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# OPINION

## TODAY'S EDITORIAL Rails to trails

February 22, 2005

Indiana is losing out on a chance to become a national leader in converting abandoned railroads into hiking, biking and horseback riding trails.

The state lags its neighbors in rail-to-trail conversion. Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin have converted more than 1,000 miles of abandoned railroads to trails. Illinois and Ohio have developed more than 500 miles. Indiana has but 152 miles.

Yet, projects such as the Monon Trail have shown that these "linear parks" get far higher usage per acre than traditional parks and can spur economic development in communities they pass through.

Conrail, CSX and Penn Central recently agreed to give up nearly 2,000 miles of abandoned railroads in Indiana. A cash-strapped state can't -- and doesn't need to -- immediately convert it all into recreational trails. But neither can it afford to let these corridors be dismantled and sold off.

Finding a way to save this valuable vestige of Indiana's rail heritage may be one of the most important things lawmakers and state leaders can do for future generations.

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