

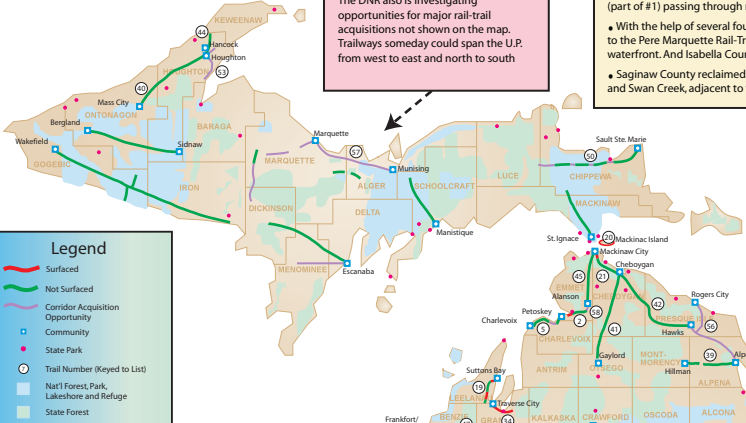
REGIONAL VISION:

Net working t he Upper Peninsula

It's a common belief that converting old railroad lines to trails is a fairly recent phenomenon in Michigan. But the DNR began acquiring railroad lines in the Upper Peninsula for trail use more than 30 years ago. These early acquisitions helped expand the snowmobile trail system. Today the U.P. boasts nearly 400 miles of rail trails for snowmobiles and off-road vehicles, and most trails also are open to non-motorized use.

Trail improvements have been limited. Most of the rail trails, as well as many other U.P. trails, could be improved to trail standards and thus accommodate a wider range of uses. The DNR welcomes local proposals to explore developing U.P. trailways to their full potential. The map below shows all major rail trails in the U.P., both existing and proposed. Those with outstanding trailway potential are numbered and included in the table.

The DNR also is investigating opportunities for major rail-trail acquisitions not shown on the map. Trailways someday could span the U.P. from west to east and north to south



REGIONAL VISION:

Net working t he Saginaw Bay Region

Over the past 20 years, several trailmakers in the Saginaw Bay region have created local trailways and greenways, most of which capitalize on the region's vast water resources. For example:

- Along the bay, the DNR utilized inactive railroad line and other routes to create a four-mile nature/biking trail (part of #1) in the Bay City State Recreation Area.
- Saginaw and Bay City recognized that reclaiming their neglected Saginaw River waterfronts could help revitalize their communities. Since then they have created an outstanding system of trailways, green spaces, boardwalks, bridges, water parks and other amenities that have transformed much of the course of their riverfronts into regional greenway and waterway attractions.
- Neighboring communities acquired inactive rail segments and worked with Bay City to develop a 10-mile loop trail (part of #1) passing through riverfront green space, urban neighborhoods and the countryside.
- With the help of several foundations and State agencies, the city and county of Midland converted an inactive rail line to the Pere Marquette Trail of Mid-Michigan (#28), extending over 20 miles northward from the downtown Midland waterfront. And Isabella County recently completed its eight-mile portion of the trail to the outskirts of Clare.
- Saginaw County reclaimed 10 miles of inactive railroad line to create the Saginaw Valley Trail (#33) between St. Charles and Swan Creek, adjacent to the Shiawassee River State Game Area.

As these and other efforts moved forward, the vision of a regional greenway/trailway network emerged. The Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative (WNI) recognized that implementing this vision could help greatly to preserve and reclaim the region's waterways and green infrastructure as well as enhance the region's quality of life and economy. So WNI leaders formed the Saginaw Bay Greenways Collaborative to spearhead a major effort. Now, through the hard work of many dedicated citizens, a 40-mile regional trailway from St. Charles through Saginaw and Bay City to the bay is within reach. Another key vision is the Trolley Line Trail, which would extend nearly 20 miles from Bridgeport to Mount Morris, and eventually could link on the north to the planned 40-mile trail and on the south to the Flint. Ultimately, the collaborative envisions a 22-county "greenway network that connects our communities to the area's natural and cultural amenities for the recreation, transportation, education and health benefits of its citizens." Like all regional trailway efforts, transforming this vision into reality requires teamwork among players too numerous to list here, as well as local leadership to foster that teamwork. With both ingredients in place, the Saginaw Bay Greenways vision is well on its way to realization.

