

Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail Niles to Berrien Springs Extension

Phase 1 Community Engagement Report



The Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail is a 34-mile trail connecting Niles, MI to Mishawaka, IN. Be Healthy Berrien, Berrien County Health Department, and Southwest Michigan Planning Commission are working to extend the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail from its current end-point in the City of Niles to the Village of Berrien Springs. This 9-mile extension would provide a unique, non-motorized connection between these two small towns through Southwest Michigan's beautiful rural landscape.

This summary contains input gathered from the public during the first phase of outreach as part of this planning effort. Phase 1 of this plan's public outreach included an online survey and public meeting held on May 7, 2019 at Niles-Buchanan YMCA. The purpose of this first phase of outreach was to explore the benefits and concerns of the proposed trail as well as gather input on desired infrastructure. Community members were asked to share their priorities for the proposed trail as well as their frequent travel destinations, non-motorized travel concerns, and facility preferences. **46** community members attended the public meeting and **31** completed the online survey.

A 2016 trail-use study of the Riverfront Trail segment in downtown Niles determined the trail is well-utilized, with approximately 601 people using the trail each day. The most widely-used segments are those located near good parking. The trail is most often utilized mid-day through the evening, with about 1/2—2/3 of trail users being adults.

Our Community's Priorities for Trail Development



What is most important to you about the new trail?

#1 Safety for Walking/Biking

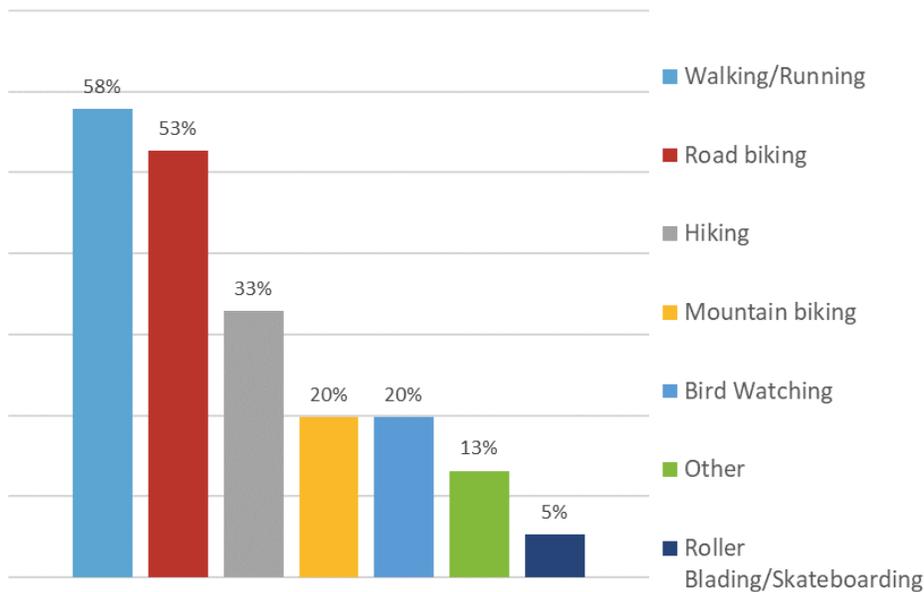
#2 Nature Preservation

#3 Fitness, Physical Activity,
& Recreation

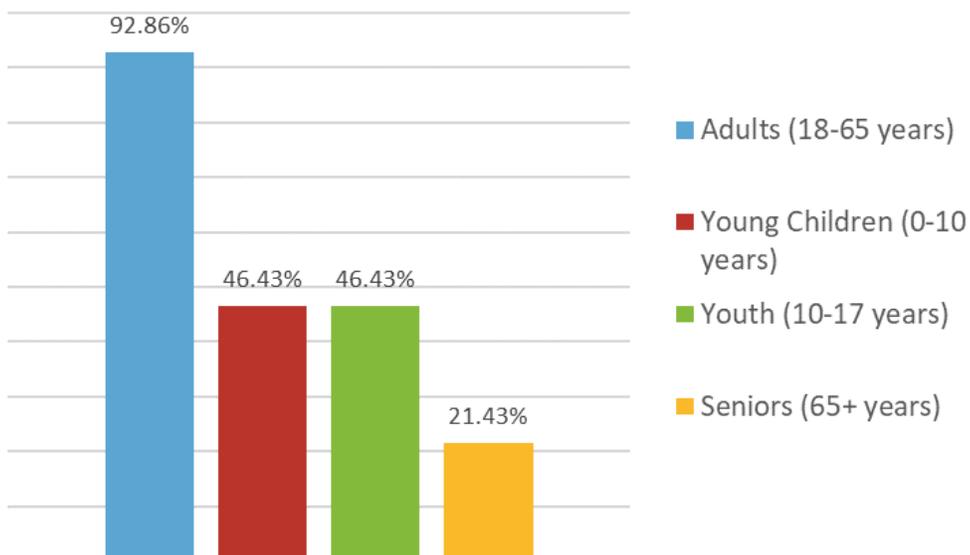
#4 Non-motorized Travel

#5 Safety for Cars and Other Vehicles

What types of activities would you like to do on the trail?



