



Use and Users of the Vasa Pathway



Introduction

The Vasa Pathway is an unpaved multi-use, non-motorized trail located amidst the Pere Marquette state forest. The Pathway is utilized by cross-country skiers, mountain bikers, walkers and naturalists and features a series of loops and trails that offer routes for all levels of user. To better understand trail use and users, a study was conducted by Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails in cooperation with researchers from the Department of Park, Recreation and Tourism Resources at Michigan State University. On site trail observation coupled with a self-administered survey of randomly selected trail users, was conducted from May 15th until September 27th, 2002. A winter survey was also done on the Vasa Pathway....

Methods

Trail use was observed at its only major trailhead access point on systematically selected days and times during the study period. Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails volunteers were positioned adjacent to the trail and counted all individuals going one direction, classifying them as adults or children and noting their mode of travel (bike, in-line skating, foot or other). Observations were then extrapolated to estimate use for the May-September period. At ten-minute intervals during four hour observation periods, a volunteer would select the next adult passing and interview him/her or ask him/her to respond to a self-administered one-page questionnaire. The minimum number of surveys administered was four per observation period and the maximum was 17. During the study period, 152 surveys were distributed on the Vasa Pathway, with 147 (97%) completed and returned.

Survey data provides two important measures. When considering respondents, this information provides accurate information about uses, but it is not representative of distinct individual users, as those who visit more frequently are more likely to be sampled and to be asked to complete a survey. However, the data can be weighted to account for this frequent use bias, and the characteristics of distinct users/visitors can be assessed. This report is organized by first describing levels of use based on observations, then describing characteristics of uses/uses based on unweighted survey data and finally, characteristics of segments of distinct users/visitors based on weighted survey data.

Observation Highlights

- The Vasa Pathway had 11,406 estimated uses with 7,494 weekday uses and 3,912 weekend uses from May 15 through September 27, 2002.
- Based on 11,406 extrapolated observations, there were 4,939 (43%) bicycling uses and 6,467 (57%) walking/running uses. There were 10,083 (88%) adult uses and 1,323 (12%) child uses.

Use Highlights from Surveys

- The majority (78%) of Vasa uses were by Traverse City area seasonal or full-time residents. They made up approximately one-third (31%) of distinct users.
- More than half (56%) of the Vasa uses were by visitors who participated in solo trail activities.
- Almost half (45%) of the use was by people who were between 19 and 40 years old, of these 53% were males and 47% females, and almost two-fifths (34%) of the use was by people who were between 41 to 60 years old, of which 67% were males and 33% females.
- One-fifth (20%) of Vasa use was by people who access the trail without driving a vehicle to it. One-fifth (20%) of the uses were by people that traveled one mile or less to reach the trail.
- The majority of uses (86%) were rated as satisfactory.

Distinct User Highlights from Surveys

- Half of distinct trail users (50%) had contributed support to Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails and two-thirds (60%) would like to become a Friend of Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails or were already members of the organization.
- Approximately two-thirds (69%) of the distinct users were tourists and they accounted for nearly one-quarter (22%) of trail uses on the Vasa Pathway. Tourists were further surveyed on the trail, however only 5 responded with the follow up tourist information, so tourist statistics were not compiled for the Vasa Pathway.

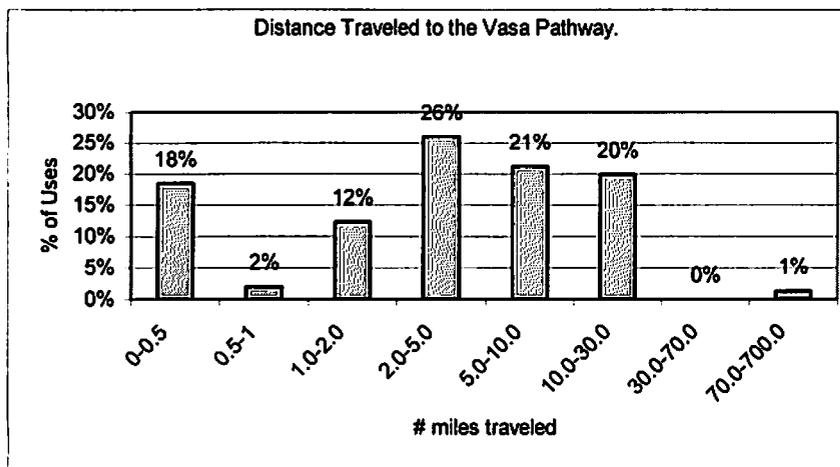
Trail Use Estimates and Characteristics

Use Estimates

The Vasa Pathway had 11,406 estimated uses with 7,494 weekday uses and 3,912 weekend uses from May 15 through September 27, 2002. Uses observed and extrapolated from observations included 4,939 (43%) bicycling uses and 6,467 (57%) walking/running uses. There were 10,083 (88%) adult uses and 1,323 (12%) child uses.

