Cover photos, clockwise from top right:
Capitol Trails Coalition, W&OD Trail | Matthew Culbertson
Capitol Trails Coalition, Metropolitan Branch Trail | Ted Eytan
Industrial Heartland Trails Coalition, Little Miami Scenic Trail | Abigail Holloran, courtesy Greene County Parks and Recreation
Route of the Badger, Hank Aaron State Trail | Cindy Barks
The Miami LOOP, Miami River Greenway | Lee Smith
The Circuit Trails, Schuylkill Banks Boathouse | Thom Carroll

Back cover photos courtesy Rails-to-Trails Conservancy staff
Sojourn photo by Wendy Palmer
At Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, we believe that communities are healthier, happier and more resilient when trail networks are central to their design. That is why we’re committed to connecting trails and building comprehensive trail systems that bring people together and get people where they want to go. Our TrailNation program brings to life this vision, proving what is possible when trail networks are at the heart of communities. Here’s a look at our current TrailNation progress in eight regions across the country.
ALL ACROSS THE COUNTRY, opportunities exist to connect communities by trail. In some places, the work is underway and the benefits to people and places are already being realized. In other places, these networks are an idea ready to be brought to life. Everywhere, the opportunity exists to bring connected trail systems to the forefront—especially as changing expectations about mobility and rapid technological developments in transportation are forcing new conversations about the future of mobility and the built environment.

TrailNation is RTC’s program—and strategy—focused on redefining what it means to build trail networks and what trail networks can mean for people and places. This work is building momentum for trails, walking and biking, ensuring that we seize opportunities to connect more trails and that we do it strategically so that projects can quickly be replicated nationwide and investments in trail network infrastructure can be understood as valuable and transformative. Through TrailNation, we’re making sure that trail networks are appreciated as vital community assets that bring powerful solutions to issues as far-ranging as chronic disease, environmental sustainability and resilience, mobility, social equity and economic growth.

WE KNOW THAT THREE KINDS OF CHANGE—in public policy, infrastructure and behavior—are necessary to realize our vision of a country connected by trails. That’s why we advocate for changes in public policy at the national, state and local levels to dramatically increase public investment in creating safe places to walk and bike; target those public investments to catalyze changes in infrastructure and build trail networks; and encourage behavior change by promoting information and resources that help more people access trails in their communities.

In six places across the country—places diverse in their geography, culture, size and scope—RTC is investing in projects and working with hundreds of organizations and local partners to build trail networks that demonstrate what it looks like when our theory of change is put to work. These projects—in the San Francisco Bay Area, southeast Wisconsin, the industrial heartland, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Miami and southeast Texas—are central to our strategy to connect communities nationwide by trail. Each of these networks provides evidence of the benefits of regional trail and active transportation systems.

TRAILNATION IS SHOWING THE COUNTRY WHAT IS POSSIBLE in all types of places when 21st-century trail networks are central to our lives. This State of the Trails Report digs into the impact that these projects can deliver, the ways we’re applying our strategy to catalyze trail network development nationwide—and the progress we are making.

2018 PROJECT SPOTLIGHT: THE TRAILNATION SUMMIT

In June 2018, RTC is bringing leaders from across the country to Milwaukee for a two-day summit to explore the intersection of trails and pressing issues like equity, public health, mobility, economic growth and climate resilience. The summit will focus on the opportunities inherent in trail networks and strategies for achieving ambitious goals to connect trails, people and places across hundreds of miles.

LEARN MORE AT rtc.li/trailnationsummit.
PUTTING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

Understanding how to build great trails drives RTC’s research and trail development team. We are pursuing projects that advance our ability to quantify the benefits of trail connectivity—from community connectivity to property values, public health and mobility. With a focus on learning what makes great trails successful and creating the tools to replicate those successes, RTC has developed a first-of-its-kind suite of research and analytics tools—including geographic information system (GIS) modeling tools, economic impact surveys, trail count programs and forecasting tools—that are redefining how we think about trails. These tools provide communities and trail builders with the data they need to make the case for investments in trails and trail networks. Current research-into-practice priorities include:

• Quantifying the effects of trail network connectivity and disconnectivity on trail usage.
• Applying RTC’s BikeAble tool in TrailNation projects and other regions across the country.
• Creating cost estimators and economic analyses to make it easier to understand the true costs and benefits of trails.
• Developing a research tool to understand the impact trails have on surrounding property values by discerning the effects of trails on adjacent land values.

