



RECREATIONAL TRAILS



FACT SHEET No. 9

SEPTEMBER 2005

Background

South Australia has an extensive network of recreational trails¹ covering a total distance of more than 6,000 kilometres. The network encompasses locations throughout the state, including the Adelaide metropolitan area, regional centres, the Mount Lofty and Flinders Ranges, coastlines, forests, national parks, wine districts and the outback.

This fact sheet gives an overview of the findings of the Recreational Trails Research Project, the largest study of its type undertaken to date in South Australia. The Office for Recreation and Sport, in partnership with the South Australian Tourism Commission and the Department for Transport and Urban

Planning commissioned the research in response to a lack of available data on trail users, and a need to understand the value of trails to individuals and the communities they traverse.

Project scope

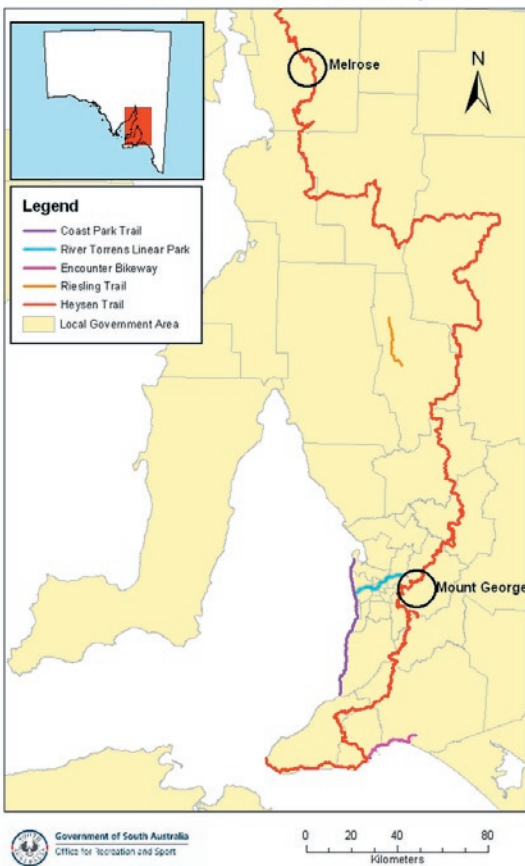
Given the vast extent of the trails network in South Australia, it was not feasible to include all trails in the research. Instead the discrete regions, trails and survey points included were selected to capture a broad cross-section of users, activity patterns and trail types within the study; that is, to maximise the likelihood that the sample would be reasonably representative of trail users in South Australia.

The research incorporated the following locations:

River Torrens Linear Park Trail

The River Torrens Linear Park Trail (RTLTP) traverses the Adelaide metropolitan area from Athelstone in the east to West Beach on the metropolitan coastline. The trail passes through the Adelaide city centre, following the course of the River Torrens. The RTLTP trail caters predominantly for walkers and cyclists and incorporates facilities such as playgrounds and picnic areas. It also serves as a transport corridor for pedestrians and cyclists.

Trails Covered in the Study



Coast Park Trail

The Coast Park Trail provides a publicly accessible linear walking and cycling trail network through the Coast Park which, on completion, will span the length of the Adelaide metropolitan coastline. The trail extends from Sellicks Beach in the south to North Haven in the north and meets the River Torrens Linear Park at West Beach.

¹ A recreational trail for the purposes of this study was defined as a corridor, route or pathway that has strong linkages with the natural environment, open space networks and cultural heritage. The study focused on land based recreational trails designed predominantly for walking and/or cycling. Other activities such as running, skating and the use of small wheel vehicles were also considered. Horse trails were excluded.

Heysen Trail (Mt George² section)

The Heysen Trail is the longest walking trail in South Australia, extending 1200km from the Flinders Ranges in the mid-north of the state to Cape Jervis in the south. The trail is of national significance, and is arguably the most well known of all South Australian walking trails. Some of the most popular sections run through the Adelaide Hills, including the segment traversing the Mt George reserve near the township of Bridgewater.

Encounter Bikeway

The Encounter Bikeway is located on the Fleurieu Peninsula approximately one hour by car from Adelaide. It is an on-road and shared path facility for walkers and cyclists, linking the coastal towns of Victor Harbor, Port Elliot and Goolwa. It has a distance of approximately 22 kilometres.

The Riesling Trail

The 27km long Riesling Trail is located in the Clare and Gilbert Valley wine region, an area popular with interstate and overseas tourists. It is easily accessible from the Adelaide metropolitan area, and is a popular destination for day and weekend visits. The trail provides walking and cycling access to many wineries and visitor attractions in the region.

The Mawson and Heysen Trails (Melrose)

The Mawson Trail is a cycling trail running from the Adelaide CBD to Blinman in the Flinders Ranges, a distance of nearly 900km. The trail was developed in the early 1990's in conjunction with cycling groups to meet a demand for cycle touring opportunities. The Mawson Trail runs in parallel with the Heysen Trail in the Melrose region.

Whilst it was considered important to examine the impacts of trails in remote regions as part of the study, the distance and location of the trail meant that on-site surveys were not feasible. However, consultation with businesses in the town of Melrose were undertaken to assess likely economic impacts of the trails network in less heavily populated areas.

