

Study of
Nearby Businesses and Adjacent Residential
Landowners to the Isabella County
Extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail

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Nearby Businesses and Adjacent Residential Landowners to the Isabella County Extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail

Executive Summary

The main purpose of studying nearby businesses and adjacent residential landowners was to better understand the level of support for the extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail prior to its construction. Further, it was to establish a baseline against which to assess support for the trail after construction and once operating. Another purpose was to begin to understand how, when and why individuals and families who have relatively easy access to the trail might use the linear park.

Toward that end, a census of all adjacent residents and nearby businesses to the corridor where the rail-trail will be constructed were mailed a questionnaire. Surveying occurred in April and May of 2000. Businesses were mailed a four-page questionnaire and residents an eight-page questionnaire. Businesses and residents also received a personalized letter and business reply envelope with the survey. Reminder postcards and a second mailing of the survey were also used to garner a strong response. Six of the nine businesses (67%) and 26 of the 42 residential landowners (62%) responded.

The highlights of the results include the following:

- Businesses located near the rail-trail were either light industrial or retail. They ranged from 3 to 70 full-time employees and 0 to 40 part-time employees. Five of the six businesses were adjacent to the trail and one business was "near" the trail. Each company's main building was on average 64 yards from the trail. Businesses were at their location for 23 years on average. Non commercial residents living adjacent to the rail-trail were primarily single-family homes and family owned agricultural land. On average, residential houses were 394 yards from the trail. Sixty percent of the residents will have a full view of the trail, 24 percent will have a partial view, and 16 percent won't be able to see the trail from their house with trees leafed out. Residents lived on average 32 years in this location and 80 percent purchased their property when the railroad was operating. Fifty percent of the residents were retired and 75 percent of the households did not have children. The most common (42%) pre-tax income bracket for residents was between \$20,000 and \$40,000.
- All the businesses knew about the upcoming trail, while 92% of the residents did. The top information source for initially learning about the trail was word-of-mouth for both businesses and residents, followed by the newspaper and township newsletter. No business or resident indicated that a park and recreation commission meeting or another public meeting introduced them to the trail. Businesses seemed more informed about the trail as 50 percent rated their level of knowledge as "moderately informed" compared to residents who were more likely to have selected "minimally informed." Residents were asked if they had questions about the trail and many questions were posed including: "how will the

trail be patrolled by law enforcement?" "will the trail area be cleaned regularly and trash removed?" "will the trail's cost raise taxes?" and "will the trail be used late in the evening?".

- Half of the businesses have attended meetings about the rail-trail and one businesses was involved in the fund raising effort. One resident was involved as a township representative at trail-related meetings and two residents were once members of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail Friends organization. Once the trail is built, residents expressed they are only slightly interested in volunteering and would be most willing to help with birdhouses along the trail or at an annual cleanup day.
- Five of the 26 residents who responded to the survey have used the Midland County portion of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail and only one resident had used another rail-trail in the state of Michigan. Businesses estimated that their employees would be most likely to use the trail after work, rather than before work or during breaks.
- At the time this survey was completed, businesses were more supportive of the new trail than residents. Businesses, however, are concerned about the safety of trail users and any potential liability at driveway crossings. Residents were "neutral" in their support for the rail-trail in Isabella County, however, a majority of the residents were "very supportive" that the trail was being designated as nonmotorized use only. Residents segmented into three levels of support: supportive and viewed the trail as a positive place for children to recreate, neutral, or unsupportive and would rather have the land under their family's control. Residents also had concerns about safety, litter, trespass and aesthetic changes. Businesses were evenly distributed on their rating of a rail-trail compared to an abandoned railroad right-of-way, whereas residents were more likely to rate the rail-trail as "much worse" or "neutral" compared to the abandoned railroad right-of-way.
- Businesses viewed the influence of the rail-trail as most positive for the nearby community, whereas residents viewed the greatest positive influence at the county level.

*Submitted by Michigan State University
Department of Park, Recreation and Tourism Resources
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Nearby Businesses and Adjacent Residential Landowners to the Isabella County Extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail

Purpose of Study

This study of nearby businesses and adjacent residential landowners to the Isabella County extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail is part of a larger, multi-year study examining the usage and benefits of Midland County's Pere Marquette Rail-Trail. In addition to this study of Isabella County businesses and residents, a study was also done of Midland County nearby businesses and adjacent residents who are located near the existing section of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail in Midland County.

The purpose of studying nearby businesses and adjacent residents is to better understand the usage of the rail-trail by individuals and families who have relatively easy access to the rail-trail and to understand their level of support for the rail-trail. For Isabella County, this study provides baseline data prior to the extension being built. These data could be compared to Midland County data collected by Pollack Design Associates of Ann Arbor in 1992 before the Midland County portion of the rail-trail was constructed, the companion study of Midland County residents and businesses conducted by Michigan State University in 2000, or any future study of Isabella County residents and businesses after the rail-trail is built. Studies of this nature allow park and recreation managers and staff to better design and manage rail-trails so that nearby residents' and businesses' interests are addressed.

