

Wm. Penn Foundation gives \$8 million for bike trails.

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The Inquirer

To help connect the region's bicycle and pedestrian paths, the William Penn Foundation has given \$8.6 million for a planned 750-mile trail network.

The money will be funneled to local governments and nonprofit organizations to design, plan, and build trails, with an emphasis on urban corridors, Andrew Johnson, director of the foundation's watershed-protection program, said Wednesday.

The foundation gave \$7 million to the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission to award for trail projects over the next three years.

And it gave \$1.6 million to the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy to "build awareness of this significant regional amenity," the foundation said.

The trails are part of the Circuit, a network being built for pedestrians and bicyclists in Southeastern Pennsylvania and South Jersey.

About 300 miles of trails in the network have been built, and an additional 50 miles are in development, leaving about 400 miles to go.

Trail advocates hope to complete the network within 20 years at a cost of \$250 million.

The push for local trails coincides with a national drive to create a 3,000-mile East Coast greenway from Calais, Maine, to Key West, Fla. Segments have been completed to make up about 29 percent of that span.

The William Penn Foundation also contributed \$10 million for regional trails in 2010.

"The foundation has supported trails since at least 1986," Johnson said. "We reached a point where all the individual trails were adding up to a regional network . . . and we are perpetuating the momentum in defining this unique asset."

Johnson said the trails also will contribute to another of the foundation's key interests - boosting public access to area waterways.

The DVRPC, a nine-county planning group, last week amended its 2015 work plans to include the new money.

It will aim the funds to "close priority gaps and complete key segments" in the trail network, the DVRPC said.

A map of The Circuit trail network is available at <http://connectthecircuit.org/>

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Still room to improve this bike-friendly region



JEFF FUSCO / For The Inquirer

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By Andrew Johnson and Sarah Clark Stuart

Philadelphia is on a roll. Actually, Philadelphians are on a roll. They're on their bikes and on their way to work. May 15 is National Bike to Work Day, and the city is marking 20 years of celebrating this annual observance.

But bike riding is not a one-day-a-year phenomenon for Philadelphians. It's a way of life, and more and more are joining in.

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that more people in Philadelphia commute to work by bicycle, per capita, than in any of the other 10 biggest U.S. cities. In 2012, the U.S. Census estimated Philadelphia's bicycle commuting rate at 2.3 percent, higher than Chicago at 1.6 percent and New York at 1 percent.

An annual survey of bicyclists during the morning and afternoon rush between West Philadelphia and Center City showed a 260 percent increase between 2005 and 2013. In two city neighborhoods, South Philadelphia and Center City, the bike commuting rates top 5 percent, ranking them among the country's top 25 bike commute neighborhoods. And consider that in its first week, Indego, the new Philadelphia bike-share program, generated 8,000 trips.

So what propels Philly forward as a pedal-to-work city? It is the region's forward-looking position on developing trails and bike lanes to create an integrated system for cyclists and pedestrians.

While more than 200 miles of bike lanes play an important role in this bike-commuter city, the expanding network of trails is also a critical contributor. The regional network is called the Circuit. When completed, it will be a 750-mile trail system that spans nine counties in Southeastern Pennsylvania and South Jersey, connecting urban, suburban, and rural communities. It will be the most comprehensive regional trail network in the country, an active transportation system that continues to fuel Greater Philadelphia as a great place to live, work, and do business.

Already, the system is a national model, demonstrating the value of strategic alliances among public agencies, nongovernmental organizations, private funders, and activists organized around a shared vision. Today, with more than 300 Circuit miles completed and an additional 50 miles in development, there are 65 trail organizations working as members of the Circuit Coalition to fund, design, connect, and build out the remaining 400 miles.

The momentum to complete the Circuit has shifted into high gear as more organizations and individuals see the value it offers beyond recreational opportunities: It is a significant form of transportation for people across the region. Once complete, the Circuit will make many more areas accessible by bike, making commuting possible for many more people.

Philadelphia's ascent as a top American bike city is undeniable, and the Circuit is a significant reason for that. However, to complete this network, we must get the Circuit to the point of offering seamless travel over a large region. Other primary modes of transportation have fully connected networks that allow people to access multiple destinations, and it is time trails do the same.

The support to accomplish this goal is strong. There is a combination of local, state, and federal funding moving the Circuit forward, mile by mile. In addition, the William Penn Foundation has supported the network since 2010, contributing more than \$20 million toward planning, design, and construction of many miles of trails, support that has also leveraged additional public funds.

Pennsylvania and New Jersey, as well as the city and eight surrounding counties, have dedicated significant resources and staff time for trails and bike lanes, and more than \$200 million of federal transportation money has been awarded for trail development. But there are miles to go before we're finished. Investment opportunities to help close gaps in the network remain, and those who want to join this regional effort can learn more at connectthecircuit.org.

