



Rock Island Trail Opportunity Analysis

Infrastructure that Strengthens Communities

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Executive Summary

Missouri has an opportunity to do something extraordinary, something that will have long term positive impacts on the State for generations. To realize this opportunity the State must accept the former rail line commonly referred to as the Rock Island Line by February 2019. As this deadline approaches it is important to consider how the decision will impact Missouri residents, communities and economy. To achieve this objective the following research tasks were completed:

- A detailed qualitative analysis of the comments and letters filed during the public comment period in 2017 and reviewed 50 news articles.
- An extensive review of the literature on the impact of trails on communities, public health and the economy.
- An analysis of the demographic and economic characteristics of the trail communities and surrounding area.
- A review of State outdoor recreation policy.
- An examination of the impact of the Katy Trail.
- Case studies of three communities that have adopted aggressive agendas in support of the Trail.

Key Findings

1. **Overwhelming Public Support.** We need look no further than the comments filed with the Department of Natural Resources to see the intensity of interest in the Rock Island Trail. An astonishing 98.6% of the 8,500+ comments supported the project. Cities along the trail have universally embraced the opportunity and places as far away as Springfield are already thinking about how to create connections.
2. **Perfect Alignment with the State Outdoor Recreation Plan.** Trails are mentioned more frequently than any other outdoor recreation facility in the current Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). One of the three goals for the State is “Support Trails and Walkable Communities”. If the State is serious about implementing this policy then the Rock Island Trail should be at the top of the to-do list.
3. **Exceptional Economic Development Opportunity.** Trails have proven to be one of the most consistent generators of positive economic impact in numerous studies of outdoor recreation (<https://www.railstotrails.org/resource-library/results/?tag=Economic+impact>). Consider the following:
 - a. The Katy Trail Economic Impact Report provides the clearest evidence of what the State can expect from Rock Island Trail users. The 2012 study documented a total impact of \$18.5 million, 367 jobs and \$8.2 million in payroll. The average visitor spent \$45 per person.
 - b. New trail oriented businesses are already opening along the recently completed Rock Island Spur. Perhaps most notable is Kim’s Cabins in Windsor offering trailside lodging. A business owner from Chilhowee posted this comment on the MDNR website, “Please, as a small town business owner in Chilhowee I beg of you to continue to expand the Rock Island Trail. I can't begin to tell you what the trail has done to boost my sales with the spur being open.”

- c. The Trail is located near two of Missouri's most prominent outdoor recreation areas that are also attracting thousands of retirees. Harry S. Truman Reservoir attracts 1.5 million visitors each year and is home to the Truman Lake Mountain Bike Park. Lake of the Ozarks is one of Missouri's most prominent tourism destinations with millions of annual visitors including the most visited State Park (Lake of the Ozarks State Park, 2.6 million). The Trail will provide another attraction that diversifies the tourism offerings across this region and increases the areas attractiveness as a retirement destination.
4. **Missouri Knows How to Build Successful Trail Projects.** The Katy Trail is a model trail lauded by national organizations like the Rails to Trails Conservancy which had this to say about the Katy Trail:

The path to prosperity hasn't been without its bumps, and ongoing challenges demonstrate the continuing need for oversight and advocacy. Still, the 237.7-mile Katy Trail shines as one of the most robust rail-trail projects in America. In September 2007, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) inducted it into the Rail-Trail Hall of Fame, the second of only 30 trails nationwide to receive this honor. (<https://www.railstotrails.org/trailblog/2016/december/02/pathway-to-prosperity-missouris-katy-trail-is-a-beautiful-model-for-commerce/>)
5. **Missouri's Trail System is the Longest in the Nation.** The Katy Trail is currently the longest trail in the US and adding the Rock Island will position Missouri as the national leader in trail oriented outdoor recreation. The potential for creating unique outdoor adventures for residents and visitors will expand significantly.
6. **Expanded Access to Outdoor Recreation for Missourians.** The distance people have to travel for recreation influences participation. Publicly accessible outdoor recreation is scarce along the proposed Rock Island Trail so it is no surprise support is high among Trail communities who need more recreation options for citizens. It is notable that 41% of all Missourians will live within 50 miles of the Trail.
7. **Communities of Interest are Extensive, Engaged and Invested.** Perhaps the most striking facet of support for the proposed Trail is that advocates are willing to invest. Missouri Rock Island Trail, Inc. reports over \$600,000 in pledges for Trail construction. Belle, Eldon and Owensville are all engaged in serious efforts to capitalize on opportunities the Trail will bring to their communities, and all of this is happening before the State has accepted the donation.
8. **The Price is Right.** Unlike the Katy Trail where much of the land was purchased, the Rock Island is being donated thereby saving the State millions of dollars in land acquisition. In some places the cost of abandoned right of way is running in excess of a million dollars a mile. This Trail is an asset with significant value. (<https://atlanta.curbed.com/2018/8/7/17660002/westside-beltline-purchase-railroad-corridor-bankhead>)
9. **Time is On Our Side.** Everyone realizes there will be a planning horizon before construction begins but accepting the donation is a crucial first step. The network of organizations, local governments, and businesses that support the project are poised to work with the State when the Trail is accepted and understand it will take time to plan and build.

10. **Demand for Trail Oriented Recreation is High and Increasing.** Three of the top five outdoor recreation activities in the United States are trail based. Between 2010 and 2017, Hiking (+12.4 million), Running (+5.5 million) and Bicycling (+5.2 million) led all other outdoor recreation activities in total growth. Specialized trail activities like Off-Road Triathlons (+102%), Adventure Racing (+88.9%) and Trail Running (+78.1%) were three of the four fastest growing outdoor recreation activities.
11. **Research Indicates Trails Have Significant Benefits for Communities and Economies.** Trails across the country have been scrutinized by researchers for decades and the consensus is that they improve public health, increase property values, make communities more attractive to residents and visitors, and generate economic impacts that exceed the costs of development.
12. **An Economic Development Boost is Needed Across this Region of Missouri.**
- a. There are 39,000 workers within a 10 mile buffer of the Trail but only 23,100 jobs which forces nearly 16,000 workers to commute.
 - b. Between 2010 and 2017 only one (Eldon, +1.2%) of the 16 incorporated places on the proposed right of way posted population growth and that growth was far below the State (2.1%) and US (5.5%). Of the eight counties the trail crosses only Benton (+0.1%), Franklin (+1.8%), and Miller (+1.9%) experienced population growth, all of the growth in Franklin occurred on the eastern (St. Louis) side of the County. Gasconade (-3.3%), Henry (-2.5%), Maries (-3.4%), Morgan (-2.0%) and Osage (-1.6%) all lost population.
 - c. All of the counties except Miller are experiencing retail sales leakage. Miller captures significant sales from tourism oriented businesses at the Lake. Even with Miller included the 8 county region lost an estimated -\$229.5 million in potential retail sales.
 - d. Poverty is high in the 16 Trail communities. The 2016 poverty rate for the 19,800 people in these communities is 26.9% compared with 15.3% for the State and 19.9% for all of Rural Missouri.

Introduction

In the summer of 2018 Missouri Rock Island Trails, Inc. asked University of Missouri Extension to prepare a report on the proposed Rock Island Trail. Extension agreed to examine the proposed project using an approach that simply asks the question “Is this a good idea and why?” To answer this question we started with a rigorous review of the public record which not only indicated nearly universal support for the project but also suggested dozens of ideas for how communities would benefit. Next we examined the published research on the impact trails have on communities to see if the ideas expressed by project advocates are supported by research. The answer is yes, trails are one of the highest impact outdoor recreation investments a government can make. This is already recognized in State policy as trails are identified in the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan as a statewide priority. The evidence in support of the Rock Island Trail continued to increase as we assessed the economic development potential where we discovered the demand for trail based recreation is high and increasing at remarkable rates. An examination of key economic indicators for trail communities revealed this region of the State needs new economic development opportunity and there are compelling reasons to think the project would make a difference based on the experience with the Katy Trail. The close proximity of the Trail to two of Missouri’s most popular outdoor recreation attractions with over five million visitors a year also provides a remarkable market opportunity. Missouri Rock Island Trails Inc., composed primarily of representatives of towns on the proposed Rock Island Trail, is convinced that the Trail will have at least as much usage and economic impact per mile as the Katy. Finally, and perhaps most notable, is the extraordinary enthusiasm the Rock Island Trail has generated among community leaders, trail advocates, and businesses who have already started investing through donations of time and money. In the following pages we review the indicators that led us to these conclusions.

Background

The Rock Island Line, completed in the early 1900’s, was a failure as a business enterprise. It was expensive to build and maintain and by the mid 1980’s only the easternmost section was still being used for train traffic. In October 1993 Southern Pacific Railroad entered into an agreement with the State of Missouri to abandon 196 miles from Owensville to Arrowhead Stadium for a recreational trail. Missouri Rail Trails Foundation had \$2.2 million to railbank the corridor and build a trail. Missouri Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) filed a public use request with the Interstate Commerce Commission and Southern Pacific filed for abandonment on October 19, 1993 but a Chicago-based group fought to keep the trains running. For three years the various parties fought over the contract conditions and the reopening of the line. In October 1999 the 244 mile corridor was sold to the newly formed Missouri Central Railroad (MCRR) that was 95% owned by Ameren. MCRR rarely ran trains west of Union. Citizens in Owensville, Rosebud, and Gerald began meeting in 2010 to pursue building a trail from Gerald to the Gasconade River and formed Meramec Region Rock Island Coalition. Discussions with Ameren about a trail began. Organizers in Eldon were doing the same thing for their area. The 47 mile segment from Pleasant Hill to Windsor was transferred to MDNR as part of Ameren's Taum Sauk disaster settlement.

