

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL®

ROUTE ASSESSMENT REPORT
MAY 2025

RAILS TO
Trails
conservancy

NEBRASKA



Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail | Photo by TrailLink user lisa.jarnigan

The Great American Rail-Trail crosses from Iowa into Nebraska on the iconic Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge. The route weaves through the urban areas of Omaha and Lincoln, connecting these population centers to the more rural western part of the state. The open sections of the Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail take trail users almost 40% of the way across the total planned mileage for Nebraska, with more miles set for construction in the near future.

TABLE 18: GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL MILEAGE IN NEBRASKA

Total Great American Rail-Trail Existing Trail Miles in Neb. (% of Total State Mileage)	310.8 (51.6%)
Total Great American Rail-Trail Gap Miles in Neb. (% of Total State Mileage)	291.1 (48.4%)
Total Trail Gaps in Neb.	9
Total Great American Rail-Trail Miles in Neb.	601.9

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT 2025

MAP 9: NEBRASKA

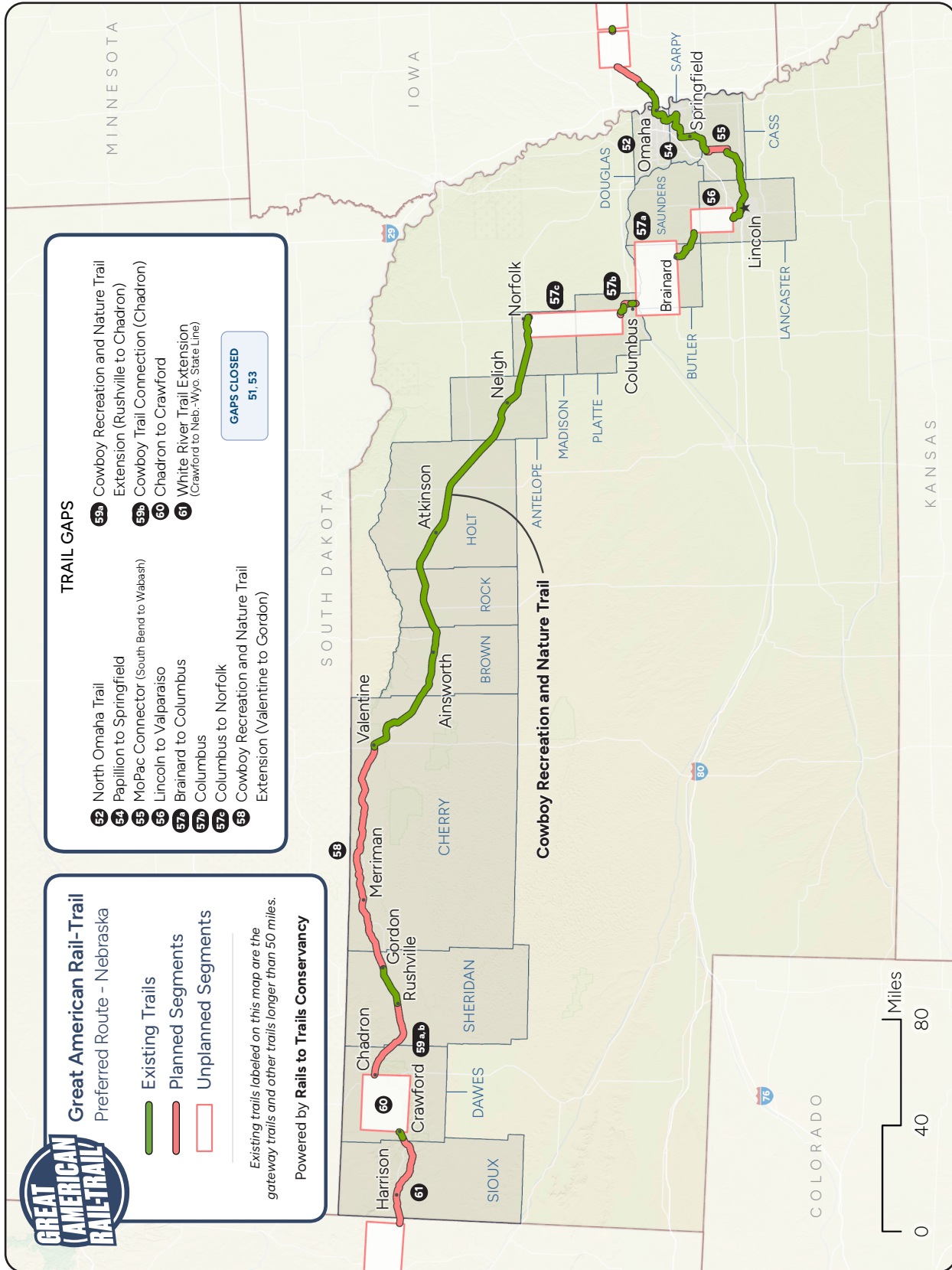


TABLE 19: GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE THROUGH NEBRASKA

