ECONOMIC POTENTIAL OF THE GREAT AMERICAN RAIL TRAIL

JUNE 28, 2022 WEBINAR

CASPER RAIL TRAIL | COURTESY PLATTE RIVER TRAILS TRUST
Join the Trail Expert Network (TEN) today

- Exclusive newsletter
- Grant Announcements
- Trail-Building Toolbox
- Webinar library
- Peer-to-peer learning on TEN Facebook group

Join at rtc.li/TEN
Technical Support

If you encounter technical difficulties, here's how to troubleshoot:

1. Log out and back into the webinar
2. Listen by phone: 1-301-715-8592 & Webinar ID: 886 0039 9451
3. Browse Zoom Customer Support topics & contact Customer Support: [https://support.zoom.us](https://support.zoom.us)

**Live captions** have been enabled for this webinar and you can toggle them on and off using the closed captions button at the bottom of your screen.
Great American Rail Trail
Liz Thorstensen

Vice President of Trail Development,
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

liz@railstotrails.org
Trails and trail networks are foundational to economic opportunity & overall economic competitiveness.
Trails and trail networks are foundational to economic competitiveness.
Menino Survey of Mayors

- Three out of every four mayors expect residents to spend more time visiting parks and greenspace than they did before the pandemic;
- Roughly two-thirds expect residents will spend more time biking or walking.
- If these expectations hold, equitable investment in parks and open spaces will become even more critical as a foundation for an inclusive city.
“There are no cheap silver bullets in economic development, but a long-distance trail comes close; it brings in tourist dollars while also creating local activity in the towns it runs through, helping sell shoes, bikes and pumping up streetscape vitality.”

—Jon Snyder, Senior Outdoor Recreation and Economic Development Policy Advisor to Washington Gov. Jay Inslee

- One of the goals of the Great American Rail-Trail is to support community economic development

- RTC estimates that the Great American Rail-Trail will cost approximately $1 billion to complete (recouped within five years by direct visitor spending along the route, per the findings of the study)
  - Since the trail was announced in 2019, more than $54 million has been invested in projects that fill critical gaps along the route.
Trail Connectivity Matters!

- It’s about access: when trail connections are made, usage increases by 40-80% - Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

- A 2020 study by the National Association of Realtors found that people who had more walkable amenities near their homes were most satisfied with the quality of life in their neighborhood.
Megan Lawson, PhD

Economist,
Headwaters Economics
megan@headwaterseconomics.org
ECONOMIC POTENTIAL OF THE GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL®
Methods

Visitor spending & economic impacts
Other measurable community benefits
Tailoring your message
How we measure economic impact

Trail Users:
- Trail Counter Data
- Statistical Modeling
How we measure economic impact

Trail Users:
• Trail Counter Data
• Statistical Modeling

Visitor Spending:
• Previous studies
How we measure economic impact

Trail Users:
- Trail Counter Data
- Statistical Modeling

Visitor Spending:
- Previous studies

Economic Impact:
- IMPLAN statistical model
DIRECT IMPACT
DIRECT BENEFITS FROM SPENDING RELATED TO THE TRAIL.
A trail visitor spends money at local restaurants, gear stores, and other businesses, supporting workers’ salaries.

INDIRECT IMPACT
BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS PURCHASES IN THE SUPPLY CHAIN STEMMING FROM USE OF THE TRAIL.
The restaurant is supported by suppliers, delivery companies, and other industries.

INDUCED IMPACT
EMPLOYEES IN THE BUSINESS SUPPLY CHAIN SPEND THEIR WAGES IN THE COMMUNITY, CREATING A RIPPLE EFFECT.
Workers at the restaurant, supply store, delivery company and other supporting industries spend their salaries in the community for everyday needs, supporting diverse businesses.
The Great American Rail-Trail could generate annually:

- 25.6M Trips
- 2,500 New Jobs
- $229.4M in visitor spending
- $104M in labor income
- $22.8M in new tax revenue
- $161M GDP contribution
GRT will support diverse industries

- Lodging: 3,980 jobs
- Building & Landscape: 140 jobs
- Retail: 4,990 jobs
- Real Estate: 710 jobs
- Professional Services: 320 jobs
- Sporting & Athletic Goods Manufacturing: 630 jobs
- Restaurant: 8,650 jobs
- Business Management: 310 jobs
- Hospital & Other Health Care: 290 jobs
- Warehousing: 160 jobs
In Iowa, the trail is expected to generate annually:

- $1.2M in new tax revenue
- $14.3M in visitor spending
- 170 new jobs
- $5.8M in labor income
- 1,700,000 trips
- $8.9M GDP contribution
Other measurable community benefits
Rural recreation counties gain population
Non-recreation counties lose population

Net migration, 2010-2019

Change in population per 1,000 residents

Rural U.S.

