



Non-Motorized Trails

Genesee County is making significant strides in the development of a premier non-motorized network. More communities are experiencing first-hand the economic, health, and social benefits of developing non-motorized trails. In the past four years alone over \$5.3 million in engineering and construction funds have been captured by Genesee County communities to construct non-motorized facilities. By the year 2020, over 11 miles of non-motorized trails will be constructed since the development of Genesee County's previous Regional Trail Plan in 2014. While the goals and objectives of the Regional Trail Plan stay true, development priorities are being updated in 2018 to reflect the completion of previous priorities and changes in public support. One momentous project GCMPC has been a part of in recent years is the designation of Michigan's Iron

Belle Trail (IBT) Route. The IBT included 45 of its 700-mile bicycling route in Genesee County, building upon our extensive existing network of trails and planned connections. The IBT initiative has reinvigorated trail advocates and communities to make non-motorized connections for both recreational and transportation purposes. Residents were asked during the *Genesee: Our County, Our Future* community survey to prioritize how they would spend transportation funds in their community if given the opportunity. Residents expressed strong interest in non-motorized trails; allocating on average 20% of all available funds towards non-motorized development.



Walkability and Accessibility

The Flint-Genesee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Walkability Action Team was selected as 1 of 10 metropolitan regions nationally to participate in the 2017 Walkability Action Institute, sponsored by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Decatur, GA. The team demonstrated the capacity and level of readiness to create equitable access to opportunities for physical activity. The diverse makeup of our team would allow us to effectively implement policy, system, and environmental changes that promote walkable communities, improve health outcomes, and create new opportunities for residents. Since attending the Action Institute, the Flint-Genesee Team collectively has sought opportunities to increase health awareness, improve access to core services, document pedestrian activity, define potential barriers, and provide safe places that support residents walking to improve health.

The launch of the Flint Bike Share system in 2017 is one step community agencies have taken to improve equitable access to core resources. The system now includes nine stations, twenty-four bicycles, and is expanding every year with over 750 active members and 2,200 trips generated to date. As the non-motorized network grows, the greater interest neighboring communities will have to add bike stations of their own.



To establish a baseline and continuing knowledge of non-motorized facility usage, GCMPC started a trail count/surveillance program with an online regional data dashboard. The first of its kind in the State of Michigan, Genesee County municipalities may borrow the trail counters to measure current activity, quantify their economic impact, and leverage future grant dollars to build new connections. Trail counts also help to decipher the characteristics of a trail by studying the time of day, which day of the week and what month of the year activity is recorded. Is the trail used solely for recreation, commuting to work, after-school athletics, or all of the above? In the first year alone GCMPC recorded over 49,000 trail users across fifteen communities. Plans are



underway to expand the program with the installation of permeant counters along each of the regional trail corridors including the Flint River Trail, Genesee Valley Trail, and the Silver Lake Road Trail corridors.

Health and Wellness

The built environment we live in has a profound impact on our overall wellness and health. According to a 2018 County Health Rankings report, Genesee County ranks 82nd out of 83 counties for overall health outcomes.¹ Our daily routine is influenced by this built environment and can unknowingly persuade us to make certain lifestyle decisions. Take for example eating healthy. Some neighborhoods in Genesee County have limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables. If fresh and affordable food options were located closer, one might be more inclined to provide healthier foods for their family. The same could be said about participating in physical activities. One might become more active and choose walking/biking as their primary mode of transportation or form of recreation if amenities such as non-motorized trails were more accessible. According to the Global Wellness Institute, wellness is *the active pursuit of activities, choices, and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health*.² If the non-motorized infrastructure is missing from communities, it becomes ever more difficult to consistently partake in an active lifestyle.

Community Workshop

On September 14th, 2018 GCMPC invited local officials, stakeholders, trail advocacy groups, and members of the public to participate in the discussion of Genesee County's regional non-motorized trail network and priorities. The objectives for the workshop were to learn about trail development since 2014, where new trails should locate, which communities need further

Source: ¹County Health Rankings, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2018

²Build Well to Live Well: Wellness Lifestyle Real Estate & Communities, Global Wellness Institute, pg. 53, 2018

assistance, and to reaffirm trail development priorities.

