



Bikes in Beds

How to maximize bicycle tourism in Haywood County and Western North Carolina

Draft Executive Summary
February 2015

This report summarizes the results of *Bikes in Beds: How to maximize bicycle tourism in Haywood County and Western North Carolina*, an effort funded by the Haywood County Tourism Development Authority and Southwestern Commission. BicycleHaywoodNC—a local advocacy council of the Blue Ridge Bicycle Club—obtained the grants to better define the potential for bicycle tourism. This study is an extension of the Haywood County Comprehensive Bicycle Plan, which was adopted in 2011 and included a recommendation for a more detailed study on the economic impacts of bicycling.

While focusing on Haywood County, this study is intended to provide an overview of bicycle tourism opportunities for all of Southwestern Commission's area. This includes Cherokee, Clay, Haywood, Jackson, Graham, Macon and Swain Counties.

Changing Dynamics

Bicycling is rapidly changing and growing in the United States. More and more people are participating in it for recreation and transportation. The Outdoor Foundation's annual Outdoor Participation Re-

port for 2013 found that more than 91 million Americans participate in some form of bicycling. Bicycling is more popular among Americans than hiking, canoeing, kayaking and golfing combined.

The Region's Potential

This report is intended to summarize and frame the likely impacts of increased investment in and promotion of bicycling in Western North Carolina. It projects potential economic impacts of investing in a variety of bicycling facilities. It defines the many types of bicycling tourists to help educate leaders and service sector businesses who may not be familiar with diversity among bicyclists.

It also outlines programs in other states, particularly Oregon, where Scenic Bikeway programs, bicycle-friendly business promotion, and bicycling-specific marketing are yielding incredible results. The beauty of these program is that the promotional efforts are geared toward promoting economic development in small towns and rural areas. It is a model for Haywood County and the rest of the region to replicate and create their own successes.



91.5
million

Number of Americans
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The Outdoor Foundation,
Outdoor Participation Report (2013)

The Bicycling Tourist

What is a “bicycling tourist”? When asked that question many default to the spandex-clad cyclist that climbs steep mountain roads for the fun of it. Others may think about the dirt-covered mountain biker. Some view a bicycling tourist as a group or family that just wants to ride a few miles on a greenway or trail as part of their vacation.

All of these depictions are correct. The challenge when it comes to attracting a bicycling tourist is understanding how they are unique and how they are different. Their needs are as varied as the type of bicycle they ride and the type of clothing they wear. At right are images of the different types of bicycling tourists for Bikes in Beds. They are characterized as:

- **Recreational Bicyclist:** These bicyclists enjoy long-distance rides or loops and seek scenic routes that allow them to avoid heavy traffic. They enjoy Haywood County’s country loops and sweeping views.
- **Touring Bicyclist:** The touring bicyclist enjoys multi-day excursions and seek scenic routes. They may carry their gear or be accompanied by a support vehicle. The Blue Ridge Parkway is a popular touring route.
- **Event Bicyclist:** This type of bicyclist rides on long-distance routes for special events such as the Blue Ridge Breakaway. They enjoy multi-day events to maximize their travel and seek events where they vacation.
- **Mountain Biker:** This breed of bicyclist looks to escape the confines of roads and paved trails. They generally drive to their trail but do enjoy non-motorized routes to get there. They enjoy campgrounds near trails.
- **Low Stress Bicyclist:** This bicyclist seeks off-road greenways or trails that are conducive to a slow-paced ride with family or others seeking to get away and relax. They bring their bike on vacation in hope of finding recreational trails.

Communities in Western North Carolina have varied advantages and opportunities when seeking to attract these types of bicyclists. All counties have the ability to attract recreational, touring and event bicyclists. Communities near the Jackrabbit Mountain Trails, the Tsali Mountain Bike Trails and Hanging Dog Trails attract many mountain bikers. While there are no greenways in Western North Carolina that have the same draw as the Virginia Creeper Trail in Virginia or Swamp Rabbit Trail in South Carolina, there is some potential to attract low stress riders. Each community should work toward developing facilities and strategies to attract types while capitalizing on their unique attributes.

