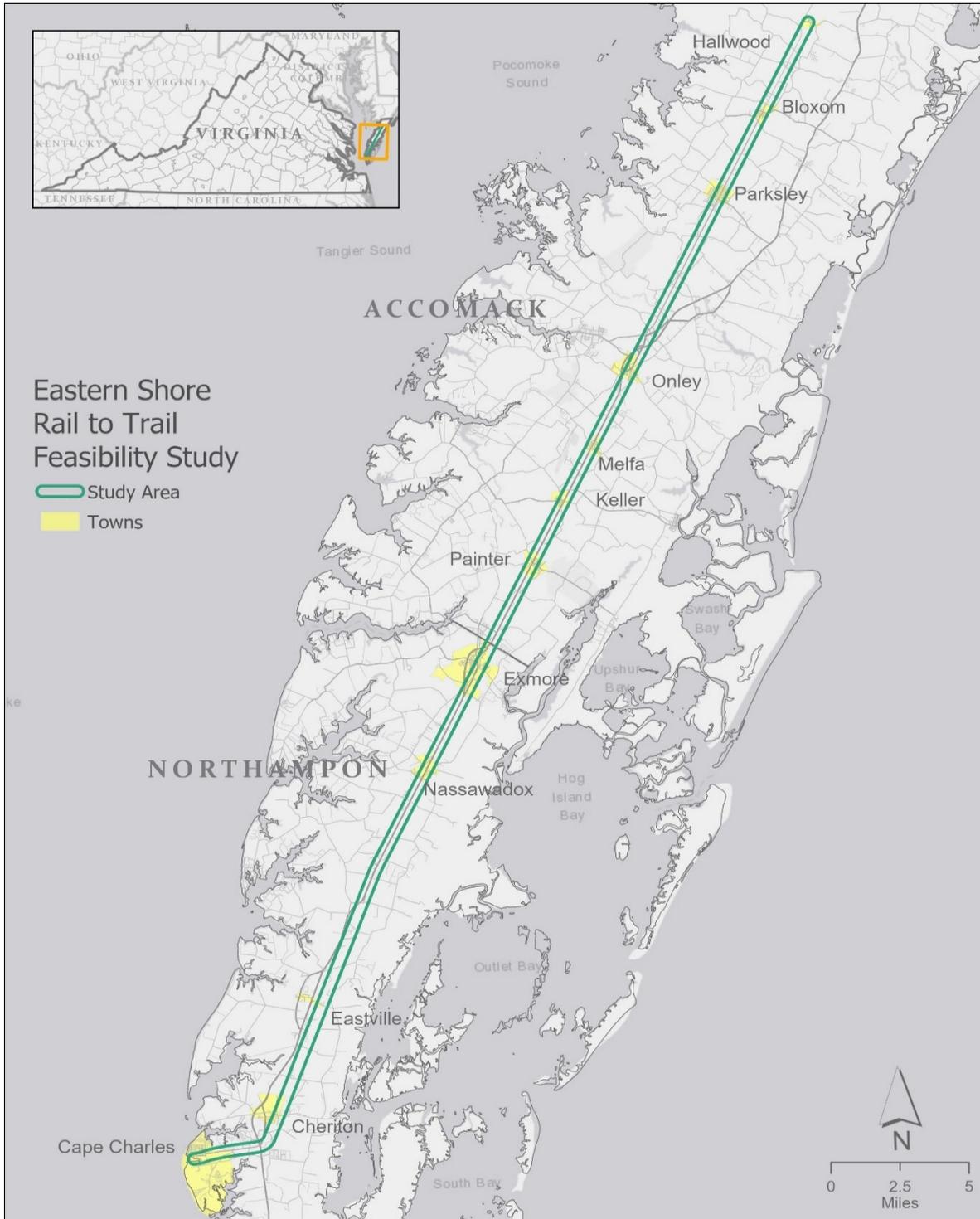


2021 Community Profile for Eastern Shore Rail Trail *Accomack & Northampton Counties, VA*



CREDIT: VA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

About This Document

A community profile provides a summary of baseline conditions and trends in a community and study area. It establishes the context for assessing potential impacts and for project decision-making.

This document is not static and should be updated as needed to reflect the most recent information available.

Understanding the context and characteristics of a community is the first step towards meaningful engagement and a successful outdoor recreation and conservation project.

