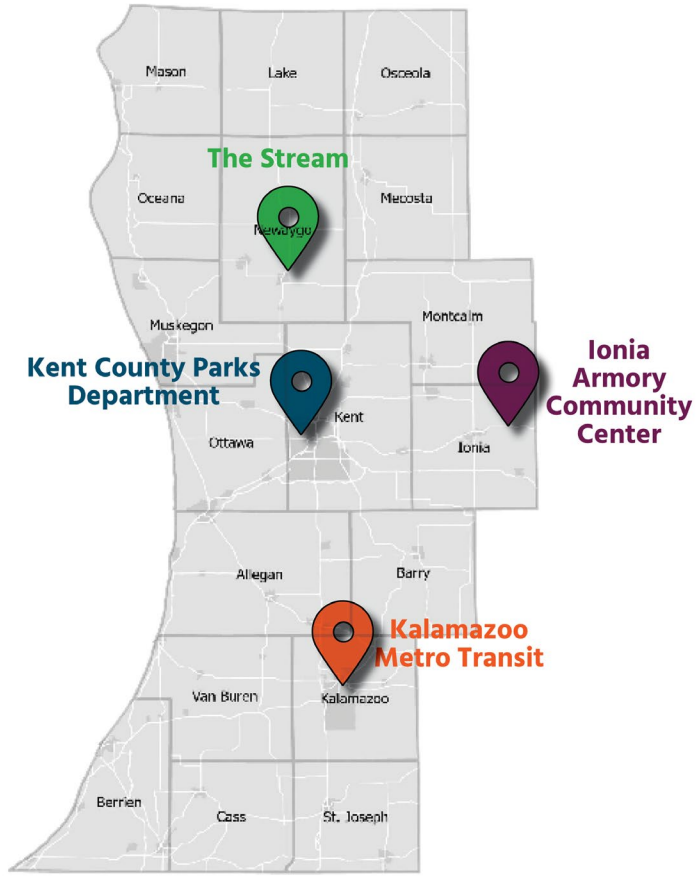
West Michigan Regional Trails Master Plan

WEST MICHIGAN trails

Non-motorized, Multi-use Pathways Connecting West Michigan Communities and Destinations



2024 Spring Trail Summits

March 20th and 21st

Meeting Input Tool

We will be using Mentimeter Through the Meeting Today

Go To:

Menti.com

Use Code:

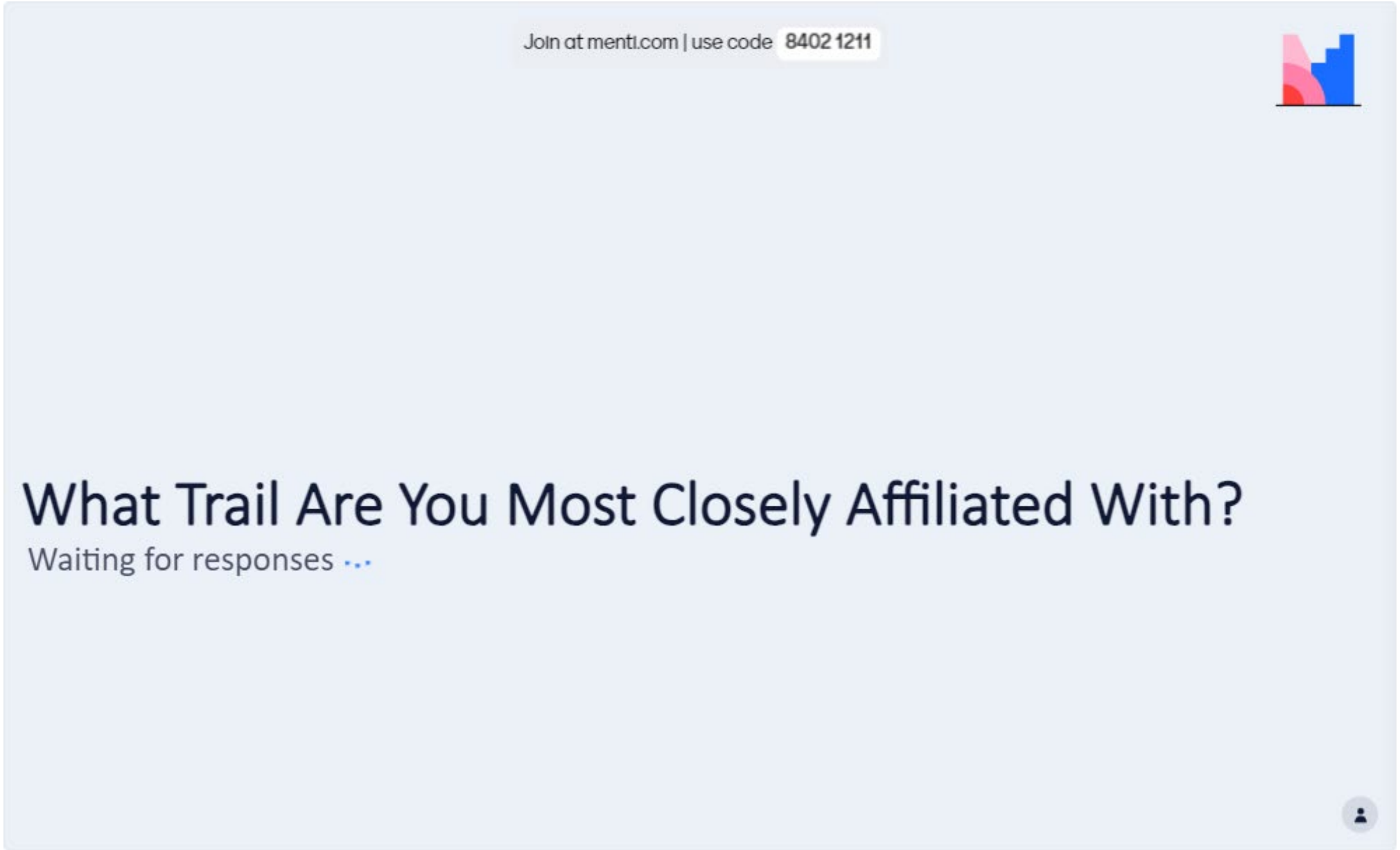
8402 1211

Or Scan the QR Code

Make sure to hit submit!

Beyond the formal input, you may ask questions

What Trail Are You Most Closely Affiliated With?



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What Type of Organization Are You With?

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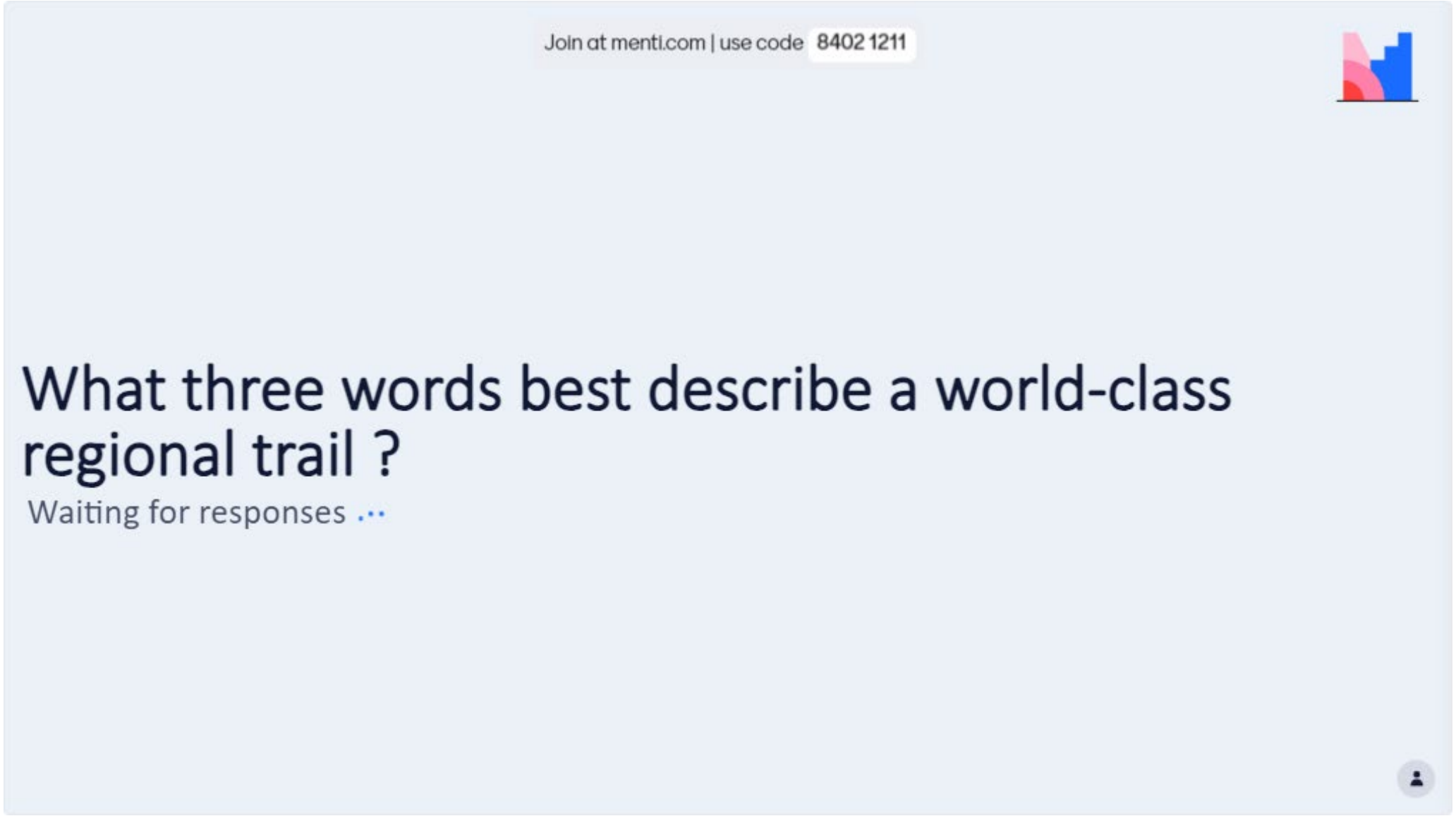
What Three Words Best Describe a World-Class Regional Trail?



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Introductions

Today's Agenda

- WMT Current Initiatives
- Survey Findings
- Regional Trail Impact Analysis

Break

- Sub-Region Gap and Trail Upgrade Planning
- Balancing Completing Gaps and Upgrading Trails
- Next Steps

West Michigan Trails Current Initiatives

West Michigan Trails is a regional non-profit with a mission to strategically engage organizations and entities to coordinate, execute, fund, and sustain the development of the West Michigan trail network.

Our vision is a world-class trail experience connecting West Michigan.

West Michigan Trails Current Initiatives

www.wmtrails.org

Regional Trails Master Plan

Need for a Master Plan

- Significant recent growth in non-motorized trails and bikeways
- Increase in funding requests begs the question, "What is priority?"
- Master Plan needed for cohesively growing and effectively funding the regional effort
- Need to increase equitable access to the network
- Regional plan can lead to cooperative multi-jurisdiction grant applications

Operations Assessment Update

Parallel Solutions, Megan Motil

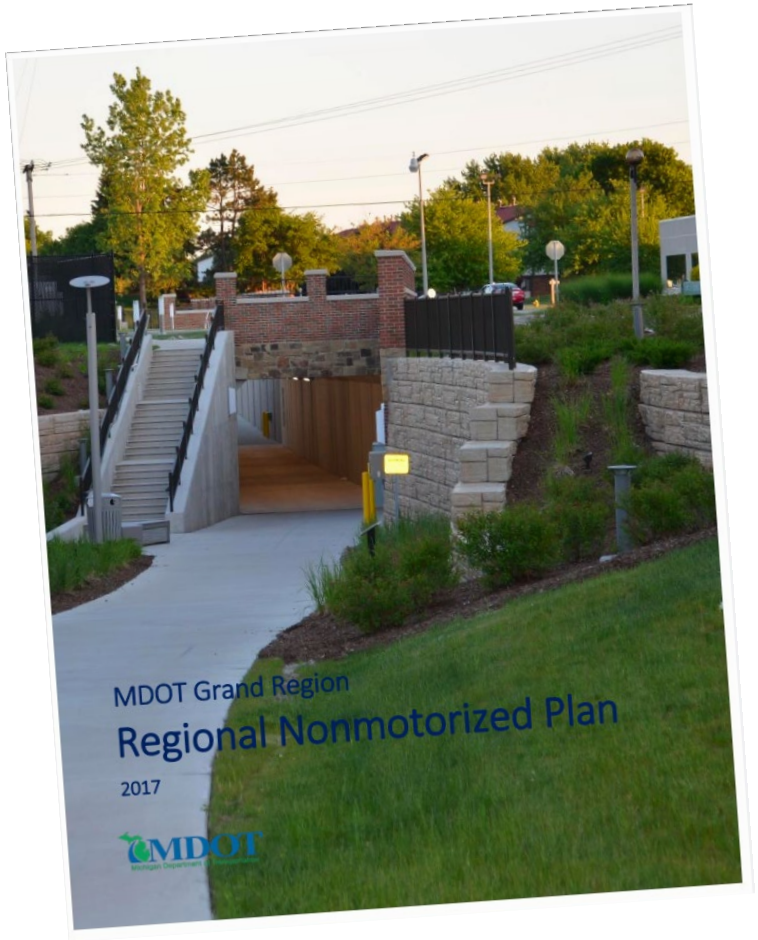
- Internal Assessments
- External Assessments
- Organizational Structure and Growth

Wayfinding Update

Consistent Regional Trail Signage

Wayfinding Update

MDOT Grand Region: Regional Nonmotorized Plan



These priorities are region-wide and involve and impact a number of agencies and organizations. They may or may not be MDOT specific priorities. The intent is to document priorities that impact and inform the region as a whole.

Coordinated + Consistent Wayfinding System for Regional Network

In coordination with a regional marketing effort, it is a priority in the region to work together to determine how to develop a coordinated and consistent wayfinding system for the regional network. This is particularly important where the regional networks traverse through cities and towns and where regional networks cross one another. This should include confidence markers to/from and between the regional network, coordinated emergency markers, and signage that encourages exploration of nearby amenities and destinations. *Signage packages should adhere to MUTCD standards.*

Wayfinding Update

A connected, visually consistent, and attractive wayfinding and regulatory signage framework across West Michigan will provide many benefits:

- Welcome new trail users by clearly explaining the allowed trail uses
- Encourage people to bicycle and walk by highlighting how easy it is to travel via trail
- Guide users through complicated or confusing transitions between dedicated trails and on-street routes
- Create awareness of the larger trail network
- Give trail users the confidence to explore farther than they normally would
- Promote key destinations that may be slightly off the trail
- Give first responders and trail users the tools to identify the location of an emergency

Wayfinding Update

Basic process involves four steps

1) Orientation: determining one's location
2) Decision Making: choosing and following a route
3) Confirmation: the "breadcrumbs" that let you know you're still on the correct route
4) Destination Recognition: "gateway" signs such as "Kalamazoo" or "Grand Rapids"

Wayfinding Update

Meets important regulatory guidelines:

- MUTCD: Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices
- AASHTO: American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
- Worked with:
  - State of Michigan MDOT and MDNR
  - State of Michigan EMS and 911
- Designed to work on Trails and on Roadways

Wayfinding Update

Sign samples

Trailhead Kiosk

Trailhead Vehicular

Wayfinding Update

Sign samples

Trail Directional

On-road Directional

Wayfinding Update

Sign samples

Trail and Street Name

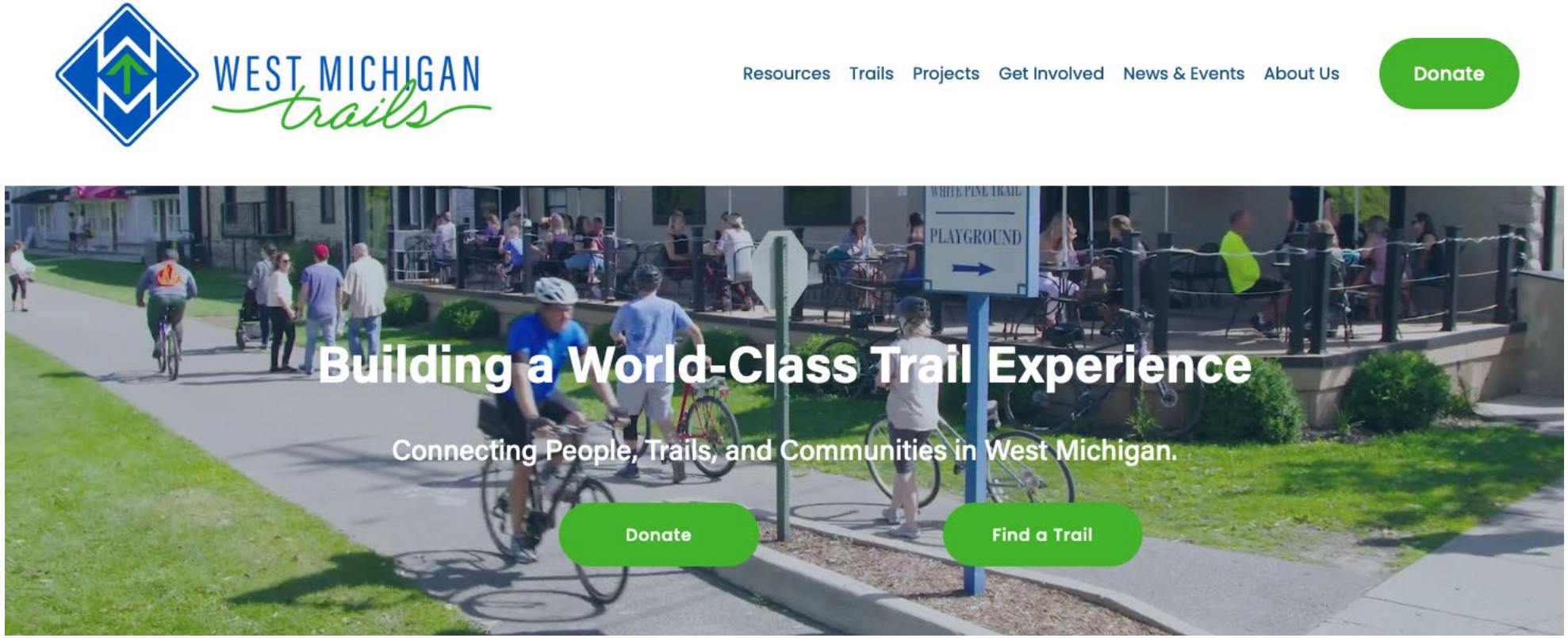
Mile marker

Confirmation

Wayfinding Update

Design Guide and Access to Design Templates

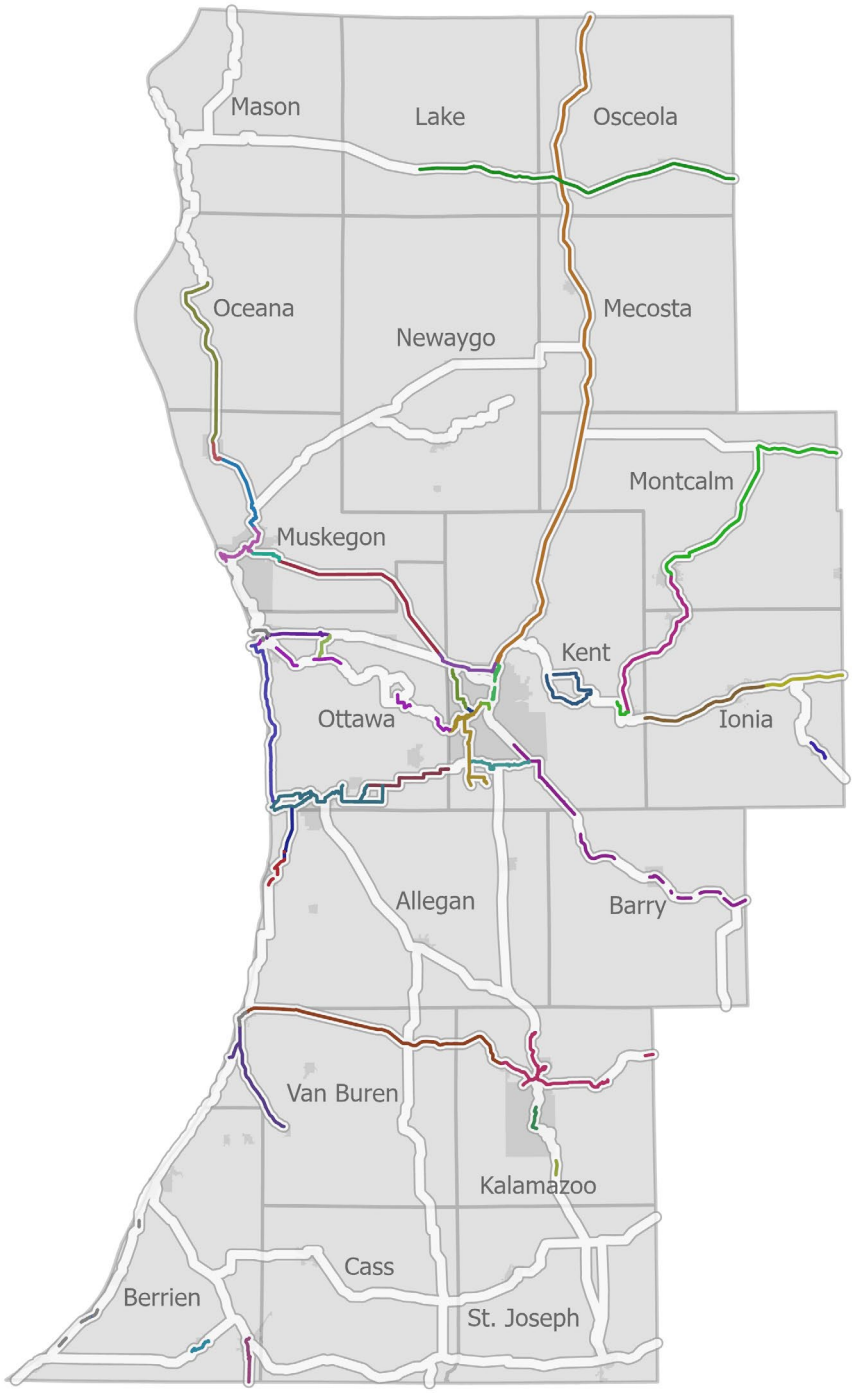
- www.wmtrails.org – hover over the Resources tab



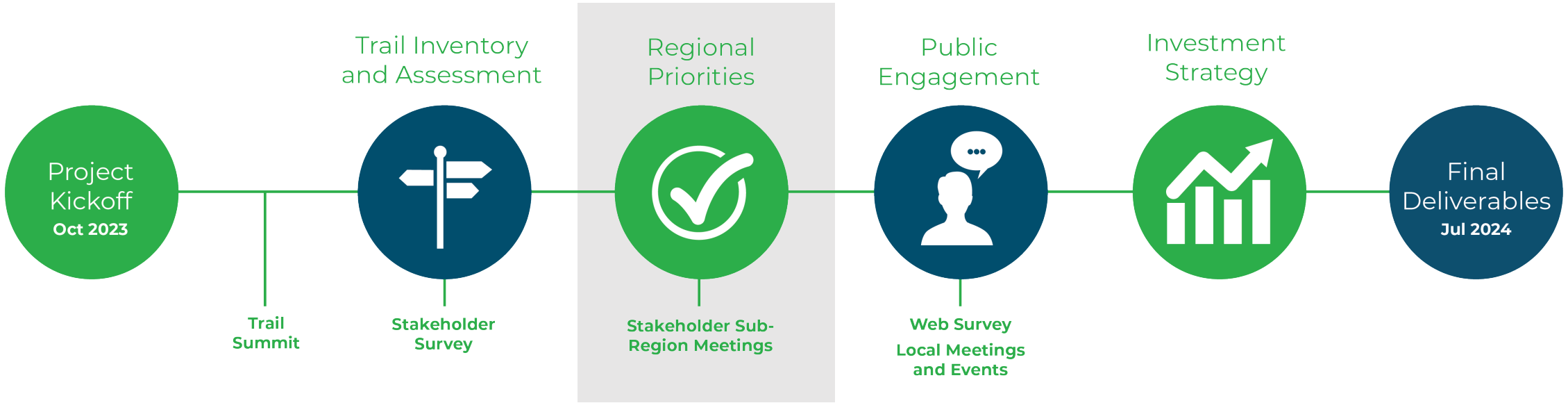
Regional Trail Network

What Are We Looking At Today?

- The focus is on Shared-use Paths and Cycle Tracks – Family Friendly Routes
- Existing or Already Planned Trails
- Not Every Trail in Every Town
- Focus on Regional Links
  - Not City Networks
  - Not Spur Trails
- **The Big Connections!**



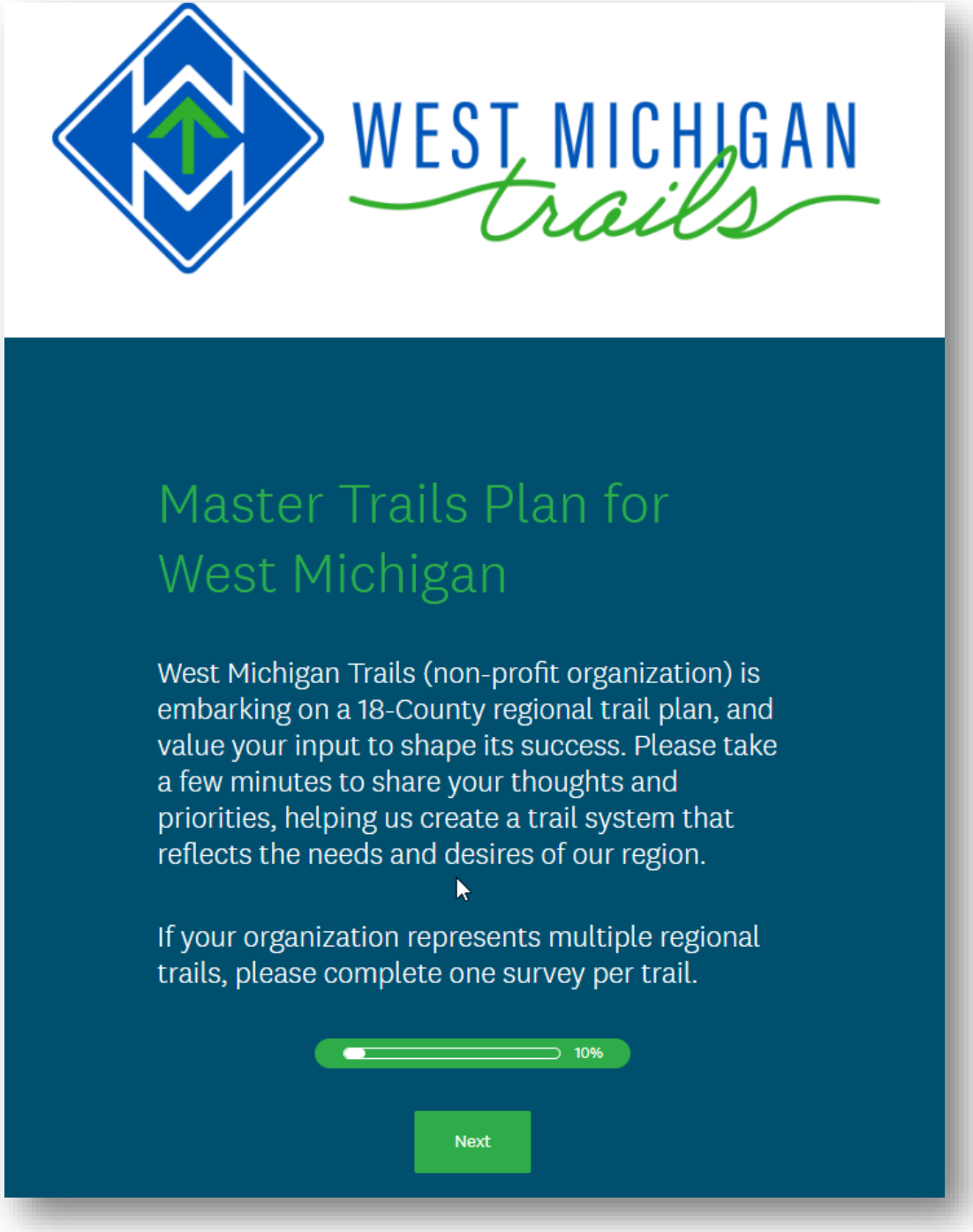
Timeline



- Project kicked off in October with the West Michigan Trail Summit
- Stakeholder Survey January and February
- Met with the Steering Committee in December and February

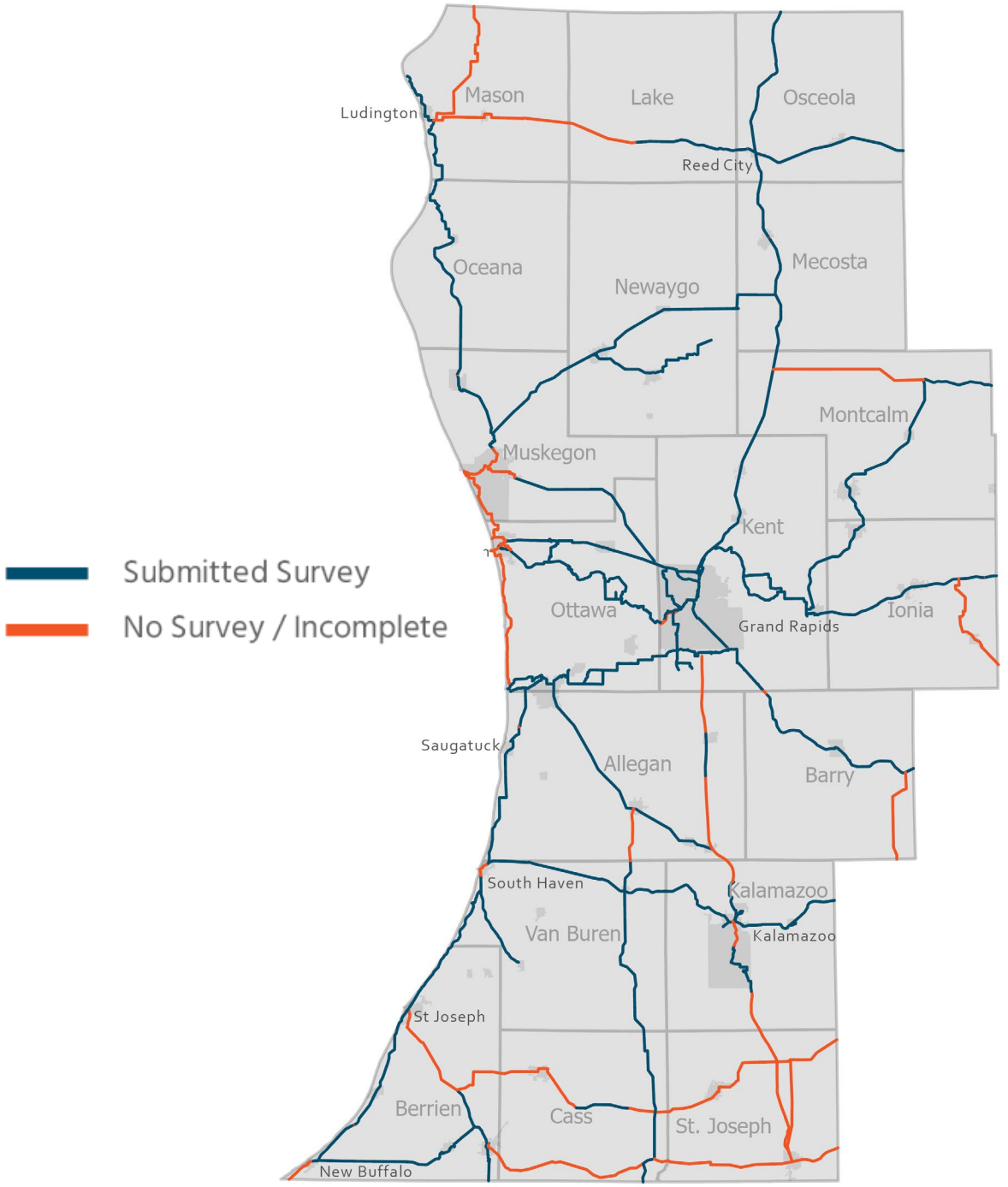
Stakeholder Survey

- The Purpose was to Collect Uniform Baseline Information on Existing and Planned Regional Trails
- Sent to Key Trail Stakeholders
- Included a Trail Self-Assessment



Participation and Information Gaps

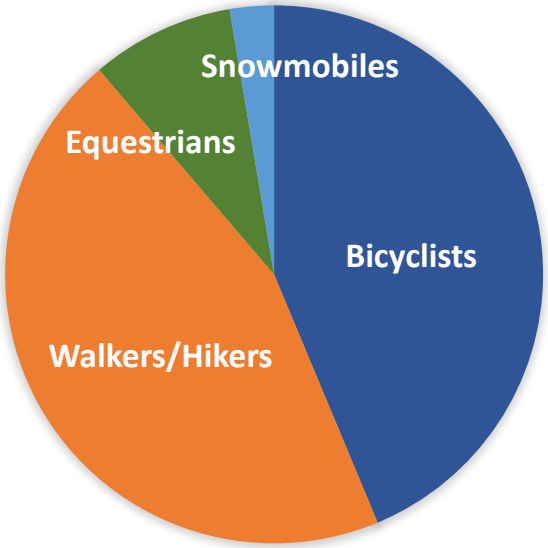
- 70+ surveys completed
- Some trails have multiple surveys submitted and some of have none
- Missing input from southern counites and some of the more rural areas
- Some connections may be too preliminary to push forward with this plan



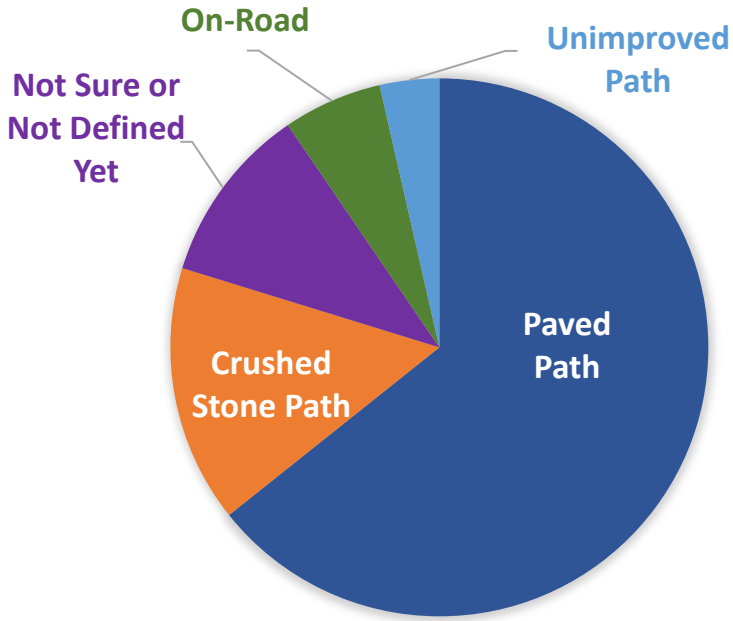
Trail Status and Facility Overview

WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATUS OF YOUR TRAIL

WHO IS ALLOWED ON THE TRAIL?

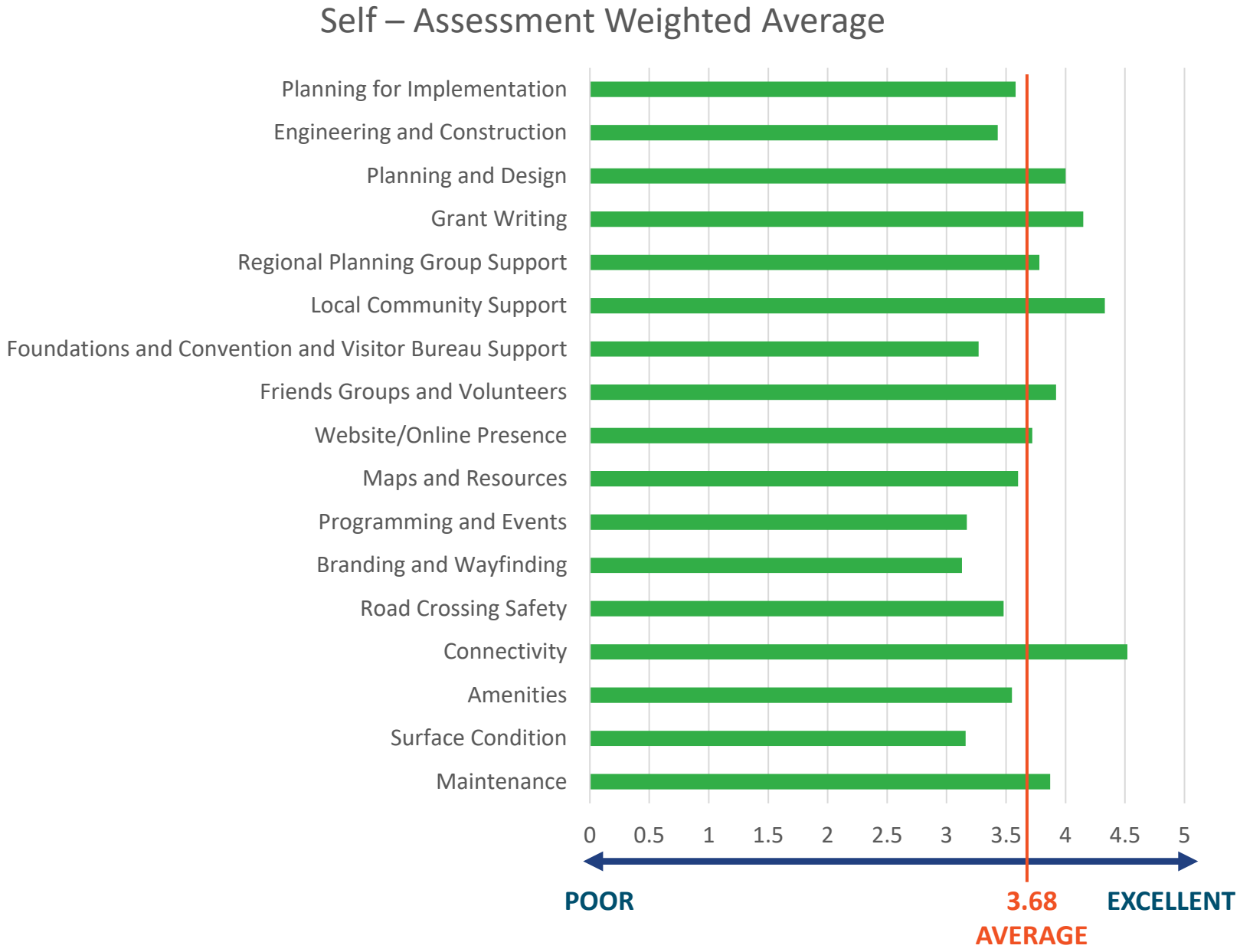


WHAT IS YOUR TRAIL FACILITY TYPE?



Self-Assessment

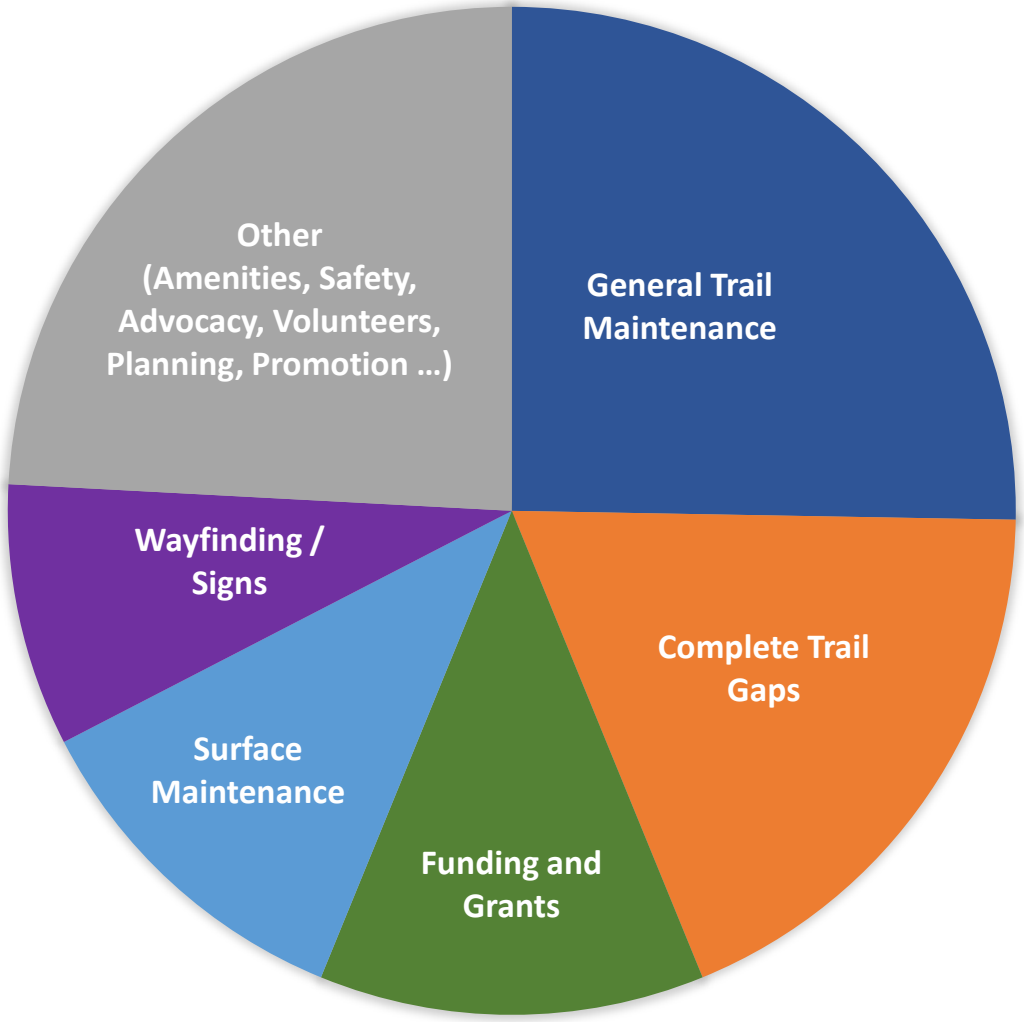
- Aligning expectations of what it means to be a World Class Trail



Trail Priorities

What are the top priorities for this trail?

