

Impact of Trails on the Health and Well-Being of Communities in the Washington DC metro area

Dr. Torsha Bhattacharya
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

Social determinants of health

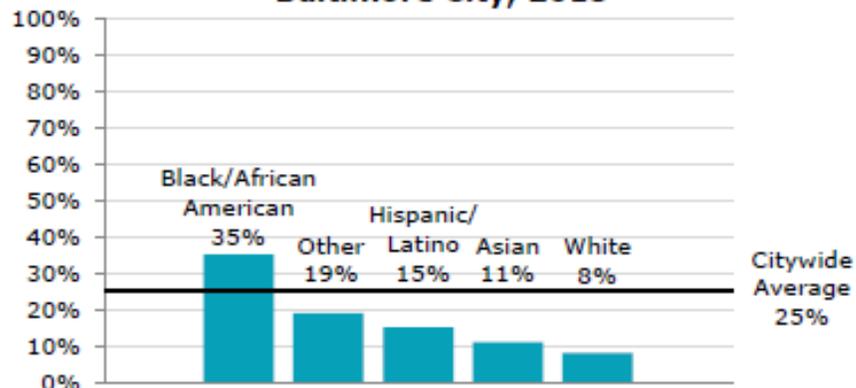


- Social and Community Context
 - Civic Participation
 - Social Cohesion
- Health and Health Care
 - Access to Health Care
- Neighborhood and Built Environment
 - Access to Foods
 - Crime and Violence
 - Environmental Conditions

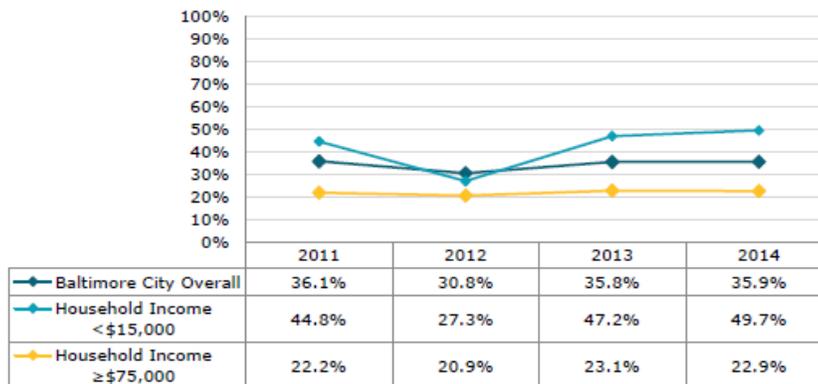
Source: <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-of-health>

Food Desert, Obesity and its relation to where people live in Baltimore

Percentage of Residents Living in Food Deserts by Race/Ethnicity, Baltimore City, 2015*

