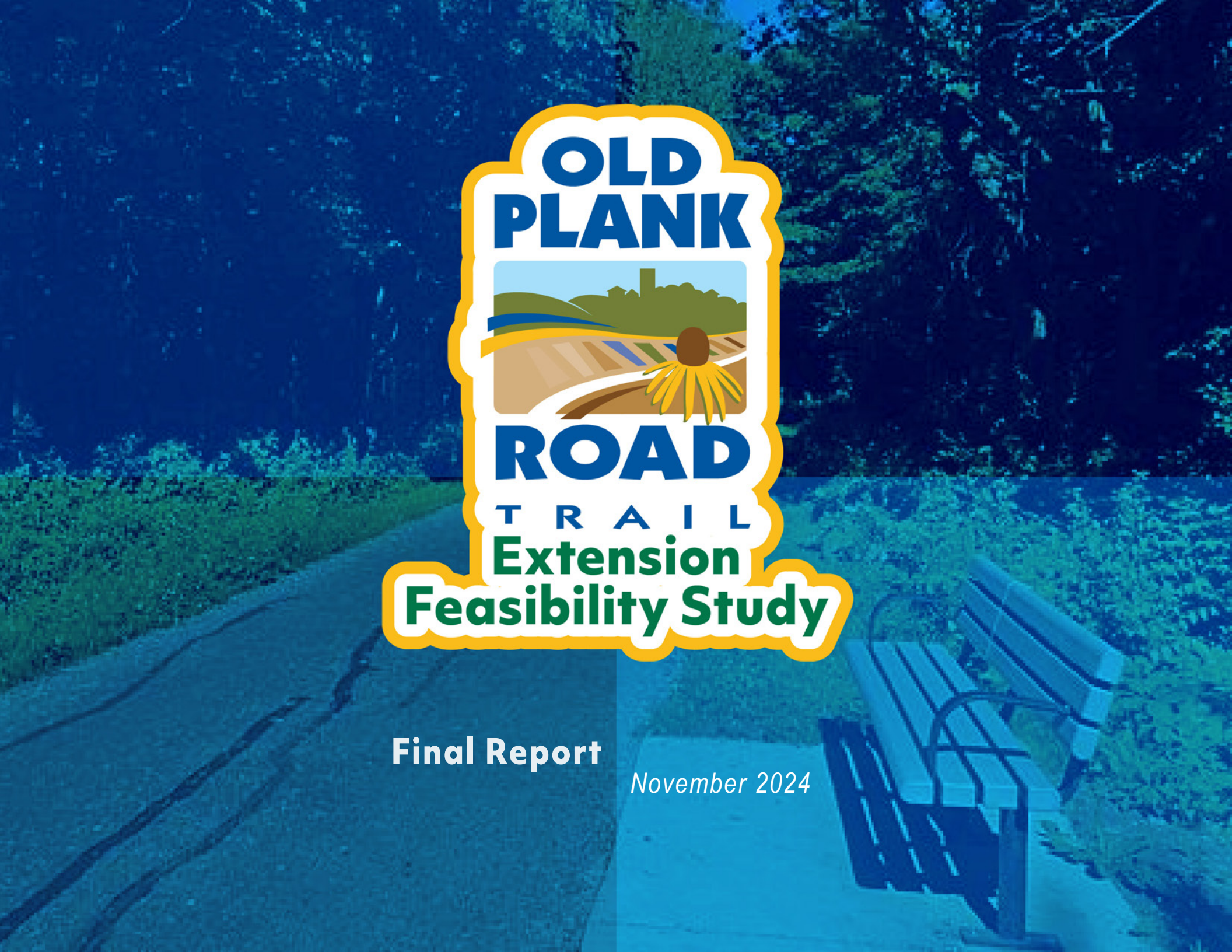

OLD PLANK ROAD TRAIL Extension Feasibility Study

Final Report

November 2024

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A special thank you to all the organizations and members who were Project Partners or served on the study's Steering Committee:

City of Chicago Heights
Village of Ford Heights
Village of Sauk Village
Village of Lynwood
Town of Dyer
Town of Schererville
South Suburban Mayors and Manager Association (SSMMA)
Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC)
Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways (DoTH)
Forest Preserves of Cook County
The Forest Preserve District of Will County
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)
Pace Suburban Bus
Village of South Chicago Heights
Village of Steger
Town of Griffith
South Shore Trails
Openlands
Folks on Spokes
Rails to Trails Conservancy

Another thank you to all the residents, business owners, trail users, and bike enthusiasts who provided feedback into the development of this study.

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Looking west along the inactive Norfolk Southern rail corridor at Lake Street in Dyer, Indiana

section 1

Study Overview

ABOUT THE STUDY

The purpose of the Old Plank Road Trail (OPRT) Extension Feasibility Study is to identify and assess the feasibility of a connection between the existing eastern terminus of the OPRT, at the Thorn Creek Trail in Chicago Heights, Illinois, and the Pennsy Greenway in Schererville, Indiana.

Study Goals

Identify a preferred trail alignment that is safe, feasible, cost-effective, and consistent with community input and preferences.

- Increase walking and biking connectivity between community destinations and the future OPRT extension.
- Increase awareness of the existing OPRT, share community benefits of a trail extension and trail-oriented development, and receive robust community input.
- Provide a turn-key implementation strategy that study area agencies can use to move the project forward, aligning near and mid-term actions with available financial resources.

Existing OPRT Eastern Terminus


Inactive Rail Corridor and Preferred Trail Alignment


Pennsy Greenway

Study Area

The study area encompasses the six municipalities between the existing OPRT eastern terminus and the Pennsy Greenway, including Chicago Heights, Ford Heights, Sauk Village, and Lynwood in Cook County, Illinois, and Dyer and Schererville in Lake County, Indiana.

