

# SILVER COMET TRAIL



Silver Comet Trail  
Economic Impact Analysis and  
Planning Study  
July 2013

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## STAFF

David Kenemer, Northwest Georgia Regional Commission  
Byron Rushing, Atlanta Regional Commission  
Julie Smith, Bike! Walk! Northwest Georgia

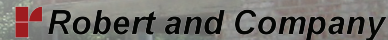
## PROJECT STAKEHOLDERS

Georgia Department of Transportation  
Polk County Board of Commissioners  
Polk County Tourism  
City of Rockmart  
GRITS  
Georgia Bikes  
City of Dallas  
PATH Foundation  
Paulding County Transportation  
Rome Chamber of Commerce  
Outdoor Chattanooga  
Cobb County Department of Transportation  
Cobb County Parks and Recreation, Cultural Affairs Dep't.  
Silver Comet Cycles  
Bike Cobb  
Walker County

City of Atlanta Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs  
City of Atlanta Department of Planning and Community Development  
Georgia Department of Economic Development  
Lula Lake Land Trust  
Rome/Floyd County Planning Department  
City of Rome

## CONSULTANT TEAM

Alta Planning + Design  
Econsult Solutions  
Robert and Company



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

<b>1</b>	<b>PROJECT BACKGROUND</b>	
	Introduction and Project Purpose.....	1-2
	History of the Silver Comet Trail .....	1-2
	Context.....	1-3
	Project Goals .....	1-4
	Stakeholder Involvement .....	1-4
	Benefits of Trails and Greenways .....	1-6
<b>2</b>	<b>TRAIL USAGE EVALUATION</b>	
	Overview.....	2-2
	Summary of Findings.....	2-3
	Trail Count Summary.....	2-7
	Trail Evaluation Surveys.....	2-11
<b>3</b>	<b>ECONOMIC IMPACT SUMMARY: EXISTING CONDITIONS</b>	
	Introduction and Overview.....	3-2
	Direct Activity.....	3-5
	Tourism Activity.....	3-8
	Tourism Spending.....	3-9
	Spillover Impacts .....	3-12
	Unmet Demand .....	3-15
	Fiscal Impacts.....	3-19
	Property Value Impacts.....	3-19
<b>4</b>	<b>TRAIL EXPANSION RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGY</b>	
	Overview .....	4-2
	Regional Corridor Expansion .....	4-4
	Local Corridor Expansion .....	4-9
	Future Trail Features and Amenities .....	4-16
	Phasing Strategy .....	4-17
	Probable Development Costs .....	4-21
<b>5</b>	<b>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY</b>	
	Maximizing Impact .....	5-2
	Best Practices .....	5-2
	New Development.....	5-6
	Cost Benefit Framework .....	5-13
<b>6</b>	<b>IMPLEMENTATION</b>	
	Overview .....	6-2
	Implementation Schedule .....	6-2
	Funding Strategies .....	6-3
	Implementation Action Steps .....	6-4
	<b>APPENDICES</b>	
	Appendix A: Funding.....	A-1
	Appendix B: Design Guidelines.....	B-2
	Appendix C: Economics.....	C-2

# CHAPTER TWO

## TRAIL USAGE EVALUATION

### OVERVIEW

The trail usage evaluation for this project is a first of its kind for the Silver Comet Trail. While efforts have been undertaken to analyze portions of the Silver Comet Trail since its initial development, there has never been an effort to look at the entire 61 mile stretch of trail.

The trail evaluation was used to answer several questions including:

- How many people are using the trail and where are people using the trail?
- Who is using the trail?
- When and how often are people using the trail?
- Do people spend money in the communities along the trail and if they do, what do they spend their money on?

To get answers to these questions, the planning team developed a data collection methodology specific to this project but one that is also in line with national best practices. The methodology for the trail usage evaluation, along with the results, are presented in the sections that follow.



## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### SUMMARY OF COUNT FINDINGS

- Number of trail users counted: 6,524 people
- 71% of users were cyclists.
- 28% of users were pedestrians.
- The weekly trail volumes are highest during the weekends.
- Women are more likely to use trail heads that are in more densely populated areas, such as a downtown or trail head with significant user volumes.
- Pedestrian volumes are highest at trail heads in more densely developed areas.
- At rural trail heads or less developed areas, the majority of users are cyclists.
- Smyrna Trail Head
  - Highest estimated annual trail volume
  - Highest % of pedestrians compared to all users counted at trail head
- Cedartown Trail Head
  - Lowest estimated annual trail volume
  - Georgia/Alabama State Line

### SUMMARY OF SURVEY FINDINGS

- Number of Surveys: 889
- 84% of people drive to the trail.
- 97% of people use the trail for exercising or recreation.
- The trail is a regional trail. People visiting the trail traveled from 23 counties and 8 different states, including Washington state, to use the trail.
- The majority of trail users use the trail often (more than 5 times a month) and use it year round.
- Highest ranking improvements desired:
  - Restrooms
  - More trails
  - Wayfinding and signage
- When users spend money while using the trail, the majority of them spend money on food.
- When users spend money while using the trail, the majority of them (approximately 80%) spend \$50 or less.
- When people visit the trail from out of town, the majority of them are just visiting for the day.

## METHODOLOGY

The trail evaluation for this project used the methodology developed as part of the National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project (NBPDP). The project is co-sponsored by Alta Planning + Design and the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) Pedestrian and Bicycle Council. The project provides a consistent model for data collection and on-going data use for communities across the US.

The national methodology provides standardized formats for data collection and analysis. Annual counts conducted in a systematic manner provide strong benchmarking information on bicycling, walking and trail activity. Count data can help understand existing bicycling and pedestrian patterns, understand needs, plan for future bikeways, walkways, and trails, and measure the success of existing programs and facilities. While the count data does not provide comprehensive mode share data, it does offer a snapshot of peak bicycle and pedestrian activity on a typical day.

Information was collected using counts and surveys. The counts provide baseline data of volumes of users along the trail, as well as other user characteristics such as mode of travel. The surveys help identify trip characteristics, additional user characteristics, and user attitudes and preferences about trail conditions.

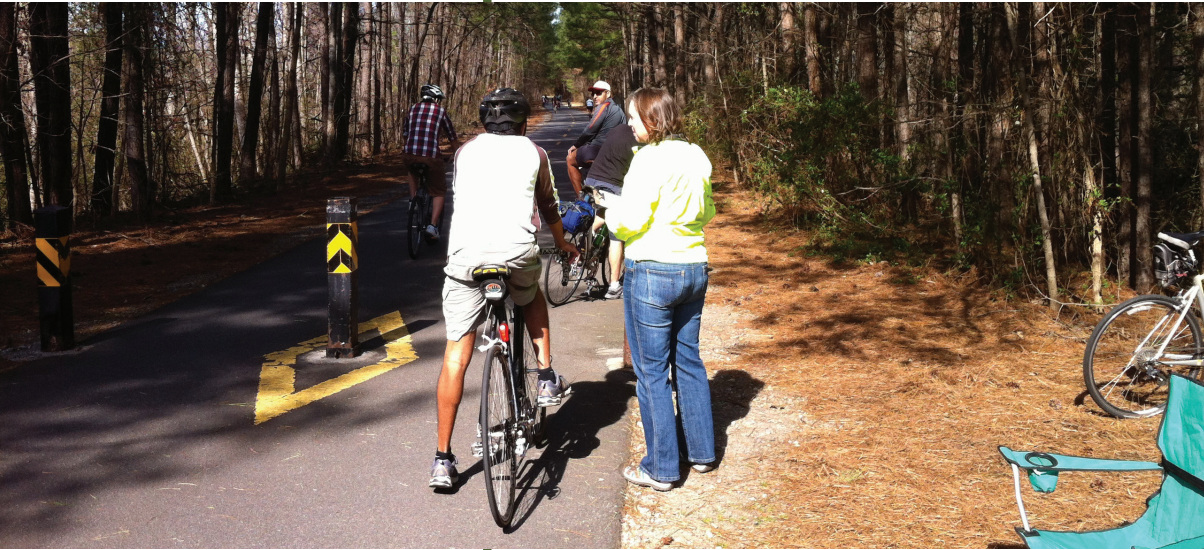


*Volunteers conducted counts and surveys through training administered by the consultant.*

## LOCATIONS

Counts were conducted at nine locations along the trail. The locations were selected based on the following criteria:

- trail conditions
- geography (rural to urban)
- jurisdiction
- anticipated higher volumes of trail use
- proximity to destinations



*Intercept surveys were conducted among random users.*

The selected count locations included:

- Alabama/Georgia State Line
- Cedar Town Trail Head
- Rockmart Trail Head
- Rambo Nursery Trail Head
- Dallas Trail Head
- Hiram Trail Head
- Powder Springs Trail Head
- Silver Comet Cycles Trail Head
- Smyrna Trail Head

Summary data for trail heads is included in the Trail Count Summary section of this chapter. Additionally, trail head specific count data is provided in the Appendix.

#### DATES

The days of the week and the times of day for the counts were in line with NBPDP standards. Additionally, the time of day for the weekend counts was extended from the typical two-hour time period to a four-hour time period. The extended time period was selected to incorporate the NBPDP recommended time of 12pm-2pm as well as the 10am-12pm, which the steering committee felt was important to capture local trail use patterns.

It should be noted that while counts were scheduled for four dates in March, trail evaluations were only conducted on two Wednesdays and the first Saturday. Trail evaluations were canceled on Saturday March 23 due to inclement weather. While best practices encourage the use of a minimum of two data points for analysis, the Planning Team felt comfortable that the first Saturday represented a typical spring day. The weather on Saturday March 16 was sunny and warm.

Table 2.1 Trail Evaluation Dates

COUNT WEEK	WEEKDAY	WEEKEND
Week 1	Wednesday March 13	Saturday March 16
Week 2	Wednesday March 20	Saturday March 23 (cancelled)

Table 2.2 Trail Evaluation Time of Day

DAY OF WEEK	TIME
Weekday (Wednesday)	PM: 4 -6pm
Weekend (Saturday)	PM: 10am-2pm

### FORMS

Two field count forms, one for the weekday counts and one for the weekend counts, were used for the trail evaluation. Two form types were needed because the time periods for data collection (two hours for weekday counts versus four hours for weekend counts) are different. Two survey forms, one for the field surveys and one for the online survey, were used for the trail evaluation. Two form types were needed because the questions differ for those using the trail for a specific trip and those not using the trail for a specific trip. Instructions on how to use the field survey

were provided during the volunteer training webinar. The count and survey forms for the used for the trail evaluation are provided in the Appendix of this report.

### VOLUNTEER TRAINING

To ensure the data was collected consistently and accurately, all volunteers were required to participate in a data collection training session. This requirement was important to ensure the data was collected consistently and accurately and to provide a means of quality control. The session was hosted and led by the Planning Team using a webinar and online video.

Table 2.3 Summary of Volunteer Training

DATE	FORMAT	VIEWING AREAS
Thursday March 7 from 12pm – 1pm	Online webinar	Online; Atlanta Regional Commission; and the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission

Topics covered included:

- Overview of the project
- Logistics
- Preparation for the day of the count
- Setting up for the counts and surveys
- How to conduct the counts and surveys
- What do you do when the count and survey time is over.



## COUNTS

User counts were conducted in the field at nine pre-selected locations. The counts were manual screen line counts conducted by trained volunteers. One volunteer from each volunteer team was assigned the task of conducting the counts.

The screen line counts were conducted along the trail, rather than at a trail head intersection or street crossing. Screen line counts are used to collect data on the number of people who pass a specific point, or "screen", traveling in one of two directions. Screen line counts are different than intersection counts, which document the number of people passing through an intersection in three or more directions.

## SURVEYS

Surveys were conducted in the field and online.

### FIELD SURVEYS

The field surveys were conducted at the same time as the counts. The volunteers tasked with conducting the surveys were asked to survey as many trail users as possible during their scheduled time slots. Volunteers either read the survey questions to trail users and document their responses or allowed the participants to complete the survey themselves.

## ONLINE SURVEYS

The online survey was hosted by the Planning Team using Survey Money and was distributed by the steering committee to list-serves and email lists managed by the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission, Atlanta Regional Commission and local advocacy groups. The online survey was open from early February 2013 to the end of March 2013.

## TRAIL COUNT SUMMARY

Volunteers counted a total of 6,524 users along the Silver Comet trail at nine locations over three count periods. The count periods in total covered eight hours during peak use periods during weekdays and weekends. The information was used to estimate the volume of trail users as well as identify who is using the trail and how.

Key findings include:

- **The trail head with the highest annual volume of users is Smyrna (433,535 people)**
- **The trail head with the lowest annual volume of use is Cedartown (25,124 people)**
- **The majority of people using the trail are cyclists (71%) followed by pedestrians (28%) and other (1%).**
- **Pedestrian volumes are highest in more densely populated areas.**

- **At rural and more remote trailheads, the majority of users are cyclists.**
- **Women are more likely to use trail heads that are in more densely populated areas, such as a downtown or trail head with significant user volumes.**
- **The highest volumes along the trail are during the weekend, with weekday use significantly less compared to weekend use.**

### VOLUME OF USERS

The highest volume of trail use is at the beginning of the trail in Smyrna. From eastern Cobb County, the volume of use decreases progressively to where the trail ends at the Georgia-Alabama line and connects to the Chief Ladiga Trail in Alabama. Annual trail volumes range from 433,535 people in Smyrna to 25,124 at the Cedartown Depot and Trail Head.

Table 2.4. Trail Head Ranking by User Characteristics

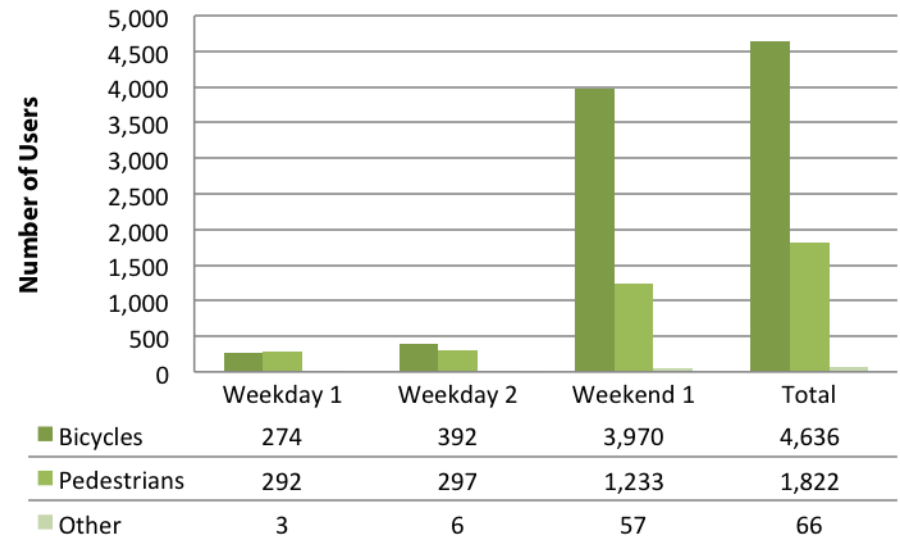
EVALUATION LOCATION RANKINGS	ANNUAL VOLUME	BICYCLES/ TOTAL USERS RANK	PEDESTRIANS/ TOTAL USERS RANK	OTHER/ TOTAL USERS RANK	FEMALE RANK	MALE RANK
1. GA/AL State Line	8	1	9	8	9	1
2. Cedartown Trail Head	9	3	7	8	4	6
3. Rockmart Trail Head	7	8	2	1	2	8
4. Rambo Nursery Trail Head	6	5	5	7	7	3
5. Dallas Trail Head	5	4	6	6	8	2
6. Hiram Trail Head	4	6	4	3	5	5
7. Powder Springs	3	2	8	4	6	4
8. Silver Comet Cycles Trail Head	2	7	3	5	3	7
9. Smyrna Trail Head	1	9	1	2	1	9

Table 2.5. Estimated Daily, Monthly and Annual Trail Use By Location (All Users)

LOCATIONS	ADJUSTED ANNUAL TOTAL	AVERAGE MONTHLY USE	AVERAGE DAILY USE	ANNUAL VOLUME RANK
1. GA/AL State Line	47,002	3,917	129	8
2. Cedartown Trail Head	25,124	2,094	69	9
3. Rockmart Trail Head	90,087	7,507	247	7
4. Rambo Nursery Trail Head	191,984	15,999	526	6
5. Dallas Trail Head	203,111	16,926	556	5
6. Hiram Trail Head	270,217	22,518	740	4
7. Powder Springs	276,664	23,055	758	3
8. Silver Comet Cycles Trail Head	349,885	29,157	959	2
9. Smyrna Trail Head	433,535	36,128	1,188	1

In terms of volume by day of the week, weekend user volumes are the greatest. During weekdays, the percentage of people walking and biking is roughly equivalent. However during weekend, the majority of users are riding a bike. Other users, such as those roller blading or on a skateboard, remain low regardless of the day of the week.

