

CHAPTER FOUR

RESIDENTS' MAILBACK QUESTIONNAIRE

RESIDENTS MAIL-BACK QUESTIONNAIRE

The residents survey consisted of a mail-back questionnaire hand-delivered to 1,488 residents along the four previously identified market areas of the Pinellas Trail. This quantitative survey was designed to assess resident perceptions regarding the trail's impact on neighborhood quality and property values.

A. Survey Distribution

To obtain a valid cross section of the various communities traversed by the Pinellas Trail, the MPO's general planning consultant designed a study sample to distribute 1,600 surveys within the four market areas along the Pinellas Trail, or roughly 400 questionnaires in each market area. The St. Petersburg and Dunedin market areas had to be extended slightly to ensure that 400 surveys could be disseminated. The questionnaires were handed out to residents of properties located within approximately one quarter of a mile on either side of the trail along the selected segments. Ultimately, 1,488 surveys were distributed to area residents.

B. Response Rate

Of the 1,488 surveys disseminated, 441 surveys were mailed back completed. This response represents a response rate of 30 percent with the highest response from the Seminole market area (37%). The average and individual market area response rates fall within acceptable limits for mail-back surveys. A further break down of responses is contained in *Table 4.1: Distribution and Responses*.

Distribution and Responses.

Table 4.1: Survey Response Rate

Area	Distributed	Returned	Response
Seminole	400	146	37%
St. Petersburg	400	108	27%
Clearwater/Dunedin	400	112	28%
Palm Harbor	288	75	26%
Total	1,488	441	30%

Only 288 questionnaires were distributed in Palm Harbor because of two obstacles. First, many Palm Harbor homes and condominiums are located within private gated communities that hampered the distribution of questionnaires. Second, the Palm Harbor market area is a sparsely populated part of the trail. Residents mailed back 75 questionnaires from Palm Harbor, which provides a sufficient sample size for analysis.

C. Survey Instrument

The questions and potential answers are listed in *Exhibit 4-1*. This mail-back questionnaire was stamped and self-addressed. The form was to be completed by one member of the household. It included a brief explanatory paragraph, and MPO staff contact names and telephone numbers. The questions were formulated to evaluate resident perceptions regarding the trail's impact on adjacent neighborhoods. The questionnaires were handed out to residents living within approximately one quarter of a mile of the trail. Within each of these areas, a cross section of community types was selected to encompass urban, suburban, and commercial activity center areas. Recently sold homes (within 2-3 years) were targeted in an attempt to ensure they comprised an estimated 25 percent of the survey sample.

D. Response Summaries

Survey responses are summarized in the following sections, beginning with an overview of the socioeconomic characteristics of respondents. The summaries also identify the user's perceptions of the trail. *Appendix A* includes the written comments that were provided by resident respondents. *Appendix B* is a summary of the survey responses from trail-abutting business owners.

Exhibit 4.1: Survey Form

1. How long have you lived at this address?
 - a. Fewer than 5 years
 - b. 5 years or more
2. Do you own or rent your home?
 - a. Own
 - b. Rent
3. Including yourself, how many adults age 18 or over living in the household are:
 - a. Retired?
 - b. Working at home?
 - c. Working outside the home?
 - d. Not employed?
4. If there are minors or college-age children living in your household, how many are there:
 - a. Under five years old?
 - b. In grades K-5?
 - c. In grades 6-12?
 - d. In college?
 - e. Over 16 but not in school?
5. Would you say that you ride your bicycle or jog/walk more often, less often or about the same since you began living near the Pinellas Trail?
 - a. More often
 - b. Less often
 - c. About the same
6. How often do you or others in the household use the Pinellas Trail?
 - a. Never (skip to question 8)
 - b. Seldom (a few times a year)
 - c. Sometimes (1 or 2 times a month)
 - d. Often (about once a week)
 - e. Daily (5 to 7 times a week)
7. Why do you use the trail? (Rank all that apply by putting a "1" by the type of trip you make most frequently, "2" by the second most frequent type of trip, "3" by the third most, etc.)
 - a. To commute to work
 - b. To travel to school
 - c. To visit a friend / socialize
 - d. To visit a park / recreate
 - e. To shop or eat out
 - f. To exercise
 - g. Other (please describe and rank _____)
8. How would you rate the trail on the following?

