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Community Engagement

Development of the Greater Mercer Trails Plan was driven by extensive engagement and collaboration with the many communities and stakeholders comprising the Greater Mercer area. Feedback was gathered through numerous sources including online and printed surveys, an interactive WikiMap, and numerous public meetings where the project team shared findings and concepts with stakeholders and received feedback, suggestions, and comments. The team hosted and participated in dozens of meetings and events in support of the planning process.

Stakeholder Engagement

Local stakeholders, municipal and county governments, and members of the public, are all integral to the planning process, each contributing their own unique perspectives and experiences, furthering the aim of providing recommendations beneficial to stakeholders throughout the Greater Mercer area.

The outreach and engagement process included the following elements, subsequently discussed in greater detail:

- Study Advisory Committee meetings
- Community “Pop-Up” Meetings Events
- New Jersey Bike and Walk Coalition
- Public Meetings
- Social Media and Crowdsourcing

Study Advisory Committee

The Study Advisory Committee (SAC) served as the foundation for directing the plan. Members included the Mercer County Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force plus representatives from Plainsboro and Montgomery Townships. The SAC determines which elements to focus on and in which direction to take the project.

The committee’s role is to ensure that the study is based on a thorough understanding of local context and needs, and the project team adequately understands and addresses local vision, goals, and priorities.

Members of the SAC include representatives from local municipalities, Mercer, Middlesex, and Somerset County, the Greater Mercer Transportation Management Association, (GMTMA), the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia, the Lawrence Hopewell Trail (LHT) and the Tri-State Transportation Campaign. SAC members are intended to represent stakeholders from all parts of the study area. A complete list of committee members is provided in the Appendix.

Three SAC meetings were held to guide the planning process from goal setting and assessment of existing conditions, to development and assembly of candidate network improvements, and finally to review of the Framework Plan.

SAC Meeting #1 – 04.16.2018

This first meeting introduced the study, project team, and SAC roles and responsibilities. The study goals, objectives, and vision statement, presented on page 12, were among the principal outcomes of the engagement process.

SAC Meeting #2 – 10.29.18

At the second SAC meeting the team presented the findings of the infrastructure inventory and assessment, including trail mapping, data collection, previous studies and implementation status, and various performance measures including crash data.

GMTMA Board Meeting – 01.18.2019

Members of the GMTMA Board received a summary of the overall planning process, and overview of the Framework Plan of draft trails, paths, and on-street network.

SAC Meeting #3 – 03.18.19

The final SAC meeting included an overview of the draft findings, and the individual layers and elements that make up the overall network - including both existing and proposed facilities on state, county, and municipal roadways, and off-street trails and paths. Comments from committee members ranged across a broad spectrum of planning, mobility, safety, and quality-of-life issues.



Community Meetings and Events

Project team members participated in a series of events using the “pop-up” approach, traditional in-person meetings, and conference calls.

Community “Pop-up” Events are an innovative and efficient way to involve those who live, work, visit, and do business in the study area to ensure they are engaged in the planning process. Engagement events, meetings, and activities included the following:

- NJ Trails Task Force Meeting-04.20.18
- Lawrence Greenways Committee-05.02.18
- Capital to Coast Trail Planning Meeting-05.19.18
- Meeting with Jay Watson, D&R Greenways-06.12.18
- Meeting with Tim Brill, New Jersey Conservation Foundation to discuss Assunpink Greenway, Union Transportation Trail, and Capital to Coast Trail - 06.28.18
- Meeting with Rob Poppert, Hamilton Township-07.09.18
- Meeting with Chuck Latini, Ewing Township-07.13.18
- Meeting with Eleanor Horne, LHT-07.20.18
- Presentation and discussion with Princeton Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory

Committee (PBAC)-07.27.18

- Plainsboro Townships provided documentation and maps
- Monmouth County Collaborative Trails Meeting-08.30.18
- Princeton PBAC & Complete Street Committee-09.27.18
- LHT Annual 2018 Full Moon Bike Ride, Lawrence-08.27.18
- Multi-County NJ Trails Collaborative Meeting-12.11.18

GMTMA staff also attended numerous event, meetings, and activities, including the following:

