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Rails-to-Trails Conservancy State Capitol Briefing Proves Overwhelming Support in Favor of Regional Trail Networks and Need for Sustained Funding

Building additional momentum for the state's developing 700-miles-plus trail network, the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) announces support for the network as a lead partner

MADISON—Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) and Rep. Evan Goyke (D-Milwaukee) gathered with state legislators at the capitol last week to discuss strategies to establish the political will and the funding necessary to connect trails in the southeastern part of the state.

Simultaneously, the [Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission](#) (SEWRPC) announced joining as a lead partner in a coalition to develop the Route of the Badger—a powerful 700-mile inclusive regional trail network in Southeastern Wisconsin. The Route of the Badger trail network is also an important element of the SEWRPC VISION 2050 plan that is guiding the efforts to meet the region's long-term land-use and transportation needs. The trail network is viewed as a driver of new opportunities in the region and across the state—for physical activity, tourism, recreation and economic growth.

“Collaboration is essential to the success of the Route of the Badger,” said Willie Karidis, RTC’s Route of the Badger project manager. “The enthusiasm that exists among state legislators, planning agencies, local businesses—really, most people who learn about the vision of 700 miles of trail connecting the southeastern part of the state—is inspiring. It’s a testament to the potential that this trail network has to equitably deliver health and economic benefits to the state.”

At the event, RTC and its partners discussed how best to move forward an emerging statewide legislative trails caucus that will help to deliver the political leadership necessary to complete a trail network at this scale. In addition, partners showcased how the Route of the Badger can deliver transformative benefits to the region.

“VISION 2050, the Commission’s transportation and land-use plan for our region, recommends a well-connected bicycle and pedestrian network that includes on- and off-street bicycle facilities and accessible pedestrian facilities,” said Kevin Muhs, executive director of SEWRPC. “The Route of the Badger will help achieve the VISION 2050 bicycle and pedestrian goals, while improving the region’s multimodal options by serving as a mechanism for garnering support among cities and counties to fill in the gaps of an already substantial off-street bicycle network in Southeastern Wisconsin.”

RTC and SEWRPC previously partnered to gather the spatial data necessary to create the Route of the Badger planning map, which is essential to the project’s implementation.

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. Route of the Badger is a TrailNation™ project, part of RTC’s initiative to prove what is possible nationwide when trails are connected into seamless networks. Connect with RTC at railstotrails.org and @railstotrails on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).