

Economic Impact Model for a Bellingham Skatepark

Tourism-Focused Cost–Benefit Analysis

Research Basis

A recent peer-reviewed study of the Lauridsen Skatepark in Des Moines, Iowa—the largest public skatepark in the U.S.—applied a **travel cost model (TCM)** with visitor surveys to estimate user benefits. Findings:

- **\$61 daily consumer surplus per adult user**
- **\$488,000+ in annual user benefits** under conservative visitation assumptions
- Evidence of **regional tourism draw** and willingness to travel for high-quality facilities

This provides a credible, transferable methodology for projecting economic impacts in Bellingham.

Key Assumptions for Bellingham Model

- **Daily consumer surplus per user:** \$61 (conservative baseline)
- **Season length:** 160 days annually (days skateable without snow/rain)
- **Average adult users/day:**
  - Conservative: 30
  - Optimistic: 120
- **Visitor spending (direct tourism):** \$70/user/visit (lodging, meals, retail, transport)
- **Economic multipliers for local spending:** 1.5–2.0

Financial Model

Scenario	Adult Users/Day	Days Open	Annual Visits	User Benefit	Visitor Spending	Multiplier	Total Economic Impact
Conservative	30	160	4,800	\$292,800	\$336,000	1.5	\$504,000
Optimistic	120	160	19,200	\$1,171,200	\$1,344,000	2.0	\$2,688,000

## Notes:

- “User benefit” = direct non-market value via TCM consumer surplus.
  - “Visitor spending” benchmarked to peer recreation/tourism studies.
  - “Multiplier” captures indirect & induced spending as dollars circulate locally.
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## ROI Perspective

- **Construction cost range:** \$50–\$75/sq.ft.
  - **Example:** 15,000 sq.ft. park = \$750,000–\$1,125,000
  - **Payback period:**
    - Optimistic scenario: 1–2 years
    - Conservative scenario: 2–4 years
  - **Upside not yet monetized:** youth/family use, health outcomes, event hosting, regional branding.
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## Tourism & Community Takeaways

- **Destination appeal:** Well-designed parks attract regional skaters, BMX, scooter riders, and families.
  - **Annual impact:** \$0.5M to \$2.7M, comparable to other sports tourism assets.
  - **Equity & inclusivity:** Facilities serve diverse demographics, echoing national trends.
  - **Long-term gains:** Civic reputation, reduced “skater flight” to other cities, and amplified downtown activity.
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## Conclusion

Investment in a Bellingham skatepark is a **defensible, high-ROI tourism strategy**. Even under conservative assumptions, the park generates half a million dollars annually in local economic impact. A larger vision positions Bellingham as a **regional action sports destination**, returning 2–3x the investment within a few years.

## Reference:

Kemp, T. (2025). *Shred Central: Estimating the user benefits associated with large public skateparks*. *Journal of Economic Analysis*, 4(1), 66-82.