About Eastern Shore of VA Rail Trail Working Group

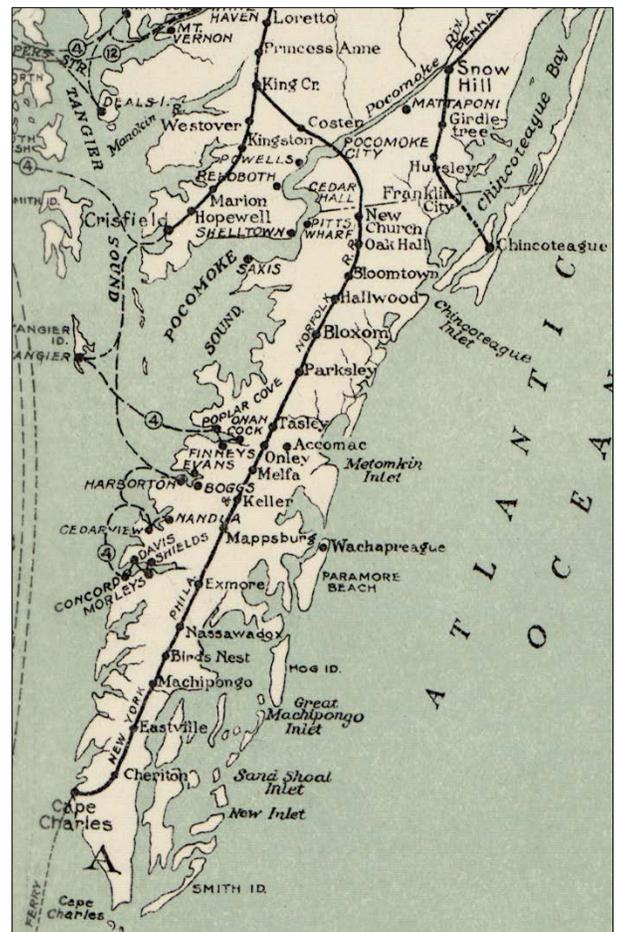
The mission of the Eastern Shore of Virginia Rail Trail Working Group is to promote and support development of an approximately 50-mile regional hiking and biking trail along the former Bay Coast Railroad. The Working Group is an unincorporated coalition of public, private, and non-profit organizations based in Accomack and Northampton counties.



CREDIT: VA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Project Context

The Eastern Shore Rail Trail would travel along the abandoned rail line of the former Bay Coast Railroad Company route that extended between the Town of Cape Charles, VA and Pocomoke City, MD. The project study for the Rail Trail extends approximately 50 miles between Cape Charles and the Town of Hallwood. The Eastern Shore Rail Trail would span the counties of Northampton and Accomack and travel through the towns of Cape Charles, Cheriton, Eastville, Nassawadox, Exmore in Northampton County, and the towns of Painter, Keller, Melfa, Onley, Parksley, Bloxom, and Hallwood in Accomack County.



CREDIT: VIRGINIAPLACES.ORG

PEOPLE

Demographics

Accomack and Northampton counties are a predominantly White area of middle-aged to senior adults. Over 50% of the population in each county is over the age of 45 years old. The next largest age groups are youth under the age of 17 and 25 to 44 years old residents. With 20% of residents in both counties under the age of 17, the Eastern Shore Rail Trail has an opportunity to engage youth and their families with outdoor recreation and conservation in their own communities, fostering a culture of healthy living in VA's Eastern Shore.

