



Use and Users of the TART Trail



Introduction

The Traverse Area Recreational Trail (TART) is a 10-mile multiple use, non-motorized trail from Bunker Hill Road in Acme Township to the M22/M72 intersection in Traverse City. The trail runs along the Grand Traverse Bay, through downtown Traverse City neighborhoods and the Mitchell Creek Watershed. To better understand trail use and users, a study was conducted by the Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails in cooperation with researchers from the Department of Park, Recreation and Tourism Resources at Michigan State University. On-site trail use observation, coupled with a self-administered survey of randomly selected trail users, was conducted from May 2 through September 28, 2002.

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Methods

Trail use was observed at four different points on the TART Trail on systematically selected days and times during the study period. Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails volunteers were positioned adjacent to the trail and counted all individuals going one direction, classifying them as adults or children and noting their mode of travel (bike, inline skating, foot or other). Observations were then extrapolated to estimate use for the May-September period. At ten-minute intervals during four hour observation periods, a volunteer would select the next adult passing and interview him/her or ask him/her to respond to a self-administered one-page questionnaire. This resulted in from two to 30 surveys distributed per observation period. During the study period, 958 surveys were distributed on the TART Trail, with 780 (81%) completed and returned.

Survey data provides two important measures. When considering respondents, this information provides accurate information about visits, but it is not representative of distinct individual users, as those who visit more frequently are more likely to be sampled and to be asked to complete a survey. However, the data can be weighted to account for this frequent use bias, and the characteristics of distinct users/visitors can be assessed. This report is organized by first describing levels of use based on observations, then describing characteristics of visits based on unweighted survey data and finally characteristics of segments of distinct users/visitors based on weighted survey data.

Observation Highlights

- The TART trail had 154,803 estimated visits with 90,975 weekday visits and 63,828 weekend visits from May 2nd through September 28th, 2002.
- Based on 154,803 extrapolated observations, there were 75,234 (49%) bicycling visits, 59,599 (38%) walking/running visits, 17,028 (11%) in-line skating visits and 2,942 (2%) visits for various other activities. There were 122,604 (79%) adult and 32,199 (21%) child visits.

Use Highlights from Surveys

- The majority (79%) of TART visits were by Traverse City area seasonal or full-time residents. However, residents only accounted for one-third of distinct users.
- More than half (57%) of TART visits were by visitors who participated in solo trail activities.
- Most (84%) of the use was by people that were over 18 years of age. Almost half of the use (42%) was by people who were between 41 and 60 years old, of these 59% were males and 41% females.
- Approximately 60% of TART use was by people who accessed the trail without driving a vehicle to it. Over half (52%) of the visits were by people that traveled one mile or less to reach the trail.
- The majority of visits (73%) were rated as highly satisfactory and none were rated as unsatisfactory.

Distinct User Highlights from Surveys

- More than a tenth of distinct trail users (13%) had contributed support to Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails and one-fifth (22%) would like to become a Friend of Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails or were already members of the organization.
- Two-thirds of the distinct users were tourists and they accounted for 21% of the visits on the TART Trail, while those who worked or lived in the area accounted for 79% of the visits. Ninety-three percent of surveyed tourists stayed overnight in the area. Of those who stayed overnight, almost half (44%) stayed in a hotel.

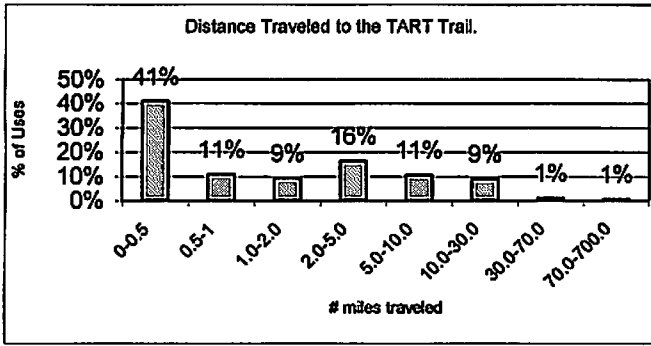
Trail Use Estimates and Characteristics

Use Estimates

The TART Trail had 154,803 estimated visits with 90,975 weekday visits and 63,828 weekend visits from May 2nd through September 28th, 2002. Visits observed and extrapolated from observations included 75,234 (49%) bicycling visits, 59,599 (38%) walking/running visits, 17,028 (11%) in-line skating visits and 2,942 (2%) visits for various other activities. There were 122,604 (79%) adult and 32,199 (21%) child visits.

TART Use Activities and Access

Survey data suggested TART Trail visits were mostly for exercise (44%), recreation (38%) or transportation to work, school, or other locations (18%). Nearly all visits on the trail (91%) were rated satisfactory (on a scale of 1-9 with 9 being highly satisfied and "1" being highly dissatisfied) with 73% being rated "9" and 18% "8." The remaining 9% were rated as a "5" (neutral), "6" or "7."



