

# Capital Crescent Trail / Georgetown Branch Trail Survey Report

**May 2007**

*This report was prepared to summarize the results of a September 2006 Survey and Analysis conducted by the Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail.*

*It would not have been possible without the efforts of the 92 Capital Crescent Trail Coalition volunteers who contributed over 140 hours of time to conduct the survey.*

*Special thanks go to Wayne Phyllaier from the CCTC who coordinated and analyzed the survey results and to Pamela Zorich from M-NCPPC Research and Technology who verified the analysis. While the CCTC gathered and summarized the trail traffic data, the conclusions and planning recommendations in the report are those of M-NCPPC.*

**Department of Parks | Park Planning and Stewardship Division**  
The Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission  
8787 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20910

## OVERVIEW

Over one million people use the popular Capital Crescent (CCT) and Georgetown Branch Trails each year. A Survey of users on the Capital Crescent and Georgetown Branch Trails was completed by volunteers from the Capital Crescent Trail Coalition (CCTC) in September 2006 to obtain information on the amount and type of use of this popular trail. Volunteers completed 23 hours or more of detailed used counts at each of the four locations. This is the third time that that The CCTC has conducted a user survey of the trail. The first survey was conducted in 1996. The Coalition repeated the surveys in the year 2000 and 2006 to observe usage changes since the opening of the River Road Bridge and the Wisconsin Avenue Tunnel. Two Georgetown Branch locations were added to these later surveys.

The Maryland Department of Transportation had asked for a 2006 update of previous survey numbers to assist with Planning the "Purple Line" and Trail.

The major purposes of the surveys were to:

- Gain a better understanding of the current amount and type of use on each trail,
- Assist with future trail planning
- Help assess projects and priorities for trail Capital Improvements Projects and maintenance.

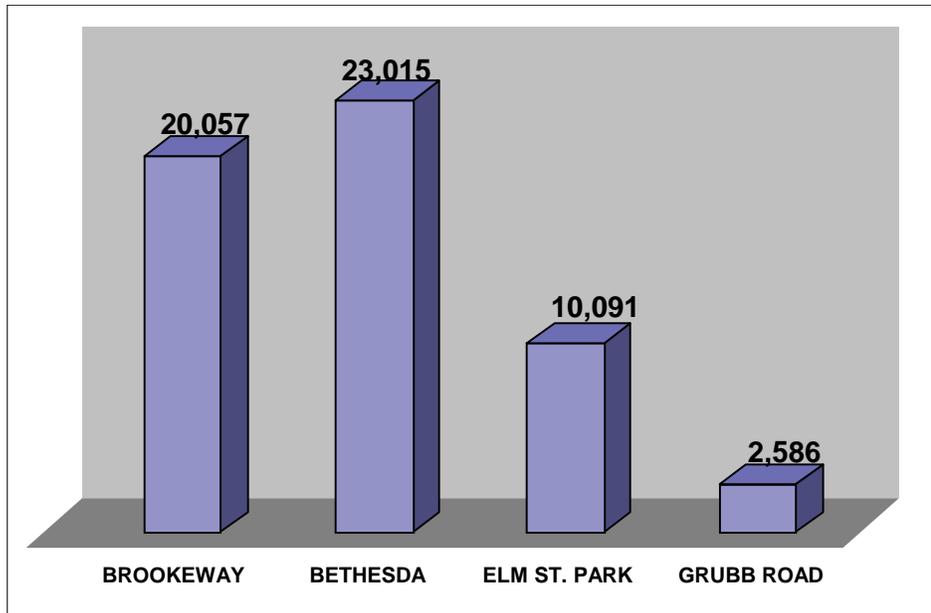


## Survey Highlights

- This survey substantiates the popularity and need for hard surface trails in Montgomery County and recorded the tremendously heavy use of the CCT- over 500 users an hour during peak periods.
- The survey showed that the paved CCT received twice the use of the gravel Georgetown Branch Trail. The low use of the gravel trail at Grubb Road strongly supports the need to pave this portion of the trail and complete it to downtown Silver Spring.
- The Survey recorded a peak use of 565 users per hour at the Bethesda Ave survey location and 507 users per hour at the Brookeway Drive location. On the Georgetown Branch Trail, peak use was 261 users per hour at Elm St. Park and only 51 users per hour at Grubb Road. An average use per hour for all locations was generally a little less than half of this peak amount.
- Average weekly users for the CCT are estimated to be over 18,000 uses, with 23,000 weekly users at the Bethesda Avenue location.
- A comparison with previous surveys indicated that trail use has increased significantly (over 50%) since 1996.
- Walkers and joggers combined accounted for the greatest amount of users at Bethesda Avenue location, while bicyclists were the heaviest users at the other survey sites.

- The number of persons using roller blades on the CCT has consistently declined from over 10% in 1996 to only 1-2% in 2006.

