



UNITED TRAILS

POKA-BACHE

CONNECTOR

IMPACT REPORT

OCTOBER 1, 2025



WORKING **TOGETHER** TO BUILD THE POKA-BACHE CONNECTOR

Four counties, seven cities and towns, and many grassroots supporters and private donors working together to complete 82.01 miles of interconnected multiuse trails.

Allen County

DeKalb County

Steuben County

Wells County

City of Angola

City of Auburn

City of Bluffton

City of Fort Wayne

Town of Huntertown

Town of Ossian

Town of Waterloo

Fort Wayne Trails, Inc.

DeKalb County Indiana Trails, Inc.

Steuben County Trails, Inc.

Wells County Trails

Auburn/Waterloo Trail Committee

Community Foundation DeKalb
County

Steuben County Community
Foundation

Grassroots Philanthropic and
Volunteer Support



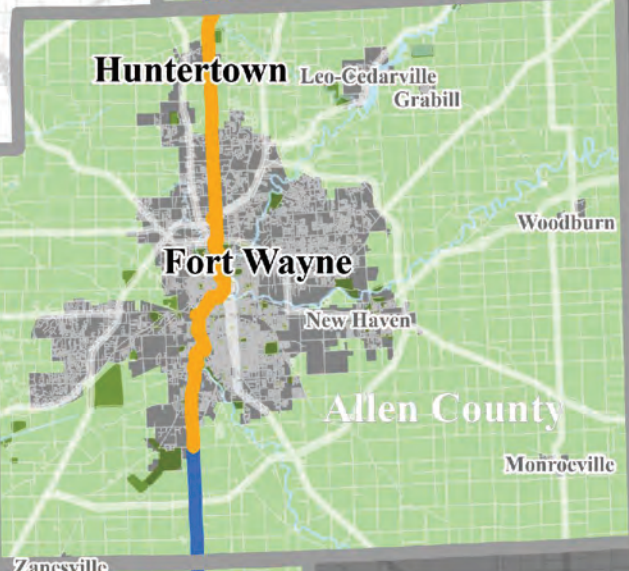
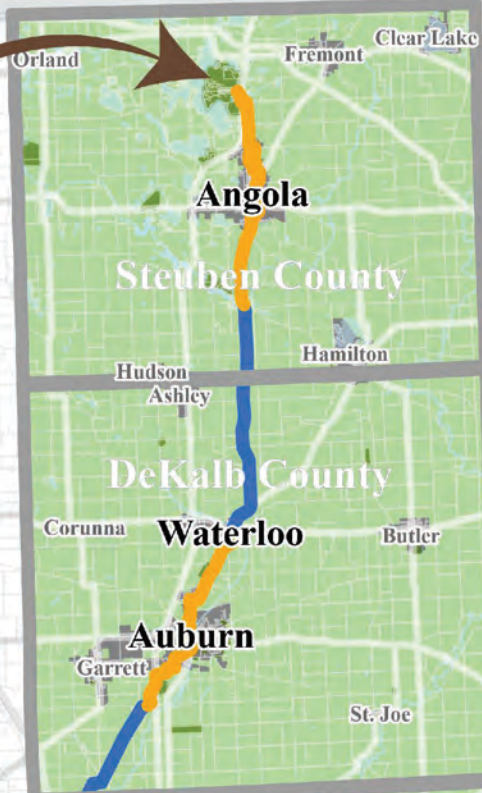
Poka-Bache Connector

- Unfunded Trail
- Existing Trail/Under Development



Pokagon State Park

Ouabache State Park



Poka-Bache Connector: 82 Miles of Connectivity

Location: Traveling through four counties in northeast Indiana, the Poka-Bache Connector trail will connect Pokagon State Park near Angola as the northernmost point down to Ouabache State Park near Bluffton to the south. The 82.01-mile trail will join Steuben, DeKalb, Allen, and Wells counties through a multiuse trail that connects to other trails. While collectively known as the Poka-Bache Connector, individual trail sections may have local names including the Interurban Trail, Pufferbilly Trail, and Auburn Junction Trail.¹

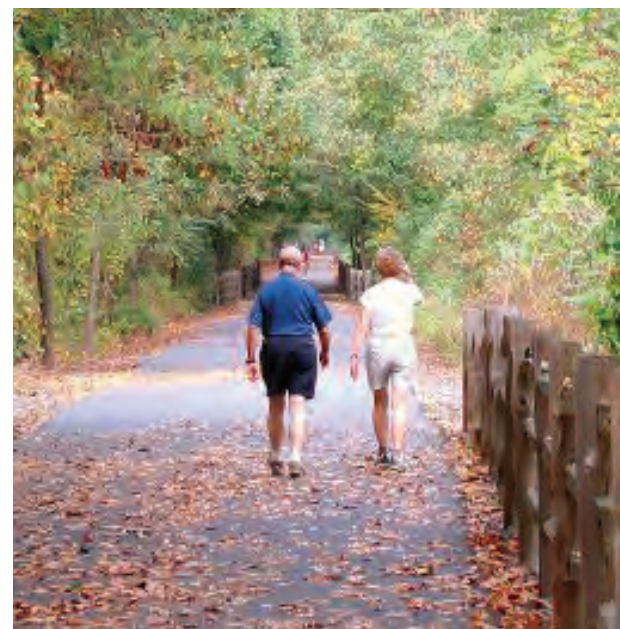
When complete, it will be one of the longest connected trail routes in Indiana.

Purpose: This state visionary trail, first proposed in 2006 in the current form, serves four purposes:

1. Economic development and tourism: Trail construction supports local jobs, and visitors will come to northeast Indiana to visit the trail network while spending money at local restaurants, hotels, and other businesses
2. Recreation: Families, friends, and individuals can use the local trail network to connect with others and have fun in urban, suburban, and rural settings
3. Health and wellness: Trails offer new and expanded ways to walk, bike, or use other human-powered movement
4. Transportation: The Poka-Bache Connector is adjacent to dozens of destinations of interest including employers, schools, downtowns, libraries, and restaurants/retail corridors

Trail length, status: As of September 2025, the Poka-Bache Connector has 39.56 miles of fully constructed trails, constituting 48.2% of the total length. Another 12.33 miles are under development in some phase of design, construction, or have funding secured. The remaining 30.12 miles or 36.7% of the trail still need final design and construction.

