



DUPAGE COUNTY TRAILS PLAN

ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

1.21.2022

SURVEY

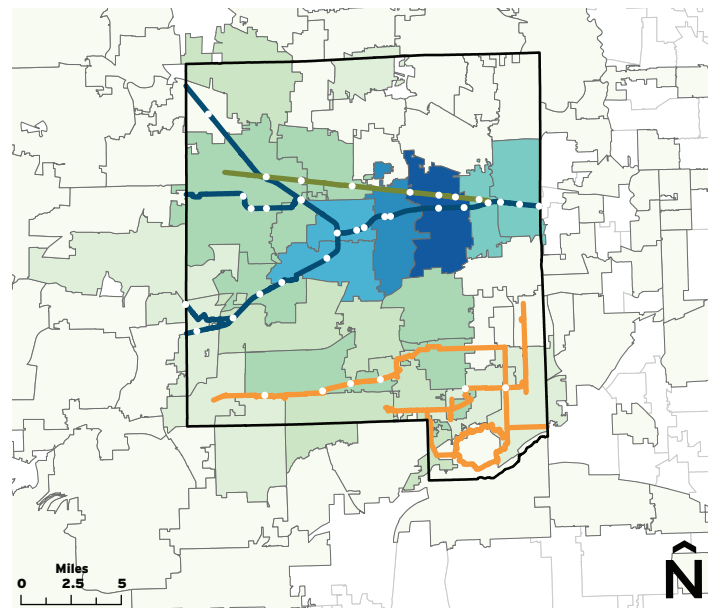
OVERVIEW

As part of the DuPage County Trails Plan, a survey was designed to gather public input on topics such as trail usage, trail character, barriers, wayfinding, volunteerism, and marketing. The survey was live for six weeks from October 4 - November 9, 2021. A total of 2,323 responses were gathered. The survey was predominately advertised via signage on the trail, which was strategically distributed throughout the trail system. In addition, the survey was marketed through DuPage County communications and distributed to community partners including bike and pedestrian advocacy groups, service providers for people with disabilities, and area municipalities to share through their communications networks.

The map to the right shows where the survey was completed by zip code with an overlay of where signs advertising the survey were placed. The zip codes with the most responses are 60148 (Lombard and Villa Park, 279 responses), 60137 (Glen Ellyn, 218 responses), 60187 (north Wheaton, 167 responses), 60189 (south Wheaton, 159 responses), and 60126 (Elmhurst, 140 responses). Of the survey respondents that provided a zip code (2,107), 91% are in DuPage

County, and 82% of responses are from zip codes that touch either the Illinois Prairie Path, the Great Western Trail, or the Southern DuPage County Regional Trail.

SURVEY RESPONSES BY ZIP CODE



DuPage County Trails

- ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH
- GREAT WESTERN TRAIL
- SOUTHERN DUPAGE COUNTY REGIONAL TRAIL
- TRAIL USER SURVEY SIGN LOCATIONS

Survey Responses by Zip Code

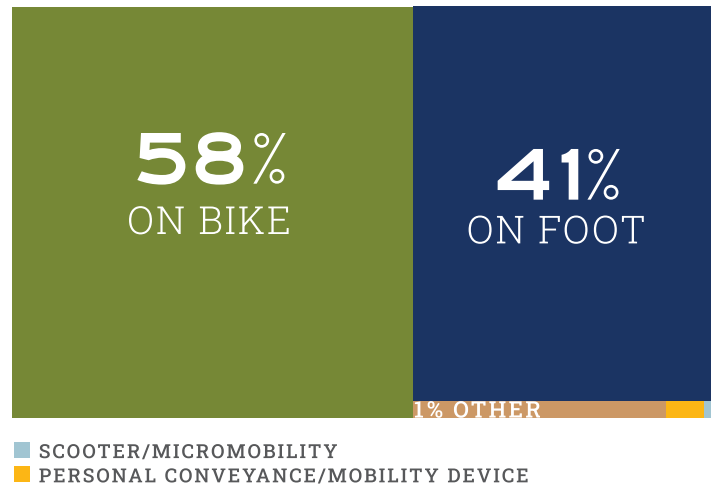
- 1 - 10
- 11 - 25
- 26 - 50
- 51 - 100
- 101 - 150
- 151 - 200
- 201 - 250
- 251 - 281

TRAIL USAGE

MODE

The vast majority of survey respondents are either biking (58%) or walking (41%). Of the 1% of respondents who chose "Other", the majority report that they ride the trails on horseback.

