



GREENWAY TRAIL USER SURVEY

Results and Analysis

April 2021



Parks, Recreation
and Historic
Preservation



Executive Summary

In Spring 2020, Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) partnered to create a survey for the general public about current use of and preferences for greenway trails, as part of the 2021 Statewide Greenway Trails Plan. The survey included 15 questions about general greenway trail activities and five demographic questions.

Based on survey responses, it is evident that greenway trails are a highly valued and well-used resource for residents in all parts of the state. More than **85% of survey respondents reported using a greenway trail on at least a monthly basis**. Walking and bicycling were reported as the most common activities, with more than half of respondents reporting participation in each activity on greenway trails at least a few times a month. Greenway trails are primarily used for exercise, health and wellness, being in nature, and simply having fun.

Survey respondents spent between one and two hours on the trail and covered between five and 15 miles. A typical journey to a greenway trail took under 30 minutes in travel time. However, the average travel time to access a trail varied greatly by region of the state; almost half of respondents reported having to travel 30 minutes or more to access a greenway trail in regions such as Long Island, the Southern Tier, and New York City. More than **70% of respondents reported having taken a day trip with the primary purpose of visiting a greenway trail**, and 43% have taken out-of-state visitors to explore one of New York's greenway trails.

The survey also asked respondents to identify their favorite greenway trail and explain which characteristics made the trail their favorite. Over 100 different greenway trails were listed by respondents, with long-distance trails such as the Erie Canalway Trail and the Genesee Valley Greenway the most commonly listed responses. The most common reason given for why a trail was the user's favorite was the proximity of the trail to where the user lived or worked and the ease with which the trail could be accessed (48% of responses). The scenery or natural beauty found on individual greenway trails was also a common reason given for why a trail was a user's favorite (19%). As the question allowed respondents to elaborate, the survey yielded dozens of insightful anecdotes about users' preferences. A few examples of these responses:

"It offers a variety of experiences and access to three unique towns. You pass through orchards, rock outcrops, forest, so many interesting things."

"We live close to it. Use it for bicycle commuting to work, for bike outings and for multiway tours. Also for walks, dinners at canalside restaurants and more."

"Many different areas, some busy, some more secluded. You can just go for miles!"

"Pretty, peaceful, interesting terrain with good biking pavement and bridges."

The preferred surface type for a greenway trail is one of the most polarizing issues among users - and the survey results reflected this, with **40% of respondents indicating a preference for hard surface paved trails, followed by a 27% preference for stone dust and a 26% preference for natural, dirt, or other unfinished surfaces**.

When planning trips to greenway trails, survey respondents primarily considered the length of the trail (80%), the proximity of the trail (78%), and the scenery or accessibility of nature along the trail (69%). The surface type was a consideration for only 55% of respondents, suggesting that many greenway trail users will use a trail regardless of whether the surface is of their preferred type. The primary source of information for greenway trail users is, unsurprisingly, the internet, with 70% of respondents selecting that option and an additional 30% relying on social media. Many of those who selected an open-ended "other" option indicated either email, apps, or other web-based platforms as their primary source of information. The second most common answer was through word of mouth (42%).

Finally, three questions targeted factors to drive the future growth of the state's greenway trails network. When asked what factors would increase their use of greenway trails, the most commonly cited response was the development of more trails in the respondent's area (75%), with providing more information about where to access trails, providing more trails of the respondents preferred surface type and providing more amenities along trails all cited by more than 25% of respondents.

The survey also asked respondents which priorities trail managers should focus on. **More than 85% of respondents considered it very important or important to create new or expand existing greenway trails, increase funding opportunities for greenway trails, and close gaps to create a more interconnected greenway trail system.** The priority considered least important by survey respondents was connecting greenway trails with restaurants and retail destinations, suggesting that greenways are viewed primarily as recreational or commuting options. Similarly, on-trail maps and signage and parking were indicated as the two most important amenities to user experience on greenway trails (70% indicating each amenity as very important or important), followed by the presence of restrooms (61%).

The survey received a significant number of responses from all regions of New York, although a disproportionate number of the respondents were from upstate regions, led by the greater Rochester area, with far fewer responses from New York City and Long Island than would reflect their share of the state's population. The median age of survey respondents was 58, and more than 90% of respondents were White/Non-Hispanic, despite only representing 56% of the state's general population.

The survey was administered over the internet during a three-month period in late spring and early summer of 2020. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, paper copies were not distributed and in-person surveys were not conducted; therefore, survey participation was limited to those with computer or smartphone access. Participation in the survey was solicited through four email communications, via social media posts across Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram platforms, and cross-promotion with partner organizations and elected officials.

I. Intro/Background

In November 2019, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed into law a bill that required the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) to complete a plan for a comprehensive statewide system of non-motorized multi-use trails, known as greenway trails. In Spring 2020, OPRHP partnered with Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) to survey the general public regarding current use of and preferences for greenway trails. This report summarizes the findings of that survey.

The legislation requiring the completion of a statewide greenways plan comes at a watershed moment for such trails in New York. Since the first rail-to-trail conversion projects were completed in New York in the 1970s, residents and visitors alike have enjoyed the use of greenway trails for both recreation and transportation purposes. Since those first abandoned rail lines were converted into greenway trails, more have been constructed every year, with other forms of greenway trails adding to the state's diverse collection. Particularly, New York's extensive network of canals has led to the development of many canal trails, most notably the 360-mile Erie Canalway Trail.

Efforts to close the gaps in the Erie Canalway Trail and in other major trail corridors led Governor Cuomo to announce an ambitious and visionary project in 2017, the Empire State Trail. The Empire State Trail project closed many of the gaps in existing greenway trail networks and combined them with a unified branding and standard set of wayfinding and informational signage. Completed at the end of 2020, the Empire State Trail is the nation's longest statewide trail network, stretching 750 miles through the Hudson and Champlain Valleys from New York City to the Canadian border, and west along the Erie Canalway Trail from Albany to Buffalo.

With the Empire State Trail now complete, the New York State Greenway Trails Plan looks to take stock of the state's current network of greenway trails beyond the spine of the Empire State Trail and lay out a vision for the future development and geographic distribution of greenway trails. This survey report augments that effort by analyzing the views, preferences and desires of the general public for improving existing and planning future greenway trails.

II. Methodology

PTNY and OPRHP began development of the survey in March 2020 by reviewing similar surveys, both from previous New York State surveys and surveys in other states. New York's 2010 Statewide Trails Plan included five survey and workshop reports that had been completed during the preceding six years. These included an in-person trail user survey, a general public outdoor recreation survey, a survey of local government officials and state park managers, a summary of public trails workshops and a survey of trail organizations completed by OPRHP and PTNY.

Generating the survey questions was a collaborative effort between PTNY and OPRHP. As directed by the legislation requiring state parks to complete this plan, the survey focused explicitly on greenway trails, deviating from New York's 2010 Statewide Trails Plan which was inclusive of greenway trails, long distance hiking trails, water trails, and other types of trails. Participants were offered the following definition of greenway trails to ensure that the opinions and answers recorded were specifically about greenway trails, including "rail trails, canal trails, or bike paths."

The survey, along with supporting information, was available from April 30 to July 2, 2020 through an online platform located at GreenwaysPlan.org. Capturing the opinions and preferences of greenway trail users was

intended to form a cohesive narrative about what kind of activities greenway trail users engage in, as well as why and how often they engage in those activities, and what aspect of greenway trail development and maintenance they would like to see prioritized in the future.

PTNY solicited participation in the survey through four email communications and via social media posts across Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram platforms. The survey was also promoted by OPRHP email and social media communications. PTNY also reached out to partner organizations across the state to request their assistance in encouraging participation in the survey. During a webinar series that PTNY held on April 23, 2020, May 12, 2020, and June 4, 2020 webinar attendees were encouraged to direct their followers to www.greenwaysplan.org, where members could learn more about the Greenways Plan and access the survey.¹

Once the survey was completed, the raw data was downloaded and processed. A total of 2,924 survey entries were recorded. When incomplete and duplicate responses were filtered out, 2,673 responses remained. Entries received from a zip code residing outside of New York State were separated out from the bulk of the responses. This left 2,436 entries that comprise the analysis included in this report. To facilitate analysis of the responses by region, the zip codes provided by each survey respondent were grouped by region using the first three digits. The map below shows the regions used for purposes of this analysis.