## ESTIMATED WEEKLY TRAIL USE



## Scope of Study and Sites Surveyed

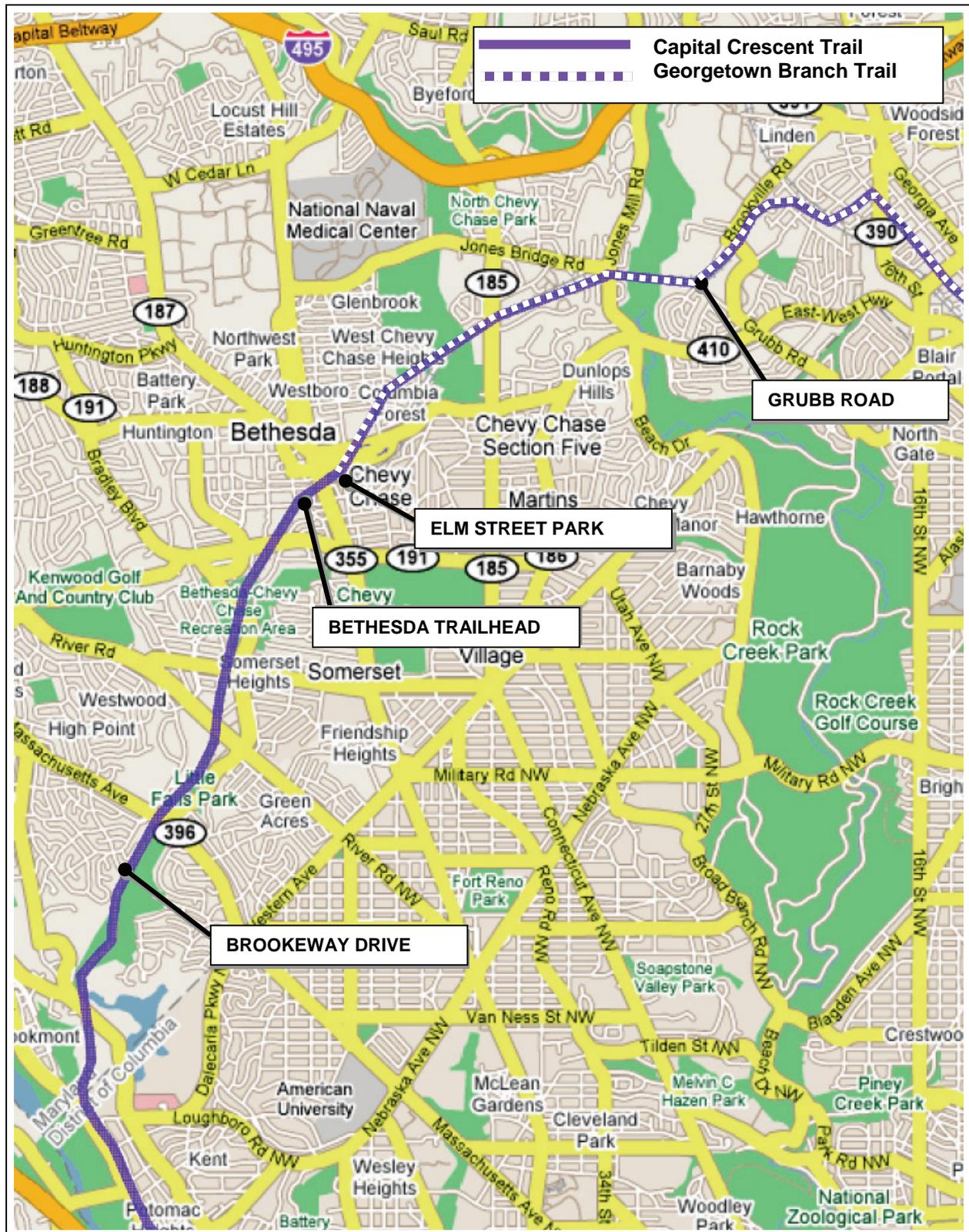
This user survey was designed to gather a sampling of data at two locations on the Capital Crescent trail and two locations on the Georgetown Branch Trail. Survey visits were divided between weekdays, weekday evenings and weekend visits to obtain a cross section of use. Surveyors counted the number of users for a one-hour period and recorded their activity (bicycling, walking, jogging, and in line skating). A description of the survey methods is included in the Appendix.

Capital Crescent Trail Survey location sites were Bethesda Avenue and Brookeway Drive. Bethesda Avenue is the termination of the paved trail and includes a trailhead with parking, making it a very heavily used location. Brookeway Drive is south of River Road and provided an opportunity to assess trail usage both before and after the construction of the River Road Bridge. Brookeway Drive is also located where a neighborhood connector path enters the trail. The CCTC surveyed an additional site in the District of Columbia at the Georgetown Trailhead, and information on these counts is included in the Appendix.

Georgetown Branch survey sites (2000 and 2006 surveys only) were at Elm Street Park, which is adjacent to the tunnel under Route 355, and Grubb Road, where the trail has a neighborhood street connection.

By surveying locations on both the Capital Crescent and the Georgetown Branch Trails, the effect of differences in trail surfacing and locations on type and amount of use could be measured.

