Indianapolis Cultural Trail sees thousands of users during Super Bowl

The Indianapolis Cultural Trail: A Legacy of Gene and Marilyn Glick (Cultural Trail) started with a vision of an urban trail network that would highlight the many culturally rich neighborhoods and promote the walkability of the city of Indianapolis. Based upon the success of the Monon Trail and the Indy Greenways system, the Cultural Trail was designed to connect the five Indianapolis cultural districts (the Wholesale District, Indiana Avenue, the Canal & White River State Park, Fountain Square, and Mass Ave) and Broad Ripple Village. While each cultural district exhibits unique characteristics and offers much to visitors and residents alike, connecting the districts offers greater potential to leverage the cities’ assets and promote its walkability. The Cultural Trail also serves as a downtown connector for much of the Indianapolis Greenways system.

When complete, the trail will encompass approximately seven miles extending from 10th Street on the north to Fountain Square on the south. The Cultural Trail provides access to the IUPUI campus and the Central Canal on the west side of downtown, and Alabama Street and the Mass Ave corridor to the east, with connectors on Washington and Walnut streets to complete the loop. As a valuable community asset, the Cultural Trail will serve as a resource for residents and a draw for visitors and tourists.

The length and location of the Cultural Trail provides an infrastructure for recreation, exercise, transit, and tourism. Because of its strategic design, it not only allows users access to the cultural districts, but also the amenities within each district. One way to assess the level of impact and value to the community is to count the number of users of the Cultural Trail. To that end, researchers at the IU Public Policy Institute (PPI) asked the Cultural Trail officials to establish a number of temporary data collection locations. Currently, PPI collects data for the Indy Greenways trail network. PPI began counting trail traffic at four locations along the Monon Trail in February 2001, and is currently monitoring a network of 19 locations on seven trails in Indianapolis including the Monon, Fall Creek, Canal Towpath, Eagle Creek, White River, Pennsy, and Pleasant Run trails. There were two primary goals for setting up counters along the Cultural Trail: first, to show the benefit and potential uses of trail data, and second, to analyze the impact of a large downtown event like the Super Bowl.

This report presents data collected at two points along the Cultural Trail (Alabama Street and Glick Peace Walk) during a three-week period around the 2012 Super Bowl festivities. After identifying the features located along the Cultural Trail and a brief description of the methodology, the report presents the collected data.

Description of the cultural districts along the Indianapolis Cultural Trail

The Cultural Trail passes through two locations in the Wholesale District, which sits in the heart of downtown. The first section runs east and west along Washington Street in front of the Indiana Repertory Theatre, the Conrad Hilton, and Circle Centre Mall. From this stretch of the Cultural Trail, pedestrians and cyclists have access to historic Monument Circle. The second location runs north and south along Capitol Avenue from the Indiana Statehouse, by the Indiana Convention Center and to Lucas Oil Stadium. In the middle of the Wholesale District, the Cultural Trail provides access to and from, the newly renovated Georgia Street which links the Indiana Convention Center to Banker’s Life Fieldhouse.

The Indiana Avenue cultural district is anchored by Indiana Avenue, which runs diagonally through the northwest quadrant of downtown. At the heart of the district lie the historic Madame C.J. Walker Theatre Center, Ransom Place Neighborhood, and the IUPUI campus. The Cultural Trail provides access to and from, the Central
Canal along St. Clair Street through Ransom Place. There is significant residential development currently underway on the north end of Indiana Avenue which could be home to IUPUI students using the Cultural Trail on their way to campus, or young professionals using the trail to exercise or commute downtown. The Cultural Trail also runs north and south, from Indiana Avenue, along Blackford Street through the IUPUI campus to Military Park. The Cultural Trail provides an important link from IUPUI to Military Park, which hosts many large outdoor events and cultural festivals.

