

ILLINOIS



Hennepin Canal Parkway | Photo by TrailLink user jfahler

The Great American Rail-Trail route across Illinois incorporates the majority of the northern leg of the Grand 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)	165.4 (86.8%)
Total Great American Rail-Trail Gap Miles in Ill. (% of Total State Mileage)	25.1 (13.2%)
Total Trail Gaps in Ill.	4
Total Great American Rail-Trail Miles in Ill.	190.5

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT 2026

MAP 7: ILLINOIS





Great River Trail | Photo by TrailLink user Ikgatu

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)
Pennsy Greenway (Ind.-Ill. State Line to Lansing)	0.5
TRAIL GAP 27 – Lansing Greenway	2.2
Thorn Creek Trail	10.4
Old Plank Road Trail	21.7
TRAIL GAP 28 – Joliet	3.5
Illinois & Michigan Canal State Trail	60.8
TRAIL GAP 29 – LaSalle to Bureau Junction	14.6
Hennepin Canal Parkway	59.7
TRAIL GAP 30 – Colona to Silvis	4.8
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	190.5
Existing Trail Miles	165.4
Trail Gap Miles	25.1

PENNSY GREENWAY (INDIANA-ILLINOIS STATE LINE TO LANSING)

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Ill. (in Miles)	14.4 / 0.5
Surface Type	Asphalt
Trail Managers	Forest Preserves of Cook County, Lake County Parks, Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, Schererville Parks & Recreation
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.

TRAIL GAP 27 – LANSING GREENWAY

Planning Status	Partially planned
Funding Status	Partially funded
Construction Status/ Expected Completion Date	TBD

There is a 2.2-mile gap in the Lansing trail network between the Pennsy Greenway and the Thorn Creek Trail. The Village of Lansing 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.

A feasibility study was completed in 2025 to review an extension of the Old Plank Road Trail that would consider a more direct connection to complete Trail Gap 27. 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 / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Ill. (in Miles)	17.7 / 10.4
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 10.4 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 / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Ill. (in Miles)	21.7 / 21.7
Surface Type	Asphalt
Trail Managers	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	opr.org
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/old-plank-road-trail

The Old Plank Road Trail travels 21.7 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 eventually acquired the trail for the old Michigan Central Railroad line. The Old Plank Road Trail is part of the Grand Illinois Trail system.

TRAIL GAP 28 – JOLIET

Planning Status	Unplanned
Funding Status	Unfunded
Construction Status/ Expected Completion Date	TBD

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 / Total Length Along Great American Rail- Trail in Ill. (in Miles)	79.5 / 60.8
Surface Type	Asphalt, crushed stone, grass, gravel
Trail Managers	Forest Preserve District of Will County, Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Website	• dnr.illinois.gov/parks/park.imcanal.html • 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. The trail 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 60.8 miles to connect the village of Rockdale, southwest of Joliet, to LaSalle at the Illinois River.



Old Plank Road Trail | Photo by TrailLink user antonlove1

TRAIL GAP 29 – LASALLE TO BUREAU JUNCTION

Planning Status	Partially planned
Funding Status	Unfunded
Construction Status/ Expected Completion Date	TBD

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.

A separate study was completed in 2024 to assess the feasibility of completing a rail-with-trail along the active rail corridor that parallels the Illinois River. The route was determined to be largely feasible given several statewide criteria, and work is underway to align the political and funding interests for further design and potential project construction. Supporting this effort is Canal Trail Connector, Inc., a local committee of engaged and well-connected members.



Hennepin Canal Parkway | Photo by Ryan Cree

HENNEPIN CANAL PARKWAY

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Ill. (in Miles)	104.5 / 59.7
Surface Type	Asphalt, crushed stone
Trail Manager	Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Website	dnr.illinois.gov/parks/park.hennepincanal.html
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 59.7 miles, connecting Bureau Junction to Colona, the western terminus of the Hennepin Canal Parkway.

TRAIL GAP 30 – COLONA TO SILVIS

Planning Status	Partially planned
Funding Status	Unfunded
Construction Status/ Expected Completion Date	TBD

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 Grand Illinois Trail network between the Hennepin Canal Parkway and the Mississippi River, also known as the Critical Gap Connector. The towns of Carbon Cliff and Silvis are coordinating to determine the best route to complete the remaining 4.8 miles of this gap, and progress should be forthcoming.

GRAND ILLINOIS TRAIL (EAST MOLINE)

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Ill. (in Miles)	2.9 / 2.9
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 / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Ill. (in Miles)	1.1 / 1.1
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.

GREAT RIVER TRAIL

Total Length / Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Ill. (in Miles)	62.5 / 7.7
Surface Type	Asphalt
Trail Managers	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	qctrails.org/trails/trail/great-river-trail
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/great-river-trail

The Great River Trail is a 62.5-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.

CROSSING THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

The Quad Cities provide two trail crossings of the Mississippi River from which Great American Rail-Trail users can choose. The Government/Arsenal Bridge is a multimodal bridge that contains a bicycle and pedestrian element and crosses between Rock Island, Illinois, and Davenport, Iowa. In 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. Both bridges are about the same length and accommodate trail users.