



Section III

Demand Forecast

Baker/Carver Regional Trail is anticipated to become a significant regional trail destination due to its connectivity with recreational amenities including existing and proposed regional trails, regional parks and park reserves, in addition to downtown Maple Plain’s retail and commercial nodes. The proposed regional trail will help fill a significant north-south gap in the regional trail system - adding 17 miles, and providing trail users a recreation-based multi-modal, alternative transportation option across the entire stretch of western Hennepin County.

Recreational Use Trends

National, state, regional, and Park District recreational use trend studies support continued expansion, improvement, and implementation of trails. Recreational studies also indicate that of the wide varieties of recreation activities, trails appear to be the common thread across most demographics groups.

National Trends

National recreation trends compiled within the *Outdoor Recreation Participation Report: Topline 2013* by the Outdoor Foundation indicate a clear increase in participation since 2006 in several regional trail activities for persons over 6 years old: biking (road/paved surface) 2 percent increase; day hiking 16 percent increase; running/jogging 35 percent increase; and trail running 32 percent increase. This same study found that running, jogging, and trail running is the second most popular adult activity with 14.9 percent of adults participating (30.8 million participants); bicycling is the third

most popular adult activity with 12 percent of adults participating (24.8 million participants); and hiking is the fourth most popular adult activity with 11.7 percent adults participating (24.2 million participants).

The Outdoor Foundation found that accessibility is a key factor to getting Americans outside. Not surprisingly, their study found that people with walking (56 percent participation) and biking (58 percent participation) routes close to their home get outside at significantly higher rates than those without (47 percent participation for walking and biking).

Statewide Trends

The 2008-2012 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), published by Minnesota DNR, denotes that of Minnesota adults, 54 percent participate in walking and 29 percent in biking as recreation activities (Figure 9).

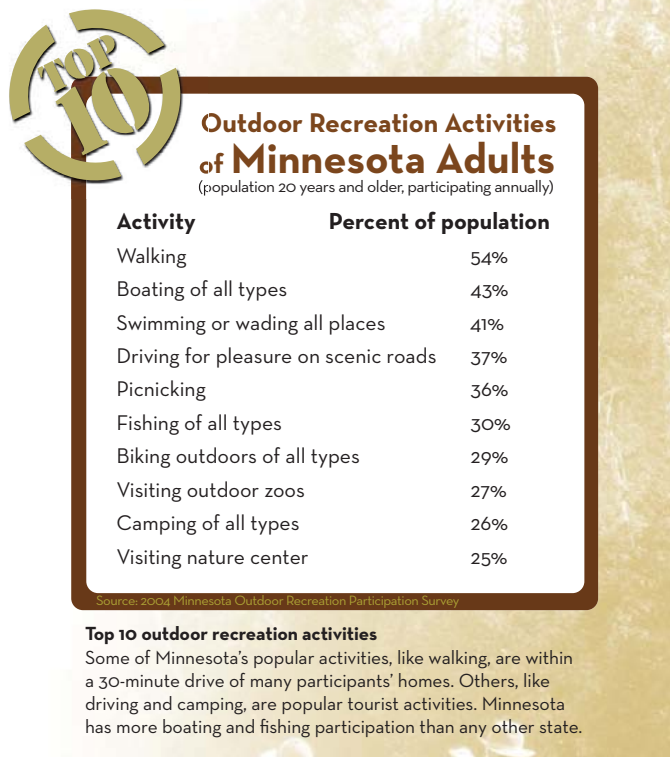


Figure 9
How Minnesota Adults Recreate Outdoors
Source: MnDNR 2008-2012 SCORP

The SCORP identified the following key trends and issues that are also relevant to regional recreational activities and facilities such as the Baker/Carver Regional Trail area:

- Two-thirds of all recreation use occurs within a half-hour drive from home; creating the need for outdoor recreation lands near areas of higher population density and growth.
- Sustaining existing outdoor recreation facilities for future generations remains a key issue.
- Obesity rates rose 132 percent in Minnesotans between 1990 and 2006; creating the need to improve opportunities for a healthier lifestyle through outdoor recreation.
- The *Last Child in the Woods* phenomenon extends to adults; access to “nearby” nature and frequent unstructured play and exploration is vital.
- The population is aging, more culturally and ethnically diverse, and more concentrated in

urban and urbanizing areas; changes in who participates, what activities they participate in, where they participate, why they participate, and when they participate are all changing.

