



Three Rivers Heritage Trail

2024 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Acknowledgements

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Since 1991, Friends of the Riverfront has worked to protect and restore the riverfront in the Pittsburgh region through trail development and stewardship after decades of legacy pollution. The Three Rivers Heritage Trail now encompasses 33 miles of urban and suburban riverfront trails along both banks of the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio rivers. Through broad and diverse collaborations, we continue to work towards and promote environmental restoration, economic vitality, and public health benefits for Allegheny County and Southwestern Pennsylvania.



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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I am delighted to present the findings of the comprehensive Three Rivers Heritage Trail Impact Assessment. This endeavor, made possible by the invaluable contributions of community members, municipal leaders, stakeholders, and experts, marks a significant milestone in Friends of the Riverfront's mission to enhance and expand the trail network in Allegheny County.

The findings underscore the trail's burgeoning significance, not merely as a recreational asset but as a vital component of our region's transportation infrastructure and a catalyst for community well-being. As we delve into the statistics—trail usage more than doubling in the past decade, an economic impact tripling to \$26.5 million annually—we also recognize the profound, immeasurable value encapsulated in the stories, photos, and aspirations of the 900+ survey participants.

A famous quote resonates strongly here: "Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted" (William Bruce Cameron). The Three Rivers Heritage Trail is more than numbers; it is a space where joy is shared, health is prioritized, and community thrives. The insights gleaned will serve as a compass, guiding our ongoing endeavors to enhance and expand the trail system, ensuring its accessibility for generations to come.

I extend my gratitude to all those who contributed to this study, investing time, expertise, and passion. Special thanks to Fourth Economy for their exceptional work, Allegheny County for their collaborative spirit and financial support, DCNR, and the Hillman Foundation for their generous contributions.

Sincerely,



Kelsey Ripper
Executive Director
Friends of the Riverfront



"I love how the world seems so vast and so small in one go. On the trail you're reconnected to nature and the energy of human society, bound to Pittsburgh and also experiencing a multitude of places all at once."

TRAIL USER SURVEY RESPONSE



Key Findings

What does the trail mean to the region?

ABOUT THE TRAIL

The Three Rivers Heritage Trail is a 33-mile multi-use riverfront trail system in the Pittsburgh region. The trail runs along the banks of the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio rivers. The Three Rivers Heritage Trail provides access to Pittsburgh's central business district, neighborhoods, municipalities, shopping, venues and local attractions. The Three Rivers Heritage Trail also serves as the host for the final segments of the Great Allegheny Passage, Erie to Pittsburgh Trail and the central nexus for the Industrial Heartland Trails Coalition.

The Three Rivers Heritage Trail is a key piece of the region's economic transformation and post-industrial resurgence following the collapse of the steel industry. Although it is easy to assume that the now successful trail has always existed, the trail is the outcome of decades of work to restore and reclaim the regions' riverfronts for public use. Friends of the Riverfront was formed in 1991 to provide leadership and give direction to trail creation and support the development of the Three Rivers Heritage Trail system. As sections of the trail developed areas opened to the public for recreational use and social connection. Friends of the Riverfront partnered with mayors, municipal leaders, philanthropic partners, and committed citizens to develop and maintain the trail.

In 2010, the Three Rivers Heritage Trail was designated as a National Recreation Trail – a designation that is granted to trails that are regionally significant, have been open to the public for at least 10 years, and practice proper management and maintenance.



In 2014, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy conducted a study of the users of the Three Rivers Heritage Trail. That study estimated 623,000 user visits resulting in a total economic impact of \$8.3 million. In the past ten years, the trail has grown from 24 miles to 33 miles through developments that closed gaps in the trail and expanded to new service territory. As the trail has grown over the past decade, so has its economic impact. **In 2024, there are an estimated 1.3 million user visits to the trail resulting in \$22.4 million in direct economic impact from local spending, and \$26.5 million when including indirect and induced benefits. Trail spending supports \$16 million in earnings for local workers and generates a total of \$5.7 million in tax revenue.**

1.3 million
user visits

\$26.5 million
total economic impact

\$16 million
in earnings for local
workers

\$5.7 million
tax revenue generated
by the trail

CONNECTION TO ARTS, CULTURE, RECREATION, AND VIBRANCY

The Three Rivers Heritage trail connects riverfront and natural spaces with arts, entertainment, and cultural amenities. The trail provides opportunities for recreation and commuting for both residents and visitors to the region, and allows access to dense urban areas, popular shopping and entertainment districts, and green space. Trail users spend money at local businesses, attend events, and participate in arts and culture activities along the trail.

