

The PTSTF Meeting for October 12, 2021

PTSTF Committee Members – Please note, this is an in-person meeting located at EMS Building at **12490 Ulmerton Rd., Room #130, Largo, FL** **(same place as before the move to Zoom)**.

We respectfully request each committee member contact us to notify us prior to the meeting if they **are not** able to attend.

Furthermore, we request your respective departments strive to find a meeting replacement in the event your attendance is not feasible at this meeting.

Please contact us: Angela Ryan (aryan@forwardpinellas.org) and Maria Kelly (mkelly@forwardpinellas.org).



**PINELLAS TRAIL SECURITY TASK
FORCE (PTSTF) MEETING AGENDA**

October 12, 2021 - 9:00 a.m.

Pinellas County Emergency Services Center
12490 Ulmerton Road, Room 130
Largo, FL 33774
(Telephone: 727-582-2000)

THE PLANNING COUNCIL AND METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION FOR PINELLAS COUNTY

FACE MASKS ARE ENCOURAGED, BUT ARE NOT REQUIRED

1. **CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS**
 2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES – July 13, 2021**
 3. **PTSTF STRATEGIC PLANNING DISCUSSION**
 4. **QUARTERLY REPORT FROM PINELLAS TRAIL PARK RANGER**
 5. **LAW ENFORCEMENT AND AGENCY REPORTS**
 - Sheriff's Office
 - Belleair
 - Clearwater
 - Gulfport
 - Largo
 - St. Petersburg
 - Tarpon Springs
 - Animal Services
 - Public Safety Services
 - Pinellas County Risk Management
 - Volunteer Patrol Programs and Updates
 6. **REPORT ON TRAIL USER COUNT DATA**
 7. **REPORT ON TRAIL CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY**
 8. **REPORT ON TRAIL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES**
 9. **OTHER BUSINESS**
 10. **ADJOURNMENT**
- **NOTICE TO LAW ENFORCEMENT REPRESENTATIVES - IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO ATTEND THE MEETING, PLEASE E-MAIL YOUR INCIDENT/OFFENSE REPORT TO ANGELA RYAN, aryan@forwardpinellas.org**

IF YOU WOULD PREFER, YOU CAN FAX THE REPORT TO THE PINELLAS COUNTY MPO at (727) 464-8212.

THANK YOU.

NEXT PTSTF MEETING – JANUARY 11, 2022

Public participation is solicited without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, disability, or family status. Persons who require special accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act or persons who require translation services (free of charge) should contact the Office of Human Rights, 400 South Fort Harrison Avenue, Suite 300, Clearwater, Florida 33756; [(727) 464-4062 (V/TDD)] at least seven days prior to the meeting.

Appeals: Certain public meetings result in actions taken by the public board, commission or agency that may be appealed; in such case persons are advised that, if they decide to appeal any decision made at a public meeting/hearing, they will need a record of the proceedings, and, for such purposes, they may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based.

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Pinellas Trail Security Task Force – October 12, 2021

2. Approval of Minutes – July 13, 2021



SUMMARY

The summary minutes of the July 13, 2021 Pinellas Trail Security Task Force meeting are attached.

ATTACHMENTS: Pinellas Trail Security Task Force Summary Minutes –July 13, 2021

ACTION: Approval of the July meeting summary

PINELLAS TRAIL SECURITY TASK FORCE
MEETING Summary
JULY 13, 2021

The following is a summary of the July 13, 2021 Forward Pinellas - Pinellas Trail Security Task Force meeting, which was held in person in Largo. The Security Task Force meets at least quarterly during the year.

IN ATTENDANCE

Officer Ron Wolfson, Chairman	St. Petersburg Police Department & Volunteer Coord.
Officer V. Tran	Largo Police Department
Officer Anthony Boone	Tarpon Springs Police Department
Deputy Eric Gibson	Pinellas County Sheriff's Office
Deputy Terrance Fallahee	Pinellas County Sheriff's Office
Lynn Abbott	Pinellas County Public Safety Services
Ranger Tom Rill	Pinellas County Parks and Conservation Resources
James Abaka	Pinellas County Risk Management
Caroline Lanford	Pinellas County Planning
Joan Rice	Pinellas County Public Works Traffic Division
Scott Daniels	Friends of the Pinellas Trail
Stuart Schwartzreich	Pinellas Trail Auxiliary Ranger
Angela Ryan	Forward Pinellas Staff
Maria Kelly	Forward Pinellas Staff

1. CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chairman Ronald Wolfson, St. Petersburg Police Officer, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

2. APPROVAL OF MEETING SUMMARY – April 13, 2021

The summary from the April 13, 2021 meeting was approved with no corrections.

3. PRESENTATION: MICROMOBILITY KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE SERIES (KES)

Ms. Angela Ryan, Forward Pinellas staff, shared a presentation on the Micromobility Knowledge Exchange Series (KES). Forward Pinellas works with local government partners to address emerging planning topics through applied research and best practices that guide the development of policy and regulatory practices. Micromobility transportation is the subject of the next KES topic. "Micromobility" generally refers to a range of lightweight transportation devices operating at low speeds, typically up to 15 mph. These include electric bicycles as well as electric skateboards and scooters, although bicycles are not being addressed as part of this effort. The rise of micromobility activity that has taken hold in many communities across the country demonstrates the emerging popularity of these devices. But with popularity comes controversy and confusion, public concern as well as public demand. Local governments have been confronted with significant regulatory challenges. Consulting with local governments on matters of placement, parking, and speeds, and with assistance from the City of St. Petersburg and the City of Tampa, Forward Pinellas as developed "A Guide to

Micromobility in Pinellas County”, which is a research based practical application resource for local governments to consider when developing micromobility policy and regulatory codes in their communities. Next steps include continual collaboration with county, state, and federal partners the hosting of a micromobility forum, committee presentations, the development of an informational video and promotion of the report as a “living document” as technology, data and laws evolve. Questions were taken and appropriately answered.

4. PINELLAS TRAIL VISIONING STUDY

Ms. Joan Rice, Pinellas County Public Works (PCPW), shared updates on the Pinellas Trail Visioning Study and the Courtesy Campaign beginning this fall. The Trail Visioning is nearly completed, and the project objective is to create a visioning document that meets the current and future needs of the trail. The document is currently in draft form and will be completed by the end of July. PCPW visited with all of the Pinellas Trail stakeholders (the municipalities The Trail runs through, Pinellas County Parks and Conservation Resources, the Friends of the Pinellas Trail, as well as the public) and asked what they liked and what they would like to see for the next 30 years on the Trail. A survey was sent out in early January/February 2021 and over 2,000 people responded. This survey covered maintenance, design standards, signage, amenities, and safety issues. Regarding the survey results, the top two amenities’ people would like to see more of are restroom and water stations, more signage (e.g. mile markers), maps, and wayfinding. Trail users said they would use an app on their phone and would use the Trail more if there were safer crossings. The next steps are to incorporate the comments received from stakeholders, prioritize improvements, and implement those improvements through the development of funding strategies. One of the items discovered through the survey were the concerns about people being rude on The Trail. For 8 weeks this fall, there will be signs along the Trail to encourage behavior modification. Trail educational information will be on the PCPW website and each week a new topic will be featured beginning with “be nice”. Additional signage will be distributed along the Trail, including maps and wayfinding. Questions were taken and appropriately answered.

