

Yellowstone-Grand Teton Pathway Economic Impact Study

Project Description

Description of Proposed Service

It is proposed that an impact study be performed to estimate the economic benefits of the proposed 262-mile non-motorized pathway within the greater Yellowstone and Grand Teton area. The economic impacts will be estimated for a five county area covering three states.

Economic Impact Region States and Counties		
Idaho	Wyoming	Montana
Teton County Fremont County	Park County Teton County	Gallatin County

Primary Scope of Work

Project Need

Driving the Yellowstone-Grand Teton Loop provides a scenic experience, but the ever-growing popularity of cycling is creating significant demand for safer alternatives to sharing highly traveled roads with motorized vehicles. Many communities are also endowed with abandoned rail lines that are being repurposed for use by non-motorized vehicles. Rural communities that survive on small business revenues and farming are often bypassed by travelers. Many of these communities can utilize once prosperous abandoned rail lines by developing and connecting non-motorized pathways.

Developed pathway systems connecting communities can create opportunities to keep tourists in an area longer than short trail systems. An example includes the Cycle Greater Yellowstone bicycle tour, which brings 900 cyclists to Victor, ID and the region via the Teton Pass between Idaho and Wyoming. By demonstrating the economic impact of a connected pathway system, the many communities affected by the pathway would gain a better understanding of the pathway's regional significance. Segments of paved pathways already exist in Teton County, WY, Grand Teton National Park, and in Teton County, ID between the towns of Victor and Driggs.

In 2012 the City of Victor, ID, with assistance from non-profit organization Teton Valley Trails and Pathways, applied for a Federal Lands Access Program grant to construct a 1.9 mile pathway from Moose Creek outside of Victor to the Idaho/Wyoming state line. This pathway is 1.9 miles of 16 miles worth of missing links needed to connect Ashton, ID to Jenny Lake in Grand Teton National Park; completion of the remaining 16 miles would link 150 miles of world class pathways. In July 2013 the Western Federal Lands division of the Federal Highway Administration awarded the City of Victor a \$1.7 million dollar FLAP grant to construct the 1.9 mile pathway. Teton County, WY subsequently applied for and was awarded a \$500,000 FLAP grant to begin planning and engineering for a 6.1 mile missing link; the 6.1 miles in Teton County, WY would pick up at the Idaho/Wyoming state line and terminate at the summit of Teton Pass, connecting to the existing Old Teton Pass Road.

The impact study, which will describe results of a completed pathway, will be shared throughout the greater Yellowstone-Grand Teton region to build support for future pathway development.

Project Benefits

The completed economic impact study will provide an accurate quantitative approach to measure the benefits communities can achieve through coordinated economic development efforts. Smaller rural communities will gain perspective on job creation potential and their ability to contribute to the regional economy.

The impact study's results will provide elected officials with information to guide decisions regarding the effective use of tax dollars. The long-term benefits of the project would include the completion of a connected pathway that will be utilized by residents and visitors from across the globe.

The results of the impact study will be especially useful to local business owners. The industries most likely impacted by the completed pathway include leisure, hospitality, and retail establishments. In the third quarter of 2013, Teton County, ID had over 50 privately owned leisure and hospitality related businesses with an average of 14 or less employees. The completed pathway will attract active individuals who will likely frequent local bike shops and general sporting goods retailers. The results of the impact study will enhance the ability for these locally owned small businesses to plan for future growth as the pathway is completed.

Project Tasks

A successful impact study will include several phases. The initial phase of the project will include a thorough literature review of economic impact studies on non-motorized pathways. Interviews will be conducted with organizations responsible for existing pathways within the Yellowstone-Grand Teton region to help evaluate current pathway usage. Further research will be performed to discover pathway user spending patterns. Surveys and interviews conducted with current pathway users will help estimate spending patterns and baseline usage statistics. Primary and secondary data gathered by the team will then be processed through an economic impact model. A comparative analysis will be performed to evaluate key findings for accuracy. A final written report with key findings will be prepared and presented to stakeholders.

Accomplishing the Grant Purpose

The grant award will fund the economic impact study that will enable stakeholders to see potential impact of the pathway on large and small business by industry. The information gained from the study can be applied and leveraged in the future to expand the efforts already made by stakeholders throughout the region. Local business can benefit from the information gained through the study by preparing for potential changes in the area where they operate.

Project Timeframe

Once grant funding is approved, the project can move forward immediately. Timing is especially important since a significant number of pathway users will be available during the summer months between July and September. Research will be carried out between late June and the middle of September. Economic impact numbers will be modeled during September and early October with final results available by the end of October.

Independent Consultant Description

It is anticipated that the economic impact study be performed by the Research & Business Development Center in Rexburg, ID. The Center employs a skilled staff with many years of experience working on tourism-related economic impact projects throughout the region. The RBD Center is also a non-profit institution that has a specific mission to help grow the region's economy. The individual that will lead the project, Will Jenson, is the business research director at the RBD Center and holds a bachelor's and master's degree in economics with a specialization in community and regional economic development; he is well-

recognized as an authority on the local economy. Mr. Jenson also teaches in the economics departments of Brigham Young University–Idaho and Idaho State University.

Project Location

The economic impact study will be performed in Rexburg, ID, but research will be conducted throughout the counties and communities located along the pathway. The area includes five counties and three states. **Appendix A** includes a map of the 262-mile route.

Anticipated Results of Grant Implementation

Once the grant is successfully implemented and the impact study is carried out, the final product will serve as a useful tool to measure the impact of recreation tourists and natural amenity attractions throughout the region. The results of the study will provide information on which industries will benefit the most from a connected pathway system. These benefits will be quantified into the number of jobs created and the value of pathway user contributions toward gross regional output. The study will also help demonstrate what can be accomplished through coordinated and regional economic development efforts.

Project Budget

The total project cost will be \$21,000. The requested federal portion of the total cost is \$17,000. East-Central Idaho Planning and Development is committed to contribute \$4,000 toward the project cost. It's possible that the City of Victor, ID may also contribute some portion of the total \$4,000 in non-federal funding.

Jobs Created or Sustained by Project

The project will partially sustain one full-time and four part-time jobs at the RBD Center. Indirectly the information gained through the project could potentially create hundreds of jobs throughout the Yellowstone-Grand Teton Region.

Grantee's Experience

East-Central Idaho Planning & Development Association, Inc. (ECIPDA) was created in 1976 as a private, non-profit corporation serving nine counties in eastern Idaho, with the purpose of providing community and economic development. East-Central Idaho Development Company (ECIDC) was then created in 1982, to act in concert with ECIPDA to provide small business lending and assistance. They now work together as "The Development Company."

The Development Company is based on voluntary associations of local governments and community organizations. The Board of Directors for each of the companies consists of representatives from each of the participating units of government, as well as from various community organizations and private enterprises. These independent Boards direct the work of the corporations.

The Development Company was organized to assist local entities and citizens in seeking cost-effective solutions to area-wide problems; to provide a forum for area-wide policy development, render community planning, program management, small business lending, and technical assistance; and to serve as a coordinating link between cities, counties, small business, and regional, state, and federal agencies. Additionally, it provides staffing to the State of Idaho for services through the Workforce Investment Act.

In 1992, ECIPDA received the Economic Development Administration's Region X Award of Excellence for the creation of the Business Development Center in Rexburg, ID. There are now several other Development Centers, created by ECIPDA, working in other areas throughout the region. In 1990, 1994, and 2002, ECIDC received the NADCO Top Production Award for CDC's in the nation, of the same size

category. These awards only demonstrate our basic motto, which is: “Our future success is built on the efforts we make today!”

Appendix A

