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MEMORANDUM

To: MPO Policy Committee

Date: October 1, 2009

From: Don Kopec

Re: Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways and Trails Plan

CMAP staff requests that the following text be approved as part of the Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways and Trails Plan – 2009 Update:

"Trails development should be coordinated with plans, now and in the future, for other transportation uses in these corridors to avoid conflicts and maximize transportation benefits."

The recommended text is to be inserted on page 3 of the plan text (posted at <http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=17445>) after the sentence "Transportation, railroad, and utility rights of way may be used for this purpose."

The text was developed by the City of Chicago and the Regional Transportation Authority in response to discussions that originated at the CMAP Programming Coordinating Committee and continued at the Transportation Committee.

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Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways and Trails Plan 2009 Update: Planning Process and Public Review

October 1, 2009

Planning Process

The planning process for the 2009 Update of the Regional Greenways and Trails Plan included: a survey of local governments; creation of a Steering Committee to obtain shape files of trails and greenways for each of the seven counties; meetings and correspondence with the Steering Committee and CMAP Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force to work on maps and review materials; and presentations to and input from CMAP Committees. (CMAP Board review expected October 14th).

The first step in updating this plan was to develop a local government survey and distribute, along with specially prepared maps, to 282 municipalities and 175 park districts. The survey asked for information on trail and greenway development in their jurisdictions since the 1997 Greenways and Trails Plan. Recipients were asked to describe and map the greenways and trails that they think should be added, mark those that are no longer relevant, and/or identify any changes in status since the previous plan. General comments about the plan were also solicited. The responses from the survey were included in the development of the 2009 map.

Secondly, a steering committee was formed consisting of representatives from each of the seven counties, the forest preserve and conservation districts, the National Park District, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, a local park district and municipality, advocacy organizations, and the Council of Mayors planning liaisons. After a kick-off meeting of the steering committee, communications were conducted primarily through email and meetings with county staff. Shape files were obtained for map development. The Steering Committee met jointly in a workshop with the CMAP Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force on November 14, 2007 to work on county maps. Follow-ups to that meeting were conducted with counties, forest preserve and conservation districts, and municipalities to address issues relating to the draft maps. During this time, local government and Council of Mayors bicycle plans were examined for potential facilities that could provide important linkages in the plan's network of greenways and trails. Aerial photographs were used to identify additional facilities that could serve as regional connections to the network. Over the next year, extensive consultation and technical work was undertaken to update the maps, including incorporating the work of six newly adopted county and council of government bikeway plans as well as extensive new open space acquisitions. The last of the subregional plans was adopted at the end of 2008.

The Steering Committee and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force met jointly in a workshop May 27, 2007, where they were presented with the draft plan and maps prior to release for public review. The Plan was endorsed at that meeting and forwarded to the CMAP Transportation Committee for their June 12, 2009 meeting. After the presentation of the Plan, the Transportation Committee released it for a public review period starting June 12th and ending June 26th. The Plan document, executive summary, and maps of the trails, primary regional trail system, and greenways were posted on the CMAP website. Notification of the public review period and link to the plan was included in the CMAP weekly email on June 12th. Upon request, the public review period was extended to July 24th, at which time an additional announcement and web link was distributed in the weekly email. During the public review period, an additional map was created and posted on the web that was a composite of the three maps that had been posted earlier.

The CMAP Environmental Committee was presented with the draft plan and maps in July and appropriate comments were incorporated in the plan. The plan was presented to the Programming Coordinating Committee on September 9th, at which time there was a request to add language on abandoned rail lines and trails. The additional language was presented and discussed by the Transportation Committee on September 18th. Based on that meeting, the language was reduced in length to one sentence. The Environment and Natural Resources Committee will be updated on October 7th; the MPO Policy Committee will be presented with the plan on October 8th and the Coordinating Committee on October 14th. Board approval is anticipated at their meeting later that day.

Public Review Comments and Responses

We heard from forest preserve and conservation districts, transportation agencies, township, counties, watershed planning committee, ecosystem partnership, and advocacy organizations. The recommendations were very helpful and will be included in the plan as described below. The list that follows focuses on the major recommended additions or changes on the map and the document and our responses to each of the recommendations.