5. QUARTERLY REPORT FROM PINELLAS TRAIL PARK RANGER

Ranger Tom Rill filled in for Chief Ranger Carol Gray, Parks and Conservation Resources (PCR), and reported that on April 4, PT622, there was a report of a male cyclist taking a fall and declining EMS. On May 23, a cyclist struck a metal bollard, but was uninjured. It was noted that at the last meeting, illegal camping was discovered at PT577. After 60 days, Rangers did a full clean up filling a dumpster of abandon items. On April 7, at PT531, illegal signs in the right-of-way were addressed. At PT325 on April 14, Deputy Harland requested the Chief Ranger’s presence as there was a female subject reported to have been urinating on the Trail. No action was taken. On June 18, there was an incident with a dirt bike at Elfers Spur involving a juvenile male and Tarpon PD was notified. One comment made by Auxiliary Ranger Schwartzreich noted that the amount of graffiti on the Trail has come down considerably since the second quarter.

6. LAW ENFORCEMENT AND AGENCY REPORTS

A. Sheriff's Office

Deputy Eric Gibson reported that for Q1, there were 35 calls, 5 of those were directive patrols and nothing else of consequence. At the end of May, the Wall Street Journal contacted Deputy Gibson regarding the subject of Trail Courtesy and in the June publication, none of his comments appeared. Because of that conversation with the journalist and after subsequent conversation with the Parks Director, the Sheriff's Office has increased their presence on The Trail for pedestrian and bicycle safety. There were 84 calls for service in Q2 and 42 of those were traffic stops of bicyclists and motorists where citations were issued.

B. Belleair

Belleair did send in a report that was not brought to the meeting. This report will be sent out to the members.

C. Clearwater

No one attended from Gulfport.

D. Gulfport

No one attended from Gulfport.

E. Largo

Officer V. Tran of the Largo PD reported that for April through June, there was a total of twenty calls. 2 assist citizen, 1 assist agency, 6 directive patrols, 7 patrol check, 1 property report and 2 welfare checks. On April 12 there was a call for assist citizen for a lost phone on the Trail. The "find my phone" app was turned on, so they were able to find the phone. On April 14, an agency assist call for silver alert was made. A 79-year-old female citizen was reported missing and law enforcement was able to locate the missing person. On May 29, a welfare check was initiated. The complainant reported that there was a female on the Trail yelling "daddy". Officers were able to talk with the female subject who seemed coherent, so they left, and the female subject left the area. On June 29 a welfare check was initiated for a subject that was intoxicated.

F. St. Petersburg

No one attended from Gulfport.

G. Tarpon Springs

Officer Anthony Boone reported Tarpon PD has been working with the Park Ranger regarding graffiti at the north end of the Trail and that an arrest was made. Despite the arrest, graffiti is still appearing. There have been issues with ATV's using the bank of the Anclote River near Dixie Highway. Two sections of the fence along the Pinellas Trail have been torn down. Tarpon PD reached out to Pinellas County for repairs and is awaiting a response. Repairing the fence will prevent the ATVs from coming onto The Trail. Officers have been walking the trail and reporting in. On June 4, there was a traffic detail on the new Mears extension near Safford Ave. There were 22 bicycle

warning issued and 6 citations issued for failure to stop. Two bicycle officers were able to address any bicyclists that attempted to evade the traffic detail. A request for an RRFB crossing at Disston Avenue was submitted for when the new Mears extension opens. Ranger Rill expressed concern about the fence being down and this could be due to construction vehicles getting into and out of the construction site.

H. Animal Services

No one attended from Animal Services; however, a report was received, there was once report of a dog on dog attack, but no one was injured.

I. Public Safety Services

Ms. Lynn Abbott, Pinellas County EMS & Fire Administration, shared that they received a total of 30 calls related to the Trail. One motor vehicle crash, 3 motor vehicle/bike events, 7 bike falls with only one condition reported, 2 pedestrian falls and 4 ill pedestrian calls with 13 refusals of EMS services.

J. Pinellas County Risk Management

James Abaka reported the semi-annual inspection of The Trail was conducted and found The Trail to be in good condition, from Tropicana Field to the Pasco County line.

K. Volunteer Patrol Programs and Updates

Chair Wolfson stated that the volunteers are slowly beginning to come back but must be fully vaccinated to return to work. New volunteers are being sought

7. AUTOMATIC TRAIL COUNTERS

Ms. Angela Ryan, Forward Pinellas staff, reviewed the counter reports for March, April and May 2021. The trends for these three months are similar for the trends were seen for the rest of the year in that higher use on the trail occurs each year higher than average use during the COVID-19 pandemic. Questions were taken and appropriately answered.

8. REPORT ON TRAIL CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

Ms. Rice shared an update on the Trail construction activity. Construction continues on the North Loop between Enterprise Road and John Chesnut Park. Regarding the piece of sidewalk that was removed along East Lake Rd, construction will begin in late August to replace it. Regarding the South Loop, from Haines Bayshore to the south, a virtual public meeting took place on May 13, 2021 and construction will begin in 2024, which is a part of the Pinellas Trail. In regard to the San Martin Bridge, the PD&E final hearing will be in September for The Trail connection to the North Bay Trail. The Courtney Campbell Overpass is funded for construction in 2024. The Howard Frankland Bridge is continuing, and the Gandy Bridge PD&E Study is underway and will have a trail upon completion. The Harn Boulevard Overpass connection over US19 will be completed in 2023. In regard to the Bayway Trail South, a FDOT project in Tiera Verde, the trail will run right next to the bridge. Further to the south of that corridor, a two-way bike lane will be constructed on the east side of the roadway. Regarding the Oldsmar Trail, construction will begin at the end of summer. As of now, 68 miles of the Pinellas Trail Loop are completed.

9. REPORT ON TRAIL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Scott Daniels, Friends of the Pinellas Trail, gave a brief update. There has been great feedback regarding the new Facebook page and Website from people who use The Pinellas Trail. Plans are in the works for a public meeting to discuss updates to The Pinellas Trail, via Zoom, for later this summer and the intent is to include a panel of County, volunteer, and citizen participants to answer questions and to discuss what is happening with The Pinellas Trail at that point in time. If interested, please reach out to Scott Daniels.

10. OTHER BUSINESS

11. ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Wolfson adjourned the meeting at 10:48 a.m. The next PTSTF meeting is scheduled for October 12, 2021, and we hope to meet in person.

SUMMARY

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Forward Pinellas committees and other in-person operations were drastically modified, resulting in many committee meetings being formatted to an online forum and several meetings rescheduled. The PTSTF members, comprised of law enforcement and emergency professional staff, were required to focus on other priorities during the pandemic, resulting in a reduction in committee attendance. Given the importance of the PTSTF committee, Forward Pinellas decided to utilize a strategic planning session to ensure that the structure of future meetings is conducive to carrying out the important work of the PTSTF, while providing the most meaningful engagement opportunities for its members.

In August 2021, Forward Pinellas disseminated a short survey to all PTSTF members with the intent of collecting data, ideas and overall feedback on the future direction of the committee. The intent of this exercise was to ensure PTSTF meetings are valuable for member's time and participation, and to develop a strategic plan for future meeting operations. The feedback received from the survey provided insights into desired meeting timeframes, agenda items and overall structure. Specifically, suggestions received included the emphasis for virtual meetings, agenda items focused on law enforcement and patrolling efforts, as well as an emphasis on regional multi-purpose trail laws and rules.

Forward Pinellas staff will guide the PTSTF committee through the survey findings and engage the committee in an open discussion on strategic plans for future meetings. After the October 12, 2021 committee meeting, Forward Pinellas staff will utilize the meeting discussion points to collaborate internally with leadership as well as with Pinellas County staff, on a renewed PTSTF committee strategic plan for operation.

ATTACHMENT(S): None

ACTION: None required; informational item only

SUMMARY

This item will include the monthly data summary reports for the automatic trail counters along the Pinellas Trail. Note that average hourly data has been included with the reports.