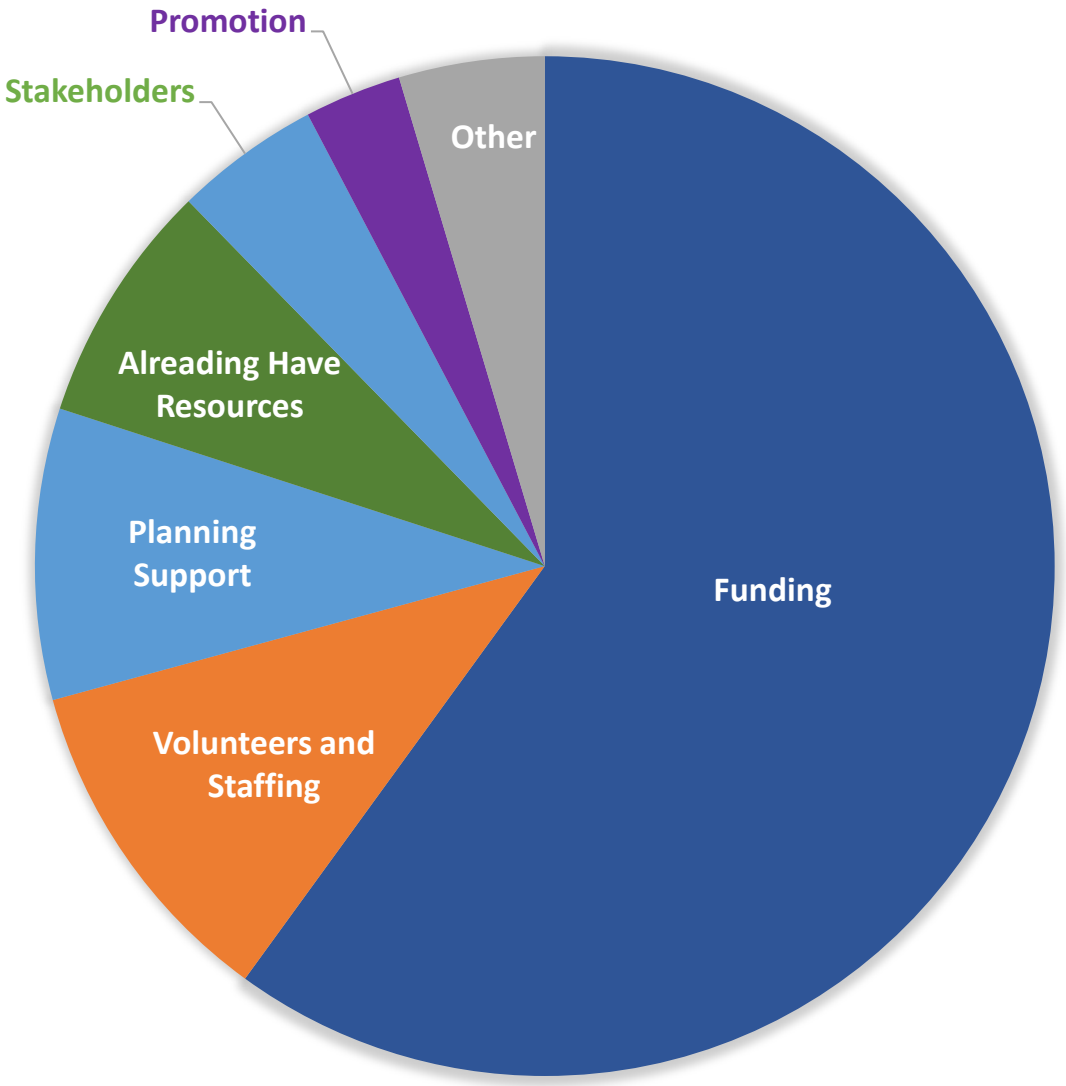
1. General Trail Maintenance
2. Complete Trail Gaps
3. Funding and Grants
4. Surface Maintenance
5. Wayfinding/Signs



Trail Resources

What resources do you need to address your top priorities and initiatives?

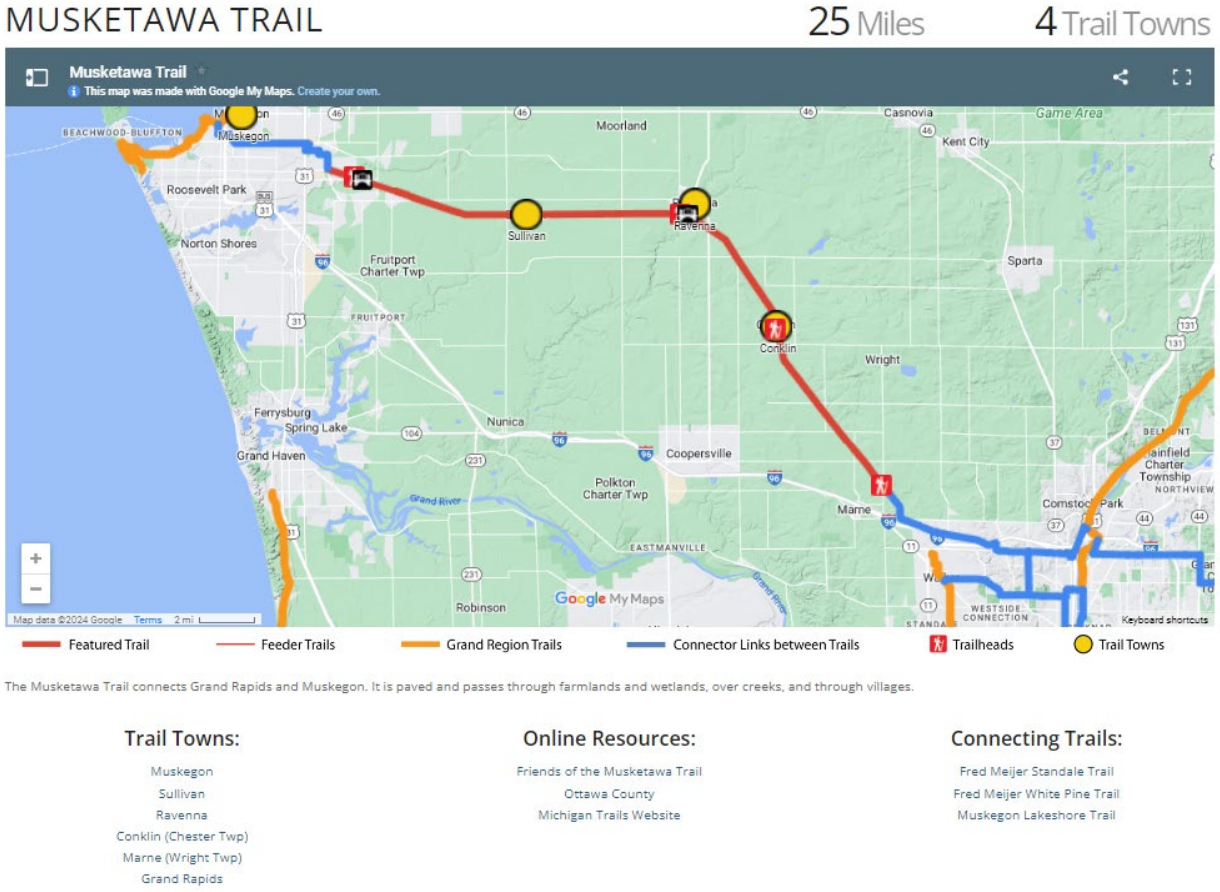
1. Funding
2. Volunteers and Staffing
3. Already Have Resources they Need
4. Planning Support
5. Promotion



Using Information for a Dashboard

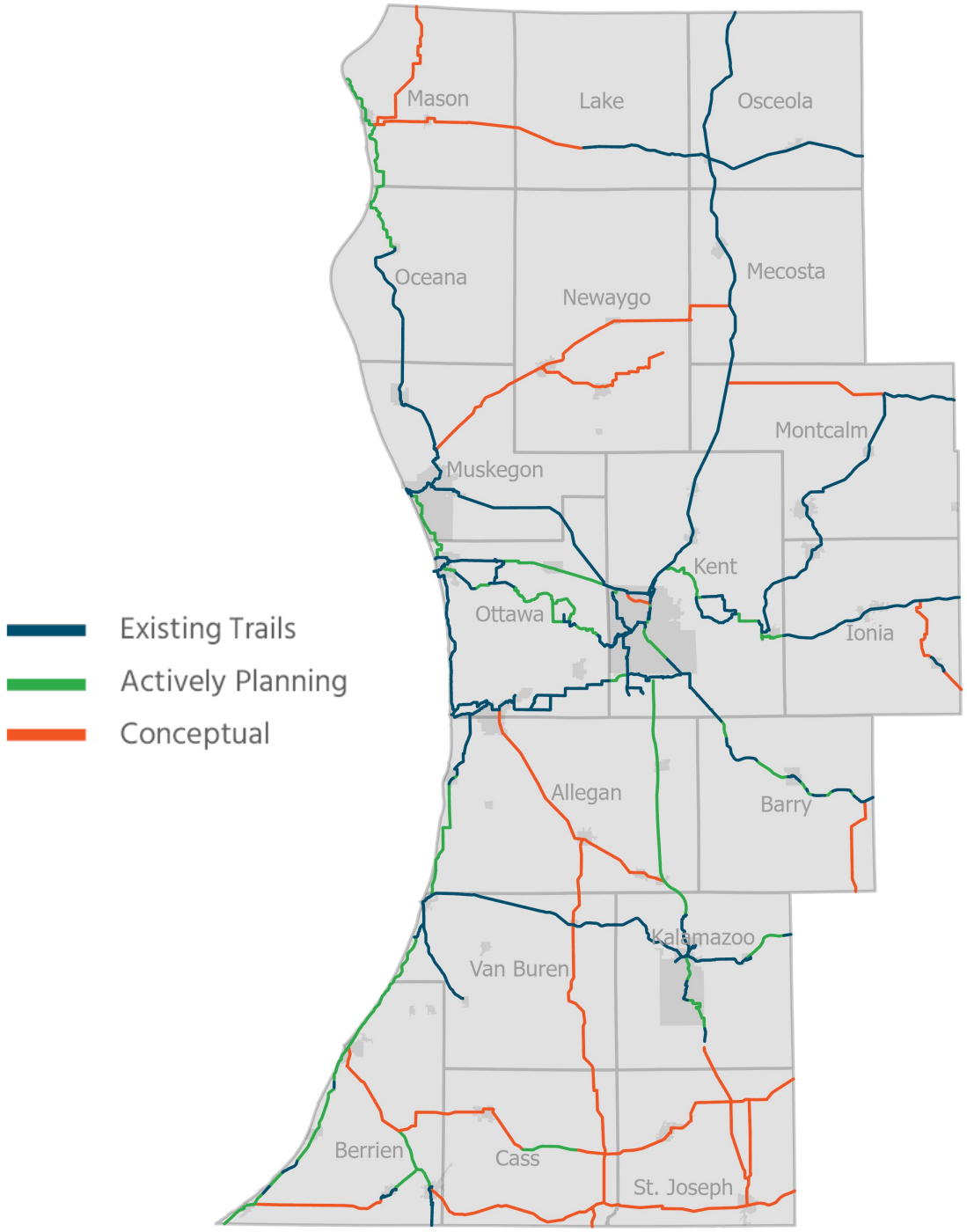
Majority of the feedback provides baseline data on specific trails. This information will be summarized in a dashboard:

- Trail Status and Facility Data
- Self Assessments
- Current Initiatives
- Contact Information



Updated Planning Map

- Updated based on survey input and participation
- We anticipate this network to evolve through the planning process



Draft Regional Trail Impact Analysis

Disclaimers:

- This is a decision support tool, not a decision-making tool
- Looking at 18 counties and 50+ trails requires a space station perspective
- Utilized many data inputs in the analysis
- Subjective scoring based on underlying data
- Ranked entire trails or 15-20 mile segments
- Higher Score = Higher Impact

Does not include an analysis for political support ☺

Draft Regional Trail Impact Analysis

Community Impact

Assesses the potential contribution of existing and proposed trail segments to the local community, considering equitable access, connectivity to destinations, safety, and route comfort.

Trail Life Stage

Identifying the life stage of a trail to tailor support and interventions accordingly, acknowledging differences between new trails in their infancy and older trails requiring different types of support.

Investment Impact

Evaluates existing trail conditions and proposed trail gaps to maximize value and assess the return on investment, ensuring optimal resource allocation.

Local Support

Documents local support based on public input and community feedback, fostering a holistic perspective that incorporates local needs and preferences.

A data-driven tool to aid decision-making regarding regional trail investments when funding becomes available

Community Impact

Assesses the potential contribution of existing and proposed trail segments to the local community, considering equitable access, connectivity to destinations, safety, and route comfort.

- Criteria based on equitable access; connectivity to destinations; and safety and comfort of the route
- Each criteria was rated independently with a resulting composite score
- Assessing existing and proposed trails full potential

Equity

- Climate Change
- Energy
- Health
- Housing
- Legacy Pollution
- Transportation
- Water and Wastewater
- Workforce Development

Destinations

- Access to population centers
- Access to rural town centers
- Access to parks and recreation

Safety & Comfort

- Traffic Safety: The goal is to minimize potential hazards at intersections and crossings, including railroads and major roadways.
- Route Stress: The emphasis is on promoting family-friendly pathways situated away from vehicular traffic, such as off-road trails.
- Environmental Stressors: Priority is given to providing a comfortable and aesthetically pleasing journey for trail users.

Community Impact - Equity

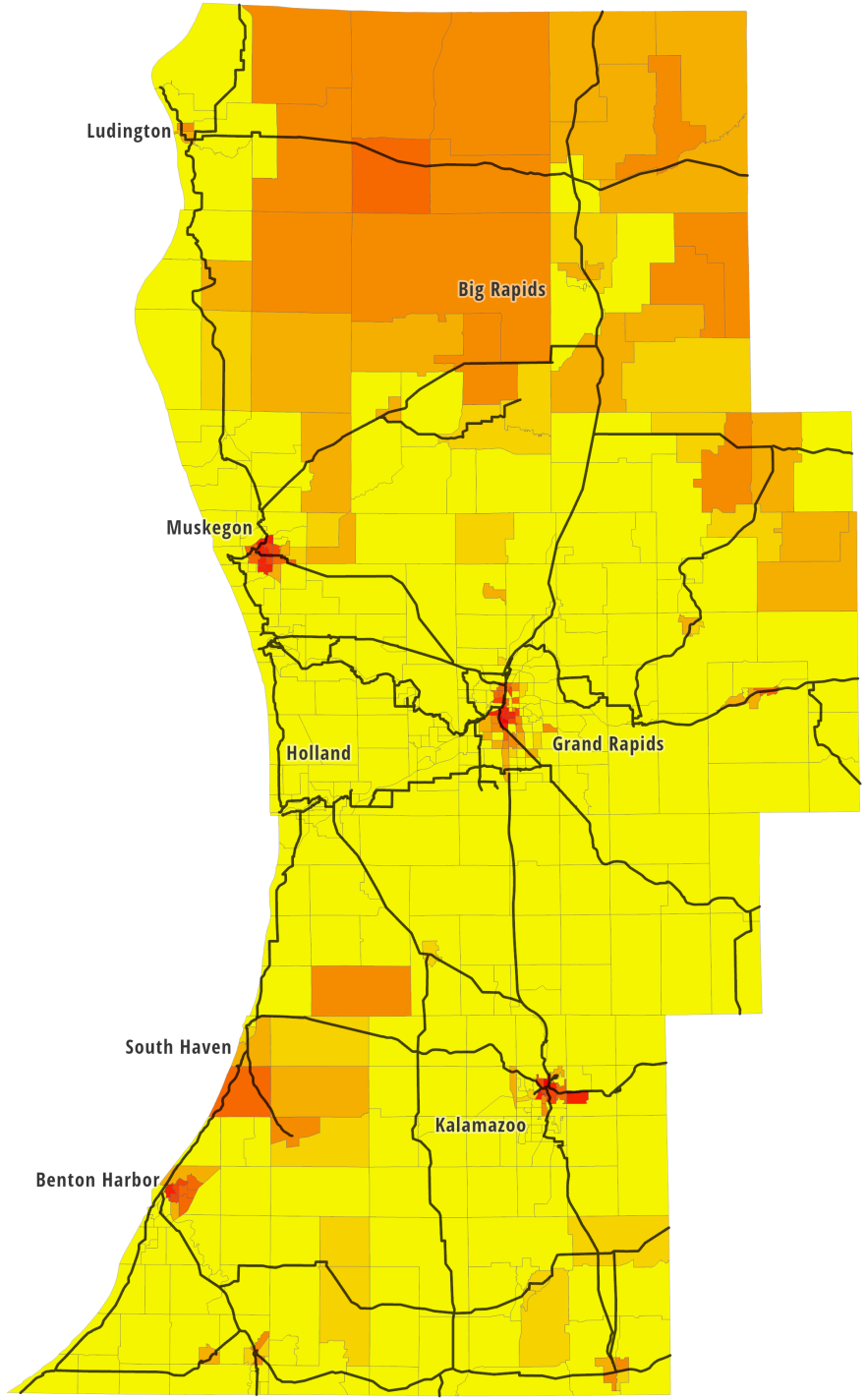
Disadvantaged Areas

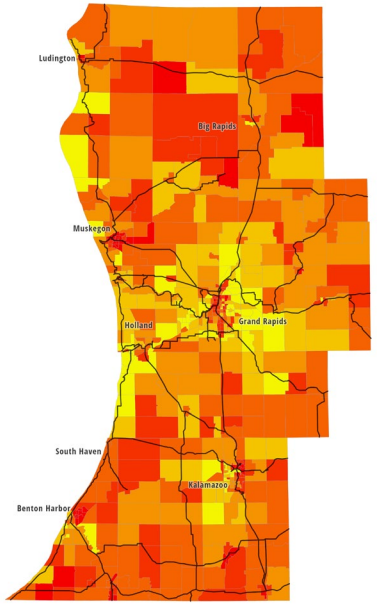
The Census Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool identifies disadvantaged communities nationwide

Criteria:

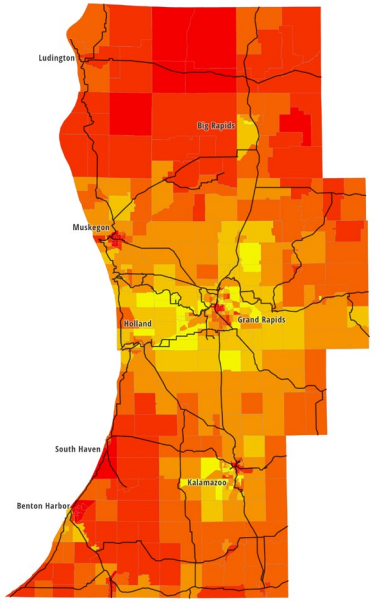
- Climate Change
- Energy
- Health
- Housing
- Legacy Pollution
- Transportation
- Water and Wastewater
- Workforce Development

Census Tracts that are overburdened and underserved are highlighted in the darker shades of orange

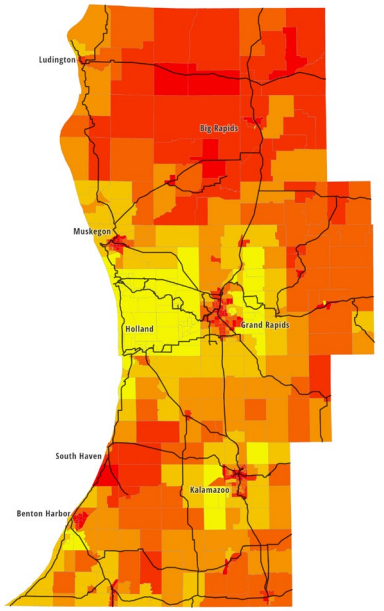




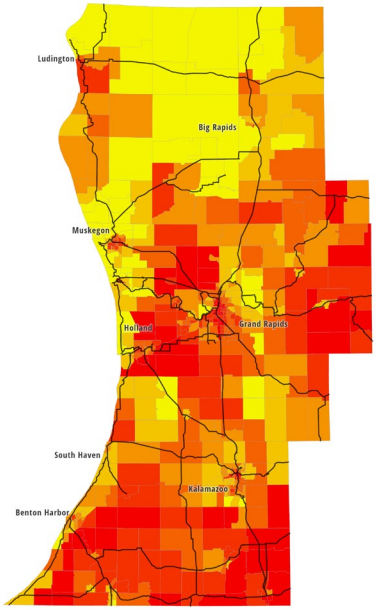
LIFE EXPECTANCY



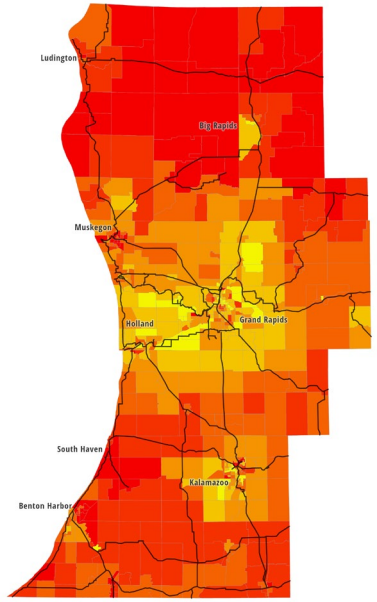
DIABETES



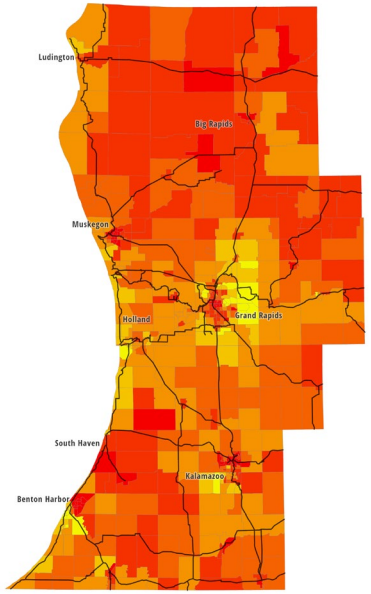
LOW MEDIAN INCOME



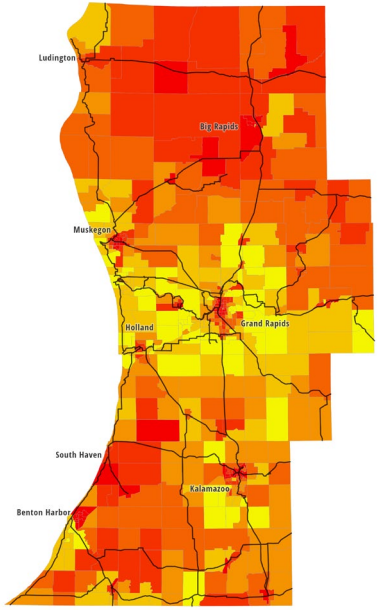
LACK OF GREENSPACE



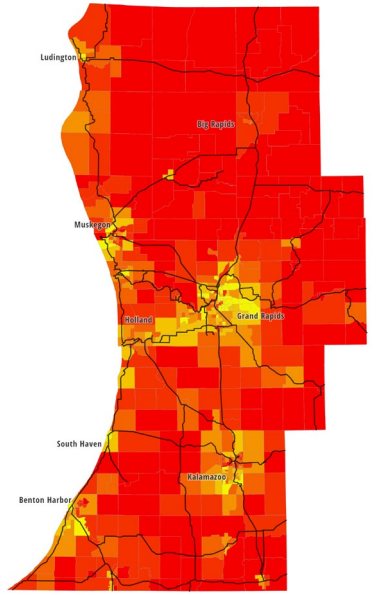
HEART DISEASE



ASTHMA



POVERTY



TRANSPORTATION BARRIER

Community Impact - Destinations

Access to Population Centers

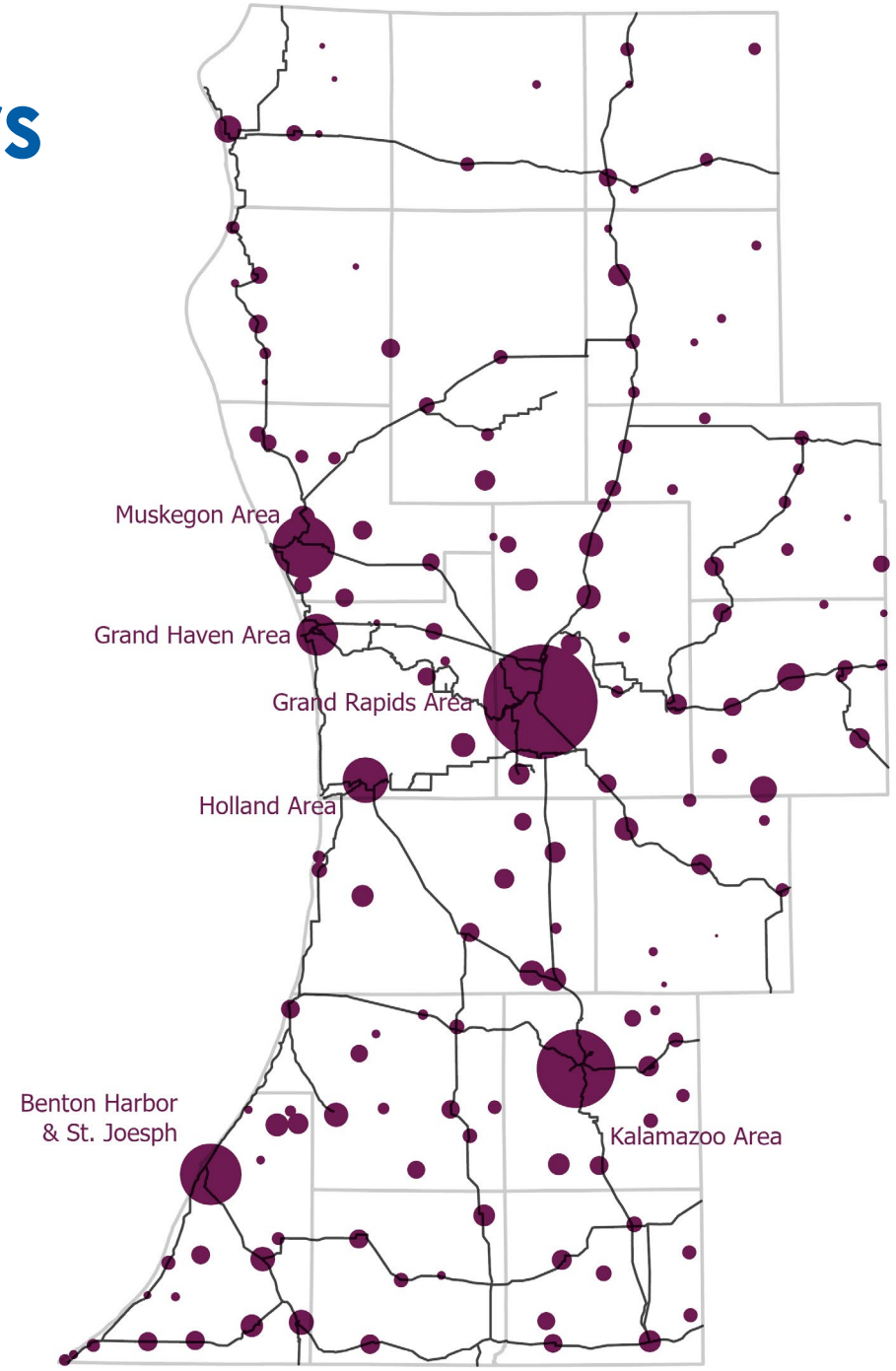
Criteria:

- Population density of a city, town, village, or place

Based on metropolitan area rather than city boundary

Scoring:

1 to 5 with 5 having the highest population density



Community Impact - Destinations

Access to Rural Town Centers

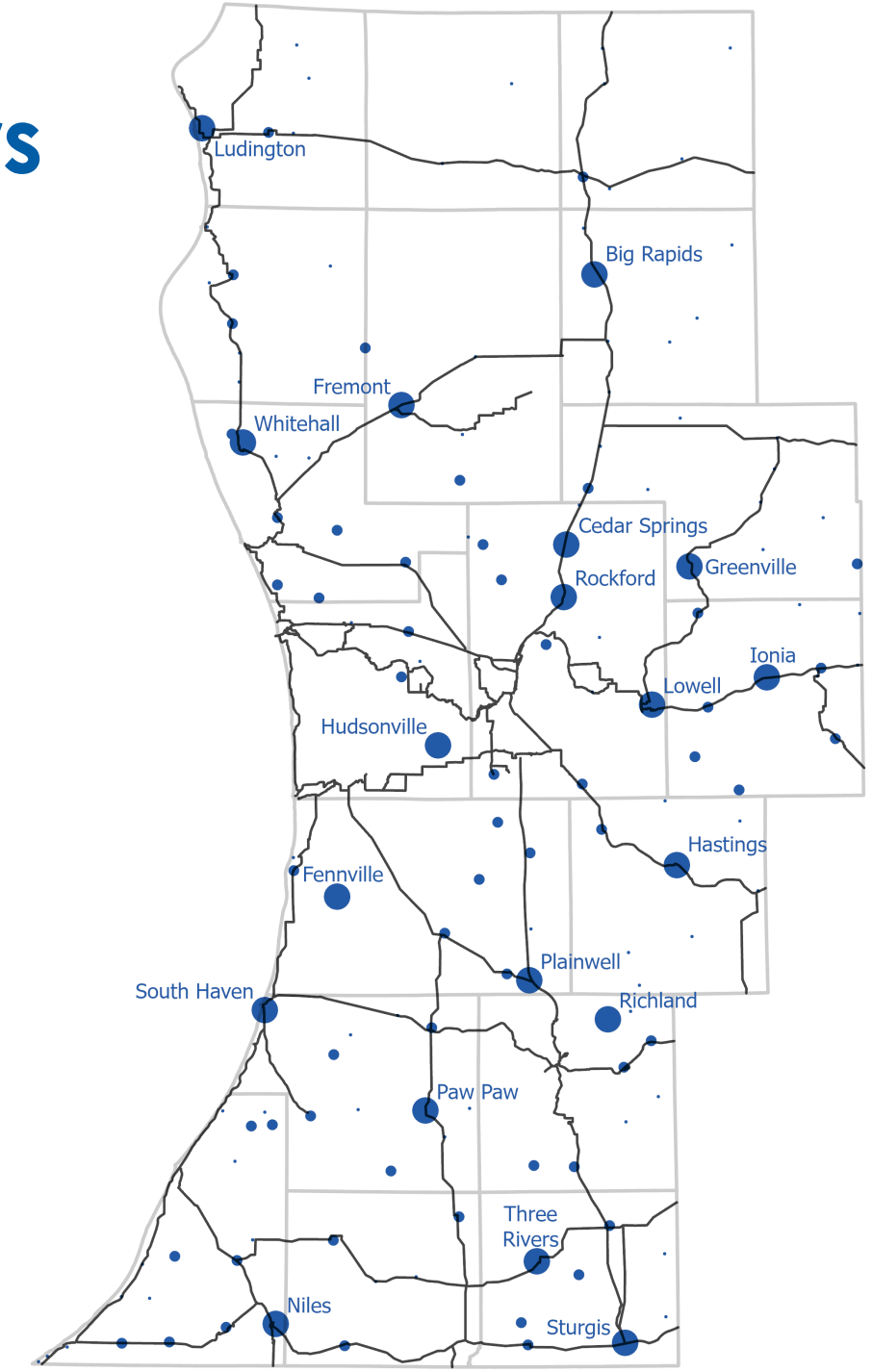
Criteria:

- Population density under 2000 people per square miles
- Larger Rural Town Centers defined by presence of Big Box Commercial (Walmart, Meijer)

Scoring:

1 - 2 points for Smaller Rural Town Centers

3 points for Larger Rural Town Centers



Community Impact - Destinations

Access to Parks and Recreation

Criteria:

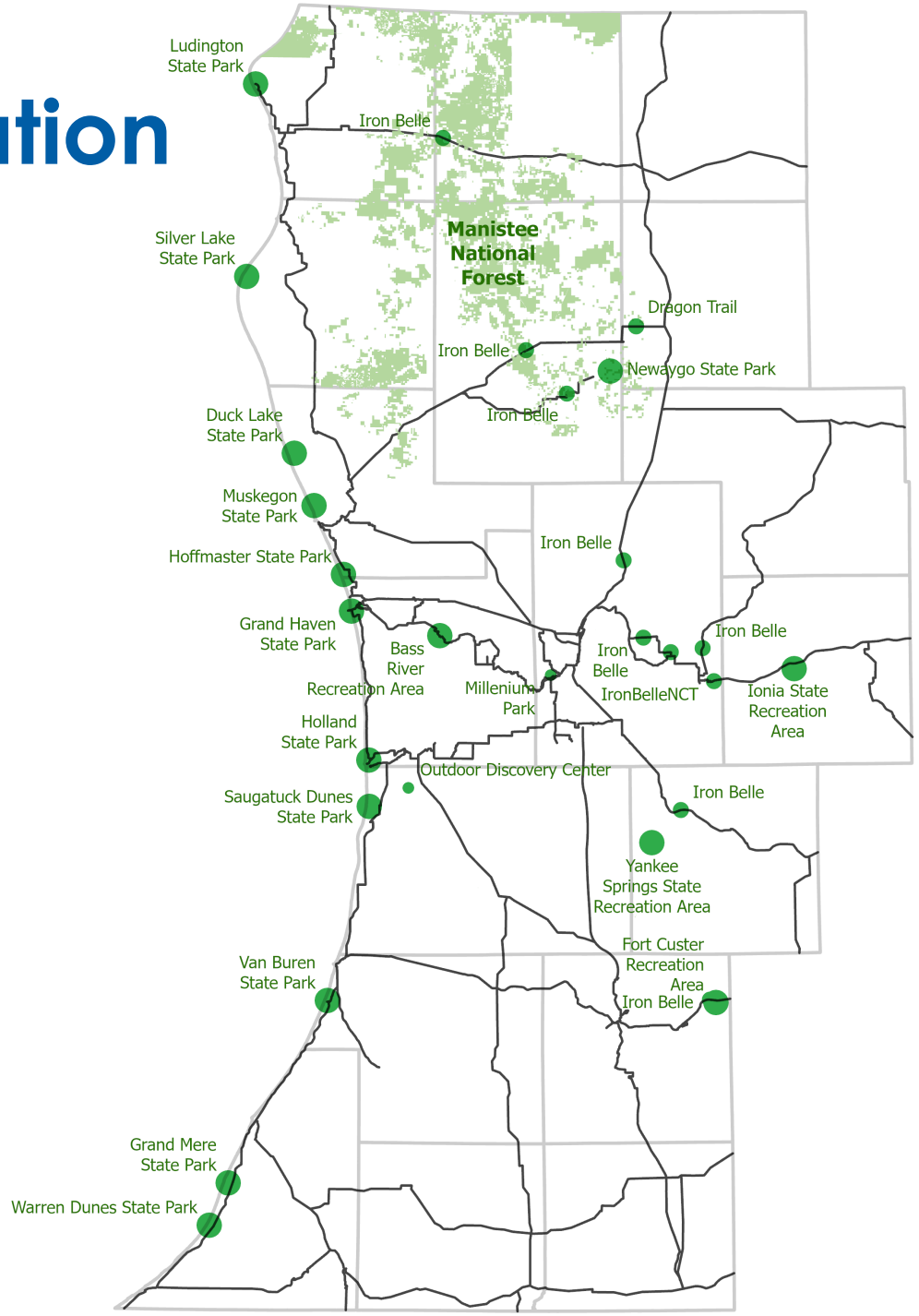
- Regionally significant parks, recreation areas, and major trail networks

Examples:

State Park and Recreation Areas, Iron Belle Trail, and the Dragon Trail

Scoring :

1 to 5 with 5 being the most destinations



Community Impact – Safety and Comfort

Traffic Safety

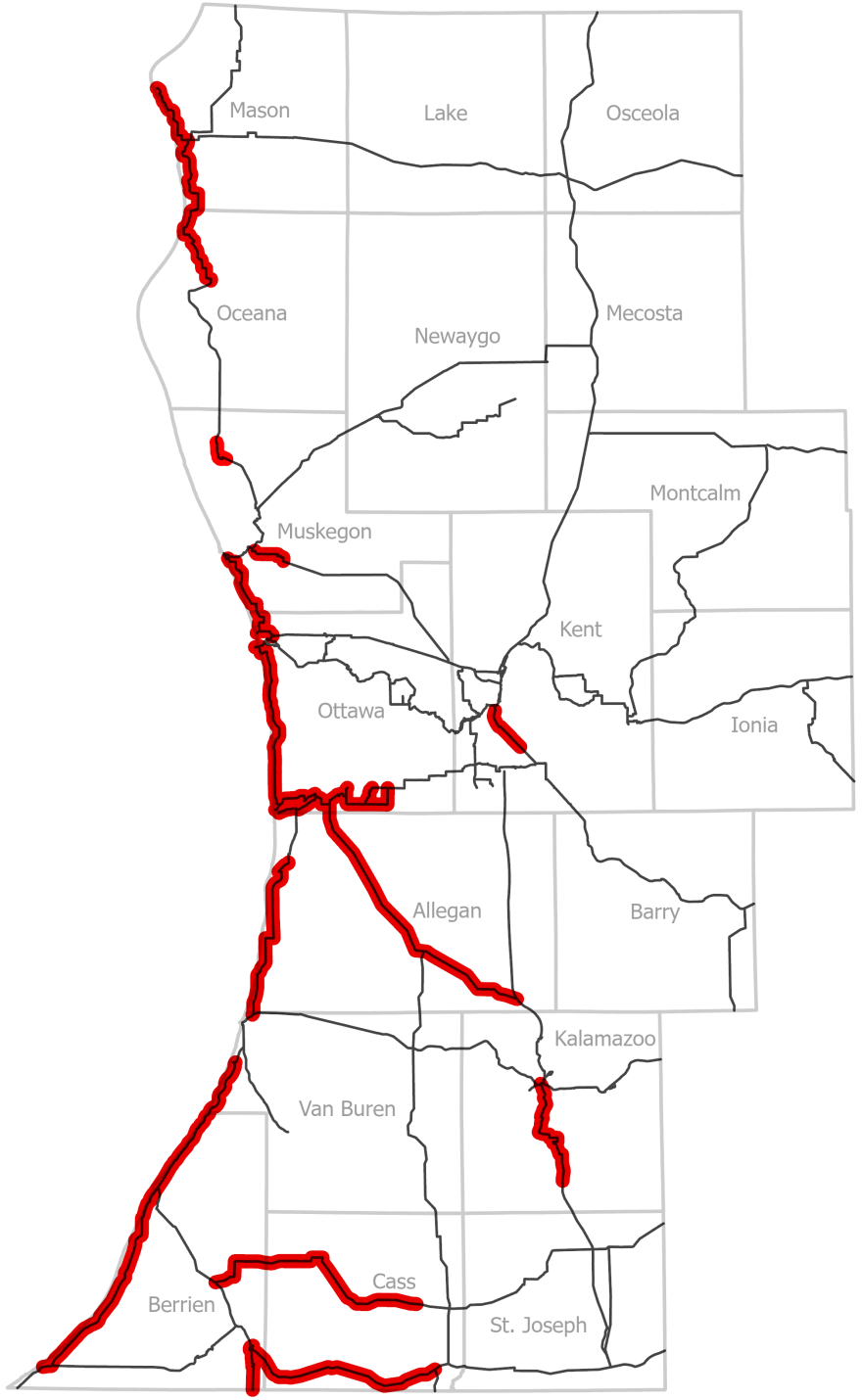
Criteria

- Number of road and railroad crossing per mile

Greater likelihood of a crash occurring with higher number of conflict points

Scoring:

Negative 1 for a higher number of road crossing per mile



Community Impact – Safety and Comfort

Route Stress

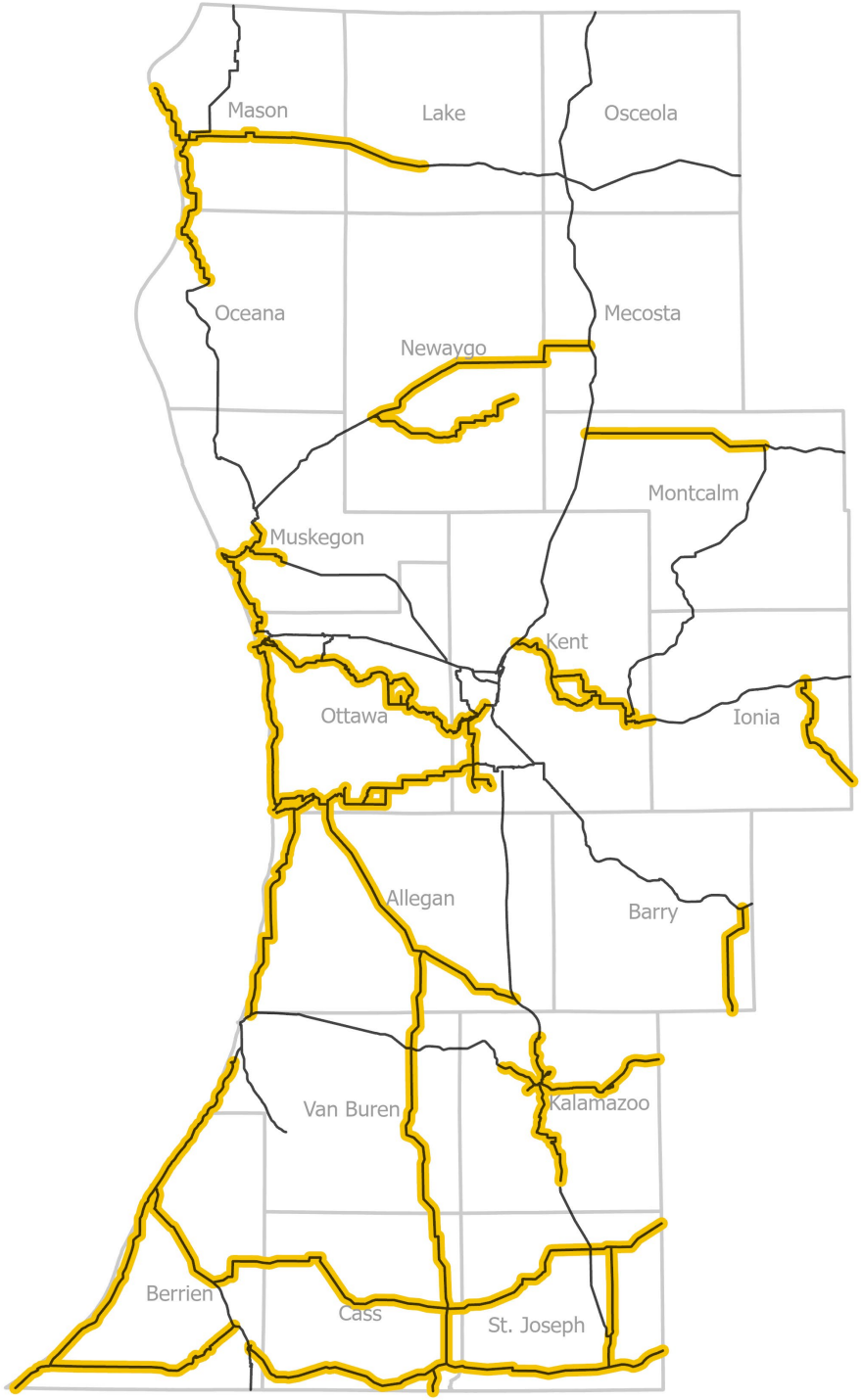
Criteria:

- Trails that are adjacent to road corridors (Sidepaths)

Exposes trail users to air and noise pollution and minor conflict points at driveways. Exact nature of some connections is not currently defined.

