This report highlights key recommendations from *A Region Transformed*, RPA's fourth regional plan for the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut metropolitan area. The full plan will be released in November 2017.

**Acknowledgments**

This report was produced by

**Robert Freudenberg**, Vice President, Energy & Environment, RPA  
**Sarabrent McCoy**, Research Analyst, Energy and Environment, RPA  
**Ben Oldenburg**, Senior Graphic Designer, RPA

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Highlights

RPA proposes the development of an integrated regional network of nearly 1,650 miles of biking, hiking and walking trails, connecting people and open spaces.

Connecting the region’s precious open spaces together and to our communities via a network of trails would catalyze economic development, and boost recreational opportunities, improving health and quality of life while enhancing the biodiversity of our natural systems. This vision is in keeping with other ambitious regional networks that RPA has included in previous plans and successfully advocated for over our history, from the parkway and transit systems to the concept of a regional Greensward.

Partners

The Tri-State Trail Network builds on past and ongoing work of local and national trail organizations, conservation groups, and federal, state, and local governments.

- D&R Canal Commission
- Harbor Ring Committee
- Hudson River Waterfront Conservancy
- New Jersey Bike and Walk Coalition
- East Coast Greenway Alliance
- Motor Parkway East
- Trust for Public Land NY
- Trust for Public Land NJ
- Trust for Public Land CT
- Orange County Land Trust
- Hudson Valley Rail Trail Association
- Tri-State Transportation Campaign
- New York League of Conservation Voters
- Brooklyn Greenway Initiative
- Scenic Hudson
- American Littoral Society
- Morris Canal Greenway Working Group
- Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission
- D&R Greenway Land Trust
- Appalachian Trail Conservancy
- Appalachian Mountain Club
- Merritt Parkway Trail Alliance
- Long Island Greenbelt Conference
- Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
- NY-NJ Trail Conference
- New Jersey Audubon
- Bike Hudson Valley
- Hiking Long Island
- NRDC
- CT Fund of the Environment
- Transportation Alternatives
- Sustainable South Bronx
- Land Trust Alliance – New York Chapter
- New York State Bicycle Coalition
- Wildlife Conservation Society
- Doris Duke Charitable Foundation
- The Nature Conservancy – New York
- The Nature Conservancy – Hudson Valley
- Hudson Valley Greenway
- Environment New Jersey
- Open Space Institute
- Bike Tarrytown
- Hudson River Waterfront Conservancy
- Orange County Land Trust
- People Friendly Stamford
- ...and many others

As the network starts to become reality, we will work to integrate and support additional proposals that contribute to overall connectivity of the network, or provide connections to communities not yet along the network’s path. We look forward to filling out our dataset of relevant trail proposals and existing connections further, and see data sharing as a key opportunity.
The Tri-State Trail Network
Source: Regional Plan Association
A Fragmented Natural Region

The New York-New Jersey-Connecticut region is both densely populated and rich in natural and recreational resources. From the forested open spaces of the Catskills, Highlands and Pinelands to the sandy shores of New Jersey and Long Island, the region includes hundreds of iconic parks and landscapes, but they are largely fragmented from each other and not well connected to the population centers that would use them. While thousands of miles of trails wind through our region, they are largely disconnected from each other. The trails provide recreational opportunities within the region’s preserves and parks but fail to facilitate greater connections between this natural beauty and the communities where most people live.

As a result, getting to these open spaces usually means taking a car, which adds to the greenhouse gases that are warming the planet and limits access to nature for too many residents. The state of our fragmented natural region perpetuates inequities and diminishes the quality of life and health benefits that come from recreation and access to open space. At the same time, communities on the edge of parks and open spaces are losing out on the economic opportunities of tourism that greater access would provide. And our region’s tremendous natural and recreational value is largely overlooked, resulting in lost opportunities for stewardship and threatened support for open space protection. Finally, natural pathways that facilitate wildlife migration between open spaces, unimpeded by high-speed roadways and development are critically important in this era when climate change will alter habitats and threaten biodiversity.

