

- ⚡ OUTDOOR RECREATION
- ⚡ AIR QUALITY
- ⚡ TOURISM
- ⚡ SAFETY
- ⚡ COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

POWERLINE TRAILS

HB22-1104

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Loveland's North Trail

BACKGROUND

Coloradans love biking and walking trails—within their neighborhoods, between communities, and even across the state. But finding space for new trails can be challenging. Communities in other states (and a few here too) have found a novel opportunity to partnering with their utility to build multimodal walking and bicycling paths underneath powerlines. This doubles the value of these community assets and makes use of under-utilized land. Similar to "rail trails" along old railroad easements, these powerline trails:

- Provide a network of safe and fun routes for work, school, or play, away from car traffic
- Improve air quality
- Bring outdoor recreation tourism to various parts of the state
- Reduce the land acquisition cost of new multimodal paths through public/private partnerships
- Improve community connection

Despite the widespread benefits, these trails are far more rare than they could be. Most local governments, tourism offices, community advocates, and outdoor recreation enthusiasts are still unaware of the potential for siting new biking and walking trails along powerlines. In other cases, they are hindered by questions around design, funding, maintenance, or liability. This bill addresses these challenges through awareness, outreach, safety protocols, and specific landowner protections.

ABOUT THE BILL

The bill assists local governments with voluntarily putting in new powerline trails. It addresses a few key informational gaps in current statute to make projects more likely to happen in a smart and prepared way.

Note: Local governments are not required to construct new trails, but they will have the right information available at the right time to consider such projects. The bill encourages and streamlines, powerline trails, while protecting safety and landowner rights:

- **Notification:** Utilities will notify local governments about the potential for powerline trails under transmission lines that are planned to go through their jurisdiction, [providing examples, design best practices, and safety requirements](#).
- **Safety Protections:** Utilities will have greater (and earlier) utility involvement in the design and engineering review of a trail and will put safety considerations like vegetation clearances, non-conductive materials, and ability to close trails for maintenance at the forefront rather than an afterthought.
- **Landowner Protection:** The bill specifies that landowners are not required to grant access to Powerline Trails, a protection missing from current statute.

COLORADO EXAMPLES

Powerline trails are not a new idea—the below examples already demonstrate that they are feasible and highly-valued. However, they are few and far-between. Check out these examples that showcase the possibilities.



TEXAS MODEL

Following a related bill in Texas, the large utility Oncor has been transforming pathways under parts of the company's transmission rights-of-way into hike and bike trails over the past decade as part of the Oncor Texas Trails program. They call it a "Sustainable Community Partnership Model." The company notes, "These trails help create pathways that will be integral parts of the communities Oncor serves. The Oncor Texas Trails program is also a key part of Oncor's commitment to supporting health and fitness initiatives, as well as part of a broader Oncor initiative to align Oncor's assets with community needs."

Guiding Principals for new trails include maintaining the safety of the public and Oncor's employees and contractors; promoting a sustainable community partnership model that aligns with Oncor's community involvement focus on health and wellness; ensuring public awareness and support for hike and bike trail projects including the adjacent landowners; and maintaining the reliability, security and electrical clearance requirements. CenterPoint Energy, another large utility in Texas, offers a similar program.

THIS BILL DOES NOT...

- Require a local government to put in a Powerline Trail
- Require a utility to allow a Powerline Trail, especially where it isn't safe to do so
- Require ratepayers to fund trails
- Apply to rural co-ops or municipal utilities (which provide distribution, not transmission)
- Require a landowner to allow access for a Powerline Trail
- Allow trails through sensitive wildlife habitat
- Require state funding for trails

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