The primary goal of the SCORP is to increase participation in outdoor recreation by all Minnesotans and visitors. By increasing recreation facilities and increasing them in or near populated areas and populated areas with increasing diverse populations, the Baker/Carver Regional Trail will help meet this goal and start to respond to some of the trends and issues identified in the SCORP.

Regional Trends

The Metropolitan Council’s 2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan notes that, according to the SCORP, trail recreation is becoming increasingly important as the interest and demand for more trails is being felt at all levels of government. This increased interest in trail recreation reflects the fact that it is a healthful form of exercise for people of all age groups; is suitable for all levels of physical conditioning; can be carried out by families, groups, or individuals; and is often available close to home.

Park District Trends

Visitation to the Park District’s regional trails has increased 400 percent from 1999-2009 and is now estimated at approximately 4.1 million visits per year (2013). About half of this phenomenal growth in visitation is explained by the growth of the trail network itself, with the number of miles approximately doubling from 56 miles to 120 miles. Use patterns within the Park District’s system of parks and trails have also changed in the last 12 years. The Baby Boomers who used to bring their children to Park District parks are now empty-nesters, and they have flocked to the regional trails to get exercise and to get outdoors. Biking, as an alternative form of transportation, has gained traction over the past five years throughout the metro region and more users are now bike commuting. The Park District’s work with local communities and Hennepin County has resulted in a regional trail network that is better connected to the local

“feeder” trail, sidewalk, and bike lane networks, making the system more accessible to a larger portion of the population.

In 2011, the Cedar Lake LRT Regional Trail surpassed 500,000 visits (followed closely by the North Cedar Lake Regional Trail at 496,000 annual visits) - marking the first time in the Park District’s history that a regional trail received a half million visits and making visitation comparable to French Regional Park. Of the 14 Park District regional trails open in 2013, six received 300,000 or more visits. For comparison purposes, seven of the 20 parks and reserves received 300,000 or more visits.

As of 2014, regional trail visits accounted for over 40 percent of all visits to the Park District’s facilities. Trail visitation is expected to continue to increase at a rate greater than the expected increase in population, and to increase at a rate faster than expected visitation increases to the Park District’s park units.

Demographic Trends

Aging Baby Boomer Generation. The Baby Boomer generation is one of the Park District’s primary user groups. The U.S. Census Bureau considers a Baby Boomer to be someone born during the demographic birth boom between 1946 and 1964 following World War II. The recreational preferences and habits for this group are well established and demand for their preferred activities will continue to be strong. However, as this group ages, physical limitations will require some park and trail visitors to change their recreational activities from higher intensity activities such as running, in-line skating, and biking to lower-impact recreational activities such as walking, nature observation, and educational opportunities. Many of these activities are accommodated by the regional trail system. As this generation ages, trail use over time may initially decrease and then increase when the housing stock turns over to younger families with children.

Immigrant Groups. Metropolitan Council demographers have identified that about half of the total increase in population for the region from 1990 to 2000 was due to immigration of first-generation U.S. citizens and the births of their children. This trend was expected to continue through 2010, if not longer. Within the region, there are several prevalent immigrant groups: Hmong/Southeast Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Somali, and West Africans. To date, this influx of new immigrant groups are generally not participating in regional trail use at the same rates as non-immigrant populations. The Park District is committed to better understanding this phenomenon and will continue to study this further with the ultimate goal of attracting regional trail users which mirror the demographics of the region.

