Measuring Trails Benefits: Property Value

How are trails related to property value?
Trails can be associated with higher property value, especially when a trail is designed to provide neighborhood access and maintain residents' privacy. Trails, like good schools or low crime, create an amenity that commands a higher price for nearby homes. Trails are valued by those who live nearby as places to recreate, convenient opportunities for physical activity and improving health, and safe corridors for walking or cycling to work or school.

Price is not property owners’ only concern. Legal, well-marked access eliminates problems with trail users trespassing. Research also shows that those who opposed a trail prior to construction generally find a trail to be a much better neighbor than they anticipated.

When trails increase property value, local governments receive more property tax revenue. Depending on the trail, this revenue boost can help to partially offset the trail’s construction and maintenance costs.

Additional details on each of these topics, as well as other relevant research, are available at http://headwaterseconomics.org/trail.

Select Research Highlights
• In San Antonio, Texas, neighborhood trails were associated with a two percent house price premium. Trails that were surrounded by greenbelts were associated with a five percent house price premium.¹

• In southwestern Ohio, the Little Miami Scenic Trail is associated with higher property value in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Up to a mile away from the trail, for every foot closer to the trail, property value increase by about $7. A home a half mile from the trail would sell for approximately nine percent less than a home adjacent to the trail.²

• In suburban New Castle County, Delaware, homes within 50 meters of bike paths commanded a four percent price premium.³

• In rural Methow Valley, Washington, homes within one-quarter mile of trails benefited from a 10 percent price premium.⁴

• Along a popular trail in Austin, Texas, the price premium ranged from 6 to 20 percent, depending on whether the neighborhood had views of the greenbelt surrounding the trail and whether it had direct neighborhood access to the trail.⁵ This price premium translated to roughly $59,000 per year in additional tax revenue or five percent of the annual cost of trail construction and maintenance.⁶

How to use this information:
This research is of interest to property owners adjacent to a proposed trail, residential developers who are considering incorporating trails in new subdivisions, and local government staff who want to understand trails’ fiscal impacts.

This summary is one of several handouts describing the state of research related to the benefits of trails. The other summaries address:
• Public health
• Business impacts
• Quality of life
• Overall benefits
• Access

This series offers a succinct review of common benefits identified in the 130+ studies in Headwaters Economics’ free, online, searchable Trails Benefits Library.
• In Indianapolis, researchers found that a high-profile, destination trail was associated with an 11 percent price premium for homes within a half mile of the trail. Other trails had no price premium.7

• In Seattle, Washington4 and upstate New York9 adjacent property owners were concerned about trail-related crime before the trail was built. Researchers found no change in crime rate after the trail was built.

Methods

To measure the price premium attributable to proximity to trails, researchers use statistical models that compare the price of homes identical in all ways (e.g., size, age, number of bedrooms) except their distance from a trail. When this price difference is calculated over thousands of homes, researchers are able to estimate the average price premium for homes near trails.

Some research uses surveys to ask homeowners whether they believe the trail increases their property value and by how much. Due to the subjective and likely biased nature of these questions, conclusions from these surveys are unreliable. Careful statistical modeling provides more objective estimates.

Original studies and additional details on methods can be found in the Trails Benefits Library at http://headwaterseconomics.org/trail.

Contact

Megan Lawson, Ph.D. megan@headwaterseconomics.org, 406.570.7475.

Footnotes


Economic Benefits of Rail-Trails

One famous example of the economic benefit of greenspace is “The Central Park Effect.” New York City completed Central Park in 1863. Within 15 years, property values around the park had doubled, and city government had collected millions of dollars of additional property tax revenue.23 Today, the buildings overlooking “Central Park West” are some of the most expensive and exclusive real estate in the world. Central Park is just one example of the way that parks, trails, and greenspace can reap enormous economic benefits for a community.

