

THE FIRST *20* YEARS



Great Rivers Greenway

MISSION: Make the St. Louis region a more vibrant place to live, work and play by developing a regional network of greenways.

DEAR ST. LOUIS REGION,

It's been 20 years since people voted Great Rivers Greenway into existence. That vote created a sales tax dedicated to parks and greenways, allowing us to collaborate with partners and communities to build, care for and bring to life your network of greenways, creating healthy habitats and watersheds along the way.

With greenway visits up 76% in 2020, we've heard how getting fresh air and exercise, connection to nature and each other are all critical right now.

It has been an honor to deliver on the community's vision for a vibrant, connected region. This is a look at these first 20 years and an invitation to envision the next 20 — thank you!

Susan Trautman, Chief Executive Officer

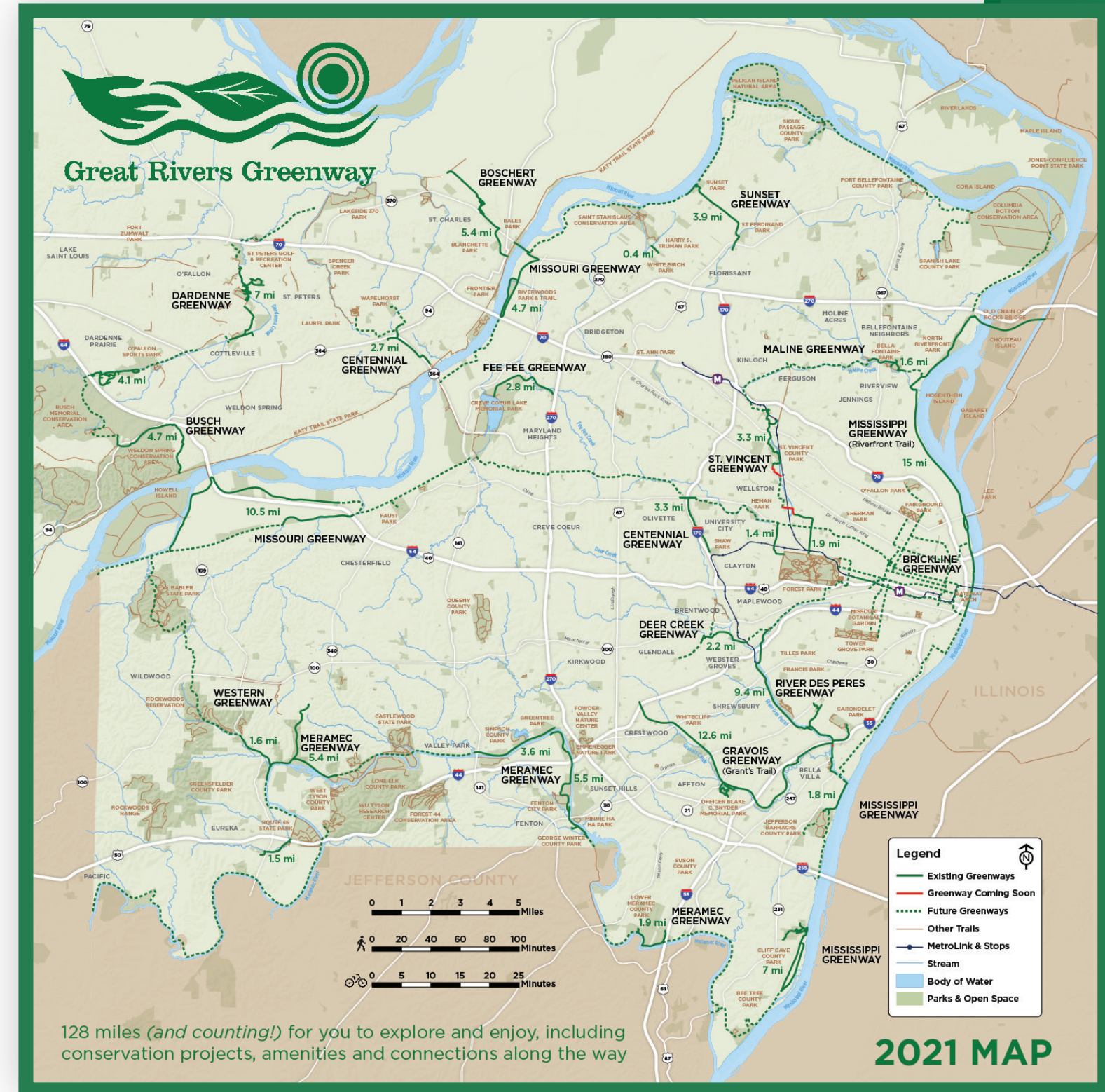
GREAT RIVERS GREENWAY

is a public agency serving St. Louis City, St. Louis County and St. Charles County, governed by a 12-member appointed Board of Directors that represent the region, led by a staff of 25 people and works with 265+ partners to bring the network of greenways to life.

WHAT IS A GREENWAY?

Greenways are all different, reflecting the communities they connect. They typically include:

- paved, **accessible trail** to walk, run, bike, roll
- **conservation projects** to enhance the environment
- **amenities** like benches, water, restrooms
- **connections** to destinations all over the region



ST LOUIS 2004: THE ORIGIN OF GREAT RIVERS GREENWAY

In 1996, business and civic leaders recognized the unique opportunity to leverage the year 2004 as an opportunity to revitalize the St. Louis region. They created St. Louis 2004, a nonprofit organization with the mission to bring about a renaissance in the 12-county bi-state region.