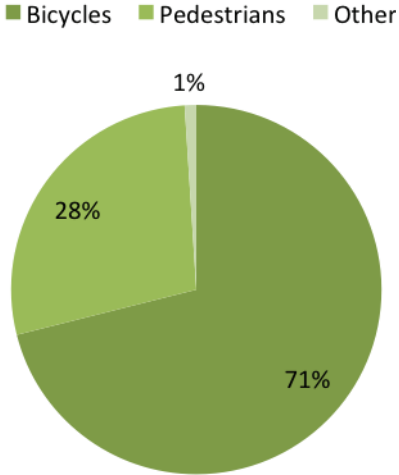
Figure 2.1 Total Trail Volume By User Type and Day of the Week



**USER ACTIVITY**

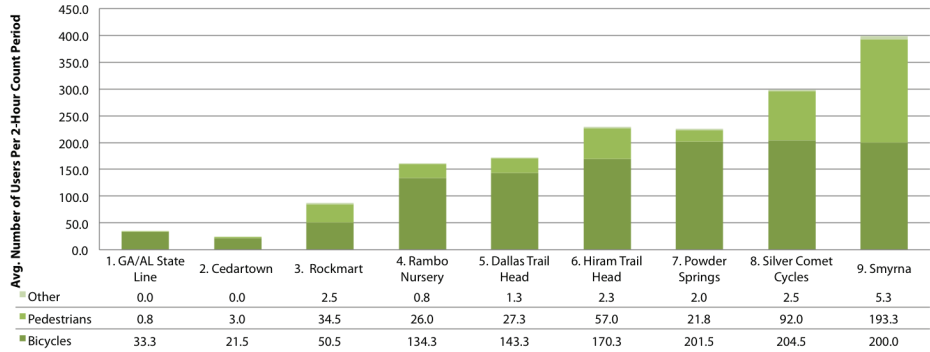
Overall, the majority of people using the trail are riding a bike. Of all the people counted during the three count periods, 71% were riding a bike, 28% were walking and 1% were traveling by other means such as rollerblades, scooter or skateboard.

Figure 2.2 Silver Comet Trail Use by User Activity



In addition overall trail user by user activity, several trends were identified. Where trail heads are located in more developed areas, the percentage of people walking and biking is more balanced. Where trail heads are located in less developed and rural areas, the percentage of people walking decreases and the percentage of people biking increases. Figure 2.3 illustrates the

Figure 2.3 Average Number of Users Per 2-Hour Count Period by Count Location



distribution by user activity at each of the nine count locations.

**GENDER**

The majority of people using the trail are male. **Of all the people counted during the three count periods, 62% were male and 38% were female.**

In addition to overall usage, several interesting gender trends were identified. The gap between male and female users is smallest at less remote areas, such as trail heads with high user volumes and in more developed areas. Women were less likely to use more remote and rural trail heads to access and use the trail.

Figure 2.4 Silver Comet Trail Usage by Gender

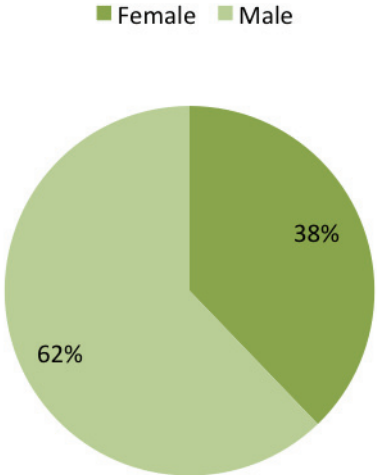
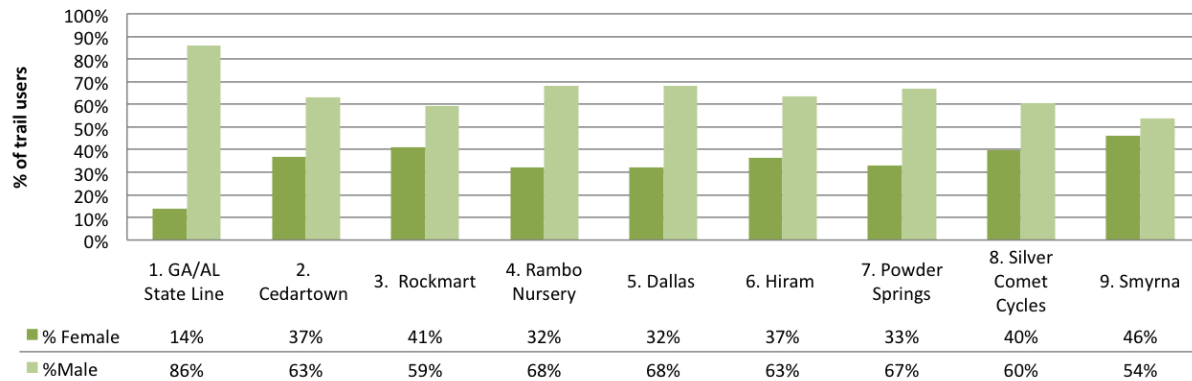


Figure 2.5 Trail Use by Gender and Trail Head Location



### TRAIL EVALUATION SURVEYS

In total, 889 trail evaluation surveys were conducted for this project. 472 were collected in the field during count periods at nine locations. Additionally, 417 online surveys were collected during a two-month period from February to March of 2013.

Field surveys were conducted at all nine count locations during three count periods. The locations with the highest percentage of surveys collected includes Smyrna and Rockmart. The majority of surveys were conducted during the Saturday field count.

Figure 2.6 Distribution of Field Surveys by Survey Location

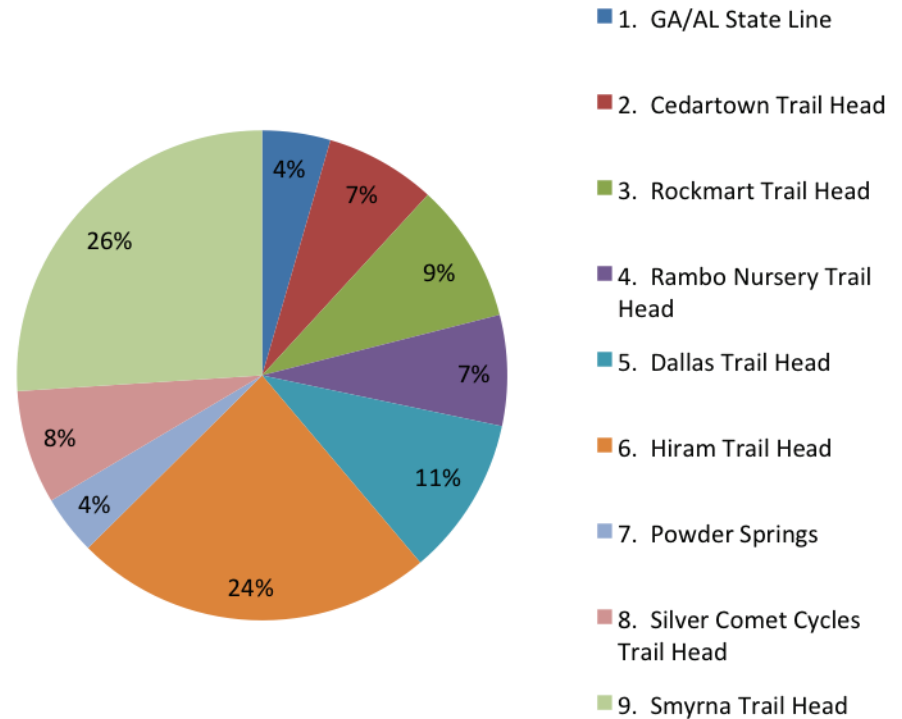
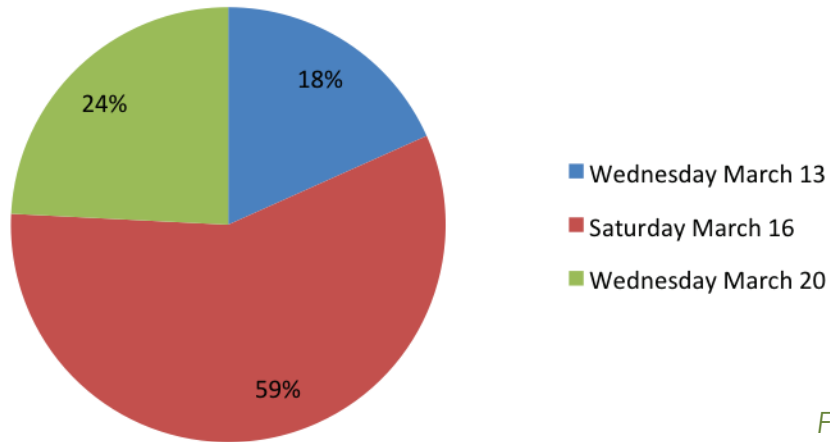


Figure 2.7 Distribution of Field Surveys by Count Date and Day of Week



### KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

Key findings include:

- The Silver Comet Trail is a regional trail . **Of the 472 people surveyed in the field, respondents came from 23 counties in Georgia and everyone count in the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission and the Atlanta Region.**
- People visit the trail from around the country. **Of those people interviewed, people came from 23 other states and as far away as Washington state.**

### RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Of the people that participated in the surveys, the majority of respondents were male. This response rate is likely the result of the gender distribution of people using the trail rather than their willingness to take a survey.

**By activity, the majority of people that responded were**

Figure 2.9 Field Survey Participant Activity

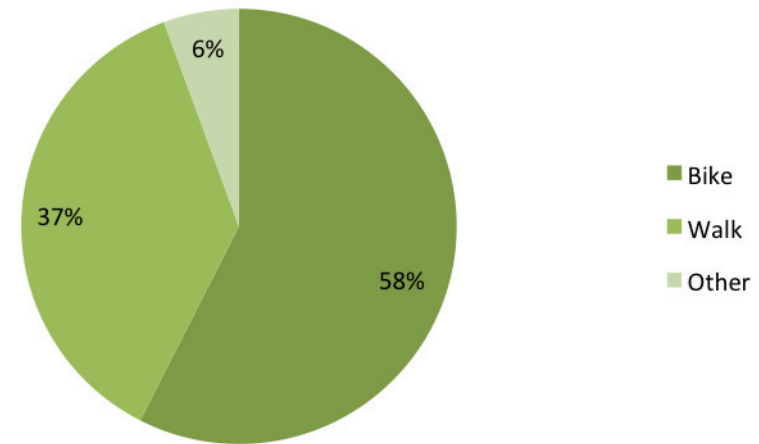
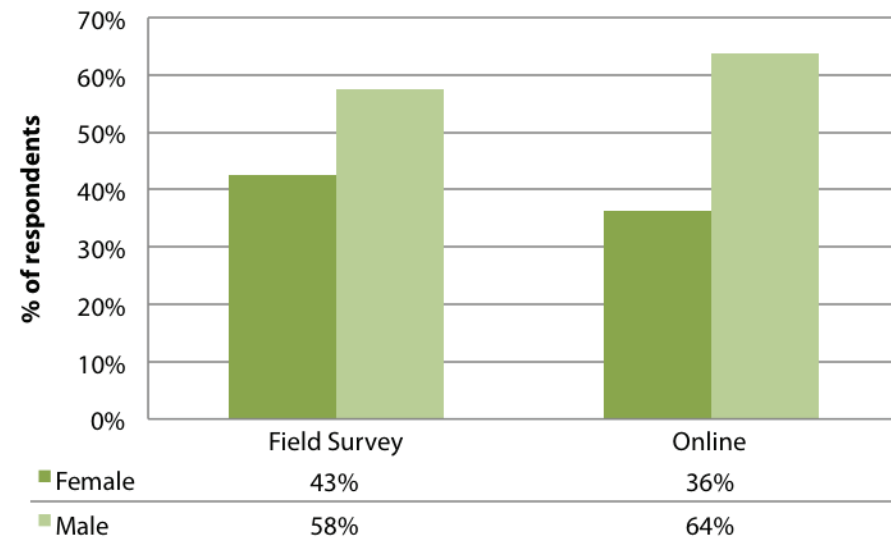


Figure 2.8 Gender of Field and Online Survey Participants



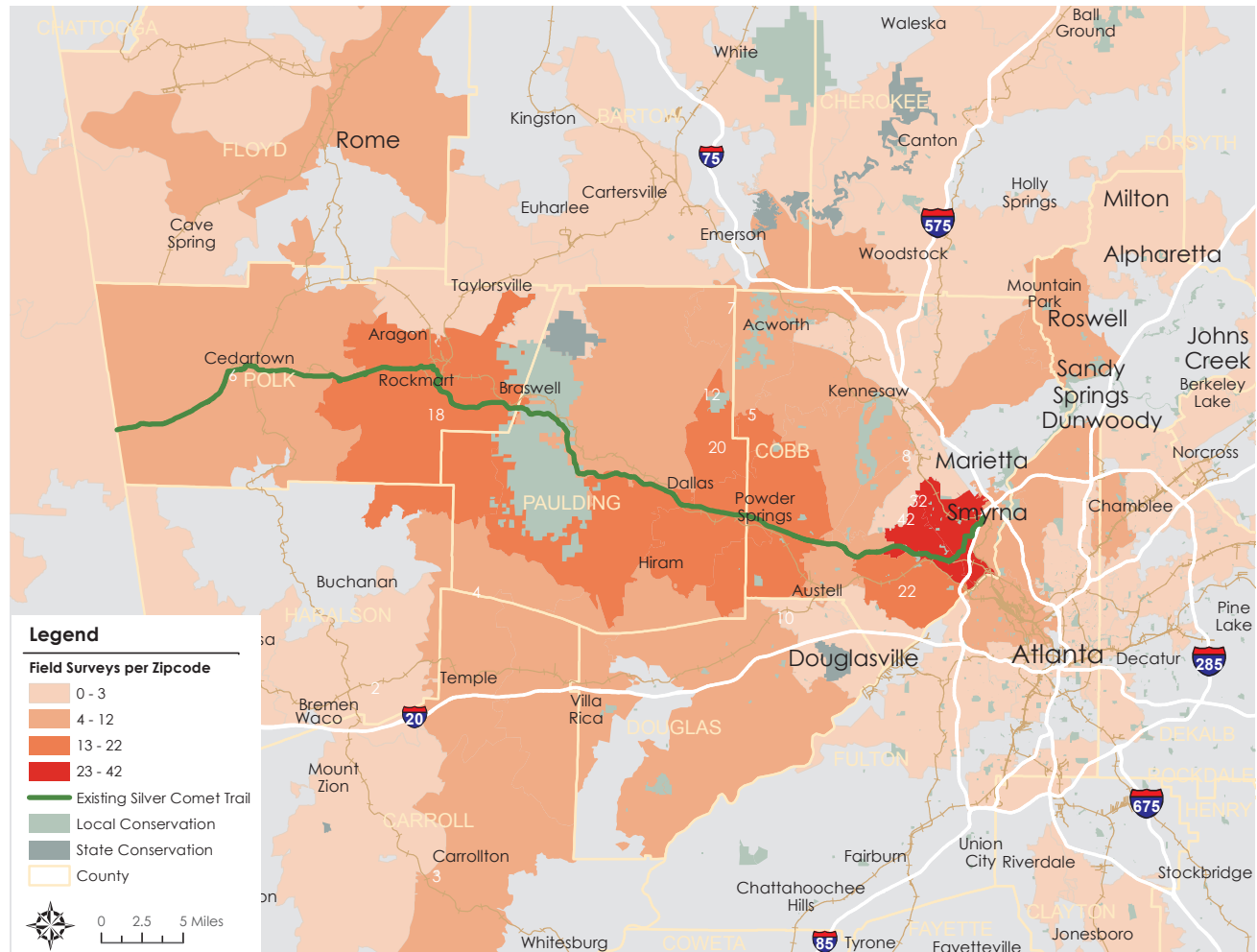
**biking (58%), followed by walking (37%) and other (6%).** Like the gender of field survey participants, the distribution of the activity of survey participants reflects a similar activity distribution observed during the counts.

### WHERE DO PEOPLE LIVE THAT USE THE TRAIL?

A significant number of field survey participants were from the counties that the trail passes through (Cobb, Paulding and

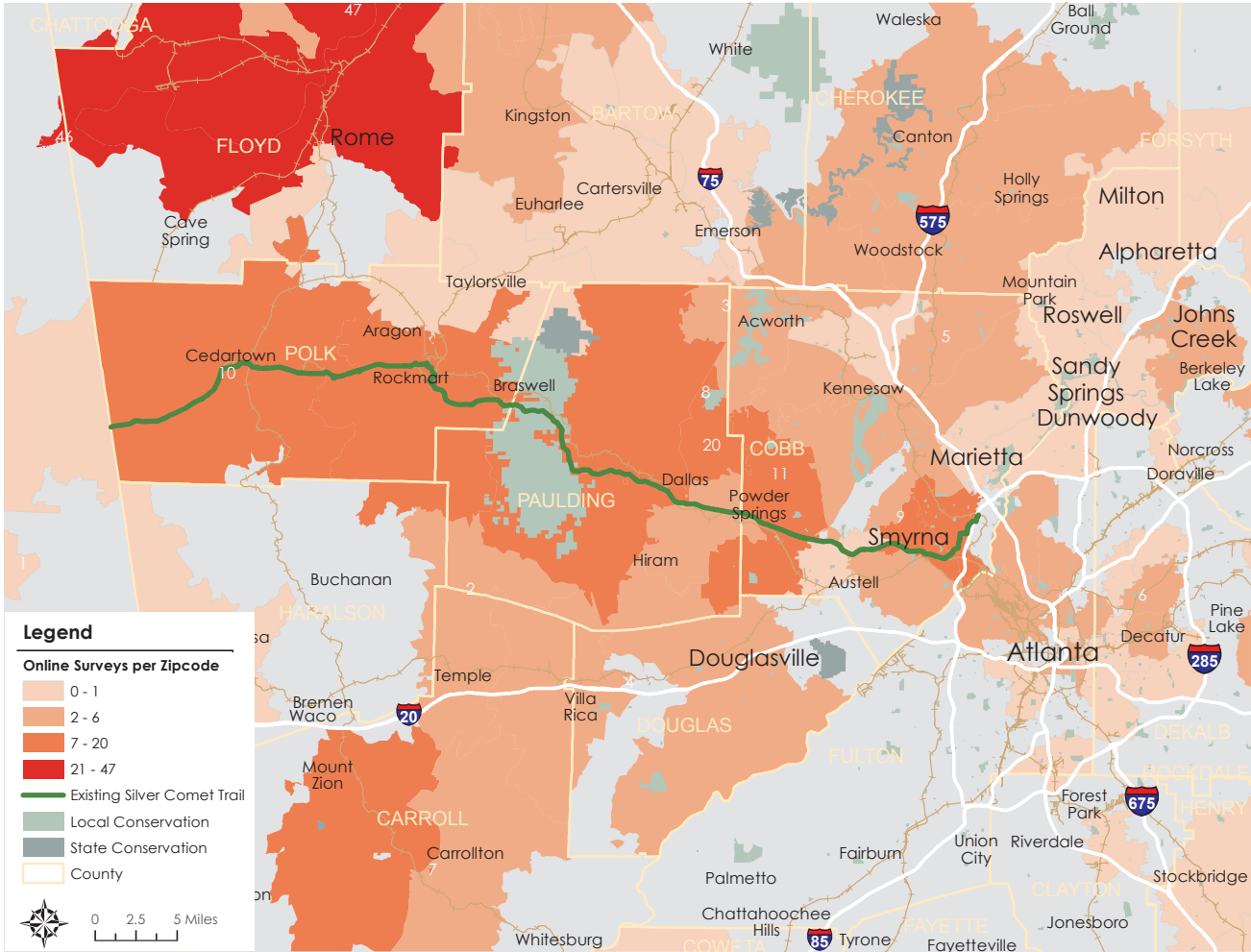
Polk Counties) or the adjacent counties. However, Maps 2.1 and 2.2 show that the trail also draws people from throughout Georgia, including many of the counties in the

Map 2.1 Distribution of Field Survey Home Zip Code



northwest Georgia region and the Atlanta region. In total, survey responses were from 15% of all counties in Georgia (23 out of 159).

