

Urban Pathways to Healthy Neighborhoods

Focus on: Connections

What are Urban Pathways?

Urban pathways go by many names, including bikeways, trails and greenways. These pathways are used for healthy recreation and—when seamlessly interconnected with pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure like sidewalks and bicycle lanes—can be ideal routes for active transportation, including biking and walking.

Part of the Solution

In many urban areas across the country, low-income populations and communities of color face disproportionate challenges of obesity, difficult commutes and scarcity of open space. Promoting the development and use of urban pathways can help address these challenges by integrating physical activity into daily routines, connecting residents with green spaces and providing cost-effective solutions to improving community health.

The Urban Pathways Initiative

Through the generous support of The Kresge Foundation, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) launched the Urban Pathways Initiative to advocate for equitable investment in vulnerable communities that promote the health, transportation and environmental benefits of trail use. Learn more at www.railstotrails.org/urbanpathways.



Urban pathways are effective routes for active transportation—human-powered mobility, including biking and walking—when linked to a greater network of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, allowing trail users to access the trail from their home or workplace and safely reach community destinations. Planning and designing urban pathways within the context of other city and regional planning efforts can better integrate pathways into the city's transportation and greenspace network, providing more opportunities for active transportation and recreation.

Many urban pathways are shorter than 10 miles in length and are sometimes fragmented due to limited availability of right-of-way for development.¹ Creating safe on-street connections can be essential to encouraging trail use, and cities across the country are exploring novel approaches and demonstrating creative solutions to improving bicycle and pedestrian connections. In particular, connecting trails to cycle tracks² and bicycle boulevards³ may make the transition from trail to street feel smooth and secure. Creating safe crossings at intersections and developing other on-street bicycle facilities like bike lanes can also help improve pathway connectivity and accessibility. The following lessons and examples explore different approaches to connecting urban pathways to bicycle and pedestrian networks, transit, parks and greenspace, and other community destinations.



This issue summary is part of a series that explores best practices and lessons learned from urban pathways across the United States. To access the entire series visit www.railstotrails.org/urbanpathways/lessons.

Show (and tell) people where to go.

Form social connections to the trail by raising awareness with signage, events and outreach materials. Residents may not know about the trail if it is in a formerly neglected area, or they may not know how it connects to other community destinations. Wayfinding signage can help neighborhood residents locate trail access points from nearby streets; conversely, this signage can direct trail users to nearby amenities like retail, schools and community centers. When hosting activities on the pathway, bring a city bicycle and/or trail map to show existing and potential connections to and from the pathway. Use temporary events or media campaigns to show how facility improvements or trail extension projects could benefit the community.



Photo: ©Lance Murphey

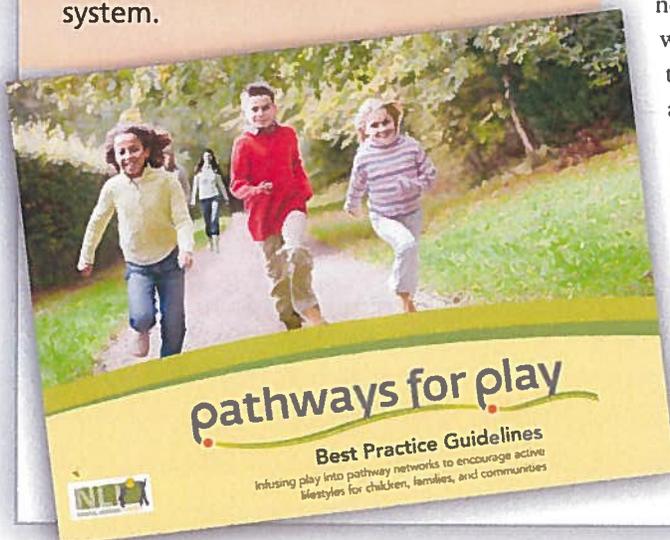
Memphis, Tenn. New Face for Old Broad

An important missing link that would connect Memphis' Shelby Farms Greenline to downtown and the city's largest park stops short at Broad Avenue, a wide four-lane roadway. To complete the missing link, Broad Avenue was transformed, at least temporarily, into a "complete street" featuring bike lanes, art-inspired crosswalks painted by local schoolchildren, and temporary businesses that set up shop for the weekend. It's part of an effort, called "A New Face for an Old Broad," to show the community what Broad Avenue could be while making the connection between the trailhead and Overton Park. Visit our TrailBlog to learn more.⁴

Contact: Livable Memphis, www.livablememphis.org



Extend the trail into the community and use it as a spine of the park system.



Urban pathways can form a vital linkage between city greenspace and parks and form the backbone of a greenway system. These connections can be especially important in low-income communities where access to parks and greenspace is often limited. For example, the city of Compton, Calif., is using the Compton Creek Bike Path and Multi-Use Trail as a focal point for a larger park system in the Compton Creek Regional Garden Park Master Plan⁵.

Urban pathways also provide children safe routes to parks for recreation, allowing opportunities to play and explore along the way. Pathways for Play, a program developed in partnership with Play-Core, GameTime, the Natural Learning Initiative, and American Trails, provides excellent resources for communities working to create networks of shared-use pathways and play pockets. Pathways for Play: Best Practice Guidelines are available at www.pathwaysforplay.org.

