NKY

REGIONAL TRAILS PLAN

2026

TRI STATE TRAILS

CORA
CINCINNATI OFF-ROAD ALLIANCE

NKY REGIONAL TRAILS PLAN FUNDERS

OneNKY™ ALLIANCE

Funding for the Northern Kentucky Regional Trails Plan was organized by the OneNKY Alliance, whose mission is to transform Northern Kentucky by uniting and mobilizing leaders around initiatives that deliver tangible, measurable results and move the region forward. The Steering Committee and funders would like to specially recognize Ryan Salzman for his contributions to the formation of this plan during his time at the OneNKY Alliance. This plan was made possible through the generous support of the following organizations, businesses, and individuals:

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NKY REGIONAL TRAILS PLAN

JUNE 2026

TRI STATE TRAILS

CORA
CINCINNATI OFF-ROAD ALLIANCE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This plan was developed through the input and dedication of the Steering Committee and project partners, representing more than 40 local governments, county agencies, conservation districts, nonprofits, and community organizations. Their continued leadership and collaboration will be essential to advancing these projects toward implementation.

STEERING COMMITTEE & PROJECT PARTNERS

Devou Park Overlook - Covington, KY

Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons - Dayton, KY

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PROJECT TEAM

ABOUT CINCINNATI OFF-ROAD ALLIANCE

The Cincinnati Off-Road Alliance (CORA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to building, maintaining, and advocating for natural-surface trails across Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky. Founded in 1996, CORA partners with local governments, park systems, and community organizations to design, build, and steward multi-use trails for mountain biking, hiking, trail running, and adaptive riding using sustainable trail-building practices developed by the U.S. Forest Service.

CORA relies on volunteers and staff to maintain regional trail systems and manages a real-time trail conditions map with an open/closed model to protect trails and support responsible use. In Northern Kentucky, CORA partners with local governments on trail development and stewardship, including ongoing work at Tower Park in Fort Thomas.

ABOUT TRI-STATE TRAILS

Tri-State Trails is a nonprofit organization working to connect people and places through a regional network of trails and bikeways across Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana. Tri-State Trails provides technical assistance, data collection, advocacy, and project support to help communities build safe and accessible walking and biking infrastructure.

Tri-State Trails previously authored the 2014 Northern Kentucky Regional Trails Plan, a predecessor to this effort, as well as the Covington + Newport Bicycle Transportation Plan. This plan builds upon that work by updating regional trail priorities and expanding the vision in coordination with partners such as Cincinnati Off-Road Alliance (CORA) to include both paved and natural-surface trail opportunities.

TRI STATE TRAILS

CORA
CINCINNATI OFF-ROAD ALLIANCE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purple People Bridge - Newport, KY

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

The NKY Regional Trails Plan is a visionary guide for advancing a connected system of paved and natural surface trails across Northern Kentucky. It outlines best practices, design guidance, and supporting amenities such as community bike parks, skills courses, and traffic gardens to help communities plan and implement high-quality trail projects.

This plan is intended to help local jurisdictions evaluate how their internal active transportation networks connect to a broader regional trail system. Route recommendations reflect the best available data at the time of publication and are expected to evolve as conditions, partnerships, and opportunities change. Most corridors identified have not been engineered, and this plan does not include detailed design or cost estimates. For many segments, next steps include feasibility studies and preliminary engineering to support funding applications. Funding sources included in this plan are not assigned to specific projects but provide a toolkit to advance priorities and improve competitiveness for grant funding.

NKY REGIONAL TRAILS PLAN

Tri-State Trails and the Cincinnati Off-Road Alliance (CORA) are building on years of work to expand trail and bikeway opportunities across Northern Kentucky. Recent initiatives include the Covington + Newport Bicycle Transportation Plan, authored by Tri-State Trails and adopted in 2024, and the Saratoga Street Bikeway, an ongoing planning effort in Newport. CORA continues to grow and maintain natural surface trails in parks across Northern Kentucky, including Sargeant Park in Dayton and Tower Park in Fort Thomas. Beyond building trails, CORA is actively involved in natural surface trail planning and stewardship, working to remove barriers, guide the process, and provide hands-on assistance to communities looking to expand and maintain their trail systems.

The NKY Regional Trails Plan builds on this momentum by envisioning a Braided Trail Network across Boone, Campbell, and Kenton counties. This interconnected system of paved and natural surface trails is envisioned to provide continuous routes that link communities and destinations while offering flexible options for people walking, biking, and exploring outdoors.

Inspired by leading cities like Bentonville, Boulder, Chattanooga, and Knoxville, the plan demonstrates how regional trail connectivity can strengthen communities, improve active transportation, and enhance quality of life. A Steering Committee of local, county, state, and regional partners has guided the process since March 2025, working to review existing conditions, refine proposed trail routes, and prioritize connections across the network.

WHAT IS A BRAIDED TRAIL NETWORK?

A Braided Trail Network is an interconnected system of paved multi-use paths and natural surface trails that link communities and destinations. It allows people to mix and match routes—whether walking, biking, hiking, or mountain biking—for a flexible, continuous experience tailored to their preferences and skill level.

To view the online interactive map, please visit our project website HERE.

Covington, KY

VISION STATEMENT

The NKY Regional Trails Plan envisions a safe, connected trail network that links communities, supports active transportation and recreation, and enhances quality of life across Boone, Campbell, and Kenton counties. By prioritizing equity, health, and economic opportunity, the plan aims to make trails essential infrastructure for all.

PROJECT GOALS

DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL TRAILS PLAN

- Identify opportunities for paved multi-use trails, on-road bicycling infrastructure, and natural surface trails across Campbell, Kenton, and Boone counties.

STRENGTHEN REGIONAL COLLABORATION

- Establish a coalition of local governments, community stakeholders, and advocates to align trail planning efforts and move projects toward implementation.

ANALYZE EXISTING CONDITIONS AND TRAIL OPPORTUNITIES

- Conduct GIS mapping, site assessments, and public engagement to refine trail alignments, prioritize corridors, and ensure connectivity to key destinations (employment centers, schools, parks, etc.).

ENGAGE THE PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDERS

- Facilitate public input sessions, online surveys, and stakeholder meetings to gather feedback on proposed trail alignments and priorities, ensuring community needs are reflected in the plan.

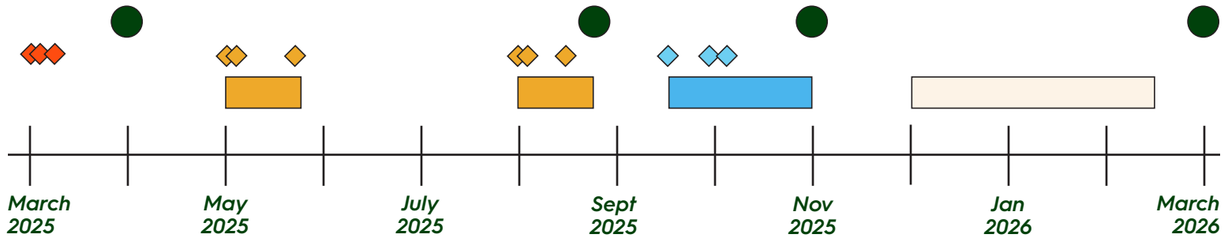
CREATE AN IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING STRATEGY

- Develop a prioritized funding strategy that aligns with state and federal grant opportunities and outlines steps to advance trail projects from planning to construction.

PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process for the NKY Regional Trails Plan included a series of steering committee and working group meetings, along with public engagement sessions throughout September and October 2025. Initial kickoff meetings with Boone, Campbell, and Kenton Counties were held to introduce the project, gather GIS data, and coordinate with county staff before the first steering committee meeting, where baseline conditions and project goals were established.

Throughout the planning process, the project team collaborated with local governments, county agencies, parks departments, and community organizations to review plans, identify trail opportunities, and refine corridors. County working groups meetings brought together local governments, county agencies, and advocacy organizations to review mapping, discuss feasibility, and coordinate across jurisdictions. Public meetings and an online survey invited residents to share feedback on proposed routes and priorities. The process combined technical expertise and community input to shape a regionally supported trail network for Northern Kentucky.



PROJECT TIMELINE

- County Kickoff Meetings
- Steering Committee Meetings
- County Working Group Meetings
- Public Open House
- County Working Group Meetings
- Online Survey Open
- Targeted Stakeholder Meetings & Plan Development

Campbell County Working Group Meeting

Devou Park Backcountry Trails - Covington, KY

BENEFITS OF TRAILS

Enhance Bicycle Connectivity Across Northern Kentucky

- Improve walking and biking options between communities that have been divided by highways and railroads

Link Trails, Parks, & Recreational Assets

- Connect residential neighborhoods to local parks and regional greenspaces like Devou Park and A.J. Jolly Park
- Create public spaces to recreate & enjoy outdoors

Spur Economic Development

- Increase property values and drive development along the trail network
- Attract visitors and generate tourism spending
- Connect suburban communities to urban core

Expand Transportation Opportunities For All Ages & Abilities

- Create safe paths for walking, running, and biking that are separated from car traffic
- Support a multi-modal transportation network that is less reliant on cars

Improve Public Health

- Make active lifestyles more accessible and convenient
- Decrease rates of obesity, cardiovascular disease, and other preventable illnesses
- Increase interaction with nature to boost mental health

Increase Transportation Equity

- Provide a safe travel option for individuals without a car
- Connect trails to historically underserved communities

Promote Environmental Sustainability

- Reduce emissions from car travel and improve air quality
- Make it easier for residents to live car-light or car-free

Attract & Retain Talent

- Help companies secure talented professionals to the region
- Create a world class amenity that puts Northern Kentucky on the map

ECONOMIC AND HEALTH BENEFITS

Outdoor recreation is a major economic driver in Kentucky, contributing nearly twice the economic output of the state's automotive industry. Investments in trails improve community health and generate returns through job creation, tourism, increased tax revenue, and stronger local businesses.

According to the Outdoor Industry Foundation, in Kentucky alone, outdoor recreation generates:

56,000
DIRECT JOBS

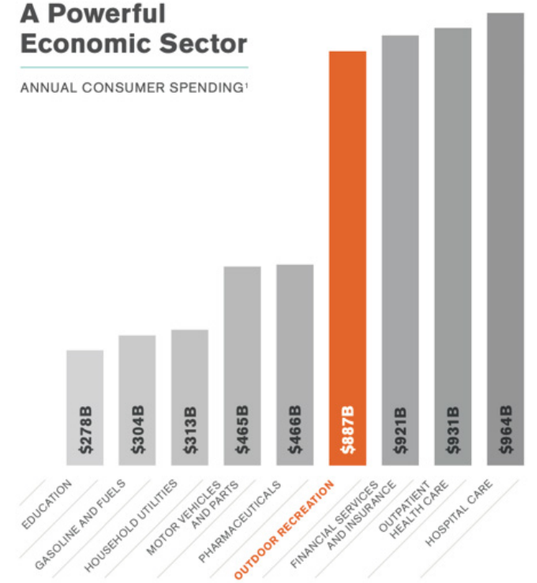
$4.5B
IN VALUE ADDED GDP

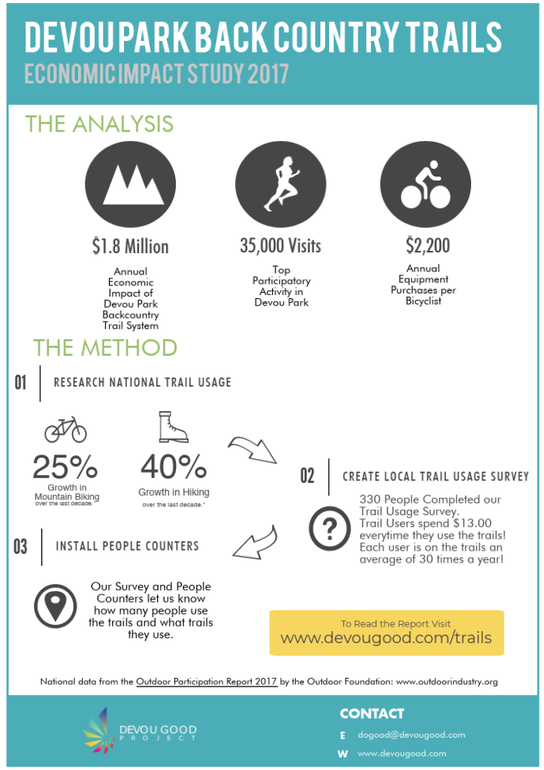
$2.0B
IN WAGES AND SALARIES

$756M
IN STATE & LOCAL TAX REVENUE

According to the *Devou Park Backcountry Trails Economic Impact Study* (2017), the 12-mile natural-surface trail system generates about **$1.8 million annually**. It attracts roughly **35,000 visitors each year**, who spend about $13 per visit locally, while trail users report spending about **$1,500 annually** on equipment and gear, highlighting the broader economic benefits of outdoor recreation. Research also shows that access to trails and parks improves physical and mental health and supports better outcomes for children and students.

> "As a cancer doctor, I am an ardent supporter of trails. Exercise can prevent heart disease, many cancers, and other significant health conditions. Exercise improves mental health.
>
> We should invest in trail connectivity to improve the health of our communities while lowering our health care costs."
>
> **- Dr. Robert Summe, MD MPH**





TARGET AUDIENCE

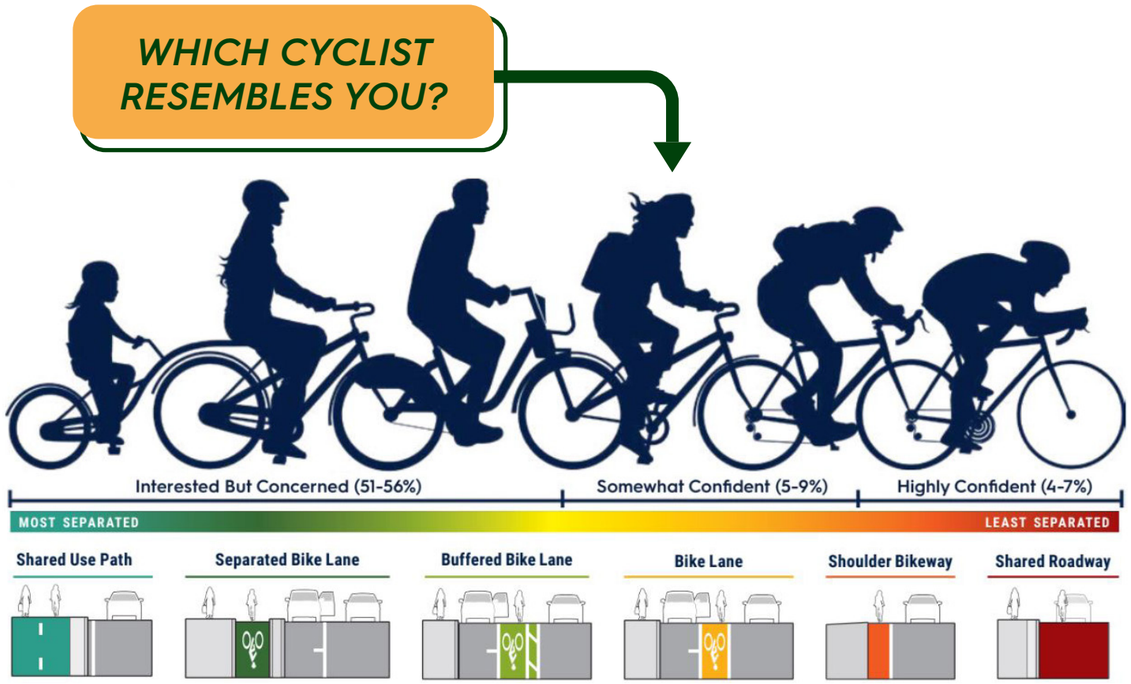
BICYCLE DESIGN USER PROFILES

When planning bikeway infrastructure, it is important to consider who the facilities are intended to serve. Cyclists are commonly grouped into three user profiles based on comfort riding in traffic: **Highly Confident**, **Somewhat Confident**, and **Interested But Concerned**. Understanding these groups helps guide facility selection and encourages more people to bike.

This plan primarily focuses on the **Interested But Concerned** group, which represents the largest share of the population. These individuals enjoy bicycling recreationally and may bike for transportation but are uncomfortable riding near motor vehicles. They prefer lower-stress environments such as shared-use paths or protected bike lanes and are often discouraged by roadways or intersections that lack safe infrastructure. Providing separated bikeways can significantly increase bicycling among this group.

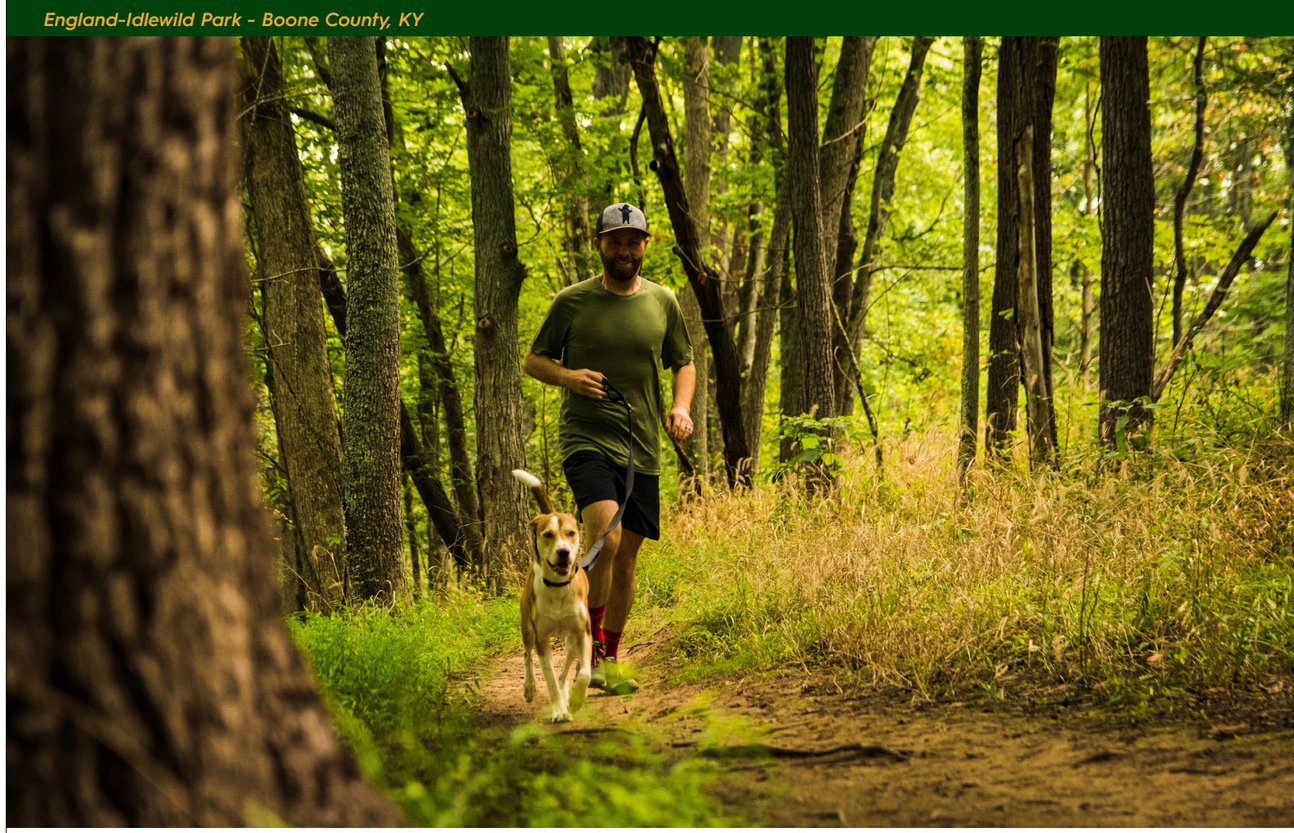
Somewhat Confident cyclists are comfortable riding in the roadway but prefer designated facilities such as bike lanes or bicycle boulevards, including some commuters willing to tolerate short higher-stress segments. **Highly Confident** cyclists represent a smaller portion of the population and are generally willing to share the road with vehicles regardless of separation.

To serve riders of all ages and abilities, the plan prioritizes protected bikeways while also considering bike lanes and bicycle boulevards where right-of-way constraints exist, using guidance from FHWA, KYTC, and NACTO.



City of Hamilton, OH, Active Transportation Plan

England-Idlewild Park - Boone County, KY



DIFFERENT TRAIL USERS AND DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

This plan recognizes that the regional trail network will serve a wide range of users with different needs, speeds, and preferred trail experiences. Key user groups include **cyclists**, **adaptive cyclists**, **hikers** and **pedestrians**, **micromobility devices such as scooters and one-wheels, mountain bikers**, and **equestrian riders**.

Adaptive cyclists use handcycles, recumbent bikes, tricycles, and other specialized equipment that often require wider, smoother, and more accessible trail surfaces. Hikers and pedestrians typically prefer lower-speed environments and natural settings. Mountain bikers seek natural-surface trails with varying terrain and technical features. Equestrian riders require trails designed to accommodate horses and riders safely, typically on wider natural-surface corridors with taller vertical clearance, with tree limbs cleared higher.

Because these uses have different speeds, space needs, and comfort levels, the trail network should be planned to provide a variety of trail types and experiences rather than expecting all users to share the same facilities. In some locations, users may share trails, while in others certain uses may be separated to reduce conflicts.

Trail designs should emphasize appropriate widths and surfaces, clear signage and wayfinding, and thoughtful routing to reduce conflict points between faster and slower users. Providing dedicated or parallel facilities where feasible helps create a safer, more comfortable trail system that accommodates all users while minimizing potential conflicts.

Big Bone Lick State Historic Site - Boone County, KY

PREVIOUS PLANNING STUDIES

BUILDING ON PAST PLANS & STUDIES

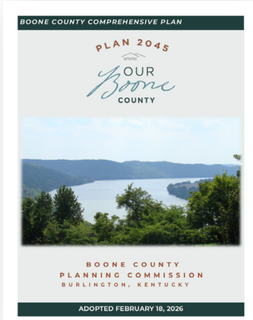
The NKY Regional Trails Plan builds on a strong foundation of previous planning efforts across Boone, Kenton, and Campbell counties. The project team reviewed comprehensive plans, corridor studies, park plans, and regional initiatives that address walking, biking, tourism, and outdoor recreation.

Comprehensive planning is organized slightly differently in each county. Boone and Kenton Counties maintain countywide comprehensive plans that guide planning for all jurisdictions, while many communities in Campbell County prepare their own local comprehensive plans. These documents outline long-term growth priorities and identify opportunities to improve walking and biking connections. Additional studies highlight the role trails play in supporting tourism, economic development, and access to parks and riverfront destinations, helping inform a coordinated vision for Northern Kentucky's regional trail network.

TAKE A LOOK

COUNTYWIDE COMPREHENSIVE PLANS

BOONE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (2026)



Boone County's Comprehensive Plan provides a countywide framework for unincorporated Boone County and the cities of Florence, Union, and Walton. The plan emphasizes a more connected multimodal transportation system, including expanded walking and biking access, regional trail coordination, multi-use paths, sidewalk connections, and links to parks and destinations such as the CVG Loop. It highlights trails and shared-use paths as key tools for improving quality of life, expanding recreation opportunities, and strengthening connections between communities and destinations across the county.

CAMPBELL COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (2026)

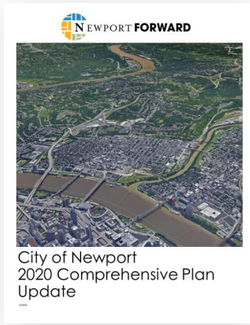
Campbell County's Comprehensive Plan guides long-term growth and development for unincorporated Campbell County and Crestview, Silver Grove, Southgate, Melbourne, and Woodlawn. It evaluates demographics, recreation assets, and transportation infrastructure to inform future priorities. Guiding principles emphasize protecting natural resources, expanding recreation opportunities, and improving pedestrian and bicycle connectivity. The plan supports development of a regional system of parks and trails, expanded access to the Ohio and Licking Rivers, and investment in facilities such as the Riverfront Commons corridor.

KENTON COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (2024)

The Kenton County Comprehensive Plan outlines long-range policies and strategies to guide development and investment throughout the county and all of it's jurisdictions. The Mobility chapter emphasizes a multimodal transportation system that expands travel options beyond driving by supporting walking, bicycling, transit, and shared-use paths. Recommendations focus on improving bicycle and pedestrian safety, filling gaps in sidewalk and bike networks, expanding active transportation infrastructure, and strengthening connections between communities. The plan also prioritizes regional trail corridors such as Riverfront Commons, the Licking River Greenway, and other shared-use paths.

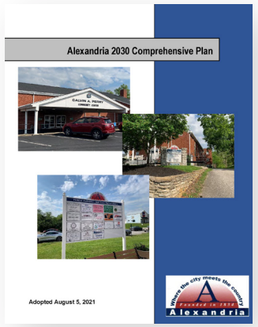
LOCAL COMPREHENSIVE PLANS

NEWPORT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (2020)



The Newport Forward Comprehensive Plan is the city's long-range policy guide for land use, redevelopment, infrastructure, and mobility. Recommendations include expanding the Riverfront Commons trail, connecting it to the Purple People Bridge and Licking River Greenway, creating a bike-friendly trail along Riverboat Row, improving bike lanes and neighborhood connectors (Saratoga, 5th/6th Streets, 4th Street Bridge), adding levee trail access, and implementing complete streets and multimodal corridors on KY 8 and KY 9.

ALEXANDRIA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (2021)



Alexandria's Comprehensive Plan guides growth while preserving the city's small-town character. It promotes a multimodal transportation system, expanded sidewalks, bike paths, and pedestrian crossings, and encourages greenway corridors and open space connections that link to recreation areas.

BELLEVUE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (2022)

The Bellevue Comprehensive Plan guides redevelopment, mobility, and riverfront access. It prioritizes expanding Riverfront Commons, improving bike and pedestrian connections to the Ohio River and neighborhoods, enhancing walkability along Fairfield Avenue, and creating safer multimodal street corridors throughout Bellevue.

COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLANS:

- Boone (2026) - *Countywide*
- Kenton (2024) - *Countywide*
- Campbell (2026) - *Unincorporated Campbell County, plus Crestview, Silver Grove, Melbourne, Southgate, and Woodlawn*

LOCAL COMPREHENSIVE PLANS:

- City of Newport (2020)
- City of Alexandria (2021)
- City of Bellevue (2022)
- City of Cold Spring (2018)
- City of Dayton (2020)
- City of Highland Heights (2024)
- City of Wilder (2019)
- City of Fort Thomas (2018)

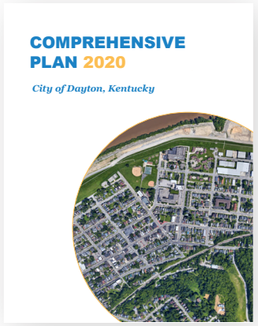
OTHER RELEVANT PLANS AND STUDIES:

- Covington + Newport Bicycle Transportation Plan (2024)
- NKY Tourism Master Plan (2022)
- Innovate 2028 - Southbank Partners Strategic Plan
- Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons Study (2024)
- Eons Adventure Park Master Plan (2025)
- Licking River Greenway Master Plan (2008)
- Boone County Master Parks Plan (2006)
- Kenton County Parks Master Plan (2016)
- New Kenton County Park Master Plan (2021)
- A.J. Jolly Park Master Plan (2021)
- Ohio River Way Strategic Plan

COLD SPRING COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (2018)

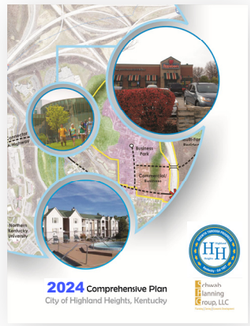
Cold Spring's Comprehensive Plan recommends coordinating with regional partners to develop hike and bike trails, improving pedestrian and bicycle access through sidewalks, trails, and bike lanes, and enhancing corridor design along US-27/Alexandria Pike.

DAYTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (2020)



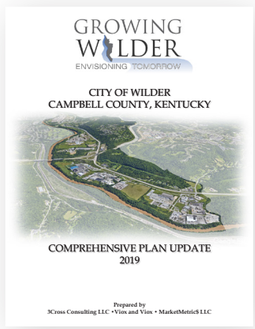
The Dayton Comprehensive Plan recommends complete streets improvements, expanded sidewalks and pedestrian safety, bike facilities, and connecting parks and open spaces with trails and greenways, while planning additional Ohio River recreation access.

HIGHLAND HEIGHTS COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (2024)



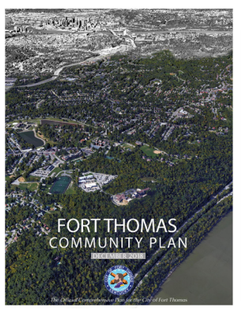
The 2024 Highland Heights Comprehensive Plan recommends mixed-use redevelopment, improved pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, closing sidewalk gaps, creating bike paths and walkways, and preserving open space while strengthening the city's role as a walkable, NKU-anchored college town.

WILDER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (2019)



The 2019 Growing Wilder Comprehensive Plan recommends expanding the Licking River Greenway trail system, preserving creek corridors for recreation, and creating new trail and sidewalk connections linking neighborhoods, parks, and redevelopment areas to the Licking River corridor.

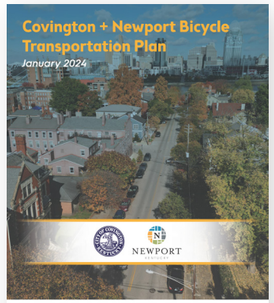
FORT THOMAS COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (2018)



The 2018 Fort Thomas Comprehensive Plan guides future growth through chapters on land use, transportation, parks, and community facilities, establishing strategies for mobility, recreation, and environmental stewardship. Within the parks and connectivity chapters, the plan prioritizes expanding the city's trail system, including mountain bike and hiking trails at Tower Park, reopening reservoir trails, and extending the Landmark Tree Trail. It also recommends new shared-use paths connecting Fort Thomas Avenue and city neighborhoods to the Ohio River and the regional Riverfront Commons Greenway.

OTHER RELEVANT PLANS & STUDIES

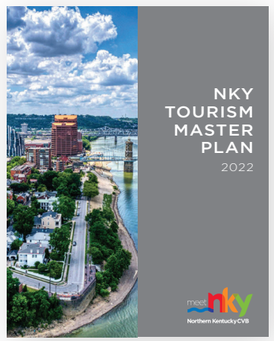
COVINGTON + NEWPORT BICYCLE TRANSPORTATION PLAN (2024)



The Covington + Newport Bicycle Transportation Plan provides a roadmap for creating a safe, connected bicycle network across both cities. Developed by Tri-State Trails with local and state partners, the plan identifies priority corridors, infrastructure improvements, and policy recommendations to support riders of all ages and abilities. It focuses on closing network gaps, improving safety on key streets such as Fourth Street and Saratoga Street, and linking neighborhoods to major destinations including the Ohio River, Riverfront Commons, and regional trails. The plan outlines implementation strategies to guide phased investments over time.

2026 APA Kentucky Outstanding Trail Plan Award

NKY TOURISM MASTER PLAN (2022)



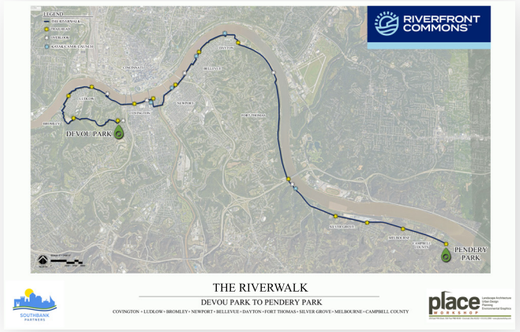
The 2022 NKY Tourism Master Plan outlines strategies to grow Northern Kentucky's visitor economy by leveraging outdoor recreation, riverfront assets, and regional connectivity. The plan identifies trails and bikeways as key tourism drivers, recommending investment in the Riverfront Commons Trail, improved bicycle connections between river cities and neighborhoods, and expanded access to the Licking River Blueway and surrounding greenway corridors. It also highlights linking trails with downtown districts, parks, and cultural destinations to create a cohesive network of recreation and tourism experiences across NKY.

INNOVATE 2028 - SOUTHBANK PARTNERS STRATEGIC PLAN

The Southbank Partners Innovate 2028 Strategic Plan outlines regional economic development priorities to transform Northern Kentucky's urban communities through investments in transportation, infrastructure, and placemaking.

The plan emphasizes multimodal transportation and trail connectivity, including completing The Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons, linking cities along the Ohio River, as well as prioritizing greenways and blueways as "human highways" by connecting parks, neighborhoods, and regional destinations.

RIVERWALK AT RIVERFRONT COMMONS MASTER PLAN (2024)



Southbank Partners, in collaboration with its city partners, worked with Place Workshop to prepare The Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons Master Plan. The project will span across eight cities and connect Devou Park in the west, to Pendery Park in the east. The plan identifies existing, engineered (funded), and planned sections along with proposed site amenities highlighting The Riverwalk as a pivot part of Riverfront Commons, Northern Kentucky's Riverfront District.

EONS ADVENTURE PARK MASTER PLAN (2025)

Eons Adventure Park in Erlanger is a planned outdoor recreation destination featuring a best-in-class natural-surface trail system for hiking, mountain biking, and accessible trail use. The concept includes roughly 9 miles of trails ranging from barrier-free greenway paths to technical backcountry and downhill MTB trails, plus a community bike park and skills course. The project is being developed through a public-private partnership with CORA and local partners to expand nature access, outdoor recreation, and regional trail tourism.

LICKING RIVER GREENWAY MASTER PLAN (2008)

The Licking River Greenway Master Plan outlines a vision for a continuous multi-use trail and green corridor along the Licking River from its confluence with the Ohio River to I-275, connecting Covington, Newport, Wilder, and Taylor Mill. The plan identifies opportunities for bicycle and pedestrian trails, river access points, habitat restoration, and connections to parks, neighborhoods, and regional trails such as Riverfront Commons.

BOONE COUNTY PARKS MASTER PLAN (2006)

The Boone County Parks and Recreation Master Plan identifies strong public demand for jogging, walking, biking, and hiking trails and prioritizes development of a countywide greenway and trail network. The plan recommends linking parks, schools, neighborhoods, and preserved open spaces through connected hike-bike corridors, expanding trail systems in parks such as Central Park, England-Idlewild Park, and Boone Woods, and integrating trails into future park acquisitions. Additional recommendations include developing horse trails, nature trails, and greenway connections along natural corridors to support recreation and conservation.

KENTON COUNTY PARKS MASTER PLAN (2016)

The 2016 Kenton County Parks Master Plan identifies expansion of the county's trail network as a priority for recreation and connectivity between parks and natural areas. Key recommendations include developing additional hiking and natural-surface trails within county parks and constructing a paved shared-use trail connecting Pioneer Park to Doe Run Lake, creating a regional recreation corridor and improving access between major park destinations. The plan also supports broader greenway connections linking parks, neighborhoods, and scenic landscapes across Kenton County.

NEW KENTON COUNTY PARK MASTER PLAN (2022)

The New Kenton County Park Master Plan outlines development of a 225-acre park along Independence Station Road adjacent to Lincoln Ridge Park. The plan establishes a long-term framework for recreation, habitat restoration, and community use. A central feature is a diverse trail network, currently in design and subject to refinement, including approximately 5.9 miles of mountain biking trails, 4.1 miles of hiking trails, 2.2 miles of paved ADA-accessible trails, and 2 miles of adaptive-ready multi-use paths, anchored by a mountain biking hub with pump track and beginner skills loop.

A.J. JOLLY PARK MASTER PLAN (2021)

The A.J. Jolly Park Master Plan (2021 update) guides improvements to Campbell County's largest park and its recreation assets. Trail recommendations focus on expanding and enhancing the park's extensive system of equestrian trails (currently about 20 miles), improving natural-surface hiking and walking trails, and adding additional walking/biking connections and trailheads in wooded areas of the park. The plan also recommends expanding nature trails near the Environmental Education Center and improving access points and trailhead facilities to support trail users.

OHIO RIVER WAY STRATEGIC PLAN (2025)

The Ohio River Way Strategic Plan (2025) promotes a braided network of land and water trails linking communities along the Ohio River. Priorities include expanding the National Water Trail, improving river access and campsites, promoting riverwalks, and supporting regional bicycling and multi-use trail connections between river towns.

KY 237 Trail - Boone County, KY

PLAN OVERVIEW

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Existing Conditions chapter summarizes key maps and analyses that inform the NKY Regional Trails Plan. These include regional context, existing and planned trails, trail usage data, and crash patterns. Demographic and socioeconomic maps highlight population density, race, income levels, and vehicle access to identify gaps, understand current conditions, and guide future trail planning decisions.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The Public Input chapter summarizes outreach efforts used to gather feedback on proposed trail routes and alternatives. Tri-State Trails and CORA engaged over 400 participants through two in-person open houses, a virtual meeting, and a 45-day online survey. Community input helped refine both paved and natural surface trail recommendations, including the braided trail network concept. Feedback on trail use, barriers, and priorities informed updates to alignments and implementation, ensuring the plan reflects local needs and preferences.

DESIGN GUIDELINES

The Design Guidelines chapter outlines best practices for both paved and natural surface trails. Paved trail guidance draws from NACTO and the KYTC Complete Streets Manual, addressing facility types, widths, separation, and intersection design to improve safety and comfort for all users. Natural surface trail guidance references IMBA's Trail Solutions and Mountain Bike Trail Development guidelines, focusing on sustainable trail design, alignment, grading, drainage, and long-term maintenance to support a resilient braided trail network.

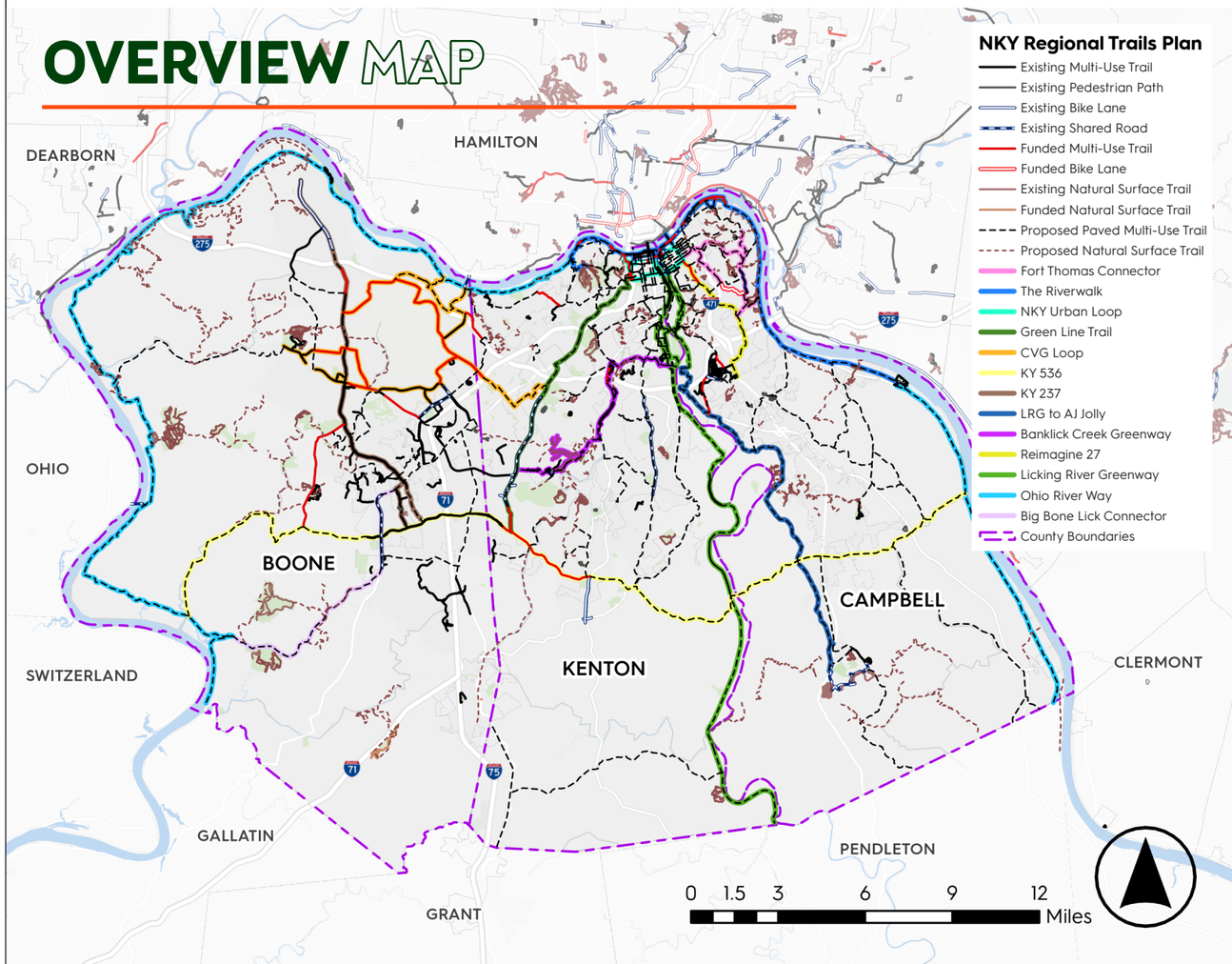
PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

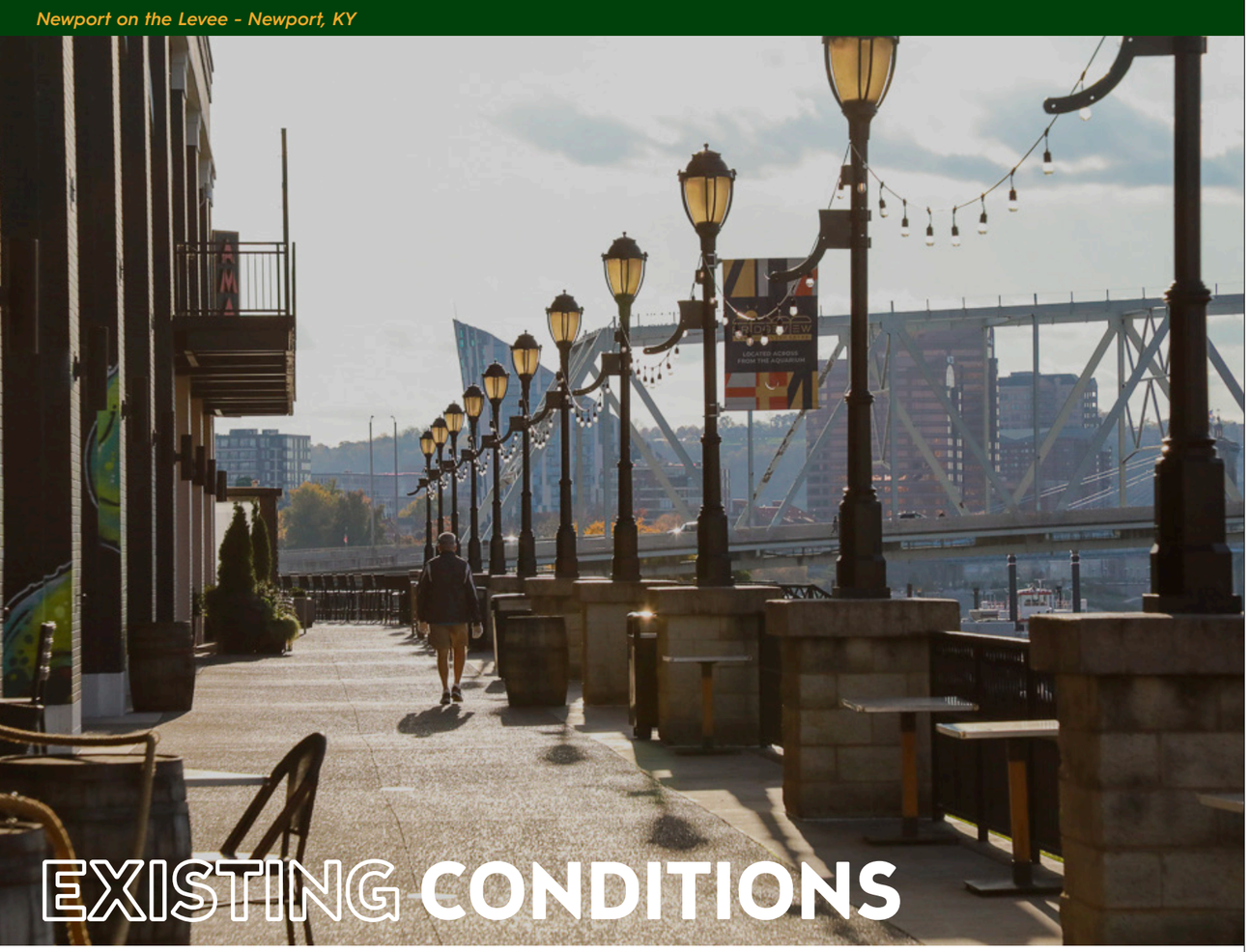
The Plan Recommendations chapter presents proposed routes and supporting strategies for implementing the regional trail network. Route recommendations include maps and details for arterial paved trails and natural surface trail focus areas, along with key partners for each corridor. Programmatic recommendations highlight initiatives such as branding and promotion, the OneNKY Connector Route and signage, traffic gardens, and community bike parks and skills courses to support network use and long-term success.

FUNDING STRATEGY

The Funding Strategy chapter outlines potential funding sources to support implementation of the regional trail network. It highlights key grant opportunities at the federal, state, and local levels, along with other funding mechanisms that can be used to advance both paved and natural surface trail projects, helping communities identify and pursue resources to move recommended projects forward.

Sargeant Park Site Visit - Dayton, KY





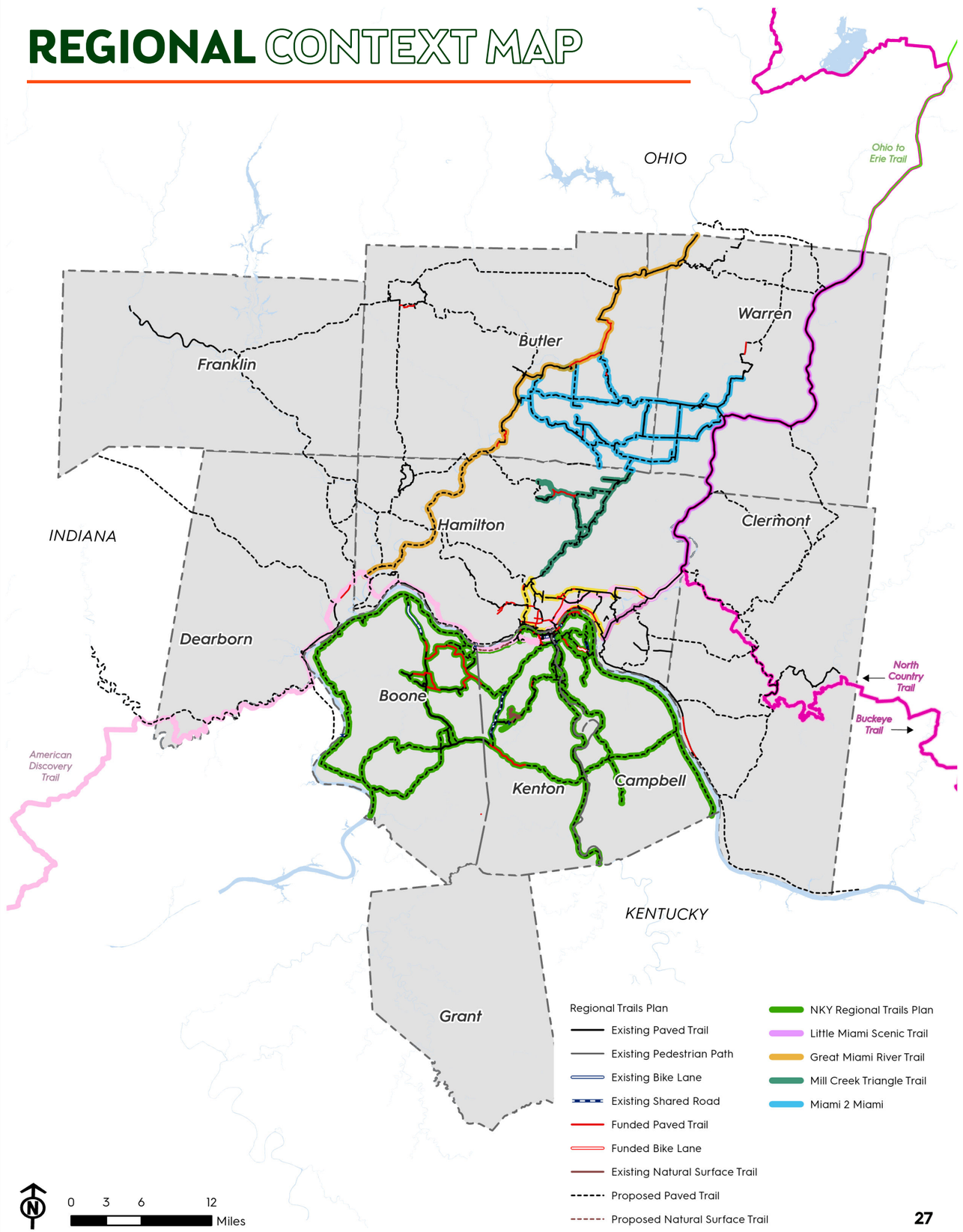
Newport on the Levee - Newport, KY

EXISTING CONDITIONS

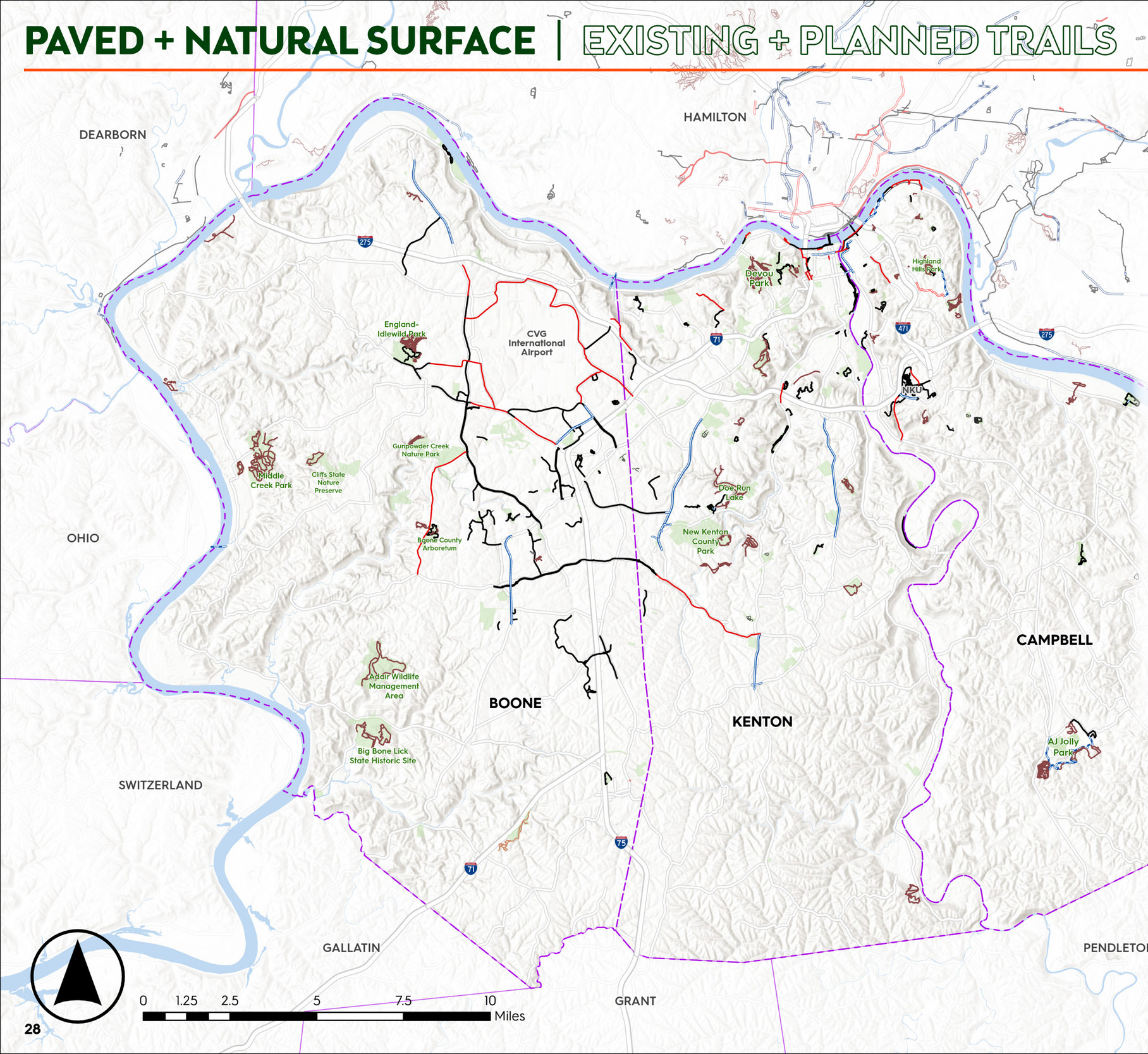
This chapter provides an overview of how people live, travel, and access trails across Northern Kentucky today. The analysis draws from multiple sources, including U.S. Census and American Community Survey data, Tri-State Trails' Trail Monitoring Program, crash data from Kentucky Transportation Cabinet records, and GIS mapping of the existing and planned trail network. These sources help identify where demand exists, where gaps remain, and how future investments can better serve communities.

Key findings highlight a strong and growing trail network anchored by the Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons and the Purple People Bridge, which sees nearly 2,000 users per day and far exceeds regional averages. Usage trends show that connectivity plays a major role in how people use trails, with more complete networks generating higher demand while disconnected segments see lower activity. Demographic and socioeconomic patterns also show the importance of improving access, with higher population densities in the urban core and more than 5 percent of households lacking access to a vehicle. The following pages examine existing and planned trails, trail usage patterns, safety conditions, and demographic characteristics to help guide future trail investments.

REGIONAL CONTEXT MAP



PAVED + NATURAL SURFACE | EXISTING + PLANNED TRAILS



EXISTING & FUNDED TRAILS

123	35	166
MILES OF PAVED TRAILS	MILES OF FUNDED PAVED TRAILS	MILES OF NATURAL SURFACE TRAILS

Northern Kentucky's existing and planned trail network is anchored by a strong urban core in northern Kenton and Campbell Counties. The Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons (5.8 miles built, 3 miles funded) and the Licking River Greenway provide key paved connections, with recent improvements including newly added bike lanes on the Girl Scout Bridge and a planned shared use path on the reconstructed Fourth Street Bridge. Multi-use natural surface trail systems at Devou Park, Highland Hills, Tower Park, and Sargeant Park further expand recreational access in these areas.

Across the region, Kenton County includes paved facilities such as Pioneer Park trails, the Bromley–Crescent Springs corridor, and the expanding KY 536 trail, which connects into Boone County's growing network. Campbell County features trails around NKU and at A.J. Jolly Park, while Boone County continues to build momentum with the CVG Loop, KY 536, and KY 237 corridors, complemented by natural surface trails at England-Idlewild, Big Bone Lick, and Middle Creek Park.

