
HEALTH COMMUNITY:

What You Should Know About Trail Building

WHY BUILD TRAILS?

Individuals must choose to be active, but the way a community develops its built environment can ease or impede the desire to be active. Lack of time or access to convenient outlets for human-powered transportation and recreation opportunities are reasons commonly cited by all populations as barriers to regular exercise. The development of a trail in a neighborhood makes it easier for people to incorporate exercise into their daily routines, whether for recreation or non-motorized transportation. This is particularly true if the trail is developed and designed so that it connects people to places they want to go, such as schools, transit centers, businesses and neighborhoods.

ADVOCACY:

- **TRAILS MUST BE COMMUNITY BASED.** The most popular trail and greenway projects are those that grow out of community desire and effort rather than those that are imposed on a community. Many trails have formed advocacy organizations, referred to as “Friends of the Trail” groups. The most important functions of a Friends organization are to promote it at all times and defend the trail when necessary. Find out if your existing trail or trail project has a Friends group by contacting the trail manager (if it is open for use) or the developing agency (if the trail is still under development). If no advocacy group exists, you might want to work with your local commissions, bicycle/walking/equestrian organizations, and neighbors to start one.
- **TRAIL SYSTEMS MUST ALSO HAVE STRONG COMMUNITY SUPPORT.** In order to maximize the potential use of individual trails, they need to connect to each other and should be part of a larger network of on-road and off-road bicycle and pedestrian transportation systems. Just as roads are useful because they connect, so too with trails. Regional trail planning efforts are underway around the country including in Detroit, Michigan, Cleveland, Ohio and St. Louis, Missouri, just to name a few. Like individual trails, trail systems need broad-based public and private partnerships, which include the health community. Trail systems are created through a planning process that includes community input throughout each stage of development. This community involvement generates support for the trails and ensures that the system will address the community’s needs.

DESIGN

The success of a trail is also dependent upon good design. Design of a whole trail system as well as its component parts must meet the needs of the anticipated users, which include people of all ages, socio-economic status, abilities and activities (bicycling, walking, running, wheelchair, equestrian, in-line skating). Design elements such as making trails aesthetically pleasing and easily accessible, with multiple points of entry, will also encourage use of the trail. More information about trail design can be found in *Trails for the 21st Century, Planning, Design, and Management Manual for Multi-use Trails*, by Charles A. Flink, Kristine Olka, Robert M. Searns and Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.

WHAT TYPE OF OPPOSITION TO TRAILS EXISTS?

Just like any other public project, trails do run into some opposition, especially NIMBY opposition (not in my backyard). The concerns shared by many people include safety, vandalism and liability. Many studies have examined these issues and have found that these concerns rarely materialize and can be addressed by creating a solid design and management plan. It is also important to build a strong support coalition from the outset, inform the public about the trail project, listen to their concerns and keep them involved in the planning process.

FUNDING SOURCES

There are three primary sources of federal funding for trails, Recreational Trails Program, Transportation Enhancements (TE) and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ). All are derived from federal gas taxes, legally administered through the Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA21, earlier ISTEA), but each has a specific purpose and criteria for eligibility, which trails meet. Each state gets a certain allotment based on a formula. Other federal agencies provide funding that may address specific parts of your trail project, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, Housing and Urban Development and the Forest Service. Many states provide funding through sources including state gas tax, bonds, sales tax, license plates,

lottery revenue. Learn more about trail funding sources on the Trails and Greenways Clearinghouse Web site and your state trail Web sites.

- The **RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM** funds the development and maintenance of recreational trails and trail facilities for both non-motorized and motorized recreational trails. Trail uses include: hiking, bicycling, in-line skating, equestrian use, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, off-road motorcycling, all-terrain vehicle riding, four-wheel driving, or using other off-road motorized vehicles. This program is administered by your state's park and recreation department. Learn more on the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Web site: www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrail.htm.
- **TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENTS** money can be used to fund twelve different community focused transportation activities. Trail projects funded through this program must be linked to surface transportation. In this case, a scenic hiking trail leading you through pristine wilderness would probably not qualify. However, if it serves as a place to recreate and connects a neighborhood to a commuter station or business district, then it may qualify for TE funding. In addition, project sponsors (usually a unit of state or local government) must provide a local match of approximately 20% of these federal funds, depending on the state's requirements. This program is administered by state departments of transportation. Learn more from the National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse at www.enhancements.org.
- **CMAQ** funding may be used for trails, however projects must meet certain criteria for mitigating air pollution and areas with good air quality are not eligible. When applying this to trails, think about how your trail might help reduce automobile trips in your community. For example, children could use the trail to get to school instead of being driven. The CMAQ program is managed by your state's department of transportation or local air quality management office. Learn more on FHWA's Web site at www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/cmaq.htm.

