

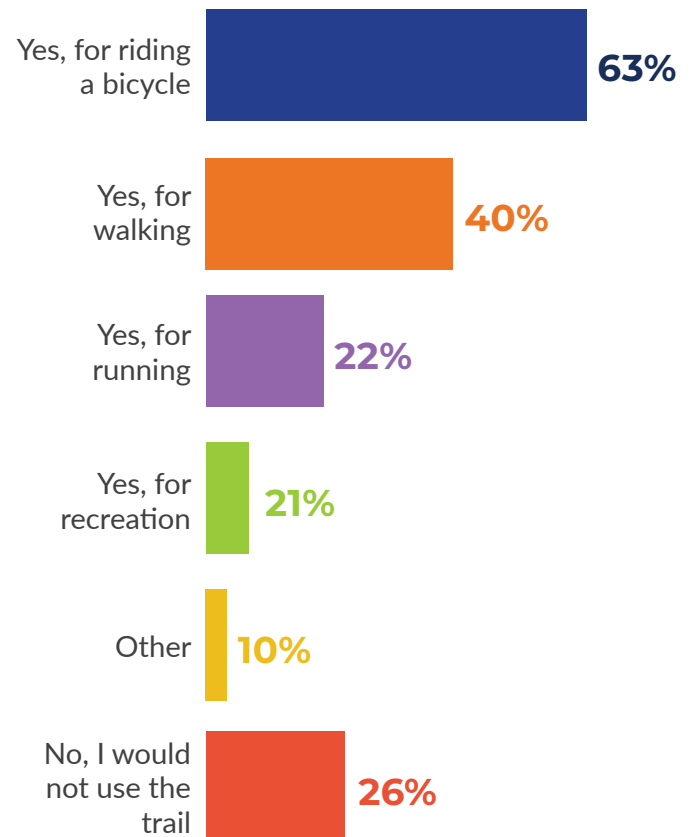
PAUL HENRY-THORNAPPLE TRAIL TO LANSING RIVER TRAIL

COMMUNITY INPUT SUMMARY

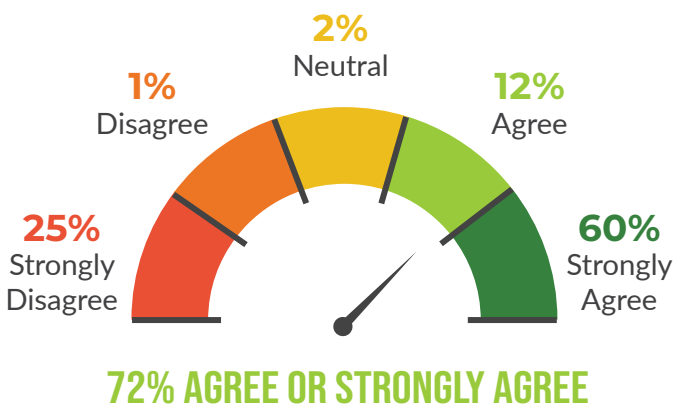
During April and May 2025, public engagement for the Tri-County Regional Trails Plan included six open houses across the region and an online survey to encourage broad participation. A total of 204 surveys were completed for the proposed Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail to Lansing River Trail connection, and 82 people attended open houses in Charlotte and Dimondale. Community members shared their opinions on the proposed route, including their support or concerns. This valuable feedback played a key role in shaping the final route. This document summarizes the input received during the process.



WOULD YOU USE THE TRAIL CONNECTION?



IT IS IMPORTANT TO PROVIDE A TRAIL CONNECTION BETWEEN THE PAUL HENRY-THORNAPPLE TRAIL AND LANSING RIVER TRAIL



Most respondents who strongly disagreed with the proposed trail indicated they would not use it and reside in Chester Township, where the route would require easements through private property.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT THE PROPOSED ROUTE?



Connectivity Between Communities — Enthusiasm for connecting Charlotte, Dimondale, Holt, and Lansing for commuting, recreation, and access to parks, schools, and existing trails.

