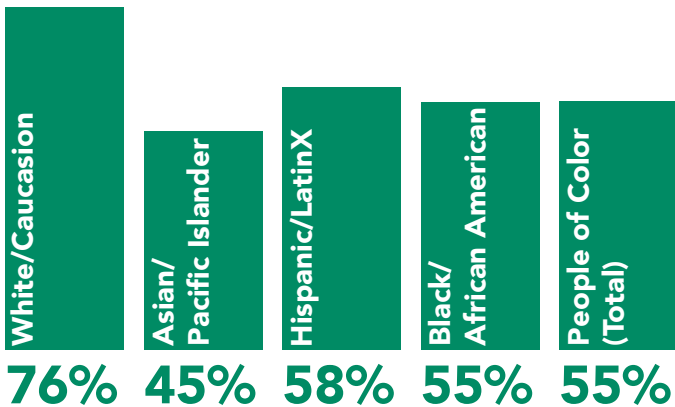


2 Who is using the trails currently, and do trail users differ from nearby residents?

Fewer than two-thirds of residents located in the study areas were aware that there is a trail close to where they live. The first job in many neighborhoods may be to raise awareness of the trails.

Do you agree with the statement:

“When I am in the parks or on the trails around here, I see other people like me.”



Some residents expressed **sadness** or **anger** that they no longer felt welcome in gentrifying areas.

The **Empowered** archetype rejected the idea that they were not welcome.

Percentage People of Color

	Trail Users (intercepts)	Study Area (census data)
Camden	74%	69%
Trenton	79%	55%
Cobbs Creek	54%	84%
Norristown	16%	47%

Focus Group in Trenton:

“The Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park Trail runs right next to US Route 1. Then, it looks like it's running close to the canal as well. Has anyone ever visited this area before?”

“I never knew this area existed. This is new for me.”

“I may have driven past it, but never paid attention to it.”

“I've heard of the Delaware River Trail, but I never did with this or anything.”

“No one knows a lot about it?”

“No, I don't. I'm not familiar with it.”

“No.”

“Okay. How close are you from this area where this trail is?”

“I'm like, I would say, maybe about two miles, maybe three. I'm not far at all.”

“I'd say probably 10 minutes.”

“I'm from where the train station is. I think I'm almost around 20 minutes.”

“It was kind of hurtful [when they took the park playground equipment away] because it's like, you got a community up there (Jeffersonville), and it seems they care about what's going on in their neighborhood. And we have people here that have the money, but don't act like they care. It's like, they could care less if our kids have anywhere to play and they could care less if we have anywhere that we can relax at. It's depressing.”

– Norristown Participant

Despite their profound concerns, residents want to be outdoors, but they often do not feel invited to use public spaces.

In a city like Camden, which has its challenges, it is almost life affirming. And I really mean this. It lifts your spirit. It validates you when you see nature.
-Camden Participant

Describe being near water:

- "Rejuvenating"
- "Exhilarating"
- "Soothing"
- "Stimulating"
- "Relaxing"
- "Calming"
- "Centering"
- "Grounding"
- "Peaceful"

Like being in nature, **being close to water** brings a powerful sense of relaxation and renewal. But many people in these neighborhoods **cannot picture water near them**. This offers an opportunity for trails to promote and leverage their proximity to water.

One-quarter of the people interviewed who live near trails along waterways could not picture the local river in their minds. The number who could not picture water near them surpassed 40% in some neighborhoods.

However, there was overwhelming agreement with the statement: **"Being outdoors in parks or on trails makes me feel happier,"** indicating that there is a desire to connect with nature, but trail organizations must do more to increase awareness and create spaces that respond to needs of local communities.

How do underrepresented communities currently connect with the outdoors?

Given the great emotional benefits they described, many people in these neighborhoods are connecting with the outdoors, despite the barriers. Most people look to the trail for passive recreation like walking and relaxing in nature.

White trail users are almost twice as likely to bike compared to people of color, while there is almost no difference along racial or ethnic lines when it comes to jogging or running, picnicking or barbecuing, or taking children to run and play.



