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Capturing the Full Value of Your Trail

October 3, 2018

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We'll consider two questions.

1. How do we understand the value of our trail to the community?

2. How do we make the best overall case for our trail?

Types of Value

- Economic
- Health
- Transportation
- Recreation
- Environmental
- Political
- Community Cohesion
- Etc.

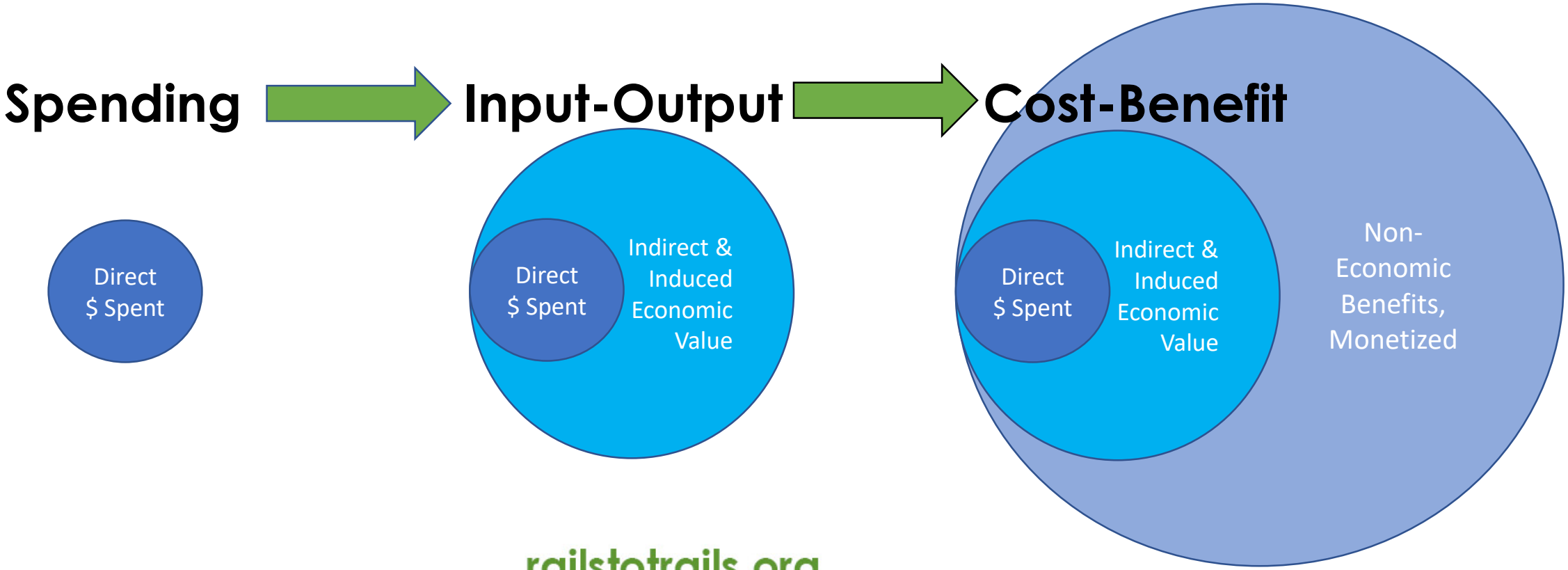
Let's focus on economic values.

- There are 3 main ways to assess the "economic value" of a trail.
- They show *vastly* different results, but all are correct in their respective contexts.
- The choice of method depends on your purpose, audience, and resources.

Economic Value Assessment Methods

Spending → Input-Output → Cost-Benefit

Economic Value Assessment Methods



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And now, a brief diversion to discuss ice cream.

Example: Jill buys an ice cream.

Jill paid $3 for an ice cream cone.

