

WASHINGTON, D.C.

ROUTE

A journey westward along the Great American Rail-Trail will begin at the steps of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. The trail will travel among some of the most iconic landmarks in the nation’s capital along the National Mall, including the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial, where the trail heads north along the Rock Creek Park Trails. The route then picks up the Capital Crescent Trail in Georgetown, which flows into the towpath of the Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) Canal National Historical Park stretching from Washington, D.C., to Cumberland, Maryland.



C&O Canal National Historical Park traveling under the Capital Crescent Trail | Photo by Alice Crain

TABLE 2 GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL MILEAGE IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

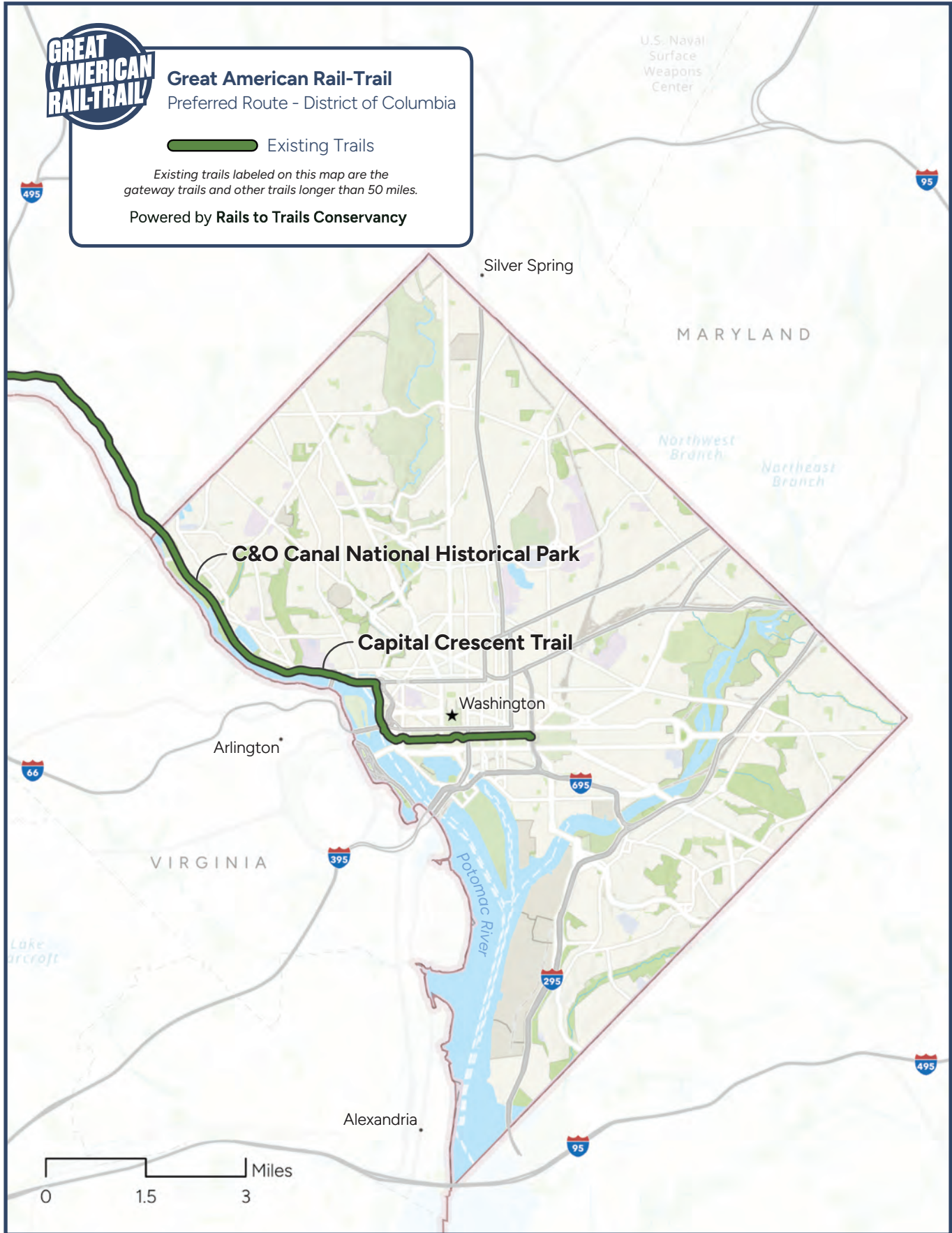
Total Great American Rail-Trail Existing Trail Miles in D.C. (% of Total State Mileage)	7.5 (100%)
Total Great American Rail-Trail Gap Miles in D.C. (% of Total State Mileage)	0 (0%)
Total Trail Gaps in D.C.	0
Total Great American Rail-Trail Miles in D.C.	7.5

