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# TRAILS & TRAIL NETWORKS AS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Vice President,  
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy



# RAILS-TO-TRAILS CONSERVANCY

*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.*



# TRAILS & TRAIL NETWORKS AS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

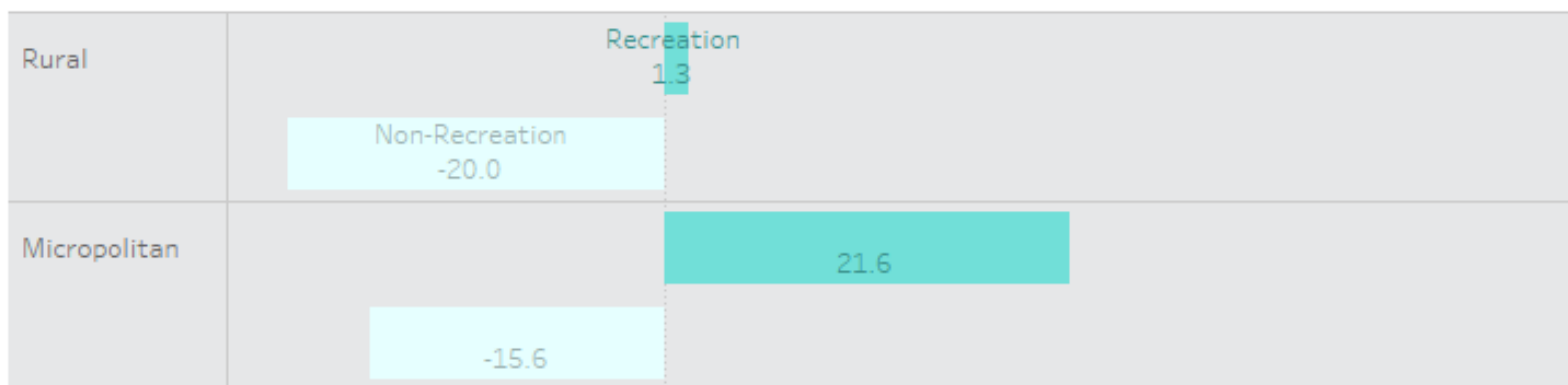
- Demand for trails and outdoor recreation continues to grow
- Trails and trail networks as foundational to economic competitiveness
  - Trail Oriented Development
  - Trail Towns
- Your role....

# RECREATION COUNTIES ATTRACT NEW RESIDENTS AND HIGHER INCOMES

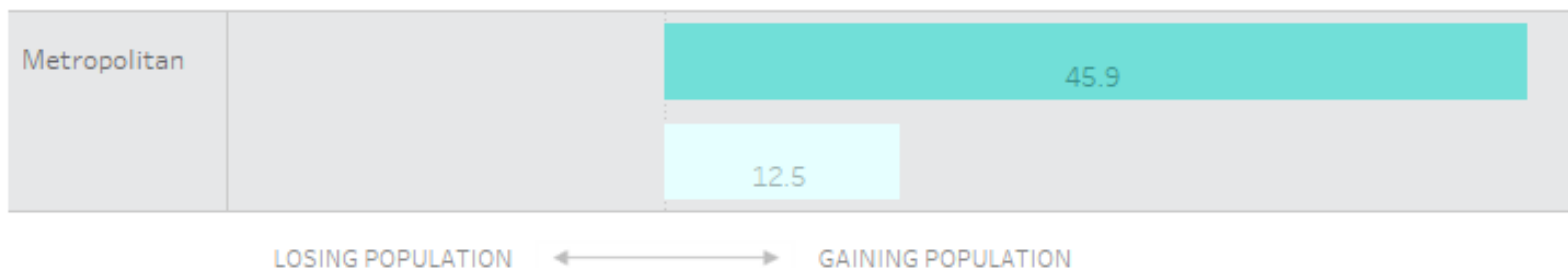
## Recreation Counties Have Higher Net Migration Rates Since 2010



In non-metro areas, recreation counties are growing while non-recreation counties are losing residents on average.



