

Inspiring Community Through Inclusive Trail Practices

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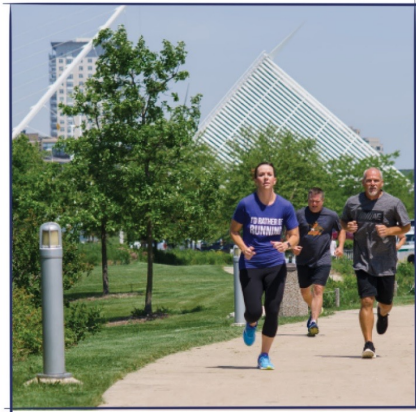
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Presentation Agenda

- Setting the stage: How have disparities in investment shaped access to trails and participation in outdoor recreation?
- Understanding barriers to the outdoors and active transportation
- Creating equitable and inclusive trails
- Q&A

Disparities in Investment

Reconnecting Milwaukee

Milwaukee's exemplary trails, including the Oak Leaf Trail and Hank Aaron Trail, serve as critical infrastructure for city residents, connecting communities and offering transportation and recreation benefits to those who use them. But many communities that could benefit most from trails lack access to them. Past transportation and land use decisions, coupled with structural racism and its effects, disenfranchised and disconnected communities of color across America. In Milwaukee, we see this reflected in the paths of I-94 and I-43, which divide communities from destinations and opportunities.



A 5x7-inch film negative shows the Marquette interchange from 1970. It was rebuilt between 2004 and 2008. | Photo courtesy Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

- Segregation has created an infrastructure system with significant trail and transportation disparities.
- The most disinvested communities tend to have the least access to walking and biking infrastructure
- Studies show that Non-white and lower-income residents are three times more likely to live in 'nature-deprived' communities without access to trees, parks and other green space.

Understanding Barriers to Trail Use: methodology

- RTC's National Barriers to trail use survey conducted in Spring 2020 (1214 responses)
- RTC's Regional Survey focusing on four metro areas: Bay Area, Cleveland, Miami and Washington DC conducted in Summer 2020 (n >= 600)
- Qualitative focus group with San Francisco, Cleveland, Baltimore, and Washington DC residents

Understanding Barriers to Trail Use

- Trails have limited visibility in under-represented communities
- Concerns about safety and lack of representation reinforce a feeling of unwelcome
- Disproportionate access to neighborhood trails hinders trail use
- Quality of trail maintenance directly affects perception of welcome and likelihood of use
- For people living in communities under significant stress, trails and outdoor recreation are not a top priority

Regardless of trail use, majority of participants across demographic groups value trails and associate it with community wellbeing.

Creating Inclusive Trail Practices

- Everyone, everywhere *deserves* to be connected to and welcomed on trails.
- Create safe outdoor and trail experiences for all community members.
- Outside recreation is essential and valued by everyone.
- How do we get there?

Considerations for Creating Inclusive Trail Experiences

Trails have limited visibility/awareness in under-represented communities.

Strategies for Connection + Inclusion on Trails

- Design educational outreach, field trips and trail events that position local trails as a community destination.
- Develop free gearless trail events, outdoor education and access to gear that are targeted to nature and outdoor novices.
- Create staff positions and programming embedded in the city and county government. (e.g. District of Columbia)

Case Study: Brownsville's CycloBIA



Source: CycloBIA Brownsville

Goal: encourage people to exercise and cycle safely together as a community.

- City of Brownsville, TX: leaders created a suite of community events to promote healthy eating and active living in response to high rates of obesity, poverty and diabetes among its predominately Latino residents.
- The re-occurring event has attracted approximately 10,000 participants since 2012.
- Foot and bike traffic to restaurants along route yields enough revenue for businesses to pay as much as two months of taxes

Considerations for Creating Inclusive Trail Experiences

Concerns about safety and lack of representation reinforce a feeling of unwelcome for many under-represented people on trails.

Strategies for Connection + Inclusion on Trails

- Create community-led trail and outdoor recreation events, activities and groups that meet resident needs.
- Nurture and amplify representation of diverse trail participants through communication, marketing, outreach, education, information, resources and ambassador programs.
- Engage the community in the full trail development and maintenance process—from design and development to amenities and programming.

Case Study: D.C. Trail Ranger Program (WABA)



Goal: Create safe outdoor and trail experiences for all trail visitors and users

- Community-led support for trail users focused on community outreach and trail maintenance
- Started in 2013 as seasonal part-time support and in 2022 received funding by DDOT that provides year-round daily trail presence.
- Program invests in staff + the community
 - Rangers receive living wages and benefits
 - Recruited from communities that they serve and represent the diverse communities whom they support

Considerations for Creating Inclusive Trail Experiences

Lack of access to neighborhood trails hinders trail use among under-represented communities.

Strategies for Connection + Inclusion on Trails

- Use geospatial data and mapping analytics to understand and prioritize trail investment in communities lacking access.
- Raise awareness of the funding available for active transportation and trails in every state.
- Build public-private partnerships to fill the funding, capacity and knowledge gaps.

Considerations for Creating Inclusive Trail Experiences

Quality of trail maintenance directly affects perceptions of welcome and likelihood of trail use.

Strategies for Connection + Inclusion on Trails

- Encourage community-based organizations with funding, information and resources to participate in trail improvements such as benches, trees for shade, water fountains and regular trail clean ups.
- Build community engagement through trail maintenance advocacy and opportunities to beautify trails.
- Educate residents on how trails are funded to address concerns about taking funding away from other community priorities.

Case Study: Cobbs Creek Volunteer Clean-Up



- Result of decades of resident advocacy for a scenic, paved trail, which is part of a developing 800-mile Circuit Trails network through the region and Southern New Jersey
- Started: 2017 by two West Philly neighbors who organized a community cleanup program and asked local volunteers to meet regularly
- Now: Group meets regularly for a weekly power hour cleanup with led by regular volunteers

Considerations for Creating Inclusive Trail Experiences

For people living in communities under significant stress, trails and outdoor recreation may not be a top priority.

Strategies for Connection + Inclusion on Trails

- Develop free community-led programming for groups experiencing stress that simply allow people to decompress.
- Create safe spaces for significantly stressed communities to connect with family and friends.
- Communicate how trails and nature can become a recharging and healing space for residents to connect with themselves, families and friends—especially when coupled with other activities of interest and community-led programming.

Case Study: California's Richmond Greenway



- 3-mile urban trail with community led events, activities and recreation opportunities built from 1970s dumping site.
- Inspired by community activism, led by residents and community organizations improving the greenway with murals, orchards, a BMX course, community garden, an edible forest, weekly self-care group bike rides, etc.
- Residents planned for a summer youth camp with “safe, green and clean” paths to parks, schools, churches and community centers—that facility is in planning stages.

Approaches for Sustained Community Engagement

- Talk directly to residents!
- Engage early and often
- Develop community-led programming
- Create and maintain safe spaces for communities to gather
- Communicate how trails and nature can be a place to recharge and heal



Funding to Support Equitable Trail Practices

RAISE Grants

- New focus on sustainability and equity
- Trails and active transportation more competitive than ever

Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program

- Funding for **connected** active transportation infrastructure

Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program

- \$1B for **reconnecting** communities historically divided by transportation infrastructure

Thriving Communities Program

- \$21M for technical assistance, planning and capacity building

Get resources for accessing federal funding at: railstotrails.org/trailstransform



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