	Excellent Not Sure	Good	Fair	Poor
a. Ease of access from home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Ease of access to destinations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Crime safety/security	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Crash/traffic safety	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Ease of travel (level of congestion)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Other (please describe below and rate)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. On a scale of negative three to positive three, with negative three being very negative, positive three being very positive and zero being no change, how has the Pinellas Trail changed:

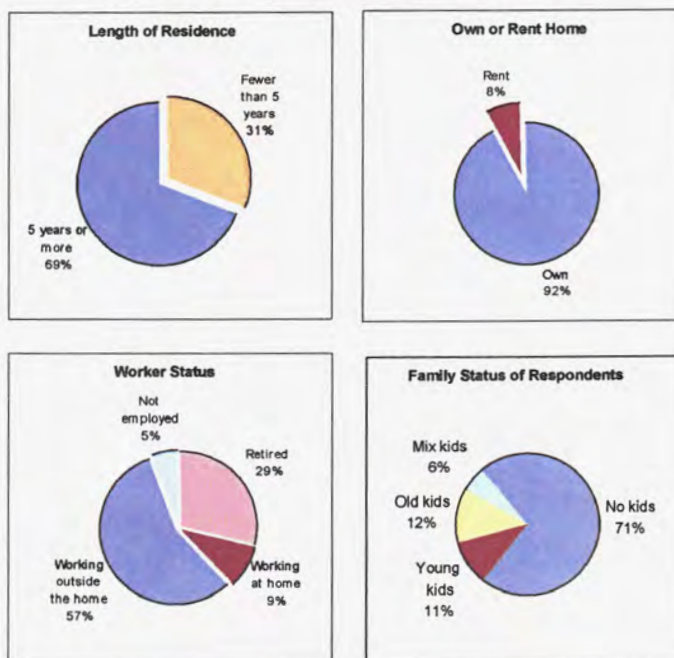
tive

	Negative			No Change			
	- 3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
a. Your property value?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Neighborhood property values?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Level of Crime/Sense of security?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Privacy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Noise?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Accessibility to activities/destinations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Neighborhood acquaintances?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

1. Socioeconomic Characteristics

The 441 households that mailed back surveys represent a population of 736 adults and 216 children. In general, the survey respondents are homeowners (92%) with an average of 2.16 persons per household (Exhibit 4.2). Most respondents have lived in the same house for more than five years (69%) and currently work outside of the home (57%). Twenty-nine percent are retired and 29 percent have children. There is a good balance between employed and retired respondents as well as a fair mix of family types and ownership status.

Exhibit 4.2: Socioeconomic Characteristics



2. Trail Use

Sixty-five percent of those surveyed indicated that they use the Pinellas Trail at least once a week, thus confirming its popularity among Pinellas residents (Exhibit 4.3). This finding was echoed by the responses from the realtors and homeowner's association officers' surveys. The remaining use characteristics are summarized in the three pie charts below.



Exhibit 4.3: Trail Use

Most area residents use the Pinellas Trail to either “exercise” (43%) or to “go to a park” (22%). The trail is also used for non-recreational, or utilitarian trips. Eleven percent of those surveyed use the trail “to shop” and another 13 percent use it to “visit friends.”

Two-thirds of the respondents exercise more since the trail opened while another 28 percent exercise about the same amount as they did before the trail opened. Another six percent say that they exercise less since the trail was constructed.

3. Perceptions of the Trail

The Pinellas Trail appears to be a popular recreation and transportation facility with respondents. Over 80 percent of those surveyed said that access from their home was “excellent” and another 13 percent said that access was “good.” Survey respondents also considered the trail to have “excellent” or “good” access to destinations (44% and 40% respectively) and ease of travel is also rated highly (42% and 48% respectively).

A majority of respondents (61%) rate the trail as excellent or good in terms of crime and security. Likewise, more than 60 percent rated the trail either “good” or “excellent” in terms of crashes, as summarized in the pie charts to the right (Exhibit 4.4). In the comments portion of the surveys, residents expressed a variety of safety and crash concerns. Most of the comments specifically identified the failure of both motorists and cyclists to stop at trail crossings. The crossings at 64th Street and east of Pasadena were identified by name. Some comments expressed concern about high-speed cyclists and skaters colliding with pedestrians.