Connectivity: This trail goes through seven cities and towns. When complete, the Poka-Bache Connector will link more than 121,000 people, 140 recreational areas, 10 libraries, and 50 schools within a mile of the trail. It is part of the United Trails Plan, which covers 12 northeast Indiana counties to provide an interconnected trail network within and between communities.²

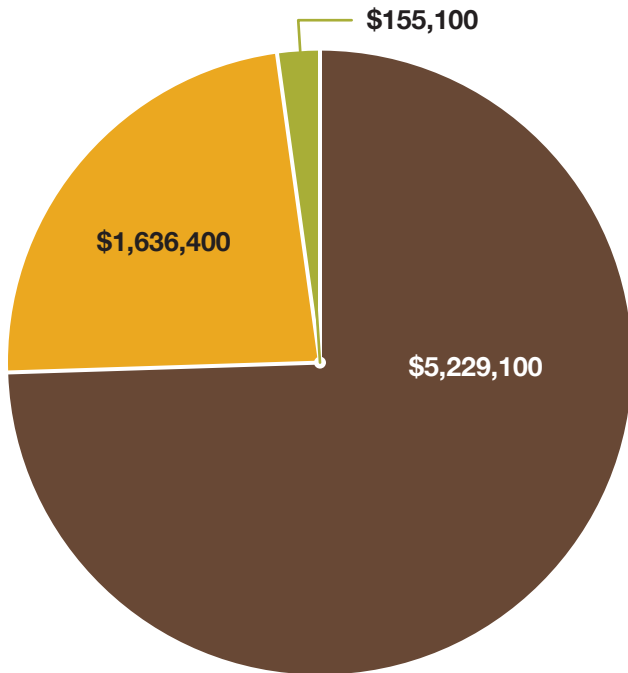


1. For more information about the Poka-Bache Connector including detailed maps by county, visit <https://www.in.gov/nircc/planning/bicycle-pedestrian/poka-bache-connector/>

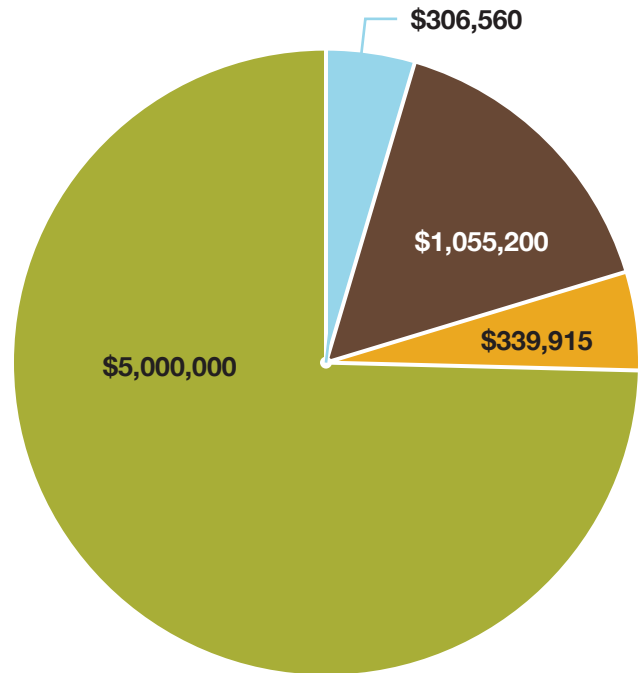
2. For more information about the United Trails plan, including the regional map, visit <https://www.in.gov/nircc/planning/bicycle-pedestrian/northeast-indiana-united-trails-plan/>

\$38.8 MILLION IN FUNDING SINCE 2021.

