



CHAPTER 6

# Economics of the Trail

Communities across the state and country are realizing the economic potential of trails as highly desirable destinations that bring dollars into the places they serve. In addition to preserving critical open space and providing important transportation options, trails and greenways attract visitors from near and far—visitors who can facilitate job growth in tourism-related opportunities like restaurants, local stores, and lodging.

Communities around the country are increasingly utilizing this “Trail Town” model of economic revitalization that places trails as the centerpiece of a tourism-centered strategy for small-town revitalization. Trail Towns contain trails that are well connected to downtown businesses. Based on the well-known National Main Streets economic model, Trail Towns are literally inviting trail users to spend time and dollars in their community.

Researchers have found that the economic impact of this approach, also known as TrOD (Trail-Oriented Development) is significant, as shown in this [Rails to Trails Conservancy article](#).

**“A Trail Town is a community through which [a trail] passes that supports [trail users] with services, promotes the Trail to its citizens and embraces the Trail as a resource to be protected and celebrated. Trail Towns are built on a relationship between a town, the Trail and its volunteers.”**

— ADAPTED FROM THE NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL ASSOCIATION



SOURCE: QUIET CORNER NEMBA



# TRAIL AS ECONOMIC GROWTH CORRIDOR

Beyond small business development, wealth construction and economic prosperity, trails contribute to the local economy in a variety of ways through their economic impact, health and quality of life improvements, community health and safety improvements land conservation. Trails have been found to increase valuations & prices and decrease the time on the market for properties located close to them, as shown in the following examples throughout the country:

- ✓ The **Green Ribbon Preserve**, which is made up of 65 parcels, totaling 578 acres of protected land, and a 12.6-mile public trail, has a significant, positive impact on property values. There are 2,646 houses located within ½ mile of the Green Ribbon Preserve, and it is estimated that 13.5 percent of the property value of homes within a ½ mile of the trail is attributable to the proximity of the trail and preserved open space. This is higher than the county average of 2.95 percent. In other words, if the Green Ribbon Preserve and Trail were removed, the total assessment value of these homes would decrease by \$87 million or \$33,184 per house. This equates to an additional \$2.83 million in total annual property taxes (or approximately \$1,072 per property) generated for the municipalities and school districts. Additionally, the Wissahickon Creek and public trails located within the Green Ribbon Preserve are increasingly being used to market the area's real estate for its proximity to natural, green spaces.<sup>1</sup>

- ✓ In suburban New Castle County, Delaware, homes within 50 meters of bike paths commanded a four percent price premium.<sup>2</sup>
- ✓ In **San Antonio, Texas**, neighborhood trails were associated with a two percent house price premium. Trails that were surrounded by greenbelts were associated with a five percent house price premium.<sup>3</sup>
- ✓ Twenty (20) studies that investigated the impact of trails on residential property values were reviewed. The results indicated that a small positive premium of between 3 percent and 5 percent was the most widespread outcome for a single-family home located next to a trail. However, there were outliers that suggested the premium might be as high as 15 percent in some cases, while in other contexts there may be a small negative impact.<sup>4</sup>
- ✓ In southwestern Ohio, the **Little Miami Scenic Trail** is associated with higher property values in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Up to a mile away from the trail, for every foot closer to the trail, property value increased by about \$7. A home a half mile from the trail would sell for approximately nine percent less than a home adjacent to the trail.<sup>5</sup>
- ✓ In rural **Methow Valley, Washington**, homes within one-quarter mile of trails benefited from a 10 percent price premium.<sup>6</sup>

1 Montgomery County Planning Commission. March 2022. Return on Environment: The Economic Impact of Protected Open Space in Montgomery County, PA

2 Racca, D. and A. Dhanju. 2006. Property Value/Desirability Effects of Bike Paths Adjacent to Residential Areas. University of Delaware, Delaware Center for Transportation Working Paper 188.

3 Asabere, P. and F. Huffman. 2009. "The relative impacts of trails and greenbelts on home price." The Journal of Real Estate Finance and Economics 38(4): 408-419.

4 Crompton, John L. April 23, 2020. "The Impact of Trails and Greenways on Property Values." Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences at Texas A&M University.

5 Karadeniz, D. 2008. The Impact of the Little Miami Scenic Trail on Single Family Residential Property Values (Unpublished Master's Thesis). University of Cincinnati School of Planning.

6 Resource Dimensions. 2005. Economic Impacts of MVSTA Trails and Land Resources in the Methow Valley. Methow Valley Sport Trails Association.



Minuteman Bikeway



Nashua River Rail Trail

- ✓ Along a popular trail in **Austin, Texas**, the price premium ranged from 6 to 20 percent, depending on whether the neighborhood had views of the greenbelt surrounding the trail and whether it had direct neighborhood access to the trail.<sup>7</sup> This price premium translated to roughly \$59,000 per year in additional tax revenue or five percent of the annual cost of trail construction and maintenance.<sup>8</sup>
- ✓ Homes sales were examined in the seven Massachusetts towns through which the **Minuteman Bikeway** and **Nashua River Rail Trail** run. Statistics on list and selling prices and on days on the market were analyzed. The analysis showed that homes near these rail trails sold at 99.3% of the list price as compared to 98.1% of the list price for other homes sold in these towns. The most significant feature of home sales near rail trails is that these homes sold in an average of 29.3 days as compared to 50.4 days for other homes.<sup>9</sup>
- ✓ In **Indianapolis**, researchers found that a high-profile, destination trail was associated with an 11 percent price premium for homes within a half mile of the trail. Other trails had no price premium.<sup>10</sup>

7 Nicholls, S., and J. Crompton. 2005. "The Impact of Greenways on Property Values: Evidence from Austin, Texas." *Journal of Leisure Research* 37(3): 321-341.

8 Crompton, J., and S. Nicholls. 2006. "An Assessment of Tax Revenues Generated by Homes Proximate to a Greenway." *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 24(3): 103-108.)

9 Della Penna, Craig. January 25, 2006. "[Home Sales Near Two Massachusetts Trails](#)." The Murphys Realtors, Inc.

10 Lindsey, G., Man, J., Payton, S., and K. Dickson. 2004. "Property values, recreation values, and urban greenways." *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 22 (3): 69-90.

## The Importance of Trails to Connecticut Residents

In addition to their positive influence on property values, trails play an important role in Connecticut’s outdoor recreation offerings on which residents and visitors spend their time and money. In the 2017-2022 Connecticut Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), surveys indicate that trails are among the highest priorities of respondents.

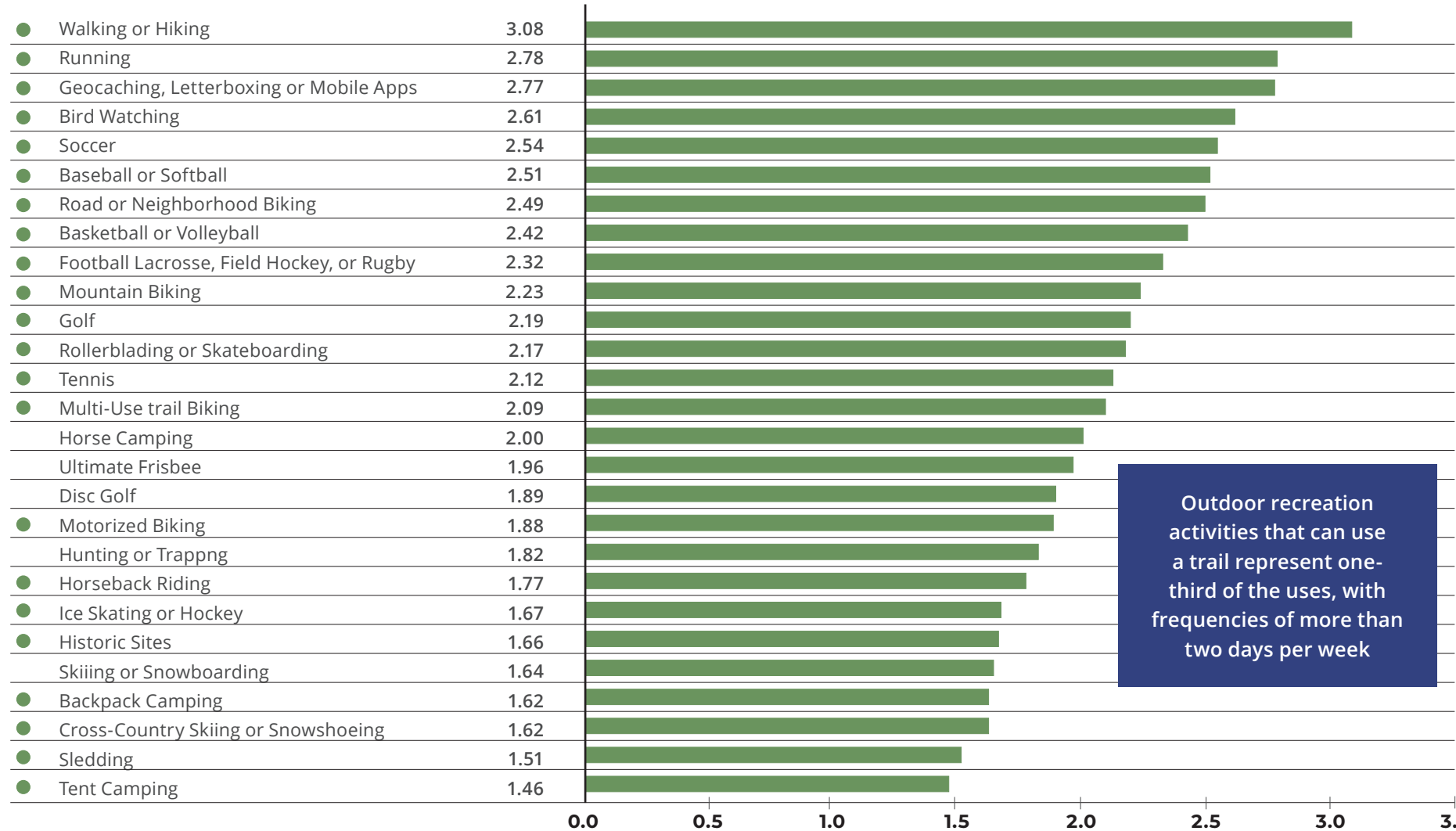
Paved multi-use trails are the most important recreational asset with almost 30% of respondents ranking them among the most important facilities to develop in municipal-owned outdoor recreation areas. See Figure 6A, which is the question and response survey from the 2017-2022 SCORP.

### Q8: Please Select the three facilities most important to your household to develop in municipal-owned outdoor recreation areas.