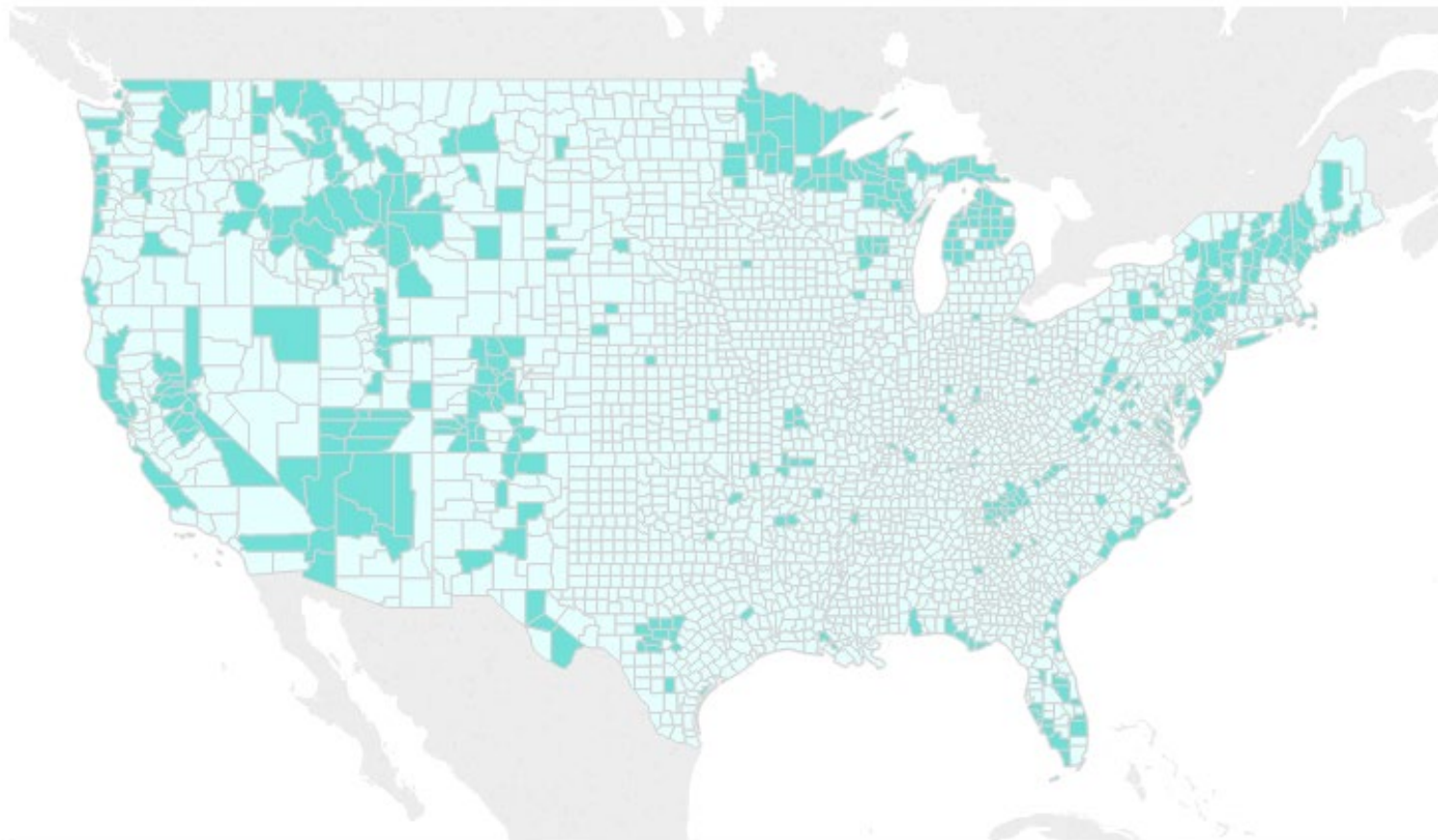
In metro areas, recreation counties are gaining residents at a faster pace on average.





# RECREATION COUNTIES ARE GROWING

Recreation Counties, as classified by the USDA Economic Research Service



■ Recreation county    ■ Non-recreation county

# DEMAND FOR TRAILS DURING COVID-19

The New York Times

## Is It OK to Take a Walk?

Yes, experts say. Equal parts transit alternative and therapy, contemplative strolls are helping people's mental and physical health. Just stay six feet apart.



