

Central Ohio Greenways: Behind the Scenes Interview Series



Eric Oberg

2019 COG Board Member
Director of Trail Development
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
Midwest Regional Office

Q: What is your favorite COG trail and why?

A: “I would have to say the Alum Creek Trail. This trail, now that it is fully connected, is the perfect mix of scenic, convenient and utilitarian. There are so many places along Alum Creek that make you feel like you are out in a rural area and you are right in the city. It connects places you want to go and does it with beautiful scenery and trail design.”

Q: What skills and expertise do you hope to bring to the Central Ohio Greenways?

A: “I am lucky to be able to have a full-time job working on trails. I work on a regional and national scale and can bring that perspective and experience to the COG board. My career has included leading trail construction, surveying and planning activities to working on massive regional trail network visions. The chance I have to see and learn from professionals around the country and world in my position allows me to bring innovative ideas and best practices to COG activities.”

Q: As a Central Ohio Greenway board member, what has been your experience with the COG board?

A: “My organization, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, was a founding member of COG, and I have been involved with COG for more than 12 years. The development of the board has been such a wonderful experience, and getting to be a part of the trail discussion with such a wide variety of visionary people has been a real treat. The important and complex work that COG is tackling is so much better developed with the members of the board being engaged. I use this experience as an example nationwide of innovative, smart and effective regional trail development.”

Q: What are your favorite greenways around the country, and what can COG learn from them?

A: “I am in love with my local trails, the Miami Valley Trails in Southwest Ohio. I can access the Little Miami Scenic Trail right from my home and have been able to use it for day trips as well as multi-day bike-packing trips with my wife and kids. COG is well on the way to having a system as interconnected at the Miami Valley system, and that is important. I also was blown away by the Dequindre Cut in Detroit. This trail is such an amazing example of how a community can make something that was truly a liability and unsafe space into one of the real highlights of the city. It is an amazing trail experience connecting cultural, entertainment and residential parts of Detroit.”

Q: What is your favorite trail activity?

A: “Without a doubt my favorite activity is riding my bike with my family. I have been able to introduce my wife and kids to overnight bike trips, and trails have allowed this to happen. I am also a real fan of quality hiking trails in special places, but my true passion is longer distance biking. I just love being able to experience places from my bike, food, drinks, museums and cultural institutions. All these places just seem more fun to access by bike!”



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Alex Nouanesengsy
2019 COG Board Member
Transportation Planner I/GIS Lead Analyst
Licking County Area Transportation Study

Q: What is your favorite COG trail and why?

A: “The Blacklick Creek Trail is my favorite, because that’s the trail I spent the most time on growing up. It will always hold a special place for me.”

Q: What kind of places would you like to connect by trail?

A: “Trails are rightfully thought of as greenways, but I would like to see more urban connectivity as well. It would be great to take trails to commute to more places.”

Q: What communities do you hope to collaborate with in the year ahead?

A: “I hope to continue a strong partnership with the Licking County Health Department and hope to look at new opportunities with communities in Licking County that are not yet tied into our trail network!”

Q: What is your favorite trail activity?

A: “I most enjoy walking and being able to really take in the sights, sounds, and smells of greenspace.”

Q: Why do you think the COG trail system is important for the Central Ohio region?

A: “The COG trail system is important for Central Ohio, because it can help create paths toward equity, health, transportation, and recreation. It truly is a community amenity that will help improve everyone’s livelihoods.”



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Greg Lestini

2019 COG Board Member
Partner
Bricker & Eckler LLP

Q: What is your favorite COG trail and why?

A: “Alum Creek, bar none. It’s close to my house and absolutely beautiful in every season. Now that it’s expanded northward, I can ride all the way to Easton from my house, which is a joy.”

Q: As a Central Ohio Greenways Board Member, what has been your experience with the COG Board?

A: “Very seldom have I had the pleasure to serve with such an experienced and dedicated group of people. Everyone on the board brings a unique perspective and love for Central Ohio’s Greenways. They understand the asset that is our trail system and are laser-focused on making it the best trail system in the country – worthy of all central Ohioans who use it.”

Q: What kind of places would you like to connect by trail?

A: “I love the idea heading out my front door on two wheels and biking to one of this region’s countless restaurants. If, while increasing use and reducing congestion, we can also make the trails a way to connect users to fabulous food and drink, I will be a happy board member.”

Q: What are your favorite greenways around the country, and what can COG learn from them?

