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## **LOCAL OFFICIALS HIGHLIGHT MAJOR STEPS FORWARD IN RAILS TO TRAILS DEVELOPMENT**

*County Executive Delagrave proposes \$500K allocation in 2021 Racine County budget*

Union Grove – Racine County Executive Jonathan Delagrave was joined by Assembly Speaker Robin Vos and other local officials and advocates Tuesday to highlight County Executive Delagrave’s proposed \$500,000 investment toward acquisition of an 11-mile corridor that is vital to the regional vision for the Route of the Badger trail network.

When developed as a trail, this corridor will provide new access for walking, biking and outside activity for area residents and yield millions in potential revenue and healthcare cost savings for the region.

Route of the Badger is southeastern Wisconsin’s 700-mile landmark regional trail network and a Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) TrailNation™ project. The regional trail network will connect Racine and Milwaukee counties, as well as Kenosha, Walworth, Waukesha, Washington, and Ozaukee, unlocking new economic, health and recreation and tourism opportunities for the region.

County Executive Delagrave announced the \$500,000 allocation in his budget address on Tuesday, October 6. The budget allocation comes from money generated from land sales, not tax dollars. Pending approval by the Racine County Board, the funding would leverage \$1 million previously designated in the state’s Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program and complete the land acquisition needed for the project.

“The Route of the Badger is more than a network of bicycle and pedestrian paths — it will be a major boost for economic development, health and wellness, tourism, and quality of life,” County Executive Delagrave said. “While there’s still work to be done and money to be secured, Racine County is committed to doing all we can to ensure this trail is completed. I am grateful for the support of Speaker Vos and the tireless efforts of rails to trails advocates. I’m excited to work with the County Board to ensure this project continues to move forward.”

The acquisition of the 11-mile section of the Canadian Pacific Railway between Sturtevant, Mount Pleasant, Yorkville, Union Grove and Dover represents a significant step forward in the Route of the Badger trail network’s completion. When complete, the

corridor will nearly connect east to west across Racine County and provide 56 miles of uninterrupted trail within the Route of the Badger network.

“It’s great to see the Rails to Trails project moving forward. I want to thank the Racine County Executive for also prioritizing the trail after we secured \$1 million from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship funds. This project has been a result of years of coordinated efforts at the local, county and state levels,” Speaker Robin Vos said. “So many Racine County residents will benefit from this multi-purpose trail system that will attract tourists and economic development. With the increased need and interest in getting outdoors, this latest development comes at a perfect time.”

A recent RTC study found that the net economic impact of trails and active transportation annually in Wisconsin is as much as \$1.5 billion, including direct trail user spending of \$686 million and health costs avoided of \$833 million — economic benefits that increase exponentially as the connectivity between trails, people and places improves.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significant increase in trail use across the state, with usage 2 to 3 times higher in March 2020 compared to March 2019. Nationwide, RTC reports that trail use has risen 60 percent on average this year compared to last year.

“The CP corridor has always been a critical piece of the Route of the Badger vision – this 11-mile segment has the potential to unlock hundreds of miles of connected trails across Southeast Wisconsin,” said Willie Karidis, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy’s project manager for the Route of the Badger. “Once developed as a trail, this corridor has the potential to generate new revenue and new access to outdoor spaces in communities that otherwise have little; two outcomes that deliver outsized benefits as our communities continue to manage the COVID-19 pandemic.”

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