Steuben County: \$7,020,600



DeKalb County: \$6,701,675

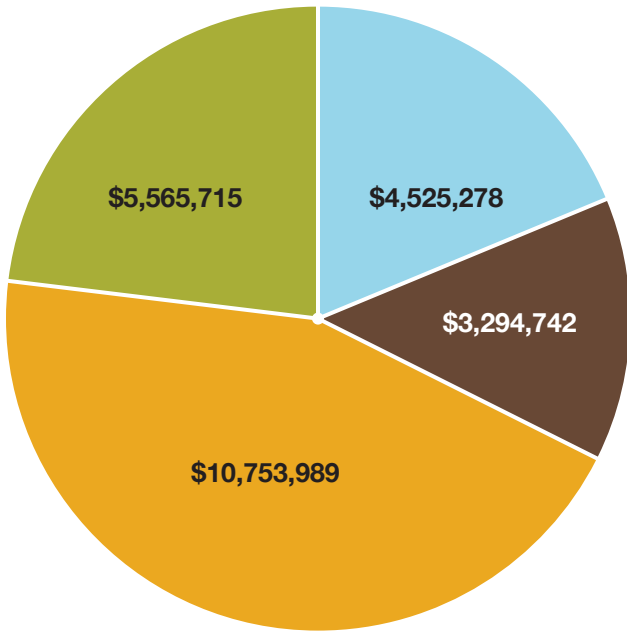


What's Next for the Poka-Bache Connector Trail

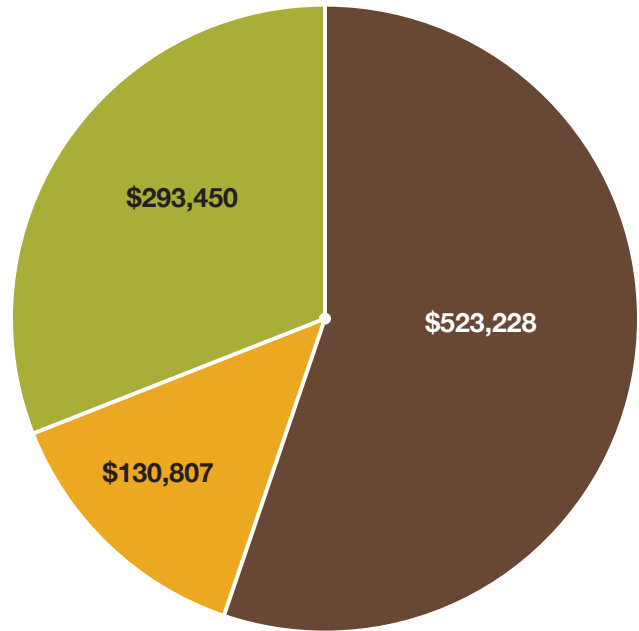
- The corridor has been well established around cities and towns, but county connectivity is the next step to meet the reality of connection to Pokagon and Ouabache State Parks. As of 09/25, the Poka-Bache Connector has 39.56 miles of fully constructed trails, constituting 48.2% of the total length. Another 12.33 miles are under development in some phase of design, construction, or have funding secured. **The remaining 30.12 miles or 36.7% of the trail still need final design and construction.**
- Of the needed trail connectivity, 12.57 miles resides in DeKalb Co., 9.33 miles in Wells Co., 5.03 miles in Allen Co., and 3.2 miles in Steuben Co.



Allen County: \$24,139,724



Wells County: \$947,485



- A part of the design services will also establish a priority for connectivity and development as constructing 30 miles of trail at once is not feasible.
- Design and engineering services, estimated at \$7.5M, are needed to establish an alignment for the trail and to prepare the remaining sections for funding and construction.
- Due to local budgets being stretched, the development of the trail is not likely without significant state, federal, or private philanthropic support.
- **With four decades focused on the Poka-Bache Connector, it must be seen as a priority corridor at the local and state levels. We need your help to accomplish this!**

For ways to support each county and the overall Poka-Bache Connector Trail, visit PokaBacheConnectorTrail.com.

Grassroots Effort With Public-Private Partnerships

Working together: Trail development, construction, and maintenance in northeast Indiana is a public-private partnership. For the Poka-Bache Connector, the following work together:

- Allen, DeKalb, Steuben, and Wells counties
- The cities of Angola, Auburn, Bluffton, and Fort Wayne
- The towns of Hometown, Ossian, and Waterloo
- Fort Wayne Trails, Inc.; DeKalb County Indiana Trails, Inc.; Steuben County Trails, Inc.; Wells County Trails with Wells County Revitalization, Inc. as fiscal agent; and the informal Auburn/Waterloo Trail Committee
- Community Foundation DeKalb County and Steuben County Community Foundation
- Grassroots philanthropic and volunteer support

Government agencies, non-profit organizations, plus private donors and volunteers build trails that enhance economic development and tourism, add new recreational activities, improve health and wellness, and connect people of all ages to destinations of interest.

History of the Poka-Bache Connector

Initial idea in 1976: The Poka-Bache Connector's predecessors were first proposed in the Northeastern Indiana Regional Coordinating Council (NIRCC) 1976 Regional Bikeway Plan using routes similar to the current path north of Fort Wayne through DeKalb County and into Steuben County and through Bluffton to the Ouabache State Park. Despite the initial regional plan, transportation funding emphasized motor-vehicle travel, although some trails were constructed in and near cities and towns with a recreational and natural focus including one of Indiana's first rail-trails between Auburn and Waterloo.

Transportation network with Poka-Bache Connector as visionary trail: Adopted in 2000, NIRCC's 2025 Transportation plan was the first to include trails as part of the transportation network. In the early 2000s, the Aboite New Trails organization in Fort Wayne encouraged local and state officials to add multiuse trails to roadway design. Prior to this, local trail advocacy focused on recreational and scenic routes. The Poka-Bache Connector was first included in NIRCC's 2030 Transportation Plan, adopted in 2005, which had the first comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian plan. In 2006, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources named what was then the Upstate Indiana Trail an inaugural state visionary trail in the statewide greenways and trails plan. It has been listed in the 2016 and 2021 trail plans as a priority visionary trail.

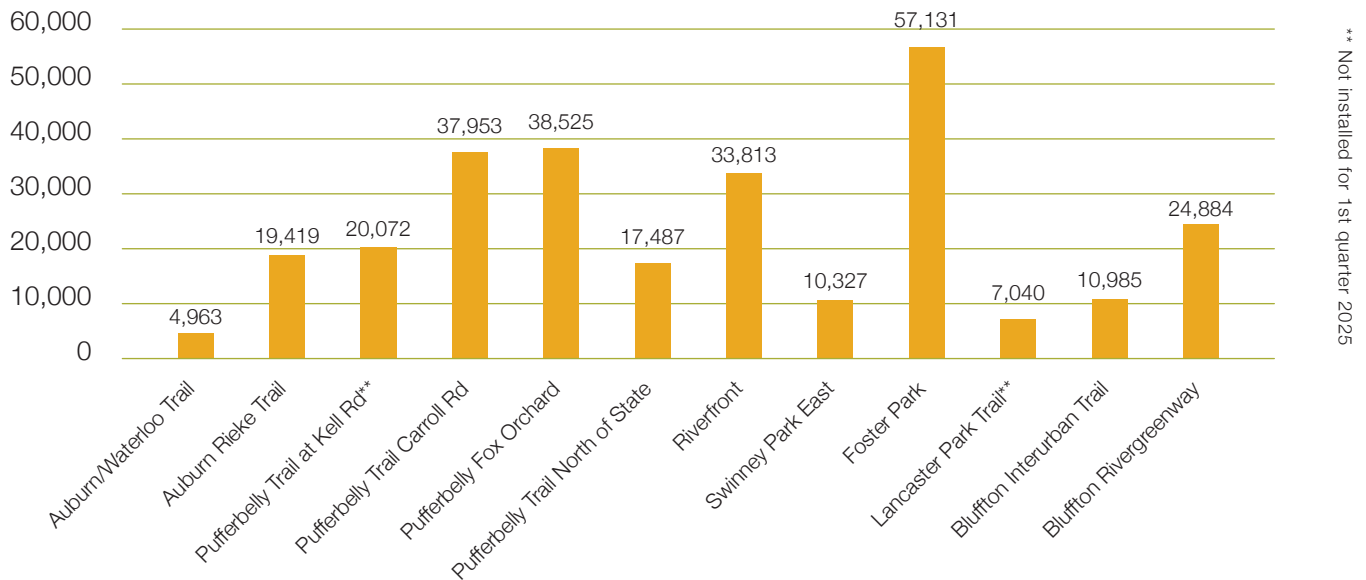
Renewed interest, construction across all four counties: Support for trail connectivity grew between 2000 to 2010, with a regional approach from local government and trail advocates. In 2005, the City of Fort Wayne hired a greenways manager. The Upstate Indiana Trail was renamed to the Poka-Bache Connector in 2016, and NIRCC branded regional trail planning as United Trails in 2017. In this same timeframe, DeKalb, Steuben, and Wells counties experienced renewed interest and growth in multiuse trails. Steuben County completed a feasibility study in 2007 for