Non-recreation counties
Recreation counties
Tailoring your message
GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL

TAILORING YOUR MESSAGE
Strategies for impactful advocacy

AUDIENCE

ISSUES OF INTEREST

MESSAGES TO EMPHASIZE
Strategies for impactful advocacy

AUDIENCE

• Public officials and agencies
• Businesses
• Private Citizens
Strategies for impactful advocacy

For public officials and agencies:

• Community health, safety, and welfare

• Fiscal responsibility and budgeting

• Economic diversification

ISSUES OF INTEREST

For public officials and agencies:

• Community health, safety, and welfare

• Fiscal responsibility and budgeting

• Economic diversification
Strategies for impactful advocacy

MESSAGES TO EMPHASIZE

• Increase state/local revenues by attracting visitors
• Source of community cohesion and pride
• Complements existing community plans and strategies
# Tailoring Your Message

**Audience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential messages to amplify:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social costs, benefits and outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach and education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public awareness and education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy and advocacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Issues of concern:**

- Safety
- Access
- Connectivity
- Economic development
- Environment
- Sustainability
- Public health
- Economic development
- Transportation
- Recreation

**Audience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential messages to amplify:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social costs, benefits and outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach and education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public awareness and education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy and advocacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Issues of concern:**

- Safety
- Access
- Connectivity
- Economic development
- Environment
- Sustainability
- Public health
- Economic development
- Transportation
- Recreation

---

**Practically:**

- Assess the needs of the audience
- Identify the key messages to emphasize
- Adjust the messaging approach based on audience feedback

---

**Results:**

- Improved public awareness and engagement
- Increased support for rail-trail initiatives
- Enhanced community engagement and participation
- Positive feedback from stakeholders
Subscribe to updates! headwaterseconomics.org/contact
Brandon Garrett
Chief of Staff,
City of Council Bluffs, Iowa
bgarrett@councilbluffs-ia.gov
Our Mission:

To continuously improve the quality of life and attractiveness of the City of Council Bluffs.
Where is Council Bluffs, Iowa?
Where is Council Bluffs, Iowa?
Where is Council Bluffs, Iowa?
A Growing Metro

• The Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA has a population of 1.06M people

• The metro is expected to grow by 500,000 people over the next 30 years
A Growing Metro

• Population of Council Bluffs is about 63,000
• Approximately 50% of households below poverty level
A Growing Metro

- UNMC’s “NExT” project: c. 8,700 new jobs
- Less than 3 miles west of Council Bluffs
A Growing Metro

• Mutual of Omaha’s new corporate headquarters
• Less than 1 mile west of Council Bluffs
Where will they go?

- Suburban Omaha is 30-45 minutes away from Downtown
- Council Bluffs is on the doorstep of Downtown Omaha
Chicago & Northwestern Railway
1st Avenue

- City-owned ROW
- Former railroad; tracks removed
- 1 block south of W. Broadway
- 66’ wide
- 1.8 miles from 16th to 35th
“It’s more than a trail.”
Furthering Interconnections, Revitalization, Streetscapes, Transportation, and Aesthetics for a Vibrant Economy
Furthering Interconnections, Revitalization, Streetscapes, Transportation, and Aesthetics for a Vibrant Economy
Big Picture: Connections

- Bike trails
- Bike lanes
Big Picture: Connections

Great American Rail-Trail
More Than 3,700 Miles Between Washington, D.C., and Washington State
Big Picture: Connections

Two GART routes:
- Scenic greenway
- Heart of the Community
Big Picture: Connections

Two GART routes:
- Scenic greenway
- Heart of the Community
Free City wifi in the corridor
A Multi-Use Trail

- 66’ of ROW
- Trail Concept
- Offset to south side
A Multi-Use Trail

- Trail Concept
  - 14’-16’ wide:
    - 10’-12’ asphalt
    - 2’ concrete shoulders
  - Smooth, continuous surface
  - City has equipment to make repairs
  - Funded by the City’s CIP and generous grants from the Iowa West Foundation

- Diagram:
  - Concrete
  - Asphalt 10’-12’
  - Concrete
  - 1% MIN.-1.5% MAX.
  - 2” HMA SURFACE COURSE (3/8” MIX)
  - 2” HMA INTERMEDIATE COURSE (3/4” MIX)
  - 2” HMA BASE (3/4” MIX)
  - 12” SOIL - AGGREGATE SUBBASE
Trail Lighting
Before FIRST AVE
Thomas Jefferson High School Campus