- Mercer Green Fest, Lawrence-03.17.18
- St. Anthony’s Health Fair, Hightstown-04.08.18
- Rider University Health Fair, Lawrence-04.12.18
- Earth Day Event at Bloomberg, Montgomery-04.16.18
- Montgomery Earth Day-04.22.18
- Hopewell Earth Day-04.24.18
- Earth Day Event at BMS, Lawrence-04.26.18

- Communiversity, Princeton-04.29.18
- Princeton Ciclovía-05.06.18
- St. Lawrence Rehab Bike Rodeo, Lawrence-05.12.18
- Princeton Wheels Bike Rodeo-05.19.18
- Pennington Day-05.20.18
- Trenton Library Birthday-06.08.18
- West Windsor National Night Out-08.07.18
- TCNJ Welcome Week, Ewing-08.24.18





New Jersey Bike and Walk Coalition

Bike-Walk 2018 Summit-03.24.18

The team and GMTMA staff facilitated a 'Tell us Your Trail Tales' session at the 2018 New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition Summit at Mercer County Community College in West Windsor. Large maps of the study area were displayed and the team collected feedback from stakeholders concerning strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement, as well as desired trail connections.

Bike-Walk 2019 Summit-02.23.19

The team hosted a follow-up session at the 2019 New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition Summit. Attendees reviewed findings and in-progress recommendations and concepts, and discussed walking and biking challenges, barriers, and other concerns.

Public Meetings

Public meeting formats were structured to encourage open discussion on a wide range of topics to help guide and inform the planning and development of the countywide network of trails, shared-use paths, and on-road facilities.

Private citizens, advocates, planning and engineering professionals, and municipal and agency representatives attended a series of public meetings held between April 2018 and June 2019 in Princeton, Robbinsville and Ewing Township, and Trenton.

Open Public Forum-Princeton-04.24.18

This meeting introduced the study purpose, schedule, and community outreach plan. The meeting concluded with an interactive session in which the project team and attendees marked comments on maps including where attendees travel and where more trails are desired. This exercise helped with vision and goal-setting.



Municipal Meeting, Ewing Township-09.12.18

This meeting consisted of a short presentation by the project team about the progress made to-date and next steps.

Attendees contributed ideas for desire lines and destinations to investigate further, including providing bicycle and pedestrian connections between Trenton-Mercer Airport and the West Trenton SEPTA station. After the presentation, attendees drew their comments on a large printout map of the area and interacted with the project team.

Municipal Meeting, Robbinsville Township Public Library-09.25.18

The project team engaged attendees to gather feedback and comments. Most of the attendees were already familiar with the project. The meeting was cut short during the presentation due to inclement weather resulting in the venue (Mercer County Library-Robbinsville Branch) closing early.

Municipal Meeting, Princeton-09.27.18

The project team presented their progress to Princeton's Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory and Complete Street Committees as well as the general public. This presentation included a short-term work plan, and a list of ways stakeholders can contribute to the process including the online survey, interactive WikiMap, and fact sheets and comment cards provided to attendees.

Social Media and Crowdsourcing

Online Survey

The project team created and maintained an online survey to elicit feedback concerning stakeholder behaviors and attitudes toward biking and walking in the study area. The survey elicited 165 responses.

The Mercer County Trail Network Survey was launched in March 2018 and remained open until October. This survey was designed with input from Steering Advisory Committee members. The survey provided important feedback on the types of biking, walking, and trail improvements capable of expanding these modes and improving the user experience.

