



CONNECTING COMMUNITIES TO ACTIVE RECREATION



Mindful of our nation's growing obesity epidemic and the increasingly significant need to mitigate congestion and pollution, NRPA urges Congress to increase its investment in alternative methods of transportation that will help alleviate the environmental, economic, and health challenges faced by our nation.

Specifically, the more than 21,000 members of the National Recreation and Park Association call on Congress to provide \$690 million over 6 years for the recreational trails program in the reauthorization of the Surface Transportation Program and to increase funding for the Transportation Enhancements Program, bike and pedestrian trails, and other transportation programs that improve community health and livability.

Why Invest in Trails?

While trails have historically been viewed primarily as a recreation resource, today they are used for much more than just recreation and have become a vital component in addressing such issues as energy dependence, climate change, poor air quality, and traffic congestion.

In cities and rural communities throughout our country, trails provide citizens with alternative means of accessing essential community services and resources. These networks require minimal or no transport via motorized vehicles and connect citizens to other modes of transportation within a community. Additionally, trails provide convenient and affordable means of access to community businesses, resources, and amenities which stimulate local economies, strengthen community health and wellness, enhance quality of life for all citizens, and protect our environment. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) acknowledges the importance of

increasing physical activity through built and natural environment changes, including the development and promotion of such community infrastructure as trails, bikeways, sidewalks, and parks. In 2001, the Task Force on Community Preventive Services noted the need to increase physical activity within communities, and specifically recommended creating or enhancing access to places for physical activity (e.g., biking or walking trails).

Legislative Background

With the passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Equity Act (ISTEA) in 1991, Congress set forth a proclamation that the nation's surface transportation program include funding for more than just highway construction projects. More specifically, the language in ISTEA set the foundation for the development of a national, multi-modal approach to transportation with a strong recognition of the integral role local communities would have in helping to meet the national goals of minimizing congestion and improving air quality.

In the surface transportation bills that have been enacted since that time, Congress has funded a variety of alternative transportation programs, including Transportation Enhancements, the Recreational Trails Program, Safe Routes to School, and a number of other programs that promote livable communities and provide health and wellness, safety, and economic benefits to communities nationwide.

The current authorization of the Surface Transportation Act was signed into law in August 2005, as the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), and provided a

\$244 billion investment in our nation's public transportation and transportation infrastructure.

SAFETEA-LU provided approximately \$3.5 billion for the Transportation Enhancements program of which approximately 55 percent is allocated to bike and pedestrian trails and rails-to-trails conversion projects. SAFETEA-LU also provided funding to a variety of other programs of interest to park and recreation agencies. For instance, the Recreational Trails Program was funded at \$370 million and the Boating Safety and Fishing Education Trust Fund received \$570 million.

Addressing National Priorities

Protecting Our Environment

Trails have an enormous impact on the environment. They play a vital role in decreasing the levels of CO₂ emissions released into the atmosphere, they enable people to experience wildlife habitat with minimal impacts, and they can also be an important environmental education tool.

- According to the 2001 National Household Transportation Survey, Roughly 40 percent of all trips in metropolitan areas are two-miles or less in length, which are trips that can and should be taken on foot or bicycle but are still taken primarily by car due to disjointed land-use patterns, poor infrastructure design, and limited connectivity.

- A report released by the Federal Highway Administration entitled, *Benefits of Bicycling and Walking to Health*, reports that families who walk two miles a day instead of driving will, in one year, prevent 730 pounds of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere.

- A report released by the Rails to Trails Conservancy illustrates that the volume of decreased auto travel is equivalent to cutting oil dependence and greenhouse gas emissions from passenger vehicles by 3 percent (modest scenario) to 8 percent (substantial scenario).

Improving Health in Communities

In 2001, the Department of Health and Human Services published *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*. In this report, the Surgeon General declares the increased rate of obesity in the United States an

epidemic and called upon communities to create safe sidewalks or trails to encourage physical activity.

Subsequent reports stress the importance of creating opportunities for physical activity within communities.

The prevalence of adult obesity in the United States has more than doubled since 1980 to where two-thirds of U.S. adults are now overweight or obese. The increase is even more severe among children and teens. Physical inactivity increases the occurrence of chronic diseases and adds to increased healthcare costs. The CDC estimates that the total cost of obesity in the United States in the year 2000 was \$117 billion.

Studies show that community-based prevention activities (such as improving recreation infrastructure) are among the most effective means of combating obesity and chronic disease.

- In a study published by the CDC, creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity led to a 25.6 percent increase in the number of people exercising three or more days per week.

- A group of studies reviewed in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* show that creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity combined with informational outreach produces a 48.4 percent increase in frequency of physical activity.

- According to a report published by the Rand Corporation, for every mile a person walks or runs, they will save society at least 24 cents per mile in medical and other costs.

Economic Benefits of Trails

Trails help to boost local economies in a variety of different ways. In fact, a National Park Service study reveals that the economic impact of a trail is realized through a combination of newly created trail-related jobs and the expansion of existing businesses related to travel, equipment, clothes, food, souvenirs, and maps.

The National Trails Training Partnership notes that a trail can bring at least \$1 million annually to a community.

In a 2008 Department of Transportation interim report on the Nonmotorized Transportation Pilot program's survey of four communities, levels of non-motorized transportation in the four communities reduce total vehicle-miles traveled by an estimated 156.1 million miles over the course of a year, which is a projected saving of more than \$23 million in fuel costs alone, and a reduction of 67,000 metric tons of CO₂ emissions.