FIGURE 6A: Response Category (Total N varies by Activity)	Most Important	2nd Most Important	3rd Most Important	ALSPT or Adjacent
Paved multi-use trails (N=550)	10%	8%	10%	●
Unpaved multi-use trails (N=333)	4%	5%	7%	●
Unpaved single use trails (N=207)	3%	4%	4%	●
ADA accessible Trails (N=88)	2%	2%	1%	●
Cross-country skiing or snowshoeing trails (N=74)	1%	1%	1%	●
Off-road motor, dirt biking, and ATV areas (N=94)	2%	1%	2%	
Picnic Areas/Shelters (N=608)	11%	1%	9%	●
Playgrounds (N=491)	9%	8%	8%	
Inclusive accessible playgrounds (N=155)	3%	3%	2%	
Baseball and softball fields (N=166)	3%	3%	2%	
Soccer, football, lacrosse and rugby fields (N=159)	3%	3%	2%	
Volleyball, tennis and basketball courts (N=205)	3%	4%	3%	
Golf Courses (N=138)	4%	2%	1%	
Disc Golf Courses (N=31)	<1%	1%	1%	●
Outdoor pools, water parks and splash pads (N=458)	8%	8%	7%	
Freshwater/saltwater swimming areas (N=332)	6%	6%	4%	●
Boating access for motorboating, jet skiing, sailing or paddlesports (N=82)	1%	2%	1%	
Snorkeling and scuba diving areas (N=30)	1%	1%	<1%	
Nature Preserves and bird watching areas (N=310)	5%	6%	4%	●
Historic sites and areas (N=373)	8%	6%	4%	●

# Average Frequency of Participation In Land Based Recreation Activities Statewide

BY HOUSEHOLD, ON A SCALE FROM 1 (SELDOM) TO 4 (SEVERAL TIMES A WEEK)



Outdoor recreation activities that can use a trail represent one-third of the uses, with frequencies of more than two days per week

● Denotes Activities on ALSPT

Source: 2017-2022 Statewide Comprehensive outdoor Recreation Plan Data

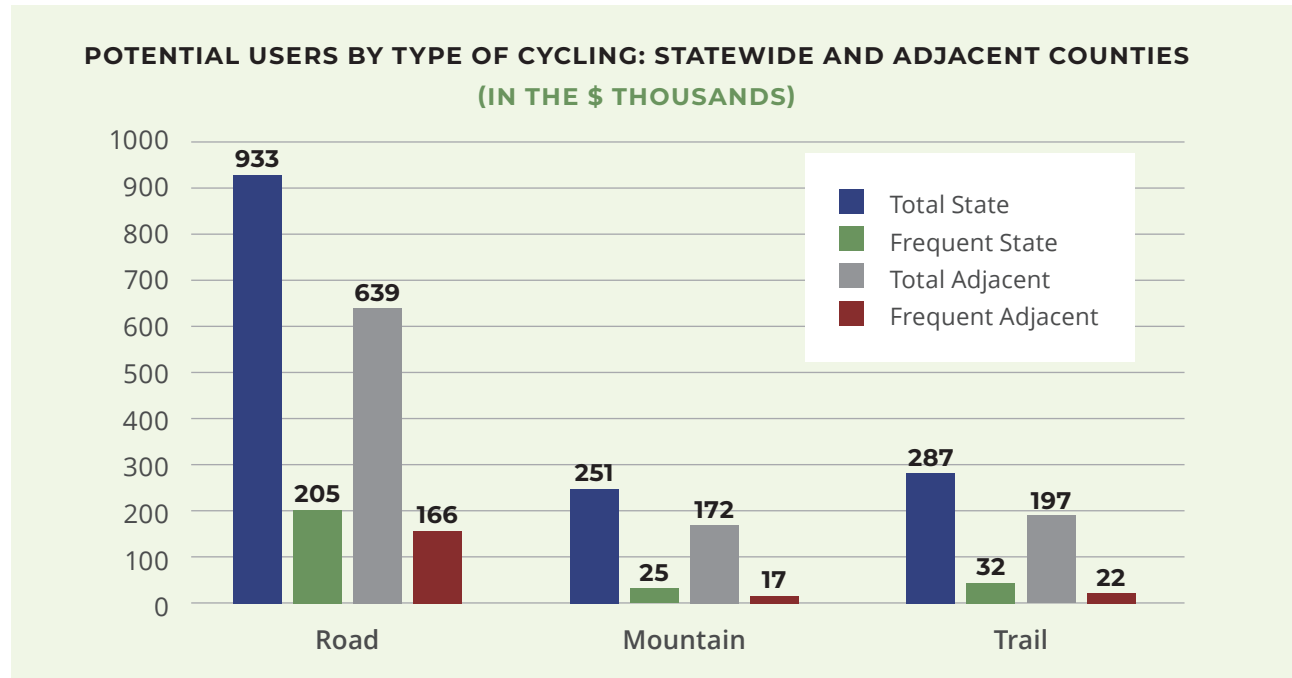


Based on the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan utilization estimates, there is a potential pool of more than 900,000 riders who could use the trail (see table at right). This is assuming that adjacent counties represent a pool of bicyclists that is as large as 639,000 bicyclists or as few as 166,000, a pool of multi-use trail users as large as 197,000 and a pool of mountain bikers as large as 172,000. Similarly, the data implies that the total pool in host communities (those communities through which the Trail runs) is 24,000, with 5,000 frequent users, 7,500 trail uses (with more than 800 frequent users) and 6,600 mountain bikers (with more than 600 frequent users). Neighboring Massachusetts may add another 8,000 potential riders. It appears that if more of the ALSPT were paved and maintained, the potential user pool for the trail would increase.

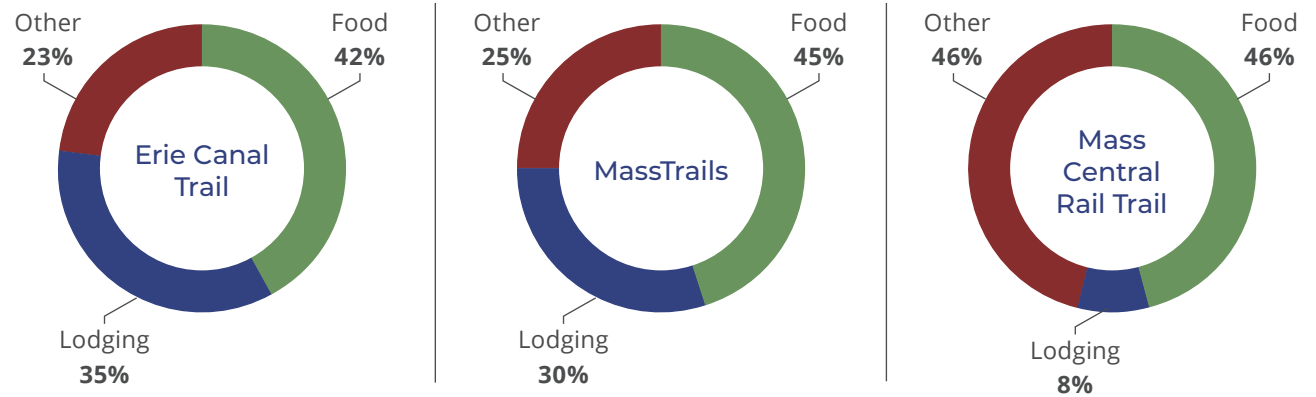
While trails can be an important part of a region's economy, spending levels of trail users vary dramatically because of the different profiles of each trail (see Figure 6B at right). For example, several Massachusetts trails serve as commuter pathways, so the travel-related spending by users on them is lower than on other more scenic trails. In contrast, the Erie Canal Trail in New York is more of a destination trail with a significant number of room nights generated by users with the average user spending \$185 compared to a maximum of \$13 for MassTrails.

FIGURE 6B

Expenditures by Cyclist Based on Bike Trail Category



DISTRIBUTION OF SPENDING BY USER SPENDING PROFILE



"Other" includes retail spending, gas, and other spending. **Source:** Economic Impact Studies of Erie Canal and MassTrails

The Air Line State Park Trail Master Plan Count and Survey Analysis Report, from the Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR) at UConn Extension, that was finalized in September 2022, evaluated trail use on the Air Line State Park Trail to better understand how the trail is being used. Data were collected through long term and short-term infrared trail counters and 146 survey responses to a digital survey deployed through posters and lawn signs from January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2021. The major findings of the report are explained at right and many relate to future economic growth related to the trail.

The ALSPT user study found that food/restaurants were one of the most asked for amenities (in addition to camping and restroom facilities). This is consistent with the findings of the economic impact studies above. As noted earlier, the ALSPT 12-Town region is more dependent on the hospitality industry than Connecticut overall. So, any additional activity that generates incremental revenue is beneficial. Using MassTrails weekend maximum spending range of \$13 and using the spending distribution of Mass Central Rail Trail, which more closely resembles the ALSPT 12-Town region, the maximum potential annual spending from only cyclists would be approximately \$2,560,000, or 197,000 multi-use riders x \$13, and \$1,200,000 of that amount would likely be spent on food and beverages at nearby restaurants and bars.

## Major Findings of the Air Line Trail State Park Master Plan Count and Survey Analysis Report

1

The Air Line State Park Trail is popular, with over 800,000 estimated uses in 2021.

2

There needs to be a better understanding of the reasons why people don't use trails like the Air Line State Park Trail and what would increase use of them.

3

There are opportunities to build connectivity between the Air Line State Park Trail, local trails, downtowns, business districts, schools and parks.

4

The majority of survey respondents did not patronize a business when visiting the ALSPT, but those that visited businesses identified many local businesses in East Hampton and Colchester where connections are easy. Communities and trail advocates could focus on understanding what amenities currently exist, what amenities bicycle users seek, and how trails might be better networked to attract longer distance tourism.

5

Based upon count data estimates and with survey responses, the three busiest parking areas and entrance points are Smith Street in East Hampton, Route 163 in Colchester, and Route 85 in Hebron. These areas can serve as focus areas for amenity enhancement and connection points. It also identifies the need to develop strategies to draw trail users to northern trail sections with connections to local businesses and downtown areas such as Willimantic, Pomfret, and Thompson, among others.

6

The need for increased trail user amenities, such as restrooms, mileage markers and signs, and improved maintenance is clear based on survey responses.



