

NEBRASKA



Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge connecting Iowa and Nebraska | Photo by Kevin Belanger, courtesy Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

ROUTE

The Great American Rail-Trail crosses from Iowa into Nebraska on the iconic Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge. The route weaves through the urban areas of Omaha and Lincoln, connecting these population centers to the more rural western part of the state. The Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail takes trail users almost 40 percent of the way across Nebraska, with more miles set for construction in the near future.

RTC found and reviewed 21 plans in Nebraska to better understand the state's trail priorities. A full list of these plans can be found in Appendix A.

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT NEBRASKA

TABLE 18 GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL STATISTICS IN NEBRASKA

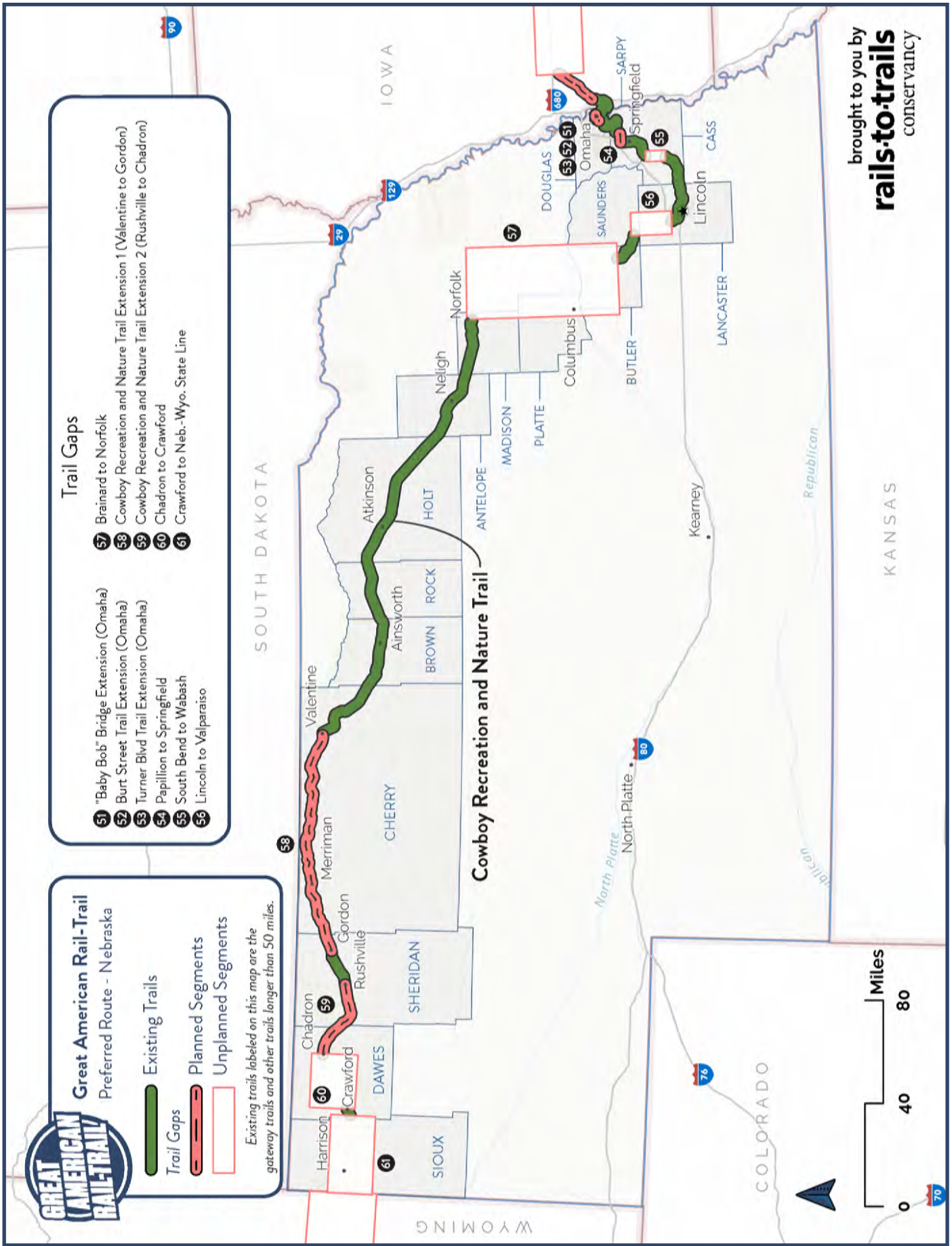
Total Great American Rail-Trail Existing Trail Miles in Neb. (% of Total State Mileage)	303.5 (51.1%)
Total Great American Rail-Trail Trail Gap Miles in Neb. (% of Total State Mileage)	289.9 (48.9%)
Total Trail Gaps in Neb.	11
Total Great American Rail-Trail Miles in Neb.	593.4