A: “I really enjoy the Loveland Trail and the Hocking Adena Bikeway here in Ohio. And, while it may not be a trail, per se, it is magical to see how NYC has transformed Manhattan into an accessible complete streets program, where bikes move seamlessly (and much more efficiently) through the throngs of cars and taxi cabs on the island.”

Q: Why do you think the COG trail system is important for the Central Ohio region?

A: “A robust, connected trail system is not just about health, or recreation, or economic development or quality of life... I believe it is a thread that holds all those things together. People, particularly those people who want to see their communities thrive and grow, appreciate and gravitate to places that create a sense of connectivity – to nature and to each other. I think this is the epitome of what COG and the COG board is all about. That is why it is important to me and why I believe it is important to the Central Ohio region.”



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Dan Kaderly

COG Operations & Access Vice-Chair
Park Manager
Scioto Audubon/Greenways
Columbus & Franklin County Metro Parks

Q: What is your favorite COG trail and why?

A: “My favorite Central Ohio Greenway Trail is the Scioto Trail. The Scioto Trail offers a little bit of something for everyone. While you travel along the Scioto Trail, you are welcomed by an array of nature along riparian corridors, with access to parks featuring amenities from outdoor climbing walls to an Audubon Nature Center, baseball fields, dog parks, fishing and boating access, fantastic views of the downtown skyline from the Scioto Mile, easy access to a number of neighborhoods, and other destination points like the Arena District, and local bars and restaurants.”

Q: What skills and expertise do you hope to bring to the Central Ohio Greenways?

A: “I hope to share my experiences, skills, and knowledge of managing the maintenance and administration of over 80 miles of regional greenway trails for the Columbus and Franklin County Metropolitan Park District over the past 6 years.”

Q: Why do you think the COG trail system is important for the Central Ohio community?

A: “The Central Ohio Greenways trail system is important for the Central Ohio community because it will connect communities, neighborhoods, Downtown Columbus, and other destination points, bringing people and places together. Many of our Central Ohio Greenways follow riparian corridors. By building out a network of trails in these areas, it allows access to other recreational opportunities like boating, fishing, hiking, and discovering and exploring nature. I also believe that these trails will improve the quality of life for residents in Central Ohio and will be used to meet the fitness, recreational, and transportation needs of the communities we serve.”

Q: What is your favorite trail activity?

A: “My favorite trail activity is spending time with my family on peddling and paddling trips exploring the greenway trails and rivers throughout the state, including some of my favorite biking and paddling trips along the Kokosing river trail and Mad River trail.”

Q: What makes COG’s mission meaningful to you?

A: “COG’s mission is meaningful to me for multiple reasons. Having managed sections of a large network of trails for a period of time, I have noticed that connectivity brings people and communities together. They provide people opportunities to recreate, work out, hold events, commute places using non-motorized vehicles, and enjoy nature -- and they have added to the quality of life for the residents of Central Ohio.”



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Kacey Brankamp

2019 COG Board Member
Program Director, Downtown C-Pass
Capital Crossroads Special Improvement District

Q: What is your favorite COG trail and why?

A: “My favorite trail is the Olentangy Trail, mostly because of its proximity to where I grew up and now live. I grew up in walking distance of the Olentangy Trail and used it regularly for running, biking and exploring. Now my kids use the trail just as I did. It’s a community gathering place for me – a group runs every Sunday morning, and I typically see people I know on the trail. I also love how the Olentangy Trail connects lots of points of interest, including Downtown and the Scioto Audubon Metro Park, along the river. Most importantly, I value that it provides a peaceful, natural setting in the city.”

Q: As a Central Ohio Greenway Board member, what has been your experience with the COG board?

A: “I’ve thoroughly enjoyed serving on the board and appreciate the opportunity to do so. The trails have enriched my life, and I hope to do my own small part to carry that forward for others.”

Q: What kind of places would you like to connect by trail?

A: “It would be wonderful to have better connections between job centers and residential neighborhoods to encourage more trail use for transportation. You can never have too many connections to ice cream shops and breweries!”

Q: What is one feature you would like to see on a COG trail in the future?

A: “I love the idea of incorporating art into trails, similar to the Indy Cultural Trail, and adding historical signage. It feels like a neat opportunity to strengthen connections between trail users and the community through history and art, and enrich the trail experience, too.”

Q: What makes COG’s mission meaningful to you?

