

# Executive Summary

## PURPOSE

### WHY PLAN NOW?

In March 2024, an interdepartmental team was formed to update the 2013 Paved Recreational Trails Master Plan, renamed, the Strategic Trails Plan (STP). The STP aims to connect segments of the community that may not have historically enjoyed the use of trails by closing gaps between neighborhoods and destinations and establishing an actionable framework for maintaining Fort Collins' maturing trail system. The robust scope of work prioritizes collaboration between the City's Community Services Department and the Planning, Development, and Transportation Service Areas, emphasizing the nexus between on-street facilities and paved trails as part of a seamless interconnected system for navigating the City comfortably and safely.

The STP provides a road map for the planning and expansion of the paved trail system while preserving the existing system. The project team led a robust community engagement process that influenced the plan's policies and recommendations, including the location and conceptual alignment of proposed new trails.

**“Fort Collins’ paved trails weave a remarkable story, bridging past and future while offering a scenic pathway through the heart of the city. These trails represent more than mere concrete; they embody the city’s commitment to accessibility, environmental stewardship, and community well-being.”** - CSU Geospatial Centroid Storymap *Mapping the Story of Paved Trails in Fort Collins*



City of  
Fort Collins

## STRATEGIC TRAILS PLAN

Connecting People to City Destinations & Natural Places

## COUNCIL PRIORITIES

In 2022, the City conducted a [15-Minute City Analysis](#) which defines what a “15-minute city” means for Fort Collins: a city where every resident can walk, bike, or roll within 15 minutes of their home to their daily needs and services. More recently, Fort Collins City Council set two priorities for 2024-2025 aimed at achieving a 15-minute City:

1. Advance a 15-minute city by igniting neighborhood centers
2. Advance a 15-minute city by accelerating our shift to active modes

The City's paved trail system and the STP play a vital role in helping to achieve the 15-minute city vision. The STP recognizes that the paved trail system must be designed in coordination with, and to complement, existing and future on-street walking and bicycling facilities. Proposed trails identified in this plan were established by holistically considering the entire network of walking and biking facilities within the City.

## PLAN CONGRUENCE

Trail development is a collaborative process involving multiple City departments that provide overlapping and complementary functions such as planning, funding, wayfinding, construction, and maintenance.

Ensuring STP alignment with related City plans is an important guiding principle of the planning process. The project team conducted extensive review of existing local and regional plans, maps, and policy initiatives with implications for paved trail planning in Fort Collins. This effort included identifying the specific policies, objectives, and recommendations from related plans that align with or are closely related to STP focus areas (described below), themes, and City Council Priorities.

## PLAN VISION

The Strategic Trails Plan will expand the paved trail system to meet the needs of an evolving community while instilling a culture of safety and inclusivity that welcomes people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.



## PLAN GOALS

The plan's overarching goals are to:

- Provide a framework for the future planning, design, maintenance, funding, and preservation of the paved trail system
- Create seamless integration of a low-stress network (on and off-street systems) to achieve a 15-Minute City while maintaining the trail system's recreational value
- Ensure an equitable trail system is maintained by prioritizing trail connections to underrepresented neighborhoods, schools, parks, and natural areas while working to protect environmentally sensitive areas

## PROJECT PHASES

The overarching planning process and community engagement were organized in three phases completed over a 16-month period.



### PHASE 1: VISION AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Phase 1 defines project goals, reviews relevant background information and related plans, analyzes existing trail maintenance needs and level of service, and poses initial questions to gauge community needs, preferences, challenges, and satisfaction with paved trails in order to identify gaps and potential new trail connections.

### PHASE 2: PROPOSED TRAILS AND POLICIES

Phase 2 presents proposed new trails and policies informed by community input and

analyses conducted during Phase 1. Additional analyses on new proposed trails and design and construction standards are conducted during this phase.

### PHASE 3: PLAN DEVELOPMENT AND ADOPTION

Phase 3 consolidates community input, the results of analyses, and prioritization into recommendations to produce the STP. Community engagement in this phase centers on draft plan review and culminates in City Council adoption of the STP.



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

STP engagement strategies provided a framework for meaningful and inclusive community engagement early and frequently. Community engagement informed all three phases of the planning process and utilized a variety of methods including: *Our City* project homepage; interactive mapping; online questionnaires; visioning open house; pop-up engagement events; and the first-ever Northern Colorado Trail Summit.

## ENGAGEMENT THEMES

The following major themes emerged consistently throughout the public engagement process and directly informed the policy direction of the STP.



- **Trails for all:** Everyone should have access to trail opportunities and the planning and design of trails should account for the great variation in abilities, cultural backgrounds, modes of movement, and diversity of the community.
- **Community Connections:** Priority connections for the community include neighborhoods, schools, parks, natural areas, and linkages to other trails.
- **Interconnected Network:** Trails are a key component of the City's system of facilities for active transportation and recreation and should be considered congruently with those facilities to provide a seamless and safe user experience.
- **Complement On-Street Infrastructure:** Trails should complement, not replace on-street bicycle infrastructure. In many areas of the city, the existing and proposed on-street infrastructure is low-stress.
- **Balancing Trail Access:** Homeowner concern for loss of privacy if trails are developed within irrigation ditch corridors and very close to homes.
- **New Trails in the Northeast:** Strong support for investment in NE Fort Collins trails and interim facilities while future development processes unfold.
- **Trail Safety Education:** Need for additional trail safety education regarding user behaviors/etiquette.
- **Partnerships Produce Results:** Collaborative trail development in Northern Colorado has resulted in the successful completion of numerous projects that connect Fort Collins to neighboring communities. The City should continue to leverage partnerships for a coordinated approach to network development.
- **Trails as a mechanism for environmental stewardship:** Trail development should integrate environmental analysis and best practices to understand potential impacts to habitat and sensitive ecosystems and eliminate or mitigate negative impacts through close collaboration with the Natural Areas Department and compliance with applicable federal, state, and city regulations.
- **Continue proactive community engagement:** The planning process for the STP has successfully engaged community members. On-going communication with the community on trail-related topics should continue beyond plan adoption.
- **Expand outreach focus:** Trail safety and etiquette education should expand to include community awareness on paved trails impacts to sensitive habitats and wild life, such as bicycle volumes and speeds. Outreach should provide ways to avoid or mitigate these impacts.





