

# THE CIRCUIT TRAILS

## 2025 Strategic Plan

### Introduction

The Circuit Trails Coalition is a diverse network of nonprofit organizations, government partners, and foundations working to complete and promote the Circuit Trails—an interconnected, multi-use trail network spanning the Greater Philadelphia region in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Since 2012, the Coalition has advanced trail development by securing funding, coordinating regional efforts, and advocating for policies that support a connected, accessible trail system. Once completed, the Circuit Trails network will include 850+ miles of trails, ensuring more than 3.1 million people—50 percent of the region’s population—live within one mile of a Circuit Trail.

The Circuit Trails are one of the most comprehensive regional trail networks in the nation, linking urban, suburban, and rural communities while bolstering local economies, providing safe and accessible spaces for walking and biking, connecting people to green spaces and waterways, and enhancing the well-being of the region’s residents.

Through collective action, the Circuit Trails Coalition has driven significant progress—encouraging regional adoption of its vision; securing increased federal, state, and local funding; and leading dynamic campaigns to engage new and existing trail users. By continuing to build momentum, the Coalition is advancing the vision for a fully connected, equitable, and transformative trail network.

This strategic plan builds on the Coalition’s momentum and guides its agenda for **five** years, beginning in **May 2025**. Following several years of increasing use of—and demand for—trails in the region, funding at the federal level is being heavily scrutinized at the outset of this plan, making the Coalition’s commitment to advancing trail development in our communities more important, and more challenging, than ever.

By advancing the goals outlined in this strategic plan, the Coalition will drive progress toward a fully connected and sustainable trail network that benefits communities, enhances mobility, and strengthens the region.

## Who This Plan is For

The Circuit Trails Coalition was founded on the understanding that completing and maintaining the trail network requires collaboration across all levels of government—federal, state, county, and local—as well as nonprofit organizations that develop, manage, promote, activate, and advocate for trails. While governmental and funding partners play a critical role, this plan is primarily designed to guide and support the nonprofit organizations that make up the Coalition, ensuring they have the strategies, direction, and coordination needed to advance the vision of a fully connected, accessible, welcoming, and inclusive Circuit Trails network.

## Our Values and Approach

The Circuit Trails Coalition is committed to ensuring trails serve and benefit people of all backgrounds and in all communities. Expanding access to trails, especially in underserved communities, requires thoughtful planning and investment in safe, connected, durable, and well-maintained infrastructure that links people to jobs, daily destinations, and recreational opportunities. It also requires meaningful investment in people—the local leaders and program providers who create enticing, culturally-relevant outdoor activities that increase a sense of welcome and belonging on trails.

Our work is guided by a commitment to equity, collaboration, and broad community engagement. We strive to create an inclusive coalition where different perspectives shape decision-making, ensuring trails meet the needs of current and future trail-users. Transparency and responsible stewardship of resources are core to our efforts, informing how we work with partners, funders, and local leaders.

This strategic plan reflects a collaborative effort, developed with active participation from Coalition members and committees. It was informed by a comprehensive trail gap analysis that identified the most critical opportunities to further, and more equitably, develop the network. These insights ensure our efforts are focused where they are most needed, guiding the Coalition's collective work toward a more connected and widely used trail system that benefits all people across the region.

## 2025 Steering Committee Member Organizations

Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia  
Clean Air Council  
Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor  
Disability Pride PA  
East Coast Greenway Alliance  
Fairmount Park Conservancy  
Friends of the Wissahickon  
Lawrence Hopewell Trail

Natural Lands Trust  
Pennsylvania Environmental Council  
Rails to Trails Conservancy  
Riverfront North Partnership  
Trenton Cycling Revolution  
Tri-State Transportation Campaign  
Trust for Public Land

## Looking Ahead to 2030

Across the next five years, the Circuit Trails Coalition will:

- Expand and maintain the Circuit Trails network, making it more accessible, welcoming, and sustainable.
- Expand the Circuit Trails community, fostering diversity among trail users, growing participation, and building support.
- Expand and strengthen the Circuit Trails Coalition, making it more relevant and representative.