# DATA COLLECTION SITES FOR THIS SURVEY



\*CCTC also collected data at the Georgetown Trailhead in D.C.

**Top Right: The Georgetown Branch Trail at Jones Bridge Rd.**

**Below: Bethesda Avenue trailhead allows access to more types of trail users.**

**Bottom Right: The Capital Crescent Trail south of River Road.**



# MAJOR STUDY FINDINGS

## Comparisons of Trail Usage

### 1. AMOUNT OF USE

The 2006 survey showed that the use of the Capital Crescent Trail is incredibly high with average hourly use of approximately 240 users, which is over twice that of the Sligo Creek Trail, our second most popular trail in the County. Weekend use was generally the highest with a peak of 565 users observed on a Sunday afternoon. This extremely high use sometimes results in user conflicts between bicyclists and pedestrians. The lower counts on the gravel trail at the Grubb Road location highlight the need to pave the Georgetown Branch portion of the trail.

AMOUNT OF USE	1996 Average Hourly Use	1996 Peak Hourly Use	2000 Average Hourly Use	2000 Peak Hourly Use	2006 Average Hourly Use	2006 Peak Hourly Use
<b>CAPITAL CRESCENT TRAIL</b>						
Bethesda Avenue	172	221	240	536	263	565
Brookway Drive	152	404	237	561	229	507
<b>GEORGETOWN BRANCH TRAIL</b>						
Elm Street Park	-	-	110	298	115	261
Grubb Road	-	-	24	51	30	80

### 2. TYPES OF USE

Except at Bethesda Avenue, bicycling generally was the most popular use on both the Capital Crescent and Georgetown Branch Trails with approximately half the users choosing this trail use activity. Walking was also very popular with people and included parents with strollers and persons walking their dogs. A surprisingly large percentage of users on the Capital Crescent trail were in-line skaters on roller blades in 1996 and 2000. However, this use declined dramatically in 2006.

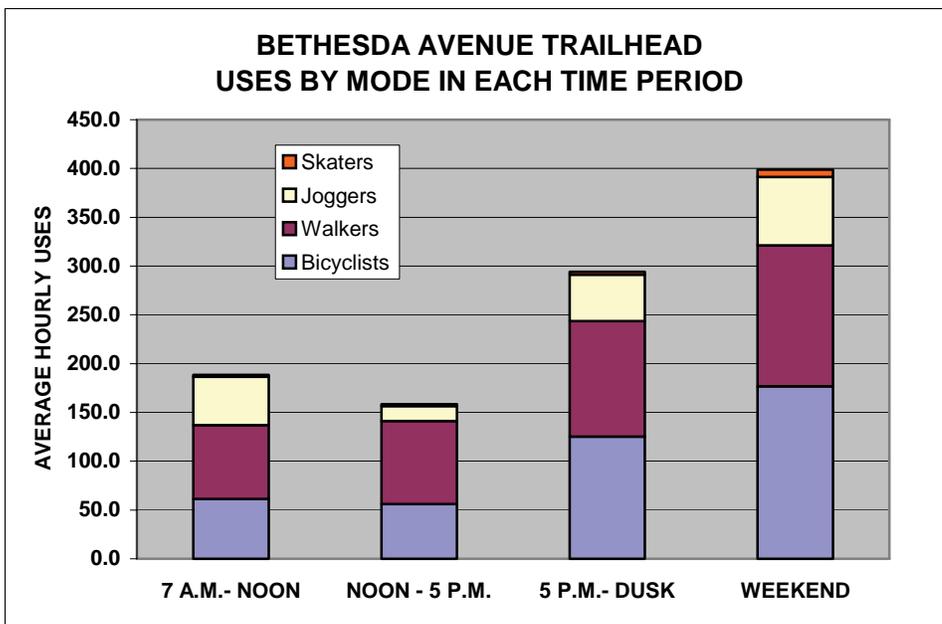
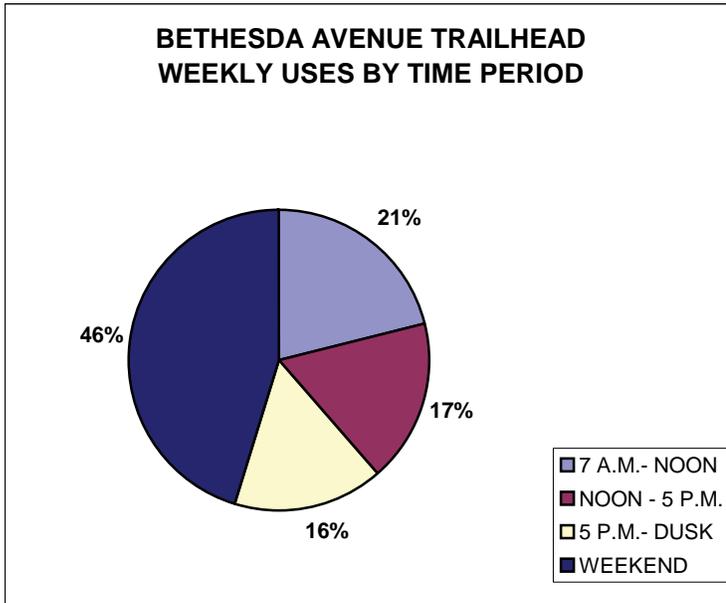
TYPE OF USE	1996 Usage				2000 Usage				2006 Usage			
	Walk*	Jog	Bicycle	Roller Blade	Walk*	Jog	Bicycle	Roller Blade	Walk*	Jog	Bicycle	Roller Blade
<b>CAPITAL CRESCENT TRAIL</b>												
Bethesda Avenue	26%	17%	45%	12%	37%	15%	41%	7%	43%	17%	39%	1%
Brookway Drive	15%	11%	64%	10%	18%	18%	56%	8%	16%	15%	67%	2%
<b>GEORGETOWN BRANCH TRAIL</b>												
Elm Street Park	-	-	-	-	30%	16%	54%	0%	38%	20%	42%	0%
Grubb Road	-	-	-	-	41%	13%	46%	0%	21%	24%	55%	0%

