

South Central Pennsylvania Trails Connectivity Assessment

2023 - 2024



Overview

The Central Pennsylvania Trails Initiative of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council is an assessment of existing trail and current trail development activities throughout a broad region of the state. There are no exact definitions of Central Pennsylvania, rather it broadly covers the Northern Tier, Susquehanna Valley, and Cumberland/Lebanon Valleys and the South Central area.

To address the breadth of the region, PEC decided to approach the assessment in three large swathes. The seven counties defined as “South Central” for the purposes of this report were in part grouped together due to their economic interconnectedness and correlation with PennDOT’s Region 8. The counties just to the north and west, loosely encompassing the Appalachian Mountains Section of the Ridge and Valley Province, are being addressed separately, as

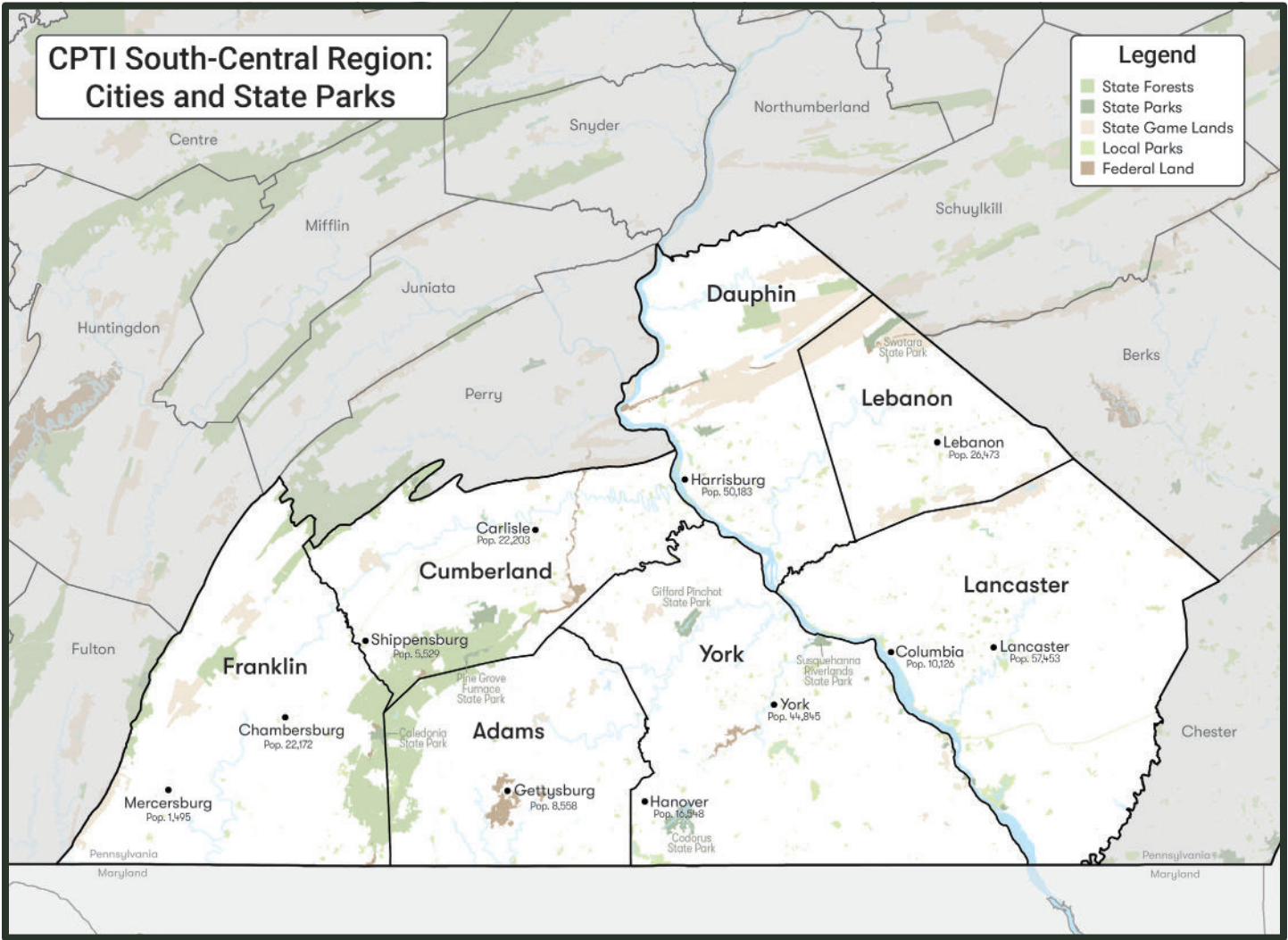
are the north-central counties that are part of the PA Wilds region.

The purpose of the assessment is to more comprehensively understand the trail development activity within the region with the intention of encouraging more multi-purpose recreational and active transportation facilities (trails) to serve the region’s large population. More connected networks of trails attract greater numbers of users and connect more communities, employment and retail centers, and park/recreation facilities. Increased connectivity is synergistic for multi-purpose trail development.

An outcome of this process will be recommendations for trail alignment and possible trail connections that will create a connected network over a long-term development effort (15-20 years).



Source: Discover Lancaster



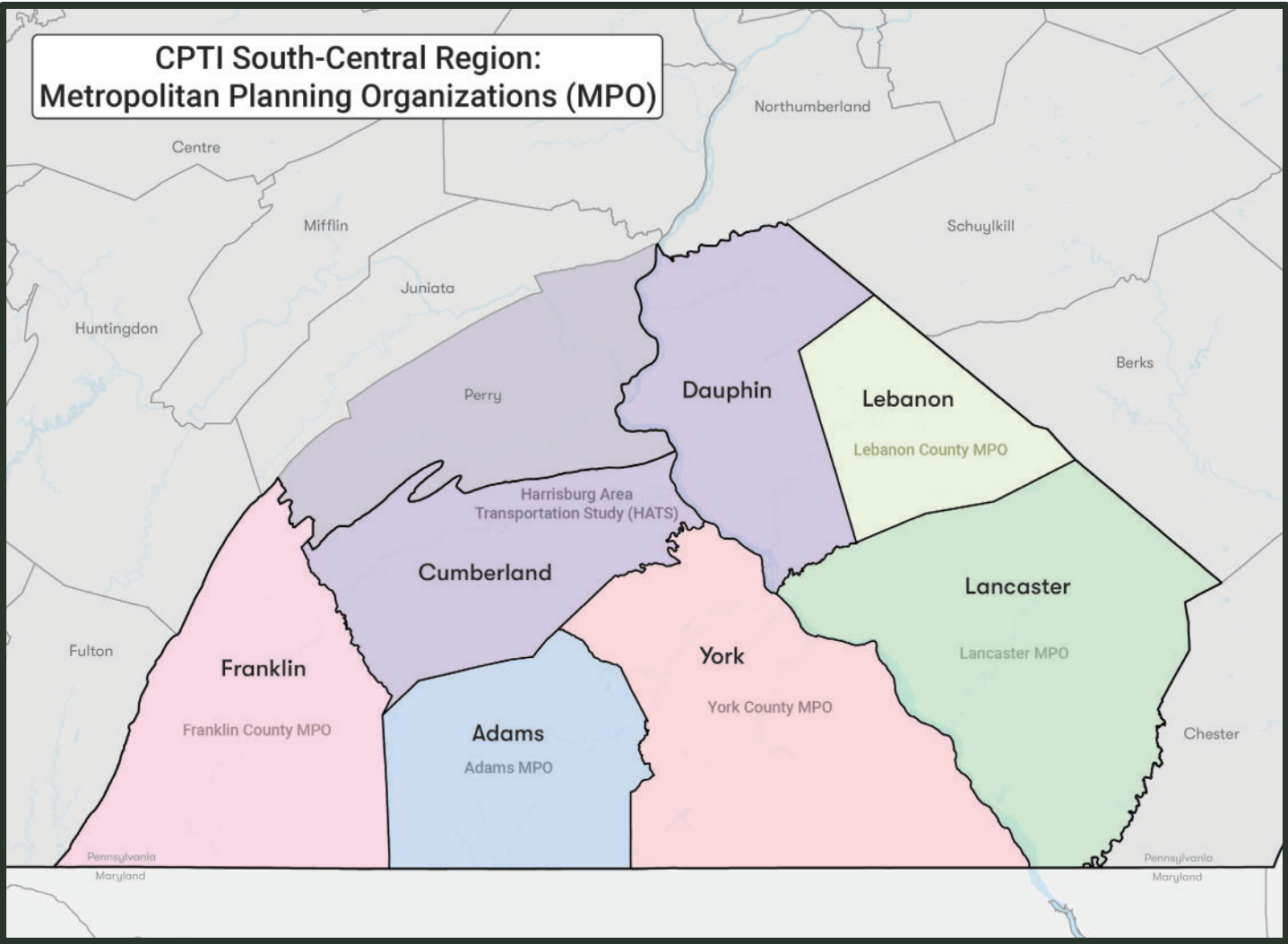
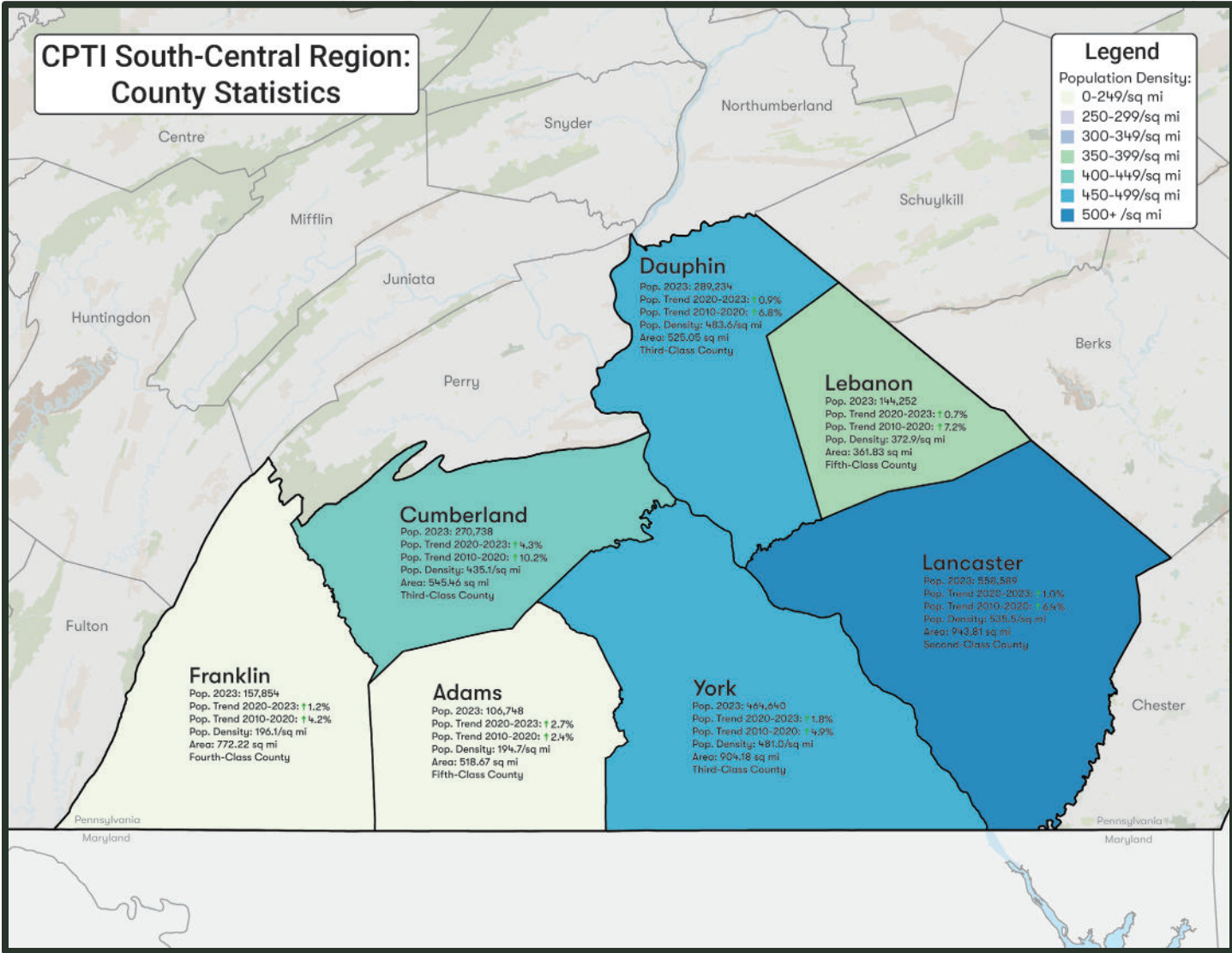
Source: Explore York County