Trails come in different forms and serve multiple purposes. To jumpstart discussion, participants were asked in less than three words to describe what non-motorized trails mean to them. The audience found common ground on the word's *community, safety, recreation, health, and exercise.*



After discussing various active living initiatives and hearing from trail advocates in the room, the first group activity was to review the existing non-motorized network for the entire county. Participants were asked to place a yellow sticker where they would like to see a new trail connection, highlight in pink where there has been new development, and write a note near trail segments that need technical assistance.

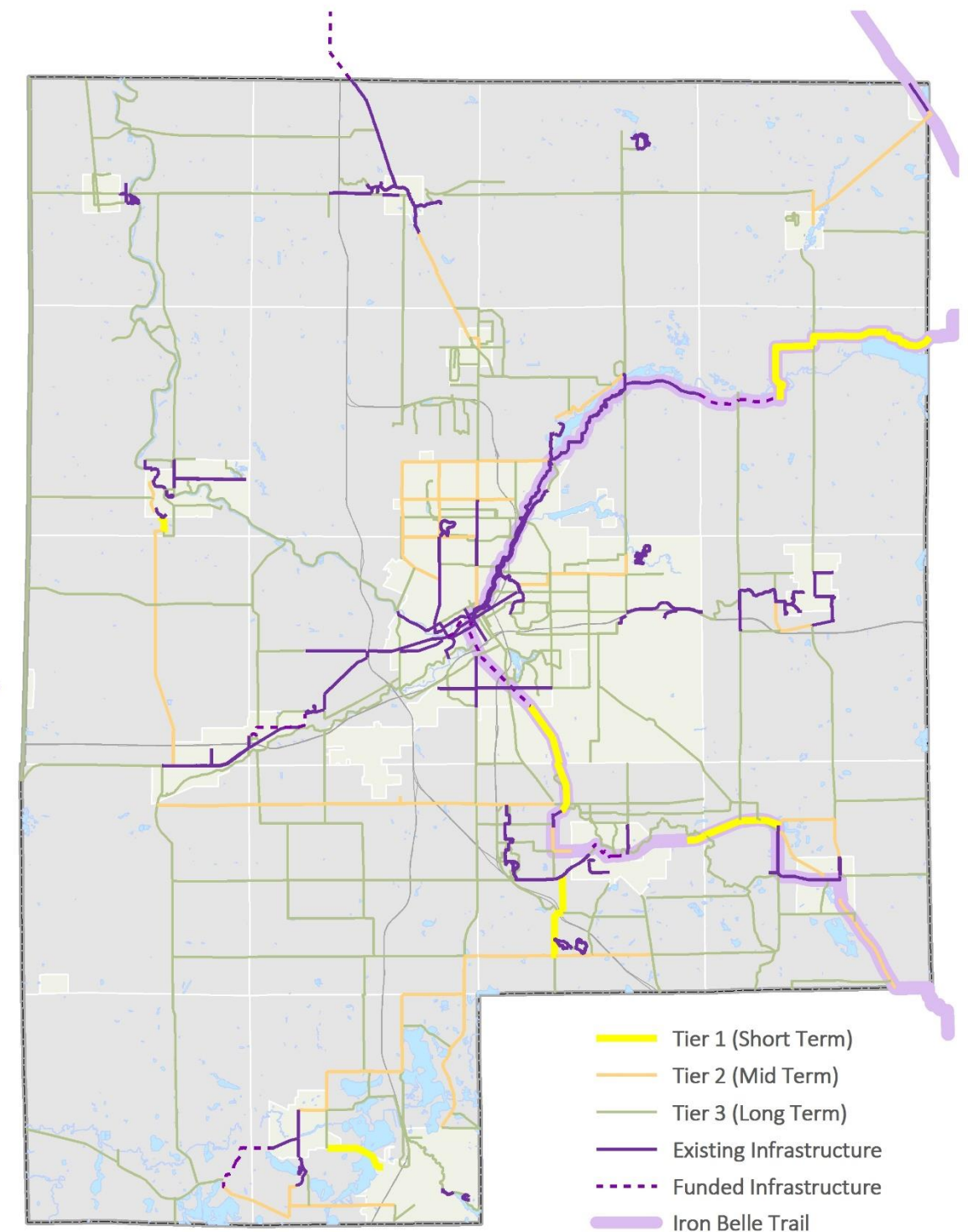
The second group activity was to help GCMPC reaffirm priorities through an interactive voting exercise. After the voting was complete, staff reviewed with the workshop attendees if they concur with priorities on each trail segment. Multiple trail corridors maintained or improved their ranking while only a few rankings were lowered.