\*Includes children in strollers

### 3. INDIVIDUAL SITE SURVEY SUMMARIES

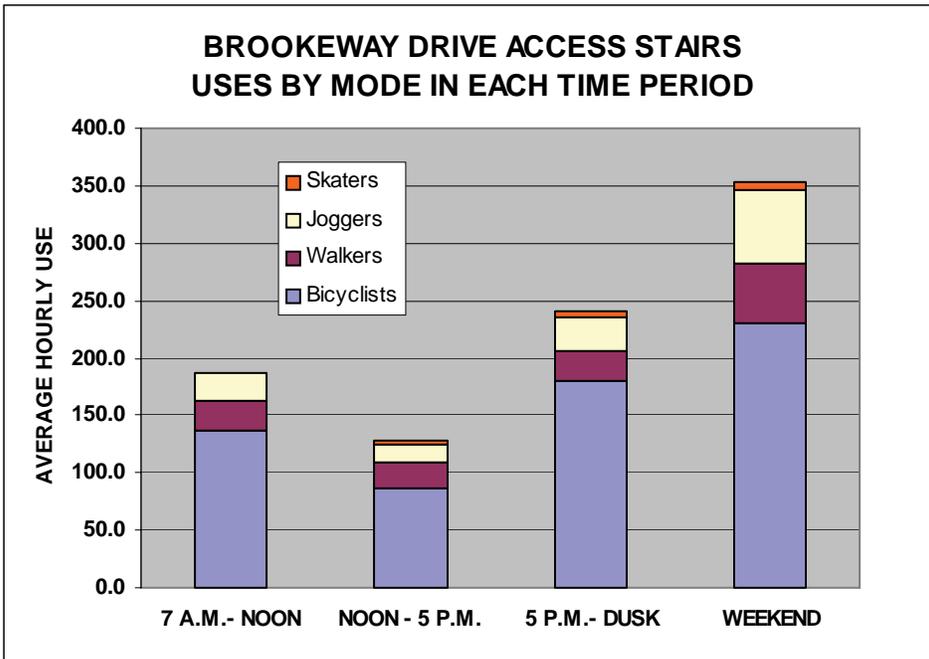
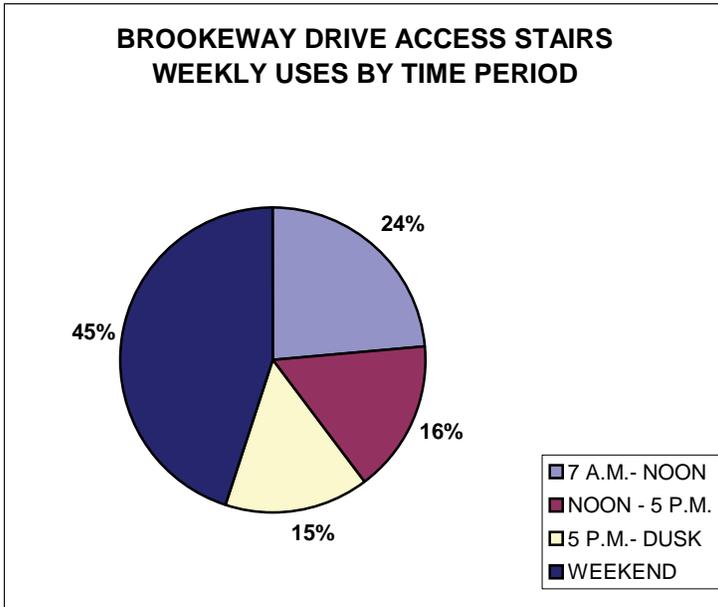
#### a. Bethesda Avenue Trailhead

The survey point near the Bethesda Avenue Trailhead has consistently had the greatest number of users, with a 2006 Survey average of over 260 users per hour. The average number of users per hour rises to 415 on the weekend with a one time peak count of 565 users per hour. This is the only survey location where walkers and joggers exceeded bicyclists.