WHO ARE THE MAIN CONTACTS FOR TRAIL BUILDING ACTIVITIES IN YOUR STATE?

Each state has a **state trail coordinator**, within the state parks and recreation department, who administers the Recreational Trails Program and who can help with general information about building and managing trails in your state. The state **transportation enhancements coordinator** works within the state transportation department. The state **bicycle and pedestrian coordinator** also works for the state transportation department and is the point person for on-road bicycle facilities (such as bicycle lanes) as well as pedestrian facilities such as sidewalks. **Town/city planners** are good local contacts, make good partners for projects, and can lead you to additional partners for your project. Search for your state contacts either on www.enhancements.org or www.trailsandgreenways.org.

HOW CAN I FIND OUT WHERE THE TRAILS ARE?

Start by contacting your state trail coordinator. Many state recreational departments have information available on their Web sites, such as the South Carolina State Trails Program (www.sctrails.net). In addition, non-profit trail organizations keep track of trail locations. Rails-to-Trails Conservancy has an on-line database of all open rail-trails in the United States. American Trails also has links to trail Web sites. You may want to provide links from your Web site to these others to help people who are looking for trail information.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO WORK WITH YOUR TRAIL COMMUNITY?

Partnerships between the health and trail communities are forming around the country. Partnerships include promoting the location of trails, promoting exercise along trails, encouraging businesses to promote the use of trails for commuting, conducting studies about the relationship between health and the existence of trails, building trails, and sponsoring programs such as safe routes to school. A few examples include the Texas Department of Health Trail Registry (www.tdh.state.tx.us/trails), Redding Walkabout for Wellness, California Trail Connection (www.caltrails.org) and Indiana Walk to School Day (www.indygreenways.org/volunteers/walk2school_oct00.htm).

HELPFUL TRAIL WEB SITES AND RESOURCES

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, www.railtrails.org

Trails and Greenways, www.trailsandgreenways.org

National Center for Bicycling and Walking,
www.bikewalk.org

American Trails, www.americantrails.org

Thunderhead Alliance, www.thunderheadalliance.org

Backcountry Horsemen, www.bchc.org

National Park Service's Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, www.ncrc.nps.gov/rtca/

Land Trust Alliance, www.lta.org

International Mountain Biking Association,
www.imba.com

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TRAIL BUILDERS:

What You Should Know About the Health Community

WHO IS THE HEALTH COMMUNITY?

The health community is comprised of a large variety of state, local and private officials, agencies and organizations. The health community includes state departments of public health, local county or city public health agencies, HMOs and health insurance companies, local health officials, networks, prevention centers, health boards, foundations that promote healthy communities, health professionals, academics and educational institutions, Federal health agencies as well as organizations such as the American Association of Retired Persons and the American Heart Association.

WHY IS THE HEALTH COMMUNITY INTERESTED IN THE BUILDING OF TRAILS?

Physical activity rates in the U.S. are dangerously low. The 1996 Surgeon General’s report on physical activity and health recommends that Americans engage in at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity most days of the week. Yet only an estimated 20% of adults meet that recommendation. These high rates of inactivity are perilous due to the chronic disease afflictions that are associated with sedentary lifestyle, such as vast increases in risks for developing heart disease and diabetes. One explanation for this low level of physical activity is that incidental daily physical activity has been structured out of people’s lives. Twentieth-century labor-saving devices from the car to e-mail; workforce shifts from manual labor to white-collar jobs; increased use of computers; the prominence of cars, videos and computer games as leisure activities, have all contributed to reductions in the need for people to move. **Trails offer Americans additional safe locations and settings to walk, bike and even in-line skate during leisure time or commuting.**

HOW DO I GET IN TOUCH WITH THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMUNITY?

Contact your state or local health departments and ask to speak with someone who works in the cardiovascular disease program or health promotion programs. Lists of health contacts can also be found on the Web sites for the National Center for Bicycling and Walking, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, and the Chronic Disease Directors. Your state Governor’s Council of Physical Fitness and Sports is also a good contact for information and resources (see resource list below for Web sites).

WHAT TYPES OF PROGRAMS THAT MAY BE RELATED TO TRAILS DO STATE HEALTH DEPARTMENTS FUND?

