

Study shows economic impact of NC greenways

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Posted Apr 4, 2018 at 11:50 PM

Updated at 12:05 AM

Greenways bring a lot to communities around North Carolina, from drawing tourists to drawing dollars, and a recent study by the state Department of Transportation shows that the economic impact of those outdoor paths can be huge.

The study's objective was to provide a comprehensive approach to evaluate the economic returns being generated by existing trails of regional significance in the state. The study focused on four pathways in different parts of the state: the Brevard Greenway in Brevard, the American Tobacco Trail in Durham, the Duck Trail in Duck and the Little Sugar Creek Greenway in Charlotte.

Looking at usage of the trails over several years, the study found numerous economic benefits for communities stemming from the greenways and their usage.

"This study provides evidence of the economic benefits of a collaborative multi-modal transportation system, further making the case for bicycling and pedestrian facilities," Julie White, NCDOT deputy secretary for multi-modal transportation, said in a release about the study's findings. "There's been a lot of commentary on this idea, but we now have solid, North Carolina-specific data to back it up."

The study was prepared for NCDOT by the Institute for Transportation Research and Education at North Carolina State University with Alta Planning and Design. Using data from 2015, 2016 and 2017, the study found an impact of \$19.4 million in total estimated revenue for local businesses along the four greenways that were studied.

It also found \$684,000 in total estimated sales tax revenue from those businesses that goes back to local governments.

Benefits from the one-time expenditure of \$26.7 million in trail construction are estimated at \$48.7 million in total business revenue and 790 jobs from construction of the four studied greenways. The study found a \$25.7 million impact from savings due to more physical activity, less pollution and fewer traffic injuries.

That means that for every \$1 spent on trail construction, \$1.72 annually is supported from those benefits, according to the study.

Joe Sanders, with the Blue Ridge Bicycle Club, says this study can be another arrow in the quiver for when he or others go in front of public bodies to advocate for more greenways or similar trails. He said it's nice to see North Carolina-specific confirmation of the economic benefits of greenways that can be hard to quantify.

"It's not easy to understand how something as simple as a greenway or path like that can have economic benefits," he said. "And that's been a tough one for us to convey that message."

This unbiased, third-party study shows that the paths really do have economic benefits, Sanders said. Groups often point to the positive benefits of nearby Swamp Rabbit Trail in Traveler's Rest, S.C. and the Virginia Creeper Trail around Damascus, Va., he said, but now have local examples to use.

In 2017, the third year of study for the five-mile Brevard Greenway — which saw around 76,000 annual trips over the last three years — users were pretty evenly split between male and female. Fifty-two percent of users surveyed were between ages 26 and 55; 44 percent were older than 55; and 3 percent were between 18 and 25.

Slightly more than half of the users, at 55 percent, had a household income between \$50,000 and \$149,999. The majority of users, 77 percent, completed college or earned an advanced degree, and 67 percent were local, defined as living within the same zip codes of the trail itself: 28768 and 28712.

Among all surveyed users, the average number of trips in the past two weeks was five, and 90 percent of greenway trips were for exercise or recreational purposes.

Users were also surveyed on where they spend their money around the trail. Researchers found that food-related expenditures, either at a restaurant or grocery store, were the most common places trail users spent their money.

Twenty percent of those surveyed made a restaurant-related purchase at the average cost of \$19, and 10 percent made a grocery-related purchase averaging \$32.

Overall, the study found the Brevard Greenway generates an annual sales revenue output of \$1.56 million, supports 21 jobs and generates \$614,000 in labor income.

For the full report and information on all four greenways studied, visit

<https://itre.ncsu.edu/focus/bike-ped/sup-economic-impacts/>



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People gather in July of 2016 for the official grand opening of the new extension of the Oklawaha Greenway from Patton Park area to Berkeley Mills Park. A state Department of Transportation study finds that every \$1 spent on trail construction supports \$1.72 annually from local business and sales tax revenue, as well as benefits related to health and transportation.