

Accessible Trails: Public Forum

Tonight's Agenda

6:00 - 6:15: Welcome and Introduction

6:15 - 6:30: Presentation

6:30 - 7:30: Breakout Groups

7:30 - 7:55: Report Back

7:55 - 8:00: Next Steps

DODSON & FLINKER
Landscape Architecture and Planning

Unpaved  Trails For All



What is the Trails for All Project?

*The Trails for All initiative aims to create **universally accessible trails**, through intentional trail planning that **removes barriers to access** and **brings the outdoors to individuals of all abilities** via **trail improvements** such as gentle grades, stable surfaces, and inclusive signage in Massachusetts.*

What is the Trails for All Project?

Key Objectives:

- Identify the range of **trail experiences that are desired**
- Identify the **critical barriers** to providing that range of accessible experiences in natural environments
- Identify **resources necessary** for providing that range of accessible experiences in Massachusetts
- Engage in this effort not for, but by and with, individuals with lived experience with disabling conditions
- Cultivate a culture of recognition that accessible trails can't be made without the input and partnership of people with lived experience of disability.

What trails are we talking about?



Natural surface pedestrian trails, adaptive-use trails, and put-ins for “blue trails”
that provide experiences in nature.

Not all accessible trails are the same!

Length	Long	Short
Surfacing	Concrete, asphalt, decking, crushed stone, compacted soil	
Trail Width	Narrow	Wide
Features	Minimal	Extensive
Engagement	Independent	Facilitated/Programmed
Context	Urban/built	Remote/natural
Slope	Flat/gradual	Steep (powered or levered devices required)
Noise	Quiet/ambient	Loud/sudden noises
Crowds	Crowded	Uncrowded
Fees	Free	Entry fee/membership
Restrooms	Yes	No
Visual	Non-visual wayfinding/interpretation, high contrast signs, guide ropes, trail edges	
Transit	Connected	Auto-dependent

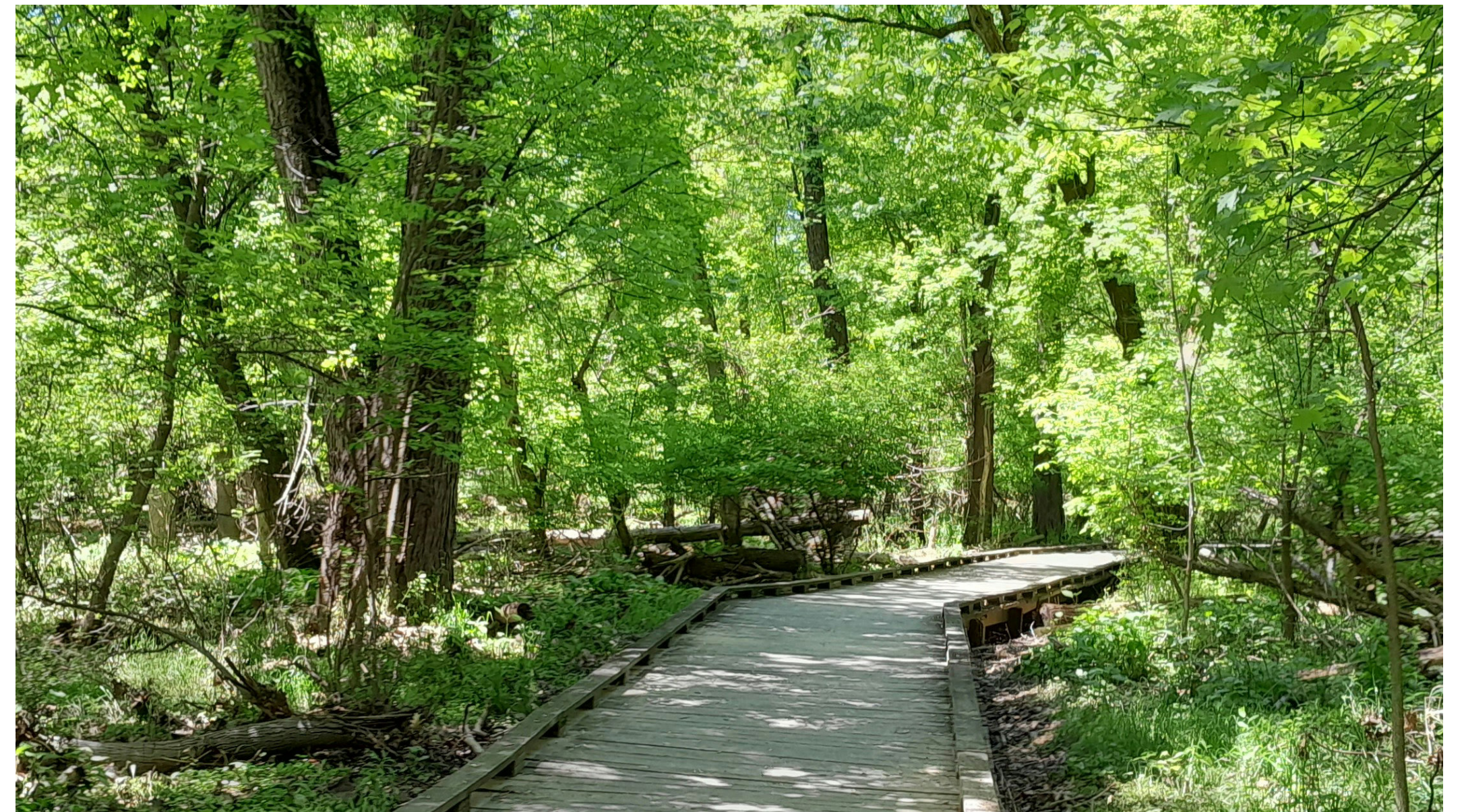
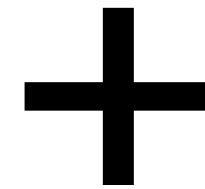