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Direct Spending Analysis

Jill paid $3 for an ice cream cone. **Result = $3.00**

=

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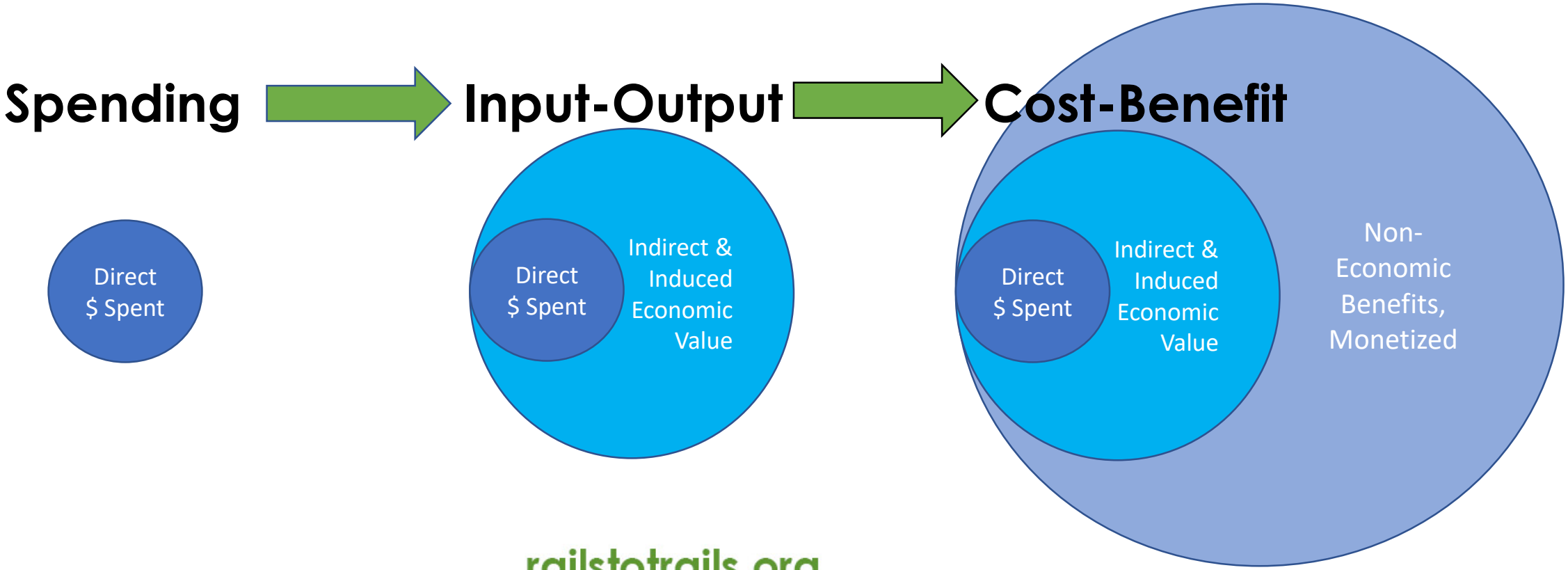
Economic Value Assessment Methods



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Input-Output Assessment of Economic Value

- Broader than direct spending assessment.
- Uses a software, IMPLAN, plus an understanding of the direct spending, to also account for indirect and reflected benefits of money spent within a community.

Example: Jill buys an ice cream.

Jill paid $3 for an ice cream cone.

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Input-Output Analyis

Jack paid $3 for an ice cream cone. Once we include direct, indirect, and induced spending, that $3 may be worth $5-$8 to the economy.

=

(Output or “value of production”)

+

(Inputs)

+

Value Added:	
Employee Compensation:	
Proprietor Income:	
Other Property Type Income:	
Tax on Production and Imports:	
Total Value Added	

(Value added)

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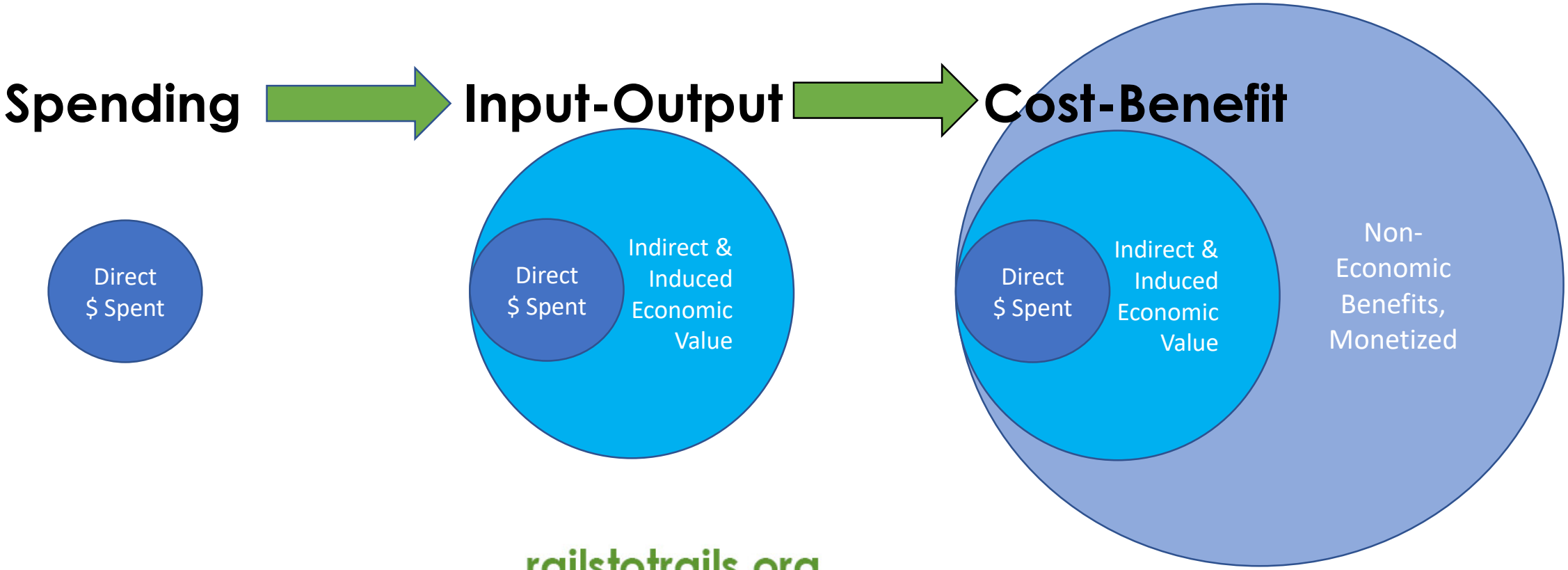
Input-Output Assessment of Economic Value