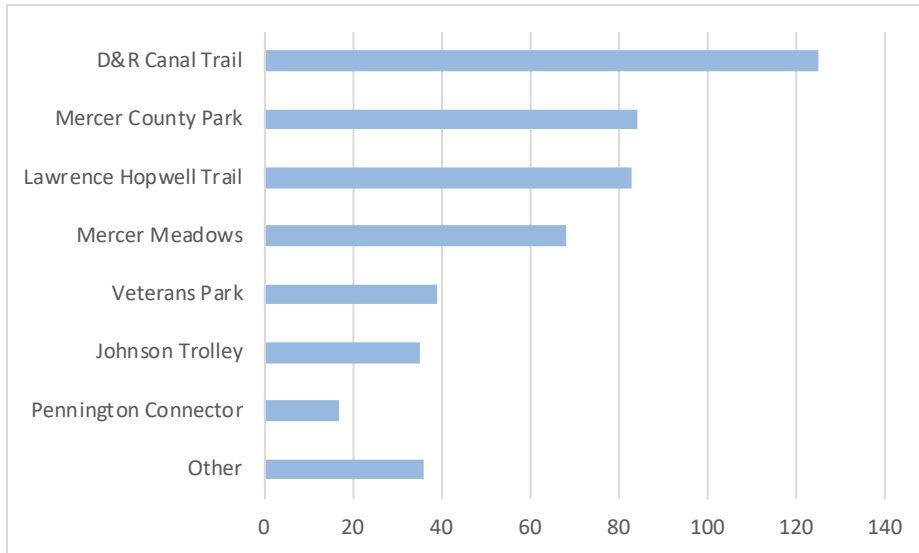
Principal findings from the survey include:

- 92% of respondents use trails in the study area
- 57% of respondents were between the ages of 45 and 64
- 89% of respondents use the D&R Canal; 59% use the LHT (Graph 1)

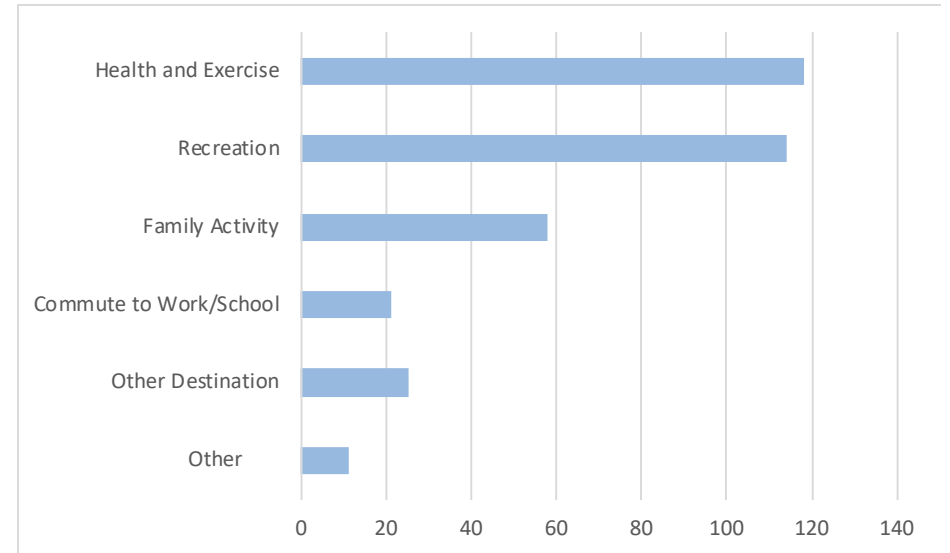
- Exercise and recreation are the most common activities along the trails (Graphs 2 and 3)
- Most respondents use the trails at least 2-4 times per month
- Most respondents still drive to trails and parks (Graph 4)
- Access and wayfinding are the most desired amenities
- Desire for connections to existing trails, parks and train station
- Rarely used for commuting or shopping trips



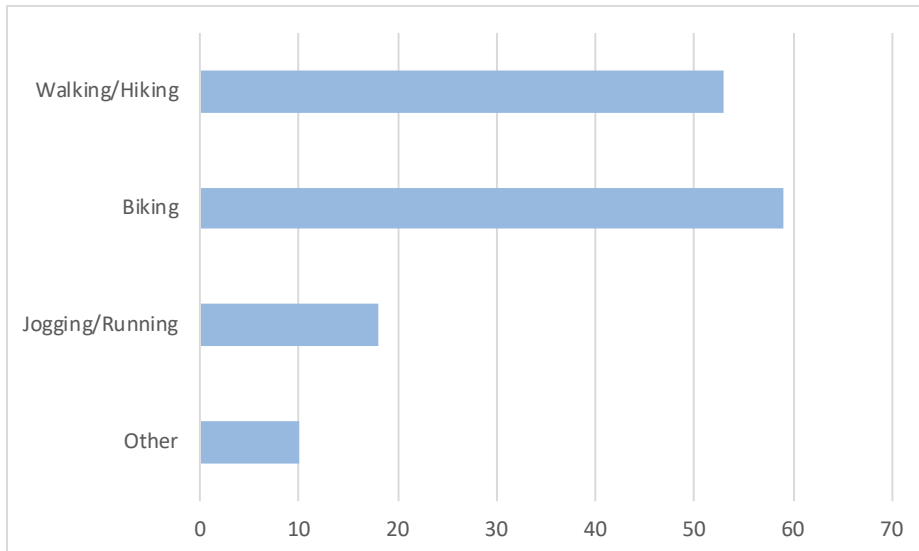
Graph 1: Which trails have you used in the past year?



