



# TRAILS FOR ALL

EXPANDING THE  
ACCESSIBLE  
TRAILS NETWORK IN THE  
COMMONWEALTH

2026



# COMPILED RECOMMENDATIONS

# PLANNING & POLICY

## 1 CENTER LIVED EXPERIENCE

- 1.1.1. Fund, plan, design and test all trails in partnership with people with diverse disabilities, ensuring accessibility is integrated in every project from the outset. Ensure participation from individuals with lived experience of disability who reflect the full diversity of the community, especially underserved populations. [State Agencies, Land Trusts, Land Owners, Trail Design Consultant, Trail Builders, Private Funders, Municipalities]
- 1.1.2. Compile a list of accessibility consultants with lived experience who can consult on accessible trail projects throughout planning, design, and construction. [Advisory Council, State Agencies, Large Land Trusts]
- 1.1.3. Create a multi-stakeholder Advisory Council at the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) to advise MOOR and EEA Agencies on the findings of the Trails for All Report and the implementation of recommendations. The Advisory Council should center lived experience with at least one-third of members being persons with lived experience of a disability, and also include broad representation from other key stakeholder agencies, organizations and groups. Specifics of size, agency representation, terms, meeting cadence, and compensation should be determined by EEA. [State Agencies[EEA]]
- 1.1.4. Draft a Model Policy Platform which could be adopted by local governments and non-profit organizations to normalize and prioritize accessibility in outdoor spaces. [Advisory Council]

## 2

PLAN A ROBUST AND EQUITABLE  
STATEWIDE ACCESSIBLE TRAIL SYSTEM

- 1.2.1. Systematize accessible trail planning by integrating it into routine municipal and regional planning efforts such as Open Space & Recreation Plans, Bicycle & Pedestrian Plans, Regional Greenway Plans, and others. [Regional Planning Agencies, Trail Design Consultants, State Agencies, Municipalities]
- 1.2.2. Evaluate trail networks within towns, regionally, and statewide, to identify gaps in the accessible trail networks and experiences. Efforts to identify gaps could begin with: [Advisory Council, Regional Planning Agencies, State Agencies, Municipalities, Land Trusts, Trail Consultants]
  - Gateway Cities
  - Places where residents do not have an accessible trail within a 20-minute trip
  - Existing or planned transit corridors that lack nearby trailheads
- 1.2.3. Evaluate trail networks at the local, regional, and statewide scale to identify opportunities for new “keystone” trails—destinations that offer distinctive natural, historic, or cultural settings, can extend a mile or more, and have the potential to attract regional visitors for an exceptional experience. [State Agencies, Regional Planning Agencies, Large Land Trusts, Trail Consultants]
- 1.2.4. Develop an accessible trail redesign decision-making toolkit to guide municipalities and trail organizations in evaluating existing trails for potential accessibility improvements. Key factors to consider include transit access, availability and accessibility of parking, trail length, width, and grades, and the condition of the trail surface, subbase, and drainage. [Advisory Council, Trail Consultants]
- 1.2.5. Ensure that accessibility is a central consideration in all trail improvement projects. [State Agencies, Land Trust, Land Owners, Trail Design Consultant, Trail Builders]
- 1.2.6. Expand programs providing adaptive equipment and assistance to access nature. Support, fund, advertise, and maintain adaptive and assistive recreation equipment lending and sharing programs, networks and systems.

[State Agencies, Land Trusts, Adaptive Programs, Adaptive Equipment Companies, Advocates]

- 1.2.7. Explore opportunities for accessible trails that follow the routes of aqueducts, sewer and water lines, flood control levees and other infrastructure corridors. [Regional Planning Agencies, Trail Design Consultants, State Agencies, Municipalities]

### 3 CREATE AND MAINTAIN FUNDING SOURCES TO EXPAND AND SUPPORT THE ACCESSIBLE TRAIL NETWORK

- 1.3.1. Establish a dedicated state fund, able to accept public and private contributions, to ensure sustainable state-level funding for construction and ongoing maintenance of accessible trails. [Legislators, State Agencies]
- 1.3.2. Prioritize accessible trails within the MassTrails grant program and other state grants programs. Ensure that any state funding for conservation and/or recreation includes funding for accessible trail construction and maintenance [State Agencies (MassTrails)]
- 1.3.3. Integrate accessibility improvements into existing and future climate resilience, open space, and infrastructure funding mechanisms. [State Agencies, Private Funders]
- 1.3.4. Partner with hospitals and health networks to: [Health Care Providers, Land Trusts, Adaptive Programs, Private Funders, Department of Public Health]
- Develop accessible trails on or near healthcare campuses;
  - Support shuttle services and trailhead access for patients and community members;
  - Provide adaptive equipment rentals or loans; and/or
  - Incorporate trail-based programs into rehabilitation, wellness, and preventive care initiatives.