¹ For more information about the webinars see Chapter 4 of the Statewide Greenways Plan

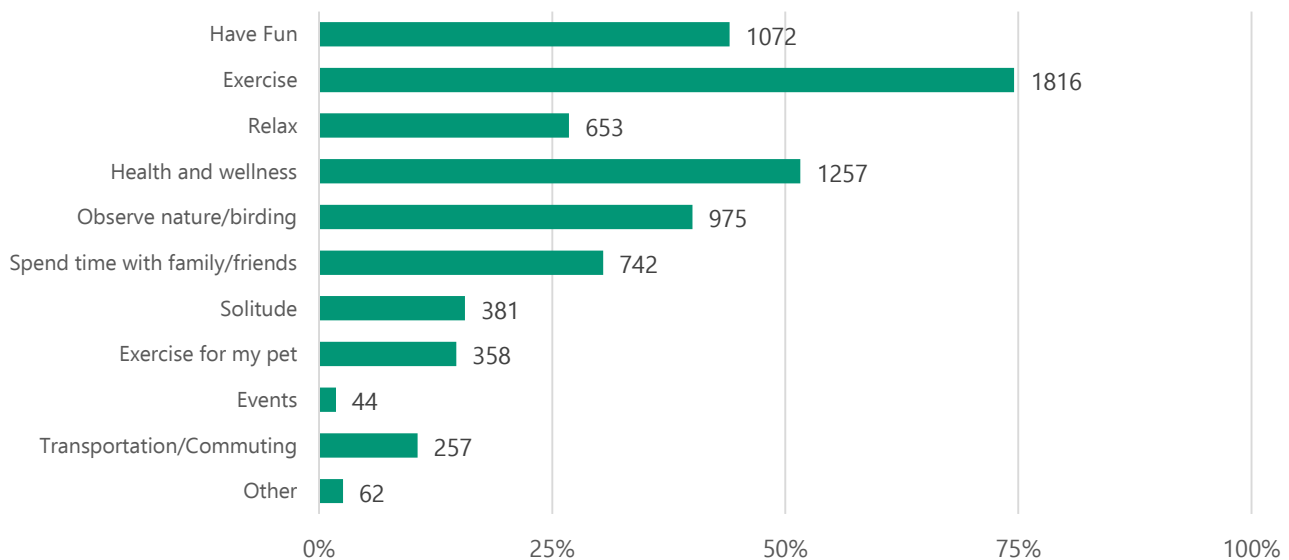
III. Survey Responses

The public survey consisted of 15 questions about general trail use and expectations and five questions to capture demographic information. The first section solicited information about greenway trail use, visitation and travel patterns, favorite greenway trails, and sources of greenway trail information. The following section evaluated the factors that users consider prior to visiting a greenway and how they would prioritize investment in existing and future trail development opportunities. A final question requested additional feedback, comments, and recommendations on the survey or other aspects of greenway trail use throughout the state. Finally, the survey requested demographic information from respondents about their place of residence, age, gender, race/ethnicity, and primary mode of transportation.

Greenway Trail Activities

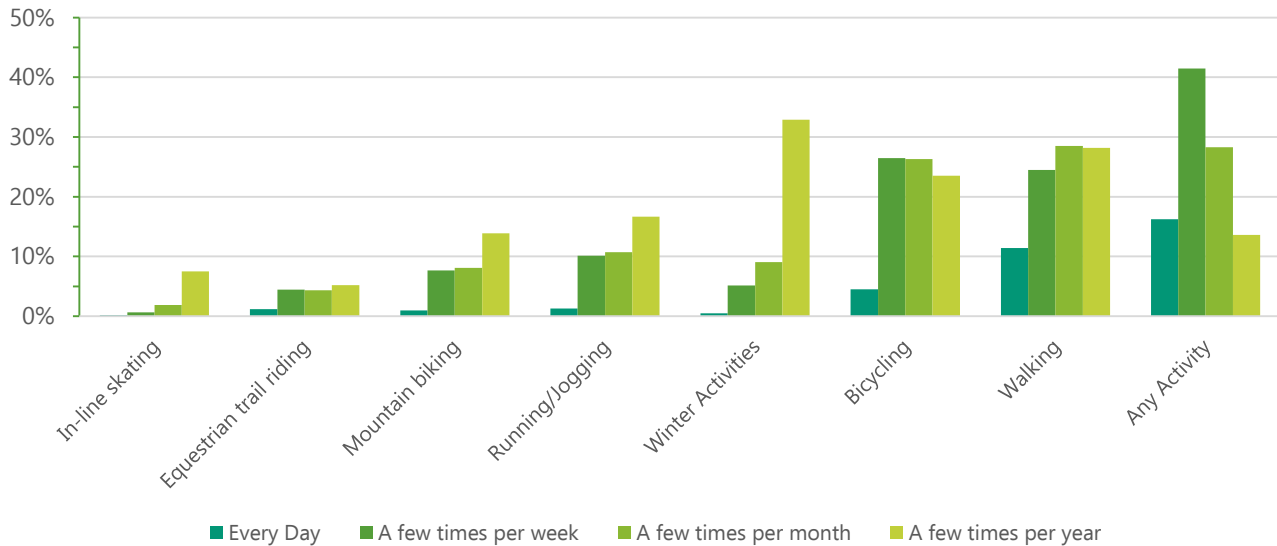
When respondents were asked to identify their three primary motivations for using greenway trails from a list of 10 options, “exercise” was the most common response, indicated by 75 percent of respondents as a top motivation for using greenway trails. Following close behind were “health and wellness” (52%), “having fun” (44%) and “observing or enjoying nature,” such as birding (40%). Greenway trails are also used for transportation purposes such as commuting to work by 11 percent of respondents.

Q1 - What are your top three motivations for using greenway trails?



Of the seven specified greenway trail use options, the most common use on greenway trails was walking, with 35% of respondents indicating that they walk on greenway trails weekly, with an additional 28% walking on greenway trails a few times a month. Bicycling was the next most common greenway trail use, with 35% of respondents riding on greenway trails at least once a week, and 63% riding on greenway trails at least once a month. Running or jogging was less common, with 22% of respondents doing one of those activities on a greenway trail a few times a month or more frequently. While few surveys indicated weekly or monthly participation in winter activities, 48% of respondents said that they snowshoed or cross-country skied at least a few times a year. Only 15% of respondents used greenway trails for horseback riding at least once a year. Overall, 58% of respondents used greenway trails for one of the identified activities at least a few times a week, and 86% used greenway trails at least a few times a month. Only 11 respondents, or fewer than 0.5%, reported never using greenway trails for an activity.

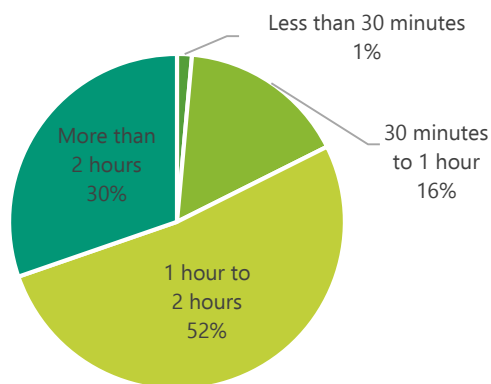
Q2 - How often do you participate in the following activities on greenway trails?



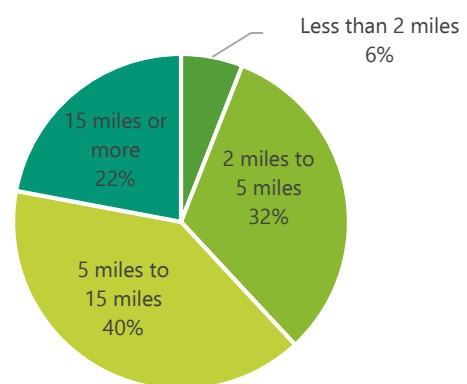
The length in time and distance covered on a typical visit to greenway trail varied. Fewer than 1% of respondents indicated that a typical visit to a greenway trail lasted less than 30 minutes, while 52% typically visited for between one and two hours while an additional 30% responded that a typical visit lasted more than two hours. Similarly, only 6% of respondents covered fewer than two miles on a greenway trail during a typical visit, while 40% covered five to fifteen miles and 22% covered more than fifteen miles on a typical trip. The most frequent combinations of responses were from those who took between one and two hours on a visit to a greenway trail and covered between five and fifteen miles (22% of all respondents) and two and five miles (20% of all respondents). These were followed by those who visited greenway trails for more than two hours and covered between five and fifteen miles (14%) and more than fifteen miles (13%).

Overall, 57% of respondents reported a typical visit to greenway trails as lasting more than one hour and covering more than five miles. This supports the idea that greenway trails are destinations for visitors, that they are heavily used by those who make it a point to dedicate time to spending on a greenway trail – and that they seek those trails where they can cover a longer distance.

Q3 - How long does your typical visit to greenway trails last?