32,673

Accomack County Total Population

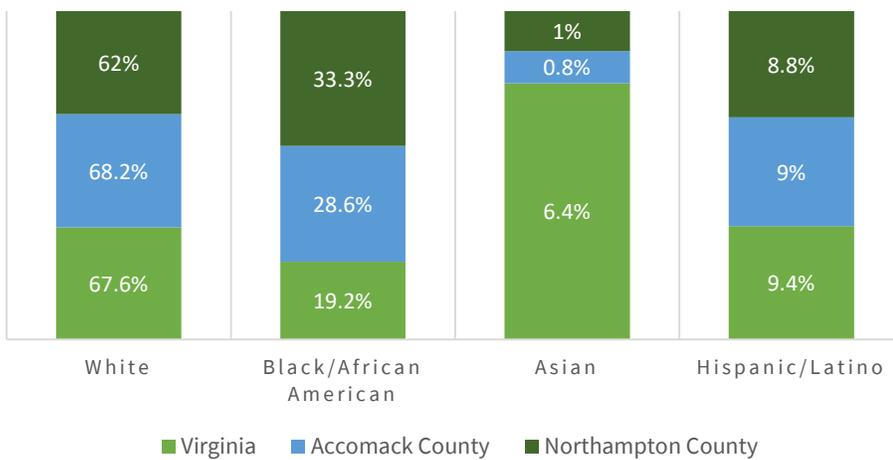
SOURCE: US CENSUS, 2019: ACS 5-YEAR ESTIMATES DETAILED TABLES

11,885

Northampton County Total Population

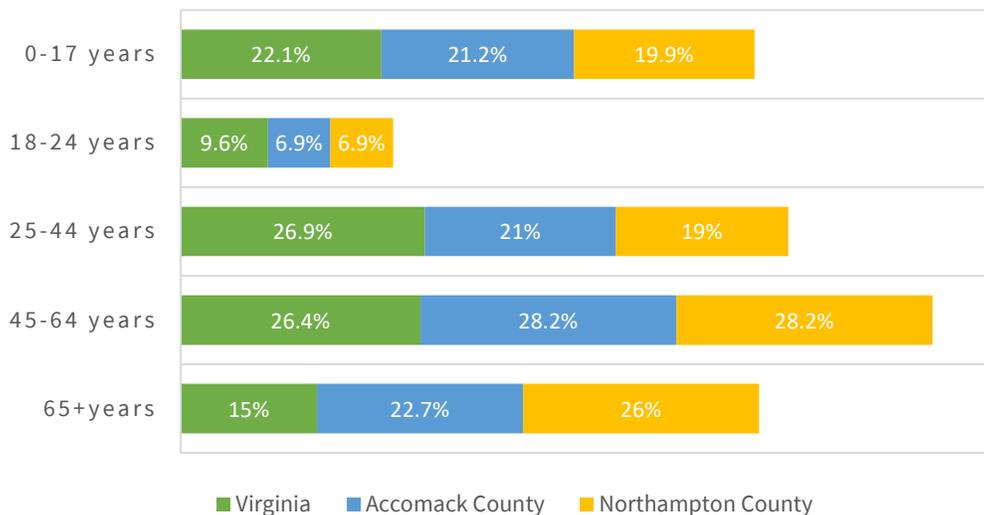
SOURCE: US CENSUS, 2019: ACS 5-YEAR ESTIMATES DETAILED TABLES

RACE & ETHNICITY



SOURCE: US CENSUS, 2019: ACS 5-YEAR ESTIMATES DETAILED TABLES

AGE



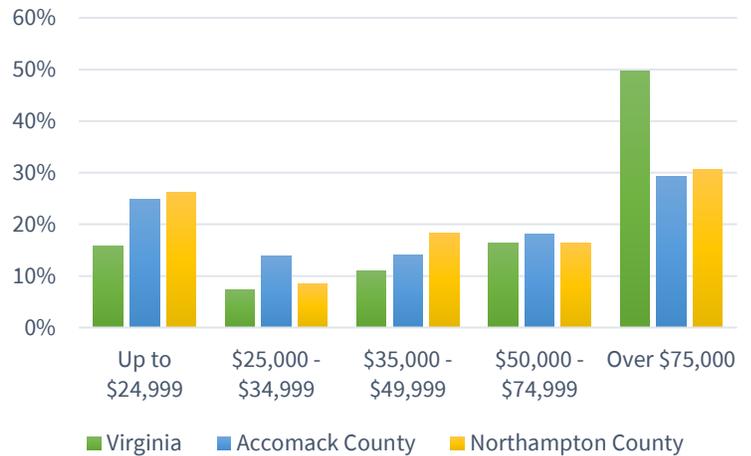
SOURCE: US CENSUS, 2019: ACS 5-YEAR ESTIMATES DETAILED TABLES

Socioeconomic Conditions

The distribution of household income to the right illustrates that most residents in VA's Eastern Shore earn significantly less than residents in the rest of the state. Despite similar unemployment rates, nearly twice the number of residents in Accomack and Northampton live in poverty in comparison to the rest of Virginia. The median household income for Accomack and Northampton residents remains significantly lower at \$46,073 and \$47,227, respectively, in comparison to \$74,222 for the state.

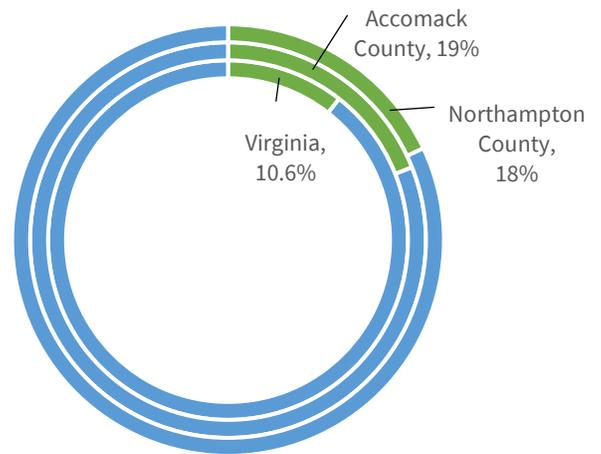
In terms of educational attainment, residents in Accomack County graduate high school at higher rates than residents in Northampton and Virginia. This trend is not visible in higher education, where a significantly lower number of Eastern Shore residents have a bachelor's or graduate degree. Higher educational attainment plays a significant role in promoting individual and community health. Existing partnerships with public and nonprofit agencies present the project's Working Group with an opportunity to educate Eastern Shore residents on employment opportunities available in the fields of outdoor recreation, conservation, and design fields, among many others.