Map 2.2. Distribution of Online Survey Home Zip Code





### HOW DO PEOPLE GET TO THE TRAIL?

Figure 2.10 shows how people get to the trail. Field survey participants were asked 'How did you get to the trail?' and online survey participants were asked 'How do you get to the Silver Comet Trail?' Both surveys show that the majority of people (approximately 80%) access the trail by car. **Approximately 15% of people access the trail by walking or biking** and approximately 5% of people use public transit or other modes of travel to get to the trail.

### WHY DO PEOPLE USE THE TRAIL?

Figure 2.11 and 2.12 show why people use the trail. Field survey participants were asked 'How did you get to the trail?' and online survey participants were asked 'How do you get to the Silver Comet Trail?' For the field survey, respondents said **the two primary reasons for using the trail are for exercising (76.1%) and recreation (20.9%)**. Just over 1% of the field survey participants said their trips were for non-recreational purposes such as commuting to work or local trips for shopping.

Figure 2.10 How do people get to the trail?

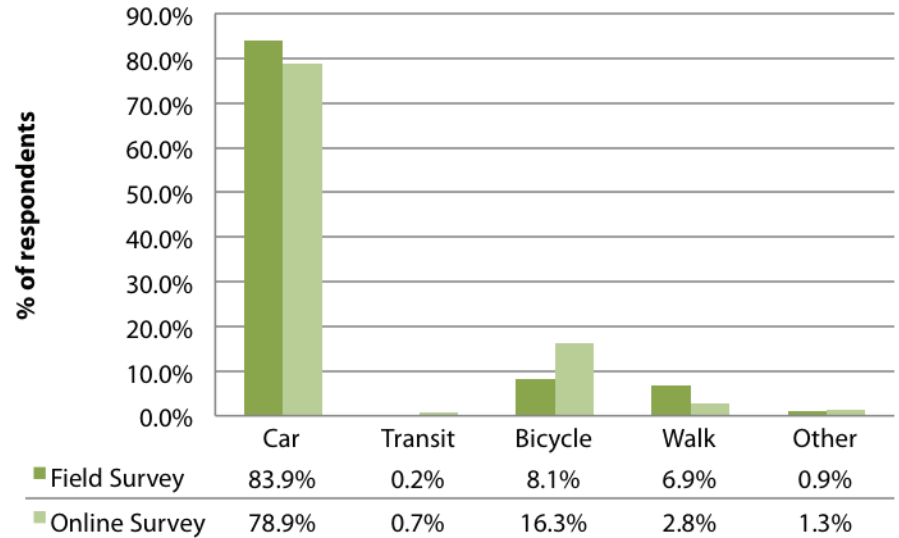


Figure 2.11 Field Survey: What best describes the purpose of this trip?

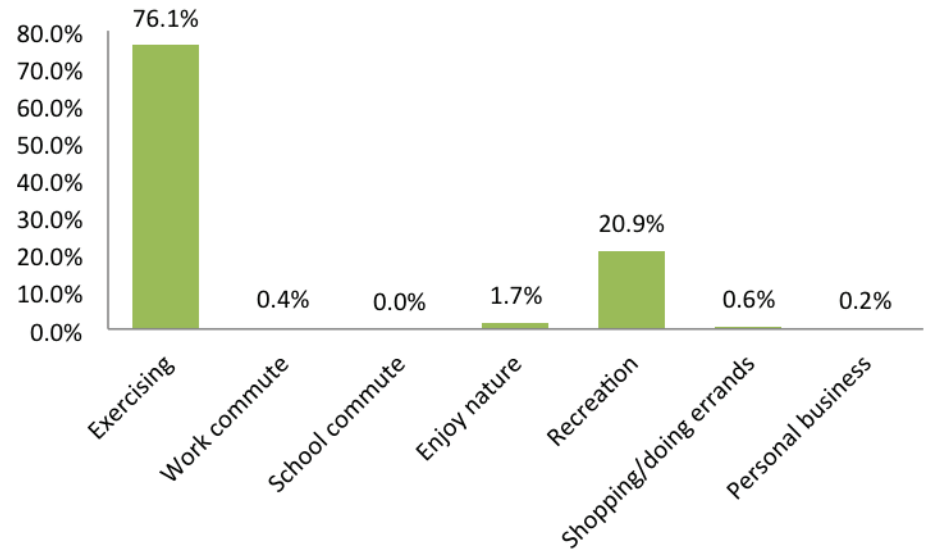
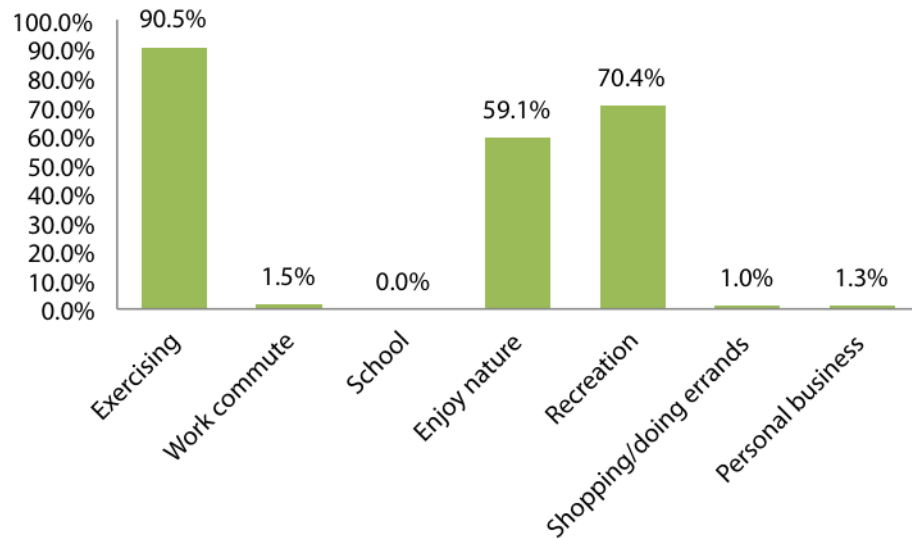
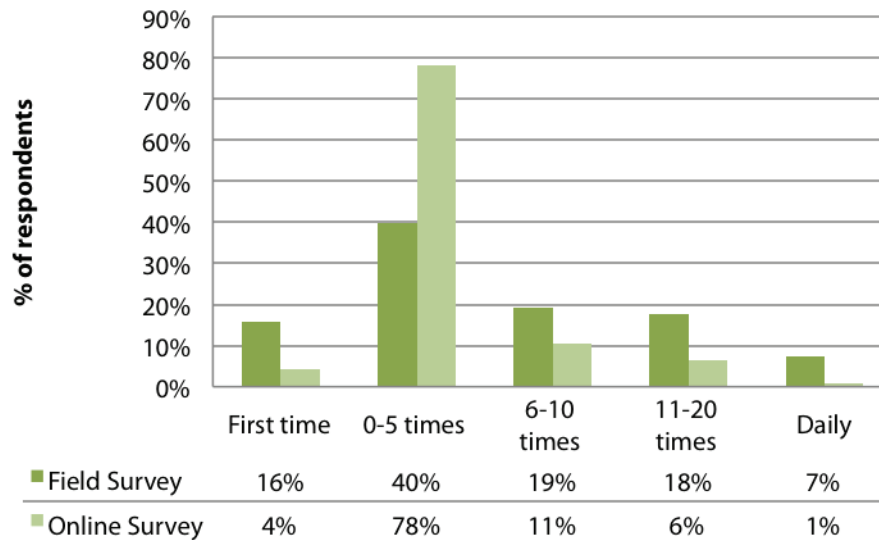


Figure 2.12 Online Survey: Why do you use the Silver Comet Trail (check all that apply)?



The results from the online survey reflected similar sentiments. The majority of people completing the online survey said they use the trail for some type of recreational purpose. The main reasons for using the trail included exercising, enjoying nature and recreation. Very few people said they use the trail for commuting or other non-recreational trips.

Figure 2.13 In the past month, about how often have you used the trail?



### HOW OFTEN DO PEOPLE USE THE TRAIL?

Figure 2.13 shows how often people used the trail in the past month. The questions were asked in March in the field and online from February to March of 2013. The question asked of field and online survey participants was 'In the past month, about how often have you used the trail?' The survey results show that for those that use the trail, they use it often. **The field survey results show that 40% of respondents use the trail**

Figure 2.14 What time of year do people use the trail?

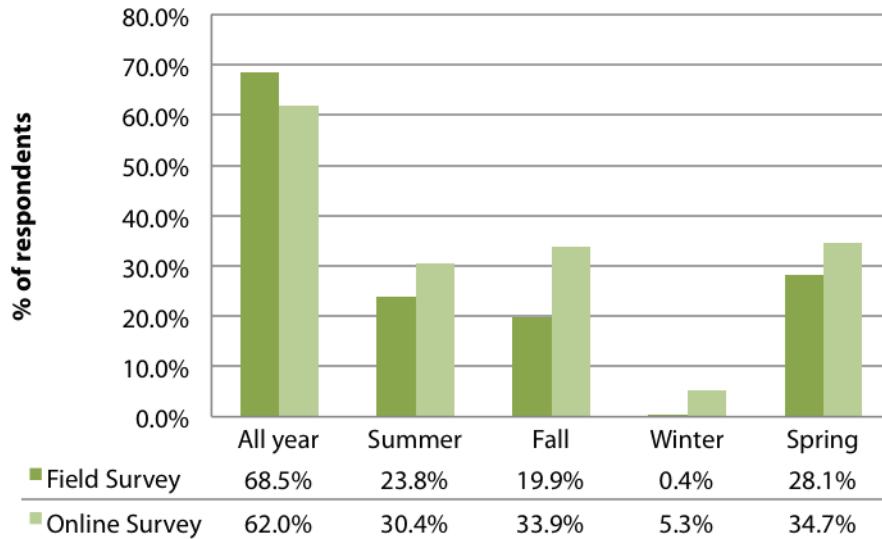
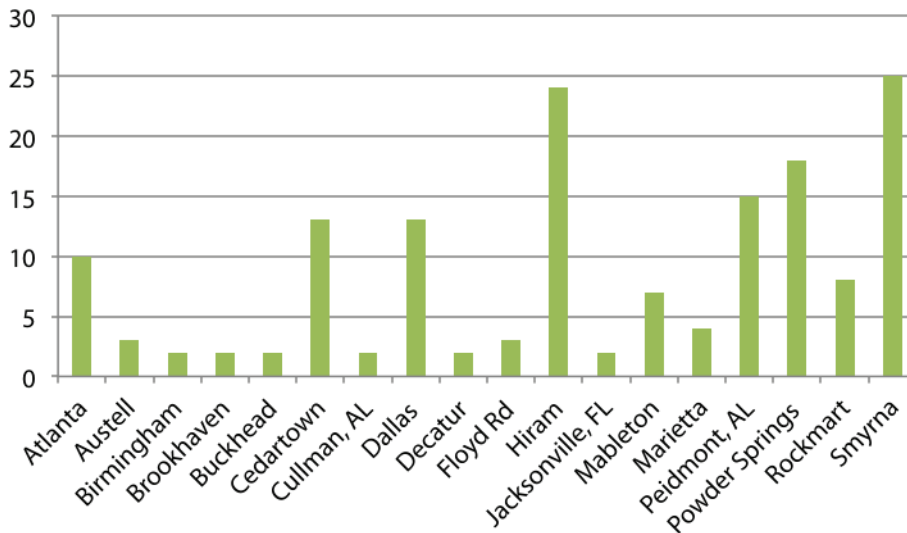


Figure 2.15 Trip Origins listed two or more times by field survey participants



**0-5 times a month and 44% of respondents use the trail 6 or more times a month.** The majority of online respondents (78%), use the trail 0-5 times a month and 18% of respondents use the trail 6 or more times a month.

**WHAT TIME OF YEAR DO PEOPLE USE THE TRAIL?** Figure 2.14 shows what time of year people use the trail. Field and online survey participants were asked 'Please check the seasons in which you use the trail (check all that apply).' Of all the people surveyed, the majority use the trail year round (62.0% and 68.5% respectively for online and field surveys). **By season, use appears to be general consistent during the summer, fall and spring.** Winter is the one season where use drops significantly.

**HOW FAR DO PEOPLE TRAVEL ALONG THE TRAIL AND HOW MUCH TIME DO PEOPLE SPEND ON THE TRAIL?** Table 2.6 shows how far people travel along the trail and how much time they spend on the trail. Field survey participants were asked "What is the total length of this trip (start to finish)?" People responded by giving any of the following: distance (in miles), time (in minutes), origin (city), and/or destination (city). On average, people spend 96 minutes on the trail and travel 21 miles. The median time and distance is 60 minutes and 12 miles respectively. **The most frequent trip origin cities provided were Smyrna and Hiram.** The most frequent destination cities provided were Cedartown and Rockmart.

Figure 2.17 Do people use public transit to access the trail?

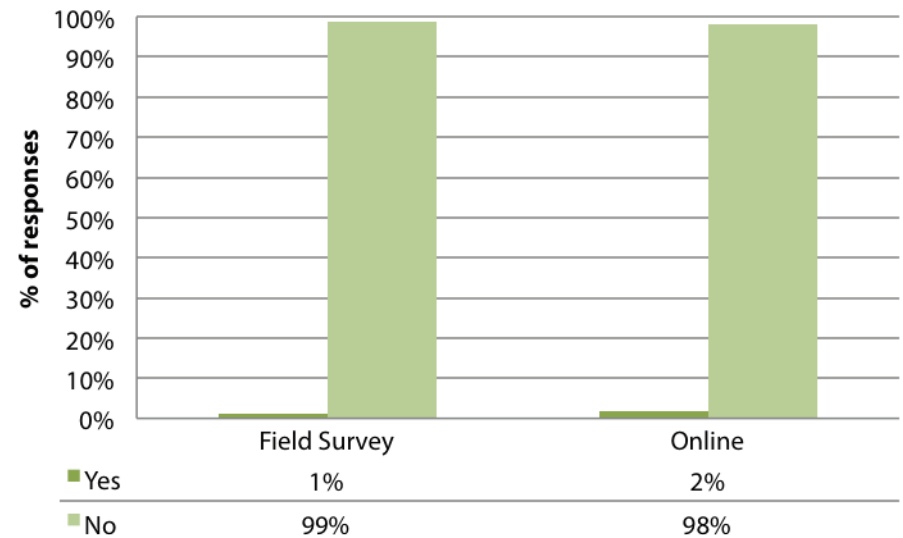


Table 2.6 Trip distance and trip time along the trail.

	MEDIAN	MEAN	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM
Trip Distance (in miles)	12	21	0.5	145
Trip Time (in minutes)	60	96	8.5	540

**DO PEOPLE USE PUBLIC TRANSIT TO ACCESS THE TRAIL?**

Figure 2.17 shows the response people gave when asked specifically about using public transit to access the trail. Field survey participants were asked ‘Will any part of this trip be taken on public transit?’ and online survey participants were asked ‘Do you ever use public transit to get to the Silver Comet Trail?’ Responses to both questions show that **only 1 – 2% of trail users access the trail by using public transit.**

**WHAT ARE THE REASONS PEOPLE USE THE TRAIL?**

Figure 2.18 shows the reasons people chose to use the trail as opposed to somewhere else. Field survey participants were asked ‘Why are you using the trail as opposed to somewhere else (Please select all that apply)?’ and online survey participants were asked ‘Why do you use the Silver Comet Trail as opposed to somewhere else?’ **The primary reason people use the trail are because it is accessible/close, lower traffic volumes and**

Figure 2.18 Reasons people use the trail as opposed to somewhere else.

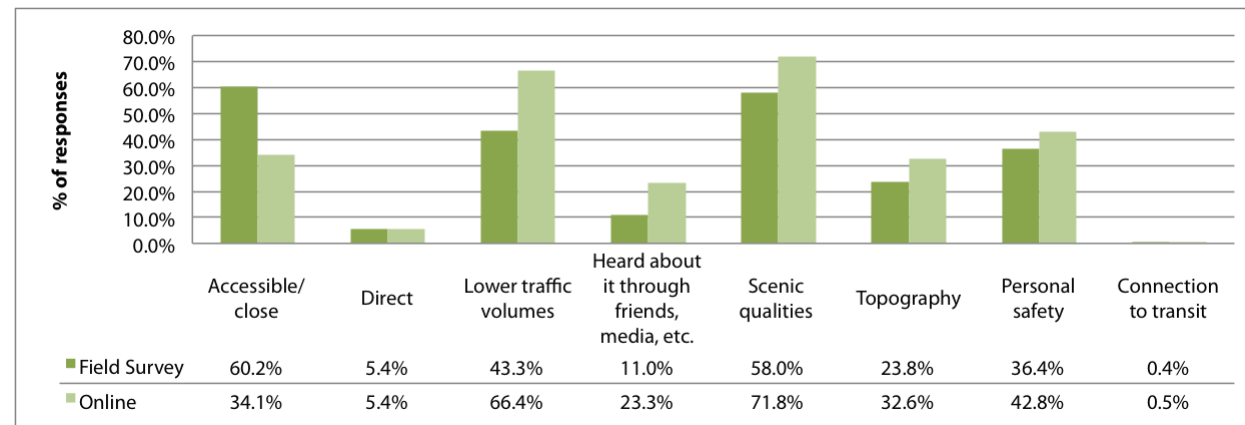


Figure 2.19 What improvements do people want to see along the trail?