Existing Trail or Trail Gap Name	Length in Neb. Along Great American Rail-Trail (in Miles)
Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge	0.2
North Downtown Pedestrian Bridge/ "Baby Bob" Bridge (formerly Trail Gap 51)	0.2
Mike Fahey Street Shared-Use Path	0.2
TRAIL GAP 52 – North Omaha Trail	0.6
Burt Street Trail	0.8
Turner Boulevard Trail	2.1
TRAIL GAP 53 – Turner Boulevard Trail Extension (Omaha) COMPLETED	-
Field Club Trail	1.4
South Omaha Trail	3.7
Keystone Trail	5.6
West Papio Trail	5.7
Walnut Creek Lake Trail	2.6
TRAIL GAP 54 – Papillion to Springfield 1	0.2
Schram Road Trail	0.8
Trail Gap 54 – Papillion to Springfield 2	0.5
Schram Road Trail	0.3
Trail Gap 54 – Papillion to Springfield 3	1.7
MoPac Trail (Springfield)	13.2
Platte River Connection	1.5
TRAIL GAP 55 – MoPac Connector (South Bend to Wabash)	10.1
MoPac Trail East	20.7
MoPac Trail West	6.2
Antelope Valley Trail	1.0
Salt Creek Levee Trail	1.0
Oak Lake Connector Trail	0.8

Existing Trail or Trail Gap Name	Length in Neb. Along Great American Rail-Trail (in Miles)
North 1st Street Trail	1.5
Superior Street Trail	0.2
Highlands Trail	1.3
TRAIL GAP 56 – Lincoln to Valparaiso	16.8
Oak Creek Trail	13.0
TRAIL GAP 57a – Brainard to Columbus	28.1
Third Avenue Viaduct Trail	1.0
TRAIL GAP 57b – Columbus	4.0
Robert White Trail	1.5
Bob Lake Trail	1.2
TRAIL GAP 57c – Columbus to Norfolk	46.8
Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail (Norfolk to Valentine)	203.7
TRAIL GAP 58 – Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail Extension (Valentine to Gordon)	90.2
Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail (Gordon to Rushville)	16.6
TRAIL GAP 59a – Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail Extension (Rushville to Chadron)	25.9
TRAIL GAP 59b – Cowboy Trail Connection (Chadron)	5.8
TRAIL GAP 60 – Chadron to Crawford	26.3
White River Trail	2.8
TRAIL GAP 61 – White River Trail Extension (Crawford to Neb.-Wyo. State Line)	34.1
Total Miles	601.9
Existing Trail Miles	310.8
Trail Gap Miles	291.1

BOB KERREY PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	0.4 / 0.2
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Managers	Council Bluffs Parks & Recreation, Omaha Parks & Recreation, Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • councilbluffs-ia.gov/2178/bob-kerrey-pedestrian-bridge • visitomaha.com/bob
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/bob-kerrey-pedestrian-bridge

The Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge, discussed in more detail in the Iowa chapter of this report, has become a major community landmark. The bridge is lit at night to provide a safe and attractive connection throughout the day and night. Visitors taking the bridge into Omaha can travel about a half-mile south along the Omaha Riverfront Trail to the Omaha Visitors Center to learn more about Omaha and what it has to offer. People continuing along the Great American Rail-Trail will head west into Omaha along the recently completed “Baby Bob” bridge extension, described below.

NORTH DOWNTOWN PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE/“BABY BOB” BRIDGE (FORMERLY TRAIL GAP 51)

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	0.2 / 0.2
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Manager	City of Omaha
Website	visitomaha.com/bob

In early 2025, a long-planned extension of the Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge opened to facilitate an easier trail connection into downtown Omaha. Called the North Downtown Pedestrian Bridge (or “Baby Bob” Bridge), the bridge helps trail users cross the configuration of roads and railroads along the Missouri River frontage and connects to the Mike Fahey Street Shared-Use Path at North 10th Street.

