

The Regional Impacts of the Central Ohio Greenways in Franklin County

2022



The Return on Investment of Greenways on Franklin County's Economy and Quality of Life

Central Ohio Greenways (COG) is a trail network of national significance spanning 230+ miles, connecting Central Ohio to other parts of the state and country. COG trails are traveled more than 12 million miles annually by residents and tourists. The trails provide economic, quality of life, and health benefits to the community. With Central Ohio expected to be a region of over 3.1 million people by 2050 – bringing an increased demand for more walkable neighborhoods, transportation options, and outdoor recreational opportunities – trails have become even more critical to the livability of our growing region. The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission's (MORPC) COG Board is committed to a Regional Trail Vision to add over 500 miles of trails to the Central Ohio. In Franklin County alone, the existing network of 120 regional trail miles is envisioned to expand to nearly 300 miles.

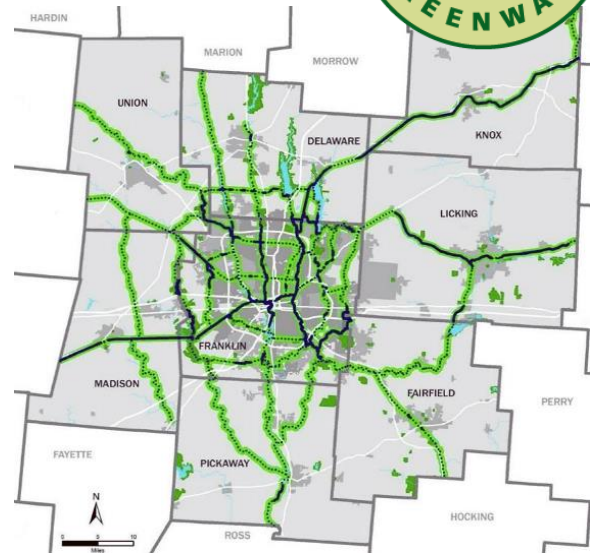


Figure: 2022 COG Regional Trail Vision

In 2021 MORPC hired Econsult Solutions Inc (ESI) to conduct a data-driven evaluation of the impact of a fully built-out Vision. The completed report, *The Regional Impacts of the Completed Central Ohio Greenways in Franklin County*, revealed that once complete, the COG Vision in Franklin County is expected to generate \$350 million in total economic impact. The impact will benefit economic activity, job creation, environmental services, connectivity to public transportation, tourism opportunities, and healthy lifestyles.

A DATA-DRIVEN EVALUATION

Only about 25% of the population in Franklin County can safely access a trail by foot or bike today. However, this percentage will nearly double when the Regional Trail Vision is fully implemented. Surveys reveal that people use trails to improve their mental and physical health and see trails making positive impacts on social equity, environmental concerns, and economic opportunities. While quantifying that impact is challenging, MORPC and ESI have developed a quantitative estimate of the impact of the fully built-out Regional Trail Vision in Franklin County. The ESI methodology assumes a fully built-out trail network in 10 years, and that economic activity will be generated through the initial \$203 million investment of building the trails, as well as the resulting indirect and induced effects, such as purchases from local vendors and labor income spent on goods and services. The methodology also quantifies environmental services such as carbon storage, transportation and safety benefits, and public health benefits of trails to reveal a complete picture of the full impact of a completed trail network for Central Ohioans.



Public Health



Social Equity



Environment



Economy

The built-out Regional Trail Vision will play a crucial role in offering a safe, healthy, thriving, and well-connected region. Trails serve as a catalyst for additional economic and community development projects and provide various environmental benefits. Trails also promote active recreation, which creates health benefits for users and opportunities for "local tourism." While it is clear that trails offer value to transportation, recreation, health, and quality of life, this value can also be measured in terms of economic benefit and return on investment.

Impacts from Capital Investments:

The estimated \$203 million built-out investment will generate direct construction activity in the region, resulting in an estimated \$350 million in total economic impact, supporting 1,890 jobs with \$113 million in earnings in Franklin County.



That's \$2 million of economic benefits per mile of new trail construction.