Existing Regional Trails
Sources: NYC DOT, ConnDOT, NYS DEP, NJ DEP, CT DEEP, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, East Coast Greenway, Hunterdon County Parks, DVRPC, Monmouth County Parks, Mercer County Parks, Warren County Parks, Sussex County Parks, Lenape Trail Walk, Pequonnock River Trail, Motor Parkway East, LIGHT, New York – New Jersey Trails Conference, Essex County, Passaic County, Ulster County Transportation Council

Trails today

The tri-state metropolitan region is already home to a number of clusters and arteries of trails of local, regional, and national importance. The Appalachian Trail takes hikers from Georgia through our region to Maine, while the East Coast Greenway uses our region’s rights of way to connect cyclists and those on foot to the southernmost and northernmost points along the eastern seaboard. Smaller systems of hiking trails within parks and preserves, from the Pine Barrens to the New Jersey Highlands to the eastern Catskills, allow for on-foot exploration of some of the region’s richest natural landscapes. Other stretches like the Croton Aqueduct Trail, the Long Island Greenbelt Trail, and the Saddle River Bike Path allow for local connections between adjacent municipalities.
The need for a trail network

**Economic Development**
Over the past two decades, economic growth in our region has enabled some communities to thrive, while others struggle with high rates of poverty and limited growth opportunities. A regional trail network could help to boost the economies of the “trail towns” along the route, opening up new opportunities for revitalization, tourism and hospitality, and improving the value of nearby properties.

**Equity**
All too many of our region’s residents have limited access to open space and natural places. This inequity is most apparent in urban communities with high rates of poverty and limited transportation access outside of their city boundaries. A regional trail network – in combination with local trails and greenways – could dramatically improve access for all of the region’s residents, providing an affordable means for recreation and access to nature. Even more people would be able to access by implementing the rail and bus improvements to trail locations that are recommended in the forthcoming report *A Region Transformed*. 
Open space protection and biodiversity

While open space comprises nearly 70% of our region’s land use, only 21% of our total land is considered protected, leaving significant amounts vulnerable to future development. At the same time, our warming climate is forcing species of all stripes to migrate to cooler places. By engaging more of the region’s population with nature, a regional trail network would foster a sense of stewardship among trail users, helping to ensure greater support for open space protection.

Protected Open Space in the Region

Source: Nature Conservancy; RPA Analysis
Note: Here we define “unprotected open space” as everything in the Nature Conservancy’s definition of terrestrial habitat that does not overlap with our protected lands data.

- Protected Open Space
- Unprotected
- Existing Trails

Share of obese adults

A regional trail network would provide greater opportunities for more people to get out into nature and be active.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southwestern Connecticut</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern New Jersey</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Island</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hudson Valley</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Institute for Health Metrics & Evaluation

Health

Like the rest of the nation, our region is suffering through an obesity epidemic. In 2001, less than one in four adults in the region were obese. In 2011, nearly one in three adults was obese. Childhood obesity rates, while leveling off in recent years, still remain high. A regional trail network would provide greater opportunities for more people to get out into nature and be active, and without using an automobile. This could help with both physical and mental health in the region.
Vision

RPA proposes the development of an integrated regional network of nearly 1,650 miles of biking, hiking and walking trails, connecting people and open spaces. This interstate trailway system builds on existing trails, currently proposed routes, and new routes that take advantage of underutilized rights-of-way such as low-speed or abandoned roadways, rail lines, transmission lines and pipelines. It would expand access for millions of residents, putting over 8 million of today’s residents within a half-mile of a trail, a nearly 25% increase. 18.6 million – over 80% of today’s residents – would live within two miles of a trail.

Connecting the region’s precious open spaces together and to our communities via a network of trails would catalyze economic development, and boost recreational opportunities, improving health and quality of life while enhancing the biodiversity of our natural systems.

This vision is in keeping with other ambitious regional networks that RPA has included in previous plans and successfully advocated for over our history, from the parkway and transit systems to the concept of a regional Greensward.

“A 1650 mile trail network would put 8 million residents within a half-mile of a trail.”

