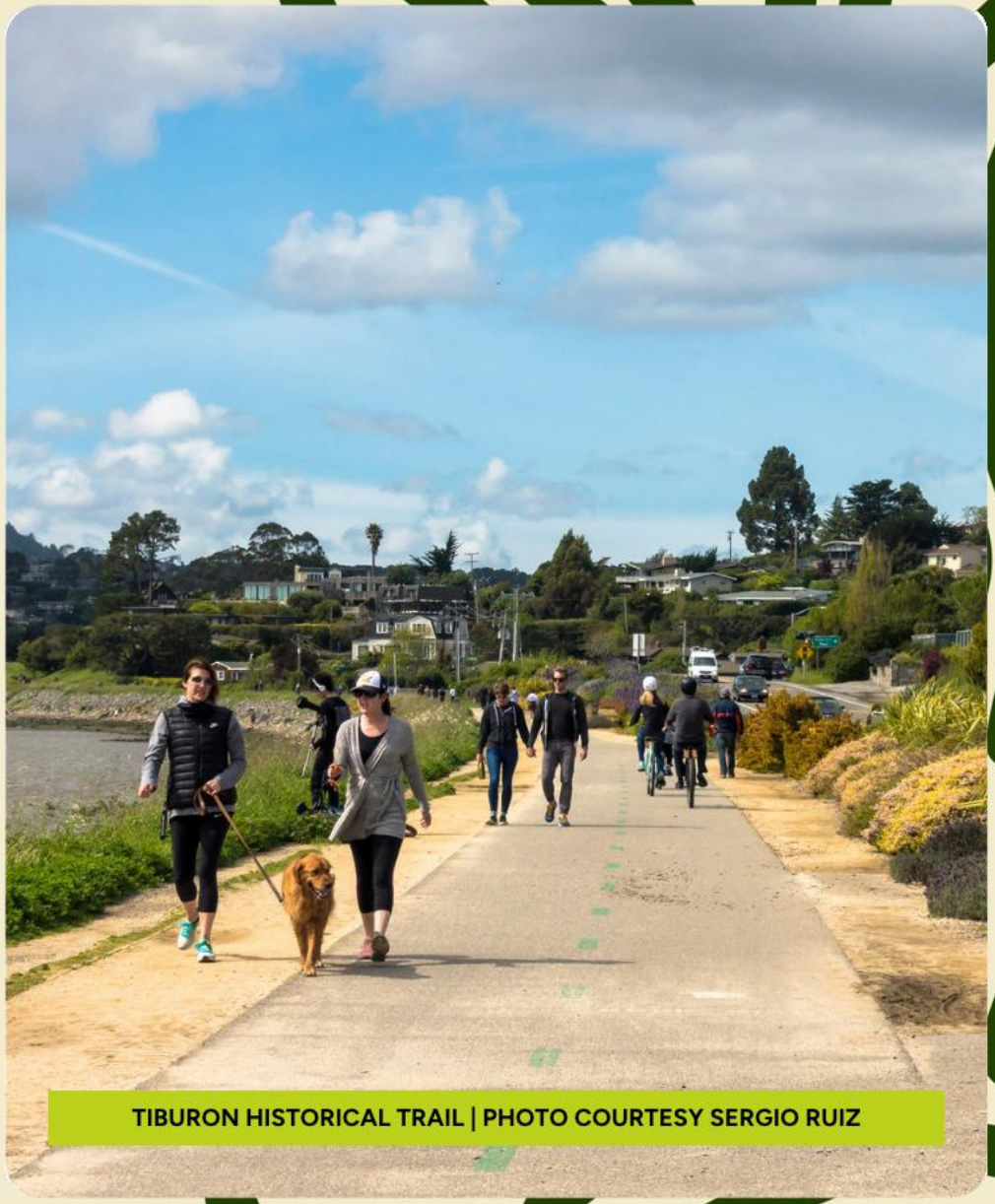
NOVEMBER 18, 2026

State Legislative Landscape:

Building Your 2027 Agenda for Walking, Biking and Trails



TIBURON HISTORICAL TRAIL | PHOTO COURTESY SERGIO RUIZ

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APA AICP CM

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State Legislative Landscape: Building Your 2027 Agenda for Walking, Biking and Trails

