

Indianapolis Cultural Trail

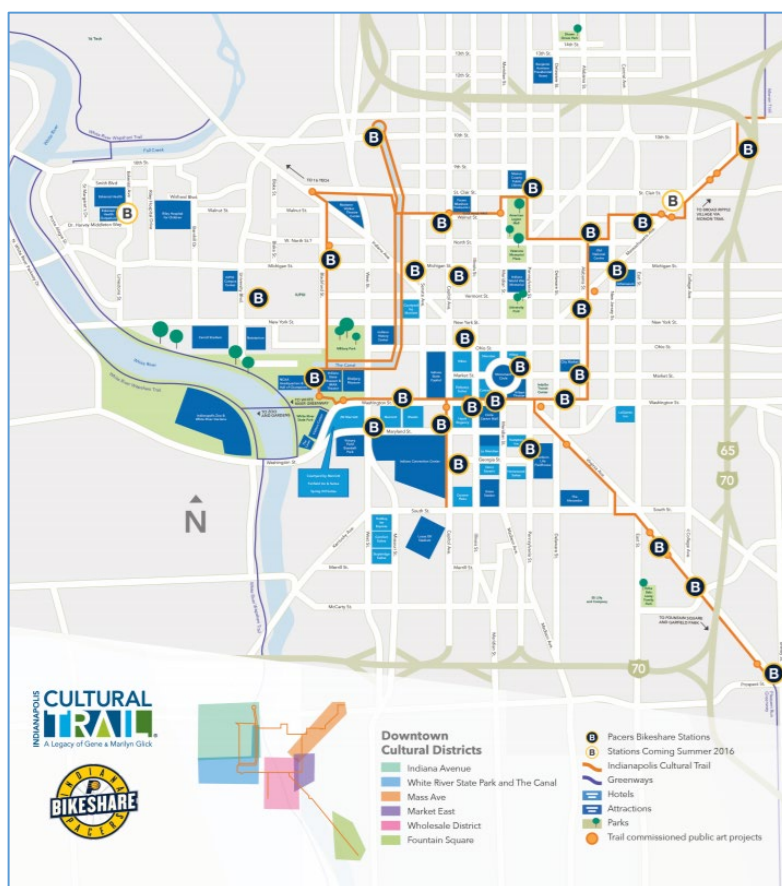
Indianapolis, Indiana

Description

The Indianapolis Cultural Trail is an 8-mile urban bicycle and pedestrian path in downtown Indianapolis, Indiana that exemplifies the positive impacts that street grid road diets can have on communities. The trail uses excess right-of-way from wide city streets to connect the city's seven cultural districts to each other and to improve pedestrian and bicyclist access throughout the city. It has led to extensive real estate development in areas along the trail, improved safety, and has transformed the way residents and visitors experience the downtown.

Making the Decision

In 2001, the Central Indiana Community Foundation (CICF), a philanthropic services provider for Indianapolis and Marion County, proposed that five neighborhoods near the downtown core of Indianapolis (plus a sixth one outside the downtown core) be designated as cultural districts. However, the CICF recognized that, for their proposal to succeed, the cultural districts needed to be better connected for pedestrians and bicyclists. In response to these concerns, CICF proposed the Indianapolis Cultural Trail to connect the districts. Construction began in 2007 and was finished in 2012 with the completion of the Southeast Corridor. The trail now connects seven cultural districts (a seventh was added after work on the trail began): the Wholesale District, Indiana Avenue, the Canal and White River State Park, Massachusetts Avenue, Fountain Square, Market East, and (via the Monon Trail) Broad Ripple Village.



This map of the Indianapolis Cultural Trail shows the cultural districts, bikeshare stations, attractions, and hotels in downtown Indianapolis. (Source: indyculturaltrail.org)

Prior to the construction of the Cultural Trail, the street-level transportation network in downtown Indianapolis did not prioritize pedestrians. Several popular tourist destinations were located within walking distance of one another, yet the experience of walking was unpleasant, unpopular, and felt

unsafe. Many people chose to drive between downtown destinations, and people attending conferences usually traveled from hotels to the Indianapolis Convention Center via an extensive system of overhead walkways.

Design and Public Engagement Process

The design of the Indianapolis Cultural Trail relied on the input of community members and stakeholders. Although the CICF had established that the purpose of the trail was to connect the cultural districts, the community provided guidance on what the exact route would be and what the trail would look like. The proponents of the trail hosted several design charrettes for the public to solicit feedback on lights, benches, bicycle parking, and other visual elements.

Creating the Indianapolis Cultural Trail required obtaining right-of-way on the city streets where the path was proposed. In 2004, once the CICF had raised substantial private funding adequate to make the project feasible, the city of Indianapolis granted the project one travel lane of road width. The right-of-way was used to create an eight-foot-wide bicycle path buffered by landscaping. The city supported the trail because it felt that the value in creating a linear park downtown was greater than the impacts of reducing the level of service on the adjacent roadways from A to C due to reducing the roadway capacity by one travel lane.

Throughout the planning and design processes, project proponents intended for the trail to serve as a distinctive attraction for the city. Because of this and the extensive public input received, the design team selected more visually appealing, and potentially more expensive design treatments. These included concrete pavers instead of asphalt, landscaping along the entire length of the trail, and providing lighting 24 hours a day so that the trail could be used safely and comfortably anytime. The designers of the path also recognized that the landscaping could be used to capture and filter stormwater, so 25,400 feet of stormwater planters were installed along the trail.