- Results in a much larger, more comprehensive assessment of local economic value.
- More reflective of full economic picture, and therefore needed for public financing or value-capture assessments (e.g. TIF funding).
- More expensive to produce, as the IMPLAN software is costly, and harder to explain.

Economic Value Assessment Methods



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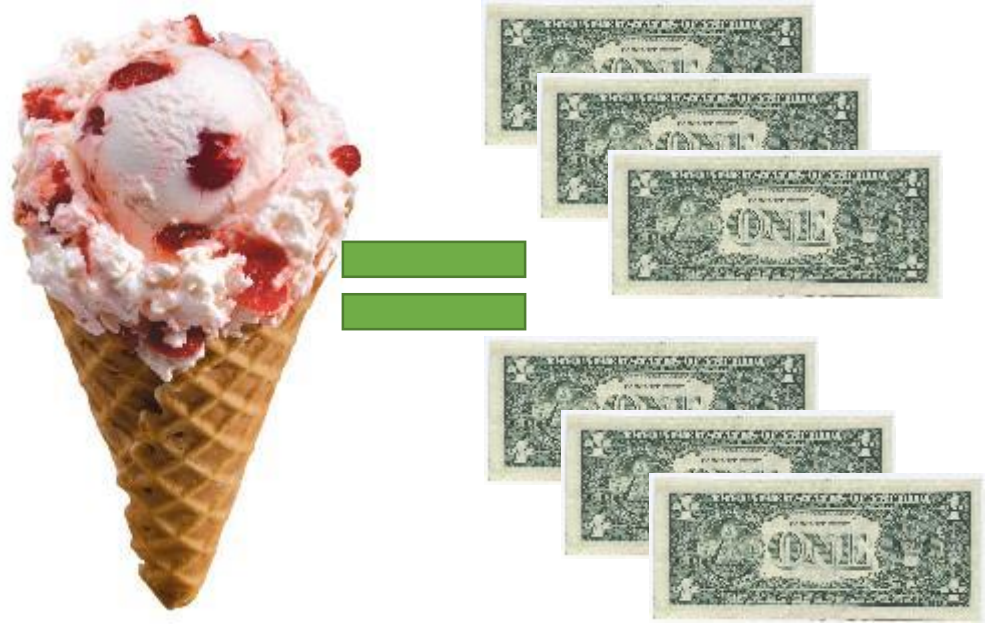
Cost-Benefit Analysis

1. Take your best economic analysis.
2. Add quantified & monetized non-economic benefits.
3. Subtract costs.

Cost-Benefit Analyis

Jack paid $3 for an ice cream cone. That ice cream cone is worth $5-$8 to the economy. Is that ice cream cone a net positive or negative for the community?



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+/-

- Animal Welfare?
- Health Effects?
- Production Pollution?