Recreational Bicyclist



Touring Bicyclist



Event Bicyclist



Mountain Biker



Low Stress Bicyclist



Measuring Economic Impact

Based on local tourism expenditure data and visitor profiles for Western NC, **it is estimated that bicycle tourism accounts for roughly 2% of total trips to Haywood County and generates more than \$3 million in annual expenditures by visitors.**

This study estimates **the Blue Ridge Breakaway generates roughly \$150,000 to \$170,000 in visitor spending.** The **Lake Logan Triathlon attracts over three times as many participants over several days and could have an economic impact of more than \$500,000.**

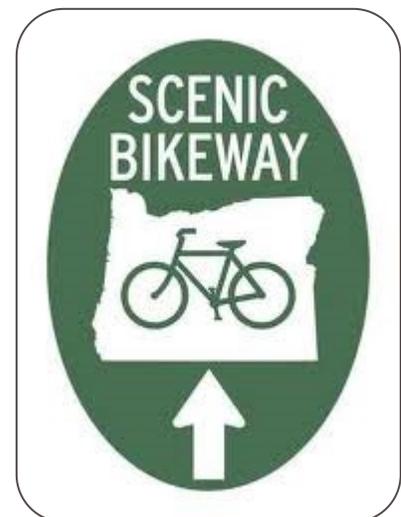
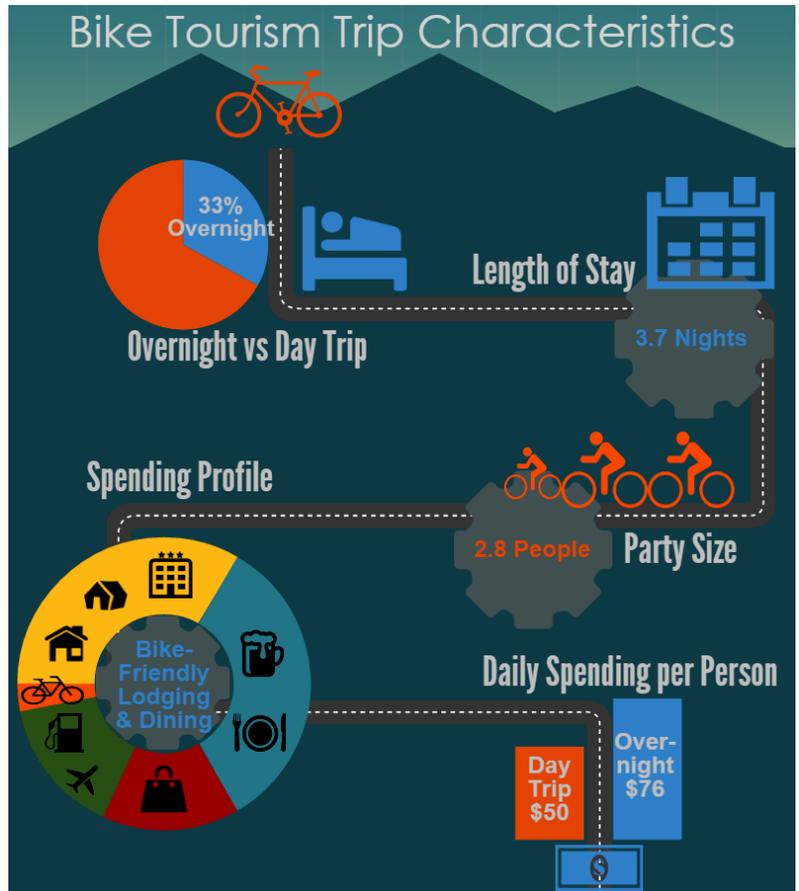
A greenway connecting Waynesville to Canton would serve as a regional attraction for visitors. Families and other groups looking for low-stress cycling excursions without strenuous climbs or vehicle traffic would enjoy the trail. Such **a greenway could attract thousands of visitors to Haywood County each year and generate up to \$1 million in annual tourism expenditures.** The construction of a greenway across Haywood County could also result in a one-time increase in property values within a quarter mile of the facility. The cost of constructing the proposed Haywood County greenway is estimated at \$9 million.

The mountainous terrain and large amount of public land in Haywood County provide potential for the development of additional high quality trails that can attract visiting mountain bikers. There large network of Forest Service roads in the County could also be promoted to attract the growing number of cyclists looking for gravel road rides and gravel grinder events.

Scenic Bikeways

The study recommends Haywood County, along with other WNC communities, pursue establishment of a Scenic Bikeways program to fuse recreation, transportation, and the economic benefits of bicycle tourism. The program can be modeled after similar programs in Vermont and Oregon, which have been wildly successful in bringing new life to small towns and promoting economic development. A Scenic Bikeway is defined as “a signed bike route on existing roads and paths that provide access to national, state, or regional resources of superlative quality and scenic splendor. The route is on public lands, rights-of-way, or on existing easements on private property. The route is open to the public.”

