

How Trails Improve Communities

From www.railtrail.org, of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.

Trails and greenways are too often seen narrowly when it comes to their benefits. People tend to focus on the recreational or environmental aspects of trails and greenways, failing to see the big picture - the total package of benefits that a trail or greenway can provide to communities including public health, economic and transportation benefits, and even the effect on community pride and identity. When seen as a whole, the evidence about the far-reaching benefits of trails and greenways is compelling, especially given the minimal public investment involved compared to other undertakings with the same community goals.

Health

Trails and greenways create healthy recreation and transportation opportunities by providing people of all ages with attractive, safe, accessible and low- or no-cost places to walk, cycle, hike or run. Trails make it easier for kids and adults to fit exercise in their daily routines by connecting them with places they want or need to go. Communities that encourage physical activity by making use of trails can see a significant effect on public health and wellness.

Transportation & Livability

In addition to providing a safe place for people to enjoy recreational activities, greenways and trails often function as viable transportation corridors.

Conservation & Environment

Conservation corridors have all the traditional conservation benefits of protected lands and parks, but have the additional benefits due to their linear nature. As tools for ecology and conservation, greenways and trails help preserve important natural landscapes, provide needed links between fragmented habitats, and offer tremendous opportunities for protecting plant and animal species. In addition, they allow people to experience nature with minimal environmental impact.

Economy/Revitalization

The economic effects of trails and greenways are sometimes readily apparent (as in the case of trailside businesses), and are sometimes more subtle, such as when companies establish new factories and offices in communities with amenities like trails. There is no question, however, that countless communities across America have experienced an economic revitalization due in whole or in part to trails and greenways. See the website for specific studies showing how properties near trails sell faster and are worth more.

Historic Preservation/Community Identity

Many community leaders are surprised at how quickly trails become sources of community identity and pride. These effects are magnified when communities use trails and greenways to highlight and connect historic and cultural sites.

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Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program
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