

Indianapolis Cultural Trail

Improving Livability in Central Indiana

Overview

In recent years, Indianapolis has been listed as having the best business climate in the Midwest, one of the top ten metropolitan areas with the best cost of living, and one of the best cities to relocate to in America.^{1,2,3} These accolades follow years of livability investments aimed at creating a livelier downtown and a more cohesive city identity. Since 2001, the Cultural Development Commission has advanced a comprehensive economic development strategy for downtown to anchor the city's neighborhoods. The commission designated six "cultural districts" – historic, walkable neighborhoods within downtown Indianapolis - that contain unique arts, cultural, heritage, sports, and entertainment landmarks.⁴ To complement and link these downtown destinations, city leaders initiated development of an eight-mile [Indianapolis Cultural Trail](#) in 2006, converting traffic lanes and parking spaces into a dedicated off-road trail for bicyclists and pedestrians.⁵ The city planned additional redevelopment projects concurrent with the Cultural Trail, including revitalization of the downtown Market Square area to be more attractive to businesses, and revisions to downtown zoning regulations to facilitate mixed-use opportunities, increase brownfield redevelopment, and moderate parking requirements.

"We are already seeing tens of millions of dollars invested into new buildings, both commercial and residential, where the developers are quoting that the reason for their development is the Indianapolis Cultural Trail"

Brian Payne, president, Cultural Indiana Community Foundation

Even before the Cultural Trail's completion in 2012, Indianapolis' investments in the city's core accelerated economic growth downtown, creating jobs and attracting young professionals and new businesses seeking a more convenient and appealing location in the heart of the state's largest employment center.⁶ The downtown development strategy, coupled with the increased access to downtown destinations, has helped bring additional new attractions and investment to the area⁷ such as:

- Creation of more than **11,000 jobs** and economic benefits exceeding **\$863 million** through direct construction, private sector investment along the trail, and expanded tourism;⁸
- **\$21.4 million in fuel saving** over the next 25 years as walking and cycling offset local vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by 83 million miles;⁹ and,
- **Increasing property values** along the Cultural Trail up to \$45 million.¹⁰

With funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Department (HUD), the Department of Transportation (DOT), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Department of Energy (DOE), Indianapolis continues to build momentum downtown. The city is further expanding transportation options; creating more attractive, accessible public spaces; and increasing affordable housing downtown. These investments and initiatives reinforce the foundation of diverse, thriving, and livable neighborhoods.

The Partnership agencies incorporate six principles of livability into Federal funding programs and policies to support locally developed projects:

- Provide more transportation choices.
- Promote equitable, affordable housing.
- Enhance economic competitiveness.
- Support existing communities.
- Coordinate policies and leverage investment.
- Value communities and neighborhoods.

Such coordinated investments align with the mission of the [Partnership for Sustainable Communities](#) (Partnership), through which several grants were awarded to Indianapolis. The Partnership is a cooperative initiative between HUD, DOT, and EPA that coordinates Federal housing, transportation, and other infrastructure investments in order to make neighborhoods more prosperous, reduce pollution, and enable people to live closer to jobs. It helps communities improve access to affordable housing, increase transportation options, and lower transportation costs while protecting the environment. The Partnership agencies incorporate six principles of livability into Federal funding programs and policies to support locally developed projects.¹¹

Capturing Momentum

Constructing a trail to encourage economic development downtown was not a new strategy for Indianapolis; it built on the proven success of a nearby investment in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. The heavily-used 15.6-mile [Monon Trail](#), a converted rail bed, runs north from downtown Indianapolis, past the Indianapolis Art Center in Broad Ripple Village (a designated cultural commercial district), schools, parks, State fairgrounds, and suburban residential neighborhoods.¹² The first segment of the Monon Trail was funded with over \$7 million in Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Transportation

“It may not have sand and crashing waves, but the Monon Trail is the equivalent of beachfront property in the Indianapolis area.”
Bill Ruthhard, Indianapolis Star, November 23, 2003

Enhancements grants¹³ and opened in 1999. It recorded more than 1.2 million users in its first year, making this urban greenway one of the busiest in the nation. Homes within one-half mile of the trail sell for an average of 11 percent more than comparable homes farther away¹⁴ and 2003 study estimated the overall impact of Marion County’s trails on property values at more than \$140 million.¹⁵ The precedent set by the Monon Trail assured developers that their investments in the Cultural Trail and surrounding area were reasonable and worthwhile.