HOW DO YOU TYPICALLY USE DUPAGE COUNTY TRAILS?



PURPOSE

Most respondents indicated that the main reason they use the trail is exercise/fitness (91%, 2,116 responses), with the next most common selection as recreation/experiencing nature (73%, 1,711 responses). Access to shopping/dining/entertainment and social gathering are the next most common options, with 16% of responses respectively (377 and 366 responses).

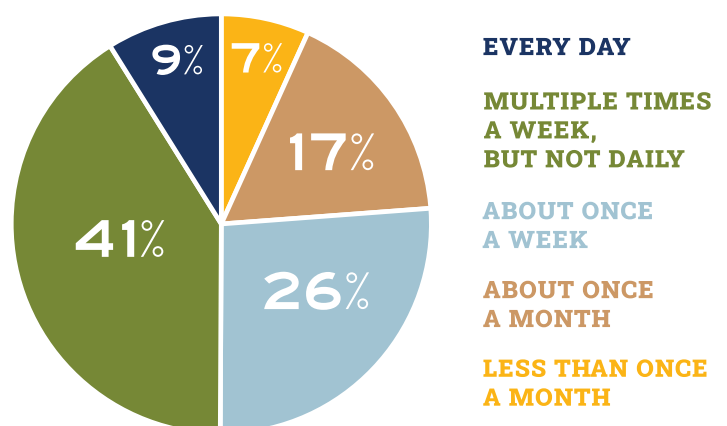
WHY DO YOU USE THE TRAIL?
SELECT ALL THAT APPLY



FREQUENCY

Most survey respondents visit the DuPage County Trail system on a weekly basis, with the largest group of respondents indicating that they visit the trail system multiple times a week, but not daily (41%). Roughly a quarter of respondents use the trails once a month (17%) or less (7%). Just 9% of survey respondents visit the system on a daily basis.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU VISIT THE TRAIL SYSTEM?



DESIRED CONNECTIONS

The survey posed the question “Is there somewhere you wish you could get to on the trail system but cannot reach?” A total of 555 people outlined places they want to go on the trail system but are not currently able to (this excludes those who replied “No”). The table to the right highlights the twenty most mentioned destinations pulled from these responses.

The most commonly desired connection is the **Morton Arboretum** in Lisle (with 151 responses referencing it). This destination is along the planned corridor of the East Branch DuPage River Trail (EBDRT), and has been noted as a highly desired future connection. The wheels are in motion to make the Arboretum more accessible, including the reconstruction of IL 53 between Butterfield Rd and S. Park Blvd., which will include a side path on the east side. In addition, the Village of Lisle and the Morton Arboretum have coordinated on a study to identify connections across I-88 to bring Lisle residents to the Arboretum.

Other top responses include **more connections county-wide** (mentioned 62 times), particularly **north-south connections** (mentioned 55 times). Either in-part or as a whole, the planned **EBDRT** is also mentioned 49 times.

Community areas that were mentioned often as desired connections include **Naperville** (38 mentions), **Downers Grove** (32 mentions), **Chicago** (35 mentions), and **Glen Ellyn** (23 mentions).

The West Branch DuPage River Trail (**WBDRT**) was mentioned 28 times, either in-part or in its entirety. The most mentioned WBDRT project was a bridge over IL 59/Roosevelt Rd. When complete, this connection would connect the WBDRT trail system to **Blackwell Forest Preserve**, a picturesque destination that was also mentioned 22 times.

WHERE DO YOU WISH YOU COULD GO ON THE TRAIL SYSTEM?