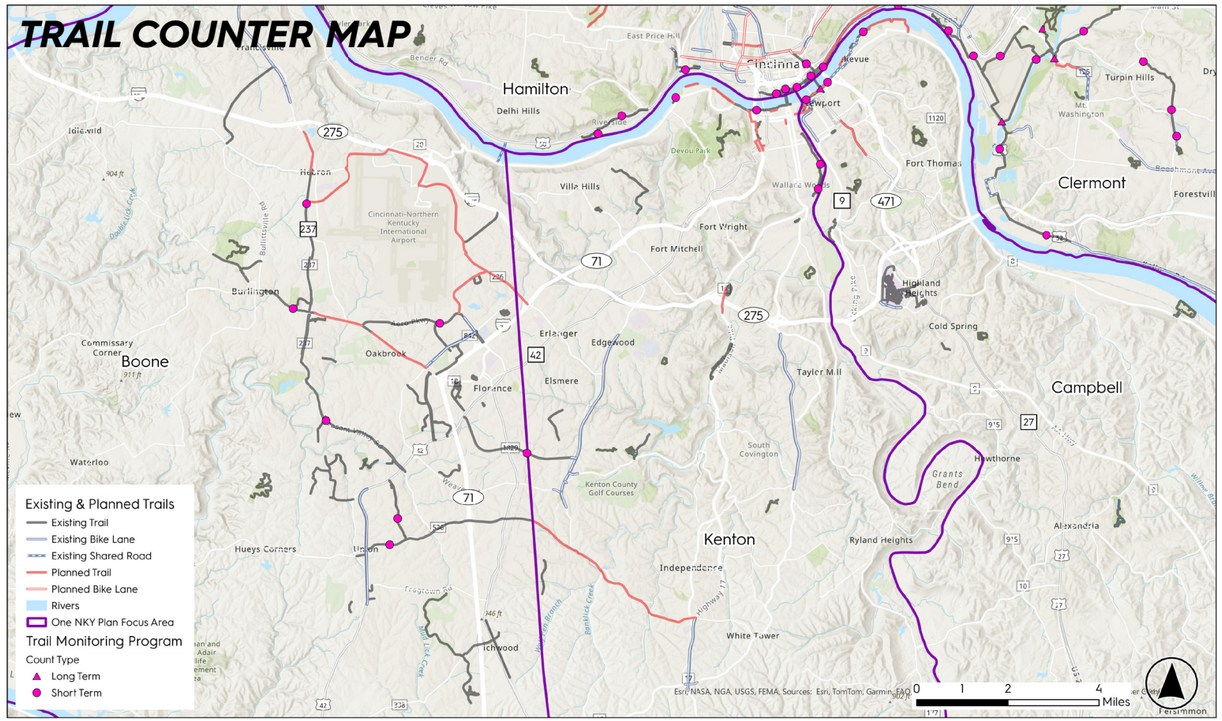
NKY Regional Trails Plan

- Existing Multi-Use Trail
- Existing Pedestrian Path
- Existing Bike Lane
- Existing Shared Road
- Funded Multi-Use Trail
- Funded Bike Lane
- Existing Natural Surface Trail
- Funded Natural Surface Trail

Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS

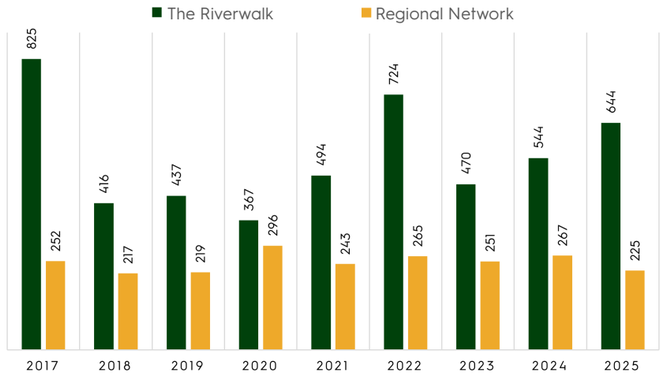
TRAIL MONITORING DATA

TRAIL COUNTER MAP



Tri-State Trails' Trail Monitoring Program tracks usage across the region using permanent (year-round) and short-term (7-day) counts, generating Average Annual Daily Trail Traffic (AADTT) and Trail Miles Traveled (TMT). This data helps identify usage trends and supports grant applications for new trail investments. In Northern Kentucky, data is collected from a permanent counter on the Purple People Bridge and short-term counters along key corridors. As trail connections improve, usage increases, while disconnected trails tend to see lower activity.

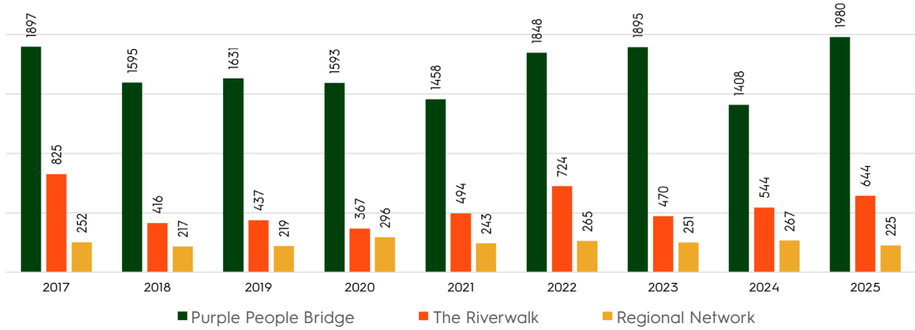
RIVERWALK AT RIVERFRONT COMMONS AADTT OVER TIME



The Riverwalk consistently exceeds the regional average, with strong and sustained usage over time. After a dip in 2020 due to a trail closure, counts rebounded in 2021 and peaked in 2022, remaining high through 2025.

Overall, the data highlights steady growth and reinforces the Riverwalk as one of the region's most heavily used trail corridors.

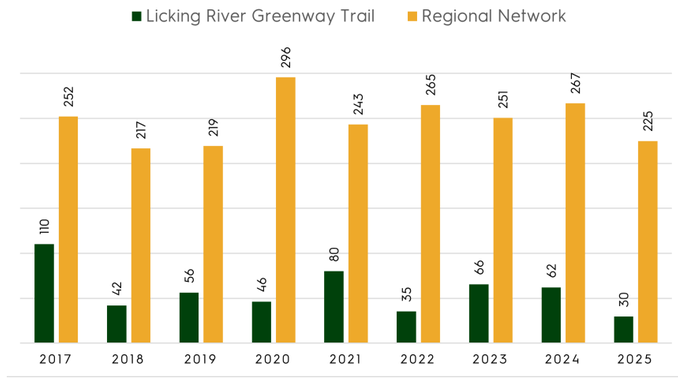
PURPLE PEOPLE BRIDGE AADTT OVER TIME



1,980
USERS PER DAY ON THE PURPLE PEOPLE BRIDGE IN 2025

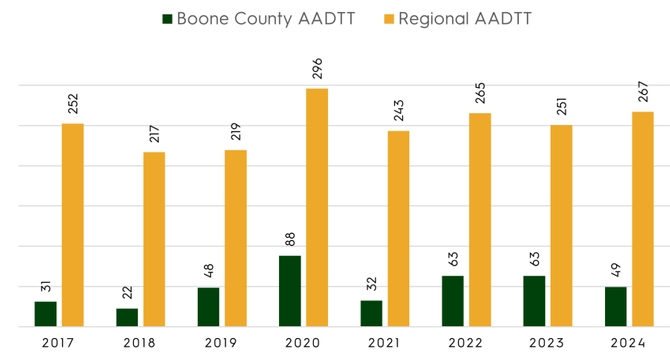
The Purple People Bridge consistently ranks as the most highly utilized trail in the region, with AADTT well above both The Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons and the regional average each year, often seeing roughly five times the usage of the regional average. While The Riverwalk also shows strong usage and growth, the bridge's sustained high volumes highlight its critical role as a regional connection for people walking and biking between Ohio and Kentucky, and as one of the most important active transportation facilities in the region.

LICKING RIVER GREENWAY AADTT OVER TIME



The Licking River Greenway sees lower usage compared to the regional average, reflecting its role as a local recreation asset. Its shorter length and limited connectivity constrain usage, but extending the trail to more communities and linking it to the Riverwalk could significantly increase demand.

BOONE COUNTY TRAILS AADTT OVER TIME



Boone County trails show lower usage than the regional network, reflecting a system that is still developing and not yet fully connected. As key corridors like the CVG Loop Trail are completed and linked to surrounding communities, usage is expected to grow, highlighting the importance of continued investment in connectivity.

Former Fourth Street Bridge - Covington and Newport, KY

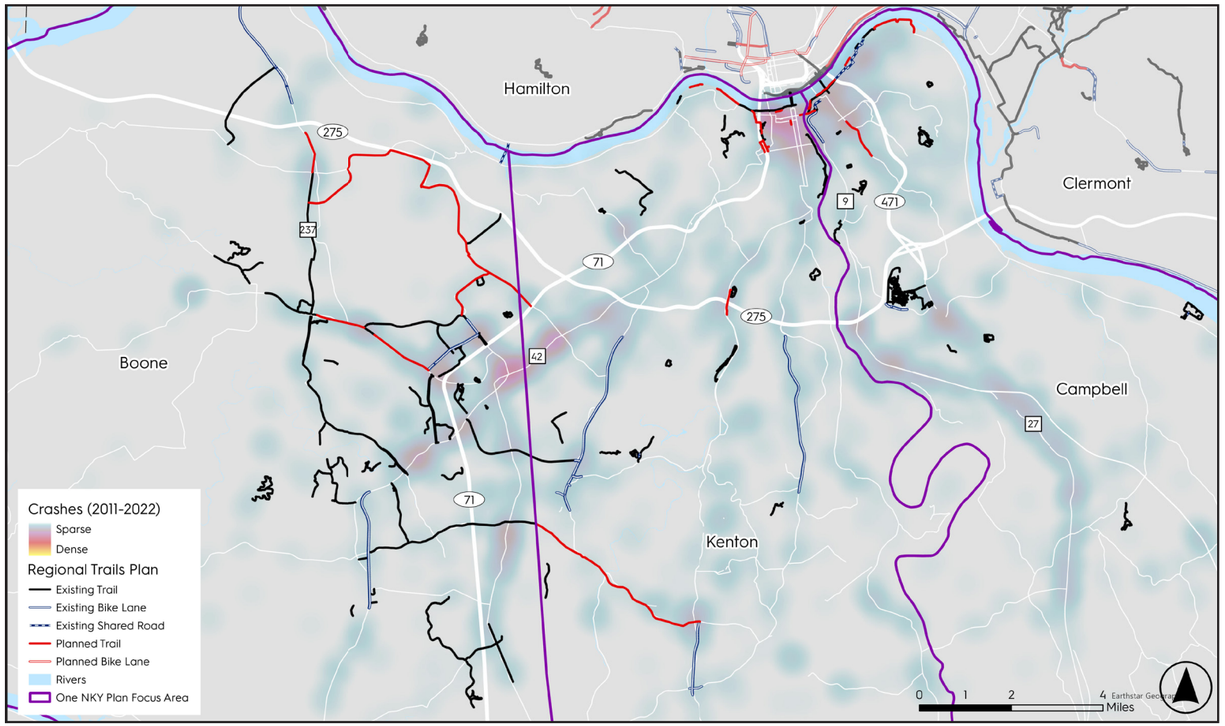
CRASH ANALYSIS

With the omission of interstate crashes, there were approximately 2,000 crashes between 2011-2022 across Northern Kentucky (Boone, Kenton, and Campbell Counties).

Most crashes are occurred in more densely populated areas on or near Kentucky state routes. According to this data, some roads that have reoccurring crashes are Dixie Highway, Alexandria Pike, and 4th Street. Fifteen percent of crash types in this time period involved cyclists or pedestrians.

15%
OF CRASHES INVOLVE BIKES OR PEDESTRIANS

NKY CRASH ANALYSIS MAP *(2011-2022, NO INTERSTATES)*



DEMOGRAPHICS

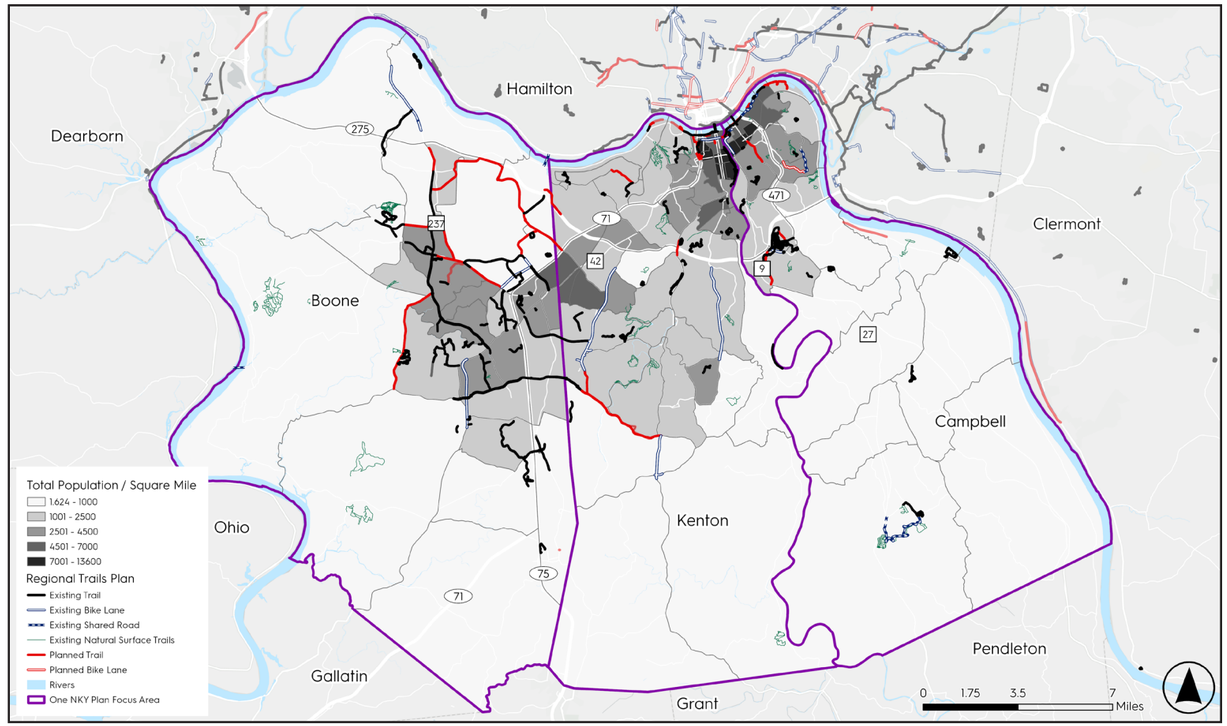
POPULATION DENSITY

The majority of Northern Kentucky's population is concentrated in the urban core north of I-275, with the highest densities located between I-471 and I-71 in Covington and Newport, reaching up to 13,500 people per square mile.

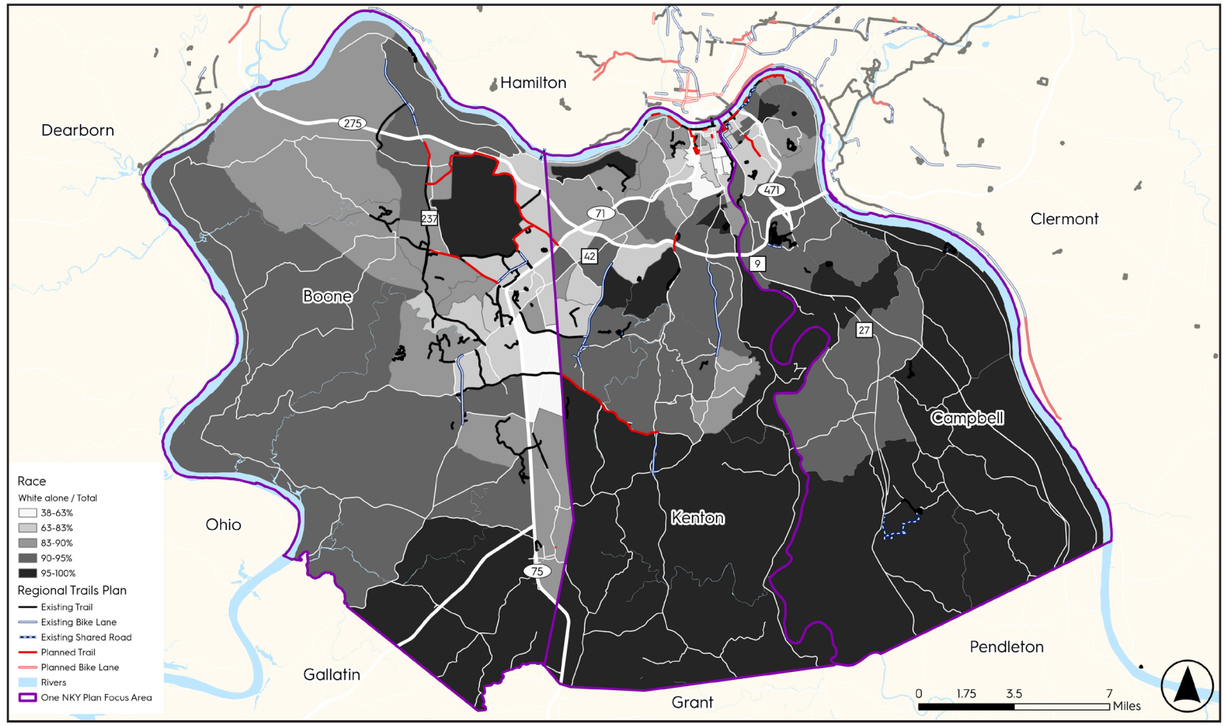
Additional areas of higher density are found in central Campbell County around NKU, as well as north of KY 536 in central Boone and Kenton Counties, including communities such as Erlanger, Florence, Burlington, Independence, and Fort Mitchell. The estimated total population of Northern Kentucky is 400,686 people.

TOTAL POPULATION OF NORTHERN KENTUCKY
400,000

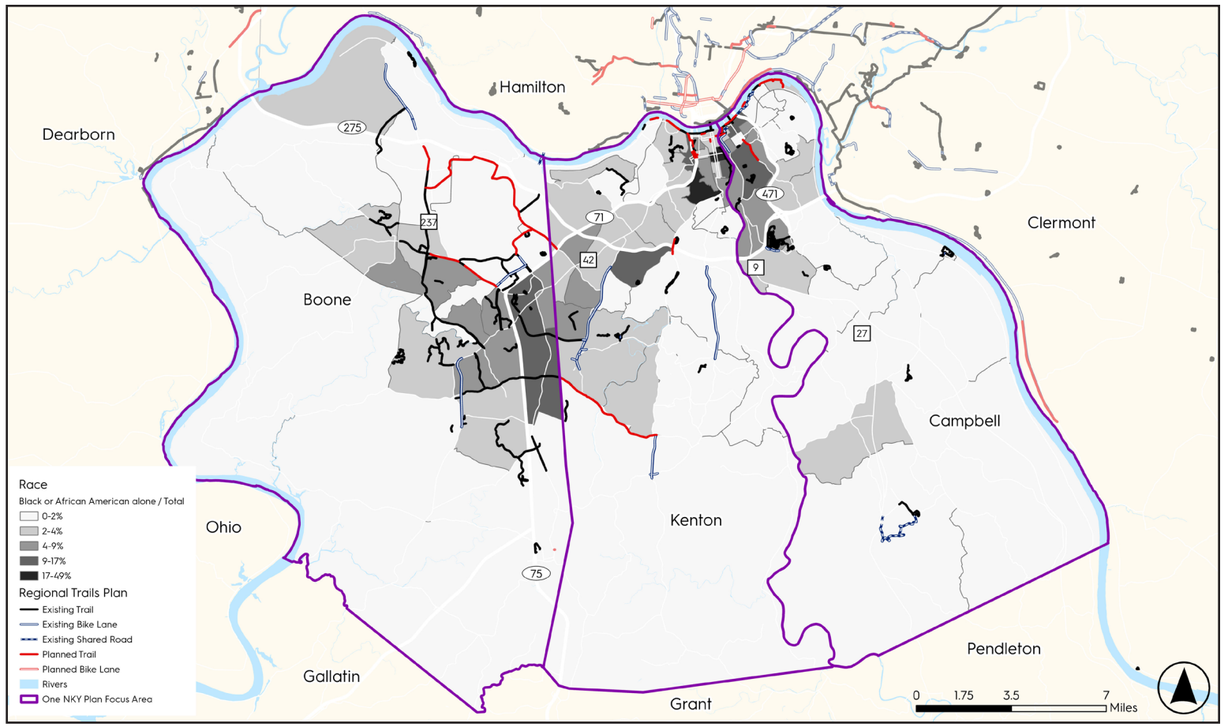
POPULATION DENSITY MAP



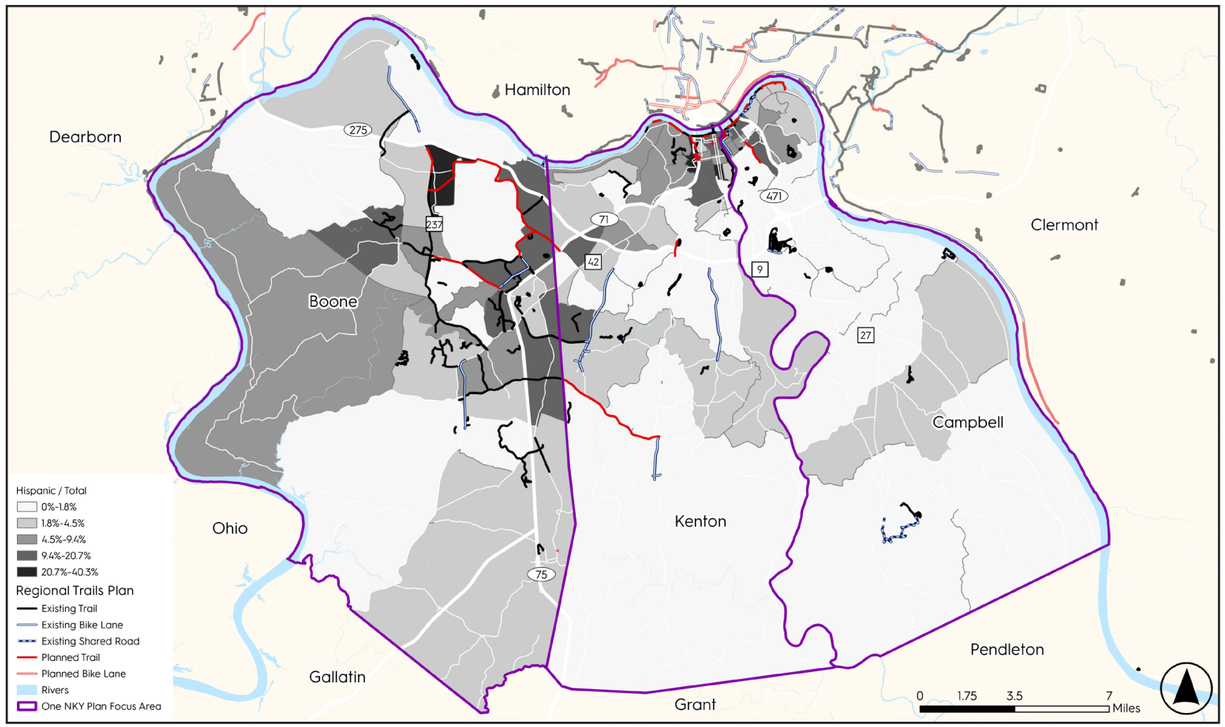
WHITE POPULATION



BLACK POPULATION



HISPANIC + LATIN POPULATION



DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Northern Kentucky has a majority White alone population of 87.5% compared to 81-86% statewide. In more rural communities in these counties, the white population is larger. More densely populated areas in Northern Kentucky tend to be more diverse in communities like Covington and Newport.

Only 3.7% of residents describe themselves as Black alone compared to 8-9.4% statewide. As mentioned previously, nonwhite residents tend to reside in more urban communities like Covington, Newport, and Florence, as well as parts of Burlington, Wilder, and Crestview Hills.

Nearly 4.5% of people in Northern Kentucky describe themselves as Hispanic or of Latin Origin, compared to 5-5.6% at the state level. Just northwest of Cincinnati Northern Kentucky International Airport, between 20-40% of residents identify as Hispanic or Latino. Other areas in this Northern Kentucky with large populations of Hispanic or Latino residents are in Florence, Covington, and Newport.

88% WHITE

4% BLACK

5% HISPANIC

SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Understanding socioeconomic conditions helps identify where transportation barriers exist and where trail investments can improve access to jobs, services, and recreation. Income levels and vehicle access are key indicators of communities that may rely more on walking, biking, and transit.

The following maps highlight household income patterns and access to a vehicle across Northern Kentucky, illustrating differences between higher-income, lower-density areas, and more densely populated communities with greater transportation needs.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

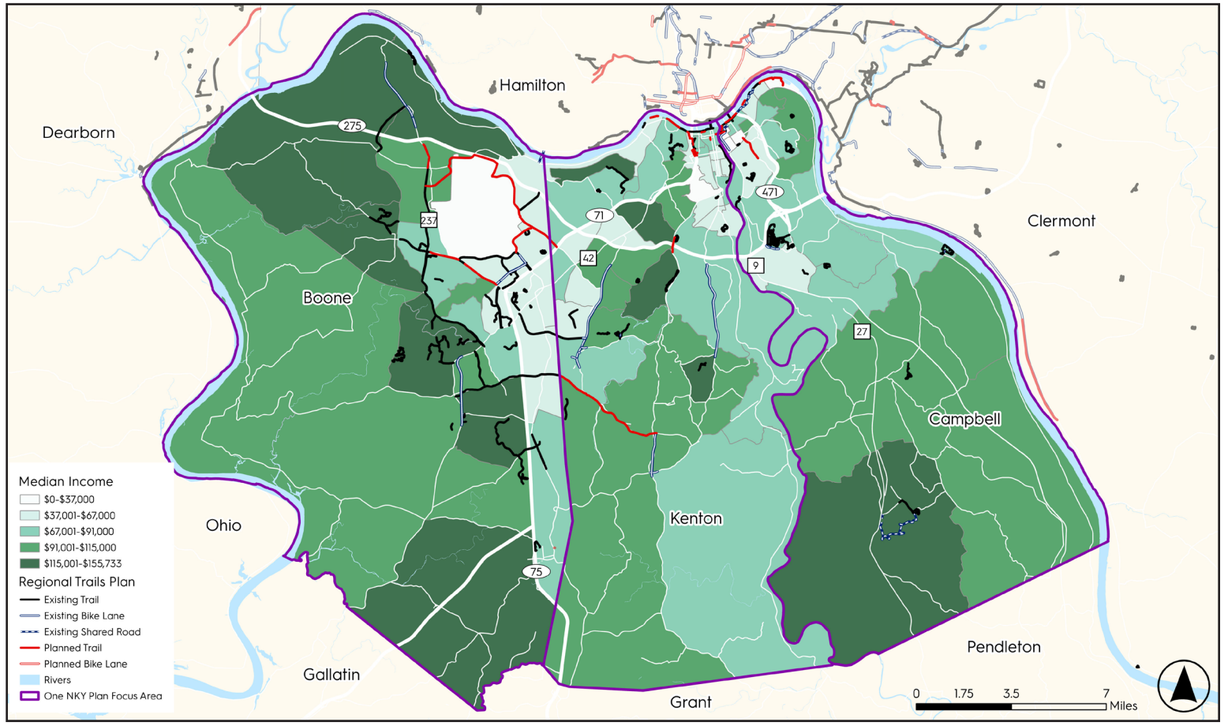
The median income in northern Kentucky is $81,000 with higher incomes in Boone County trending towards over $100,000 as the annual income. Wealthier communities tend to be in more rural areas like Verona, Grants Lick, Persimmon Grove, Union, Hebron, and Bullittsville. More low income communities lie in more densely populated areas like Florence, Erlanger, Covington, Newport, and Cold Spring, just south of Northern Kentucky University.

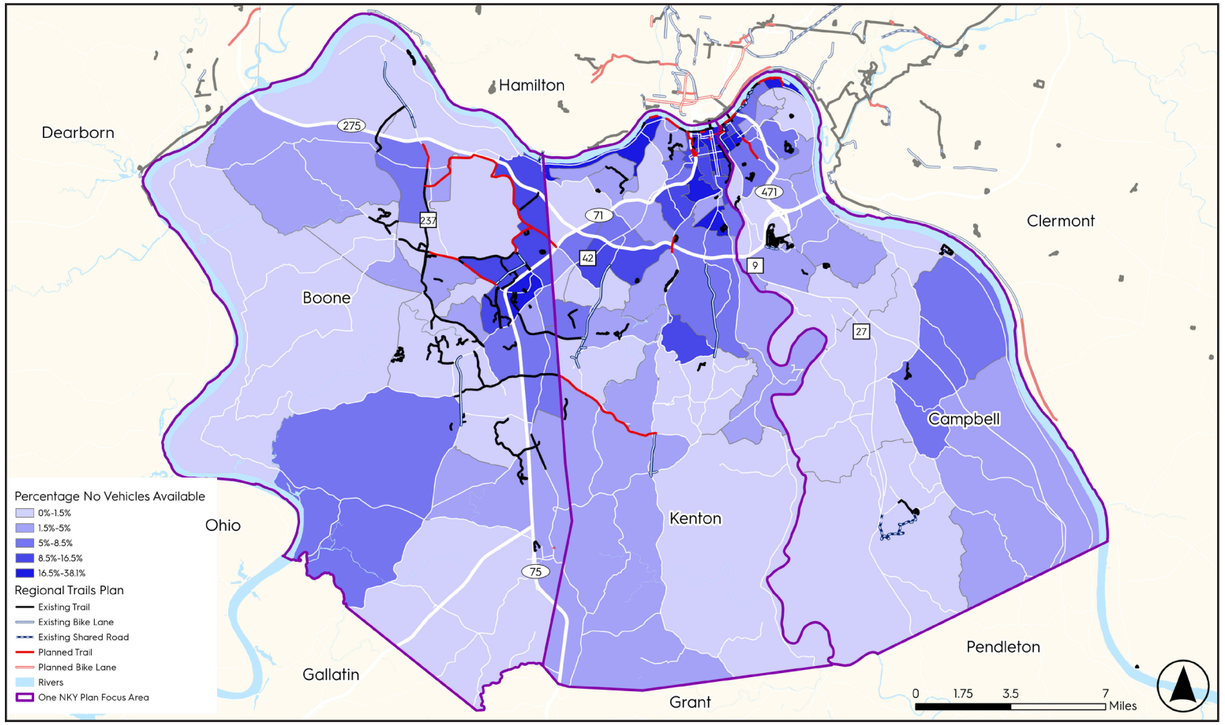
9,000
HOUSEHOLDS IN NKY DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO A VEHICLE

Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons - Covington, KY

ACCESS TO A VEHICLE

According to this dataset, out of 157,166 households in northern Kentucky, 5.7% identify as zero car households. While some of this may not be an issue for those in more urban communities, in southeast Campbell County and southwest Boone County, more rural communities have a higher percentage of zero car households. New trail connections as a transportation option may be vital to these communities.





PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

After data collection, an analysis of the existing conditions, and working group meetings with key stakeholders, Tri-State Trails and CORA developed initial proposed routes and alternatives for the Northern Kentucky Regional Trails Plan. Paved trails and natural surface trails were proposed to form an interconnected system that could provide continuous routes that link communities and destinations while offering flexible options for people walking, biking, and exploring outdoors.

A robust public engagement outreach strategy was used to connect with over 400 survey responses from people across Northern Kentucky and Greater Cincinnati. Critical feedback from the public engagement process was used to refine plan recommendations and proposed routes.

422
SURVEY RESPONSES

238
UNIQUE COMMENTS

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The public engagement process included several opportunities for the public to weigh in on the initial proposed routes. The project team hosted public open houses to present the plan materials and gather community input along with an online public input survey.

OPEN HOUSES

BOONE COUNTY - 9/22/2025

CAMPBELL COUNTY - 9/29/2025

VIRTUAL MEETING - 10/2/2025

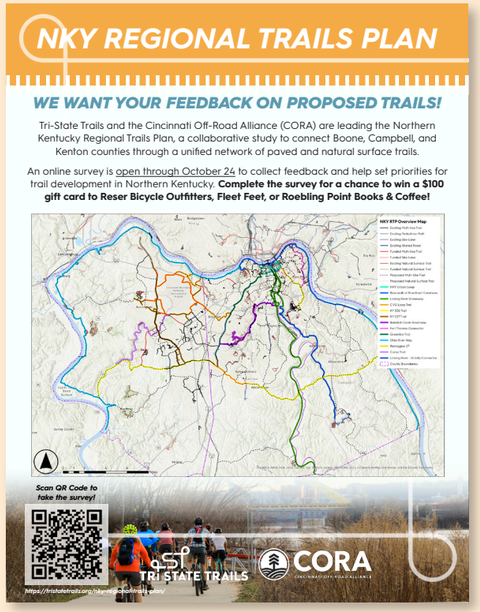
The project team hosted two in-person public open houses, plus one virtual open house, where project boards and maps were displayed around the room. The open houses also included a brief presentation from the project team to explain the goals of the project and field questions or concerns from the audience.

ONLINE SURVEY

OPEN 9/22/2025 - 10/27/2025

The online public input survey was open for 45 days to allow adequate time for public feedback. Tri-State Trails, CORA and project partners promoted the survey through a social media campaign and project fliers posted in public spaces like libraries and government buildings. The project team developed an online StoryMap to visually present the proposed facility types and proposed routes for paved and natural surface trails.

SURVEY FLIER



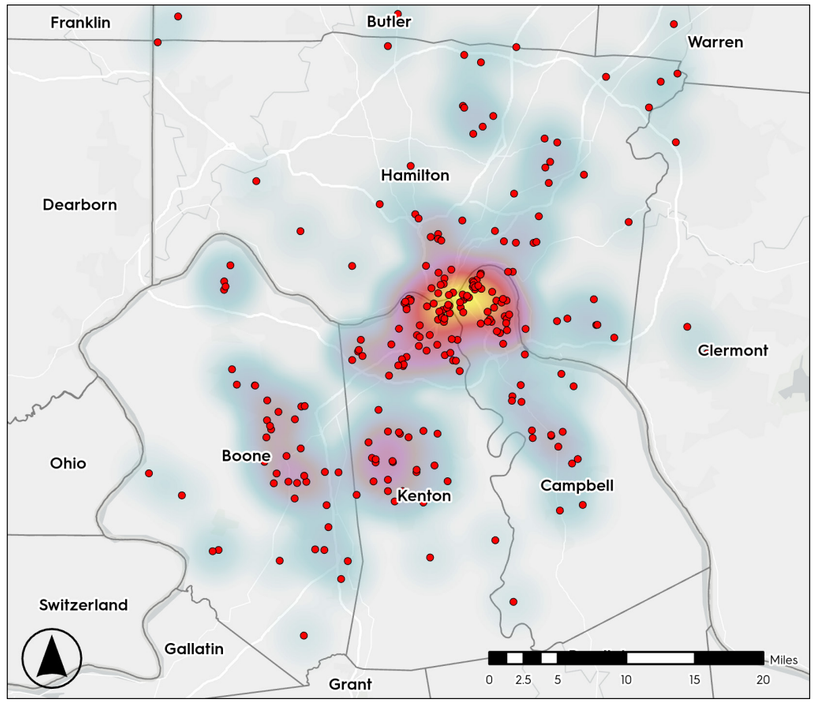
PROJECT STORYMAP

SOCIAL MEDIA GRAPHIC

SURVEY RESULTS

The online survey received 422 responses, with broad geographic representation and strong participation in Northern Kentucky. Results show overwhelming support for expanding the trail network, with 95% of respondents supporting more paved and natural surface trails. Respondents use trails for walking, biking, and hiking, but barriers such as limited access, lack of awareness, and time constraints highlight the need for a more connected and accessible system.

SURVEY RESPONDENT HEATMAP



39
BOONE COUNTY RESPONSES

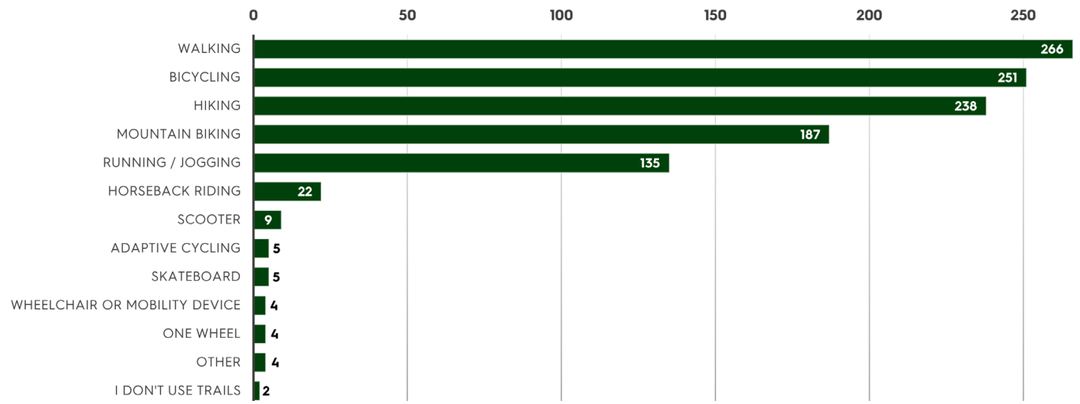
59
CAMPBELL COUNTY RESPONSES

243
KENTON COUNTY RESPONSES

75
OHIO RESPONSES

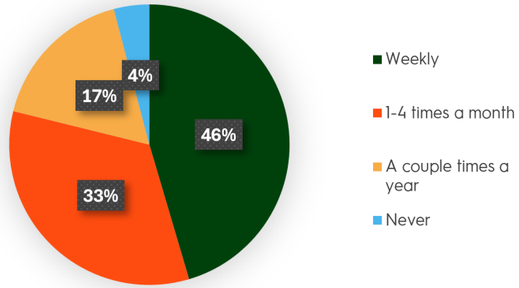
422
TOTAL

HOW DO YOU TYPICALLY USE TRAILS?



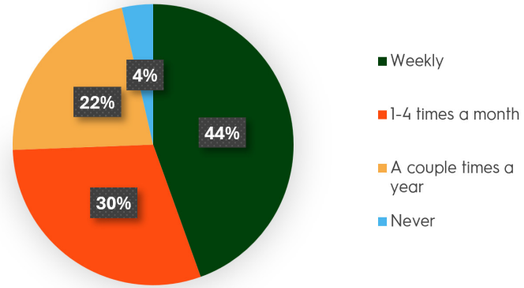
422 RESPONSES

HOW OFTEN DO YOU USE MULTI-USE PAVED TRAILS?



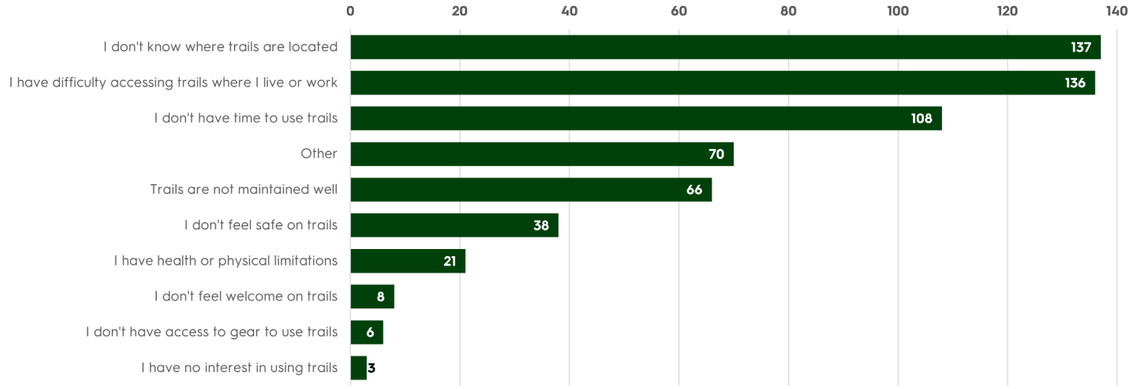
418 RESPONSES

HOW OFTEN DO YOU USE NATURAL SURFACE (DIRT OR GRAVEL) TRAILS?



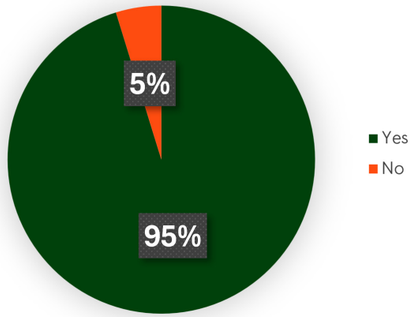
420 RESPONSES

WHAT PREVENTS YOU FROM USING TRAILS AT ALL OR MORE THAN YOU CURRENTLY DO?



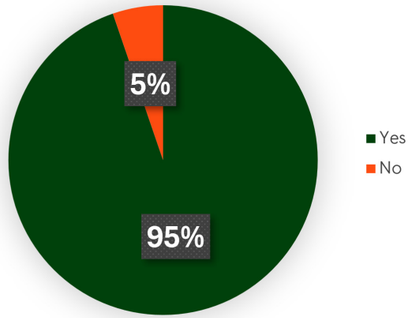
390 RESPONSES

DO YOU SUPPORT MORE PAVED TRAILS IN NKY?



419 RESPONSES

DO YOU SUPPORT MORE NATURAL SURFACE TRAILS IN NKY?



418 RESPONSES

SURVEY RESULTS

Survey responses show that the most important factors when choosing to use a trail are experiencing nature, separation from vehicle traffic, opportunities for exercise, and mental health benefits. Safety also ranks highly, including safe roadway crossings and personal safety on trails.

Proximity to home and connectivity to destinations are key considerations, while factors such as parking, amenities, and historical interpretation are generally less influential.

WHICH FACTORS ARE MOST IMPORTANT WHEN DECIDING TO VISIT OR USE A TRAIL?

#1 - OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIENCE NATURE

#2 - SEPARATION FROM VEHICLE TRAFFIC

#3 - OPPORTUNITY TO EXERCISE

#4 - MENTAL HEALTH / WELLNESS

#5 - SAFE / ACCESSIBLE ROADWAY CROSSINGS

#6 - PERSONAL SAFETY ON TRAILS

#7 - PROXIMITY OF TRAIL TO MY HOME

#8 - TRAIL CONNECTIVITY TO DESTINATIONS

#9 - EASE OF NAVIGATING TRAIL

#10 - ACCESSIBILITY OF PARKING

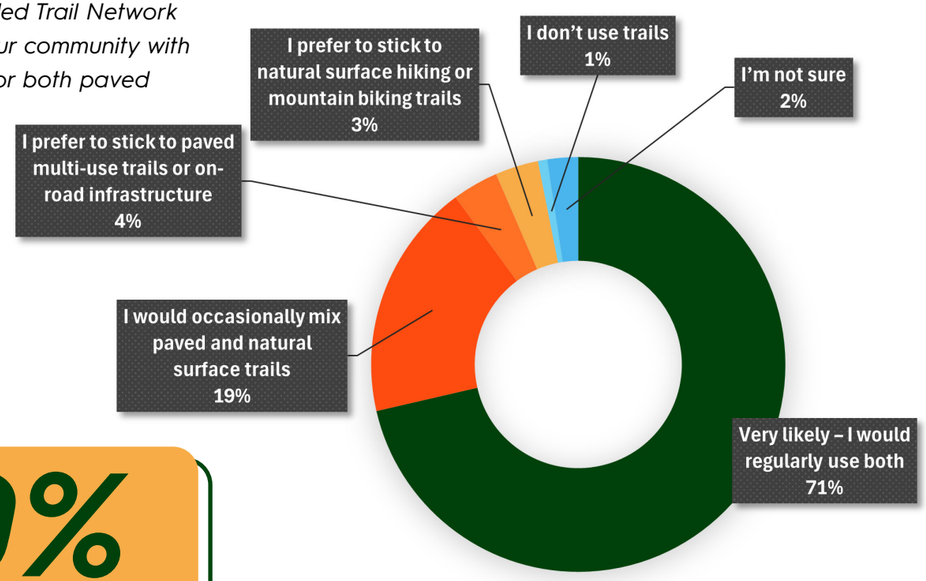
#11 - AVAILABILITY OF RESTROOMS, WATER, ETC.

#12 - OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN ABOUT HISTORY

#13 - PROXIMITY OF TRAIL TO MY WORKPLACE

WOULD YOU USE A BRAIDED TRAIL NETWORK?

If a continuous Braided Trail Network were available in your community with connected options for both paved paths and natural surface trails, how likely would you be to use both types of trails together?



90%
SAID THEY WOULD

There is strong interest in a braided trail network that combines paved and natural surface trails. Nearly 90% of respondents indicated they would use both types of trails together, with a majority saying they would regularly do so. Only a small share prefer to use one trail type exclusively or are unsure, **highlighting broad support for an integrated, multi-experience trail system.**

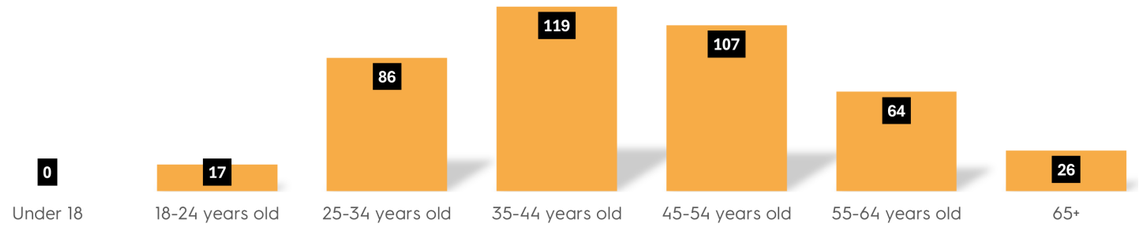
Public Open House - Newport, KY

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

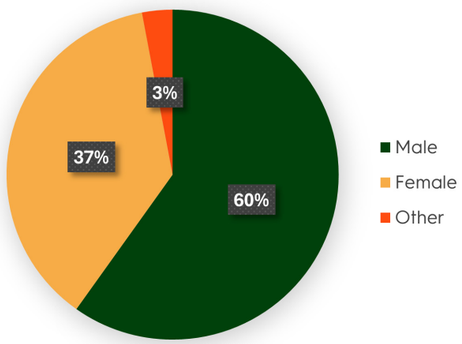
Optional for respondents, demographic questions were included at the end of the survey. This information was collected to better understand who participated in the survey and to evaluate how well responses reflect the broader community.

Understanding respondent demographics helps identify potential gaps in outreach and ensures that future engagement efforts can be more inclusive and representative of all Northern Kentucky residents.

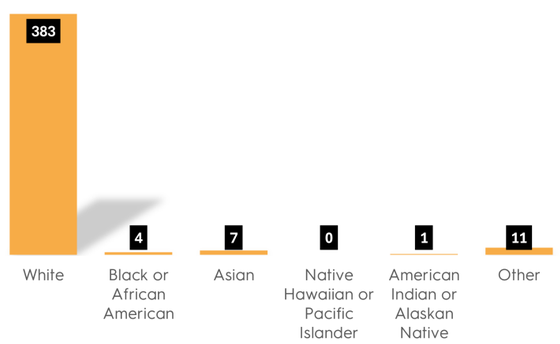
AGE



GENDER



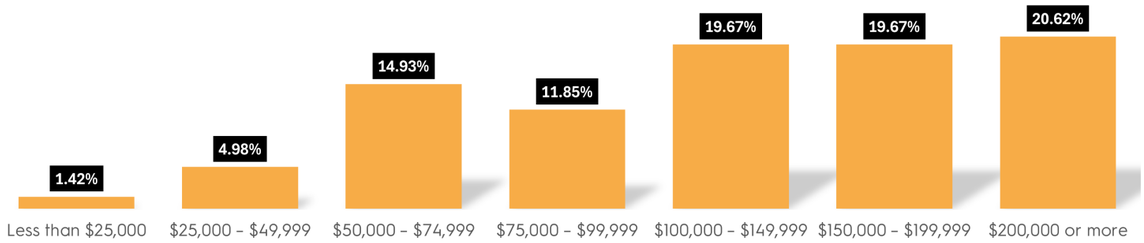
RACE



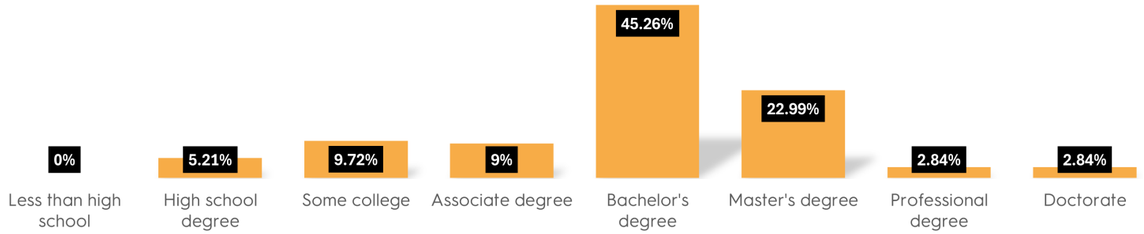
Survey responses show participation across a range of age groups, with the highest representation among adults ages 25–54. Gender responses were relatively balanced, with a slight majority identifying as male.

Race data indicates that most respondents identified as White, with smaller representation from other racial groups, which generally reflects the demographics of the Northern Kentucky region.

INCOME



EDUCATION ATTAINMENT



Income and education data show a wide range of household incomes and a highly educated respondent base, with many participants holding a bachelor's or advanced degree. This distribution provides insight into the economic and educational backgrounds of survey participants and helps inform recommendations that consider affordability, access, and the varying needs of trail users across the region.

Public Open House - Burlington, KY

KEY THEMES IDENTIFIED

GENERAL THEMES

General Support / Positive Feedback

- Broad enthusiasm for expanding the paved trail and natural surface trail network, with many saying **"the more, the better,"** and noting NKY could become a regional outdoor destination.
- Desire for long, well-connected trails modeled after proven systems like Little Miami Scenic Trail.
- Users highlight high demand, volunteer support, and willingness to travel for trails, citing success stories like Knoxville and Bentonville.
- Emphasis on keeping trails as natural as possible and prioritizing ecosystem protection.

Amenities & Trailhead Needs

- Requests for core amenities like bathrooms, water fountains, lighting, and safe parking, along with access to nearby businesses.
- Requests for basic trailhead amenities like free parking (including trailer parking), benches, waste stations, and other user comforts.

Wayfinding / Mapping / Public Awareness / Programming

- Requests for better mapping and wayfinding tools, including clear labeling of trail types, offline navigation, and a centralized website for current trail info.
- Need for signage and map resources so people know where trails are and how to use them.
- Interest in more trail-based events (running, hiking, ultras).

Safety / Security

- Safety issues include enforcing leash laws and operating hours, and ensuring trails feel secure, minimize isolation, and provide protected bike infrastructure separated from traffic.

Public Open House - Burlington, KY

PAVED MULTI-USE TRAIL THEMES

Connectivity / Network Gaps

- Strong desire for safe, continuous trail connections between cities, neighborhoods, parks, and key destinations.
- Need to close major gaps—crossing barriers like highways, rivers, and high-traffic roads, and connections to river cities.
- Interest in trails that support active transportation, with access to workplaces, restaurants, schools, and transit.

Safety / Protected Infrastructure

- Strong demand for protected, off-road trails and physically separated bike lanes.
- Safety concerns at busy intersections and along high-traffic roads, especially for children and older riders.
- Desire for well-lit, well-maintained, wide trails that feel secure for all users.

Trail Surface / Paving / Width

- Strong preference for smooth, wide paved trails for narrow-tire bikes, wheelchairs, strollers, and small-wheeled devices.
- Mixed interest in surface types—many prefer asphalt for comfort and access, while others prefer alternatives like crushed limestone.

Project Delivery / Timing / Funding

- Strong interest in funding and quick project delivery with support for using roadway funds or fundraising.

Paved Trail Maintenance

- Calls for better upkeep of existing paths and bike lanes, including surface repairs and debris removal.

NATURAL SURFACE TRAIL THEMES

Varied Types of Natural Surface Trails

- Strong interest in longer, interconnected natural surface routes that link parks to the trail system rather than short, isolated loops.
- Support for expanding trails in existing parks (e.g., England-Idlewild) and creating a braided trail network with multiple skill levels and trail types (beginner, flow, downhill, hybrid-friendly).

Equestrian Trails / Horse Access

- Strong demand for more dedicated horse-accessible trails, with limited options currently.
- Calls to protect existing equestrian trails at A.J. Jolly and avoid mixing horses with bikes.

Trail Connectivity / Network Growth

- Strong interest in expanding the natural surface network by connecting parks, neighborhoods, and nearby communities so people can ride from home instead of driving.
- Support for linking natural surface trails to paved greenways and regional loops to grow a larger, connected trail system.

Trail Maintenance / Stewardship

- Many note that natural surface trails are cheaper to build and maintain, but still need ongoing maintenance and better upkeep.
- Strong willingness from users (especially MTB and equestrian groups) to volunteer or help with stewardship if given structure and support.

User Balance / Multi-Use Conflicts

- Concerns about trail conflicts and user compatibility, with calls to keep some natural surface trails separated by use (e.g., horses vs. bikes vs. hikers).

SURVEY COMMENTS

> The ability this would give me to be able to ride my bike from my house and truly just be able to safely explore/ride would truly be incredible. I seriously hope this project can be fulfilled. I often travel to places where trail networks like this exist and think of relocating there due to how expansive and accessible the trail network is. The opportunity to have this out my front door is a dream.

> I've been to places like Bentonville, Arkansas, which has been highly successful and also Knoxville, Tennessee in the Urban Wilderness where it's brings together the community and it's such a positive effect on mental health wellness and a huge economic boost to the area and look forward to having it done right here in Northern Kentucky.

> We travel To Knoxville where they have a terrific braided network. It makes for a fun get away and I can't imagine living somewhere we could enjoy trails like that everyday! This is terrific!

> Any trails that allow long distance bike rides off the road would be amazing. Either crushed limestone or paved is great. First priority for me is the ability to ride off road safely. I love to ride through nature but being able to bike to different northern Ky areas via trail would be awesome too. Rail trail paths are what I am looking for - not mountain biking.

> I know it is already in the works, but I would really love to see more connections of MTB trails out of the park and in to town. I ride both as a means of transportation/for environmental reasons and enjoy mountain biking. Being able to ride to and from the trails is great. I am a confident road cyclist/commuter, but it's hard to keep up with traffic safely on a mountain bike. Thank you all for what you do.

> If you are looking to prioritize the paved trails, it all begins with connecting the suburbs/ outside cities to the river cities. This would be huge! The other frustration I have sometimes is parking. When I need to load up my bike, it would be great to have free trailhead parking.

> I would like to see protected bike lanes whenever possible. People are less likely to use lanes that are not separated from traffic by a physical barrier.

> The more trails the better!!!

> I think this would be awesome! I think gravel or dirt paths are a great way to explore nature near the urban Cincinnati area.

> To be able to travel across natural surface trails would be amazing. Just getting from one trail system to another on natural surfaces would be incredible.

> I am an avid mountain biker, and would really love to see more challenging and varied trails focused on descending and gravity.

> Prioritize getting between destinations rather than biking being a primarily recreational activity.

> I hope there will be more bridle / horse trails! Let me know if you need more feedback, ideas, or volunteers to create more horse trails!

> Attempting to make NKY an outdoor destination is a great idea. The more cycling is normalized, the better for the population.

Devou Park Backcounty Trails - Covington & Ludlow, KY (Photo credit: Nick Dew)

Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons - Covington, KY

DESIGN STANDARDS

Design standards in the NKY Regional Trails Plan establish a consistent framework for developing both paved and natural surface trails across Boone, Campbell, and Kenton Counties. These standards prioritize safety, comfort, and accessibility, supporting a network that serves users of all ages and abilities while creating a cohesive regional trail experience.

Paved trail and on-street bikeway guidance draws from established best practices to ensure facilities are safe, intuitive, and connected. These standards help communities select appropriate facility types based on roadway context, traffic conditions, and surrounding land uses, while supporting long-term network build-out and implementation.

Natural surface trail guidance reflects industry-proven approaches to building sustainable, durable trails that work with the landscape. Key principles include managing water through rolling contour alignments, maintaining moderate grades, and incorporating features like grade reversals and outslopes to reduce erosion and long-term maintenance needs.

These design standards position trails as essential infrastructure that supports recreation, transportation, and economic development across the region.

BRAIDED TRAIL NETWORK

WHAT IS A BRAIDED TRAIL NETWORK?

A braided trail network is an interconnected system of paved multi-use paths and natural surface trails that link communities and destinations. Whether walking, biking, hiking, or mountain biking, it allows people to mix and match routes for a flexible, continuous experience tailored to their preferences and skill level.

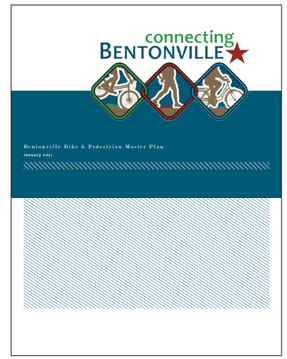
By integrating both paved and natural surface trail planning, this plan builds the vision for a braided trail network in Northern Kentucky that blends transportation and recreation across the region on a *variety of trail types*.

NKY has over 150 miles of existing paved and natural surface trails, and this plan focuses on how to connect it all to form a cohesive system.

Wasson Way Paved and Natural Surface Trail - Cincinnati, OH

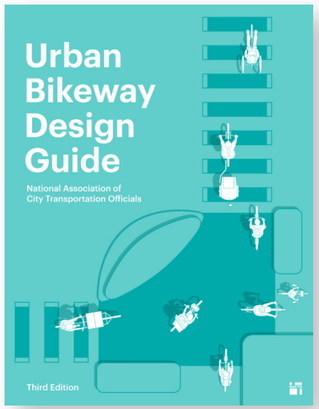
INSPIRATION AND BEST PRACTICES

The NKY Regional Trails Plan draws inspiration from peer regions that have invested in braided trail networks combining greenways, natural surface trails, and neighborhood connectors. Bentonville leveraged this approach to create a nationally recognized trail system that supports daily mobility, major events, and a strong outdoor recreation economy. Similarly, Knoxville integrated more than 1,000 acres and 50 miles of interconnected trails into its urban fabric, generating an estimated $14–$29 million in annual economic impact while revitalizing adjacent neighborhoods and expanding access to outdoor recreation.