After FIRST AVE
Thomas Jefferson High School Campus
Thomas Jefferson High School Campus
Thomas Jefferson High School Campus
Trail Plazas
(every 3-4 blocks—6 total)
Trail Plazas
Big Picture: Connections
Public Art
-Pedestals for sculptures
Public Art
-Murals on backs of W. Broadway businesses
A Multi-Modal Corridor

- 2015 West Broadway Master Plan
Re-Zoning Effort
Design Standards

- Architectural Standards
  - Primary focus on facades facing W. Broadway and Major Streets
  - Quality, durable materials
  - Visual interest/pedestrian orientation

- Site Development Standards
  - Building orientation: primary focus on W. Broadway and Major Streets
  - Buildings along fronts; parking to sides and rears of buildings
New Zoning District in 2019: Mixed Commercial Residential District

**Highlights:**
- Limited commercial and residential uses
- Minimal setbacks (0-10’)
- Minimum density: 40 units/acre
- Architectural design standards
- Landscape standards
- Street trees
- On-street parking
- Parking minimums AND maximums
- Underground detention
- 50 sq. ft. of “site amenity” per dwelling
- Added limited administrative authority for CD Director on plan amendments
Proposal Selected for 28th Street:
Proposal Selected for 34th Street:
Big Picture: Connections

- Bike trails
- Bike lanes

- Future transit?
Modern Streetcar?
EXTENSIONS

The initial line can extend north, south and west in Omaha and to Council Bluffs.
Multi-Modal Bridge

- Pedestrians
- Cyclists
- Micromobility
- Streetcar
A Multi-Modal Corridor

- Multi-use Trail should be complete by end of 2022
A Multi-Modal Corridor

- Concept with future transit
Plazas Convert to Transit Stops
(every 3-4 blocks—7 total)

100' PLAZA CONCEPT
Trail Plazas
Convert to Transit Stops
Big Picture:
A Connected Metro Core
Please contact me if you would like more information:
Brandon Garrett, Chief of Staff
712-890-5268
bgarrett@councilbluffs-ia.gov
How Do You Leverage a Trail/Trail Network for Economic Development?
Involve Everyone!

- Elected Officials
- Trail Planners/ Advocates
- Local/Regional/State Agencies
- Economic Development Orgs/Chambers
- Main Street Organizations
Intentionality Is Everything!

Support funding for trails, recreation and conservation

Utilize trail network and recreation projects as OPPORTUNITIES for leveraging larger economic development initiatives, rather than separate projects

Planning trail networks and active transportation systems provides opportunities to pull multiple agencies such as parks/rec, economic development, health, planning and transportation together to leverage resources and have more impactful outcomes

Thoughtful and coordinated marketing and promotion: events, events, events!
Your Role
(or what you should advocate for)...

✓ Have a vision: Dedicate resources to developing a trail corridor as a destination by recruiting a well-planned mix of retail, housing, commercial, office, transportation options, etc.

✓ Proactively identify and address legal barriers, land and building needs, economic incentives, and businesses needed along a trail.

✓ Dedicate resources to recruiting businesses, assist business owners through the startup process, and educate them on the customer base coming from the trail.
Take action from the initial planning phases of a trail: establish a community land trust to keep costs artificially low for new businesses (or affordable housing).

Implement creative policy initiatives to incentivize and encourage businesses to locate along the trail.

Harness anticipated future growth to fund infrastructure improvements using value capture tax instruments such as Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) or Tax Increment Financing (TIF).

Assess trail-adjacent business owners’ perceptions of the trail’s impact and how to maximize it to benefit their business: interviews and surveys!

Your Role
(or what you should advocate for)...

Take action from the initial planning phases of a trail: establish a community land trust to keep costs artificially low for new businesses (or affordable housing).

Implement creative policy initiatives to incentivize and encourage businesses to locate along the trail.

Harness anticipated future growth to fund infrastructure improvements using value capture tax instruments such as Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) or Tax Increment Financing (TIF).

Assess trail-adjacent business owners’ perceptions of the trail’s impact and how to maximize it to benefit their business: interviews and surveys!
Political Leadership and Buy-In

- Indiana - Next Level Trails is the largest infusion of trails funding in state history.
- Addtl $60m American Rescue Plan

“Trails have been an important resource for Hoosiers’ physical and mental well-being throughout the pandemic,” Gov. Holcomb said. “These projects are a transformational investment in quality of life for communities across our state and a valuable tool for economic and tourism development. We are creating important connections that take us one step closer to becoming the most trail-friendly state in the country.”
Discussion and Questions

Liz Thorstensen  
liz@railstotrails.org

Megan Lawson  
megan@headwaterseconomics.org

Brandon Garrett  
bgarrett@councilbluffs-ia.gov

Moderated by Kevin Belanger  
kevinb@railstotrails.org
Thank You!