

# West Michigan Regional Trails Master Plan



Draft Updated: 10/02/24

*A Plan For  
Non-motorized,  
Multi-use Pathways  
Connecting  
West Michigan  
Communities and  
Destinations*



# Acknowledgments

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Rails to Trails Conservancy

Michigan Trails & Greenways Alliance

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DALMAC Fund

Anonymous Private Donor



Photo by David Mordis





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# Project Overview

## About the West Michigan Trails Organization

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West Michigan Trails is an organization dedicated to developing a non-motorized, linked-trail system throughout West Michigan. It started as a grassroots effort by a core group of individuals representing the region and has been actively working towards its goals for over two decades. With a dedicated Board of Directors representing a variety of trail interests, the organization aims to connect communities, protect natural habitats, and provide active transportation options to parks, cultural sites, and civic destinations.

The West Michigan Regional Trails Master Plan is one of three current key initiatives of West Michigan Trails. Together they seek to establish an action plan to continue the development of the trail network, guide people through the trail network, and put in place the support mechanisms necessary to foster implementing the regional trail network vision. Key initiatives include:

- **Regional Trails Master Plan** - This document identifies the current state of the regional trails, the needs of those trails and the overall network, and sets priorities for development.
- **Operations Assessment** - Evaluates internal operations and regional requirements to establish an organizational structure, growth plan, and operational best practices.
- **Wayfinding Guide** - In 2023, West Michigan Trails and regional stakeholders prepared a Wayfinding Sign Concepts and Implementation Guide for trails and bikeways. This guide provides the tools necessary for implementing a visually consistent and attractive wayfinding signage system. It is available for download from the West Michigan Trails website at [wmtrails.org](https://wmtrails.org).

# Project Overview

## A Plan for West Michigan Trails

West Michigan Trails seeks to enhance the quality of life by advancing a regional trails movement. With a geographic area consisting of 18 counties, running about 170 miles north-south and 50 to 70 miles east-west, it is an ambitious mission. The project area includes 910 miles of existing trails; two of the oldest rail-trails in the state; the longest rail-trail in Michigan; nearly 200 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline; a national forest; hundreds of miles rolling farmland and orchards, four state recreation areas, and 13 state parks. Linking these resources with a complete network of trails would result in west Michigan becoming a destination of national significance and establishing a defining quality of life factor for the over two million people who live in the region.

However, significant gaps remain in the regional trail system that need completion. The existing trail network is not equally distributed across the region and investments in regional trails vary dramatically by county. Older trails need major upgrades such as resurfacing and bridge replacements. And expectations of trails have risen along with their popularity. Users expect trails to have conveniently spaced restrooms, water sources, and bike repair stations. Along the route users look for wayfinding, interpretive signage, and rest areas. They expect towns and parks along the way to interface with the trail and find a place to lock their bikes while visiting.

The trails movement is at an inflection point. We are transitioning from a mindset where trail building is opportunistic, and the number of miles is the defining metric to an approach that asks where the next trail should be built and where the qualitative factors are just as important as the quantitative. Trail building has leaned heavily on friends groups in the past but current trail expectations demand a level of professionalism in the design, construction, management, programming, and maintenance that are beyond what many volunteer organizations can provide.

There are also two realities that must be confronted as we move into this next phase of trail building. First, all the easy trails have been built. We are unlikely to see 30 miles of unencumbered railroad ROW come on the market. Second, trails are being planned where they are needed, filling gaps in the network and addressing historic inequities. These two factors, in combination with the raised expectations, combine to make the next trails challenging to design and expensive to build.

West Michigan is already working to meet these challenges. This plan is a compendium of trails that have already gone through the initial vetting process and have been identified as priorities in other regional trail plans. The planned trails are the result of many public engagement efforts that have preceded this project. Clearly, the desire to fill in the obvious gaps in the network is strong.

“  
A daily escape from the stress and rigor of everyday life. The trails offer a quick break and refresh without having to go too far from home.  
”

PUBLIC INPUT



This plan provides a framework in which to understand the status of all existing and planned regional trails and their priorities. It provides analysis that identifies historic funding inequities and climate and economic justice disparities. It also includes a wealth of maps that help trail groups make their case to federal, state, and local funding sources.

## How to Use This Plan

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While this plan was created for West Michigan Trails to aid in developing the regional trail network, it was also designed with trail managers and advocates in mind. The Action Plan section includes a summary for each trail intended for use in grant applications and fundraising efforts. Additionally, the [Supplemental Maps](#) section includes numerous maps that can support the case for each trail. The grouping of trails into four sub-areas aims to facilitate the ongoing efforts of the planning groups established at the Spring 2024 Trail Summits.

“ I am so impressed with this plan and vision!

PUBLIC INPUT ”

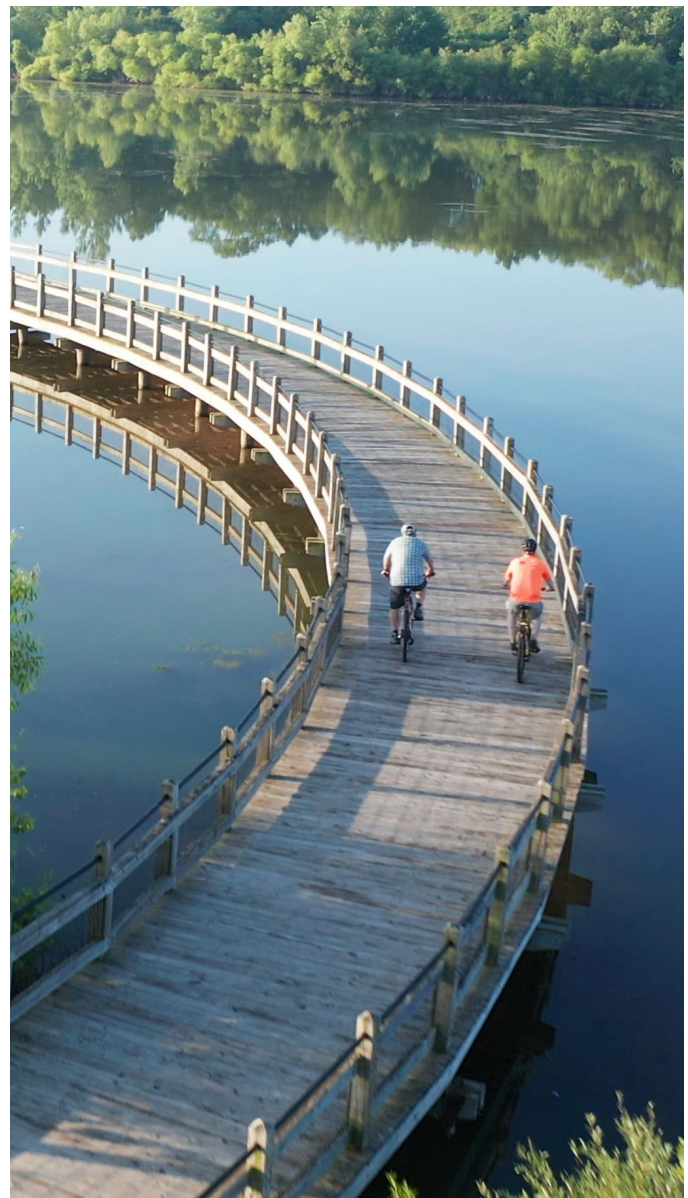


Photo by Thom Bell

# Defining a World Class Regional Trail System

One of the project’s charges was to create a document that will help lead to the establishment of a world class regional trail system. However, as a West Michigan Trails board member noted, the organization had not yet defined exactly what that means. To address this, we enlisted the help of the project’s steering committee and attendees of the Spring 2024 Trail Summits stakeholder meetings by asking what words best describe a world-class regional trail.



Variations of the words connectivity, accessible, maintained, safe, and multi-use rose to the top. There were also mentions of characteristics like scenic, nature, engaging, and specific amenities, but these seemed best summarized by another word mentioned a few times—inspiring. Taking all those words into consideration, we offer the following. In an area as large and diverse as the 18-county project area, a definition that focuses on experience rather than specific things seems appropriate:

*West Michigan Trails envisions the establishment of a **multi-use trail** system that **connects** people and places, that is **accessible** throughout the region and by people of all abilities, that is **safe**, well **maintained**, and **inspiring**.*

# Elements of a Regional Network

A well-designed regional network encompasses several key elements to ensure it meets the diverse needs of its users.



## Trail Surface and Width

Comfortable, safe, and allows social interaction.

Photo courtesy The Greenway Collaborative



## Safe Road Crossings

Clear expectations and visibility between trail users and road users.

Photo courtesy The Greenway Collaborative



## Wayfinding Systems

Comprehensive signs, maps, and online resources to guide users.

Wayfinding Concepts and Implementation Guide for West Michigan Trails and Bikeways at [wmtrails.org](http://wmtrails.org)



## Amenities

Essential facilities such as benches, restrooms, and water fountains to enhance user comfort.

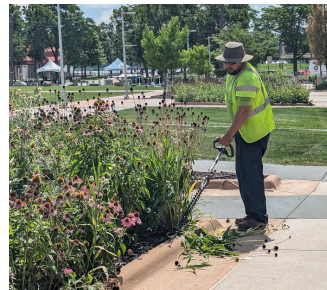
Photo courtesy The Greenway Collaborative



## Community Support

Local involvement and advocacy to sustain and enhance the trail network.

Photo courtesy Prein & Newhof



## Regular Maintenance

Regular upkeep to keep trails clean, safe, and accessible.

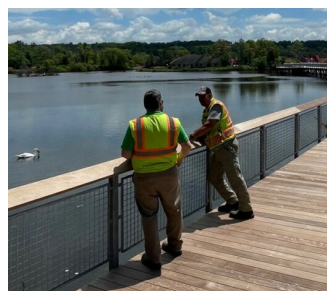
Photo courtesy The Greenway Collaborative



## Dynamic Promotion & Programming

Activities and events to engage the community and encourage trail use.

Photo courtesy Prein & Newhof



## Effective Management

Effective oversight to ensure the trail network meets user needs and safety standards.

Photo by David Stricklen

# Design Evolution in Urban and Suburban Settings

To effectively integrate trails into urban and suburban settings, it's essential to design pathways that connect key destinations, ensure safe road crossings, incorporate green infrastructure, and provide amenities for user comfort. Over the past decade, trail design has advanced significantly to enhance safety, accessibility, and user experience.

This section highlights examples and resources on current standards and necessary upgrades to bring existing trails up to today's best practices, supporting the vision for a world-class trail network. By adopting these design standards and evolving expectations, West Michigan can create a trail system that exceeds user expectations, offering a safe, enjoyable, and enriching experience for all, whether traveling through the countryside or a metropolitan area.

The following example images illustrate what to do when traditional rail-trails transition into urban areas and showcase the potential of an urban greenway.



Vancouver, Ontario

Photo courtesy of the Greenway Collaborative



Grand Rapids, Michigan

Photo by Strong Towns (via X)



Indianapolis, Indiana

Photo Courtesy of The Greenway Collaborative

## Design Guidelines and Resources

Numerous readily available design guidelines provide comprehensive details on integrating best practices. Below are a few example resources, click on them for more details. For the latest information, visit the websites of these organizations, as they continually update and release new publications.

- [Small Town and Rural Multimodal Networks \(FHWA\)](#)
- [Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities \(AASHTO\)](#)
- [Urban Bikeway Design Guide \(NACTO\)](#)
- [Bikeway Selection Guide \(FHWA\)](#)
- [Proven Safety Countermeasures \(FHWA\)](#)
- [Sidepath Design Best Practices \(MDOT\)](#)
- [Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices \(FHWA\)](#)
- [Improving intersections for Pedestrians and Bicyclists \(FHWA\)](#)
- [Sidepath Intersection and Crossing Treatment Guide \(MDOT\)](#)
- [Separated Bike Lane Planning and Design Guide \(FHWA\)](#)
- [Improving Visibility at Trail Crossings \(FHWA\)](#)
- [Guide for Improving Safety at Uncontrolled Crossing Locations \(FHWA\)](#)

### **National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO)**

publications offer innovative and practical design standards to improve urban transportation systems.

[www.nacto.org](http://www.nacto.org)

### **American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO)**

offers design guidelines and technical standards that assist state and local agencies in creating pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly infrastructure.

[www.transportation.org](http://www.transportation.org)

### **Rails-to-Trails Conservancy**

focuses on building a nationwide network of trails from former rail lines and connecting corridors to build healthier places for healthier people. They provide extensive resources on trail development, funding, and maintenance.

[www.railstotrails.org](http://www.railstotrails.org)

### **Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT)**

is vital for non-motorized planning in Michigan, allocating funds, implementing policies, and collaborating with communities. They collect data, conduct outreach, and integrate non-motorized plans into statewide transportation for safer pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.

[www.michigan.gov/mdot](http://www.michigan.gov/mdot)

### **Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)**

publishes manuals, guidelines, and research studies on non-motorized transportation best practices, providing valuable resources for city planners and engineers. They also support non-motorized planning in cities through funding, technical guidance, and resources.

[www.fhwa.dot.gov](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov)

# Project Overview

## Study Area

West Michigan Trails encompasses an 18-county area, situated throughout the western part of the state, spanning from Indiana and the Lake Michigan shoreline to inland communities. The trails in this region connect key cities, towns, and natural areas, offering scenic routes that traverse forests, parks, and waterfronts. They provide vital links between urban centers like Grand Rapids, Muskegon, Kalamazoo, Holland, and smaller rural towns, enhancing regional connectivity and access to a vast number of economic, recreational, and tourist destinations.



**18** Counties

**141** Cities & Villages

**2.2** Million People

**2** MDOT Planning Regions

**4** Michigan Planning Regions

**6** Metropolitan Planning Organizations

**22** % of the population in the State of Michigan

“

Using the trails, I've come across things I would not have otherwise seen if I had been on the road.

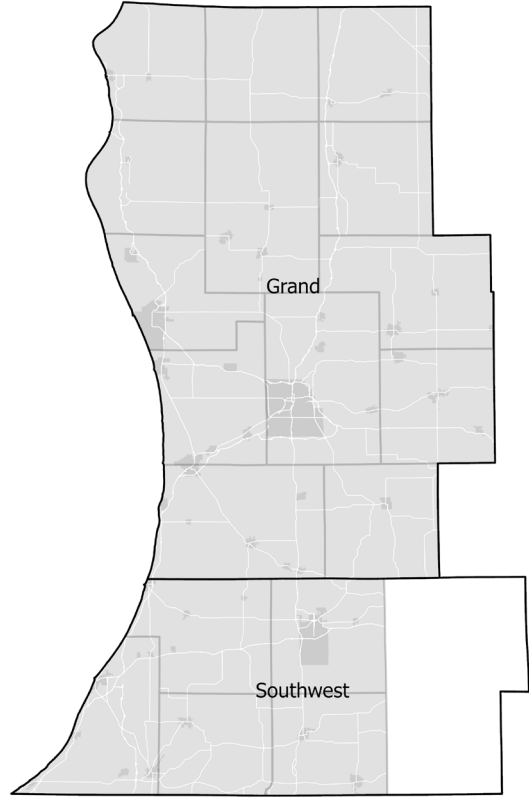
TRAIL USER

”

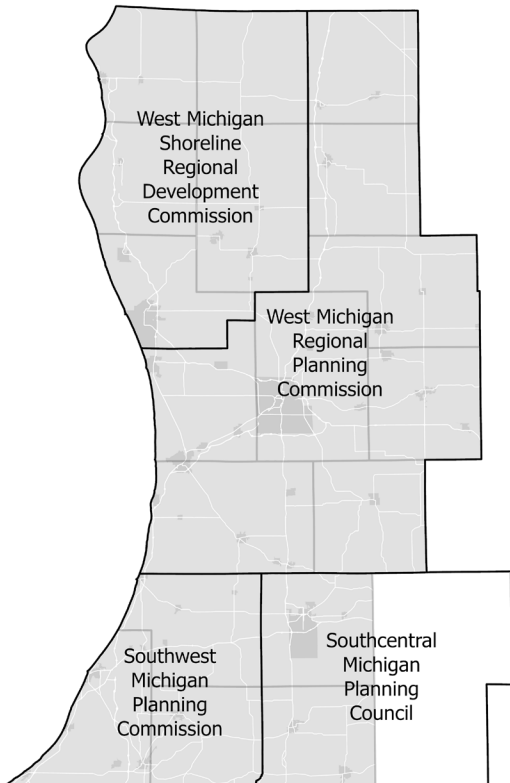
## 18-County Project Area



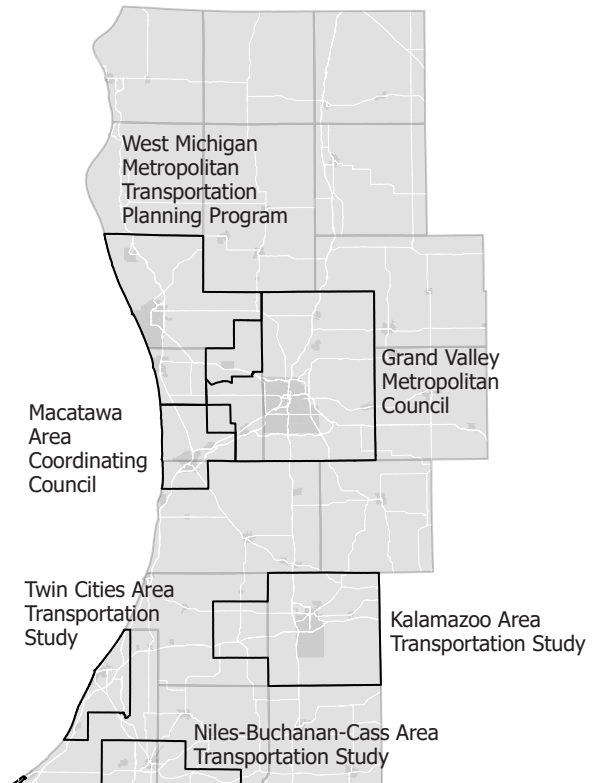
## Michigan Department of Transportation Regions



## Michigan Planning Regions



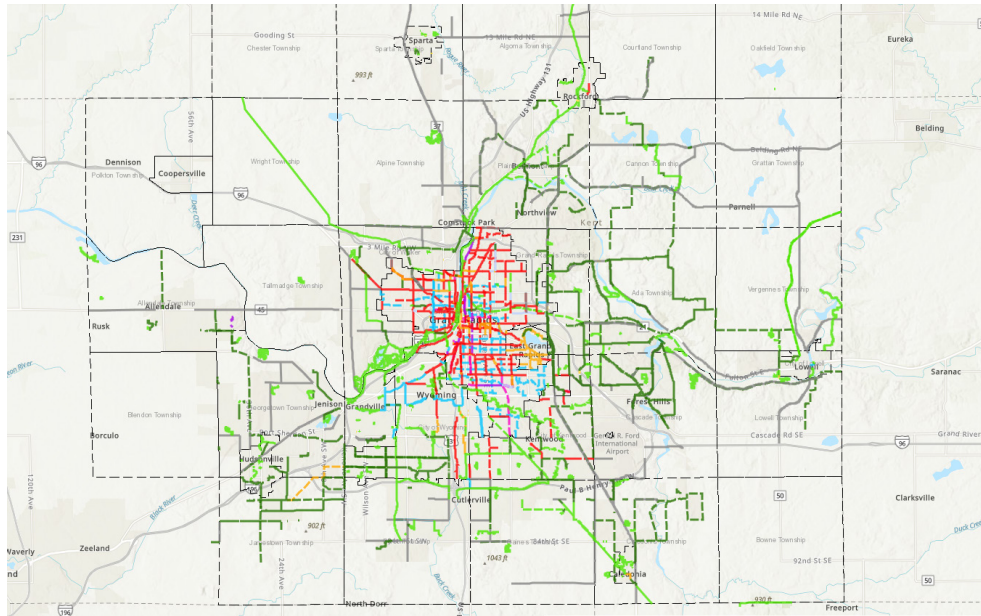
## Metropolitan Planning Organizations



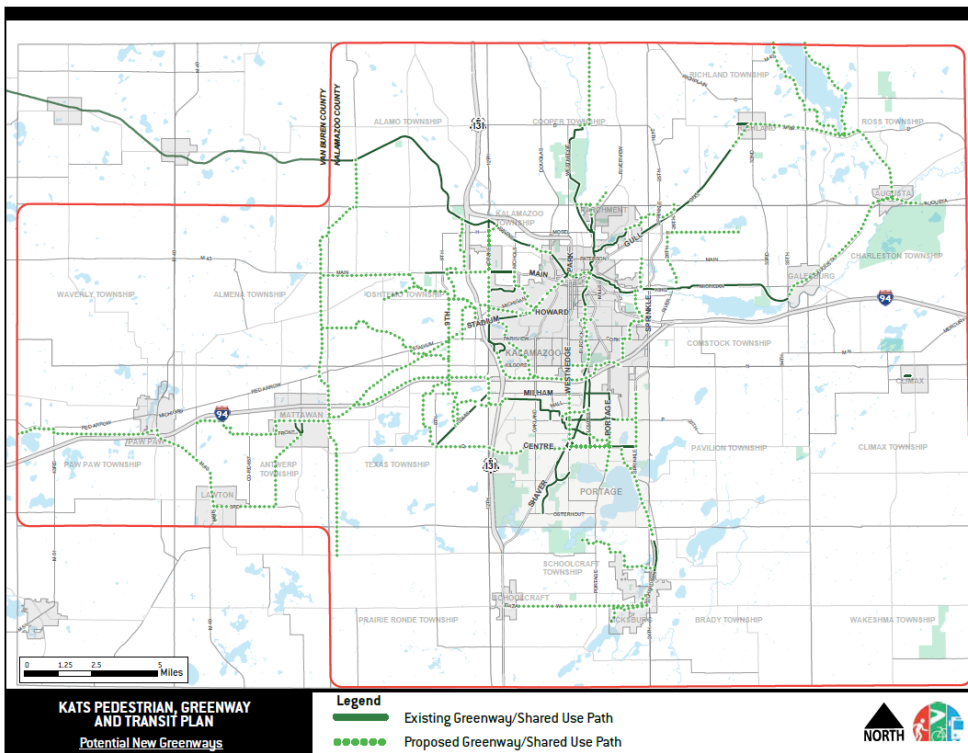
# Building on Existing Efforts

West Michigan began building trails over 30 years ago! Extensive trail planning at the local, regional, and state level already exists in the region, and this plan aims to build on these efforts. The plan focuses on synthesizing the vast amount of information in order to improve coordination and guide the next steps.

Below are examples of some of the regional trail plans that were referenced during the planning process.



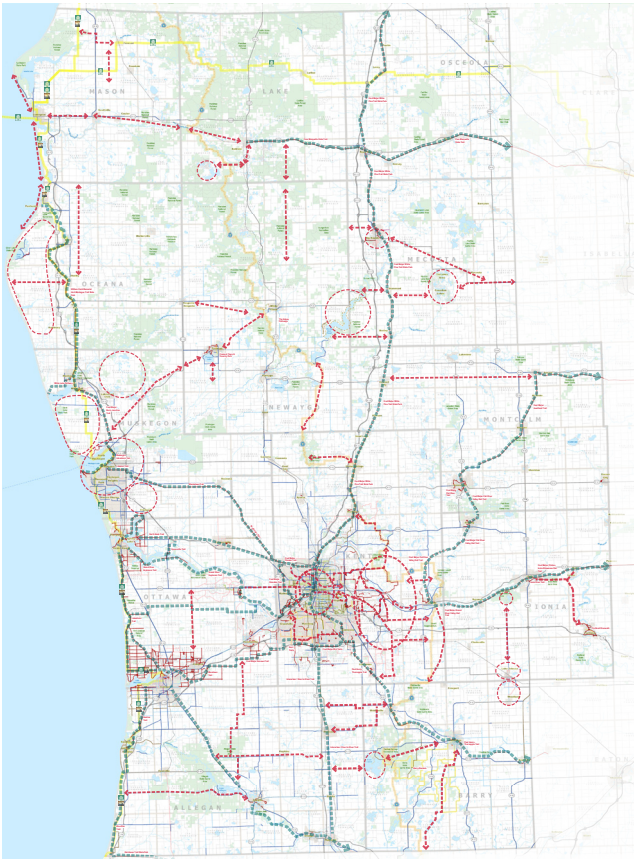
Grand Valley Metropolitan Council Active Transportation Plan



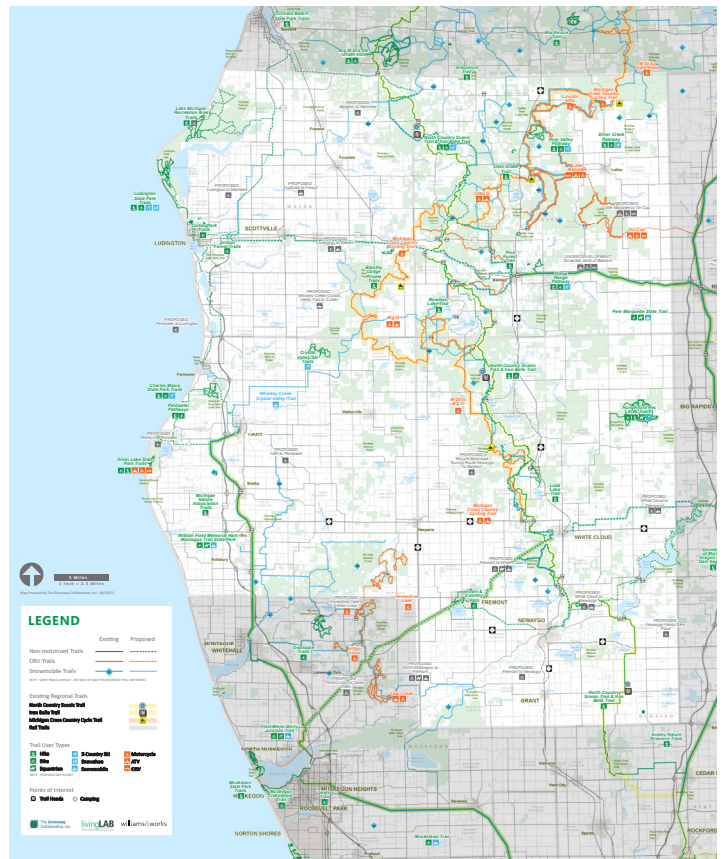
KATS Pedestrian, Greenways and Transit Plans

The potential new greenways stretch throughout the KATS Region and provide connections to the denser areas of the region

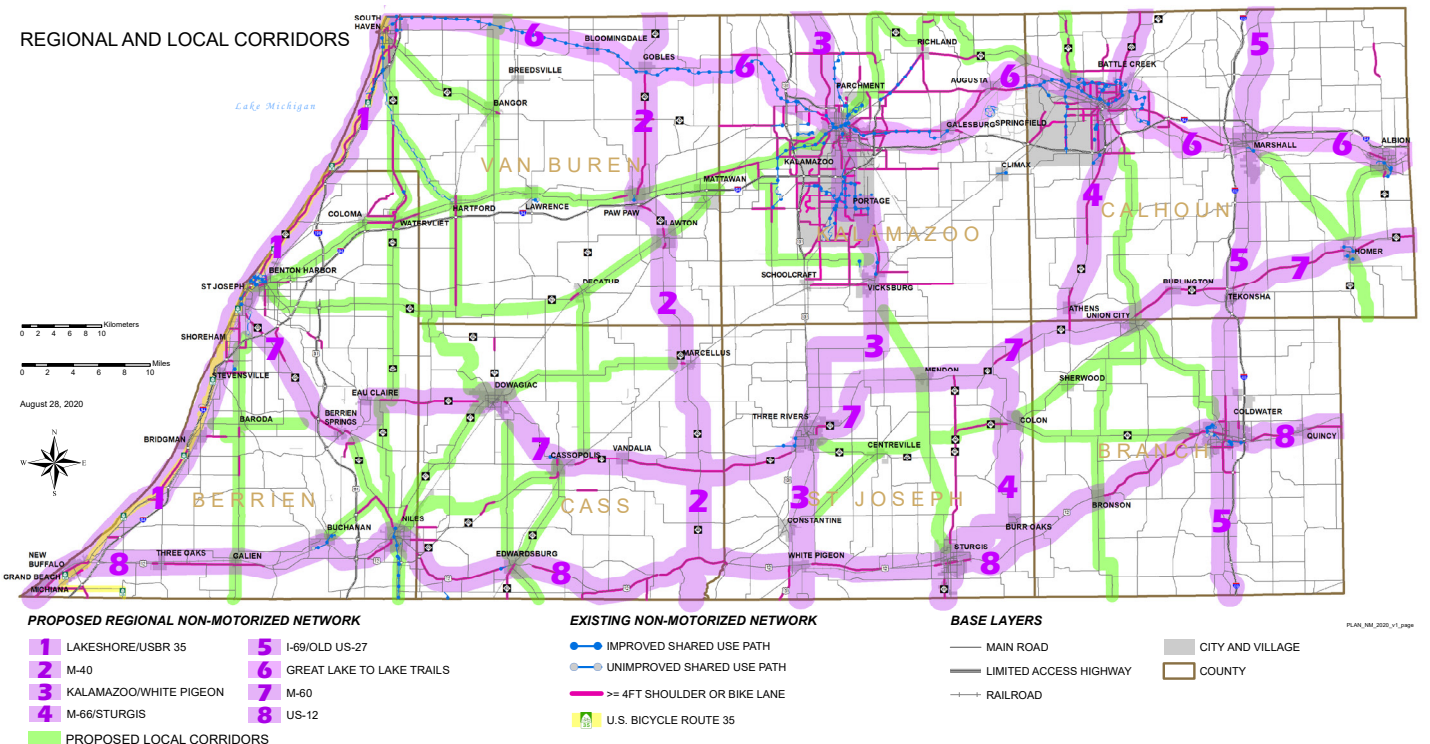




Grand Region Non-motorized Plan



West Michigan's Wide Open West Trail System



MDOT Southwest Region Non-motorized Plan

# Types of Trails Included in the Plan

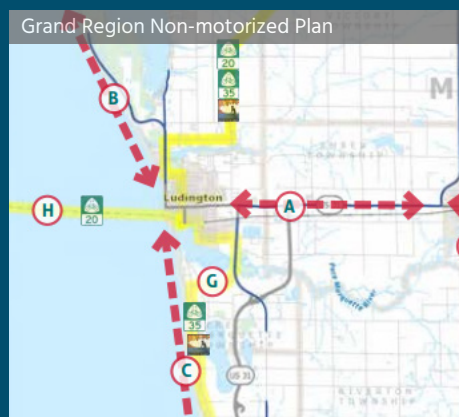
This trail plan focuses on the larger, regionally-significant, multi-use trails that connect West Michigan communities and destinations.

The primary emphasis is on shared-use paths and cycle tracks designed to be family-friendly routes.

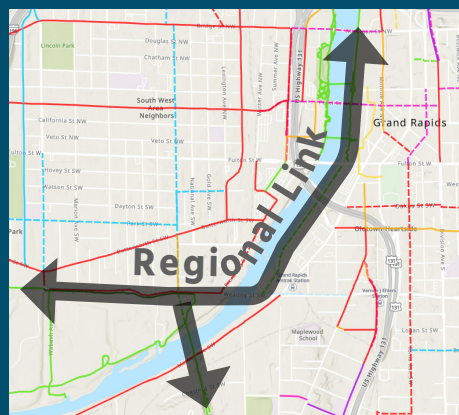


Photo Courtesy of The Greenway Collaborative

Only existing or already planned trails from other regional plans are considered, ensuring a realistic and actionable approach.

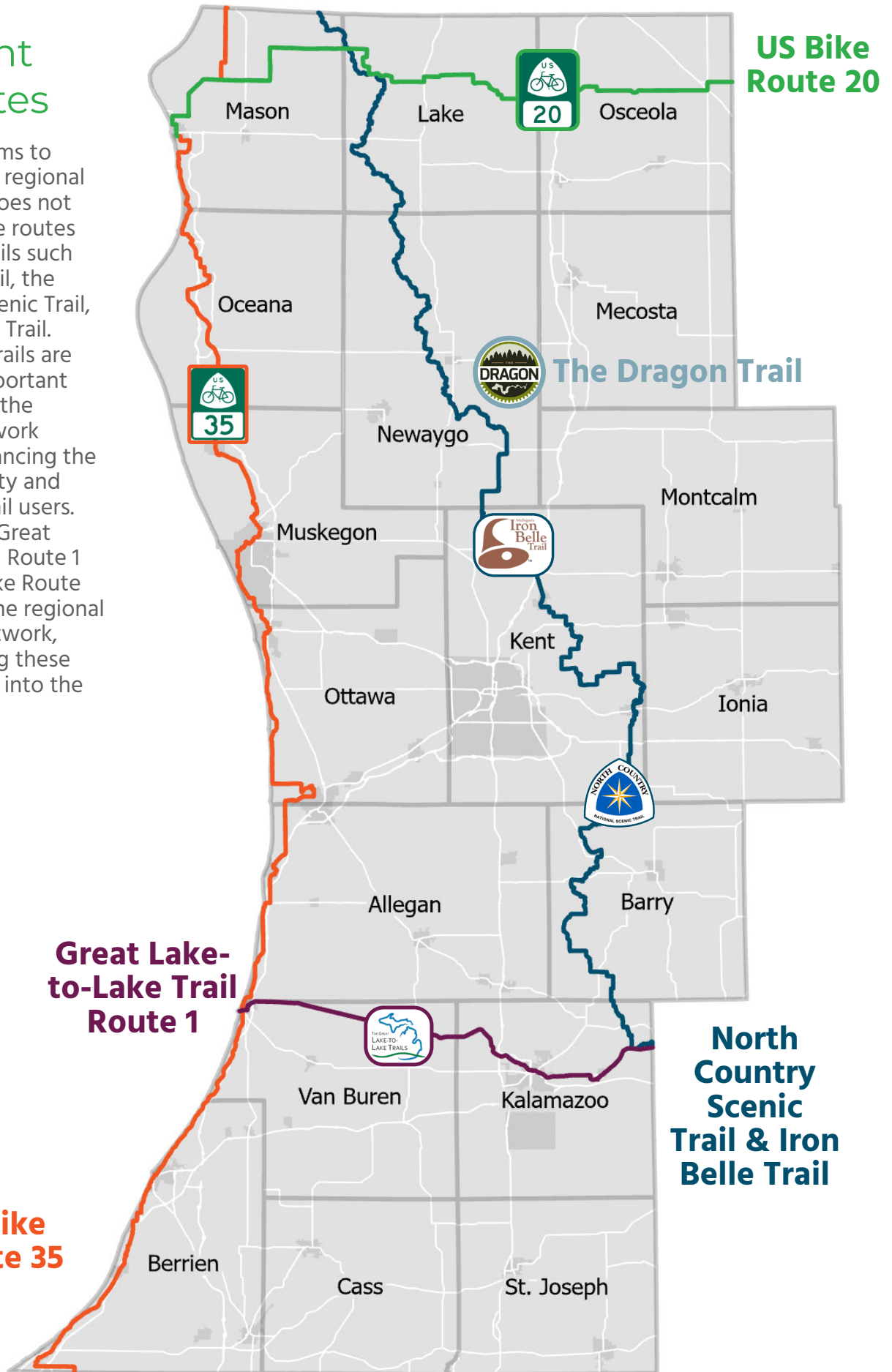


The plan highlights regional links rather than city networks or spur trails, emphasizing the big connections that unite communities across the region. Not every pathway in every town is included; instead, the focus is on strategic trails that enhance connectivity on a broader scale.



## Other Significant Trail Routes

While this plan aims to create a cohesive regional trail network, it does not include all US bike routes or single-track trails such as the Dragon Trail, the North Country Scenic Trail, and the Iron Belle Trail. However, these trails are recognized as important destinations that the regional trail network connects to, enhancing the overall accessibility and experience for trail users. Additionally, the Great Lake-to-Lake Trail Route 1 and part of US Bike Route 35 overlap with the regional multi-use trail network, further integrating these prominent routes into the broader system.



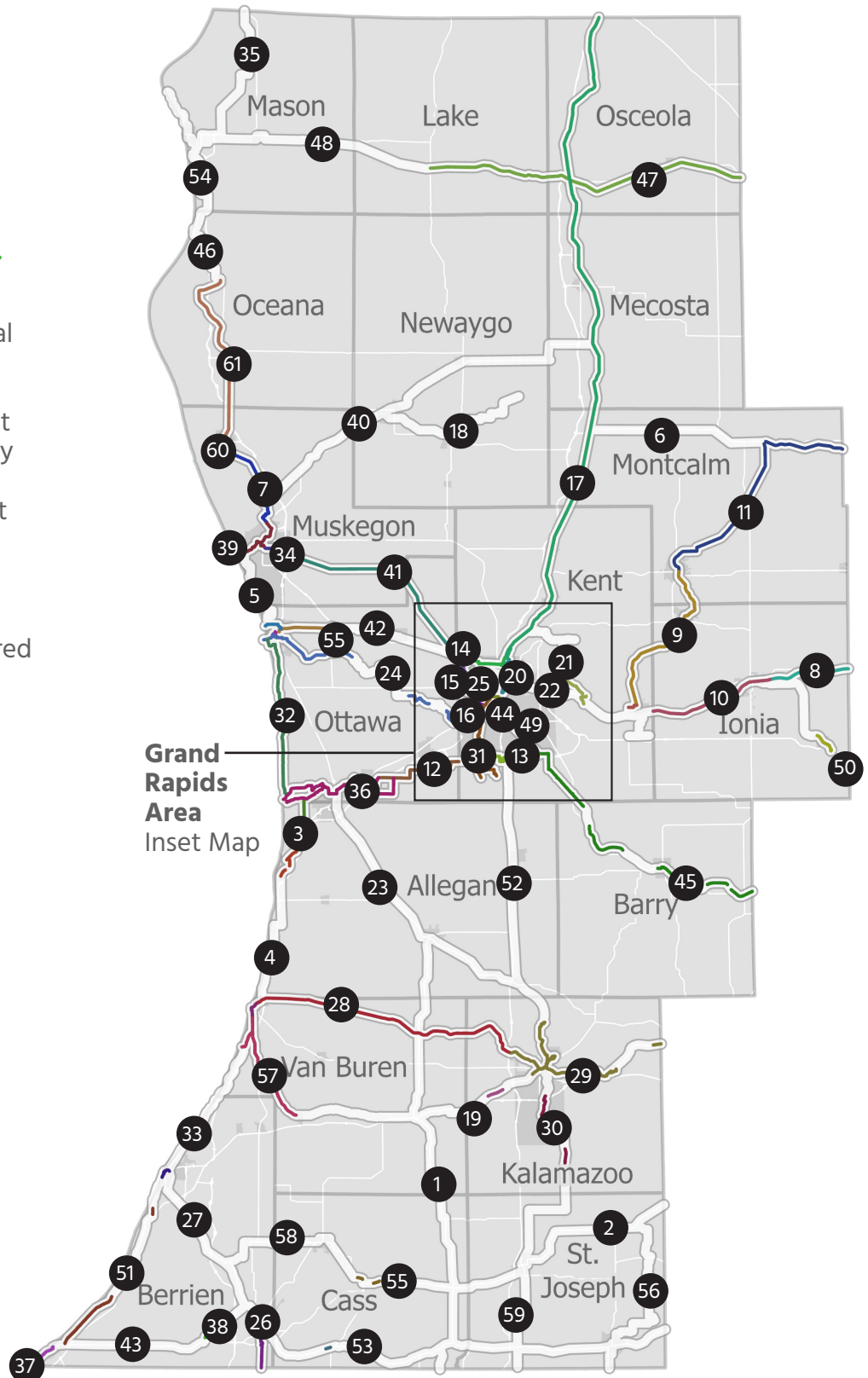
# West Michigan Regional Trail Network Map



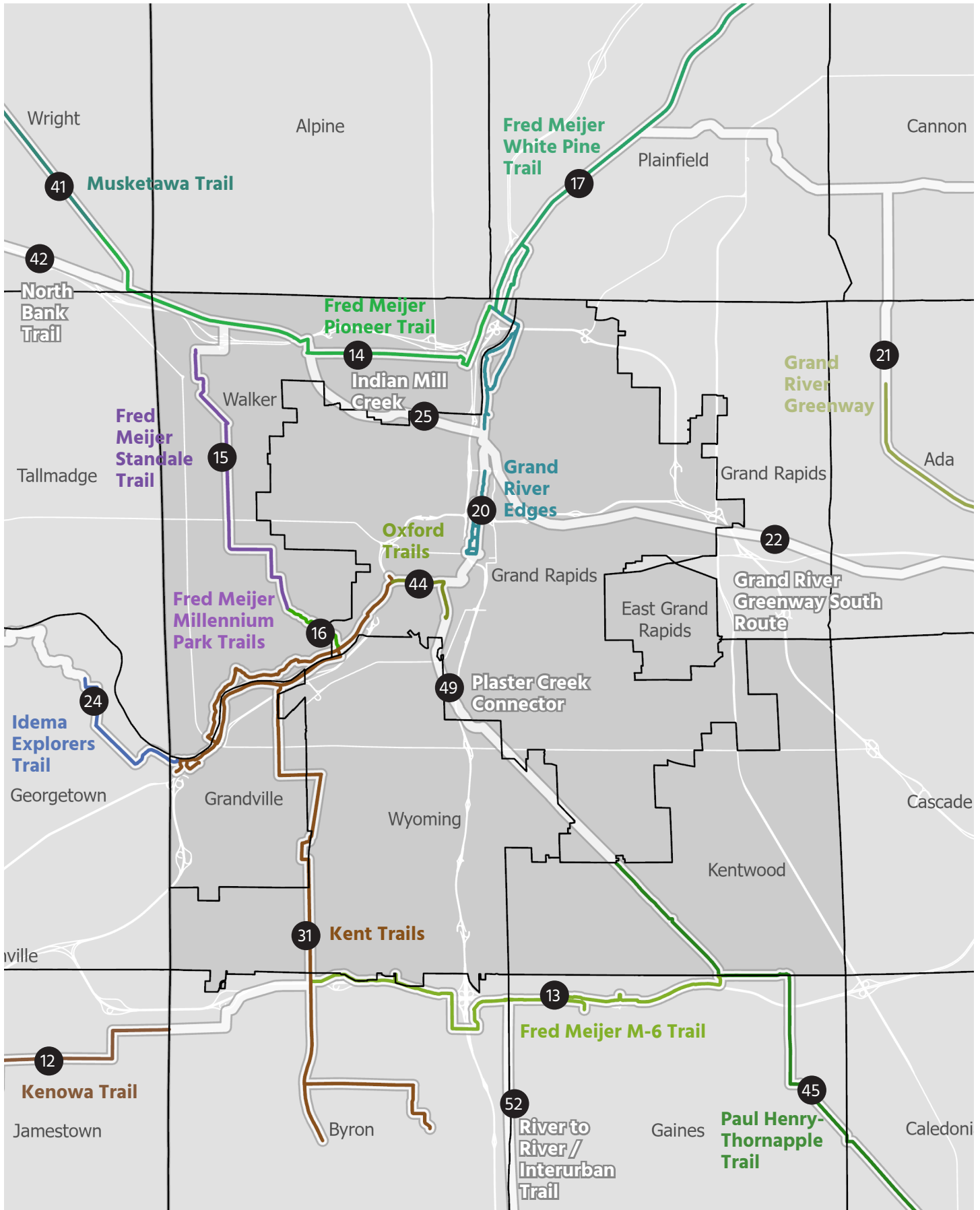
WEST MICHIGAN  
*trails*

This map highlights the regional trail network that numerous agencies and organizations are working on in West Michigan. It illustrates existing and currently planned non-motorized, multi-use pathways connecting West Michigan communities and destinations.

The white lines represent the planned network and the colored lines represent existing trails.



# Grand Rapids Area Inset Map



## Map Key

1. Allegan-Van Buren-Cass / M-40
2. Berrien-Cass-St Joseph / M-60
3. Beeline Trail
4. Blue Star Trail
5. Coastal Trail
6. Edmore to Howard City
7. Fred Meijer Berry Junction Trail
8. Fred Meijer Clinton-Ionia-Shiawassee Rail Trail
9. Fred Meijer Flat River Valley Rail Trail
10. Fred Meijer Grand River Valley Rail Trail
11. Fred Meijer Heartland Trail
12. Fred Meijer Kenowa Trail
13. Fred Meijer M-6 Trail
14. Fred Meijer Pioneer Trail
15. Fred Meijer Standale Trail
16. Fred Meijer Millennium Park Trails
17. Fred Meijer White Pine Trail State Park
18. Fremont to Dragon Trail
19. Fruitbelt Trail
20. Grand River Edges
21. Grand River Greenway
22. Grand River Greenway South Route
23. Holland to Plainwell
24. Idema Explorers Trail
25. Indian Mill Creek
26. Indiana - Michigan River Valley Trail
27. Indiana - Michigan River Valley Trail Extension
28. Kal-Haven Trail State Park
29. Kalamazoo River Valley Trail
30. Kalamazoo-Portage-Vicksburg
31. Kent Trails
32. Lakeshore Trail (Ottawa County)
33. Lakeshore Trail (Berrien/Van Buren Counties)
34. Laketon Trail
35. Ludington to Mansitee
36. Macatawa Greenway Trail
37. Marquette Greenway
38. McCoy's Creek Trail
39. Muskegon Lakeshore Trail
40. Muskegon to White Pine Trail
41. Musketawa Trail
42. North Bank Trail
43. Old Sauk Trail
44. Oxford Trails
45. Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail
46. Pentwater Hart Trail
47. Pere Marquette State Trail
48. Pere Marquette Trail Extension
49. Plaster Creek Connector
50. Portland to Ionia
51. Red Arrow Linear Park
52. River-to-River / Interurban
53. Route US 12
54. Shoreline Trail
55. Spoonville Trail
56. Sturgis / M-66
57. Van Buren Trail State Park
58. Van-Cass Heritage Trail
59. Vicksburg-Three Rivers- White Pigeon
60. White Lake Pathway
61. William Field Memorial Hart-Montague Trail State Park

“

The regional trail system has moved to the forefront of the recreation, transportation and economic development landscape of West Michigan. The Regional Master Trails Plan will be an invaluable resource for trail funders, builders and users to determine the best way to shape the system into the future.

BEN SWAYZE, KENT COUNTY TRAILS

”



Photo by Thom Bell

# Project Overview

## Planning Process

The plan was developed over a twelve-month period spanning 2023 and 2024, with guidance from a Steering Committee composed of representatives from across the region. The project launched in October 2023 at the West Michigan Trail Summit. Stakeholder surveys and sub-region trail summit meetings were held in early 2024 to identify, define, and prioritize the regional trail network. In August 2024, the draft plan was made available for public review and 875 responses were gathered through an online survey. The final plan concluded with an action plan report in October 2024.

The following pages summarize community engagement efforts.

“ I appreciate the opportunity to be heard to expand the trails. We LOVE them and enjoy them regularly! Thank You  
PUBLIC INPUT ”

## Project Timeline

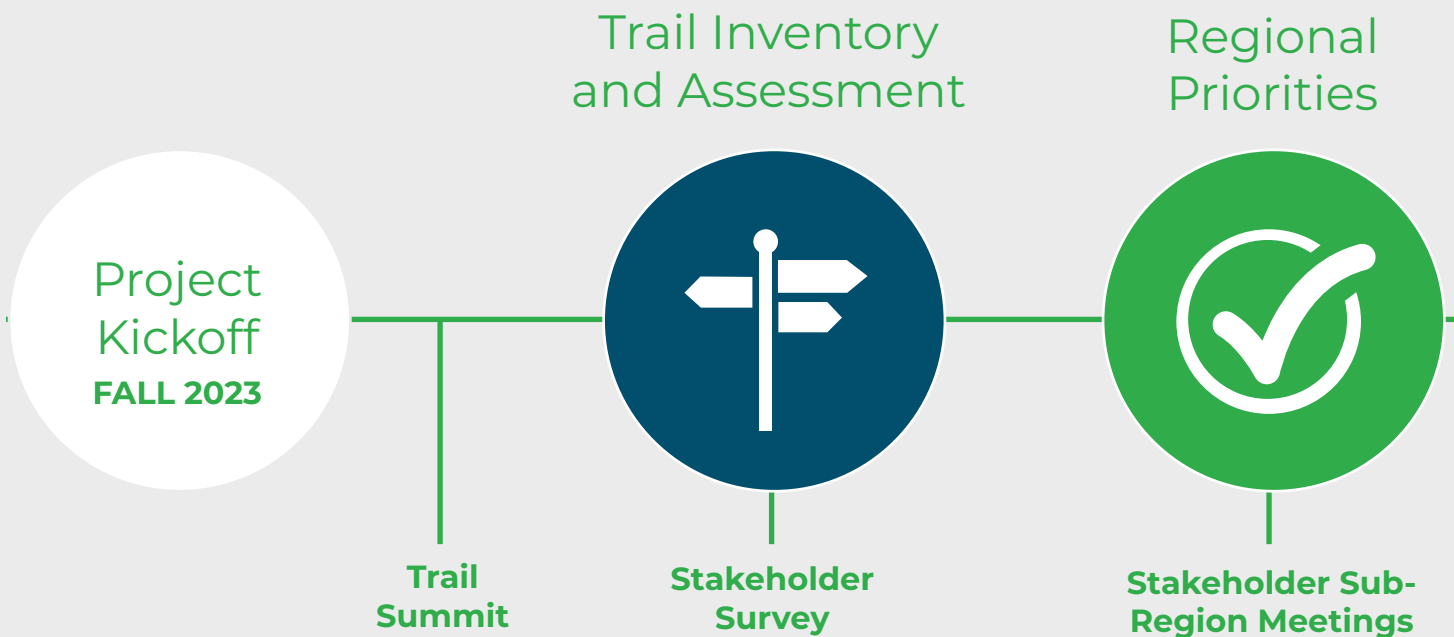






Photo courtesy of The Greenway Collaborative

Public  
Engagement



Web Surveys

Action  
Plan



Draft Plan  
Review

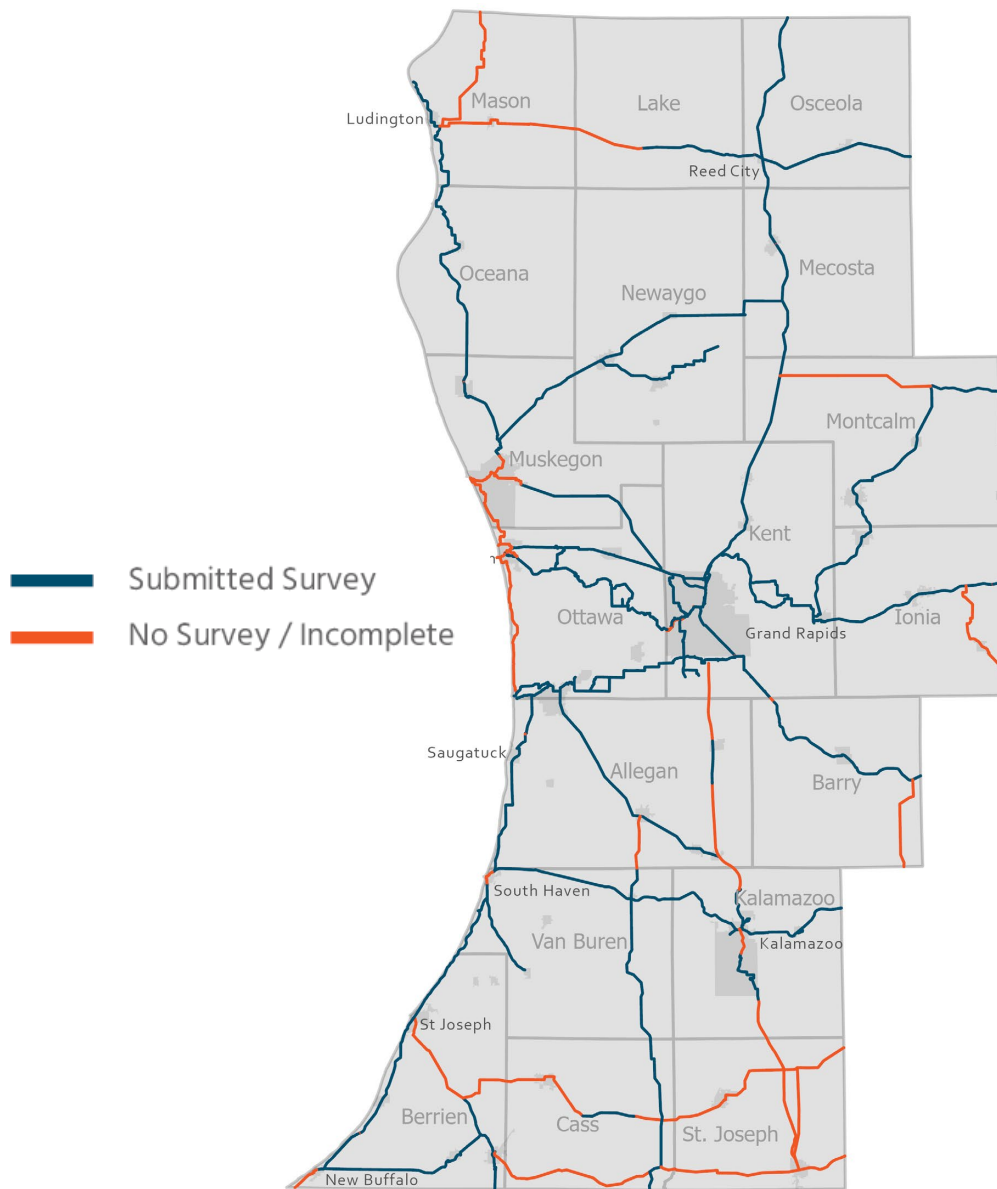
Final  
Deliverables  
**SUMMER 2024**

# Stakeholder Surveys

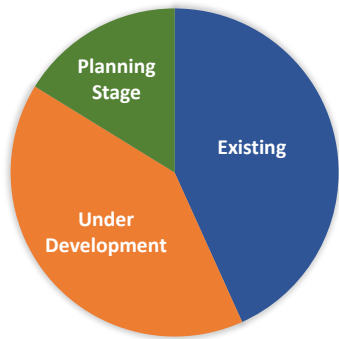
The purpose of the stakeholder survey was to collect uniform baseline information on existing and planned regional trails. It was sent to key trail stakeholders and included a trail self-assessment. Over 70 surveys were completed, although some trails had multiple submissions while others had none.