On this Bike to Work Day, Philadelphians should stand proud of the work that's been accomplished to increase opportunities for bicycling in the region and of their commitment to truly embracing this asset that is all around us. As residents and commuters, we should all use and enjoy the trails for transportation and recreation. And business owners and corporate leaders can encourage their employees to do both.

Significant progress is being made and people are out enjoying the region's trails every day, but more support will be needed before the Circuit reaches its full potential.



Biker on trail.

STOCK/ASSOCIATED PRESS

JULY 24, 2015

Report: Demand increasing for Delaware Valley's multiuse bike trails

Data from bike, pedestrian counting program spurs metro planning organization to expand The Circuit by 450 miles

RECREATION BIKING DELAWARE VALLEY TRAILS

BY MICHAEL TANENBAUM

PhillyVoice Staff

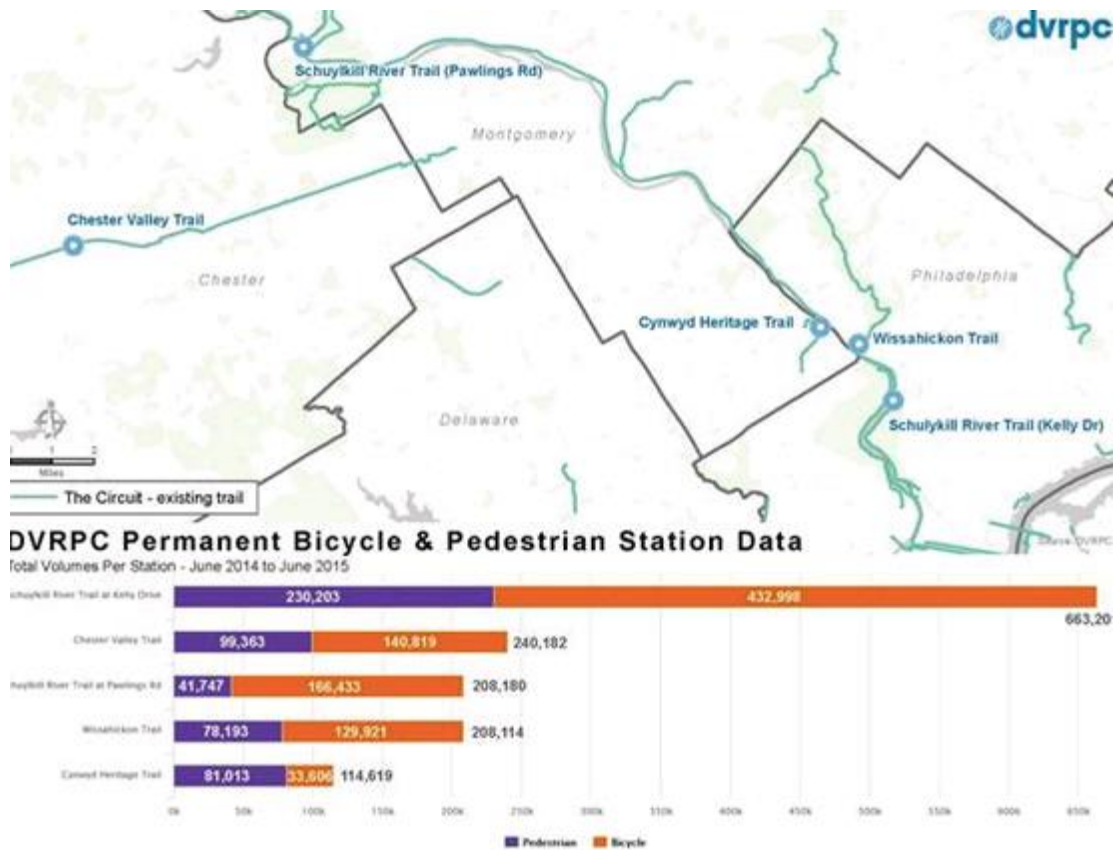
Bikers and pedestrians are making good use of a network of trails, known as The Circuit, that surrounds the Delaware Valley and stretches more than 300 miles throughout the Greater Philadelphia region in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, according to a report that analyzed data collected by permanent bike and pedestrian counters.

The report, released by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), compiled data gathered the first year of the counting program's implementation across 11 trails in the region.

RELATED STORY: [Five warm weather activities to do in Philly](#)

“We are proud that Greater Philadelphia is among the first regions in the country to install permanent bicycle and pedestrian counters,” said DVRPC Executive Director, Barry Seymour. “We hope to explore additional opportunities to invest in measurement technology and support the strong demand for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure that this data suggests.”