Access and Accessibility



Access

Can people get to trails?
(Transportation to trails, finding trails,
hours of operation, etc.)

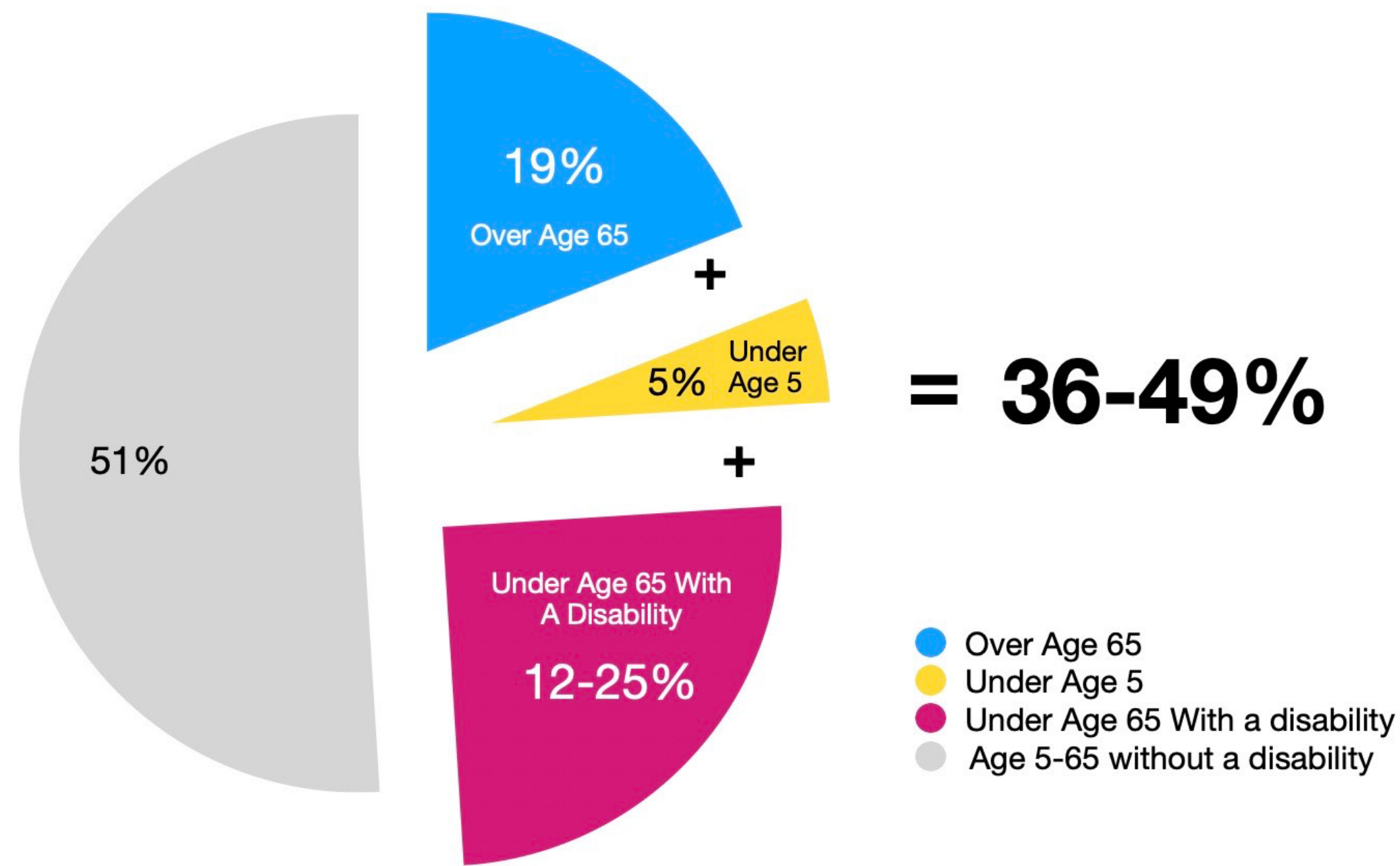


Accessibility

Can all people, regardless of ability, use trails?
(Surface stability, slope, width, resting areas,
non-visual wayfinding, etc.)

Who uses Accessible Trails?

36-49% of Massachusetts residents can benefit from **Accessible Trails**



Source: CDC, 2024
Rates have increased in the last year.

- 26% of adults in Massachusetts have a disabling condition (mobility, visual, auditory, or cognitive); almost 1.5 million people.¹
- 28.7% of adults nationally have a disabling condition.²

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/dhds/impacts/index.html>

² CDC, <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2024/s0716-Adult-disability.html>

Who uses Accessible Trails?

- **44% of adults ages 65+** identify as having a disability.¹
- Last year, MA was the **#1 destination for retirement**²
- Between 2020 and 2030, the population over 65 in MA is expected to increase from 15 to **21 percent** of the total population.³
- Interest in outdoor recreation among older adults is growing:
 - 39.5% of people 65+ participated in outdoor recreation in 2023⁴

1 CDC, <https://www.cdc.gov/disability-and-health/articles-documents/disabilities-health-care-access.html>

2 AARP, <https://www.aarp.org/money/retirement/2024-states-where-retirees-moved/>

3 MA Healthy Aging Collaborative, <https://mahealthyagingcollaborative.org/data-report/explore-the-profiles/>

4 Outdoor Foundation, Outdoor Recreation Participation Trends Report 2024, [OutdoorIndustry.org](https://www.outdoorindustry.org/)

Nature Provides Health Benefits



- Studies show that spending time in nature benefits health and well-being and **reduces stress**.
- The more natural an environment, the greater the stress reducing benefit.

