

To: Chairs of Economic Development Committee,  
Chamber of Commerce, and First Selectmen

As Chair of Cornwall's Economic Development. I am writing to ask you to support a project that will bring an estimated \$4 million a year into our towns. The project is the proposed Housatonic Covered Bridge Bike Trail, also known as the "HouBike Trail." The \$4 million/year estimate of economic benefit is based on trail expenditure data along existing similar trails collected by the Rails to Trails Conservancy (a national advocacy group). Further, this projection has been reviewed and approved by the Rails To Trails Conservancy's national expert on spending along trails, and has been deemed to be consistent with projects of similar size and location.

Below is a concept map for the HouBike Trail. With the addition of the New Milford River Trail, the combined 45 miles of trail will follow the Housatonic River from New Milford north to the Massachusetts border. It is a multi-town project and will not happen without multi-town support. The HouBike Trail continues to receive strong support from the Upper Housatonic National Heritage Area, a program of the National Park Service.

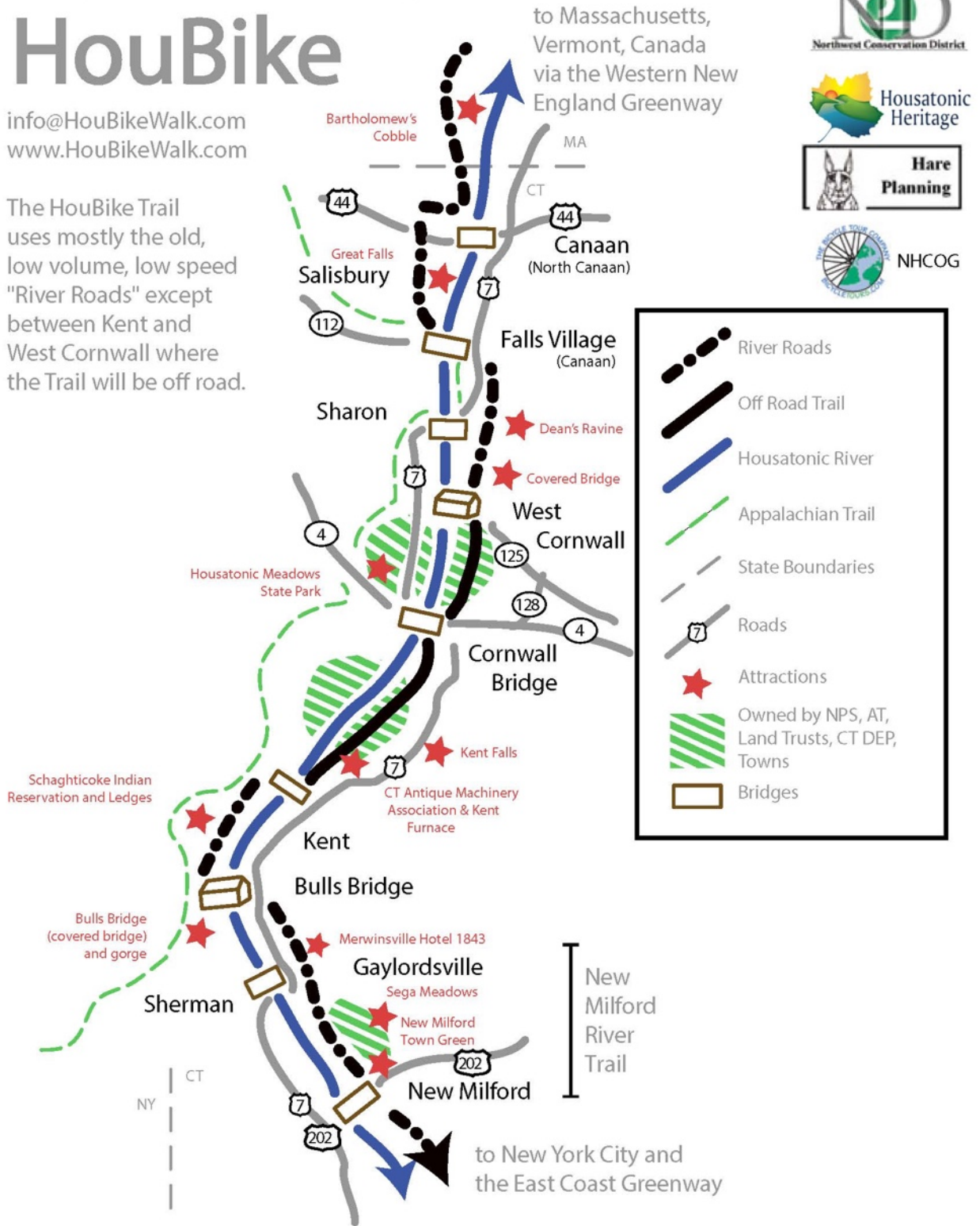
The Proposed Housatonic Covered Bridge Trail