Photo: Nathan McLean
When complete, the 1,650 miles of the Tri-State Trail Network will facilitate connections to nature, promote health, well-being and economic activity and foster stewardship of our natural resources, while protecting biodiversity by providing safe migration pathways as the climate changes.

A regional network would provide more equitable access to trails and the open spaces they connect, increasing walkable access (defined as living within a half-mile of a trail) putting over 8 million of today’s residents within a half-mile of a trail, a nearly 25% increase from today. 18.6 million would live within two miles of a trail. Even more importantly, the network would expand access to a greater variety of open spaces and a larger geography by stringing together local trails to facilitate region-scale access. When complete, over two-thirds of the region’s population today (15 million) would live within 2 miles of direct access to the network. Residents along the network trails would have access by trail to 141 state and national parks or preserves – around 297,000 acres total – along with thousands of acres of open space preserved by land trusts.

The network would also pass through 278 of the region’s municipalities, opening up economic development opportunities around tourism, recreation and hospitality. The region’s new “trail towns” would become pivotal destinations to rest, refresh and regroup, bringing in vital revenue to local businesses and municipal budgets. In the urban core, the network has the potential to catalyze the formalization of hundreds of miles of rustic trails on city parkland.

Building a Rich Legacy of Trail Development and Stewardship

This proposal builds on the work that countless organizations have been doing for decades, from large regional and national players such as the Trust for Public Land to local groups and coalitions that have persisted in creating and maintaining individual trails. Building on this foundation, RPA has identified gaps in connectivity between these proposals and existing trails and has found ways to extend them, or have them meet. While 813 miles of the network are already built, just as many are not yet built. The network would connect existing trails, complete ones that are in development, and support the creation of new trails, many of which have been proposed and championed for years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Connects The Network</th>
<th>Planned/Proposed Trails</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Existing trails</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sidepaths</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>813.1mi (50.0%)</td>
<td>345.8mi (21.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Utility</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>197.2mi (12.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>98.4mi (6.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Active Rail</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45.5mi (2.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Water</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44.7mi (2.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sidepaths** are bi-directional shared use paths directly parallel and adjacent to roadways. The regional network sidepaths could utilize the relatively wide rights-of-ways of existing roadways, particularly throughout the region’s suburbs and more developed destinations. Examples of proposed sidepath stretches in the RPA regional trail network include the Merritt Parkway Trail, significant portions of the Motor Parkway Trail, and the northern connection to the D&R Canal Trail.

**Utility corridors:** Whether above a trail, adjacent, or buried below, utility - or road, or rail - infrastructure can successfully coexist with trail use, though limitations and potential adverse effects should be properly understood and accounted for. Generally, concurrent use of a right-of-way by a trail and a utility company can be mutually beneficial to the owner/occupant of the land (the utility company), the trail operator, and the users of the trail. Successful examples of concurrent use include the Washington & Old Dominion Trail in Fairfax County, VA, or the Albertson Parkway in San Jose, CA, both trails lying beneath electric power transmission lines.

Source: Regional Plan Association
1 Harbor Ring

Length: 43 miles  
Status: Partially complete  
Needs: VNB access (at minimum bike racks on bus) + signage and infrastructure along roads  
Steward: Harbor Ring Commission

The Harbor Ring connects communities along New York Bay, from lower Manhattan across via ferry to Hoboken, Jersey City, and Bayonne, across the Bayonne Bridge to Staten Island, then over the Verrazano Narrows Bridge – if not via future pedestrian pathway, at least via bus (with bike racks) – over to the Brooklyn Greenway and across the Brooklyn Bridge. Completion would require collaboration between the Harbor Ring Committee and local and state leaders from New York and New Jersey. Along with the local-scale greenways of New York City and the Manhattan/Bronx portion of the Empire State Trail, the Harbor Ring contributes to a complex core of local-scale trails from which the rest of the regional network radiates.

2 Manhattan Trail

Length: 13 miles  
Status: Partially complete  
Needs: Reduced to a single lane from 59th and 14th Street Union Square, closed in Times, Herald and Madison Squares. Next phase will fully close the span to auto traffic and could extend treatments further south to the Battery on Broadway or alternate routes.

