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Issue 48

## Connecting Trails in Ohio

Shared-use paths (trails) are an important tool for creating safe, connected active transportation networks. Ohio boasts hundreds of miles of these trails. Planning, funding, constructing and managing trails require many partners around the state including park districts, local jurisdictions, regional trail groups and others.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, trails have been more important than ever, providing needed access to outdoor recreation as well as transportation for essential service workers. In fact, national trail usage is up 200% compared to the same time last year, according to the *[Rails to Trails Conservancy](#)*.

However, trails have also been impacted by the effects of COVID-19. Impacts range from closed trails, increased signage needs, new regulations, loss of volunteer hours and a loss of visitors due to cancelled events. With all these changes, we thought it was time to check in with Ohio's trail community.

### Keeping Trails Safe During COVID-19

While some trail amenities, such as restrooms and gathering spaces, may remain closed, many trails are open for use. To accommodate this, trail and park leadership are creating and displaying informational signs, updating websites, creating videos and other materials to communicate the best way to use trails safely.

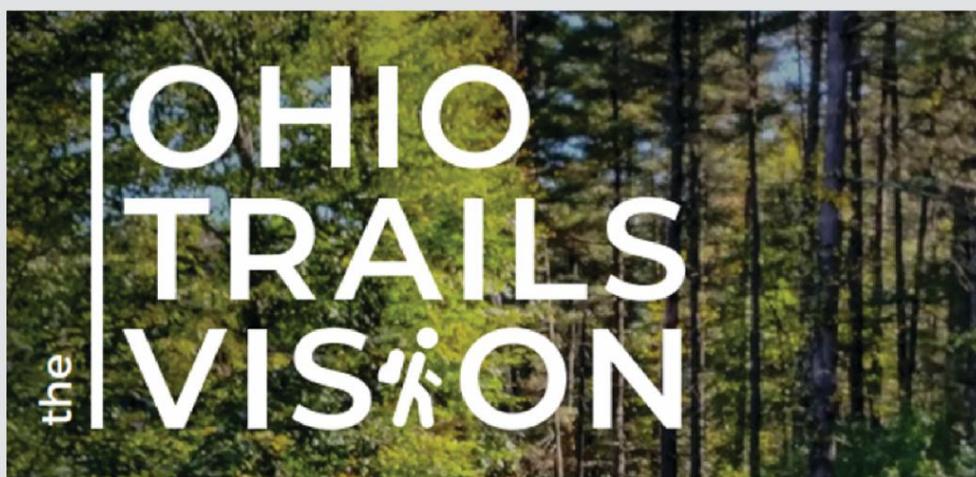


The national Rails to Trails Conservancy has provided social distancing signage for public use in Spanish and English.

### Collaborations Around the State

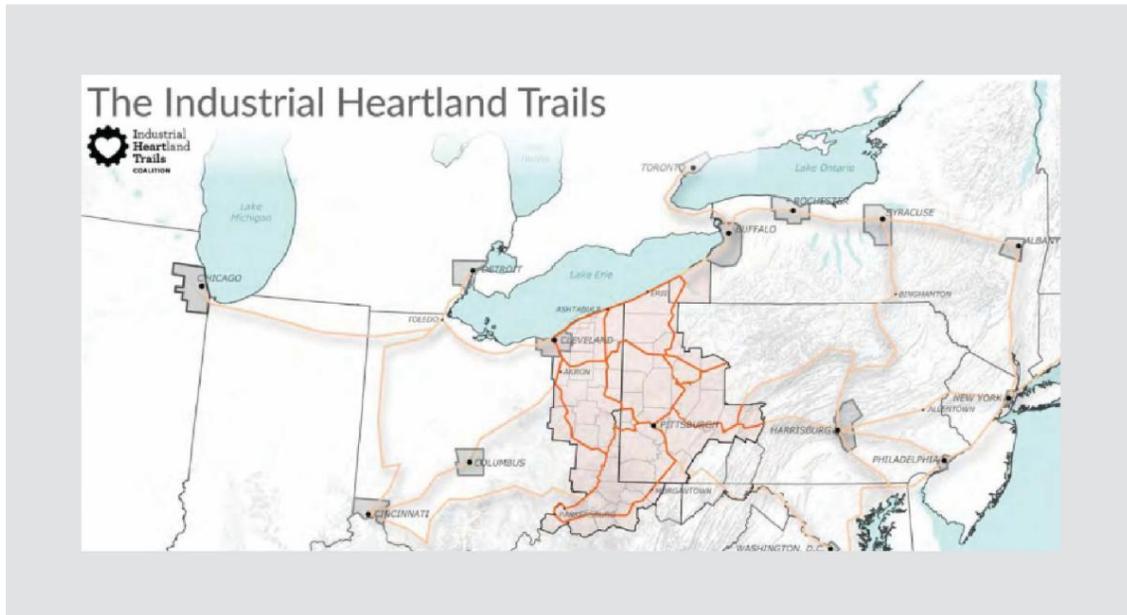
Partnerships and collaborations are key for setting and achieving an ambitious vision for the future of Ohio trails. Here are just a few examples of collaborations in Ohio:

- ***The Ohio Trails Partnership*** is a cooperative effort managed by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), working to develop and maintain Ohio's non-motorized trail system.
- **ODNR** recently published the 2019 *Ohio Trails Vision* setting ambitious goals for the future of trails in Ohio. Following up on this achievement, the agency is completing Phase 2 of the Ohio trail inventory, which will be housed in a web map and smart phone app which will give Ohioans a single destination to digitally explore trails across the state.



- ***Industrial Heartland Trails Coalition*** is a coalition working to complete and

connect a 1,450-mile network of multi-use trails in eastern Ohio, western Pennsylvania, northern West Virginia and southwest New York.



## Q+A

To hear more about collaboration, we talked to a key partner, Sara B. Maier from [Cleveland Metroparks](#).

**How has Cleveland Metroparks worked with regional trail organizations to build out a cohesive trail system?**

Participation in the development of the [Cuyahoga Greenways Plan](#), adopted in 2019, has been essential. The plan sets a 50-year vision and preceded by the formation of the Cuyahoga Greenways Partners, which is made up of multiple organizations and non-profits in the county. The plan provides a framework for aligning our priorities and strengthening our funding requests.

**What makes this type of partnership successful?**

About 10 years ago, Cleveland Metroparks recognized the need to be more involved in trail planning outside our park boundaries. We are now strong partners in the Cuyahoga Greenway Partners, have dedicated staff time and funding for trail work. Staff time is essential. Without someone with the capacity to organize meetings and be the ringleader, complex projects fall through the cracks

For the Cuyahoga Greenways Partnership, Elaine Price, from the County Planning Commission, is this person. She organizes meetings, keeps everyone on task, keeps leadership involved and keeps everyone engaged in the process.

**Can you give an example of a joint effort, big or small, that led to a more**

## connected trail network?

In 2009, an alignment plan was developed to fill a six-mile gap in the Cleveland Metroparks Emerald Necklace Trail, our now nearly-continuous, 53-mile all-purpose trail that rings the county. This plan was a partnership between the Park District and the cities of North Royalton, Broadview Heights and Brecksville. The strength of this partnership enabled Cleveland Metroparks to leverage local funds to receive funding through NOACA and the Clean Ohio Trails Fund. Completing this section took nearly a decade, and would not have happened without all (of the) municipalities being heavily involved, financially invested and committed through leadership. This project is also important because it got our organization comfortable working collaboratively on regional trail projects and taking a larger role in planning and advocating for a continuous network in the county and beyond.

## Trail Funding Opportunities

Some of the most significant sources of trail funding include ODNR's *Recreational Trail Program and Clean Ohio Trails Fund* ODOT's *Transportation Alternatives (TA) funding* and its *MPO & Large Cities Program*.

**ODNR** funding will be available with the passing of the state budget, which typically goes into effect on July 1, and can be used for trail development, construction and maintenance.

**ODOT TA** funding can be used for trails outside of MPO areas and are eligible for acquisition of right-of-way, construction and maintenance or restoration.

The **MPO & Large Cities Program** provides funding to multimodal transportation systems within Ohio's urban areas, including facilities such as shared use paths.

Other programs which can be utilized for the development and construction of shared use paths include ODOT's *Highway Safety Improvement Program* (HSIP) and its *Safe Routes to School Program*

HSIP can fund shared use paths to improve safety for non-motorized users along parallel routes with documented safety concerns. Resources such as FHWA's *Bikeway Selection Guide* helps transportation practitioners make decisions related to the selection of safe bikeway types – such as shared use paths.

The SRTS program includes shared use paths as eligible infrastructure projects when they provide connectivity for K-8 students accessing school.

More details are available in the *ODOT 2020 Program Resource Guide*.



## Announcements

- ODOT, ODNR and Ohio Find It Here have updated the *Ohio Bikeways Brochure* and *Printable Map*, which highlights the many long-distance trails and bike routes that crisscross the state.
- If you are a trail owner or manager, help ODNR complete their trail inventory by taking this *survey* about your local trails and trail data.
- *Register for the next round of Walk.Bike.Ohio stakeholder meetings* being held virtually in July. Transportation practitioners and partners are encouraged to join for an update on work to date and to discuss draft strategies.
- The National Highway Institute has a new *Bicycle Facility Design* web-based training course available for free for anyone seeking to learn more about planning and designing bicycling facilities.

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## Questions? Feedback?

Drop us a line, [bikeohio@dot.ohio.gov](mailto:bikeohio@dot.ohio.gov)

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