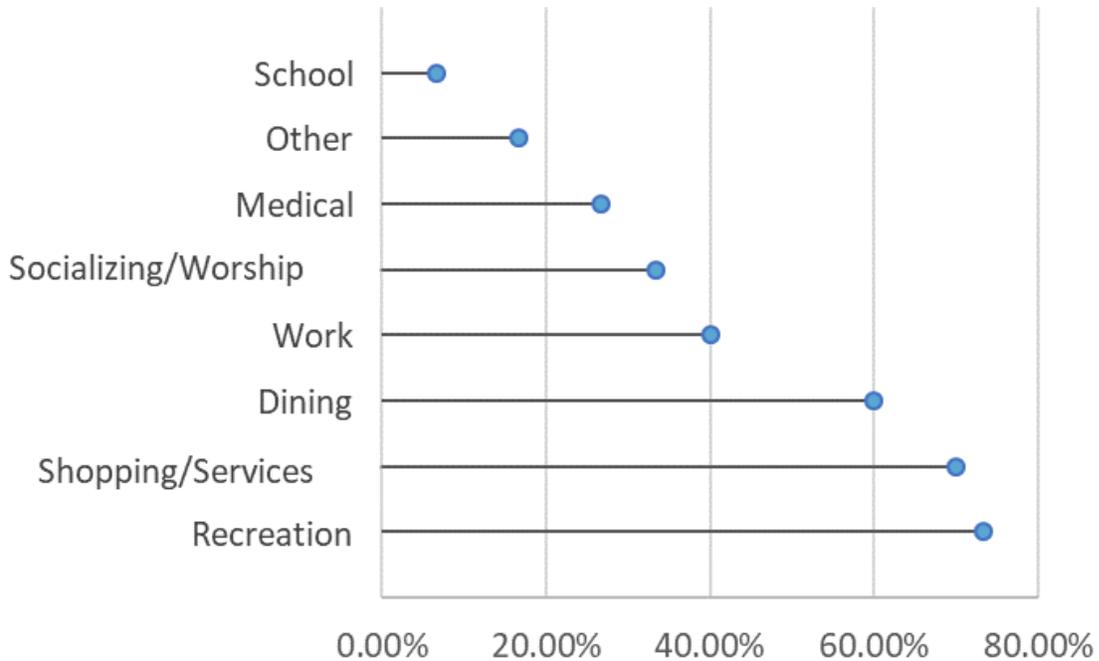
Who will use the trail with you?



Understanding Travel Today



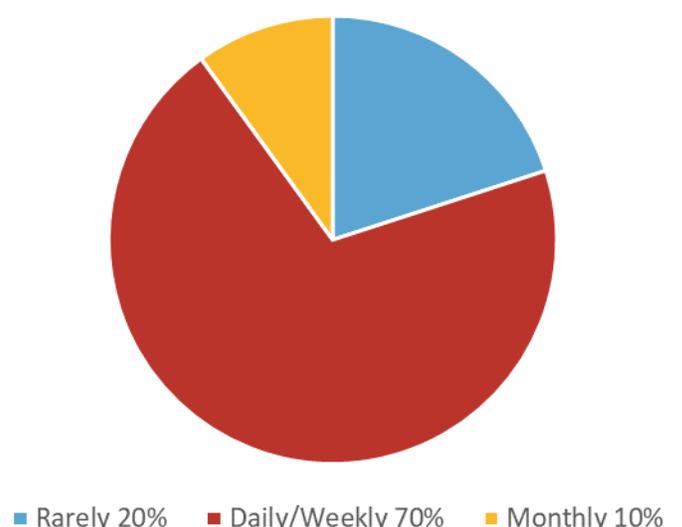
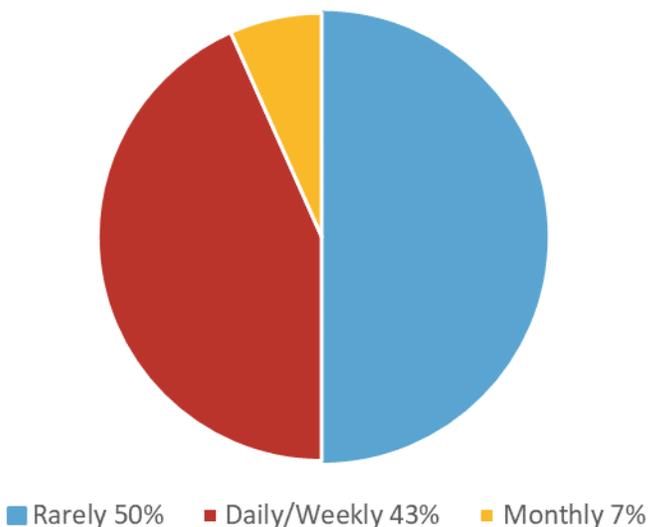
For what purposes do you travel between Niles and Berrien Springs?



How frequently do you...

walk or bike for transportation?