This report is organized in the following sections:

- Purpose of Study (page 1)
- Description of Isabella County Extension (page 1)
- Procedures for Conducting the Study (page 2)
- Results
 - Description of Nearby Businesses, Adjacent Residents, and Location (page 3)
 - Knowledge of Rail-Trail Extension (page 8)
 - Usage of the Rail-Trail (page 12)
 - Support for Rail-Trail (page 12)
 - Influence of Rail-Trail (page 13)
- Conclusions and Implications (page 16)
- Appendices
 - Mail Questionnaire - Nearby Businesses (page 17)
 - Mail Questionnaire - Adjacent Landowner Residents (page 22)
 - Letters and Postcard that Accompanied Questionnaire (page 31)

Description of Isabella County Extension

The extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail from Midland County into Isabella County begins at the eastern Isabella county line, just west of Coleman. The current trail ends in the center of Coleman and Midland County Parks has received a grant to complete the Midland County portion of the trail to the western Midland county line. Isabella County Parks will connect the trail with the newer section of the Midland County segment and then continue northwest parallel to Old U.S. 10 or Saginaw Road to the eastern outskirts of Clare. The rail-trail will pass through the town of Loomis and run just north of Herrick Recreation Area. The rail-trail extension is currently planned to be eight miles long.

Procedures for Conducting the Study

Names of adjacent residents were obtained by reviewing plat maps and obtaining names and addresses from the Isabella County tax assessor. Names and addresses of nearby businesses were obtained from Sue Ann Kopmeyer, the director of Isabella County Parks and Recreation.

Two survey instruments were developed for the samples. The nearby business survey was four-pages and the adjacent resident survey was eight-pages (see Appendix). A personalized cover letter and postage paid envelope was mailed along with the survey instrument. The first mailing was April 18, 2000. A follow-up and thank you postcard was mailed on April 26, 2000. Two weeks after the postcard mailing, a second survey mailing was sent to all those who had not yet responded. Of the nine businesses who were mailed a survey, six returned a completed survey resulting in a 67 percent response rate (Table 1). Of the fifty-one adjacent resident names and addresses, nine letters were returned as undeliverable and 26 completed surveys were returned (Table 2). A 62 percent response rate was achieved for the adjacent resident survey.

Table 1. Response Rates for Nearby Businesses

Original Sample Size	Returned	Overall Response Rate
9	6	66.6%

Table 2. Response Rates for Adjacent Residents

Original Sample Size	Unreachable (bad addresses or deceased individuals)	Adjusted Sample Size	Returned	Overall Response Rate
51	9	42	26	61.9%

Results

The results are organized around five main themes. The first section is a description of business and resident respondents. The second and third sections describe their knowledge of the rail-trail and use of Midland County's existing rail-trail. The fourth and fifth sections describe their support for the rail-trail extension into Isabella County and the estimated influence of the rail-trail on residents and businesses.

Description of Nearby Businesses, Adjacent Residents, and their Location

Of the six businesses that responded, three businesses classified themselves as a light industrial or warehousing operation and three businesses placed themselves as consumer services or retail (Table 3). The number of full-time employees ranged from three to 70 employees with an average of 20 employees. The number of part-time employees ranged from none to 40 employees with an average of eight part-time employees. Residents classified their land uses, with 54 percent classified as residential housing, 54 percent agricultural use, 8 percent business operations, 8 percent undeveloped land, 4 percent apartment or multi-family housing, and 4 percent rental property (Table 4)

Most businesses (83.3%) placed themselves as being adjacent or right next to the rail-trail (Table 5). The remaining business indicated they were near the rail-trail. Most residents (87.5%) also placed their property being adjacent or right next to the rail-trail. Thirteen percent of the residents indicated the rail-trail intersected their property. The distance from the rail-trail to a business' main building or a resident's home was also assessed. On average, business buildings were 64 yards away and resident homes were 394 yards away (Table 6). Business building distances ranged from 35 to 100 yards away, while resident home distances ranged from 50 to 1,760 yards away. Only residents were asked about the visual presence of the trail from their homes. Sixty percent have full view of the trail in a summer season, 24 percent have partial view and 16 percent will not see the trail (Table 7).

Length of occupancy at their current location was substantial for businesses and residents. On average the businesses were at their current location for 23 years and residents for 32 years (Table 8). Occupancy ranged from three to 100 years for businesses and residents. For residents, 80 percent purchased their property when the railroad was operating on the rails, while 20 percent purchased after the rail corridor was abandoned. Only one resident considered the future use of the rail corridor when they purchased. This person thought the land would revert back to adjacent property owners when the railroad left.

Residents were asked to describe their household in a series of demographic questions. More women completed the survey than men (62% women/38% men). The average age of adults was 54 years old. Households were most likely to have two adults and no children (25.0%), a single adult (25.0%), or more than two adults and no children (25.0%) (Tables 9 and 10). Residents were most likely to be retired (50.0%), followed by full-time employed (19.2%), self-employed (19.2), or homemaker (11.6%) (Table 11). On average, resident respondents lived in Isabella County 38 years. It was most common for a person to live in the county 21-40 years (50.0%),

while 15 percent lived in the county over sixty years (Table 12). Completing high school (44.0%) was the most common level of educational achievement (Table 13). Forty percent had some college schooling or graduated with a degree and another four percent attended graduate school. Twelve percent did not complete high school. Only twelve of the 26 respondents provided income data. Of the 12, 42 percent earned between \$20,000 and \$40,000 in 1999 before taxes in household income, 33 percent earned less than \$20,000, and 25 percent earned between \$40,000 and \$60,000 (Table 14).

Adjacent residents were asked why they recreate outdoors to better understand how they might use and appreciate the rail-trail. The top reasons were to enjoy nature, promote health and relax. On average these three reasons received a score between "moderately" and "very" important (Table 15). Some other reasons that were slightly less important were to be outside, exercise, spend free time, and for fun and enjoyment. Being with others, being alone, and cultural study and education were even less important than the previously mentioned reasons. Training for sports was the least important reason for recreating outdoors.

