

ILLINOIS

ROUTE

The Great American Rail-Trail route across Illinois incorporates the majority of the northern leg of the Great Illinois Trail between Lansing, Illinois, and the Quad Cities along the Mississippi River. The iconic Illinois & Michigan Canal State Trail and Hennepin Canal Parkway make up almost 75% of the existing miles that the Great American Rail-Trail route will use to cross Illinois. Some strategic investments can help complete the roughly 27 miles of trail remaining to be built to fully connect the Great American Rail-Trail across Illinois.

RTC found and reviewed 26 plans in Illinois to better understand the state's trail priorities. A full list of these plans can be found in Appendix A.

TABLE 14 GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL STATISTICS IN ILLINOIS

Total Great American Rail-Trail Existing Trail Miles in Ill. (% of Total State Mileage)	167.0 (85.7%)
Total Great American Rail-Trail Trail Gap Miles in Ill. (% of Total State Mileage)	27.8 (14.3%)
Total Trail Gaps in Ill.	4
Total Great American Rail-Trail Miles in Ill.	194.8

TABLE 15 GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE THROUGH ILLINOIS

Existing Trail or Trail Gap Name	Length in Ill. Along Great American Rail-Trail (in Miles)
Penny Greenway (Ind.-Ill. State Line to Lansing)	1.7
TRAIL GAP 27 – Lansing	1.4
Thorn Creek Trail	10.9
Old Plank Road Trail	21.6
TRAIL GAP 28 – Joliet	3.5
Illinois & Michigan Canal State Trail	60.4
TRAIL GAP 29 – LaSalle to Bureau Junction	14.6
Hennepin Canal Parkway	63.2
TRAIL GAP 30 – Colona to East Moline	8.3
Beacon Harbor Parkway Trail	1.1
Great River Trail	7.5
Government/Arsenal Bridge	0.6
Total Miles	194.8
<i>Existing Trail Miles</i>	<i>167.0</i>
<i>Trail Gap Miles</i>	<i>27.8</i>

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT ILLINOIS

PENNSY GREENWAY (INDIANA-ILLINOIS STATE LINE TO LANSING)

Total Length (in Miles)	7.9
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Ill. (in Miles)	1.7
Trail Type	Greenway, rail-trail
Surface Type	Asphalt
Trail Manager	Forest Preserves of Cook County, Lake County Parks, Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, Schererville Parks & Recreation
Website	indygreenways.org/pennsy-trail
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/pennsy-greenway

The Pennsy Greenway is currently open in three segments between Schererville, Indiana, and Calumet City, Illinois. The existing sections of trail in Indiana are discussed in more detail in the Indiana chapter of this report. The Great American Rail-Trail will enter Illinois along the Pennsy Greenway at the village of Lansing, Illinois, and travel an additional 1.7 miles northwest to Lansing’s Chicago Avenue, where the route will then head south along Trail Gap 27, described below.

TRAIL GAP 27 – LANSING

There is a small gap in the Lansing trail network between the Pennsy Greenway and the Thorn Creek Trail that, if completed, would be a major development in connecting the region’s trail network. The 1.4-mile gap in Lansing can currently be connected by an interim on-road connector, as illustrated by Forest Preserves of Cook County. The gap falls under the village of Lansing’s jurisdiction rather than the Forest Preserves of Cook County. The village of Lansing has been contacted to determine whether the interim connector will be a separated facility.

The Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission’s 2018 Recommended Road Bike Routes document illustrates that the on-road route along Chicago Avenue is in “fair” condition and advises cyclists to “use caution.” An off-road trail should be explored in more detail through Lansing.

THORN CREEK TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	17.2
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Ill. (in Miles)	10.9
Trail Type	Rail-trail
Surface Type	Asphalt
Trail Manager	Forest Preserves of Cook County
Website	fpdcc.com/preserves-and-trails/trail-descriptions/#thorn-creek
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/thorn-creek-trail

The Thorn Creek Trail offers a paved 17-mile route traveling through woodlands and several communities on the southern outskirts of Chicago. The Forest Preserves of Cook County championed and currently maintains the Thorn Creek Trail. The Thorn Creek Trail will host the Great American Rail-Trail for 10.9 miles, connecting Thornton south to Chicago Heights. Thorn Creek Trail is part of the Grand Illinois Trail system.