REUTERS

Crowds flock outside as coronavirus toll mounts



USA TODAY

TRAVEL

Coronavirus pandemic gives new momentum to bike rides, local trails across USA

5 NEWS

LOCAL

Local cities see increase in use of public trails

ROUTE FIFTY

Connecting state and local government leaders

Trail Use Way Up as Coronavirus Stifles Other Activities

TODAY

Why bike riding has soared in popularity during the pandemic

BAY JOURNAL

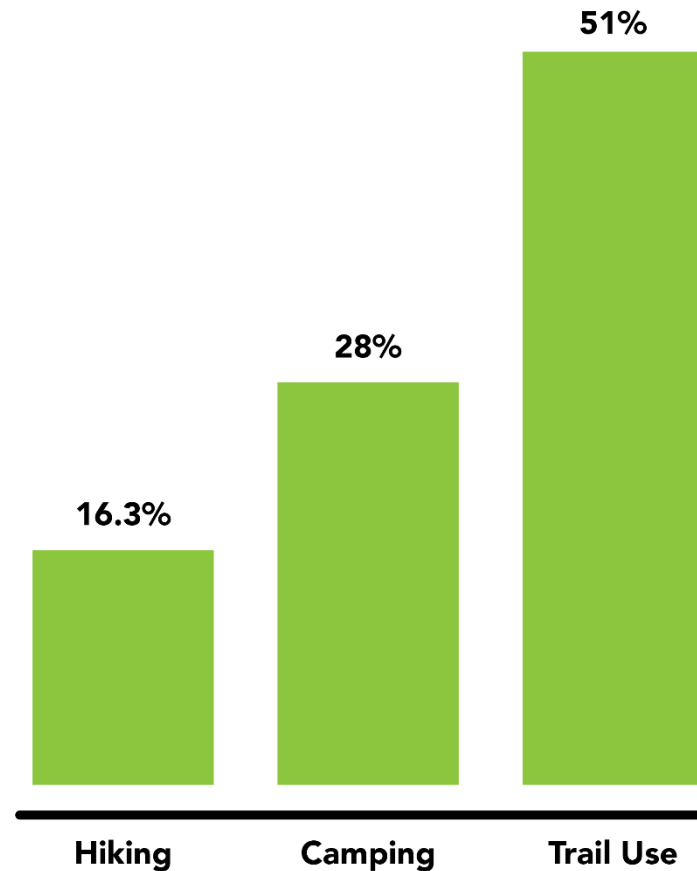
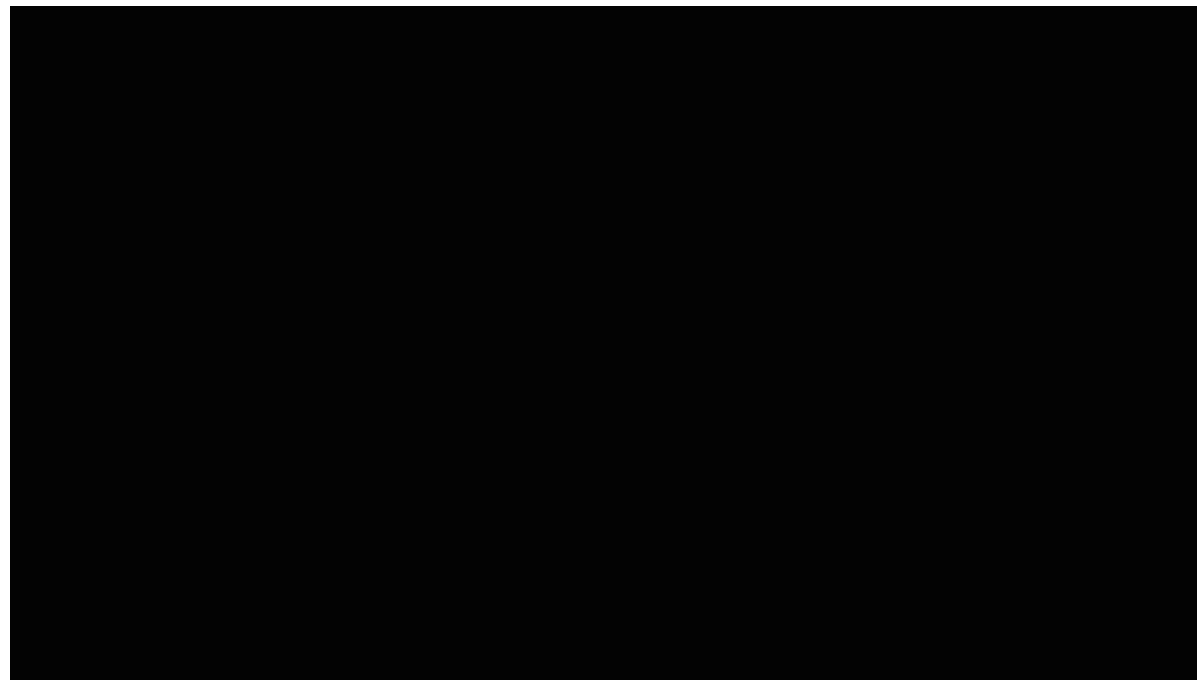
COVID lockdown unleashes swarms of visitors at parks, trails



