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# **Policy and Program Recommendations Following the Evaluation of an Urban Rail-Trail Conversion Project**

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**Supported by the Mary Black Foundation, Grant #628**

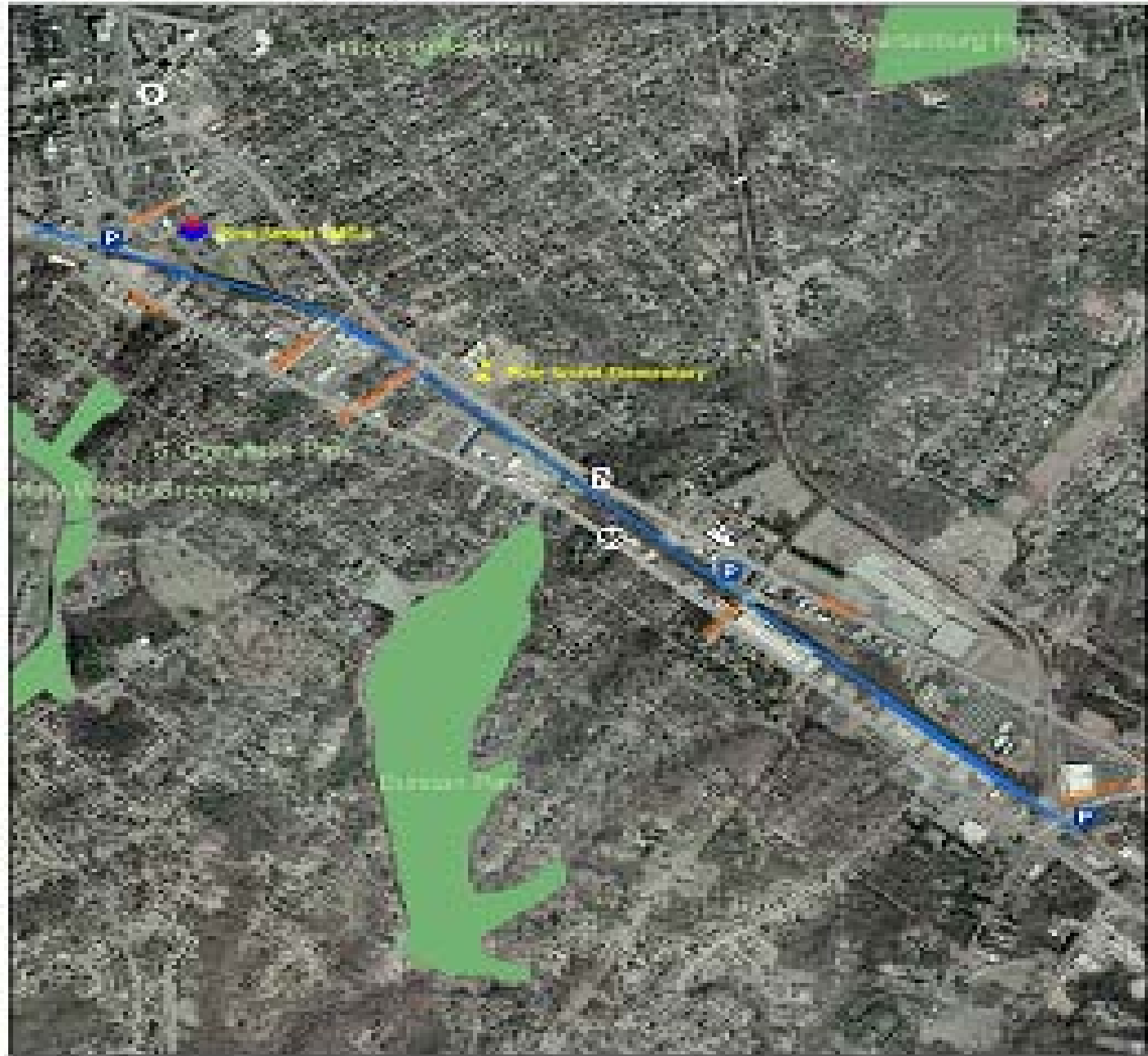
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# Background

- In 2002, the Mary Black Foundation in Spartanburg, SC identified *Active Living* as 1 of its 2 grant making priorities (over \$5M allocated to date).
  - Among substantial investments were funds to support a 2-mile rail-trail conversion.
    - Serves as a key connector between downtown business district and more rural parts of county
    - Dissects 2 adjacent residential neighborhoods differing in income, education, and race profiles.
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Hub City  
Connector:

MBF  
Rail-Trail  
Segment







# Objectives

- A systematic 5-year process was initiated to monitor users of this rail/trail segment to more fully inform community leaders of:
  - its overall use
  - use by residents from two adjoining neighborhoods
  - future program and policy strategies to increase use of the segment



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# Methods

- The System for Observing Play and Recreation in Communities (SOPARC)<sup>a</sup>
  - Can be implemented in diverse community and trail settings
  
  - Proven valid and reliable for gathering data on:
    - user demographics (e.g., age, sex, race)
    - environmental features (e.g., temperature, weather, equipment)
    - user features (e.g., type of activity)
    - physical activity level (e.g., sedentary, walking, very active)

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<sup>a</sup>McKenzie et al. System for observing play and recreation in communities (SOPARC): reliability and feasibility measures. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*. 2006;3:S208-S222.

