



Economic Impact

New or improved bicycle infrastructure can have a positive impact on the economy, both local and regional. Adding bike lanes and bike racks is low-cost compared to building parking lots or roadways, and these investments have been shown to enhance shopping districts and residential communities while generating tourism and supporting business.

Different bicycle facilities, and their targeted users, will affect different parts of the local economy. Recreational facilities that draw non-local users, such as mountain bike trails, rail-trail trails, and trail networks affect sales of “soft goods” such as food, drinks, restaurant meals, and accommodations. Facilities that are primarily used by local riders, such as bike lanes, mountain bike parks, and BMX facilities, can increase sales of “hard goods” like bicycles, equipment, clothing and gear. Measurement strategies can be different for different types of facilities.

Recreational facility data is typically obtained through user surveys; some surveys utilize volunteers who intercept users, some are postage-paid surveys left at trailheads or local businesses. Surveys may measure sales of soft and/or hard goods.

Resources:

- USDOT Federal Highway Administration: Guidebook on Methods to Estimate Non-Motorized Travel: Supporting Documentation – describes two kinds of studies to forecast bicycle or pedestrian travel levels;
<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/pedbike/98166/sec2.1.cfm>
- Rails to Trails Conservancy: Trail User Surveys and Economic Impact report – provides information on the methodology used to collect data and compares trail user expenditures and other data for 20 trails;
http://www.railstotrails.org/resources/documents/resource_docs/Comparison_of_Trail_Users_Surveys_FINAL.pdf
- Rails to Trails Conservancy Trail User Survey Workbook – help with developing and implementing a user survey;
http://www.railstotrails.org/resources/documents/resource_docs/UserSurveyMethodology.pdf
- Rails to Trails Conservancy: Schuylkill River Trail 2009 User Survey and Economic Impact Analysis – a comprehensive example of a survey completed using the Workbook as a guide for development;

http://www.railstotrails.org/resources/documents/wherewework/northeast/Schuylkill%20River%20Trail%20Users%20Survey_Final_low%20res.pdf

Measuring the effect of new or improved transportation facilities like bike lanes is more difficult, since riders are usually local and soft good sales are not new to the economy. Municipalities or larger bike advocacy organizations may conduct mail or online surveys of residents on their mode of transportation, use of facilities, and purchases of equipment or gear for an assessment of city-wide economic impact. Organizations can also develop relationships with bike shops in smaller communities to measure sales before and after a new facility like a bike park or trail system is constructed to measure the local economic impact.

Additionally, regions that are destinations for cycle tours, races, or other events can partner with the hosting organization or operator to count the tourism dollars brought to a community. Multiplied by the number of tours per season, this impact can be significant. A 2008 report on the economic impact of RAGBRAI (The Registers Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa) is an example of this kind of measurement. http://www.uni.edu/step/reports/STEP_RAGBRAI.pdf