Missouri Rock Island Trail, Inc. (MoRIT) was formed in 2014 when the two community-based trail organizations joined forces. MoRIT and the Missouri Bicycle and Pedestrian Federation then presented Ameren with 12,500 letters of support for rail-banking. In September 2015 it was announced the 47 mile segment would be constructed and open as a state park in December 2016. Also in December 2016 Ameren and Missouri State Parks filed a Notice of Interim Use with the Surface Transportation Board for the donation of the next 144 miles of corridor from Windsor to Beaufort. In the last two years there are several other notable events surrounding the proposed project:

- Governor Nixon joined Ameren in a public statement in December 2016 confirming the pending transfer of the remaining 144 miles of the Rock Island line to the State in 2017.
- In early 2017 under a newly elected governor who later resigned, newly appointed DNR Director Carol Comer announced a pause to study the costs and benefits of accepting the corridor for a recreational trail.
- Missouri Bicycle and Pedestrian Federation (MBPF), a statewide coalition of bicycle, pedestrian, and trails groups representing over 40,000 members, expressed strong support for interim trail use and conversion of the rail line under the National Trails System Act, echoing many of the points raised by MoRIT. MBPF compared the potential Rock Island Trail to the existing Katy Trail, noting that those initially opposed to the Katy Trail have overwhelmingly become supporters, and suggested that the Rock Island Trail may be “even more advantageously situated for tourism potential.”
- Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) expressed support for the NITU and future conversion of the rail line into the Missouri Rock Island Trail for public use and opposed the Missouri Farm Bureau Federations request of a stay. RTC highlighted that the rail line has not been actively used since the 1980s and the trail project would create a statewide network of over 450 miles by intersecting with the Katy Trail.
- MDNR gathered public comments between March and August 2017. Over 8,500 comments and 14 letters were filed with MDNR.
- The Surface Transportation Board deadline for Ameren and MDNR to reach a rail-banking agreement is February 21, 2019.
- Salvage operations were completed in the summer of 2018.
- Three public meetings are scheduled for October and November 2018 in Owensville, Versailles and Meta. The final decision is expected shortly after these meetings are concluded.
- Missouri Farm Bureau is the lone dissenting voice and has opposed the project from the beginning.

Trail Oriented Outdoor Recreation is Ranked First in Total Users and Growth

The Outdoor Foundation publishes the longest running and highest quality assessment of outdoor recreation participation in the US (<https://outdoorindustry.org/research-tools/>). With nearly 40,000 households in the sample the statistical accuracy of the data is exceptional. Three of the five top ranked outdoor activities are trail oriented. Running, jogging and trail running is by far the largest category with 55.9 million participants and 4.2 billion outings. Cycling is ranked third with 47.5 million participants and Hiking is ranked fourth.

2017 Top Ranked Outdoor Activity Participation Rates (persons aged 6+ years)

Activity	Rank	Participants (in millions)	% of all Americans	Average Number of Outings	Total Outings (in millions)
Running, Jogging and Trail Running	1	55.9	19%	76	4,200.0
Freshwater, Saltwater and Fly Fishing	2	49.1	17%	18	885.2
Road Biking, Mountain Biking and BMX	3	47.5	16%	48	2,300.0
Hiking	4	44.9	15%	14	624.4
Car, Backyard, Backpacking and RV Camping	5	41.8	14%	13	523.8

Source: <https://outdoorindustry.org/research-tools/>

Trail based recreation activities also lead all other outdoor activities in terms of total increase in participation. Between 2010 and 2017 Hiking, Running, Bicycling and Trail Running were four of the top five activities in terms of total increase in numbers of persons reporting they participated in an outdoor recreation activity. Hiking posted extraordinary growth with 12.4 million new hikers, more than twice as many as the next closest activity. Running (+5.5 million) and Bicycling (+5.2 million) were ranked two and three. The most notable increase is for Trail Running which accounted for 72% of the 5.5 million increase in Running.

Top Five Outdoor Activities Based on Total Increase in Participation 2010 to 2017 (sorted by Change 2010 to 2017)

Activity	2010 (add ,000)	2017 (add ,000)	Change 2010 to 2017	% Change 2010 to 2017
Hiking	32,496	44,900	12,404	38.2%
Running (Running/Jogging or Trail Running)	50,370	55,922	5,552	11.0%
Bicycling (Road/Paved Surface, Mountain/Non-Paved Surface, BMX)	42,347	47,535	5,188	12.3%
Kayaking (Recreational)	6,465	10,533	4,068	62.9%
Trail Running	5,136	9,149	4,013	78.1%

Source: <https://outdoorindustry.org/research-tools/>

Three of the five fastest growing outdoor activities also use trails. Between 2010 and 2017 Non-Traditional/Off Road Triathlons led all other outdoor recreation activities with a 102.2% growth. Adventure Racing (+88.9%) and Trail Running (+78.1%) were also in the top five.

Outdoor Activities with the Largest Percent Change in Participation 2010 to 2107

Activity	2010 (add,000)	2017 (add ,000)	Change 2010 to 2017	% Change 2010 to 2017
Triathlon (Non-Traditional/ Off Road)	929	1,878	949	102.2%
Adventure Racing	1,339	2,529	1,190	88.9%
Skiing (Freestyle)	2,950	5,353	2,403	81.5%
Trail Running	5,136	9,149	4,013	78.1%
Telemarking (Downhill)	1,482	2,532	1,050	70.9%

Source: <https://outdoorindustry.org/research-tools/>

Every indicator points to increasing demand for recreational trails. This is great news for Missouri which is recognized as a national leader in trail development. The addition of the Rock Island to Missouri's award winning Katy Trail will position Missouri as a national, possibly international, destination for trail users.

Communities of Interest are Extensive, Engaged and Invested.

Since the filing of the Notice of Interim Trail Use in 2014 trail enthusiasts, communities, economic development organizations, national trail advocacy organizations and the business community have all responded with unbridled optimism about the opportunities the proposed trail will provide. The optimism is justified based on Missouri's experience with the Katy Trail and the recently opened Rock Island Spur. Some of the key indicators of support include:

- Missouri Rock Island Trail, Inc. has received over \$600,000 in pledges for trail construction.
- In Eldon a donor has pledged \$150,000 in matching money to rebuild the former railroad depot.
- Belle authored a successful grant to develop a part of the trail in their community but because the State has not accepted the donation the grant award is being contested.
- Several communities are already thinking about how to create connections with the proposed trail including Springfield and Bolivar who want to connect the Frisco Highline Trail with the Rock Island. The Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization is interested in a connection with the Katy Trail through Jefferson City. The City of Warsaw, already recognized as one of the most bike friendly cities in the US (<http://mobikefed.org/2012/08/warsaw-missouri-becomes-one-most-bikeped-friendly-small-cities-us>) is also exploring how to connect with the proposed Trail. The Johnson County Spirit Trails Coalition has expanded its trail development plans to create a connection with the Rock Island Spur.

- The small business community on the recently completed Rock Island Spur and on the proposed rail line have rallied in support of the project (<https://mobizmagazine.com/2017/08/17/plans-for-rock-island-bike-path-prompt-small-town-entrepreneurship/>).

Trails Have Notable Positive Impacts on Communities

As the demand for trail oriented recreation has increased numerous agencies and organizations have published research examining the economic impact and benefits of trails at the national and community level. The most noted authority on rails to trails projects is the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (www.railstotrails.org) that was created in 1986 to provide policy makers with objective information about rails to trails projects. Several studies that address the impact of trails are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. (2011). Active Transportation Beyond Urban Centers: Walking and Bicycling in Small Towns and Rural America. Retrieved from: <https://www.railstotrails.org/resource-library/resources/active-transportation-beyond-urban-centers-report/>

- The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's report on recreational trails in rural America highlights the specific benefits that trails bring to small towns and communities, including those to the economy, health, safety, youth, and community as a whole.
- RTC emphasizes that rates of engaging in active transportation in rural communities are similar to those in urban areas, and can provide the same enhancements in health, economy, environment, and social and community cohesion. Bicycling to work is almost twice as common in small towns as in urban centers, and overall bicycling rates in larger rural towns mirror those in urban areas. Communities can seek federal funding via programs such as Transportation Enhancements, Safe Routes to Schools, and the Bike/Walk Pilot Program to support infrastructure for active transportation in rural communities.
- This active transportation infrastructure may additionally attract "creative class" businesses that spur high job-growth rates. "Active streets scenes and outdoor recreation opportunities" were two qualities that appealed to creative class workers, according to a USDA Economic Research Service study. Rural communities near the Root River State Trail in Minnesota have realized these benefits, with towns like Lanesboro transforming from severe decline to \$1.5 million annual trail-driven revenues.
- Trails may be especially beneficial in rural areas given their potential to address health and aging concerns, youth safety and school transportation, and historical preservation. By promoting safe active transportation projects, rural towns can enhance their draw as family-friendly communities where kids can walk and bike to school and for recreation. Preservation of historical, cultural, and natural amenities build community identity and further serve as a draw for new residents. Rural health concerns, including higher rates of obesity, may be improved as residents gain opportunities for outdoor physical activity including walking and bicycling.
- The RTC report concludes that rural communities have significant active transportation infrastructure needs, and that more towns should follow the examples set by those already pursuing and benefiting from trails across the country.

