Comparing Demographic Features of Trail Users Obtained Via Direct Observation with Current Census Data

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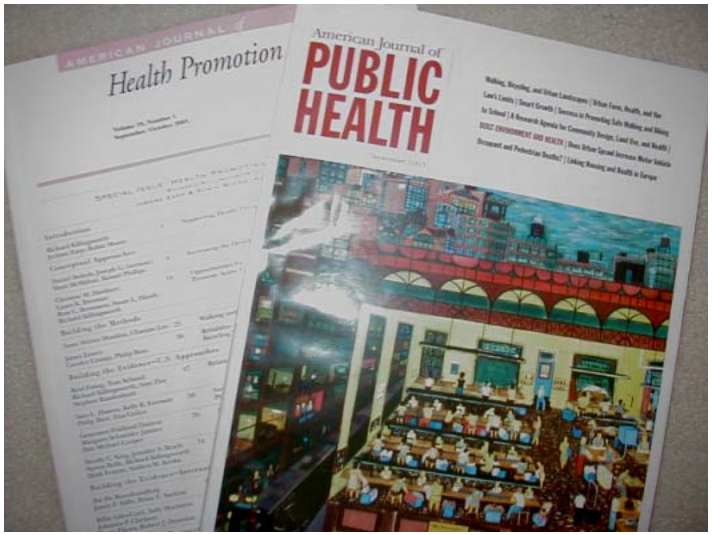
Research suggests more walking if . . .

- Presence of sidewalks, paths.
- Shorter blocks, more frequent intersections, grid network.
- Access to trails, parks, greenways, and public transit.



However, presence and availability of activity-friendly environments doesn't necessarily mean that they will be used

Community Background

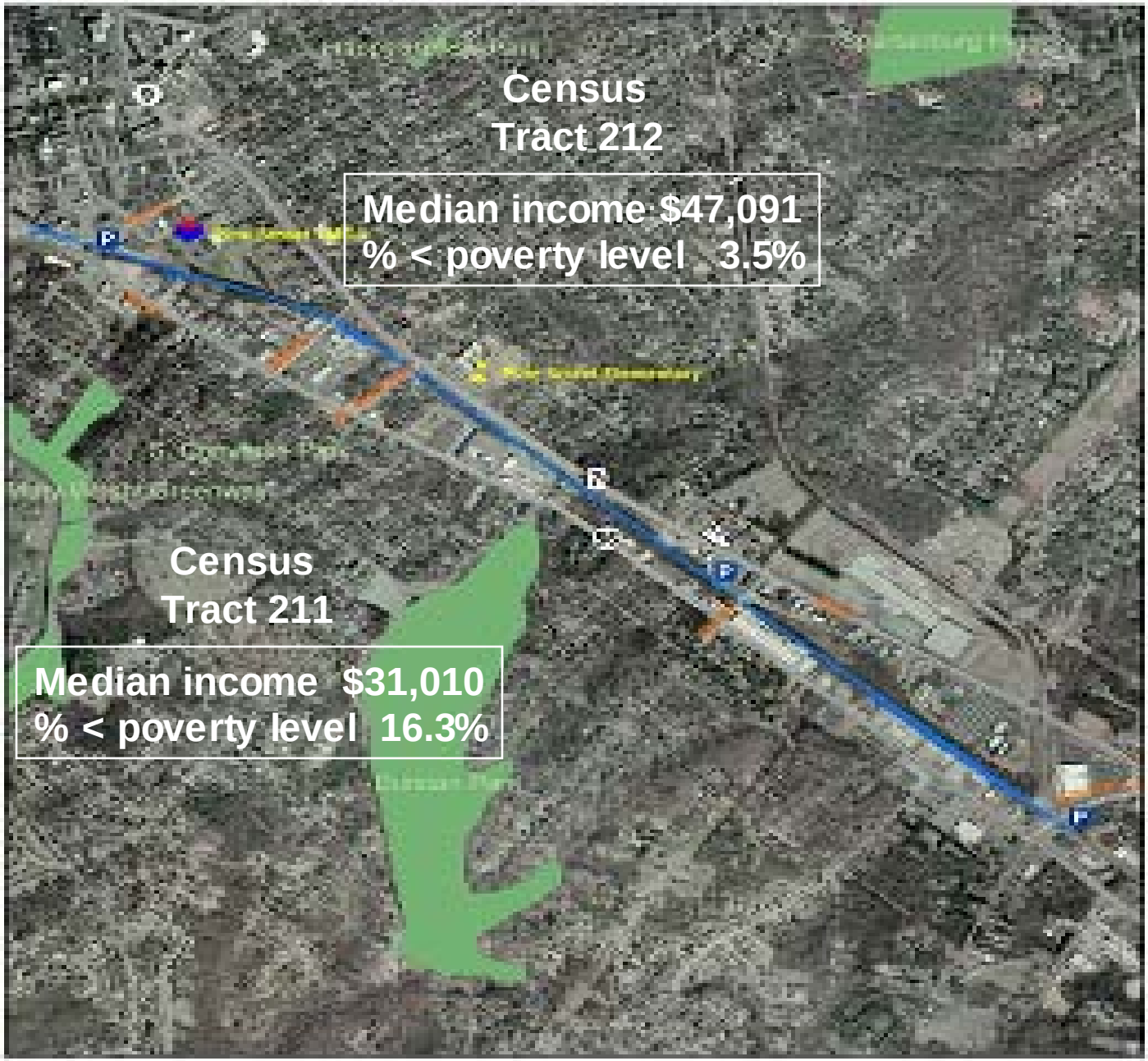
- In 2002, the Mary Black Foundation in Spartanburg, SC identified *Active Living* as 1 of its 2 grantmaking priorities (over $5M allocated to date).