Broadway, the oldest path in New York City, a Native American thoroughfare originally named Wickquasgeck, already has stretches of protected bike lanes. In the Second Regional Plan, RPA proposed Broadway as one of two north-south pedestrian streets in Manhattan (with Fifth Avenue), closed to all but bus traffic and heavily landscaped. To complete the Manhattan Trail, we propose that New York City officially reduce Broadway to a single lane of traffic from 14th to 59th streets, employing traffic calming measures to make the street safe for bikes and pedestrians south of 14th Street, with Times, Madison, and Herald Squares closed to Broadway traffic. From 59th, the trail would continue through Central Harlem, from Central Park West to Frederick Douglass, Saint Nicholas, and Edgecombe to Highbridge Park, avoiding the neighborhood’s steepest inclines. This trail would build on existing investments in Highbridge and Morningside Park and connect four existing parks, providing safe pathways for residents of upper Manhattan to reach the Long Path, Empire State Trail, and Merritt Parkway Trail.

3 Inner Sound Shore Loop

Length: 55 miles  
Status: Partially complete  
Needs: Bridge access, waterfront easements and infrastructure from city-owned & utility owned land.  
Stewards: South Bronx Greenway

The Inner Sound Shore Loop would extend the proposed South Bronx greenway, move it closer to the waterfront where possible, and connect it with a new route along the North Queens waterfront to a shoreway circumnavigating Rikers Island. The route would utilize both city- and utility-owned land, and would take advantage of routes which could be opened up if older wastewater plants were consolidated at a new treatment plant on Rikers Island.
4 Morris Canal Greenway
Length: 107 miles
Status: Largely Incomplete
Needs: Acquisition/easement of utility, rail, and road ROW + infrastructure investments along waterways
Stewards: Morris Canal Greenway Working Group, New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition, Friends of the Ice and Iron Rail Trail, New Jersey Transportation Planning Authority

The Morris Canal Greenway route includes parts of the proposed Essex-Hudson Greenway, the Lenape Trail, and some existing Canal Greenway, connecting the Hudson River and Meadowlands to the Lehigh Valley and 38 municipalities along the way. With part of the route running along the Morris Canal's nineteenth-century right-of-way, the trail provides access to the D&R Canal Trail Connector and the extensive hiking networks of Passaic, Sussex, and Warren Counties.

5 Jersey Shore Trail
Length: 70 miles
Status: Partially Complete (Needs Designation)
Needs: Infrastructure and signage along mean high higher water tidal line

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection holds that the public’s right to shoreline access predates even New Jersey’s statehood, living on in the Public Trust Doctrine. It therefore seems that, to a certain degree, the majority of what we call the Jersey Shore Trail has existed just as long, without a name or signage. We propose making official the mean high higher water tidal line’s status as a trail route – at some points diverted to existing pedestrian paths – from the pedestrian paths of Sandy Hook to the southernmost point of Long Beach Island, and through the barrier island communities and coastal parks along the way.

6 East Coast Greenway
Length: 145 miles
Status: Partially complete
Needs: Acquisition/easement of road and utility ROW + infrastructure investments along water and through parks
Stewards: D&R Canal Commission

The East Coast Greenway of New Jersey – building off of the existing D&R Canal Trail – would run along the Delaware and Raritan Canal, up through Middlesex, Union, Essex, and Hudson Counties to the Hudson River waterfront, connecting the Raritan River communities to the Meadowlands. Once complete, this segment of trail would connect to the larger East Coast Greenway, which runs from Maine to Florida.

7 Shore-to-Somerset Connector
Length: 60 miles
Status: Largely Incomplete
Needs: Acquisition/easement of utility, rail, and road ROW + infrastructure through forest

An east-west proposed route between the D&R Canal Trail and the Jersey Shore Trail, the Shore-to-Somerset Connector utilizes a number of existing corridors, including active rail rights-of-way – a model known as a rail-with-trail. It runs from Point Pleasant to Franklin, with connections to Pigeon Swamp State Park, Monmouth Battlefield State Park, and a number of historic farms and houses. It also facilitates a connections between an extended Henry Hudson Trail and the rest of the network.