Trail User Surveys and Economic Impact. Retrieved from: <https://www.railstotrails.org/resource-library/resources/trail-user-surveys-and-economic-impact-a-comparison-of-trail-user-expenditures/>

- Rails-to-Trails Conservancy conducted a comparative study of user-survey reported economic expenditures on 14 rails-trails in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, New York, and Rhode Island. Across these studies, between 25 to 86 percent of trail users purchased soft goods (food, beverages, and non-durable items) spending an average of \$2.00 (local users on the Virginia Creeper Trail) to \$30.30 (Pine Creek Rail Trail users) each.
- The report concluded that rural trails passing through town centers may reap the most economic benefits of all the trail types. Because rural trails bring users into direct contact with small town centers and retail establishments, there may be more opportunity for economic impact than exists along urban trails.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. (2013). Investing in Trails: Cost-Effective Improvements—For Everyone. Retrieved from: <https://www.railstotrails.org/resource-library/resources/investing-in-trails-cost-effective-improvements-for-everyone/>

- Spending on trail infrastructure provides high return on investment by creating jobs, reducing healthcare costs, expanding transportation options, and boosting local economies.
- More jobs are created per dollar in the design, engineering, and construction of walking and bicycling facilities than any other type of transportation infrastructure construction.
- Trails provide accessible and safe venues for physical activity, thereby encouraging healthier communities and reducing expenditures.
- Two-thirds of Americans “would like more transportation options” according to a 2010 national poll, and 88 percent of rural Americans deemed “pedestrian-friendly” transportation facilities important, per a 2009 national survey.
- Tourism via recreational trails can provide important economic benefits for local small business and communities, providing annual revenues of millions of dollars per trail in some cases.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. (2003). Historic Preservation & Community Identity. Retrieved from: <https://www.railstotrails.org/resource-library/resources/historic-preservation-community-identity/>

- Trails connect people to the history of local places by linking and providing access to historic locations, buildings, bridges, and more. Historically significant places can be preserved and highlighted to visitors along the trail.
- Railroads benefit from preservation, as less than half of the national rail system of the 1920s exists today. Maintaining rail lines preserves the past and enables trail users to continue to experience this aspect of the country’s history. Engineering feats that highlight technological and industrial progress, such as the Gasconade Bridge, offer trail users insight into the region’s development and heritage. By emphasizing local historical and natural amenities, trails can also contribute to community identity and civic pride.

Property Values Are Higher Near Trails

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 places for walking or cycling to work or school.

Price is not a 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.

- 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. (Asabere, P. and F. Huffman. 2009. "The relative impacts of trails and greenbelts on home price." *The Journal of Real Estate Finance and Economics* 38(4): 408-419.)
- 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 increases 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. (Karadeniz, D. 2008. *The Impact of the Little Miami Scenic Trail on Single Family Residential Property Values* (Unpublished Master's Thesis). University of Cincinnati School of Planning.)
- In suburban New Castle County, Delaware, homes within 50 meters of bike paths commanded a four percent price premium. (Racca, D. and A. Dhanju. 2006. *Property Value/Desirability Effects of Bike Paths Adjacent to Residential Areas*. University of Delaware, Delaware Center for Transportation Working Paper 188.)
- In rural Methow Valley, Washington, homes within one-quarter mile of trails benefited from a 10 percent price premium. (Resource Dimensions. 2005. *Economic Impacts of MVSTA Trails and Land Resources in the Methow Valley*. Methow Valley Sport Trails Association.)
- 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. 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. (Crompton, J., and S. Nicholls. 2006. "An Assessment of Tax Revenues Generated by Homes Proximate to a Greenway." *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 24(3): 103-108.)

Trails Have Positive Impacts on Public Health

Trails can improve public health by increasing physical activity and providing safer transportation routes for pedestrians and cyclists. In light of increasing chronic disease in the U.S., the Surgeon General has identified physical activity as one of the most effective actions people can take to improve their health.

Trails often encourage inactive people to become active and modestly increase the activity levels of already-active residents. Because they provide a safe environment, trails are the only place where many residents exercise. The gains in physical activity are most significant in rural places with few parks and narrow road shoulders. Increased physical activity is greatest among people at greatest risk of inactivity, including people with low income, low education attainment, and the elderly. Research has found that the benefits of reduced health care costs associated with increased physical activity on trails far outweigh the costs of trail construction.

- In Morgantown, West Virginia, 60 percent of trail users report they exercise more regularly since they began using trails, and 47 percent of trail users report getting their recommended physical activity through trail use alone. Twenty-three percent of respondents did not exercise regularly before using the trails. (Abildso, C., S. Zizzi, S. Selin, and P. Gordon. 2012. "Assessing the cost effectiveness of a community rail-trail in achieving physical activity gains." *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 30(2): 102-113.)
- Walking trails in rural, southeastern Missouri increase exercise particularly among people most at risk of inactivity: those who were not already regular walkers, have a high school education or less, or who earn less than \$15,000 per year. Trails that are at least a half mile long, paved, or located in the smallest towns are associated with the largest increases in exercise. (Brownson, R., R. Housemann, D. Brown, J. Jackson-Thompson, A. King, B. Malone, and J. Sallis. 2000. "Promoting Physical Activity in Rural Communities: Walking Trail Access, Use, and Effects." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 18(3): 235-242.)
- Several communities and states have measured the savings in health care costs due to residents' exercise on trails, and compared these benefits to the costs of building the trails. Although it can be challenging to isolate physical activity associated only with trails, researchers have found the benefits from reduced health care costs far outweigh the cost of trail construction. (1. BBC Research & Consulting. 2014. *Community and Economic Benefits of Bicycling in Michigan*. Prepared for the Michigan Department of Transportation. Grabow, M., M. Hahn, and M. Whited. 2010. 2. *Valuing Bicycling's Economic and Health Impacts in Wisconsin*. The Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies Center for Sustainability and the Global Environment at University of Wisconsin-Madison. 3. Wang, G., C.A. Macera, B. Scudder-Soucie, T. Schmid, M. Pratt, and D. Buchner. 2005. "A cost-benefit analysis of physical activity using bike/pedestrian trails." *Health Promotion Practice* 6: 174-179.)

Trails Have Significant Impact on Business Development

Trails can generate business impacts and create new jobs by attracting visitors, especially overnight visitors. As more communities create distinct destinations that are also attractive places to live and work, a growing body of research shows how trails can contribute to their success.

Destination trails attract visitors from outside the local area who travel specifically to use a trail. The benefits from destination trails are most commonly measured in terms of the local business impacts. This includes business revenue, employment, and employee earnings. In addition to its direct effect on

businesses, visitor spending also has a ripple effect in the community as employees and business owners spend their earnings, and local and state governments receive more tax revenue.

The economic impact from trails is highest when a trail is connected to local businesses that cater to trail user needs, including restaurants, grocery stores, camping and hotels, guiding services, and gear stores. This connection can occur directly through trail spurs that link to commercial centers, as well as through signs at trailheads or shuttles between a town and the trailhead. Because lodging often accounts for the biggest proportion of trip expenses, a trail's economic impact is greatly increased when it attracts more overnight users.

- Overnight stays are the biggest contributor to total spending. At a mountain bike race in North Carolina, each additional night adds \$101 to a visitor's total spending. Along the Great Allegheny Passage, overnight users spend seven times more than day users. (1. Schiller, A., and J. Whitehead. 2013. Economic Impact of the 2012 '6 Hours of Warrior Creek' Mountain Bike Race. Boone, NC: Center for Economic Research and Policy Analysis at Appalachian State University. 2. Campos, Inc. 2009. The Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) Economic Impact Study (2007-08). The Progress Fund.)
- Quality of trails and amenities that support trail users have the largest effect on total number of visitors. (1. Berard, D., S. Chapin, A. Hoogasian, T. Kane, D. Marcouiller, and T. Wojciechowski. 2014. The Economic Impacts of Active Silent Sports Enthusiasts. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Extension Report 14.1.)
- Communities can capitalize on trails when the trails are directly linked to towns via spur trails or shuttles. (Kazmierski, B., M. Kornmann, D. Marcouiller, and J. Prey. 2009. Trails and their gateway communities: A case study of recreational use compatibility and economic impacts. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Division of Cooperative Extension Publication #G3880.)
- Although events are short-lived, participants often return to the community after the event. (Berard, D., S. Chapin, A. Hoogasian, T. Kane, D. Marcouiller, and T. Wojciechowski. 2014. The Economic Impacts of Active Silent Sports Enthusiasts. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Extension Report 14.1.)
- After visiting an area, some tourists become residents or second home owners, bringing their businesses, supporting the local economy, and paying taxes. (1. Meltzer, N. 2014. "Adapting To The New Economy: The Impacts of Mountain Bike Tourism in Oakridge, Oregon". Eugene, OR: University of Oregon Department of Planning, Public Policy and Management. 2. 10 Resource Dimensions. 2005. Economic Impacts of MVSTA Trails and Land Resources in the Methow Valley. Methow Valley Sport Trails Association.)

The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan Identifies Trails as a Priority

The Missouri Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) for 2013-2017 serves to guide outdoor recreation planning and funding within Missouri over the next five years, and its publication also satisfies an eligibility requirement for federal Land and Water Conservation Funds. The SCORP includes background information on Missouri's outdoor recreational resources, needs, and funding; provides the results of three statewide surveys of residents and outdoor recreation professionals; and

lists goals and recommendations for the next five years.