Scoring:

Negative 1 for being adjacent to a roadway



Community Impact – Safety and Comfort

Environmental Stressors

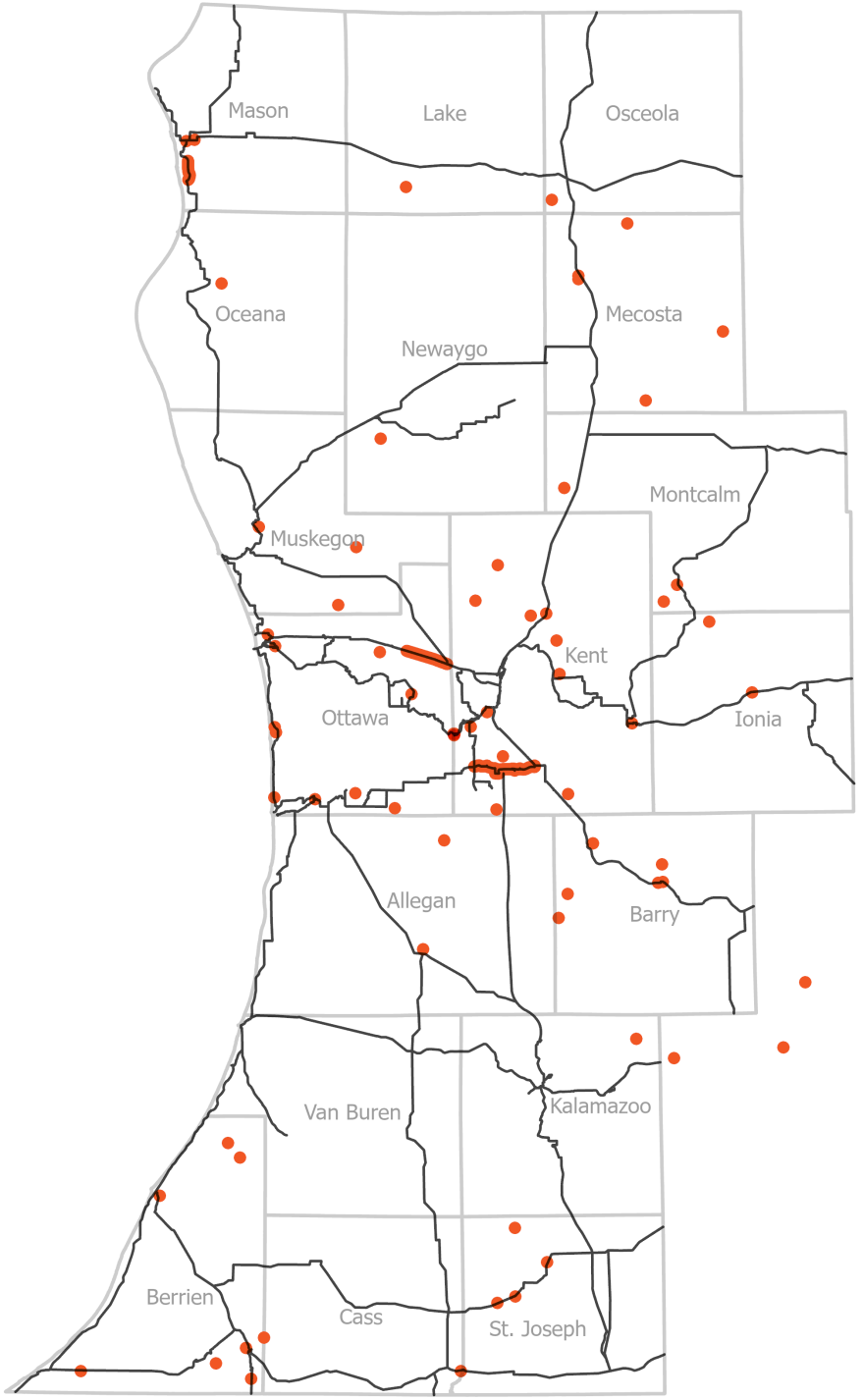
Criteria

- Visual, auditory and olfactory elements that may diminish the trail experience

Adjacency to Landfills, freeways, wastewater treatment facilities, refinery, coal fire power plants

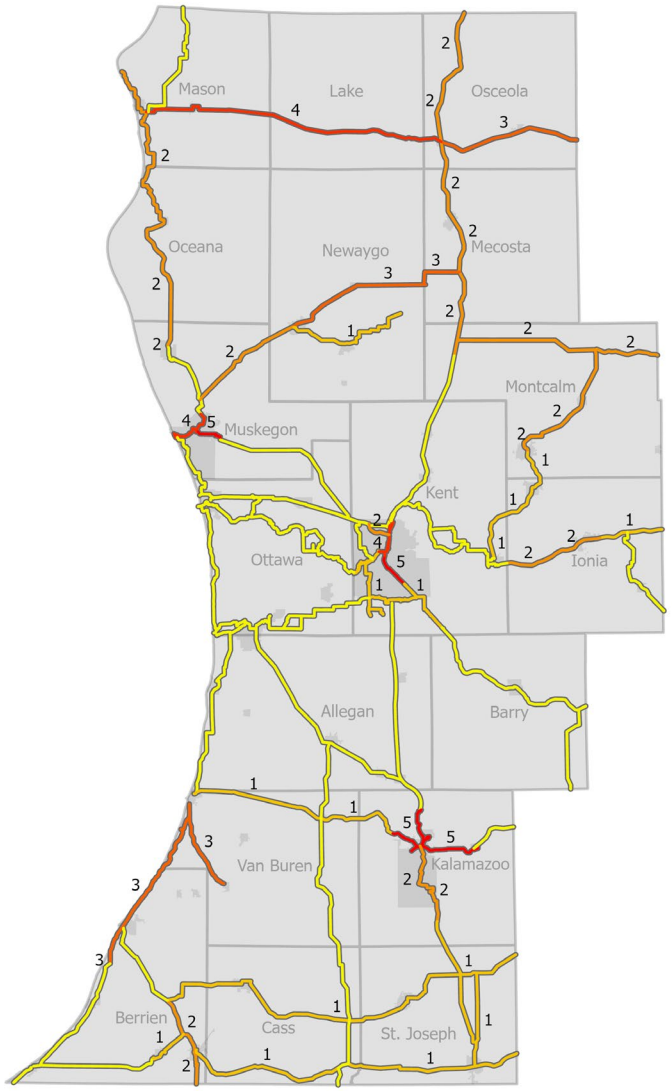
Scoring:

Negative 1 for being adjacent to environmental stressors



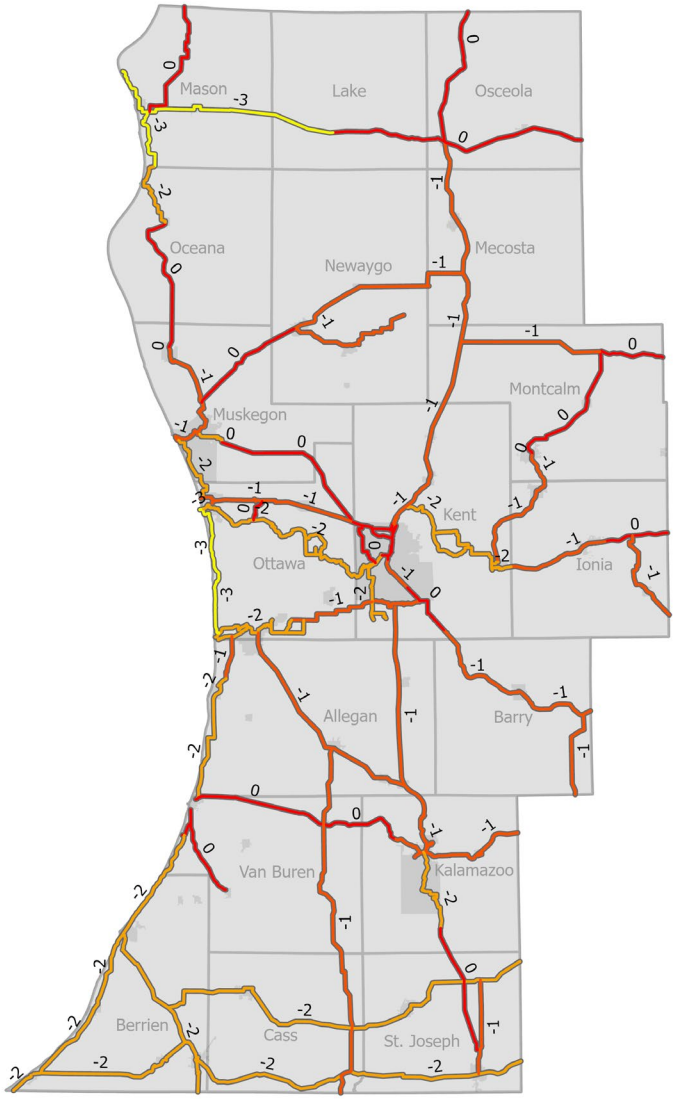
Community Impact

Scoring Trail Segments Subtotals



EQUITY

DESTINATIONS



SAFETY AND COMFORT

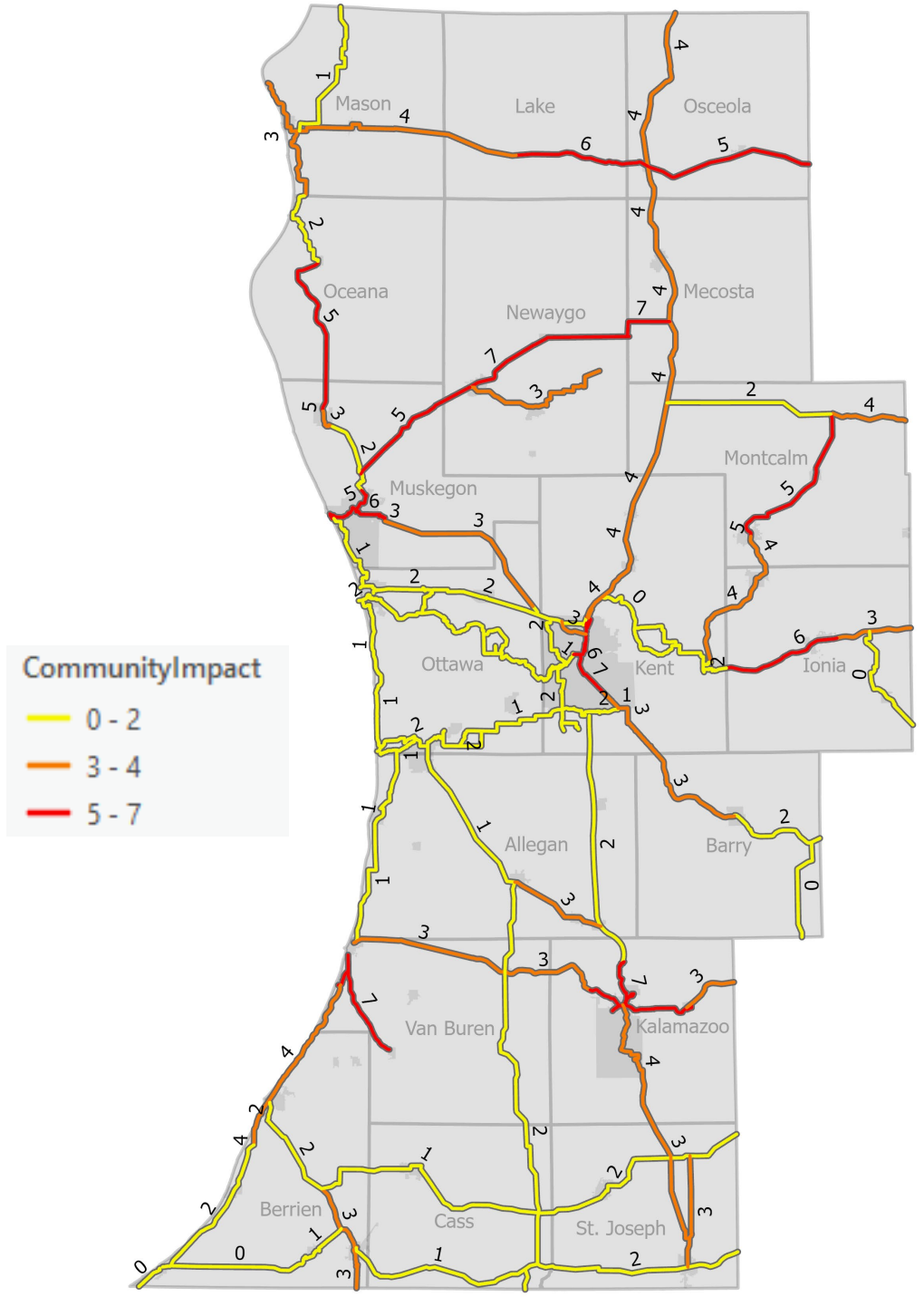
Community Impact

Composite Score

Equity + Destinations – Safety and Comfort

Summary

Assesses the potential contribution of existing and proposed trail segments.



Trail Life Stage

Identifying the life stage of a trail to tailor support and interventions accordingly, acknowledging differences between new trails in their infancy and older trails requiring different types of support.

- Classify trails into life stages
- New trails require different support than older trails
- Tailor support accordingly

Conceptual

Trails in the conceptual stage are illustrated as desire lines on plans or maps, indicating potential routes that have not yet progressed to further development or implementation. These trails represent future projects that could enhance and expand the regional network.

Infancy

Trails in this stage are in the early phases of establishment, characterized by active planning and working toward implementation and initial development.

Adolescence

Trails in this stage have undergone initial development and are experiencing growth and expansion, with increasing usage and infrastructure development.

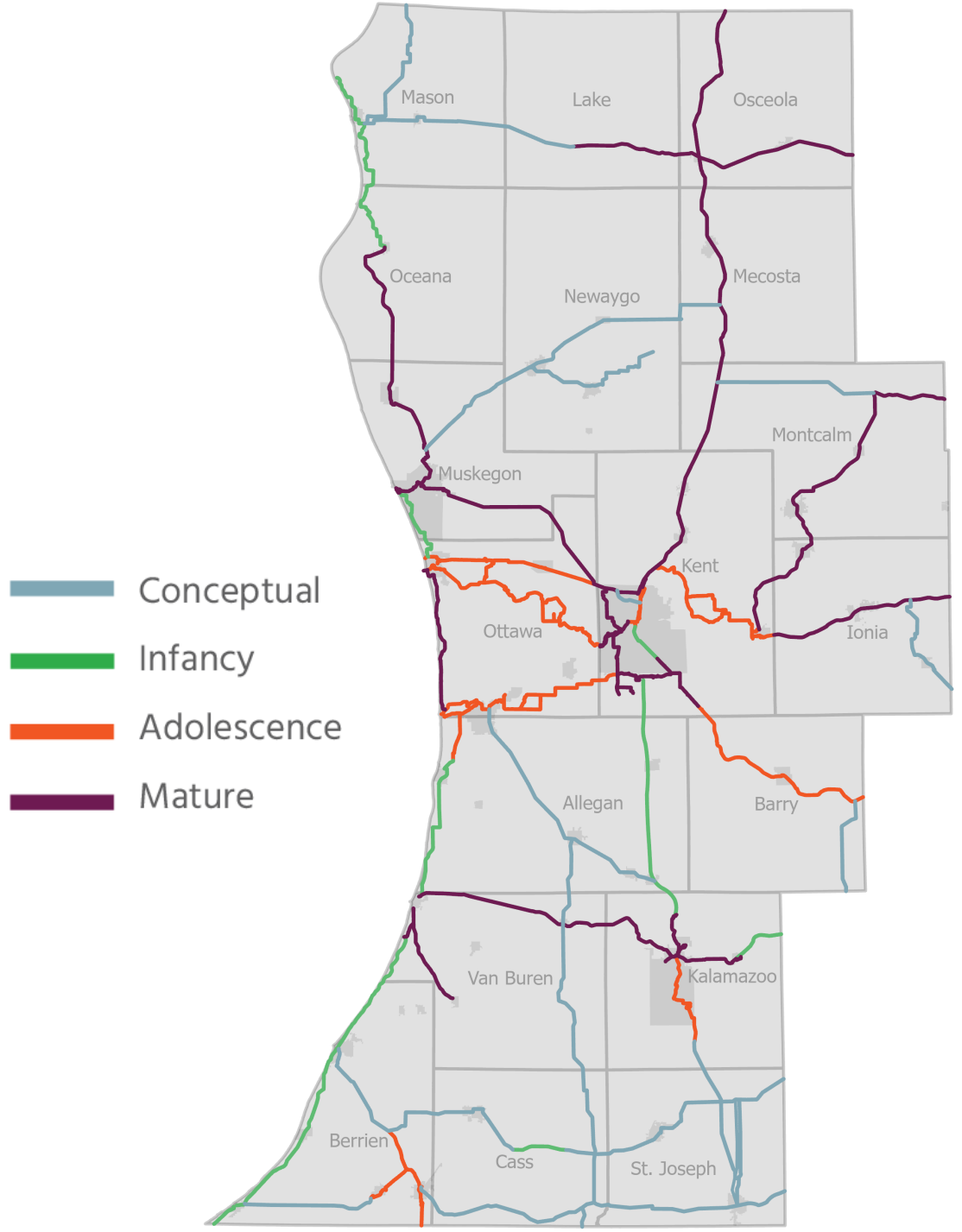
Mature

Established trails with well-developed infrastructure looking at facility upgrades and long-term maintenance requirements including trail resurfacing.

Trail Life Stage

Trail Life Stage Map

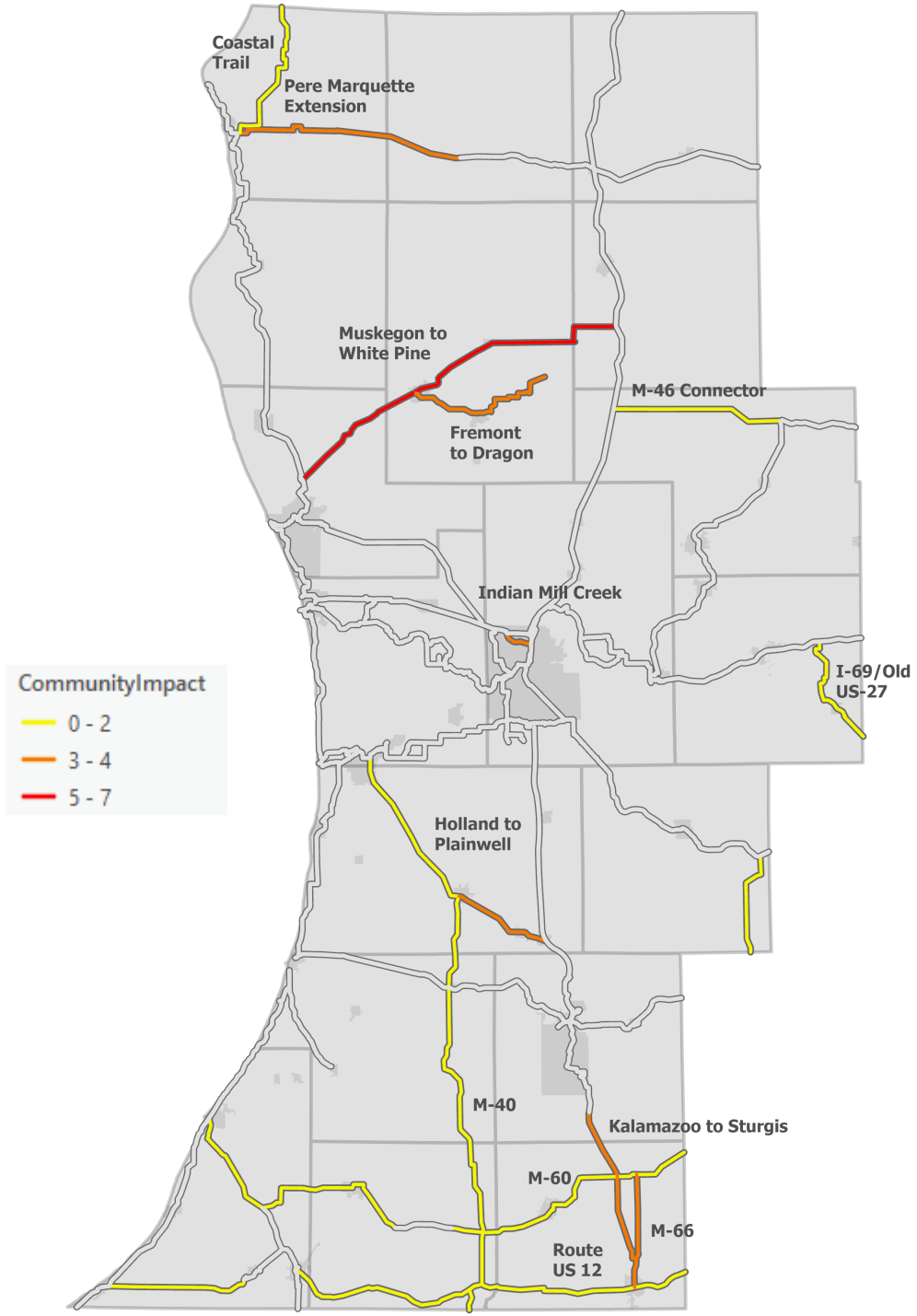
- **Conceptual** – existing in a regional plan but no active planning
- **Infancy** – actively planning, seeking grants, and working towards implementation
- **Adolescence** – a work in progress, completing gaps and trailheads
- **Mature** – substantially complete, adding amenities, and making necessary updates



Trail Life Stage
Conceptual Trails

Highest Community Impact:

- Fremont to White Pine
- Pere Marquette Extension
- Fremont to Dragon
- Indian Mill Creek
- Holland to Plainwell
- Kalamazoo to Sturgis
- M-66

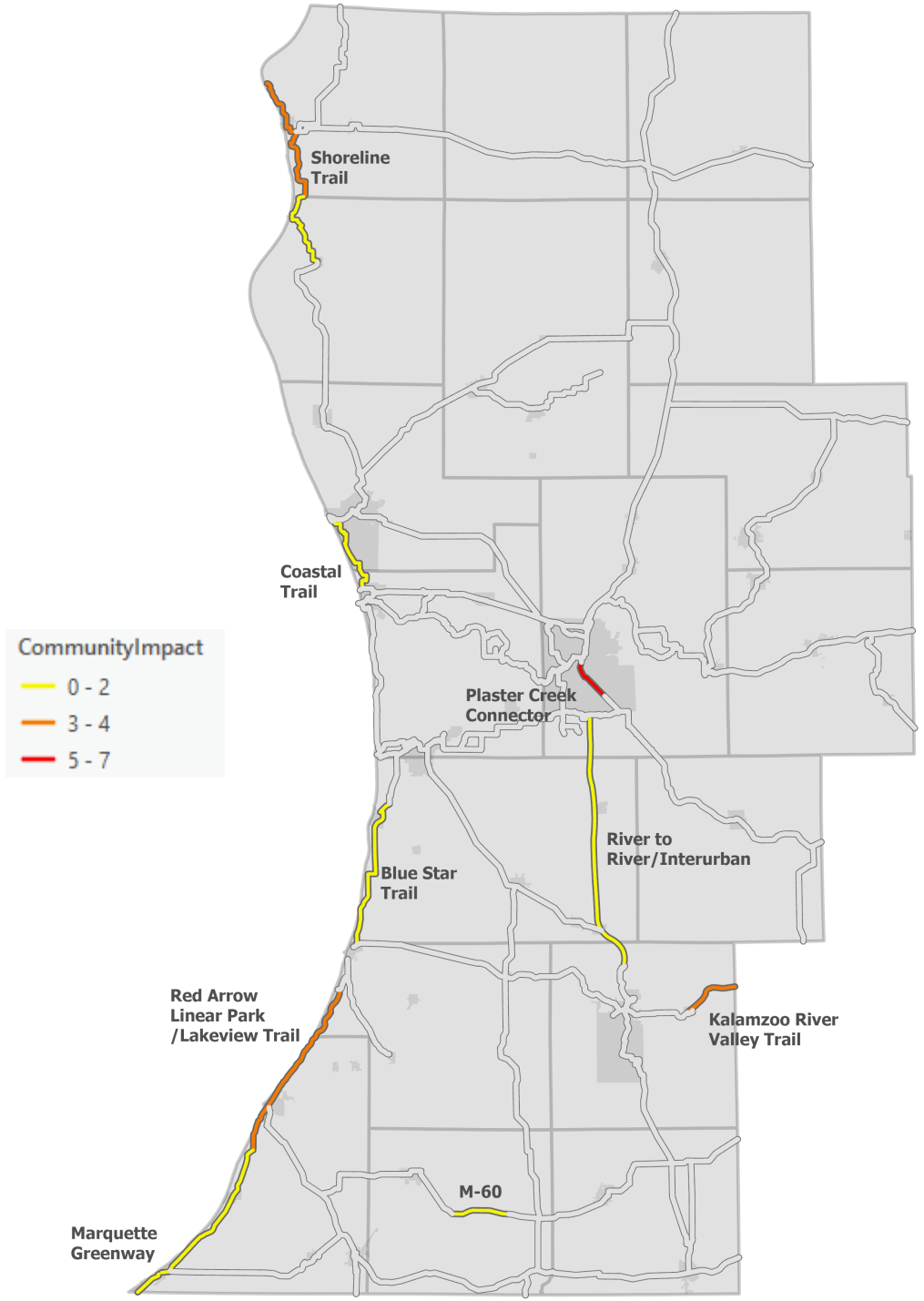


Trail Life Stage

Infancy

Highest Community Impact:

- Plaster Creek Connector
- Shoreline Trail
- Kalamazoo River Valley Trail Extension
- Red Arrow Linear Park/Lakeview Trail

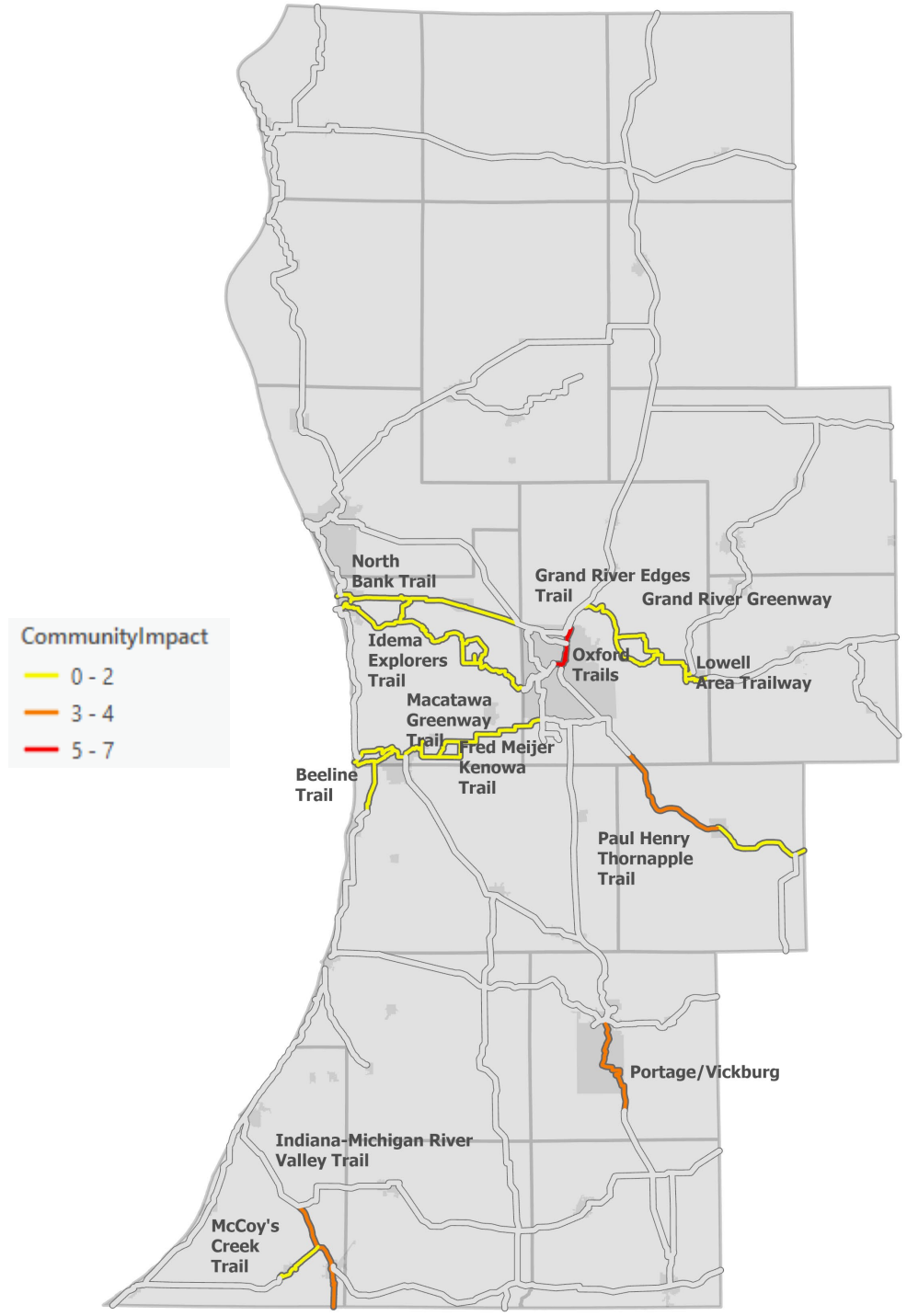


Trail Life Stage
Adolescence

Highest Community Impact:

- Grand River Edges
- Paul Henry Thornapple Trail
- Portage/Vicksburg
- Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail Extension

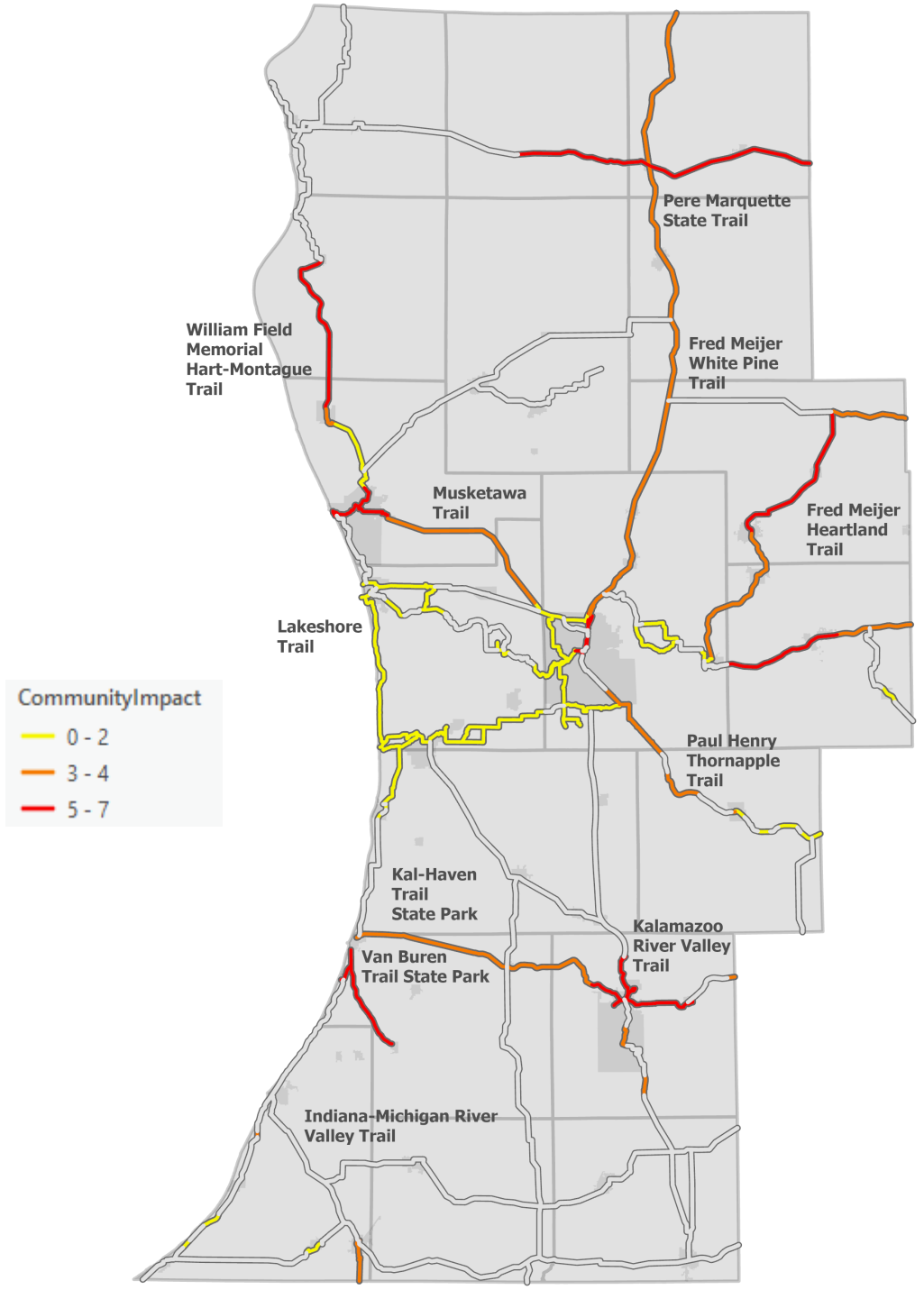
Redundancy in Grand Rapids to Grand Haven connections



Trail Life Stage
Mature Trails

Highest Community Impact:

- Pere Marquette State Trail
- WFM Hart-Montague Trail
- Muskegon Lakeshore Trail
- Laketon Trail
- FM Heartland Trail
- Kalamazoo River Valley Trail
- Van Buren Trail State Park
- Grand River Edges



Investment Impact

Evaluates existing trail conditions and proposed trail gaps to maximize value and assess the return on investment, ensuring optimal resource allocation.