Safe, Off-Road Travel — The route offers a safe alternative to biking and walking along busy roads, especially in areas lacking sidewalks or bike lanes.

Paved Surface — A paved trail is preferred to support a wider range of bikes, including e-bikes and road bikes, and to encourage use across age and ability levels.

Use of Rail Corridors (Rails-to-Trails) — Using abandoned rail lines is seen as efficient, scenic, and cost-effective. Many appreciate reusing old corridors in ways that serve the public.

Outdoor Recreation & Health — The trail supports safe exercise and time outdoors, especially in rural areas. It promotes healthy activity close to home for people of all ages.

Family-Friendly & Everyday Use — The trail's accessibility to homes, parks, and schools makes it a convenient option for families, children, and older adults. It supports safe, daily use for recreation, commuting, and short local trips.

Support for Local Businesses and Tourism — The trail is seen as a way to boost small-town economies, with stops for food, rest, and nearby attractions.

Strategic Improvements & Early Wins

Respondents emphasized the importance of achieving “low-hanging fruit” to build momentum. Quick, visible progress can improve public confidence and demonstrate commitment.

Desire for Trail Features & Improvements —

Safe crossings, bridges, wider sidewalks, sidepaths, and scenic views. Specific suggestions included a Grand River pedestrian bridge in Dimondale and links to Crandell Lake Park.

WHAT DO YOU DISLIKE ABOUT THE PROPOSED ROUTE?



Private Property & Landowner Rights — Many landowners along the route oppose trails crossing private land, especially where they've reclaimed old rail corridors. Concerns include loss of privacy, eminent domain, trespassing, and disruptions to farming, hunting, and livestock. Many resent being asked again after past opposition.

Public Safety, Vandalism & Policing — Existing trails were cited as magnets for litter, vandalism, dumping, noise, and drug use. Residents fear similar issues will degrade their community's character, burden them with cleanup, and pose safety risks — especially in areas with limited police patrols and emergency access. Concerns about personal liability persist, and many doubt the trail can be safely managed with current resources.

Loss of Rural Character — Opponents value their quiet lifestyle and view the trail as bringing noise, strangers, and urban issues. Many moved to the area for privacy and don't want to give that up.

Public Costs & Spending — There's skepticism about trail costs amid struggling services. Many see it as an unnecessary burden when roads and emergency response are underfunded.

Distrust in Process & Representation — Many distrust the planning process, feeling past opposition was ignored and fearing this is just a box-checking exercise before pushing forward.

Preference for Alternate Routes — Some would support trails routed away from homes and farms. Suggestions included using state-owned right-of-ways, enhancing already popular gravel bike routes, or improving shoulders and signage on low-traffic roads. There was a strong preference for avoiding land that cuts through private property, especially where homes, livestock, or crops are directly adjacent to the old railroad bed.

**TELL US ANYTHING
ELSE YOU FEEL IS
IMPORTANT:**



Trail Design & Infrastructure — Paved trails are preferred, with crushed limestone acceptable in some areas. Key needs include restrooms, water refill stops, mile markers, signage, and safe crossings.

Connectivity & Access — Regional trail connections between towns such as Holt, Dimondale, Charlotte, and Eaton Rapids enhance recreation and commuting. Opportunities to coordinate trips with kayaking add value. Improved crossings at barriers like I-96 and expanded access to destinations like Crandell Lake Park would boost trail utilization.