South Central: Defining the Region

The counties included are Adams, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Lebanon, Lancaster, and York. This region comprises 4,530 square miles of Pennsylvania, covering 10 percent of the land in the Commonwealth and is heavily populated. The total population for the region is 1,922,055 with county populations ranging from more than half a million in Lancaster County to just over 100,000 in Adams. Thus, Lancaster is a 2nd class county, Cumberland Dauphin and York are 3rd class, Franklin is 4th class, and Adams and Lebanon are counties of the 5th class.

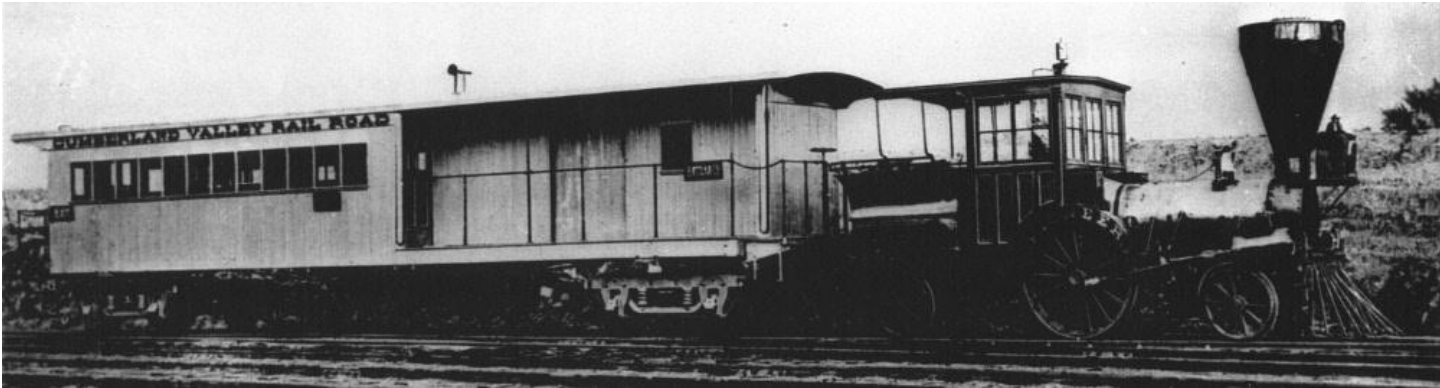
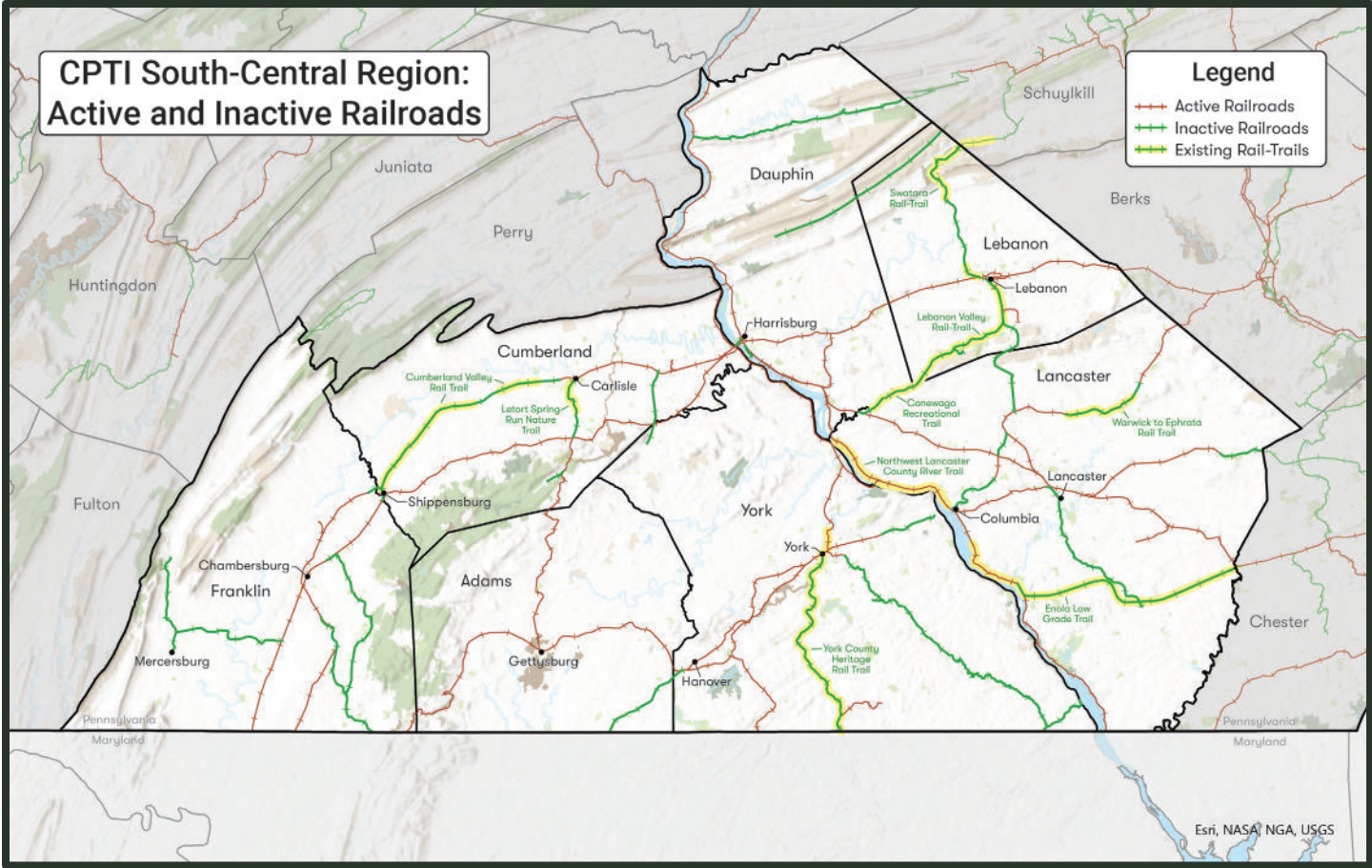
The entire eight county region comprises PennDOT’s Region 8 District. There are multiple MPOs. One is composed of three counties, the Harrisburg Area Transportation Study (HATS) that includes Cumberland, Dauphin, and Perry. Each of the other counties serves as an MPO with those responsibilities housed within each county’s planning department/commission.

There are several large core cities that serve as destinations and anchors for much of the trail activity including: Carlisle, Chambersburg, Gettysburg, Hanover, Harrisburg, Lancaster, Lebanon, Shippensburg, and York.



Physiologically the area includes the Great Valley arc southwest to northeast, the Piedmont to the south and east, and is divided by the mighty Susquehanna River with just two potential trail crossings of the Susquehanna. The physiology defined the historic development of railroad service, which due to both rail service redundancy and the relative decline in rail use, has left an enticing network of former rail corridors. Several of these now define some of the longer distance trail corridors, most notably the already built York Heritage Rail Trail, the more than

60% completed Lebanon Valley Rail Trail, and the expanding Cumberland Valley Rail Trail. These opportunities and others have been mapped and the connectivity potential identified as a component of this assessment. An important outcome of the process will be to coordinate trail planning and development with state government agencies including DCNR and PennDOT, particularly District 8. The regional vision will also be shared with railroads and other right-of-way owners to support the need for cooperation.



Source: Visit Cumberland Valley



The York Heritage Rail Trail in York County, PA.

The Process

CPTI Planning Process

1. List creation
2. Questionnaire development, and one-on-one or group interviews
3. Trail segment/trail plans collection/refinement
4. Creation of a basemap
5. Stakeholder discussion and input
6. Formulation and distribution of a report and map

Stakeholder Engagement

PEC prides itself on a stakeholder approach to the many initiatives it undertakes to protect and restore Pennsylvania’s natural resources, and to facilitate equitable human access for recreation and enjoyment. Therefore, the CPTI process began with a key partner, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, specifically the Regional Advisor Lori Yeich. Additionally, Silas Chamberlin with the York County Economic Development Alliance was a crucial source, as well as, the architect/planner Robert Thomas, principal of the Campbell Thomas firm.