The Canal & White River State Park district is located on the west end of downtown. This district is densely packed with several attractions easily accessible from the Cultural Trail such as the NCAA Hall of Champions, Indiana State Museum and IMAX Theater, Eiteljorg Museum, and White River State Park. The Canal Walk, a three-mile loop that has been incorporated into the Cultural Trail, is a popular destination for both fitness enthusiasts and those who seek a more casual pace. Along much of the Canal Walk are residential apartments, condominiums, and hotels—home to potential trail users. The Canal Walk also provides access to the Indiana History Center, restaurants, and recreational activities such as Segway and bicycle tours, kayaks and paddleboats, and gondola rides. The Canal Walk extends from north of 10th Street to the south where it meets White River State Park. From White River State Park, users have access to the White River Greenway.

Fountain Square is located on the city’s southeast side and is connected to downtown by Virginia Avenue. This historic neighborhood has undergone extensive revitalization in recent years and, as a result, is becoming a vibrant and diverse neighborhood while retaining its originality and distinct characteristics. The Cultural Trail, upon completion, will run along Virginia Avenue connecting visitors and residents to the numerous restaurants, antique stores, and art galleries in Fountain Square. The Cultural Trail can take pedestrians and cyclists from Banker’s Life Fieldhouse, through the Fletcher Runner on the Cultural Trail in the Indiana Ave District
Map 1: The Indianapolis Cultural Trail

Source: Indianapolis Cultural Trail (www.indyculturaltrail.org/map)
Note: Broad Ripple Village is not shown on the map (above) because it is not a cultural district.
Place neighborhood and into the heart of Fountain Square. From Virginia Avenue, the trail connects users to more shops, restaurants, and galleries along Prospect Avenue and Shelby Street. There also has been substantial residential development along Virginia Avenue; these residents can use the Cultural Trail to travel downtown or into Fountain Square.

The Mass Ave cultural district is located northeast of downtown and runs diagonally along Massachusetts Avenue, southwest to northeast, from Delaware Street to 10th Street. Mass Ave is anchored by the Lockerbie Square (to the south) and Chatham Arch (to the north) neighborhoods, with new residential development along the northeast end of Massachusetts Avenue. From the Cultural Trail, users can walk or ride to performances at the Murat Theatre at Old National Centre, attend religious services at any of the five churches, or enjoy the many boutiques, restaurants, and art galleries in the district. For residents of the area, the Cultural Trail may serve as a route for exercise or to the neighborhood grocery store or to the two area YMCAs. In addition to the many attractions along Massachusetts Avenue, the Cultural Trail also provides a link to City Market and the Bike Hub. The section of the trail along the Mass Ave district may prove to be a popular attraction for cyclists from where Massachusetts Avenue meets the Monon Trail at 10th Street. The 10th Street corridor is a popular route for bicycle commuters and cycling enthusiasts and serves as a creative way to connect the downtown cultural districts to Broad Ripple Village. Additionally, from the Monon Trail, users can access the Fall Creek Trail and the Central Canal Towpath.

Broad Ripple Village is located about six miles north of downtown, along the banks of the White River, and is a major attraction along the Monon Trail. Broad Ripple is home to a diverse mix of residents and because of its many restaurants, boutiques, and art galleries, it is a frequent destination for visitors and tourists, particularly on weeknights and weekends. Additionally, Broad Ripple is host to several art and cultural events throughout the year. Furthermore, Broad Ripple is an important midpoint between Downtown Indianapolis and the city of Carmel, with all three destinations linked by the Monon Trail.

Now that the Monon Trail is linked to Downtown Indianapolis, through the convenience of the Cultural Trail, and the city of Carmel, it may prove to be an increasingly effective commuting route for cyclists.

**Methodology and the value of usage data**
Counts can be used to determine total usage and to track changes in use over time. Data collection may aid in determining the effectiveness of event promotions and program marketing implemented to guide more people to specific venues. Trail user counts also can provide support to grant applications, justification for future investments, and a means to foster community support. In short, counting can help highlight the benefits of the trail and potentially help guide policy, programs, and future investments.
The equipment utilized to collect the data consists of a transmitter and a receiver located opposite one another on either side of the trail or path. The transmitter emits an infrared beam that is sensed by the receiver; each time a trail user passes through the beam, the counter records one event. These records are then inputted into a data model to forecast counts. The model is primarily responsible for ensuring all users are counted and eliminating those who may be double counted on roundtrips.