# HouBike

info@HouBikeWalk.com  
www.HouBikeWalk.com

The HouBike Trail uses mostly the old, low volume, low speed "River Roads" except between Kent and West Cornwall where the Trail will be off road.

to Massachusetts, Vermont, Canada via the Western New England Greenway



	River Roads
	Off Road Trail
	Housatonic River
	Appalachian Trail
	State Boundaries
	Roads
	Attractions
	Owned by NPS, AT, Land Trusts, CT DEP, Towns
	Bridges

New Milford River Trail

to New York City and the East Coast Greenway

The support of the region's economic development organizations is needed because the Northwest Hills Council of Governments is starting to develop a 30 year Transportation Plan for the Region. We believe that the HouBike Trail should be a major part of that Transportation Plan. Like any other major transportation project, without strong support it probably will not get a high priority in the Plan. Then the region will lose \$4 million a year in added business. As the Concept Plan shows, the HouBike Trail will be made up mainly of the old, low volume, low speed River Roads along the Housatonic.

Those of you who are familiar with Millerton, NY will recognize how much the 11 miles of the Harlem Valley Trail have contributed to business in Millerton's downtown district. The proposed HouBike Trail with the New Milford River Trail will be 45 miles long.

The \$4 million estimate is likely a conservation figure. If you look at the Concept map again, you will see the attractions along the Trail noted in red. By themselves, none of these attractions is likely to attract many people from outside the Northwest Corner. However, connecting the attractions with the HouBike Trail and its many views along the Housatonic creates a major tourism destination, one that will attract people from outside the region. Connecting those attractions will create, for lack of a better term, a historic, linear, aerobic, amusement park.

Attached is an Appendix. It has a concept map/poster that explains the Western New England Greenway (WNEG). It will run from New York City to Montreal. The HouBike Trail will be an essential segment of WNEG. WNEG will draw many through riders, and is another reason why the \$4 million/year estimate for the HouBike Trail may be low. The Appendix also contains a detailed explanation of how the estimate of \$4 million/year coming into towns along the Trail was developed. It is worth emphasizing that the \$4 million/year will be spent in the towns and villages along the Trail. This has been the experience of all rural trails, just as it has been in Millerton.

We hope you will send a letter strongly supporting the HouBike Trail to Rick Lynn, Executive Director, Northwest Hills Council of Governments at 59 Torrington Road, Suite A-1, Goshen, CT 06756. Please also send a copy to Pat Hare, a consultant for the HouBike Trail, at [hareplanning@yahoo.com](mailto:hareplanning@yahoo.com).

We also hope that your individual members will respond to the Northwest Hills COG's online survey with support for the Trail. The survey can be found at [www.surveymonkey.com/r/NHCOG](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NHCOG).

If you have any questions, please feel free to email me, or to email Pat Hare at [hareplanning@yahoo.com](mailto:hareplanning@yahoo.com). If your Commission would like a presentation on the HouBike Trail, Mr. Hare, a city planner, is available to do one.

Janet Carlson,  
Chair, Cornwall Economic Development Commission.

## **Appendices**

### **1. Concept Map/Poster for the Western New England Greenway**

The HouBike Trail will draw many additional visitors from outside the region due to its inclusion as part of the Western New England Greenway (WNEG). WNEG (pronounced win-neg) was proposed by the HouBike Committee, with strong support from the Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area, a program of the National Park Service.