Event # #9339452

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Today's Team



Andrew Dupuy
Director of State-Level Policy, RTC



Brantley Tyndall
Director of Bike Walk RVA, Sports Backers



Lane Santa Cruz
Vice Mayor of Tucson, AZ

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Rails to Trails Conservancy: State Policy

- Advocates for funding for active transportation infrastructure & networks – including trails – from state legislatures, governors, state DOTs & TPWD (or equivalent), ballot measures.
- RTC is nation's leading trails organization that's a national leader among active & multimodal transportation advocates on state policy
- RTC supports state and local partners. 35+ states in last decade. Work has supported billions of $ in new state funding, in addition to additional funding that was renewed or defended against attacks/cuts.
- Offers successful policy and tactical examples from other states, recognizing not one-size-fits-all

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Midterms: State and Local Results

Major wins for Democrats in Governorships

- Six states' governors changed from Republican to Democrat (AK, GA, IA, NV, OH, TX), which Dem-held KS still uncalled (Democrat has a slight lead). Democrats hold majority of Governorships.
- An additional 15 states elected new governors from same party.
    - New governors likely mean new nominees for secretaries of departments of Transportation and Natural Resources, policy agendas for governors and their agencies. (Even with a re-elected governor, a secretary may decide to leave post now.)

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Midterms: State Legislative Results

New Democratic Majorities in State Legislatures

- Democrats gained six new trifectas (AZ, MI, MN, NV, PA, WI)
- Flipped at least a dozen legislative chambers (including lower chambers in GA, NC, TX) and gained supermajorities in 4 chambers (CO, NV, NY, VT)
- Broke several GOP trifectas and supermajorities in 11 chambers (within 8 states)
- Impact: even though trails have been a bipartisan issue, new members and leadership may have appetite for funding that didn't previously exist.
- Impact: New leadership (House speaker/Senate leader) will appoint new committee chairs & members.

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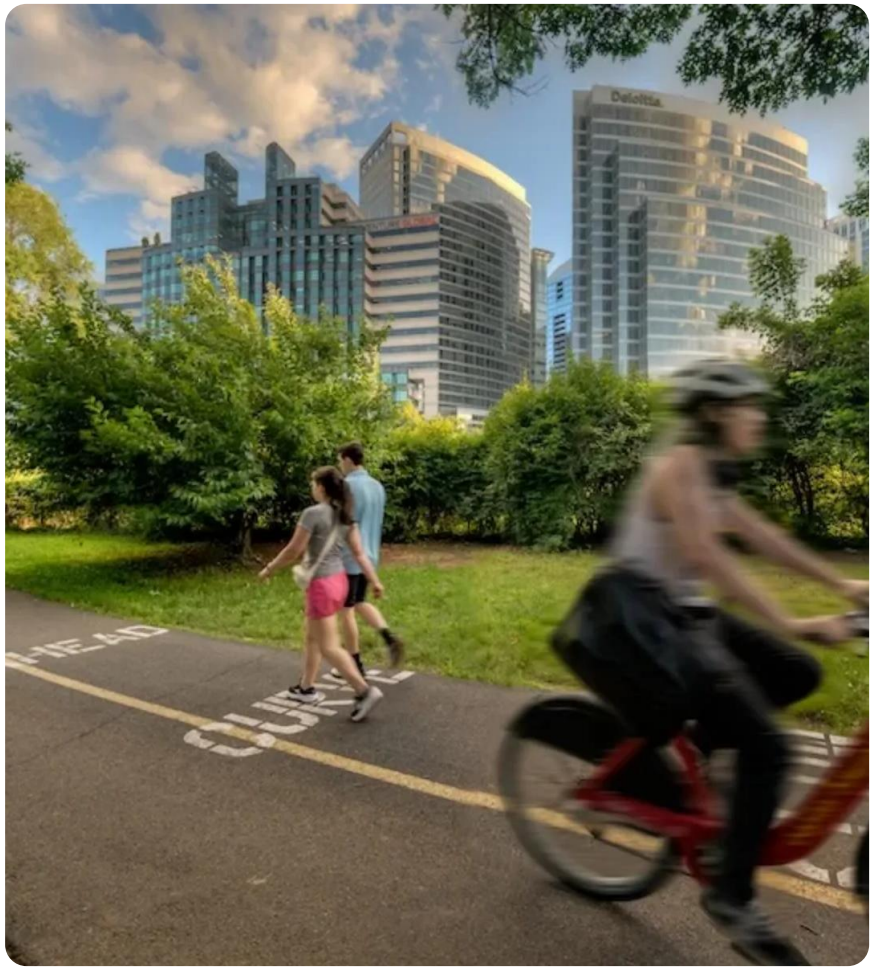
State and Local Ballot Measures