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# DEMAND FOR TRAILS DURING COVID-19

Percentage Increase in Outdoor Activities in 2020

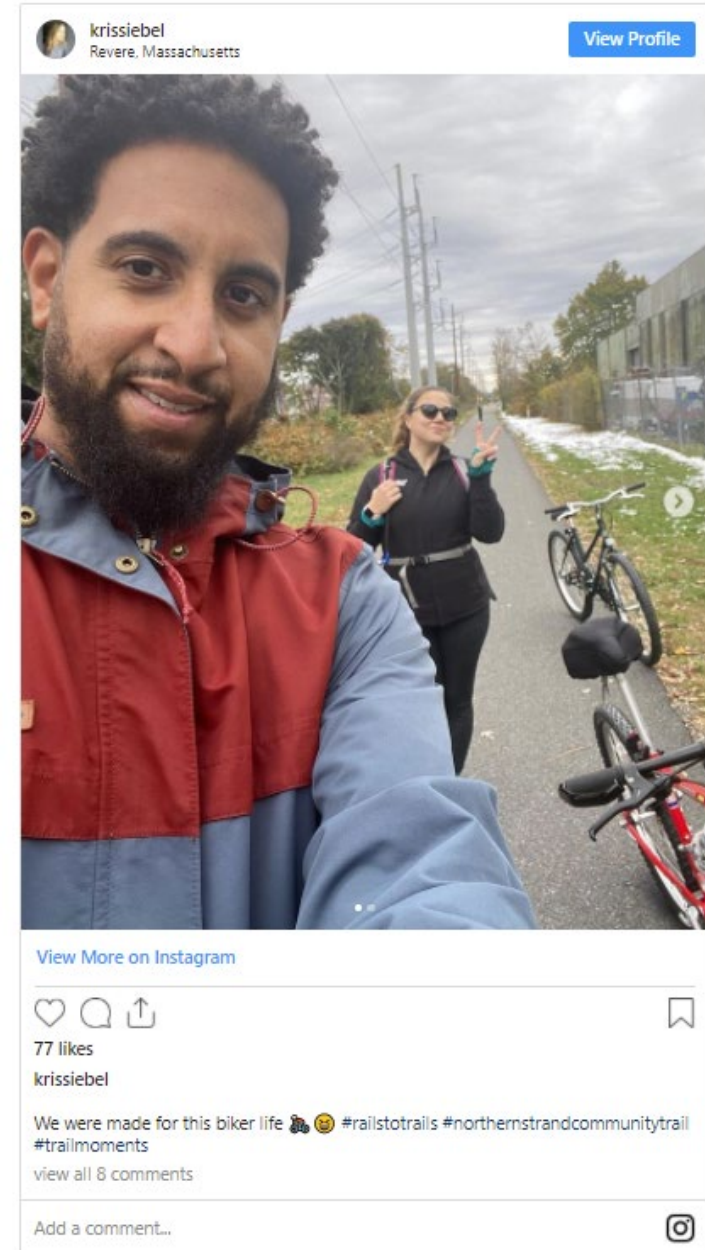


Source: Outdoor Industry Association, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy



# DEMAND FOR TRAILS DURING COVID-19

- ✓ 86% say having access to the outdoors has reduced stress.
- ✓ 58% go outdoors more or a lot more than before.



# MENINO SURVEY OF MAYORS

- Three out of every four mayors expect residents to spend more time visiting parks and greenspace than they did before the pandemic;
- Roughly two-thirds expect residents will spend more time biking or walking.
- If these expectations hold, equitable investment in parks and open spaces will become even more critical as a foundation for an inclusive city.