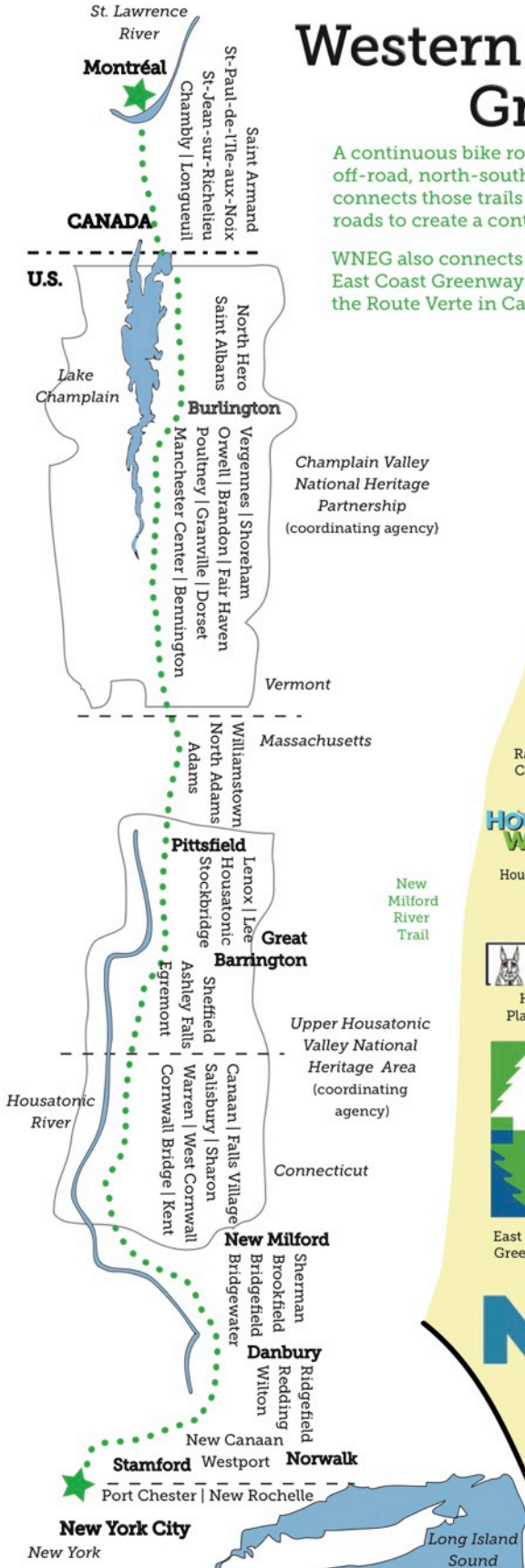
WNEG is a trail combining the HouBike Trail and many others. It will run from New York City to Montreal, making use of many existing off-road trails, and also low volume, low speed “back” roads. It is shown in the concept map/poster below.

WNEG was proposed by the HouBike Committee when it realized that to both the north and south of our region there are many groups already working on north-south trails, at times unknown to each other. The HouBike Committee invited all of them to a conference and virtually all responded. Their logos are on the concept map/poster below. This year marked the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference. Also, last summer, a group of WNEG supporters rode WNEG from Norwalk to Burlington, Vermont. It was the third Norwalk-Burlington ride. WNEG has also gotten preliminary approval as a US Bike Route. As it develops, WNEG will bring many “through riders” to our villages and stores. Finally, WNEG has also had strong support from the Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership in Vermont. It is a sister organization to the Housatonic Heritage area, and like it, a program of the National Park Service. It lies directly to north of the Housatonic Heritage area, starting at the southern border of Vermont, and going north to the Canadian border. The borders of both Heritage areas are outlined on the poster.

# Western New England Greenway

A continuous bike route that uses the growing mileage of off-road, north-south trails in western New England. WNEG connects those trails together using low-volume, low-speed roads to create a continuous route from New York to Montreal.

WNEG also connects the East Coast Greenway to the Route Verte in Canada.