A: “All of COG’s mission is meaningful to me. I know there’s great value in increasing the number of trails and their use for both recreation and transportation. Our greenway trails provide connections to things that matter – be it nature, exercise, catching up with a friend, or getting from point A to B. More greenways mean more opportunity to do the things that matter.”



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Ted Beidler, P.E.

COG Trail Development Committee Chair
Project Engineer
Franklin County Engineer, Cornell R. Robertson

Q: What is your favorite COG trail and why?

A: “They’re all good, but I would have to say the Olentangy Trail is my favorite. Not only does it provide quick access from our home, but it covers a nice stretch from Downtown Columbus at the south end all the way to Worthington Hills/Hills Market to the north.”

Q: What kind of places would you like to connect by trail?

A: “When I look at our “[Vision Map](#),” I would like to see how we can connect some of the outer suburbs - like Grove City, Hilliard, Gahanna, etc. - into the existing trail system. I would also like to focus on a couple of east-west connections - maybe Dublin-Granville Road in the north and Williams Road/Scioto Big Run in the south.”

Q: What communities do you hope to collaborate with in the year ahead?

A: “No. 1 is Columbus! While I noted above the desire to connect some of the outer suburbs, those connections will all run primarily through Columbus. The Trail Development Working Group will also be relying on Columbus staff to help us with developing “urban” trail design features to add to our existing set of trail-design guidelines.”

Q: What are your favorite greenways around the country, and what can COG learn from them?

A: “Favorites? Boy, there are so many: Katy Trail in Missouri, Great Allegheny Passage in Pennsylvania/Maryland, etc. I think the most significant highlight of those trails and others are well established trailheads with toilets, water fountain and bike repair facilities, and ones that are maintained year-round! Our winters are not that harsh here in Central Ohio, so if we want to encourage regular trail use, we can help by having facilities open all year long.”

Q: What skills and expertise do you hope to bring to COG?

A: “I plan on helping with the preliminary engineering and cost estimating for our proposed sections of trails. I have close to 30 years of experience on those tasks on traditional highway and bridge projects, but hope to apply some of that knowledge to expanding our COG trail system.”



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Laura Ball
2019 COG Board Member
Parks & Recreation Development Director
City of Westerville, Parks & Open Space

Q: What is your favorite COG trail and why?

A: “The TJ Evans Trail is my favorite “get out of town” trail. The 14-mile length makes it a good out-and-back, 28-mile trail for us to ride. It has a variety of scenery, ranging from wooded creek-side to pastoral pasture and farm fields. The 2% rail grade makes it easy to go both 7 and 15 miles per hour, and there is little to no congestion.”

Q: As a Central Ohio Greenway board member, what has been your experience with the COG board?

A: “I’ve been attending Central Ohio Greenways meetings since before it was formalized into a board. It started as a collection of trail builders, advocates and stakeholders trying to figure out how to get our projects implemented and coordinated across jurisdictional boundaries. The group has changed over the years, but the commitment and passion of the attending members has not waned.”

Q: What kinds of places would you like to connect by trail?

A: “For my weekend riding, I prefer to ride on trails that either take me into the heart of a community - generally a historic downtown - where I can take a break for lunch or snack or ride in the rural areas to refresh from city life. For the COG trail network in general, I'd like to see a system that is as inviting to visitors as it is to its daily users.”

Q: What communities do you hope to collaborate with in the year ahead?

A: “I’m looking forward to seeing what our trail partners in Union, Delaware, Licking and Knox counties are developing. I always like visiting them on the weekends, and there is nothing better than riding on a brand new trail.”

Q: Why do you think the COG trail system is important for the Central Ohio region?

A: “I think the trail system is important for both the recreational rider and the commuter. Riding for leisure contributes to a healthy, active lifestyle; and getting comfortable riding on trails helps people gain the confidence to venture onto the road network. We need to get to the critical mass of riders to initiate the paradigm shift to active and alternative transportation. As our regional population continues to climb, active and alternative forms of transportation will be our saving grace. Whether people use the trails to commute, use them for first-mile/last-mile connections, or gain road riding confidence on them, bicycling as a form of transportation will help our future road congestion problems.”



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Taylor Axene

Central Ohio Greenways Intern, MORPC

Q: What is your favorite COG trail and why?

A: “My favorite Central Ohio Greenways trail is the Olentangy Trail because of the various urban environments along the trail. I love how I can be at the Hills Market and shopping, near a neighborhood, and then immersed in a sea of trees in just a short portion of trail. Parts of the Olentangy trail are so unique and allow people to get to where they need to go while enjoying how they got there.”