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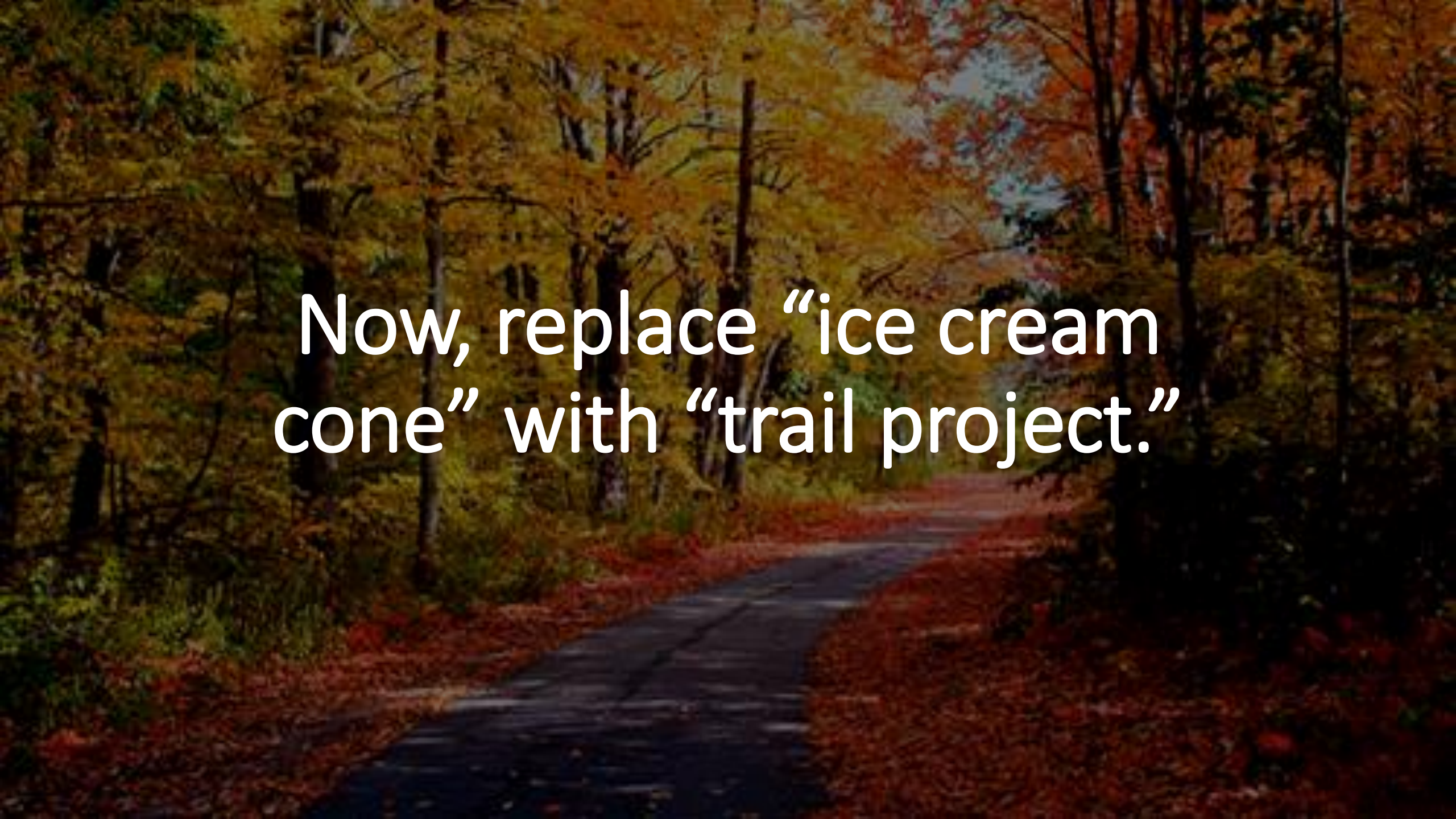
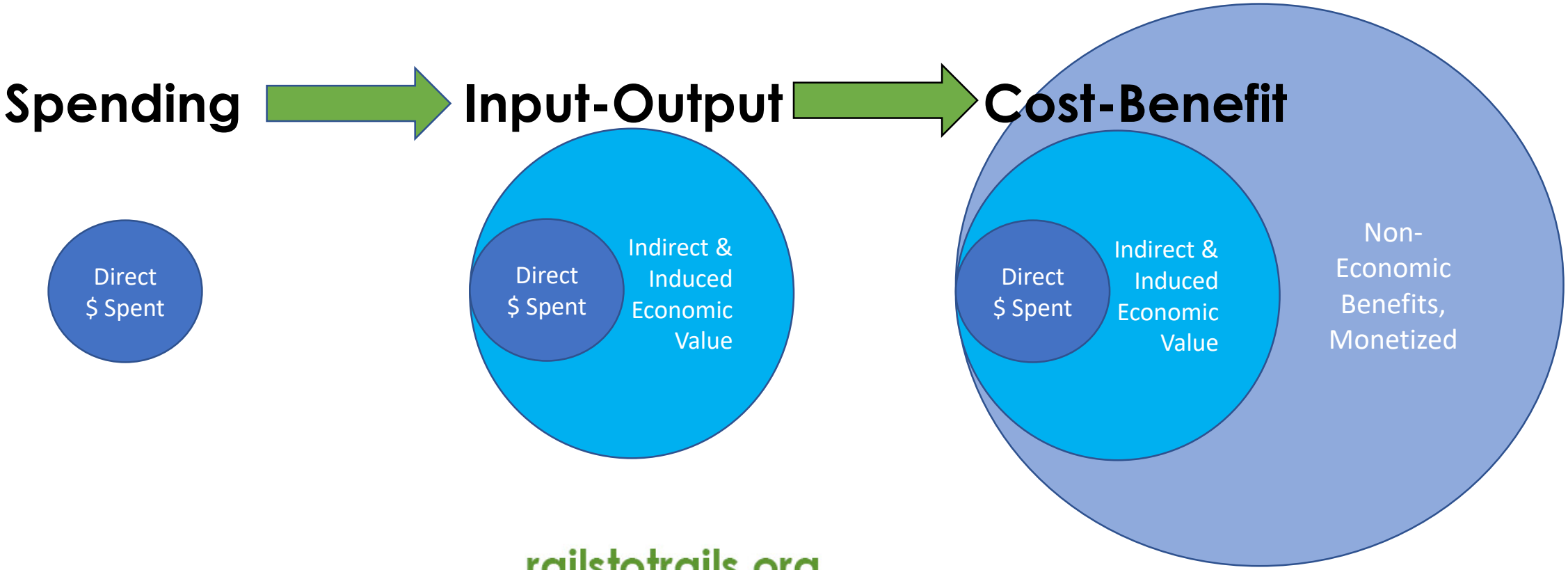