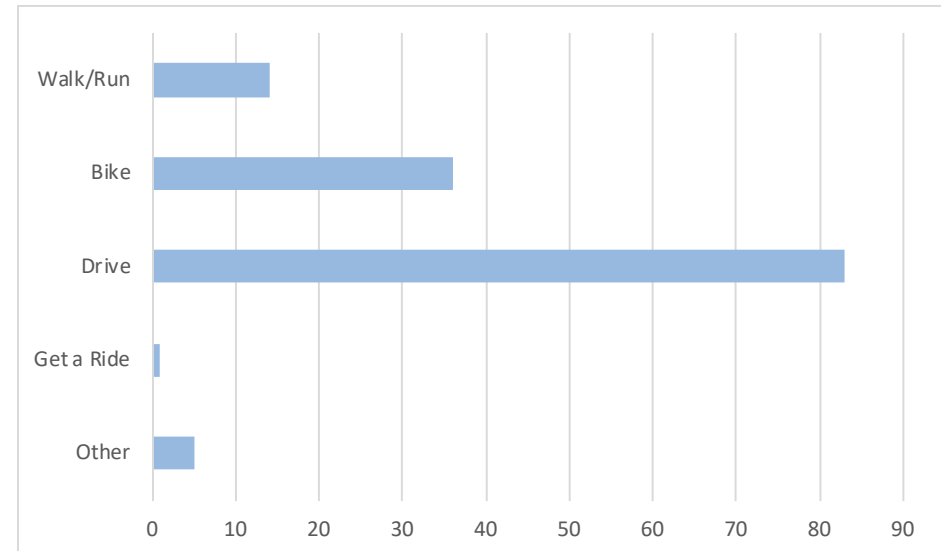
Graph 3: For what purpose do you use the trail?



Graph 2: What is your primary activity on the trail?



Graph 4: How do you usually get to the trail?