INCOME DISTRIBUTION



SOURCE: US CENSUS, 2019: ACS 5-YEAR ESTIMATES DETAILED TABLES

POVERTY STATUS



SOURCE: US CENSUS, 2019: ACS 5-YEAR ESTIMATES DETAILED TABLES

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

4.6%

Virginia

3.9%

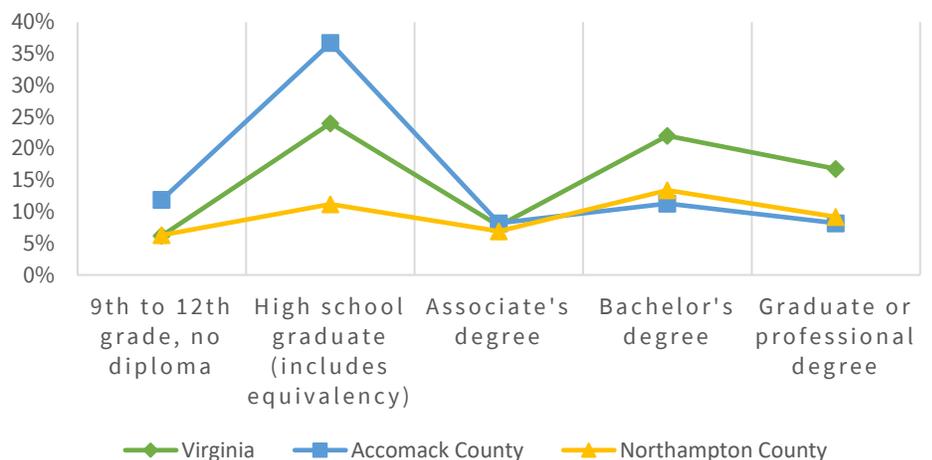
Accomack County

4%

Northampton County

SOURCE: US CENSUS, 2019: ACS 5-YEAR ESTIMATES DETAILED TABLES

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



SOURCE: US CENSUS, 2019: ACS 5-YEAR ESTIMATES DETAILED TABLES

Health

The life expectancy for residents in Accomack and Northampton counties is 76 years, in comparison to 79.5 years for Virginia. In both counties, the top causes of death are cancer and heart disease. In Accomack County, 16.6% of residents have no health insurance, nearly double the rate of uninsured residents in the state. 10.9% of Northampton residents have no health insurance.

LIFE EXPECTANCY



76 years

compared to Virginia average of 79.5 years

SOURCE: CDC, LIFE EXPECTANCY (2018)

POOR OR FAIR HEALTH



Virginia	16%
Accomack	20%
Northampton	19%

SOURCE: COUNTYHEALTHRANKINGS.ORG (2017)

LACK OF HEALTH INSURANCE



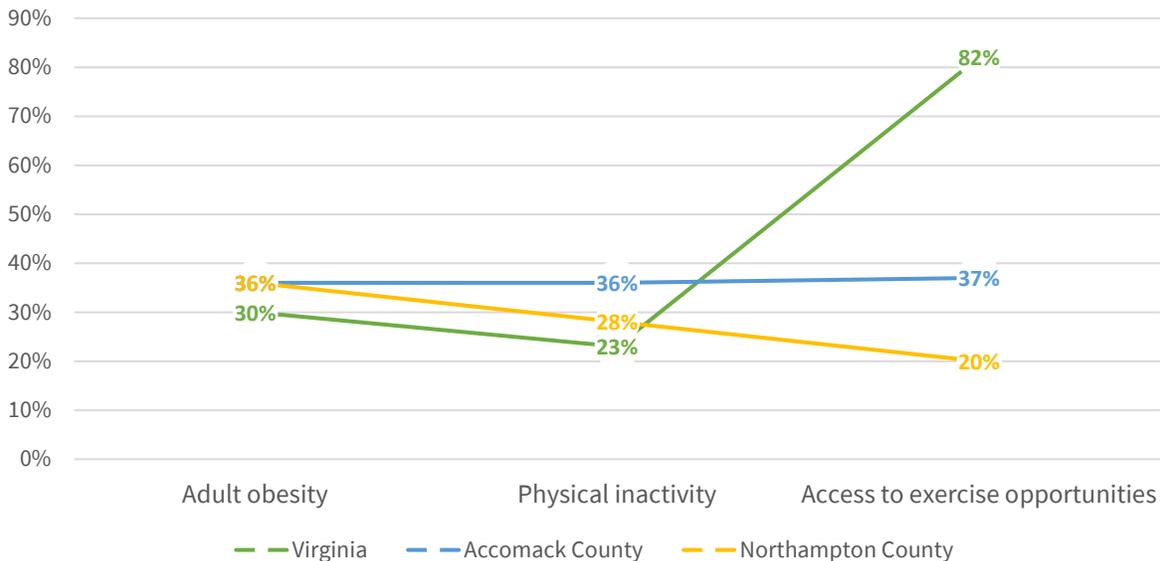
Accomack	Northampton
16.6%	10.9%

compared to 8.6% of residents in the state

SOURCE: US CENSUS, 2019: ACS 5-YEAR ESTIMATES DETAILED TABLES

Adults in Accomack and Northampton counties report having poor or fair health at higher rates than those in Virginia. A similar trend occurs with obesity and physical inactivity rates, where adults in Accomack and Northampton report higher rates than the state average at 30% and 23%, respectively. These percentages may not be surprising given that only 20% of Northampton County and 37% of Accomack County residents have adequate access to exercise opportunities. These percentages are significantly lower than Virginia's, where 82% of the population has adequate access to exercise opportunities. The Eastern Shore Rail Trail has the potential to provide safe and close-to-home opportunities for Accomack and Northampton residents and visitors to recreate outdoors.

