

"Just completed: a renovation of the historic McKinley Bridge across the Mississippi River, with a 6,600 foot bike and pedestrian way offering spectacular views of downtown St. Louis and its landmark Gateway Arch, to be connected in the next twelve months to a converted railway trestle going five more miles into the heart of the city. Yet the greenway advance wouldn't have happened if both the Missouri and Illinois state legislatures – along with the voters of St. Louis, two adjacent Missouri counties and four in Illinois – had not agreed in 2000 to fund a bi-state regional park district to set up the interconnecting parks, trails, and greenways."

The Economic Benefits of Trails – American Hiking Society

In a study conducted in August 2001, of the visitors of the Rio Grande National Forest (52% listed hiking as their primary activity, it was estimated that the amount of money each individual spent per visit within a 50 miles radius of the recreation site included \$567.93 for lodging, \$319.44 for food and drink, and \$168.44 for transportation. It was also estimated in a typical year, these visitors individually spend \$3,805.92 on all outdoor recreation activities.

A May 2001 study of visitor impact in Blaine County Idaho near the Salmon River, indicated the impact of visitor spending was 19 the creation of 5,980 jobs and \$120 million in income in a single county. In 1998, outdoor enthusiasts contributed almost \$132 million dollars to the economy while visiting the Everglades National Park and helped create over 5,000 new jobs. (Business for Wilderness, *The Bottom Line: Protecting the Value of America's Public Lands*, 2001, p. 5.). The Washington State Trails Plan estimated that trail users in the state have an estimated equipment investment of over \$3.4 billion which generates tax revenues of \$13.8 to \$27.6 million.

- *Traffic Congestion Relief*

Americans spend millions of dollars purchasing, operating and maintaining vehicles. The average car costs about \$3,000 per year to operate plus up to \$2,000 for gasoline (prior to gasoline inflation of the years between 2004 and 2008). Yet, studies indicate that 50% of all car excursions are less than 3 miles – a distance that could easily be walked or biked. Using human-powered transportation could result in a savings of 17.9 billion motor vehicle miles, seven billion gallons of gas, and 9.5 million tons of exhaust emissions annually. (*National Bicycle and Pedestrian Clearing House, Technical Assistance Series, Number 2: The Economic and Social Benefits of Off Road Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities, Washington, D.C. 1995, p. 3.*)

- *Lower Cost Healthcare*

Studies show that walking or hiking a few times per week can improve a person's health and lower healthcare costs. A National Park Service study compared people who lead sedentary lifestyles to those who exercise regularly. The exercisers filed 14 percent fewer health claims, spent 30% fewer days in the hospital, and had 41% fewer claims greater than \$5,000. (*Greenways, Incorporated, p. 14*).

Trail Expenditures Shown to Reduce Health Care Costs – A cost-benefit analysis of using bike/pedestrian trails in Lincoln, Nebraska to reduce health care costs associated with inactivity. Every \$1 investment in trails for physical activity led to \$2.94 in direct medical benefit.

The Economic and Social Benefits of Trails, —Gary Sjoquist, *Quality Bicycle Products*

During warm weather months in Minnesota, nearly 1.5 million cyclists, inline skaters, and walkers use our nationally-recognized city, county, and state trails. In fact, these trails are a quality of life issue for residents, as well as luring tourists from neighboring states who don't have access to the number and variety of trails we have in Minnesota. Other than a quality of life issue, our trails are an economic boon to the state as well.

"Generally, it's been found a trail can bring at least one million dollars annually to a community."

Lanesboro, on the Root River Trail in Southeastern Minnesota, is an often-cited example of the economic impact a trail can have. Pre- and post-trail Lanesboro, a town of about 800 residents, differ dramatically. Post-trail Lanesboro boasts 12 B&Bs (with year-long waiting lists), 8 restaurants, an art gallery, a museum, and a thriving community theater well-off enough to offer housing to its actors. Economically speaking, the Root River Trail has had more than a \$5,000,000 a year economic impact for Lanesboro.