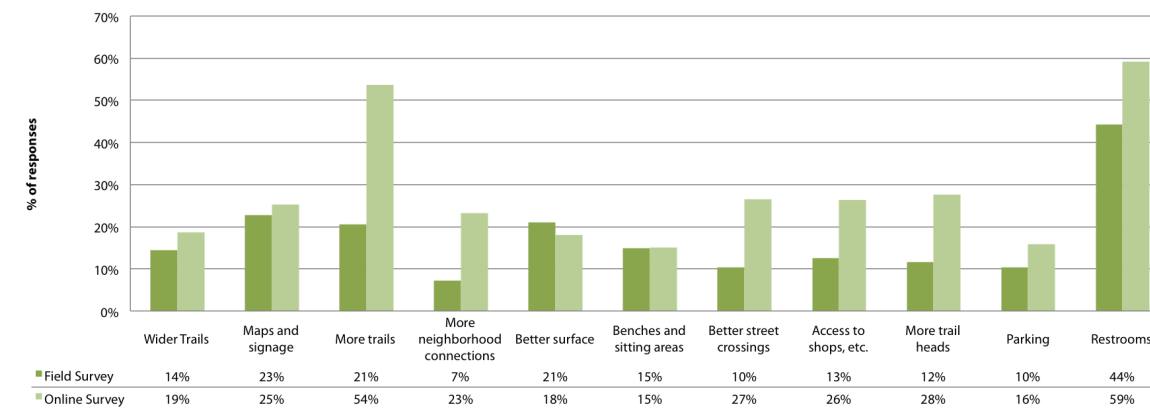
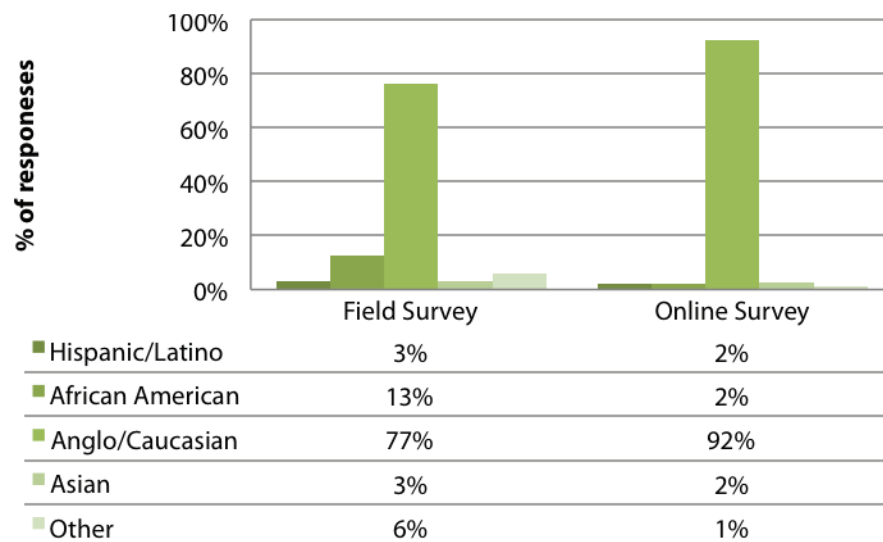


Figure 2.20 What is the ethnicity of people using the trail?



**the scenic qualities.** The directness of the trail to destinations and connection to transit had the lowest response rates.

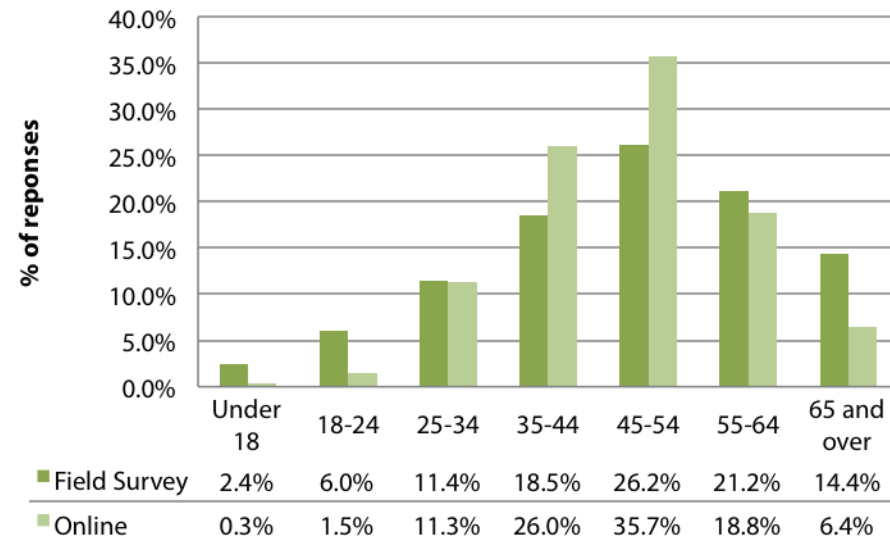
**WHAT IMPROVEMENTS DO PEOPLE WANT TO SEE ALONG THE TRAIL?**

Figure 2.19 shows what improvements people would like to see along the trail. Field and online survey participants were asked ‘What would you like to see improved along the Silver Comet Trail (Please check all that apply)?’ **The highest priority improvement is restrooms**, however it is not clear whether their response means more restrooms, better restrooms, or both. Other higher priority improvements include maps and signage, better surface and wider trails.

**WHAT IS THE ETHNICITY OF PEOPLE USING THE TRAIL?**

Figure 2.20 shows the ethnicity of people using the trail. Field and online survey respondents were asked ‘What ethnic group do you belong to?’ Both the field and online surveys show that the majority of trail users are anglo/Caucasian. However what is interesting is the difference in responses for other ethnic groups. The field surveys show that **non-anglo/Caucasian ethnic groups have a greater distribution and share** of all users of the trail than what the online survey suggests.

Figure 2.21 Age of trail users



### WHAT IS THE AGE OF PEOPLE USING THE TRAIL?

Figure 2.21 shows the age distribution of people using the trail. Field and online survey participants were asked 'What is your age group?' Both the surveys have a similar distribution of responses with the **majority of people indicating they are between the age of 35-64**. The field survey, however, shows that there are likely more people under the age of 24 and over the age of 65 that use the trail.

# CASE STUDY



## MARIN COUNTY PARKS PRESERVE TRAIL CENSUS AND SURVEY

This study was drafted in 2011 for the Marin County Department of Parks to determine who its trail users are, when and how often users visit the trails, and their trail attitudes, preferences, and experiences.

The trail study found that an estimated 2.8 million to 3.7 million people visit the Marin County Parks trails every

year. Approximately 76% of trail users are pedestrians, compared to 23% bicyclists. The most popular preserves in terms of visitor activity were Baltimore Canyon, Blithedale Summit, and Camino Alto. The study also determined how people travel to the preserves; the majority (69%) arrived by driving or carpooling, while 22% arrived by walking. The survey found that visitor experiences with and opinions of the trails were positive overall: 97% reported good

to great trail conditions, 76% reported good to great maps and signs, and 94% reported good to great trail interactions. This study provides a good model for how an agency can use a trail census and survey to inform the planning process by determining what aspects of the trail system are working well, what aspects need improvement, and how they can better serve the needs of visitors.

Figure 2.22 Survey respondent reported household income

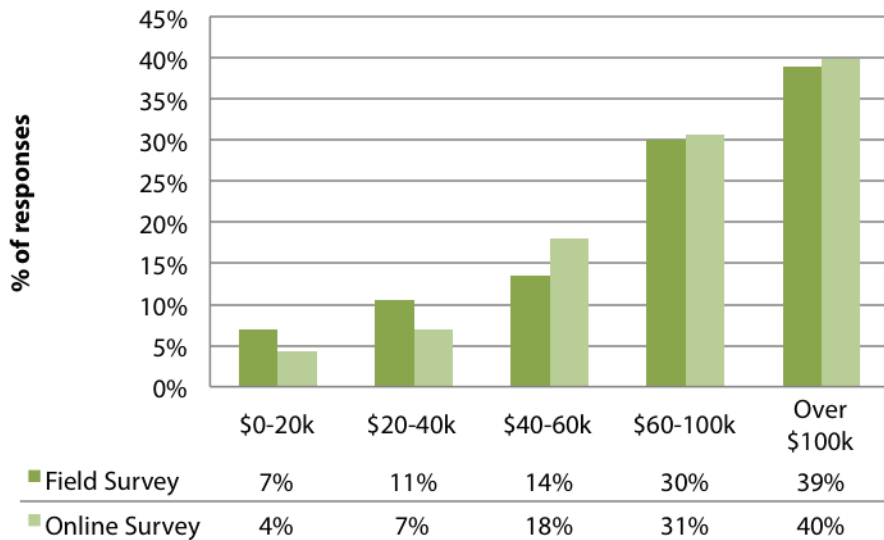
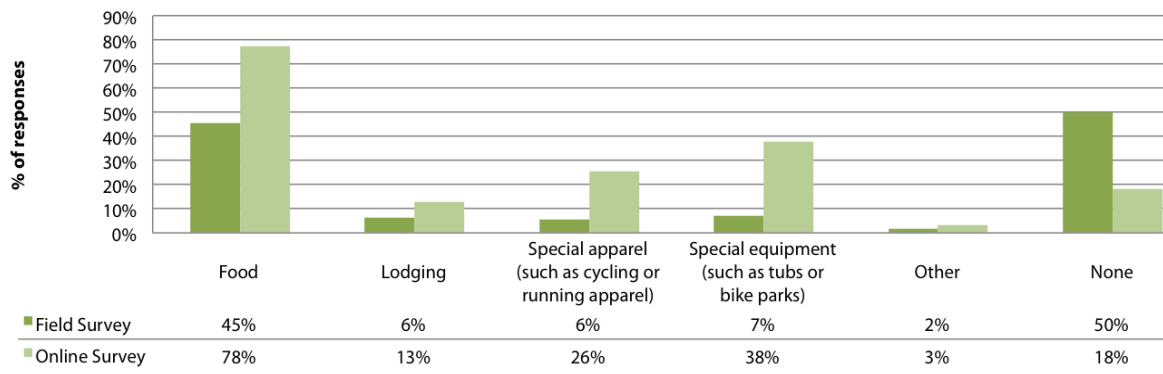


Figure 2.23 What do people buy when they use the trail?



**WHAT IS THE HOUSEHOLD INCOME OF PEOPLE USING THE TRAIL?**

Figure 2.22 shows the household income of survey participants. Field and online survey participants were asked ‘What is your

household income?’ The **majority of survey respondents (approximately 70%) have a household income greater than \$60,000.**

**WHAT DO PEOPLE BUY WHEN THEY USE THE TRAIL?**

Figure 2.23 shows what people spend money on when they use the trail. Field survey participants were asked ‘Do you anticipate spending money on any of the following categories during this trip (check all that apply)?’ and online survey participants were asked ‘Do you ever spend money on any of the following categories during a trip along the Silver Comet Trail (check all that apply)?’ Field surveys show that the **majority of people either do not spend money or they spend money of food.** Online surveys indicate that the majority of people spend money on food or special equipment.

**HOW MUCH DO PEOPLE SPEND, ON AVERAGE, DURING A TRIP?**

Figure 2.24 shows how much people typically spend during a trip. Field survey participants were asked ‘If you do anticipate spending money, what do you estimate your party’s overall spending to be during this trip?’ and online survey participants were asked ‘If you do spend money during a trip, what do you estimate your average spending to be during a typical trip?’ The **majority of respondents (79% and 83% respectively for field and online survey responses) said they spend between \$0 and \$50 during a trip.**

Figure 2.24 How much do people spend, on average, during a trip?

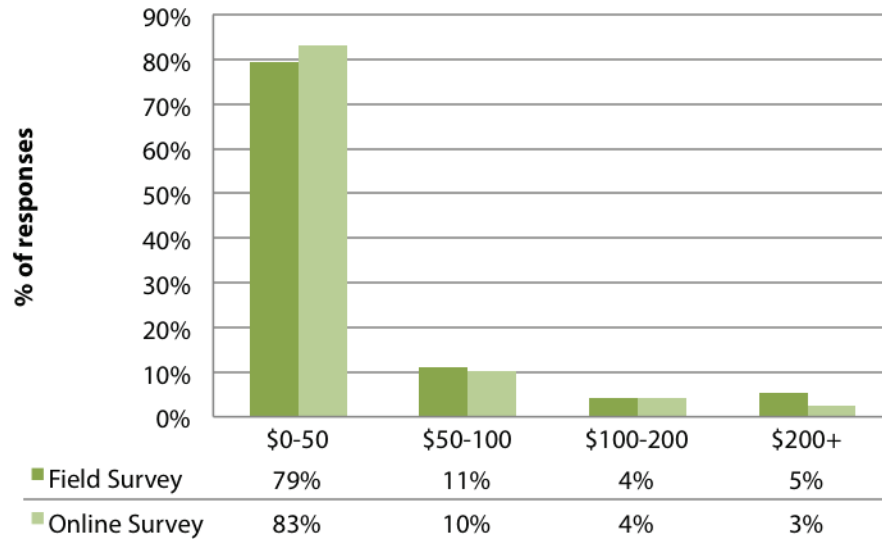
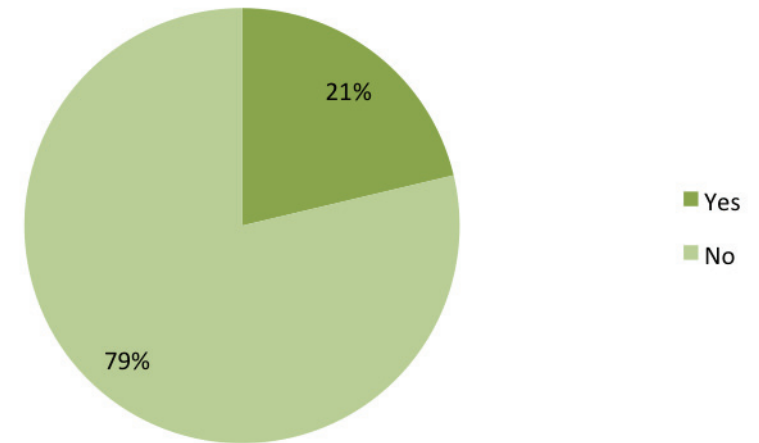


Figure 2.25 Are people visiting from out of town?



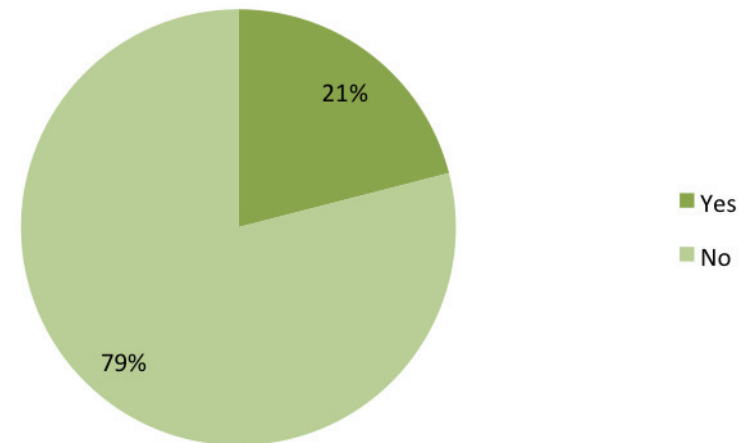
DO OUT OF TOWN VISITORS USE THE TRAIL?

Figure 2.25 shows whether people visit from out of town. Field survey participants were asked 'Are you visiting from out of town?' **21% of respondents said they were visiting from out of town.**

Figure 2.26 shows whether people using the trail ever stay overnight when they do. Online survey participants were asked 'Do you ever stay overnight when using the Silver Comet Trail?' **21% of respondents said they stay overnight when using the trail.**

Figure 2.27 shows whether people stay overnight or just visit for the day when they are visiting from out of town. Field survey participants were asked 'If you are visiting

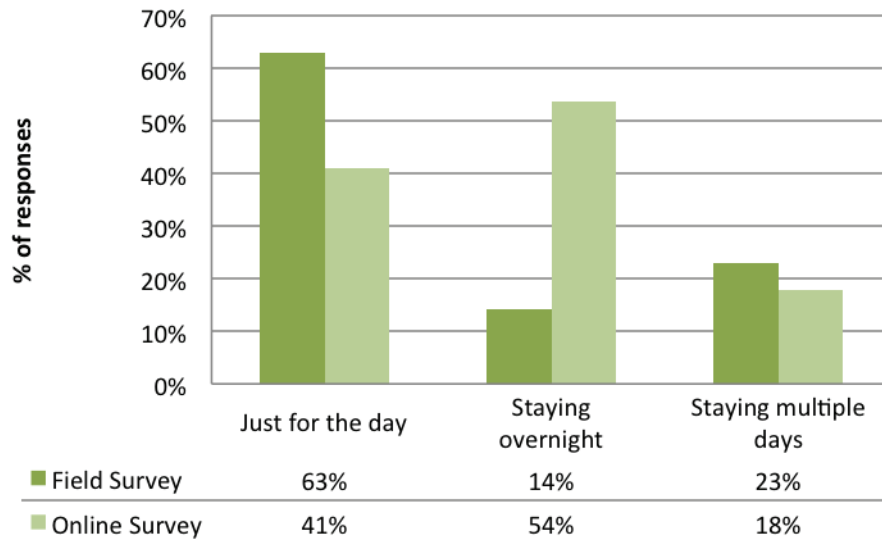
Figure 2.26 Do you ever stay overnight when using the trail?





from out of town, how many days will you be in town?' and online survey participants were asked 'If you do stay overnight, how many days do you spend traveling along the trail (check all that apply)?' Of the people that are visiting the trail that took a field survey, the **majority (63%) were just visiting for the day. However, there is also a sizeable group of visitors that stay overnight (14%) or stay multiple days (23%).**

Figure 2.27 How long do people stay when visiting?