Area	Organization
Adams	Adams County Planning & Development
Adams	Adams Economic Alliance
Regional	Appalachian Mountain Club
Regional	Bike South Central PA
State wide	Campbell Thomas Co.
Dauphin	Capital Area Greenbelt Association
Regional	Commuter Services of Pennsylvania
Lancaster	Conestoga River Club
Cumberland	Cumberland County Planning Department

A discussion guide was developed with questions about trail development interest, activities, and perspective. The first interviews were conducted in August 2023; fifteen interviews were conducted. Additionally, there were numerous additional less formal conversations to track down trail plans, digital files, and contacts. The last “formal” interview was conducted in February 2024.

Throughout the stakeholder process, the PEC team was building the basemap on an ArcGIS platform. Trail alignments were added as provided, and the project team held occasional check-in meetings.

In April 2024, two virtual stakeholder meetings were held with nearly 30 discrete participants excluding PEC staff. In preparation for that meeting, PEC staff assessed and analyzed the trail corridors and conditions and prepared a preliminary presentation of a 400-mile South Central Trails Network composed of four major “trunk line” trails at 240 miles, and 10 identified connecting and supporting trails themselves comprising over 160 miles. Six critical gaps have been identified in the major trunkline corridors, comprising 52 miles. These sections are a priority to create a connected South Central Trail Network that merits focused attention to attain trail completion.

Area	Organization
Cumberland	Cumberland Vally Rail Trail Council
State wide	DCNR Bureau of Forestry
State wide	DCNR Bureau of Recreation & Conservation
State wide	DCNR State Heritage Areas
Adams	Destination Gettysburg
Lancaster	Discover Lancaster
York	Explore York
York	Farm & Natural Lands Trust of York
Cumberland	Friends of the Conodoguinet Greenway
Regional	Grand History Trail
Franklin	Greene Township Engineer
Regional	Harrisburg Area Transportation Study / Tri-County Planning
Dauphin	Harrisburg Regional Chamber (CDEDC)
Adams	Healthy Adams Bicycle / Pedestrian, Inc.
State wide	Keystone Trails Association
Lancaster	Lancaster Clean Water Partnership
Lancaster	Lancaster Conservancy
Lancaster	Lancaster County Planning Commission
Lancaster	Lancaster Farmland Trust
Adams	Land Conservancy of Adams County
Lebanon	Lebanon County Planning Department
Lebanon	Lebanon Valley Rails to Trails
York	Mason-Dixon Trail
National	Rails to Trails Conservancy
Regional	September 11th National Memorial Trail
Regional	South Mountain Partnership
Regional	Susquehanna National Heritage Area
Regional	Susquehanna Riverlands Conservation Landscape
Dauphin	Visit Hershey & Harrisburg
York	Watershed Alliance of York
Cumberland/York	Yellow Breeches Watershed Association
York	York County Economic Alliance
York	York County Planning Commission (MPO)
York	York County Rail Trail Authority

An Emergent Seven County Trail Network

A connected network of multi-purpose trails typically consists of key trunk trails that extend greater distances and serve as through corridors. Intersecting with these trunklines are trails that connect to a critical destination such as a town, park, or other natural resource feature, yet may “dead end” at that resource without continuing.

The emerging South Central Trail Network reflects these typical characteristics. There are four “trunk” through trails:

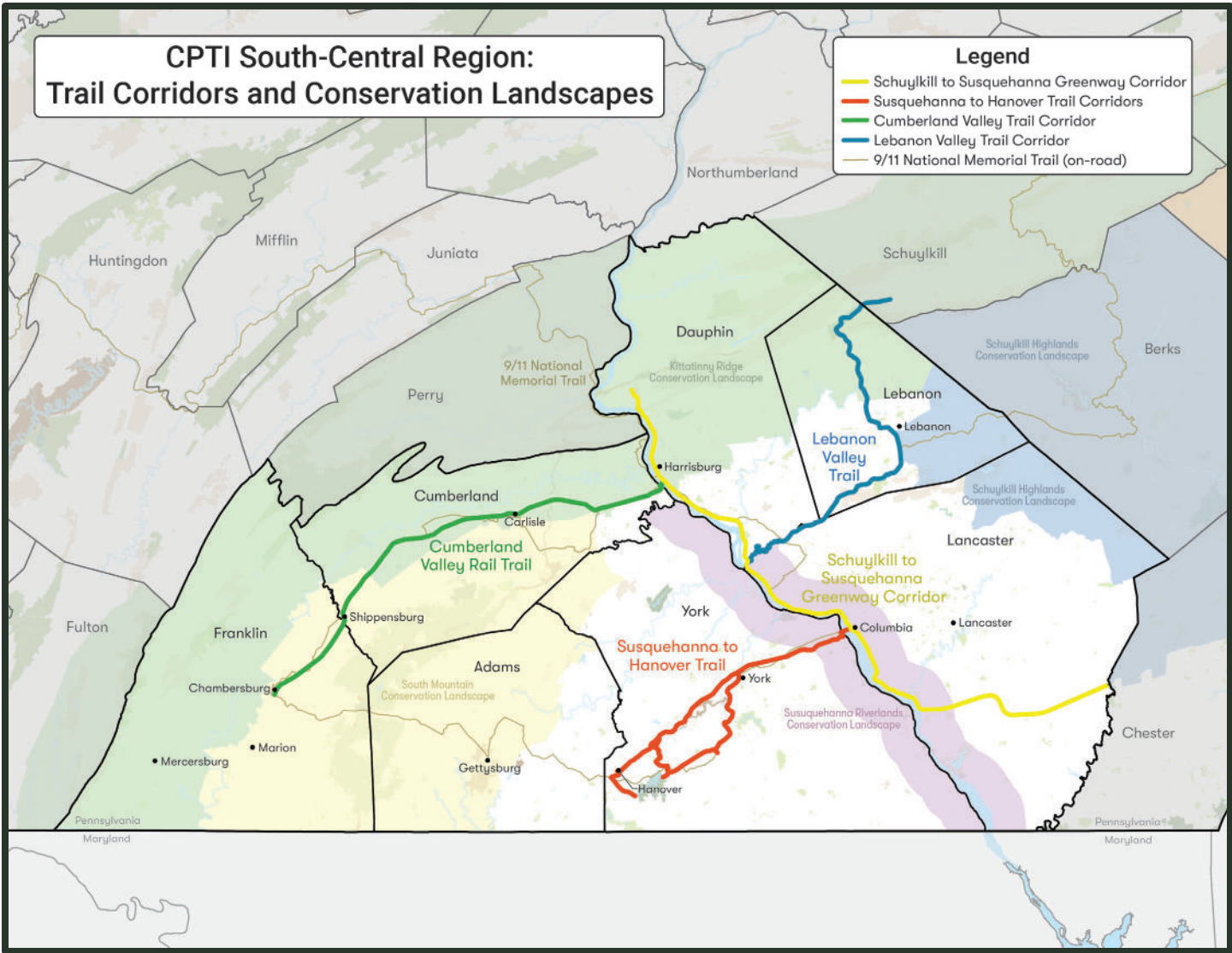
1. Schuylkill to Susquehanna Greenway

2. Lebanon Valley Trail

3. Cumberland Valley Rail Trail

4. Susquehanna to Hanover Trail

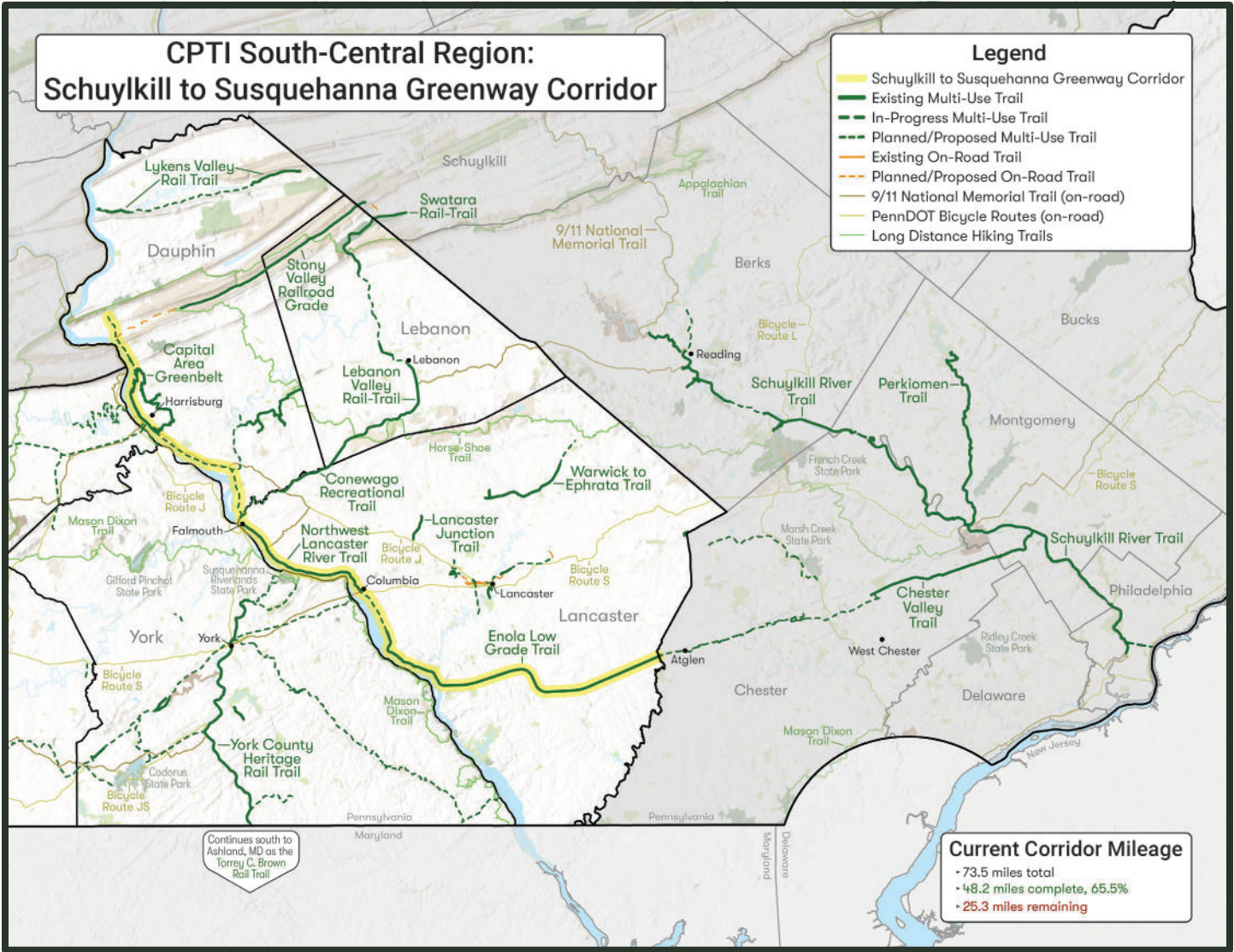
Importantly, the September 11th National Memorial Trail, which forms a loop in this region of the state, is co-aligned with many miles (but not all) of each of these corridors. This is a powerful additional impetus for building out these trails for their full potential to contribute to this national pilgrimage network.