DESTINATION	COUNT
Morton Arboretum	151
More Connections, County-wide	62
North and South	55
East Branch DuPage River Trail (EBDRT)	49
Naperville	38
Chicago	35
Downers Grove	32
West Branch DuPage River Trail (WBDRT)	28
Glen Ellyn	23
Blackwell Forest Preserve	22
Shopping	19
Crossing I-88	14
Waterfall Glen	14
Forest Preserves, County-wide	14
Lisle	14
Hidden Lake	13
Pate Philip State Park	12
Crossing IL 53	12
Bartlett	12
Fermilab	11

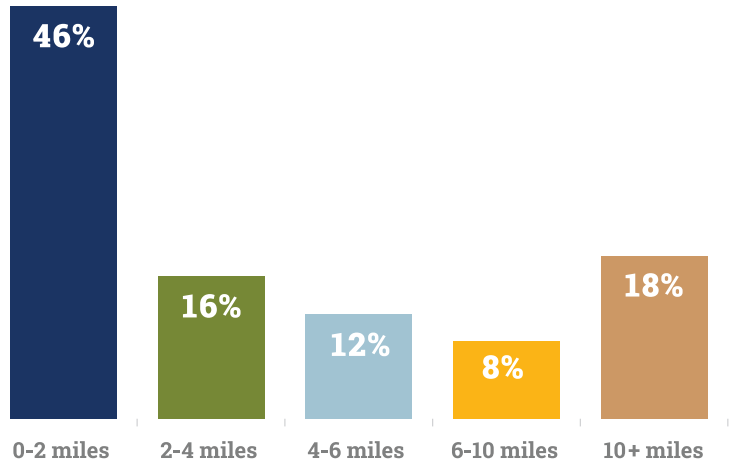
Initial funding for this bridge was awarded in 2017, and construction of the bridge is anticipated to break ground in 2023.

Other notable areas noted in the responses (mentioned between 10-20 times) include crossing I-88, shopping, Waterfall Glen, Forest Preserves, Lisle, Hidden Lake, Phillips State Park, Crossing IL-53, Bartlett, and Fermi Lab.

DISTANCE TRAVELED

Forty-six percent of survey respondents (1,062) travel a very short distance to access DuPage County trails, between 0-2 miles. The next most commonly traveled distance is over ten miles, with 18% (418) making the trek. Another 16% (366) reported traveling between 2-4 miles, while the remaining 20% (470) travel between 4-10 miles.

HOW FAR DO YOU TRAVEL TO ACCESS DUPAGE COUNTY TRAILS?



COMMON ROUTES & STEMS

Of the DuPage County trails, the most commonly used trail among survey respondents was the Illinois Prairie Path (IPP), with over 2,000 reporting that they have used the trail within the last year. The next most used trail was the Great Western Trail (GWT) with 1,527 reported users, followed by the Southern DuPage Regional Trail (SDRT) with 654 reported users. Though somewhat uncommon, 170 people report that they didn't know which of the trails they had used.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING REGIONAL TRAILS HAVE YOU USED IN THE LAST YEAR?

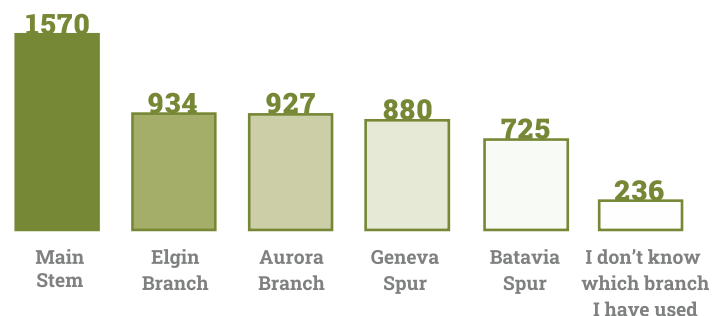
SELECT ALL THAT APPLY



Of those who indicated they use the IPP, a follow up question prompted respondents to indicate which branches they had used in the last year. The IPP Main Stem was the most common branch (1,570 responses) with the Elgin Branch, Aurora Branch, Geneva Branch, and Batavia Spur all reporting similar use. Around 12% (or 236) respondents are not sure which branch they had used.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BRANCHES OF THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH HAVE YOU USED IN THE LAST YEAR?