ADVOCATING FOR TRAIL NETWORKS

Every day, RTC’s staff advocate for trails. On Capitol Hill and in states, we work to protect and increase investments at the federal and state level that support safe trail, walking and bicycling networks for people of every age and ability, and in every community, to create healthier places for healthier people. Among the myriad benefits that these investments bring, we know that they encourage active transportation through human-powered mobility such as walking and bicycling, which increases physical activity, provides balanced transportation choices and fosters economically vibrant communities with a high quality of life. Current policy priorities include:

• Preserving the $850 million federal Transportation Alternatives program against congressional attacks, and establishing the importance of trail networks to new federal infrastructure investment.
• Engaging 10 states to create and strengthen state policies to secure $80 million in new funding for trail and active transportation networks, at least $30 million of which will recur each year, and catalyzing other states to use successful state policy models.
• Leading a legislative campaign to more than triple federal investment in the Recreational Trails Program—currently $85 million—to match motorized trail vehicle gas tax receipts.
• Leading an advocacy effort to improve and increase state spending of federal transportation dollars on trails and active transportation.

RTC’S APPROACH TO BUILDING TRAIL NETWORKS

RTC has developed an innovative, collaborative approach to building trails and active transportation systems from concept to implementation. In each of our TrailNation projects, we apply RTC’s depth of expertise and hone our strategies to reflect local realities and new opportunities. We know that it takes a systematic approach to catalyze the rapid development of trail systems nationwide. Here are the steps we take in every project we work on:

PROJECT VISION
Creating a common vision of a trail network that connects people’s imaginations with their communities, neighbors and environment.

COALITION BUILDING
Creating a broad-based, regional network of partners and supporters in the public, private and nonprofit sectors working collaboratively to implement the project vision.

MAPPING AND ANALYTICS
Leveraging RTC’s comprehensive geospatial database of open trails to identify trail network gaps, and then analyzing those gaps to determine realistic opportunities to build trails.

GAP FILLING STRATEGY
Assessing analytics in partnership with the coalition to prioritize trail system investments that will increase usage at the lowest possible cost, improve community health and equity, and build support to complete the network.

INVESTMENT STRATEGY
Working within the coalition to strategically accelerate completion of the trail network by securing federal, state and local public funding as available.

ENGAGEMENT
Developing a communications and marketing strategy to build the public and political support needed to advance the trail project while also encouraging trail use.
2018 PROJECT SPOTLIGHT:

**COALITION BUILDING**
Conducting extensive outreach to engage neighborhoods in developing the trail network.

**ENGAGEMENT**
Establishing a name and brand for the trail network to generate engagement and community connections to the work.

**GAP FILLING STRATEGY**
Developing conceptual design renderings for proposed trail corridors in Highlandtown, Armistead Gardens and Middle Branch to serve as key connectors to the rest of the trail network.

**LEARN MORE:** railstotrails.org/baltimore
The Baltimore Greenway Trails Coalition—following RTC’s vision and leadership—is working to create a 35-mile world-class network of urban trails that links the diverse neighborhoods, cultural amenities and outdoor resources that make up the landscape of Baltimore City. Only 10 additional miles are needed to close critical gaps in 60 neighborhoods throughout the city and help reverse the urban fragmentation and resulting socio-economic segregation prevalent since the 1950s. Former rail lines, industrial coastlines and reconfigured roadways will be transformed from barriers in the built environment to community-based assets centered on trails. The Baltimore City Department of Planning’s Green Network Plan has adopted the project, building momentum in support of the trail vision.