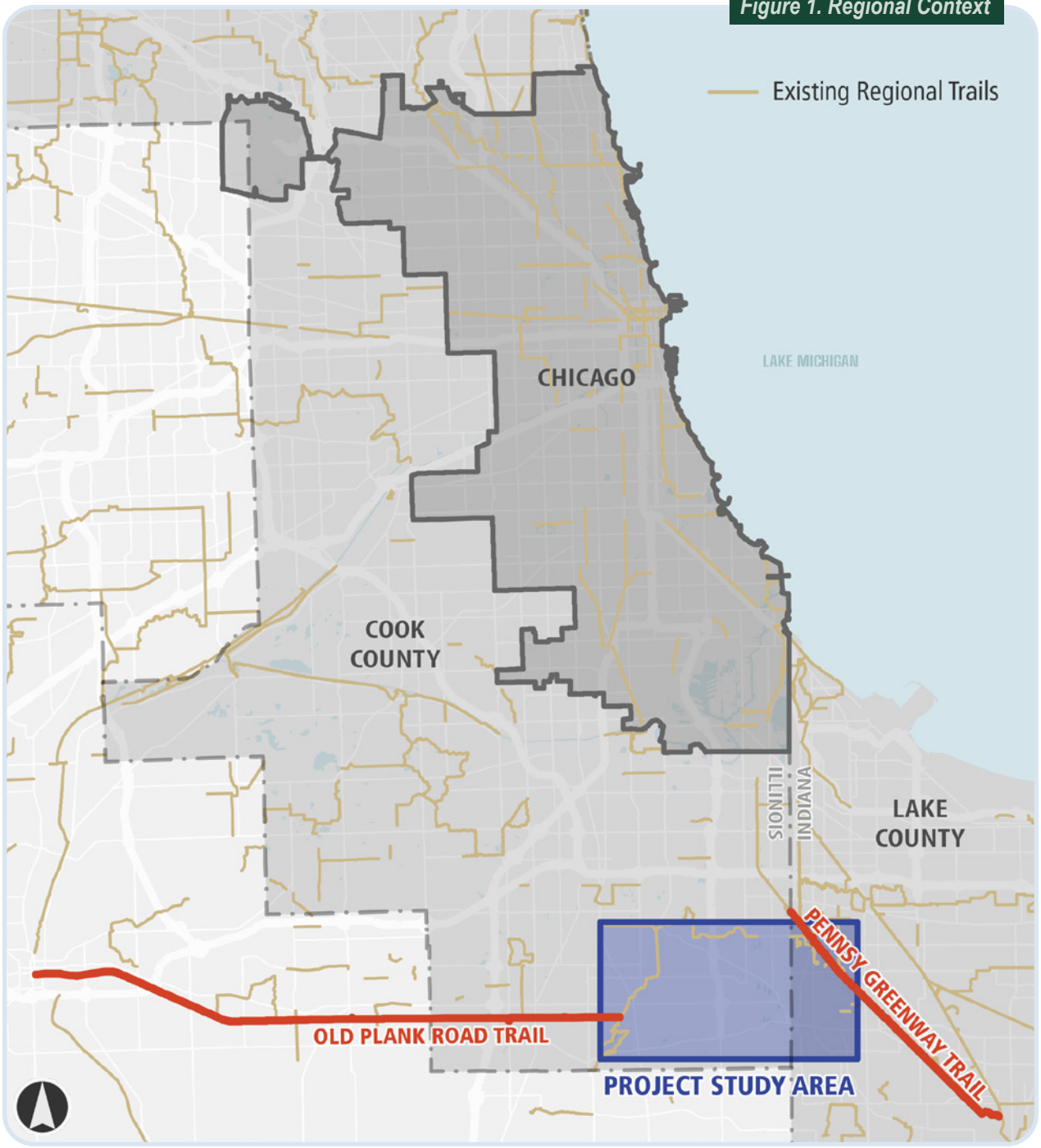
Community Benefits

Once completed, this bi-state trail connection will bridge a critical gap in the regional trail system, connect residents and visitors to key destinations, and help to realize a larger vision aimed at revitalizing the Chicago Southland and supporting active, safe, and healthy communities across the Calumet region.

The benefits of this regional project are far-reaching and include public health, economic, and transportation benefits, as well as positive effects on community pride and identity. A comprehensive trail network serves as an economic engine for the region, allowing residents and tourists to explore the area and venture into nearby communities to shop, relax in parks, and visit cultural attractions.

The OPRT extension will meet the Pennsy Greenway, which connects north to the Burnham Greenway, Cal-Sag and Lakefront Trails, and Chicago. The trail will also connect to the new Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD) West Lake Corridor Project, which will provide a vital transportation link between Chicago, Cook County, and northwest Indiana.

