

Hearing regarding 6151 and 6152
House Transportation Committee
May 27, 2010

Good morning Honorable Members of the Committee:

I am Nancy Krupiarz, Executive Director of the Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, representing our organizational board of directors today. Our mission is to foster and facilitate the development of an interconnected system of trails and greenways throughout the State. We do this through providing technical assistance to local units of government and citizen advocacy groups on all aspects of trail planning, development, operation, and maintenance. We also educate the public about Michigan's trail system by publishing a state trail directory of all the multiuse trails every other year and we hold both a weekend and a week-long bicycle tour with about 700-800 bicyclists that travels a different route of trails and connecting back roads across the state every year. This will be our 20th year of the Michigander Bicycle Tour this year. And we work on policy issues at both the state and local governmental levels that help facilitate our mission. That is why I am here today to promote your support of House Bill 6151 and 6152 to enact a statewide complete streets policy.

Michigan has approximately 1400 miles of multi-use trails on various types of linear corridors, some on abandoned rail beds, utility corridors, road rights of way, on easements across public lands and some very few on easements across private lands. These trails are used by a diverse array of our population: moms with strollers, those with disabilities, fitness enthusiasts, senior citizens, children, whole families, etc. The most frequent type of use we see is walking followed by bicycling. Many of these trails receive federal transportation enhancement grants for their development. The purpose of these grants are for nonmotorized transportation. However, without the connections to neighborhoods, downtowns, schools, these trails only receive use by those that will brave the traffic to get to the trail, or live right next to it or are willing to go through the trouble of driving to it, with bikes, strollers or other gear in tow. It is a discouragement to trail use if it is not easily accessible and not connected at either end.

Michigan State University studies on Michigan trails has shown that these corridors will be used for active transportation if they are well-connected to destinations. The TART Trail in Traverse City is one fine example of a trail that is connected to the downtown, to schools, to neighborhoods, and to numerous workplaces. MSU found that 17% of the users of this trail were doing so for transportation reasons (see www.carrs.msu.edu/trails), which was far more than any of the other trails they studied. That is why we feel that connecting our trails to complete streets will extend the nonmotorized transportation network, tying in trails with connecting roads which have sidewalks, bike lanes, transit, and other connections. It maximizes the benefits of the investments that have been made into these trails by allowing them to be used for all sorts of trips and offering a community perhaps for the first time, a chance for citizens to adopt a healthy active lifestyle in carrying out their daily business. With a "complete" network, nonmotorized trips can conveniently begin and end at any point in the system, which means more people will take advantage of a nonmotorized option. This eases traffic congestion, improves air quality, and improves the health of our citizens.

We have seen many studies across the nation that show that trails benefit the economy. Property values next to trails tend to increase by 10 percent or more. People will pay more to live in communities where there is adequate greenspace to enhance their quality of life. But trails are only a piece of the puzzle. Walkable and bikeable streets and connections to transit complete the picture. Michigan is losing its youth to places where they want to live and work. The Cool Cities survey conducted a few years ago of people ages 18 to 35 showed that that age group ranks bikeable/walkable communities at the top of the list for the ingredients that play into their decision of where they want to live, right along with places where they can find employment. Workers in their second careers, 50's and up, frequently work from home. They too seek places that are bikeable and walkable, as we see many of them locating to places that offer them this quality of life.

If Michigan does not do this, there are plenty of other states across the nation that will continue to draw our young people, our visitors, our families away to places that do offer the kind of coordinated, connected system of active transportation infrastructure that they seek. Michigan is #2 in the nation for the trails that we offer. Let us finish what we've started by allowing all the pieces of the puzzle to come together. For a state that pioneered so many innovations in transportation in the early years, (the first paved road, the first highway, the first automobile, etc.) we feel that we are now being left behind because we have not elevated our transportation planning across state and local levels to be that of a well-coordinated, well-connected, community-centered system that responds to all of the transportation needs of its citizens.