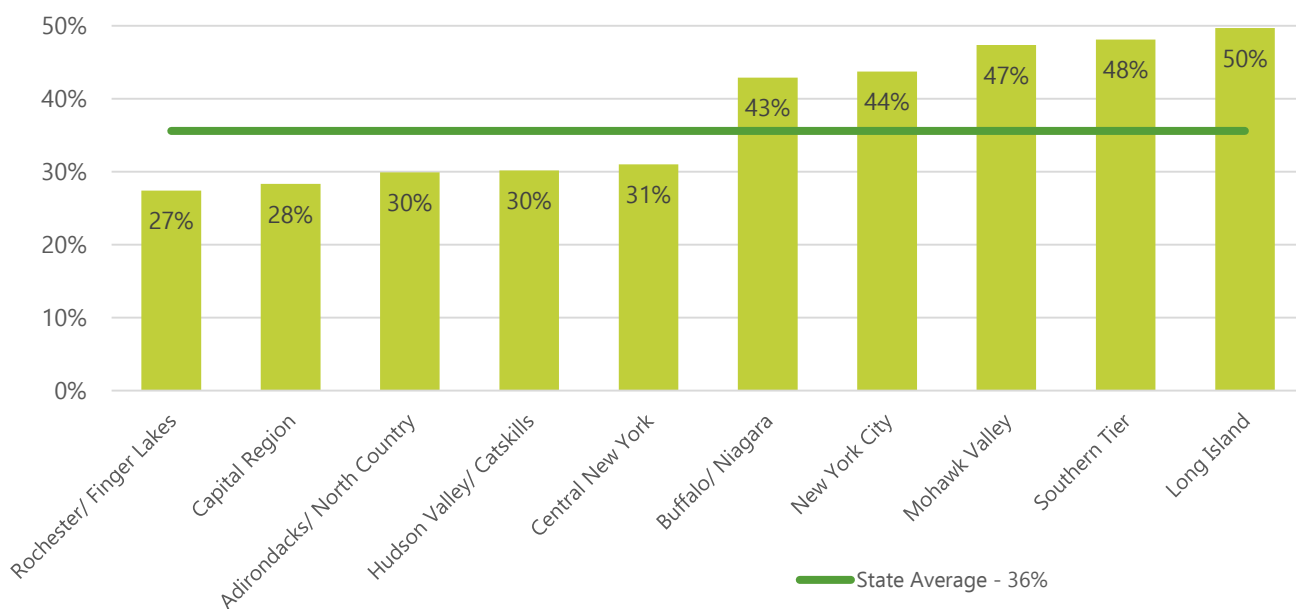
Q4 - On a typical visit to a greenway, how many miles do you cover?



Traveling to visit Greenway Trails

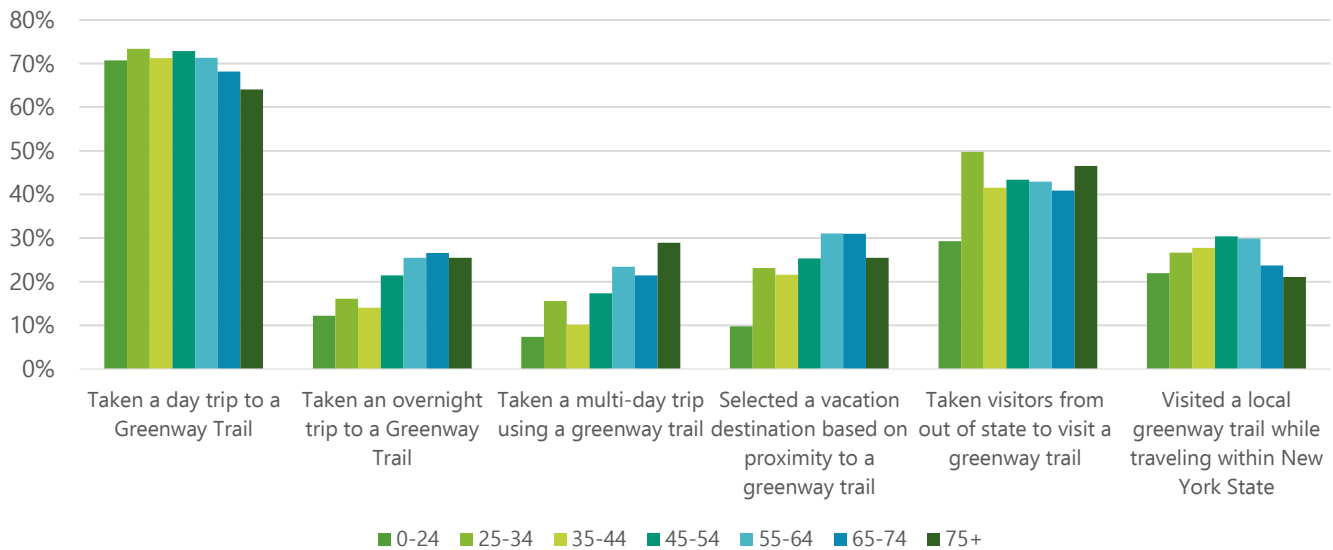
The travel time to access greenway trails was spread fairly evenly over the different response options, with 64% indicating travel times of 30 minutes or less and only 11% traveling more than an hour on average to access greenway trails. However, responses to this question varied greatly by region. In four of the 10 regions surveyed (Rochester/Finger Lakes, Capital Region, Adirondacks/North Country, and Hudson Valley/Catskills), 30% or fewer of respondents indicated a typical travel time of 30 minutes or more, with Central New York close behind at 31%. On the other end of the spectrum, half of Long Island residents reported having to travel more than 30 minutes to access a greenway trail, followed by the Southern Tier (48% of respondents), Mohawk Valley (47%) and New York City (44%). New York City (18%) and the Southern Tier (22%) saw the highest number of respondents who typically traveled more than an hour to visit a greenway trail.

Q5: Percentage of survey respondents who reported typically traveling more than 30 minutes to access greenway trails, by region



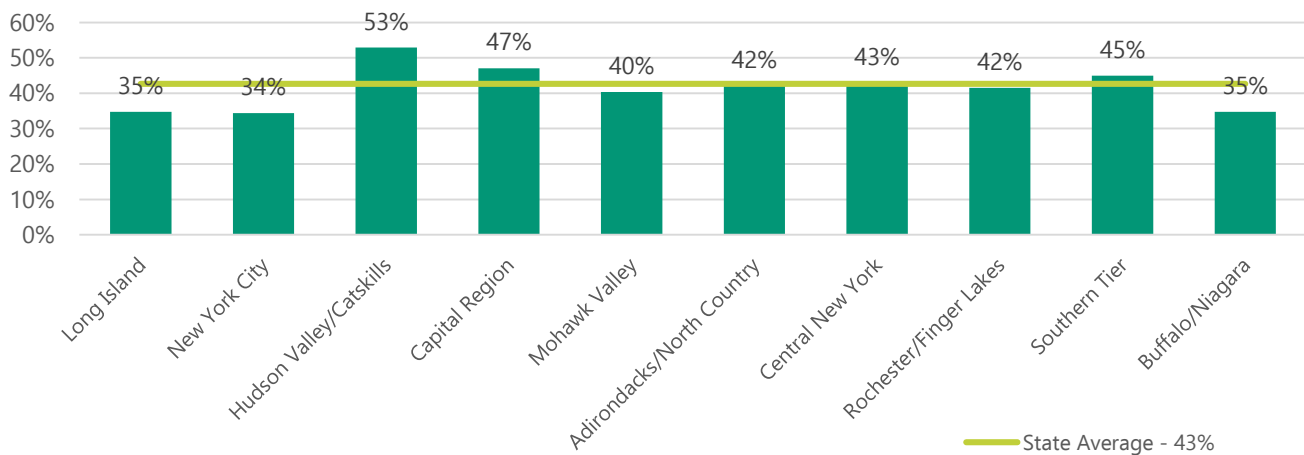
Survey respondents also relayed their past travel experiences relative to greenway trails. The majority of respondents indicated having taken a day trip with the primary goal of visiting a greenway trail (71%), while 22% had taken an overnight trip to visit a greenway trail, and 19% had taken a multi-day trip, such as an organized bicycle tour, using greenway trails. The survey also explored whether respondents had selected a vacation destination based on its proximity to a greenway trail (27%), taken visitors from out of state to a greenway trail (43%), or visited a greenway trail while traveling for non-vacation purposes (27%). Survey respondents under 55 were slightly more likely than those over 55 to have taken day trips (72% to 69%). However, older survey respondents were more likely than younger respondents to have taken overnight trips to visit a greenway trail (26% to 18%), to have taken a multi-day trip using a greenway trail (23% to 14%), and to have selected a vacation destination based on proximity to a greenway trail (31% to 23%).

Q6 - Travel experiences with greenway trails by age



The number of respondents who recorded having taken visitors from out of state to visit a local greenway trail varied by region. Residents of the Hudson Valley/Catskills region were most likely to have taken out-of-state visitors to a greenway trail, at 53%. By contrast, 35% or fewer of respondents in Long Island, New York City, and the Buffalo/Niagara regions responded as having done so.