ATTACHMENT: Pinellas Trail User Count Data Summary Reports:

- June 2021
- July 2021
- August 2021

ACTION: No Action Required, informational item only

Pinellas Trail User Count Data Summary

Automated Trail Counter Data Collection Period:
June 1st – 30th (30 days)

June 2021

30-Day Count Total: ***121,892**

Daily Average Users: **3,932**

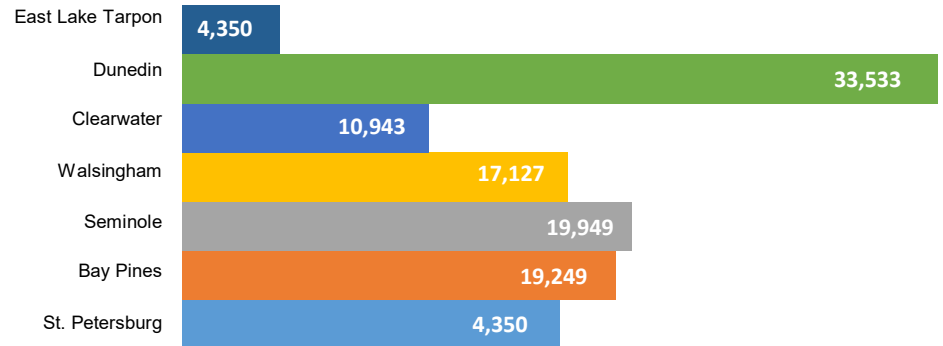
Highest Daily Totals:

#1 – Saturday, June 26th (Dunedin – 1,801)

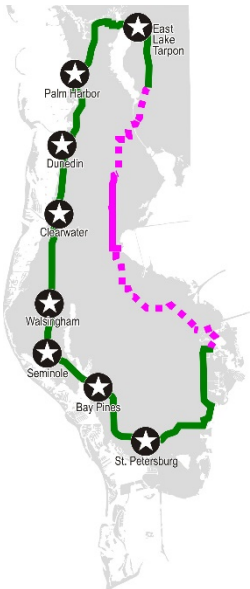
#2 – Saturday, June 5th (Bay Pines – 1,005)

#3 – Saturday, June 12th (Walsingham - 830)

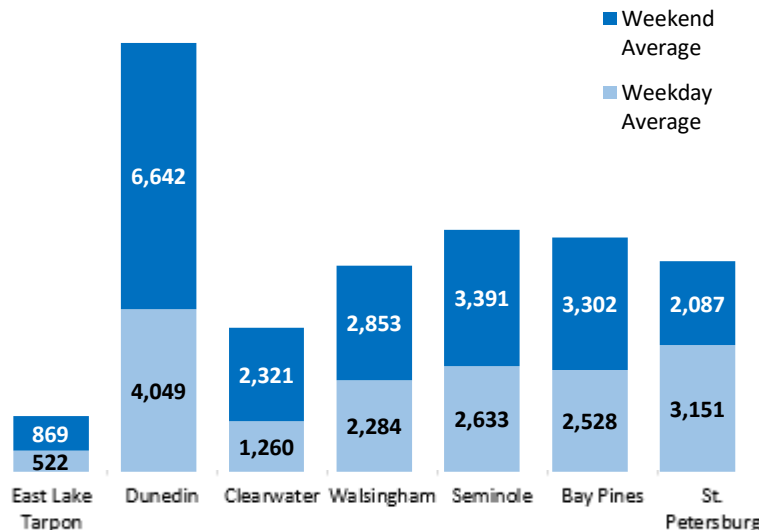
June Monthly Trail Use by Counter Location



Counter Locations



Weekday & Weekend Profile



Trail User Mode Split

Counter Location	Walking (Pedestrian Icon)	Bicycling (Bicycle Icon)
East Lake Tarpon:	11%	89%
Dunedin:	18%	82%
Clearwater:	10%	90%
Walsingham:	18%	82%
Seminole:	25%	75%
Bay Pines:	10%	90%
St. Petersburg:	22%	78%

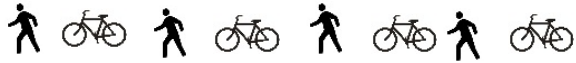
Source: Forward Pinellas *June 2021*
National Weather Service: [June 2020](#)

*Palm Harbor counter technical issues, no data provided.

Pinellas Trail User Count Data Summary

Automated Trail Counter Data Collection

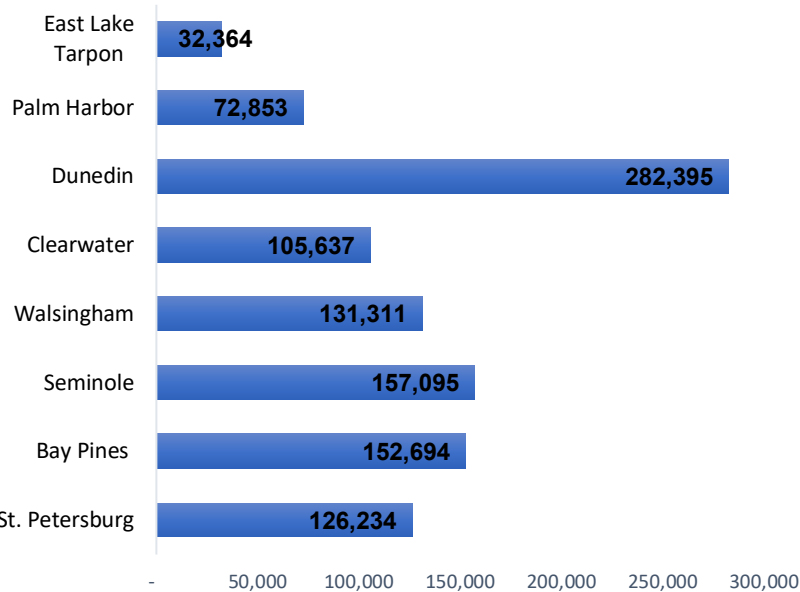
Period: January – June 2021 Data*



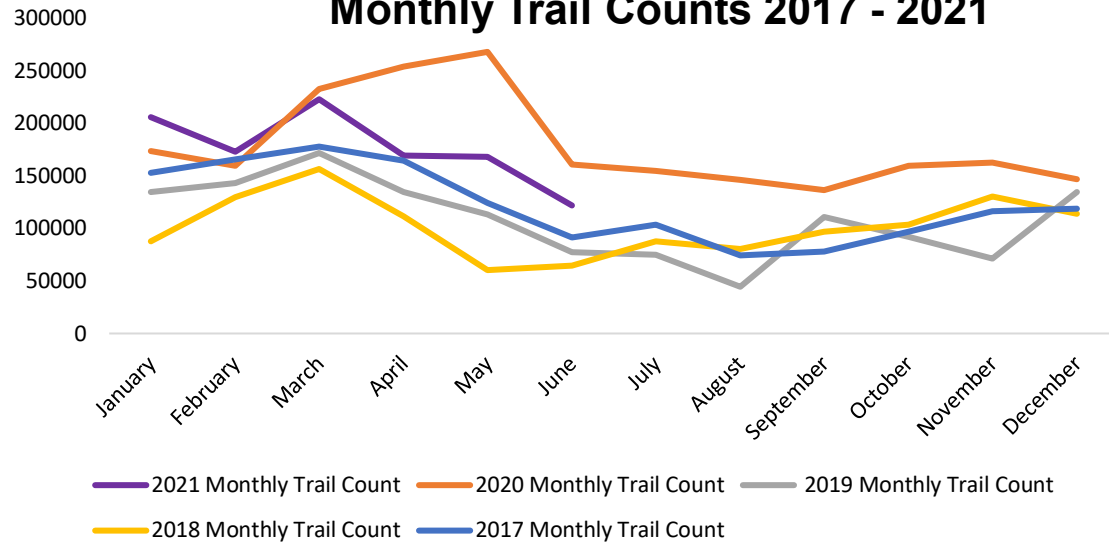
Jan-Jun 2021 Total Count:

1,060,923

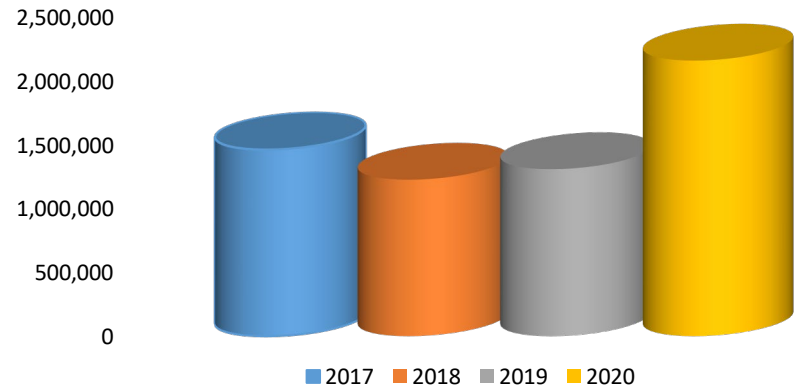
Year to Date Data Per Location



Monthly Trail Counts 2017 - 2021



Pinellas Trail Use 2017 – 2020



* 2010 – 2016 Survey Data & 2017-2021 Counter Data. Technical issues with several counters in 2019 resulting in several missing days of data during 2019.

Pinellas Trail User Count Data Summary

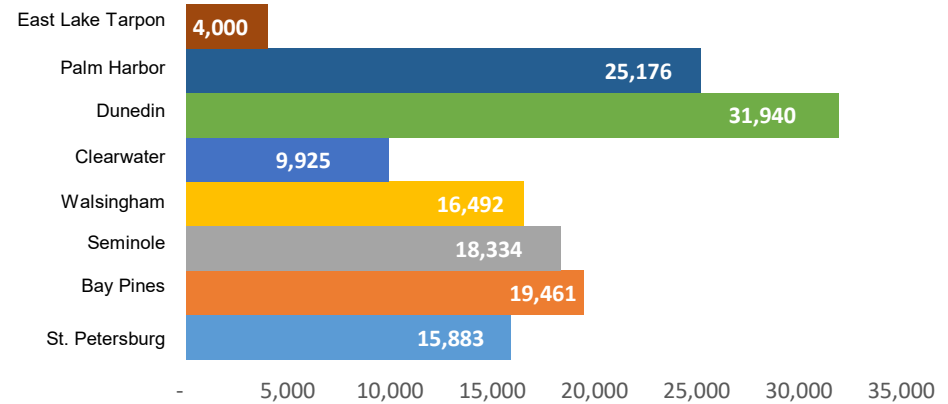
Automated Trail Counter Data Collection Period:
July 1st – 31st (31 days)

July 2021

31-Day Count Total: **141,211**
Daily Average Users: **4,555**
Highest Daily Totals:

- #1 – Saturday, July 4th (Dunedin – 1, 721)
- #2 – Sunday, July 10th (Palm Harbor – 1,363)
- #3 – Sunday, July 25th (St. Petersburg – 821)

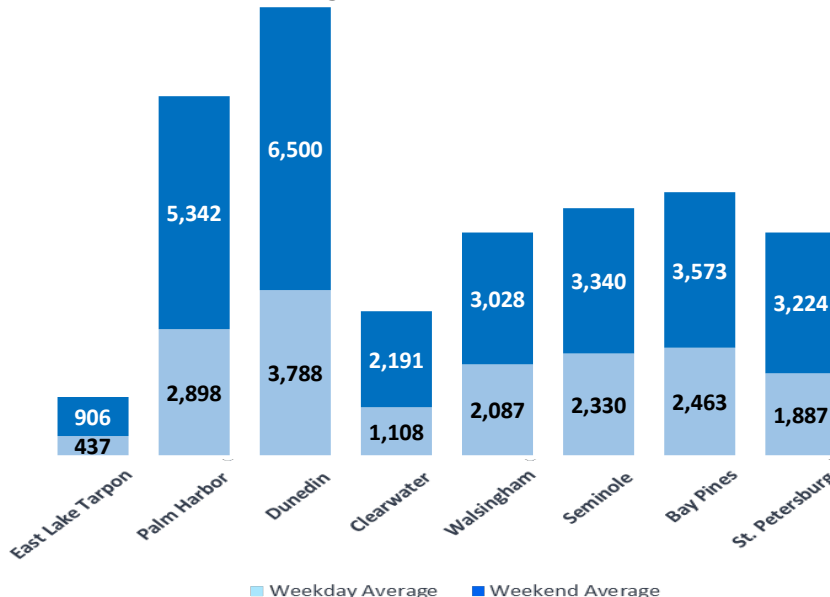
July Monthly Trail Use by Counter Location





Counter Locations



Weekday & Weekend Profile



Trail User Mode Split

		
East Lake Tarpon:	8%	92%
Palm Harbor:	23%	77%
Dunedin:	15%	85%
Clearwater:	5%	95%
Walsingham:	15%	85%
Seminole:	21%	79%
Bay Pines:	12%	88%
St. Petersburg:	17%	83%

Source: Forward Pinellas July 2021
National Weather Service: [July 2020](#)