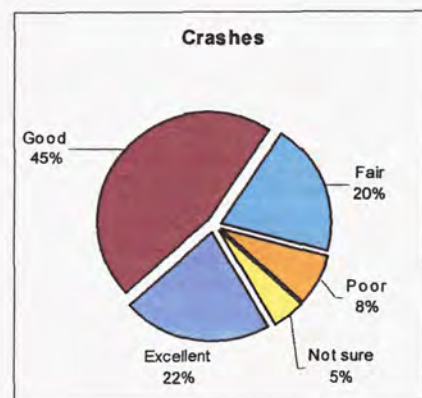
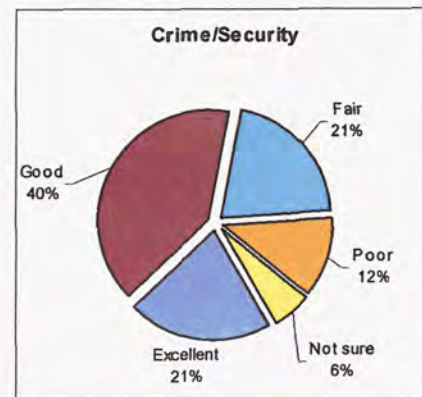
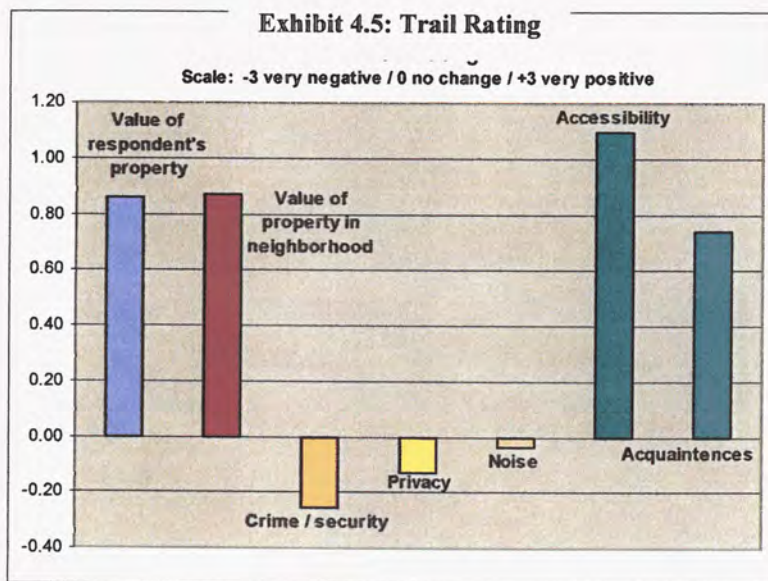


Exhibit 4.4: Trail Perceptions

4. Composite Rating

A composite rating is used to identify overall satisfaction with the trail (Exhibit 4.5). The rating uses a scale that ranges from negative three (a very negative rating) to a positive three (a very favorable rating). A rating of zero indicates neither positive nor negative perceptions.



