

While we may have a fair assortment of trails in our region, we are far short of what should be our goal, a connected and maintained system of trails for all to enjoy. For a community that has embraced the outdoors as a key component of our brand, we have neglected our trails and the many advantages they bring for far too long. There are so many benefits that come from an integrated, connected and maintained trail system that we must address this important need for many reasons.

Business Impacts: If we are to continue on our quest to become a college town, with a vibrant downtown and a knowledge based economy driven by technology jobs, we must be pedestrian and bike friendly. The ability to walk or bike to work and other activities greatly improves our overall attractiveness to the talent we need in the years ahead. Additionally, a world class trails system attracts visitors and trail friendly events. In fact, according to *Pathways to Prosperity* 2005, the economic contribution of visitors far exceed the original public investment in the trails.

Quality of Life Impacts: To enjoy a community like ours, with all the great events, attractions and amazing weather, we want to be outdoors, biking or walking from one part of our community to another. There is plenty of research to indicate that property owners adjacent to trails realize the convenience, access to recreation and connection to the natural environment associated with trails. A survey in Nebraska reported that 68% of the respondents indicated that the trails had a positive impact on their community.

Public Health Impacts: Given the increased emphasis on walking and physical activity for health, what better way to get ones daily exercise or “steps” in, than to have some quality time on a trail, walking or biking, rather than driving and parking to get somewhere. In fact, being near a trail encourages exercise. 60% of trail users report they exercise more regularly and 23% indicate that they did not get regular exercise in before they started using trails.

We have much room for improvement! There are many great things being done by volunteers in the area along with maybe a dozen poorly funded non-profits addressing components of our trails system. There is also the newly formed Eastern Sierra Trails Coalition, attempting to coordinate the efforts of more than 20 agencies, non-profits and trail advocates to encourage collaboration in an effort to help connect the region. However, we need a plan and funding to make it happen. As we work to becoming the next great place to live, work and play, we must develop the public and private partnerships that will adequately invest in the trails, bikeways and pedestrian friendly streets that will give us the pathway we need to get there.