Park District Regional Trail User Data

Regional trails are most heavily visited during the spring, summer, and fall seasons with summer receiving 40 percent of annual visits, spring and fall each receiving 25 percent of annual visits, and winter receiving 10 percent of annual visits. Winter has seen more seasonal growth, in part due to warmer winters, the increased use of trails for commuting, and the use of trails for year-round exercise regimens.

The trend continues to indicate that biking is, and will remain, the predominant regional trail activity at 76 percent, followed by walking (15 percent), and running (six percent). In-line skating, mobility-device users and other miscellaneous uses make up the balance of trail users.

The vast majority of regional trail visitors use trails for recreation and exercise. However, 12 percent of all regional trail visits are now for commuting purposes, up from about 1 percent in 1998. Regional trails that are paved, with few stop conditions, limited interactions with vehicles, and with seamless connections to employment, retail, and commercial centers have a greater percentage of regional trail visits attributed to commuting (19-28 percent) than regional trails without these three attributes. While these certainly are not the only

factors in determining the desirability of a regional trail corridor for commuting purposes, they appear to play an important role.

The 2009 regional trail survey data indicates that regional trail users are predominantly white (96 percent), male (60 percent), highly educated (76 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher), married/partnered (77 percent), middle-aged (41 percent are in the 45-59 age group), and upper-middle class (43 percent have household incomes over \$100,000).

With the exception of premier "destination" trails such as the Dakota Rail Regional Trail, the majority of use comes from people living within three miles of the trail corridor. Consequently, the American Community Survey (2008-2012) demographics analyzed for the Baker/Carver Regional Trail are reflective of Park District trail user demographics as aforementioned.

Several regional trails within the more diverse first-tier communities (Richfield, Bloomington, Edina, New Hope, Crystal, Robbinsdale, Brooklyn Center) are planned for development in the next three years, and the overall trail visitor profile is expected to diversify once those trails are open for use.

Trail Visitor Preferences

Bicycle and pedestrian studies from across the country, and over the last twenty-five years, have come to the same general conclusions regarding user preferences - regardless of user type. Trails with these characteristics will attract visitors from greater distances, will have greater annual use, and will produce more enjoyable experiences for trail users:

- Natural settings (scenic, leafy vegetation, limited evidence of the built environment, etc.)
- A diversity of natural settings (woodlands, wetlands, prairies, etc.)
- Visual and physical separation from vehicles
- A continuous and contiguous route with limited stop conditions
- A smooth surface (either paved or aggregate)
- Connectivity with destinations and other bicycle/pedestrian facilities

- Opportunities for loops
- Trail amenities - drinking water, mileage markers, restrooms, and wayfinding

Some bicycle and pedestrian studies also indicate that participants are willing to spend more money and travel longer distances to utilize facilities that incorporate these preferences.

In recognition of user preferences, the Baker/Carver Regional Trail route was selected to provide linkages to regional recreation destinations; balance recreation and natural resources; minimize stop conditions, provide a safe, off-road, multi-modal transportation option, and ultimately, increase the desirability of the regional trail. As such, it is reasonable to expect that a regional trail, such as Baker/Carver Regional Trail, that incorporates these preferences, will be used more and provide a more enjoyable experience than a regional trail that does not.

Projected Trail Use & Visitation

The percentage breakdown by activity of Baker/Carver Regional Trail will generally mirror Park District regional trail activity trends (Table 1). Bicycling will be the primary regional trail use, with ancillary uses such as walking, running and in-line skating capturing a smaller percentage of the total use. These expected uses remain consistent throughout the trail corridor with the exception of where the regional trail passes through the Maple Plain downtown commercial area. In this location, it is anticipated that the regional trail will receive an increased percentage of pedestrian activity associated with the sidewalk network.