Now, replace “ice cream cone” with “trail project.”

Direct Spending Analysis

Economic Value Assessment Methods



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Direct Spending Analysis

How do we do it?

Direct Spending Analysis

How do we do it?

What do we ask?

The True Story of the World's Longest Trail Survey

How do we decide what to ask trail users?


How do we decide what to ask trail users?
Ask them EVERYTHING.

What Matters?

- Frequency of use
- Distance of user from trail
- Hard goods spending
- Soft goods spending
- Lodging

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Trail Impact Survey

In order to provide you with a high quality trail experience, we are conducting a survey of trail users. Your cooperation in completing this survey will be greatly appreciated. One user per survey form please!

1. How often, on average, do you use the trail? (Select One)
   - Daily
   - Between 3 and 5 times a week
   - 1 or 2 times a week
   - Once a week
   - A couple of times a month
   - Once a month
   - A few times a year
   - First time
2. How do you generally access the trail? (Select One)
   - Walk
   - Bike
   - Drive
   - Other
3. What is your **primary** activity on the trail? (Select One)
   - Walking/Hiking
   - Biking
   - Jogging/Running
   - Horseback riding
   - XC skiing/Snowshoeing
   - Other activity (specify) _____
4. Generally, when do you use the trail? (Select One)
   - Weekdays
   - Weekends
   - Both
5. How much time do you generally spend on the trail each visit? (Select One)
   - Less than 30 minutes
   - 30 minutes to 1 hour
   - 1 to 2 hours
   - More than 2 hours
6. Would you consider your use of the trail to be most frequently for…(Select One)
   - Recreation
   - Health and Exercise
   - Commuting
   - Other (specify) _____
7. If you use the trail to commute, what is the total round trip mileage? _____
8. How did you find out about the trail? (choose all that apply)
   - Word of mouth
   - Roadside signage
   - Driving past

   - Newspaper
   - Parks Department
   - Bike shop
   - Convention and Visitors Bureau
   - Information from Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
   - Internet web site
   - Other _____
9. RTC considers trail related spending as money spent on bikes, bike supplies, bike racks, sportswear (footwear and clothing). Considering that, how much did you spend in the last year on trail related gear?
10. In conjunction with **this** visit to the trail, how many nights did you stay and how much did you spend per-night on overnight accommodations?

Type of Accommodation	Motel or Hotel	Bed and Breakfast or AirBNB	Friend or Relative's Home	Campground	Other (please specify): _____
Nights spent:					
Cost per night:	$_____	$_____	$_____	$_____	$_____

11. In conjunction with **this** visit to the trail, approximately how much did you spend, per person, on these items?

Beverages	Snack Foods	Meals	Ice Cream	Other
$_____	$_____	$_____	$_____	$_____

12. How many people are there in your group?
13. How do you view the quality of the maintenance of the trail? (Select One)
    - Excellent
    - Good
    - Fair
    - Poor
14. How do you view the safety and security along the trail? (Select One)
    - Excellent
    - Good
    - Fair
    - Poor
15. How do you view the cleanliness of the trail? (Select One)
    Excellent
    Good
    Fair
    Poor
16. What portion of the trail do you use most often? (circle all that apply):
    A B C D E
17. What is your residential zip code? _____
18. What is your age?
    - 15 and under
    - 16 to 25
    - 26-35
    - 36-45
    - 46-55

    - 56-65
    - 66 or older
19. How many children under the age 15 are there with you today? _____
20. What is your gender?
    - Male
    - Female
    - Other
21. What is your race?
    - African American
    - American Indian or Alaska Native
    - Asian
    - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
    - White
    - Other
22. What is your household annual income?
    - Less than/Equal to $25,000
    - $25,001-$50,000
    - $50,001-$75,000
    - $75,001-$100,000
    - $100,001-$200,000
    - More than $200,000

The 3 Page RTC Standard Trail User Survey for Assessing Direct Spending

Conducting the Survey

- Need at least 300 responses for statistical validity
- Need an estimate of trail usage. This can be done with automated counters or manual (human) counts.
- The survey asks about hard goods, soft goods, and lodging—plus frequency of trail use.