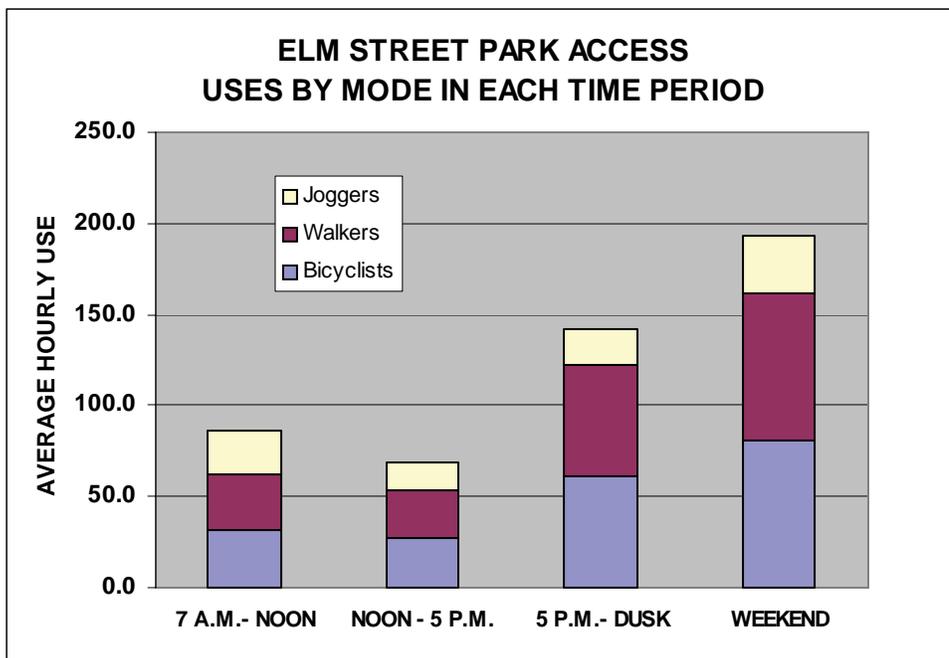
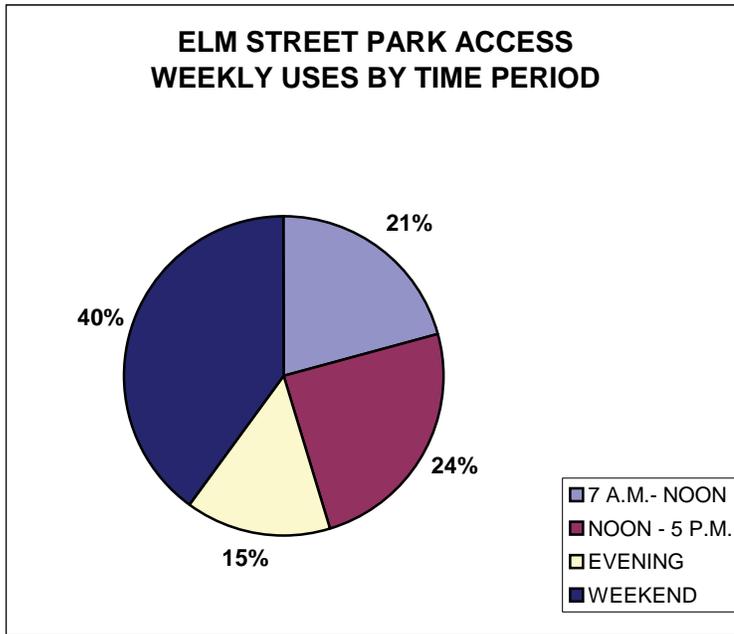
b. Brookeway Drive

Surveyed use at the Brookeway Drive location, south of Massachusetts Avenue, was also extremely high, with nearly 230 average users per hour. This location benefits from the bridge installed over River Road. Weekends were also the highest survey use period with an average of over 360 users per hour and a peak use of 507. The percentage of bicycle use was 67%, which is significantly higher than at any of the other survey locations.



