



Trail networks are essential to the well-being of people, places and the planet.



At Rails to Trails Conservancy, we believe in the joy and impact that trails deliver for people, places and the planet. We see it in the memories being made on the trail. The way communities come together in this space. And how places thrive because of connected trail networks.

That's why—as the nation's largest advocacy organization for trails, walking and bicycling—we're working hard to make sure trails connect everyone, in every neighborhood across America. We are building a nation connected by trails, reimagining public spaces to create safe ways for everyone to walk, bike and be active outdoors.

Since 1986, we've supported the creation of more than 41,000 miles of rail-trails and multiuse trails across the country and more than 150 trail networks. Today, the opportunity—and the challenge—is to connect these trails in every community from coast to coast.

America's trail networks are transforming people's lives and the places where they live—creating new opportunities for mobility and recreation, and creating spaces for communities to come together and thrive. When we connect trails, their impact grows exponentially. Existing spaces to walk, bike and be active outside can be transformed into systems that prioritize equitable access to safe and convenient walking and biking routes. With increased connectivity, the use of trail networks increases by as much as 80%, and the economic, health, climate and transportation benefits they deliver are maximized.

Our work to connect the country's trails is critical. That's because trail networks—from citywide projects like the Baltimore Greenway Trails Network to cross-country routes like the Great American Rail-Trail®—create convenient ways for people to enjoy the outdoors and safe ways to get around in their communities.

Trail networks are the building blocks of America's active transportation system.



Building a future where trails connect everyone, everywhere.



Maryland's Baltimore Greenway Trails Network | Photo courtesy Allison Abruscato

RTC's five-year strategic plan, launched in October 2023, is fueled by unprecedented public investment and heightened public demand for rail-trails and multiuse trails nationwide. The focus of this plan is to leverage that momentum to secure the support and investment needed to make trail networks essential infrastructure in America.

RTC's success is measured by more than just miles on the ground. It's measured by the quality and substance of the partnerships, projects and programs that build enduring momentum. It's seen in the consistent push for innovation in trail planning and programming to build the nation's trail systems. Our goal is that equitable trail networks are prioritized for the long term—and valued for their unique contributions to some of the most pressing challenges communities face related to the economy, climate, health and our quality of life.

Here's how we're making that happen.

Infrastructure

We will proliferate the development of trail and active transportation networks nationwide by:

- Expanding the impact of RTC's TrailNation™ initiative, leveraging model projects and a national peer-learning community so that connected trail networks are standard practice in planning and developing active transportation infrastructure
- Expanding our technical assistance to meet the highest and most value-added needs in the field
- Developing a comprehensive strategy to plan for and fund trail maintenance
- Upholding the power of railbanking and developing legal approaches to preserve more corridors that advance trail networks and connectivity
- Protecting and promoting public rights-of-way for trail development at a national scale, including utility corridors, rail-with-trail, roads and levees

Equity

We will catalyze the development of community-driven trail and active transportation networks with the aim to increase trail use and trail networks in underserved and under-resourced communities by:

- Making community-driven equitable development a priority and common practice in the trails and active transportation sector
- Increasing public funding accessed and deployed by historically marginalized communities for trail development and maintenance
- Positioning trails as the go-to option for safe and welcoming outdoor recreation and active transportation for everyone

Investment

We will grow public funding to create, connect and maintain trails, while improving the effectiveness of those resources and creating new opportunities for investment by:

- Implementing a comprehensive education, advocacy and technical assistance strategy that maximizes the opportunity to secure federal funding for active transportation
- Seeding policy innovation and establishing new policies and programs to more quickly build and sustain trail and active transportation networks
- Further expanding the political clout of the trails movement so that trail and active transportation networks are prioritized as essential, and local, state and federal policymakers accelerate investment in networks
- Significantly increasing federal funding for active transportation and establishing policies and accountability mechanisms to direct more formula funding to trails and active transportation

Participation

We will encourage and inspire more people to use trails across the country, hastening a culture shift where communities demand trail systems as essential for their well-being and their communities by:

- Capturing the public imagination and communicating the individual joy, community impact and societal benefits of trails
- Translating enthusiasm for trails into broad participation in the movement, growing the number, breadth and diversity of public advocates for trails and trail networks
- Sharing our passion for trails through TrailLink™ and making it possible for everyone to access trails and experience the joy of being outdoors

Dig into our strategy and get involved at railstotrails.org.