The stated benefits of designation include: providing a unique cycling experience that creates lasting memories of Oregon, identifying the best bike rides in Oregon, attracting tourism dollars, and providing additional value to the neighboring communities.



Branding Pillars

The image at right illustrates the programs and investment Haywood County and other Western North Carolina communities can develop to increase bicycle tourism. The primary focus areas prioritize information for tourists and the hospitality industry in addition to promoting the area through branding, social media and special events. These focal points can be directly influenced by the Tourism Development Authorities and similar organizations.

The other pillars are also important but may require additional partners, more investment and more opportunities to develop. The most expensive investment is in new facilities. Building a 10-mile long greenway or constructing bicycle lanes along several miles of street can take lots of time and money. Community education and public relations are also a component of building a bicycle tourism brand for a region. Other endeavors, such as becoming a community designated as a “Ride Center” by the International Mountain Bicycle Association (IMBA) can take time but are achievable for the region. Once bicycle tourism is successful it breeds other businesses, which could include shuttles to the Blue Ridge Parkway or to other destinations for bicyclists traveling without their vehicles or other support.

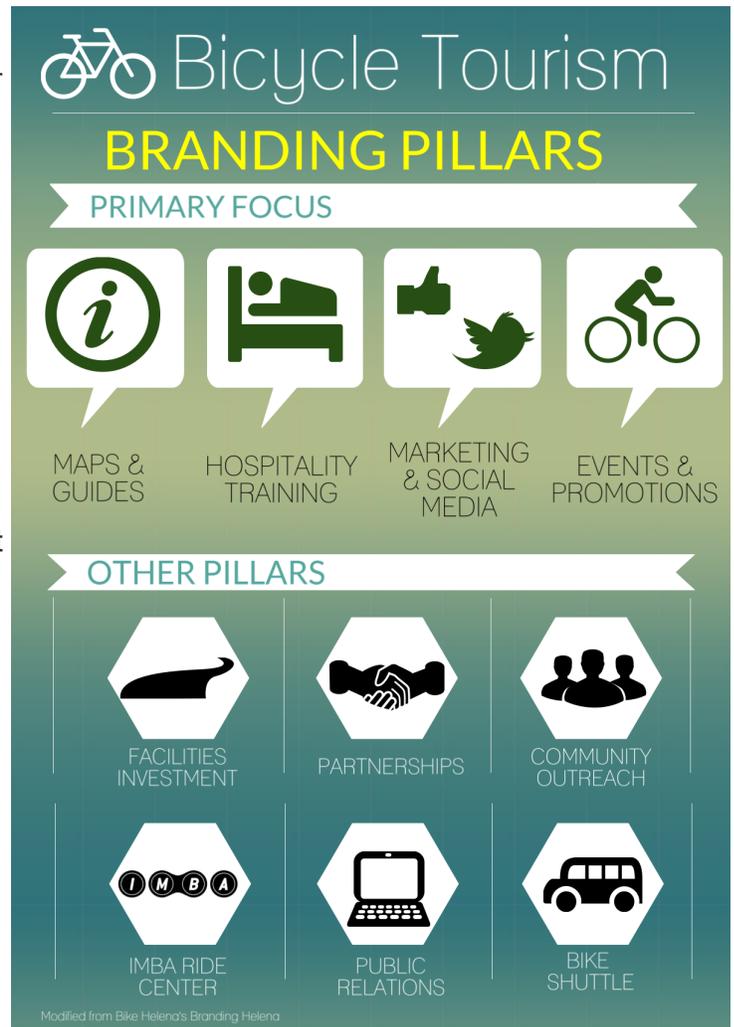
Hospitality Training

A unique finding in this study was how several communities across the United States are actively engaging their local representatives in the hospitality industry to education and build understanding of bicycle tourism.

Bentonville, Arkansas, has increased its investments in bicycling facilities dramatically over the past decade. Each year they gather leaders from their tourism bureau, the chamber of commerce and hospitality industry for a day-long training on bicycle tourism. They teach the attendees about the different needs of bicyclists and emerging trends in bicycling so they can better serve this growing sector of the tourism industry.

Helena, Montana, actively promotes itself as a mountain biking destination for the United States. Each year they have a designated “Trail Days” for the hospitality industry where they take business owners and employees to the trails to experience what its like to ride. It helps them understanding the needs of visitors they are looking to attract and retain.

It is recommended that WNC develop a similar program.



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 BICYCLIST PLANNING 

Kostelec Planning of Asheville, NC, was the lead consultant for *Bikes in Beds*. Chipley Consulting of Asheville and The Path Less Pedaled of Portland, OR, also contributed to the report.

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