The governors of both Illinois and Missouri met on the Old Chain of Rocks Bridge across the Mississippi River in July 1999 to sign their respective pieces of legislation together.

Around the region, more than 10,000 people were polled, 1,200 people participated in visioning sessions and action teams were formed to establish major goals. One such goal, working in conjunction with existing government agencies and nonprofit organizations, focused on Parks and Open Space.

After more rounds of community engagement, the plan was formed to create a sales tax, put on the ballot in five counties across two states, that would fund both the parks departments in those areas and the new agency (Great Rivers Greenway) to connect the region with greenway trails. Oversight would be provided by the county executives appointing board members for the new organization.

Community engagement helped to refine the concept once again as the bills passed in both Illinois and Missouri.



ENGAGEMENT RESULTS SHOWED THAT THE KEY VALUES PEOPLE DESIRED WERE:

95%

Protecting land that improves water quality

95%

Improving, restoring and expanding parks

92%

Preserving critical wildlife habitat

88%

Providing disabled and expanded public access to recreational areas

87%

Increasing park safety

86%

Providing community trails

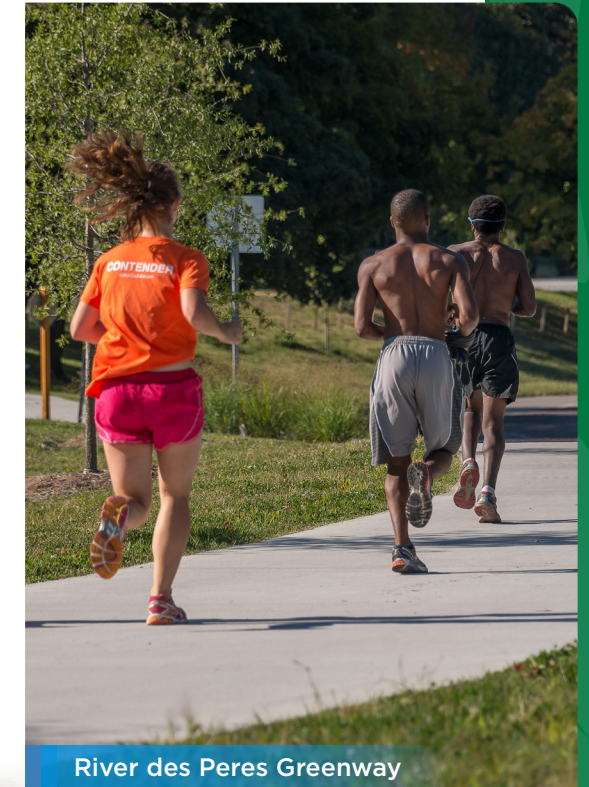
Hence, the proposition was called the Clean Water, Safe Parks and Community Trails Initiative and its 1/10th of one cent sales tax would generate more than \$20 million each year in Missouri to improve local parks (50% of revenue) and develop the regional network of greenways (50% of revenue). Both of those activities would contribute to the goals listed above. On November 7, 2000, Proposition C passed in St. Louis City, St. Louis and St. Charles counties in Missouri (at 68%) and in Madison and St. Clair counties in Illinois.