- 70% of trail users
- attend events
- and participate
- in arts and
- culture activities
- along the trail



A Trail for Everyone

In 2023, there were an estimated **1.3 million user visits to the trail**, double the number of trips compared to 2014 trail counts.

We conducted a survey of trail users to better understand the health impacts of the Three Rivers Heritage Trail. Our survey was open to trail users for 6 months and recorded 912 responses. Primary reasons for usership are health, exercise, or recreation. Trail users can be segmented by **frequent users, recreation users, and overnight visitors**. Trail users spend an average of **\$10 per trip** across all user types.

49%

of respondents use the trail for **health or exercise**



37%

of respondents use the trail for **recreation**



13%

of respondents use the trail for **transportation or commuting**



55%

of respondents use the trail with **one or more people**



16%

of respondents use the trail with a **child under the age of 18**



RECREATIONAL USERS

- ▶ use the trail once a month or a few times each month
- ▶ spend more per trip, but less overall
- ▶ \$17 to \$35 per trip
- ▶ \$280 to \$435 per year

FREQUENT USERS

- ▶ use the trail daily or a few times each week
- ▶ spend less per trip, but more annually
- ▶ \$8 to \$10 per trip
- ▶ \$1,200 to \$2,800 per year

OVERNIGHT VISITORS

- ▶ use the trail while visiting
- ▶ \$570 per 2-day trip
- ▶ \$161 per night in overnight accommodation
- ▶ \$124 per day in consumable goods

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

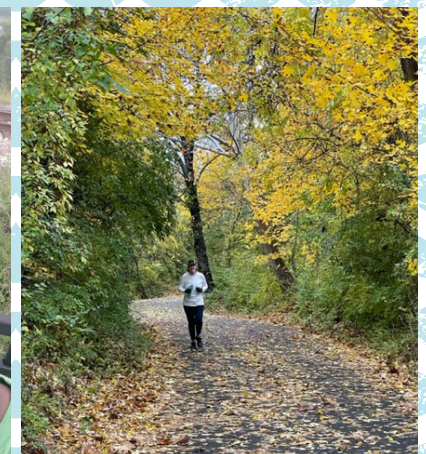
- ▶ Household Income: 12% Less than \$50K, 30% \$50K to \$100K, 42% \$100K or more
- ▶ Age: 23% Under 35, 20% 35-44 years old, 36% 45-64 years old, 21% 65 or older
- ▶ Race: 91% White, 2% Asian, 1% Black, 3% Multiracial or Other
- ▶ Ethnicity: 92% Non-Hispanic, 3% Hispanic