Table 3. Nature of Businesses

Type of business:	
Light industrial or warehousing	3 businesses
Consumer services or retail	3 businesses
Number of employees:	
Full-time	Range: 3 - 70 employees Mean: 20 employees
Part-time	Range: 0 - 40 employees Mean: 8 employees

Table 4. Type of Residential Ownerships

	Residents
Agricultural Use	53.8%
Residential house	53.8
Business Operations	7.7
Undeveloped Land	7.7
Other (rental property)	3.8
Apartment or multi-family housing	3.8

Note: Multiple answers allowed.

Table 5. Location of Property in Relation to Trail Extension

Property is:	Businesses	Residents
Adjacent or right next to trail	83.3%	87.5%
Trail intersects property	0	<u>12.5</u>
Near the trail	<u>16.7</u>	not offered as a response
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 6. Distance from Main Building or House to Trail Extension

	Businesses	Residents
Range	35-100 yards away	50 - 1,760 yards away
Mean	64 yards	394 yards

Table 7. Visual Presence of Trail for Residents

Degree of view from house in the summer:	Residents
Full view of trail	60.0%
Partial view of trail	24.0
Can't see trail at all	<u>16.0</u>
Total	100.0%

Table 8. Years Occupied Property

	Businesses	Residents^a
Range	3 - 100 years	3 - 100 years
Mean	23 years	32 years

^a. 80% of the residents indicated that they purchased their property when the railroad was operating on the rails; 20% purchased after the rail corridor was abandoned. All but one resident did not consider the future use of the rail corridor when they purchased. The one that did thought the land would revert back to property owners.

Table 9. Number of Adults and Children in Households

<u>Adults in household</u>		<u>Children in household (under 19)</u>	
Number of	Residents	Number of	Residents
1	25.0%	0	75.0%
2	41.6	1	4.2
3	29.2	2	4.2
4 or more	<u>4.2</u>	3 or more	<u>16.6</u>
Total	100.0%	Total	100.0%

Table 10. Household Composition

Types of Households:	Residents
Single adult	25.0%
More than two adults in household and no children	25.0
Two adult household	25.0
Two adult and children household	20.8
More than two adults in household and children	4.2
Single parent	<u>0.0</u>
Total	100.0%

Table 11. Employment Status of Resident Respondents

Employment status:	Residents
Retired	50.0%
Self-employed	19.2
Full-time employed	19.2
Homemaker	11.6
Part-time employed	0.0
Unemployed	0.0
Student	<u>0.0</u>
Total	100.0%

Table 12. Length of Residency in County

Years living in Isabella County:	Residents
0-20 years	15.4%
21-40 years	50.0
41-60 years	19.2
61-80 years	<u>15.4</u>
Total	100.0%

Table 13. Highest Level of Education Attained

Highest level of Education	Residents
Graduate school	4.0%
College diploma or some college	40.0
High school diploma	44.0
Less than high school	<u>12.0</u>
Total	100.0%

Table 14. 1998 Pre-tax Household Income of Residents

Income	Percent of Respondents
\$60,000 or more	0.0%
\$40,000-\$59,999	25.0
\$20,000-\$39,999	41.7
less than \$20,000	<u>33.3</u>
Total	100.0%

Note: 14 of the 26 respondents chose not to answer this question.

Table 15. Reasons for Recreating Outdoors

Members of household recreate to:	Not at all important	Slightly important	Mode- rately important	Very important	Extremely important	Mean^a score
Enjoy nature	13.0%	8.7	21.7	34.8	21.7	3.4
Promote health	13.0	8.7	30.4	17.4	30.4	3.4
Be outside	17.4	8.7	26.1	26.1	21.7	3.3
Relax	13.0	8.7	39.1	13.0	26.1	3.3
Spend free time	21.7	4.3	34.8	13.0	26.1	3.2
Exercise	17.4	13.0	26.1	13.0	17.4	3.2
Fun and enjoyment	17.4	13.0	26.1	17.4	26.1	3.2
Be with others	26.1	4.3	34.8	21.7	13.0	2.9
Explore areas of the county	30.4	17.4	26.1	17.4	8.7	2.6
Cultural study and education	30.4	26.1	17.4	17.4	8.7	2.5
Be alone	30.4	21.7	26.1	13.0	8.7	2.5
Train for sports	43.5	13.0	30.4	4.3	8.7	2.2

^a Rating scale where "1" equals not at all important and "5" equals extremely important.

Knowledge of Rail-Trail Extension

Nearby businesses and adjacent residents were asked about their knowledge of the upcoming trail. Specifically they were asked how they first learned about the rail-trail extension. All six businesses indicated they knew about the trail, however only 92% of the residents knew the trail was going to be built in their neighborhood (Table 16). The top information sources for businesses were word-of-mouth (50.0%), the newspaper (33.3%) and the township newsletter (16.7%). For residents the top information sources were word-of-mouth (47.8%), the newspaper (21.7%), from others who lived along the trail (13.0%), and township newsletter (8.7%), and trail brochure (8.7%). No business or resident indicated a park and recreation commission meeting or other public meeting introduced them to the trail.

Businesses rated themselves as better informed than residents. Fifty percent of the businesses indicated they were "moderately informed," whereas 46 percent of the residents indicated "minimally informed" (Table 17). Thirty-one percent of the residents felt that they were not at all informed.

Adjacent residents were also asked in an open-ended questions if they had questions about the rail-trail. They were the following:

- How will the trail be patrolled by law enforcement? On a regular basis? (3 mentions)
- How will traffic on busy road crossings be dealt with?
- Will there be proper access to the trail in case of accidents?
- Will there be rest areas?
- Will my property be safe? How?
- Will the trail area be cleaned regularly and trash removed? Will there be waste containers along the trail? (5 mentions)
- Will it raise taxes? (2 mentions)
- Will it be used late in the evening? 24 hour usage? (2 mentions)
- When will construction take place?
- How will the County keep snowmobiles and motorcycles off?
- How soon will it be done?
- Will there be driveways over the Rail-Trail?