Recommendations and Comments Relating to the Greenways and Trails Plan Text

- Recommendation: Add language relating to the potential future transportation use of abandoned rail lines that have been converted to trails.
 - Response: the following sentence was added to Page 3 of the text document:
 - Trails development should be coordinated with plans, now and in the future, for other transportation uses in these corridors to avoid conflicts and maximize transportation benefits.
 - The action recommendation 5.5.6 was revised to “Monitor and evaluate rail abandonments and assemble partnerships to preserve those abandoned rights-of-way that are desirable for trail purposes, and, where feasible, additional multi-modal transportation options.
 - The action recommendation 5.1.1 was revised to: “Coordinate regional greenway and trail planning and local land use and transportation planning in order to encourage the preservation of greenways and the continuity of trails.”
 - The action recommendation 5.6.4 was revised to “Collaborate with transportation agencies to encourage the planning and development of trails within or adjacent to existing and future right-of-way, including the accommodation of trail and bikeway lanes on new and renovated bridge structures.”
- Recommendation: Change the title of the chart, “Trail Mileage by County,” to indicate it only includes regional greenways plan trails.
 - Response: Clarified title of the table to read: **Greenways and Trails Plan Trail Mileage, by County**
- Recommendation: Note that jurisdictions may have additional miles of trails not in the plan.
 - Response: Added text: “The following table illustrates the number of miles of trails in each county that are part of the Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways and Trails Plan. Many jurisdictions have miles of bikeways and trails that are not part of this plan; those miles are not included in the table below.”
- Recommendation: The difference between bike trails and bike routes is blurry. Add a brief discussion on this and a working definition of trail.

- Response: Added “It should be noted that while many communities have bike plans that include bike routes, which typically refer to signed, on-road facilities, they are not considered regional greenway plan trails unless they are very short connections that provide essential linkages to or between the Primary Regional System.”
- Recommendation: Add an action recommendation that encourages building multi-purpose trails along water-based greenways.
 - Response: Added “Encourage, where appropriate, environmentally sensitive multi-use trails along water-based greenways to increase public access, enjoyment, and stewardship of these resources.”
- Recommendation: Add proposed Hebron to Harvard Trail Concept to list of priorities in the text.
 - Response: Added proposed trail to list of priorities
- Recommendation: Add proposed Kishwaukee River Trail Concept to list of priorities in text.
 - Response: Added proposed trail to list of priorities
- Recommendation: Add proposed McHenry County College to Route 47 Trail Concept
 - Response: Added proposed trail to list of priorities
- Recommendation: Add proposed Rakow Road to Prairie Trail Connector Concept to priorities in text.
 - Response: Added proposed trail to list of priorities
- Recommendation: Add The Kishwaukee River to the list of resource rich areas recognized under the programs of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.
 - Response: Added Kishwaukee to the list
- Recommendation: Add Openlands, The Conservation Foundation, Sierra Club, local land trusts, and ecological consultants to list of organizations and agencies that provide technical assistance on protection and restoration of stream greenways that are in private ownership.
 - Response: The five groups were added to the list
- Recommendation: (Metra staff): Change wording of the action recommendation: “collaborate with owners of rail right-of-way and with highway agencies to encourage planning and development of trails within existing and future rights-of way” to “adjacent to” or “alongside” existing and future rights-of-way.
 - Response: Re-phrased the sentence to read “within or alongside”
- Recommendation: Recommend dimensions or scales that constitute effective greenways
 - Response: Added an action recommendation “Encourage local and subregional agencies and technical assistance providers to identify dimensions and scales that constitute effective greenways for habitat, stormwater quantity and quality management, and other functions.
- Recommendation: Do not reference the new state index for bio-integrity; it has been criticized for not including many highly important aquatic habitats, or streams and river segments with high restoration potential.