Vasa Use Activities and Access

Survey data suggested Vasa Pathway uses were mostly for exercise (58%) or for the purpose of recreation (41%). The remaining uses were for transportation to work, school, or other locations (1%). The majority (86%) of uses on the Pathway were rated satisfactory (on a scale of 1-9 with "9" being highly satisfied and "1" being highly dissatisfied), with 73% being rated "9" and 13% "8." The remaining 14% were rated ranging from "4" (near neutral) to "7."



One-fifth (20%) of Vasa Pathway uses were by people who did not drive a vehicle to reach the trail. Most uses (26%) were by people who traveled between two and five miles to reach the Vasa Pathway. More than half (58%) traveled five miles or less to reach the trail and one-fifth (20%) traveled one mile or less. Four-fifths (82%) of those traveling less than one mile did not drive to the trail.

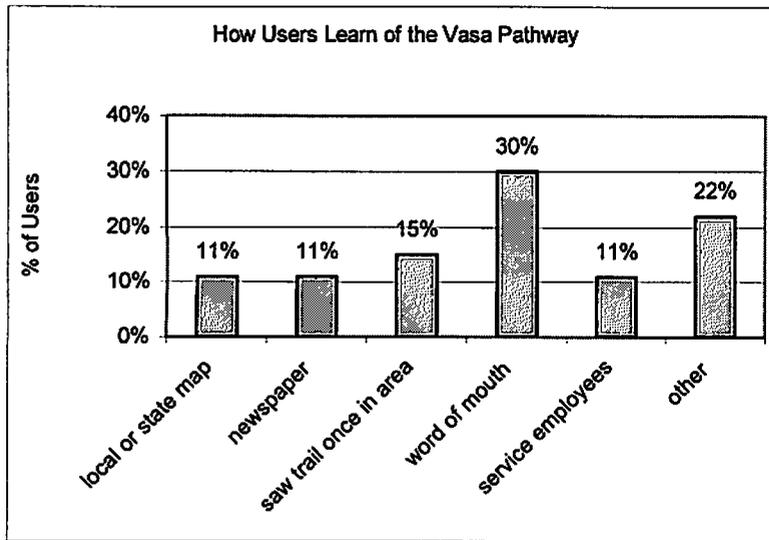
The most commonly used entry point (90%) to the Vasa Pathway was the Bartlett location (Vasa Trailhead). Other starting points included Bunker Hill (1%), 3 Mile Rd. (2%), Barlow (1%), Division (1%), M-72 (1%) and other undesignated points (4%) on the Vasa Pathway. Two-thirds (62%) of the use was by people spending one hour or less using the Vasa Pathway. The time people spent on the trail ranged from a few minutes to four hours and the average was two hours. On the day surveyed over half (58%) of the use was by people who exclusively used the Vasa Pathway while the rest used the Vasa Pathway and one or more additional trails.

Demographics

Over half (56%) of the use was by solo trail participants, while the average group size was two. The majority (45%) of use was by people who were 19 to 40 years old, of which 53% were males and 47% females. This was followed by 34% of use by people who were 41 to 60 years old, of which 67% were males and 33% females. Fourteen percent (15%) of use was by youth under the age of 18; of these 58% were males and 42% females. The remaining 6% of use was by people who were 61 years of age or older, of these 56% were males and 44% females. Three percent of use was by people who had an impairment limiting work and recreation participation.

Distinct Trail User Characteristics

Source of Discovery of the Vasa Pathway



One-third (30%) of distinct trail users first learned of the Vasa Pathway by word of mouth from friends or relatives. Fifteen percent of Vasa users first learned about the trail by actually seeing it once they arrived in the area, one-tenth (11%) learned about the trail from the newspaper, one-tenth (11%) from a local or state map and another one-tenth (11%) from service employees. Almost one-quarter (22%) of users found out about the trail by other means, such as: participating in special events like the Vasa Race and the Iceman Bike Race; being residents in the area; through club memberships, via the Michigan Trail Book and the Internet.

