

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 25 miles of trail remaining to be built to fully connect the Great American Rail-Trail across Illinois.

TABLE 14 GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL MILEAGE IN ILLINOIS

Total Great American Rail-Trail Existing Trail Miles in Ill. (% of Total State Mileage)	168.3 (87.0%)
Total Great American Rail-Trail Trail Gap Miles in Ill. (% of Total State Mileage)	25.2 (13.0%)
Total Trail Gaps in Ill.	4
Total Great American Rail-Trail Miles in Ill.	193.5



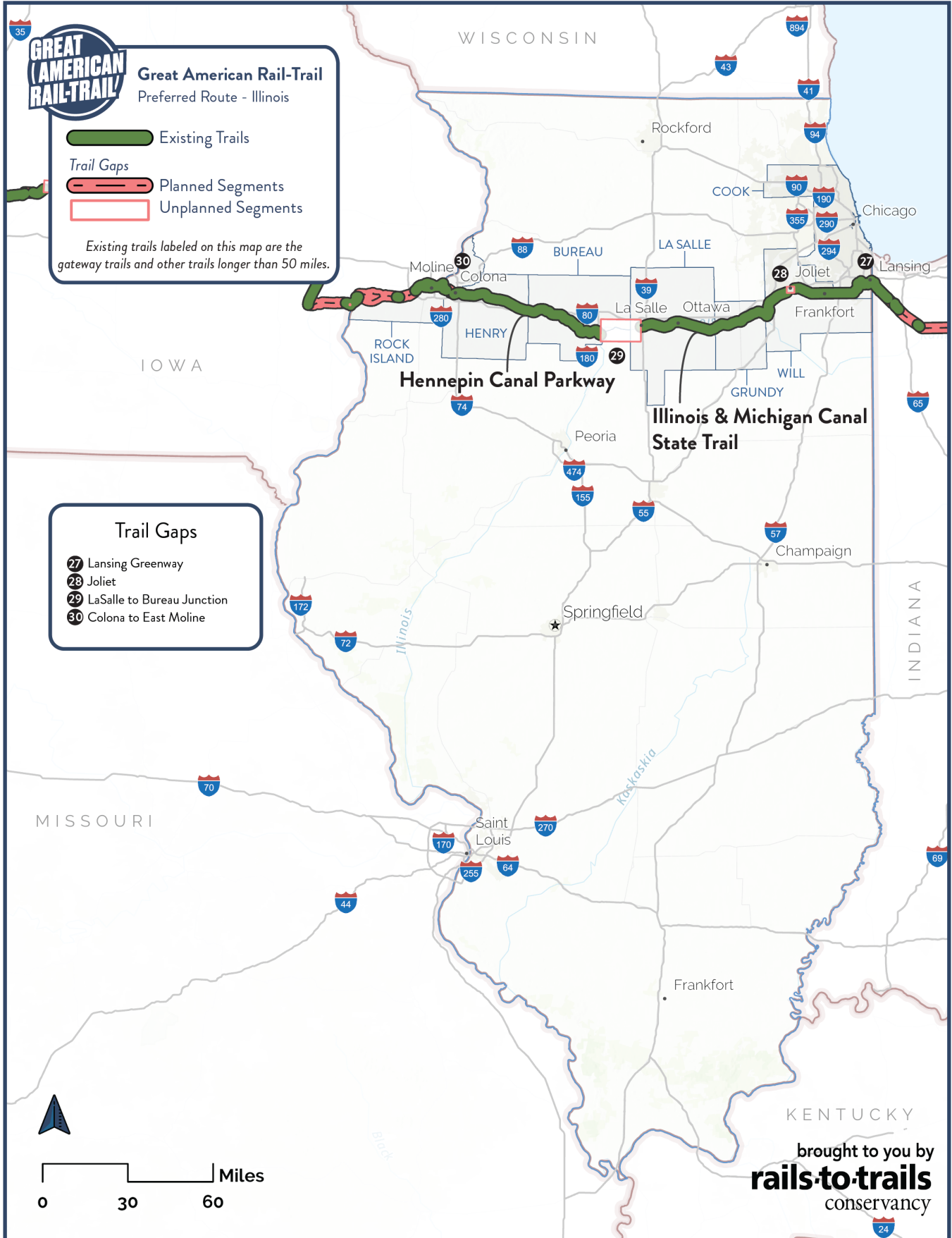
Riders stop for a refreshment along the Old Plank Road Trail in Frankfurt, Illinois | Photo by TrailLink user antonlove1

