

Connecting United States and Canadian Greenways

Gwen Gell, Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Michigan, gell@umich.edu

Kevin Berk, Osgoode Hall Law School, kevinberk@osgoode.yorku.ca

John Hartig, Great Lakes Institute for Environmental Research, University of Windsor, jhartig@uwindsor.ca

In 2016, a U.S.-Canadian partnership released a binational greenways vision map to connect emerging international greenways, trails, and bike lanes. The goal of this project was to establish safe and convenient routes for pedestrians and bicyclists (Figure 1). The partners included: Bike Friendly Windsor Essex, Canadian Consulate General, City of Detroit, City of Windsor, Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, Detroit Greenways Coalition, Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau, Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, Detroit/Wayne County Port Authority, Downtown Detroit Partnership, Essex County, Essex Region Conservation Authority, National Park Service, Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wheelhouse Detroit and Windsor Bicycling Committee.

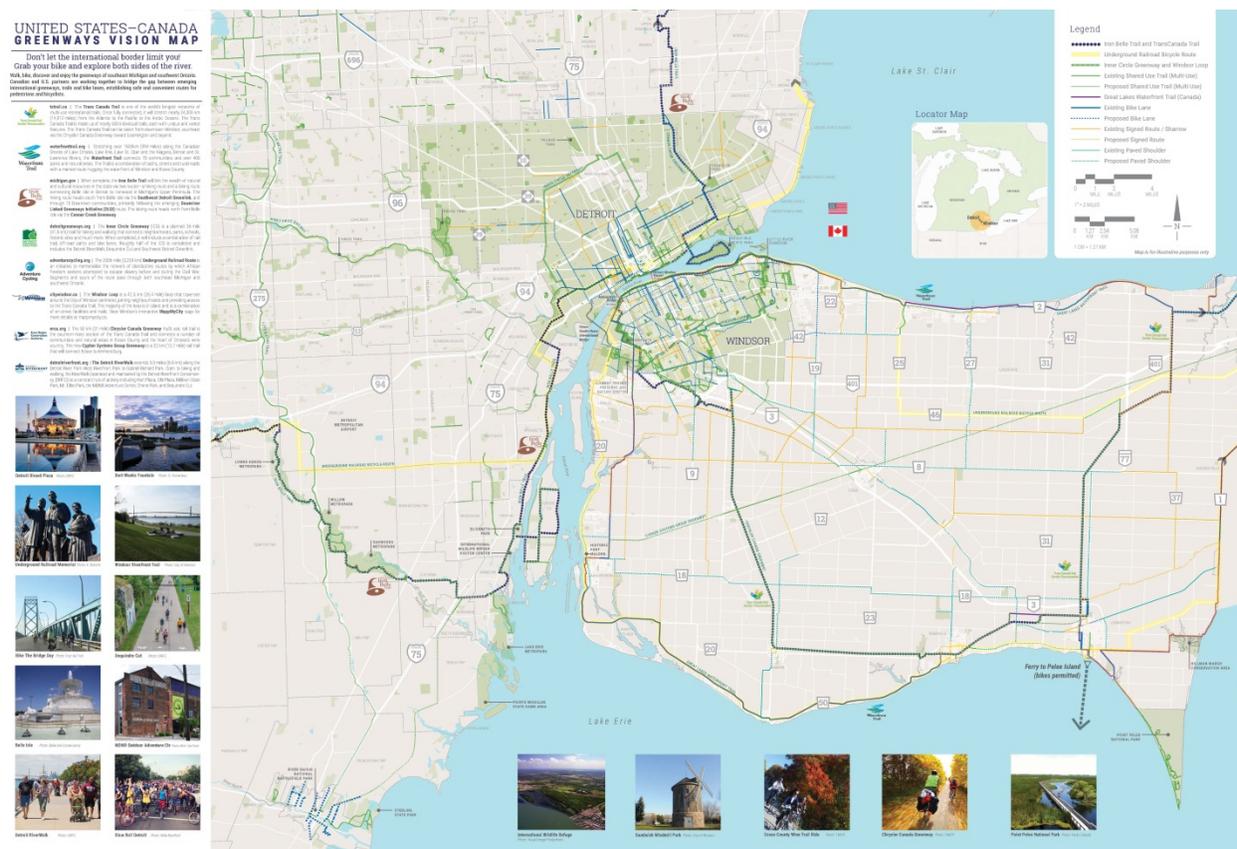


Figure 1. U.S.-Canada Greenways Vision Map.