Trails Raise Property Values

A survey conducted by the National Association of Realtors and the National Association of Home Builders discovered that trails are the second most important feature homebuyers considered when deciding where to live. The survey found that 36 percent of homebuyers rate trails as “important” or “very important” when determining the desirability of a neighborhood. Only highway access ranks higher than trails on the survey.24

Homebuyer preferences for trails can translate into higher property values. All across America, trails have been a benefit for buyers, builders, and realtors alike:

- A 1998 survey of property values in Brown County, Wisconsin showed that lots adjacent to the Mountain Bay Trail sold for an average of 9 percent more than similar lots not adjacent to the trail.25
- According to a 1995 study 73 percent of real estate agents in Denver, Colorado believed that trail-adjacent homes would be easier to sell.26
- Developers of Shepherd’s Vineyard subdivision in Apex, North Carolina increased the sale price of 40 homes bordering a regional greenway. Those homes were among the first to be sold.27

Trails Lower Insurance Premiums

Trails and greenways are often built along rivers or within floodplains. These trails are constructed of low impact materials and continue to absorb water in their natural state. Trails can also serve as a buffer between rivers and local housing. This process can reduce the destructive impact of floods.

The potential savings from floodplain preservation are astronomical. Almost 10 million homes are located in floodplains nationwide. Flooding causes over $1 billion in property damage every year, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency.28 But thanks to trails and greenways, we can reverse these effects and save taxpayers money.
store the Mingo Creek floodplain and reduce the impact of devastating floods in the future. Their greenway plan preserved and enhanced the floodplain surrounding Mingo Creek through a combination of woodlands, wetlands, parks, and trails. Following completion of the greenway, flood insurance premiums in Tulsa dropped by 25 percent.29

**Trails Promote Eco-Tourism**

Tourism is South Carolina’s number one industry, and hiking and camping are frequently enjoyed tourist activities. The S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism (PRT) routinely gathers information about the travel and tourism preferences of South Carolinians. According to the 1999 *South Carolina Recreation Participation and Preference Study*, 18.9 percent of South Carolina’s residents age 12 and older enjoyed hiking in 1999, while nearly 25 percent participated in camping. Furthermore, 24.5 percent of South Carolinians enjoy guided nature trails and studies. Participation in camping, hiking, and guided nature trails has increased substantially since the previous PRT survey in 1994.30

These preferences have economic consequences. Outdoor activities such as hiking and camping appeal to an upper-income demographic. Approximately one out of three families making $50,000 or more enjoy hiking, while 30 percent of campers have a college degree. Equipment for camping and hiking is a $1.75 billion industry in the United States, while camping and hiking apparel account for $259 million in annual sales.31

In Tulsa, Oklahoma, local officials designed a greenway along Mingo Creek. Over the years, Mingo Creek flooded frequently, causing devastating losses for homeowners along its banks. For example, a 1984 flood on Mingo Creek killed five people and caused $125 million in property damage. The citizens of Tulsa worked together to re-
COMMUNITY GEMS

Like a magnificent gem on display, trails and greenways attract visitors from near and far. Many communities realize the economic potential of these highly desirable recreation destinations. Trails and greenways bring job growth in construction and maintenance as well as tourism-related opportunities like river rafting tours, bike rentals, restaurants and lodging. A National Park Service study revealed that the economic impact of a trail involves a combination of newly created trail-related jobs and the expansion of existing businesses related to travel, equipment, clothes, food, souvenirs and maps.¹ That is only the beginning of the importance these amenities can have for a community’s economy. The ecological benefits of greenways can help communities mitigate costs associated with the control of water and air pollution and flood management. Dedicated trail and greenway corridors can also play a valuable role in preserving linear space for future infrastructure needs. Trails and greenways can increase perceived quality of life in a community, and consequently attract new businesses.

Americans living in rural, suburban and urban communities are demanding that green places be protected as a way to maintain their quality of life. Local governments are finding they can no longer permit poorly planned development if they are to compete for residents and businesses and pay for the infrastructure costs associated with sprawling growth. Many companies seeking to relocate or establish a corporate headquarters have cited the availability of trails as a significant factor in their decision to choose one locale over another. Cities such as Providence, Rhode Island and Chattanooga, Tennessee, transformed industrial blight into beautiful and useful riverfront greenways and

WHAT ARE TRAILS AND GREENWAYS?