Trail Users

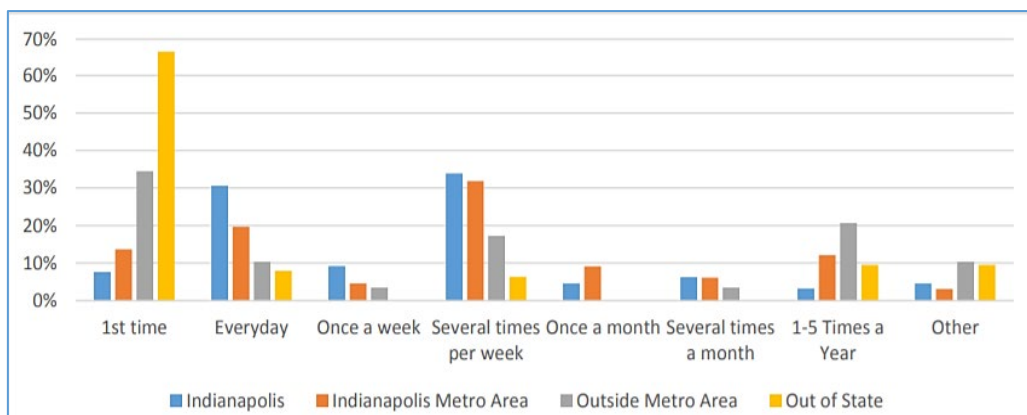
In 2014, the Indiana University Public Policy Institute conducted research on the impact of the Indianapolis Cultural Trail to serve as a baseline report for future impact studies. The researchers surveyed 558 trail users to better understand the demographics of the trail users and their usage patterns. Fifty-three percent of respondents were between 18 and 35 years old. Sixty-nine percent of respondents were from Indianapolis, 13 percent were from the Indianapolis metropolitan area, and 18 percent were from out of State or outside the metropolitan area. The research found that over half of the respondents used the trail at least several times a week, and one quarter of survey respondents used the trail every day. The most popular reason that Indianapolis and metro area residents used the trail is exercise and recreation, followed by commuting to work.

Economic Impacts

The city of Indianapolis and the CICF did not foresee how much the trail would catalyze the development of the downtown. From the beginning, the city and proponents of the Indianapolis Cultural Trail were committed to collecting data about the trail's economic impacts. A team of researchers from Indiana University's Public Policy Institute conducted a baseline economic impact study of the project that involved measuring changes in property value, new business activity, and retail spending by trail users.

Property Values

The study investigated the changes in property values for the 1,747 properties located within 500 feet (approximately one block) of the trail. They found that, between 2008 (the first full year of construction on the trail) and 2014 (when the study was conducted), assessed property values had increased 148 percent. This translated to an increase of approximately \$1 billion in assessed property value across the city of Indianapolis. Corroborating the influence of the trail on real estate value, 26 percent of the survey respondents who lived on or near the path indicated that proximity to the trail was a factor in their choice of where to live.



Trail User Survey Respondents by Residency and Frequency of Use (2014). (Source: Indiana University Public Policy Institute)

Commercial Activity

The Indiana University Public Policy Institute surveyed 66 businesses located on or near the Cultural Trail to understand the effects they have experienced because of the construction of the trail. Sixty percent of respondents indicated that they experienced an increase in the number of customers since the trail opened. Forty-eight percent said that they experienced an increase in revenue.

Several business owners responded that the customer and/or revenue increases led to the creation of additional full-time and part-time positions. The additional activity led the businesses to create 40 to 50 new full-time positions and 47 part-time positions since construction began on the trail.

Other Impacts



The trail incorporated pavers and landscape buffers into the design. (Source: indyculturaltrail.org)

In addition to the economic impacts of new real estate development and business activity, the trail has substantially improved the safety, and quality of life of residents and visitors to Indianapolis. The street grid that existed prior to the trail had been designed with the goal of moving people in and out of downtown as quickly as possible via wide, one-way streets. To accommodate the trail and ensure safety, the city of Indianapolis reduced road widths and added “No Turn on Red” signs and phased traffic signals. The trail’s landscaped buffer also helps to improve the safety of trail users.

Costs

The CIFIC built the Indianapolis Cultural Trail using both public and private funds. The total project cost for the 8-mile Indianapolis Cultural Trail was \$63 million. The trail broke ground in 2007 after a \$15 million gift from Indianapolis developers Gene and Marilyn Glick. In 2010, the project received a \$20.5 million Federal Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant. The remaining funds used to construct the trail were \$14.5 million in Federal highway funds remaining from projects located near the trail and \$12.5 million in philanthropic donations from other sources. No local tax money was used for the trail construction or its ongoing maintenance.

Progress since Project Completion

Researchers interviewed community leaders, business operators, developers, and nonprofit leaders in the different cultural districts bordering the trail for their opinion on the impact of the trail and how it could be improved. Business owners reported that they thought the trail offered greater connectivity to downtown, created a more positive setting, and attracted more visitors to the areas connected by the trail.

A nonprofit organization called the Indianapolis Cultural Trail, Inc. (ICT, Inc.), was created to operate and maintain the trail after its completion. In 2014, ICT, Inc. added a bike share program—Pacers Bikeshare—to the trail. The program has been very popular, and ICT, Inc. has plans for future expansion.

The trail has provided a model to the rest of Indianapolis as well as to other cities around the world for how excess right-of-way can be repurposed to provide bicycle and pedestrian facilities that stimulate economic growth, improve health and safety, and increase connectivity in cities.

For More Information

For more information about the Indianapolis Cultural Trail, visit <https://indyculturaltrail.org>.



This is a photo of a Pacers Bikeshare station along the Indianapolis Cultural Trail. (Source: indyculturaltrail.org)