MIKE FAHEY STREET SHARED-USE PATH

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	0.2 / 0.2
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Manager	City of Omaha

With the opening of the Baby Bob Bridge in 2025, the shared-use path along Mike Fahey Street has become an important connection. The path travels for three blocks, including in front of Charles Schwab Field Omaha, home to the NCAA Men’s College World Series annually.

TRAIL GAP 52 – NORTH OMAHA TRAIL

Planning Status	Fully planned
Funding Status	Fully funded
Construction Status/ Expected Completion Date	Construction expected in 2027

The North Omaha Trail is a developing trail in downtown Omaha and its northern neighborhoods. Spark CDI, an Omaha-based nonprofit, received a grant from the Nebraska Department of Economic Development in 2024 for the expansion of the North Omaha Trail. A short section of the Great American Rail-Trail will follow the North Omaha Trail along Burt Street. Plans are in place to complete this connection, with construction expected in 2027.

BURT STREET TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	0.8 / 0.8
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Manager	Omaha Parks & Recreation
Website	parks.cityofomaha.org/parks/trails
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/burt-street-trail

The existing Burt Street Trail runs 0.8 mile between North 20th and North 30th streets in Omaha. The trail is a shared-use path that parallels Burt Street on the south side of the road. It is largely wide enough to accommodate both bicycle and pedestrian traffic, though there are small sections that narrow to a normal sidewalk width. This pathway provides a connection on the north side of the Creighton University campus.

TURNER BOULEVARD TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	2.1
Surface Type	Asphalt, concrete
Trail Manager	Omaha Parks & Recreation
Website	parks.cityofomaha.org/parks/trails
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/turner-boulevard-trail

The Turner Boulevard Trail connects to the Burt Street Trail at North 30th Street in Omaha. The trail is a shared-use path that runs along the west side of North 30th Street and Turner Boulevard, winding past several parks and neighborhoods and ending at the Field Club of Omaha.

TRAIL GAP 53 – TURNER BOULEVARD TRAIL EXTENSION (OMAHA) COMPLETED

A 0.3-mile extension of the Turner Boulevard Trail was completed in 2021 along Pacific Street to connect to the Field Club Trail.

FIELD CLUB TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	1.8 / 1.4
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Manager	Omaha Parks & Recreation
Website	parks.cityofomaha.org/parks/trails
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/field-club-trail

The Field Club Trail travels 1.8 miles from the intersection of South 39th and Leavenworth streets south to the northern terminus of the South Omaha Trail. Of this trail, 1.4 miles beginning at the end of the Turner Boulevard Trail Extension will provide a connection through Omaha and the Hanscom Park neighborhood for the Great American Rail-Trail. The Field Club Trail occupies an old railroad bed that lies 30 feet below grade.

SOUTH OMAHA TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	3.7 / 3.7
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Manager	Omaha Parks & Recreation
Website	papiionrd.org/recreation-wildlife/parks-and-trails/metro-omaha-trails
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/south-omaha-trail

The South Omaha Trail connects the Field Club Trail to the Keystone Trail at its crossing of Little Papillion Creek. The South Omaha Trail is built on a former Chicago and North Western Transportation Company corridor with an old trestle crossing South 60th Street.

KEYSTONE TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	15.0 / 5.6
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Managers	Bellevue Parks Department, Omaha Parks & Recreation, Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District
Website	papionrd.org/recreation-wildlife/parks-and-trails/metro-omaha-trails
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/keystone-trail

The South Omaha Trail connects to the Keystone Trail at its crossing of Little Papillion Creek, though the Keystone Trail continues several miles north through much of western Omaha. The Keystone Trail partially follows the banks of Papillion Creek atop the flood control levees, while the remaining 2.3 miles are along an old rail corridor. The Great American Rail-Trail turns west once the Keystone Trail intersects the West Papio Trail near South 36th Street at its crossing of Big Papillion Creek in Bellevue.