The vision of these Canadian and U.S. partners is to encourage stronger linkages between emerging greenways of southwest Ontario and southeast Michigan via a future dedicated bike lane on the new Gordie Howe Bridge, improvements to the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel Bus to accommodate cyclists, and a possible future ferry system between Windsor and Detroit.

Greenways are connections that link communities, parks, nature areas, cultural features, economic centers, and historic sites. Based on experience throughout the world, greenways promote outdoor recreation, catalyze ecotourism and economic development, promote healthier lifestyles, provide safe alternatives to motorized transportation, increase adjacent property values, celebrate historical and cultural assets, promote conservation and environmental education, and improve quality of life.

Windsor and Detroit share the same ecosystem and have much in common culturally, socially, economically, and historically. Each has a unique greenway system.

Windsor Greenways

In many respects, Windsor's greenways have been an inspiration for the development of Detroit's greenways. Windsor's Department of Parks and Recreation maintains 1,214 ha (3,000 acres) of green space, 180 parks, and over 64 km (40 miles) of trails. Beginning in the 1960s, Windsor started creating a 43-km (27-mile), shared-usage, trail network called the "Windsor Loop" that circumnavigates around the entire city and connects to neighboring communities. The longest greenway trail in this network is the Roy A. Battagello River Walk (built in the late 1960s, and upgraded/widened several times), stretching from west of the Ambassador Bridge to the historical Hiram Walker Distillery, a distance of about five miles. This trail also connects to other trails leading to key natural areas and city parks, including Ojibway Park and Ojibway Prairie Provincial Nature Reserve, Malden Park, Spring Garden Area of Natural Scientific Interest, and others. Other key extensions of this greenway trail network include the Ganatchio Trail (built in 1971), its Little River Extension (built in 1996), the Devonwood Bike Trail (built between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s), the Rt. Hon. Herb Gray Parkway trails that offer an additional 19 km (12 miles) of greenways (opened in 2016), and the 22-km (13.7-mile) rail trail called the Cypher Systems Group Greenway that was completed in 2017 (connecting Essex to Amherstburg).

Detroit Greenways

Detroit has over 320 km (200 miles) of bike routes and greenways, including the Detroit RiverWalk that won an Excellence in the Waterfront Award from The Waterfront Center, the Dequindre Cut Greenway that links the waterfront with Detroit's Eastern Market and many neighborhoods, the Joseph Compeau Greenway that is under construction and will connect the RiverWalk with neighborhoods, the May Creek Greenway that is in development that will connect the RiverWalk with Michigan Central Station and neighborhoods of southwest Detroit, and the Joe Louis Greenway that is a 51-km (32-mile) greenway trail from the Detroit RiverWalk to Highland Park, Dearborn, and Hamtramck (projected to be completed in 2022). Detroit's greenways are connected to over 1,600 km (1,000 miles) of greenway trails in southeast Michigan.

Cross-Border Connections

In response to the 2016 U.S.-Canada Greenways Vision Map, the Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority committed to including a dedicated bicycle and pedestrian lane on the new Gordie Howe Bridge projected to be completed in 2024 (Figure 2). Further, improvements have been made to the Windsor-Detroit Tunnel Bus to accommodate bicycles. Greenways organizations continue to advocate for a cross-border ferry system that would provide an additional greenway linkage. Although there are numerous obstacles, the Detroit/Wayne County Port Authority has received a \$2.4-million federal grant to explore the feasibility of such a cross-border ferry, and if feasible, undertake a pilot project.



Figure 2. The Gordie Howe International Bridge projected to be completed in 2024 (credit: Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority).