(https://mostateparks.com/sites/mostateparks/files/Missouri%20SCORP%202013-2017_FINAL.pdf)

Importance of Trails

The SCORP indicates that multi-use recreational trails figure prominently in Missouri residents' outdoor recreation activities and preferences. Missouri residents are more active than the average American, according to the report, and those Missouri residents who participate in outdoor recreation daily are most likely to walk or hike, garden, watch birds and wildlife, and walk their dogs. Trails are "by far" the most popular outdoor recreation facilities among Missouri adults and are expected to become even more popular over the next five years, according to outdoor recreation professionals. (SCORP 30, 98)

Barriers and Unmet Needs

Those Missouri residents who do not participate in outdoor activities cite health concerns, disabilities, age, and cost as barriers to participation, which highlights the importance of accessible recreation opportunities including multi-use trails. Overall, half of Missourians expect their outdoor activities to increase over the next five years, and outdoor recreation professionals expect to see an increased demand for trails during this same period. (SCORP 30, 51, 53-54, 82)

Trails are well-suited to address the outdoor recreation needs of underserved populations in Missouri, including older adults and teens in rural communities. Teenagers (13-18 year olds) were identified as the age group with the most unmet outdoor recreation needs, followed by older adults (55 years and older) and young children (0-5 year olds). Trails are already the most popular outdoor recreation facility among Missouri adults and families, and increase in popularity as residents age, potentially providing an even more beneficial resource for older residents. Trail running is increasingly popular among teens nationally and serves as a "gateway" activity, since 98 percent of trail runners also participate in other outdoor activities. Thus, trails create multigenerational outdoor recreational opportunities that serve to address unmet needs in Missouri communities. (SCORP 77, 79, 82, 95)

Access to outdoor recreation facilities in rural areas is significantly less adequate than in urban areas within Missouri. Those same rural areas often face higher obesity rates than the State as a whole, which is ranked 11th nationally in obesity. Increasing access to local trails could have a significant impact on outdoor participation rates, since Americans who live near trails and walking/bike routes are found to have 20 to 25 percent higher levels of outdoor recreation activity than those who lack such facilities. (SCORP 79, 81, 88, 91-93, 95)

Growth Potential

Missourians rate their satisfaction with outdoor recreation opportunities as high (4.17 out of 5), but they are less satisfied with outdoor activities in their local area (3.89 out of 5), where they are most active. Specifically, surveyed Missourians indicated that they would like to see more walking and bicycle trails in their communities. This need for trails was echoed by outdoor recreation professionals, who identified trails as the outdoor recreation facility most in demand but lacking in availability. (SCORP 30, 54, 78)

Economics

While funding is cited as a challenge by many outdoor recreation professionals, more than half of Missourians agree that parks, open spaces, greenways, and conservation areas should be considered budget priorities even in difficult economic times and they overwhelmingly (95%) believe that spending time outdoors leads to a happier and healthier life. Missourians also believe in prioritizing funding for trails specifically, with 74% of respondents supporting connecting communities by sidewalks and trails as an important government expense. (SCORP 30, 37, 99)

Federal grant programs, including the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and Recreational Trails Program (RTP), have provided funding to local governments, school districts, and other organizations in Missouri for outdoor recreation facilities. These funds for outdoor recreation projects in Missouri have included nearly \$84 million since 1965 through LWCF and more than \$18 million since 1993 through RTP. (SCORP 31-32)

Missouri state parks also generate economic activity, with visitors—about 22 percent of whom are from out-of-state—spending approximately \$410 million a year, creating an estimated economic impact of \$538 million, according to an economic impact study conducted by the University of Missouri. Potential home buyers in Missouri also value nearby parks and open space, with 84 percent of survey respondents citing these facilities as an important criterion when purchasing a home. (SCORP 37-38)

Five-Year Goals and Recommendations

The Missouri SCORP cites three overarching goals for outdoor recreation development in Missouri over the next five years: (1) meet Missourians' outdoor recreation needs, (2) make connections, and (3) support trails and walkable communities. To address the first goal, the report recommends providing easily accessible outdoor recreation facilities and specifically focusing on multi-use facilities such as trails, since they serve as an opportunity to “do more with less” by meeting the needs of many residents with a single facility. Other recommendations include encouraging gateway activities (such as biking, running, or walking on trails) and increasing youth and older adult participation. The second goal emphasizes cooperation between state and local agencies and other organizations in order to encourage healthy lifestyles; the potential for recreational trails to generate community engagement and involve multiple stakeholders in planning and development emphasizes their applicability under this goal as well. Finally, the third goal is explicitly directed at increasing recreational trails and walking routes in Missouri communities, given their high demand and the opportunity they provide for diverse outdoor recreation activities in local settings. (SCORP 110-111).

There is Overwhelming Public Support for the Rock Island Trail

The Missouri Department of Natural Resources solicited public feedback during a comment period ending August 31, 2017, resulting in 8,685 comments. The public response was overwhelmingly positive, with 98.6% of commenters supporting the trail and only 1.2% opposed the project. An additional 0.2% were undecided or did not explicitly state a position on the trail.

Among pro-trail commenters, several themes emerged in their support for the trail including economic benefits, tourism, recreation, health, safety, and historical and environmental preservation. Comments

often cited multiple categories of benefits of the Rock Island Trail, but the themes are summarized separately below for clarity.

Economic Opportunity

Economic benefits were the most widely cited reason for supporting the trail with over 5,000 comments making some reference to enhanced economic opportunity. Commenters raised a wide range of economic benefits of the Rock Island Trail, including generating business opportunities and attracting new businesses, increasing competitiveness and sales at existing businesses, and revitalizing the local economies of rural communities in the region. At least 23 commenters identified themselves as business owners, all of whom supported the proposed trail.

New Business Opportunities

Several commenters indicated that the trail presented new business opportunities, both in communities along the rail line and by businesses that plan to make use of the trail when completed. Commenters also noted the new business development that has already occurred in anticipation of the trail, including local establishments that are rejuvenating small town centers.

"We are an Outfitter that serves between 40 and 80 people annually on just the Katy Trail ride alone. If the Rock Island Trail were to connect fully to the Katy Trail, we would be able to develop a separate, additional bike ride which would be a week-long ride that could generate thousands of dollars which would be brought to all of the small towns along the Rock Island Trail"

"I am a property owner with potential to put a business along the trail. I believe the trail is a great asset to Missouri."

"[S]ince the announcement of the trail project, there are at least four new restaurants planned, a new library, and several new businesses along Main Street, which is about a block away from the rail line, and these businesses have all been announced within the last few months! And there have been talks about other needed businesses for when the trail is finished, like a bike repair shop, a hotel or bed and breakfast, and several more, continuing to boost tax revenue and lower unemployment."

"I believe that adding this type of attraction will make the great state of Missouri attractive to business considering moving to the state."

Supporting Existing Businesses: Attracting Talent

Business owners specifically highlighted the trail's potential to attract and retain talent in Missouri by enhancing the state's competitiveness on the national stage as a destination for employment. As companies compete to provide attractive amenities to employees, features like the Rock Island Trail may provide a compelling incentive.

"My perspective on this is as a small business owner in a high-tech industry, competing for talent on the national stage. Amenities like this are critical to my company's ability to compete."

"I am the CEO and founder of a sports management company headquartered in St. Louis. We've relocated employees from Wisconsin and Indiana to St. Louis and part of their reason for coming here

is their desire to participate in more outdoor activities. This Rock Island trail will be just one more reason for people to come to Missouri to enjoy the outdoors.”

“As a business owner, I think it sends a message to potential employees that Missouri is a good place to live by providing access to quality pedestrian and bicycle paths throughout the state.”

Supporting Existing Businesses: Growing Sales

Local business owners expressed overwhelming support for the trail, citing the success of businesses along the Katy Trail and increases in sales in areas where Rock Island Trail development has already begun.

“Please, as a small town business owner in Chilhowee I beg of you to continue to expand the Rock Island Trail. I can't begin to tell you what the trail has done to boost my sales with the spur being open.”

“As a small business owner in Belle MO. We are counting on the trail to improve the desperately needed revenue in our small Missouri town.”

“As a business owner I can't imagine how tight it would be for a store without the extra business we receive from the trail.”

Community Revitalization

Boosting the economies of rural communities was celebrated by commenters not only as an opportunity for the revitalization of struggling towns and the boosting of real estate values around the trail, but also to foster local and regional pride in these communities and their contributions to Missouri's economy and culture.

“Help us turn our small towns into revitalized contributors to the Missouri economy.”

“I am a realtor from the Lake of the Ozarks, and I have found that property values are higher when trails are near homes. In my travels throughout the midwest, communities that have trails are more prosperous, productive, and more attractive to live in.

“In terms of return on investment, this seems to be a unique opportunity to help revitalize the small towns in mid-Missouri, and in conjunction with the Katy Trail, create a renowned tourist attraction for the entire state. It is difficult to think of another project that would benefit as many groups and people within the state”

Tourism

The trail “would give Missouri a unique world-class outdoor recreation asset.”

Tourism was mentioned 2,150 times in the comments. The benefits of trail-driven tourism raised by commenters included the economic and social impacts of visitors as well as increased prominence for Missouri as a tourist destination, given that linking the Katy and Rock Island Trails would create the longest rails-to-trails project in the U.S. by far.

“The trail would give Missouri a unique world-class outdoor recreation asset.”

"The Rock Island Trail will provide significant economic benefits to Missouri. I live in Illinois. Last year I made two trips to ride the KATY Trail. The first trip was with two friends. We spent five days and four nights staying in hotels, B and B's, and eating three meals a day in Missouri restaurants. I also spent about \$200 in Missouri bike shops. I estimate I spent about \$1200 in Missouri that I would not have otherwise spent. My two friends did likewise. We also took the Amtrak train from St. Louis to Sedalia. The second trip was a day trip on the KATY Trail with one friend. We purchased two meals each, bought gasoline and snacks and spent approximately \$200 total in Missouri that would not have been spent there if not for the KATY Trail. If the Rock Island Trail is completed I will be spending like amounts with friends while riding it. If it is not built that economic activity will not come to Missouri. The small towns along the KATY Trail were dying they are now active and vital."

Economic and Social Impacts

Those commenting in support of the trail referenced the potential economic benefits of drawing in tourists to towns along the proposed trail and also expressed enthusiasm for hosting and introducing visitors to their communities.

"As a Hospitality business owner in Versailles I am excited to welcome visitors to travel through our town... Our community is excited to be a part of this adventure"

"I am in full support of this trail. We are homeowners/business owners along the route and feel that attracting tourists will better our area and economy. We would also like to enjoy the trail!"

"It would encourage tourism, but also provide those of us who already live here a new way to celebrate and enjoy our amazing state."

"Trails are a cross-state welcome mat for our communities."

Unique Tourism Asset

The Rock Island Trail was noted by commenters as significant not only for its national and international tourist appeal, but also for its potential to promote unity and renown around a one-of-a-kind recreational asset.

"I would greatly like the state to accept the Rock Island trail, it will be an important part of the American Discovery Trail, the nation's only non-motorized coast to coast trail. As such it will bring people from all over the world to the area where they will become aware of what Missouri has to offer and of course will spend money at local businesses."