Both samples were asked about their involvement thus far. One businesses indicated that they were involved in the request for funding for the construction of the rail-trail (Table 18) and one resident was involved as a township representative. Three businesses indicated they attended meetings in the late 1990's on the trail. No businesses had ever been members of the Friends of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail and two residents indicated they were once members but no longer are current or active.

Residents were asked about their willingness to volunteer once the rail-trail is built. On a scale from 1 to 5 where 5 equals extremely interested residents on average were only slightly interested in volunteering (Table 19). The most support was for putting up and maintaining birdhouses and assisting with the annual cleanup day. The least amount of support was for help as a trail guide.

Adjacent residents were asked if there are any special places along the rail-trail. Herrick Nature Park, particularly for swimming in a former gravel pit, was mentioned three times. Swamps in the area were noted for their bird watching and preservation significance. The woods were mentioned as a place for a pleasant walk. Todd's store was mentioned as a good place for refreshments.

Table 16. First Learned about the Extension of the Rail-Trail

	Businesses	Residents
Heard of trail before survey	100.0%	92.0%
Information sources:		
Word-of-mouth	50.0%	47.8%
Newspaper	33.3	21.7
Other (lived along trail)	0	13.0
Trail brochure	0	8.7
Township newsletter	16.7	8.7
Other public meeting	0	0
Park and recreation commission meeting	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 17. Informed about Rail-Trail Extension

	Businesses	Residents
Not at all informed	16.7%	30.8%
Minimally informed	16.7	46.2
Moderately informed	50.0	15.4
Fully informed	<u>16.6</u>	<u>7.7</u>
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 18. Involvement by Businesses and Residents

Level of involvement:	Businesses	Residents
Attended meetings during the late 1990's	3 of 6 businesses attended	Not asked
Additional involvement in the planning, development or maintenance of the trail	1 of 6 businesses has assisted	1 of 26 residents has been involved as a township representative
Member of Friends group	None of the 6 businesses have been members	2 of 26 residents are no longer members 24 of 26 residents have never been members 0 residents are currently members

Table 19. Interest in Volunteer Activities

Volunteer activities:	Not at all interested	Slightly interested	Moderately interested	Very interested	Extremely interested	Mean^a
Putting up and maintaining birdhouses	56.5%	13.0	17.4	13.0	0	1.9
Annual cleanup days	56.5	17.4	13.0	8.7	4.3	1.9
Annual bike-a-thon	65.2	8.7	13.0	13.0	0	1.7
Establishing and maintaining native prairie plants along the trail	60.9	17.4	17.4	4.3	0	1.7
Adopt-a-trail trash pickup	63.6	18.2	9.1	9.1	0	1.6
Establishing and maintaining special gardens along the trail	68.2	13.6	13.6	4.5	0	1.6
Helping as a trail guide	78.3	13.0	4.3	4.3	0	1.4

Note: 3 respondent selected to not answer this question.

^a Rating scale where "1" equals not at all interested and "5" equals extremely interested.

Usage of the Rail-Trail

Businesses were asked to estimate how they think their employees may use the trail. Of the three businesses responding, they suggested that the rail-trail would most likely be used more after work than during breaks with employees bicycling, walking, running, roller blading, or just relaxing. One of these three businesses indicated that they could see employees using the trail before work for exercise purposes. A second business predicted usage of the trail during work for walking or running on breaks.

Adjacent residents were asked if they have used the rail-trail in Midland County. Five of the 26 respondents have used the existing trail. Three of these residents use it primarily for exercise and two use it primarily for spending their free time. Four of the five respondents provided answers on how frequently members of their household use the trail. Two respondents indicated their household (spouse and children) use the rail-trail a few times a year, one respondent indicated weekly, and another respondent indicated daily. All five of the respondents indicated bicycling on the Midland County portion of the rail-trail. Four respondents indicated walking, two in-line skating, one picnicking, and one visiting attractions along the trail. Only one of the 26 respondents has used another rail-trail (Hart-Montague Rail-Trail), besides the Pere Marquette.

Support for Rail-Trail

Both businesses and residents rated the rail-trail concept across various stages of the trail's development and construction. Businesses were most supportive of the idea of the rail-trail, closely followed by support for the existing trail in Midland County, and the nonmotorized designation of the trail (Table 20). While one business was very opposed to the rail-trail connecting Clare to Coleman the majority were neutral or supportive. Business respondents had mixed feelings about the trail planning and decision making process. Residents were most supportive of the nonmotorized designation of the trail followed by the creation of the trail connecting Clare to Coleman. Support for the existing trail in Midland County, the idea of the rail-trail, and the planning and decision processes received more neutral ratings than opposition or support ratings.

Table 20. Support for the Rail-Trail

Business Results:	Very opposed	Moderately opposed	Neutral	Moderately supportive	Very supportive	Mean^a
Idea of trail before it is built	0%	0	16.7	33.3	50.0	4.3
Existing trail in Midland County	0	0	20.0	60.0	20.0	4.0
Non-motorized use only	0	16.7	16.7	16.7	50.0	4.0
Trail connecting Clare to Coleman	16.7	0	16.7	33.3	33.3	3.7
Trail planning and decision process	0	20.0	40.0	20.0	20.0	3.4
Resident Results:						
Non-motorized use only	15.4%	3.8	23.1	0	57.7	3.8
Trail connecting Clare to Coleman	19.2	0	34.6	23.1	23.1	3.3
Existing trail in Midland County	19.2	3.8	46.2	15.4	15.4	3.0
Trail planning and decision process	19.2	7.7	50.0	11.5	11.5	2.9
Idea of trail before it is built	19.2	3.8	57.7	7.7	11.5	2.9

^a Rating scale where "1" equals very opposed and "5" equals very supportive.