1. Schuylkill to Susquehanna Greenway

The Schuylkill to Susquehanna Greenway was designated by DCNR in 2020. It follows the routes of the Chester Valley Trail in Montgomery and Chester Counties, and the Enola Low-Grade Rail Trail and Northwest Lancaster County River Trail in Lancaster County. For the purposes of this connectivity assessment, the corridor extends from Chester

County to north of Harrisburg. A portion of the corridor from Falmouth to Harrisburg co-aligns with the September 11th National Memorial Trail. Large portions are already built. The largest gaps needing planning and development are Columbia to the Enola Low Grade Trail in Washington Borough, and from the Village of Falmouth to Harrisburg through Steelton. This corridor extends 73.5 miles - 48.2 miles are built, meaning it is 65.5% complete.

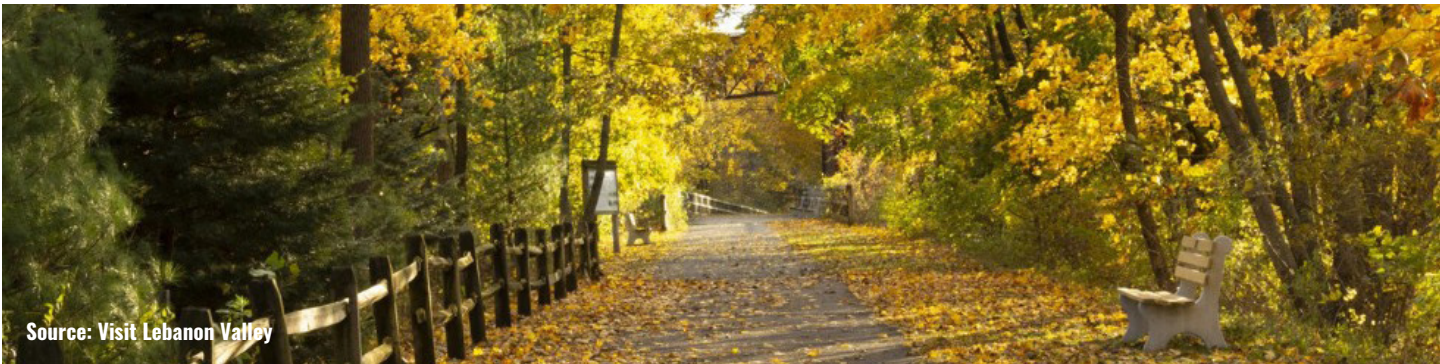
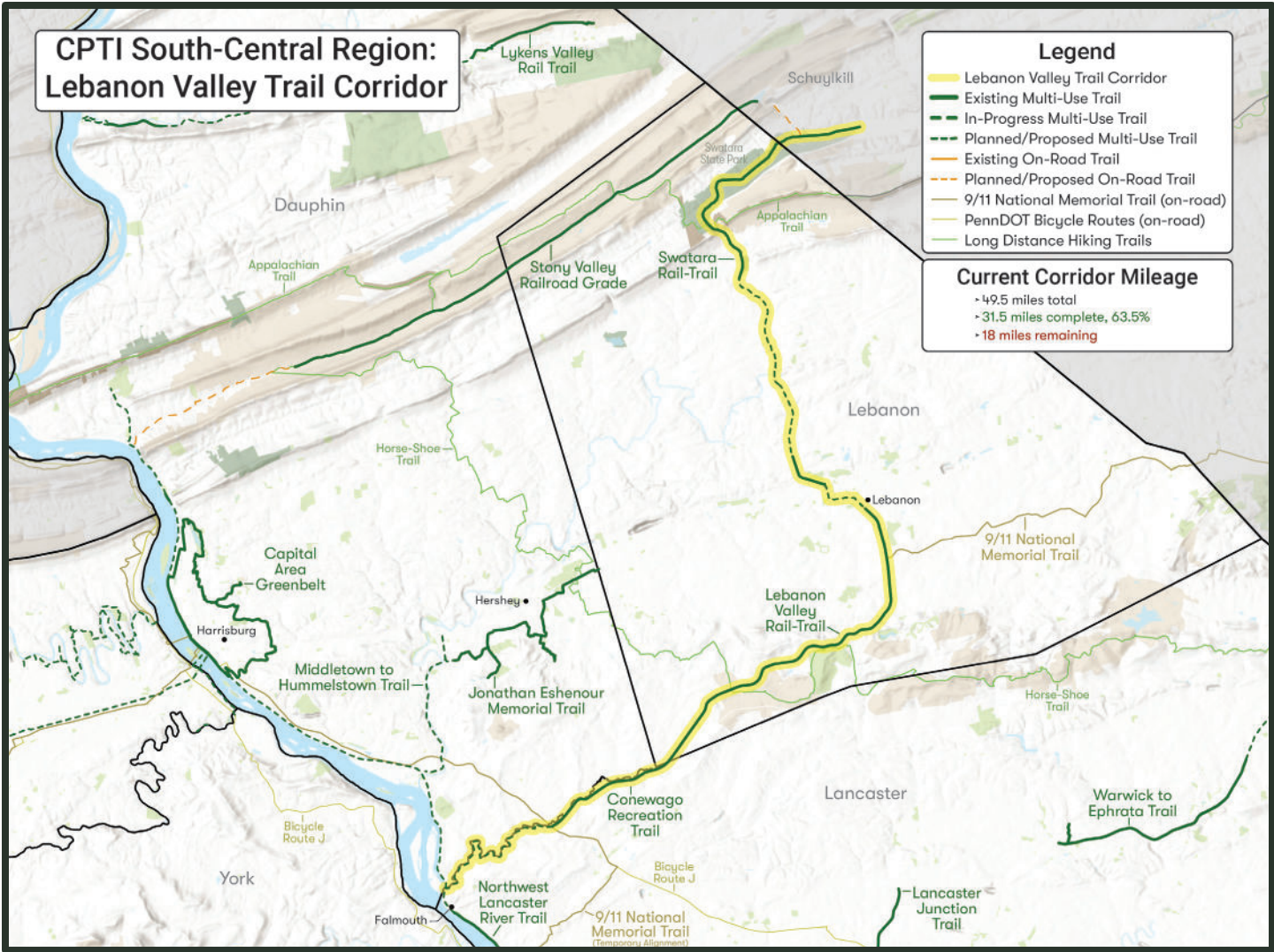


Source: Susquehanna Greenway Partnership

2. Lebanon Valley Rail-Trail

The Lebanon Valley Rail-Trail (LVRT) is a key component of the regional trail network, which also includes the Conewago Recreation Trail and the future extension to the Northwest Lancaster River Trail (NWRT). The Lebanon Valley Rail-Trail continues southward from DCNR's Swatara Rail Trail to Cornwall, where it continues westward through

the Mount Gretna area, but ending 3.5 miles short of the Susquehanna River. The core of the trail follows the alignment of the Cornwall & Lebanon Railroad, although the extension to the Susquehanna is not on railbed. A major driver of this trail development has been the Lebanon Valley Rails to Trails which has worked in partnership with the Lebanon County Planning Commission on many trail development projects. This corridor extends 49.5 miles - 31.5 are built, meaning it is 63.5% complete.

