

Phases of Trail Tourism Readiness			
Phase	Definition	Common Characteristics	Examples From The Field
<i>In Development</i>	Communities in this phase may not yet have a completed trail, or may have trails that are still under development or only partially open. These places have strong potential for trail discovery, but the infrastructure, visibility and visitor services needed to support tourism are limited, fragmented or not yet in place. Community assets and experiences are minimally marketed and often have low visibility—even locally. Visitor use is primarily informal or incidental, and tourism is not yet a focus. Communities at this stage can start planning for future amenities, marketing efforts and partnerships that will eventually support tourism at the local or regional scale.	- Trail infrastructure is incomplete, newly developed or minimally used - Trail and/or region not yet well known - Limited coordinated tourism messaging - Few visitor amenities (e.g., limited wayfinding or basic services)	In Manhattan, Montana, a local cattle-brand inspector is organizing a citizen-led effort to connect an existing 2-mile section of trail eastward to the Headwaters Trail System. A federal grant is supporting early work to develop the corridor, which will contribute to trail tourism opportunities in this part of Montana along the Great American Rail-Trail®.
<i>Local Favorite</i>	Communities may have a trail that is physically established and open for use, but caters mostly to nearby residents. The community has assets it promotes, though not heavily. Visitor amenities are minimal or uneven. The experience may lack a clear identity, cohesive branding or other features that would attract a wider audience. The trail adds to local quality of life, but is not yet positioned to attract or be promoted to a wider market. Many Great American Rail-Trail communities will find themselves at this stage. They have strong community support and local use while they work to convert that momentum into visitor readiness.	- Trail is open and functional - Trail is used frequently by residents - Trail and/or outdoor recreation is not yet viewed as an economic driver - Promotion of trail and/or region relies primarily on word-of-mouth marketing - Insufficient visitor amenities	An existing 3-mile section of the White River Trail in Crawford, Nebraska, is part of a developing 30+ mile trail connection west into Wyoming. The completed trail is a local favorite, popular with families and providing a nonmotorized connection between downtown Crawford and nearby Fort Robinson State Park. As trail mileage is completed and tourism amenities developed, it has the potential to deliver significant economic benefit to the region.
<i>Regional Destination</i>	Communities in this stage have developed a tourism approach. Visitation has moved beyond local use and toward regional visits, offering a more complete visitor experience. The community supports its trail tourism assets with recognizable branding, established amenities and a hospitality culture. The existing trails and trail network are integrated into the community and are part of a connected regional brand, though the scale of community assets may not yet be ready to accommodate a national audience. Communities in this phase are fully participating in the emerging regional travel patterns of the Great American Rail-Trail. Communities at this stage benefit from increased visibility, stronger partnerships and a clearer sense of identity.	- Consistent trailheads with amenities and wayfinding - Strong trail identity with recognizable branding - Local trail promotion - Trail is activated with programming, events and other activities led organically by organizations and businesses - Used by visitors from within the region who spend money locally	Wallace, Idaho, sits along the Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes, an 80-mile paved rail-trail in the Idaho panhandle. Its smooth surface and high-quality amenities attract visitors from across the region. Wallace leverages the trail to build economic opportunity, for example, this town of fewer than 1,000 residents offers multiple hotels and restaurants easily accessible from the trail.
<i>National Destination</i>	This is the most advanced stage. The community and its regional neighbors have established a fully developed trail tourism strategy and cross-sector partnerships to attract a national audience. Trails and related assets are widely recognized as high-quality outdoor experiences and are supported by robust infrastructure, visitor services and programming. Communities in this phase offer compelling, well-marketed, trail-based experiences capable of supporting multiday trips and attracting national and international visitors. The community has fully integrated trail promotion into its tourism ecosystem, supported by trained staff and strong marketing. The community's active visitor management practices protect both community character and the quality of the trail experience. These communities exemplify what is possible along the Great American Rail-Trail: a fully realized trail destination that supports multiday travel, generates significant economic impact and tells a compelling local story.	- Leading piece of the regional tourism strategy and a main reason why people visit - Well-documented economic benefits that are used to justify continued investment in the trail and trail tourism - Abundance of trail-specific amenities throughout the community	The Great Allegheny Passage (gaptrail.org) in Pennsylvania and Maryland is a premier national destination for long-distance trail tourism. The region brands itself as an outdoor recreation hub, rooted in the power of the trail system, and people using the trail benefit from highly coordinated signage and wayfinding directing them to businesses and commercial amenities easily accessible to the trail. Well-documented evidence of the trail's strong economic development benefits reinforce the impact and make the case for future investment.