

Bike Tourism in Smaller Communities

WSDOT'S MISSION

WE PROVIDE SAFE, RELIABLE
AND COST-EFFECTIVE
TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS
TO IMPROVE COMMUNITIES
AND ECONOMIC VITALITY FOR
PEOPLE AND BUSINESSES.

Washington is creating and improving active transportation connections in communities of all sizes. Investments in walking, rolling and biking infrastructure help people travel in our beautiful state more easily and safely.

Developing and improving shared-use paths, trails, walkways, crossings and local Complete Streets benefits communities in

many ways beyond supporting daily travel. One such way is by encouraging bike tourism: travel that involves bicycling, whether it's for the whole journey or at destinations.



WHO ARE BIKE TOURISTS?

Bike tourists don't fit a single mold. By the numbers, bike tourists skew mostly middle aged (31-50 years old) but can be young or old. They bring a variety of needs and desires, from comfort-loving adults looking for a restaurant meal and cozy bed each night, to more intrepid cyclists who camp and stock up at the grocery store.³

In addition to typical tourist attractions, people touring by bike typically boost sales at local businesses that are important to residents. These include services such as grocery stores, restaurants, cafes, shops, lodging, and bike repair shops.

BICYCLE TOURISM BENEFITS COMMUNITIES

When Washington towns and cities embrace investments that support bike tourism, they strengthen local economies, improve their residents' quality of life, provide vital transportation connections for the many nondrivers who live there and even attract additional funding for local infrastructure.

Smaller communities across the Pacific Northwest have experienced these benefits:

Increased spending on lodging, services, recreation and more. Bike tourists travel more slowly and stop more often than do those traveling by car. This means bike tourists tend to spend more nights at hotels, inns and other lodging facilities. They also visit more places over the same distance a car traveler can cover in a single day, spending up to 40% more per trip.¹

¹ https://www.calbike.org/our_initiatives/healthy_climate_and_communities/bike-tourism-for-economic-development/

² <https://www.precedenceresearch.com/cycle-tourism-market>

Bike tourism makes critical contributions to Washington’s outdoor economy. The Washington Recreation and Conservation Office found that outdoor recreation in Washington state is connected to over \$40 billion in total annual spending⁴, both direct and indirect. Biking and hiking contribute significantly to this total while providing other benefits. Every dollar spent on outdoor recreation returns \$1.52 in economic activity.²

Improved connections for local residents. The same trails and shared use paths that make bike tourism easier and more enjoyable provide year-round opportunities for residents riding for everyday transportation, health and fun.

When locals use these facilities, they get to enjoy outdoor activities, improve their health and connect with nature through cycling or walking. Bicycling also takes people places at a speed slow enough to experience



the world around them. This can improve residents’ sense of place, encourage them to more deeply explore where they live and create connections with their neighbors, community life and bike-friendly businesses.

Importantly, roughly one-third of Washington residents don’t or can’t drive. Facilities that make bike tourism easier offer critical daily access to jobs, schools, businesses and beyond for the nondrivers who can use a bike or trike to get around and for children on their way to school.

Increased destination marketing. Bike tourism can raise the profile of small communities that tourists might otherwise overlook. For example, converting the abandoned Palouse to Cascades railroad track into a rail trail attracted cyclists to towns along its length, boosting communities’ economies and reputations. A major trail like that allows all the towns along the way to brand themselves as part of something bigger—a destination attraction. If a town doesn’t have a long regional trail connection, it can still tout its bike-friendliness to travelers who bring their bikes and use them to get around town and take short day trips.

ACTIONS: Attracting bicycle tourists to your community

Communities can attract bicycle tourists by creating spaces and offering resources that make them feel welcome. This includes offering overnight lodging, especially with bike-specific features; creating comfortable connections between trails and towns; providing bike-specific signage and information kiosks

that make navigation easy; encouraging businesses to serve bicycle tourists; installing bike parking in town along with complete bike routes in town; and working with other communities on regional trail connections.

