HOW CAN WE SAFELY EXERCISE OUTDOORS IF THE TRAILS ARE CROWDED?

Montgomery County’s multiuse trails offer the opportunity to exercise outdoors, but overcrowding during the COVID-19 pandemic can make social distancing difficult to achieve.

The Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC) recently developed a new web app to empower residents to walk, jog, and bicycle on neighborhood streets and local roads as a more convenient alternative to using the trails. The app is based on an analysis from the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), which was initially developed to support the county’s award-winning plan, Bike Montco: The Bicycle Plan for Montgomery County.

The app features an interactive map which identifies local streets that can be used comfortably by bicyclists, walkers, joggers, and runners. The public can enter their address to find a suitable network near where they live. Many of these streets start in a person’s own neighborhood. The web app can be found at www.montcopa.org/GetOutAndGoStreets.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Montgomery County’s trails have been, and continue to be, very crowded during the pandemic.
- Low-stress and neighborhood streets are a good alternative to using the trails.
- The county created a web app to help citizens find low-stress streets near their home.

Roughly 70% of streets in Montgomery County are relatively comfortable to use.
“In addition to our popular trail network, there are a lot of opportunities to exercise right in our own neighborhoods.”

– Ken Lawrence, Vice Chair, Montgomery County Commissioners

Since the start of the pandemic, the number of people using Montgomery County’s popular trail system has been up by almost 200 percent at times.

Meanwhile, county residents have reduced their travel as a result of COVID-19. According to data compiled by the University of Maryland, the average number of miles county residents are traveling each day declined at their peak by almost three-quarters, and it continues to be lower than pre-pandemic levels. With traffic way down during the stay-at-home order, our streets are quieter.

The original DVRPC analysis concludes that roughly 70 percent of Montgomery County’s roads are relatively comfortable for bicyclists, based on pre-coronavirus traffic conditions, making the streets and sidewalks in many of our own neighborhoods a convenient solution to using the trails.

Since the pandemic began, trail use has increased up to 200% at times.

The average county citizen is driving fewer miles per day than before COVID-19.

**RESOURCES**

*University of Maryland, COVID-19 Impact Analysis Platform*

Provides data and insight on the impact of COVID-19 on mobility, health, economy, and society for all states and counties and is updated daily.

*DVRPC Bicycle LTS and Connectivity Analysis*

Web map that ranks roads based on Level of Traffic Stress (LTS)—a road classification system based on comfort to bicyclists and includes rankings for individual streets and maps islands of low traffic stress.

*Bike Montco: The Bicycle Plan for Montgomery County*

Bicycle plan that includes a future vision of a planned bicycle network in Montgomery County based in part on data derived from the DVRPC Bicycle LTS and Connectivity Data.

**RELATED TOPICS**

- Safeguarding Our Open Space

- Low-stress streets and sidewalks can be used for a variety of recreational activities, such as bicycling, walking, and running.