

Pocono Forest & Waters Conservation Landscape SUCCESS STORY

By: Live Well Luzerne/Wilkes-Barre Family YMCA

Downtown Wilkes-Barre Bicycle and Pedestrian Count

SUMMARY

The Downtown Wilkes-Barre Bicycle and Pedestrian Count organizes volunteers to count pedestrians and bicycles in about 10 locations in downtown Wilkes-Barre in September that are expected to have bicycle and pedestrian traffic or are otherwise significant for bicyclists and pedestrians. Methods and materials are taken from the National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project. The Count provides basic data about levels of bicycling and walking in downtown Wilkes-Barre, can help measure the impact of increases in walkability and trail projects, and can also help recruit business to downtown Wilkes-Barre.



CHALLENGE

Bicycling and walking are human-powered transportation. These modes of transportation provide many benefits that automobile transportation doesn't: they don't burn fossil fuels, they provide people with needed daily physical activity, and they create an active, social, secure public environment.

The City of Wilkes-Barre is a relatively low-income small city of about 40,000 residents in Luzerne County, in North-East Pennsylvania, with obesity and lack of physical activity well-documented problems. The City has been working to revitalize the downtown as well, including creation of a multi-modal center, streetscape enhancements, and major development projects, in the long-term including major trail projects. In trying to create positive change in walking and biking, lack of information about current levels and patterns of walking and bicycling in Wilkes-Barre, and comparable small cities is a distinct challenge.

PARTNERSHIP IS KEY

Wilkes-Barre YMCA housed the project and helped with copying forms and materials. **King's College & Dr. Bridget Costello** & about 50 research methods students volunteered to count as a class project. **Pennsylvania Environmental Council** allowed intern Ryan Bullock to help manage some counting periods. **Diamond City Partnership-Downtown's Business Improvement District-** provided guidance on where counts should be held. **Luzerne County Bikes & Walks, Live Well Luzerne, and the PA DOH District Office-** all provided volunteer counters



SOLUTION

The Downtown Wilkes-Barre Bicycle and Pedestrian filled the need for more information about levels of walking and bicycling in Wilkes-Barre by recruiting volunteer counters to count bicyclists and pedestrians at key location in the City. Counting methods and materials adopted from the National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation project, which also recommends dates to hold the count. In 2012, the third year of the count, almost 60 volunteers counted 10 locations at different times during the weekdays on Sept. 11th (a Tuesday), 12th and 13th, as well as on Saturday, Sept. 8th. This data provides basic information on how people move around downtown Wilkes-Barre on foot or by bicycle. It can be used for comparison by other small cities, especially in North East Pennsylvania, or around Binghamton, New York.

RESULTS

Data collected show that there continues to be significant walking in downtown Wilkes-Barre, with a 2012 average rate of 251 persons counted per location per two hour period, with a range from 19 to a high of 1005 persons per two hour period. Bicyclists are about 10% of total travelers, and female bicyclists are about 8-10% of total bicyclists. The rate of female bicyclists in the United States as a whole tends to be low, reflecting concerns about safety, but in downtown Wilkes-Barre they seem especially low. In comparison, women are about 41 to 42% of total pedestrians consistently. High points for pedestrian activity are Rodanos/Public Square and Main Street in front of Boscov's/Provincial Towers. The Market Street Bridge is the high point for bicycle activity. This bridge has especially wide sidewalks on both sides of the bridge, giving both pedestrians and bicyclists feelings of space and safety from traffic as they cross the Susquehanna River. Downtown walking is highest at lunch, and bicycling is highest in the evening, reflecting the recreational nature of bicycling in the City of Wilkes-Barre. Using the extrapolation tool of the National Bicycling and Pedestrian Documentation Project, we can estimate annual "non-programmed event" use of River Common at about 230,000 visitors annually. Data should be useful in the future and for other small cities.

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