Study objectives

The Recreational Trails Research Project was seen as the first stage in the development of local research and evaluation systems to improve understanding of the economic, social and environmental benefits of trails to the state. The broad aims were to collect data to assist with the promotion, maintenance and ongoing management of the existing trails network, and to inform decisions on the development of new trails or sections. The study was also seen as an important advocacy tool to communicate the benefits of trails to the wider community.

More specifically, the objectives of the research were to:

- > develop a profile of trail users, in respect to demographic and residential characteristics, and trail usage patterns;
- > identify social and health benefits associated with the use of trails;
- > examine user attitudes towards the trails experience; and
- > assess the economic impact of trails in selected locations.

² Mt George was the only location on the Heysen Trail in which users were surveyed for the study. The results obtained could therefore be considered typical of trails within the populated areas of the Adelaide Hills, but would not be representative of the more remote sections of the Heysen Trail.

Methodology

The study consisted of both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, including:

- > surveys of trail users across various locations to identify the social and health impacts of trail-based activities;
- > economic modelling to assess the impact of the Riesling Trail in the Clare and Gilbert Valley region; and
- > focus groups and in-depth interviews to obtain information from stakeholders regarding perceptions of the economic impacts of trails on businesses in the Clare Valley, Melrose and selected retail outlets in the metropolitan area.

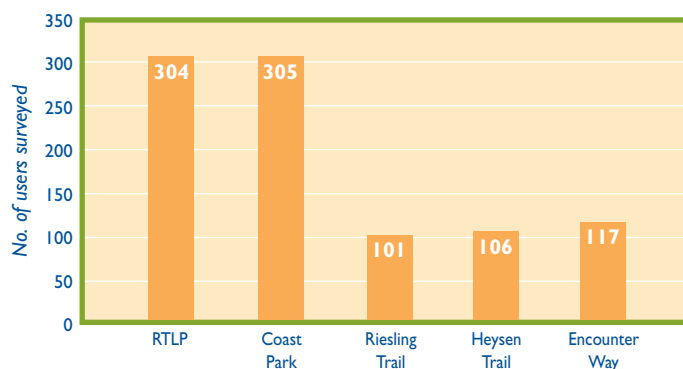
Surveys were conducted on-site with trail users aged 14 years and over, by means of a purpose-designed questionnaire. Fieldwork for the study was conducted between March and May 2004. With the exception of the Heysen Trail, in which all user data were collected at the same location, sampling took place at several intercept points on each trail, and was spread across various times and days of the week.

Results

Trail users surveyed

In total, 933 trail users were interviewed for the study. The number of responses gathered on each trail is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Number of users surveyed by trail

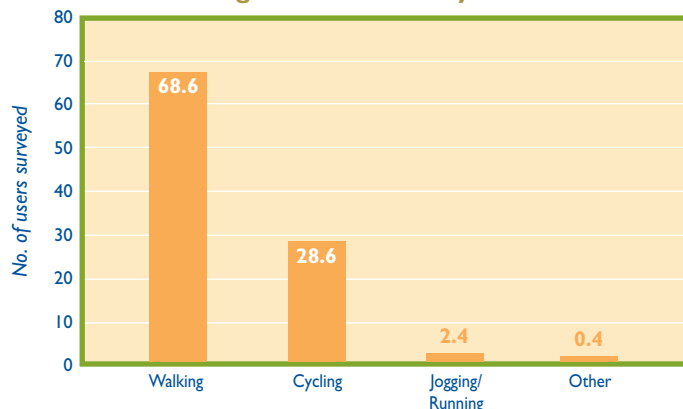


Trail user profile

Mode of use

Figure 2 shows that the majority of trail users who participated in the survey were either walkers (68.6%) or cyclists (28.6%).

Figure 2. Trail use by mode

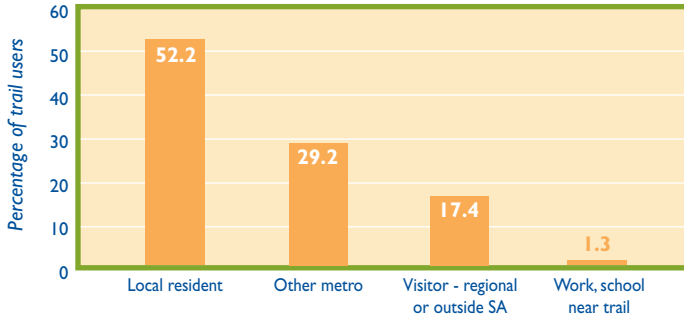


(Note: The 'other' category included gophers and small-wheeled vehicles such as scooters and skateboards).

Residential status

More than half (52%) of those surveyed described themselves as residents in close proximity to the trail they were using (see Figure 3), with 47% residing outside the immediate catchment area. Only a very small percentage (1%) worked or attended an educational institution close to the trail they were using.

