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## CHAPTER FIVE

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

## MAXIMIZING IMPACT

### OVERVIEW

Promotional and organizational best practices for other recreational amenities can be drawn from in guiding the expansion of the Silver Comet Trail towards maximum impact. The purpose of this section is to provide such guidance, to the end of steering expansion efforts towards actions that will result in the outcomes associated with the benefits discussed in this report. Four categories of best practices will be discussed: existing trail identity, branding efforts, infrastructure investment and cross-agency collaboration.

## BEST PRACTICES

### EXISTING TRAIL IDENTITY

Trail identity can be defined as the visual cues users receive when entering, exiting, or using a trail. Identity is influenced by many factors. Geography, surrounding land use, natural features, history, and local community can be used to create a sense of place. These tools are often personified and used in marketing and promotion materials. Establishing a strong trail identity creates interest and can attract tourism and increase visitation, thereby stimulating the local economy.

Part of the Silver Comet corridor's appeal is the diversity of landscapes and population centers to be experienced over 61 miles. The trail extends through rural and urbanized areas, including three counties and six population centers. Much of the remaining trail traverses remote, natural areas including the Paulding Forest Wildlife Management Area.

Future trail connections that connect to the Atlanta Beltline Trail, the city of Rome and Town of Cave Springs, and ultimately Chattanooga will contribute to the diversity of trail use and



character. These connections can have a positive influence on trail identity, increasing visitation and trail-oriented business development. The Silver Comet Trail is already considered a regional attraction. Expanding the northern and southern reach of this facility has the potential to enhance local communities and market the trail as a world-class destination.

#### BRANDING EFFORTS

Recreational amenities that sprawl over dozens of miles can yet be described by a single brand that unifies the promotional

message and the user experience. For example, the Adirondacks and the Outer Banks have immediate name recognition among travelers, regardless of whether they are the actual names of geographical locations that can be found on a map. Significantly, they are all seen as one distinct destination to consider when making vacation plans, thus greatly increasing their draw in contrast to the sum of the much smaller draw of the individual destinations contained within them.

## CASE STUDY



#### MINNEAPOLIS MIDTOWN GREENWAY

The Midtown Greenway in Minneapolis has implemented a successful wayfinding system that communicates to users how far, in minutes; a destination is for both bicycling and walking. Other wayfinding systems can include signage that communicates health educational tools, such as how many calories are burned for a certain distance walked or

biked on the trail. Additionally, overhead trail signage or "gateways" at road crossings that are visible from the roadway help to market the trail and increase awareness. The gateways typically include the trail name and a short list of destinations and travel times along the corridor. (<http://midtowngreenway.org/>.)





Examples of wayfinding signage systems ranging from static signage to digital kiosks, to QR codes.

### SIGNAGE AND WAYFINDING

The Silver Comet Trail has its own logo and signage system. PATH Foundation maintains and replaces signage along the trail. The existing system uses mile markers, gateways, and kiosks made of recycled plastic. Although durable and strategically placed, many kiosks are missing maps or wayfinding elements entirely. PATH is considering transitioning to aluminum signage for increased long-term maintenance.

To strengthen the Silver Comet Trail's identity, the logo, signage, and brand would benefit from a more unified and updated aesthetic, with an increase in wayfinding opportunities. At a minimum, wayfinding signage should be installed along the trail at strategic locations near lodging, restaurants, services, and town centers to increase economic growth opportunities.

Alongside overall name recognition comes a number of tangible components of a single unified brand, such as a logo, signage, and other design elements. These components, when used across geographies and on multiple platforms (physical signage, brochures, websites, social media) and by multiple operators (state and local government, as well as hotels, retailers, and restaurants), can reinforce that single identity and thus strengthen the location's overall draw, both to residents and tourists.

### INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

The purpose of infrastructure investment, in the case of the Silver Comet Trail, is multi-faceted. First, it enhances the user experience by refreshing worn elements and replacing them with newer ones. This sends both a tangible and psychological message – to residents, that the amenity is worth a repeat visit because it has been upgraded, and to visitors, that the amenity is now even more worth the time to explore. Second, it enhances the user experience by tying the entire system of trails together in a cohesive manner. Given that a main goal of the expansion of the Silver Comet Trail is to exponentially increase the ways in which it can be explored, it is vital that clear signage is provided that allows users to navigate through new sections and connect between previously disparate sections. And, as new users are expected – both residents who live close to new sections and visitors who are compelled by the expanded Silver Comet Trail to take a day trip or overnight stay to enjoy it – this presents an opportunity to tell the story of the Silver Comet Trail and create a new impression on its users.

### INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION

An under appreciated way to maximize the impact of a new or expanded recreational amenity is to foster inter-agency collaboration. Usage, spending, and overall enjoyment can be enhanced if there can be better integration between the related but separate work of various public and private

sector entities. For example, within the State's government, there are opportunities for the Department of Tourism and the Department of Transportation to collaborate on branded signage and other ways to mark the area and facilitate wayfinding. Local and regional entities should also be connected to, in order to promote the expanded Silver Comet Trail and connect it to other local and regional attractions. And, as mentioned above, private sector entities within the hospitality industry – hotels, retailers, restaurants, and sellers of recreational goods and services – need to be brought into a working partnership that creates a unified and enhanced experience for residents and visitors alike.

## NEW DEVELOPMENT

### VISITOR OUTREACH, PROMOTIONS AND MARKETING

The Silver Comet Trail serves as a link to the outdoors, providing residents and visitors easily accessible opportunities for community building, recreation, education, exercise and transportation. The trail is a facility that is available to all income groups, all neighborhoods, and all community groups, regardless of background and experience. Many residents likely take pride in the trail, as it has become part of their daily, weekly, or monthly lives, and it has allowed them to access basic needs and interact with neighbors without automobile dependence.

### INTERPRETIVE OPPORTUNITIES

Interpretive signage programs that promote the historical and cultural value of a community are placemaking tools and inform trail users of important nearby destinations. As future connections are made to the Silver Comet Trail trunk line, additional historical and cultural information should be incorporated into the signage program as programming progresses over time.

Similarly, if connections are made to schools within walking or bicycling distance, the Silver Comet Trail can serve as a hands-on environmental classroom for people of all ages to learn historical information and experience natural landscapes, furthering environmental awareness. Local schools and community groups will be able to incorporate outdoor learning activities into their curriculums and expose children to the experience of outdoor education. According to the book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*, by Richard Louv, a reduction in time spent outside seems to increase behavioral problems, anxiety, depression, and attention deficit disorder, whereas more time outside increases an understanding of the natural world, relieves stress, and reduces undesirable behaviors. All subjects or curriculum can be presented in an outdoor classroom. Outdoor classrooms also provide alternatives for all to gain a better knowledge of what natural resources are and to understand the interconnectedness of these resources.





*Parents gather with their kids to help children learn about riding bicycles safely to school during a bicycle education class.*

Opportunities are available in an outdoor classroom to educate youth on the importance of taking care of the environment.

#### **BICYCLE EDUCATION & SKILLS (ADULTS)**

Bicycle Skills Training Courses should be developed and offered to adult cyclists of all levels who wish to learn bicycling technique, how to navigate busy roads

and complex junctions, and how to teach their children the proper and safe way to ride a bicycle. Courses that are taught as a series of three-hour, on-bike classes on the weekends would most likely be convenient for the majority of adults. The League of American Bicyclists offers excellent resources on proper bicycling practices and have League Cycling Instructors (LCIs) that teach courses to suit the needs of any cyclist.

#### **BICYCLE EDUCATION & SKILLS (YOUTH)**

Bicycle Skills Training Courses should be developed and offered as part of summer camps or as an independent summer camp to youth cyclists of all levels to teach bicycling technique and how to navigate busy roads and complex junctions. These trainings could

range from one-time, three-hour intensive trainings to a week-long series of daily, two-hour trainings as part of summer camps, to full-week bike adventure camps. The youth courses could also be incorporated into the physical education curriculum in elementary schools and middle schools, which would guarantee that a high percentage of the youth population in the northwest Georgia region are taught proper and safe handling of a bicycle. The Parks and Recreation Departments of the City of Atlanta, Cobb County, and other interested programs stakeholders should partner with community centers or the Boys and Girls Club to initiate adult and youth bicycle education and skills classes that can be attended in the evenings during the week or on the weekends.