PAVED TRAIL DESIGN STANDARDS

NACTO: URBAN BIKEWAY DESIGN GUIDE (THIRD EDITION)



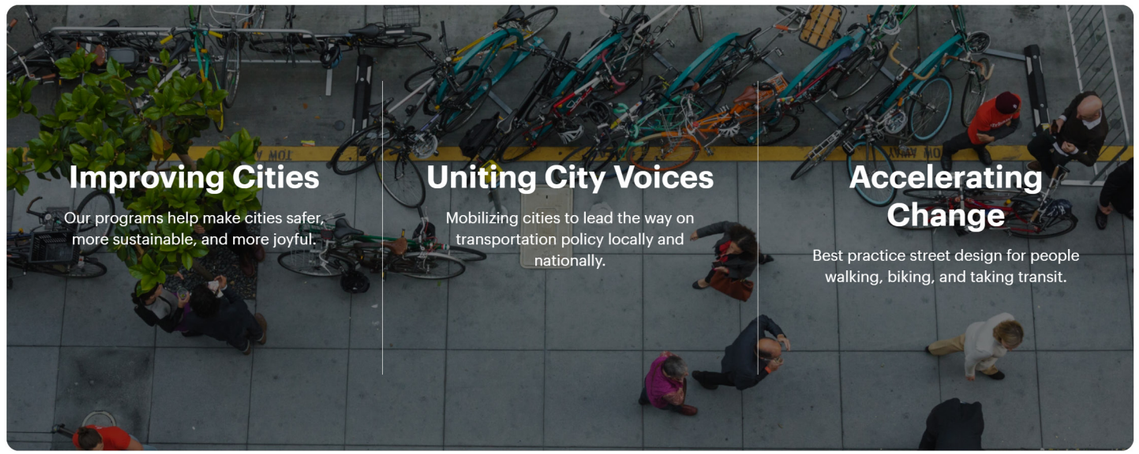
The latest edition of the *Urban Bikeway Design Guide* is a widely used resource for planning and designing safe, comfortable, and connected bikeway networks. The third edition reflects lessons learned from cities across North America and builds on real-world implementation to provide more practical direction for a range of bikeway types.

It emphasizes designing for all ages and abilities, prioritizing comfort, safety, and predictability. The guide also focuses on how streets function as part of a connected network, helping communities select appropriate designs based on context, traffic conditions, and surrounding land uses.

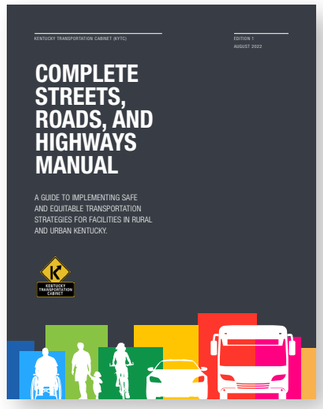
The recommendations in this plan draw from these principles and apply them to Northern Kentucky's communities, supporting both near-term implementation and long-term network development. While not every treatment will be appropriate in every location, this resource provides a strong foundation for decision-making and helps ensure consistency across jurisdictions as the regional trail and bikeway network continues to grow.

NACTO = National Association of City Transportation Officials

NACTO National Association of City Transportation Officials



KYTC: COMPLETE STREETS, ROADS, AND HIGHWAYS MANUAL



The NKY Regional Trails Plan draws from the *KYTC Complete Streets, Roads, and Highways Manual*, which establishes statewide best practices for safe, multimodal transportation. The manual provides guidance for planners, engineers, and local governments to incorporate walking, bicycling, and transit into roadway projects across Kentucky.

The manual reflects a shift from traditional, vehicle-focused design toward a more balanced approach that prioritizes safety, accessibility, and comfort for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists. It emphasizes context-sensitive solutions, recognizing that roadway design should respond to surrounding land use, community needs, and anticipated demand.

Much of the guidance is informed by federal standards and resources, including those from the Federal Highway Administration, ensuring consistency with national best practices while addressing Kentucky-specific conditions.

By incorporating this guidance, the plan aligns with statewide policy and provides a practical framework for implementing complete streets projects, including on-street bikeways and pedestrian facilities, across Northern Kentucky communities.

KYTC = Kentucky Transportation Cabinet

Kenton County Working Group Meeting

PAVED TRAIL FACILITY TYPES

SELECTING A TRAIL FACILITY TYPE

The KYTC Complete Streets Manual and NACTO's Urban Bikeway Design Guide provide complementary guidance on when different bicycle and trail facility types are appropriate for people of all ages and abilities. This guidance is based on roadway characteristics such as vehicle speed, traffic volume, number of travel lanes, and curbside activity, and should be used by cities to select facility types that respond to existing conditions while prioritizing safety, comfort, and usability.

The figures shown illustrate how this guidance is applied across different contexts. FHWA tables (top right) summarize recommended bicycle facilities for urban and rural settings and are also included in the KYTC Complete Streets Manual. NACTO guidance (bottom left and bottom right) expands on these recommendations by considering additional factors such as the number of motor vehicle lanes, target speeds, and operational characteristics.

FHWA = Federal Highway Administration

Contextual Guidance for Selecting All Ages & Abilities Bikeways

Roadway Context				All Ages & Abilities Bicycle Facility
Target Motor Vehicle Speed*	Target Max. Motor Vehicle Volume (ADT)	Motor Vehicle Lanes	Key Operational Considerations	
Any		*Any*	*Any of the following:* high curbside activity, frequent buses, motor vehicle congestion, or turning conflicts‡	**Protected Bicycle Lane**
< 10 mph	Less relevant	No centerline, or single lane one-way	Pedestrians share the roadway	**Shared Street**
≤ 20 mph	≤ 1,000 – 2,000		< 50 motor vehicles per hour in the peak direction at peak hour	**Bicycle Boulevard**
≤ 25 mph	≤ 500 – 1,500			
	≤ 1,500 – 3,000	Single lane each direction, or single lane one-way	Low curbside activity, or low congestion pressure	**Conventional or Buffered Bicycle Lane, or Protected Bicycle Lane**
	≤ 3,000 – 6,000			**Buffered or Protected Bicycle Lane**
	Greater than 6,000			**Protected Bicycle Lane**
	Any	Multiple lanes per direction		
Greater than 26 mph†	≤ 6,000	Single lane each direction	Low curbside activity, or low congestion pressure	**Protected Bicycle Lane, or Reduce Speed**
		Multiple lanes per direction		**Protected Bicycle Lane, or Reduce to Single Lane & Reduce Speed**
	Greater than 6,000	*Any*	*Any*	**Protected Bicycle Lane, or Bicycle Path**
High-speed limited access roadways, natural corridors, or geographic edge conditions with limited conflicts		*Any*	High pedestrian volume	**Bike Path with Separate Walkway or Protected Bicycle Lane**
			Low pedestrian volume	**Shared-Use Path or Protected Bicycle Lane**

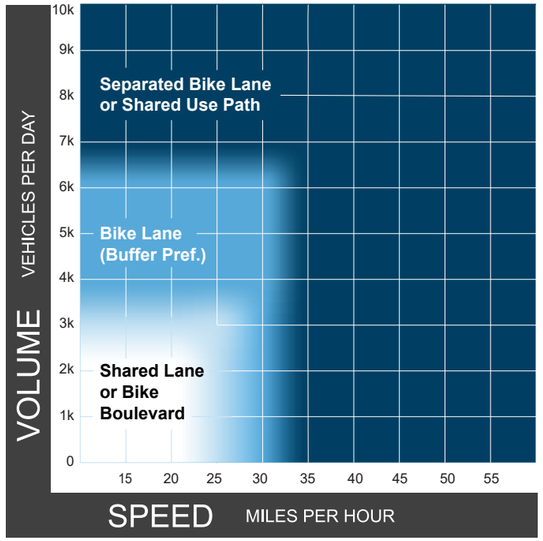
* While posted or 85th percentile motor vehicle speed are commonly used design speed targets, 95th percentile speed captures high-end speeding, which causes greater stress to bicyclists and more frequent passing events. Setting target speed based on this threshold results in a higher level of bicycling comfort for the full range of riders.

† Setting 25 mph as a motor vehicle speed threshold for providing protected bikeways is consistent with many cities' traffic safety and Vision Zero policies. However, some cities use a 30 mph posted speed as a threshold for protected bikeways, consistent with providing Level of Traffic Stress level 2 (LTS 2) that can effectively reduce stress and accommodate more types of riders.[18]

‡ Operational factors that lead to bikeway conflicts are reasons to provide protected bike lanes regardless of motor vehicle speed and volume.

Figure. Contextual Guidance for Selecting All Ages & Abilities Bikeways Chart
Source: NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide

FHWA URBAN BICYCLE FACILITY SELECTION GUIDANCE



FHWA RURAL BICYCLE FACILITY SELECTION GUIDANCE

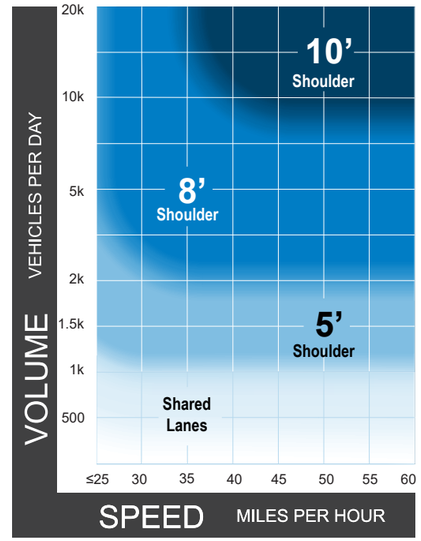


Figure. FHWA Urban and Rural Bike Facility Selection Guidance
Source: KYTC Complete Streets Manual, p. 87.

NACTO BICYCLE FACILITY SELECTION GUIDANCE

GUIDANCE FOR SELECTING ALL AGES & ABILITIES BIKEWAYS

Bikeway	Target Motor Vehicle Speed	Motor Vehicle Volume per day	Motor Vehicle Volume Peak Hour in Peak Direction
Protected Bike Lane	Any	Any	Any
Shared Spaces	≤10 mph ≤15 km/h	≤ 1,000	≤60
Bicycle Boulevard	≤ 20 mph ≤ 30 km/h	≤ 500 - 2,000	<50-150
Advisory Bike Lane	≤ 20 mph ≤ 30 km/h	≤ 500-2,000	<50-150
Constrained Bike Lanes	≤ 20 mph ≤ 30 km/h	≤ 1,500-3,000	≤ 300
Constrained Bike Lane *with Buffer*	≤ 25 mph ≤ 40 km/h	≤ 6,000	≤ 600

Figure. Guidance for Selecting All Ages & Abilities Bikeways Chart
Source: NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide, p. 71.

PAVED TRAIL FACILITY TYPES

SHARED USE PATHS

- Paved facilities, typically 10 to 14 feet wide, also known as a multi-use trail
- Bikes are completely separated from vehicular traffic, either with a landscape median or physical barrier
- Shared space with pedestrians

PROTECTED BIKE LANES

- Physically separated bike lanes that provide one-way facilities on both sides of the street or a two-way facility on one side of the street
- Bikes are separated from vehicular traffic with flexible materials like bollards and pavement markings, or with a constructed materials like a curb or median
- Adjacent parking lane can create additional separation

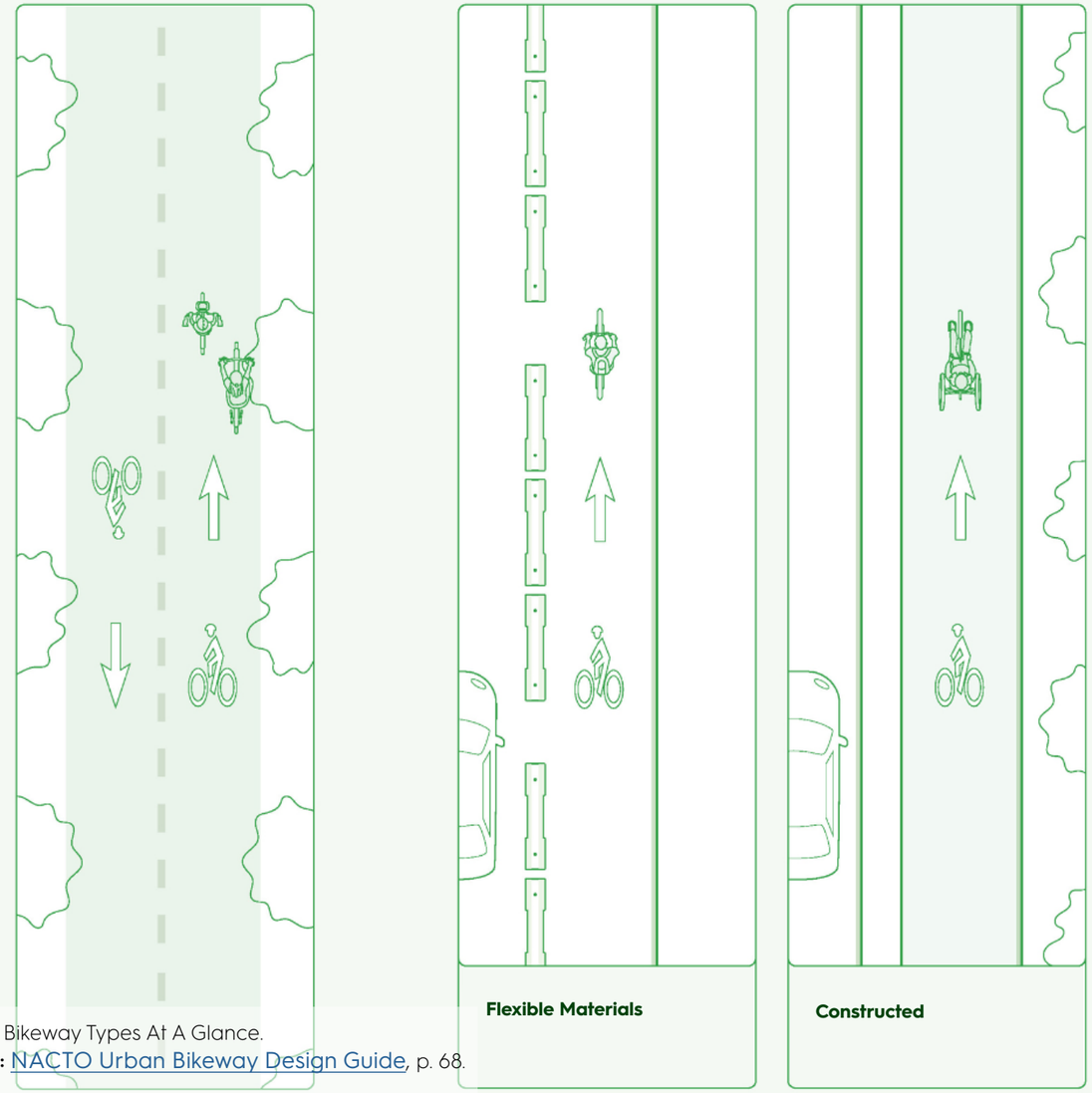
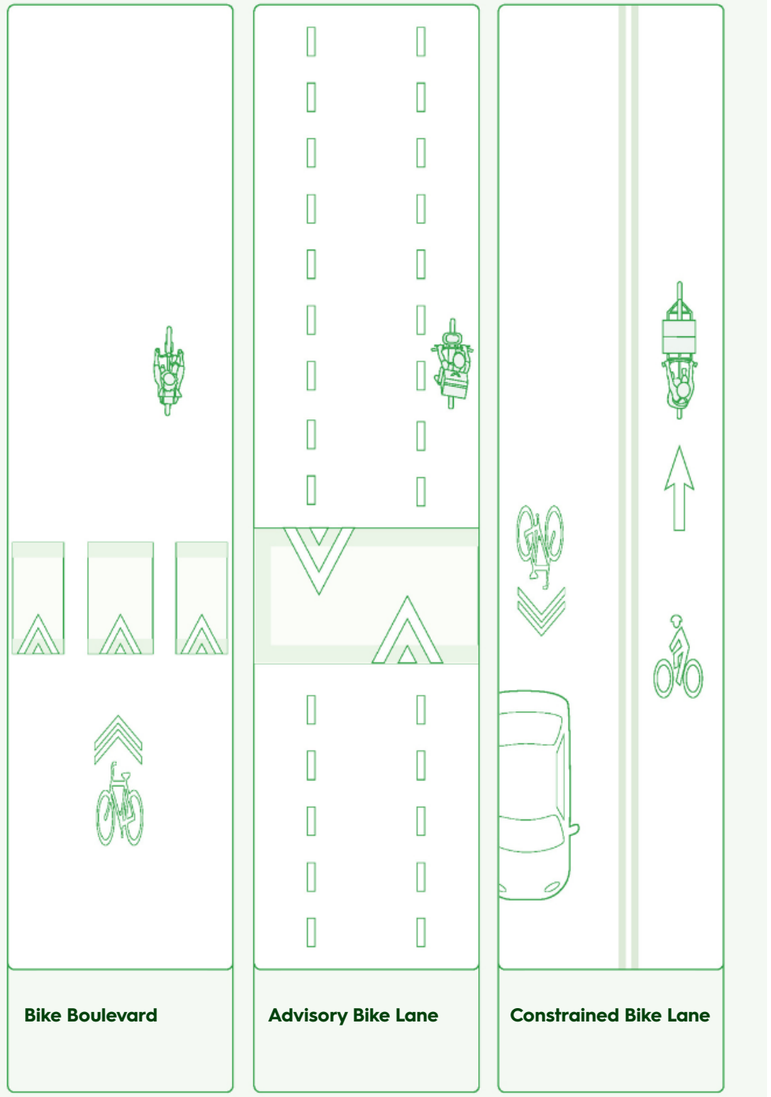


Figure. Bikeway Types At A Glance.
Source: NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide, p. 68.

BIKEWAYS FOR LOW-SPEED, LOW-VOLUME STREETS

These bikeway types are most appropriate on low-speed, low-volume streets in Northern Kentucky, particularly on local and residential roadways near schools, parks, and neighborhood centers where traffic calming and comfortable bicycle travel are key priorities.

- Bike Boulevards create continuous, comfortable bicycle routes on local streets with low traffic volumes and slow vehicle speeds. While some streets already function this way, design treatments are often needed to calm traffic, divert through-vehicles, and prioritize bicycles at intersections and crossings.



- Advisory Bike Lanes feature a narrow two-way travel lane with dashed one-way bike lanes on each side. Motor vehicles yield to cyclists and may briefly enter the bike lane to pass oncoming traffic when it is clear.
- Constrained Bike Lanes provide minimal separation from motor vehicles, often limited to a painted line. Buffered bike lanes add extra horizontal separation, typically using a one to three foot buffer between the bike lane and traffic or between the bike lane and on-street parking.

SHARED-USE PATHS

Also known as multi-use trails or side paths, shared use paths are paved bicycle and pedestrian corridors, typically 10 to 14 feet wide, that make up the arterial routes of the bicycle transportation network. In Northern Kentucky, the Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons, Licking River Greenway, the KY 237 Trail, and the KY 536 Trail are all prominent examples of shared use paths with a lot of recent momentum and community support.

Shared use paths are widely accessible to people of all ages and abilities that offer a pleasant commuting or recreational experience. Shared use paths are also referred to as side paths when they are in the right-of-way or adjacent to vehicular traffic. Side paths are great opportunities to create a protected shared space for rolling and strolling in the public right-of-way.

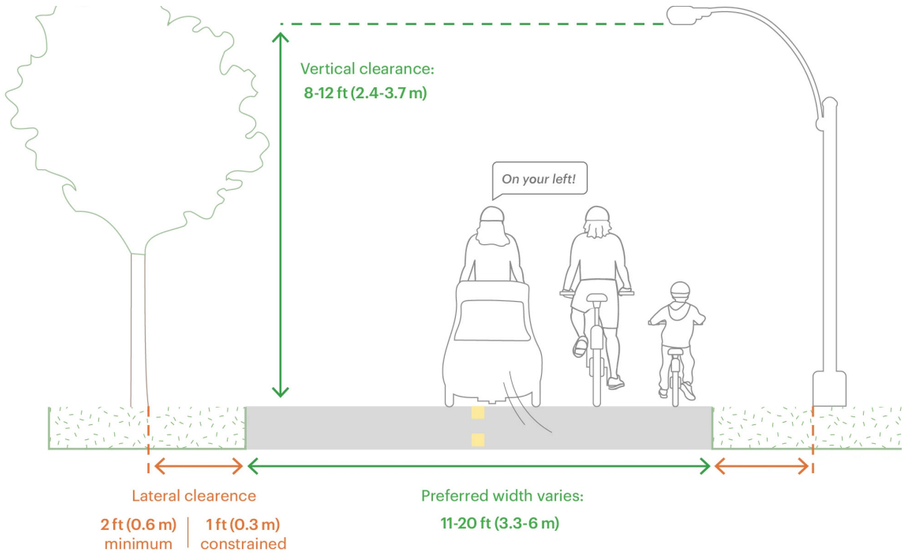


Figure. Shared Use Paths - Design Guidance
Source: NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide, p. 180.

PREFERRED SHARED USE PATH WIDTH*

8-11 FEET
LOW VOLUME

11-14 FEET
MEDIUM VOLUME

15-20 FEET
HIGH VOLUME

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- *Topography - should meet minimum vertical slope of 5% and horizontal slope of 2%*
- *Land ownership within the trail corridor*
- *Potential bridges or structures within project area*
- *Environmental and archaeologically sensitive areas (wetlands, floodway, etc)*
- *Separation of users (pedestrians and cyclists) in urban contexts with higher volume*
- *Signage and intersection design at key crossings*

****Corridors that anticipate high user volumes require wider shared use paths to accommodate passing, side-by-side travel, and reduce conflicts between bikes and pedestrians.***

Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons
Currently about 6 miles in length, with another 3 miles funded, this proposed 20-mile multi-use trail aims to link eight of Northern Kentucky's river cities – Ludlow, Bromley, Covington, Newport, Bellevue, Dayton, Fort Thomas, and Silver Grove. Originally envisioned in the early 2000s, The Riverwalk is beginning to come to life. Covington, Dayton, Ludlow, and Newport have each built portions of their segment of The Riverwalk in recent years with more coming soon.

Licking River Greenway Trail
The Licking River Greenway Trail provides a relaxing escape from Northern Kentucky's bustling urban hub and serves as a gateway to the Ohio River and Downtown Cincinnati. While only 2 miles of the paved Licking River Greenway Trail have been built along Covington's Licking Riverfront, this multi-use trail is proposed to connect to neighboring Newport, Wilder, and Taylor Mill once complete.

PROTECTED BIKE LANES

Protected bike lanes provide a dedicated, physically separated space for bicyclists, improving safety and comfort for users of all ages and abilities. They are well suited for streets with higher vehicle speeds and volumes, using curbs, parked cars, or vertical elements to separate cyclists from traffic. This separation reduces crash risk, including dooring, and encourages more people to ride. Careful design at intersections and driveways is essential to maintain safety and visibility.

DESIGNING ONE-WAY PROTECTED BIKE LANES

The NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide recommends one-way protected bike lanes between **5–9 feet wide**, with a buffer or physical barrier separating cyclists from traffic. Parking-protected lanes should include at least a **3-foot buffer.** Pavement markings include bike symbols and solid white buffer lines with diagonal striping where space allows, while green markings highlight conflict areas such as intersections and driveways.

Bike lane signage and no-parking signs reinforce proper use. Designs should also accommodate curbside needs such as accessible parking, loading zones, and transit boarding. At intersections, crossbike markings, visibility zones, and traffic-calming geometry help reduce turning conflicts.

5-9 FEET
PREFERRED ONE-WAY PROTECTED BIKE LANE WIDTH

8-13 FEET
PREFERRED TWO-WAY PROTECTED BIKE LANE WIDTH

DESIGNING TWO-WAY PROTECTED BIKE LANES

Two-way protected bike lanes allow travel in both directions on one side of the street. A **preferred width of 13 feet** supports side-by-side riding and passing, while **8 feet is a minimum** for constrained segments. Markings include bike symbols after intersections and driveways, a dotted yellow centerline, and green pavement in conflict areas.

Additional signage is needed, as drivers may not expect two-way bicycle traffic. Treatments such as EXCEPT BIKES plaques, crossbike markings, and geometric features like corner islands or turn wedges help manage conflicts at intersections and driveways.

ONE-WAY VS. TWO-WAY PROTECTED BIKE LANES

One-way protected bike lanes typically follow the direction of motor vehicle traffic and work well on streets with frequent intersections. Two-way facilities consolidate bicycle travel on one side of the street, creating a wider, more separated bikeway that can feel similar to a shared-use path.

While one-way facilities align more naturally with typical intersection operations, two-way protected bike lanes can improve connectivity and route-finding, particularly along corridors with limited crossings, where the bikeway must remain on one side of the street due to land use or corridor conditions, or where it connects directly to trails, parks, campuses, or shared-use paths.

ONE-WAY PROTECTED BIKE LANES

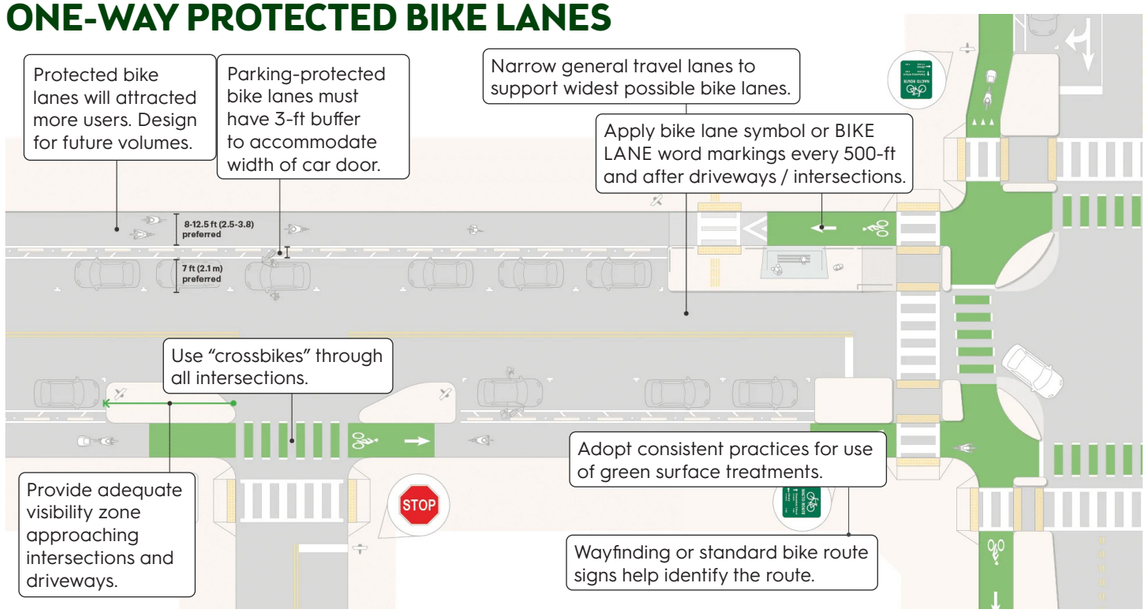


Figure. Protected Bike Lanes - Design Guidance
Source: NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide, p. 150.

TWO-WAY PROTECTED BIKE LANES

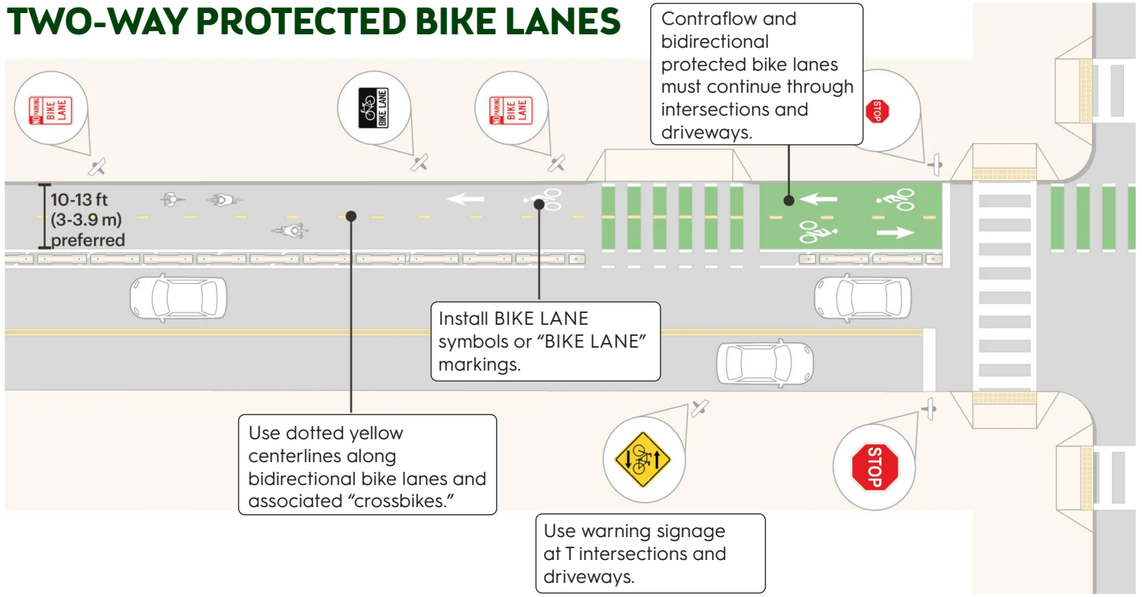


Figure. Contraflow and Two-Way Protected Bike Lanes - Design Guidance
Source: NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide, p. 157.

PROTECTED BIKE LANES

SEPARATING PROTECTED BIKE LANES

Protected bike lanes must include physical separation from vehicles to improve safety and comfort. Separation can range from quick retrofit treatments to permanent capital improvements depending on street conditions, traffic speeds, and funding. Stronger barriers should be used where vehicle speeds or volumes are higher, or where curbside activity increases conflict points with the bikeway. Designers should account for buffer width and shy distance from vertical objects so the usable riding space remains comfortable.

Common separation strategies include:

- **Parking-protected lanes**
- **Low barriers or modular curbs**
- **Constructed medians or raised curbs**
- **Flexible delineator posts**
- **Mid-height concrete barriers**

Parking can function as a buffer when paired with a 3-foot door zone. Flexible delineators and low barriers are often used for quick, low-cost installations, while concrete barriers and medians provide more durable separation. Raised protected bike lanes, typically installed during full street reconstruction, offer a high level of separation between the roadway and sidewalk.

Mid-Height Barrier

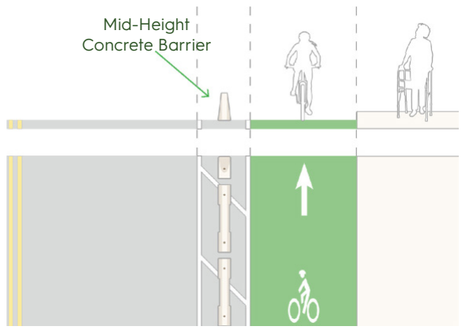


Figure. Mid Height Barrier
Source: Nacto Urban Bikeway Design Guide, p. 166.

Flexible Delineators

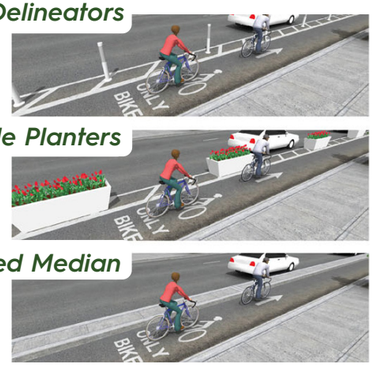


Figure. Mid Height Barrier
Source: Nacto Urban Bikeway Design Guide

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- ***Pavement Markings** - Bicycle lane word, symbol, and/or arrow markings placed every 500-feet (MUTCD Figure 9C-3).*
- ***Pavement Color** - Green reflective paint (MUTCD approved), yield lines, and "Yield to Bikes" signage at intersections, driveways and conflict areas.*
- ***Protection Strategy** - Plastic, reflective lane delineators, movable planters or a raised curb may be used to protect cyclists from adjacent travel lane.*
- ***Two-Way vs. One-Way Bicycle Traffic** - Dashed yellow centerline used for two-way bicycle traffic if two-way protected bike lane is proposed.*

**MUTCD = Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*

One-Way Protected Bike Lanes - Licking River Girl Scout Bridge (Covington & Newport)
The Licking River Girl Scout Bridge between Covington and Newport was retrofitted in 2025 with one-way protected bike lanes. As part of a road diet, KYTC converted two travel lanes to create dedicated space for bikes. Flexible delineator posts now separate cyclists from vehicle traffic, providing a safer connection across this busy corridor. With construction underway on the 4th Street Bridge, this creates a critical link between the two riverfront cities.

Two-Way Protected Bike Lane - Central Parkway (Cincinnati, OH)
Cincinnati's Central Parkway protected bike lane separates two-way bicycle traffic from vehicles using flexible delineators and modular curbs. The 12-foot bikeway, with about 15 feet of rideable space, creates a comfortable, low-stress experience for riders of all ages and abilities. The 3.8-mile corridor includes both two-way and one-way protected segments, with some sections also using on-street parking as a buffer between bikes and traffic.

LOW-SPEED, LOW-VOLUME STREETS

While protected facilities such as shared-use paths and protected bike lanes are generally the safest and most user-friendly options, shared street solutions may be appropriate where roadway conditions support them. On streets carrying fewer than 6,000 motor vehicles per day, treatments such as **bicycle boulevards**, **advisory bike lanes**, or **constrained bike lanes** can provide effective accommodations where dedicated facilities are not feasible.

For these facilities to function safely and comfortably, traffic-calming measures and roadway designs that reduce motor vehicle speeds and volumes are essential. Clear roadway markings and signage are critical to communicate priority, guide user behavior, and reinforce awareness of bicyclists and pedestrians. Intersection treatments are equally important and should prioritize safe, intuitive crossings for people walking and bicycling.

BIKE BOULEVARDS

Bike boulevards should be considered along low-speed, low-volume streets that create continuous, comfortable routes through the local street network. They prioritize people biking while maintaining local vehicle access, making them a key part of a low-stress network that connects neighborhoods, schools, parks, and local destinations.

These corridors typically operate at **25 mph or less and 3,000 vehicles per day or fewer,** with more comfortable conditions achieved at lower speeds and volumes. Where needed, traffic calming and volume management strategies such as speed humps, mini-roundabouts, curb extensions, and diverters should be used to reduce speeds and discourage cut-through traffic.

Design should emphasize clear wayfinding, shared-lane markings placed to improve visibility and avoid curbside conflicts, and safe, intuitive crossings. Intersections should prioritize bicycle movement using treatments like traffic calming, stop control for cross traffic, or signalized crossings.

Bike boulevards should support two-way bicycle travel and can be adapted to a variety of street types, including those with on-street parking and residential driveways.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- ***Vehicle Speed & Volume*** *- Keep speeds ≤ 25 mph and volumes ≤ 3,000 vehicles per day; lower thresholds improve comfort.*
- ***Traffic Calming & Diversion*** *- Use tools like speed humps, curb extensions, mini-roundabouts, and diverters to manage speeds and limit cut-through traffic.*
- ***Wayfinding & Pavement Markings*** *- Apply consistent signage and prominent shared-lane markings to guide users and improve visibility.*
- ***Intersection Design*** *- Prioritize bicycle movement with treatments such as stop control for cross streets, raised crossings, or signals where needed.*

BIKE BOULEVARD DIAGRAM

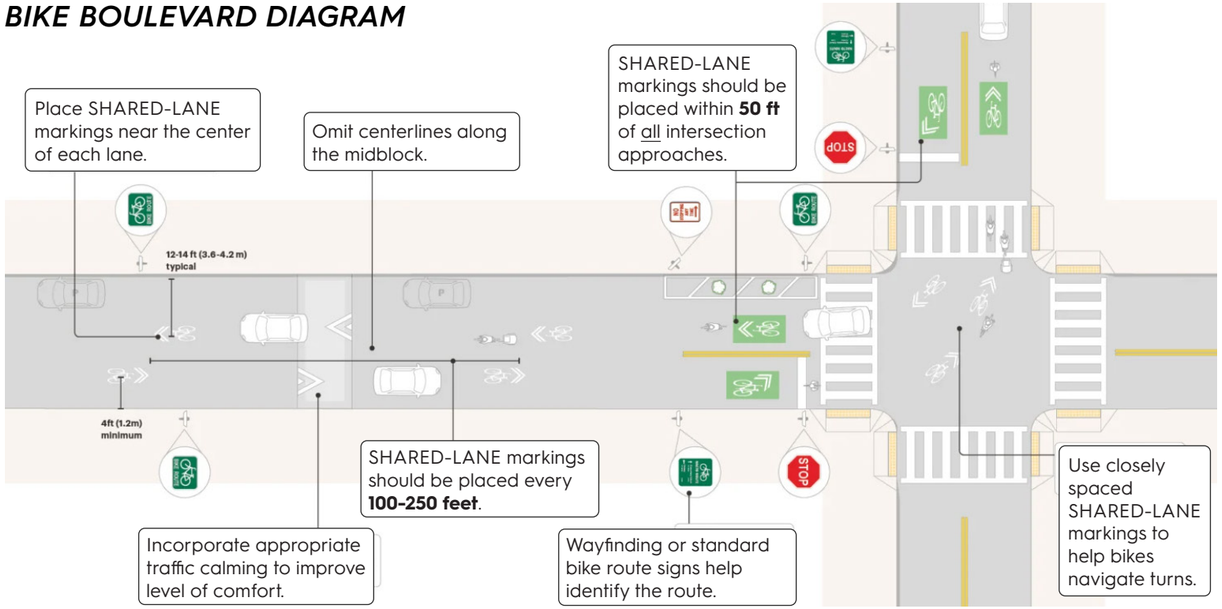


Figure. Bicycle Boulevard - Design Guidance
Source: NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide, p. 106.

Shared Roadway Pavement Markings
Berkley, CA (Source: NACTO)

Speed Cushions
Seattle, WA (Source: FHWA)

WAYFINDING SIGNAGE

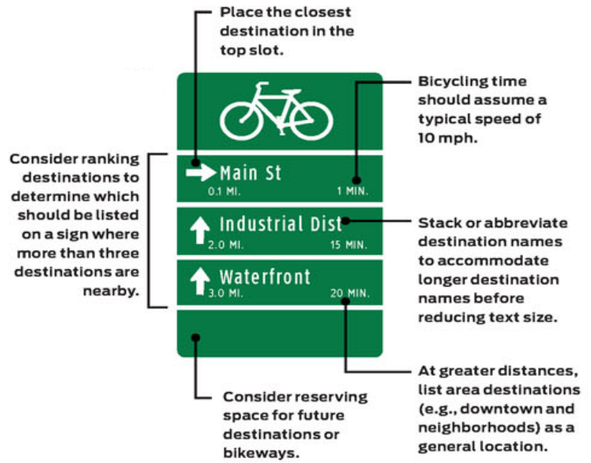


Figure. Wayfinding Signage - Design Guidance
Source: NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide

ADVISORY BIKE LANES

Advisory bike lanes are low-cost treatments that organize shared streets using a narrow two-way motor vehicle lane and dashed bike lanes on each side. Drivers yield into the bike lane to pass oncoming vehicles when clear, creating a shared, flexible street environment that prioritizes bicyclists.

These facilities are most appropriate on low-speed, low-volume streets, typically at or **below 25 mph and 3,000 vehicles per day**, with greater comfort at lower thresholds. They are often used where streets are too narrow for conventional bike lanes but still benefit from clear space allocation.

Typical designs include **5–6.5 ft advisory bike lanes and a 10–15 ft** center lane. Traffic calming, pinch points, and clear markings help reinforce yielding and reduce speeds.

Advisory bike lanes work well in residential contexts with on-street parking, but alternative bikeway designs should be considered where visibility is limited or traffic volumes are higher.

Advisory Bike Lanes
New Hampshire (Source: Streets.MN)

Advisory Bike Lanes
Bloomington, IN (Source: Alta Planning + Design)

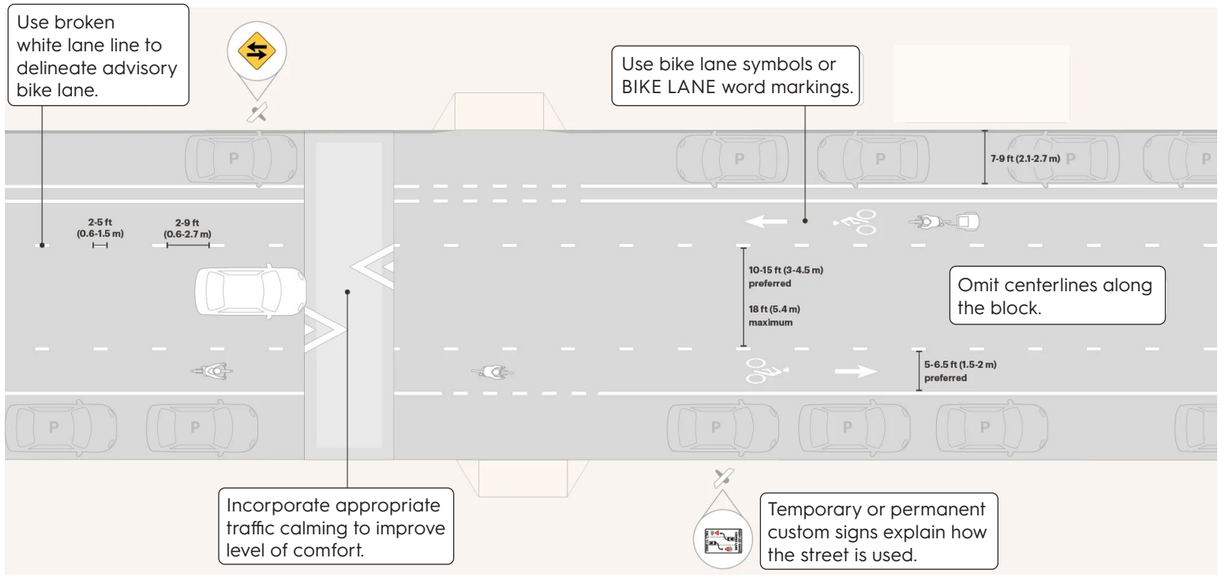


Figure. Advisory Bike Lane - Design Guidance
Source: NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide, p. 118.

CONSTRAINED BIKE LANES

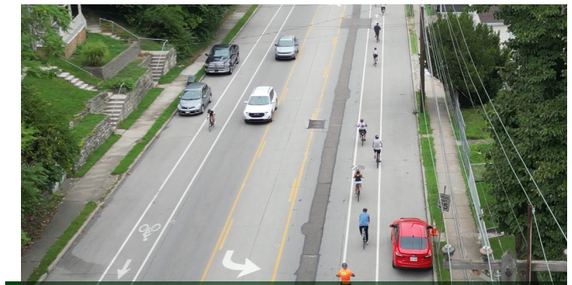
Constrained bike lanes provide dedicated space for bicyclists using painted separation, with or without a buffer. They are often used where right-of-way is limited and protected bike lanes are not feasible, helping organize the roadway and improve safety compared to shared lanes.

These are most appropriate on streets with speeds at or below **25 mph and volumes up to 8,000 vehicles** per day, with buffered lanes supporting higher volumes. Lower speeds and volumes significantly improve comfort for a wider range of users.

Typical designs include **6–7 ft bike lanes**, with buffers where possible to increase separation from traffic or parked cars.

To improve safety, designers should narrow travel lanes, manage speeds, and address curbside activity to reduce blockages. Where feasible, constrained bike lanes should be designed for future upgrade to protected facilities.

Fourth Street Bike Lane
Covington, KY (Source: Tri-State Trails)



Delta Avenue Bike Lane
Cincinnati, OH (Source: Tri-State Trails)

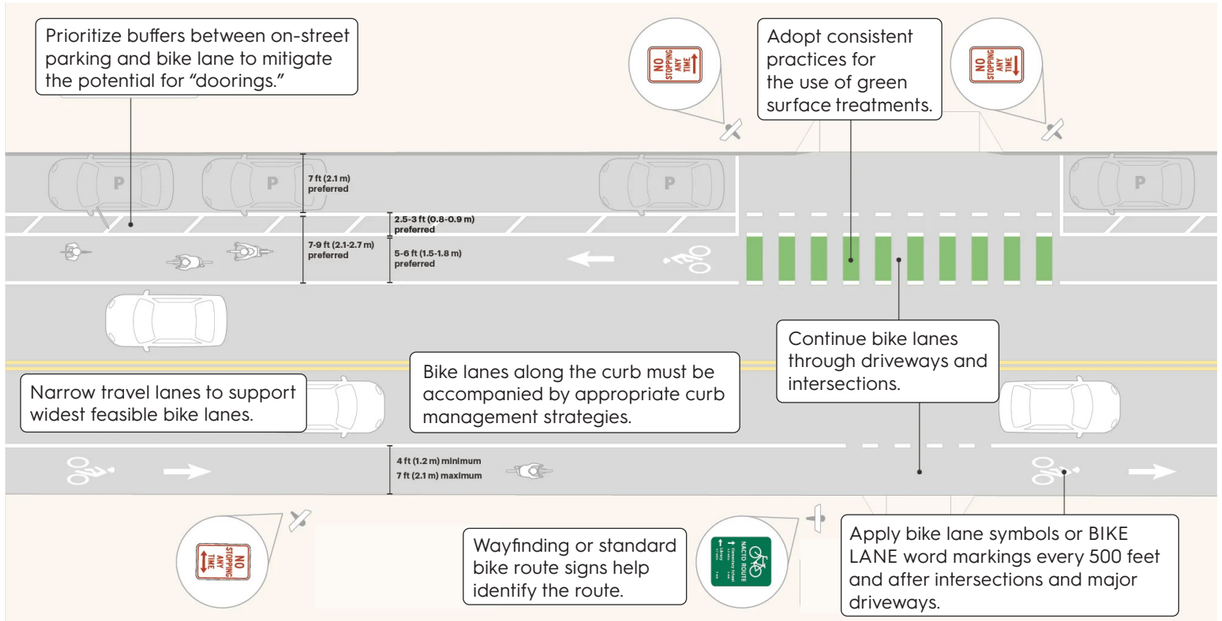
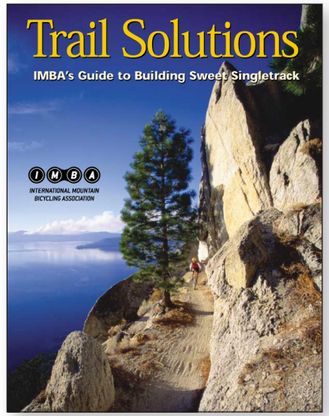


Figure. Constrained Bike Lanes - Design Guidance
Source: NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide, p. 130.

NATURAL SURFACE TRAIL DESIGN STANDARDS

TRAIL SOLUTIONS: IMBA'S GUIDE TO BUILDING SWEET SINGLETRACK



Trail Solutions: IMBA's Guide to Building Sweet Singletrack* is the definitive resource on sustainable trail design, construction, and maintenance. Rooted in foundational principles established by the USDA* Forest Service, it is widely regarded as the industry standard for trail-building best practices.

This manual provides proven, field-tested techniques for creating durable and engaging singletrack trails that minimize environmental impact and maximize user experience. Central to its philosophy is a comprehensive approach to sustainability where social, economic, and environmental factors are foundational. The techniques discussed highlight the importance of environmental stewardship, achieved through proper water management, drainage design, and aligning trail construction with natural landscapes and human behavior.

MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAIL DEVELOPMENT: GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESSFULLY MANAGING THE PROCESS

Mountain Bike Trail Development: Guidelines for Successfully Managing the Process is a resource developed for land and park managers who are seeking to build sustainable trails. This publication, produced by the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC) in partnership with Rock Solid Trail Contracting and IMBA*, draws from industry standard methods developed by USDA* Forest Service and adapts them for mountain biking specific applications.

This text breaks down the mountain biking trail development process from start to finish, capturing all aspects from planning, through construction, to maintenance. The guide provides a high-level understanding of mountain bike trail development so that land managers can be a knowleadgable participant in the multidisciplinary process involving stakeholders, contractors, municipal and organizational partners, trail users, and advocates. The guide assumes the reader has no experience in the mountain biking and/or trails industry.

***USDA = United States Department of Agriculture**
***IMBA = International Mountain Biking Association**

KOOTENAY ADAPTIVE MOUNTAIN BIKING (AMTB) TRAIL STANDARDS

The Kootenay Adaptive Mountain Biking (aMTB) Trail Standards establish design and construction guidelines for designing and building trails that expand accessibility for riders using adaptive mountain bikes. These standards ensure trails are safe, accessible, and enjoyable by considering the design requirements of adaptive bicycles, which are typically wider, longer, and have different turning and grade requirements than conventional bicycles.

These guidelines address key considerations such as tread width, turning radii, grade limits, surface firmness and stability, obstacle clearance, passing zones, and sightlines to ensure that trails are safe, durable, and inclusive to adaptive riders. These guidelines provide thoughtful planning considerations and construction methods that promote inclusivity without compromising on the character and challenge of traditional mountain biking experiences.

DO NOT USE THIS GUIDE TO CONSTRUCT TRAILS

This *Natural Surface Trail Design Standards* chapter does not provide sufficient or comprehensive information for trail construction. This text serves as a reference guide for municipal stakeholders, land managers, and organizational partners who seek to build sustainable trails. It is intended to provide the reader with a basic understanding of terminology, some construction techniques, and essential considerations when beginning the process of planning, designing, and constructing sustainable natural surface trails.

Trails can no longer be treated as a side project – they are infrastructure which supports recreation, transportation, and everyday movement in a growing recreationally-focused economy. These community assets influence tourism, real estate, local businesses, and quality of life. With this level of community impact, trails must be engineered with an understanding of soil science, hydrology, climate patterns, human behavior, accessibility, liability, and long-term maintenance.

Professional trail contractors today bring a unique and dynamic skill set that reflects the increasingly complex nature of trail building. As recreation economies continue to grow nationally, the demand for well-constructed trails will grow accordingly. Expertly crafted trails provide an experience that brings trail users back over and over again, and require minimal maintenance over their lifespan.

NATURAL SURFACE TRAIL TYPES

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE TRAILS

Sustainable trail design requires a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach. For a trail system to be truly sustainable, it must advance not only **physical durability**, but also **environmental stewardship**, **social responsibility**, and long-term **economic viability**. While ongoing maintenance is essential to the success of any trail system, facilities designed and constructed in accordance with the five core sustainability guidelines require substantially less long-term intervention. Established over 20 years ago, these principles remain the industry gold standard for building world-class singletrack trails.

Effective implementation of these guidelines begins with a foundational understanding of basic grading principles – specifically, how the constructed trail tread relates to the natural hillside and manages water across the landscape.

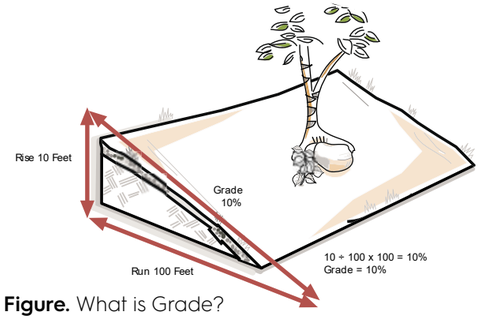


Figure. What is Grade?
Source: Trail Solutions: IMBA's Guide to Sweet SingleTrack, p. 59.

Grade is calculated by dividing the vertical elevation change between two points by the horizontal distance between them.

Expressed as a percentage, grade equals the **rise over run, multiplied by 100.**

EROSION: WHY TRAILS FAIL

Erosion is the natural process by which soil and rock are gradually worn away by wind and water over time. While it is a natural process, erosion can be significantly accelerated by gravity, concentrated water flow, and repeat use by all trail users. If not properly managed, erosion can become progressively destructive.

Water is the primary driver and greatest accelerator of erosion. When allowed to concentrate and flow directly down the trail tread, it increases in velocity, carving ruts that can evolve into deep trenches. Over time, this channeling destabilizes the tread, compromises user safety, and can ultimately lead to trail failure.

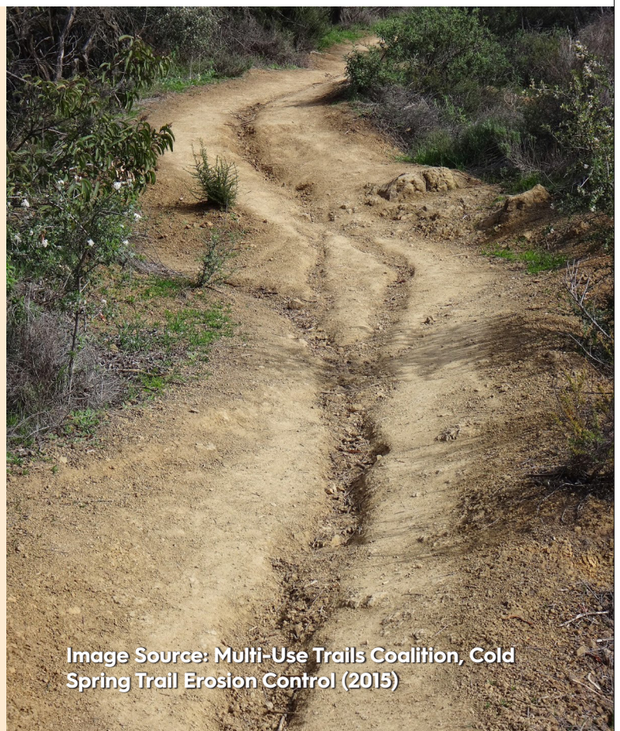


Image Source: Multi-Use Trails Coalition, Cold Spring Trail Erosion Control (2015)

TRAILS THAT LAST: ROLLING CONTOUR TRAILS

Rather than continually investing in maintenance to correct recurring erosion problems, the more effective approach is to construct trails that resist erosion by design. This method, called a **rolling contour trail**, follows the natural contours of the landscape to work with the terrain rather than against it.

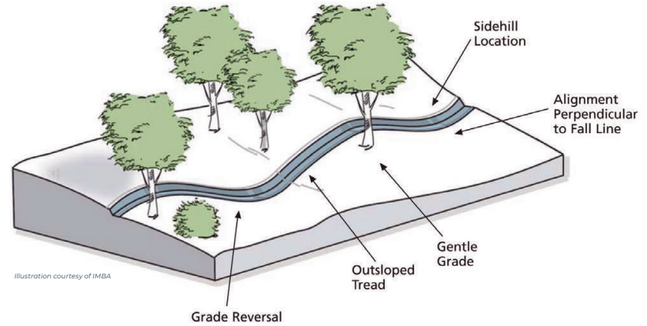


Figure. Rolling Contour Trail
Source: Mountain Bike Trail Development Guidelines, p. 30.

Rolling contour trails are characterized by moderate, sustainable grades, subtle undulations called **grade reversals**, and a consistent **outslope** - typically a 5% tilt toward the downhill edge of the tread. These elements work together to prevent water from concentrating and flowing down the path, and instead encourage a **sheet flow**, allowing water to drain gently and evenly across the tread. By managing water in this way, the trails maintain structural integrity, reducing long-term maintenance needs and keeping rock and soil where it belongs - ***on the trail***.

CRITICAL TRAILBUILDING TIPS

Avoid the Fall Line

- Fall line trails follow the most direct route down a slope - following the natural path of water.
- Trails that run straight downhill concentrate water, accelerating erosion, exposing roots, and forming gullies.

Avoid Flat Areas

- Trails built on flat terrain can experience ponding and prolonged standing water.
- The tread should be aligned slightly higher than surrounding ground on at least one side to allow proper drainage.

FALL LINE TRAILS

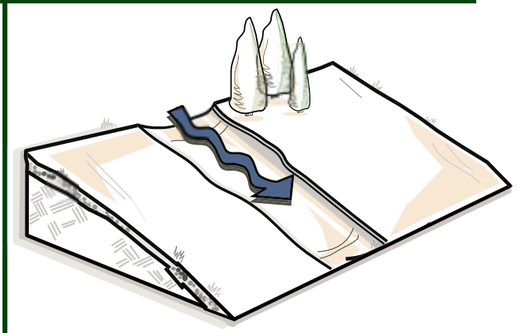
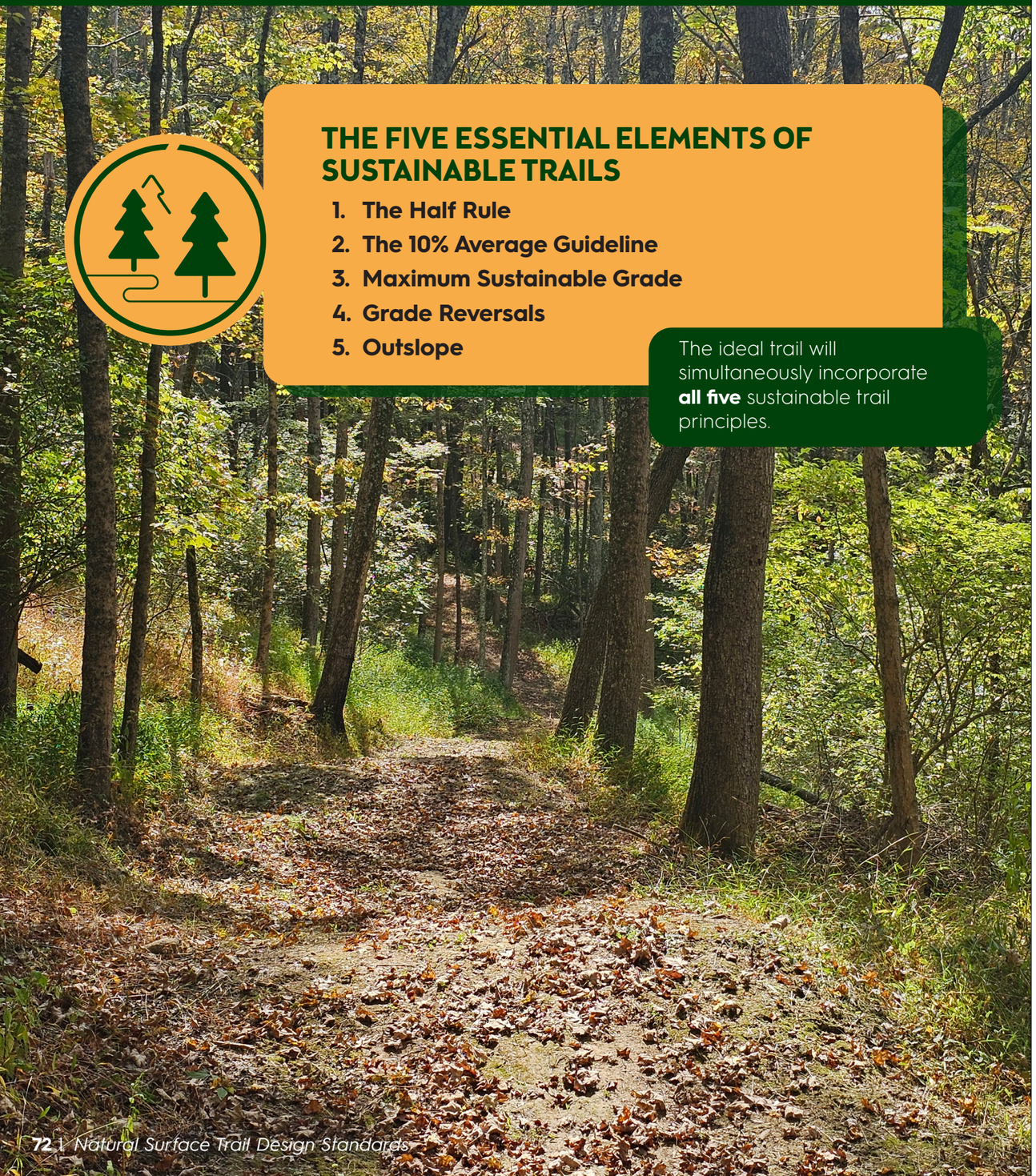


Figure. Fall Line Trail
Source: Trail Solutions: IMBA's Guide to Sweet SingleTrack, p. 60.