Vasa Surveyed Users' Trail Activities Over the Past Twelve Months

Of the distinct Vasa users surveyed, all of them had used the trail in the previous year. The majority (92%) were infrequent users (using the trail ten or less times per year) and 8% were frequent users (more than ten times per year). Over the 12 months prior to the day they were sampled, distinct Vasa users participated in a variety of activities on the Vasa Pathway including bicycling, skiing, walking, running, and walking dogs. Half (50%) bicycled, approximately one-fourth (23%) ran, 20% walked, 12% walked the dog, and 6% skied. For those participating in the activity, bicyclists averaged 4 uses per year, runners 4 uses per year, walkers 5 uses per year, dog-walkers 2 uses per year and skiers 12 uses per year.

Most (96%) of Vasa users only participated in one trail activity on the Vasa over the 12 months prior to being surveyed: 48% only bicycled, 20% only ran, 16% only walked, and 12% only walked the dog. The remaining 4% of Vasa users skied and walked. In the twelve months prior to being surveyed, 50% of the distinct Vasa users exclusively used the Vasa Pathway, while 35% used the TART Trail as well as the Vasa, and 15% used the Leelanau Trail and the Vasa. None of the users surveyed on the Vasa had used all three trails. The primary activities for Vasa users on the TART Trail were bicycling, walking, and running and on the Leelanau Trail they were bicycling, walking and in-line skating.

Trail Involvement

When asked about trail involvement, half of the distinct trail users (50%) had contributed support to Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails and two-thirds (60%) would like to become a Friend of Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails or were already members of the organization.

User Suggestions

Users were asked in an open-ended format to suggest an improvement to the Vasa or an extension they would like to see. Sixty-two percent of distinct users had a suggestion and 38% provided no suggestion. Those users who provided suggestions were segmented three ways: 1) frequent vs. infrequent users, (frequent users – more than ten Vasa uses in 12 months prior to being surveyed and infrequent users – less or equal than ten uses); 2) residents vs. tourists (residents – those with a primary or seasonal home in the Traverse City area and tourists – those without a primary or seasonal home in the Traverse City area); and 3) supporters vs. others (supporters – those who reported contributing support to the trail, and others – those who did not report contributing support to the trail.)

Frequent vs. Infrequent Users

Frequent users on the Vasa Pathway did not suggest any improvements or extensions.

Improvements: Approximately two-thirds (60%) of infrequent users suggesting an improvement wanted additional signage on the Vasa Pathway. Almost one-third (30%) of infrequent users would like to see more maintenance and the remaining 10% wanted to improve crossings.

Extensions: One-fourth (25%) of the infrequent users suggesting extensions wanted to connect the Vasa to the TART, one-fourth suggested an extension east to Williamsburg, one-fourth wanted an extension north to Elk Rapids and one-fourth suggested extensions in general.

Residents vs. Tourists

Improvements: One-third (33%) of the residents suggesting improvements would like to see more amenities such as water fountains and restrooms. One-third of residents wanted more maintenance and one-third suggested improving crossings. Two-third (67%) of tourists suggesting improvements wanted more signage on the Vasa Pathway. The remaining one-third (33%) of tourists would like to see more maintenance on the trail.

Extensions: Those residents suggesting extensions all reported non-specified extensions. One-third (33%) of tourists suggesting extensions wanted to connect the Vasa to the TART, one-third suggested an extension east to Williamsburg, and one-third wanted an extension north to Elk Rapids.

Supporters vs Other Users

Improvements: Half (50%) of the supporters suggesting improvements wanted improved maintenance on the Vasa Pathway. One-fourth (25%) of supporters suggested more signage on the trail, and the remaining (25%) suggested improving crossings. Almost three-fourths (71%) of other users suggesting improvements wanted more signage and 29% suggested more maintenance on the trail.

Extensions: One-third (33%) of the supporters suggesting extensions wanted a connection between the Vasa Pathway and the TART Trail. One-third of supporters suggested a connection north to Elk Rapids and the remaining 33% suggested extensions in general. All other users suggesting extensions wanted one east to Williamsburg.