To begin the study of usage and install counters and collection points on the Cultural Trail, a three-week test period was established to coincide with the Super Bowl in Indianapolis. While the Super Bowl clearly would draw more visitors to the area than usual, it provided an opportunity to measure the impact of a major downtown event on the Cultural Trail. Counter locations were established beginning after the Super Bowl Village opened (week 1), and remained in place through Super Bowl weekend and the days immediately following to account for tear-down and other clean-up related activities (week 2). The third and final week was after the Super Bowl activities had concluded, which would provide an opportunity to measure normal usage.

Two locations were selected for counter placement. The first was located on Alabama Street between New York and Vermont streets. This location was chosen because it serves as a means to connect downtown visitors to the Mass Ave corridor. The counter location was established on the east side of Alabama Street and recorded northbound and southbound usage. At this location, the Cultural Trail consists of two lanes. The west half of the trail is laid with patterned brick while the east half is a sidewalk that runs along the adjacent buildings. The counter only recorded traffic on the west half of the Cultural Trail. This report takes into account the counter location and recognizes that some trail use occurred on the east half of the trail; making the recorded counts conservative.

The second location, at the Glick Peace Walk, was chosen because it was outside the perimeter of designed Super Bowl activities. The transmitter and receiver were positioned opposite from each other on the north and south sides of the Cultural Trail and recorded both eastbound and westbound usage.
Results of the counts
To better understand the quantities and types of usage, it is necessary to examine the two locations of counts separately. Because the locations offer different features and surrounding amenities, it is useful to examine usage in both peak hours and peak days to better illustrate the various ways in which the trail is and can be used. The Alabama Street location, which is between downtown and Massachusetts Avenue, is situated in an area of high traffic for shopping, dining, and entertainment. The Glick Peace Walk is located along Walnut Street between Capitol Avenue and Meridian Street. It is more isolated, by design, to provide a serene environment for trail users. Although these locations represent different users and features, understanding how and when the trail is used is essential to appreciating the benefits and attributing value.

Alabama Street location
The counter at the Alabama Street location recorded 11,649 counts for the three-week observation period. Trail use was consistent through the weekdays with increased usage during the weekends, which may be driven by the surrounding amenities and attractions, including salons and shopping boutiques, places of worship, art galleries and studios, and numerous restaurants (Figure 1). The volume during weekdays is steady which demonstrates the strength and capacity of trail use during business hours. The weekday counts represent potential opportunity for area restaurants, grocery stores, and retail businesses to attract people on breaks or after work. Also, the recently added Bike Hub at City Market, just south of the counter location, may drive bicycle traffic through the area. Because of the Super Bowl, the weekend data are skewed, but still relevant. For example, for the three weeks measured, 2,112 counts were recorded on Fridays; however, the Friday before the Super Bowl accounted for over 60 percent of these Friday counts. That particular Friday (February 3, 2012) was highlighted by a concert and strong attendance at Super Bowl Village, which attracted large crowds. This spike in counts demonstrates the potential for significant usage during big events. The post-Super Bowl weekend counts indicate the Cultural Trail is used frequently and may be incorporated into various weekend activities. Furthermore, the high counts during Super Bowl weekend demonstrate the trail’s capability to attract and move crowds between downtown and Massachusetts Avenue, especially during large events such as conferences, festivals, and cultural and sporting events.

Identifying peak hours offers an in-depth glimpse into the usage of the Cultural Trail (Figure 2). Without querying the users, we can only presume the reasons for trail use, but use during specific timeframes suggests possibilities. Early morning counts may indicate users implementing the trail for commuting to work or exercising before work. Afternoon counts may indicate people using the trail to go to a restaurant for lunch or running midday errands. Evening counts may reflect people using the trail to commute home, exercise after work, or to go to dinner.

