



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT MICHIGAN'S IRON BELLE TRAIL

Why a statewide trail?

Michigan's natural and cultural resources are spectacular, and hiking or bicycling is a wonderful way to experience the state's vast array of scenic views, cultural resources, vibrant communities and wildlife resources. Michigan's Iron Belle Trail links the wealth of existing trails, helps fill gaps where needed and celebrates the partnerships that have developed and are maintaining the trails. The trail creates opportunities for rural economic development, healthy recreation and awareness of Michigan's natural resources.

What is the latest on the Iron Belle Trail?

Acquisition and development of the trail is ongoing. Currently, 68.2 percent of the trail (1,377 of 2,019 miles) are connected. In its current proposed state, the hiking route will be 1,221 miles and the biking route the remaining 798. The hiking route portion of the trail follows the current route of the North Country National Scenic Trail while the bicycling trail connects many different segments from Belle Isle in Detroit to Ironwood in the Upper Peninsula.

Why two routes?

There are numerous advantages to having two routes of the Iron Belle Trail:

1. Two routes showcase the state and its partners' extensive investment in trails. The two routes also allow for statewide and national marketing of the many trails that will comprise the bicycle portion of the trail and supports the national marketing that is already occurring on the North Country National Scenic Trail.
2. Two routes allow for more economic development opportunities, both rural and urban.
3. Two routes meet the expectation of long distance hikers and bicyclists by having the tread design and outdoor experience that they expect.
4. Michigan has so much to offer that one trail would not do justice to our scenic landscapes, natural and cultural features, vibrant communities, spectacular water bodies and great existing trails.

As you have identified the trail corridor, what has been the reaction of the potential partners?

There is great excitement about the opportunity to participate in Michigan's Iron Belle Trail in communities across the state. These communities are proud of their trails and are excited about the opportunity to share them with new visitors. Partner agencies and communities from across the state have joined the effort to connect the trail.

What are potential funding sources to assist in acquisition and development of the trail?

There are many options for funding the acquisition and development of the trail, all of which will be leveraged. The federal government provides limited funds to the North Country Trail Association and its volunteers to develop and maintain the North Country National Scenic Trail. The Association seeks private and other funding sources as well. Federal highway dollars, Recreation Improvement Fund, Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, local resources, businesses, foundations, trail groups, and volunteers are all involved in the development and maintenance of both the hiking and the bicycling portions of the trail. Funding gaps along this route continues to be a priority for MDOT's Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP).

Partners are critical in managing and funding the trail. A complete list of land acquisition opportunities is being maintained and can be obtained by request from State Trails Coordinator Paul Yauk at 517-284-6141 or yaukp@michigan.gov.

What is the impact on the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund?

As is currently the case for trail funding, multiple funding sources are utilized to acquire and develop a trail. The Natural Resources Trust Fund will be looked to as one of many funding sources.

What happens to all of the other important trail projects?

Michigan's Iron Belle Trail is a priority state trail. There are many priority regional and local trails that will continue to move forward for acquisition and development. In fact, acquisition and development along this statewide trail will enable the department and local communities to link portions of the state's larger trail network through connections to Michigan's Iron Belle Trail.

How does this concept complement the already-existing trail systems in Michigan, particularly the North Country National Scenic Trail?

As America's longest National Scenic Trail (4,600 miles), the North Country National Scenic Trail passes through seven states and connects America's northern heartlands from eastern New York to central North Dakota, including 1,150 miles in Michigan – more trail miles than any state along the North Country National Scenic Trail. As such, North Country National Scenic Trail serves as the principal hiking corridor in a vast network of trails across Michigan. Like two of its sister national scenic trails – the Appalachian NST in the east, the Pacific Crest NST in the west – the North Country NST brings an added uniqueness to Michigan's trails system and creates an even greater destination potential for Michigan's efforts at being The Trail State.

How will the trail benefit Michigan's overall State Trail system?

Michigan's Iron Belle Trail is the newest addition to Michigan's 12,500 miles of recreational trails, which have earned Michigan the reputation as The Trails State. This extensive trail network offers plentiful opportunities for hiking, bicycling, equestrian, snowmobiling, kayaking and other trail pursuits. Michigan's Iron Belle Trail will raise awareness and interest in trails all over the state. It will also serve as an opportunity for partners to develop and test tools and partnerships to promote all Michigan trails.

Who will be responsible for maintenance?