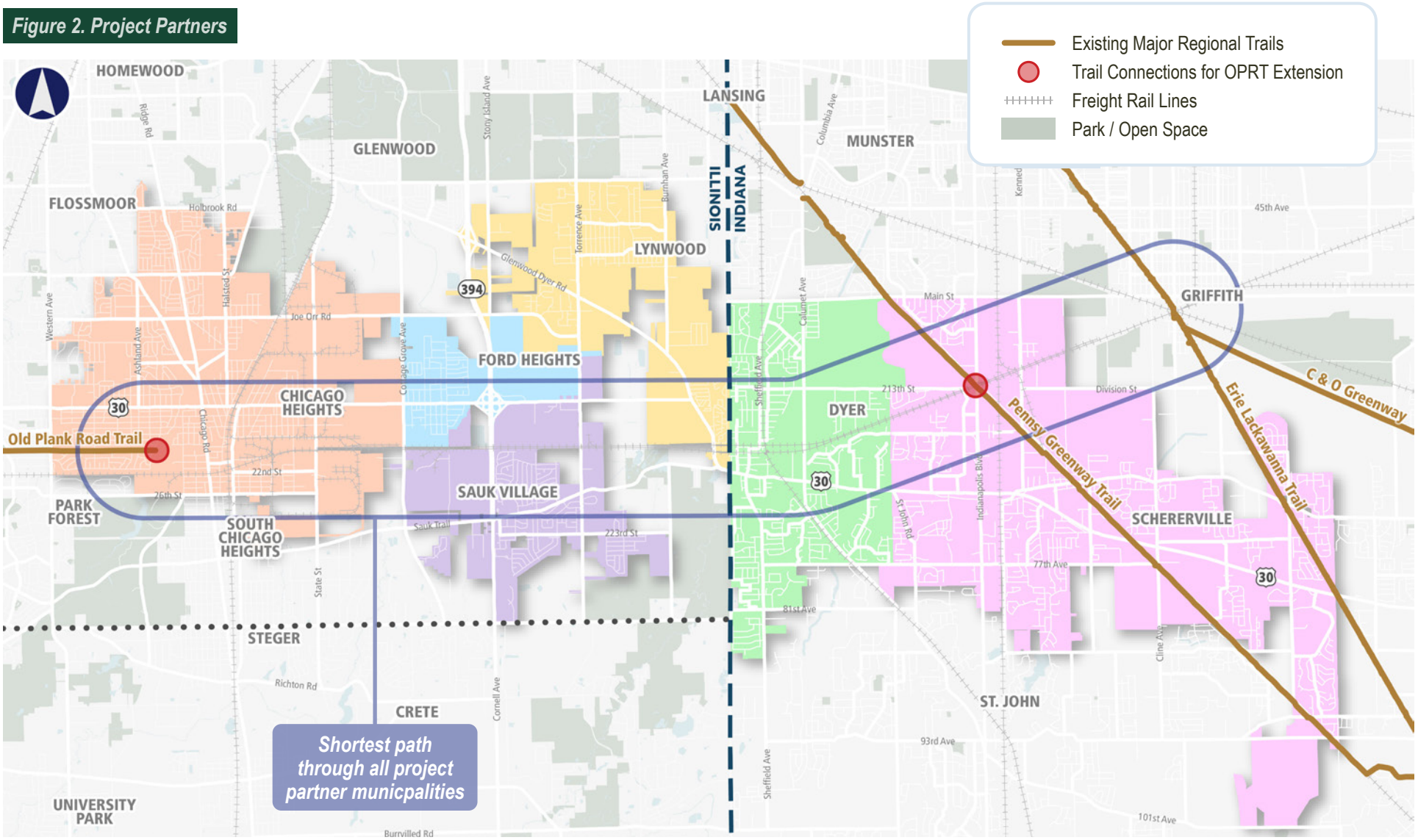
Figure 1. Regional Context



Project Partners

The project partners include six municipalities (Chicago Heights, Ford Heights, Sauk Village, Lynwood, Dyer, and Schererville), the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association (SSMMA), the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC), Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways, the Forest Preserves of Cook and Will Counties, Openlands, and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP).

Figure 2. Project Partners

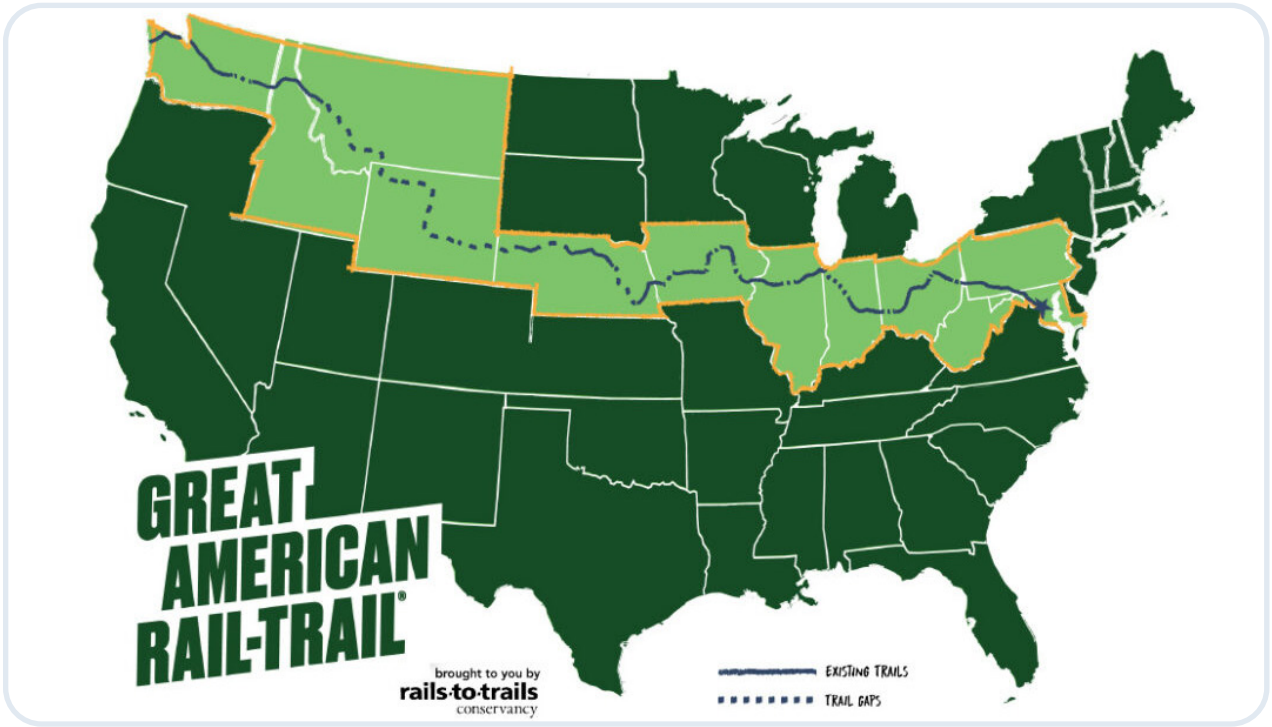


Old Plank Road Trail History and Significance

The existing OPRT is currently a 22-mile recreation and nature trail, connecting Joliet on the west to Chicago Heights on the east, traversing through Will and Cook Counties. The OPRT was a “rails to trails” project, converting railroad tracks to a regional pedestrian and bicycle trail. It has a deep history in the area, representing significant eras in the region. The trail progressed from an emigration route in the late 1700s, to a planned literal plank road trail (which was not constructed), a trail which supported trading in the early 1800’s, to the Joliet and Northern Indiana Railroad in the mid-1850s[1]. The railroad was abandoned in the 1970’s and community members started using the tracks as a walking trail. Through extensive local efforts, the OPRT was established and constructed in the 1990’s and opened in 1997.

Since the 1700’s, the OPRT has been responsible for moving people and goods. The industrial history of the OPRT nods to the significance that railroads and industrial corridors have had along the existing OPRT and to the communities through which the OPRT will extend, shaping their local economies and transportation systems.

The OPRT extension also has a significant national role. Upon completion, this alignment would likely become part of the Great American Rails Trail (GART)[2], connecting 3,700 miles between Washington State and Washington D.C.