# TRAILS AND TRAIL NETWORKS AS FOUNDATIONAL TO ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS





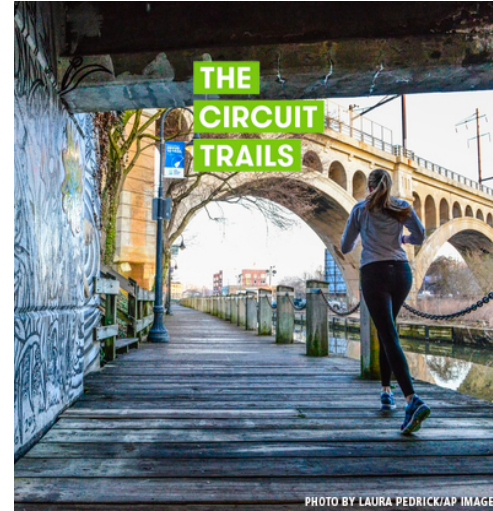
A blue line-art illustration of a trail winding through a city and countryside. On the left, a city skyline with various skyscrapers is visible. A trail leads from the city towards the right, passing a bench and a sign with a bicycle icon. The trail continues through a rural landscape with rolling hills, trees, and a small house. The sky is filled with clouds and a sun. The text 'TRAIL NATION' is prominently displayed in the center, with a star to the left of 'TRAIL'. Below it, 'rails-to-trails' and 'conservancy' are written in a smaller font.

# ★ TRAIL NATION

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# THESE EIGHT TRAIL NETWORKS ARE CONNECTING MILLIONS OF AMERICANS...





# TRAIL CONNECTIVITY MATTERS

- When trail connections are made, usage increases by **40-80%** -Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
- A 2020 study by the National Association of Realtors found that people who had more walkable amenities near their homes were most satisfied with the quality of life in their neighborhood





# TRAIL NETWORKS AS ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

Food & Lifestyle

## Viewpoint: An equitable trail network is what Baltimore's economy needs now



BALTIMORE  
BUSINESS JOURNAL

A rendering of a proposed addition to the Baltimore Greenway Trails Network at Monument City Brewing Co. in Southeast Baltimore.

GABRIELLE RASHLEIGH/RAILS-TO-TRAILS CONSERVANCY

By Alicia Wilson, Jon Laria and Deb Tillett – Contributors  
Mar 26, 2021, 7:00am EDT

"This investment in the city's green space and biking and walking infrastructure has the potential to be transformational."



IN THIS ARTICLE

Transportation

# Completing network of trails in the D.C. region would bring a financial boost, report says

A new report says a plan for a nearly 900-mile network of trails would create 16,000 construction jobs and generate \$1 billion a year.



People take advantage of the warm weather to walk, jog and bike through Rock Creek Park. (Katherine Frey/The Washington Post)

By [Lori Aratani](#)

May 1, 2021 at 8:00 a.m. EDT

 [Add to list](#)

A proposal to add more than 400 miles to the region's existing trail network could create more than 16,000 jobs and generate more than \$1 billion a year in revenue from





# THE CAPITAL TRAILS NETWORK AS AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOL

## Spending by Trail Users

### Trail Users Spend \$538M Annually on Soft and Hard Goods

**\$11 average  
per trip per trail user**

soft goods include: beverages, food

**\$490 average annually  
per trail user**

hard goods include: shoes, bicycles,  
parts, equipment, accessories

Generating

**Total  
Economic Impact  
\$941 Million**  
annually

**Total  
Jobs  
8,200**  
annually

**Total  
Wages  
\$298 Million**  
annually

**Annual  
Tax Revenues  
\$23 Million**  
local and state





# TRAIL ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT



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# THE CAPITAL TRAILS NETWORK AS AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOL



“City-State’s mission is to be a cultural institution and community hub. Our building is perfect for making beer, but the Metropolitan Branch Trail is vital to our larger goals, and we are looking forward to enhancing it. We are especially excited for the MBT to extend all the way to Silver Spring! Breweries and bicycles go together like malt and hops, and we will have bike racks and a water fountain available to the public. In addition to beer, we will offer to-go coldbrew coffee, tea, and other non-alcoholic drinks to MBT users.”

-James Warner, Founder, City-State Brewing Co. Washington, DC





# MIDTOWN GREENWAY, MINNEAPOLIS





# CARROLL CREEK LINEAR PARK — FREDERICK, MD

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# TRAIL TOWNS

Trail Towns are a model of economic revitalization that places trails as the centerpiece of a tourism-centered strategy for community revitalization.