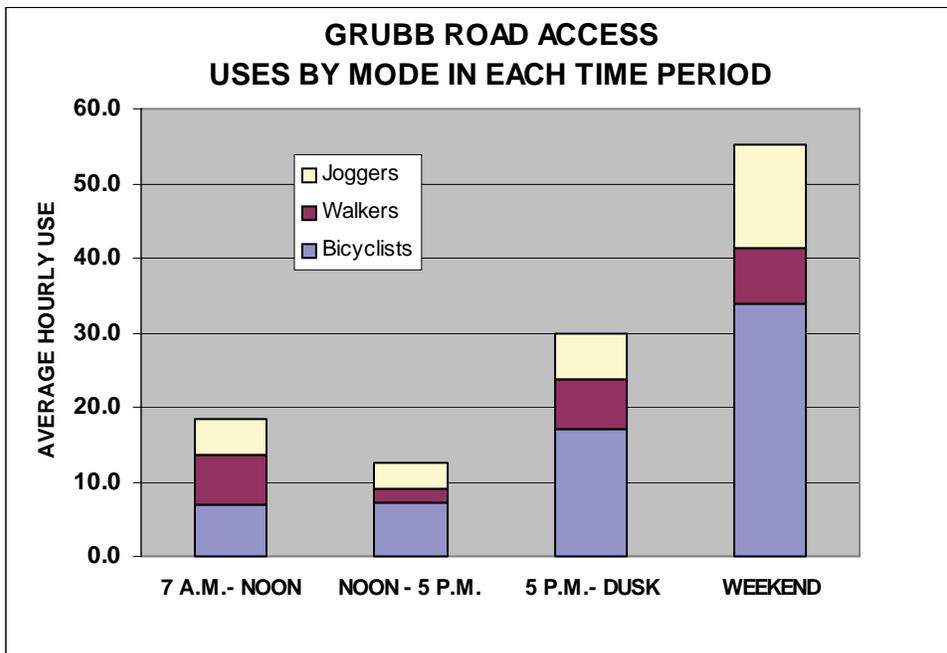
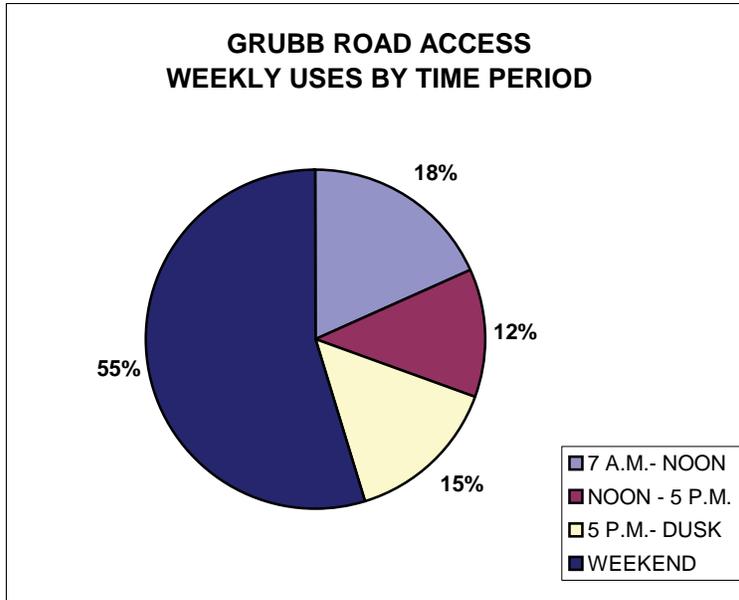
c. Elm Street- Georgetown Branch Trailhead

This Survey location was at Elm Street Park at the east end of the Wisconsin Avenue CCT underpass. This is also where the CCT becomes the Georgetown Branch Trail. Although the gravel Georgetown Branch Trail receives much less use than the paved CCT, this central Bethesda trail location receives a great deal of use with an average of 115 users per hour and a peak use of 261 users per hour. Weekends still receive the greatest number of users and bicyclists account for 42% of users with 38% walkers and 20% joggers.



d. Grubb Road- Georgetown Branch Trail

The Grubb Road survey location experienced much lower use than the CCT. It is a gravel trail which is isolated at times and ends in an industrial area of west Silver Spring rather than continuing on to the Silver Spring Center. The completion of the Rock Creek Trestle Bridge crossing increased use since 2000, and when the trail is ultimately extended to Silver Spring, it will certainly gain users. On the weekend an average of 30 users per hour were counted with a peak of 80 users per hour. Bicyclists accounted for 55% of the use.





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# APPENDIX I

## Survey Methodology

### Number and timing of counts

- Surveys were conducted by 92 volunteers between Labor Day and October 4, 2006
- A minimum of 20 one hour long counts were required for each location surveyed, distributed among four general time periods:
  - Weekday, 1 a.m. to noon, 3 counts
  - Weekday, noon to 5 p.m., 3 counts
  - Weekday, 5 p.m. to Dusk, 7 counts
  - Weekend, any daylight hour, 7 counts
- Counts could be taken on any day and time within the general time period.
- Counts were to be taken during fair weather (not during rain or drizzle)
- Counts were taken at the following locations
  - The Georgetown Trailhead, near mile 10.0
  - The Brookeway Drive access, at mile 5.5
  - Just south of the Bethesda Trailhead, near mile 3.5
  - The Elm Street Park access at the east end of the Bethesda tunnel
  - The Grubb Road access east of Rock Creek, near mile 1.0

