

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

October 16, 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. The plan was approved by the MPO Policy Committee on October 8, 2009, and adopted by the Board on October 14, 2009.

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, 2009, 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, 2009, 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. Comments from the public review period and staff responses are included in the next section.

The Environmental Committee was presented with the draft plan and maps July 1st, 2009 and appropriate comments were incorporated in the plan. The plan was presented to the Programming Coordinating Committee on September 9th, 2009, at which time there was a request to add language regarding additional transportation uses on abandoned rail lines. The Transportation Committee reviewed the additional language on September 18th, 2009. Based on discussion at those meetings, the Transportation and Programming Coordinating Committee crafted an additional sentence (see next section) and approved the plan. The Environment and Natural Resources Committee was updated on October 7th, 2009. The MPO Policy Committee was presented with the plan and approved it at their October 8th, 2009 meeting. The CMAP Board adopted the Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways and Trails Plan - 2009 Update at their October 14th, 2009 meeting.

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.