

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL®

ROUTE ASSESSMENT REPORT
MAY 2025

RAILS TO
Trails
conservancy

MARYLAND



C&O Canal National Historical Park | Photo by Suzanne Matyas

The Great American Rail-Trail route across Maryland consists of two key trails: the towpath of the C&O Canal National Historical Park and the Great Allegheny Passage. The two trails meet in Cumberland, Maryland, creating a well-used connection between Washington, D.C., and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

TABLE 4: GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL MILEAGE IN MARYLAND

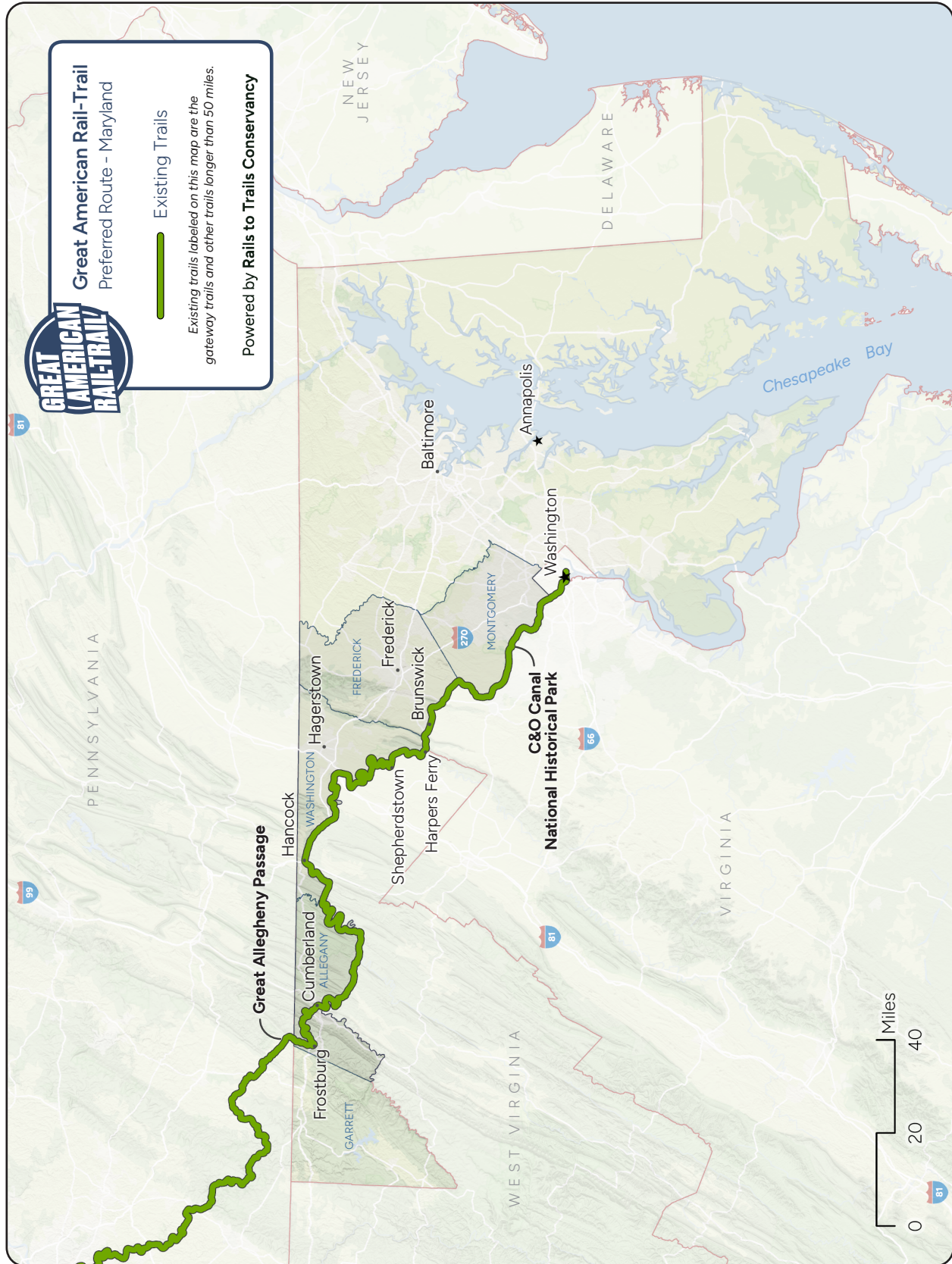
Total Length / Total Length along Great American Rail-Trail in Md. (in Miles)	200.8 (100%)
Total Great American Rail-Trail Gap Miles in Md. (% of Total State Mileage)	0 (0%)
Total Trail Gaps in Md.	0
Total Great American Rail-Trail Miles in Md.	200.8

TABLE 5: GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE THROUGH MARYLAND

Existing Trail Name	Length in Md. Along Great American Rail-Trail (in Miles)
C&O Canal National Historical Park	180.3
Great Allegheny Passage	20.5
Total Miles	200.8
Existing Trail Miles	200.8
Trail Gap Miles	0.0

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT 2025

MAP 2: MARYLAND





Great Allegheny Passage | Photo by Paul Ericson

C&O CANAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

Total Length / Total Length along Great American Rail-Trail in Md. (in Miles)	184.5 / 180.3
Surface Type	Crushed stone, dirt, gravel
Trail Manager	National Park Service
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> canaltrust.org nps.gov/choh/index.htm
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/chesapeake--ohio-canal-national-historical-park

The C&O Canal National Historical Park, also known as the C&O Canal Towpath, follows the route of the Potomac River for 184.5 miles between Washington, D.C., and Cumberland, Maryland. The canal, which operated for more than 100 years, transported ships carrying various goods down the waterway to market. Today, visitors can still see the rich history of the canal through many of its original features, including locks, lockhouses and aqueducts. The towpath itself was historically used to assist ships as they floated down the canal. Now, the towpath is a well-used trail that sees more than 5 million visitors annually (compared to 1 million in 1996).