- Identifying historical funding disparities and connectivity gaps
- Assessing both existing and proposed trails

Underinvested Areas

Provides access to historically underinvested areas

Network Contribution

Enhances the regional trail system through connectivity or upgrades to meet world-class trail standards

Investment Impact

Underinvested Areas

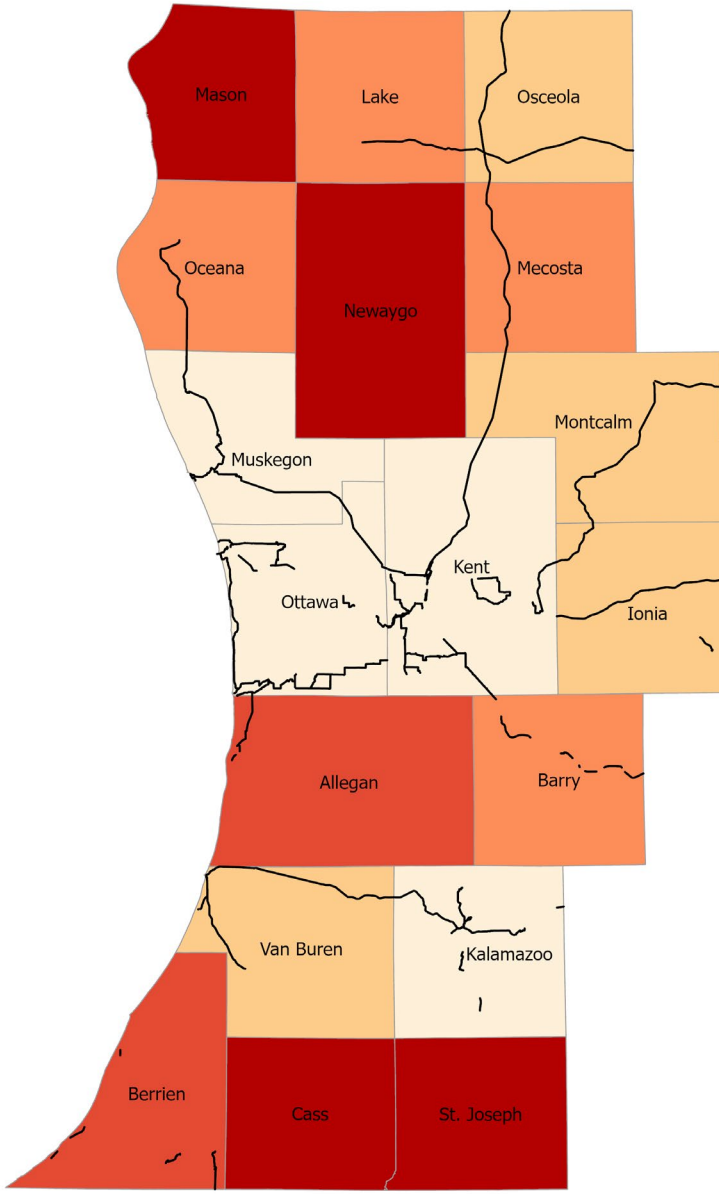
Criteria:

- Existing trails per county

Regional trail investment distribution perspective

Scoring:

1 to 5 with 5 being entirely located in a county without any regional trails



Investment Impact

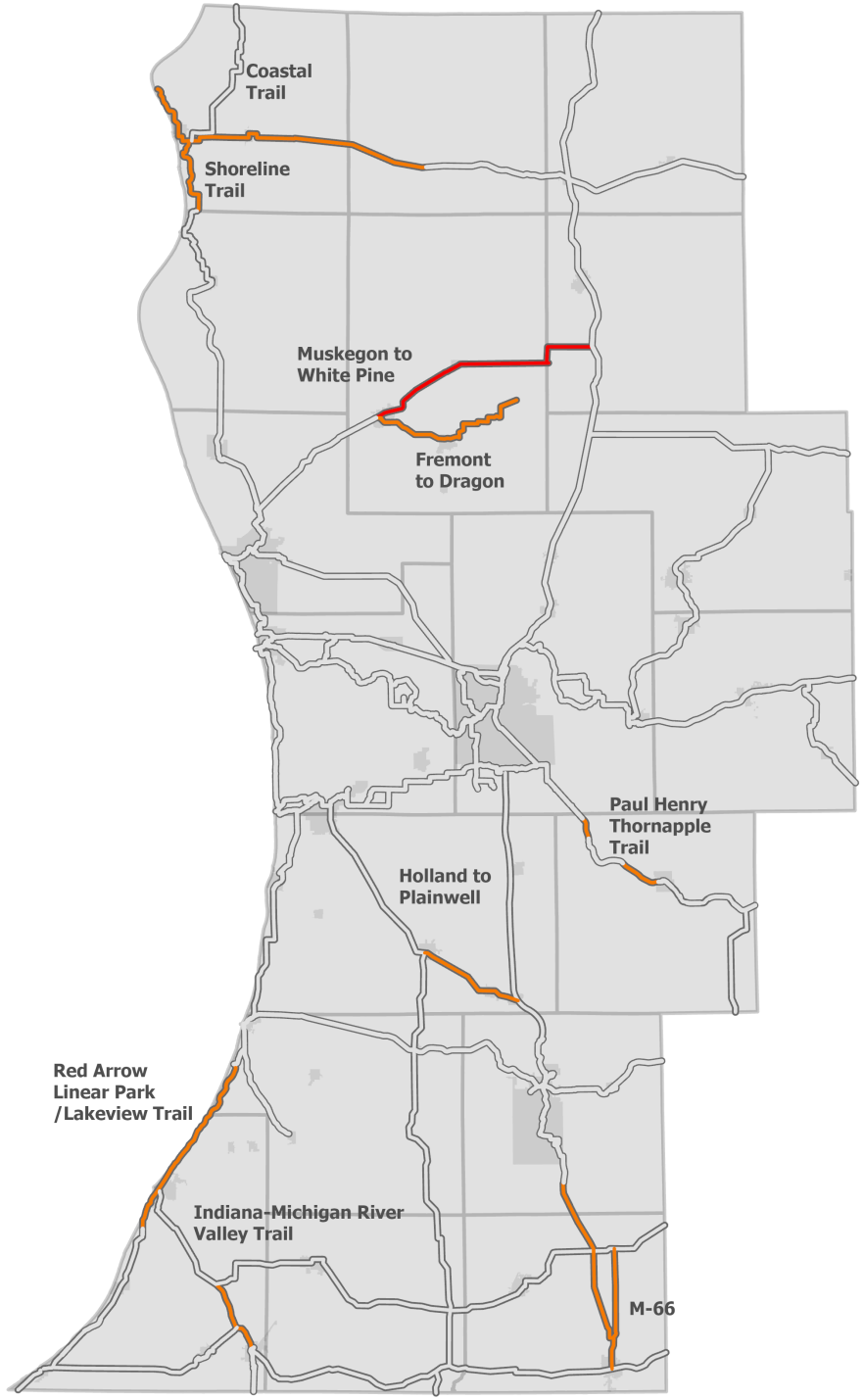
Big Impact / Underinvested

High Community Impact

&

Historically Underinvested Areas

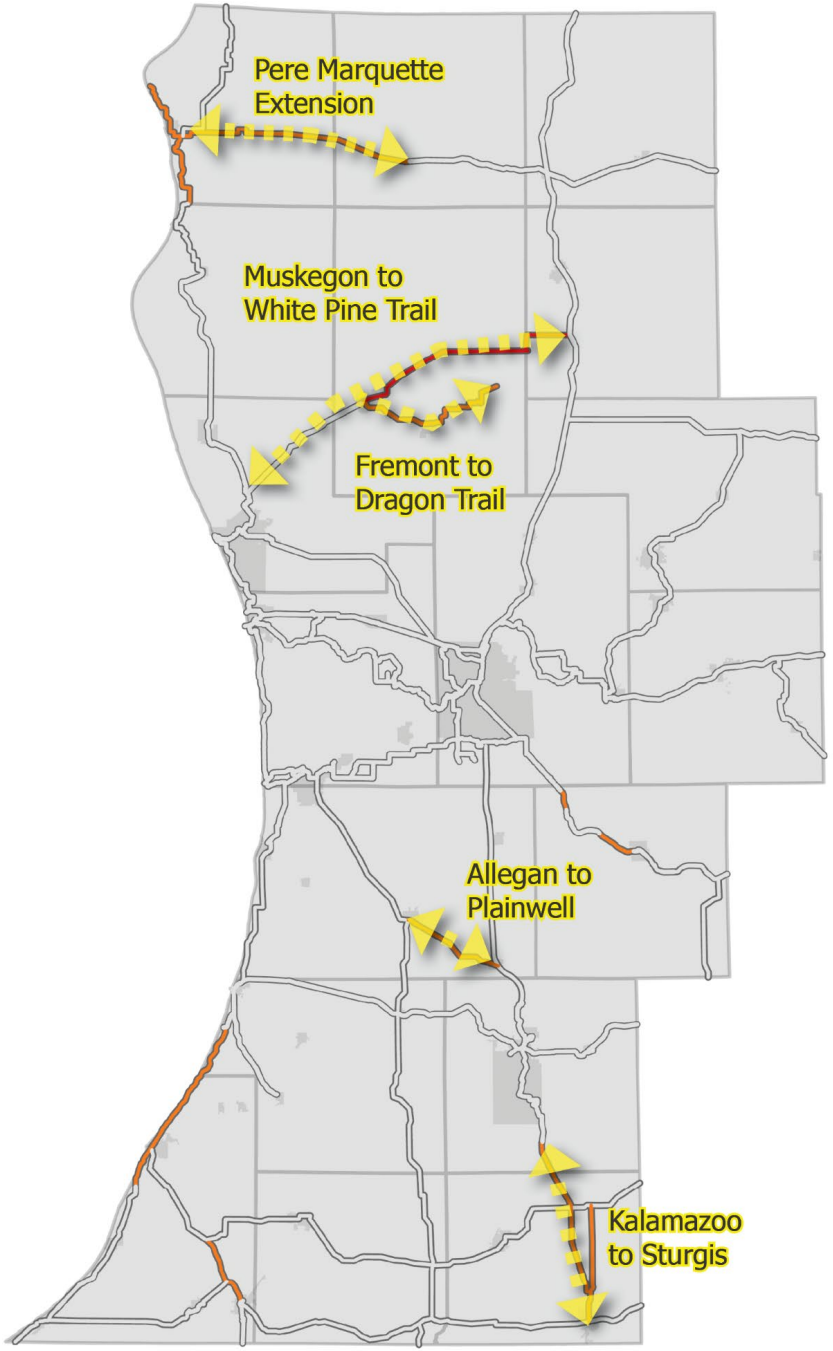
=



Investment Impact

Big Impact / Underinvested Concept Routes

- Conceptual routes that have a high community impact and that are in underinvested areas
- Currently no active planning efforts that we are aware of
- To move forward these concept routes will need champions and planning support



Investment Impact

Network Contribution

- Planned connections that close significant regional gaps
- Not high community impact trails on their own, but…
- They provide short connections between two high impact trail segments

  or

- Complete network holes in underinvested counties

Local Support

Documents local support based on public input and community feedback, fostering a holistic perspective that incorporates local needs and preferences.

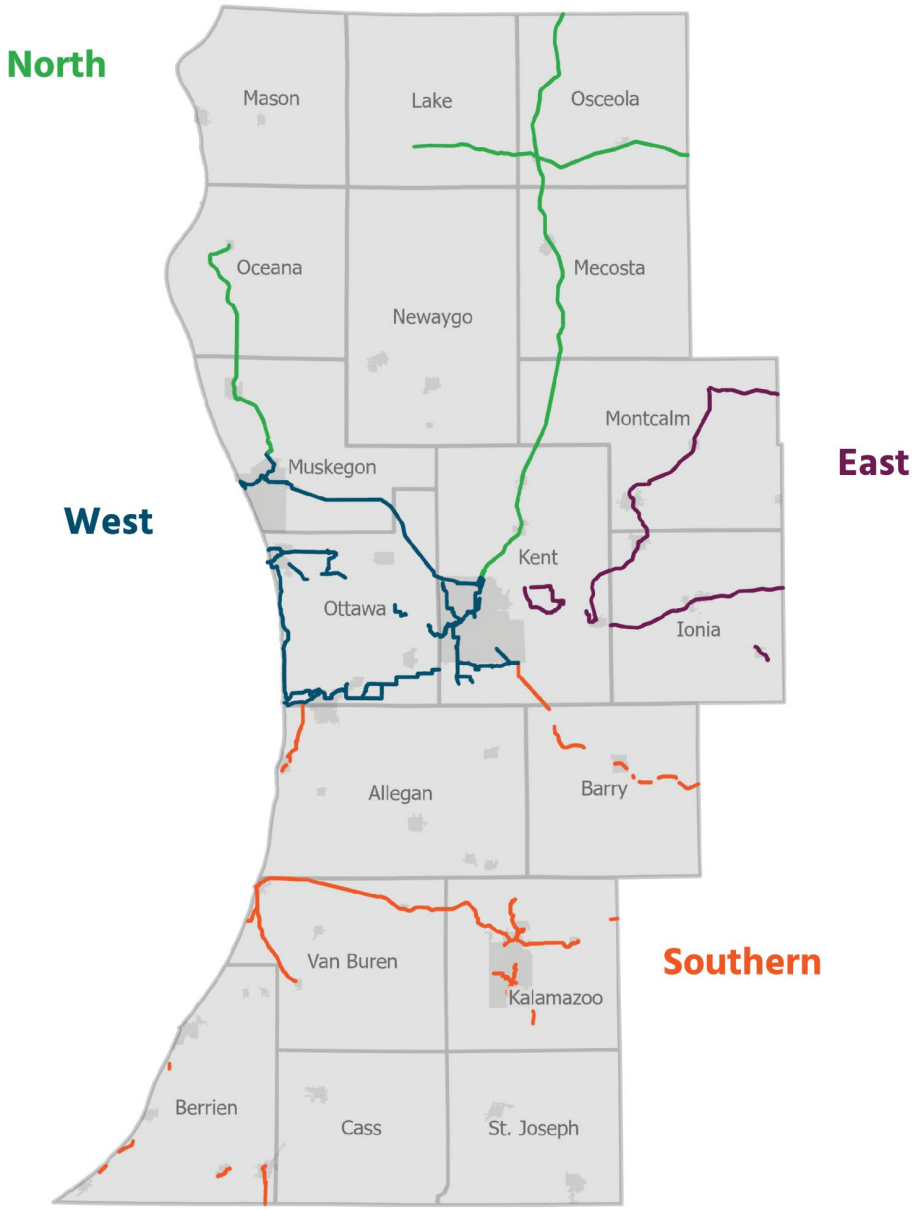
- All the trails in the network have a degree of support as evidenced by their inclusion in a regional plan
- But not all the trails have groups actively working towards implementation
- The next step in public engagement will gauge the public's support for various trails

Public Input

Priorities identified through public engagement.

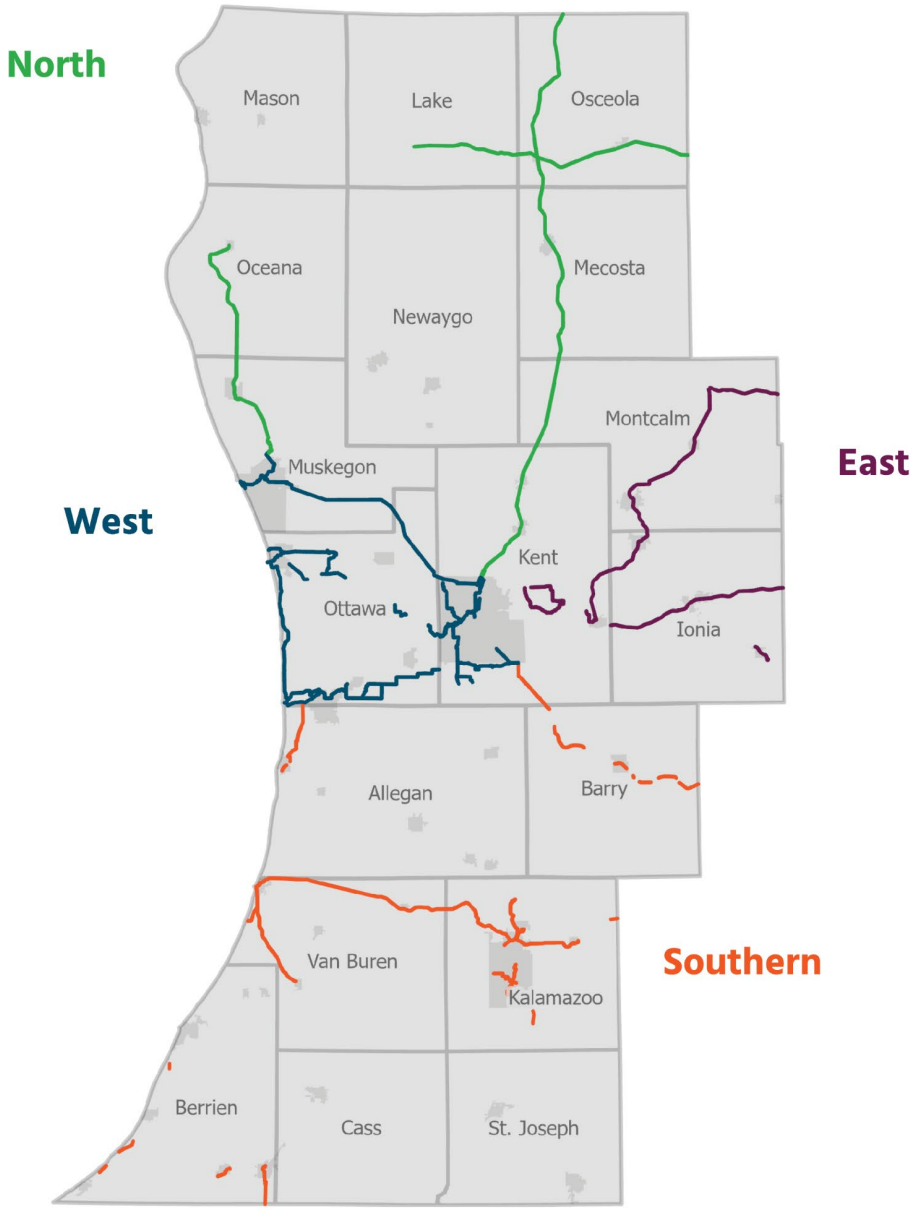
Ten Minute Break

When We Return Looking at the Sub-Region



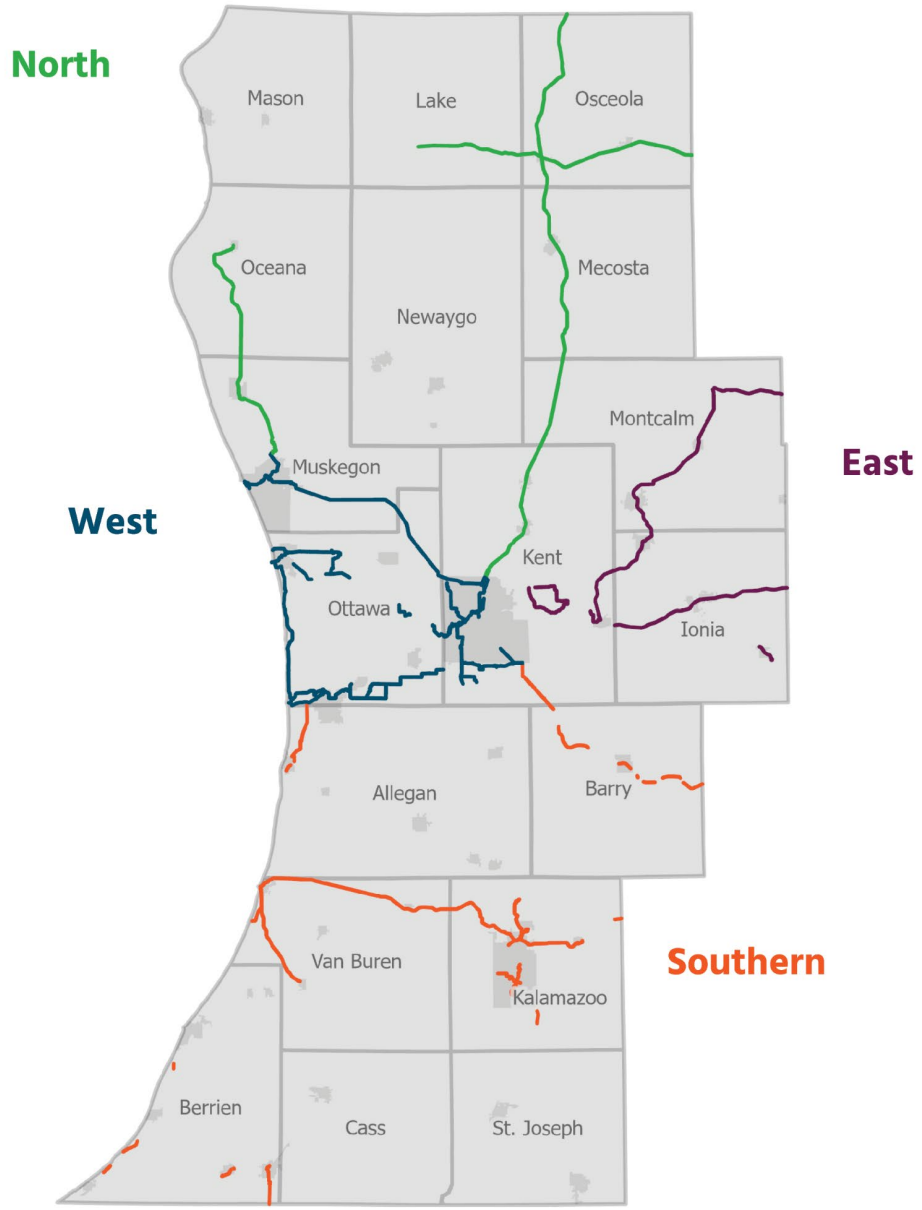
A More Detailed Look at the Sub-Regions

- We are going to look at some of the same maps but focused on the sub-region
- Want to see what we may have missed
- Get feedback on priorities

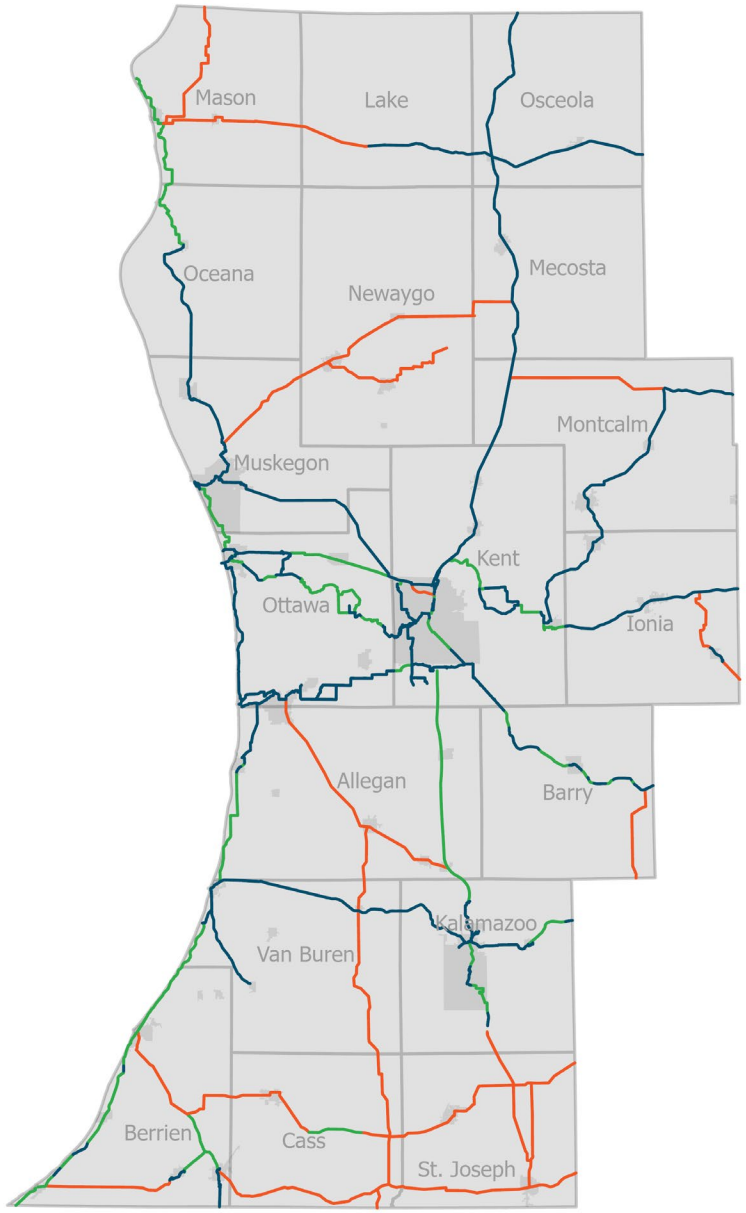


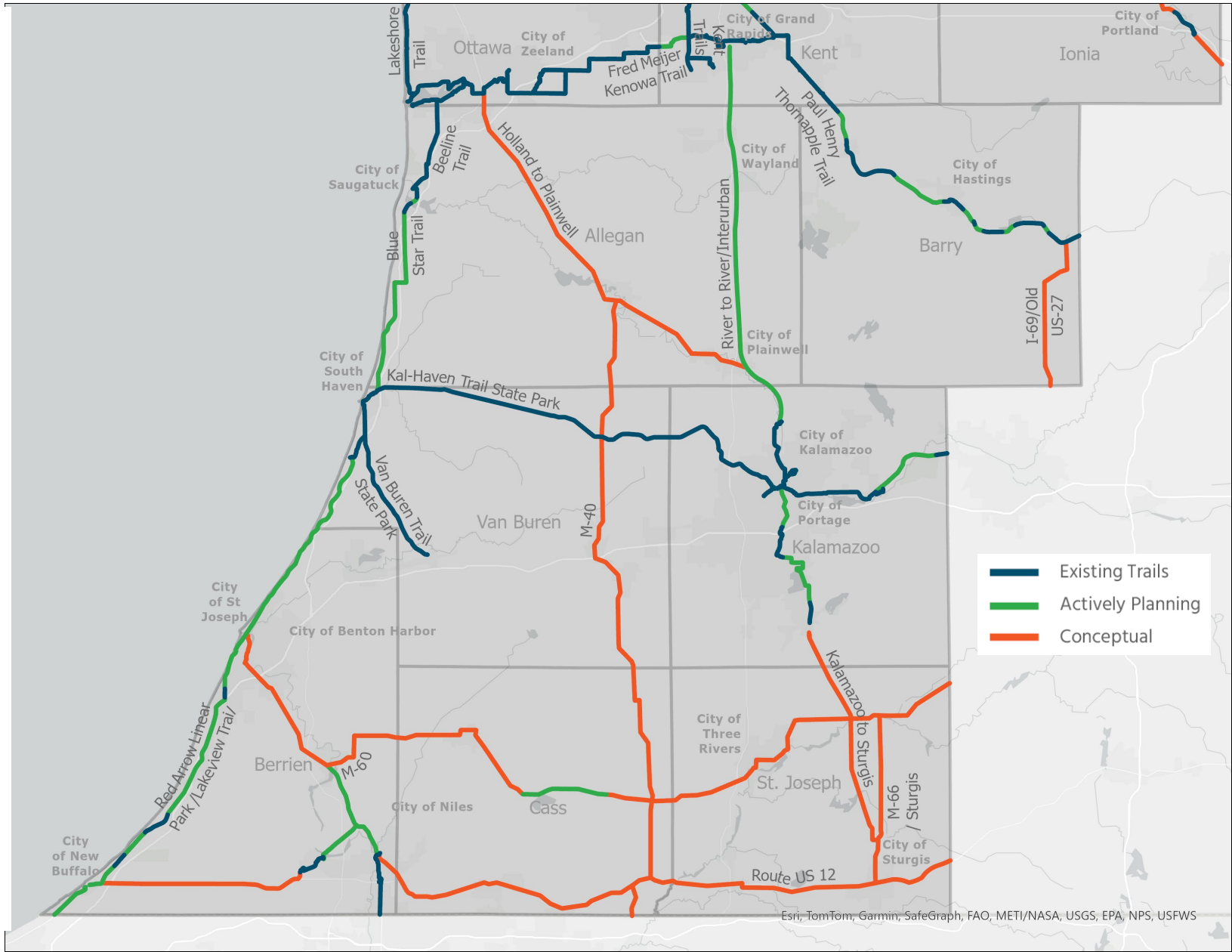
South Sub-Region

- Van Buren Trail State Park
- Kalamazoo River Valley Trail
- Kal-Haven Trail State Park