- Among substantial investments were funds to support a 2-mile rail-trail conversion.
  - Serves as a key connector between downtown business district and more rural parts of county

  - Dissects 2 adjacent residential neighborhoods differing in income, education, and race profiles.

Hub City Connector:

MBF Rail-Trail Segment



Project Aims

- USC Prevention Research Center funded to employ a systematic 5-year (2005-2009) evaluation process to fully inform community leaders about:
  - overall use of the rail-trail segment
  - use of the rail-trail segment by residents of nearby neighborhoods
  - impact of the rail-trail segment on income of nearby retail businesses
  - changes in zoning and use of commercial properties adjacent to the rail-trail
  - changes in values of residential properties in nearby neighborhoods
  - potential policies and programs to increase use of the rail-trail segment

Methods

- The System for Observing Play and Recreation in Communities (SOPARC)[a]
  - Can be implemented in diverse community and trail settings
  - Proven valid and reliable for gathering data on:
    - user demographics (e.g., age, sex, race)
    - environmental features (e.g., temperature, weather, equipment)
    - user features (e.g., type of activity, alone or with others)
    - physical activity level (e.g., sedentary, walking, very active)

[a]McKenzie et al. System for observing play and recreation in communities (SOPARC): reliability and feasibility measures. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health.* 2006;3:S208-S222.

SOPARC Protocol

- In an unobtrusive manner, observations made by trained college students
- Quarterly, observations made 4x/day (7:30am, 12:30pm, 3:30pm, 6:00pm) for 7 consecutive days
- At each time frame, observations conducted at 6 rail-trail segment access points
- Air temperature and weather conditions noted at each time frame

