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# ECONOMIC IMPACT OF GREENWAYS

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## **GREENWAYS TEND TO BE USED BY WALKERS AND BICYCLISTS**

Greenways vary greatly in scale, from narrow ribbons of green that run through urban, suburban, and rural areas to wider corridors that incorporate diverse natural, cultural and scenic features. They can incorporate both public and private property. They may follow old railways, canals, or ridge tops, or they may follow stream corridors, shorelines, or wetlands, and include water trails for non-motorized craft.

Some greenways are recreational corridors or scenic byways that may accommodate motorized and non-motorized vehicles. Others function almost exclusively for environmental protection and are not designed for human passage. In the case of this study, greenways refer to open space corridors used primarily for bicycling and walking. They are often designed to loop around neighborhoods, communities or the outer rim of downtown areas allowing people of every age and skill level to use them. They also tend to be on more flat terrain making them usable by strollers as well as wheelchairs. And most, but not all, tend to be wider than a standard sidewalk and made out of asphalt, concrete or other such solid surface material.

Greenways may differ in their location and function, but overall, a greenway will protect natural, cultural, and scenic resources, Greenways tend to connect open space, natural landscape features, scenic, cultural, historic and recreational sites, and urban and rural communities. They provide recreational benefits, enhance natural beauty and are perceived to improve quality of life in neighborhoods and communities.

## **GREENWAYS SERVE AS ECONOMIC STIMULANTS FOR SOME AREAS**

Greenways have proven to be catalysts in many areas for increased business opportunities and increased revenue into communities through recreation equipment rentals and sales, lessons, special events, on-site concessions and other related businesses. For example, in a 2004 study of the 45 mile long Washington to Old Dominion Trail from Arlington to Purcellville VA, an estimated 1.7 million people use the trail on an annual basis putting nearly \$7 million directly into the northern Virginia economy. Nearly 90% of the users of this particular trail are by people who live within an hour radius of the trail and yet the nonlocals contribute nearly 1.8 million into the local economy, create the equivalency of 34 full-time jobs and bring in nearly \$642,000 of personal income into the northern Virginia economy on an annual basis.

Other trails and greenways have had similar positive effects on the communities in which they are located. As noted by Rory Robinson of the National Park Service<sup>1</sup>:

- The opening of Mineral Belt Trail in Leadville Colorado led to a 19% increase in sales tax revenues which helped the city recover from a mine closure in 1999.
- In Dunedin Florida, 35% of the downtown storefronts were vacant in the early 90's. The abandoned CSX railroad track was converted into the Pinellas Rail Trail and by 2009, the storefront occupancy was 100% and business is booming.

And, as mentioned earlier in the study, the Virginia Creeper Trail has had a tremendous positive impact on Damascus Va. Business license fees collected in 2003 was \$23,000. Today, despite the downturn in the economy, revenues in 2009 surpassed \$55,000. A 58% increase in just six years. New businesses since the trail opened include seven bike rentals and shuttle services, twenty-one (21) lodging facilities within the corporate limits including an RV Park, an additional 19 lodging facilities within 2 to 17 miles of the town plus seven (7) restaurants<sup>8</sup>.

## **GREENWAYS AND TRAILS IN GENERAL INCREASE PROPERTY VALUES**

It has also been found in numerous studies that trails tend to increase property values. A 2004 survey was conducted by the National Association of Realtors and National Association of Home Builders of 2,800 people nationwide. When asked what they would like to see in a new community 57% responded walking and jogging trails. This was above park areas (54%), outdoor pools (40%), proximity to convenience (40%) and exercise facilities (35%). And a developer in Front Royal VA who donated a 50-foot wide, seven-mile long easement along a trail sold all 50 parcels bordering the trail in only four months.

And Money Magazine chose to highlight parks or trail amenities in 63% of the best places to retire in 2003 indicating that trails play an intricate part in the popularity of an area.

## **GREENWAYS AND TRAILS CAN HELP IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF A COMMUNITY**

As noted earlier, improved health of a community can help to lower health care costs considerably. The seven counties within the Spearhead Trails region are currently in the low end for overall health of its people. The Town of Big Stone Gap and the Town of Pennington Gap in Southwest Virginia are addressing this by developing greenways around both of their communities making their downtown areas much more conducive to bicycling and walking. The Town of Pocahontas has also developed an excellent walking track and is now working on a more extended walking/bicycle trail nearby.

## **GREENWAYS ARE NOT FOR EVERY COMMUNITY**

Many of the communities in Southwest Virginia are not conducive to developing greenways due to limited available land mass around the communities themselves and the steepness of the terrain. Greenways also tend to be more expensive to develop than most other trails due to the materials used to construct them and the width of many to accommodate bicyclists, strollers and walkers plus the ongoing cost involved to maintain them. Unlike typical sidewalks, Greenways tend to be 5 to 8 feet wide minimum. Shared paths may be as wide as 12 foot.

Having said this, many communities are finding them well worth the cost. The annual economic impact of cyclists at the North Carolina Outer Banks is 9 times the one-time cost of building the trail and although Maryland's Northern Central Rail-Trail's management and maintenance costs average over \$191,893 annually, the trail-related tax income to the state totals over \$303,000. Add with this the increase in surrounding property values and the perceived quality of life advantages, greenways can be well worth the investment.