#### **LAW ENFORCEMENT**

Bicycle education courses should be taught by law enforcement officers to law enforcement officers to give all officers the tools they need to properly enforce the traffic and parking laws as they relate to bicyclists and pedestrians. The course curriculum should include information on the "rules of the road" for bicyclists, as well as the traffic laws for motorists. The course should be a combination of classroom instruction and field practice. The program will also be useful to police departments for educational outreach to the bicycle community or other organizations. Incorporating skills training and certification for officers who wish to patrol on bicycle could also be included in



these courses.

#### BICYCLE REPAIR PROGRAMS

Bike repair programs encourage the learning of technique and create feelings of empowerment in participants in the program. Many programs teach bike safety, maintenance, and on-road skills and have encouraged more people to bicycle for exercise, transportation, and leisure. In addition, these programs have increased the visibility of bicycling in communities. Community bike-repair programs take different forms, but typically they are run by local community groups. These groups acquire used bicycles, often through donations, that are repaired by volunteers who are offered training for the repairs and an option to volunteer for earn-a-bike programs. Bicycle repair programs and bicycle co-ops successfully train citizens in proper bicycle maintenance for the simple trade of sweat equity. Citizens can bring in their own bicycle and learn how to perform maintenance and repairs and, in return, offer their time to perform maintenance and repairs on donated bicycles that will be distributed back out into the community.

#### PUBLIC ART PROGRAM

Art is one of the best ways to strengthen the connection between neighbors, community members, business owners, and local officials. Across America and elsewhere, public green or open spaces are being dedicated to local or regional art. Artists are employing

a remarkably wide range of creative strategies to foster awareness of public spaces and are lending or donating pieces of art in support of the community initiative.

In 2004, American Trails launched “Artful Ways”, a new partnership with the National Park Service Rivers and Trails Program, the USDA Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management. Artful Ways will encourage creative ways of enhancing trail interpretation and trail-related facilities on National Recreation Trails using temporary and permanent site-based art. NWGRC and ARC stakeholders should consider initiating a similar program for the Silver Comet Trail and partner with local artists to create engaging public art pieces for display at deliberate locations along the trail.

#### ART WALKS

To compliment the public art program, NWGRC and ARC should work with the local artists to plan and promote “Art Walks on the Trail”, a series of events during which local artists may display pieces of their work for sale. An “Art Walk on the Trail” event should be planned on a segment of trail that is accessible from a trailhead. These events



*Public art along trails enhances the trail users' experience and promotes local artists.*

would raise awareness of the Silver Comet Trail, attract people to the facility, create opportunities to socialize and meet new people, and promote local artists. Artists would benefit from the increased public exposure, especially those who do not have their own gallery or store front to display and sell their work.

#### BICYCLE PARKING SUPPORTS LOCAL ESTABLISHMENTS

All affected jurisdictions along the Silver Comet Trail corridor should update local zoning, licensing, and permit processes that designate the types and numbers of bicycle parking required at private employment and retail facilities. These facilities should offer bicycle parking in safe, well-illuminated areas near entrances. Providing secure bicycle parking is a key ingredient in efforts to encourage bicycling as a form of transportation. Placing long-term bicycle parking at transit stations provides opportunities for multi-modal travel and supports alternative transportation choices. Adequate and safe places to park bicycles will draw rail trail users into downtown areas to perform any number of activities that stimulate the local economy, such as shopping or enjoying a meal at a local establishment, running an errand at the post office, or returning a library book.

