



# THE ECONOMICS OF TRAILS

Many people tend to link trails with recreation and relaxation, so it is easy to overlook the economic and social impacts trails provide to Ontario's communities. By reviewing the economic impact for each of the major trail users, as both direct and related expenses, the scope of the level of activity within Ontario becomes clearer.

User group	Km of trail	Economic Expenditure Trail Use	Related Variable Day/Night Expenses	Total <sup>i</sup>
Snowmobiles/ATV's	50,000	\$682 million	\$518 million	\$1.2 billion
Hikers	8,000	\$70 million	\$240 million	\$310 million
Urban Pedestrian	4,000	\$400 million	\$40 million	\$440 million
Cyclists - Shared Use	2,000	\$20 million	\$26 million	\$46 million

The growing trend of people taking their vacations closer to home, for shorter durations but with more frequency is a direct result of our changing attitudes towards improved quality family time, as well as meeting individual economic needs. Many trail user group organizations are well-positioned to fill that need, for example three-day equestrian rides and five-day bicycle tours. During these excursions, money is pumped into the local economy through sales of durable goods, lodging and food.

Local businesses receive the most immediate economic benefit of trails. The Bruce Trail, most notably Ontario's longest hiking trail, averages 400,000 users annually, 70% of whom purchase non-durable goods during their visit to the Bruce Trail area with an average expenditure of about \$20 (that's \$5,600,000 of spending!). Approximately 75% of this was spent within a 10km corridor on either side of the trail (Schutt 1997).

Trails also have a positive impact on the economics of our health care system. By leading a more active lifestyle, eating

properly and using trails as a form of recreational exercise, people are better able to manage their health. Having access to safe and affordable recreation, people can prevent and/or manage health afflictions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease and stroke, and circulatory and respiratory problems. Our provincial government recognizes this invaluable contribution and addresses it by outlining in their board of health guidelines under chronic disease prevention:

- The board of health shall work with municipal recreation departments and other community partners to promote and increase access to regular physical activity for people of all ages. This shall include as a minimum:
  - assist community partners to increase the availability of safe and accessible recreation opportunities such as walking trails and cycling routes.

Trails hit even closer to home. Several studies have shown that residential properties are



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easier to sell when located close to greenspaces; it's also been identified that property values increase based on the proximity to the trail. One reason is the reduction of street noise. Trails provide an environment for recreation and an opportunity to get in touch with nature.

Trails enhance activity and helps introduce neighbors. Trails “help reduce municipal costs associated with providing infrastructure and transportation services to outlying areas” (Community Greenspaces are Worth Money, Environment Canada, 2000). In an urban setting, trails encourage active transportation. Active transportation means fewer vehicles on the roads, not only reducing emissions, but also reducing the operating costs for personal vehicles, i.e., gas and maintenance. Victoria Transport Policy Institute, 1996, reported that the cost of urban personal motor vehicles (accidents, pollution, congestion, parking, roads and surrounding land) not paid for by individual users is \$26.5 billion annually. And

Transport Canada, 1997, estimates the environmental impact of (all) transportation is between \$14 - \$36 billion annually. Health care costs due to poor air quality from emissions and lower levels of physical activity have not been factored in. As the OTC continues to study the economic impact of trails, we are finding that trails

- 1) have a net economic benefit from trail infrastructure development in communities
- 2) have a direct and measurable impact on the local economy with increased tourism and jobs
- 3) decrease health care costs
- 4) improve property value
- 5) provide a healthy, cost-effective method of transportation

All this and beauty too. Who would have thought that trails had so much to offer!

## Sources

1. Go for Green ([www.goforgreen.ca](http://www.goforgreen.ca))
2. Schutt, A.M. (1997), The Bruce Trail, Ontario: Users and Their Economic Impact. M.A. Thesis, Canadian Heritage and Development Studies, Trent University
3. Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, December 1997

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<sup>i</sup> Chart number formulae - established based upon verbal estimates reported to the OTC and information from Hike Ontario based upon, "Economic and User Survey of the Bruce Trail", Trent University (Peterborough, Ontario), 1997.