



Research Summary – Trails & Public Safety

Rail-Trails & Safe Communities – The Experience on 372 Trails

http://www.railstotrails.org/resources/documents/resource_docs/tgc_safecomm.pdf

Source: National Park Service & Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 1998

Subject: Multiple trails nationwide

Findings:

- Out of the 372 trails included in this study, RTC found only 11 rail-trails in 1995 and ten rail-trails in 1996 which had experienced any type of major crime, three percent of responding trails. These figures are very low, considering the 372 trails surveyed cover nearly 7,000 miles of trail and more than 45 million estimated annual users.
- The national burglary rate in rural areas was 687 incidents per 100,000 inhabitants; only three of the rural trails reported a break-in to adjacent property in 1995 and three in 1996. There are an estimated 26 million annual users on the 254 surveyed rural trails covering 5,282 miles.
- “The trail does not encourage crime, and in fact, it probably deters crime, since there are many people, tourists, and local citizens using the trail for many activities at various hours of the day.” -- Pat Conlin, Sheriff, Green County, WI.
- “The trail has not caused any increase in the amount of crimes reported and the few reported incidents are minor in nature. We have found that the trail actually led to a decrease in problems we formerly encountered, such as underage drinking along the river banks. The increased presence of people on the trail has contributed to this problem being reduced.” -- Charles R. Tennant, Chief of Police, Elizabeth Township, Buena Vista, PA.
- “Happily, I can report to you that we have had no major problems on our rail trails. The development of this park has been a very positive experience for the entire community. The park receives a lot of use from the public. The incidents we have had are for the most part misuse of the trail. Items such as a go-cart or motorcycle being driven on the trail. In 1995, the Midland Sheriff’s Office responded to eight calls on the rail trail. None of these responses required a formal report. In 1996, the Sheriff’s Office responded to eight calls, one of which required a ticket for minor possession of tobacco products. In 1997 through the first of May, we have had no calls for service on the trail.” -- John S. Reder, Sheriff, Midland, MI.

Crime on Trails

<http://lpd304.blogspot.com/2010/08/crime-on-trails.html>

Source: The “Chief’s Corner” Blog, Lincoln, NE, 2010

Subject: Incidence of crime on Lincoln’s trails and in other locations around the city

Findings:

- Lincoln's trails are quite safe, but anytime you have a place where people gather, crime will inevitably follow. There have been 27 Incident Reports on recreational trails in Lincoln so far this year.
- By comparison, there have been 130 in alleys, 677 in bars and restaurants, 1,066 at schools, 1,972 on streets, and 11,529 in residences, to name just a few other location types.

Former Rail-Trail Opponent has Different Views Today

<http://www.railstotrails.org/whatwedo/railtrailinfo/resources/firsthand.html#>

Source: Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 2000

Subject: Arden Hills, MN; B&O Trail, IN

Findings:

- “There's been no problem with litter, noise or window peepers, and no damage to the trail or my property. There's been plenty of smiles on my face, though, as I've watched from my kitchen window or my deck the families sharing time together on bikes and trikes, groups of kids with beach towels or fishing poles in their wagons heading for the lake, early risers getting in their aerobic exercise, or couples catching the last rays of a sunset as they stroll along after dinner.

“As I came to realize the positive effect this trail has had on our neighborhood, I recently sought the appointment from the city council to serve as a citizen representative on the master plan task force for the Ramsey County Park that includes the beach at Lake Johanna. Working with this group I've become a strong advocate for the inclusion of both paved and non-paved trails for recreational use throughout the 400-acre park.”

Omaha Recreational Trails: Their Effect on Property Values and Public Safety

<http://www.unomaha.edu/recadmin/trails/omahatrails.pdf>

Source: University of Nebraska at Omaha, 2000

Subject: West Papio, Keystone, and Field Club Trails

Findings:

- Experiences with trail-related theft (4.0%) and property damage (4.7%) were reported infrequently by respondents and most of these incidents were of relatively minor nature.
- Only one respondent out of 149 wanted to see the trail along their property closed. Only two have ever considered moving but these two also the same respondents who did not care for an adjoining skateboard facility.

