

# THE JOHNSON TROLLEY TRAIL

## CONNECTING MERCER COUNTY COMMUNITIES



DECEMBER 19, 2022

Mercer County Action Team

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## The Basic Idea

The construction of the I-295 corridor in the early 1970s separated and divided communities and neighbors across Mercer County. A pedestrian and bicycle trail following the alignment of the historic Johnson Trolley Line (The Johnson Trolley Trail) will reconnect Mercer County communities from Trenton to Princeton and beyond.

The Johnson Trolley Trail (JTT) serves five critical purposes:

- Open **equitable** trail access to residents in communities from Trenton to Princeton
- Provide a **safe** corridor for pedestrian and non-motorized transportation
- Stimulate **healthy** activity for Mercer County residents
- Promote **access** to businesses, schools, recreation, and amenities across Mercer County
- Connect **communities through collaboration** on joint projects

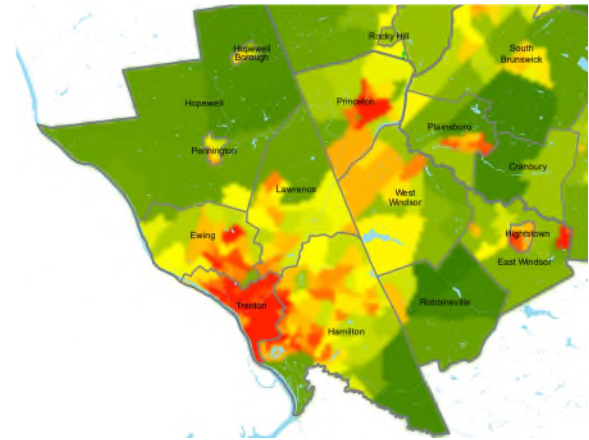
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## The Need

The accompanying map from the Greater Mercer Trails Plan shows that demand for walking and biking is very high in Princeton, Ewing, Lawrence, Hamilton, and Trenton. But barriers and gaps limit mobility for pedestrians and cyclists in those communities, separating and isolating them as “islands.”

Safety is a paramount concern in encouraging people to use non-motorized transportation.<sup>1</sup> Most county and state highways in Mercer County are high-volume, high-speed, or wide roadways producing a high level of traffic stress tolerated only by a very few determined individuals. Access for pedestrians and cyclists is often limited to their immediate neighborhoods.

Communities along the proposed JTT with the highest bicycle demand tend to have the highest population densities and economic opportunities, namely Trenton and central Princeton, as well as portions of Lawrence, Ewing, and Hamilton near Trenton.



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## The Opportunity

The historic Johnson Trolley Line once linked Trenton to Princeton. Some sections are still in use today as trails, including segments from Spruce Avenue in Ewing to the Eldridge Park neighborhood

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<sup>1</sup> The increasing accident death toll for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorcyclists in the U.S. is unique among developed nations. “The Exceptionally American Problem of Rising Roadway Deaths,” NYT, 11/27/2022

and Rider University in Lawrence and from Denow Road to Phillips Avenue in Lawrenceville. To connect these segments, a multi-use bridge concept<sup>2</sup> has been developed to close the critical gap created by constructing the I-295 highway.



Completing the JTT will reconnect thousands of Mercer County residents to work, school, and recreation. In addition, a continuous JTT provides connections to the Lawrence Hopewell Trail, the Delaware and Raritan Canal towpath, and the Circuit Trails, a vast regional network of hundreds of miles of multi-use trails.

The proposed Johnson Trolley Trail southern extension leads into downtown Trenton near the Trenton Battle Monument. The proposed northern extension links to the Lawrence Hopewell Trail and Princeton. In the center of the proposed changes is a pedestrian bicycle bridge for safely crossing I-295.

The Federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL, also known as IIJA) provides substantial funding for trails and other pedestrian and bicycle safe passage improvements. The New Jersey Legislature

<sup>2</sup> Although less than 1/2 mile long, this project provides access and connections to hundreds of miles of trails and bicycle facilities across Mercer County and neighboring communities.

has also responded to the emerging demand for similar improvements, which have become a focus of state funding.

As a collaborative program, the JTT invites the involvement of federal, state, county, and municipal governments working with regional associations, residents, businesses, schools, universities, trail advocates, and other stakeholders to:

- Formulate a strategic plan for the complete JTT route and stakeholder engagement
- Plan the JTT route working from the Greater Mercer Trails Plan and Mercer County Bicycle Master Plan
- Identify specific opportunities and challenges
- Define projects to bridge gaps and establish sponsors
- Provide funding for trail planning, engineering, construction, and maintenance
- Build the JTT

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### The Challenges

- Design a pedestrian/bicycle bridge over I-295 (engineering concept completed)
- Define responsibilities for bridge and trail jurisdiction and long-term maintenance
- Obtain necessary funding for trail segments
- Acquire necessary rights of way

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### Our Ask

Completion of the JTT is the highest priority for the Mercer County Action Team (MCAT). Work with us to:

- Expand the coalition of support for the JTT
- Identify opportunities for programmatic and financial support
- Participate in community forums to inform and engage residents and other stakeholders
- Help coordinate resources

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### The Mercer County Action Team (MCAT)

MCAT is composed of trail advocates and trail professionals, engineers, nonprofit leaders, and county and municipal representatives. Its charge is to:

- Achieve consensus on priority segments for the Circuit Trails in Mercer County
- Make a case for the development of trail segments
- Mobilize municipal, county, state, and public support and resources
- Assist with applications for funding
- Support trail initiatives to encourage safe use

Each of the nine counties in the Circuit Trails works closely with the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission.

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## Selected Resources

- [Greater Mercer Trails Plan](#)
- [Johnson Trolley Line Trail Story Map](#)
- Johnson Trolley: I-295 Crossing Concepts & Cost Estimates, Michael Baker International, December 14, 2021
- [The Circuit Trails—Johnson Trolley Line](#)
- [“The Exceptionally American Problem of Rising Roadway Deaths,” The New York Times, 11/27/2022](#)
- [Take the Trolley! The Trolley Age in Mercer County](#), Dennis P. Waters, Pennington Public Library