TABLE 19 GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE THROUGH NEBRASKA

Existing Trail or Trail Gap Name	Length in Neb. Along Great American Rail-Trail (in Miles)	Existing Trail or Trail Gap Name	Length in Neb. Along Great American Rail-Trail (in Miles)
Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge	0.2	Oak Lake Connector Trail	0.8
TRAIL GAP 51 – “Baby Bob” Bridge Extension (Omaha)	0.1	North 1st Street Trail	1.5
TRAIL GAP 52 – Burt Street Trail Extension (Omaha)	0.9	Superior Street Trail	0.2
Burt Street Trail	0.7	Highlands Trail	1.3
Turner Boulevard Trail	1.8	TRAIL GAP 56 – Lincoln to Valparaiso	17.4
TRAIL GAP 53 – Turner Boulevard Trail Extension (Omaha)	0.3	Oak Creek Trail	13.0
Field Club Trail	1.4	TRAIL GAP 57 – Brainard to Norfolk	82.6
South Omaha Trail	3.7	Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail (Norfolk to Valentine)	202.1
Keystone Trail	5.6	TRAIL GAP 58 – Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail Extension 1 (Valentine to Gordon)	90.0
West Papio Trail	5.7	Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail (Gordon to Rushville)	16.6
Walnut Creek Lake Trail	2.6	TRAIL GAP 59 – Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail Extension 2 (Rushville to Chadron)	29.4
TRAIL GAP 54 – Papillion to Springfield	3.5	TRAIL GAP 60 – Chadron to Crawford	23.8
MoPac Trail (Springfield)	13.2	White River Trail	2.8
Platte River Connection	1.5	TRAIL GAP 61 – Crawford to Neb.-Wyo. State Line	32.5
TRAIL GAP 55 – South Bend to Wabash	9.4		
MoPac East Trail	20.7	Total Miles	593.4
MoPac Trail West	6.1	Existing Trail Miles	303.5
Antelope Valley Trail	1.0	Trail Gap Miles	289.9
Salt Creek Levee Trail	1.0		

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT

MAP 9: NEBRASKA



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GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT NEBRASKA

BOB KERREY PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE

Total Length (in Miles)	0.2
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	0.2
Trail Type	Greenway
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Manager	Council Bluffs Parks & Recreation, Omaha Parks & Recreation, Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District
Website	councilbluffs-ia.gov/2178/Bob-Kerrey-Pedestrian-Bridge visitomaha.com/bob/
TrailLink Map	trailink.com/trail/bob-kerrey-pedestrian-bridge/

The Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge, discussed in more detail in the Iowa chapter of the report, has become a major community landmark, with a planned extension into Omaha in the works. The bridge is lit at night to provide a safe and attractive connection throughout the day and night. Visitors taking the bridge into Omaha can travel about a half-mile south along the Omaha Riverfront Trail to the Omaha Visitors Center to learn more about Omaha and what it has to offer. People continuing along the Great American Rail-Trail will head west into Omaha along the planned “Baby Bob” bridge extension.

TRAIL GAP 51 – “BABY BOB” BRIDGE EXTENSION (OMAHA)

The Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge currently ends on the Omaha side of the Missouri River at Lewis & Clark Landing, connecting trail users to the Omaha Riverfront Trail running along the Missouri River. The current configuration of roads and railroads just to the west of this landing makes it difficult for trail users to access the bridge from downtown Omaha.