# REGIONAL TRAIL TOWN STRATEGY

- **A coordinated network with services and amenities for trail users:**

- Restaurants
- Accommodations
- Bike shops
- Cultural and historic sites
- Regional /national parks
- Camp sites





# ELEMENTS OF A TRAIL TOWN

- Improve connectivity between trail and town
- Improve level of services and amenities available
- Ensure that investments are in the best interest of the local community
- Foster a culture of hospitality, of stewardship, and of inclusivity in trail communities



Source: Amy Camp, Cycle Forward



# TRAIL TOWNS

## Established Programs

- Trail Town Program®: 10 years
- Appalachian Trail Community Program: 7 years
- Canal Towns Partnership: 7 years
- North Country Trail Town Program: 6 years
- Buckeye Trail Town Program: 6 years
- Arizona Trail Gateway Communities Program: 6 years
- Kentucky Trail Town Program: 5 years





# CRITICAL ELEMENTS TO THE SUCCESS OF TRAIL TOWNS

- Provide access to capital/lending
- Offer business coaching (Small Business Development Centers or some other source)
- Capacity to keep the program going




# PRIOR LOCAL PLANNING



**RESTORE YOUR  
ECONOMY.ORG**

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**DOWNLOAD THE  
LEADERSHIP IN TIMES OF  
CRISIS TOOLKIT**

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**ECONOMIC RECOVERY  
VOLUNTEER PROGRAM**





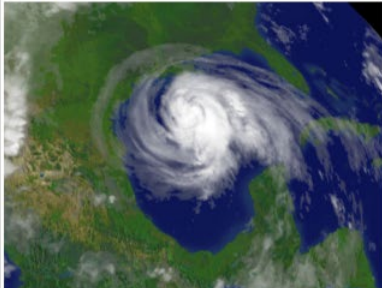


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**PUBLICATIONS AND  
REPORTS**