Almost two-thirds (60%) of TART visits were by people who did not drive a vehicle to reach the trail. Most (77%) visits were by people who traveled less than 5 miles to reach the TART Trail. Over half (52%) traveled 1 mile or less and 41% traveled a ½ mile or less to reach the trail. Of those traveling less than ½ mile, ninety-two percent (92%) did not drive a car or truck to reach the trail.

The most commonly used entry points to the TART Trail were Barlow (28%), followed by 3 Mile (18%), then Division (11%), 5 mile (7%), Bunker Hill (7%), Cass (7%), M-72 (6%), Hastings (5%) and other non-designated entry points (11%). Most (54%) use was by people spending one hour or less using the trail. The time that people spent on the trail ranged from a few minutes to 12 hours and the average was 1.6 hours. On the day surveyed, 93% of the people exclusively used the TART Trail and its connecting routes, while the remaining 7% used TART and the Leelanau and/or Vasa Pathway.

Demographics

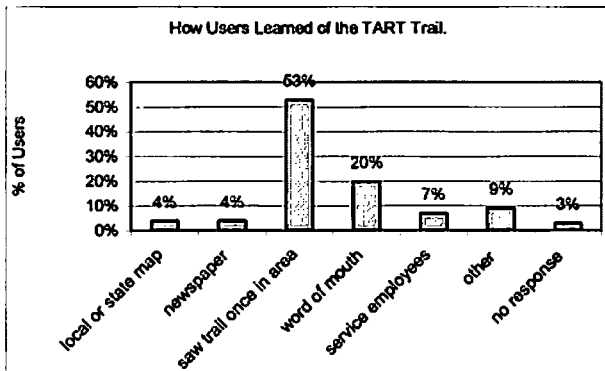
Over half of the use (57%) was by solo trail participants, while the average group size was two. The majority of use (84%) was by people who were over 18 years old. Almost half of the use (42%) was by people 41 to 60 years old; of these 59% were males and 41% females. This was followed by 35% of use by people 19 to 40 years old, of which 49% were males and 51% females. Sixteen percent of use was by youth under the age of 18 of which 58% were males and 42% females. The remaining 7% of use was by people who were 61 years of age and above, of these 63% were males and 37% females. Three percent of use was by people who had an impairment limiting work/recreation participation.

Tourist Data

Two-thirds of distinct people using the TART were tourists and they accounted for 21% of TART Trail visits. Concerning tourist visits, 93% of tourist visits resulted in an overnight stay. Of those overnight stays, 44% were in a hotel, 28% at a campground, 11% in a rented cabin or cottage and 17% in a seasonal home or with friends and/or family. One-fifth (22%) chose their lodging because of its proximity to the trail. Half of the tourist visits involving overnight stays in the Traverse City Area were for three nights or more, while the other half stayed for less than three nights. For those who stayed in paid lodging accommodations the average lodging spending was \$437.00 per party per trip. For all tourist visits surveyed on the TART Trail spent an average of \$165.00 on restaurant and bar meals and drinks per party per trip, \$72.00 on grocery and convenience store goods, \$151.00 on motor vehicle expenses, \$74.00 on recreation and entertainment, and \$50.00 on other goods, such as souvenirs and clothes. Tourist residences included two countries and fourteen states, with most of tourists residing in Michigan (58%), Ohio (7%), and Wisconsin (5%).

Distinct Trail User Characteristics

Source of Discovery of the TART Trail



A majority (53%) of distinct trail users first learned of the TART Trail by seeing the trail once they were in the area. One-fifth (20%) of users learned of the trail by word of mouth from friends or relatives. The remainder of the users surveyed learned of the trail from service employees (7%), newspapers (4%), and local or state maps (4%) or by a variety of other means (9%) including through club memberships, via the Michigan Trail Book and the Internet.

TART Surveyed Users' Trail Activities Over the Past Twelve Months

Of the distinct TART users surveyed, 90% had used the trail in the previous year while 10% were first time users. Of those who had previously used the trail, 94% were infrequent users (using the trail ten or less times per year) and 6% were frequent users (more than ten times per year). Over the 12 months prior to the day they were sampled, distinct TART users participated in a variety of activities on the TART Trail including bicycling, walking, running, in-line skating, walking dogs, skiing, and using a wheelchair or walker. Over half (60%) bicycled, 28% walked, 13% in-line skated, 9% ran, 2% walked the dog, and less than one percent cross-country skied or used a wheelchair on the TART.

For those participating in the activity, bicyclists averaged 4 visits per year, walkers 4 visits per year, in-line skaters 5 visits per year, runners 6 visits per year, and dog-walkers 14 visits per year.

