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Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal Misses Opportunity to Prioritize Walking and Biking as Essential

Despite boosting existing walking and biking funding, bill is missing innovative infrastructure spending necessary to deliver significant climate and community benefits, says nation's largest active-transportation advocacy organization.

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), the nation's largest active-transportation advocacy organization, is calling on Congress to infuse the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act with the funding necessary to have a meaningful impact on the nation's active-transportation system.

While the long-negotiated bipartisan infrastructure package includes funding, programs and eligibilities for active transportation, the bill fails to fully fund two programs that are key to connecting and maintaining the nation's active-transportation system: active-transportation connectivity grants and the Recreational Trails Program.

"In this bill, the Senate and the White House have outlined significant new spending in the nation's infrastructure, but they failed to guarantee strategic investments in active transportation necessary to meet the needs of the moment—the health of our planet and our communities demands that we drive less. They had an opportunity to pass a game-changing bill that would have a generational impact; instead, they maintained a status quo approach," said Kevin Mills, RTC's vice president of policy.

According to RTC, the reauthorization of the [federal surface transportation bill was on track](#) to deliver transformative policy change and billions of dollars in dedicated funding for trails, walking and biking. Included among the bills was a new program establishing active-transportation connectivity grants designed to strategically connect trail and active-transportation systems, making it safer and more convenient for people to walk and bike where they need to go. In the infrastructure package, the program is authorized but remains unfunded—setting up an annual fight for the investments needed to accelerate the completion of active-transportation systems nationwide, according to RTC, which is placing its focus on securing guaranteed funding for the program.

The bill also increases funding for the legacy active-transportation program, Transportation Alternatives, by an estimated 70%, to an average of \$1.44 billion annually by allocating 10% of the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program. The Recreational Trails Program, which is the primary federal source of funding for trail maintenance, remains at status quo levels of \$84 million per year [despite a new government study](#) that shows the revenue to support the program at over \$280 million per year.

“Trails, walking and biking are essential infrastructure,” said Mills. “As Congress and the White House work to quickly pass this infrastructure bill, the benefits of walking and biking to the economy and the climate, and the role of trails and active-transportation infrastructure in creating safe, equitable communities cannot be overlooked. We’re working closely with our champions and partners in the Senate and the House to fully fund the programs included in this bill so that these policy changes can have the intended impact.”

RTC’s study, [Active Transportation Transforms America](#), attributes \$34.1 billion annually in economic activity to active transportation, with the potential to grow to \$138.5 billion annually as the connectivity of trail and active-transportation networks improves. In addition, the value of fuel savings from shifting short car trips to walking and bicycling trips, using walking and bicycling to access public transit, inducing mixed use and reducing congestion is currently \$3.3 billion annually, which could increase to nearly \$22 billion annually. The amount of CO₂ saved annually could grow by an amount between 13 million and 54 million metric tons annually.

The Senate’s passage of the infrastructure bill comes on the heels of a bleak report on the climate from the [United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#), which calls for all greenhouse gas emissions to be zeroed out in an effort to protect against the worst impacts of climate change—a goal that’s increasingly difficult to meet without substantial increases in active transportation.

“This bill had the potential to provide the focused funding and policy change necessary to: deliver independent mobility to millions of Americans who do not drive cars, save lives from traffic crashes, create new jobs, reduce emissions and promote equity,” said Mills. “We’re disappointed it doesn’t go farther for active transportation, but we will continue to fight for full funding of connectivity grants and the Recreational Trails Program as it moves through the final stages of the legislative process.”

The bill does include some additional and potentially beneficial opportunities for increased investments in trails, walking and biking through a significant increase in multi-modal funding for RAISE Grants, at \$7.5 billion over five years, and a new Safe Streets for All provision, which rises to \$1 billion per year.

The [package of bills RTC is advocating for in Congress](#) has been championed by hundreds of national, state and local organizations—representing interests as far-ranging as biking and walking, health, transportation reform, environment, disability rights and planning—and our nation’s local elected officials. More than 20,000 people have signed on to a petition in support of RTC’s vision. Together, these bills offer critical policy changes to federal funding for active transportation to strategically target investments and maximize the role of trails and other active-transportation infrastructure in contributing to job creation and healthy, safe, accessible and equitable communities.

Learn more about RTC’s efforts to inspire a visionary transportation reauthorization bill at railstotrails.org/trailstransform, and follow the commentary on social media using the hashtag #TrailsTransform.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy is the nation’s largest trails organization—with a grassroots community more than 1 million strong—dedicated to building a nation connected by trails, reimagining public spaces to create safe ways for everyone to walk, bike and be active outdoors. Connect with RTC at railstotrails.org and @railstotrails on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).