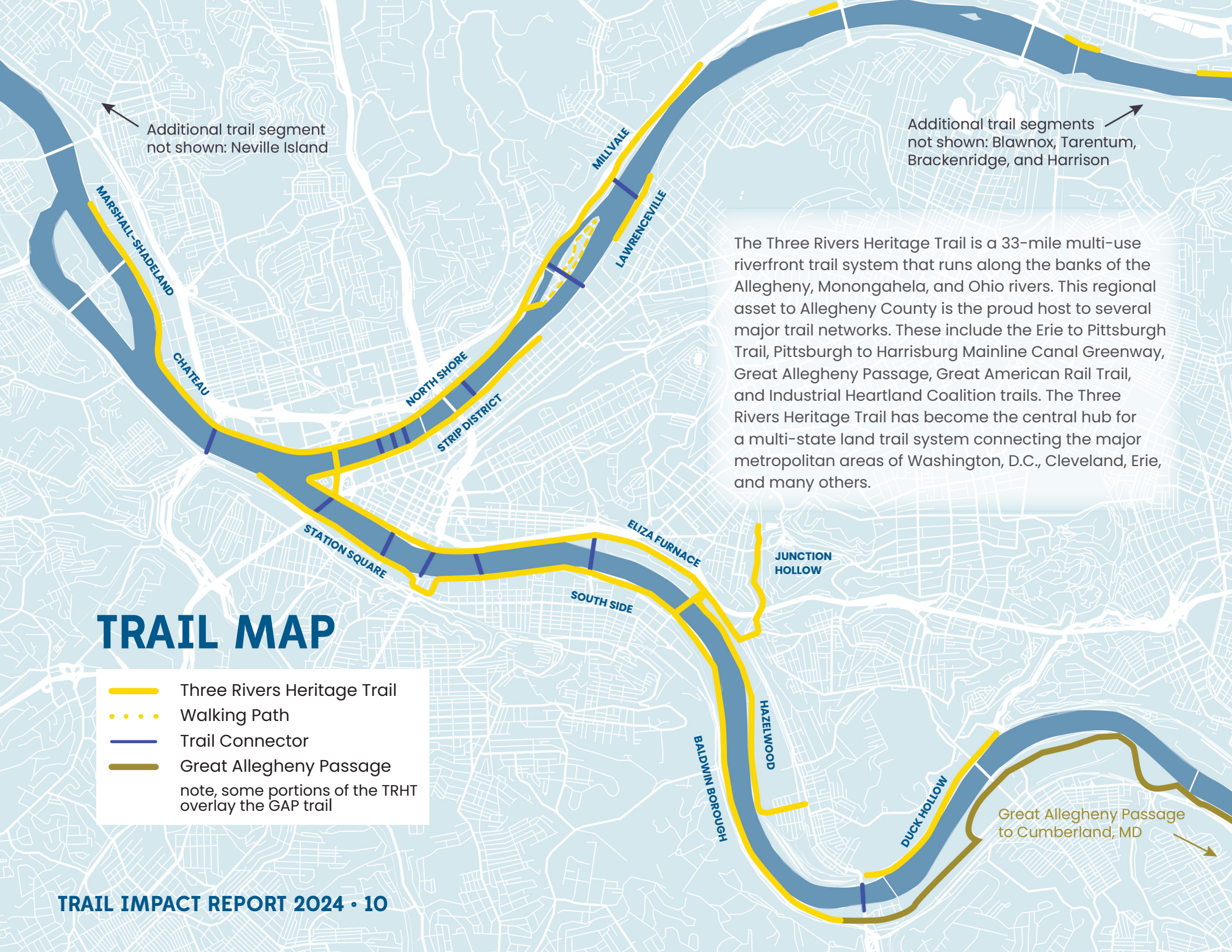
The Three Rivers Heritage Trail has become a regional asset. Hundreds of thousands of trips are taken each year by locals using it for recreation, tourists exploring the city, or cyclists starting their journey in Pittsburgh to transverse the trail to Washington, D.C. via the Great Allegheny Passage and C.O. Canal Towpath. The trail celebrates the heritage that once existed in its place. Along the trail you will find 61 interpretive signs celebrating the history of the region and what once was. The trail has become integrated into the communities as a transportation alternative. It has provided residents and visitor with a healthy means of traveling to work, sporting events, concerts, museum, etc.

The Three Rivers Heritage trail blends both urban and natural landscapes creating a unique user experience. One can curate their ride to meet a variety of needs and interests. The trail is unique in that it is not a linear trail experience. You can start in one river valley and venture to another. You have the option to leave Allegheny County and venture down the Great Allegheny Passage. One day you will have the opportunity to venture to Erie, PA, Cleveland and Ashtabula, OH, and Wheeling, Morgantown, and Parkersburg, WV.

"I really like having safe passage for recreational travel around the city. I have used the trails to give personal tours to many visitors this year. It's helped me make new friends and has had a big impact on my mental health."

TRAIL USER SURVEY RESPONSE





Additional trail segment
not shown: Neville Island

Additional trail segments
not shown: Blawnox, Tarentum,
Brackenridge, and Harrison

The Three Rivers Heritage Trail is a 33-mile multi-use riverfront trail system that runs along the banks of the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio rivers. This regional asset to Allegheny County is the proud host to several major trail networks. These include the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail, Pittsburgh to Harrisburg Mainline Canal Greenway, Great Allegheny Passage, Great American Rail Trail, and Industrial Heartland Coalition trails. The Three Rivers Heritage Trail has become the central hub for a multi-state land trail system connecting the major metropolitan areas of Washington, D.C., Cleveland, Erie, and many others.