July 2021 Average Hourly Counter Report

120

100

80

60

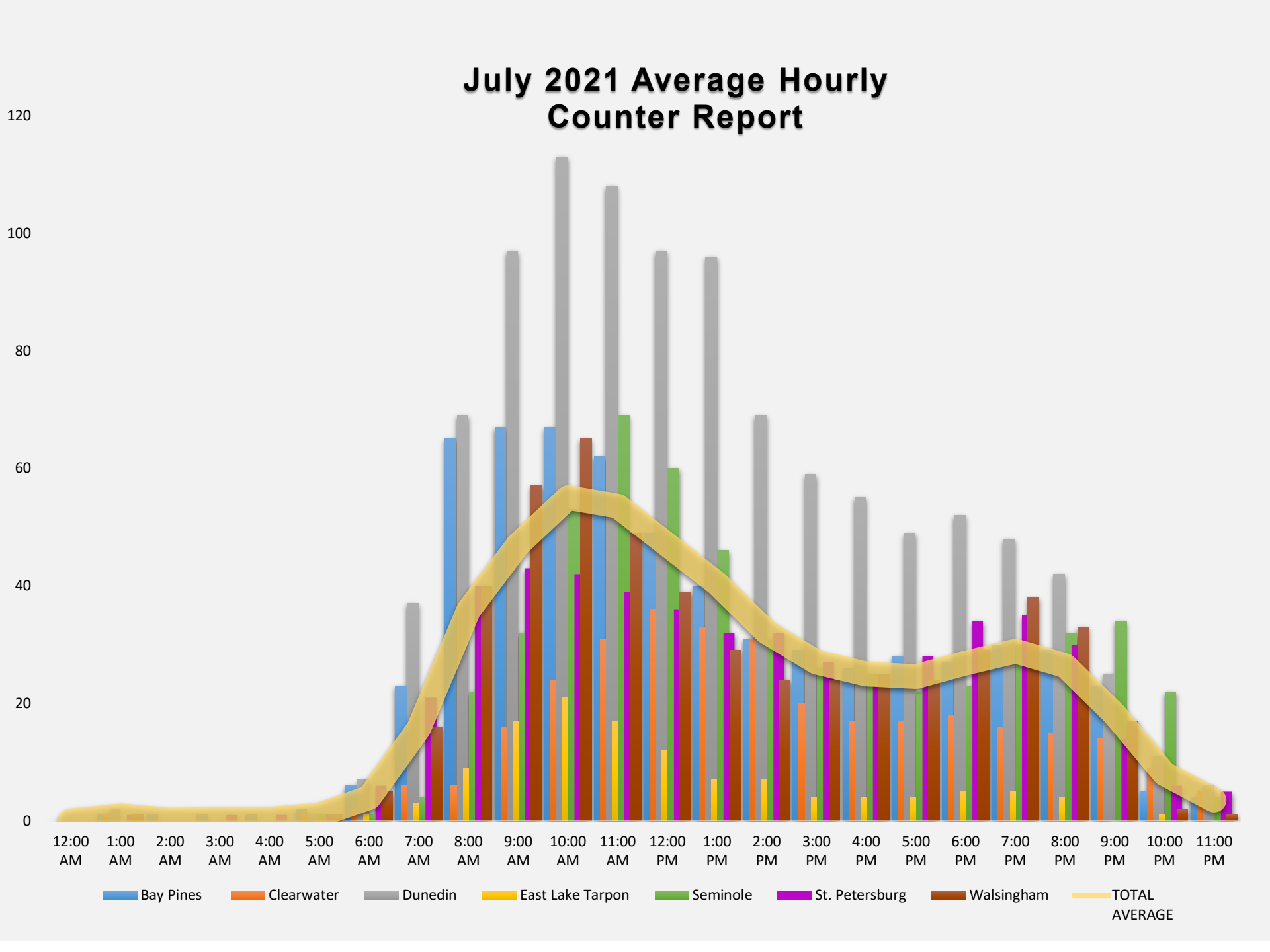
40

20

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12:00 AM 1:00 AM 2:00 AM 3:00 AM 4:00 AM 5:00 AM 6:00 AM 7:00 AM 8:00 AM 9:00 AM 10:00 AM 11:00 AM 12:00 PM 1:00 PM 2:00 PM 3:00 PM 4:00 PM 5:00 PM 6:00 PM 7:00 PM 8:00 PM 9:00 PM 10:00 PM 11:00 PM

■ Bay Pines
 ■ Clearwater
 ■ Dunedin
 ■ East Lake Tarpon
 ■ Seminole
 ■ St. Petersburg
 ■ Walsingham
 ■ TOTAL AVERAGE



Pinellas Trail User Count Data Summary

Automated Trail Counter Data Collection

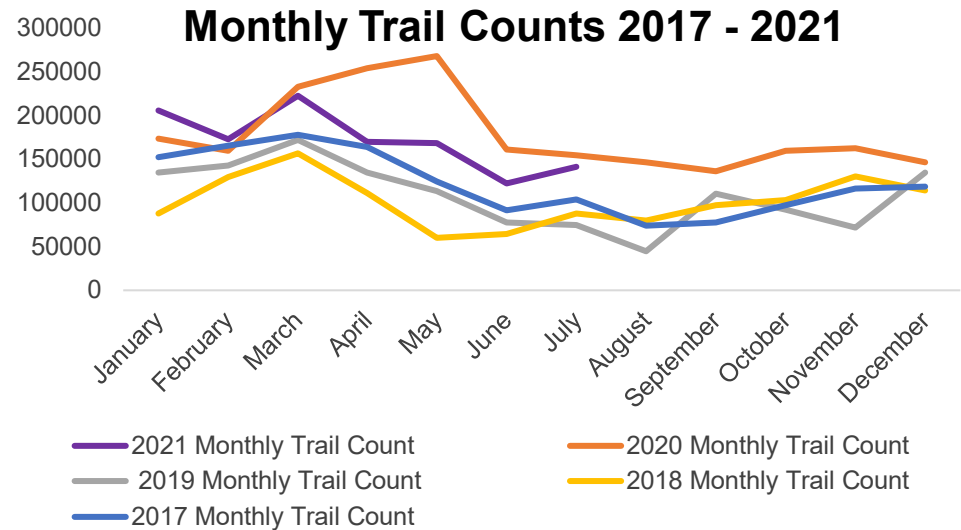
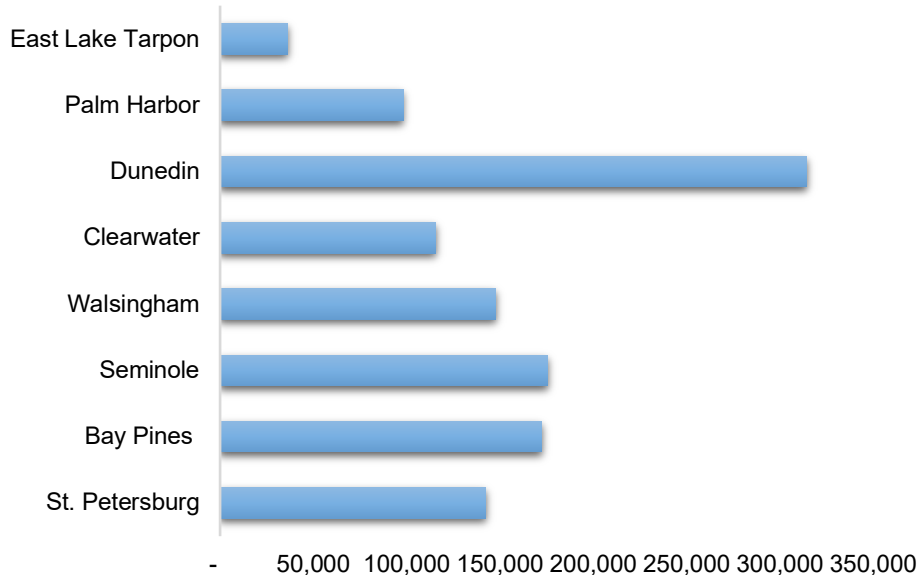
Period: January – July 2021 Data



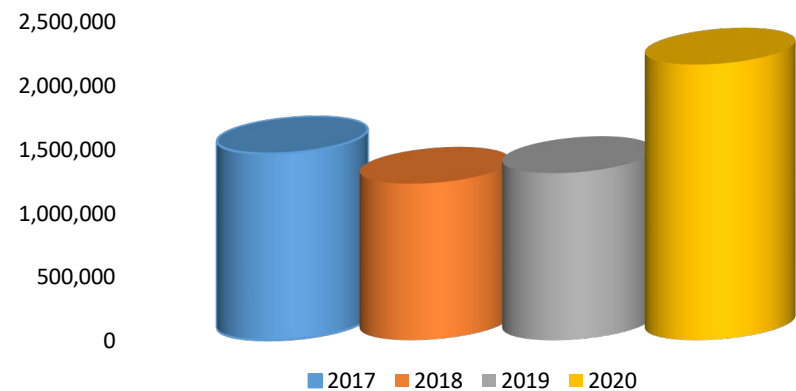
Jan-July 2021 Total Count:

1,202,134

Year to Date Data Per Location



Pinellas Trail Use 2017 – 2020



* 2010 – 2016 Survey Data & 2017-2021 Counter Data. Technical issues with several counters in 2019 resulting in several missing days of data during 2019.

