Project Report for

Property Value/Desirability Effects of Bike Paths
Adjacent to Residential Areas

prepared for

Delaware Center For Transportation

and

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by

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Introduction

Studies and surveys in other parts of the country have shown that bicycle paths (trails, greenways) can contribute to areas where they are established by providing recreation, transportation, a sense of community, increased property values, and lower crime. On the other hand, in some cases with many new initiatives for the creation of walking and biking paths there is resistance by members of the community who worry that property values may be negatively impacted, that there will be loss of privacy, and the potential for more crime in their neighborhood. Success of bike and walking trail projects depends often on planners understanding and communicating what is known about the impacts of bike and walk ways in a community.

This project examined the literature and presents what is known concerning the impacts on property values with the introduction of bicycle paths and also presents some information about crime in relation to bicycle and pedestrian paths. In addition a statistical model was developed in this project using Delaware property data to examine the impact of bicycle paths on nearby housing.

In addition to being used by bicycles, “bike paths” are typically designated for use also by pedestrians, skaters, and other non-motorized uses and are typically referred to as paths, trails, or greenways. Bike lanes addressed in this project were for the most part, dedicated paths rather than portions of the public roadway simply striped or designated as a suggested bike way due to extra road width or shoulders. There is no information to suggest that a bike path designated as such by only the presence of a shoulder in the road would impact property values in Delaware as they are for the most part indistinguishable from the road corridor itself and are more a feature of the existing road rather than the neighboring properties.
Part One, Studies Addressing Impacts of Bike Paths

Some bike path initiatives around the country to create bicycle or pedestrian paths have been encouraged and facilitated by the local communities, while in other communities, such facilities have encountered resistance where residents fear that the introduction of a path or trail will lead to decrease in property values and/or increase in crime that would adversely affect the quality of life. Some property owners bordering proposed bike paths or greenways have shown opposition to trails in “their back yards”. There is a large debate as to whether pedestrian and bicycle trails effect property values and negatively impact the quality of life. Increasingly, projects such as “Rails to Trails” program, greenways initiatives, and a variety of bike path projects, site the need to address the economic impact question in order to gain crucial public support for their projects. A literature review was undertaken for this project to identify previous studies on the issue.

In the last two decades a number of studies covering a wide spectrum of bike path related issues at local, regional and national levels have been conducted. Federal Highway Administration (FHA) on the national level and various departments of transportation at state level are the major funding agencies for such studies. The following portion of this section explores studies related to the economic impacts of bike paths on property values.

**Colorado Study**

One of the most often referenced studies is “The Effect of Greenways on Property Values and Public Safety”* in Colorado. It involves a survey of residents adjacent to a variety of trails in Metro-Denver. This study found that the effect of the trails on neighboring property was beneficial rather than detrimental. For residents of single family homes adjacent to the trail, 29% of residents believed that location of the trail would increase the selling price of their homes. 7% of the residents felt that the trail would make the home easier to sell, 29% were positively influenced by the trail in their decision to buy their

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home. For residents of town homes, apartments, and condominiums adjacent to the trail, 42% felt it would increase the selling price of their home and 17% were influenced by the trail to move to the area. No public safety issues could be directly linked to the trail. Police interviewed as part of the study doubted there was a concern for public safety during day light hours due to the constant passage of people on or around the trails.

**Burke-Gilman Trail Study**

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.

**The National Association of Reversionary Property Owners (NARPO)**

The National Association of Reversionary Property Owners (NARPO) is “a group of property owners who have joined together to educate all landowners in the United States about the true ownership of railroad, utility, road and other governmental types of Rights-Of-Way (ROW).” (http://home.earthlink.net/~dick156/row.htm) The group argues that groups, in particular rail-to-trail groups, are unconstitutionally taking abutting property

Conclusion

This project performed a literature review of past information and studies concerning property values related to the presence of bicycle and pedestrian paths. In addition Delaware property values were examined to determine how the presence of a bicycle path may affect property values.

Bike facilities are typically also for pedestrians, skaters, and other non-motorized uses and are typically referred to as paths, trails, or greenways. Bike lanes addressed in this project were for the most part, dedicated paths rather than portions of the public roadway simply striped or designated as a suggested bike way due to extra road width or shoulders.

The majority of studies examined indicate that the presence of a bike path/trail either increases property values and ease of sale slightly or has no effect. Studies have shown that neighbors of many bike paths/trails feel that the quality of life of their neighborhood has been improved, that the trails were a good use of open space, and in the case of abandoned railways were an improvement from before the trails went in. There is definitely a large portion of the population that sees bike paths as an amenity and will seek out residences near trails, parks, and other natural resource areas. Some studies express that those recently moving into areas near bike paths are generally more favorable to them than those who have lived in neighborhoods before the construction of a trail. In some areas a large majority of neighbors are very happy with the trails, even some who were originally opposed to their construction. Whether or not a bike path is generally beneficial for a locale depends on a number of factors.

Opponents to bike path and trail projects often say that property values will be adversely affected but there is not much evidence of this. The National Parks Service hits the mark when they say, “Increases in nearby property values depend upon the ability of developers, planners and greenway proponents to successfully integrate neighborhood development and open space. Designing greenways to minimize potential homeowner-park user conflicts can help avoid a decrease in property values of immediately adjacent
properties.” There are numerous examples in the literature that indicate overall success depending on attention to design and maintenance and addressing issues and problems with property owners promptly.

A model developed in this project that examined factors affecting property values in Delaware and the effects of proximity to a bike path show that a bicycle path would be expected to slightly increase property values by about $8,800.

Related to property values is crime, and information about crime near or on bike paths is referenced in this report. Crime happens in most types of land use (e.g. parking lots, college campus, abandoned railway, street corner, stores, wooded areas, industrial parks, private homes etc) and with any recreational facility the level of crime typically is correlated with the level of crime in the surrounding area and the design of the facility. A well-managed recreation facility is more likely to be a better neighboring land use than an abandoned property. This study concludes that crime on bike paths is minimal and must be 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.