A specific example from Lanesboro can provide further insight. The bike shop in Lanesboro, a small "mom and pop" kind of a place, sold 60 tandem bicycles in a single year (more than the Twin Cities largest multi-store bike retailer that same year). Now, few people would go to Lanesboro to specifically purchase a not-inexpensive tandem bicycle. Rather, this is an indication of people who are having a good time, want it to continue, and are willing to spend the money to spend quality time on the trail. This kind of "impulse" purchase bodes well for retailers along our trails.

Nationally, trail-related expenditures range from less than \$1 per day to more than \$75 per day, depending on mileage covered. Generally, it's been found a trail can bring at least one million dollars annually to a community, depending on how well the town embraces the trail. For a town like Lanesboro, a trail can mean an annual economic impact of more than five million dollars. Furthermore, 70% of real estate agents use trails as a selling feature when selling homes near trails. 80.5% of them feel the trail would make it easier to sell. Additionally, the U.S. National Parks Service notes that increases in property values range from 5 to 32% when adjacent to trails and greenways.

With trail users relatively affluent, mobile, and interested in spending quality time with families, trails provide a perfect "getaway" adventure. Having access to trails has changed how families recreate, with people taking shorter but more frequent "vacations" closer to home and with a more family-oriented focus.

Economic Benefits of Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation to Arizona – Statewide Motorized and Nonmotorized Trails Plan, —November 2004, Arizona State Parks

Whether one enjoys exploring Arizona's backcountry driving a truck, dirt bike or quad, or one prefers using their own muscle power to hike the trails, the following information may be of interest. Arizona State University conducted a yearlong economic study of recreational off-highway vehicle use in Arizona in 2002, completing 15,000 telephone surveys and 1,269 mail questionnaires from randomly selected Arizona households.

The study findings show the total economic impact (direct and indirect) to Arizona from recreational OHV use is more than \$4 billion annually. OHV recreation activities provide an economic contribution to the State and its 15 counties mainly through direct expenditures for motorized vehicles, tow trailers, related equipment, accessories, insurance and maintenance costs.

Percent of Direct OHV Expenditures is \$3.1 Billion:

- Trip Expenditures 28%
- Vehicle Expenditures 34%
- Equipment Expenditures 38%

Additionally, an economic benefit is generated when OHV recreationists spend money in local communities close to areas they recreate in for recreational trip items such as gasoline, food, lodging and souvenirs. These direct purchases provide indirect benefits by helping to pay for many people's salaries and wages, and contributing to local and State tax revenues.

In 2002, Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation in Arizona:

- Created a statewide economic impact of \$4.25 billion
- Generated over \$3 billion in retail sales (trip expenditures, \$842.3 million; vehicle expenditures, \$1,035.2 million; equipment expenditures, \$1,178.2 million)
- Added \$187 million to annual State tax revenues
- Created household income (salaries and wages) for Arizona residents totaling \$1.1 billion
- Supported 36,591 jobs in Arizona
- Was participated in by 455,453 households or 1.1 million people, which accounts for 21% of Arizona's population
- Accounted for 12.2 million OHV Recreation Days in Arizona and an additional 1.8 million days in adjacent states and countries
-

RECENT ARTICLES

Northwest Arkansas Times - Editorial, Saturday, July 19, 2008

Fight, Fight, Fight! More Trails are a Must

"Mayor Coody touts the City's trail system as one of his top accomplishments during his first two terms in office. As he develops his campaign in his quest for a third term, it seems to us he needs to go beyond the rhetorical flourishes. Last year the city budget for trails was hit hard —it dropped from \$1.3 million to \$500,000. At that rate, it is going to take a long, long time for the city to actually build all those scenic trails public officials and citizens alike enjoy bragging about. Of course, the burden does not just land on the mayor's shoulders. He proposes a budget; ultimately the City Council must approve it. That's where a lot of cuts are made. Ward 2 Alderman Kyle Cook, Chairman of the City's trails Task Force is ready to "fight like hell" on behalf of winning full funding of the trails program.

"A key principle behind Fayetteville's trail construction program is to bring about approximately five miles worth of new trails annually – at least according to the city's website, that is. It is true that several miles of beautiful trails already exist, and we are grateful for them, every inch in fact. But the goal of trails supporters is to create a whopping 129 miles worth of trails connecting green space to neighborhoods all across the city. Reaching that admirable goal requires more construction, and more check writing, than anything the public has witnessed up to this point.