Figure 2: Total users of the Cultural Trail counted on weekdays, by hour, Alabama Street location, 2012

Note: Study period is January 29, 2012 through February 18, 2012. Each bar represents an aggregate count, by weekday hours, for the three-week period. The counts include Monday – Friday for January 30-February 3, February 6-February 10, and February 13-February 17.
Much of the traffic may be supported by growing residential development on Massachusetts Avenue, and the Chatham Arch and Lockerbie Square neighborhoods. Furthermore, the counter was placed in front of the local grocery store which serves these surrounding neighborhoods. The weekday morning counts follow a strong stair-step progression. Between the hours of 8am and 11am, there is a steady stream of users which may be commuters traveling to work or those engaging in early exercise. The 11am-12pm counts show a strong increase in users as the lunch hour approaches with a sudden spike between 12pm and 1pm. Moreover, Saint Mary Catholic Church holds a 12pm Mass, Monday through Friday. Between 4pm and 7pm, there is another spike in use. This timeframe could indicate this increased count is people leaving work, shopping or traveling to dinner. Trail use begins to decrease at 7pm, and by 8pm usage levels are less than those seen after 11am.

The weekend peak hours for the Alabama Street location demonstrate a much more gradual pattern of progression (Figure 3). The weekend traffic on the trail seems to be greater between noon and 5pm, which may be explained by the lunchtime activity and proximity of five churches. Many of these churches begin Sunday service around 10am, with a traditional service lasting an hour to an hour and thirty minutes. There was a shuttle service provided to drive people from downtown hotels to Mass Ave and because the counter was only placed on the west lane of the Trail, it is certain the number of people in the area is underestimated by the results of the count. After 4pm, the counts drop precipitously into the evening, and by 8pm the counts are less than at 9am. The weekend peak hours are helpful as many festivals and cultural events generally take place on weekends. Also, the Murat Theatre, a venue for concerts and theatrical events, and many churches are within walking distance of this location on the Trail. More importantly though, the data suggest the trail accomplishes its primary objectives: providing a distinct path through the cultural districts while promoting the walkability of the city.

**Glick Peace Walk location**

During the three-week observation period, the counting device at the Glick Peace Walk location recorded 3,870 total counts (Figure 4). Although this location recorded substantially fewer counts than the Alabama Street location, it is important to understand how the two locations differ. The Peace Walk was designed with 12 sculptural gardens dedicated to honoring individuals devoted to peace and improving the life of others. The Peace Walk was constructed in a location isolated from major centers of activity to offer trail users a more tranquil experience. The Peace Walk offers walkers, runners, and other outdoor enthusiasts access to and from many downtown attractions including the Canal Walk. The counts, per day, remain steady throughout the week. While we suggest most of the users may be recreational and casual, because the Peace Walk links Meridian Street to the Canal, many can use this section of the trail for transit purposes. And because the Trail connects to IUPUI, via the Canal, it serves as an avenue for students walking or bicycling to and from class. It is also worth noting, the count for Fridays, like the Alabama Street location usage, is boosted by pre-Super Bowl festivities as demonstrated by the

![Figure 3: Total users of the Cultural Trail counted on weekends, by hour, Alabama Street location, 2012](image)

*Note: Study period is January 29, 2012 through February 18, 2012. Each bar represents an aggregate count, by weekend hours, for the three-week period. The counts include January 29, February 4, February 5, February 11, February 12, and February 18.*

![Figure 4: Total users of the Cultural Trail counted, by day of the week, Glick Peace Walk location, 2012](image)

*Note: Study period is January 29, 2012 through February 18, 2012. Each bar represents three separate days. For example, Sunday in the figure includes counts on January 29, February 5, and February 12.*
fact that the count on Friday, February 3, represents 55 percent of the total of all Friday counts. This Friday count demonstrates potential for large events to drive trail use and potentially impact all trail segments.

The peak hour breakdown of the Peace Walk counts reinforces the notion that this location is used more for recreation and leisure than the part of the Trail near the Alabama Street location (Figure 5). Morning users, possibly walkers and joggers, demonstrate the strong usage around 8am. The main hours of use for the Peace Walk are between 4pm and 6pm. These after-work hours provide an opportunity for people to exercise or enjoy the outdoors before the evening hours.

