User Survey of the Farmington River Trail

June 2013

Prepared by the Central Connecticut Regional Planning Agency for the Town of Burlington
Executive Summary

Prior to reconstructing part of the Farmington River Trail\(^1\) in Burlington, the Central Connecticut Regional Planning Agency (CCRPA)\(^2\) conducted a short study to better understand trail use. The construction will be funded with 80% federal\(^3\) and 20% local funding; a public information meeting about the project will be held. CCRPA installed automatic pedestrian/cyclist counters on the trail and surveyed trail users regarding potential improvements.

CCRPA counted trail users from May 8\(^{th}\) to June 9\(^{th}\). Counters were installed at two locations near the intersection of Route 4 and Route 179: one north of the parking lot, and one south of the parking lot. These counters record passersby. (Persons that pass by the counter twice in one day are counted twice.)

The counters recorded a daily average 293 uses. Using standard adjustment factors, this extrapolates to 99,000 trail uses annually. Daily trail activity peaks around noon, with the greatest total daily use on weekends. See the Trail Counter section and appendices for additional data.

CCRPA employees surveyed 155 trail users during the same period as the counts. Users were asked where they were visiting from, if they had gone or were going to local businesses, what recreational activities they were taking part in, and their opinions of the trail. Respondents largely arrived by car and came from over thirty different towns. Two-thirds of respondents said they planned to visit local businesses. Trail users have a general positive perception of the trail. Over a quarter of total comments cited the tree roots and deterioration of the trail as a concern. See the Trail Survey section and appendices for additional data.

The intent of this report is to provide some usage statistics and user feedback prior to the public information meeting for the reconstruction of the Burlington section of the Farmington River Trail.

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1 See Farmington Valley Trails Council website (www.fvgreenway.org) for local trail system information.
2 Burlington is a member of CCRPA, which is the federally-designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the region responsible for regional coordination of transportation and land-use planning.
3 The region receives an allocation (some programs annually) of federal transportation money through the Transportation Alternatives Program and Surface Transportation Program.
Trail Counters

Counter Locations
Three TRAFx Infrared Trail Counters were installed along the trail from May 8th to June 9th. The first counter was adjacent to the parking lot at the intersection of Route 4 and Route 179. The second counter was north of the first counter. The third counter malfunctioned and did not provide data. Figure 1 illustrates these locations.

How the Counters Work
The counters record every time a hot object, such as a pedestrian or bicyclist, passes in front of the counter. Each recording includes a date and time stamp. The counters are relatively accurate but may under- or overcount users on occasion (e.g., persons walking side-by-side may be counted once; wildlife may also be counted.)

Note that the counters record the number of “uses” rather than unique “users.” For example, a trail user may pass the counter once when leaving his car and a second time when returning to it. This user would be counted twice.

Count Statistics
Over the period from May 8th to June 9th, Counter 1 recorded 9,663 total uses. Counter 2 recorded 8,646 total uses. This report will primarily describe the results of the first location counter, though data for both counters can be found in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

Daily trail use appears to vary day-by-day and is affected by weather conditions. Trail use is higher on weekends. May 27th (Memorial Day) was the busiest with 1,032 uses recorded by Counter 1. The second highest count was on June 9th (a Sunday) with 1,030 uses. June 7th, when Tropical Storm Andrea passed by, recorded the least trail use with 16 uses. During the 33-day study period, there were 16 sunny days and 17 days that may have been affected by weather ranging from cloudy overcast to thunderstorms. The average over the total time period is 293 uses per day (including weekdays, weekends, and days with bad weather). Figure 2 shows the daily trail uses recorded from May 8th to June 9th.
Figure 2: Observed trail uses per day from May 8th to June 9th

![Observed trail uses per day from May 8th to June 9th](image)

*Weekdays are green, with weekends dark blue, and weekday holidays in light blue.*

From an hourly perspective, the majority of trail activity takes place from sunrise to sunset. The busiest hours of the trail are from 10 AM to 2 PM, with 1 PM to 2 PM being the peak hour. On the busiest trail day, May 27th, there were 177 trail uses between 1 PM to 2 PM. On average, there are 34 uses during the peak hour. Figure 3 is the total number of users by hour over the entire study period. For example, a total of 1,133 uses were recorded from 1 PM to 2 PM from May 8th to June 9th.