Regional Non-Motorized Trail Priorities

The 2018 regional non-motorized trail priorities are developed not only from the community workshop voting exercise but from reviewing each community's approved Parks and Recreation Master Plans, and conversations with community leaders. The finalized regional priority map is an instrument for both Genesee County and each community to use in their efforts to secure local, state, and federal grant dollars to construct non-motorized trails. Tier 1 segments represent those which have strong public support and highest regional priority for development. Tier 2 segments represent those which also have public support for short term development. Tier 3 segments represent long term vision for trail development. No matter what a trail segment's ranking is, development can take place in any order. GCMPC staff will continue to provide technical assistance to local trail groups and communities with priority trail segments identified on the map with the goal of building an interconnected non-motorized system for both transportation and recreation.



Genesee County 2018 Trail Priorities





A water trail, or blueway, is a designated route on a navigable stretch of river, shoreline, or ocean that has been mapped out to create a positive outdoor recreation experience. The trails are typically organized by local volunteers with the help of public officials and private landowners, all of whom promote its proper use and maintenance. Genesee County is home to two major waterways that provide economical, recreational, and environmental benefits. The Flint River, located in the northern half of Genesee County, flows from east to west beginning in Lapeer County and making its way to the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge in Saginaw County. The Shiawassee River, located in the southern third of Genesee County, flows east to west from Oakland County, on its way to Shiawassee County. Each water trail includes several established public access points that accommodate a diversity of trip lengths, levels of difficulty, and provide access to a variety of opportunities. Furthermore, these water trails are supported by community-based organizations and citizen-led groups that share common interests towards promoting conservation, stewardship, and recreational access. Organizations include Friends of the Shiawassee, Headwaters Trails Inc., Keepers of the Shiawassee, Southern Lakes Parks and Recreation, Genesee County Parks and

Recreation, Flint River Paddlers, Flint River Corridor Alliance, and the Flint River Watershed Coalition.

Importance of Water Trails

Water trails are powerful economic drivers for local communities, generating new business and an increase in outdoor recreation tourism. According to the Outdoor Industry Association 2018 Economy Report, residents of Michigan's 5th Congressional District (which includes Genesee County) spend approximately \$1.4 billion on outdoor recreation each year, thanks in part to our abundance of lakes, streams and shoreline. Water trails are rooted in the fabric of many communities. They foster interactive and educational experiences by providing information on the community's past via historical markers and informative signs. As water trails attract more users of local waterways, they also increase awareness of the natural beauty and importance of conservation efforts and water quality. While on the water overall health is improved including reducing stress, weight loss, and muscle toning.



**\$1.4 Billion Spent
Each Year**

Water Trail Projects Underway

Community partners from both the Flint and Shiawassee Rivers submitted applications to the National Park Service for their consideration to be added as National Water Trails in 2017. Although decisions have yet to be finalized, progress to improve these water trails is on-going. In addition to numerous access site improvements along both water trails, a paddler guide is being developed for the entire Flint River Water Trail which will provide the public with float times, launch locations, and overall trail character. Most recently, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) selected both the Shiawassee River and the Flint River as two of the first eight state-designated water trails.

Each of these water trails scored well in the areas of offering clear information for users, boasting broad community support, providing a quality trail experience, and having a water trail best management plan in place. As a result of the statewide designation and national designation to

follow, we can expect continued economic growth in the communities that surround these water trails. Up to date information is available at www.gcmprc.org/non-motorized.

Genesee County Water Trails