Figure 3. Residential characteristics of trail users

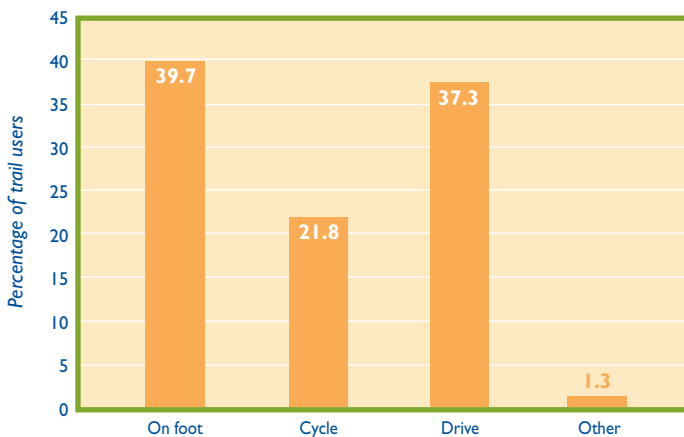


Not surprisingly, the proportion of users who were local residents varied considerably by trail. When analysed separately, the survey results showed that the percentage ranged from 65% on the Heysen Trail (Mt George) to only 13% on the Riesling Trail. The proportion of local residents using the other trails in the study was 63% for the Coast Park, 56% for the River Torrens Linear Park and 38% for the Encounter Bikeway.

Mode of access to trail

As shown in Figure 4, the majority of users either accessed the trail on foot (40%) or by car (37%). A further 22% cycled to the trail on which they were surveyed. Only a very small proportion (1%) used other means of access, such as public transport.

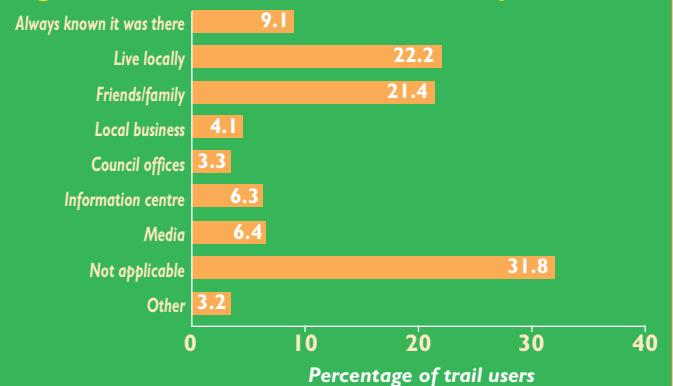
Figure 4. Mode of access to trail



Information needs

The trails network in South Australia is promoted through a range of sources, including printed maps and brochures distributed through tourism information centres, businesses and council offices, and on-line facilities such as the Trails SA website. However, almost one third of survey respondents (32%) indicated they had not accessed any information about the trail they were using (see Figure 5). Of those who had sought trail-related information, the majority had done so from informal sources such as friends and family (21%), or through their knowledge of the local area (22%). Comparatively few users had obtained material from council offices (3%), local businesses (4%) or information centres (6%). Only 0.6% of trail users who participated in the survey reported obtaining information from the internet (included in the 'other' category as shown in the graph).

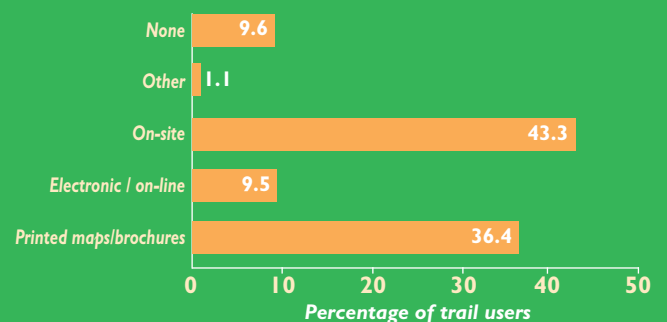
Figure 5. Information sources accessed by trail users



(Note: percentages in the graph total to more than 100%, as some respondents listed more than one source of information).

The survey included a question asking users to indicate the type of information they would prefer to access in relation to trails (see Figure 6). The results showed that there was a clear preference for on-site (43%), or printed information such as maps and brochures (36%). It is interesting to note that the percentage of users expressing a preference for on-line information (10%) was much higher than the proportion who had actually used this source (0.6%).

Figure 6. Type of trail-related information preferred by users



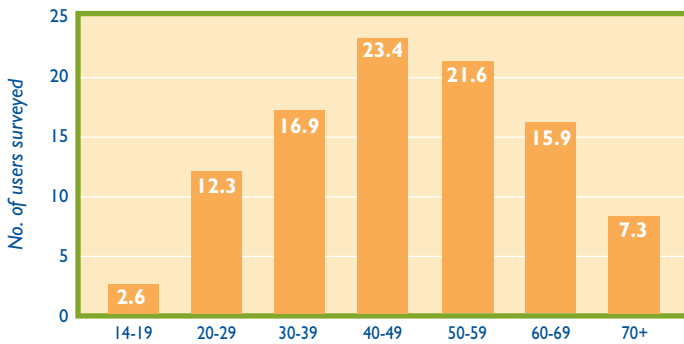
Users of the Riesling Trail were most likely to prefer printed maps and brochures (53% of users on this trail), while those surveyed on the Encounter Bikeway (57%) and Coast Park Trail (51%) showed a stronger preference for on-site information compared to users of the other trails in the study.

