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**Cluster:** Environment, Development, and Sustainability

### Further Reading:

Manton, R., Hynes, S. & Clifford, E. (2016). [Greenways as a tourism resource: A study of user spending and value](#). *Tourism Planning & Development*. DOI: 10.1080/21568316.2015.1136835

Manton, R., Duggan, A., Goggins, J. & Clifford, E. (2014). Carbon costs and savings of Greenways: creating a balance sheet for the sustainable design and construction of cycling routes. *International Journal of Environment and Sustainable Development*, 13(1), pp. 3-19.

Manton, R. & Clifford, E. (2013). Review of construction and maintenance guidelines for Greenways. *Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers - Transport*, 167, pp. 377-383.

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**Read More About:** The [Environment, Development, and Sustainability](#) cluster within the Whitaker Institute for Innovation and Societal Change.

*The content and views included in this policy brief are based on independent, peer-reviewed research and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Whitaker Institute.*

## Greenways: public resources for sustainable tourism and recreation

Cycling is increasingly recognised as a key mode in reducing the environmental impact of transport, promoting physical activity and developing the tourism sector. The provision of safe and attractive cycling routes is an important part of encouraging uptake of cycling. Greenways, as traffic-free trails, are fast becoming a feature of the landscape with an emphasis on tourism and recreation. Although greenways are relatively expensive to deliver (typically €100,000 per kilometre), they have received significant funding in recent years: at least €30 million in Ireland in the last five years). National and local government require evidence of return on this investment, yet there is a lack of information on the economic impact of greenways.

### Research Findings

This study of 1125 international greenway users found the average spend per user per night to be €47, with accommodation and food & drink accounting for the largest share. Interestingly, Irish greenway users spend more than twice their UK counterparts on motor fuel (and substantially less on public transport), suggesting that Irish greenways are less accessible and more reliant on car-based travel. A case study involving the Great Western Greenway (GWG) between Westport and Achill in Co. Mayo was examined in greater detail in this study. The GWG cost €7.2 million to build and is regarded as a greenway 'success story' and a demonstrator for a future cycle network. Surveyed GWG users (n = 277) spent an average of €51 per night. Again, motor fuel costs to this rural location were disproportionately high, accounting for 15% of all greenway-related expenditure.

A Travel Cost Model was used to examine the effect of travel cost on the number of greenway trips taken by survey respondents. Unsurprisingly, an increase in travel costs reduced the number of greenway trips taken. Also, being employed, a student, retired, married or having children all increased greenway trip frequency. Using the model results, the consumer surplus per trip was calculated to be €77 or 83% of the total value. This figure represents the value of access to the greenway to the visitor above what has actually been spent. It indicates the significant potential that these routes possess as resources for tourism and recreation. It was also interesting to note from the survey that 72% of respondents objected to making any direct financial contribution for greenway access. Users conceptualise greenways as public resources and, though open to supporting the use of public funds for greenway construction, most would not pay a direct charge for greenway use.

### Policy Implications

The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and local authorities are currently planning, and investing, in a 2,000 km Irish National Cycle Network. This network should prioritise greenway-standard routes and should link to EuroVelo, the European cycle network, to capture the economic benefits of cycle tourism and deliver a return on investment. Moreover, government funding schemes should promote the accessibility and connectivity of greenways, foster integration with public transport and ensure the protection of wildlife. These attributes recognise broader benefits of greenway infrastructure to the environment, society and the economy as well as the importance of a modal shift to cycling. Greenways, if properly planned and designed, can represent sustainable resources for all to enjoy.