- In last few years, state legislatures have not appropriated as much new funding for active transportation, including trails, as in 2010s. Voters, however, have continued to do so at the ballot box.

- In 2026, 12 of 15 ballot measures, in 10 states, supported by RTC passed. (November-only: 10 of 13, in 8 states.) These accounted for at least $360 million in identified funding for bicycling, pedestrian, and trail infrastructure, with trails and other active transportation eligible within an additional $3.7 *billion* in funding for open space conservation, outdoor recreation, etc.



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State and Local Ballot Measures (cont.)

- Ballot measures supported by ally and partner organizations were also popular. Voted passed:
    - 20 of 22 of Trust for Public Land's priority measures, accounting for $19 billion
    - 81-85% of transit measures highlighted by the American Public Transportation Association's CFTE
    - 81% of nearly 300 transportation measures tracked by American Road and Transportation Builders Association's Transportation Investment Advocacy Center



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Seize the Post-Election Moment

Influence agenda of governors-elect (especially, but not limited to, party flips)

- Suggest criteria – or even good/bad candidates – for new state DOT and DNR secretary
- Educate staff on importance and value (affordability, economic development, public health) of active transportation/trails so they're a higher priority
    - "Transportation is always 4th on a priority list of three, or 11th on Top 10 list."
- Identify relevant transition teams (links to Gov-elect sites: https://2026governortracker.bhfs.com/)
- Meet with Gov.-elect's policy advisors, top funders, etc.
- Make suggestions for executive draft budget

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2027 State Forecast & Agenda

- Budget forecasts (and analysis from enacted FY27 budgets) are a mixed bag
  - National Association of State Budget Officers called FY27 budgets “stable but constrained.”
  - Decent revenue projects may be offset by long-term structural obligations, Democrats’ wish lists
- Micromobility (e-bike and e-moto legislation) will be a hot topic, with good, bad & ugly bills.
- Elected official education, cultivation, advocacy
  - Find contacts for new Governor, advocate for pro-active transportation agenda, secretaries of DOT/DNR
  - Meet with new Speaker/Senate leader to educate them about importance of trails, request allies as chairs and members of relevant committees
  - Educate newly-elected members in your area, invite them to see local trail project.
- Consider future ballot measures, adding trails/active transportation/safety to proposed ones (i.e. transit)

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Working the Legislature

- Educate incoming leadership (Speaker, Senate leader) on value of trails/AT, and that committee chairs (Transportation, Natural Resources, Appropriations/Finance) should respect these issues
    - Work others who may become chairs or members of relevant committees
- Trails as bipartisan issue in divided legislatures
- Cultivate local members, new members, staff & invite to trail visits (weather permitting) before and early in Session



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Policy Models: Executive

- NY (2017): State of the State call for $200M to complete 750-mile, cross-state Empire State Trail
- IN (early 2020s): $180M for Next Level Trails program/Visionary Trails System
- PA (2026): Gov & DCNR $81M for trails & parks
- Various: Statewide trail plans done in-house by state TPWD/DNR equivalent or DOT
    - Strong preference for agency collaboration
    - Can also be mandated or funded by legislature, relatively inexpensive