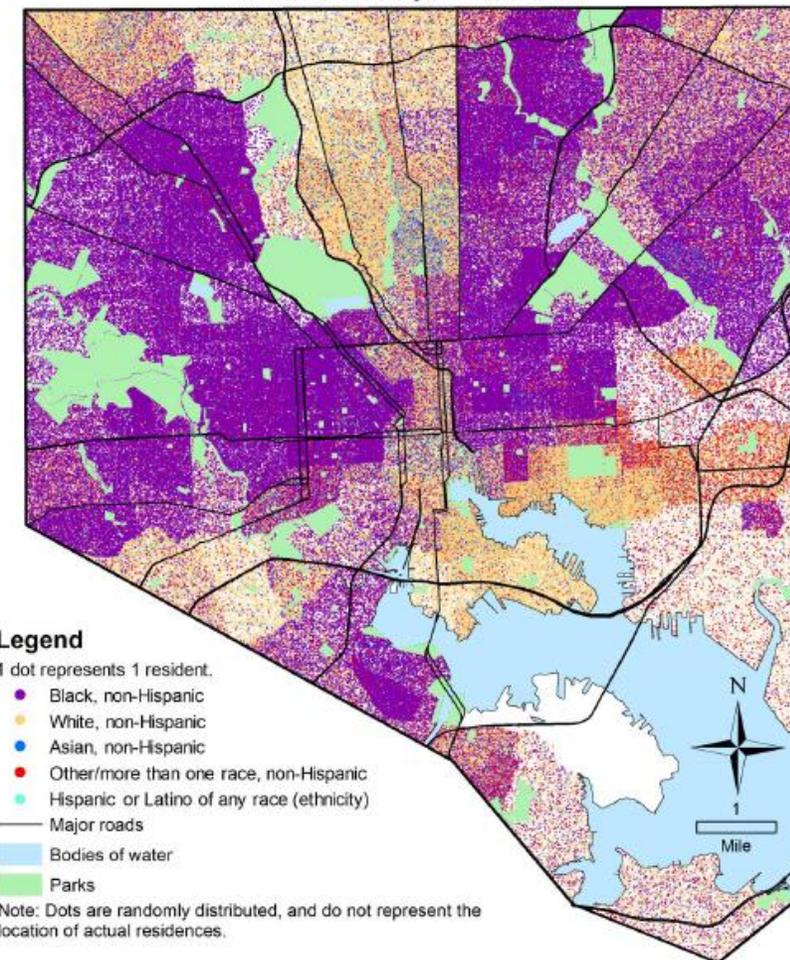


Percentage of Population that is Obese (BMI ≥ 30.0) by Household Income, Baltimore City, 2011-2014



Source: Maryland Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2011-2014.

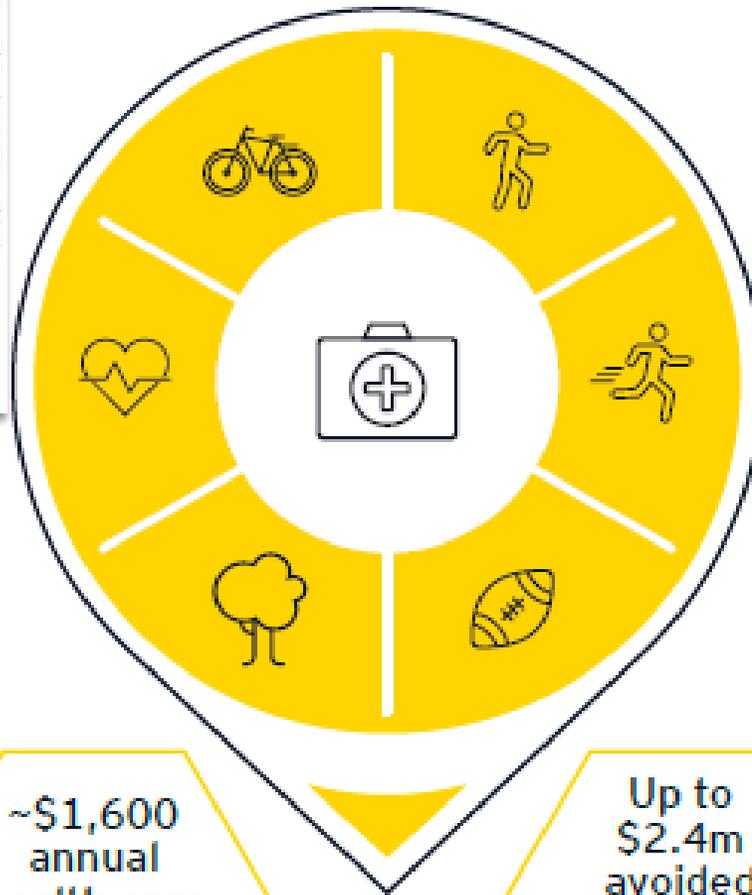
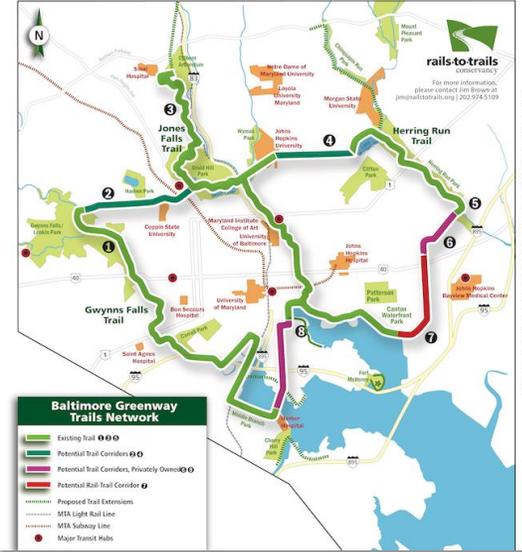
Geographic Distribution of Residents by Race and Ethnicity, Baltimore City, 2011-2015