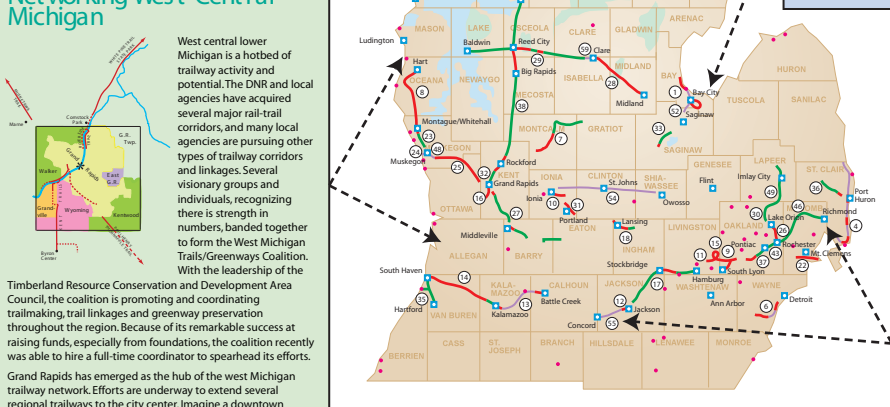
REGIONAL VISION:

Net working West Central Michigan

West central lower Michigan is a hotbed of trailway activity and potential. The DNR and local agencies have acquired several major rail-trail corridors, and many local agencies are pursuing other types of trailway corridors and linkages. Several visionary groups and individuals, recognizing there is strength in numbers, banded together to form the West Michigan Trails/Greenways Coalition.

With the leadership of the Timberland Resource Conservation and Development Area Council, the coalition is promoting and coordinating trailmaking, trail linkages and greenway preservation throughout the region. Because of its remarkable success at raising funds, especially from foundations, the coalition recently was able to hire a full-time coordinator to spearhead its efforts.

Grand Rapids has emerged as the hub of the west Michigan trailway network. Efforts are underway to extend several regional trailways to the city center. Imagine a downtown trailhead at the junction of these trails, from which cyclists, runners, hikers, in-line skaters and wheelchair users could strike out in any one of several directions and travel a trailway network for more than 300 miles. This is the exciting vision of the coalition, the city, Kent County, and other far-thinking west Michigan trailmakers.



REGIONAL VISION:

Net working S outh ern Michigan

The Michigan Airline Railway once spanned southern lower Michigan from shore to shore. Today, dozens of trailmakers are stitching together segments of this railroad line and other routes between Concord, in southwest Jackson County, and Richmond, near Lake St. Clair. Through their combined efforts, the potential has emerged for a continuous 140-mile trailway linking some of Michigan's most populous areas, within easy cycling distance of several million Michiganders.

This "mega-trail" would include several trailways identified at left and other connecting segments. Some trailmakers already have completed their trails; others have only begun to explore the possibilities.

Communities in Oakland and Macomb counties recently took some huge steps toward establishing the eastern part of the mega-trail. They have acquired, or have committed to acquire, more than 40 miles of the former Airline Railway through some of Michigan's fastest-growing communities. This right-of-way and connecting segments will become the Clinton River Trail (#43) and Macomb Orchard Trail (#46). Crucial to this achievement were the tireless efforts of citizen-created "friends of the trail" groups in both counties; the purchase of several rail corridor segments by the Trust for Public Land, which will preserve them until local agencies can secure funding; technical assistance from the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and DNR; and the cooperative spirit of the Canadian National Railway. Also, three funders—the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Board, the Michigan Department of Transportation, and the GreenWays Initiative of the Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan—have provided critical acquisition financing.

A continuous Michigan Airline Trail might not be completed for decades—if ever. But trailmakers have already preserved right of way for a large share of its potential mileage. And links with other trailways are in place or planned, especially in southeast Michigan. Most recently, far-thinking trailmakers have suggested continuing the mega-trail west to join the Kalamazoo River Valley Trailway and the Kal-Haven Trail, thus creating a shore-to-shore super mega-trail across southern Michigan.