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New House Bill Will Connect America's Active Transportation System

Leading Trails and Active Transportation Organization Touts "Connecting America's Active Transportation System Act" as the Pathway to Creating a Nationwide Network of Safe Walking and Biking Routes

WASHINGTON—Today, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) applauded the co-sponsors of the "Connecting America's Active Transportation System Act," Rep. Daniel Lipinski (Ill.-3), Jared Huffman (Calif.-2), and Chris Pappas (N.H.-1), for their leadership to build an active transportation system that seamlessly links the nation while providing powerful benefits to Americans in the form of transportation choice, health and wellness, economic growth and opportunity, and climate protection.

The bill will provide \$500 million annually in funding for a federal competitive grant program to help communities and regions build connected active-transportation routes—trails, sidewalks, bikeways and other infrastructure—to ensure people can get where they want to go safely by foot, bike or wheelchair. This proposal, if included in the next federal transportation bill alongside increased funding for Transportation Alternatives and the Recreational Trails Program, would provide the necessary resources and policy changes to deliver a 21st century transportation system to the nation. This transformative approach to funding active transportation would meet growing demands from rural, suburban and urban communities across America for convenient, accessible, well-maintained biking and walking routes.

"I'm pleased to introduce the 'Connecting America's Active Transportation System Act' with Reps. Pappas and Huffman," said Rep. Lipinski. "This bill will provide critical funding to help close the gaps in our nation's pedestrian, cyclist and trail networks. Closing the Illinois & Michigan Canal State Trail gap in my district is a top priority for avid cyclists like myself, and this legislation will help us get there. It's vital for both public and environmental health that we connect active transportation networks and increase opportunities to go for a scenic walk or bike ride. Thanks to Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, America Walks and others for getting the ball rolling on this important initiative."

A recent study released by RTC underscores the importance of connecting the trails and active transportation infrastructure that already exist in communities nationwide. The study, "[Active Transportation Transforms America](#)," finds that as the connectivity of trail networks improves, so do the health and well-being of people and places. One example can be seen in the current economic return on investment of active transportation networks, which deliver more than \$34.1 billion annually when health, climate and direct economic benefits are considered. This is a return that can be doubled, and even quadrupled, as connectivity spreads to more places in America.

"To meet the challenge of climate change, while continuing to connect people to where they want to go, we need to think differently about our infrastructure and provide people with more, and better, transportation options," said Rep. Huffman. "Our quality of life, economy and environment depend on it. This bill invests in transportation infrastructure that gives folks the option to travel using convenient, climate-friendly options nationwide."

The introduction of the "Connecting America's Active Transportation System Act" coincides with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) [recent physical activity call to action](#). With a goal of getting 27 million more people physically active by 2027, the CDC points to the need to create active routes to everyday destinations—making physical activity and healthy choices convenient and accessible to Americans.

“Smart infrastructure connects Americans with the people and places most important to them,” said Rep. Pappas. “This legislation will expand our active transportation networks, giving people additional active ways not only to exercise and recreate, but also to get to school, commute to work and travel between communities. It also makes good economic sense; these strategic investments in infrastructure throughout the state will bolster local economies and improve quality of life for tourists and locals alike. I look forward to working with my colleagues to find more bipartisan ways to improve our constituents’ commutes, their health and the environment.”

With the FAST Act—the current bill governing the nation’s surface transportation spending—set to expire later this year, RTC has been persistent in calling on Congress to consider new and transformative approaches to how the country invests in transportation, especially encouraging a focus on leveraging America’s existing walking and biking infrastructure by connecting it into systems.

“We are at an opportune moment. With more than 36,000 miles of multiuse trails on the ground, we can make strategic infrastructure investments that weave together existing active-transportation facilities, forming connected transportation systems. By creating active transportation systems, we will make it easier and safer for people to walk and bike where they want to go,” said Kevin Mills, RTC’s vice president of policy.

“Targeting federal investment on priority connections is the affordable and quick way to make America’s active transportation system convenient for everyday travel. This will work in the same way as our road and rail networks, connecting people within and between communities. We look forward to working with Congress for passage of a transformative bill that meets America’s diverse and shifting transportation needs. This bill is a major leap forward,” said Mills.

Currently, funding for walking and bicycling facilities comprises less than 2% of the federal surface transportation budget, with limited policy direction to strategically prioritize those funds to fill critical infrastructure gaps and make the active transportation system more effective and efficient. More than 20 national organizations representing interests as far-ranging as health, planning and design, and our nation’s local elected officials are joining RTC in calling on Congress to take this opportunity to invest in connecting America’s trails, walking and bicycling infrastructure to create an active transportation system for the country.

Read the full text of the “Connecting America’s Transportation System Act” and 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 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.