The city of Omaha plans to extend the Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge 0.1 mile over Riverfront Drive and the railroad tracks to a planned trail extension along Mike Fahey Street. This project is listed in Omaha’s 2019-2024 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) as the North Downtown Riverfront Pedestrian Connector Bridge, but the local nickname for this project is the “Baby Bob” bridge. Estimates for the bridge extension cost have run between \$3.5 million and \$4.5 million, and construction is slated to begin in 2020, per Omaha’s 2019-2024 CIP.¹⁷

TRAIL GAP 52 – BURT STREET TRAIL EXTENSION (OMAHA)

The city of Omaha plans to extend the existing Burt Street Trail 0.9 mile from its current western terminus at North 20th Street eastward to connect to the Baby Bob Bridge Extension. The trail will follow Burt Street to CHI Health Center Omaha, where the Baby Bob Bridge Extension is to connect at the end of Mike Fahey Street. There are no cost estimates and no anticipated date of construction for this trail extension.

BURT STREET TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	0.7
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	0.7
Trail Type	Greenway
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Manager	Omaha Parks & Recreation
Website	parks.cityofomaha.org/parks/trails

The existing Burt Street Trail runs 0.7 mile between North 20th and North 30th streets in Omaha. The trail is a shared-use path that parallels Burt Street on the south side of the road. It is largely wide enough to accommodate both bicycle and pedestrian traffic, though there are small sections that narrow to a normal sidewalk width. This pathway provides a connection on the north side of the Creighton University campus.

TURNER BOULEVARD TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	1.9
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	1.8
Trail Type	Greenway
Surface Type	Asphalt, concrete
Trail Manager	Omaha Parks & Recreation
Website	parks.cityofomaha.org/parks/trails
TrailLink Map	trailink.com/trail/turner-boulevard-trail/

¹⁷ The CIP states that “construction of the North Downtown (‘Baby Bob’) Pedestrian Connector Bridge would complete the connection between ... major destinations and would promote further redevelopment in both North Downtown and the Riverfront.”

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT NEBRASKA



MoPac Trail East in Nebraska | Photo by Kevin Belanger, courtesy Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

The Turner Boulevard Trail connects with the Burt Street Trail at North 30th Street in Omaha. The Turner Boulevard Trail currently travels 1.9 miles. The Turner Boulevard Trail will host the Great American Rail-Trail for 1.8 miles, spanning the intersection of North 30th and Burt streets to the intersection of South 36th and Pacific streets to connect through Omaha. The trail is a shared-use path that runs along the west side of North 30th Street and Turner Boulevard, winding past several parks and neighborhoods and ending at the Field Club of Omaha.

TRAIL GAP 53 – TURNER BOULEVARD TRAIL EXTENSION (OMAHA)

The Turner Boulevard Trail is slated for a 0.3-mile extension with construction expected to begin in the spring of 2019. The trail extension will follow the right-of-way of Pacific Street, just north of the Field Club of Omaha, between South 36th and South 39th streets.

FIELD CLUB TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	1.8
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	1.4
Trail Type	Greenway, rail-trail
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Manager	Omaha Parks & Recreation
Website	parks.cityofomaha.org/parks/trails/
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/field-club-trail/

The Field Club Trail currently travels 1.8 miles from the intersection of South 39th and Leavenworth streets south to the northern terminus of the South Omaha Trail at Vinton Street. Of this trail, 1.4 miles beginning at the end of the Turner Boulevard Trail Extension will provide a connection through Omaha and the Hanscom Park neighborhood for the Great American Rail-Trail. The Field Club Trail occupies an old railroad bed that runs for 2 miles and lies 30 feet below grade.

SOUTH OMAHA TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	3.7
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	3.7
Trail Type	Rail-trail
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Manager	Omaha Parks & Recreation
Website	pacionrd.org/recreation-wildlife/parks-and-trails/metro-omaha-trails/
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/south-omaha-trail/

The South Omaha Trail connects the Field Club Trail to the Keystone Trail at its crossing of Little Papillion Creek. The South Omaha Trail is built on a former Chicago and North Western Transportation Company corridor with an old trestle crossing South 60th Street. The city of Omaha installed a pedestrian hybrid beacon signal at the busy at-grade crossing of South 50th Street to allow for safer crossing.

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT NEBRASKA

KEYSTONE TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	15.0
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	5.6
Trail Type	Greenway, rail-trail
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Manager	Bellevue Parks Department, Omaha Parks & Recreation, Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District
Website	papionrd.org/recreation-wildlife/parks-and-trails/metro-omaha-trails/
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/keystone-trail/

The South Omaha Trail connects to the Keystone Trail at its crossing of Little Papillion Creek, though the Keystone Trail continues several miles north through much of western Omaha. The Keystone Trail partially follows the banks of Papillion Creek atop the flood control levees, while the remaining 2.3 miles are along an old rail corridor. The Great American Rail-Trail will turn west once the Keystone Trail intersects the West Papio Trail near South 36th Street at its crossing of Big Papillion Creek in Bellevue, though the Keystone Trail itself continues south to the Bellevue Loop Trail.