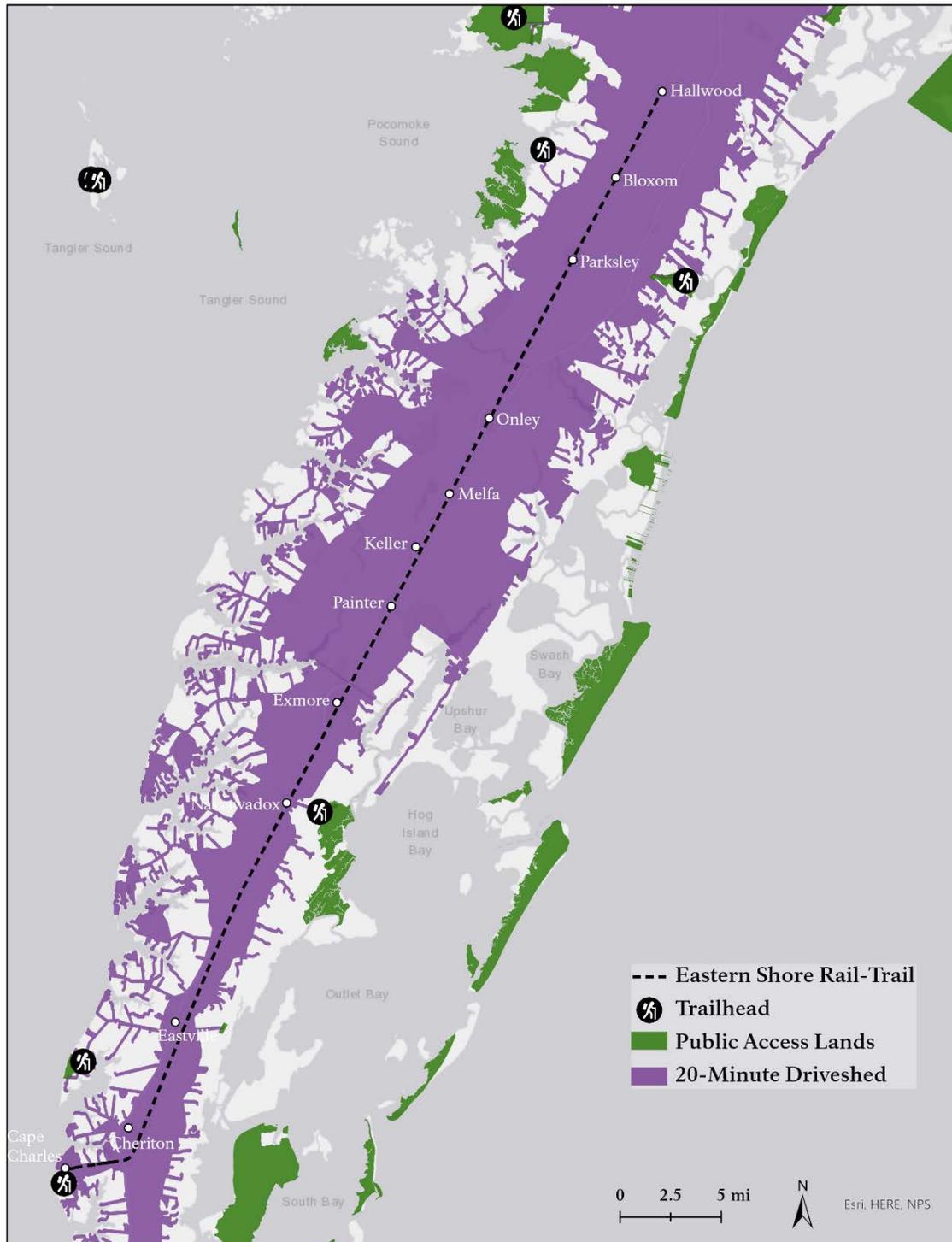
HEALTH BEHAVIORS



SOURCE: COUNTYHEALTHRANKINGS.ORG (2019)

Health: Access to Exercise Opportunities

Public lands along the coast of Accomack and Northampton counties provide residents with access to a number of protected open spaces that offer amenities such as ballfields, playgrounds, walking and biking trails, pavilions, picnic tables, water, and beach access. However, the majority of these public lands are located farther than a 20-minute drive from communities along Route 13 and may not provide residents with safe and easy access to “close-to-home parks” (over 50% of respondents in VA DCR 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey indicated that a close-to-home park should be within a 15-minute walk or bike ride, or within a 20-minute drive).



SOURCE: VA-DCR, NATURAL HERITAGE

Health: Access to Exercise Opportunities

The *Eastern Shore Rail to Trail Feasibility Study* conducted by VDOT invited public feedback from May-June 2020 on the value of the proposed trail. Over 3,400 individuals responded to the online survey, with an overwhelming 90% of respondents stating that they would utilize the trail if developed. The following comments from survey participants illustrate how the Eastern Shore Rail Trail can provide Accomack and Northampton residents with easy access to parks, walking and biking and other community assets in their own backyard:

“Nowhere safe to walk or bike now”

“There are no sidewalks in my neighborhood but the railroad tracks go right past my back yard. This would give my community a much-needed safe place to walk/jog and teach our children to ride their bikes”

“Eastern Shore residents do not have access in our rural area to walk safely... It is unsafe to walk without lighting, sidewalks and other amenities afforded to nearby cities... Beach access is either Cape Charles or Assateague beaches and there is nothing in the middle”

“I think this will be a fantastic addition to the Shore. I think it could convince tourists to stay in the middle of the shore, rather than stop at Chincoteague or go straight down to Cape Charles. There’s so much to offer in the middle!”

