PRESS RELEASE

Greenways recognised in the European Commission’s new EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy

A major step forward for sustainable mobility, active tourism and territorial development across Europe

[Brussels, 19 November 2026] – Greenways have been explicitly recognised in the European Commission's new EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy, presented on 4 November 2026. This marks an important step forward for the European Greenways Association (EGWA) and its continued efforts to promote greenways as essential infrastructure for sustainable tourism, active mobility and regional development.

The European Commission's Staff Working Document to the Strategy, “Tourism – A Key Asset for Europe: Towards an EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy”, acknowledges the contribution of greenways to reducing the environmental footprint of tourism, promoting low-carbon transport, strengthening connections between urban and rural areas, and encouraging nature-based, active and cultural tourism.

In particular, the Commission highlights the integration of non-motorised transport routes, such as greenways and cycling routes, into the wider transport network as an important measure to decarbonise tourism, provide alternatives to overcrowded destinations, extend the tourism season and improve the wellbeing of local communities.

The strategy also explicitly mentions European Greenways alongside EuroVelo and European long-distance hiking trails as part of Europe's recreational infrastructure supporting sustainable mobility, cross-border connectivity and the attractiveness of destinations.

Recognition of greenways as strategic European infrastructure

For the European Greenways Association, this recognition represents an important achievement and a valuable opportunity to strengthen the position of greenways in European tourism and mobility policies.

Greenways are routes reserved for non-motorised travel, developed in both urban and rural areas, often by reusing disused railway lines, canal towpaths and other existing infrastructure. They provide safe and accessible spaces for walking, cycling, wheeling and other outdoor activities, while connecting people with Europe's natural and cultural heritage.

Their contribution goes far beyond recreation and tourism. Greenways support climate objectives, encourage sustainable travel choices, strengthen territorial cohesion and create opportunities for local communities and businesses.

The European Commission's strategy recognises several of these benefits, highlighting the role of greenways in:

- Decarbonising tourism transport and encouraging active mobility.
- Improving connectivity between urban and rural areas.
- Developing nature-based, cultural and outdoor tourism.
- Distributing tourism flows beyond overcrowded destinations and traditional peak seasons.

- Supporting local economies and strengthening community identity.
- Contributing to environmental protection and more resilient tourism destinations.

Greenways in action: the Great Western Greenway in Ireland

The strategy also highlights the Great Western Greenway in County Mayo, Ireland, as an example of sustainable infrastructure and circular economy principles.

Developed along a disused railway line, this 48.5-kilometre coastal walking and cycling route demonstrates how the reuse of existing infrastructure can deliver environmental and tourism benefits.

The Commission particularly highlights its innovative features, including a boardwalk across sensitive bogland, e-bike charging facilities, solar-powered waste bins and public furniture made from repurposed wind turbine blades.

This example illustrates how greenways can combine sustainable mobility, heritage preservation, biodiversity protection and environmental innovation.

A recognition built on years of European cooperation and advocacy

The European Greenways Association has consistently advocated for the integration of greenways into European policies on sustainable tourism, mobility, climate action and territorial development.

Through its network of nearly 50 organisations and institutions from 16 European countries, EGWA promotes the development and recognition of greenways as accessible, sustainable and multifunctional infrastructure benefiting both visitors and local communities.

EGWA's contribution to the European Sustainable Tourism Strategy underlined four key areas in which greenways can support Europe's tourism transition:

1. Providing green infrastructure for sustainable transport, travel and mobility.
2. Contributing to climate change mitigation and environmental protection.
3. Supporting the green transition of the tourism sector and local entrepreneurship.
4. Strengthening local communities and promoting the inclusion of women, young people and disadvantaged groups.

The explicit inclusion of greenways in the European Commission's strategy reflects the importance of these priorities and provides a stronger basis for future cooperation between European institutions, national and regional authorities, tourism stakeholders and greenway organisations.

Looking ahead: turning recognition into action

While the recognition of greenways in the strategy is an important milestone, the next challenge is to translate this visibility into concrete action and investment.

The European Greenways Association welcomes this recognition and encourages European and national institutions to further support the development, maintenance and promotion of greenway networks, improve their connections with public transport and strengthen their integration into sustainable tourism strategies.

> *“The recognition of European Greenways in the EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy is an important step forward. It confirms that greenways are much more than recreational routes: they are strategic infrastructure contributing to sustainable mobility, climate action, territorial cohesion and the development of more inclusive tourism. We now look forward to working with European institutions and partners to turn this recognition into concrete opportunities for greenways and the communities they serve.”*
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> **— European Greenways Association (proposed quote; approval required)**

The inclusion of greenways in the EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy is an encouraging milestone for the European greenways movement and a strong signal that sustainable tourism must be built on connected, accessible and environmentally responsible infrastructure.

About the European Greenways Association (EGWA)

Established in 1998, the European Greenways Association (EGWA) brings together nearly 50 organisations and institutions from 16 European countries committed to the creation, development and promotion of greenways across Europe.

EGWA promotes greenways as infrastructure for sustainable mobility, active and accessible tourism, environmental protection, cultural heritage and healthy outdoor recreation. Since 2003, the Association has organised the European Greenways Award every two years, recognising outstanding achievements in greenway development and promotion.

Further information

EGWA website: https://www.aevv-egwa.org/

EGWA contribution to the strategy: https://www.aevv-egwa.org/greenways/european-sustainable-tourism-strategy/

European Commission – EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy:
https://transport.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/commission-strengthens-europes-position-worlds-leading-tourism-destination-2026-11-04_en