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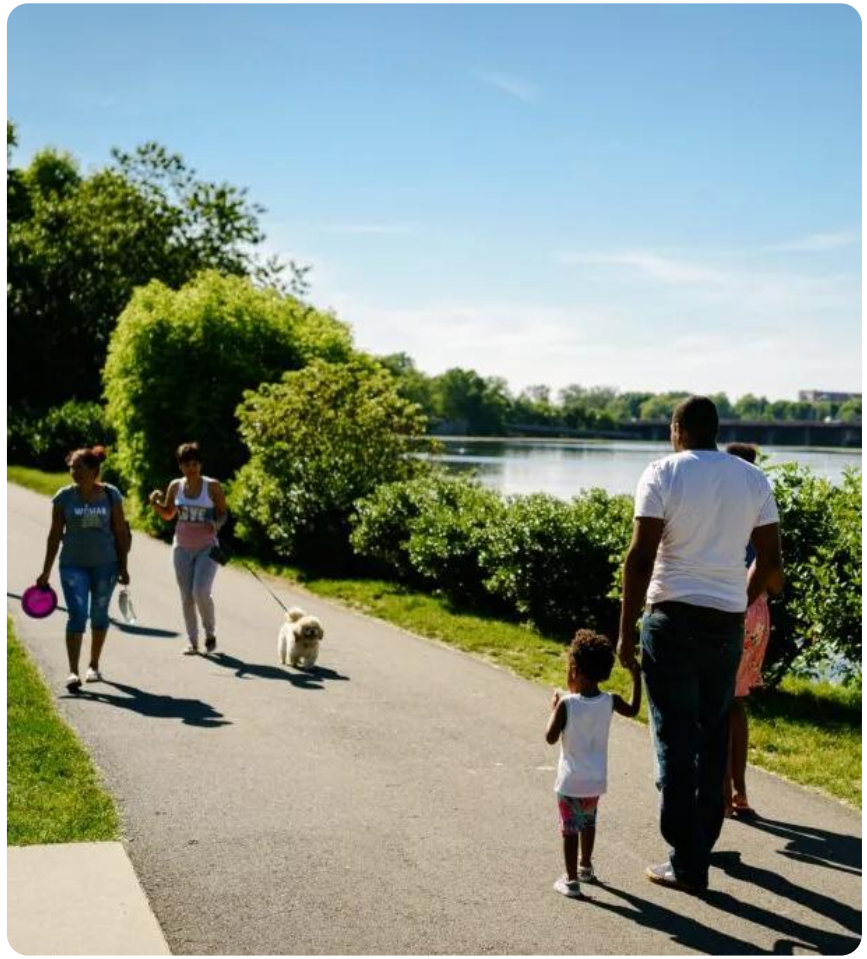
Policy Models: Legislative

- NC (2020s): Great Trails State program/coalition, multiple years of new funding, Year of the Trail, passed under Republican legislature/Democratic governors
- VA (2023): Split Legislature, Republican Governor passed $79M in new state funding, incl. creation of Office of Trails under DOT
- NE (2022): Legislature passed funding for two trails (Mopac & Cowboy) along Great American Rail Trail. Overrode one veto.
- CO & MN (2020s): Climate alignment DOT law can steer more existing funding to bike/ped/trail/transit with no fiscal note



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BUILDING YOUR 2027 AGENDA FOR TRAILS



FALL LINE

SPORTS BACKERS

RAILS TO TRAILS CONSERVANCY WEBINAR

Brantley Tyndall

Director of Bike Walk RVA, Sports Backers

President, Virginia Trails Alliance

SPORTS BACKERS



300k+
Event Attendees

3,000+
Youth in Fitness & Run Clubs

119
Active RVA Certified Companies & Schools

6,000+
Volunteers

62
Free Weekly Fitness Classes

ACTIVE LIVING MISSION



$400+m

Bike/ped funding since 2013

300

trained bike/ped advocates

150

miles of bike/ped added since 2013

7

local bike/ped plans passed

$50+m

Annual Economic Impact

Transforming our region into a premier destination where active living drives community forward - for visitors, for locals, for all.