Public Health Impacts:

Physically active people typically have lower incidences of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, depression, certain cancers, and obesity than their sedentary counterparts.

It is estimated that the completed trail network will support approximately 48,100 physically active trail users annually. These users could achieve aggregate annual health care cost savings of nearly \$57 million from the recreation.



This equates to \$194,100 of annual health care savings per mile of trail.

Transportation and Safety Impacts:

Users on the completed network who replace short automobile trips with trail trips could reduce annual vehicle miles traveled in the region by 24.6 million miles.



That's an \$1,800 per mile savings in annual social cost of carbon emissions.

Trail Spending Impacts:

It is estimated that the completed trail network in Franklin County will result in \$74 million of direct spending by trail users annually.



That's \$300,000 of annual direct spending by trail users per mile of trail.

Environmental Service Benefits:

The trail network should include a green buffer and tree cover to support sustainable and resilient ecosystems. Preserving and improving vegetation along the proposed trails could provide 1.2 million in annual ecosystem service benefits and \$5.1 million in Lifetime carbon storage.



That's \$4,167 per mile of trail in ecosystem benefits and \$17,545 per mile of trail in lifetime carbon storage.

Residential Property Value Impacts:

The trail network is expected to contribute to an estimated \$825 million property value premium for properties that are within ½ mile of the trails. It is estimated that the property value increase will equate to additional property tax revenues of about \$2.2 million per year for Franklin County jurisdictions.



That's \$18,800 of tax revenue annually per mile of trail.

A RESILIENT ECOSYSTEM

As part of a region’s green infrastructure, trails and trail building—if completed in ways that support natural resources—can help to preserve the surrounding natural environment, which otherwise may be at risk for development or loss. **While the majority of trails are paved, the ecosystems surrounding the trail offer environmental benefits that can be estimated to save Franklin County over \$1 million annually** through pollution removal, replenishing water supply, water quality improvements, wildlife habitat preservation, and carbon sequestration.

