

EQUITABLE TRAIL DEVELOPMENT LOGIC MODEL

SITUATION

Access to safe places close to home where we can walk, bike and be active outdoors is a matter of life and death.

Chronic diseases like obesity and heart disease are pervasive among Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC)—as are limited health-care options and opportunities for physical activity ([Center for American Progress](#)), underlying risk factors at the root of the disproportionate toll of COVID-19 among BIPOC communities. The story of pedestrian fatalities is similar; Black pedestrians are twice as likely as whites to die while walking, a disparity that has grown rapidly over the past decade ([CDC MMWR](#)). An assessment of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's (RTC's) GIS database finds that only 12% of the nation's trail miles are located in communities with a high social vulnerability score ([CDC](#)), perpetuating the systemic underpinnings causing significant disparities between those who do and those who do not have access to safe spaces to be physically active in their neighborhoods. The United States has a long and deep history of structural racism rooted in discriminatory policies, land use and planning practices, alongside an exclusionary outdoor culture, which perpetuate racial inequities in our access to the outdoors.

PRIORITIES

At RTC, we believe that trails can connect everyone, everywhere, and that every person deserves access to free, accessible and safe places where they can walk, bike and be active in their neighborhoods. A legacy of racist planning and land-use practices has contributed to outsized health and wellness, economic, and mobility challenges that leave BIPOC communities isolated from economic opportunity, lacking assets and resources for health and wellness, and physically segregated from other communities. While infrastructure has long been used to segregate neighborhoods, trails have the power to unite—transforming communities and creating joyful, vibrant public spaces that are equitable and inclusive. Trails connected into seamless networks are essential to healthy communities, providing routes separated from vehicle traffic for people to walk and bike as part of their daily lives. This community-based infrastructure is created by reimagining public spaces in ways that connect people rather than separate them—and by prioritizing grassroots leadership, emphasizing introspection and acknowledging historical injustices that continue to negatively impact people's lives.

INPUTS

RTC is taking to scale transformative practices and policies that yield fully inclusive trails and trail networks. RTC is uniquely positioned to define the practice of equitable trail development as the nation's pre-eminent leader in trails, walking and biking advocacy, with assets including:

- The nation's only comprehensive GIS database of trails, with 40,000+ miles mapped at TrailLink.com
- An applied research team and baseline research using public opinion and GIS analysis to understand relational trail and equity outcomes
- A full-service team of experts in trail and active transportation policy, trail development and practice, trail use and outdoor recreation marketing

ACTIVITIES

Changing the status quo means centering equity and racial justice at each stage in the process to conceptualize, plan, fund and utilize trails, and then consistently putting that process into practice. This includes:

- **Visioning and coalition building:** Ensuring diverse and representative participation in defining, leading and implementing trail development
- **Trail-access spatial analysis:** Analyzing trail access and the connectivity of trails and active transportation routes to understand the racial and economic equity implications and define equitable approaches for future trail and trail network development
- **Positioning marginalized communities to lead and plan:** Redefining transportation and recreation planning, especially as they relate to active living and outdoor spaces—putting BIPOC communities in the lead to conceptualize and create the plans, policies and best practices that will yield the most equitable outcomes
- **Securing resources and addressing inequitable outcomes:** Advocating for more accessible public/private funding sources, and leveraging models that prioritize active transportation and outdoor recreation investment in marginalized communities alongside the strategies and policies that promote racial healing
- **Inclusive community engagement:** Designing trail-user engagement, content and programming strategies that prioritize the interests and safety of BIPOC communities, and uphold representation and inclusivity in the outdoors and in active transportation

OUTPUTS

Much of the work to transform trail development and active transportation practices and policies around fully inclusive and racially just outcomes targets primary audiences that currently hold power over the process. Simultaneously, organizations leading racial justice and civil rights work at the community level are critical partners in building the leadership of marginalized communities in reimagining public spaces as vibrant places for community healing, outdoor recreation and active transportation. Current and future trail users are secondary audiences, the beneficiaries of a successful strategy.

- Government and elected officials
- Local, regional and state planning agencies (transportation agencies, jurisdictional agencies, metropolitan planning agencies, etc.)
- Organizations leading racial justice and civil rights work at the community level
- Nonprofit and community-level partners across sectors, including environmental protection, health equity and economic development
- RTC's partner network (300+ organizations and growing) working to advance regional trail networks nationwide

AUDIENCES

OUTCOMES

Intended results can be understood through fundamental elements of [transportation equity](#)—acknowledgment, accountability and application—as well as through RTC's equity action plan.

Short-Term [Up to 3 Years]: Acknowledgment Phase

Acknowledgment of equity as a fundamental value to trail network planning

- Improved integration of equitable development policy and practice among priority audiences
- Improved engagement among racial justice, civil rights and cross-sector organizations
- Increase in inclusive outreach to more diverse potential trail users

Mid-Term [3–5 Years]: Accountability Phase

Commitment to advance equity through trail network development

- Plans exist and are in implementation phases that improve equitable distribution of trail infrastructure
- Successful implementation of transformative policies that prioritize investment in trail networks in marginalized communities

Long-Term [5–10 Years]: Application Phase

Action being taken that advances equity through trail networks

- Increase in BIPOC communities who have access to and use trails and active transportation
- Field of trail and active-transportation planning, policy and practice significantly reoriented around equity principles
- Trail networks are equitably distributed and used, removing racial barriers to mobility, health, environmental justice and economic opportunity

ASSUMPTIONS

- Inclusive and equitable approaches to trail network development in marginalized communities will yield diverse and inclusive trail use and equitable outcomes associated with the greatest existential threats facing the United States related to health, racial justice and healing, environment, economic recovery and ideological divides.
- Building trust in marginalized communities will be possible, overcoming a legacy of white power and privilege in land use and transportation planning, and a long-held culture of exclusion in the outdoors.
- Important stakeholders will prioritize this work, investing and engaging in the process of building equitable trail-development strategies that will deliver significant social outcomes.
- People living in marginalized communities seek access to and participation in trails and the outdoors.
- RTC's leadership is essential to advancing the work and is uniquely positioned nationally to deliver on a vision at this scale.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

- U.S. Department of Transportation commitments to equity, climate, safety and economic opportunity provide federal leadership to advance these priorities.
- Reauthorization of the federal surface transportation bill could provide significant resources to advance trail network development in marginalized communities.
- Post-COVID-19 economic situation could stall outcomes if state and local budgets are limited, affecting investments in infrastructure.
- Behaviors related to transportation patterns and equitable access to transportation (e.g., transit, individual car ownership, safe places to walk/bike/be active) in society in the aftermath of COVID-19 will inform strategies.

SUCCESS INDICATORS: BENCHMARKS

- Increase in participation among primary audiences in equitable trail-planning processes
- Decline in racial disparities of trail use and access
- Increase in # of people from marginalized communities within # of miles/minutes to a connected trail system
- Increase in public funding for trails and safe walking and biking infrastructure dedicated to marginalized communities
- Increase in % of short trips taken by walking/biking among marginalized communities