

CHAPTER ONE

LITERATURE REVIEW

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This chapter summarizes the most recently published community impact studies and articles that relate to multiuse trails. The review focuses on publications that examine community opposition to new trail extension projects; particularly, those based upon concerns that crime or noise would reduce property values. In Pinellas County, much of the opposition appears to center upon a fear that by increasing accessibility, the trail will introduce crime into adjacent neighborhoods and thereby reduce property values within adjacent neighborhoods.

The following reviews include a description of the project, a summary of the associated issues or impacts, any pertinent data collected to address those issues and identification as to what courses of action are being recommended or have been implemented to address local concerns and/or mitigate the impacts.

A. *“The Impacts of Rail-Trails: A Study of the Users and Property Owners from Three Trails”* (U.S. Department of the Interior; National Park Service; Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program; February 1992)

This study examines the benefits and impacts of rail-trails and systematically assesses both the trail users and nearby property owners of the same trails. Three diverse rail-trails from across the U.S. were studied: (1) the Heritage Trail, a 26-mile trail which traverses rural farmland in eastern Iowa; (2) the St. Marks Trail, a 16-mile trail beginning in the outskirts of Tallahassee, Florida and passing through small communities and forests to the Gulf of Mexico; and (3) the Lafayette/Moraga Trail, a 7.6-mile paved trail 25 miles east of San Francisco, California. The following are some of the findings from the study:

- The amount of “new money” brought into the local county(s) by trail visitors from outside the county(s) was \$630,000, \$400,000 and \$294,000 annually for the Heritage, St. Marks, and Lafayette/Moraga Trails, respectively.
- Overall, trail neighbors had experienced relatively few problems as a result of the trails. The majority of owners reported that there had been no increase in

problems since the trails had been established, that living near the trails was better than they had expected it to be, and that living near the trails was better than living near the unused railroad lines before the trails were constructed.

- Landowners along all three trails reported that their proximity to the trails had not adversely affected the desirability or values of their property. Of those who purchased property along the trails after the trails had been constructed, the majority reported that the trails either had no effect on the property's appeal or added to its appeal.

The results of this study indicate that rail-trails are valuable recreation resources that provide a wide array of benefits to users, neighborhood landowners, and local communities. They attract and keep a core of very dedicated users, and in many instances, attract visitors from outside the local communities. These non-local visitors are the most important source of economic benefits generated by the trails. Most landowners were satisfied with living near the rail-trails examined in this study.

B. *Rail-Trails and Safe Communities; Executive Summary* (*Rails-to-Trail Conservancy in cooperation with the U.S. Department of the Interior; National Park Service; Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program; 1998*)

This comprehensive study combines a survey of rail-trails across the country and an analysis of federal crime statistics to illustrate that the fact that greenways with trails have very low crime rates. Rail-trail managers across the country were surveyed in an effort to document the level of crime on trails and to identify effective crime mitigation measures adopted along the trails. Only 11 of the 327 survey respondents reported any type of serious crime for 1995, and only ten reported incidences of serious crimes for 1996. These figures are very low considering that the survey covered over 7,000 miles of trails and approximately 45 million annual trail users. The trail crime rate was calculated at 0.53 crimes per 100,000 persons. These crime rates were contrasted with national major crime statistics in urban, suburban and rural areas. The national crime statistics identified a rate of muggings for the year 1995 at 335 per 100,000 people. These national

crime rates, compared with the 1995 trail crime rates, revealed that rail-trails experience very low major crime rates.

The study also reviewed trail design and management strategies employed to minimize the possibility of crimes. Various rail-trails incorporated the use of design features such as long sight lines, the reduction of possible hiding places, and lighting at trail heads. The survey also revealed that 69 percent of the trails have a type of safety patrol to deter crime and found that trails, because of the high user population at various times of the day, actually discourage the incidence of crime.