This strategic plan will require a sustained investment of time and talent by members of the Coalition, resulting in:

- Increased trail access within under-resourced communities, and progress towards our goal of 550 miles of Circuit Trails by 2030.
- Progress on the Coalition's Priority Projects, through support from Coalition members and our public partners and the enthusiastic championing of Priority Projects from our grassroots base, elected officials, and appointed leaders.
- Improved trail sustainability, particularly within underserved communities.
- Stronger, more diverse, and sustainable funding for equitable trail development and maintenance.
- Safer, well-maintained trails across the Circuit Trails network, supported by defined trail maintenance practices.
- Equitable access and inclusive use of the Circuit Trails.
- Engaging programming, events, and activities that create a welcoming environment and build community support for trail development and sustainability.
- Greater awareness of the Circuit Trails through inclusive marketing and outreach, with a focus on engaging new users from underrepresented and underserved communities.
- Increased grassroots and governmental support for trail development, maintenance, and programming.
- Increased capacity and resilience of the Circuit Trails Coalition and Coalition member organizations.
- Stronger, sustainable leadership of the Circuit Trails Coalition and increased capacity, diversity, efficiency, and connection within the Coalition.

## ➤ EXPAND AND MAINTAIN THE CIRCUIT TRAILS NETWORK, MAKING IT MORE ACCESSIBLE, WELCOMING, AND SUSTAINABLE.

### **Goal 1: Achieve 550 miles of Circuit Trails by 2030 with a focus on increasing trail access within under-resourced communities.**

#### **Objective 1: Advance Priority Projects<sup>1</sup> of the Circuit Trails Coalition and support the Coalition's public partners to deliver projects.**

**1A:** Identify Coalition members and partners to strategically champion the Coalition's Priority Projects identified in the Circuit Trails Gap Analysis, and leverage Coalition member resources to advance Priority Projects and expedite implementation.

**1B:** Support county and municipal partner agencies in building capacity to accelerate project delivery, particularly for fully-funded trail projects, through advocacy, strategic guidance, resource sharing, and collaboration.

#### **Objective 2: Strengthen, diversify, and sustain funding for equitable trail development and maintenance.**

**2A:** Advance equitable trail development and maintenance by securing funding and resources for Priority Projects and advocating for their adoption as county priorities, with support from county, regional, and state agencies.

**2B:** Advocate for state-level trail development resources to target trail projects with the greatest impact for under-resourced communities, including the Coalition's Priority Projects.

**2C:** Increase programmed funding for Circuit Trail segments within the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC)-prepared New Jersey and Pennsylvania Transportation Improvement Programs.

**2D:** Conduct economic impact reports and use the results to advance an advocacy agenda that strengthens the momentum for consistent and sufficient project funding, development, and long-term maintenance, leveraging data to empower advocacy with elected officials and decision-makers.

### **Goal 2: Improve trail sustainability, particularly within underserved communities.**

#### **Objective 1: Strengthen trail maintenance practices across the Circuit Trails network, particularly in underserved communities, ensuring the safety and comfort of users and the**

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<sup>1</sup> Priority Projects are defined as the overall top 25 ranking trail development projects identified through the [Gap Analysis of the Circuit Trails](#). The Gap Analysis analyzed nearly 300 unbuilt segments of the planned Circuit Trails network, scoring each segment based on various factors, including local demographics (e.g., race, ethnicity, and income); population density; connection to employment; connection to a park; and other variables. Full details can be found on pages 8 and 9.

## **long-term sustainability of the Circuit Trails.**

**1A:** Broaden and enhance Maintenance Committee participation to ensure deeper representation, integration, and support of Coalition priorities.

**1B:** Assess trail maintenance needs and practices across the Circuit Trails network, particularly in underserved communities and areas vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

**1C:** Establish a maintenance standard of care for the Circuit Trails to ensure we're providing key resources and accessible information for Coalition members and partners.

**1D:** Increase Coalition member and partner engagement with workforce development programs and partnerships. Conduct an assessment of workforce development programs in the Circuit Trails region, including programs utilized by Coalition members and partners.