Extensions Beyond Detroit and Windsor

Detroit's greenways are part of Michigan's Iron Belle Trail that touches hundreds of municipalities and crosses through 48 counties in Michigan (Figure 3). Using existing trails, networks, and new connections, the trail extends more than 3,200 km (2,000 miles) from Ironwood, Michigan at the far western tip of the Upper Peninsula to Belle Isle in Detroit, with a route of bicycling, and a route of hiking. When complete it will link the wealth of natural and cultural resources in Michigan. In Detroit, the route heads south from Belle Isle via the Southwest Detroit Greenlink and through 10 Downriver communities, primarily following the

emerging route of Downriver Linked Greenways Initiative. The biking route heads north from Belle Isle via the Conner Creek Greenway.

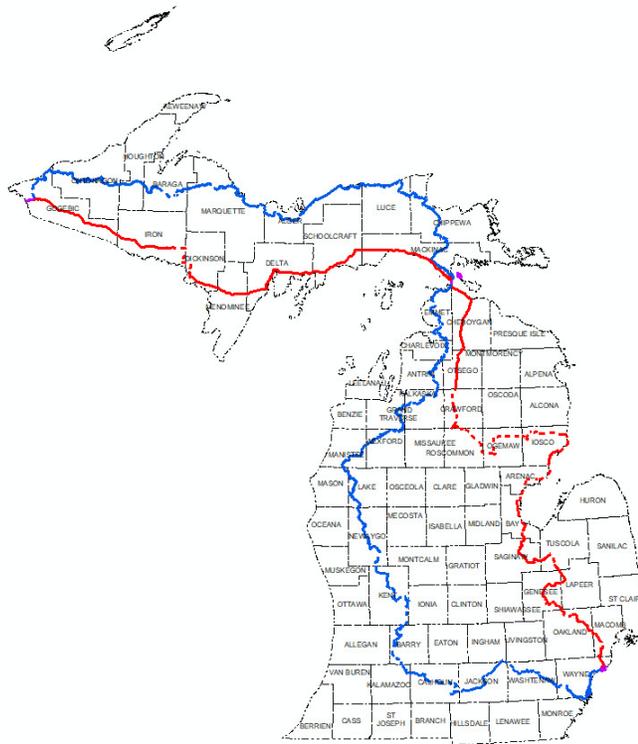


Figure 3. The Iron-Belle Trail (credit: Michigan Department of Natural Resources).

Windsor's greenways connect to Essex County greenways and are part of the Trans Canada Trail, officially renamed The Great Trail in September 2016 (Figure 4). It is a cross-Canada system of greenways, waterways, and roadways that stretches from the Atlantic to the Pacific to the Arctic oceans. The trail extends over 24,000 km (15,000 miles) and is the longest recreational, multi-use, trail network in the world. Trans Canada Trail is the name of the nonprofit organization that raises funds for the continued development of the trail, however, the trail is owned and operated at the local level. It should be noted that the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail, that stretches over 1,600 km (1,000 miles) along the shores of Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, Lake St. Clair, Lake Huron, and the St. Clair, Detroit, Niagara, and St. Lawrence rivers, is part of the Trans Canada Trail.



Figure 4. The trans-Canada trail named The Great Trail (credit: The Great Trail).

Management Next Steps

Both greenway systems in southwest Ontario and southeast Michigan are unique individually, but together and with the Iron Belle Trail and The Great Trail they are truly world-class. These greenway systems will continue to evolve. Continuous and vigorous oversight and advocacy will be needed to realize a common vision. Further, it is critically important that government agencies, educational institutions, businesses, environmental organizations, conservation clubs, faith-based organizations, and concerned citizens join forces to continue to work together to reconnect people to the land and water in urban areas through greenways. These partnerships have the ability to foster outdoor recreational and educational experiences that help to galvanize an appreciation and love for the outdoors. That, in turn, will help develop a strong sense of place that can inspire a stewardship ethic.

Possible next steps to raise awareness and build excitement include:

- offer free access to the Tunnel Bus on weekends for cyclists;
- host a Windsor-Detroit open streets event, coupled with demonstrating a cross-border ferry; and

- organize bicycle events and races, once the Gordie Howe Bridge opens, that cross the border and showcase connectivity of greenways.