NATURAL SURFACE TRAIL TYPES

Goltra Nature Preserve - Cincinnati, OH



THE FIVE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF SUSTAINABLE TRAILS

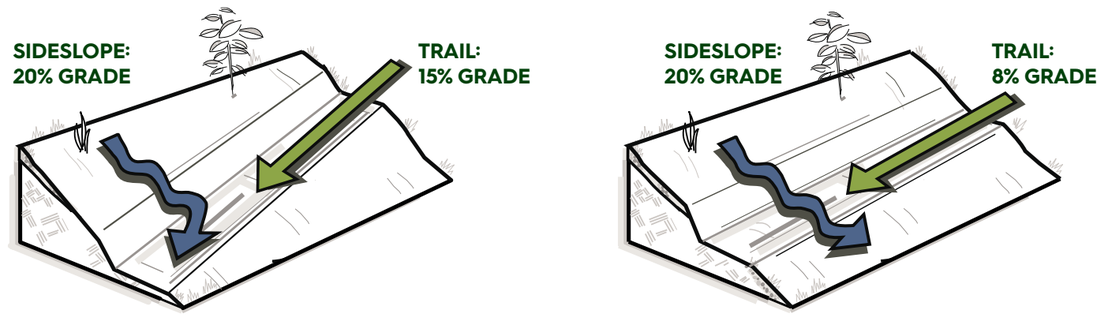
1. The Half Rule
2. The 10% Average Guideline
3. Maximum Sustainable Grade
4. Grade Reversals
5. Outslope

The ideal trail will simultaneously incorporate **all five** sustainable trail principles.

1. THE HALF RULE

The grade of a trail tread should **never** exceed half the grade of the hillside or sideslope it traverses. When the tread grade surpasses this threshold, it is considered a **fall-line trail**. In these conditions, the flow of water will no longer drain across the trail - it will instead concentrate and flow down the length of the trail, accelerating erosion and causing gulleying that can ultimately result in tread failure if left unaddressed.

The first step in flagging the trail corridor is to measure the sideslope grade and confirm that the proposed tread grade remains below half of that value. For example, on a hillside with a 14% sideslope, the trail tread should not exceed 7%.



THIS TRAIL BREAKS THE HALF RULE

THIS TRAIL MEETS THE HALF RULE

Figure. Half Rule
Source: Trail Solutions: IMBA's Guide to Sweet SingleTrack, p. 63.

EXCEPTIONS TO THE HALF RULE

There is an upper limit to the half rule! You must also apply knowledge about the maximum sustainable grade to ensure the longevity of your trails.

Very steep trails will erode, even if they meet the half rule.

For example, a trail constructed at a 24 percent grade across a steep 50 percent sideslope may still prove unsustainable, even though it technically complies with the half-rule guideline.

NATURAL SURFACE TRAIL TYPES

2. THE 10% AVERAGE GUIDELINE

The 10 Percent Average Guideline is the gold standard for sustainable trail design. It recommends that the overall average trail grade remain at or below 10 percent, regardless of the sideslope grade. Also referred to as the overall trail grade, this metric represents the average slope of the trail from beginning to end.

This does not mean that the entirety of the tread is kept below 10% - there may be short sections with unique conditions that are steeper. For trails that undulate, the average trail segment grade can be calculated per section.

10%
AVERAGE GRADE FOR MAXIMUM SUSTAINABILITY

Average trail grade plays a critical role in providing the intended user experience on a trail. **Beginner trails** should range between **1-5%** average grade; **intermediate trails** range between **5-7%** average grade; **advanced trails** can include **7-9%** (or higher) grades, depending on the intended experience.

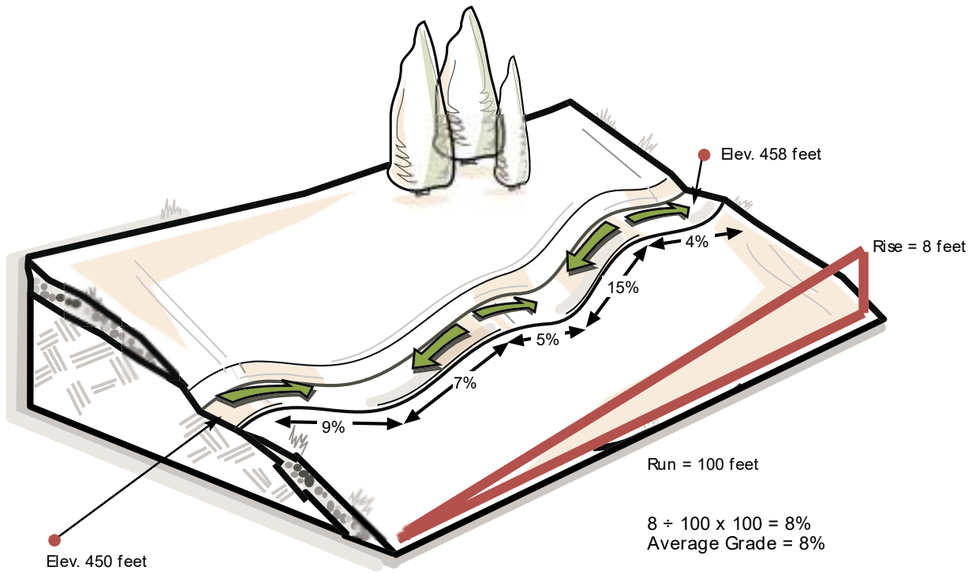


Figure. Average Trail Segment Grade
Source: Trail Solutions: IMBA's Guide to Sweet SingleTrack, p. 64.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Flag the trail with conservative grades below 8% to allow for flexibility in case of obstacles or unexpected reroutes. By using shallow grades in the beginning during the planning process, the route can be adjusted in the field without needing to reconfigure the entire trail.

WHY TEN PERCENT?

- **Supports Sustainable Planning** A 10% average grade helps estimate trail length, map feasible corridors, and design sustainable alignments early in planning.
- **Works Across Most Soils** A 10% average is a reliable guideline for durability across varied soil types, without requiring detailed soil analysis.
- **Reduces User-Caused Erosion** Grades at or below 10% limit soil displacement from user traffic, reducing erosion risk.
- **Provides Design Flexibility** Conservative grades allow route adjustments around obstacles without forcing steep sections.
- **Simplifies Future Reroutes** Trails built near a 10% average are easier to modify if erosion or alignment issues arise.
- **Accommodates Grade Reversals** Lower average grades allow for dips and undulations without creating unsustainably steep climbs.

Goltra Nature Preserve - Cincinnati, OH

NATURAL SURFACE TRAIL TYPES

3. MAXIMUM SUSTAINABLE GRADE

Maximum trail grade is the **steepest section of trail that is longer than 10 feet**. Early in the design and planning phase of any trail project, it is critical to determine the precise maximum grade that can be sustained by the terrain and soil type within the constraints of the local conditions. Knowing this figure early on will aid in planning the trail alignment and ensure maximum sustainability.

The maximum sustainable trail grade typically ranges from **15 to 20 percent**; however, this threshold is highly site-specific and may vary depending on environmental conditions, soil characteristics, anticipated use, and other contextual factors.

15-20%
TYPICAL MAXIMUM SUSTAINABLE GRADE

» **Apply the Half Rule** Trail grade should not exceed half the sideslope grade; on gentle hillsides, maximum sustainable grade is typically half the sideslope.

» **Consider Soil Type** Soil type influences its cohesion quality and drainage abilities. Some soils can support steeper grades than others, and it is helpful to understand soil properties and your site-specific conditions before starting.

» **Account for Rock** Solid rock can support steeper grades, but earthen gaps between rock may require armoring to prevent erosion.

» **Factor in Rainfall** High rainfall can lead to water-caused erosion; low rainfall can lead to loose and dry trail tread surfaces. Take rainfall into consideration and plan for gentler trail grades if the site experiences either - or both - of these extremes.

» **Use Grade Reversals** Grade reversals are short dips, followed by a rise. This construction method drains water off the tread in small volumes, preventing large volumes from channeling down the trail. Frequent application of grade reversals allow for slightly steeper grades in shorter sections of trail, and prevent erosion issues from spreading beyond a localized area, making for easier maintenance. More on grade reversals in the next section.

» **User Type** Trails intended for low-impact users such as hikers and bicyclists may tolerate short sections of steeper grades (15–25%), depending on site conditions. Higher-impact uses, such as equestrians and motorized vehicles, require gentler maximum grades.

» **Anticipate Use Volume** High traffic trails may require shallower maximum grades.

» **Align with Difficulty Level** More technical trails may incorporate steeper sections but often require additional drainage and stabilization measures.

» **Design Conservatively** When in doubt, use conservative grades to reduce risk and allow for long-term adaptability.

4. GRADE REVERSALS

A **grade reversal** is an essential drainage feature the protects the trail from erosion and ponding issues. These are spots along the trail, typically spaced 20-50 feet apart, where the tread levels out and changes direction, moving in the opposite vertical direction for 10-50 linear feet before changing directions again. This subtle undulation forces water to stop at regular intervals along the trail and exit at the low point of the grade reversal before it can gain volume, velocity, and erosive power.

Most trails will benefit greatly from frequent and regular grade reversals. Depending on environmental factors such as rainfall and soil types, the exact spacing is flexible, but the rationale for them and the positive impact they have on trail lifespan remain universal. Grade reversals ensure that trails can endure with minimal maintenance by preventing common issues that arise with age by **dividing the trail into short, individual watersheds**. Where a trail may experience ponding, this water will only be trapped for a short distance before it will drain.

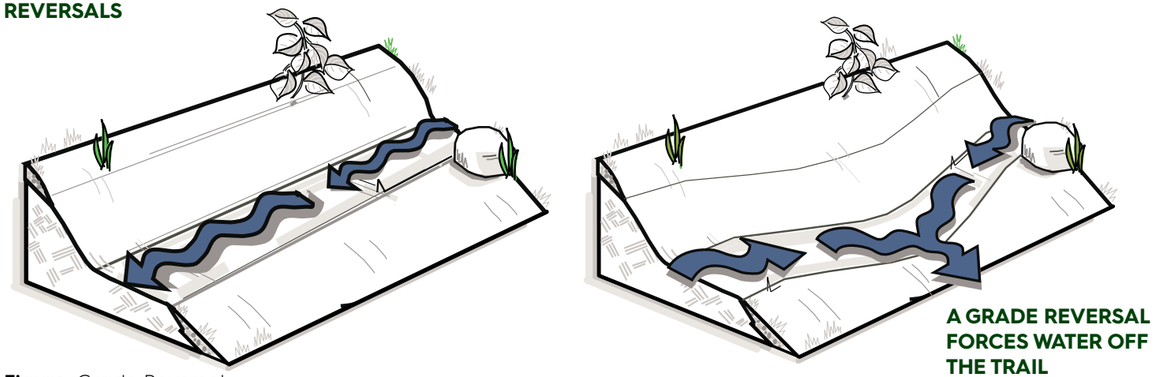


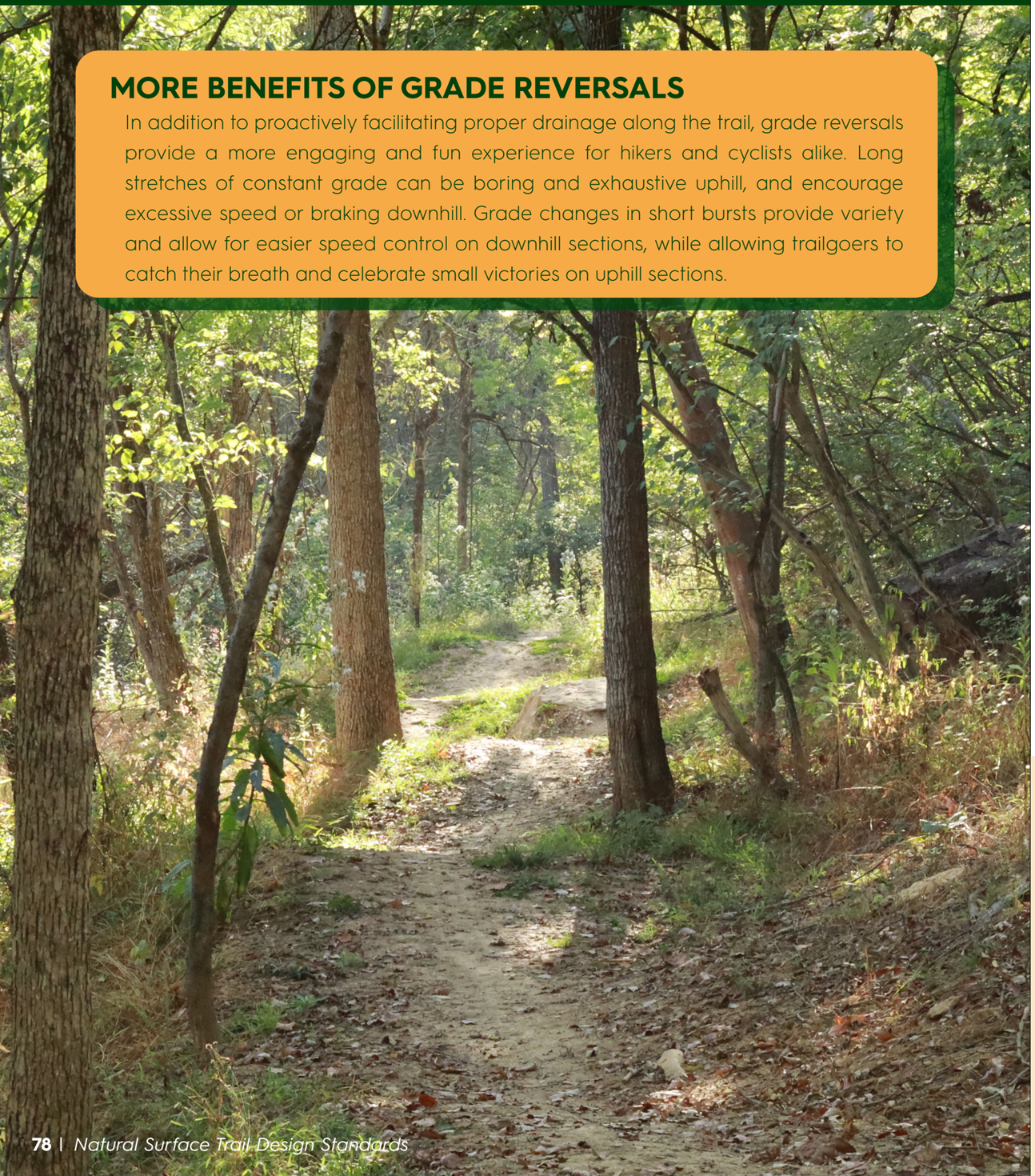
Figure. Grade Reversal
Source: Trail Solutions: IMBA's Guide to Sweet SingleTrack, p. 67.

TERMINOLOGY

Grade reversals are also known as grade dips, grade brakes, drainage dips, and rolling dips.

NATURAL SURFACE TRAIL TYPES

Sargeant Park Trails - Dayton, KY



MORE BENEFITS OF GRADE REVERSALS

In addition to proactively facilitating proper drainage along the trail, grade reversals provide a more engaging and fun experience for hikers and cyclists alike. Long stretches of constant grade can be boring and exhaustive uphill, and encourage excessive speed or braking downhill. Grade changes in short bursts provide variety and allow for easier speed control on downhill sections, while allowing trailgoers to catch their breath and celebrate small victories on uphill sections.

5. OUTSLOPE

As a trail traverses a sideslope, a consistent element should be a **sideslope**, which is a slight tilt toward the downhill edge of the tread. This subtle cross-slope grading promotes positive drainage by directing water from the backslope across the trail surface and downslope in a "**sheet flow**". This construction method significantly reduces the risk of erosion and ponding.

5%
RECOMMENDED GRADE OF OUTSLOPED TREAD

A consistent outslope is essential for long-term trail durability. A **cross-slope grade of 5%** is recommended; however, over time, user traffic compacts the center of the tread and can create a concave surface as soil migrates towards the edges of the tread surface. While this wear is inevitable over time, incorporating frequent grade reversals helps limit water concentration and mitigate long-term tread degradation.

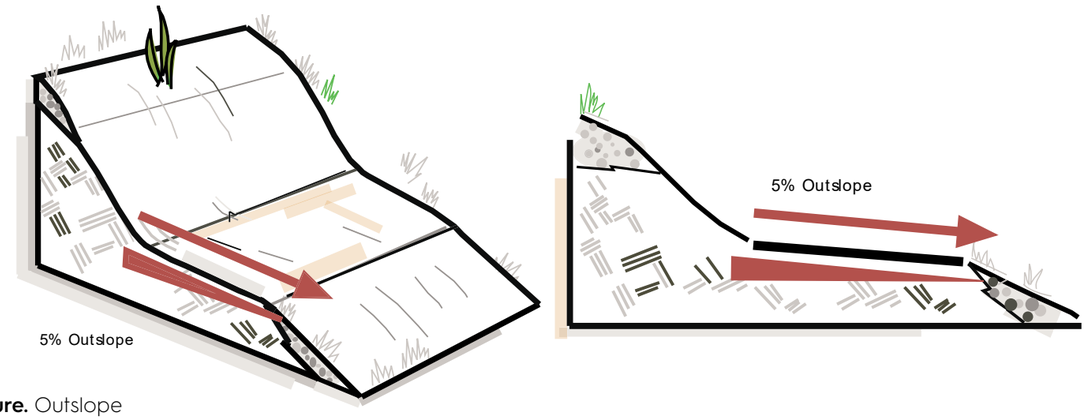


Figure. Outslope
Source: Trail Solutions: IMBA's Guide to Sweet SingleTrack, p. 69.

SHEET FLOW

When rain falls on hillsides, some water will percolate into the earth - the rest flows down the hillside in dispersed sheets. This process is called "sheet flow", and if each of the five essential elements of sustainable trails have been followed, this flow will gently sheet across the trail and down the hillside in a non-erosive manner, doing little damage.

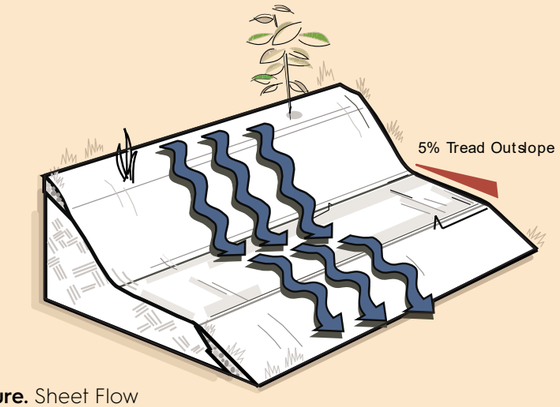


Figure. Sheet Flow
Source: Trail Solutions: IMBA's Guide to Sweet SingleTrack, p. 69.

NATURAL SURFACE TRAIL TYPES

IMBA'S TRAIL DIFFICULTY RATING SYSTEM

The IMBA Trail Difficulty Rating System helps users to determine the technical difficulty of a trail. Adapted from the International Trail Marking System, this chart helps users manage risk, make informed decisions at the trail, encourage visitors to use trails that match their skill level, improve user experience, and aid in the trail planning process.

There are two primary factors that influence a trail's difficulty level: grade and obstacles.

Beginner/Easy	Intermediate/More Difficult	Advanced/Very Difficult	Expert/Extremely Difficult
0-5% Average Grade	5%-8% Average Grade	8%-12% Average Grade	10%-15% Average Grade

TRAIL RATING GUIDELINES

» **Rate Technical Challenge Only** The system only accounts for the technical challenge of trails - *not* the physical exertion required to complete them. Indicate physical exertion separately by including length and total elevation change.

» **Collect Trail Measurements** Evaluate your trail against the table on the following page. This table is effective as a guideline; however, it is likely that a trail will exhibit traits of more than one difficulty level. Use your best judgment to make a final decision on the difficulty rating.

» **Include Difficulty and Trail Length on Signs and Maps** In addition to the difficulty rating, a trail's length and elevation change should be noted separately on a sign. Displaying all three elements provide enough information to help visitors make informed decisions that match their skill level and intended experience.

» **Evaluate Difficulty Relative to Local Trails** Trails should be rated relative to other trails in the locale. Understanding the inventory of trails in a region and sizing your trail up against them helps create a comprehensive assessment that informs the trail user and helps them select an appropriate route.

» **Consider Other Trail Qualities** A wide variety of site conditions contribute to a trail's difficulty. Exposure, corridor clearance, and turn radius are not included in the table but contribute to the human experience. A tight turn around a steep drop may not be technical, but it contributes a psychological challenge that adds to the overall difficulty of the trail.

» **Use Common Sense** Trail difficulty rating is a subjective process - but no set of guidelines will replace common sense and good judgment. Consult with other trail users to help finalize the rating system.

IMBA Trail Difficulty Rating System (IMBA)

	EASIEST WHITE CIRCLE	EASY GREEN CIRCLE	MORE DIFFICULT BLUE SQUARE	VERY DIFFICULT BLACK DIAMOND	EXTREMELY DIFFICULT DBL. BLACK DIAMOND
TRAIL WIDTH	72" (1,800 mm) or more	36" (900 mm) or more	24" (600 mm) or more	12" (300 mm) or more	6" (150 mm) or more
TREAD SURFACE	Hardened or surfaced	Firm and stable	Mostly stable with some variability	Widely variable	Widely variable and unpredictable
AVERAGE TRAIL GRADE	Less than 5%	5% or less	10% or less	15% or less	20% or more
MAXIMUM TRAIL GRADE	Max 10%	Max 15%	Max 15% or greater	Max 15% or greater	Max 15% or greater
NATURAL OBSTACLES AND TECHNICAL TRAIL FEATURES (TTF)	None	Unavoidable obstacles 2" (50 mm) tall or less Avoidable obstacles may be present Unavoidable bridges 36" (900 mm) or wider	Unavoidable obstacles 8" (200 mm) tall or less Avoidable obstacles may be present Unavoidable bridges 24" (600 mm) or wider TTF's 24" (600 mm) high or less, width of deck is greater than 1/2 the height	Unavoidable obstacles 15" (380 mm) tall or less Avoidable obstacles may be present May include loose rocks Unavoidable bridges 24" (600 mm) or wider TTF's 48" (1,200 mm) high or less, width of deck is less than 1/2 the height Short sections may exceed criteria	Unavoidable obstacles 15" (380 mm) tall or less Avoidable obstacles may be present May include loose rocks Unavoidable bridges 24" (600 mm) or narrower TTF's 48" (1,200 mm) high or greater, width of deck is unpredictable Many sections may exceed criteria

IMBA Trail Difficulty Rating System

Figure. IMBA Trail Difficulty Rating System
Source: Mountain Bike Trail Development Guidelines, p. 55.

NATURAL SURFACE TRAIL TYPES

DESIGNING FOR ADAPTIVE MOUNTAIN BIKES

Adaptive Mountain Bikes (aMTB) are three- or four-wheeled cycles that accommodate a broad range of users that may not be able to ride a conventional bicycle. The Kootenay Adaptive Sport Association (KASA) has developed a set of trail standards to aid in the planning, design, and construction of adaptive mountain bike trails that are fun, safe, and inclusive based on the following understandings:

» **Build for a Larger Footprint** Adaptive mountain bikes accelerate slower, decelerate faster, are wider, longer, and heavier than two-wheeled bicycles.

» **Consider Speed** Some models require the rider to take their hands off the handlebars in order to pedal with hand cranks; therefore, an aMTB rider cannot easily pedal while navigating a turn. The trail should be constructed to facilitate the appropriate speed and momentum required for an aMTB to clear corners, berms, and other obstacles.

» **Maintain Clear Sight Lines** Sight lines for adaptive riders are much lower than conventional riders - about 3 feet above the tread surface. Vegetation height, corridor clearance, tread undulation, and visibility at intersections are a few of many aspects that trail builders should take into careful consideration during construction.

» **Gentle Slope Angles** Adaptive mountain bikes are typically three-wheeled and are at risk of tipping when off-camber at low speeds. Adaptive riders are strapped into their cycle, so any risk of tipping poses a significant danger to their safety. Slope angles at turns and berms should be gentle enough to allow for safe passage.

Image Source: The Bridge Adaptive Sports & Recreation

BEST PRACTICES

Recommended Widths

» Most aMTB equipment require a minimum tread width of **40" for tight turns.**

» For general riding, a minimum tread width of **48" is required**.

Camber

» Bench cut trail should be firm and compacted, with outsloping at the minimal angle as required for positive drainage (3%-5%). A more gentle outslope is preferred.

» Confirm the trail will facilitate cycle speeds to carry aMTBs through off-camber trail sections above 8% slope angle. **Momentum reduces tipping hazard.**

» **Avoid or eliminate off-camber or one-sided obstacles** exceeding a 12% slope angle, or provide a full aMTB tread-width ride-around option.

» **Gradually transition off-camber trail features** (back to minimum cross slope angle), to allow a full pedal stroke before next feature of trail section.

TYPICAL SECTIONS OF aMTB TRAILS

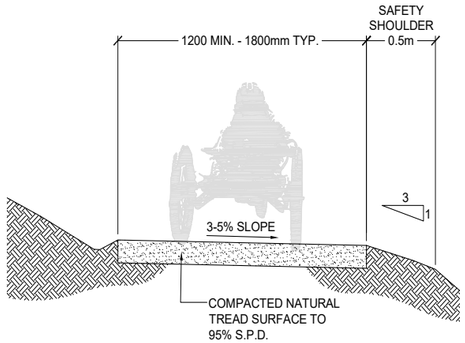


Figure. Typical aMTB Trail Section
Source: Kootenay Adaptive Mountain Biking (aMTB) Trail Standards, p. 1.

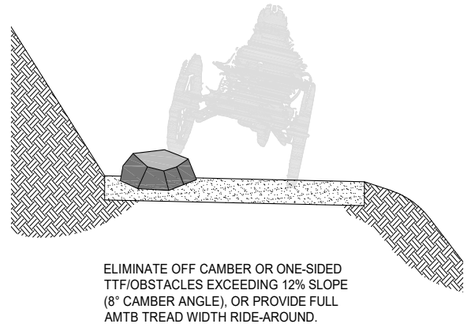


Figure. Off-Camber Hazard
Source: Kootenay Adaptive Mountain Biking (aMTB) Trail Standards, p. 1.

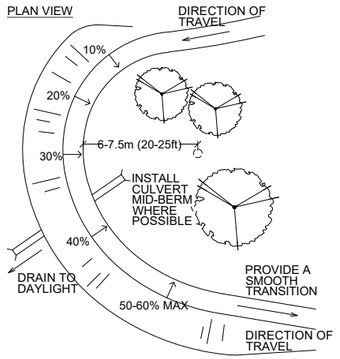


Figure. aMTB Corner Radius
Source: Kootenay Adaptive Mountain Biking (aMTB) Trail Standards, p. 2.

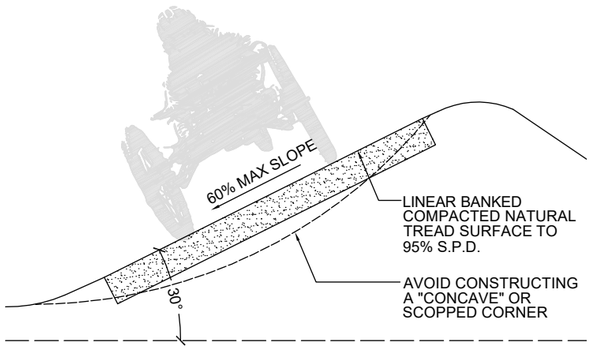


Figure. aMTB Berm
Source: Kootenay Adaptive Mountain Biking (aMTB) Trail Standards, p. 2.

NATURAL SURFACE TRAIL TYPES

aMTB CORNERS, BERMS, AND BANKS

There are a few aspects that require careful consideration when designing and constructing turns on adaptive trails.

» **Speed:** An aMTB rider may be pulled towards the low point of a bank if their speed is too low, increasing the tipping hazard. Berms must account for weight and rolling resistance of aMTBs, maintain centrifugal support through the turn, and be designed with a lower exit than entry since riders cannot pedal mid-turn.

» **Radius:** The ideal radius range for aMTB corners is 20-25 feet. Tighter radii can be achieved as berm size and trail speed increases.

» **Shape:** A linear bank design is preferable to a concave or scooped berm. Linear berms present a lower tipping risk if the aMTB is supported on all wheels through the banked turn. The bank height and angle need to accommodate the ride speed, increasing with the riders' momentum to a maximum slope of 60%.

60%
MAXIMUM SLOPE ANGLE

» **Grade Reversals:** Grade reversals must be aligned on the upper and lower legs of a climbing turn to facilitate drainage off the tread, and set back far enough to give riders enough time to "set up" for entry and exit (see illustration below).

» **Rollers:** aMTBs are longer than conventional bicycles; therefore, the spacing and height of rollers must be longer to prevent the front and back wheels from being forced in opposing directions simultaneously. The final design of rollers should be determined on site during construction, with anticipated rider speed in mind. Riders should not have to pedal to complete rollers.

Avoid flat or outsloping corners in an ascent/descent. Banked corners help aMTB riders complete a turn using momentum, instead of exertion.

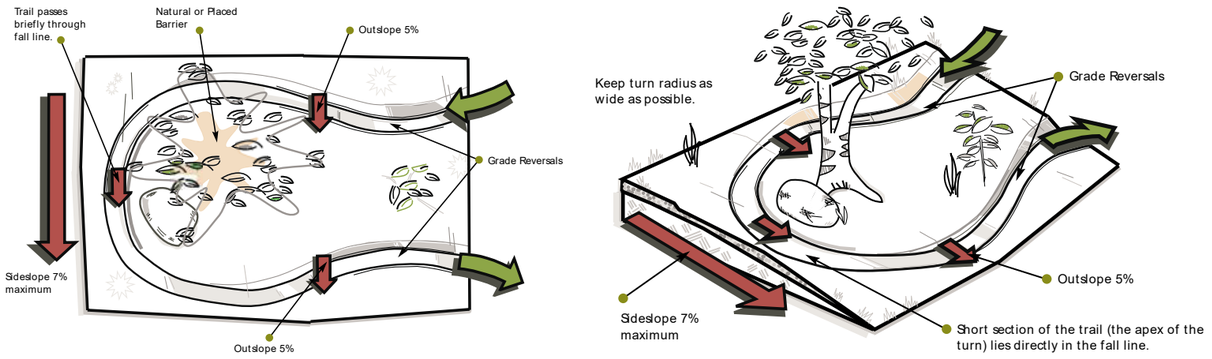


Figure. Climbing Turn
Source: Trail Solutions: IMBA's Guide to Sweet SingleTrack, p. 150.

aMTB TRAIL DIFFICULTY RATING SYSTEM

Adapted from the IMBA Trail Difficulty Rating System, the aMTB Trail Difficulty Rating System uses the same foundational principles with additional information regarding technical aspects such as **camber, turns, and berms**, the **likelihood of exposure**, and **recommended riding equipment** to communicate to riders the challenges on the trail ahead.

RECOMMENDED aMTB TRAIL WIDTH

GREEN	BLUE	BLACK
Beginner/Easy	Intermediate/More Difficult	Advanced/Very Difficult
6 ft • 72 in • 1.80 m	5 ft • 60 in • 1.50 m	4 ft • 48 in • 1.20 m

	aMTB WHITE	aMTB GREEN	aMTB GREEN SQUARE	aMTB BLUE	aMTB BLACK	aMTB DBL BLK	aMTB DBL. BLK
TRAIL WIDTH: (ave/min)	1.8m+ (72"+)	1.8m/1.5m (72"/60")	1.7m/1.4m (66"/54")	1.5m/1.2/ (60"/48"+)	1.2m/1m (48"/40")	1.1m/0.98 m (44"/38.5")	<0.98m (<38.5")
TREAD SURFACE:	hardened or surfaced	firm and stable	mostly stable some variability	mostly stable some variability	widely variable	widely variable and unpredictable	widely variable and unpredictable
OBSTACLES (TTF):	no obstacles	obstacles full width 2" or less / no asymmetrical tread areas	obstacles full width 5" or less / partial width 2" or less	obstacles full width 8" or less / partial width 3" or less	obstacles full width 12" or less / partial width 6" or less	obstacles full width 12" or less / partial width 10" or less / assistance recommended	impassable obstacles / assistance required
UNAVOIDABLE BRIDGES: (wider if not straight)	1.8m+ (72"+)	1.5m+ (60"+)	1.5m+ (60"+)	1.4m+ (54"+)	1.2m+ (48"+)	1m+ (40"+)	<0.98m (<38.5") possible
MAX TRAIL GRADE:	10% (6 deg)	15% (8.5 deg)	20%+ (11 deg)	20%+ (11 deg)	20%+ (11 deg)	25%+ (14 deg)	25%+ (14 deg)
CAMBER: TURNS, BERM & TTF	level	only enough to drain	Some off camber possible: max 36.5% (20 deg)	Some off camber possible: max 36.5% (20 deg)	Some off camber likley: max 58% (30 deg)	Off camber certain: 58%+ possible (>30 deg)	Off camber certain: 58%+ possible (>30 deg)
CAMBER: TRAIL STRAIGHTAWAYS	level	only enough to drain	max outslope 5-8% (3-5 deg)	max outslope 5-8% (3-5 deg)	max outslope 8-14% (5-8 deg)	max outslope 8-14 % (5-8 deg)	14%+ (> 8 deg) outsloping possible
MIN FLAT CORNER RADIUS:	7.5m (24.5 ft)	6m (20 ft)	6m (20 ft)	6m (20 ft)	6m (20 ft)	4.5m (15 ft)	4m (13 ft)
MIN BERM CORNER RADUS:	n/a	n/a	6m (20 ft)	4.5m (15 ft)	4.5m (15 ft)	<4m (13 ft)	< 3m (10 ft)
EXPOSURE:	no exposure	no exposure	no exposure	minimal exposure	exposure likely	exposure likely	exposure likely
RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: *Riders may choose to take equiment on trails falling outside of recommended trail difficulty at their own risk, but in this case support rider always recommended. !							

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT / CATEGORY DESCRIPTIONS (LEGEND)

WHEELCHAIR:
- Manual wheelchair (with or without front wheel attachment)
- Powerchair
- Scooter
- Any other mobility related device

CROSS-COUNTRY (RECUMBENT / COMBINED CRANK & STEERING):
- **One wheel in the front** and two in the back
- Front wheel drive
- Seating – recumbent type seating with legs straight ahead
- Full or no suspension depending on brand

ALL-MOUNTAIN (RECUMBENT / COMBINED CRANK & STEERING):
- **Two wheels in the front** and one wheel in the back
- Rear wheel drive
- Seating – recumbent type seating with legs straight ahead
- Full suspension or rear suspension only depending on brand

ALL-MOUNTAIN (KNEELING / HANDLEBARS W/ SEPARATE CRANK):
- Two wheels in the front and one wheel in the back
- Rear wheel drive
- Seating – kneeling with cranks below you and handlebar above
- Full suspension or rear suspension only depending on brand

BOWHEAD ALL ELECTRIC
- Two wheels in the front and one wheel in the back
- Articulating front end
- Full electric with hand twist throttle; no crank; Rear wheel drive
- Seating – recumbent type seating with legs straight ahead
- Full Suspension

Figure. Adaptive Mountain Biking (aMTB) Trail Difficulty Rating System
Source: Kootenay Adaptive Mountain Biking (aMTB) Trail Standards, p. 3.

Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons - Covington, KY

TRAIL ROUTE RECOMMENDATIONS

The project team evaluated topography, property ownership, available land, existing right-of-way, and connections to key community destinations to identify feasible corridors for both paved and natural surface trails. These concepts were refined with the Steering Committee to reflect local priorities and on-the-ground insight, then shared with the public to further shape the recommendations.

Paved multi-use trails form the backbone of the regional network, serving as primary corridors for walking, biking, and rolling across Northern Kentucky. These arterial routes connect communities, link major destinations, and establish a long-term vision for a cohesive system. Complementing this network, strategic focus areas for natural surface trails support a "Braided Trail Network," expanding access to parks, schools, libraries, hospitals, government buildings, and other key destinations while providing diverse recreational experiences.

An interactive online map is available below, allowing users to explore the recommended routes in greater detail and zoom in to specific corridors.

To view the online interactive map, please visit our project website HERE.

PAVED MULTI-USE TRAIL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The development process for paved multi-use trails is a long-term, multi-phase process that can take up to 10 years, progressing from early community engagement and planning through engineering, funding, construction, and ongoing maintenance.

Trail Development Process	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
Community Engagement & Coalition Building										
Planning										
Preliminary Engineering (Feasibility Study)										
Securing Construction Funding										
Detailed Engineering (Construction Documents)										
Construction										
Operations & Maintenance								...and beyond		

NATURAL SURFACE TRAIL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

PLANNING YEAR 1 — COMMUNITY NEED & OPPORTUNITY

FUNDING YEAR 2-3 — DONATIONS, CORPORATE SUPPORT, GRANTS, GOVERNMENTS

BIDDING YEAR 4, Q1-Q2 — MAY THE BEST WIN

WAITING Y4 Q3-Y5 Q1 — FOR THE BUILDER

BUILDING YEAR 5, Q2-Q3 — THE QUICK PART

MAINTENANCE & PROGRAMMING YEAR 5, Q4 AND ON — MAKE IT SUSTAINABLE

AVERAGE OF **5 YEARS** FROM PLANNING TO CONSTRUCTION

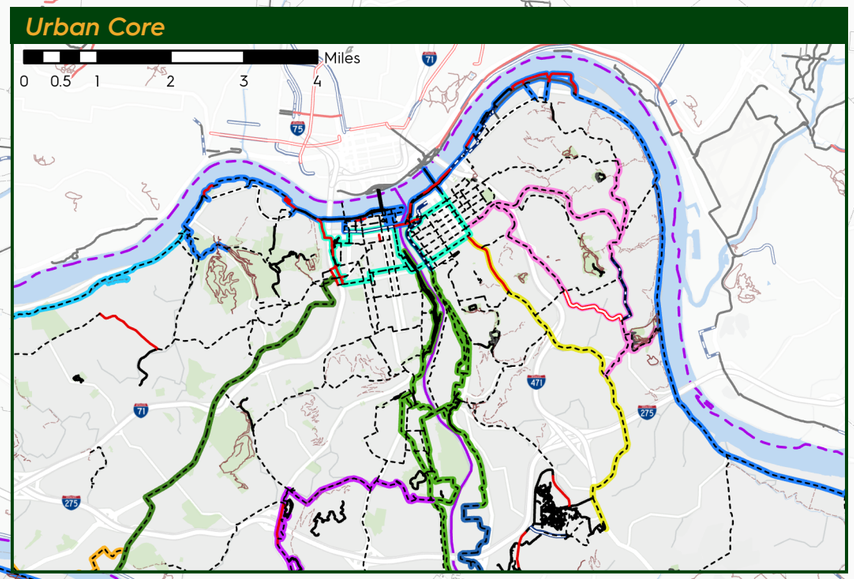
Natural surface trails typically have a shorter development timeline than paved trails, often moving quicker from planning to construction, depending on available funding and community support.

IMPORTANT CONTEXT

» **Trail Alignments:** All proposed trail routes are conceptual and were developed based on public engagement and Steering Committee feedback, using the best available information at the time of plan development. The regional trails plan is intended to be fluid, and routes may evolve over time as conditions change, new information becomes available, and additional coordination and public engagement occurs.

» **Land Access & Landowner Protection:** Proposed trails could be routed on public land or through easements granted by private landowners. Kentucky's Recreational Use Statute (KRS 411.190) protects landowners from liability for injuries sustained by people using their property for recreational purposes.

PROPOSED | PAVED MULTI-USE TRAILS



See Urban Core Map

Madeira
Bridgetown North
Bridgetown
Mack
Norwood
Greendale
Lawrenceburg
Aurora
Cincinnati
Newport
Devou Park
Fort Thomas
England Idlewild Park
Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky International Airport
Burlington
Erlanger
NKU
Taylor Mill
East Fork State Park
Middle Creek Park
Boone County Cliffs State Nature Preserve
Gunpowder Creek Nature Park
Doe Run Lake
New Kenton County Park
Hawthorne
Alexandria
Boone County Arboretum
Union
Independence
New Richmond
CAMPBELL
White Tower
Adair Wildlife Management Area
Big-Bone
Big Bone Lick State Historic Site
AJ Jolly Park
Quercus Grove
Gurley Corner
Patriot
Verona
Carntown
Crittenden
Butler
GALLATIN
Napoleon
Gardnersville
Boston

NKY Regional Trails Plan

- Existing Multi-Use Trail
- Existing Pedestrian Path
- Existing Bike Lane
- Existing Shared Road
- Funded Multi-Use Trail
- Funded Bike Lane
- Existing Natural Surface Trail
- Funded Natural Surface Trail
- Proposed Paved Multi-Use Trail
- Proposed Natural Surface Trail
- Fort Thomas Connector
- The Riverwalk
- NKY Urban Loop
- Green Line Trail
- CVG Loop
- KY 536
- KY 237
- LRG to AJ Jolly
- Banklick Creek Greenway
- Reimagine 27
- Licking River Greenway
- Ohio River Way
- Big Bone Lick Connector

0 1.25 2.5 5 7.5 10 Miles

Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

PROPOSED | PAVED MULTI-USE TRAILS

Paved multi-use trails form the backbone of the regional network, serving as the primary corridors for walking, biking, and rolling across Northern Kentucky. Organized as a connected system of arterial routes, these trails illustrate how communities can be linked to one another and to key destinations like schools, parks, job centers, and commercial districts. Together, they present a bold, long-term vision for a comprehensive regional trail network that expands mobility options, supports local economies, and improves quality of life for residents of all ages and abilities.

The routes identified in this plan are conceptual and reflect the best available information at the time of its development. Corridors were selected based on factors such as topography, available right-of-way or publicly held land, roadway conditions, traffic volume and speed, and previously documented plans and community input.

Specific facility types are not prescribed for every route at this stage. As individual segments advance, a trail feasibility study may be needed to further evaluate corridor conditions and potential constraints, and identify appropriate design solutions specific to each project. Performing a feasibility study is a great way to develop preliminary engineering plans, refine trail alignments, and establish cost estimates necessary to pursue local, state, and federal funding opportunities.

KY 237 Trail - Boone County

ARTERIAL MULTI-USE TRAIL NETWORK

BUILDING ON EXISTING MOMENTUM	LINKING DENSE POPULATION CENTERS	CONNECTING TO KEY DESTINATIONS	EXPANDING WORLD-CLASS RECREATION EXPERIENCES
RIVERWALK AT RIVERFRONT COMMONS	NKY URBAN LOOP TRAIL	REIMAGINE 27 CORRIDOR (NEWPORT TO NKU)	BANKLICK CREEK GREENWAY
LICKING RIVER GREENWAY	FORT THOMAS CONNECTOR	LICKING RIVER GREENWAY TO A.J. JOLLY PARK CONNECTOR	BIG BONE LICK CONNECTOR
CVG LOOP TRAIL	GREEN LINE TRAIL		OHIO RIVER WAY
KY 536 TRAIL			
KY 237 TRAIL			

A key component of the paved multi-use trail recommendations is the arterial network. The project team identified thirteen arterial routes across Northern Kentucky to form the backbone of the system, building on a combination of existing momentum, strategic connections, and long-term opportunity.

Some routes expand well-established corridors with strong public support and funding, such as the Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons, Licking River Greenway, CVG Loop Trail, and key state route corridors like KY 536 and KY 237. Others focus on linking dense population centers to the regional network, including the NKY Urban Loop Trail, Fort Thomas Connector, and Green Line Trail. Additional routes connect major destinations and recreation assets, such as Northern Kentucky University and A.J. Jolly Park, while corridors like the Banklick Creek Greenway, Bone Lick Creek Connector, and Ohio River Way emphasize scenic, high-quality experiences along creeks, waterways, and through major parks that integrate with natural surface trail systems.

In contrast, collector routes fill in the gaps between arterial corridors and extending access into surrounding neighborhoods and rural areas. These routes are more conceptual and were not studied at the same level of detail, but they are critical for creating a complete and connected network. Many collector routes may be implemented over a longer timeframe and could be advanced opportunistically through roadway projects, such as KYTC-led reconstructions or resurfacing efforts, to incrementally build out the regional trail system.

THE RIVERWALK AT RIVERFRONT COMMONS

Led by Southbank Partners in partnership with eight riverfront communities, The Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons is a transformative 20-mile regional paved trail network along the Ohio River, connecting Covington to Silver Grove and linking eight river cities into one unified riverfront community. Together, these partners established a cohesive identity for Riverfront Commons, Northern Kentucky's Riverfront District, branded as "The Front Porch of the South," to reflect the riverfront as a shared regional destination.

With nearly 6 miles complete and 3 miles currently funded, and a 2022 USDOT RAISE grant providing $3.8 million for final planning and design of the 20-mile trail, communities are already seeing the riverfront come to life as new segments open and momentum continues to build. As gaps are filled, the trail will connect directly to the Purple People Bridge and Cincinnati's CROWN network, creating a continuous, multi-state riverfront experience.

PROJECT LENGTH

20 MILES

IMPACTED COMMUNITIES & KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- ***City of Covington***
- ***City of Bromley***
- ***City of Ludlow***
- ***City of Newport***
- ***City of Bellevue***
- ***City of Dayton***
- ***City of Fort Thomas***
- ***City of Silver Grove***
- ***Southbank Partners***

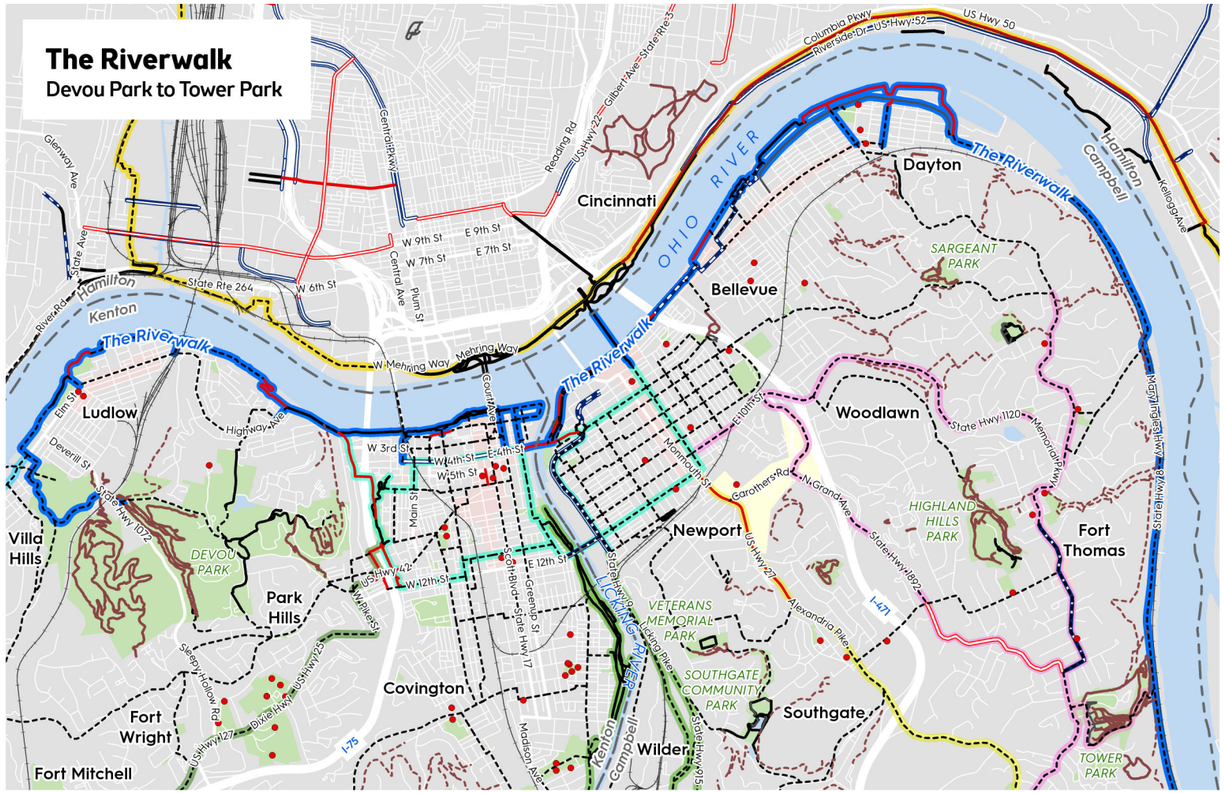
This shared vision is already being implemented on the ground, with Riverfront Commons kiosks, wayfinding and gateway signage, and "bike hubs" appearing along the trail to support users and strengthen the corridor's identity. The route links iconic destinations like Devou Park, Covington Plaza, Gen. James Taylor Park, Festival Park, Tower Park, and Pendery Park. The master plan outlines trailheads, overlooks, and paddle access points that reinforce Riverfront Commons as both a transportation asset and a premier public space along the Ohio River.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

With the Riverwalk Master Plan and corridor routing already established, the next phase should focus on advancing remaining segments into implementation. This includes **completing preliminary engineering and developing planning-level cost estimates for trail segments that are not yet built,** providing communities with the information needed to **pursue construction funding.**

Strong momentum exists in the urban core communities of Covington, Newport, Bellevue, and Dayton, where visible progress is helping build public support and regional excitement. Building on this success, Southbank Partners should **continue coordinating with Ludlow, Bromley, Fort Thomas, and Silver Grove to refine project scopes, develop cost estimates, and position these segments for state and federal construction grants.**

At the same time, communities with existing trail segments should continue enhancing the user experience through additional trailheads, river overlooks, paddlecraft access points, and connections to business districts. While these improvements add value, the primary focus should remain on closing remaining gaps and constructing the full 20-mile Riverwalk.



LICKING RIVER GREENWAY

First envisioned in the 2008 Licking River Greenway Master Plan, this trail is a planned 40-mile corridor extending from the confluence of the Licking and Ohio Rivers in Covington south to Frederick's Landing in Wilder, with the long-term vision of continuing further upstream to Kenton County's southern border. As one of the region's most unique trail concepts, the Greenway is designed as a "braided" system that combines paved shared-use paths with a gravel trail to create a diverse and immersive riverfront experience.

Today, key segments are already in place. Covington's 2.5-mile section features a series of murals, along with a 1.5-mile paved levee trail and a 1-mile riverside gravel path. In Ryland Heights, a 1.1-mile segment along Locust Pike provides an early example of how the corridor can extend into more rural communities.

PROJECT LENGTH

40 MILES

IMPACTED COMMUNITIES & KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- ***City of Covington***
- ***City of Taylor Mill***
- ***City of Ryland Heights***
- ***City of Newport***
- ***City of Wilder***
- ***Kenton County***
- ***Campbell County***

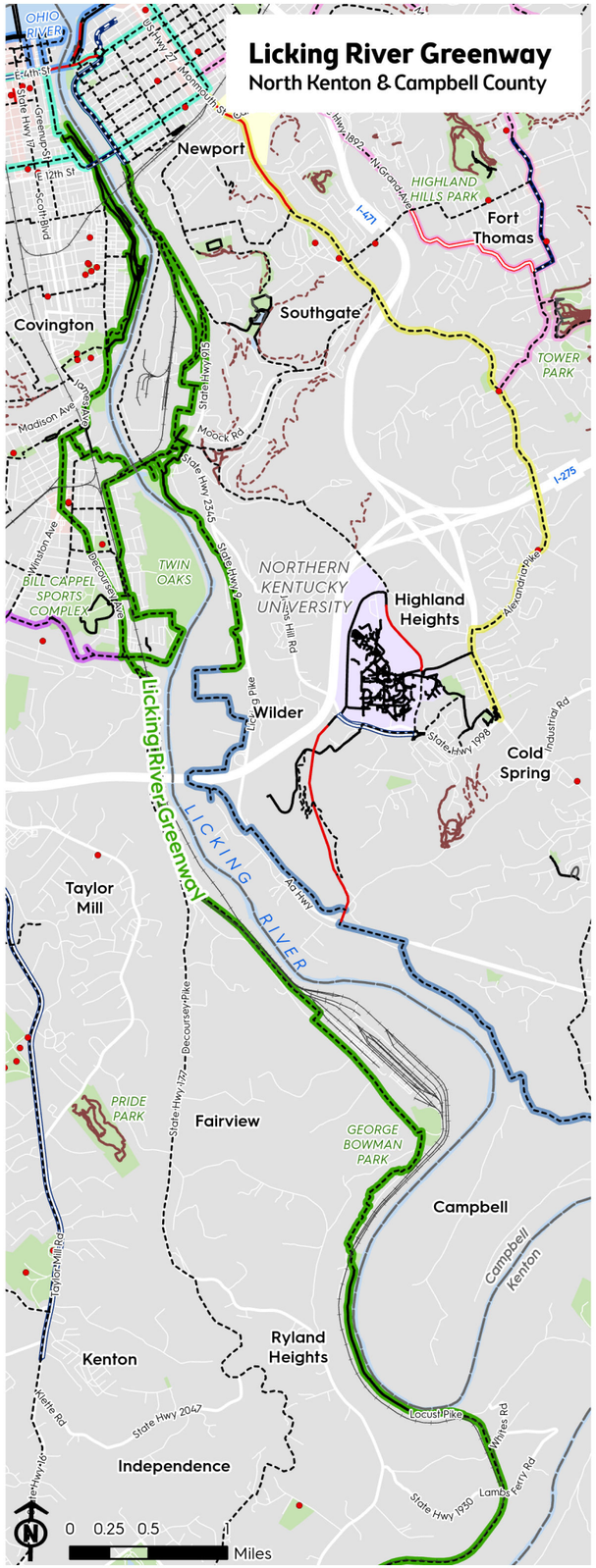
The Licking River Greenway is proposed to serve as a north-south arterial corridor, connecting neighborhoods, parks, and communities along the river to NKYs urban core. Advancing it will require navigating key challenges, including coordination around an inactive railroad corridor and identifying a feasible route through Covington's Latonia neighborhood where space is limited.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

The 2008 Licking River Greenway Master Plan provided a strong foundation and helped catalyze early implementation in Covington. However, progress has slowed south of these areas due to constrained corridors, fragmented ownership, and limited space along the river. To move the project forward, **an updated, corridor-wide feasibility and action plan should be completed to refine routing, evaluate alternatives, and establish a clear implementation strategy.**

This effort should bring together key cities, Kenton and Campbell Counties, state agencies, and regional partners to **reassess existing conditions, confirm priority alignments, and identify realistic solutions for constrained segments.** The study should include detailed mapping, site analysis, and coordination with property owners and utilities to determine feasible trail corridors and potential easement needs. It should evaluate opportunities for both paved and natural surface trails, reinforcing a braided trail concept and expanding recreational opportunities along the river.

A critical outcome of this next phase should be identifying priority segments that can advance toward implementation, including key gaps such as the connection between Covington and Latonia at James Avenue to connect low-stress street networks. This includes developing preliminary engineering concepts and planning-level cost estimates to position projects for state and federal funding. Establishing a clear phasing strategy will allow communities to focus on achievable segments while continuing to build momentum along the corridor, **with a primary focus on advancing buildable segments and closing critical gaps along this north-south corridor.**



CVG LOOP TRAIL

Led by Boone County Fiscal Court in coordination with KYTC District 6, the CVG Loop Trail is gaining strong momentum as a signature regional trail forming a loop around the Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky International Airport. Nearly 10 miles of connected trails already exist, including segments on KY 237 and Aero Parkway. The remainder of the project is fully funded, with plans to complete the loop including 13.5 miles of funded segments along Connor Road, KY 20 (Petersburg Road), KY 236 (Donaldson Highway), KY 1017 (Turfway Road), and KY 18 (Burlington Pike). As these projects advance, the loop is steadily taking shape as a continuous trail network supporting both active transportation and everyday recreation around a major employment hub.

