

Best Practices in Achieving Economic Benefits from Trail Development

Arisaig Provincial Park, Antigonish County (Jim Vance)

Generating Direct Revenues

Most Nova Scotia trails are free for public use, allowing different sectors of the local economy to realize the benefits of trail-related expenditures. While the purpose of this guide is primarily to assist trail developers with realizing these indirect economic benefits, the following suggested strategies for generating direct revenues may be useful:

- Trail fees, passes, or levies on trail-related goods and services, especially for use of motorized vehicles on trails.
- Charging for some goods and services directly on trails such as huts, cabins and ferry service for gear.

Generating Indirect Economic Benefits

Strategies to gain revenues directly from trails are valuable. However, for most trail developers and host communities it is even more significant to ensure that local purchases will be made for gear, food, transportation, accommodation, and other trail-related activities. In particular, being able to demonstrate the linkages between trail development and local purchasing is increasingly important in attracting investment and public funding.

The following best practices or keys to success are designed to assist trail developers and organizations in maximizing indirect economic benefits. Some trails are relatively fixed and not all of the suggestions below can be applied. However, where choices are possible, the following can be considered.



Kenomee Canyon Trail, Colchester County (Hilary Paquet)





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Construction and maintenance considerations

Once the trail is built, many important economic factors are “locked in” such as the location, type of trail, length and other characteristics. It is important to take these basic factors into account before any construction work begins.

- **Highlight a remarkable art, culture, history, health, or natural feature** of the area that will drive the attraction potential of the trail.
- **Link communities** to increase economic benefits, especially from tourists who may use accommodations (“hut to hut” hiking is popular in places) at both ends or along the trail where communities are located.
- **Locate trail entrances** near community centres or tourist attractions for easy access and to establish and maintain a close connection with local businesses.
- **Minimize trail difficulty** in order to attract the widest possible range of users.
- **Design for specific intended users** to fit their needs and preferences.
 - **Hikers/walkers** – mostly prefer day trips on well-marked and maintained trails that are easily accessible.
 - **Snowmobile and off-highway vehicle riders** – prefer hub and spoke approach, based on hotel or bed and breakfast accommodations.
 - **Horseback** – users tend to avoid multi-use trails, and prefer trails dedicated to horseback riding, as well as large parking and turning areas for trailers.
 - **Cyclists** – prefer hub and spoke approach with a base of accommodation and amenities from which to launch several day trips.
 - **Skiers** – prefer hub and spoke approach like cyclists (although shorter routes), and may be particularly attracted by variable topography that presents light challenges for skiing. Also—may seek groomed trails.
- **Develop a maintenance plan** with financial commitments and assigned responsibilities for maintenance.
- **Use local resources** for construction and maintenance to maximize local economic benefits.
- **Ensure there is always adequate signage** to the trail and on the trail so users can find their way with ease.
- **Work pro-actively to prevent conflicts** between users on high traffic or multi-use trails, and with community or business members who may be affected by trail use.



Bull Run Trail, Lunenburg County (Laura Barkhouse)





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Community and business considerations

Ideally, each of the following requirements should be taken into account at the time of design and construction. However, it is understood that often opportunities/issues emerge only after the trail is opened and increasing visitation to the area begins to reveal gaps that may be filled through related development initiatives.

- **Provide local goods and services** that generate the core revenues associated with trail use: nearby restaurants, entertainment, accommodation, and shopping.
- **Involve business and community** members who can help generate trail-related economic benefits, and who will aim to capture those benefits. Soliciting business and community involvement early in the process improves the likelihood of harvesting good local ideas and contributions that can be incorporated into the project to maximize economic benefits.
- **Meet specific needs** of users such as fuel and repair services, gear rentals, trail condition information, and check-in services for the safety of trail-users. Horseback riders may also require special gear and supplies as well as veterinary services nearby. Skiers and snowmobilers require accommodations and services that are open year-round (not just during the warmer months). Cyclists require bike shops for repair and businesses that rent bikes and gear.
- **Obtain permission** and support from those who may be affected by trail users. This will help to ensure a positive experience for everyone on and off the trail. Constructing trails without community support can cause many problems for trail developers and users at every stage.