Prepared by the Office of Epidemiology Services, Baltimore City Health Department, August 2017.
Source: Table DP05: ACS DEMOGRAPHIC AND HOUSING ESTIMATES, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, census tract-level data



Figure 9: Health benefits



Sedentary lifestyles and vehicle dependency adversely affect personal health outcomes, and there is a correlation between physical inactivity and cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, cancer, depression and premature death.²⁰

Easy access to trails can provide Baltimore residents and tourists with attractive, safe and inexpensive avenues for physical activity. This can support healthy lifestyles and help mitigate health problems.

The economic value of health benefits associated with trails can be estimated from reduced health care costs of trail users. For example, Wang, G. et al. (2004)²¹ estimated that for each dollar spent on building and maintaining the trails, approximately three dollars were realized in reduced health care costs by trail users in annualized terms.

The 2020 County Health Rankings²² estimates that approximately 27% of the adult population in Baltimore is reported as physically "inactive."²³ The estimated health benefits associated with the expanded trail range from \$1.8m to \$2.4m.

Alongside public health benefits, evidence suggests physical activity also boosts people's workplace productivity, mental health and overall well-being.²⁴



Capital Trails

- ▶ 800 miles of existing and planned trails
- ▶ Maryland, Washington, D.C. and Virginia.

Survey and Focus Group Research

RTC's National Latent Demand (barriers to trail use) Survey conducted between May 21-22, 2020. (1290 responses)

RTC and WABA conducted qualitative focus group for D.C. September 28, 2020. (21 participants)

3 June – 19 July 2020

21-22 May

28 Sep. 2020

RTC Regional Survey focusing on Washington Metro area conducted between June 3-July 19, 2020. (840 responses)



Regional Survey Summary

- ▶ All respondents believe trails contribute to the wellbeing of their community
- ▶ Enjoying nature, getting physical exercise and relaxing are the top cited reasons to use trails
- ▶ Black respondents are more likely to be afraid of crime and accidents, having an emergency, and feel that trails are not welcoming for people like them
- ▶ Non-trail users perceive trails to be further away than trail users
- ▶ Females tend to be more concerned about crimes on trails, whereas males tend to be more concerned about having emergency on trails



Focus Group Summary: Who Is Not Welcome On Trails?

- ▶ People with mobility issues, senior citizens
- ▶ Black participants noted that they don't feel trails are for them
- ▶ Black participants expressed worry about other people's perception of them, whereas white participants were concerned about other people's behavior on trails
- ▶ People using trails in a way that is not proper, dangerous, inconsiderate
- ▶ People going too fast, not following the 'unwritten rules', misusing the trail



Top Cited Barriers To Trail Use

- ▶ Fear and perception of crime and violence
- ▶ Trails not clearly marked or maintained
- ▶ Distance (real and perceived)/ lack of access to trails



Strategies...

- ▶ Promoting the intrinsic destination value of trails
- ▶ Public messaging and education to increase visibility of local trails is an important strategy for promoting and cultivating support for CTC's trail network vision.
- ▶ Culturally specific programming including trail rangers/ambassadors should highlight socializing, recreation, getting close to nature, physical activity and wellness specific to every community.
- ▶ Promote inclusivity. Messages, promotional materials and programming that is representative of the local demographics.

How do we increase diversity of trail users

- ▶ Providing easy access to trails, especially for vulnerable groups
- ▶ Designing communities for all ages and abilities
- ▶ Recognizing barriers vary but motivators resonate with everyone
- ▶ Highlighting what is attractive about trails and trail networks
- ▶ Addressing real and perceived barriers



Thank you!

Questions?

Torsha Bhattacharya

Director of Research

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

Ph: 202-974-5110

torsha@railstotrails.org