Conducting the Survey

- **With 300+ responses you can assume a "normal" sample; derive spending-per-user; then multiply by counted usage.**

Conducting the Survey

- With 300+ responses you can assume a “normal” sample; derive spending-per-user; then multiply by counted usage.
- If we all use the same survey: results will be comparable; data will be aggregable; analysis will be scalable.
- The most current standard trail spending survey is always available at: research@railstotrails.org

Recent Trail Spending Results

Assessing the Economic Benefits of Trails

Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath

- Annual Users: 222,005

- Annual Direct Spending: $6.9M
  - Hard Goods: $3.7M
  - Soft Goods: $159K
  - Lodging: $3M

Mon River Trail System

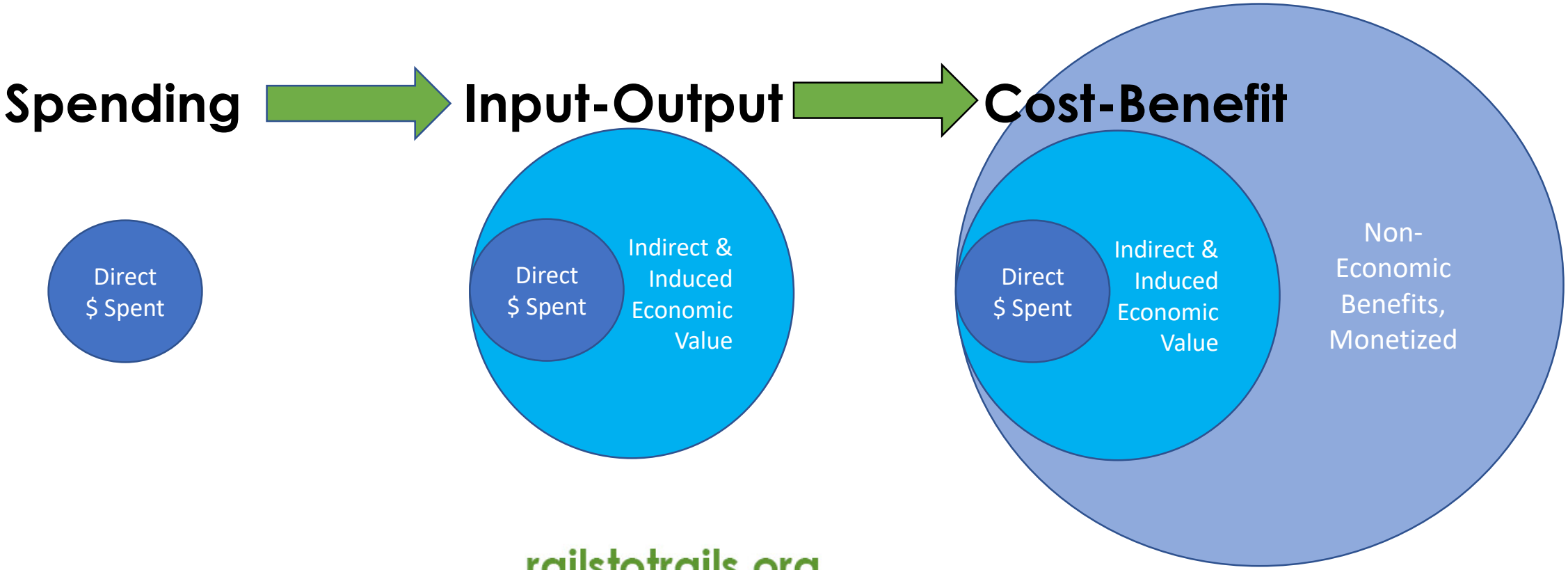
- Annual Users: 205,000

- Annual Direct Spending: $6.1M
  - Hard Goods: $2.75M
  - Soft Goods: $155K
  - Lodging: $3.2M

Direct Spending Analysis Summary

- Trails differ in popularity and design, but there is a convergence of spending effect in the general $6-$9M range.
- Trails that allow for multi-day trips may overperform.
- But if you see a trail economic assessment in the hundreds of millions…

…you're probably seeing a different economic assessment model.