SELECT ALL THAT APPLY

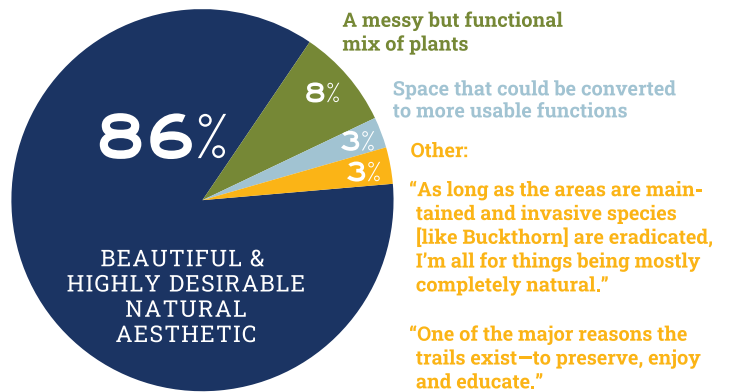


TRAIL CHARACTER

NATIVE PLANTS

The vast majority of survey respondents (86%) consider native plants and prairie grasses as a beautiful and highly desirable natural aesthetic. While some (8%) see them as messy but functional, most open ended responses reiterated the benefit to local ecology and the need to inform the public of their value. Many comments address a need for better maintenance to curb the spread of invasive species like buckthorn, as well as poison ivy and poison oak. Maintaining sight-lines was also a concern among those who chose "Other".

DO YOU CONSIDER NATIVE PLANTS AND PRAIRIE GRASS AREAS TO BE:



VALUE OF PLANTS & TREES

Most respondents rank the function of plants (in terms of wetland stabilization, habitat, shade, etc.) and native species (in terms of biodiversity and adaptation to the local climate) as the most valuable characteristics of plants and trees along the trail. Open ended responses highlight the value of shade and trees along the trail system, as well as the need to maintain sight lines and curb invasive species.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DO YOU VALUE THE MOST WHEN IT COMES TO PLANTS AND TREES ALONG THE TRAIL?



TRAIL SETTINGS

The top ranked natural setting is wooded/shaded, with 66% of respondents prioritizing this condition. Many of the open ended responses noted that they like all settings/don't have a preference, noting that the variety of settings within a trail is what makes it interesting. Others indicated a preference for wooded/shaded in the summer and open natural/parkland in the winter. Comments regarding downtown corridors noted that the main nuisances with this setting are vehicular fumes and safety concerns.

PLEASE RANK THE BELOW TRAIL SETTINGS BY PREFERENCE.

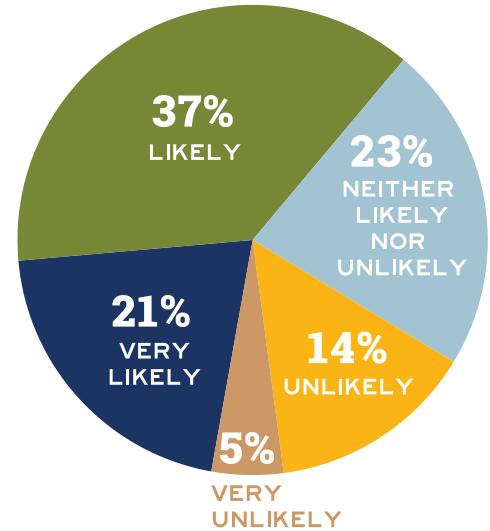
- 1 WOODED/SHADED
- 2 RIVER CORRIDOR
- 3 PRAIRIE/TALLGRASSS
- 4 OPEN NATURAL/PARKLAND
- 5 DOWNTOWN CORRIDOR

"It's nice to experience the variety, from the openness of the prairies to the coolness and windbreaks that the wooded areas provide."

INFORMATIONAL SIGNAGE

More than half of survey respondents (1,136 or 58%) are likely or very likely to stop and read educational signage about the native landscape, with 23% indicating that they are very likely to stop and learn more. Alternatively, 19% said that they are either unlikely or very unlikely to stop and read. The remaining 23% of respondents fall somewhere in between.