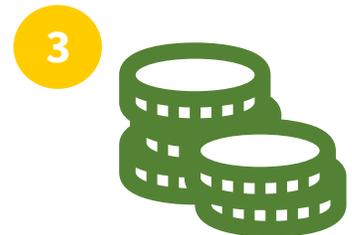
Most important benefits of the trail for survey respondents



Safe places to walk and bike



Health and wellness



Increase tourism

Top reasons for using the trail for survey respondents



Exercise



Recreate



Social or family outing

PLACE

Community Conditions: Residential

Accomack and Northampton counties have a similar percentage of owner-occupied (66.8% and 65.2%, respectively) and renter-occupied units (33.2% and 34.8, respectively) to the state average percentage (66.3% owner-occupied and 33.7% renter-occupied). However, Accomack and Northampton counties may have slightly more mortgage-burdened residents. Despite a lower percentage of rent-burdened residents than Virginia, over 40% of residents in VA's Eastern Shore pay over 30% of their total income on rent.



MORTGAGE AFFORDABILITY INDEX

26.2% Virginia

31.2% Accomack

27.7% Northampton

of households paying over 30% of total income on mortgage

SOURCE: US CENSUS, 2019: ACS 5-YEAR ESTIMATES DETAILED TABLES



RENT AFFORDABILITY INDEX

47.8% Virginia

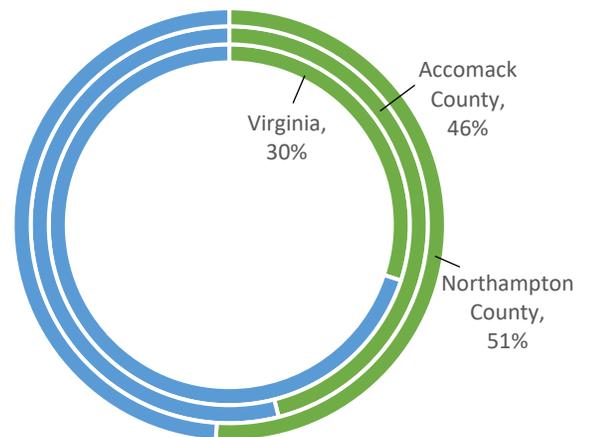
45.9% Accomack

40.2% Northampton

of households paying over 30% of total income on mortgage

