

Fall River Residents Enjoy Walking on New River Rail Trail

by: Eric Andrade

SUMMARY

The Alfred J. Lima Quequechan River Rail Trail (QRRT) has helped residents of Fall River, Massachusetts, be more active. After its opening in early June 2016, residents from all over the city and surrounding areas have packed the trail. The majority report that they now walk more because of the beauty and convenience of the trail. Not only has the QRRT increased recreational physical activity, it has also provided residents with a safe way to walk to work, get their groceries, or run errands.



CHALLENGE

In 2012, Mass in Motion Fall River partners conducted a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) for the 1-mile radius of the future Quequechan River Rail Trail corridor. Half of Fall River's 88,000 residents live within this 1-mile radius. The HIA cited 2002–2007 data from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health that showed Fall River ranked worse than the Massachusetts average for a number of health measures. For instance, 63% of Fall River adults were

overweight versus 55% in the state, 28% versus 19% had obesity, 10% versus 8% had diabetes, and 45% versus 52% got 30 minutes of moderate physical activity 5 days a week or 20 minutes of vigorous activity 3 days a week. The HIA also showed residents were affected by socioeconomic factors that impacted healthy food access and physical activity opportunities. For example, one-third of adult residents within the HIA area did not own cars.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

To learn more about the QRRT, visit: <http://walkfallriver.org/quequechan-river-rail-trail/>. To learn more about the HIA, visit: http://www.mapc.org/sites/default/files/FallRiver_Final_HIA.pdf. To learn more about Massachusetts risk factors and health behaviors, visit <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/masschip/brfss-rf/brfssrfcity-townfallriver.rtf>. This project is supported by the Diabetes Prevention - State and Local Public Health Actions to Prevent Obesity, Diabetes, and Heart Disease and Stroke cooperative agreement (DP14-1422).

"This was one of the biggest transformations of my life. I began to socialize with people... people walking the trail were always smiling and willing to converse about how the trail is one of the best things that has ever happened in Fall River."

- Janice Clarke

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SOLUTION

The city opened the QRRT in summer 2016. Mass in Motion Fall River (a healthy living initiative) worked with partners and the city to encourage residents to use the trail. They launched a branding campaign called Walk Fall River that included 150 wayfinding signs and a walking campaign. Local hospitals and community health workers led walking groups in English, Portuguese, and Spanish. A joint-use agreement with a university created parking for the QRRT. Hundreds of maps showing nearby healthy markets were handed out at events. These activities spread the word that the trail was functional and could support the residents and local businesses by improving access to community resources.

RESULTS

The opening of the first 0.6 mile stretch of the trail had an immediate impact in the community. A fall 2016 survey of approximately 150 people found that 62% of QRRT users reported walking more since the trail opened—42% of those respondents said they exercised two or three times a week more often than previously. Eighty-seven percent of users reported using the trail for exercise, while 15% said they used it for functional purposes such as grocery shopping or getting to and from work safely. Ninety-five percent of residents said that the QRRT's natural beauty was the best part about the trail and motivated them to use it more often. These results clearly show that the trail has been successful in mobilizing trail users to be more active.

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<http://www.cdc.gov/cdc-info/requestform.html>

Web site

<http://nccd.cdc.gov/nccdsuccessstories/>

The findings and conclusions in this success story are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the funding agencies or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Preserving the QRRT is essential to maintaining long-term, sustainable health benefits for residents. A new Groundwork Southcoast office, part of the Groundwork USA network, is set to open in Fall River. Groundwork will maintain the trail through environmental stewardship and address food justice and access through economic development plans. Department of Health and Mass in Motion staff are also working with city officials and department heads to ensure sustainable built environment approaches are incorporated into city planning, such as the upcoming 5-year Open Space and Recreation Plan.

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