Q6: Percentage of survey respondents who reported taking visitors from out-of-state to visit a local greenway trail, by region

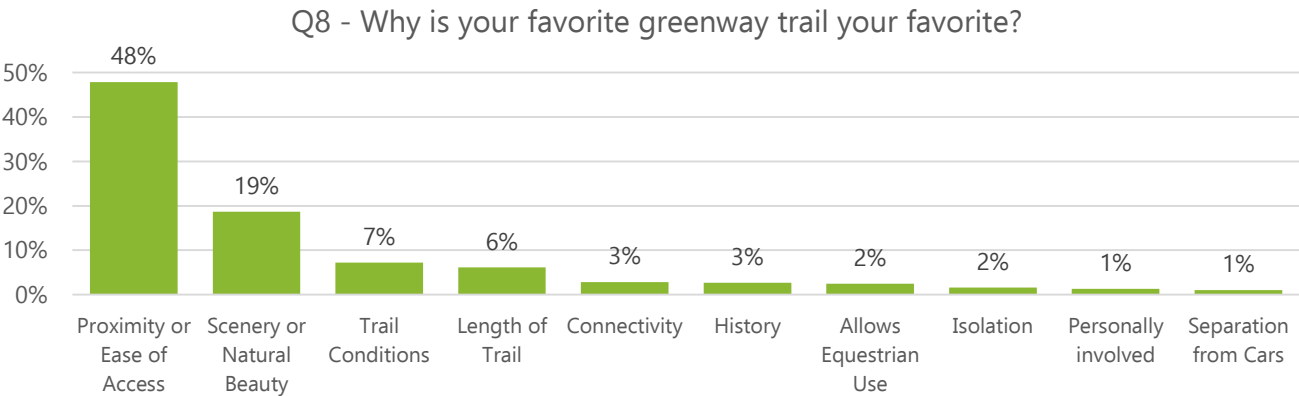


There are many factors that influence the ability to access greenway trails. While the availability of greenway trails in a region undoubtedly plays a significant role, other factors may be in play as well, as traffic in certain parts of the state or reliance on public transit can result in a longer travel time needed to reach a greenway trails a certain distance from one's home, while the same distance can be covered more rapidly in other parts of the state. Travel time for visiting greenway trails can also be skewed on the nature of the visit. Those who are visiting greenway trails for a day trip or an overnight trip will be traveling a longer distance and taking a lengthier trip than would those who are visiting a local trail for a shorter trip.

Favorite Greenway Trails

Survey respondents were asked to identify their favorite greenway trail in New York State and indicate why they identified this greenway trail as their favorite. By far, the most popular greenway trail listed by respondents was the Erie Canalway Trail. This was unsurprising, due to the length and connectivity of the trail -- at 360 miles, the Erie Canalway Trail connects six of New York’s ten largest cities. Other popular greenway trails were either among the state’s longest or located near large cities. The second most popular greenway trail was the Genesee Valley Greenway, which runs for 90 miles south from Rochester. The heavily used Hudson River Greenway along the Hudson River in Manhattan was the third, followed by Westchester County’s North County/South County Trail and the Albany County Helderberg-Hudson Rail Trail.

When asked to provide an open-ended response about why the survey respondent selected a particular greenway trail as their favorite, nearly half (48%) indicated that the proximity of, or ease of access to, this greenway (most likely from their place of residence) influenced their selection. Descriptions of the natural beauty and scenery along the greenway trail selected were found in nearly 20% of responses, and the condition of the trail (including maintenance and upkeep, terrain, and available amenities) in 7% of responses.



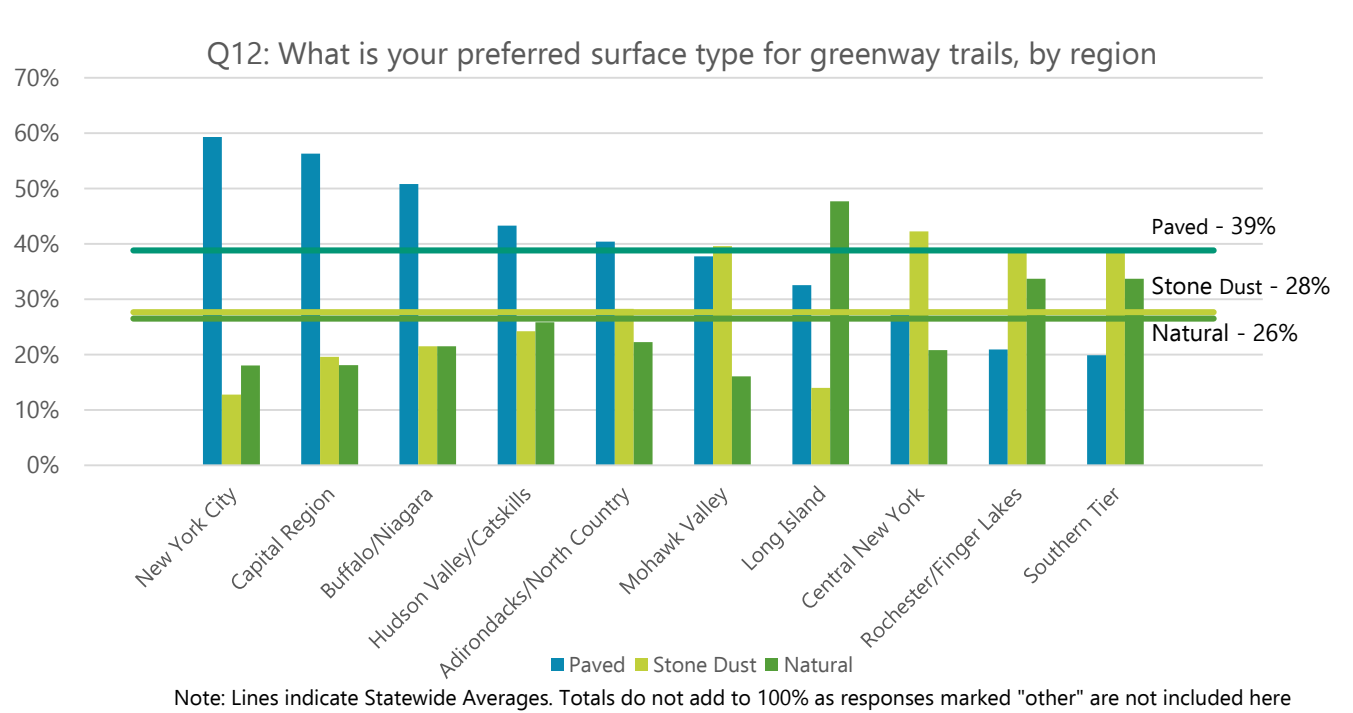
Of note, 450 of the responses indicated the name of a state or local park, other state land, or long-distance hiking trail as their favorite greenway. This response is likely due to confusion among survey respondents about the scope of the survey and how greenway trails are defined despite the efforts of PTNY and OPRHP to explicitly define a greenway trail as a “rail trail, canal trail, or bike path” with the goal of keeping the focus on the greenway trails under the purview of this planning process.

Planning a trip to a Greenway Trail

A pair of questions asked survey respondents about what sources they used and what factors they considered when planning a trip to a greenway trail. By far, the most common sources for accessing and finding information about greenway trails was the internet (70%), with social media cited by 30% of respondents. The most commonly cited sources for information for those who relied on the internet were the AllTrails.org, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy’s TrailLink.com, PTNY’s Trailfinder map, ptny.org/trailfinder, and various sources available through New York State government. Many people also cited using search engines such as Google to find information about trails, or relying on websites for the individual trail they planned on using. Many also indicated the use of social media sources such as Facebook and Twitter to find information about new trails to explore. The second most common source of information for survey respondents was through word-of-mouth exchanges (42%). Other respondents indicated that they seek out information from e-communications from trail-related organizations, from local news, or that they rely on signage and kiosks in their communities.

