



## SB-274-FN

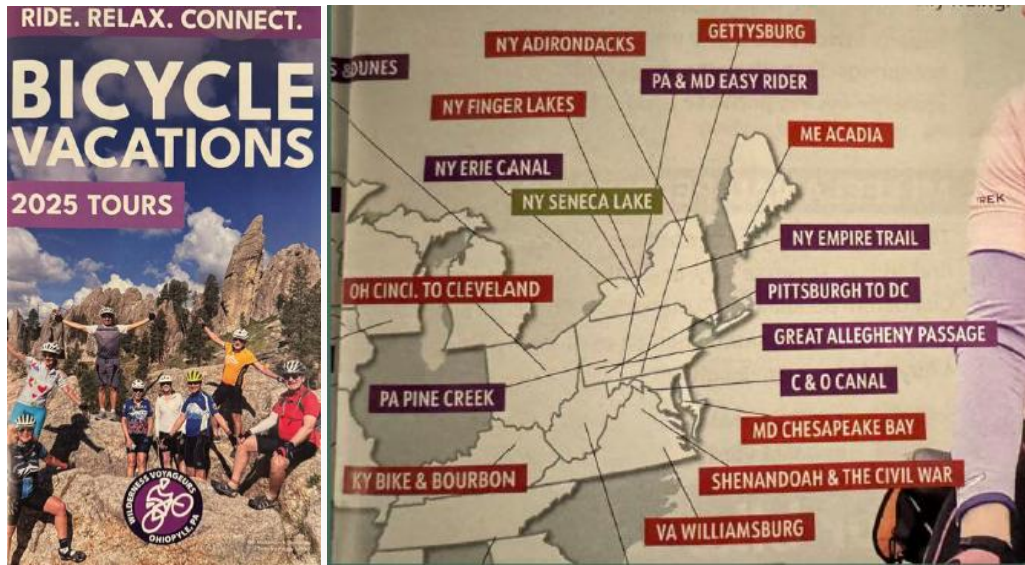
# NH Rail Trail Coalition Testimony

Michael Kowalczyk

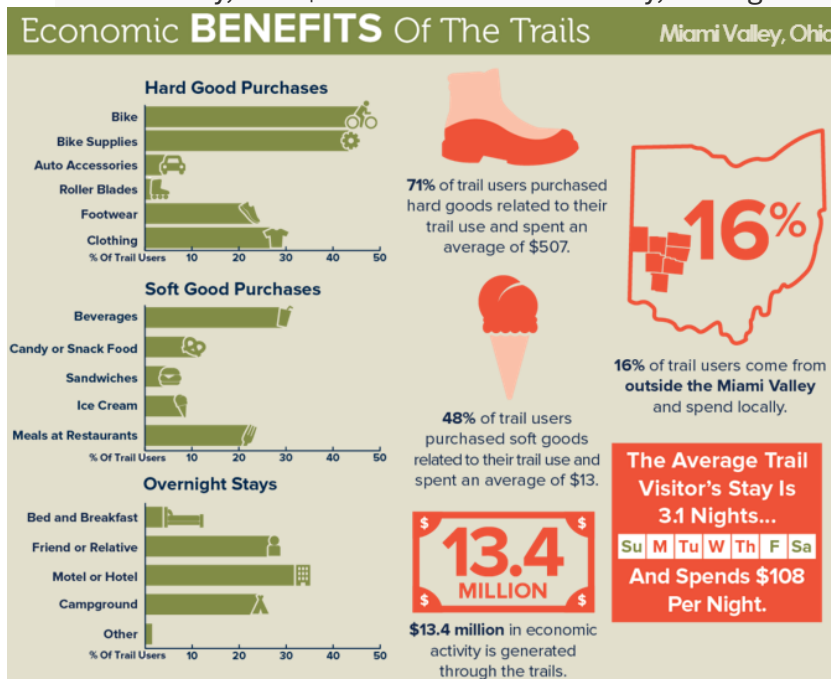
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Senate Bill 274-FN. Phase 1 in implementing the NH State Rail Trail Plan. AN ACT establishing a 4-year pilot program with potential for statewide expansion to improve rail trails in New Hampshire through federal, state, and private funding and making a bonded appropriation.

- **Introductions:**
  - Mike Kowalczyk: NHRTC board member; Founder and president of the Monadnock Region Rail Trail Collaborative, Chair of the Swanzey Rail Trail Advisory Committee
  - NHRTC: A volunteer advocacy group who's mission is to promote the development, maintenance, and use of trails built on NH's railroad corridors.
  