Figure 5: Total users of the Cultural Trail counted on weekdays, by hour, Glick Peace Walk location, 2012

The weekend peak hours indicate strong usage during the late morning and early afternoon (Figure 6). Between the hours of 10am and 1pm there are steady counts of users. This timeframe can expect to see walkers, runners, and cyclists using the trail. The peak weekend hour for the Peace Walk is between 1pm and 2pm. This peak is followed by a steady decline until the 4pm to 5pm hour where there is another, smaller spike in usage. After 5pm, the weekend counts fall quickly at this location. Still, the weekend counts show the Cultural Trail is used frequently indicating value to the community with the potential to contribute significantly to improving public health by providing an urban safe, delineated path for physical activity.

Super Bowl week
Few events compare in magnitude to the Super Bowl. But Indianapolis hosts many other significant downtown events such as the NCAA Men’s and Women’s Final Four, Future Farmers of America Convention, and the Indiana Black Expo. While these other events may pale in comparison, the Super Bowl can effectively highlight possible trends and concentrations of trail usage that other events may produce. Because the Super Bowl is a global event, with media from all over the world in attendance, it is carefully watched and the host city often undergoes intense scrutiny. The city of Indianapolis was seen as tremendously successful, particularly for a “cold weather” city during the months of January and February. The unseasonably warm weather during the Super Bowl festivities undoubtedly contributed to the success and the record crowds, but the Cultural Trail also may be seen as a contributing component.
The study period began on Sunday, January 29 (Figures 7 and 8). The NFL Experience at Super Bowl Village opened on Friday, January 27, which indicated the beginning of the Super Bowl festivities. Because most of the national and international media did not arrive until midweek, it is possible that many of the trail users counted at the beginning of the week were people living within the Indianapolis metropolitan area. By Thursday, most of the media and those in town specifically for the Super Bowl began to arrive. The end of the week was highlighted with numerous Super Bowl parties and a record-setting attendance at Super Bowl Village. The counts peaked for both locations on Friday, February 3, as unseasonably warm weather and concerts brought massive crowds to Georgia Street. Saturday saw a slight decline in trail use with rain and cooler temperatures for much of the afternoon; however, the weather cleared in the evening and the crowds returned downtown for another night of concerts.

The second week of counts started Sunday, February 5, the day of the Super Bowl game. The weather again was unseasonably warm with clear skies, and both residents and visitors ventured out to enjoy the remaining Super Bowl festivities. Monday and Tuesday saw significant trail usage as there were still many visitors and media in town as well as crews responsible for the tear-down and clean-up as the Super Bowl came to a close. By Wednesday, the trail counts returned to what could be categorized as “normal” as most visitors and media had left and colder weather moved into the area. The counts, for both locations, continued to decline through the end of the week as any remaining visitors left and it is possible that most trail users were Indianapolis residents.

The third week of counts was to serve as an observation of how a normal week might look: a week not preceding or following a major event. By Monday, trail usage counts were back up from a weekend low. Tuesday, February 14, was a holiday which may have affected trail usage. By midweek, the weather began to warm and trail usage counts increased at both locations, with peak counts on Friday, February 17. Tracking normal usage is helpful for understanding the ebb and flow of trail use and when the Cultural Trail is likely to attract the most users.

**Figure 7:** Total use of the Cultural Trail through study period, by day, Alabama Street location, 2012

Note: Study period is January 29, 2012 through February 18, 2012; the Super Bowl game day was February 5.

**Figure 8:** Total users of the Cultural Trail counted through study period, by day, Glick Peak Walk location, 2012

Note: Study period is January 29, 2012 through February 18, 2012; the Super Bowl game day was February 5

**Websites for the cultural trail and cultural districts:**
www.indyculturaltrail.org
www.discoverwholesaledistrict.com
www.discoverindianaavenue.com
www.discovercanal.com
www.discoverfountainsquare.com
www.discovermassave.com
www.discoverbroadripplevillage.com
Furthermore, the third week of counts demonstrates how holidays and special occasions can affect trail use.