# 12-TOWN ECONOMIC REGIONAL INDICATORS

In general, employment & business data in the 12-Town Air Line State Park Trail region showed mixed results between 2015-2020 (see Figure 6C). In 2020, there were 2,897 businesses and 29,581 employees in the 12-Town region, representing a 9% increase in businesses over 2015, but a 9% decrease in employees since 2015. During this same time period, the number of businesses in the State of Connecticut increased by 7.6%, but the state lost 8% of its job base. In terms of wages, the region experienced a 10% increase in wages and an 18% increase in the average annual wage between 2015-2020, while the State as a whole saw smaller increases, a 7% increase in wages and a 16% increase in its annual wage.

**While the ALSPT 12-Town region’s economy performed better than that of the state overall, its average wages were still \$25,000 below the statewide average despite the significant increase between 2015-2020.** The region is also more dependent on tourism-related activity than the state, e.g., the hospitality industry (food service and accommodations) represents 8% of the Trail’s 12-Town regional employment versus only 6.2% of the state’s employment base.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Data suppression in some communities makes comparison of the arts entertainment and recreation sector makes comparison across the entire tourism industry difficult.

FIGURE 6C

Change in Business and Jobs in the ALSPT Region

ALSPT Communities	Change 2015 - 2020			
	Businesses	Jobs	Total Wages	Average Wage
Chaplin	5	(84)	(\$1,009,961)	\$7,456.97
Colchester	38	(222)	\$23,476,412	\$9,385.95
Columbia	8	(12)	\$9,618,677	\$10,432.14
East Hampton	26	(16)	\$28,893,217	\$15,696.97
Hampton	12	105	\$4,132,424	\$1,663.96
Hebron	15	(184)	\$10,682,182	\$10,887.57
Lebanon	12	(39)	\$14,538,474	\$12,485.39
Pomfret	10	61	\$11,545,232	\$5,470.09
Portland	29	(159)	\$13,099,016	\$9,170.96
Putnam	17	(648)	\$12,716,770	\$7,615.60
Thompson	28	(325)	(\$7,299,726)	\$5,156.84
Windham	63	(1,552)	\$36,208,516	\$10,556.41

Source: NAICS Town Employment Data

# COMPETITIVE FACTORS FOR THE REGION FOR TOURISM

The ALSPT already plays a significant role in many of the communities' local economies. Nearly every Plan of Conservation & Development (POCD) of the communities along the Trail explicitly mentions the ALSPT as a key asset (see Figure 6D). Several communities also mention

expanded tourism as a key economic development initiative in their POCDs and a few communities explicitly mention the ALSPT as a development asset for recruiting talent and businesses.

FIGURE 6D

Elements of ALSPT Town Plans of Conservation and Development

ALSPT Communities	Elements of Plan of Conservation & Development				
	Specific Mention ALSPT	Trails Emphasis	Bike / Ped Mobility Improvements	Outdoor Recreation	Tourism Expansion
Chaplin	●		●		●
Colchester	●	●	●	●	
Columbia	●	●	●	●	
East Hampton	●				●
Hampton	●		●	●	
Hebron	●	●		●	●
Lebanon	●	●			●
Pomfret	●	●	●	●	
Portland	●	●	●	●	●
Putnam	●	●	●	●	●
Thompson	●				●
Windham	●	●		●	●

## Inviting Visitors to Enjoy Agro-tourism Offerings

According to the Connecticut Office of Tourism FY23 Strategic Plan, tourism is the State of Connecticut’s 8th largest industry and supports 5.3% of all jobs and 84,254 people as of 2017. The tourism industry impacts many businesses including lodging, restaurants, transportation, retail businesses, and recreation businesses and employs one out of every 19 residents

in Connecticut. The communities in the ALSPT region are interested in promoting tourism, especially agro-tourism, as part of their local economic development initiatives. They see great value in their agricultural assets and would like to invite visitors to visit and enjoy them, as one can see in their Plans of Conservation & Development (POCD) (see Figure 6E).

FIGURE 6E

Excerpts from ALSPT Town Plans of Conservation and Development

	Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development
<b>Chaplin</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Community and Economic Development Commission supports promoting tourism, agritourism and cottage industries through protection and enhancement of the town’s natural resources and activities such as the Natchaug River, hiking trails and farms. The Commission is working with the boards of the Senior Center and Community Center to develop a Chaplin Arts and Cultural Center providing a destination for people to come and enjoy art, cultural events as well as many natural features like hiking trails, a pristine river to fish and kayak, opportunities for mountain bikers and skiers and allseason tourism, which from an economic development standpoint is our best asset.</li> <li>• The Community and Economic Development Commission supports the designation of local and state scenic road designations as a tool to increase tourism within the community.</li> <li>• Consider tourism and agritourism as an opportunity for economic development.</li> </ul>
<b>Colchester</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Westchester Village is intended to be a secondary village within Colchester which will meet many needs for basic retail shopping, tourism, and local services, especially for those residents of western Colchester.</li> <li>• Preservation of farmland offers opportunities for agro-tourism, a fast-growing CT travel industry segment.</li> <li>• Recognize and promote a “farm trail” with a variety of agricultural activities (Xmas trees, wine/grapes, cheese, chickens, flowers, horses, eggs, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Columbia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include agricultural business support in the town’s economic development strategies; support agricultural events and farmers markets.</li> </ul>



**Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development**

**East Hampton**

- Plan for safe and accessible pedestrian and bicycle pathways for in-town travel, and transit services to other communities.
- The Historical Society should continue to encourage house tours and other historic tourism initiatives as an element of East Hampton’s overall economic development strategy.
- Promote recreational opportunities such as an expanded Air Line Trail or a golf course for residents with the ability to attract visitors from other areas.
- Consider updated regulations to allow for Air BnB lodging accommodations.
- Promote agricultural tourism by allowing flexibility for accessory agricultural uses.
- Consider creating a Tourism Board to help in the promotion of tourist related activities.
- The Town recently completed a project to develop an Air Line Trail trailhead in the Village Center. This new trailhead, along with an improved parking facility has increased tourism and pedestrian activity in the Village Center and provides additional off-site parking for Village properties. A new project which will begin in the coming year will extend the Air Line Trail westward toward Portland. Eventually, downtown Portland and the Village Center will be connected by the trail providing for increased tourism opportunities and better pedestrian access.
- The Air Line Trail is a scenic resource and a major tourist draw.
- With an expanded Air Line Trail being completed in the coming year and its proximity to the Lake as well as other outdoor recreational opportunities, East Hampton is poised to become a destination for the needs of those tourists.

**Hampton**

- Review Zoning and Subdivision Regulations and revise accordingly to ensure that they encourage and sustain agriculture, including agri-tourism and ecotourism.
- Many rural New England towns have successfully marketed themselves as tourist destinations, and there are as yet untapped opportunities to attract day-trippers to food, farm, historic and nature related-venues. This may best be achieved through a multi-town effort to concentrate and publicize tourist opportunities.
- Review and revise Zoning Regulations to encourage the reuse of large and historic agricultural properties for contemporary, economically viable uses, such as educational opportunities, art and craft production and sales, tourist opportunities, recreational opportunities, large event venues, etc.
- Review Zoning Regulations to foster the economic contribution made by agriculture and value added agricultural products.

	Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development
<b>Hebron</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help support town festivals like Farm Day Tours and the Annual Maple Festival.</li> <li>• Promote the establishment of an annual Hebron Historical House / Sites Tour to increase interest in preserving these historic sites.</li> <li>• Promote Tourism and cross-promote other events happening in Town</li> <li>• Encourage tree farming as an agricultural use and consider instituting a town wide holiday festival to support this activity.</li> </ul>
<b>Lebanon</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assure that town ordinances, regulations, policies and actions support the continuation of agricultural use and small businesses.</li> <li>• Utilize town web site to include a list of and links to museums, annual events, agriculture, recreation, and businesses and prepare a town map that locates these features.</li> <li>• Maintain Economic Development Commission focus on establishing relationships with business property owners and promoting heritage tourism, agriculture, home-based and new businesses.</li> </ul>
<b>Pomfret</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to celebrate agricultural business in Town, including farms, through advertising.</li> <li>• Continue outreach efforts to farmers and agricultural businesses, and educate the public about the benefits of agriculture.</li> </ul>
<b>Portland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider promoting other forms of economic development such as hospitality, lodging, age-related housing and tourism.</li> <li>• Continue to support farms and farming in Portland.</li> </ul>
<b>Putnam</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore the creation of other agricultural incentives for these areas, such as tax breaks or purchase of development rights, or zoning and/or economic development incentives that further encourage agricultural and/or agricultural-related land uses. Implement such incentives if deemed appropriate.</li> <li>• Make provisions in the zoning regulations to encourage agritourism, agritainment and non-traditional agriculturally-related activities in coordination with farming.</li> <li>• Address tourism, the arts and culture, and recreation and agritourism to serve as economic drivers.</li> </ul>

Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development	
<b>Thompson</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop public events at key tourism and recreation sites.</li> <li>• Provide support for efforts to increase tourism to Thompson.</li> <li>• Organize and Conduct annual farm tours.</li> <li>• Develop cooperative partnerships to market and promote local recreation assets to potential visitors.</li> <li>• Develop &amp; promote annual agritourism events.</li> <li>• Develop and support marketing infrastructure for local farmers.</li> </ul>
<b>Windham</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publicize Windham’s historic resources as a step to help protect, preserve, retain, and enhance existing historic sites to promote tourism.</li> <li>• Promote Windham as a regional hub for local food, with commercial kitchens (CLiCK), the Willimantic Food Co-op, and seasonal farmers markets.</li> <li>• Review zoning and other regulations for compatibility with farming and other agricultural support services (such as agritourism, events and festivals hosted at farms, etc.) as part of a comprehensive zoning re-write.</li> <li>• Build on Windham’s Unique Assets to Attract Visitors.</li> <li>• Provide a web-based calendar that lists cultural community events, promote events through image filled emails, and social media similar to Easton, PA. Build a contact list for emailing event news.</li> <li>• Ensure that tourists feel welcome and enjoy a quality experience when visiting Windham.</li> <li>• Continue to support the development of the Whitewater Park as an attractor of future recreational tourism.</li> <li>• Promote the East Coast Greenway, the Air Line Trail, and the entire recreation and trails system in Windham as a major attraction for businesses and entertainment.</li> <li>• Promote and celebrate Windham’s historic districts as tourism destinations with appropriate signage, and promotion of events such as Victorian Days and Windham Town Green events.</li> <li>• Promote and preserve historic buildings, both as housing and for tourism.</li> <li>• Celebrate and publicize recreational activities on the trails and rivers in Windham.</li> </ul>



## Working Toward Trail Improvements Across the Region

In addition to tourism, the communities in the region are also looking to maintain and improve the ALSPT and other trails, so that residents and visitors alike can enjoy them as shown below in action items related to trails, bicyclists, and pedestrians in the various Plans of Conservation & Development:

	Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development
<p><b>Chaplin</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For any future improvements to the Rte. 198 bridge, the town should request safe bicycle and pedestrian access. Consider a viewing platform cantilevered on the side of bridge next to Diana’s Pool or safe access to the north bank where crowds gather.</li> <li>• Consider the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists in the review of all commercial and residential development, and in the development of town facilities where appropriate.</li> <li>• Work with DOT to increase pedestrian and bicycle safety along state routes by utilizing traffic calming techniques.</li> <li>• Seek funding to create a bicycle lane from Garrison Park on Route 198, across Route 6 and along Chewink Road to the trailhead for the Air Line Trail.</li> <li>• Investigate pedestrian linkages within the municipal core including Garrison Park, the town hall, the library, and the senior center.</li> <li>• Improve signage for existing trail heads and ensure good signage for proposed trails and bikeways.</li> <li>• Review the adequacy of parking at the Chewink Road/Air Line Trail head and at the Two Sisters Parcel on Route 6.</li> <li>• Maintain trail connections between Garrison Park and adjacent Joshua’s Trust property and Natchaug State Forest.</li> <li>• Maintain the stone dust trail around the pond.</li> </ul>



## Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development

### Colchester

- Install signs promoting a “farm trail” and identify it as such on the Town webpage.
- Create an open space system where different open spaces are interconnected with trails within Colchester and to surrounding communities.
- Improve and promote the Air Line Trail and other trails.
- Continue to work with the State of Connecticut and the Norwich Public Utilities Department to develop public trails on their lands in Colchester.
- Ensure that the Town Center has a strong pedestrian focus and that driveways and parking areas do not adversely affect the pedestrian realm.
- Encourage shared access and public or private street interconnections to and through rear land to create more manageable block sizes, open up additional land for development, and create a more pedestrian-friendly environment.
- Promote the evolution of Westchester as a rural “hamlet” with a pedestrian-friendly flavor.
- Undertake a special study of Westchester in order to promote mixed uses, identify ways to enhance its “hamlet” character, and ways to make it more pedestrian friendly.
- Create, maintain, and enhance a pedestrian-friendly development pattern in village areas.
- Seek to extend sidewalks for pedestrians in the Town Center, Westchester center, and adjacent areas.
- Where appropriate, require new developments to install sidewalks.
- Create more pedestrian trails and greenways in the community.
- Establish a system of bicycle routes in Colchester.
- Consider bicycle travel whenever road work is undertaken.
- Educate people on bicycling.
- Develop a trail / greenway master plan.
- Create a local bicycle route map and install signs and pavement markings to identify routes.
- Become recognized as a “bicycle-friendly community.”

	Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development
<p><b>Columbia</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt a small, pedestrian-friendly mixed-use district along Route 66 in the town center.</li> <li>• Continue to steward this land [Szedga Farm] while encouraging the use of the trails and community gardens and providing land for active agriculture.</li> <li>• Create a natural resource planning map that shows lands that are of the highest priority for preservation and highlight areas for greenways, trails, wildlife corridors and agriculture.</li> <li>• Pursue opportunities to extend or improve open space greenways with walking trails.</li> <li>• Promote public access to open space and trails as appropriate by linking open spaces and conservation areas.</li> <li>• Plan for future subdivision road locations; require new subdivisions be in a pattern to facilitate road and trail linkages.</li> <li>• Develop a master plan for Recreation Park that includes trails and internal roadways connecting active and passive recreation areas.</li> <li>• Continue to steward town-owned trails; increase public awareness of passive opportunities available in Columbia.</li> <li>• Work toward an inter-connected trail system.</li> <li>• Plan safe and accessible pedestrian and bike pathways for in-town travel, and transit services to other communities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>East Hampton</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek out grants to expand the Air Line Trail and create better signage to encourage trail users to visit local businesses.</li> <li>• Consider creating trail head for access to the Air Line Trail.</li> <li>• Enhance and protect the existing trail system throughout town.</li> <li>• Work with Eversource to connect the trail in East Hampton to an expected trail on the old railroad right-of-way in Portland.</li> <li>• At present, the Air Line Trail's western terminus is in the village center of East Hampton and will eventually form a 50-mile trail linking Portland and Webster, MA. Plans are currently in place to extend the trail easterly into the town of Portland.</li> <li>• Establish trails along greenways to encourage passive recreation.</li> <li>• Although used primarily for recreation, the Air Line Trail cuts through the town and is used for bicycle transportation.</li> <li>• Create walkable villages through sidewalk, safety, and streetscape improvements.</li> <li>• Extend the Air Line Trail westward to connect to Portland.</li> <li>• Accommodate bikes whenever practical in road and site development projects. Develop a list of roads where bike lanes should be considered.</li> </ul>



	Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development
<b>Hampton</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage development that is compact and transit-accessible, with pedestrian-oriented development patterns.</li> <li>• Identify and review the status of any Town roads that are not maintained. Evaluate their potential for future uses, including use for bicycles and pedestrians.</li> <li>• Evaluate the location of a future footpath along one or both sides of Main Street/Route 97 on Hampton Hill.</li> <li>• Develop a town-wide cycling and walking map.</li> <li>• Seek funding to support walking and cycling paths along Route 97 and Route 6 as well as along selected Town routes.</li> </ul>
<b>Hebron</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support and protect trail corridors that will highlight wildlife areas and raise understanding of natural systems.</li> <li>• Establish a trail network with viewpoints along trailside by working cooperatively with adjacent landowners.</li> <li>• Work with the Economic Development Commission and others in marketing the Town’s many recreational opportunities to enhance local economic development, and bringing recreational activities such as bike races, running races and horseback trail riding meets to the Town business center.</li> <li>• Continue to pursue available grant funding to maintain, map, and extend current trail systems and enhance park facilities.</li> <li>• Continue to expand existing educational activities (field walks, interpretive markers, cooperative activities with the schools, nature trail booklets, marked trails, earth day events, etc.) that will make the public aware of the important roles that these natural systems perform including threats to these systems such as those posed by invasive species.</li> <li>• Provide safe pedestrian access within sites and between sites to help reduce the impact of the automobile.</li> <li>• Continue to encourage the establishment of sidewalks in the public right-of-way throughout the town center.</li> <li>• Work with the CT Department of Transportation to continue to install crosswalks and pedestrian cross buttons to encourage pedestrian activity in the Town Center.</li> <li>• Connect Hebron Center with sidewalks / bikeway to Hebron Elementary School and eventually the Air Line Trail.</li> <li>• Connect Hebron Center trails with a new trail through the RHAM complex, Salmon River State Forest and Burnt Hill Park.</li> <li>• Plan and seek funding for a sidewalk / bikeway connection between the Town Center and the Air Line Trail.</li> <li>• Seek grants and other funding sources to implement the Jeremy River Trail, a connection between the Town’s business center and Burnt Hill Park.</li> </ul>

Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development	
<b>Hebron (continued)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development should be land/soil/topography based, with consideration given to preserving natural features. Streams and wetlands should serve as buffer areas, and provide opportunity for passive recreation such as walking paths and trails.</li> <li>• Integrated sidewalks and trails should be constructed to facilitate walking from Hebron Elementary School and Stonecroft senior housing to the Library or to the central business district.</li> <li>• A bikeway / pedestrian connection should be planned and implemented between the Village Green District / Hebron Center area to the Church Street Park and Air Line Trail to the south.</li> <li>• Enhancement of transitional areas should occur including the installation of park benches, flower and community gardens and other public amenities together with the establishment of pedestrian sidewalks, bicycle paths and walking trails to enhance the visibility, attractiveness and enjoyment of the Town Center by helping to minimize traffic volume, improve traffic circulation and enhance the accessibility to municipal, educational, recreational, residential, commercial, cultural and historical sites.</li> <li>• A long-range plan of a pedestrian connection along Church Street from Hebron Center, to the Neighborhood Convenience District, and eventually to the Air Line Trail should be actively pursued. This would greatly add to the vitality of this neighborhood commercial district, and increase pedestrian safety in the immediate area.</li> <li>• Consider the permanent preservation of the Skungamaug Fish and Game Club and other properties along the Jeremy River consistent with the recreational use of the Air Line Trail and environmental value of the river system.</li> <li>• Connect the Jeremy River Trail System, originating at Burnt Hill Park, to the RHAM High School complex.</li> <li>• Encourage opportunities by the schools and affiliated organizations, to maintain, rehabilitate, research and study Town open space, historical sites, State or Town parks and trails, etc. so as to reaffirm and strengthen a sense of civic spirit within the student body.</li> </ul>
<b>Lebanon</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider additional opportunities to create multi-purpose trail networks open to the public through existing open space and road systems, when preserving new properties, and during the development review process.</li> <li>• Continue to work with the State of Connecticut to provide adequate signage, access and parking at Lebanon state parks, including the promotion of passive recreation activities such as bicycling, cross-country skiing, and equestrian access.</li> <li>• Connect or loop the walking path around Town Green in the vicinity of the Library, provide additional parking at the Library site for those utilizing Lebanon Green, and provide greater utilization of Lebanon Green for community events.</li> </ul>

**Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development**

**Pomfret**

- Consider coordinated development of sidewalk system connecting municipal properties and private institutions in Route 169/Route 44 area as well as the Pomfret Hill Section.
- Consider future development in association with the Air Line State Park Trail. Work with DOT and DEEP to control access and explore interconnection to Pomfret’s Recreation Park and Connecticut Audubon Society. Replace historic trestle crossing on Route 169 and Needles Eye Road.
- Seek funding for sidewalks and other area improvements through Small Town Economic Assistance grants, Federal TEA grants, Quinebaug-Shetucket Rivers Valley Corridor programs, Borderlands and other sources (i.e., USDA – United States Department of Agriculture).
- Develop regulatory standards for Village area, including parking, access, and other standards to encourage mixed-use, pedestrian friendly development and discourage strip development.

**Portland**

- Work with CT-DOT to improve the intersection of Routes 17, 17A and 66 to serve pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles.
- Encourage the creation and maintenance of a pedestrian friendly streetscape.
- Promote redevelopment of the riverfront to create a pedestrian friendly environment with recreational amenities.
- Continue to link parking areas, public access points, and visitor attractions via an overall network designed to accommodate pedestrians and bicycles.
- Enhance the pedestrian environment through street furniture, fencing, street plantings, pedestrian scale lighting, crosswalks, signage, and sidewalk improvements.
- Extend the Air Line Trail to the Town Center.
- Establish connections from the Air Line Trail to East Hampton, Middletown and Glastonbury.
- Establish an interconnected system of open space in order to create greenway trails and wildlife corridors.
- Aspire to be a pedestrian-friendly community.
- Ensure that adequate and safe pedestrian crosswalks are provided in appropriate places.
- Close gaps in discontinuous sidewalks.

	Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development
<p><b>Portland (continued)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enforce the existing sidewalk maintenance ordinance.</li> <li>• Aspire to be a bicycle-friendly community.</li> <li>• Create an overall system of bicycle routes in Portland.</li> <li>• Accommodate bicycles whenever practical in road and site development projects.</li> <li>• Narrow travel lanes and create bicycle lanes where possible.</li> <li>• Establish formal bike lanes with medians where space is available.</li> <li>• Work with CTDOT to include bike lanes on all state roads in Portland.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Putnam</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create walkable neighborhoods</li> <li>• Make provisions for obtaining and siting street furniture (benches, bicycle racks, trash receptacles, etc.) where practical</li> <li>• Improve and expand existing and construct new walking/ bicycle/cross-country skiing trails, greenways, parks, and similar open or natural land uses.</li> <li>• Extend and connect Putnam’s greenways, constructing new walking/bicycle/cross-country skiing trails, to link with, and bring about the preservation of, areas of natural, scenic, historic or cultural value; partner with adjoining communities to create a regional greenways network.</li> <li>• Expand the existing greenway network to include the existing Little River Trail and other greenway trails, notably a trail along the Five Mile River.</li> <li>• Use existing monetary set-asides, trail construction associated with Pomfret’s sewer main construction activities, and grants, to fund construction of the Air Line Trail and the extension of the River Trail, and perform said construction.</li> <li>• Add separate or shared (with sidewalks/walking paths) bicycle lanes onto roadways where feasible.</li> <li>• Construct new sidewalks in areas of heavy pedestrian traffic that currently do not have sidewalks.</li> <li>• Improve existing roadways, sidewalks, and pathways (greenways) for the convenience of not only automobile drivers but also for bicyclists and walkers.</li> <li>• Explore the creation of a bike sharing program.</li> <li>• Provide sidewalks linking housing and essential services for walking residents</li> </ul>

## Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development

### Thompson

- Install stone dust on critical sections of the Air Line State Park Trail.
- Develop outdoor recreation assets in alignment with the “Trail Town” report from the National Park Service assistance program.
- Enhance Thompson’s appeal for adventure racers and recreational cyclists.
- Encourage local businesses to invest in covered bike racks. Encourage local restaurants to plan menus aimed at cyclists.
- Add signage that indicates to share the road with bicyclists.
- Add active pedestrian protection at the Air Line Trail Crossing at Route 193.
- Install Signage at the intersection of Routes 12 & 193 to indicate Trail Parking, West Thompson Dam, Downtown.
- Install a new painted crosswalk by the Air Line Trail parking lot on Route 12.
- Add safety signage at the New Road intersection with the Air Line Trail.
- Regrade/repair sections of the trails that are not bike friendly.
- Develop a Sidewalk Master Plan.
- Work with new developments to provide or improve sidewalks.
- Add additional directional/safety signage at trailheads and along the trails.
- Secure agreements with abutting property owners for additional access points to the Air Line Trail.
- Add trail signage and amenities such as benches.
- Improve parking at trail access points.
- Support Cyclocross and “Gravel Grinder” competitions.
- Support the development of trails and events for mountain biking and recreational bike use.
- Partner with the CT Trails Census to observe trends in trail use.
- Build partnerships with trail racing event organizations.
- Seek grant funding for Trails equipment and programming enhancements.
- Pursue additional connections between existing trails.



### Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development

#### Windham

- Consider painting “sharrows” to remind drivers to share the road with bicyclists.
- Improve pedestrian and bike connections from ECSU campus to Downtown.
- Increase, where possible, walkability in historic villages with bikeways and walking paths that are physically separated from roadways.
- Complete Air Line Trail / East Coast Greenway connection between Bridge and Jackson Streets along Riverside Drive up Railroad Avenue to the North side of Main Street. Include signage along trail to direct users to restaurants and businesses.
- Coordinate with CT DEEP and others to provide maintenance on the Air Line Trail and East Coast Greenway including litter removal.
- Seek funding for a trail connection in North Windham from Air Line Trail to Mansfield Hollow Recreational Areas.
- Include sidewalk maintenance in the public works operating budget; replace the entire block of sidewalk only when the replacement cost is less than maintenance, or the sidewalk needs to be widened.



# NATIONAL INSPIRATION OF TRAIL TOWN PROGRAMS



## TRAIL TOWN PROGRAM

The Trail Town Program powers community development with outdoor tourism across Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Maryland— but the program also helps trails around the nation.

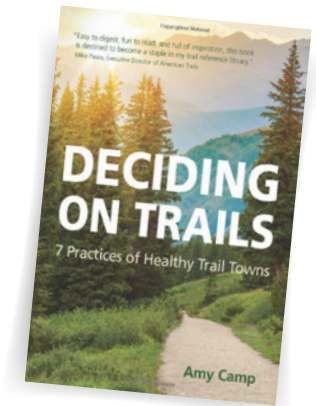
The program starts by thinking regionally: a world-class trail needs amenities along its entire stretch, and towns working together can create a much broader impact with 5 keys to a successful Trail Town:

- Partnerships
- Assessment and research
- Connecting town to trail
- Business and real estate development
- Marketing

Not every project looks the same. Every region has its own strengths and challenges. This program can support the ALSPT Region with insights and lessons they've learned along the way. Initial support is available in this free [Trail Town guide](#).

Nationally, there are numerous programs and support to towns to build economic connections to trails. The Trail Towns Program is one such program and through research for this plan, “Deciding on Trails” is also an excellent segue into education on how the twelve towns of the ALSPT Region can become trail towns. There are also many available webinars such as “[The Catalytic Impact of Trails](#)” produced by American Trails.

Assessing the towns for their current and potential development as “Trail Towns”, each town has the existing and potential unique economic connections to the trail. Business and physical connections require enhancement, signage and wayfinding to expand economic assets of the region.



**Nationally, there are numerous programs and support to towns to build economic connections to trails.**



# TRAIL TO TOWN GROWTH CONNECTICUT EXAMPLES

To emulate and expand concepts and methods for economic growth, the ALSPT Region can look to [railstotrails.org](http://railstotrails.org) for examples of towns & cities in Connecticut that have worked together to improve and maintain trails to keep them vital parts of their communities and economies:

## **FARMINGTON CANAL HERITAGE TRAIL -**

Farmington Canal Heritage Trail - The evolution from canal to railroad to trail tells the history of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail. The 48-mile trail begins on the urban campus of Yale University in New Haven but takes on a more rural aspect as it heads north to the Massachusetts state line. The corridor follows a short-lived canal completed in 1835 that was replaced in 1847 by a railroad that ran until the 1980s (a small segment is still active in Plainville). The longest paved trail in the state, its asphalt surface and proximity to population centers makes it one of the most popular. The trail joins the Farmington River Trail in two places. The East Coast Greenway shares the trail from Simsbury to New Haven, minus the gap between Plainville and Southington. The New England Rail-Trail Spine Network incorporates the entire trail length.

**FARMINGTON RIVER TRAIL** - The Farmington River Trail runs a C-shaped circuit through the forests and communities west of Hartford. It connects at both ends with the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail to create a frequently used 26-mile loop. The trail itself is listed at 16 miles, although some of that is on low-traffic roads between Canton and Simsbury, where you'll also find less than a mile on dirt/crushed stone. The rest of the trail is paved. The scenic Farmington River flows along the southern half of the trail and is home to several historical factories and the Canton Historical Museum in Collinsville, a good half-way stop for refreshments or shopping.

**PEQUONNOCK RIVER TRAIL** - The historical seaport of Bridgeport on Long Island Sound anchors 14 miles of trail that runs north to the Colonial-era town of Newtown. The Pequonnock River Trail stitches together these locally developed trails that follow the former Housatonic Railroad. Riverside parkland is a big draw for trail users. They use the trail, some of which is paved, to visit such destinations as the Beardsley Park and Zoo in Bridgeport, the 5-mile-long Pequonnock River Wildlife Area in Trumbull, and the Centennial Watershed State Forest in Newtown. The downtown Bridgeport segment is separate from the northern sections of the trail.



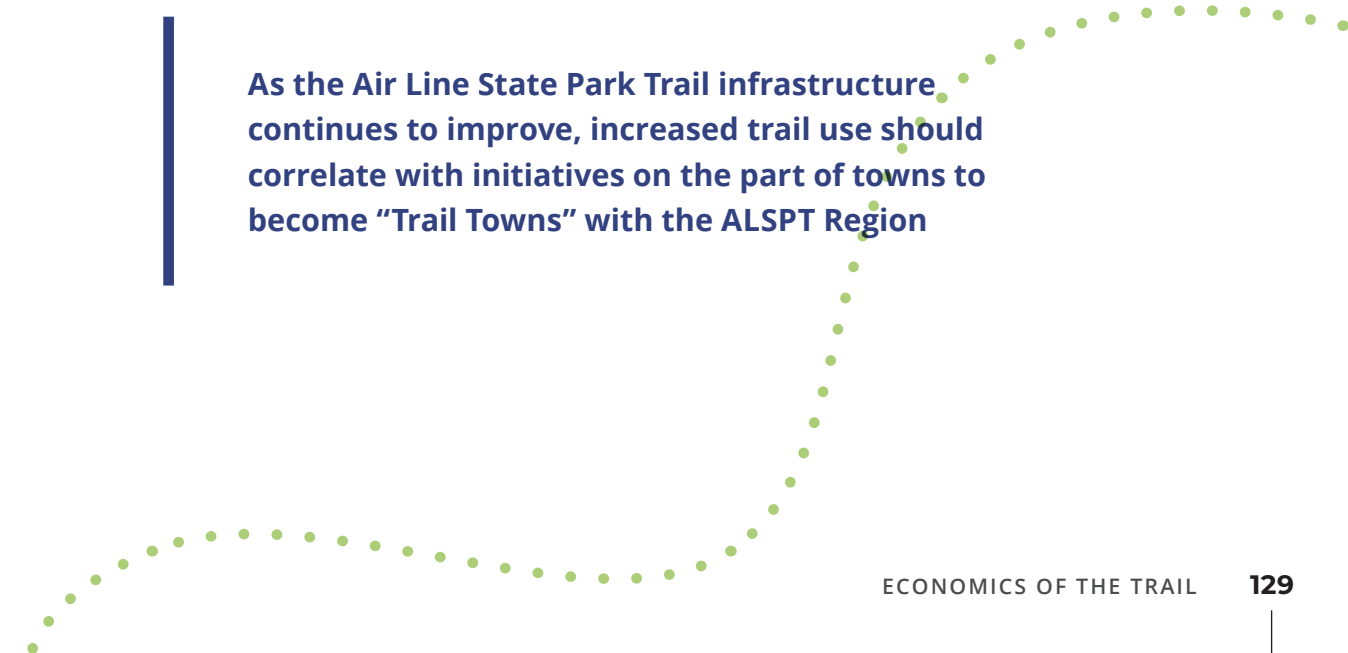
*Scene along the  
Pequonnock River Trail.  
Photo by Matthew Lupoli,  
[www.traillink.com](http://www.traillink.com).*

**LARKIN STATE PARK TRAIL** - The woody environs of the Larkin State Park Trail make this an ideal destination to escape the sun under a leafy canopy in the summer or enjoy up-close leaf peeping in the fall. At one time a link on the New York & New England Railroad, the 11-mile trail rolls between Southbury and Naugatuck just southwest of Waterbury. Founded as the Larkin State Bridle Trail geared toward equestrians, the pathway is widely enjoyed by people on horseback. Fat-tired bicycles are recommended for those on wheels, as the trail surface of crushed stone, gravel, cinder and dirt can get rough and soggy, especially after wet weather.