- 1.3.5. Work with the CPA Coalition and other Community Preservation Act stakeholders to more effectively use CPA funds to create, preserve, rehabilitate and/or restore the accessible trail system. [State Agencies (EEA), CPA Coalition, Advocates]
- 1.3.6. Guarantee that key state agencies—including the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the Department of Fish and Game (DFG), and the Massachusetts Office of Outdoor Recreation (MOOR)—receive sufficient operating budget allocations and capital investment resources to plan, design, build, and maintain accessible trails across the Commonwealth. Sustained funding for agency staff, technical expertise, project management, and oversight of grant and capital programs is essential to expanding the accessible trail network and ensuring long-term stewardship of these public assets. [Legislators]

## 4

### REDUCE ADMINISTRATIVE AND REGULATORY BARRIERS

- 1.4.1. Collaborate with DCR and MassDOT to create public contracting categories, qualifications, specifications, best management practices, and mechanisms that are specific to the needs of accessible trail design and construction in natural areas. (See also 2.3.3.) [State Agencies (DCR, MassDOT), Advisory Council]
- 1.4.2. Collaborate with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and advocacy partners to “right-size” the regulatory framework for wetlands review and permitting to reduce the time, cost, and technical barriers to accessible trail maintenance and construction permitting while maintaining

strong wetland resource protections. [State Agencies, Advocates, Legislators]

## 5 FACILITATE TRANSPORTATION TO TRAILS

1.5.1. Create a Transit to Trails initiative with MassDOT and regional transit authorities to enhance transit access to accessible trails. The initiative may include: [State Agencies, Regional Transit Authorities, Regional Planning Agencies, Trail Consultants]

- Ensuring all trailheads can serve as drop-offs and pick-ups GPS coordinates, regardless of official street addresses.
- Exploring and promoting dedicated weekend routes, dedicated shuttle buses, subsidized vouchers, and volunteer buddy systems.
- Establishing a “Safe Routes to Trails” initiative and improved sidewalk and crossing connections near trailheads in planning the trail system.

# DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

## 1 ESTABLISH STATEWIDE STANDARDS

- 2.1.1. In partnership with the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board, develop and adopt statewide standards for accessible trails that include surfacing, grading, drainage, width, slope transitions, edge treatments, and signage. [State Agencies, Trail Builders, Private Contractors, Private Quarries]
- 2.1.2. Establish 3/8" minus crushed stone material as the default material for accessible trail surfacing. Use alternate materials only where site conditions, aesthetic goals or performance requirements demand them. Partner with builders and quarries to test performance, standardize sieve gradations, and maintain a shared, up-to-date guide with ideal mixes for different conditions. [State Agencies, Trail Builders, Private Contractors, Private Quarries]

## 2 BUILD A COMMON RESOURCE OF BEST PRACTICES

- 2.2.1. Provide a compendium of best trail design practices, informed by persons with lived experience, to ensure that accessible trails provide a high-quality user experience in addition to meeting minimum standards. [State Agencies (DCR), Large Land Trusts, Trail Builders, Private Contractors, Trail Consultants]
- 2.2.2. Provide a compendium of construction best practices, including construction methods and specifications. [State Agencies (DCR), Large Land Trusts, Trail Builders, Private Contractors, Trail Consultants]
- 2.2.3. Compile and publish examples of accessible trails to highlight success stories. [State Agencies (DCR), Large Land Trusts, Trail Builders, Private Contractors, Trail Consultants]

### 3

## CULTIVATE TRAIL CONSTRUCTION EXPERTISE

- 2.3.1. Support programs to share and disseminate best practices, success stories, specifications, and sources for trail surfacing. [State Agencies, Land Trusts, Trail Builders, Trail Consultants, Advocates]
- 2.3.2. Develop model scopes of work and selection criteria to help towns and smaller land owners identify construction contractors with suitable skills and experience with natural surface trails. [Advisory Council, Trail Builders, Trail Consultants]
- 2.3.3. Collaborate with DCR and MassDOT to create public contracting categories, qualifications, specifications, best management practices, and mechanisms that are specific to the needs of accessible trail design and construction in natural areas. (See also 1.4.1) [State Agencies[DCR, MassDOT], Advisory Council]
- 2.3.4. Encourage collaboration between trail designers, builders, and individuals with a lived experience of a disability in every trail project. Consider requiring participation of those with lived experience [State Agencies, Advisory Council, Trail Builders, Trail Consultants].