**Developing Coastal Tourism as an  
Economic Driver:**

**Strategies & Recommendations for  
Brazoria, Chambers, Galveston and  
Matagorda Counties, Texas**



**October 2011**

# LRGV ACTIVE PLAN



<https://www.railstotrails.org/media/601652/the-active-plan-low-res.pdf>



# LRGV ACTIVE PLAN

TRAVEL ↗

## *Your Next Biking Adventure Vacation Is at the Texas Border*

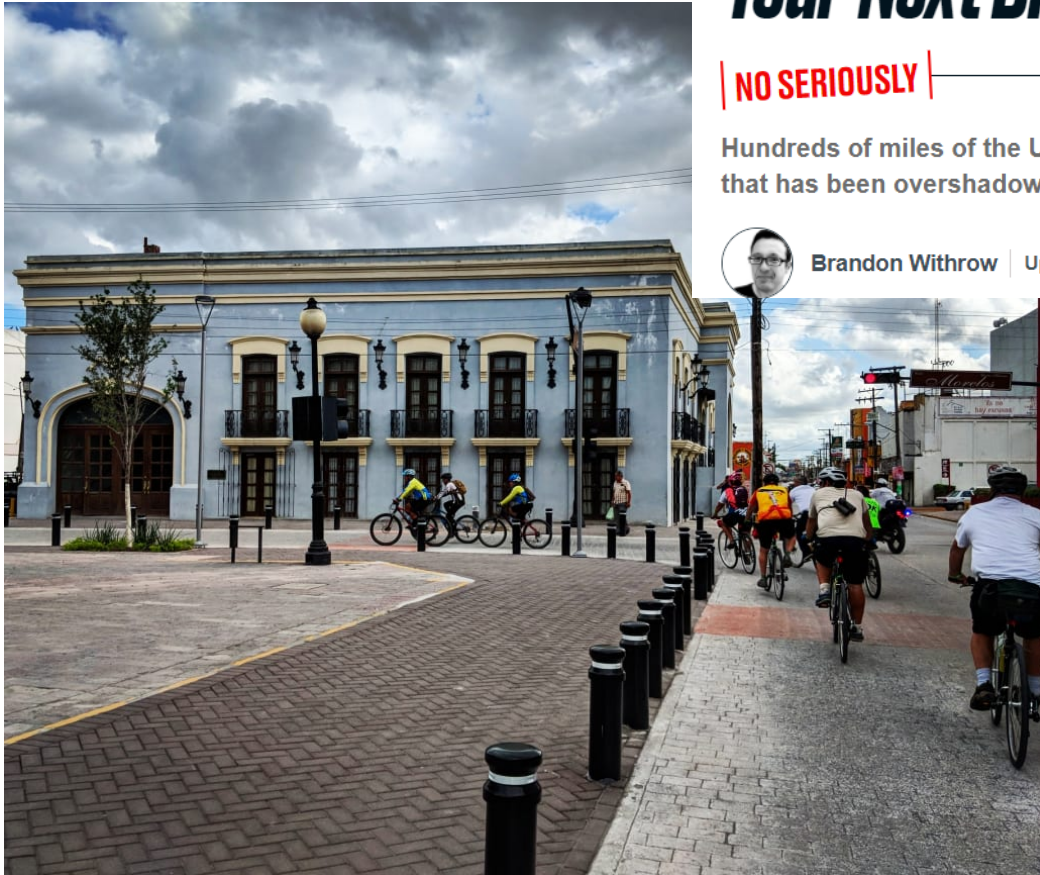
**| NO SERIOUSLY |**

Hundreds of miles of the U.S.-Mexico border region have been turned into a biking paradise—showcasing a region with a rich history that has been overshadowed by ugly politics.

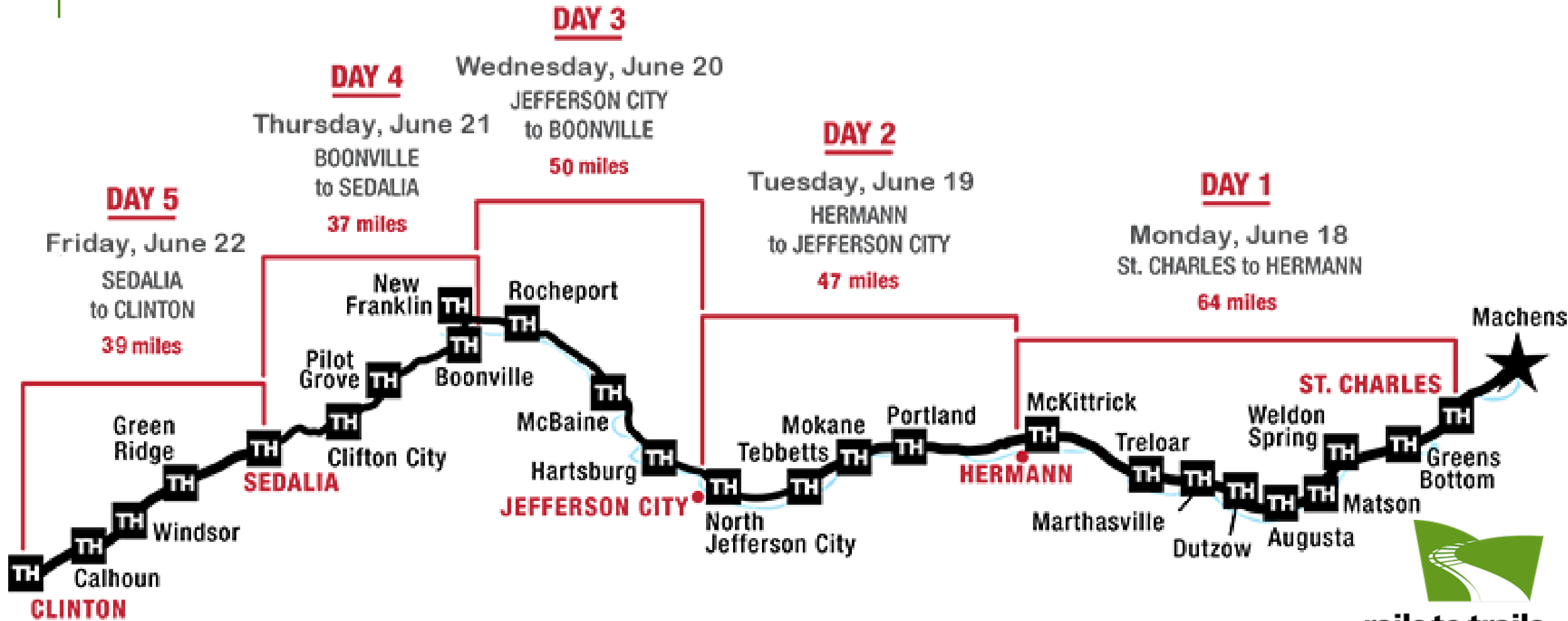


Brandon Withrow

Updated Nov. 24, 2018 7:56AM ET / Published Nov. 23, 2018 9:12PM ET



# KATY TRAIL STATE PARK, MISSOURI













# SUCCESS FACTORS...

- ✓ Service-oriented businesses cluster together to pull in trail traffic
- ✓ Events, programming, activities to draw in traffic and awareness
- ✓ Safety: lighting and critical mass of people
- ✓ Eliminate physical barriers (major arterials cutting off access to the trail)