trail alignment options to Pokagon State Park, and Angola built trail segments in 2010, 2016, and 2019. Auburn built the section from the old rail alignment at North Street to connect with the Wayne-Van Buren intersection at the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Museum in 2011 using a federal grant. Bluffton constructed the Interurban Trail from the Wabash River pedestrian bridge to Monroe Street along State Route 1 in 2016 with federal funding. Since the formation of the Poka-Bache Coalition and Task Force, the Poka-Bache Connector communities have pursued public and private funding, with awards of more than \$38.8 million from federal and state grants, local match, and private philanthropy including \$5 million from the Vann Family Foundation and \$5 million from the Lilly Endowment Inc.

Trail Usage

More than 280,000 trail uses in first half of 2025: Local residents and visitors alike are using constructed portions of the Poka-Bache Connector, as measured by the twelve trail counters located in Allen, DeKalb, and Wells counties. In the first half of 2025, the counters tallied almost 283,000 uses along the Poka-Bache Connector in these three counties. No counters are in Steuben County for this trail.

January – June 2025 Counter Totals for Allen, DeKalb, and Wells Counties



More use from improved connectivity: Counters along the Poka-Bache Connector’s Pufferbelly Trail in Allen County showed daily use more than doubled from an average of 103 uses a day between 2016 and 2018 to 210 in 2021 and 2022 after the Pufferbelly’s Dupont Road underpass opened in 2020. Improved connectivity is expected to result in additional use when people can travel longer stretches on trails and reach more destinations.



Activities and Advocacy

Local activities support and fund Poka-Bache Connector: In recent years, development and construction has involved activities and funding, including state and federal grants, private-sector cash gifts and in-kind donations, and grassroots activities to build awareness and increase use. Since the formation of the Poka-Bache Coalition and Task Force, as explained later this report, 22.36 miles of trails are in development or completed, including bridges, right of way acquisition, and other trail-support structures like trailheads.

Allen: Poka-Bache Connector projects in Indiana's largest county by square miles have secured \$10,753,989 in local funds, \$4,525,278 in federal funds, \$3,294,742 in state funds, and \$5,565,715 in private philanthropy and gifts to construct 8.8 miles of new trail and reconstruct or relocate another mile of existing trails. Fort Wayne and Fort Wayne Trails secured \$5 million from the Vann Family Foundation for the Vann Family Crossing pedestrian bridge over Coliseum Boulevard/SR 930. Fort Wayne's Bluffton Road bridge over the St. Marys River is renovated in 2025 to improve Rivergreenway bicycle-pedestrian access. Fort Wayne installed dog waste stations, park benches, a new kiosk, and new bollards. Fort Wayne and Fort Wayne Trails will provide long-term maintenance of the Golden Spike Trail Hub. Fort Wayne Trails and the City co-host Trek the Trails and Tread the Trails events on the Pufferbelly Trail and Poka-Bache Connector plus National Take a Hike Day and the Winter Solstice Walk and Bike Ride. Fort Wayne Trails and Fort Wayne recruit Adopt-A-Greenway volunteers to keep the Poka-Bache Connector maintained and cleaned. In 2024, they co-hosted the Pufferbelly's Washington Center/ Ice Way groundbreaking and a news conference to announce the Vann Family Foundation gift. Fort Wayne, Allen County, Huntertown, and Fort Wayne Trails have worked together on state and federal grant applications, including almost \$6 million in Next Level Trails funding. In 2022 and 2023, Fort Wayne worked with Trine University for a trail mid-block crossing study with the Pufferbelly Trail. Huntertown and Fort Wayne Trails secured right of way in the Twin Eagles neighborhood. Fort Wayne Trails paid for the engineering and construction of the Payton County Park Trail Hub and installed nine benches along the Pufferbelly Trail. Fort Wayne Trails provided marketing support including a donor engagement video, high-quality drone videos of the Pufferbelly, dozens of social media posts to 22,700 followers, public service announcement about mid-block trail crossings, and coordination of marketing and communications strategy including annual trail map printing and distribution of 50,000 copies that features the Poka-Bache Connector within the local trail network.



