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BUILD America 250 Act Poses Challenges for America's Active Transportation Future

The surface transportation bill released by the U.S. House of Representatives' Transportation & Infrastructure Committee protects legacy active transportation programs, while failing to prioritize the infrastructure needed to make walking and biking more functional

WASHINGTON—Although the surface transportation bill released this week by the U.S. House of Representatives' Transportation & Infrastructure Committee protects legacy active transportation programs, policy changes in **the bill will make it harder for places to build out the connected active transportation infrastructure Americans want and need**, according to Rails to Trails Conservancy, the nation's largest trails, walking and biking advocacy organization.

"While the House T&I Committee's BUILD America 250 Act doesn't represent the draconian cuts to active transportation initially threatened, **it is not a victory lap**," said Kevin Mills, RTC's vice president of policy. "It is clear in the bill text that Congress understands the **importance of connectivity to a functional transportation system**—bridges to nowhere don't move people or goods. Yet, the bill fails to provide the policies and investment needed to deliver the [connected walking and biking infrastructure that is essential](#) for everyone to safely navigate their communities, especially the 30% of Americans who do not drive."

"This bill poses challenges for America's active transportation future," said Mills. "Without dedicated funding for connecting active transportation networks, and policies that prioritize strategic investments in trails, protected bike lanes and sidewalks that close gaps in walking and biking routes, American families are still forced to navigate a patchwork system that puts their safety and the well-being of our communities at risk."

RTC's analysis of the bill found that the committee made a point to repeal the [Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program](#), or ATIIP, which was authorized under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and was the only dedicated source of funding for closing gaps in active transportation networks. The initial funding round of ATIIP grants was oversubscribed by a ratio of 40 to 1, underscoring the breadth of demand for connected active transportation infrastructure nationwide.

While the legacy [Transportation Alternatives \(TA\) program](#) remains intact, **the new bill makes it easier for states to transfer money out of TA to other unintended uses**, a proven way to reduce spending power for active transportation projects. Under IIJA, the law limited opportunities to transfer funding out of the program, requiring states to demonstrate insufficient demand. These requirements pushed states to fully implement the program, which created opportunities for those with larger funding shares to make more strategic investments in connecting active transportation infrastructure. For example, in Texas, where IIJA inspired a [restructuring of the state's TA program to prioritize investments in connectivity](#), available funds were dramatically oversubscribed, demonstrating the depth of demand for connected, functional walking and biking routes that would otherwise not have been met in a state long prone to transfers.

A new program included in the House bill, the Surface Transportation Accelerator Grant (STAG), has focused goals of improving connectivity, safety and quality of life. Under the program, eligibility for active

transportation networks for rural geographies is ambiguous. This will likely have an influence on whether rural active transportation networks will be prioritized, limiting the benefit to rural Americans. In fact, more than 1 in 4 of the nation's developing trail networks serve rural counties. Grants made under IIJA further demonstrate rural demand for connected walking and biking routes across rural communities. [RAISE/BUILD](#) alone invested \$2.3 billion in rural walking and biking projects, representing more than 45% of the total share of the program's grant funding that went to walking and biking.

Decades of federal, state and local investment has established a foundation for the nation's active transportation system that includes over 42,500 miles of multiuse trails, hundreds of developing trail and active transportation networks, and an annual economic impact of more than \$34 billion. Current public funding falls far short of the scale of demand and urgency to provide safe walking and biking routes nationwide. Programs that invest in this infrastructure are woefully oversubscribed, limiting progress that directly correlates with the safety, economic opportunity, and quality of life of Americans across rural, urban and suburban communities. RTC's [federal policy agenda](#) outlines a strategy to build the nation's essential walking and biking infrastructure through investment and policy reform to deliver the active transportation infrastructure America needs.

Rails to Trails Conservancy is the nation's largest trails organization—with a grassroots community more than 1 million strong—dedicated to building a nation connected by trails, reimagining public spaces to create safe ways for everyone to walk, bike and be active outdoors. Connect with RTC at railstotrails.org and [@railstotrails](#) on social media.