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New Opportunities for Trails, Walking and Biking in Congress's Package of Infrastructure Bills

Together, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the House's Build Back Better Act more than double funding for trails, walking and biking; recognize important role of trails and active transportation as climate and equity tools; and establish a new program to connect the nation's trail and active transportation system

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) (H.R.3684) has cleared the U.S. House of Representatives and will head to the White House, where the president is expected to sign the long-negotiated bipartisan infrastructure deal that includes reauthorization of the nation's federal surface transportation bill. This comes as the House makes progress toward passage of the Build Back Better Act (H.R.5376), the social spending package that has been negotiated alongside the infrastructure bill and [includes additional new funding for trails and active transportation](#), underscoring the important role this infrastructure serves in addressing critical social issues like climate and equity.

According to Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), the nation's largest active-transportation advocacy organization, while it is disappointing that the [bipartisan infrastructure bill missed the opportunity](#) to make transformative policy changes to create accountability for progress on climate, equity and mode shift, the bill does include advances in funding for trails, walking and biking that the organization has long championed, including:

- A nearly 70% increase for the legacy Transportation Alternatives Program (which includes the Recreational Trails Program) from \$850 million to an average of \$1.44 billion per year, so that states and localities can build trails and other active transportation projects.
- Authorizing the Connecting America's Active Transportation System Act (H.R.2991/S.684), listed in the bill as the Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program, at \$200 million per year. This innovative new policy establishes competitive connectivity grants that will strategically invest in projects that connect active transportation infrastructure, accelerating local and regional plans to create safe, convenient walking and biking routes to everyday destinations.

The bill leaves two significant items of unfinished business. First, it maintains funding for the Recreational Trails Program, the only federal source of trail maintenance funding, at \$84 million per year, [despite findings from a federal study](#) that show revenue to support the program in excess of \$280 million annually. In addition, the bill does not guarantee funding for connectivity grants, which RTC will seek through the annual appropriations process.

“While the infrastructure bill does not equal the broadly transformative approach of the House transportation bill passed earlier this year, we can't overlook that the increased funding and new connectivity grants represent a major step forward for America's active transportation policy, especially

when paired with new programs in the Build Back Better Act,” said Kevin Mills, RTC’s vice president of policy.

“Although we will have work to do each year to secure the funds, Congress is endorsing policy change that will deliver independent mobility to millions of Americans who do not drive cars. The new active transportation connectivity program has the potential to create more equity in our transportation system, save lives from traffic crashes, create new jobs—all while reducing emissions. It will change people’s lives for the better—if Congress follows through with dedicated funding,” said Mills.

RTC cautions that the funding for the connectivity program and increased funding for the Recreational Trails Program are not guaranteed, and this unfinished business has the potential to hinder progress in the pursuit of a connected, well-maintained active transportation system nationwide. RTC will mobilize the active transportation sector to advocate for funding through the annual appropriations process, while seeking to maximize new programs for which active transportation is eligible in the Build Back Better Act, assuming full passage, by working nationwide to encourage applications of impactful projects. In addition, attention will be on the U.S. Department of Transportation, to ensure that connectivity grants are launched and funded and to continue advocating for appropriate funding levels for the Recreational Trails Program.

“The passing of the bipartisan infrastructure bill is a significant milestone. Now, we can shift our focus to appropriations as well as how these programs are implemented so that we’re creating and maintaining the trails and other walking and biking infrastructure that are essential for more people to walk and bike more often. This is what it will take to address significant challenges facing our communities and the climate,” said Mills.

The [package of bills RTC has championed in Congress](#) has the support of 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. More than 32,000 people have signed a petition in support of connecting America’s trail and active transportation system. RTC’s platform offers 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, nor to transform longstanding federal policy norms. The leadership for active transportation connectivity from Sens. Ed Markey (D-Mass.), Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) and Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) in the Senate, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Peter DeFazio (Ore.-4), and Reps. Chris Pappas (N.H.-1) and Jared Huffman (Calif.-2) was powerful in advancing a vision where people can walk and bike more and drive less. Their leadership offers momentum for active transportation that will carry us forward,” said Mills.

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](#).