When complete, the trail network will connect the city’s anchor institutions and destinations—including universities, hospitals, museums, parks, schools, waterfronts and employment centers—with Baltimore’s diverse communities. As this process unfolds, it is critical that communities are engaged. RTC is leading the effort to connect with every single neighborhood along the route to ensure that the trail network meets community needs and provides walking and biking access to the places that matter to the people who will use it. In addition, RTC’s team is developing an innovative funding strategy to accelerate network buildout with a focus on creating a model that can be replicated in communities nationwide.
2018 PROJECT SPOTLIGHT:

**GAP FILLING STRATEGY**
Prioritizing trail gaps that will catalyze network completion, while developing strategies to elevate the partners and projects necessary to close these gaps.

**MAPPING AND ANALYTICS**
Analyzing access to trails in underserved communities to bolster advocacy for increased investment in trails and active transportation in those communities that need it most.

**INVESTMENT STRATEGY**
Training municipalities and trail and transit advocates about strategies for acquiring state and federal trail construction funding, building the coalition’s capacity to secure the investments necessary to complete the network.

LEARN MORE: railstotrails.org/bayarea
RTC chairs the Bay Area Trails Collaborative, which envisions developing a 2,700-mile regional trail network that will connect the San Francisco Bay Area—its trails, people and places—in innovative ways.

Through the development of the trail network, the Collaborative—comprising more than three dozen organizations, agencies and businesses—is focused on improving the overall quality of life in the region by creating more opportunities for recreation and active transportation, addressing health disparities in underserved communities, reducing pollution and greenhouse gases and promoting environmental sustainability.

Completing the remaining gaps in the existing Bay Area trail network could spark new waves of outdoor tourism, small business investment and job creation. A 2011 statewide study found that Californians engage in an estimated 1.5 billion days of outdoor recreation each year—specifically in activities such as walking, biking or running on paved surfaces for fitness and pleasure—with trip expenditures topping $4 billion.¹ The trail network includes signature attractions that bring millions of tourists to the region annually, such as the Bay Trail and the Bay Area Ridge Trail, and connect to renowned tourist destinations like San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park and Bridge.

¹ California Outdoor Recreation Economic Study: Statewide Contribution and Benefits, California State Parks, 2011
2018 PROJECT SPOTLIGHT:

MAPPING AND ANALYTICS
Prioritizing trail gaps that will catalyze network completion and demonstrating how these projects will help achieve regional goals like improving access to transit, creating safe routes to schools and connecting to parks and open space.

COALITION BUILDING
Collaborating with organizations and agencies across the region to jointly advocate for increased state and regional investment in active transportation and recreation.

MAPping and ANALYTICS
Conducting an equity analysis of the trail network to understand the accessibility of trails, particularly in underserved communities.

LEARN MORE: railstotrails.org/capital
What better place than the Washington, D.C., region—which gets the attention of millions of tourists each year as well as national leaders—to create a model of success to be replicated across the country? The trail network’s potential to connect people and places across a region as diverse and dynamic as D.C. and then serve as a model for the nation is a driving force behind RTC’s role as a founding member of the Capital Trails Coalition. The coalition is focused on connecting more than 600 miles of trail in D.C., Maryland and Virginia.

A well-connected trail network in the region promises to transform public life by linking diverse communities, promoting personal and environmental health and building sustainable local economies. Such a network could provide opportunities for active transportation that work for everyone across the region’s diverse cities, suburban corridors and rural communities. RTC is spearheading efforts to define the regional network map, aggregating the existing trail data across multiple jurisdictions and prioritizing network gaps so that trail builders can develop the network as efficiently and effectively as possible. As the plan comes to life, the coalition is committed to prioritizing projects and network connections that serve the region’s traditionally underserved neighborhoods, ensuring that this world-class network of multiuse trails is equitably distributed throughout the region.
At Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, we know the power of trails to connect and transform communities. With strategic investments in filling gaps, trails have the potential to create comprehensive networks that deliver incredible benefits to people and places, from smart transportation to economic growth, health and wellness, a resilient environment and social equity. Our TrailNation projects prove what’s possible when trails are at the heart of communities. These regional network-building projects—implemented in partnership with local organizations—have the power to catalyze the development of trail networks nationwide, creating healthier places for healthier people.