The first-year data provided insight into where there is increasing demand for additional bicycle facilities, which the DCRPC hopes will help connect people to jobs, recreational opportunities, public transportation, green spaces and other neighborhoods. To that end, the Circuit Coalition, a group of nonprofit organizations, foundations and agencies, plans to expand The Circuit's system of multiuse trails by another 450 miles.



Permanent Bicycle and Pedestrian Station Data (DVRPC)

The counter program, funded with support from The William Penn Foundation, combines a passive infrared sensor, which detects body heat, with an inductive loop that detects the metallic signature of bicycle wheels, generating a total count of pedestrians and cyclists, including their direction of travel.

Based on the data, the most frequently traveled trails in The Circuit over the past year were as follows:

- Schuylkill River Trail at Kelly Drive – 663,201
- Chester Valley Trail – 240,182
- Schuylkill River Trail at Pawlings Road – 208,180
- Wissahickon Trail – 208,114
- Cynwyd Heritage Trail – 114,619

For more information about The Circuit and the counting program, visit [here](#).



Schuylkill River Boardwalk. (Emma Lee/WHYY)

USA TODAY's 10Best: Schuylkill River Trail wins Readers' Choice award for best urban trail

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The Schuylkill River Trail is the Circuit's longest trail and the region's most heavily used multi-use, recreation and commuter trail. A panel of travel and outdoor recreation experts nominated 20 trail systems located near major U.S. cities for Best Urban Trail and turned to USA TODAY and 10Best readers to vote for their favorite trail.

"We are thrilled that the Schuylkill River Trail has taken the number one spot," said Joseph Syrnick, president and CEO of Schuylkill River Development Corporation (SRDC). "Certainly, we have seen the trail become more and more popular, and this honor validates the hard work and investment made by many entities."

The Schuylkill River Trail is in the process of expansion, with over 60 miles of finished trail including a 26-mile stretch from Philadelphia to Phoenixville. With the help of the Circuit Coalition – made up of 43 organizations dedicated to trail development in the region – enormous efforts have been made to connect sections of the Schuylkill River Trail and promote the trail as a single entity. When complete, the Schuylkill River Trail is projected to be nearly 130 miles long and will be a key corridor of the Circuit, a planned 750-mile network of bicycle and pedestrian trails connecting people to jobs, communities, parks, and rivers in the Greater Philadelphia Region. The Circuit currently includes 300 miles of completed trails and 50 miles in progress throughout Pennsylvania and South Jersey with plans to connect existing trails and add an additional 400 miles to the system in the coming years.

“The Schuylkill River Trail is an iconic part of the Circuit that we look forward to watching expand,” said Sarah Clark-Stuart, the chair of the Circuit Coalition. “When complete, pedestrians and cyclists will have greater access to trails for recreation and transportation in addition to a gateway to open green space and the river.”

Now holding the award as Best Urban Trail, the Schuylkill River Trail tops trails across the country and maintains a strong reputation as not only a local attraction, but a tourist one as well. The trail allows pedestrians and cyclists access to travel 26 miles beyond the hustle and bustle of the city to enjoy neighboring towns and the region’s natural beauty.

“We are confident that with the continued collaboration among supporters and organizations, this trail will become one of the most accessible and enjoyable for residents of the region and a major destination for trail users from throughout the country,” said Silas Chamberlin, executive director of the Schuylkill River National & State Heritage Area.

About the Circuit

[The Circuit](#) is a multi-use trail network that connects 300 miles of trails throughout the Greater Philadelphia area in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, with plans to add 450 additional miles to the system. When fully complete, the Circuit will help connect people to jobs, recreational opportunities, public transportation and other neighborhoods, and will serve as a gateway to open green space. Support of the Circuit is being led by The Circuit Coalition, a group of nonprofit organizations, foundations and agencies working together to raise the profile of this regional trail network, and educate people about the benefits an increased trail network will bring to the region.

About the Schuylkill River Development Corporation

[SRDC](#) is revitalizing Philadelphia’s tidal Schuylkill River corridor into an asset that connects neighborhoods and encourages investment. Working with the City and stakeholders to build, maintain, and program Schuylkill Banks, SRDC drives improvements in recreation and transportation, community and economic development, public health, and environmental stewardship, benefiting neighbors, Philadelphia and the region.

About the Schuylkill River National & State Heritage Area

The [Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area](#), managed by the non-profit Schuylkill River Greenway Association, uses conservation, education, recreation, historic and cultural preservation and tourism as tools for community revitalization and economic development.

Best state in America: Pennsylvania, for turning old rails into trails

By [Niraj Chokshi](#) June 5   [Follow @NirajC](#)



A rail bridge reaches over the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia. (Victor J. Blue/Bloomberg)

For more than 20 years, hikers have struck out on June's first Saturday to confirm what America's most famous naturalist, John Muir, [noted more than a century ago](#): "Wildness is a necessity."