WEST PAPIO TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	22.9 / 5.7
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Managers	Omaha Parks & Recreation, Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District
Website	papionrd.org/recreation-wildlife/parks-and-trails/metro-omaha-trails
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/west-papio-trail

The West Papio Trail connects at its eastern end to the Keystone Trail and continues west toward the city of Elkhorn through the city of Papillion, following West Papillion Creek. At the western edge of Papillion, the Great American Rail-Trail heads south along South 96th Street toward the Walnut Creek Lake and Recreation Area to eventually connect to the MoPac Trail. The Great American Rail-Trail makes a brief on-street jog westward along Santa Fe Circle to access a trail underpass to safely cross underneath the busy state Route 370.

WALNUT CREEK LAKE TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	3.3 / 2.6
Surface Type	Boardwalk, concrete
Trail Managers	City of Papillion, Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District
Website	papillion.org/facilities/facility/details/walnut-creekrecreationarea-14
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/walnut-creek-lake-trail

The West Papio Trail connects to a trail system at Walnut Creek Lake, a 105-acre reservoir and mixed-use recreation area in Papillion. The lake and recreation area are under the management of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District. The paved loop around Walnut Creek Lake is 3.3 miles and is complete with amenities including a campground, restrooms, water fountains and an equestrian trail.

TRAIL GAP 54 – PAPILLION TO SPRINGFIELD

Planning Status	Partially planned
Funding Status	Partially funded
Construction Status/ Expected Completion Date	TBD

The Omaha metropolitan area has long been interested in completing a trail connection between the Walnut Creek Lake Trail and the MoPac Trail. As the area around Papillion continues to develop, a trail is being developed along Schram Road. Portions of it are already in place, with three gaps remaining to complete this connection.

SCHRAM ROAD TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	1.1 / 1.1
Surface Type	Asphalt, concrete
Trail Managers	City of Papillion, Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District

A shared-use path is being built along Schram Road as the area develops into a residential community in the western Omaha suburbs. Just over 1 mile currently exists, though new sections will become active as the area continues developing.

MOPAC TRAIL (SPRINGFIELD)

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	13.2 / 13.2
Surface Type	Crushed stone
Trail Manager	Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District
Website	papionrd.org/recreation-wildlife/parks-and-trails/metro-omaha-trails
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/mopac-trail-(springfield)

The MoPac Trail exists in three segments, starting just north of Springfield to the north and ending in Lincoln to the south and west. Nearly the entire route rests on an abandoned Missouri Pacific Railroad corridor (the MoPac).

Segment 1 – MoPac Trail (Springfield):

Beginning at Schram Road in Omaha, the MoPac Trail heads south along state Route 50 through the town of Springfield, where a former gap in the route between Platteview Road and Main Street was recently completed slightly away from the former MoPac rail line, allowing for uninterrupted off-road travel through Springfield. The MoPac Trail continues along the old rail corridor south of the Platte River, just north of the city of Louisville, where the trail heads west to parallel state Route 31. Once the trail reaches the Platte River at South Bend, there is a trailhead with parking as the trail continues to cross the Platte River over the Lied Platte River Bridge.

Segments 2 (MoPac Trail East) and 3 (MoPac Trail West) are discussed below.

PLATTE RIVER CONNECTION

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	1.5 / 1.5
Surface Type	Concrete, crushed stone
Trail Managers	Lower Platte South Natural Resources District, Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District
Website	lpsnrd.org/lied-bridge-platte-river-connection papionrd.org/platte-river-bridge-trail-grand-opening
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/platte-river-connection

A connection across the Platte River at the village of South Bend, Nebraska, was completed in 2002, using an abandoned Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad bridge. The bridge across the river is now known as the Lied Platte River Bridge, named after the Lied Foundation, a major contributor to the project. The bridge was heavily damaged by flooding in March 2019. Lower Platte South Natural Resources District and the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District collaborated to repair and reopen the bridge to the public in July 2021.

TRAIL GAP 55 – MOPAC CONNECTOR (SOUTH BEND TO WABASH)

Planning Status	Partially planned
Funding Status	Partially funded
Construction Status/ Expected Completion Date	TBD

In 2024, the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District approved a final alignment to close this long-standing gap in the MoPac Trail. The Nebraska Legislature appropriated \$8.3 million in 2022 to help close this gap, which is currently being used to finalize designs for the trail. Fundraising efforts are focused on securing the remaining funds necessary to construct this gap. Completing Trail Gap 55 will close the last substantial trail gap between Nebraska's two largest cities—Omaha and Lincoln—and will go a long way to helping the state realize its trail tourism potential along the Great American Rail-Trail.