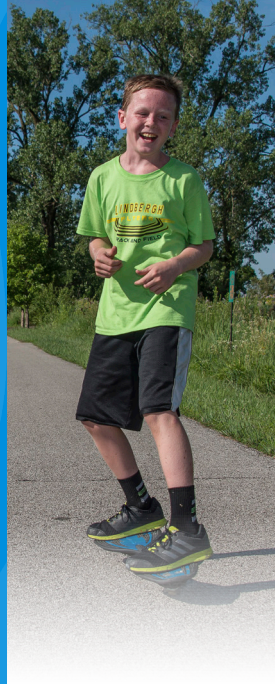


THE FIRST STRATEGIC PLAN focused on three outcomes a network of greenways could bring — economic development (strengthening economy and catalyst for growth), social capital (health, interactions and bonds) and environmental stewardship (preserves and enhances). Stakeholders identified ways to work to improve watershed and habitat health while strengthening the vibrancy and competitiveness of the St. Louis region — improving quality of life for everyone who could connect to nature and each other on the greenways. The possible routes, shown below, often were named for the watersheds, rivers and creeks they were connecting.



EARLY GREENWAY PROJECTS





THE SECOND STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE, through extensive community engagement, established an overall goal of the greenways to “make the St. Louis region a better place to live” and revised the list of goals that the greenway system should accomplish to five:

- connect communities and neighborhoods
- preserve and connect people to nature
- improve economic vitality
- provide transportation choices
- promote good health

The community was also clear — although Great Rivers Greenway was set up to build the greenways — the agency also needed to promote and sustain them. While partners were still committed to the day-to-day care of the greenways, Great Rivers Greenway went on to create two new departments to market and activate the spaces and supplement their care with staff, vendors and volunteers.



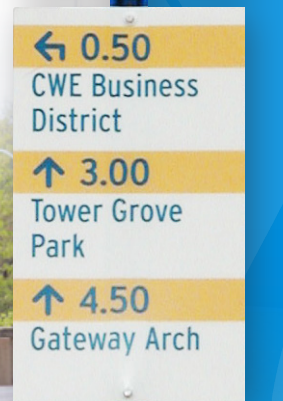
IN ADDITION TO MANAGING THEIR OWN GREENWAY PROJECTS, Great Rivers Greenway also supports other initiatives in the region that have similar goals.

Bike St. Louis was a partnership program where Great Rivers Greenway and local municipalities matched funds for federal grants to establish 150 miles of street routes for bicycles in Cities of St. Louis, Kirkwood and Clayton.

With many partners, Great Rivers Greenway helped to establish and implement the Gateway Bike Plan for the region overall, which included policy, infrastructure, education and enforcement activities.

Some connectivity or conservation projects were brought to life with partners through cost-sharing, such as master plans for watersheds, parks departments, floodplain land banking or portions of bridges or roadways dedicated for people walking and biking.

Great Rivers Greenway also funded a feasibility study for bringing a bike sharing program to St. Louis in 2014. Many partners and community members participated, leading to Bi-State Development and the City of St. Louis implementing a dockless bike and scooter share system with private operators.