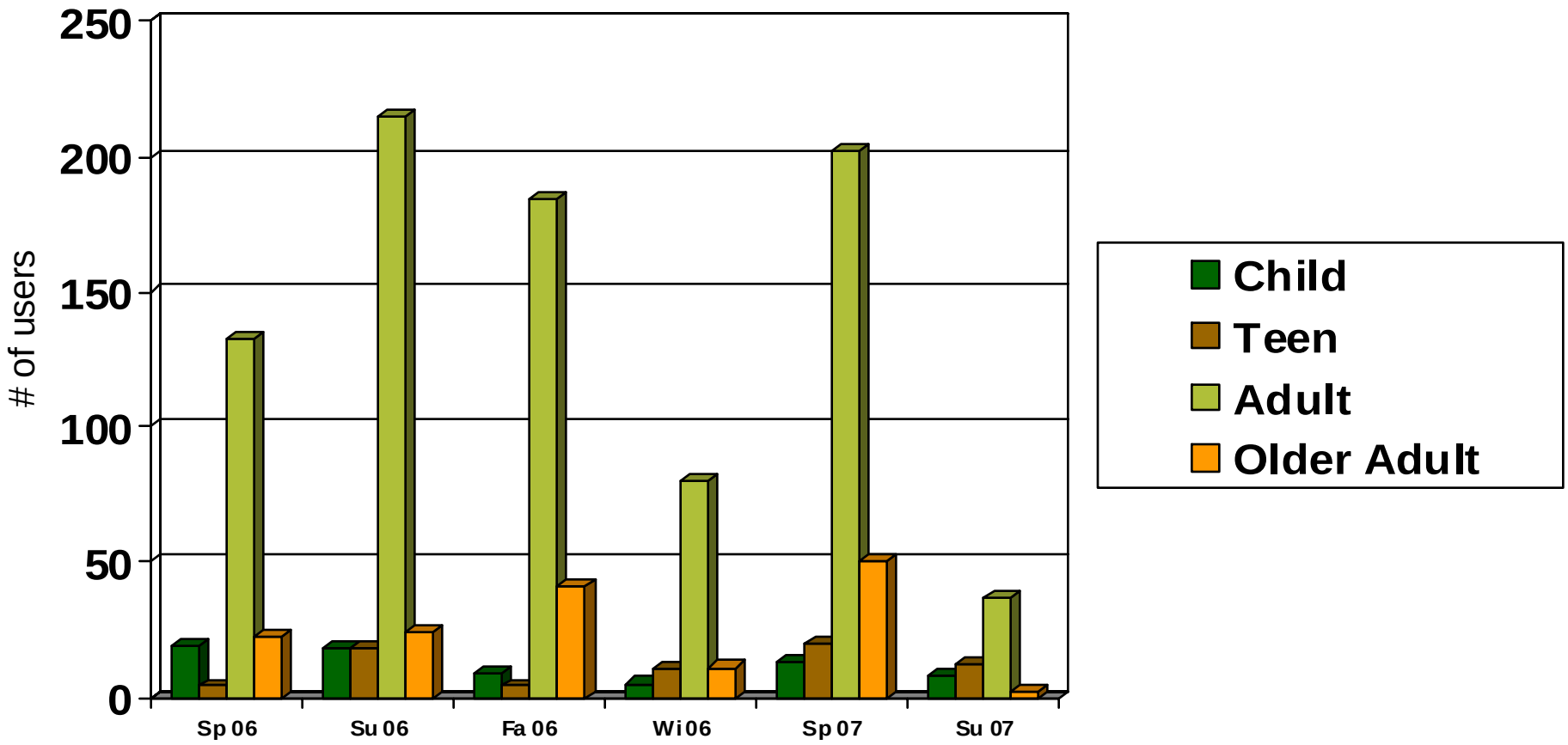
Results of Direct Observation

During 16 months following construction of the rail-trail segment (May 2006–July 2007):