BY THE NUMBERS

43 MILES

$300 MILLION RAISED

7 LOCALITIES

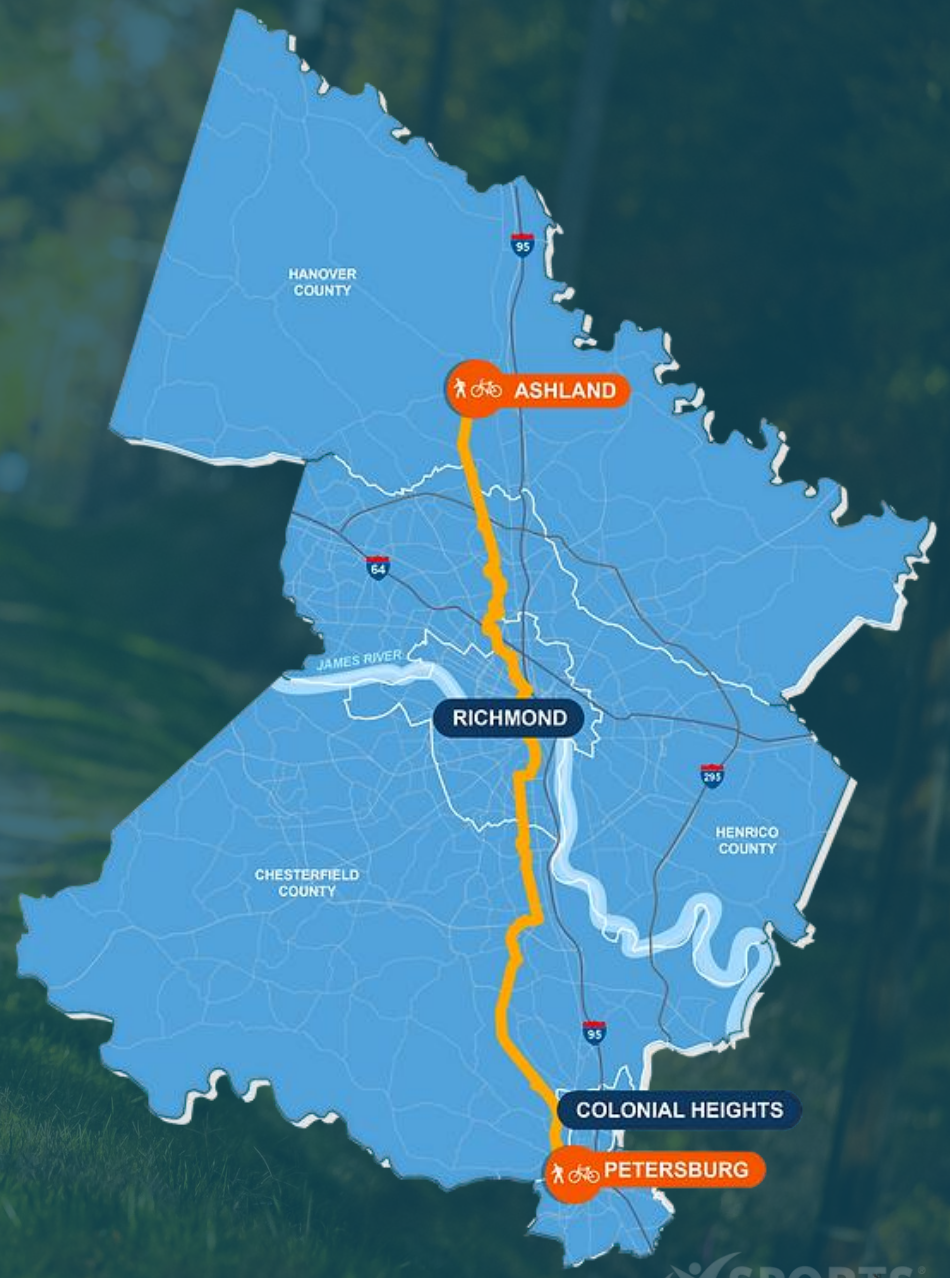
- 50+ ELECTED OFFICIALS

340,000 RESIDENTS

150,000 JOBS

95 PUBLIC SCHOOLS

- 6 UNIVERSITIES, INCL. 2 HBCUS



Let's GO!

New Governor

Ballot Initiatives

Funding

Policy

Staff



NEW GOVERNOR

Governors appoint members to Cabinet

- Secretary of Transportation
- Secretary of Natural Resources
- Secretary of Commerce and Trade

Usually are confirmed by Legislature

Secretaries often involved in campaign. Selection not very public.

