

Powerful Partnerships: Utility Companies + Trails

BY ZAHNI KHIN

Working alongside utility companies across the country, trail entities have often used utility corridors to help build safe and accessible trails for local communities. Some of these most visible trails span miles under large power lines, but utility corridors refer to any passages built below or above ground that carry utility lines, such as electricity, water or natural gas. The benefits of these types of partnerships can include a reduction in the costs associated with trail development and the maximization of the available land to meet transportation and connectivity needs. They also provide ways for utility companies to reach out and connect with the local communities they serve. Here are a few examples from across the United States.

Florida

DUKE ENERGY TRAIL



Western Florida's Duke Energy Trail is a part of the Pinellas Trail Loop, a developing 75-mile route that spans from St. Petersburg to Tarpon Springs. Currently, 4.1 miles of the Duke Energy Trail are paved and open, and it is projected that the trail will total 22.5 miles once complete. Running underneath large power lines, the trail utilizes several Duke Energy rights-of-way. With minimal shade, you have a direct view of everything surrounding the trail.

In 2017, a 1.2-mile trail extension was made to the trail, funded by the "Penny for Pinellas" 1% sales tax. As funding opportunities are made available, future additions will be made to the Duke Energy Trail. Eventually, it will connect on its northern end to the East Lake/Tarpon Springs section of the 50-mile Fred Marquis Pinellas Trail (pinellascounty.org)—a Hall of Fame Rail-Trail—and on its southern end to the planned Weedon Island Trail. •

Learn more: rtc.li/duke-energy-trail-fla

Maryland

POWERLINE TRAIL



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THESE TYPES OF CORRIDORS, VISIT RTC'S TRAIL-BUILDING TOOLBOX: rtc.li/tool-box-utilities.

Get a detailed look at trail-utility partnerships in our cover story on the Route of the Badger on p. 8.

Flanked by trees and bookended by two popular parks in Montgomery County, Maryland, the Powerline Trail serves as an important east-west connector to recreational amenities and outdoor spaces. Stretching 6 miles from South Germantown Recreational Park to North Potomac's Muddy Branch Stream Park, the pathway was the first public trail built within a power corridor in the county. With its natural surface, the trail is not currently accessible to all types of trail use, but it offers an enticing experience for runners, hikers, mountain bikers and equestrians.

The trail is a collaboration between Montgomery Parks and Pepco, a public utility company that supplies Washington, D.C., and the surrounding Maryland communities. In April 2021, the state of Maryland pledged \$10 million to expand the trail in a project that will more than double its mileage. When complete, the 13-mile route will extend to Bethesda's Cabin John Regional Park and include a paved segment. •

Learn more: rtc.li/power-line-trail

California LAFAYETTE-MORAGA REGIONAL TRAIL



The Lafayette-Moraga Regional Trail connects its two namesake communities via a paved 7.65-mile pathway. A key community connector, it provides access to several schools (including St. Mary's College), parks, neighborhoods, commercial areas and the Briones to Las Trampas Regional Trail (rtc.li/b-to-lt-regional). One of the first rail-trails in California, the corridor was originally used to carry lumber by train. It later served as a utility easement, and the route was eventually converted into a multiuse trail through the cooperation of utility companies, the local communities and the East Bay Regional Park District.

Learn more: rtc.li/lafayette-moraga-trail

Michigan MUSKETAWA TRAIL



The Musketawa Trail offers a 25-mile route through the farmland and woods of Western Michigan. The pathway travels through Conklin and Ravenna, crossing several trestle bridges along the way, and ends on the outskirts of Muskegon. It follows a route first used by the Muskegon, Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad in 1886. Rail service ended in the corridor by 1978, and a vision for a rail-trail emerged in the 1990s. Today, the corridor also hosts several electrical lines, instituted through granted easements between the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and utility companies.

Learn more: musketawatrail.com

Texas CENTERPOINT ENERGY TRAIL



Opened in 2019, the CenterPoint Energy Trail marks the first hike-and-bike trail constructed along a CenterPoint Energy easement in Houston. Beginning just north of Sims Bayou Greenway, the 1.5-mile pathway heads north, paralleling Hiram Clarke Road to West Airport Boulevard. For residents in the city's southwestern neighborhoods, the trail offers an important link into the Bayou Greenways (rtc.li/bayou-greenways), a developing 150-mile network of connected parks and trails along Houston's major waterways being spearheaded by the Houston Parks Board.

Learn more: rtc.li/centerpoint-energy-trails

TOP: TRAILLINK USER DAVIDGORDON144; MIDDLE: DAVID HOFFMAN; BOTTOM: TRAILLINK USER TAYLOR HALL