WEST PAPIO TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	22.9
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	5.7
Trail Type	Greenway, rail-trail
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Manager	Omaha Parks & Recreation, Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District
Website	papionrd.org/recreation-wildlife/parks-and-trails/metro-omaha-trails/
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/west-papio-trail/

The West Papio Trail connects at its eastern end to the Keystone Trail and continues west toward the city of Elkhorn through the city of Papillion, following West Papillion Creek. At the western edge of Papillion, the Great American Rail-Trail will head south along South 96th Street toward the Walnut Creek Lake and Recreation Area to eventually connect to the MoPac Trail. The Great American Rail-Trail will make a brief on-street jog westward along Santa Fe Circle to access a trail underpass to safely cross underneath the busy state Route 370. The West Papio Trail will host the Great American Rail-Trail for 5.7 miles between the Keystone Trail and Papillion.¹⁸

¹⁸ Note that if an extension of the 144th Street Trail is ever created south of I-80, the Great American Rail-Trail may be rerouted to include the new section of the West Papio Trail and the trail along South 144th Street.

WALNUT CREEK LAKE TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	3.3
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	2.6
Trail Type	Greenway
Surface Type	Boardwalk, concrete
Trail Manager	City of Papillion
Website	papillion.org/facilities/facility/details/walnut-creekrecreationarea-14
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/walnut-creek-lake-trail/

The West Papio Trail connects to a trail system at Walnut Creek Lake, a 105-acre reservoir and mixed-use recreation area in Papillion. The lake and recreation area are under the management of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District. The paved loop around Walnut Creek Lake is 3.3 miles and is complete with amenities including a campground, restrooms, water fountains and an equestrian trail.

TRAIL GAP 54 – PAPILLION TO SPRINGFIELD

The Omaha metropolitan area has long been interested in completing a trail connection between the Walnut Creek Lake Trail and the MoPac Trail. A distinct trail corridor has not yet been identified. In the meantime, people who would like to travel between the trails can use Schram Road. This approximately 3.5-mile connection passes through farmland along an unpaved, low-volume county road. Gravel roads such as this can provide for a low-stress bicycling experience and require the same equipment that would be needed on an unpaved rail-trail such as many of those included in the Great American Rail-Trail route. When a trail connection to fill this gap is identified, the route of the Great American Rail-Trail will be adjusted to use that corridor. In the meantime, Schram Road can provide an appropriate interim on-road connector.

MOPAC TRAIL (SPRINGFIELD)

Total Length (in Miles)	13.2
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	13.2
Trail Type	Rail-trail
Surface Type	Crushed stone
Trail Manager	Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District
Website	papionrd.org/recreation-wildlife/parks-and-trails/metro-omaha-trails/
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/mopac-trail-(springfield)/

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT NEBRASKA

The MoPac Trail exists in three segments, starting just north of Springfield to the north and ending in Lincoln to the south and west. Nearly the entire route rests on an abandoned Missouri Pacific Railroad corridor (the MoPac).

Segment 1 – MoPac Trail (Springfield): Beginning at Schram Road in Omaha, the MoPac Trail heads south along state Route 50 through the town of Springfield, where a former gap in the route between Platteview Road and Main Street was recently completed slightly away from the former MoPac rail line, allowing for uninterrupted off-road travel through Springfield. The MoPac Trail continues along the old rail corridor south of the Platte River, just north of the city of Louisville, where the trail heads west to parallel state Route 31. Once the trail reaches the Platte River at South Bend, there is a trailhead with parking as the trail continues to cross the Platte River over the Lied Platte River Bridge.

Segment 2 – MoPac East Trail (discussed below).

Segment 3 – MoPac Trail West (discussed below).