DeKalb: DeKalb County, Auburn, and Waterloo have secured a total of \$339,915 in local funds, \$1,055,200 of state funds, \$306,560 in federal funds and \$5,000,000 in private funds to construct 4.2 miles and renovate 2.4 miles of the Poka-Bache Connector. DeKalb County received a \$1,055,200 Next Level Trails Grant in 2022 to widen and resurface 2.77 miles of the Auburn Waterloo Trail. DeKalb County Indiana Trails, Inc. and the Community Foundation DeKalb County secured \$5 million from the Lilly Endowment, Inc. in 2024 to construct the trail from the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Museum southwest to Kruse Plaza at C.R. 11A. In 2021, a section of the Auburn Waterloo Trail adjacent to DeKalb High School and Middle School was dedicated to long-time trail advocate Ken Metzger. Metzger Park includes a pavilion, park benches, small parking area, and sculptures along the trail. A funding commitment was secured in 2025 to repair a tunnel under Interstate 69 for future trail construction, which is not included in the aforementioned fundraising totals.

Steuben: The northern-most county has \$1,636,400 in local funds, \$5,229,100 in state funds, and \$155,100 in private donations to construct almost 4.5 miles the Poka-Bache Connector. Angola and Steuben County both received Next Level Trail grants, totaling more than \$5.2 million. Trine University engineering students completed a preliminary engineering study with conceptual designs in 2021 from the intersection of Main St/Bellefontaine Rd and Old US 27 in Pleasant Lake to the county line. Steuben County Trails, Inc. and Angola Parks and Recreation department received a NIPSCO safety grant for safety training to community members. A safety seminar and Trail Trek event took place on National Trails Day in 2021 to promote trail usage and educate about safe trail operations. Steuben County Trails has worked with Steuben County Communications and Angola Dispatch to establish safety markers along the trail route. A new trailhead is part of the inclusive Sheets Family Park, under construction in 2025, located on the east end of the YMCA of Steuben County campus in Angola.

Wells: Bluffton has used \$130,807 of local funds, \$523,228 in state funds and \$293,450 of private donations and gifts to build 1.5 miles of this state visionary trail. Interurban Trail extension was completed in 2024 through public donations including the Caylor Nickel Foundation, a grant from the Wells County Foundation, parks department funding, and a Next Level Trails grant. The second phase of the Interurban Trail in Bluffton was fundraised for and built in 2024, expanding the Poka-Bache Connector to the north edge of the city. Bluffton and Wells County Trails worked with Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology students to evaluate how to connect the Bluffton River Greenway and Interurban Trail. A bank erosion control study was completed, and construction of the first phase started in 2025 to protect the Bluffton River Greenway and River Road. In 2025, Wells County Trails organized the Wells County Trails Challenge as a fundraiser to encourage residents and visitors to explore the county's 28 miles of multiuse trails.

Economic Impact

Construction and tourism generate millions in economic impact and supports hundreds of jobs: The Poka-Bache Connector Coalition hired the Community Research Institute at Purdue University Fort Wayne to perform an economic impact study in 2022 to identify the number of jobs supported and total economic impact of the Poka-Bache Connector's construction and ongoing impact as a result of travel and tourism.

Using IMPLAN software, this project measured the economic impact through the use of multipliers unique to the studied region's geography for the trail's construction and visitor and retail spending.

Key findings:

- Constructed trails in the Poka-Bache Connector supported a total of 264.76 jobs between 2008 and 2022 with a total economic impact of \$42.4 million in 2022 dollars.
- Future trail segments in the Poka-Bache Connector could have an economic impact of \$136.9 million in 2022 dollars and potentially support a total of 859 jobs from 2023 to 2045.
- Spending by visitors and trail users as a result of the Poka-Bache Connector in 2022 on overnight accommodations, food and beverage purchases, and retail purchases for items to use on the trail like bicycles or running shoes created a regional economic impact of \$6.9 million and supported 67.1 jobs in the four-county region annually.
- While the construction impacts create one-time economic events due to their temporary nature, the visitor and retail spends will happen year over year, creating repeated economic impact from private dollars. Furthermore, the data inputs for retail and visitor spends were conservatively estimated, meaning that growth in trail use and travel related to the Poka-Bache Connector could create a larger annual economic impact in the years to come.

Poka-Bache Task Force and Coalition

Public sector, private advocacy groups coordinate and collaborate: To coordinate planning, engineering, and construction, the public and private partners started meeting as a bipartisan coalition in 2021 to complete this state visionary trail. The Poka-Bache Connector's 11 jurisdictions entered into an interlocal agreement in 2023 for a formal Task Force to complete this 82.01-mile trail. The priorities of both are 1) trail planning and construction to improve health and wellness, 2) economic development from trail construction and use, 3) additional access to the natural environment with new recreational opportunities, and 4) supporting and encouraging tourism as a result of the Poka-Bache Connector. The Task Force and Coalition work together to secure public and private funding, including a donor database and online giving forms and donation receipts, for Poka-Bache Connector design, development, construction, completion, marketing, and maintenance.



Task Force Budget

Cost sharing based on population: The 11 jurisdictions in the Poka-Bache Task Force share costs, based on population size from the 2020 Census. The 2026 budget is \$60,000 to cover marketing, fundraising, and advocacy at a regional level.

Poka-Bache Connector Task Force 2026 Budget Apportionment				
Jurisdictions	2020 Total Population (Decennial Census)	2020 Applied Population Participating City or Town Subtracted from County Population	% Population of Participating Jurisdictions	2026 Apportionment
Steuben County	34,435	25,095	5.1%	\$3,065
City of Angola	9,340	9,340	1.9%	\$1,141
DeKalb County	43,265	27,737	5.6%	\$3,387
Town of Waterloo	2,116	2,116	0.4%	\$258
City of Auburn	13,412	13,412	2.7%	\$1,638
Allen County	385,410	112,383	22.9%	\$13,725
Town of Hometown	9,141	9,141	1.9%	\$1,116
City of Fort Wayne	263,886	263,886	53.7%	\$32,228
Wells County	28,180	14,606	3.0%	\$1,784
Town of Ossian	3,266	3,266	0.7%	\$399
City of Bluffton	10,308	10,308	2.1%	\$1,259
Total		491,290	100%	\$60,000

Appendix A – Project List

Following is a spreadsheet of projects completed since the start of the Poka-Bache Coalition.