TRAIL MAP

- Three Rivers Heritage Trail
 - ... Walking Path
 - Trail Connector
 - Great Allegheny Passage
- note, some portions of the TRHT overlay the GAP trail

Great Allegheny Passage
to Cumberland, MD

Assessing the Impacts



**ECONOMIC
IMPACTS**



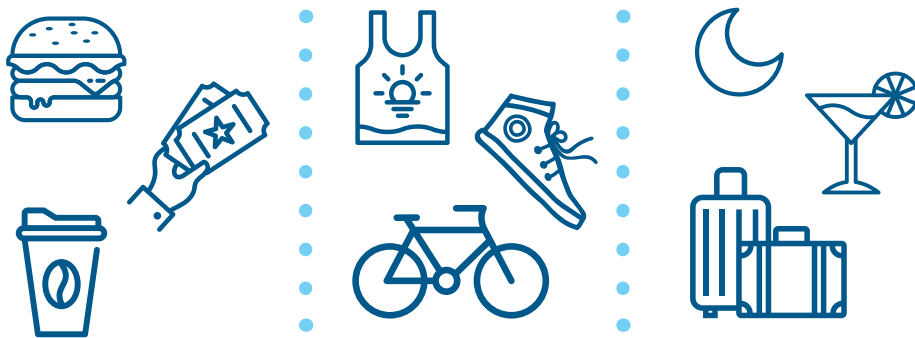
**HEALTH
IMPACTS**



**COMMUNITY
IMPACTS**

Economic Impacts

This analysis focuses on the direct economic impact of the trail, separate from the impact of the many regional assets that the trail links together. We call our downtown the Golden Triangle, and it contains many of the region's attractions. Likewise, attractions across the North Shore, South Side, Strip District such as landmarks, stadiums, museums, venues, main streets, and parks are accessible via the trail. The Three Rivers Heritage Trail is a trail network that links these gems together. This analysis is an appraisal of the network alone, and does not count the impact of each regional asset but the value of both are intrinsically linked.



Trail visitors spend both on **consumable goods** like food and beverages, dining, cultural venues, entertainment, bike and outdoor recreation equipment rental and on **durable goods** like biking supplies, recreation equipment, clothing, and footwear. Further spending impacts are generated by **overnight visitors** who spend on overnight accommodation and consumable goods. Spending impacts were calculated by combining trail counter data with trail spending information from trail user survey results. A detailed explanation of the methodology used for this report is available as an appendix.

SPENDING IMPACTS

\$22.4 M IN DIRECT ANNUAL ECONOMIC IMPACT FROM LOCAL SPENDING ON CONSUMABLE GOODS, OVERNIGHT STAYS, AND PURCHASED DURABLE GOODS.

\$13.3 M in Economic Impact from Local spending on Consumable Goods

Cultural venues, bike rental, entertainment and sporting, recreation equipment rental, groceries, convenience stores, or gas stations, restaurants or prepared food/drink stands including cafes, breweries, ice cream

\$4.8 M in Annual Economic Impact from spending on Durable Goods

Biking supplies / maintenance, recreation equipment, clothing, footwear

\$4.3 M in Annual Spending Generated by overnight visitors

Overnight accommodation and consumable goods spending. A series of survey questions helped determine the spending generated from overnight visitors versus local users.

BUSINESS, EMPLOYMENT, AND TAX IMPACTS

BUSINESS IMPACTS

Trail users support arts, culture, and recreation businesses. The direct spending of trail users benefits the following kinds of businesses:

RESTAURANTS

\$6.4 M



LODGING

\$2.4 M



RETAIL

\$12.5 M



ARTS, CULTURE, & ENTERTAINMENT

\$1 M



EMPLOYMENT

Trail use and spending supports

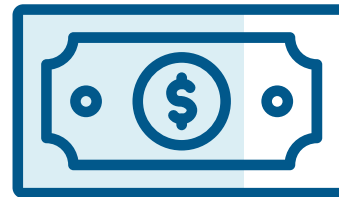
**351
EMPLOYEES**

generating a total

**\$16 M
IN WAGES**

READ ALL ABOUT IT!

The \$16 million in earnings from trail-related spending equals the amount earned by Book Retailers in Allegheny County.



72¢

NEARLY 72 CENTS FROM EVERY DOLLAR SPENT SUPPORTS WAGES FOR RESIDENTS.