PROJECT LENGTH

29 MILES

IMPACTED COMMUNITIES & KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- ***Boone County*** *(Burlington, Hebron, & Oakbrook areas)*
- ***City of Florence***
- ***City of Erlanger***
- ***CVG Airport***

Building on this progress, communities and stakeholders should advance connections to key destinations and surrounding areas. Links to the Ohio River Way, Anderson Ferry, and Eons Adventure Park will expand access to the Ohio River corridor. Connections east into Erlanger, Crestview Hills, and Edgewood will better serve dense areas in Kenton County. Expanding south will improve access to Florence, Union, the KY 536 Trail, and Big Bone Lick State Historic Site, strengthening the CVG Loop Trail as a regional spine.

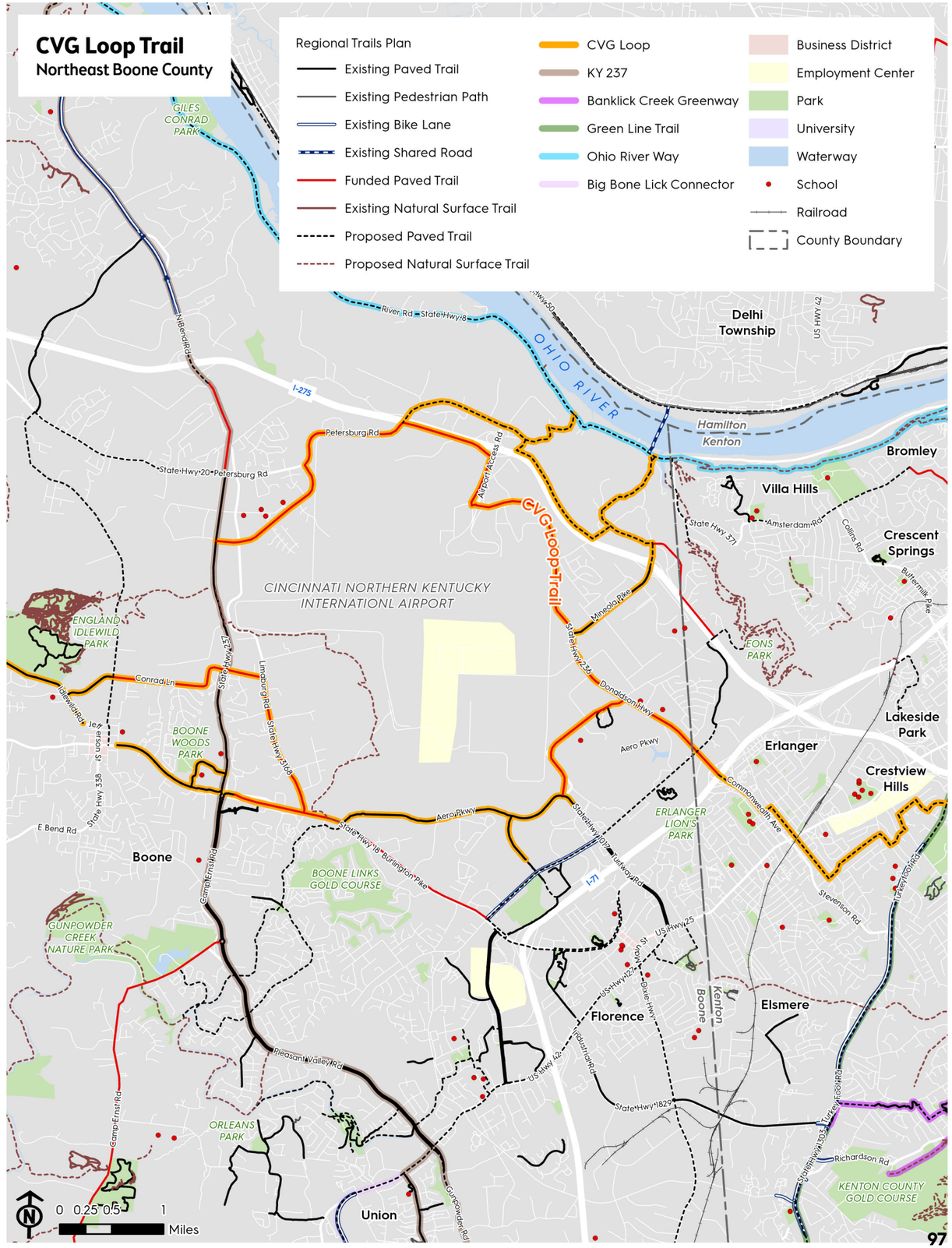
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

Advancing the CVG Loop Trail includes completing the remaining segments to establish a continuous loop around the airport. Delivering these projects will solidify the trail as the backbone of the regional network and set the stage it to expand to surrounding communities and destinations.

Three focused feasibility studies are recommended to advance key segments of the network:

- **Ohio River & Northeast Connections:** Evaluate connections to the Ohio River Trail, Anderson Ferry, and Eons Adventure Park. Focus on identifying alignments that address steep topography and meet ADA requirements, potentially requiring switchbacks or alternative routing.
- **Kenton County Corridor Connections:** Refine connections to the Kenton County Green Line Trail along Turkeyfoot Road and the existing trail on Industrial Road. Evaluate alternatives that address constraints such as dense residential areas, on-street parking, limited right-of-way, and frequent driveways.
- **Florence & Union Connections:** Advance recommendations in the 2019 Florence Bike and Pedestrian Plan by developing preliminary engineering for trails along US 25 (Dixie Highway), US 42, and neighborhood routes to move segments toward implementation.

Across all studies, identifying a preferred alignment supported by preliminary engineering and planning-level cost estimates will be critical to position these segments for future grant funding.



KY 536 TRAIL

Led by KYTC District 6, the KY 536 Trail is a critical east-west arterial trail spanning Boone, Kenton, and Campbell Counties. Of its 39-mile vision, 9 miles are complete and 4 miles are funded. Recent roadway realignments have incorporated shared use paths, building out much of Boone County's portion of the corridor, with construction currently extending into Kenton County.

As the corridor advances, the KY 536 Trail could serve as a key spine connecting multiple regional routes, including the Ohio River Way, Camp Ernst Road Trail, Big Bone Connector, KY 237 Trail, Green Line Trail, Licking River Greenway, and AJ Jolly Connector. It could also provide access to major destinations such as Big Bone Lick State Historic Site, Boone County Arboretum, the New Kenton County park, and several schools along the corridor.

The corridor also supports access to existing and proposed natural surface trail systems and environmental assets, including Big Bone Lick, the Adair Wildlife Area, Gunpowder Creek, and Four Mile Creek. Together, these connections position the KY 536 Trail as both a transportation corridor and a gateway to regional outdoor recreation.

PROJECT LENGTH

39 MILES

IMPACTED COMMUNITIES & KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- ***Boone County***
- ***Kenton County***
- ***Campbell County***
- ***City of Union***
- ***City of Independence***
- ***City of Alexandria***
- ***KYTC District 6***

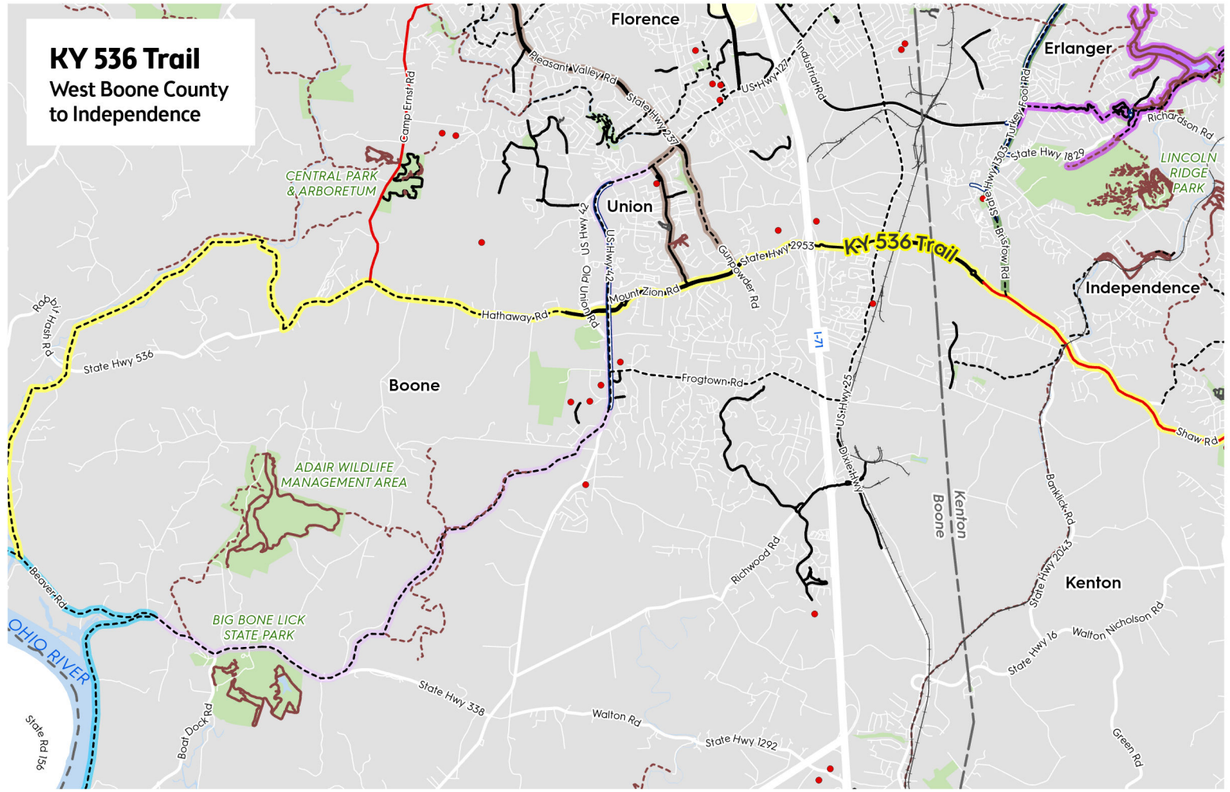
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

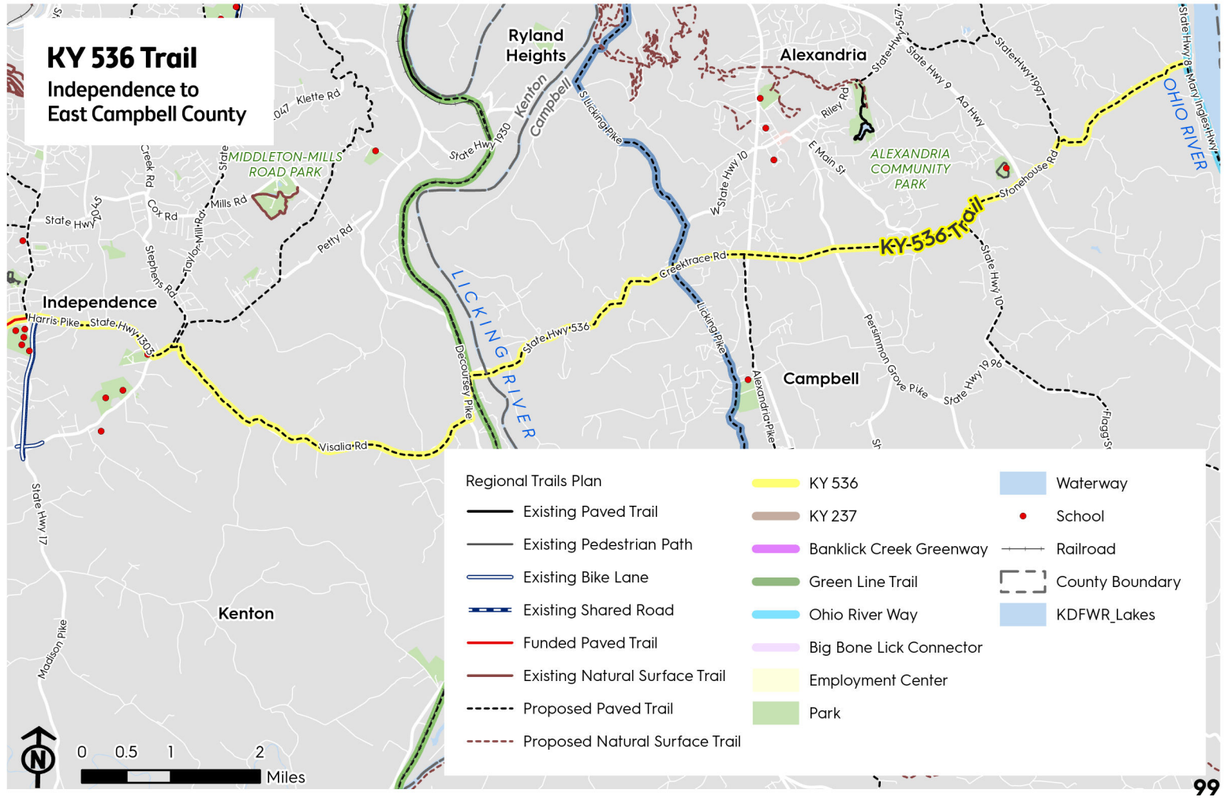
Advancing the KY 536 Trail will require continued coordination with KYTC District 6 to move current projects from early development into final design and construction.

Key segments in Kenton County between KY 17 and KY 177, are still in the early planning stages, with alternatives being refined and property impacts forthcoming. **As these projects progress, it will be important to ensure that shared-use paths are incorporated as part of roadway modernization** to address existing safety concerns, including narrow lanes, steep grades, and the lack of bicycle and pedestrian accommodations. **Incorporating a shared-use path is critical to establishing a safe and viable active transportation facility in this rural part of Kenton County and expanding the regional trail network.**

Looking east, the **extension of KY 536 through Campbell County** has not yet been formally studied. **Coordination between Campbell County and KYTC District 6 will be critical to advance this segment,** which has been identified as a local priority and may warrant inclusion in future KYTC capital improvement plans and state capital funding discussions.

To the west, a feasibility study should be conducted to evaluate extending corridor improvements through the rest of Boone County and toward the Ohio River. This should assess options for either continuing the roadway realignment with a parallel shared use path or developing a standalone trail connection, helping to close a key gap in the regional network and strengthen connections to the Ohio River Way corridor and Big Bone Lick.





KY 237 TRAIL

Led by KYTC District 6 and Boone County Fiscal Court, the KY 237 Trail is a north–south shared use path that improves safety for people walking and biking along this busy corridor. As a key segment of the CVG Loop Trail, it's one of the longest paved trails in Northern Kentucky with 20 miles built and additional segments funded as part of a planned 23-mile corridor linking neighborhoods, schools, parks, and businesses.

The corridor could play a critical role in connecting major regional routes, including the Ohio River Way to the north and the KY 536 Trail to the south, with potential future connections along US 42 toward Big Bone Lick State Historic Site. It could also provide access to destinations such as England-Idlewild Park, several schools near Conner Road, and future natural surface trails in northern Boone County along the Ohio River.

PROJECT LENGTH

23 MILES

IMPACTED COMMUNITIES & KEY STAKEHOLDERS

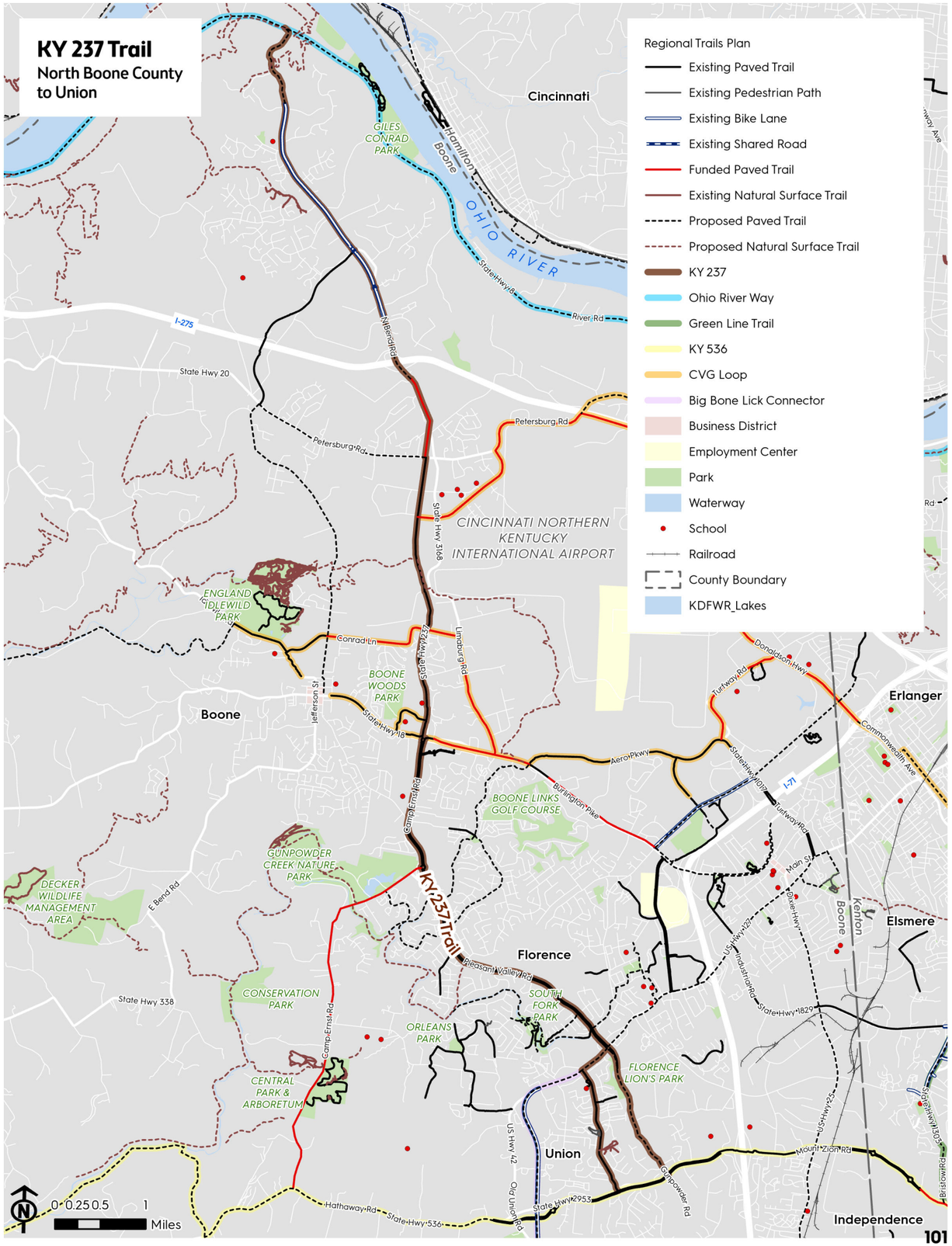
- ***Boone County*** *(Burlington, Hebron, & Oakbrook areas)*
- ***City of Florence***
- ***KYTC District 6***

As an important north–south spine, the corridor has opportunities to be strengthened over time by closing gaps, improving existing segments, and expanding connections both north and south to better serve surrounding communities and the regional trail network.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

Closing key gaps along the KY 237 corridor will require a feasibility study with preliminary engineering, inclusion in the KYTC Six-Year Plan, and advancement through future roadway projects or OKI funding opportunities. These gaps include the following segments:

- **Southern Connection to KY 536 Trail Along US Highway 42:** Key stakeholders should prioritize a connection from the southern terminus near Gunpowder Road to the KY 536 Trail. This would include a short 0.4-mile connection along US Highway 42 to the existing trail on Wetherington Boulevard. Completing this segment will establish a critical link between two major corridors.
  - In addition, a connection along US 42 to the north toward Dixie Highway and the existing trail on Turfway Road should be considered. This segment would further strengthen the network by linking to existing trails on Industrial Road and Ewing Boulevard and providing better bike and pedestrian access to the Florence Mall.
- **Northern Connection to Ohio River Way Along North Bend Road (KY 237):** Another priority is to advance the extension of the funded segment that ends just south of I-275 north toward the Ohio River. This effort should evaluate converting existing bike lanes along North Bend Road (KY 237) through Francisville to a shared use path or protected bike lane. As a 45 MPH roadway with traffic volumes up to 30,000 vehicles per day near I-275, a safer facility is needed to support users of all ages and abilities. A feasibility study and preliminary engineering should be conducted to identify a preferred alignment and position this segment for future funding opportunities.



NKY URBAN LOOP TRAIL

A priority recommendation in the 2023 Covington + Newport Bike Plan, the NKY Urban Loop Trail is a 7-mile route that creates a continuous, protected bikeway loop through Northern Kentucky's urban basin. Complementing the CROWN in Cincinnati, this urban circulator would connect dense neighborhoods to the Purple People Bridge, the Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons , and the Licking River Greenway, and link key business districts in Covington and Newport to downtown Cincinnati. The route also provides access to several schools and parks, including Goebel Park, Randolph Park, General James Taylor Park, and Newport's future Festival Park.

PROJECT LENGTH

7 MILES

IMPACTED COMMUNITIES & KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- ***City of Covington***
- ***City of Newport***
- ***Southbank Partners***
- ***KYTC District 6***
- ***City of Cincinnati***

Recent projects include Covington's Fourth Street bike lanes, protected bike lanes on the Licking River Girl Scout Bridge, and construction underway on the new Fourth Street Bridge with shared use paths. Newport partnered with Tri-State Trails to complete a feasibility study for a protected bikeway on Saratoga Street, and plans for the Brent Spence Bridge corridor include future shared use path connections in Covington. As these projects advance, the NKY Urban Loop Trail has the potential to become a defining regional asset, supported by coordinated branding, wayfinding, and trail amenities to create a clear, recognizable network.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

The planned OneNKY Connector Route signage will help improve navigation and establish a clear, cohesive identity for the NKY Urban Loop. It is critical that these signed routes be enhanced with safe, protected infrastructure for the NKY Urban Loop to survey the widest audience. Coordination with KYTC District 6 and the City of Newport for the planned reconfiguration of KY 9 and Saratoga Street is necessary to implement a protected bike facility that accommodates increased usage as the network grows.

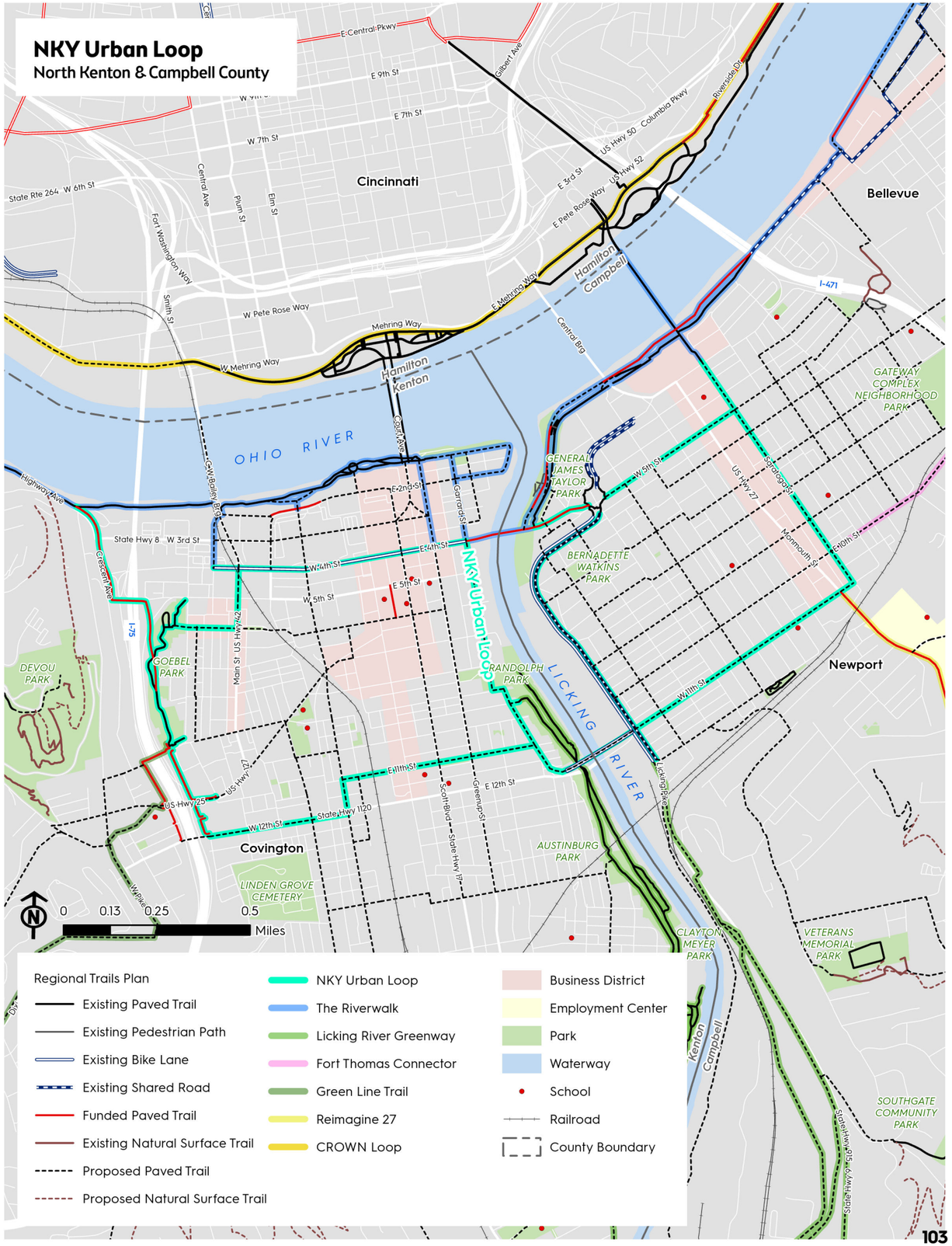
Feasibility studies, including preliminary engineering and planning-level cost estimates, should be conducted to select appropriate facilities, refine alignments, and advance priority segments. This effort should evaluate routing options, assess right-of-way and design constraints, and identify preferred alternatives for future funding. Priority corridors for further evaluation include:

Covington:

- Connection from Goebel Park to the Fourth Street bike lanes via 6th Street / MainStrasse / Main Street
- 11th and 12th Street corridor from the Licking River Girl Scout Bridge to the Brent Spence Bridge improvements

Newport:

- 5th Street corridor from the roundabout/Fourth Street Bridge to Saratoga Street
- 11th Street corridor from the Licking River Girl Scout Bridge to Saratoga Street



FORT THOMAS CONNECTOR

The Fort Thomas Connector is a proposed 11-mile bikeway network that would extend the NKY Urban Loop Trail into Fort Thomas. The network includes key corridors along Fort Thomas Avenue, Grand Avenue (KY 1892), and Memorial Parkway (KY 1120), with connections to Tower Park, Sargeant Park, and Highland Hills Park. It also identifies opportunities for natural surface trails linking Fort Thomas Avenue to the Ohio River Way and major parks.

Approximately 2 miles of Fort Thomas Avenue through the main business district are currently striped as a shared roadway. In addition, the City of Fort Thomas is planning a 1-mile bike lane on Grand Avenue between Highland Avenue and Fort Thomas Avenue, providing a near-term improvement.

This project would connect dense neighborhoods in Fort Thomas to multiple schools, parks, commercial areas on Fort Thomas Avenue, the urban basin, and the regional trail network. Additional opportunities include natural surface trail connections to the Ohio River Way at multiple locations, as well as potential paved trail or bikeway improvements along Dayton Pike, Covert Run Pike, and Highland Avenue. This project, coupled with the proposed natural surface trails in Fort Thomas, Dayton, and Bellevue, create the potential for the braided trail network to be piloted.

PROJECT LENGTH

11 MILES

IMPACTED COMMUNITIES & KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- ***City of Fort Thomas***
- ***City of Dayton***
- ***City of Bellevue***
- ***City of Newport***
- ***Fort Thomas Schools***
- ***KYTC District 6***

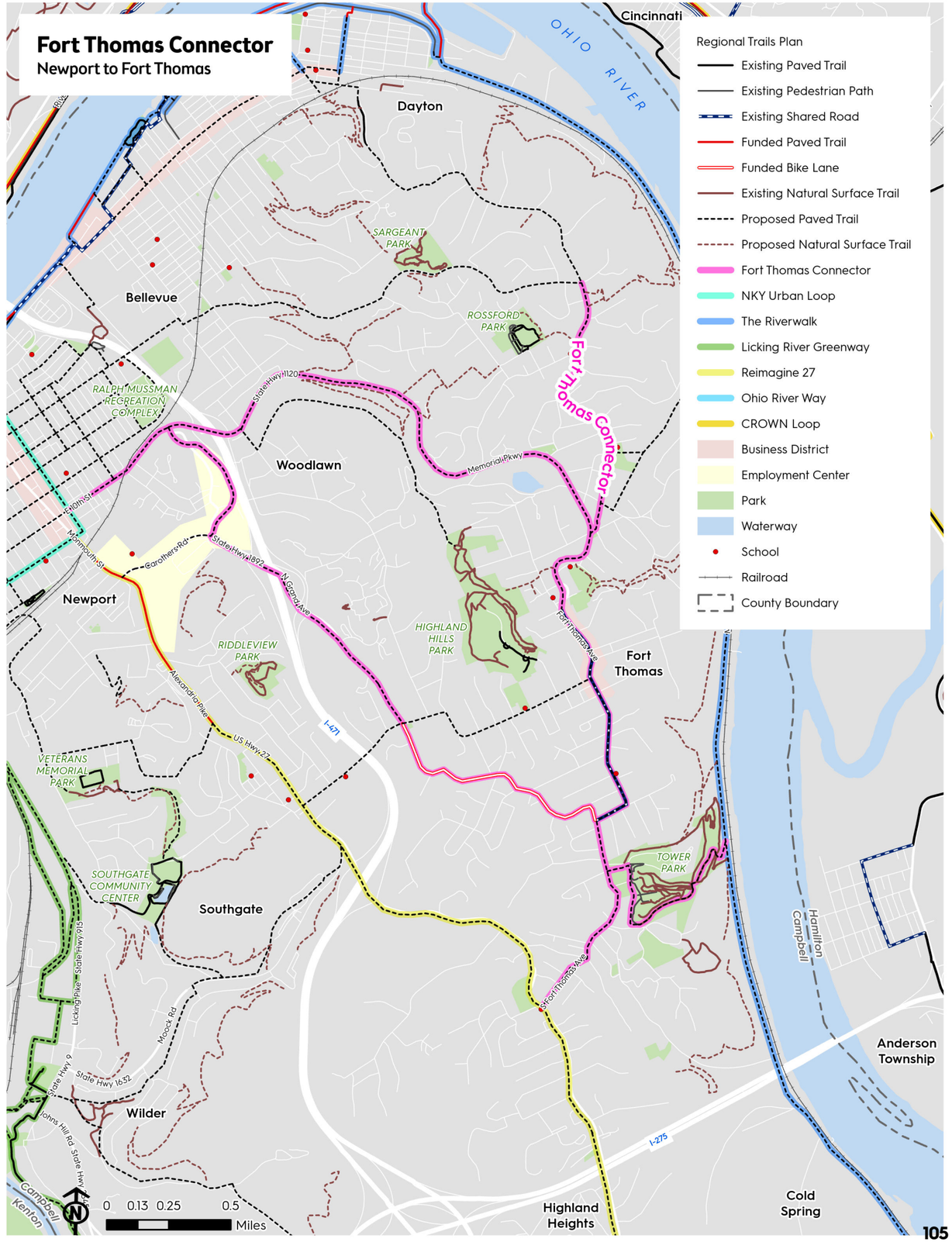
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

Implementation of the Fort Thomas Connector requires coordination between Fort Thomas and KYTC District 6, along with targeted feasibility studies to refine alignments and prioritize improvements.

Fort Thomas and KYTC should **evaluate upgrading the planned bike lane on Grand Avenue to a shared use path to better accommodate a wider range of users. A feasibility study should assess how the corridor connects to the NKY Urban Loop via Grand Avenue and Memorial Parkway,** with a focus on providing a safe connection to St. Elizabeth Fort Thomas and improving access to Newport.

Additional study is needed along Fort Thomas Avenue to **evaluate converting portions of the existing shared roadway into a shared use paved trail,** including opportunities to reconfigure the medians to accommodate a shared use path. **Early implementation should prioritize segments with the greatest impact, particularly near Highlands High School and other key destinations.**

As Fort Thomas Avenue approaches Covert Run Pike, the roadway narrows and becomes winding with limited sight distance for motorists and cyclists. **A study should evaluate options to connect to Dayton.** In the near term, Fort Thomas could advance natural surface trail connections to the Ohio River Way (*see River Cities & Hillsides Focus Area on page 118*) while pursuing longer-term connections to Dayton and Bellevue via Dayton Pike and Covert Run Pike, which links to Sargeant Park. Other priority spurs include Highland Avenue, creating an east-west link to the US 27 corridor and Moyer Elementary School, and connections to Highland Hills Park.



GREEN LINE TRAIL

The Green Line Trail is a proposed 11-mile paved trail that reimagines the historic Green Line streetcar, which operated from the late 1800s until the 1950s. The line once connected Northern Kentucky communities to Cincinnati's Dixie Terminal, shaping walkable and densely populated streetcar suburbs in Covington, Park Hills, Fort Mitchell, Lakeside Park, and Crestview Hills. Repurposing this legacy corridor into a trail honors its history and creates an active transportation spine through one of Kenton County's most densely populated areas.

Portions of the original corridor have been redeveloped or converted to roads, so the proposed route follows Dixie Highway (US 25) and Turkeyfoot Road (KY 1303), extending from Covington to KY 536 in Independence. The corridor includes constrained segments due to limited right-of-way and highway crossings.

High traffic volumes and speeds make existing bike lanes on Turkeyfoot Road uncomfortable for most users, highlighting the need for a separated, low-stress facility. By connecting dense neighborhoods, schools, jobs, Thomas More University, and the Ohio Riverfront, the Green Line Trail would provide a critical, low-stress route for walking and biking in a high-demand corridor.

PROJECT LENGTH

11 MILES

IMPACTED COMMUNITIES & KEY STAKEHOLDERS

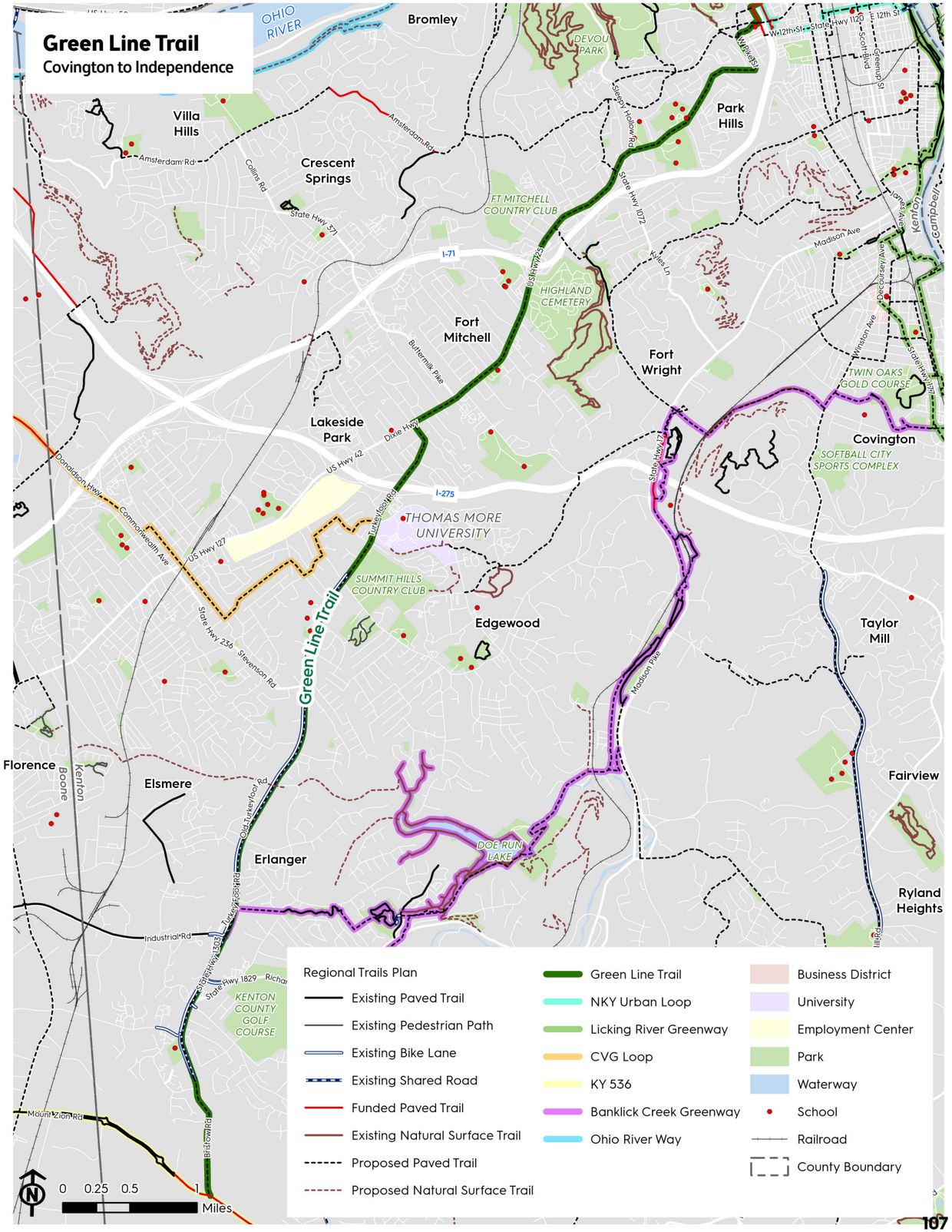
- ***City of Covington***
- ***City of Park Hills***
- ***City of Fort Mitchell***
- ***City of Lakeside Park***
- ***City of Crestview Hills***
- ***City of Edgewood***
- ***City of Erlanger***
- ***City of Elsmere***
- ***City of Independence***
- ***KYTC District 6***
- ***Thomas More University***
- ***St. Elizabeth Edgewood***

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

Communities should coordinate with KYTC District 6 to advance segments of the Green Line Trail alongside planned roadway projects on Dixie Highway (US 25) and Turkeyfoot Road (KY 1303). KYTC has active and planned improvements in this corridor, including roadway reconfiguration, resurfacing, and safety projects. These efforts present a timely opportunity to incorporate a shared use path as part of project design and implementation. **Local jurisdictions should advocate early in the design process to ensure space is preserved for a future trail.**

Advancing this corridor will **require strong coordination and consensus** among local governments, KYTC, and regional partners. **A corridor or feasibility study should refine the preferred alignment, evaluate which side of the roadway is most feasible, and identify costs, constraints, and right-of-way needs.** Given the documented safety concerns on Dixie Highway and Turkeyfoot Road, a phased approach could target crash hot spots over time.

Fort Mitchell recently received OKI funding for sidewalk improvements on Dixie Highway. **Communities could begin by prioritizing sidewalk connections to neighboring jurisdictions, focusing on pedestrian improvements first while accommodating future bike traffic as investments are made.** With several schools nearby, Safe Routes to School connections and bike boulevards on low-traffic streets could serve as early phases, with **long-term opportunities to reconnect segments of the historic streetcar alignment where feasible.**



REIMAGINE 27 CORRIDOR

Led by Southbank Partners in partnership with the four corridor communities, the Reimagine 27 Corridor will connect Newport's urban core to Northern Kentucky University along Alexandria Pike/US 27, creating a critical spine between dense neighborhoods, business districts, schools, and a major employment and education center. As a primary north-south route carrying approximately 6,500 to 14,800 vehicles per day through Newport, Southgate, Fort Thomas, and Highland Heights, the corridor presents a strong opportunity to expand safe, reliable active transportation and strengthen connections to the regional trail network while supporting future development.

The 6-mile corridor extends from Newport on the Levee to Northern Kentucky University. Newport has secured funding for a 1-mile shared use path between 11th Street and Bluegrass Avenue, establishing an important first phase.

PROJECT LENGTH

5 MILES

IMPACTED COMMUNITIES & KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- ***City of Newport***
- ***City of Southgate***
- ***City of Fort Thomas***
- ***City of Highland Heights***
- ***Campbell County***
- ***NKY University***
- ***Southbank Partners***
- ***KYTC District 6***

Key challenges include limited right-of-way, high traffic volumes, frequent driveways and side streets, and barriers at the I-471 and I-275 interchanges. Coordination with KYTC, context-sensitive design, and phased implementation will be essential to improve safety while maintaining the corridor's role as a regional roadway.

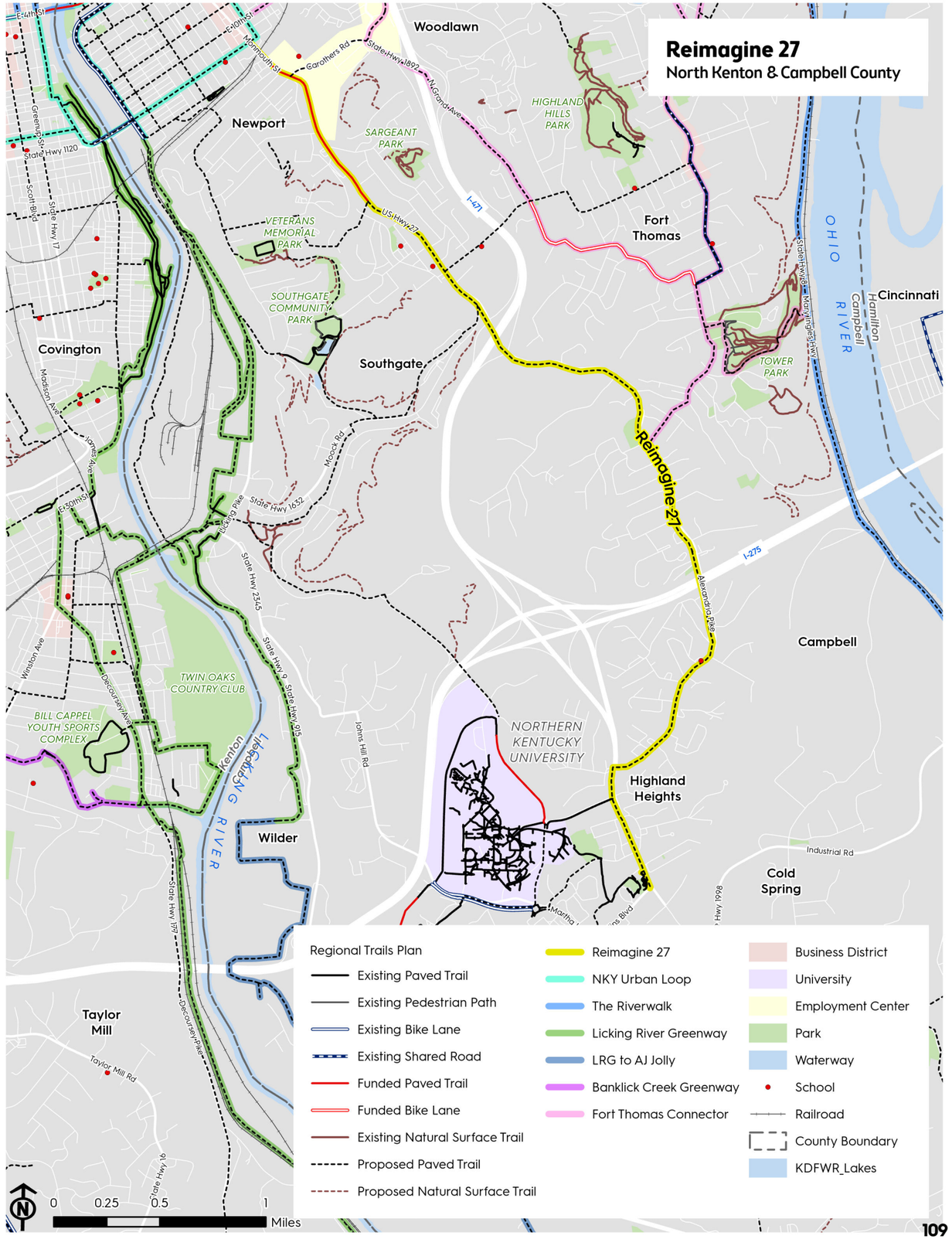
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

Implementation of the Reimagine 27 Corridor will build on ongoing local and regional efforts to improve safety and connectivity along this critical north-south route. Southbank Partners established an interlocal agreement to facilitate this project.

The City of Newport is advancing construction of an 8-foot wide shared use path on US 27. Farther south, corridor planning remains ongoing across each city, evaluating opportunities to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists while planning for future development and corridor succession. Continued coordination with KYTC and new development will help ensure pedestrians and cyclists are prioritized with appropriate facility types. **As plans advance, developing cost estimates for the trail will be a key next step to support OKI funding applications.**

A previous 2007 KYTC Access Management Plan recommended a road diet along US 27 from Fort Thomas Avenue to I-471, including a shared use path and landscaped medians that were never implemented. **This plan should be revisited to reassess feasibility and develop updated cost estimates for future grant applications.**

The City of Southgate is planning a shared use path from Bluegrass Avenue to Mook Road, with a focus on safe crossings of US 27. **As planning advances, this project should be positioned for federal funding to support implementation.**



A.J. JOLLY PARK CONNECTOR

The Licking River Greenway to A.J. Jolly Park Connector is a conceptual 15-mile trail that would link the Licking River Greenway to A.J. Jolly Park, one of Campbell County's largest recreation destinations. The route follows key corridors such as KY 9 (Licking Pike), KY 915, and the Licking River, creating a new north-south spine for active transportation in the heart of the county. This corridor also presents an opportunity to develop a braided trail network that combines paved and natural surface trails.

As improvements to the KY 536 corridor continue to move east, this connector could serve as a key north-south junction, linking to a future shared use path on KY 536. The trail would also connect to proposed natural surface trail systems near Alexandria and A.J. Jolly Park (*see Four Mile Creek and A.J. Jolly Park Focus Areas on pages 124-127*), expanding access to parks, conservation areas, and rural landscapes.

PROJECT LENGTH

15 MILES

IMPACTED COMMUNITIES & KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- ***City of Wilder***
- ***City of Cold Spring***
- ***City of Alexandria***
- ***Campbell County***
- ***KYTC District 6***
- ***NKY University***
- ***AJ Jolly Park CDC***
- ***Campbell County Conservation District***

Additional connections could link neighborhoods in Alexandria and surrounding communities to NKU and nearby cities such as Cold Spring, Crestview, and Melbourne. By tying together the Licking River corridor, Four Mile Creek conservation areas, and A.J. Jolly Park's existing trail system, this project would create a new regional destination and introduce a braided trail network in an area of Campbell County that currently lacks connected trail infrastructure.

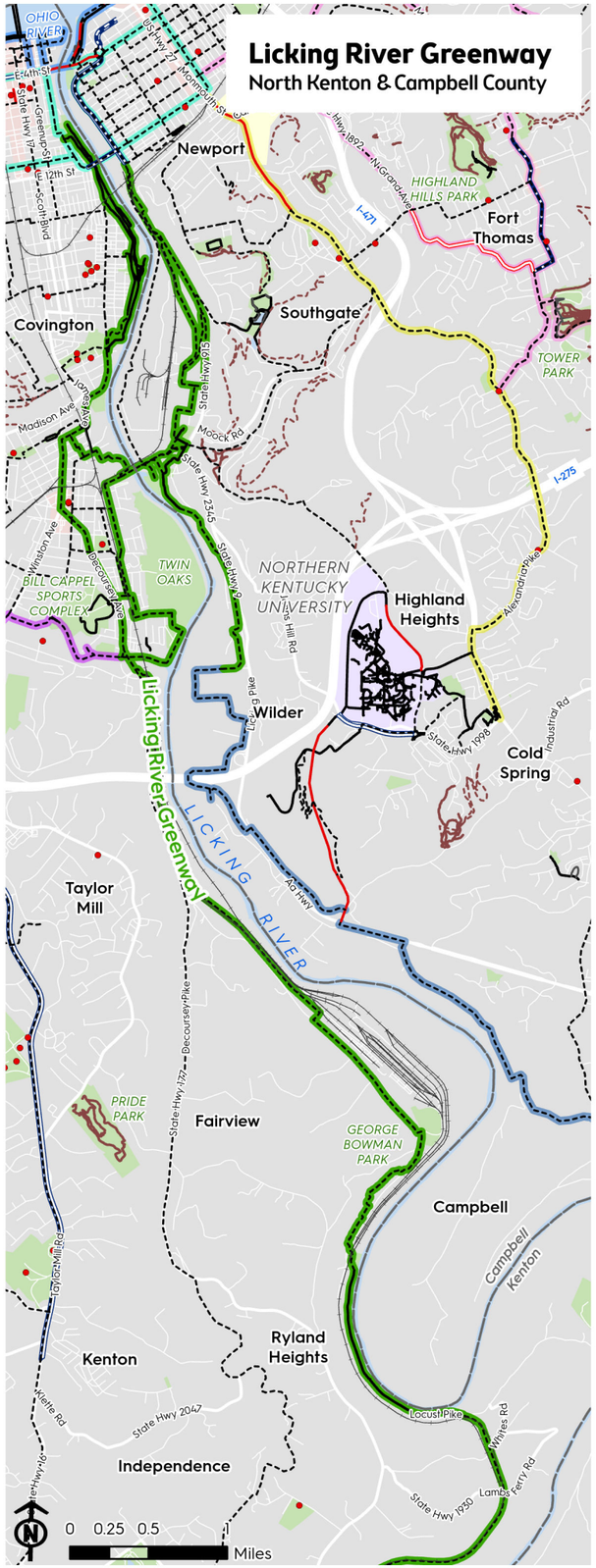
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

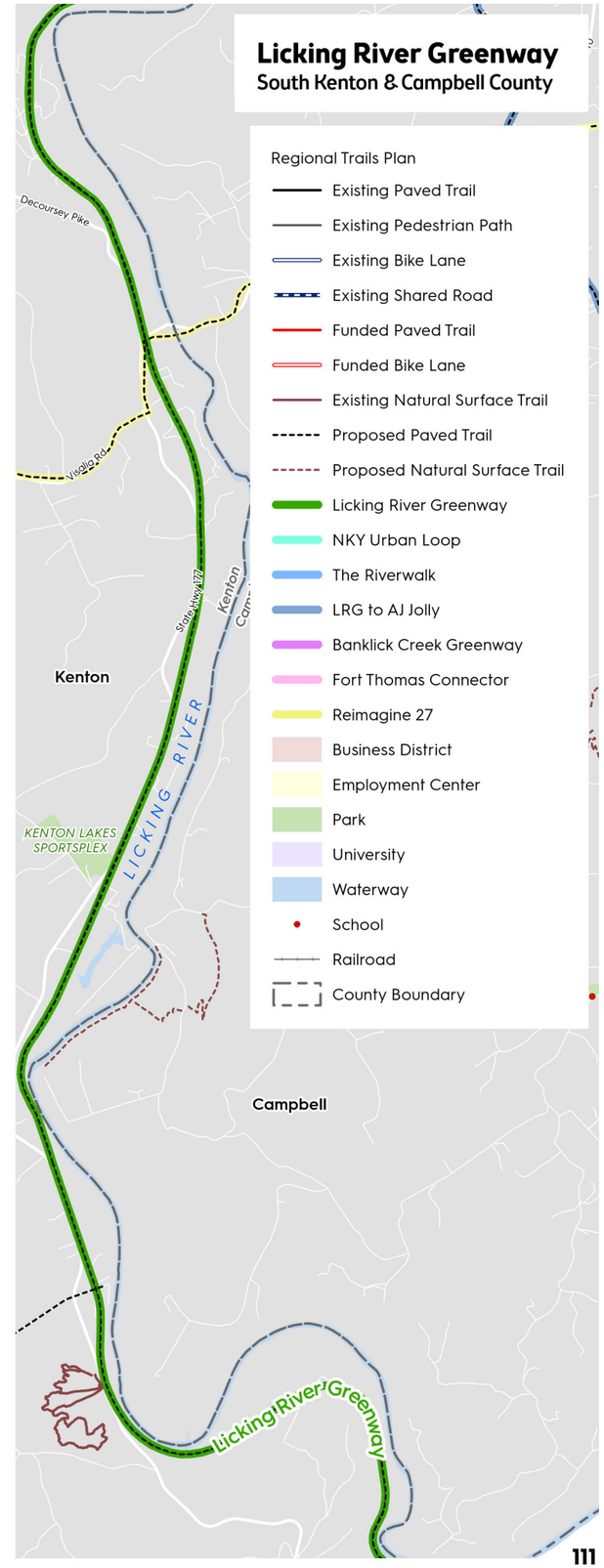
Advancing the Licking River Greenway to A.J. Jolly Park will be a long-term effort requiring a phased approach. Given the length and topography of the corridor, early work should focus on evaluating right-of-way constraints and identifying priority segments to connect to NKU and A.J. Jolly Park.

Initial efforts should focus on the northern and southern ends of the corridor, to build upon where trail use and infrastructure already exist. **A feasibility study could inform alignments near Wilder and NKU along KY 9 and KY 915 (Licking Pike)** toward the Hawthorne/Alexandria area, building on a planned connector road and 1.33-mile paved trail from NKU to Poole's Creek Road/Licking Pike.

In the south, AJ Jolly Park provides an opportunity to expand Campbell County's paved trail infrastructure around its largest recreation amenity, which includes an existing of natural surface and equestrian trails. **A feasibility study should be considered along KY 915 (Licking Pike) from AJ Jolly to the Licking River to connect to proposed natural surface trails near Hawthorne and Alexandria.** The Campbell County Conservation District owns publicly held land along the Licking River in this area, providing a major opportunity for proposed natural surface trails.

As natural surface trail projects advance, planning should be coordinated with paved trail development to support a braided trail network. This effort will require a project champion to lead feasibility, coordination, and future grant funding.





BANKLICK CREEK GREENWAY

The Banklick Creek Greenway is a 20-mile vision to connect Covington's Latonia neighborhood south to Doe Run Lake and Flagship Park along Banklick Creek, creating a continuous creekside corridor that links neighborhoods to nature. Of this total, 9.5 miles are built and 11 miles are proposed. The plan envisions a braided trail corridor with both paved and natural surface trails, with connections to Lincoln Ridge Park, Kenton County's new 225-acre park, Brushy Fork Trails, and the Wolsing Trails farther south.

Some segments are experiencing significant erosion and may require streambank restoration that could align with trail development. Critical stakeholders include the Banklick Creek Watershed Council, with experience in creek restoration and conservation land management, strong local partnerships, and grant experience, as well as Kenton County Parks. Coordination with the Army Corps of Engineers will also be required.

The corridor has potential to connect NKY communities to regional trails, including the Green Line Trail and Licking River Greenway, as well as key destinations such as Sanitation District No. 1, Fidelity campuses, Fort Wright Nature Center, and Thomas More University.

PROJECT LENGTH

20 MILES

IMPACTED COMMUNITIES & KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- ***City of Covington***
- ***City of Taylor Mill***
- ***City of Fort Wright***
- ***Kenton County Parks***
- ***Banklick Creek Watershed Council***
- ***KYTC District 6***
- ***Thomas More University***
- ***St. Elizabeth Edgewood***

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

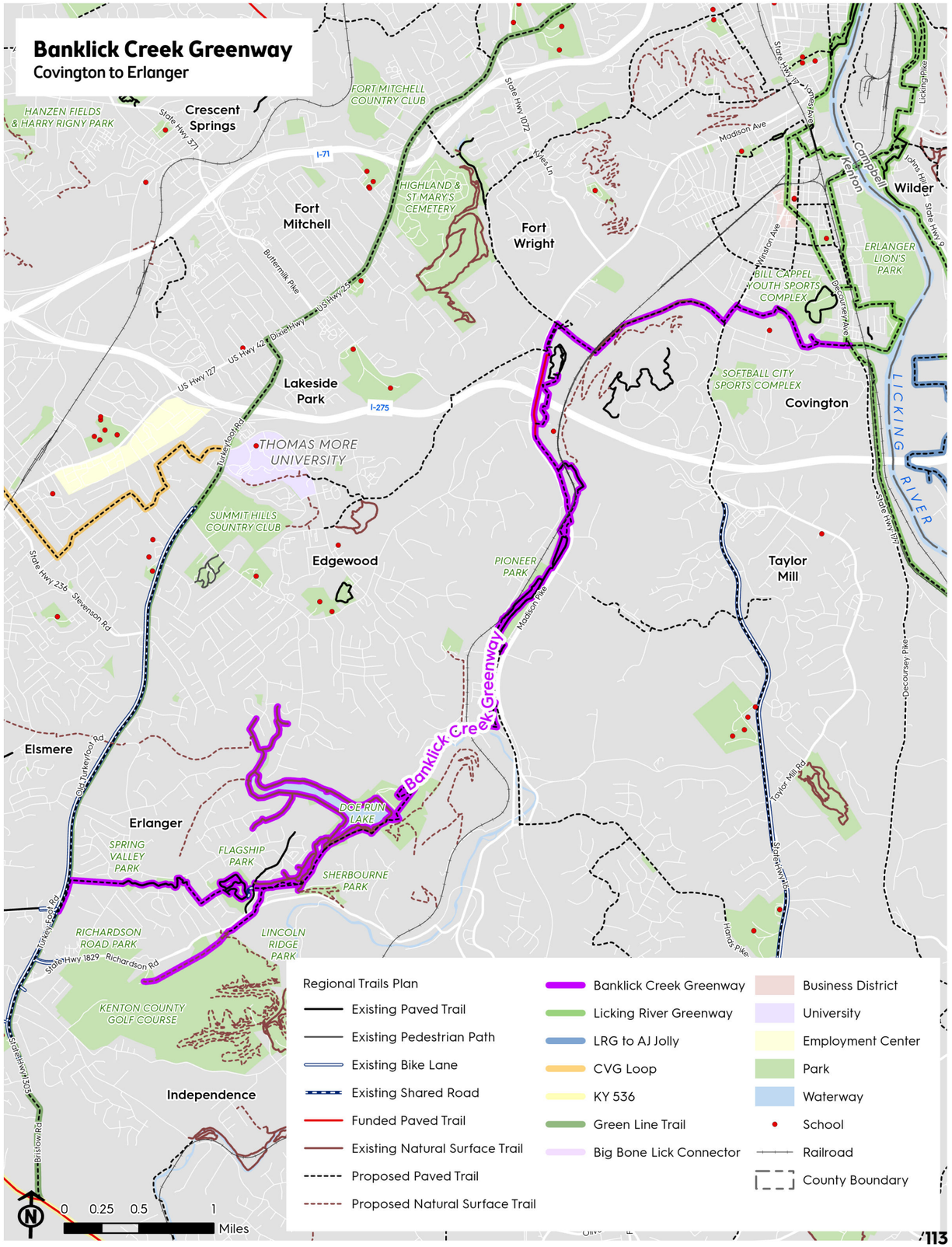
The Banklick Creek Greenway is well positioned to advance into a corridor feasibility study, pending coordination and agreement among key partners. Kenton County Parks, local jurisdictions, and regional stakeholders should build on prior planning efforts to refine alignments, evaluate constraints, and identify priority segments for implementation.