Greenways are corridors of protected open space managed for conservation and recreation purposes. Greenways often follow natural land or water features, and link nature reserves, parks, cultural features and historic sites with each other and with populated areas. Greenways can be publicly or privately owned, and some are the result of public/private partnerships. Trails are paths used for walking, bicycling, horseback riding and other forms of recreation or transportation. Some greenways include trails, while others do not. Some appeal to people, while others exist primarily as a habitat for wildlife. From the hills and plains of inland America to the beaches and barrier islands of the coast, greenways provide a vast network linking America’s special places.

“IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS, WE’VE HAD MORE TOURISTS THAN IN THE LAST 30 YEARS. BEFORE, THERE WASN’T ANYTHING TO BRING THEM HERE.”

—ROCKMART, GEORGIA MAYOR CURTIS LEWIS SPEAKING OF THE SILVER COMET TRAIL, MAY 6, 2002.
ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION
trails as part of strategic plans to attract businesses and residents. Many cities have sought to emulate the success of the San Antonio Riverwalk in Texas, the anchor of the city’s tourism economy by virtue of its links to popular stores, restaurants and other destinations. While the Riverwalk is a truly unique urban environment that would be difficult to emulate, many communities find that trails and greenways provide the tools to turn geographic resources into community trademarks that become focal points of civic pride and key attractors of new residents and businesses.

- Pittsburgh Mayor Tom Murphy, testifying at a Congressional hearing, credited trail construction for contributing significantly to a dramatic downtown revitalization. Miles of trails now connect millions of dollars of economic development, including new stadiums, housing, office space and riverfront parks.²

- A 1998 report by the Center for the Continuing Study of the California Economy found that conservation of open space and higher density development were essential to preserve a higher quality of life, an important factor in attracting employers and employees to California localities.³

- After considering several cities, Ruby Tuesday, Inc., moved its Restaurant Support Center to a site adjacent to the Greenway Trail in Maryville, Tennessee. Samuel E. Beall, III, chairman and CEO, stated, “I was very impressed with the beauty of the park, which helps provide a sense of community to this area, as well as the many benefits it provides to our more than 300 employees.”⁴

AN ECONOMIC BOON FOR COMMUNITIES

The body of academic work regarding the economic benefits of trails and greenways is quite substantial. The methodology of such studies varies greatly, just as different trails vary in characteristics such as length, populations served, and the nature of adjacent residential and commercial areas. Therefore, it is difficult to apply the conclusions of one or two studies to every trail or greenway and predict what impact a new greenway might have on a given community. The fact that most greenways are multi-objective and can be viewed at different scales also makes economic evaluation more complex and difficult.⁵ However, the evidence supporting the conclusion that trails and greenways improve local economies grows greater by the day. Across the United States, trails and greenways are stimulating tourism and recreation-related spending. Trail and greenway systems have become the central focus of tourist activities in some communities and the impetus for kick-starting a stagnating economy.

- According to a 1998 study, the direct economic impact of the Great Allegheny Passage exceeded $14 million a year—even though the trail was only half-finished at that time.⁶ In Confluence, Pennsylvania, one of the project’s first trailhead towns, the trail has encouraged the development of several new businesses and a rise in real estate values.⁷

- In the months following the opening of the Mineral Belt Trail in Leadville, Colorado, the city reported a 19 percent increase in sales tax revenues.

“Properties along the trail have taken off...I’ve got a list of 300 prospective buyers waiting for property along the river and trail, and they’re willing to wait just for those properties.”