"If you believe in this goal, if you believe in trails, if you believe in alternative transportation, if you believe in getting people out of their cars and into the great outdoors, if you believe that Fayetteville has the opportunity to lead the state in something significant by way of its trails – now is the time to pick up the telephone, call your council representatives, and make your thoughts known. Don't be afraid. Call Mayor Coody and tell him you believe the city's trails add up to a vision that is worth shooting for. Making way for new trails will help Fayetteville stand out among cities in Northwest Arkansas and across the state and region. More trails means more options for residents trying to get around town. The city is already sprinkled with a number of trails. It's true. But the plain truth is that it is difficult to get from point A to point B when those trails don't connect or come anywhere close to the places we call home.

"With gas prices not about to drop any time soon, trails can also play an important role in our efforts to lower our dependency on oil. Trails also provide safe routes for bicyclists, walkers, and runners. Trails also return us to nature, humble us, and act as a lasting credit to those souls thoughtful enough to ensure their birth and construction in the first place.

"Do you get the feeling we are supportive of the city's trail program? Much about these fine thoughts will fall short of becoming reality, at least in the near future) without more funding on the part of city government. Headaches born of trying to bring city finances in under budget (again) will always be with us. The opportunity to create quality green space that can be used by us and future generations for years to come won't be. So, let's do something about it.

The Detroit News, June 10, 2008

Cycle sales are up as Drivers switch to save at the gas pump, by Jennifer Youssef,

Ricky Cook was growing weary shelling out \$60 every time he filled the tank of a Dodge Ram diesel pickup that got 18 miles per gallon – on a good day. When diesel reached \$4.75 a gallon, he started looking for a cheaper way to get to work and zip around town.

He found it two months ago in the form of a 2006 Kawasaki motorcycle with its impressive 50 mpg and wallet-friendly \$15 fill-up. And, the 22 year old towing and recovery driver couldn't be happier. Cook is among thousands of drivers across Metro Detroit and the United States who are flocking to fuel-efficient two-wheeled vehicles – motorcycles, scooters, and bicycles – to find relief from \$4.00 a gallon gas.

Arkansas Democrat- Gazette - July 27, 2008

Spring Creek Trail... (Excerpts)

"The Walton Family Foundation grant (to Springdale) could be as much as \$1 million dollars, but, for the foundation to disburse the funds, Springdale and private donors, each must match it in either cash or in-kind services. Thus far, Springdale has only managed to find \$83,000 for the trail project.

"Rogers, however, reached its challenge grant for trails offered by the Walton Foundation. From 2005 to 2007, Rogers raised \$2 million in a combination of public money and private in-kind donations and in return received a \$1 million grant from the foundation. Rogers officials have built three miles of trails with the grant money so far and plan to build another eight. Their goal is linking the city through trails from north to south and providing pedestrian access to the Pinnacle Hills Promenade shopping center."

Fayetteville Free Weekly – July 17, 2008

Thrills and Spills... (Excerpts)

The 11th annual Eureka Springs Fat Tire Festival, the largest event of its kind in the central United States, lands in Eureka Springs on Friday for three jam-packed days. Last year's event drew over 1,000 participants and spectators from all over the country. This year's festival will be "fatter" than ever, according to event organizer David Renko.

"Word keeps spreading about what a fantastic place Eureka is for mountain biking. We expect "Fatty '08 to be our biggest year yet," Renko said.

EDITORIAL: Trails, Bike Paths and Sidewalks are Infrastructure Too - Trails offer a large return for a very small investment —Robert Searns, Urban Edges.

"More creative solutions are needed, and bikes and walking shoes are part of this solution." Just how many automobile bridges can you build with the penny or so of each Federal Transportation dollar spent on bicycling and walking facilities? Of late, some have suggested that there is a causal tie between federal investment in non-motorized facilities and the growing 24 problem of deteriorating roads and bridge infrastructure. Worse still there have been comments and political advertisements trivializing bicycle and walking facilities as somehow obsolete, frivolous and less than worthy.