A primary focus should be connecting major parks along the corridor, including Doe Run Lake, Pioneer Park, the new Kenton County Park, Flagship Park, and Spring Valley Park. **This opportunity for a braided trail system builds on recommendations from the 2016 Kenton County Master Parks Plan and link existing natural surface trails and paved trails into a cohesive network.** Kenton County Parks and partner communities should prioritize advancing these connections.

Another high-priority segment is the connection from the Licking River Greenway in Latonia west along Banklick Creek toward Sanitation District No. 1's campus, where KYTC District 6 is planning a shared use path along Madison Pike. This segment presents an opportunity with minimal property impacts along the Banklick Creek and should be evaluated with a feasibility study to position it for future grant funding.

Priority spur trails should be considered that connect to the following destinations:

- Thomas More University via Orphanage Road and Horsebranch Road in Crestview Hills
- A connection to the existing trails at Fort Wright Nature Center and Highland Cemetery along Highland Avenue



BIG BONE LICK CONNECTOR

The Big Bone Lick Connector Trail is a new arterial trail concept linking residential areas in Boone County, including Florence, Union, and Oakbrook, to Big Bone Lick State Historic Site and the future Ohio River Way trail. This corridor is envisioned as a signature recreation experience that blends paved and natural surface trails through a scenic, creekside setting.

North of Rice Pike, the route follows US 42, where existing bike lanes are present but conditions are challenging due to traffic volumes ranging from 20,000 to 35,000 vehicles per day. Reconfiguring the corridor to include a shared use path would create a safer, more comfortable connection to key east-west routes such as KY 237, KY 536, and Wetherington Boulevard, with relatively few driveway and side street conflicts.

South of Rice Pike, the trail transitions to a more rural alignment along Big Bone Creek, offering a scenic connection to Big Bone Lick and ultimately the Ohio River. Key constraints include limited right-of-way along US 42, high traffic volumes, and privately held land with notable elevation changes along the creek corridor.

PROJECT LENGTH

10 MILES

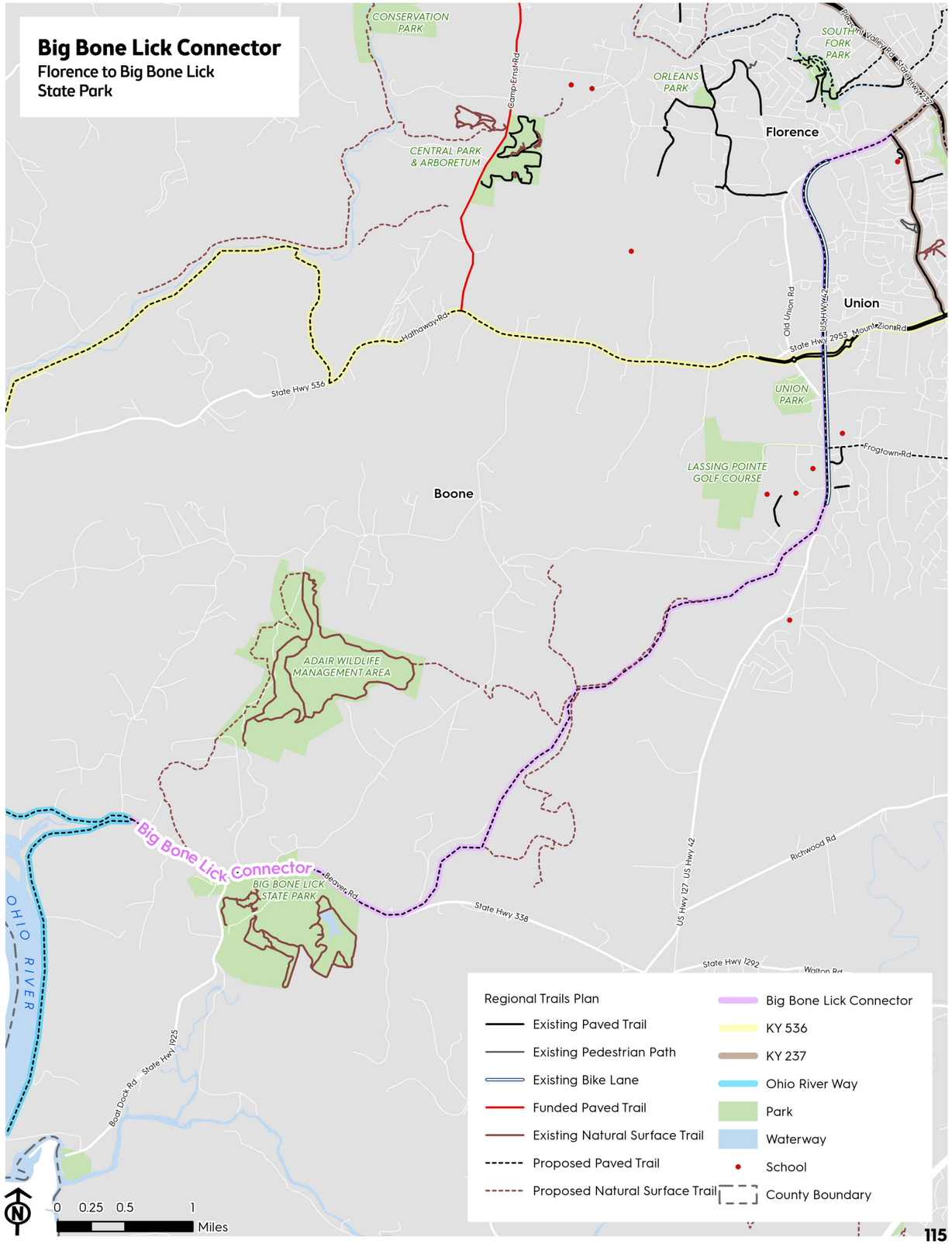
IMPACTED COMMUNITIES & KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- ***Boone County***
- ***City of Florence***
- ***City of Union***
- ***KYTC District 6***
- ***The Boone Conservancy***
- ***Kentucky State Parks***

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

Implementation of the Big Bone Lick Connector Trail should focus on two priority segments that address immediate safety needs and establish a long-term connection to the Ohio River Way and Big Bone Lick State Historic Site.

- **US 42 Corridor (Union):** A feasibility study should be conducted to evaluate converting existing bike lanes along US 42 into a shared use paved trail. With traffic volumes of 20,000–35,000 vehicles per day and speeds at 45 MPH, the current bike lanes are not comfortable for most users. The study should assess which side of the roadway is best suited for a paved trail, identify constraints, and develop preliminary concepts and cost estimates to support future funding applications.
- **Creek Corridor to Big Bone Lick and Ohio River Way:** Efforts should prioritize advancing a connection from US 42 and Rice Pike south to Big Bone Lick State Historic Site and the Ohio River Way. This will require significant property coordination along Big Bone Creek and Dark Hollow Branch. Kentucky State Parks and Boone Conservancy could be stakeholders, but a lead agency or champion will be needed to advance this concept. The corridor could be positioned as a signature tourism and conservation project, highlighting Big Bone Lick's significance as an Ice Age fossil site and location of one of the first organized paleontological expeditions in the US, where mammoths, mastodons, and bison traveled to mineral springs. A trail network following creek valleys can preserve sensitive landscapes, support water quality, and create a distinctive experience that connects communities to the area's natural and cultural history.



OHIO RIVER WAY

The Ohio River Way is a 308-mile National Recreation Trail and National Water Trail designated by the National Park Service, connecting riverfront communities across Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio. The initiative envisions a continuous greenway along the Ohio River from Louisville, Kentucky to Portsmouth, Ohio.

In Northern Kentucky, approximately 58 miles of the Ohio River Way are proposed along the full riverfront through Boone, Kenton, and Campbell Counties, building on the momentum and foundation established by the Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons. This corridor has the potential to become a world-class recreation experience that blends paved trails, natural surface trails, and water access points, including canoe and kayak launches, to create a truly braided trail network.

The Ohio River Way nonprofit serves as the primary champion of this effort, dedicating resources to secure funding and advance implementation of a continuous trail that connects river cities, rural communities, and neighboring counties.

Key constraints include limited right-of-way along portions of the river, private property impacts, active railroad corridors, and steep hillsides. Addressing these challenges will require coordination among public agencies, private landowners, and regional partners to advance priority segments.

PROJECT LENGTH

58 MILES

IMPACTED COMMUNITIES & KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- *City of Ludlow*
- *City of Bromley*
- *City of Villa Hills*
- *Boone County*
- *City of Silver Grove*
- *City of Mentor*
- *City of California*
- *Campbell County*
- *The Boone Conservancy*
- *Southbank Partners*
- *Ohio River Way*

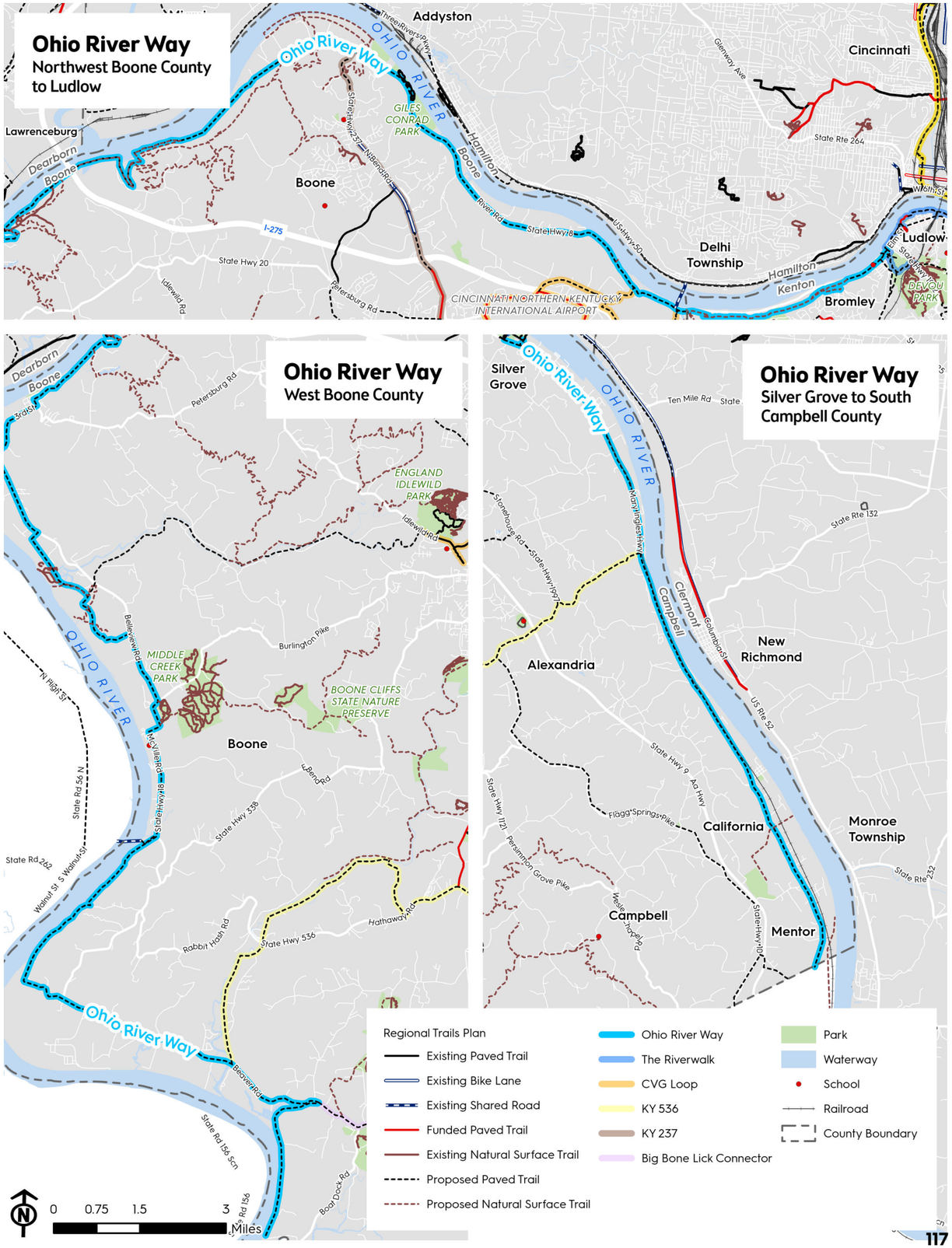
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

Advancing the Ohio River Way will be a long-term effort focused addressing significant constraints, including narrow corridors between the river, roadway, railroad, and steep hillsides. **Ohio River Way will play a critical role as a lead champion and coordinating partner to move this vision forward.**

Building on recent efforts in Ohio, where Ohio River Way received ODOT funding for a feasibility study along the river, NKY communities should coordinate with Ohio River Way to pursue similar planning and feasibility efforts along this corridor. This includes identifying priority segments and developing strategies to address complex constraints.

New funding opportunities should be explored in partnership with Ohio River Way, including the **recently established Kentucky Outdoor Recreation Revenue and Regional Authority (KORRRA), which could provide a state-level funding mechanism for recreation along the Ohio River. Additional coordination should include pursuing Appalachian Regional Initiative for Stronger Economies (ARISE) funding for planning and implementation.**

Given limited river crossings, future infrastructure investments should consider **incorporating bike and pedestrian facilities on bridges** to improve connections between Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana and strengthen regional trail connectivity.



PROPOSED | NATURAL SURFACE TRAILS

The proposed natural surface trail network is organized around eight focus areas that reflect Northern Kentucky's varied landscape, including river valleys, steep hillsides, conserved lands, and expanding park systems. These areas were selected based on their ability to leverage existing assets, connect communities to nature, and support a braided trail network that blends recreational experiences with regional connectivity.

Each focus area plays a distinct role within the broader network, from urban hillside connections and creek-based greenways to large-scale conservation corridors and destination-quality trail systems. Together, they identify where natural surface trails can deliver the greatest impact for recreation, tourism, and long-term connectivity across the region.

Ohio River Conservation Region

Eons Park

River Cities & Hillsides

Boone Central Parks

Banklick Creek Corridor

Four Mile Corridor

Big Bone Creek

A.J. Jolly Park & Agritourism Gateway

DEARBORN
HAMILTON
CLERMONT
OHIO
BOONE
KENTON
CAMPBELL
SWITZERLAND
GALLATIN
GRANT
PENDLETON

England-Idlewild Park
CVG International Airport
Devou Park
Highland Hills Park
NKU
Gunpowder Creek Nature Park
Middle Creek Park
Cliffs State Nature Preserve
Boone County Arboretum
Doe Run Lake
New Kenton County Park
Adair Wildlife Management Area
Big Bone Lick State Historic Site
AJ Jolly Park

NKY Regional Trails Plan

- Existing Natural Surface Trail
- Funded Natural Surface Trail
- Proposed Natural Surface Trail
- Existing Multi-Use Trail
- Existing Pedestrian Path
- Funded Multi-Use Trail
- Funded Bike Lane
- Proposed Multi-Use Trail
- Fort Thomas Connector
- The Riverwalk
- NKY Urban Loop
- Green Line Trail
- CVG Loop
- KY 536
- KY 237
- LRG to AJ Jolly
- Banklick Creek Greenway
- Reimagine 27
- Licking River Greenway
- Ohio River Way
- Big Bone Lick Connector

0 1.25 2.5 5 7.5 10 Miles

Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS

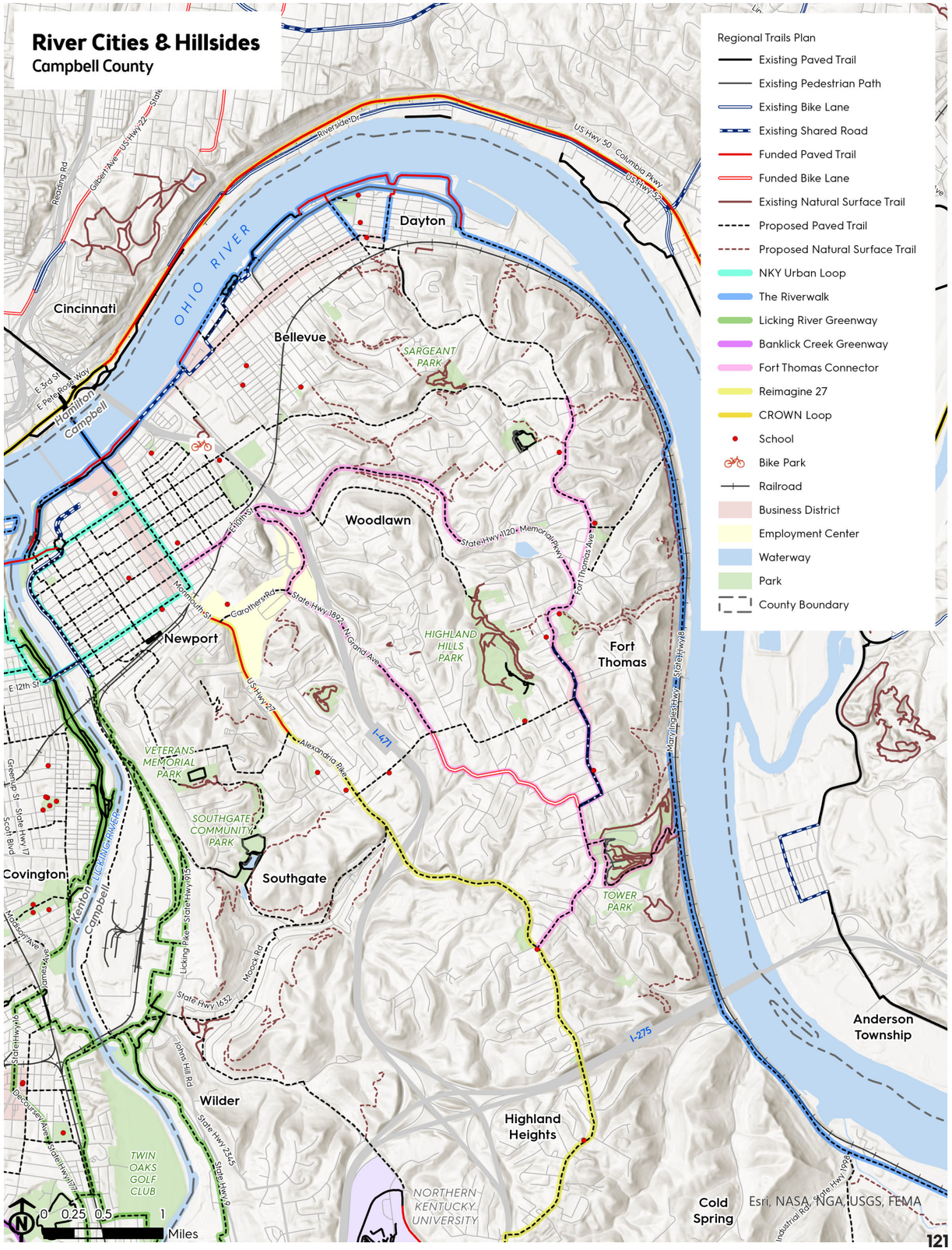
RIVER CITIES & HILLSIDES: CAMPBELL COUNTY

Northern Kentucky's urban core is defined by its dramatic topography, rivers, creeks, and steep hillsides that have historically constrained development but now offer some of the most compelling natural surface trail terrain in the region. Campbell County communities are surrounded by abundant green space and canopy-covered hillsides primed for trail activation, where the momentum is already building. Recent trail openings at Sargeant Park in Dayton, combined with ongoing expansions complementing park improvement projects and new playground amenities at Tower Park in Fort Thomas, signal that Campbell County has identified trail investment as a community health and wellbeing priority and is leading by example.

The undeveloped hillsides of Campbell County present a unique opportunity for a connected natural surface trail network. A spine of hilltop parks, including Jamestown Pike Park, Highland Hills Park, and Rossford Park, could be linked by natural surface trail connections that descend to the future Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons along the Mary Ingles Highway hillside, creating a regional off-road corridor entirely separate from the roadway. For pedestrians and cyclists alike, this would represent a transformative addition to the regional network: a scenic, car-free route connecting hilltop neighborhoods to the riverfront urban core.

What makes this corridor particularly compelling is the diversity of experiences offered. The Sixth Street Bike Park (adjacent to DIY Skatepark) in Newport provides a neighborhood-scale destination for riders looking to develop and test their bike handling skills in a creative, community-built environment. In Dayton, a traffic garden offers a welcoming entry point for younger riders encountering cycling infrastructure for the first time. Together, these destinations position the trail network as a connected ecosystem of active, place-based experiences that serve riders of every age and ability.

View from Jamestown Pike Park - Dayton, KY

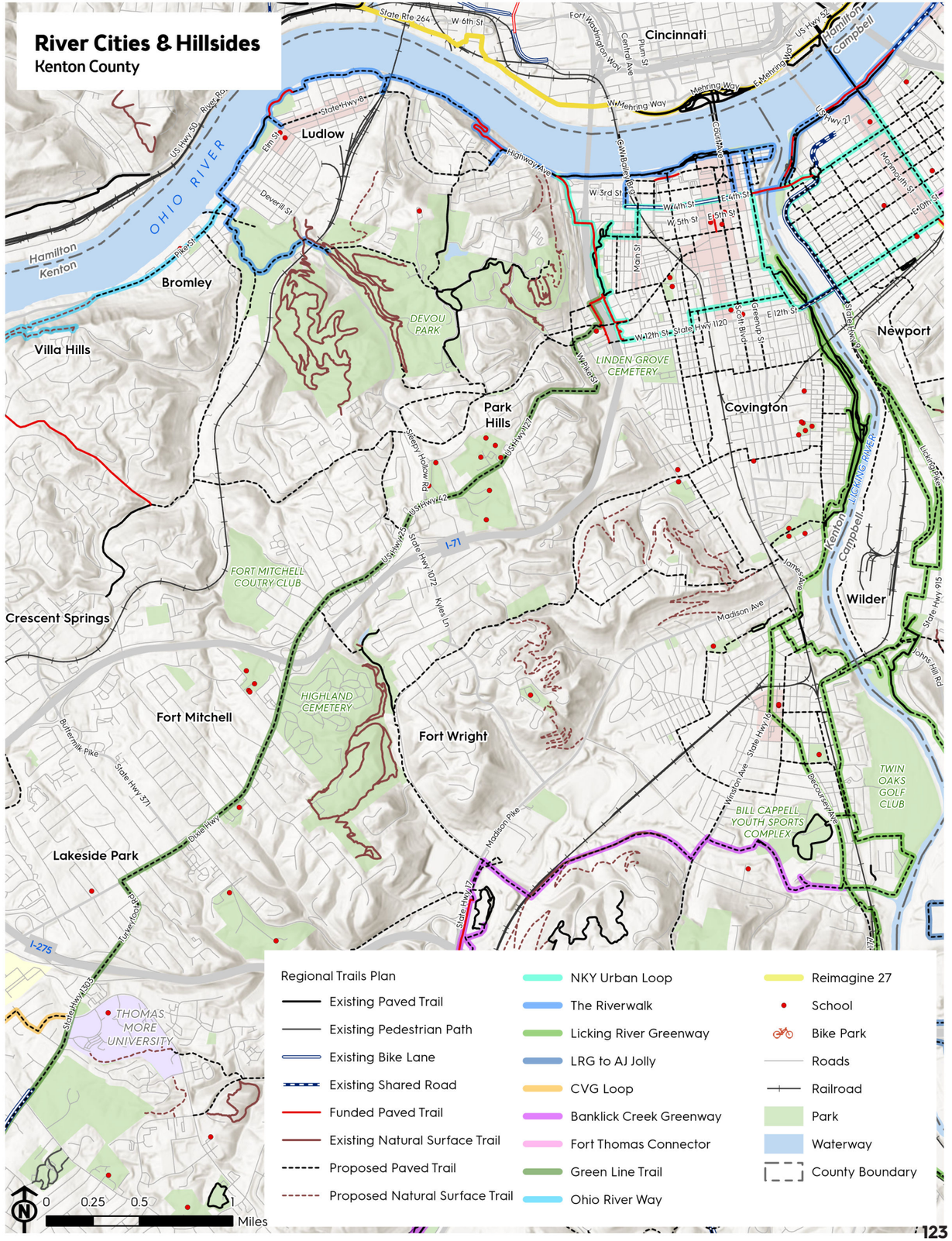


RIVER CITIES & HILLSIDES: KENTON COUNTY

North Kenton County, while more heavily developed and urbanized than North Campbell County, offers its own compelling opportunities for connective natural surface trails linking river communities with key recreation destinations. Devou Park in Covington anchors the western end of the corridor, comprising over 700 acres of intact forested land and nearly 20 miles of bike-optimized natural surface trails. The park serves as a regional destination for riders, runners, and hikers alike, offering a backcountry experience with rewarding views of the Ohio River and the Cincinnati skyline. There is something for everyone, whether one has a full day to spend exploring or just a quick lunch break. Connections to established greenways, including the Licking River Greenway Trail, present additional opportunities to extend the network and further integrate natural surface trails into the region's broader active transportation fabric.

Beyond existing park land, North Kenton County's evolving development landscape presents a distinct and time-sensitive opportunity for trail expansion. Several property development projects are currently underway, and large interconnected parcels under city, developer, and commonwealth ownership create favorable conditions for strategic collaboration. When trail connectivity is identified early in the planning process, these properties can become assets that attract tenants and investors, enhance property values, and offer residents meaningful access to nature and active recreation as part of their everyday environment. Early engagement with developers and landowners is key to ensuring that the trails of tomorrow are embedded in the projects being planned today.

Landmark Trail Opportunities in Kenton County

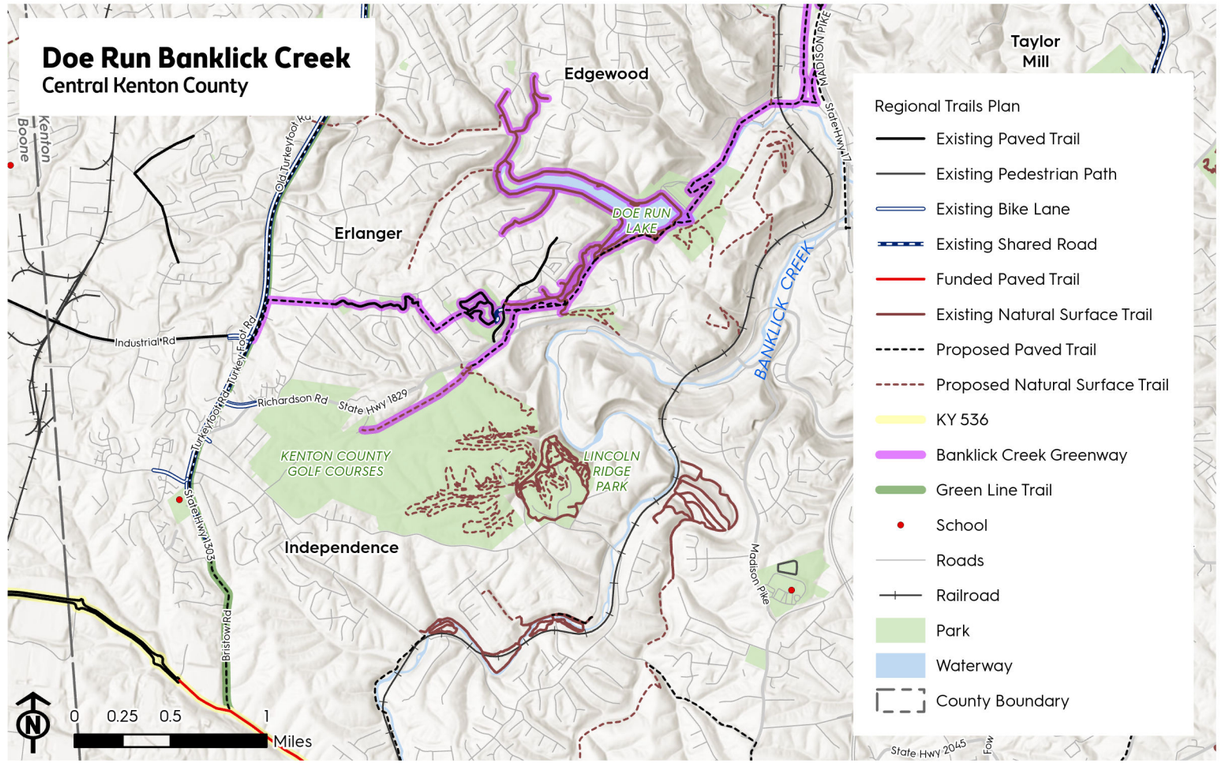


DOE RUN-BANKLICK CREEK CORRIDOR

Kenton County's parks and green spaces are poised for a major revival that positions the county as a premier destination for trail users seeking a natural outdoor experience close to home. The Banklick Creek Corridor serves as the spine of this vision, threading together a nearly unbroken chain of green space that celebrates natural waterways and ecological diversity. If thoughtfully activated, this corridor would unite over 32 miles of planned and existing trails along a largely protected creek corridor, creating one of the most significant connected greenway systems in the region.

Key destinations along the corridor include Doe Run Lake, which features a 30-acre lake with fishing, paddling, and kayak rentals surrounded by 8 miles of natural surface hiking trails; SD 1's Public Service Park, an educational green campus with trails traversing conserved wetlands and highlighting hydrological systems; Pioneer Park, which offers a one-mile walking loop following the Banklick Creek through an ecologically rich and scenic wetland stream corridor; and Wolsing Woods, a 42-acre nature preserve featuring over 2 miles of trails. The centerpiece of the Banklick Creek Corridor is the new Kenton County Park, a transformative project that will reimagine the existing Fox Run golf course and Lincoln Ridge Park as a vibrant, multi-use public asset. The new park plans will introduce over 10 miles of natural surface trails designed to serve all user groups, and optimized for mountain bikers of all skill levels — including technical descent lines for more advanced and adventure-seeking riders. Together, these destinations form a connected recreational ecosystem. For Kenton County, the Banklick Creek Corridor represents a generational opportunity to invest in public health, ecological stewardship, and a growing outdoor economy.

Doe Run Lake - Covington, KY



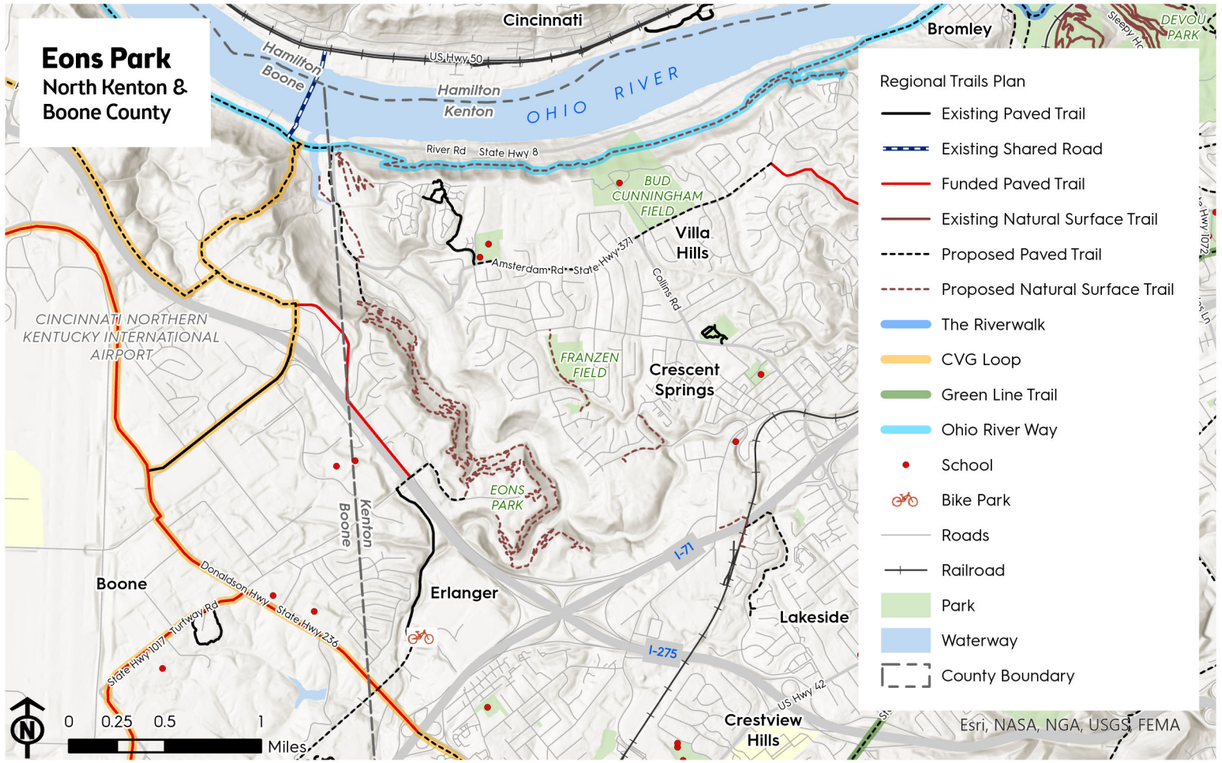
Pioneer Park - Covington, KY

EONS ADVENTURE PARK

Situated in the Dry Creek valley near the intersection of I-275 and I-71/75, Eons Adventure Park is envisioned as a primary regional asset, boasting approximately 1,000-acres programmed with natural surface trails in the heart of Northern Kentucky. Initial development is introducing a dog park, a gateway bike park skills facility, and several miles of paved and natural surface multi-use trails that activate the valley's dramatic terrain. The Dry Creek valley offers destination-quality trail experiences highlighting expansive vistas, limestone bluffs, and forested hollows that deliver a sense of remoteness and natural beauty rarely found this close to a major urban core. The bike park serves as a major recreation hub and gateway with access to the broader trail system, while supporting youth activity, beginner skill development, and year-round park activation that draws users back consistently across all seasons.

Future trail phases would extend the network beneath I-275 at Turfway, threading through the lower Dry Creek corridor to unlock some of the park's most scenic and technically compelling terrain. This expansion would also establish a critical regional connection, linking the Boone County paved trail network through Eons Park to the historic Anderson Ferry landing and the broader Ohio River Way. Longer-term connections to the OneNKY Connector, and east along Route 8 toward Bromley and Riverfront Commons, would position Eons Park as a key natural surface anchor within the region's growing braided trail network. For nearby workers, residents, and visitors alike, the park offers something increasingly rare in a dense urban region: a world-class outdoor experience just minutes from home, work, and major highway corridors.

Connections to Anderson Ferry on Route 8

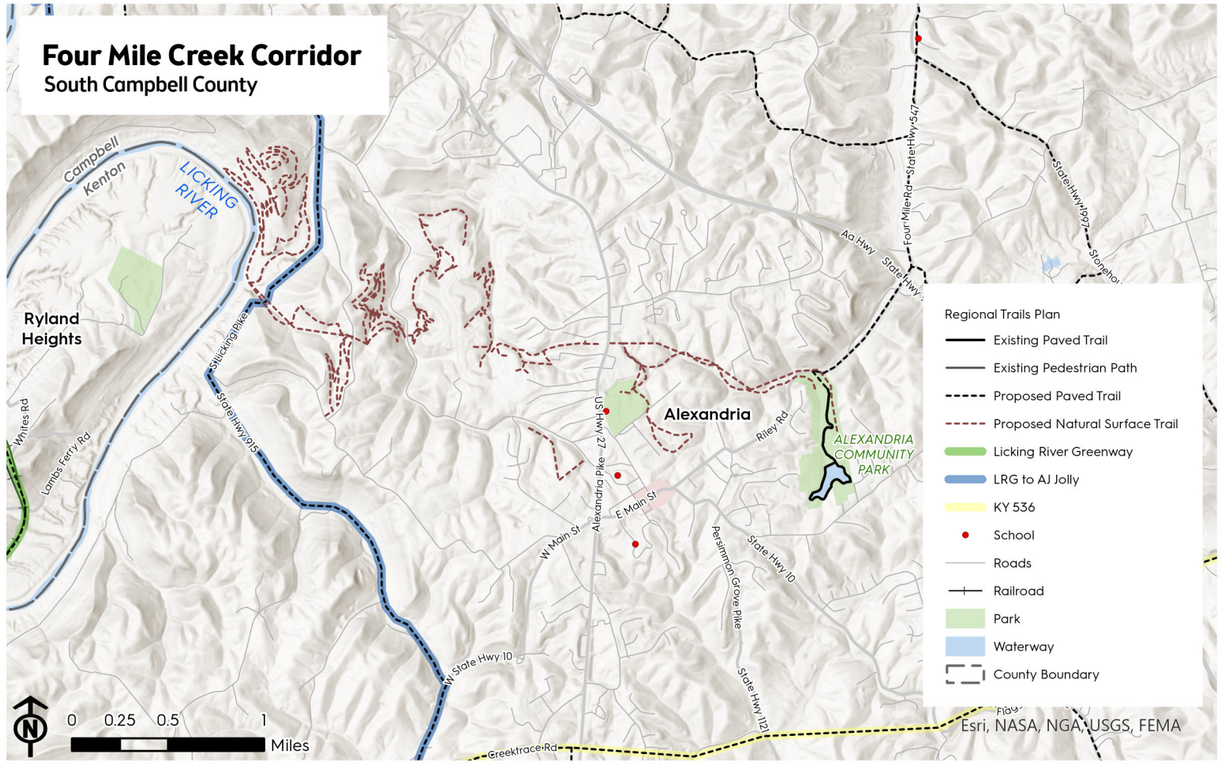


Dry Creek Valley - Erlanger, KY

FOUR MILE CREEK CORRIDOR

In the rolling uplands of southern Campbell County, Alexandria presents a compelling opportunity to weave together parkland, school campuses, conservation areas, and newer residential development into a cohesive and connected trail experience. The Four Mile Creek valley serves as the natural spine of this vision, providing a greenway corridor that links Alexandria Community Park and its adjacent reservoirs to the Campbell County school campus and Bishop Brossart High School, creating meaningful active transportation options for students and community members alike. This connection alone represents a high-value investment, establishing a safe, off-road route between residential neighborhoods, schools, and community recreation assets that serves everyday users of all ages, from families on weekend walks to students commuting by bike.

East of Route 27, the corridor expands in both ambition and character. A key trail crossing of Route 27 connects the established community trail network within the Arcadia development to the broader Alexandria corridor, while the Hawthorne Crossing Conservation Area offers a more naturalistic destination experience, featuring elevated views of the Licking River valley set within a conserved native landscape that provides a striking contrast to the surrounding suburban environment. Together, these connections lay the groundwork for a larger trail spine that could eventually link Alexandria into the regional network via the Licking River Greenway, extending the reach of the broader Northern Kentucky trail system southward and positioning Alexandria as an active, trail-connected community within the region's growing outdoor recreation identity.



Alexandria Community Park - Alexandria, KY

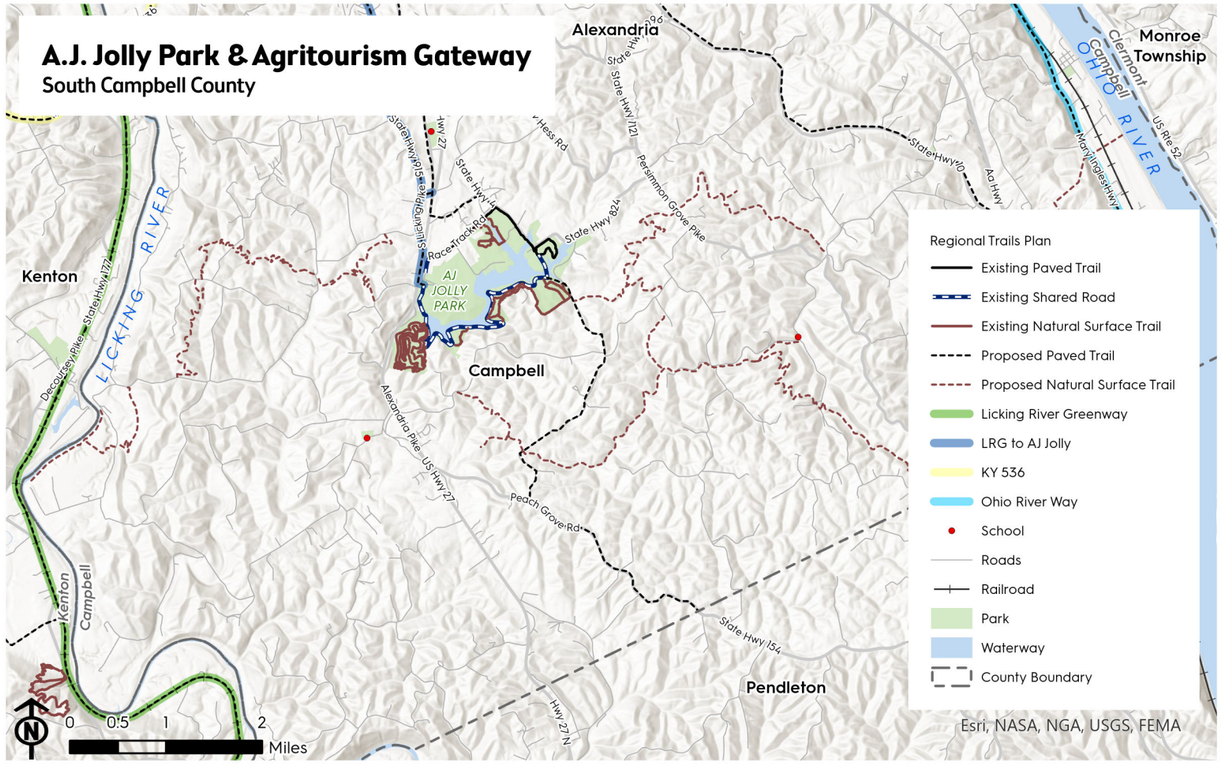
Hawthorne Crossing Conservation Area - Alexandria, KY

A.J. JOLLY PARK & AGRITOURISM GATEWAY

Anchored by the 1,000-acre A.J. Jolly Park in rural Campbell County, this area holds some of the greatest untapped trail potential in Northern Kentucky. The park's existing infrastructure, including 89 campsites and five yurts, positions it as a natural basecamp for multi-day hiking and mountain biking excursions in a region where overnight trail experiences are rare. Existing equestrian trails and future multi-use trails provide a solid foundation that, with targeted improvements and thoughtfully designed new alignments, could support a trail system worthy of regional and national recognition. A.J. Jolly represents a rare convergence of natural assets, existing amenities, and undeveloped terrain that signals the potential for a signature destination: one that retains the unhurried, rural character of life out in the county while drawing visitors from across the region and beyond.

Three strategic connections would dramatically expand the park's reach and impact. A trail link northward into the Lakeside neighborhood would extend everyday access to nearby residents, transforming AJ Jolly from a destination park into a community resource integrated into the fabric of daily life. An agritourism farm loop — threading through surrounding agricultural land via gravel or natural surface trail — would offer a novel and distinctly regional experience that supports farm-based tourism and provides a replicable model for rural land conservation through trail access. Together, these connections position A.J. Jolly not just as a recreational destination, but as an anchor for a broader rural trail economy that celebrates and sustains the agricultural landscape of southern Campbell County.

Bird Watching at AJ Jolly Park - Alexandria, KY



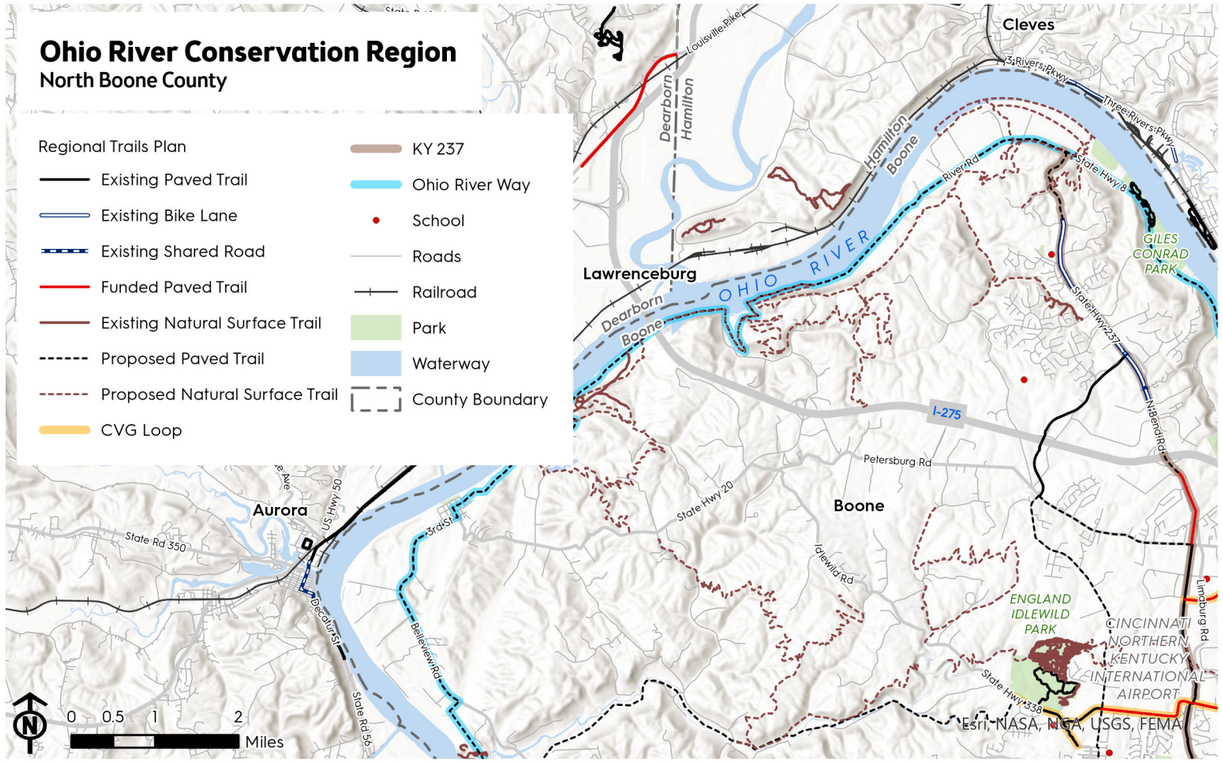
Camping and Agritourism Opportunities

OHIO RIVER CONSERVATION REGION

At the western edge of Northern Kentucky, this corridor represents one of the most valuable conservation and trail opportunities in the tri-county area. A paved or compacted gravel Ohio River Way trail would extend westward from the end of Route 8, passing beneath the Carroll Lee Cropper I-275 bridge and into the newly protected Boone Conservancy lands, which comprise over 350 acres of floodplain forest and upland terrain offering river access, hilltop vistas, and an ecological richness that stands in striking contrast to the rapidly developing landscape surrounding it. Together with adjacent preserves on both sides of the river, this corridor forms a contiguous natural area of more than 4,000 acres — a rarity in the region and a conservation asset of genuine significance. The rich bottomlands and forested bluffs deliver an experience of ecological diversity and scenic drama rarely found at this scale in an urbanizing region, culminating in unparalleled views of the Great Miami River confluence.

The corridor's proximity to the Creation Museum and planned hospitality development adds a compelling tourism dimension to what is already a strong conservation and recreation case. A trail connection linking these visitor attractions to the natural areas along the river would create a destination trail loop capable of serving both regional residents and out-of-town visitors, extending length of stay, supporting local hospitality businesses, and broadening the audience for Northern Kentucky's growing outdoor recreation identity. This western corridor has the rare potential to function simultaneously as a world-class conservation landscape, a regional trail destination, and an economic driver, making it one of the highest-priority trail investment opportunities in the entire Northern Kentucky network.

Boone Conservancy Property - Boone County, KY



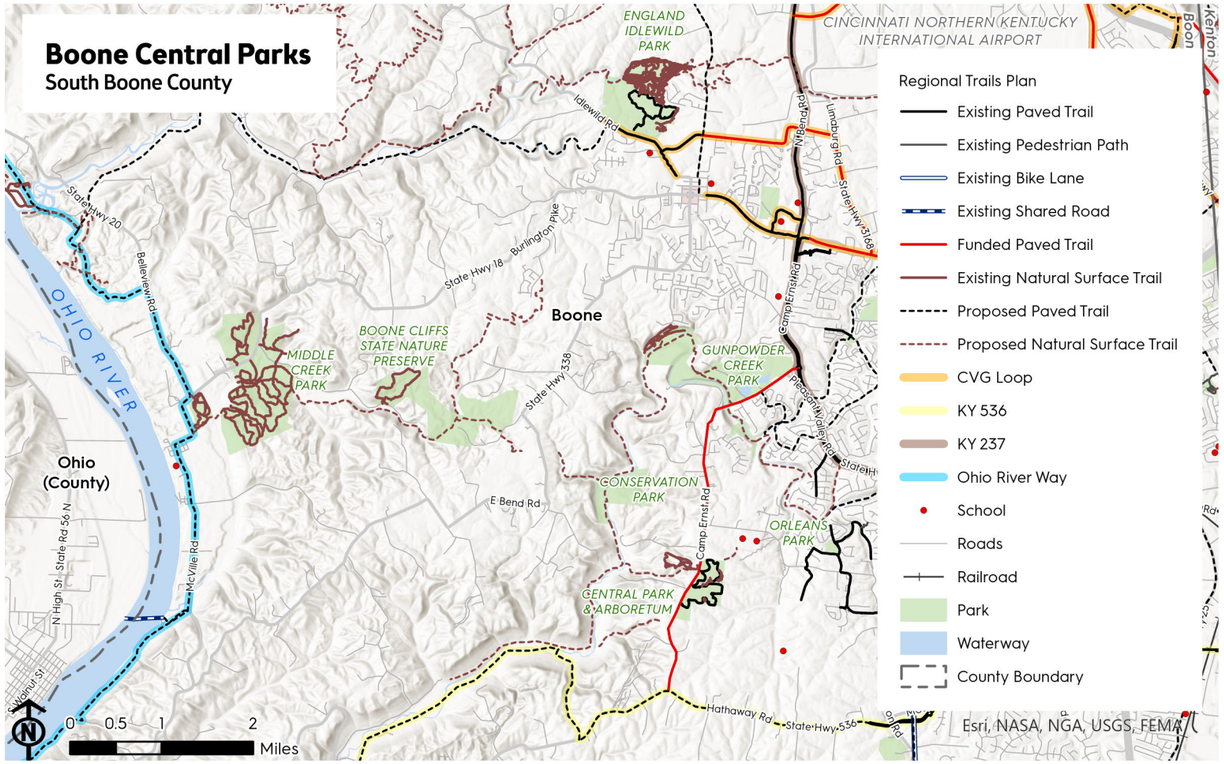
Boone Conservancy Property - Boone County, KY

BOONE CENTRAL PARKS

Despite Boone County's rapid growth, its central corridor retains a remarkable collection of open spaces that together form a framework for a future natural surface trail network of genuine regional significance. This area encompasses Dan Beard Scout Council's Camp Michaels, Camp Ernst and Camp Ernst Lake, the Boone County Arboretum, Middle Creek Park, the dramatic Boone County Cliffs, the historic Dinsmore Homestead, England-Idlewild Park, and the county fairgrounds. This concentration of natural, cultural, and recreational assets is extraordinary for a county experiencing significant development pressure. Natural surface trails winding through and between these properties could create a connected greenway offering an immersive outdoor experience ranging from forested ridge walks and creek-side paths to interpretive history programming and open meadow corridors. This corridor represents a key opportunity to permanently anchor a wild, natural spine through the heart of Boone County.

Three connections would form the backbone of this network. A multi-use trail linking Camp Ernst to Camp Michaels through intact forested terrain would create a compelling biking and hiking route through some of the most ecologically significant natural land remaining in the county. A family-friendly greenway connector between the Boone County Arboretum and Middle Creek Park would weave through open space and native landscapes, establishing an anchor at the heart of the corridor. Natural surface trails traversing the Boone County Cliffs — one of the corridor's most dramatic features —would showcase the area's striking limestone escarpments, delivering a scenic and educational experience that communicates why this landscape is worth protecting.

Creek Access and Expansive Tree Canopies Make Great Trails



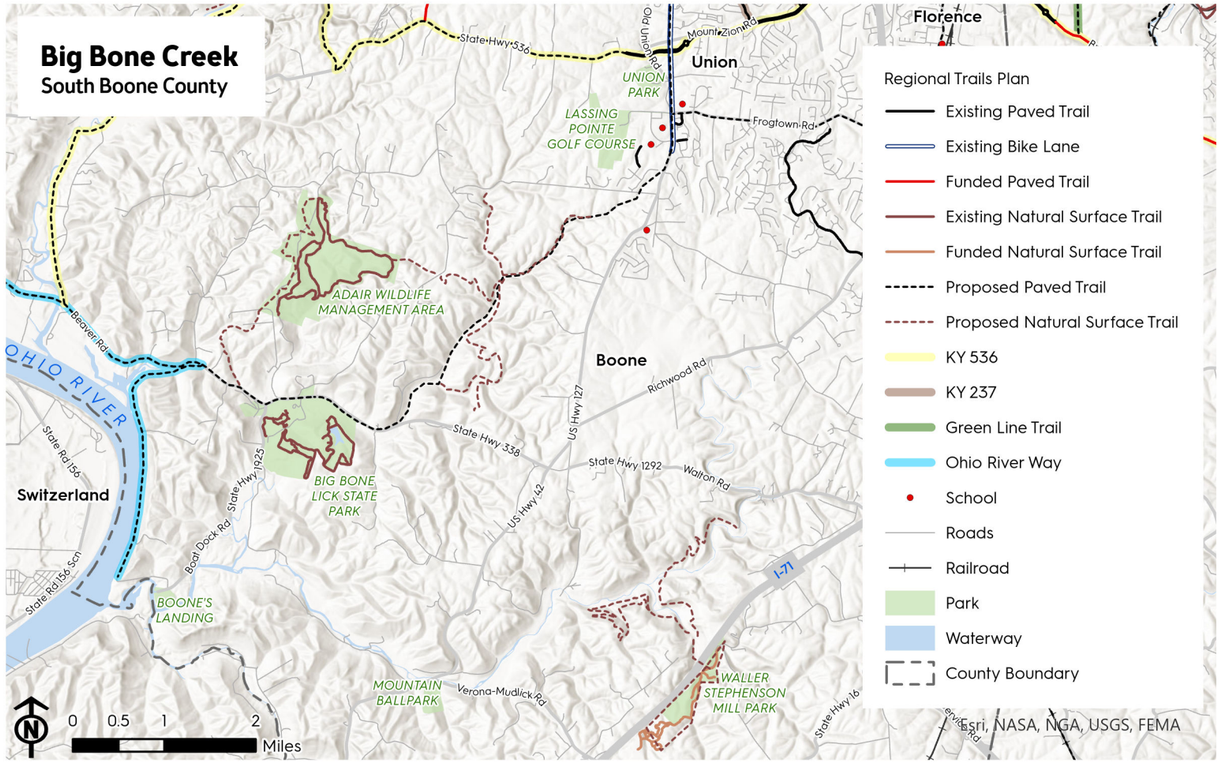
England Idlewild Multi-Use Trails - Burlington, KY

BIG BONE CREEK

Southern Boone County remains one of the least developed and most ecologically rich corners of the tri-county region. Anchored by Big Bone Lick State Park, a site of national paleontological significance where the bones of Pleistocene megafauna were unearthed from ancient sulfur spring deposits, this area offers a rare convergence of scientific heritage, natural beauty, and backcountry character. The winding valleys of Big Bone Creek and Big South Creek provide natural riparian corridors ideally suited to low-impact natural surface trails, connecting the state park southward to the Adair Wildlife Management Area and westward through open rural landscapes toward the I-74 corridor. Potential connections to Waller-Stephenson Mill Park would extend the system further, creating a network with the depth and diversity to draw users from across the region into what could credibly be positioned as a national park-quality destination in Northern Kentucky's own backyard

Three investments would form the foundation of this network. A singletrack extension linking Big Bone Lick State Park's paleontological sites to the Adair Wildlife Management Area would elevate the park's recreational profile. Low-impact backcountry trails following the Big Bone Creek riparian corridor westward would deliver an immersive natural experience — quiet, scenic, and ecologically rich — rarely available this close to the Cincinnati metropolitan area. At Waller-Stephenson Mill Park, new trail development oriented toward cross-country running and mountain biking would introduce a competitive dimension to the southern corridor, creating a venue capable of hosting regional events while serving everyday users in the southeastern reaches of the county.