#### RECREATIONAL COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES: WEEKEND WALKABOUTS

Weekend Walkabouts are recreational community activities occurring regularly that

promote community building, environmental stewardship, walking, and physical activity, while also bringing attention to the new rail trail. Weekend Walkabouts can be held either monthly from May to October or quarterly to include one walk per season, depending on community momentum and leadership. Weekend Walkabouts should be scheduled and held along different stretches of the rail trail. The events' walking routes should highlight safe and inviting places to connect to the rail trail and should be three miles or less in length. These events are ideal for individuals, families, and seniors.

Weekend Walkabouts may be organized based on themes for each walk, such as an architectural tour or a "Steeple Chase" tour (visiting historic churches located in close proximity to the rail trail). The tour could focus on the rail trail connections to parks, neighborhoods, or schools, or it could focus on the public art that will be located along the rail trail as part of the public art program. To generate added marketing potential, community leaders, artists, historians, or local celebrities could be chosen to lead each walk. For each event, at least one volunteer should be positioned at both the front and the rear of the walking group. The pace should remain at 2-2.5 miles per hour or less. A refreshment break with water should be offered at the halfway point for any walk of two or more miles.

### RACE EVENT OPPORTUNITIES

Recreational running and bicycling races are extremely popular community building events. Local area events and races such as the Silver Comet 10K, half and full marathon, Dixie200 Relay, Race for a Cure, Frankie's Ride to the Border, already exist and help to foster community spirit. Project stakeholders should reach out to the organizations that plan and promote existing runs and bicycle events to determine if there are opportunities for partnership and rerouting race courses to run segments of a race on future trail connections. National Running Day takes place in June every year, and planning a new community event for an upcoming National Running Day would generate excitement in the region. Successful national examples of recreational community events are the "Susan G. Koman Race for the Cure", Ragnar Relay races, and the Warrior Dash. Obstacle courses such as the Warrior Dash and the Tough Mudder have become increasingly popular events around the country and should be considered in future programming initiatives for the trail. A more traditional event such as a duathlon should also be considered in future programming for the rail trail, as the cycling or running segment of the event could easily be planned on the trail.

Most local running stores and volunteer groups (such as Georgia Running and Big Peach Running Company) are already assisting with promotion and planning of races and have member email list-serves

that they use to send information.

### WALKING OR BICYCLING POSTER CONTEST

This fun and interactive local competition educates and engages students about the variety of benefits the trail provides. The poster contest should include an educational component that teaches students how the rail trail impacts the health, transportation, environment, and economies of the communities it traverses. A field trip to the rail trail should be planned for the class before the poster contest to inspire and excite the children. Each year Polk, Paulding, Cobb, (and eventually Floyd) County should coordinate with the school districts to schedule the contest and develop the "scoring" criteria for the posters. Students in grades four, five, or six would be the best age group for this contest, and the school districts should determine which grade (or grades) should participate. Once the details of the contest have been clearly defined, the students should be tasked with creating a poster that highlights the benefits and value of using the trail. Students could be asked to include their favorite memory from the class' trail field trip. A selection panel made up of the participating school districts



*Race events draw visitors to the area, spurring tourism-related benefits, and create a sense of local community pride.*



will choose the winner of the contest. After the announcement of the winning entry, the poster should be incorporated into the trailhead signage and put on display for a predetermined amount of time.

#### WALKING AND BICYCLING GROUPS

Community walking or bicycling groups are dedicated to promoting, motivating and encouraging members to walk or bike for the health of it; to improve their quality of life by living active and healthy lifestyles; and fostering the spirit of fellowship and having fun along the way to better health and fitness. Most groups are open to all ages and abilities; however, some schedule different events offering more or less strenuous options for group members. In some communities, groups even offer “singles” bicycle rides

which connect single adults with other people who enjoy the same activity. Many groups are formed with the goals of increased physical activity, enjoying good company, meeting new people, and finding pleasure in exploring new places in the community in a non-competitive environment – “Go at your own pace”. Members celebrate health, fun, and the social benefits of physical activity by providing a variety of exercise and social events. There are several existing walking and bicycling clubs in Atlanta and the northwest Georgia region, and