How do underrepresented communities want to use the trails?

Residents want a trail that is **a place to be**, not necessarily to move from place to place. When asked what type of trail would attract them, most study participants focused on activities or amenities like food trucks or music festivals or places to sit and enjoy the natural setting. While only **10% of trail users said they want to use the trail for transportation**, 78% said exercise and 61% said recreation. People want neighborhood trails where the community can gather.



What do communities think about the Circuit Trails?

When shown a map of the Circuit Trails, participants were **surprised that the network existed**, and many were excited. Some liked the idea of trails connecting their neighborhood to parks and joining neighborhoods to each other. These residents found the concept of the Circuit to be **unifying and hopeful**. Many suggested **adding the word "Network"** in the branding of "Circuit Trails," to better describe what the Circuit offers.

For some, knowing that there is a large, connected network of trails aroused a desire to explore, but the majority just wanted to know that the Circuit Trails will give them an experience with fresh air and nature, **close to where they live**.

How often are people living near the trail in these communities using the trail?

Over half of nearby residents seldom or never access any trail, let alone the one that is closest to them. That number is 50% in Norristown, and reaches 57% on the Delaware County side of Cobbs Creek. This raised questions about trail connections, access, and welcome.

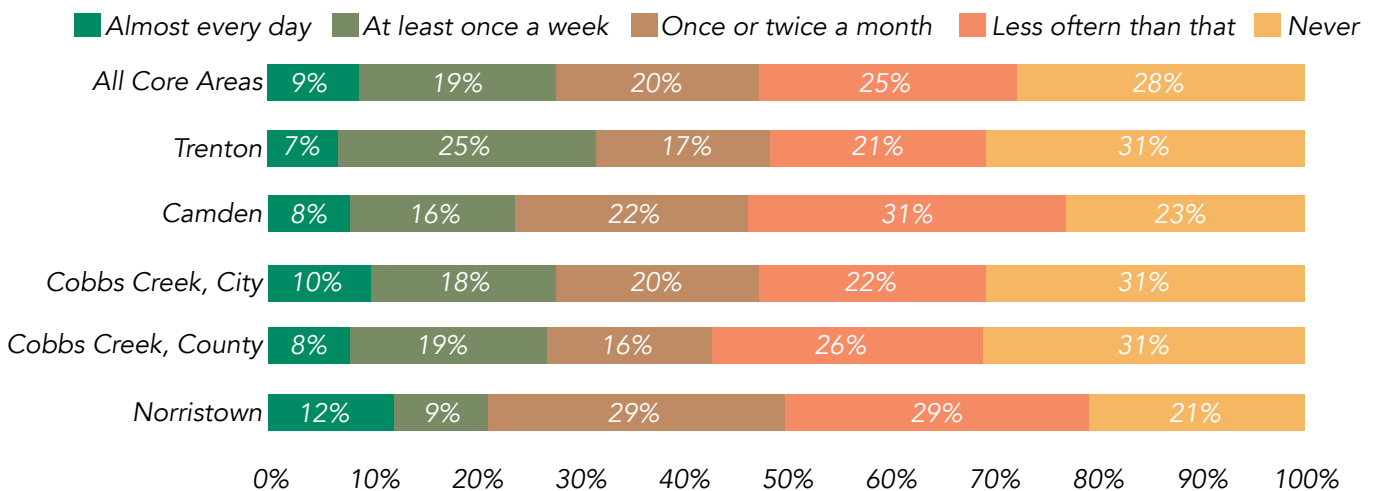
This result is one of the most significant findings of this study.

A large number of people in these neighborhoods are not engaged with their local trail at all. In part, the disparity we see on at least some of the trails between the makeup of trail users and residents living near the trail is due to the fact that so many nearby residents are not engaged with the trail. Yet we know, from the discussion in every focus group, that people want to spend time outdoors if their most basic concerns about personal safety and COVID safety can be overcome.

Frequency of Trail Use

Community Survey

“How often do you come to this trail or another like it?”