Demographic profile of trail users

Gender and age

The research suggested that trails were accessed equally by men and women. The survey sample consisted of 465 males (49.8% of the total) and 468 females (50.2%). Although 45% of survey respondents were aged between 40 and 59 years, in general, trail use was also spread across a range of age groups (see Figure 7).

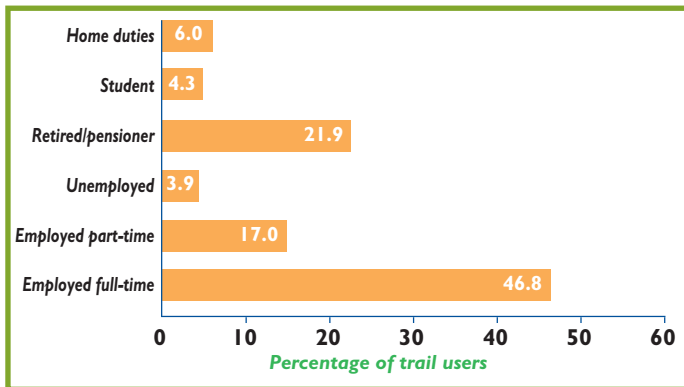
Figure 7. Age distribution of trail users



Employment status

A profile of respondents by employment status is shown in Figure 8. Most trail users who participated in the research were in either full or part-time employment (64%), with around one in five (22%) retired or in receipt of a pension. Only a small percentage were students (4%), persons engaged in home duties (6%) or unemployed (4%).

Figure 8. Employment status of trail users

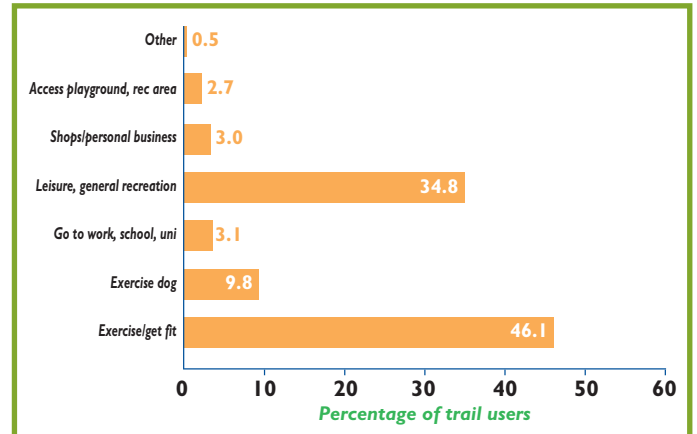


Trail usage patterns

Main reason for using the trail

Almost half of all survey respondents (46%) gave 'fitness or exercise' as their primary reason for using the trail (see Figure 9). An additional 35% listed leisure or general recreation as the main purpose of their activity. Only a relatively small proportion were using the trail primarily to access other locations such as playgrounds or recreational areas (3%), shops (3%), and work or educational institutions (3%).

Figure 9. Main reason for using trail

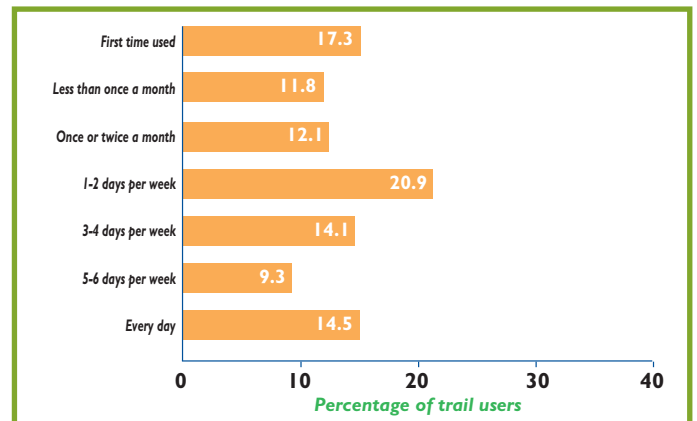


Again, some clear differences in the main reason for use emerged by trail. The Coast Park and River Torrens Linear Park Trails had the highest rate of use for fitness or exercise (53% and 52% respectively). In keeping with its use as a commuter corridor, the River Torrens Linear Park Trail also had the largest proportion of users whose main reason for being on the trail was to get to work, school or university (9%). Almost three quarters of users surveyed on the Riesling Trail (74%) indicated that the primary purpose of their activity on the trail was leisure or general recreation.

Frequency of use

A substantial proportion of respondents (38%) were frequent trail users, having used the trail on which they were surveyed on three or more days per week in the last month (see Figure 10). The percentage of those who were using a particular trail for the first time (17%) was also relatively high. Less frequent users (2 days per week or less) accounted for around 45% of survey participants.