Influence of Rail-Trail

Influence of the rail-trail on several levels from one's own life to Isabella County was considered by businesses and residents. Businesses felt the trail would have the strongest positive influence on the community, followed by Isabella County, the neighborhood, and employees (Table 21). For all four levels, businesses rated influence as neutral or positive except for one business which felt the trail would have a very negative influence on the neighborhood. Overall, residents rated the influence of the trail more negatively than the businesses. Unlike business ratings, residents were less likely to feel the rail-trail would bring about a positive influence. In every category, more viewed the rail-trail as very negative than very positive. The highest ratings were for the

rail-trail positively influencing Isabella County, followed by the community and the neighborhood. The lowest ratings were for the trail's influence on one's own life or others in their family.

Nearby businesses were asked how the rail-trail may influence their real estate investment. In terms of the time it would take to sell their business, four businesses commented that the trail would make "no difference" and two businesses commented it would sell at a "slower" pace. In terms of value, three businesses commented that the trail would make "no difference" in the amount their business would sell and three businesses said it would sell for "less money."

In their own words residents were asked to express how they think the extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail will affect the quality of their neighborhood. Nine positive comments were provided including: "will be able to meet new people," "safer for recreational use and exercise," "it will make a good place for children and young people in our neighborhood (2 mentions)," "it is good!" "the rail-trail will improve it (the resource)," "everybody can use it to walk on so people get together more," "it will clean up an old railroad track," and "provides another place to walk, job, rollerblade, bicycle, etc." Six neutral comments were provided including: "remains to be seen (2 mentions)," "not sure, there are a lot of mosquitoes in the area," "no real change in the neighborhood," "land is used for hunting," and "don't know yet, but hope it is good." Eight negative comments were provided including: "the rail-trail will just bring more noise, dope and drinkers to the village," "we came to this land to farm, not to see people," "trash and the number of people using it, trespassing on property," "property damage, trash and littering," "poor effect," "it will make a poor neighborhood," "I wouldn't walk alone on it," and "I hope the people who have been on the trail so far keep walking." Three respondents gave no comment.

The six businesses who responded to the survey held a wide variety of opinions on whether the Rail-Trail would be worse or better than the abandoned railroad right-of-way. Two businesses felt the Rail-Trail would be "much better" than the railroad right-of-way (Table 22). The remaining four businesses ranged from "moderately better" to "much worse" in their rating. Explanations for these rating included: "the rail-trail would be a productive use of non-used property that benefits the area," "important for use of property, benefits the residents," "trail will bring customers," "no real effect," "rail-trail is a threat to children's safety (because of delivery trucks)," and "truck/trailer traffic and recreation trail traffic don't mix."

Of the residents who responded to the survey about one-third felt the rail-trail would have more of a negative influence than the existing abandoned railroad, a third were neutral and a third felt the trail would be positive. Explanations for these ratings were categorized into negative, neutral and positive. Negative comments included: "without patrols, crime will increase," "trespassing on property, waste, damage and stealing on/from property will occur," "trash on property and motorcyclists intrusion," "property should have been returned to owners after 1999 lease finished," "loss of privacy," "people on property will cause damage," "part of rail-trail land was once our property and would like to get it back," "increased traffic in view of our home when before there was none," and "many of trees will have to be cut down." Positive comments included: "the trail will be useful to many," "safer for the children on bikes (3 mentions)," "I will use the trail for exercise," "a pleasant view from my house," "physical benefit," "less noise (than

trains)," "I hope landscaping will be better," and "it will be taken care of and weeds won't grow up." Neutral respondents expressed "no effect."

In another question, adjacent residents were asked to express their thoughts, either positive or negative, about the rail-trail extension in Isabella County. There were an assortment of positive and negative comments. The positive comments included: "will be good for children, will give them something to do (3 mentions)," "we will use it more often," "they should finish it sooner, it will be great when finished," "will be nice for walking," and "good and useful." The negative comments included: "concerned about trash on their property," "should have given back the land on both sides of the track, since it was in the family for so long," "will require police patrol, because there have been many robberies in the past year," "pollution of the area, we would like to see preserved for wildlife sanctuary," "keep it out!" "I don't want to be responsible for any one on my property," "littering could become a problem," "just get the project underway, you have been planning for so long," "it sucks" and "it is a waste of money." At the very end of the survey, three additional comments were expressed. One respondent wants the county to mow the grass in front of the rail-trail area. Another respondents is disappointed that Midland County has not completed the trail through Coleman, as it leaves 4/10 of a mile on the road which is dangerous. A final respondent said "we pay taxes here to be in the country. However, we have no choices, no voice in anything."

Table 21. Expected Influence of Rail-Trail

	Very negative influence	Moderate negative influence	Neutral	Moderate positive influence	Very positive influence	Mean ^a
Business results:						
Community	0%	0	33.3	0	66.7	4.3
Isabella County	0	0	33.3	33.3	33.4	4.0
Neighborhood	16.7	0	16.7	33.3	33.3	3.7
Employees	0	0	50.0	50.0	0	3.5
Resident results:						
Isabella County	23.1%	7.7	26.9	34.6	7.7	3.0
Community	30.8	3.8	23.1	30.8	11.5	2.9
Neighborhood	26.9	3.8	38.5	23.1	7.7	2.8
Family or other household members' lives	34.6	0	34.6	19.2	11.5	2.7
Own life	34.6	0	42.3	11.5	11.5	2.7

^a Rating scale where "1" equals very negative influence and "5" equals very positive influence.

