



FACT SHEET

Iowa Bicycle & Recreational Trails

Iowa has built a comprehensive multi-use trail system over the past few decades, offering significant opportunities for both transportation and recreation.



Trail System Overview



Current trail mileage:
2,980 miles (including bike lanes)



Long-term goal: 5,500+ miles



Usage: biking, walking, running, & other non-motorized activities

Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan

This plan is developed by the Iowa DOT to guide investments and improvements in non-motorized transportation by identifying needs and recommendations that align with the State Transportation Plan and help coordinate efforts between state, regional, county, and city agencies.

Plan details: <https://iowadot.gov/transportation-development/systems-planning/areas-planning/transportation-plans/bicycle-pedestrian-plan>

Economic & Health Benefits of Trails

(Study: *Economic and Health Impacts of Bicycling and Trails in Iowa*, Scioto Analysis, Jan. 2025)

Biking and walking are essential to Iowa's transportation system and recreation, offering significant economic and health advantages.



Economic Impact

900,000 Iowans

ride bikes each year; 350,000 ride at least twice a month.

Biking and trail use contribute **\$1.4 billion annually** to Iowa's gross state product.

21,000+ jobs supported, primarily in retail and food services.

Trail-related economic activity generates:

- **\$690M** in wages.
- **\$23M per year** in state income taxes.
- **\$11M per year** in state sales taxes.



Health Benefits

Regular cycling leads to lower obesity and better overall health.

Estimated annual health impact of biking in Iowa:

- **9,000** fewer overweight or obese individuals.
- **1,200** fewer cases of high blood pressure.
- **250** fewer strokes.
- **170** fewer cases of breast cancer.
- **100** fewer cases of colorectal cancer.
- **5,400** fewer Iowans experiencing poor mental health due to increased physical activity.

Funding Programs for Trails

Several funding programs support the development and maintenance of Iowa's trail network.

State Recreational Trails (SRT) Program

Established: 1988

Purpose: Provides state funding for recreational trails and related facilities for motorized and non-motorized users.

Application process:

- Applications are due **July 1** each year. Submitted primarily by cities and counties.
- Reviewed by a **multi-agency advisory committee** (Iowa DOT, Iowa Economic Development Authority, and Iowa Department of Natural Resources).
- Evaluated based on **nine key criteria**, including population served, compatibility with trail plans, economic impact, accessibility, and project readiness.

Project requirements:

- Must be “shovel-ready” and completed within **two years**.
- Funding is dependent on annual appropriations from the **Rebuild Iowa's Infrastructure Fund (RIIF)**.

Recent Funding Cycle (FY2026):

- **22 applications** submitted, **\$12M** requested.
- **9 projects** awarded funding, with **\$2.5M** approved.
- The total investment, including matching funds, reached **\$17.2M**, supporting **14+ miles of new or improved trails**.
- Demand for funding consistently exceeds availability; over the past five years, requests have averaged **7× the available funds**.

More info: <https://iowadot.gov/modes-travel/trails/federal-state-recreational-trails>

Transportation Alternatives Set-aside Program

This program provides funding for a variety of non-motorized transportation projects, including trails.

Statewide Application Program

Purpose: Funds large-scale projects with statewide or multi-regional impact.

Eligibility: Cities, counties, school districts, and non-profits

Evaluation:

- Projects are scored based on **12 criteria**, including:
 - Completion of trail linkages.
 - Consistency with planning efforts.
 - Safety improvements.
 - Tourism and economic impact.
 - Accessibility and long-term maintenance plans.

Recent Funding Cycle (2025):

- **30 applications** submitted, requesting **\$34M**.
- **11 projects** funded, with **\$12M** available.

More info: <https://iowadot.gov/transportation-development/local-systems/grant-programs/transportation-alternatives>

Federal Recreational Trails (FRT) Program

Established: 1991 as part of the Federal-aid highway program.

Purpose: Funds the development and maintenance of recreational trails for motorized and non-motorized users.

Eligible projects:

- Maintenance and restoration of existing trails.
- Purchase of equipment for trail construction and maintenance.
- Construction of new trails and related facilities.
- Acquisition of land for trail development

Application process:

- Submitted primarily by government agencies
- Reviewed by a **7-member advisory committee** representing various trail user groups across Iowa.
- Evaluated based on **11 criteria**, with priority given to well-planned projects that:
 - Serve multiple user groups.
 - Improve access for underserved populations.
 - Connect existing trail networks.
 - Leverage other funding sources.

Recent Funding Cycle (2025):

- **11 applications** submitted, requesting **\$6M** in funding.
- **4 projects** selected, with **\$1.4M** available.
- Over the past five years, funding requests have averaged **5× the available funding**.

Regional Application Program

Funding: Over **\$9M** per year is distributed to **Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Regional Planning Affiliations (RPAs)**.

Process:

- MPOs and RPAs allocate funds through local competitive application programs.
- They may award funds annually, accumulate funds for larger projects, or borrow against future allocations.

2024 Funding Cycle Results:

- **59 applications** submitted, requesting **\$42.2M** (total project costs estimated at **\$113M**).
- **42 projects** funded, receiving **\$27M**, supporting projects totaling **\$89M**.