

Chicago River Trail

Our vision for a seamless Chicago River Trail system that will provide a low-stress corridor for people walking, running, and biking.

The idea of a continuous Chicago River Trail is not a new one. At least as far back as Daniel Burnham's 1909 Plan for Chicago, concepts for river front promenades and other public spaces have been a part of the public discourse.

But thanks to recent initiatives, like Chicago's recently released Our Great Rivers vision, buzz about a continuous Chicago River Trail is once again coming to the fore.

Urban waterfronts provide cities with unique possibilities for recreation, open space, and transportation. Many world class cities have invested in developing waterfront parks and trails in order to connect residents with the myriad quality of life benefits they can bring, such as improved health, cleaner environments, and economic opportunity.

While Chicago's lakefront park and trail system is second to none, the Chicago River has not yet reached its full potential as a community recreation and alternative transportation asset.

A continuous Chicago River Trail system would help meet this potential by transforming a neglected asset into a vibrant open space and active transportation corridor that will connect Chicago's diverse neighborhoods to the river and to each other in a way they have never been before.

Why We Need a Chicago River Trail

Experience in Chicago and in cities around the world have proven time and again that investments in public spaces and infrastructure like a continuous Chicago River Trail would bring many benefits:

Promoting active transportation, like biking and walking, supports healthy communities, cleaner environments, and a vibrant local economy

Providing connections for residents to access much needed open space and recreation opportunities

Supporting sustainable economic development through tourism, local retail, and other sectors

Trail Design Options

The Chicago River Trail will require a mix of design options to address the broad range of riverside contexts.



Traditional River Edge Trail

Commonly seen along the North Branch of the Chicago River, a traditional river edge trail uses land along the bank of the river for a conventional multi-use path.

Decked Trail

Rather than use land adjacent to the river, a decked trail is constructed over the river on pylons. This is a good alternative for connecting existing segments, such as in the Riverview Bridge project, which is scheduled for completion in 2017.

Floating Trail

Floating trail systems exist in several US cities, including Portland and Philadelphia. Like decked trails, floating segments provide a good alternative where no land is available for a traditional trail segment.

On-Street Connections

In some instances, a trail along the river may not be feasible in the near term. In these situations we can consider creating high-quality on-street connections between river trail segments.

