FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Nov. 2, 2015

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Proposed Transportation Bill Amendments Seek to Undercut Trails Program

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Amendments have been filed to the U.S. House of Representatives’ transportation funding bill—H.R. 3763, the Surface Transportation Reauthorization and Reform Act of 2015 (STRRA)—in advance of this week’s floor debate in an attempt to eliminate a critical trails program and limit funding for safe places to walk and bike.

Rep. Buddy Carter (R-GA) filed an amendment that would eliminate funding for the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) and strike existing eligibility for walking and biking projects in the Surface Transportation Program. This would take away flexibility from states and localities to set their transportation priorities. In addition, Rep. Carter also filed an amendment that would make all walking and biking funds in urban areas subject to transfers for other uses. Rep. Ted Yoho (R-FL) also filed an amendment that would eliminate funding authority for the RTP.

“Federal investment has triggered a renaissance of walking and biking in America with all its attendant benefits, and now some in Congress want to stop it,” said Kevin Mills, RTC’s senior vice president of policy. “It makes absolutely no sense to eliminate a trails program that provides tremendous return on investment for the American public by connecting places, developing the economy and improving health and safety.”

For more than 20 years, the RTP has been funded with a portion of the fuel taxes from off-road trail vehicles. The program is strongly supported by the motorized outdoor recreation industry as well as non-motorized trail groups.

Walking and biking paths are affordable to build and provide billions of dollars in fuel, transportation and health care savings every year, as well as investment in local communities along trails. These multi-use pathways also provide a safe place for people to walk and bike away from busy roads—a benefit that’s critical for tens of millions of Americans who don't have access to a car—including many seniors and children.

The Rules Committee will meet Tuesday to decide which amendments are in order. Those cleared for consideration could go to the House for debate and vote later in the day, or later this week.

For more: railstotrails.org/trailblog/2015/october/22/flash-house-committee-passes-multi-year-transportation-bill/

#ProtectTrails
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), a nonprofit organization with more than 160,000 members and supporters, is the nation's largest trails organization dedicated to connecting people and communities by creating a nationwide network of public trails, many from former rail lines and connecting corridors. Founded in 1986, RTC’s national office is located in Washington, D.C., with regional offices in California, Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania. For more information, visit www.railstotrails.org.