Figure 10. Frequency of trail use within the last month

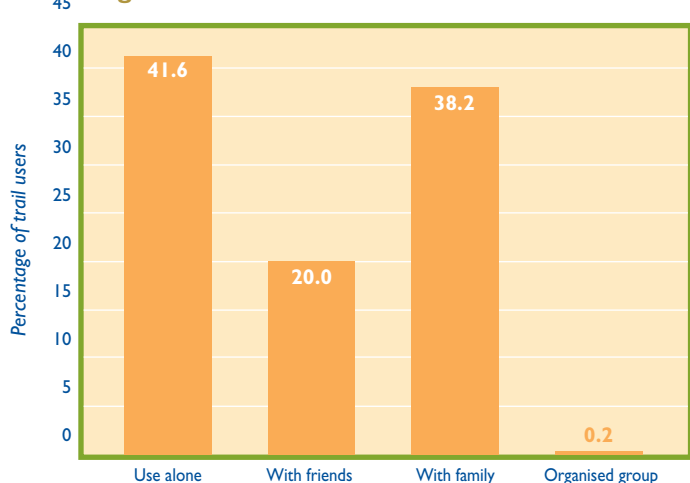


In keeping with the high rate of respondents who were visitors to the Clare and Gilbert Valley region, the Riesling Trail had the highest rate of users accessing the trail for the first time (64%), while those surveyed on the River Torrens Linear Park (56%) were most likely to have used the trail three times a week or more in the previous month.

Trail use as an individual or social experience

In total, 58% of those surveyed were using trails in company with either family members or friends, compared with 42% who were alone (see Figure 11). Only a very small number were part of an organised group (0.2%).

Figure 11. Social versus individual use of trails



Analysis by trail showed that there were clear differences in usage between urban and non-urban trails, in respect to whether the activity was a solitary or social experience for the user. The proportion of persons using trails alone ranged from more than half on the River Torrens Linear Park (56%) and Coast Park Trails (52%) to only 14% on the Riesling and Heysen Trails (Mt George).

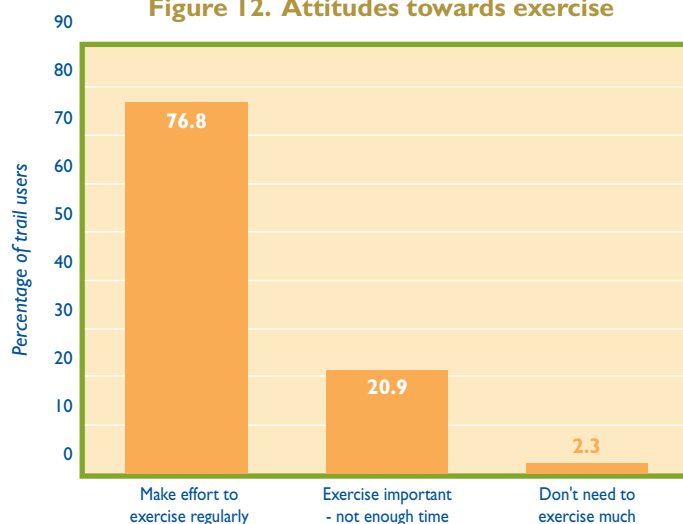
Health impacts of trails

One of the key aims of the study was to examine health benefits associated with trail use, and to increase understanding of the value placed on trails by the individuals who use them. The questionnaire included items focusing on both direct benefits through physical activity levels associated with trail use, and indirect benefits such as impacts on general well-being.

Attitudes of trail users to exercise

Those who responded to the survey were asked about their general attitude towards exercise, and whether they made an effort to participate in physical activity on a regular basis. As illustrated in Figure 12, trail users tended to be people with a high level of awareness of the benefits of physical activity, and who either made an effort to exercise regularly (77% of respondents), or considered exercise important (21%). Only a very small proportion (2%) considered that they didn't need to exercise much.

Figure 12. Attitudes towards exercise

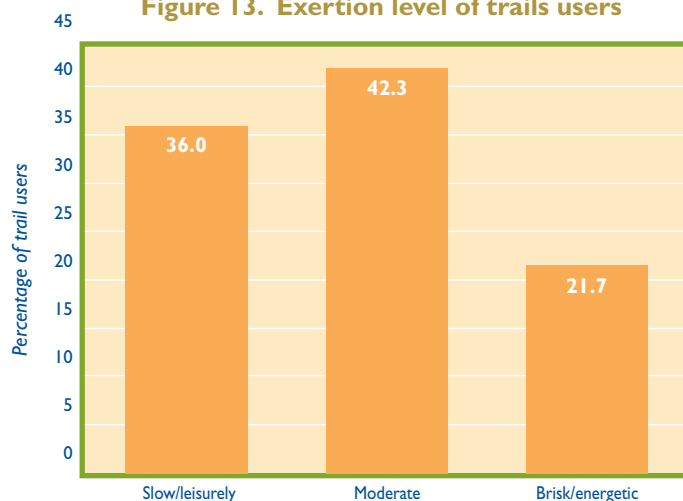


Exertion levels of trail users

Survey respondents were also asked to provide a simple self-report measure of their level of exertion when using the trail, and to indicate how long they spent engaged in the activity. This information enabled an estimation of the proportion of users likely to be gaining direct physical health benefits from their activity on the trail.