### Counting Methods

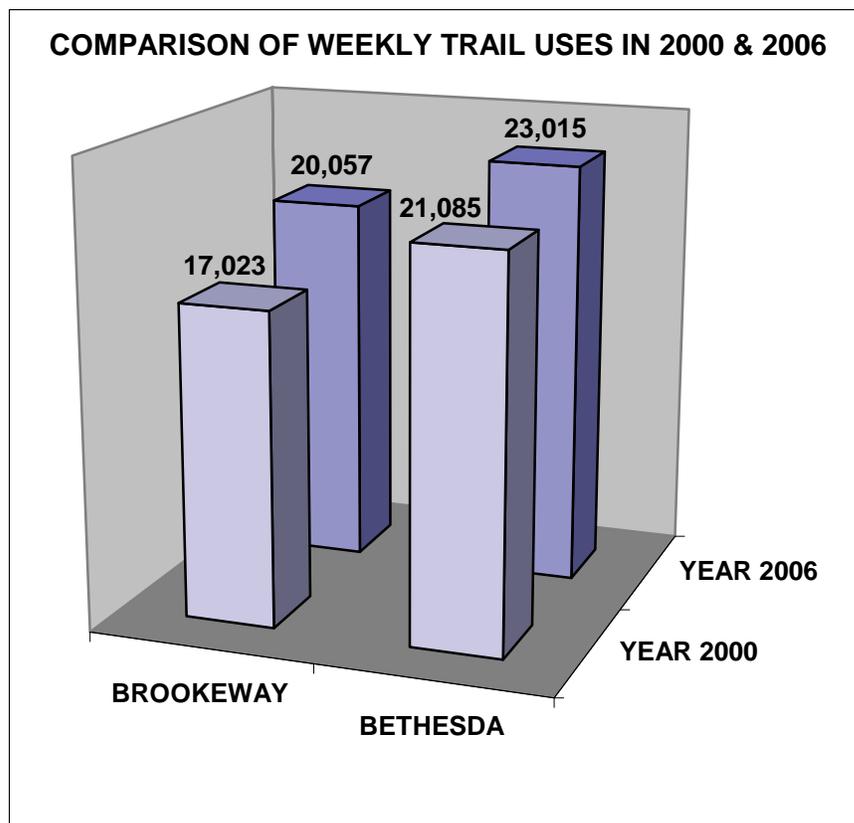
- Volunteers counted trail uses for one hour periods
- Any person passing by the observation point in either direction counted as a “use”.
- A person returning on a round trip during the survey hour was counted as another use.
- Volunteers counted the uses by mode (cyclists, walkers, joggers, and in-line skaters)

## APPENDIX II

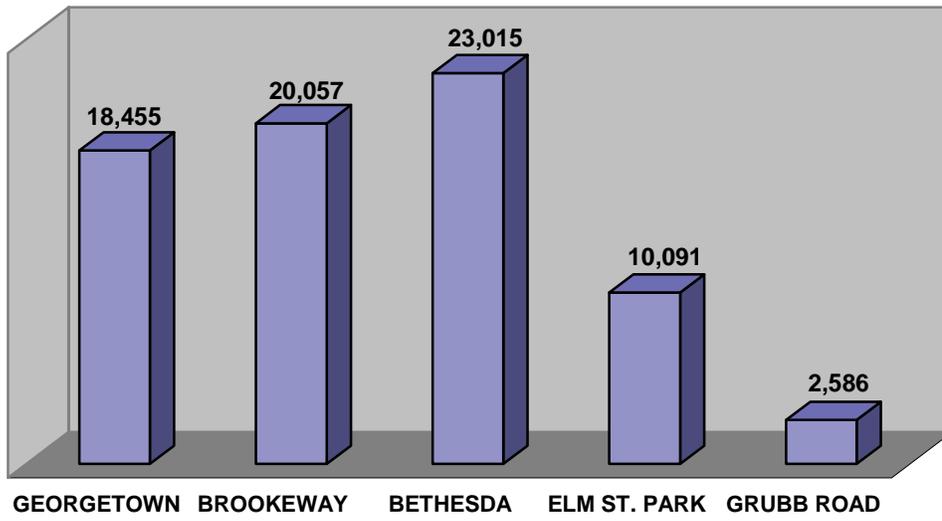
### Weekly Trail Use Estimates

The weekly trail use was estimated as follows

- All counts within the same general time period were given equal weight for the hourly use averages.
- For WEEKLY TRAIL USE estimates:
  - Each day was assumed to begin at 7 a.m. and end at Dusk, at 7:30 p.m.
  - The average for each time period was multiplied by the number of hours that time period has in one week.
  - The products for all time periods were added to get the total weekly use.