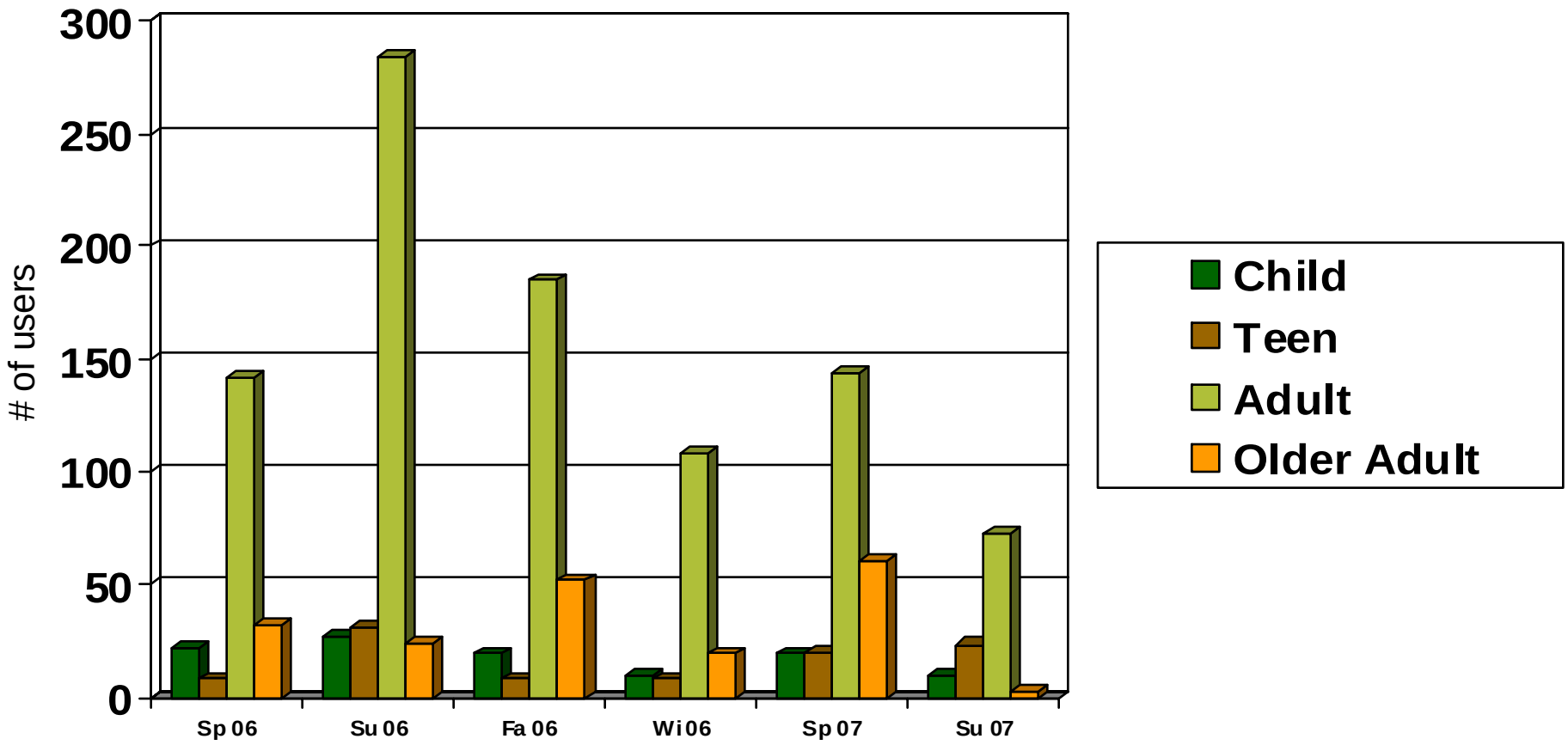
- 2,535 users were observed (avg. 60/day)[#]:
  - 57% walking, 41% very active, 2% sedentary
  - vast majority (73%) were adults
  - 54% male, 46% female
  - 72% white, 28% non-white