The survey gathered comprehensive information on various aspects of the trails, including their status and facility types, ownership and management, priorities, resources needed, current trail initiatives, and points of contact. It also included a self-assessment on planning, support, promotion, advocacy, and current trail conditions.

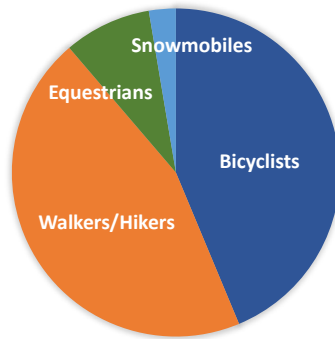
Survey input was critical in the development of the Sub Area Action Plan.



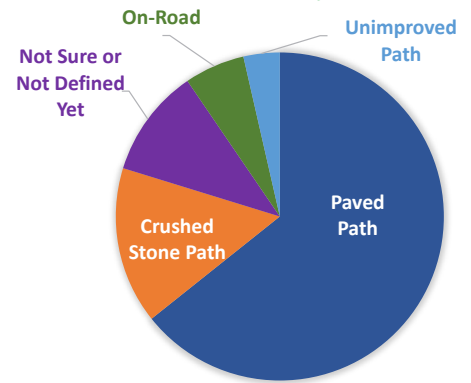
### WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATUS OF YOUR TRAIL?



### WHO IS ALLOWED ON THE TRAIL?



### WHAT IS YOUR TRAIL FACILITY TYPE?



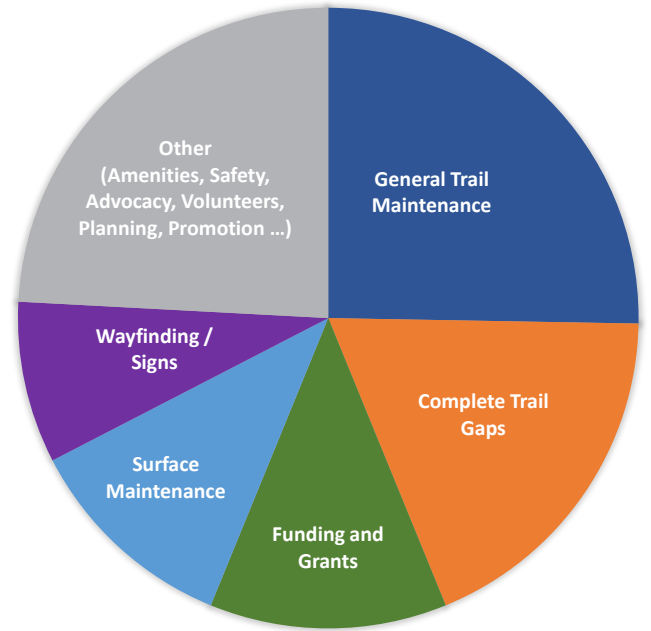
**COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SELF-ASSESSMENT SO WE CAN GET A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE CURRENT STATUS OF YOUR TRAIL. ON A SCALE FROM 1 TO 5, WITH 1 BEING "POOR" AND 5 BEING "EXCELLENT," PLEASE RATE THE FOLLOWING:**

#### Self – Assessment Weighted Average



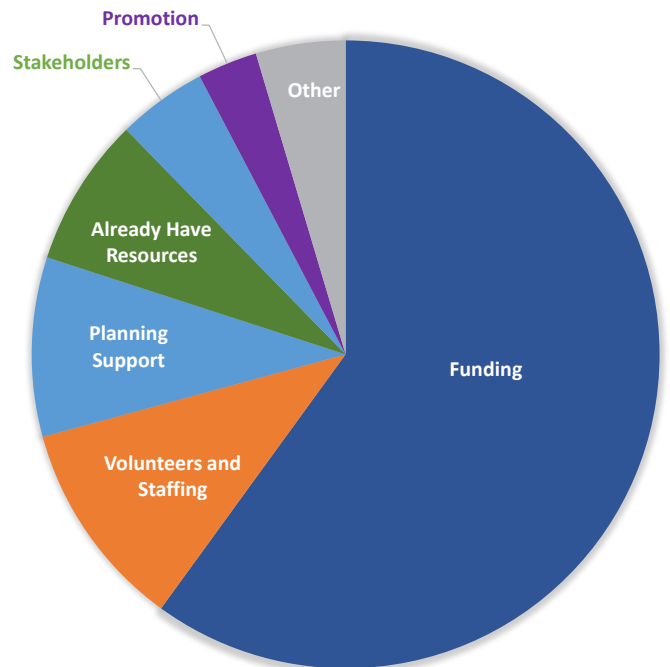
## WHAT ARE THE TOP PRIORITIES FOR THIS TRAIL?

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



## WHAT RESOURCES DO YOU NEED TO ADDRESS YOUR TOP PRIORITIES AND INITIATIVES?

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



# Spring Stakeholder Summits

In the spring of 2024, four stakeholder summits were held, each focusing on a different area of the region. These summits saw participation from over 50 stakeholders, reflecting a diverse range of interests and expertise. During the meetings, the results of the trail stakeholder survey were presented, and extensive discussions were held on trail analysis data and sub-region priorities.

Mentimeter, an interactive presentation software, was utilized in some of the meetings to gather input on attendee demographics and facilitate discussions on sub-region priorities, particularly concerning funding and other challenges. This tool proved valuable in enhancing engagement and ensuring that a wide array of perspectives were heard.

A major conclusion drawn from these meetings was the strong preference among trail stakeholders for continuing yearly sub-region meetings. These meetings were viewed as more productive and beneficial for ongoing collaboration and addressing regional trail development priorities.

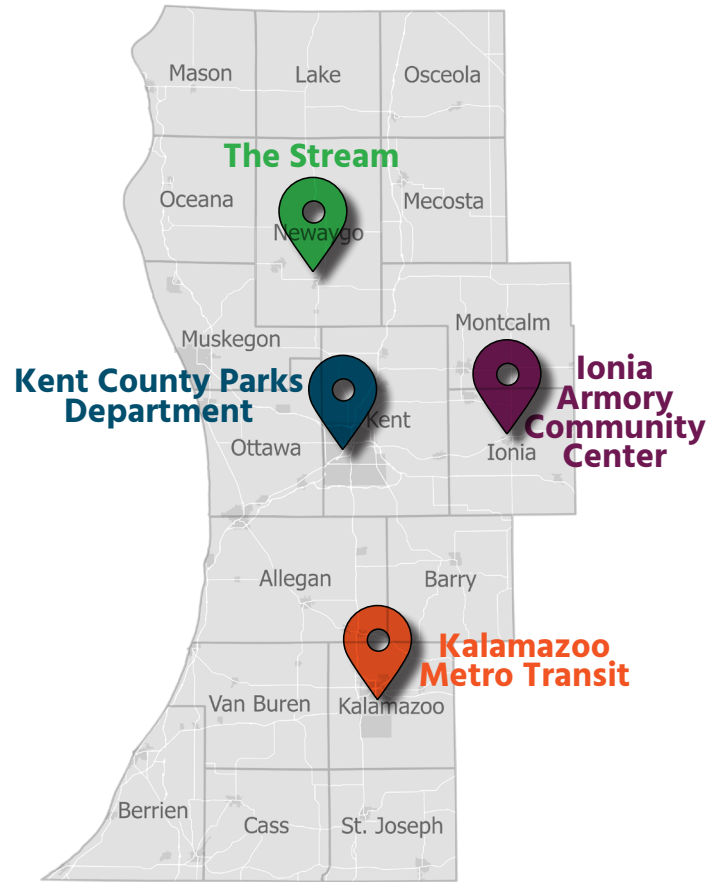
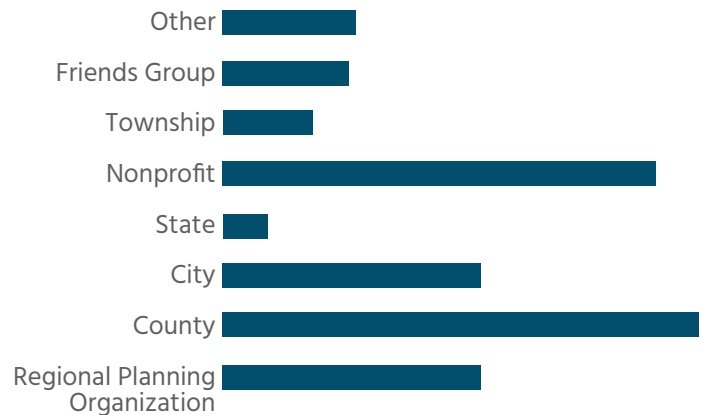


Photo courtesy of The Greenway Collaborative

## WHAT TYPE OF ORGANIZATION ARE YOU WITH?



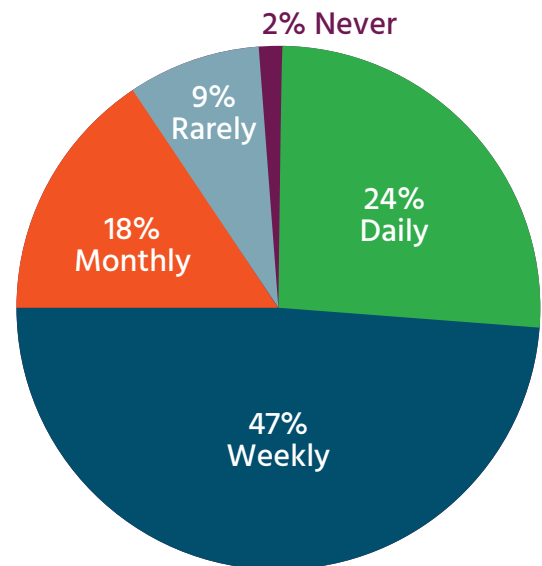
# Public Engagement

Public engagement is a vital component of the development of trails in West Michigan, ensuring the network reflects community needs. In August 2024, 875 responses were gathered through an online survey, and a draft of the plan was made available for public review. This section summarizes the feedback received, covering topics such as trail usage, preferred activities, desired improvements, and suggestions for new connections.

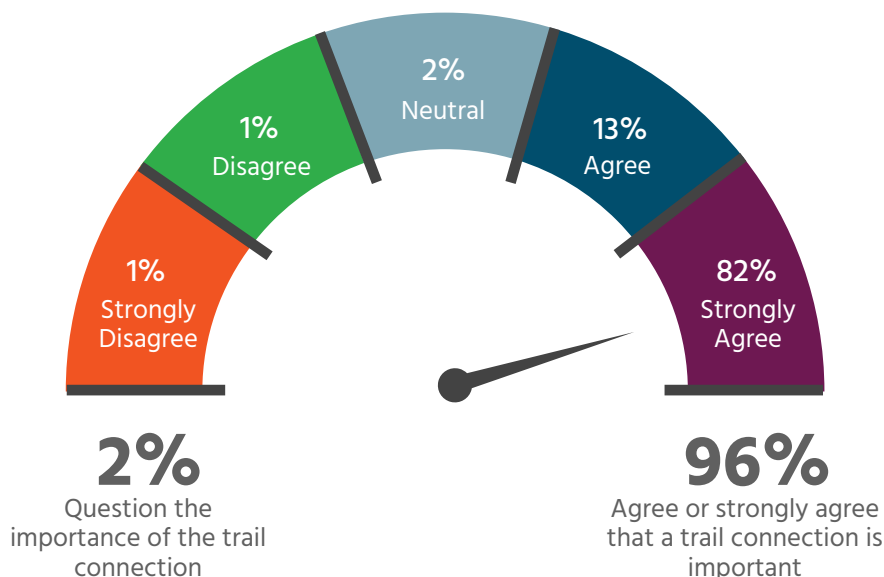
The survey questions explored key areas, including the importance of connecting communities, satisfaction with current amenities, preferred trail surfaces, and volunteer opportunities. These insights will help shape a more connected and accessible trail network for West Michigan.

The infographics summarize key input from the survey.

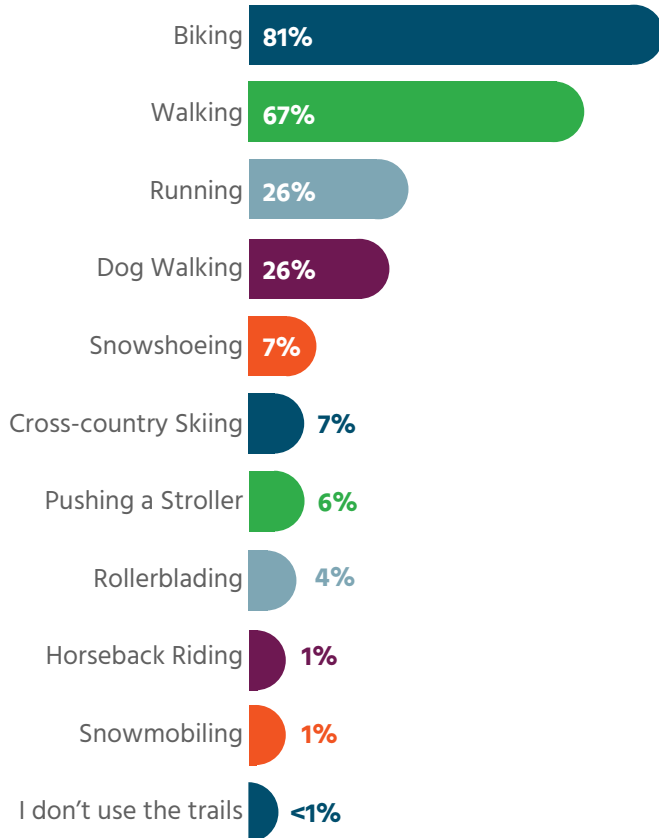
## HOW OFTEN DO YOU USE THE MULTI-USE TRAILS IN WEST MICHIGAN?



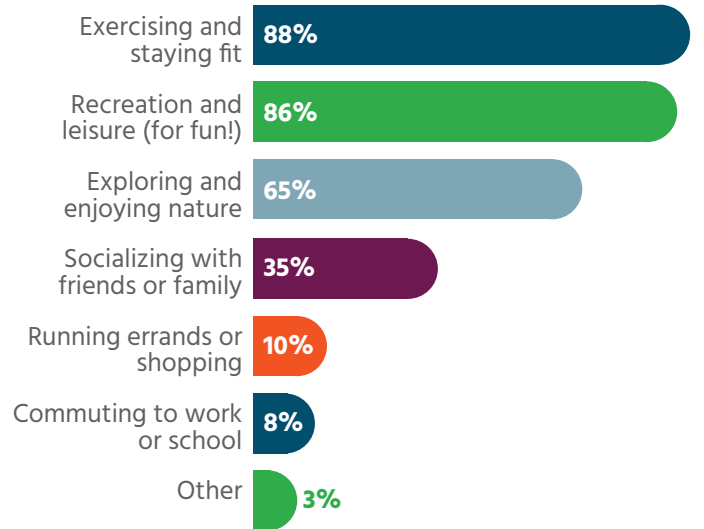
## IT IS IMPORTANT TO PROVIDE A NETWORK OF MULTI-USE TRAILS THAT CONNECT COMMUNITIES ACROSS WEST MICHIGAN?



## WHAT ACTIVITIES DO YOU PRIMARILY ENGAGE IN WHEN USING THE TRAILS?



## WHAT ARE YOUR PRIMARY REASONS FOR USING TRAILS IN OUR REGION?



Homeschool, training, racing, geocaching, lunch break, avoid road traffic, safety, physical therapy

## WHAT IS THE BEST THING YOU HAVE DISCOVERED OR EXPERIENCED ON A TRAIL IN WEST MICHIGAN?

**Wildlife:** Eagles, deer, turtles, birds, bobcats, etc.

**Plants and Flowers:** Wildflowers, fresh greens, spring flowers, trees.

**Natural Beauty:** Scenic views, fall foliage, water views, beauty of various landscapes.

**Serenity:** Peace, tranquility, quiet, solitude, escaping from traffic.

**Mental Health:** Stress relief, connection to nature, mental and physical health benefits.

**Trail Quality:** Paved trails, easy access, well-maintained, scenic trails.

**Safety:** Safety from traffic, clean facilities, secure environments.

**Ease of Use:** Connectivity, trailheads, smooth surfaces.

**Friendships:** Meeting new people, interacting with others, community vibe.

**Family and Friends:** Spending time with family, enjoying activities with friends.

**Events and Activities:** Fun experiences, social encounters, organized events.

**Fitness and Exercise:** Hiking, biking, running, cross-country skiing.

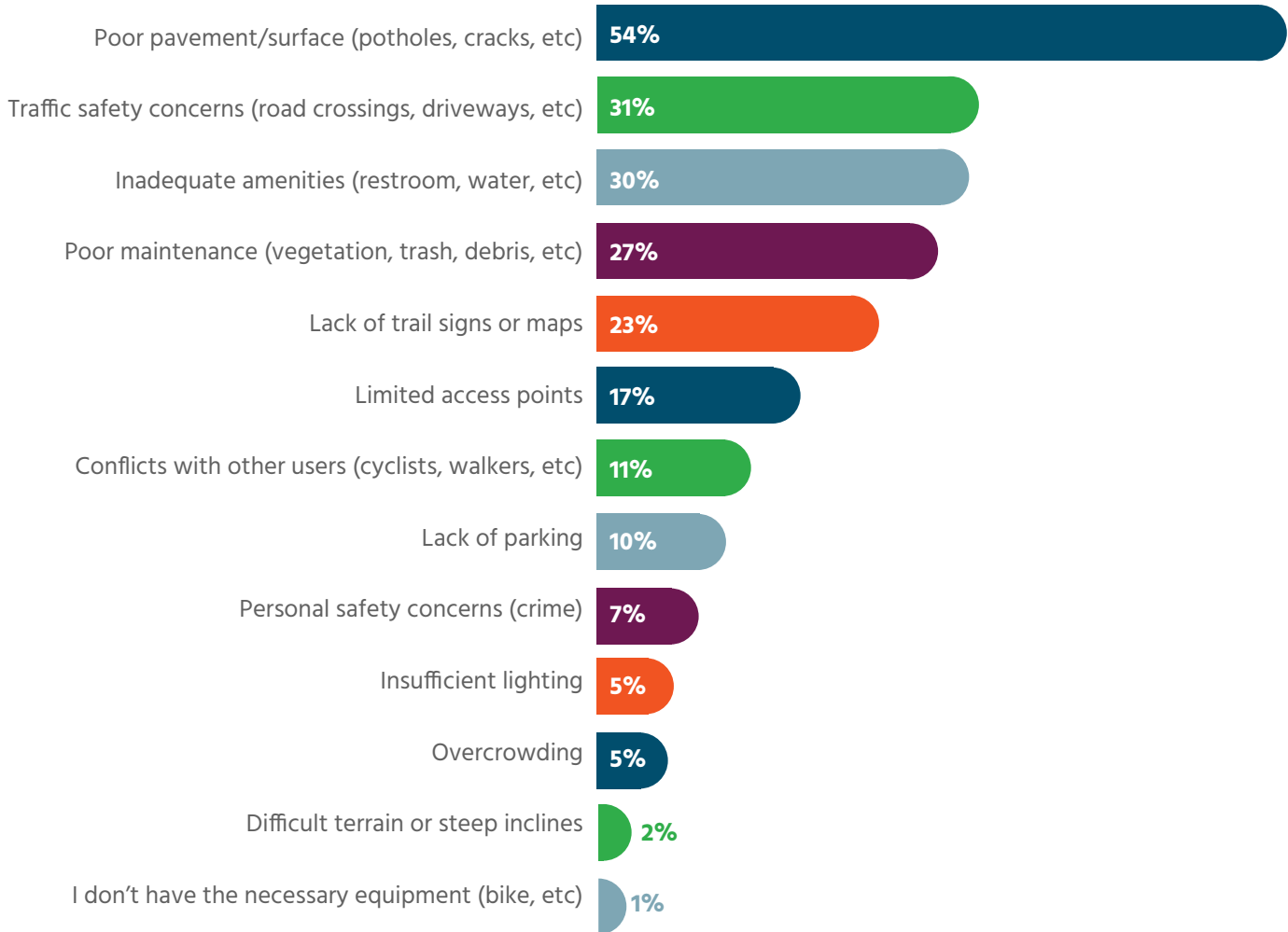
**Exploration:** Discovering new trails, exploring small towns, scenic rides.

**Recreation:** Enjoyment of outdoor activities, finding new places to eat and shop.

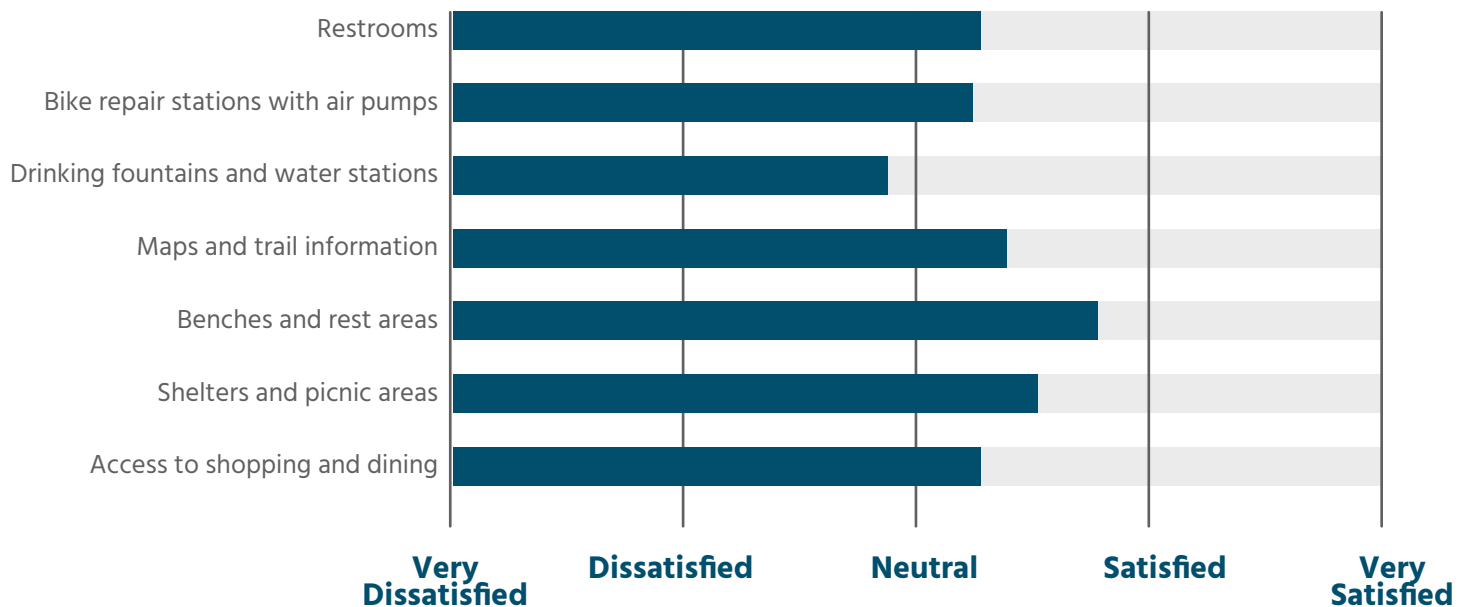
**Unique Sightings:** Rare wildlife, specific scenic spots, memorable encounters.

**Historical and Cultural:** Historic spots, local businesses, community connections.

## WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST ISSUES YOU HAVE ENCOUNTERED WHILE USING THE TRAILS?

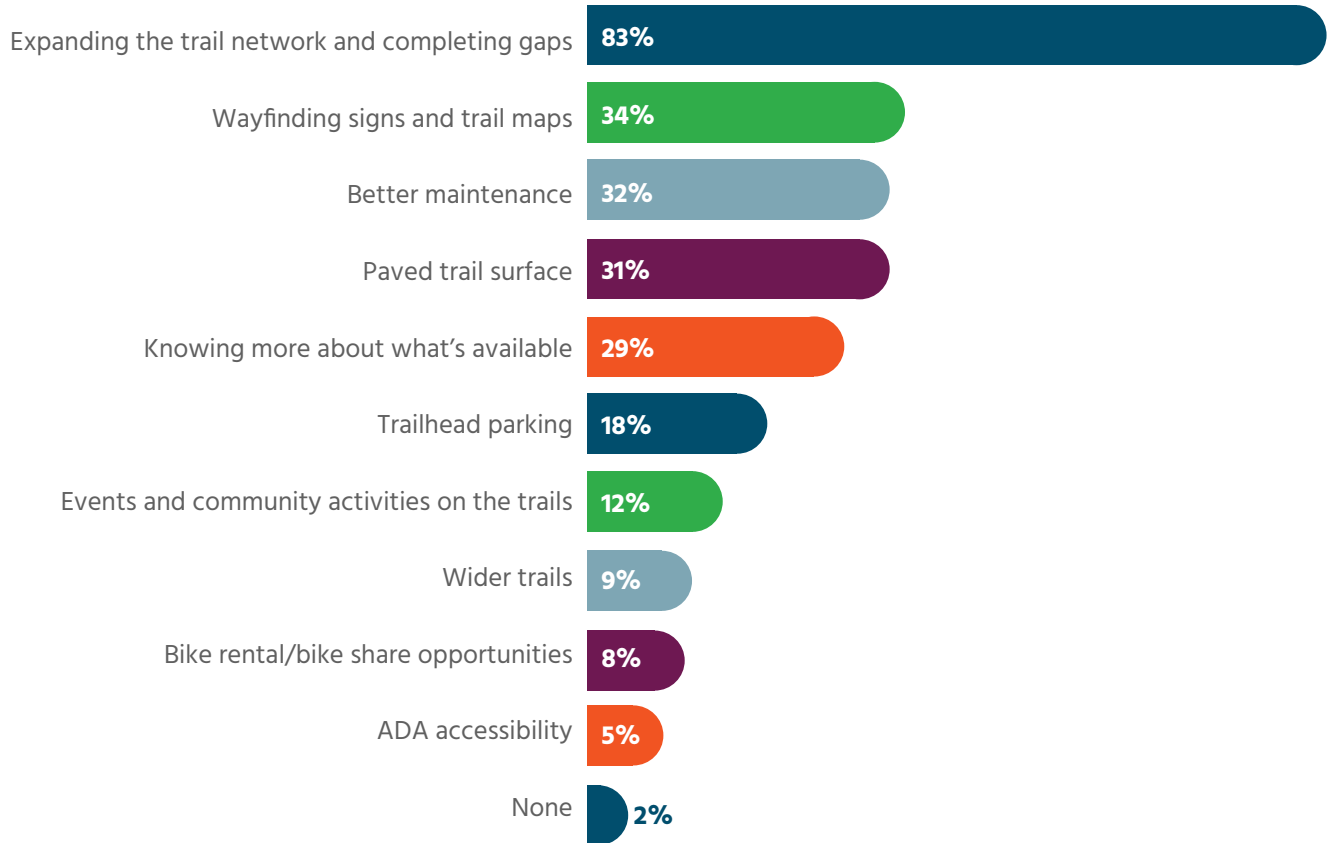


## HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE AMENITIES AVAILABLE ALONG THE TRAIL?

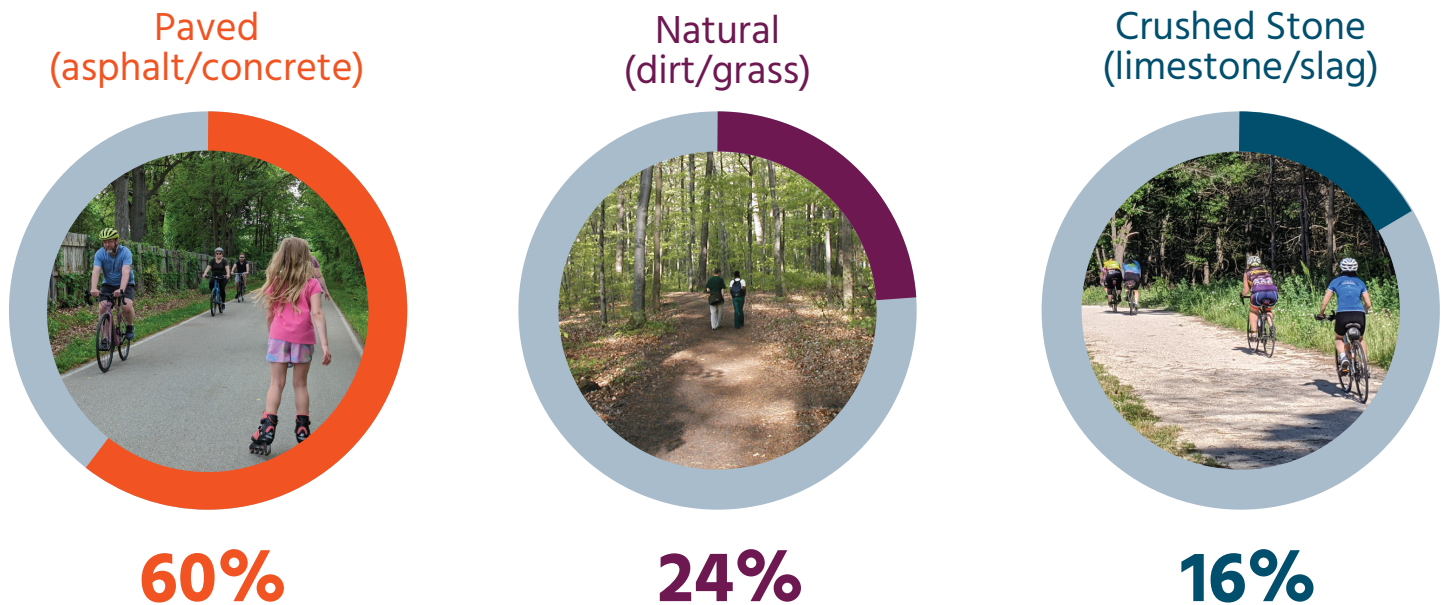




## WHAT IMPROVEMENTS WOULD MAKE YOU USE THE REGIONAL TRAIL NETWORK MORE OFTEN?



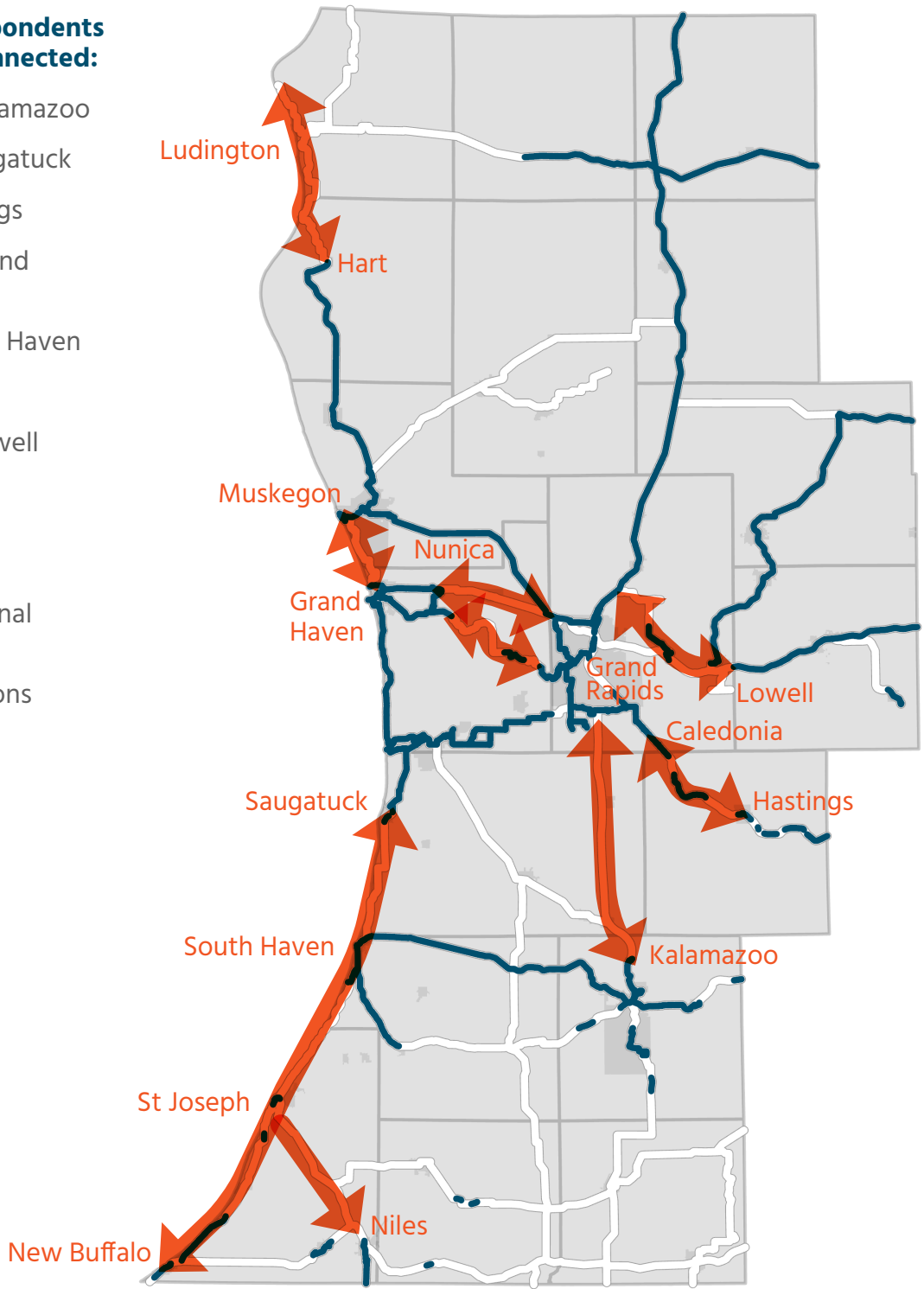
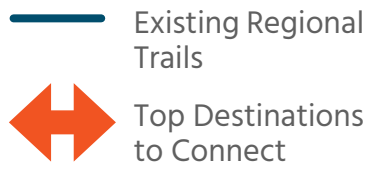
## WHAT TYPE OF SURFACE DO YOU PREFER?



**IS THERE A TRAIL CONNECTION YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE ADDED TO THE NETWORK THAT IS CURRENTLY MISSING? PLEASE DESCRIBE THE DESTINATIONS YOU WOULD LIKE TO CONNECT.**

**Top Destinations Respondents Would Like to See Connected:**

- Grand Rapids to Kalamazoo
- New Buffalo to Saugatuck
- Caledonia to Hastings
- Grand Haven to Grand Rapids
- Muskegon to Grand Haven
- Hart to Ludington
- Grand Rapids to Lowell
- St Joseph to Niles



# Additional Desired Regional Connections

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The regional trail network in this plan focuses on existing or planned trails from other regional plans, ensuring a realistic and actionable approach. Beyond these core trails, public surveys and stakeholder input have highlighted several additional desired connections. These proposed links should be evaluated for potential inclusion in future regional plans, as they are not currently part of the existing network. They aim to enhance connectivity and expand the regional trail system's reach, reflecting community feedback and strategic planning efforts.

## Desired Regional Connections Identified in the Survey and by Stakeholders:

- **Broadway Corridor:** Connecting Musketawa Trail to Dune Harbor Park south of Muskegon. This route is currently under development.
- **Comstock-Kalamazoo River Valley Trail:** Connecting Kalamazoo River Valley Trail through Comstock and Pavilion Townships to Portage. Existing sections include Romance Road Parkway Trail to the airport. As part of Portage city's 5-year plan, efforts are focused on constructing the Sprinkle Road Bypass Trail along the east side to Lexington Green Park. Planning is ongoing to align the route and secure funding to extend the trail through Pavilion and Comstock Township to Green Meadow Park.
- **Fruitbelt Trail Spur:** Connecting the existing Fruitbelt Trail in Oshtemo Township through Texas Township to the Portage Bicentennial Trail. Portage plans to build the 4-mile Northwest Trail extending from the Portage Creek Bicentennial Trail to Texas Township. Texas Township is responsible for completing a 3.5-mile trail segment connecting from the Portage Northwest Trail on 12th Street to the Fruitbelt Trail.
- **Fruitland and Laketon Townships:** Developing a plan for a bike path connecting Duck Lake and Muskegon State Parks. The townships are actively seeking grant funding for this project.
- Caledonia to Lowell
- Cedar Springs to Muskegon
- Nunica to Cedar Springs through Ravenna or Sparta
- North Muskegon to Muskegon State Park
- Muskegon to Wolf Lake
- Fremont to Whitehall
- Robinson to Holland
- Berrien Center to Berrien Springs
- Sister Lakes to Dowagiac





# Action Plan

Developed specifically for West Michigan Trails, the primary purpose of this plan is to aid decision-making regarding regional trail development. By leveraging the insights provided, West Michigan Trails can prioritize projects and allocate resources strategically to areas with the potential for significant regional benefits. This approach ensures alignment of trail development efforts with regional goals, thereby maximizing their impact.

This plan also serves as a comprehensive guide for stakeholders, policymakers, and community members involved in trail development. The action plan analyses and recommendations can be used to:

- **Identify Priorities:** Focus on areas with the greatest potential for regional connectivity and impact. The action plan highlights a few key maps from the analysis, with additional resources available in the [Supplemental Maps](#) Chapter.
- **Allocate Resources:** Strategically direct funding and support to address critical gaps in the trail network.
- **Support Grant Applications:** Leverage the data and findings to strengthen proposals for funding.
- **Collaborate Effectively:** Coordinate efforts among various stakeholders to ensure alignment with regional goals.
- **Monitor Progress:** Regularly review and adjust the action items to stay on track with the five-year focus.

The Regional Master Trails Plan is a shot in the arm to our multiuse trails efforts in Mason County! No stone was left unturned in gathering pertinent data and stakeholder input throughout the 18-county region, leading to a comprehensive document that we have already used to complete grant applications. Thanks to West Michigan Trails' vision and Greenway Collaborative's expertise, we have a plan to guide our trail building efforts in West Michigan for years to come.

KRISTI LUCAS-ZIMMERMAN, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR  
CHAMBER ALLIANCE OF MASON COUNTY/THE RIGHT PLACE

# Action Plan

## Introduction

The vision for the regional trail network is to create a seamless and extensive system that connects communities and enhances active transportation and recreational opportunities. While an impressive trail system already exists, there are critical gaps that need to be addressed for it to function effectively as a cohesive regional network. This action plan explores the potential of existing, developing, and planned trails, aiming to complete these connections and realize the full potential of our regional trail network.

The action plan focuses on synthesizing current planning efforts across the region and outlining actionable items that can be achieved over the next five years. The following pages provide an overview of key analyses and datasets evaluated during the planning process, followed by the action plan recommendations.

“ Trails have exposed me to beautiful areas that I otherwise would not have discovered. At this time the limited trail network can mainly be used for exercise and leisure. I really wish I could use a more extensive trail network to make trips to the grocery store, ride with my kids to their school, or travel around the state.



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Photo courtesy of Michigan Trails Magazine

# West Michigan Regional Trail Network

## Regional Multi-use Trails:

-  Existing
-  Planned

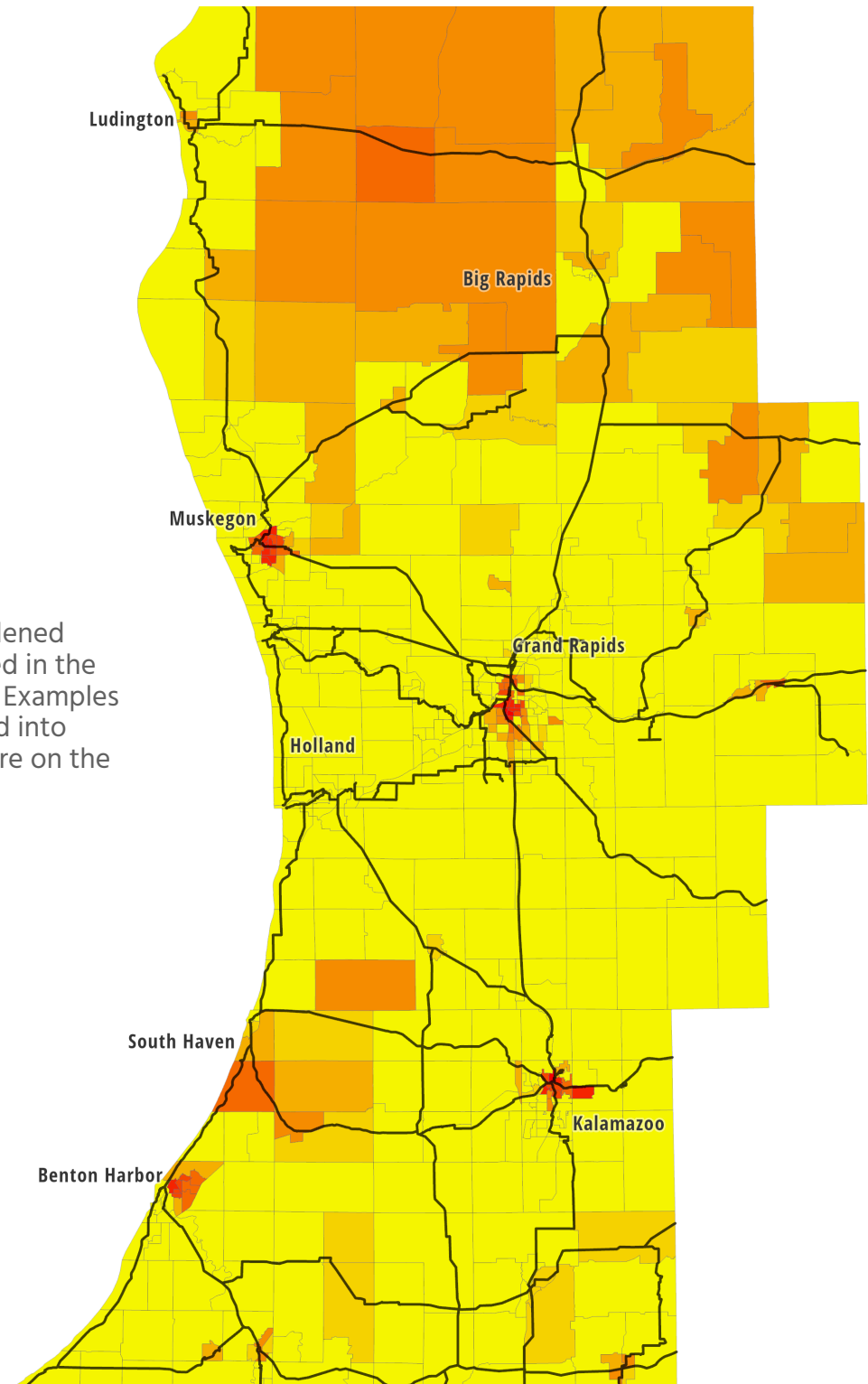
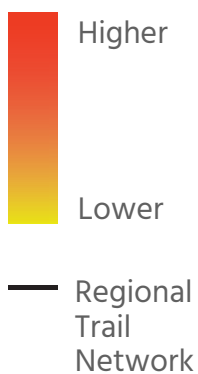


# Equitable Access in Trail Planning

Ensuring equitable access is an essential part of trail planning. Identifying disadvantaged areas helps prioritize projects and allocate resources effectively to regions with the potential to deliver significant benefits. The following dataset utilizes the Census Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool, which identifies disadvantaged communities nationwide based on criteria including climate change, energy, health, housing, legacy pollution, transportation, water and wastewater, and workforce development.

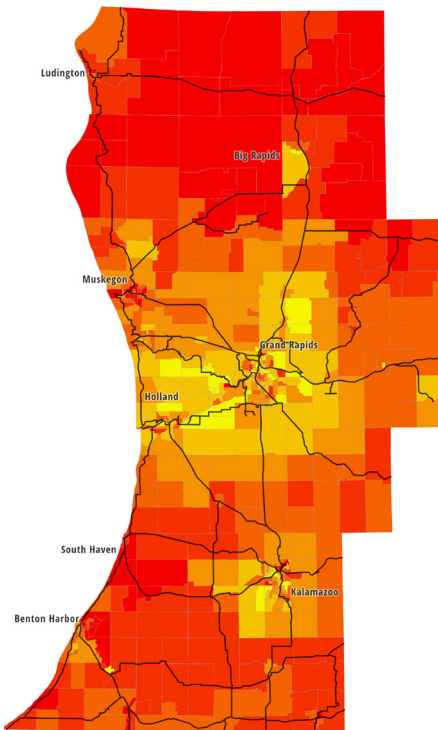
## Disadvantaged Areas

Census Tracts that are overburdened and under served are highlighted in the darker shades of orange below. Examples of the types of datasets that fed into the Disadvantages Areas Map are on the following page.

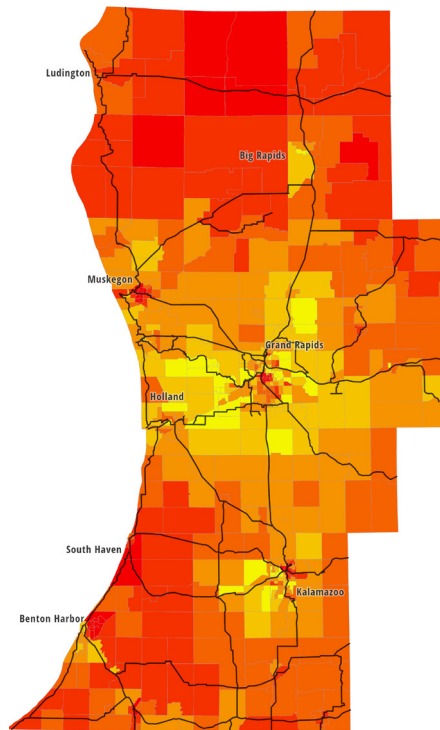




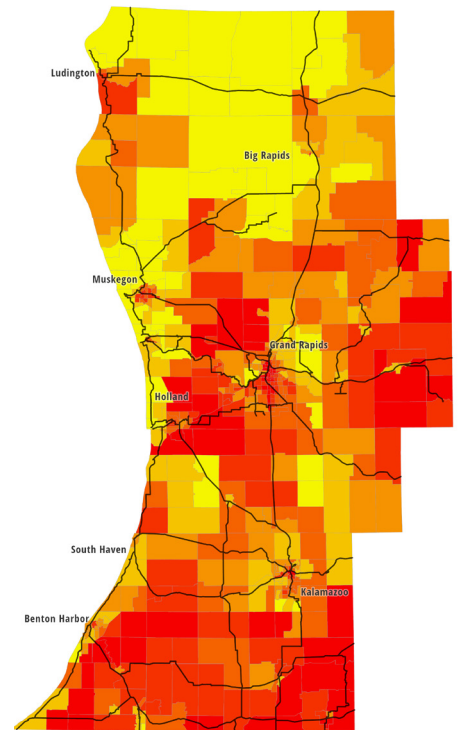
These maps showcase a few examples of the types of datasets that contribute to the Disadvantaged Areas map.



