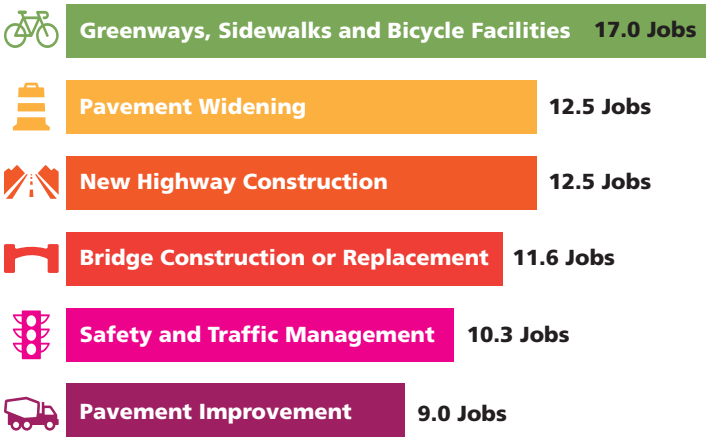
Trail Investment: A Good Deal for the American Economy

Trails and Trail Networks Revitalize American Infrastructure

Job Creation: Making a Case for Healthy Transportation Investments
Jobs Created Per Million Dollars Spent



Source: American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO)
Average Direct Jobs by Project Type (2012); jobs in terms of full-time equivalents (FTE)

More Jobs Per Dollar

A study commissioned by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) on American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) job creation found that transportation enhancements (trails, walking and biking) projects create 17 jobs (design, engineering and construction) per $1 million spent, more than any other type of project.[1]

Creating Economic Opportunity

A 2012 economic impact study of the Great Allegheny Passage, a 150-mile trail between Cumberland, Maryland, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, found that trail users spent more than $40 million annually.[2] A 2008 study found that the trail-related local businesses there (bike shops, restaurants, etc.) pay out $7.5 million in wages every year—stimulating our rural economies.[3] In Michigan, meanwhile, in- and out-of-state bicycle tourism generate $38 million and $22 million per year, respectively.[4]

Strong Communities

While the Erie Canalway Trail in upstate New York attracts users from across the country, residents from communities along the 360-mile trail account for almost 90 percent of trail use. By making 1.5 million visits annually along the trail, local users spend over $165 million in their own communities.[5]

Trails as Transportation

Between 2000 and 2012, the number of U.S. workers who commuted daily via bicycle increased from 488,000 to 786,000—a 60 percent gain.[6] With continued investment in bicycle infrastructure, we can expect more than 1 million Americans to routinely bike to work. Increasing transportation alternatives increases worker productivity and decreases wear on federal highways—saving maintenance costs.

Fiscal Responsibility

The federal government pays 28 percent of all health-care costs in the United States.[7] A study of Lincoln, Nebraska, found that every dollar spent on trails returned $2.94 in direct medical benefits.[8] Having access to walking or jogging trails is associated with a higher percentage of people meeting current activity recommendations compared with those who didn't have access to trails. Investing in active transportation infrastructure eliminates a host of negative health-risk factors in trail users—relieving strain on federal health-care programs and American taxpayers while catalyzing community development.

Brockport, New York | Photo courtesy Parks & Trails New York

Sources:

[1]http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/nchrp/docs/NCHRP08-36(103)_FR.pdf
[2]https://www.trailtowns.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Economic-impact-of-all-Trails-1.pdf
[3]https://www.trailtowns.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/07-294-GAP-Economic-Impact-Study-2008-2009_Final-Report.pdf
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[5]https://headwaterseconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/Trail_Study_109-NY-Econ-Impact-Erie-Canalway.pdf (p. 24)
[6]https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2014/acs/acs-25.pdf
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