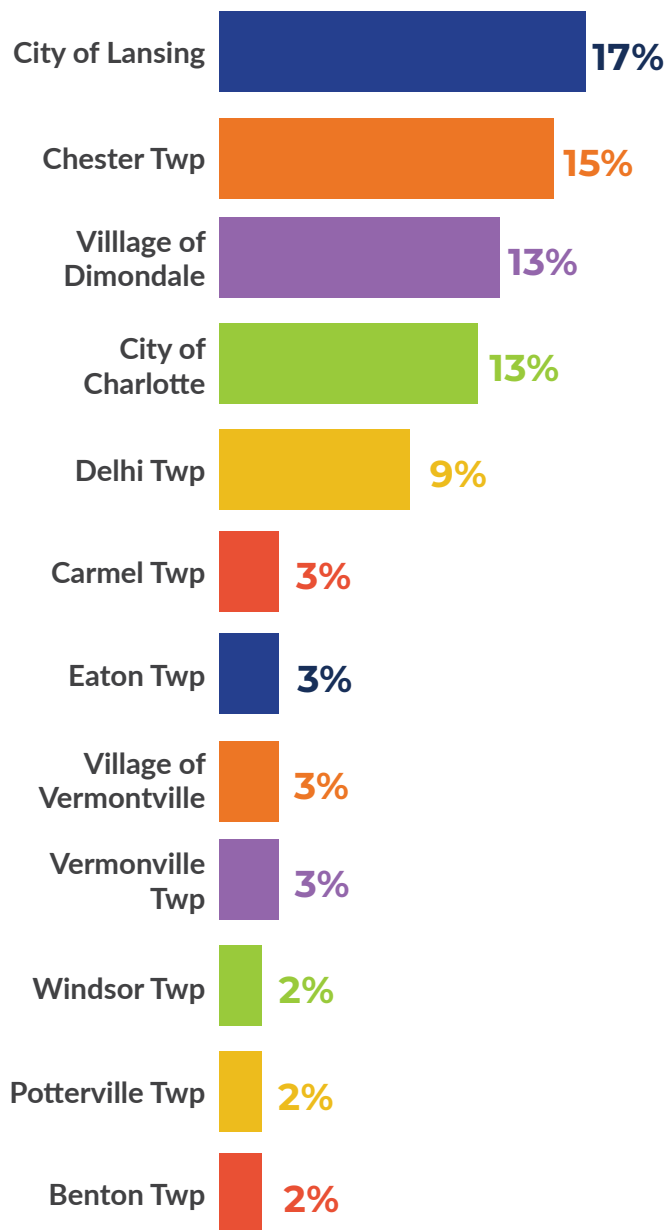
Safety & Trail Conditions — Safe trail use depends on protected bike lanes, well-marked crossings, flashing lights, and signage. Maintenance is a recurring concern, especially in areas where trails may fall into disrepair or already lack emergency access and police presence.

Existing Trail Issues — Priority should be given to maintaining and repairing current trails first.

Private Property & Routing — Avoid crossing private land — especially reclaimed rail corridors. Use public roads or rights-of-way instead.

Community Benefits — There is strong support for trails as they encourage outdoor activity, promote public health, support active transportation, and help people connect with nature. They also provide economic benefits through tourism and increased foot traffic in local communities.

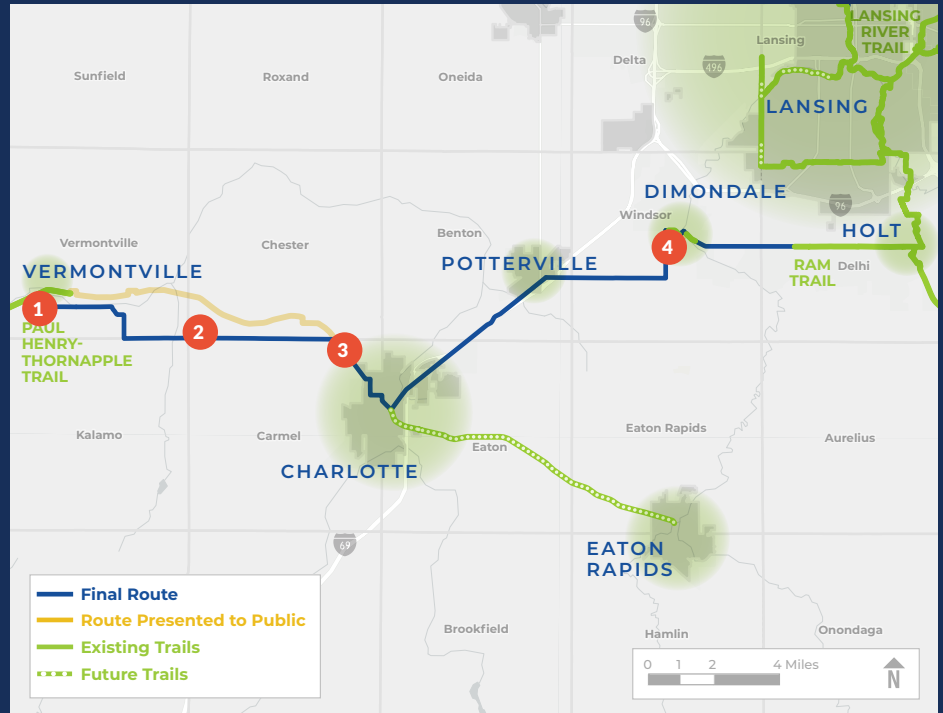
**SELECT THE AREA YOU LIVE IN OR ARE
MOST FAMILIAR WITH:**



