

Central Ohio Greenways Strategic Plan Action Item Update - 2023



INTRODUCTION

Central Ohio Greenways (COG) is a trail network of national significance spanning 230+ miles, connecting Central Ohio to other parts of the state and country. The COG network includes parts of the Ohio to Erie Trail and the national Great American Rail Trail that extends from Washington, D.C., to Seattle, Washington. COG trails are traveled more than 12 million miles annually by residents and tourists. The trails provide economic, quality of life, and health benefits to the community. With Central Ohio expected to be a region of over 3.15 million people by 2050 – bringing an increased demand for more walkable neighborhoods, transportation options, and outdoor recreational opportunities – trails have become even more critical to the livability of our growing region.

In 2015, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission's (MORPC) approved the creation of the COG Board. The Board serves as a subcommittee to the Sustainability Advisory Committee and focuses on increasing the use and miles of the regional trail system. Its 25 members represent the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. The Board is guided by working teams that support the advancement of the Vision and Mission of COG.

Vision: A world-class network of trails accessible to every Central Ohioan.

Mission: To increase greenway trail mileage and use of trails for recreational and transportation needs.

In 2015, the newly formed COG Board hired planningNEXT to develop a strategic plan and to confirm the Boards' vision, mission, and goals, memorialized in the 2016 COG Strategic Action Plan. In the years since the Board has made incredible progress. The Regional Trail Vision, a plan to add over 500 miles of trails, was adopted by MORPC and local government partners.

Advancement in COG's brand, regional awareness, partnership, wayfinding, technical assistance, trail towns visioning, and other efforts have all contributed to COG becoming a clear leader in advancing trails, active transportation, and outdoor recreation.

Since 2015, the region has continued to evolve. Today there is an increasing demand for more walkable and bikeable communities, more state, federal, and local funding available for trails, and a desire to encourage more use of trails. Additionally, regional efforts such as LinkUS, RAPID5, and Vision Zero have raised awareness of COG and seek to leverage trails as the backbone of Central Ohio's safest bike and pedestrian infrastructure to support holistic transportation and outdoor recreation opportunities.

With a commitment to trail-related investments in the region, the COG Board, and all of Central Ohio are ready to focus efforts on a revised set of actions items in the Strategic Action Plan that will allow the region to build off the work that has already been done and to carry out bold new visions for the future. With the momentum around trails and regional connectivity, the Board used its 2023 retreat to assess the alignment of its 2016 Strategic Plan with current regional priorities. It found that it needed something new. The following document serves as the 2023 COG Strategic Plan Action Item Update. New action items reflect the goals of the COG Board and MORPC and will require support from the COG Board, COG working groups, and regional partners.

OVERVIEW OF THE 2023 COG BOARD RETREAT

In March 2023, the COG Board convened its annual retreat. After reflecting upon the accomplishments, progress, and evolution of COG from 2015 to 2023, the Board turned its attention to discussing regional advancements in trail-related efforts. Next, the Board evaluated its progress on the 2016 Strategic Action Plan. The 2016 plan identifies 53 actions intended to guide the progress of the COG Board and its working teams. At its retreat, the Board reviewed each action item to determine its status (complete/ongoing/incomplete) and alignment with current regional priorities. Following this assessment, the Board engaged in three facilitated workshops focused on partnership development, strategic funding, and trail town planning.

- **Partnership Development Workshop:** In this workshop, Board members were asked to discuss how COG, RAPID5, LinkUS, and other regional initiatives can support collaboration throughout Central Ohio to strengthen the relationship of strategic partners and support trail-related regional collaboration among local governments.
- **Strategic Funding Workshop:** The Board members were asked to discuss existing obstacles and opportunities for leveraging funding while determining what resources could support the advancement of accessing strategic funding to fill gaps and expand the trail network.
- **Trail Town Planning Workshop:** In this session, Board members were asked to discuss potential partnerships, program structure, funding, and resources necessary to advance trail tourism programs, specifically what action items are needed to support a regional Trail Town initiative in their community.

In each workshop, Board members were asked to identify three to five relevant short- or long-term goals. Four common themes emerged: collaboration, messaging, resources & guidelines, and program operations. These themes, outlined below, together with the results of the Strategic Action Plan assessment, resulted in the creation of 26 new or revised action items for the COG's Strategic Plan's Action Item Update. These action items include ongoing actions from the 2016 plan or modifications to previous action items. The reduction of action items from 53 to 26 reflects the completion of previously established action items and focused concentration on critical next steps.