**Montréal**  
 Vélo Québec  
 LOCAL MOTION Burlington  
 Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership  
 Ashwilticook Trail  
 Vermont Bicycle & Pedestrian Coalition  
 Berkshire Bike Path Council  
 National Park Service  
 Northwest Connecticut Council of Governments  
 Housatonic Valley Association  
 Still River Greenway  
 Merritt Parkway Trail Alliance  
**NYC**

Other logos include: Rails to Trails Conservancy, Bikes Belong, HouBikeWalk Trail, Hare Planning, Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area, Housatonic Valley Association, Bicycle Tour Company, East Coast Greenway, New Milford River Trail, Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area, Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area, Still River Greenway, Norwalk River Valley Trail, and Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area.

WesternNewEnglandGreenway  
[www.wnengreenway.org](http://www.wnengreenway.org)

Graphic by Hare Planning  
 Draft 09-08-13  
 Submit changes to  
 hareplanning@yahoo.com

## 2. Background for The \$4 million/year Estimate



Hare Planning

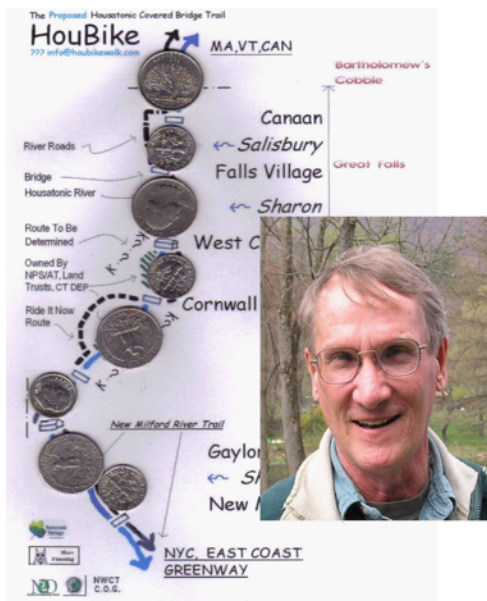
POB 65/ 31 Pine Street, Cornwall, Connecticut 06753

860 672 2315 [hareplanning@yahoo.com](mailto:hareplanning@yahoo.com)

10/19/2010; Filed As: HouBike/ Economic Impact 111006 – (97-03)

### The Economic Impact of the Proposed Connecticut Housatonic Covered Bridge Trail (The HouBike Trail)

As a “destination trail,” HouBike Trail should attract \$4 million/year in “non-local expenditure” according to Carl Knoch, the Rails to Trails Conservancy’s expert on economic impact.



The proposed Houbike Trail, when fully implemented, is projected to generate nearly \$4 million dollars of annual spending throughout Northwestern Connecticut.

That money will come from primarily from “non-local” users buying “soft goods” like water, soda, candy, lunches, restaurant meals, etc. Non-locals visiting trails spend 10 dollars for every dollar spent by local users.<sup>1</sup>

The estimate of \$4 million dollars is based on the expenditure data from two comparable “destination” trails,<sup>2</sup> as well as the proximity of the HouBike Trail to the New York metropolitan area. The comparable trails are the Pine Creek Rail Trail (\$3.4 million non-local user spending annually/95,000 annual non-local users/62 mile trail)<sup>3</sup>, and the Virginia Creeper Trail System (\$2.4 million non-local user spending annually/69,000 non-local annual users/33.4 mile trail).<sup>4</sup> The average of the two figures is \$2.9 million a year in “non-local” spending brought in by the two trails.<sup>5</sup>

Both the Pine Creek and Virginia Creeper Trails are a significant distance from major population centers. The Pine Creek Trail Rail Trail is 190 miles from the nearest major city, Philadelphia. The biggest cities near the Virginia Creeper Trail are Knoxville, Tennessee and Greensboro, North Carolina, and both are more than 100 miles away. In contrast, the southern end of the HouBike Trail will be 82 miles from New York City. Having a much larger metropolitan area much nearer a destination trail should generate a much larger number of non-local visits to the HouBike Trail than Philadelphia generates to the Pine Creek Rail Trail, or Knoxville and Greensboro generate to the Virginia Creeper Trail. Also, the HouBike Trail is closer to the heavily populated East Coast Corridor than the two comparable trails, which are located in

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> A destination trail is one that attracts a majority of non-local users. See p 9 of Trail User Surveys and Economic Impacts – A Comparison of Trail User Expenditures, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Northeast Regional Office, March 2009. This study compares user spending on the 14 east coast trails for which spending data is available. [www.railstotrails.org/.../Comparison\\_of\\_Trail\\_Users\\_Surveys\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.railstotrails.org/.../Comparison_of_Trail_Users_Surveys_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Non-local user spending for the two trails was developed using the local/nonlocal spending ratio of 1:10 developed in Appendix A.