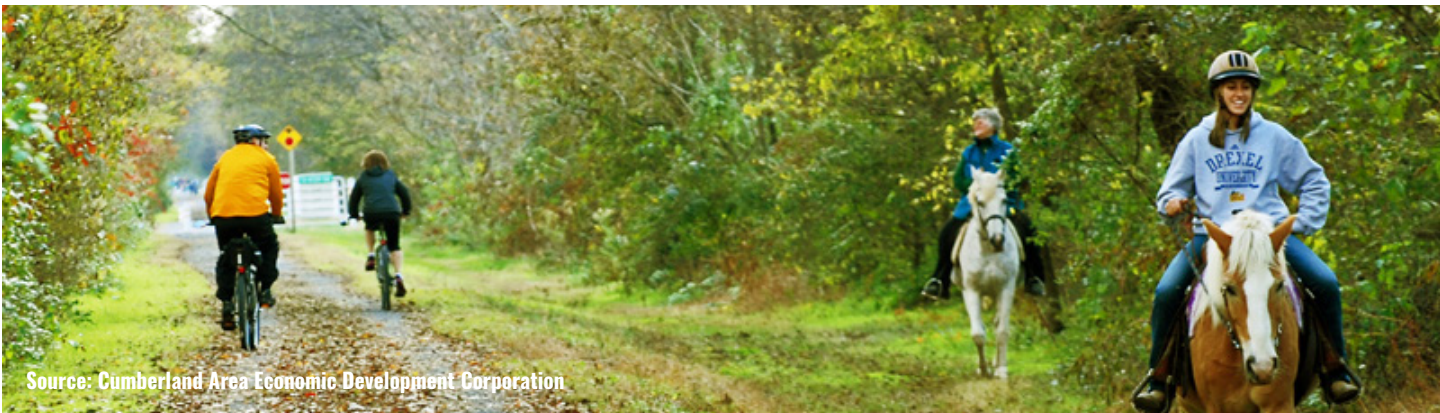
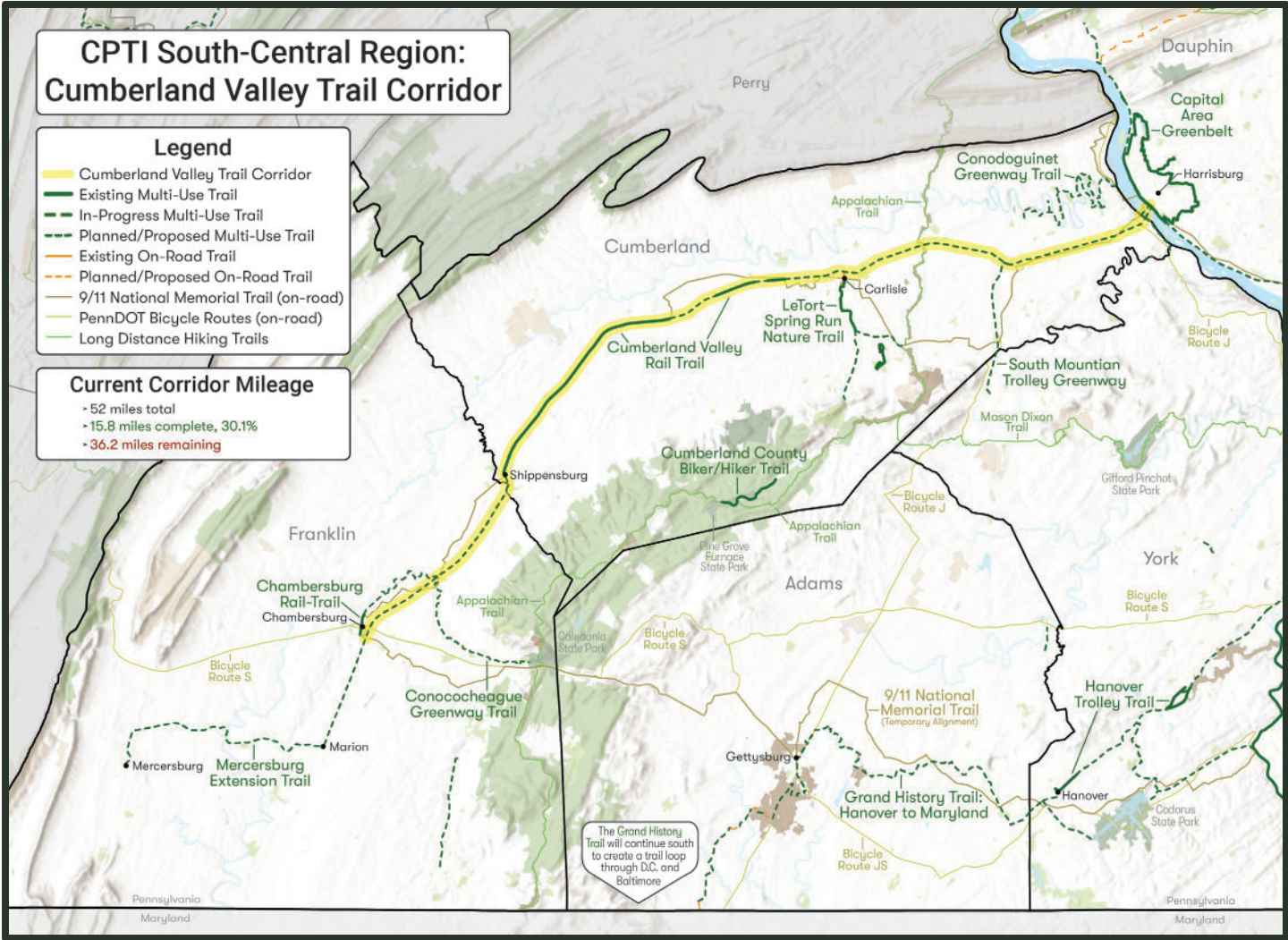


Source: Visit Lebanon Valley

3. Cumberland Valley Rail Trail

The Cumberland Valley Rail Trail corridor extends from the West Shore of the Susquehanna southwestward to Chambersburg and ends in Marion. A large portion of trail exists between Carlisle and Shippensburg, including Newville, although even this built out section has significant gaps. A

major driver of this trail development has been the Cumberland Valley Rails to Trails Council which has collaborated extensively with the Cumberland County Planning Commission, local governments, and property owners among others including the Franklin County Planning Department. This corridor extends 52 miles - 15.8 are built, meaning it is 30.1% complete.

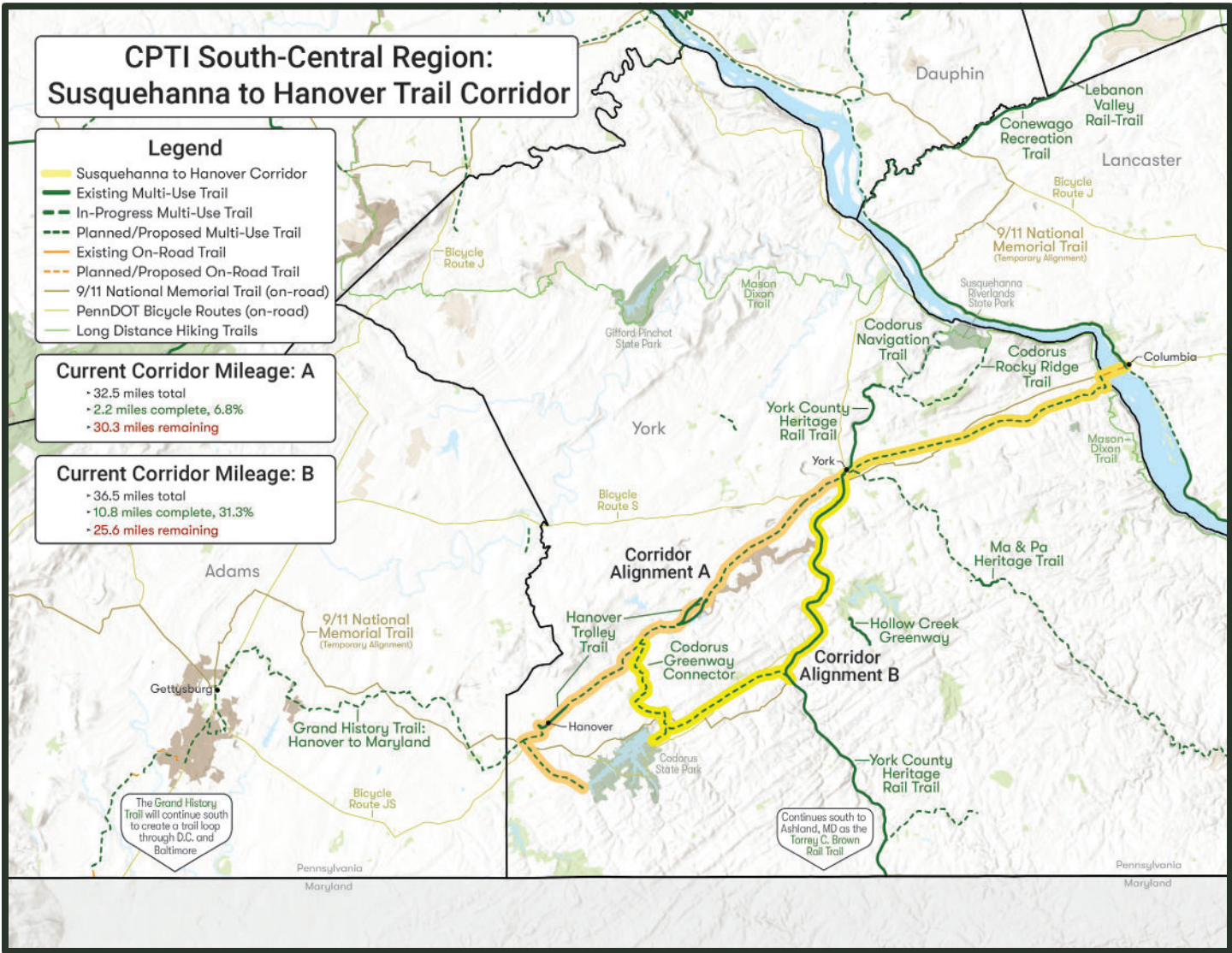


Source: Cumberland Area Economic Development Corporation

4. Susquehanna to Hanover Trail

The Susquehanna to Hanover Trail is the most conceptual and least built out of these four trunk trails. While the Hanover Trolley Trail connecting York to Hanover is actively under development led by the York Heritage Rail Authority, the connection from Wrightsville to York is entirely conceptual. The September 11th National Memorial Trail is co-aligned with much of this corridor, though it currently aligns on the existing York Heritage Trail. Two alignments for the corridor have been identified. The first makes use of the partially built Hanover Trolley Trail with intention to connect to the western side of Codorus State Park. The second alignment uses a portion

of the York Heritage Rail Trail with intention of connecting to the eastern side of Codorus State Park, and ultimately connecting to the Hanover Trolley Trail via the proposed Codorus Greenway Connector. The western side of Codorus State Park has a variety of recreational opportunities including a mountain bike trail system, paddling, and a campground, but bicycle access across the park is limited to riding on two-lane roads with fast-moving traffic. These proposed corridors share the same alignment for the 11.8 miles from Wrightsville to York. Corridor alignment A extends 32.5 miles - 2.2 miles are built, meaning it is 6.8% complete. Corridor alignment B extends 34.5 miles - 10.8 miles are built, meaning it is 31.3% complete. 2.1 miles of trail are planned to be constructed in 2025.