Other areas represented 13% of respondents, including East Lansing, Mason, Delta Township, Meridian Township, Eaton Rapids, Olivet, Williamston, and Watertown Township.

HOW COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS SHAPING THE TRAIL:

KEY ROUTING UPDATES BASED ON FEEDBACK



1

Accessing the Paul-Henry Thornapple Trail

The current trail ends on a gravel road between a small neighborhood and a grain elevator south of Vermontville, making it difficult to find and access. The updated route proposes connecting to the trail at Maple Valley High School on N. Mason Road, where an existing shared-use path provides easier access to the trail. This location also presents a strong opportunity for establishing a trailhead with parking and amenities.

2

Shift to Scenic Road Route

While the original plan to use the former rail corridor was not feasible due to property access limitations, a new opportunity has emerged. A scenic gravel road bike route through picturesque rural landscapes is now being proposed as an alternative. This new route maintains regional connectivity through wayfinding and reflects the growing popularity of gravel road cycling in the area. Future considerations could include Natural/Scenic Road designations and lower advisory speeds.

3

Connect to Optimist Park

Add pathway connection from Charlotte to provide paved access to Optimist Park, which serves as the starting point to the gravel road route heading west on Kinsley Hwy.

4

Dimondale Pedestrian Bridge

Proposed bridge over the Grand River connecting Danford Island Park and Lions Park for safer access to parks and Dimondale Elementary.

BROADER INSIGHTS AND KEY TAKEAWAY

Community engagement around the proposed regional trail revealed several emerging themes that offer direction for future trail planning and investment. These broader insights highlight not only where public support is strongest but also where focused planning is needed to ensure a successful and sustainable trail system.



Provide Key Infrastructure to Support Safe and Comfortable Trail Use

Participants emphasized the need for basic infrastructure to support trail use, especially on longer-distance routes. Key trailheads should be identified and improved with amenities such as parking, signage, restrooms, water stations, and seating areas. Provide wayfinding including location and destination markers to enhance the user experience. Incorporate current best practices for trail crossings appropriate for an all ages and abilities trail.



Define Maintenance Responsibilities and Funding

Ensuring the long-term maintenance of the regional trail is a priority for many, particularly in rural communities. Many rural areas lack the staffing, equipment, and budget capacity to support trail upkeep. To ensure safe, year-round access, a clear maintenance plan is needed that defines roles and secures outside funding. This will prevent local governments from being overburdened by an asset they cannot sustain on their own.



Prioritize Connections to Satellite Communities First

There is strong public support for expanding the trail outward from Lansing to connect with nearby towns. These segments are viewed as more feasible in the short term and align with areas of higher population and clear community backing. In addition, these routes are likely to be more competitive for grant funding due to the connections they provide, making them a strategic starting point for trail expansion.



Address Challenges with Remote Extensions

Trail segments extending farther from Lansing face more significant challenges. These include longer distances between points of interest, a lack of amenities or destinations along the route, and less visible community support — especially from rural residents. These realities suggest a need to reassess the pace and approach for these extensions and to consider how features, access, and local engagement could be improved over time.

