



Investing in Trails

Cost-Effective Improvements—for Everyone

In tough economic times, governments have to make the most of every tax dollar spent. That's why trails stand out. With fewer federal dollars available, these projects can be completed at a low cost and return dividends in the form of improved mobility for active travelers, children, and seniors and increased access to healthy recreation opportunities for all.

Trails positively address areas of national interest including dependence on foreign oil, public health, air quality and safety. Trail investments are extremely cost-effective transportation infrastructure, especially for trips that are three miles or less (nearly half of all trips) and those one mile or less (more than one quarter of all trips).

Trails are essential elements of any active transportation system. Where trails have been prioritized, surrounding communities have benefited greatly from economic, quality of life, health, accessibility, and mobility improvements. In national surveys¹, consumers have repeatedly chosen trails and walkability as desired neighborhood amenities, boosting local real estate values.

Increased investment in trails, bicycling and walking means:

- **More jobs per dollar:** Design, engineering and construction of walking and bicycling facilities such as trails create more jobs per dollar than any other type of transportation infrastructure construction.²
- **Positive returns for the federal budget:** The federal government pays 28 percent of all health care costs in the United States³, while expending billions annually on expensive transportation infrastructure. Investing in trails helps Americans safely incorporate exercise into their daily mobility, hitting the bottom line for both of these sectors.
- **Greater travel choices for the American public:** A bipartisan 2010 national poll⁴ found that nearly three-quarters of Americans feel they “have no choice but to drive as much as” they do, and two-thirds “would like more transportation options.” In a 2009 national survey⁵, 88 percent of rural Americans said “pedestrian-friendly” transportation facilities were important.
- **Local economies:** Americans spend more on bicycling each year than they do on airline travel.⁶ Trail-based tourism is a major economic driver in many small communities, supporting local small businesses through annual revenues of millions of dollars per trail in direct consumer spending in many cases.⁷
- **Reduced oil dependence:** Transportation is responsible for 71 percent of U.S. petroleum use.⁸ Cutting miles driven—and reduced congestion with fewer cars on the road—is among the best ways to manage our oil-related economic, environmental and security vulnerabilities. Shifting short trips to bicycling and walking could save four to 10 billion gallons of fuel each year.



Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

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Trails: Economic Powerhouses



TRAIL TOWNS

The “Trail Towns” initiative along the Great Allegheny Passage promotes businesses aiming to capitalize off the 700,000 annual trips taken along the rural trail corridor between Cumberland, Md., and Pittsburgh, Pa. Direct annual spending by trail users exceeds \$40 million. This economic infusion has enabled a resurgence of many towns that had declined with the loss of mining jobs and the original railroad. Trail-related businesses pay out \$7.5 million in wages every year, and since 2007, 54 new or expanded businesses serving trail users have created 83 new jobs in eight small towns. (www.atatrail.org/au/impact.cfm)

BILLINGS, MONTANA

The Billings, Mont., Chamber of Commerce commits to the development of trails as a long-term strategic objective on its website, noting the numerous benefits that trails bring to a community: “Develop our trail system for the economic and healthy community benefits that result from active transportation (to work and school and for leisure). Communicate the quality of life and economic benefits to the business community and general public. Bring trail support groups and stakeholders together to find solutions to connect our trails and keep them clean and safe. Seek federal support through transportation and appropriations bills.” (www.billingschamber.com/priorities/)



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MONON TRAIL

In Indianapolis, Ind., the Monon Trail is the crown jewel of the city’s trail system. It has spurred significant business development along its corridor and has been credited with the revitalization of the Broad Ripple Village neighborhood. A 2004 study found that the amenity value of trails was associated with more than \$140 million in increased property values in Marion County, which includes Indianapolis, Carmel, and other communities transformed by the Monon Trail. (Lindsey *et. al.* (2004), Property Values, Recreation Values, and Urban Greenways, *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 22(3), pp. 69–90)

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2. [http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/nchrp/docs/NCHRP08-36\(103\)_FR.pdf](http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/nchrp/docs/NCHRP08-36(103)_FR.pdf)
3. <http://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-Reports/NationalHealthExpendData/Downloads/tables.pdf>, Table 5
4. <http://t4america.org/resources/2010survey/>
5. http://www.rita.dot.gov/bts/sites/rita.dot.gov/bts/files/publications/special_reports_and_issue_briefs/special_report/2011_07_12/html/entire.html
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7. http://www.railstotrails.org/resources/documents/resource_docs/Comparison_of_Trail_Users_Surveys_FINAL.pdf
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