**CONNECTING COMMUNITIES, TRANSFORMING LIVES**

**Expanding Transportation Options**
More than one-quarter of all trips we make are less than a mile—an easy walking distance—and nearly one-half are within 3 miles—an easy biking distance.¹ Trail networks create the infrastructure that encourage and enable people to walk and bike as part of their daily lives.

**Fueling Strong Businesses and Economies**
As trail systems grow, they spark new investment in trailside businesses and commercial opportunities along the trail route. In urban areas, this supports trail-oriented development on the neighborhood scale; in rural and suburban communities, this spurs and supports tourism, bringing new dollars into the community.

**Promoting Social Equity**

**Protecting the Environment**
are strongest when open spaces are connected.³ Trail networks contribute to a healthy environment by protecting precious open space while encouraging active modes of transportation that reduce air

¹ Safe Routes to Everywhere, Partnership for Active Transportation, 2014 ² Active Transportation for America: The Case for Increased Federal Investment in Bicycling and Walking

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**BAY AREA TRAILS COLLABORATIVE**
Imagine what’s possible when trails are at the heart of communities.

TrailNation.org

Fueling Strong Businesses and Economies

As trail systems grow, they spark new investment in trailside businesses and commercial opportunities along the trail route. In urban areas, this supports trail-oriented development on the neighborhood scale; in rural and suburban communities, this spurs and supports tourism, bringing new dollars into the community.

Improving Health and Wellness

When people have 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. Comprehensive trail systems can give people new access to outdoor recreation opportunities.

Protecting the Environment

The environmental benefits of green infrastructure are strongest when open spaces are connected.

Trail networks contribute to a healthy environment by protecting precious open space while encouraging active modes of transportation that reduce air pollution, traffic congestion and climate change.

Social Equity

Systems can bridge gaps in communities, creating new social activity and outdoor connected active connections to the more Americans without a car.

Promoting Social Equity

Protecting the Environment

Improving Health and Wellness

Notes:

1. Safe Routes to Everywhere, Partnership for Active Transportation, 2014
4. Trail networks contribute to a healthy environment by protecting precious open space while encouraging active modes of transportation that reduce air pollution, traffic congestion and climate change.
2018 PROJECT SPOTLIGHT:

**ENGAGEMENT**
Designing and implementing a regional trail network marketing campaign to build awareness, generate support and increase trail use.

**GAP FILLING STRATEGY**
Providing focused technical support and advocacy to advance the completion of several important trail segments: Merchantville to Camden, Atlantic Avenue Rail-with-Trail, Hamilton-Robbinsville Township Trail and a rail-with-trail in North Philadelphia.

**ENGAGEMENT**
Manufacturing and installing trail network signage that aligns each trail’s role with the broader trail network and provides identification, landmarking and directional information for trail users.

**LEARN MORE:** railstotrails.org/circuit
RTC plays a leadership role on the Circuit Trails—an innovative, regional trail network connecting people of all ages to jobs, communities and parks in Greater Philadelphia and New Jersey. Currently in progress, the project will eventually encompass more than 800 miles of trails on both sides of the Delaware River, building upon the region’s existing active transportation infrastructure. By the time the network is complete (currently projected for 2040), more than 50 percent of the region’s population—over 3.1 million people—will live within a mile of the Circuit Trails.

With 325 miles of trail already on the ground, the Circuit Trails provide safe off-road connections to many critical community destinations—particularly in historically underserved areas—and are helping to establish cultural and social linkages to the region and to nature. For example, RTC has invested in hundreds of kids from Camden, New Jersey, who, over the years, have been learning great biking skills and making an impact in their neighborhoods as youth leaders and watershed trail ambassadors. Through various programs, they are empowered to travel by bike and by foot—some for the first time in their lives—to various points throughout Philadelphia.

Likewise, an unused rail line in a disadvantaged area of Pennsauken, New Jersey, could provide a safe off-road connection to the Ben Franklin Bridge and into Philadelphia. Another rail-with-trail corridor in North Philadelphia has the potential to become both an iconic piece of infrastructure and a critical component of an equitable development strategy for the community.

