

Trails boost business, health

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The [York County Heritage Rail Trail](#) is more than just a walk in the park.

The roughly 21-mile trail resulted in \$5.4 million to \$6.2 million of economic impact in 2007, according to a [User Survey](#) by the county's Rail Trail Authority.

Rail trails are branching out and expanding across the midstate, and proponents say they're good for area residents' economic - as well as physical - health.

The York County Heritage Rail Trail, which stretches from the Mason-Dixon Line to downtown York, drew 394,823 users in 2007.

York County administers the trail as one of its parks and is extending it from the [Colonial Complex](#) downtown north to [John C. Rudy Park](#) in East Manchester Township.

The expansion will bring more people into the city because they can leave their cars at a suburban terminus and bike in instead of having to park downtown, said Tammy Klunk, assistant director of the York County Parks and Recreation Department.

The user survey also details other economic impacts the trail has on the area: 89.6 percent of respondents said their time on the trail influenced them to buy "hard" goods such as running or biking gear, leading to each individual spending an average of \$367 on these items.

The report notes that this figure compares to other Pennsylvania rail trails such as the Pine Creek Rail Trail, a 2006 study of which showed users spent an average of \$354.97 on these items.

Some 79.1 percent of York Heritage Rail Trail survey respondents said they had purchased soft goods such as food or water related to their time spent on the trail, averaging \$12.86 per person per trip.

Estimating 350,000 visitors per year, report authors calculated roughly \$5.4 million of impact per year for hard good and soft goods; for 400,000 visitors, that number climbs \$6.2 million. (The attendance for 2007 was 394,000.)

Not counted in these tallies were the 12 percent of respondents who said they booked an overnight stay in conjunction with their use of the trail, spending an average of \$51.

Another piece of the economic impact is the businesses that have expanded or opened to take advantage of traffic on the trail, the report notes, including the New Freedom Railroad Café and The Cycle Inn bed and breakfast.

Work also continues on the 12.5-mile [Lebanon Valley Rail-Trail](#) in Lebanon County, which runs from near Zinns Mill Road south to join the 5-mile [Conewago Recreation Trail](#) at the Lancaster County line.

About 4 miles are being added from Zinns Mill Road to Eighth Street behind the Lebanon Daily News building, and organizers are applying for the next phase, which would extend the trail north from there.

The rail trail can help lure businesses relocating to the area because one of the first questions businesses ask is about recreational activities for employees in the area, said Jon Fitzkee, a transportation planner with the Lebanon County Planning Department.

"This current phase into the city of Lebanon opens (the trail) up to more usage than before," he said.

It runs past the [Lebanon Expo Center](#), South Hills Park in South Lebanon Township and Lebanon High School and Cedar Crest High School.

Workers can use the trail on their lunch break, and area residents can use it to commute by bicycle, Fitzkee said.

In that vein, a 2003 study by Indiana University's [Center For Urban Policy And The Environment](#) found that a rail trail in Indianapolis increased property values along it by a total of \$140 million.

Trail access is the top amenity potential homeowners said they would like to have in a new community, according to a 2004 study by the National Association of Homebuilders that was [Cited](#) in the New York Times.

But a trail need not be near homes to have an economic impact.

In Lancaster County, Manor Township is negotiating with [Norfolk Southern Corp.](#) to acquire 207 acres to create a six-mile rail trail along the Susquehanna River. The township's appraisal places the value of the land, which sits above the active rail line, at \$435,000.

"We're confident it will be a great enhancement, and it will be used extensively," said Barry Smith, manager for Manor Township.

Although the proposed trail itself is in a rural and remote area, it has the possibility of drawing more people to nearby Millersville, Columbia and Washington Boro, Smith said.

Further down the road, Smith said he believes the trail has the potential to spark interest - and investment - in the Susquehanna River corridor.

"It's going to bring people," he said.