WHEN TRAILS ARE AT THE HEART OF COMMUNITIES, COMMUNITIES THRIVE.

The Route of the Badger offers a vision of healthy, thriving communities in Southeast Wisconsin centered around a world-class, 500-mile-plus regional trail system that connects people across towns and counties. Southeast Wisconsin is home to 340 miles of existing trail, which means that a relatively small investment that builds upon existing infrastructure can improve the connectivity of the trail system; better connecting people to the places they want to go. This approach to trail-system development is a placemaking strategy that positions trails as community necessities, rather than nice-to-have amenities. When more people can use trails to get where they want to go, the benefits to the economy, public health and transportation become the foundation of healthy, sustainable communities.

WHAT CAN ROUTE OF THE BADGER DO FOR WISCONSIN?

EXPAND SMART TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

In Milwaukee, as many as one-in-five residents do not own a car,¹ which means their transportation options are limited. With access to a connected regional trail system, they’ll have more active transportation options that safely and conveniently connect them—and others across the region—with the places they want and need to go. The Route of the Badger will integrate with Wisconsin’s burgeoning multi-modal transportation system, creating safe routes to everywhere for everyone, regardless of age, race and income.

FUEL STRONG BUSINESSES AND ECONOMIES

In Wisconsin, the economic impact of bicycle recreation and tourism is more than $900 million each year.² Vibrant regional trail systems are proven economic drivers, sparking neighborhood-scale economic development with tourism, new investment in trailside businesses and commercial opportunities along trail routes.

IMPROVE PUBLIC HEALTH

Creating accessible opportunities for people to get out and get moving is a game changer for public health. When people have access to safe places to walk within 10 minutes of their home, they are one and a half times more likely to meet recommended activity levels than those who don’t.³ Route of the Badger will give people living in Southeast Wisconsin new access to outdoor recreation, with the potential for improved physical activity and a savings in direct health care costs of more than $22.4 million.⁴

ENHANCE REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

Quality of place is a key factor in attracting and retaining a younger, highly educated workforce and trails add value—millennials walk, bike and take public transportation significantly more than people their age did a decade ago,⁴ and nearly 80 percent of those living in large cities say they get around on foot.⁵ The Route of the Badger will expand on this value, helping the region become a talent magnet.

PROMOTE SOCIAL EQUITY

Just like with other forms of infrastructure, disparities exist in the distribution of trail and active transportation networks. These disparities often coincide with other socioeconomic disparities that have a negative impact on people and places. If done thoughtfully and with meaningful community engagement, comprehensive trail systems can bridge gaps within and between communities, providing access to safe transportation, physical activity and outdoor recreation, improving health and quality of life.

¹ Alliance for Biking and Walking 2016 Benchmarking report
³ Valuing the Economic and Health Impact of Bicycling in Wisconsin, May 2011
⁴ Millennials in Motion: Changing Travel Habits of Young Americans and the Implications for Public Policy, 2014
⁵ Millennials & Mobility: Understanding the Millennial Mindset and New Opportunities for Transit Providers, 2013
⁶ Valuing Bicycling’s Economic and Health Impacts in Wisconsin, January 2010
How is Route of the Badger being built?

The Route of the Badger is a partnership of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and the Wisconsin Bike Fed to build healthier communities in the seven-county region of Southeast Wisconsin. With 340 miles of existing trail, the first phase of the project (2016–2017) will launch a collaborative, multi-partner process to use data and innovative tools to design a 500-mile-plus trail system. The project’s early focus will be to close gaps in the trail network between urban and suburban neighborhoods, connecting Milwaukee, Waukesha and Racine counties; developing a 75-mile trail loop connecting Racine and small towns to the west and Milwaukee to the north. When completed the Route of the Badger has the potential to transform Southeast Wisconsin’s trails into a powerful, interconnected regional trail network with new opportunities for physical activity, tourism, recreation and stronger businesses along its route.

About Rails-To-Trails Conservancy’s TrailNation™ Projects

At Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, we believe that trail networks can deliver smart transportation, strong economic growth, healthy people, competitive regional advantage and social equity. Our TrailNation™ Projects are network-building projects that have the power to catalyze the development of trail networks nationwide, creating healthier places for healthier people. The heart of this work will come through smart investments that close gaps and improve access to trail networks across communities. The scope of this work expands to become a placemaking strategy, with trails at the center of healthy, sustainable communities.

Join the movement to bring Route of the Badger to reality. Sign on at RailToTrails.org/RouteoftheBadger.