OLD PLANK ROAD TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	21.6
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Ill. (in Miles)	21.6
Trail Type	Rail-trail
Surface Type	Asphalt
Trail Manager	Forest Preserve District of Will County, Old Plank Road Trail Management Commission, Rich Township, Village of Frankfort, Village of Park Forest, Village of Matteson
Website	oprt.org
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/old-plank-road-trail

The Old Plank Road Trail travels 21.6 miles west from Chicago Heights to Joliet across a densely populated suburban landscape. The trail follows what was once a trail created and used by indigenous peoples around Lake Michigan that was later used by fur trappers and early settlers. Business interests later acquired the trail for the old Michigan Central Railroad line. The Old Plank Road Trail is part of the Grand Illinois Trail system.

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT ILLINOIS

TRAIL GAP 28 – JOLIET

There is a 3.5-mile gap through Joliet between the Old Plank Road Trail and the Illinois & Michigan Canal State Trail. The Will County 2030 Transportation Plan emphasizes the importance of connecting regional trail systems near and around Joliet. The plan also mentions the array of regional trails around the city of Joliet and the importance of signage in helping trail users navigate regional trail systems. It will be necessary to travel across the Des Plaines River to connect with the Illinois & Michigan Canal State Trail. Further research is required to accurately reroute and fill this trail gap.

ILLINOIS & MICHIGAN CANAL STATE TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	79.5
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Ill. (in Miles)	60.4
Trail Type	Canal
Surface Type	Asphalt, crushed stone, grass, gravel
Trail Manager	Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Forest Preserve District of Will County
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · www.dnr.illinois.gov/recreation/greenwaysandtrails/pages/imcanal.aspx · iandmcanal.org
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/illinois--michigan-canal-state-trail

The 79.5-mile Illinois & Michigan Canal State Trail follows the Illinois and Michigan Canal alongside the Illinois River. It traverses the I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor, designated in 1984 as the first National Heritage Area in the United States. Along the trail are multiple state parks, historical sites and opportunities to observe wildlife. The Illinois & Michigan Canal State Trail will host the Great American Rail-Trail for 60.4 miles to connect the village of Rockdale, southwest of Joliet, to LaSalle at the Illinois River. A recent change in political leadership is viewed as a positive step toward securing more funding for the trail.

TRAIL GAP 29 – LASALLE TO BUREAU JUNCTION

A 14.6-mile gap exists between the western terminus of the Illinois & Michigan Canal State Trail in LaSalle and the eastern terminus of the Hennepin Canal Parkway in Bureau Junction. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources has discussed connecting the two through an on-street route. Efforts to connect the gap through an off-road trail have been made, but are reportedly difficult. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources is ready and able to assist local communities with bike planning for both on-road and off-road partner projects, but will not move forward with a “state trail” project.

HENNEPIN CANAL PARKWAY

Total Length (in Miles)	104.5
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Ill. (in Miles)	63.2
Trail Type	Canal
Surface Type	Asphalt, crushed stone
Trail Manager	Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Website	www.dnr.illinois.gov/Parks/Pages/HennepinCanal.aspx
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/hennepin-canal-parkway

The 104.5-mile Hennepin Canal Parkway, administered by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources as a state park, follows an old towpath along the Hennepin Canal, first opened in 1907. The canal was originally built to link the Illinois and Mississippi rivers. Most of the various locks and aqueducts necessary to span the 105-mile distance are still in place, and the entire canal is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Hennepin Canal Parkway will host the Great American Rail-Trail for 63.2 miles, connecting Bureau Junction to Colona, the western terminus of the Hennepin Canal Parkway.

