



## Ohio River Trail Council “Your Town” Program



There is a new interstate planned to be built in “Your Town”, and its travelers, for the most part, are on bicycles or in kayaks. The proposed *Ohio River Trail* when completed will inter-connect two of the largest trail systems in the United States, the *Great Ohio Lake to River Greenway* and the *Great Allegheny Passage*. In addition, the Ohio River Trail Council (ORTC) is also developing the *Ohio River Water Trail System* which includes water trails along the Ohio River, Beaver River, Little Beaver Creek, Raccoon Creek and the Chartiers Creek.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), tourism is the second largest industry in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. “Penn’s Woods” is teeming with wild resources and beautiful vistas. The Keystone State’s trails are like a “magnificent gem on display” attracting visitors, who facilitate job growth in ecotourism-related opportunities like river rafting tours, canoeing, bicycle sales and rentals.

Referring to the Greater Allegheny Passage, the late U.S. Congressman John P. Murtha is quoted as stating, “The trail is already attracting a lot of people, and were just starting to market it. It’s a major asset for our region, not only because of the tourist dollars it’s attracting, but also because it’s a piece of our economic rebuilding efforts.”

In 2008, the annual direct spending attributed to Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) was \$ 40.8 million, up from \$7.26 million in 2002. The total annual wages attributed to trail user spending was \$7.5 million and overnight visitors spend an average of \$98 a day in trail communities. There was net gain of forty-two (42) new trail related businesses since 2007. An estimated 700,000 trips are taken annually on the GAP.

Many small towns have used the “Trail Town” model of economic revitalization, which focuses on connecting trails to their “Main Streets”. Visiting trail users patronize the downtown restaurants, retail stores, hotels and bed & breakfasts, thereby building vibrant communities. What they want is a “Trail Town”. To create a “Trail Town”, you need a dedicated core group of citizens that can envision a “healthy” business district, both physically and economically, and organize fellow residents and merchants who are committed to advancing downtown and economic development.

Sometimes small-town revitalization is more subtle, like increased property values in “Trail Towns” or when a family or a company decides to relocate to a neighborhood because of quality of life amenities like greenways. In 2002, a survey of two-thousand recent homebuyers, co-sponsored by the National Association of Home Builders and the National Association of Realtors, inquired about the “importance of community amenities,” and greenways finished second only to highway access. In addition to promoting small-town revitalization, trails are progressively being used to help urban communities revitalize abandoned or brownfield corridors.

The Ohio River Trail Council “Your Town” Program is based on “Main Street” principles. The success of a “Trail Town” relies on communities becoming bicycle and pedestrian oriented. There is reference material and technical assistance available through the [Ohio River Trail Council \(www.ohiorivertrail.org\)](http://www.ohiorivertrail.org). The Ohio River Trail Council supports the development of a [Bicycle Friendly Community \(BFC\)](#) for each of our partner communities or “Trail Towns”. The Bicycle Friendly Community Program provides incentives, hands-on assistance, and award recognition for communities that actively support bicycling. A Bicycle Friendly Community welcomes cyclists by providing safe accommodation for cycling and encouraging people to bike for transportation and recreation. This program is administered by the [League of American Bicyclists. \(www.bicyclefriendlycommunity.org\)](http://www.bicyclefriendlycommunity.org) and provides a [Step by Step Guide to Turn Your Town into a Bicycle Friendly Community](#).



Building a “Trail Town”, like all things, happens step by step. The time is now to begin planning and implementing bicycle friendly steps to entice future trail visitors into the heart of your business district. The Ohio River Trail Council is dedicated to bring individuals, groups, councils, organizations, schools, conservancies, communities, companies, corporations, recreational users and all levels of government together to achieve our common goals. The Ohio River Trail Council is serving as a unification tool in order to guarantee a bright future for our rivers, forests, and towns.