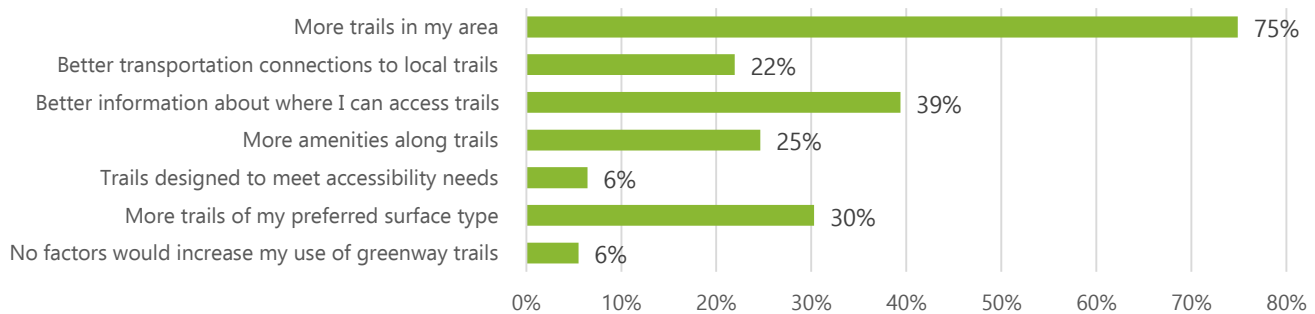
Respondents were asked to select the factors that they consider when planning a trip to a greenway trail. The majority of respondents (80%) selected the distance available for them to walk or ride as a primary factor. Slightly more than three-quarters of respondents (78%) selected proximity to a greenway trail, and nearly 70% of respondents indicated that scenery/access to nature was a factor. Half of respondents identified surface type as a contributing factor. A follow-up question asked respondents to indicate their preferred greenway trail surface type. Forty percent preferred paved (asphalt/concrete), with nearly one-third preferring stone dust, and just over one-quarter preferring a natural surface. Many of those who selected “other” indicated that they preferred different trail surfaces for different contexts, with paved preferred for urban settings or for bicycling, and stone dust or natural preferred for more rural settings and for walking.

Surface type preferences varied by region. Paved greenway trails were preferred by respondents from New York City (59%), the Capital Region (56%), and Buffalo/Niagara (51%). Paved surface was selected by a plurality of respondents in the Hudson Valley/Catskills (43%) and Adirondacks/North Country (40%), but not by a majority. Similarly, stone dust was selected as the preferred surface type by a plurality, but not a majority, of respondents in Central New York (42%), the Mohawk Valley (40%), Rochester/Finger Lakes (39%), and the Southern Tier (39%). The only region to have the greatest number of respondents prefer natural/unfinished surfaces was Long Island at 48%.



When asked what would be the leading factor to increase their use of greenway trails, 75% of respondents selected more trails in their area, followed by 39% of respondents that wanted better information about where to access trails and 30% who wanted more trails of their preferred surface type. Only 6% of respondents claimed that there were no factors that would increase their use of greenway trails.

Q11 - What factors would increase your use of greenway trails?



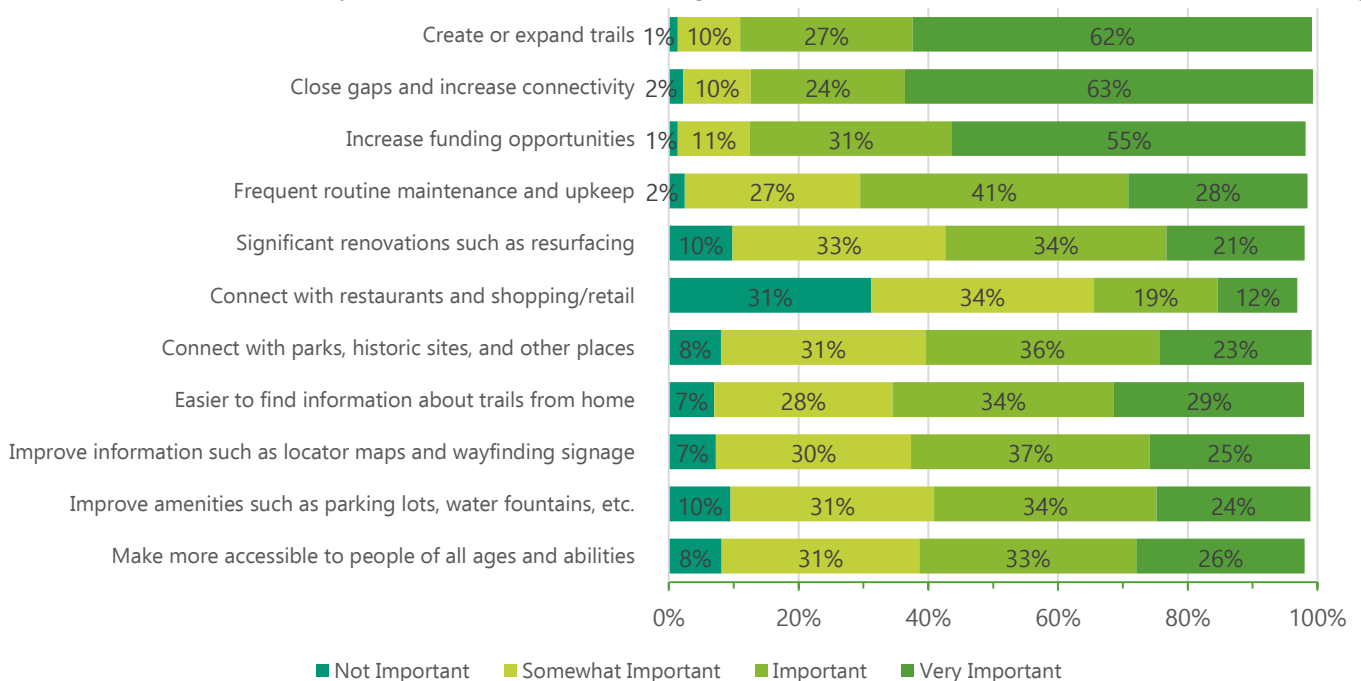
Planning for the future of greenway trails

Respondents were asked to rate the relative importance trail managers should assign to 11 possible opportunities to further develop, maintain, or improve the greenway trail network, and to rate the importance of 11 amenities/services along greenway trails. Users were asked to rate each opportunity as very important, important, somewhat important, or not important, and had the option to respond “no opinion/don’t know.”

Respondents overwhelmingly prioritized closing the gaps and creating an interconnected greenway trail system, creating new or expanding existing greenway trails, and increasing funding opportunities for greenway trails. Each of these options were marked as very important or important by more than 85% of respondents, with 63% marking closing the gaps to create a more interconnected greenway trail system as very important, followed closely by 62% marking creating new or expanding existing greenway trails as very important.

Seven of the other eight options were generally well received, marked as important or very important by between 55% and 70% of respondents and no less than 88% of respondents. The only option that was not given the same level of importance by respondents was connecting greenway trails with restaurants and shopping/retail destinations, with 31% suggesting that it was not important.

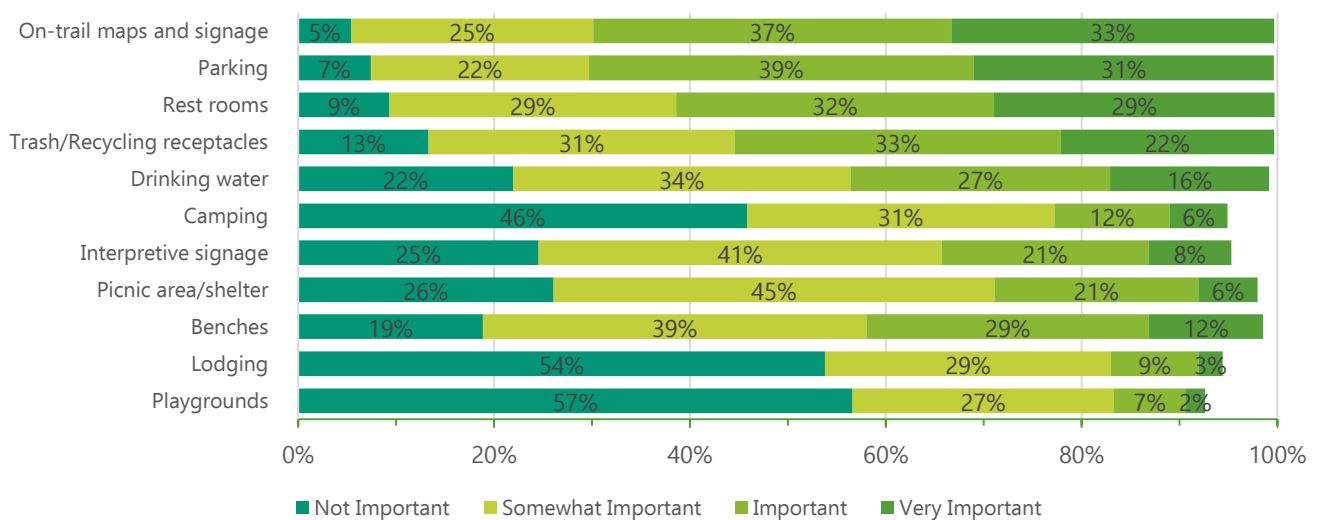
Q13 - How important do you feel it is that trail managers across New York prioritize each of the following?



The relative importance of various amenities on greenway trails saw a great variance in prioritization.