"Missouri needs to take advantage of the extraordinary landscape to draw in more visitors and young people, trails like this one are key to the future of the state as a desirable place to live."

"I am an avid trail bike rider, and have done research across the US and the globe on the best trails to ride for long-distance vacations. Connecting the Rock Island Trail to the Katy Trail will make this trail an even greater world-class destination for Missouri."

"Being knowledgeable about this route, I believe it will be even more popular than the Katy Trail."

"This is a positive unifying project that will rally support from sponsors in America and bring honorable recognition to our state."

Health, Recreation and Fitness

Health, recreation and fitness were mentioned 5,300 times in comments. Commenters expressed enthusiasm for the recreational opportunities provided by the Rock Island Trail. Supporters of the trail referenced the multi-generational appeal of the trail and brought up their eagerness to use the trail for personal enjoyment and family bonding - 1,200 responses specifically mentioned the Trail as an opportunity for families to exercise together.

"It would encourage people to bond with their families in a safe adventure that promotes healthy physical activity. As taxpayers and small business owners, our family believes this is a good investment for Missouri."

"As a lifelong farmer in Owensville whose property is close to the trail I approve it and look forward to its completion. My family and I will use it often."

"I think the trail will be great for young families. The trail will offer a safer means in kids bicycling without the dangers of vehicular traffic and will aid in some of the problems with health and obesity that we are seeing in our younger generations."

Health

The health benefits of the proposed trail were raised by commenters who focused on the individual benefits of outdoor physical activity, the potential to improve health outcomes more broadly, and the accessibility of the trail to many users. Eight commenters identified themselves as physicians, all of whom were in support of the trail.

Commenters emphasized their personal interest in exercising on trails to maintain and improve their health. Several physicians mentioned that rural Missourians, in particular, may lack suitable venues for physical activity and would benefit from this community asset. Comments also specifically cited the potential benefits for younger and older Missourians' health provided by the trail.

"I bike for pleasure and for the healthy exercise. Since hip replacement my doctor doesn't want me to run or jog so biking and walking are my two choices. I think the more off road trails we have the better it will be for Missourians. I am for this trail 100 percent."

"As a physician, I frequently prescribe exercise to my patients. Many of my rural patients state they don't have anywhere good to go exercise. Having the Rock Island Trail would provide access to rural patients to a fantastic exercise area, where they could walk, bike, or run."

"After 42 years as a professional scientist I chose to return to Columbia and retire. One of the main reasons I chose Columbia was the Katy Trail State Park... It provides me with a safe, peaceful, and healthy way to stay in shape."

"As a physician for Veterans I know that residents having more access to healthy outdoor activities has the potential to improve personal wellbeing as well as physical health."

Improving Health Outcomes and Reducing Medical Costs

Beyond the individual health benefits of the trail, commenters also referred to the potential for improvement in broader health trends and reducing medical costs. Rural communities, older residents, and youth were specifically mentioned as populations that would benefit from outdoor recreational opportunities.

"We are becoming a more active society in the fight against obesity and one of the best forms of exercise is biking/cycling. Old and young alike can participate."

"More and more people, especially seniors, are riding bikes these days and we need more places OUT OF TRAFFIC to ride. I am a 72 year old cyclist with NO medical problems simply because I exercise-- especially bike. More bike trails could lead to less health care problems and longer happier lives."

"As a psychologist, I see the many mental health benefits of having such a trail system throughout these areas. Decreased depression, anxiety, loneliness, isolation, and boredom would be beneficial for individuals; increased activity level, sense of purpose, and feeling of belonging would also be a result for many people."

"[R]ural health and childhood obesity rates improve where residents have safe places to walk and bicycle."

"Health and happiness obtained through regular exercise will directly impact Missouri's economy through a strong workforce. The more dedicated bike/hike paths offered in the state will increase the chances that people will exercise more and require less medical care or time off from work due to injuries."

Accessible Recreational Opportunity

Commenters also highlighted that rails-to-trails projects provide accessible recreational options for those with mobility limitations due to the minimal grade. These trails also provide safer locations for recumbent bicycles, which can have lower visibility in roadways shared with motorized vehicles.

"The trails are generally very gentle grades which make it usable for even mobility impaired folks."

"As a senior I like the idea of being able to hike and area which does not overstress my knees with steep grades."

"Corridors like this... provide equal access to outdoor education and enjoyment for all ages and levels of physical ability, which is good for both individual health and acceptance of social diversity."

Safety

Many commenters (653) specifically mentioned safety benefits of separating pedestrian, hiking, and cycling from highways and other roadways used by motorized vehicles. In most communities and in all of the rural area surrounding the proposed Trail there are very few safe places for cyclists, walkers, and runners so it is no surprise the many view the Trail as a much-needed solution to an ongoing public safety issue. Schools were often mentioned in conjunction with public safety especially in communities where the Trail would provide a safe route to school. Additional safety benefits include the potential for

local Mennonite and Amish residents to use the trail, thereby reducing risk of collisions with motorized vehicles.

"I live about a half mile from where the trail will be in Leslie, MO. My family can't wait for this trail. There are so few safe places to run or ride a bike in rural MO. This trail is so needed in this area."

"The trail will provide much needed safe areas for local families to ride bikes and hike, away from busy streets."

"For safety's sake, I am so anxious to get walkers and bikers off the public streets and highways... Separation of the personal traffic and vehicular travel would be a huge blessing for everyone."

Mennonite and Amish users

Commenters cited discussion of permitting local Mennonite and Amish users to ride on the trail, thereby separating them from the risk of collision with motorized vehicles. Facilitating transit in those areas for both Mennonite/Amish users and motorists would provide safety benefits on roadways and trails alike, for all members of the community.

"One perhaps overlooked benefit is the improved safety that the trail would offer to citizens in the communities. Frequently on the narrow, hilly roads that parallel the proposed trail one will encounter pedestrians, bicyclist, and equestrian. Frequently these are members of the Mennonite and Amish communities. Moving this traffic to the trail will improve safety for them as well as motorist in the area of the trail."

"I understand that local Mennonites in the Versailles area will possibly be allowed to ride on the trail, increasing their safety (rather than having to ride on a two-lane highway)."

"We live in Barnett Mo and would love to have the trail so close! It would provide recreation for us as well as a safer route for the local Mennonites to travel."

Safe Routes to Schools

Local use of the trail for students to get to and from school safely was brought up by commenters as a unique opportunity for these communities. Commenters mentioned that in some towns the Rock Island Trail could provide a viable pedestrian route to local schools where there currently is none.

"Owensville is excited as the trail will not only skirt along their park but also by the school giving their children a safe route to walk or bike to school."

"The trail will also create a safe way for kids to walk or ride their bikes to school."

We desperately need this trail to happen in our area. I am Owensville, Mo. and have been involved from the very beginning with Ameren donating this land to the state of Missouri. We need this trail through our city not only for the economic impact and benefit, but mainly for a "safe route to school" for our children. Currently because of where our schools are located and the proximity to Highway 19 our students are not allowed to walk or ride their bikes to school. This would have a huge positive impact on our children and it would also promote a healthy environment to cut down on obesity in younger children. We as a city are prepared to move forward and develop our 3 mile stretch through town with a lot of our own funds and would apply for some grants. Governor Greitens please accept

the Rock Island Trail. I supported you in the election and ask for your support in this worthy project. Thank you for listening. Respectfully, of Owensville

Historic Preservation

The opportunity to preserve the history of the Rock Island Line in Missouri was raised by 198 commenters as an important benefit of the proposed trail. Many of these comments came from those who had memories of the rail line when it was operational, and from those who felt the preservation of its history was important for future generations.

"What a great way to preserve a piece of Missouri history. As a kid I remember watching the Rock Island trains rolling between Summerfield Mo. to the great tressel across the Osage river. I can't think of a better use for this land than a bike trail through the beautiful Missouri county side."

"The Rock Island Line has historic value... this conversion would help ensure preservation of some of that history."

"Missouri's extensive trails from rails connect all generations to its natural beauty, as well as to the history of its railroads and the many towns they go through."

"I strongly support the Rock Island Trail Project and DNR entering into an Interim Trail Use Agreement. Missouri's extensive trails from rails connect all generations to its natural beauty, as well as to the history of its railroads and the many towns they go through. Perhaps most importantly, the trails are available and accessible to a wide variety of Missourians, from rural communities to larger cities, and provide a source of tourism, economic development and cultural exchange in important, historic and less populous areas within the state."

Preservation of Towns and Buildings

Commenters also supported the opportunities to preserve regional and local history that could accompany trail development. Some cited preservation and renovation efforts already underway while others expressed community enthusiasm for preservation and showcasing lesser-known Missouri histories.

"An old historic building on our main street that was on the verge of being condemned has been purchased by a trail enthusiast and is being restored."

"Our town takes great pride in keeping up the history that comes from the surrounding area, and strives continually to create interest and a draw to bring people through the community, and or to relocate."

Community Responses

Commenters who mentioned local places (counties and towns) overwhelmingly supported the project, often citing specific benefits that local communities would enjoy as well as broader benefits to the region and state. Windsor, Eldon, Beaufort, and Owensville were mentioned in the most comments, but notably every town along the proposed trail was mentioned in the public comments. Only 10 of the 658 comments that identified a place were opposed to the project.

Comments that mentioned specific places along the trail emphasized civic engagement and a desire to proactively engage with the trail project to enhance local communities and the region and state as a whole. Commenters noted the benefits currently being realized along the Katy Trail and Rock Island Spur, as well as funding and development opportunities already underway in support of the Rock Island Trail. The local responses suggest that there are proactive and committed residents eager to make the most of the Rock Island Trail opportunity.