Source: Rails to Trails

[1]https://oprt.org/trail-history.htm

[2]https://www.railstotrails.org/site/greatamericanrailtrail/

Lansing drainage ditch crossing near the inactive rail corridor (between Torrence and US-30)

2 section Existing Conditions

EXISTING CONDITIONS

This Existing Conditions analysis reviewed the current conditions of the study area to understand opportunities for potential trail alignments and improvements.

The following section provides a high-level overview of the existing transportation network, safety concerns, environmental resources, planned improvements, and challenges and opportunities within the study area. A summary of recent plans and studies completed across the study area is also detailed on the following page. Please see ***Appendix A*** for the full Existing Conditions Report.

Datasets Reviewed

- Local and regional bike routes
- Transit
- Roadway jurisdiction
- Traffic volumes
- Number of travel lanes
- Speed limits
- At-grade railroad crossings
- Environmental resources
- Crash hot spots and crashes involving people walking or biking (2017-2021)
- Community-oriented land uses
- Freight-generating land uses
- Major and local roadway projects

Looking northeast at Cottage Grove and inactive rail

Inactive rail corridor across Plum Creek

Pennsy Greenway Trail at active rail crossing

Union Pacific rail crossing along 16th St

Sheffield Ave looking north towards Edmunds

Review of Relevant Plans / Studies

Local and regional plans call for improvements to the biking and walking network. Some of these reference the OPRT specifically, while others have a greater vision for enhanced access and connectivity across the Chicago Southland and to Indiana. The OPRT Feasibility Extension Study has taken into consideration numerous local plans to align with future goals and improvements within the surrounding region.

Local Plans / Studies

City of Chicago Heights Comprehensive Plan (2015)

The City of Chicago Heights Comprehensive Plan focuses on redevelopment and improved utilization of existing land uses. While the City has strong community amenities, better and safer connections, especially for non-motorized transportation, would improve community cohesion. Accessibility, affordability, and connections to goods and services are key considerations for future development. Reoccurring community concerns include lack of bicycle routes, sidewalk network gaps, and unprotected crossings. The plan mentions that the Chicago Heights Park District is working with Cook County to complete the OPRT and Thorn Creek Trail segments through the City to provide access to adjacent forest preserves and neighboring communities. The community would like to see connections from these trails to selected bike routes and local roads.

City of Chicago Heights Active Transportation Plan (2012)

The City of Chicago Heights partnered with Active Transportation Alliance to produce the City of Chicago Heights Active Transportation Plan. The plan is composed of improvements to the physical infrastructure as well as policies and programs that make it safer and more convenient for people to walk, bike and use transit in Chicago Heights. Plan objectives include multi-modal opportunities to walk or bike safely throughout the community, schools, parks, OPRT and Thorn Creek Trail, St. James Hospital, and other destinations. Plan recommendations are guided by network users. There is a desire within the community to improve connections to existing forest preserve trails and roadways to foster safe travel between neighboring communities.

Envision Ford Heights (2020)

Envision Ford Heights is the Village's first comprehensive community planning and revitalization effort (strategic plan). It is aimed at identifying, reactivating, connecting, and leveraging the Village's community assets in ways that create long-term economic opportunities and that enhance the livability and resilience of Ford Heights and surrounding Southland communities. While the Village does not have any bicycle facilities, a number have been proposed in previous planning efforts, including the extension of the OPRT. Stakeholders have expressed the desire for more outdoor recreation facilities. The Village sees these bikeway components, when coupled with improvements to the other transportation networks, as a way to help enable safe, convenient, and comfortable travel and access for all road users regardless of their age, ability, or mode of transportation.

Village of Sauk Village Comprehensive Plan (2019)

The Village of Sauk Village Comprehensive Plan provides a long-range framework to guide stakeholders in decisions about growth, land use, conservation of natural resources and major capital facility improvements. A

goal of the plan is to improve connections to existing and proposed open spaces and natural resources. The plan highlights the opportunity to improve connectivity for cyclist and pedestrian safety throughout the Village, with an emphasis on connecting residential neighborhoods, schools, libraries, commercial centers, forest preserves, recreational facilities and trails to the overall regional mobility network.

Village of Lynwood Active Transportation Plan (2016)

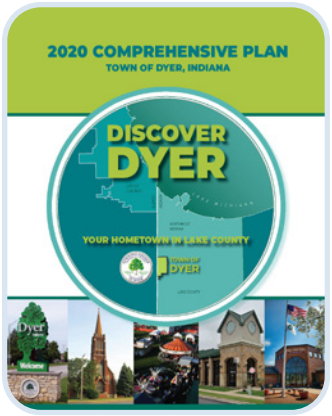
The Village of Lynwood partnered with Active Transportation Alliance to produce this plan. The plan aims to create a safer and more accessible community for people traveling on-foot or by bike that also considers existing development patterns and opportunities for future growth. The community identified trail projects that could enhance Lynwood's network, including the Old Plank Trail extension. The plan also makes trail recommendations including extending the OPRT along old railroad right-of-way.

Village of Lynwood Comprehensive Plan (2014)

The Village of Lynwood Comprehensive Plan serves to help guide the Village's future actions as the community addresses the challenges of community character, quality of life, and economic viability. This plan identifies the future intersection of Joe Orr Road and Glenwood Dyer Road as a potential area to serve as the Village's Town Center and envisions the extension of Joe Orr Road as the ideal location for retail, office, and civic uses. The plan also specifies that sidewalks and paths should be considered on all newly constructed roads, and that a bike system should include connections to forest preserves, parks, schools, and civic uses, and key locations, including the proposed Town Center along Joe Orr Road.

Town of Dyer Comprehensive Plan (2020)

The Town of Dyer Comprehensive Plan consolidates past planning efforts into one plan to guide future developments and infrastructure investments. The plan specified goals for its downtown district, some of which include creating a walkable downtown that is safe and attractive for pedestrians and making downtown a major hub for the bicycle trail system. One of the plan's trail framework goals includes a trail connection to the Pennsy Greenway.