- The most highly valued amenities were on-trail maps and signage, marked as very important by 33% of respondents and important by an additional 37%.
- Parking was the next most valued amenity, marked as very important by 31% of respondents and important by 39%.
- The presence of restrooms and trash/recycling receptacles were the options selected as very important or important by the next greatest number of respondents, receiving responses of 61% and 55% respectively.
- 57% of respondents marked playgrounds as not important, the lowest ranking of any amenity. This was unsurprising given that the average age of respondents was 58.
- Lodging (54%) and camping (46%) were also often selected as not important, which is consistent with the responses in question six that fewer than 25% of respondents had either taken overnight trips to visit greenway trails or taken a multi-day trip using a greenway trail.

Q14 - How important are each of the following amenities to your experience on greenway trails?



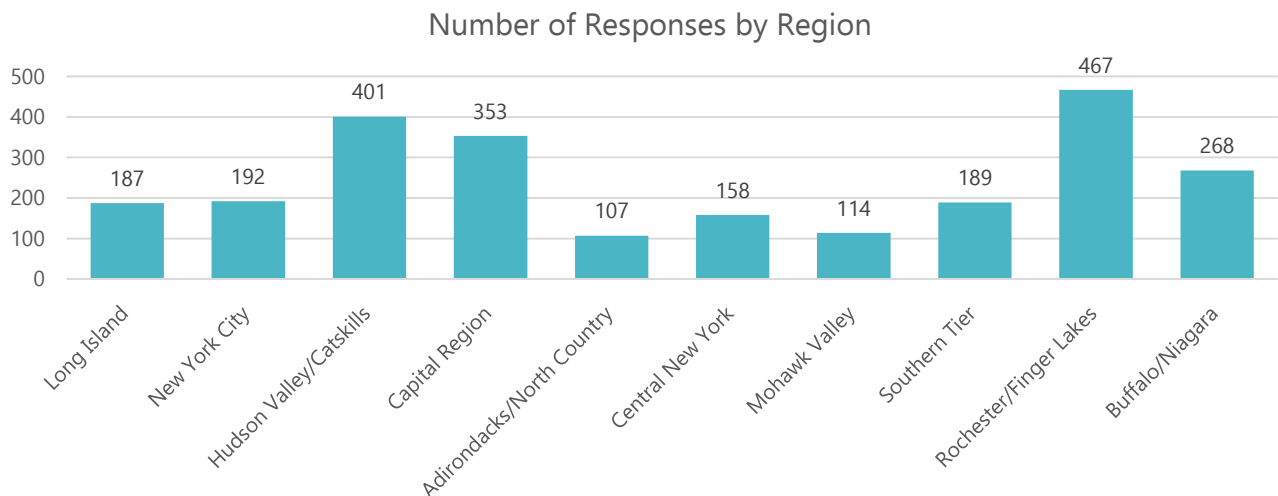
Respondents were asked for additional comments or considerations to gather further insight into issues not covered directly in the survey. Several individuals focused on connectivity and promoting a shift from use of cars to other forms of transportation, with one respondent suggesting that “the ability to take bicycles on commuter rail and then connect to greenway trails is very desirable.” Another respondent expressed that “the expansion of the trail system with connectors is making bike riding as transportation very viable.”

Other respondents raised issues of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion for communities of color and disadvantaged groups, a subject of increased interest regarding outdoor recreation. One respondent requested that a concerted and “conscious effort be made for minorities to feel welcome on trails,” recommending that “the use of picture signage that depict[s] all races using and enjoying these spaces” will help in “reducing unconscious bias and profiling.” A comment from an individual with a disability spoke to a difficulty in participating in outdoor recreation opportunities when greenway trails are not universally accessible, or when adequate information is not made available about which greenway trails are accessible.

Although not directly referred to in the survey questions, the impact of COVID-19 was also a major topic of discussion. Respondents requested that new greenway trail development incorporate wider paths, and a large majority of comments referenced the need to invest in greenways to meet the increasing demand witnessed during the pandemic. Roadway safety, specifically road crossings, was cited, as well as environmental safety precautions, in particular, “installing boot brush stations to help prevent the spread of invasive species and interpretive signs that raise awareness of invasives.” Overall, more designated space (for equestrians and for cyclists) was cited as an important consideration for future development, as well as local stewardship programs to ensure that these assets are maintained and accessible to all.

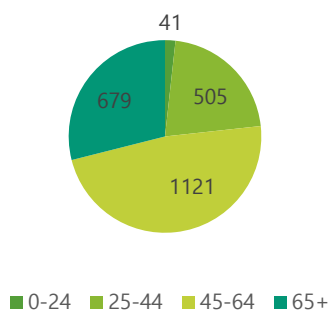
IV. Demographic Information

The survey requested that respondents provide basic information about themselves for analysis purposes, including their zip code, age, gender, race/ethnicity, and primary mode of transportation. The demographic analysis below compares these figures for all questions to statewide data compiled by the U.S. Census Bureau as part of the 2014-18 American Community Survey Five-Year Average.²

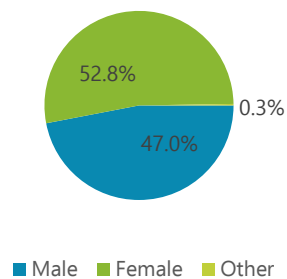


Survey responses were received from residents of all parts of the state, with some regions providing a disproportionate number of responses. The survey captured more of the opinions of upstate residents; the Rochester/Finger Lakes region provided 19% of responses despite only comprising 6% of the state's population, and the Capital Region provided 14% of responses despite only comprising 5% of the state's population. At the other extreme, only 8% of responses came from New York City residents, despite the region being home to 42% of New York State residents, and Long Island's 8% response rate was less than its 15% share of state residents.

Q17 - What is your age?



Q18 - What gender do you identify as?

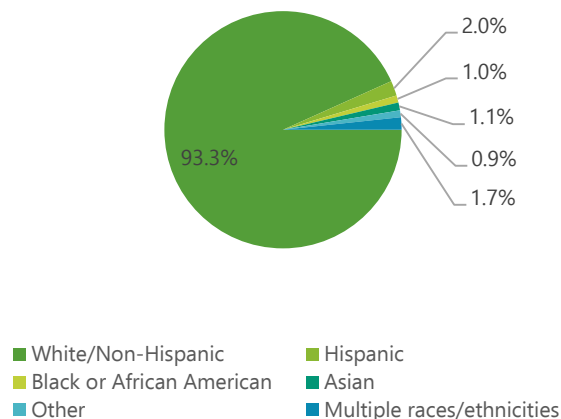


The median age of survey respondents was 58 and more than half of respondents were 55 years old or older. Thus, the survey disproportionately reflects the views of older New Yorkers, leaving youths and young adults up to age 25 severely underrepresented. Just 10% of survey responses came from those 25 or younger, despite this demographic making up 46% of the state's population. Respondents were roughly split between female (53%) and male (47%). The vast majority of survey respondents identified as White/Non-Hispanic (93%), while all other races/ethnicities were significantly underrepresented, especially Hispanic (2%) and Black or African American

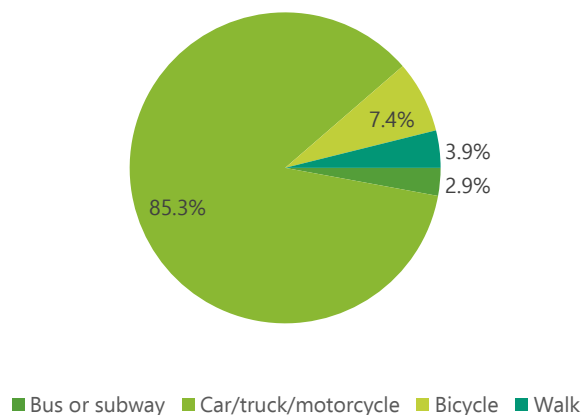
² Data retrieved from data.census.gov, Table DP05 for all Zip Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs) in New York State.

(1%). By contrast, only 56% of the state's population identify as White/Non-Hispanic, while 19% identify as Hispanic and 14% identify as Black or African American. Non-White racial/ethnic groups made up less than 10% of survey respondents, despite being more than 40% of the state's population.

Q19 - What race/ethnicity do you identify as?



Q20 - What is your primary mode of transportation?



Most respondents primarily traveled by car, truck, van, or motorcycle (85%), over 20 percentage points higher than the share of motor vehicle users among the state's general population. Much of this difference is accounted for by the corresponding absence of public transportation users in this survey. Only 3% of respondents indicated that they use public transportation as their primary mode of transportation, compared to the nearly 30% of the state population that relies on public transportation as their main mode. This substantial difference is likely tied to the geographic skew of our respondents toward upstate New York, where public transportation is much less common than in New York City. After personal vehicles, the next most popular mode of transportation indicated on the survey was bicycle (7%), six percentage points higher than the percentage of people that use a bicycle as their main form of transportation in general across the state. People that use bicycles as their primary form of transportation were likely attracted to the survey because they are already invested in cycling infrastructure.