Windsor

"This would be a boost to the economy of all towns along the trail. Our town of Windsor and nearby Leeton and Chilhowee have already seen additional businesses open, an increase in community pride, and economic enhancement from the addition of the Rock Island connecting with the Katy. Farmers that own land along the Rock Island that were previously against the trail are now seeing potential for the economy of their local communities."

Eldon

"We have been working for five years to achieve the end goal of a trail and we definitely see this as the future of Eldon. The Rock Island Depot in Eldon is one of only two remaining depots along the right of way. An alumni of Eldon High School has pledged a matching donation of \$150,000 to redo the depot to create a Welcome Center housing the Eldon Chamber of Commerce and a Railroad History Museum. We see tremendous historical as well as health and wellness benefits to our community and its citizens in addition to the economic development potential of the Rock Island Trail. We are passionate and willing to provide any information that is helpful in making this very important decision."

Beaufort and Gerald

"We lived in Beaufort for 20yrs until just recently moving to Gerald a little over a month ago. In that time I've seen both towns remain healthy, but both would also benefit from the revitalization, tourism and exposure the new trail would bring. If it turns out anything like the Katy trail then I'd expect all the small towns along the old rail route to flourish amongst the national and international exposure."

Owensville

"Please accept the Rock Island Trail. I am a 22-year-old college graduate from Owensville, MO. My newlywed husband and I have decided to move back here after college because we love the community of Owensville. We both have been active members of the Ultimate M.O.B. (Making Owensville Better), a group of young people working to improve our own community through service projects, volunteering, hosting a musical festival, and organizing ultimate frisbee events. Opportunities like this do not happen every day, and what better way to make a lasting positive impression of rural Missouri for future generations than to be in support of a dream such as this."

Stover

"As a resident of the community of Stover, I support the trail efforts and hope to see it come to fruition. I'm a member of the Stover Lion Club, the Chamber of Commerce, and a small business owner. For all these roles I foresee a direct positive economic benefit. In terms of return on investment, this seems to be a unique opportunity help revitalize the small towns in mid-Missouri, and in conjunction with the Katy Trail, create a renowned tourist attraction for the entire state."

Trail Communities Need Economic Development Opportunities

The Rock Island Trail connects 16 incorporated places and two places referred to as Census Designated Places (Eugene and Beaufort) and crosses seven counties. Although there are some differences among the communities and counties the overall condition of the economy in this part of Missouri is best described as stagnant. This region of the State, like much of rural Missouri, is still struggling to recover from the Great Recession. Some of the key indicators of economic distress are described in the following paragraphs. Indicators will only be presented for the incorporated places since comparable data is not published for Census Designated Places.

Population Losses Undermine Community Capacity

Population growth is one of the best indicators of prosperity or decline in a community. Lack of population growth influences every facet of a community. People are the workers, entrepreneurs, leaders and consumers that make a local or regional economy vibrant and productive. Eldon is the only community that has posted population growth in the 2010 to 2017 period with Ionia, the smallest place on the Trail, showing no change. Losses in other places have ranged from -0.7% in Rosebud to -4.3% in Bland, Windsor had the largest total loss at -120. The total losses across all places is -372 (-1.9%). The situation in these communities mirrors conditions across rural Missouri where 280 of the 358 incorporated places lost population between 2010 and 2017. As a point of comparison Missouri population increased 2.1% but the proportion of the population living in incorporated places increased 2.7%. Over 85% of all population growth in Missouri occurred in eight metropolitan counties.

Place	2010 Population	2017 Population	Change 2010 to 2017	% Change 2010 to 2017
Argyle	162	159	(3)	(1.9%)
Barnett	203	196	(7)	(3.4%)
Belle	1,545	1,497	(48)	(3.1%)
Bland	539	516	(23)	(4.3%)
Cole Camp	1,121	1,108	(13)	(1.2%)
Eldon	4,567	4,623	56	1.2%
Freeburg	437	427	(10)	(2.3%)
Gerald	1,345	1,315	(30)	(2.2%)
Ionia	88	88	0	0.0%
Leslie	171	169	(2)	(1.2%)
Meta	229	224	(5)	(2.2%)
Owensville	2,676	2,589	(87)	(3.3%)
Rosebud	409	406	(3)	(0.7%)
Stover	1,094	1,067	(27)	(2.5%)
Versailles	2,482	2,432	(50)	(2.0%)
Windsor	2,901	2,781	(120)	(4.1%)
Total	19,969	19,597	(372)	(1.9%)

Source: Census Bureau

Eldon is the only community that has posted population growth in the 2010 to 2017 period with Ionia, the smallest place on the Trail, showing no change. Losses in other places have ranged from -

0.7% in Rosebud to -4.3% in Bland, Windsor had the largest total loss at -120. The total losses across all places is -372 (-1.9%). The situation in these communities mirrors conditions across rural Missouri where 280 of the 358 incorporated places lost population between 2010 and 2017. As a point of comparison Missouri population increased 2.1% but the proportion of the population living in incorporated places increased 2.7%. Over 85% of all population growth in Missouri occurred in eight metropolitan counties.

County	2010 Population	2017 Population	Change 2010 to 2017	% Change 2010 to 2017
Benton	19,056	19,074	18	0.1%
Franklin	101,492	103,330	1,838	1.8%
Gasconade	15,215	14,726	(489)	(3.2%)
Maries	9,178	8,867	(311)	(3.4%)
Miller	24,747	25,228	481	1.9%
Morgan	20,565	20,145	(420)	(2.0%)
Osage	13,885	13,662	(223)	(1.6%)
Region	204,138	205,032	894	0.4%
Region without Franklin	102,646	101,702	(944)	(0.9%)
Missouri	5,988,925	6,113,532	124,607	2.1%

Source: Census Bureau

Population at the county level portrays a similar situation with four of the seven counties experiencing losses. Franklin and Miller both had modest gains but the population growth in Franklin was in the eastern part of the County near St. Louis and in Miller growth occurred on the far west edge at Lake of the Ozarks not in the area where the Trail is located. Benton had a small 0.1% increase. Gasconade (-3.3%) and Maries (-3.4) suffered the largest losses with Morgan (-2.0%) and Osage (-1.6%) more typical of rural Missouri where average losses were -2.0%.

Population losses in communities and counties along the Trail are the result of two factors. The first is the relatively old age profile across this region. All of these counties have larger proportions of persons aged 65+ than the State and therefore median ages are also high. The outcome of this old age profile are higher mortality rates and population losses as births exceed deaths by wide margins. Benton, Gasconade, Maries and Morgan counties have the oldest age profiles and large negative rates of natural change.

County	% 65+	Median Age	Natural Change	Migration
Benton	29.6%	52.9	(928)	951
Franklin	16.4%	40.6	1,822	84
Gasconade	22.2%	45.7	(320)	(158)
Maries	20.5%	43.9	(110)	(198)
Miller	18.8%	41.4	167	332
Morgan	24.0%	46.3	(290)	(122)
Osage	17.6%	40	191	(415)
Missouri	16.1%	38.3		

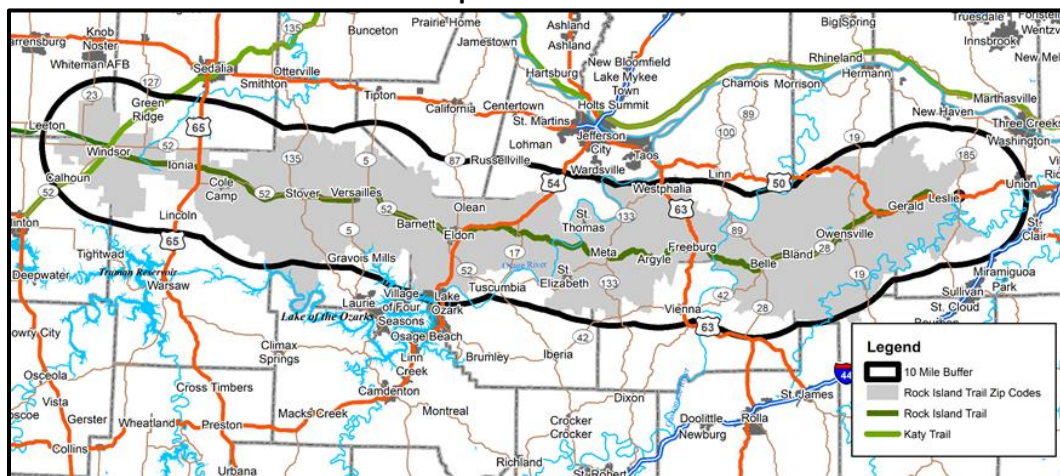
Source: Census Bureau

Migration is the other factor influencing population change. Gasconade, Maries, Morgan and Osage had relatively large losses from outmigration. The notable positive migration in Miller and Benton are primarily retirees who have been moving to Lake of the Ozarks and Truman Reservoir in relatively large numbers for the last two decades.

Uneven Job Growth Leaves Many Communities Looking for Opportunity

The economy of the area along and surrounding the Trail has only recently recovered from the Great Recession. In the 10 mile buffer surrounding the trail there are 39,000 workers but only 23,000 jobs, the result is 41% of workers living in this area commute to jobs elsewhere. High rates of commuting often contribute to population decline as workers chose to move to the job. This is likely influencing population decline in the communities along the Trail.

Rock Island Trail 10 Mile Buffer and Zip Codes



Zip codes are the smallest areas for which there is high quality data about employment and wages so the following discussion will use zip codes for analysis of employment changes (see map for area covered by zip codes). There are 23 zip codes along the Trail. In 2007, the year before the Great Recession, there were 20,564 jobs in the 23 zip codes. That total dropped to a low point of 17,923 in 2011 -- a **-12.8%** loss (**-2,641** jobs).