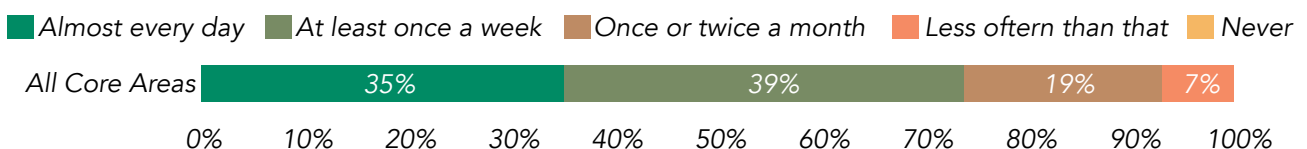


By contrast, **once on the trail people make it a habit**. Among the trail users intercepted through the Trail Survey, about one-third said they are using the trail almost every day, and another 39% said they are using the trail, or one like it, at least once a week.

Frequency of Trail Use

Trail Intercept Survey

“How often do you come to this trail or another like it?”



3

How can nearby residents in these neighborhoods be engaged, motivated, and welcomed onto the trails? What can trail advocates and stakeholders do to encourage that?

What Would Get You Outdoors on a Trail?

*Open-ended Question on Community Survey
Top 8 Responses*

Perceived safety	Friends to go out with
More activities and events	Better maintained trail
Better Weather	COVID's end/ Mask wearing
Gardens and nature	Better access and signage

The focus groups invited people to imagine the trail that would welcome and attract them.

What amenities would it have? What programs would it offer? What would it look and feel like?

Their recommendations fall into broad categories explained on the next page:

Programming & Welcome

Physical Infrastructure

Security

Greening

Outreach

welcoming

Programming

1. Invite everyone to **have their fun on the trail**

The best way to overcome a subtle lack of welcome is to offer compelling activities geared towards the tastes of the audience. Live music, festivals, family-oriented activities, pop-up shops, local artisans, historical commemorations, and food trucks were key ideas.

2. Extend an **overt welcome**

Imagery can be meaningful. Stakeholders suggested that public art at trail access points feature people of color, and posting the message “Black Lives Matter” in key locations would also convey a sense of respect and welcome.

3. Host organized **group activities**

Many people want to be on the trail with a friend or in a group, both for fellowship and to alleviate their safety concerns. Post-COVID, offer opportunities to join up with other people along the trail to pursue similar interests, with activities such as guided nature hikes or birdwatching walks, yoga along the trail, exercise groups, and activities for children.

appropriate

Security

4. Create spaces where people **feel safe**.

With few exceptions, people insisted they did not want to see a police presence on the trail. Most people would welcome “ambassadors” or “park rangers,” whom they felt would use a friendly approach, or simply callboxes along the trail in areas where safety is a concern.

inviting

Infrastructure

5. Develop places to **gather and relax**

Numerous people asked for amenities that would allow them to gather with family and friends, entertain their children, or just sit and read a book or enjoy nature. These could include places to picnic and barbecue, playgrounds, and benches and other places to sit.

6. **Prioritize trail maintenance and amenities**

People hoped for better maintenance of the trail surface, lighting in certain areas, and easier or safer access points including adequate parking. In addition, they hoped for amenities along the trail, such as bikeshare, restrooms, sports courts or fields, and boat rentals.

7. Install **useful signage**

Study participants asked for signs in their neighborhoods to point the direction to the trail. It was also suggested that signage could tie into the Circuit Trails Network, not just pointing the way to the local trail, but also indicating further destinations that could be accessed through the regional trail network, to enhance that thirst for exploration.

creative

Greening

8. Build an urban **oasis**

Residents want trails that provide a respite from the urban environment. They want a creatively designed trail that offers glimpses of water, the sound of birds, splashes of color. Residents hope for accessible places where they can dip out of their normal world and dip in to a peaceful, green environment, even if only for a short time.

authentic

Outreach

9. Show **people enjoying the trail**

People want to see images of people who look like them enjoying the trail. They want to imagine themselves on the trail, and know that they belong there. The Circuit’s website and outreach should show real people from these neighborhoods having fun on the trail.