**FOR PEOPLE VISITING, WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THEIR TRIP?**

Figure 2.28 shows the purpose of visitors' trip. Field survey participants were asked 'If you are visiting from out of town, was this trip just to use the trail or did you plan to do other things as well?' and online survey participants were asked 'If you do stay overnight near the trail, do you just use the trail or do you do other things as well?' The majority of respondents said they just use the trail. This response, combined with the response from Figure 2.25 indicates that **the majority of visitors are just visiting for the day and that many of the visitors are traveling from within the region to use the trail.**

**FOR PEOPLE STAY OVERNIGHT WHEN VISITING THE TRAIL, WHERE DO THEY STAY?**

Figure 2.29 shows where people stay when visiting and using the trail. Field survey participants were asked 'If you are staying overnight, where are you staying?' and online survey participants were asked 'If you stay overnight when using the trail, where do you stay?' **The majority of field survey participants were are visiting and staying overnight stay at a hotel.**

Figure 2.28 Purpose of trip for people visiting from out of town

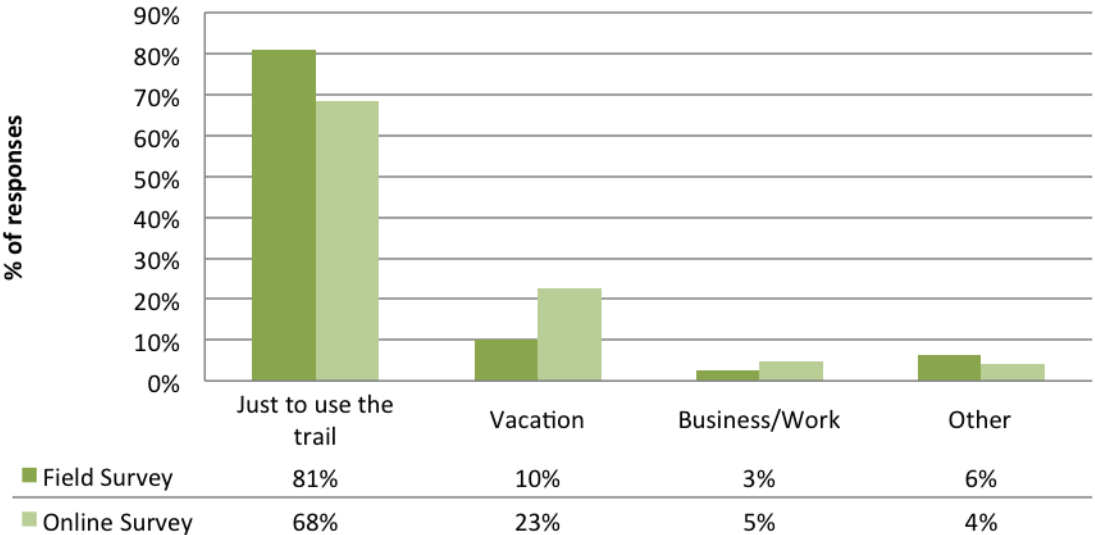
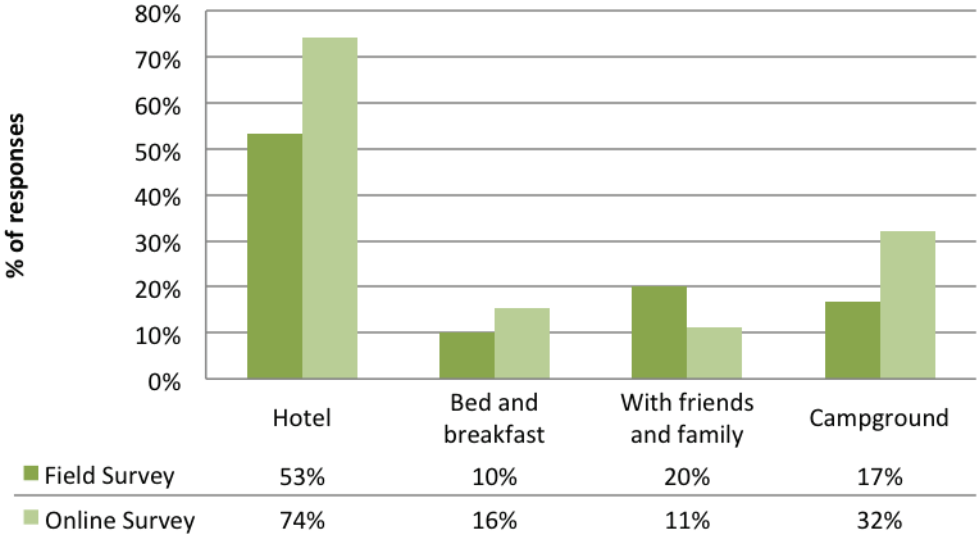


Figure 2.29 Where do people stay when visiting the trail?







# CHAPTER THREE

## ECONOMIC IMPACT SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

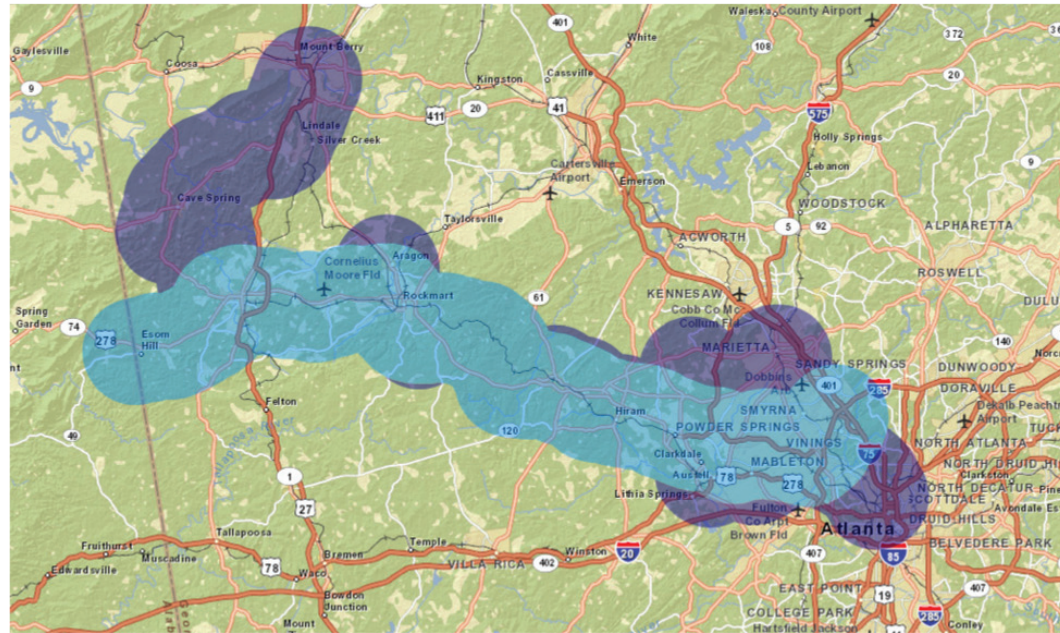
Our economics expert, Econsult Solutions, calculated the economic impacts from spending from local and non-local visitors on durable and non-durable goods by extrapolating from previous studies done by others in the field as well as previous work done by Econsult Solutions. Data was drawn from reliable outside sources that provided information on retail consumption by NAICS code as compiled from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Expenditure Survey (e.g. ESRI).

The Northwest Georgia Regional Commission (NWGRC) is exploring the expansion of the Silver Comet Trail (see Figure 3.1). This expansion will increase the trail by over 66 miles, consisting of roughly 27 miles of improvements and expansions on the Northwest portion of the trail, 7 miles along the central part of the trail, and 32 miles on the western portion of the trail. This will increase the Silver Comet Trail by 108 percent, and will double the number of people living within four miles of the Silver Comet Trail (see Table 3.1). Such an expansion is intended to increase trail usage, improve regional connectivity, and strengthen the recreational amenity for residents and visitors alike.

In determining whether and how to pursue expanding the Silver Comet Trail network, it is useful to consider the many economic benefits that will confer to residents, local merchants, and the State of Georgia as a whole. Recreational amenities such as rail-trails are increasingly seen as regional economic development tools, even if their economic impacts are difficult to quantify.



Figure 3.1 – Silver Comet Trail Current Location and Proposed Expansion  
 (Blue = 4-Mile Buffer around Current Trail, Purple = 4-Mile Buffer around Proposed Expansion)



Source: ESRI (2013), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)

Table 3.1 – Residential Population Located within Four Miles of the Silver Comet Trail

	Within 4 mi. of Existing Trail	Within 4 mi. of Expanded Trail	Within Project Service Area	Within the State of Georgia
Population	411,742	808,237 (96% more)	869,172	9,774,937
Households	160,641	326,379 (103% more)	316,429	3,618,481

Source: US Census Bureau (2010), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)

The purpose of this chapter is to examine, identify, and quantify the many economic benefits associated with the Silver Comet Trail in its current form as well as in its expanded form. Economic benefit categories include the following:

- 1. Direct Activity** – As a recreational amenity, its direct use results in related spending by users, which benefits local merchants.
- 2. Tourism Activity** – While many of those direct users are local residents, some

are visitors, who inject additional spending into the State in travel-related expenditure categories such as accommodations, food, and entertainment.

- 3. Spillover Impacts** – Together, these infusions of direct spending in turn generating spillover impacts throughout the State, as merchants ramp up their operations in response to new demand and as employees spend a portion of their earnings within their local economies.
- 4. Unmet Demand** – This new demand provides a catalyst for business formation and attraction, as unmet demand is absorbed by new and relocating merchants.
- 5. Fiscal Impacts** – These economic expansions also grow various tax bases, which produces additional tax revenues for the State.
- 6. Property Value Impacts** – The trail itself is a positive amenity that people are willing to pay a premium to have in close proximity, resulting in higher property values for residents and higher property tax revenues for local municipalities and school districts.
- 7. New Development** – Some of the increase in value associated with areas near

the amenity motivates not only higher property values for existing homes but also the addition of new homes, further increasing an area's property tax base.

- 8. Employer and Employee Attraction** – In addition to drawing in out-of-state visitors and serving in-state residents, the Silver Comet Trail has a similar attraction and retention effect on employers and employees, resulting in increased commercial activity within the State.
- 9. Mobility** – The additional mobility conferred to the State by the amenity increases the number of non-automobile trips that are taken, with



Trail users are willing to pay a premium to be in close proximity to the Silver Comet Trail.

time, environmental, and economic gains for all.

**10. Direct Use and Health Benefits** – The existence of the amenity results in direct use benefits for users, including positive health outcomes and therefore lower health care costs.

**11. Ecological Services Rendered** – The existence of the amenity also provides valuable ecological services that would otherwise need to be paid for in the open market.

These impact estimates are based on direct survey data, past research, existing literature, and, where necessary, conservative assumptions. Estimates associated with the Silver Comet Trail in its current form represent a retrospective look at what impacts have been and are currently being enjoyed, while estimates associated with the Silver Comet Trail in its expanded form represent a prospective look at what impacts will be enjoyed upon expansion.

Even with the extensive primary and secondary research that went into these analyses, it is impossible to precisely know the magnitude of these various economic impacts, nor is it necessary, since the purpose of these impact estimates is to introduce their existence and their relative level into the broader policy discussion on whether and how to invest in such an amenity. Accordingly, numbers are rounded and should be considered order of magnitude estimates, rather than precise amounts.

The purpose of this chapter is to inform the present discussion on whether and how to expand the Silver Comet Trail. Attention is given to the costs and benefits of expanding the Silver Comet Trail network. Attention is also given to ways in which the Silver Comet Trail's usage and therefore its economic impact can be maximized, through a review of a variety of promotional and organizational best practices.

Table 3.2 – Estimated Usage of the Current Silver Comet Trail, by Major Trailhead

GA/AL State Line	Cedartown Trail Head	Rockmart Trail Head	Rambo Nursery Trail Head	Dallas Trail Head	Hiram Trail Head	Powder Springs	Silver Comet Cycles Trail Head	Smyrna Trail Head	Total # Uses
47,000	25,000	90,000	192,000	203,000	270,000	277,000	350,000	434,000	1,888,000

Source: Alta Planning + Design (2013), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)

Table 3.3 – Estimated Recreational Usage Patterns of Residents Living within Four Miles of the Current Silver Comet Trail, by Recreational Activity

Activity	% of Population That Participates	Total # Users	Avg # Uses/Yr	Total # Uses
Backpacking/Hiking	10.6%	44,000	46	2M
Bicycling (Mountain)	4.2%	17,000	35	1M
Bicycling (Road)	11.2%	46,000	35	2M
Jogging/Running	11.5%	47,000	82	4M
Walking for Exercise	31.3%	129,000	68	9M
<b>Total</b>				<b>17M</b>

Source: Georgia Department of Natural Resources (2011), US Census Bureau (2012), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013); M=million

## DIRECT ACTIVITY

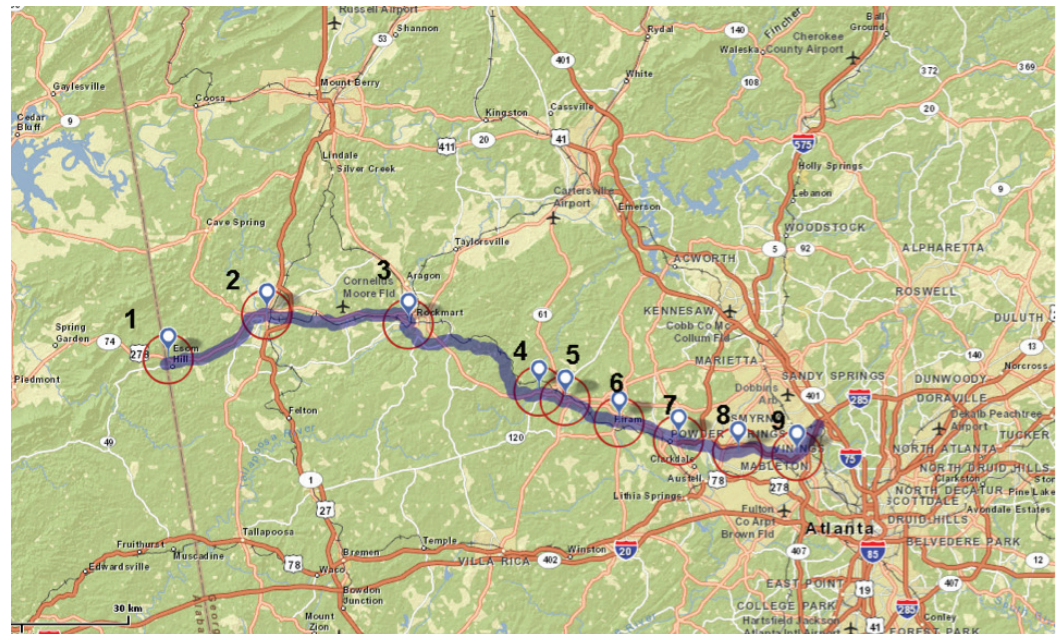
### OVERVIEW

As a recreational amenity, the Silver Comet Trail attracts significant usage, which in turn stimulates the State economy as users make purchases before, during, and after their enjoyment of this amenity. The following pages explore the scale and composition of spending within the State associated with the existence of the Silver Comet Trail, and their total economic and fiscal impact, net of the many spillover effects that result from that spending. This section focuses on direct usage of the Silver Comet Trail and attendant spending associated with that usage.

### CURRENT TRAIL USAGE

Primary research conducted during the Trail Usage Evaluation indicates that the **Silver Comet Trail likely currently generates at least**

Figure 3.1 Numbering of Selected Trailheads of the Current Silver Comet Trail



Source: Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)



**1.9 million uses each year** (see Table 3.2 and Figure 3.1). This estimate is corroborated by secondary research conducted by Econsult Solutions, Inc. on the recreational profile of the population living within a 4-mile radius of the Silver Comet Trail, which suggests that this group of over 400,000 people participate in an aggregate 17 million recreational uses per year (see Table 3.3).<sup>1</sup> Hence, an estimated 1.9 million uses, which includes uses by non-residents (i.e. visitors), would seem to represent a reasonably low capture rate of recreational usage by nearby residents, and in fact these figures may suggest that the estimate of 1.9 million uses is too low.

<sup>1</sup> Specifically, US Census Bureau data and Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan data were used to develop a profile of recreational activity for the population located within four miles of the Silver Comet Trail.

### FUTURE TRAIL USAGE

It is unknown exactly how much more use the Silver Comet Trail will generate once it is expanded. One can very easily argue that if the expansion doubles the number of people living within four miles of the Silver Comet Trail, it will similarly double usage of the Silver Comet Trail. Recreational amenities tend to be enjoyed by people who have easy access to them, and since the introduction of recreational amenities to areas that did not previously have them tends to result in their being used by residents who now have easy access to them. In fact, one can make a defensible argument that **usage will increase by even more, since oftentimes regional trails result in an exponential increase in usage as greater connectivity leads to even more and longer usage than what the sum of multiple individual links might indicate.**

Table 3.4 – Estimated Usage of the Silver Comet Trail in its Current and Expanded Form

Estimated Current Uses	% Increase from Expansion	Estimated Future Uses
1.89M	50%	2.83M

Source: Alta Planning + Design (2013), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)

Table 3.5 – Estimated Per-Party Spending for Users of the Silver Comet Trail

Spending Per Party	\$0-\$50	\$50-\$100	\$100-\$200	\$200+	Weighted Average
% Responses	79%	11%	4%	5%	\$49

Source: Alta Planning + Design (2013), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013). For weighted average, midpoints were assumed for each spending range, and \$300 was assumed for the \$200+ spending range.