Most (90%) of TART users only participated in one trail activity on the TART over the 12 months prior to being surveyed: 53% only bicycled, 22% only walked, 8% only in-line skated, and 6% only ran. The remaining 11% of TART users participated in multiple activities. In the 12 months prior to being surveyed, 74% of distinct TART users exclusively used the TART trail, while 9% used the Leelanau as well as the TART, 6% used the Vasa and the TART, and 4% used all three trails (TART, Leelanau and Vasa). The remaining 7% used other combinations of trails that did not include the TART Trail, although they were surveyed there. The primary activities for TART users on the Leelanau were bicycling, walking and in-line skating and on the Vasa they were bicycling, cross-country skiing and walking.

Trail Involvement

When asked about trail involvement, more than a tenth of distinct users (13%) reported they had contributed support to the TART Trails and 22% would like to become a Friend of Traverse Area Recreation Transportation Trails or were already members of the organization.

User Suggestions

Users were asked in an open-ended format to suggest an improvement to the TART Trail or an extension they would like to see. Fifty-nine percent of distinct users had a suggestion and 41% provided no suggestion. Those users providing suggestions were segmented three ways: 1) frequent vs. infrequent users (frequent users – more than ten TART visits in the 12 months prior to being surveyed and infrequent users – more or equal than ten visits); 2) residents vs. tourists (residents - those with a primary or seasonal home in the Traverse City area and tourists - those without a primary or seasonal home in the Traverse City area); and 3) supporters vs. others (supporters - those who reported contributing support to the trail and others - those who did not report contributing support to the trail).

Frequent vs. Infrequent Users

Improvements: Of the frequent users suggesting an improvement, one-third (34%) suggested the Leelanau Trail be paved, 33% wanted more amenities such as water fountains, restrooms and improved or more parking, and the remaining 33% would like to see more maintenance on the trail. Almost one-fourth (22%) of infrequent users with improvement suggestions would like to see more amenities along the trail, 22% would like to see the Leelanau Trail paved, 16% suggested improving various crossings, 14% wanted more signs, 4% would like to see the marina detour improved, and the remaining 24% wanted other improvements.

Extensions: Half (50%) of the frequent users suggesting an extension wanted to connect the TART Trail to the Leelanau Trail and the other half would like to see extensions east towards Williamsburg. One-third (32%) of infrequent users would like to see extensions east towards Williamsburg. More than one-fourth (28%) would like to see the TART Trail connected to the Leelanau Trail, 4% suggested more local connections, 4% wanted extensions north, 4% suggested finishing the Boardman Lake Trail, and the remaining 28% suggested extensions in general.

Residents vs. Tourists

Improvements: Approximately one-third (30%) of residents suggesting an improvement would like to see the Leelanau Trail paved. One-fourth (22%) of residents would like to see more amenities such as water fountains, restrooms and improved or more parking, 13% wanted more maintenance, 13% suggested improvements of various crossings, 9% would like more signage and the remaining 13% suggested other improvements. One-fourth of tourists with improvement suggestions would like to see more amenities. Approximately one-fifth (17%) of tourists suggested more signage; 15% wanted the Leelanau Trail paved, 15% also wanted to improve various crossings, 6% suggested more maintenance, 6% wanted to improve the marina detour, and the remaining 17% suggested other improvements.

Extensions: Two-fifths (38%) of residents suggesting an extension proposed one east to Williamsburg. One-third (31%) of residents would like to see the TART Trail connected to the Leelanau Trail, 13% wanted the Boardman Lake Trail completed, 6% would like extensions to the North and the remaining 12% suggested extensions in general. One-

third (29%) of the tourists with an extension suggestion would like to see the TART Trail extended to the east towards Williamsburg, 18% wanted to connect the TART Trail to the Leelanau Trail, 6% suggested local connections, 6% would like to see extensions to the north and the remaining 41% suggested extensions in general.

Supporters vs. Other Users

Improvements: Two-fifths (40%) of supporters of Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails suggesting an improvement wanted the Leelanau Trail paved, one-third (30%) would like to see more amenities such as water fountains, restrooms and more or improved parking lots, 10% wanted more maintenance, 10% wanted to improve various crossings, and the remaining 10% suggested other improvements. One-fifth (19%) of other users with an improvement suggestion would like to see more amenities, 17% suggested paving the Leelanau Trail, 17% would like to see more signage, 15% wanted various crossings improved, 11% would like more maintenance, 4% suggested improving the marina detour and the remaining 17% suggested other improvements.

Extensions: Two-thirds (66%) of supporters with extension suggestions wanted an extension east towards Williamsburg, 17% would like the TART Trail and the Leelanau Trail connected and the remaining 17% suggested general trail extensions. Approximately one-third (28%) of other users suggesting an extension would like one east towards Williamsburg, one-fourth (25%) suggested connecting the TART Trail to the Leelanau Trail, 7% would like to see an extension north, 7% would like the Boardman Lake Trail completed, 7% wanted to see local connections and the remaining 29% suggested extensions in general.

Across all users, the other improvements suggested included more winter maintenance, more shade/more trees, improved bicycling courtesy, looped trails, barriers between trail and roads, more trail information distribution among local businesses, and a center dividing line on the trail.

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