

# Trails



Photo Credit: Buffalo Valley Recreation Authority

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Trails represent a great opportunity for people of all ages to **socialize, exercise, and commute**, especially in small rural communities where natural recreational areas play a significant role and there is no good sidewalk infrastructure.

“Community trails are diverse in character and may include paved and unpaved trails, rail-trails, short circular walking paths around schools and work places, and trails within parks” (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2011, p.2).

Most of the municipalities under analysis are linked through local trail systems or through the **Trans Canada Trail**, which is currently changing and expanding in some areas. It is important to provide information on the characteristics and features that should be considered in order to make these trails **accessible for seniors**, allowing them to use them and benefit from their full potential.

**Trails as elements to enhance access for seniors to everyday destinations.**

## Granville Greenways

The Granville County Greenway integrates a network of trails for recreation and commuting purposes across five rural municipalities in North Carolina. **The trail system connects natural reserves, parks, historic sites, schools, worksites, commercial premises, and residential areas in a safe and accessible way.** The paths have been adapted for walking, biking, horseback riding, and other types of recreational activities. Different types of greenways can be identified along the system, including rails to trails, rails with trails, and on road bike routes. This diversity of greenways has been strategically distributed through each community and integrated to their Development Plans, requiring the connection of all new constructions to the network.

The final master plan was successfully released in 2006 (Figure 1), requiring an update in 2019 to add more connections and public access points along larger regional and state greenway systems (LiveWell Granville’s Health Promotion Workgroup, 2006). This precedent not only provides detail characteristics and strategies to make greenways more accessible, but also presents them as an **element to enhance access for seniors to everyday destinations.**



Photo Credit: LiveWell Granville’s

Figure 1: Granville County Greenway Master Plan.

## Buffalo Valley Rail Trail Study

The Buffalo Valley Rail Trail (BVRT) is located in Union County, Pennsylvania, has a total length of ten miles, and is covered of asphalt and gravel. It



Photo Credit: Union County Trail Authority

Figure 2: Rail Trail Pavilion.



Photo Credit: Union County Trail Authority

Figure 3: Bikers on Rail Trail.

accommodates different recreational activities and currently provides three trailheads with parking, amenities, and restrooms (Figures 2 and 3).

A research was conducted in 2017 to analyze its pedestrian and cycling accessibility using the **Trail Collector Analysis (TCA) methodology**. **Mobility, location, infrastructure, and safety metrics** were applied resulting in the identification of four main access points and a series of accessibility recommendations.

Some of the main recommendations include addressing specific ADA requirements, improving surface and lighting conditions, implementing additional pedestrian amenities, and enhancing wayfinding features (Oswald Beiler et al., 2017). This precedent provides an interesting methodology tool that could be studied and applied to evaluate seniors' accessibility to trails throughout our municipalities.

## Haida Gwaii Friendly Boardwalks

The Haida Gwaii park and trail system is located in British Columbia and has a length of approximately one kilometer immersed in the forest. The project is focused on the integration of accessibility features that address more specialized considerations in addition to the regular picnic sites, benches, outhouses, and parking areas. **Universal Access standards were integrated considering vision, hearing, and mobility issues**. These features include a four-track panelled talking sign, elevated and handicapped accommodated boardwalks (Figure 4), and interpretive panels designed with colour contrasts and braille (Spinal Cord Injury BC, 2015). This precedent illustrates different ways of applying design elements to make eco-tourism on trails accessible to everyone despite the topographic challenges of the place (Figure 7).

## Trail Restroom

A trail restroom structure was designed by Miro Rivera Architects in 2013 to be integrated as a sculpture along the Lady Bird Lake Hike and Bike Trail in Austin, Texas. The structure forms a spine of vertical Corten steel panels that allow for natural lighting and ventilation while accommodating a restroom, a

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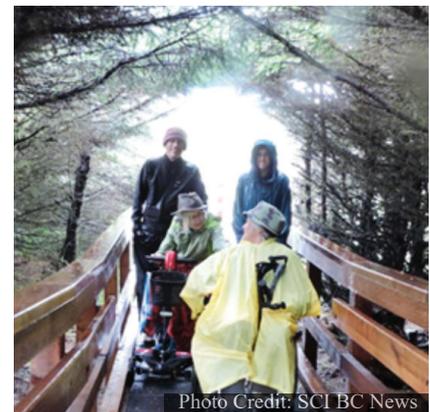


Photo Credit: SCI BC News

Figure 4: Opening ceremony on National Aboriginal Day 2014.

Figure 5: Trail Restroom Aerial View.



Photo Credit: Paul Bardagjy

Figure 6: Trail Restroom Structure.



Photo Credit: Paul Finkel

## Integrating a placemaking element in different access points along trails

drinking fountain, a shower, a sink, and a bench (Figures 5 and 6). It is a **flexible and multi-use intervention that requires low maintenance costs** and enhances seniors' accessibility by providing resting and shading features during long walks (Archdaily, 2013). This precedent offers a specific design solution that could also be integrated as a placemaking element in different access points along trails and adapted to the aesthetic characteristics of each community.

### Final Thoughts

Trails can be complex systems that require a long, detailed, and careful planning process. Policymakers should support policies and promote partnerships to facilitate the development and funding of trail networks that are convenient to everyone. In order to achieve it, is fundamental to improve accessibility conditions, provide age-friendly amenities at convenient distances along pathways, and reduce or completely eliminate barriers. After analyzing the previous precedents some important barriers were identified, including terrain difficulties, lack of areas to rest, physical obstacles within the path, and exposure to potential hazards such as unregulated crossings.

Precedents discussed along the text illustrate the implementation of several accessibility design elements that can also be analyzed in further detail in different accessibility **reports and design guidelines for trails**. Some of these documents are:

- Designing Sidewalks and Trails for Access (Kirschbaum et al., 2001).
- Small Town and Rural Multimodal Networks (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2016).
- Active Transportation Beyond Urban Centers (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 2011).

In conclusion, inclusive access to trails must be a high priority in the development of age-friendly rural communities. Several social, economic, and environmental benefits for all ages can be obtained from trail networks if these are correctly approached and implemented.



Photo Credit: SCI BC News

Figure 7: Haida Gwaii Trail Top View.

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