— Suzan Beal, a sales associate with Coldwell Banker Real Estate
Owners of restaurants and lodging facilities report that they are serving customers who have come into town specifically to ride the trail. The trail has helped Leadville recover from the economic blow of a mine closure in 1999.8

- The Mineral Wells to Weatherford Rail-Trail near Dallas, Texas attracts approximately 300,000 people annually and generates local revenues of $2 million.9

- Visitors to Ohio's Little Miami Scenic Trail spend an average of $13.54 per visit just on food, beverages and transportation to the trail. In addition, they spend an estimated $277 per person each year on clothing, equipment and accessories to use during these trail trips. The total economic benefit is impressive considering there are an estimated 150,000 trail users per year.10

- The Mispillion River Greenway in Milford, Delaware, is credited with inspiring downtown reinvestment and a net gain in new businesses, with more than 250 people now working in a downtown that was nearly vacant 10 years ago.11

**IMPACTS ON PROPERTY VALUES**

Trails and greenways increase the natural beauty of communities. They also have been shown to bolster property values and make adjacent properties easier to sell. Perhaps the most famous example of the ability of dedicated greenspace to have such an impact is New York City's Central Park. Within 15 years of its completion, property values doubled and the city raised millions of dollars through taxes.12 These economic impacts are seen across the country:

- A 1998 study of property values along the Mountain Bay Trail in Brown County, Wisconsin shows that lots adjacent to the trail sold faster and for an average of 9 percent more than similar property not located next to the trail.13

- In a 2002 survey of recent home buyers sponsored by the National Association of Realtors and the National Association of Home Builders, trails ranked as the second most important community amenity out of a list of 18 choices.14

- Realizing the selling power of greenways, developers of the Shepherd's Vineyard housing development in Apex, North Carolina added $5,000 to the price of 40 homes adjacent to the regional greenway. Those homes were still the first to sell.15

**COMBINING ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS**

Trails and greenways can play an important role in improving water quality and mitigating flood damage. Greenways preserve critical open space that provides natural buffer zones to protect streams, rivers and lakes from pollution run-off caused by fertilizer and pesticide use on yards and farms. They also can serve as flood plains that absorb excess water and mitigate damage caused by floods. Such conservation efforts make good sense because they save communities money in the long run.

- The estimated annual value of the water filtration attributed to wetlands along a three-mile stretch of Georgia's Alchay River is $3 million.16

- The lowest cost estimate for a water treatment alternative to natural water filtration created by wetlands in the Conagre Bottomland Swamp in South Carolina was $5 million.17

- Approximately 10 million homes are located in flood plains across America. The Federal Emergency Management Agency estimates that flooding causes more than $1 billion in property damages every year.18 Converting these areas to greenways would free that money to be spent on other needed projects. After years of devastating losses from flooding, Tulsa, Oklahoma, designed a greenway along Mingo Creek that preserved and enhanced the floodplain to include woodlands, wetlands, parks and trails. As a result of this and other important measures, flood insurance rates in Tulsa dropped by 25 percent.19

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"**THE TRAIL IS ALREADY ATTRACTING A LOT OF PEOPLE, AND WE'RE JUST STARTING TO MARKET IT. IT'S A MAJOR ASSET FOR OUR REGION, NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF THE TOURIST DOLLARS IT'S ATTRACTING, BUT ALSO BECAUSE IT'S A KEY PIECE OF OUR ECONOMIC REBUILDING EFFORTS.**"

—U.S. CONGRESSMAN JOHN P. MURTHA (D—PENN.)

SPEAKING OF THE GREAT ALLEGHENY PASSAGE
HELPFUL RESOURCES


ENDNOTES


2 Testimony before the Committee on the Judiciary of the U.S. House of Representatives, June 20, 2002.


4 Enhancing America's Communities: A Guide to Transportation Enhancements, National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse, November 2002, p. 11.


