

According to several studies and trail surveys, these ranges reflect what bicyclist spend per day on long and short rides:

Day trips: \$15 - \$20 per person traveling to the area for a one-day trip. Local residents on a day trip would be less, or about \$5 - \$10 per day.

Short Distance: \$50 per day, per person for 2 - 3-day trips (either as part of a bike trip or a longer vacation).

Long Distance: \$50 - \$60 per day, per person for 4 - 7-day trips.

What do Bicyclists Want?

The old stereotype of a “twenty-something” cyclist with a fully loaded bike looking for a cheap place to camp should probably be put to rest. Bicyclists today are a varied group with different bicycling interests (trail, mountain biking, touring, racing, etc.) and will often have significant resources to spend on short to long bicycle trips.

Bicyclists’ needs are not that much different from other travelers. Cyclists on extended bicycle tours will need overnight lodging and will dine in restaurants with the same frequency as other travelers. These cyclists will pedal between 40 - 100 miles per day. Although bicycle camping is popular with many of these cyclists, more are shifting to “credit card touring” and stay in traditional lodging facilities.

Bicycle touring companies now offer bike tours primarily as “fully-supported” rides. The cyclists enjoy the riding; food, lodging, and the transport of their gear is provided for them. Often these coordinating companies secure rooms months in advance for their participants.

Frequent stops for water, soft drinks, and snacks are a need for all cyclists. Studies show that cyclists often return to areas where they were treated as valuable guests. In commenting on positive experiences, cyclists will often note how courteous drivers were and how “comfortable” the roads were from a traffic and width standpoint. Lastly, people with younger children are almost always looking for off-road bike trails.

Opportunities & Resources

The popularity of bicycling along Wisconsin’s GRR is increasing. The challenge for local businesses and communities is to enhance their position as hosts to increase the economic benefits of this popular vacation and pastime activity.



Several map products are available to guide bicyclists: Eight regional maps are available covering the entire state and a specially developed “strip-map” has been prepared for the Mississippi River area. See <http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/travel/bike-foot/bikemaps.htm> for the latest information on these resources.

THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF BICYCLING ALONG WISCONSIN'S GREAT RIVER ROAD



Bicyclists – whether tourists or local residents – contribute a great deal to our local economies and they can contribute a great deal more. New information resources and maps are available to better-promote our area. This brochure examines the beneficial economic impact that bicycling can have for communities.

Bicycling & the Great River Road

The Wisconsin section of the Great River Road (GRR) is a designated National Scenic Byway. It extends from the state's border with Illinois approximately 250 miles to Prescott and provides residents and visitors with countless recreational opportunities along a visually spectacular natural river corridor. Over the years, bicycling has become established as one of the most popular activities in the corridor, ranging from long-distance touring, to trail riding on the Great River State Trail, to short-distance day trips.

Recognizing the stock of bike accommodations already in place in the corridor, the popularity of bicycling there, and the potential impacts on the area's tourism and economy, in 1999 the Wisconsin Mississippi River Parkway Commission (WIMRPC) requested an interagency effort to study the potential and plan for a continuous bikeway along the entire length of the Great River Road in Wisconsin.

At about the same time that the WIMRPC endorsed the final plan, the U.S. Department of Transportation announced the designation of a 10-state Mississippi River Bicycle Trail (MRT) from the Gulf of Mexico to the headwaters of the Mississippi River in Minnesota. The MRT, as currently planned, follows the GRR route very closely through Wisconsin.

Potential Tourism Benefits

With the continuation of improved accommodations for bicyclists, the 10-state MRT will be increasingly attractive to a wide range of tourists. Parts of the corridor are already designated as a long-distance route by the Adventure Cycling Association (a national bicycle touring organization) and draw bicyclists from around the country. There are several bicycling touring companies that offer tours along the MRT. In addition to long-distance bicycling, many individuals and families from the Upper Midwest combine short-distance bicycling into other popular activities – especially camping and hiking – along the GRR.

According to a survey report by the Travel Industry Association, 27 million Americans took bicycling vacations in a recent 5-year period, making it the third most popular vacation activity in the country. The impact of tourist spending associated with bicycling has not been studied comprehensively in Wisconsin, but some research provides a sense of the potential impact:

- A 2005 comprehensive bicycle impact study for Wisconsin estimated the economic impact of several multi-day rides in the state to be between \$3.7 and \$6.2 million with 2,100 participants.
- A 1995 study of the Red Cedar Trail in Dunn County, Wisconsin, indicated that the trail's annual economic impact to the local economy was \$2 million from approximately about 40,000 annual users. The average expenditure per user per day in the local area was \$49.
- In the report *Economic Impact Study of Wisconsin's Scenic Byway – Great River Road* found that 2% of the surveyed visitors traveled along the byway by bicycle and 4%

stated that as the reason why they came to this area.

Although each situation is different, anecdotal accounts of local impacts are numerous. Lanesboro, Minnesota was a quiet, sleepy town with a declining population base when a state trail was built and energized tourism for the village. The trail is still a major tourism draw and other tourism components have also been developed. Today Lanesboro is still small – only 788 people – but it has 10 B&Bs, 16 hotels and inns, 12 specialty retail shops, and 10 restaurants.

Right here in Wisconsin, Sparta has proclaimed itself to be the bicycle capitol of the United States. Along with other communities located on the Elroy-Sparta Trail (Elroy, Kendall, and Wilton), Sparta has experienced a considerable increase in dining and lodging revenue due to the trail.

Promotion of bicycling, as envisioned in the GRR Bikeway Plan, has three audiences:

- Day cyclists, including local residents, traveling short distances to ride the GRR route.
- Shorter-distance cyclists who will take either day or two-day trips, as part of a weeklong vacation.
- Longer distance cyclists who will ride Wisconsin's portion of the GRR or the entire length of the MRT.

The potential for day-cycling can be strengthened by the variety of cycling that the GRR offers. For example, the Great River State Trail offers an excellent facility for off-road cyclists and is especially attractive to families. Providing alternate routes adjacent to the GRR will allow cyclists to “loop-around” using the main GRR as one leg and the alternate as another. Finally, nearby mountain biking opportunities and local bicycle routes provide additional options for day-cyclists.