



## Bike trail leads to economic growth



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It takes about two and a half hours to drive from Pittsburgh to Cumberland, Md. The scenic route takes a bit longer.

The Great Allegheny Passage, which connects the two cities, is about 150 miles and takes about two or three days, depending on one's pedaling speed. About a million bikers from all over the country and more than 35 countries hit the trail each year and, according to a recently released study by the Pittsburgh consulting firm Fourth Economy, they generated an economic impact of \$121 million in 2019.

This is a huge increase over the \$40.7 million the then-unfinished trail helped produce in 2009 during the last economic impact study. Since its completion in 2013, the trail has seen businesses flourish, property values near the trail double over the rate of median values in Pennsylvania and Maryland, and helped produce \$19 million in tax revenue.

The far-reaching Great Allegheny Passage has been a key factor in towns in both states' progression from manufacturing economies to healthier, more diversified economies.

The increased tourism has boosted the hospitality and retail businesses by leaps and bounds in recent years, as bikers stop at restaurants and breweries, crash in local hotels or Airbnbs, and purchase replacement gear or parts. In 2019, GAP users put more than \$74 million into local economies along the trail, causing about \$22 million in indirect spending (purchases by businesses) and nearly \$25 million in induced impacts, which the study explains as “household spending from income generated by direct and indirect impacts in the GAP region.”

Of the hundreds of trail riders and residents in the nearby towns surveyed, an overwhelming 93% said the GAP is a boon to the communities it passes through.

In addition to the economic figures, the trail is also a scenic introduction to the beauty and majesty of this part of the country, including some spectacular vistas at the Eastern Continental Divide in Meyersdale, Somerset County. Other towns impacted in Pennsylvania include Pittsburgh, Homestead, McKeesport, West Newton, Connellsville and others.

Ridership mirrored other outdoor trail usage in 2020, leaping into high gear during the pandemic and increasing by around 50%. Even this jump in usage wasn't enough to offset revenue lost due to COVID, but the Post-Gazette's [Bob Batz Jr. reports](#) that there are “many signs of hopeful activity along the trail,” as existing businesses continue to rebound and entrepreneurs launch new ventures.

Residents and trail riders should keep the trail's scenic and economic value in mind when planning forays and do what they can to keep the corridor vibrant.

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