7 Enhancing America's Communities, p. 17.

8 Ibid., p. 11.

9 A Guide to Transportation Enhancements, National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse, 1999, p. 11.


11 Enhancing America's Communities, p. 14.


Studies of Existing Trails and Shared Use Paths:

Overview on Shared-Use Paths and Safety

Trails and greenways implemented around the country over the past few decades have demonstrated positive impacts to the communities where they have been installed. Studies and surveys in multiple contexts have shown paths can benefit communities by providing exercise and recreation opportunities, transportation choices, a sense of community, increased property values, and lower crime. There are many misconceptions about the safety of bicycle paths/trails and their relationship to property values/the real estate market. Below is a collection of excerpts from various resources that provide information on the often-misunderstood nature of bicycle paths/trails and their effect on the community.

Misconceptions over Trail Security¹

In their article, Rail-Trail and Safe Communities: The Experience on 372 Trails (1998), Tammy Tracy and Hugh Morris address many misconceptions concerning trail security. Their research revealed that crime rates are lower on trail networks than the overall crime rate for the region in which they are located, whether urban, suburban, or rural. The authors also discovered that in many cases the trail networks reduced minor crimes such as graffiti and vandalism. Worth noting, however, was that although there were differences among urban, suburban, and rural trails in terms of graffiti (26 percent reported in urban areas compared to 17 percent in suburban and 12 percent in rural areas) there was virtually no difference between urban, suburban, and rural related to incidents of littering and sign damage.

Facilities with More Users Have Fewer Security Issues²

An important component of security is “eyes,” in other words, the more people present, the less likelihood of criminal activity. To that end, the design of sidewalks and multi-use paths should create a pleasant environment where people want to spend time. Interviewees found that heavily used facilities experience less crime.

Burke-Gilman Trail Study³

Another study examining a trail’s effect on property values is outlined in evaluation of the Burke-Gilman trail’s effect On Property Values and Crime** in Seattle metropolitan area. The Burke-Gilman trail is an 8 to 10 foot wide, 12.1 mile, multipurpose trail that follows an abandoned railroad right of way and passes through residential neighborhoods. Data was collected via telephone by interviewing, residents near and adjacent to the trail, real estate agents who buy and sell homes near the trail, and police officers who patrol neighborhoods adjacent to the trail. According to real estate agents, property near but not immediately adjacent to the trail is significantly easier to sell, and on average sells for six percent or more. Property immediately adjacent to the trail, however, is only slightly easier to sell. Almost two thirds of the residents felt the trail increased the quality of life in the neighborhood and there is a very high level of public acceptance and support for the trail. The study concluded that concerns about decreased property values, increased crime, and a lower quality of life due to the trails was unfounded, and in fact the opposite was true, that multi-use trails are an amenity that help sell homes, increase property values and improve the quality of life.

Rails To Trails Conservancy⁴

TheRails To Trails Conservancy conducted a survey of 372 trails representing a diverse set of trail types, lengths, and geographic locations from 38 states. The motivation for the study was to address the wide range of safety concerns that local residents often voice during the development phase of a trail’s introduction. The study sites how often trail opponents refer to stories of trails attracting drug dealers, murderers, and rapists with only a handful of newspaper headlines to back up their assertions rather than empirical research. While referencing many studies that have shown that trails have not caused any increase in crime, the study goes much further by providing incident statistics for years 1993 and 1996 and comparing these to national crime rates. The study shows that occurrence of major crimes committed affecting the estimated 5 million trail users across the country, is vastly below national rates for those crimes. For somewhere between 10 to 15% of the trails surveyed, the types of problems that were most often associated with trails are litter, illegal motor vehicle use, and disruptive noise (almost half of the users surveyed said these were not problems at all.) Figure 1 shows statistics for major crimes. This study concludes that crime on rail-trails is minimal and must be

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considered in perspective with risks associated with other activities. The way to minimize crime on trails is to ensure that users exercise proper safety precautions, keep the trail well maintained, and boost trail use.