Q: What is one feature you would like to see on a COG trail in the future?

A: “I would love to see green infrastructure implemented along the greenway corridors, because they can aid in a trail functionality while improving aesthetics. I believe it is important that the two work together to revitalize our urban environments. Greenways can benefit from sustainable solutions such as bioswales, rain gardens, and permeable pavement. Additionally, art is a great way to enhance trail experience too. Central Ohio has fantastic artists in the region who I’m sure would love to sprinkle their creative expertise along greenways.”

Q: What skills and expertise do you hope to bring to COG?

A: “I consider myself a passionate and dedicated person. I take a lot of pride in my work for Central Ohio Greenways, and it helps that the COG board consists of amazing people who are equally as passionate about their work. I wish to direct my passion towards trails and how they can be a valuable asset for communities to gain greater access to goods and services. It is vital that we provide the region with multi-modal transportation options so that we may break the barrier that so many face in accessibility.”

Q: What communities do you hope to collaborate with in the year ahead?

A: “I wish to collaborate with communities that need safer options to get to their destinations. I, unfortunately, experienced this personally when my fiancé and dog were hit by a car earlier this year. Pedestrians and cyclists should feel safe as they go about their commuting and recreational needs along roadways. Greenways can help to bridge the gap. Not only is it important to provide proper infrastructure, but automobiles can easily identify where individuals will be located along roadways. The element of surprise can be eliminated if cars know where to expect people. Central Ohio Greenways is creating an urban greenway design guide that can help communities in this effort.”

Q: Why do you think the COG trail system is important for the Central Ohio region?

A: “The COG trail system is important for the Central Ohio region because it can help establish unique environments and connect areas throughout the region. I love when I can ride my bike, get fresh air, and be immersed in the environment around me. I feel more in tune with what my personal needs are and how Mother Nature can help.”



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Melinda Vonstein, AICP

Central Ohio Greenways Coordinator, MORPC

Q: As MORPC's Central Ohio Greenways Coordinator, what has been your experience with the COG board?

A: "Since joining MORPC about a year ago, I have had the privilege of meeting, working with, and learning from the Central Ohio Greenways Board members, working groups, and the large community of trail advocates. This group radiates an authentic passion and commitment for trails in the Central Ohio region. Each member of the group has generously shared their time, creativity, and expertise to build the trusted Central Ohio Greenways program that we have today. Their successful collaboration with countless public, private, and nonprofit agencies has led to the development of a multi-county shared [Trail Vision](#) and best practice guidelines for trail design, signage, and branding. It has been so inspirational to work with a group of people with such contagious passion for trails in our region, and I am excited to continue working with COG as we move toward implementing the aggressive 700+ mile Trail Vision."

Q: What is your favorite trail activity?

A: "I love planning weekend outings on the trail with my family. Last year, we had a really great experience riding COTA to the Zoo and then biking home on multi-use paths in Powell and Worthington before connecting to the Olentangy Trail in Columbus. It was so exciting to discover that we were able to bike the 16 miles from the zoo to our home almost entirely on multi-use paths and trails."

Q: What kind of places would you like to connect by trail?

A: "While I love being able to spend weekends on the trail, I am most excited to use trails for more everyday commutes. The Central Ohio Greenways Trail Vision seeks to develop an interconnected network of trails linking neighborhoods to jobs and economic centers. These connections will provide more convenient opportunities to spend time outdoors on a trail while running everyday errands."

Q: What makes COG's mission meaningful to you?

A: "COG's mission to increase trail miles and use of trails is so meaningful to me, personally, because I hope to continue to raise my son in Central Ohio. Access to trails, sidewalks, and multi-use paths significantly improves my day-to-day quality of life with my son. He is two years old and gets so excited when I give him the options of walking, biking, busing, or driving with me to the grocery store. I don't think that he has ever chosen to drive! It may seem silly, but commuting with my son on a human scale is one of the things that I value most. He learns about bugs, sticks and nature, we get to talk, and we spend quality time together while just completing normal tasks."

COG's dedication to planning a trail network that serves all people within our growing region, especially communities that have historically been underserved, will not only improve the quality of life for my family but, more significantly, our entire region. According to the [Central Ohio Greenways 2015 Impact of Trails Study](#), trails improve quality of life by encouraging healthy life-styles, improved environmental conditions, and driving economic development opportunities."