VIRGINIA

2025:

Governor Abigail Spanberger picked trail supporters for Transportation and Natural Resources Secretaries

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BALLOT INITIATIVES

Funding options that must go to ballot include

- General Obligation Bonds
- Tax Increment Financing
- Special Tax Districts

VIRGINIA

2026:

Virginians passed three out of three ballot initiatives

- not for trails

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GENERAL FUNDS

Get in the State budget

Administrative route:

- Dept of Transportation's budget

Legislative Route:

- Budget Amendment

Can include creation of new taxes or using existing funds

VIRGINIA

2022:

Governor's budget sought $233m for 3 major trails

Ultimately led to $79m and created VDOT Office of Trails

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BONDS

Bonds are loans governments can take from the Bond Market. Your government's bond rating and market conditions determine feasibility of this option.

General Obligation bonds require ballot measure and are the simplest to construct.

- Restricted to specific capital projects
- Repaid with General Fund. Not free money, but almost feels like it!

VIRGINIA

2002:

General Obligation Bond passed Legislature and Popular Referendum

Established $119m for Parks

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STAFF

State Staff positions often created by legislature

- State Parks
  - planners and project managers
  - rangers
  - engineers
- Transportation Staff
  - admin
  - engineers
  - grant reviewers

VIRGINIA

2022:

Budget Amendment created three positions in VDOT State Trails Office and tasked them with creating State Trails Plan

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OTHER POLICY IDEAS

Funding authority:

- Collect special taxes for a specified purpose.

1% for the Arts model:

- Dedicate portions of projects to trails and active transportation

Public Private Partnership

- Economic Development deals open lots of possibilities

VIRGINIA

2020:

CVTA created by state legislation, VA's fourth transportation authority. Has funded Fall Line at $130m

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GODSPEED
and thank you
BRANTLEY@SPORTSBACKERS.ORG

Navigating Ballot Measures: Active Transportation & Local Governance

A Road Package That Moves People

How RTA Next built in walking, biking, transit and accessibility

Vice Mayor Lane Santa Cruz
City of Tucson, Ward 1



RTA Next in one minute

$2.67B

Regional transportation plan for Pima County

20 years

Funds projects from 2026 to 2046

March 2026

Approved by voters (Props 418 & 419)

Why some advocates said no

Track record

RTA 1 projects ran late, and money was moved between projects.

Roads vs. people

Worry that road widening would win over walking, biking and transit.

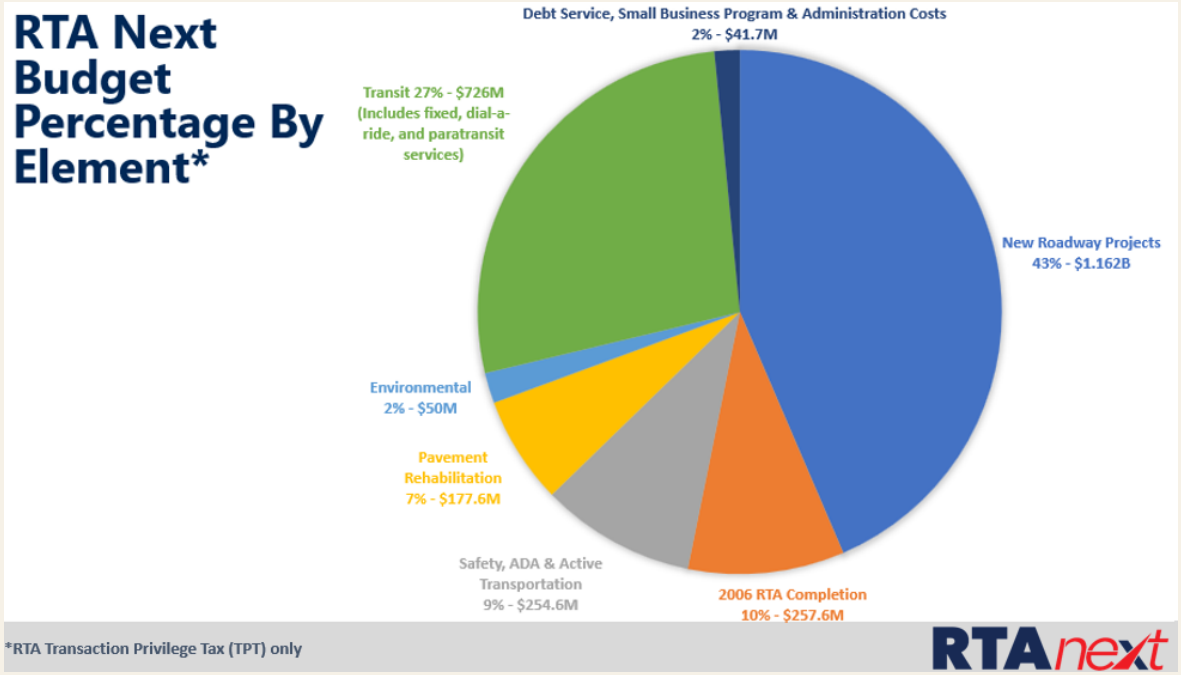
Fair representation

Tucson has the most people but one seat, one vote on the RTA Board.