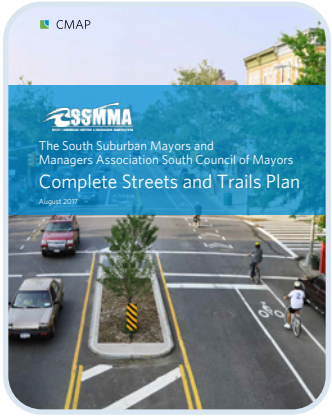
Town of Schererville Comprehensive Plan (2009)

The Town of Schererville Comprehensive Plan is a policy document intended to guide growth and development decisions as well as an expression of the community's expectations and aspirations. The town is responsible for maintaining portions of the Erie-Lackawanna Trail and the Pennsy Greenway. The plan includes a goal to integrate bicycle and pedestrian level travel into overall transportation system facilities. Strategies identified to reach this goal include providing access to the Pennsy Greenway from all neighborhoods by integrating trails development with all street improvements and future roads. Action steps include preparing and adopting a Pedestrian and Bike Master Plan to increase community connectivity, developing a Trail Adoption Program to maintain greenways and main streets, and preparing prototype trailhead plan for the Town with minimum design standards.

Regional and County Plans / Studies

South Suburban Mayors and Manager Association (SSMMA) Complete Streets & Trails Plan (2017)

The SSMMA Complete Streets & Trails Plan identifies a recommended Council-wide bikeway network, key areas where pedestrian and accessibility improvements should be prioritized, and potential corridors for right-size road reconfigurations. This plan calls for addressing missing regional trail connections, promoting bicycling as a viable mode of transportation that caters to a range of bicyclist needs and types, developing complementary bikeway infrastructure, and promoting bicycle parking among other items.

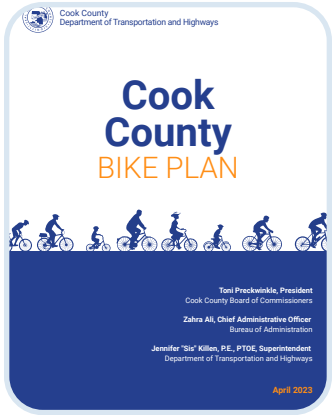


SSMMA IL Route 394 / Route 1 Corridor Plan (2015)

The SSMMA IL Route 394/Route 1 Corridor Plan identifies improvements to the 394 corridor within a 3-mile boundary between I-80 and the Will-Kankakee County Line. Improvements related to cyclist and pedestrian amenities include recommended design standards and identified priority routes within the study area. Identified pedestrian routes within the OPRT Extension Feasibility Study Area include Joe Orr Road between the CSX Railroad Tracks and Torrence Avenue and extending the sidewalk in conjunction with future Joe Orr Road extension. Potential bicycle routes include extending OPRT.

Cook County Bike Plan (2023)

The plan outlines ways the County will build bike infrastructure along roadways under Department of Transportation and Highways' (DoTH) jurisdiction, make connections within the existing trail network to eliminate gaps, study potential areas where new off-street trails can be installed, provide support to municipalities looking to add bike routes on residential streets and partner with agencies to make intersections safer for cyclists, especially in areas where bike paths cross major roads. The plan includes recommendations for extending the OPRT along the Norfolk Southern inactive railroad corridor, as well developing a sidepath along Cottage Grove Avenue within this project's study area.



Connecting Cook County (2016)

Connecting Cook County is the County's 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan. The plan seeks to prioritize transit and other transportation alternatives by funding transportation improvements to make it easier and more convenient to walk, bike, or take transit to destinations. The County will assist local governments with the adoption of bicycle and pedestrian planning programs designed to identify gaps in existing services and promote increases in pedestrian and bicycle trips. The plan also prioritizes maintaining and modernizing existing transportation assets, including bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The County will help develop regional and subregional trail and path plans with councils of government and municipalities that address existing gaps and promote more walk and bicycle trips.

Moving South Cook (2023)

The Moving South Cook plan seeks to improve truck routing and address community safety concerns in southeast Cook County. The plan analyzes available data and pairs it with stakeholder feedback process to develop a network of potential Class II truck routes. This plan also outlines cross section typologies of varying lane widths, traffic volumes, and land use contexts to address multimodal safety on Class II truck routes. Joe Orr Road from its current eastern terminus at Torrence Avenue to the state line is a proposed Class II truck route.

ON TO 2050 (2018)

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning ON TO 2050 comprehensive regional plan provides regional planning strategies, priorities, and direction for the seven-county region in northeast Illinois. The plan's three overarching principles include inclusive growth, resilience, and prioritized investment. The non-motorized goals within this plan include enabling safe, convenient, and comfortable non-motorized transportation options for all residents to create vibrant communities, improve equity and public health, and support local economies and ensuring bicycle and pedestrian safety. Recommendations for achieving these goals include partnering with local communities to pilot new approaches and establish strategies to support compact, safe, and walkable communities; improving access to public rights of way for pedestrians, cyclists, seniors, and people with disabilities; and investing in safe bike and pedestrian pathways to desired destinations. The Plan was updated in 2022 to reflect changes in conditions across the region since it was first published.

The Northeastern Illinois Greenways and Trails Plan (2016)

The Northeastern Illinois Greenways and Trails Plan was adopted as part of ON TO 2050, is a long-range plan which "envisions a network of continuous greenway and trail corridors, linked across jurisdictions, providing scenic beauty, natural habitat, and recreational and transportation opportunities." Many of the alignments shown in the plan are conceptual. The OPRT is shown as an existing regional trail from Joliet to Chicago Heights where it connects to Thorn Creek Trail.

NIRPC Greenways & Blueways Plan (2020)

The NIRPC Greenways and Blueways 2020 Plan is the first plan which combines the areas of conservation, transportation, and recreation into a single document for Lake, Porter, and LaPorte Counties. The plan consolidates prior studies into a single plan that provides general guidance and recommendations for the three-county area. The transportation section of the plan focuses on pedestrians and bicyclists' use of regional roadways and addresses the need for network planning along the regional trail system. Proposed trail corridors are suggested and ranked by priority. The plan cites the American Discovery Trail as a top priority corridor. The proposed corridor includes the study area explored as part of the OPRT Extension Feasibility Study.

The Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District's (NICTD) West Lake Corridor Project (Under Construction)

The existing NICTD South Shore Line connects Northwest Indiana to Chicago and Cook County, Illinois. NICTD's West Lake Corridor Project is a southern branch extension of the South Shore Line in Lake County, Indiana with stations and Hammond, Munster, and Dyer. The project would improve mobility and accessibility in the region as well as stimulate local job creation and economic development opportunities for Lake County. The OPRT extension would aim to connect to the new line, offering a non-motorized transportation route for trail users in Cook County, Illinois and Lake County.