### 2006 WEEKLY TRAIL USES

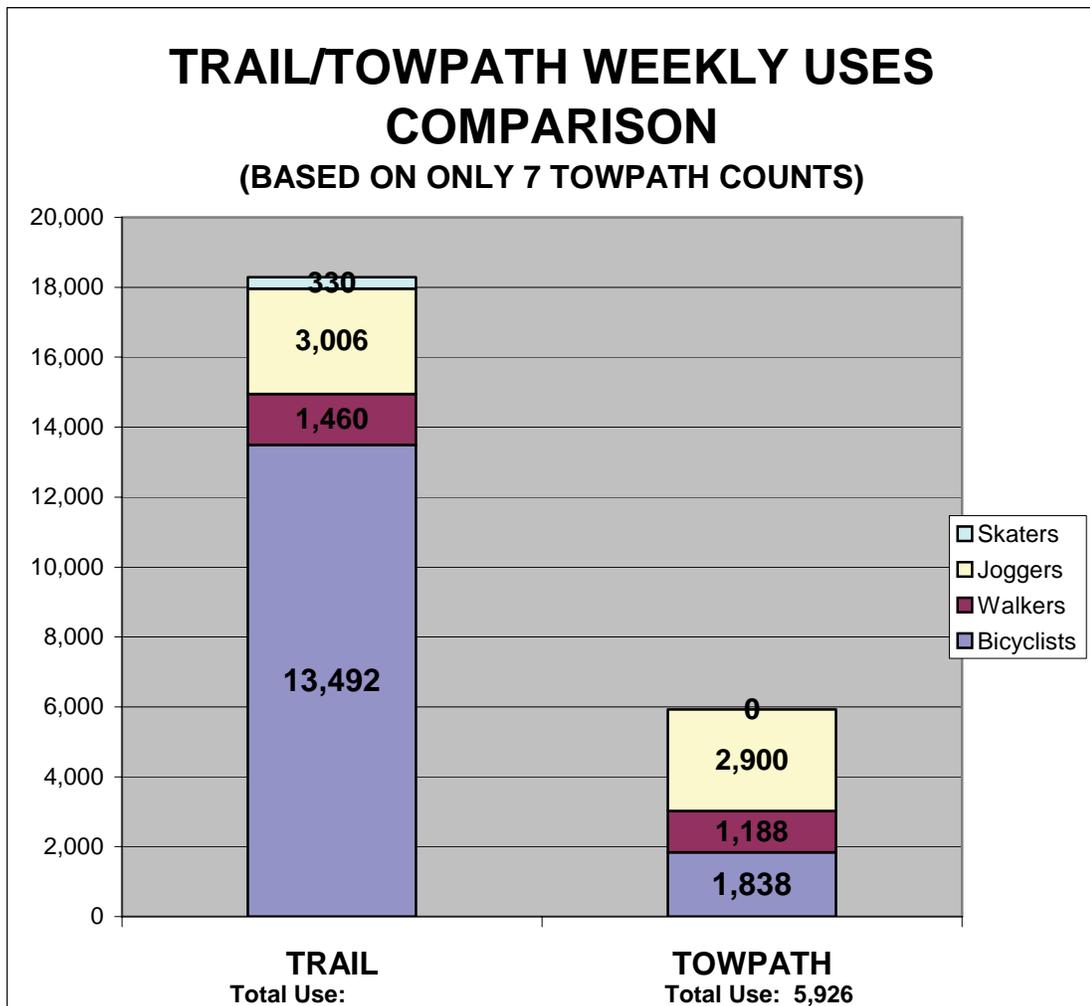


# APPENDIX III

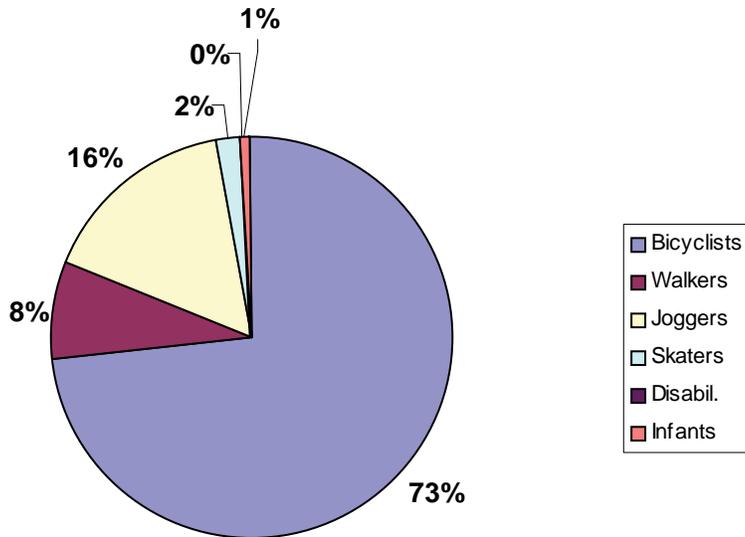
## Georgetown Trailhead User Counts

The CCTC also completed 33 one hour long user counts at the Georgetown trailhead in the District of Columbia. A peak hourly use of 427 was counted on a weekend. The type of use varied somewhat from that of other survey locations, in that a much higher percentage of those counted were bicyclists (73%) and 2% were roller-bladers. The following graphs show the amount and type of use at this location.

The CCTC performed a limited "side study" to compare usage on the C&O towpath near the Georgetown Trailhead. Seven hour long use counts were taken which showed that approximately three times the number of people use the CCT per week than the towpath (see weekly comparison graph).



### GEORGETOWN TRAILHEAD WEEKLY USES BY MODE



### GEORGETOWN TRAIL HEAD HOURLY USES IN EACH TIME PERIOD