WikiMapping

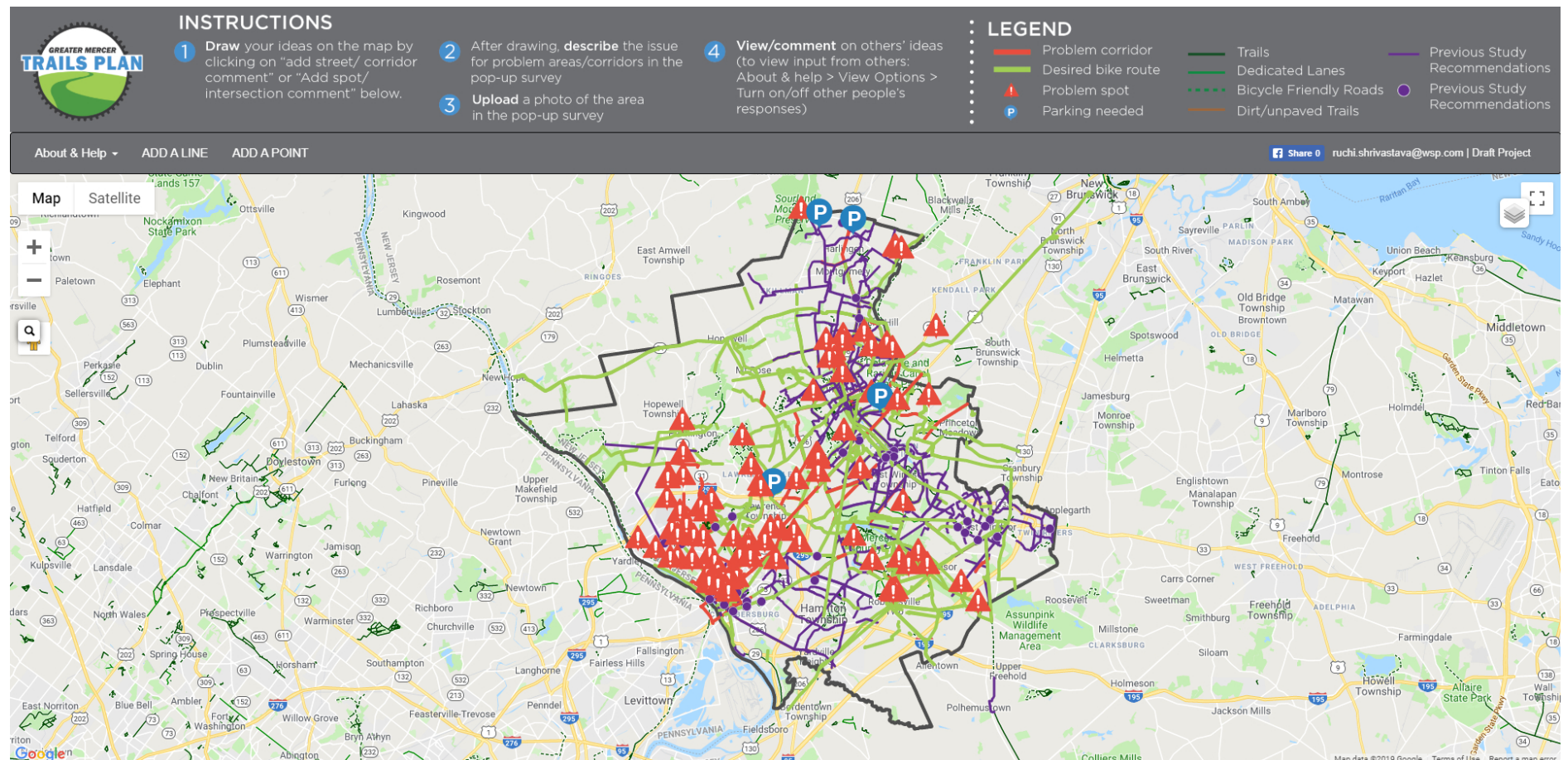
An online “WikiMap” website was launched and opened to the public in March 2018 to collect place-based comments about biking and walking in the study area. Like hard copy maps used at public events, the web interface allowed users to markup a virtual map of the study area.