equates to ~22,000 users/yr

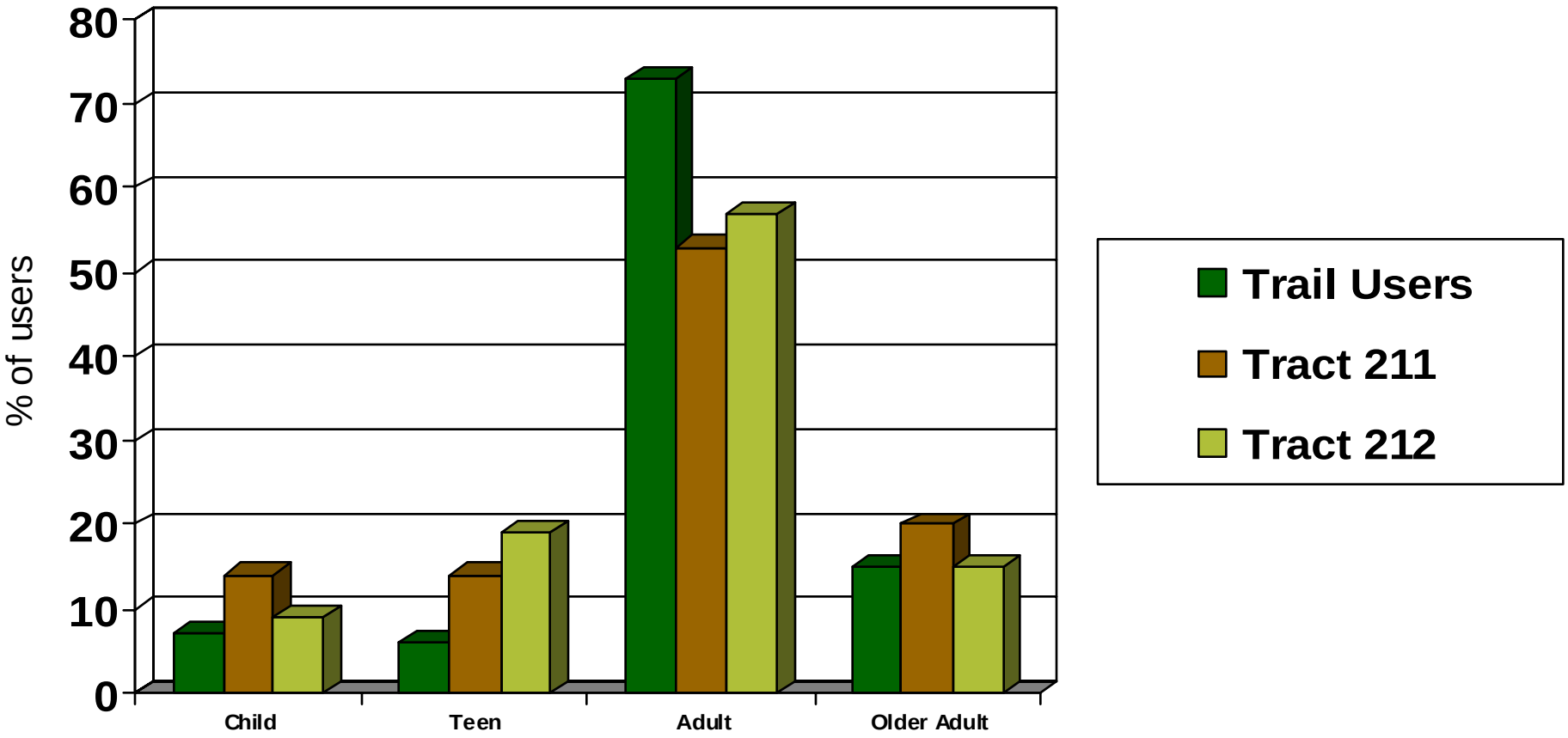
Age Characteristics of Female Users Across Quarterly Observation Periods