MOPAC TRAIL EAST

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	20.7 / 20.7
Surface Type	Crushed stone
Trail Manager	Lower Platte South Natural Resources District
Website	lpsnrd.org/mopac-east-trail
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/mopac-trail-east

The second segment of the MoPac Trail, following the old corridor of the Missouri Pacific Railroad's Omaha Belt Line, travels 20.7 miles between Wabash and Lincoln. This eastern segment of the MoPac Trail is very rural and travels on a crushed stone path through prairie, woodland and farmland. A separate equestrian trail, the Charles L. Warner Equestrian Trail, is provided along the majority of the trail. Here, the MoPac Trail East connects to the MoPac Trail West to make the rest of the voyage into Lincoln.

MOPAC TRAIL WEST

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	6.2 / 6.2
Surface Type	Concrete, crushed stone
Trail Manager	Lincoln Parks & Recreation
Website	lincoln.ne.gov/city/departments/parks-and-recreation/parks-facilities/trails
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/mopac-trail-west

The third segment of the MoPac Trail starts at South 84th Street, east of Lincoln, and travels 6.2 miles into downtown Lincoln. The MoPac Trail West travels through many neighborhoods in Lincoln and helps connect the two campuses of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

ANTELOPE VALLEY TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	2.1 / 1.0
Surface Type	Concrete, crushed stone
Trail Manager	Lincoln Parks & Recreation
Website	lincoln.ne.gov/city/departments/parks-and-recreation/parks-facilities/trails
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/antelope-valley-trail

The Antelope Valley Trail runs roughly south to north through downtown Lincoln, with Lincoln High School to the south and Salt Creek to the north. The trail passes Trago Park, Union Park Plaza and the Bob Devaney Center.

SALT CREEK LEVEE TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	4.0 / 1.0
Surface Type	Crushed stone
Trail Manager	Lincoln Parks & Recreation
Website	lincoln.ne.gov/city/departments/parks-and-recreation/parks-facilities/trails
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/salt-creek-levee-trail

The Salt Creek Levee Trail connects a trail along the levee of Salt Creek from its confluence with Oak Creek down to the Jamaica North Trail. The Great American Rail-Trail will utilize the northern mile of the Salt Creek Levee Trail connecting the Antelope Valley Trail to the Oak Lake Connector Trail at a bridge crossing Salt Creek.

OAK LAKE CONNECTOR TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	1.4 / 0.8
Surface Type	Asphalt
Trail Manager	Lincoln Parks & Recreation
Website	lincoln.ne.gov/city/departments/parks-and-recreation/parks-facilities/trails
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/oak-lake-connector-trail-

The Oak Lake Connector Trail travels around Oak Lake Park along Charleston and North 1st streets in Lincoln, connecting to a shared-use path along North 1st Street at U.S. 6/Cornhusker Highway.

NORTH 1ST STREET TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	1.5 / 1.5
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Manager	Lincoln Parks & Recreation
Website	lincoln.ne.gov/city/departments/parks-and-recreation/parks-facilities/trails
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/north-1st-street-trail-

A shared-use path runs along the length of North 1st Street from U.S. 6/Cornhusker Highway northwest to Superior Street. The trail is made of concrete and is approximately 10 feet wide, running along the northbound lane of North 1st Street.

SUPERIOR STREET TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	4.4 / 0.2
Surface Type	Asphalt
Trail Manager	Lincoln Parks & Recreation
Website	lincoln.ne.gov/city/departments/parks-and-recreation/parks-facilities/trails
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/superior-street-trail

A 0.2-mile section of the Superior Street Trail will host the Great American Rail-Trail between North 1st Street and a connection to the Highlands Trail at Technology Drive in Lincoln. The Superior Street Trail is primarily a commuter route following its namesake thoroughfare from U.S. 6/Cornhusker Highway to the Highlands neighborhood at the western edge of the city.

HIGHLANDS TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	2.6 / 1.3
Surface Type	Asphalt
Trail Manager	Lincoln Parks & Recreation
Website	lincoln.ne.gov/city/departments/parks-and-recreation/parks-facilities/trails
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/highlands-trail-(ne)

The Highlands Trail offers a pleasant 2.6-mile loop through Lincoln's Highlands neighborhood, providing the western link of the series of trails that travels through Lincoln. Those following the Great American Rail-Trail can follow the trail 1.3 miles along West Highland Boulevard and connect north along NW 12th Street to the Highlands Trail's terminus near NW 10th Street.

