



# Economic Impact of the Swamp Rabbit Trail

## Changes in Business Traffic and New Business Potentials

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### Abstract

The purpose of this project was to determine the impact of the Swamp Rabbit Trail on local businesses in the Travelers Rest area. Phone and face-to-face interviews with business owners and trail users gave insight into the types of businesses most frequented by cyclists and walkers. We found that the businesses cited in the Swamp Rabbit brochure are supporters of the trail and have had increases in sales because of walk-in business. Also, many trail users are generally positive about the trail and agree that it has increased their potential to spend money in Travelers Rest. Anecdotal evidence from trail users indicate that more water fountains, restrooms, and a nice hot dog stand would be well received additions to the trail.



### I. Introduction

The Swamp Rabbit Trail is an ongoing project in Greenville County that converted an unused rail line into a multiuse facility that connects downtown Greenville to Travelers Rest. The trail promotes health and alternative forms of transportation by encouraging people to ride bikes, walk, or run in an environment protected from motor vehicles. In the city of Travelers Rest, a project to revitalize downtown occurred in conjunction with the opening of the trail. This has led to many new businesses in downtown and hopefully increased revenue for the city. Unfortunately, the economic downturn occurred during this time as well, but we were still interested in the perspectives of trail users and business owners. We used interviews to determine the impact that the trail has had on small businesses in Travelers Rest to see if the trail has been an asset to the city.



### II. Literature Review

There have been many economic studies done on trail projects on the overall impact of the trail for tourism and the local economy. The consensus is that trails are good for business and attract people to the area and give them a reason to return. The trails are also incentives for people who work near the trail to exercise and get outside more often. Few resources are available outlining gaps in businesses on the trail or gaps in access points, as the access points are planned when the trail is built. Most studies focus on the money currently being spent instead of the potential for new businesses catering to trail users (Tomes, 2009). Many of the studies used surveys to identify the opinions of both trail users and adjacent property owners and business owners (Vogt, 2002). This includes asking trail users how much money they spend per trip and assessing business owners' opinions of how the trail has affected business activity (Tomes, 2009; Greer, 2001). The surveys also focused on how much influence and support the businesses had with the trail development (Greer, 2001). Other studies, however, looked at property values and how they have changed since the construction of community trails (Karadeniz, 2008). This research will address the gaps in the literature that do not specifically look at resources available to trail users and where more retail and food service opportunities are needed. The research will also combine several of the individual approaches outlined in the studies to try to assess an overall economic impact.

### Results from Businesses within 500 ft. of Swamp Rabbit Trail

Business Name	Surveyed	Years open	Type of Business	Comments
TD's Express Mart	Yes	10 years	Convenience store	Gatorade and water sales have increased
BP Station	Yes	40+ years	Convenience store	Drinks, energy bars, and snacks have increased, more business on weekends
TR Oriental	Yes	12 years	Restaurant	
Lunsford Fuel Country Store	No		Retail	Not Surveyed
The Flop Shop	No		Retail	Not Surveyed
Loftis Printing	Yes	41 years	Printing	Customers have complained about lack of parking and yielding to bikers on trail
Mclesky-Todd Pharmacy/True Value	No		Convenience store and Hardware store	Not Surveyed
All About Me	No		Retail	Not Surveyed
Leopard Forest Café	Yes	7 years; New location since 2010	Restaurant	Added rear curb appeal to increase direct traffic from trail, also the trail had some weight in moving closer to trail
Martha's Hardware	No		Retail	Not Surveyed
William's Hardware Cafe	Yes	Dec. 2008	Restaurant	During 2 month trail closure, lost \$25,000 worth of business
RS Gas Station	Yes	"Forever?"	Convenience store	Across busy road from trail, customers are primarily regulars
Petee's Good Food	No		Restaurant	Not Surveyed
Sunrft Adventures	Yes	31 years	Retail	Sales up 6% from last year, feels that trail doesn't allow for easy enough access to store
Spring Park Driving Range	No		Driving range	Not Surveyed