Pinellas Trail User Count Data Summary

Automated Trail Counter Data Collection Period:
August 1st – 31st (31 days)

August 2021

31-Day Count Total: **118,949**
Daily Average Users: **3,837**

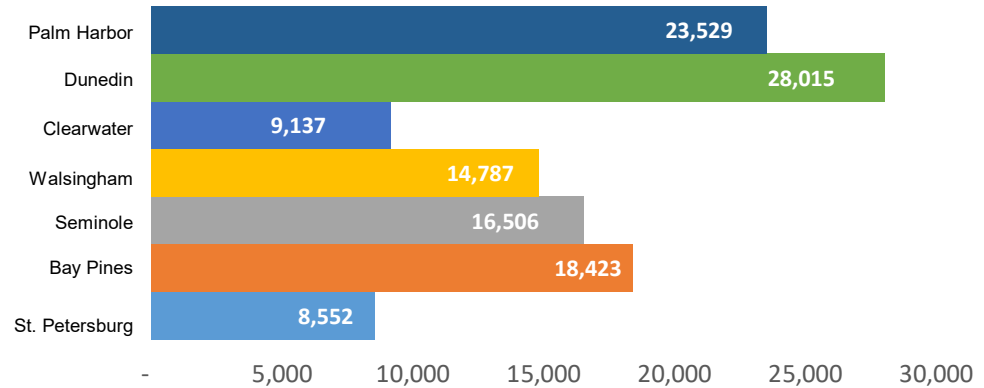
Highest Daily Totals:

#1 – Sunday, August 8th (Dunedin – 1,625)

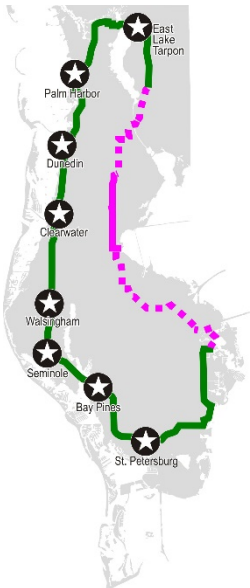
#2 – Saturday, August 7th (Bay Pines – 1,000)

#3 – Saturday, August 21st (Clearwater – 539)

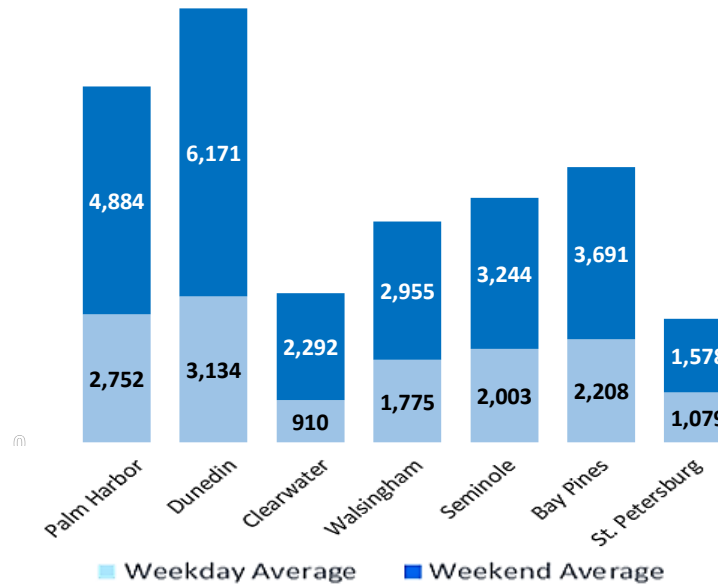
August Trail Users by Counter Location




Counter Locations



Weekday & Weekend Profile



Trail User Mode Split



Counter Location	Pedestrian (%)	Cyclist (%)
Palm Harbor:	20%	80%
Dunedin:	15%	85%
Clearwater:	3%	97%
Walsingham:	9%	91%
Seminole:	19%	81%
Bay Pines:	13%	87%
St. Petersburg:	17%	83%

Source: Forward Pinellas *August 2021*
National Weather Service: [August 2021](#)

Pinellas Trail User Count Data Summary

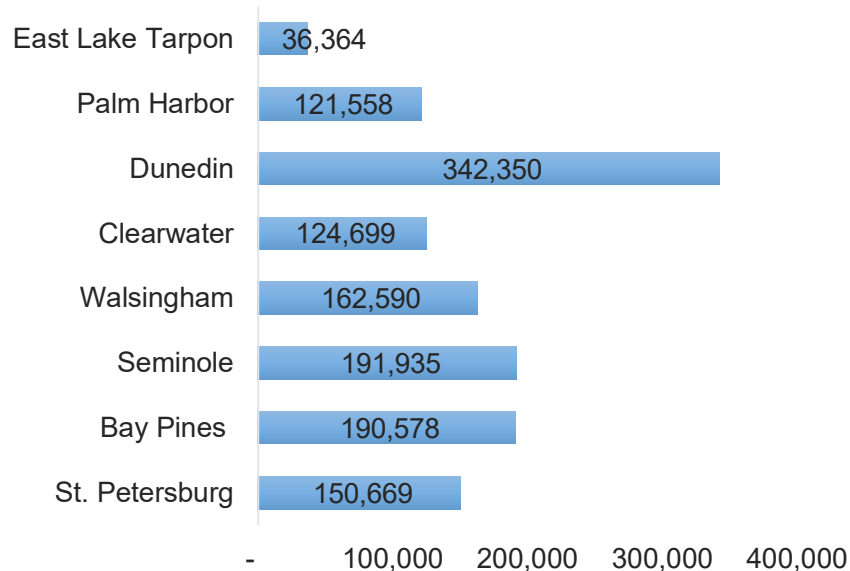
Automated Trail Counter Data Collection

Period: January – August, 2021 Data*

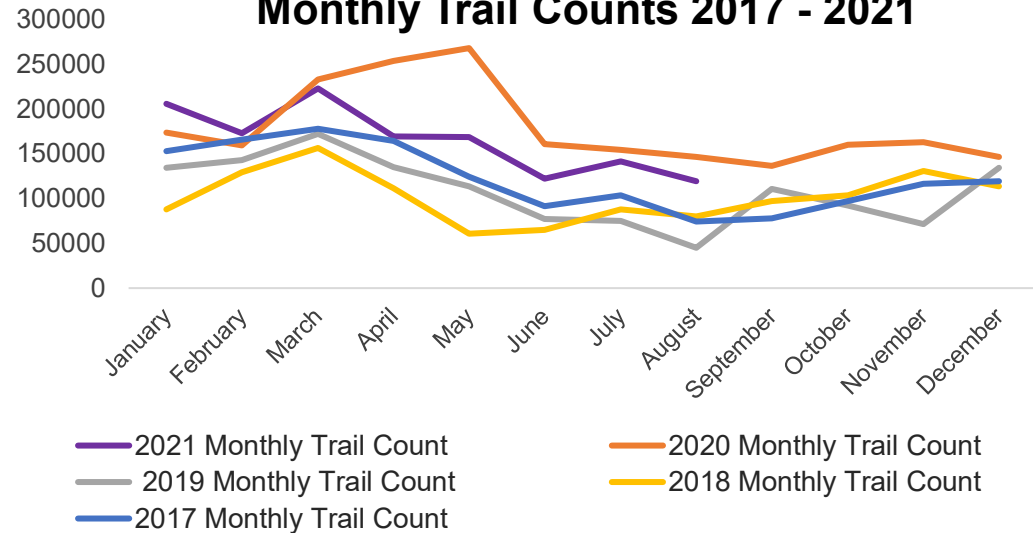


**January-August, 2021 Total Count:
1,320,743**

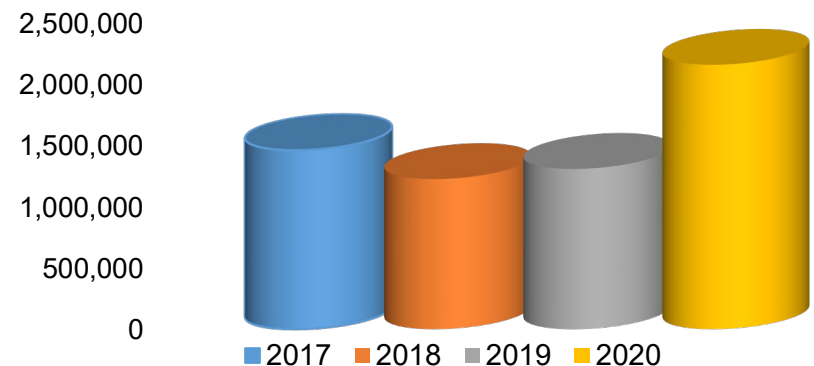
Year to Date Data Per Location



Monthly Trail Counts 2017 - 2021



Pinellas Trail Use 2017 – 2020



* 2010 – 2016 Survey Data & 2017-2021 Counter Data. Technical issues with several counters in 2019 resulting in several missing days of data during 2019.