Figure 1, Comparison of Major Crime Rates between Rail Trails and the Nation (rates per 100,000 population), Source: Rails To Trails Conservancy.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>CRIME</th>
<th>URBAN</th>
<th>SUBURBAN</th>
<th>RURAL</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mugging</td>
<td>335</td>
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<td>102</td>
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<td>Assault</td>
<td>531</td>
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<td>293</td>
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<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
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<td>.04</td>
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</table>

1. Rates per 100,000 Population. FBI Uniform Crime Reports for 1995
2. Rates per 100,000 users, RTC survey results 1995

For more evidence and information on trail design and safety issues, visit the following resources:


Trail Effects on Neighborhoods: Home Value, Safety, Quality of Life: [http://www.americannaturetrails.org/resources/adjacent/sumadjacent.html](http://www.americannaturetrails.org/resources/adjacent/sumadjacent.html)

Active Transportation Beyond Urban Centers: Walking and Bicycling in Small Towns and Rural America Tracy Hadden Loh, et al., Rails to Trails Conservancy, January 2012

Recent data from the US Department of Transportation shows active transportation, biking and walking, is alive and well in rural America. Federal investment in rural areas is critical since small towns have a difficult time funding improvement projects. [http://www.railstotrails.org/resourcehandler.ashx?id=4141](http://www.railstotrails.org/resourcehandler.ashx?id=4141)

Research Finds that Homeowners and City Planners Should 'Hit the Trail' When Considering Property Values Ranier vom Hofe and Olivier Parent, University of Cincinnati, October 11, 2011 University of Cincinnati research suggests that location near nature trails could hold a financial benefit for homeowners and ultimately neighboring communities. Housing prices went up by nine dollars for every foot closer to the trail entrance. Ultimately, the study concluded that for the average home, homeowners were willing to pay a $9,000 premium to be located one thousand feet closer to the trail. Read the complete article here

The Impact of Trails on Communities Jim Wood, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, 2010. This powerpoint presentation examines the positive impacts of trails on homeowner associations, businesses, personal health, and tourism. [Download PDF](http://www.railstotrails.org/resourcehandler.ashx?id=4141)

The Impact of the Little Miami Scenic Trail on Single Family Property Values Duysu Karadeniz, University
This 92-page Masters thesis carries out a statistical pricing technique to measure the impact of the rail trail on single-family residential property values in southwest Ohio. The analysis suggests that each foot increase in distance to the trail decreases the sale price of a sample property by $7.05. In other words, being closer to the Little Miami Scenic Trail adds value to the single-family residential properties.
http://www.americantrails.org/resources/economics/littlemiamipropvalue.html

Cutting Edge Research in Trails and Greenways - Michigan's project Dr. Christine Vogt, et al., Michigan State University, Mid America Trails & Greenspace Conference, December, 2007 Chicago, IL. This presentation describes research on six of Michigan's rail trails. Included are data on the number and type of trails users, opinions of adjacent residents, and their use of the trail. Economic benefits and the opinions of adjacent businesses are also described. Download PDF (934K)

Bicycle Paths: Safety Concerns and Property Values Los Angeles County, Metropolitan Transport Authority August 20, 2007 There are many misconceptions about the safety of bicycle paths/trails and their relationship to property values/the real estate market. The LA MTA assembled a collection of excerpts from various websites, journals and other online resources that provide information on the often misunderstood nature of bicycle paths/trails and their effect on the community. Download PDF (96K)

Property Value/ Desirability Effects of Bike Paths Adjacent to Residential Areas David Racco and Amardeep Dhanju University of Delaware, November 2006 The authors do an exhaustive review of literature and examine the effects of property values in Delaware. http://www.railstotrails.org/resourcehandler.ashx?id=4482

Two Approaches to Valuing Some of Bicycle Facilities' Presumed Benefits Kevin J. Krizek, University of Minnesota Journal of the American Planning Association, Vol. 72, No. 3 Summer 2006 The author examines both on-road bicycle facilities (bike lanes) and off-road facilities (shared-use paths including rail to trails) in the twin cities area. One approach utilizes a statistical model that relates property values to a large number of variables and then looks for positive and negative indicators. The author finds that proximity to off-road facilities in urban areas increases property values while the opposite appears to be the case in suburban areas. The author suggests that the results for suburban trails may be influenced by other phenomena. In particular, he suggests that lower home values in suburban areas may be a legacy effect of the reduced value of residential property near active railroads. http://attfiles.org/files/pdf/krizek-valuing-bicycle%20facilities-benefits.pdf