Riparian Corridor Natural Surface Trails in Northern Kentucky



Big Bone Lick State Historic Site - Union, KY (Source: Kentucky State Parks)

Branded Trail Pavement Marker (Source: Dewhaus Design)

PROGRAMMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations highlight strategies that support trail use beyond physical infrastructure, focusing on building a strong identity, improving navigation, and creating opportunities for people of all ages to gain confidence on a bike. These approaches reflect public input on desired trail amenities, ensuring the network responds to community needs. Together, they help communities activate the regional network and make it more visible, accessible, and easy to use.

Branding, promotion, and wayfinding signage play a key role in creating a cohesive network. Cincinnati Off-Road Alliance developed a unified brand and early wayfinding concepts to guide users along routes already in use today. Building on this effort, the OneNKY Connector Route represents an early step toward implementation by linking communities through signed routes that would benefit from clear and consistent navigation.

Additional tools focus on education and skill-building. Traffic gardens provide safe environments, such as the example at Gil Lynn Park, where children can learn basic riding skills and roadway safety. Community bike parks and skills courses, including local examples like Eons Adventure Park, offer opportunities for riders of all ages to gain experience and confidence on different trail features.

FUTURE TRAIL AMENITIES

Enhancing the user experience with well-planned amenities can make the Northern Kentucky trails feel more comfortable, welcoming, and functional for all users. Incorporating the following elements will add value to the trail and encourage greater community engagement.

Trail Counting Technology Trail counters are valuable tools for monitoring trail usage and supporting the Tri-State Trails Trail Monitoring Program. By tracking user activity, these devices provide critical data to guide decisions about trail maintenance, programming, and funding. Resources for trail counting technology are available through OKI.

Trailhead Parking and Restroom Facilities Trailhead parking, combined with essential facilities like restrooms and water fountains, improves comfort and usability for all trail users. Locations near existing parks or close to businesses are ideal for trailheads, as they provide additional amenities and easy access to the trail network.

Bike Parking and Repair Stations Bike repair stations, equipped with tools for minor repairs, and dedicated bicycle parking enhance convenience and safety for cyclists. These features provide critical support for trail users. Tri-State Trails has collaborated with communities across the region to install these amenities, helping create a reliable and enjoyable trail experience.

Trail Lighting Strategic trail lighting increases safety and usability, allowing the trail to remain accessible during early mornings, evenings, and darker months. This feature ensures that the greenway is welcoming and functional year-round.

Public Art Incorporating murals, sculptures, and other forms of public art along the trail adds vibrancy and character, transforming the greenway into a cultural and visual landmark. Art enhances the trail experience and celebrates the unique identity of the local community.

These future amenities will transform the trails in Northern Kentucky into a vibrant, welcoming, and versatile destination, offering an exceptional experience for all users and fostering a stronger connection to the surrounding communities.

Tri-State Trails trail counting technology

Bicycle repair station and public bike racks

BRANDING & PROMOTION

LOCAL BRANDING STRATEGIES: CINCITUCKY TRAILS

Cincinnati Off-Road Alliance, in partnership with OneNKY Alliance and Dewhaus Design, developed a unique branding identity to capture the spirit and essence of local trail culture, known as Cincitucky Trails. This initiative is the promotional lifestyle brand that is redefining the Northern Kentucky region as an outdoor recreation destination, centered around trails. Inspired by the technicolor sunsets often seen setting on Cincinnati's famous skyline and the deep green of the region's wooded hillsides, this brand unifies an entire region connected by trails.

Cincitucky Trails is a brand that could connect and promote the trail network, cultural experiences, and outdoor adventures in Northern Kentucky. It is a consumer-facing tourism and lifestyle brand that amplifies the wealth of outdoor recreation destinations and amenities, and tells the story of our region to a much broader audience.

This initiative was conceptualized as a tool to drive public support for the development of multi-purpose trails and celebrate them through promotion and exposure, with the goal of growing the local rider population and sharing information with travelers seeking to experience the region's unique ecosystem of trails - including both paved and natural surface.

Image Source: City Lifestyle, "Explore Cincitucky Trails" (accessed April, 2026).

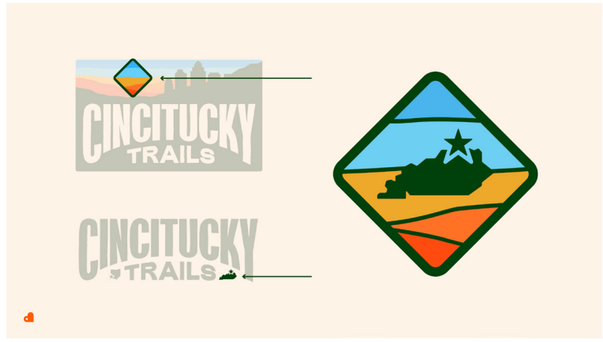
12oz CANS 12PK | TRAIL LAGER

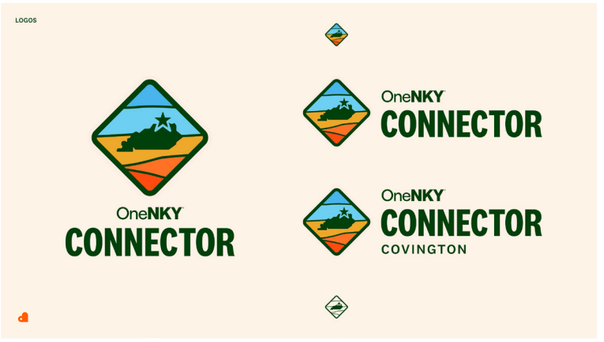
Image Source: City Lifestyle, "Explore Cincitucky Trails" (accessed April, 2026).

LOCAL BRANDING STRATEGIES: THE ONENKY CONNECTOR

With the foundations established to promote regional outdoor recreational tourism and trail identity, the same branding strategies are being adapted to amplify hyperlocal initiatives - including Northern Kentucky's OneNKY Connector ("the Connector"). Utilizing the same color palette and highlighting Kentucky's state iconography with a star pointing to Northern Kentucky, this initiative builds upon the successes of the Cincitucky brand while unlocking opportunities to connect more deeply with local communities on the trails.

The Connector repurposes the Cincitucky brand and reinterprets it into a distinct wayfinding and signage system that is highly visible, recognizable, and clearly signals that users are on the Connector. It is intended to be implemented across Northern Kentucky on new trail projects and applied retroactively to existing trail systems. A critical element for the OneNKY Connector's long term success will be systematically pursing funding to convert shared roadways to dedicated infrastructure over time.

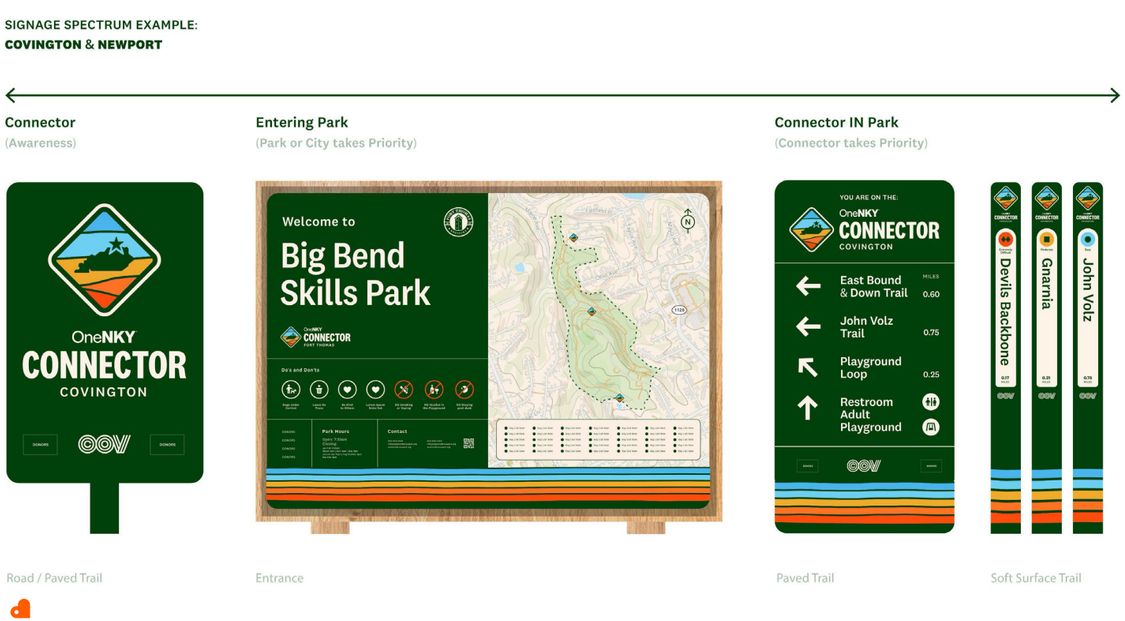




OneNKY Connector Branded Digital Kiosk Rendering

WAYFINDING & SIGNAGE STRATEGIES

The signage system is designed to work as a cohesive family across a range of applications – from street-level wayfinding to informational kiosks and trailhead markers. While each sign is adapted to fit its specific context, the system maintains a consistent visual language that helps users feel safe and confident while navigating the network. The system is intentionally flexible, allowing materials, scale, and placement to respond to local context.



ONGOING LOCAL COLLABORATION

Many of our partner communities have already invested into their own unique branding strategies, and the Connector is designed to respect and compliment them. By interpreting local branding elements into a simplified, monochromatic expression, this preserves what makes each community unique while maintaining visual continuity across the region and remaining scalable. Users will know they're in the Connector trail network whether they're in Covington's urban core, or on the trails at Eons Park.

WAYFINDING SIGNAGE HIERARCHY

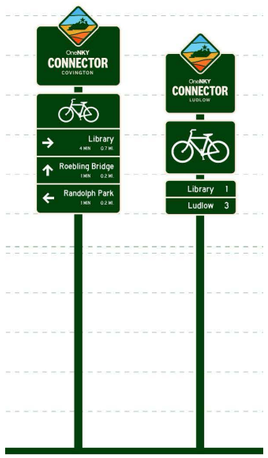
Successful wayfinding helps people move from point A to point B with confidence. At its core, it should quickly answer key cognitive questions such as: "Where am I now?" "What city am I in?" and "How do I stay on the route?" Clear, consistent signage reduces uncertainty and allows users of all experience levels to navigate the network comfortably.

Wayfinding should follow a logical hierarchy, but that hierarchy may flex depending on context. In destination-focused areas, signage may emphasize place identity and nearby landmarks. Along corridors and between destinations, it should prioritize directional guidance, helping users answer: "Where am I going and how do I get there?"

The OneNKY Connector signage system is designed to support this approach, providing clear, consistent guidance that helps people navigate the regional network with confidence while reinforcing a cohesive identity across Northern Kentucky's trails and bikeways.

MUTCD STANDARDS

On state routes, the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet requires that all signage comply with the standards established in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). These national guidelines established by the FHWA ensure consistency, visibility, and safety across all public roadways. For bicycle facilities, Part 9 of the MUTCD—*Traffic Control Devices for Bicycle Facilities*—specifically defines the appropriate sign types, dimensions, placement, and applications for bike-related wayfinding and route designation.

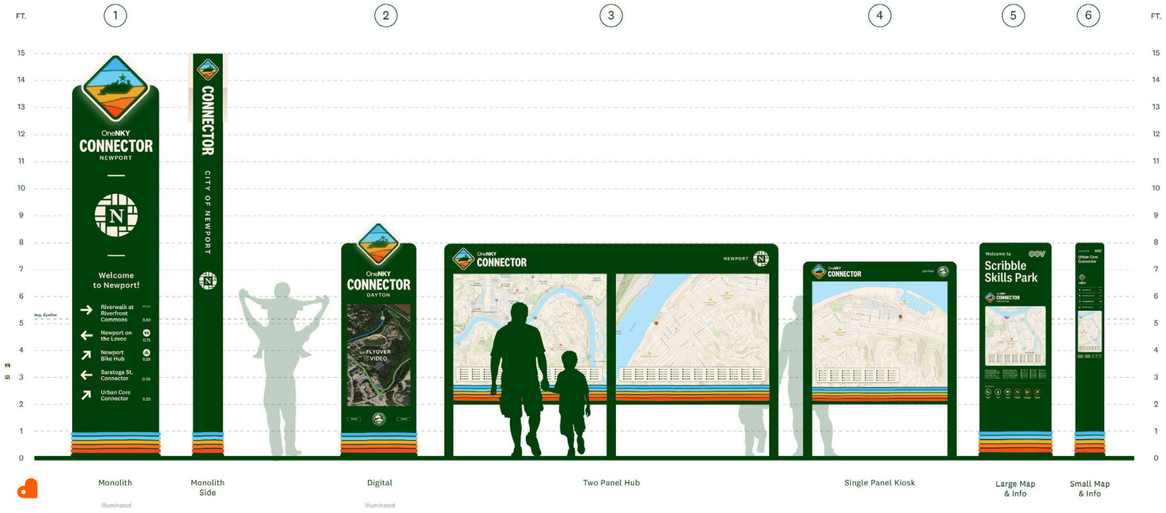


Because portions of the OneNKY Connector are located on state-maintained roadways, the signage for these segments was designed to comply with MUTCD standards. This includes Bike Route Guide Signs (D11-1 and D11-1c) and Bicycle Destination Signs (D2-1). These sign are meant to follow federal requirements for clarity and legibility while incorporating select OneNKY Connector branding elements to create a consistent and recognizable identity across the regional network.

WAYFINDING & SIGNAGE STRATEGIES

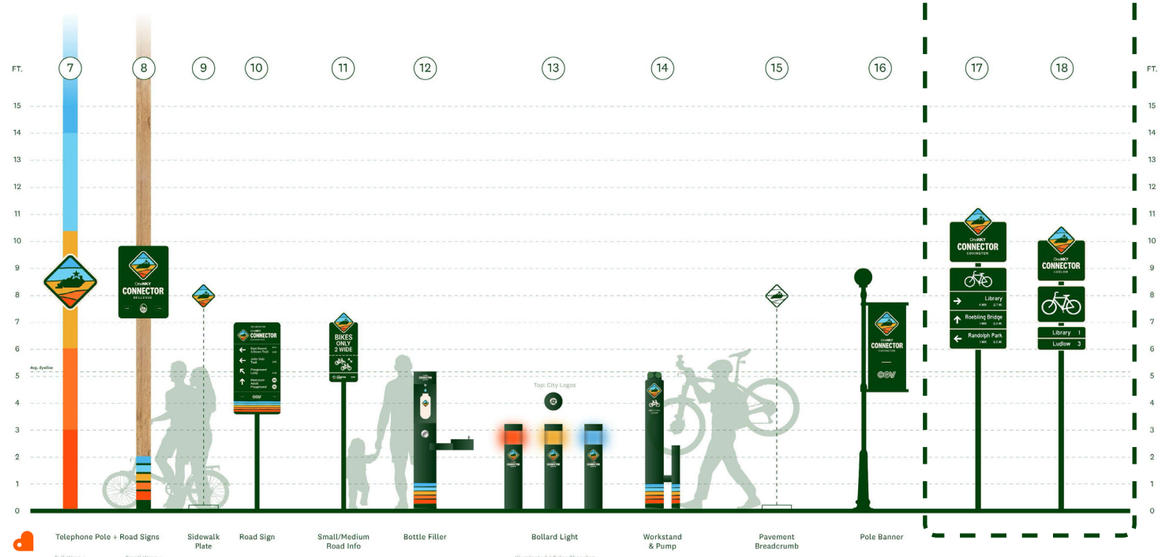
WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE: MORE URBAN SETTINGS

TEMPLATE OVERVIEW
PAVED - URBAN AREAS
15 SIGNS



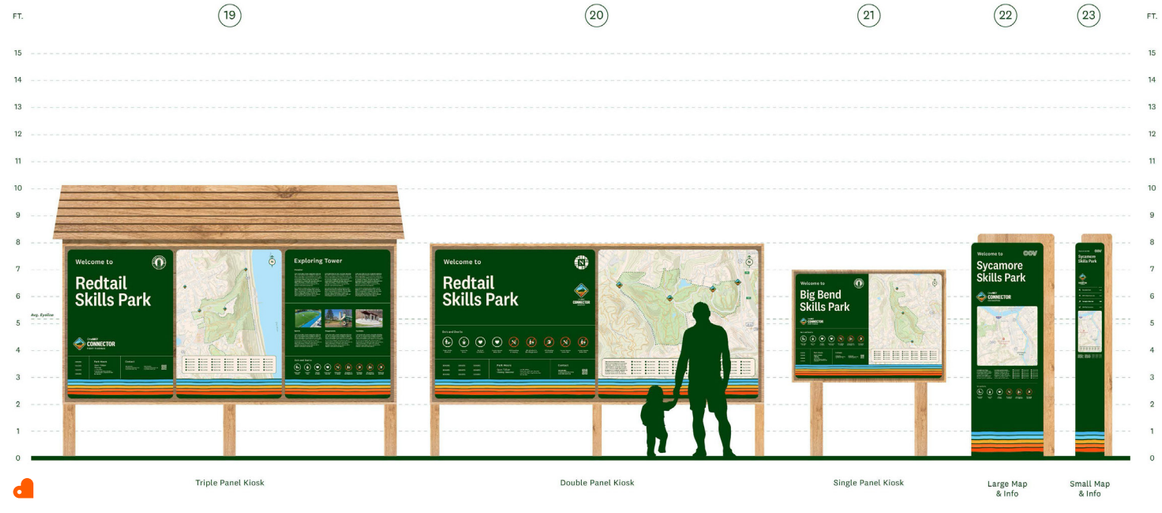
TEMPLATE OVERVIEW
PAVED - URBAN AREAS
15 SIGNS

KYTC - MUTCD STANDARD
2 SIGNS

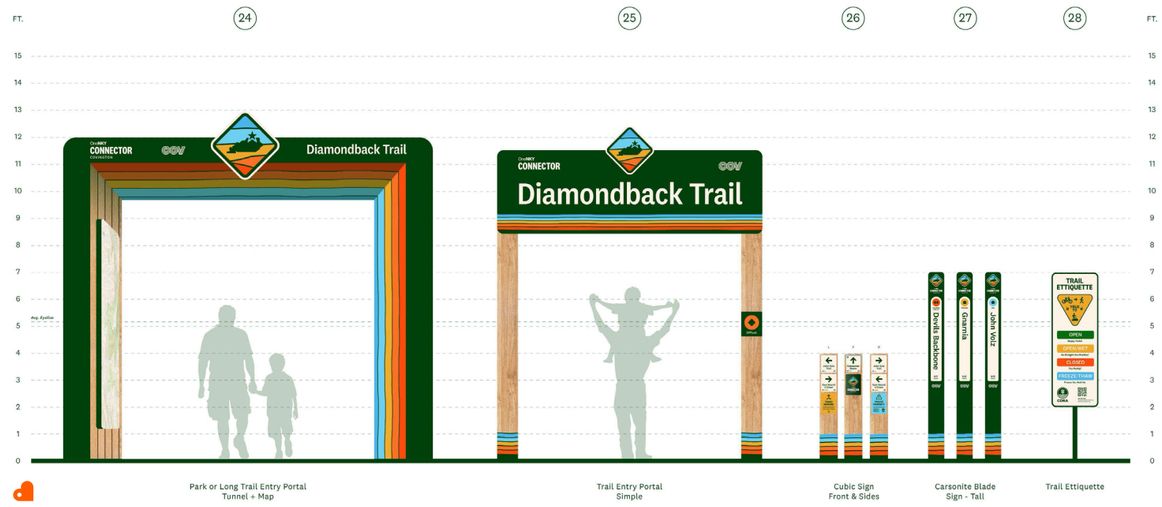


WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE: MORE NATURAL SETTINGS

TEMPLATE OVERVIEW
DIRT - PARK AREAS
15 SIGNS



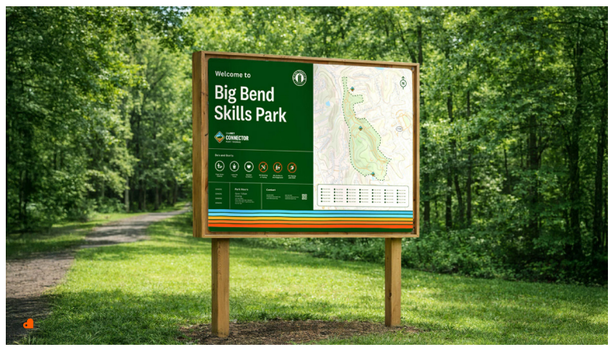
TEMPLATE OVERVIEW
DIRT - PARK AREAS
15 SIGNS



WAYFINDING & SIGNAGE STRATEGIES

POTENTIAL BRAND APPLICATION RENDERINGS

While The Connector functions primarily as a wayfinding and signage brand, its applications for placemaking extend well beyond trail markers and directional signage. The brand's distinctive color palette and design elements can be applied across a broad range of public assets – including sidewalk medallions, trail blazes, mural palettes, interpretive art installations, and gateway portal structures. Strategic deployment of these elements in the public realm creates opportunities to foster community identity and local pride, while building public familiarity with and affinity for the brand over time. Collaborative placemaking efforts also present an opportunity for municipalities to engage local artists, makers, and fabricators in producing landmark elements that reflect the character of their communities, deepening the connection between the trail network, the brand, and the people it serves.



ADDITIONAL PLACEMAKING STRATEGIES: BIKE HUBS

The placemaking effort includes a series of pocket parks referred to as "Bike Hubs," which are designed to serve as urban trailheads and community gathering nodes distributed throughout the urban core. Bike Hubs are creative placemaking spaces where local art, active transportation infrastructure, and wayfinding coalesce to create environments that invoke curiosity and encourage people to gather, linger, and connect with their surroundings.

Strategically located across Northern Kentucky and sited proximal to local businesses, Red Bike (local bike share), and nearby trails, Bike Hubs are far more than simple rest stops. Each location is designed as a fully activated public space, anchored by The Connector brand identity and programmed with a suite of amenities that serve people traveling by foot or by bike. These amenities typically include maps and wayfinding resources, information about nearby destinations and trail connections, bike racks and repair stands, shaded seating, lighting, and accessible gathering areas. Art installations, developed in collaboration with local artists, and raised planters complete the experience, lending each site a sense of place and visual identity that reflects the surrounding community.

The Bike Hub network functions as connective tissue between neighborhoods, trails, and local commerce, creating a series of recognizable, welcoming places that reinforce The Connector brand at the street level. For local communities, these nodes represent a low-cost, high-impact investment in public space activation that can be phased and scaled to meet local needs and available resources.

The First Bike Hub: Go With Glo! Corner at Roebling Books & Coffee - Covington, KY

OneNKY CONNECTOR ROUTE

GOALS OF THE ONENKY CONNECTOR

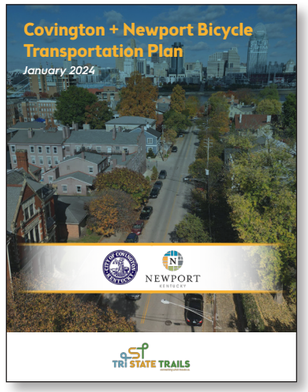
The OneNKY Connector is an early implementation effort to realize the Regional Trails Plan. It is a pedestrian and cycling route linking Erlanger to Fort Thomas, spanning seven cities across three counties, that prioritizes access to the destinations people want and need to go to, including grocery stores, schools, parks, employment centers, business districts, and both existing and proposed trail networks. **This project takes immediate action by activating existing rights-of-way along vetted routes with cohesive signage and wayfinding.** It is a strategic, near-term effort to promote ridership and regional visibility while local leaders continue to advance long-term, permanent infrastructure solutions.

The OneNKY Connector implements the Regional Trails Plan incrementally by identifying the most comfortable and accessible **existing roads, multi-use trails, and low-speed pathways** across jurisdictions and connecting them through a consistent, recognizable wayfinding system. Route selection was guided by a rigorous vetting process that evaluated each segment for vehicle speed, roadway width, surface quality, and overall comfort for pedestrians and cyclists. The route prioritizes low-speed residential and tertiary road classifications, targeting corridors with posted speed limits at or below 25 MPH and roadway widths narrow enough to naturally calm traffic and encourage cautious driver behavior. Each segment was field-verified to confirm suitability before inclusion, ensuring that the route as signed reflects a standard of care appropriate for users of all ages and abilities. At its core, **this project strengthens the legibility of the existing network,** making it easier for people to navigate to the places they want and need to go by foot or by bike. This approach leverages assets already in place, reducing implementation barriers, and supporting walking and cycling as practical, everyday transportation choices.

Small, strategic interventions unlock a regionally scaled network, establishing a navigable corridor that serves as a precedent for community infrastructure developments across Northern Kentucky. Combined with placemaking efforts and ongoing collaboration with municipal partners, the Connector buildings long-term momentum and positions the region as a connected, welcoming place to live, work, and play.

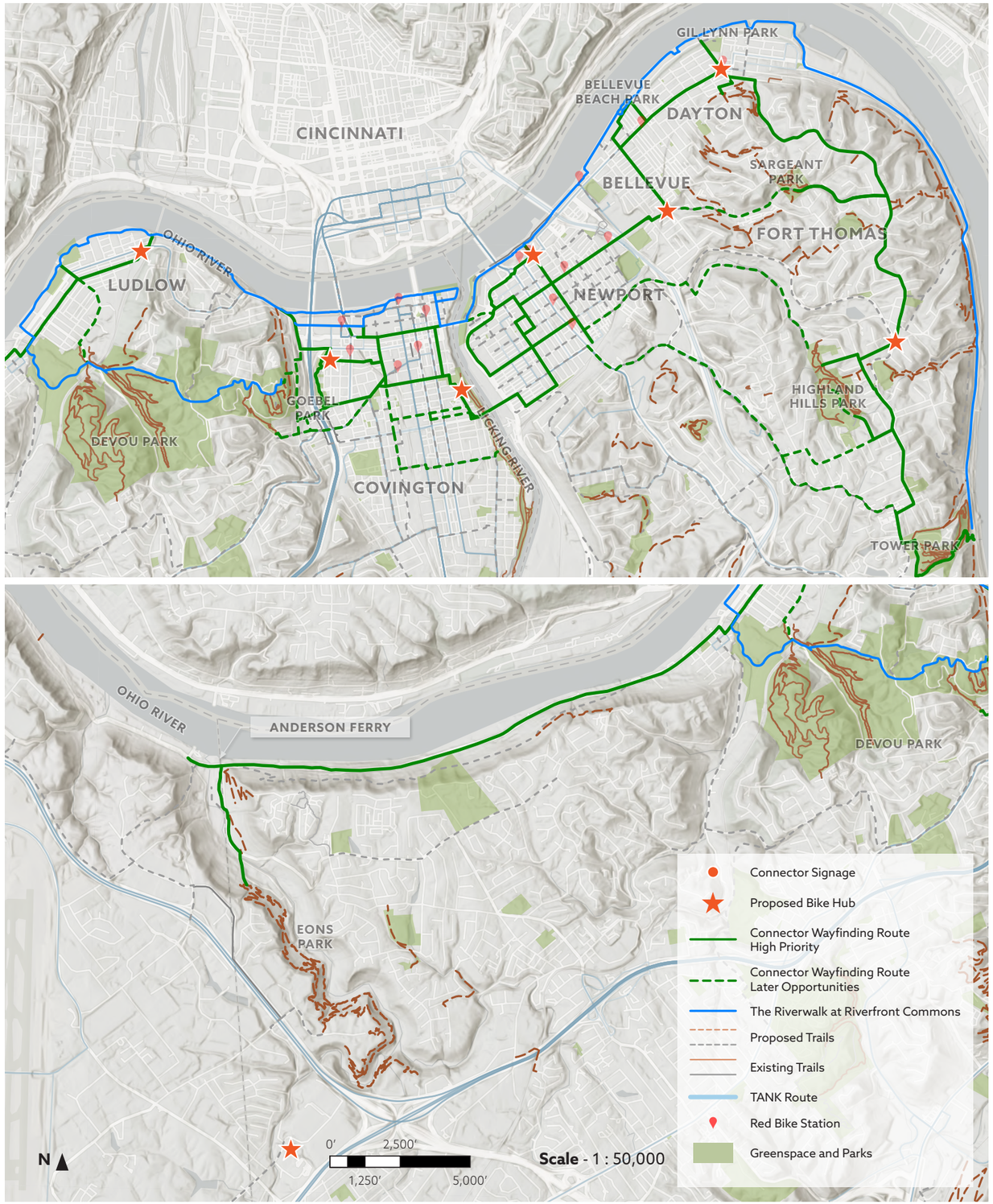
COMMUNITIES LEADING THE CHARGE

The OneNKY Connector builds upon the momentum and framework established in the Covington + Newport Bicycle Transportation Plan (2024), with recommended routes updated to reflect current conditions as of spring 2026. Because the project focuses on installing signage rather than physical infrastructure, the route network is inherently flexible, capable of adapting to right-of-way changes over time and scalable to incorporate additional communities and corridors as the initiative grows.



By working directly with local leaders across the region to advance this plan, the Connector serves as a Phase 1 implementation strategy of the Regional Trails Plan. The initial network spans seven communities across Northern Kentucky: Erlanger, Ludlow, Covington, Newport, Bellevue, Dayton, and Fort Thomas.

THE CONNECTOR ROUTE



OneNKY CONNECTOR ROUTE

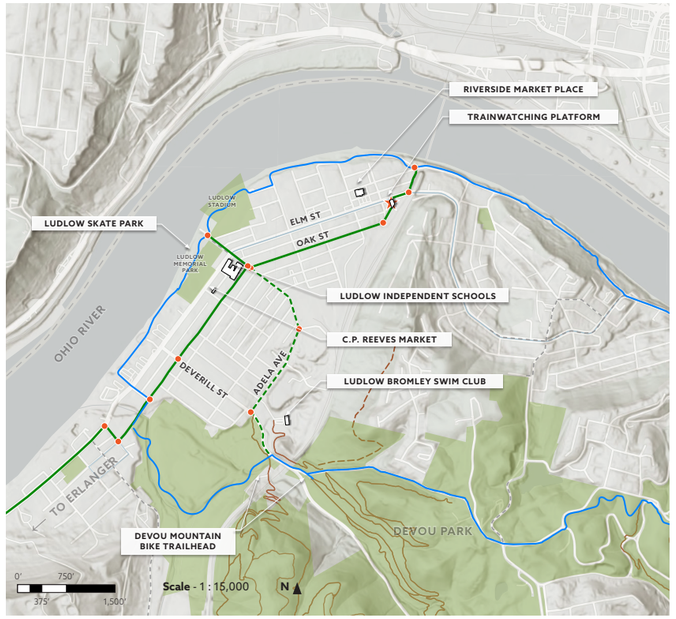
EARLY IMPLEMENTATION

Route selection prioritized low-stress travel conditions for users of all ages and abilities. Corridors were evaluated based on factors including vehicle speeds, traffic volumes, sidewalk and shared-use path availability, intersection safety, and proximity to key destinations. The signage helps bridge gaps within existing infrastructure by clearly communicating the most comfortable and intuitive path forward, reducing uncertainty for new and infrequent riders and encouraging more people to choose active transportation as a viable option.

The Connector serves an important equity function. By connecting underserved neighborhoods across the seven participating communities, the network helps ensure that the benefits of active transportation infrastructure, including improved mobility, access to economic opportunity, and healthier built environments, are available across the region rather than concentrated in areas that already enjoy robust transportation options. The route was thoroughly vetted through technical analysis and coordination with local partners to help ensure these connections are intentional, practical, and responsive to community needs. Intentional routing decisions reflect a commitment to serving all residents, not just those with options and immediate access to existing amenities.

Looking ahead, the Connector is designed to grow. The signage-first approach establishes a replicable framework that can be extended to additional communities, updated to reflect new infrastructure as it comes online, and refined based on user feedback and observed travel patterns.

LUDLOW

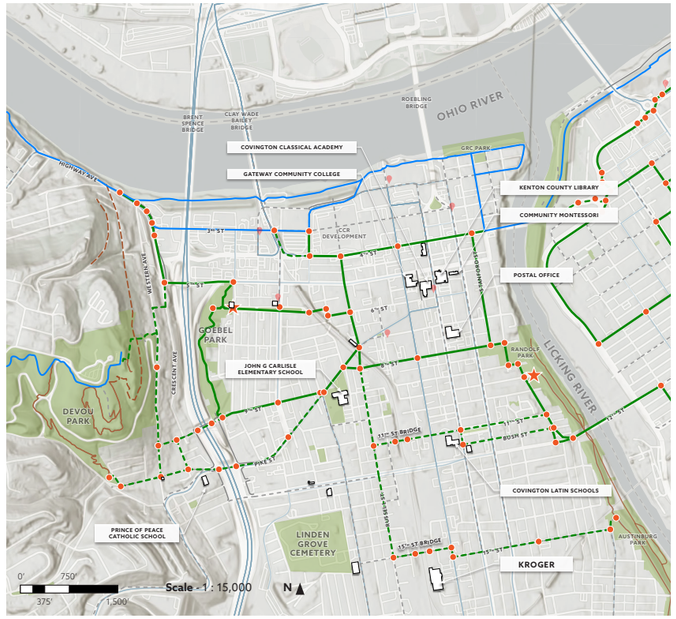


The Connector corridor through Ludlow takes advantage of low-speed residential streets and proximity to existing trail networks to link cultural and community assets. The route connects Ludlow Independent Schools, Memorial Park, the train-watching platform, Ludlow Skatepark, Ludlow Stadium, and the Ludlow-Bromley Swim Club, while also providing access to The Riverwalk and the Devou Park hiking and biking trailhead, extending the network's reach into one of the region's most beloved green spaces.

The route continues westward toward Bromley along Route 8 to the Anderson Ferry, before traversing uphill towards Erlanger and the Future Eons Park.

- Connector Signage
- Proposed Bike Hub
- Connector Wayfinding Route High Priority
- Connector Wayfinding Route Later Opportunities
- The Riverwalk
- Proposed Trails
- Existing Trails
- TANK Route
- Park & Ride
- Red Bike Station

COVINGTON



The route winds through Covington's complex urban road network, passing through Mainstrasse Village and the anticipated Covington Central Riverfront development while connecting key civic destinations like grocers, schools, cultural landmarks, parks, libraries, and post offices.

The route takes advantage of four bridges: the 11th Street Bridge, the 12th Street Bridge, the 15th Street Bridge, and later phases will include shared use paths with the reconstruction of the 4th Street Bridge. Planned right-of-way expansions and future bike and pedestrian infrastructure related to the Brent Spence Bridge project are also included.

- Connector Signage
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- The Riverwalk
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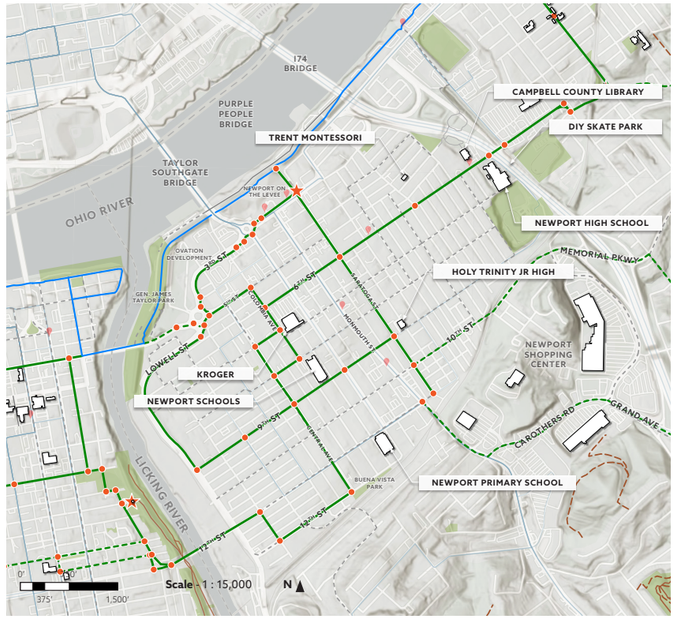
- Red Bike Station

NEWPORT

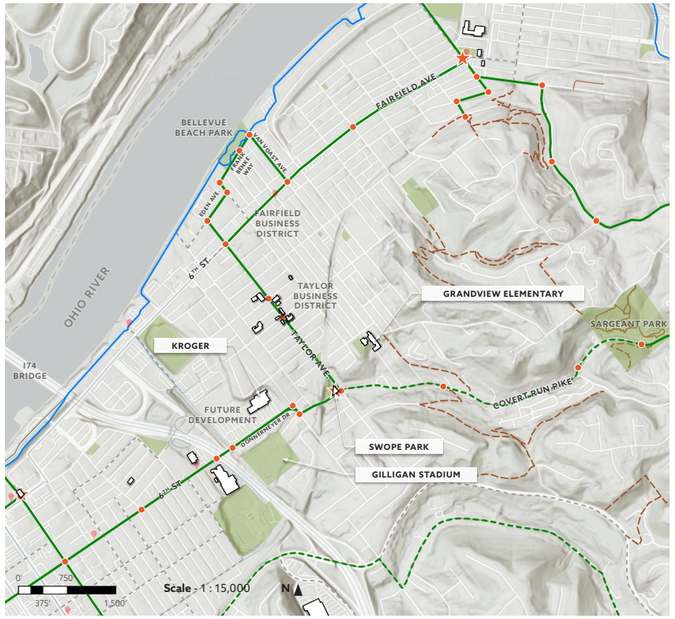


The Newport segment links some of the city's most active and frequented destinations, including the new Kroger, the Ovation mixed-use development, Buena Vista Park, and General James Taylor Park. The route connects residents to Newport Schools and the Campbell County Public Library, reinforcing the network's role as a practical transportation corridor for daily needs.

The alignment is strengthened by planned bike and pedestrian infrastructure, with later phases incorporating improvements to the 4th Street Bridge, enhancing regional connectivity across the Licking River corridor.

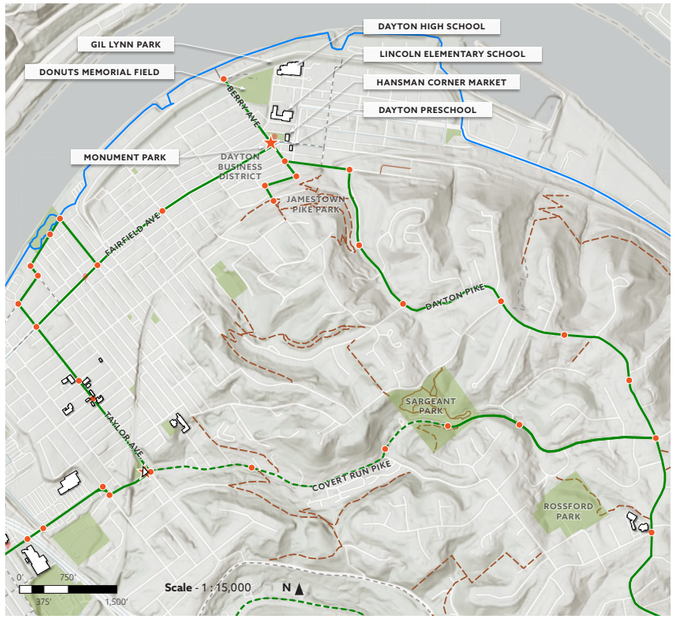
- Connector Signage
- Proposed Bike Hub
- Connector Wayfinding Route High Priority
- Connector Wayfinding Route Later Opportunities
- The Riverwalk
- Proposed Trails
- Existing Trails
- TANK Route
- Park & Ride
- Red Bike Station

BELLEVUE



The Bellevue segment continues out of Newport along 6th Street and Donnermeyer Avenue, linking everyday destinations and neighborhood assets. The route connects residents to grocers, and the Fairfield Avenue and Taylor Avenue business districts, making it a practical option for daily errands, and providing connections to recreation assets like Bellevue Beach Park and Sargeant Park. Planned bike and pedestrian infrastructure, alongside anticipated mixed-use developments and right-of-way expansions along the corridor, position this segment for significant near-term improvement and reflect strong local momentum for active transportation investment.

DAYTON



The Connector passes through the heart of Dayton, linking business districts and Dayton Schools with neighborhood green spaces including Jamestown Pike Park and Gil Lynn Park.

The route also connects to the Manhattan Harbor development, a significant mixed-use waterfront project that reinforces the Connector's role in linking active transportation infrastructure to the region's most dynamic areas of growth and investment.

- Connector Signage
- Proposed Bike Hub
- Connector Wayfinding Route High Priority
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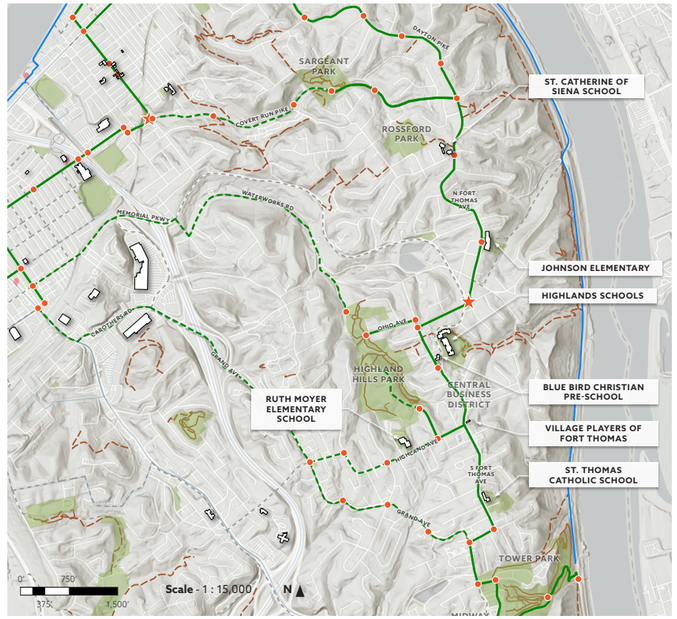
FORT THOMAS



Fort Thomas serves as the eastern terminus of the route. The Connector links two of the city's primary commercial nodes, the Fort Thomas Central Business District and the Midway Business District, alongside several Fort Thomas Schools, priming the corridor for student pedestrian and cycling activity.

The route also connects to Highland Hills Park with Tower Park, providing recreational access and reinforcing Fort Thomas's strong identity as a walkable, amenity-rich community.

- Connector Signage
- Proposed Bike Hub
- Connector Wayfinding Route High Priority
- Connector Wayfinding Route Later Opportunities
- The Riverwalk
- Proposed Trails
- Existing Trails
- TANK Route
- Park & Ride
- Red Bike Station

The OneNKY Connector is Northern Kentucky's own urban trail network connecting our paved multi-use paths and soft surface trails to the places we live, the outdoors we love, and the region we all share. Built for bikes, feet, and fresh air, it connects us all and moves us forward together.

TRAFFIC GARDENS

A traffic garden is a scaled-down street environment designed for active play and hands-on learning. These spaces use simplified, painted roadway features such as intersections, lane markings, and signage to replicate real-world conditions on a safe, hard surface. By creating a "mini-world" of streets, traffic gardens give children a realistic setting to explore how transportation systems work.

Traffic gardens can take many forms, including pop-up, temporary, or permanent installations depending on community needs and available space. They are often used to transform underutilized areas into engaging, educational amenities. Through active play, children learn how to navigate streets, understand traffic patterns, and build confidence in a controlled environment that prepares them for real-world biking and walking.

BENEFITS & COMMUNITY VALUE

Traffic gardens support a wide range of outcomes beyond recreation. They encourage physical activity while helping children build safety awareness, risk competence, and confidence navigating their environment. These spaces also create opportunities for social interaction, STEAM learning, and intergenerational engagement, making them valuable community assets for users of all ages and abilities.

As walking and biking have declined among children, traffic gardens help reintroduce active transportation in a safe and supportive setting. They provide a foundation for lifelong mobility skills by allowing children to practice real-world scenarios such as navigating intersections and understanding signage. Research shows that this type of experiential learning can improve coordination, social development, and independent decision-making, while also helping children better understand and engage with the built environment around them.

Roll Hill Stingers Traffic Garden - Cincinnati, OH

Roll Hill Stingers Traffic Garden - Cincinnati, OH

DAYTON TRAFFIC GARDEN

The City of Dayton developed a traffic garden at Gil Lynn Park to support students who regularly walk or bike to school. Located next to Lincoln Elementary and Dayton High School, it provides a safe, hands-on environment to learn bike safety and real-world bike skills.

The $25,000 project was funded through a Governor's Highway Safety Grant secured by the Dayton Park Board and Tri-State Trails. Discover Traffic Gardens led design and engineering, evaluating multiple layout options to fit the site. Construction occurred in fall 2023, which included concrete repairs to ensure a smooth riding surface.

Today, the traffic garden is a valuable asset near the Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons, offering a space for skill-building while connecting to the regional network.

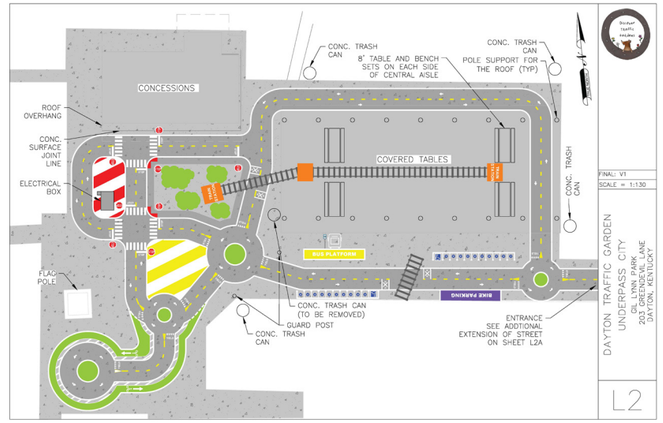


Figure. Dayton Traffic Garden, Gil Lynn Park
Source: Discover Traffic Gardens

Gil Lynn Park Traffic Garden - Dayton, KY

COMMUNITY BIKE PARKS AND SKILLS COURSES

Bike parks are purpose-built outdoor cycling facilities designed for riders of all ages and abilities to practice bike handling skills in a controlled and safe environment. Unlike a traditional trail or greenway, bike parks feature constructed elements that challenge riders progressively and at their own pace. Bike parks often include features such as pump tracks, jump lines, flow trails, technical terrain, and skills courses.

Skills courses are typically focused zones within bike parks where riders, particularly children and beginners, can develop foundational riding competencies. Often, these spaces are utilized by youth programs and schools to teach balance, braking, cornering, safe riding habits, and trail etiquette.

Together, bike parks and skills courses provide complete riding ecosystems for riders across a broad spectrum to come together. These spaces are profoundly inclusive, offering something for everyone for generations.

Bike Park Plans at Clear Creek Park - Anderson Township, OH

Mountain Bike Skills Course and Loop Trail at Mitchell Memorial Forest - Cincinnati, OH

BENEFITS OF BIKE PARKS AND SKILLS COURSES

Bike parks deliver meaningful returns to the communities that build them, spurring local economic activity, attracting tourism, and giving municipal park systems a low-cost, high-engagement amenity. Studies consistently show that mountain biking and bike park facilities generate significant visitor spending on lodging, food, gear, and transportation, and the growth of trail networks across the Cincinnati region reflects this pattern. For cities evaluating capital investments in parks and recreation, bike parks represent a compelling value proposition: a single facility that serves a broad demographic, generates repeat visitation, and activates underutilized spaces.

Bike parks provide measurable wellness benefits to the communities they serve. These facilities create spaces that reduce stress, combat sedentary behavior, and foster social connection across age groups. Growing research links outdoor recreation infrastructure access with improved mental health outcomes, particularly for youth. Children who engage in active outdoor recreation develop stronger physical health baselines, greater resilience, and healthier lifelong relationships with risk and challenge. Studies also show that children who ride bikes regularly are significantly more likely to remain physically active into adulthood, making investment in youth cycling infrastructure one of the highest-leverage public health interventions available to municipalities.

For community leaders, this means that a bike park is not simply a recreational amenity. They are long-term investments in community health. By introducing young residents to cycling in a safe, skills-based environment, municipalities help establish lifelong habits that reduce healthcare costs, increase community wellness, and build more active, connected communities over time. Sited strategically within a connected regional trail network, a bike park becomes an entry point into a broader culture of active transportation and outdoor engagement that pays dividends for generations.

Youth Gym Programs at Nighthawk Bike Park - Cincinnati, OH

Mountain Bike Skills Course at Mount Airy Forest - Cincinnati, OH

Trail maintenance is essential to protecting the long-term value, safety, and usability of the region's trail network. Whether paved or natural surface, trails require ongoing care to remain accessible, comfortable, and reliable for all users. Without regular inspections, routine upkeep, and clearly defined responsibilities, even well-designed facilities can quickly deteriorate, leading to safety concerns, higher long-term costs, and diminished user experience.

A proactive maintenance approach helps extend the lifespan of trail investments, supports consistent quality across jurisdictions, and reinforces public confidence in the network. It also strengthens partnerships among agencies, communities, and volunteers who play a critical role in stewardship. By prioritizing maintenance alongside planning and construction, communities can ensure trails continue to serve as safe, welcoming, and durable assets for years to come.

PAVED MULTI-USE TRAIL MAINTENANCE

Effective maintenance of paved multi-use trails is essential to keep them safe, accessible, and functional for all users. Maintaining shared use paths involves routine asset management and seasonal upkeep, such as regular inspections to assess pavement conditions, timely repairs of surface issues, and year-round tasks like debris removal, vegetation control, and ensuring compliance with accessibility standards. A well-structured maintenance program not only enhances the user experience but also extends the lifespan of the trail, reducing the need for costly reconstructions in the future.

For highly-utilized shared use paths like the Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons, or Licking River Greenway, annual or biennial inspections are recommended to monitor surface conditions and identify necessary repairs. These inspections should evaluate factors such as surface smoothness, cracks, or other defects, while ensuring compliance with accessibility guidelines. Developing a robust inspection program with a pavement condition rating system and a routine schedule is essential to ensure trails remain safe and inviting year-round. ODOT's Multi-Modal Design Guide provides best practices for trail maintenance and serves as a valuable resource for communities when planning and implementing maintenance strategies.

Who maintains each section of paved multi-use trail will depend on the organizational structure chosen by stakeholders. Several models have been successfully implemented in other projects:

Community-Based Maintenance Each jurisdiction or community maintains its section of the trail. While this ensures localized attention, it may not be feasible for communities with limited resources to perform routine trail maintenance.

Agency-Led Maintenance A single agency, or a few larger county agencies—such as a County Parks Department—could assume responsibility for maintaining the entire trail system. This centralized approach can provide consistency and efficiency but requires significant funding and coordination.

Volunteer-Based Maintenance A dedicated "friends" group could be established to raise funds and support trail maintenance. This approach encourages community engagement but may require supplemental resources for more technical maintenance needs.

Hybrid Approach A combination of these models could be adopted, distributing responsibilities based on the strengths and capacities of individual communities, agencies, or volunteer groups.

While grant opportunities specifically for trail maintenance are not as common, especially for projects solely focused on maintenance, some funding programs do include maintenance as an eligible activity.

Selecting the most appropriate maintenance model will require collaboration among project partners and stakeholders to ensure the trail remains a valuable regional asset for years to come.

NATURAL SURFACE TRAIL MAINTENANCE

Long-term stewardship requires a clearly defined, shared commitment among the organizations that build trails, the agencies that own and manage the land, and the community volunteers who often carry a significant portion of the maintenance load. These relationships are best formalized early through Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) and maintenance agreements that define roles, responsibilities, funding commitments, and service-level expectations. For municipalities, these agreements offer a practical mechanism for delegating day-to-day maintenance responsibility to established trail organizations with the expertise, equipment, and volunteer networks to get the job done. Trails built with a maintenance plan are a lasting community asset.

CORA is well-positioned to serve as a partner in stewardship and natural surface trail maintenance. The organization's network of more than 100 miles of natural surface trails was originally built by volunteers — trailblazers who identified the opportunity, then planned, designed, and constructed the system largely by hand over three decades. That volunteer-driven culture of stewardship remains the backbone of the network today. To support its continued growth, CORA is developing systems to support and empower volunteers at every experience level. Training programs, tool libraries, and standardized maintenance guidelines offer the tools and resources to the communities at the heart of CORA's mission and vision.

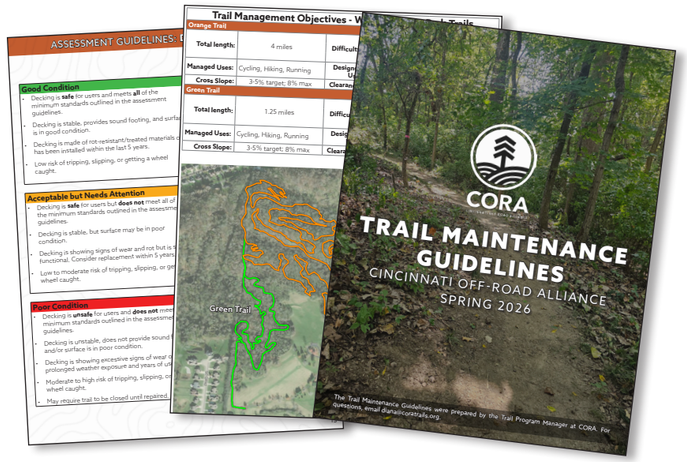
Volunteers at Stonelick State Park - Clermont County, OH

MAINTENANCE AS CONSERVATION

CORA is well-positioned to serve as a stewardship and maintenance partner. The organization's network of more than 100 miles of natural surface trails was built by volunteers — trailblazers who identified the opportunity, then planned, designed, and constructed the system largely by hand over three decades. That volunteer-driven culture of stewardship remains the backbone of the network today. To support its continued growth, CORA is developing standardized tools, training programs, and standard operating procedures that empower volunteers at every experience level to contribute effectively and consistently. These resources ensure that this community remains at the heart of CORA's long-term mission and vision.

MAINTENANCE ASSETS AND RESOURCES

Developed in accordance with guidelines established by the USDA Forest Service, the CORA Trail Maintenance Guidelines establish a foundation of minimum maintenance standards for trails across the regional network. The guide is designed as a practical resource for land managers, park staff, and volunteer leaders by standardizing trail care and ensuring consistency across the system. Included are a Trail Maintenance Responsibilities Matrix and Calendar which outline routine maintenance tasks and the recommended cadence of performance, a Trail Day Worksheet to be used for planning volunteer events, Trail Management Objectives (TMOs) that outline design standards, and guidelines for performing regular assessments. This document provides a comprehensive, accessible framework that ensures trails are maintained to the highest standard for years to come.



Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons - Covington, KY

FUNDING + IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

POSITIONING PROJECTS FOR FUNDING SUCCESS

Turning this plan into trails on the ground requires sustained investment, strategic partnerships, and communities that are ready to act when funding windows open. Trail projects are rarely funded through a single source. The most successful projects are built through layered strategies — combining federal and state grants with local match, private philanthropy, and in-kind contributions such as volunteer labor.

Communities that have documentation of need, established partnerships, and a project scope ready before a grant cycle opens consistently outperform those that begin the process after an announcement. This plan is that documentation.

The sections that follow describe the most relevant funding programs for each trail type, provide typical grant windows, outline how much preparation time each program requires, and introduce the regional organizations that can help move projects from concept to construction.

REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS

REGIONAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

CINCINNATI OFF-ROAD ALLIANCE (CORA) | TRI-STATE TRAILS

CORA leads natural surface trail design, construction, and stewardship, while TST advances paved trail planning, funding strategy, and implementation support across the region.

NKY AREA DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT (NKADD) | OneNKY ALLIANCE

NKADD provides technical, planning, and grant support, while OneNKY Alliance convenes regional partners and attracts private investment to advance trail implementation.

SOUTHBANK PARTNERS | OHIO RIVER WAY

Southbank Partners provides economic development coordination, riverfront development, branding, and grant funding throughout the NKY urban core and serves as regional project manager for The Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons, while Ohio River Way leads regional coordination of the 308-mile National Water trail spanning Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana.

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION AGENCIES

KENTUCKY TRANSPORTATION CABINET (KYTC): DISTRICT 6

Oversees state routes and serves as a key partner for project coordination, local project administration, and integration of trail improvements into roadway projects.

OKI REGIONAL COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

Serves as the MPO and primary funding administrator for federal transportation programs, guiding project prioritization and enabling access to major trail funding sources.

TRANSIT AUTHORITY OF NORTHERN KENTUCKY (TANK)

Connects transit and trail networks by coordinating bike and pedestrian access to bus routes, stops, and transit facilities.

