

Community Development Committee

Meeting date: August 19, 2019

Subject: Visualizing travel to regional parks using location-based services data

District(s), Member(s): All

Policy/Legal Reference: Minn. Stat. § 85.53; Minn. Stat. § 473.351; *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*

Staff Prepared/Presented: Joel Huting, Research Manager (651-602-1349)

Division/Department: Community Development / Regional Planning

Proposed Action

None; information and discussion only.

Background

Council staff have been exploring the use of passively collected, anonymized and aggregated cell phone location-based services data as provided by [Streetlight Data](#) for analyzing visitation to regional parks. This data source shows tremendous promise in understanding visitation to the parks at granular levels that would not be achievable using traditional survey-based research methods.

These traditional methods include an intercept-based visitor survey conducted every five years for understanding demographics, home zip codes, and other visitor/travel characteristics, alongside an annual usage survey to estimate the amount of visitation. Both of these methods are only statistically representative at the system- and agency-level; therefore, the Council has no reliable park- or trail-level data on visitation or demographics.

Council staff, in partnership with the Parks Implementing Agencies, are exploring numerous analyses to demonstrate the use of Streetlight Data for providing park-level data on visitation including usage, demographics of visitors, percent local- and non-local visitation, travel mode, and other key vital statistics for system planning. Further, the team has explored the use of the data to systematically identify racial inequities in visitation at the park- and trail-level – the ideal unit of analysis required for prioritizing many equity investments.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The Regional Parks System is comprised of key regional assets that are vital in advancing the Thrive outcome of Livability. Identifying specific racial inequities in visitation at the park- and trail- level will help prioritize investments to advance the Equity outcome. Having a better understanding of overall visitation patterns will inform better Stewardship of financial resources.