Total employment only returned to the 2007 level in 2018. However there are dramatic differences in employment growth at the zip level. Only 11 of the 23 zip areas have recovered to 2007 employment and only three zip areas added more than 100 jobs. The three zips where nearly all of the job increases occurred are the result of growth in only three businesses: Quaker Windows and Doors in Freeburg (+750), Bogler Trucking in Gerald (+180) and Diamond Pet Foods in Meta (+100). Without these business expansions the economy of the region surrounding the Trail would still be down **-641** jobs (**-3.1%**). Of the 12 zip areas that lost jobs the net deficit is **-985**. Six of the zip areas have experienced double digit losses with Rosebud posting the largest proportional loss (**-25.7%**). Notable losses occurred in several of the largest commercial centers.

Eldon, the largest place, also experienced the largest total losses (**-214**) followed by Versailles (**-187**) and Owensville (**-159**).

Zip Area	2007 Jobs	2018 Jobs	Change 2007 to 2018	% Change 2007 to 2018
Freeburg 65035	432	1,252	821	190.1%
Gerald 63037	793	990	197	24.9%
Meta 65058	239	355	116	48.4%
Barnett 65011	205	280	75	36.6%
Bland 65014	256	308	52	20.4%
Saint Elizabeth 65075	416	450	34	8.2%
Windsor, MO 65360	1,254	1,282	28	2.3%
Cole Camp 65325	811	838	27	3.3%
Leslie 63056	115	129	15	12.7%
Ionia 65335	67	74	7	11.2%
Koeltztown 65048	19	20	2	8.3%
Argyle 65001	37	35	(2)	(6.6%)
Westphalia 65085	524	506	(17)	(3.3%)
Olean 65064	117	97	(19)	(16.6%)
Stover 65078	722	694	(28)	(3.8%)
Saint Thomas 65076	268	234	(34)	(12.8%)
Henley 65040	452	406	(46)	(10.3%)
Rosebud 63091	266	198	(68)	(25.7%)
Belle 65013	925	831	(94)	(10.2%)
Eugene 65032	683	568	(116)	(16.9%)
Owensville 65066	3,274	3,115	(159)	(4.9%)
Versailles 65084	2,473	2,286	(187)	(7.6%)
Eldon 65026	6,218	6,004	(214)	(3.4%)
Total	20,564	20,953	389	1.9%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, QCEW

Communities Have High Poverty and Low Incomes

Wages and incomes are low and poverty is high for the communities along the Trail. Average wages (\$55,213) are only 71% of the Missouri average of \$64,188 (Bureau of Labor Statistics) for workers in the 23 zip codes. According to the 2016 income and poverty estimates from the Census Bureau 37% of households in the 16 incorporated places have incomes below \$25,000 and 19% of households have zero or negative wealth which means they own no assets and have no savings. Poverty rates are significantly above State averages with 27% of persons below the poverty line compared with 15% for Missouri. In 2018 the average per capita income of \$18,817 was only 68% of the Missouri average of \$27,659 (Syrgos Popstats).

Retail Sales Leakage Limits Local Government Options

Retail sales tax is an important component of local government revenues. Leakage of potential sales undermines the capacity of local governments to provide services. All of the counties except Miller are experiencing sales leakage. The large surplus in Miller is the result of sales at Lake of the Ozarks. Even with Miller included the Trail counties are losing **-\$229.5 million** in potential sales. The losses are particularly large in Maries where over one-half of potential sales are lost and per capita sales are only 38% of the State average. Osage County is close behind with leakage of **-82.5 million (-43.0%)** and per capita sales only 58.3% of the Missouri average.

County	2017 Retail Sales	Per Capita Sales 2017	Leakage or Surplus 2017	% of Potential Sales Lost
Benton	\$167,033,412	\$8,757	(\$29,944,300)	(15.2%)
Franklin	\$1,147,417,353	\$11,104	(\$176,937,532)	(13.4%)
Gasconade	\$175,972,728	\$11,950	(\$5,968)	(0.0%)
Maries	\$46,395,480	\$5,232	(\$48,508,179)	(51.1%)
Miller	\$389,762,447	\$15,450	\$140,700,756	56.5%
Morgan	\$234,367,745	\$11,634	(\$21,068,114)	(8.2%)
Osage	\$109,340,444	\$8,003	(\$82,528,937)	(43.0%)
Region	\$2,270,289,609	\$11,073	(\$229,488,331)	(9.1%)
Missouri	\$83,502,999,529	\$13,732		

Source: Missouri Department of Revenue, University of Missouri Extension

Missouri Knows How to Build Successful Trail Projects

The reluctance to accept the Rock Island Trail donation is perplexing given the State's experience with the Katy Trail which was a more complicated process than creating the Rock Island Trail. The Katy Trail development took place over a decade and included hurdles that will not be barriers on the Rock Island. First and foremost the Rock Island line is being donated and includes the entire abandoned line. This is a stark contrast to the Katy Trail which was acquired in pieces and required the purchase of some of the abandoned rail line. Other challenges included creating policies for managing landowner concerns, dealing with major floods in 1993, and managing a unique and large scale construction project for the first time. When the project was complete the Missouri Department of Natural Resources had not only succeeded by excelled.

The Katy Trail has been identified as a model trail by national organizations like the Rails to Trails Conservancy which had this to say about the Katy Trail:

"The path to prosperity hasn't been without its bumps, and ongoing challenges demonstrate the continuing need for oversight and advocacy. Still, the 237.7-mile Katy Trail shines as one of the most robust rail-trail projects in America. In September 2007, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) inducted it into the Rail-Trail Hall of Fame, the second of only 30 trails nationwide to receive this honor."
(<https://www.railstotrails.org/trailblog/2016/december/02/pathway-to-prosperity-missouris-katy-trail-is-a-beautiful-model-for-commerce/>)

The Trail has been featured in dozens of travel and tourism magazines and was a major part of Missouri being named the "Best Trails State" in 2013 by American Trails, a national, nonprofit organization that advocates for trails. The Katy Trail has even been the subject of two books, Cycling the Katy Trail: A Tandem Sojourn Along Missouri's Katy Trail by Neil Hanson, and The Complete Katy Trail Guidebook by

Brett Dufur. Media exposure has positioned the Katy as a cycling destination, promoted tourism, and spawned the creation of dozens of businesses that serve trail users.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of success is the economic impact the Trail has on the State. A 2011 study used a survey of trail visitors to assess expenditures and capture data about visitor characteristics (https://mostateparks.com/sites/mostateparks/files/Katy_Trail_Economic_Impact_Report_Final.pdf). The summary findings included the following impacts based on a visitor estimate of 400,000:

- The total economic impact of the Katy Trail in 2011 was nearly \$18.5 million.
- The average visitor party (3.21 people) spent \$147.14 per night.
- Visitors spent, on average, \$45 per person per day/night of their trip on trip-related expenses.
- Visitors spent, on average, \$56.82 per person per day/night of their trip on Katy Trail-related expenses.
- The total economic impact of \$18,491,000 included both direct and indirect spending, which supported 367 jobs with a total payroll of \$5,128,000.

The economic impact of the Rock Island is likely to be similar to the Katy Trail and could possibly be larger. The higher density of development along the proposed trail means there are more opportunities for trail users to spend money. Research indicates that the higher densities of amenities and services along trails result in higher expenditures. (Berard, D., S. Chapin, A. Hoogasian, T. Kane, D. Marcouiller, and T. Wojciechowski. 2014. *The Economic Impacts of Active Silent Sports Enthusiasts*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Extension Report 14.1.).

Exceptional Economic Opportunity

The proposed Trail is located in close proximity to two of Missouri's most visited outdoor recreation areas that are also attracting significant numbers of retirees.

Harry S. Truman Reservoir located only 17 miles south of the proposed Trail had 1.5 million visitors in 2016. Because this is primarily a recreational lake with no development permitted on the shore the primary users are looking for outdoor recreation opportunities. The Truman Lake Mountain Bike Park which is home to several special events and attracts cyclists from across the US is located on the lake near Warsaw.

Eldon is only 11 miles from Bagnell Dam at Lake of the Ozarks and will undoubtedly emerge as a gateway to the Trail if the donation is accepted. The Lake of the Ozarks is one of Missouri's most frequently visited outdoor recreation centers. The Lake is home to two of the top ten most visited parks in Missouri; Lake of the Ozarks State Park is ranked first and attracted 2,559,845 visitors in 2017 and Ha Ha Tonka ranked 10 with 553,018 visitors, these parks accounted for 14.3% of all visits to a Missouri State Park in 2017.

The large number of visitors to these areas will provide a huge potential market for the Rock Island Trail. It is likely that outfitters and guide services will seize this opportunity and develop customized visitor experiences that utilize the Trail.

Benton, Morgan and Camden (Lake of the Ozarks) counties have become retirement havens over the last three decades. The three counties have attracted over 19,000 retirees since 1980 and recent data

indicates the trend is continuing. Amenities like trails are important to retirees as they seek places that offer abundant outdoor recreation opportunities. The Rock Island Trail would be a significant asset for these counties as they continue to grow the base of retirees.

Profiles of Opportunity

There are four Rock Island Trail communities that are already creating plans for capitalizing on the development of the Trail. It is useful to profile these places and document the actions taken at the local level to realize the potential opportunities the Trail will bring and understand the motivation behind those actions.

Eldon

In the comments filed with Missouri State Parks concerning the conversion of the Rock Island line to a State Park the superintendent of schools had this to say:

"I am very much in support of DNR entering into an Interim Trail Use Agreement for the Rock Island Trail Project. I will provide some reasons below. 1. As the school superintendent I know that the trail will be able to provide safer access to our schools for those students that walk. 2. I believe that the trail through our community would improve the health of our community. It would encourage more walking and biking. 3. I believe that the trail would help us attract and also keep our young families. We know that young families are looking for quality of life features and a trail through the community definitely helps attract those families. 4. A possible trail through our community has already spurred development with the Lake Regional Hospital to expand and also Rock Island Village <https://www.rockislandvillage.com/> 5. The Eldon School District Building Trades program plans on renovating the existing depot. We have an Eldon Alumni that has challenged the community with a \$150,000 matching grant towards building the depot. However we can't start construction if Missouri State Parks doesn't own the property. Our agreement with the previous director was that the depot would be given to the City of Eldon for development and maintenance. 6. Eldon and Versailles are considered some of the poorest communities in the State according to this article: <https://www.roadsnacks.net/poorest-places-in-missouri/> I believe having a trail through those two communities would greatly improve the economic conditions. I am also a cow/calf farmer and I do have some property along the trail and this does not concern me."



