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ADVOCATES CALL FOR CLOSING STREETS NATIONWIDE TO CREATE CRITICAL SPACE FOR WALKING AND BIKING AT A SOCIAL DISTANCE DURING COVID-19 CRISIS

Petition is among the resources Rails-to-Trails Conservancy is providing to inform communities and individuals about ways to maintain physical activity and wellness during time of extreme social distancing

WASHINGTON—Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) is calling on the nation’s mayors and local elected officials to close select streets to vehicle traffic to increase access to safe outdoor space for people to engage in physical activity at a social distance during the COVID-19 crisis.

RTC’s efforts model the global “open streets movement” and amplify the success of current efforts around the world to dedicate more local infrastructure for walking and biking during this time of extreme social distancing. RTC launched a [petition](#) calling for immediate action from local elected officials and will convene a [webinar](#) on Thursday, April 2, 2020, at 2 p.m. EDT, to share insights and expertise about how individuals can encourage their local elected officials to take immediate action.

The webinar, which is open to the press and the public, will be moderated by Liz Thorstensen, RTC’s vice president of trail development, and will feature the expertise of advocates and local officials pursuing similar efforts: Sarah Clark Stuart, executive director, Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia; Laura Leticia Bahamón Peña, bicycle manager, Ministry of Transportation, City of Bogotá (Colombia); Jodie Medeiros, executive director, Walk San Francisco; and representatives from the city of Duluth, Minnesota.

Trails and outdoor spaces are seeing major spikes in usage across the country as people look to these assets for daily physical activity and mental respite in the wake of COVID-19. Dramatic increases in visitation are being recorded across the United States; an analysis of 31 trail counters for the week of March 16–22 by RTC found a nationwide trail usage increase of nearly 200% from that same week in 2019. Surging demand for trails and outdoor places is making it increasingly difficult for people to keep 6 feet of space between each other, forcing some trails and parks to close, while others limit facilities and services.

As trails continue to serve as significant sources of health and wellness for Americans, RTC is urging everyone to practice safe and responsible trail use and self-care at all times. RTC continues to provide up-to-date resources and information at railstotrails.org/COVID19, offering:

1. Weekly articles with updates about physical activity and being outside during this time, including resources about efforts to [close streets for walking and biking](#), [staying active](#) and [outdoor safety during the pandemic](#). Articles are available for citation and reprinting upon request.
2. [TrailLink](#) is a free trail-finder resource with information on more than 37,000 miles of trails nationwide. The website and mobile app are a service provided by RTC that includes trail maps, as well as walking and biking directions to local trails, contact information for local trail managers, and status updates about trail facilities.

RTC recommends that all trail users check the local guidance on outdoor activities and with local trail organizations to confirm status of facilities prior to visiting.

3. Weekly [trail count updates](#) providing an analysis of national trail usage gathered from RTC's 31 trail counters distributed across the country.
4. Webinars to address the biggest issues facing the trail and outdoor community in response to COVID-19. Details on the next webinar, April 2, at 2 p.m. EDT, are below. All are open to the press.

WHAT: Webinar calling for closing streets to create space for walking and biking during COVID-19 crisis

WHEN: Thursday, April 2, 2020, at 2:00 p.m. EDT

WHERE: **Webinar**
[Register online.](#)

To view RTC's [petition](#), or for more information on RTC's COVID-19 resources, [visit RTC's website](#) or [register online for the April 2 webinar](#).

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy is the nation's largest trails organization—with a grassroots community more than 1 million strong—dedicated to connecting people and communities by creating a nationwide network of public trails, many from former rail lines. Connect with RTC at railstotrails.org and [@railstotrails](#) on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).