

Central Ohio Greenways Strategic Action Plan Amended 2026



A note about the 2026 amendment: This action plan was developed in 2023 and later amended to include the items in **Bold** in 2026 to integrate the goals of the COG Advisory Council's newest working group, the Blueways Working Group.

INTRODUCTION

Central Ohio Greenways (COG) is a trail network of national significance spanning **400+ 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, MORPC's Commission approved the creation of the COG Advisory Council. The Advisory Council serves as a subcommittee to the Sustainability Advisory Committee and focuses on increasing the use and miles of the regional trail system. Its members represent the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. The Advisory Council is guided by working teams that support the advancement of the Vision and Mission of COG.

Vision: A resilient world-class network of trails that move, inspire, and connect every Central Ohioan.

Mission: To increase trail mileage and use of trails for recreational and transportation needs while promoting environmental stewardship and expanding safe access.

In 2015, the newly formed COG Advisory Council hired planningNEXT to develop a strategic plan and to confirm the Advisory Council's vision, mission, and goals, memorialized in the 2016 COG Strategic Action Plan. In the years since the Advisory Council 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 an overwhelming commitment to trail-related investments in the region, the COG Advisory Council, and all of Central Ohio are ready to focus efforts on a revised set of action items in the Strategic Action Plan. Items 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 Advisory Council used its 2023 retreat to assess the alignment of its 2016 Strategic Plan with regional priorities.

During the 2026 retreat, the Advisory Council revisited those updates made in 2023 to integrate the goals of the Blueways Working Group. The following document serves as the 2023 COG Strategic Action Plan Update Amended 2026. New action items reflect the goals of the COG Advisory Council and MORPC. The implementation will require the support of the COG Advisory Council, COG working groups, and regional partners.

OVERVIEW OF THE 2023 COG ADVISORY COUNCIL RETREAT

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

- **Partnership Development Workshop:** In this workshop, Advisory Council 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 Advisory Council 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 network.
- **Trail Town Planning Workshop:** In this session, Advisory Council 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, Advisory Council members were asked to identify three to five relevant long and short-term goals. Four common themes emerged: collaboration, messaging, resources & guidelines, and program operations. These themes, together with the results of the Strategic Action Plan assessment, resulted in the creation of 26 new or revised action items for 2023 COG's Strategic Action Plan 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 the focused concentration on critical next steps.



ACTION ITEMS

Updates and amendments to action items within COG Strategic Action Plan are shaped through a collaborative process that reflects the Advisory Council'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 annual COG Advisory Council Retreat provides an invaluable opportunity for the Advisory Council to reflect on past accomplishments and unite in bold envisioning for the future. The COG Advisory Council Retreat in 2023 generated an update to the existing Strategic Action Plan rather than a new plan. **Similarly, the COG Advisory Council Retreat in 2026 generated amendments to the action items rather than undergoing a full update.** This iterative approach highlights the Advisory Council'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 Advisory Council's adoption of these amended action items demonstrates a commitment to advancing the Central Ohio Greenways Program.

Collaboration

ID	Action	COG Advisory Council Leadership	Working Groups	MORPC Staff
C1	Establish a Trail Towns Working Group	•		•
C2	Establish Sub-Region Collaboration Groups	•		•
C3	Maintain the Regional Bikeways and Blueways File and COG Vision Map		•	•
C4	Develop Active Transportation, Outdoor Recreation, Mobility Partnerships, Environmental Stewardship Partners, and Tourism Organizations	•	•	•
C5	Advocate for Trail and Green Space Funding	•		•
C6	Develop a Climate and Environmental Action Plan		•	•
C7	Pursue Water Trail and Scenic River Designation		•	•
C8	Develop partnerships with local education institutions to expand internship, fellowship, and research programs		•	•
C9	Develop a Regional Water Trail Plan		•	•

ACTION ITEMS (CONT.)

Messaging

ID	Action	COG Advisory Council 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/ Workshops	•		•
M5	Maintain the Trail User Map including the Water Trails User Map			•
M6	Share Water Quality and Safety Information and Provide Real Time Water Levels Data			•
M7	Host or support annual public events such as celebrate trails day, bike to work day, riverfest, and regional river clean-ups			•

Resources & Guidelines:

ID	Action	COG Advisory Council Leadership	Working Groups	MORPC Staff
RG1	Maintain Brand Guidelines			•
RG2	Establish a Partnership Messaging Toolkit		•	•
RG3	Establish Trail Safety Protocols for different elements such as e-motos, crossings, etc.		•	•
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	•	•	•

ACTION ITEMS (CONT.)

RG10	Offer Technical Assistance			•
RG11	Complete an Impact of Trails Report Annually or Bi-Annually			•
RG12	Identify and Develop Environmental Stewardship Projects (e.g. Onion Bag)		•	•
RG13	Establish Water Access Point Design Guidelines		•	•
RG14	Establish a Hazard Removal Consortium		•	•

Program Operations:

ID	Action	COG Advisory Council 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 ten 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 Update, the COG Advisory Council 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 Advisory Council will also be asked to support the nomination of new COG Advisory Council and Working Group members who offer the expertise necessary to continue to advance the COG Vision and Mission.

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

2026 COG Advisory Council Members

- Mike Andrako, Franklin County Engineer Office
- Laura Ball, City of Westerville, Parks & Recreation
- Brad Bodenmiller, Logan Union Champaign Regional Planning Commission
- Michael Bodine, City of Marion
- Kacey Brankamp, Capital Crossroads & Discovery SID's
- Sarah DeMeo, Ohio Hispanic Coalition
- Deserae Dinger, Burgess & Niple
- Jody Dzurainin, Ohio to Erie Trail
- Catherine Girves, Toole Design
- Zac Guthrie, City of Gahanna, Parks and Recreation
- Jonett Haberfield, Visit Fairfield County/Escape to Buckeye Lake
- Beth Hugh, Korda Nemeth Engineering
- Kelli Johnson, Black Girls do Bike
- Adrienne Joly, City of New Albany
- Dan Kaderly, Quarry Trails Metro Park
- Kari Kauffman, Experience Columbus
- Angela Mitchell, Black Women in Nature
- Brian Mullaney, City of Marysville
- Eric Oberg, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
- Andrew Overbeck, MKSK
- Jessie Powers, Outdoor Recreation Council of Appalachia
- Letty Schamp, City of Hilliard Engineer Office
- Kelly Scocco, City of Columbus, Department of Public Service
- Kim Shields, Grove City
- Zach Sunderland, Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA)
- Chris Tavenor, Ohio Environmental Council
- Olivia Toth, Knox County Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Mara Villaseca, Knowlton School of Architecture
- Brad Westall, City of Columbus Recreation & Park



For more information, visit:
www.centralohiogreenways.com



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