While these improvements might seem to be a good scapegoat for our highway ills, the facts say this is simply not true. The reality is that while nearly 10% of all trips to work, school and the store are by bike or foot, the amount of federal dollars invested nationwide for bike and pedestrian improvements has averaged around 1% over the past decade or so.

It is also noteworthy that more than 40% of the trips made daily in our cities are two miles or less and 25% less than a mile. Many of these are by car but could be made by bike or on foot— with improved facilities. We can visualize the part of each dollar spent as smaller than the number "1" on the corner of the bill. But, if you visualize what has been accomplished, catalyzed by this small investment, you would see hundreds of miles of bike paths and greenways that are transforming our cities, and countless barrels of oil not burned. You would see millions of trail users, billions of private dollars invested in quality urban redevelopment in Denver, Chattanooga, and Pittsburgh stimulated by these amenities.

Some have suggested that these investments are a throwback to the 1900s with cartoon-like figures on old-time bicycles. Perhaps it is these critics living in the past, though their past is the 1950s, a time of cheap oil, uncrowded roads and smaller populations. It's a nostalgic vision that does not take into account that today, according to the Texas Transportation Institute— The average commuter spends 88 extra hours a year in their car at a cost of \$78 billion in lost time, burning 2.9 billion extra gallons of fuel spewing tons of contaminants.

That vision also overlooks that in the 1950s a school kid had a longer life expectancy than today's child with nearly one in five clinically overweight due in large part to being driven rather than walking. How shortsighted to envision a transportation system epitomized by an SUV modeled after an assault vehicle that burns a gallon of gasoline to convey an overweight occupant eight miles down a crumbling road. Is this the pinnacle of American ingenuity and know-how? We can do better! The 2007 reality is that we need a diversity of solutions and each has its place.

While investment in alternative modes of transportation won't fully solve these daunting problems, simply building more roads and bridges won't either. More 25 creative solutions are needed and bikes and walking shoes are part of this solution and they are a very apropos means of travel for these times. No one in the bicycle and trails community suggests that highways and bridges are not absolutely necessary infrastructure to be funded and maintained. We are saying, though, that bicycle and walking facilities are also part of the picture.

Even in trying times this kind of investment can and should be a part of the picture. In the depths of the depression, FDR dispatched tens of thousands of unemployed youth into the National Forests, building a legacy of over 100,000 miles of trails, instilling a sense of stewardship and a sense of pride. Some say that action may have helped save our Republic by engaging a restless populace and stimulating the economy. Surely we can similarly allocate a penny or so on the dollar to help solve today's daunting problems. More importantly these improvements are something that the public—the taxpayers who ultimately fund all of the programs—have said they desire and demand. Survey after survey shows that trails, walking and bicycle facilities rank in first priority for recreational activity, in deciding where to buy a home and where public funds should be spent.

In Kansas City for example citizens ranked investing in trails over building a new football stadium! Indeed one of the engines transforming our inner cities and sustaining our economy is the rise of a class of creative workers and entrepreneurs who demand trails, greenways, bicycle and pedestrian amenities— an essential ingredient revitalizing urban areas from Denver to Detroit.

CONCLUSIONS and SUMMARY

From across America, city, state, and federal officials have studied the economic impact of comprehensive trail systems. Using sophisticated modeling to project and measure trail use impact on business growth and development, the prevailing opinion is “The development of trails and trail systems make a profound economic impact on the regions and communities that surround them.” Even healthcare is impacted economically by frequent trail use. Surveys indicate far fewer medical bills, lower insurance reimbursements, and fewer hospital stays by people who regularly use trails for transportation or recreation.

Numerous case studies have been illustrated to support the case statement premise, but, perhaps, one of the most important findings of all is that public opinion supports the development of trails and trail system; Americans want their government to find alternatives to traffic congestion, greenhouse gases, and high fuel consumption. While not the only answer, trail development has become a key part of the balancing equation.

As many studies indicate, taxpayers are willing to spend more to have these economic engines in their communities because they do more than impact growth and economics, trails also support quality of life by improving aesthetics (to be sure) but, also, by improving the economic and social health of the areas where they are located.