Learn more about all these projects at www.railstotrails.org/urbanpathways/connections.

Connecting trails to transit can significantly improve mobility for residents who use transit and non-motorized forms of transportation. A trail connection to transit can also be used to spur improvements in bikes-on-transit policies, such as bike racks on buses, trains and at stations.



The Trolley Trail in downtown Charlotte, N.C., is sometimes referred to as the “station access trail” by local residents because of its excellent connection to the city’s light rail system.

Houston, Texas

Improving Connections to Transit

Houston’s growing light rail network is expanding to the city’s East End, serving predominately Hispanic neighborhoods along Harrisburg Boulevard. Working with Metro and the Houston-Galveston Area Council’s Livable Centers program, the Greater East End Management District created a plan to improve pedestrian access from neighborhood streets to the new transit line. District funds supported improvements within the light rail corridor, and federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds were awarded to construct sidewalks on nearby streets that connect to the light rail—a total of \$7.75 million is being spent on sidewalk

improvements in the District. The first sections of sidewalk are now in place, and more are on the way.

In addition, the Harrisburg and Sunset rail-trails run a block away from the planned transit line, while the expanding Buffalo Bayou trail system is along the neighborhood’s northern edge. These trail connections combined with sidewalk improvements will provide residents safer, more accessible connections to transit and provide more opportunities for active transportation.

Contact: Greater East End District,
www.greatereastend.com/livable-centers-initiative

Plan and partner to make community connections happen beyond the trail.

To encourage trail use for both active transportation and recreation, several planning and design elements should be considered. Facilities should meet state and federal design guidelines, provide lighting, safe intersections and accessible connections. See resources on back for design guidance.

Work with adjacent jurisdictions and local advocate groups (bicyclists, smart growth groups, e.g.) to develop better connectivity between trails and bicycle/pedestrian networks. Create a multi-jurisdictional advisory committee to advocate for connectivity, apply for funding and include trail facilities in regional planning documents.

Compton, Calif.

Compton Creek Bike Path and Multi-Use Trail

Compton Creek Trail users must navigate across four to six lanes of fast-moving traffic several times, creating significant obstacles to using the trail. Most intersections do



Pedestrians and equestrians must navigate wide, busy street crossings on the Compton Creek Bike Path and Multi-Use Trail.

not have marked crosswalks or signalized intersections where the trail bisects a street mid-block. As part of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy’s Urban Pathways Initiative, we developed *Across the Arterial*, a report that illustrates a variety of innovative intersection treatments to enhance trail user safety.⁶

Bicycle, Pedestrian and Trail Design Guidelines and Resources

National Association of City Transportation Officials Urban Bikeway Design Guide

<http://nacto.org/cities-for-cycling/design-guide>

To address dangerous intersection and crossing challenges, see:

- Intersection Crossing Markings
- Median Refuge Islands
- Active Warning Beacons
- Hybrid Beacons, aka High-intensity Activated Crosswalk (HAWK) Signal

Federal Highway Administration, *Designing Sidewalks and Trails for Access*, Chapter 16: Trail Crossings

www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/side-walk2/sidewalks216.htm

Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices

<http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/index.htm>

1. List of urban trails can be accessed at www.railstotrails.org/urbanpathways/lessons
2. <http://nacto.org/cities-for-cycling/design-guide/cycle-tracks/>
3. www.ibpi.usp.pdx.edu/guidebook.php
4. <http://community.railstotrails.org/blogs/trailblog/archive/2010/11/30/memphis-connects-parks-with-trails-and-complete-streets.aspx>
5. www.comptoncity.org/index.php/Planning-and-Economic-Development/compton-creek-regional-garden-park-master-plan.htm
6. <http://community.railstotrails.org/media/p/15636.aspx>

CASE STUDY: IMPROVING TRAIL CONNECTIONS THROUGH COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

LAFITTE CORRIDOR

NEW ORLEANS, LA.

LENGTH: 3.1 MILES • CONSTRUCTION PLANNED IN 2014

The Lafitte Corridor runs through the heart of New Orleans, intersecting several historical and culturally significant neighborhoods. The project holds great potential, but connections—to adjacent neighborhoods as well as the city's bicycle and pedestrian networks—will be critical to ensuring the greenway is accessible and well used. To help local partners effectively advocate for improved street and sidewalk connections to the future greenway, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy partnered with the NOLA Cycle mapping project to conduct a physical assessment of 60 miles of roadways and intersections surrounding the corridor.

With the help of 30 local volunteers, RTC staff assessed intersections, crosswalks, sidewalks, curb ramps and amenities—noting the existence and condition of elements that would make getting to the greenway, via walking and bicycling, safe and pleasant from nearby homes, schools and businesses. RTC staff used the data to create maps that identify which routes offer good connections to the corridor, and which need physical improvements.

This assessment was included in the 2011 report, *The Lafitte Corridor and Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's Urban Pathways Initiative: An Emerging Opportunity to Connect Neighborhoods to Healthy Living*. Local trail supporters can use the report to advocate for capital improvements and to help city officials prioritize bicycle and pedestrian improvements near and within the corridor.

To access the assessment visit www.railstotrails.org/urbanpathways/lessons.

