

# Accessibility Audit of the High Line Canal Trail

Taylor Flanagan, Lillian Sachitano, & Isabel Whitehead

## Background & Purpose

The High Line Canal Trail is an urban recreational trail stretching 71-miles across the Denver Metro area, along a historic waterway. The High Line Canal Conservancy (the Conservancy) works to preserve and protect the Trail, in partnership with the public and through the lens of equity and inclusion for all trail users. To further this mission, we systematically audited the physical accessibility of the trail during the summer of 2024. We focused our efforts on user access of the trail and its amenities, identifying a resource as accessible if it can be used by any person in an equally effective manner and with a similar level of ease. Our audit was informed by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards for Accessible Design, as well as expertise from a local consultant. The results of our audit identify areas of both high and low accessibility, which the Conservancy can use to prioritize their efforts. Additionally, we compiled research on the most effective methods for communicating accessibility levels to the community, particularly those with mobility disabilities.

**Waterton Canyon**

Littleton

**Green Valley Ranch**

Denver

**Long's Pine Grove Trailhead**

*This trailhead offers the greatest number of amenities and serves as a prime example of a wheelchair accessible trailhead.*

## Crafting our Methodology

Our team consulted with accessibility expert Topher Downham (Founder, Omni Accessible) and created a comprehensive methodology for assessing the accessibility of the trail.



Measured the running slope, cross slope, surface type, and difficult terrain every 100 ft. using 2 ft. smart levels and measuring wheels.



Measure the ADA accessibility of parking spaces, parking aisles, and any available access routes from the parking lot to the trail using 2ft. smart levels and measuring wheels.



Georeference all points of access, connectivity, and amenities (restrooms, benches, shade structures, potable water, trashcans) using ArcGIS Field Maps.

# Deliverables

## Data & Methodology

Over 4,300 accessibility data points, including all access points and trailheads for the entire length of the trail, have been compiled and shared within digital shapefiles. The methodology document details the exact auditing methods used by the team, so that future studies can use the same process and ensure consistent data collection.

## Summary of Findings

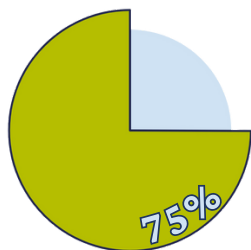
This comprehensive document offers a full analysis of trail accessibility, which helps the Conservancy staff to easily understand where problem areas exist. This also allows the team to fully understand and synthesize the data that has been collected to determine how it may be used to improve the trail in the future.

## Communication Guide

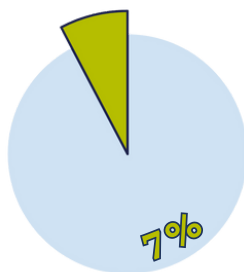
This toolkit serves as a resource for Conservancy staff to determine how best to communicate the accessibility audit findings to trail users and the broader public through signage, digital communications, guidebooks, etc. This includes our recommendations of bite-sized information for each segment of the trail.

## Significant Findings & Recommendations

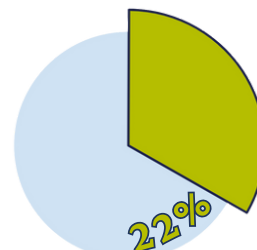
Of the 28 trailheads along the High Line Canal Trail, we found...



75% of trailhead parking lots offer at least one designated ADA parking space. But...



Only 7% of all designated ADA parking spaces actually meet requirements and standards.



Additionally, only 22% of trailhead parking lots offer an ADA accessible route to the trail.

While some areas of the trail demonstrate good physical accessibility, our results demonstrate numerous areas that need improvement. But accessibility is a moving target, as ADA standards shift and physical trail conditions change over time. To ensure ongoing accessibility, we recommend repeating the accessibility audit regularly - either across the whole trail every five years or across one-fifth of the trail annually. Enhanced community engagement can help to identify practical accessibility challenges and usage patterns, which can be used to prioritize improvements of highest use, particularly those with disabilities or mobility devices. Finally, future audits should expand their definition of "accessibility" to address the needs of other disability communities.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Meghan McCarroll, our Capstone Advisor, for the support and guidance; Breana Winters, our Capstone Partner & Associate Director of Community Programs, for the dedicated support and collaboration; Topher Downham, our Capstone Partner & greatest resource in crafting our methods; and the staff at the Conservancy who collaborated and contributed to our work.