TRAIL GAP 56 – LINCOLN TO VALPARAISO

Planning Status	Unplanned
Funding Status	Unfunded
Construction Status/ Expected Completion Date	TBD

In 2024, a local committee formed to help identify potential corridors to help fill the gap between the Highlands Trail in Lincoln and the Oak Creek Trail in Valparaiso. One such potential corridor would be to develop a rail-with-trail along the active Union Pacific Railroad corridor connecting Lincoln north to Valparaiso. The corridor has a low traffic density, according to data from the Federal Railroad Administration in 2014.

The next step is to complete a feasibility study for this rail-with-trail alignment. Fundraising is underway to support this next step. The Lower Platte South Natural Resources District recently approved a letter of support for considering a rail-with-trail opportunity on this section of active rail line between Lincoln and Valparaiso.

OAK CREEK TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	13.0 / 13.0
Surface Type	Crushed stone
Trail Manager	Lower Platte South Natural Resources District
Website	lpsnrd.org/oak-creek-trail
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/oak-creek-trail

The Oak Creek Trail occupies a former Union Pacific Railroad corridor between the Nebraska villages of Valparaiso and Brainard. The trail travels 13 miles through Saunders and Butler counties. Across the county line is the tiny community of Loma, where restrooms are located just off the trail near the St. Luke Czech Catholic Shrine in the center of town. An equestrian trail runs adjacent to the Oak Creek Trail for its entire route, and horse trailer parking can be found at the trailheads in Valparaiso and Loma.

TRAIL GAP 57A – BRAINARD TO COLUMBUS

Planning Status	Partially planned
Funding Status	Unfunded
Construction Status/ Expected Completion Date	TBD

A 28-mile gap exists between Brainard and Columbus. The rail line on which the Oak Creek Trail was constructed between Valparaiso and Brainard extends northwest for an additional 10.5 miles to David City. The rail line is not officially abandoned and is currently under Nebraska Central Railroad Company ownership, though Federal Railroad Administration data from 2014 shows no rail traffic along this corridor. If this section is ever officially abandoned, Butler County and the local natural resource districts should seek to extend the Oak Creek Trail northwest to David City. As the rail line to David City crosses through the jurisdiction of three natural resource districts (Lower Platte South, Upper Big Blue and Lower Platte North, respectively), a trail development and management partnership could be pursued.

From David City, an active BNSF Railway line continues north through Columbus, Nebraska, and has a traffic density of two out of five, according to 2014 Federal Railroad Administration data. The Lower Platte North Natural Resources District recently approved a letter of support for considering a rail-with-trail opportunity on this section of active rail line between David City and Columbus.

THIRD AVENUE VIADUCT TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	1.0 / 1.0
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Manager	City of Columbus
Website	columbusnetrails.com
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/third-avenue-viaduct-trail

The 3rd Avenue viaduct was an infrastructure project decades in the making. Prior to its completion, travelers heading north or south along 3rd Avenue between 8th Street and U.S. 30 were forced to cross a tangle of Union Pacific Railroad tracks at street level. The finished viaduct, which opened in August 2018, includes a concrete path between 8th and 19th streets (just south of U.S. 30), ensuring safe passage over the tracks for drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians. The trail is part of a trail network in Columbus known as CART (Columbus Area Recreational Trails).

TRAIL GAP 57B – COLUMBUS

Planning Status	Partially planned
Funding Status	Unfunded
Construction Status/ Expected Completion Date	TBD

The city of Columbus and CART are working together to complete a network of trails through Columbus, including an approximately 4-mile connection between the Third Avenue Viaduct Trail and the Robert White Trail. The new connection would follow 3rd Avenue north and the existing canal northwest before intersecting with the Robert White Trail at the Lake Babcock Reservoir.

ROBERT WHITE TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	1.5 / 1.5
Surface Type	Crushed stone
Trail Manager	City of Columbus
Website	columbusnetrails.com
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/robert-white-trail

In Columbus, the Robert White Trail runs 1.5 miles between 18th Avenue/Monastery Road and the start of the Bob Lake Trail at the intersection of 65th and 68th streets. The trail follows the southern shore of Lake Babcock for its duration.

