



Billings, Mont.

PROFILE:

POPULATION: 103,098
MEDIAN INCOME: \$46,065
MEDIAN HOME VALUE: \$175,100
% W/ BACHELORS DEGREE: 22.2%
WALK SCORE: 44/100

STATISTICS:

- 35 miles of paved off road trails.
- BikeNet has contributed \$300,000 for local match to federal projects, primarily raised by an Ales for Trails yearly fundraiser.

QUOTES:

"Federally funded investment in our non-motorized transportation sparks private investment in trails and trail projects which lures companies, increases residential quality of life and retains a qualified workforce...Talented people move to Billings in large part because of our trail system."

—[JOHN BREWER, CEO of the Billings Montana Chamber of Commerce](#)

"If the parents see that there is a safe way then they'll encourage the children and they'll be walking and biking, too."

—[DIANE MORLEDGE-HAMPTON, SRTS Committee Member](#)



Photo: [Ron Reiring](#)



Photo: [Jennifer Brandel](#)

Building a Trail, Building a Workforce

Montana's outdoor resources are one of its leading assets. Billings, nicknamed the Magic City because of its overnight success as a railroad town in the 1880s, is located within driving distance of Yellowstone National Park, Custer National Forest, and a multitude of other outdoor activities. Since this small city put together its first active transportation plan in 1995, it has built a 35 mile network of hard surface multi-use trails, and is now focusing on developing an equally successful network of on-road bike lanes.

As "[Montana's Trailhead](#)," Billings is a great place to raise a family, launch a successful business, or grow an existing business to new levels. One in four businesses in this rural region started after the owner visited as a tourist, and Billings was ranked the [number one](#) small city to launch a business by [Fortune Magazine in 2009](#). One of the drivers behind Billings economic success — the city enjoyed unemployment rates between under 6 percent throughout the 2008–2012 recession — is its focus on quality life, and that includes options for nonmotorized transportation. According to Billings Chamber of Commerce CEO John Brewer, "talented people move to Billings in large part because of our trail system that creates the quality of life they are expecting. A healthy trail system is vital to a healthy community."

Focusing on the unique competitive advantage provided by their geography, Billings has a 95-person [Trails Committee](#) focused on developing, sustaining, and educating citizens about trails. This group is made up of members throughout the community who recognize that trails are no longer amenities, "they are essential infrastructure for business recruitment." Transportation, including bicycle trails and safe routes for pedestrians are a huge part of creating a successful community.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION
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Employees expect to live and work in a city with high quality of life, and the quality of life offered by Billings and its trails is precisely what helped U.S. Senator Max Baucus convince GE Capital to locate an operations center in Billings — a move that now employs 400 residents. The completion of a long-awaited bicycle and pedestrian trail underpass on Main Street in downtown Billings, built with federal Transportation Enhancements funding, in combination with non-profit grants and private investment was key to bringing development to the downtown neighborhood. According to John Brewer, “what was once a vacant area now has 20 businesses, including GE Capital and has experienced \$83 million in private investment. And that \$83 million in private investment would not have happened without the trail segment.”

The business community is not the only sector that recognizes the importance of the trail network to continued quality of life. Billings residents personally provide support for the continued maintenance and development of options for active transportation. [BikeNet](#), a local non-profit focused on supporting trail education and development, raises 85 percent of its funding from their yearly Ales for Trail fundraiser. The events largest income is raised from direct ticket sales. Three thousand people showed up to the 2011 Ales to Trails to celebrate Billings trails, and support further development. To date, BikeNet has contributed \$300,000 to local matching funds for federally funded projects. BikeNet, and Billings residents supporting their trail network one beer at a time, were able to contribute \$33,000 to the same Main Street underpass project that brought so much investment into the city.