To be conservative, it is assumed that the expansion of the Silver Comet Trail will increase usage by 50 percent. This is half of what would be estimated if an increase proportionate to the number of nearby households was used, and is roughly proportionate to the proposed mileage increase in the Silver Comet Trail. Based on this conservative assumption, **usage of the expanded Silver Comet Trail will be about 2.8 million uses per year** (see Table 3.4).

#### DIRECT SPENDING

Primary research conducted during the Trail Usage Evaluation indicates that the average per-party spending for users of the Silver Comet Trail is about \$50 (see Table 3.5). This is in line with research on other trails similar to the Silver Comet Trail, and represents a small fraction of the estimated total recreational

spending by people living near the Silver Comet Trail (see Table 3.6)<sup>2</sup>.

Assuming an average party size of two and only one activity per trip, this suggests **aggregate spending associated with the current Silver Comet Trail of about \$47 million** (1.9 million uses x 1 use/trip x 2 people/party x \$50/party = \$47 million) and **aggregate spending associated with the expanded Silver Comet Trail of about \$71 million** (2.8 million uses x 1 use/trip x 2 people/party x \$50/party = \$71 million) (see Table 3.7).

<sup>2</sup>For example, Marcouiller et al (2002) estimated \$25 per visit day for local visitors and \$53 per visit day for non-local visitors within the State of Wisconsin, while Carleyolsen et al (2006) estimated an average of \$43 per user trip for a variety of uses across studies in Canada and the US.

Table 3.6 – Estimated Annual Recreational Spending by Residents Living within Four Miles of the Current Silver Comet Trail, for Selected Recreational Categories

Recreational Category	Within 4 mi. of Existing Silver Comet Trail	Within 4 mi. of Expanded Silver Comet Trail	Within Project Study Area	Within the State of Georgia
Bicycles	\$20	\$20	\$13	\$18
Camp Fees	\$25	\$24	\$19	\$24
Camping Equipment	\$6	\$6	\$5	\$6
Fees for Recreational Lessons	\$128	\$122	\$84	\$114
Food and Drink on Trips	\$431	\$394	\$312	\$382
Sports, Recreation and Exercise Equipment	\$140	\$134	\$115	\$135

Source: ESRI (2013), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)

Table 3.7 – Estimated Aggregate Spending from Users of the Silver Comet Trail in its Current and Expanded Form

Trail	Estimated # Uses	Uses/Trip	People/Party	Estimated Spending per Party	Estimated Aggregate Spending
Current	1.88M	1	2	\$50	\$47M
Expanded	2.83M	1	2	\$50	\$71M

Source: Alta Planning + Design (2013), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)

## TOURISM ACTIVITY

### OVERVIEW

A meaningful proportion of the usage and spending estimated in the previous section comes from visitors. Their spending profile includes not only spending related to their usage of the Silver Comet Trail but spending in other travel-related categories, such as accommodations, food, and entertainment. This too represents an economic boost for the State and a reason to invest in the Silver Comet Trail and in its expansion.

### TOURISM COMPONENT OF USAGE

Primary research conducted during the Trail Usage Evaluation indicates that about 21 percent of users of the Silver Comet Trail

come from outside of Georgia. This seems reasonable, given that a 150-mile radius from the Silver Comet Trail (i.e. a 2 ½ hour drive) reaches into population centers in Alabama, North Carolina, and Tennessee and captures an overall population of about 15 million, of which half are located outside of the State of Georgia (see Table 3.8 and Figure 3.2). This suggests that **out-of-state visitors represent about 400,000 out of the 1.9 million current uses of the Silver Comet Trail and about 600,000 out of the 2.8 million future uses of the expanded Silver Comet Trail** (see Table 3.9).

### TOURISM SPENDING

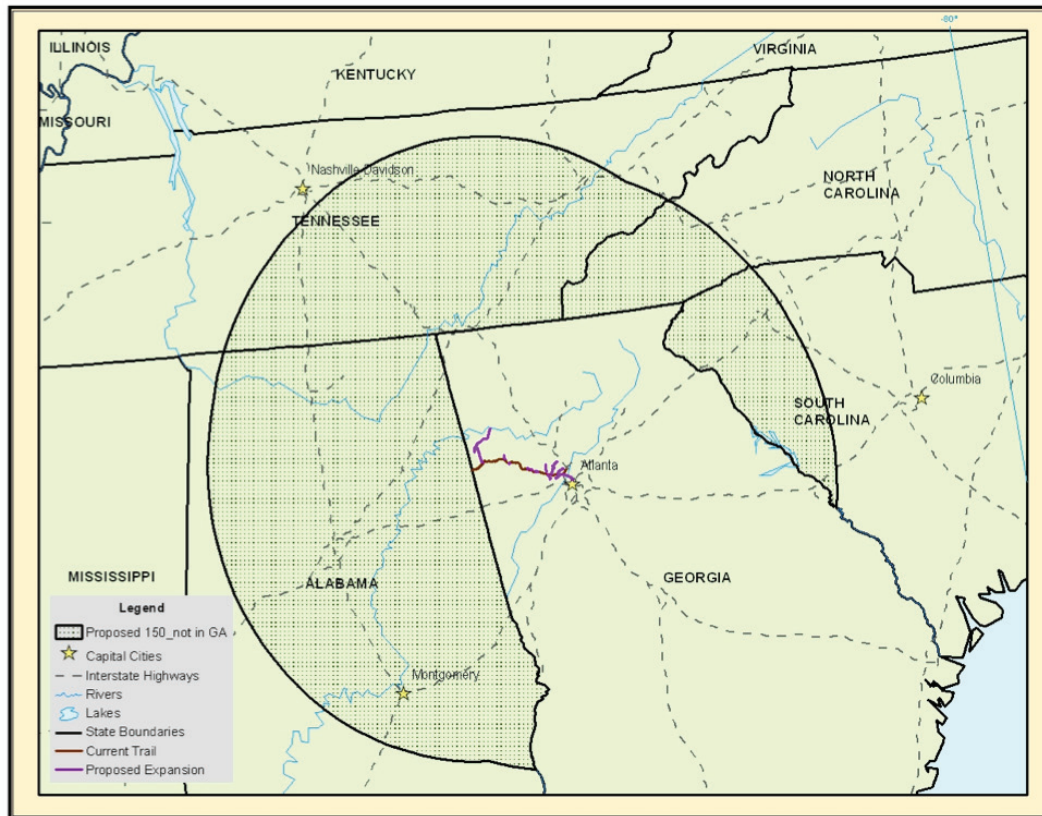
Out-of-state visitors are likely to have a spending profile that is fundamentally different from that of residents. First, if they are

Table 3.8 – Population within a 150-Mile Buffer of the Silver Comet Trail in its Current and Expanded Form

	Current	Expanded	Total	# Outside of GA	% Outside of GA
Population	14.98M	0.54M	15.53M	7.40M	48%
Households	5.72M	0.20M	5.93M	2.93M	49%
Housing Units	6.54M	0.23M	6.77M	3.36M	50%

Source: US Census (2010), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)

Figure 3.2 150-Mile Radius from Current and Expanded Silver Comet Trail



Source: : ESRI (2013), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)

Table 3.9 – Out-of-State Visitor Component of the Estimated Aggregate Annual Uses of the Silver Comet Trail in its Current and Expanded Form

Trail	Estimated # Uses	% Out-of-State Tourists	Estimated # Uses by Residents	Estimated # Uses by Out-of-State Tourists
<b>Current</b>	<b>1.88M</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>1.49</b>	<b>0.39</b>
<b>Expanded</b>	<b>2.83M</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>2.24</b>	<b>0.59</b>

Source: Alta Planning + Design (2013), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)

Table 3.10 – Estimated Per-Day Spending by Visitors to Georgia

Trail	# Visitors	Aggregate Spending	Per-Day Spending	% of All Visitors
In-State	38.9M	\$4.01B	\$103	26%
Out-of-State	109.5M	\$11.93B	\$109	74%
Day Trip	30.9M	\$1.70B	\$55	21%
Overnight	116.7M	\$14.24B	\$122	79%
<b>Total</b>	<b>147.6M</b>	<b>\$15.94B</b>	<b>\$108</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: US Travel Association (2012), Georgia Department of Tourism (2012), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)

Table 3.11 – Estimated Aggregate Spending from Users of the Silver Comet Trail in its Current and Expanded Form, Including Tourism Spending by Out-of-Town Visitors

Current	# Uses	People/Party	Recreational Spending per Party	Tourism Spending per Party	Estimated Aggregate Spending
Residents	1.49M	2	\$50	\$0	\$37M
Tourists	0.39M	2	\$50	\$50	\$20M
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.88M</b>				<b>\$57M</b>
Expanded	# Uses	People/Party	Recreational Spending per Party	Tourism Spending per Party	Estimated Aggregate Spending
Residents	2.24M	2	\$50	\$0	\$56
Tourists	0.59M	2	\$50	\$50	\$30
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.83M</b>				<b>\$86</b>

Source: Alta Planning + Design (2013), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)

traveling from farther away, they are more likely to make purchases on recreational amenities before, during, and after their use of the Silver Comet Trail. Second, they incur additional spending related to their visit, including higher outlays on transportation and food and potentially (for overnight stays) outlays on accommodations.

It is conservatively assumed that out-of-state visitors represent an additional \$50 in spending per day per party (for a total of \$100 per day per party: \$50 on recreation before, during, and after usage of the Silver Comet Trail, and \$50 on all other spending). As a point of reference, statewide it is estimated that visitors to Georgia spend over \$100 per day (\$55 for day visitors and \$122 for

overnight visitors) (see Table 3.10). This means that **out-of-state visitors to the current Silver Comet Trail are responsible for an additional \$20 million per year within the State, and that out-of-state visitors to the expanded Silver Comet Trail will be responsible for an additional \$30 million per year within the State** (see Table 3.11). Hence, **recreational and tourism spending combined represent \$57 million now from the current Silver Comet Trail and \$86 million in the future from the expanded Silver Comet Trail** (see Table 3.12).

## SPILLOVER IMPACTS

### OVERVIEW

The Silver Comet Trail is responsible for a

Table 3.12 – Estimated Aggregate Spending from Users of the Silver Comet Trail in its Current and Expanded Form, Including Tourism Spending by Out-of-Town Visitors

Current	Estimated Aggregate Recreational Spending	Estimated Aggregate Tourism Spending	Estimated Aggregate Spending
Residents	\$37	\$0	\$37M
Tourists	\$10	\$10	\$20M
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$47</b>	<b>\$10</b>	<b>\$57M</b>
Expanded	Estimated Aggregate Recreational Spending	Estimated Aggregate Tourism Spending	Estimated Aggregate Spending
Residents	\$56	\$0	\$56M
Tourists	\$15	\$15	\$30M
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$71</b>	<b>\$15</b>	<b>\$86M</b>

Source: Alta Planning + Design (2013), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)

considerable amount of direct spending, in the form of recreational spending that takes place before, during, and after use of the Silver Comet Trail, as well as in the form of tourism spending that is drawn into the State by the existence of the Silver Comet Trail. These direct expenditures in turn generate spillover economic effects, as merchants ramp up their operations in response to new demand and as employees spend a portion of their earnings within their local economies. As a result, additional jobs are supported and additional industries are benefitted.

#### ECONOMIC IMPACT METHODOLOGY

Economic activity generated by the Silver Comet Trail, in the form of recreational spending and out-of-state visitor spending, in turn produces two kinds of spillover effects. First, locally sourced materials generate increased business activity for local vendors, who in turn ramp up their activities and their own sourcing; this is known as the indirect effect. Second, workers earn wages and in turn spend a portion of their earnings within their local economies; this is known as the induced effect. The composition and scale of these spillover effects can be modeled using Regional Input-Output Modeling System (RIMS II) multiplier data provided by the US Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis.

In this way, one can model the total economic impact generated by the Silver Comet Trail. For the purposes of this report,

these impacts were sized to the level of the State of Georgia and to the four-county region representing parts of the State that are geographically proximate to the Silver Comet Trail, which includes Polk, Paulding, Cobb, and Fulton counties (referred to as the Region in this report). Direct expenditures generate economic activity that ripples out from the Silver Comet Trail. Since the Region is completely contained within the State, the State economic impact figures include the Region economic impact figures, and the difference between the two represents the amount of economic activity that takes place in the parts of the State outside the Region (See Appendix C for additional detail on Econsult Solutions' economic impact methodology).

#### ECONOMIC IMPACT FROM RECREATIONAL AND TOURISM SPENDING

As estimated above, the Silver Comet Trail is currently responsible for about \$57 million in direct spending per year, and will be responsible for about \$86 million in direct spending per year once it is expanded. These direct expenditures in turn generate considerable spillover impacts throughout the Region and State:

- In its current form, **the Silver Comet Trail generates about \$100 million in total expenditures throughout the Region each year, supporting about 750 jobs and about \$20 million in earnings, and generates about \$120 million in total expenditures**

Table 3.13 – Estimated Economic Impact from Direct Recreational and Tourist Spending Associated with Current Silver Comet Trail

	Within the Four-County Region	Within the State of Georgia
Direct Expenditures	\$57M	\$57M
Indirect & Induced Expenditures	\$41M	\$61M
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$98M</b>	<b>\$118M</b>
<b>Total Employment (Jobs)</b>	<b>750</b>	<b>1,310</b>
<b>Total Earnings</b>	<b>\$20M</b>	<b>\$37M</b>

Source: US Department of Commerce (2011), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)

Table 3.14 – Estimated Economic Impact from Direct Recreational and Tourist Spending Associated with Expanded Silver Comet Trail

	Within the Four-County Region	Within the State of Georgia
Direct Expenditures	\$86M	\$86M
Indirect & Induced Expenditures	\$62M	\$91M
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$147M</b>	<b>\$177M</b>
<b>Total Employment (Jobs)</b>	<b>1,130</b>	<b>1,980</b>
<b>Total Earnings</b>	<b>\$30M</b>	<b>\$55M</b>

Source: US Department of Commerce (2011), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)



throughout the State each year, supporting about 1,300 jobs and about \$37 million in earnings (see Table 3.13).

- In its expanded form, the Silver Comet Trail will generate about \$150 million in total expenditures throughout the Region each year, supporting about 1,100 jobs and about \$30 million in earnings, and will generate about \$180 million in total expenditures throughout the State each year, supporting about 2,000 jobs and about \$55 million in earnings (see Table 3.14).

**INDUSTRY DISTRIBUTION OF ECONOMIC IMPACT FROM RECREATIONAL AND TOURISM SPENDING**

These economic impacts are widely distributed across numerous industries throughout the Region and State. The retail and food industries see significant impacts from the Silver Comet Trail, but other industries besides those two represent 56 percent of the expenditure impact and 43 percent of the employment impact within the Region, and 61 percent of the expenditure impact and 48 percent of the employment impact within the State (see Table 3.15).

Table 3.15 – Industry Distribution of Estimated Economic Impact from Direct Recreational and Tourist Spending Associated with the Silver Comet Trail

Expenditure Impact within the Four-County Region		Expenditure Impact within the State of Georgia	
	%		%
Retail trade	31.1%	Retail trade	27.7%
Food services and drinking places	12.9%	Food services and drinking places	11.3%
Transportation and warehousing	8.2%	Real estate and rental and leasing	8.0%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	7.0%	Transportation and warehousing	7.6%
Real estate and rental and leasing	6.6%	Finance and insurance	6.1%
All other industries	34.2%	All other industries	39.3%
Employment Impact within the Four-County Region		Employment Impact within the State of Georgia	
	%		%
Retail trade	36.8%	Retail trade	33.6%
Food services and drinking places	19.9%	Food services and drinking places	17.9%
Transportation and warehousing	9.6%	Transportation and warehousing	11.0%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	6.3%	Arts, entertainment, and recreation	6.0%
Real estate and rental and leasing	5.0%	Accommodation	4.8%
All other industries	22.5%	All other industries	26.7%

Source: US Department of Commerce (2011), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)

Table 3.16 – Comparison of Supply and Demand for Selected Retail Categories within a Four-Mile Radius of the Current Silver Comet Trail

	Demand	Supply	Gap	# Merchants
Food & Beverage Stores	\$769	\$676	\$93	237
Health & Personal Care Stores	\$162	\$137	\$26	173
Gasoline Stations	\$735	\$830	(\$95)	153
Clothing & Clothing Accessories Stores	\$195	\$132	\$63	254
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book & Music Stores	\$52	\$48	\$4	108
Food Services & Drinking Places	\$761	\$631	\$130	840
<b>Total Retail Trade and Food &amp; Drink</b>	<b>\$5,033</b>	<b>\$5,216</b>	<b>(\$183)</b>	<b>3,033</b>
<b>Total Retail Trade</b>	<b>\$4,272</b>	<b>\$4,585</b>	<b>(\$313)</b>	<b>2,193</b>
<b>Total Food &amp; Drink</b>	<b>\$761</b>	<b>\$631</b>	<b>\$130</b>	<b>840</b>

Source: ESRI (2013), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)

## UNMET DEMAND

### OVERVIEW

The extent to which the economic impacts described in the previous section actually accrue to the Region and State depends on the existence of local merchants to meet the demand for various goods and services by users of the Silver Comet Trail. The purpose of this section is to compare what is being demanded by consumers with what is being supplied by merchants, to see where there is unmet demand that therefore represents an opportunity for more localized capture of economic activity.