RTC’s impact on local trail development and advocacy is especially important in New Jersey, where the pace of trail building and funding is slower than it is across the river in Pennsylvania. The RTC team is leading an effort to engage public agency officials, planning authorities and partners to improve trail funding programs and accelerate progress.
2018 PROJECT SPOTLIGHT:

**GAP FILLING STRATEGY**
Leading trail feasibility studies along the Cleveland to Pittsburgh and Ashtabula to Pittsburgh corridors to inventory existing conditions, property ownership, local planning documents and community assets associated with each trail gap segment.

**COALITION BUILDING**
Serving as a lead organizer and co-host of the Industrial Heartland Trails Coalition Summit, held every other year to convene the broad coalition of partners across the 1,400-miles-plus trail network.

**MAPPING AND ANALYTICS**
Leading efforts to improve the precision of tracking trail use by creating a project-wide traffic count system and an advanced modeling program to show changes in trail use and demand over time.

LEARN MORE: railstotrails.org/ihtc
The Industrial Heartland Trails Coalition plans to establish the industrial heartland as a premier destination offering a 1,400-miles-plus multiuse trail network experience. The trail network will stretch across 48 counties in four states—Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio and New York—from the shores of Lake Erie to the confluence of the Three Rivers in Pittsburgh and on to the Ohio River and Appalachian foothills.

The trail network that the coalition is pursuing will spur a new wave of regional tourism, encouraging exploration of the small towns, major cities, historical sites, rivers and mountains that characterize America’s first frontier and heartbeat of the industrial revolution. A recent study about the project’s potential economic impact found that the network is uniquely positioned to bring value to the region by harnessing its industrial past and cultural history into a new shared identity that promotes tourism and increases trail use and demand. RTC is leading efforts along three project corridors: Parkersburg to Pittsburgh, Cleveland to Pittsburgh and Ashtabula to Pittsburgh.

1 P32+ Connectivity Analysis, Pennsylvania Environmental Council, 2014
2018 PROJECT SPOTLIGHT:

**COALITION BUILDING**
Leading the efforts to increase local capacity and formalize a coalition to guide project implementation.

**MAPPING AND ANALYTICS**
Creating a geospatial database to assist in comprehensive management and analysis of countywide data to guide project implementation and inform the gap filling strategy.

**ENGAGEMENT**
Designing and launching a brand and communications strategy to engage the local community, increase project awareness, and support and elevate the project nationally.

LEARN MORE: railstotrails.org/activeplan
RTC is part of the coalition implementing the Lower Rio Grande Valley Active Transportation and Tourism Plan, or “Active Plan,” including securing public funding streams to support the buildout of the network. The Active Plan is a blueprint for a 428-mile trail network that will link the rich natural, cultural and historical resources the area is known for with a goal of creating a regional identity for outdoor tourism, promoting healthier lifestyles and generating a new sense of community pride among everyone who lives in the valley.

By providing equitable access to safe transportation corridors in some of Texas’ poorest and most underserved communities, the Active Plan will increase access to safe places for recreation and physical activity for families who currently have very few—empowering many to create new connections throughout the valley. The Active Plan will create new biking and walking connections to critical destinations such as jobs, educational institutions, grocery stores, health-care facilities, and outdoor and civic sites. The Active Plan's countywide trail network is designed to encourage daily physical activity, bringing trails, walking and biking into people's neighborhoods and lives. A recent economic and health impact study found that the projected yearly medical cost savings to residents are estimated to be between $3.1 million and $6.4 million.3

The Active Plan will also have an enormous economic impact in the region by injecting critical small business investment and generating new tourism revenues along the project route. The area is home to thousands of unique species of flora and fauna, and the Active Plan is expected to create opportunities to educate locals and attract new visitors to experience these natural wonders. The Active Plan has the potential to produce upwards of $40 million in tourist spending for the region in the 10-year period following completion—and the construction phase for the six catalyst projects is expected to generate an economic impact of $56 million.4

3 A Healthy Advantage: Expected Economic Benefits from Implementing the Lower Rio Grande Valley Active Transportation and Tourism Plan, National Parks Conservation Association, 2017
4 Ibid.
2018 PROJECT SPOTLIGHT:

GAP FILLING STRATEGY
Working with partners and private developers to secure a 6-mile rail-with-trail that connects downtown Miami to Broward County.