PLATTE RIVER CONNECTION

Total Length (in Miles)	1.5
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	1.5
Trail Type	Rail-trail
Surface Type	Crushed stone, concrete
Trail Manager	Lower Platte South Natural Resources District
Website	papsnrd.org/recreation-wildlife/parks-and-trails/metro-omaha-trails/ lpsnrd.org/lied-bridge-platte-river-connection
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/platte-river-connection/

A connection across the Platte River at the village of South Bend, Nebraska, was completed in 2002, using an abandoned Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad bridge. The bridge across the river is now known as the Lied Platte River Bridge, named after the Lied Foundation, a major contributor to the project.

TRAIL GAP 55 – SOUTH BEND TO WABASH

The Lower Platte South Natural Resources District identifies an interim on-road connector between the Platte River Connection and the MoPac East Trail. The Nebraska Bicycle Alliance and the Nebraska Trails Foundation recently announced a partnership to focus their organizations' energies on helping close this 9.4-mile gap to make a multiuse trail between Omaha and Lincoln closer to reality. An exact corridor for a trail has not yet been identified, but when one is, this will be an important statewide connection.

MOPAC EAST TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	20.7
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	20.7
Trail Type	Rail-trail
Surface Type	Crushed stone
Trail Manager	Lower Platte South Natural Resources District
Website	lpsnrd.org/mopac-east-trail
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/mopac-trail-east/

The second segment of the MoPac Trail, following the old corridor of the Missouri Pacific Railroad's Omaha Belt Line, travels 20.7 miles between Wabash and the intersection of South 98th and A streets (east of Lincoln). This eastern segment of the MoPac Trail is very rural and travels on a crushed stone path through prairie, woodland and farmland. A separate equestrian trail, the Charles L. Warner Equestrian Trail, is provided between Wabash and the intersection of South 98th and A streets, near the western endpoint of the MoPac East Trail. Here, the MoPac East Trail connects to the MoPac Trail West to make the rest of the voyage into Lincoln.

MOPAC TRAIL WEST

Total Length (in Miles)	6.1
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	6.1
Trail Type	Rail-trail
Surface Type	Concrete, crushed stone
Trail Manager	Lincoln Parks & Recreation
Website	lincoln.ne.gov/city/parks/parksfacilities/trails/
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/mopac-trail-west/

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT NEBRASKA

The third segment of the MoPac Trail starts at South 84th Street east of Lincoln and travels 6.1 miles into downtown Lincoln. The MoPac Trail West travels through many neighborhoods in Lincoln and helps connect the two campuses of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. The Great American Rail-Trail will head north at North Antelope Valley Parkway—the westernmost terminus of the MoPac Trail—onto the Antelope Valley Trail.

ANTELOPE VALLEY TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	2.1
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	1.0
Trail Type	Greenway
Surface Type	Concrete, crushed stone
Trail Manager	Lincoln Parks & Recreation
Website	lincoln.ne.gov/city/parks/parksfacilities/trails/
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/antelope-valley-trail/

The Antelope Valley Trail runs roughly south to north through downtown Lincoln, with Lincoln High School to the south and Salt Creek to the north. The trail passes Trago Park, Union Park Plaza and the Bob Devaney Center. The Antelope Valley Trail will host the Great American Rail-Trail for 1 mile, connecting the MoPac Trail West to the Salt Creek Levee Trail.

SALT CREEK LEVEE TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	4.0
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	1.0
Trail Type	Greenway
Surface Type	Crushed stone
Trail Manager	Lincoln Parks & Recreation
Website	lincoln.ne.gov/city/parks/parksfacilities/trails/
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/salt-creek-levee-trail/

The Salt Creek Levee Trail connects a trail along the levee of Salt Creek from its confluence with Oak Creek down to the Jamaica North Trail. The Great American Rail-Trail will utilize the northern mile of the Salt Creek Levee Trail connecting the Antelope Valley Trail to the Oak Lake Connector Trail at a bridge crossing Salt Creek.

OAK LAKE CONNECTOR TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	1.4
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	0.8
Trail Type	Greenway
Surface Type	Asphalt
Trail Manager	Lincoln Parks & Recreation
Website	lincoln.ne.gov/city/parks/parksfacilities/trails/
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/oak-lake-connector-trail-/

The Oak Lake Connector Trail travels around Oak Lake Park along Charleston and North 1st streets, connecting to a shared-use path along North 1st Street at Cornhusker Highway. Oak Lake Park provides two parking lots and a restroom facility, as well as walking trails along Oak Lake.