HOW LIKELY ARE YOU TO STOP & READ EDUCATIONAL SIGNAGE THAT PROVIDES INFORMATION ON THE TYPES/FUNCTIONS OF NATIVE LANDSCAPE ENVIRONMENTS?



TRAIL BARRIERS

NAVIGATION & WAYFINDING

While most respondents indicated they have never been turned around or unsure of their location, about one in six have been lost or turned around on the trail system (16%) and one in five have found themselves in situations where they are unsure if they were on the right trail (19%).

There were a few locations that commonly caused confusion, particularly at places where the IPP split into branches and spurs. Connections with other trails were sources of confusion as well.

Some respondents indicated locations that may not be on the County's trails network. Many people mentioned West Chicago, as well as Herrick Lake Forest Preserve.

Many mention poor signage as the culprit of their confusion, and some mention that mile markers with cardinal directions would be helpful.

HAVE YOU EVER FOUND YOURSELF LOST OR TURNED AROUND ON THE TRAIL SYSTEM?

16%
HAVE BEEN LOST OR TURNED AROUND

19%
HAVE BEEN UNSURE THEY ARE ON THE RIGHT TRAIL

MOST COMMON LOCATIONS OF CONFUSION

Connection Points:
IPP Branch Splits |
IPP & Salt Creek Trail |
IPP and Fox River Trail

Other: West Chicago |
Herrick Lake Forest Preserve

SAFETY

While almost half of respondents (49%) reported that they have never felt unsafe on the trail, the other half of respondents have. The most common reason people feel unsafe are trail crossings and automobiles (33%). Many report that streets with high speeds and poorly marked crossings are a concern.

Twenty percent of respondents indicated that other people on the trails have made them feel unsafe. Comments referenced people on electric bikes or cycling at high speeds. Some responses mention a fear of loitering and attacks on the trail, though many indicated that this fear comes from the news as opposed to personal experience. Ideas like additional lighting and emergency posts were proposed as solutions.

The physical conditions of the trail make up 11% of unsafe conditions. Many report issues such as loose gravel and ruts in the trail as concerns, as well as impacts from weather, such as icy stretches, and limestone screenings being washed away from rain.

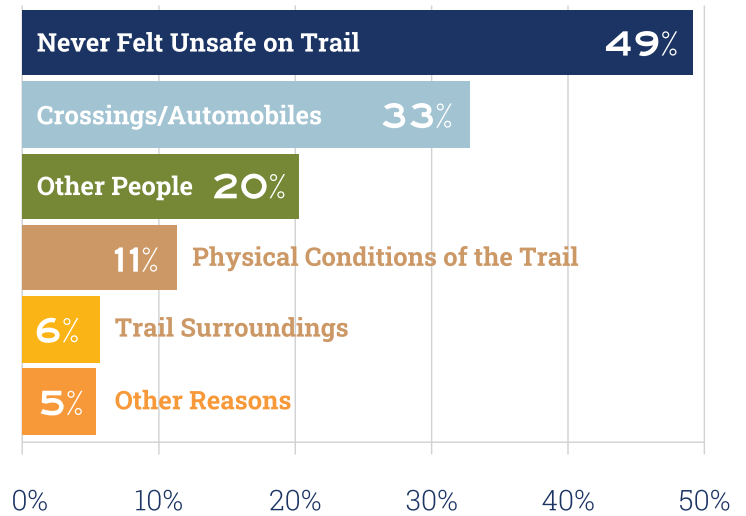
NUISANCES

Of the over 2,000 survey responses, 60% experienced some sort of nuisance while on a DuPage County trail. The most commonly reported nuisances are animals off-leash in prohibited areas (550 reports) and overgrown vegetation (473 reports).