<sup>4</sup> Trail User Surveys and Economic Impacts cited above, pp. 10, 11. Only the 2 trails cited out of the 14 in the study are destination trails. [www.railstotrails.org/.../Comparison\\_of\\_Trail\\_Users\\_Surveys\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.railstotrails.org/.../Comparison_of_Trail_Users_Surveys_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> The estimate does not include additional spending on overnight accommodations, or spending on “soft goods” spending by local residents attracted to the Trail, or spending on hard goods like bicycles, bike accessories, clothing, etc.

northern Pennsylvania and far southwestern Virginia, respectfully. The closeness of the HouBike Trail to New York City and the coastal area of high population density justify assuming at least a 33% increase in the estimate of “non-local” visitors and therefore spending on the HouBike Trail over the \$2.9 million average of the two spending totals from the Pine Creek and Virginia Creeper trails. The result is an estimate of about \$4 million a year in expenditures for soft goods along the Trail. Note that this figure does not include spending by “local users” of the HouBike Trail. Their spending will not be new money to region, but will be new to businesses along the Trail.<sup>6</sup>

The spending data and the user visit statistics given above are based on a 2009 Comparison Study of Trail User Expenditures by the Northeast Regional Office of the national Rails to Trails Conservancy. Some quotes from that study are directly relevant to financial impact of the Houbike Trail on villages:

- *The rural trail that passes through town centers (not all do) may perhaps enjoy the largest economic impact of all the trail types.*
- *To achieve economic vitality by itself, the trail must bring the user into easy and direct contact with retail establishments. For this reason, the rural trail that passes through or stops and ends in small town centers and becomes a focal point may appear to have greater economic impact over (sic) an urban trail. Retail next to the trail offers a sense of safety and belonging, fostering a sense of “this store is here for me.”<sup>7</sup>*

The Houbike Trail will go directly through the town and village centers of Canaan Falls Village, West Cornwall, Cornwall Bridge, Kent, Gaylordsville, and New Milford.

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<sup>6</sup> This estimate is conservative for several reasons. First, as just noted, it does not include local spending that would be diverted to the villages along the Trail from other locations in the immediate area, for example, by someone going biking rather than bowling in a nearby city like Torrington. Also, it does not take into account any, “multiplier effect.” Finally, as noted in Appendix A, it uses a conservative figure for local/non-local spending ratio for one of the two comparable trails on which the estimate is based.

<sup>7</sup> Trail User Surveys and Economic Impacts... cited above, p.9

Another fact will also make the HouBike Trail attract many non-local users. The proposed HouBike Trail is not just a 45 mile string of beautiful views of the Housatonic. There are pearls on the string. They include, starting in the north, Bartholomew's Cobble in Ashley Falls, Massachusetts, the Great Falls at Falls Village, the falls at Dean's Ravine in North Cornwall, the Covered Bridge in West Cornwall, Housatonic Meadows State Park in Cornwall Bridge, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Kent Iron Furnace in Kent<sup>8</sup>, the ledges in the Schaghticoke Indian Reservation in Kent, and the covered bridge and rapids at Bull's Bridge in Kent. It is worth noting that the nearby Harlem Valley Rail Trail in Amenia and Millerton, New York is very popular even without an adjacent river or more scenery than views of farmland, and even though it is only 15 miles long. It attracts 55,000 users a year.<sup>9</sup>

The connections between the HouBike Trail and other trails will also contribute to its future economic impact. The longer a trail and its connecting trails, the more it becomes a destination, and the more "non-local users" it attracts. To the north, the HouBike Trail will connect to another north-south trail being planned along the Housatonic in Western Massachusetts, which will in turn connect to a north-south trail in Vermont, and that will in turn connect to a trail the Canadians have already built south from Montreal to meet the Vermont trail. To the south, the HouBike Trail will join the trail planned from New Milford south to meet the emerging East Coast Greenway that runs from Maine to Florida.