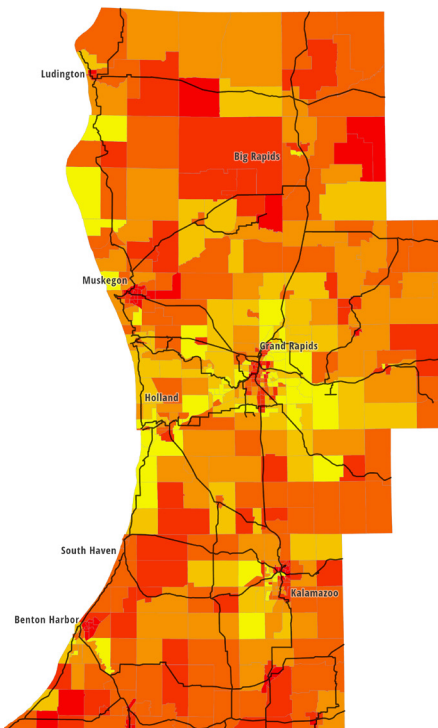
**Heart Disease**



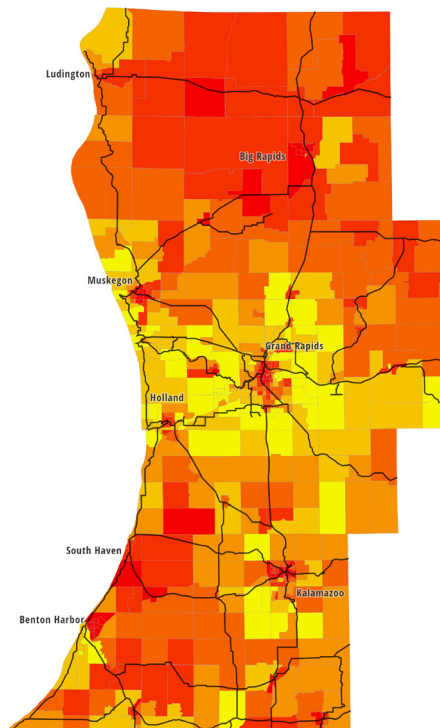
**Diabetes**



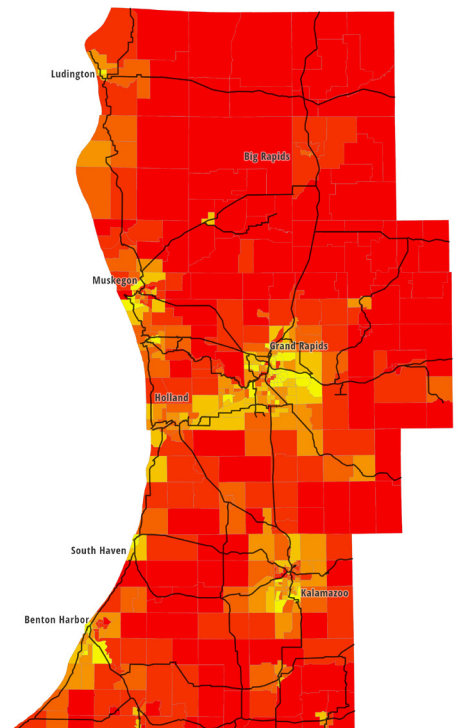
**Lack of Greenspace**



**Low Life Expectancy**



**Poverty**



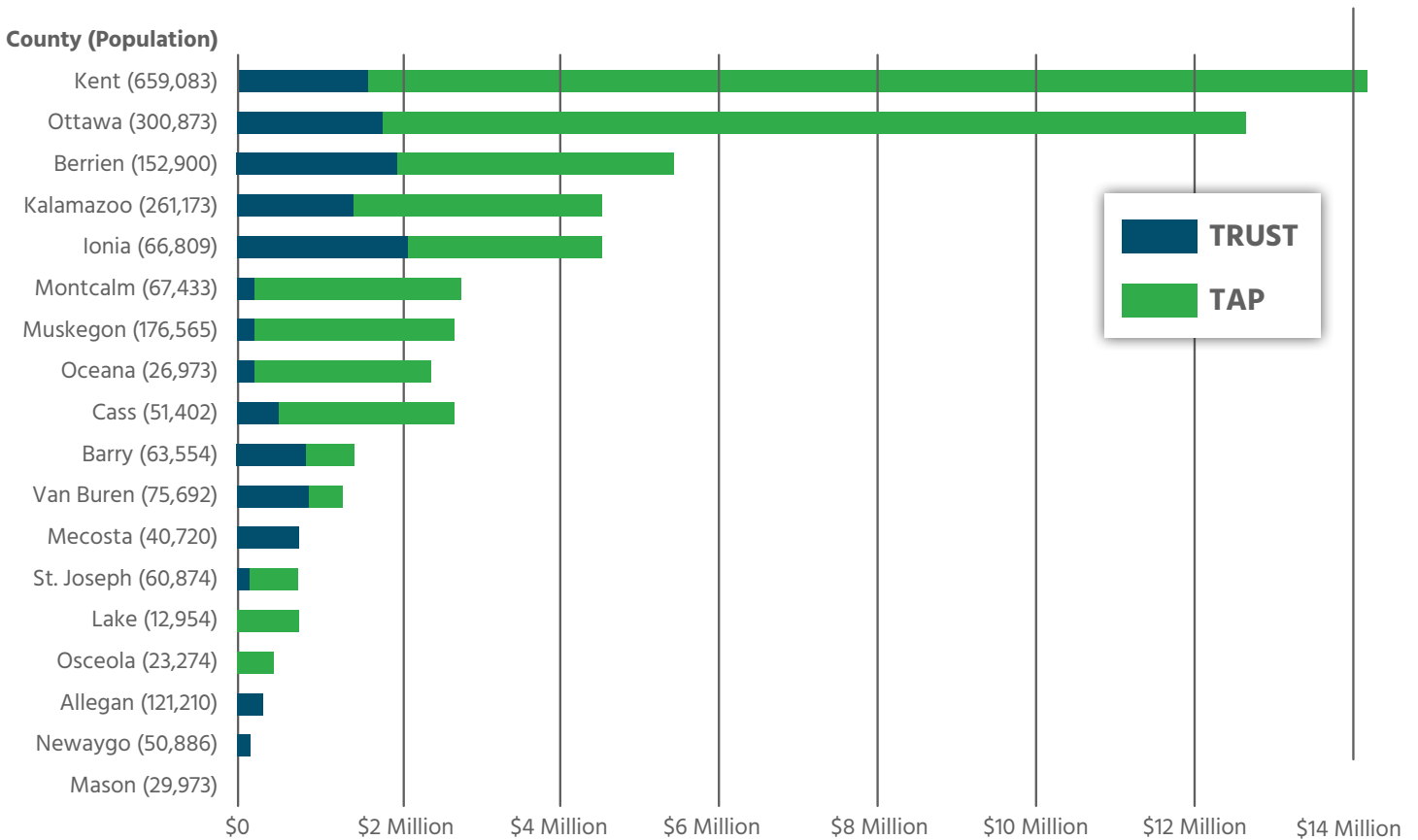
**Access to Transportation**

# Trail Investments and Funding Disparities

From a regional perspective, trail funding and investment across the region have not been equitable. There are significant opportunities to provide trail connections to disadvantaged areas that have historically received less support.

Funding for trail development and maintenance typically comes from numerous sources, including local governments, federal funding primarily through the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), state funding primarily through Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (TRUST), local foundations, and individual contributions. The following chart illustrates how TAP and TRUST funds have been distributed across different counties in the region for trail projects. While this chart does not account for all funding sources, it provides a snapshot of how state and federal funds are supporting trail development in the region.

## Distribution of TAP and TRUST funds Across Counties for Only Trail Projects



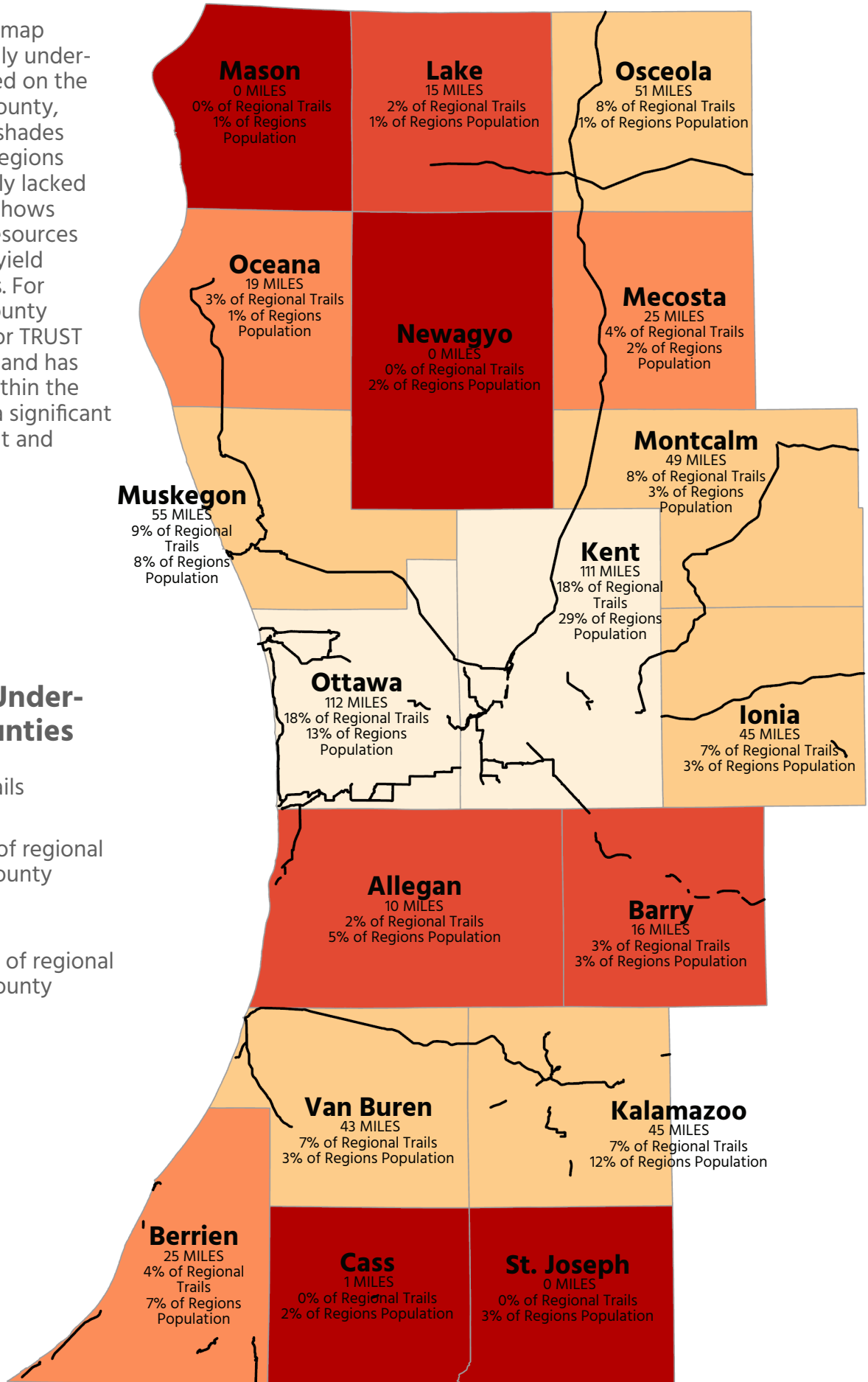
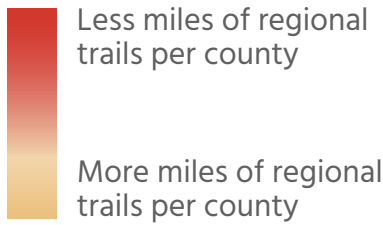
*This table represents the distribution of TAP and TRUST funds across counties for only trail specific projects in West Michigan between 2013 and 2023. There are inherent limitations and subjectivity in extrapolating data specifically pertaining to trail projects, particularly for larger, more complex projects where funding allocations may not be clearly delineated. Additionally, TAP contributions have increased significantly in recent years, which influenced the decision to use a ten-year time frame for this analysis. Consequently, this data may not capture the full scope of trail funding distribution. No similar analysis for other regions has been found for comparison purposes.*

Over the past 10 years, an average of \$25 per person from state and federal funds has been allocated to trails in the region, equating to about \$2.50 per person per year, not accounting for inflation.

The accompanying map highlights historically under-invested areas based on the existing trails per county, depicted in darker shades of red. Identifying regions that have historically lacked trail development shows where additional resources and support could yield substantial benefits. For instance, Mason County received zero TAP or TRUST funds toward trails and has no existing trails within the county, indicating a significant need for investment and development.

### Historically Under-invested Counties

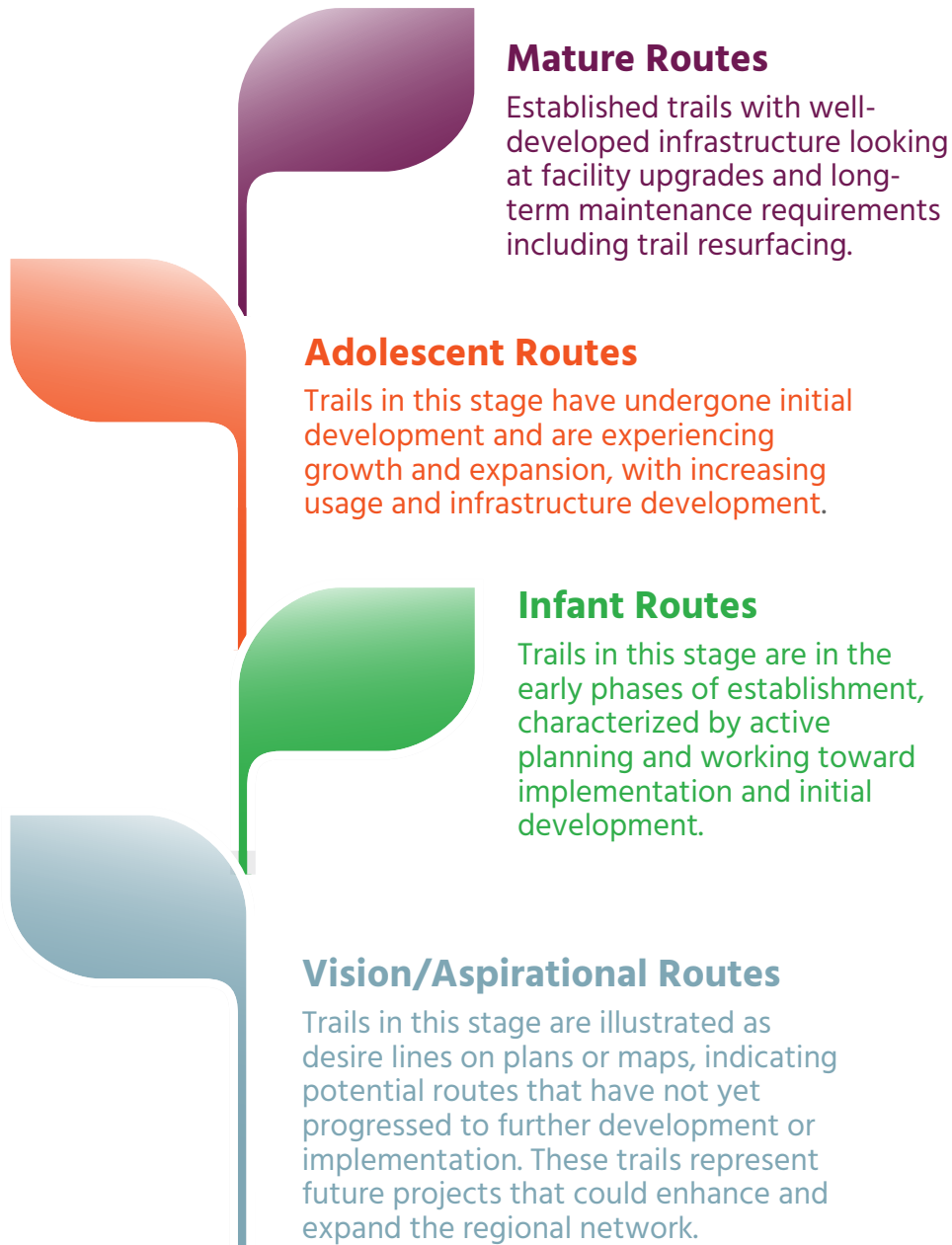
— Existing Trails



# Trail Life Stage Classification

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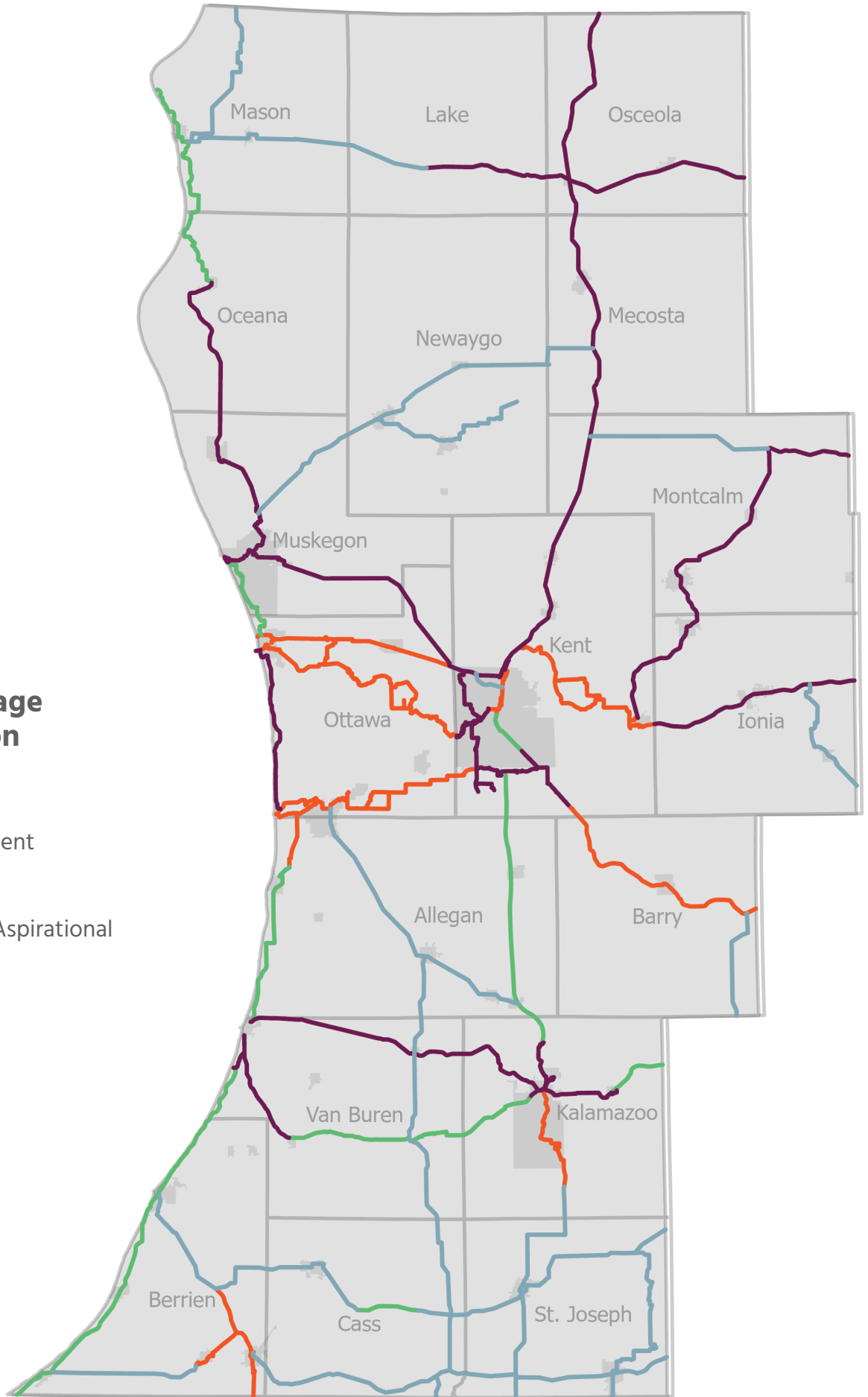
The Action Plan has been organized by trail life stage, classifying each trail as Mature, Adolescent, Infant, or Vision/Aspiration Route based on its stage of development. This classification system helps tailor support and interventions according to the specific needs of each trail, recognizing the differences between new trails in their infancy and older trails requiring diverse types of support.



**THESE DESIGNATIONS ARE USED TO ORGANIZE THE ACTION PLAN**

### Trail Life Stage Classification

- Mature
- Adolescent
- Infant
- Vision/Aspirational

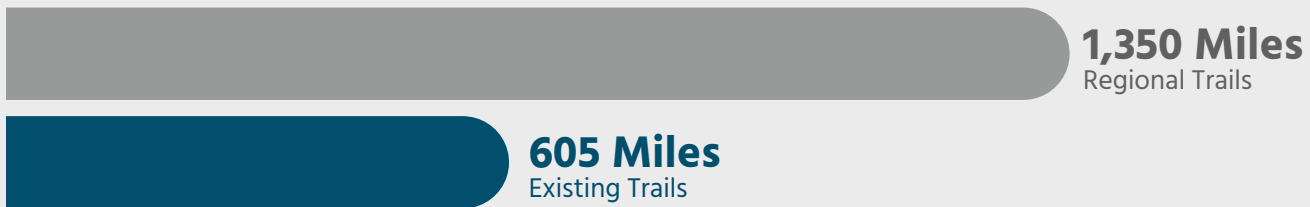


## Action Plan

# West Michigan Regional Trail Network

This comprehensive initiative navigates the challenges of coordinating a trail action plan across an expansive 18-county region. Balancing diverse needs and priorities, the plan focuses on outlining near-term goals for the next five years to enhance communication and coordination among stakeholders. It includes region-wide initiatives applicable to the majority of trail organizations and stakeholders in the 18-county West Michigan Trails area. Additionally, the plan features individual pages dedicated to each trail that can be extracted for grants and other trail planning efforts. The ultimate goal of this plan is to provide a planning tool that enhances coordination and effectively supports trail development in West Michigan.

### WEST MICHIGAN REGIONAL TRAIL NETWORK:



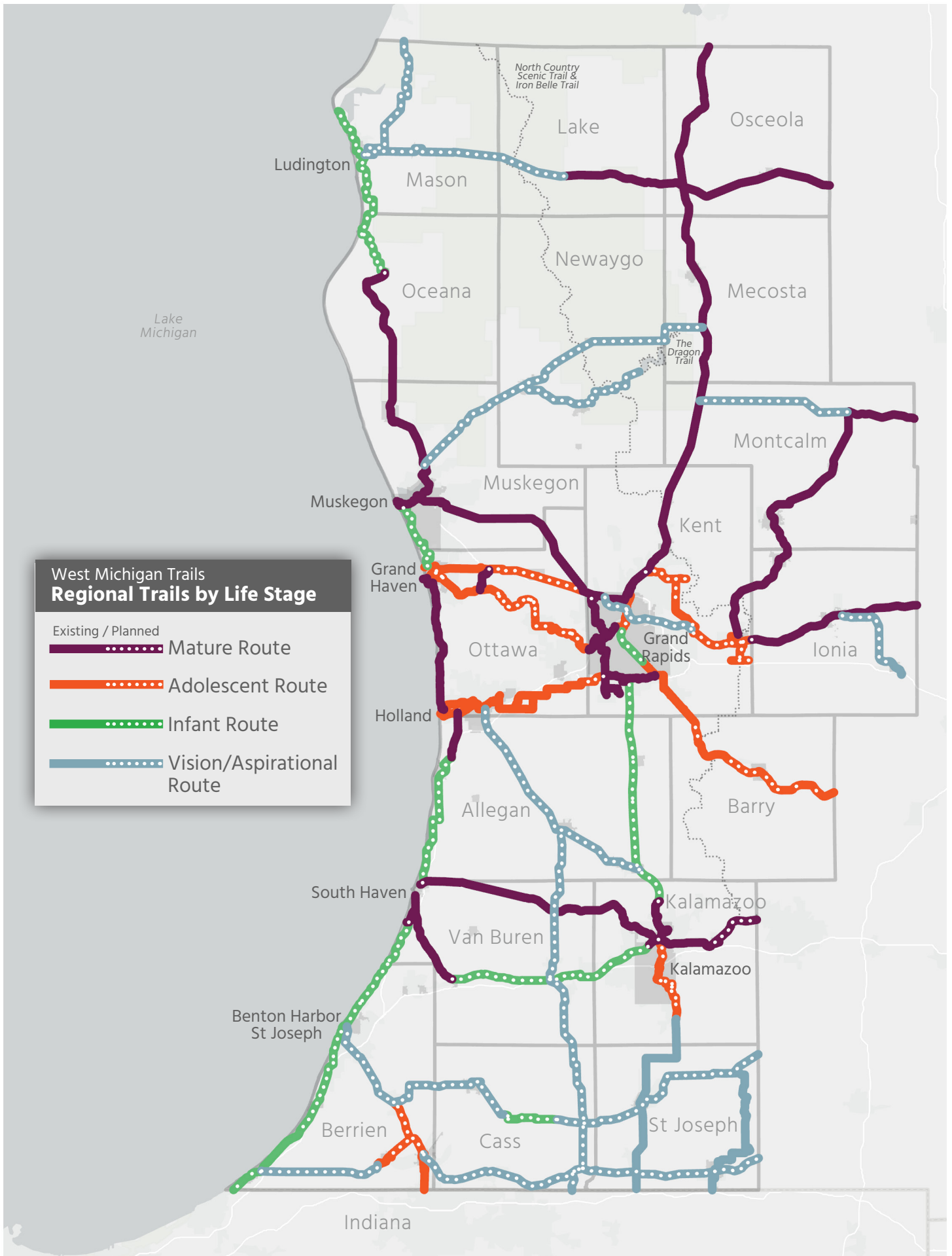
### TRAIL LIFE STAGE:



“ I’m really excited about this initiative. Connectivity is key and makes so much sense vs building new infrastructure if something exists. Connecting between trails is so important to make this a regional network. Thanks for focusing on this!

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# Action Plan

# Regional Initiatives

## **West Michigan Trails Focus**

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There are a number of activities, issues, and needs that have been identified that are applicable to the vast majority of trail organizations and stakeholders in the 18-County West Michigan Trails area. These are further detailed below.

### **Maintain Database of Contacts**

Across the 18-County area, there are a significant number of organizations, municipalities, friends groups, foundations, volunteers, etc. that help to own, manage, plan for, improve, and promote the regional trail network. A database of contacts has been developed as part of this planning effort and efforts to **regularly update the database** is a top priority.

### **Quarterly/Semi-Annual E-newsletter**

On a semi-annual or quarterly basis, develop and send out an e-newsletter to a broad stakeholder list. The primary audience should be the various stakeholder agencies and organizations that work to build, improve and maintain the regional network. **The purpose is to share success stories, resources, announcements, and inspiration.**

### **Convene Summit(s)**

This planning process has confirmed the need to continue to bring together the vast number of regional trail organizations and stakeholders in the **18-County area at an Annual Summit** in order to share resources and advance the coordinated efforts of the entire network. In addition to the large, yearly summit, it is a priority to coordinate and host four smaller **Annual Sub-Region Summits (North, West, East and South)**. These localized meetings will allow for stakeholders within each region/area to gather together for a more detailed exchange of information sharing and conversations more directly related to their specific geographic area.

### **Regional Signage**

**A Wayfinding Sign Concept and Implementation Guide** with sign design standards and graphic file prototypes was completed in 2023 by West Michigan Trails and a number of partners. The goal is for all regional trails to use the guide in order to install a cohesive and seamless wayfinding system that promotes trail use, names, and branding. **Raising awareness that the guide exists and how to use it continues to be a high priority as is securing funding for various entities to do installations.**

### **Promotion, Awareness, and Advocacy**

Continually work to raise awareness and the role of the West Michigan Trails organization as well as awareness and use of this Plan and associated mapping/data resources. Work to promote and advocate for the entire West Michigan Regional Trail Network at the local and state level as well as in the Midwest Region. Additional considerations include working closely with tourism related organizations to promote the network such as West Michigan Tourist Association, Pure Michigan, Michigan Beachtowns, as well as the various county and local convention and visitors bureaus in the area. There also continues to be a need for a robust and coordinated education campaign about safety, interacting with various modes, etc. While a lot of materials exist at the national, state, and local levels, there is a need for coordinating and disseminating the information on a regular basis through a variety of medias.



## Assist in Securing Funding

The vast majority of organizations that are planning, building, and managing the West Michigan Regional Trail Network are in need of support to secure funding to advance their work toward construction but also to secure sustainable funding sources for on-going maintenance. Support from a regionally-focused organization will likely take multiple forms from distributing information about available grants and offering grant writing support, to advocating for funding at the state and national levels and lobbying West Michigan foundations and private corporations. Coordination with other state-level organizations will also be essential to ensure comprehensive and cohesive efforts.

## Volunteer Recruitment Support

There are a significant number of amazing "Friends of" organizations associated with the West Michigan Regional Trail Network that work tirelessly to develop and maintain many miles of the system. A large majority of these groups are struggling to recruit additional volunteers. While the reasons for the challenge likely vary from trail to trail, a regionally-focused organization could provide assistance with general messaging and media development such as social media posts to share/use/modify, development of posters, flyers, mailers, etc. Many of the "Friends" groups are needing particular assistance with strategies to reach out to the young adults and families to join and assist.

## Master Plan Updates

The Regional Trail Master Plan focuses on short-term priorities and should be updated every 5 to 7 years. To keep it relevant and adaptable, systematic updates should be conducted on a yearly basis. Annually, touch base with each trail group to confirm contact details, track progress, and review any shifting priorities. Use the trail summary pages as a dynamic notebook to record updates and changes in priorities. Maintaining accurate records and regularly engaging with trail groups will streamline the recalibration process, ensuring the plan remains accurate and manageable over time.

## Collect and Share Resources

Organizations that are building and managing the West Michigan Regional Trail Network are a variety of sizes and capacities with varying experiences, abilities and resources. There is a need for a regionally-focused organization to stay apprised of, collect, develop and share information related to common issues such as policy issues, maintenance agreements, easement/lease language, how to coordinate with utility and railroad companies, e-bikes on trails, managing trespassing, establishing/growing/funding "Friends of" groups, recruiting volunteers, becoming a 501(c)(3), etc. There is also a need to establish and share design guidelines for the ideal regional network (both off- and on-street) including width, materials, safe road crossings, separated bike lanes, wayfinding, etc..



Photo by Don Vanden Brink

# Regional Funding Needs

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Estimating the cost of developing one mile of shared-use pathway is challenging. A single highway pedestrian overpass can cost as much as 7 miles of trail, and the cost of an urban waterfront trail can be many times that of a rural rail-trail. When considering an 18-county system with trails in various stages of development, even order-of-magnitude estimates are difficult.

Shared-use paths can range from \$650,000/mile for an asphalt path in a rural context to \$1,100,000/mile for a concrete path in a suburban or urban area. Additional costs include structures such as bridges, boardwalks, road crossings, wayfinding, and amenities. Consequently, the per-mile budget of \$750,000 to \$1,250,000, averaging around \$1 million per mile.

Additionally, major bridges, such as those over rivers and freeways, can cost between \$2 to \$8 million, significantly increasing the cost of the trail per mile.

## Adolescent Routes

There are 237 miles of trails in various stages of development in this category including approximately 91 miles planned. Many of the recently completed 146 miles have only basic improvements at this point. For these trails an allowance of \$20,000 per mile is given for improvements such as wayfinding, safer road crossings, and amenities.

**\$91 million in trail construction costs for planned trails**

**\$3 million for amenities and improvements for recently constructed trails**

Excluding the Grand Rapids Waterfront, we estimate that less than \$10 million per year is currently being spent on trails from combined federal, state, local, foundation, and private sources. This amount is approximately what is needed just to maintain the existing trail system.

## Infant Routes

There are 196 miles of trails in this category. These are the next generation of trails to be built and are currently in the planning and funding stages.

**\$196 million in trail construction costs**

## Mature Routes

There are currently 452 miles of trail under this category. Some of these older sections need resurfacing, road crossing upgrades, wayfinding signage, and updated amenities. Trail surfaces have about a 20-year life span. If we assume that each year: 5% of the existing trail system will need to be resurfaced; amenities will need to be upgraded; and the cost to do such is about 40% of new construction we can estimate a system-wide yearly allowance for the mature routes.

**\$9 million each year in trail rehabilitation costs**

## Funding Scenarios

Totaling the costs of the Adolescent Routes and Infant Routes, it comes to \$290 million. If we take those costs plus the yearly allowance for rehabilitation of Mature Routes we can then sketch out what the yearly trail construction and rehabilitation budgets for various time frames.

**5-year time frame comes to \$67 million each year**

**10-year time frame comes to \$38 million each year**

**15-year time frame comes to \$28 million each year**

**20-year time frame comes to \$23.5 million each year**

## Non-Construction Additional Costs

- **Routine Maintenance Costs:** Yearly routine maintenance costs can range from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per mile. The existing mature routes in the 18-county region are likely spending about \$6 million each year on maintenance.
- **Acquisition Costs:** While most trails are located on public property, there are situations where property must be purchased. There are also costs for long-term leases, etc.
- **Soft Costs:** Prior to a grant being submitted, feasibility studies, trail design, preliminary engineering, and public engagement must be conducted. When funds are secured, there are costs related to evaluating subsurface conditions, delineating wetlands, surveying, construction documents, and construction administration. These “soft” costs are often about 20% of the construction costs. There are few funding sources for this work and they are typically born by the local municipalities, non-profit friends groups and/or trail management agencies. In addition, many grants are reimbursement-based requiring substantial capital and cash flow.

## Aspirational Routes

In addition to the previously discussed routes, there are 464 miles of Aspirational Routes. For perspective, the combined total of the Mature, Infant, and Adolescent Routes is 885 miles.

**\$464 million of construction costs**

“What you are doing is very important and we are forever grateful for the work you all have done. Thank you so much and I hope that we can continue to grow the trails!”

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Photo courtesy of Prein & Newhof

# Addressing the Funding Gap

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Clearly the existing funding scenario for regional trail development is not sufficient to implement the trails that are included in this plan. This is not a surprise to anyone, and the need to develop additional funding was identified repeatedly in stakeholder surveys. Historically, regional trail funding has been a combination of federal funding, primarily the Transportation Alternative Program (TAP), state funding, primarily through MDNR's Trust Fund (TRUST), and local funding comprised of a mix of public, private, and foundations. While in recent years TAP and TRUST funding has increased, they remain very competitive programs with most successful grants providing significantly more matching funds than the minimum requirement. Both TAP and TRUST also fund many other types of nonmotorized and recreation projects beyond trails. In addition to TAP and TRUST there are numerous other state and federal funding sources available that have supported trail development in a number of capacities but the amount of trail funding is significantly less than TAP and TRUST funding.

The region has been successful in engaging the private sector and foundations in trail projects. Fred Meijer Mid West Michigan Trail Network is testament to the late Fred Meijer's love of trails and desire to leave a legacy to the communities that he grew up in and where he started his business. The Grand River Greenway project has been successful in raising substantial amounts of philanthropic funding and is close to meeting their goal. The City of Grand Rapids' multifaceted redevelopment of the waterfront has utilized many public and private funding sources. Ottawa County and several townships have trail specific millages. But even with these success stories, a significant funding gap remains.

As we look for new models for funding regional trails it is important to address both the elements that need funding and how to coordinate the various sources of funding. While there are numerous funding sources available, finding the right sources for a particular project, writing grants, and administering grants is a major undertaking.



# Key Elements of Comprehensive Trail Funding

Trail funding goes well beyond the construction. The following are five key elements that need to be addressed.



## Land Acquisition

This is often best accomplished via a public-private partnership. A well-capitalized local non-profit organization or conservancy has the capacity to quickly secure land and hold the properties until public funding is arranged, which is typically a lengthy process. This can also happen at the state level for larger projects.



## Maintenance and Management

This is the other most difficult aspect of trail development. It includes seasonal maintenance and proactive scheduled maintenance that is typically funded by the managing agency through general funds, park millages, or a designated trail mileage. But every 20 to 25 years, trail resurfacing and bridge replacement is required, these types of projects are typically grant supported.



## Planning, Design, and Engineering

This is one of the more difficult aspects of trail development to fund. This includes feasibility studies, preliminary engineering, cost estimates, grant writing, construction documents, bid management, and construction administration. This work typically is done by professional consultants engaged by governmental agencies and in some cases non-profit organizations for initial studies.



## Organization Capacity Building

The planning, funding, construction, management, and maintenance of regional trails require numerous individuals with a diverse set of skills. Even the largest organizations are unlikely to have all the necessary resources. Some skill sets are typically found within the public sector and others within the private sector, specifically in non-profits, foundations, and conservancies. Rural areas, where many regional trails are located, typically face greater challenges in building this capacity compared to larger metropolitan areas.



## Construction

This is the best funded of the trail funding needs but each of the funding sources have their own criteria on what type of projects they fund, total project budgets, grant ranges, funding cycles, and match requirements. Given that most trail projects match federal, state, and local funding sources and span multiple years this can be a complex endeavor that requires successful funding from multiple agencies.



Thanks for all you are doing to make cycling in West Michigan enjoyable.

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# Coordinating Resources and Increasing Funding at ALL Levels

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## Federal

Lobby federal government to establish specific trail earmarks for existing federal funding sources and increase funding for trails overall. Encourage the creation of a trail specific funding source similar to the Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) program that provides financial support for planning, infrastructure, behavioral, and operational initiatives.

## State

In addition to existing funding sources, lobby state government to consolidate existing trail funding from all agencies and programs and establish a single trail-specific grant program with a universal application and funding cycle. This could potential even incorporate state administered federal funds such as TAP. This would require earmarks for trail projects from the various funding sources. In addition to the existing funding sources, lobby for general fund allocation for trails. Explore allocating a portion of trail funding to specifically address underserved communities. This could be based on the DNR SPARK Grants that focus on equity and identify specific opportunity communities.

## Michigan Planning Regions and Metropolitan Planning Organizations

With a multi-jurisdictional view and staff with expertise in environmental issues, transportation planning, economic development, and GIS these organizations are ideally suited to support trail development. Given the jurisdictional overlap between the Planning Regions and the Metropolitan Planning Organizations, clear roles and responsibilities in regard to supporting local trail initiatives should be defined. Both MPR's and MPO's will likely continue to be involved but specific staff should be identified as the primary point of contact and serve the role of coordinating between the agencies.

## County Government

Work with county road commissions to establish a trail-specific funding stream. Act 51 (the public act that defines the distribution of transportation funding in the state) requires a minimum of 1% of an agency's transportation funds be allocated to nonmotorized improvements. Earmark a portion of that for trails and work to increase the nonmotorized set aside. Additionally, collaborate with county parks departments and commissions, where they exist, to establish a trail millage and a general fund earmark for trails.

## Local Government

Work to establish trail specific millages and/or designated trail funding budget allocations. Prepare model millage language, target millage amounts, and campaign materials that provide a clear vision on how the funds will be spent and leveraged.

## Regional Philanthropic

Collaborate with existing foundations, businesses, and individuals to coordinate funding for regional trails. This effort would focus on addressing elements of regional trails that are currently difficult to fund and providing match money for federal and state grants to support poorer communities.

“ I love that there is planning and being intentional on a wider scale helping ensure broad adoption and access. ”

PUBLIC INPUT

# Enhancing Coordination through Public-Private Partnerships

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Even if trail funding is simplified at the federal, state, regional philanthropic, county, and local levels, it still requires significant coordination and local funding. Two of the most successful non-profit organizations promoting regional trail development in the state are the Huron-Waterloo Pathways Initiative and TART Trails organization. Both organizations have established long-standing partnerships with public sector agencies.

These organizations rely heavily on their partnerships with public agencies who are the trail managers in most cases. They raise private funds and coordinate with cities, townships, road commissions, and county parks departments on the promotion of millages. They also coordinate with the regional planning and transportation agencies. They have the capital and ability to quickly and discreetly acquire properties and hold them until public funding becomes available.

## GOAL: TRIPLE THE TOTAL AMOUNT OF CURRENT FUNDING FOR REGIONAL TRAILS

Through a combination of increased funding at the federal, state, regional, and local levels the goal is to triple the total amount of funding for regional trails. This would allow for all the trails currently classified as Adolescent and Infant to be built within a 15-year timeframe as well as meet rehabilitation costs of the Mature Routes.

### Other Examples

The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy has put together information on Funding for Multiuse Trails on their website, <https://www.railstotrails.org/trail-building-toolbox/acquisition-funding/>. It outlines the various federal funding programs and grants and the type of work they fund. It also includes information on state and local government funding approaches.



# Sub Area Action Plans

The 18-County West Michigan Trails area includes over 60 different "trails" that are in varying stages and have a wide variety of needs. Some segments are heavily used and were built more than 30 years ago while others are little more than a line drawn on a map illustrating the desire to connect at some point in the future. The emerging Regional Trail Network is immense and while considering the overall network and the 18-County area as a whole is important, for planning, discussion and illustrative purposes, it has been divided into one of four "regional areas": the North Area, West Area, East Area, and South Area. It is recognized that this division isn't perfect and some trails and jurisdictions fall into more than one "Area", however, organizing into four sub-areas is necessary due to the sheer geographic size and number of trails.

## North Area

- William Field Memorial Hart-Montague Trail State Park
- Fred Meijer White Pine Trail State Park
- Pere Marquette State Park
- Fred Meijer Berry Junction Trail
- White Lake Pathway
- Shoreline Trail
- Pentwater Hart Trail
- Pere Marquette Extension
- Muskegon to White Pine Trail
- Fremont to Dragon Trail
- Ludington to Manistee

## East Area

- Fred Meijer Grand River Valley Rail Trail
- Fred Meijer Flat River Valley Rail Trail
- Fred Meijer Clinton-Ionia-Shiawassee Rail Trail
- Fred Meijer Heartland Trail
- Grand River Greenway
- Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail
- Edmore to Howard City
- Portland to Ionia

## South Area

- Kal-Haven Trail State Park
- Van Buren Trail State Park
- Kalamazoo River Valley Trail
- Beeline Trail
- Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail
- Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail Extension
- McCoy's Creek Trail
- Kalamazoo-Portage-Vicksburg
- River-to-River/Interurban Trail
- Blue Star Trail
- Red Arrow Linear Park
- Lakeshore Trail
- Marquette Greenway
- Fruitbelt Trail
- Van-Cass Heritage Trail
- Berrien-Cass-St Joseph/M-60
- Holland to Plainwell
- Allegan-Van Buren-Cass/M-40
- Vicksburg-Three Rivers-White Pigeon
- Old Sauk Trail
- Route US 12
- M66/Sturgis

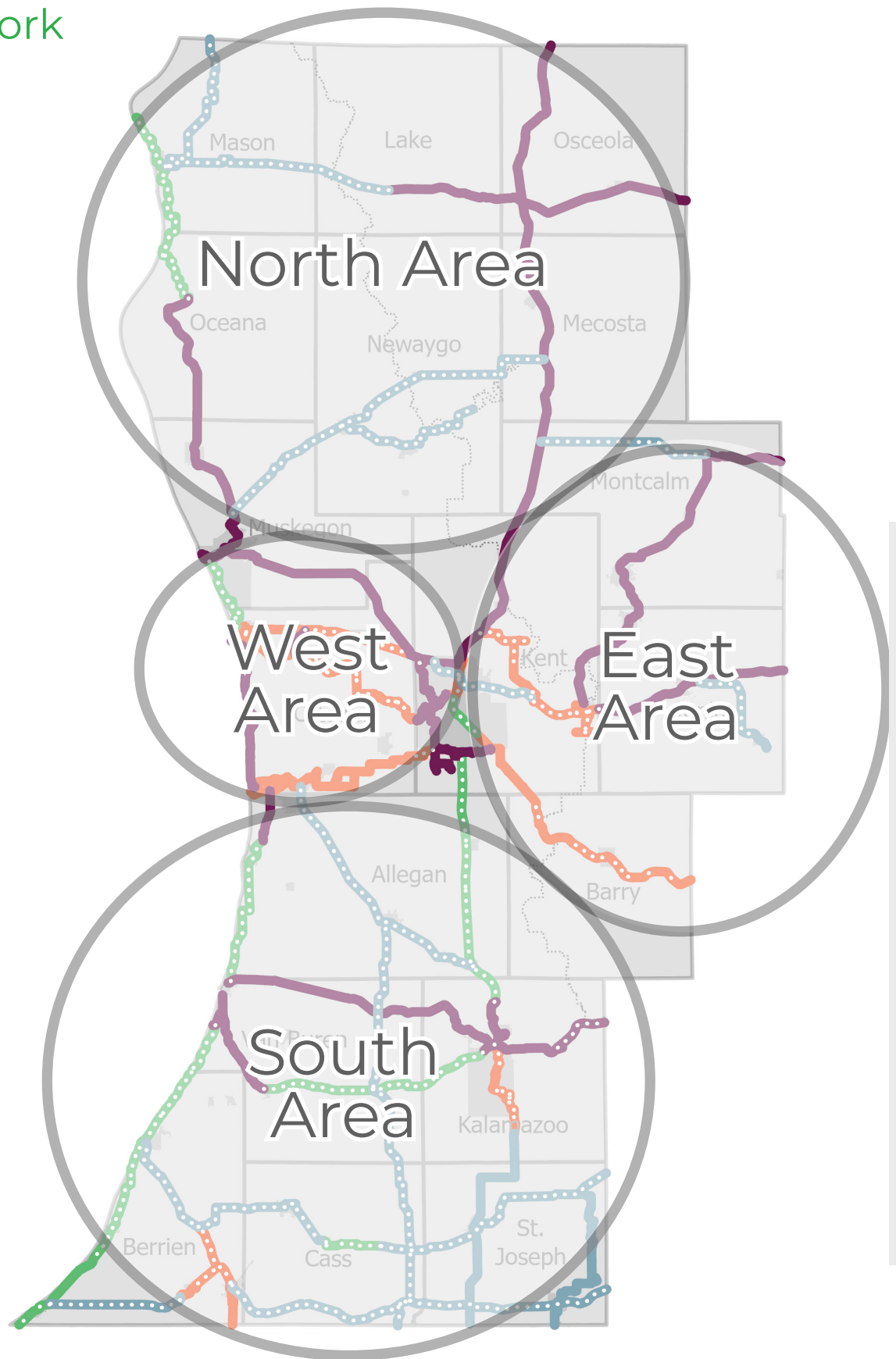
## West Area

- Muskegon Lakeshore Trail
- Laketon Trail
- Musketawa Trail
- Fred Meijer Pioneer Trail
- Fred Meijer Standale Trail
- Fred Meijer Millennium Park Trails
- Oxford Trails
- Kent Trails
- Fred Meijer M-6 Trail
- Lakeshore Trail
- North Bank Trail
- Spoonville Trail
- Idema Explorers Trail
- Macatawa Greenway Trail
- Fred Meijer Kenowa Trail
- Grand River Edges
- Coastal Trail
- Plaster Creek Connector
- Indian Mill Creek
- Grand River Greenway South Route

“ I appreciate the opportunity to be heard to expand the trails. We LOVE them and enjoy them regularly! Thank You  
PUBLIC INPUT ”



West Michigan  
Regional  
Trail Network  
Planning  
Areas



# Action Plan

## North Area

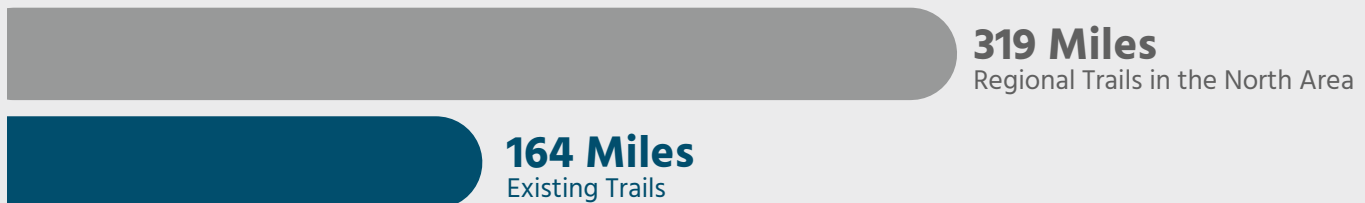
### Initial Focus (Next 5 Years)

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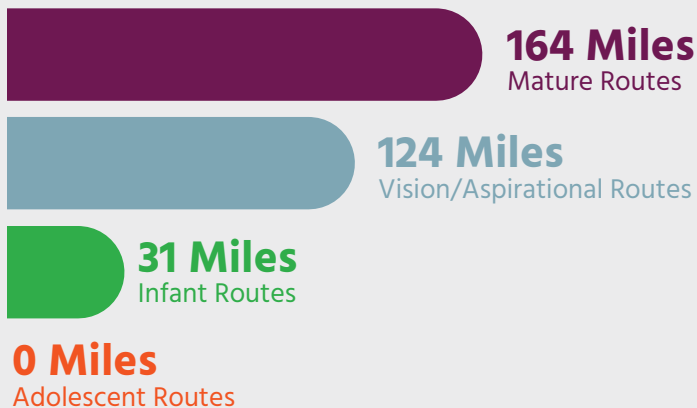
The following pages and associated map highlight the regionally-significant trail network in the **Northern Area** of the larger 18-County West Michigan Trails organizations purview. The highlighted regional trail network is in various “stages” and has a wide variety of needs. Some segments are heavily used and were built more than 30 years ago while others are little more than a line drawn on a map illustrating the desire at some point in the future to become an important regional connection.