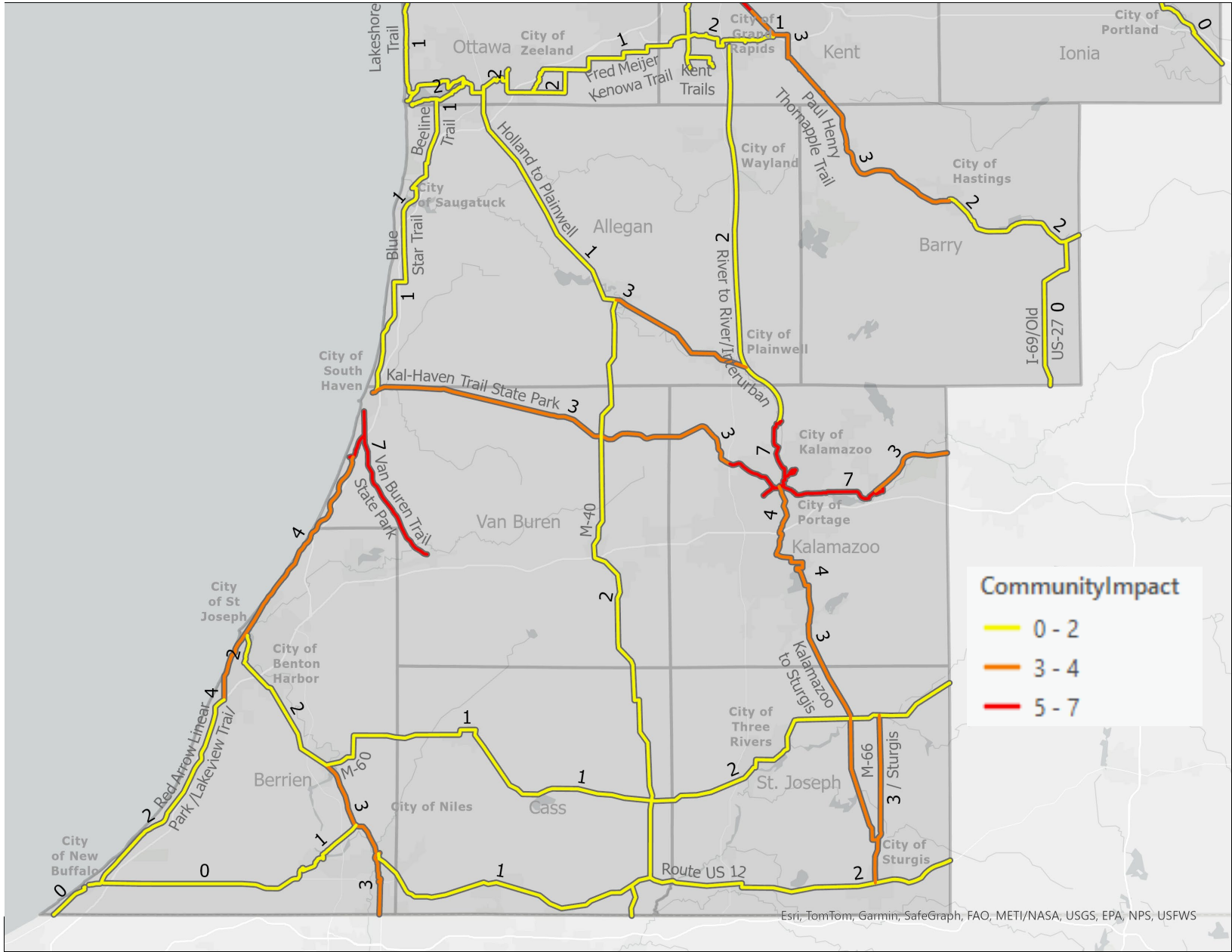


South Trail Planning Map

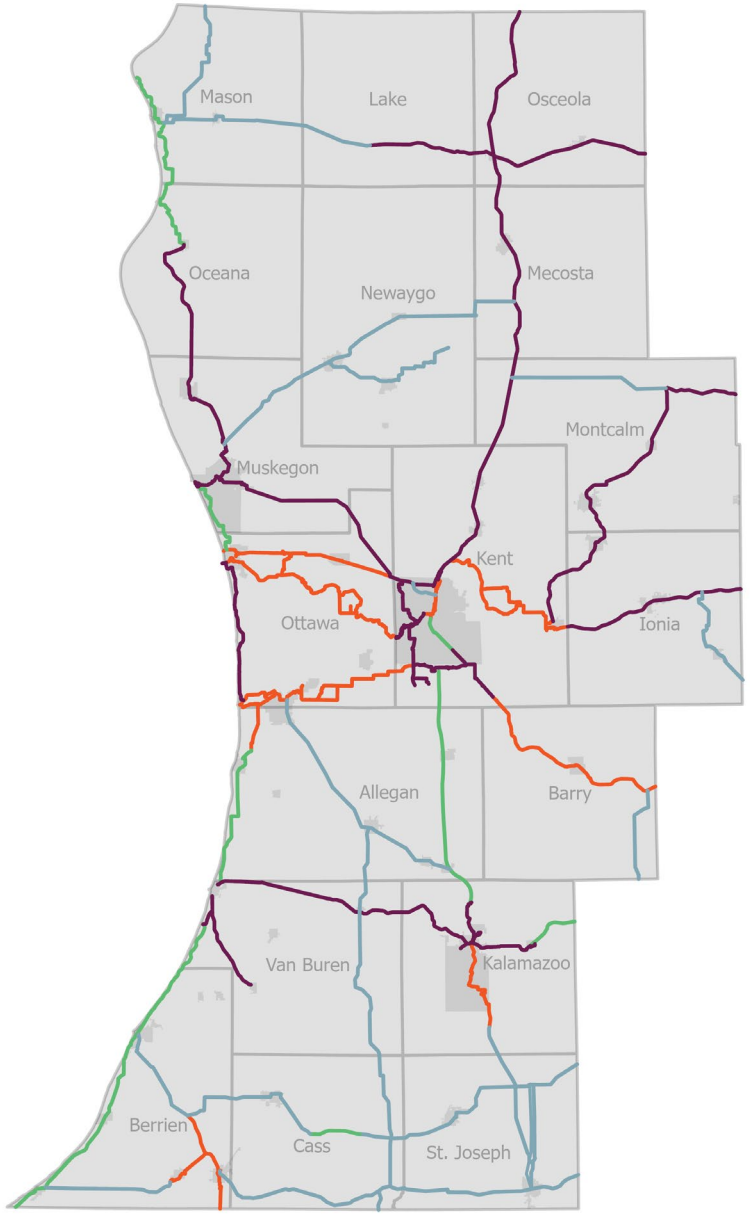


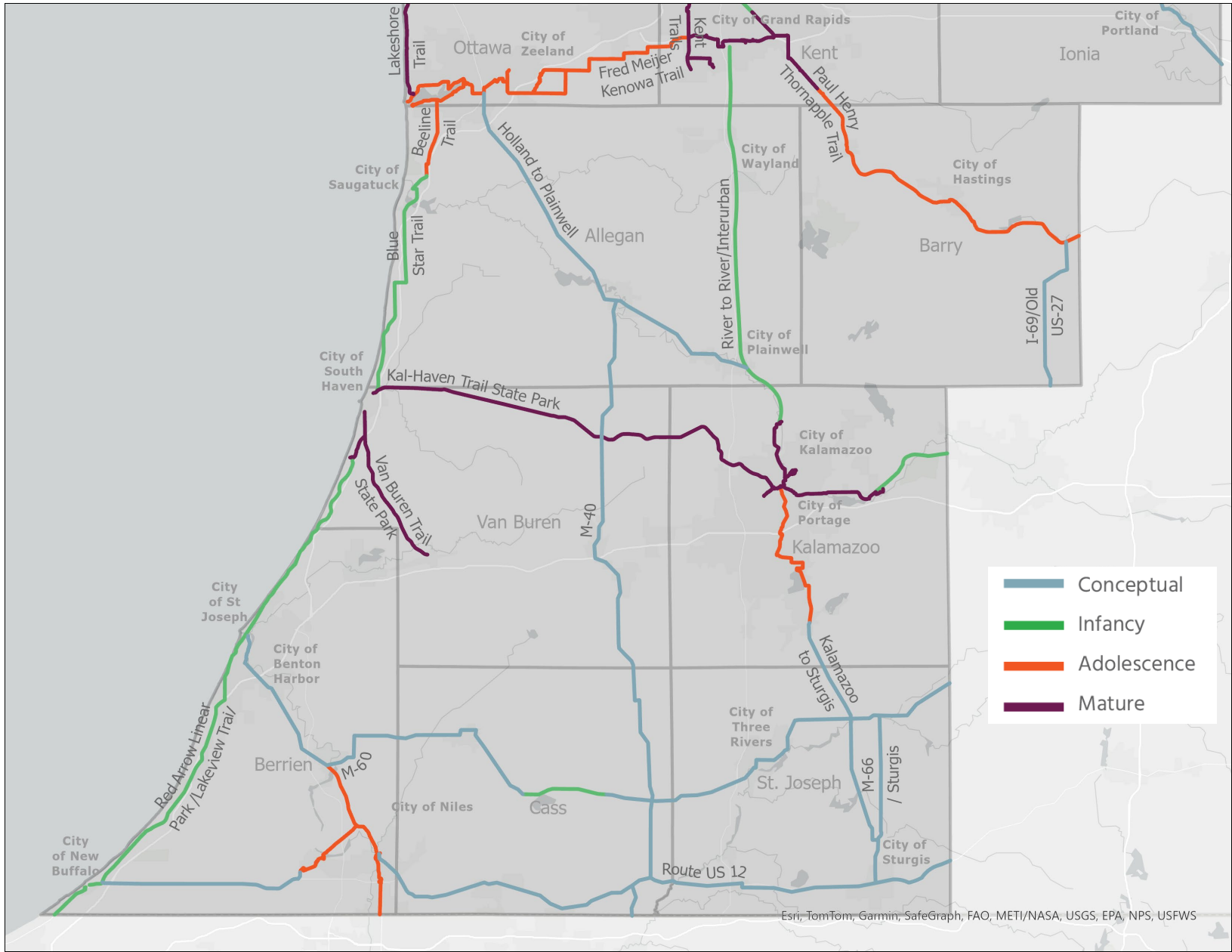


South Trail Community Impact

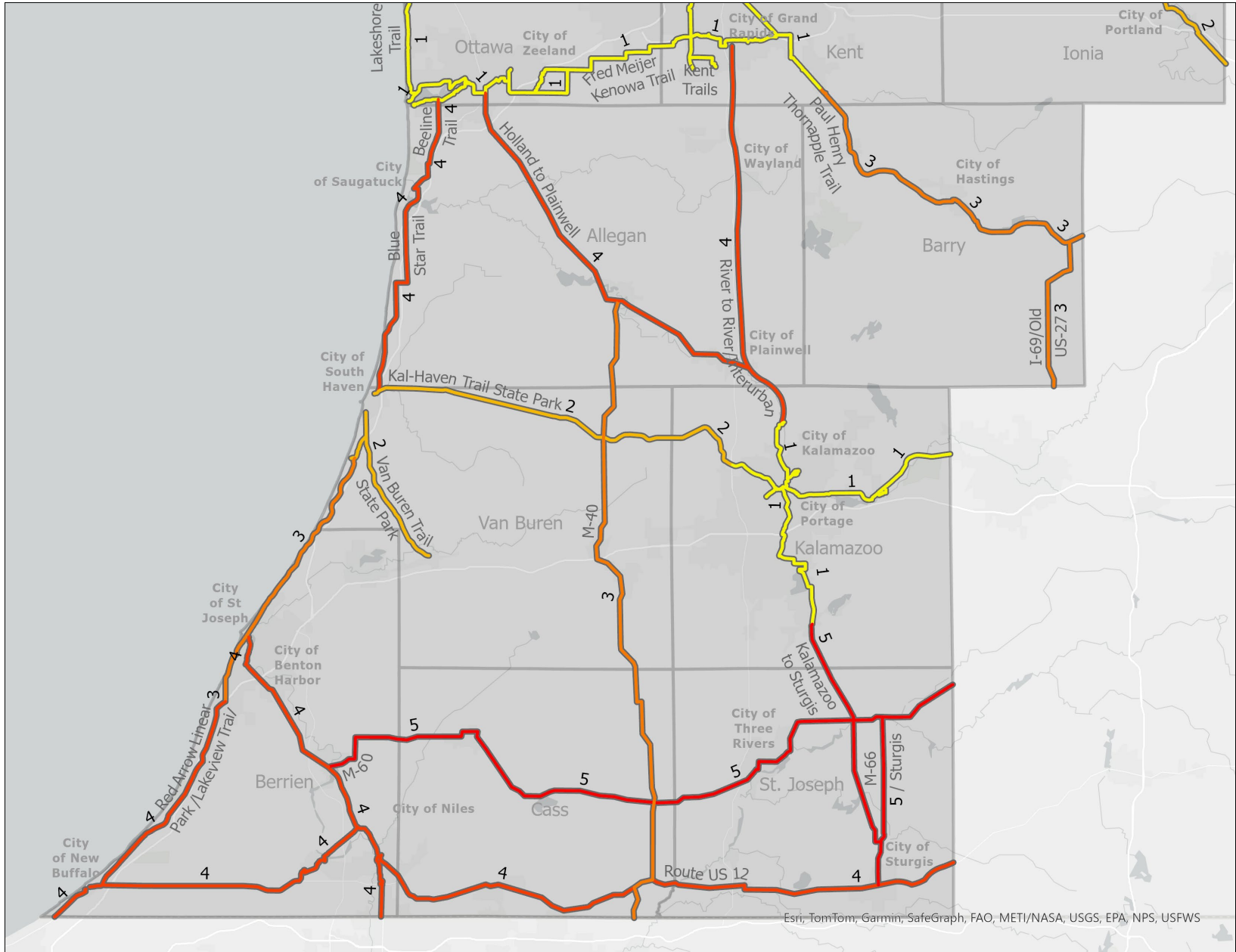


South Trail Life Stage

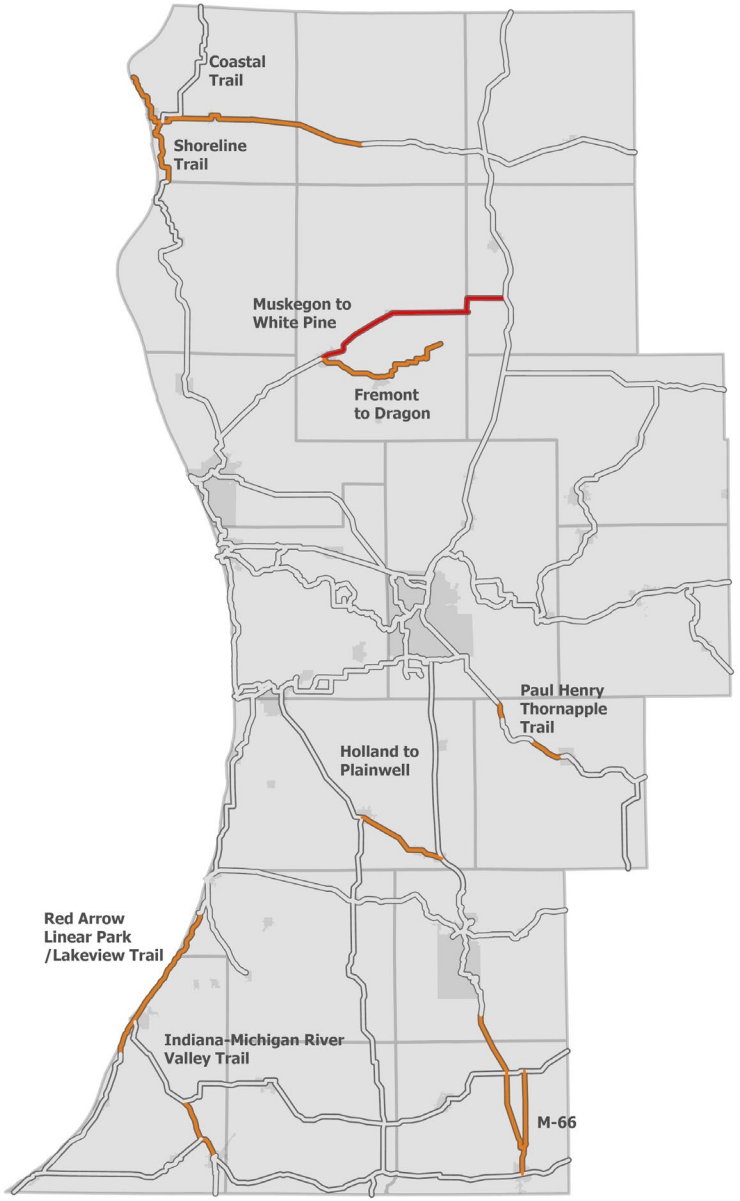


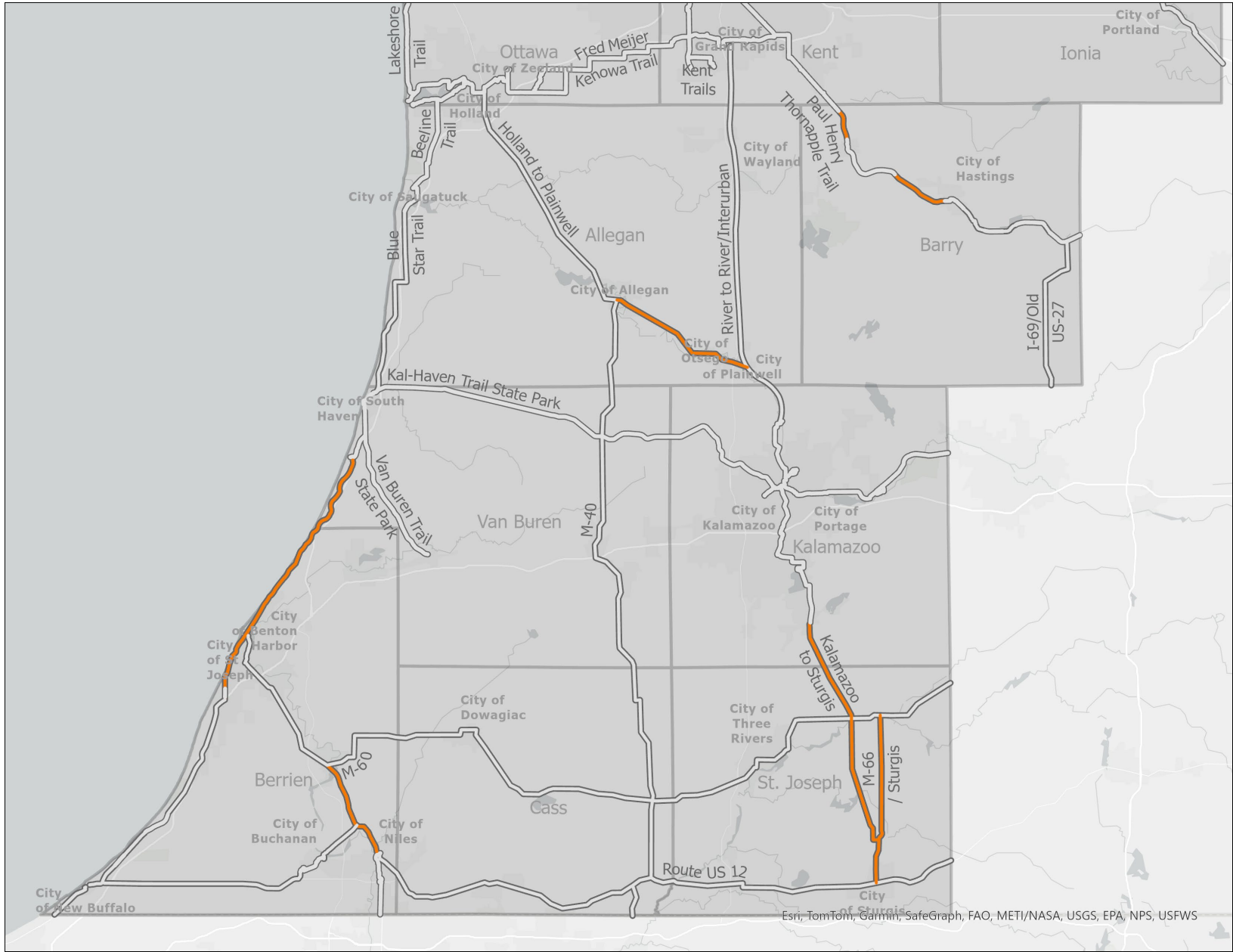


South Underinvested Areas

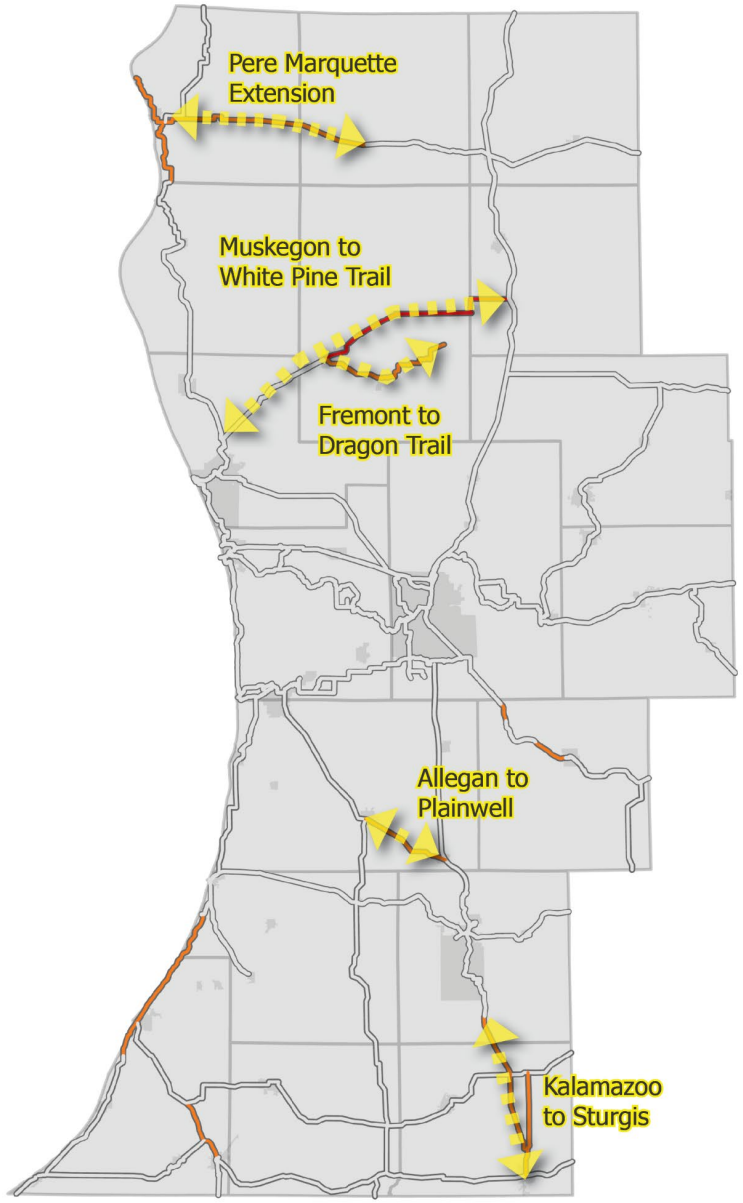


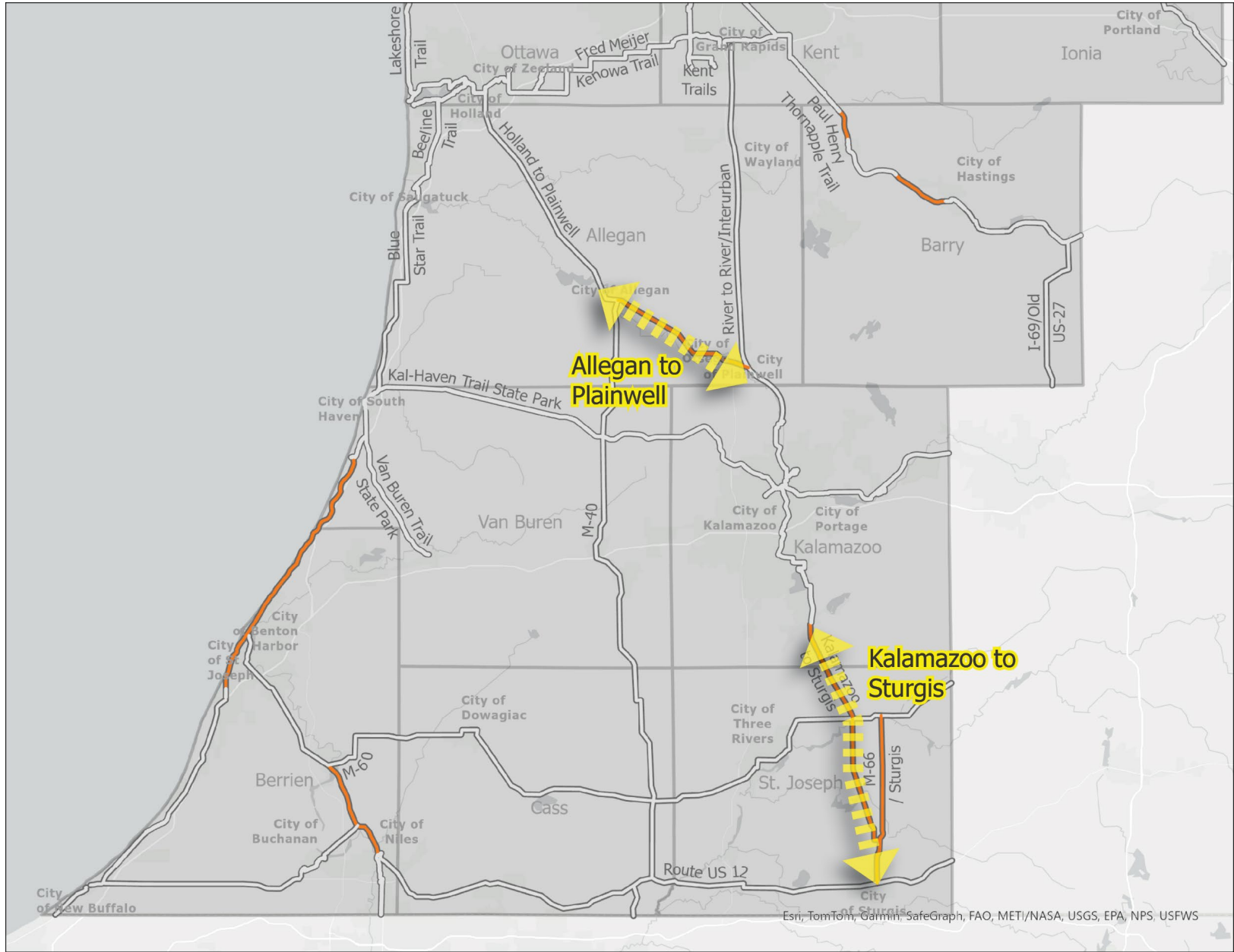
South Big Impact / Underinvested



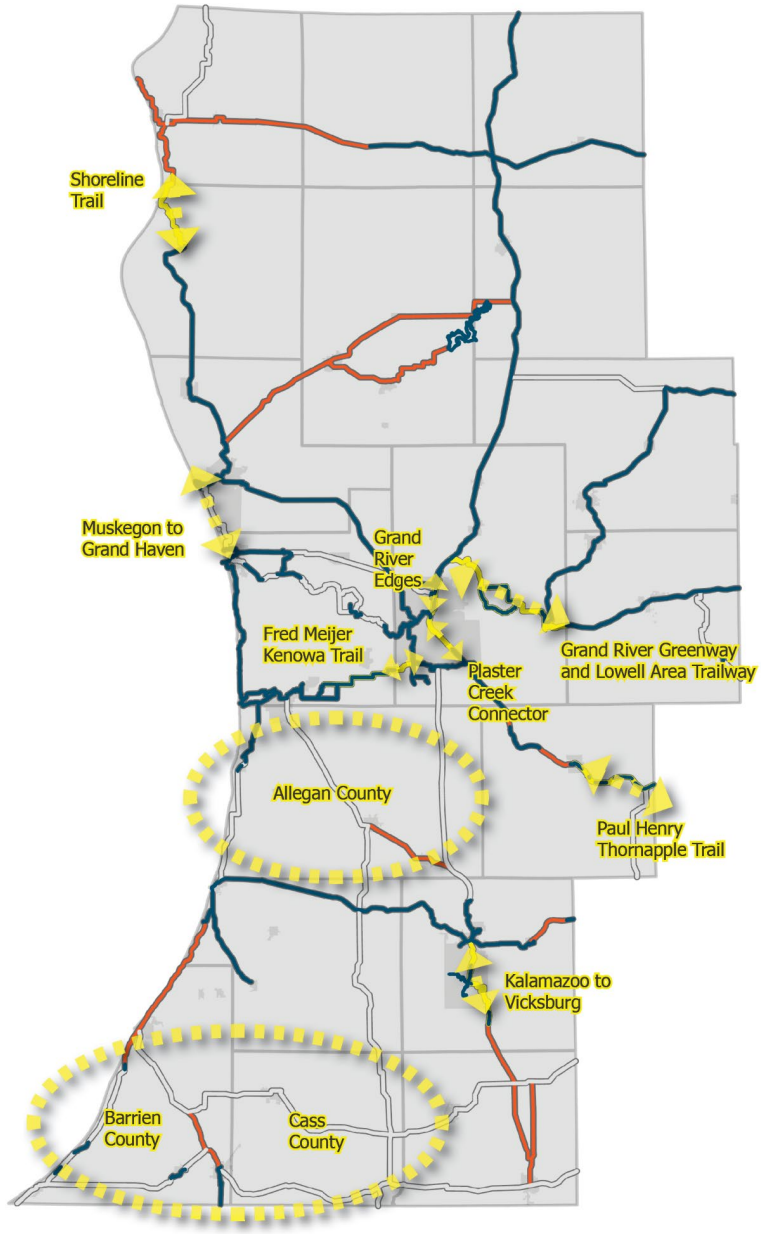


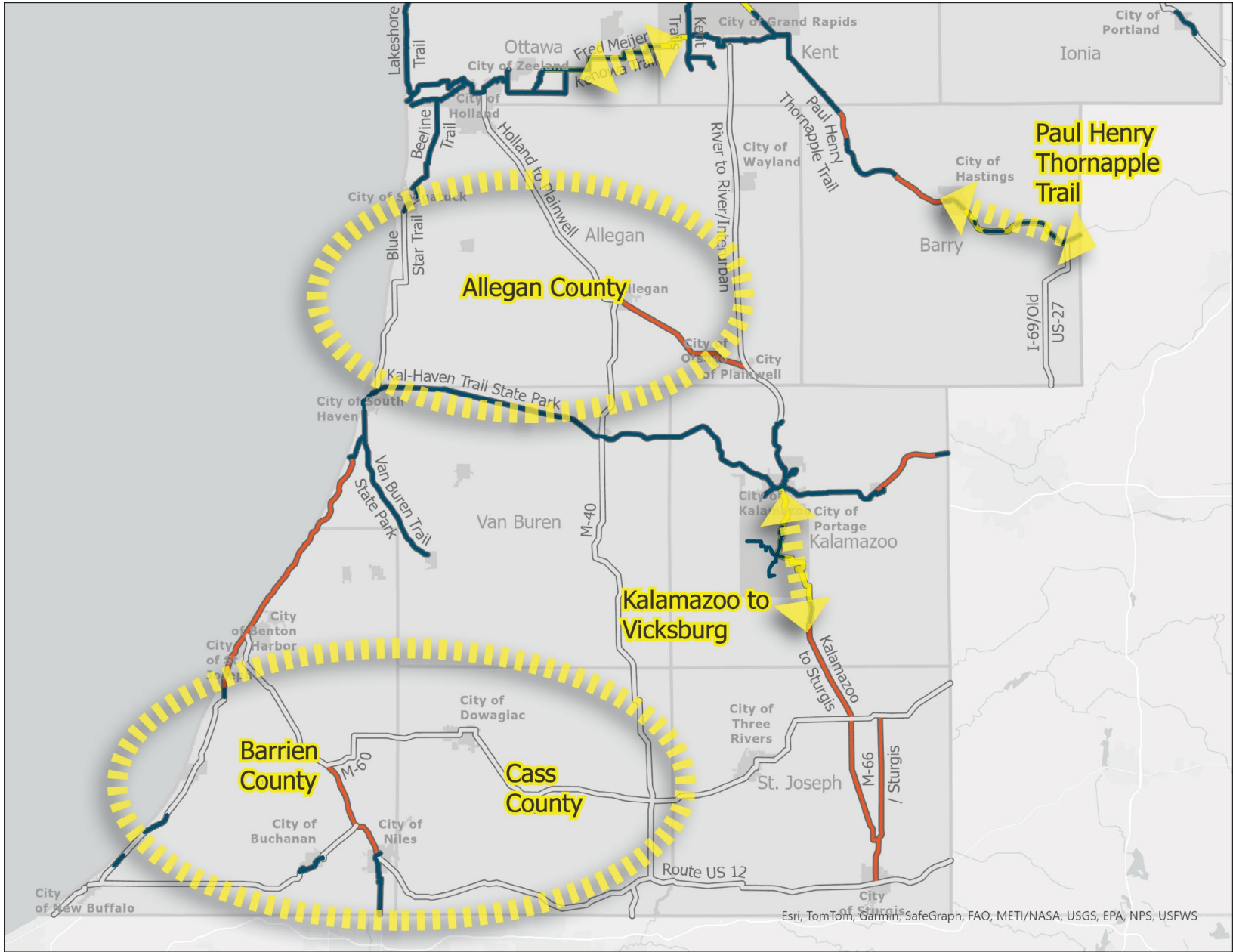
South Big Impact / Underinvested / Concept



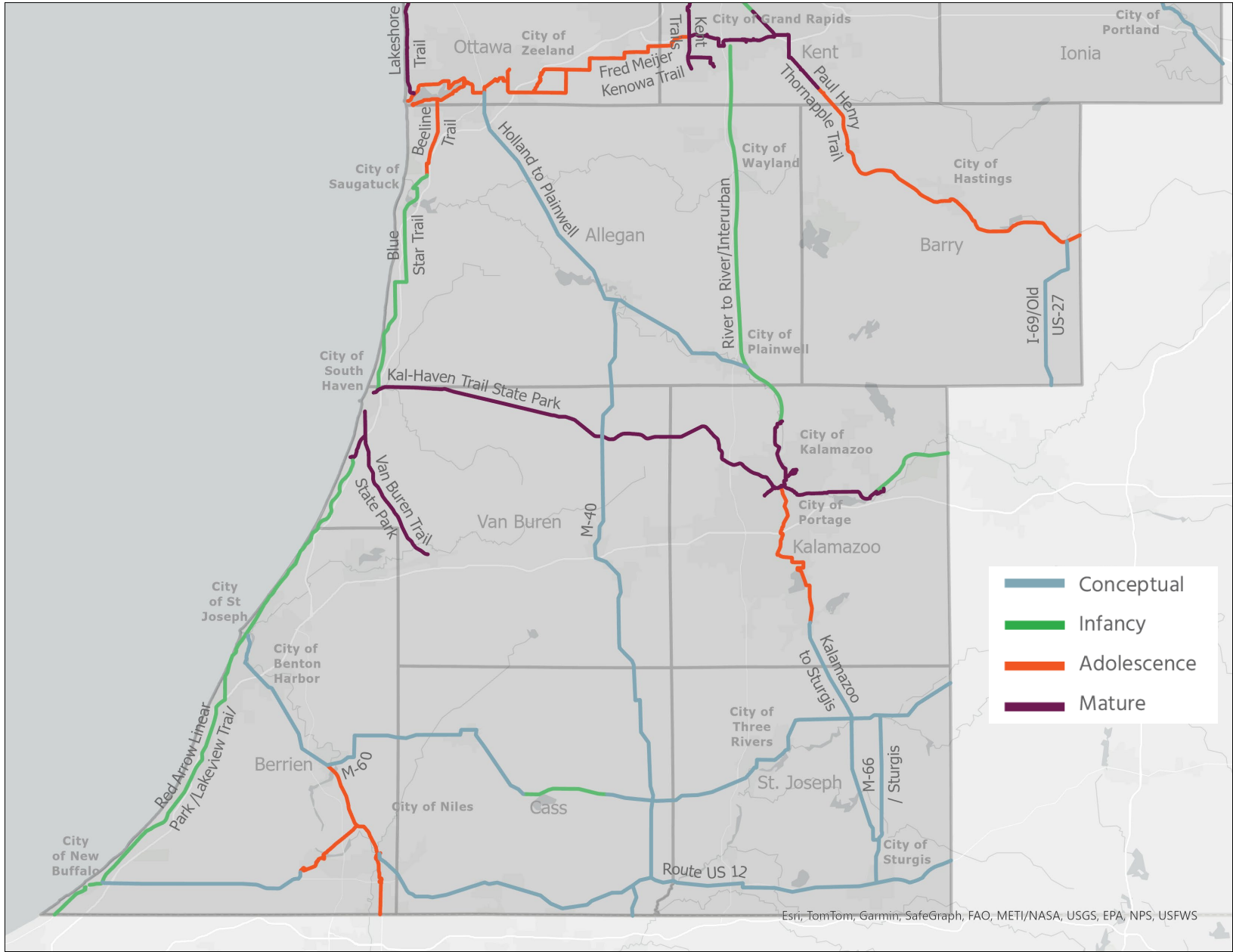


South Network Contribution



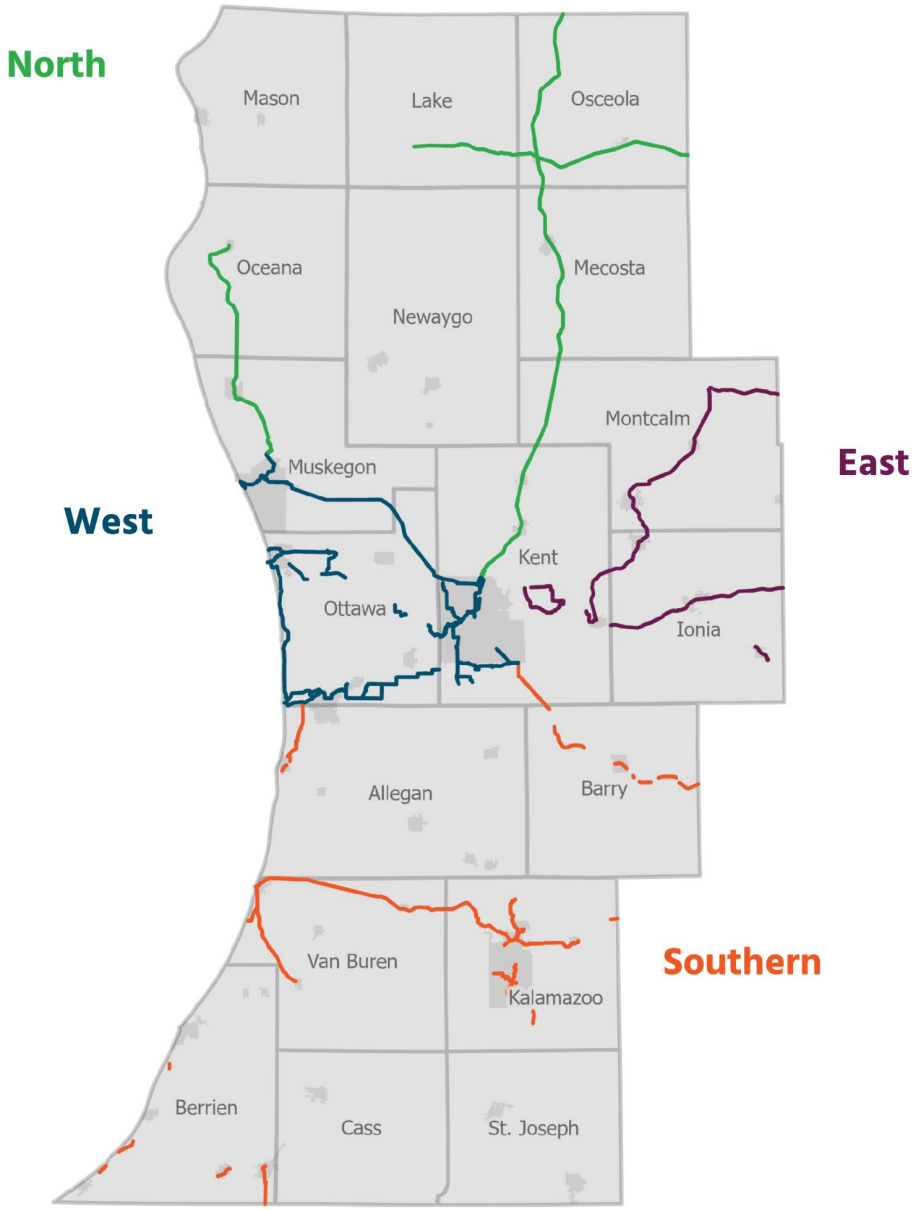


Balancing Investments

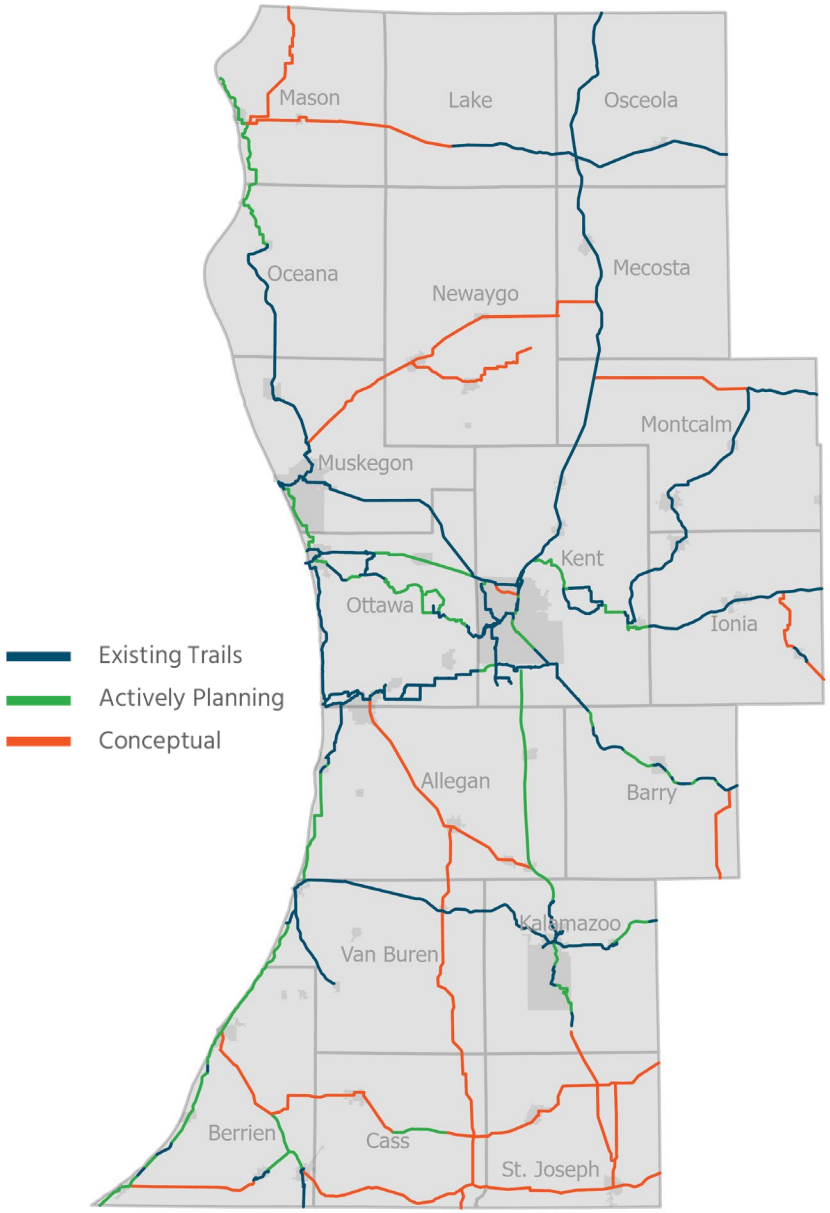


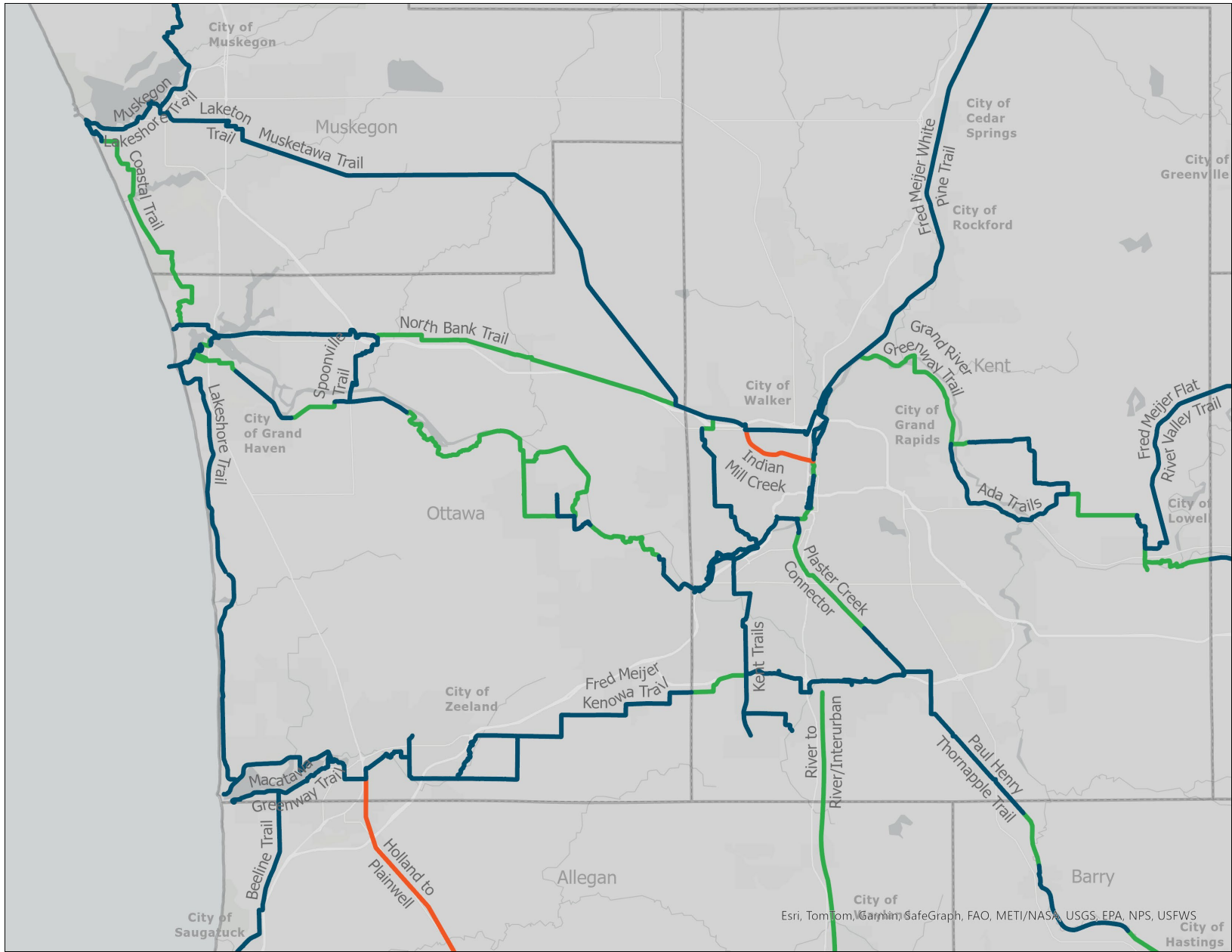
West Region

- Lakeshore Trail
- Laketon Trail
- Muskegon Lakeshore Trail
- Macatawa Trail
- Paul Henry Thornapple Trail
- Kent Trails
- M6 Trail
- FM Pioneer Trail
- FM Standale Trail
- Lakeshore Trail
- FM Millenium Park Trail