- Response: A note will accompany the maps (we will use the more inclusive, previous IDNR maps in addition to the new one) that states that local surveys have identified high quality stream segments beyond what is included in the map.
- Recommendation: Stream quality should be determined by studies that go into more detail about smaller segments not included in state studies.
 - Response: Added action recommendation “Promote localized stream quality surveys in order to identify high quality stream segments that are not included in state-wide studies.”
- Recommendation: There should be a system to measure the quality of headwater streams since the state survey doesn’t include many of the smaller stream segments.
 - Response: Added action recommendation “Create a biological stream rating system for headwater streams.”
- Recommendation: Include as an action recommendation “Provide technical assistance to private property owners and homeowner’s associations that own many greenway segments through-out the region.”
 - Response: Added recommendation
- Recommendation: Incorporate the recommendations and visions in this plan into the strategies for long-range and comprehensive land use and transportation planning for the region.
 - The Greenways and Trails Plan will be integrated in the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan. The plan will be referenced; the map will be included, as will applicable action recommendations.
- Recommendation: Add text to clarify what regional trails are and are not.
 - Response: Added “Many communities have bike plans that include bike routes, which typically refer to signed, on-road bikeways. With very few exceptions, these existing or proposed on-road facilities are not considered regional greenways plan trails. One notable exception is the Grand Illinois Trail (GIT), which utilizes some on-road connections for the purposes of continuity. All segments of the GIT are identified on the regional map and noted as such. “
- Recommendation: Include “health benefits” to the list of recreational benefits greenways can provide.
 - Response: Added to the list
- Recommendation: Add language to the Values of Greenways section on air and soil quality.
 - Response: Added “Greenway vegetation can mitigate the accumulation of greenhouse gases by capturing and storing carbons released in the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels. Other pollutants, such as contaminated soil, can also be mitigated through vegetation’s natural processes.”
- Recommendation: Add “online mapping tool” to the list of products of “Natural Connections: Green Infrastructure in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana in the green planning chart.
 - Response: Added to chart
- Recommendation: Add “phyto-remediation and “healthy lifestyles” to the goals of the Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways and Trails Plan column in the green planning chart.

- Response: Added to the chart
- Recommendation: Add “Off-road segments of the Historic” to the heading “Route 66 Trail” in the Key Map Elements section since it is primarily an on-road route.
 - Response: Wording will be included
- Comment: “Since the proposed greenways map only became available to review one week ago, Openlands had not had sufficient time to assess whether other important greenways might be recommended for inclusion.”
 - Response: The greenways map was available on CMAP’s website along with the trail element and the primary trail network first posted. Subsequently, CMAP combined those three maps and posted it on the website as a new, composite map.

Recommendations and Comments Relating to the Greenways and Trails Map

- Recommendation: Add additional 3-5 mile diameter primary network trails throughout the region in order to attract bicycle and pedestrian use.
 - Response: Added “Encourage local and subregional agencies and technical assistance providers to identify 10 to 15 mile primary trail loops to increase local access to the regional trail network.”
- Comment: McHenry County is generally deficient regarding designated trail corridors and substantially lags the rest of the 7 county region.
 - Response: Additional trails in McHenry County were added to the map based on information sent subsequent to this comment (see next recommendation)
- Recommendation: Add to the map three future primary trails that include crossings on the Fox River: Bull Valley Road/Miller Road, Rt. 176, and Rawson Bridge Road
 - Response: Added the new primary trail proposals to the map
- Recommendation: Add greenway between Wolf and Powderhorn Lakes on the map.
 - Response: Added greenway to map
- Recommendation: Add greenway between Stony Creek and Lake Park in Oak Lawn.
 - Response: Added greenway to map.

While additional helpful recommendations were received and appreciated, they may not be represented here because they were not thought to impact the substance or intent of the Plan.

Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways and Trails Plan

– 2009 Update: Executive Summary

What Is a Greenway?

Greenways may range from narrow corridors of undeveloped landscape that run through urban and suburban development, to wide corridors that incorporate diverse natural and cultural features. A greenway can be land- or water-based. It can incorporate both public and private property, but always provides benefits for the larger community. Some are primarily recreational corridors, while others function almost exclusively for environmental protection and are not necessarily intended for substantial human passage. Some greenways run along stream corridors, shorelines, or wetlands; others follow abandoned railway tracks or other land-based features.