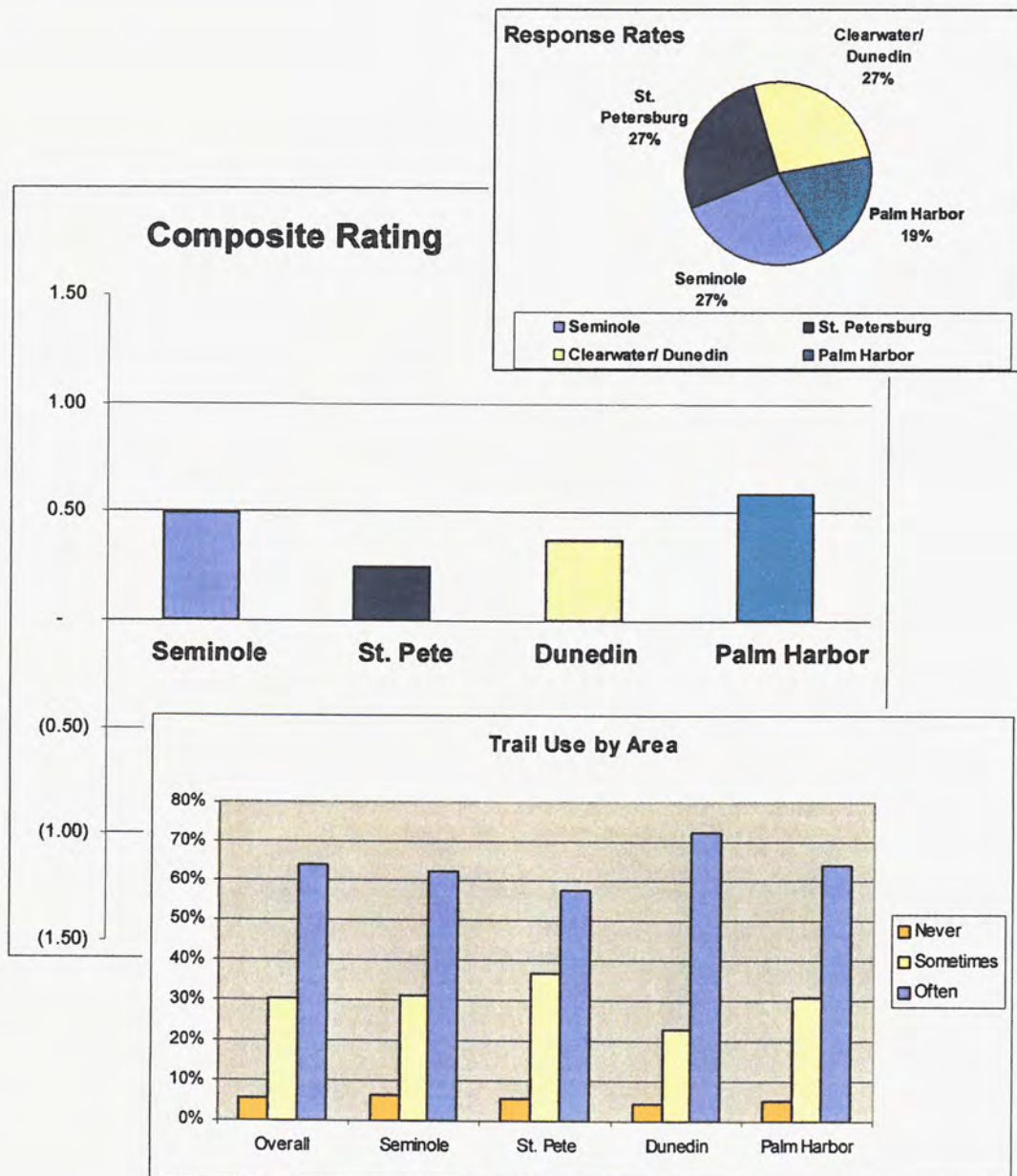
On the whole, respondents rated the trail's impact on access to activities, value of their property, value of neighborhood properties and neighborhood acquaintances positively. They negatively rated the trail's impact on crime/ security, privacy and noise. Several stratifications of the survey sample attempt to explain how use and perceptions of the trail differ among respondents. The stratifications are by market areas, length of residence, employment status, family status, and frequency of use.

5. Market Areas

Perceptions from the four market areas (Seminole, St. Petersburg, and Dunedin and Palm Harbor) are nearly identical (Exhibit 4.6). The highest ratings are from residents along the Seminole and Palm Harbor segments, the lowest are from the St. Petersburg area.

Use of the trail is also similar among the four areas. Dunedin residents are more likely to use the trail "often" (72%) but the percentage that never used the trail is essentially the same among the market areas. Despite the perceived inequities cited in the homeowner's association officer's survey, trail use and perceptions by abutting property owners are not impacted by community or location.

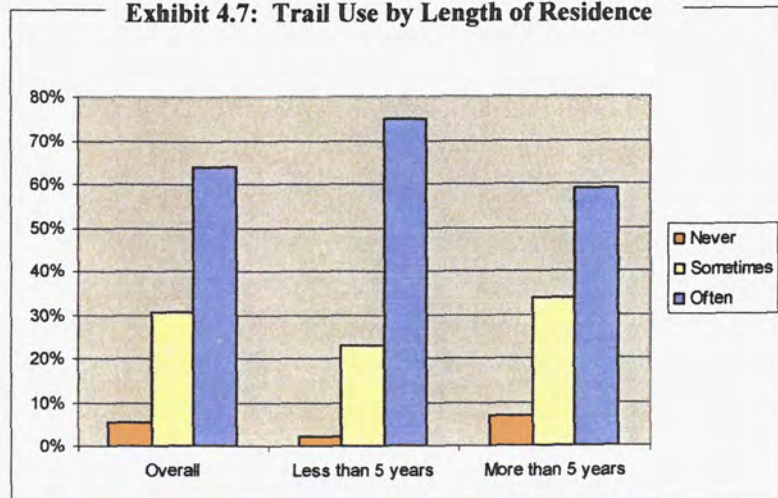
Exhibit 4.6: Trail Perceptions by Market Area