\$23

AVERAGE HOURLY WAGE OF TRAIL-SUPPORTED JOBS

TRAIL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT



Traveler's Rest Hotel | Southside

Inspired by their own travels, owners Mary Beth Karabinos and Paul Kletter opened Traveler's Rest in 2018. Catering to cyclists who are traveling the GAP and C&O trails, the pair purchased the building specifically due to its proximity to the trail. They attribute more than a quarter of their business to trail users.



Golden Triangle Bike | Downtown

Golden Triangle Bike has been providing tours, rentals, and shuttle service for more than 15 years to bicyclists exploring Pittsburgh and the region. According to owner Tom Demagall, the trail is responsible for 100% of his business at Golden Triangle where more than 6,000 bikes are rented annually.



Steel City Salt | Millvale

Steel City Salts sells salts, blends, spices, and sugars at its headquarters and storefront in Millvale, as well as hundreds of retailers and restaurants nationwide with products ranging from Himalayan sea salt to dill pickle salt.



Farmer x Baker | Aspinwall

As the name suggests, Farmer x Baker sources local and organic ingredients and transforms them into delicious and beautiful dishes, serving out of a shipping container on the banks of the river in Allegheny Rivertrail Park. Umbrellaed tables provide a relaxing place to fuel up while exploring the great outdoors.



Bike the Burgh | Various Locations

Bike the Burgh hosts a variety of tours featuring Pittsburgh's history, architecture, brew culture, and bridges. The organization has 3,000 bike tour and rentals customers each year and uses the trail system almost every day from April through October.



Over the Bar Bicycle Cafe | Southside

Inspired by the atmosphere of Quaker Steak & Lube, Over the Bar Bicycle Cafe is decorated with bicycles instead of automobiles. "Over the Bar is not only a bicycle-themed restaurant, we consider ourselves to be advocates of active living and healthy lifestyles," says owner, Michael Kotyk. "The surrounding parks and recreational opportunities fit right in with who we are."



The Strip District Terminal balances the needs of the future with the pleasures of the past. Focused on pedestrian access and ease-of-use, the Terminal provides a mix of retail, dining and office space, with an aesthetic spotlight on local and contemporary art. A critical element of the development was the creation of pedestrian passageways at 17th and 18th to connect the neighborhood to the trail.

Source: McCaffery: The Strip District Terminal Transformation

TAX IMPACTS

Spending from trail users and income tax from trail jobs results in an estimated

\$5.7 M
IN TAX
IMPACTS



\$1.6 M
IN LOCAL TAXES
nearly \$50K per mile!



\$1.7 M
IN STATE TAXES
\$51K per mile!



\$2.4 M
IN FEDERAL TAXES
nearly \$74K per mile!

Adding it All Up

If the Three Rivers Heritage Trail were an industry, its Gross Regional Product (GRP) would be nearly **\$26.5 million!**

To put that into context, that is more than the GRP of **surface coal mining** and about equal to the GRP of **commercial bakeries** in Allegheny County.

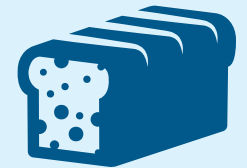


\$26.4 M
SURFACE COAL MINING



\$26.5 M

THREE RIVERS HERITAGE TRAIL



\$26.7 M
COMMERCIAL BAKERIES

Gearing Up Investment



Constructed in 1994 to support Pittsburgh's emerging technology ecosystem, the Pittsburgh Technology Center was one of the first major riverfront brownfield redevelopments in Pittsburgh. Connected to the trail via the Hot Metal Bridge, Pittsburgh Technology Center represents the first planned inner-city industrial development for R&D and a successful adaptive reuse of a former steel site. It serves as an example for further developments along trail adjacent and riverfront properties. An estimated 1,140 workers are currently employed on the site.

Source: Pittsburgh Technology Center Community and History – RIDC and Census on the Map.