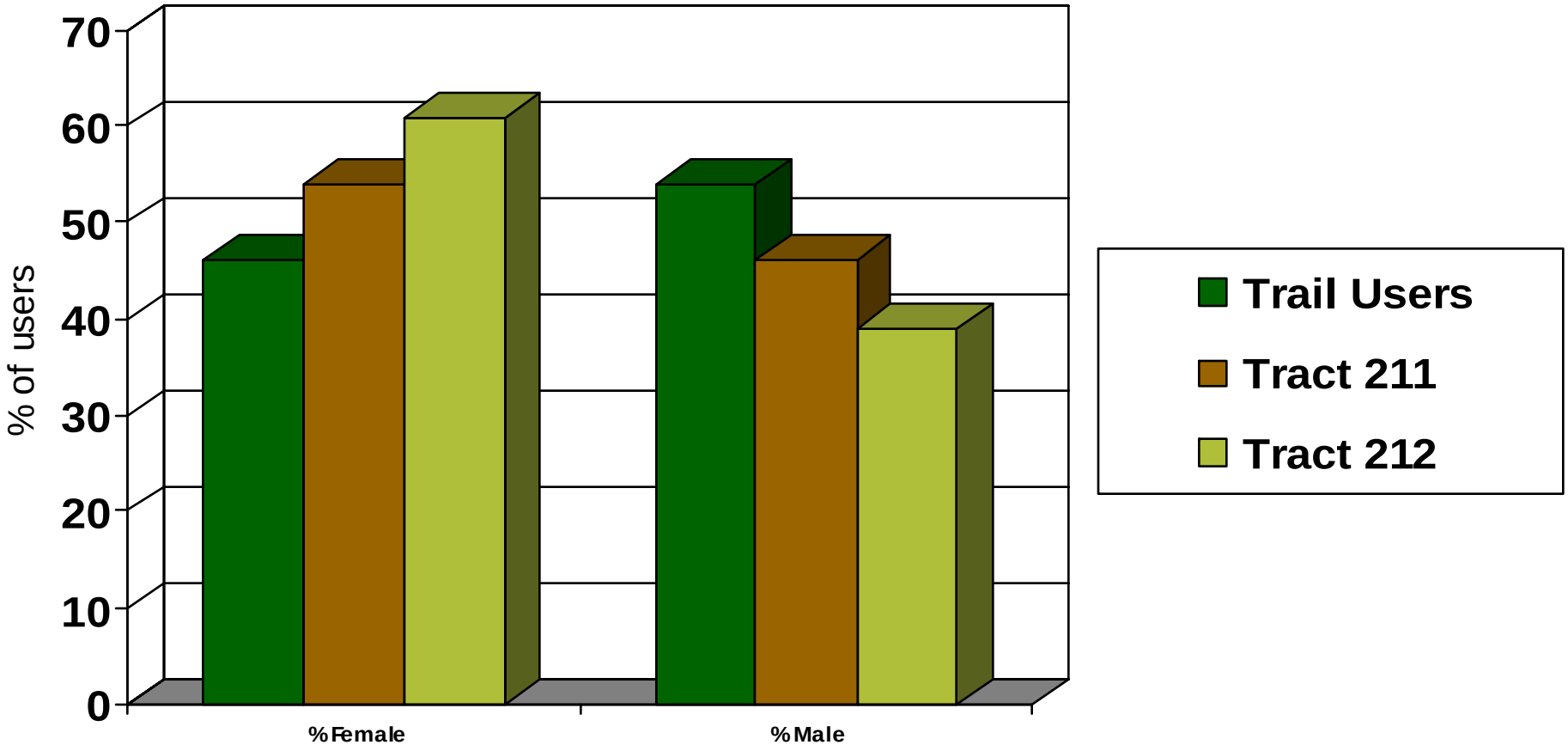
Age Characteristics of Male Users Across Quarterly Observation Periods