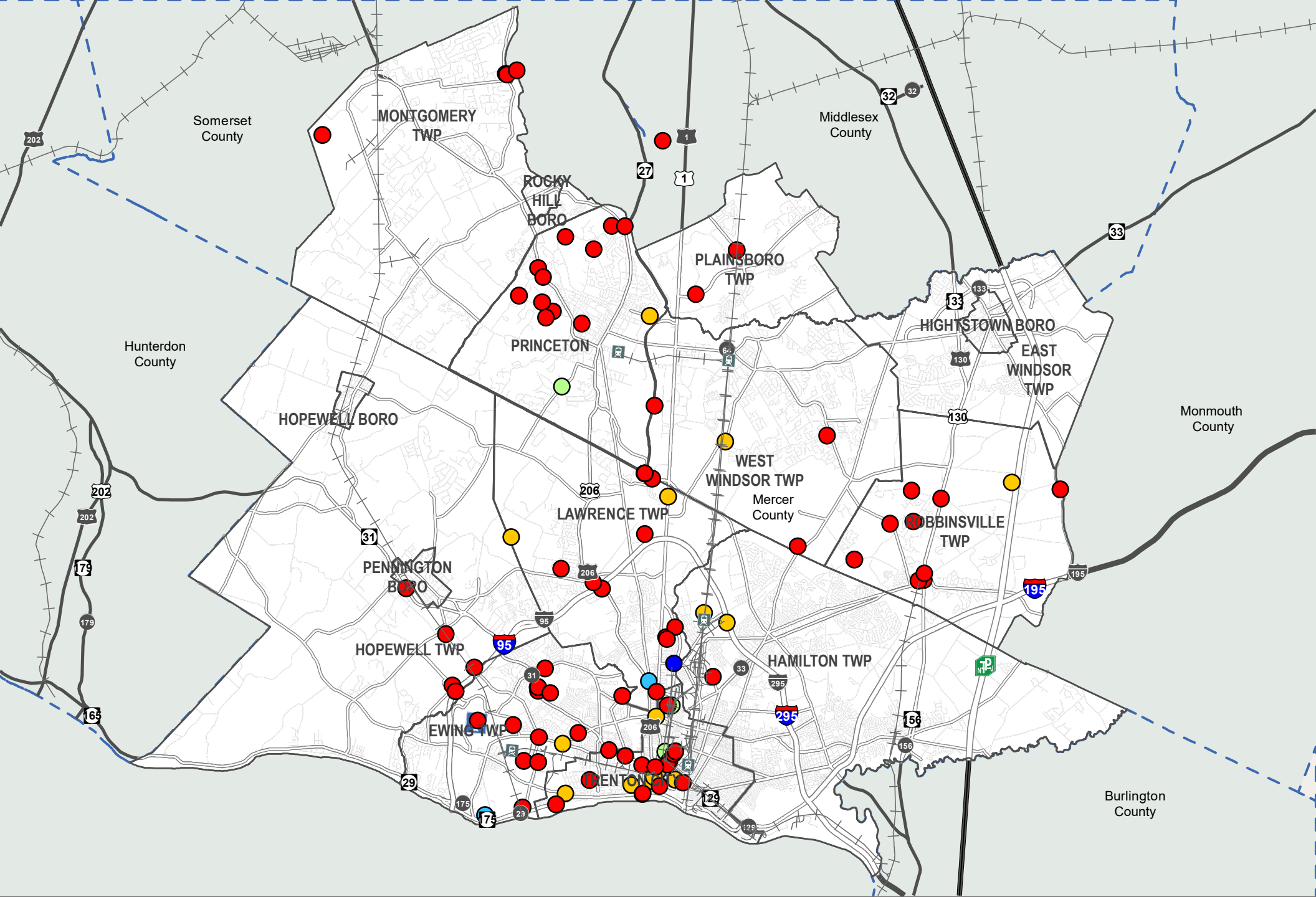
Users were asked to identify corridors

and spot locations difficult for walking and biking, desired walking and biking routes, and ideal locations for bicycle parking. There were 774 total WikiMap responses including 420 online responses, and 354 outreach and previous study recommendations.

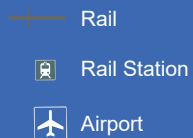
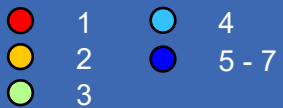
General themes of WikiMap comments and annotations included:

- Problem spots and intersection
- Barriers to local and regional mobility
- Destinations and travel needs
- Desired bike routes
- Corrections and additions to base maps
- Through WikiMap, comments were separated into several categories.