Nature Provides Health Benefits



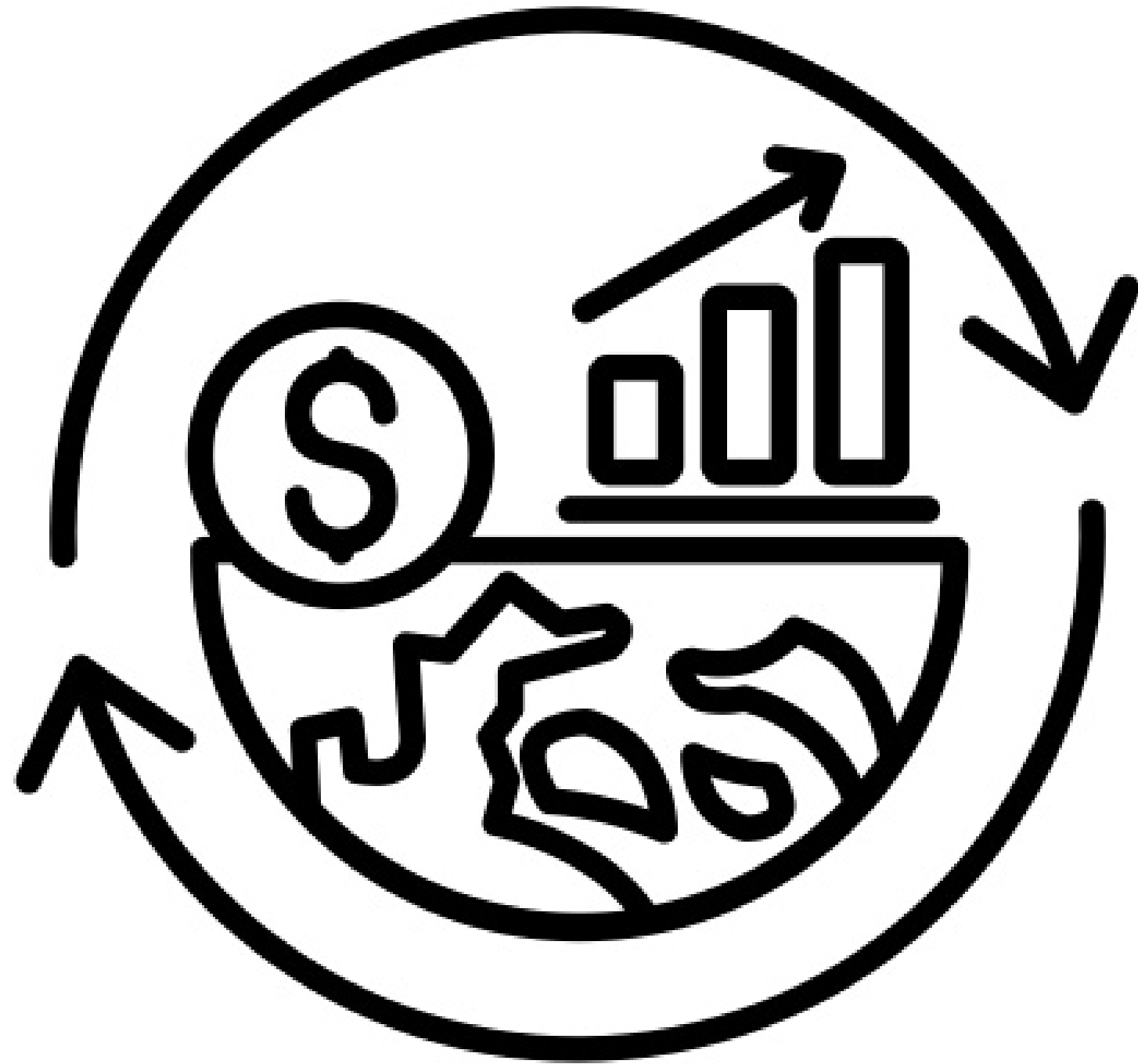
- People with mobility disabilities are **33% more likely** to develop **stress-related illnesses** than their non-mobility-limited peers.¹
- In 2023, Massachusetts spent \$23.5 billion on preventable healthcare costs.²
- It's estimated that spending \$1 on trails can save \$3 in medical costs.³

¹ https://www.academia.edu/14931024/Assessing_stress_in_disability_Developing_and_piloting_the_Disability_Related_Stress_Scale

² 2023 study by Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation of Massachusetts

³ According to literature from American Trails and the American Heart Association

Outdoor Recreation is an Economic Driver



- Massachusetts has the fastest growing outdoor recreation industry in the nation:
 - \$13.2 billion in 2023
 - 13.3% growth from 2022 to 2023
 - 73% growth since 2012¹
- **Accessible/adaptive travel is a growing market:**
 - Valued at \$58.7 billion in 2020, and continued growth expected.²

¹ <https://www.mass.gov/news/new-report-massachusetts-leads-us-in-growth-of-outdoor-recreation-contributing-over-13-billion-to-massachusetts-economy>