8 Henry Hudson Trail + Connection
Length: 35 miles
Status: Partially complete
Needs: Connections to Shore-to-Somerset and Jersey Shore Trails
Stewards: Monmouth County Park System, Rails-to-Trails

The Henry Hudson Trail in Monmouth County, part of the national Rails-to-Trails network, began as a former rail right-of-way. Today, it is a multi-use path running through wetlands, fields, and forest. The path should be extended, via a wide active rail right-of-way, to connect the existing Henry Hudson Trail to the regional network via the Jersey Shore Trail and the Shore-to-Somerset Connector.
The Long Path connects the region’s core to points far beyond the region, up to near Albany, and should be connected to the Hudson River Waterfront Walkway, down to where it meets the Hudson Ring, in Hoboken. The Path began in the 1930s as an answer to Vermont’s Long Trail, conceived of as a way to one day connect New York City to Lake Placid. It hugs the Hudson River through the Palisades, turning through High Tor State Park near Haverstraw in Rockland County and heading north through Schunnemunk Mountain State Park, over to Shawangunk Ridge, Minnewaska State Park, then up through the Catskills. Along the way, it provides breathtaking views of the lower Hudson River, the Valley, and New York City.

Unlike most of these trails, the Appalachian Trail does not support bike travel; it is the most rugged of trails on this list. But seeing as it provides connections within the region and beyond, this iconic trail, though largely unpaved, serves a key role in the greater regional network. Roughly 10% of its 2,190 miles fall within the RPA region, connecting our region’s foot travelers not just to Maine and Georgia (and the states in between) but to some of our region’s most iconic open spaces: The Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, the New Jersey and Hudson Highlands, and a number of state parks and heritage areas both east of west of the Hudson River, which it crosses at Fort Clinton.
12 Merritt Parkway Trail / East Coast Greenway

Length: 120 miles
Status: Partially complete
Needs: Pedestrian connections along roads and other rights-of-way between Bronx and New Haven Counties
Stewards: Merritt Parkway Trail Alliance, East Coast Greenway Alliance, Pequonnock River Trail

The Merritt Parkway Trail connects parts of the East Coast Greenway via a route proposed by RPA in 1994, along the still-active Merritt Parkway. The East Coast Greenway runs from Florida to Maine, at some points separate from the road but at others planned as an on-road bike route. The Merritt Parkway Trail directly connects to Long Island via ferry and upstate New York via the Empire State Trail, stringing together the Sound’s cities to agricultural and small-town patches in between. In New Haven, the route heads north via, in part, the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail. The Parkway itself traverses some of Connecticut’s most scenic landscapes and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1991.

13 Connecticut Connector

Length: 50 miles
Status: Largely incomplete
Needs: Acquisition/easement of lands along utility and rail rights of way, along small waterways

Between Long Island Sound and Litchfield Hills, the Connecticut Connector provides links to the Appalachian Trail to the north and the East Coast Greenway to the south, passing by Lovers Leap State Park, Weir Farm State Park, Huntington State Park, and many others along the way. The section of proposed and existing trail from Norwalk to Danbury is part of the Norwalk River Valley Trail.
**Motor Parkway Trail**

- **Length:** 203 miles
- **Status:** Partially complete
- **Needs:** Acquisition/ easement of lands along utility corridors + infrastructure along roads, through forests, along beach
- **Steward:** Motor Parkway East

Where it can, the Motor Parkway Trail follows the route of what used to be the Long Island Motor Parkway, the first parkway built exclusively for car traffic. Portions of the original parkway route still exist, whether as overgrown clearings, converted bicycle paths, or sections of the current road system. The proposed trail route spans nearly the entire length of Long Island, from New York Harbor to Montauk, through inland Nassau and Suffolk Counties to the Pine Barrens, Peconic Bay, and the Block Island Sound. Much of the trail through Suffolk County uses a powerline right-of-way; building a trail with this underused linear ground space would facilitate direct connections to the Parkway right-of-way to the west and the natural paths of the South Fork. Via a bicycle/pedestrian path over the Throgs Neck Bridge, the trail would use local-scale greenways in Queens and the Bronx to connect with the major Hudson Valley trails.

