

Stories from Small Towns

Traverse City, Michigan (Pop. 15,018)

Two decades ago the state department of transportation widened a road into town without any provisions for walking or cycling. Local citizens then formed into a group to promote trails and walking in the city and at the state level. Upon securing funding, the group built trails. After the department of transportation objected to a trail to “nowhere,” the private group coordinated with town leaders to tie in a base park, and thus was birthed the Traverse Area Recreation Trail.

Business leaders, including those at a local resort on the edge of town, wanted connectivity. “There’s no reason our guests shouldn’t be able to hop on a trail and bike into Traverse City,” said the owner. In a state heavily influenced by the automobile, these events spurred a way of thinking. Now there are 25 miles of paved trails connected to trail networks, and Traverse City is known for health and recreation opportunities.

Key Lessons

- Economic benefits are huge. One trail network pumps \$2.6 million into the local economy, mostly due to special events.
- People are paying to live in areas where they can walk and bike.
- Start somewhere; it doesn’t have to be big! Gather people and get started.



Photo Credit: Michigan Municipal League. Used under Creative Commons License. <http://bit.ly/1YHKc3p>

Thank you to Julie Clark, Executive Director of TART Trails, Traverse City, Michigan.