**WINDSOR LOCKS CANAL STATE PARK TRAIL**

Fishermen can be a common sight on the 5.4-mile Windsor Locks Canal State Park Trail in the northwest corner of the state. It's not surprising, as the trail occupies a narrow sliver of land between the Connecticut River and the historical Enfield Falls Canal. The asphalt trail itself replaces the towpath used by mules to tow barges along the canal in the mid-1800s, avoiding the river's rapids. The wooded isle draws wildlife, including bald eagles. The state closes the trail from November through the spring so the bald eagles can nest in peace.

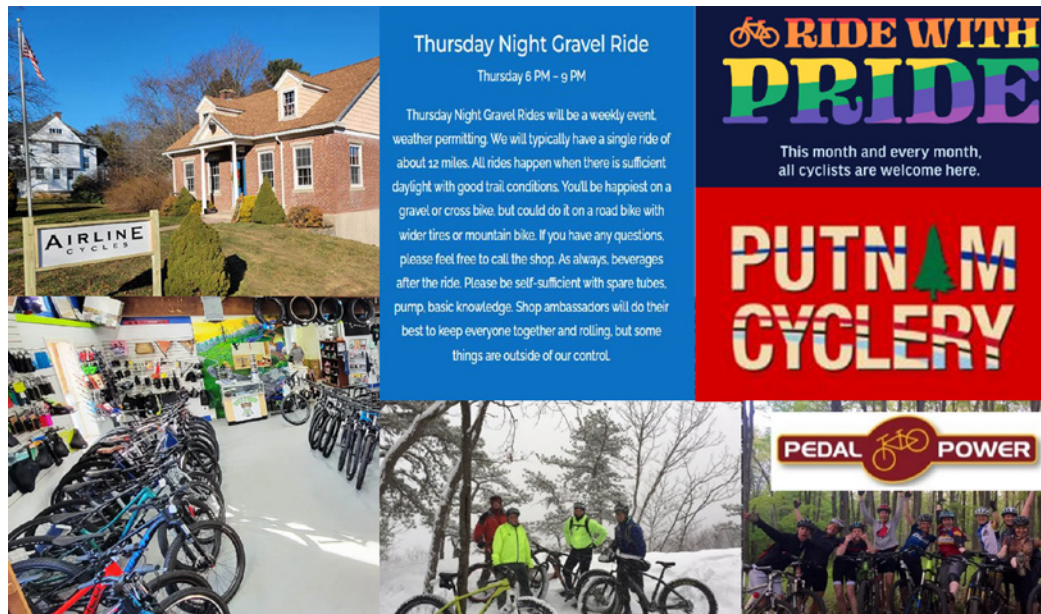
With the potential trail user numbers increasing, as noted in the previous paragraphs, the Air Line State Park Trail Region and the member towns have an opportunity to improve the economic vitality of their village centers and the region with the trail as a focused destination. Currently there are few services and amenities that cater to the trail system and trail users. This is understandable as the full length of the trail is not finished with reliable conditions over its entire length. As the trail infrastructure continues to improve, increased trail use should correlate with initiatives on the part of towns to become "Trail Towns" with the ALSPT Region supporting the regional "Trail Towns" concept through marketing of businesses and services that support the trail (see examples on page 91).



**As the Air Line State Park Trail infrastructure continues to improve, increased trail use should correlate with initiatives on the part of towns to become "Trail Towns" with the ALSPT Region**



## Examples of Existing ALSPT Oriented Business and Events Promotion



### Bike Shops Abound on the Air Line State Park Trail

From the Putnam Cyclery on the north end of the trail and Pedal Power in Willimantic to Air Line Cycles in East Hampton, bicycle retail, repair shops are critical to the success of the ALSPT Region. Air Line Cycles for instance has been a strong advocate for the Air Line State Park Trail and the Town of East Hampton business community. There's a sense of community building that emanates from the owner, the staff and

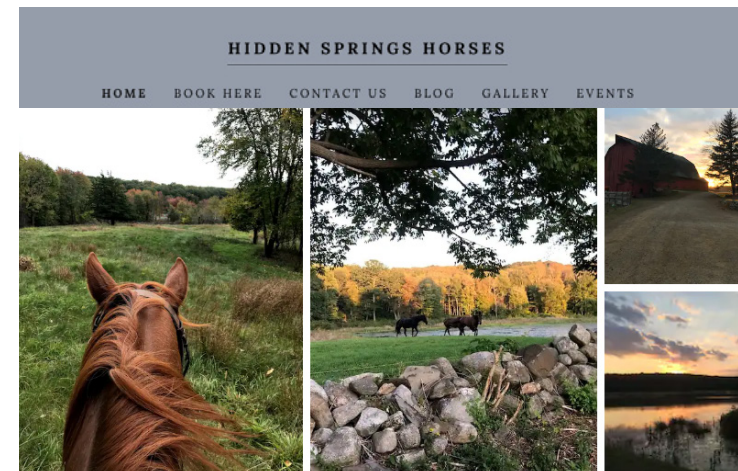
business, building events that bring people of all riding styles together.

"Air Line Cycles is the classic small town America bike shop, where cutting edge technology meets old school community. Whether you are looking for the latest in Di2 electronic shifting or clutch derailleurs for better chain retention, AirLine Cycles has the expertise you are looking for!"

### Horse Adventures Await Trail Users

We start out at Hidden Springs Farm, our 20-acre piece that is home to our nine rescue horses. Once tacked up, we lead you to the Air Line Trail State Park which is across the street from the farm. This trail takes us to a scenic reservoir, perfect for taking photos!

"We absolutely loved this experience at Hidden Springs farm! The location is beautiful, and you could tell how much love is put into caring for those horses. We felt so connected to our horses Tinto and Meri and didn't want to leave them! And it was such an amazing value if you consider that this is a private tour! I highly recommend this for any animal lovers that would like to connect with and ride some beautifully natured horses. We hope to be back soon!"





## Racing for Quinebaug Valley Community College

The “Tackle the Trail” marathon was established in 2014 to raise for students and programs at QVCC. The last funding count raised was \$500,000. Over nine years, the event has grown from a 20 mile race to a full cohort of trail race options for individuals and relay teams including a marathon, a ½ marathon, a 10K relay and a Tackle Jr. which is free to young children. Tackle the Trail has been successful partnering with Wyndham

Land Trust, CT DEEP, Hale YMCA, NOW and other organizations and sponsors. Each year there are over 150 volunteers, 50 teams, and hundreds of individual runners. Participants from local to global travel to Northeast Connecticut to experience the Air Line State Park Region and run the trail. This presents an opening for collaboration among the ALSPT Region, cross marketing the trail and the towns while promoting the importance of this fundraising event.



**Current Site -  
 Building has been removed**



**Concept design of site  
 with future trailside use**



### TRAILSIDE BUSINESS EXAMPLE

## Grassroots Business Opportunity with Town Property

Hebron, Connecticut: Route 85 Air Line State Park Trail Parking Area – Town purchased 1.2 acre property in 2017 through foreclosure. Negotiations with town for purchase or lease could prompt building of a trailside business as demonstrated in the example shown here.



**TOWN VIEW FROM THE TRAIL** Based on informal trail interviews, towns of the ALSPT Region can either be invisible or visible based on the visitors' experience. With a goal of increasing visibility from the trail, towns can heighten awareness of town centers or businesses based on "trail towns" economic goals. They can encourage awareness as thru towns with signage and business names or allow the use of popup business trucks or sheds at trail parking lots.

**PORTLAND**



**"Lots of traffic! Is it safe for bikes? How do I find the trail. Looks like they have new things popping up?"** - Gateway Downtown Thru Businesses: Calendar - Event Focus

**COLUMBIA**



**"Is this the Hop River Trail? I missed the winery? Loved the river!"** - Tri-Axis Wayfinding with Hop River and ALSPT for Public Information to Businesses

**HAMPTON**



**"Am I still in Chaplin? Is this state forest? Is there food and things to see farther up the trail?"** - Trailside Businesses - Popups

**HEBRON**



**"Can't wait till there's a trail connection into the business district. Is there a place to stay?"** - Find Your Way Businesses Off the Trail with Calendar - Event Focus

**LEBANON**



**"I hear there's a great Farm Market and History Museum, what else?"** - Find Your Way Businesses Off the Trail with Calendar - Event Focus

**EAST HAMPTON**



**"There's quite a bit downtown here. Why isn't there more? Is there a place I can stay overnight?"** - Downtown Thru Businesses: Calendar - Event Focus



## POMFRET



**“Beautiful scenery? Where can I get a bite to eat?”** - Pomfret Station Information Sharing to Businesses Off the Trail

## PUTNAM



**“Wow, what a great downtown, who knew. Is there a safe place to park a bike?”** - Downtown Thru Businesses: Calendar- Event Focus

## COLCHESTER



**“If I take the spur trail, is it worth it? Anything to visit, places to eat?”** - Find Your Way Businesses Off the Trail

## THOMPSON



**“Fascinating history, especially the Train Wreck. Where can I eat?”** - Find Your Way Off the Trail Businesses

## WINDHAM



**“Eclectic and it great to see the diversity of people in one place in Eastern Connecticut.”** - Downtown – Thru Trail Business: Calendar – Event Focus

## CHAPLIN



**“Not sure what there is north of Willimantic. What am I going to see? Are there stopping points?”** - Trailside Businesses - Popups

# INFLUENCE CORRIDORS ALONG THE TRAIL

The ALSPT Region can also tap into some economic influence and opportunities beyond the boundaries of the ALSPT Region to increase the number of users on the trail and to improve the economies of the towns along the ALSPT. Marketing and economic growth for Connecticut transcends geographic boundaries. There are many influence regions within the state that align and yet also compete for economic and tourism relevance.