The NWI 2050 Plan (2019)

The NWI 2050 Plan is a planning document produced by the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, the Metropolitan Planning Organization for Lake, Porter, and Laporte Counties. The plan envisions a “connected NWI” which includes better transit, finishing the multi-use trail network, implementation of Complete Streets that accommodate a variety of transportation modes, and the removal of barriers in the transportation system. Some of the strategies identified within the plan include improve pedestrian and bicycle accessibility to high density population areas, employment and retail centers, transit stations, parks, and schools; prioritizing non-motorized facilities that maximize connectivity across counties and municipal boundaries, and main centers; collaborating with entities and local landowners on high priority new trail corridors opportunities; making pedestrian and biking areas safe and more desirable for users by providing amenities like lighting benches, drinking fountains, restrooms, etc.

Openlands Strategic Plan (2017)

The Openlands Strategic Plan outlines action items across the natural landscape within Northeastern Illinois, Southeastern Wisconsin, and Northwestern Indiana. The goal of this plan is to provide guidelines that will help realize a vision of a vast network of land and water trails to promote the quality of life in the region. Main priorities for the organization relevant to the OPRT Extension Feasibility Study include protecting priority landscapes, building advocates for nature, and advancing nature-based solutions to combat climate change. Openlands collaborates with municipal governments throughout the region to help coordinate region-wide projects and commits to work with others to establish resiliency- based metrics to encourage resilient nature-based solutions.

Great American Rail-Trail (Ongoing)

The OPRT comprises a portion of the Great American Rail-Trail, a national trail system that traverses 12 states from Washington to Maryland. The Rails to Trails Conservancy compiled the 2023 Route Assessment for Illinois where it identified the gap in the OPRT between Thorn Creek and the Pennsy Greenway. The Route Assessment mentions the current effort to consider a more direct trail connection from the Pennsy Greenway in Schererville, Indiana to the eastern end of the OPRT in Chicago Heights.

The American Discovery Trail (Ongoing)

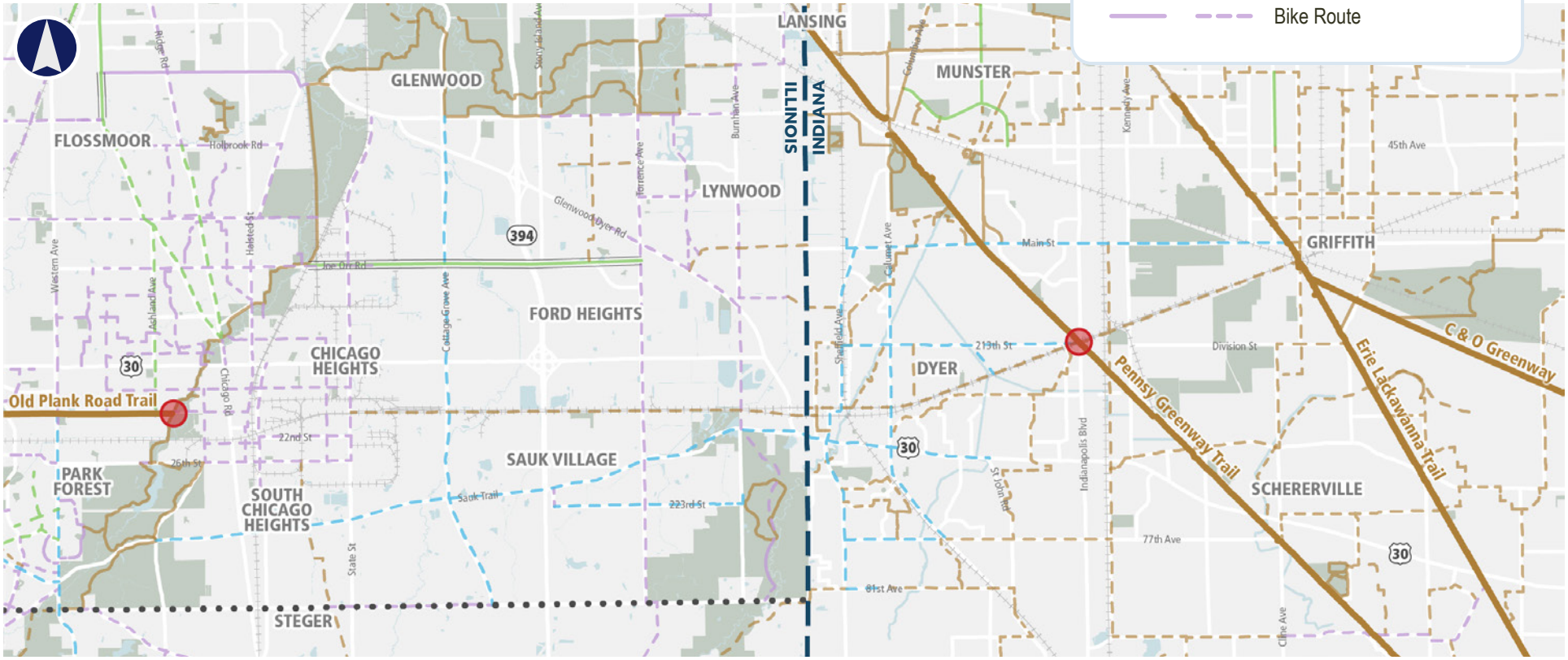
The American Discovery Trail is a national trail that extends 6,800+ miles from Pt. Reyes National Seashore, California to Cape Henlopen State Park, Delaware. The OPRT is part of The American Discovery Trail northern route.

Key Insights

Regional Connectivity

The study area contains several existing regional trails and local bike facilities, however this area is generally void of greater bike connectivity. Many of the municipalities have developed standalone plans with goals to increase their bike networks, which would ultimately create broader connectivity and greater access for residents and visitors to and from their communities. Cook County also recently completed their first-ever bike plan, which includes the OPRT trail extension. Their commitment and priority to improve biking in this study area can further enhance opportunities to connect to and from the future OPRT trail alignment.