TABLE 3 GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE THROUGH WASHINGTON, D.C.

Existing Trail Name	Length in D.C. Along Great American Rail-Trail (in Miles)
National Mall Trails	2.4
Rock Creek Park Trails	0.7
K Street/Water Street Cycle Track	0.6
Capital Crescent Trail	2.3
C&O Canal National Historical Park	1.5
Total Miles	7.5
Existing Trail Miles	7.5
Trail Gap Miles	0.0

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT 2024

MAP 1: WASHINGTON, D.C.



GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT WASHINGTON, D.C.



Ian Mackay and his team depart on an adventure on the Great American Rail-Trail in the summer of 2022. | Photo by Anthony Le, courtesy Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

NATIONAL MALL TRAILS

Total Length (in Miles)	5.0
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in D.C. (in Miles)	2.4
Trail Type	Greenway
Surface Type	Concrete, dirt
Trail Manager	National Park Service
Website	nps.gov/nama/index.htm

Beginning at the steps of the U.S. Capitol, the Great American Rail-Trail will travel west from this eastern extent along the National Mall. The National Mall has a series of trails owned and maintained by the National Park Service that are popular with tourists traveling east and west around the monuments and museums. Bicycles are allowed on the trails, but because the trails are frequently crowded, cyclists should take caution and proceed through the National Mall Trails slowly.

The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) installed wayfinding signage along the circle surrounding the Lincoln Memorial to direct cyclists toward the Rock Creek Park Trails into the Georgetown neighborhood of Washington, D.C.¹ The trail crosses the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway (also known as Rock Creek Parkway) before heading north along the Potomac River. The trail hugs the river, then merges with the Rock Creek Park Trails. The National Mall Trails will host the Great American Rail-Trail for 2.4 miles.

¹ The District of Columbia Bicycle Master Plan includes a recommendation that DDOT “work with [the National Park Service] to designate major bicycle routes in the Mall area with distinctive signs and pavement markings.” DDOT has already begun installing wayfinding signs along the National Mall and Rock Creek Park Trails. To highlight the start of the Great American Rail-Trail, these signs and other potential future signage and markings could extend to the beginning of the Capital Crescent Trail, described on page 17.

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT WASHINGTON, D.C.

ROCK CREEK PARK TRAILS

Total Length (in Miles)	8.5
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in D.C. (in Miles)	0.7
Trail Type	Greenway
Surface Type	Asphalt, dirt
Trail Manager	National Park Service
Website	nps.gov/rocr/planyourvisit/hiking.htm
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/rock-creek-park-trails

The Rock Creek Park Trails connect to the National Mall Trails along the banks of the Potomac River near the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge (which carries Interstate 66, or I-66). The Rock Creek Park Trails travel 8.5 miles in total in Washington, D.C., from just south of the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge along Rock Creek Parkway north to the intersection of Oregon Avenue Northwest and Wise Road Northwest, with a several-mile gap in the middle through Rock Creek Park.