6. Tenure

The length of residence influences use of the trail (Exhibit 4.7). Those who have lived in the house fewer than five years are more likely to use the trail (75%) than those who had lived in the house longer (59%). The realtor survey supports this finding, with many realtors suggesting that those with active lifestyles tend to seek homes near the trail. As with the use results, the composite ratings indicate that those living in the house less than five years are somewhat more satisfied with the trail than those with longer tenure.

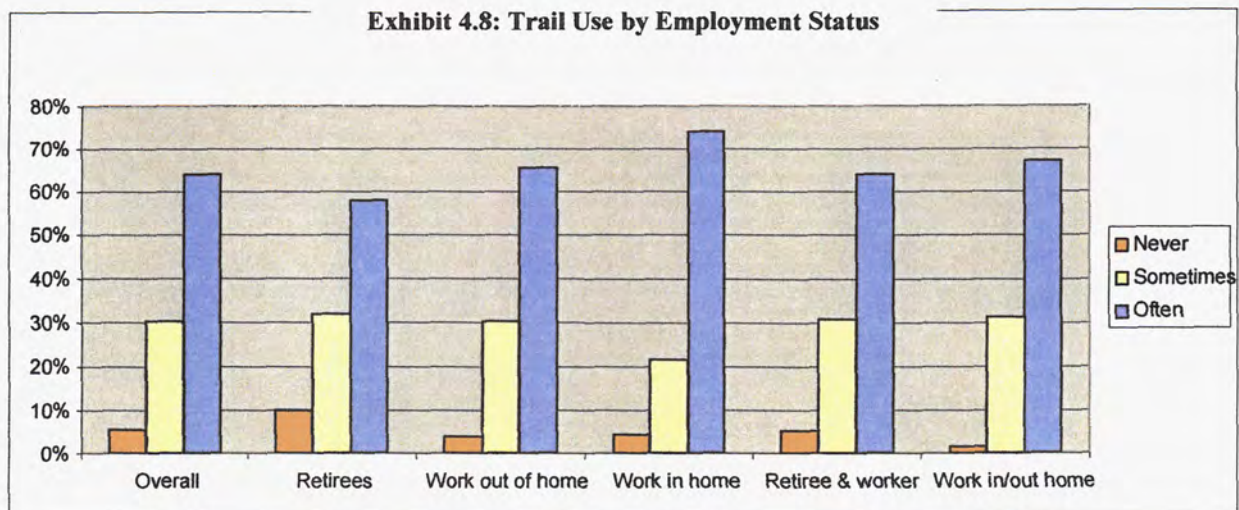
Exhibit 4.7: Trail Use by Length of Residence



7. Employment

Households were stratified by those where all members are retired, those where members worked in the home, those where members worked out of the home and those with a combination of employment types (Exhibit 4.8). Several of the realtors interviewed believe that retirees do not use the trail as often as others, but there is also a sense the trail attracts those with