TRAIL GAP 30 – COLONA TO EAST MOLINE

The city of East Moline plans to complete the gap between the Hennepin Canal Parkway and the developing Mississippi River Trail, also known as the Critical Gap Connector in the Grand Illinois Trail. The plan to complete this gap involves a combination of on-street signed routes and shared-use paths from Colona to East Moline. Most of the streets that are planned to be on-street signed routes are low-volume, low-speed roads, though the route is currently proposed to cross the Rock River on state Route 84/Colona Road, a major arterial road. A physically separated alternative should be explored in this section.

The topography around the village of Carbon Cliff requires a trail with switchbacks to reach the city of Silvis, where the separated shared-use path begins along Crosstown Avenue.

An alignment to complete this trail gap along an active BNSF Railway line was previously approved and funded in the early 2000s. Prior to the start of construction, BNSF Railway decided it was no longer in its interest to allow the trail to be completed, and the project stalled until the realignment described above was selected.

East Moline hired an engineering firm to complete a preliminary opinion of probable construction costs for the entire project, which was completed in January 2018. The total cost for construction and engineering for the 8.3 miles of trail and on-street connectors was just under \$6 million. The project already has significant funding attached to it through various Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program grants and the requisite 20% local match. The project has a funding shortfall of just under \$2 million, the majority of which is needed to complete the Carbon Cliff section. The trail project is currently in the design phase.

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT ILLINOIS

BEACON HARBOR PARKWAY TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	1.1
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Ill. (in Miles)	1.1
Trail Type	Asphalt
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Manager	City of East Moline
Website	qctrails.org/trails/trail/7th-street-the-quarter-trail
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/beacon-harbor-parkway-trail

The Great American Rail-Trail will utilize 1.1 miles of an existing trail that heads west along 13th Avenue. The trail leads to the East Moline City Office on Beacon Harbor Parkway. Near the Beacon Harbor welcome center, which faces the Mississippi River, the city recently invested in benches and upgrades to the trail. A large development is planned for this area, including a hotel that could increase the desire for trails and act as a logical trailhead for visitors. The trail connects to the Great River Trail at Beacon Harbor.

GREAT RIVER TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	62.3
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Ill. (in Miles)	7.5
Trail Type	Rail-trail
Surface Type	Asphalt
Trail Manager	City of East Moline, City of Moline, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Rock Island County Forest Preserve District, Village of Hampton, Village of Port Byron, Village of Rapids City
Website	greatrivertrail.org
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/great-river-trail

The Great River Trail is a 62.3-mile trail that travels along the banks of the Mississippi River between Savanna and Rock Island, Illinois. The Great River Trail will host the Great American Rail-Trail for 7.5 miles, heading southwest from East Moline to Rock Island. East Moline is currently exploring funding opportunities to resurface the section of the Great River Trail through the city, where it was last resurfaced 20 to 25 years ago.

The Great American Rail-Trail plans to take the Government Bridge (also known as Arsenal Bridge) across the Mississippi River into Iowa. However, a project to build a new river crossing is currently underway. The three-year project aims to build a new bridge connecting Moline to Bettendorf, Iowa, often referred to as the I-74 Bridge. The current Memorial Bridge along I-74 will be decommissioned. As the city of Moline is currently in discussions about how to connect the Great River Trail to this new bridge, Great American Rail-Trail users will have multiple options to connect across the river safely.

GOVERNMENT/ARSENAL BRIDGE

Total Length (in Miles)	0.6
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Ill. (in Miles)	0.6
Trail Type	Rail-with-trail
Surface Type	Asphalt
Trail Manager	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The Great American Rail-Trail will enter Iowa along the Government/Arsenal Bridge over the Mississippi River. Bicycle and pedestrian accommodations exist on both sides of the bridge, but people wishing to connect directly to Iowa's Riverfront Trail (part of the Mississippi River Trail) along the riverbanks below should take the downstream side of the bridge. A ramp directly connects the unnamed trail along the bridge to the Riverfront Trail below. The Mississippi River bridge crossing is discussed in more detail in the Iowa chapter.