COALITION BUILDING
Continuing the development of a diverse coalition of stakeholders—the Miami-Dade Trail Alliance—to lead the project locally.

PROJECT VISION
Building new local capacity within RTC to accelerate the project.

LEARN MORE: railtotrails.org/loop
The Miami LOOP is a 225-mile trail vision to expand transportation options, make biking and walking safer and more equitable, strengthen the regional economy, reduce the area’s carbon footprint, and improve health and wellness across Miami-Dade County. Approximately 54 percent of the network is already complete, and nearly 86 percent of the LOOP’s proposed corridors are publicly owned. RTC is actively working to secure state funding to further support the project.

RTC has partnered with The Miami Foundation and more than 20 local organizations and advocates to form the Miami-Dade Trail Alliance, which organized to turn vision into reality by serving as a collective voice for the LOOP and its diverse network of trails. The Alliance seeks to enrich quality of life for all people in the region through equitable access to active transportation and outdoor recreation. Smart investments that the Miami LOOP will make in the region’s trail system will fill small, targeted gaps in the area’s biking and walking infrastructure; create a seamless network of routes to transit hubs and points of interest; combat the area’s high bicyclist and pedestrian fatality rates; and build the capacity of local partner groups. What’s more, the network will have an incredible impact on the city’s carbon footprint. Usage estimates suggest that when the network is completed, two trails—The Underline and the Ludlam Trail—will result in nearly 8 million vehicle miles avoided annually in Miami.5

5 Miami-Dade County Trail Benefits Study, Ludlam Trail Case Study, Miami-Dade County, January 2011
2018 PROJECT SPOTLIGHT:

**GAP FILLING STRATEGY**
Acquiring an 11-mile disused rail line in Racine County, the key piece of trail corridor to create a scenic 70-mile loop that connects Burlington, Milwaukee and Racine.

**COALITION BUILDING**
Continuing to develop a diverse coalition of trail supporters and local project leadership, building the necessary capacity to support and advance the trail network vision.

**GAP FILLING STRATEGY**
Developing the strategy, including robust community engagement, to build a rail-with-trail project through Milwaukee along the 30th Street rail corridor.

**LEARN MORE:** railstotrails.org/badger
RTC has convened a strong coalition of partners to begin bringing the Route of the Badger to life. The Route of the Badger represents a vision of healthy, thriving communities in southeast Wisconsin centered around a world-class, 500-miles-plus regional trail system that connects people across cities, towns and counties, providing endless transformational opportunities for physical activity, tourism, connections to nature, recreation and stronger businesses along the route.

The RTC team recently dug into Milwaukee, applying an equity lens to better understand how the existing biking and walking infrastructure in the city serves specific populations and how two significant trail projects—the Kinnickinnic River Trail extension and trail facilities along the 30th Street Corridor—would affect connectivity in the most underserved neighborhoods in the city. The results of the BikeAble connectivity analysis were inspiring, illustrating the incredible impact that plans for the Route of the Badger can have to connect people to safe walking and biking infrastructure and address decades-long patterns of systemic racism. The analysis found that investing in two specific projects has the potential to connect more than 200,000 people to a trail. Investment in these projects would create new active transportation opportunities for entire segments of the city that have previously been isolated without cars or safe biking and walking networks.

Southeast Wisconsin is already home to 340 miles of incredible trails. A relatively small investment that builds upon existing infrastructure would greatly improve connectivity regionwide, better connecting people to the places they want and need to go.
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy is the nation’s largest trails organization—with a grassroots community more than 1 million people strong—dedicated to connecting people and communities by creating a nationwide network of public trails, many from former rail lines.

Learn how you can help build the movement at railstotrails.org, and connect on social @railstotrails.