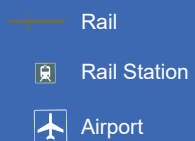


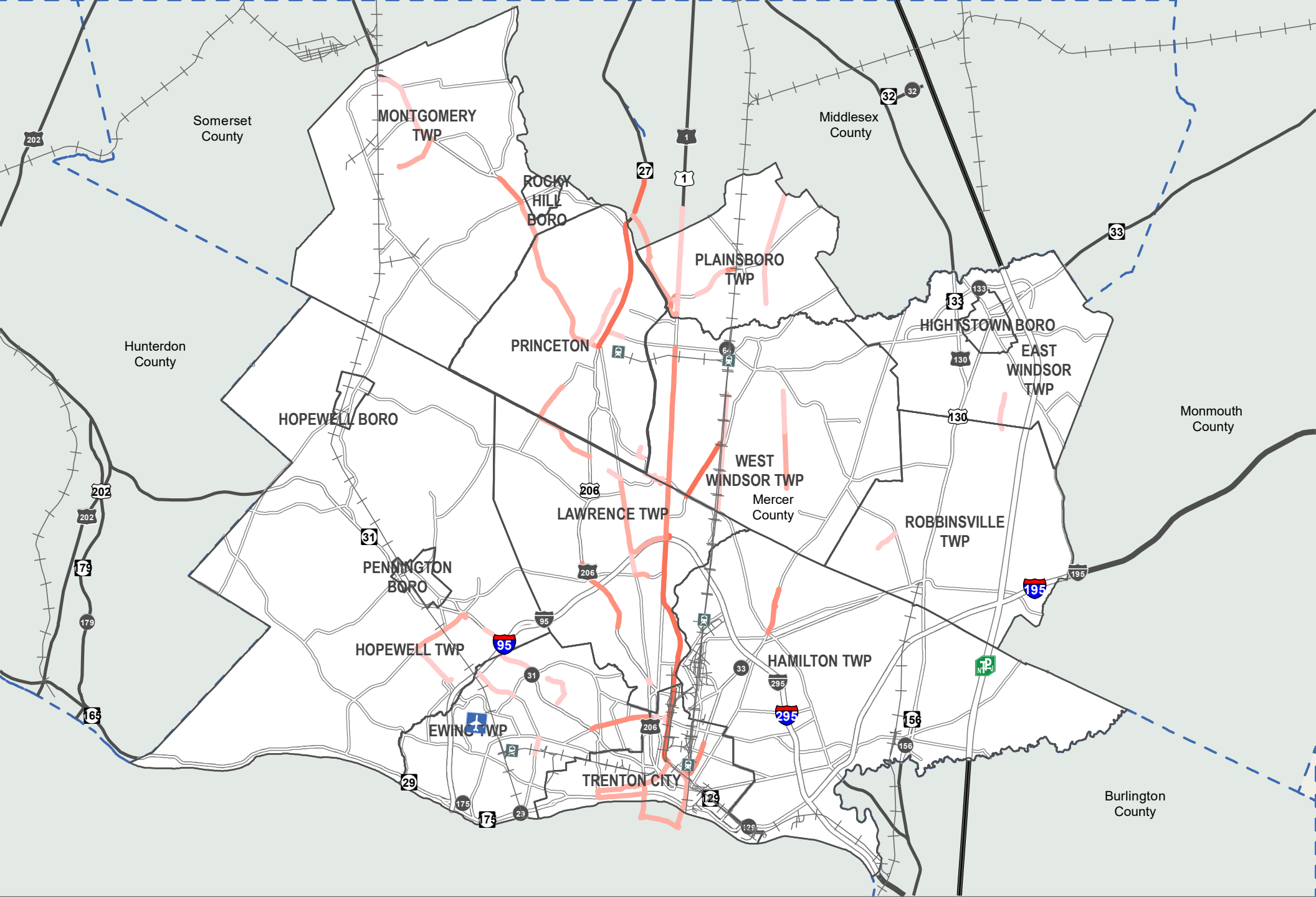
Wikimap Problem Spots Frequency





Wikimap Desired Routes Frequency





Wikimap Problem Corridors Frequency



- Rail
- Rail Station
- Airport



VISION STATEMENT

The Greater Mercer Trail Network Plan will help create an integrated network of multi-use trails, paths, and on-street facilities to serve a variety of transportation needs and connect users of all ages and abilities to the many opportunities, services, and destinations in the region.

Vision and Goals

The Vision Statement articulates the purpose and intent of the study in a brief and concise manner, while the Goals are a series of declarative statements used to prioritize and evaluate the various recommendations and concepts.

The Vision Statement and Goals reflect the priorities and concerns of study area stakeholders and represent local values, desires, and concerns. Working with the focus groups, and advisory committees, and others, the team identified a host of needs, issues, and concerns including pedestrian safety and mobility, access, travel safety for school-age children, and wayfinding.

The team reviewed the extensive record of public discourse, written comments, and correspondence in formulating and refining the Greater Mercer Trails Plan Vision Statement and Goals.

Improve Mobility

Develop regional trail routes, crossings, and facilities accessible to all ages and abilities

Expand Access to Destinations

Expand access between residential areas and important local and regional destinations

Provide Trail Amenities

Provide and enhance amenities along trails, including parking, lighting, and benches

Develop Regional Connections

Integrate Mercer County's trail network with other regional trails, supporting linkages to neighboring counties and towns

Enhance Safety

Enhance safety and driver awareness of bicyclists and pedestrians through improved crossings, sidewalks, and bicycle facilities, consistent with local context and priorities



Greater Mercer Trails Plan