

To Guelph City Council as Shareholder of GJR:

I am writing this letter in support of John Fisher's and the Guelph Hiking Trail Club's proposal that GJR shareholders vote to change GJR's mandate such that it includes a comprehensive Rails With Trails strategy.

I, and other members of the Guelph Trail User-Groups Coalition (GTUC), have presented evidence of the substantial economic benefits of rail trails to Council and staff in Economic Development, Tourism and Parks several times in the past. I will remind you of some of our research findings in light of GHTC's proposal.

Published economic impact studies of trails generally incorporate any or all of the following elements:

- Economic stimulus from construction
- Increased revenue for local restaurants, hotels, gas stations, grocers, bicycle stores, sporting good stores, etc.
- Help struggling businesses stay in operation
- Opening of new businesses
- Job creation
- Increase property values
- Increased tax revenue at the federal (HST, income tax), provincial (HST, income tax) and municipal (property tax) level
- Health savings from increased fitness
- Intangible benefits from improved mental, physical and psychological well-being
- Increased tax revenue at the federal (HST, income tax), provincial (HST, income tax) and municipal (property tax) level

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) has pioneered the use of trail user visitation and spending surveys to accurately assess the value of the U.S. trails tourism economy along destination rail-trails. Using their 15-years-plus dataset of localized trail-spending studies, RTC found average direct spending at trail-oriented and trail-adjacent businesses of \$5 million to \$7 million and an economic impact of between \$10 million and \$40 million dollars a year, depending on the length of the trail and number of commercial operations nearby, much of it coming through lodging and food expenditure. Specifically, in 2019, RTC calculated that the total local spending impact of the nation's (U.S.A.) 2,218 rail-trails is U.S.\$10.6 billion annually (an average of \$4.8 million per trail), which could grow to as much as \$21 billion annually. Trail use has skyrocketed during the pandemic, so these numbers would be substantially higher now.

As an example of the potential economic benefits of connected trail development in Guelph, we used data derived from several trail spending and use studies to estimate the total annual increase in revenue that would be generated in Guelph from a completed G2G connector. (This was calculated by multiplying estimated user numbers by average user spending. Note this only

reflects the second element in the above list of sources of economic benefit, from spending at local businesses). We found the revenue generated would be:

Nondurable items (foods, drinks, hotel, etc): \$1,190,000

Durable retail goods (bicycle supplies, clothing, etc) : \$1,110,000

Total: \$2,300,000

As a retired professor of epidemiology/health economics, I would argue that the economic benefits alone of a Rails With Trails strategy strongly support GHTC's proposal. In addition, however, it closely aligns with the priorities of Guelph's Strategic Plan:

- Foster easy, accessible movement through trails, paths, roads and corridors
- Respond to climate change and prepare for a net-zero-carbon future
- Make strategic investments that nurture social well-being
- Contribute to a sustainable, creative and smart local economy

These are highly laudable objectives, but of little value if we don't take concrete steps to achieve them. Taking advantage of the unique asset of GJR's ROW for the public good would be ground-breaking. I urge you to give GHTC's proposal serious consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Meg Thorburn
Chair, GTUC
Director, Guelph Cycling Club