COUNTYWIDE AGENCIES

BOONE, CAMPBELL, AND KENTON COUNTY DEPARTMENTS

County administration, public works, planning, and parks departments all play a critical role in leading implementation of large, complex, cross-jurisdictional projects.

COUNTYWIDE CONSERVATION DISTRICTS & CONSERVANCY ORGANIZATIONS

Conservation districts and conservancies protect and manage key natural lands, serving as critical partners and landholders for trail alignments, access, and long-term stewardship.

LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS - ELECTED OFFICIALS AND STAFF

Local governments lead project delivery by setting priorities, securing funding, and advancing trail projects from planning through construction and maintenance within their city boundaries.

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS | LOCAL NONPROFITS

Local school districts and nonprofits advocate for trail projects and support implementation through education, programming, stewardship, and community engagement initiatives.

FUNDING SOURCES

Different trail types align with different funding sources. The tables below highlight key programs by trail category, with some programs, like Recreational Trails Program and Land and Water Conservation Fund, that apply to both natural surface and paved trails.

Match requirements, eligibility, and deadlines may change, so communities should confirm details with the issuing agency before applying.

USDOT FUNDING PROGRAMS

» The **USDOT Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD)** program funds large, multimodal transportation projects, including paved shared-use trails that improve regional connectivity, access to jobs, and economic development. Capital projects support construction of infrastructure, while planning projects fund studies, feasibility analyses, and design. BUILD primarily funds transportation-oriented, capital infrastructure, especially paved, regional, and multimodal projects rather than small-scale recreational improvements.

» The **USDOT Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A)** program funds projects that improve roadway safety for all users, with a focus on reducing crashes and fatalities. It supports both planning and implementation, including safety action plans, corridor studies, and construction of projects like protected bike lanes, sidepaths, safer crossings, traffic calming, and intersection improvements. Infrastructure projects require an adopted Safety Action Plan, which a regional plan like this could help satisfy. SS4A is generally best suited for roadway-based bike and pedestrian improvements rather than standalone regional trails.

OKI REGIONAL COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS FUNDING PROGRAMS

» The **OKI Surface Transportation Block Grant Program for Northern Kentucky (SNK)** is a competitive, reimbursement-based federal funding program administered by OKI that supports multimodal transportation projects, including shared-use paths, sidepaths, bike lanes, crossings, and safety improvements. Eligible phases include design, right-of-way, and construction, and projects are evaluated based on regional connectivity, safety, implementation readiness, and consistency with adopted plans. SNK is a commonly used program to fund paved regional trail projects.

» The **OKI Transportation Alternatives (TA)** program funds smaller-scale bicycle and pedestrian projects, including shared-use paths, sidewalks, crossings, and streetscape improvements that enhance local connectivity and safety. While awards are smaller than other OKI programs, TA is another source that can be layered with other funding to help advance individual segments or complementary improvements as part of a larger trail project.

PAVED TRAIL FUNDING SOURCES

PROGRAM	FUNDER	AWARD RANGE	MATCH REQUIRED	TYPICAL WINDOW
BUILD* Grant Program	USDOT	$1M - $25M †	20%	Jan - Feb
Safe Streets & Roads For All Program (SS4A)	USDOT	$100K - $25M ††	20%	March - May
Surface Transportation Block Grant for NKY (SNK)	FHWA via OKI	$5M Maximum	20%	March - June
Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)	FHWA via OKI	$650K Maximum	20%	March - June
Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)	KYTC Office of Local Programs	$500K - $2M (no formal maximum)	20%	Nov - Jan
Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality (CMAQ)	KYTC Office of Local Programs	$500K - $5M (no formal maximum)	20%	Periodic call for projects
Recreational Trails Program (RTP)	FHWA via KY DLG	$25K - $250K	20%	March - June
Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)	NPS via KY DLG	$250K - $1M	50%	Jan - August (approx.)
Kentucky Ohio River Regional Recreation Authority (KORRRA)	KY DLG	TBD	TBD	TBD
GRANT** Program	KY Cabinet of Econ. Development	Up to $2M+	Varies	Monthly rolling

* BUILD - Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development
** GRANT - Government Resources Accelerating Needed Transformation
† - Max Award: $25M; Capital Projects: $5M Minimum; Planning Projects: No Minimum
†† - Implementation Grants: $2.5 - $25M; Planning & Demonstration Grants: $100K - $5M

KYTC OFFICE OF LOCAL PROGRAMS

» **KYTC's Transportation Alternatives (TAP)** program is similar to OKI TAP but statewide, funding small to mid-sized bike and pedestrian projects like shared-use paths, sidewalks, crossings, Safe Routes to School projects, and streetscape elements improving connectivity and safety.

» The **KYTC Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ)** program supports larger projects that reduce emissions, including trail and bikeway connections to jobs, transit, and activity centers, as well as corridor improvements that shift trips away from driving.

» Both programs fund similar projects to OKI funding programs and provide access to a larger statewide funding pool. They are less predictable because they are awarded through statewide competition and do not follow the same consistent funding cycle as OKI programs.

FUNDING SOURCES

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- The **Recreational Trails Program (RTP)** funds smaller-scale trail projects, including natural surface and some paved trails, trailheads, and maintenance, supporting incremental improvements and recreation-focused connections. RTP is one of the best funding sources for natural surface trails, though smaller awards can make it less suitable for long paved corridors.
- The **Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)** supports park and recreation projects, including trail development, trailheads, and land acquisition, with a focus on destination-oriented amenities. LWCF is one of the best sources for natural surface trails and is especially well suited for land acquisition and larger paved trail projects within park settings.
- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Community Projects** fund a wide range of community improvement projects, including public infrastructure such as sidewalks, streetscape enhancements, and some bicycle and pedestrian facilities when tied to economic development or community revitalization. Eligible activities also include property acquisition, construction, planning, and other community-focused investments, and trail projects may qualify if they support access, equity, or redevelopment goals.
- The **Kentucky Ohio River Region Recreation Authority (KORRRA)** is a newly established regional authority that is positioned to support development of the regional trail system across the Ohio River corridor through partnerships and coordinated implementation. Created in 2024, an important step to utilize this mechanism is appropriating funding from the General Assembly.

KENTUCKY CABINET FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The **Government Resources Accelerating Needed Transformation (GRANT) Program** is meant to help Kentucky communities secure and deliver large federal-funded projects by providing state funding to meet local match requirements. The program is a competitive, state-funded initiative administered by the Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development that strengthens applications for federal programs.

It can support trail-related transportation and recreation projects, including paved and natural surface trails, as well as planning or engineering, when those activities are eligible within the paired federal grant. NKADD can help identify opportunities, coordinate partners, and support applications, so interested cities should reach out early.

NATURAL SURFACE TRAIL FUNDING SOURCES

PROGRAM	FUNDER	AWARD RANGE	MATCH REQUIRED	TYPICAL WINDOW
Recreational Trails Program (RTP)	FHWA via KY DLG	$25K - $250K	20%	Jan - Feb
Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)	NPS via KY DLG	$250K - $1M	50%	Jan - August (approx.)
CDBG* Community Projects	HUD via KY DLG	Up to $750K	Varies	Varies
Kentucky Ohio River Regional Recreation Authority (KORRRA)	KY DLG	TBD	TBD	TBD
GRANT** Program	KY Cabinet of Econ. Development	Up to $2M+	Varies	Monthly rolling
EDA Public Works & Economic Adjustment	US Econ. Development Administration	$100K - $30M	20-50%	Rolling
Horizon Community Impact Fund	Horizon Community Funds NKY	Varies (typically $10K - $115K)	Varies	Varies

* CDBG - Community Development Block Grant
** GRANT - Government Resources Accelerating Needed Transformation

UNITED STATES ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION - PUBLIC WORKS & ECONOMIC ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMS

The **EDA Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance Programs** provide flexible federal funding for infrastructure and planning projects that create jobs and attract private investment in distressed communities. Public Works focuses on infrastructure that supports business growth, and Economic Adjustment Assistance is more flexible, funding both planning and construction.

Projects must demonstrate clear economic outcomes, including job creation or private investment. Trail projects can be eligible when they function as economic infrastructure, such as improving access to employment centers, supporting redevelopment, or advancing tourism strategies tied to measurable economic growth.

HORIZON COMMUNITY FUNDS OF NORTHERN KENTUCKY

The **Horizon Impact Community Fund of Northern Kentucky** is a 501(c)(3) community foundation that pools philanthropic resources to support projects with broad community benefit. It can support trail projects by serving as a fiduciary to leverage private donations, funding amenities or programming, and promoting projects through a regional philanthropic network, with strong consideration for projects that demonstrate community impact and equity. CORA and Tri-State Trails have established a Trail Fund at Horizon Community Foundation.

FUNDING SOURCES

PAULA NYE MEMORIAL EDUCATIONAL GRANT

The Paula Nye Memorial Bicyclist and Pedestrian Education Grant is a statewide program administered by the Kentucky Bicycle and Bikeway Commission. It provides funding for bicycle and pedestrian safety education, outreach, and awareness initiatives that promote safe travel and sharing the road.

Funded by sales of Kentucky's "Share the Road" specialty license plate, the total funding available varies each year. The program supports activities such as safety education programs, curriculum development, public outreach campaigns, and training. While it does not fund major infrastructure, it complements trail investments by improving safety knowledge, encouraging use, and strengthening community support for active transportation.

KENTUCKY TRAIL TOWN PROGRAM

The Kentucky Trail Town program, administered by the Kentucky Department of Parks, is a tourism and economic development initiative that helps communities connect to trail systems and position them as outdoor recreation destinations. It supports planning, branding, and improvements like trailheads and signage, while providing marketing support and positioning communities for future funding and tourism investment.

In 2024, Andy Beshear announced a state-funded grant program offering up to $30,000 for trail development, amenities, and related improvements. While funding is not currently available in 2026, similar opportunities may emerge, and communities with strong or growing trail networks may benefit from pursuing designation to be well-positioned for future funding and promotion.

LOCAL & PRIVATE FUNDING SOURCES

LOCAL CAPITAL & DEPARTMENT BUDGETS

Local governments and County agencies across NKY prepare annual capital budgets to fund infrastructure and community improvements. Trail and bikeway projects can be funded through these budgets when resources allow, though prioritizing limited discretionary funds remains a challenge given competing needs in many NKY cities. As a result, pursuing grant funding, much of which is reimbursement-based, is essential to leverage local dollars. Once secured, capital budgets should account for total project costs, including required local match commitments.

Implementation typically involves coordination across departments such as Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Planning or Neighborhood Services, and Economic Development, each playing a role in project delivery and funding. County agencies, particularly parks and public works departments, should also plan for capital investments and staffing. As projects advance, operating budgets should be evaluated to ensure sufficient staff capacity for planning, design, construction, and long-term maintenance.

TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (TIF) DISTRICTS

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is a tool that uses future property tax revenue from new development to fund infrastructure improvements such as streets, sidewalks, utilities, and trail or bikeway projects. Communities can establish TIF districts in areas where future development is anticipated, allowing increased tax revenue to be reinvested locally.

Across Northern Kentucky, TIF districts can help fund bicycle and trail infrastructure within redevelopment areas, either as a primary funding source or as a local match to leverage grants. Communities can also establish new TIF districts in areas targeted for growth, where trail and bikeway investments can support and help catalyze additional development.

PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING

Philanthropic funding plays a critical role in advancing trail projects across Northern Kentucky by supporting a layered funding strategy that combines public grants with private investment. Donations and foundation grants can be used as local match to unlock larger federal and state funding, reducing the burden on local governments and accelerating project delivery. Organizations like the OneNKY Alliance can help coordinate regional partnerships and attract philanthropic investment, positioning trail development as a shared economic and community priority. Projects that demonstrate broad public benefit, equity, and regional impact are especially well-suited for philanthropic support.

Additional philanthropic sources, such as the Paula Nye Grant through the Kentucky Bicycle and Bikeway Commission, and the Horizon Community Funds of Northern Kentucky can also support trail-related efforts.

CROWD SOURCING OR CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

Another potential option to fund projects is through a capital campaign to raise private donations. Tri-State Trails successfully implemented this model through the CROWN Capital Campaign in Cincinnati, which raised $10.1 million in individual, corporate, and foundation contributions to leverage federal and state grants for trail construction. With strong local support for bike infrastructure, a similar approach could be successful in Northern Kentucky, with Tri-State Trails as a likely partner to help facilitate a public-private partnership. Packaging projects into a compelling regional vision and assembling a fundraising team of community leaders is essential.

Cincinnati Off-Road Alliance (CORA) has also demonstrated effective fundraising strategies for trail projects by combining corporate sponsorships, foundation support, major donor campaigns, and event-based fundraising. Efforts such as corporate trail days, branded sponsorship opportunities, and partnerships with community foundations like the NKY Trail Fund have helped attract both small and large donors. CORA's approach highlights the importance of project-specific storytelling, clear funding goals, and visible recognition opportunities to build sustained philanthropic support for trail development.

FUNDING SOURCES

POTENTIAL LONG-TERM FUNDING STRATEGY

COUNTYWIDE PARKS AND TRAIL AUTHORITY

Today, parks in Northern Kentucky are managed by individual cities or county departments, which has made it complex and challenging to build a connected trail network across jurisdictional boundaries. Unlike Ohio, Kentucky does not have a formal "park district" structure, which has resulted in inconsistent maintenance strategies and the lack of a streamlined funding stream for operations and maintenance of trails. A more transformational approach would be to establish a regional public entity with taxing authority that could be responsible for owning and maintaining regional trail and park projects. This entity could be structured with its own governing board and, if enabled by voters, a dedicated funding mechanism such as a countywide tax. Creating a new political structure like this would be laborious, and may require approval from the Kentucky General Assembly.

Today, counties can create a similar model by strengthening a countywide Parks & Recreation Board, forming interlocal agreements with cities, and designating a single lead agency to coordinate trail development. This entity could operate at the county level or as a multi-county regional authority serving Boone, Kenton, and Campbell counties. Trail projects could also advance by forming interlocal agreements for specific trail projects, similar to how the Riverwalk at Riverfront Commons has advanced through interlocal agreements with Southbank Partners.

Paired with a dedicated funding source, such as a voter-approved Parks and Trails Fund, this approach can provide recurring local match for grants, allow for long-term project planning, and enable local governments to lead large, multi-jurisdictional trail connections. This model would position Northern Kentucky to deliver a cohesive, high-quality trail network that connects parks, neighborhoods, and key destinations more efficiently.

This approach advances large, transformative trail projects that require coordination, sustained funding, and regional leadership to move forward.

Goltra Preserve Volunteer Trail Day - Cincinnati, OH

LAYERED FUNDING STRATEGY

LAYERED FUNDING STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

Most trail projects are funded through multiple overlapping sources outlined on the previous pages. Identifying which grant program is best suited for a community's trail is an important first step that CORA, Tri-State Trails, NKADD, and other community partners can assist.

Additional steps include assembling a publicly controlled corridor and completing planning work such as preliminary engineering and cost estimation. Each of these steps is critical before applying for construction funding.

The phased approach below shows how planning, funding, design, and construction activities typically sequence across a project timeline.

PHASE 1 **Planning & Documentation** *(1-2 years)*	» Engage Tri-State Trails, CORA, or NKADD for an initial scoping conversation » Commission trail feasibility study » Understand site control (ownership, easement, or private landowner MOU) » Conduct community engagement — document attendance & support letters » Formally adopt this plan at the governing body level » Identify the primary grant target and begin pre-application prep
PHASE 2 **Funding & Application** *(1-2 years)*	» Identify local match sources (budget + foundation + in-kind where applicable) » OKI programs (TAP/SNK): engage OKI before Call for Projects opens » Hire grant writer if needed (NKADD, CORA, or Tri-State Trails can assist) » Pursue private foundations for planning/engagement expenses (optional)
PHASE 3 **Engineering, Design & Permitting** *(2-4 years)*	» Upon grant award, initiate NEPA environmental review (for federal funds) » Engage licensed engineer or landscape architect for design documents » Complete ROW acquisition or easement agreements, following requirements of grant process » Finalize construction documents and prepare for bid
Phase 4 **Construction & Stewardship** *(3+ years)*	» Establish long-term maintenance plan and funding stream » Competitive bid and award construction contract (required for federal grants) » Document user counts and outcomes — strengthens future grant applications

TOP FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITIES

Formally adopt the NKY Regional Trails Plan.	A formally adopted plan is one of the most powerful grant support documents. The NKY RTP, comprehensive plans, and engineering feasibility studies are all great examples of adopted plans.
Identify a fiscal agent / project sponsor.	Funders increasingly require a maintenance plan. Establishing stewardship before applying strengthens both the project and the application.
Start application early, not at time of announcement	Treat grant applications as a year-round process. The best applications typically take 6–12 months to prepare. Begin preparation and coordination with key partners well in advance.
Stack multiple funding sources.	Layer local, state, federal, and private funding sources to minimize the burden to the local government.
Use in-kind donations as a local match.	Funders increasingly require a maintenance plan. Establishing stewardship before applying strengthens both the project and the application.
Use volunteer labor as a local match.	CORA volunteer trail crew days generate documented in-kind value that counts toward RTP and LWCF match requirements.

Successful trail funding requires early coordination, strong documentation, and a strategic approach to assembling resources. Communities should treat grant applications as a year-round effort, beginning preparation well in advance and working closely with strategic partners. Formally adopted plans, such as the NKY Regional Trails Plan and feasibility studies, are essential tools that strengthen funding applications, demonstrate project readiness and help local governments prioritize the next segment for implementation.

A layered funding strategy is critical. Combining public funds with private donations can help meet local match requirements and advance projects through multiple phases. For some programs, in-kind contributions, such as volunteer labor or land donations can offset the required match funding. Identifying a fiscal agent, typically a local government, ensures eligibility for most programs, while nonprofits can continue to lead project development.

Finally, establishing a long-term maintenance and stewardship plan from the outset improves project outcomes and makes applications more competitive.

LANDOWNER ENGAGEMENT

PARTNERING WITH LANDOWNERS

The Northern Kentucky Regional Trails Plan envisions a connected network of paved and natural surface trails spanning Boone, Campbell, and Kenton counties. Achieving that vision requires more than just planning, engineering, and funding, it requires the voluntary participation of private landowners who are willing to allow trails to cross their property. This chapter provides guidance for trail planners, local governments, and community partners on landowner discussions, what agreements are appropriate for different situations, and how Kentucky law supports landowners who open their land for public recreation.

Landowner engagement depends on building relationships as much following proper legal procedures. The most successful trail projects across the country have been built on trust, transparency, and a shared understanding of the mutual benefits that trails bring to communities and landowners alike. Done well, landowner engagement turns potential obstacles into partners and advocates.

Private Property Crossing - Alexandria, KY

WHY PRIVATE LAND ACCESS IS ESSENTIAL

Many of the most strategic trail connections in Northern Kentucky require routing across private property. Public land, parks, road rights-of-way, and greenways form the backbone of the trail network; but, these are rarely available in continuous, uninterrupted corridors. Gaps between publicly owned parcels are often privately owned land, and without cooperative access agreements across those gaps, the network remains incomplete.

Short jaunts across private parcels, sometimes just a few hundred feet long, can transform a disconnected series of segments into a seamless regional trail. The difference between a trail system that stops and starts, and one that flows continuously through a community, is often the willing participation of a handful of private landowners.

Trail Opportunities on Private Access Roads

Arcadia Housing Developments Trails - Alexandria, KY

BENEFITS TO LANDOWNERS

For landowners, participation in the regional trail network can offer meaningful benefits:

- Increased property values adjacent to trails
- Reduced maintenance responsibilities in dedicated trail corridors
- Legal liability protections under Kentucky law
- Potential tax advantages for donated easements
- The satisfaction of contributing to a lasting community amenity

Additionally, once a trail is formed, neighbors and others stick to the trail more often and uninvited exploration all but disappears as the hiker's or biker's desired experience can be found on the trail.

LANDOWNER ENGAGEMENT

AGREEMENT TYPES: EASEMENTS, LICENSES, AND MOUs

Not every landowner situation calls for the same type of legal agreement. The appropriate instrument depends on the nature of the landowner's interest in the property, the permanence of the intended trail, and the level of formality the situation requires. The three primary agreement types used in Northern Kentucky trail development are perpetual trail easements, license-to-use agreements, and memoranda of understanding (MOUs). Each has distinct characteristics, benefits, and limitations.

PERPETUAL TRAIL EASEMENTS

A trail easement is a recorded legal instrument that grants a non-possessory right to use a defined portion of a private landowner's property for trail purposes. Easements "run with the land," meaning they remain in effect regardless of changes in ownership. The easement is recorded against the deed and binds future owners as well as the current one. For trails that are intended to be permanent public infrastructure, a perpetual easement is generally the strongest and most appropriate form of agreement.

CORA has developed a Perpetual Trail Easement agreement that has been used to secure private land access in Northern Kentucky, including on residential parcels in Kenton County. This agreement defines the trail easement area (typically described by a plat or GPS coordinates attached as an exhibit), specifies permitted and prohibited uses within the easement area, outlines maintenance responsibilities, establishes notification and approval procedures, and grants CORA the right to assign the easement to a public entity such as a city, county, or park district. A sample easement agreement is included as online **Appendix A (available at tristatetrails.org/NKY-RTP)** of this plan.

Under a perpetual easement, the landowner retains ownership of the underlying property and continues to enjoy all uses of the land that are not inconsistent with the trail easement, including obtaining a loan on the property. The easement itself can be broad across an area, or can be narrow, often 20 feet to either side of the trail centerline. They typically occupy the undevelopable hillsides or a small fraction of the total parcel, where convenience to the landowner should be considered. Landowners are not required to perform trail maintenance; that obligation rests with CORA or the designated trail manager.

It is also important to consider existing mortgages or loans on a property before recording a perpetual trail easement. If a lender forecloses on a property and the easement was recorded after the mortgage, the easement could be terminated. To help protect the easement, trail organizations and landowners should seek consent or subordination from the property owner's lender, and in some cases conduct a title review before finalizing the agreement.

RIGHT TO ACCESS AGREEMENTS

A Right to Access is commonly used to authorize an organization like CORA or a trail building contractor to access public land for planning, evaluation, and preliminary trail design activities. They do not convey construction or maintenance rights on their own, but they help to determine feasibility that can only be done with ground-truthing, and help pave the way for more formal agreements and allow work to advance before more formal legal instruments are in place. These are often useful at the beginning stages of planning and ideation on a project.

LICENSE-TO-USE AGREEMENTS

A license is a permissive, revocable authorization for a specific use. Unlike an easement, a license does not run with the land and does not create a permanent property interest. It can generally be terminated by either party with appropriate notice and does not need to be recorded with the county clerk. For this reason, licenses are often preferred when a high degree of formality is unnecessary, when the trail use is intended to be temporary or provisional, or when the landowner is an institutional entity such as a land trust, conservancy, or land bank whose mission already aligns with public access.

Land trusts and conservancies operating in Northern Kentucky, including organizations such as The Hillside Trust, the Kenton County conservancy, Campbell County Conservancy, and Boone Conservancy, may find a license-to-use agreement preferable to a formal easement precisely because their existing conservation purposes are compatible with public access. In these situations, a license provides sufficient legal authorization to construct and maintain a trail while preserving flexibility for both parties.

Similarly, land banks and county land programs that hold surplus or underutilized property for eventual redevelopment may be receptive to licensing trail use during the interim period before the land is put to its intended long-term use. A well-drafted license agreement can include provisions that survive a land sale or specify conditions under which the trail use continues, giving the trail program reasonable assurance of continuity.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOUs)

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), or Good Faith Agreements, are less formal documents that establishes a framework for cooperation between an organization and a land manager, typically a municipality or public agency without creating the binding legal obligations of an easement. MOUs do not create long-term property rights or obligations for either party as an easement would.

CORA's standard MOU template outlines the purpose and scope of access, confirms that no obligation to approve future improvements is created, establishes insurance and indemnification requirements, and sets a defined term with termination provisions. A sample MOU is included as **Appendix B (available at tristatetrails.org/NKY-RTP)**.

LANDOWNER ENGAGEMENT

LANDOWNER TYPE AND AGREEMENT MATRIX

LANDOWNER TYPE	AGREEMENT TYPE
PUBLIC LAND & INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS	
Municipality / Public Agency (City, county, park district)	Right to Access Then MOU / License
Land Trust / Conservancy (Hillside Trust, Kenton, Campbell, Boone)	License to Use (Recording Optional)
Land Bank / County Program (Surplus / underutilized parcels)	License to Use or MOU
PRIVATE LANDOWNERS	
Private - Large Rural / Agricultural Parcel	Perpetual Easement
Private - Small Residential Lot (Single-family home, small lot)	Perpetual Easement If pursued
Active Development (Ashley Development, Fischer Homes / Sunrock Farms)	Recorded Easement With subdivision plat
INSTITUTIONAL & COMMERCIAL LANDOWNERS	
Condo Association / HOA (Apartment complex, multi-family)	Easement or License
Commercial / Industrial (Office campus, warehouse, industrial park)	Easement or License
Faith-Based / Nonprofit Organizations (Church, school, community organizations)	Easement or License

Landowner Type and Agreement Matrix. Agreement types and engagement likelihoods are general guidance; individual situations vary. Always consult legal counsel before executive any agreement.

LANDOWNER TYPE AND AGREEMENT MATRIX

WHEN USED	ENGAGEMENT LIKELIHOOD	KEY CONSIDERATIONS
Planning phase, then construction	HIGH	CORA MOU framework applies; public process governs
Trail construction + Ongoing use	HIGH	Mission alignment; license typically sufficient
Interim access before Redevelopment	HIGH	Public benefit orientation; streamlined approval
Construction + Permanent Access	HIGH	Trail far from structures; landowner retains full ownership
Permanent access, precisely defined area	MODERATE	Privacy concerns; careful siting required; longer process
At platting / Subdivision approval	HIGH IF EARLY	Approach during platting; maximizes flexibility & value
Board approval required	MOD-HIGH	Shared-space culture; position as a residential amenity
Property owner / Management decides	MODERATE	Frame as employee commute benefit + corporate goodwill
Board or Congregation	MODERATE	Mission alignment + community impact as key talking points

LANDOWNER ENGAGEMENT

APPROACHING LANDOWNERS: PROCESS AND BEST PRACTICES

The manner in which landowners are first approached is often as important as the legal and financial details that follow. Trail planners and advocates should approach every landowner conversation with humility, transparency, and genuine respect for the landowner's concerns. Initial outreach should never be adversarial, transactional, or pressuring. The goal of the first conversation is simply to introduce the project, listen to the landowner's questions and concerns, and gauge their openness to further discussion. These should be with individual landowners, not several groups, so they feel at ease sharing concerns.

THE "DESIGN-FIRST, ASK-SECOND" APPROACH

One of the most effective practices in trail easement negotiation is what practitioners sometimes call the **"design-first, ask-second"** approach. Rather than approaching a landowner with an abstract request to allow a trail "somewhere" across their property, this approach involves three sequential steps:

1. **Secure the landowner's permission** to have a qualified trail crew or surveyor evaluate the property for trail feasibility. This initial ask is low-stakes. You are asking for access to look, not access to build. The Right to Access Agreement (available at **tristatetrails.org/NKY-RTP**) is an appropriate instrument for this initial evaluation phase.

2. **Conduct a professional trail assessment** to identify a preferred alignment that respects the landowner's concerns (avoiding proximity to the home, sensitive areas, or active agricultural operations), maximizes the trail experience, and minimizes environmental impact. CORA staff are trained in sustainable trail design and can use Trimble GPS equipment to accurately map potential alignments and generate exhibits suitable for easement descriptions.

3. **Return to the landowner with a specific, well-documented proposal:** a defined easement area based on the preferred alignment, a clear description of what is proposed to build and maintain, and answers to the landowner's likely questions about liability, taxes, and property rights. At this stage, the landowner can see exactly what they are being asked to agree to.

This sequence dramatically increases the likelihood of a successful negotiation. Landowners who have participated in the initial site assessment often develop a sense of ownership over the trail's design, making them more receptive to formalizing access through an easement. It also produces higher-quality easement descriptions, since the alignment is based on actual field conditions rather than assumptions made at the computer.

TALKING POINTS BY LANDOWNER TYPE

Different landowners have different concerns, and effective engagement requires tailoring the conversation to the audience. The following guidance is intended to help local government agencies and trail advocates frame the conversation appropriately for each major landowner category.

Landowner Type	Recommended Talking Points
Large Rural / Agricultural Landowners	Emphasize that **the trail will be located far from the home and working areas**, that the organization/agency assumes all maintenance responsibilities, and that Kentucky's recreational use statutes (KRS § 411.190 and KRS § 150.645) provide strong liability protections. Discuss the potential for a **charitable tax deduction if the easement is donated**. Frame the trail as a long-term legacy and community contribution consistent with good stewardship of the land.
Residential Landowners (Small Lots)	Acknowledge that **this is the most sensitive category**. Be clear about the precise location of the trail within the easement area, the non-motorized and public nature of use, the maintenance commitment, and the screening or buffering that can be incorporated. Where privacy is a concern, explore whether fencing, vegetation, or shifted alignment can address it. **Be prepared for a longer conversation and do not rush.**
Condominium Associations and HOAs	Focus on the trail as a **resident amenity that adds value to the development** and supports an active lifestyle. HOAs and condo boards often respond well to data on property value impacts near trails. Clarify if the trail is a public facility that will be maintained or an HOA responsibility. Be prepared to present to the board, not just an individual contact.
Commercial and Industrial Property Owners	Frame the trail as an **employee benefit** (active commuting, midday wellness), a **customer amenity, and a visible demonstration of corporate citizenship**. If the property is near a major trail corridor, the connection can be positioned as a branding opportunity. Liability protection and zero maintenance cost to the property owner are key closing points, though some companies may wish to sponsor their part of trail.
Land Trusts and Conservancies	**Lead with mission alignment**. Land trusts and conservancies exist to protect land for the long-term benefit of the public. A trail easement or license is consistent with that mission. The conversation should focus on the specific mechanics of the agreement, width, permitted uses, maintenance responsibilities, rather than the fundamental question of whether to participate.
Active Developers	Timing is everything. **The ideal moment to secure a trail easement from a developer is during the subdivision platting process**, before lots are sold. At that stage, the developer has maximum flexibility to incorporate trail corridors into the project design, and doing so may increase lot values and serve as a marketing differentiator. Planners should identify trail corridors in proposed developments early in the review process and initiate conversations accordingly.

Talking points by landowner type Adapt language to the specific landowner's values and concerns.

LANDOWNER ENGAGEMENT

LEGAL PROTECTIONS FOR LANDOWNERS

One of the most powerful tools available to trail advocates when engaging private landowners is **Kentucky's recreational use statute**. Many landowners express concern about liability and the fear that someone injured on their property while using a trail will sue them. Kentucky law addresses this concern directly and provides substantial protection to landowners who allow public recreational use of their land for free to users.

Two statutes are particularly relevant: KRS § 411.190 and KRS § 150.645. Trail planners and CORA staff should be prepared to explain both statutes in plain language and, where appropriate, direct landowners to an attorney for specific legal advice. The text of both statutes is provided, followed by a plain-language summary of each.

KRS § 150.645: LANDOWNER RECREATIONAL USE PROTECTION

KRS § 150.645: Landowner Recreational Use Protection
Kentucky Revised Statutes, Chapter 150: Fish and Wildlife Resources

(1) Any owner, lessee, or occupant of land or water who grants permission to enter or use such land or water for recreational purposes, without charge and without any written agreement, shall not be liable to any person who enters pursuant to such permission for injury to such person or damage to such person's property caused by any act or omission of such person, while on such land or water.

(2) Any owner, lessee, or occupant of land or water who grants permission, without charge, to hunt, fish, trap, camp, hike, sightsee, or engage in any other recreational activity on such land or water shall not be liable to any person for injuries or property damage that occur during or as a result of such recreational activities.

(3) Nothing in this section shall prevent a landowner from being held liable for willful or wanton acts causing injury to persons using the land, or for injuries arising from the charging of fees for recreational use.

(4) This section shall be construed to encourage landowners to make their land and water areas available to the public for recreational purposes.

Plain-Language Summary: KRS § 150.645
KRS § 150.645 provides a parallel layer of liability protection specifically within the context of Kentucky's fish and wildlife statutes. Like KRS § 411.190, it protects landowners who allow public recreational access for free to users from liability for injuries that occur during that recreational use. Together, these two statutes create a robust legal framework that encourages landowner participation in Kentucky's trail and outdoor recreation network. As noted in the CORA Trail Conservation Easement template: "The Grantor shall be entitled to all limits of liability as set forth in KRS § 411.190, KRS § 150.645 and such other applicable statutes that may from time to time be enacted."

NOTE: Ohio does not currently have a comparable statewide recreational trail liability law specific to this context. Expanding similar protections in Ohio could help support future trail development efforts and encourage additional partnerships with private landowners in communities across the state.

KRS § 411.190: RECREATIONAL USE STATUTE

KRS § 411.190: Recreational Use Statute
Kentucky Revised Statutes, Chapter 411: Liability of Public Entities and Their Employees

(1) As used in this section, unless the context requires otherwise:
(a) "Charge" means the admission price or fee asked in return for invitation or permission to enter or go upon the land.
(b) "Land" means land, roads, water, watercourses, private ways and buildings, structures, and machinery or equipment when attached to the realty.
(c) "Owner" means the possessor of a fee interest, a tenant, lessee, occupant, or person in control of the premises.
(d) "Recreational purpose" includes, but is not limited to, any of the following, or any combination thereof: hunting, fishing, swimming, boating, camping, picnicking, hiking, pleasure driving, nature study, water skiing, winter sports, and viewing or enjoying historical, archaeological, scenic, or scientific sites.

(2) An owner of land owes no duty of care to keep the premises safe for entry or use by others for recreational purposes, or to give any warning of a dangerous condition, use, structure, or activity on such premises to persons entering for such purposes.

(3) Except as specifically recognized by or provided for in subsection (6) of this section, an owner of land who either directly or indirectly invites or permits without charge any person to use such property for recreational purposes does not thereby:
(a) Extend any assurance that the premises are safe for any purpose;
(b) Confer upon such persons the legal status of an invitee or licensee to whom a duty of care is owed;
(c) Assume responsibility for or incur liability for any injury to persons or property caused by an act or omission of such persons.

(4) Unless otherwise agreed in writing, the owner of land who permits any person to use such property for recreational purposes without charge does not assume responsibility for or incur liability for any injury to persons or property caused by an act or omission of such persons.

(5) This section does not limit the liability which otherwise exists:
(a) For willful or malicious failure to guard or warn against a dangerous condition, use, structure, or activity;
(b) For injury suffered in any case where the owner of land charges the person who enters or goes on the land an admission price or other consideration;
(c) To any person who is expressly invited rather than merely permitted to come upon the premises by the landowner.

(6) Nothing in this section creates liability where none previously existed, nor shall it be construed to increase the liability of any person.

(7) This section shall be liberally construed to encourage owners of land to make land and water areas available to the public for recreational purposes.

Plain-Language Summary: KRS § 411.190
Under Kentucky's Recreational Use Statute, a private landowner who allows members of the public to enter their property for recreational purposes — including hiking, biking, nature study, and similar activities — without charging admission is generally not legally responsible if someone is injured on that property. The landowner does not have a duty to keep the land in a "safe" condition or to warn visitors about hazards, and the visitor is not considered a guest ("invitee") to whom heightened duties apply. The statute does not protect a landowner who deliberately hides a dangerous condition or acts recklessly — but for ordinary recreational injuries, the protection is substantial. A trail easement does not constitute a "charge" within the meaning of the statute, so the liability protection is not forfeited by executing an easement. Landowners should consult their own attorney for advice specific to their situation.

EASEMENT DESIGN: CORRIDOR VS. ALIGNMENT APPROACHES

How a trail easement is geographically defined – the shape and dimensions of the area described in the easement document – has significant practical implications for trail design, construction, and long-term management. Two primary approaches are used in trail easement practice: the corridor approach and the alignment approach.

CORRIDOR-BASED EASEMENTS

A **corridor-based easement** defines a wide swath of land, often identifying undevelopable hillside property within which the trail may be located and managed. The exact trail alignment within that corridor is not fixed at the time of easement execution; the trail manager retains flexibility to locate the trail at the optimal position within the corridor, to relocate it over time as conditions change, and to make design adjustments during construction without requiring a new easement.

Corridor easements are particularly well-suited to early-stage negotiations, where the precise trail alignment has not yet been established through a formal survey. By securing a wide corridor, the trail organization or government agency can enter into a binding legal agreement with the landowner before detailed design work is complete, then use that corridor as the framework for subsequent trail design. This approach is also useful in situations where utility corridors, floodplains, or topography may require the trail to shift slightly from the initially anticipated line.

The primary tradeoff of the corridor approach is that landowners may feel less certain about where on their property the trail will be built, which can create anxiety for those with proximity concerns. Clear communication and a commitment to landowner notification before construction are essential when using this approach.

England-Idlewild Park - Boone County, KY

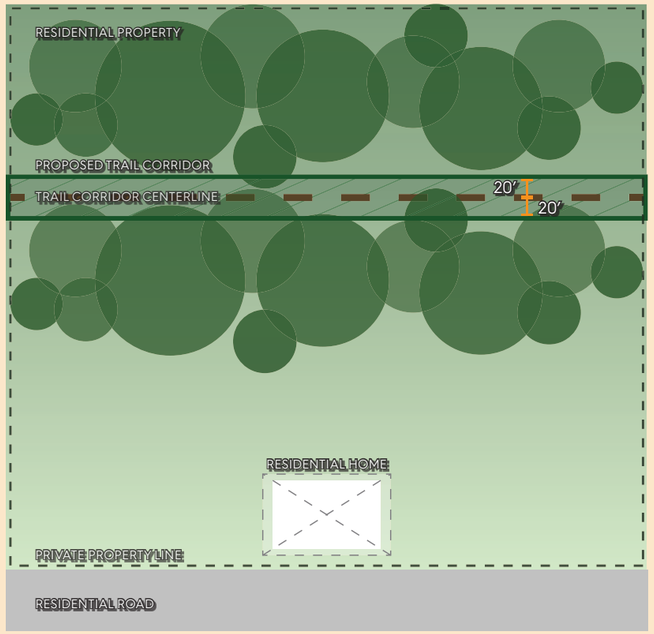
ALIGNMENT-BASED EASEMENTS

An alignment-based easement defines a narrow area centered on a specific, surveyed trail centerline, typically extending 10 to 20 feet to either side of that centerline, for a total corridor width of 20-40 feet. **This approach gives the landowner greater certainty** about the precise location of the trail on their property and is often more palatable to landowners who are concerned about trail proximity to their home, agricultural operations, or other sensitive areas.

CORA's trail crews are equipped with Trimble GPS equipment capable of accurately mapping trail alignments and generating georeferenced exhibits suitable for use in easement documents. In cases where the trail has been field-designed and GPS-surveyed prior to easement execution, an alignment-based easement description can be generated directly from the survey data. Alternatively, some easements in Northern Kentucky have been described by reference to a plat (a surveyed map attached as an exhibit to the easement) which provides a precise graphical description of the easement area.

In situations similar to those encountered by Duke Energy or other utility providers, it may also be acceptable to describe the easement area using a general description or a sketch without precise dimensions, particularly for informal or license-type arrangements. The appropriate level of precision should be determined based on the permanence and complexity of the proposed trail.

TRAIL EASEMENT TYPES & REAL PROPERTY SCENARIOS



Scenario 1: Residential Property
A proposed trail corridor follows along a wooded hillside on private property. The trail corridor traverses property line in the forest far away from the home and poses little potential for disruption.

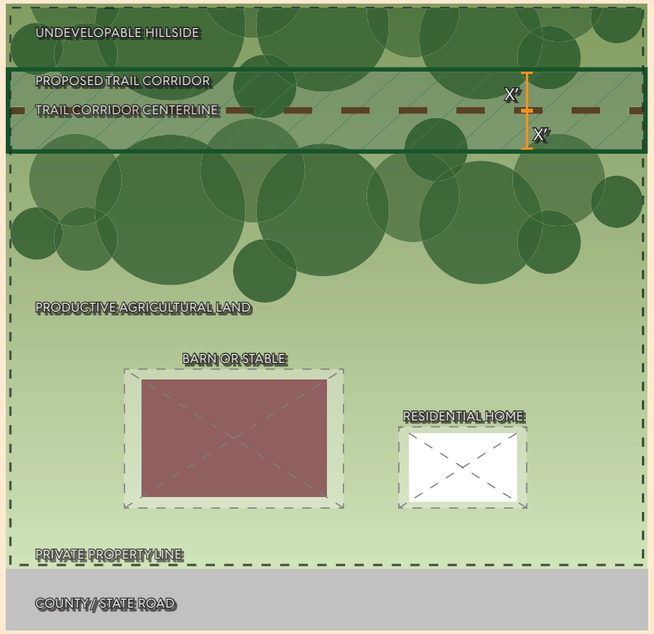
Agreement Type: Perpetual Easement for a Linear Corridor

Easement area defined as:
"Twenty feet on either side of surveyed trail centerline"

- Landowner retains all property rights outside the corridor.
- KRS § 411.190 provides liability protection to the homeowner.

LANDOWNER ENGAGEMENT

TRAIL EASEMENT TYPES & REAL PROPERTY SCENARIOS

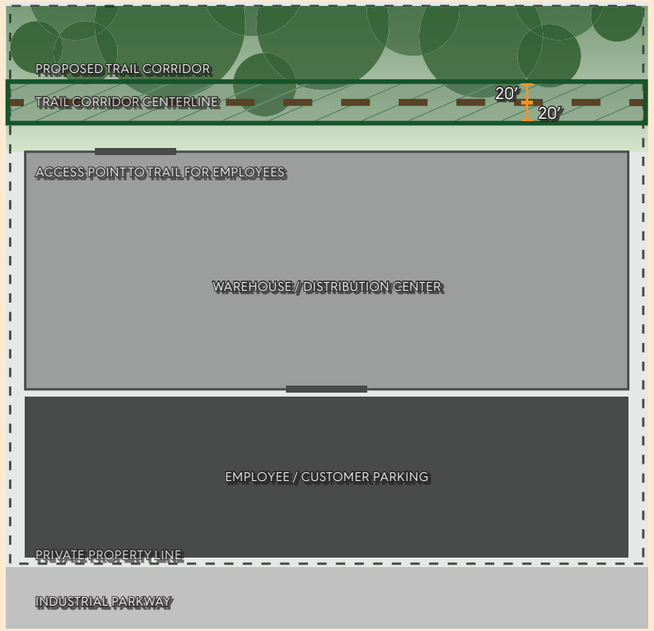


Scenario 2: Agricultural Property
A productive farm on agricultural land with a farmstead near the public right-of-way. The rear of the property is undevelopable wooded hillside - the ideal location for a broad corridor easement where the trail runs through the woods, far from any residences.

Agreement Type: Perpetual Easement for a Broad Corridor

Easement area defined as:
"The wooded parcel north of the field edge as shown on Exhibit A."

- Trails located away from farming operations is a key negotiating point.
- Tax deductions may apply for donated easement value.



Scenario 3: Commercial/Industrial Property
A warehouse or distribution center has a landscaped buffer strip on the outskirts of the property where a trail easement or license runs through. This spur connection creates a useful trail for commuters or people visiting businesses.

Agreement Type: Easement or License to Use

- A license provides flexibility if the property may redevelop.
- A recorded easement provides stronger permanence.
- Frame as a benefit to employees with zero maintenance costs to the property owner.

EASEMENT VALUE AND TAX CONSIDERATIONS

For many landowners, particularly those with larger parcels, the donation of a trail easement may qualify for a **federal income tax deduction as a charitable contribution**. This potential benefit can be a meaningful incentive, and a significant factor in the financial calculus of participation, but it must be handled carefully and with appropriate professional guidance.

This section is provided for general informational purposes only. CORA, Tri-State Trails, and its partners are not tax advisors, and nothing in this plan should be construed as legal or tax advice. Landowners interested in exploring the tax implications of a trail easement donation should consult a qualified attorney or certified public accountant with experience in conservation easement transactions.

VALUING A TRAIL EASEMENT

The value of a donated trail easement is generally determined by a qualified appraisal conducted by a licensed real estate appraiser, using the **"before and after" method**: the value of the property before the easement is subtracted from its value after the easement, and the difference is the easement value. For trail easements across residential or commercial property, the reduction in value associated with the easement may be modest; for large rural parcels where the easement could restrict certain development options, the reduction may be more substantial.

To qualify as a deductible charitable contribution under federal law, a conservation easement must meet the requirements of Internal Revenue Code Section 170(h). The donation must be made to a qualified organization (such as a land trust or nonprofit with a conservation purpose), must be perpetual, and must serve a recognized conservation purpose, which can include providing public recreational access. The Land Trust Alliance (www.landtrustalliance.org) publishes detailed guidance on conservation easement tax law and has advocated for landowner-friendly policies at the federal level.

RELEVANT RESOURCES

The following organizations publish guidance on easement value, tax deductions, and the mechanics of conservation transactions that may be applicable to trail easement situations:

- **Land Trust Alliance:** Standards and Practices for Land Trusts; IRS Form 8283 guidance
- **Trust for Public Land:** Conservation finance resources and easement transaction support
- **Internal Revenue Service:** Publication 526 (Charitable Contributions); IRS Form 8283 (Non-Cash Charitable Contributions)
- **Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund:** State-level resources for land conservation in Kentucky
- **National Park Service:** Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and trails funding

Landowners should also consult the Kentucky Revised Statutes governing charitable deductions and any applicable local or state tax incentive programs.

LANDOWNER ENGAGEMENT

HOW CORA HOLDS AND TRANSFERS TRAIL EASEMENTS

Cincinnati Off-Road Alliance is an Ohio nonprofit corporation registered to conduct business in Kentucky as Cincinnati Off-Road Alliance Incorporated. CORA has the legal capacity to hold perpetual trail easements on behalf of the public trail network, and its standard easement template explicitly conveys this authority.

CORA's role in easement holding reflects a practical reality in trail development: public entities such as cities, counties, and park districts are often not yet organized or funded to manage an easement at the time the trail is first developed. CORA acts as an interim steward, securing and managing the easement until a permanent public manager is in place and then transfers the easement to the appropriate governmental or quasi-governmental entity.

Granting the easement to a nonprofit such as CORA also allows **tax deductions that may not be possible donating straight to governmental agencies**. Some park departments may also have their own "Friends of the Park" nonprofit that may similarly be able to handle such a transaction, with the possibility of conveying the easement to a government agency immediately, or at a later time as is appropriate.

ASSIGNMENT AND TRANSFER PROVISIONS

CORA's Perpetual Trail Easement template includes an explicit provision granting the right to assign the easement to a government agency. Specifically, the easement grants CORA the right to "grant an easement to government agencies that will allow, but not obligate, such government agencies, their successors, lessees, and assigns to share with the Grantee all of the rights, limitations and privileges given to the Grantee in this Easement." This language ensures that as the regional trail network matures and public entities take on greater trail stewardship roles, the legal foundation of the trail, the easement itself, can be smoothly transferred.

Potential transferee entities in Northern Kentucky include the Boone, Campbell, and Kenton county governments, municipal park departments, land conservancies, and any future regional trail authority. CORA coordinates with local government partners to identify the most appropriate long-term easement holder for each trail segment.

RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM COMPLIANCE

Easements also addresses a specific federal funding concern. Trails funded through the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), authorized under 23 U.S.C. § 206, require that grantees maintain certain public access and use obligations as a condition of funding. Easement template language preserves the ability to comply with RTP requirements even where those requirements may impose constraints or obligations not anticipated at the time of easement execution. Landowners who allow their property to be included in an RTP-funded trail project benefit from federally supported trail construction and management at no cost to themselves.

LOCAL EXAMPLES: EASEMENTS ALREADY IN PROGRESS

Northern Kentucky's trail development community does not need to theorize about landowner engagement – it is already happening. The following examples demonstrate that private landowners in the region are willing to participate in the trail network when approached with professionalism, transparency, and a clear articulation of mutual benefit.

ASHLEY DEVELOPMENT

Ashley Development has demonstrated a proactive approach to trail access by providing trail easements as properties within its developments are subdivided. Rather than treating trail corridors as an afterthought, Ashley Development has incorporated easement areas into the subdivision plat process — a model that benefits the trail network by securing permanent access at the moment of maximum flexibility in the development process, and benefits the developer by creating a built-in trail amenity that can be marketed to prospective buyers. Trail planning staff should use Ashley Development's approach as a template for conversations with other active developers in Boone, Campbell, and Kenton counties.

FISCHER HOMES / SUNROCK FARM

Fischer Homes, one of the region's most active residential builders, is planning to incorporate trail easements into its Sunrock Farm development. This represents a significant opportunity to secure trail connectivity through what will become an established residential community, at a stage when trail corridors can be incorporated into the site plan without compromising the development's design, during geotechnical engineering, and for implementation during grading. The Sunrock Farm easements, when executed, will serve as another tangible local example of responsible development that integrates trails as essential community infrastructure.

EONS PRESERVE

The Eons Preserve area represents a developing but potentially significant opportunity for large-scale private land access in the region. Corporex, the major landowner in the Eons area, is engaged in ongoing discussions with the Eons Preserve Foundation regarding conservation and recreational access arrangements. Sanitation District 1 is the other major property manager, with a desire to support this novel community asset. While the details of any future easement or conservation agreement are not yet finalized, the Eons Preserve framework could ultimately contribute significant natural-surface trail access to the regional network, connecting established trail systems with one of the region's most distinctive natural landscapes.

LANDOWNER ENGAGEMENT

A NOTE TO LANDOWNERS

First and foremost, no one will ever require you to grant access to your property for a trail. Participation is entirely voluntary. This plan identifies corridors where trail connections would be beneficial, but identified corridors are not mandates – they are opportunities. If a trail representative contacts you about a potential trail crossing, you are always free to decline.

If you are a landowner whose property lies within or adjacent to a proposed trail corridor in this plan, you may be wondering what participation in the regional trail network would actually mean for you.

If you are open to a conversation, here is what you can expect:

- A representative from CORA, Tri-State Trails, and/or your local government will reach out to introduce the trail project and explain what the proposed trail would look like on your property.
- You will have the opportunity to ask questions and express concerns before any agreement is discussed.
- If you are interested in proceeding, a professional trail crew can visit your property to evaluate potential alignments — at no cost to you — and work with you to identify a location that respects your concerns.
- If you ultimately agree to a trail crossing, the trail representative will draft an agreement that precisely defines the trail area, specifies what the trail representative will and will not do on your property, and describes your rights and protections.
- The trails organization or the government agency — not you — will be responsible for constructing and maintaining the trail.
- Kentucky law (KRS § 411.190 and KRS § 150.645) provides substantial liability protection to landowners who allow public recreational use of their property without charge.
- You may be eligible for a federal income tax deduction if you donate the easement as a charitable contribution. A qualified appraiser and attorney can help you evaluate this option.
- You retain ownership of your property and all uses of it that are not inconsistent with the trail easement area, including obtaining a loan on the property.

Trails change communities for the better. They improve public health, connect neighborhoods, support local businesses, and enhance property values. The landowners who have already partnered with CORA and local governments to make Northern Kentucky's trail network a reality have contributed something lasting and meaningful to their community. **If you have questions, we encourage you to reach out to CORA at coratrails.org or contact your local government officials.**

Licking River Greenway - Covington, KY

Breakfast on the Bridge - Purple People Bridge - Newport, KY

ACKNOWLEDGING OUR PARTNERS

Tri-State Trails and Cincinnati Off-Road Alliance would like to thank the many communities, partners, and stakeholders across Northern Kentucky who contributed their time, input, and local knowledge during this planning process. Your participation helped shape a plan that answers the needs and priorities of the region.

We also extend our sincere appreciation to OneNKY Alliance and its members for their leadership and investment in this effort, which made the development of this plan possible.

We look forward to working alongside our Northern Kentucky partners to advance implementation of the regional trail network.

To view the online interactive map, please visit our project website HERE.

MOVING FORWARD

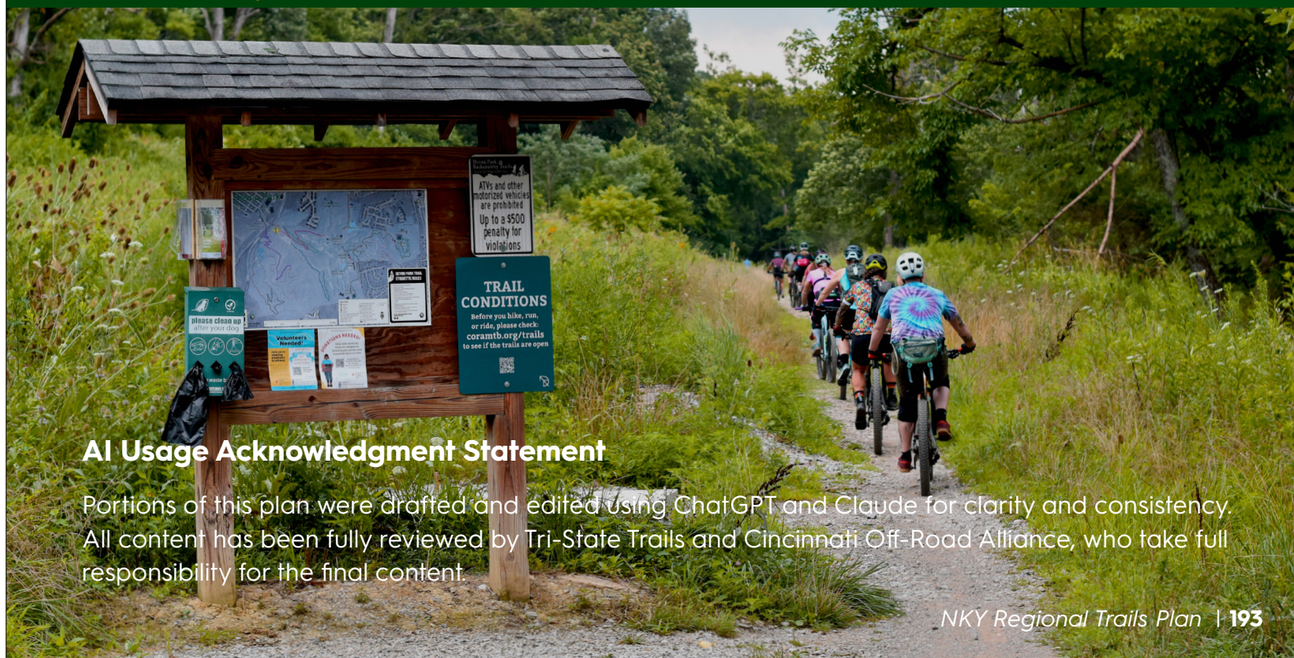
Northern Kentucky has a clear path forward for building a connected regional trail network. This plan identifies priority corridors, outlines realistic funding strategies, and reflects input from communities and partners across Boone, Campbell, and Kenton counties. It provides a framework that can guide decision-making and position projects for implementation.

Advancing this network will require coordination across jurisdictions, sustained funding, and local leadership to move projects from concept to construction. Some communities will take the lead on priority segments, while others will support through policy alignment, partnerships, and funding commitments. Regional partners will continue to play a key role in providing technical assistance, securing resources, and maintaining momentum.

As this network expands, Northern Kentucky has the opportunity to become a leading outdoor recreation destination, with a braided trail network that combines paved and natural surface trails to serve a wide range of users and experiences. A connected trail system expands transportation options, improves neighborhood connectivity, and increases transportation equity, while supporting economic development, attracting and retaining talent, improving public health, promoting environmental sustainability, and linking parks and recreation destinations across the region.

Progress will happen incrementally, but each completed segment strengthens the system and increases its regional impact. This plan establishes the foundation and framework. Moving projects forward will require continued coordination, funding, and local leadership.

Devou Park Backcountry Trails



AI Usage Acknowledgment Statement

Portions of this plan were drafted and edited using ChatGPT and Claude for clarity and consistency. All content has been fully reviewed by Tri-State Trails and Cincinnati Off-Road Alliance, who take full responsibility for the final content.

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Roebling Suspension Bridge - Covington, KY

NKY REGIONAL TRAILS PLAN

Tri-State Trails and the Cincinnati Off-Road Alliance (CORA) are building on years of work to expand trail and bikeway opportunities across Northern Kentucky. Recent initiatives include the Covington + Newport Bicycle Transportation Plan, authored by Tri-State Trails and adopted in 2024, and the Saratoga Street Bikeway, an ongoing planning effort in Newport. CORA continues to grow and maintain natural surface trails in parks across Northern Kentucky, including Sargeant Park in Dayton and Tower Park in Fort Thomas. Beyond building trails, CORA is actively involved in natural surface trail planning and stewardship, working to remove barriers, guide the process, and provide hands-on assistance to communities looking to expand and maintain their trail systems.

The NKY Regional Trails Plan builds on this momentum by envisioning a Braided Trail Network across Boone, Campbell, and Kenton counties. This interconnected system of paved and natural surface trails is envisioned to provide continuous routes that link communities and destinations while offering flexible options for people walking, biking, and exploring outdoors.

Inspired by leading cities like Bentonville, Boulder, Chattanooga, and Knoxville, the plan demonstrates how regional trail connectivity can strengthen communities, improve active transportation, and enhance quality of life. A Steering Committee of local, county, state, and regional partners has guided the process since March 2025, working to review existing conditions, refine proposed trail routes, and prioritize connections across the network.