

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL®

ROUTE ASSESSMENT REPORT
MAY 2025

RAILS TO
Trails
conservancy

PENNSYLVANIA



Three Rivers Heritage Trail | Photo by Renee Rosensteel

The Great American Rail-Trail route through Pennsylvania connects several existing trails with one trail gap just west of Pittsburgh. By connecting the trail through Pittsburgh, the Great American Rail-Trail also connects to the Industrial Heartland Trails Coalition (IHTC), a vision for a 1,500-mile network of trails that is part of RTC’s TrailNation™ portfolio. The IHTC network will stretch across 51 counties in four states—Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio and New York—from the shores of Lake Erie to the confluence of the three rivers in Pittsburgh and on to the Ohio River and Appalachian foothills.

TABLE 6: GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL MILEAGE IN PENNSYLVANIA

| | |
|---|---------------|
| Total Great American Rail-Trail Existing Trail Miles in Pa. (% of Total State Mileage) | 162.7 (94.3%) |
| Total Great American Rail-Trail Gap Miles in Pa. (% of Total State Mileage) | 9.8 (5.7%) |
| Total Trail Gaps in Pa. | 1 |
| Total Great American Rail-Trail Miles in Pa. | 172.5 |

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT 2025

MAP 3: PENNSYLVANIA

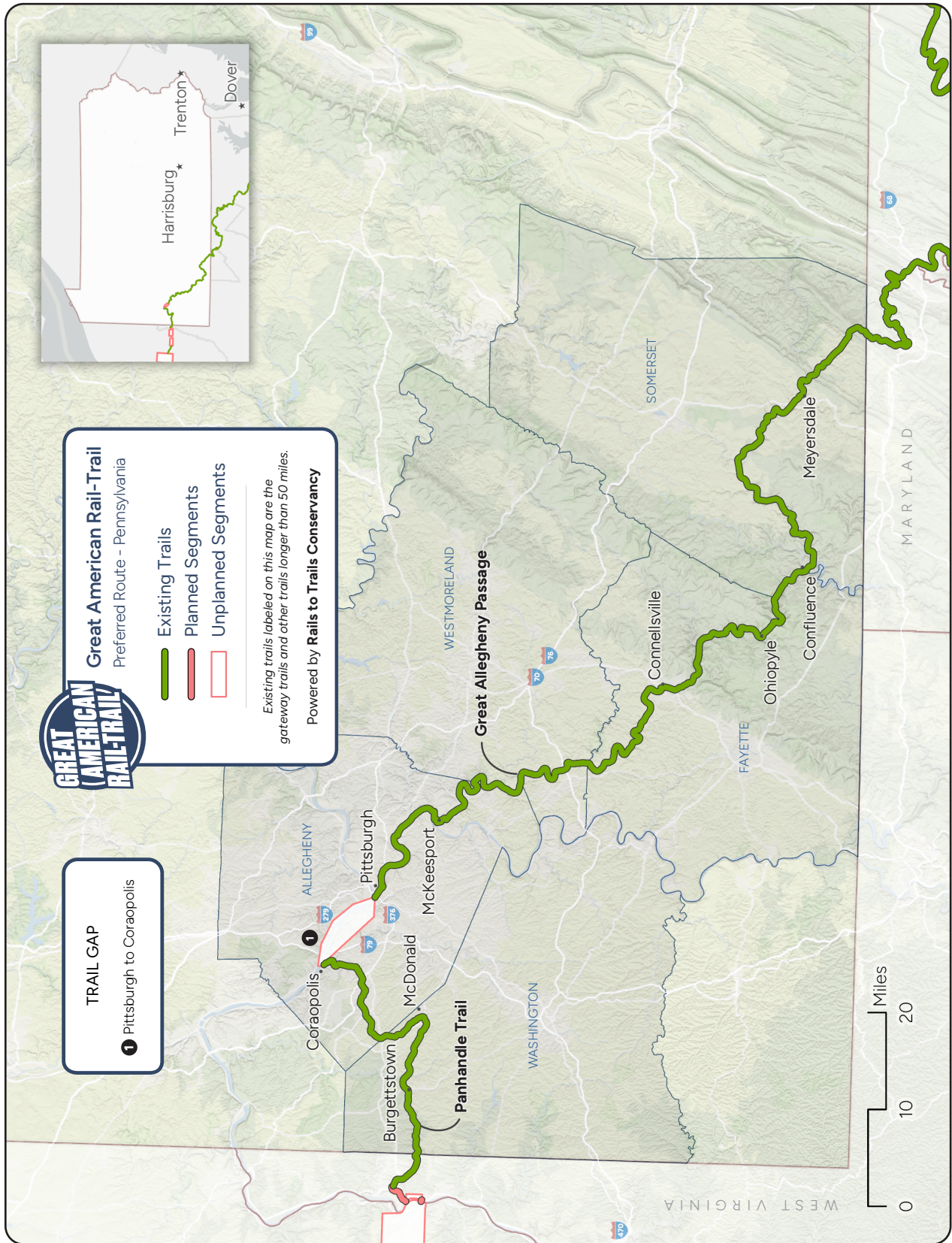


TABLE 7: GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE THROUGH PENNSYLVANIA

| Existing Trail or Trail Gap Name | Length in Pa. Along Great American Rail-Trail (in Miles) |
|---|---|
| Great Allegheny Passage | 124.7 |
| Three Rivers Heritage Trail | 3.6 |
| TRAIL GAP 1 – Pittsburgh to Coraopolis | 9.8 |
| Montour Trail | 18.4 |
| Panhandle Trail | 16.0 |
| Total Miles | 172.5 |
| Existing Trail Miles | 162.7 |
| Trail Gap Miles | 9.8 |