Beyond supporting local spending at restaurants and retailers, The Three Rivers Heritage Trail is an important amenity to many of Allegheny County's largest employers. Businesses in Allegheny County have estimated annual revenues of \$307 billion. Businesses within a half mile of the trail have estimated revenues of \$173 billion, which is **56 percent** of the county total.¹

“Access to amenities, like the regional trail network, help meet the live, work, play requirements many companies desire”

Tim White, Senior Vice President, Business Development and Strategy, Regional Industrial Development Corporation (RIDC)

Access to the riverfront and the trail system has spurred significant investment. The development of the trails has helped to spur the significant revitalization adjacent to the trail such as the transformation of the Pittsburgh Technology Center from a suburban office park to a mixed use development now valued at **\$182.9 million** assessed value, the reconnection of the Strip District to the riverfront and the reactivated Strip District Terminal with an assessed value of **\$210 million**. The latest is revitalization of the long dormant J&L Steel Site. The development of Mill 19 on the rebranded Hazelwood Green has a current assessed value of \$16.3 million, but if it matches the value of the nearby Pittsburgh Technology Center, it has the potential to add **\$540 million** to the tax base of the city.²

1. Reported by Database USA from Lightcast™ 2023.

2. This estimate is based on the per acre real estate value of the Pittsburgh Technology Center extrapolated to the Hazelwood Green site.



SUCCESS STORY: Mill 19

Mill 19, a former steel mill located on the 178-acre Hazelwood Green site, once owned by J&L Steel Hazelwood Works and LTV Steel, was one of the last large riverfront brownfields within city limits. The building was left to rust when the steel industry collapsed, but its bones – an underlying steel superstructure – remain strong. Today, Mill 19 has been revitalized and, while its design pays tribute to our industrial past, it has been transformed into a hallmark of the region's economic growth and its path forward.

Redevelopment of the site focused on pedestrian and bike infrastructure, including protected bike lanes, raised crosswalks, lighting, street trees, and bike racks. Paved bikeable and walkable paths reconnect Hazelwood to the Monongahela River and other city trails. Outdoor amenities include a “ruin” garden, a contemplative space that combines the remnants of old machinery foundations with thoughtful landscaping. Seating includes steel beams and concrete salvaged from the original building. Other amenities will include a stage for outdoor performances and other amenities designed to invite and encourage public use of the space.

Source: RIDC Mill 19: A Pittsburgh Industrial Hallmark

Health Impacts

While recreational trails are frequently cited for their positive economic impacts, the health impacts are also significant and cannot be overlooked. A variety of studies have found mental health benefits, including social connectivity, physical health benefits, environmental health benefits and even medical cost saving benefits of trails.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Our survey results indicate that **79% of trail users report a positive change in mood or self-esteem after using the trail.** This is not an anomaly. A recent analysis of ten studies found significant improvements in self-esteem and mood after participants exercised outside.³

It's also worth noting that **55% of survey respondents indicated they used the trail with a group.** Social connectedness is a core influencer of health, and has been correlated with longer life and improved mental and physical health outcomes. Trails provide an important space for social connectivity.⁴

PHYSICAL HEALTH

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "having access to places for physical activity, such as parks and trails, encourages community residents to participate in physical activity and do so more often."⁵ Our survey results reflect this: **53% of trail users report the amount of time they spend exercising has increased since they started using the trail.** And this is supported by a variety of studies. A study was conducted before and after trails were installed, and found that those living within less than a mile of the new trails were getting on average 45 minutes more exercise a week after the trails were built than they were before they had that available infrastructure.⁶

There are lots of studies on the physical health benefits of active transportation, which are worth mentioning here, because in our survey, **13% of respondents use the trails for transportation or for commuting to school or work.** One study with over 200,000 participants found that those who commute on foot or by bike have significantly lower rates of cardiovascular disease and cancer than those who commute by car.⁷

3. Barton J, Pretty J. *What is the best dose of nature and green exercise for improving mental health? A multi-study analysis.* Environ Sci Technol. 2010 May 15.

4. National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Population Health, *How Does Social Connectedness Affect Health?*, 2023, March 30.

5. Centers for Disease Control, Parks, Trails and Health, 2014, October 27.

6. Goodman A, Sahlqvist S, Ogilvie D. *New Walking and Cycling Routes and Increased Physical Activity: One- and 2-Year Findings From the UK iConnect Study.* American Public Health Association. 2014, April 15.

7. Celis-Moralis C, Lyall D, Welsh P, Anderson J, Steel L, Guo Y, Maldonado R, Mackay D, Pell J, Sattar N, Gill J. *Association between active commuting and incident cardiovascular disease, cancer, and mortality: prospective cohort study.* British Medical Journal. 2017, April 19.