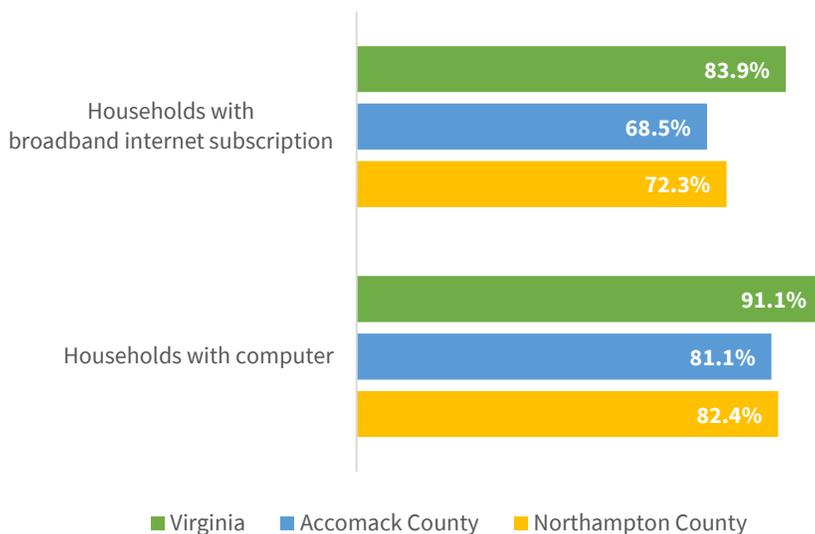
SOURCE: US CENSUS, 2019: ACS 5-YEAR ESTIMATES DETAILED TABLES

CHILDREN IN SINGLE-PARENT HOUSEHOLDS



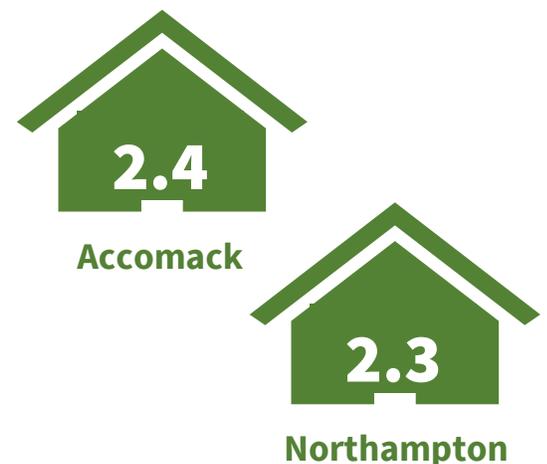
SOURCE: US CENSUS, 2019: ACS 5-YEAR ESTIMATES DETAILED TABLES

COMPUTER & INTERNET USE



SOURCE: US CENSUS, 2019: ACS 5-YEAR ESTIMATES DETAILED TABLES

AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE



compared to 2.6 for Virginia

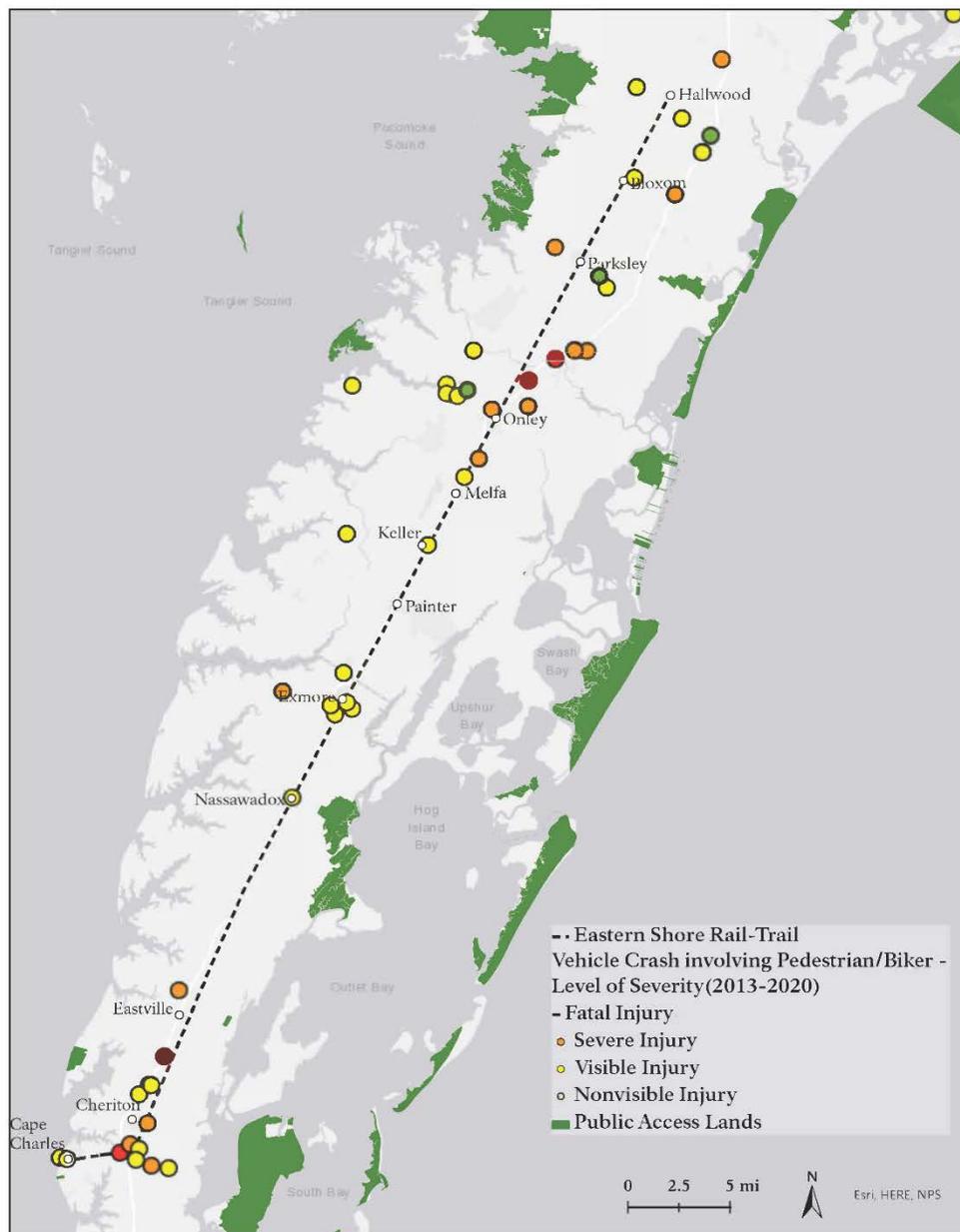
SOURCE: US CENSUS, 2019: ACS 5-YEAR ESTIMATES DETAILED TABLES

Community Conditions: Transit

Accomack and Northampton counties are car-dependent areas where most errands require the use of a car. 90% of households in VA's Eastern Shore have access to a vehicle and driving to work is the most common form of commuting.

Road safety is a key focus area for state, regional and local transportation departments (Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization). The *Eastern Shore Rail to Trail Feasibility Study* highlighted that the rate for motor vehicle crash hospitalizations for the Eastern Shore (71.6 per 100,000 population) was significantly higher than the rate for the entire state of Virginia (45 per 100,000 population) in 2017.