**Wading River Rail-Trail / Long Island Greenbelt**

- **Length:** 59 miles
- **Status:** Partially complete
- **Needs:** Continuing construction and route designation
- **Stewards:** Long Island Greenways and Healthy Trails, Long Island Greenbelt Trail Conference

The Wading River Rail Trail proposes utilizing the out-of-service LIRR extension from Port Jefferson to Wading River, closed since 1938 and now a powerline right of way. Moving south of Port Jefferson, it connects with the Long Island Greenbelt, a National Recreation Trail, forging connections between Long Island Sound and the Great South Bay, between the Motor Parkway Trail and the Long Island Coast Trail. It passes through a number of state parks along the way.

**Long Island Coast Trail**

- **Length:** 56 miles
- **Status:** Partially complete
- **Needs:** Bridge access (or bus connection) + infrastructure and signage along roads and beach
- **Steward:** Long Island Greenbelt Trail Conference

The Long Island Coast Trail utilizes the existing Jones Beach Bikeway and Long Island Seashore Trail, connecting them via a proposed roadside trail route along the Ocean and Robert Moses Causeways. It connects Jones Beach State Park to New York State’s only Federal Wilderness Area on Fire Island, with Robert Moses State Park in between.
Implementing a regional trail network will require cooperation, funding, foresight and commitment to take all the necessary steps to create a new regional asset.

There are many challenges to implementing such a comprehensive and far-reaching vision. On any stretch of the proposed network, there are likely to be conflicts and barriers, from competing uses and issues of liability, to privacy concerns and local opposition, to lack of funding for planning, construction and maintenance of the system, amongst other issues.

In order to develop, construct and maintain a regional trail network, collaborations between federal, state, and local governments, transit agencies, utility authorities and land trusts, trails groups and other open space and recreation partners will be necessary. Input and feedback from the public will be required. Trail segments will need to be prioritized, funds raised, acquisitions of rights-of-way carried out, and maintenance plans developed and implemented. But this work has been done before with great success. The following are best practices pulled from some of the more successful regional trail networks that could help to guide implementation of the network here in our region.

1. Organize a regional trail network coalition to prioritize trail segments most relevant to regional connectivity, allocate funding, and provide support, data, and other resources to local governments and trail groups.

Federal, state, and local government should collaborate with land trusts, trails groups and other partnerships to develop this integrated network. Other regional trail networks, from Atlanta to Philadelphia, have fostered this collaboration through a coalition. The coalition could be led, as the Industrial Heartlands Trail Coalition in Pittsburgh is, by a team of representatives of regional and trail-building organizations, with land trusts, local and state governments, and other environmental organizations participating as members and partners. The coalition could track long-term trail progress, oversee the allocation of regional trail network funds, maintain and distribute the library of resources available to participating municipalities – fundraising ideas, best practices, design guidelines – and provide other support to local-scale trail builders in the region.

2. Secure funding for planning, implementation, and maintenance.

In other regional trail networks across the country, fundraising and allocation of trail funds operates on both a local and regional scale: While a regional coalition might oversee fundraising and allocation of federal and foundation trail funds, particularly for the design and engagement phases of trail building, in some cases construction and maintenance of regional trails rely heavily on state and local sources, or fundraising on a local scale. In addition to allocating regional trail funds, the coalition could provide resources to local governments seeking to fundraise around particular local stretches.
3. Define design guidelines and a shared terminology to support universal access wherever possible.

From the Appalachian Trail to the Hudson River Waterfront Walkway, there are a number of trail classes included in the network. While trails like the Appalachian Trail are a bit more rugged, where rights-of-way allow, the goal of multi-modal accessibility – for users on bikes, on foot, using wheelchairs, pushing strollers – should be paramount in trail design and siting.

Regional trail planning and collaboration between hundreds of jurisdictions will require maintenance of a regional trail data repository and data standards. The Industrial Heartland Trail Network of Pittsburgh plans around an open source map of trails built and proposed, amenable to coalition members’ varying degrees of mapping capacity and overseen and edited by the coalition’s coordinators.