### III. Methodology

In order to delineate the Swamp Rabbit Trail, we took data from Greenville County GIS that included the railway that is now the trail. The research on the city of Travelers Rest because of the high density of trail friendly businesses in the downtown area. We then created a 500ft buffer in ArcGIS around the trail and clipped the tax parcel layer from the county. This buffer distance was selected because it included businesses that were both visible and accessible to trail users. From this tax parcel layer land parcels were then selected with the land use codes listed as 510 (Convenience Store), 513 (Supermarket), 520 (Retail/General), or 620 (Restaurant/Cafeteria). Because the businesses can go in and out of business, we then verified the results on foot. Businesses were removed that were improperly listed (or added in the case of Sunrft Adventures), are no longer in business, or not applicable to a trail user (such as an electrical supply company). Once a list of businesses that catered to trail users was compiled, we then randomly selected 8 out of the 15 using the random number generator in Excel. Business owners or managers were then surveyed to assess their business' impact from the Swamp Rabbit Trail. In order to determine if trail users really spend money in local businesses while on the trail, we went to the trail to conduct interviews and then we compiled the data into a chart.

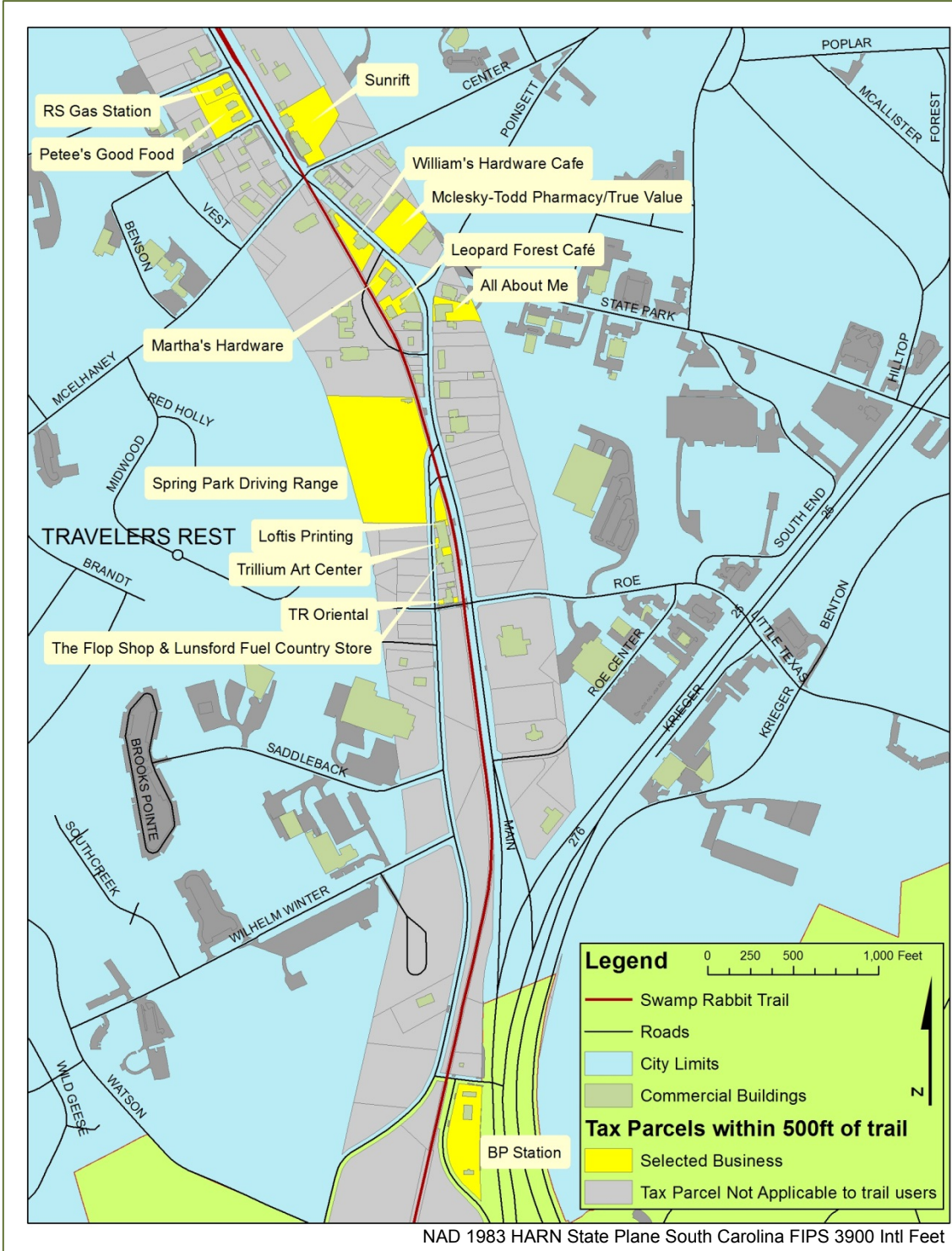


Interviewing on the trail in downtown Travelers Rest

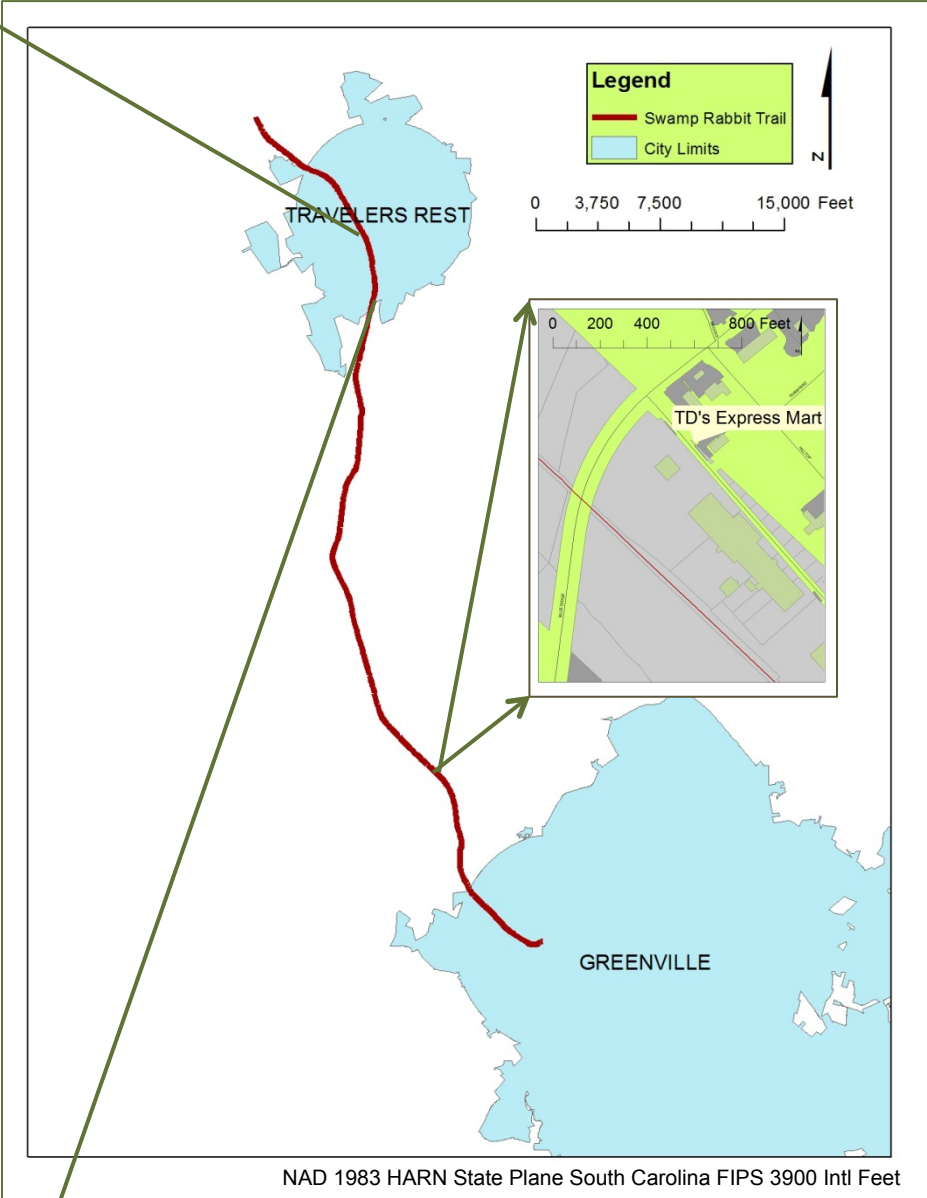
### IV. Results and Discussion

#### Map of Businesses

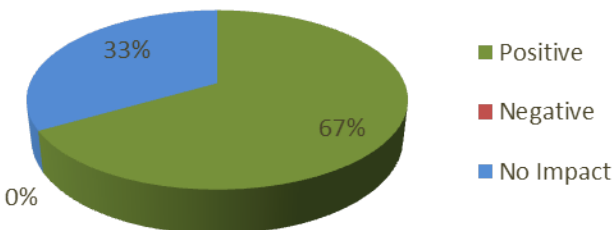
In TR, useful to trail users



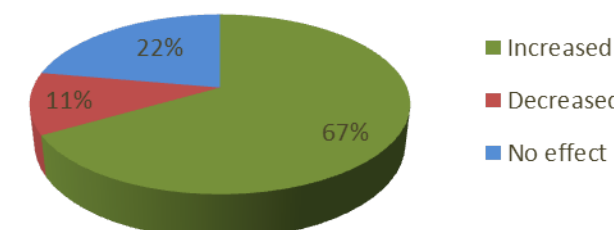
#### Extent of Swamp Rabbit Trail



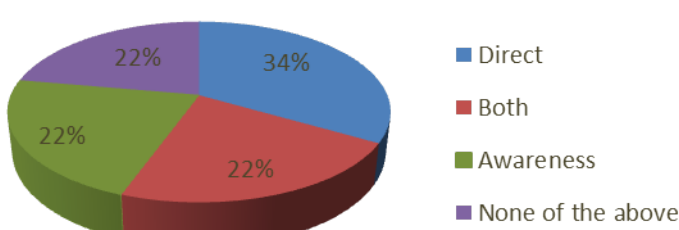
#### Projected Impact over Next 5 Years



#### Swamp Rabbit's Effect on Business Activity Since its Construction



#### Is the change in business activity due to direct traffic from the trail, or increased awareness of the business?



### V. Conclusion

Our results conclude that while not everyone spends money while on the trail, having such a corridor going through downtown Travelers Rest has brought new people to the area and increased business traffic. There are now more opportunities for trail-friendly businesses and the area will only get more popular as the trail continues to grow. Most businesses are happy with the trail, as it brings many more customers and creates a larger sense of community. The only negative responses we heard were from businesses concerned with parking and those upset that their voices were not heard during the construction phases.

### V.I. Future Research

Research should continue in this area to concretely quantify the impact of trails on small businesses near the trail. This can help when other communities are looking into similar projects. Also, continuing to interview trail users will make the survey data less anecdotal and more statistically significant as well as help to make the trail more user friendly. We had originally intended to use tax revenue data, but the information was only available to 2008, which precedes the opening of the trail.

### VIII. Acknowledgements

Thanks Mike Winiski, Amélie Davis, and all those who responded to the survey!

### VII. References

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