Figure 3: Total trail uses by time recorded across all days from May 8th to June 9th

![Total trail uses by time recorded across all days from May 8th to June 9th](image)

The National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project has developed a method to estimate annual trail usage from sample counts. This method uses one week of data and multiplies it by a monthly adjust-
ment factor (derived from analysis of trail counts from across the country). Following their method (calculations shown in Appendix 3), the Burlington section of the Farmington River Trail receives over 99,000 uses annually. The count for this location last year in 2012 estimated 92,000 annual uses. Counts at the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail show 141,000 annual uses in Burlington and 418,000 annual uses in Southington. The New England Trail at the Ragged Mountain trailhead in Berlin sees 29,000 annual uses.

User Survey
Trail users were also surveyed in person. CCRPA employees spent a combined 25 hours total on the trail asking users about how they use the trail, how they arrive at the trail, where they come from, if they are visiting any local businesses, what they like and dislike about the trail, and any improvements they would like to see. Surveys took place at two locations on the trail: at the main parking lot in Burlington and along the trail toward Collinsville. Surveys were conducted during the morning and afternoon throughout the week as well as the weekends. Persons who preferred to take the survey at another time were given the option of a mail-in postcard survey. A total of 151 responses to the survey were collected in person, and 4 mail-in responses were also received.

A sample of the post-card survey can be found in Appendix 4. Survey results can be found in Appendix 5.

Origin of Trail Users
Most trail users are from Burlington and surrounding communities. The top five are Burlington (13%), Bristol (12%), Canton (11%), Avon (10%), and Farmington (6%). Visitors reported coming from 34 towns, including one trail user from Massachusetts and another from New York.

Mode of Arrival
When asked how users arrived at the trail, driving (93%) was the highest response, followed by biking (6%) and walking (1%).

Uses & Activity
The most popular recreational activity is walking (49%). Biking (30%) and running (12%) follow. Smaller percentages of users responded with fishing (6%), kayaking (1%), swimming (1%), and rollerblading (<1%).

Visiting Local Businesses
One-third of surveyed users did not plan to visit local businesses. However, many trail users indicated that had visited or would visit Collinsville (43% of all persons surveyed) during their trip. Unionville (8%), Farmington (7%), Burlington (4%) followed, with smaller percentages for other destinations. Most of those who had gone to or were going to Collinsville volunteered that they would visit LaSalle’s Market.
Likes / Dislikes / Improvements

The survey also asked users about their likes and dislikes based on their experiences on the trail.

Survey respondents indicated that the qualities of the trail they most appreciated were its proximity to the river, the ‘flatness’ of the trail, and the scenery of the area. Many people mentioned the safety provided by the trail in comparison to walking or biking on a road. Twelve frequently-mentioned terms, or ‘buzzwords’, appeared in responses a total of 158 times.

Substantially fewer users gave negative comments about the trail. The most common dislike voiced by trail users was the condition of the trail, specifically the tree roots and bumps in the Burlington section. A small percentage mentioned finding garbage along the trail, as well as garbage on the paths leading down to the river and on the river banks. Analyzing the responses, nine buzzwords appeared a total of 107 times.

The survey also asked trail users what improvements, if any, they would like to see on the trail. Almost a third (34%) of respondents said the trail did not need any improvements. Although 74% of trail users disliked the deteriorated condition of the trail caused by the tree roots, only 27% mentioned fixing the paths as an improvement. (Some responses may not have identified fixing the path as an improvement since they had already mentioned it as a dislike.) After trail repairs, the next most mentioned improvement (25%) was for restrooms and water fountains to assist users taking long walks or bike rides. Others commented that installation of waste receptacles would reduce the amount of litter on the trail. A smaller number of trail users suggested mileage markers and emergency call boxes on the trail.

In general, the surveyed trail users had positive things to say about the trail. Many trail users mentioned it was an asset to the area and would like to see future improvements to keep the trail in good condition.