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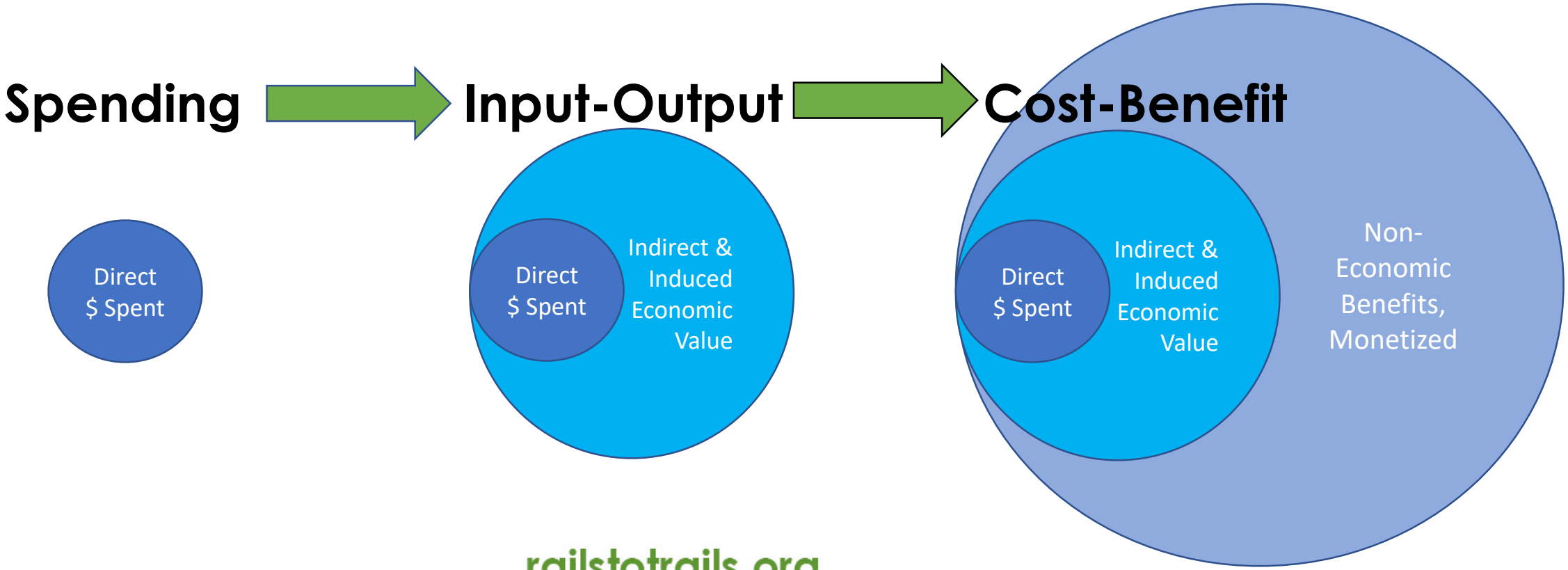
Input-Output Model Trail Economic Impact Assessment

- RTC doesn't generally do these, as they require specific input-output data about local economic conditions, employment, and spending.
- Thus, they're usually done by city/county economic development authorities.
- Can form the underlying basis for financing, such as through bonds or TIF programs.

Input-Output Model Trail Economic Impact Assessment

- A trail whose direct spending effect is in the "normal" range of $6-9M might see an input-output economic impact in the range of $45-$125M.
- This accounts for all the spending-based economic activity spurred by the trail, including indirect and induced value created.

So now, the cost-benefit assessment.



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Quantify or discuss what the economists would call "externalities."

