

Perceptions of the Otago Central Rail Trail.

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Abstract

Even though the name has changed, the concept of greenways/rail-trails and their benefits to the communities through which they pass have existed for many years. Early City planners proposed the idea of greenbelts and garden cities because of their potential for recreation and aesthetic beauty. The concepts of greenbelts and garden cities have evolved into the greenways of today, which have begun to reclaim unused industrial areas for the benefits attainable from green areas.

Because of the abandonment of some uneconomic rail lines in recent years the potential to turn railway corridors into greenways (i.e. rail trails) has been realised. In its simplest definition a rail trail is a linear multi-use trail that has been built within an abandoned rail corridor. Rail trails offer many different experiences and benefits to the users and communities surrounding the trail. Current international research on rail trails has attempted to identify the users, resident attitudes and the increased economic impact of rail trails, although there is a relative lack of research into the perceptions of the business community.

This thesis identifies information about the users of the 150 km Otago Central Rail Trail in New Zealand. Four different surveys were conducted in order to attain a significant representation of the trail users and perceptions and expectations of the Otago Central Rail Trail during the first year that the trail has been completely open for use. The first survey contributed to the research into the business perceptions of the Otago Central Rail Trail was conducted during the months of October 2000 and February 2001. A total of 102 surveys were distributed and 66 were returned to the researcher creating a response rate of 64.7 percent. The three other surveys reviewed the trail users. The first user survey was distributed to the participants of the 'Great New Zealand Rail Trail Challenge Race: Ranfurly to Middlemarch' on November 26, 2000. There were approximately 70 participants in the race, 50 surveys were distributed and 31 completed surveys were returned to the researcher at a response rate of 62.0 percent. The second survey was distributed before the Otago Central Rail Trail Challenge Duathlon in February 2001. In total 119 surveys were distributed between the 210 race contestants and 37 were returned to the researcher. The final survey was distributed to the general trail users between the months of November 2000 until February 2001. Surveys were distributed in cooperation with three accommodations along the trail, one tour guide and the researcher.

The results of the research agree with the business community that the main type of activity on the Otago Central Rail Trail is bicycling and the majority of trail users travel with their friends. Although, families and couples are increasingly using the rail trail. There was little difference in the results supplied by the respondents to the different surveys in regards to many of the motivations, satisfactions and expected trail facilities. The main difference between the three trail user groups came in the form of the demographic population (gender, age, marital status and education level).