

TrailNation Summit

HOSTED BY RAILS TO TRAILS CONSERVANCY

October 27-29, 2025
Cleveland, Ohio

Advancing Trail Networks

Essential Infrastructure for Mobility, Belonging & Economic Vitality

Rails to Trails Conservancy's TrailNation™ Summit is where the vision of trail networks at the center of healthy, thriving communities becomes reality. Over two full days in Cleveland, participants will be immersed in a learning experience designed to gain the skills and build the necessary connections with professionals and advocates from different fields, geographies, and areas of expertise to accelerate the development of country's 175+ trail networks.

Here's a snapshot of the TrailNation Summit experience:

- Daily keynote and plenary sessions, exploring topics intended to inspire action and spark curiosity
- Deep-dive master class sessions, orchestrated in rural, suburban and urban cohort groups to dig into strategies that are essential to the success of the nation's trail networks
- Opportunities to make meaningful connection that will kickstart relationships across sectors and geographies to accelerate learning and action in support of trail network development

Keynote and Plenary Sessions

From Amenities to Essentials: The Governors' Case for Trails and Active Infrastructure

Nationwide, communities, states and regions are banding together to build out their visions for trail networks. In many places—rural and urban, red and blue—governors are applying their leadership to accelerate the pace of progress. We'll hear firsthand from governors who have been at the helm of this progress and why they believe that trail and active transportation networks are essential to the well-being of the states they lead.

Funding Trail Investment in a Shifting Political Landscape

In Washington, D.C., and in statehouses nationwide, 2025 marks a year of change and shifting priorities, bringing increased scrutiny to investments in trails, walking and bicycling. This session will explore strategies for aligning advocacy with new federal, state and local priorities—amplifying the economic, safety and quality of life impact of trails, while exploring the critical role of state leadership and investment, diverse funding sources, and philanthropic support in ensuring trail networks continue to grow and deliver powerful returns.

Joy Transforms

In a time of extreme polarization, studies show that America is experiencing a loneliness epidemic. In many communities, trail networks are spaces that spark joy and create a shared community identity, unlocking the key ingredients of place-based transformation that fuels economic growth and quality of life. Together, we'll explore what it means to leverage joy for impact, building support and inspiring the action needed to make meaningful progress for the nation's trail networks.

World Cafe: Big Ideas. Fast Connections. Real Solutions.

This fast-paced, highly interactive session is designed to maximize learning and connections. Participants will rotate through expert-led small-group conversations on the tools and tactics shaping trail networks today—including spatial data, market analysis, trail-user data, community-first design, funding readiness, economic impact, and effective public engagement and messaging. The World Cafe model emphasizes actionable insights and hands-on advice tailored to real-world trail development challenges, providing new strategies, fresh ideas, and personal connections that are the seed for lasting partnerships.

Master Classes

These immersive learning sessions will feature hands-on learning with leaders in the field, alongside case studies of sustainable solutions to funding, advocacy and trail development challenges. Rural, suburban and urban cohort groups will move through the sessions as a team, walking away with the specific localized skills and new perspectives to empower local action.

Overcoming Obstacles to Trail Network Implementation

Across the country, communities face similar—yet unique—challenges as they seek to build out their trail networks. Whether we're working in rural, suburban or urban communities, building public support and political will are essential to success. This session will focus on a range of issues unique to the geographies where we work, from community connection to health and economic revitalization, landowner opposition and rights of way, addressing mobility needs and strategies for integrating trails with existing infrastructure and transit.

Engaging End Users: Marketing, Messaging & Trail Activation

Regardless of the community you represent, outreach and engagement are essential to the success of your trail network. This session dives into approaches for activating your trail network through strategic outreach, inclusive messaging, media partnerships, and community-centered programming that turns occasional users into loyal stewards.

Mapping Trail Networks for Implementation & Advocacy

Mapping is a key step in bringing the vision of a trail network to life—essential to the implementation of and advocacy for connected trail networks nationwide. Together, we'll explore effective mapping strategies to build decision-maker awareness of the trail system, approaches to developing comprehensive approaches for corridor analysis, and the power of collaboration across stakeholder groups.

Trails as Economic Engines

Increasing walkability and bikeability is a proven method for regional economic growth. Together, we'll explore strategies for leveraging trail networks to support small businesses, increase tourism, attract talent, and drive local investment—complete with data insights and messaging tools to help advocates speak to the economic value of trails in any region

Cohorts, Connections and Explorations

At the Summit, we'll learn together, we'll challenge each other, and we'll have fun making new friends. The Summit is designed to maximize connections, bringing participants together in cohorts grouped by rural, suburban and urban geographies so that people can create relationships and tackle comparable challenges with fresh perspectives from across the country. Time is set aside for cohort meetups and networking at evening receptions. Plus, at the TrailNation Pitch Fest, you'll get a chance to learn how active transportation projects from across the country are positioning their projects for funding. And we won't miss our chance to get out on the trail, teaming up with Cuyahoga Greenways, our host trail network in Cleveland, to get outside and explore the innovation driving regional trail development.

Learn More and Register

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