# INFORMATION

1

## MAKE TRAIL ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION CLEAR AND AVAILABLE TO ALL

- 3.1.1. Adopt a numerical, icon-based, or name-based statewide trail accessibility rating system to be utilized by all state properties and for trails planned, built, or upgraded with the use of state-provided funds. Explore opportunities to coordinate with regional or national partners. (See Appendix C) [Advisory Council, All Actors]
- 3.1.2. Publish a guidance document for land managers and trail stakeholders on how to rate, classify, and sign their trail using the statewide trail accessibility rating system. Include guidance on submitting ratings and classifications that includes detailed trail access information (TAI) to a centralized trails inventory. (These metrics could also be used as a reporting requirement for trails designed/planned, built/upgraded, or maintained with state funds.)
- 3.1.3. Ensure accessibility ratings and trail access information (TAI) are integrated into any state-wide or regional trail inventories. [State Agencies, Regional Planning Agencies, Municipalities]
- 3.1.4. Consider shared use of the High-Efficiency Trail Assessment Process (HETAP) tool between trail organizations to expand trail assessment capabilities, combined with regular training opportunities. Alternatively, provide training for a set of individuals to conduct assessments using the tool across the state. [State Agencies {DCR}, Large Land Trusts]
- 3.1.5. Develop a concise resource—a web page or one-page handout—to help trail managers and staff confidently welcome visitors of all abilities. The resource should summarize regulations, legal requirements, and other tools or guidance that support safe and positive trail experiences for visitors. [Advisory Council]

2

## IMPLEMENT SHARED STANDARDS AND POLICIES FOR DATA COLLECTION AND USE OF DIGITAL MAPPING AND OTHER APPLICATIONS

- 3.2.1 Adopt a technical data standard for accessible trails that reflects the design/construction standards described in action 2.1.1. This data standard should define

a “schema” to enable digital representation of accessible trails information such as trail slope, width, surface type, ADA parking, and restrooms, and to support the collection, verification, and digital publication of information about accessible trails to an online map and/or open data platform.

3.2.2 Develop and maintain a statewide accessible trail inventory and database by compiling and aggregating existing sources of trails information and by collecting new information where relevant trail attributes are missing. This database should build on existing efforts like the MassGIS Statewide Trails Database, and should be maintained by dedicated GIS and database staff. Ensure that projects funded by various state grants & programs provide trail data consistent with these standards.

3.2.3 Publish an accessible trails web map and data hub website with information available for bulk download, via application program interface (API), and made usable via official and third party web tools, such as a mapping system and/or app that uses the trail rating system. The web map should include search and filtering tools that allow online users to filter trails not only by accessibility “rating/category” but also by specific key information relevant to accessibility, such as “max grade”, “trail width”, “trail surface material”, “availability of ADA parking”, “availability of ADA bathroom” etc.

### 3

## EXPAND AWARENESS OF ACCESSIBLE TRAILS AND THEIR BENEFITS

3.3.1. Promote the numerous benefits of accessible trails to decision-makers and the general public to build support and awareness. [Advisory Council, Advocates]

3.3.2. Advertise the presence of accessible trails through hospitals, rehab centers, schools, senior centers, disability commissions, adaptive sports and recreation non-profits, and public transit. [Regional Planning Agencies, Municipalities, State Agencies, MOD]

3.3.3. Continue the dialogue with the Department of Environmental Protection, DCR, Legislature, and other relevant stakeholders to raise awareness about trails, and especially accessible trails, as a resource for public good. [Advisory Council, State Agencies, Legislators, Advocates]

# MAINTENANCE

## 1 ENSURE ONGOING ACCESSIBILITY THROUGH PLANNED MAINTENANCE

- 4.1.1. Provide training and/or resources for land managers, contractors, and municipal staff on accessible trail maintenance best practices, including monitoring vegetation, obstructions, surface conditions, and publishing updates online and/or at trailheads to inform users. Consider incorporating accessible trails maintenance-focused sessions into venues such as the MassTrails Conference. [Trail Consultants, Trail Designers and Builders, and/or State Agencies]
- 4.1.2. Develop template maintenance plans and guidelines to help trail managers systematize and budget for maintenance and inspections. Require maintenance plans as part of applications for public grants that fund accessible trail design and construction. [Trail Consultants, Trail Designers and Builders, and/or State Agencies]
- 4.1.3. Encourage land managers to provide simple, accessible feedback systems (e.g., online forms, QR codes, phone number) so trail users can report issues or provide input in real time. [All Trail Managers, State Agencies, Land Trust]

## 2 EXPAND CAPACITY OF CONTRACTORS, STAFF, AND VOLUNTEERS TO PERFORM MAINTENANCE

- 4.2.1. Foster connections between landowners/trail managers and trained maintenance professionals (contractors, NGO staff, or others) to support timely inspections and emergency repairs to sustain accessible conditions.
- 4.2.2. Partner with educational programs and landscape professionals to build a consistent pipeline of trained professionals who can conduct inspections, perform routine upkeep, and make repairs. Support the sharing and dissemination of best practices for trail maintenance.

4.2.3. For routine trail care and non-specialized tasks, leverage volunteers, schools, Scouts, Friends of Trails groups, and AmeriCorps under professional supervision. [All Trail Managers, State Agencies, Land Trust]

3

### ENSURE FUNDING RESOURCES SUPPORT MAINTENANCE

4.3.1. Ensure state grant program include maintenance of accessible trails as eligible activities [State Agencies]

4.3.2. Work with the CPA Coalition and other Community Preservation Act stakeholders to more effectively use CPA funds to create, preserve, rehabilitate and/or restore the accessible trail system. (See also Action 1.3.5.) [State Agencies (EEA), CPA Coalition, Advocates]