Table 22. Comparison of Rail-Trail to Abandoned Railroad Right-of-way

	Much worse	Moderately worse	Neutral	Moderately better	Much better	Mean^a
Businesses	16.7%	16.7	16.7	16.7	33.3	3.3
Residents	30.8	3.9	30.8	23.1	11.5	2.8

^a Rating scale where "1" equals much worse and "5" equals much better.

Conclusions and Implications

The extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail through the northwest corner of Isabella County is designed to provide recreation opportunities for county residents and visitors. Based on this census of adjacent residents and nearby businesses, it has also engendered a wide variety of public opinion. These opinions range from strongly supportive of the concept, construction and implementation of the trail to opposed to it at all phases.

Among businesses there is more support or neutrality than opposition. Concerns focus primarily on safety of trail users and concerns about liability for businesses at driveway crossings. Support focuses on the trail being a community improvement and attracting visitors to the local area.

For adjacent residents, three distinct groups of opinions are evident. A third see the trail as an improvement over the existing abandoned industrial corridor. They see the recreational opportunity, especially for neighborhood children, as positive and the trail as aesthetically pleasing. Another third, who were neutral, expressed few opinions. A final third were negative. They had distinct opinions and concerns. They were historical concerns about wanting the land in their private ownership, land which had been in their family's ownership prior to the railroad. Others were concerned about the potential for litter, trespass and safety of their person or property. Finally, there were aesthetic concerns about changes in the landscape (cutting of trees) or seeing people where they previously saw none.

It is important for Isabella County to address these concerns. We are recommending that the questions posed by respondents be addressed by a variety of means. These may include newspaper articles, personalized letters, an educational flyer, informing key "information sharers" to improve word-of-mouth communication and the township newsletter. As construction dates become more definite, residents and businesses should be notified about activities related to the rail-trail. The County and Friends of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail can also begin to think about volunteer programs. The results of this study suggest that putting up bird houses might be the most successful in terms of resident involvement. After the trail is constructed, efforts should be made to encourage residents, employees of local businesses, and visitors to use the trail. Messages that promote enjoying nature, health benefits and relaxation would be positive for motivating adjacent residents. Over time, the goal would be that a majority of the adjacent residents and businesses would be strong supporters, users and stewards of the rail-trail.

Appendix A
Mail Questionnaire
Nearby Businesses

Survey of Isabella County Businesses
Located Near the Extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail

*Sponsored by Michigan State University, Michigan Dept. of Natural Resources,
and Michigan Dept. of Transportation*

Instructions

Thank you for agreeing to complete this survey about your business or operations that is located near the Isabella County extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail. Your responses are very important to Isabella County and will also help other communities. Please read each question carefully before responding. Answer to the best of your ability and save any additional comments for the end. The map (above) is provided to show the location of the Rail-Trail.

The first set of questions asks about your business or operations.

1. Had you heard about the Isabella County extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail before receiving this survey? (Please no or yes and then continue with second part)

NO, CONTINUE TO QUESTION 2

YES, How did you first learn about the extension of the trail? (check one)

- NEWSPAPER
- WORD-OF-MOUTH
- TOWNSHIP NEWSLETTER
- TRAIL BROCHURE
- PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING
- OTHER PUBLIC MEETING
- OTHER _____

2. How would you classify your business or operation that is next to the Isabella County extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail? (please check all that apply)

- LIGHT INDUSTRIAL OR WAREHOUSE
- CONSUMER SERVICES OR RETAIL
- SOMETHING ELSE (PLEASE DESCRIBE) _____

3. How long has your business been at its current location (i.e., near the extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail)? (fill in number of years)

_____ NUMBER OF YEARS OCCUPIED

4. How many full-time and part-time employees are employed? (fill in a number)

_____ FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES _____ PART-TIME EMPLOYEES

5. How would you describe the property in relation to the Isabella County extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail? (check one)

- TRAIL INTERSECTS PROPERTY
- ADJACENT OR RIGHT NEXT TO THE TRAIL
- NEAR THE TRAIL

6. How far is the main building from the actual trail? (fill in a number in yards or miles)

_____ YARDS OR _____ PORTION OF A MILE

The next questions ask about any involvement you or employees might have had in the development of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail.

7. Did you or employees attend any planning meetings during the late 1990's for the Isabella County extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail? *(please check one)*

NO YES NOT SURE NOT HERE DURING THAT TIME

8. How informed do you feel about the design and estimated usage of the soon to be trail? *(check one)*

Not informed at all **Minimally informed** **Moderately informed** **Fully informed**

9. Have you or any of your employees been involved in the planning, development or maintenance of the trail? *(please describe)*

NO YES, PLEASE DESCRIBE _____

10. Are you a member of the Friends of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail? *(please check one)*

NEVER NO LONGER YES, CURRENTLY A MEMBER

11. Do you think that you or any of your employees will use the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail before work? During breaks? Or after work? *(check one for each time and then explain usage)*

	No	Yes	If yes, what would the rail-trail be used for?
BEFORE WORK	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
DURING BREAKS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
AFTER WORK	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

12. How would you rate your level of support of the following items related to the Isabella County extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail? *(please circle a response for each statement)*

	Very opposed	Moderately opposed	Neutral	Moderately supportive	Very supportive
IDEA OF TRAIL BEFORE IT IS BUILT	1	2	3	4	5
TRAIL PLANNING AND DESIGN PROCESS	1	2	3	4	5
EXISTING TRAIL IN MIDLAND COUNTY	1	2	3	4	5
TRAIL CONNECTING CLARE TO COLEMAN	1	2	3	4	5
NONMOTORIZED USE ONLY ON TRAIL	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B
Mail Questionnaire
Adjacent Landowner Residents

Survey of Isabella County Residents Living Next to the Extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail

*Sponsored by Michigan State University, Michigan Dept. of Natural Resources, and Michigan Dept. of
Transportation*

Instructions:

Thank you for agreeing to complete this survey about living near the Isabella County extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail. Your responses are very important to Isabella County and will help in the development of rail-trails. Please read each question carefully before responding. Answer to the best of your ability and save any additional comments for the end. The map (above) is provided to show the location of the Rail-Trail.

