



## SUMMARY OF OPEN HOUSE MEETINGS



*Prepared for:*  
**The New Jersey Department of Transportation  
and  
The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection**

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**The RBA Group**

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## Summary of Open House Meetings

A series of “Open House” meetings was held to inform the public about the New Jersey Trails Plan Update process and to elicit public comment, particularly comments related to issues or concerns that should be addressed in the Plan. The Open Houses also provided opportunities for individual discussion among participants, New Jersey Department of Transportation, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and Plan Advisory Committee members. Three meetings were held, geographically dispersed, one each in north, central and south New Jersey:

- Tuesday, September 12, 2006; 3:30 pm to 7:30 pm (Canale Training Center, Egg Harbor Township, Atlantic County); Attendance: 32
- Tuesday, September 19, 2006; 3:30 pm to 7:30 pm (Frelinghuysen Arboretum, Whippany, Morris County); Attendance: 79
- Tuesday, September 26, 2006; 3:30 pm to 7:30 pm (Ellarslie Museum, Trenton, Mercer County); Attendance: 52



Canale Training Center, Egg Harbor Township



Frelinghuysen Arboretum, Whippany

A “Sign In” table was set up and staffed at the entrance of each Open House. Five “stations” were set up providing information to attendees in the form of hand-outs and display boards. Upon entering and signing in, attendees were invited to review the various displays at each station and to provide feedback by filling out a Trail User Survey and/or Comment Form.

- Station #1: Benefits of Trails
  - Station #2: Trail User Groups
  - Station #3: Trail Trends: Newer Users, Future Scenarios, Recreational Trails Program Trends
  - Station #4: Key Issues
  - Station #5: Feedback (Survey Forms/Comment Sheets)
- Many of the attendees had already completed the Trail User Survey that had been posted on [www.njtrails.org](http://www.njtrails.org)

Representatives of the NJDOT, NJDEP and members of the Plan Advisory Committee were present to answer questions and discuss issues “one-on-one” with attendees.

## Summary of Issues From Open Houses - Survey Forms and Comment Sheets

The following is a summary of issues from one-on-one conversations at the Open House Meetings, and from Comment Sheets and Survey Forms that were submitted at the meetings:

### **Facility Needs (includes both the overall supply of trails and the variety of trails) -**

It was frequently mentioned in user surveys that there is an inadequate supply of trails and ancillary facilities, especially during peak use times, for trails in general and for trails serving specific user groups. Of particular note were a lack of motorized trail opportunities and a lack of access

(put-in/take-out sites) to “blue trails”. Equestrians cited a loss of trails from suburbanization, as trail use has been through informal arrangements on privately-owned lands. There should be a variety of trails for various trail users and skill levels.



Ellarslie Museum, Trenton

**Motorized Trail Uses** – Although this issue involves both “facility needs” (see above), User Conflicts (see below), and Safety, Security, Enforcement (see below) the magnitude of needs and conflicts associated with motorized trail uses warrants including this as a separate issue. Survey results frequently mention that there is a dearth of legal facilities for this user group. Many indicated that such facilities should be made available since the funding source for the National Recreational Trails Program (NRTTP) is derived from the federal fuel tax on the sale of fuel for motorized recreational vehicles. Many other trail users (primarily hikers) strongly expressed negative attitudes towards motorized trail use because of negative impacts on the hiking experience and trail facilities. Suggestions ranged from the need for segregated facilities and more vigorous enforcement to outright bans.

**Quality/Condition/Maintenance of Trails** – The most frequently mentioned issue or concern raised in the Trail User Survey is the condition or level of trails maintenance: litter, degraded trail surfaces, lack of blazing, etc.

**User Conflicts (Multiple Use and Compatibility)** – A number of trail users vigorously and frequently asserted that conflicts among users is a huge problem. Others say they rarely or never encounter such problems. Various type of conflicts are said to occur, including walkers (hikers, etc.) vs. bicyclists and mountain bikers; walkers v. mountain bicyclists, walkers vs. (illegal) motorized trail users, equestrians v. walkers, bicyclists and mountain bikers. Survey responses: suggest that there should be an emphasis on both providing trails for specific uses and for multiple uses.

**Information Needs** – A frequent comment in the surveys is that there is insufficient information available on the location, types and difficulty of trails that exist around the state.

**User Education** – Survey responses indicate that users need to be educated about trails etiquette to reduce conflicts and other problems such as illicit use. This education can be in the form of improved signing on trails, through trail provider information resources, user groups educating their own members, or seminars or conferences.

**Rights of Way for Trails** – The need to capitalize on abandoned rail rights of way was mentioned frequently. Also mentioned were the possibility of using utility rights of way and public lands with restricted access for trails and the difficulty of using private land for trails purposes because of landowner unwillingness to open private property to public use.

**Safety and Security (Management, Enforcement, Safety for Trails Users)** – Safety and personal security were mentioned as issues of concern. Both a lack of on-site staff and a lack of enforcement (e.g., for unauthorized motorized use of trails, littering, etc.) were noted by attendees.

**Trails and Transportation** - New Jersey has the opportunity to extend the trails experience beyond recreation to include utilitarian travel. Trails should be developed between key destinations. New Jersey can be a model for others who are exploring non-motorized transportation options. Urban trails are important to New Jersey and should be recognized as a critical facility type in the New Jersey Trails Plan.