Moving Forward: Our Advocacy Strategy

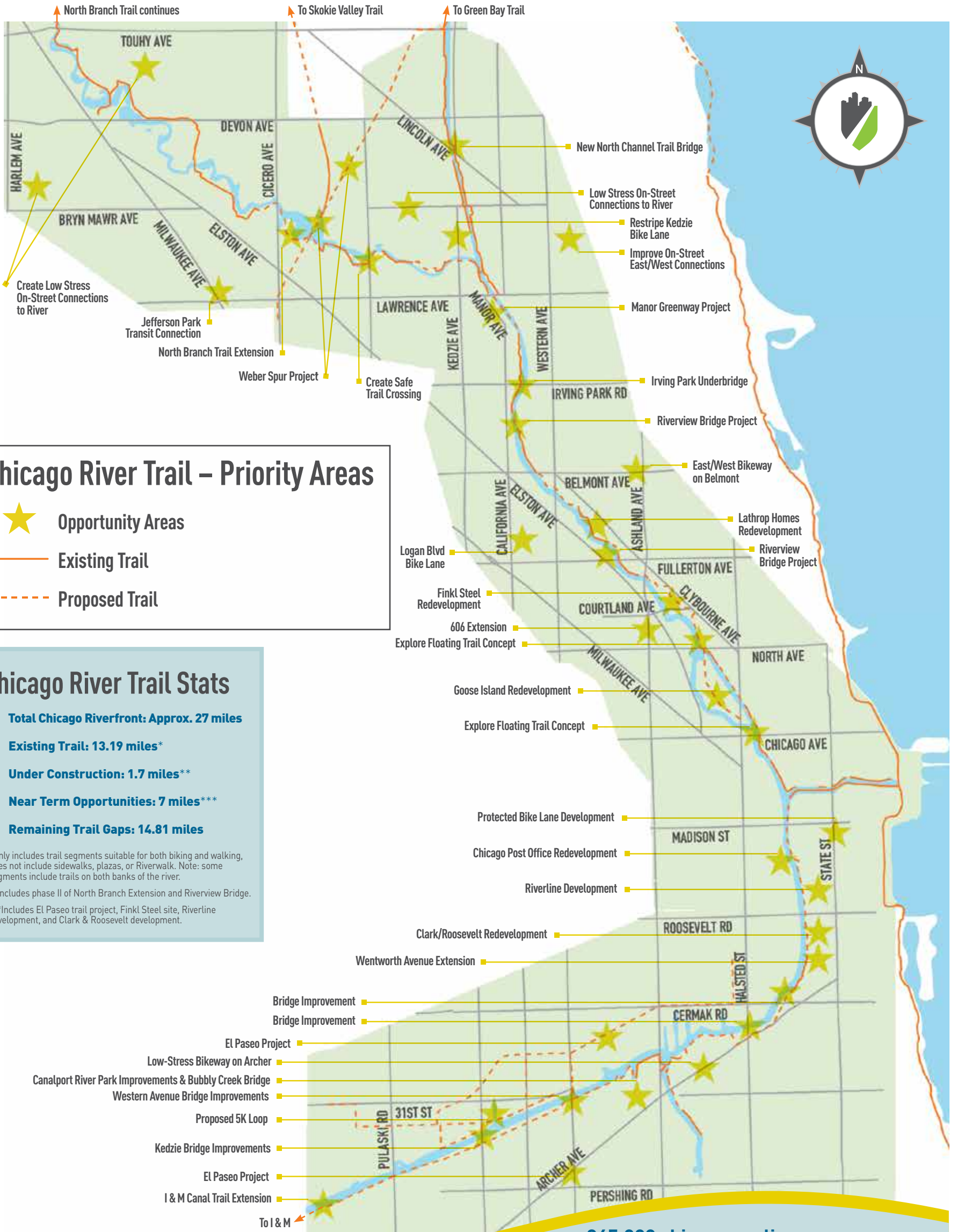
With so many different challenges and opportunities shaping the course of Chicago River Trail development, a coordinated advocacy effort will be required to ensure community voices are heard and progress is made.

1. Build consensus – working in partnership with key community and public stakeholders, we will build consensus on the vision for a continuous Chicago River Trail

- 2. Identify priorities** – using this consensus as a guide, we will establish priorities to focus our advocacy efforts on immediate opportunities to drive Chicago River Trail development forward
- 3. Establish coalition** – based off of these priorities, we will organize our allies and grassroots supporters to push this agenda forward
- 4. Mobilize support** – using diverse advocacy tactics, we will work to directly influence Chicago River Trail development and drive progress towards the ultimate goal of a seamless trail system

As an immediate next step, Active Trans will be releasing a detailed Chicago River Trail Action Plan in Fall 2016, developed with support from community partners and advocates from across the city.

Special thanks to Driehaus Foundation for supporting Active Trans's Chicago River Trail advocacy.



945,000 chicagoans live within one mile of the Chicago River, approximately 35% of the population.

A Window of Opportunity

Not only can we expect widespread benefits from a continuous Chicago River Trail, but we have a unique window of opportunity to advance this dream over the next few years.

- **We are closer than you think.** There are already 13.19 miles of trail along the Chicago River that are appropriate for both walking and biking. An additional 1.7 miles are slated for completion by the end of 2017.
- **The public wants more off-street trails.** The long term success of Chicago’s Lakefront Trail, as well as the more recent projects like the 606 & Bloomingdale Trail, point to a latent demand for low-stress, off-street trails.

- **We can leverage ongoing development.** Multiple public and private projects are underway or slated to break ground along the Chicago River, such as the Riverline development in the South Loop and the proposed El Paseo project in Pilsen and Little Village. These provide immediate opportunities to develop 7 miles of new trail segments and improve access, however, coordination is required.
- **The money is out there.** While Chicago and the State of Illinois face a tough fiscal landscape, the region has also proven an ability to leverage other sources of funding to finance these types of transformative projects, including federal grants, private donations, and creative financing strategies.