Figure 13 shows that the majority of trail-based activity was reported as being undertaken at either a moderate or brisk level of exertion (64% of respondents in total). This finding is consistent with the fact that, including those who were exercising a dog, the most common reason for using trails was for fitness or exercise. Around one in three users (36%) assessed their activity as slow or leisurely.

Figure 13. Exertion level of trails users

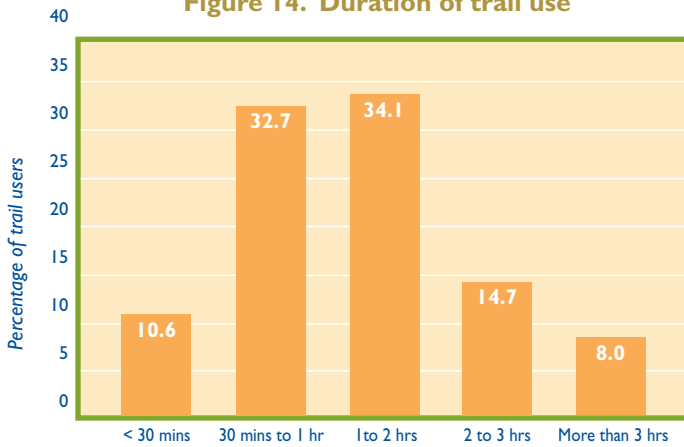


Users surveyed on the River Torrens Linear Park Trail were most likely to be undertaking their activity at a brisk or energetic pace. Conversely, the Heysen Trail (Mt George) and Encounter Bikeway had the highest proportion of users who described their pace as slow/leisurely (44%).

Time spent using the trail

Almost 90% of respondents were using the trail for longer than 30 minutes, with over half (57%) spending more than one hour on the trail when surveyed (see Figure 14). A further 23% were using the trail for two hours or more.

Figure 14. Duration of trail use

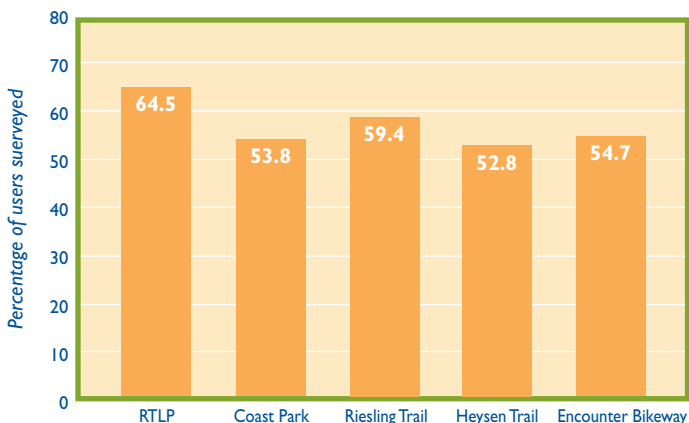


Assessment of health benefits

When the self-report data on exertion levels were combined with information on time spent on the trail, the results indicated that overall, 58% of users were likely to be gaining direct physical health benefits from their activity. The calculation was based on the percentage of respondents who spent 30 minutes or more on the trail, at either a moderate or brisk pace.

Figure 15 shows the percentage of users estimated to be gaining health benefits, according to the trail on which they were surveyed. Those using the River Torrens Linear Park Trail (65%) were most likely to fit into this category, although more than half of users on all trails were assessed as gaining direct benefit from their activity.

Figure 15. Percentage of users likely to be gaining health benefits



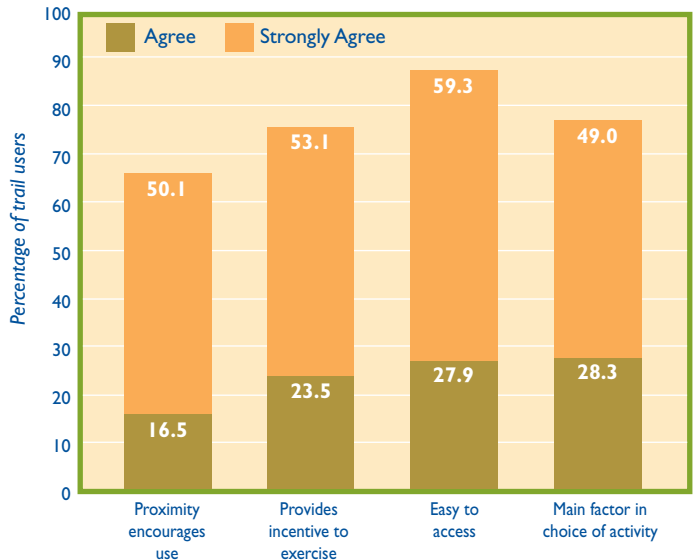
The value placed on trails

Those participating in the survey were asked whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, strongly disagreed or were neutral towards a series of statements relating to perceptions of the value of trails as a resource for individuals and the communities in which they are located. Results are shown in the following section.

Trails as an incentive for physical activity

The finding that trails can have health benefits for users was supported by responses to questions about trails acting as a direct incentive for people to engage in physical activity. The results shown in Figure 16 suggest that, for many people, having access to a trail does in fact encourage them to undertake physical activity.