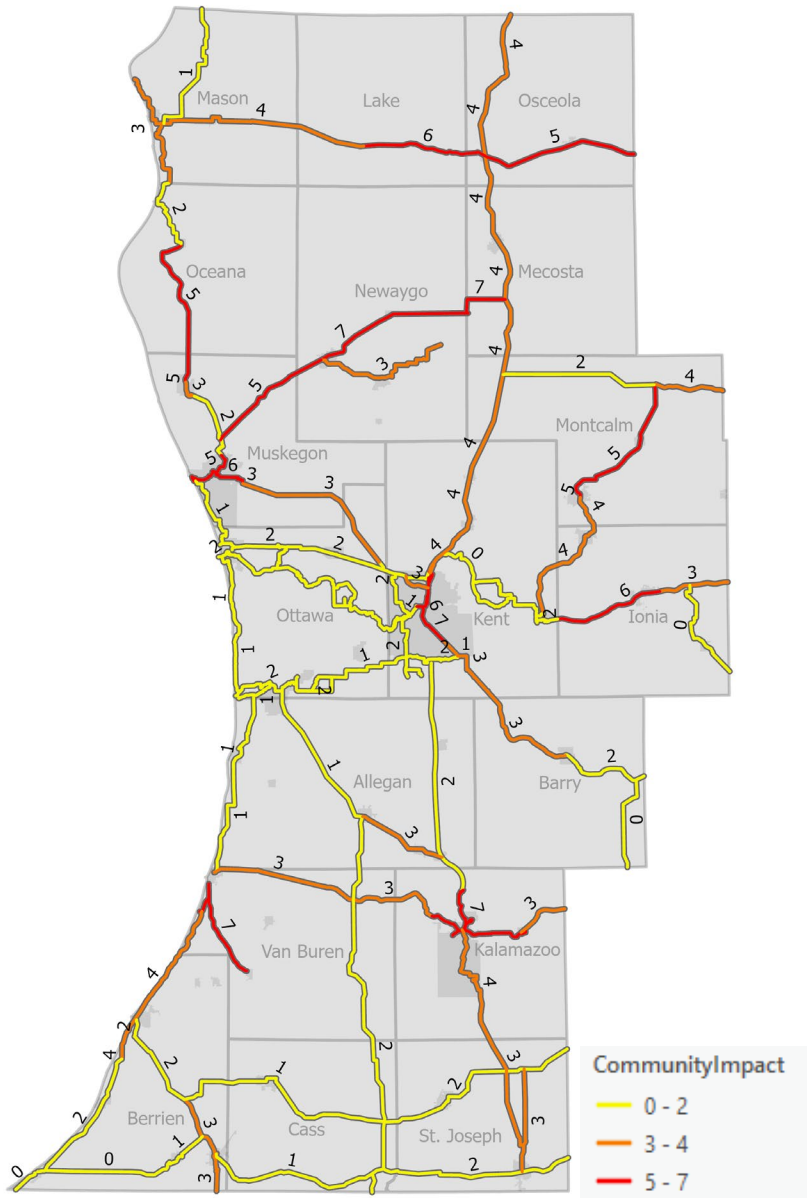


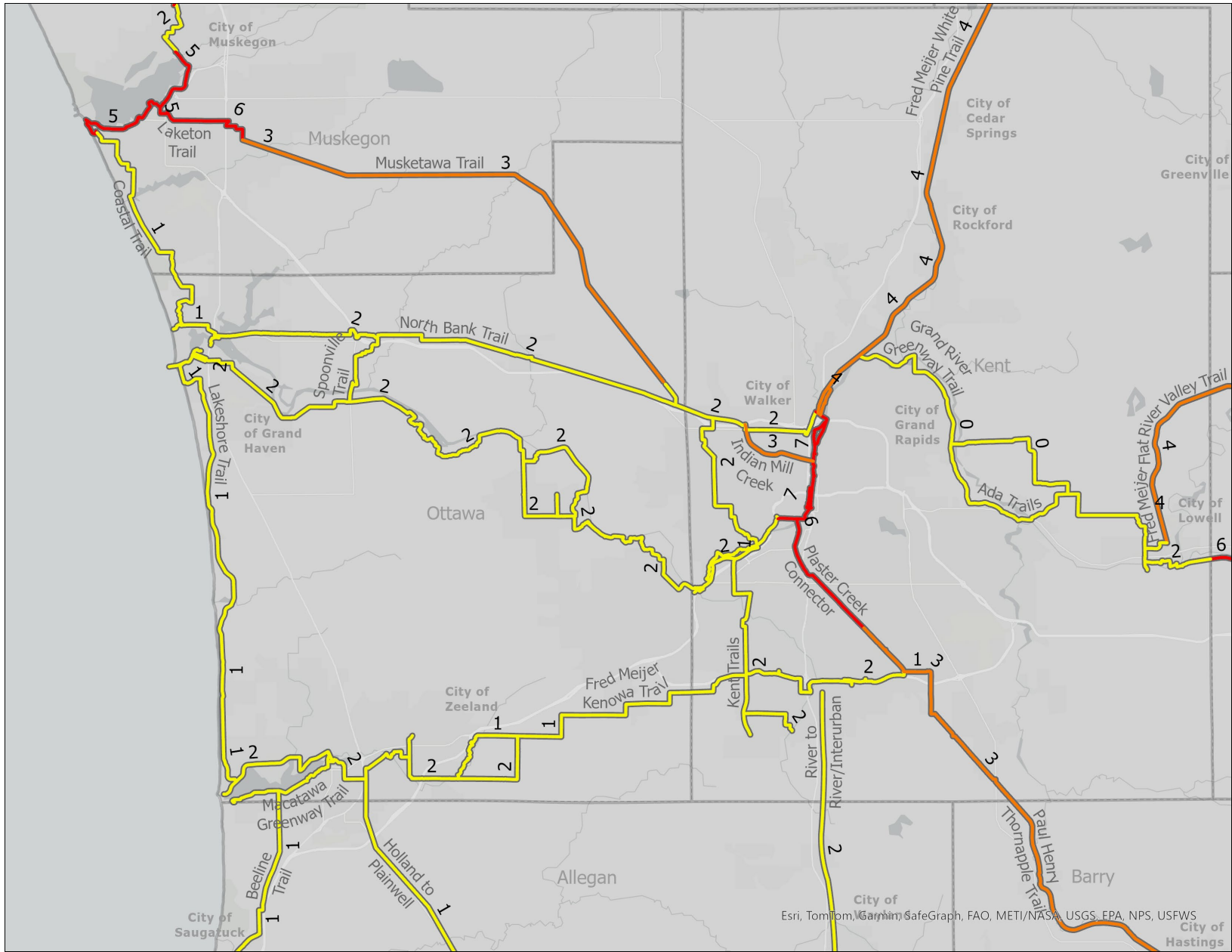
West Trail Planning Map



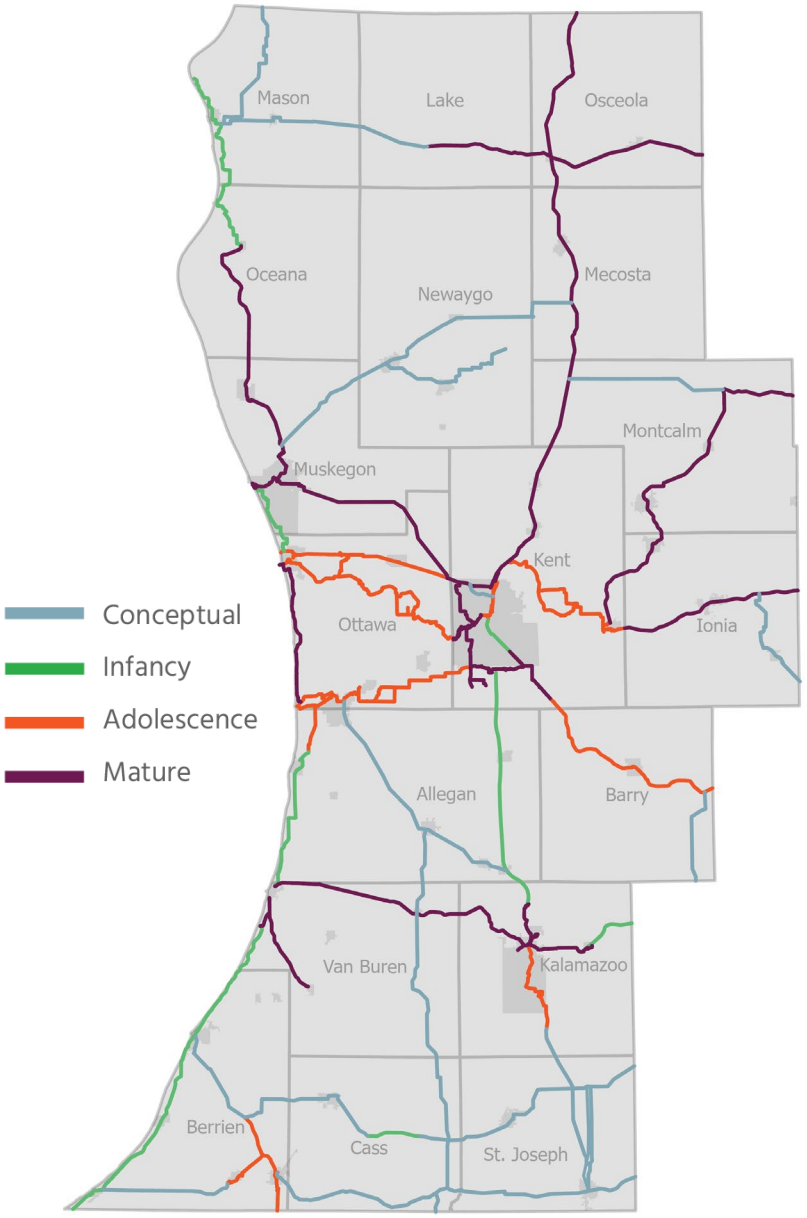


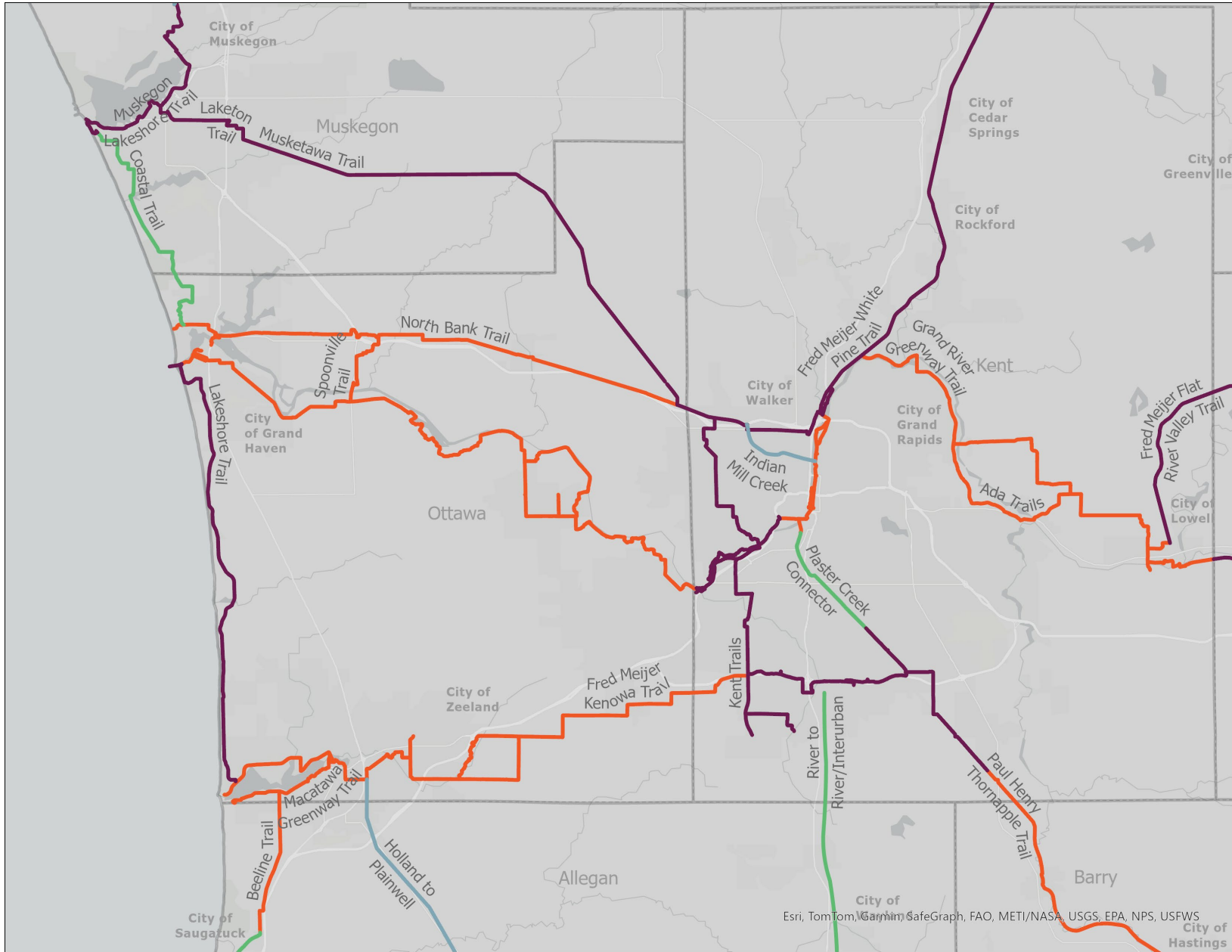
West Community Impact



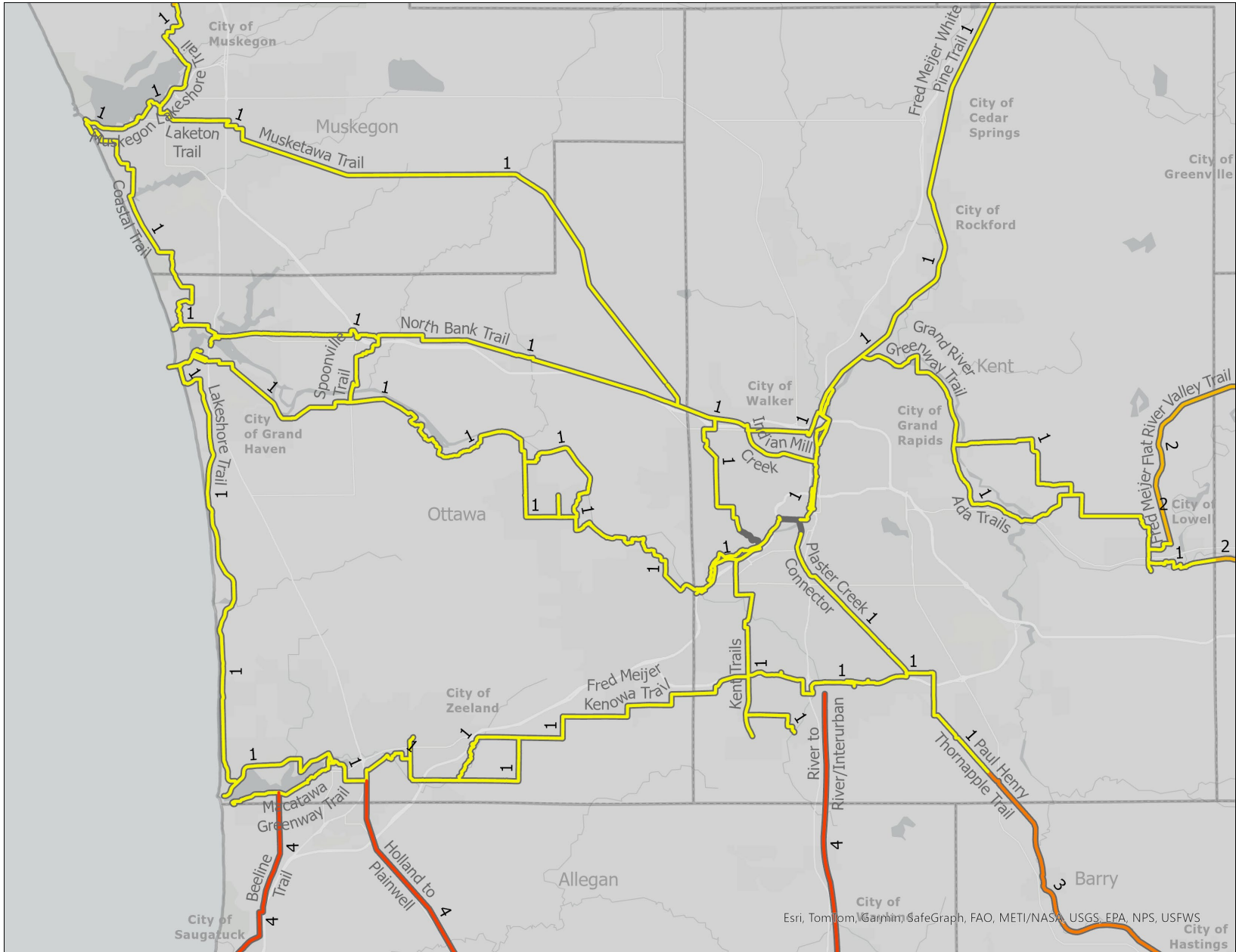


West Trail Life Stage

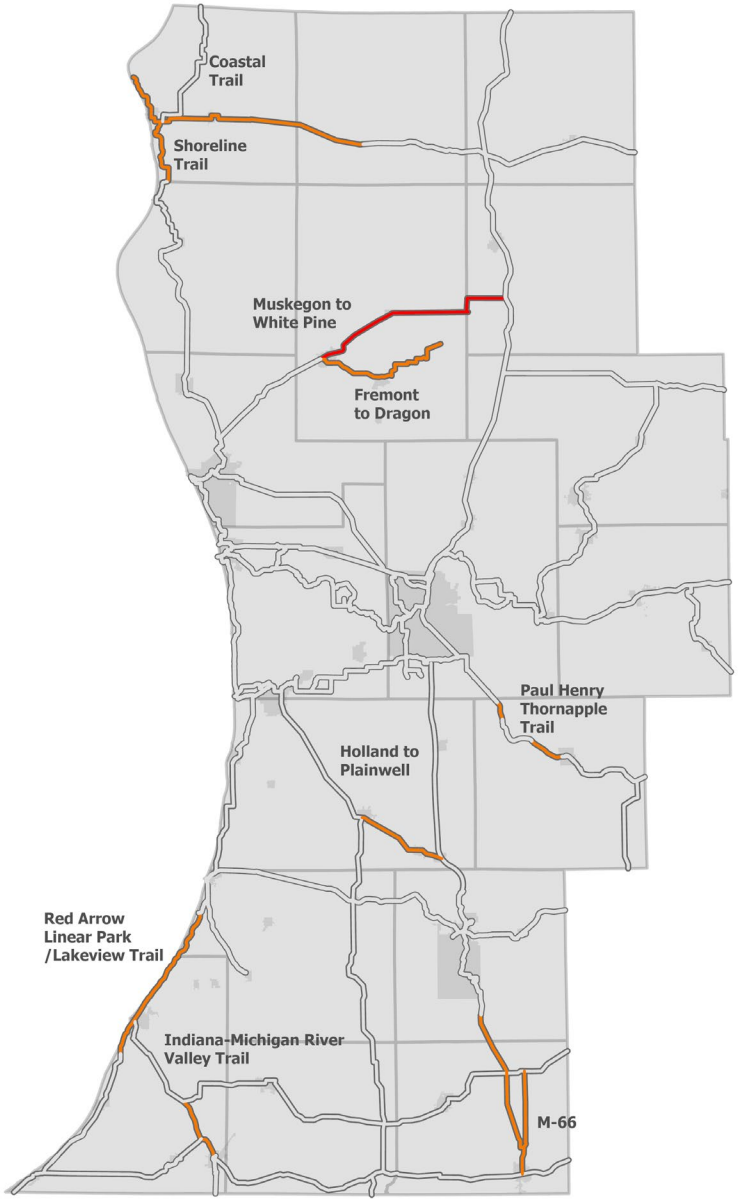


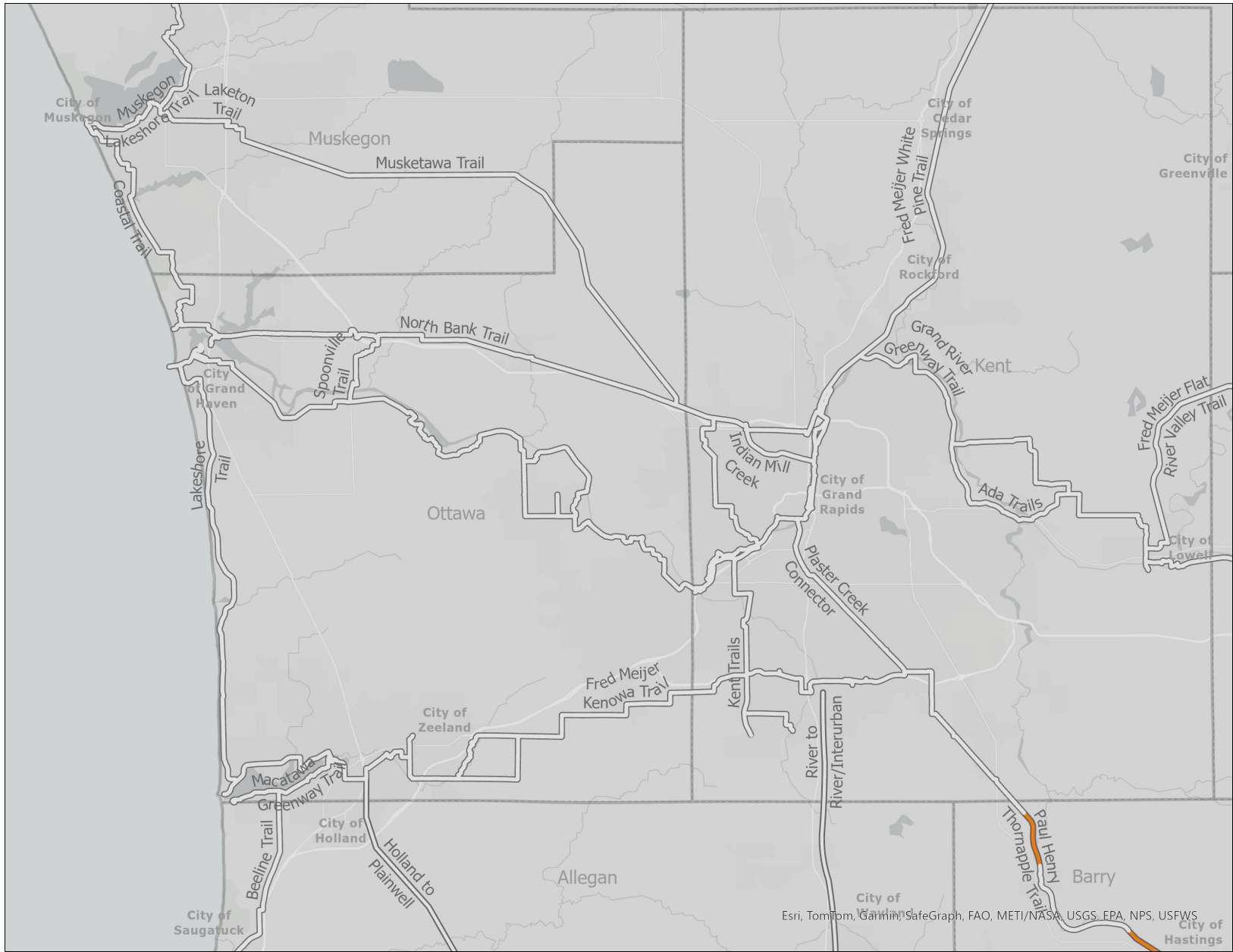


West Underinvested Areas

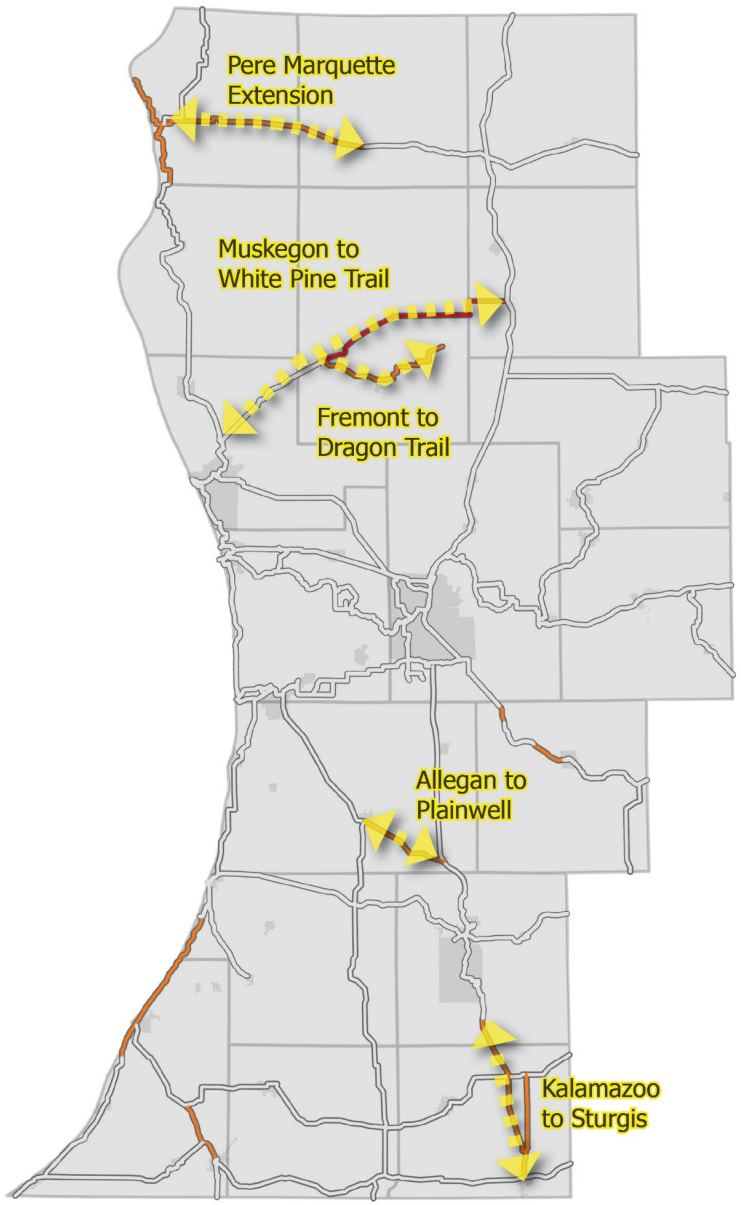


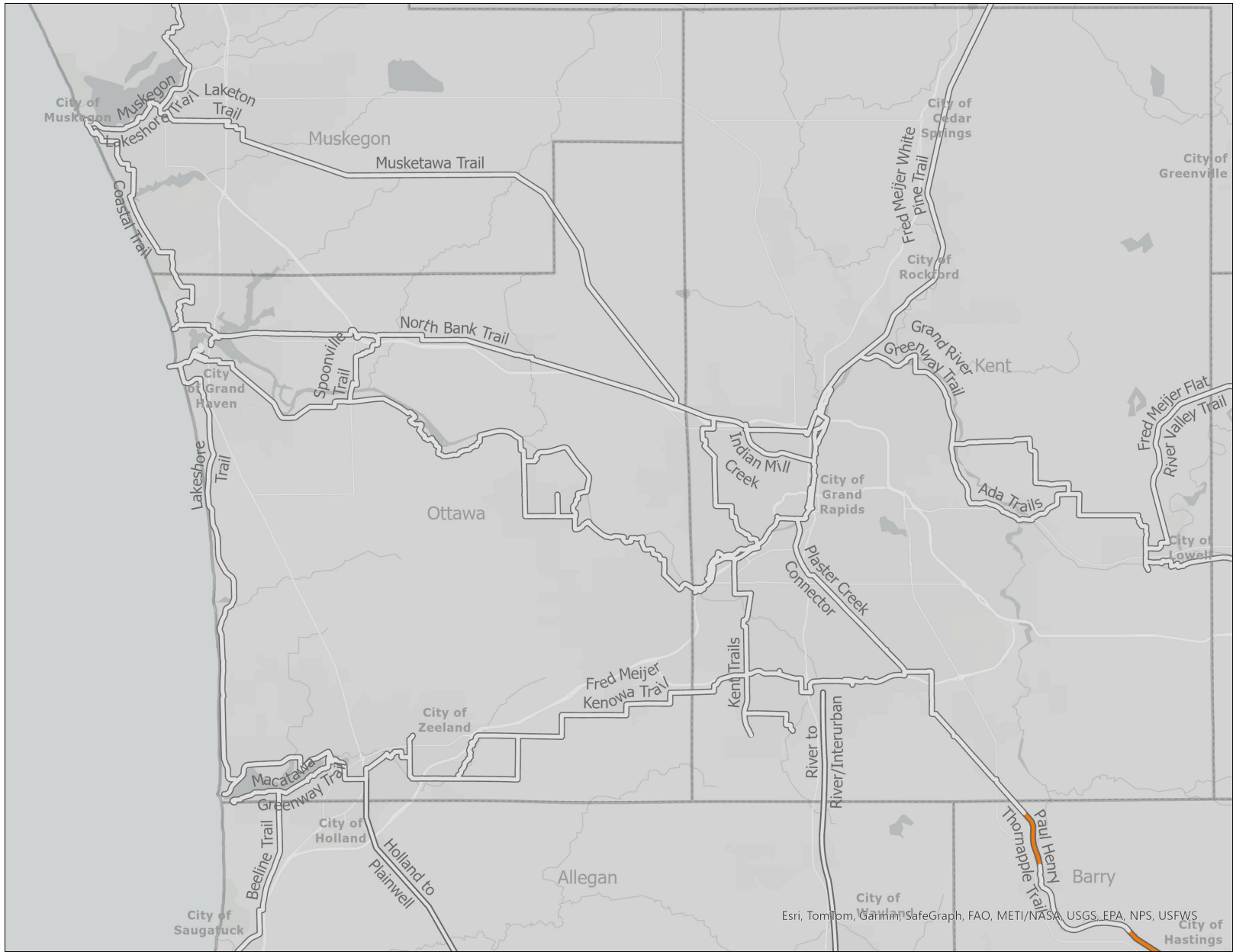
West Big Impact / Underinvested



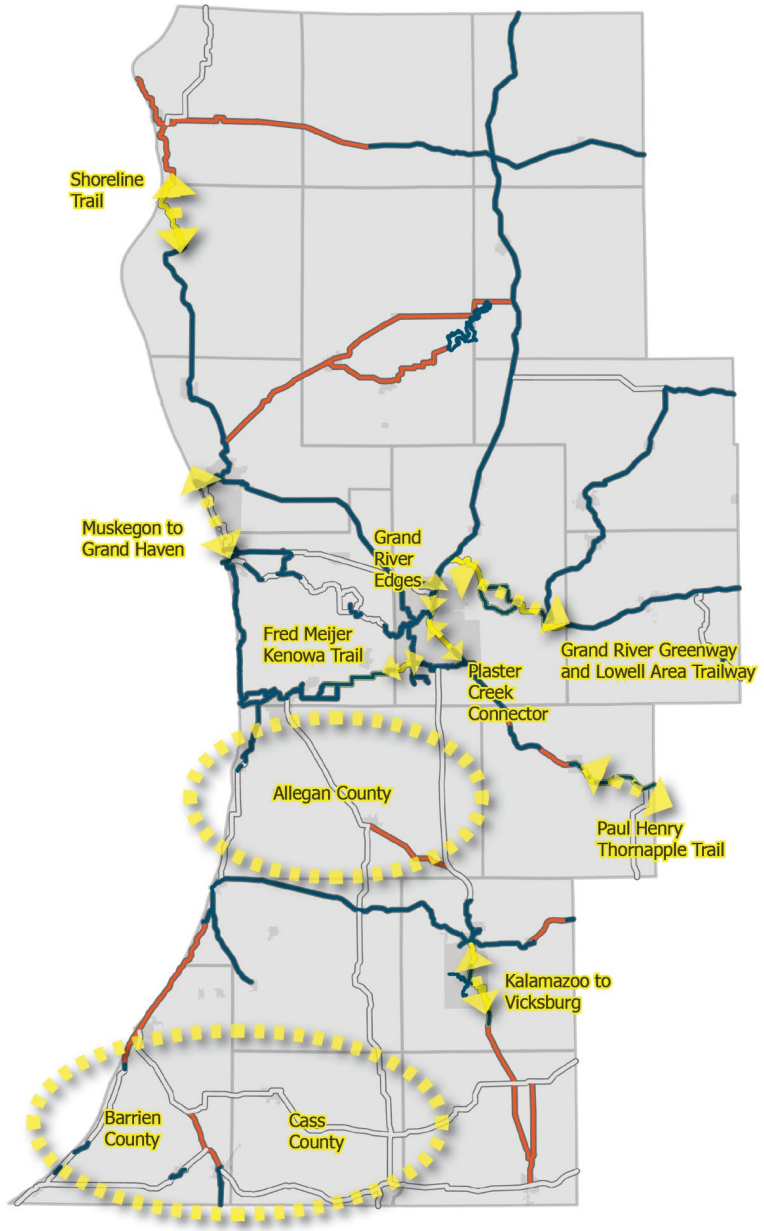


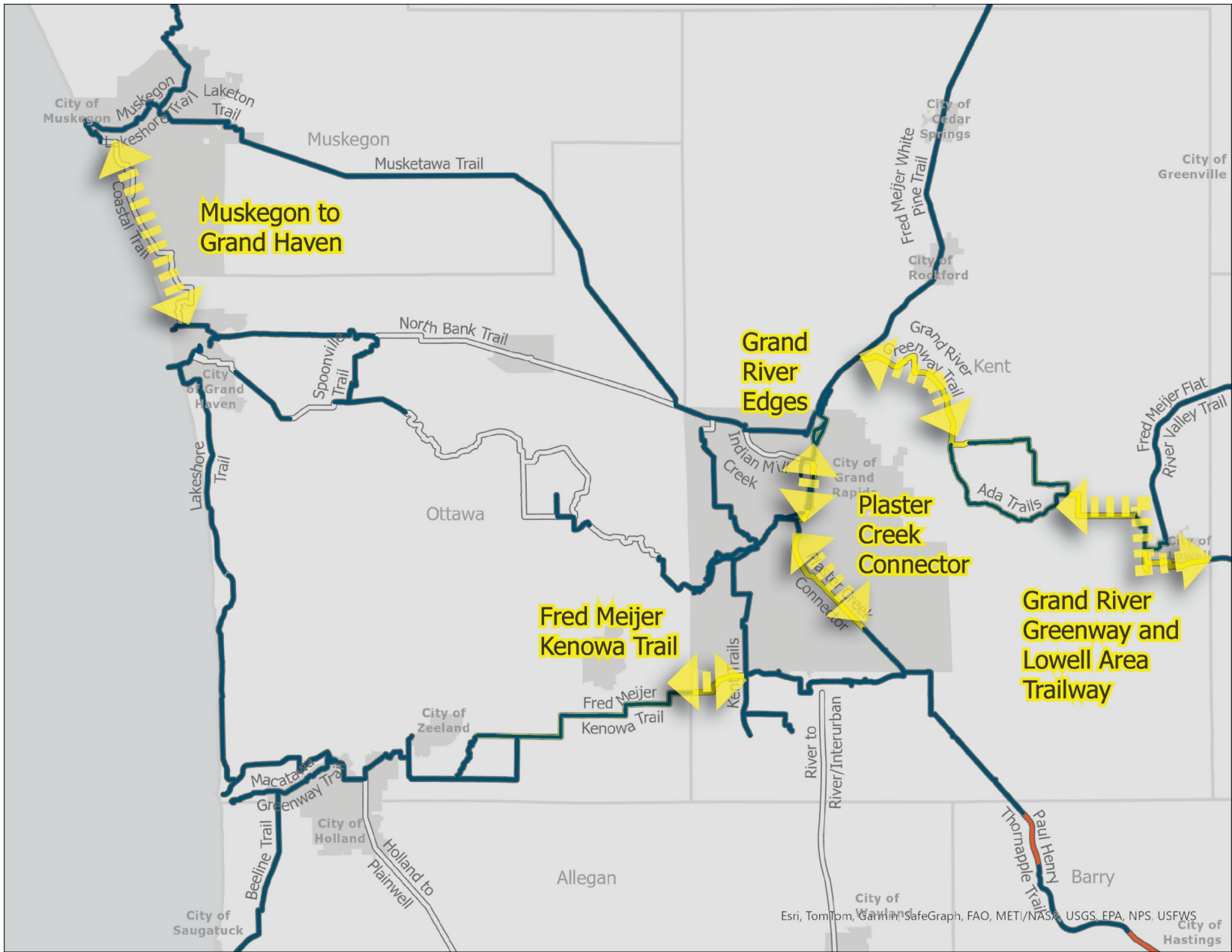
West Big Impact / Underinvested / Concept





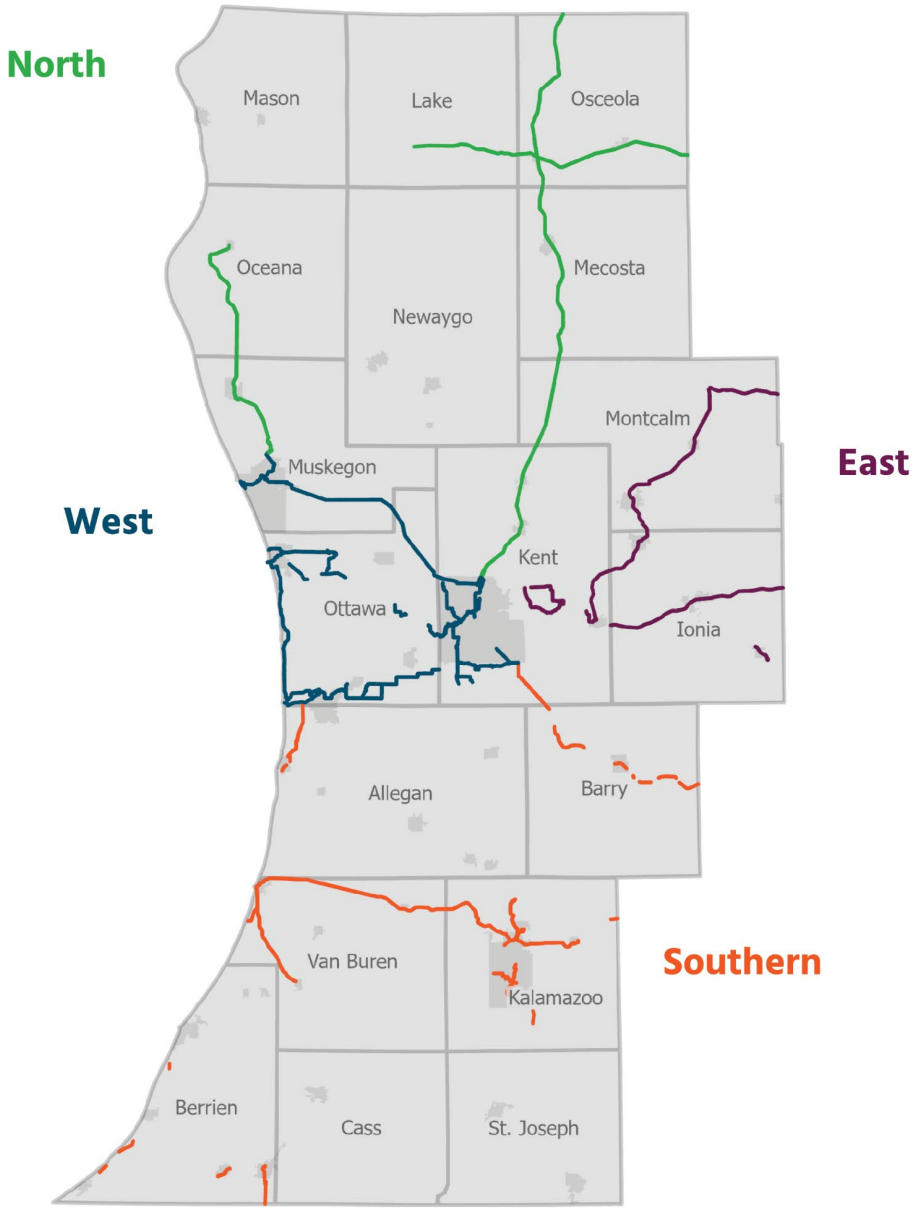
West Network Contribution



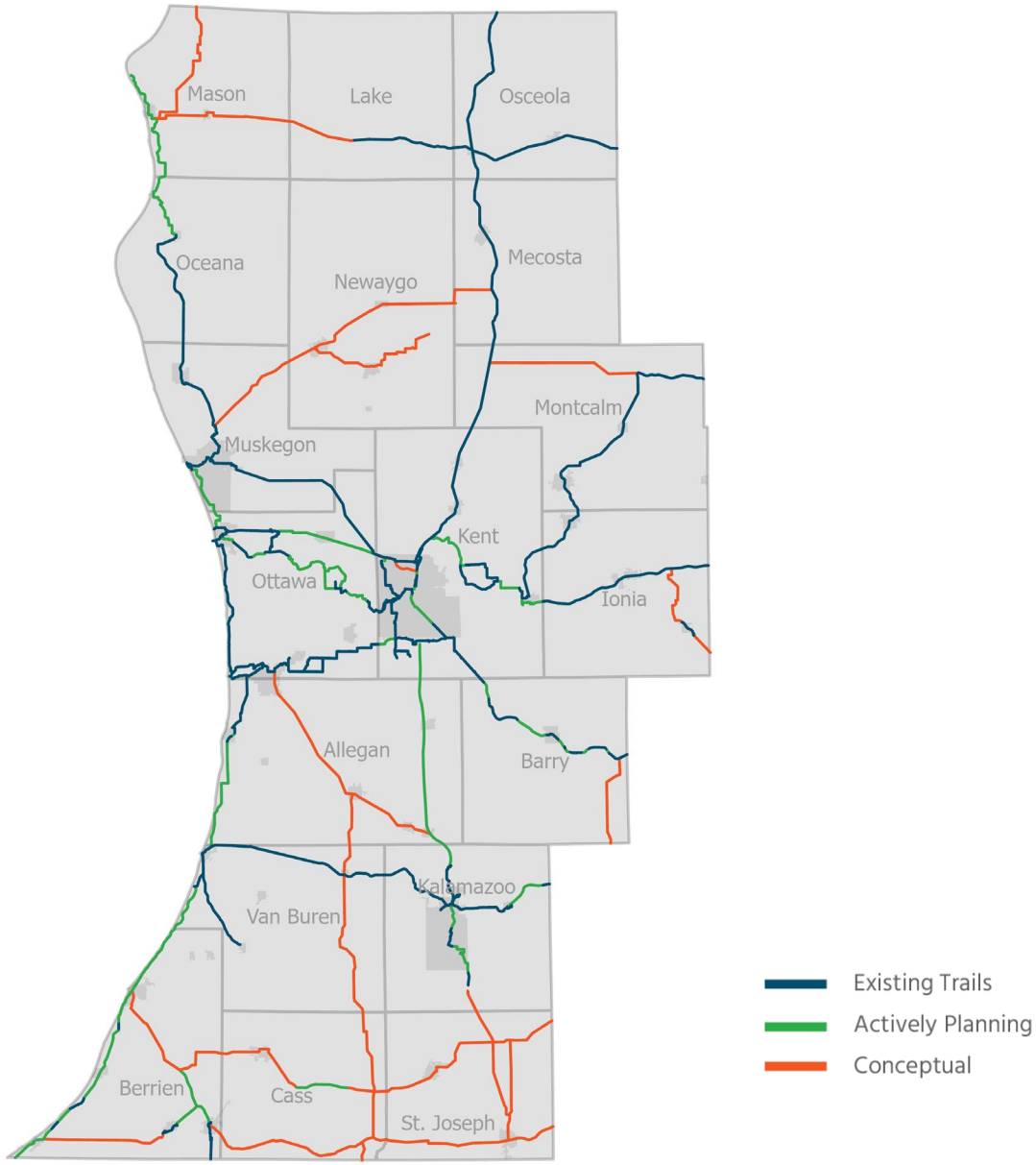


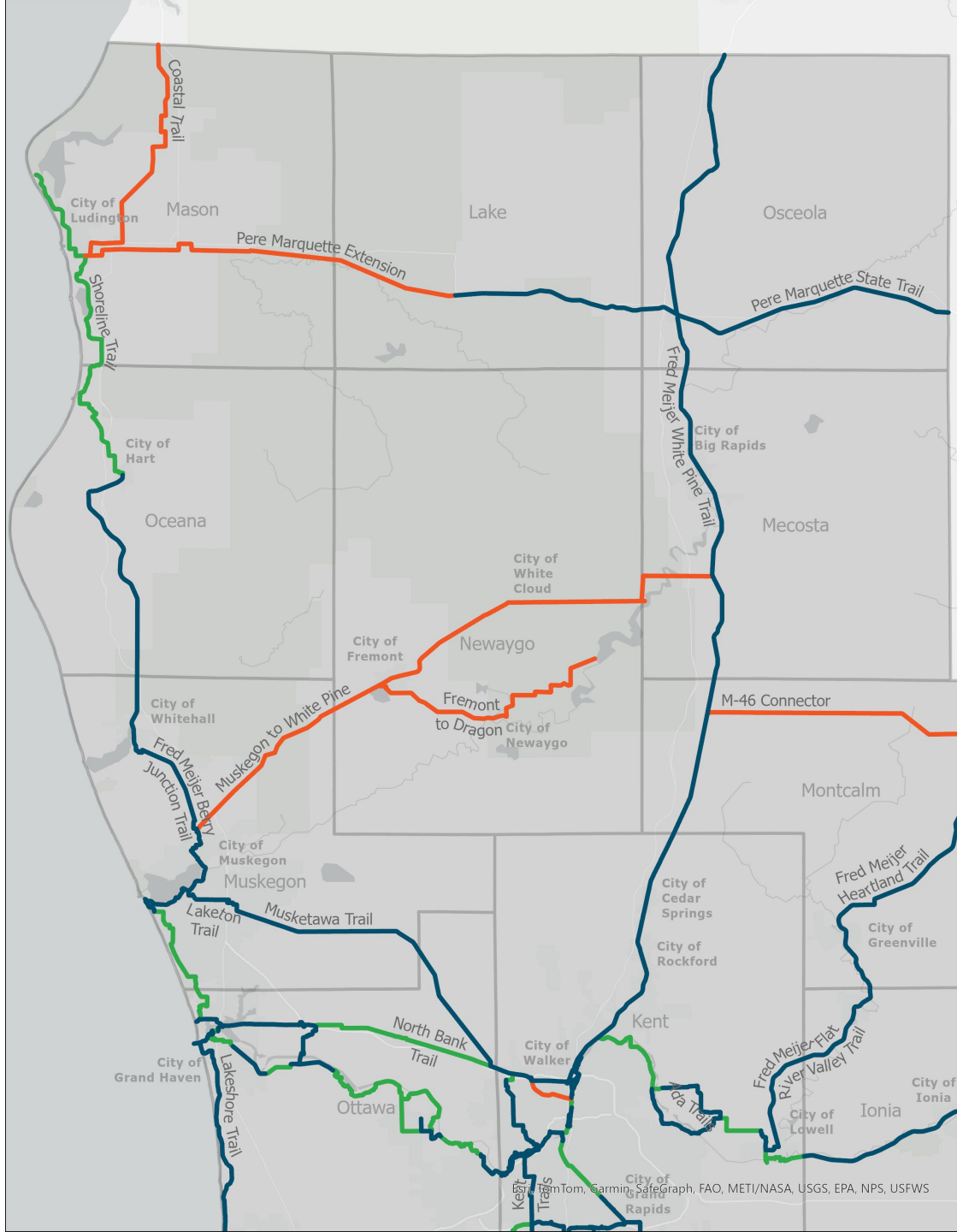
North Region

- Pere Marquette Trail
- WFM Hart-Montague Trail
- FM White Pine Trail
- While Lake Pathway
- Fred Meijer Berry Junction Trail