Development and maintenance of the hiking trail is currently performed by chapter volunteers of the North Country Trail Association. Their continued participation is imperative to the success of Michigan's Iron Belle Trail. Michigan Department of Transportation is responsible for the US-2 bike route through the Upper Peninsula, or the Department of Natural Resources for the North Central State Trail.

Why were certain trails not included?

Hiking Route: The hiking route utilizes the route of the North Country National Scenic Trail, which is a major partner to accomplish Michigan's Iron Belle Trail. Out of the 7 states through which the North Country National Scenic Trail traverses, Michigan contains the longest section, making this trail a natural choice for the hiking route of Michigan's Iron Belle Trail.

Biking Route: Starting at Belle Isle, the bicycle route also focused on existing facilities with opportunities to make logical trail connections. The bicycling route starts on the east side of the state through a network of developed trails, with the goal of connecting with one of Michigan's longest state rail trails: the North Central State Trail from Gaylord to Mackinaw City. As planning moves forward and the primary routes are finalized, there will be many opportunities for other communities to plan trail connections to the main routes. Ultimately, the trail will become an interconnected facility, celebrating a "Pure Michigan" experience with connections to many communities throughout Michigan.

Who sets the rules/use guidelines for the trail?

Since Michigan's Iron Belle Trail comprises numerous smaller, existing trails, the use and rules are determined by the managing authority for each section of trail. In other words, different sections of the trail have different rules. Michigan DNR is working to compile a list of contact information and/or websites for all of the partners who manage sections of trail. If you have questions about use on a particular section of trail, please contact the local managing authority. In most cases, an online search will help determine who manages a trail.

Why was the trail in my community not included in the route of Michigan's Iron Belle Trail?

Hiking Route: The hiking route of Michigan's Iron Belle Trail utilizes the route of North Country National Scenic Trail, which is a major partner in this statewide endeavor. Of the 7 states through which North Country National Scenic Trail traverses, Michigan contains the most miles, making it a natural choice for Michigan's Iron Belle Trail to lie along this existing route. This allows the trail to use existing

infrastructure as much as possible, keeping costs down and drawing attention to other trails. The national recognition of North Country National Scenic Trail will bring additional attention to Michigan's Iron Belle Trail and Michigan's entire trail system.

Biking Route: Starting at Belle Isle, the bicycle route was also created with the goal of using existing trails and making logical trail connections to provide a statewide route. The bicycling route follows the east side of the Lower Peninsula, weaving through a network of developed trails with the goal of connecting with one of Michigan's longest state rail-trails: North Central State Trail from Gaylord to Mackinaw City.

If my community/trail isn't part of the trail, how can we get involved?

As planning for Michigan's Iron Belle Trail moves forward and the primary hiking and bicycling routes are identified and developed, there will be opportunities for other communities to plan trail connections to the initial trail routes. Ultimately, the trail will become an interconnected facility, celebrating a "Pure Michigan" experience with connections to many communities throughout Michigan. A community toolkit will eventually be made available for communities along the trail (and other communities who wish to be involved) to take advantage of this statewide economic driver. Watch for details at www.michigan.gov/dnrtrails and make sure to sign up for email updates by clicking the red envelope.

How do trail users cross between the Upper Peninsula and Lower Peninsula?

Trails users can cross the Mackinac Bridge by motor vehicle or take the ferry to Mackinac Island.

Ferry to Mackinac Island: Ferries are available in both the Lower Peninsula (Mackinaw City) and the Upper Peninsula (St. Ignace). This option allows users to walk/bike around the island on M-185 and enjoy the natural, cultural and historic resources at this classic Michigan tourism destination. The Mackinac Island Ferry service takes approximately 25 minutes from dock to dock, but is only provided at scheduled times. Visit www.mackinacisland.org/transportation for schedules and prices of available ferry services.

Mackinac Bridge Authority transport services: Pedestrians and bicyclists are not allowed to cross the Mackinac Bridge on foot or bike except on the Labor Day Bridge Walk (Sept. 7, 2015). Any other time of year, users can cross the bridge 24/7 with Mackinac Bridge Authority's transport services. The fee is \$5 per bicycle (includes one person per bike); \$3.50 for a pedestrian to ride in a Mackinac Bridge Authority vehicle. For northbound users, there is a phone at the south end of the bridge. Instructions for using the phone are posted in the phone box. For southbound users, please visit our service window in the administration building on the north end of the Mackinac Bridge on the east side of the toll plaza. Transport service is provided on an as-needed basis, and service is normally provided within ½ hour of the call.

For more information:

Learn more about Michigan's trails at www.michigan.gov/dnrtrails. You can also sign up for email updates by clicking the red envelope.

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