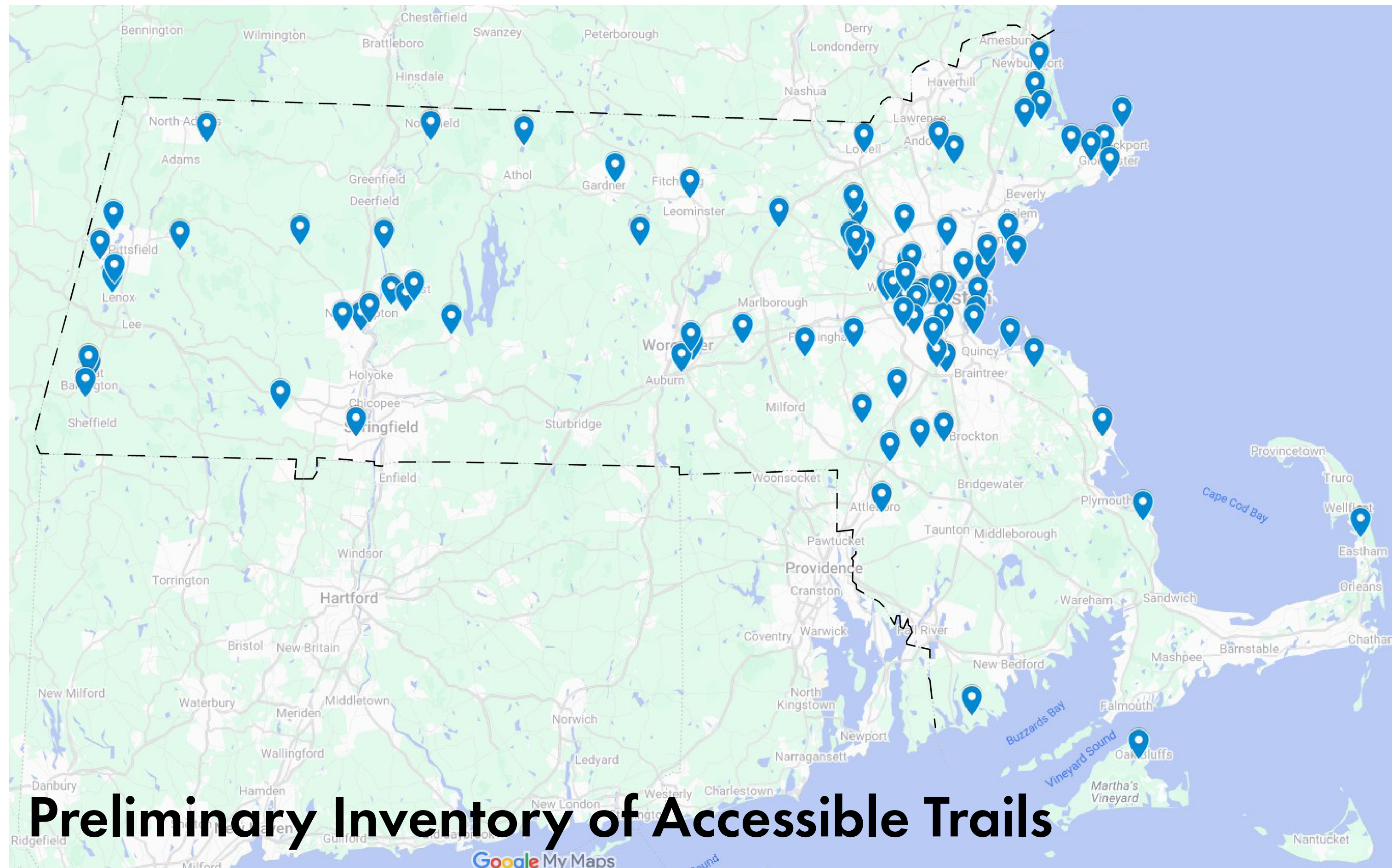
² <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/economic-impact-of-disability-travel-reaches-58-7-billion-301162417.html>

The State of Trails in MA

- Massachusetts has over 4,000 miles of unpaved trails in state parks—yet only **7.5 miles are accessible**. That's **0.2%**.
- Overall, less than **0.5% of soft surface trails** in Massachusetts are accessible.



Trail Distribution



Accessible trails are not distributed equally across the state.

Large areas of the state lack nearby accessible trail options, requiring significant travel.

Trails for All

- Trails aren't optional, they are essential infrastructure for health and well-being.
- People with disabilities and others with mobility challenges have a right to enjoy public and natural spaces.
- How can we improve trail accessibility in Massachusetts?
- Let's talk!



Breakout Groups

Report Back

Thank you for joining us!

- Next Public Forum: September 15th
- Additional thoughts?
- Comment form: <https://www.mass.gov/forms/accessible-trails-for-all-public-comment-form>
- Email: info@dodsonflinker.com

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