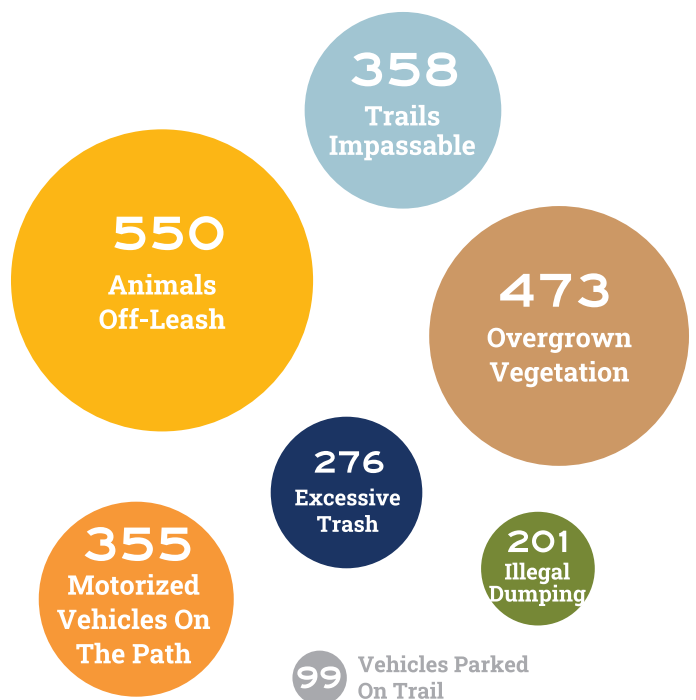
Those that marked that they found trails inaccessible/impassable (358 reports) provide more context for their response. Most indicated that this was the result of a weather event, such as heavy rains or storms, which resulted in standing water, muddy areas, and most often down trees and limbs. Many people noted that these issues were addressed “remarkably quick”.

The issue of animal waste on the trails—namely from horses and dogs—is mentioned in a number of responses.

HAVE YOU EVER FELT UNSAFE ON THE TRAIL SYSTEM? CHECK THE CONDITIONS THAT MADE YOU FEEL UNSAFE.



HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED ANY OF THE FOLLOWING NUISANCES WHILE ON A DUPAGE COUNTY TRAIL?

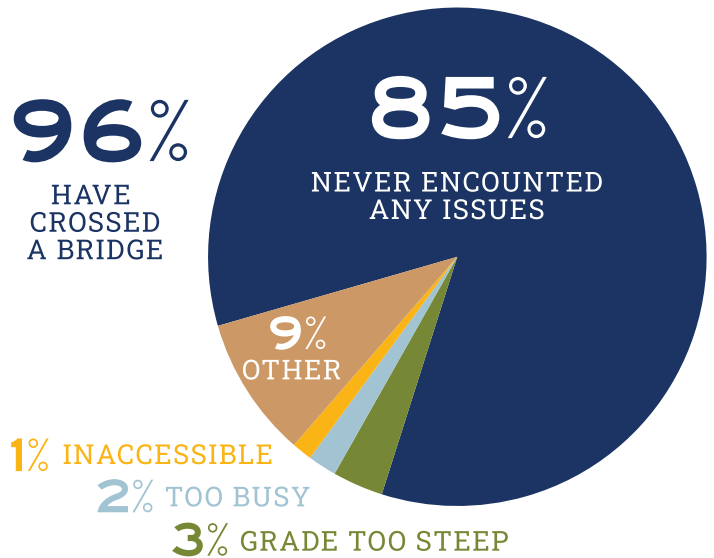


BRIDGES

The vast majority of survey respondents (96%) indicated that they have crossed a bridge while on a DuPage County Trail, and most (85%) have never encountered any issues with these trail bridges.

Of those that have encountered issues, most concerns are around bridges that are slippery, too narrow, or are uneven and in need of maintenance.

HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED ISSUES OR CONCERNS WITH ANY TRAIL BRIDGES THAT YOU'VE CROSSED?



WAYFINDING

COMMUNICATION

According to the survey results, the most important piece of information to communicate on navigational signage is connection to other trails. Based on the responses, navigating between trails is often the most common point of confusion. Other navigational priorities include pointing trail users to parks, forest preserves, and natural areas, and features such as rivers and lakes.

Survey respondents did not prioritize navigational signage to municipalities, downtowns, transit stops, or public amenities as highly as natural areas and other trails.