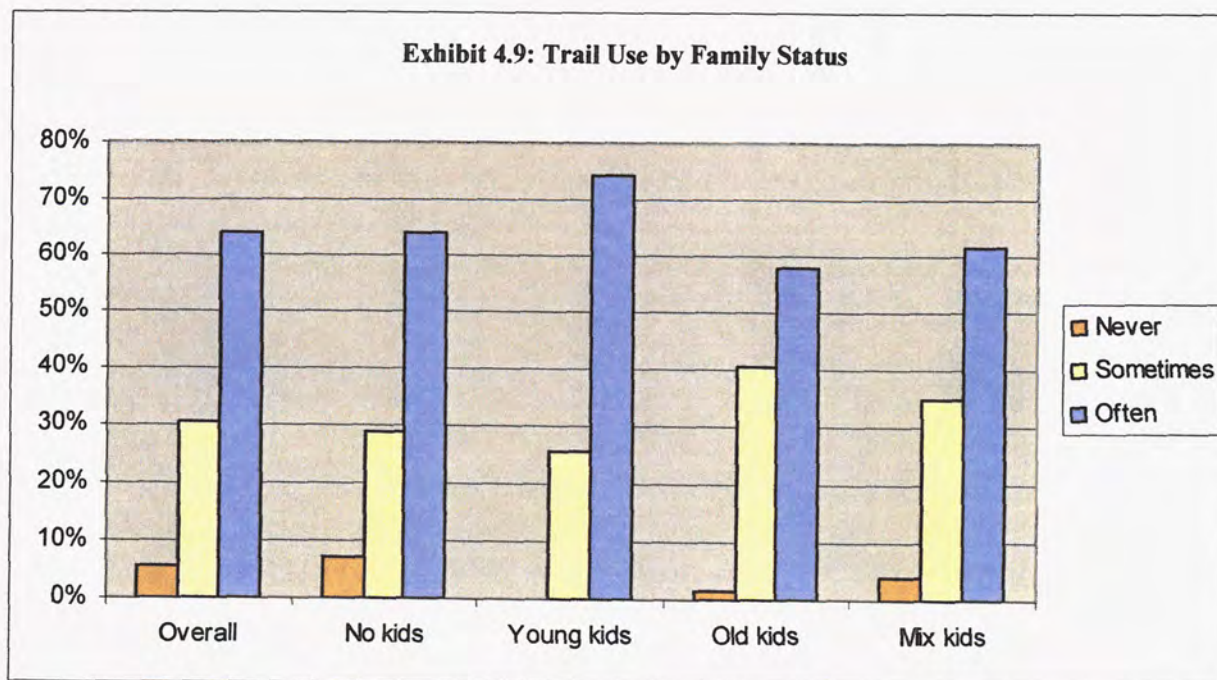
Exhibit 4.8: Trail Use by Employment Status



active lifestyles, which does not always relate to age or retirement status. Survey results support the latter notion. Findings indicate that 58 percent of retirees use the trail once a week or more, which is very comparable to the 64 percent of the overall sample who use it as often. The highest trail use is by respondents who work at home (75%). As with use, retirees tend to have a slightly lower positive opinion about the trail than other household types, but the difference is not significant.

8. *Family Status*

Realtors also believed that households with young children use the trail more frequently than other families (Exhibit 4.9). This assumption is borne out by the survey results (75 percent of families with young children use the Pinellas Trail “often”). Fewer families with older children use the trail “often.” While children in a family influence trail usage, it appears that there is a base level of trail usage across family types.



