Fitness Trails

A fitness trail consists of a series of exercise activity stations that are installed along a route. Users run, jog or walk from station to station performing the exercise activities along the way.

Fitness trails are typically made of ten to eighteen stations arrayed along a half mile to one and a half mile route. The most typical setting for a fitness trail is along a man-made asphalt path through a park. Some trails may be unpaved dirt or gravel.

Components of a Fitness Trail Station

A fitness trail station is composed of the exercise apparatus with instructional signage installed in a defined area called the pad. Most manufacturers recommend installing the station on a pad made from rubber composite material, but less expensive alternatives may be used such as grass, mulch or sand.

The pad is typically rectangular, perhaps about 10 x 12 feet, but may vary depending on the exercise apparatus. The instructional signage instructs the user on the proper and safe use of the equipment.

Cluster Installation

A variation on the fitness trail concept is to install more than one fitness apparatus in a cluster. This application is typically done where a range of equipment is placed in a park setting. This approach removes the aspect of running or walking from station to station, but can be done to create an outdoor gym. In other instances, smaller equipment clusters may be placed along a trail instead of the traditional one piece installation.

Composition of Fitness Apparatus

The fitness equipment itself may be constructed from three types of materials: wood, wood-plastic composite, and metal. The appearance of wood and wood-plastic composite is similar, but the composite materials will have a longer life.

1. Wood construction exercise station.

2. Metal construction exercise station showing instructional signage.

Services of Equipment Manufacturers

We spoke with representatives of five leading manufacturers of fitness trail equipment in the United States. We discovered that two leading manufacturers, Par Course and Vita Course are no longer in operation, although their equipment remains in place from trails installed as long as thirty-five years ago.

Fitness trail manufacturers sell most of their products to units of government and institutional customers such as schools, corporations and resorts. They tout the simple installation requirements of the fitness apparatus as a major selling point. No specialized knowledge is required for installation beyond installing concrete footings and bolting together the equipment components. Use of professional assistance of an engineer or architect is not required.

The equipment apparatus is designed under the supervision of an exercise physiologist and is designed to be safe on its own or in conjunction with other stations from the same manufacturer. Based on the length of the proposed trail and/or the number of station sites along the way, each manufacturer is prepared to recommend a selection of equipment that will provide a well-balanced workout. In addition, they can provide advice for special configurations that would serve a specialized audience, such as children or the elderly.

All of the manufacturers we spoke with have existing GSA Contract numbers for use with Federal government funding sources and are used to the concerns and requirements of being under government oversight for procurement.

Constructing a Trail in an Urban or Semi-Urban Environment

We were not able to find examples of a fitness trail installed in an urban or semi-urban environment that did not use a dedicated trail or path. None of the equipment manufacturers or installers were familiar with this type of installation.

We believe that it is possible to install a trail in this setting. This would be a unique and innovative approach to creating a vibrant mixed-use environment. It is not uncommon to see people walking, jogging and performing other forms of exercise on sidewalks and streets near their homes and businesses.

Constructing a Fitness Trail in a nontraditional environment such as along city streets and sidewalks would require that the builder have site control over the locations of the individual stations where the equipment would be installed and access to public right-of -way to allow the user to travel from one station to the next. Safe street crossings will be required, but existing infrastructure may allow for this with no additional expense. There may be a need for additional signage or markers to allow users to more easily find their way.

3. Way finding route sign.

4. Way finding trail marker.

Budget Estimate for One Fitness Station
Multiply the proposed number of stations by the figures below. Understand that there are cost variations beyond those of construction type and quality based on the complexity of each individual exercise apparatus.

	Low Range	High Range	Comments
Cost of one fitness apparatus (avg.)	1800	4000	Wood construction is least expensive, metal most expensive.
Station Site Preparation Materials	400	2500	Ground covering, footings, landscape timber.
Instructional Signage	300	800	
Wayfinding Signage	80	200	
Installation	200	500	Ground cover systems will move this price to higher range.
Total:	$2,780	$8,000	

Other cost considerations: Route sign for beginning of trail; benches or other seating; site leasing or acquisition costs; government fees; freight costs.

Manufacturers of Fitness Trail Equipment

NuToys Leisure Products Box 2121 LaGrange, IL 60525 (800) 526-6197	nutoys4fun.com
Playworld Systems, Inc. 1000 Buffalo Road Lewisburg, PA 17837-9795 (800) 233-8404	playworldsystems.com
Columbia Cascade Timberform & Pipeline (800) 547-1940, ext. 850	timberform.com
SouthWood Corporation PO Box 38900 Charlotte, NC 28278 (800) 727-6884	fittrail.com
Play and Park Structures 401 Chestnut Street Chattanooga, TN 37402 (800) 727-1907	playandpark.com

We were very interested in finding examples of existing fitness trails and how they are integrated into their communities. What we found suggests that they are viewed as an ingredient in a larger

system. Park system websites mention them as an amenity but typically do not offer photographs, maps or anything else. For example, Rock Creek Park in Washington, DC is co-administered by the National Park Service and the District of Columbia Department of Parks and Recreation. It has "a 1.5 mile fitness trail that begins near the Connecticut Avenue entrance." No other information is available online.

The City of Corning, New York completed installation of a Playworld Systems fitness trail in the Summer of 2010 in Dennison Park. Citizens contributed $12,000 towards its construction and documented the results. This was one of the best documented fitness trails we discovered.

Examples of Fitness Trails

City of San Antonio, TX	San Antonio Parks Fitness Page
Town of Bethlehem, NY	Bethlehem Parks Page
City of Corning, NY	www.cityofcorning.com Local news stories about fitness trail Matt Crance Fitness Trail The Corning Leader, July 25, 2010
City of Lockport, NY	City of Lockport Parks Page