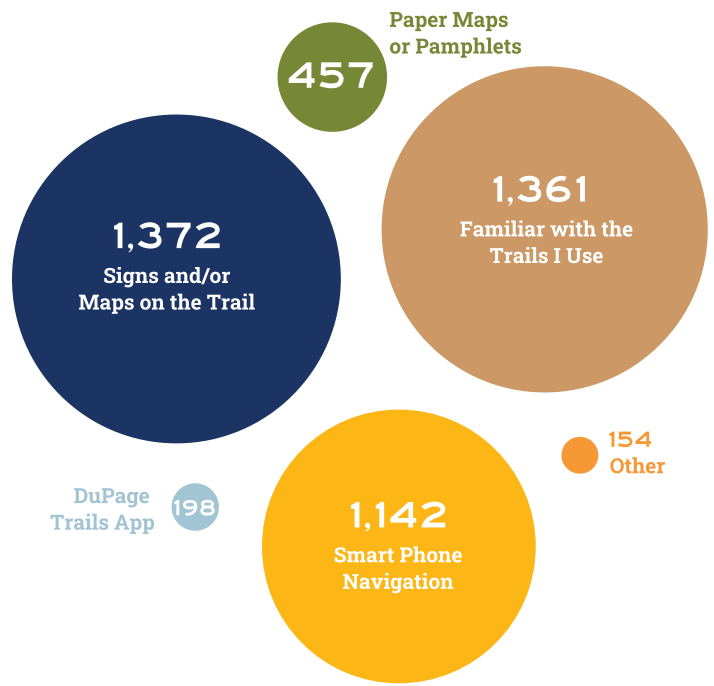
RANK THE BELOW ITEMS IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE TO COMMUNICATE ON NAVIGATIONAL SIGNAGE



NAVIGATION

Most survey respondents use the signs or maps on the trails to navigate the system, or they are familiar enough with the trails that they do not need navigation assistance. Smart phone navigation is also popular with survey respondents. Relatively few respondents use paper maps or the DuPage Trails App.

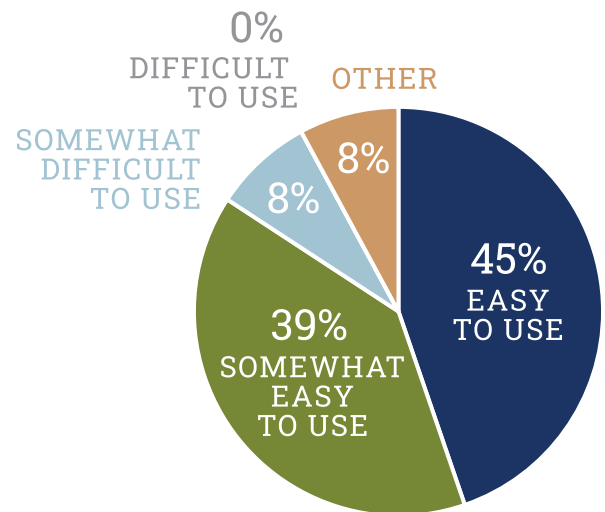
HOW DO YOU KNOW WHERE TO GO ON THE TRAILS SYSTEM? WHAT DO YOU USE TO NAVIGATE THE TRAILS?



TRAILS APP

Very few people (just 1.6% or 38 people) answered the question about the user experience of the Trails App. Of those that responded, most indicated that it was easy to use (45%) or somewhat easy to use (39%). No one reported the app as difficult to use (0%). Comments on this question note that they haven't used the app, or that phone connectivity issues unrelated to DuDOT make using the app a challenge while on the trails.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE USER EXPERIENCE OF THE TRAILS APP?



VOLUNTEERISM & MARKETING

TRAILS CLEANUP

Although most survey respondents have never been involved in a trail cleanup, those that have been involved (16%) describe many organizations that spearhead cleanups. Many noted that they pick up trash on their own when they walk. Of those that have been involved in an organized cleanup, common organizers include the Boy Scouts, Sierra Club, and municipal Earth Day.

