

# Advocating for Active Transportation:

## Introducing RTC's Reauthorization Agenda

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# Before we begin:

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# Agenda

1. Current Events and Political Context
2. RTC's Reauthorization Agenda & Actions
3. What You Can Do to Advocate for Trails

# Pragmatic, **Optimistic ... Aware**

- Momentum of robust investment and pro-trail culture shift nationwide despite federal policy backlash
- Pursue federal, state and local opportunities to maximize impact (e.g., ballot measures)
- Build visibility, deploying right messengers and messages to meet moment



Washington D.C's Met Branch Trail



# Administration Context

Fluid, uncertain policy environment

Asserting unprecedented executive power

Method:

- Broadly freeze funding
- Review grants, policies, programs for alignment with principles
- Revise to align or take back unobligated \$



Nebraska's Cowboy Trail | Visit Norfolk

# USDOT Secretary Directives

## Reset Principles and Standards

- Small and “local” projects not the federal role
- Amend existing grant agreements
- Cultural issues influence priorities: marriage/birth rates; mask/vaccine mandates; immigration
- Articulated values: family/child safety; access to opportunities; quality of life

## Rescission Order

- Initiate action against any grant, policy or program inconsistent with administration policy

## March 12 Memo

- Added bicycle infrastructure to list of topics subject to review—recreational trails and shared use paths called out
- Unobligated *and partially obligated* grants: cancel or renegotiate scope

# Strategy to Blunt Claw Backs

## Strategic Leadership

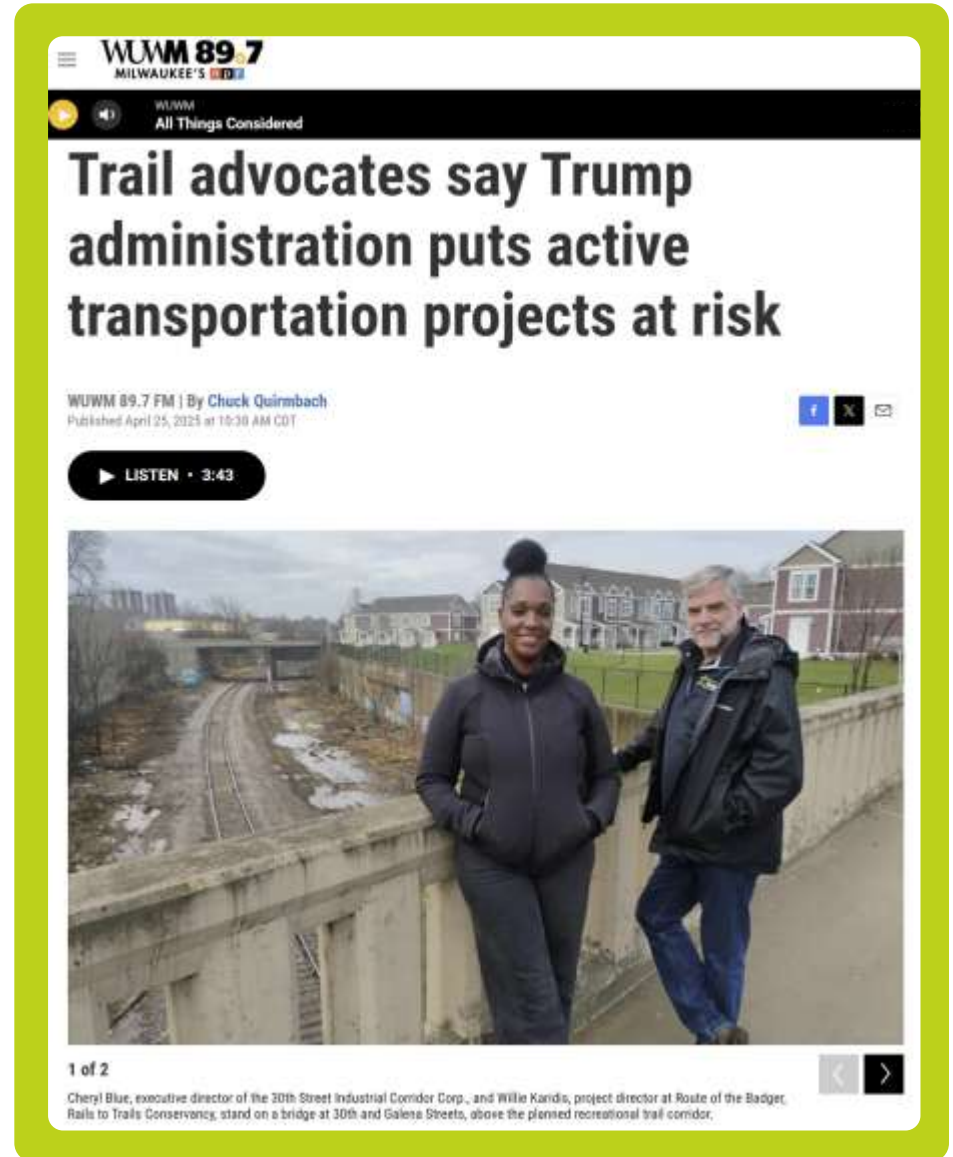
- Leverage unprecedented violation of expectations
- Activate partners to engage local, state, federal electeds (Letter to Duffy: 175 local leaders)
- Messaging, making the case