Most health departments have a “chronic disease control” unit, wherein staff work on risk factors, such as tobacco, inactivity and poor nutrition, or work to combat specific diseases, such as diabetes, cancer, heart disease, stroke, asthma, etc. The size of the state health department will determine whether staff work on several risk factors and/or diseases or are specialists. The programs most likely to promote trails are those that promote physical activity or combat obesity. These programs may include: physical activity promotion, maternal and child health, diabetes prevention, heart health—sometimes called cardio-vascular disease (CVD) control and healthy cities and communities. In addition, programs focusing on women’s health, senior wellness programs, and diabetes control and prevention might also include a component for promoting trails.

WHAT TYPES OF FUNDING SOURCES ARE AVAILABLE?

Public health departments receive funding from a variety of sources including Federal, state and private funding.

FEDERAL

- The Federal government annually allocates Prevention Block Grant funds, overseen by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). These are not categorical funds and state health departments may determine how to sub-divide their portion of these funds among programs that work to prevent disease, injury and death.
- The CDC and other federal agencies routinely allow state health departments to apply for program-specific funding, such as diabetes control or breast cancer screening in rural communities. These are competitive grants and funding is closely monitored throughout the course of the grant, which is typically 1–3 years in length.

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently announced its intention to award several hundred micro-grants (up to \$2,010 each) to organizations whose work support the goals of Healthy People 2010, the federal public health agenda for the next decade. Programs to encourage trail use as part of a healthy, active lifestyle are among the list of eligible applicants. More information is available at www.health.gov/healthypeople.

STATE

- Many state-funded public health programs are established by state legislation, which designates both the types of programs to be funded and the amount of money they are eligible to receive. This makes it difficult for state-funded programs to shift their mission or expand their services, despite population growth or other demonstration of need.
- State health departments receive funding by partnering with another state agency, such as the Departments of Transportation or Education, or Office of Traffic Safety. An inter-agency agreement will specify how funds will be used.

WHAT RESEARCH HAS BEEN DONE TO DEMONSTRATE THE LINK BETWEEN HEALTH AND TRAILS?

Several studies have been conducted that show the use of trails and proximity to trails appears to increase the rate of regular physical activity. Environmental barriers such as travel distance and hilly terrain also appear to be important considerations when planning community trails. More work is underway to understand how access to trails and active promotion of trails can work together to improve health.

WHAT CAN I DO TO WORK WITH THE HEALTH COMMUNITY?

The public health community is an important ally to have on the side of your community's trail projects, because they represent a large constituency, which will broaden the support for your trail. Also, health officials have already been involved in influencing community design in order to protect the public health. Promoting trails is one more way to do this.

Partnerships between the health and trail communities are beginning to form around the country. Partnerships can include promoting the location of trails (most health Web sites currently do not include links to trails), promoting exercise activities along trails, encouraging businesses to promote the use of trails for commuting, conducting studies about the relationship between health and the existence of trails, co-sponsoring conferences, and safe routes to school. Additional examples of partnerships include the California Trails Connection (www.caltrails.org), Rhode Island's walking trails program, (www.pathtohealth.org), Wyoming Valley Wellness Trails Partnership in Pennsylvania, Redding Walkabout for Wellness and the Indiana Walk to School Day (www.indygreenways.org/volunteers/walk2school_oct00.htm). In California, every non-profit hospital is required to employ a full-time community benefits coordinator, who develops an annual Community Benefits Plan, which involves working with the community to identify health needs, and striving to achieve them (www.healthycities.com). Contact your local hospitals and health organizations to see if you can create a new partnership.

HELPFUL WEB SITES AND RESOURCES

American Association of Retired Persons, www.aarp.org

American Heart Association, www.americanheart.org

American Cancer Society, www.cancer.org

American Lung Association, www.lungusa.org

America Walks, www.amwalks.org

Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, www.astho.org

CDC, Active Community Environments, www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/aces.htm

CDC National Center for Chronic Disease and Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Physical Activity, www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa.

Chronic Disease Directors, www.astcdpd.org

National Association of County and City Health Officials, www.naccho.org

National Association for Health and Fitness, www.nahf.org

National Center for Bicycling and Walking, www.bikewalk.org

National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute's "Hearts and Parks" program, www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/prof/heart/obesity/hrt_n_pk/index.htm

Road Runners, www.rrca.org

Kidswalk-to-School: A Guide to Promote Walking to School, www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk.htm

How to Promote Physical Activity in Your Community, by the Association of State Directors of Health Promotion and Public Health, to order e-mail

maful02w@wonder.em.cdc.gov.



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