In downtown, other seeds of revitalization were planted well before completion of the Cultural Trail. In 1995, the Circle Centre shopping and entertainment complex opened with funding from a mix of private and public sources, including over \$187 million from the city of Indianapolis and \$17 million from HUD.¹⁶ This project triggered development of new corporate headquarters, hotels, residences, and shops downtown,¹⁷ including 150 new restaurants since 2000.¹⁸ Indianapolis is now working to improve its infrastructure and street-level experience to capitalize on this concentration of investments. The Cultural Districts Program highlights key locations in the city’s downtown, and the Indianapolis Cultural Trail knits them together.

Figure 1: Map of the Indianapolis Cultural Trail and surrounding Cultural Districts. [Source: <http://midwestmla.org/ConnectMidwest/2011/09/29/post-578/>]



Maximizing the Economic Benefits of the Cultural Trail

Local citizens and businesses alike supported the development of the Cultural Trail, anticipating the quality-of-life and economic benefits it would bring to downtown and beyond. The Cultural Trail was funded through a public-private partnership between the city of Indianapolis and the [Central Indiana Community Foundation](#), a philanthropic and leadership organization serving Indianapolis for nearly 100 years. The Cultural Trail cost \$62.5 million to construct. After investing \$15.5 million of Federal transportation funding and \$26.5 million in contributions from private individuals, foundations, and local corporations¹⁹ into the project and completing three miles of the trail, Indianapolis was awarded a \$20.5 million Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant in 2010, administered through the DOT.

Developers began purchasing and developing land adjacent to the greenway long before its completion, both in stable neighborhoods as well as those with multiple abandoned or vacant properties. Between 2007 and 2010, over \$17.5 million of new commercial building permits and \$36.4 million residential building permits were filed within one-half mile of the Cultural Trail,²⁰ adding new retail, dining, and tourist establishments to the area. Several nearby existing businesses expanded to accommodate the growing demand for destinations close by. Indianapolis anticipates that the Cultural Trail will lead to more than 11,000 new jobs in the city and will yield economic benefits from construction, private sector investment, and increased tourism to exceed \$863 million.²¹

New businesses in close proximity to the Cultural Trail range from small locally-run shops to large-scale mixed-use developments. Small businesses adjacent to the Trail are flourishing. For example, Calvin Fletcher's Coffee Company, a local coffee shop, relocated to a larger space along the Trail to accommodate the jump in business as a result of the Trail in recent years.²² Tom Battista, a local developer, owns properties on both Virginia Avenue and Massachusetts Avenue. When he bought two properties on Massachusetts Avenue, only three people worked in them. Now there are over 70 employees working in those buildings for almost exclusively locally-run businesses.²³

One anchor of downtown's revitalization includes [CityWay](#), a \$155 million development just one block from the Trail. The city entered into a public-private partnership with the Eli Lilly and Company, Buckingham Companies, Dolce Hotels and Resorts, and the YMCA of Greater Indianapolis to create 250 market-rate apartments, a 209-room hotel, and 10 restaurants and shops.²⁴ CityWay is expected to create 2,800 temporary and permanent jobs and generate \$350 million through consumer spending and new workers' salaries over a five-year period.²⁵ The development also includes public parks and plazas.²⁶

"[The tax revenue] is going to give us some flexibility and allow us to do some good projects with the development of downtown."

Deron Kintner, Executive Director of the Indianapolis Public Improvement Bond Bank

New development continues to spur additional investment downtown. In 2012, tax revenue from new development in the area allowed Indianapolis to re-invest in projects downtown. Funds collected through the downtown's tax-increment financing district must be spent on economic development projects in the downtown area or used to pay off the city's debt. The additional \$12.1 million raised in 2011 contributed to several renovations projects, including supplemental funding for the Indianapolis Convention and Visitors Association, City Market (a historic marketplace downtown) renovations, and sewer and street improvements near CityWay.²⁷

Local businesses and corporations expect the Trail to attract customers, and to attract workers in all sectors, ranging from the retail and services industries employees to acclaimed research and business fields. The increased foot traffic and access provided by the Indianapolis Cultural Trail benefits existing businesses and draws new ones, attracts tourists who now view downtown Indianapolis as a destination unto itself, and appeals to large employers seeking to recruit young, educated, creative class workers.