Figure 16. Trails as an incentive for physical activity

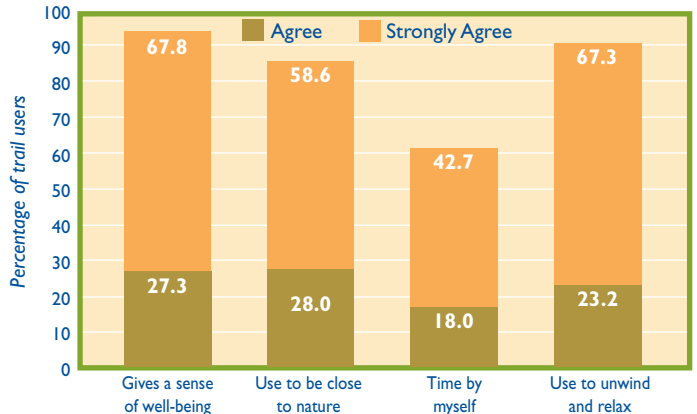


(Full statements were: 'The proximity of the trail to my home encourages me to use it'
'Having access to this trail provides an incentive for me to exercise regularly'
'I use the trail because it is easy to access'
'The trail is the main factor in my choice to undertake this activity today')

Trails as a contributor to individual well-being

As well as benefits to physical health, the data supported the idea that trail use can impact positively on health in a less tangible way (see Figure 17). Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that trail use can promote a sense of well-being, and can provide a means to unwind and relax. The chance to be close to nature was an important part of the experience, and for a significant proportion, using a trail was an opportunity to have time by themselves.

Figure 17. Trails as a contributor to individual well-being

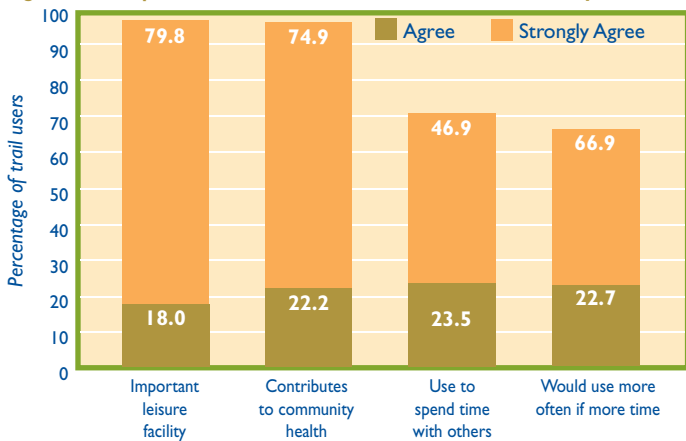


(Full statements were: 'Using this trail gives me a sense of well-being'
'I use this trail to be close to nature'
'I use the trail when I want time by myself'
'I use this trail to unwind and relax')

The perceived value of trails as a social and community resource

The study also explored user perceptions of the value of trails as a social and community resource. Eight in ten respondents (80%) strongly agreed that the trail they were using was an important local recreational and leisure facility (see Figure 18). A similar proportion (75%) strongly agreed that the trail contributed to the health and well-being of the community as a whole. While the previous graph showed that many people use trails to spend time alone, they were also widely used as a social experience to spend time with family or friends.

Figure 18. The perceived value of trails as a social and community resource

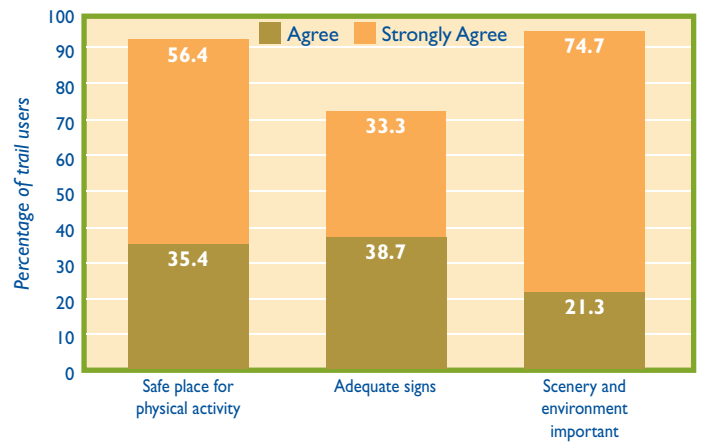


(Full statements were:
 'The trail is an important recreational and leisure facility in this area'
 'The trail contributes to the health and well-being of the wider community'
 'I use the trail to spend time with friends/family'
 'I would use the trail more often if I had more time')

User perceptions of the trails environment

In response to questions on perceptions of specific features of the trails environment, the majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the trail they were using was a safe place in which to undertake physical activity (see Figure 19). A smaller proportion felt that signage was adequate, suggesting that there could be some improvements in this area. Three quarters of those surveyed strongly agreed that the scenery and environment along the trail was an important aspect of the experience.

