Trio of Trails a Triumph

There is more than a big mouse drawing people to the Orlando Metropolitan Area. In 2008, Florida was the first state named “Best Trails State in America” by American Trails, and according to a pair of recent studies by the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council, trails in Seminole and Orange county are doing their part to drive tourism while providing locals safe access to biking and walking facilities. The trails generate millions of dollars for the local economy, support hundreds of jobs and are a significant contributing factor in attracting tourists.

In Orange County, a trio of trails are changing the way people get around and engage with the natural and urban environment. The Little Econ Greenway, West Orange Trail and Cady Way Trail have an economic impact of $42 million annually for the local economy and sustain 516 jobs. The trails receive an estimated 1.7 million visits a year. (East Central Florida Regional Planning Council, 2011)

Just to the north, Seminole County is keeping pace with another set of notable trails. The scenic, 23-mile Cross Seminole Trail services a variety of recreational activities, including biking, rollerblading, and horseback riding, while the 14-mile Seminole Wekiva Rail Trail is doted with hotels, allowing out-of-town visitors to enjoy strolling among Florida’s lush flora and fauna. In combination with the Sanford Riverwalk and the Flagler Nature Trail, the Seminole County trail network receives more than 1 million uses a year, has an economic impact of $14 million annually and sustains 174 jobs. In addition, a quarter of busi-
QUOTES:

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—HAROLD BARLEY, executive director, MetroPlan Orlando

"This urban trail is another great amenity for our citizens because it represents the completion of an important segment of a multi-modal transportation project that actually links three of our four SunRail stations."

—BUDDY DYER, mayor

"I think they’re catching on. People are seeing that this is a great way to exercise, but it’s also a great way for mobility. In the old days, it used to be only mobility, and then it became only exercise, and now they’re seeing it both ways."

—ROBERT F. STUART, District 3 commissioner

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nesses surveyed in Seminole County reported that their employees used the trails to commute to work. The trail system is a valued priority for Seminole County residents who, in 2000, voted to approve a $25 million bond that provided for acquisition of natural land for the development of the trail network.

Beyond the economic benefits, the trails are used and appreciated by residents for their recreation and transportation opportunities. "I think they’re catching on. People are seeing that this is a great way to exercise, but it’s also a great way for mobility. In the old days, it used to be only mobility, and then it became only exercise, and now they’re seeing it both ways," says Robert Stuart, Orlando District 3 commissioner. The trail system in Orange and Seminole counties provides safe transportation for pedestrians and other non-motorized users.

The Orlando Metro area has been designated the most dangerous city for pedestrians by Transportation for America, with 59 pedestrian fatalities in 2010 despite low rates of walking. In 2012, Orange County celebrated the completion of an urban section of the Cady Way Trail, which provides separated paths for pedestrians and cyclists, and enhances safe access to local amenities and public transportation facilities.

MetroPlan Orlando Executive Director Harold Barley spoke at the urban trails opening. "With all the projects we’ve got going on in central Florida, none are more popular than the trails," stated Barley. "The trails today are the most popular projects because they serve neighborhoods and they serve the region."