Greenways differ in their location and function, but a greenway network will protect natural and cultural resources, provide recreational opportunities, improve and sustain hydrological functions, and enhance the natural beauty and the quality of life in neighborhoods and communities.

What is a Regional Greenways Plan Trail?

In this plan, regional trails are multi-jurisdictional facilities offering recreational opportunities and transportation uses, connecting communities and greenways throughout the region. While on-road bicycling presents many benefits, the emphasis in this plan is primarily existing and planned off-road facilities. The proposed trail alignments in the plan are conceptual and long-range. Regional trails include a variety of facility types, suitable for bicycling, walking, and paddling, but also offer diverse uses such as roller-blading, equestrian uses, and cross-country skiing. This plan emphasizes connectivity between regional trails and with forest preserves and conservation areas. Many of the trails in this plan offer a “green experience” in the midst of a highly urbanized environment. This plan also emphasizes consistency with locally- and county-based trail plans, thus enhancing opportunities to partner in the implementation of this plan.

Why Do We Need a Regional Greenways and Trails Plan?

A greenways and trails plan offers a vision of continuous greenway and trail corridors, linked across jurisdictions, providing scenic beauty, natural habitat, or recreational opportunities for our communities. Many jurisdictions govern land use and landscape design in northeastern Illinois, so developing a regionally coordinated and connected vision of greenways and trails across these jurisdictions can inform local land-use decisions, and hopefully inspire decisions about development that are consistent with the greenways and trails identified. In addition, greenways and trails projects, including land acquisition, can enhance our communities. Greenway projects inspired by this plan offer some combination of the following characteristics:

- Benefits large populations in multiple communities
- Bridges gaps to help complete greenways
- Creates new connections between greenways
- Provides wildlife migration paths between isolated natural areas
- Protects tributary streams to preserve water quality and ecological value in main regional waterways
- Protects residential and commercial areas threatened by flood damage
- Improves access to recreational trails where it is currently lacking
- Protects high quality natural areas threatened by development

- Protects important scenic vistas and historic areas from development
- Increases access to open space for mature and distressed communities with disadvantaged populations
- Offers a variety of recreational uses
- Provides alternative transportation routes (walking, bicycling) and improves access to public transportation systems

A Changing Environment for Greenway Planning

The Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways and Trails Plan was first adopted in 1992, and then updated in 1997. Changes in northeastern Illinois have brought on the need to update the plan. For one, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning was created to insure transportation, land use and other focus areas are addressed in concert to create a comprehensive regional plan that presents a unified vision for the region's future. That plan, *GO TO 2040*, integrates this plan, thereby strengthening recommendations and supporting implementation of proposed regional trails and greenways.

In addition, Kendall County has become part of the northeastern Illinois area. Also, the serious clean water supply concerns in this region are beginning to be addressed through the State and Regional Water Supply Planning Initiative. Northeastern Illinois is also facing health concerns related to physical inactivity. More recreational opportunities and more connections to the natural environment can address these issues.

The one-hundredth anniversary of Burnham and Bennett's 1909 Plan of Chicago also brings to the fore historic initiatives and visionary goals for the region concerning nature, open space, and green corridors, including the establishment of forest preserves, improvement of the lakefront, and efforts to develop and protect a system of connected open spaces. The public's enthusiasm about this anniversary could have a lasting impact on the realization of Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways and Trails Plan.

Key Features of the Map

This map updates existing and proposed regional greenways and trails, major open space, and connections among them. It includes the locations of Illinois Nature Preserves, and sites on the Illinois and County Natural Areas Inventories. Many of these high quality areas are within designated greenways and existing open space and need to be protected. The regional trail system may, where appropriate, provide opportunities for viewing these areas, but care must be taken to protect fragile Natural Area resources from adverse impacts. Unprotected natural area sites need to be given preservation status through acquisition or other means, as appropriate.

Streams are a vital part of this plan; they are focal points for environmental education and stewardship; they can provide valued opportunities for canoeing and kayaking; they can be rich centers of biodiversity; and they can provide important water quality, water supply, and flood mitigation functions. All streams in this plan are considered existing or proposed greenways.