To further support and incentivize this type of growth, Indianapolis is revising downtown zoning regulations.²⁸ In 2010, Indianapolis received \$1.2 million through a [HUD Community Challenge Planning Grant](#) to comprehensively update the city's zoning ordinances and related development regulations to better reflect current needs and improve quality of life. The project, [Indy Rezone](#), will update zoning codes to

facilitate mixed-use opportunities, increase brownfield redevelopment, and moderate parking requirements to encourage walking. This effort reflects the city's commitment to livability and long-term vision. Through the work of six Technical Task Forces, Indy Rezone will help Indianapolis increase gross density, leading to decreased pollution, fewer vehicle miles traveled, and lower green-house gas emissions,²⁹ as well as improve public health as a result of better air quality and increased physical activity. The project team plans to produce a final version of proposed ordinances in spring 2014.³⁰

"Today's knowledge worker demands distinctive natural, recreational, cultural and lifestyle amenities when selecting a place to live, work, and play. The Cultural Trail connects all these demands."

Dr. John Lechleiter, Cultural Trail donor and CEO of Eli Lilly and Company

Expanding Transportation Choices

When Indianapolis hosted the Super Bowl in 2012, the city was praised for the walkability of the downtown. Visitors could conveniently travel between hotels, restaurants, and Lucas Oil Stadium,³¹ all on the Cultural Trail and downtown sidewalks. This is consistent with the growing trend of Indianapolis residents and visitors spending more time downtown. Annual attendance at major downtown leisure attractions has increased by 83 percent since 1994 to 8 million annual visits³² – a result, in part, of the city's strategic investments to expand transportation options downtown. The investments and grants discussed below describe additional projects that build upon and support the success of the downtown Cultural Trail strategy:

- The DOE awarded Indianapolis with an Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) in 2010 to construct 17 miles of bicycle lanes on existing city streets, through urban and suburban neighborhoods with both commercial and residential properties along the routes.³³ The corridors with striped bicycle lanes create important connections to the Cultural Trail, as well as between the existing downtown bicycle network and the city's existing 30 miles of greenway.³⁴
- The city reconstructed three blocks of Georgia Street in downtown Indianapolis. Constructed in 2012 with \$10 million in Federal transportation funding and \$2.5 million in city and State funds, the project decreased the number of travel lanes from four to two and added a pedestrian promenade in the median. It also included bicycle racks, pedestrian way-finding and historical signage.³⁵
- In August 2012, The Indianapolis Metropolitan Planning Organization, in cooperation with Indianapolis Public Transit Corporation (IndyGo), received \$2 million from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to conduct a regional alternatives analysis for the implementation of bus rapid transit (BRT) along East-West and North-South corridors in Central Indiana, including downtown Indianapolis, the Indianapolis International Airport, and the region's second largest city, Carmel.^{36 37} The study area has a high level of need, as defined by the high number of transit-dependent and low-income households.³⁸ The system will better connect these residents and communities to downtown Indianapolis and to jobs, and the Trail will connect them to downtown amenities once they arrive.



Figure 2: The Cultural Trail [Source: <http://www.reasite.com/projects/indianapolis-cultural->]

“A vibrant urban community is its mobility options. Having the convenient connectivity of transit to bike and pedestrian paths is a demonstration of forward thinking multi-modal planning”.

Michael Terry, president and CEO of IndyGo. <http://www.indyculturaltrail.org/testimonials.html>

Prior to the construction of the Cultural Trail and these related investments, many corridors in downtown Indianapolis did not have sidewalks. One third of the total Cultural Trail project funding replaced city infrastructure that otherwise would not have been improved, including one mile of a two-lane roadway and eight miles of sidewalk. Connections between the Cultural Trail, the city’s bicycle

and pedestrian network, and IndyGo allow residents and visitors to easily move throughout the region and downtown. Nearly 30 downtown IndyGo bus routes – all equipped with bicycle racks – intersect the Trail, allowing bus passengers the option to ride the bus with their bicycle and commute by bicycle or foot once downtown.