**Appendix A: "Destination" Trail Users' Daily Spending On Soft Costs, from Trail User Surveys and Economic Impacts – A Comparison of Trail User Expenditures**

Daily Spending by non-local users (soft costs):

*Pine Creek Rail Trail*: \$36.00 (derived based on Local/Non-Local spending ratios below by solving the following two equations:

$(31\% \text{ local visitors} \times 138\text{k total visitors})(\$X \text{ per local visitor spending}) + (69\% \text{ non-local visitors} \times 138\text{k visitors})(\$Y \text{ per non-local visitor spending}) = \$3.6 \text{ m in total spending}$

And

$(\$Y \text{ non-local visitor spending}) = 10 \times (\$X \text{ local visitor spending})$

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<sup>8</sup> Also, next to the Furnace are the Sloane Stanley Museum of early American tools and the Connecticut Antique Machinery Association Inc.'s working museum.

<sup>9</sup> Email from Lisa DeLeeuw, Harlem Valley Rail Trail Assoc., [hvrta@fairpoint.net](mailto:hvrta@fairpoint.net), October 28, 2010

*Virginia Creeper Trail*: \$19.20 (This is actually the figure for all users given in the study. Working back from the data in the study, the figure for non-local users would be \$34.96/day. The figure of \$19.20 was used to be conservative.)

Local/Non-local Trail Users Daily Spending Ratios (Soft Costs):

Oil Heritage Trail System: \$3.71 local user/\$32.93 non-local users (includes lodging, camping)

Virginia Creeper Trail: \$2.00 local user/non-local user \$19.20

These figures indicate that for each dollar spent by local users, non-local users spend about \$10.

Finally, a careful reader who goes back to the source document for this estimate, RTC's Northeast Region study, *Trail User Surveys and Economic Impacts*, will find the following statement: *In the Phase 2 Trail Town Economic Impact Study of the Great Allegheny Passage completed in 2009, the data collected revealed that "trail users traveling 50 miles or more to get to the trail spend approximately twice as much in trail communities as those traveling less than 50 miles."* Using this ratio would result in a significantly lower estimate for "non-local" spending on the HouBike Trail.

But the *Trail User Surveys and Economic Impacts* study goes on to say that *"Defining the geographic limits of what is local in relation to a trail is certainly subjective and may be rationalized based on regional topography as well as the type of trail and the majority use. A 20-mile urban trail may see a large amount of commuter use and have the local area defined as only the adjacent counties. A 200-mile long-distance trail may function as a destination in itself; perhaps the local area would be better defined as a 100-mile radius. Defining local vs. non-local is an important distinction for the trail manager to make, and all user survey analyses need to reflect that distinction."*<sup>10</sup>

In particular, defining local versus non-local for the Great Allegheny Trail is hard. The Great Allegheny starts less than 10 miles from downtown Pittsburgh and goes out radially, like a spoke on a wheel, actually a very bent spoke because it follows a river's twists through mountains. When should visitors to the Great Allegheny Trail "spoke" from Pittsburgh be counted as local or non-local? Do they become non-local when they are 50 miles out? Also, does the 50 mile travel distance used to define non-local visitors mean distance travelled in a car or distance travelled on a bike? In addition, some 69% of the Great Allegheny's visitors are 'local' and only 31% local, which means it is not a destination trail as defined in the study.<sup>11</sup>

There is also another problem. "Local" visitors from Pittsburgh are likely to spend more on a trail visit than local visitors in places with depressed local economies like those of northern Pennsylvania (the Pine Creek Trail) or southwestern Virginia (the Virginia Creeper Trail).

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<sup>10</sup> *Trail User Surveys and Economic Impact...* cited above, p 8.

<sup>11</sup> See footnote 1.

In summary, when selecting comparable Trails and ratios to use in estimating non-local spending on the HouBike Trail, the Great Allegheny Trail ratio was ignored because of the difficulty of defining a “non-local” visitor when a trail starts very near and draws many visitors from a major city.