NORTH 1ST STREET TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	1.5
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	1.5
Trail Type	Greenway
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Manager	Lincoln Parks & Recreation
Website	lincoln.ne.gov/city/parks/parksfacilities/trails/
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/north-1st-street-trail-/

A shared-use path runs along the length of North 1st Street from U.S. 6/ Cornhusker Highway northwest to Superior Street. The trail is made of concrete and is approximately 10 feet wide, running along the northbound lane of North 1st Street.

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT NEBRASKA

SUPERIOR STREET TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	4.4
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	0.2
Trail Type	Greenway
Surface Type	Asphalt
Trail Manager	Lincoln Parks & Recreation
Website	lincoln.ne.gov/city/parks/parksfacilities/trails/
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/superior-street-trail/

A 0.2-mile section of the Superior Street Trail will host the Great American Rail-Trail between North 1st Street and a connection to the Highlands Trail at Technology Drive in Lincoln. The Superior Street Trail is primarily a commuter route following its namesake thoroughfare from U.S. 6/Cornhusker Highway to the Highlands neighborhood at the western edge of the city.

HIGHLANDS TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	2.6
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	1.3
Trail Type	Greenway
Surface Type	Asphalt
Trail Manager	Lincoln Parks & Recreation
Website	lincoln.ne.gov/city/parks/parksfacilities/trails/
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/highlands-trail-(ne)/

The Highlands Trail offers a pleasant, 2.6-mile loop through Lincoln's Highlands neighborhood, providing the western link of the series of trails that travels through Lincoln. Those following the Great American Rail-Trail can follow the trail 1.3 miles along West Highland Boulevard and connect north along NW 12th Street to the Highlands Trail's terminus near NW 10th Street.

TRAIL GAP 56 – LINCOLN TO VALPARAISO

There are no known corridors that could help complete the 17.4-mile gap between the Highlands Trail in Lincoln and the Oak Creek Trail in Valparaiso. There is an active Union Pacific Railroad corridor connecting Lincoln north to Valparaiso with a low traffic density, according to data from the Federal Railroad Administration in 2014. While a feasible,

off-road multiuse trail option between these two trails continues to be explored, a temporary on-road interim connection can be made using various low-volume county roads in Lancaster and Saunders counties.

OAK CREEK TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	13.0
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	13.0
Trail Type	Rail-trail
Surface Type	Crushed stone
Trail Manager	Lower Platte South Natural Resources District
Website	lpsnrd.org/oak-creek-trail
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/oak-creek-trail/

The Oak Creek Trail occupies a former Union Pacific Railroad corridor between the Nebraska villages of Valparaiso and Brainard. The trail travels 13 miles through Saunders and Butler counties. Across the county line is the tiny community of Loma, where restrooms are located just off the trail near the St. Luke Czech Catholic Shrine in the center of town. An equestrian trail runs adjacent to the Oak Creek Trail for its entire route, and horse trailer parking can be found at the trailheads in Valparaiso and Loma.

TRAIL GAP 57 – BRAINARD TO NORFOLK

The rail line on which the Oak Creek Trail was constructed between Valparaiso and Brainard extends northwest for an additional 10.5 miles to David City. The rail line is not officially abandoned and is currently under Nebraska Central Railroad Company ownership, though Federal Railroad Administration data from 2014 show no rail traffic along this corridor. If this section is ever officially abandoned, Butler County and the local natural resource districts should seek to extend the Oak Creek Trail northwest to David City. As the rail line to David City crosses through the jurisdiction of three natural resource districts (Lower Platte South, Upper Big Blue and Lower Platte North, respectively), a partnership on trail development and management could be pursued.

From David City, an active Nebraska Central Railroad Company line continues north through Columbus, Nebraska, and has a traffic density of two out of five, according to 2014 Federal Railroad Administration data. Columbus has a small number of existing trails that could be connected into a network, as well as an active and engaged local trail committee. North of Columbus, a Nebraska Central Railroad Company line continues north to Norfolk. The line is listed as active in 2014 Federal Railroad Administration data, but it shows no rail traffic along this corridor. If this section is ever officially abandoned, local natural resource districts should seek to turn it into a trail as well.

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT NEBRASKA

While a feasible, off-road multiuse trail option bridging the 82.6-mile gap between Brainard and Norfolk continues to be explored, an interim on-road connector can be made using various low-volume county roads in Butler, Platte and Madison counties.