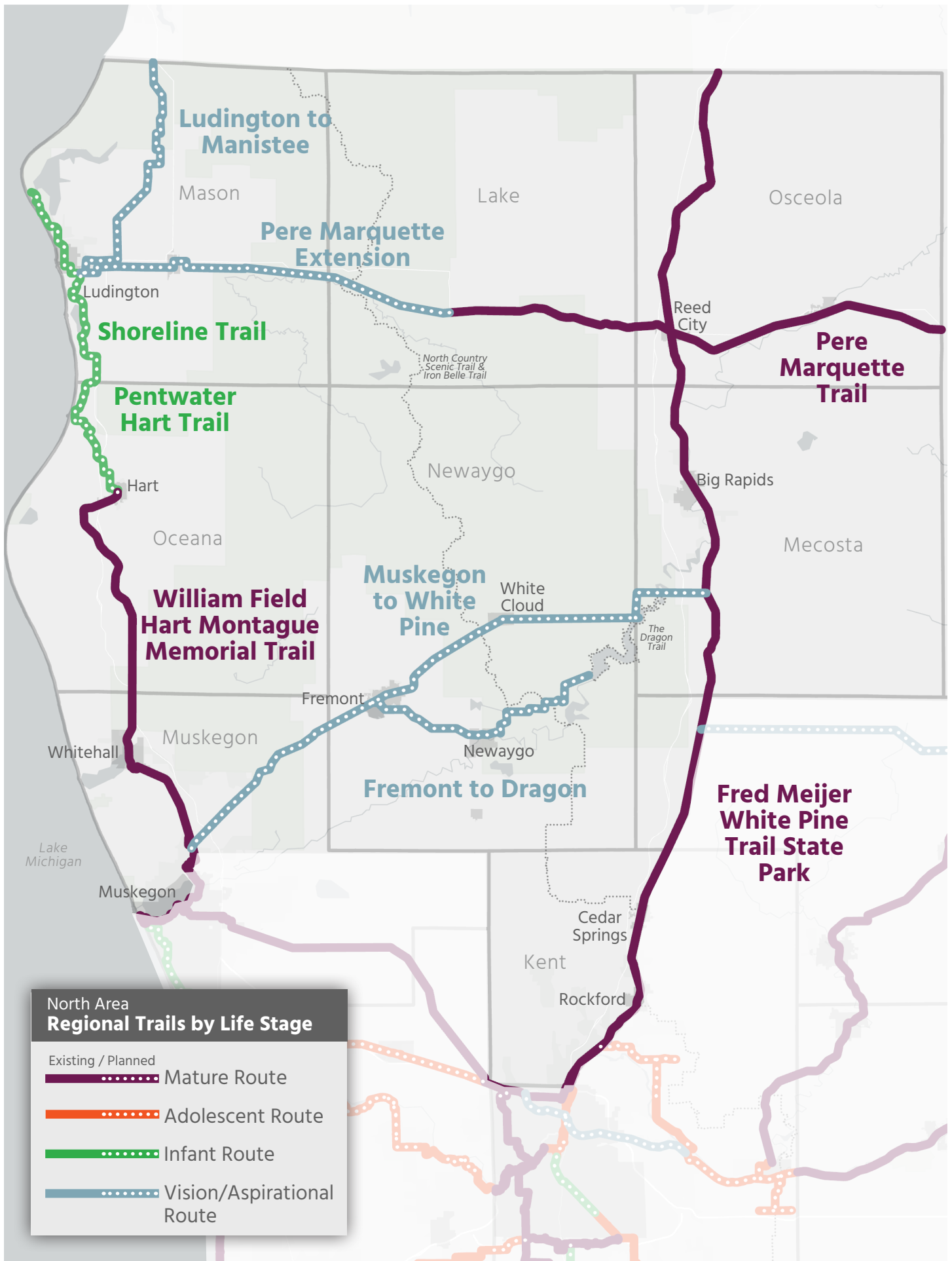
The following pages are organized by “stage” of the trail and document the primary focus and needs of each over the next 5 years, regardless of who/what organization may be involved and/or responsible. These lists are not comprehensive but rather reflect the big picture, near-term items of focus.

#### REGIONAL TRAILS IN NORTH AREA:



#### TRAIL LIFE STAGE:





# William Field Memorial Hart-Montague Trail State Park

Michigan's first linear state park, over 35+ years old, owned and managed by the MDNR with an active friends group. Completely rebuilt in 2016.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 22 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers, Equestrians

**CONTACT:** MDNR

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Coordinate and work on signage, kiosks, expanding equestrian use, and management of the snowmobile program within the DNR.
- An ongoing maintenance plan and funding to regularly address maintenance issues.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

### Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans

This trail is a designated route of US Bike Route 35 and is a key regional trail connection that will link Ludington and Muskegon.



# Fred Meijer White Pine Trail State Park

Longest linear State Park at 90+ miles, 30+ years old, owned and managed by the MDNR with an active friends group. Recently paved from Howard City to Big Rapids (22 miles).

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 90+ Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers, Snowmobiles

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of the Fred Meijer White Pine Trail 501(c)(3)

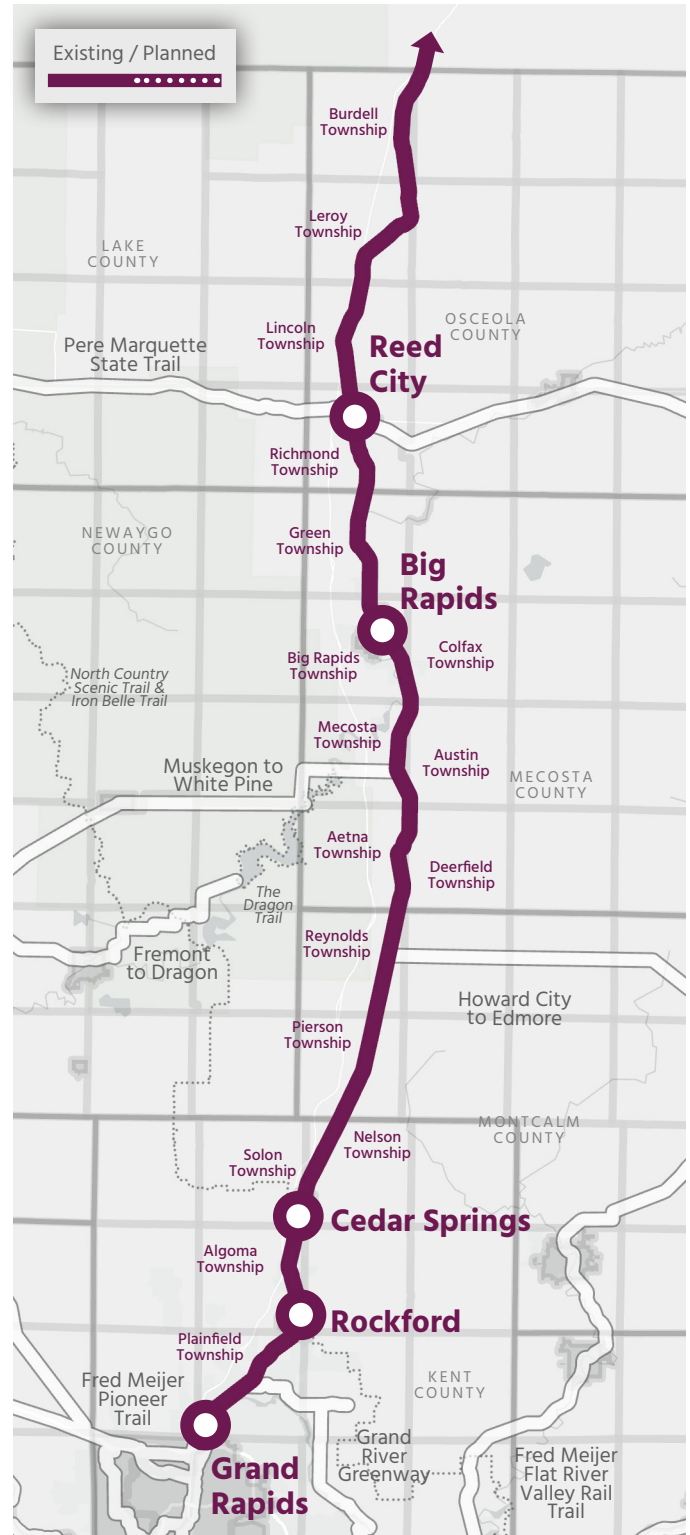
**CONTACT:** MDNR

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

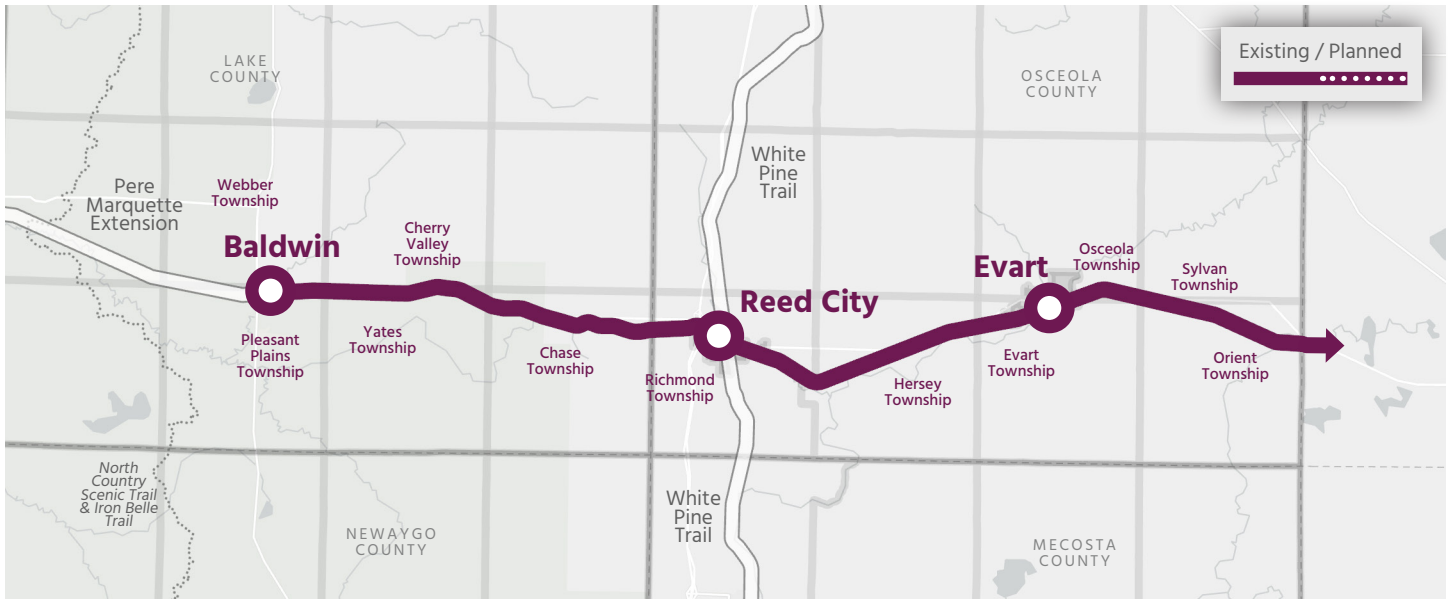
- Road crossing safety and signage improvements. A considerable number of road crossings have little to no signage. Coordination between MDNR, MDOT, and local jurisdictions to plan and implement.
- Rebuild the 13-mile segment between Big Rapids and Reed City (last paved in 1998).
- Complete signage along trail. Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

### Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans

As one of Michigan's longest rail-trails, this trail provides a regional connection between Grand Rapids and Cadillac.



# Pere Marquette State Trail



From Baldwin to Clare (56 miles), the trail is owned and managed by the MDNR. It has a limestone surface from Reed City to Baldwin and is paved between Reed City and Clare.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 56 Miles


**FACILITY:** Limestone Shared Use Path, Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers, Equestrians, Snowmobile

**VOLUNTEER:** "Friends" of the Pere Marquette State Trail - West End

**CONTACT:** MDNR

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

 **Addresses historic funding disparity**

 **Serves area with significant disadvantaged communities**

In combination with the Pere Marquette Rail-Trail, this link provides a regional east-west connection across central Michigan to the city of Midland.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Improve surface of 20-mile segment between Reed City and Baldwin. Coordinate with stakeholders to determine asphalt vs limestone, ensuring accessibility.
- Improve promotion and advocacy at the state, regional and local levels.
- Strengthen and empower friends group.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

# Fred Meijer Berry Junction Trail

Owned by the MDNR and four local townships, managed by local municipalities and has an active friends group, final phase completed in 2018, 11.5 miles paved from Muskegon to Whitehall.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 11.5 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of the Berry Junction Trail (501)(c)(3)

**CONTACT:** MDNR

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- An ongoing maintenance plan and funding to regularly address maintenance issues.
- Improve promotion and advocacy at the state, regional and local levels.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.



## Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans

This trail is a designated route of US Bike Route 35 and is a key regional trail connection that will link Ludington and Muskegon.

# White Lake Pathway

3.2 miles from Montague to Whitehall, paved with asphalt. It connects the Berry Junction Trail and the Hart-Montague Trail. Owned by the DNR with support from Friends of the Berry Junction Trail.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 3.2 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers, Snowmobiles

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of the Berry Junction Trail (501)(c)(3)

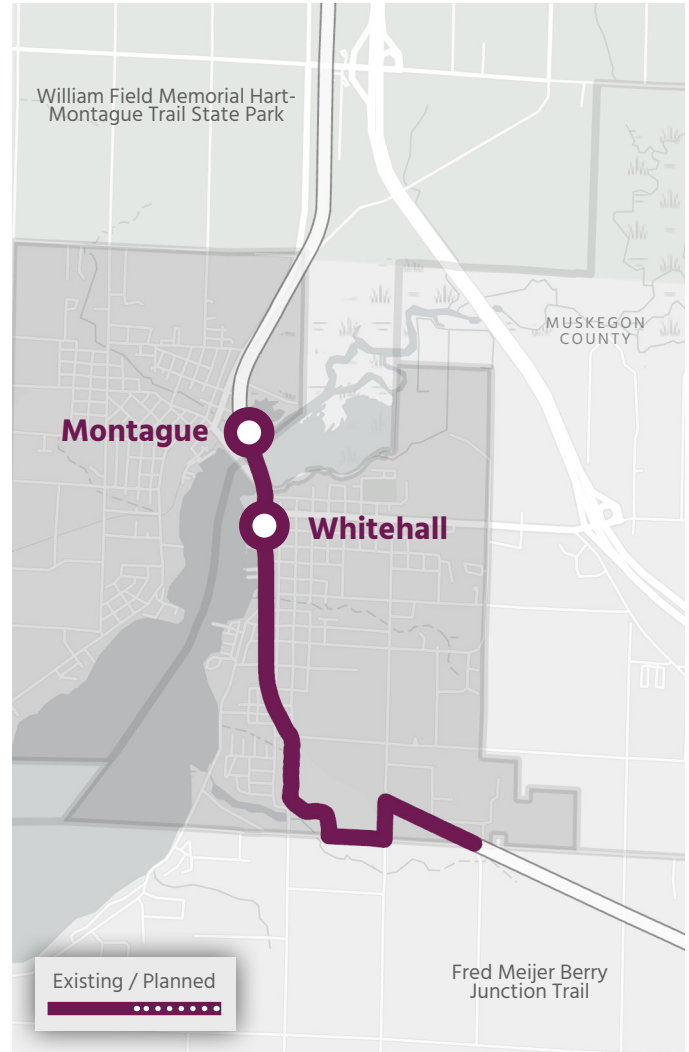
**CONTACT:** White Lake Area Chamber and CVB

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- An ongoing maintenance plan and funding to regularly address maintenance issues.
- Improve promotion and advocacy at the state, regional and local levels.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

### Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans

This trail is a designated route of US Bike Route 35 and is a key regional trail connection that will link Ludington and Muskegon.





# Shoreline Trail

The Shoreline Trail is a planned 24-mile connection in Mason County between Ludington State Park and Pentwater.

**LIFE STAGE:** Infant

**LENGTH:** 24 Miles

**FACILITY:** To Be Determined

**ALLOWED:** To Be Determined

**CONTACT:** Chamber Alliance of Mason County

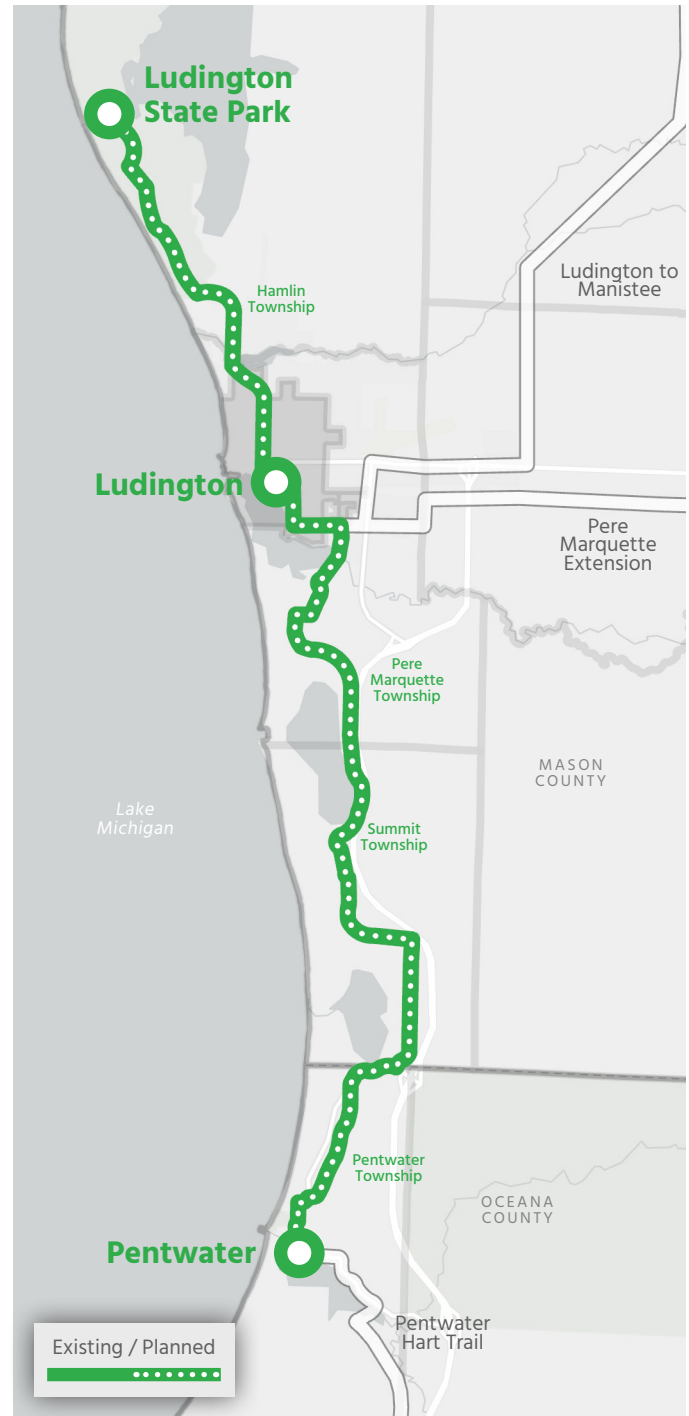
## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Design and construct connection between Ludington State Park and the City of Ludington. Continue on-going coordination efforts between the DNR, MDOT, Ludington, Hamlin Township, etc. Install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.
- Finalize planning and alignment effort and begin construction of connection from Ludington south to Consumers Reservoir, Mason County Campground, etc.
- Continue coordination and alignment efforts to advance planning of trail segment between Consumers Reservoir and the Pentwater Hart Trail.

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

 **Addresses historic funding disparity**

This trail connects shoreline communities with Ludington State Park and is a part of a regional trail connection that will link Ludington and Muskegon.



# Pentwater Hart Trail

The Pentwater Hart Trail is in Oceana County and proposed to connect the planned Shoreline Trail to the Hart Montague Trail, approximately 9-miles and connecting the towns of Pentwater and Hart.

**LIFE STAGE:** Infant

**LENGTH:** 9 Miles

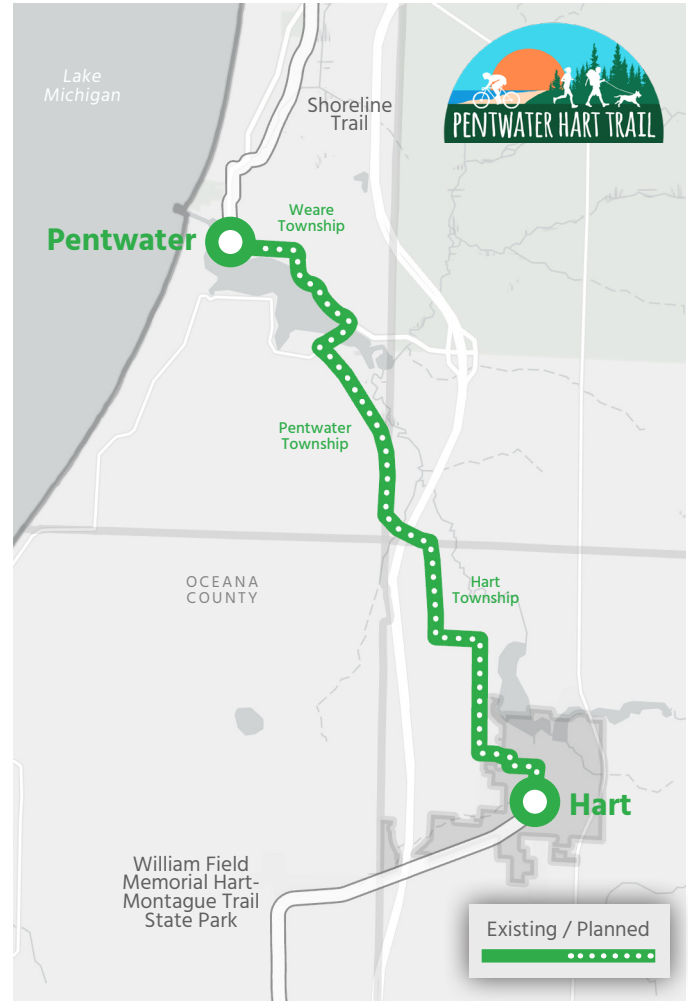
**FACILITY:** Shared Use Path, On-Road Route

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**CONTACT:** Friends of the Pentwater Hart Trail  
501 (C)(3)

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

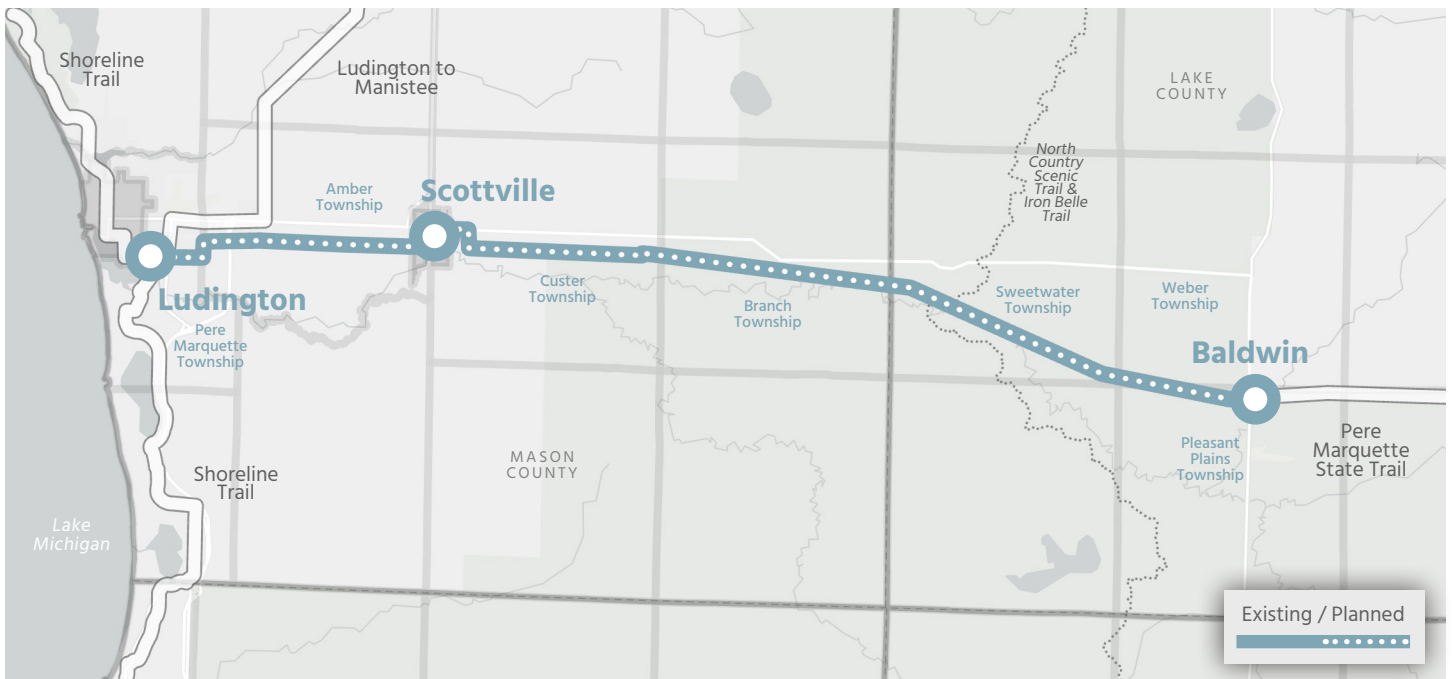
- Secure funds, design and construct connection between Village of Pentwater and the northern terminus of the Hart-Montague Trail. Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.
- Coordination and alignment efforts to advance planning of segment between Village of Pentwater and Shoreline Trail to the north in Mason County.



## Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans

This trail is a part of a regional trail connection that will link Ludington and Muskegon.

# Pere Marquette Extension



Long term vision to extend the Pere Marquette State Trail in Baldwin to Ludington.

**LIFE STAGE:** Vision/Aspirational

**LENGTH:** 30+ Miles

**FACILITY:** To Be Determined

**ALLOWED:** To Be Determined

**CONTACT:** Chamber Alliance of Mason County

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

 **Addresses historic funding disparity**

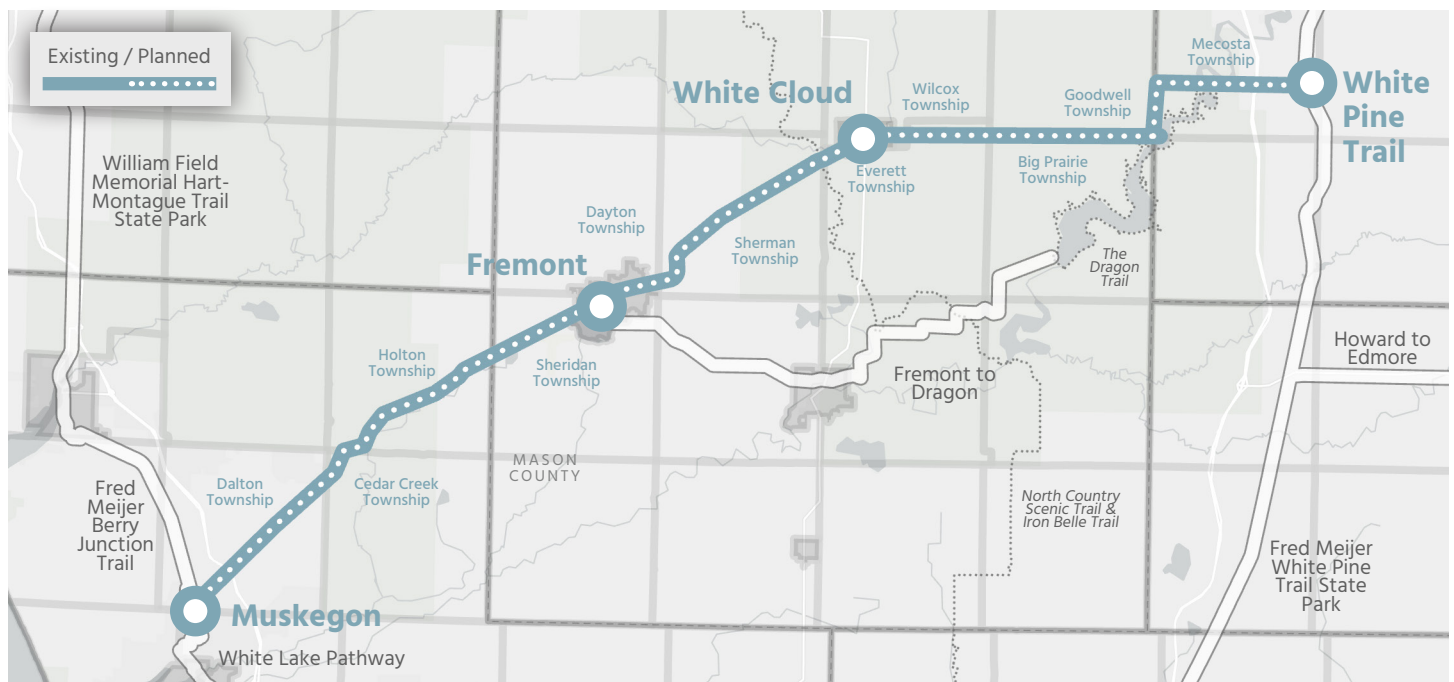
 **Serves area with significant disadvantaged communities**

In combination with the Pere Marquette State Trail and Pere Marquette Rail-Trail, this link has the potential to provide a regional east-west connection across central Michigan from Ludington to the city of Midland.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

This long-term connection is recognized as valuable for enhancing the regional trail network, however, it is not likely to receive considerable focus or resources in the immediate future. This is due to a variety of challenges such as the presence of active rail corridors, private property and easements, limited local support, completion of other priorities, etc. Despite these obstacles, this connection has been envisioned by various stakeholders in the past and continues to be acknowledged as an integral component of the long-term vision for the regional trail network. Over the next five-year period this aspirational connection should continue to be monitored and evaluated as opportunities arise for its realization.

# Muskegon to White Pine Trail



Long term vision to connect Muskegon, Fremont, and White Cloud to the Fred Meijer White Pine Trail State Park.

**LIFE STAGE:** Vision/Aspirational

**LENGTH:** 50+ Miles

**FACILITY:** To Be Determined

**ALLOWED:** To Be Determined

**CONTACT:** Newaygo County Economic Development Partnership

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

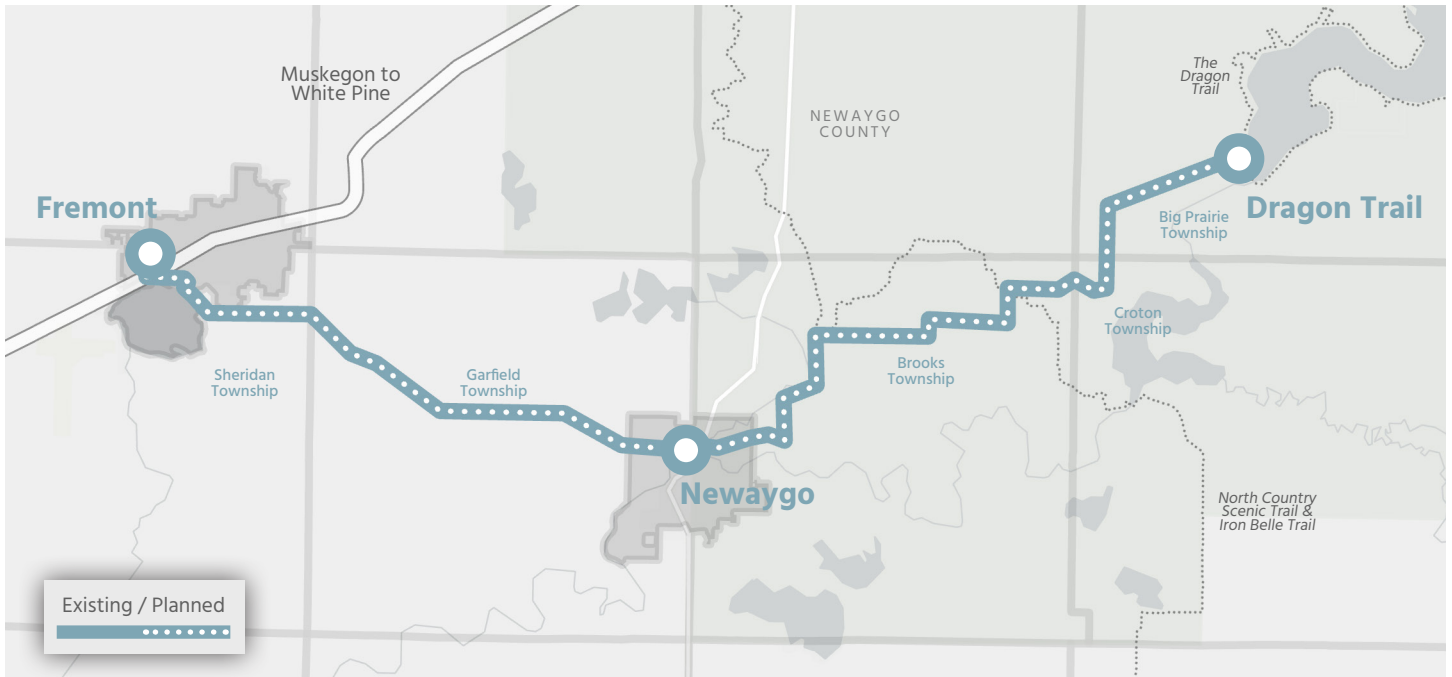
 **Addresses historic funding disparity**

This trail connection was identified as a strategic gap in a historically under-invested area and presents valuable opportunities for targeted regional trail expansion.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

This long-term connection is recognized as valuable for enhancing the regional trail network, however, it is not likely to receive considerable focus or resources in the immediate future. This is due to a variety of challenges such as the presence of active rail corridors, private property and easements, limited local support, completion of other priorities, etc. Despite these obstacles, this connection has been envisioned by various stakeholders in the past and continues to be acknowledged as an integral component of the long-term vision for the regional trail network. Over the next five-year period this aspirational connection should continue to be monitored and evaluated as opportunities arise for its realization.

# Fremont to Dragon Trail



Long term vision to connect Fremont and Newaygo to the Dragon Trail, , 45 miles of mountain biking, hiking, running trails around Hardy Pond/Dam.

- LIFE STAGE:** Vision/Aspirational
- LENGTH:** 20+ Miles
- FACILITY:** To Be Determined
- ALLOWED:** To Be Determined
- CONTACT:** Mecosta County Parks, Newaygo County Parks, Newaygo County Economic Development Partnership

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

 **Addresses historic funding disparity**

This trail connection was identified as a strategic gap in a historically under-invested area and presents valuable opportunities for targeted regional trail expansion.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

This long-term connection is recognized as valuable for enhancing the regional trail network, however, it is not likely to receive considerable focus or resources in the immediate future. This is due to a variety of challenges such as the presence of active rail corridors, private property and easements, limited local support, completion of other priorities, etc. Despite these obstacles, this connection has been envisioned by various stakeholders in the past and continues to be acknowledged as an integral component of the long-term vision for the regional trail network. Over the next five-year period this aspirational connection should continue to be monitored and evaluated as opportunities arise for its realization.

# Ludington to Manistee

Long term vision to connect Ludington to Manistee.

**LIFE STAGE:** Vision/Aspirational

**LENGTH:** 25+ Miles

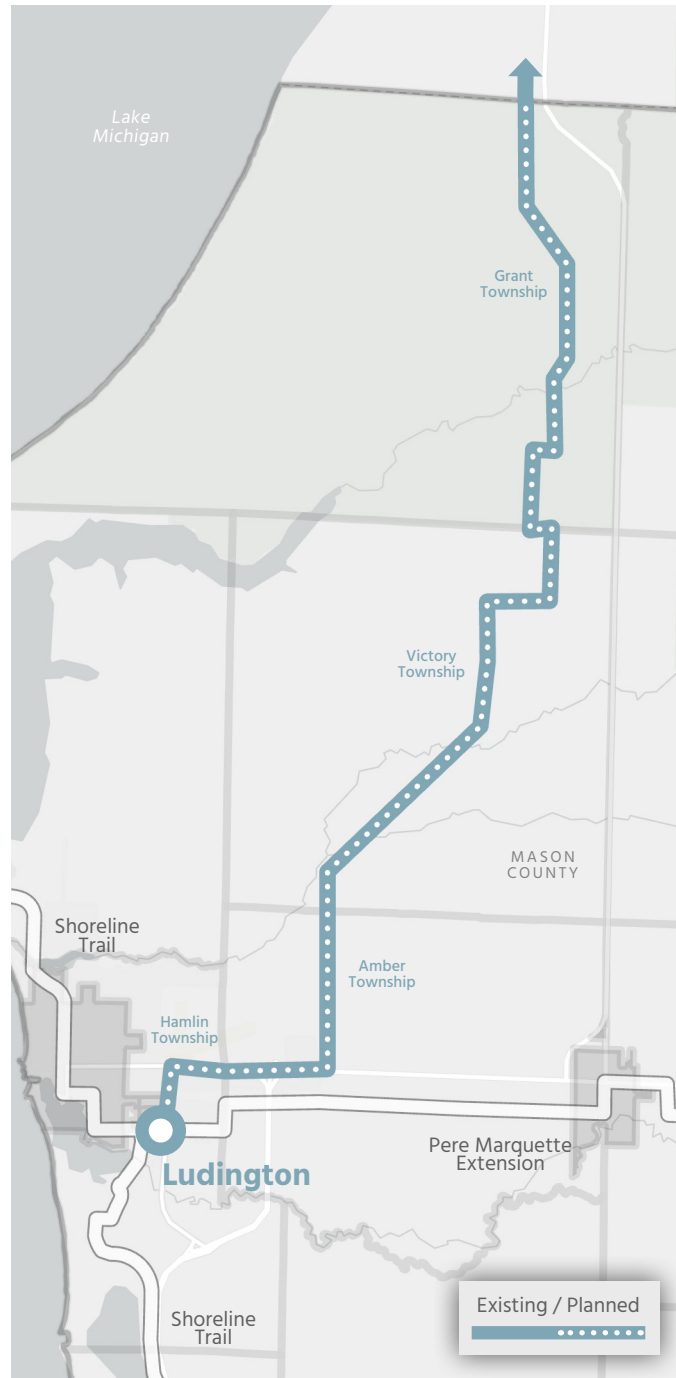
**FACILITY:** To Be Determined

**ALLOWED:** To Be Determined

**CONTACT:** Chamber Alliance of Mason County

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

This long-term connection is recognized as valuable for enhancing the regional trail network, however, it is not likely to receive considerable focus or resources in the immediate future. This is due to a variety of challenges such as private property and easements, limited local support, completion of other priorities, etc. Despite these obstacles, this connection has been envisioned by various stakeholders in the past and continues to be acknowledged as an integral component of the long-term vision for the regional trail network. Over the next five-year period this aspirational connection should continue to be monitored and evaluated as opportunities arise for its realization.



**Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

This trail is a part of a regional trail connection that will link the West Michigan Regional Trail Network to Manistee.



# Action Plan

## East Area

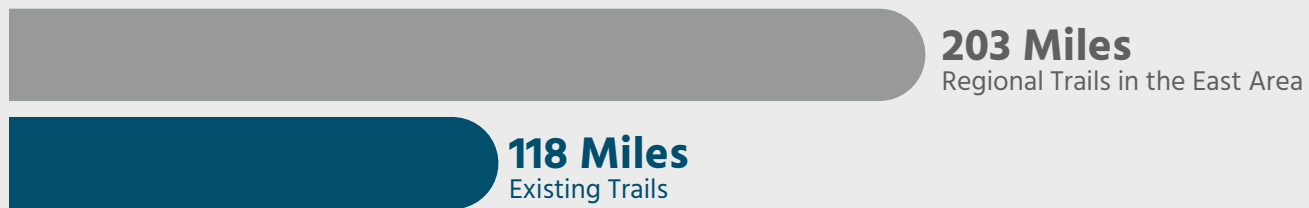
### Initial Focus (Next 5 Years)

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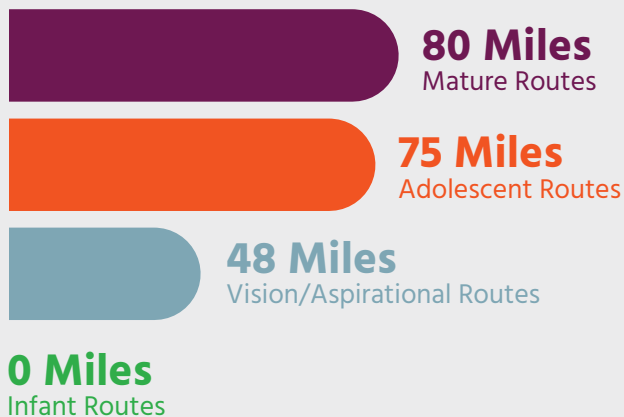
The following pages and associated map highlight the regionally-significant trail network in the **Eastern Area** of the larger 18-County West Michigan Trails organizations purview. The highlighted regional trail network is in various “stages” and has a wide variety of needs. Some segments are heavily used and were built more than 30 years ago while others are little more than a line drawn on a map illustrating the desire at some point in the future to become an important regional connection.

The following pages are organized by “stage” of the trail and document the primary focus and needs of each over the next 5 years, regardless of who/what organization may be involved and/or responsible. These lists are not comprehensive but rather reflect the big picture, near-term items of focus.

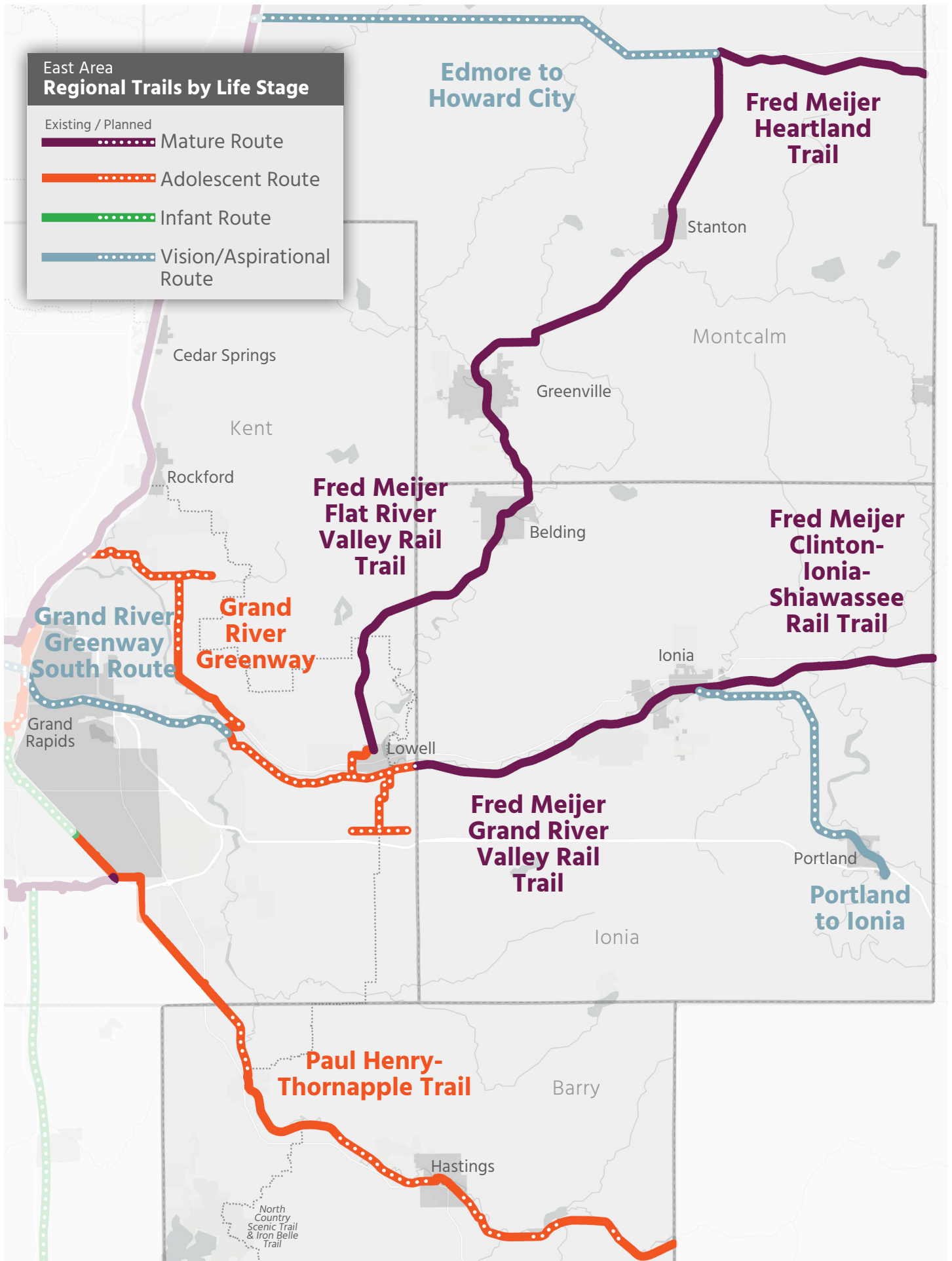
#### REGIONAL TRAILS IN EAST AREA:



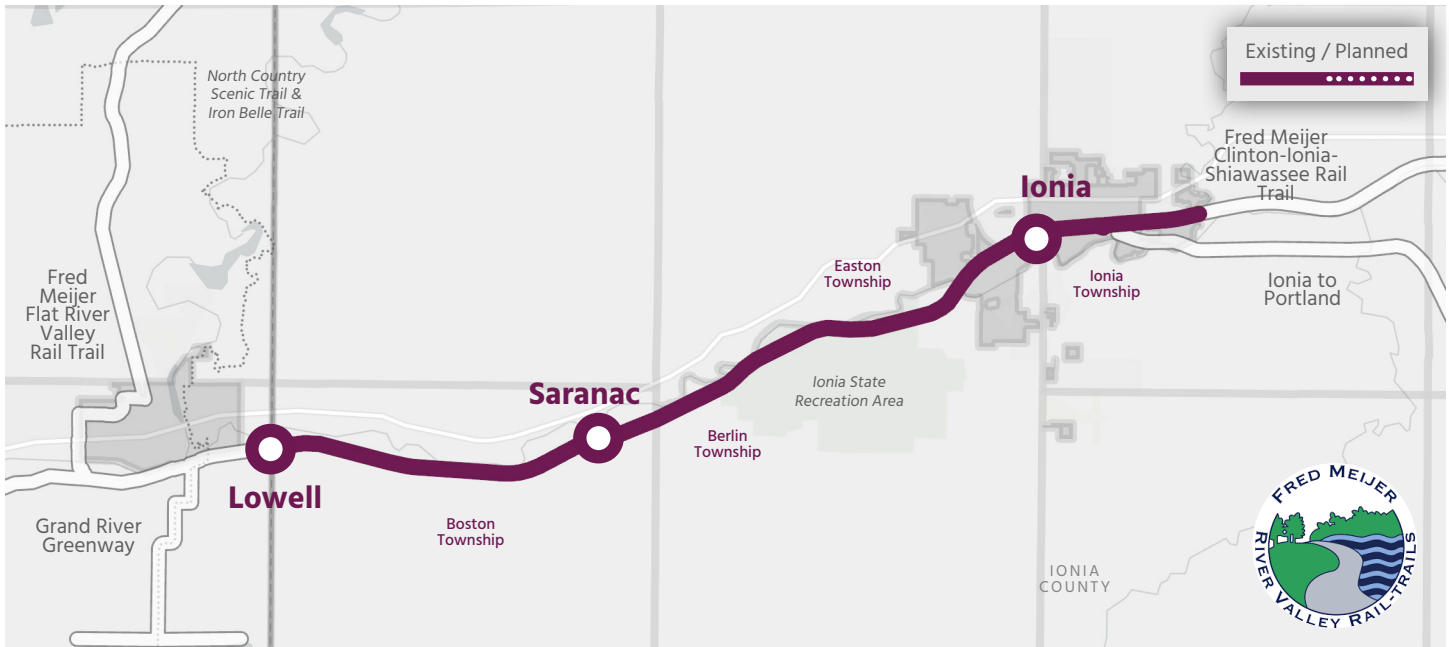
#### TRAIL LIFE STAGE:







# Fred Meijer Grand River Valley Rail Trail



Owned by MDNR, Friends of Fred Meijer River Valley Rail-Trail manages the trail, former railroad between Lowell to Ionia, 17 miles, crushed limestone, crushed asphalt with paved asphalt in cities, Fred Meijer Mid-West Michigan Rail Trail endowment is used for maintenance and funds managed by Mid-West Michigan Trail Authority.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 17 Miles

**FACILITY:** Fine Aggregate Shared Use Path, Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of Fred Meijer River Valley Trail 501(c)(3)

**CONTACT:** MDNR

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Construct Phase 1 of a gap in Lowell along the Grand River from North Riverside Park to Lowell Recreation Park in 2024.
- Construct Phase 2 of the gap in Lowell from Lowell Recreation Park east to Fred Meijer Grand River Valley Rail Trail, including a new pedestrian bridge over the Grand River.
- Acquisition of the former railroad corridors both east and south of Lowell to make critical connections.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.



**Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

Planned connections in Lowell close significant gaps in the region, providing the final link in the Fred Meijer Mid-West Michigan Trail Network.

# Fred Meijer Flat River Valley Rail Trail

Owned by MDNR, Friends of Fred Meijer River Valley Rail-Trail manages the trail, former railroad between Lowell to Greenville, 21.6 miles, paved in some cities, finely screened and compacted recycled asphalt, Lowell Area Recreation Authority (LARA) to bridge gap in 2024 to connect to Grand River Valley Rail Trail.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 21.6 Miles

**FACILITY:** Recycled Asphalt Shared Use Path, Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of Fred Meijer River Valley Trails 501(c)(3)

**CONTACT:** MDNR

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

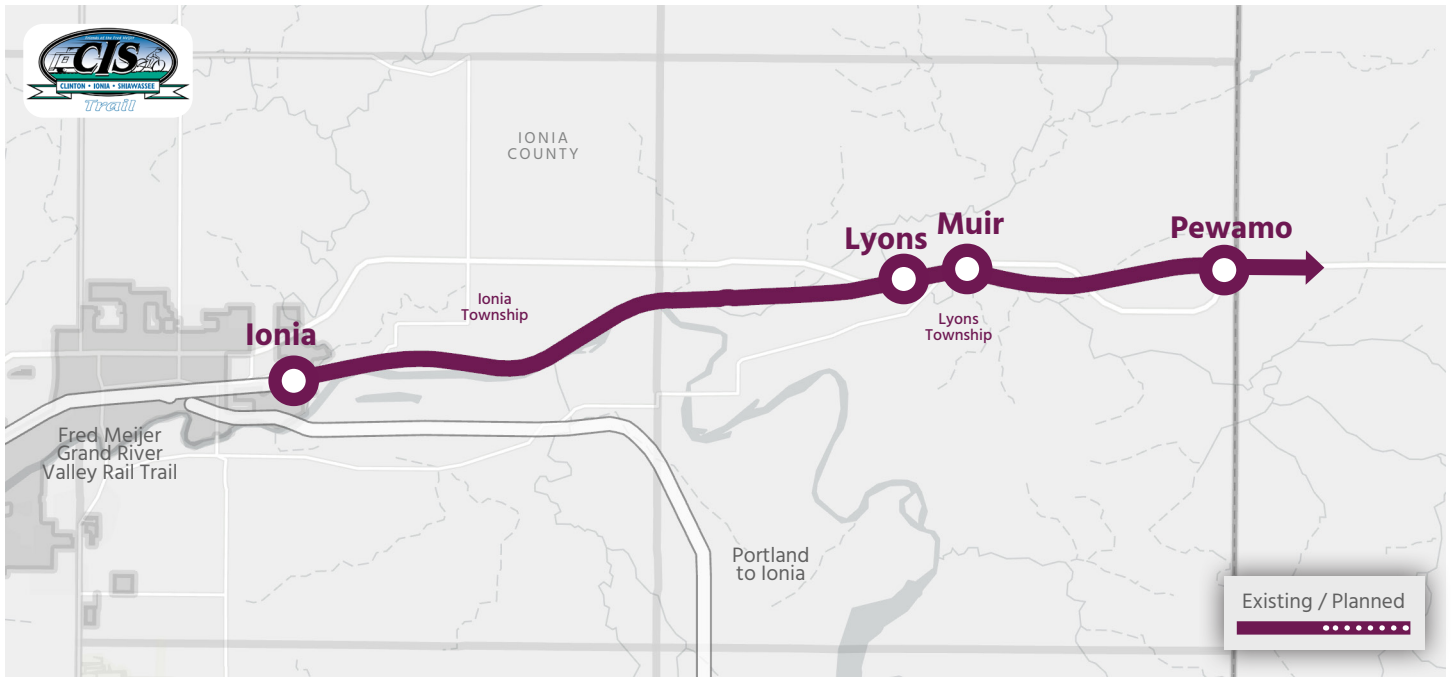
- Construct Phase 1 of a gap in Lowell along the Grand River from North Riverside Park to Lowell Recreation Park in 2024.
- Construct Phase 2 of the gap in Lowell from Lowell Recreation Park east to Fred Meijer Grand River Valley Rail Trail, including a new pedestrian bridge over the Grand River.
- Acquisition of the former railroad corridors both east and south of Lowell to make critical connections.
- Improve trail surface where it was not built as engineered, extend short culverts.
- Tree maintenance.
- Promotion and wayfinding - new maps, brochures, water crossing signs, etc.
- Road crossing safety improvements.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.



## Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans

Planned connections in Lowell close significant gaps in the region, providing the final link in the Fred Meijer Mid-West Michigan Trail Network.

# Fred Meijer Clinton-Ionia-Shiawassee Rail Trail



Owned by MDOT, managed by DNR and Mid-West Michigan Trail Authority, Friends of the Fred Meijer CIS Trail does majority of maintenance, 41.3 mile, opened in 2015, from Owosso to Ionia, asphalt in towns and compact limestone between. The Fred Meijer Mid-West Michigan Rail Trail endowment is used for maintenance and funds managed by Mid-West Michigan Trail Authority.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 41.3 Miles

**FACILITY:** Fine Aggregate Shared Use Path, Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of the Fred Meijer Clinton-Ionia-Shiawassee Rail Trail

**CONTACT:** MDNR

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- MDNR make improvements to surface.
- Build connection/extension into the City of Owosso.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

### Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans

This trail provides a regional east-west connection that links the West Michigan Regional Trail Network to Clinton County and eventually Lansing.

# Fred Meijer Heartland Trail

Privately owned and managed trail by Friends of the Fred Meijer Heartland Trail, 501(c)(3), 45.8 miles, paved between Alma and Greenville, completed in 2015, Fred Meijer Mid-West Michigan Rail Trail endowment is used for maintenance and funds managed by Mid-West Michigan Trail Authority.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 45.8 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**CONTACT:** Friends of the Fred Meijer Heartland Trail 501(c)(3)

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Funding to resurface 4-6 miles of trail each year.
- Write grants and secure funding.
- Grow membership and recruit more volunteers.
- Improve understanding of how other privately-owned trails manage challenges such as insurance, funding, and cash flow.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.



## Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans

This trail provides a regional connection that links the West Michigan Regional Trail Network to Gratiot county in central Michigan.

# Grand River Greenway

The Grand River Greenway, east of the White Pine Trail, passes through Cascade, Plainfield, Cannon, Ada, and into Lowell. This effort is coordinated by Kent County Parks, along with Cascade, Ada, Plainfield, Cannon Townships, Lowell Township, and the Kent County Parks Foundation. As of Summer 2024, the project is estimated to cost \$60.3 million, with \$37.5 million already secured.

**LIFE STAGE:** Adolescent

**LENGTH:** 30 Miles (East of White Pine Trail)

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path, Some Sections Not Defined Yet

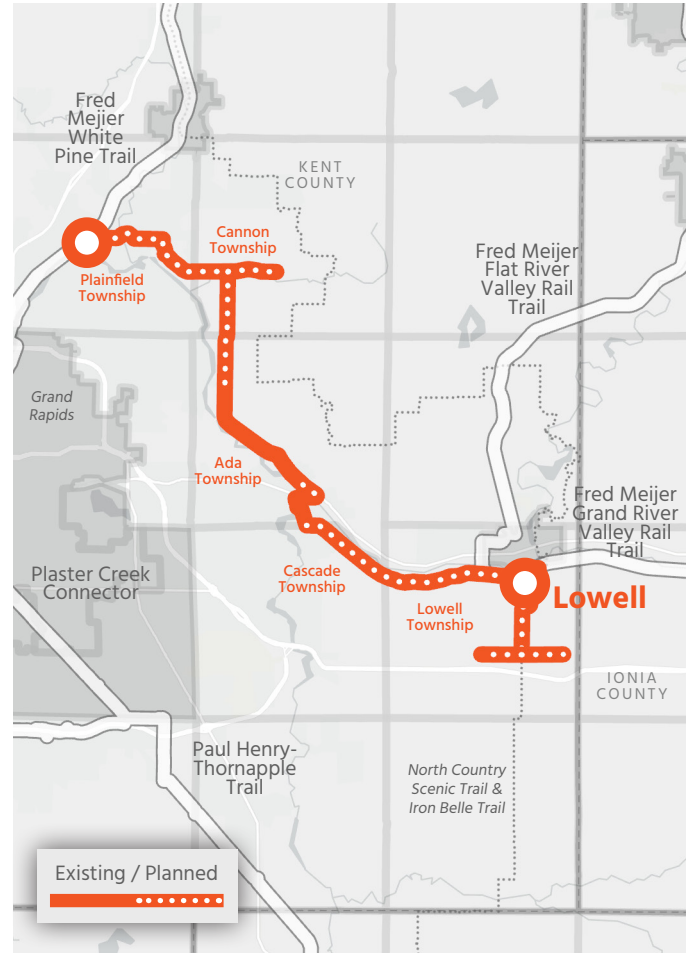
**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers, Some Segments Not Defined Yet

**VOLUNTEER:** Kent County Parks Volunteer Services

**CONTACT:** Kent County Parks and Local Communities

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Secure final funding (being led by Kent County Parks Foundation).
- Determine final ownership and management agreements.
- Construct Knapp Street pedestrian bridge to create east/west connection.
- Construct gap from White Pine Trail to Ada.
- Secure funds, design and construct gap from Ada to Lowell.
- Explore options for connecting to the Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail through Cascade Township.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.



## Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans

This planned connection closes a significant gap in the region by linking the Fred Meijer Mid-West Michigan Trail Network to Grand Rapids. It is also a key component of the broader Grand River Greenway vision, aiming to create a 76-mile trail network that connects over 30 parks across Ottawa and Kent counties.

# Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail

Owned and managed by local jurisdictions, 42 miles from Grand Rapids to Vermontville, variety of surfaces including, paved sections, crushed stone, on-road, unimproved/natural corridor. The Thornapple Trail Association and Kent County Parks Volunteer Services help with maintenance. Kent County Parks and Barry County Parks are also heavily involved.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Middleville - secure funding for bridge replacements in partnership with Barry County.
- City of Hastings - 0.5 miles of railroad right-of-way to extend the trail from Apple Street to Walmart. Additionally, the city intends to partner with MDOT to install a pedestrian crossing island on M43 at Tyden Park.
- Thornapple Township - planning, funding and securing of final 0.5-mile gap south of Garbow Road in order to complete acquisition of route between Caledonia and Middleville.
- Thornapple Township - funding, design, engineering and surfacing of trail from Stimson Road to Crane Road.
- Castleton Township- funding design, engineering and surfacing of 2+ miles of trail in Morgan from Thornapple Drive to east of Devine Road.
- Village of Nashville/Castleton Township - secure funding and surface section of trail (approximately 1.5 miles) from Greggs Crossing Road east to Fuller Street Elementary/School Street).
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.



**LIFE STAGE:** Adolescent

**LENGTH:** 42 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path, Grass and Gravel Trail, On-road Routes, Some Sections Not Defined Yet

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

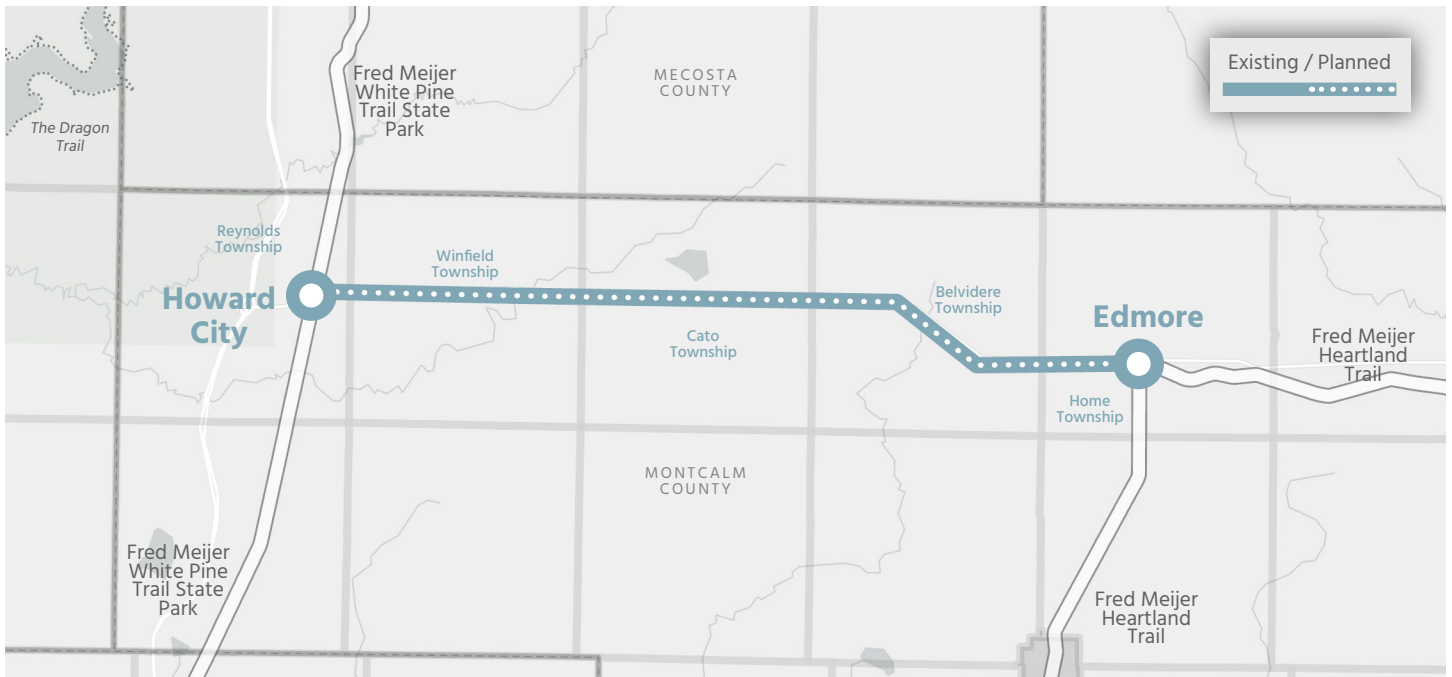
**VOLUNTEER:** Thornapple Trail Association 501(c) (3), Kent County Parks Volunteer Services

**CONTACT:** Barry County Parks, Kent County Parks, and Local Communities

**Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

This trail provides a regional connection that links the West Michigan Regional Trail Network to Eaton County and eventually Lansing.

# Edmore to Howard City



Long-term vision to connect the Fred Meijer Heartland Trail in Edmore to the White Pine Trail in Howard City along/near M-46.

**LIFE STAGE:** Vision/Aspirational

**LENGTH:** 20 Miles

**FACILITY:** To Be Determined

**ALLOWED:** To Be Determined

**CONTACT:** To Be Determined

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

This planned connection closes a regional gap, connecting the Fred Meijer Mid-West Michigan Trail Network to the White Pine Trail.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

This long-term connection is recognized as valuable for enhancing the regional trail network, however, it is not likely to receive considerable focus or resources in the immediate future. This is due to a variety of challenges such as the private property and easements, limited local support, completion of other priorities, etc. Despite these obstacles, this connection has been envisioned by various stakeholders in the past and continues to be acknowledged as an integral component of the long-term vision for the regional trail network. Over the next five-year period this aspirational connection should continue to be monitored and evaluated as opportunities arise for its realization.



# Portland to Ionia

Long term vision to connect Ionia to Portland Riverwalk following an old rail corridor.

**LIFE STAGE:** Vision/Aspirational

**LENGTH:** 15 Miles

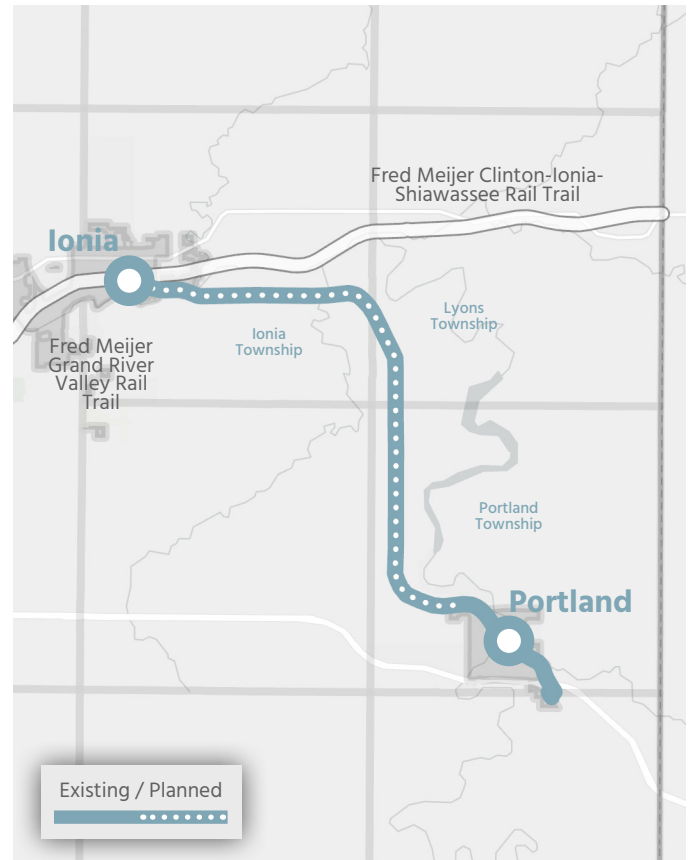
**FACILITY:** To Be Determined

**ALLOWED:** To Be Determined

**CONTACT:** To Be Determined

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

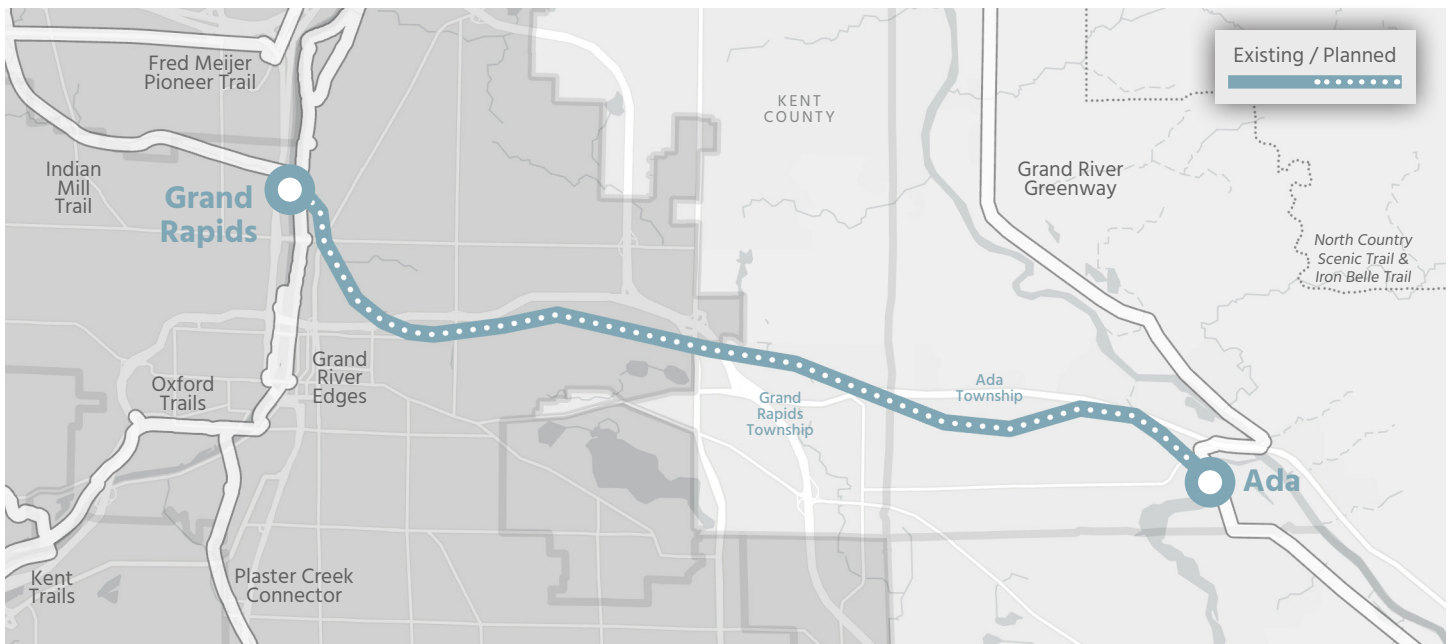
This long-term connection is recognized as valuable for enhancing the regional trail network, however, it is not likely to receive considerable focus or resources in the immediate future. This is due to a variety of challenges such as the presence private property and easements, limited local support, completion of other priorities, etc. Despite these obstacles, this connection has been envisioned by various stakeholders in the past and continues to be acknowledged as an integral component of the long-term vision for the regional trail network. Over the next five-year period this aspirational connection should continue to be monitored and evaluated as opportunities arise for its realization.



### Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans

This planned connection closes a regional gap, connecting the Fred Meijer Mid-West Michigan Trail Network to the existing riverwalk trail in Portland.

# Grand River Greenway South Route



Long-term vision to connect Grand Rapids to Ada as part of the Grand River Greenway Southern Connection, following a rail corridor.

**LIFE STAGE:** Vision/Aspirational

**LENGTH:** 11 Miles

**FACILITY:** Undetermined

**ALLOWED:** Undetermined

**CONTACT:** Kent County Parks

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

 **Serves area with significant disadvantaged communities**

This planned connection closes a regional gap, connecting Grand Rapids to the Fred Meijer Mid-West Michigan Trail Network.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

This long-term connection is recognized as valuable for enhancing the regional trail network, however, it is not likely to receive considerable focus or resources in the immediate future. This is due to a variety of challenges such as the presence of active rail corridors, private property and easements, limited local support, completion of other priorities, etc. Despite these obstacles, this connection has been envisioned by various stakeholders in the past and continues to be acknowledged as an integral component of the long-term vision for the regional trail network. Over the next five-year period this aspirational connection should continue to be monitored and evaluated as opportunities arise for its realization.



# Action Plan

## South Area

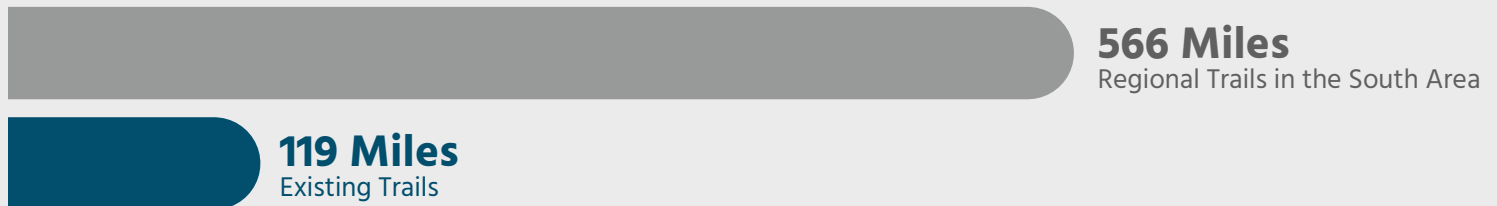
### Initial Focus (Next 5 Years)

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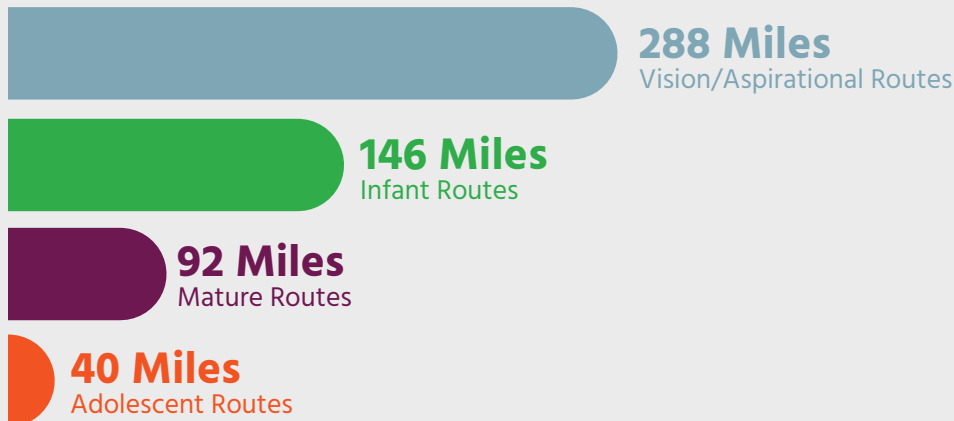
The following pages and associated map highlight the regionally-significant trail network in the **Southern Area** of the larger 18-County West Michigan Trails organizations purview. The highlighted regional trail network is in various “stages” and has a wide variety of needs. Some segments are heavily used and were built more than 30 years ago while others are little more than a line drawn on a map illustrating the desire at some point in the future to become an important regional connection.

The following pages are organized by “stage” of the trail and document the primary focus and needs of each over the next 5 years, regardless of who/what organization may be involved and/or responsible. These lists are not comprehensive but rather reflect the big picture, near-term items of focus.

#### REGIONAL TRAILS IN SOUTH AREA:




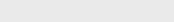


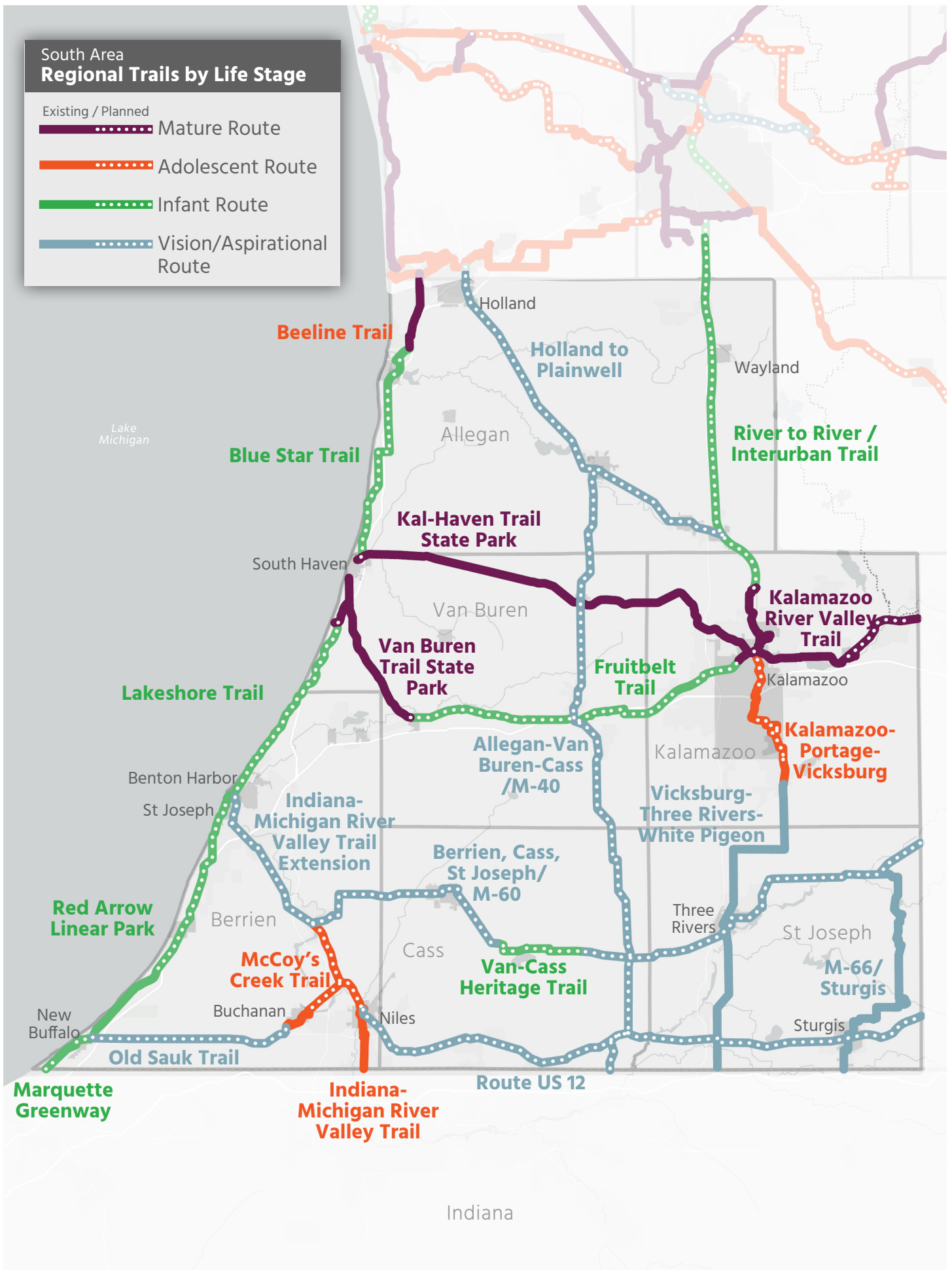
#### TRAIL LIFE STAGE:



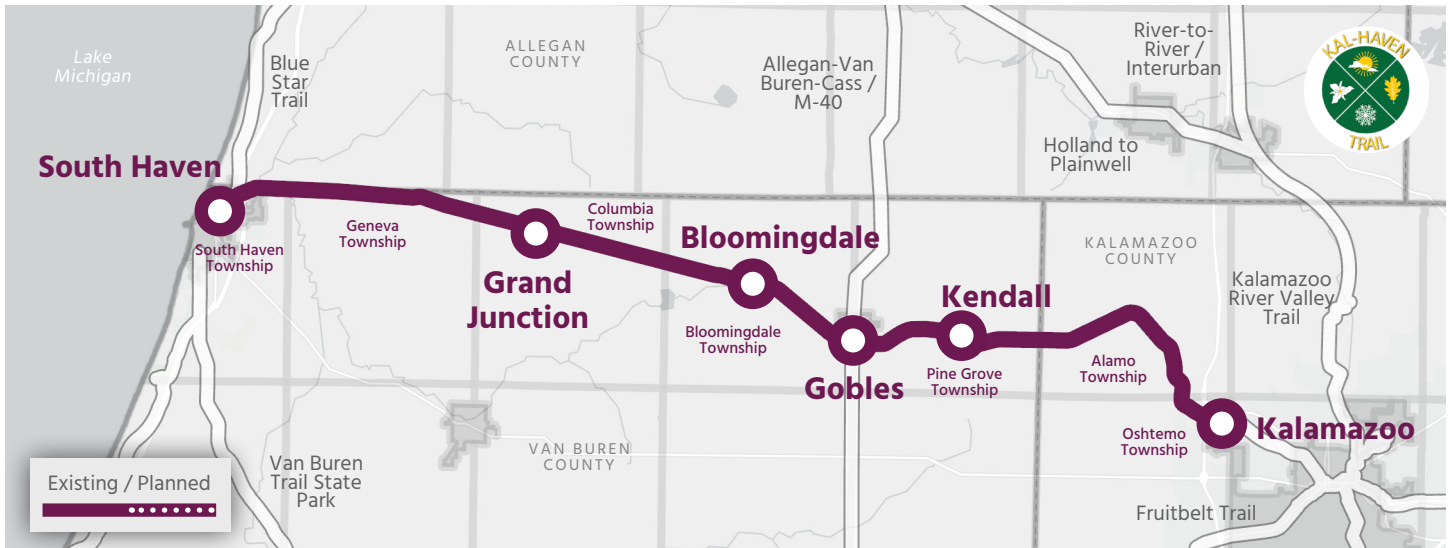
South Area  
Regional Trails by Life Stage

Existing / Planned

-  Mature Route
-  Adolescent Route
-  Infant Route
-  Vision/Aspirational Route



# Kal-Haven Trail State Park



Approximately 34-mile crushed limestone/slag path situated on an abandoned railroad corridor that links South Haven and Kalamazoo. Part of the Great Lake-to-Lake Trail System, which spans over 270 miles from Lake Michigan to Lake Huron. Designated a "Michigan Heritage Trail." Owned and managed by MDNR with Friends of the Kal-Haven Trail. Resurfacing, bridge replacements, road crossing improvements, etc. completed in 2024 on the 14-mile western half from South Haven to Bloomingdale.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 34.5 Miles

**FACILITY:** Crush Stone Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers, Snowmobiles

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of Kal-Haven Trail

**CONTACT:** MDNR

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

As one of Michigan’s longer rail-trails, this trail is designated as part of the Great Lake-to-Lake Trail and provides a regional connection between South Haven and Kalamazoo.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Secure funding to design and build improvements to the eastern half of the trail (as was done on the western half).
- Safety and signage improvements.
- Secure dedicated funding for maintenance.
- Offer drinking water and modern restrooms at the 3 trailheads.
- Increase capacity of and interest in Friends of Kal-Haven Trail 501 (c)(3) to ensure longevity.
- Continue to seek funding to repair existing amenities and add new amenities.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

# Van Buren Trail State Park

The Van Buren Trail State Park is a 15-mile dirt/gravel shared use path that runs between Hartford and South Haven. Two-mile section near South Haven is paved, remainder is unimproved gravel, grass, sand and ballast stones. MDNR owns and manages trail, Friends of the Kal-Haven Trail also work on the Van Buren Trail. Van Buren Trail Spur in South Haven at 16th Avenue opened in 2015, 4.5-mile paved trail connecting Van Buren Trail State Park to South Haven.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 15 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path, Grass and Gravel Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers, Equestrians, Snowmobiles

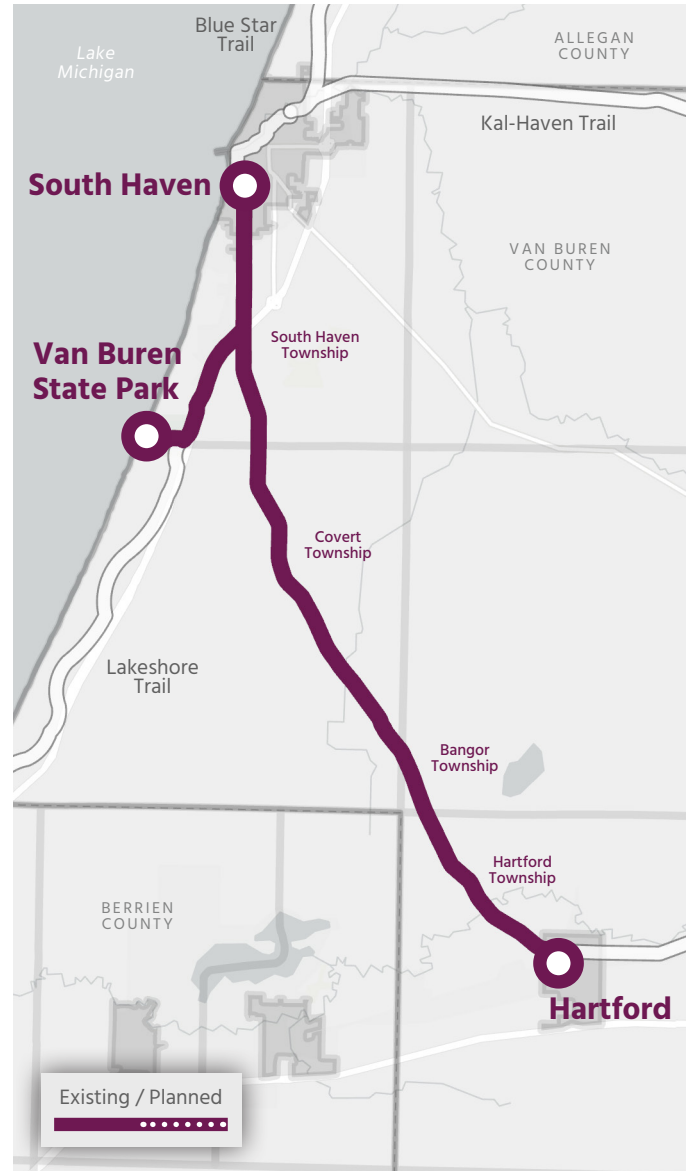
**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of the Kal-Haven Trail

**CONTACT:** MDNR

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

 **Serves area with significant disadvantaged communities**

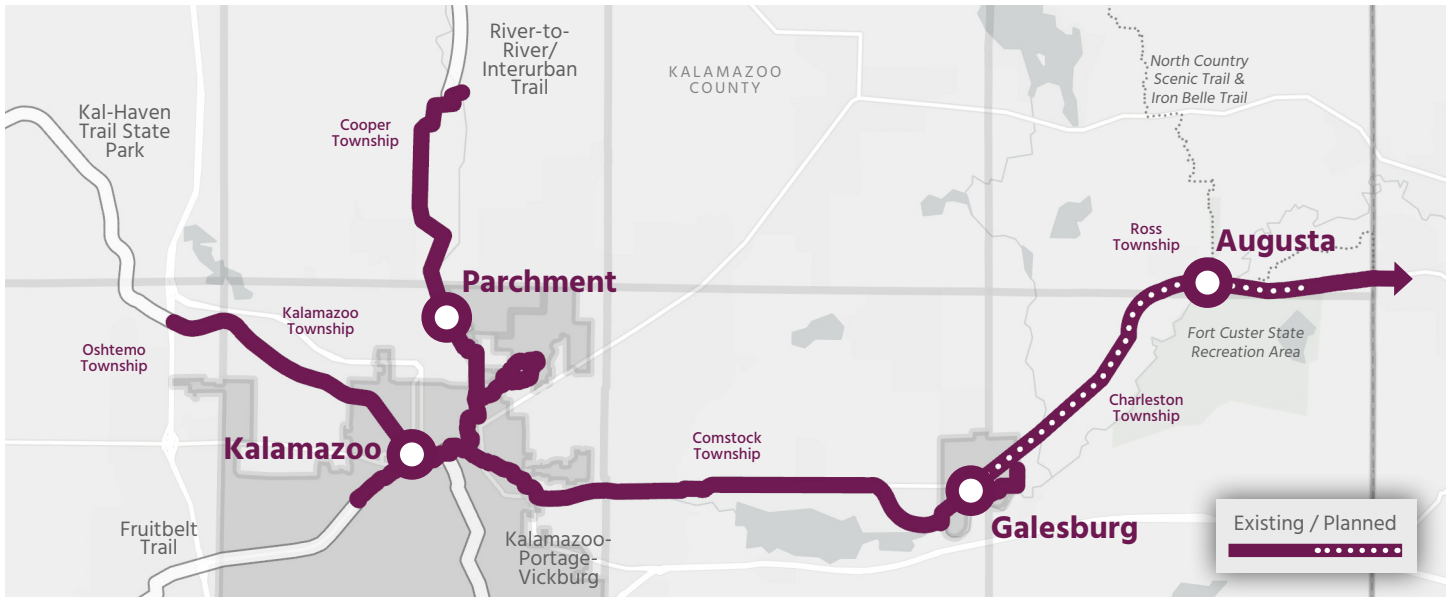
This trail connects the city of South Haven to Van Buren State Park and extends down to Hartford. When combined with other trails in the region, it has the potential to be part of a larger trail network that parallels the shoreline of Lake Michigan from Chicago to Ludington.



## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Finish engineering/design (in progress) and construction of trail surfacing improvements
- Secure funding for trail surfacing, safety and signage
- Establish a sustainable maintenance funding source
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system

# Kalamazoo River Valley Trail



Managed and owned by Kalamazoo County Parks, planned 35 mile trail (including spurs and connections) with 24 miles complete. Connects the Kal-Haven Trail in the west to Galesburg in the east. Paved trail as well as signed route through downtown Kalamazoo. Friends of the Kalamazoo River Valley Trailway and Parks Foundation of Kalamazoo County help support.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 35 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of the Kalamazoo River Valley Trailway

**CONTACT:** Kalamazoo County Parks

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

 **Serves area with significant disadvantaged communities**

The planned connections close a significant gap in the Great-Lake-to-Lake Trail System.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Design and construct 4.8-mile trail segment from Galesburg to Augusta.
- Design and build Ravine Road Trail Segment - 0.8 mile connection from Azon Manufacturing to Douglas Avenue.
- Continue planning and coordination to extend south to the Portage-Vicksburg Trail.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.



# Beeline Trail

Owned and managed by Laketown Township, shared use path (10' wide) approximately 8 miles connecting Holland and Saugatuck.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 8 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**CONTACT:** Laketown Township

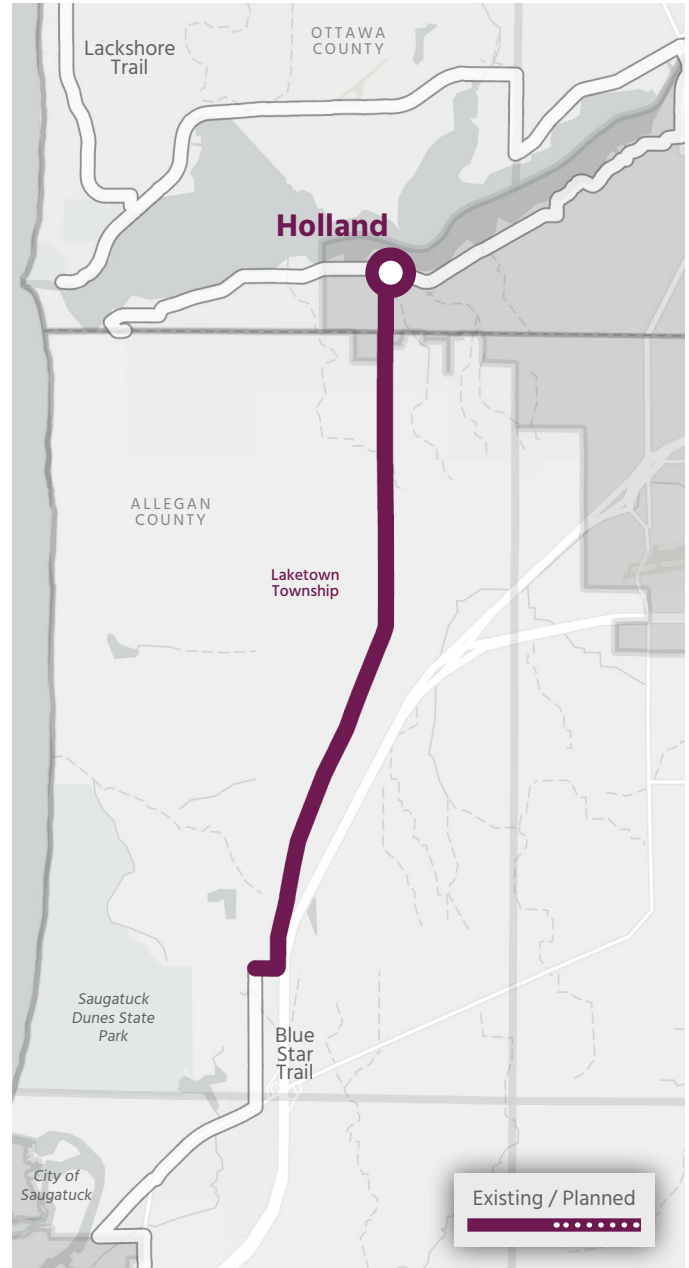
## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Support efforts to build path/trail along Blue Star Highway from the Beeline Trail south into Douglas.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to fund and install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.
- Continue to secure funding for maintenance and road crossing improvements.

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

 **Addresses historic funding disparity**

When combined with other trails in the region, the Beeline Trail has the potential to be part of a larger trail network that parallels the shoreline of Lake Michigan from Chicago to Ludington.



# Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail

Currently extends from South Bend, IN into Michigan just south of Niles. Traverses approximately 6 miles from the Michigan border north into downtown Niles and the St. Joseph River. Planned to extend into Berrien Springs, ultimately to St Joseph. Received congressional earmark in federal budget.

**LIFE STAGE:** Adolescent

**LENGTH:** 15 Miles (In Michigan)

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail, Be Healthy Berrien

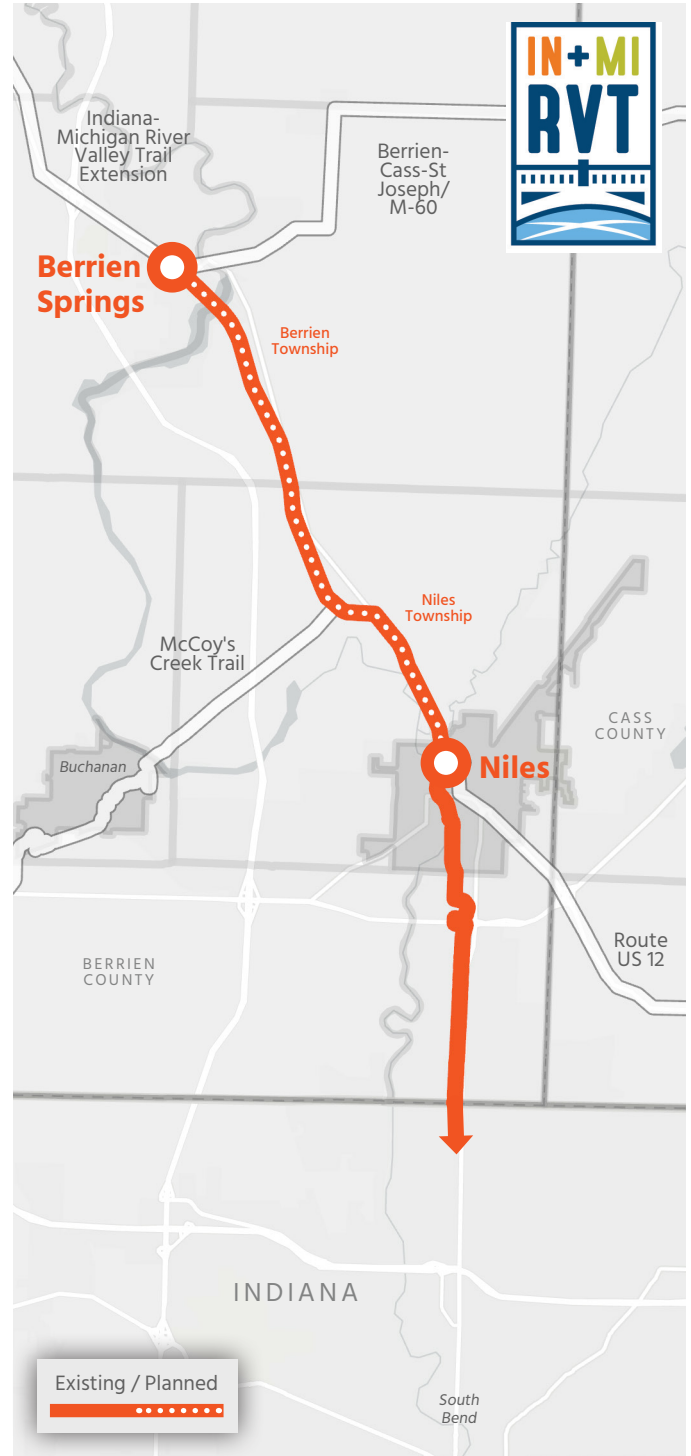
**CONTACT:** SWMPC and Local Municipalities

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Resurface the trail in Niles.
- Construct section from Plym Park north to Pucker Street. funding secured to Pucker Street.
- Continue route planning and engineering to extend the trail north to Berrien Springs - an approximately 8 mile extension utilizing former interurban rail line, US 31 right-of-way, non-motorized bridge over Lake Chapin.
- Coordinate to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

The trail provide a regional connection to Indiana.



# McCoy's Creek Trail

The existing McCoy's Creek Trail is an approximately 5-mile shared use path that primarily serves the City of Buchanan. Improvements are currently underway and will provide a key connection from Buchanan to the proposed extension of the Indiana Michigan River Valley Trail at Walton Road. Trail will be extended in 2024 from EB Clark Woods in Buchanan, northeast along Walton Road, across the St. Joseph River to River Saint Joe Brewery. Trail markers recently installed. Friends of McCoy's Creek Trail was formed in 2004.

**LIFE STAGE:** Adolescent

**LENGTH:** 8 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path, Sidewalks

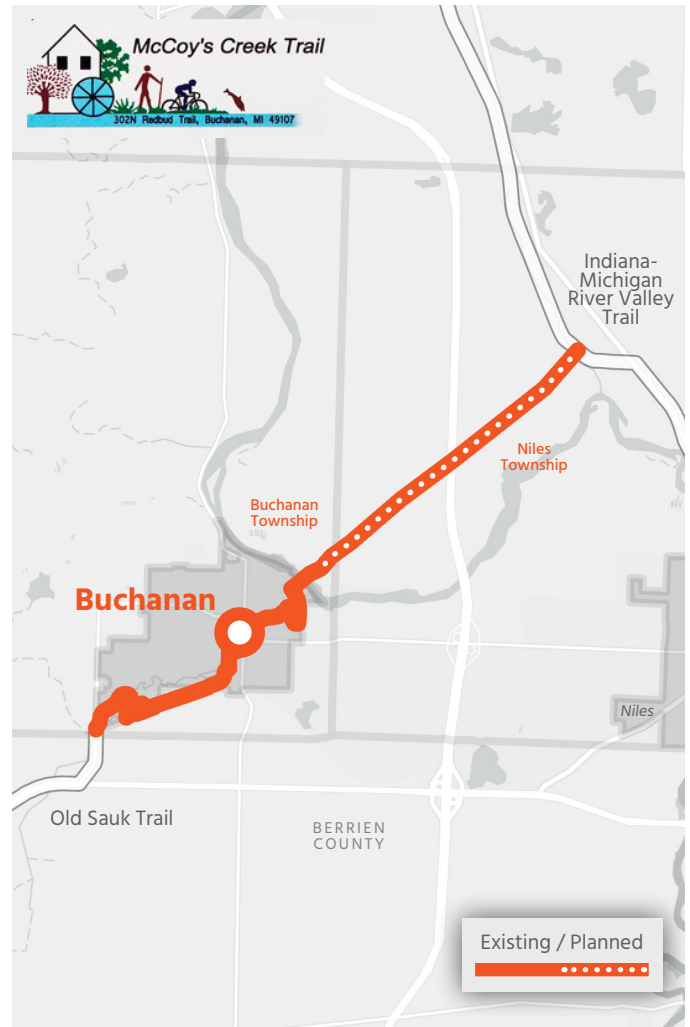
**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of McCoy's Creek Trail

**CONTACT:** SWMPC and Local Municipalities

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Secure additional funds to design and build the trail from River Saint Joe Brewery northeast to connect to the Indiana Michigan River Valley Trail Extension near US Highway 31.
- Coordinate to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.



 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

The trail is part of a regional link that provides an east-west across Berrien, Cass and St Joseph Counties.

# Kalamazoo-Portage-Vicksburg

The trail is proposed to connect from the Kalamazoo River Valley Trail through Portage and to Vicksburg. Existing sections include the Portage Creek Bicentennial Park Trail, Austin Lake Trail and the Vicksburg Trail.

**LIFE STAGE:** Adolescent

**LENGTH:** 30 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

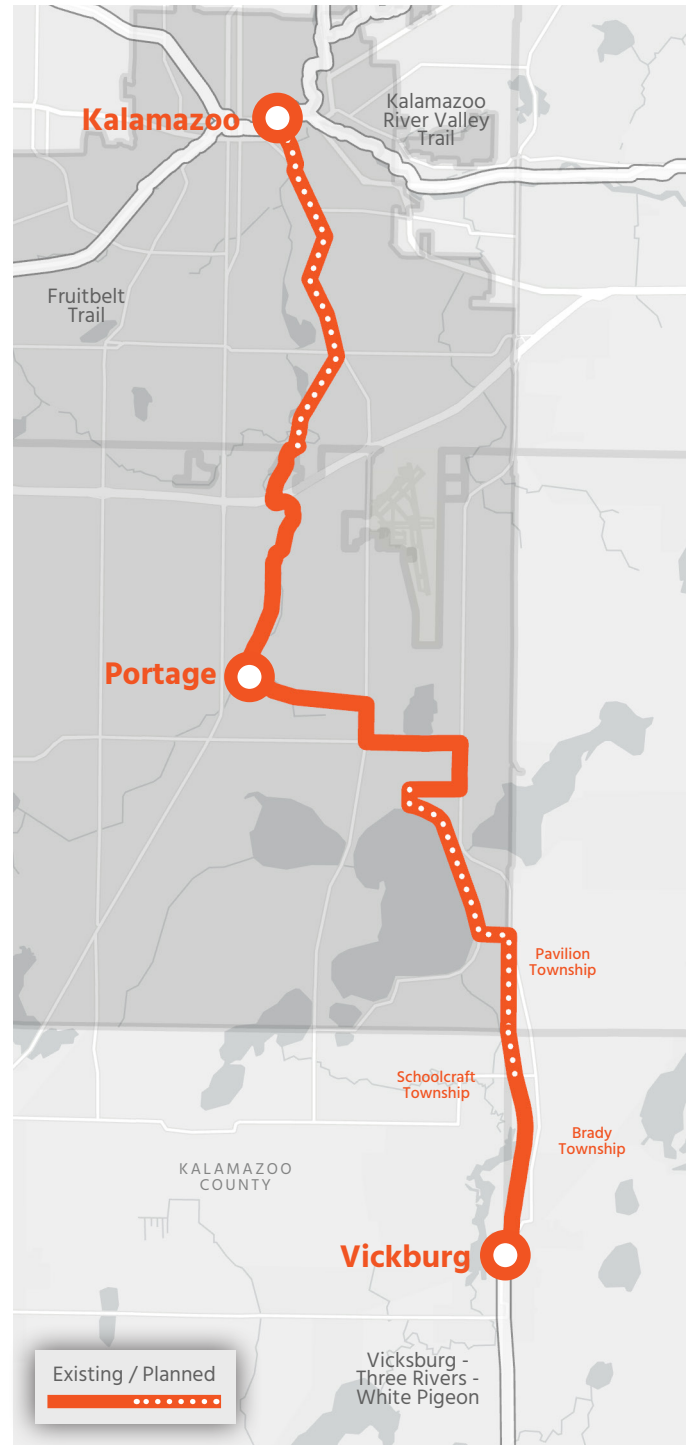
**CONTACT:** Local Municipalities

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Construct the Austin Lake Trail segment of the Portage Bicentennial Trail (2025).
- Continue planning efforts, route alignment and funding to connect Portage to Kalamazoo River Valley Trail (approximately 4 miles).
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

The trail provide a regional connection to communities south of Kalamazoo.



