



PHOTO: Aerial view of the Ludlam Trail corridor in Miami-Dade County

COURTESY FRIENDS OF THE LUDLAM TRAIL

## Florida's Ludlam Trail

The future looks bright for the Sunshine State's Ludlam Trail, a key piece of the developing Miami LOOP trail network in Miami-Dade County.

BY LAURA STARK

In the heart of Florida's Miami-Dade County, a proposed 6.2-mile rail-trail is being passionately supported by the communities surrounding it. Ken Bryan, director of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's (RTC's) Florida Field Office, notes that the trail project checks off all the boxes. There are five schools that abut the corridor as well as a handful of parks, residential neighborhoods, connections to both bus and light rail transit, and the shopping and employment centers of Dadeland Mall and the Miami International Airport. The Ludlam Trail will connect them all.

The cherry on top is that even with the hubbub of activity around it, the corridor remains a peaceful place tucked into a major metropolitan area. It offers a natural setting shaded with pine rockland, where even a critically endangered species of bat—found natively nowhere else in the world but south central Florida—thrives.

"The Ludlam Trail is tranquil,

and that's something that's hard to find in our highly motorized, noisy, bustling, tourist-driven county," enthused Victor Dover, a longtime advocate for the trail and a town planner by trade with the firm Dover, Kohl and Partners. "The first thing people point out when you take them on a walk on the railroad right-of-way is how quiet it is. Just a few hundred feet into the trail, you feel like you're in a world apart from the shopping centers and office parks and traffic jams."

Such an intuitively important project was also the key to dreaming up something much bigger: the Miami LOOP ([railstotrails.org/miami](http://railstotrails.org/miami)), a vast interconnected trail system growing across Miami-Dade County. The LOOP's genesis coalesced when local trail advocates first saw the potential to connect the Ludlam Trail with two other developing trails: the Miami River Greenway and The Underline. Later, more trails were incorporated into the vision

and, today, the regional network is planned to encompass 225 miles of trail. The ambitious project is an integral part of the Miami-Dade County Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces Department master plan for improving livability and sustainability across the county.

"We're beginning to change the mentality of people to use trails for more than just recreation," said Xavier Suarez, the county commissioner for District 7, through which half the Ludlam corridor runs. "What the Miami LOOP begins to do is provide people with an opportunity to use cycling and walking to go to work."

Recently, Commissioner Suarez assisted with efforts, initiated by RTC, to secure state funding to augment local dollars for the acquisition of the land that will close the small gap between the Ludlam Trail and The Underline. While excitement is building for that connector project and the construction of the Ludlam Trail itself, progress has been long-awaited.

"At that time, they were talking about using it for transit, but there was a big uproar from neighbors about using it for trains," recalled Dover about the initial conversations that sprang up when the Florida East Coast Railway abandoned parts of the corridor about 20 years ago. "Since it had been so many years since any trains had run on it, people had become used to it as a private, tranquil space behind their houses, and it was hard for people to imagine it going back into service as a rail. The backlash was pretty swift and strong, so the idea for making the Ludlam Trail came out of that as an alternative."

When a real estate developer wanted to make use of the space in the mid-2000s, a volunteer group called the Friends of the Ludlam

### TRAIL UNDER CONSTRUCTION: Ludlam Trail

#### LOCATION:

The rail-trail will run parallel to Ludlam Road, extending from the Miami International Airport south to Dadeland Mall in Miami-Dade County.

#### USED RAILROAD CORRIDOR:

The corridor was originally used for the Miami Belt Line, built in the 1920s by railroad tycoon Henry Flagler. Later, it was owned by Florida East Coast Industries.

#### LENGTH:

6.2 miles

#### SURFACE:

The goal is to pave the Ludlam Trail with separated paths for pedestrians and bicyclists.



Trail organized a town hall meeting so that neighbors could voice their concerns with the proposal. Nearly 500 people flocked to the event. A county commissioners' meeting followed, drawing the same-sized crowd.

Miami-Dade County eventually bought the corridor, but—to reduce costs—a compromise was negotiated. Along the corridor, there would be locations at key street intersections known as “nodes,” where privately owned mixed-use development would be permitted, but the long stretches in between the nodes would remain the much-desired natural settings of a linear park. The trail would run continuously through both environments.

“Later this year, we anticipate having public meetings to go over all the possibilities for the trail,” said Dover, who is excited about diving into the design details of the future pathway. “Phase one will accomplish about half of its length; that leaves the second half of the trail, which may be done in one or two more phases.”

Dover anticipates the trail will be transformative for the community. “We calculated that there are about 45,000 people who live within easy biking distance of the trail—that’s a huge amount of the local population in an area where there’s nothing similar.” •

Learn more about the project at [ludlamtrail.org](http://ludlamtrail.org).

PHOTO: The Ludlam Trail corridor offers a tranquil place for respite in busy Miami-Dade County.



The Miami LOOP is a 225-mile trail vision intended to generate transformative transportation, social equity, economic, environmental and health benefits across Miami-Dade County.

Learn more about this RTC TrailNation™ Project: [railstotrails.org/miami](http://railstotrails.org/miami).



Laura Stark is a lead writer and editor for Rails to Trails magazine.

# CELEBRATE TRAILS (@HOME!)

**rails-to-trails**  
conservancy

On April 18, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy brought our annual celebration of the spring trail season online. We didn't want to miss a chance to celebrate trails—for providing essential space for people to be active outside now, and for always creating connections to community, nature and our health.

Thank you to the thousands of trail users, partners and sponsors who joined us in sending a message of gratitude, hope and resilience on behalf of the trails we cherish.



## SHARE THE TRAIL



At RTC, we've always known how important it is for all trail users to practice good trail etiquette, but “Sharing the Trail” matters now more than ever to keep new and seasoned trail users alike safe.

### Remember:

- ☼ Keep 6 feet between yourself and others at all times.
- ☼ On the trail, do not gather in groups.
- ☼ Announce yourself. Keep right, pass left.

Get the latest Share the Trail resources at [railstotrails.org/sharethetrail](http://railstotrails.org/sharethetrail).