Rock Creek Park is the oldest and largest urban park in the national park system. The portion of the Rock Creek Park Trails system through Rock Creek Park in Washington, D.C., is owned and maintained by the National Park Service. The Rock Creek Park Trails will host the Great American Rail-Trail for 0.7 mile.

K STREET/WATER STREET CYCLE TRACK

Total Length (in Miles)	0.6
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in D.C. (in Miles)	0.6
Trail Type	Greenway
Surface Type	Asphalt
Trail Manager	DDOT



Ian Mackay on the first leg of his tour on the Great American Rail-Trail in the summer of 2022 | Photo by Suzanne Matyas, courtesy Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

The Rock Creek Park Trails create a connection to a protected bike lane, or cycle track, along K Street/Water Street in the Georgetown neighborhood of Washington, D.C. (accessible via a ramp from K Street Northwest to Rock Creek Parkway). DDOT installed the two-way protected bike lane in 2018 along the length of K Street/Water Street, underneath the elevated Whitehurst Freeway, between 30th and 34th streets Northwest. The two-way protected bike lane was extended all the way to the entrance of the Capital Crescent Trail in 2022.

The K Street/Water Street Cycle Track will host the Great American Rail-Trail for 0.6 mile.

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT WASHINGTON, D.C.



Capital Crescent Trail in Washington, D.C. | Photo by Milo Bateman, courtesy Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

CAPITAL CRESCENT TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	11.0
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in D.C. (in Miles)	2.3
Trail Type	Rail-trail
Surface Type	Asphalt, crushed stone
Trail Manager	DDOT, Montgomery County Department of Transportation, National Park Service
Website	cctrail.org
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/capital-crescent-trail

At the end of Water Street, the Great American Rail-Trail reaches the first rail-trail along the route as it heads west from Washington, D.C., onto the Capital Crescent Trail. This 11-mile trail uses the right-of-way of the former Georgetown Branch of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, which was abandoned in the mid-1980s. The trail begins by traveling underneath the remnants of the former Alexandria Aqueduct. The paved Capital Crescent Trail is sandwiched between the Potomac River on the left and the C&O Canal on the right. After about 2 miles, the Capital Crescent Trail arcs northward toward Bethesda, Maryland, and crosses over the C&O Canal Towpath at the Arizona Avenue Bridge. Trail users continuing on the Great American Rail-Trail can find a connection to the historical C&O Canal Towpath at Fletcher's Cove Boathouse 0.5 mile before the Arizona Avenue Bridge.

The National Park Service operates and manages the Capital Crescent Trail as part of its upkeep of the C&O Canal Towpath. Montgomery County, Maryland, and Washington, D.C., also contribute to the ongoing maintenance of this trail, as it is one of the most heavily used trails in the region and sees significant year-round usage.

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT WASHINGTON, D.C.



Lock 8 along the C&O Canal Towpath in Maryland | Photo courtesy Bill and Ann Testerman

C&O CANAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

Total Length (in Miles)	184.5
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in D.C. (in Miles)	1.5
Trail Type	Canal
Surface Type	Crushed stone, dirt, gravel
Trail Manager	National Park Service
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · canaltrust.org · nps.gov/choh/index.htm
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/chesapeake--ohio-canal-national-historical-park

The C&O Canal National Historical Park, also known as the C&O Canal Towpath, follows the route of the Potomac River for 184.5 miles between Washington, D.C., and Cumberland, Maryland. The canal, which operated for more than 100 years, transported ships carrying various goods down the waterway to market. Today, visitors can still see the rich history of the canal through many of its original features, including locks, lockhouses and aqueducts.

The towpath itself was historically used to assist ships as they floated down the canal. Now, the towpath is a well-used trail that sees more than 5 million visitors annually. The number of visitors has increased significantly in the last 25+ years; visitor counts were closer to 1 million in 1996.

The C&O Canal Towpath will host the Great American Rail-Trail for 181.8 miles, about 1.5 miles of which are in Washington, D.C. As the remaining 180.3 miles are in Maryland, the towpath will be discussed in more detail in the Maryland chapter.