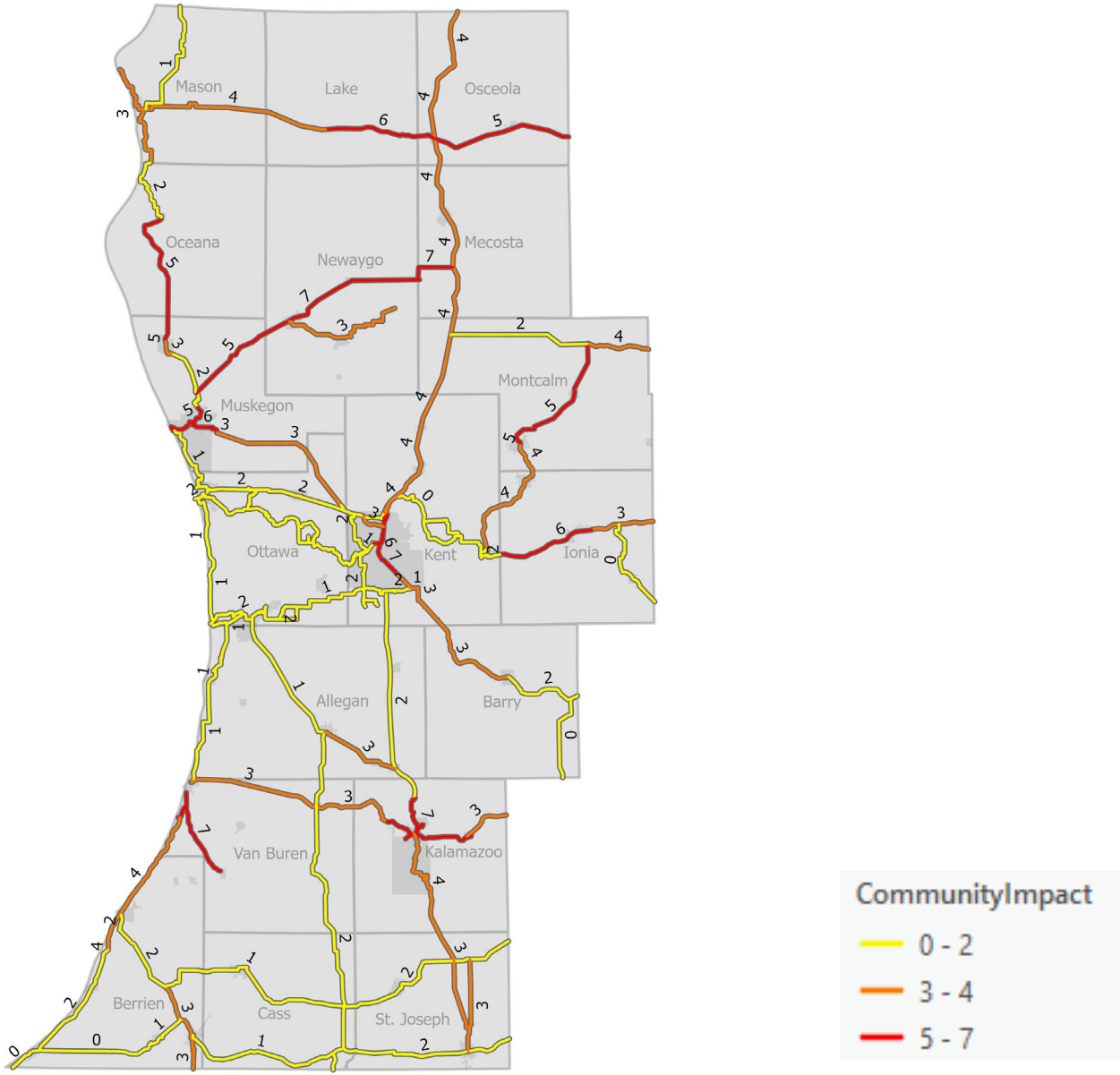


North Trail Planning Map



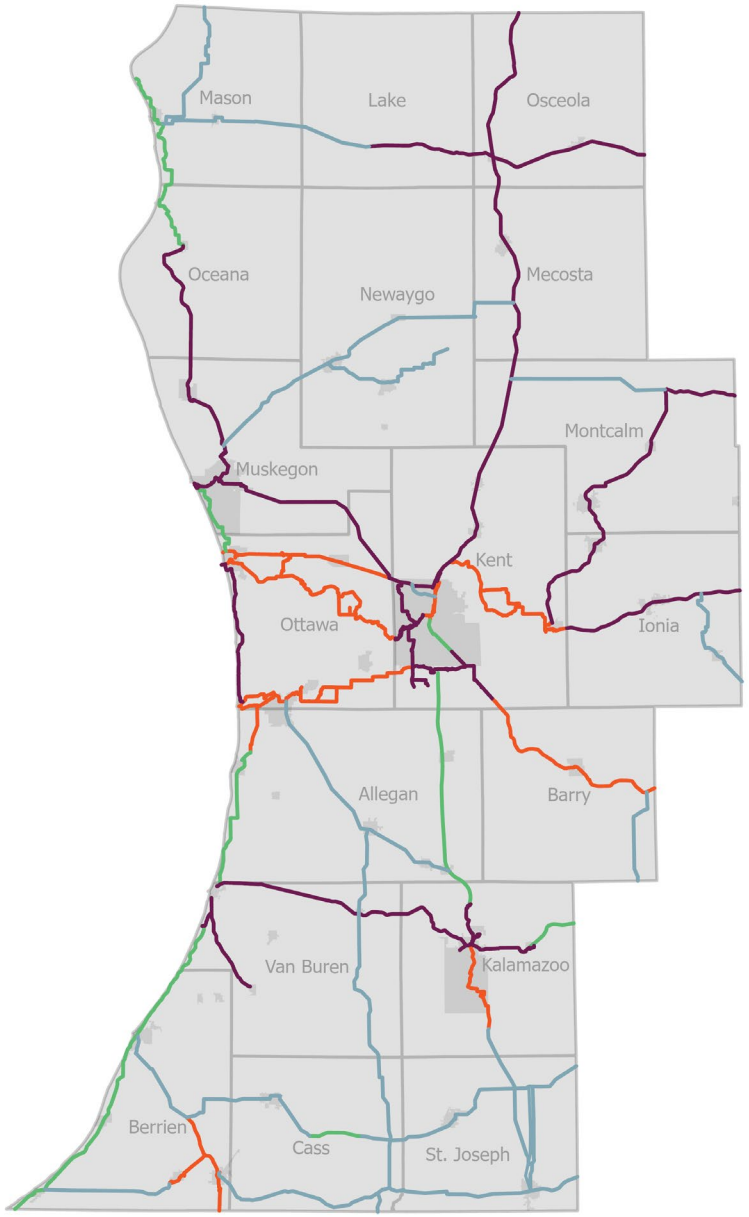


North Community Impact

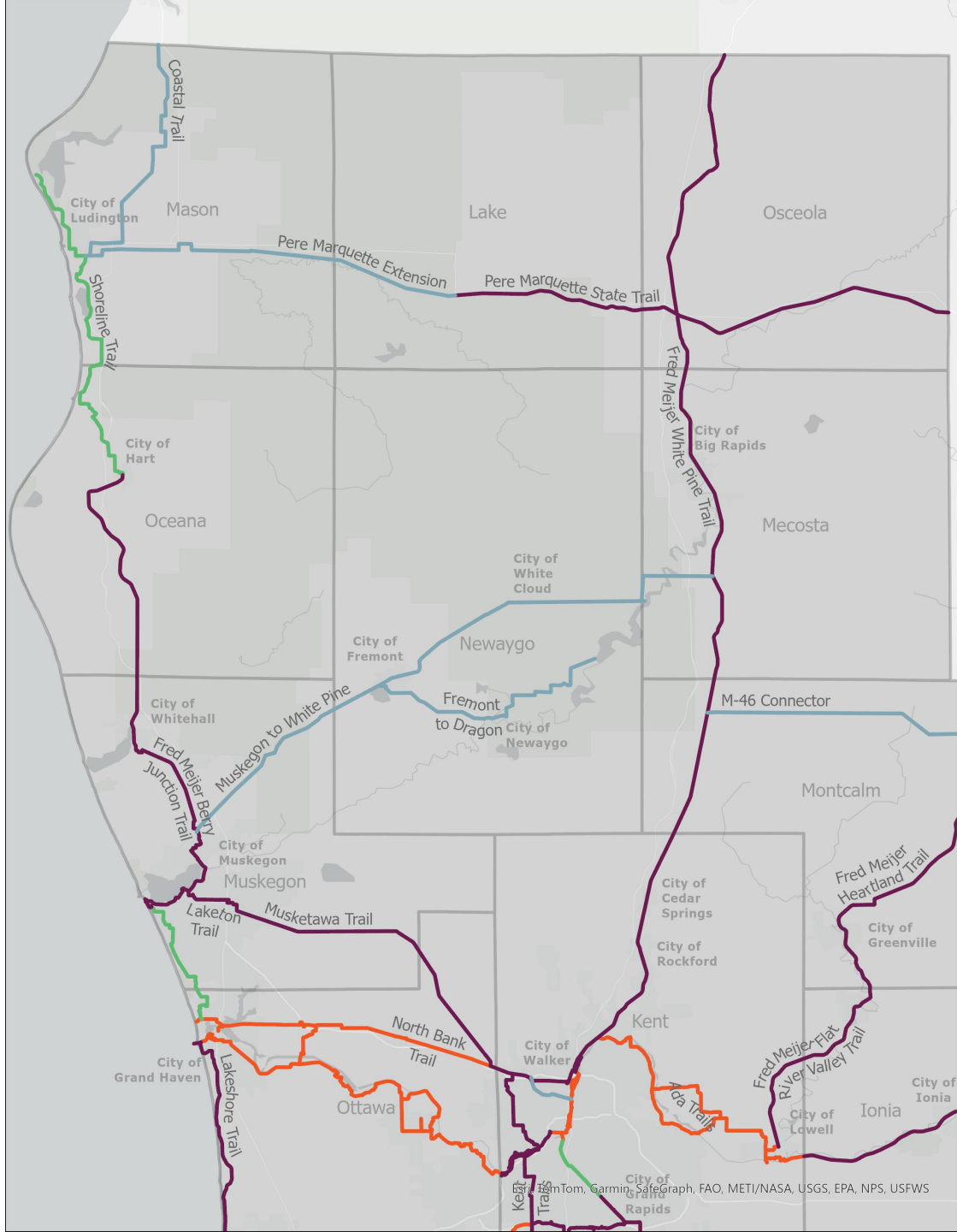


CommunityImpact
- 0 - 2
- 3 - 4
- 5 - 7

North Trail Life Stage

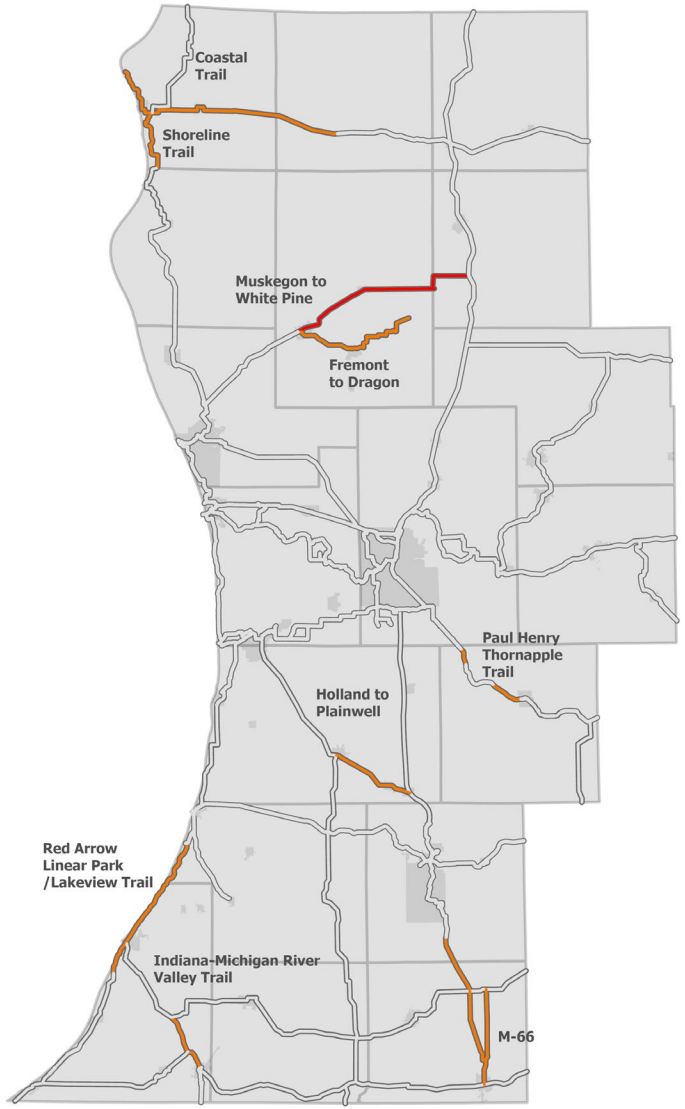


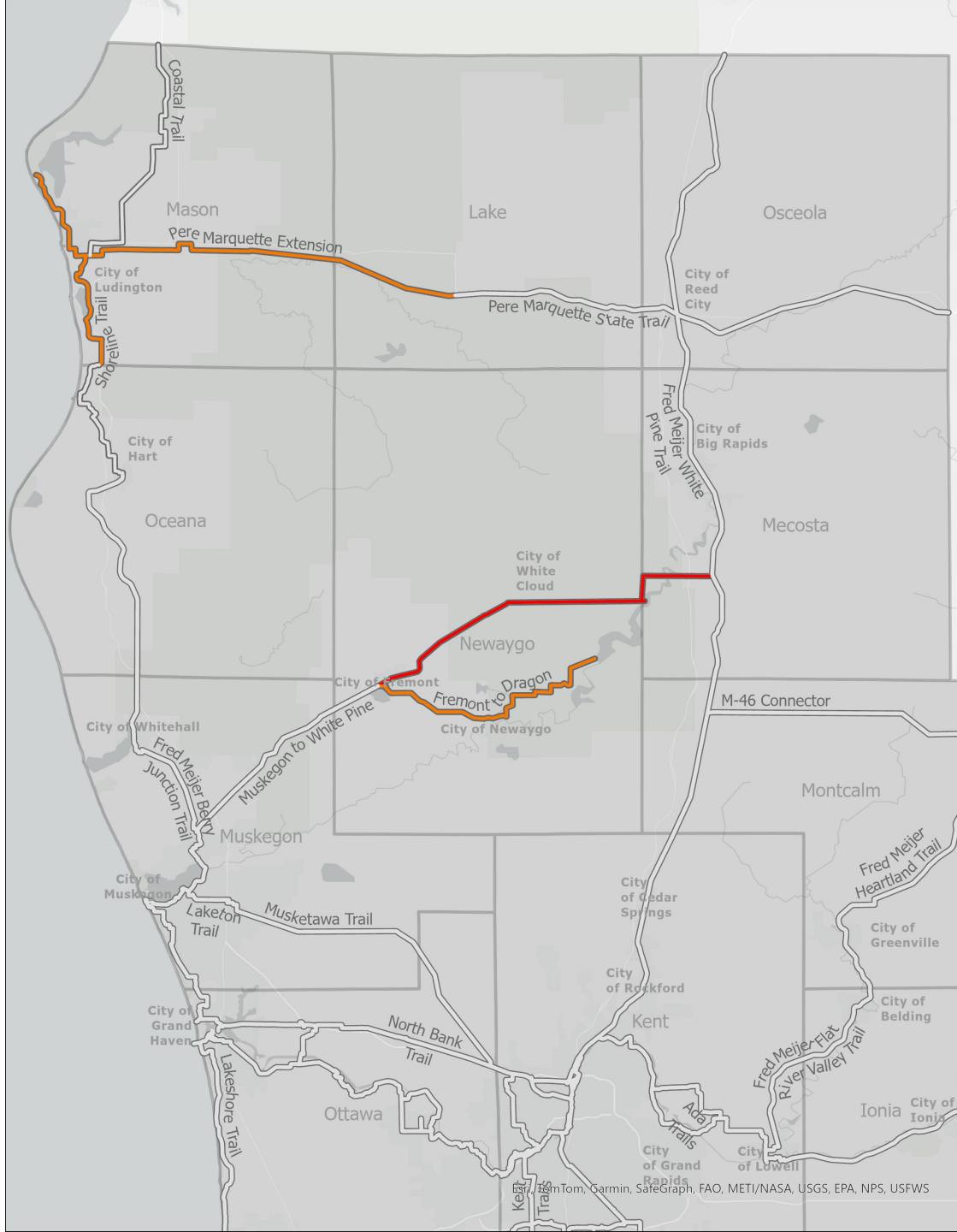
- Conceptual
- Infancy
- Adolescence
- Mature



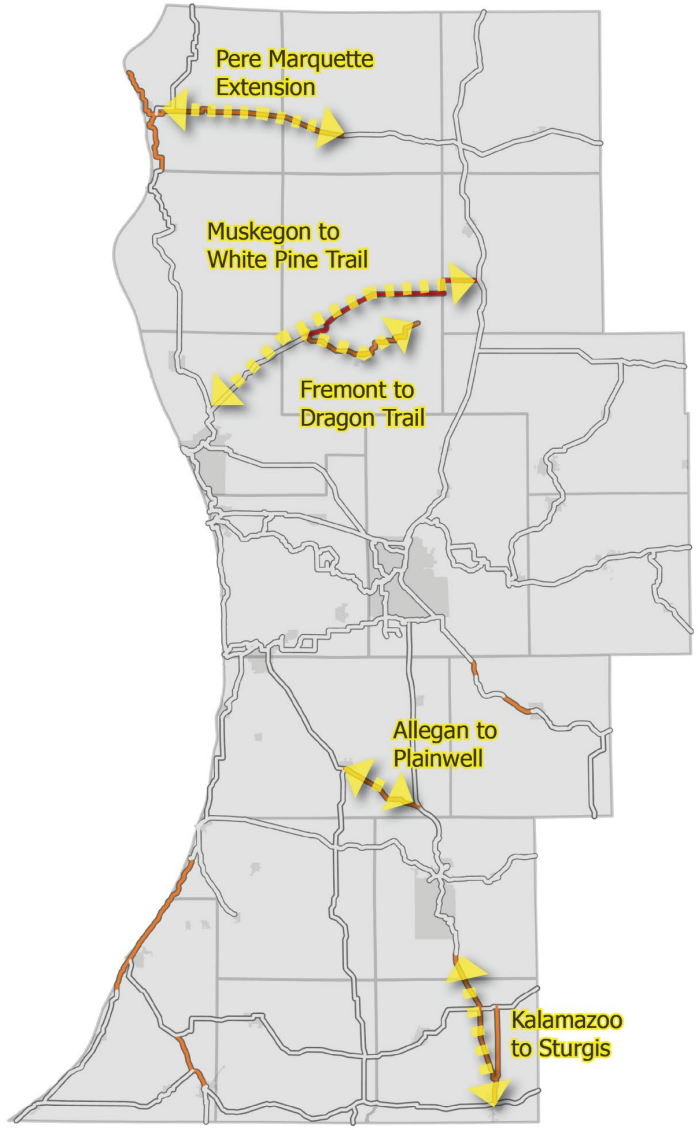
N. Underinvested Areas

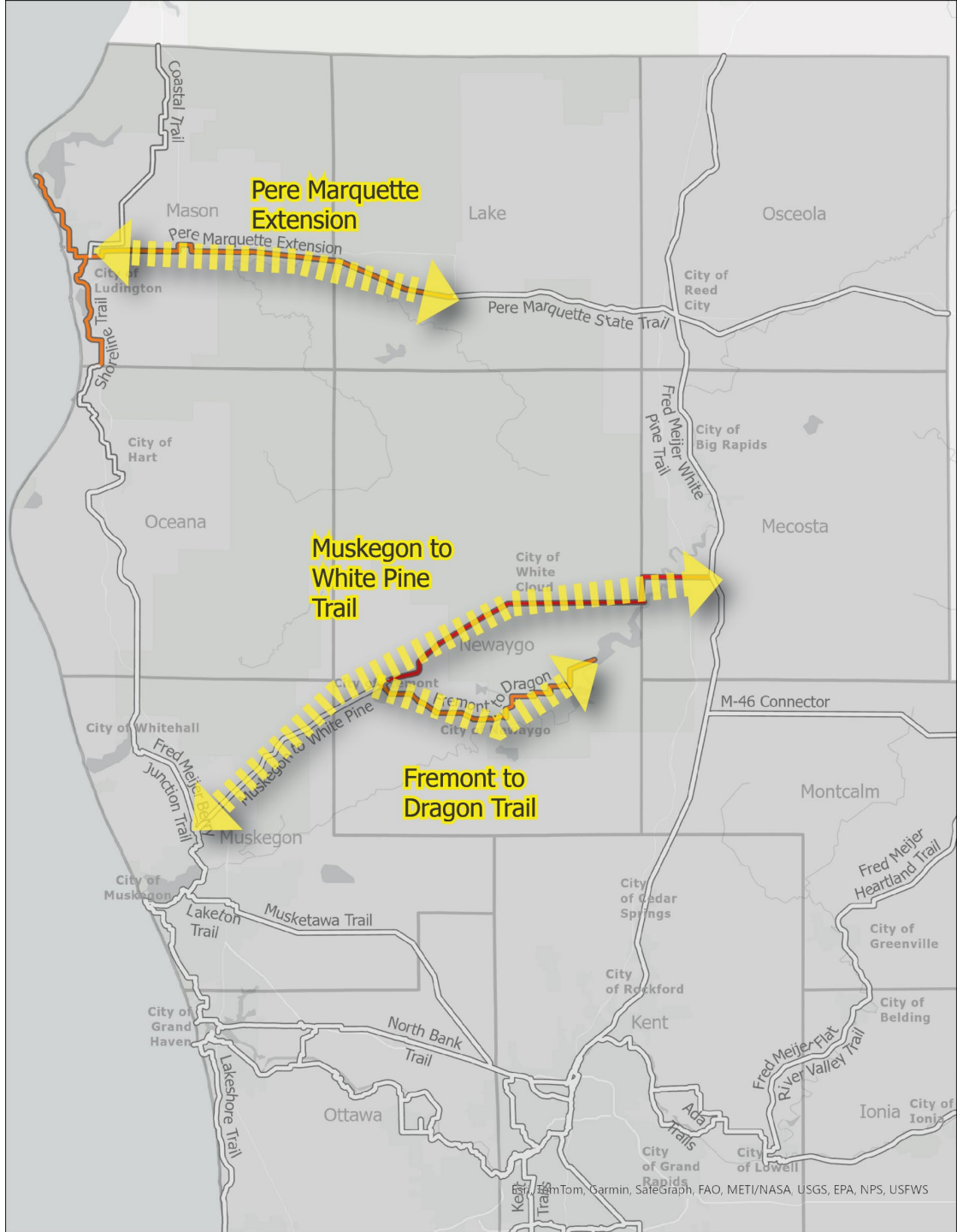
North Big Impact / Underinvested



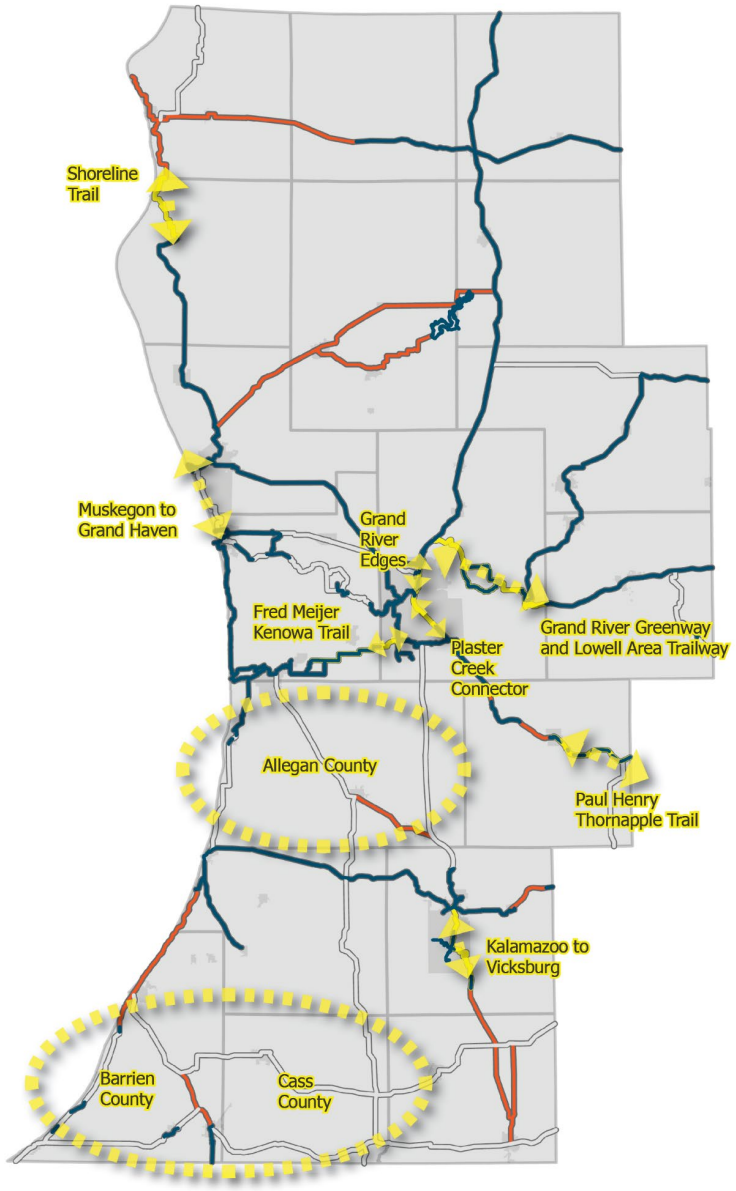


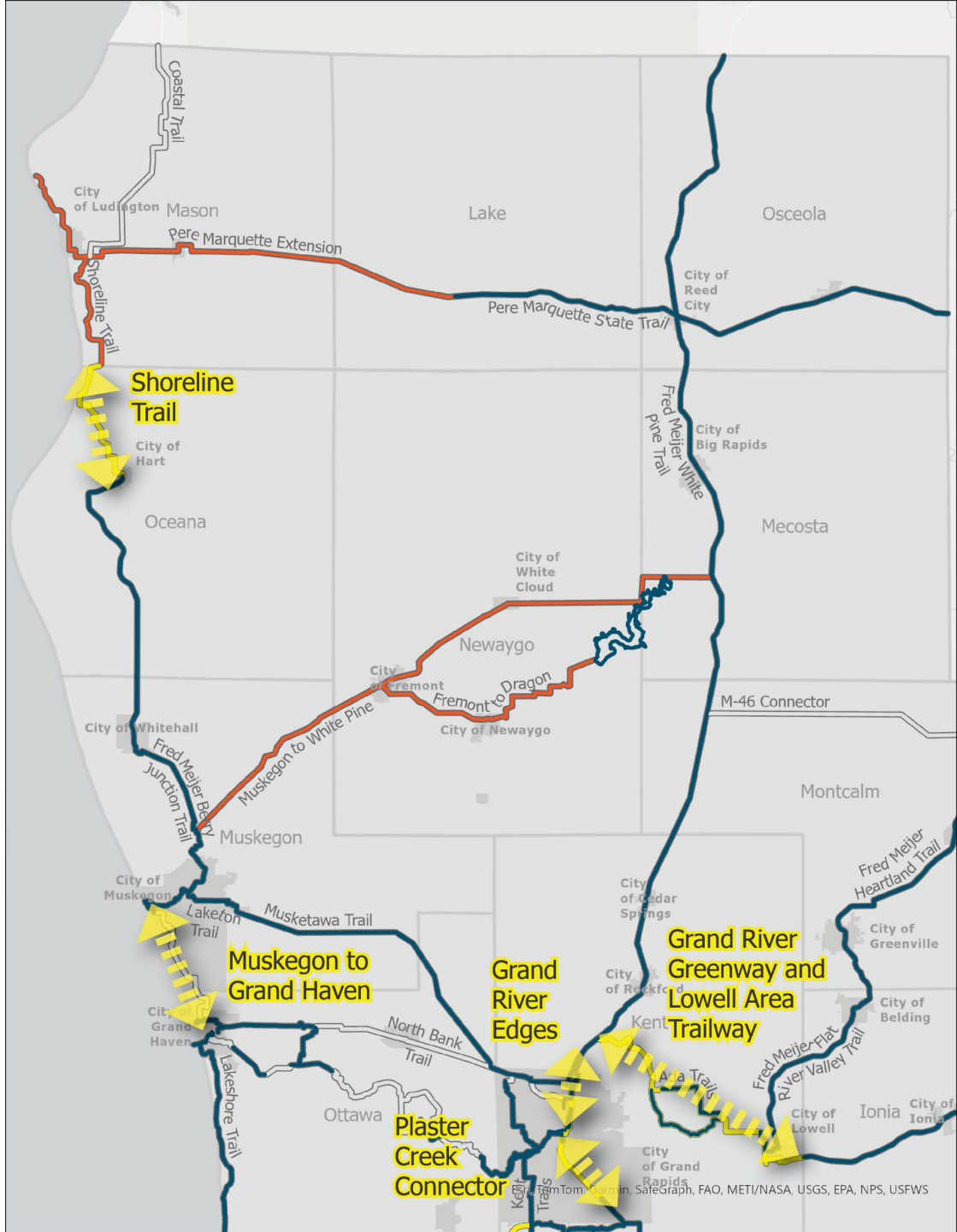
North Big Impact / Underinvested / Concept





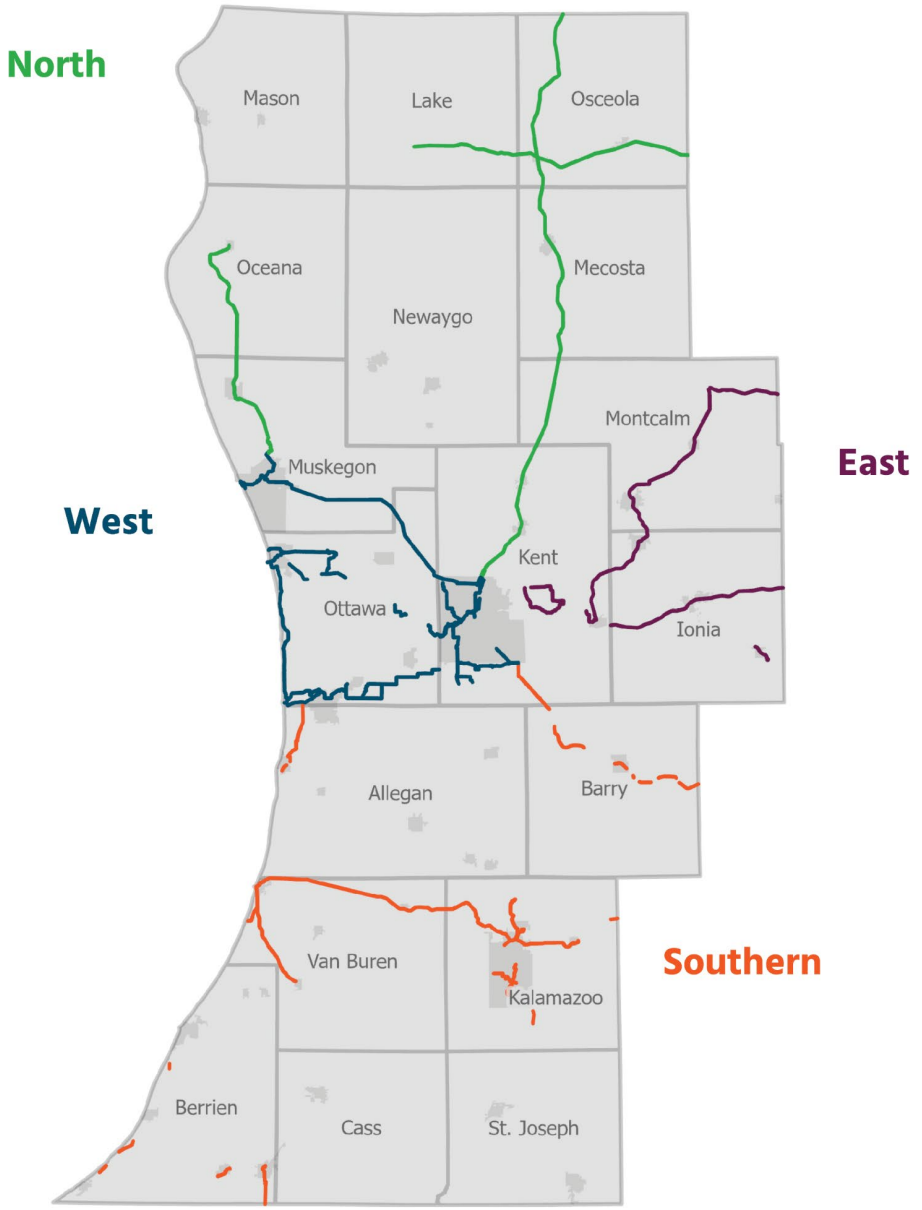
North Network Contribution



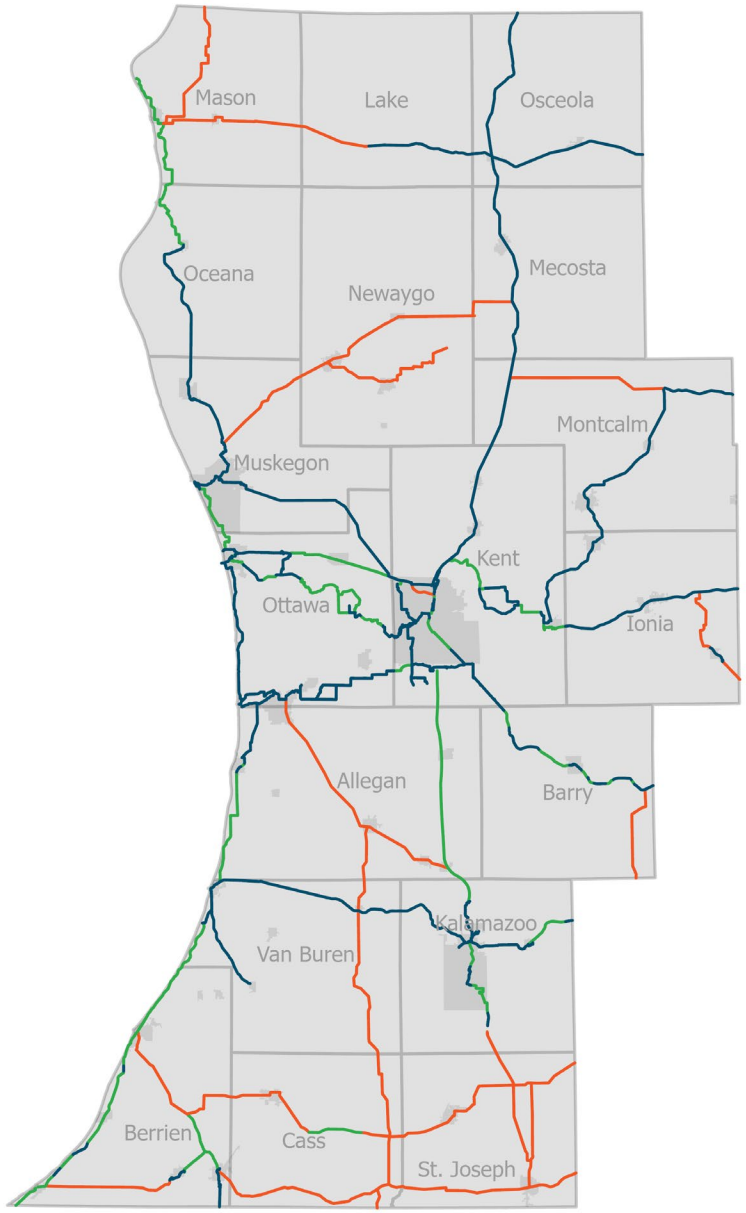


East Region

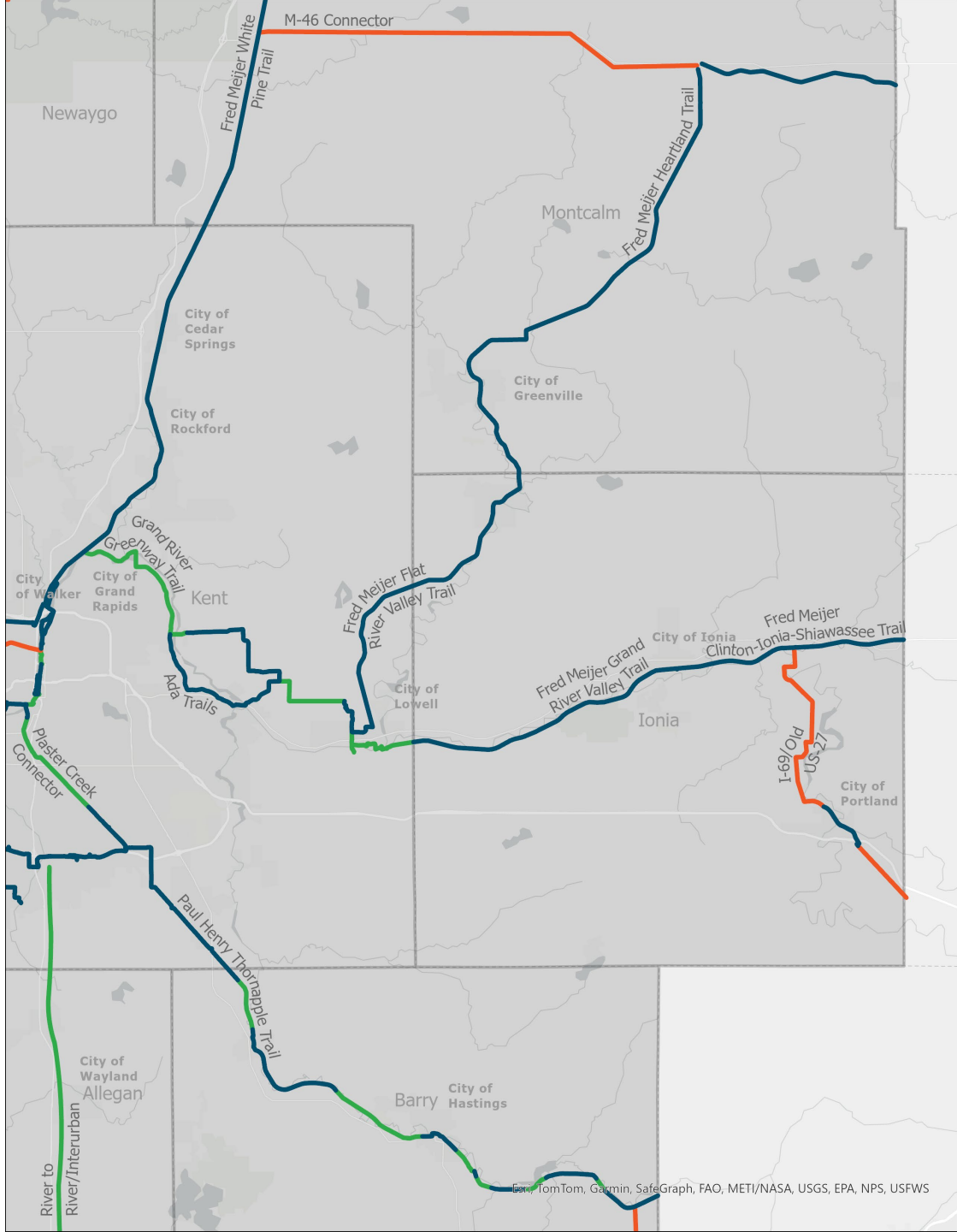
- FM Grand River Flat Valley Trail
- FM Heartland Trail
- FM Flat River Valley Trail
- FM CIS Trail