Figure 3. Bike Facilities



Transportation Network

Most of the roadways that connect across multiple municipalities are wider, faster, and higher trafficked throughways which pose safety concerns. These include IL 30/ Lincoln Highway, Glenwood Dyer Rd, IL 394, Chicago Rd, Torrence Ave, and Indianapolis Blvd. These roads are also often under Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and Indiana Department of Transportation (InDOT) jurisdiction, necessitating additional coordination. Additionally, any of these north-south roads have the potential to intersect the potential trail alignment, so extra design considerations are needed to ensure a safe and comfortable crossing experience for future trail users. See ***Appendix A*** (pages 8-15) for more information.

Surrounding Land Use

This area has a strong history rooted in industrial and transportation-related industries, which can typically generate more significant truck traffic or rail activity. While industrial uses are numerous, the study area also has the potential to connect many existing or planned downtowns across six of the intersecting municipalities. The potential OPRT trail alignment has the opportunity to provide connections to these existing community-oriented places, or inspire development along the trail corridor that serves this purpose. See ***Appendix A*** (pages 16-18) for more information.

Environmental Resources

The study area has a number of natural resources that may impact how the alignment options are designed. Many creeks across the study area run north-south, which naturally creates floodways, floodplains, and numerous wetlands. Along the east-west freight corridor, several floodways and floodplains with larger footprints overlap across the tracks or abut the corridor. Several community parks, forest preserves, or nature preserves are also in the vicinity. See ***Appendix A*** (page 19) for more information.

Traffic on Torrence Avenue in Sauk Village

Industrial uses along the rail corridor

Thorn Creek crossing at Indian Hills Forest Preserve

Opportunities

Inactive Railroad

The east-west inactive Norfolk Southern rail line that runs through the study area is a prime alignment option due to its continuity between the existing OPRT and Pennsy Greenway. Tracks have already been removed at several locations throughout the corridor. However, coordination with the owners of the inactive rail line will be necessary to move forward with a trail alignment along this corridor.

Connections to Downtowns and Key Destinations

The potential OPRT alignment has the potential to create connections to and from key assets of the surrounding communities (e.g., downtowns, parks). Several municipalities have plans to reimagine and redevelop their downtowns, making them prime destinations for future trail users, but existing downtowns or commercial/recreational spaces would also benefit from this potential trail connection to the OPRT extension.

Utilize Existing Infrastructure

Several structures are already constructed and have the potential to create a more seamless integration of the future OPRT extension. These include a roadway underpass and several waterway bridge crossings.

Local planners had the foresight to construct an underpass beneath Lincoln Highway with the hope the future OPRT extension could utilize the inactive rail corridor. Additionally, several of the waterway crossings along the inactive rail line already have an existing bridge structure built, however the condition of each structure will need to be evaluated further.

Inactive rail corridor near Central Park in Dyer, IN

Lincoln Highway / US 30 underpass in Lynwood, IL

Thorn Creek bridge in disrepair within Indian Hills Forest Preserve

At-grade railroad crossing with 16th Street in Chicago Heights, IL

Challenges

Water Crossings

Several creek and ditch crossings will be required to make the OPRT extension possible. In most instances, existing bridge structures are in place, however the condition of each structure will need to be evaluated further. Some locations have structures beyond repair and would need to be rebuilt if the trail alignment were to cross nearby.

Arterial Roadway and At-Grade Railroad Crossings

Across the entire study area, some major roadways and at-grade rail lines run north-south and pose a potential challenge for future trail users to safely cross. Some of these roadways have higher traffic volumes as well as truck traffic trying to access the various industrial or transportation-related uses. The north-south rail lines have the potential to cause trail users to wait longer times at these rail crossings for freight trains to pass through.

Community Open House at the Sauk Village Community Center on October 25, 2023

section 3

Community Outreach

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Community outreach early and often is essential in developing a community-led plan and in establishing a trail that is actively used by community members.

This bi-state trail connection will connect residents and visitors to key destinations. Understanding community priorities is critical when developing a trail alignment that serves local residents and businesses, while also assisting to revitalize the Chicago Southland and supporting active, safe and healthy communities across the Calumet region. If the plan is developed in collaboration with community members, it is more likely to progress into future phases of design and implementation because it reflects local priorities.

The OPRT project team took a collaborative engagement approach throughout the study to bring the community along throughout the trail development process. The project team received feedback through a Steering Committee and Project Partners, and from the public. During the study, the project team held several touchpoints through a variety of formats with community leaders and the public. Input received throughout the project influenced the evaluation and development of potential trail alignments. The project team also launched an interactive online map and public survey, attended pop-up meetings at community events, and held focus groups and open houses throughout the study area.

Community open house held in St. Johns Township, IN

Tote bags for people attending the open houses

Study team/stakeholders at existing eastern terminus

How the Community Participated in the Study

TRAIL EXTENSION ALIGNMENTS EVALUATION | SUMMER + FALL 2023

Key Stakeholders Bus Tour

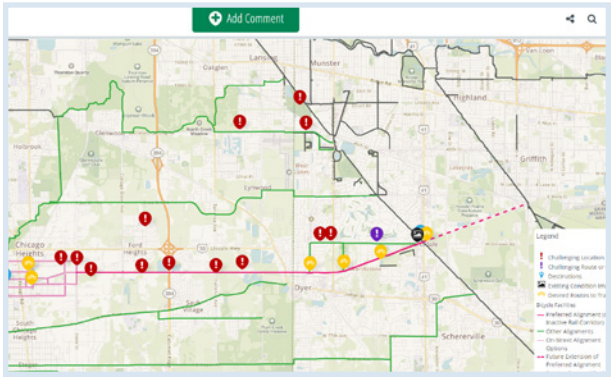
The project team joined several stakeholders on a bus tour of the potential trail alignments. The group discussed challenges and opportunities at key locations in the study area, and talked through how the OPRT extension can potentially address connectivity gaps for walking and biking.

Online Interactive Map

During Summer 2022, an online interactive Social Pinpoint map of the study area was launched for community members to provide feedback on the potential trail alignments, mark challenges and opportunities, and highlight community destinations. The online map also included a short survey for respondents to share insights for the OPRT extension.

Pop-up Events

The project team attended five community events to grow awareness about the project. The team had a table with a study area map to discuss challenges and opportunities for walking and biking. A project flyer, including survey link, and tote bags were also available. Events included: Bike the Drive on DuSable Lake Shore Drive (Chicago, IL); Glowing Bike Ride (Lynwood, IL); Ride Illinois Summit (Champaign, IL); Schererville Craft Show (Schereville, IN); and a Town Hall meeting (Lynwood, IL).