Q: What communities do you hope to collaborate with in the year ahead?

A: "I look forward to seeing collaboration with public transportation and other active transportation efforts. An interconnected network of trails creates a great transportation opportunity for many people, and further connecting that network with other options such as COTA will only enhance the reach of the network."



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Letty Schamp, P.E.
2019 COG Board Member Chair
City of Hilliard, Deputy Engineer

Q: What is your favorite COG trail and why?

A: “I live within walking distance of the intersection of the Heritage Trail and the Hellbranch Trail in Hilliard, so both trails are my favorites because they provide me with the means to walk or bike to many of the places that I want to go as part of my normal day. I can step out my door and connect to parks, the YMCA, and to the Old Hilliard Historic District to enjoy time alone or with family & friends. These two trails provide not only a convenient fitness opportunity for me, but also a safe and comfortable active transportation option.”

Q: What kind of places would you like to connect by trail?

A: “I am a self-proclaimed “foodie”, I love craft beer, and I am a die-hard Buckeye fan. So, I would like to walk or ride my bike to some great casual spots with my husband, where I could enjoy some creative food, try a new beer, and watch a Buckeye game.”

Q: What makes COG’s mission meaningful to you?

A: “COG’s mission – to increase greenway trail mileages & use of trails for recreational and transportation needs – is meaningful to me because it focuses on quality-of-life issues for our communities. For decades, our land use and transportation policies have been disjointed, so our streets and highways have become barriers to mobility and livability within our communities. Trails break down many of these barriers; they connect people to things, encourage economic development on a more human scale, and allow people to experience the outdoors without always getting in their car and driving.”

Q: What skills and expertise do you hope to bring to COG?

A: “My background is in engineering, and I have focused my career on planning, designing and constructing a transportation system that meets the mobility needs of all users. I hope to combine my practical, detail-oriented, organizational skills with my vision for an integrated, connected Central Ohio to COG.”

Q: Why do you think the COG trail system is important for the Central Ohio region?

A: “From our rural areas to our suburbs and urban core, trails can transform our communities, connect people in a meaningful way, improve health, drive economic development, and provide an equitable transportation system. Our region could reach three million people over the next thirty years, and it is critical that we change the way that “transportation” is defined. Trails are a critical component of Central Ohio’s transportation system of tomorrow. They not only provide a convenient and safe first-mile/last-mile link to transit, but they also provide a fun and active way to get around.”



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Kerstin Carr, Ph.D
Director of Planning & Environment, MORPC

Q: What is your favorite COG trail and why?

A: “I love the diversity of our trail system here in Central Ohio, so it’s hard to pick a favorite. But living on the East side, I really enjoy the Blacklick trail and its natural environment and beautiful bridges.”

Q: As MORPC’s Director of Planning & Sustainability, what has been your experience with the COG Board?

A: “I have been so inspired by the passion and active participation of our Central Ohio Greenways board and working group members. Since the creation of this board in late 2015, every member has provided so much of their own time to ensure we are moving the [5-year strategic plan](#) forward. This resulted in a comprehensive vision of a [700+ mile regional trail](#) vision for our region, which was adopted last year by MORPC’s board. Not only are they working to help us expand the trail system, but also to make it more user-friendly through consistent wayfinding signage, branding, and marketing.”

Q: What is your favorite trail activity?

A: “A couple years ago, my family and I biked all of Central Ohio’s trails in one summer. We really enjoyed getting out in nature, being active, and experiencing the different settings. Some of the trails have great connections to local communities, allowing us to also visit restaurants or sites we hadn’t seen before. But we also love visiting our Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks and walking the trails to access the rivers or to have a picnic.”

Q: What kind of places would you like to connect by trail?

A: “I’d love to see more urban greenways in neighborhoods that have been traditionally underserved. These greenways should enhance and celebrate the culture and history of their neighborhoods. Examples across the country show the economic development potential that trails can unleash, while protecting our environmental and cultural assets.”

Q: What is one feature you would like to see on a COG trail in the future?

A: “I am very passionate about seeing more neighborhoods connected to trails by sidewalks and multi-use paths. While our regional trails provide a low-stress network for people of all ages, it also serves as the backbone for our active transportation system. It is critical that we continue to build out a transportation network that provides safe walking and biking opportunities, especially in our urban and suburban areas, so people can access their destinations from their homes without having to use a car. ”