GREAT ALLEGHENY PASSAGE

Total Length / Total Length along Great American Rail-Trail in Md. (in Miles)	145.2 / 20.5
Surface Type	Asphalt, crushed stone
Trail Manager	Allegheny County, Great Allegheny Passage Conservancy, Mountain Maryland Trails
Website	gaptrail.org
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/great-allegheny-passage

The Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) is an iconic trail that runs nearly 150 miles from Cumberland, Maryland, to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and was built by a mix of private and public partners, nonprofit entities, and local trail groups and volunteers working in concert as the Great Allegheny Passage Conservancy. RTC selected the GAP for the Rail-Trail Hall of Fame in 2007.

Cumberland and Frostburg are the major towns along the Maryland portion of the GAP. For much of the 16 miles of trail between Cumberland and Frostburg, the trail parallels the active Western Maryland Scenic Railroad, making this the first rail-with-trail section of the Great American Rail-Trail. This section of the GAP itself was constructed on the former Western Maryland Railway, which began operations between Cumberland, Maryland, and Connellsville, Pennsylvania, in 1912.

APPENDIX: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Abandoned rail corridor – When a railroad company ceases operations on a line or terminates the line itself. Abandonment is official when the Surface Transportation Board (STB) has issued an order authorizing abandonment of the line and the railroad has notified the STB that it has consummated the abandonment authorization.

Active rail corridor – Any rail corridor that has not been formally abandoned through the process identified by the Surface Transportation Board.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) – The federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination based on disability.

Arterial road – A major thoroughfare, particularly one used to provide a large traffic capacity for traveling longer distances.

Ballast – The trackbed upon which railroad ties are laid, often composed of crushed stone.

Bike lane – A portion of the roadway that has been designated by striping, signage and pavement markings for the preferential or exclusive use of bicyclists.

Bike route – On-street routes that are signed for bicycle travel but do not provide any physical or visual separation from automobile traffic.

Bollard – A short post used to divert traffic from an area or road.

Contiguous – Sharing a common border; touching.

Culvert – A tunnel carrying a stream or open drain under a road, railroad or trail.

Decking – The surface of a bridge.

Federal Railroad Administration – An agency within the U.S. Department of Transportation that handles matters related to the railroad industry.

Geographic Information System (GIS) – A system designed to capture, store, manipulate, analyze, manage and present spatial or geographic data.

Greenway – A strip of undeveloped land, set aside for recreational use or environmental protection.

Interim on-road connector – An on-road segment that is to be used temporarily while a trail is being planned or built.

Multiuse trails – Trails that are designed to accommodate more than one type of use (walking, bicycling, horseback riding, etc.).

Non-motorized trails – Trails that do not allow travel using vehicles with motors.

Off-road trails – Trails that are outside of a roadbed for motorized vehicles.

Protected bike lane (cycle track) – A bikeway that is at street level and uses a variety of methods for physical protection from passing traffic. Protected bike lanes (cycle tracks) can allow bicycle movement in one or both directions on one side of a road.

Railbanked/railbanking – Condition allowing a railroad to “bank” a corridor for future rail use. During the interim, alternative trail use is a viable option.

Railbed – The roadbed of a railroad track.

Rail corridor – The tracks and railroad right-of-way (generally 50 to 100 feet wide, though it varies widely by geography).

Rail-trail – The conversion of a disused railway track into a multiuse trail. The characteristics of abandoned railways—flat, long, frequently running through historical areas—are appealing for various developments.

Rail-with-trail – A trail located adjacent to an active rail line.

Rail yard – A complex series of railroad tracks for storing, sorting, loading and unloading railroad cars.

Recreational Trails Program – A competitive grant program managed by state trail administrators; therefore, only projects that meet certain criteria may be funded. Its funds are drawn from the larger Transportation Alternatives Program.

Right-of-way – The land on which a railroad line, road or utility is built.

Roadway – The strip of land over which a road passes.

Shared land marking (sharrow) – Road marking used to indicate a shared land environment for bicycles and automobiles.

Shared-use path – A form of infrastructure that supports multiple recreation and transportation opportunities (a common synonym for “trail”).

Shoulder (road) – A strip of land adjacent to the traffic lane of a road, often used as an emergency stopping lane.

Surface Transportation Board (STB) – The federal agency that oversees changes made by railroad companies. Formerly the Interstate Commerce Commission.

Towpath – A road or trail on the bank of a river, canal or other inland waterway.

Trailbed – The roadbed of a trail.

Trail gap – Section of trail that still needs to be built to connect the existing trails.

Transportation Alternatives Program – A program administered by the Federal Highway Administration to authorize funding for programs and projects defined as “transportation alternatives,” including on- and off-road pedestrian and bicycle facilities. The Transportation Alternatives Program is the largest federal source for trail funding.

Waterway – A river, canal or other route for travel by water.



At Rails to Trails Conservancy, we are building a nation connected by trails. We reimagine public spaces to create safe ways for everyone to walk, bike and be active outdoors.