V. Survey Conclusions

Greenways are a highly valued resource for New York State residents, with more than 85% of survey respondents using a greenway trail on at least a monthly basis. Greenway trails are primarily used for exercise, health and wellness, being in nature, and for simply having fun. Across the state, greenway trails seem to be viewed as more of a place for exercise and recreation than for utilitarian transportation, as only 11% of respondents cited transportation as one of their top three motivations for using a greenway. This trend is also reflected in the factors that survey respondents consider when planning a trip to a greenway trail, with just 8% indicating that a greenway trail's use for commuting to school or place of work is a consideration. However, in New York City, greenway trails are more widely viewed as a transportation option. Almost 30% of New York City respondents cited transportation as a primary motivation for using a greenway trail, and 20% indicated that they consider the ability to use a greenway trail for commuting to work or school when planning a trip to a greenway.

The survey shows that New Yorkers want more greenway trails, both through the extension of existing greenway trails and by the construction of new greenway trails. The survey found that the number one factor that would increase use of greenway trails was more trails in a respondent's area. Across the state, the length of the greenway trail and the proximity of the trail were the two strongest factors respondents considered when planning a trip to a greenway, cited by 80% and 78% of respondents respectively as important considerations. Respondents believe that trail managers should be investing in greenway trail creation and expansion, with the majority of respondents indicating that it was important or very important to create new or expand existing greenway trails (88%), close gaps and create a greenway trail system that is more interconnected (87%), and increase funding opportunities for greenway trails (86%). Together, all of these findings suggest that expanding or creating more greenways that reach more people should be the number one priority, giving more New Yorkers opportunities for outdoor exercise and recreation.

The survey also revealed regional disparities in access to greenway trail networks that can help inform future planning efforts. While 64% of respondents statewide indicated that they can access a greenway trail in thirty minutes or less, not all regions have equal access to greenway trails. A significant portion of residents of Long Island (50%), the Southern Tier (48%), Mohawk Valley (47%), and New York City (44%) typically travel more than 30 minutes to access greenway trails. While the reasons for the lengthier travel required to visit greenway trails in these regions may vary, such as traffic and reliance on public transportation, creation of new greenway trails can be targeted in these regions to improve access to greenway trails. While 65% of White/non-Hispanic respondents could access greenway trails within 30 minutes, only 55% of Black or African American respondents could do the same. When considering the location of new or expanded greenway trails, an effort should be made to reach minority populations.

The survey indicated that greenway trails present many opportunities for tourism. More than 70% of respondents from across the state indicated that they have taken a day trip in order to visit a greenway trail, creating opportunities for patronizing trailside businesses for refreshments or trail-related needs. Residents of the Southern Tier (79%), Long Island (76%), the Hudson Valley/Catskills (76%) and New York City (74%) were the most likely to have taken a day trip to visit a greenway trail. These results are most likely associated with the time residents take to get to greenway trails. With the exception of the Hudson Valley/Catskills, the majority of respondents within these regions indicated that they travel over half an hour to reach a greenway trail, making any visit to a greenway trail a day trip.

Many respondents have also taken longer trips to visit greenway trails, with 22% indicating that they had taken an overnight trip and 19% that they had taken a multi-day trip. As the state's trail network continues to grow, with the completion of the Empire State Trail adding to the more than 1,200 miles of existing greenway trails across the state, we expect to see additional trail-based tourism in all parts of the state.

By region, the majority of respondents that had taken an overnight trip came from Long Island (31%) and New York City (29%). Similarly, the majority of respondents that had taken multi-day trips came from New York City (24%), Long Island (22%) and the Capital Region (22%). Respondents aged 55 and older were more likely to have taken an overnight trip (26%) than respondents under age 55 (16%). The difference was even more stark when considering multi-day trips, where 25% of respondents over age 55 had taken such a trip, while only 13% of respondents under 55 had done the same.

Together, these results imply that those most likely to make overnight or multi-day trips are older residents from the downstate regions. This age cohort has the potential to bring significant economic benefits to the greenway trail communities that they visit on their trips, taking into account the money they will spend on lodging, food and beverages, and any other trail-related needs.

There is still room for growth in tourism along New York's greenway trails. When asked to indicate the importance of different trail amenities, lodging and camping were two of the lowest-ranking amenities, receiving a rating of unimportant by 54% and 46% of respondents. With its network of over 100 greenway trails and the completion of the Empire State Trail, New York has enormous potential to capitalize on overnight and multi-day greenway trail tourism.

On-trail maps, signage, and parking are the most important amenities to provide along greenway trails, as each was selected as important or very important by more than 70% of survey respondents. It is clear that survey respondents value the ability to orient themselves in a place and trail managers should work to make maps and signage as clear as possible. Ensuring enough parking at various locations along a greenway trail should also be considered a high priority when designing new greenway trails or expanding existing ones. The next most important amenity to respondents was restrooms, with 61% of respondents identifying them as important or very important to a greenway trail experience. Restrooms should be easy to locate and accessible for all greenway trail users.

Survey results indicated that the primary source of greenway trail information for survey respondents was the internet (70%), with an additional 30% using social media. Greenway trail websites and social media are very important resources for greenway trail users, and should be prioritized and kept current to provide users with up-to-date information.

VI. Survey Limitations

Two notable challenges impacted our ability to collect survey data that reflects the views of all state residents: potential language barriers and geographic/demographic make-up of respondents. The survey and plan description were only made available in English due to an inability to translate the information in a timely manner. For future considerations, additional public outreach materials should be made available in Spanish and other languages as appropriate.

The survey responses were not geographically representative of the views of the state as a whole, due to a disproportionately low number of responses received from downstate communities, as Long Island and New York City provided only 16% of the survey responses despite being home to 57% of the state's population. As a result, all of the upstate regions had a disproportionately high number of responses. PTNY and OPRHP did promote participation in areas across the state by requesting assistance from partner organizations. Organizations were asked to share this opportunity with their members, allowing us to reach audiences not necessarily connected to the existing trail user networks, those who may not consider themselves "greenway trail users." This survey was as much about understanding why residents use greenway trails, as it was about understanding why they do not. Therefore, we hoped to draw from opinions across the state, especially in places that may be underserved by the existing network. In future efforts, the State and supporting partners will need to make more explicit the need to capture the opinions of individuals in regions where representation was low.

Another notable shortcoming is the lack of diversity within the sample size. The vast majority of survey respondents identified as White (93%), a far greater proportion than that of the state's population (56%). In contrast, all other races/ethnicities were significantly underrepresented, especially Hispanic (2%) and Black or African American (1%), which make up 19% and 14% of the state population respectively. When combined, all non-White racial/ethnic groups made up less than 10% of survey respondents, whereas they make up over 40% of the state's population. The challenges of gathering public input during COVID-19 has limited our outreach abilities. Without conducting in-person surveys, directing resources to specifically solicit feedback from underrepresented groups was difficult. Future surveys of greenway users, whether conducted digitally or in-person, should make extra effort to reach out to groups underrepresented in this process.

VII. Appendix – Survey Questions and Raw Data

Survey questions and responses are provided below in the same order they were provided to those filling out the survey. A number of questions allowed for open-ended responses. Responses were coded to the best ability of PTNY staff. The questions that required responses to be coded are marked with an asterisk. *

Greenway Trail Activities

In general, what are your top three motivations for using greenway trails?

Answer	Number	Pct.
Have Fun	1072	44%
Exercise	1816	75%
Relax	653	27%
Health and wellness	1257	52%
Observe nature/birding	975	40%
Spend time with family members and/or friends	742	30%
Solitude	381	16%
Exercise for my pet	358	15%
Events	44	2%
Transportation/Commuting	257	11%
Other	62	3%
TOTAL	2436	100%

How often do you participate in the following activities on greenway trails?

Answer	Every Day		A few times per week		A few times per month		A few times per year		Never	
	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.
Walking	278	11%	596	24%	694	28%	687	28%	181	7%
Running/Jogging	31	1%	246	10%	261	11%	406	17%	1492	61%
Bicycling	109	4%	645	26%	641	26%	573	24%	468	19%
Equestrian trail riding	29	1%	108	4%	105	4%	127	5%	2067	85%
Mountain biking	23	1%	186	8%	197	8%	338	14%	1692	69%
In-line skating	3	0%	15	1%	46	2%	182	7%	2190	90%
Winter activities	11	0%	125	5%	220	9%	802	33%	1278	52%
Any Activity	395	16%	1010	41%	689	28%	331	14%	11	0%

*Answers for "Any Activity" are not sum of above columns; they reflect the most frequent response to any activity provided by each survey respondent

How long does your typical visit to greenway trails last?

Answer	Number	Pct.
Less than 30 minutes	35	1%
30 minutes to 1 hour	394	16%
1 hour to 2 hours	1269	52%
More than two hours	738	30%
TOTAL	2436	100%

On a typical visit to a greenway, how many miles do you cover?