BOB LAKE TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	1.2 / 1.2
Surface Type	Crushed stone
Trail Manager	City of Columbus
Website	columbusnetrails.com
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/bob-lake-trail

The Bob Lake Trail runs 1.2 miles between the northern terminus of the Robert White Trail at 65th and 68th streets, south of 83rd Street. The trail follows the southwestern shore of Lake Babcock for part of its route.

TRAIL GAP 57C – COLUMBUS TO NORFOLK

Planning Status	Partially planned
Funding Status	Partially funded
Construction Status/ Expected Completion Date	TBD

The city of Columbus plans to construct a trail extending from the Bob Lake Trail westward along the canal to at least 63rd Avenue. From 63rd Avenue, the trail would continue north toward Norfolk. 2014 data from the Federal Railroad Administration lists a local Nebraska Central Railroad Company rail line to Norfolk as active, but shows no rail traffic along the corridor. If this section is ever officially abandoned, local natural resource districts should seek to transform it into a trail as well. Alternative options, including low-volume county roads, should be explored in the meantime to make this 46-mile connection in the interim.

COWBOY RECREATION AND NATURE TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	220.3 / 220.3
Surface Type	Concrete, crushed stone
Trail Manager	Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Website	bikecowboytrail.com outdoornebraska.gov/cowboytrail
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/cowboy-recreation-and-nature-trail

The Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail (“Cowboy Trail”) is one of the country’s longest rail-trails. The Cowboy Trail was designated as a National Recreational Trail as part of the National Park Service’s National Trails System in 2001. When it is fully complete, the trail will extend more than 300 miles between the cities of Norfolk and Chadron. Two segments of the Cowboy Trail are currently complete: 203.7 miles between Norfolk and Valentine, and 16.6 miles between Gordon and Rushville.

The Cowboy Trail was created when a major corridor of the Chicago and North Western Transportation Company (originally part of the Fremont, Elkhorn and Missouri Valley Railroad) was abandoned in 1992. RTC purchased the railroad right-of-way and donated it to the state of Nebraska. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission now owns the entire corridor between Norfolk and mile marker 400, about 5 miles east of downtown Chadron.

Maintenance of the Cowboy Trail has historically been underfunded at the state level. This situation leaves parts of the Cowboy Trail in rough but passable shape, particularly as the trail passes through the more remote sections of completed trail on the western end. The trail has not been entirely resurfaced since it was first completed in the late 1990s, and short sections could be rough from washboarding. Flooding in the spring of 2019 severely damaged portions of the Cowboy Trail, with repair costs estimated to top \$7.7 million. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is currently completing those repairs using funding from the state and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

TRAIL GAP 58 – COWBOY RECREATION AND NATURE TRAIL EXTENSION (VALENTINE TO GORDON)

Planning Status	Partially planned
Funding Status	Partially funded
Construction Status/ Expected Completion Date	TBD

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission owns a former rail corridor between the existing trailheads in Valentine and Gordon that was never officially surfaced as part of the Cowboy Trail. The commission has been hesitant to complete construction on this 90-mile section of trail until dedicated and stable funding is made available by the Nebraska Legislature for ongoing operations and maintenance of the entire Cowboy Trail.

Between Valentine and Merriman (approximately 61 miles), the bridges are decked and the remaining activities to open the trail include mowing, grading and surfacing with crushed stone. Ballast and railroad ties are still present on the remaining 30 miles between Merriman and Gordon, and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is preparing to remove the ballast when resources allow. The bridges along the section between Merriman and Gordon still need to be decked as well. Completing the entire Cowboy Trail will go a long way toward making the Great American Rail-Trail a reality and providing economic development assistance to the small towns that settled along the former rail corridor.

TRAIL GAP 59A – COWBOY RECREATION AND NATURE TRAIL EXTENSION (RUSHVILLE TO CHADRON)

Planning Status	Fully planned
Funding Status	Fully funded
Construction Status/ Expected Completion Date	Construction expected in 2026 and 2027

Cowboy Trail West Inc. is working to support the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to complete the western 25.9 miles of the Cowboy Trail from Rushville to mile marker 400, east of Chadron. Cowboy Trail West completed and maintains the existing western section of the Cowboy Trail between Gordon and Rushville in Sheridan County.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission recently rehabilitated the bridges along the Cowboy Trail between Rushville and mile marker 400. The commission also obtained a Transportation Alternatives grant to complete surfacing of this section, which is likely to be completed in 2026 or 2027.

