The Great Lake-to-Lake Trails project began in 2009 with a generous grant to Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance from the Kresge Foundation, to accelerate the development of a network of cross-state trails. Anticipated outcomes include enhanced tourism, transportation, health and fitness, and economic development opportunities. Stakeholder identification and collaboration on a multi-agency level is ongoing. A marketing/branding strategy and recommended next steps are included in the planning effort.

Michigan ranks #1 in the country with 2,478 miles of open-rail trail. With connecting non-rail trail miles, there are well over 3,000 miles of multi-use trail for hiking, bicycling, running and often snowmobiling, horseback riding and ORV use, operated by state, county, township, city, village or nonprofit entities. Michigan is now at the enviable point of being able to connect long stretches of trail corridor across the state. Many of the east-west cross-state trail routes can be connected from one Great Lake to another in the foreseeable future. A system of Great Lake-to-Lake Trails is envisioned for promoting Michigan’s tourism and nonmotorized transportation assets. Route 1 extends from South Haven to Port Huron and is comprised of 10 trails totaling 175 miles already in place. Many opportunities for thematic promotion will present themselves as these trails are connected to each other. For a current map of Michigan’s multi-use trail system, see www.michigantrails.org.

System Benefits
Fifteen existing trails will connect to create Route 1 of the Great Lake-to-Lake Trails. Each trail offers benefits that will be elevated across the state and extended to communities in the “spurs.” These benefits include:

Economic Vitality: Trails serve as “economic engines” by increasing property values on nearby land, generating new tourism-related business and increasing customer flow to existing merchants serving trail users. Business climates are stronger when people walk and ride.

Transportation: Trails provide social links in local, regional, and state nonmotorized transportation systems, with traffic-free passage between neighborhoods, shopping areas, schools, libraries and more.

Social Connectedness: Trail users establish important bonds with neighbors, friends and family while enjoying the trail. Whether the trail is a trail head for individual recreation projects, a venue for fundraising activities or simply a walk, traffic-free space for recreation builds a community’s social capital. Waterfront “oases and oaks” on a trail also deter crime.

Environmental Preservation and Enhancement: Trails can provide impromptu habitat for wildlife and native plants. Green space set aside for nature and recreation often provides valuable buffering for underutilized, wildlife movement and other ecological processes. Trails enhance parklands, providing interconnected corridors to support these important natural systems.

Health and Fitness: Residents of trail communities enjoy free recreation facilities in walking, bicycling, rockclimbing, etc. for good health and fitness. Trails also provide relief from the pressures of everyday life by offering nature’s rejuvenatingsetting.

Outdoor Recreation: Hikers, bicyclists and other history buffs can be developed for all ages, given the abundance of historical resources along trails. Rail-trail connections can teach important lessons on reuse and historic preservation as well.

Another benefit gained from connecting the trails involves increased development momentum. The Great Lake-to-Lake Trail actually validates a framework for 55 communities to “buy in” for planning purposes. Each trail segment is an element of a local nonmotorized transportation plan or designations, such as “Bike Route to School,” “Bicycle Friendly Community” or other initiatives. From a marketing standpoint, a fully connected cross-state trail attracts more attention both within and outside the state.

Featured Destinations on the Trail:

ROUTE SOUTH HAVEN TO PORT HURON
Southern lower Michigan’s pastoral farms and woodlands dominate the scenery along Route 1, although lakeside towns and villages offer a wide variety of attractions. Offerings range from world-class beaches and exciting nightlife to historical sites, farms, estuaries and unique shopping experiences. The trail is positioned to enhance local business in each community along the way.

Marketing, Branding and Signage
The 15 existing trails within Route 1 are destined from each other as they are similar. A strong collective identity will create a framework for promotion of each individual trail. With 15 different trail names, 6 different logos, 6 friends groups, and community signage ranging from state, to county, to township, to city, to a anything under the sun will strengthen the identity’s appeal.

The Great Lake-to-Lake Trails uses images of cross-state routes from one Great Lake to another. The logo uses the unbreakable “Michigan” tradition outline with a blue edge to symbolize the Great Lake’s water’s edge and a green underscore for the land-based corridor. The identity is created strong enough to symbolize a long-distance cross-state route but unburdened enough to avoid conflict with individual trail names or logos. The Great Lake-to-Lake Trails logo can be incorporated into signage on the trails as well as into promotional items, such as handshakers, trail guides and a website. Concepts for signage design are designed according to the federally mandated Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.

The five Great Lake-to-Lake Trails provide visitors with an opportunity to sample five unique slices of Michigan. A website will be produced that showcases trip options and includes links to each individual trail. A unified “trail” logo will be a central portal for planning their entire trip.

A promotional brochure template has been developed that allows various logos with varying line thicknesses ranging from easy-to-rough “pouch and trail” options.

ROUTE Escanaba to Porcupine Mountain State Park-–
Buckwild Beauty of the western Upper Peninsula

The Blue Water Link has stations in Kalamazoo, Battle Creek, Albion, Jackson and Portage. Sometimes the Blue Water Link has stations in Kalamazoo, Battle Creek and Port Huron. Other stops of the trail along these lines include Lansing, Park Art and Dorem. Ultimately providing potential for future blue link transportation opportunities to meet major cities in southern lower Michigan.