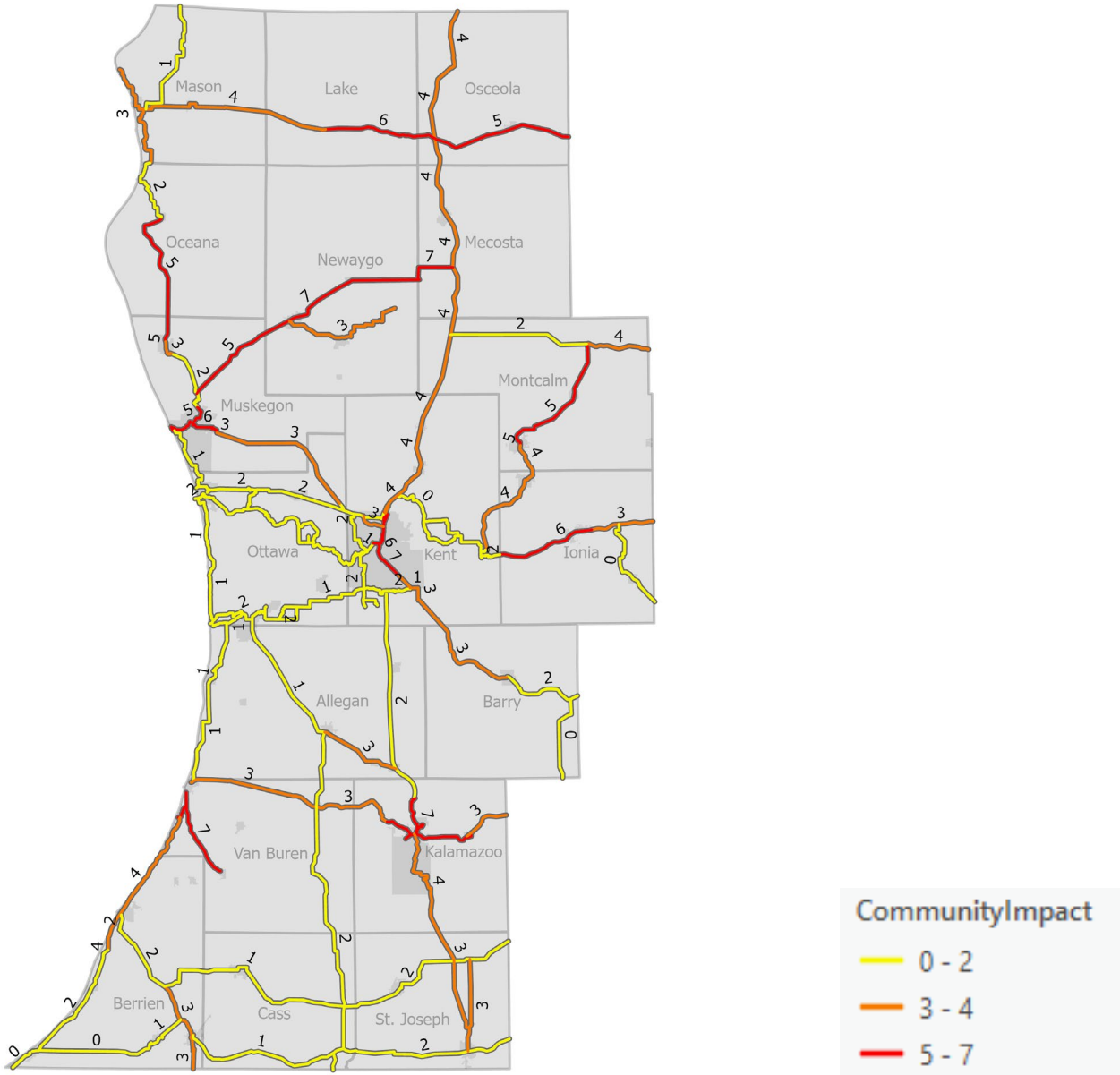
East Trail Planning Map



- Existing Trails
- Actively Planning
- Conceptual

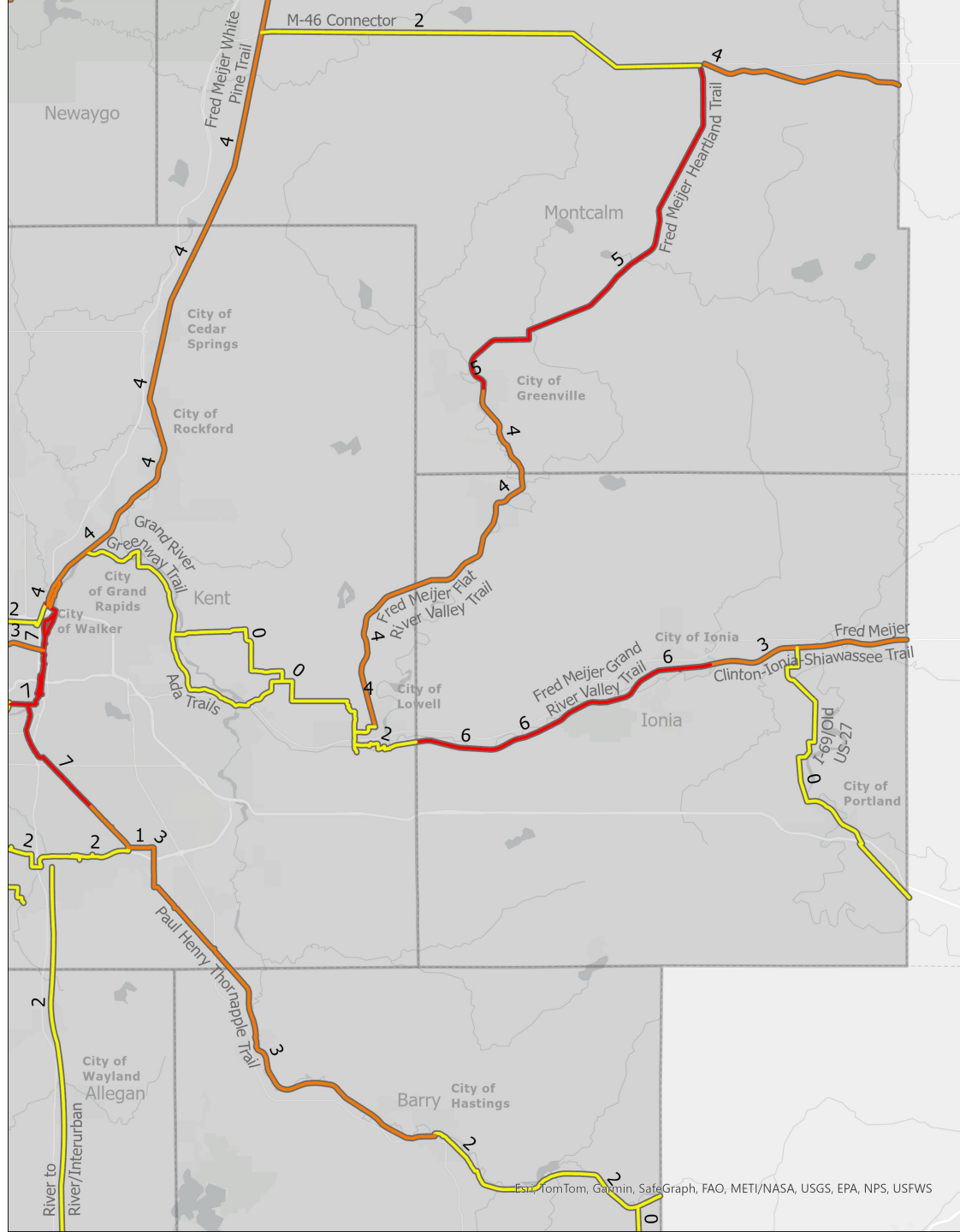


East Community Impact

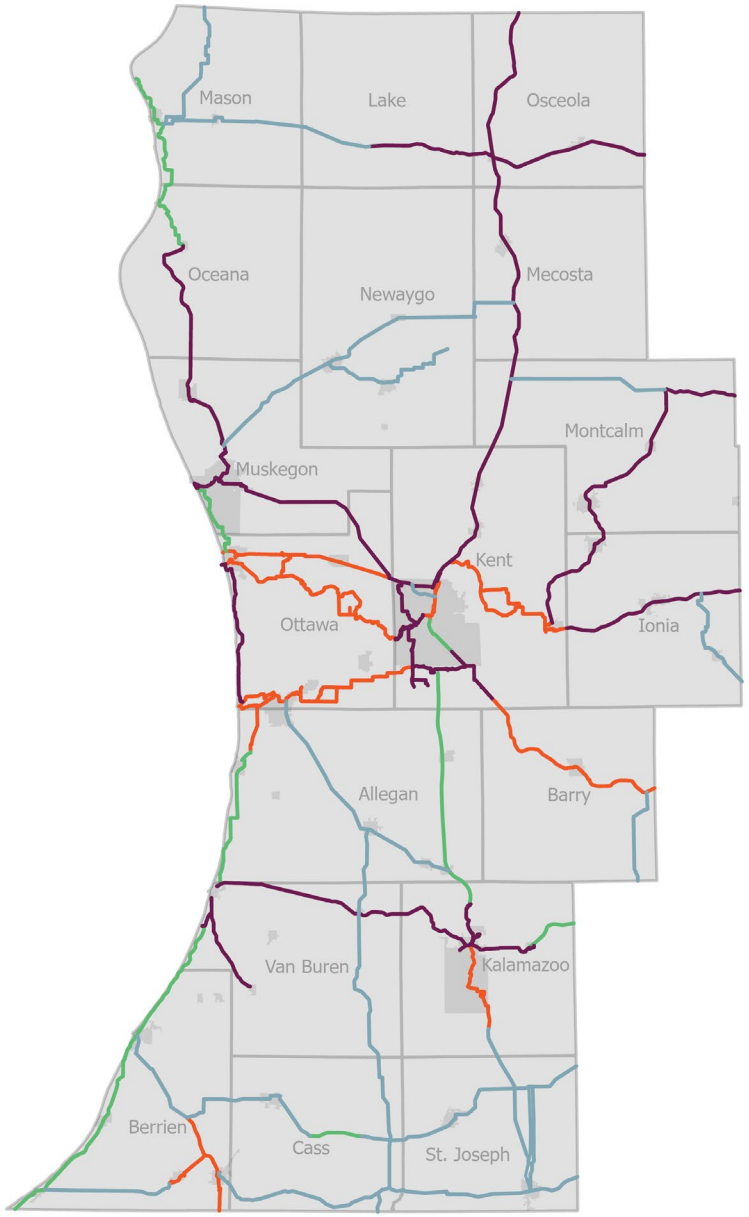


CommunityImpact

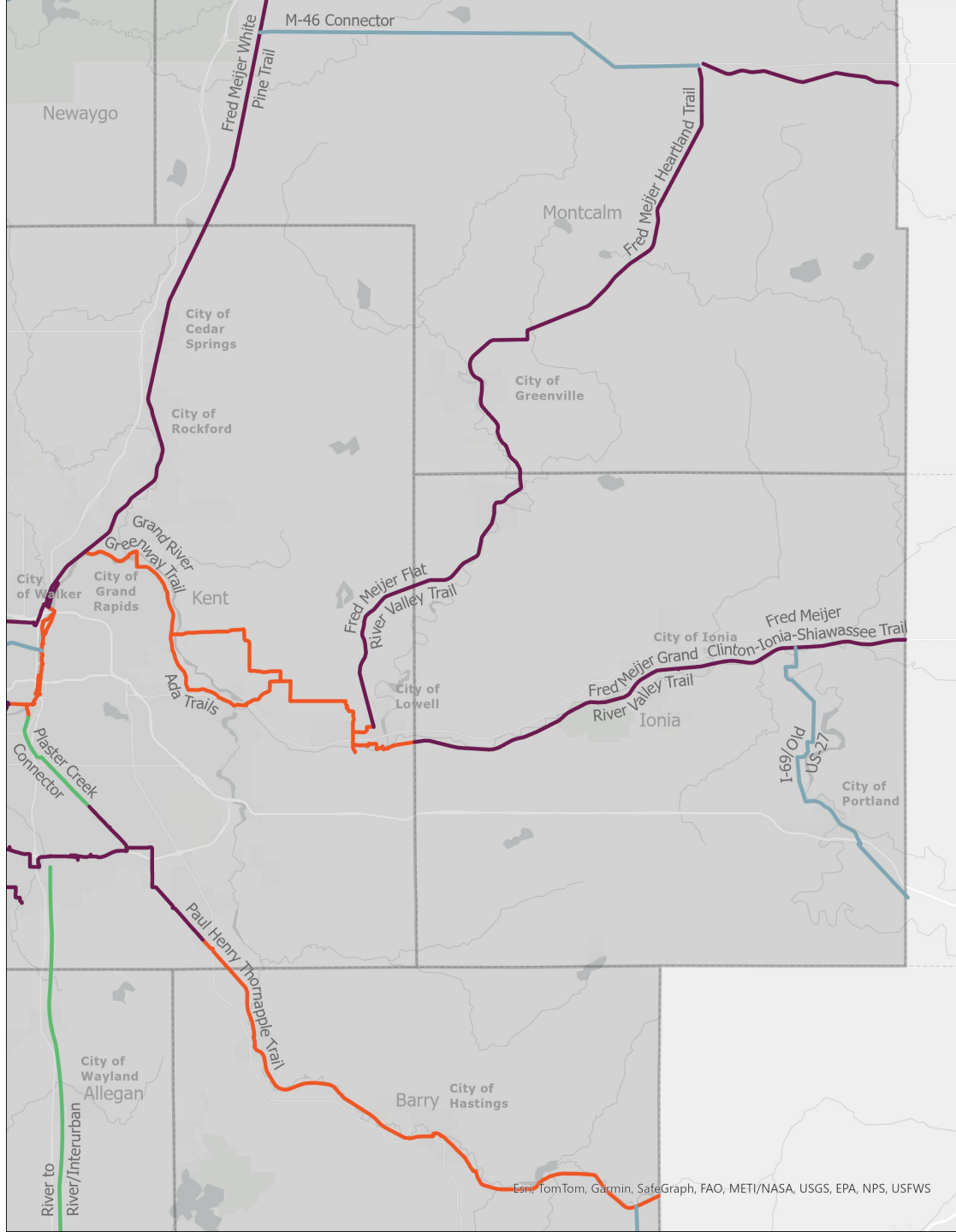
- 0 - 2
- 3 - 4
- 5 - 7



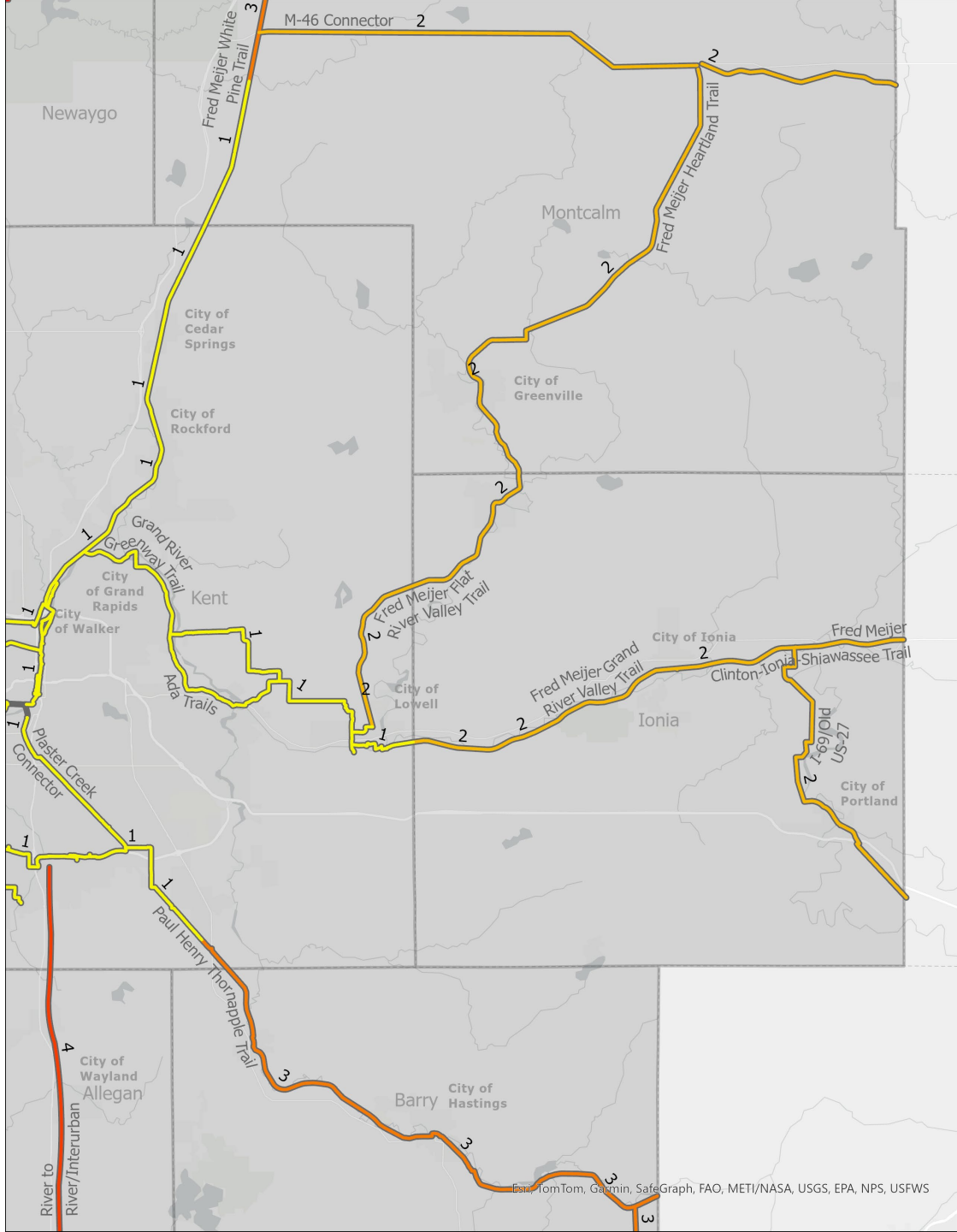
East Trail Life Stage



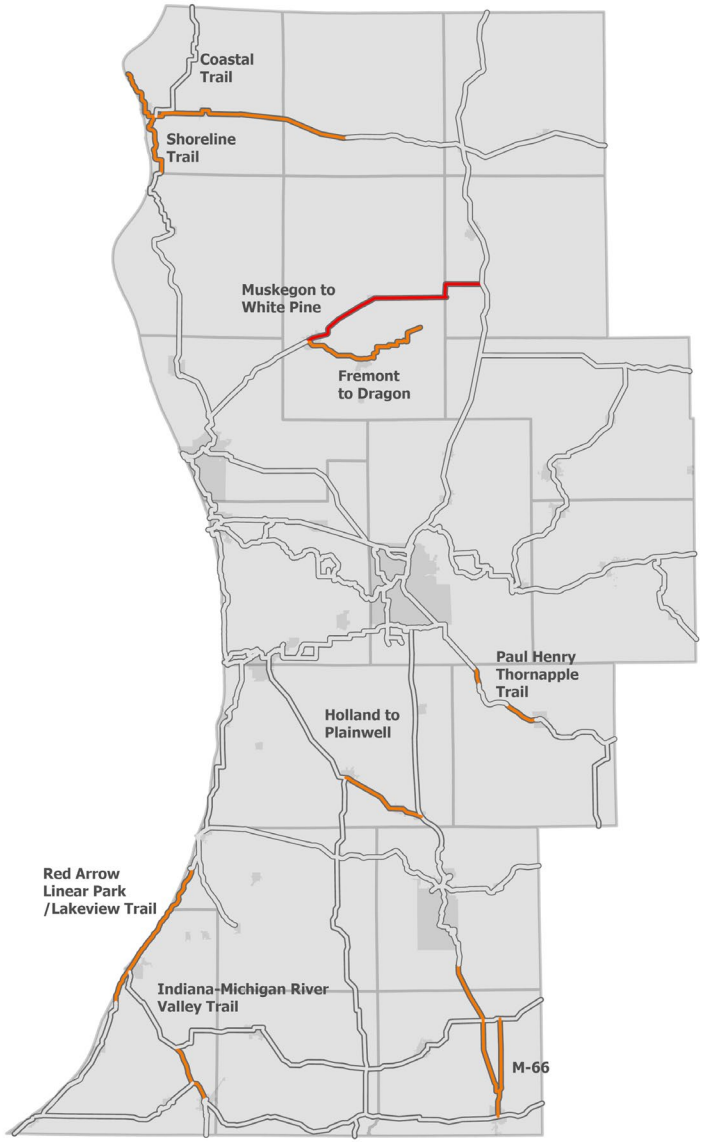
- Conceptual
- Infancy
- Adolescence
- Mature

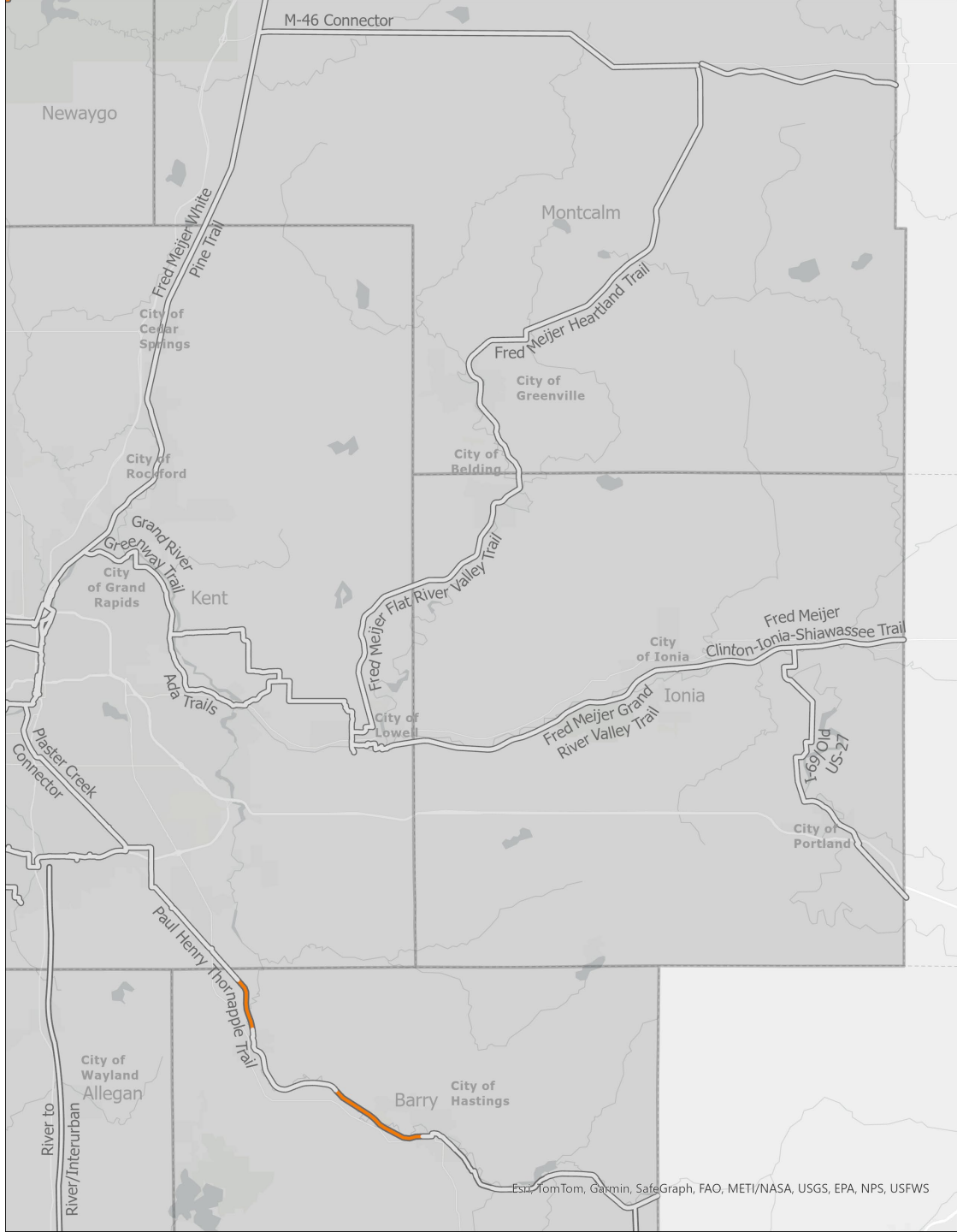


East Underinvested Areas

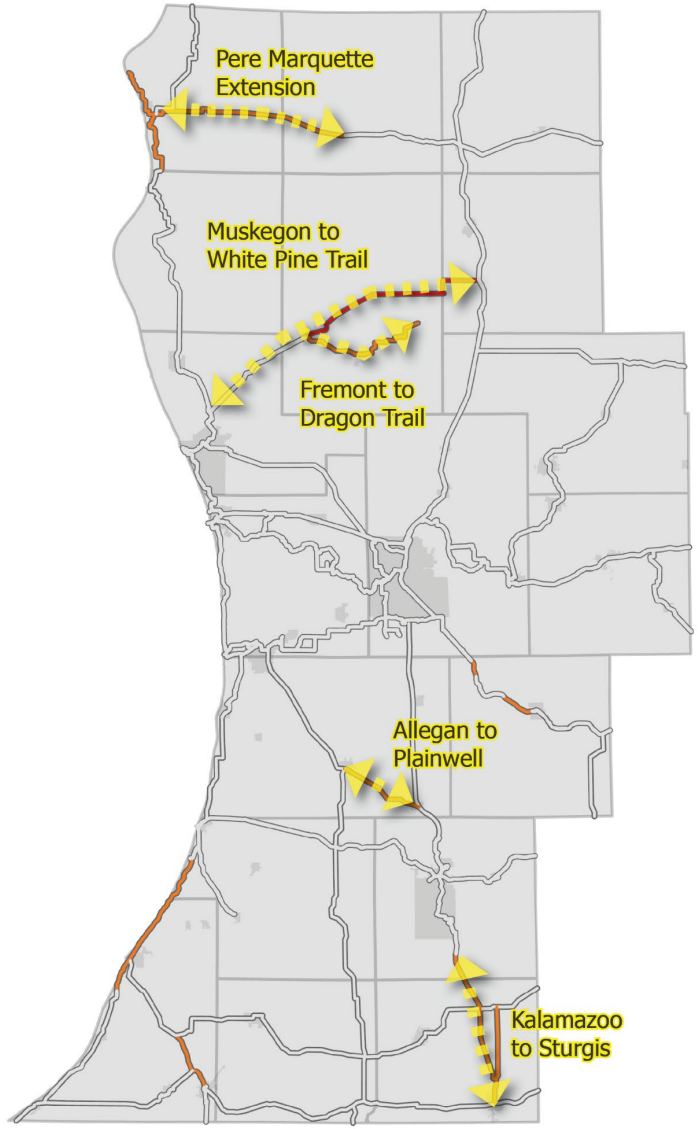


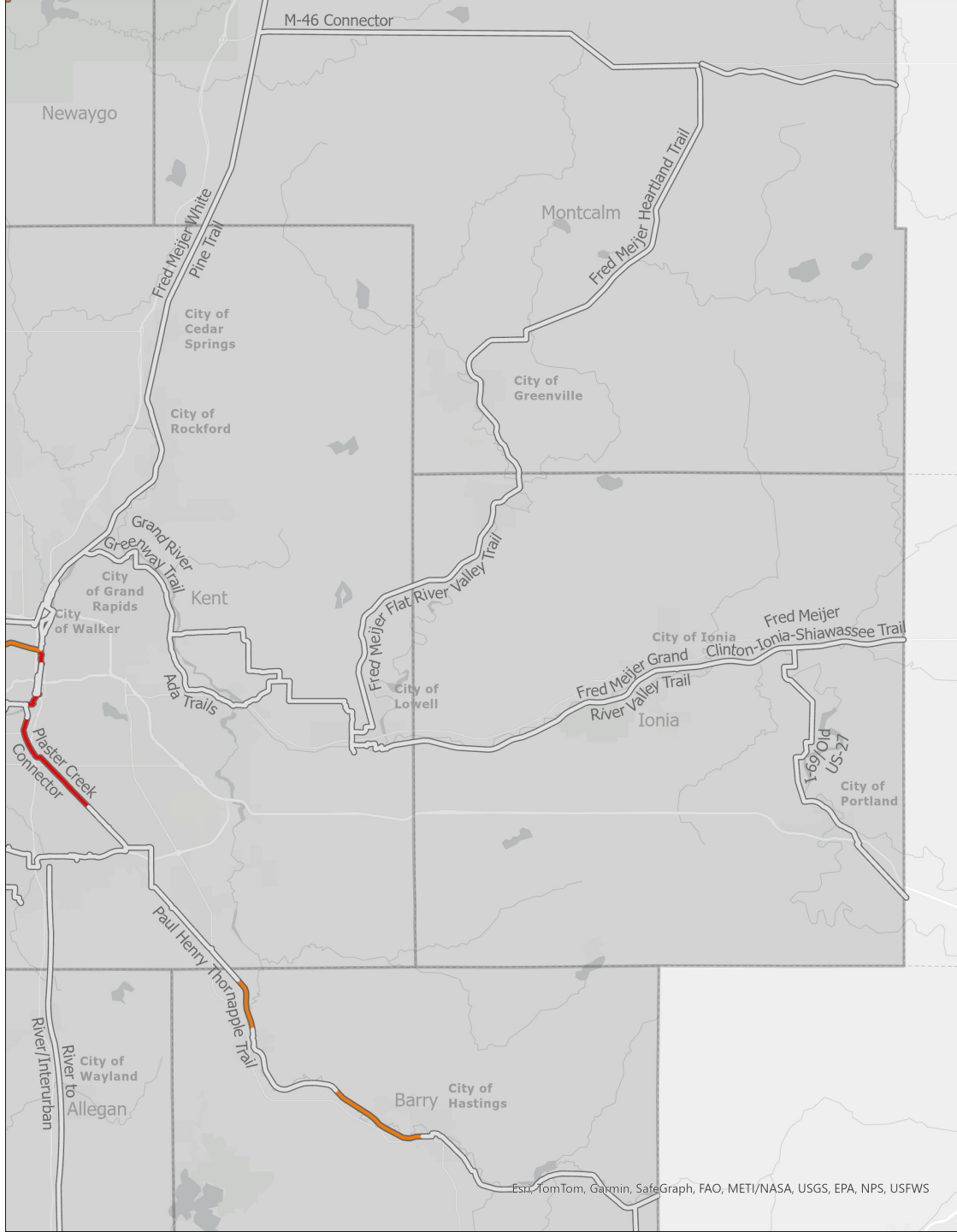
East Big Impact / Underinvested



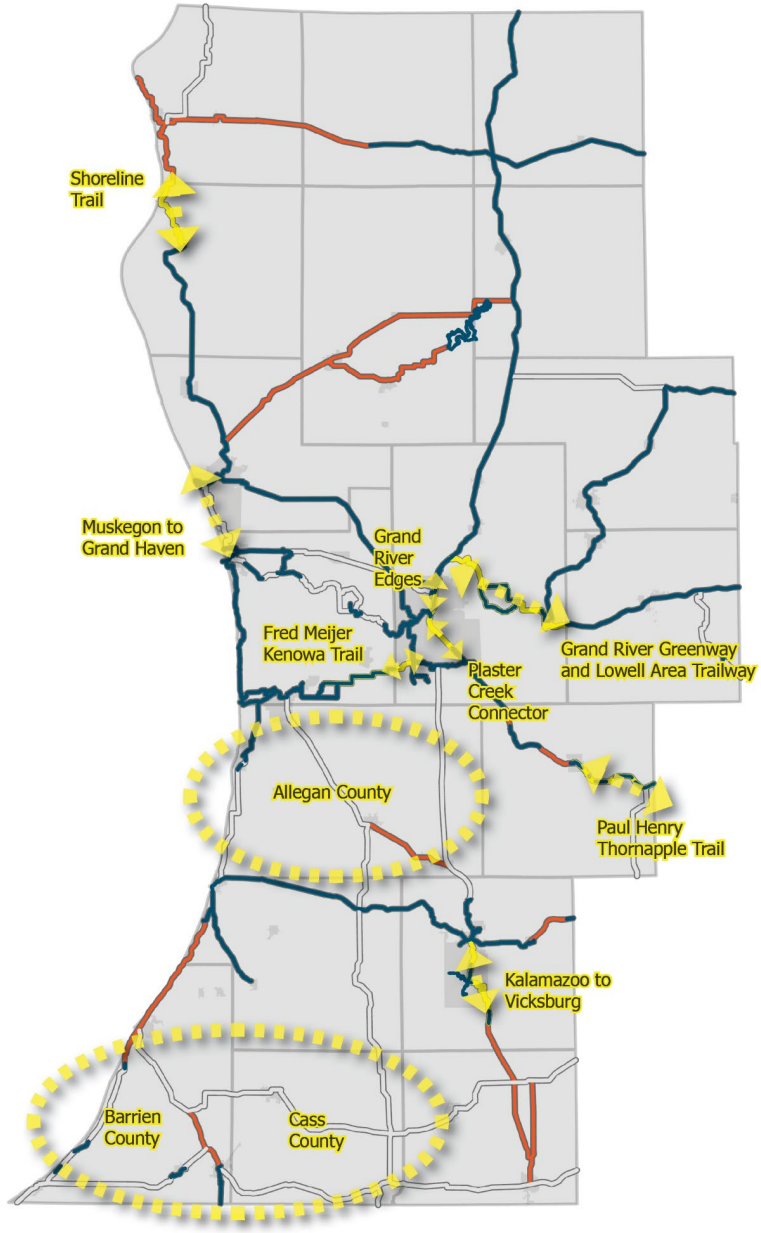


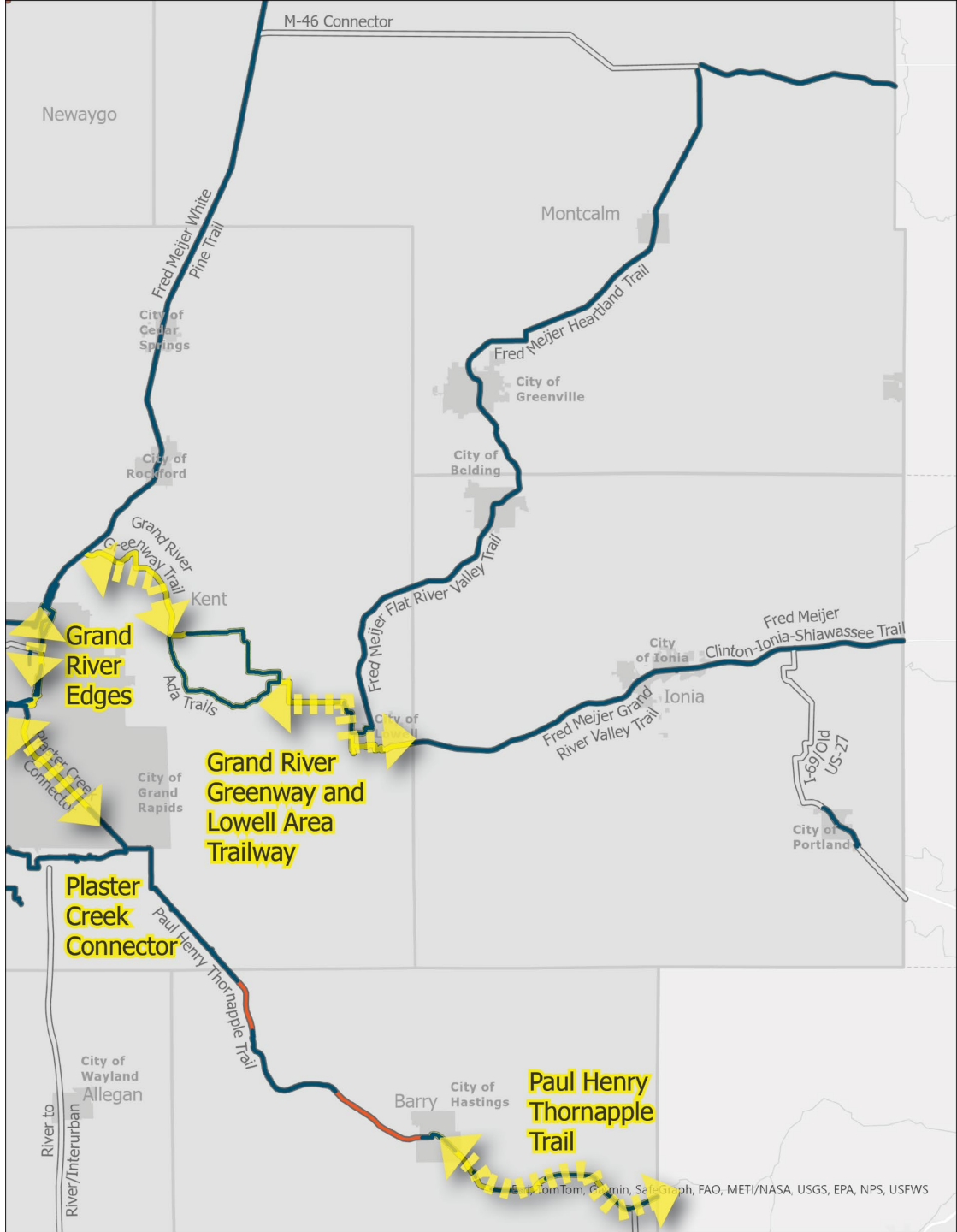
East Big Impact / Underinvested / Concept





East Network Contribution





Reality Check

- Preliminary estimates are about $7,500,000 is spent on trails in the region each year outside of the Grand Rapids Waterfront
- A new trail costs about $500,000 to $1,000,000 and up per mile
- The easy trails are done

How Would You Prioritize Spending Trail Dollars?

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How Difficult is it to Obtain Funding For:

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What is Your Biggest Non-Funding Related Roadblock in Developing Trails?

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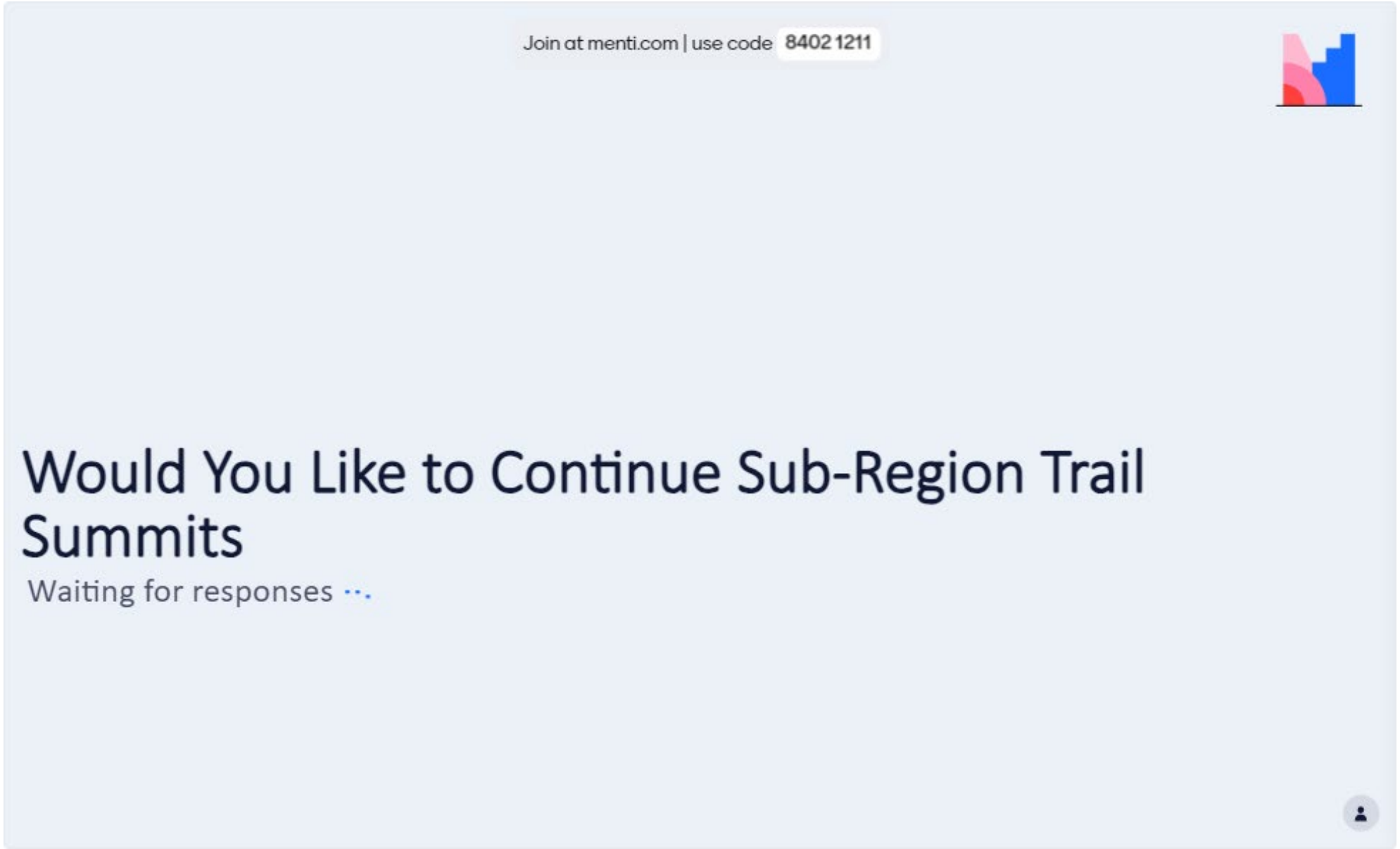
Would You Like to Continue Sub-Region Trail Summits?



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Next Steps

- Combine the input from all of the trail summits
- Develop trail dashboard
- Public engagement
- Draft an investment strategy

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