*Trail clean-up days preserve the natural environment and help with the overall management and maintenance of the trail.*

a map of the trail with trailhead areas and connections to other trails and parks should be developed and distributed to the existing groups.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Adopt-A-Trail Programs assist with maintaining, enhancing, and monitoring the trails and trailheads all over the country. Volunteers are utilized as part of the program and can be assigned segments of the rail trail. Anyone with an interest in trails and the outdoors can volunteer for the program. Individuals, families, businesses, community and service organizations, churches, schools, and scout troops are all examples of volunteers. Creating an Adopt-A-Trail program provides an opportunity for all members of the community to be actively involved in conservation and preservation. Through this program, local community groups and businesses could have the option of making a donation that is used for trail clean-up and maintenance. Helping to maintain and enhance the rail trail improves the resource for all to enjoy. The effort brings trail and nature enthusiasts closer to the environment and their community. Volunteers will enjoy the time they spend outdoors and the personal satisfaction gained through volunteerism. Volunteer activities could include:

- Keeping the trail surface free of sticks, rocks and other debris.
- Pruning small limbs from the trail corridor.
- Cleaning debris from benches, bridges,

and stairs.

- Litter clean-up.
- Cleaning waterbars and drainage ditches.
- Reporting trees across the trail, erosion problems, suspicious or illegal activities, vandalism, & safety issues.

### WALKING SCHOOL BUSES AND BICYCLE TRAINS

A walking school bus is a group of children walking to school with one or more adults. If that sounds simple, it is, and that's part of the beauty of the walking school bus. It can be as informal as two families taking turns walking their children to school or as structured as a route with meeting points, a timetable, and a regularly rotated schedule of trained, trustworthy volunteers.

A variation on the walking school bus is the bicycle train, in which adults supervise children riding their bikes to school. The flexibility of the walking school bus or bicycle train makes it appealing to communities of all sizes with varying needs.

When beginning a walking school bus or bicycle train, remember that the program can always grow. It often makes sense to start with a small bus or train and see how it works. Pick a single neighborhood that has a group of parents and children who are interested. It's like a carpool—without the car—with the added benefits of exercise and visits with friends and neighbors. For an informal bus:

- Invite families who live nearby to walk or bike.
- Pick a route and take a test trip.
- Decide how often the group will walk or bike together.

Success with a simple walking school bus or bicycle train may inspire a community to build a more structured program. This may include more routes, more days of walking, and more children. Such programs require coordination, volunteers, and potentially attention to other issues, such as safety training and liability. The school principal and administration, law enforcement, and other community leaders will likely be involved.

First, determine the amount of interest in a walking school bus or bicycle train program. Contact potential participants and partners, such as parents and children; principal and school officials; law enforcement officers; and other community leaders.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend one adult for every six children. If children are age 10 or older, fewer adults may be needed. If children are ages four to six, one adult per three children is recommended.

A good time to begin is during International Walk to School Week, which takes place every October. Walk or bike and look for ways to encourage more children and families to be involved. There are numerous neighborhoods

located near or adjacent to the Silver Comet Trail, and at least three schools are located within 1/2 mile walking or bicycling distance of the trail. These conditions work well with the creation of walking school buses or bicycle trains. The counties should meet with representatives of the school system to begin discussing the development of this community program. There may be a “local champion” who already walks or bicycles with their child to school.

#### NATIONAL BIKE MONTH AND WALK TO SCHOOL DAY SUPPORT/PARTICIPATION

National Bike Month is an opportunity to celebrate the unique power of the bicycle and the many reasons people choose bicycles as their mode of transportation or for recreation.

The schools located along, or in close proximity to the Rail Trail, should support, and as much as possible, encourage students, teachers and staff to participate in National Bike Month activities.

The NWGRC and ARC, in partnership with the counties and towns along the existing and future trail corridor should encourage employers and school systems to offer incentives to employees and students who participate in National Bike Month activities and Walk to School Day events to promote initiative and reward their participation. For example, Cobb, Paulding, and Polk County should encourage school districts to partner

with parents to organize bicycling trains and walking school buses for the children who will participate in Walk to School Day. Each group of students should be led safely to school by a parent or teacher volunteer. Additionally, the State should also encourage employers to allow flexible work days to employees participating in National Bike Month.