Busch Greenway



Sunset Greenway



Boschert Greenway



St. Vincent Greenway



Gravois Greenway: Grant's Trail



Dardenne Greenway



Missouri Greenway



Centennial Greenway



Deer Creek Greenway



In conjunction with the CityArchRiver Project (*see next page*), Proposition P: The Safe and Accessible Arch and Public Parks Initiative was a second sales tax initiative, 3/16th of a cent, in St. Louis City and St. Louis County. This tax was divided as well - 60% went to Great Rivers Greenway (half of which was for greenways and half was for the CityArchRiver project), while 40% went to the parks departments in those two counties. This supported Great Rivers Greenway's ability to increase their staff capacity to meet the goals laid out by the community in the 2010 strategic plan update.

THE CITYARCHRIVER PROJECT

was a monumental undertaking from the beginning. As one of the lead designers of the redesign said, **“it was about finishing the park in the spirit in which it was intended.”** The \$380 million renovation of Gateway Arch National Park and its surrounding areas in downtown St. Louis was a historic partnership between the private sector and federal, state, and local government agencies. Core partners include the National Park Service, Missouri Department of Transportation, Great Rivers Greenway, Bi-State Development, Gateway Arch Park Foundation, and Jefferson National Parks Association. Through a unique partnership of public and private funding, many agencies and the St. Louis community came together to completely change how visitors and the region experienced the city’s defining calling card to the world: the Gateway Arch.

Great Rivers Greenway continues to take care of this investment by funding and managing, with partners, the (now-increased) operations and maintenance of these areas.

GREAT RIVERS GREENWAY

contributed in three main ways:

1 Great Rivers Greenway was part of the CityArchRiver Alliance of partners, collaborating to guide the project through design and construction. The agency stewarded the local taxpayers’ investment (\$90 million) into the project. This local lens was crucial in influencing how a project of this scale would benefit the people of St. Louis.

Of particular note was the strategy to make the construction work available to local contractors. The project was carefully divided into many different contracts so that local contractors had the capacity, bonding ability and insurance to bid on projects. While contracts were mostly let by the National Parks Service, Great Rivers Greenway hosted and advertised pre-bid meetings locally so people could understand the process, form teams with each other and submit their bids in a competitive environment. And it worked! 87% of all contract dollars went to 158 contracts with area firms.

2 Because the project did have many different contractors, Great Rivers Greenway played the role of coordinator for common site items, for consistency and quality control. These included the high quality soils that would go throughout the site plus amenities such as benches and lights.

3 With partners and the help of a TIGER (now called BUILD) federal grant, Great Rivers Greenway took on one major element of the project - redoing the riverfront. Raising and reinforcing Leonor K. Sullivan Boulevard an average of 1.5 feet along the 1.5 mile span, it’s now much heartier to withstand the common flood events of the mighty Mississippi River. It’s now equipped with new lighting and electric outlets for events and programs.



Great Rivers Greenway also tracked participation by disadvantaged business enterprises, with 31.8% of contracts on the Riverfront project going to minority-owned business enterprises and 17.6% to women-owned business enterprises. On Kiener Plaza, those figures were 33.04% and 2.93%.



Three thousand community members celebrated in June 2016 with a 2016-foot-long picnic to celebrate the reopening of the riverfront.

WITH PROPOSITION P REVENUES NOW COMING IN AND CITYARCHRIVER PROJECT WELL UNDERWAY,

the next strategic plan update in 2015 was focused on improving internal operations. Great Rivers Greenway had many successful projects (113 miles of greenways) as well as many lessons learned. Much of this time in the agency's history was spent developing and documenting best practices and operationalizing plans to achieve the goals set forth by the community.

During this time, as always with the help of partners and community members, Great Rivers Greenway solidified guidelines for greenway design, civic engagement, interpretation and public art, brand and environmental graphics, new sign standards, level of care for once the greenway is built and a project management software system to catalog timeline, budgets, stakeholders and risks.