First and foremost, the ALSPT Region could work to define its marketing influence as the region continues to build out the trail. It is also vital to the economic growth of the ALSPT Region to explore the concept of partnering with adjacent areas to promote geographic synergy and a positive tourism & trail travel experience for Connecticut residents and outside visitors alike. By accentuating this alignment of concurrent efforts to build multi-use trails by varied organizations near the ALSPT Region, the ALSPT Region can take on a leadership role to promote economic and trail oriented business growth to developing trail systems by aligning with organizations in the following influence regions.

## CENTRAL CONNECTICUT CONNECTOR INFLUENCE CORRIDOR

Through the Jonah Center for Earth and Art visioning process, in partnership with RiverCOG, a new multi-use trail initiative is conceptualized for future funding and construction. This initiative would create a new dynamic economic influence region for both the Air Line State Park Trail Region and the Hop River Trail Region via this connector multi-use trail that also ties into the Farmington Canal Heritage Multi-Use Trail in Cheshire, CT. This connection would provide numerous economic and recreational benefits to all towns within this economic region and to the state as a whole:

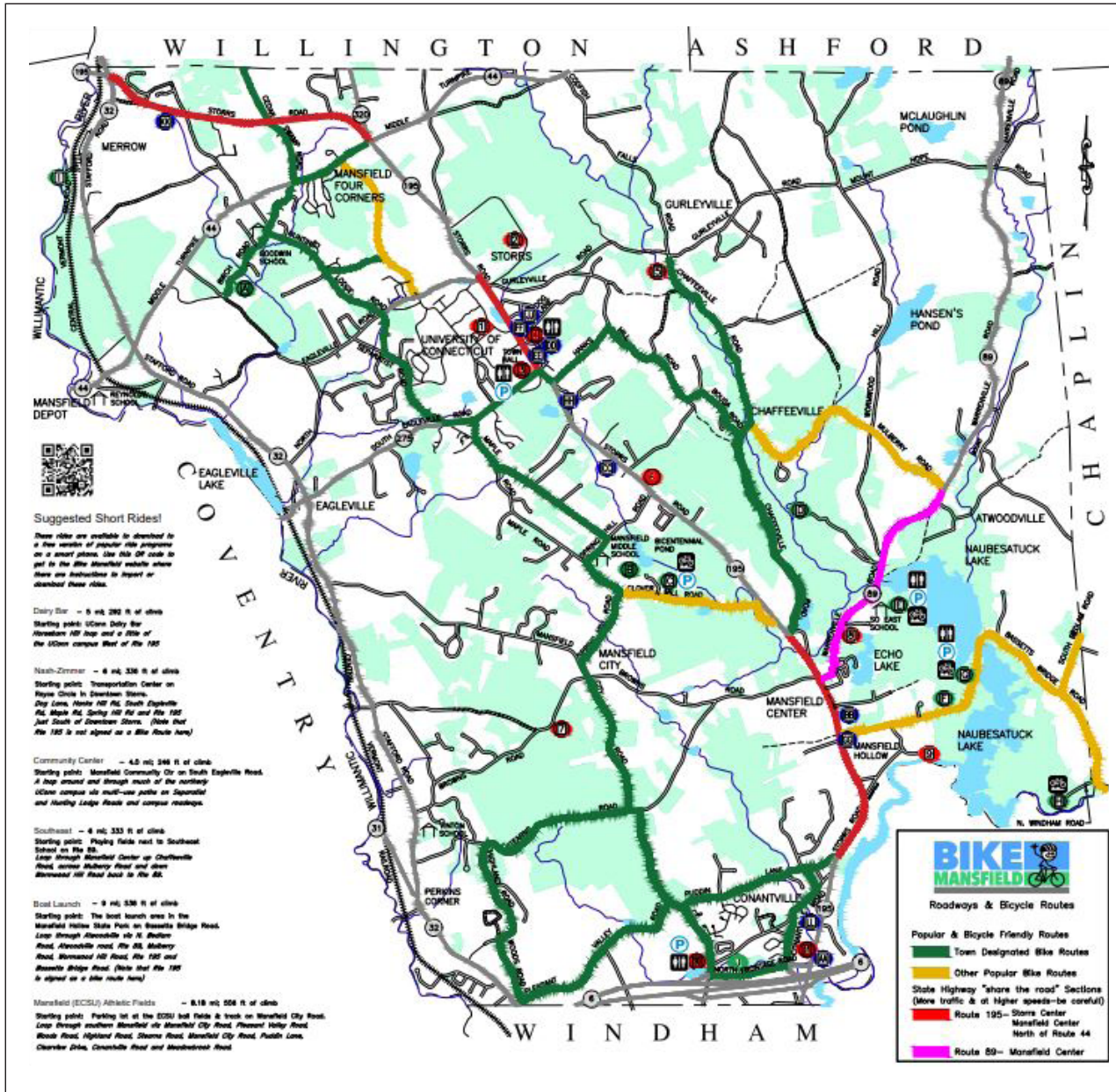
- The connector would enhance existing shorter walking and cycling trails by greatly increasing the accessible mileage of each trail. Recreational multi-use trail travel and options for bicycle commuters would be significantly improved.
- The connector would provide a bike route to the commuter rail hub in downtown Meriden, which cyclists could use to travel to New Haven, Hartford, Springfield and beyond.
- It would connect the Air Line State Park Trail with the East Coast Greenway (see map at top of post) at two locations (Cheshire and Willimantic), creating a 111-mile bike trail loop



around the greater Hartford area. Such a facility would be sure to attract recreational bicyclists from a large surrounding area.

- There is a unique opportunity within this larger influence region to build a synergistic destination-oriented trail system for tourism and extended stay visits for out of state visitors.
- Marketing coordination between towns, COGs, transit districts, tourism regions and the ALSPT Region is critical to effectively marketing the tourism opportunities to visitors from out of state.





## THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT – MANSFIELD CORRIDOR

This influence corridor is dynamic in the power and potential of youthful exuberance inherent at nearby University of Connecticut (UConn) and the forward planning initiatives for outdoor recreation by the Town of Mansfield and its regional partners. Mansfield along with the CT Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA) and the American Public Health Association actively supported an APA grant initiative led by the Eastern Highlands Health District for a Healthy Communities Toolkit for Connecticut.

Mansfield’s open space connections map notably portrays the potential for a hiking connection through open space between UConn and the ALSPT. While the town doesn’t have a continuous off-road bike trail system at this time, it has a defined specific bike route in a public-oriented online map. Opportunities for connecting into the ALSPT corridor are evident. With Windham Transit District routing, bike racks on buses and continued planning from Mansfield, Windham and UConn, a dynamic system furthers the goals of the Healthy Communities Toolkit, and the connection with the ALSPT will further enhance economic growth in the region, with the ALSPT as the focal point.

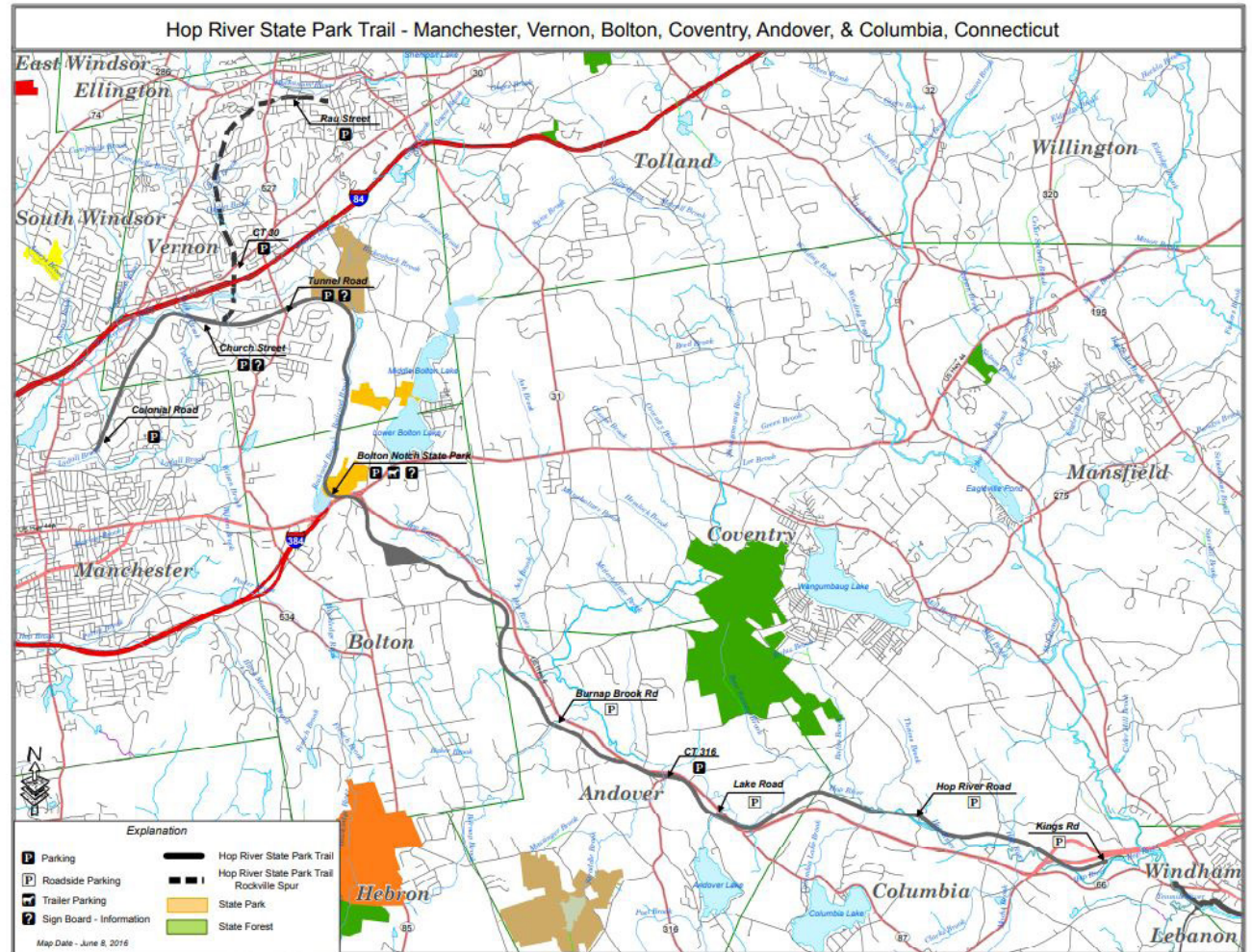
At left, Mansfield Bike Routes with Points of Interest



## HOP RIVER STATE PARK TRAIL INFLUENCE CORRIDOR

The Hop River State Park Trail, which is a CT DEEP-owned multi-use trail linking Windham to Manchester, intersects with the ALSPT near the Willimantic River. The seven towns that influence and support this trail system have formed a burgeoning alliance with a focus on improving reliability, communications between member towns and coordinating improved wayfinding with support from CT DEEP. The trail is a former railroad line that winds 20.2 miles through the towns of Manchester, Vernon, Bolton, Coventry, Andover, and Columbia. Like a pathway through time, this serpentine path passes among modern subdivisions and crosses roads, but mostly takes the trail user along a remote, quiet, and long unused path through the eastern Connecticut countryside. The Hop River Trail Alliance includes four groups that advocate for section of the Hop River State Park Trail: Bike Walk Andover, Bike Walk Bolton, Bike Walk Columbia, and Vernon Greenways.