4. Create safe and user-friendly connections between trails and nearby transit.

There would be 111 regional rail stations within a half-mile of a trail on the completed network, plus 237 New York City subway stations and 13 PATH stations. Safe pathways and wayfinding signage between transit stations and trails will facilitate use, but will require policies and investments that enhance the safety and operation of our streets through design. Building off of the concept of “Complete Streets,” A Region Transformed classifies different street types and offer best practices to improve the mobility and safety of the region’s residents. These concepts should be applied at these key connector locations so that trail users may benefit from safer crossings, more pleasant pedestrian conditions and better defined bike routes. Municipalities and transportation agencies should continue to work together as part of the Regional Trail Network to prioritize safe streets that connect from transit to trail.
5. Partner with utility and transportation authorities to tap into underutilized rights-of-way.

Because a number of other utility corridors today were once rights-of-way for rail, they are some of the widest rights-of-way available in our region’s densest corners, allowing for safe, linear trail travel where underutilized ground space is converted into gravel or paved paths. In some cases, utility companies owning the right-of-way have donated unused ground space to trail operators, in exchange for what can, when needed, be utilized as an access road, allowing for easier travel to lines and fixtures in case of utility emergency or needed repairs. The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy has found that a utility company, by allowing the space to be transformed into a public amenity, can in addition form better relationships with the communities they serve.

Concerns remain that, in the case that someone is injured while on a trail, the utility company or owner/lessor/operator of the land will be held accountable. But each state has a Recreational Use Statute, confirming that, as New York State’s does, “an owner, lessee, or occupant of premises who gives permission to another to pursue any recreational activities upon private premises does not thereby . . . assume responsibility for or incur liability for any injury to person or property caused by any act of persons to whom the permission is granted”. As such, private landowners are only liable to recover damages if an injured person proves “willful and wanton misconduct” from the landowner.


This proposal builds on an extensive set of trails that have been created through persistent and dedicated advocacy by numerous stakeholders. While the proposal identifies specific potential rights-of-way to improve and connect this natural infrastructure, finalizing exact corridors will require smaller-scale surveying and continued collaboration with local jurisdictions, state/federal agencies, and related service providers.

Creating an effective network also means improving existing trails and connections. In particular, the connections between the greater region and New York City include major bridge crossings – such as the Brooklyn and George Washington Bridges – that are likely to be in high demand by many users. Investments to integrate stronger bike and pedestrian connections into these existing structures, along with new pedestrian/bike-only crossings such as those in the Inner Sound Shore Loop, will help to advance the success of the network.
Trail Trips

Potential Rail Connections and sample trips available with the new Tri-State Trail Network

Source: Regional Plan Association

Fairfield County to South Shore Long Island

The trail network facilitates a trip between Metro-North Connecticut and the South Shore of Long Island, with a there-and-back trip involving a half-hour’s train ride to Bridgeport, a ride on the ferry to Port Jefferson, and a north-south bike ride or hike across the island from Long Island Sound to Islip’s coast.

Jersey Shore Loop

The Jersey Shore Trail, in concert with the New Jersey Transit Coast Line, makes for many possible loop trips along the shore and through the towns and boroughs of Ocean and Monmouth Counties. A simple day hike along the proposed Jersey Coast network trail might run from Asbury Park to Spring Lake.

NYC-to-Mohonk Day Trip

Most ambitious – but feasible for a full day trip – might be a car-free trip between Grand Central and Mohonk Preserve, utilizing the Empire State Trail and some simple roadside connections by bike to the Mohonk Preserve visitors’ center, with a possible re-route along the existing Wallkill Valley Rail Trail on the return.
Regional Plan Association is an independent, not-for-profit civic organization that develops and promotes ideas to improve the economic health, environmental resiliency and quality of life of the New York metropolitan area. We conduct research on transportation, land use, housing, good governance and the environment. We advise cities, communities and public agencies. And we advocate for change that will contribute to the prosperity of all residents of the region. Since the 1920s, RPA has produced three landmark plans for the region and is working on a fourth plan due out in 2017. For more information, please visit, www.rpa.org.

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