## River-to-River/ Interurban Trail

10 communities, private property, former interurban rail line (owned by Consumers Energy and leased by ITC), Kalamazoo to Grand Rapids, 35+ miles, planning study and conceptual alignment completed in 2018 with a number of stakeholders.

**LIFE STAGE:** Infant

**LENGTH:** 35 Miles

**FACILITY:** To Be Determined

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**CONTACT:** Local Municipalities

### 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Apply for grant funding to begin design and construction.
- Continue coordination with Consumers, ITC, MDOT, EGLE, and other state and local jurisdictions.
- Reach out to private property owners regarding potential easements.
- Continue to grow friends group and volunteer support.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

 **Addresses historic funding disparity**

This planned trail closes a significant gap in the region between Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo, within an under-invested county..



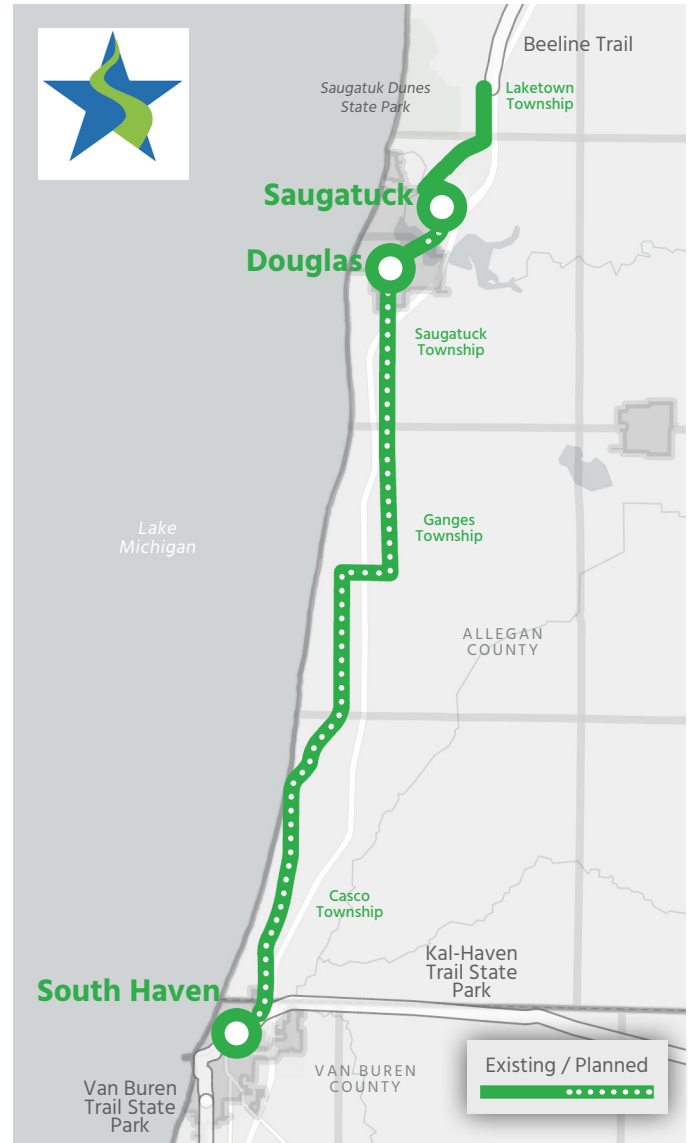
# Blue Star Trail

A paved 20-mile off-road shared-use path running primarily along the Blue Star Highway connecting people and communities from Saugatuck to South Haven. The plan is to build contiguous sections of the trail, going south from Saugatuck Township and north from South Haven. It helps complete the overall southwest Michigan trail network as it will connect to the Beeline Trail going north to Holland, the Kal-Haven Trail going east to Kalamazoo and the Van Buren State Park Trail going south towards Benton Harbor.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Laketown Township construct shared use path from the N I-196 interchange (Exit 41) east to 62nd St.
- Build two sections that will fill in gaps from the Beeline Trail in Saugatuck Township to the existing trail that ends at Wiley Rd. in Douglas. Finalizing details of design to satisfy conditional grants with expected construction in 2025.
- Extend trail south by 3 miles from Wiley Rd. in Douglas to M-89, the southern border of Saugatuck Township. Complete preliminary design and secure funding for construction (estimate - \$5.6M).
- Obtain grant to complete funding for a designed 0.5-mile trail section going north from the Kal-Haven Trail in South Haven to the trail at Baseline Rd.
- Hire an independent contractor to function as Development Coordinator for the Friends Group to support fundraising events, donor database management, promotion, and planned major gifts campaign.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

When combined with other trails in the region, the Blue Star Trail has the potential to be part of a larger trail network that parallels the shoreline of Lake Michigan from Chicago to Ludington.



 Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans

 Addresses historic funding disparity

**LIFE STAGE:** Infant

**LENGTH:** 20 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of Blue Star Trail Group  
501(c)(3)

**CONTACT:** Local Municipalities

# Red Arrow Linear Park

Red Arrow Linear Park will be a shared use path that will run near/along Red Arrow Highway and M-63. Eventually a 22-mile link connecting the Marquette Greenway in New Buffalo (and all the way to Chicago) north to the Lakeshore Trail in St Joseph and Benton Harbor. Friends of Berrien County Trails assists as does Southwest Michigan Planning Commission.

**LIFE STAGE:** Infant

**LENGTH:** 22 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of Berrien County

**CONTACT:** SWMPC and Local Municipalities

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Complete design and build MDNR section of trail through Warren Dunes State Park as a critical component in the expansion to Bridgman.
- Secure funding to design and build remaining sections in Chikaming Township from Warren Dunes State Park north to St. Joseph.
- Plan and build trailheads and amenities.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

### Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans

When combined with other trails in the region, the Red Arrow Linear Park has the potential to be part of a larger trail network that parallels the shoreline of Lake Michigan from Chicago to Ludington.



# Lakeshore Trail

The Lakeshore Trail will be a shared use path that will ultimately connect the Red Arrow Linear Park to the Van Buren State Park Trail along M-63 and the Blue Star Highway. Friends of Berrien County Trails assists as does Southwest Michigan Planning Commission.

**LIFE STAGE:** Infant

**LENGTH:** 17 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of Berrien County

**CONTACT:** SWMPC and Local Municipalities

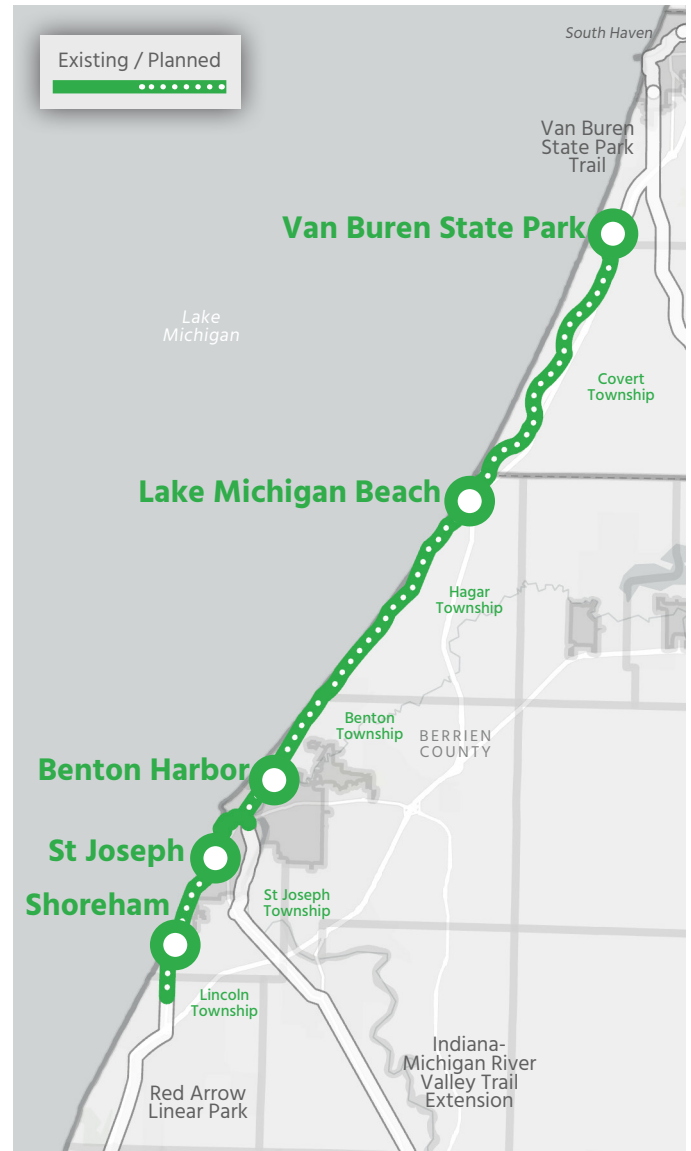
## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Secure funding and build 2.5 mile trail between Higman Park Road and Monte Road Trailhead in 2025. Estimated to cost \$3.15 million with \$2.4 million secured.
- Continue planning efforts, route alignment and funding to extend trail north through Van Buren County .
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

 **Serves area with significant disadvantaged communities**

When combined with other trails in the region, the Lakeshore Trail has the potential to be part of a larger trail network that parallels the shoreline of Lake Michigan from Chicago to Ludington.





# Marquette Greenway

58-mile shared use trail from Chicago to New Buffalo in Michigan. Construction from New Buffalo to Grand Beach Road Railroad Crossing will be complete in 2024.

**LIFE STAGE:** Infant

**LENGTH:** 58 Miles

**FACILITY:** Shared Use Path, On Road

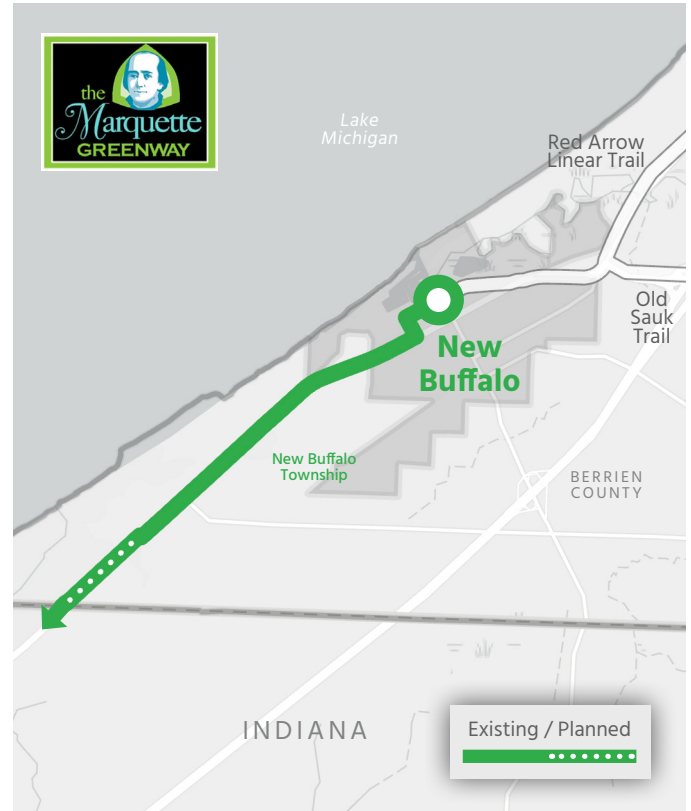
**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of Barrien County

**CONTACT:** SWMPC and Local Municipalities

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

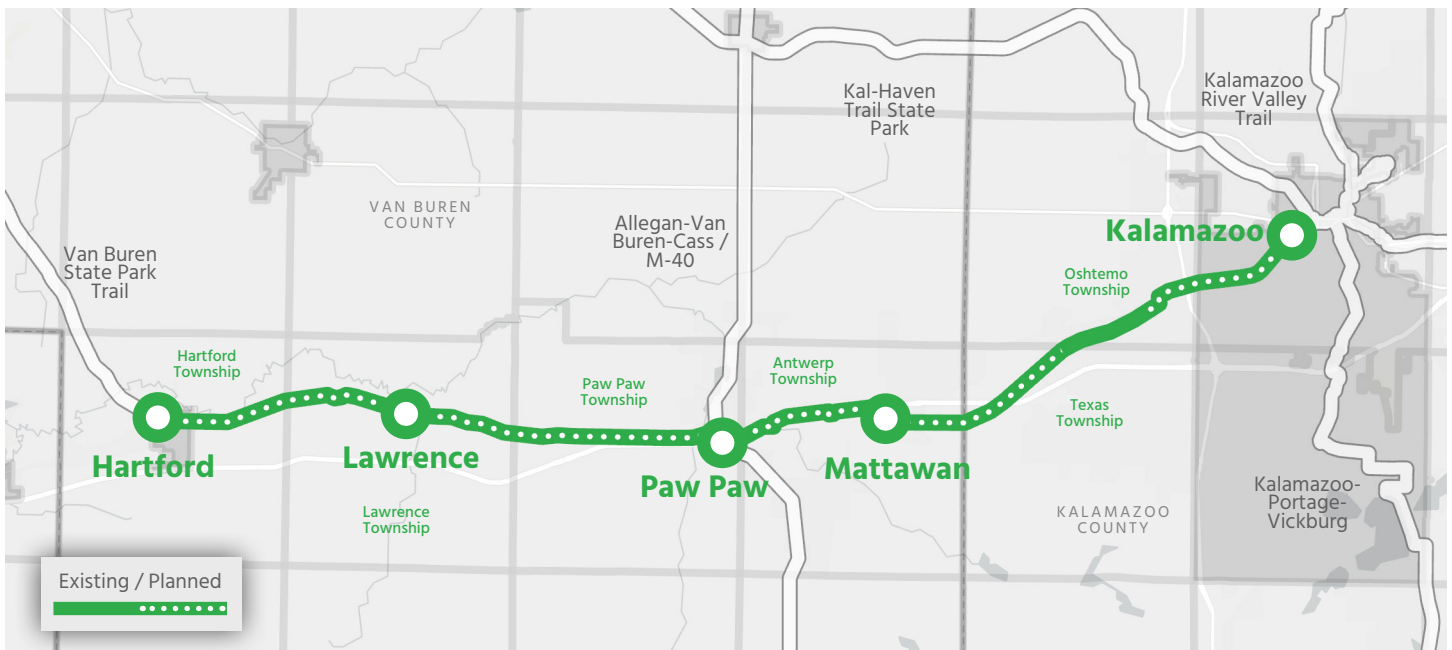
- Build the final Michigan section from Grand Beach Road Railroad Crossing to Indiana border in 2025/2026.



## Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans

This planned connection provides a significant link to trails in Indiana and Illinois. When combined with other trails in the region, it has the potential to be part of a larger trail network that parallels the shoreline of Lake Michigan from Chicago to Ludington.

# Fruitbelt Trail



Long-term planned route to connect Kalamazoo to Van Buren Trail/South Haven, 10'-wide crushed stone, approximately 32 miles across Kalamazoo and Van Buren Counties.

**LIFE STAGE:** Infant

**LENGTH:** 32 Miles

**FACILITY:** To Be Determined

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**CONTACT:** SWMPC

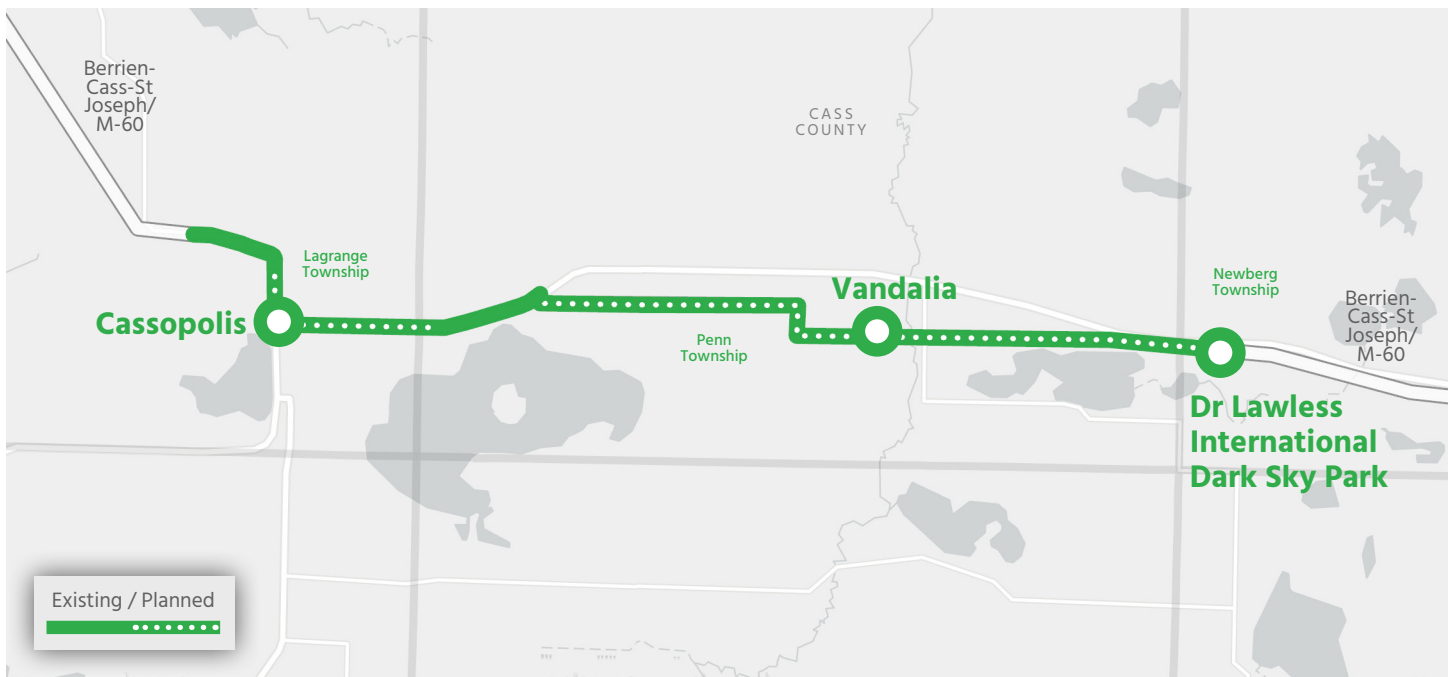
 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

When complete it will provide a regional connection between South Haven and Kalamazoo.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS:

- Oshtemo Township - Finish construction of trail with parking, crushed stone surface for hiking or biking. The project site extends from 9th Street to Oshtemo Township’s southern border with Texas Township and abuts Oshtemo’s Flesher Field Park at 3664 South 9th Street.
- Continue coordination in Antwerp Township to secure funding and construct a 4.9-mile, 10-foot asphalt path connecting the Village of Paw Paw to the Village of Mattawan, with trailheads at each terminus.

# Van-Cass Heritage Trail



The South West Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC), Cass County Parks Department, Cass County Road Department, Cassopolis Village, Vandalia Village, Penn Township, and Midwest Energy & Communications are working to implement a 10-mile trail connecting Cassopolis to Vandalia, partially following an old railroad.

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

 **Addresses historic funding disparity**

The trail is part of a regional link that provides an east-west across Berrien, Cass and St Joseph Counties.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Secure local match for Village of Cassopolis for construction TAP grant.
- Complete the trail within the Village of Cassopolis.
- Secure funding to design/build trail from Decatur Road to Vandalia.
- Continue discussions and planning to determine route from Vandalia to Dr TK Lawless International Dark Sky County Park.
- Coordinate to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

**LIFE STAGE:** Infant

**LENGTH:** 10 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** SWMPC convenes a local stakeholder group

**CONTACT:** SWMPC

# Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail Extension

Long term vision to extend the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail from Niles to St. Joseph.

**LIFE STAGE:** Vision/Aspirational

**LENGTH:** 14 Miles

**FACILITY:** To Be Determined

**ALLOWED:** To Be Determined

**CONTACT:** SWPMC

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

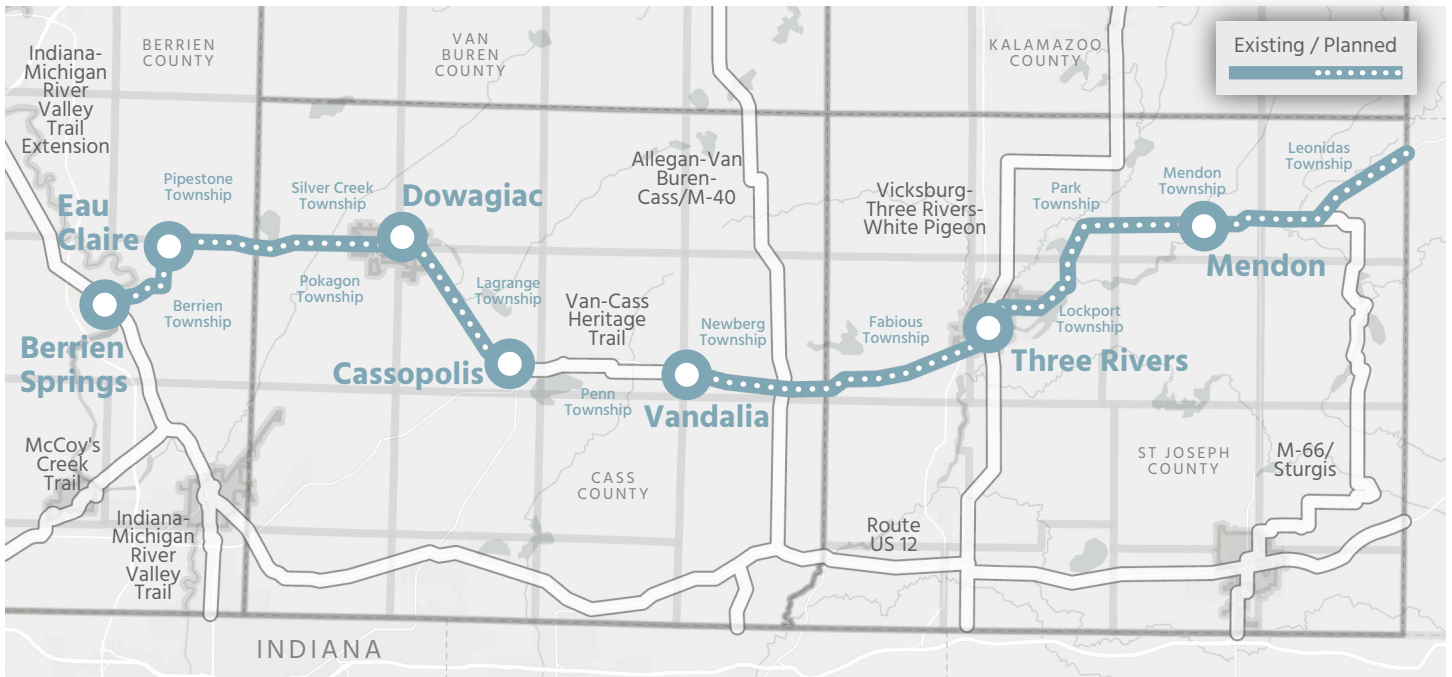
This long-term connection is recognized as valuable for enhancing the regional trail network, however, it is not likely to receive considerable focus or resources in the immediate future. This is due to a variety of challenges such as private property and easements, limited local support, completion of other priorities, etc. Despite these obstacles, this connection has been envisioned by various stakeholders in the past and continues to be acknowledged as an integral component of the long-term vision for the regional trail network. Over the next five-year period this aspirational connection should continue to be monitored and evaluated as opportunities arise for its realization.

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

When complete, it will part of a regional connection between Benton Harbor/St. Joseph and Indiana.



# Berrien - Cass - St Joseph / M-60



Long term vision to connect Benton Harbor/ St Joseph to Three Rivers and Mendon in St Joseph County following near/along M-60.

- LIFE STAGE:** Vision/Aspirational
- LENGTH:** 50+ Miles
- FACILITY:** To Be Determined
- ALLOWED:** To Be Determined
- CONTACT:** SWPMC

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

 **Addresses historic funding disparity**

The trail is part of a regional link that provides an east-west across Berrien, Cass and St Joseph Counties.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

This long-term connection is recognized as valuable for enhancing the regional trail network, however, it is not likely to receive considerable focus or resources in the immediate future. This is due to a variety of challenges such as private property and easements, limited local support, completion of other priorities, etc. Despite these obstacles, this connection has been envisioned by various stakeholders in the past and continues to be acknowledged as an integral component of the long-term vision for the regional trail network. Over the next five-year period this aspirational connection should continue to be monitored and evaluated as opportunities arise for its realization.

# Holland to Plainwell

Long term vision to connect Holland to Plainwell.

**LIFE STAGE:** Vision/Aspirational

**LENGTH:** 35 Miles

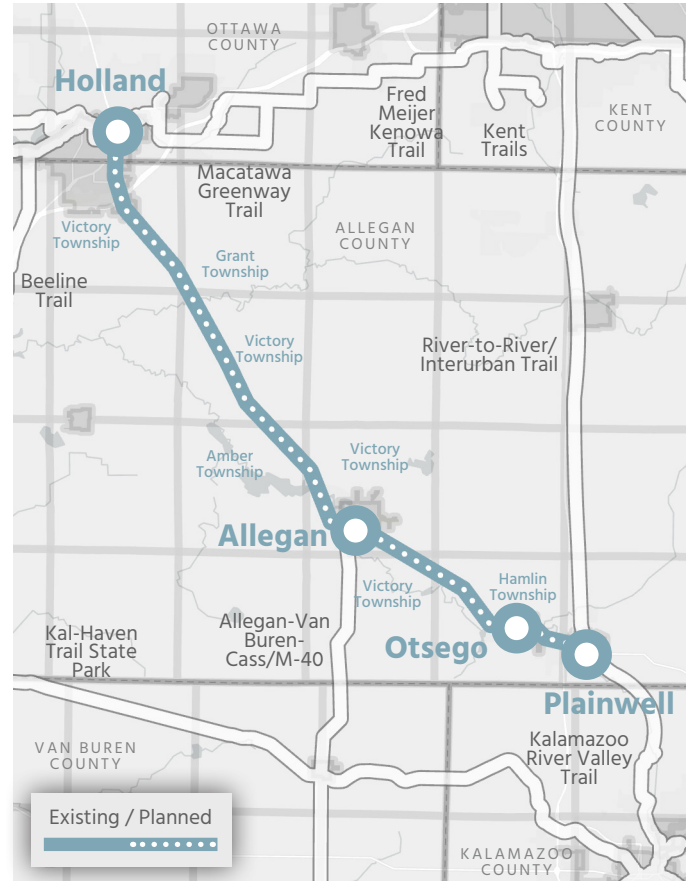
**FACILITY:** To Be Determined

**ALLOWED:** To Be Determined

**CONTACT:** To Be Determined

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

This long-term connection is recognized as valuable for enhancing the regional trail network, however, it is not likely to receive considerable focus or resources in the immediate future. This is due to a variety of challenges such as private property and easements, limited local support, completion of other priorities, etc. Despite these obstacles, this connection has been envisioned by various stakeholders in the past and continues to be acknowledged as an integral component of the long-term vision for the regional trail network. Over the next five-year period this aspirational connection should continue to be monitored and evaluated as opportunities arise for its realization.



 Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans

 Addresses historic funding disparity

Provides a regional connection between Holland and Plainwell, and eventually Kalamazoo, following the planned River-to-River Trail/Interurban Trail.

# Allegan - Van Buren - Cass / M-40

Long term vision to connect Allegan to regional trails in Van Buren and Cass Counties.

**LIFE STAGE:** Vision/Aspirational

**LENGTH:** 55+ Miles

**FACILITY:** To Be Determined

**ALLOWED:** To Be Determined

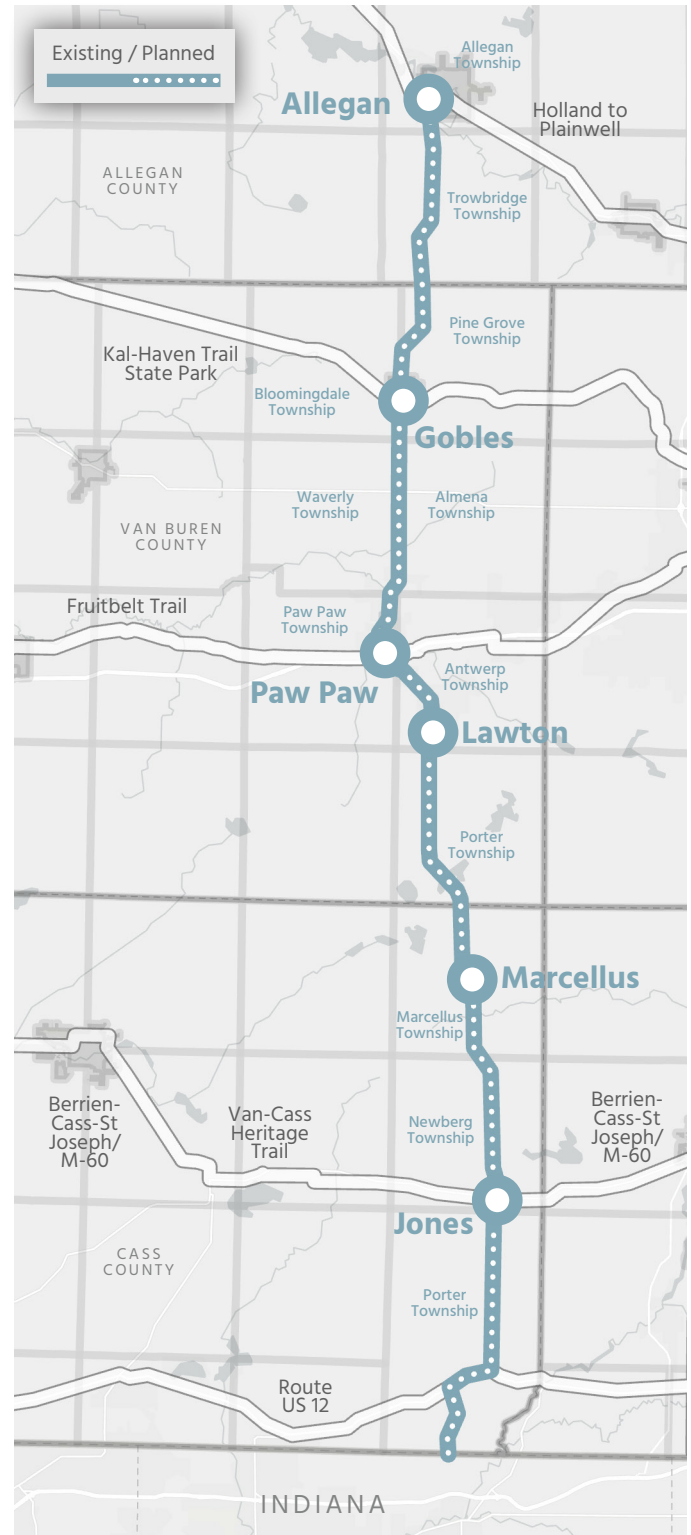
**CONTACT:** SWMPC

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

This long-term connection is recognized as valuable for enhancing the regional trail network, however, it is not likely to receive considerable focus or resources in the immediate future. This is due to a variety of challenges such as private property and easements, limited local support, completion of other priorities, etc. Despite these obstacles, this connection has been envisioned by various stakeholders in the past and continues to be acknowledged as an integral component of the long-term vision for the regional trail network. Over the next five-year period this aspirational connection should continue to be monitored and evaluated as opportunities arise for its realization.

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

Provides a north-south regional connection across the counties of Allegan, Van Buren and Cass.



# Vicksburg - Three Rivers - White Pigeon

Long term vision to connect Vicksburg to White Pigeon.

**LIFE STAGE:** Vision/Aspirational

**LENGTH:** 30 Miles

**FACILITY:** To Be Determined

**ALLOWED:** To Be Determined

**CONTACT:** Unknown

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

This long-term connection is recognized as valuable for enhancing the regional trail network, however, it is not likely to receive considerable focus or resources in the immediate future. This is due to a variety of challenges such as private property and easements, limited local support, completion of other priorities, etc. Despite these obstacles, this connection has been envisioned by various stakeholders in the past and continues to be acknowledged as an integral component of the long-term vision for the regional trail network. Over the next five-year period this aspirational connection should continue to be monitored and evaluated as opportunities arise for its realization.

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

 **Addresses historic funding disparity**

Provides a regional connection between Kalamazoo and Indiana near White Pigeon.





# Old Sauk Trail



Long term vision to connect New Buffalo to Niles following Route US 12.

**LIFE STAGE:** Vision/Aspirational

**LENGTH:** 18 Miles

**FACILITY:** To Be Determined

**ALLOWED:** To Be Determined

**CONTACT:** SWMPC

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

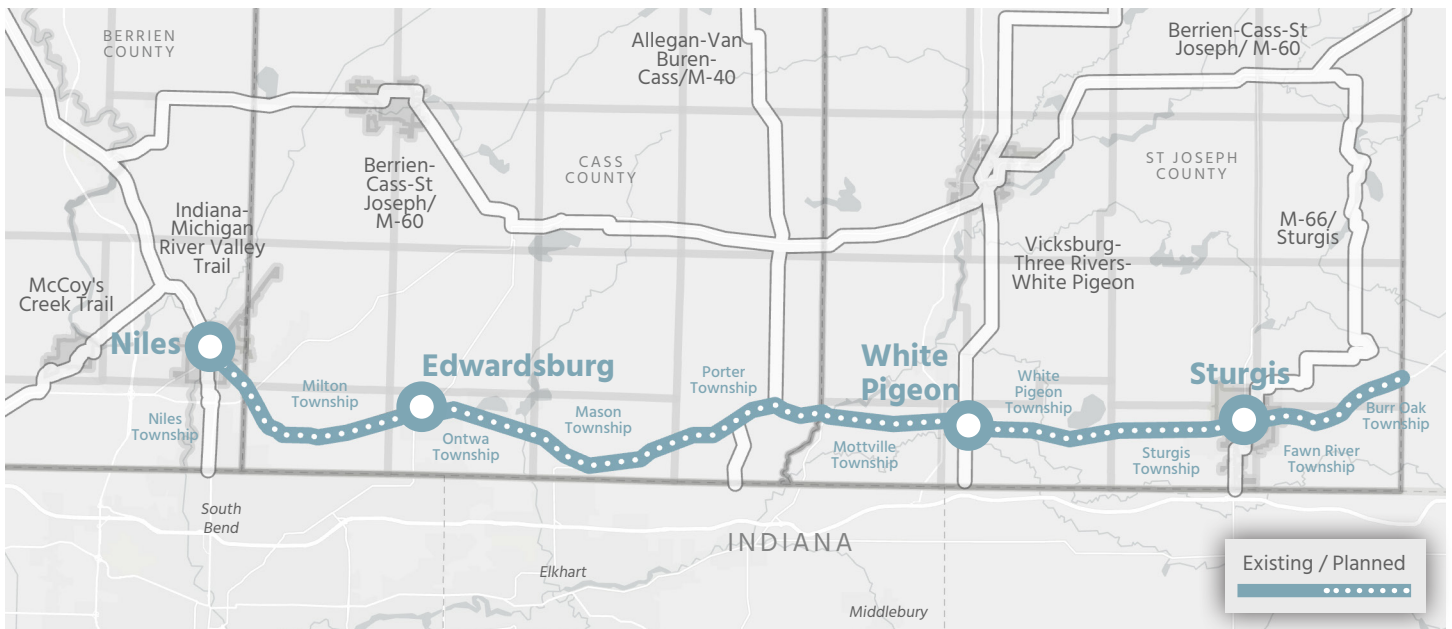
 **Addresses historic funding disparity**

The trail is part of a regional link that provides an east-west across Berrien, Cass and St Joseph Counties.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

This long-term connection is recognized as valuable for enhancing the regional trail network, however, it is not likely to receive considerable focus or resources in the immediate future. This is due to a variety of challenges such as private property and easements, available right-of-way, limited local support, completion of other priorities, etc. Despite these obstacles, this connection has been envisioned by various stakeholders in the past and continues to be acknowledged as an integral component of the long-term vision for the regional trail network. Over the next five-year period this aspirational connection should continue to be monitored and evaluated as opportunities arise for its realization.

# Route US 12



Long term vision to connect Niles to Sturgis following Route US 12.

**LIFE STAGE:** Vision/Aspirational

**LENGTH:** 50+ Miles

**FACILITY:** To Be Determined

**ALLOWED:** To Be Determined

**CONTACT:** SWMPC

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

 **Addresses historic funding disparity**

The trail is part of a regional link that provides an east-west across Berrien, Cass and St Joseph Counties.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

This long-term connection is recognized as valuable for enhancing the regional trail network, however, it is not likely to receive considerable focus or resources in the immediate future. This is due to a variety of challenges such as private property and easements, limited local support, completion of other priorities, etc. Despite these obstacles, this connection has been envisioned by various stakeholders in the past and continues to be acknowledged as an integral component of the long-term vision for the regional trail network. Over the next five-year period this aspirational connection should continue to be monitored and evaluated as opportunities arise for its realization.

# M-66 / Sturgis

Long term vision to connect to Sturgis.

**LIFE STAGE:** Vision/Aspirational

**LENGTH:** 26 Miles

**FACILITY:** To Be Determined

**ALLOWED:** To Be Determined

**CONTACT:** Unknown

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

This long-term connection is recognized as valuable for enhancing the regional trail network, however, it is not likely to receive considerable focus or resources in the immediate future. This is due to a variety of challenges such as private property and easements, limited local support, completion of other priorities, etc. Despite these obstacles, this connection has been envisioned by various stakeholders in the past and continues to be acknowledged as an integral component of the long-term vision for the regional trail network. Over the next five-year period this aspirational connection should continue to be monitored and evaluated as opportunities arise for its realization.

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

 **Addresses historic funding disparity**

Provides a regional connection to Indiana.



# Action Plan

## West Area

### Initial Focus (Next 5 Years)

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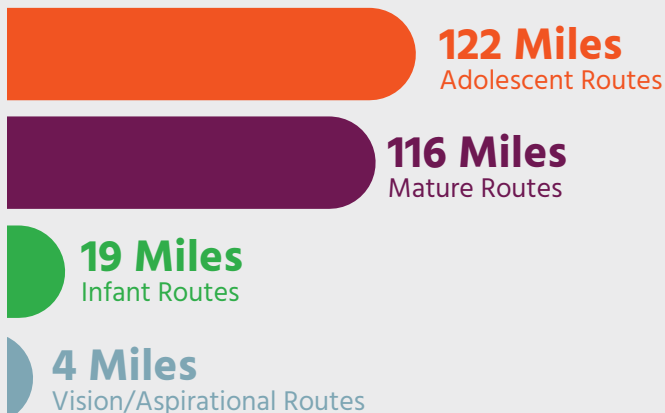
The following pages and associated map highlight the regionally-significant trail network in the **Western Area** of the larger 18-County West Michigan Trails organizations purview. The highlighted regional trail network is in various “stages” and has a wide variety of needs. Some segments are heavily used and were built more than 30 years ago while others are little more than a line drawn on a map illustrating the desire at some point in the future to become an important regional connection.

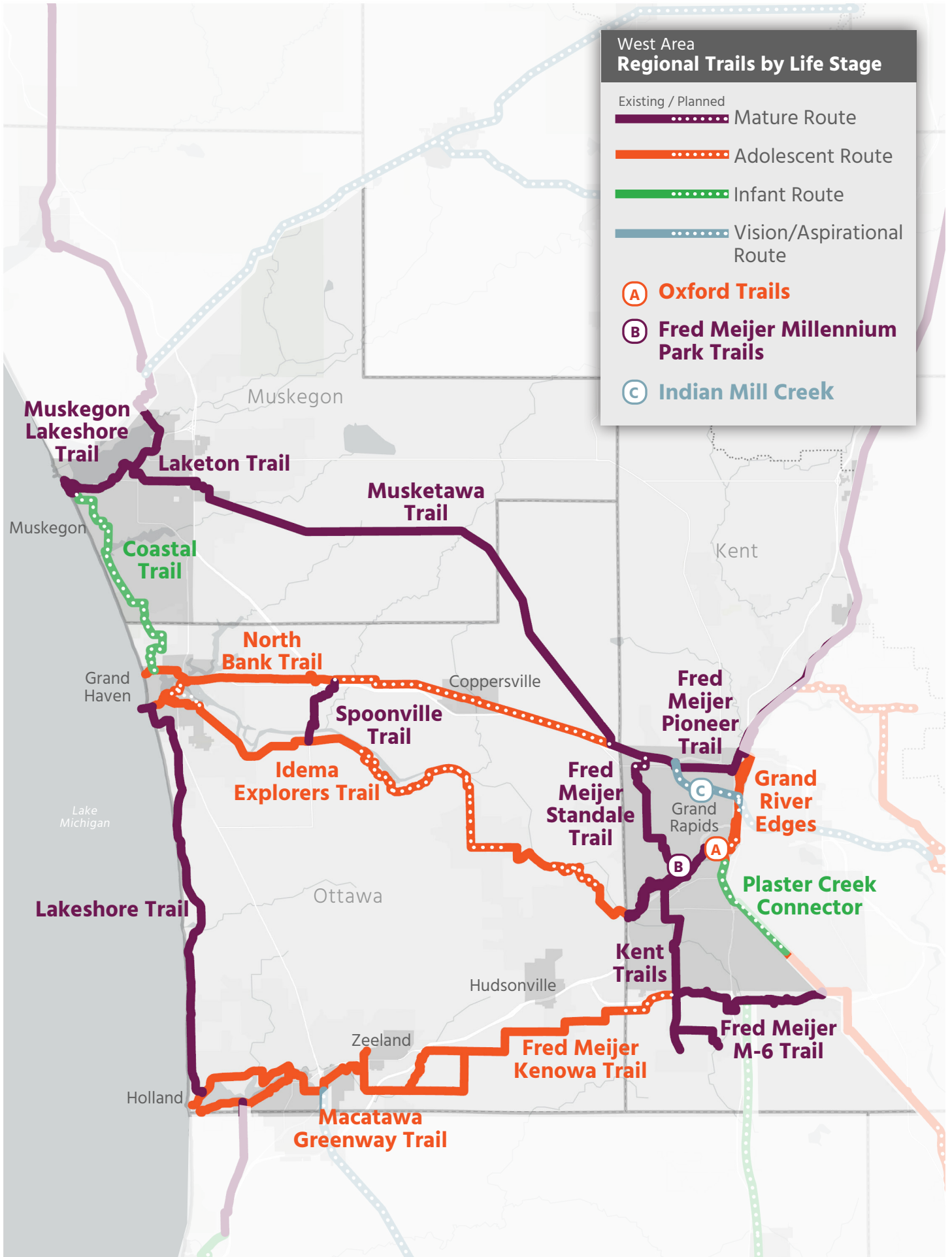
The following pages are organized by “stage” of the trail and document the primary focus and needs of each over the next 5 years, regardless of who/what organization may be involved and/or responsible. These lists are not comprehensive but rather reflect the big picture, near-term items of focus.

#### REGIONAL TRAILS IN WEST AREA:



#### TRAIL LIFE STAGE:





# Muskegon Lakeshore Trail

Follows along the southern shore of Muskegon Lake for 12 miles, paved from Pere-Marquette Beach to North Muskegon.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 12 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**CONTACT:** City of Muskegon

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Plan to move lake shore trail off of shoulder to railroad bed.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

 **Serves area with significant disadvantaged communities**

When combined with other trails in the region, the Muskegon Lakeshore Trail has the potential to be part of a larger trail network that parallels the shoreline of Lake Michigan from Chicago to Ludington.



# Laketon Trail

Owned by the City of Muskegon, this 4-mile paved link connects the Muskegon Lakeshore Trail and the Musketawa Trail.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 4 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

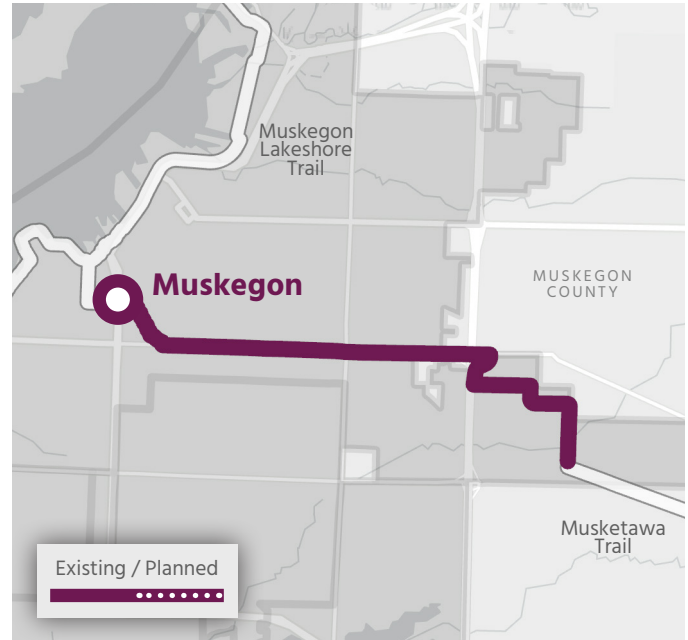
**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**CONTACT:** City of Muskegon

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

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- Upgrade/complete 0.25-mile gap between Muskegon Lakeshore Trail and Musketawa Trail from West Grand Avenue near Nelson Elementary school and across Business 31.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

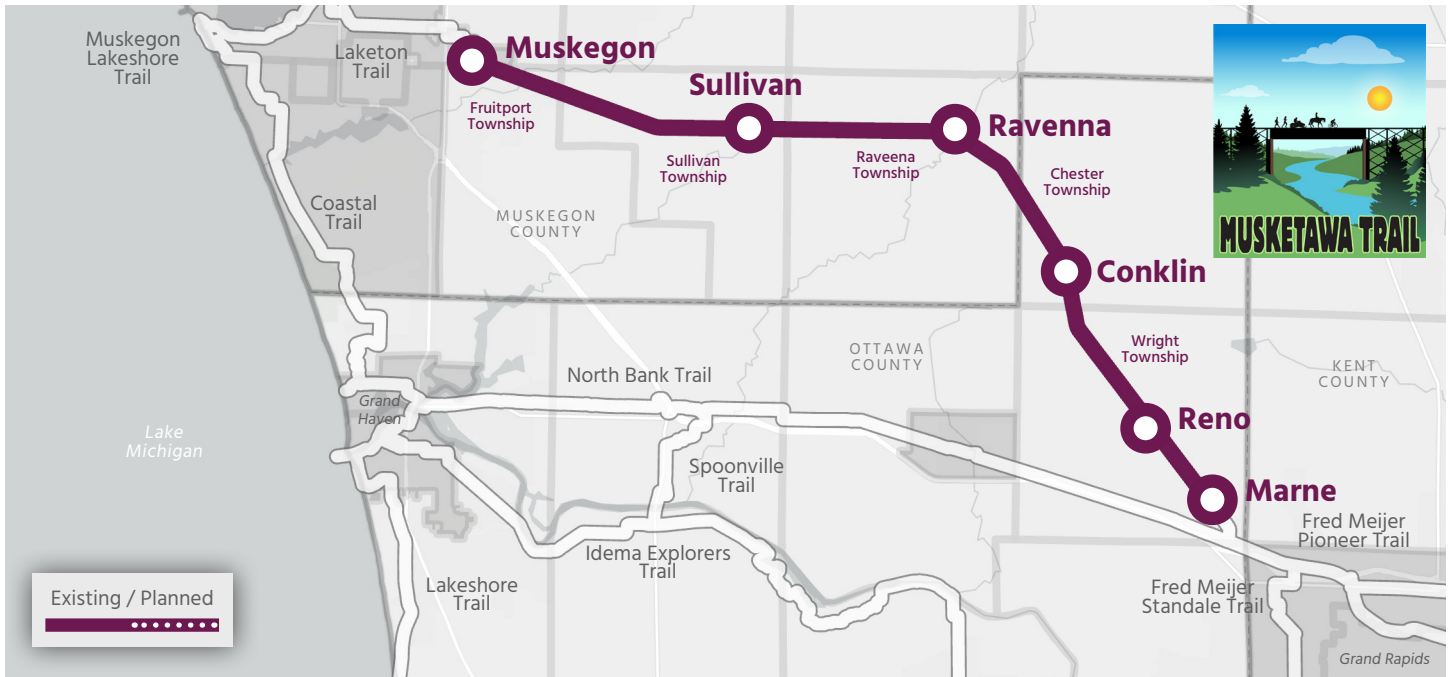


 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

 **Serves area with significant disadvantaged communities**

Part of a larger regional trail connection between Muskegon and Grand Rapids.

# Musketawa Trail



25+ year old, 26 mile, 12-foot wide, all-season trail owned by MDNR, managed by MDNR, Muskegon County and Ottawa County Parks (manages 10 miles). Connects Marne and East Muskegon.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 26 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers, Snowmobiles

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of Musketawa Trail 501(c)(3)

**CONTACT:** MDNR

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

Provides a regional trail connection between Muskegon and Grand Rapids.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Complete reconstruction of trail including surfacing, bridges and culverts. Engineering for this work is underway.
- Finalize lease for trail maintenance with Ottawa County Parks.
- Secure funding, design, and develop covered shelter and bike repair station for Muskegon/Broadway trailhead and Ed Holovka Memorial.
- Secure sustainable source for on-going maintenance funding.
- Add amenities to trailheads.
- Elevate promotion of trail to grow volunteer organization and assist with funding/donations.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.