10. Leverage Local **Social Media and Traditional Door-to-Door**

Getting social media influencers on the trail and curating images to their local followers would help create a new constituency for the trails. At the same time, many people asked for more traditional means of communication – flyers, conversations, and traditional mail.

A Longer-Term Approach: A Community-Supported Trail and Sense of Pride in Place

An eleventh, more ambitious recommendation is to develop community support for trail maintenance and programming. This research indicates that there is the potential to engage neighborhood residents to care for their own section of trail, to help maintain and design it to their liking. Focus group participants insisted they would be willing to be engaged in this way, increasing their sense of ownership and use of the trail. Residents want to have pride in their neighborhoods. They want to feel a sense of ownership, and feel that they are part of making the neighborhood better. Once accomplished, they said they would show off the trail to others as a point of neighborhood and personal pride.

“Basically, I feel as though, if the community comes together and take over the situation, as far as like keeping the park clean, looking after each other...They used to say, it takes a village to raise a child. It takes a village to run everything. So if you come together as a village that cares about your neighborhood and then wants to see better, it will become better.”

“...Yes. You can help cleaning up...”

“...Or even build it up. Plant trees, flowers, just making it nice looking.”

(Moderator): “Describe what would it be like if the community came together around this spot of the Norristown trail... What does it feel like to you? What can you imagine?”

“Something that you can be proud of living Norristown and everything.”

“Yeah, I think it would be beautiful.”

“Absolutely somewhere to call home. This is where I live. This is where I'm from and it's beautiful.”

“It's pride. You take pride in your work. If you're doing good work, then why wouldn't you want to show it off?”

“And people want to come into it.”

“Hey, come see where I live, come see where I go to cookout. You know what I'm saying? Look how beautiful it is and it makes you feel good inside.”

Impressions of the Circuit Trails

There is little awareness in these neighborhoods that there is a network of trails called the Circuit Trails. Better awareness may not only increase use, but arouse a **desire in some residents to get out there and explore**. Others just want to know that the Circuit Trails will give them the experience with fresh air and nature they are looking for, close to where they live. They like the idea of people and parts of their community being connected together, and for the trails to give them access to a natural experience. For them, **the word "network" was intuitive and may be a helpful descriptive addition to "circuit,"** as in Circuit Trails Network, helping people understand and relate to this community asset.

Moderator: "Your trail that you walk...is a part of all of this that you see on the screen."

(Participants, interrupting each other):

"That's crazy!"

"Wow, wow, wow."

"I would've never known!"

"You mean you can walk to Jersey on this trail?"

"Thank you! That's amazing!"

"I mean, yeah, no... you could walk...?"

"There is a trail, the Towpath, you can walk from... I used to pass it in Princeton. You can actually take it from New Brunswick through Princeton, down pretty much into Philly."

– Southwest Philadelphia Participants

While some participants liked the word "Circuit" and felt it brought to mind the circulatory system, most did not identify with that word. **They felt the Circuit Trails should describe themselves using the word "network."** A Southwest Philadelphia participant described the word "network" as "friendly, it's more people-friendly." They see the Circuit's role as connecting people, not places.

Major Caveat:

Some people looked at the map of the Circuit Trails and did not feel a pull to explore. They focused on the urban trails near them and could not imagine there would be anything interesting to see or do. Their comments reinforced the idea that the trail, for them, should be a place of respite from their urban environment, giving them a break from the heavily built, blighted, and crowded surroundings they see every day. The trail should offer glimpses of nature and relaxing activities. It should not be just a walk along a busy city street.

"They are (messing) with you. I have been to some of these places. ...This is regular streets!... (and) the streets are all (messed) up." – Camden Participant

Participants do not need to travel far from the city, to get this feeling of respite. People described birdsong, fresh air, or sitting by the water near where they live. In fact, they would prefer that **little immersions in the natural world** be accessible where they live. The Circuit Trails should find ways to create and invite them to spaces like this along trails.