### LEAKAGE ANALYSIS

Leakage analysis is a common tool for discerning unmet demand in a particular geography. By comparing demand, in the form of the consumption patterns of local

residents, with supply, in the form of the sales patterns of local merchants, a sense of where demand exceeds supply and where supply exceeds demand can be estimated. By itself, leakage analysis is incomplete. Local residents are free to satisfy their demands through non-local merchants, and local merchants are free to sell to visitors. Leakage analysis does provide some sense of where there might be opportunities for localized capture of economic activity.

A leakage analysis of the four-mile radius along the current Silver Comet Trail suggests particular unmet demand for food and apparel merchants (see Table 3.16):

- 1. Demand for food services and drinking places exceeds supply by about \$130 million.**
- 2. Demand for food and beverage stores exceeds supply by about \$90 million.**



*Cedartown Depot*

**3. Demand for clothing and clothing accessories stores exceeds supply by about \$60 million.**

**RETAIL OPPORTUNITIES NEAR TRAILHEADS**

Trailheads are particularly strategic locations for merchants, since they represent entry and exit points for trail users and are therefore more likely to be places where users will seek out various goods and services. A closer look at nine key trailheads of the Silver Comet Trail indicates a wide disparity in retail penetration at these locations, from only one merchant near the Coot's Lake Beach Trailhead to over 200 at the Silver Comet Connector (see Table 3.17). These trailheads vary widely in amenities such as parking and restrooms, as follows:

- SCC: The Silver Comet Connector is a paved trail that connects the Highland

Station shopping center to the start of the Silver Comet Trail at the Mavell Road Trailhead. Along with parking at Highland Station, amenities include a Publix, a bank, various restaurants, bike shops, Starbucks, many retail stores.

- FRT: Floyd Road Trailhead, located at mile marker 4.2, has great amenities including a convenience store, nice restrooms, ample parking, a fountain park, and SCD Cycles, located in the restored Silver Comet Depot.
- PST: Powder Springs Trailhead, located at mile marker 9.5, is a paved trailhead that provides easy access to fast food. Downtown Powder Springs is nearby, and Powder Springs Shopping Center is across the street from the trailhead and has gas stations, grocery stores,

Table 3.17 – Count of Merchants within a Four-Mile Radius of Selected Trailheads of the Silver Comet Trail

	SCC	FRT	PST	HT	CLBT	VWT	RT	NDSC	CD	All 9
Food & Beverage Stores	19	11	7	9	0	5	6	6	19	82
Health & Personal Care Stores	18	16	8	15	0	3	3	3	7	73
Gasoline Stations	6	11	6	7	0	6	6	7	9	58
Clothing & Clothing Accessories Stores	23	15	2	13	0	4	4	4	9	74
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book & Music Stores	4	10	4	9	0	2	1	1	2	33
Food Services & Drinking Places	74	62	30	57	1	23	26	26	35	334
<b>All Retailers</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>137</b>	

Source: ESRI (2013), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013). Total does not equal the sum of the rows above it because not all retail categories are shown.

restaurants, and banks.

- HT: Hiram Trailhead, at mile marker 14.7 on the Silver Comet Trail, is in the city of Hiram with nearby shopping including a Walmart, gas stations, grocery stores, restaurants, and banks.
- CLBT: Coot's Lake Beach Trailhead, located at mile marker 33.5, is next to Coot's Lake Beach. In addition to a public swimming pool, there is a nearby convenience store and gas station.
- VWT: Van Wert Trailhead, located at mile marker 36, has a convenience store nearby.
- RT: Rockmart Trailhead, located at mile marker 37.6, marks the start of the combined Riverwalk Park and The

Silver Comet Trail that travels through downtown Rockmart. The park is near downtown Rockmart.

- NDSC: Nathan Dean Sports Complex, located at mile marker 38.7, is a sports field. Additionally, there is lots of shopping nearby including restaurants, gas stations, and a Walmart.
- CD: The Cedartown Depot, located at mile marker 51.4, is a replica of the original Seaboard Airline Railway depot. The depot serves as the Cedartown Welcome Center and has a Silver Comet Museum. The depot is staffed during the day, and is a few blocks from historic downtown Cedartown.

It is unknown where the major trailheads will actually occur along expanded sections of

the Silver Comet Trail. A similar inventory and analysis is recommended to identify retail opportunities near future trailheads along the expanded corridor. .

## FISCAL IMPACTS

### OVERVIEW

In addition to generating economic impacts, the Silver Comet Trail expands various State tax bases, which in turn produces additional tax revenues for the State. These fiscal impacts are an important part of the benefit associated with the Silver Comet Trail and with expanding it in size, for they represent a direct return to the State on its investment.

### FISCAL IMPACT METHODOLOGY

Direct expenditures generate economic activity that expands various State tax bases and therefore generates various State tax revenues. These tax revenue increases can be modeled by looking at the extent to which

various economic impacts increase various parts of the State economy (see Appendix C for additional detail).

### FISCAL IMPACT FROM RECREATIONAL AND TOURISM SPENDING

It is estimated that direct recreational and tourism spending associated with the Silver Comet Trail, in addition to generating significant spillover impacts through the Region and State, also produce meaningful tax revenues for the State each year. Direct recreational and tourism spending associated with the Silver Comet Trail at its current size, plus the spillover impacts that result from that spending, **produce about \$3.5 million per year in tax revenues for the State, while in its expanded form, that amount increases to about \$5 million per year** (see Table 3.18).

Table 3.18 – Estimated Fiscal Impact from Direct Recreational and Tourist Spending Associated with the Silver Comet Trail

	Current	Expanded
Income Tax Revenues	\$1.1M	\$1.6M
Sales Tax Revenues	\$2.4M	\$3.3M
Business Tax Revenues	\$0.1M	\$0.2M
<b>Total Tax Revenues</b>	<b>\$3.5M</b>	<b>\$5.1M</b>

Source: US Department of Commerce (2011), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)

## PROPERTY VALUE IMPACTS

### OVERVIEW

An important impact of the Silver Comet Trail, which has nothing to do with usage and spending, is the positive effect it has on nearby property values. As a major recreational resource, the Silver Comet Trail represents an amenity people are willing to pay a premium to be located near, even if they themselves do not plan to use it. This bids prices up, increasing property values and thus representing both a wealth gain for homeowners and an increase in the property tax base for municipalities and school districts.

### THE POSITIVE PROPERTY VALUE EFFECTS OF RECREATIONAL AMENITIES

There is an extensive literature associated with the positive property value impacts of recreational amenities such as a trails, parks, and green space. This positive property value impact occurs because people value being near such amenities, and are therefore willing to pay a premium for such proximity. Statistical techniques such as hedonic regression analyses can be used to estimate the incremental impact of proximity to a recreational amenity, controlling for all other explanatory influences (See Appendix C for additional detail). This body of analyses suggests that **proximity to a recreational amenity confers a 4 to 7 percent increase in home values within a quarter-mile** (see Table 3.19).

Table 3.19 – Selected Studies of the Property Value Impact of Trails and Parks on Home Values within a Quarter-Mile

Source	% Impact
A Dynamic Approach to Estimating Hedonic Prices for Environmental Goods: An Application to Open Space Purchase – Riddel (2001)	4%
Quantifying the Economic Value of Protected Open Space in Southeastern Pennsylvania – Econsult Corporation (2010)	7%
The Economic Impact of the Catawba Regional Trail – Campbell and Monroe (2004)	4%
The Economic Impact of the Ecusta Rail-Trail – Econsult Corporation (2012)	4%
The Potential Economic Impacts of the Proposed Carolina Thread Trail – Econsult Corporation (2007)	4%
Valuing the Conversion of Urban Green Space – Econsult Corporation (2010)	7%

Source: Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)

**THE MAGNITUDE OF THE POSITIVE PROPERTY VALUE EFFECT OF PROXIMITY TO THE SILVER COMET TRAIL**

A direct multivariate regression analysis of the Silver Comet Trail's effects on nearby property values is beyond the scope of this report. However, a low-end estimate of 4 percent for houses within a quarter-mile can be used to calculate an aggregate property value impact figure.

The 4 percent estimate approach is likely conservative for at least three reasons:

1. First, the literature suggests that 4 percent is the low end of the range of positive impacts, so it is possible that the actual impact of the Silver Comet Trail is higher than 4 percent.

2. Second, what is being assumed is a fixed 4 percent increase in property values, which essentially represents a static, one-time influence. In fact it is often the case in analyses like these that the property value impact is not only static and one-time in nature but has an ongoing aspect to it. In other words, proximity to a recreational amenity not only confers nearby houses with a particular property value increase, relative to other houses, but it also results in a higher annual appreciation rate, such that the property value differential grows over time. This is consistent with findings that proximity to green space is valued more highly now than even five to ten years ago.

3. Third, by only considering houses within

*Table 3.20 – Aggregate Positive Property Value Impact to Houses Located within a Quarter-Mile of the Silver Comet Trail*

	Current	Expanded
Population	16,626	54,453
Housing Units	7,292	25,110
Average House Value in 2012	\$137,255	\$166,496
Aggregate Home Value	\$1.0B	\$4.2B
Estimated % Increase Associated within Proximity to the Silver Comet Trail	4%	4%
<b>Aggregate Positive Property Value Impact</b>	<b>\$40M</b>	<b>\$167M</b>

Source: ESRI (2013), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)

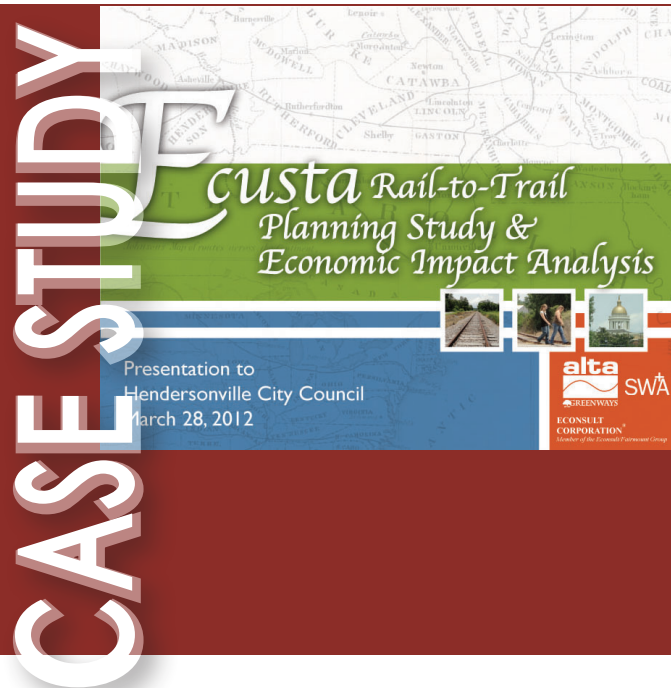
a quarter-mile of a recreational amenity, such an assumption ignores any positive property value impact on houses outside of a quarter-mile. In reality, houses can and do sell at a premium for being “close” to a recreational amenity without being within a quarter-mile of it.

In other words, the magnitude of the positive property value effect of proximity to the Silver Comet Trail is likely to be greater than 4 percent. And, the number of houses for

which that positive effect applies is likely to be more than just those within a quarter-mile of the Silver Comet Trail. Nevertheless, to be conservative, these assumptions are used to estimate the aggregate property value impact of the Silver Comet Trail.

#### THE AGGREGATE PROPERTY VALUE EFFECT OF THE SILVER COMET TRAIL

There are about 25,000 houses located within a quarter-mile of the current Silver Comet Trail, and about 46,000 houses located within



#### THE ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF THE ECUSTA RAIL TRAIL

This study was conducted for the City of Hendersonville, North Carolina, to determine the feasibility and economic impact of converting an inactive rail corridor into a paved shared-use trail. The corridor is a 20-mile line that connects the City of Hendersonville, Town of Laurel Park, Horseshoe, Etowah, Pisgah National Forest, and the City of Brevard. Trail

design, engineering, and construction is estimated to cost \$9.9 million (\$495,000 per mile), with the total closer to \$13.4 million if ancillary facilities such as trailhead parking, wayfinding signage, and roadway crossing improvements are included. In exchange, the economic return on investment for local communities is estimated at a \$42 million one-time return from direct and indirect expenditures for construction materials and labor costs, as well as initial property value

increases. An additional return of \$9.4 million is expected each year due to tax revenues, visitor spending, health care cost savings, property value increases, and direct use value to users. Conservative estimates for tourism impacts estimate that the trail will draw about 20,000 visitors every year, generating a \$2 million increase in revenue due to visitor spending. These valuable benefits show the positive economic impact that trail projects can contribute to local communities.



a quarter-mile of the expanded Silver Comet Trail, which means that **even a 4 percent increase in property value represents a significant aggregate increase in household wealth: about \$180 million for the current Silver Comet Trail and about \$315 million for the expanded Silver Comet Trail** (see Table 3.20). In other words, the **Silver Comet Trail is responsible for about \$180 million in increased household wealth, growing to \$315 million upon expansion, among owners of houses within a quarter-mile of the Silver Comet Trail.** Said another way, household wealth would decrease by \$180 million (or by \$315 million, if referring to the expanded Silver Comet Trail) if the Silver Comet Trail were to be removed and replaced by something that had neither a positive nor a negative effect on nearby house values.

**THE ANNUAL FISCAL IMPACT FROM THESE POSITIVE PROPERTY VALUE IMPACTS**

In addition to generating household wealth, the Silver Comet Trail, in its positive property value impacts, also produces higher property tax revenues for municipalities and school districts. In other words, if properties are accurately assessed, and if the Silver Comet Trail is responsible for increasing the value of properties located within close proximity of it, then it is also responsible for raising the property tax base for localities and thus generating more property tax revenues than if it did not exist. The average effective property tax rate<sup>3</sup> in localities near the Silver

<sup>3</sup> *Effective tax rate represents the tax bill divided by the tax base, and is calculated by multiplying the tax rate by the ratio between the assessed value and the market value (also known as the equalization ratio).*

*Table 3.21 – Aggregate Annual Increase in Property Tax Revenues to Municipalities and School Districts Associated with the Positive Property Value Effect the Silver Comet Trail*

	Current	Expanded
Aggregate Positive Property Value Impact	\$40M	\$167M
Average Effective Property Tax Rate	1.25%	1.25%
<b>Aggregate Increase in Property Tax Revenues</b>	<b>\$0.5M</b>	<b>\$2.1M</b>

*Source: Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)*

Table 3.22 - Illustrative Simplified Pro Forma Analysis of a Development Site and of the Meaningful Difference Proximity to the Silver Comet Trail Can Make on Development Feasibility

	Base Scenario	SCT Scenario
Price	\$300,000	\$312,000
Quantity	50	50
Total Revenue	\$15,000,000	\$15,600,000
SF/Unit	2,500	2,500
\$/SF	\$100	\$100
Variable Costs	\$12,500,000	\$12,500,000
Fixed Costs	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
<b>Profit (Loss)</b>	<b>\$1,500,000</b>	<b>\$2,100,000</b>
<b>As a % of Costs</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>16%</b>
<b>Go/NoGo @ 15%</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>

Source: Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)

Comet Trail is about 1.25 percent, so the estimated **aggregate positive property value impact of the Silver Comet Trail in turn yields about \$2 million more per year in property taxes now, growing to \$4 million more after expansion** (see Table 3.20).

## NEW DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW

Some of the value of proximity to the Silver Comet Trail is reflected in higher values for existing properties. Other values are reflected

in higher interest in new development on vacant parcels. This section explores the extent to which the Silver Comet Trail can catalyze new development, which has the positive effect of replacing vacant parcels with productive parcels, reducing blight and growing local property tax bases.

## DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

New development happens when development opportunities present themselves such that they offer a return on

investment higher than alternative uses of capital. The Silver Comet Trail, by conferring additional value to nearby locations, has the effect of converting some development sites from unattractive to attractive. It does so by increasing the return on investment on those sites, by increasing the price a site can be sold for without having any effect on the cost that must be borne to develop the site.

Specifically, it was conservatively estimated that proximity to the Silver Comet Trail confers a 4 percent increase in house values, relative to other houses not proximate to the Silver Comet Trail. This 4 percent difference, while it may seem small, can on the margins have an effect on whether a development site is worth pursuing. Some development sites are already attractive and will get advanced, while other development sites are so

*Table 3.23 - Positive Impact Associated with Development of Vacant Housing Units within a Half-Mile of the Current Silver Comet Trail*

<b>% Built Out Scenario</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>30%</b>
# New Units	77.5	155	232.5
Aggregate Increase in Market Value	\$14M	\$28M	\$41M
Annual Increase in Property Tax Revenues	\$0.19M	\$0.34M	\$0.53M

*Source: Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)*

*Table 5.3 Positive Impact Associated with Development of Vacant Housing Units within a Half-Mile of the Expanded Silver Comet Trail*

<b>% Built Out Scenario</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>30%</b>
# New Units	310	620	930
Aggregate Increase in Market Value	\$53M	\$105M	\$158M
Annual Increase in Property Tax Revenues	\$0.65M	\$1.29M	\$1.99M

*Source: Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)*

unattractive that the 4 percent increase will not make them attractive. However, for some development sites, even that small increase will prove the difference between “go” and “no go” (see Table 3.22).

There are currently about 775 vacant housing units within a quarter-mile of the current Silver Comet Trail, and about 3,100 vacant housing units within a quarter-mile of the expanded Silver Comet Trail. If even a fraction of these sites get developed into new housing units because of investment in the Silver Comet Trail, that will represent a significant increase in the aggregate market value of housing and also in the annual property tax revenues generated to localities (see Table 3.23 and Table 3.24).

## ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

### OVERVIEW

In addition to the spending generated by the Silver Comet Trail, and the value conferred to residential locations that are near it, the Silver Comet Trail produces a number of other positive economic benefits to the State and to its residents and businesses. These benefits, while quantifiable, tend to be more qualitative in nature.



The Silver Comet Trail and its future connections have many direct and indirect benefits.