COWBOY RECREATION AND NATURE TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	218.7
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	218.7
Trail Type	Rail-trail
Surface Type	Concrete, crushed stone
Trail Manager	Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Website	outdoornebraska.gov/cowboytrail/ bikecowboytrail.com
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/cowboy-recreation-and-nature-trail/

The Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail (“Cowboy Trail”)¹⁹ is one of the country’s longest rail-trails. The Cowboy Trail was designated as a National Recreational Trail as part of the National Park Service’s National Trails System in 2001. When it is fully complete, the trail will extend 321 miles between the cities of Norfolk and Chadron. Two segments of the Cowboy Trail are currently complete:

Segment 1 – 202.1 miles between Norfolk and Valentine.

Segment 2 – 16.6 miles between Gordon and Rushville.²⁰

The Cowboy Trail was created when a major corridor for the Chicago and North Western Transportation Company (originally part of the Fremont, Elkhorn and Missouri Valley Railroad) was abandoned in

1992. RTC purchased the railroad right-of-way and donated it to the state of Nebraska. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission now owns the entire corridor between Norfolk and mile marker 400, about 5 miles east of downtown Chadron.

Maintenance of the Cowboy Trail has historically been underfunded at the state level. This situation leaves parts of the Cowboy Trail in rough but passable shape, particularly as the trail passes through the more remote sections of completed trail on the western end.²¹ The trail has not been entirely resurfaced since it was first completed in the late 1990s, and short sections could be rough from washboarding.²²

TRAIL GAP 58 – COWBOY RECREATION AND NATURE TRAIL EXTENSION 1 (VALENTINE TO GORDON)

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission owns a former rail corridor between the existing trailheads in Valentine and Gordon that was never officially surfaced as part of the Cowboy Trail. The commission has been hesitant to complete construction on this 90-mile section of trail until dedicated and stable funding is made available by the Nebraska Legislature for ongoing operations and maintenance of the entire Cowboy Trail.²³

Between Valentine and Merriman (approximately 61 miles), the bridges are decked and the remaining activities to open the trail include mowing, grading and surfacing with crushed stone. Ballast and railroad ties are still present on the remaining 30 miles between Merriman and Gordon, and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is preparing to remove the ballast in the summer of 2019. The bridges along the section between Merriman and Gordon still need to be decked as well. Completing the entire Cowboy Trail will go a long way to making the Great American Rail-Trail a reality and providing economic development assistance to the small towns that settled along the former rail corridor.²⁴

¹⁹ In 2015, RTC awarded \$10,000 to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to create a promotional plan and develop a strategy to update the trail master plan and engage stakeholders along the trail. The funding was provided by the Doppelt Fund.

²⁰ In 2017, RTC awarded \$3,000 to Cowboy Trail West Inc. to surface up to 14 miles of the Cowboy Trail between Gordon and Rushville. The funding was provided by the Doppelt Fund.

²¹ Cowboy Trail West Inc. provides the labor to maintain the section between Gordon and Rushville, using materials provided by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. RTC provided a Doppelt Fund grant in 2017 to Cowboy Trail West Inc. for trail surfacing in this western section of the trail.

²² The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission would like to undergo an assessment of the trail’s more than 200 bridges. The commission is also currently in the process of creating a Cowboy Trail Master Plan, which will help identify future work needed on the existing and planned portions of the trail.

²³ The Nebraska Trail Development Plan (2004) recommends the creation of a Cowboy Trail Endowment to fund future maintenance costs of the trail. The plan proposes a \$5,000,000 endowment. With anticipated annual maintenance costs of \$200,000, the plan notes that a hypothetical 5 percent interest rate would fund half of the annual maintenance needs.

²⁴ While keeping ownership of the right-of-way for the Cowboy Trail, the Nebraska Trail Development Plan (2004) notes that “Nebraska Game and Parks Commission may consider leasing the land to adjacent landowners, with a clear contractual provision that the land is to return to NGPC control when necessary for trail development.”

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT NEBRASKA

TRAIL GAP 59 – COWBOY RECREATION AND NATURE TRAIL EXTENSION 2 (RUSHVILLE TO CHADRON)

On the western end of the Cowboy Trail, two nonprofit organizations are working to complete the remaining 29.4-mile portion of the trail into the city of Chadron. In Sheridan County, Cowboy Trail West Inc. has completed a 16.6-mile portion of the trail from Gordon to Rushville; in Dawes and Sioux counties, the Northwest Nebraska Trails Association (NNTA) has made development of the Cowboy Trail to Chadron a priority.