In addition to providing connections to transit, the Cultural Trail and other recent transportation investments also link the previously established pieces of Indianapolis’ trail system. Before, existing trails were isolated and they terminated at the edge of downtown. With the Cultural Trail connecting to over 20 miles of off-street trails, bicyclists and pedestrians can now access downtown as well as surrounding neighborhoods. Over the next 25 years, use of the Cultural Trail is projected to replace over 300,000 annual vehicle trips with bicycle and pedestrian trips,³⁹ generating \$21.4 million in fuel saving and decreasing VMT in the city by 83 million miles.⁴⁰

Revitalizing Underused Infrastructure

Indianapolis works to efficiently use the land alongside and in close proximity to its trail system and to convert it to sustainable uses. This approach has made the Cultural Trail one of the largest environmental improvement projects in Indianapolis history. The Cultural Trail replaces asphalt and concrete with 522 new trees, 220,000 square feet of new landscaping, and the city’s first stormwater planters, diverting 58,000 gallons of water per rain event.⁴¹ The planters improve downtown’s resiliency during major weather events and address potential flooding from combined wastewater and sewage overflow, diverting over 2.6 million gallons per year.

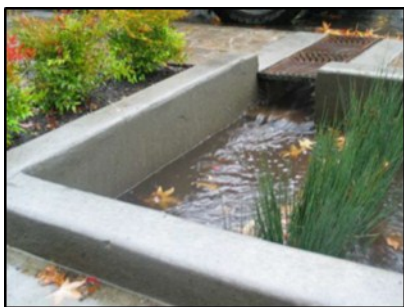


Figure 3: Stormwater Planter in Portland, OR, a model for the Indianapolis planters [Source: <http://www.indyculturaltrail.info/assets/documents/StormwaterPlanters.pdf>]

Indianapolis learned the benefits of cleaning and utilizing land adjacent to trails from its investments related to the Monon Trail. In 2005, the city received a \$200,000 EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant to inventory abandoned industrial brownfield sites, conduct site assessments, and perform human health and risk assessments in three areas – including the Monon Trail Greenway corridor.⁴² The area benefited from the redevelopment of these properties, both in terms of safety and economic development. Once redeveloped, illicit activities occurring in abandoned industrial facilities ceased,⁴³ and the area within six blocks of the greenway experienced \$500 million of investment as a result of the trail’s construction.⁴⁴ The city delineated a ¾-mile [Smart Growth Redevelopment District](#) (SRGD) northeast of downtown, and along the Monon Trail, encompassing neighborhoods challenged by illegal dumping, abandoned lots, illicit activity, and a concentration of brownfields.

A city-developed SGRD plan guides the sustainable revitalization of this area, including environmental assessments and cleanup for housing, economic development, transportation, and recreational uses.⁴⁵ In 2010, it became one of five EPA [Brownfields](#) Pilot projects. This additional funding supported the local initiative, helping the city to implement its SGRD plan. One objective of the pilot is to increase use of the Monon Trail within the SGRD, to remove physical and psychological barriers to activity in the area, and maximize the benefits of the brownfields redevelopment.

Indianapolis is also working to make the downtown Market Square Redevelopment Area more usable and attractive to businesses. The city plans to revitalize the public plaza and enhance walkability in and around the area using a [Greening America's Capitals](#) technical assistance grant from the EPA.⁴⁶ The project site for the grant is in close proximity to the Cultural Trail, and linkages between the site and Trail are being discussed, such as how to incorporate design themes from the Cultural Trail into the plaza design.⁴⁷

“Our philosophy is to route the Trail to about 70 percent to what is already great and 30 percent to places that need some extra inspiration and support”

Brian Payne, president, Central Indiana Community Foundation

Meeting Local Housing Needs

The downtown neighborhoods surrounding the Indianapolis Cultural Trail include both affluent and low-income communities.⁴⁸ As a result of the Cultural Trail and related transportation infrastructure investments, people are returning to the existing housing stock in downtown Indianapolis, and developers are constructing additional market-rate and affordable housing near the trail. Between 2001 and 2009, the city's population increased by 65,000 people, a growth rate 50 percent greater than the national average.⁴⁹ The 2010 census indicates growth in specific downtown neighborhoods, including along Massachusetts Avenue, a mixed-use corridor known for its arts scene. This is one of the city's most densely populated neighborhoods, and its growth over the past 10 years demonstrates the importance of walkability and access to area residents.⁵⁰ The Cultural Trail was strategically located to enhance such features in this and other neighborhoods.