E. Trail Use And Perceptions

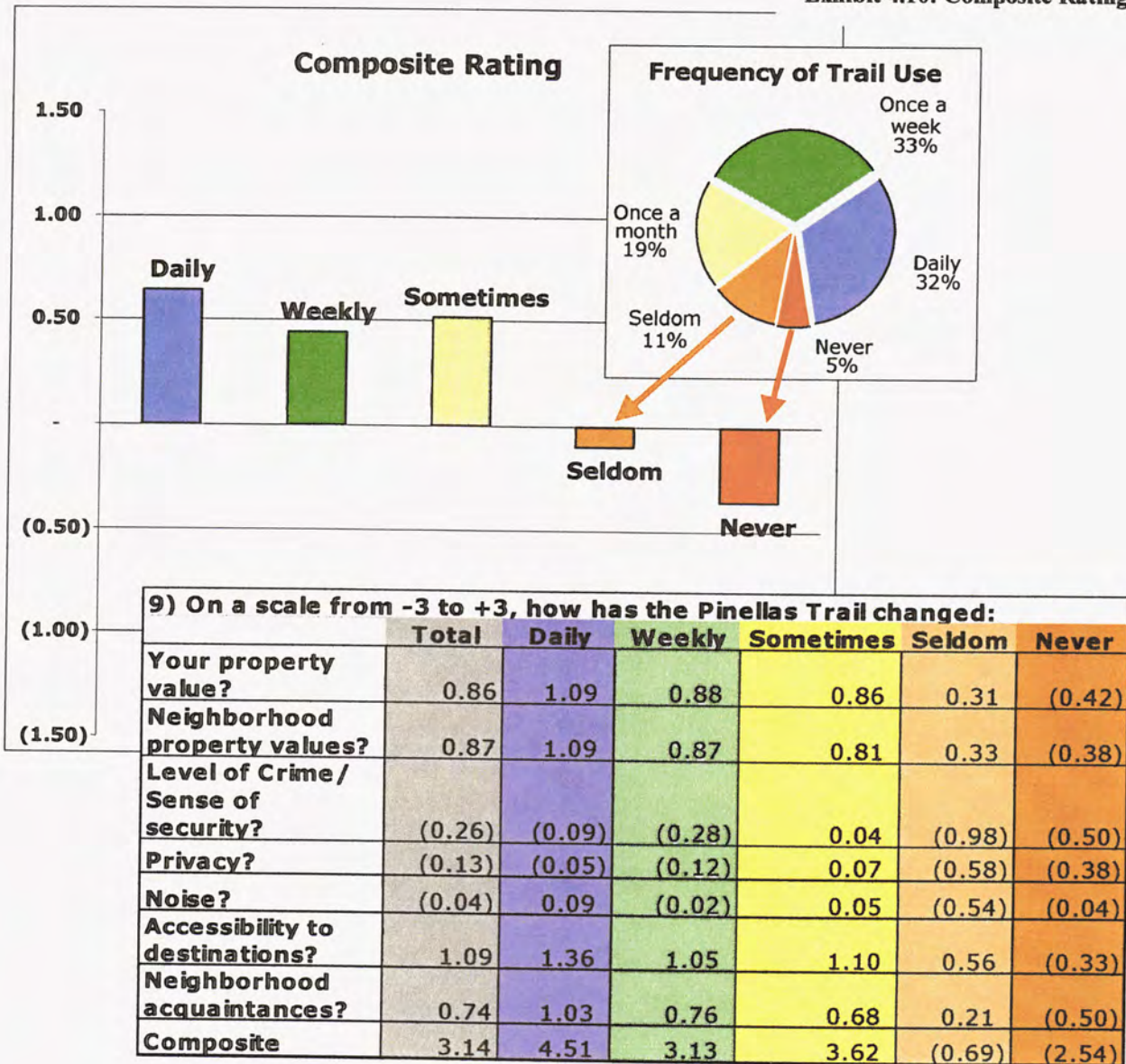
The geographic and socio-economic stratifications of the sample did not reveal significant differences among respondents' use or perception of the trail. The results did suggest that an intervening factor, intuitively understood by the realtors, that active people tend to have more positive opinions of the trail. To test this relationship, the sample was stratified by the frequency of use. The stratification did clearly indicate that trail use influences trail perceptions (Exhibit 4.10). Infrequent users rated the Pinellas Trail more negatively in every category than more frequent users.

Less than five percent of the respondents have "*never*" used the Pinellas Trail and their combined ratings of "*how the trail has changed*" were the most negative and negative in every category. The 11 percent of respondents who use "*seldom*" use the trail rated the trail a bit higher, but still negatively. Those who use the trail "*sometimes*," "*often*" and "*daily*" have very similar, positive overall ratings.

Comparing the ratings by categories, all but the "*never*" users rate the trail positively for impact to property values, accessibility and acquaintances. All but the "*sometimes*" users rate the trail negatively for crime and privacy. Only the "*daily*" and "*sometimes*" users rate the trail positively for noise.

In summary, trail use is the best indicator of perceptions about the trail. Those who never use the trail are likely to have a poor opinion of its impacts. This is supported by the realtor interviews. Several believed that those with active lifestyles, regardless of age, employment or family status, are more likely to purchase a home near the trail. The significance of this finding is that a very low percentage of respondents never use the trail.

Exhibit 4.10: Composite Rating of Trail



1. *Survey Comments*

Respondents added a number of written comments to the survey forms that helped clarify responses. The following sections summarize the written comments.

2. *Why do you use the trail?*

Under the “other” option for this question, 29 respondents said they used the trail to walk their dogs. Eighteen respondents use the trail for scenic relaxation, family time and aesthetic reasons including “to admire the greenery, shrubs, and oak trees.” Most of the remaining comments related to accessibility. Out of 23, 21 residents noted the trail’s access to the post office, barbershop, library, bank, downtown Dunedin, shopping, beach, and Swenson’s Creek. Only one negative comment came in under this question, “This trail is a big cancer.”

