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Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Pushes Congress to Resolve Unfinished Business with Reconciliation Package

The nation's largest active transportation advocacy organization calls on the U.S. House of Representatives to provide dedicated funding for trails, walking and biking that was left out of the bipartisan infrastructure bill

WASHINGTON—As the U.S. House of Representatives advances its budget framework, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), the nation's largest active transportation advocacy organization, is calling on Congress to restore the dedicated funding for trails, walking and biking that was left out of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

While the long-negotiated bipartisan infrastructure bill 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.

Specifically, RTC and its champions in Congress are seeking full funding for the Connecting America's Active Transportation System Act at \$500 million annually and the Recreational Trails Program at \$147 million annually, as proposed in versions of these bills previously introduced in the House.

"Passage of the House budget resolution creates an opportunity for Congress to invest the funds that are currently missing for active transportation programs in the infrastructure bill, but that are so important to a healthy planet and people," said Marianne Wesley Fowler, senior strategist for policy advocacy at RTC. "We can't squander this chance to compensate for the Senate's omission of the necessary funding to create and maintain walking and biking infrastructure that is connected, convenient and safe. Those factors are what it will take to get more people to walk and bike more often; mode shift is essential in our race against climate change."

A brief survey conducted by RTC in spring 2020 of local transportation planners and bicycle and pedestrian organizations identified over \$7 billion in unmet need to fill gaps in active transportation networks. According to RTC, these projects demonstrate the significant demand for, and opportunity to, advance investment in active transportation networks that provide opportunities for safe walking and bicycling to daily destinations and enable communities to address climate change by shifting transportation to carbon-free transportation options.

"Trails, walking and biking are essential infrastructure," said Fowler. "As Congress defines its budget priorities alongside the infrastructure bill, the benefits of walking and biking cannot be overlooked."

Active transportation is critical to the economy and the climate, and to creating safe, equitable communities. The bipartisan infrastructure bill includes important programs for trails, walking and biking, but without funding, these programs cannot meet their potential for impact. The House has a chance to make it right.”

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 [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 23,000 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](#).