Regarding the dollar for dollar public transportation investment, it costs \$100 million dollars to build one mile of one lane of interstate highway while it costs \$250,000 to build one mile of 12- foot wide paved or concrete trail. Considering the positive economic impact of trail systems on the public return on investment, and taking into consideration the current federal deficit spending and spiraling costs of gasoline, which is really the better investment?

The mayor of Rockport, Georgia (a rural town 35 miles outside Atlanta said it best.

"Since the opening of the Silver Comet Trail, we've had more visitors in one year than in the 25 years prior."
—*Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 2002



(<http://www.nrtdatabase.org>)

Published December 31, 2008

About the Author

Terry Eastin is the co-owner of Eastin Outdoors, Inc. and is also the Executive Director of Mississippi River Trail, Inc. Throughout her career, Terry has worked tirelessly to bring attention to the conservation, health, and economic benefits of urban trails. She is the recipient of the Kodak American Greenways Award (2007), Presidential Citation, Arkansas Recreation and Parks Association (2007), Delta Tourism Person of the Year Runner-up (2007), and 2008 National Trails Symposium Co-Chair.

More articles by this author

- Icing on the Cake! (<https://www.americantrails.org/resources/icing-on-the-cake>)

More Articles in this Category

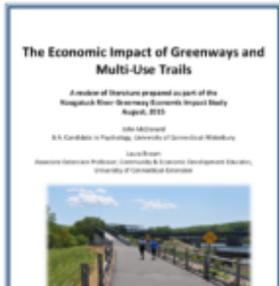
Great News on the Great American Outdoors Act!

(<https://www.americantrails.org/resources/great-news-on-the-great-american-outdoors-act>)



(<https://www.americantrails.org/news-on-the-great-american-outdoors-act>)

American Trails and our partners applaud the Senate's bipartisan effort to pass the Great American Outdoors Act by a bipartisan vote of 73-25.



(<https://www.americantrails.org/resources/the-economic-impact-of-greenways-and-multi-use-trails>)

The Economic Impact of Greenways and Multi-Use Trails (<https://www.americantrails.org/resources/the-economic-impact-of-greenways-and-multi-use-trails>)

A review of literature prepared as part of the Naugatuck River Greenway Economic Impact Study August, 2015



(<https://www.americantrails.org/resources/action-alert-national-survey-of-shovel-ready-trail-projects>)

Action Alert: National Survey of Shovel-ready Trail Projects (<https://www.americantrails.org/resources/action-alert-national-survey-of-shovel-ready-trail-projects>)

Help the trails community demonstrate its ability to put America back to work and deliver the benefits of trails to all communities.



(<https://www.americantrails.org/resources/submit-your-trail-infrastructure-projects-for-cares-act-funding>)

Submit Your Trail Infrastructure Projects for CARES Act Funding (<https://www.americantrails.org/resources/submit-your-trail-infrastructure-projects-for-cares-act-funding>)

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, signed into law by President Donald J. Trump on March 27, 2020, provides the Economic Development Administration (EDA) with \$1.5 billion for economic development assistance programs to strengthen communities.

Diversity

American Trails advances the development of diverse, high quality trails and greenways for the benefit of people and communities.

Join Us



View Local Information

Search This Site

Search

Follow Us



Why Trails

- (<https://www.americantrails.org/why-trails>)
- Benefits of Trails
(<https://www.americantrails.org/why-trails>)
- How You Can Help
(<https://www.americantrails.org/why-trails#help>)

What We Do (/programs)

- Our Programs
(<https://www.americantrails.org/programs>)
- About Us (<https://www.americantrails.org/about-us>)

Issues & Policy (/issues-and-policy)

Trails Professionals (/training)

- Training and Education
(<https://www.americantrails.org/training>)
- Jobs and Networking
(<https://www.americantrails.org/connect>)



(<https://secure.givelively.org/donate/american-trails>)



(<https://www.guidestar.org/profile/52-1591902>)



(<https://directories.onepercentfortheplanet.org/nonprofit-partners/american-trails>)

Store (<https://www.americantrails.org/store>)

Membership (<https://www.americantrails.org/store/membership-center/>)

Donate (<https://secure.givelively.org/donate/american-trails>) Advertise (</advertise>)

Contact Us (</contact-us>) Privacy Policy (</privacy-policy>) RSS (</rss.html>)