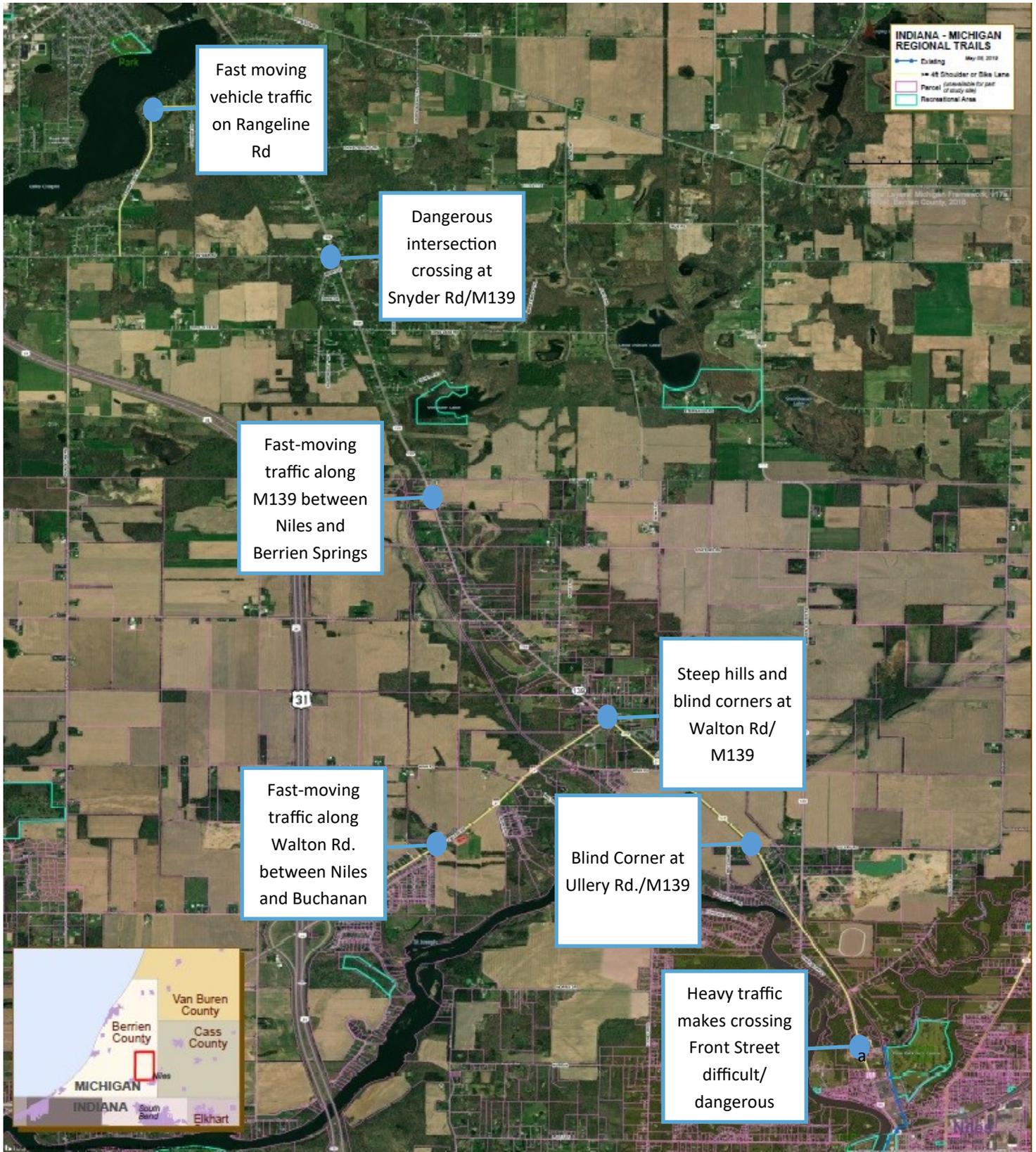
walk or bike for physical activity?



Questions, Concerns, and Ideas



Where are the locations where you have concerns with walking or biking?



Questions, Concerns, and Ideas



What are your suggestions for the proposed route?

Ensure Safety

- Post mile-markers every 1/10th mile
- Install emergency call boxes along the trail
- Regular maintenance to fill potholes and remove debris

Respect Adjacent Properties

- The trail should not disrupt wildlife habitats or farmland
- Avoid crossing private driveways
- Create positive interactions with adjacent property owners

Create Well-Equipped Trailheads & Amenities

- Include signage at trailheads and along the trail for local businesses and attractions.
- Well marked route-maps and wayfinding signage are a must!
- Ensure adequate parking at trailheads.
- Build trailheads within nearby parks that offer other outdoor recreation and facilitates (Feather Park, Rangeline Park, Plym Park)
- Restrooms are necessary at trailheads between Berrien Springs and Niles

Other Input & General Comments

"I believe this would really promote the area, attract people (visitors & new residents) and add a unique & valuable asset to the community."

The rights of a single person walking, a or single person biking, must not be taken any less than a single person driving.

"I think this would be amazing. And a bridge over Lake Chapin would be a bonus."

"I fully support this general plan. A trail connecting Niles and Berrien would be so helpful. When can we start?!"

Create an endowment to maintain the trail

Adjacent property owner concerns about privacy and security of their homes and land.