³ <https://rco.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/EconomicReportOutdoorRecreation2020.pdf>

Attract overnight visitors. One of the main benefits of bike tourism is that it can increase visitors' length of stay and spending. To attract overnight visitors, communities can offer a variety of lodging options, such as hotels, bed and breakfasts, campgrounds or hostels that cater to different budgets and preferences. Bike tourists will also appreciate bike-specific services, such as bike shops, e-bike charging stations, repair stations, secure storage facilities, laundry facilities, showers, Wi-Fi and places to charge other devices.

Connect town to trail. A crucial factor in the popularity of bike tourism is the accessibility and visibility of the town from the trail. Local governments can connect to the trail by creating safe and convenient bike routes, paths or lanes that link the town center with the nearest trailhead. The town can also install signage, maps or kiosks that inform people bicycling about attractions in town, including distance and direction with signage on bike routes. Furthermore, the town can enhance the attractiveness and identity of the trail by adding bike-specific elements like bike repair stations, as well as features that benefit all community members, such as public restrooms, water fountains, lighting designed specifically for biking and walking illumination, places to sit and rest, landscaping and public art.



Help existing businesses. Bike tourism can provide opportunities for existing businesses to expand their customer base, revenue or product range. Small communities can help local businesses by providing supportive public infrastructure such as conveniently located bike parking, wayfinding, sidewalks and safe crossings, as well as programmatic support to serve the new stream of visitors. Working together, the business community can collaborate to create packages or deals that combine lodging, dining and other activities catering to bike tourists.

Work together. Bike tourism can benefit from regional cooperation and coordination among different towns along a trail corridor. Communities can build partnerships with neighboring towns, trail managers, tourism organizations and bike groups to create a unified and consistent bike destination. Communities and business associations can also participate in regional branding, marketing, or networking efforts to increase an area's exposure and recognition among potential visitors.

Attract funding and grants. Bike tourism can attract funding and grants from state agencies, foundations and nonprofit organizations. Grant funds can be used to improve or expand bike infrastructure and wayfinding, redesign city streets to make them safer and more attractive for every type of travel, promote destinations or support other community development projects. Bike projects can be built into street preservation projects. The space required to add features that serve bike tourists (such as public restrooms, water fountains, wayfinding, Wi-Fi and charging stations) is quite small, and these improvements will provide clear benefits for local residents as well, without requiring an entire town makeover.

CASE STUDIES: Which communities have successfully capitalized on bike tourism?

Arlington

The City of Arlington has embraced the Centennial Trail, a regional trail that travels directly through the historic downtown. One of the key features of the trail is the wayfinding system, which provides information and directions to points of interest along the 30-mile route. The wayfinding signs are designed to reflect the local history and culture of each town and to encourage trail users to explore the nearby amenities and attractions. In Arlington, the wayfinding signs direct visitors to the historic downtown, where they can find restaurants, shops and museums. Arlington has installed several parklets downtown, which provide places for bike tourists and locals to rest, socialize and enjoy the local flavors.



Lewis County

Discover Lewis County provides an extensive and easy-to-navigate catalog of the county's trails and recreational opportunities as part of its resources for visitors. In addition to detailed descriptions and maps of each of the county's trails, DLC helps visitors connect to nearby restaurants, lodging and local events. Annual events, such as Ride the Willapa hosted by Lewis County Community Trails Association, attract locals and visitors to explore the region together.

Spokane County

Washington holds not one but two Centennial Trails. The Spokane Centennial Trail starts in Nine Mile Falls, runs through the heart of downtown Spokane, and passes through the cities of Millwood, Spokane Valley, and Liberty Lake. At the state border it connects with the North Idaho Centennial Trail for a total of 64 miles, creating a multi-state destination trail. It connects multiple parks along the way and is itself designated as a Washington state park as well as a National Recreation Trail. In downtown Spokane the trail passes through Riverfront Park and along several hotel properties, several of which offer bikes for checkout for their guests to pedal along the river to shopping, restaurants, galleries and museums. The regional trail network continues to grow with new connections, including the Children of the Sun Trail extending north to the small town of Mead. Towns along the regional spine build connections to get people to and from the trail, increasing its value by making it easy to ride town to town, then stay and explore. In 2025 USA Today named the Centennial Trail the third-best recreational trail in the country in its Readers' Choice Awards.