## PLAN FOCUS AREAS

- **Plan Congruence:** Extensive review of existing local and regional plans, maps, and policy initiatives with implications for paved trail planning in Fort Collins. The purpose of this effort is to identify specific policies, objectives, and recommendations from related plans that align with or are closely related to the STP Focus Areas, themes, and City Council Priorities.
- **Community Engagement:** Utilize a diverse array of communication tactics to engage internal and external stakeholders, including the formation of a community working group to steer the plan's scope, policy, and proposed action items; and engagement strategies to reach historically underrepresented populations through events offered by the City's Neighborhood Services Department.
- **Asset Management:** Maintenance audit of existing major paved trails to document observed deficiencies, pavement conditions, known user conflicts, barriers to access, and other known issues with geo-tagged waypoints.
- **Equity of Existing & Future Trails Gap Analysis:** Review previously proposed trails and recommend the location of new trails to meet the needs of Fort Collins' growing population including a focus on connecting to underrepresented neighborhoods and schools.
- **Safety, Mobility, Accessibility:** Review of current safety outreach practices and ordinances; and provide recommendations to create a culture of safety among users of the trail system. This includes trail safety education strategies.
- **Design and Construction Standards:** Review and update existing design standards to ensure that new trail facilities can meet the needs of a growing population of trail users. These recommendations will define trail typologies, design specifications for new construction, grade separated crossing standards, at-grade crossing standards, and centerline standards.
- **Irrigation Ditch and Trail Compatibility:** Evaluate the feasibility of pairing trails on, along, or across irrigation ditches; and to enhance public transparency to known challenges and explore opportunities for future collaboration with irrigation ditch companies.
- **Funding Strategies:** Review and summarize existing trail funding strategies and identify new funding opportunities to potentially accelerate the growth of trail construction.
- **Estimates of Probable Cost and Implementation Scenarios:** Unit costs based on recent trail construction will inform implementation scenarios that explore various rates of trail construction and build out of the system based on current and potential future funding levels.

**EQUITY BUILT IN.** The STP process is committed to ensuring that underrepresented and under-resourced communities within Fort Collins are included in future trail planning.

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## PROPOSED TRAILS MAP

The project team evaluated opportunities and constraints within numerous environmental and physical factors to produce a proposed trails map. While the proposed trails map is feasible from an implementation standpoint, it is extensive and unequivocally ambitious:

- **57** proposed new miles of major and minor trails
- **27** proposed grade separated crossings at major roadways
- **7** proposed grade separated crossings at railroads

The proposed trails map represents at least a 45-year planning horizon, although the proposed trails map should be revisited every 10 years as the community grows and priorities shift.

## PRIORITIZATION

To prioritize future trail projects, quantitative geospatial models were developed for both existing and proposed trails. Each model employed a slightly different set of prioritization criteria. This prioritization approach provides a framework for reconsidering priorities every two years consistent with the City’s bi-annual Budgeting for Outcomes process. The framework also helps community members understand the anticipated expansion of the trail system over time.

The result is prioritized lists that emulate community values as reflected in the STP prioritization criteria while maximizing internal and external partnerships. The 57 miles of prioritized major and minor trails have been organized into three tiers: near-term, mid-term, and long-term.

## TRAIL DEVELOPMENT AND FUNDING SCENARIOS

Based on current and potential future funding levels, two approaches to trail development have been identified.

### THE CURRENT APPROACH

The Conservation Trust Fund is currently the only dedicated funding mechanism for the development of new trails. Using this current dedicated funding source, plus the potential to augment trail development with grants and partnerships, an estimated 1.5 miles of trail on average can be planned and constructed annually.

This incremental approach represents a 45-year planning horizon. A phasing framework based on discrete trail project prioritization is summarized in the table below and provides a useful structure for estimating the timeframe for full build out of the full trail system using current funding mechanisms.

### THE ACCELERATED VISION

If additional annual funding is identified, trail development can accelerate. Additional funding would broaden staff’s capacity to expand trail predevelopment while providing more resources for design and construction thereby enabling the City to advance multiple trail projects annually.

Hypothetically, an additional \$1.5-2.0 million dollars annually through a combination of a potential increase in Conservation Trust Funds, potential Community Capital Improvement Program funding, GOCO grants, and Transportation-related grant funding, trail development could be accelerated an estimated 2.5 miles per year on average.

### DEVELOPMENT TIME FRAMES COMPARED

Prioritized Miles of Proposed Trails	Phase	CURRENT APPROACH Approximate Years to Complete	ACCELERATED VISION Approximate Years to Complete
1-20	Near-term	~15	~9
21-38	Mid-term	~30	~17
39-57	Long-term	~45	~25





# Proposed Major & Minor Trails by Phase