# Fred Meijer Pioneer Trail

Connects Musketawa Trail to White Pine Trail and to other city trails. Owned and managed by the Kent County Parks Department. Paved trail which began construction in 2010 with the last mile completed in 2020. Includes 4 miles along active rail and passes by Meijer Corporate Headquarters.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 9 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

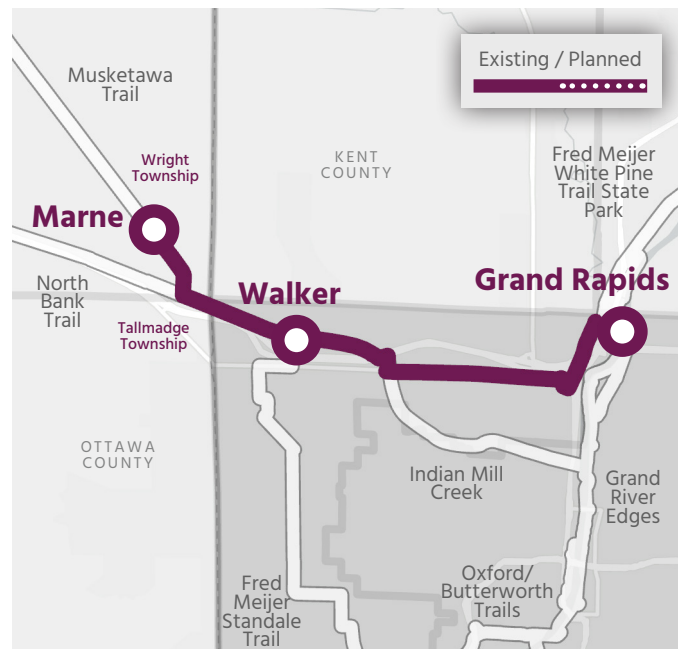
**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of Walker Trails

**CONTACT:** Kent County Parks Department

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

Part of a larger regional trail connection between Muskegon and Grand Rapids.



## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

# Fred Meijer Standale Trail

Owned and maintained by City of Walker, the 6.5 mile trail will link Pioneer Trail to Millennium Park and Grand River Greenway trails.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 6.5 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of Walker Trails, Kent County Volunteer Services

**CONTACT:** City of Walker

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Secure additional funding and build the short but expensive gap crossing I-96 at Fruit Ridge to connect the Pioneer Trail and Standale Trail and beyond. Design in process with \$25M secured of possible \$35M project (complete interchange reconstruction).
- Secure funding for safe crossings, surface maintenance and wayfinding.
- Secure sustainable trail maintenance funding (considerable amount of boardwalk maintenance needed).
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.



### Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans

Part of a larger regional connection that provides a north-south route on the west side of Grand Rapids.

# Fred Meijer Millennium Park Trails

Owned and managed by Kent County Parks, this network includes 18 miles of trails within a 1,400-acre park. The regional link follows a 1-mile route through the park using existing multi-use pathways, as shown on the map.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 1 Mile (18 total)

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** Kent County Volunteer Services

**CONTACT:** Kent County Parks

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Secure funding for safe crossings, surface maintenance and wayfinding.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

Part of a larger regional connection that provides a north-south route on the west side of Grand Rapids.

It is also a key component of the broader Grand River Greenway vision, aiming to create a 76-mile trail network that connects over 30 parks across Ottawa and Kent counties.



# Oxford Trails

Located in Grand Rapids, this 2-mile trail connects the Black Hills and Roosevelt Park neighborhoods with the Grand River regional trail network. Part of the Oxford trail runs through Consumers' property, with planned extensions on private property through easements, aiming to integrate the trail with future housing and economic development opportunities in collaboration with private partners.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 2 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

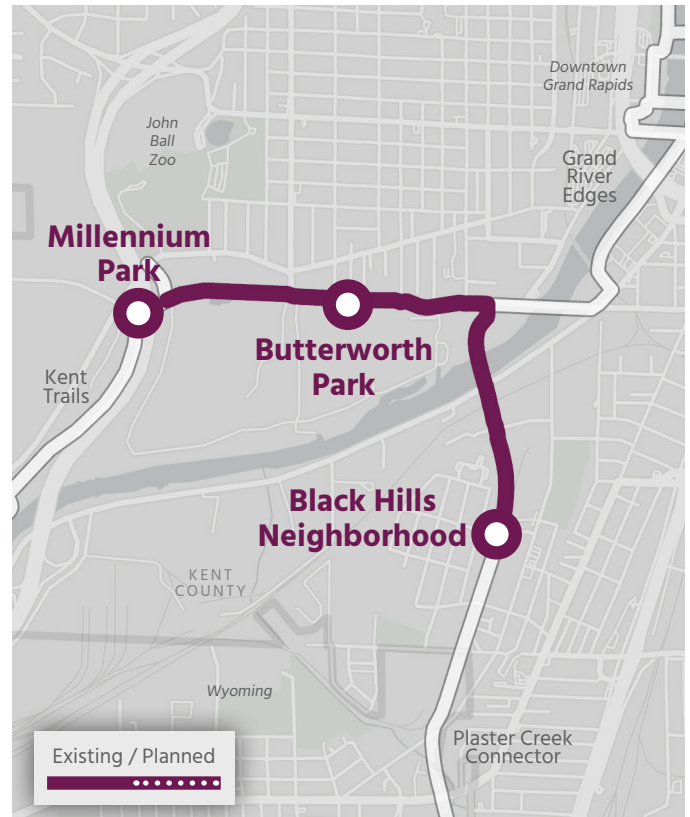
**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of Grand Rapids Parks

**CONTACT:** City of Grand Rapids Parks

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Complete the design and construction of rehabilitating the current trail from Wealthy to Oxford and expanding south to Hall St. The \$9M rehab and extension project is secured with ARPA funds from both the City of Grand Rapids and Downtown Grand Rapids Inc., focusing on the eastern and southern portions from Wealthy Street to the boat launch, as well as from the Grand River Bridge southwards (complete by 2026).
- Conceptual design for connection from Hall Street to Chicago Drive/Roosevelt Park including coordination with Factory Yards development team.
- Complete operations & maintenance study (City of GR, Kent County, DGRI).
- Ongoing community engagement, promotion, activation and programming
- Fund and complete general improvements (lighting, seating, water, etc.).
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.



 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

 **Serves area with significant disadvantaged communities**

Part of a larger regional connection that provides a north-south route through Grand Rapids.

It is also a key component of the broader Grand River Greenway vision, aiming to create a 76-mile trail network that connects over 30 parks across Ottawa and Kent counties.

# Kent Trails

Owned by Kent County, the City of Grandville, and the City of Wyoming, and managed by Kent County Parks, this 15-mile trail is over 30 years old. It serves as Kent County’s first paved rail trail, connecting Millennium Park to Byron Center and intersecting with the M-6 Trail. The trail represents a collaborative effort involving Kent County Parks, Grand Rapids, Grandville, Walker, Wyoming, and Byron Township, incorporating rail trails, surface streets, and easements.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 15 Mile

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** Kent County Volunteer Services

**CONTACT:** Kent County Parks

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

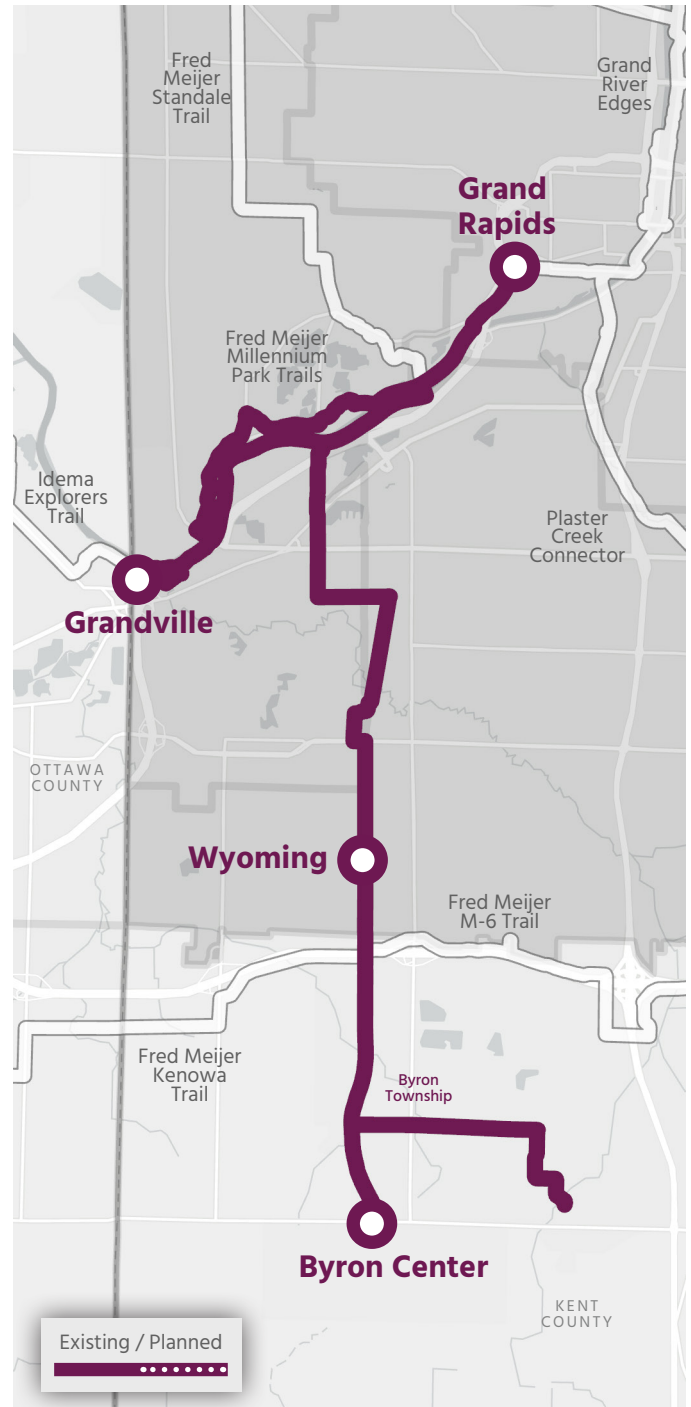
- Plan for and design upgrade of section between Prairie Parkway and Chicago Drive (currently only sidewalks). Consider on-street protected bike lanes to elevate as part of a larger regional network.
- Improve surface maintenance and safe road crossings.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

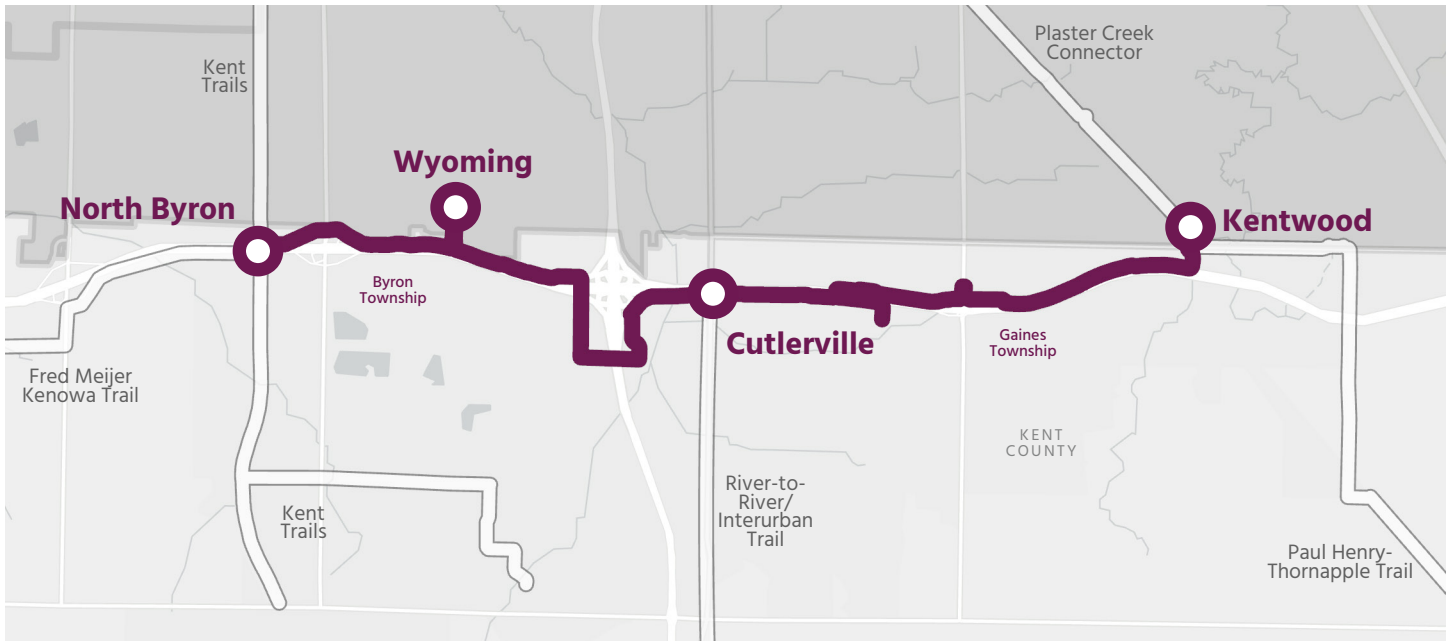
 **Serves area with significant disadvantaged communities**

Part of a larger regional connection that provides a north-south route through Grand Rapids.

It is also a key component of the broader Grand River Greenway vision, aiming to create a 76-mile trail network that connects over 30 parks across Ottawa and Kent counties.



# Fred Meijer M-6 Trail



Connects Kent Trails to Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail. Owned by Kent County. Managed by Kent County Parks. Primarily along M-6 Highway with the newest section complete in 2019.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 10 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** Kent County Volunteer Services

**CONTACT:** Kent County Parks

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

Part of a larger regional connection that provides a east-west connection from Holland to the Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail south of Grand Rapids.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Secure funding for surface maintenance, safe crossings and wayfinding.
- Connector trail between M-6 Trail and East West Trail in Kentwood is planned along Buck Creek.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system

# Lakeshore Trail

Between Holland and Grand Haven, 20 miles of paved side path parallel to Lakeshore Drive.. Owned by local municipalities.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 20 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers,

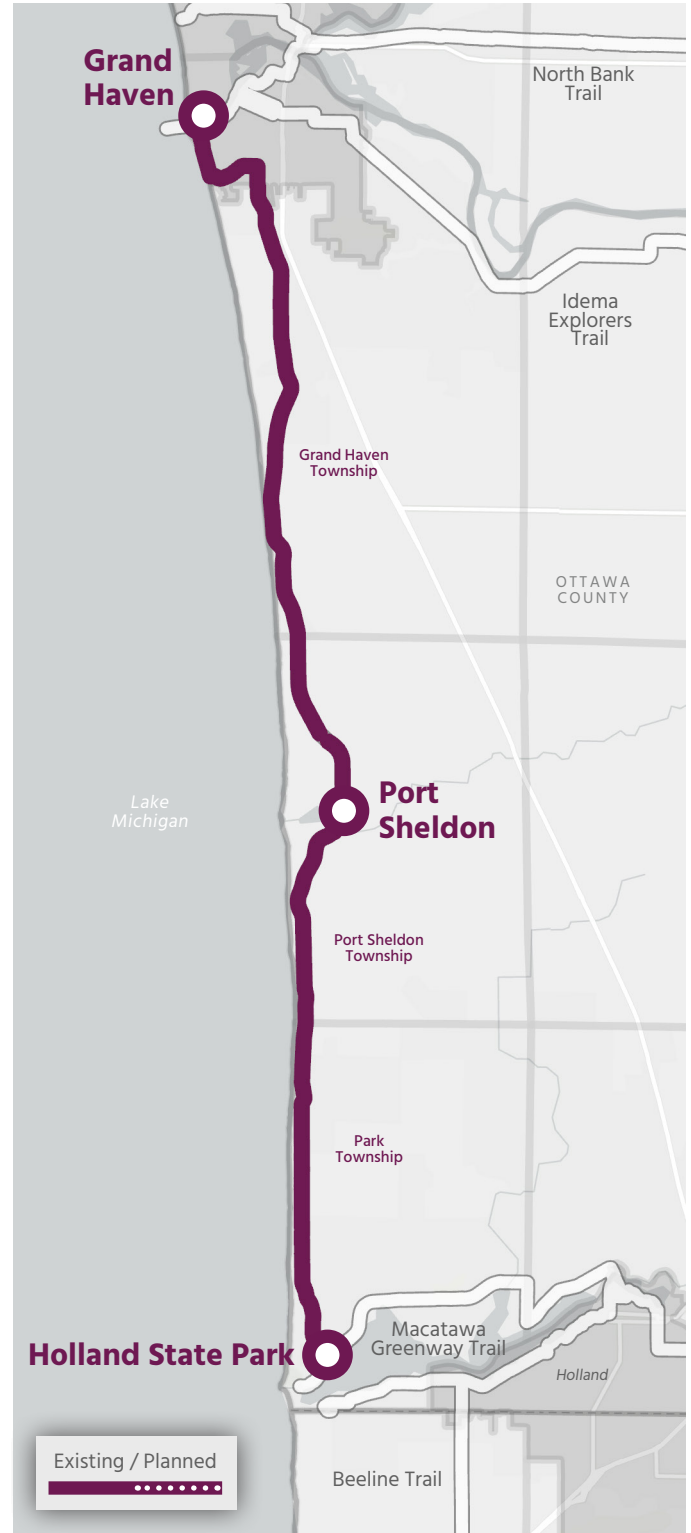
**CONTACT:** Local Municipalities

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Gap at Lakeshore Ave/Croswell Street at Consumers Energy.
- Plan and develop long-term solution (possibly on-street protected bike lanes) for route in Grand Haven north of Robbins Road (currently sidewalk or with traffic)
- As sections are rebuilt, upgrade and widen where possible to reflect regional importance.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

When combined with other trails in the region, the Lakeshore Trail has the potential to be part of a larger trail network that parallels the shoreline of Lake Michigan from Chicago to Ludington.



# Spoonville Trail

The 3.5 mile trail was completed in 2020 to connect the North Bank Trail to the Idema Explorers Trail across the Grand River. Owned and managed by Ottawa County Parks.

**LIFE STAGE:** Mature

**LENGTH:** 3.5 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**CONTACT:** Ottawa County Parks

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system including Grand Crossings Loop network/Grand River Greenway, etc.
- Review long-term need for amenities.
- Support North Bank Trail extension to the east.



**Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

This trail provides a key regional link between the North Bank Trail and Idema Explorers Trail due to the absence of available crossing over the Grand River in Ottawa County.



# North Bank Trail



Proposed 20 mile trail from Spring Lake to Marne. 6.3 miles existing from Spring Lake to Nunica/ Spoonville Trail. Easement owned by DNR from 88th Ave to Musketawa/Pioneer Trail junction. Municipalities in charge of building each section. Managed by local municipalities.

**LIFE STAGE:** Adolescent

**LENGTH:** 20 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path, Some Segments Not Defined Yet

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of the North Bank Trail

**CONTACT:** Local Municipalities



**Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

This trail provides a regional connection between along the north side of the Grand River between Grand Haven and Grand Rapids.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Partner to secure funds for design and construction of trail from Nunica to Coopersville. North Bank Trail Capital Campaign is kicking off in 2024 to raise matching funds for possible TAP grant. Crockery, Polkton, Coopersville and Wright Township have committee formed to focus on issue. Both Crockery and Spring Lake Township have passed millages for bike paths.
- Secure funds for North Bank Trail improvements and trailhead in downtown Coopersville.
- Secure funds for planning, design and construction of trail from Coopersville to Marne and the Musketawa Trail.
- Support for small communities to write grants, secure funds, coordinate, and manage project.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

# Idema Explorers Trail



Planned 10-foot wide, 36.5 mile trail connecting Grand Haven to Grand Rapids. 13+ miles exist. Section from Connor Bayou to 148th Ave scheduled construction 2025. Ottawa County Parks will own/manage most of it, though local partners will own/manage some sections.

**LIFE STAGE:** Adolescent

**LENGTH:** 36.5 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path, On-road Routes

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of Ottawa County Parks, Ottawa County Parks Foundation

**CONTACT:** Ottawa County Parks

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

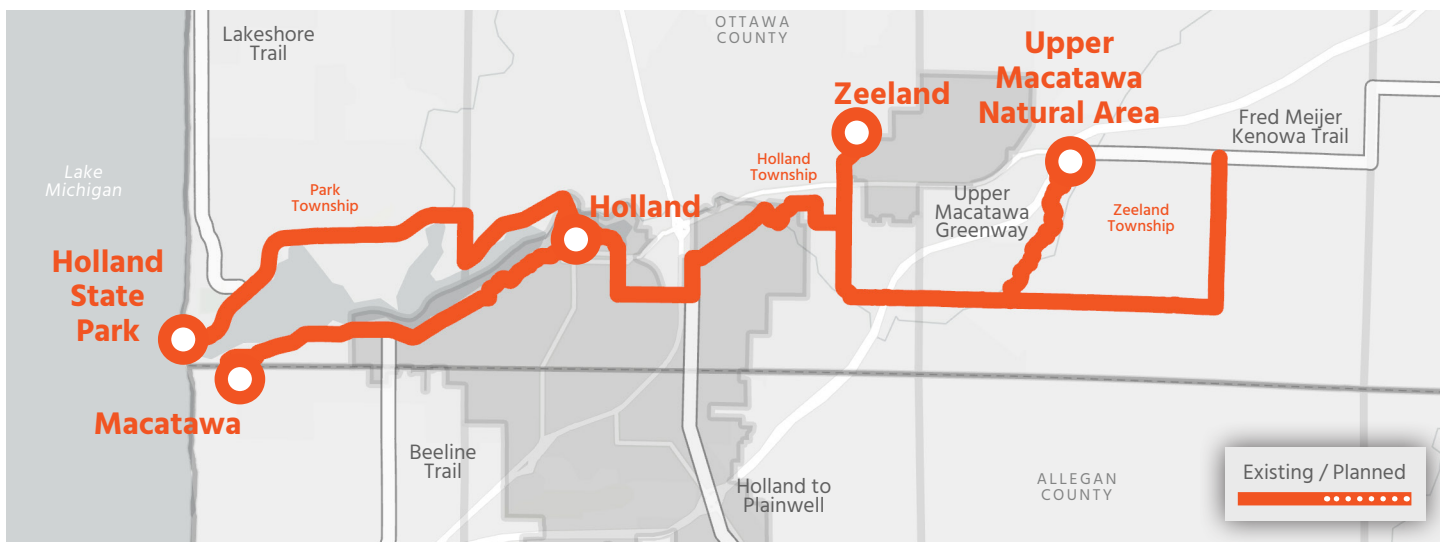
This trail provides a regional connection between along the south side of the Grand River between Grand Haven and Grand Rapids.

It is also a key component of the broader Grand River Greenway vision, aiming to create a 76-mile trail network that connects over 30 parks across Ottawa and Kent counties.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Secure funding, design and construct remaining Bass River sections to connect Riverside Park to Eastmanville Bayou (planned for 2024-2028).
- Acquire remaining permits, property and easements needed for routes.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

# Macatawa Greenway Trail



The Macatawa Greenway Trail 1.0 is a signed route plus 2.8-mile Upper Macatawa Trail that connects Laketown and Park Townships to Zeeland, Holland, and the Fred Meijer Kenowa Trail network. Owned by multiple municipalities/departments and Ottawa County. Managed by Ottawa County and Outdoor Discovery Center Network.

**LIFE STAGE:** Adolescent

**LENGTH:** 31 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path, On-road Routes, Sidewalks

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** The Macatawa River Greenway 501 (c)(3)

**CONTACT:** Ottawa County Parks and ODC

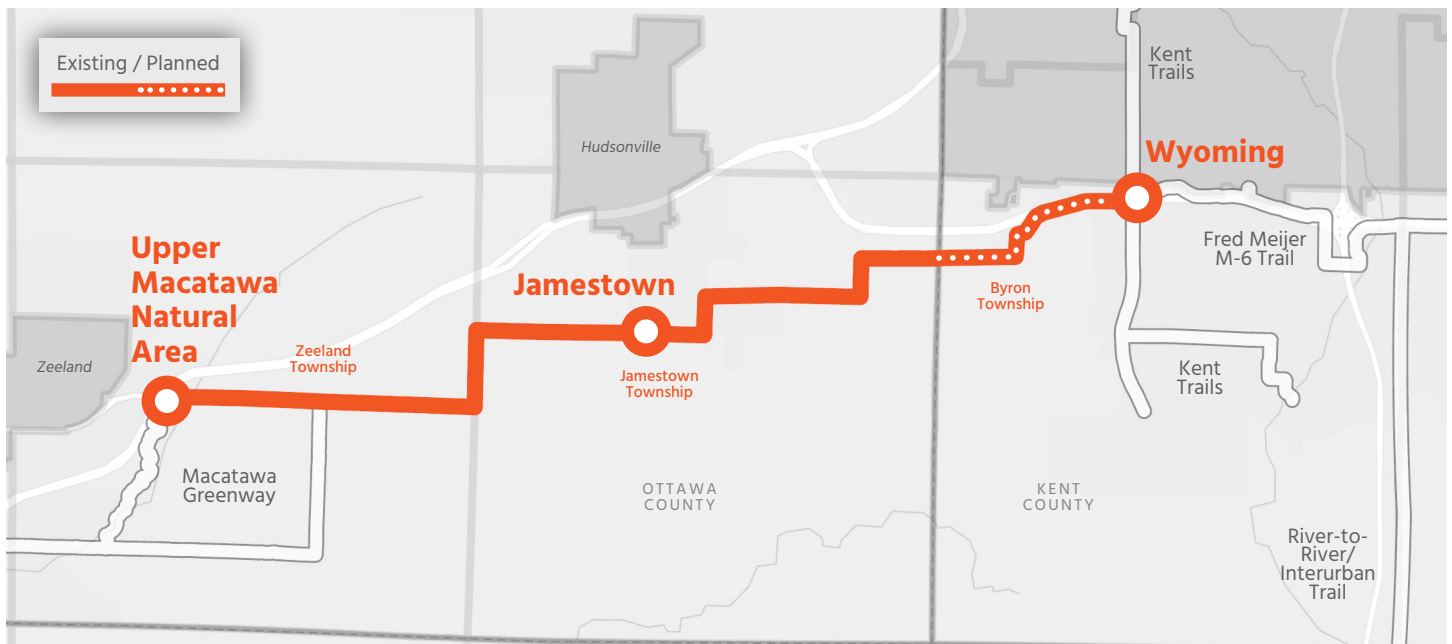
 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

This trail provides regional connections in and around Holland and is part of a larger regional connection that offers an east-west route from Holland to the Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail south of Grand Rapids.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Plan for and design upgrade of informal signed routes such from Paw Paw Drive to Windows on the Waterfront Park in Holland (currently only sidewalks). Includes challenging crossing of US 31 at 16th Street. Consider on-street protected bike lanes to elevate sections as part of a larger regional network.
- Secure final easements and work to increase amount of trail along/near the river.
- Secure funding for crossing BR-196, connecting trail along Macatawa River in Zeeland Twp.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

# Fred Meijer Kenowa Trail



Owned and managed by local municipalities, this 9.8-mile trail aims to connect Grand Rapids to Holland. It features a combination of 10-foot paved paths, 5-foot shoulders, and wide sidewalks.

**LIFE STAGE:** Adolescent

**LENGTH:** 15 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path, On-Road Route

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**CONTACT:** Local Municipalities

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

Part of a larger regional connection that provides an east-west connection from Holland to the Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail south of Grand Rapids.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Efforts ongoing to close the gap through Byron Township.
- Secure funding for on-going trail maintenance.
- Coordinate with nearby regional trails to install West Michigan regional wayfinding system.

# Grand River Edges

Owned and managed by the City of Grand Rapids, with maintenance supported by DGRI (Downtown Improvement District) in the Downtown core, this trail runs along over 5 miles of the Grand River and includes 2.2 miles of paved trail in Riverside Park.

**LIFE STAGE:** Adolescent

**LENGTH:** 9 Miles

**FACILITY:** Paved Shared Use Path

**ALLOWED:** Bicyclists, Walkers/Hikers

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of Grand Rapids Park

**CONTACT:** City of Grand Rapids and DGRI

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Complete trail gaps (Leonard to Ann, Fulton to Wealthy).
- Complete upgrades to Canal Park and Ah-Nab-Awen Park sections.
- Complete Operations & Maintenance Study (City of GR, Kent County, DGRI).
- Activation, education and programming of public spaces along trail.
- Coordination with Greenway Public Art Master Plan and Grand River Corridor Equity Framework.

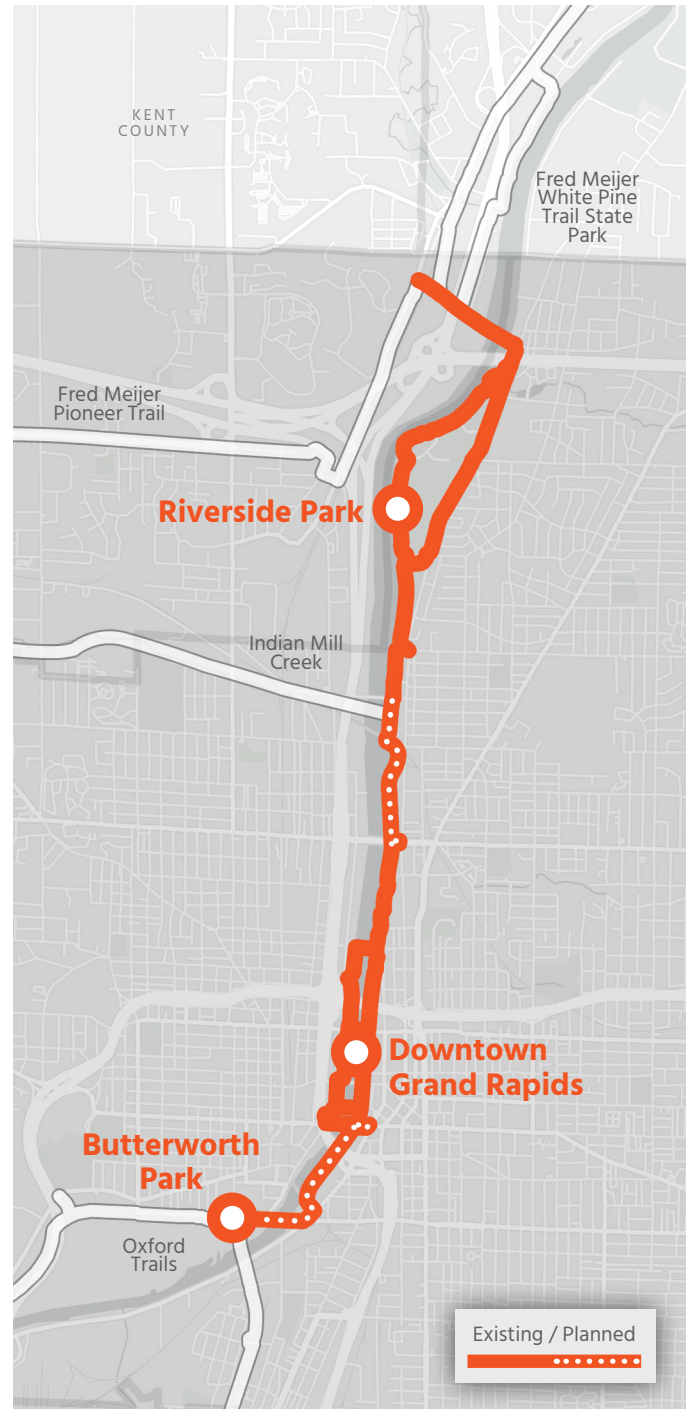


**Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**



**Serves area with significant disadvantaged communities**

A significant link in a larger regional connection that provides a north-south route through Grand Rapids to the Grand River Greenway in Kent County and the Idema Explorers Trail in Ottawa County.



# Coastal Trail

Planned trail between Ferrysburg and Muskegon. Contact Ottawa County and local municipalities

**LIFE STAGE:** Infant

**LENGTH:** 13 Miles

**FACILITY:** Undetermined

**ALLOWED:** Undetermined

**CONTACT:** Local Municipalities

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Norton Shores - construct 8' wide paved side path (west side of Lake Harbor Road) to connect Lake Harbor Park to PJ Hoffmaster State Park. City committed \$2 million in ARPA funds.
- Plan for additional segments.

### Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans

When combined with other trails in the region, the Coastal Trail has the potential to be part of a larger trail network that parallels the shoreline of Lake Michigan from Chicago to Ludington.



# Plaster Creek Connector

A proposed trail that follows along Plaster Creek in southern Grand Rapids. Not to be confused with the existing Plaster Creek Trail segment, which spurs off this connection going east-west, connecting to Ken-O-Sha Park and the Kroc Center.

**LIFE STAGE:** Infant

**LENGTH:** 6 Miles

**FACILITY:** Undetermined

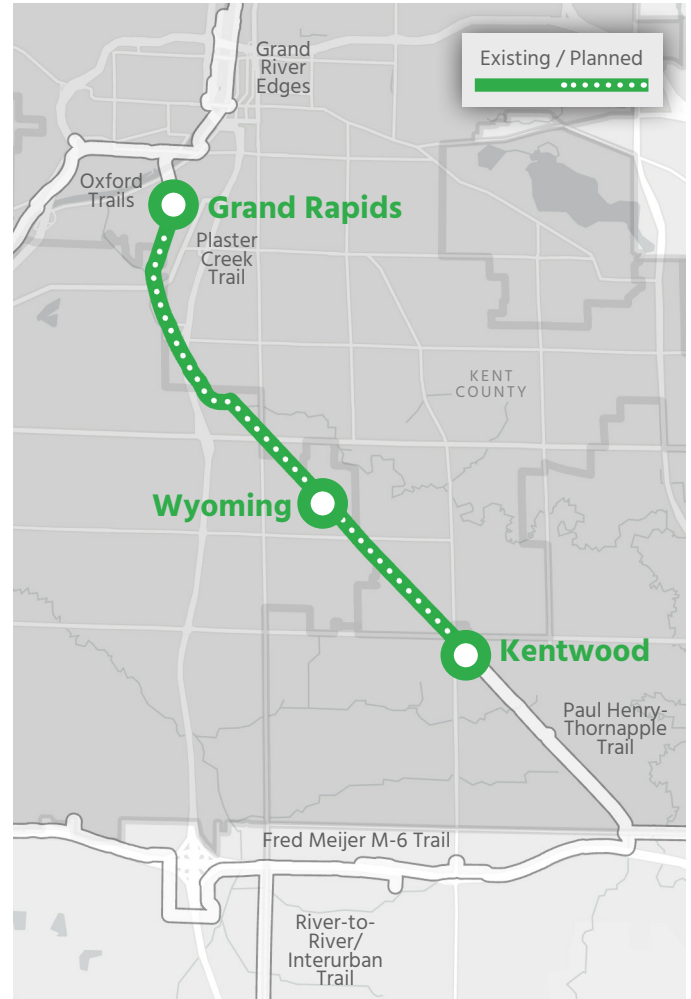
**ALLOWED:** Undetermined

**VOLUNTEER:** Friends of Grand Rapids Parks

**CONTACT:** City of Grand Rapids

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

- Complete planning study for routing, phasing, design, cost estimates as well as housing and economic development opportunities for trail from Buchanan Avenue to Godfrey/Oxford Trail.
- Secure funding for design and construction.
- Completing gaps in existing Plaster Creek Trails spur that links into this route.
- Focus planning activities around housing and economic development along this corridor.

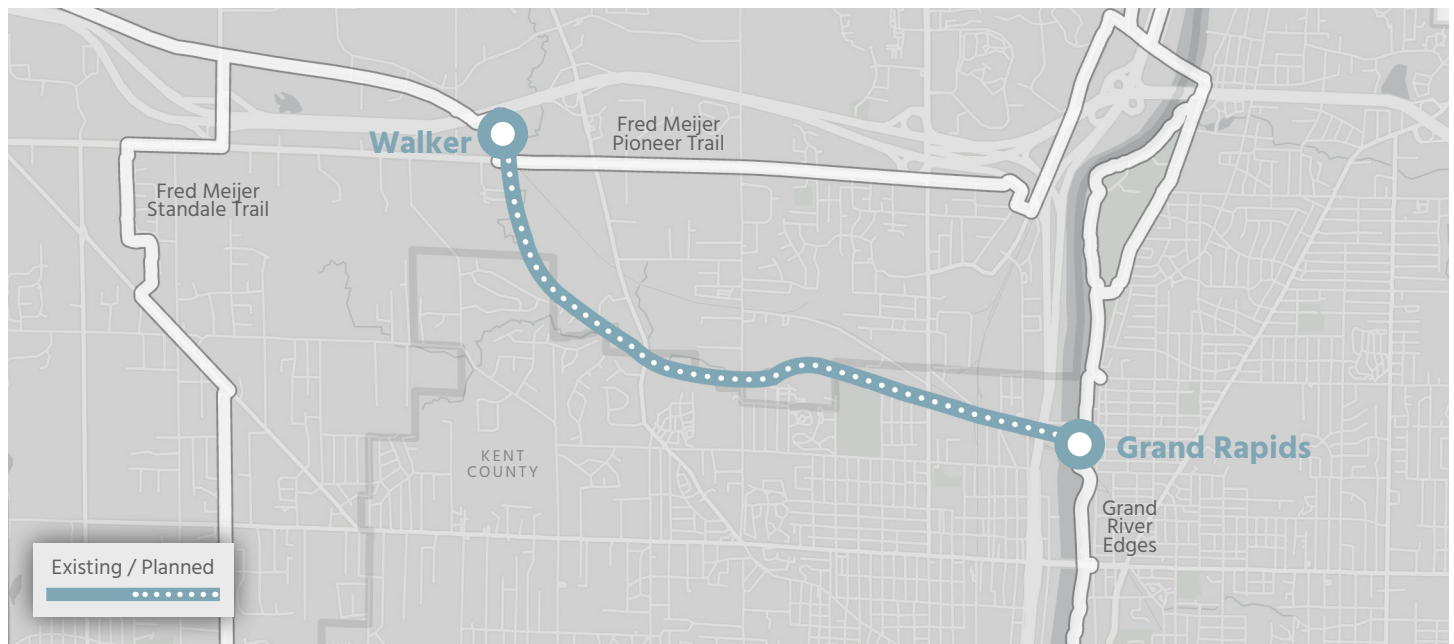


 Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans

 Serves area with significant disadvantaged communities

A significant link in a larger regional connection that provides a north-south route through Grand Rapids.

# Indian Mill Creek



Connects the Fred Meijer Pioneer Trail in Walker to Grand Rivers Edges Trail in Grand Rapids. Also referred to as the Grandwalk Greenway.

**LIFE STAGE:** Vision/Aspirational

**LENGTH:** 4 Miles

**FACILITY:** Undetermined

**ALLOWED:** Undetermined

**CONTACT:** City of Grand Rapids and Walker

 **Regionally significant trail identified in existing plans**

Provides a direct off-road connection to regional trails on the west side of Grand Rapids.

## 5-YEAR FOCUS

This long-term connection is recognized as valuable for enhancing the regional trail network, however, it is not likely to receive considerable focus or resources in the immediate future. This is due to a variety of challenges such as private property and easements, limited local support, completion of other priorities, etc. Despite these obstacles, this connection has been envisioned by various stakeholders in the past and continues to be acknowledged as an integral component of the long-term vision for the regional trail network. Over the next five-year period this aspirational connection should continue to be monitored and evaluated as opportunities arise for its realization.







# Supplemental Maps

This chapter features a collection of maps developed during the planning process. These maps serve as essential tools in visualizing and understanding the various elements and connections within the West Michigan Regional Trail Master Plan. They provide detailed insights into existing and proposed trail networks, along with demographic information, to give a clearer picture of the region's needs and opportunities for enhancing non-motorized, multi-use pathways across West Michigan communities and destinations.

- Trail Surface
- National and Regional Trail Designations
- Access to Population Centers
- Access to Rural Town Centers
- Access to Parks and Recreation
- Traffic Safety
- Route Stress
- Environmental Stressors
- Population Density
- Transportation Access
- Heart Disease
- Diabetes
- Lack of Greenspace
- Low Life Expectancy
- Poverty
- Low Income
- Maximizing Trail Impact: Strategic Gaps in Under-Invested Areas
- Bridging the Gap: Other Key Connections in the Regional Network
- Friend Group and Volunteer Support (Self Assessment)
- Foundations and Convention and Visitor Bureaus Support (Self Assessment)
- Support from Local Residents, governments and officials associated with the trail (Self Assessment)
- Regional Planning Commission, MPO's and MDOT support (Self Assessment)

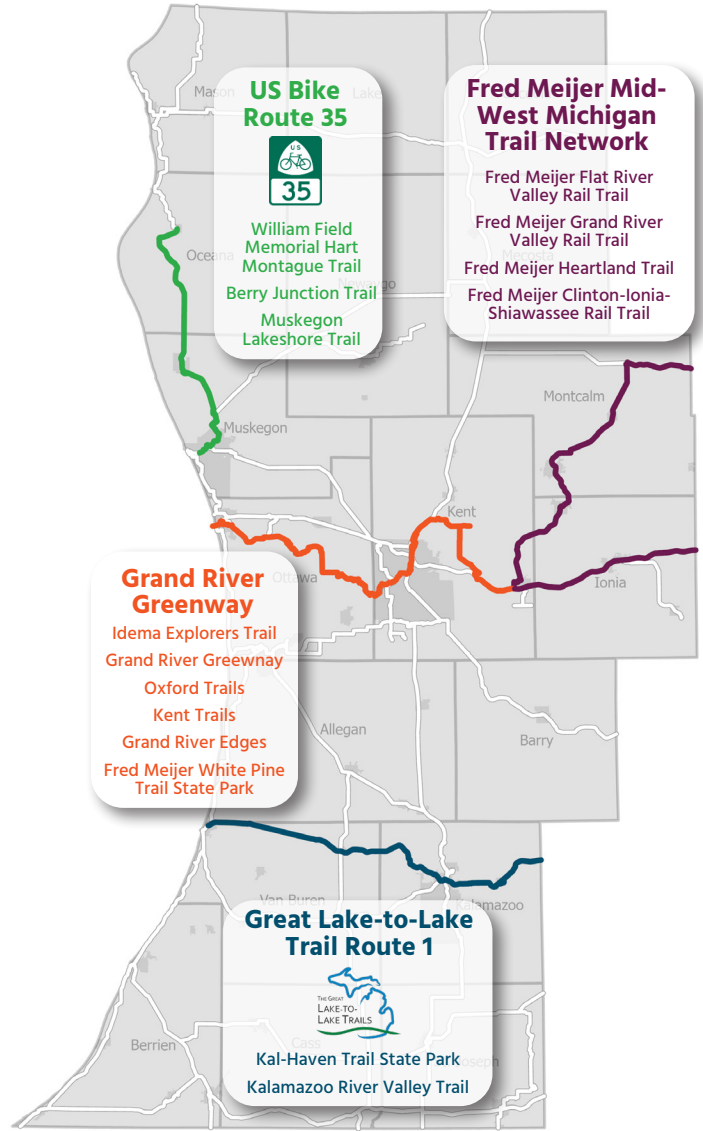
# Trail Analysis Data

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The maps in this chapter were developed during the planning process to aid West Michigan Trails in decision-making regarding regional trail development. The trail analysis maps utilize both subjective and objective data sources, drawing from various datasets to understand trail impact, including demographics and environmental factors. Key data sources include the US Census and the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool. Additionally, data collected from trail stakeholders through surveys and correspondence was used to support the information on the maps.

Despite its benefits, the data has some challenges and limitations. Acknowledging these is crucial for stakeholders using the maps to ensure findings are interpreted within the context of the data's capabilities and potential constraints.

- **Focus on Regional Impact:** Spanning 18 counties in West Michigan, the analysis data provides a panoramic view emphasizing a region-wide perspective. Detailed data on local parks and specific destinations along trails are often grouped under broader categories due to the project's scope.
- **Data Limitations:** The accuracy of assessments depends on the quality and availability of data. For example, US Census population data may not fully account for seasonal population fluctuations or transient populations like university students. Supplementary data, such as rental information, helps mitigate these limitations but does not offer a perfect solution.
- **Subjectivity in Assessment:** Achieving complete objectivity in assessing trails is often unattainable. Recognizing this inherent subjectivity, the analysis relies on underlying data to provide a balanced approach to evaluation.
- **Other Influences:** Factors such as politics can significantly affect trail planning but are challenging to quantify within this assessment framework. While the data maps cover key elements, this analysis does not capture all nuances of trail planning.
- **One Tool Among Many:** These maps serve as an informational resource, providing stakeholders with information to support well-informed decision-making. This data should be used in conjunction with other available information to inform decisions.



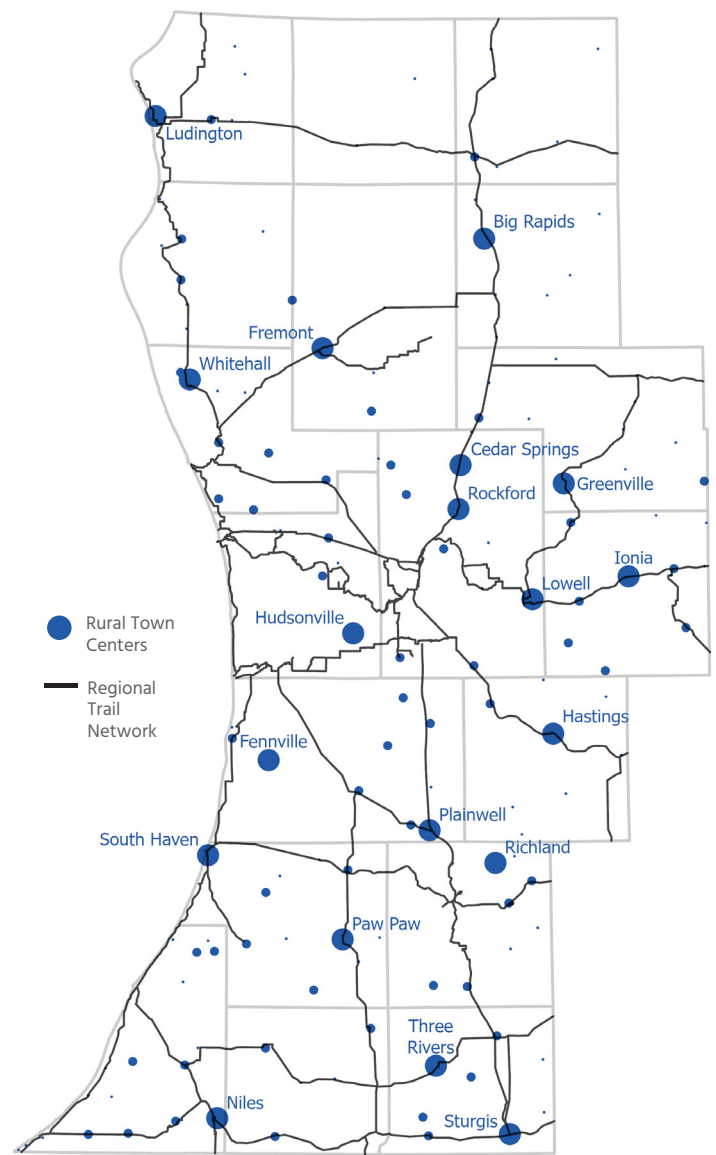
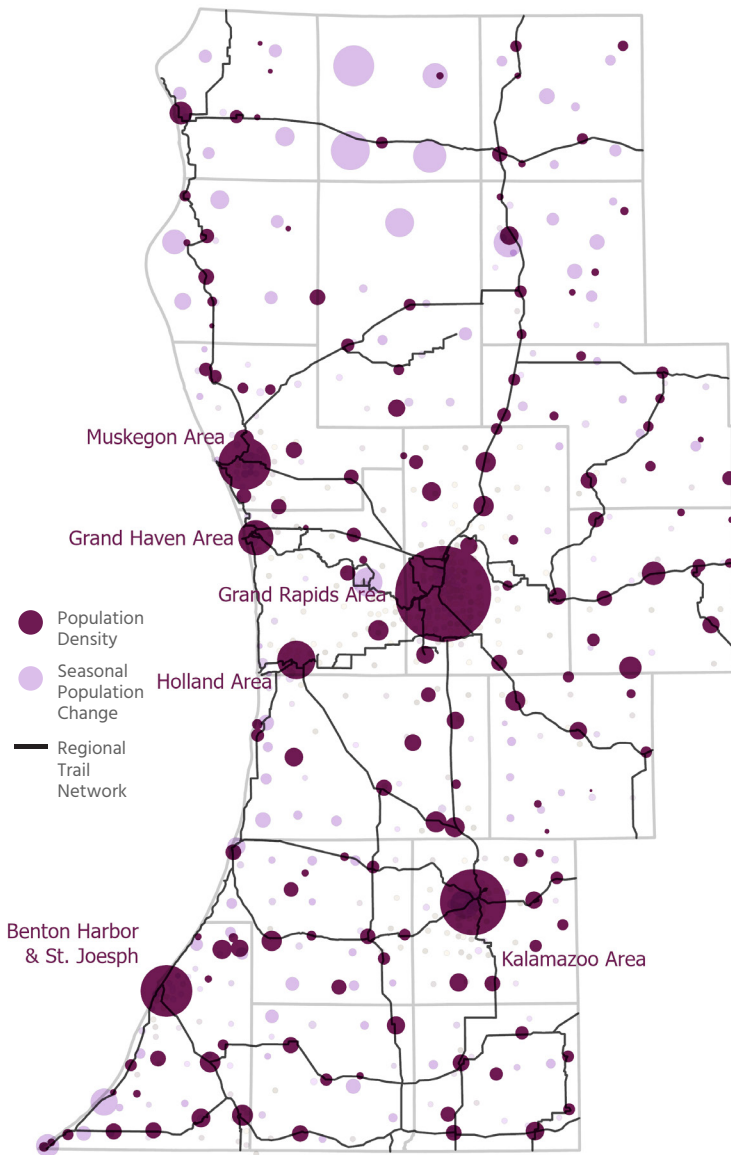
## Trail Surface

This map illustrates the various surface types of regional trails, including paved, crushed stone, and natural surfaces. Understanding the trail surface is crucial for planning, accessibility, and maintenance considerations.

## National and Regional Trail Designations

Several West Michigan regional trails combine to form portions of larger trail networks. This approach has proven effective in promoting, branding, attracting funding, and realizing the “bigger picture” of long-range connectivity.

Note: The US Bike Route continues north and south along the coast but currently uses on-road facilities instead of regional trails, except for those listed.



## Access to Population Centers

This analysis evaluates how trails connect to population centers. It examines the population density of cities, towns, villages, and places. Additionally, it accounts for seasonal populations in areas such as tourist towns and universities.