TRAIL CONSTRUCTION
PROJECTS JULY 2021

Pinellas Trail North Loop Gap Countryside	Enterprise Rd to Chesnut Sr. Park; SUN Trail; Construction has begun, Est. Complete Fall 2022 (link)
Pinellas Trail South Loop Phase 3 & 4	Haines Bayshore to Ulmerton Rd to 126th Ave; Segments of South Loop has will receive SUN Trail and FDOT Funding; Design in 2022; Construction 2024 (Pinellas County, Florida - Pinellas Trail South Gap Alignment Development)
71st Street Trail Connector	Pinellas Trail to 38th Avenue N; Design 2022, Construction 2024
San Martin Bridge & Trail connection	PD&E Study Public Hearing September 2021 (link)
Courtney Campbell Trail Overpass	Trail Overpass at S.R. 60/Bayshore Blvd; SUN Trail; Design Underway; Construction 2024
Howard Frankland Bridge Trail	FDOT include trail with new bridge construction; Design-Build Project; Est. Construction start 2020 and completed 2024 (link)
Gandy Bridge Trail	FDOT to include trail with new bridge construction; PD&E Study Underway
Harn Boulevard Overpass	Pedestrian Overpass; Design Underway; Construction start 2021; Est. Complete early 2023 (link)
Bayway Trail South	SR 679 & Tierra Verde Bridge Replacement Est. Complete Fall 2021 (link)
Oldsmar Trail Phase 6	Douglas Rd (Stevens Avenue to Race Track Rd) Design complete; Construction start summer 2021; section from Hayes Rd to Stevens Avenue postponed.

9. Other Business

A. Correspondence, Publications, Articles of Interest

Enforcement Aimed Road Safety -he World – September 2021

Transit Planners Public Health Streets Blog – September 2021

With Children Back in School – September 2021

B. Suggestions for Future Agenda Topics

This item is provided to allow committee members to suggest topics for future PTSTF agendas.

C. Other

If any member has other business to discuss, they may address it under this item.

Enforcement Effort Aimed At Keeping Pinellas Park Roads Safe

Starting Wednesday, Pinellas Park police will be out in force on the city's streets as part of a high-visibility enforcement effort.



D'Ann Lawrence White, Patch Staff

Posted Mon, Sep 20, 2021 at 10:55 am ET

Replies (2)

Enforcement efforts will focus on areas in the city that have the most accidents involving pedestrians and bicyclists. (Pinellas Park Police)

PINELLAS PARK, FL — Starting Wednesday, Pinellas Park police will be out in force on the city's streets as part of a high-visibility enforcement effort to improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.

The enforcement effort will run from Sept. 22 to May 13, 2022.

Pinellas County ranks in the top 25 counties in the state for traffic crashes resulting in serious and fatal injuries to pedestrians and bicyclists.

Enforcement efforts will focus on areas in the city that have the most accidents involving pedestrians and bicyclists.

The project is being funded through a contract with the University of North Florida in partnership with the Florida Department of Transportation's focused initiative to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety.

Find out what's happening in Pinellas Beaches with free, real-time updates from Patch.

Let's go!

This effort aims to increase awareness of and compliance with traffic laws that protect the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists. Police officers will focus primarily on educating drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists.

However, warnings or citations may be given, depending on the circumstances. This includes bicyclists who fail to ride in the direction of traffic and use lights when riding at night and pedestrians who don't use crosswalks or intersections, obey pedestrian signals or aren't visible to drivers at night.

Why Transit Planners Need to Talk About Public Health

- By [Kea Wilson](#)
- [Sep 22, 2021](#)

Baltimore is failing to deliver quality transit to the predominantly low-income neighborhoods of color that need it most, a new report from public health researchers argues — and the analysis they used to identify those areas could serve as template for other cities committed to mobility justice, too.

In a [bar-setting new report](#), a coalition of researchers from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the Baltimore Transit Equity Coalition examined which Charm City neighborhoods are most in need of expanded and reliable transit service. But rather than look only at conventional measures of transit equity — like the number of stops within reach of the average resident, or the average commute time for bus riders — the team revealed a far more granular picture of the universe of public health metrics that expanded transit access can help improve.

The team painstakingly scored each of the 653 census block groups based on five separate indicators of air pollution, along with a raft of health indicators (such as rates of asthma, low birth weight, and COVID-19), and even a broad range of “Social Vulnerability Indicators” like access to affordable housing, disability status, household language access, and more. The highest overall scores indicated a neighborhood whose residents could potentially benefit the most from transit investment; neighborhoods with lower scores, by contrast, were doing relatively well.

Mapped out, the neighborhoods with the highest scores were almost identical to the neighborhoods in the footprint of Baltimore’s [“Black Butterfly,”](#) to quote the famous term coined by Dr. Lawrence Brown, where high concentrations of low-income, BIPOC residents have been pushed into a handful of neighborhoods, thanks to the enduring legacies of [redlining](#) and other forms of institutional racism. The areas with the *least* need, conversely, were located in Baltimore’s “White L”, the L-shaped land mass that runs along the city’s harbor and central core, flanked by the butterfly’s wings.

But even within the footprint of the Butterfly, researchers found 46 neighborhoods whose needs were particularly urgent — and in a city like Baltimore, where transit

funding is scarce and a relatively high proportion of the city either relies on shared modes or [struggles to meet the costs of car ownership](#), those differences matter..

“Ideally, we’d invest in all of the neighborhoods that have been historically redlined,” said Dr. Megan Latshaw, associate scientist at Johns Hopkins and the lead author on the study. “But we don’t necessarily have the resources to do that. So if political leaders have to make tough decisions about where to invest, we want them to consider not just things like ridership and which communities are living within easy proximity of a bus stop, but also which communities have higher levels of negative health outcomes, in part because they don’t have access to the reliable, efficient transit they need.”

Maryland transportation planners don’t exactly have a reputation for prioritizing historically disadvantaged neighborhoods. In 2015, Gov. Larry Hogan [infamously cancelled](#) a long-awaited light rail extension that would have connected the historically redlined areas across east and west Baltimore — in an ironic twist, it was actually called the Red Line — diverting \$736 million in state funds to [road-widening](#) projects in the predominantly White surrounding counties and forcing the DOT to return [nearly a billion dollars in federal grants](#) in the process.

Even at the city level, Latshaw says local planners probably don’t have access to the data they’d need to truly prioritize investment in the neighborhoods that are suffering the most.

“We don’t know much about how they analyze this stuff, because it’s not a very transparent process,” she added. “But we do know they haven’t done the level of analysis that we did. We know, for instance, that the last updates they made to transit in Baltimore looked at average distance to bus stops, but not at what we call origin-to-destination times, which is how long it actually takes you to get where you’re going.”

Latshaw says even her team’s uniquely thorough analysis doesn’t tell the whole whole story of what it’s like to get around in Baltimore — because the public data they had access to didn’t, either. Thanks to a [paucity of meaningful metrics](#), the team was forced to omit stats on transit riders’ exposure to traffic violence — a particularly critical measure in a city with some of the [worst sidewalks in the nation](#) — and also they couldn’t account for levels of crime, police brutality, and other safety concerns. But she hopes future researchers will find creative ways to paint a more comprehensive picture in the future.

“We don’t just want transit that gets people where they need to go in a short amount of time,” she said. “We also want them to get there safely — in every sense of the word.”

Via [Johns Hopkins](#)

Latshaw says making holistic safety and equity data easily available would go a long way towards integrating public health into the transit planning process. But in a perfect world, good metrics wouldn’t just be easy to find — agencies would be *required* to

reference them anytime they built something new, and face real consequences if they, for instance, decided to send millions in badly-needed urban transit funding to expand suburban highways.