The occasion, National Trails Day, celebrates the nation's [more than 230,000 miles of trails](#). It's a network that continues to expand, thanks to a decades-long effort to convert abandoned rail tracks into walkable green spaces.

New York City's High Line – a roughly 1.5-mile elevated trail cutting across a western portion of Manhattan – might be the highest-profile example of a rails-to-trails project. But no state has done more to put old track to good use than Pennsylvania.

Number of open rail-trails



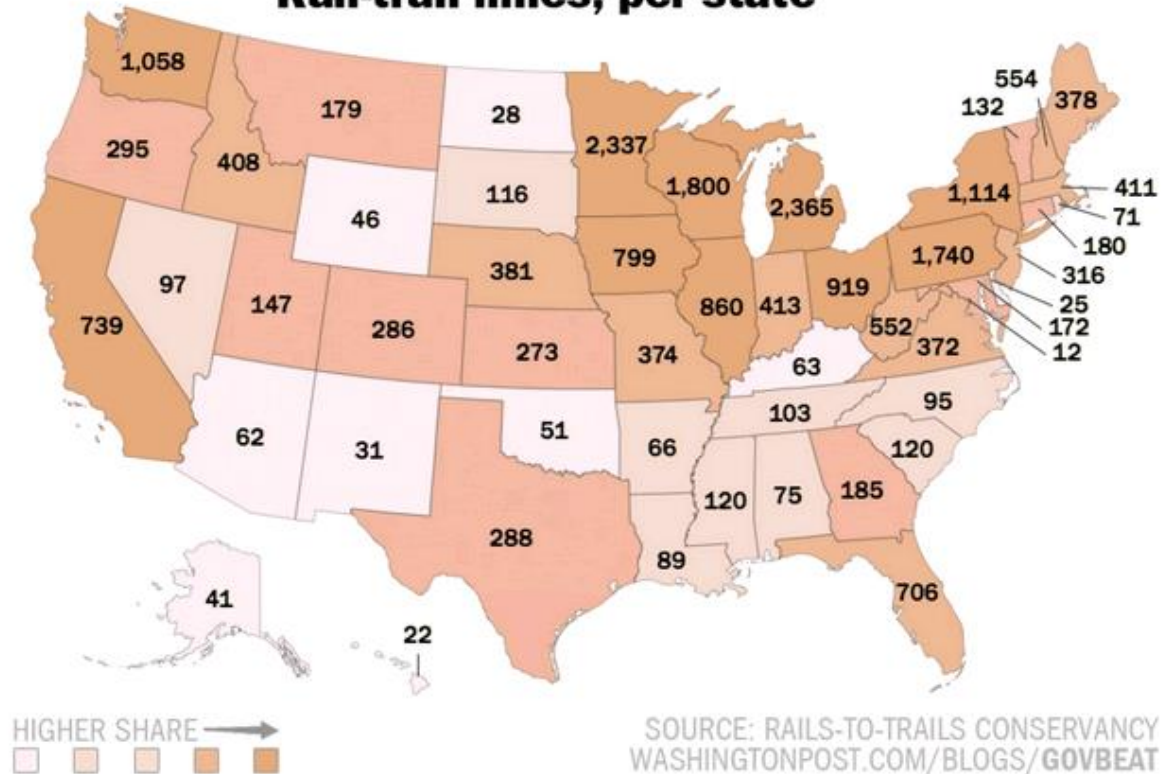
Number of open rail-trails. (Niraj Chokshi)

“A lot of the trails in Pennsylvania are world-class trails,” says Katie Harris, spokeswoman for the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a D.C.-based nonprofit dedicated to working with and tracking these projects nationally.

Not only has Pennsylvania completed the most rails-to-trails projects – 170, followed by Michigan’s 118 – but it has more projects underway than any other state, according to conservancy data. The Keystone State has also converted more miles of track than all but three other states. Michigan has the most, with 2,365 miles of converted trails, followed by Minnesota and Wisconsin. Pennsylvania has turned 1,740 miles of track into trails.

The idea was born in the mid-1960s in the Midwest. Corridors carved through cities, forests and mountains lay unused by the consolidating railroad industry, so the tracks were removed, and “people just naturally started walking,” the [conservancy says online](#).

Rail-trail miles, per state



Rail-trail miles, by state. (Niraj Chokshi)

Projects have now been implemented in all 50 states and D.C., with more than 22,000 miles of track converted so far. Hundreds of projects underway would add 8,000 miles to that count.

The conservancy is involved in one such effort, dubbed “the Circuit,” which would create a 750-mile network of trails in the Philadelphia region.

“We’re doing work all across the country, but the Circuit’s probably the most relevant example,” Harris says. The project couldn’t exist without the coordination and vision of local officials, advocates, nonprofits and governments.

And the fact that more than 300 miles are already complete is a testament to the dedication that makes Pennsylvania this week’s best state.