TRAIL GAP 59B – COWBOY TRAIL CONNECTION (CHADRON)

Planning Status	Partially planned
Funding Status	Partially funded
Construction Status/ Expected Completion Date	Some sections under construction and expected in 2026; remaining sections TBD

The Northwest Nebraska Trails Association (NNTA) is working closely with the city of Chadron and Nebraska Northwestern Railroad to complete roughly 5.8 miles of trail to connect the end of the Cowboy Trail at mile marker 400 into downtown Chadron. Nebraska Northwestern Railroad has issued an easement for a rail-with-trail along the active rail line to complete this gap, and NNTA and the city of Chadron have entered into a memorandum of understanding agreement for the eventual completion and management of the trail. Partial engineering documents were completed in 2021, and NNTA and the city of Chadron are currently raising funds for trail construction. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has awarded NNTA \$528,540 in Recreational Trails Program grants for development of this trail gap.



*Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail |
Photo by TrailLink user lisa.jarnigan*

TRAIL GAP 60 – CHADRON TO CRAWFORD

Planning Status	Unplanned
Funding Status	Unfunded
Construction Status/ Expected Completion Date	TBD

An active Canadian Pacific Railway corridor runs between the cities of Chadron and Crawford. The line has a low traffic density, according to data from the Federal Railroad Administration in 2014. There is no abandoned rail option to complete an off-road trail between Chadron and the existing White River Trail in Crawford. While a feasible off-road multiuse trail option connecting this 26.3-mile gap continues to be explored, a temporary interim on-road connector can be made using various low-volume county roads in Dawes County.

WHITE RIVER TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Neb. (in Miles)	2.8 / 2.8
Surface Type	Ballast
Trail Managers	City of Crawford, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Website	outdoornebraska.gov/fortrobinson
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/white-river-trail

The White River Trail runs along a former Chicago and North Western Transportation Company corridor for 2.8 miles, starting in Crawford and ending at Fort Robinson State Park. Fort Robinson encompasses the fort and military camp that was home to the Red Cloud Agency in the 1870s. The agency served as an issuing point for supplies to the Oglala Lakota tribe of the Great Sioux Nation, as well as the Northern Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes, authorized in exchange for land ceded to the United States in 1868.

Fort Robinson is also the site of Crazy Horse's surrender and death in 1877, and visitors can find a historical plaque that marks the location. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission handles the ongoing operations and maintenance of the White River Trail, while the city of Crawford maintains the portion of the trail outside of Fort Robinson State Park.

TRAIL GAP 61 – WHITE RIVER TRAIL EXTENSION (CRAWFORD TO NEBRASKA-WYOMING STATE LINE)

Planning Status	Partially planned
Funding Status	Partially funded
Construction Status/ Expected Completion Date	TBD

The former Chicago and North Western Transportation Company corridor that traveled along the White River in Nebraska and Niobrara River in Wyoming was severely damaged in a flood in 1991. Twenty miles of track and 45 bridges were destroyed along the corridor, and rail service never recovered after the storm. Local rail advocates were insistent upon the railbed being turned into a trail once it was no longer viable for rail traffic. The existing 3 miles of the White River Trail are the result of those efforts.

The remainder of the rail corridor between Fort Robinson State Park and Van Tassell, Wyoming, is under the ownership of the Friends of the White River Trail, which includes 34 miles in Nebraska. The friends group intends to hold on to the ownership of the rail corridor until resources become available to complete construction of the trail and keep it maintained.

Representatives from Chief Dull Knife College are currently working with the Northern Cheyenne tribe to develop a 3-mile trail from the Cheyenne Breakout barracks at Fort Robinson to the monument created to commemorate the Cheyenne Breakout of January 1879. It will be called the Healing Trail and will incorporate about 2 to 2.5 miles of the railbed west of Fort Robinson. In 2021, the Northern Cheyenne Breakout Committee received a grant from the National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program to support the development of the Northern Cheyenne Healing Trail. Funding from the Mellon Foundation is helping to support current design efforts, which are expected to be completed by the end of 2025, upon which time fundraising can occur for final project construction.

Any future trail connecting the 34.1-mile gap from Crawford to the Nebraska-Wyoming border needs to connect to a trail on the Wyoming side. Potential trail connections in Wyoming are discussed in Trail Gap 62a in the Wyoming chapter of this report.

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.