The first set of questions asks about your familiarity with the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail and your property.

1. Had you heard about the Isabella County extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail before receiving this survey? *(Please check no or yes and then continue with second part)*

NO, CONTINUE TO QUESTION 2

YES, How did you first learn about the extension of the trail? *(check one)*

- NEWSPAPER
- WORD-OF-MOUTH
- TOWNSHIP NEWSLETTER
- TRAIL BROCHURE
- PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING
- OTHER PUBLIC MEETING
- OTHER _____

2. How would you describe your property in relation to the Isabella County extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail? *(please check one)*

- ADJACENT OR RIGHT NEXT TO THE TRAIL
- TRAIL INTERSECTS PROPERTY

3. How far is your house from the actual trail? *(fill in a number in yards or miles)*

_____ YARDS OR _____ PORTION OF A MILE

4. During the summer, can you see the site of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail extension from your house? *(please circle one)*

Not at all

Partial view

Full view

1

2

3

5. How would you classify your property that is near the extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail? *(please check all that apply)*

- RESIDENTIAL HOME
- APARTMENT OR MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING
- BUSINESS OPERATIONS
- AGRICULTURAL USE
- UNDEVELOPED LAND
- SOMETHING ELSE (PLEASE DESCRIBE) _____

6. How long have you occupied or owned the property in Isabella County near the extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail? *(fill in number of years)*

_____ NUMBER OF YEARS OCCUPIED PROPERTY

7. Was it an active or abandoned railroad when you purchased your property? *(check one)*

- ACTIVE RAILROAD
- ABANDONED RAILROAD

8. When you purchased your property, did you consider how the rail corridor might be used in the future? *(please check no or yes and then continue with second part)*

NO, CONTINUE TO QUESTION 9

YES, WHAT USES DID YOU ANTICIPATE? _____

The next questions ask about any involvement you or members of your household might have had in the development of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail.

9. How informed would you say you and your household are about the Isabella County extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail? *(please circle one)*

Not informed at all **Minimally informed** **Moderately informed** **Fully informed**
1 **2** **3** **4**

10. Have you or anyone in your household been involved in the planning, development or maintenance of the trail? *(please check one and describe if your answer is "yes")*

NO, CONTINUE TO QUESTION 11 YES, PLEASE DESCRIBE

11. Are you a member of the Friends of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail? *(please one)*

NEVER NO LONGER YES, CURRENTLY A MEMBER

12. How would you rate your level of support on the following items about the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail? *(please circle a response for each statement)*

	Very opposed	Mode- rately opposed	Neu- tral	Mode- rately support- I've	Very support- I've
IDEA OF TRAIL BEFORE IT IS BUILT	1	2	3	4	5
TRAIL PLANNING AND DECISION PROCESS	1	2	3	4	5
EXISTING TRAIL IN MIDLAND COUNTY	1	2	3	4	5
TRAIL CONNECTING CLARE TO COLEMAN	1	2	3	4	5
NON-MOTORIZED USE ONLY	1	2	3	4	5

The next questions ask about how the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail might influence your neighborhood and community.

13. What influence do you think the Isabella County extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail will have on the following? *(please circle a response for each statement)*

	Very negative influence	Moderate negative influence	Neutral	Moderate positive influence	Very positive influence
YOUR LIFE	1	2	3	4	5
FAMILY OR OTHER HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS LIVES	1	2	3	4	5
YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD	1	2	3	4	5
YOUR COMMUNITY	1	2	3	4	5
ISABELLA COUNTY	1	2	3	4	5

14. Please describe how you think the Isabella County extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail will affect the quality of your neighborhood? *(write in space below)*

15. Overall, did you think living near the extension of Pere Marquette Rail-Trail will be worse or better than living near the abandoned railroad right-of-way? *(please circle one response)*

Much worse	Moderately worse	Neutral	Moderately better	Much better
1	2	3	4	5

Could you please explain why you selected your response? _____

16. Overall, how satisfied are you with the Isabella County extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail near your property? *(please circle one response)*

Very dissatisfied	Moderately dissatisfied	Neutral	Moderately satisfied	Very satisfied
1	2	3	4	5

Could you explain why you selected your answer? _____

The next set of questions are about your involvement in outdoor recreation and usage of the Midland County portion of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail.

17. People recreate outdoors for many reasons and in many different ways. How important are the following reasons for outdoor recreation to you and your household? *(please circle a response for each statement)*

<u>We recreate to:</u>	Not at all important	Slightly important	Mode- rately important	Very important	Extremely important
EXERCISE	1	2	3	4	5
BE OUTSIDE	1	2	3	4	5
ENJOY NATURE	1	2	3	4	5
PROMOTE HEALTH	1	2	3	4	5
RELAX	1	2	3	4	5
BE WITH OTHERS	1	2	3	4	5
BE ALONE	1	2	3	4	5
SPEND FREE TIME	1	2	3	4	5
TRAIN FOR SPORTS	1	2	3	4	5
CULTURAL STUDY AND EDUCATION	1	2	3	4	5
FUN AND ENJOYMENT	1	2	3	4	5
EXPLORE AREAS OF THE COUNTY	1	2	3	4	5

18. Have you or anyone in your household used the Midland County portion of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail?