Connecting Trails

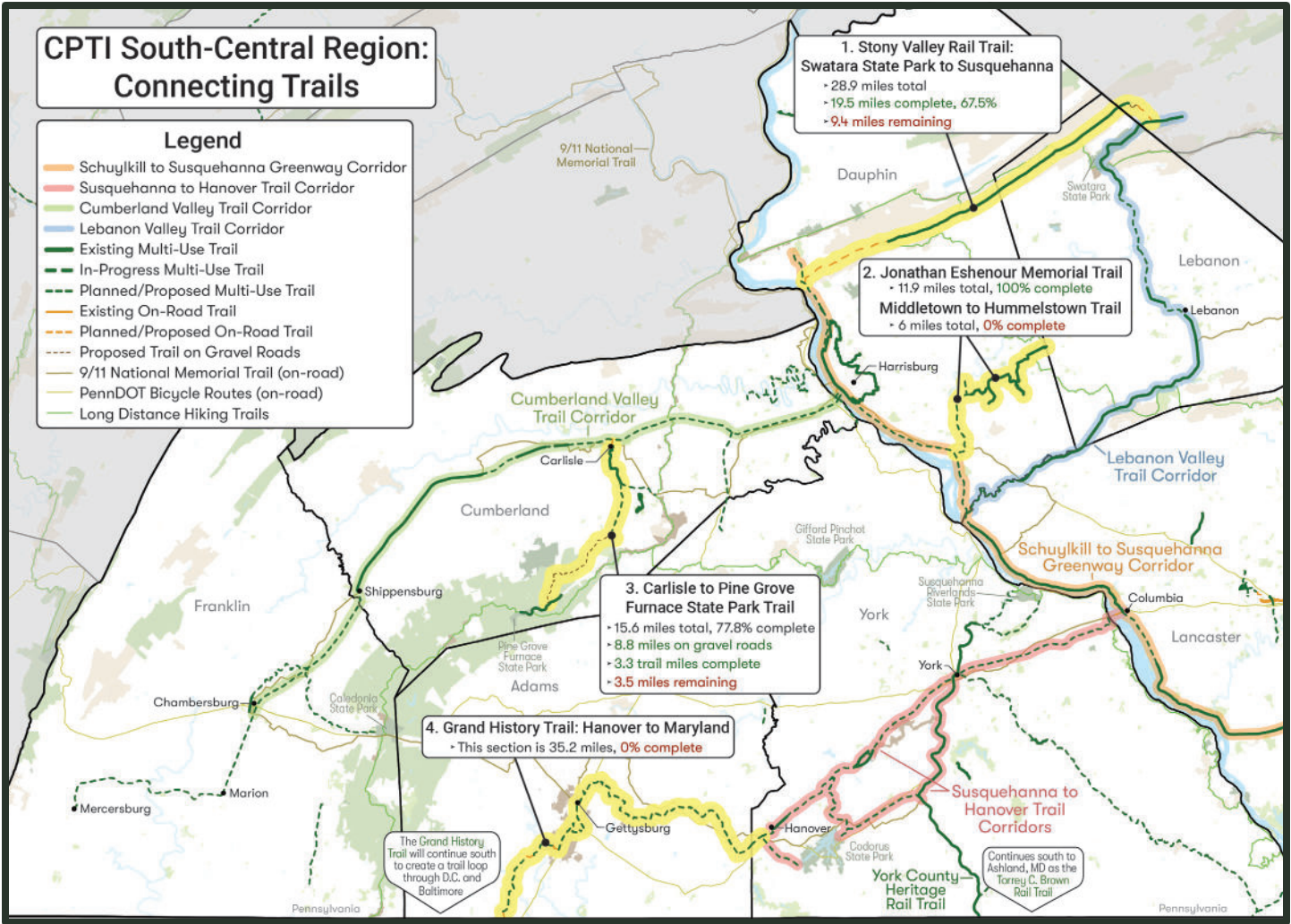
There are quite notable additional connecting trails, some of which are largely built out while others are actively in development.

1. The Stony Valley Rail Trail, a gravel trail extending 28.9 miles from Swatara State Park to the Susquehanna. 19.5 miles are complete, 9.4 miles remain.

2. The Jonathan Eshenour Memorial Trail is an existing 11.9-mile rail trail that is currently disconnected from the greater trail system. The proposed 6-mile Middletown to Hummelstown Trail is the missing link between the Jonathan Eshenour Memorial Trail and the Susquehanna
- to Schuylkill trail corridor. 11.9 miles are complete, 6 miles remain.

3. A proposed trail from the LeTort Spring Run Nature Trail near Carlisle to Pine Grove Furnace State Park and the Cumberland County Biker/Hiker Trail extending 15.6 miles with 8.8 miles on gravel roads. 3.3 trail miles are complete, plus 8.8 on gravel roads, so 12.1 miles are complete with 3.5 miles remaining.

4. The proposed Grand History Trail, extending 35.2 connecting Hanover to Gettysburg to St. Mary's, just beyond the Maryland State Lane. Zero miles have been completed.



Supporting Trails

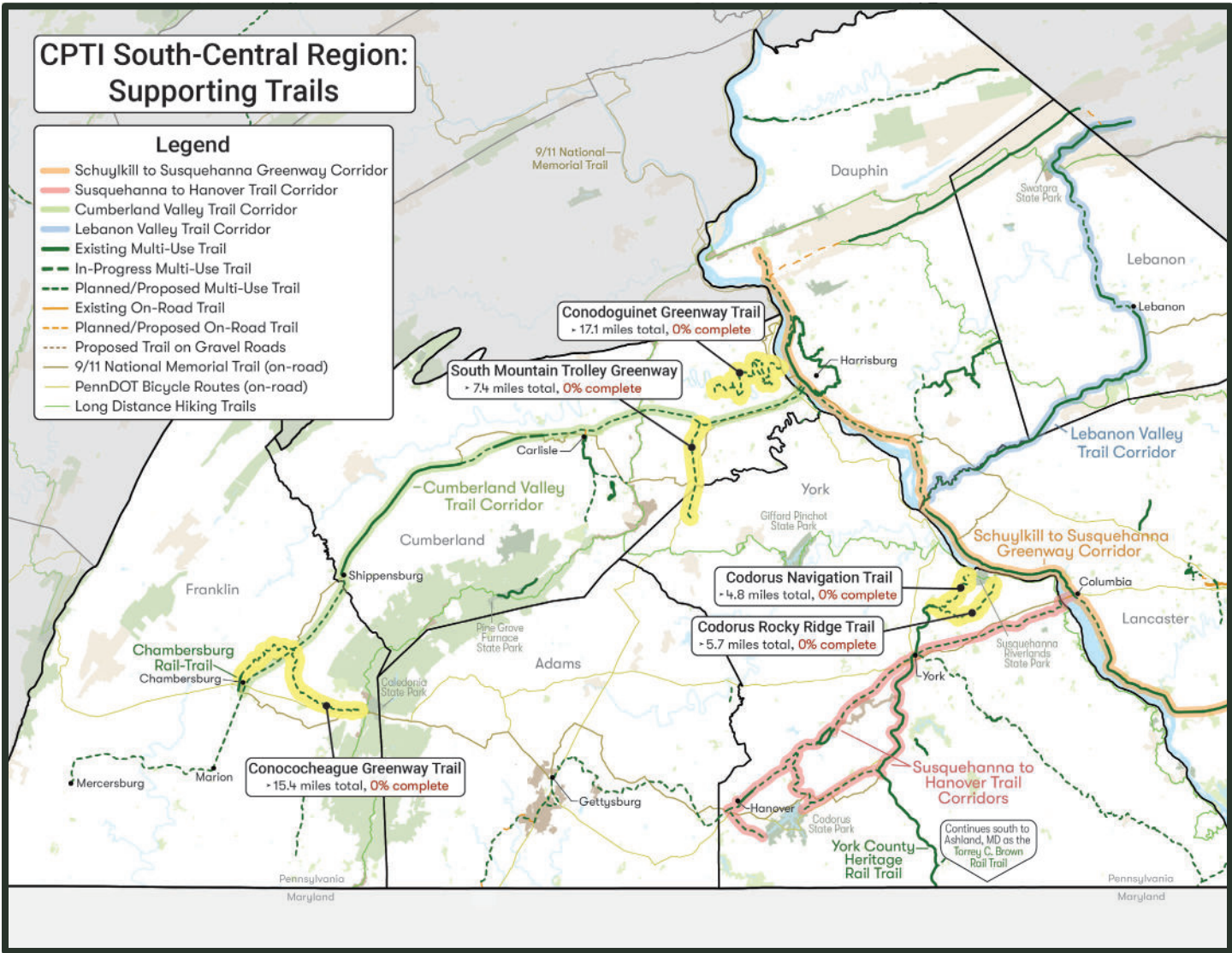
Supporting trails have been identified as valuable extensions of a connected trail network, all of which are only conceptual at this time.

1. A proposed trail extending 17.1 miles along the Conodoguinet Creek and connecting to the Susquehanna.

2. The proposed South Mountain Trolley Greenway extends 7.4 miles and is aligned with portions of an abandoned inter-urban trolley. See the map on page 17 for a detailed example.
3. The proposed Codorus Navigation Trail extends 4.8 miles from the northern terminus of the York County Heritage Rail Trail through the west side of Susquehanna Riverlands State Park.

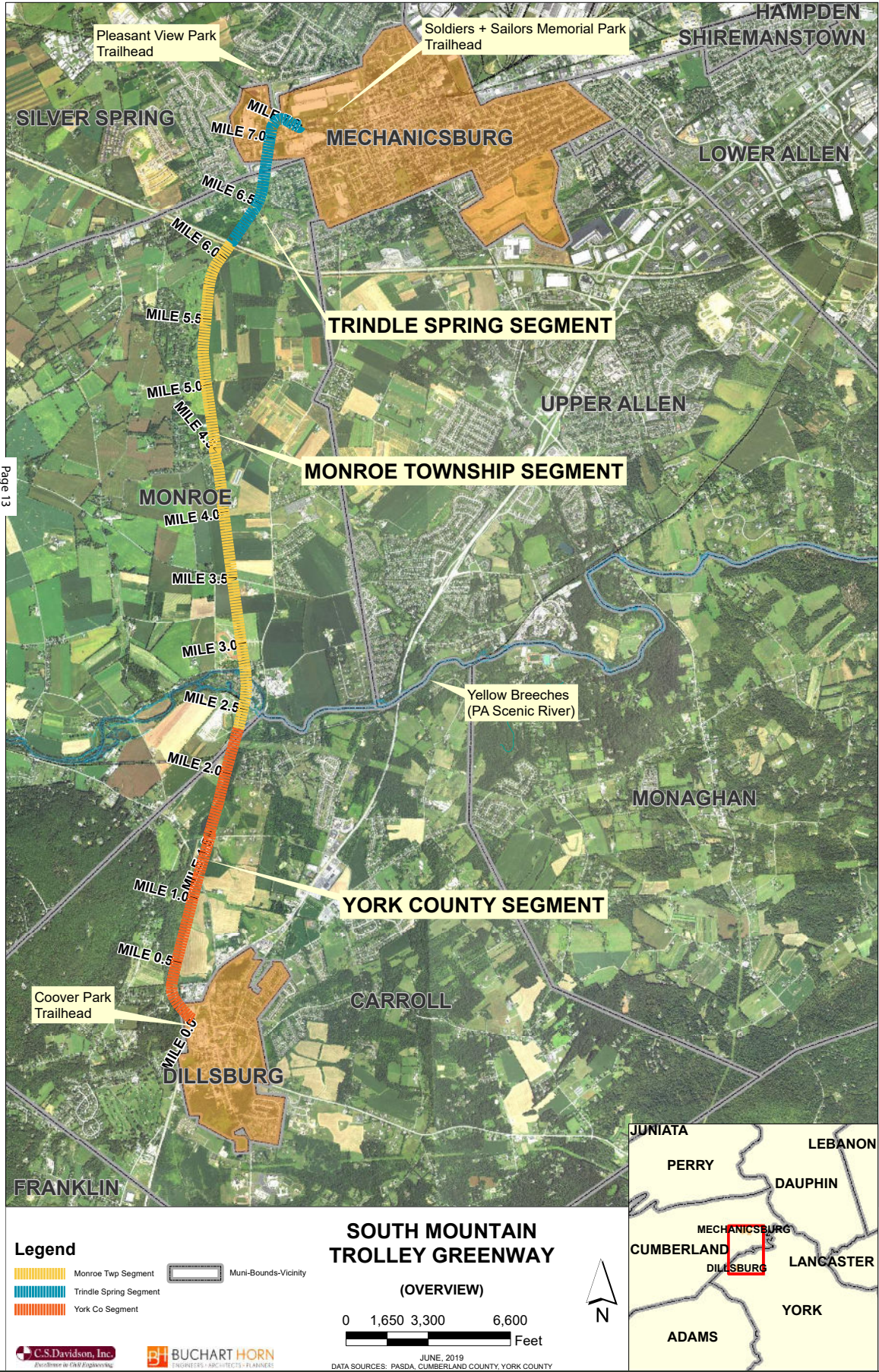
4. The proposed Codorus Rocky Ridge Trail extends 5.7 miles from the northern terminus of the York County Heritage Rail Trail through the east side of Susquehanna Riverlands State Park.