**Weather and Trail usage**

The weather can have a direct impact on trail usage (Figures 9 and 10). The winter of 2011-2012 was one of the mildest on record, and the counts reflect the good weather. Simply put, if the weather is decent, people will use the Cultural Trail.

The first week of data collection saw three consecutive days with a high temperature above or near 60 degrees with extraordinarily strong Friday counts. While the Super Bowl activities certainly played a role, Friday also had a high temperature of 53 degrees which made the open-air venues more attractive to attend. Saturday’s temperature dropped to 46 degrees with steady light precipitation through much of the day and fewer people used the Cultural Trail, in both locations.

The second week of observations saw temperatures fall from a high of 49 degrees to a low of 26 degrees. The fall in temperature was accompanied by a decline in trail counts. Weather cannot be identified as the only reason for decreased trail counts, but cooler temperatures may have certainly discouraged trail use.

The third and final week of observations saw temperatures slowly rise and trail counts also increased. From a low of 35 degrees, at the beginning of the week, to a high of 51 degrees, on Friday, trail counts increased with each location peaking on Friday. While the graphs demonstrate an observable relationship between trail counts and temperature, it is just an observation. Further analysis could be used to prove a statistical correlation between variables but it is not difficult to understand that warm weather appears to positively influence trail use.

**Figure 9:** Total users of Cultural Trail counted through the study period, with high temperature, Alabama Street location, 2012

![Figure 9](image)

Note: Study period is January 29, 2012 through February 18, 2012

**Figure 10:** Total users of Cultural Trail counted through the study period, with high temperature, Glick Peace Walk location, 2012

![Figure 10](image)

Note: Study period is January 29, 2012 through February 18, 2012
Conclusion

The Indianapolis Cultural Trail was designed to be an urban trail that could connect residents and visitors to the downtown cultural districts while providing a network that could encourage healthy activity, public engagement, and promote the walkability of the city. To evaluate the usage and understand the trail’s potential capability, counting devices were placed at two locations along the trail, at Alabama Street and on the Glick Peace Walk, for a three-week observation period during the Super Bowl. During the three-week observation period, the Alabama Street location recorded over 11,600 usage counts while the Glick Peace Walk location recorded nearly 4,000.

The data indicate that large downtown events can boost trail usage. Super Bowl weekend (Friday, February 3 through Sunday, February 5) resulted in increased trail usage at both locations. At the Alabama Street location, of the 11,649 total user counts, nearly one-third (30 percent) occurred during Super Bowl weekend. Equally impressive, the Super Bowl weekend counts at the Peace Walk accounted for nearly one-fourth (24 percent) of the total 3,870 user counts.

The data not only indicate trail usage can be increased by large downtown events, but also, organizers and planners should try to incorporate the Cultural Trail into the event design as a safe, effective means of ushering people to different parts of the city.

Coupled with weather data, the trail counts also indicate that warmer weather can help drive trail use. It is true the observation period occurred during a time of unseasonable warmth, but it is also true Indianapolis experienced a mild winter and relatively warmer temperatures before the observation period. This leads us to believe the data reflects sustained use and not a temporary, dramatic increase in trail use.

Understanding how and when the trail is used, and the factors that affect trail use, can be valuable to the Cultural Trail administrators, city leaders, local businesses, convention organizers, tourists and hospitality industries, event and festival organizers, and residents.
Indiana University Public Policy Institute

The IU Public Policy Institute is a collaborative, multidisciplinary research institute within the Indiana University School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA). The Institute serves as an umbrella organization for research centers affiliated with SPEA, including the Center for Urban Policy and the Environment, and the Center for Criminal Justice Research. The Institute also supports the Indiana Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations.

In April 2007, construction began on the Indianapolis Cultural Trail, and by Super Bowl XLVI, most of the construction was complete. As an extension of the work by the IU Public Policy Institute on the use of greenways in Indianapolis, researchers installed counters at two locations along the Cultural Trail. Counts at these locations during this time provide information about the level of trail usage, particularly during a major event.

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