Poka-Bache Connector Projects from 2021-2028 (updated 9/29/25)	Jurisdiction	Description	Status	Construction Year(s)
Poka-Bache Connector	Angola	Next Level Trails Grant: Planned alignment follows city streets from Commons Park to Angola corporation limits at Old Hwy 27	Preliminary Engineering/Right of Way	2026
Poka-Bache Connector	Steuben County	Next Level Trails Grant: Planned alignment follows Old Hwy 27 from Angola corporation limits to Main St in Pleasant Lake	Preliminary Engineering/Right of Way	2026
Waterloo Trail Extension	Waterloo	Recreational Trails Program (now Indiana Trails Program) Grant: Along Wayne St from Cedar St to Walnut St	Complete	2021
Auburn-Waterloo Trail	DeKalb County (small part in Auburn and Waterloo)	Next Level Trails Grant: Reconstructed and widened from along Main St/CR 427 from n/o Betz Rd to Cedar St	Complete	2024
Auburn Junction Trail	Auburn/DeKalb County	Lilly Endowment Grant: Planned from Auburn Cord Duesenberg Museum to CR 11A	Planning	2026/2027
Pufferbelly Trail	Allen County	Proposed trail along Fitch Rd and West Rd from current terminus of Pufferbelly Trail in Allen County to DeKalb County line	Preliminary Engineering/Right of Way Completed	TBD
Pufferbelly Trail	Allen County	Next Level Trails Grant: Life Bridge Church to Fitch Rd	Complete	2023
Pufferbelly Trail	Fort Wayne	Next Level Trails Grant: Golden Spike from Washington Center Rd to Ice Way (does not include bridge over SR 930)	Construction	2024/2025
Pufferbelly Trail	Fort Wayne	Planned Pedestrian Bridge (Vann Family Crossing) over SR 930	Preliminary Engineering/Right of Way	2026
Rivergreenway/Poka-Bache Connector	Fort Wayne	Part of Riverfront Phase 2B between Clinton St and Wells St which will improve and realign the Rivergreenway and Poka-Bache Connector	Construction	2025/2026
Rivergreenway/Poka-Bache Connector	Fort Wayne	Along St. Marys River from Brown St to Hale Ave	Complete	2024
Rivergreenway/Poka-Bache Connector	Fort Wayne	Planned trail along St. Marys River from Hale Ave to Rivergreenway (Carlton Ave)	Preliminary Engineering	2027
Rivergreenway/Poka-Bache Connector	Fort Wayne	Bluffton Road Bridge replacement over St. Marys River	Construction	2025/2026
Rivergreenway/Poka-Bache Connector	Fort Wayne	Planned along Bluffton Rd from Lower Huntington Rd to Ferguson Rd	Preliminary Engineering	2028
Interurban Trail and Lancaster Park Trail	Bluffton	Next Level Trails Grant: Along SR 1 and within Lancaster Park from Monroe St to Jackson St	Complete	2024

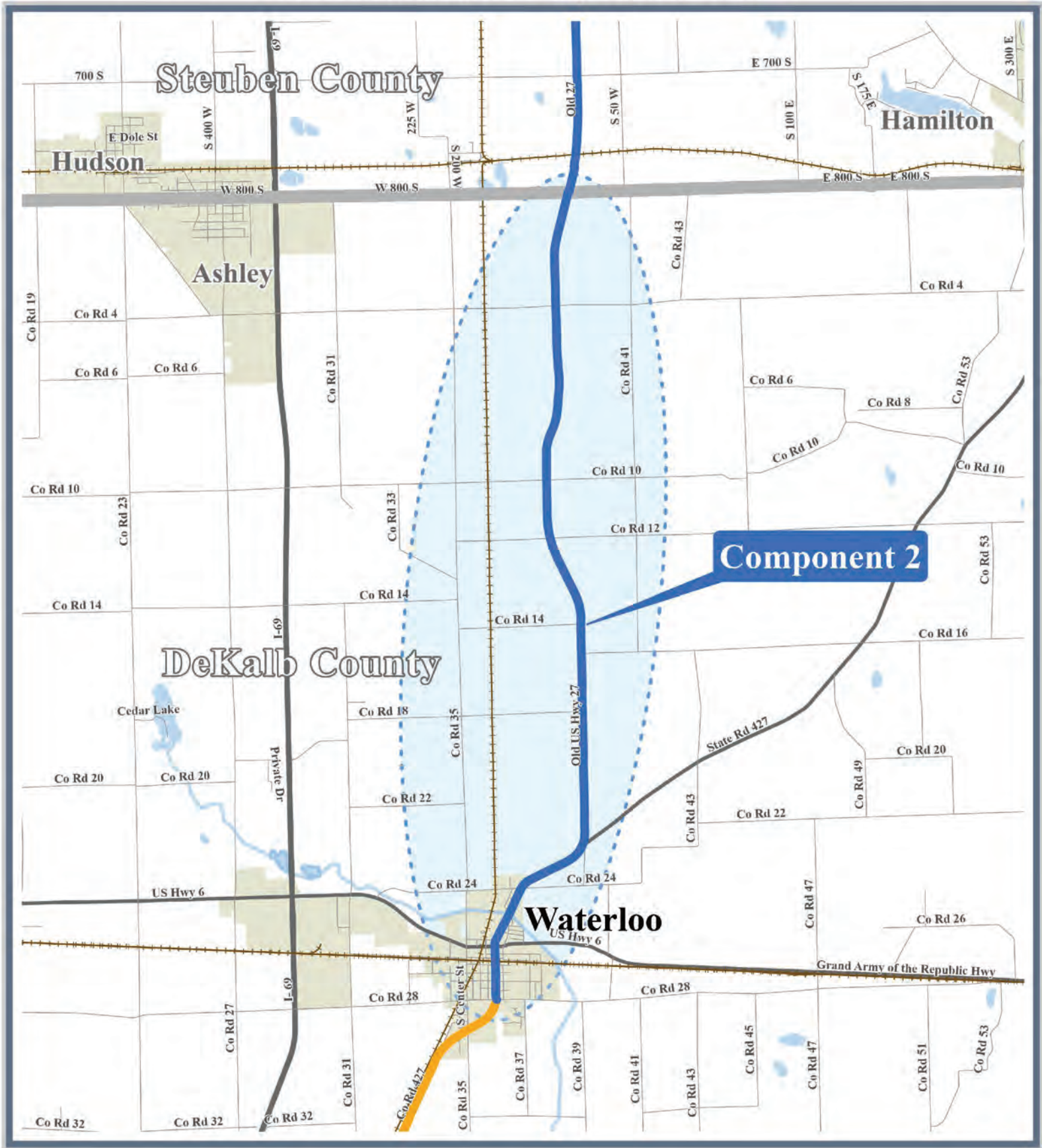
Length (miles)	New Miles	Reconstruction/Relocation	Received Grants or Funding But Not Complete as of 9/25	Federal	State	Local	Donations
1.23	X		X		\$1,505,960	\$570,040	\$20,700
3.23	X		X		\$3,723,140	\$1,066,360	\$134,400
0.65	X			\$306,560		\$76,640	
2.4		X			\$1,055,200	\$263,275	
3.5	X		X				\$5,000,000
0.5	X		X			\$150,565	
4.4	X				\$3,294,742	\$1,239,072	\$112,500
1.6	X		X	\$2,685,278		\$1,166,774	\$453,215
0.22	X		X			\$5,110,000	\$5,000,000
0.51		X	X			\$1,530,958	
0.13		X				\$60,000	
0.23		X	X			\$13,686	
0.16		X	X	\$1,840,000		\$460,000	
2.1	X		X			\$1,022,934	
1.5	X				\$523,228	\$130,807	\$293,450