3. *Crime and Loitering Comments*

Thirty-two complaints or suggestions were made about crime, sense of security, and lighting. Many complaints were about an increase in loitering on the trail by teenagers and strangers. Of particular note were complaints about loiterers drinking, breaking glass, using foul language, making noise, and unsupervised teens congregating after dark. Some respondents cited recent crimes including theft of ladders, fruit, bikes, basketballs, and a gas hedge trimmer as well as burglary of cars. Respondents commented about a lack of security in particular areas and at night. Three different respondents were concerned that recent break-ins could potentially be connected to the trail. Five residents suggested that the trail needed lighting.

4. *Accessibility and Safety Comments*

Thirty-nine accessibility and safety comments and suggestions were made on the residents’ survey. Two people complained about ADA access for wheelchair and motor scooters. Several respondents complained about high-speed trail users and bicycle clubs. One person suggested the need for a speed limit. Thirteen respondents were concerned about safety at

intersections and crossings, stating that both motorists and trail users fail to stop or slow down at stop signs. Parking was also a concern for five respondents, particularly around 102nd Avenue. Inaccessibility between Pasadena Avenue and 1st Avenue South and on the east side of Pasadena was also mentioned. Three residents complained about a large ditch that prevents trail access. Other safety issues noted were shoulders with drop-offs and parts of the trail being located too close to Alternate US 19. Two respondents were looking forward to trail additions such as a new pedestrian overpass and future access to the Wal-Mart/Tyrone area.

5. *Property Value Comments*

Comments on costs and property values ranged from one end of the scale to the other. One respondent said the trail was the “best value the taxpayers ever got. The ‘Penny for Pinellas’ was used well.” Another comment was that “too much money was spent on this farce.” One resident was concerned that the trail would “bring down property values in the re-sale market with the crime that the trail has brought in.”

6. *General Comments*

Some of those surveyed preferred the trail because the noise of the train that “used to go by a few times a day” was eliminated. Twenty-four comments fell into the great scenery and outdoor enjoyment category. A number of respondents echoed the comment, “The trail is one of Pinellas County’s finest and best accomplishments. We love the trail!” As an example of a non-user comment, this trail resident commented, “Haven’t heard any complaints. I am 90 and am too old now to walk the trail – my husband used to walk it every day – but now just can’t. I do enjoy sitting on my porch and watching the people go by, to and from the trail, and they all look like they enjoy it.” Another positive resident commented that the trail “cuts down on car traffic, people relax more, it slows down the pace of life.”

Ten negative comments were made concerning loose dogs and dog litter. Out of 24 comments on facilities, six were complimentary and 18 were complaints or suggestions. Some residents complained about garbage and trash left along the trail. Others suggested spraying for bugs, adding public telephones, public bathrooms and “watering points” for runners and cyclists. It was also suggested that rules, regulations and hours of access should be posted along the trail. In general, these written comments tend to support those made during the interviews with homeowner association officers.

F. Conclusions

There are several important findings from the residents’ survey. Residents are concerned about crime, privacy, and noise whereas the homeowner’s association officers ranked crime, loitering, and landscaping as the most important among trail-related concerns. Roughly two-thirds of the surveyed residents are using the trail to exercise at least once a week. More residents are exercising more than they did before the trail opened. While any trail-related concerns should be addressed, there is a significant community benefit associated with such an amenity used by 66 percent of surveyed residents at least once a week.

Although families with young children, newer residents, and Dunedin residents were more likely to use the trail, geography, tenure, employment, and family status are not the best indicators of trail perceptions. The most negative perceptions of the trail are held by the five percent of residents who have never used the trail. Even though infrequent users gave the Pinellas Trail a negative overall rating, their composite score was not as low as the score given by residents who had never used the Pinellas Trail. Additionally, infrequent users were primarily concerned about the trail’s adverse impact on crime, privacy, and noise. As a group, they still rated the trail as having a positive impact on property values, accessibility, and neighborhood acquaintances. Daily users had the highest composite rating of the trail; however, they were still marginally concerned about crime (0.09) and privacy (0.05). Clearly, the single strongest

indicator of trail perceptions is trail usage and, because of the high use of the trail, the overall perception of the trail is positive.