5. The proposed Conococheague Greenway Trail from the Chambersburg Rail-Trail to Caledonia State Park extends 15.4 miles.



Source: South Mountain Partnership

PROPOSED ROUTE



Recommendations & Critical Connections

To trail sponsors, the most critical trail connection is pretty much always the one on which they are working at the moment. Trail projects, like all infrastructure development, require focus and commitment. Building out a network of trails necessarily demands that many projects be undertaken simultaneously, and that is certainly already occurring across the South Central PA region. There is an abundance of thinking, hard work, planning, talking, and digging going on!

Still, some trail gaps are more important than others from the perspective of a connected network. It is often the case that some of the most important connections are those that fall “between the cracks” which in this case often means they cross county lines. Because much of the trail development occurring in the region is county-centric, four projects are of that nature and two are bridges across the Susquehanna.

An important outcome of the trail connectivity assessment is to identify the critical connections that merit a multi-stakeholder approach to accelerate trail completion. Six Critical Connections are identified and mapped below. Each involves multiple municipalities, usually two or more counties, and multiple non-profit stakeholders. The table lists each gap and includes the associated municipalities.

Cumberland-Dauphin Critical Connection

1. Harrisburg to Lemoyne: Susquehanna River Crossing

The Susquehanna River is an important regional resource and attraction, while also representing a significant barrier to the South Central PA regional network of trails. Solutions have been in discussion for years that would provide a crucial connection to the West Shore from Harrisburg providing access to the Capital Area Greenbelt. A two-phased approach has emerged.

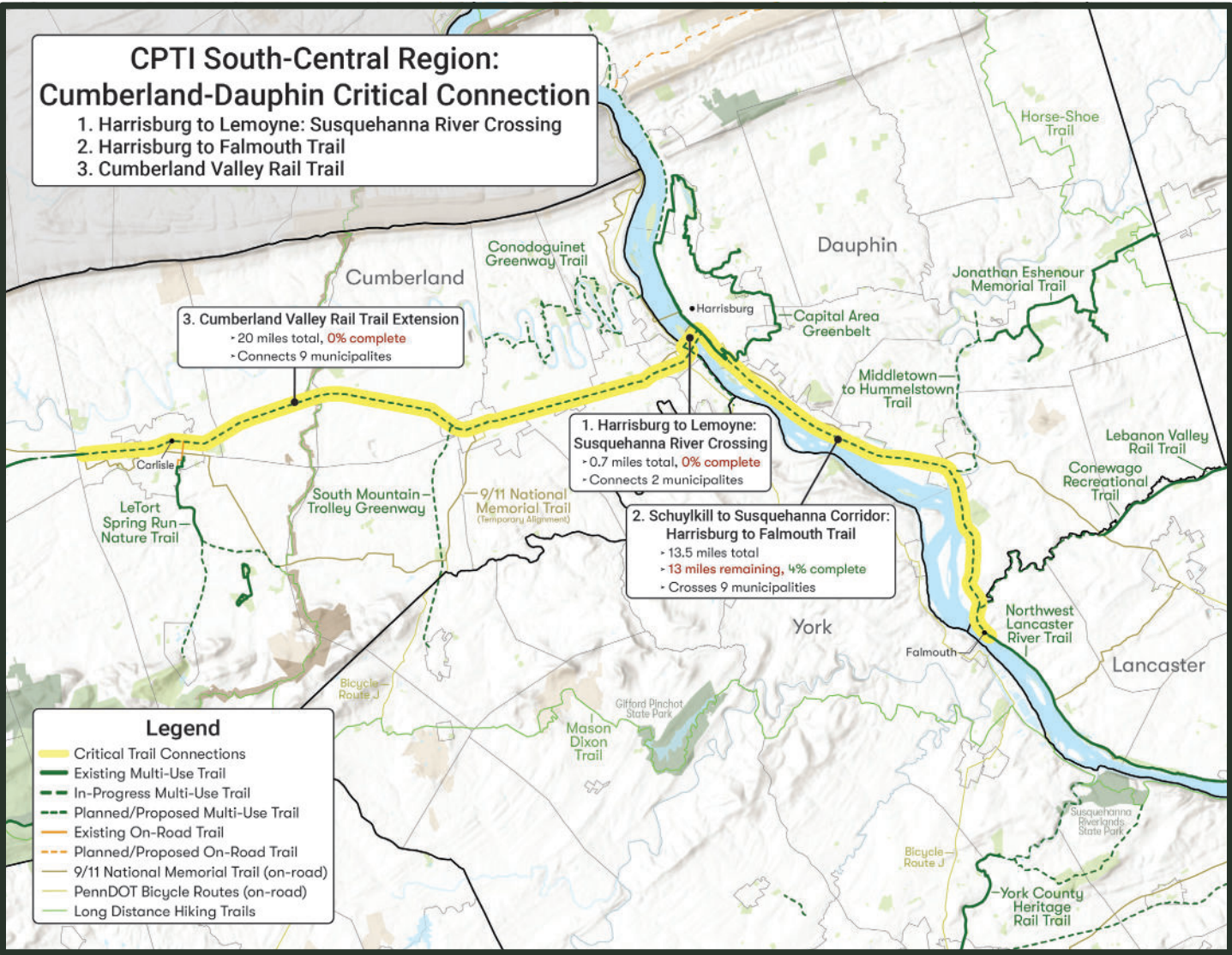
Recommendation:

It is PEC’s recommendation that multi-stakeholder working groups be established to focus attention on each of these critical connections, and that each critical connection be prioritized for funding by DCNR, PADOT, and area counties/MPOs. The working groups would serve as coordinators meeting perhaps quarterly or semi-annually. The actual trail planning and development would be advanced by self-identified leaders with the drive and the capacity for project management and completion.

1. Phase one, currently in design, will be a new utility bridge a few feet down river from the Market Street Bridge that is soon to be subject to a full-scale PennDOT led rehabilitation. The new utility bridge will include a surface appropriate for bicycle and pedestrian crossing of the River.
2. Phase two would entail rehabilitation of what is called the “CAT” bridge, an abandoned freight-rail bridge, into a park-like setting with facilities for bicycles and pedestrians to enjoy. The hope is to create a river crossing akin to The High Line on Manhattan’s West Side.

2. Harrisburg to Falmouth Trail

Connecting Harrisburg through Steelton to Lancaster County’s Northwest River Trail would accomplish a lot! Given the existing Capital Area Greenbelt and the lure of the fast developing Enola Low Grade and connections to the Chester Valley Trail, a champion for the Harrisburg to Falmouth Village trail segment must be identified because the Lebanon Valley Rail Trail could connect in this area via the Conewago Recreational Trail, and including that connection to the largely built out Rail Trail would be the best way



to approach this. The proposed trail would also help move several miles of PennDot Bicycle Route J to off-road trail. The two trails are respectively 13.5 and 7.1 miles in length.

3. Cumberland Valley Rail Trail

The connection of the Cumberland Valley Rail Trail to Harrisburg is a critical piece of a connected

trail network. This 20-mile gap spans from the Susquehanna River to the existing portions of the Cumberland Valley Rail Trail, beginning in Carlisle. Tri-County Regional Planning Commission and Cumberland County Planning Commission are cooperatively working with regional stakeholders including Bike South Central PA and the Cumberland Valley Rails-to-Trails Council to explore various trail concepts and alignments.



Lancaster-York Connection

4. Wrightsville to York Trail

The connection from Wrightsville to York would dramatically enhance the accessibility to the Enola Low Grade and on the York side, to the York Heritage Trail which is completed to Maryland and well beyond. This section has been assessed from the perspective of an abandoned rail corridor, but that is likely infeasible due to reversion and encroachment. What is the solution? A multi-stakeholder task force, convened by the Susquehanna Riverlands Conservation Landscape in partnership with both the York and Lancaster County Planning Commissions, is needed to identify a workable solution. Given that PA Rte 462 from Wrightsville to York is designated Bicycle Route S and co-aligns with the 9/11 National Memorial Trail, significant safety enhancements within the existing roadway to better accommodate and protect non-motorized users may be an interim solution. Continued focused attention and prioritization is needed in light of ped/bike improvements already planned for the Bridge and the desirability of linking from Wrightsville to York.