CLUB PARTICIPATION

Slightly more respondents (21%) indicated that they have been involved in a club activity on the trail system. These groups overlap with the cleanup groups, and most often involve running clubs and cyclist clubs, girl and boy scout excursions, Meetup groups, and hiking groups. Specific groups include the Elmhurst Bike Club, CARA Running Club, and Wheaton Pedal Pushers.

ADVERTISING

Relatively few survey respondents (12%) have seen the trail network advertised at or by a local business. The most common place that people see the trail system advertised is at local bike shops. Others mention generally seeing the trails advertised in downtown districts throughout the county, as well as by local realtors and developers.

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN INVOLVED IN A FUNDRAISER OR CLEANUP INITIATIVE ON THE TRAIL SYSTEM?

16% HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN A TRAIL CLEANUP

SPECIFIC CLEANUP INITIATIVES:

Boy Scouts | Earth Day | Sierra Club-River Prairie Group | Spring Prairie Path Cleanup | Villa Park Path Cleanup Day | Path Adoption Sections | Elmhurst Bike Club | Faith Lutheran Church | God's Work, Our Hands | Milton Township Democrats

HAVE YOU EVER PARTICIPATED IN A CLUB ACTIVITY ON THE TRAIL SYSTEM?

21% HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN A CLUB ACTIVITY

SPECIFIC CLUBS INCLUDE:

Running Clubs | Bike Clubs | Girl & Boy Scouts | Hiking Group | DuPage Birding Club | Kiwanis | Friends of the GWT | Friends of the IPP | Sierra Club | Geocaching with Church Groups | American Legion | Meetup Groups

HAVE YOU EVER SEEN THE TRAIL NETWORK ADVERTISED BY A LOCAL BUSINESS?

12% HAVE SEEN THE TRAILS ADVERTISED LOCALLY

ADVERTISED AT:

Bike Shops such as: **Midwest Cyclery | J&R Cycle | Prairie Path Cycles | Trek Downers Grove | The Bike Rack | Spokes | All Spoked Up | The Bike Hib**

Downtown Businesses such as: **Fuel & Crème | Graue Mill | REI | Dry City Brew Works | Realtors & Developers | Wheaton French Market | Dick Pond Athletics | Noodles Tattoo | Naperville Running**

WEBSITE

OVERVIEW

A website for the project was created under the domain DuPageTrailsPlan.com. The website includes information about the project and its timeline, details about the project partners, and information about ongoing engagement activities.

STATISTICS

Following the website's launch in September, it has seen 4,816 total visitors and 6,136 total page views. The majority of these website visits were in October when the survey was released. Of those page visitors, 39 entered their email to receive project updates, in addition to the 695 who entered their email in the survey to receive project updates.

SUBMISSIONS

In addition to the survey, 45 people submitted ideas or questions through the contact section of the website. These range from ideas about future connections, advocating for the EBDRT, and improvements that could be made along the trail. A sample of submissions are included to the right.

“Wondering how we can get lights on the Great Western Trail. The path would be safer and more usable with them. Likewise for a few more clearing spaces.”

“In your planning, please add restrooms at regular intervals. Very helpful when out running! ”

“Realizing that cost is the primary obstacle to progress on the proposed East Branch DuPage River Trail, I believe the connection between the Great Western Trail and the Prairie Path [should be prioritized]. We need north-south connectivity.”

“I recommend adding No electric bikes to the Rules of the Trails. They go too fast, and can be unsafe for others. It stirs up the dust and creates potholes.”

“There are many people frequenting that trails that do not know proper etiquette. Recreate on the right, pass on left, don't stop in middle of trail, etc.”

GENERAL SENTIMENT

The people of DuPage County love their trail systems, and continue to voice how important these trails are to their quality of life. The majority of concerns around the trails relate to unsafe crossings or routes where the trail becomes unsafe due to automobile traffic. The desire for additional bathrooms along the trail was repeatedly voiced, as was the need to better control invasive species. Increased guidance on the role of e-bikes on the system is desired. Despite these concerns, most people who have engaged with the survey are grateful for the work that the County does to provide this public benefit.