ACTION ITEMS

New action items for the COG Strategic Plan Action Item Update have been shaped through a collaborative process that reflects the Board’s dedication to continuous improvement, alignment with regional goals, and supporting Central Ohioans’ quality of life. While building upon the achievements of the 2016 Strategic Action Plan, the COG Board Retreat provided an invaluable opportunity for the Board to reflect on past accomplishments and unite in bold envisioning for the future. The COG Board Retreat has generated an update to the existing Strategic Action Plan rather than a new plan. This iterative approach highlights the Board’s dedication to continuous improvement by aligning the actions of the Central Ohio Greenways program with regional goals, ensuring a more robust and impactful program. The goals outlined in the table below capture the collective plan for an enhanced trail experience supporting the development of healthier, safer, more inclusive, and more sustainable communities. The COG Board’s adoption of these updated action items demonstrates a commitment to advancing the Central Ohio Greenways Program.

Collaboration:

ID	Action	COG Board Leadership	Working Groups	MORPC Staff
C1	Establish a Trail Towns Working Group	•		•
C2	Establish Sub-Region Collaboration Groups	•		•
C3	Maintain the Regional Bikeways File and COG Vision Map		•	•
C4	Develop Active Transportation, Outdoor Recreation, and Mobility Partnerships	•	•	•
C5	Advocate for Trail Funding	•		•
C6	Engage with Statewide Organizations			•
C7	Develop a Climate and Environmental Action Plan			•

Messaging:

ID	Action	COG Board Leadership	Working Groups	MORPC Staff
M1	Manage the COG Website		•	•
M2	Manage the COG Social Media		•	•
M3	Manage the Outdoor Trails Pass		•	•
M4	Host Trail Forums	•		•
M5	Maintain the Trail User Map			•

ACTION ITEMS (cont.)

Resources & Guidelines:

ID	Action	COG Board Leadership	Working Groups	MORPC Staff
RG1	Maintain Brand Guidelines			•
RG2	Establish a Partnership Messaging Toolkit		•	•
RG3	Establish Trail Safety Protocols		•	•
RG4	Establish and Maintain a Trail Count Monitoring Program			•
RG5	Establish a Trail Design Guide		•	•
RG6	Set Protocols for Construction, Detours, and Alerts along Trails		•	•
RG7	Establish Trail Event Protocols		•	•
RG8	Establish Wayfinding Guidelines		•	•
RG9	Establish a Grants Narrative Toolkit	•	•	•
RG10	Offer Technical Assistance			•
RG11	Complete an Impact of Trails Report			•

Program Operations:

ID	Action	COG Board Leadership	Working Groups	MORPC Staff
PO1	Establish Criteria for Expanding the COG Footprint	•		•
PO2	Develop Local Government Sponsorship Guidelines	•		•
PO3	Manage Standing and Project Based Working Groups		•	•

NEXT STEPS

The 2016 Strategic Action Plan directed four ongoing COG Working Groups to advance action items. These working groups supported significant progress over the last seven years; thus, it is important to strategize the best working group structure necessary to implement action items over the next 3 to 5 years. Following the adoption of this Strategic Plan Action Item Up-date, the COG Board and its working groups will be asked to form new ongoing and project-based working groups to effectively guide the implementation of this action update.

The Board will also be asked to support the nomination of new COG Board and Working Group members who offer the expertise necessary to continue to advance the COG Vision and Mission.

MORPC appreciates the COG Board member's ongoing commitment, passion, and support and thanks the Board for advancing the Central Ohio Greenways program!

COG Board Members

- Chair Michael Andrako, P.E.,
Franklin County Engineer's Office
- Laura Ball, PLA, ASLA, *City of Westerville*
- Kacey Brankamp, *Capital Crossroads Special Improvement District*
- Jody Dzurainin, *Ohio to Erie Trail*
- Bertie Fields, *Black Girls do Bike*
- William Habig, *Granville Township*
- Beth Hugh, *Korda*
- Adrienne Joly, *City of New Albany*
- Dan Kaderly, *Metro Parks*
- Kari Kauffman, *Experience Columbus*
- Tamisha Matus, *Union County Health Department*
- Angela Mitchell, *Black Women in Nature*
- Alex Nouanesengsy, *LCATS*
- Eric Oberg, *Rails-to-Trails Conservancy*
- Tobi Otulana, *Toole Design*
- Andrew Overbeck, *AICP, MKSK*
- J.M. Rayburn, *AICP, City of Dublin*
- Wayne Roberts, *Friends of Madison County Parks & Trails*
- Letty Schamp P.E., *City of Hilliard*
- Kelly Scocco, *City of Columbus*
- Scott Ulrich, *Columbus Public Health Department*
- Julie Walcoff, *Toole Design*
- Brad Westall, *City of Columbus*



For more information, visit:
www.centralohiogreenways.com



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