Given the symmetry of character and local dedication to the trail system, a collaboration between the ALSPT and the Hop River Trail Alliance is strongly recommended. The Hop River Trail Alliance is well represented by trail enthusiasts. For instance, Vernon Greenways is a group of 120 volunteers that advocates



for and helps maintain the five-mile section of the Hop River State Park Trail in Vernon. The group shares an active newsletter with its membership and is forming a nonprofit to better manage collective grant funding initiatives and coordination with CT DEEP.

**Like a pathway through time, this serpentine path passes among modern subdivisions and crosses roads, but mostly takes the trail user along a remote, quiet, and long unused path.**



## THE LAST GREEN VALLEY

The Last Green Valley, as noted in a previous chapter, is an expansive federally recognized, “National Heritage Corridor.” The region is managed by The Last Green Valley, Inc. (TLGV), a nonprofit organization dedicated to celebrating and conserving the region’s fragile and irreplaceable resources. Founded in 1995 as a grassroots organization and built upon a proven track record of success and partnerships, TLGV works to ensure a natural and cultural legacy in the region for generations to come. Seven of the twelve towns of the ALSPT Region reside within TLGV’s boundaries. For this reason alone, the importance

of collaboration with TLGV must be highlighted. The ALSPT Region and TLGV are synergistic in their goals and the TLGV has an expansive understanding of the economic opportunities inherent in the cultural and natural resources of the region. With its almost 30 years of experience in managing a large region with effective programs and projects that highlight tourism, natural resource protection, cultural preservation, TLGV can offer insights to the management of the ALSPT Region’s new initiative to collectively leverage economic sustainable growth.

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## EIGHTMILE WILD AND SCENIC WATERSHED

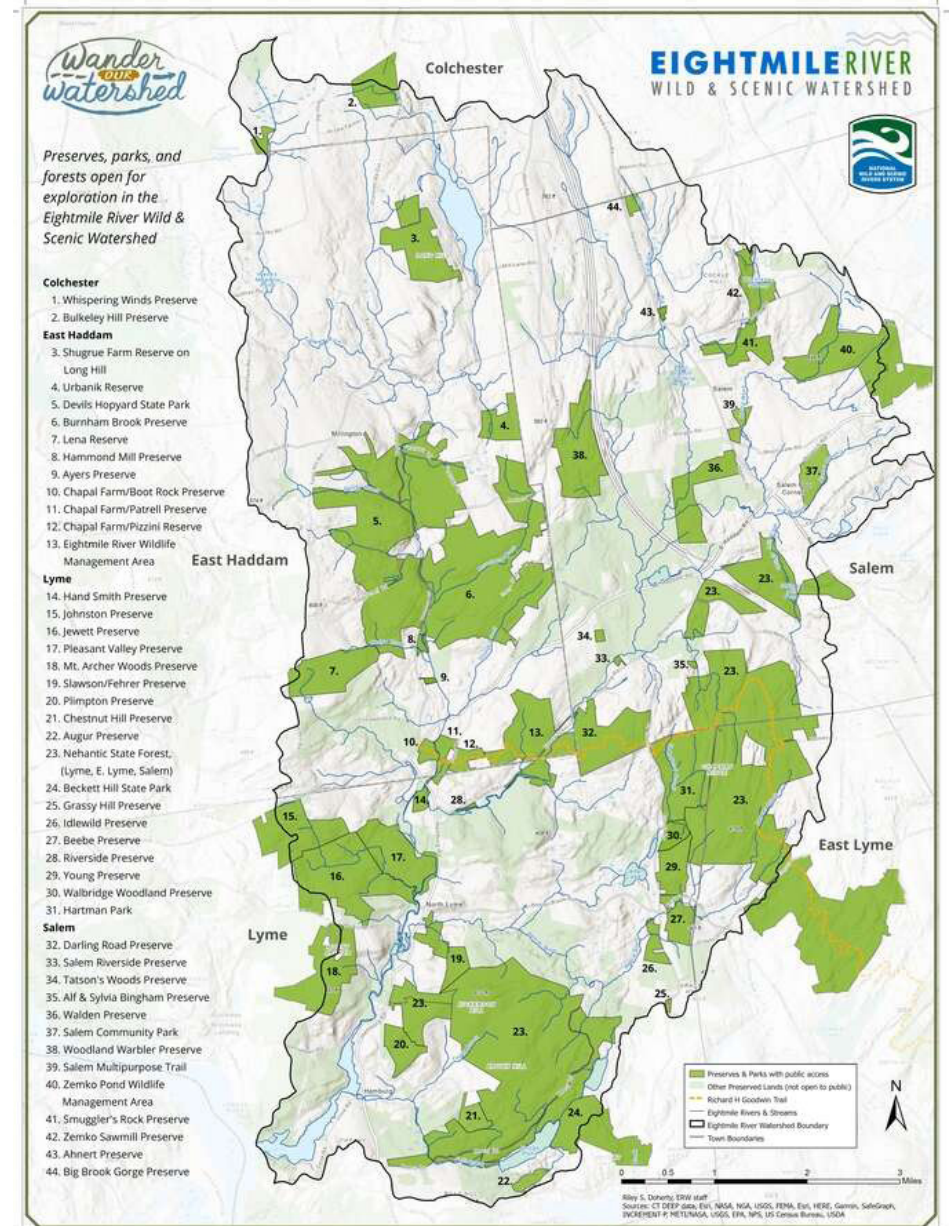
In 2006, the Eightmile River Watershed was designated as a segment of the National Wild and Scenic River System. While the watershed's boundaries encompass sixty-two square miles, primarily in East Haddam, Lyme, and Salem and despite the "eight-mile" label, the watershed contains 150 miles of rivers and streams. The watershed meets the Connecticut River eight miles north of Long Island Sound.

This Watershed is of importance to the ALSPT Region because of its connection to Colchester and the potential for expansion of its hiking trail systems through a network of municipal and land trust open space preserves and Devil's Hopyard State Park in nearby East Haddam. Recently the Eightmile River Wild and Scenic Watershed initiated a "Wander our Watershed" promotion to encourage use of the trail systems within these open space properties. The watershed is also home to most of the 14 miles that form the Richard H. Goodwin Trail, which is one of Connecticut's newest long trails. This yellow-blazed corridor is bookended

on the southeast by Darrow Pond in East Lyme and, on the northwest, the entrance to Chapal Farm Preserve on Route 82 in East Haddam.

This extensive conservation system offers future potential for collaboration between the Watershed and the ALSPT Region to build a multi-day long distance hiking trail in Eastern Connecticut. With support from CT DEEP and member towns, the two organizations could work side by side building this extensive north border to coast trail for a wilderness experience. The ALSPT Region could provide a network of support to a future trail system north of East Haddam into Colchester.

Overall, these examples give an overview of the possibilities for the ALSPT Region to build sustainable economic wealth for its towns, residents, and businesses within the region and throughout Eastern Connecticut with creative economic planning, strategic land use policy, supportive transportation infrastructure and thoughtful conservation.



## RECOMMENDATIONS: Economics of the Trail

- 01** Create a geospatial oriented database to tabulate ongoing progress toward trail user counts, trail-oriented business development, and trail event data. Work closely with UConn Extension Center to coordinate information cataloguing for the benefit of the region and other areas of the state.
- 02** Ensure that trail count systems continue through UConn and CT DEEP and information is transferred to the ALSPT database.
- 03** Join and participate in national multi-use trail programs.
- 04** Contact the Trail Towns Program for support in economic assessment of towns and contact Connecticut Main Street Center for consideration of a united Main Street view of the towns in the region.
- 05** Support and expand information systems on CT Trail Finder, which automatically update the ALSPT Region website.
- 06** Ensure that town, regional and state plans of conservation and development and comprehensive development strategies (regional economic plans) include supportive text toward sustainable conservation based economic growth in the region.
- 07** Continue to find representation on ALSPT Region organization board for influence corridor representation and collaboration.
- 08** Work with influence corridors to cross market ALSPT-based events, including fundraisers.
- 09** Work closely with bike shops to ensure they remain viable and profitable, including promoting events concurrently on ALSPT Region website and local business websites.
- 10** Work with regional economic strategy organizations such as the Southeastern CT Enterprise Region (SeCTer) to make trail-oriented businesses aware of small business lending programs that help small to medium-sized businesses expand, upgrade machinery and equipment, and/or relocate in our region. SeCTer's lending region includes all of eastern Connecticut, from the Massachusetts border to Long Island Sound.
- 11** Ensure that services and amenities are built into the trail system, either on the trail or adjacent to the trail to support expectations of trail users.



## RECOMMENDATIONS: Economics of the Trail

- 12 Work with event organizers to cross promote the ALSPT Region, its website and the importance of naming the Air Line State Park Trail and the region as the area hosting the event.
- 13 Consider a grant application to fund a full market study of the region including property valuation data to create an economic baseline for new infrastructure or improvements.
- 14 Promote diversity and equity on the trail and within the ALSPT Region. The audience of potential trail users and the economic opportunities, both cultural and economic, are the gift of becoming an inclusive and welcoming region.
- 15 Evaluate land use policy near the trail to promote business growth in service clusters zones or in village centers to ensure the larger conservation sections remain protected.

