

# Benefits of Trails and Greenways

Trails and greenways benefit communities in a variety of ways: enhancing recreational opportunities, expanding transportation options, improving public health, preserving the natural environment, boosting local economic development, and enhancing public safety. Below are a few examples of the ways trail projects can improve local residents' quality of life:

## Transportation

- Trails provide a non-polluting, convenient and safe transportation option.<sup>1</sup>
- Non-motorized transportation options can help reduce reliance on automobiles and reduce transportation costs.<sup>2</sup>
- Trails can help reduce congestion by providing transportation options that don't clog our streets.<sup>3</sup>



Source: Flickr user Richard Masoner / Cyclelicious



Source: Flickr user memily

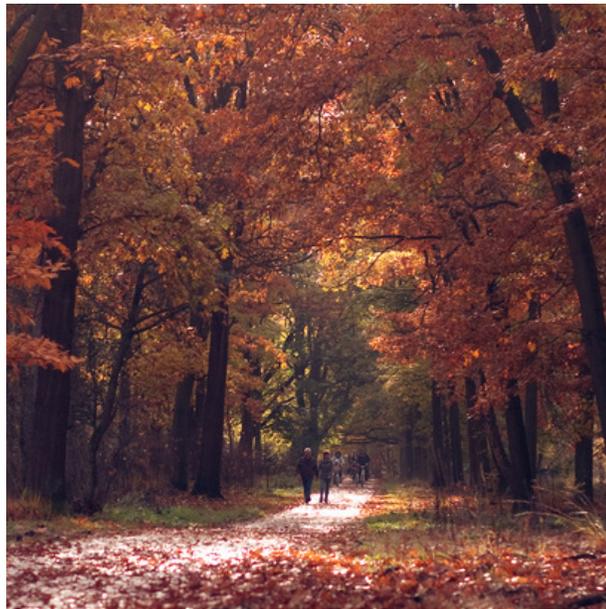
## Health

- Trails help residents of all ages incorporate exercise into their daily routines by encouraging them to walk, run, skate, and bike.<sup>4</sup>
- Fewer than one-third of Americans meet the federal recommendation of exercising five to seven times a week for at least 30 minutes. Trails provide scenic green spaces that encourage people to get outdoors and get active.<sup>5</sup>

1 Rails to Trails Conservancy. Trails and Greenways: Advancing the Smart Growth Agenda. Report. 2002.  
2 Ibid.  
3 Ibid.  
4 Rails to Trails Conservancy. Health and Wellness Benefits. Report. 2004.  
5 Office of the Surgeon General. The Surgeon General's Call To Action To Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity. Report. 2001.  
6 Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Enhancing the Environment with Trails and Greenways. Report. 1999.

## Environment

- Trails serve as tools for ecology and conservation by preserving natural landscapes, helping to reduce invasive species, and reconnecting fragmented habitats that were once separated by the built environment.<sup>6</sup>
- Trails help to improve local air quality and reduce vehicle emissions by shifting trips from driving to biking or walking, and providing vegetation that naturally creates oxygen and filters out air pollutants.<sup>7</sup>
- Trails improve water quality in both the built and natural environment. They can integrate green stormwater infrastructure to limit pollution during storm events and serve as part of a riparian zone, an area that protects waterways from pollutants and flooding.<sup>8</sup>



Source: Flickr user Fabi Fliervoet



Source: Flickr user clio1789

## Economy

- Trail-based tourism is a major economic driver in small communities, as it benefits small and local businesses through direct consumer spending.<sup>9</sup>
- In a recent study, walking and jogging trails were identified by 60% of homebuyers as the most desirable community feature that would seriously influence their decision to purchase a home.<sup>10</sup>
- Greenways, sidewalks, bicycle facilities, and other active transportation infrastructure projects create 17 jobs (design, engineering and construction) per \$1 million spent, more than any other type of transportation project.<sup>11</sup>

7 Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Enhancing the Environment with Trails and Greenways. Report. 1999.  
8 Ibid.  
9 Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Investing in Trails: Cost-Effective Improvements for Everyone. Report. 2013.  
10 National Association of Realtors. 2013 Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers. Report. 2013.  
11 Shinkle, D., & Teigen, A. Encouraging Bicycling and Walking: The State Legislative Role. Report. 2008.