Evaluation of the Burke-Gilman Trails Effect on Property Values and Crime

<http://www.brucefreemanrailtrail.org/pdf/Burke-Gilman.pdf>

Source: Seattle Engineering Department, 1987

Subject: Burke-Gilman Trail

Findings:

- Homes immediately adjacent to the trail did not experience any increase in burglaries and vandalism as a result of the trail. In the eight years the trail has been open, there has been an average of two incidences of vandalism or break-ins per year where a trail user was thought to be involved. This is well below the neighborhood average, which would expect about five incidents per year, given the number of homes along the trail. Police officers interviewed stated that there was not a greater incidence of burglaries and vandalism of homes along the trail. They attributed that fact to the absence of motor vehicles. The police officers said that there would be no significant trail problems as long as parking lots were away from the trail and bollards prevented motor vehicle use.
- Not a single resident surveyed felt the trail should be closed. Less than three percent said there were any problems associated with the trail that were serious enough to cause them to consider moving. Almost two-thirds of the residents felt the trail increased the quality of life in the neighborhood.
- Two of the residents surveyed indicated that they had been leaders in the group opposing the trail, and that they now believe the trail is the best thing that has happened to the neighborhood.

The Impacts of Rail Trails: A Study of the Users and Property Owners from Three Trails

http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/portals/trails/rtoimpact/impact_railtrail_final.pdf

Source: National Park Service & Penn State University, 1992

Subject: Heritage Trail in Iowa, St. Marks Trail in Florida, Lafayette/Loraga Trail in California

Findings:

- The majority of owners reported that there had been no increase in problems since the trails had been established, that living near the trails was better than they had expected it to be, and that living near the trails was better than living near the unused railroad lines before the trails were constructed. Although owners along the Heritage Trail were the least positive and those along the Lafayette/Moraga the most positive, the majority sampled along each trail was satisfied with having the trail as a neighbor.

Incidents on Silver Comet Trail Rekindle Safety Concerns

<This story is no longer available on AJC.com.>

Source: Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 2008

Subject: Assault arrests near the trail in Paulding County, GA

Findings:

- Despite the recent arrests of three teenagers for two trail attacks in Paulding County this month, law enforcement officials say reports of crime are low. The trail is used by more than 2 million people a year. "This was a big surprise," said Ashley Henson, a deputy with the Paulding County Sheriff's Office. "We primarily don't have any problems out there. This was an isolated incident for the most part."

- The Paulding County Sheriff's Department patrols 20.4 miles of the Silver Comet Trail from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily, Henson said. In the last 20 months, the sheriff's department has received 23 calls about the trail.
- The Cobb County Police Department patrols 12 miles of the trail. Two incidents have been reported this year, said Sgt. Dana Pierce.

Notes:

- Two assault incidents among 2 million trail users equates to an incidence of .001 assaults per 1,000 people. By contrast, the Paulding Sheriff's Department 2008 Annual Report reflects a county-wide rate of 2.61 assaults per 1,000 residents.
- The 23 trail-related calls over a 20-month period equates to 13.8 calls a year. In 2008, the Paulding Sheriff's Department received a total of 75,561 calls across the county, making 4,326 arrests.
- See <http://www.paulding.gov/pdf/Annual%20Sheriffs%20Report%202008.pdf> for statistics.

Bike Path Phobia: Selling Skeptics on Urban Greenway Bike Path Safety

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1145/is_8_35/ai_65132250/

Source: Parks & Recreation Magazine, 2000

Subject: National statistics on crime on or new multi-use trails

Findings:

- If you compare statistics for crime reported on the bike paths to crime reported in other areas of comparable size, it's clear that crime is generally lower on the bike path when examined based on raw geography.
- An important statistic to look at is the number of injury vehicle accidents in your community. Bicycles and pedestrians on paths that are separated from car traffic are unlikely to be hit by cars. When the injury rate on such paths is compared to the number of people in your community who are injured or killed by cars at other locations, it should be clear that many lives would have been saved if people had an alternative to motorized transportation or to sharing the road with motor vehicles.
- In response to the suggestion that bike paths bring violent crime to campuses, a representative flew to the National School Safety Center to personally review their records on every school-related violent incident in the country. Not one of those incidents had anything to do with a bike path. This observation was confirmed as accurate by NSSC staff.
- A critic in our community cited a half-dozen homicides as evidence of bike paths being dangerous. This suggestion helped stampede state legislators into blocking the bike path project, only to be overridden by the governor. If legislators had checked the facts, as we did when we pulled the reports, they would have found that the bike path was of little or no consequence to the crimes. The bike path might have been in the same area, but so was the river, the underbrush, or in particular cases an apartment complex, a street, a school, or a shopping mall. The path had no more impact on these crimes than did the Douglas firs, ducks, or squirrels, yet all of these other factors escaped demonization. The common denominator was not bike paths; it was isolation, under the cover of darkness, in an apartment or in thick underbrush.