- **State Rail Trail Network:**
  - NH has one of the most dense railroad corridor networks in the country.
  - The state owns 334 miles of abandoned rail corridor
  - The state owns 207 miles of active rail corridor (potential rail with trail)
  - There are 91 miles of non-state owned rail trails (e.g. owned by city or town)
  - Totaling 632 miles of potential rail trail.
  - There are ~20 potential network links to neighboring states. Each link bringing visitors to NH.
  - ~70% of NH population and ~78% of NH municipalities are within 5 miles of a rail trail.
  - In the Monadnock region, the rail trails goes through 13 towns.
  
- **NH State Rail Trail Plan**
  - Authorized and funded by Legislature (SB 185, 2019)
  - Jointly authored by DOT / DNCR, broad stakeholder engagement
  - Includes railroad corridor inventory, rail trail benefits, potential funding sources, economic value, Improvement recommendations
  - An implemented state rail trail plan assists in achieving key goals/objectives of 10 other state plans (e.g. NHDOT Ped & Bike, Outdoor Rec Plan, DHHS Roadmap 2023)
  
- **Key Benefits of implementing State RT Plan**
  - **Economic**
    - Generate tax revenue and support jobs via tourism and multi-day trips boosting local hospitality and businesses. New net revenue from better, longer, more connected trails
    - Visitors spend 3X vs residents. Visitors seek multi-day trips.
      - Wilderness Voyageurs, Ohiopyle, PA offers multi-day bike tours around the country.
      - NH is not listed.
      - NH has the potential to be listed



- Transportation & Connectivity
  - Daily commute alternative transportation
  - Reduce traffic congestion
  - Reduce vehicle/human collisions
- Health
  - Promotes physical activity
  - Reduces obesity
  - Improve physical health
  - Reduce stress
- Environment
  - Protecting hundreds of miles of “linear” park
  - Improve air by reducing motorized vehicles
- Promotes community
- Examples:
  - Miami Valley, OH: \$13.4M Economic Activity, 3.1 nights average trail visitor stay



- NY Erie Canalway Trail: \$253M Annual Economic Impact, 1.6M Annual Visits



- In crafting the bill received input and support from the following state agencies
  - Department of Natural and Cultural Resources – Bureau of Trails
  - Department of Transportation – Bureau of Rail and Transit
  - Fish and Game (safety, enforcement)
  - Bureau of Economic Affairs (economics, outdoor recreation)
- NH State Rail Trail Plan, Phase 1 project scope
  - NHDOT transfers 4 trails (~68 miles) to DNCR-Bureau of Trails
    - Cost: \$0
  - Over 4 years, make trail improvements to a standard that enables all permitted users access year round. “The 6-year-old can ride a bike on them”.
    - Cost: Federal-\$6.52M, State-\$1.63M, Local-\$816k
  - NHBOT and F&G capacity increased to support the 4 transferred trails
    - Cost: State-\$1.6M
  - Emergency Repair fund (applied to all State-owned trails) centrally managed by NHBOT as single point of contact. All requests and disbursement decisions go through NHBOT. The fund supports past disasters.
    - Cost: State-\$4M
- Funding
  - For rail trail project work use federal grants
    - 80% Federal Grants
    - 10% State (the state bond appropriation)
    - 10% Local
  - For NHBOT and F&G capacity increase, the state bond appropriation.
  - For disaster relief (a.k.a Emergency Repair Fund), the state bond appropriation.
  - In Summary taking all costs into account, the funding distribution is 44% Federal, 50% State, and 6% Local.

- Rail Trails are a revenue generator

Recreational non-motorized community:

Number of RTs	Annual Economic Contribution	Annual Tax Revenue	Jobs Supported	Data Source
9 of 27	\$18.7M	\$2.7M	164	NH State Rail Trail Plan (Current Rail Trail Conditions)
27 of 27	\$51.4M-\$60.6M 95% Confidence	\$7.5M-\$9.0M 95% Confidence	450-520 95% Confidence	NH State Rail Trail Plan Extrapolated (ChatGPT Estimation)

- Conclusions and Recommendations

- Rail trail benefits are well known throughout the country, with other states (e.g. VT, ME, FL, CA, and OH) making significant public investments (see <https://www.peopleforbikes.org/2024-voteforbikes?eid=135501> for details).
- Our outdoor recreation and tourism economies are the leading NH revenue sources, with large “new net revenue” growth potential.
- Proximity to quality rail trails attracts and retains new businesses, workers (a.k.a. Stay/Work/Play) as well as retirees.
- **Using a portion of rail-trail generated tax revenue will increase State revenues by attracting businesses, retaining workers, and increasing out of state multi-day tourism.**
- **A world class rail trail network will improve public health, provide community connection, and overall improve the quality of life.**