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Connecting America's Active Transportation System Act Included in Senate Environment and Public Works Committee's Surface Transportation Bill

Bipartisan legislation provides the funding and policy change needed to create transportation systems that make it safe and convenient for people to walk and bike where they need to go

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Today, the U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee voted to include an amended version of the Connecting America's Active Transportation System Act ([S.684](#)) in the Surface Transportation Reauthorization Act of 2021.

According to Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), the nation's largest active-transportation advocacy organization, this new program will be a major step forward in America's transportation policy. It establishes competitive grants at \$200 million annually for projects that create active transportation connectivity, providing 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.

"We are at a pivotal moment to redefine our country's transportation policy and practices," said Kevin Mills, vice president of policy at RTC.

"For 30 years, Congress has made a considerable investment through two legacy programs to build the nation's trails, sidewalks and bike lanes, establishing the backbone of our country's active transportation system. With this reauthorization, and through the Connecting America's Active Transportation System Act, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to leverage that investment to make an even bigger impact. It will support the creation of active transportation networks within and between communities, and across state lines, that provide transportation choice and will enable people to move safely to everyday destinations without cars, reducing emissions and creating jobs," said Mills.

Research shows that building [trails and active transportation infrastructure creates more jobs per dollar](#) than any other type of transportation infrastructure because the work is more labor intensive. Shifting short trips currently made by car to [walking and biking trips would have sizable impacts](#) on our economy and our climate. Investing in active transportation infrastructure within and between communities can [equitably provide safe walking and biking routes](#) for people to get where they need to go.

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 network connectivity improves, including:

- Mode shift and environmental benefits: 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.
- Calculations of economic impact: The total local spending impact of the nation's rail-trails is \$10.6 billion annually, which could grow to as much as \$21 billion annually.
- Health cost savings: Health cost savings from increased physical activity due to active transportation is currently \$20 billion annually and could grow to nearly \$92 billion annually.

The [package of bills RTC is advocating for in Congress, including the Connecting America's Active Transportation System Act](#), 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, planning and our nation's local elected officials. 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.

"It's never easy to establish a new federal program, and the leadership of Sens. Ed Markey (D-Mass.), Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) and Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) to advance S.684 is exactly what we need at this moment. Their leadership offers momentum for active transportation that will carry us forward when the U.S. House of Representatives releases their transportation bill in the coming weeks," said Mills.

Currently, funding for walking and bicycling facilities comprises less than 2% of the federal surface transportation budget, and there is limited policy direction to strategically prioritize those funds to fill critical infrastructure gaps and make the active transportation system more effective and efficient. 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](#).