Answer	Number	Pct.
Less than two miles	145	6%
2 miles to 5 miles	783	32%
5 miles to 15 miles	971	40%
Fifteen miles or more	537	22%
TOTAL	2436	100%

How long do you typically travel to access greenway trails?

Answer	Number	Pct.
Less than 15 minutes	759	31%
15 minutes to 30 minutes	810	33%
30 minutes - 1 hour	589	24%
More than one hours	278	11%
TOTAL	2436	100%

In the past, have you done any of the following?

Answer	Number	Pct.
Taken a day trip with the primary goal of visiting a greenway trail	1720	71%
Taken an overnight or longer trip with the primary goal of visiting a greenway trail	546	22%
Taken a multi-day trip using a greenway trail (such as a bicycle tour)	470	19%
Selected a vacation destination based on proximity to a greenway trail	662	27%
Taken visitors from out of state to visit a local greenway trail	1040	43%
Visited a local greenway trail while traveling within New York State for business or other non-vacation purposes	668	27%
TOTAL	2436	100%

What is your favorite greenway trail in New York State? Why is this your favorite?

Trail Name*	Number	Why is this your favorite?	Number
Erie Canalway Trail	645	Proximity/Ease of Access	1165
Genesee Valley Greenway	267	Scenery/Beauty	454
Hudson River Greenway	72	Trail Conditions	175
North County/South County Trail	68	Other/Unclear/No Response	155
Albany County Helderberg-Hudson Rail Trail	60	Length of Trail	149
Heritage Trail (Orange County)	52	Connectivity	69
Wallkill Valley Rail Trail	46	History	65
Dutchess County Rail Trail	41	Allows Equestrian Use	60
Harlem Valley Rail Trail	39	Isolation	39
Shoreline Trail (Niagara-Erie Counties)	36	Personal Involvement	31
Hudson Valley Rail Trail	26	Separation from Traffic	24
Walkway over the Hudson	26		
Zim Smith Trail	25		
Ashokan Rail Trail	23		
Warren County Bikeway	23		
Bethpage Bikeway	22		
Lehigh Valley Trail	22		
Setauket-Port Jefferson Station Greenway Trail	20		

*These are only a portion of the responses; 117 different greenway trails were listed while other responses provided answers that either did not specify one greenway trail or selected a location that was not a greenway trail. Similarly, there were other reasons that a given trail was the favorite beyond the list provided here. This list reflects all of the responses given by at least 1% of survey respondents.

How do you get greenway trails information or find out about the trails you visit?

Answer	Number	Pct.
Internet	1711	70%
Social Media	723	30%
Magazine or book about trails	388	16%
Trail brochure or flyer	575	24%
Word of Mouth	1029	42%
Other	161	7%
TOTAL	2436	100%

What websites do you rely on for information? *

Answer	Number
PTNY (Parks & Trails New York)	211
TrailLink.com	180
All Trails	116
CLIMB (Concerned Long Island Mountain Bicyclists)	24
NYNJTC (New York-New Jersey Trail Conference)	18
Google	189
Facebook	59
NYS Parks	92
NYS DEC	34
Other NYS Pages	73
County/Municipal Parks Websites	23

Needs Evaluation

What factors do you consider when planning a trip to a greenway trail?

Answer	Number	Pct.
Length (how far can I walk/ride)	1941	80%
Proximity of trail	1908	78%
Connectivity with points of interest (shopping, parks, historic sites, etc.)	887	36%
Use for commuting to school or place of work	198	8%
Surface type	1340	55%
Scenery/access to nature	1687	69%
None of the above	24	1%
TOTAL	2436	100%

What factors would increase your use of greenway trails?

Answer	Number	Pct.
More trails in my area	1824	75%
Better transportation connections to local trails	534	22%
Better information about where I can access trails	959	39%
More amenities along trails	600	25%
Trails designed to meet accessibility needs	157	6%
More trails of my preferred surface type	738	30%
Other	236	10%
No factors would increase my use of greenway trails	134	6%
TOTAL	2436	100%

What is your preferred surface type for greenway trails?

Answer	Number	Pct.
Paved (Asphalt/Concrete)	971	40%
Stone Dust (Crushed Stone/Compacted Gravel)	662	27%
Natural/Unfinished	632	26%
Other (Please indicate below)	171	7%
TOTAL	2436	100%

How important do you feel it is that trail managers across New York prioritize each of the following?

Answer	Very Important		Important		Somewhat Important		Not Important		No Opinion/Don't Know	
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.
Create new or expand existing greenway trails	1499	62%	649	27%	234	10%	33	1%	21	1%
Increase funding opportunities for greenway trails	1329	55%	760	31%	270	11%	33	1%	44	2%
Close gaps and create a greenway trail system that is more interconnected	1532	63%	580	24%	254	10%	53	2%	17	1%
More frequent routine maintenance and upkeep of existing trails (i.e. debris removal, garbage pickup)	674	28%	1007	41%	659	27%	59	2%	37	2%
Perform significant renovations such as resurfacing on existing greenway trails	519	21%	831	34%	799	33%	239	10%	48	2%
Connect greenway trails with restaurants and shopping/retail destinations	299	12%	467	19%	834	34%	760	31%	76	3%
Connect greenway trails with parks, historic sites, and other points of interest	572	23%	879	36%	767	31%	196	8%	22	1%
Make it easier to find information about trails from home	714	29%	832	34%	670	28%	170	7%	50	2%
Improve informational resources along greenway trails such as locator maps and wayfinding signage	602	25%	896	37%	734	30%	176	7%	28	1%
Improve greenway trail amenities such as parking lots, water fountains, and trash receptacles	578	24%	835	34%	764	31%	232	10%	27	1%
Make greenway trails more accessible to people of all ages and abilities	632	26%	815	33%	743	31%	198	8%	48	2%

How important are each of the following amenities to your experience on greenway trails?

Answer	Very Important		Important		Somewhat Important		Not Important		No Opinion/Don't Know	
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.
On-trail maps and signage	803	33%	891	37%	603	25%	131	5%	8	0%
Parking	747	31%	957	39%	542	22%	181	7%	9	0%
Rest rooms	698	29%	791	32%	713	29%	227	9%	7	0%
Trash/Recycling receptacles	532	22%	810	33%	762	31%	324	13%	8	0%
Drinking water	395	16%	646	27%	839	34%	535	22%	21	1%
Camping	144	6%	287	12%	764	31%	1117	46%	124	5%
Interpretive signage	206	8%	514	21%	1003	41%	598	25%	115	5%
Picnic area/shelter	148	6%	507	21%	1097	45%	635	26%	49	2%
Benches	284	12%	702	29%	955	39%	459	19%	36	1%
Lodging	61	3%	217	9%	712	29%	1310	54%	136	6%
Playgrounds	49	2%	178	7%	650	27%	1379	57%	180	7%

Do you have any additional comments or considerations that you'd like to share? *

Responses to this question varied too greatly to provide any summary data here

Demographic Information

What is your zip code?

Answer	Number	Pct.
Long Island (110XX; 115XX-119XX)	187	8%
New York City (100XX-104XX; 111XX-114XX)	192	8%
Hudson Valley/Catskills (105XX-109XX, 124XX-127XX)	401	16%
Capital Region (120XX-123XX)	353	14%
Adirondacks/North Country (128XX-129XX; 136XX)	107	4%
Central New York (130XX-132XX)	158	6%
Mohawk Valley (133XX-135XX)	114	5%
Southern Tier (137XX-139XX; 147XX-149XX)	189	8%
Rochester/Finger Lakes (144XX-146XX)	467	19%
Buffalo/Niagara (140XX-143XX)	268	11%
TOTAL	2436	100%

What is your age?

Answer	Number	Pct.
0-24	41	2%
25-34	199	8%
35-44	306	13%
45-54	438	19%
55-64	683	29%
65-74	565	24%
75+	114	5%
Total Respondents	2346	100%
No Response	90	

What gender do you identify as?

Answer	Number	Pct.
Female	1248	53%
Male	1111	47%
Non-binary/Other gender	6	0%
Total Respondents	2365	100%
Prefer not to say	71	

What race/ethnicity do you identify as?

Answer	Number	Pct.
White/Non-Hispanic	2097	93%
Hispanic	46	2%
Black or African American	22	1%
Asian	24	1%
Pacific Islander	1	0%
American Indian	4	0%
Other	16	1%
Multiple races/ethnicities	38	2%
Total Respondents	2248	100%
Prefer not to say	188	

What is your primary mode of transportation?

Answer	Number	Pct.
Bus, subway, or other mass transportation	70	3%
Car, truck, van, or motorcycle	2077	85%
Bicycle	181	7%
Walk	94	4%
Other	14	1%
TOTAL	2436	100%