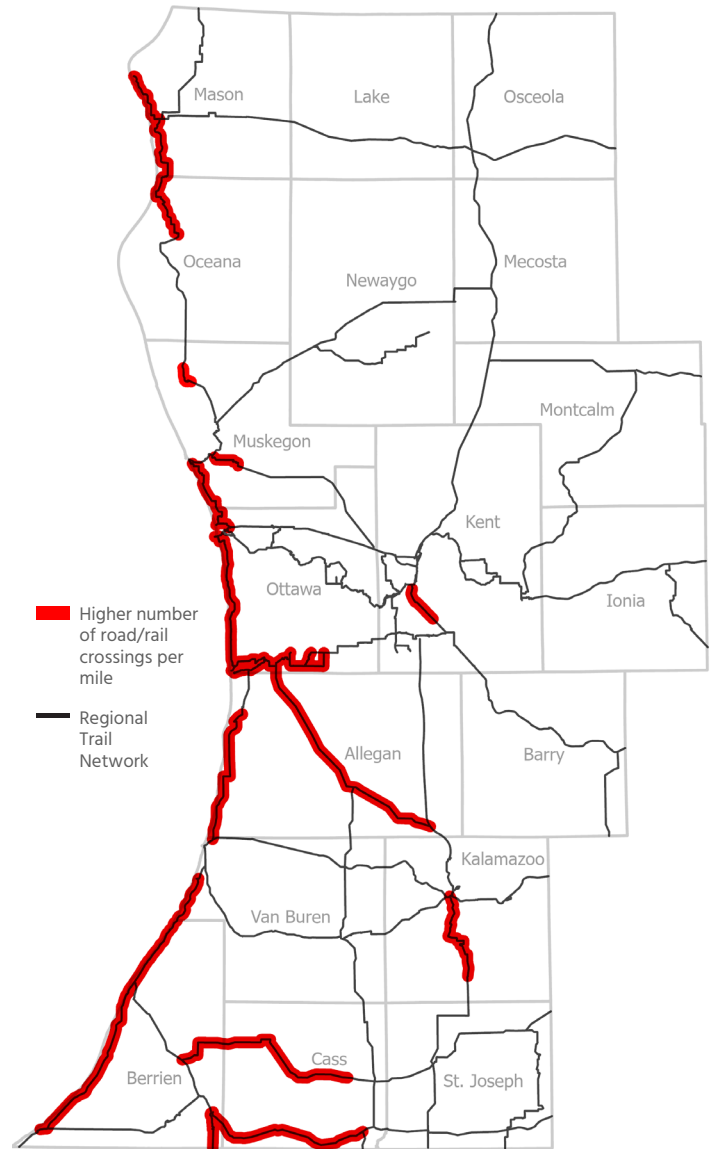
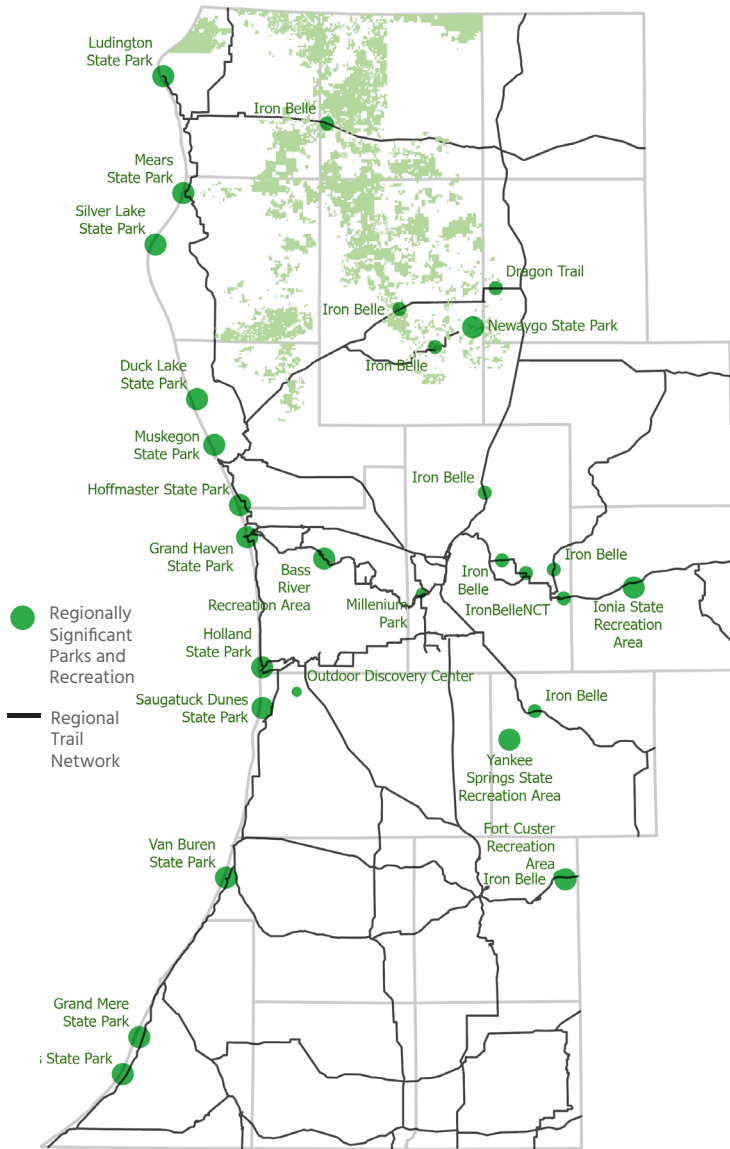
The dots are proportional to population size. The light purple dots represent areas with seasonal and transient populations.

Source: US Census 2020

## Access to Rural Town Centers

This analysis aims to identify trails that enhance connectivity to smaller and/or rural communities. It evaluates trail access to rural town centers with population densities under 2,000 people per square mile.

The blue dot represent rural town centers. the larger circles represent rural town centers characterized by the presence of big-box commercial establishments like Meijer or Walmart that tend to have more amenities due to their larger draw.



## Access to Parks and Recreation

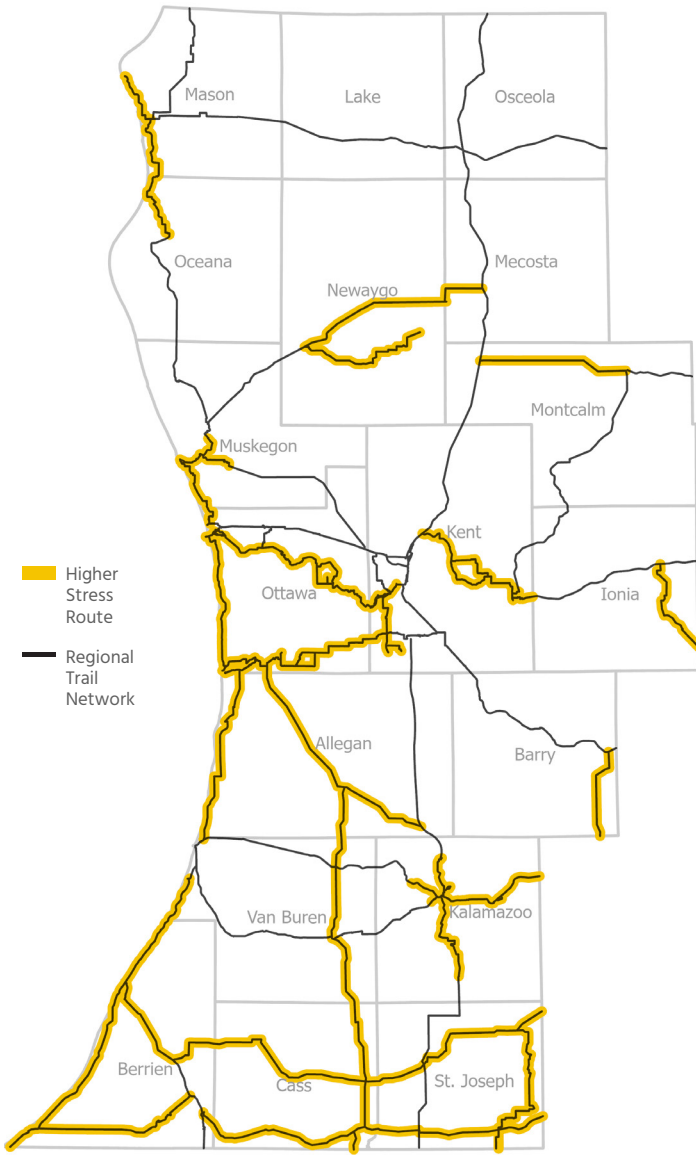
Trails were evaluated based on their proximity to regionally significant parks, recreation areas, and major trail networks such as State Park and Recreation Areas, Iron Belle Trail, North Country Trail and the Dragon Trail.

The green dots represent regionally significant parks and recreation areas. The Huron-Mansitee National Forest is also represented on the map in light green for reference.

## Traffic Safety

Evaluates traffic safety along trails, focusing on the number of road and railroad crossings per mile. Recognizing that a higher number of conflict points increases the likelihood of crashes, trails averaging a higher number of crossings per mile negatively indicate a lower level of traffic safety.

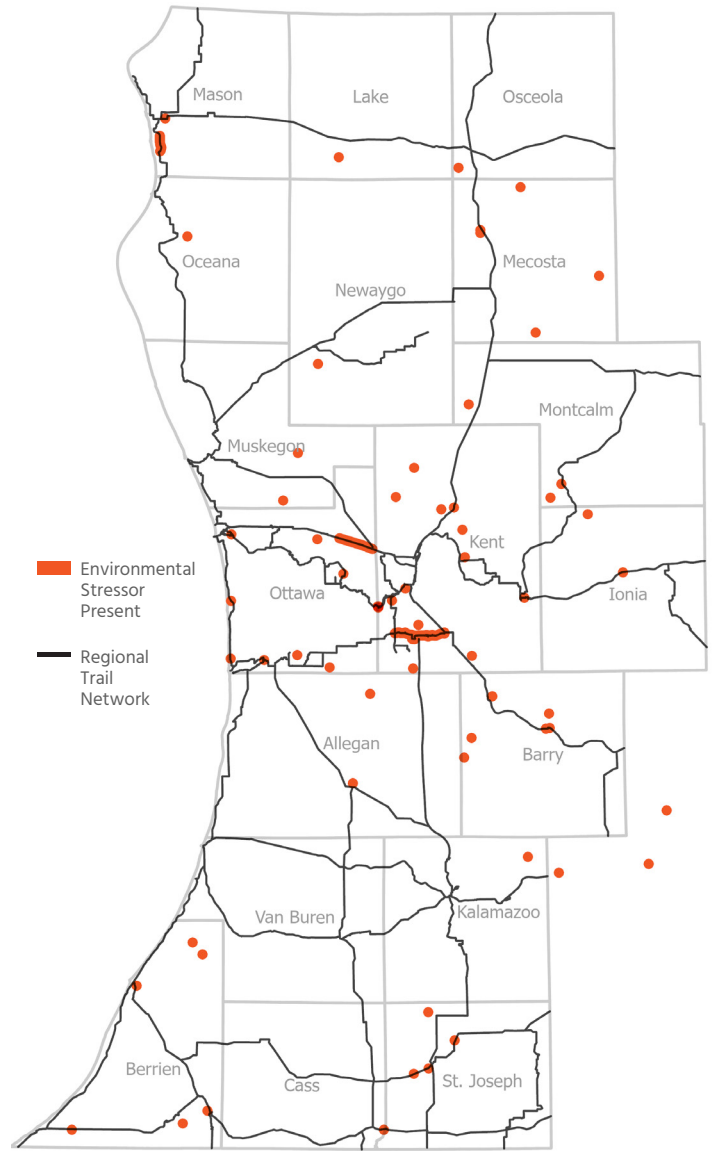
The red line represents trails with a higher average number of road/railroad crossing per mile.



## Route Stress

Considers route stress along trails, with an emphasis on promoting family-friendly pathways situated away from vehicular traffic, such as off-road trails. Trails adjacent to road corridors, such as sidepaths, which expose users to air and noise pollution and minor conflict points at driveways, indicate increased route stress.

The yellow line represents trails adjacent to road corridors. Please note that the exact nature of some of the planned trail connections are not currently defined and status could change.

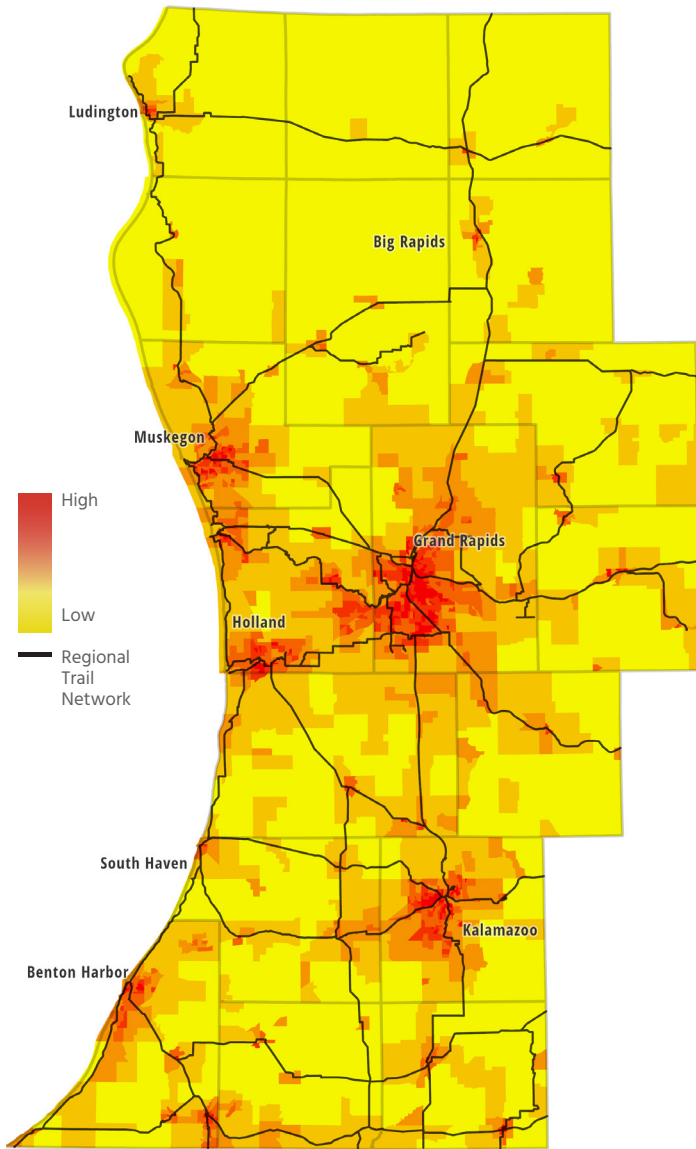


## Environmental Stressors

Evaluates environmental stressors along trails, prioritizing a comfortable and aesthetically pleasing journey for users. It considers visual, auditory, and olfactory elements that may diminish the trail experience, such as adjacency to landfills, freeways, and wastewater treatment facilities.

The red dots represent locations of environment stressors.

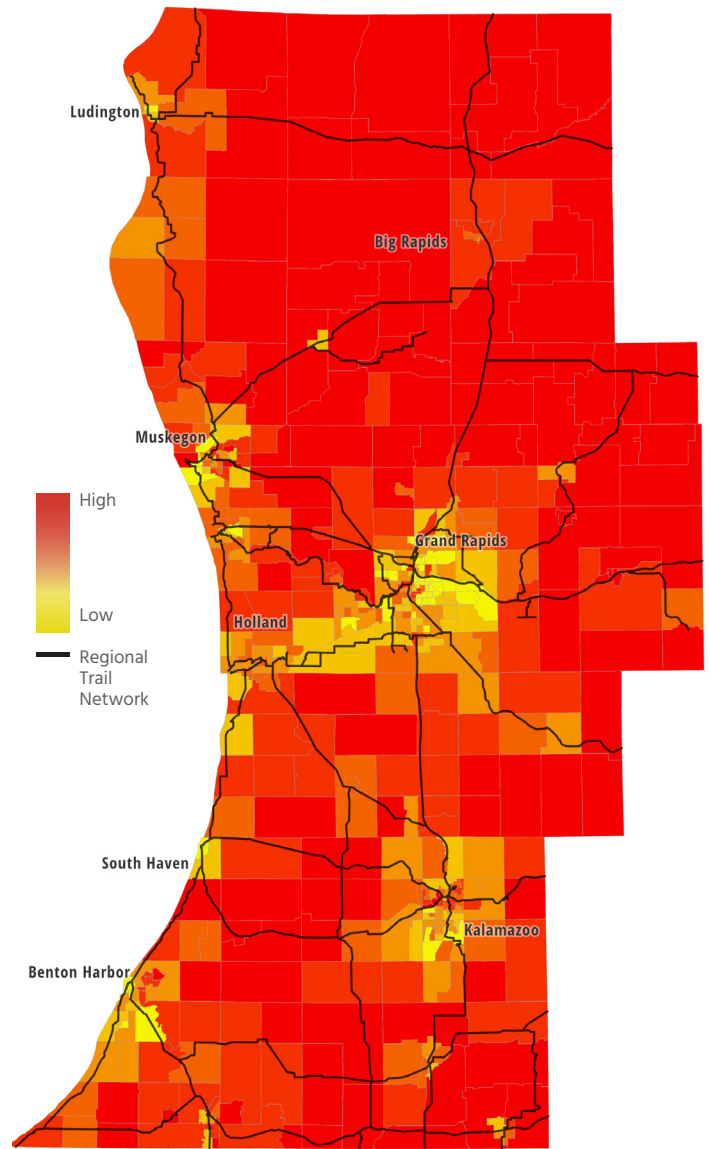




## Population Density

This map represents the distribution of population based on census block groups.

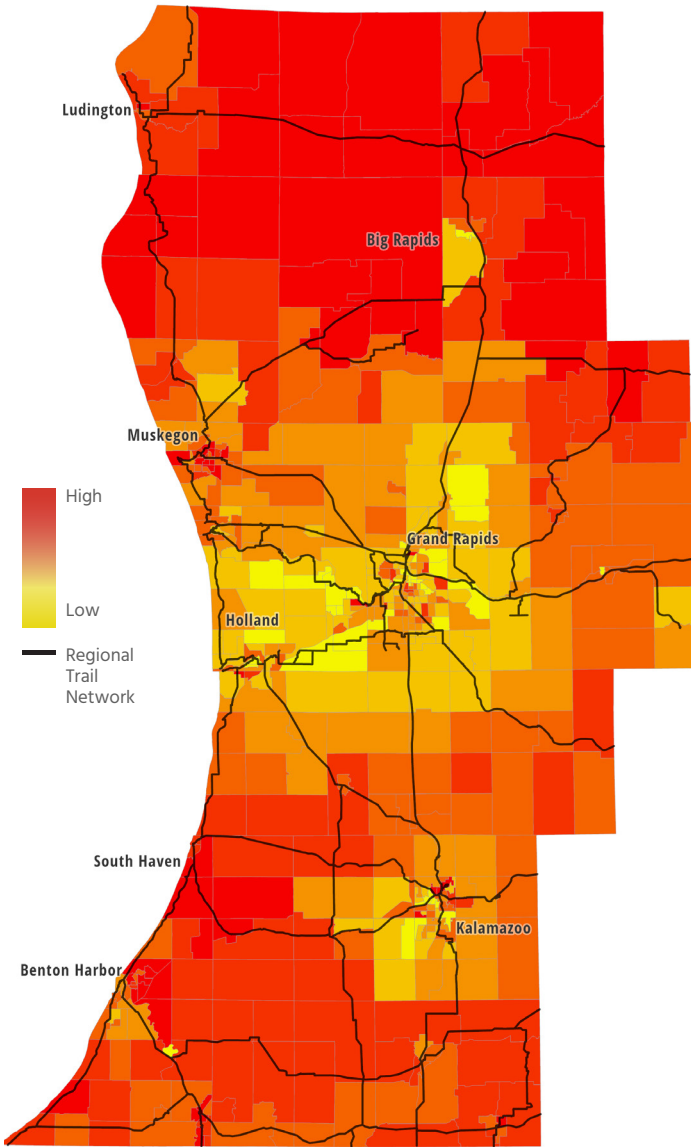
Source: US Census 2020



## Transportation Access

This map identifies census tracts above the 90th percentile for average relative cost and time spent on transportation, indicating areas where people spend more and take longer to get where they need to go.

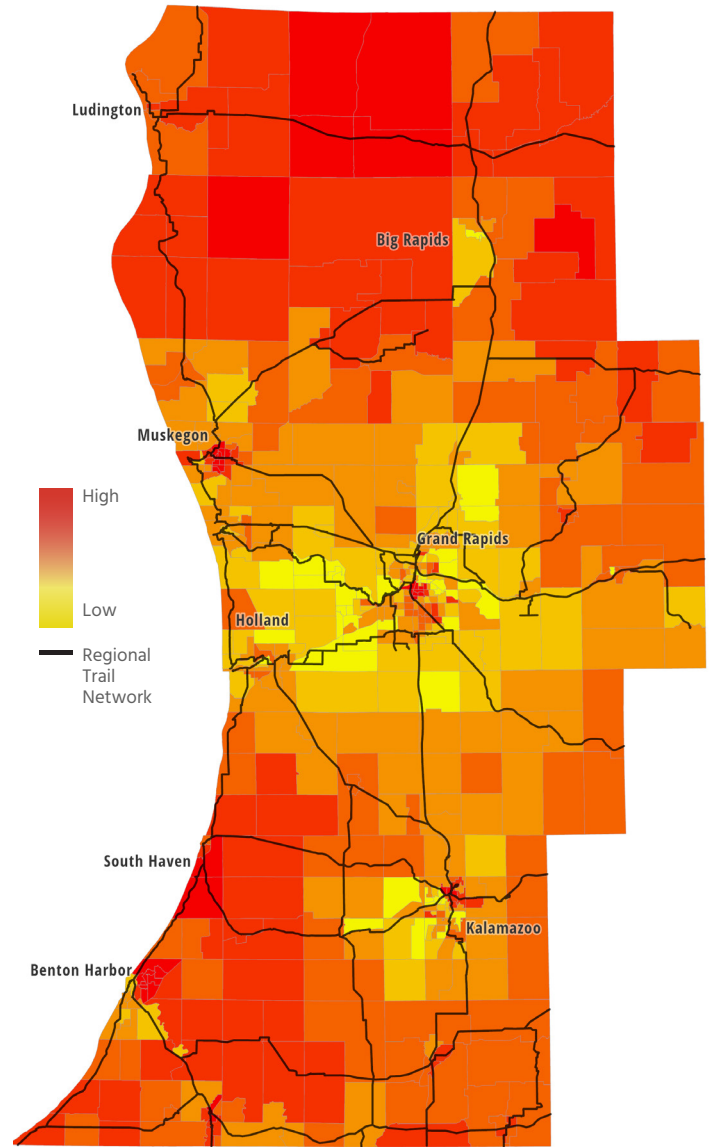
Source: Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)



## Heart Disease

This map shows the share of people aged 18 and older who have been diagnosed with angina or coronary heart disease by a health professional.

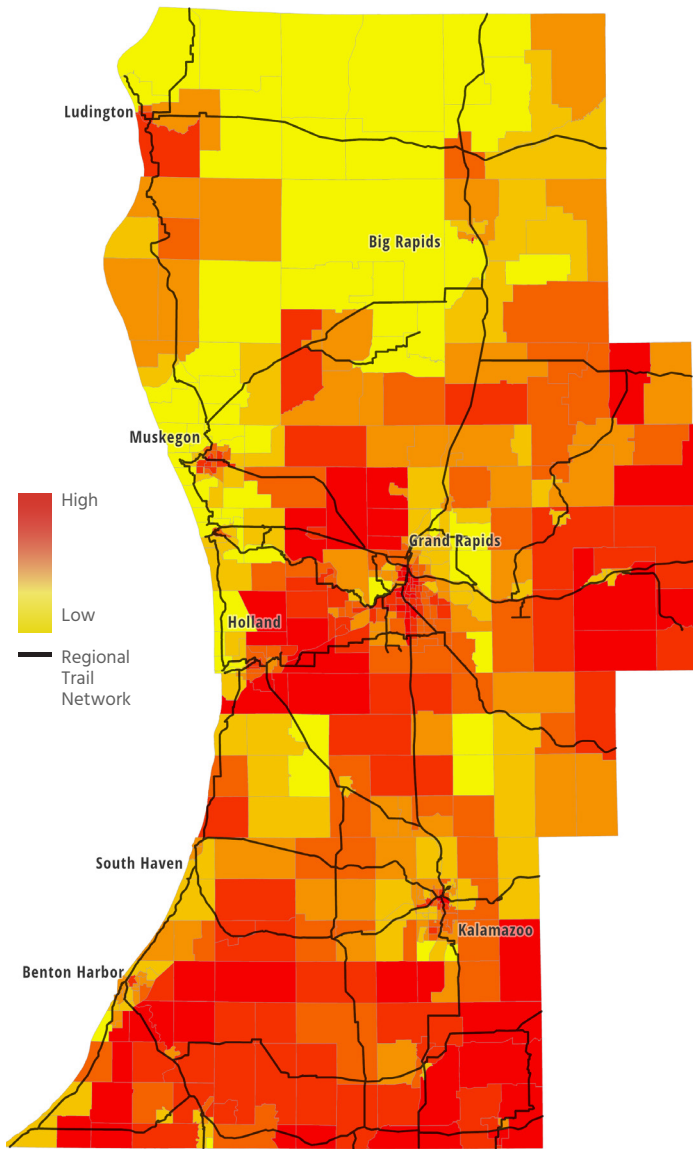
Source: *Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)*



## Diabetes

This map shows the share of people aged 18 and older who have been diagnosed with diabetes, excluding diabetes during pregnancy, by a health professional.

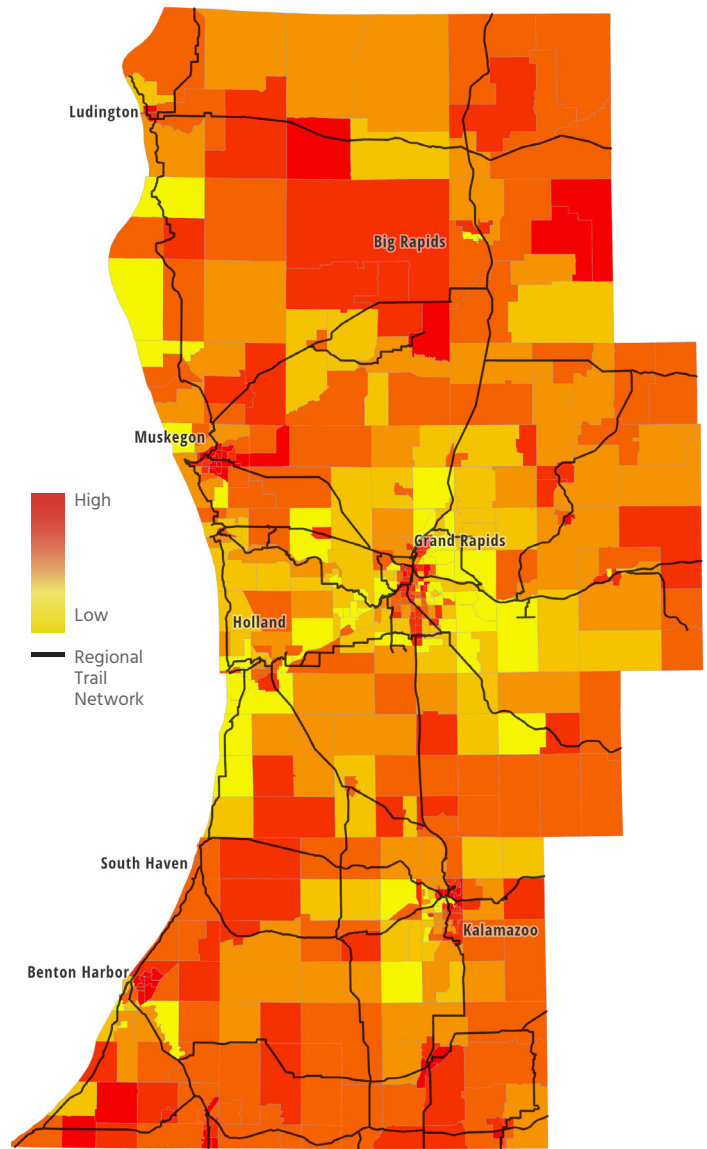
Source: *Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)*



## Lack of Greenspace

This map shows the share of land with developed surfaces covered with artificial materials like concrete or pavement, excluding cropland used for agricultural purposes. Areas that lack green space are also known as nature-deprived.

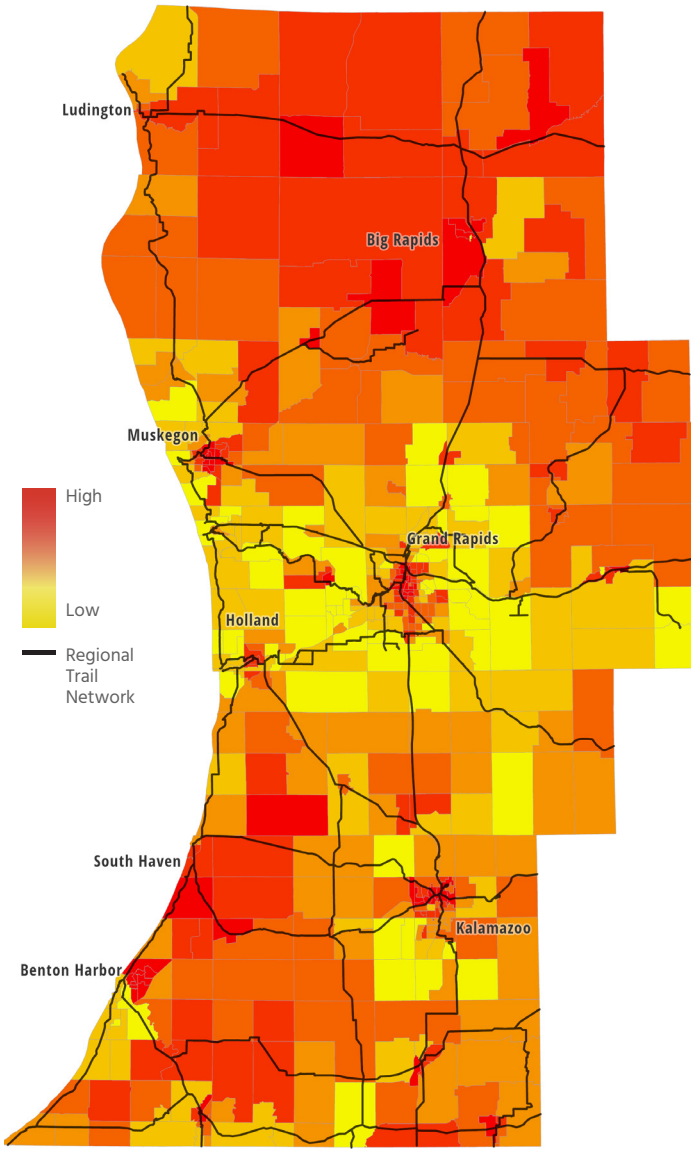
Source: *Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)*



## Low Life Expectancy

This data highlights areas where life expectancy is significantly below the national average. These regions often face various socio-economic and environmental challenges that contribute to lower life expectancy rates.

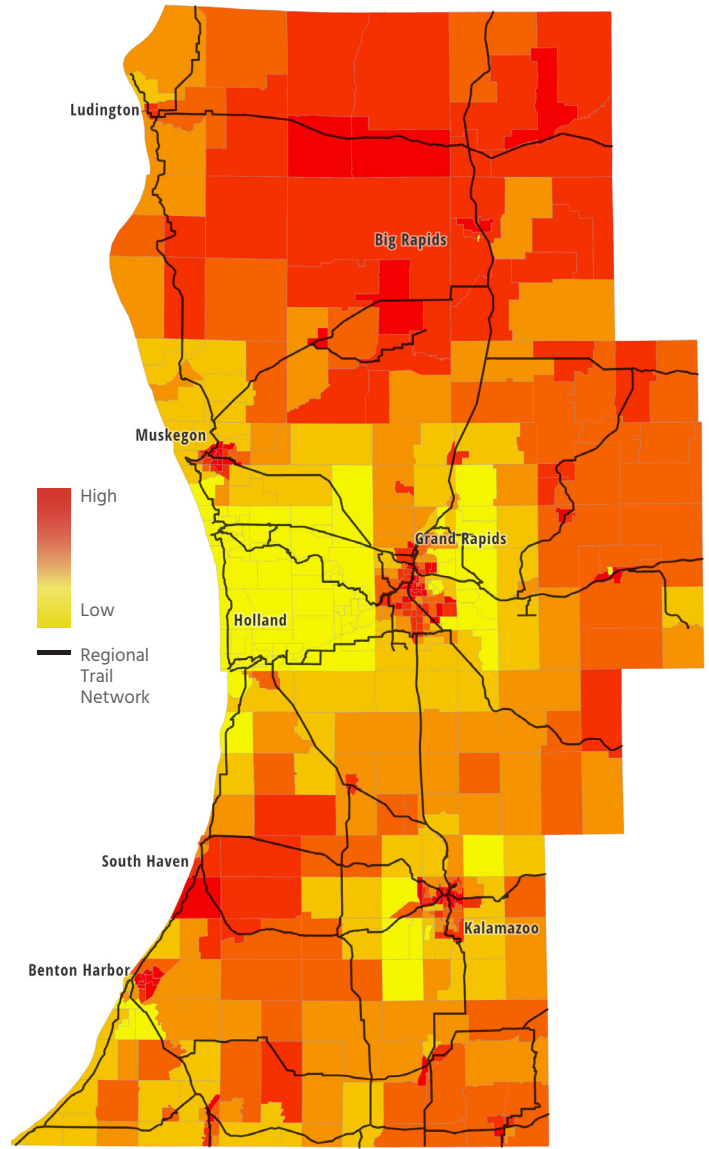
Source: *Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)*.



## Poverty

This map shows the share of people living at or below 100% of the federal poverty level.

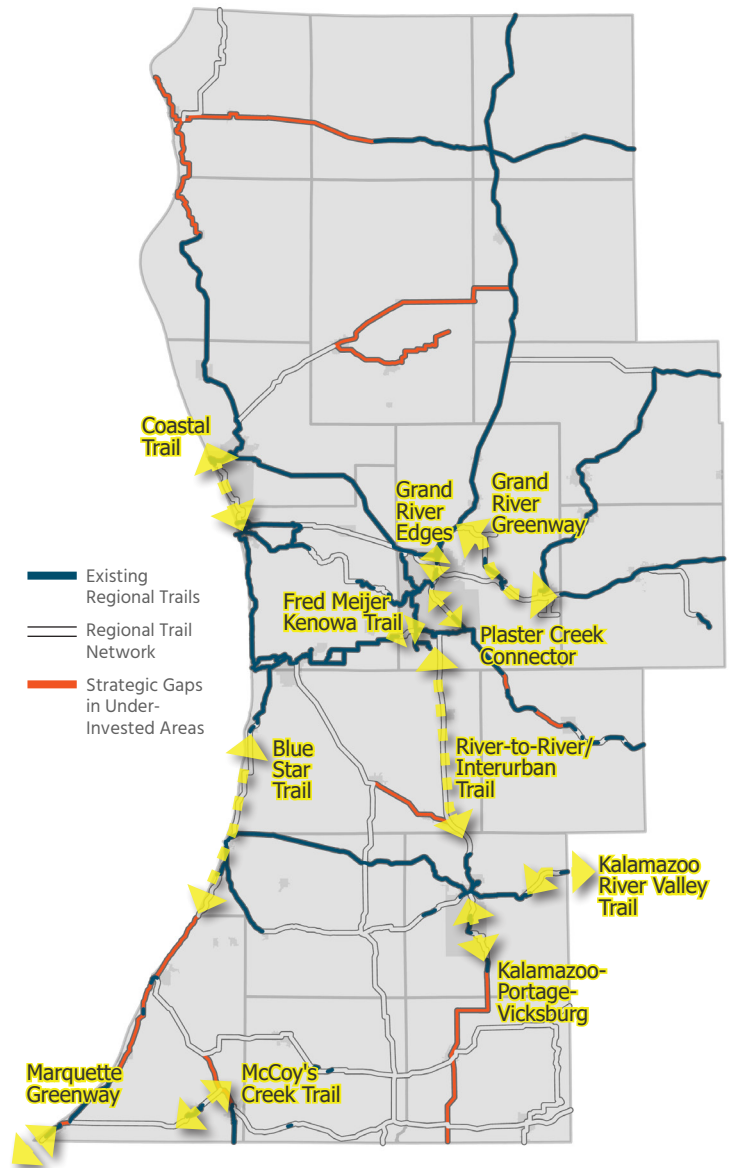
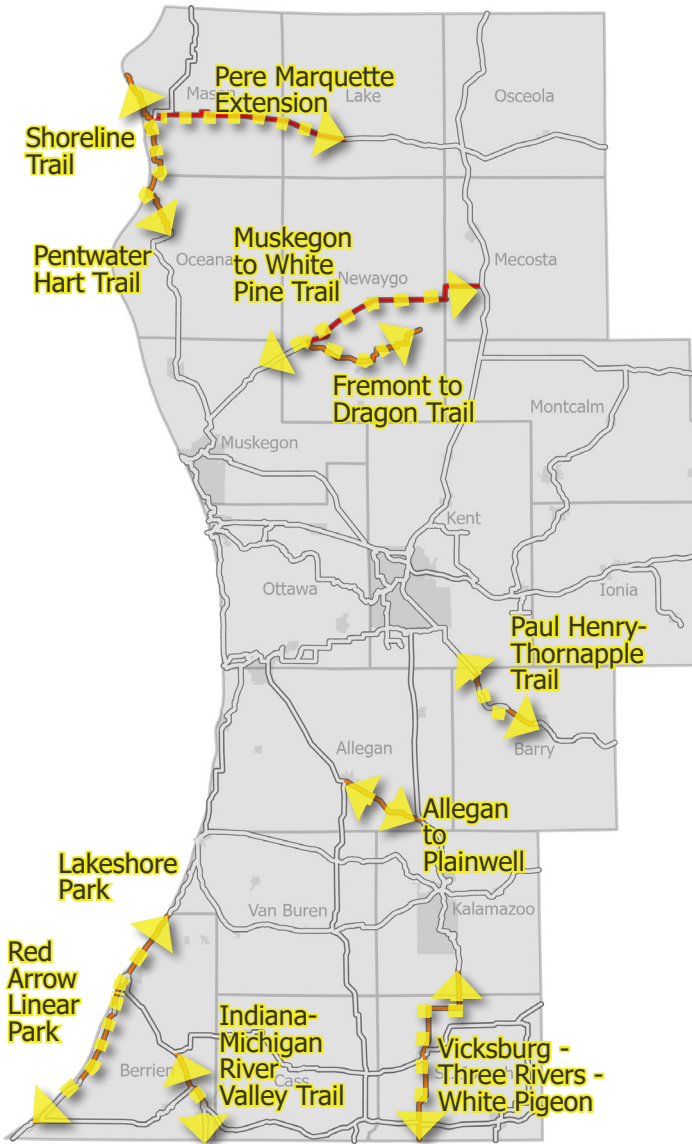
Source: *Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)*



## Low Income

This map identifies census tracts above the 65th percentile for households with income less than or equal to twice the federal poverty level, excluding students enrolled in higher education.

Source: *Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)*.



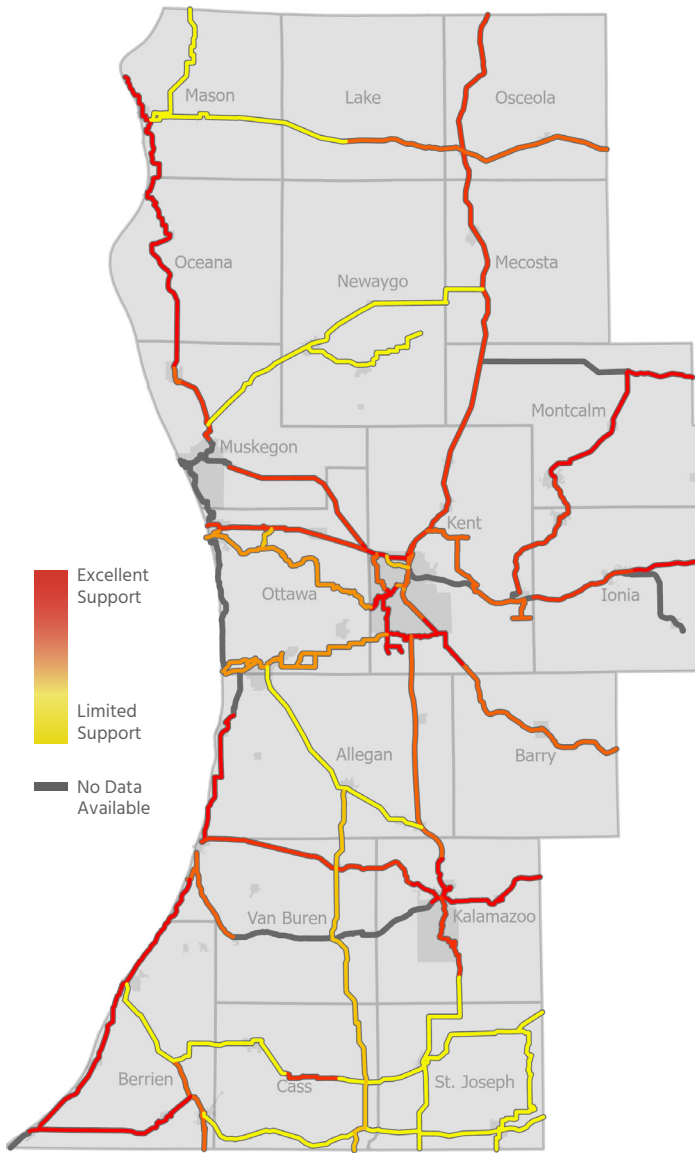
## Maximizing Trail Impact: Strategic Gaps in Under-Invested Areas

This map highlights trail gaps that have been identified as possessing significant community impact potential, particularly in historically under-invested areas. With the aim of maximizing value and return on investment, these gaps present valuable opportunities for targeted trail expansion efforts.

This analysis considered equitable access to disadvantaged areas, access to population centers, access to rural town centers, access to parks and recreation, traffic safety, route stress, and environmental stressors.

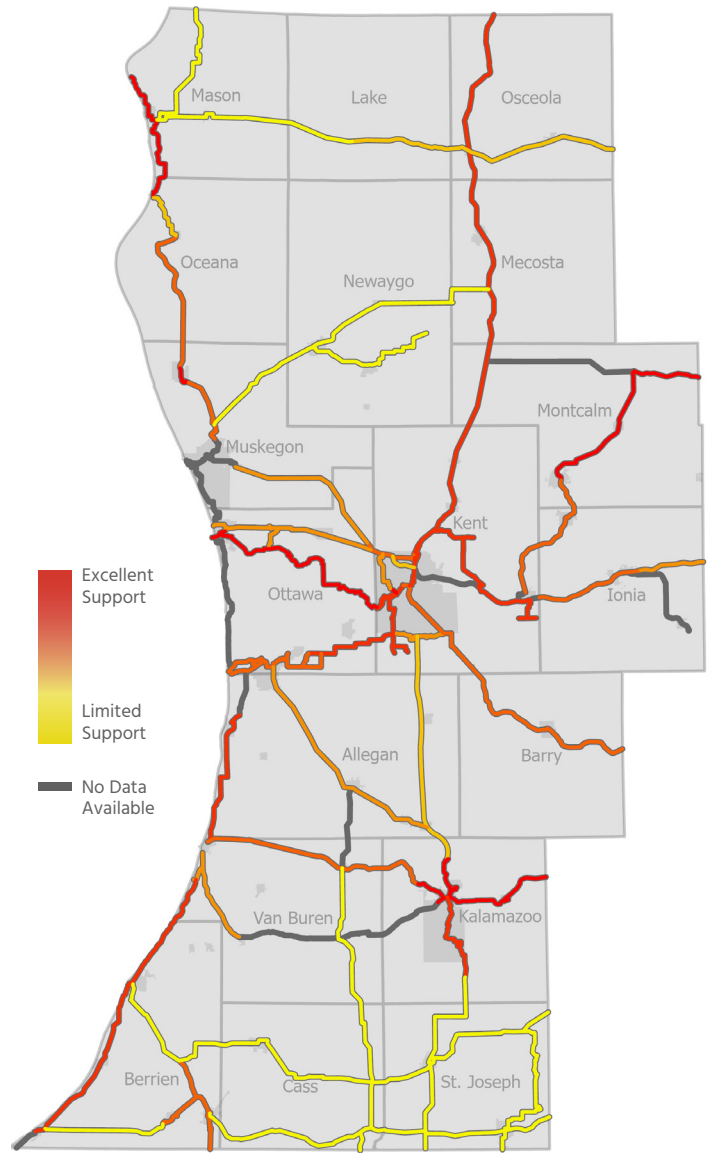
## Bridging the Gap: Other Key Connections in the Regional Network

This map illustrates significant regional trail gaps chosen for their contribution to the network. From a regional perspective they play a crucial role in closing significant gaps, providing short connections between two trail segments, or filling network holes in under-invested counties.



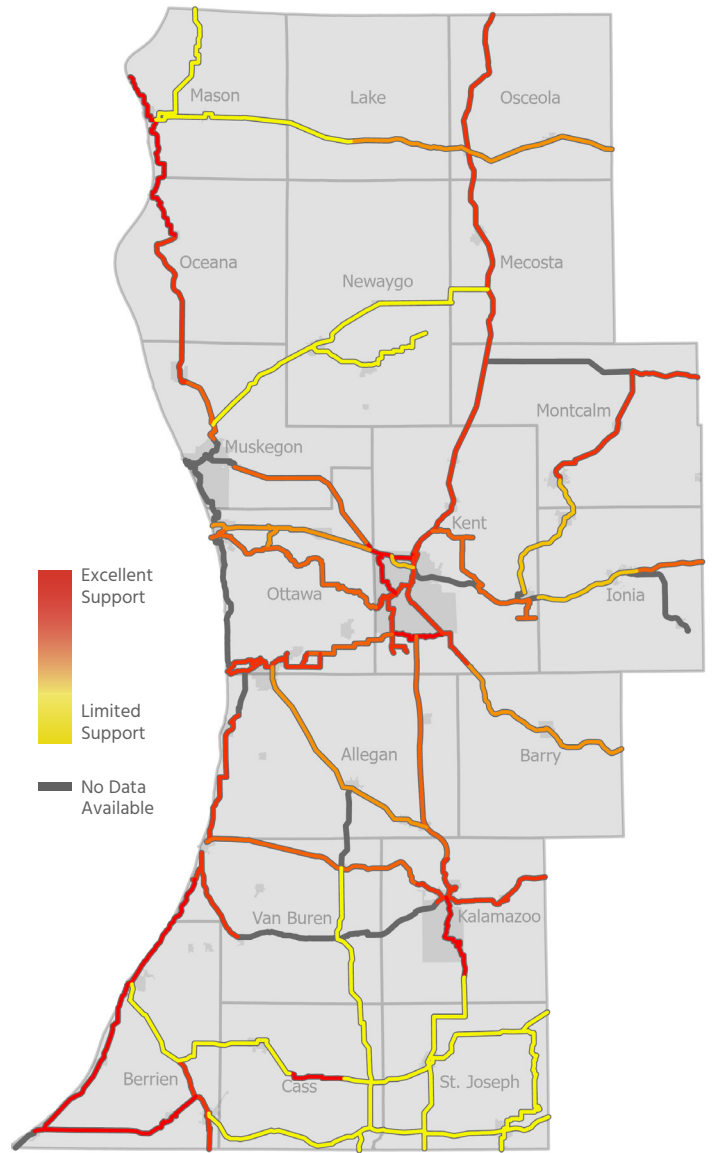
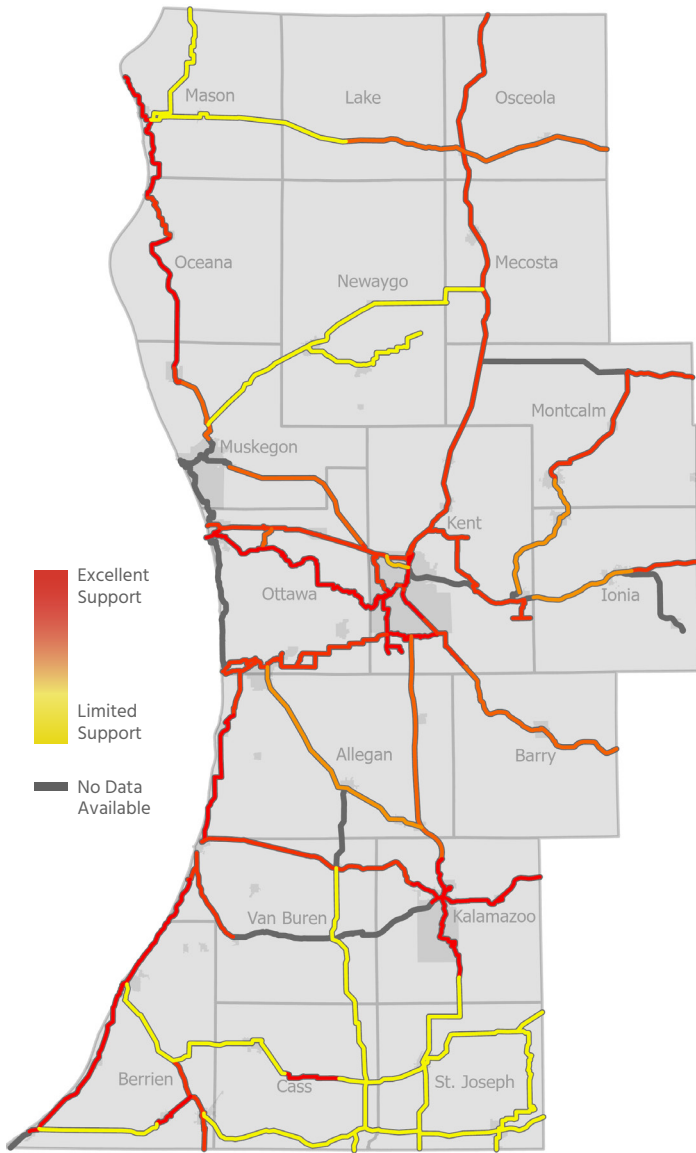
### Friend Group and Volunteer Support (Trail Self Assessment Survey)

Self-assessments, based on input from trail stakeholders via an online survey in 2023, were used to rate the level of support. These assessments can be subjective and represent the opinions of the trail managers or agencies that completed the survey. A lower level of support doesn't mean the trail is any less important to the overall network; it simply reflects that these trails may not have an organization championing efforts to move forward or may lack political support at the current time. Users should consider this score as one of several factors in decision-making, integrating it with other tools and insights for a comprehensive understanding.



### Foundations and Convention and Visitor Bureaus Support (Trail Self Assessment Survey)

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### Support from Local Residents, Governments and Officials Associated with the Trail (Trail Self Assessment Survey)

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