Figure 19. Perceptions of the trail environment

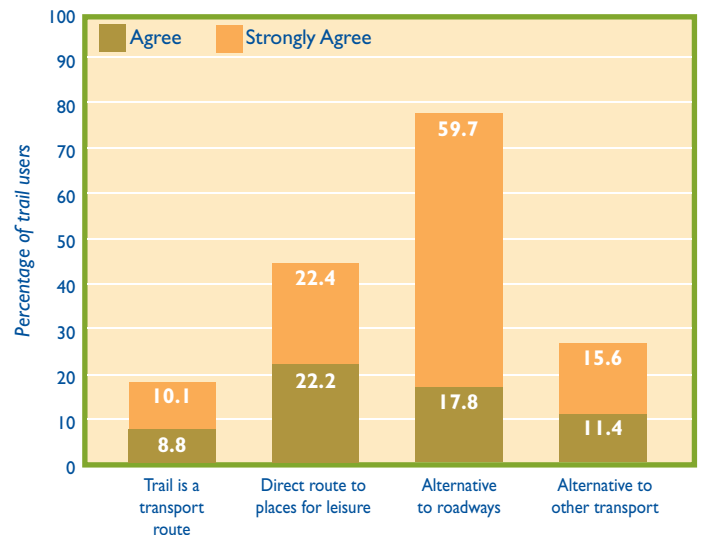


Full statements were:
 'The trail is a safe place in which to undertake physical activity'
 'There are adequate signs on this trail'
 'Scenery and environment on this trail are an important part of the experience'

Trails as a transport corridor

In addition to being a recreational facility, trails - particularly those in urban areas - can provide a pathway for commuting to work or school. As shown in Figure 20, for around one in five respondents (19%), the trail they were using served specifically as a transport corridor, while 27% chose to walk or cycle on a trail as an alternative to using other modes of transport. Although these percentages account for only a minority of users overall, the results nevertheless stress the importance of trails as a safe and environmentally friendly transport route.

Figure 20. Trails as a transport corridor



Full statements were:
 'The trail is a transport route for me'
 'This trail is a direct route to places I want to go for leisure purposes'
 'I choose to use this trail as an alternative to roadways'
 'I use this trail as an alternative to other transport and to get to my destination'

For further information regarding this fact sheet please contact:

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Economic impacts of trails

The Clare and Gilbert Valley - visitor spending on the Riesling Trail

Given the importance of the Riesling Trail as a tourist facility, additional questions were asked of visitors to the region in relation to spending patterns, their knowledge of the trail prior to visiting, and its importance in their decision to visit the Clare Valley rather than another destination. Modelling was then undertaken to try and quantify the degree of economic activity generated by the Riesling Trail.

Only those who said that the trail was important or very important in their decision to visit the region were included in the modelling exercise. Based on an average spend of approximately \$216 per person per visit, combined with available data on trail user volumes, the direct economic impact of the Riesling Trail was

estimated at slightly over \$1,000,000 per annum. Visitors who came to the Clare Valley to use the trail spent the greatest proportion on shopping, accommodation, food and drink.



Consultation with businesses in the region was undertaken to gain their perceptions of the importance of the Riesling Trail as a contributor to the local economy. Participants included operators of wineries and cellar doors, bed and breakfast facilities, hoteliers and cycle hire owners.

The consultation revealed widespread support for the trail. There was a definite opinion that the Clare Valley would not be the same without the Riesling Trail, and that it had contributed to business formation and growth. Consistent with the findings of the user survey, Clare Valley businesses recognised that there was a core group of visitors who came to the area first and foremost for the trail:

"One of the great changes for tourism in the Valley has been the Riesling Trail. A lot of tourists come for the walk and to ride".

(Hotelier)

"There's been definite spin-offs for us, and its increased significantly over the past couple of years. I get bookings from all over Australia to ride the trail".

(Cycle hire owner)

Remote trails - impacts on businesses in Melrose

Business operators in the town of Melrose, located in the southern Flinders Ranges, felt that the Heysen and Mawson Trails had considerable potential to contribute to economic activity in the region. Direct opportunities to capitalise on visits to the area by trail users through cycle hire and guided tours were highlighted, as were indirect opportunities based around accommodation. However, it was generally felt that the current direct economic impact of the Heysen and Mawson Trails was comparatively low, largely due to the type of visitors they attracted - mainly those seeking a 'no frills' camping experience. This market segment was viewed as low in dollar yield because they tended to bring the majority of supplies from home.

Increasing tourist numbers and promoting outdoor experiences were the two key areas seen as integral to growing the region, and both were perceived as being explicitly and implicitly linked to trail usage. Events such as the annual cycle tour from Spear Creek to Yorke Peninsula had a direct positive impact on the local economy, and businesses were keen to develop and promote additional events of this type. It was suggested that an event be created around the Mawson Trail, such as the Outback Odyssey.

While it was recognised that trails were a drawcard in attracting visitors to the region, and that there were economic spin-offs in being able to showcase local produce and merchandise, the overall feeling was that the potential for trail users to generate economic activity in the region was not being fully realised.



Nature based tourism offerings were considered central to the growth strategies of businesses in both the Clare Valley and Melrose, and the trails network was seen as an essential component.