## **➤ EXPAND THE CIRCUIT TRAILS COMMUNITY, FOSTERING DIVERSITY AMONG TRAIL USERS, GROWING PARTICIPATION, AND BUILDING SUPPORT.**

### **Goal 3: Champion use of the Circuit Trails, ensuring equitable access and inclusive trail use.**

**Objective 1: Support programming, events, and activities on the Circuit Trails in order to build awareness and generate interest, create a welcoming space for all, and build a constituency for trail development and sustainability.**

**1A:** Sustain the Circuit Trails Community Grant Program, securing funding to invest in locally-led programs and program providers who offer culturally-relevant and enticing outdoor activities on Circuit Trails.

- I. Continue to foster a network of grantee partners to increase connections, coordination, and cross-promotion across outdoor program providers.
- II. Continue to integrate program providers into the Circuit Trails Coalition, amplifying the voices of those most closely connected to trail users.

**1B:** Encourage and support trailside placemaking initiatives that celebrate and uplift local culture and communities.

**Objective 2: Implement targeted marketing strategies across owned, earned, paid, and shared channels to expand awareness of the Circuit Trails, with a specific focus on engaging potential new users from underrepresented groups and underserved communities.**

**2A:** Create marketing materials that authentically represent the unique needs of Circuit Trails communities, integrating key insights and recommendations from available research.

**2B:** Enhance awareness of trails and trail access, uplifting the Circuit Trails' presence within neighborhoods and helping residents navigate, understand, and take advantage of available nearby trail connections.

**2C:** Coordinate and streamline the sharing and promotion of events across Circuit grantees and coalition partners in order to maximize reach, engagement and attendance.

#### **Goal 4: Build grassroots and governmental support for trail development, maintenance, and programming.**

##### **Objective 1: Generate public support for Priority Projects and cultivate an engaged grassroots base.**

**1A:** Foster an engaged and informed network of trail activists and advocates by establishing and supporting recurring sub-regional forums that drive collective action, strengthen partnerships, and cultivate support from elected and appointed officials.

**1B:** Continue to grow and mobilize a diverse, local grassroots base that advocates for the funding, development, maintenance, and programming of the Circuit Trails while building relationships, a sense of community, and shared purpose among this group.

##### **Objective 2: Cultivate elected officials and appointed leaders as champions to build support for Priority Projects.**

**2A:** Develop and implement a strategy to cultivate relationships with elected officials and staff across all levels of government related to the Coalition's Priority Projects and public partners' projects.

#### **➔ EXPAND AND STRENGTHEN THE CIRCUIT TRAILS COALITION, MAKING IT MORE RELEVANT AND REPRESENTATIVE.**

#### **Goal 5: Increase the capacity and resilience of the Circuit Trails Coalition and Coalition member organizations**

**Objective 1: Strengthen the leadership and long-term sustainability of the Circuit Trails Coalition by increasing capacity, transparency, cultivating and retaining leadership, and facilitating equitable participation in leadership.**

**1A:** Explore strategies to sustain and grow Coalition engagement, ensuring long-term participation and leadership retention.

**1B:** Identify and secure centralized staffing to support coordination, volunteer engagement, and the advancement of initiatives.

**Objective 2: Increase capacity, diversity, efficiency, and connectivity within the Coalition.**

**2A:** Develop a Coalition and Steering Committee that is more diverse and representative of the Circuit Trails region. Intentionally expand membership to ensure member capacity and expertise meets current and future needs.

**Objective 3: Sustain a Learning Community to support Coalition members' needs and equip Coalition members to better advocate for, develop, and activate Circuit Trails equitably.**

**3A:** Codify the Learning Community as a common entry-point for new Coalition members, building a shared sense of purpose.

**3B:** Determine and implement an accessible format for sharing with the Coalition insights and resources shared in the Learning Community.

# 2025 Strategic Plan Appendix

## About the Circuit Trails Coalition's Priority Projects

Since its inception, one of the primary goals of the Circuit Trails Coalition has been to grow the network, achieving 550 miles by 2030 and an ambitious 850+ miles by 2040. The Coalition recognizes that while it is important to continue to expand the trail network outward, it is sometimes more important to fill gaps within the existing trail network – gaps that may connect miles of trails to one another; provide trail access to under-resourced communities; and connect users to parks, transit, and jobs.

