Health Impact of a Shared Use Path in Rural Appalachia: A Pilot Study

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The purpose of this pilot study was twofold: 1) to collect trail user type, frequency, and duration on two separate multi use paths in a rural Appalachian city, and 2) to estimate the health impact of the trails. In addition, this study served to establish baseline measures prior to the completion of an addition shared use path which will connect the segments. Observational data, intercept user surveys, along with infrared sensors were used to estimate the number and type of users. Data were collected for 12 hours (6:00 am-6:00 pm) on two weekdays in July of 2017. Data from surveys were analyzed in tandem with information from the counts to develop an estimate of annual visits. Weather data (precipitation and temperature) from previous research was used to create relative ratios of use for each day of the year*.* The health impact model used the relationship between exposures to trail use, verses no use, to estimate all-cause mortality using the model established by Götschi & Hadden Loh (2017). The results indicated that the approximate number of annual users (primarily walkers) for both trails combined was 7,784. Out of this number of individuals, the number who would be expected to die if they were not walking regularly would be 71. In addition, the number of deaths per year that may be prevented by this level of walking was 13. Future data collection will provide annual usage, frequency and duration as the multi-use path is connected and therefore lengthened.

References:

Advancing project-scale health impact modeling for active transportation: A user survey and health impact calculation of 14 US trails. Journal of Transport & Health (2017), http: //dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jth.2017.01.005

The study was designed to capture user demographics and usage patterns for users of two disconnected shared use paths trails in a rural Kentucky Trail Town.