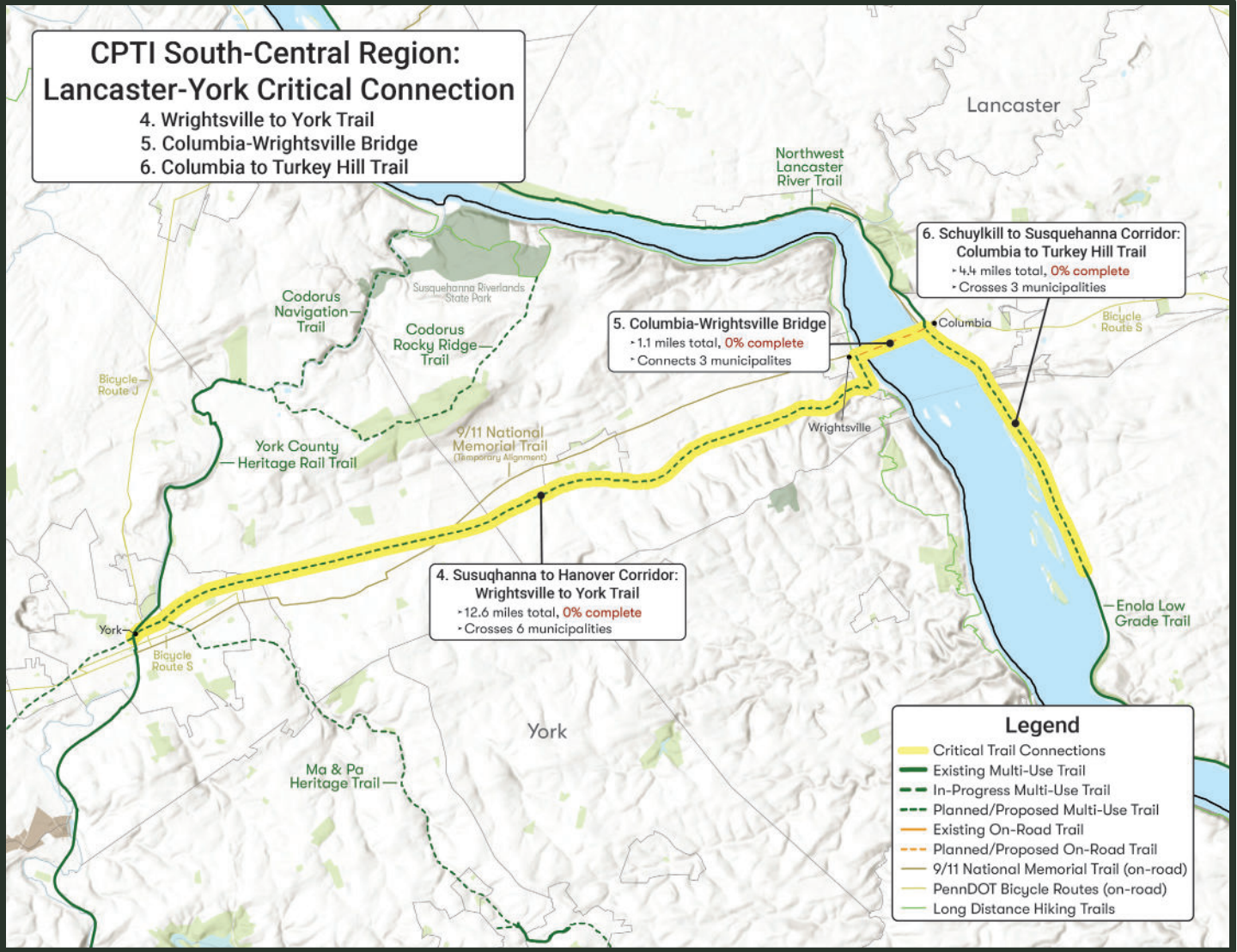
5. Columbia-Wrightsville Bridge

Columbia, a historic and prominent Lancaster County borough, is the through point for the Susquehanna to Schuylkill (S2S) Greenway. It serves as a gateway to Lancaster County and together with Wrightsville in York County on the other side of the Susquehanna, these Rivertowns serve as the anchor to the Susquehanna Riverlands Conservation Landscape. The iconic Columbia-Wrightsville Bridge (Veteran’s Memorial Bridge) is a massive multi-arch connector crossing the Susquehanna River. It is a highly picturesque symbol of connectivity, while being a huge impediment to bicycle and pedestrian use due to vehicular volume and speed. Although there is a sidewalk and space for bicyclists, the experience for non-motorized users is akin to walking the shoulder of an Interstate Highway: noisy car and truck traffic careening past, no shade, and no amenities that welcome non-motorized users. The upgrade of the bike/Ped facility on the Bridge is consistent with Lancaster County’s Places 2040 Comprehensive plan, Lancaster MPO, York MPO, West Hempfield Township and the Boroughs of Columbia and Wrightsville.

The Susquehanna Riverlands Conservation Landscape has championed improvements which are currently slated by PennDOT for the not-too-distant future. This “Rivertown Connector” would enable bike/ped users to cross the bridge safely and utilize a system of sidewalks and bike lanes to connect to Columbia’s River Park and Wrightsville’s Riverfront Park. Columbia’s River Park is the southern trailhead of the Northwest Lancaster River Trail. Wrightsville’s Riverfront Park will serve as a trailhead for both the Northwest Lancaster County River trail and the Mason Dixon trail. Improvements would also support the 9/11 National Memorial Trail, and PennDOT Bicycle Route S, both of which utilize this bridge.

6. Columbia to Turkey Hill Trail

The Columbia to Turkey Hill corridor is the “Achilles heel” in the Susquehanna to Schuylkill Trail, a Pennsylvania state-designated regional greenway. A feasibility study conducted several years ago identified active rail service from Columbia downriver and hilly topography as challenges for trail development. Lancaster County Planning Commission is taking the lead on this in partnership with the Susquehanna National Heritage Area. Focused follow-up on this gap should be a number one priority of all interested parties.



#	Name	Distance	Percent Complete	Counties	Number of Municipalities	Names of Municipalities
1	Harrisburg to Falmouth Trail	13.5 miles	4%	Dauphin, Lancaster	9	Conoy Township, Harrisburg City, Swatara Township, Lower Swatara Township, Royalton Borough, Londonderry Township, Steepleton Borough, Middletown Borough, Highspire Borough
2	Susquehanna River Crossing	0.7 miles	0%	Cumberland, Dauphin	2	Harrisburg City, Lemoyne Borough
3	Cumberland Valley Rail Trail	20 miles	0%	Cumberland	9	Hampden Township, Lower Allen Township, Middlesex Township, North Middleton Township, Lemoyne Borough, Mechanicsburg Borough, Silver Spring Township, Shiremanstown Borough, Carlisle Borough
4	Wrightsville to York Trail	12.6 miles	0%	York	6	Spring Garden Township, Springettsbury Township, Hallam Borough, Hellam Township, York City, Wrightsville Borough
5	Wrightsville Bridge	1.1 miles	0%	York, Lancaster	3	Columbia Borough, Wrightsville Borough, West Hempfield Township
6	Columbia to Turkey Hill Trail	4.4 miles	0%	Lancaster	3	Columbia Borough, West Hempfield Township, Manor Township

Moving Forward

The opportunity for a connected trail network of safe off-road multi-purpose trails is within grasp of the 1.9 million citizens of South Central PA! PEC recommends focusing attention on two “critical connections” each linking across the Susquehanna River that would lock-in the network. Prioritizing and securing these connections would benefit all the supporting and connecting trail initiatives identified by making greatly enhanced connectivity possible! Focusing on these connections would “raise all boats.”

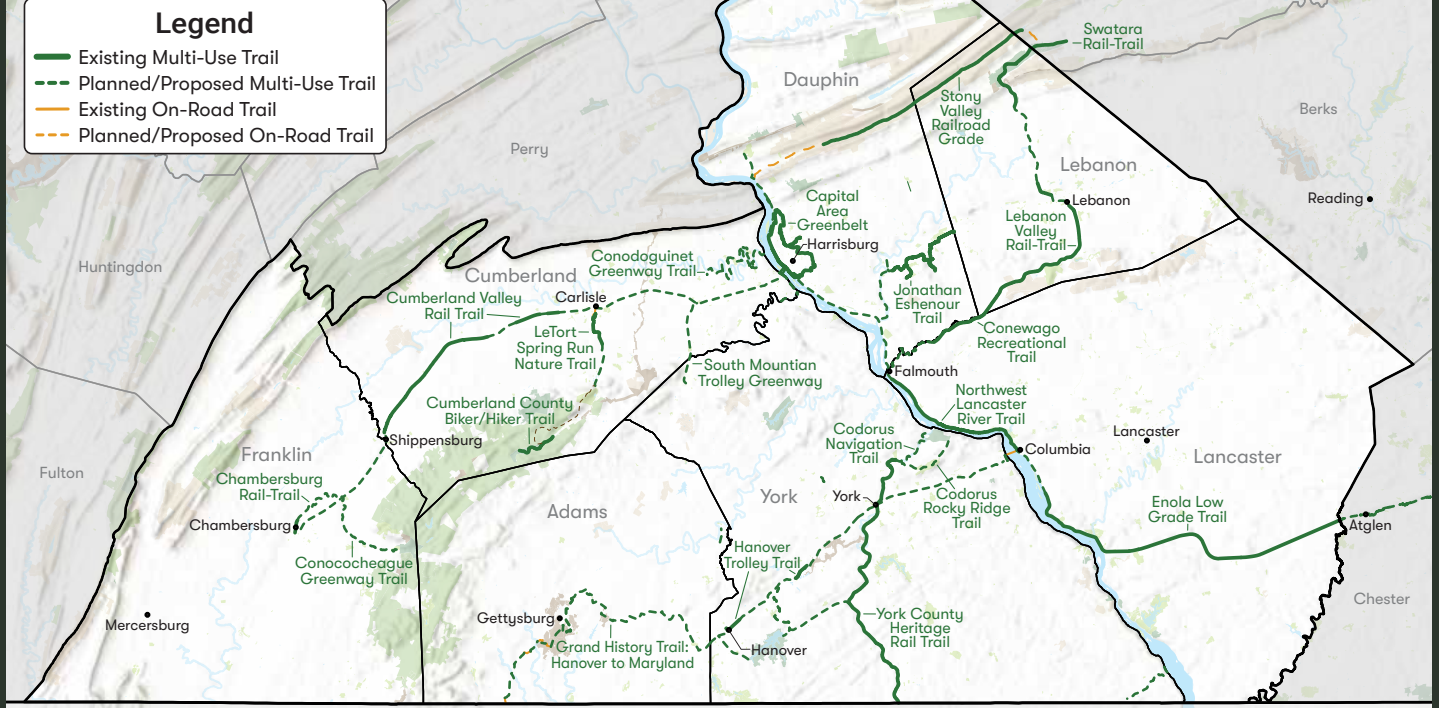
Embracing and defending this network opportunity should be a shared goal of the eight counties and dozens of stakeholders engaged in this process. Through the process, PEC has identified motivated and capable leads to build out the connections, to convene stakeholders, and to secure the essential resources to complete the job. Outreach to state agencies especially PennDOT and DCNR is critical to future success. A strategy to coordinate with railroads may also be helpful.

The vision already has momentum due to the hard work or several unconnected initiatives that have been separately building significant miles of trail. The task now is to join forces, to grasp the vision and to bring it home through focused attention to two critical connections.



Source: York County Rail Trail Authority

CPTI South-Central Region



Proposed multi-purpose trail network: 400 miles of trail when complete, 160 miles already built.



Source: National Park Service

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The Pennsylvania Environmental Council

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