To promote a more systematic approach to filling gaps in the Circuit Trails network and to highlight the need to advance trails serving under-resourced communities, the Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC) launched an effort in 2021 to inventory and analyze the almost 300 trail segments yet-to-be-built within the Circuit Trails network, expanding on work previously conducted by the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia. Through a collaborative process that involved many Circuit Trails Coalition members and partners, in June 2022 PEC published [the Gap Analysis of the Circuit Trails](#), a report and online tool.

The Gap Analysis uses various publicly-available datasets to consider the potential impact of a trail segment based on the following variables: race, ethnicity, and income of nearby residents (using the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission's Indicators of Potential Disadvantage score); number of trail miles the gap connects; population density; connectivity to employment centers; connection to a park; access to public transit; personal vehicle access in a given area; and length of the trail segment. In PEC's analysis, certain variables are weighted, including race, ethnicity, and income; population density; and others. Through this analysis, each of the nearly 300 gaps in the Circuit Trails network received a score, providing the Coalition a data-driven approach to prioritize its efforts to advance trails. More information on the Gap Analysis methodology can be found on pages 13-15 of the report.

The Priority Projects referred to throughout this document are the overall top 25 ranking gaps in the original analysis. A list of the Coalition's 2025 Priority Projects can be found on the following page. Recognizing that trail development is dynamic and datasets change, PEC has committed to updating the Gap Analysis at least once each year. The most up-to-date information on the Coalition's Priority Projects will be made available at [circuittrails.org](http://circuittrails.org).



## Circuit Trails Coalition 2025 Priority Projects

Top 25	Trail Name	Segment Name	County	Total Score
1	Liberty Bell Trail	Southern Connection	Montgomery, PA	35.5
2	East Coast Greenway	Spring Garden Street Connector	Philadelphia, PA	34.25
3	Calhoun St. Bridge Connector	Calhoun St. Bridge Connector	Mercer, NJ	32.5
4	Camden County Link	State St to near Memorial Ave	Camden, NJ	32
5	Schuylkill River Trail	Wissahickon Gateway	Philadelphia, PA	30.5
6	Camden Greenways	Haddon Ave to Newton Ave	Camden, NJ	30
7	Newtown Square Branch	Naylor's Run 6,7,8	Delaware, PA	29.25
8	Darby Creek Trail	Cobbs Creek Trail to SEPTA Line	Delaware, PA	29
9	Forge to Refuge	Market Street to City Line Ave	Philadelphia, PA	28.25
10	Tookany-Tacony-Frankford Trail	Cheltenham Ave to Ashborne Ave	Montgomery, PA	28.25
11	Delaware River Heritage Trail	D&R Canal Connector - Cass St to Union St	Mercer, NJ	28
12	Cooper River Trail - South	Baird Blvd.	Camden, NJ	27.5
13	East Coast Greenway	Tacony-Holmesburg Gap	Philadelphia, PA	27.5
14	Tookany-Tacony-Frankford Trail	Torresdale Ave to Castor Ave	Philadelphia, PA	27
15	East Coast Greenway	Chester City 2nd St/Rt. 291 - Norris Street to Ridley Creek	Delaware, PA	26.5
16	Delaware River Heritage Trail	Centennial Dr to Cramer Hill Park Trail	Camden, NJ	26
17	Cooper River Trail - South	Euclid/Kaighn Ave	Camden, NJ	26
18	East Coast Greenway	Bartram's Garden Driveway	Philadelphia, PA	26
19	Devault-Warner-Paoli	Devault Line Trail	Chester, PA	25.75
20	Schuylkill to Susquehanna Greenway	CVT Extension to Downingtown - P&T Line	Chester, PA	25.5
21	Camden County Link	Collings-Knight Trail	Camden, NJ	25.5
22	Camden County Link	Admiral Wilson Blvd Trail	Camden, NJ	25.5
23	Camden County Link	Cooper River Bridge	Camden, NJ	25
24	Parkside Cynwyd Trail	City Line Ave to Montgomery Ave	Montgomery, PA	24.75
25	Parkside Cynwyd Trail	Parkside & 53rd St to City Line Ave	Philadelphia, PA	24.75