Greenway corridors shown as existing on the map are in the public domain, and the trails that are shown as existing are completed and open to the public. Proposed trails as illustrated are largely conceptual, and final alignments would be determined by the jurisdiction through its planning and engineering processes. A more detailed map and database are available from CMAP to coordinate such planning. While some of the connecting trail proposals that are fairly close together are shown as one corridor on the map, the greenway plan facilities in the CMAP database reflect both.

The **Primary Regional Trail System** identified on this map is the “backbone” of the regional trail system. The map also identifies important existing and proposed trails that make critical direct links that interconnect the backbone trails, communities, and greenways. Existing and proposed trails that connect the regional system, forest preserves and conservation areas are also identified as primary; trail loops within forest preserves and conservation areas that don’t provide connections to the regional system are not generally included. Connections that follow more circuitous routes and/or those that would have to depend on development of a number of adjacent trails to connect to the major trails are not included. The Primary Regional System designation does not necessarily indicate priority trails for development, however many coincide with the county priorities listed in the plan document. The intention is that trails will be developed based on opportunities (private land development, public land acquisition, or complementary infrastructure development), the availability of funds and other resources, staff expertise, and policy support from elected officials.

Green Trails, or trails that are shown buffered by a green corridor, offer a “green experience” for most of their length. A path with a relatively large amount of vegetation or scenic vistas would be included. Off-road paths along a highly developed corridor with very little vegetation, for example, do not have a green buffer. With very few exceptions, greenways plan trails do not include on-road signed facilities.

The Route 66 Trail is a plan to give trail users opportunities to explore the sights, cities, towns, and rural areas of Route 66. The vision consists of off-road paths and comfortable roads for bicyclists, equestrians, and hikers. In cases where the route coincides with major backbone trails, it is identified on the map. Certain highly urbanized, long-running, on-road sections of this proposed trail are not included in this plan, owing to the off-road emphasis of this plan. The Trails Element map identifies the Route 66 Trail.

The Grand Illinois Trail is a 475 mile loop trail for hiking and biking that uses existing and planned trails in northern Illinois. Major greenway plan trails are included in this loop, as well as some on-road routes essential to creating the loop. The Trails Element map identifies Grand Illinois Trail routes.

The Plan Document

The plan includes actions that would contribute to implementation of the plan. These recommended actions in the plan are not necessarily site specific, but may indicate general priority areas. The seven general objectives identified in the plan are contained in the following list.

- Objective 1: Preserve Additional Greenway Open Space
- Objective 2: Preserve and Improve the Quality and Biodiversity of Existing Open Space, including Greenways
- Objective 3: Improve the Effectiveness and Use of Trails
- Objective 4: Expand the Existing Regional Trail System and Create Linkages
- Objective 5: Expand the Region’s Efforts to Protect, Restore and Utilize Water-Based Greenways
- Objective 6: Improve the Transportation Benefits of Trails
- Objective 7: Sustain and Strengthen the Funding Base for Trails and Greenways

Implementation of the Regional Greenways and Trails Plan will require a partnership effort among state natural resource and transportation agencies, forest preserve and park districts, county and municipal governments, conservation and recreation advocacy organizations, and private landowners. Specific actions to implement the seven objectives are detailed in the plan document.

An important function of the Regional Greenways and Trails Plan implementation program and the plan

map is to support the programs of open space jurisdictions which are working to preserve and manage greenway corridors. Much of the on-the-ground implementation will occur through the initiative of the forest preserve and conservation districts, park districts, municipalities, counties, and state and federal agencies, including the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Illinois Department of Transportation. The open space, outdoor recreation, and natural resource advocacy organizations of the region play an invaluable role in plan implementation.

*This summary is intended as an overview of the officially adopted Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways and Trails Plan. The Plan and map are both on CMAP's website at <http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/greenwaysandtrails.aspx>.

For more specific information about regional existing or proposed trails, such as where the proposal originated, contact CMAP at 312-454-0400.