MEDICAL COST SAVINGS

There is a small body of evidence surrounding the medical cost savings related to trail use. One survey of over 3,000 urban trail users found that “regular trail use prevents 36 hospitalizations due to chronic diseases and 182 premature deaths per 100,000 trail users and year, worth \$2.1 million in avoided treatment costs and \$1.7 billion based on Value of Statistical Life (VSL), respectively.”⁸ And a literature review by the American Heart Association found that for **every \$1 invested in building trails, there is a direct correlation to \$3 of saved medical costs.**⁹



ADDING IT ALL UP

Trail use prevents hospitalizations, premature death, and avoided treatment costs. For trail users, usage of the Three Rivers Heritage Trail:

Prevents

29

premature deaths



Provides medical cost savings of

\$338,000

in avoided treatment costs –
equivalent to the average medical
expenditure of **53** households¹⁰

Produces

\$273 M

in Value of
Statistical Life
benefit¹¹

8. Götschi T, Hadden Loh T, *Advancing project-scale health impact modeling for active transportation: A user survey and health impact calculation of 14 US trails*. Journal of Transport & Health. 2017, March 4.

9. *Creating Spaces That Promote Active Living*. American Heart Association. 2019.

10. Based on average medical expenditures of \$6,392.53 per household in Allegheny County. Source: ESRI 2021 from Census Business Builder.

11. Value of Statistical Life benefit refers to the additional cost that individuals would be willing to bear for improvements in safety that, in the aggregate, reduce the expected number of fatalities)

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Continuing on the thread of active commuting, the environmental benefits are also valuable to consider. A study of nearly 2,000 people found that “those who switch just one trip per day from car driving to cycling **reduce their carbon footprint by about 0.5 tons over a year, representing a substantial share of average per capita CO² emissions,**” which averages 1.8 tons to 2.7 tons in the 7 cities included in the study. Those who already cycle to commute “had 84% lower CO² emissions from all daily travel than non-cyclists.”¹²



ADDING IT ALL UP

13% of trail users’ primary use of the Three Rivers Heritage Trail is for transportation or commuting – representing an estimated 2,095 commuters. If each trail commuter reduces their carbon footprint by about 0.5 tons over a year, commuting via the Three Rivers Heritage Trail would save **1,047 tons of CO₂ annually**. This carbon footprint savings is equivalent to:



taking **233** gas-powered cars off the road

offsetting the energy use of
132 homes



or **2,422** barrels of oil **not burned**¹³

12. Dunning H. *Ditching the car for walking or biking just one day a week cuts carbon footprint* Imperial College of London. 2021, February 4.

13. EPA Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator

Community Impacts

Trails economically benefit individuals, property-owners, and communities. Trails increase property values, increase spending at adjacent businesses, influence business site selection, increase tax revenues, reduce medical costs, provide additional transportation options, and serve as low or no cost recreation. Trails can impact the economies of adjacent places through property values, municipal budgets, and business development. In this section, we analyze the impact of trails on the economies of the places they pass through and, wherever possible, consider how that impact has changed over the last decade.

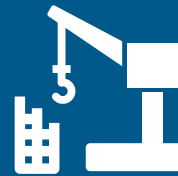


REAL ESTATE AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

Property along the Three Rivers Heritage Trail is valuable real estate. **Properties within a half mile of the trail have a fair market value of \$13.8 billion.** These properties represent 12% of the total property value across Allegheny County, even though they only account for 1% of the total land acreage. Properties within half a mile of the trail are **more than 10 times as valuable per acre as the average property in Allegheny County.** Properties within a half mile of the trail have an average fair market value of \$2.6 million per acre compared to \$247,000 for the county as a whole.

ADDING IT ALL UP

The trail has driven new commercial and residential development with building permit activity for new construction concentrated along the trail. An analysis of City of Pittsburgh building permit data since June of 2019 indicates significant construction activity planned within a half mile of the trail. This includes:



289 new commercial and residential building projects permitted within a half mile of the trail representing...

25%

of all new residential construction in the city, valued at

\$27 M

57%

of all new commercial construction in the city valued at

\$870 M

...for a total of **\$987 M** or 55% of all development activity in the City of Pittsburgh.