GREAT ALLEGHENY PASSAGE

| | |
|---|---|
| Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Pa. (in Miles) | 145.2 / 124.7 |
| Surface Type | Asphalt, crushed stone |
| Trail Managers | Allegheny County, City of Pittsburgh, Friends of the Riverfront, Great Allegheny Passage Conservancy, Ohiopyle State Park, Point State Park, Regional Trail Corporation (Yough Trail Council, Whitsett-Fayette Yough Trail Council, McKeesport Trail Commission and Steel Valley Trail Council), Somerset County, Somerset County Rails-to-Trails Association |
| Website | gaptrail.org |
| TrailLink Map | traillink.com/trail/great-allegheny-passage |

Just after crossing into Pennsylvania from Maryland, the GAP reaches the Eastern Continental Divide at 2,392 feet above sea level. The GAP features several great engineering feats, including the newly restored 849-foot-long Pinkerton Tunnel; the 101-foot-high Salisbury Viaduct, which spans more than 1,900 feet; and the 3,294-foot-long Big Savage Tunnel, and passes through the trail towns of Meyersdale, Rockwood, Confluence, Ohiopyle, Connellsville, West Newton and Boston.

THREE RIVERS HERITAGE TRAIL

| | |
|---|--|
| Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Pa. (in Miles) | 25.0 / 3.6 |
| Surface Type | Asphalt, concrete |
| Trail Manager | Friends of the Riverfront |
| Website | friendsoftheriverfront.org |
| TrailLink Map | traillink.com/trail/three-rivers-heritage-trail |

Since its inception in 1991, Friends of the Riverfront has been a pioneering organization working to protect and restore the Pittsburgh region's rivers and riverfronts after decades of legacy pollution. The Three Rivers Heritage Trail now encompasses 25 miles of urban riverfront trails along both banks of the mighty Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio rivers.

The Three Rivers Heritage Trail connects to the GAP at the Hot Metal Bridge and continues northwest through Riverfront Park along the Monongahela River. The trail then travels through Station Square, a shopping and entertainment complex occupying buildings once used by the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad. From where the GAP ends at Point State Park, the Three Rivers Heritage Trail continues across the Fort Pitt Bridge to the North Shore Trail and continues down the Chateau Trail.

TRAIL GAP 1 – PITTSBURGH TO CORAOPOLIS

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

Friends of the Riverfront, the Pennsylvania Environmental Council and Allegheny County, along with its partner organizations, have explored various options to connect the Three Rivers Heritage Trail to the Montour Trail between Pittsburgh and Coraopolis. Options to complete the trail connection along the southern shore of the Ohio River are in the planning stages. Currently, signs mark the route along Neville Road as an on-road portion of the Three Rivers Heritage Trail. In the fall of 2020, Trail Gap 1 was shortened by a 0.8-mile extension of the Montour Trail into Coraopolis. Riverlife, a nonprofit organization working to redevelop Pittsburgh's downtown riverfronts, is leading planning efforts for a trail extension from Station Square northwest to the West End Bridge, which would close this gap by about a half-mile.

MONTOUR TRAIL

| | |
|---|---|
| Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail- Trail in Pa.(in Miles) | 46.0 / 18.4 |
| Surface Type | Asphalt, crushed stone |
| Trail Managers | Montour Trail Council, Peters Township Parks & Recreation |
| Website | montourtrail.org |
| TrailLink Map | traillink.com/trail/ montour-trail |

The Montour Trail follows a portion of the old Montour Railroad, which was built between 1877 and 1914 to link the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad with the region's many coal mines. Forming a semicircle around Pittsburgh, the Montour Railroad also connected to other railroads, including the Pennsylvania Railroad, Pittsburgh and West Virginia Railway, Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and Union Railroad. Both the trail and railroad are named for the creek that runs alongside them. Highlights of the trail include the 500-foot Enlow Tunnel in Findlay Township and the 900-foot-plus McDonald Trestle. In the fall of 2020, the Montour Trail was extended by 0.8 mile into Coraopolis.

PANHANDLE TRAIL

| | |
|--|--|
| Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail- Trail in Pa. (in Miles) | 28.3 / 16.0 |
| Surface Type | Asphalt, crushed stone |
| Trail Managers | Collier Friends of the Panhandle Trail, Montour Trail Council, Washington County Parks & Recreation Department |
| Website | panhandletrail.org |
| TrailLink Map | traillink.com/trail/ panhandle-trail |

A Conrail line known as the Panhandle Railroad once connected Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to Cincinnati, Ohio; Chicago, Illinois; and St. Louis, Missouri. The portion of the rail corridor between Carnegie, Pennsylvania, and Weirton, West Virginia, is now a 29.2-mile multiuse trail known as the Panhandle Trail, which connects with the Montour Trail in McDonald, Pennsylvania. The Panhandle Trail features many small bridge crossings as it cuts through the rolling and occasionally rocky hillside.

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.