Public Choices and Property Values, Evidence from Greenways in Indianapolis Center for Urban Policy and the Environment, Indiana University-Purdue University, December 2003. This study examines the MLS database of sales of about 10,000 homes. The study relates the selling price to a long list of variables, including proximity to rail trails. A sophisticated analysis shows that this proximity is statistically insignificant except for the Monon Rail Trail. The Indianapolis Star noted, "It may not have sand and crashing waves, but the Monon Trail is the equivalent of beachfront property in the Indianapolis area." Download PDF

Home Sales near Two Massachusetts Rail Trails Craig Della Penna, The Murphys Realtors, Inc., January 2006. Homes sales were examined in the seven Massachusetts towns through which the Minuteman Bikeway and Nashua River Rail Trail run. Statistics on list and selling prices and on days on the market show that homes near these rail trails sold at closer to the list price and much faster than other homes in the area. Download Home Sales near Two Massachusetts Rail Trails (PDF)

Salem-Concord Bikeway Demand Estimate Alta Planning + Design and Rizzo Associates, Nov. 2003 This study gathered usage statistics for three New England shared-use paths as a basis for projecting usage of a proposed rail trail. The usage is strongly dependent on the number of residents within two miles of the trail. The average number of daily trips averages one trip per 33 residents with usage being about three times higher on weekends than on weekdays. http://www.nh.gov/dot/nhbikeped/pdf/Salem-ConcordDemandReport.pdf

Indiana Trails Study The 2001 study done by the University of Indiana is the country's most up to date study on rail trails and the associated issues. Six Indiana projects (including two rail trails) are covered. The "Final Trail Reports" includes detailed reports on each of the six trails plus a 45 page overall summary report. In the summary report, there is very interesting reading covering the opinions of trail neighbors, property values, crime, etc. Download PDF
Questionnaires were mailed to nearby businesses and adjacent residents. Support for the rail trail increased after it was constructed. Only 2% of businesses and 12% of residents felt that the rail trail was a worse use of land than the abandoned railroad right-of-way. Approximately 80% of residences had at least one member who used the rail trail. https://www.railstotrails.org/resourcehandler.ashx?id=4765

Nebraska Rural Trails: Three Studies of Rail Impact Donald L. Greer, University of Nebraska at Omaha, October 2001. This 98-page study looks at the impact of rural rail trails for three trails in Nebraska and one in Iowa. The responses are broken down into three groups: residents, businesses and rural property owners. Overall, the first two groups are positive concerning the impact of the trails. The opinions of the property owners are more mixed. http://www.unomaha.edu/recadmin/trails/nebtrails.pdf

Pinellas Trail Community Impact Study Pinellas County Metropolitan Planning Organization, September 2001. This study was carried out of a trail near St. Petersburg, FL. A homeowners survey indicates a high percentage of those living near the trail perceive it as an asset. Property values are increasing at a rate faster than for homes not near the trail. 90% of realtors said that home sales near the trail had increased “somewhat” or “significantly”. Crime rates are the same as elsewhere in the county. Executive summary (PDF)

Rail Trails and Safe Communities, The Experience on 372 Trails by Tammy Trace & Hugh Morris, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, January 1998. This 28-page study surveyed law-enforcement officials and crime statistics. The report shows that crime on rail-trails is not a common occurrence and that they remain much safer than many other environments.
The research suggests that converting an abandoned rail corridor to a trail tends to reduce crime. http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/docs/rt_safecomm.pdf

This extensive resource book covers many aspects of the positive values of greenways. There is extensive quantitative information included. A chapter of particular interest which addresses the concerns of abutters, especially property values, is in http://www.nps.gov/pwro/rtca/propval.htm The chapter contains extensive quantitative information.