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With World-Class Rail-Trail Project Just 22 Miles From Completion, West Virginia Could Tap Into Multimillion Dollar Trail Tourism Economy

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy feasibility study finds Parkersburg to Pittsburgh rail-trail achievable within the coming decade

BRIDGEPORT, W.VA.—Just 22 miles remain in West Virginia’s decades-long push to complete a world-class tourism and recreation amenity that would have a transformative impact on the region’s economy. That’s the primary finding of a feasibility study released today by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) and its local trail partners, examining the viability of completing the 150-miles-plus West Virginia section of the Parkersburg to Pittsburgh rail-trail—referred to by trail proponents as the “P2P.”

RTC led the study, “Connecting Parkersburg to Pittsburgh by Rail-Trail,” finding that completion of the West Virginia section could be done as soon as 2023 if local and state leaders commit their support to the project. A few key gaps in Wood, Harrison and Marion counties now remain, and are the only remaining hurdles to connect the existing rail-trails into a seamless 238-mile trail from Parkersburg to Pittsburgh that would be the fourth longest rail-trail in the United States.

Since 1988, local residents and trail advocates have converted disused rail corridors into hundreds of miles of walking and biking trails in West Virginia, including the North Bend Rail Trail, the West Fork River Trail and the Mon River Trail in the northwest part of the state. Connecting these existing rail-trails with the world-renowned Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) in southwest Pennsylvania would open the door to a recreation and tourism economy worth tens of millions of dollars annually, with the potential of attracting some of the 800,000 hikers and bikers that visit the GAP each year, along with a share of the more than \$40 million they spend annually in communities along the trail.

“Completing these few short gaps would see this part of West Virginia become an immediate draw for trail tourists across America and the world,” said Kelly Pack, a West Virginia native and RTC’s director of trail development. “The positive impact of destination rail-trails on local economies is well-proven. The GAP rail-trail through southwest Pennsylvania almost single-handedly revived and reinvented the small rural communities it passes through, many of which were skeptical years ago that a biking and hiking trail could have any impact on their economy. West Virginia is now just a few small steps away from its own world-class rail-trail that would have a similarly transformative impact on local communities here.”

In the past 18 months, local municipalities and trail groups have entered into negotiations to acquire several parcels necessary for completion, which will close eight of the 22 miles of gaps. The P2P feasibility study was presented to lawmakers, planners and trail advocates in Bridgeport on April 24, with a goal of getting the commitments and support needed to close the remaining gaps in the trail.

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The study provides a blueprint to local leaders, identifying funding sources, partnership opportunities and the planning and municipal processes required to complete each of the undeveloped gaps. The study's release marks a significant step forward in connecting the rail-trail corridor.

"Now is a good moment to reflect and congratulate those West Virginians and their allies across the region who have brought us so close to a Parkersburg to Pittsburgh connection," Pack says. "But we also recognize that the only way to adequately pay tribute to their efforts is to complete the job."

When complete, the 150-miles-plus West Virginia stretch of the P2P will connect to the larger, 1,500-miles-plus planned trail network that the Industrial Heartland Trails Coalition (IHTC) envisions spanning 51 counties through West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Ohio and New York. These projects are included among eight RTC TrailNation™ projects—the organization's national trail network building initiative. Visit www.railstotrails.org/IHTC to learn more about IHTC, the P2P and TrailNation.

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. TrailNation is RTC's trail network building initiative, designed to demonstrate the outcomes that trail networks deliver in every type of community. Connect with RTC at railstotrails.org and @railstotrails on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/railstotrails), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/railstotrails) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/railstotrails).