PROPERTY VALUES

Over the past decade, while residential property values across Allegheny County have increased, residential properties in close proximity to the trail have increased even more. Since 2014, the median priced home in Allegheny County increased by \$46,600, while trail adjacent properties increased by \$53,500. Residential properties located in block groups that contain segments of the Three Rivers Heritage Trail have on average **increased in value by \$6,900 more per home** relative to similar homes in Allegheny County in the past decade. The change in total value for these 11,191 properties in close proximity to the trail compared to their Allegheny County counterparts results in **a net residential property value increase of \$77.2 million in the past decade.**

ADDING IT ALL UP

Increases in property values benefit individual property owners, but they also benefit municipalities and school districts by generating revenue through property taxes. The expected increase in property value associated with residential properties located in close proximity to the trail could contribute **an additional \$2 million annually in property tax revenue for municipalities, school districts, and the county**, including:



\$1 million

to schools

\$619,000

to municipal governments



\$365,000

to the county

An evolving riverfront

Pittsburgh's riverfronts have an industrial past that positioned the city as a leading economic driver during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Private enterprise monopolized riverfronts, leaving generations disconnected from the beauty and benefits of the Three Rivers. Today, Friends of the Riverfront works to reclaim riverfront space for public enjoyment and recreation.

For more than a century, Pittsburgh's riverfronts were cut off from public access due to heavy industry, including steel mills and railroads until its decline in the 1970s. The riverfronts that were once seen as the backyard of Pittsburgh, were ripe with opportunity for economic development and reconnecting communities to the rivers as they once were. The Three Rivers Heritage Trail was an important piece of the revitalization efforts by the city and region after decades of heavy industrial use and legacy pollution.

Before the industrialization of Pittsburgh, the riverfronts were a recreational haven. The rivers, lined with boathouses and public swimming clubs, were well integrated into the communities. This former glory is what inspired the region to rehabilitate the riverfronts and a public trail was a part of that vision.

Friends of the Riverfront uses trail development as a tool to forge connections and improve the quality of life in communities around the county. Since its creation, the Three Rivers Heritage Trail has shaped the way people in Pittsburgh, PA view and interact with their city. The trail creates space for people to better connect with each other and their environment leading to a safer more vibrant Pittsburgh.



The riverfront in 1967...



...and today

A (brief) history of the three rivers heritage trail

1991

Friends of the Riverfront is incorporated on February 14, 1991. 'Friends' sprang from a realization that emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s of a once-in-a-century opportunity to reclaim much of the City's 35 miles of riverfront for continuous public access and greenway/recreational use. The first segment of the Three Rivers Heritage Trail was designated in 1991 by Mayor Sophie Masloff.



2010

Three Rivers Heritage Trail and Three Rivers Water Trail designated as National Recreation Trails in May 2010



2011

The **Community Trails Initiative Study** was completed in 2011, focusing on the largest expansion of the trail with potentially 26 miles in the Allegheny Valley

2014

The **Great Allegheny Passage** is completed, connecting Pittsburgh to Cumberland, MD via 150 miles of trails.



**TRAIL
DEVELOPMENT**



Trail development through the years

Southside - 1991, 1998, 1999, 2005

North Shore - 1994, 1997, 1998

Lawrenceville - 1996

Eliza Furnace - 1998

Chateau - 1998, 2000

Panther Hollow - 1999

Duck Hollow - 2001

Washington's Landing - 1999

Station Square - 2002

Strip District - 2002

Baldwin Borough - 2002

Millvale - 2002

Hot Metal Bridge - 2007

Casino - 2009

Mon Wharf - 2010

Route 28 - 2010

Convention Center - 2012

Hazelwood - 2012

Keystone/GAP - 2012

Aspinwall - 2014

O'Hara - 2016

Neville Island - 2016

Blawnox - 2017

Etna - 2021

Harrison - 2023

Brackenridge - 2023



Martin O'Malley and Mayor Sophie Masloff at the groundbreaking for the South Side segment, 1991



A marker along the Lawrenceville segment of the trail notes the distance to Point State Park

Future impacts



The Three Rivers Heritage Trail has become a vital part of Pittsburgh's identity by honoring the past while contributing to a healthier and more prosperous future. There are 35 miles of trail currently under development. The trail currently contributes **\$801,000 in Gross Regional Product per mile and \$486,000 in earnings per mile**. When the trail in the development pipeline is completed, the expected impacts could include **\$28 million in additional Gross Regional Product and \$17 million in additional earnings**.

In demonstrating the many benefits of the trail, we hope to celebrate the contributions of those who have championed the effort over the past three decades while inspiring similar projects the world over.

See you on the trails, where the journey continues.



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