This concise and eloquent description of the potential impact of the Trail on Eldon may actually understate the opportunity. Eldon is the community most likely to experience the full range of positive impacts from Trail development. This is the case because of the strategic location as a gateway to the

Lake of the Ozarks tourism industry. The Lake area attracts an estimated 3.5 million visitors during the summer season. The Rock Island Trail would provide a unique niche attraction for these visitors. Equally important is the persistent increase in the number of retirees that are moving to the Lake of the Ozarks. Research indicates that access to recreational trails is often a factor in choosing a retirement location (Deciding Where to Live: The Emerging Residential Settlement Patterns of Retired Americans. Golant, Stephen M. Generations Vol. 26, Iss. 2.). Eldon is ready to go to work on a community improvement project that will impact the community for generations to come.

Belle

These comments from Belle residents highlight the spirit of the community that was among the first to recognize the potential benefits of the Trail:

"I'm sure the Rock Island RR had a huge impact on the cities along the railway route back at the beginning of the century. No doubt the Rock Island Trail will have a greater impact on these cities especially the City of Belle. It will certainly revitalize cities trying to keep above water in these economically challenging times."

"As a small business owner in Belle MO. We are counting on the trail to improve the desperately needed revenue in our small Missouri town. The trail would give people a reason to eat, shop, and stay over night."

"I am in support of the proposed trail. As a user of the Katy Trail I have witnessed the positive impact it has on economy, health, and family life. I love Saturdays on the KT. It's regularly full of smiling kids on their bikes accompanied by their involved parents. Southern mid-MO needs more of that! I am from Belle and the possibilities in our area seem endless with Gascondy Bridge sure to be a highlight of the trail. How can that not bring business to town nearly every weekend?"



Belle was ahead of other Trail communities when they authored a successful grant for \$72,328 in 2014 to develop a trail within the City along the Rock Island rail line. As the State delayed the decision to accept the donation Missouri State Parks has asked to deobligate the funds. The most important take-away is not that Belle might lose the money, rather it is a testament to how entrepreneurial and optimistic the City is about the prospects for the Trail. Belle is one of the Trail communities that has several troubling indicators including population loss (-3.1% since 2010), high poverty rate (30.1%), and a struggling retail sector (-\$2.6 million in sales leakage and per capita sales only 64% of the Missouri average). But Belle has several assets that position it as a place that is likely to experience relatively high rates of economic impact. The trail intersects the downtown in a strategic location that will give visitors immediate access to restaurants, specialty retail, and an art gallery. Transportation access is very good as two State highways, Missouri 28 and 89, intersect near the downtown. A large vacant MFA building is located on the Trail near the downtown, community leaders are already discussing an adaptive reuse of the building to convert it to a visitors' center. Belle is also the community closest to the Gascondy Bridge

which is certain be one of the most visited sites on the Trail. Perhaps the most important reason Belle will succeed is community involvement as evidenced by the proactive Belle Friends of the Trail, an advocacy group that gives citizens a voice in the project.

Owensville

Owensville, like Eldon and Belle, has already started to see a resurgence of community spirit around the potential development of the Trail:

"This trail project, even though the salvage is not yet complete, has already had a major impact on my hometown of

Owensville. My community has been very excited about the trail coming through town, and it has already boosted the economy, before even being built! Owensville is not a very big town, but it is one of the bigger ones along the Rock Island Corridor, and therefore has the potential to create the most tax revenue for the state from this project. My town has been a quiet town with a new business here or there every few years, but since the announcement of the trail project, there are at least four new restaurants planned, a new library, and several new businesses along Main Street, which is about a block away from the rail line, and these businesses have all been announced within the last few months! And there have been talks about other needed businesses for when the trail is finished, like a bike repair shop, a hotel or bed and breakfast, and several more, continuing to boost tax revenue and lower unemployment. The trail will also create a safe way for kids to walk or ride their bikes to school, and although this has been talked about a lot already for kids in the town of Owensville, the trail could serve the same purpose for those that live outside of town or even those that live in Rosebud. I believe it is in the best interest for Owensville, the State of Missouri, and every other small town along the trail that the DNR to enter into an Interim Trail Use Agreement. Thank you."



Owensville is another Trail community that has experienced a lot of economic hardship in recent years including population loss (-2.1% since 2010), job losses (employment is down -4.9% since 2007), high poverty (21.7%), and low incomes (33.4% of households have incomes below \$25,000). However, as the commenter noted, the retail sector of the economy is relatively healthy and poised to take advantage of the opportunities the Trail will bring to the City. Trail research indicates that places with amenities and services like Owensville are more likely to experience economic impact from trails. Also like Eldon and Belle, the Trail will pass within one block of the historic downtown that has numerous restaurants and attractions. On the west side of town the Trail parallels Missouri 28 where there is another concentration of retail businesses that trail users can access. Community leaders are particularly excited about the possibilities of the Trail serving as a safe route to school. The elementary, middle and high schools are clustered on a campus located in the northeast corner of the City on Missouri 19 which makes them relatively inaccessible for pedestrians and bicycles. The Trail will provide a safe way for children to travel by foot or bicycle from residential neighborhoods to the school.

Windsor

"As the Executive Director for the Windsor Area Chamber of Commerce, I can speak with some insight as to what this trail will mean to some of these smaller communities that are struggling economically. I serve on the Farrington Park Board of Directors, as well. (Farrington Park is our city park and was donated to Windsor by the Rock Island Railroad in 1954 and is named after J.D. Farrington, the President of the Rock Island at that time.) The campgrounds at the park have seen a 400% increase over last year. We've had visitors from France, Yugoslavia, Costa Rica and other countries, as well as, visitors from Oregon to New York. These folks spend money when they're in a community. Today was the big Katy Trail Bicycle Ride...around 300 riders. I can't tell you how many times I was asked about the Rock Island Trail and there aren't enough words to describe the excitement and anticipation when these bicycle enthusiasts talked about it. There was an 88 year old gentleman on this ride and he is really excited about it. (Don't wait too long...hahaha!) Please don't let this opportunity pass: for the small communities that will benefit so much from it, the great State of Missouri that will benefit from it and the outdoors enthusiasts that will use the trail. This is a "bucket list" deal! (Yes, I heard that several times today.."riding the loop is on my bucket list")"



"I am a frequent user of the KATY Trail and am excited about the creation of the Rock Island Trail. Over the Memorial Day weekend we traveled (from St Louis) to Windsor, MO to ride the first section of the Rock Island Trail. We spent two nights in Windsor at Kim's Cabin and dined at a few of the local cafes. Over the past 20 years I have ridden the entire length of the KATY and sections of it several times always utilizing locals services along the trail... "

"I hope the Rock Island Trail Project will continue! I live in Windsor, which is a struggling small town like so many others in Missouri. I've been surprised how many people already travel to Windsor due to the Katy Trail and feel that number would be exponentially larger if the Rock Island Trail is completed. Small towns in Missouri have a

hard time attracting dollars, and this is a great way to achieve that!"

Windsor, like many of the communities along the proposed Trail, has several troubling indicators including population loss (-4.1% since 2010), high levels of retail sales leakage (-\$16.5 million), and a low income profile (23.8% in poverty). It is also one of the best places to look for indicators of how an expanded trail system is likely to impact a community. For many years Windsor was just another stop on the Katy Trail. When the Rock Island Spur opened in 2016 Windsor immediately started to see an increase in trail users and a burst of entrepreneurial activity. Among the new businesses are several that offer overnight accommodations including: Kim's Cabins, Fitzgerald's Nightly Rentals, Katy-Rock Junction, Broken Spoke Nightly Rental, and Windsor Quarter House. New restaurants and entertainment businesses include Katy Rock Escape Rooms, Next Chapter Coffee & Bagels, Sidetrack Café, and Cinco de Mayo. The owners of the Windsor Quarter House are currently renovating a vacant downtown building for a bike shop and community commons area. There is little reason to doubt that other communities along the Trail will experience similar growth in small businesses. This pattern reflects the experience along the Katy Trail where entrepreneurs have seized the opportunity to grow small businesses as the number of trail users increased.

Summary

Trails are a good public investment. They contribute to positive public health, safety, and economic development outcomes, and research indicates the benefits outweigh the costs by large margins. We need look no further than the Katy Trail for an example of what we can expect from investments in the Rock Island. The support voiced by Missourians illustrates that communities, residents, and businesses are engaged and poised to react to this opportunity. The enthusiasm is warranted given the States experience with the Katy Trail which has proven to be an internationally recognized destination. The addition of the Rock Island Trail will position Missouri as a national leader in trail development and provide a unique one of a kind attraction that will expand tourism and complement existing outdoor recreation assets across central Missouri. The persistently increasing demand for recreational trails provides a market opportunity that can distribute economic benefits to Missouri and community partners along the Trail for decades to come.

Key Findings

1. Overwhelming Public Support
2. Perfect Alignment with the State Outdoor Recreation Plan.
3. Exceptional Economic Development Opportunity.
4. Missouri Knows How to Build Successful Trail Projects.
5. Missouri's Trail System is the Longest in the Nation.
6. Expanded Access to Outdoor Recreation for Missourians.
7. Communities of Interest are Extensive, Engaged and Invested.
8. The Price is Right.
9. Time is On Our Side.
10. Demand for Trail Oriented Recreation is High and Increasing.
11. Research Indicates Trails Have Significant Benefits for Communities and Economies.
12. An Economic Development Boost is Needed Across this Region of Missouri.