Appendix B – Maps

The following maps are the five trail sections – one each in Allen, Steuben, and Wells counties and two in DeKalb County – to be engineered and constructed to complete the Poka-Bache Connector.

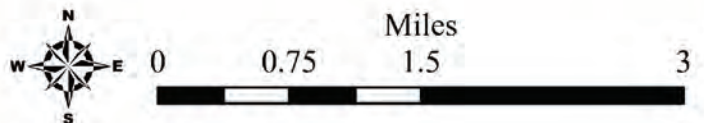
Poka-Bache Connector

Component 2 (DeKalb County North): DeKalb County Line to the existing trail located at the intersection of Walnut and Wayne streets in Waterloo



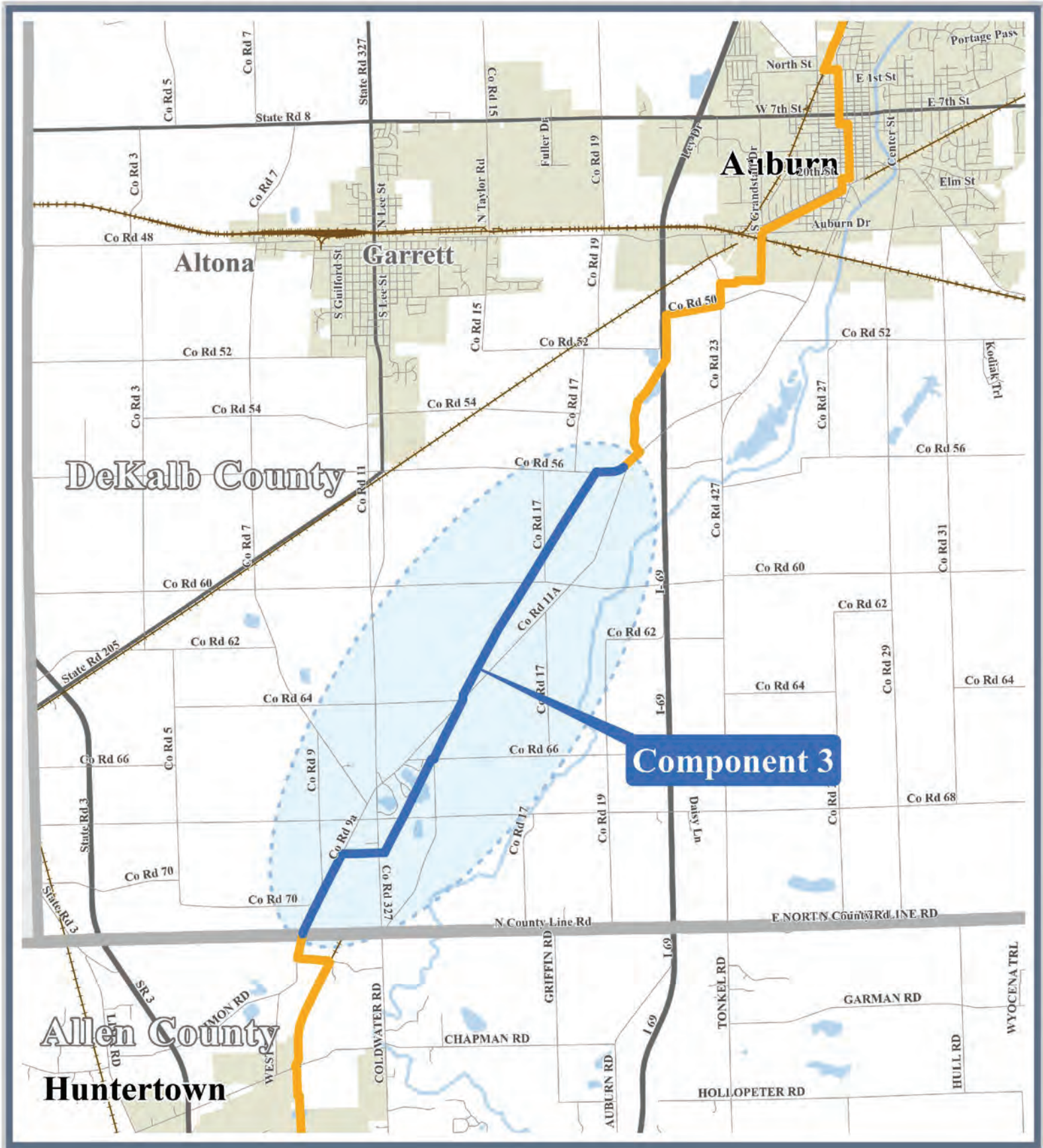
Legend

- Unfunded Trail
- Existing Trail/Under Development
- Incorporated Areas
- County Boudary