Yelm-Rainier-Tenino Trail

The Yelm-Rainier-Tenino Trail, a paved 14.5-mile rail-trail, runs east-west through southern Thurston County. In each of the three towns the trail passes through parks that provide restrooms, water fountains, and places to stop and rest, with a bike service station at the Tenino City Park. The trail intersects with the Chehalis Western Trail, connecting the communities of Yelm, Rainier and Tenino to Tumwater, Lacey, Olympia, and Woodard Bay on Puget Sound for people seeking a longer ride. Thurston County's destination marketing efforts promotes biking on the trail, saying, "The breeze, the views and the health benefits, all make for an unforgettable family adventure."



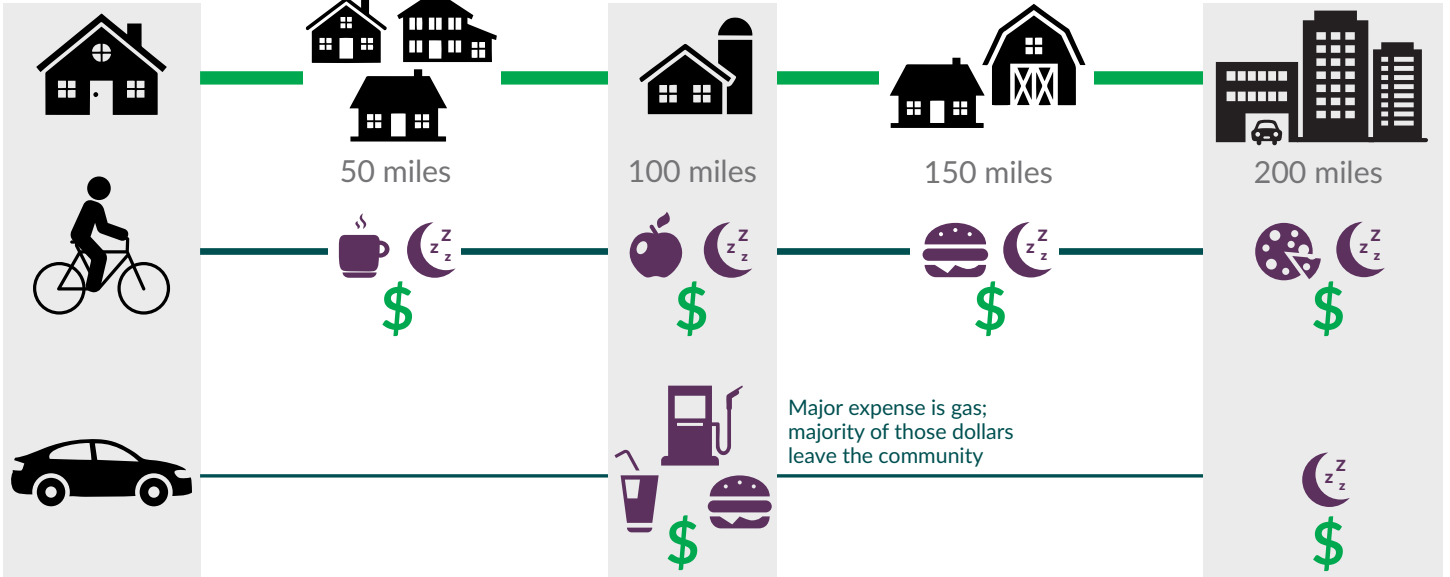
How Bicycles can save Rural economies



	17,000 calories 4 overnights
	2,000 calories 1 overnight

Over the course of the **SAME** 200 mile journey, a bike tourist will do more to support rural economies

Small Town A Small Town B Small Town C



Courtesy of The Path Less Pedaled

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