## COST-BENEFIT FRAMEWORK

### OVERVIEW

Investment decisions are usually made in part based on a cost-benefit framework: what are the costs associated with an investment, and do the benefits that accrue from that investment positively compare? The purpose of this section is to aggregate the findings from this report into such a framework, so as to inform the decision as to whether and how to invest in the expansion of the Silver Comet Trail.

### COST CONSIDERATIONS

Expansion of the Silver Comet Trail will entail two kinds of costs: upfront capital costs and ongoing maintenance costs. Neither of these costs was estimated for this report, but when such cost estimation work is performed, it will be useful to understand them on a per-mile basis, and to understand how that per-mile cost may vary depending on how much the Silver Comet Trail is expanded by. In other words, it is likely that there are some fixed elements associated with both upfront



capital costs and ongoing maintenance costs, such that per-mile costs decrease if more mileage is added.

### BENEFIT CONSIDERATIONS

Expansion of the Silver Comet Trail will entail a number of benefits, as articulated in this chapter (see Table 5.1):

1. \$24 million more in recreational spending and \$5 million more in tourism spending per year
2. \$50 million more in economic impact each year within the Region, supporting 400 more jobs within the Region
3. \$60 million more in economic impact each year within the State, supporting about 700 more jobs within the State and generating about \$1.5 million more in tax revenues each year to the State
4. \$130 million more in property value impact and \$1.7 million more in annual property tax revenues to municipalities and school districts (and even more if investment catalyzes new development in addition to conferring property value gains on existing homes)
5. A greater magnitude of a number of more intangible benefits, such as greater attraction and retention of employers and employees, increased mobility (and attendant declines in emissions, congestion, and road wear),

more direct use value, lower health care costs, and more ecological services rendered

### FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

As noted above, to what extent these benefits are actually produced depends in large part on the characteristics of the expansion of the Silver Comet Trail, and not just on whether it happens or not: the quality, configuration, and design of the expansion will go a long way towards determining the existence and magnitude of these benefits. Nevertheless, these preliminary estimates serve as a useful guide for weighing the costs and benefits of any proposed expansion.

As noted above, to what extent these benefits are actually produced depends in large part on the characteristics of the expansion of the Silver Comet Trail, and not just on whether it happens or not. For example, the quality, configuration, and design of the expansion will go a long way towards determining the existence and magnitude of these benefits.

Where it is expanded to also matters, since areas proximate to major population centers are more likely to generate additional use both from those residents as well as from visitors who wish to use the trail while they are visiting nearby destinations. For example, a proposed future expansion to Chattanooga will make the Silver Comet Trail more accessible to the millions of people who live in and around that city as well as those who visit that city each year.

Table 5.1 Summary of Benefits Associated with the Expanded Silver Comet Trail

IMPACT CATEGORY	INCREASE IN BENEFITS	PER-MILE BENEFITS
Recreational Spending	From \$47M to \$71M per year	\$0.71M- \$1.07M
Tourism Spending	From \$10M to \$15M per year	\$0.15M- \$0.22M
Regional Economic Impact	From \$98M supporting 750 jobs to \$147M supporting 1,130 jobs per year	\$1.48M- \$2.22M supporting 11-17 jobs
Statewide Economic Impact	From \$118M supporting 1,310 jobs to \$177M supporting 1,980 jobs per year	\$1.78M- \$2.68 supporting 19-30 jobs
Statewide Fiscal Impact	From \$3.5M to \$5.1M per year	\$0.05M- \$0.08M
Property Value Impact	From +\$182M to +\$316M	\$2.8M- \$4.8M
Property Tax Gains from Property Value Impact	From \$2.3M to \$4.0M per year	\$0.03M- \$0.06M
New Development	More than twice as much aggregate increase in market value and annual increase in annual property tax revenues	

Source: Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2013)