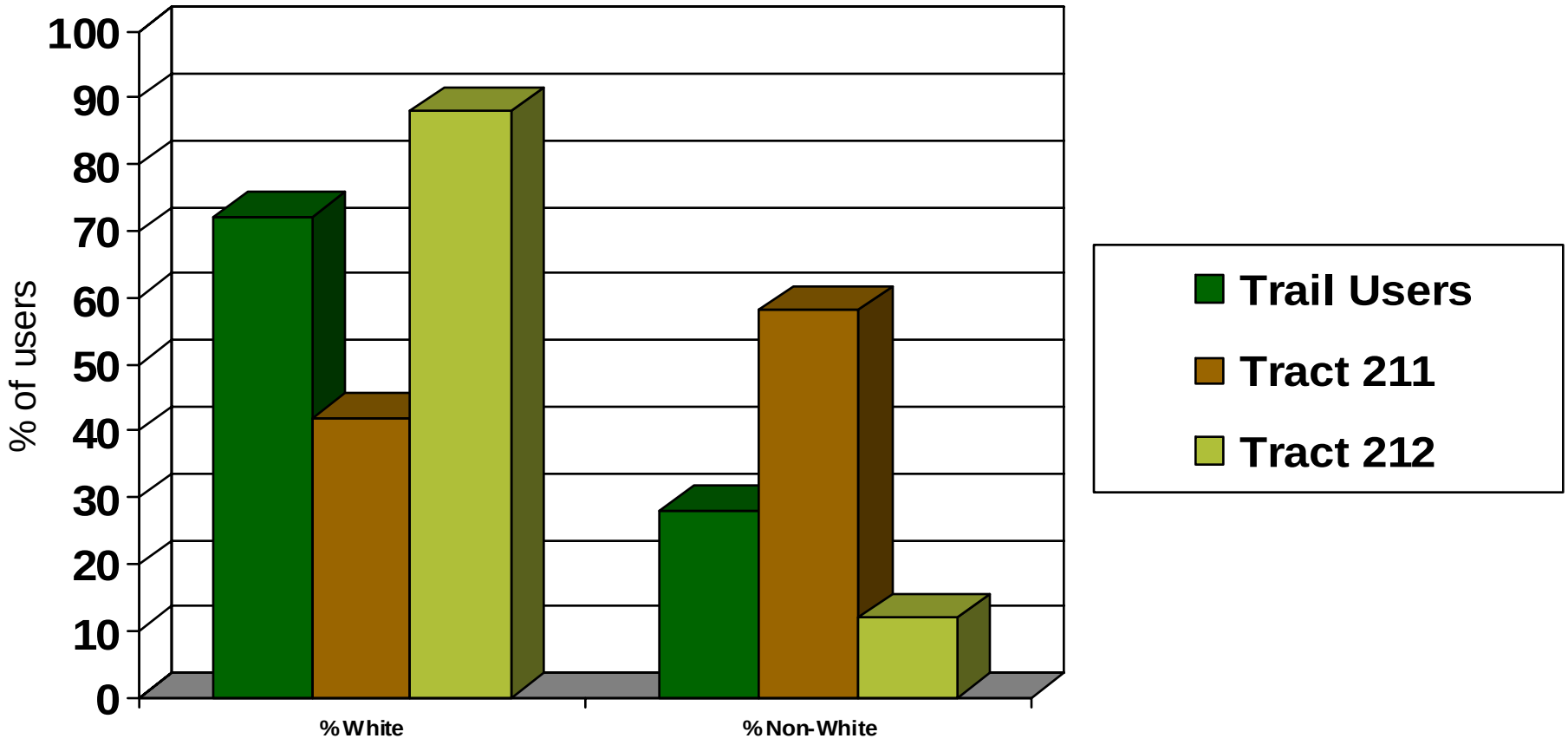
Age Characteristics of Users and Residents of Adjacent Census Tracts



Gender Characteristics of Users and Residents of Adjacent Census Tracts



Race Characteristics of Users and Residents of Adjacent Census Tracts



Conclusions

- Males used the rail-trail segment more often than females.
- Whites used the rail-trail segment more than non-whites
- Very few children and adolescents were observed using the rail-trail segment, especially compared to age distribution in nearby census tracts
- Sex of users varied from the demographics of residents living in both nearby census tracts.
- Race of users varied most from the demographics of residents in nearby census tract with higher proportion of AAs.

Implications for Community Leaders

May want to consider implementing policies, environmental improvements, and/or programs to:

- Promote greater use among:
  - non-whites
  - younger and older populations
  - persons living in nearby neighborhoods
- Formative Research:
  - Surveys, focus groups, or interviews to develop tailored marketing and program strategies

Next Steps: 2007-2009

- Monitor implementation of new policies and/or programs to promote use
- Monitor physical/environmental improvements to the rail-trail segment and surrounding areas
- Continue quarterly observations of users
- Conduct intercept surveys with sub-sample of users to gather supplemental data
- Gather data on property uses and values
- Gather data on retail businesses

Thank You!

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