In September 2018, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission offered each of the two nonprofit groups \$350,000 in Recreational Trail Program funds for trail development. In partnership with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Cowboy Trail West Inc. will use its portion to upgrade the surfacing of the trail section between Gordon and Rushville and extend it westward to Hay Springs. NNTA will use its funds to complete the trail between Hay Springs and roughly 5 miles east of Chadron at mile marker 400, where the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission-owned corridor ends and an active short line railroad begins.

In total, 41 miles of the trail will be either constructed or resurfaced, and several bridges will be decked and provided railings. Federal funds involved for this project need to be obligated prior to Sept. 1, 2019, due to mandated federal rescission. Construction can begin shortly after federal funds are obligated for this project.²⁵ Cowboy Trail West Inc. was awarded a \$250,000 grant in 2018 to surface the trail and deck 13 of the bridges on the existing portion of trail between Clinton and Rushville.

To extend the trail the final 5 miles into Chadron, NNTA is actively working with the Nebraska Northwestern Railroad and the city of Chadron to obtain an easement for a rail-with-trail project. Developments for a trailhead in downtown Chadron are already underway.

TRAIL GAP 60 – CHADRON TO CRAWFORD

An active Canadian Pacific Railway corridor runs between Chadron and Crawford. The line has a low traffic density, according to data from the Federal Railroad Administration in 2014. There is no abandoned rail option to complete an off-road trail between Chadron and the existing White River Trail in Crawford. While a feasible, off-road multiuse trail option connecting this 23.8-mile gap continues to be explored, a temporary interim on-road connector can be made using various low-volume county roads in Dawes County.

WHITE RIVER TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	2.8
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	2.8
Trail Type	Rail-trail
Surface Type	Ballast
Trail Manager	Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, City of Crawford
Website	outdoornebraska.gov/fortrobinson/
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/white-river-trail/

The White River Trail runs along a former Chicago and North Western Transportation Company corridor for 2.8 miles, starting in Crawford and ending at Fort Robinson State Park. Fort Robinson encompasses the fort and military camp that was home to the Red Cloud Agency in the 1870s. The agencies served as issuing points for supplies to the Oglala Lakota tribe of the Great Sioux Nation, as well as the Northern Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes, authorized in exchange for land ceded to the United States in 1868. It is also the site of Crazy Horse's surrender and death in 1877, and visitors can find a historical plaque that marks the location. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission handles the ongoing operations and maintenance of the White River Trail, while the City of Crawford maintains the portion of the trail outside of Fort Robinson State Park.

²⁵ RTC helped solicit \$65,000 for both groups to use as matching funds for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission grants in late 2018.

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT NEBRASKA



Cowboy Trail in Nebraska | Photo by Alex Duryea, courtesy Nebraska Tourism Commission

TRAIL GAP 61 – CRAWFORD TO NEBRASKA– WYOMING STATE LINE

The former Chicago and North Western Transportation Company corridor that traveled along the White River in Nebraska and Niobrara River in Wyoming was severely damaged in a flood in 1991. Twenty miles of track and 45 bridges were destroyed along the corridor, and rail service was never able to recover after the storm. Local rail advocates were insistent upon the railbed being turned into a trail once it was deemed no longer viable for rail traffic.

The existing 3 miles of the White River Trail are the result of those efforts, and the remainder of the rail corridor between Fort Robinson State Park and Van Tassell, Wyoming, is under the ownership of the Friends of the White River Trail, which includes 34 miles in

Nebraska. The friends group intends to hold on to the ownership of the rail corridor until the resources become available to complete construction of the trail and keep it maintained. The Nebraska Land Trust is currently working with the Northern Cheyenne tribe to develop a 3-mile trail from the Cheyenne Outbreak barracks at Fort Robinson to the monument created to commemorate the Cheyenne Outbreak of January 1879. It would be called the Healing Trail and would potentially incorporate about 2 to 2.5 miles of the railbed west of Fort Robinson.

Any future trail connecting the 32.5-mile gap from Crawford to the Nebraska–Wyoming border needs to connect to a trail on the Wyoming side. Potential trail connections in Wyoming are discussed in Trail Gap 62 in the Wyoming chapter of this report.