Figure 4: Rendering of Trailside on Mass Ave [Source: <http://trailsideonmass.com/>]

Almost 90% of Indianapolis sales are affordable to the median income-earning household. Those earning that salary need under two years of gross salary to buy a home within the city.

Property values in neighborhoods along the trail are expected to rise by up to \$45 million.⁵¹ This rise in property value demonstrates both an interest in the area, as well as a need for designated affordable properties in the area. *Forbes* identified Indianapolis as the most affordable housing market in the country,⁵² something the city is working to maintain for its residents.

Developed by the Riley Area Housing Corporation, Trailside on Mass Ave includes about 70 affordable one-bedroom units, and retail and office space on the first floor of the complex.⁵³ Facing directly onto the Trail, the project received \$1.826 million in [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act \(ARRA\) Competitive Capital Funds](#) and \$500,000 in [HOME Investment Partnerships Program](#) funding.⁵⁴ The proximity of this downtown location, combining affordable housing and access to support services, offers a unique opportunity to residents and provides walking and bicycle access to thousands of jobs. Including the funds allocated to the Trailside on Mass project, HUD has administered over \$22 million in ARRA Competitive Capital Funds to construct or improve over 1,000 affordable housing units in downtown Indianapolis in recent years.⁵⁵

Relationship to Partnership Principles

The influx of commercial and residential development in downtown Indianapolis as a result of the Indianapolis Cultural Trail and recent transportation and zoning projects demonstrates how coordinated and targeted Federal investment can generate significant momentum for private investment, from large-scale developments to the creation and expansion of small businesses. The benefits relate directly to the principles of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, as outlined below.

Provide More Transportation Choices

- The Indianapolis Cultural Trail serves as a central hub to the city's bicycle network, improving safety for bicyclists and pedestrians to travel both into and around downtown.
- The city plans to develop BRT along the major North-South and East-West corridors in the county, allowing county residents living outside of downtown easy access to the Trail and the amenities along it.
- An increase in transit, bicycling, and walking opportunities enables more car-free trips for longer distances and expands the mobility opportunities for Indianapolis residents and visitors.

Promote Equitable, Affordable Housing

- In recent years, Indianapolis has constructed or improved over 1,000 affordable housing units downtown, using \$22 million in ARRA Competitive Capital Funds.⁵⁶
- Trailside on Mass, developed by a local housing corporation, provides 70 affordable housing units directly on the Trail.

Enhance Economic Competitiveness

- The Trail is expected to lead to more than new 11,000 jobs and economic benefits exceeding \$863 million through direct construction, private sector investment along the trail, and an expansion of tourism.⁵⁷
- Both small, local businesses and national corporations have established storefronts and offices along the Trail, by relocating, expanding, or starting new companies.
- By improving the city's quality of life, the Indianapolis Cultural Trail will attract young families and creative class workers to the research facilities and major corporations housed in Indianapolis.



Figure 5: Indianapolis Cultural Trail [Source: <http://www.reasite.com/projects/indianapolis-cultural-trail/>]

Coordinate Policies and Leverage Investment

- The city was able to allocate \$12.1 million spend to local projects, including additional funds for the city's visitor association and streetscape and sewer improvements near the Indianapolis cultural Trail.⁵⁸
- Indianapolis is using \$1.2 million of HUD funding to update the city's zoning ordinances and related development regulations to facilitate mixed-use opportunities, moderate parking requirements, and improve streetscape infrastructure to encourage walking.

Summary

Encouraging walking, bicycling and transit rather than driving, the Cultural Trail and related downtown transportation infrastructure projects not only brings more people downtown, but it increases the circulation and length of time that people spend in the central city, visiting local businesses, restaurants, and cultural attractions. Coordinated investment in downtown Indianapolis brings profits to existing businesses and draws new ones as a result of the increased access to their establishments; attracts tourists who now view downtown Indianapolis as a destination unto itself; and appeals to large employers seeking to recruit young, creative class workers.

All images included in this document were drawn from publicly accessible sources, which are referenced below.

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