

Benefits of Non-Motorized Transportation Facilities: Research Summary from Midland, Isabella, Kent, Grand Traverse and Leelanau Counties

Trails connect residents, visitors, businesses and community institutions. Through this linkage they provide economic, social/recreational and health, transportation and safety benefits. They also develop into increasingly valuable community assets over time as their status shifts from situations such as abandoned brownfield corridors (e.g. abandoned railroad ROW) to familiar and revered community assets such as the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail (PMRT) in Midland and Isabella Counties, Kent Trails in Kent County and the Traverse Area Regional Trails (TART) including the Tart, Vasa and Leelanau Trails in Grand Traverse and Leelanau Counties. Through several recent research projects conducted by Michigan State University researchers, the following knowledge about the impacts of trails has been widely shared with transportation, parks and recreation officials, elected politicians, and local government leaders. Major funding for this research comes from MI Dept. of Transportation and Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station.

Economic Benefits

Trails connect communities, residents, visitors and businesses.

- In Midland and Isabella County, trailside businesses that directly benefit from the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail (PMRT) include restaurants, hotels/motels, convenience stores, bicycle shops, senior living facilities and farmer's markets.
- 23% of Midland County PMRT users surveyed and 21% of TART users were tourists to the respective areas when trail use was assessed during April - September.
- The 1999 Midwest Tandem Bike Rally, focused on the PMRT, attracted 1,100 participants from 28 states and Canada, with 74% originating outside of Michigan. This generated 1,100 room nights in the Midland area and resulted in \$260,000 in consumer spending in conjunction with the Rally. Half the participants were "very likely" to return to the area based on their experience.
- 89 percent of businesses adjacent to the PMRT in Midland County reported the trail was a "very or moderately" positive influence on their community and Midland County.

Social/Recreational Benefits

Trails provide a family-friendly recreational venue that builds a sense of community.

- Two in three households in Midland County use the PMRT one or more times annually.
- 24% of Midland County PMRT users and 21% of TART trail users are children.
- TART trails have over 150,000 uses and the PMRT in Midland County has over 177,000 uses.
- The majority of use of the PMRT and the TART trails is from residents (over 75% of trail uses) who have daily access, often those who live or work in the vicinity of the trail.
- Kent County residents rated trail activities (walking, hiking and bicycling) as the most important activities in Kent County Parks. Kent County residents also rated paved non-motorized trails as the most important facilities to expand in Kent County Parks.

Health, Transportation and Safety Benefits

Trails provide healthful, safe links among neighborhoods, community institutions and businesses.

- 73% of Midland County residents who use the PMRT reported improved health due to trail activities. Health improvements were most commonly related to initiating and increasing fitness, stress relief, family time, weight loss and cardiovascular conditioning.
- Exercise was the most common motivation for TART trail users in Grand Traverse and Leelanau Counties. Transportation uses of the TART trail in the city of Traverse City accounted for one in five trail uses.
- Midland county Sheriff John Reder reports that crime related to the PMRT is negligible and that the social nature of the trail has enhanced opportunities for police citizen interaction, including the free distribution of bicycle helmets by bicycling officers to youths without helmets.

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- Our dedicated trails website is www.prr.msu.edu/trails. You could also request a copy of the video: The Life of a MI Rail-Trail.



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