# YOUR ROLE...

- ✓ **Proactively identify and address legal barriers, land and building needs, economic incentives, and businesses needed along a trail** (*Trail advocates, elected officials, economic development entities, and business owners*)
- ✓ **Dedicate resources to developing a trail corridor as a destination by recruiting a well-planned mix of businesses** (economic development entities)
- ✓ **Harness anticipated future growth to fund infrastructure improvements using value capture tax instruments such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) for major projects or Community Enhancement Districts for projects of smaller scope.**



# YOUR ROLE...

- ✓ **Take action from the initial planning phases of a trail, such as establishing a community land trust, to keep costs artificially low for new businesses (or affordable housing) that want to locate along it.**
- ✓ **Assess trail business owners' perceptions of the trail's impact and how to maximize benefit.**

# THE ROLE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPERS

Support funding for trails, recreation and conservation

Utilize trail network and recreation projects as OPPORTUNITIES for leveraging larger economic development initiatives, rather than separate projects

Planning trail networks and active transportation systems provides opportunities to pull multiple agencies such as parks/rec, economic development, health, planning and transportation together to leverage resources and have more impactful outcomes

Marketing and promotion



# FEDERAL RESOURCES & POLICY

- Recreational trails program
- Transportation alternatives (TA) program
  - Pending transport reauthorization bill will boost TA 70% over 5 years
    - [Railstotrails.org/policy/trade](https://railstotrails.org/policy/trade)
- RAISE (formerly TIGER & BUILD), federal multi-modal competition



# RECOVERY & STATE/LOCAL BUDGETS

- IN - Next Level Trails is the largest infusion of trails funding in state history.
- Addtl \$60m American Rescue Plan

*“Trails have been an important resource for Hoosiers’ physical and mental well-being throughout the pandemic,” Gov. Holcomb said. “These projects are a transformational investment in quality of life for communities across our state and a valuable tool for economic and tourism development. We are creating important connections that take us one step closer to becoming the most trail-friendly state in the country.”*

## NEWS • PUBLIC AFFAIRS

MARCH 8, 2021

### Indiana Awards \$30M In Funding For New Trails Projects

ASSOCIATED PRESS  

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Indiana has awarded nearly \$30 million to communities and nonprofit groups for construction of 70 miles of new trails Gov. Eric Holcomb says will boost local tourism and economic development.



The \$29.6 million in funding announced Thursday for 18 communities and non-profit organizations is the part of the second round of Holcomb's Next Level Trails program. More than \$24 million for 17 other trail projects totaling 42 miles were announced in May 2019 in the first funding round.

Whitcomb said trails improve the quality of life in the state and are “a valuable tool for economic and tourism development.” He said Hoosiers have frequented trails during the coronavirus pandemic.

“Trails have been an important resource for Hoosiers’ physical and mental well-being throughout the pandemic,” he said.

Dan Bortner, the director of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, said the agency is excited to partner with local governments and nonprofits on the trails projects. He said Hoosiers visited the trails and parks “in unprecedented numbers” during the past year.

“Demand for trails has never been higher,” Bortner said.

The newly awarded [grants include 10 regional projects and eight local projects](#). The deadline for applications for the third round of Next Level Trails funding is Dec. 1.





# OTHER FEDERAL RESOURCES

- The Recreation Economy for Rural Communities planning assistance program:  
<https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/recreation-economy-rural-communities>
- Economic Development Administration: Travel, Tourism & Outdoor Recreation

## TRAVEL, TOURISM & OUTDOOR RECREATION

PROMOTING AMERICA'S TOURIST COMMUNITIES



Through the Travel, Tourism & Outdoor Recreation program, EDA is focused on accelerating the recovery of communities that rely on the travel, tourism and outdoor recreation sectors. \$750 million of EDA's American Rescue Plan funds are allocated to support the following efforts:

- State Tourism Grants: \$510 million in non-competitive awards to help states quickly invest in marketing, infrastructure, workforce and other projects to rejuvenate safe leisure, business and international travel.
- Competitive Grants: \$240 million to help communities that have been hardest hit by challenges facing the travel, tourism and outdoor recreation sectors to invest in infrastructure, workforce or other projects to support the recovery of the industry and economic resilience of the community in the future.



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# Thank You!

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**Liz@railstotrails.org**



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