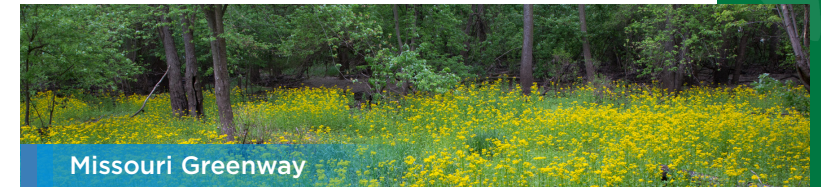
Later, both board and staff undertook trainings and educational workshops before conducting an audit of all operations to form a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan.



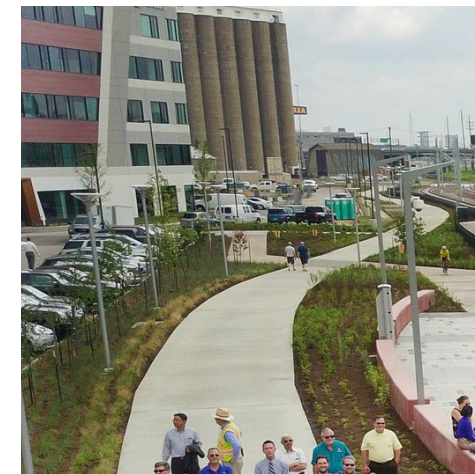
Fee Fee Greenway



Maline Greenway



Missouri Greenway



Mississippi Greenway



St. Vincent Greenway (& Trojan Park)



Brickline Greenway



Even with steady sales tax revenues, the demand for greenways and the increasing costs and complexity of projects far surpassed the funds available. The Great Rivers Greenway Foundation launched in 2016 with the goal of supporting the mission and vision of the agency. With its own board of directors, it has grown to develop two Great Rivers Greenway staff positions and solicits private funding from grants, foundations and individual donors. The Foundation has steadily evolved and primarily supports capital projects, conservation programs and operations and maintenance of the system.

ONE OF THE BIG PROJECTS ON THE HORIZON is the Brickline Greenway. This public private partnership's mission is to transform St. Louis by connecting people and our city's most treasured places, creating inspiring experiences and equitable opportunities for growth. Kicked off with a privately funded international design competition, the big idea is to not only physically connect Forest Park, the Gateway Arch, Fairground Park and Tower Grove Park, but also for the greenway to be a catalyst for equitable economic development. The project and process is driven by community engagement and was named by a public process to honor the beautiful and strong building material seen throughout the city neighborhoods (up to 17!) it will connect. A vision this bold takes all of us and it's just getting started.



Within our mission to build greenways, we have also grown our ability to implement conservation projects along the way. With partners, we plan and build greenways to:

- Create or restore habitats where plants and animals thrive and prairies, wetlands and forests can filter and return water when floods occur
- Create connections for people to walk, run, bike and roll to stay healthy and make choices that reduce car pollution
- Allow people to access, connect with, learn about, fall in love with and become stewards of nature through education (signs, tours, programs) and volunteering (clean-ups, planting days)

As we plan and build greenways, we assess and improve habitats – removing trash, debris, invasive plants and installing native plants and trees, rain gardens and other nature-based ways to manage stormwater and flooding with staff, vendors and thousands of volunteers.



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AND COUNTING...

As Great Rivers Greenway looks forward, the agency will explore ways to ensure long-term success, from operations and maintenance to alternate funding. With continued collaboration, progress will rely on civic engagement, partnership and innovation. Let's envision the next twenty years together.

Thank you TO EVERYONE WHO HAS
MADE THIS VISION A REALITY:
VOTERS | PARTNERS | DONORS | ELECTED OFFICIALS
VOLUNTEERS | ADVISORS | GREENWAY VISITORS



LIVE LIFE OUTSIDE

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