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# SOPARC Protocol

- In an unobtrusive manner, observations made by trained college students
  - Quarterly, observations made 4x/day (7:30am, 12:30pm, 3:30pm, 6:00pm) for 7 consecutive days
  - At each time frame, observations conducted at 6 rail-trail segment access points
  - Air temperature and weather conditions noted at each time frame
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# Intercept Survey Protocol

- Subset (~10%) of users asked by trained students if they would be willing to participate in a brief (5-10 minute) survey about the rail-trail segment
  - Purpose of the survey and confidentiality explained, and verbal consent to proceed obtained
  - Questions asked pertaining to:
    - Personal demographics (age, race, income, education)
    - Purpose, frequency, and duration of using the segment
    - Time and means of travel to access the segment
    - How the user became aware of the segment
    - Perceptions of maintenance, aesthetics, and safety
  - One-page project description with the PI and USC Human Subjects Research Compliance Office contact information offered
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## Results of Direct Observation

During the first 16 months following construction of the rail-trail segment (May 2006–July 2007):

- 2,535 users were observed (avg. 60/day)<sup>#</sup>:
  - 57% walking, 41% very active, 2% sedentary
  - vast majority (73%, n = 1,838) were adults
    - Age distribution coincided with adjacent census tracts\*
  - 54% male, 46% female
    - 43% male, 57% female in adjacent census tracts\*
  - 72% white, 28% non-white
    - 62% white, 38% non-white in adjacent census tracts\*

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<sup>#</sup>equate to ~22,000 users in 12 months; \*2000 Census data

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## Results of Direct Observation cont.

- ❑ Significantly more males were observed during summer, fall and winter; more women observed during the spring ( $F = 2.920$ ;  $p = .033$ ).
  
  - ❑ More males were observed in very active activity
    - 55% of males vs 23% of females did vigorous intensity PA
    - 74% of females vs 43% of males were observed walking
  
  - ❑ Air temperature related to number of users ( $F = 4.65$ ;  $p = .01$ ).
    - More people (32%) observed when the temperature was between 71-80° F
    - Over 50% of users observed when the temperature was between 71-90° F
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# Results of Intercept Survey (N = 254)

- Average Age:
  - Males: 50 years,  $\sigma = 14.03$
  - Females: 49 years,  $\sigma = 15.45$
- Race:
  - Males (N=150):
    - Non-white: 19.3%
    - White: 80.7%
  - Females (N=194):
    - Non-white: 27.0%
    - White: 73.0%



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## Results of Intercept Survey cont.

- 79% of respondents visited the trail by motorized vehicle.
  - 75% of respondents traveled less than 15 minutes to get to the trail.
  - 95% of respondents reported using the trail for exercise or recreational physical activity.
  - Over 60% of respondents reported using the trail for more than 45 minutes per visit.
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## Results of Intercept Survey cont.

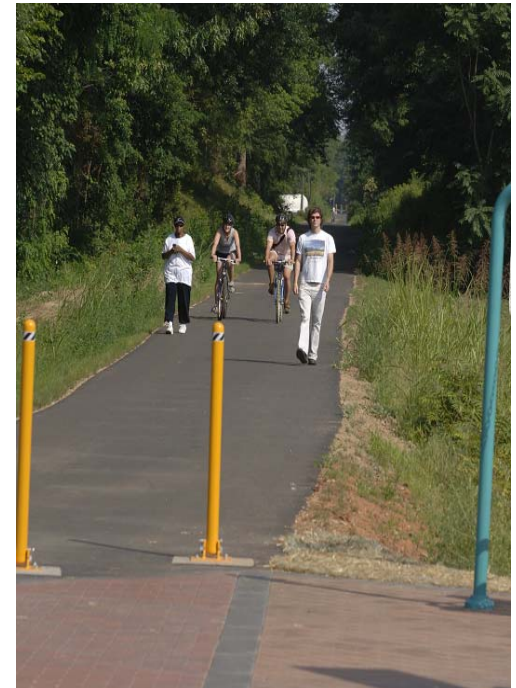
- Similar to SOPARC findings, more women (84%) than men (59%) reported using the trail for walking.
  - While more men (15%) than women (4%) reported using the trail for jogging/running.
  - Over 80% of respondents reported that the maintenance, aesthetics and perceptions of safety were good to excellent.
  - The 3 most commonly cited ways of learning about the trail were: word of mouth, newspaper, and driving by the trail segment.
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# If you build it, will they come?

## *Yes & No.*

- Males used the rail-trail segment more often than females, and usually performed vigorous exercise
- Females typically used the rail-trail segment for walking
- Few older adults and very few children and adolescents were observed using the rail-trail segment
- Spring and Summer had the greatest number of users; warmer temperatures yielded more users
- Sex and race/ethnicity of users varied from the demographics of residents living in nearby neighborhoods



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# Policy and Program Implications

Community leaders have been encouraged to consider:

- Developing tailored marketing strategies and environmental improvements to promote greater use among:
    - females
    - non-whites
    - younger and older populations
    - persons working in nearby businesses
    - Persons living in adjacent neighborhoods (e.g., designated and marked connector routes)
  
  - Implementing policies, environmental improvements, and programs to promote use of the rail-trail segment for active travel/transportation.
  
  - Creating policies, trail enhancements, and programs to sustain use of the rail-trail segment during the entire day and year.
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**THANK YOU!**