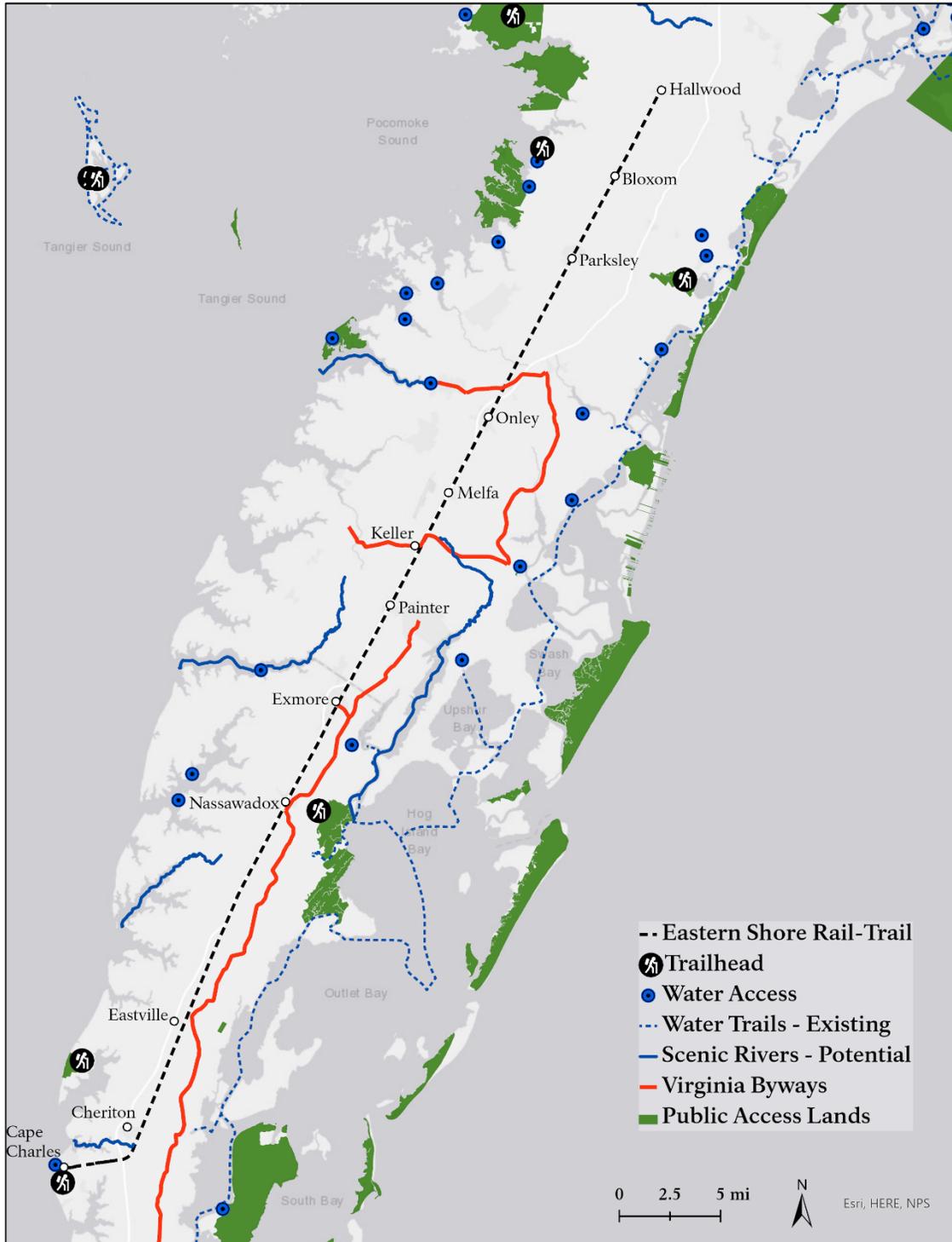
Most crashes involving a pedestrian or biker occur within the local communities along Route 13, where residents lack walking and biking infrastructure that allows for safe road crossing. The proposed trail can provide Eastern Shore residents with pedestrian-oriented infrastructure that can serve their needs – from exercising to completing errands.



SOURCE: VDOT TRAFFIC ENGINEERING DIVISION HIGHWAY SAFETY SECTION, VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES & VA-DCR, NATURAL HERITAGE

Regional Trail Connections

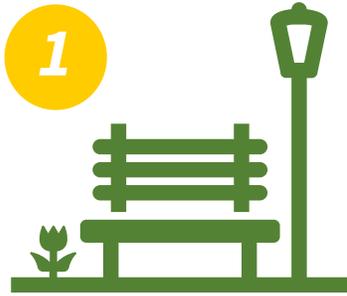
The Eastern Shore Rail Trail has the potential to provide communities along Route 13 with “close-to-home” access to walking and biking trails. The proposed trail would also provide residents and visitors with a multimodal connection to the various towns, tourist locations, and points of interest in both Accomack and Northampton counties. As illustrated below, the Eastern Shore Rail Trail would create key connections along Route 13 to other amenities such as trails, water access sites, water trails, scenic byways and public access lands that serve the outdoor recreation needs to VA’s Eastern Shore residents and visitors.



SOURCE: VOP GIS DATA FILES & VA-DCR, NATURAL HERITAGE

TAKEAWAYS

VA's Eastern Shore is a vibrant rural community with historic towns, scenic agricultural and coastal landscapes, and panoramic natural preserves and seashores home to abundant wildlife. Despite facing a number of socioeconomic and health disparities, public, private, and non-profit organizations are taking action to ensure quality of life is accessible to all in VA's Eastern Shore. Here are three ways in which the Eastern Shore Rail Trail can support community well-being in Accomack and Northampton counties:



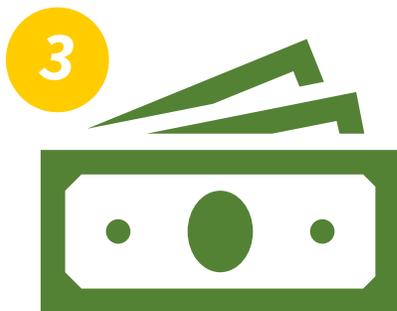
ACCESS

Safe access to close-to-home recreation and community amenities



HEALTH

Healthy living through exercise and social connection opportunities



TOURISM

Increased tourism and economic development for communities along Route 13