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)	0.5
TRAIL GAP 27 – Lansing Greenway	2.4
Thorn Creek Trail	10.3
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 Silvis	4.7
Grand Illinois Trail (East Moline)	2.9
Beacon Harbor Parkway Trail	1.1
Great River Trail	7.7
Crossing the Mississippi River	0.6
Total Miles	193.5
Existing Trail Miles	168.3
Trail Gap Miles	25.2

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT 2023

MAP 7: ILLINOIS



GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT ILLINOIS

PENNSY GREENWAY (INDIANA-ILLINOIS STATE LINE TO LANSING)

Total Length (in Miles)	12.5
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Ill. (in Miles)	0.5
Trail Type	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 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 Lansing, Illinois, and travel northwest to Lansing's Chicago Avenue, where the route will then head south along Trail Gap 27, described below.

TRAIL GAP 27 – LANSING GREENWAY

There is a 2.4-mile gap in the Lansing trail network between the Pennsy Greenway and the Thorn Creek Trail. The Village of Lansing recently confirmed a trail routing to complete this gap, which will be called the Lansing Greenway. In 2020, Lansing received a grant from the Invest in Cook program for \$155,000 to complete the preliminary engineering to close this gap. The village is currently working to implement the grant and will turn its attention to trail construction once the preliminary engineering is completed.

There is currently also an effort underway to consider a more direct trail connection from the Pennsy Greenway in Schererville to the eastern end of the Old Plank Road Trail in Chicago Heights. If this project moves forward, RTC will discuss with local partners if and how the Great American Rail-Trail should be rerouted across the Indiana-Illinois border.

THORN CREEK TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	17.2
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Ill. (in Miles)	10.3
Trail Type	Rail-trail
Surface Type	Asphalt
Trail Manager	Forest Preserves of Cook County
Website	fpdcc.com/places/trails/thorn-creek-trail-system
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 10.3 miles, connecting Thornton south to Chicago Heights. The 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 Matteson, Village of Park Forest
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.

In 2022, the Forest Preserve District of Will County repaved a 7-mile section of the Old Plank Road Trail, from Harlem Avenue in Frankfort to South Schoolhouse Road in New Lenox.

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 city of Joliet and the Forest Preserve District of Will County have identified three potential routes to complete this gap through the city. All three options require further study, including solutions for crossing the Des Plaines River.

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	Forest Preserve District of Will County, Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · www2.illinois.gov/dnr/Parks/Pages/HennepinCanal.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.

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. A study was conducted in 2013 to review alternatives for filling this gap, which included a circuitous trail route and a signed, on-street route. It was determined that neither option would move forward. RTC is currently assisting in an effort by local partners to study the opportunity to build a rail-with-trail along the active rail corridor that travels through this gap. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources has indicated a willingness to participate in the process as well.

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	www2.illinois.gov/dnr/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 SILVIS

In 2022, the city of East Moline completed a 2.9-mile portion of Trail Gap 30 between the town of Silvis and the Mississippi River, described below as the Grand Illinois Trail (East Moline). This was part of a years-long plan to fill the gap in the trail network between the Hennepin Canal Parkway and the Mississippi River, also known as the Critical Gap Connector in the Grand Illinois Trail. The towns of Carbon Cliff and Silvis are coordinating to determine the best route to complete the remaining 4.7 miles of this gap, and progress should be forthcoming.

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT ILLINOIS

GRAND ILLINOIS TRAIL (EAST MOLINE)

Total Length (in Miles)	2.9
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Ill. (in Miles)	2.9
Trail Type	Greenway
Surface Type	Asphalt, concrete
Trail Manager	City of East Moline
Website	www2.illinois.gov/dnr/recreation/greenway-sandtrails/Pages/GrandIllinoisTrail.aspx
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/grand-illinois-trail-(east-moline-to-silvis)

The city of East Moline opened a roughly 3-mile section of the Grand Illinois Trail in the fall of 2022. It is a part of the regional trail system and connects the town of Silvis to the Mississippi River.

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 in East Moline. 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)	65.5
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Ill. (in Miles)	7.7
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 65.5-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 7.7 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 20–25 years ago.

CROSSING THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Toward the end of 2021, the Iowa-Illinois Memorial Bridge (I-74 Bridge) was completed, providing a new multimodal crossing of the Mississippi River between East Moline, Illinois, and Bettendorf, Iowa. Prior to this bridge completion, the Great American Rail-Trail was routed across the Government/Arsenal Bridge farther west between Rock Island, Illinois, and Davenport, Iowa. Both bridges are about the same length and accommodate trail users. Therefore, instead of choosing which bridge should be the official crossing of the Great American Rail-Trail, both bridges are shown on the route map, and trail users can choose for themselves.