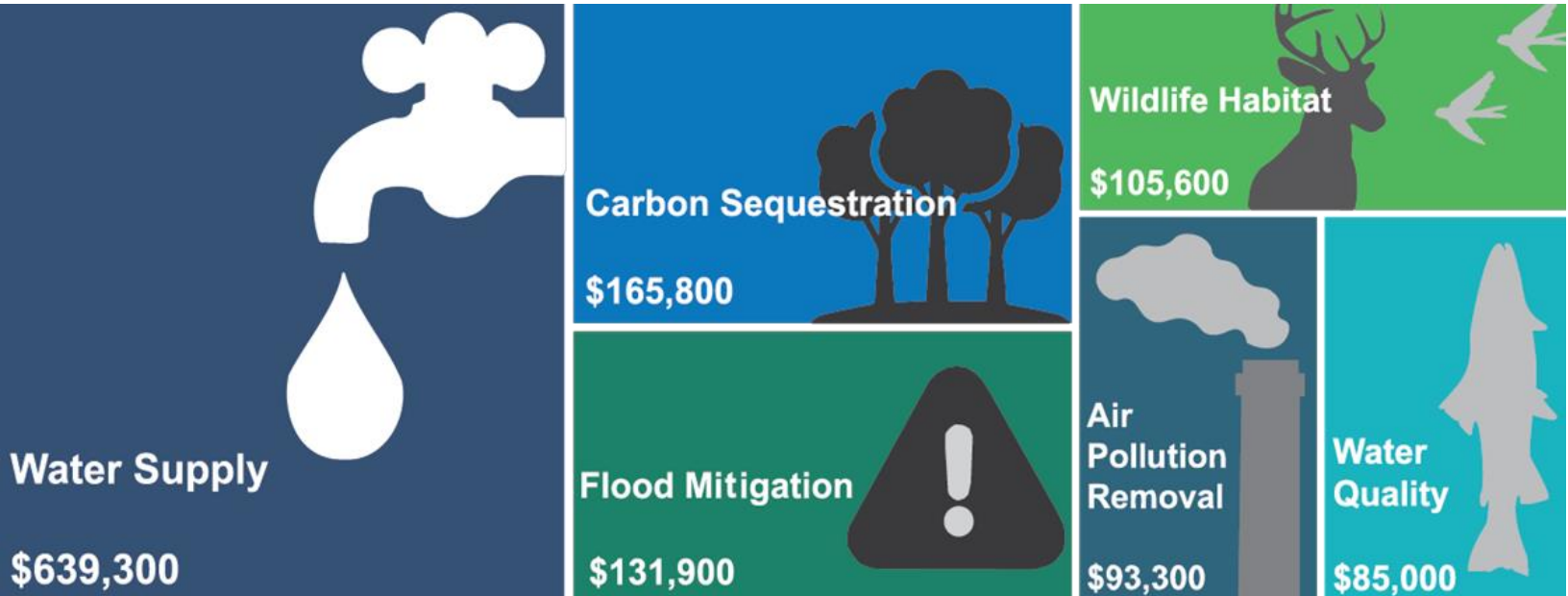


Figure: Potential Annual Environmental Benefits by Type within 50ft of the COG Vision in Franklin County

Air Quality

Poor air quality may become an increasing threat to Central Ohio causing numerous health risks. Trails can improve air quality by offering alternative transportation options that reduce emissions and preserving tree coverage that minimizes ecological harm caused by pollution.



880 acres of tree canopy will be preserved when the COG Network is completed.

This tree cover can counter the effects of climate change by capturing and retaining carbon dioxide.



Trees have already stored an estimated 30,141 tons of carbon, valued at \$5.1 million, within 50 feet of the existing trail network in Franklin County.

Additionally, new growth of the network's trees will sequester an additional \$165,800 annually in the social cost of carbon.

Water Supply and Quality

Trails only minimally disturb sensitive natural environments when compared to other more intense development. Furthermore, by protecting open spaces along trails networks can absorb water and reduce flood risk during storm events.

The soil in undeveloped areas along trails acts as a water retention source to renew streams, reservoirs, and aquifers, contributing to the continuous recharge of groundwater and streams.

Forests and wetlands provide a riparian buffer that filters and prevents various types of waste, including pathogens, excess nutrients, metals, and sediments, from entering the water supply.



Image: Scioto Mile Greenway

REGIONAL READINESS

MORPC's collaboration with regional partners will continue to emphasize the need for safe, comfortable, and connected infrastructure to support the quality of life that the region deserves. The COG Board's strong partnerships with local communities, non-profits, private companies, and residents is crucial to implementing the Regional Trail Vision. MORPC is advancing the following areas to encourage regional collaboration, creativity, and confidence to provide the backbone of a robust active transportation and recreation system that Central Ohio residents and visitors want and need.



Wayfinding and Inventory

MORPC, through a grant from the Ohio Department of Transportation, is leading a study that will offer guidance for a cohesive regional wayfinding strategy that supports the diverse trail user experiences possible on COG Trails.

Trail Towns Framework

The Trail Towns Framework will support communities in efforts to develop a culture of welcoming trail users and connecting destinations to existing trails to leverage trail tourism opportunities, active transportation infrastructure, and quality of life benefits.

Forums

MORPC hosts Central Ohio Greenways Forums three times a year. Trail building partners, elected officials, parks departments, local governments, and advocacy groups come together to share best practices, collaborate on projects, and learn.

Central Ohio Blueways

MORPC is advancing a water trails program to encourage more use of the region's waterways for active and passive recreation.

Partnerships

Experience Columbus offers a digital passport that encourages residents and visitors to explore the region's trails. You can learn more about the Outdoor Trails Pass at:

www.experiencecolumbus.com/outdoortrails/

RAPID 5 is an organization with a vision to connect our waterways, over 80 municipalities, nearly 40,000 acres of parks, and hundreds of miles of trails, to create the largest interconnected park system in the country.

LinkUS is Central Ohio's comprehensive mobility and growth initiative, where safe sidewalks, fast and reliable public transit, protected bike lanes and expanded trails meet.

The Impacts of the Central Ohio Greenways Vision in Franklin County is funded by The Columbus Foundation and local communities whose generous ongoing support advances the mission of COG.

For more information, please visit:
centralohiogreenways.com



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