



To: Torch Lake Township Board  
From: Elizabeth Calcutt, Project Manager, TART Trails, elizabeth@traversetrails.org  
Date: February 12, 2026  
Subject: Project Update for the Nakwema Trailway in Torch Lake Township

The purpose of this memo is to provide the Torch Lake Township Board with an update on the status of the Nakwema Trailway in Torch Lake Township, outline what has been learned since the Board's December 2023 motion of support, and summarize the current findings from the Alternatives Analysis recently completed by the project's engineering team. This memo is intended to clarify how the project team arrived at the current recommendation and to ensure the Board has shared context as questions and public discussion continue.

## **Background**

A schematic design process was completed in 2023 to identify an alignment for a non-motorized trail connection through Torch Lake Township as part of the larger Nakwema Trailway. This process was guided by a project team made up of TART Trails, Top of Michigan Trails Council (TOMTC), engineering consultants, and the Torch to Bay Trail Team, a group of resident trail champions.

Public engagement during this phase included two online surveys and an in-person public open house. Participation was strong, and feedback showed significant enthusiasm for a future trail connection. Key priorities identified through public input included safety and separation from vehicular traffic on US-31 and access and proximity to parks, water, and community destinations. Public input did not demonstrate a clear preference for one side of US-31 over the other.

The schematic design process identified an alignment on the west side of US-31. This process and alignment was presented to the Torch Lake Township Board at their regular meeting on December 19, 2023. At that meeting, the Board approved the following:

Motion by Cook that the Torch Lake Township Board supports the proposed Nakwema Trailway Bike Path as presented, with the Board not committing any financial resources to the TART Trail project at this time.

Following the Board's motion of support, the project team advanced survey and initial engineering work on the west-side alignment. That work identified several significant constraints, including numerous required private easements, encroachments and right-of-way limitations, and significant retaining wall. These findings raised concerns related to feasibility, environmental impacts, cost, and long-term constructability of the west-side alignment.

During this same period, TART Trails and TOMTC have continued delivering similar trail projects across the region, further informing how constraints such as highway crossings, landowner impacts, and environmental considerations can affect project success.

## **Alternatives Analysis**

In response to the constraints identified on the west side of US-31 and an understanding of what regulatory agencies consider, the project team initiated a more thorough Alternatives Analysis to reassess both sides of the corridor using updated information and a broader geographic scope.

Key elements of the Alternatives Analysis included evaluation of both east and west sides of US-31 using consistent criteria; expansion of the study area south to the southern limits of Milton Township; focus on minimizing the number of trail crossings of US-31 between Elk Rapids and Eastport. The analysis considered factors such as safety, constructability, environmental impacts, right-of-way needs, and overall feasibility.

The Alternatives Analysis identified the east side of US-31 as the recommended alignment based on:

- Fewer environmental constraints
- Reduced need for private easements
- Improved constructability
- Fewer required crossings of US-31 over the length of the corridor

As a result, the project team's current recommendation is to continue advancing planning and outreach related to an east-side alignment, while acknowledging that additional information is still needed.

## **Next Steps**

Important next steps include the completion of topographic survey work once snow conditions allow and continued landowner outreach, which is currently underway. Survey and public input will further inform planning and design refinement.

While the current recommendation differs from the alignment shown to the Board in 2023, it reflects new data and analysis completed since that time. This work represents responsible due diligence as additional information has become available.

At this time, the project team's intent is to keep the Board informed, support a shared understanding of how the project has evolved, and continue working toward a trail alignment that is data-driven, feasible, and positioned for long-term success. We appreciate the Board's continued engagement and welcome questions as the project progresses.