NO, SKIP TO QUESTION 21

YES, WHAT ONE REASON IN THE LIST IN QUESTION 17 BEST DESCRIBES THIS TRAIL USE?

19. How often have you and members of your household used the Midland County portion of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail? *(check one for each person in household)*

	Few times a year	Once a month	Couple times a month	Weekly	Daily
YOURSELF	—	—	—	—	—
SPOUSE OR ANOTHER ADULT	—	—	—	—	—
CHILDREN (#1)	—	—	—	—	—
CHILDREN (#2)	—	—	—	—	—
CHILDREN (#3)	—	—	—	—	—
CHILDREN (#4)	—	—	—	—	—

20. What activities have you or members of your household participated in on the Midland County portion of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail? *(check all that apply)*

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> WALKING | <input type="checkbox"/> IN-LINE SKATING | <input type="checkbox"/> PICNICKING |
| <input type="checkbox"/> JOGGING | <input type="checkbox"/> NATURE STUDY | <input type="checkbox"/> VISIT ATTRACTIONS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> BICYCLING | <input type="checkbox"/> PHOTOGRAPHY | <input type="checkbox"/> SOMETHING ELSE _____ |
| | | _____ |

21. Have you or members of your household recreated on any other rail-trails? *(please one)*

NO YES, WHICH ONES? _____

The next question asks you to share any thoughts you may have about the extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail in Isabella County.

22. What thoughts do you have about the Rail-Trail, either positive or negative? *(please write in the space below)*

23. What questions do you have about the Rail-Trail at this time? *(please write in the space below)*

24. After the Isabella County extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail is complete, how interested would you and others in your household be in participating in the following trail-related activities? *(circle a number each)*

<u>Activities related to the trail:</u>	Not at all interested	Slightly interested	Moderately interested	Very interested	Extremely interested
ANNUAL BIKE-A-THON	1	2	3	4	5
PUTTING UP AND MAINTAINING BIRDHOUSES	1	2	3	4	5
HELPING AS A TRAIL GUIDE	1	2	3	4	5
ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING NATIVE PRAIRIE PLANTS ALONG THE TRAIL	1	2	3	4	5
ANNUAL CLEANUP DAYS	1	2	3	4	5
ADOPT-A-TRAIL TRASH PICKUP	1	2	3	4	5
ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING SPECIAL GARDENS ALONG THE TRAIL	1	2	3	4	5

25. Are there any special places along the trail area that you think others would enjoy visiting? Please share where these places are located and why they are interesting *(describe below)*.

This final section of the survey asks for descriptive information on your household. This information will be kept in the strictest confidence and used for statistical purposes only.

26. What is your gender? MALE FEMALE
27. What are the ages of adults and children in your household? *(fill in age for each person)*
 ADULT AGES: _____
 CHILDREN AGES: _____
28. How many years have you lived in Isabella County? _____ YEARS
29. What is your present employment status? *(please check one)*
 EMPLOYED, FULL-TIME RETIRED UNEMPLOYED STUDENT
 EMPLOYED, PART-TIME SELF-EMPLOYED HOMEMAKER OTHER

30. What was the highest grade or number of years you completed in school or college? *(please circle a number)*

8 9 10 11 12	13 14 15 16	17 18 19 20 21 22 23
Thru High School	College/Tech. School	Graduate School

31. Which statement best describes your total 1999 annual household income (from all sources and before taxes)? *(please check one)*

- LESS THAN \$20,000 \$40,000 - \$59,999 \$80,000 OR MORE
 \$20,000 - \$39,999 \$60,000 - \$79,999 CHOOSE NOT TO ANSWER

Thank you for completing this survey. Please return it in the envelope or to C. Vogt, Michigan State Univ., 131 Natural Resources Bldg., East Lansing, MI. 48824-1222. If there is anything else to add, please share it in the space below.

Appendix C

Cover Letter

First Business Letter

April 18, 2000

Insert Business Name and address and town/state/zip from mail merge

Dear Insert Name:

Michigan State University, the Michigan Department of Transportation, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources are cooperating to study the use and value of rail-trails. We are currently assisting Isabella County Parks and Recreation Commission in the extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail from Coleman to Clare. The trail will be located where the old railroad tracks were along old Business 10 (Saginaw Road).

We are surveying all business owners near the extension of the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail. We acquired your name and address from recent property tax records or by identifying businesses in the area. If these records are incorrect or not current, please let us know.

The enclosed questionnaire asks about your experiences as a business landowner next to the abandoned railroad right-of-way and your experiences with the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail in Midland County. Your responses are completely confidential and your name will not be associated with any of the results.

Your response is critical in developing a better understanding of how rail-trails impact local communities. The results will be heard by trail managers and those who fund trail development and management, including the Michigan Department of Transportation and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Please take the 10 or so minutes necessary to complete the questionnaire. You indicate your voluntary agreement to participate by completing and returning this questionnaire. However, if you choose not to participate, you will not suffer any penalty.

When you have completed the questionnaire, please mail it back to us in the postage paid envelope provided. If you have any questions or concerns about this survey, please contact either of us at 517-353-5190 or e-mail at vogt@msu.edu. If you need to contact someone at Michigan State University other than the researchers about this survey, chairperson Dr. David Wright, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, can be reached at 517-355-2180 or by e-mail at ucrihs@msu.edu. Thanks for your help.

Sincerely,

Christine Vogt
Visiting Professor
vogtc@msu.edu

Charles Nelson
Associate Professor

Enc.