A road package is a mobility package.

Nearly every roadway project includes bicycle and pedestrian improvements: sidewalks, bike lanes, crossings and ADA ramps.

Where the money goes



$254.6M

Safety, ADA & Active Transportation

$726M

Transit

$954M with other funds it unlocks

36%

of the plan, before counting bike and walk features inside road projects

Source: RTA Next budget, RTA outreach presentation, fall 2025

What it looks like: Valencia Rd & Nexus Rd





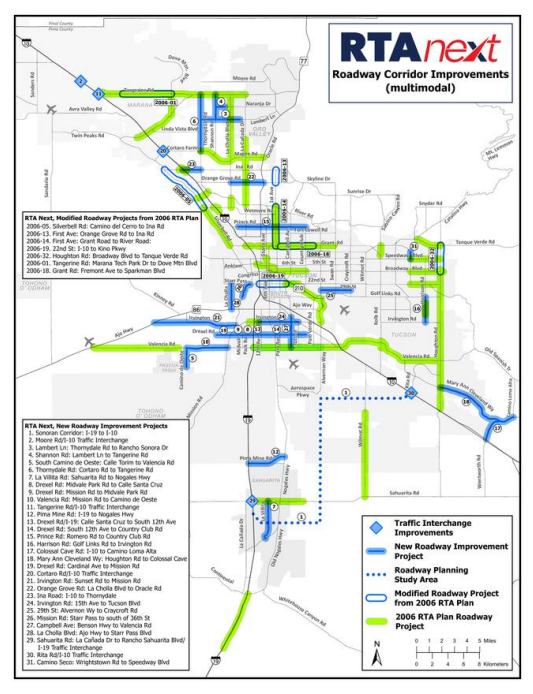
Sidewalks + ADA ramps

Bike lanes

Multi-use path to The Loop

Recently completed by the City of Tucson · RTA project

Projects across the region and in Ward 1



Region-wide



Southwest Tucson (Ward 1): blue = new RTA Next projects

Source: RTA Next Roadway Corridor Improvements (multimodal) map

Ward 1 projects: what changes

Road	What changes for people	When
22nd Street	Rebuilt with bike and pedestrian improvements and a bridge over the railroad	Period 1
Drexel Road	New Santa Cruz River bridge, new walk and bike crossing over I-19, modernized corridor	Periods 1–2
Irvington Road	Modernized with bike, pedestrian and intersection safety upgrades	Period 3
Mission Road	Bike and pedestrian upgrades; study removing travel lanes	Period 3
La Cholla Blvd	Modernized with bike, pedestrian and intersection upgrades	Period 4

Source: RTA Next project list

Already moving with RTA Next

Trail Rangers pilot

People on the trails, keeping them safe and welcoming

Transit Ambassador pilot

People on buses and at stops to help riders

Transit Safety & Security Action Plan

A plan for safer rides and stops

Silverbell Road, fast-tracked

Moved up, with pedestrian and bike lane improvements

What I'd tell advocates

1

Get in early

Shape the project list before it goes to the ballot.

2

Build a wide coalition

Advocates, neighborhoods, business and city leaders. Listen to the people who say no.

3

Stay at the table after the vote

Passing it is the start. Accountability is the work.

Thank you

Vice Mayor Lane Santa Cruz
City of Tucson, Ward 1

Project maps: RTA Mobility website

Upcoming Events

Online Dialogue – Successes and Missed Opportunities: How to Make Your Community a Federal Funding Winner

December 3, 2026 | 1:00 pm ET

Webinar – E-bikes and E-motos: Advocating for Effective Policies to Promote Safety on Trails

December 10, 2026 | 1:00 pm ET

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Audience Q&A