Indeed, that possibility might become a reality if the Democrats succeed in passing their \$3.5-trillion budget measure. The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's segment of the mega-bill included a [\\$10-billion program](#) specifically earmarked for improving the mobility of historically disadvantaged communities, which most advocates expect will be funneled primarily to transit.

But the big question is how, exactly, Washington will set parameters on which communities will qualify for the funds — a tricky analysis that Latshaw hopes public health researchers can help perform. And even if the budget measure fails, she hopes that the paper will inspire other advocates to push their transportation leaders to view transit planning through a public health lens, especially during the pandemic.

“It can't be repeated enough that the majority of people who we consider essential workers during this pandemic also [rely on transit](#),” Latshaw said. “Whether it's hospital workers or grocery store employees, these are these people who we rely on to keep us moving forward as a society. Our system is failing them, but it doesn't have to.”

With children back in schools, safety advocates seek to protect young walkers and cyclists

Nancy Pullen-Seufert says protecting children in a pandemic also can help keep them safer on foot and on a bike.

Nancy Pullen-Seufert is the director of the National Center for Safe Routes to School and a senior research associate for the Highway Safety Research Center at the University of North Carolina. (UNC Highway Safety Research Center)

By

Katherine Shaver

September 24, 2021 at 9:04 a.m. EDT

With millions of students recently returning to classrooms, some schools are seeing heavier traffic congestion as more parents drive children to avoid crowded buses.

Safety advocates who tout the health and environmental benefits of children walking and biking to school say they can navigate the additional traffic more safely using some of the same pandemic-era measures that increase social distancing.

Staggering dismissal times to reduce hallway crowding — and letting walkers and cyclists leave first — can give children on foot and bike a head-start on, and more space from, vehicles.

Opening back entrances to allow more room to access school buildings can provide neighborhoods behind schools a more direct walk or bike route. Dropping off children farther from campuses can free up jammed school parking lots while providing children and parents a way to build more walking into their day.

They cite school systems like Arlington Public Schools, which worked to make walking safer around 16 elementary schools last spring after cutting school bus service in some areas to limit bus capacities. School and county officials did “walk audits” of surrounding neighborhoods to spot potential safety hazards that needed correcting and provided families with maps of the safest routes.

Nancy Pullen-Seufert is the director of the National Center for Safe Routes to School, which coordinates the annual Walk to School Day, this year on Oct. 6. Pullen-Seufert, also a senior research associate for the University of North Carolina’s Highway Safety Research Center, spoke with The Washington Post about how the pandemic has reframed efforts to improve pedestrian and bike safety for schoolchildren.

The Post: How has the pandemic changed thinking around school travel?

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Pullen-Seufert: I think it depends on the community a bit. In some places, we’re seeing parents responding to concerns about covid by, if they have the option, driving kids to school. In other places, we’re hearing from families who are saying, “Gosh, we did more walking and biking when we were learning from home, and we realized the school trip isn’t as far as we thought,” or “We’re realizing we really liked having that extra physical activity, and we want to create some new habits around that.” We’ve seen cities prioritize sidewalk improvements and construction in places that allow for more connection between schools and neighborhoods. We’ve seen cities that have made temporary changes to their streets, either by removing a traffic lane and using cones to create more space for walking or by closing streets or limiting vehicle access to streets near a school.

Cities are making covid-era street changes permanent. Some are facing pushback.

The Post: In Arlington, the school system tried to help kids walk and ride to school more safely last spring because it wanted to reduce the number of children on buses. Can you talk about that?

Pullen-Seufert: The Arlington school district has been amazing in thinking about all the ways they want to provide options for students, particularly around walking and biking. They expanded some of their walk zones so that more students from a little further away who wouldn't necessarily have access to a school bus would have safer options for walking and biking. First, they went out and did "walk audits" to identify safety concerns and make improvements to those. They did some enhancements to crosswalks and added locations for crossing guards. On one of their higher-speed roads [Carlin Springs Road], they [temporarily] repurposed one of their traffic lanes to create more space for people to walk and bike. They also used changeable message signs to remind people that students are back to school and they're walking and biking. I think they're doing things to make changes to the built environment but at the same time are trying to change the culture around how we get around and what is expected. [Full bus service was restored for this school year, a school district official said.]

The Post: How has the fact that more people have been able to work from home or have more flexible work schedules during the pandemic affected the way children get to school? For example, do some parents have more time to walk their child to school rather than having to get them to a bus so they can leave for work?

Pullen-Seufert: We're seeing it both ways. We have families who maybe have had a chance to do more walking when everyone was at home and realized this is something they wanted to build into their lives and continue when their student returned to the classroom. Certainly more flexible work schedules for people working from home is part of that. It's sort of a reset of how we think about travel. We also have lots and lots of people who are essential workers. We still have to figure out ways to support their students in getting to school.

7 ways the ride to the office might be different this fall

The Post: What, in general, are the biggest impediments to more children walking or biking to school?

Pullen-Seufert: I think the number one [challenge] is really around the built environment, the fact that we've created streets that are more inviting for driving than they are for walking. We are recognizing the fact that we need to think about moving people and not just moving cars, so it's creating more space for walking and biking and creating more protected crossings. I also think about vehicle speeds. When we think about risk of serious injury and death, the faster a vehicle is going, the more likely the pedestrian is to not survive the crash. And, of course, it takes the driver longer to stop. We know parents get very concerned about allowing children to walk where they see high traffic volumes and high speeds. We also need to create access to transit and safe routes between transit stops and schools.

The Post: What are some of the fastest, easiest and cheapest ways that school or community leaders can make walking and cycling safer?

Pullen-Seufert: Schools can open up their back gates if they can, provide crossing guards and add more crossings to make it easier for students and families to come from a variety of directions to access the school. They can also work with the city to use traffic cones, paint or bollards to create more space for walking and create a physical and visual barrier between where people are driving and where people are walking. One of the other things we've seen during the pandemic is temporary infrastructure improvement projects. I was talking with someone in a community in Indianapolis that got a grant from their department of health to paint a bike lane in front of their school and to add another crosswalk because they wanted students [walking and on bicycles] to be able to access a different school entrance than their motor vehicle traffic.

Amid pandemic, e-cycling flourishes and gets seriously competitive

The Post: You previously mentioned that children in communities of color and lower-income neighborhoods are reflected more highly in crash statistics. Why is that?

Pullen-Seufert: We certainly see communities of color more highly represented in low-income neighborhoods, and we know that low-income neighborhoods tend to lack the same walking and

biking infrastructure that higher-income areas have. We also know that low-income neighborhoods are more likely to have a high-speed street running through them, which is obviously a safety concern. Communities of color can have lower average incomes. Sometimes that's because people are working more than one job, so there's less time for parent supervision or for being able to spend time walking to school with a child.

The Post: How do you correct these disparities for children in lower-income neighborhoods and communities of color?

Pullen-Seufert: I think it has to do with where we prioritize our resources. We need to be sure that we're first looking where there is greatest risk. It also involves making sure we're asking community members, "What are your concerns, and how would you like to be able to use your street?"

How the pandemic and a renewed focus on equity could reshape transportation

The Post: What else should people be thinking about or doing to make school travel safer, especially during a pandemic?

Pullen-Seufert: I'd say people should consider all of their options. If they have to drive, can they drive part of the way and walk the remainder of the route? Drivers should please drive slowly and yield to people who are walking and biking. They can also ask their school district and their school, "What are you doing to help protect my child who is riding the school bus?" I also think we want to connect with neighbors and ask how we can band together to support students using active travel to get to school or walk to public transit or their school bus stop.

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Transportation, infrastructure and the pandemic

By [Katherine Shaver](#)

Katherine Shaver is a transportation and development reporter focusing on urban/suburban planning issues and construction of Maryland's light-rail Purple Line. Since joining The Washington Post in 1997, she also has covered crime, courts, education and local government. [_Twitter](#)