### EMPLOYER AND EMPLOYEE ATTRACTION

Increasingly, recreational amenities are demanded by employers and employees and are therefore an important part of location decisions<sup>4</sup>. It is difficult to know just how many employers and employees have

---

<sup>4</sup> See, for example: “Quality of Life in the Planning Literature,” Dissart and Deller (2000) and “Amenities as an Economic Development Tool: is there Enough Evidence?” Gottlieb (1994).



*The Silver Comet Trail offers free use of an outdoor amenity.*

chosen the State as a location because of the Silver Comet Trail, or how many will relocate (if currently out-of-state) or remain (if currently in-state) when it is expanded. However, to the extent that it plays a role in attracting and retaining employers and employees, the Silver Comet Trail is making a major contribution to the State economy.

#### **MOBILITY**

By encouraging and facilitating non-automobile trips, the Silver Comet Trail improves mobility and reduces the number

of car trips that are taken. Being able to choose between multiple modes leads to gains for users, as they have more options for their business and leisure travel. It also takes cars off the road, which has at least three positive benefits. It reduces pollution for all, which improves air quality. It reduces congestion for the remaining drivers, saving time and additional energy consumption. It also reduces wear on roads, minimizing maintenance and replacement costs.

#### **DIRECT USE BENEFITS**

Silver Comet Trail users do not pay directly for their use, but do generate value for themselves. This value is known as a direct use benefit, and can be quantified by using "willingness to pay" surveys, which tend to assign per-trip values ranging from a couple of dollars for leisure walking to significantly more for more intensive activities like trail biking. Particularly at a time in which people are seeking no-cost and low-cost leisure options, the value associated with free use of an outdoor amenity is quite high, so the Silver Comet Trail represents a meaningful resource for the State and its residents.

#### **HEALTH BENEFITS**

One aspect of the value conferred to users of the Silver Comet Trail is the positive health outcomes associated with active recreation.

There is both an increasing awareness of and literature on the direct linkage between access to recreational amenities, increased frequency of exercise, positive health outcomes, and lower health care costs. As health care costs soar, recreational amenities are seen by governments and citizens alike as an important way to encourage active lifestyles and minimize negative health outcomes. Specifically, active recreation has been shown to lower health care costs in four major categories:

1. Direct health care costs – Those related to immediate avoidance of negative health outcomes
2. Indirect health care costs – Those related to long-term avoidance of chronic negative health outcomes
3. Direct and indirect worker compensation costs – Those related to reduction in worker compensation claims
4. Absenteeism and “presenteeism” costs – Those related to loss of workplace productivity from sickness or impaired ability to perform

#### ECOLOGICAL SERVICES RENDERED

Green space such as parks and trails themselves render valuable ecological services that might otherwise have to be

purchased in the marketplace. For example, tree-lined trails work to clean air, purify water, and sequester carbon. Depending on the size, configuration, and characteristics of the current and expanded Silver Comet Trail, the value of these services may or may not be large, but they are nevertheless worth including in the overall discussion on benefits and costs.



*Silver Comet Trail*

## TRAIL USAGE EVALUATION

To understand the scale of economic impact generated by the Silver Comet Trail, it is important to first know trail users and their activity patterns. The trail usage evaluation count and survey explored four key questions:

1. **How many** people use the trail and where are they using it most frequently?
2. **Who** is using the trail?
3. **When and how often** are people using the trail?
4. **Do people spend money** in the communities along the trail and if they do, what do they spend their money on?

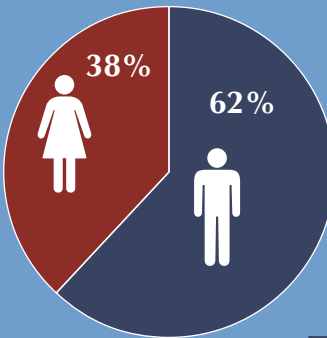
### KEY FINDINGS\*

The Silver Comet Trail has an estimated **1.9 million users** each year.

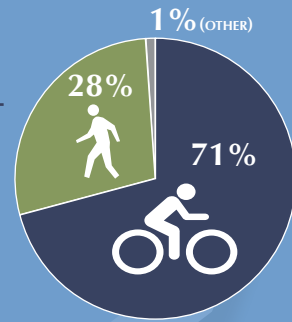
Estimated Usage of the Current Silver Comet Trail, by Major Trailhead

Smyrna Trail Head	Silver Comet Cycles Trail Head	Powder Springs	Hiram Trail Head	Dallas Trail Head	Rambo Trail Head	Rockmart Trail Head	Cedartown Trail Head	GA/AL State Line
434,000	350,000	277,000	270,000	203,000	192,000	90,000	25,000	47,000
Total Users								
1,888,000								

The **majority of trail users are bicyclists**, particularly in more remote and rural areas.



**More males** use the trail than females along every segment of the trail, though the proportion of **female users is higher in more densely populated and well-trafficked areas**, such as near downtowns and parks.



Smyrna Trail Head had the highest estimated annual trail volume.

**97%** of people use the trail either for **recreation or exercise**, though many people do use the trail for commuting or to access nearby destinations, especially in urban areas.

People visiting the trail traveled from **23 counties** and **8 states**, including Washington State, to use the trail (during the two-week survey period).

When users spend money while using the trail, the majority of them spend money on food and may spend up to \$50 per visit.\*\*

\*Information was collected via counts and surveys at nine locations using methodology from the National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project (NBPDP)

\*\*Field survey participants were asked 'If you do anticipate spending money, what do you estimate your party's overall spending to be during this trip?' This number is conservative and likely to be more than \$50 per user for non-resident users.

## ECONOMIC IMPACT ANALYSIS

This Economic Impact Analysis is the first of its kind to comprehensively report the economic benefits of the existing 61-mile Silver Comet Trail and its proposed 66-mile expansion. Recreational amenities such as rail-trails are increasingly seen as regional economic development tools that generate value through:

- **Recreational spending** (bicycle rentals, food & drink, sporting equipment)
- **Tourism** (spending by out-of-state users on lodging, transportation, dining)
- **Spillover impacts** (additional jobs and worker spending)
- **Fiscal impacts** (sales tax revenue generated)
- **Increased property values** (increased household wealth near SCT)
- **Property tax revenue** (benefitting municipalities and school districts)

Summary of Economic Impacts for Existing and Expanded Silver Comet Trail

	Current Trail Network	Expanded Trail Network
Recreational Spending	\$47 Million	\$71 Million
Tourism Spending	\$10 Million	\$15 Million
Regional Spillover	\$98 Million	\$147 Million
State Spillover Impact	\$118 Million	\$177 Million
Statewide Fiscal Impact	\$4 Million	\$5 Million
Property Value Increases	\$182 Million	\$316 Million
Property Tax Gains	\$2 Million	\$4 Million
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$461 Million</b>	<b>\$735 Million</b>

Source: Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)

### BENEFIT/COST ANALYSIS

**Benefit Valuation of the Silver Comet Trail Expansion:** Based on the estimates of the Economic Impact Analysis, **the 66-mile trail expansion is conservatively expected to generate a combined economic benefit of \$274 million.** This includes local, regional, and statewide benefits:

LOCAL	REGIONAL	STATEWIDE
\$24 million more in recreational spending and \$5 million more in tourism spending per year	\$50 million more in economic impact each year	\$60 million more in economic impact each year
\$130 million more in property value impact and \$1.7 million in annual property tax revenues to municipalities and school districts	400 more jobs	670 more jobs

The economic benefits of the Silver Comet Trail expansion will be even greater if this investment catalyzes new development within Northwest Georgia, which would create additional property tax gains and spillover impacts.

### RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The combined **cost to construct all recommended trail connections within Georgia is estimated to total \$59 million.** An estimate of the return on investment of the Silver Comet Trail expansion can be provided using the results of the existing and proposed economic impact analyses. **For every \$1 spent on the Silver Comet Trail expansion, Georgians gain an estimated \$4.64 in direct and indirect economic benefits.** This translates to an over 400% return on investment for local communities, the region, and the state.



## PROJECT OVERVIEW

In 2012, the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission (NWGRC) initiated the Silver Comet Economic Impact Analysis and Planning Study to determine the existing and future economic impacts of the Silver Comet Trail (SCT). The SCT is the nation's longest and oldest paved rail-trail, extending 61.5 miles and connecting seven cities and three counties from Smyrna to the Georgia/Alabama state line. NWGRC is exploring a 66-mile expansion within Georgia as well as coordinating with Alabama and Tennessee on long-term interstate connections. This in-state expansion alone has the potential to double the number of users and economic benefits on a local and regional scale.



## HISTORY OF THE SILVER COMET TRAIL

In 1992, The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) purchased the inactive rail line through Cobb, Paulding, and Polk counties from CSX. GDOT intended to use the line as a high-speed transit route. Instead the corridor became a shared use, non-motorized trail in 1998. Construction of the trail was initiated through a collaborative effort among GDOT, Georgia State Parks, PATH Foundation, Cobb County DOT, Paulding County, and Polk County.



## QUALITATIVE BENEFITS OF TRAILS

In addition to the spending generated by the Silver Comet Trail, and the value conferred to residential locations that are near it, the Silver Comet Trail produces a number of other positive economic benefits to residents, businesses, and the State. These benefits tend to be qualitative in nature but are important to include in an overall discussion of benefits and costs.



**EMPLOYER AND EMPLOYEE ATTRACTION**  
Quality of life decisions, including the availability of recreational amenities like trails, are becoming ever more important factors in where people choose to live and work.<sup>1</sup> The Silver Comet Trail is a valuable asset that boosts the relative attractiveness of the region compared to competing regions and plays an important role in Northwest Georgia's ability to draw and retain talented workers and employers.

### INCREASED ACCESS AND MOBILITY

By encouraging and facilitating non-automobile trips, the Silver Comet Trail improves access and mobility. Being able to choose between multiple modes of travel leads to gains for users, as they have more options for their business and leisure travel. It also takes cars off the road, which has at least three positive benefits:

- Reduces air pollution and improves air quality<sup>2</sup>
- Reduces congestion for drivers, saving time and energy consumption
- Reduces wear and tear on roads and vehicles



### DIRECT USE BENEFITS

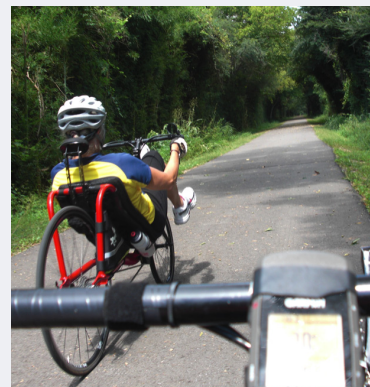
Silver Comet Trail users do not pay directly for their use, but do generate value for themselves. This value is known as a direct use benefit, or "willingness to pay". This ranges from a couple of dollars for leisure walking to significantly more for more intensive activities like trail biking. At a time in which people are seeking no-cost and low-cost leisure options, the value associated with free use of an outdoor amenity is quite high, so the Silver Comet Trail represents a meaningful resource for the State and its residents.

### HEALTH BENEFITS

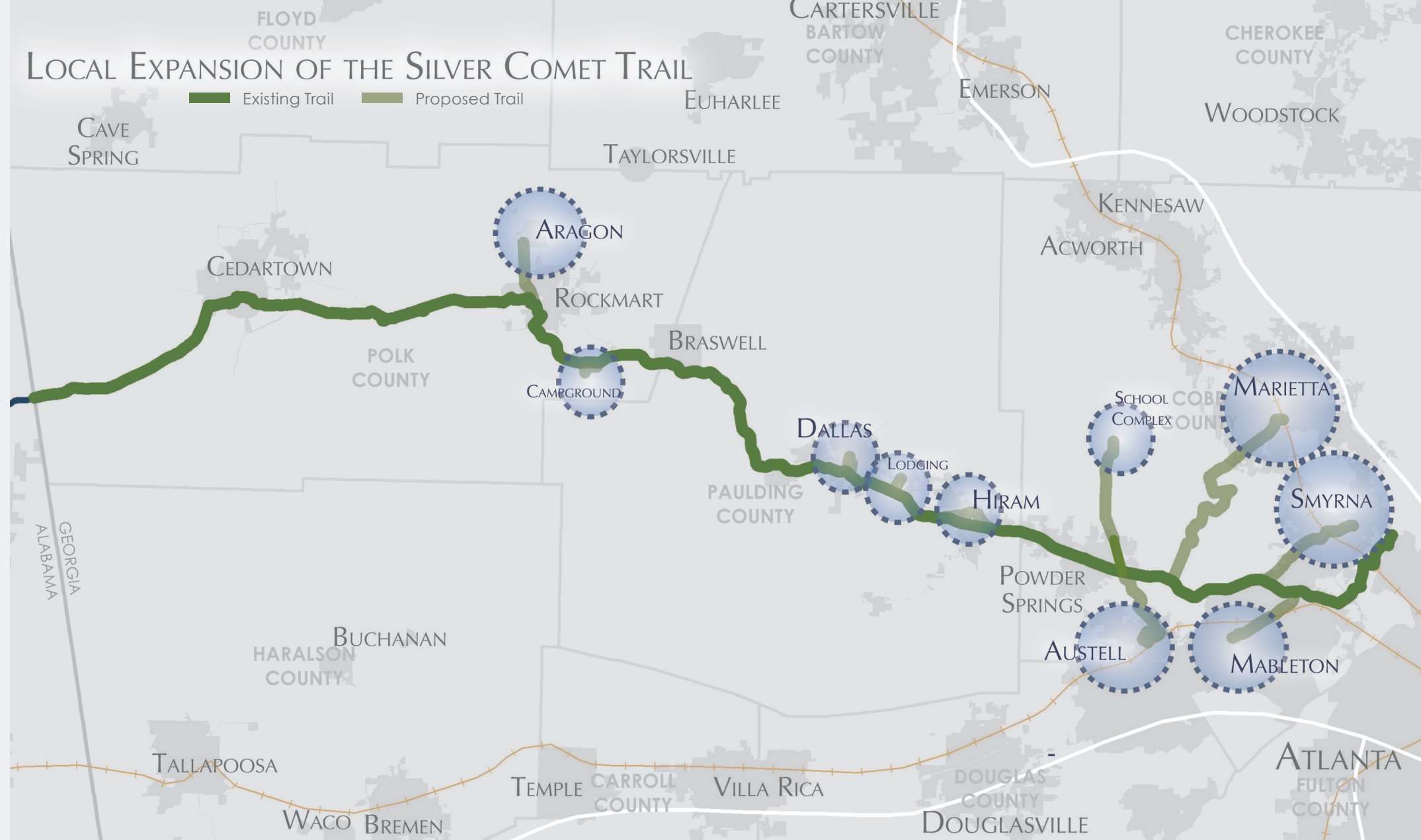
As health care costs soar, recreational amenities such as the SCT are seen by governments, health professionals, and citizens as an important way to encourage active lifestyles and minimize negative health outcomes.

Physical activity has been shown to lower health care costs in four major categories:

- Direct health care costs: Costs paid for immediate health care needs
- Indirect health care costs: Costs paid for long-term avoidance of chronic negative health outcomes
- Direct and indirect worker compensation costs: Costs paid in worker compensation claims
- Absenteeism and "presenteeism" costs: Costs paid in loss of workplace productivity from sickness or impaired ability to perform

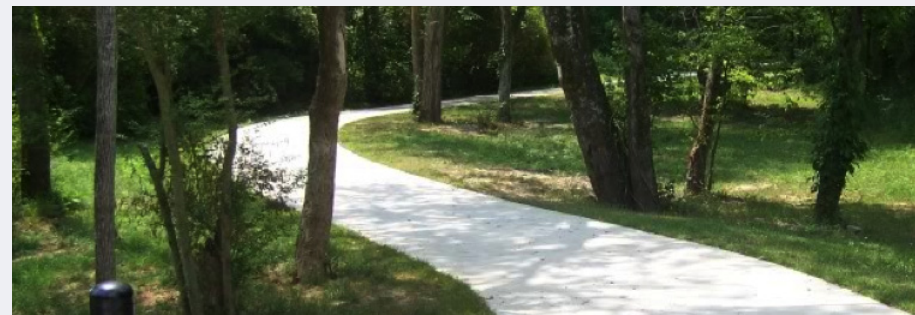


## LOCAL EXPANSION OF THE SILVER COMET TRAIL



### ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Green space corridors help link fragmented tracts of land to provide larger habitats for wildlife while also protecting sensitive natural features, natural processes, and ecological integrity. These tracts of open space also contribute to cleaner air by preserving stands of plants that create oxygen and filter air pollutants. Vegetation within the green space corridors also creates a buffer to protect streams, rivers, and lakes, preventing soil erosion and filtering pollution caused by agricultural and roadway runoff.<sup>3</sup>



1. "Quality of Life in the Planning Literature," Dissart and Deller (2000) and "Amenities as an Economic Development Tool: is there Enough Evidence?" Gottlieb (1994).
2. Federal Highway Administration. (1992). Benefits of bicycling and walking to health. Gotchi, T. & Mills, K. (2008). Active transportation for America. Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.
3. Arendt, R. (1994). Rural by Design. American Planning Association, Chicago, Illinois.

The Silver Comet Trail is a multi-jurisdictional project traversing three counties and multiple municipalities. Future connections will increase these numbers. One centralized authority is needed to plan, develop, and maintain facilities, as well as interface with the general public. For successful implementation and operations, the Silver Comet Trail's expansion will require regional management. The careful creation of a Regional Management Agency would include a cooperative effort with the NWGRC and ARC and existing municipalities responsible for maintaining the trail network.

### FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

David Kenemer, Principal Planner Northwest Georgia Regional Commission P.O. Box 1798 Rome, GA 30162-1798 (706) 295-6485   dkenemer@nwgrc.org	Byron Rushing Atlanta Regional Commission 40 Courtland St NE Atlanta, GA 30303 (404) 463-3345   brushing@atlantaregional.com
---	--

### PROJECT CONSULTANT TEAM

**alta** Alta/Greenways  
In association with Econsult Solutions, Inc.  
Robert and Company  
GREENWAYS