## Inform Movement

- Webinars, partner updates

## Direct Advocacy

- Congress (Duffy hearing)
- USDOT (met with leaders; grant releases)





# Congressional Strategy

## *Reauthorization (due 2026)*

- Sets nation's policies, programs, funding priorities
- Congress has initiated & accelerated the process

## *Appropriations (FY26)*

- Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program



*Congressman Eugene Vindman (D-VA-7) at Great American Rail-Trail event in Washington, D.C.*



# Transportation Reauthorization

## *Back to the future*

Last reauthorization (IIJA, 2021) aimed to:

- Invest in climate, safety, and equity
- Foster multi-modal transportation with more mobility options
- Initiate new programs & larger direct federal role (but formula still dominates)

Committee Chairs now aim to:

- Give \$ to states with flexibility (without accountability)
- Re-emphasize building highways
- Project 2025: walking and biking not the federal role (devolution)
- Consolidate programs (TA and RTP were in 2012)

# RTC's Reauthorization Agenda

1. Improve *dedicated* trail & walk/bike programs
  - Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside
  - Recreational Trails Program
  - Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program
2. Federal discretionary grants: foster innovation & mobility options
3. Hold states accountable to federal goals (e.g., safety)



# Recent Reauthorization Actions

- Built consensus & collaborated with partners
- Developed and promoted policy proposals
- Provided formal verbal and written recommendations to committees
- Engaged local, state and national allies to amplify requests
- Persuaded Reps/Senators to submit our requests as their priorities



# Appropriations

Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program: large strategic grants to *connect* walking and biking routes to destinations & between communities

- Program authorized in IIJA @ \$200M/yr, requires annual appropriation
- One small but successful round of grants
- FY26 last chance under original authorization: advocacy targets, Dear Colleague letters, uphill battle but reauthorization set-up



Virginia's Washington & Old Dominion Trail



# Movement Built on Political Relationships

Relationship building with Republican leaders

- Geographic targeting based on committee roles

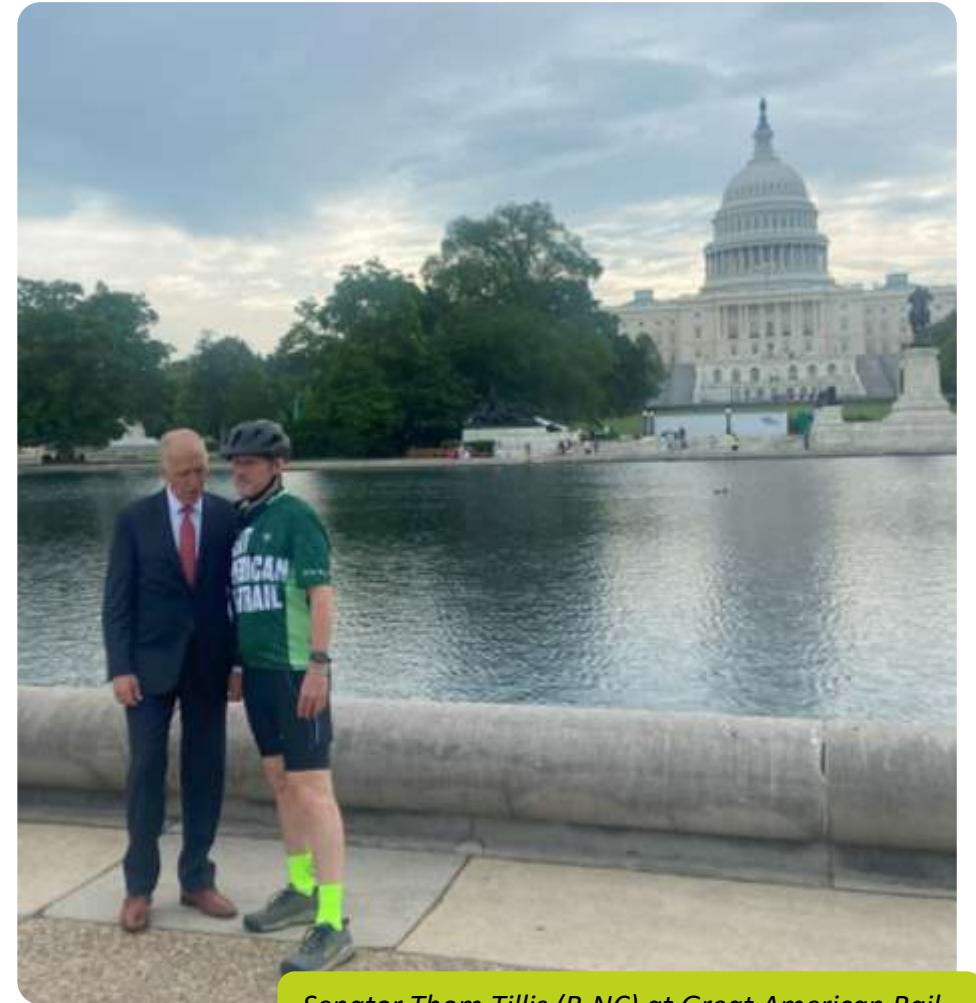
Cultivate messengers and partners who carry conservative influence