C. Evaluation of the Burke-Gilman Trail Effect on Property Value and Crime; Executive Summary (*Seattle Engineering Department, Office for Planning, May 1987*)

The purpose of this study was to determine what effect, if any, the Burke-Gilman Trail has had on property values and crime affecting property near and adjacent to the trail. Another purpose of the study was to evaluate public acceptance of the trail and the trail's effect on the quality of life of adjacent neighborhoods. The need for the study became apparent when property owners in a different area of the city expressed concern over the development of a new trail project on the basis that it might reduce their property values, increase crime, and generally reduce the quality of life. The Burke-Gilman Trail is a 12.1-mile long (9.85 miles are in Seattle), eight to ten foot wide, multi-purpose trail that follows an abandoned railroad right-of-way. Most of the trail passes through residential neighborhoods. The study concluded that:

- Real estate companies regard the Burke-Gilman Trail as an amenity that helps to attract buyers and to sell property.
- Property near but not immediately adjacent to the Trail is significantly easier to sell and sells for an average of six percent more as a result of its proximity to the trail.
- The trail has no significant effect on the selling price of homes immediately adjacent to the trail.

- The existence of the trail has had little, if any, effect on crime and vandalism experienced by adjacent property owners.
- Police officers interviewed stated that there is not a greater incidence of burglaries and vandalism of homes along the trail. They attribute that fact to the absence of motor vehicles.
- The police officers also said that there would be no significant trail problems as long as parking lots are away from the trail and bollards prevent motor vehicle use.
- There is a very high level of public acceptance and support for the trail. Not a single resident surveyed felt the trail should be closed. Less than three percent said there were any problems associated with the trail that were serious enough to cause them to consider moving and almost two-thirds of the residents felt the trail increased the quality of life in the neighborhood.

In summary, this study indicates that concerns about decreased property values, increased crime, and a lower quality of life due to the construction of multi-use trails are unfounded. In fact, the opposite is true. The study indicates that multi-use trails are an amenity that helps sell homes, increase property values and improve the quality of life.

D. *Converted Railroad Trails: The Impact on Adjacent Property* (Leonard P. Mazour Masters Thesis, Kansas State University, Department of Landscape Architecture, Manhattan, KS, 1988)

This study involved the survey of adjacent property owners along the Luce Line State Trail in Minnesota to determine the impacts of the trail on property values. The Luce Line State Trail is a 63-mile long, limestone and natural surface trail that runs from Plymouth to Cosmos, Minnesota. The former railroad line was converted to a trail for biking, hiking, horseback riding, snowmobiling and skiing.

The results of the study indicated that property owners, appraisers and realtors believed that trail had positive impacts on Trail-adjacent property values. Properties included in the survey encompassed a variety of land uses from suburban residential and small town commercial to farmland. Overall, 87 percent of the surveyed property owners

felt that the trail increased or had no effect on the value of their property. In reviewing the survey results based on property owner characteristics, 56 percent of farmland residents thought that the trail had no effect on their land value, and 61 percent of the suburban residential owners noted an increase in their property value as a result of the trail. More recent property owners felt that the trail had a positive effect on property value than did continuing owners. Realtors and appraisers were also interviewed as part of the study. The results of these interviews indicated that the trail was a positive selling point in the sale of residential, small town commercial, and agricultural properties proposed for development.

E. General Conclusions from the Literature

The literature review was designed to determine if similar community concerns are being raised regarding trail development in other areas of the country and to outline findings of other studies. Interestingly, all of the literature seems to indicate that crime does not appear to be introduced into neighborhoods. Instead, the studies generally conclude that the popularity of multiuse trails may deter crime simply because trails are popular and used throughout the day leaving few opportunities for crimes to occur unnoticed. The absence of vehicular access along the trail also acted as a deterrent to crime.

As far as property values are concerned, surveyed property owners, realtors and appraisers indicated that multiuse trails either had no effect on the marketability of property or the trails were perceived as an amenity which led to slight increases in property values. Trail neighbors experienced few trail-related problems. Most owners reported that there had been no increase in problems since the trails had been established and that living near the trails was better than living near the unused railroad lines. Landowners also reported that their proximity to the trails had not adversely affected the desirability or values of their property. Of those who purchased property along the trails

after the trails had been constructed, most indicated that the trails either had no effect on the property's appeal or added to its appeal.

One study also found that multiuse trails increased tourism and brought between \$300,000 and \$600,000 of "new money" into the local economy annually depending upon the trail. The results of that study found rail-trails to be valuable recreation resources that provide a wide array of benefits to users, neighborhood landowners, and local communities. In particular, trails attract a core of dedicated users and attract visitors. These non-local visitors are the most important source of economic benefits generated by the trails.

Accordingly, this Literature Review indicates that multiuse trails are an asset to the community, have a deterrent effect on crime, have a neutral or slightly positive effect on property values, and tend to bring new money into the local economy.