North River Falls Hiking Trail, Victoria County (Jeff A. Merrill)





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Product development considerations

Before marketing and promotion begins, ensure the trail is ready for the intended users. A positive experience begins a cycle of referrals by word of mouth that generates increased use of the trail and visits to local eating establishments and other businesses in the area. Regardless of the trail type, completing the “product” before spreading the word will start things off on the right foot.

- **Link trail use with other attractions,** activities, and tourism operators. The trail may be a primary or secondary reason for someone to visit the area and it is critically important to work together with other local attractions. Tourism operators may offer joint packages for visiting a historic site together with a guided tour of the trail, or combine a trail bicycle rental discount from a local bike shop with an accommodation and meals package.
- **Develop transport options** to the trail, and establish partnerships with travel operators. Most people may find their own way to the trail, but youth, seniors, cyclists, and others may have unique or preferred travel modes. Ensure existing transport providers can service the trail, and that the widest possible range of users can reach the trail.
- **Provide trail interpretation** or guided tours to enrich the trail experience. This is especially important if local attributes (i.e. historical, cultural, natural or artistic) may not be obvious to the average visitor.
- **Extend the tourist season** by offering discounts for shoulder and off-season packages. Extending the season is especially important because this contributes tremendously to local profits. Most tourism operators will reach their break-even point somewhere in the peak of the tourist season, and profit levels depend on how long revenues can be sustained beyond this point – the longer the better.
- **Develop itinerary plans** that include trail use. This is especially important for visitors who may be attracted to the trail as a secondary interest but may not see how the trail would fit in with their primary plans. It must be clear that the trail can be enjoyed within a trip schedule that allows for visits to other key area attractions.
- **Establish standards** for trail experiences and visitor support services. Working with local tourism operators and businesses providing accommodation or equipment rentals is important to ensure they are able to meet the expectations of visiting trail users. Consistent high-quality service from all involved in the trail experience is essential.
- **Develop geocaching** that links trail use with travel to a community. This is an emerging activity that sets adventurous travelers in search of a “cache” or “treasure” using a global positioning system (GPS) and location information typically provided on the internet. It can generate interest in travel to a trail and the local community, and participants in this activity may tend to generate higher than average visitor expenditures.

2007 International Trails Day Ride – Beaverbank Forestry Roads, Halifax Regional Municipality (Deanne Hemphill)





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Promotion and marketing considerations

Strategic promotion and marketing to generate economic benefits is best done with the help of local contacts who know how to reach and persuade the appropriate market audiences. Travel and trail recreation studies consistently indicate that word of mouth promotion and personal contact through friends and relatives is the primary factor in generating increased visitation. A variety of promotional tools and strategies can be effectively employed:

- **Capitalize on existing promotion and marketing channels** for tourism and trails at regional or provincial levels. Use tourism websites, publications, brochures and other well-recognized tools.
- **Build partnerships** with governments, the private sector, and community groups. These contacts control communication and promotion channels that can connect you with potential users.
- **Involve private sector and community leaders** in marketing. Local business operators, community leaders, and front-line tourism staff can be very helpful if they are committed to the trail development and the key promotional messages. Offering personal tours or group workshops for these individuals can be critical to building their appreciation and familiarity with trail features.
- **Use multiple media for promotion** including: websites and other electronic media, newsletters, visitor information kiosks, etc. Seek endorsement articles and quotes from travel writers, and submit articles to tourism magazines and general interest news media.
- **Brand the trail** with a logo or associate it with a parent trail network such as the Trans Canada Trail. National or provincial trail promotions can build brand recognition for local trails within the network.

- **Host a signature event** or charity fundraiser on the trail to raise awareness and build positive associations with the trail. An annual event can help attract new users to the trail and maintain local interest on a long-term basis. News coverage of the event can generate positive public relations for the trail.



Opening of the Ceilidh Coastal Trail, part of the Trans Canada Trail, Inverness County (Jim Vance)

- **Develop local retail promotions** linked to the trail. Local retailers may sell gear or trail-based merchandise for trail users. Cross-promotional activities might involve an event with retail sales taking place at the trail. Becoming a member or supporter of the trail may provide a percentage discount at local retail outlets.
- **Track** user numbers and spending, and document comments by visitors and the local community. These comments form a critical component of pieces of marketing research, as well as providing invaluable feedback to those involved in all aspects of the trail.



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Suggestions for Further Reading

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