Poka-Bache Connector

Component 3 (DeKalb County South): Intersection of County Roads 56 and 11A to Allen County line



Legend

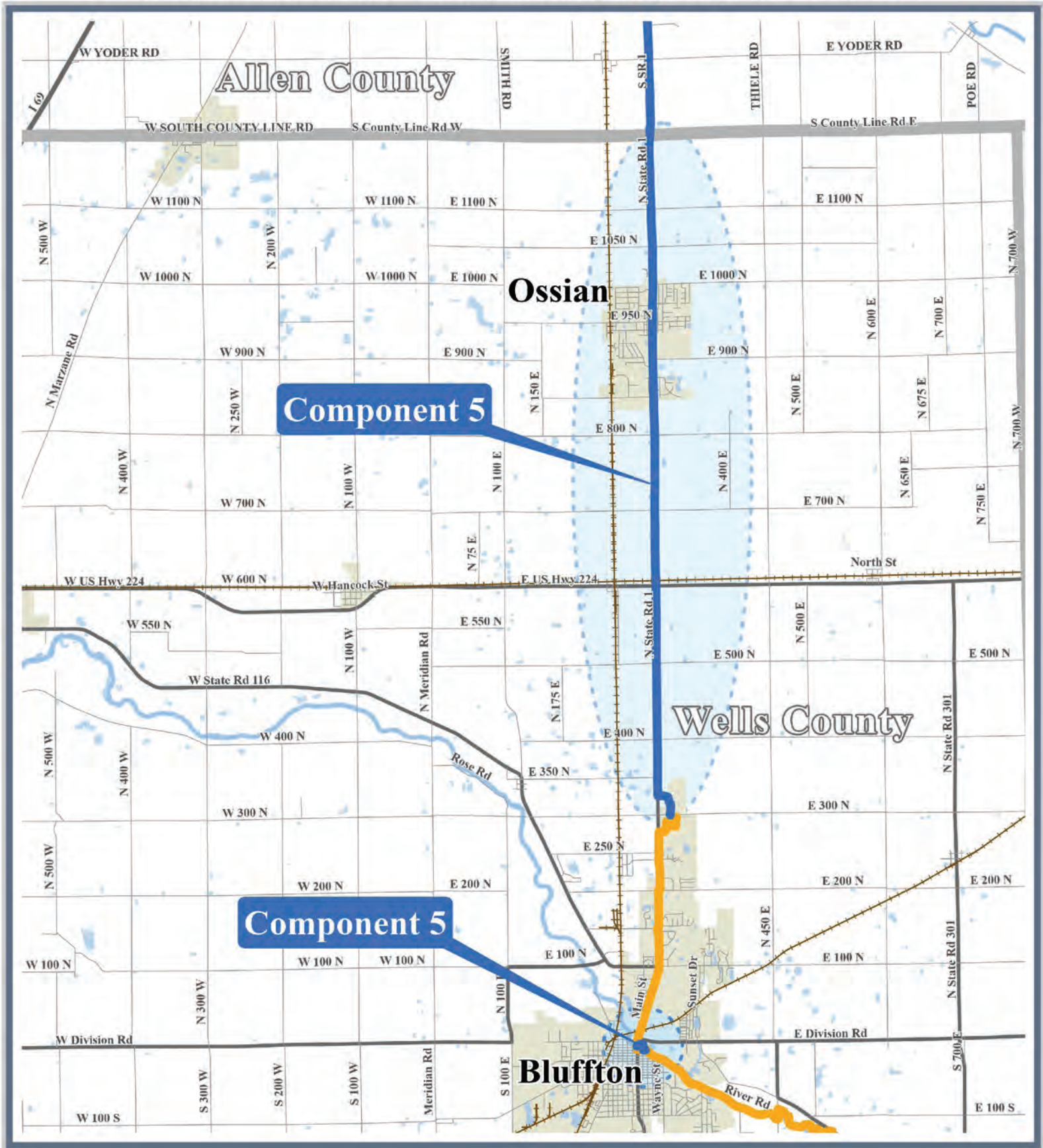
- Unfunded Trail
- Existing Trail/Under Development
- Incorporated Areas
- County Boudary

Miles

0 0.75 1.5 3

Poka-Bache Connector

Component 5 (Wells County): Wells County line to Lancaster Park plus a connector trail in downtown Bluffton between the existing Rivergreenway and the Interurban Trail

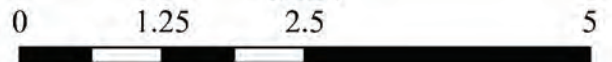


Legend

- Unfunded Trail
- Existing Trail/Under Development
- Incorporated Areas
- County Boudary

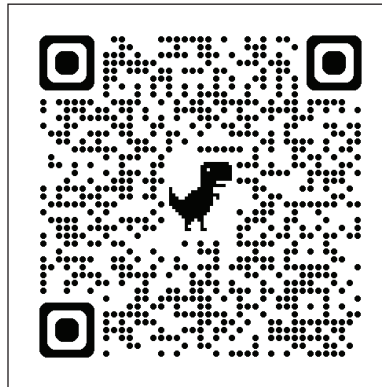


Miles



Appendix C – Interlocal Agreement

Scan this QR code to see a copy of the 2023 Interlocal Agreement.





PokaBacheConnectorTrail.com