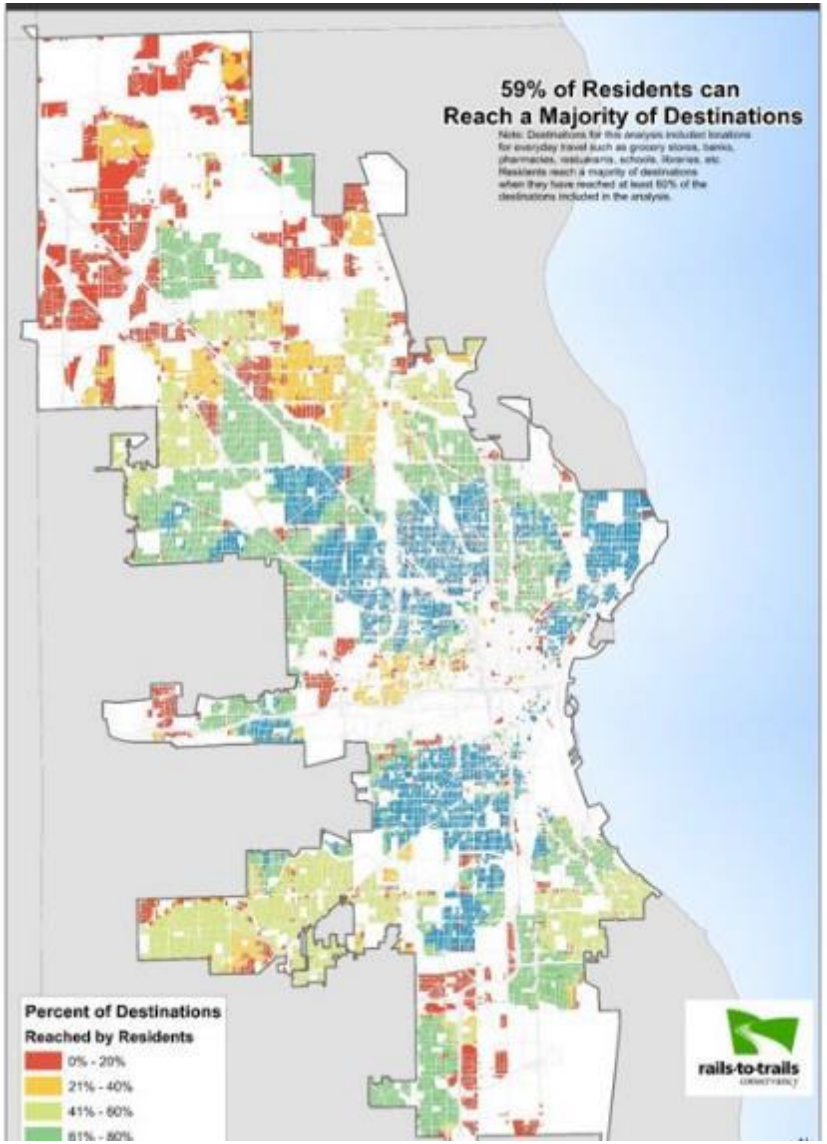
For trails, the "externalities" are often the point.

Health Benefits

- Relatively easy to quantify.
- Trails save users, on average, $7-$21 per year in health costs.
- Again, usage is required. This can be counted, predicted, or estimated.

Health Benefits

Annual Health Savings=(number of users) x $14



Transportation Connectivity Benefits

- Trails provide low-stress connectivity enabling people to get to more destinations without driving.
- RTC's BikeAble tool can help quantify the transportation benefits of trails.

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Transportation Connectivity Benefits

- Even without complex analytics, a community can quantify:
  - Number of jobs within 0.5 miles or 2 miles of a trail;
  - Number students in schools within 0.5 or 2 miles of a trail;
  - Number of carless households within 0.5 or 2 miles of a trail;
  - Number of households experiencing poverty within 0.5 or 2 miles of a trail.

Transportation Connectivity Benefits

"Once constructed, the new southside trail would serve **165 households within its walkshed** and **675 households within its bikeshed.**

Within biking distance, trail users could reach

- 120 potential jobs;
- two elementary schools and one middle school;

And this is crucial, because **30% of households within biking distance of the trail do not own cars**."

Transportation Connectivity Benefits

- Walkshed = **½ mile**
- Bikeshed = **2 miles**
- **GIS tools** are helpful, and local planning departments will often help with simple queries
- **Census.gov** and **Google Maps** can also support help make these arguments using free online tools.

Political Value

- **Parks & trails consistently rank as people's most desired amenity**, across a broad range of local and national surveys.

Political Value

- **Parks & trails consistently rank as people's most desired amenity**, across a broad range of local and national surveys.

- **Conduct a community-wide survey to determine the overall level of support for your trail.** This can be done through mailers, social media, or through contracted canvassing and surveying groups—depending on your scale.

Political Value

47% have “Used a hiking/biking/walking trail in the past year” per NRPA Americans’ Engagement with Parks Survey

Hard-to-Quantify Benefits

- Preservation of Green Space
- Mental Health
- Transportation Safety
- Community Connection
- Property Values

Hard-to-Quantify Benefits

- **Preservation of Green Space**
- **Mental Health**
- **Transportation Safety**
- **Community Connection**
- **Property Values**

Don't leave these out just because the numbers are hard. Use stories, anecdotes, photos, videos….

Making the Value Case for Trails

- Economy—using the appropriate assessment tool.
  - Hard goods, soft goods, & lodging spending
  - Indirect and induced spending using local multipliers
  - “Externalities”
- Health
- Transportation
- Political
- Stories/Visuals of “Hard to Quantify” Benefits
  - Recreation
  - Green space
  - Mental health
  - Transportation safety
  - Community connection