Seasonal use percentages for the Baker/Carver Regional Trail are expected to be consistent with regional trail seasonal use with 90 percent of visitation occurring in the spring, summer, and fall seasons (Table 2). Winter use of the Baker/Carver Regional Trail is dependent on weather conditions, available budget, and the assistance of local communities to maintain the trail. At the time this master plan was written, it is anticipated that the local communities will maintain the regional trail during the winter months as resources allow and demand warrants it.

When fully constructed, the Baker/Carver Regional Trail is projected to generate 183,000 annual visits. This visitation estimate is calculated based on the following cumulative methodology: 1) connectivity to existing regional recreational amenities, 2) destination aesthetic qualities along the trail corridor and, 3) connection to Maple Plain’s downtown (*Appendix B*).

Metropolitan Council studies indicate that 50 percent of regional trail users live within 0.75 miles from the trail (core service area) and 75 percent of users live within 3 miles of the trail (primary service area). The core service area includes the communities of Medina, Independence, Maple Plain, Minnetrista, Laketown Township, and Victoria (via Carver Park Reserve). The primary service area includes the core service area and extends further into Medina, Orono, Mound, Shorewood, and St. Bonifacius (Figure 10).

In addition, due to the regional trail’s destination qualities, it can be expected that the regional trail will draw users from a larger Twin Cities service area. This is reemphasized by the regional trail’s proximity to Lake Minnetonka and looping opportunities to adjacent trail networks.

Table 1
Regional Trail Use by Activity

Trail Activity	Percent of Expected Use
Bicycling	76%
Walking/Hiking	15%
Running/Jogging	6%
In-line Skating	2%
Other	1%

Source: Three Rivers Park District

Table 2
Regional Trail Use by Season

	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
Percent of annual visitation	25%	40%	25%	10%
Projected annual visitation	45,750	73,200	45,750	18,300

Source: Three Rivers Park District

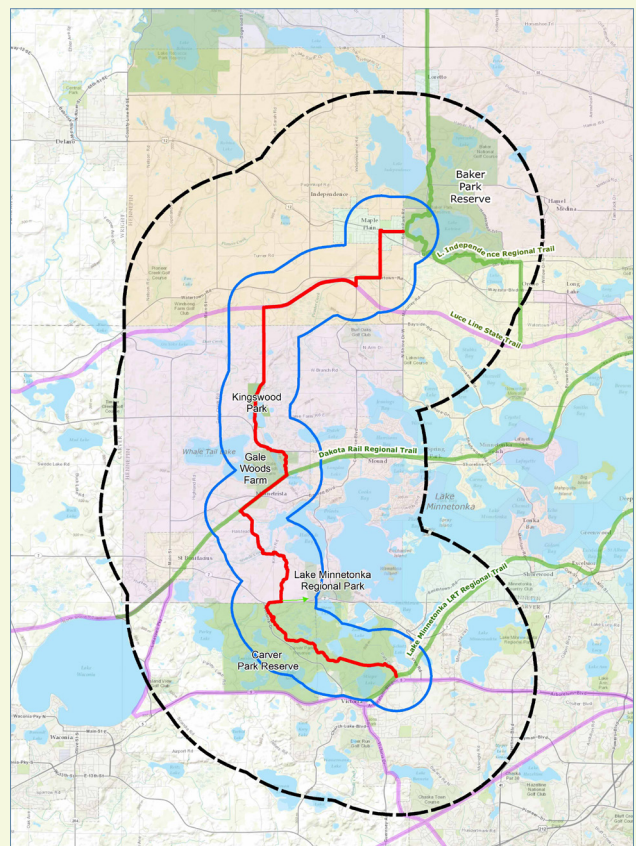


Figure 10
Regional Trail Service Area

Two service area categories exemplify core service area (0.75-mile radius indicated in blue) and primary service area (3-mile radius indicated in black).

Source: Metropolitan Council & Three Rivers Park District

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