- Home constituencies critical to political influence
- Conservative influencers and political allies

Activating America's Trail Networks

Changemakers for Trails

- Grassroots/grasstops engagement



*Senator Thom Tillis (R-NC) at Great American Rail-Trail event in Washington, D.C.*

# Shifting the Narrative, Countering Pushback

Pervasive, proactive storytelling in media and in advocacy to cement the national culture shift that trails and active transportation are essential

- Showcase Republican leadership on trails and active transportation—conservative appeal
- Elevate stories of impact on topics that carry weight (e.g. economic impact, safety)
- Be persistent and pervasive—consider political geography, messengers and the media



*Alabama State Senator Andrew Jones (R-AL-10) at Anniston 2025 Year of Trails Celebration*



# Your role in advocating for trails



# Different types of advocacy

- Everyday advocacy: introducing your network to trails, sharing on social media, telling your story about why trails matter
- Community advocacy: events and activities where you live, organizing supporters (petitions etc.), attending community meetings
- Direct advocacy: outreach to elected officials (email, phone, letters); attending meetings with local/state/federal leaders (formal or 1:1); letters to the editor and op-eds





# Engaging Local Leaders for Federal Impact

Local and state officials carry important influence with Members of Congress, often having direct relationships with district staff.

- Celebrate progress and impact
- Create experiences, invite to events that illustrate demand and benefits
- Meet to discuss active transportation
- Share stories in places they'll see—like letters to the editor in your local paper, local/regional blogs, etc.
- Amplify on social media



ASK YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS:

# Pledge to Support Active Transportation Funding



# Opportunities for Direct Advocacy

- The time is now to meet with Members of Congress
- Officials hear about many issues and are we need to keep trails, walking and biking top of mind for officials so it is relevant during decision making
- RTC is here to help partner with you to make these meetings happen





## KEY MESSAGE POINTS

# Stories of Advocacy Success

- The power of in-district outreach and mapping relationships: all politics is local
  - Relationships in unexpected places
  - The power of in-district engagement
- RTC partners and grassroots uniting
  - Changemakers for Trails program
    - Thanking our champions
    - Reinforcing support







*Photo courtesy Kristy Tayler*

# Are you interested in contacting your elected officials?

Rails to Trails will work with you on the agenda, talking points, logistics and more for any meetings or other engagement.

[Sign up here](#)





# Messaging Tips

# Why Trails Matter

- Trail and active transportation networks are essential infrastructure for America.
- The real economic impact and future promise of trail and active transportation networks is incredible—the country's trail system already generates more than \$34 billion in economic activity annually and can more than quadruple as trail systems are connected.
- And it's so much more than the economy. This infrastructure is critical to delivering the quality of life that people seek out in the places where they live, play and work.
- Connecting communities with safe walking and biking infrastructure isn't just about getting from point A to point B—it's about creating healthier, safer and more vibrant places to live.

THIS MOMENT IS URGENT

# What's At Stake

## Meeting Demand and Making Progress

- In recent applications oversubscribed with \$40 requested for ever \$1 available
- Regional trail and active transportation networks in development in hundreds of communities and every single state
- Many communities have plans in place but no funding to build or maintain the trail—preventing millions of people from accessing trails

## Keeping People Safe

- Every year, thousands are killed walking or biking due to unsafe conditions
- Studies show that bikeable, walkable communities are safer for everyone—including people in cars

## Boosting the Economy

- For every \$1 invested in trails, \$1.72 is generated annually from local business revenue, sales tax revenue and benefits related to health and transportation.



# Action Plan

Here are 4 things you can do build the movement and shift the narrative.

1. Invite your local, state or federal officials to join you out on the trail—AND AMPLIFY IT!
2. Ask your local and state officials to sign RTC's funding pledge: [rtc.li/localpledge](http://rtc.li/localpledge)
3. Engage agency contacts (DOTs, tourism, health, etc.) to demonstrate far-reaching support for active transportation networks
4. Meet with your local, state and federal representatives and staff (RTC will help!)



Rally for the Rock Island Trail in Missouri

# Q&A



**Thank you!**