Steering Committee and Project Partner Meetings

The Steering Committee and Project Partners each met three times throughout the planning process. The study vision and goals, challenges and opportunities, and the proposed alignments were discussed. The meetings also provided a platform for local municipalities, transportation agencies, and trail organizations to build consensus across state lines. In addition to the development of the trail alignment, the Steering Committee and Project Partners assisted with railroad coordination. The Steering Committee consisted of the following organizations:

- Chicago Heights
- Ford Heights
- Sauk Village
- Lynwood
- Dyer
- Schererville
- SSMMA
- NIRPC
- Cook County DOTH
- Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
- Forest Preserves of Cook and Will County
- Openlands
- Pace Suburban Bus
- South Chicago Heights
- South Shore Trails
- Steger
- Griffith
- Folks on Spokes
- Rails to Trails Conservancy

Focus Groups

Once a potential trail alignment was identified, the project team invited community representatives, local institutions, and business owners located near the trail alignment to attend one of three focus groups. At these focus groups, community members discussed the potential trail alignment, trailhead locations, and trail design features. The groups discussed how the trail extension can address local community needs, and identified potential trail-oriented development locations. Attendees could react to an aerial map of the potential trail alignment and trail-oriented development, and to rendered images of a variety of sections of the trail, potential trailheads, and railroad crossings. Each focus group was followed by a community open house.

Public Survey

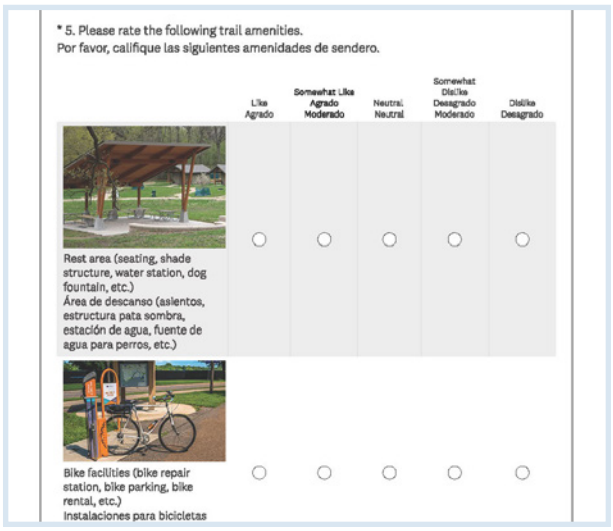
The project team launched a public survey in Fall 2023, which remained open through Winter 2024. The public survey asked respondents to provide feedback on trail amenities, potential trail alignments, potential trailhead locations, and rendered images of a variety of sections of the trail. Respondents had the opportunity to either select a specific community, or to provide feedback for all communities along the potential trail alignment.

Additional Outreach

The project team also presented at a NIRPC's Ped, Pedal & Paddle Committee to further spread awareness of this project and discuss the preferred trail alignment.

Community Open Houses

Following each focus group, all community members had the opportunity to attend a Community Open House. At each open house, the project team shared an aerial map of the potential trail alignment and trail-oriented developments, rendered images of key improvement locations along the trail, potential trailheads, and railroad crossings. During the open house, the project team was available to answer questions and hear community feedback. Open house attendees were also encouraged to provide feedback by completing the public survey.



Engagement Summary

Input received throughout the project influenced the evaluation and development of potential trail alignments. In addition to meetings with the Steering Committee and Project Partners, the project team hosted several community feedback opportunities. This section provides a summary of the community feedback, and how it influenced the OPRT extension proposed trail alignment and potential trail designs.

- 5 Pop-Up Meetings
- 3 Project Partner Meetings
- 1 Public Survey
- 3 Focus Groups
- 3 Stakeholder Meetings
- 1 Study Bus Tour
- 3 Open Houses
- 1 Online Interactive Map

Challenges and Opportunities

Opportunities

- Overall, the majority of community members who responded to the surveys or attended meetings support the rails to trails concept.
- Many community members also support regional trail connections, especially an east-west connection. Potential trail users noted Lake Michigan and other points of interest in Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan as key destinations for cyclists.

Challenges

- Safety is a major concern
  - » The preferred trail extension is next to an active rail line, and potential trail users would like to see pedestrian and bike safety prioritized at trail access points.
  - » Personal safety is also a concern along the trail.
- Some Indiana residents perceive the Illinois-Indiana border as unsafe due to several crime-related incidents, and are concerned that an additional walking and bike trail would also be unsafe.

Looking west along the active and inactive rail corridors at State St

Lincoln Hwy / US Route 30 underpass looking east

Interactive Comment Map

The Social Pinpoint Online Interactive Map received 35 total comments, with 28 comments along the trail alignments. Overall, the community is in support of regional trail connections and of the Rails to Trails concept. One respondent noted that the abandoned railroad is publicly accessible near Dyer Central Park and is often used for mountain biking. However, most have safety concerns where pedestrians and cyclists would have to cross active railroad tracks. Additionally, personal safety is also a concern.

Public Survey

A public survey was available online between November 2023 and March 2024. Of the 126 respondents, 64% live near the trail alignment and 43% and 45% visit the existing Old Plank Road Trail and Pennsy Greenway respectively.

The highest ranked trail amenities are crossing safety improvements, rest area services, and public open space. When asked "How important" are each of the trail amenities, respondents chose 'Important' or 'Very Important' 50% - 70% of the time.

Of safety improvements, high visibility crosswalks, street lighting, wayfinding signage, and pedestrian beacons were most important.

Respondents were also asked about trailhead locations. In general, respondents preferred trailheads with planned programming, especially parks and direct connections to existing community recreational amenities.

SURVEY SUMMARY

Ranking of Trail Amenities

1. Crossing Safety Improvements *(ADA Accessible ramps, high visibility crosswalks, pedestrian beacons)*
2. Rest Area Services *(seating, shade structure, water station, dog fountain)*
3. Public Open Space *(parks and plazas)*
4. Commercial Areas *(dining and shopping)*
5. Bike Facilities *(bike repair station, bike parking, bike rental)*
6. Connections to On-Street Bike Routes
7. Parking Lot
8. Landscaping / Public Art

When asked "how important" are each of these amenities, respondents chose 'Important' or 'Very Important' 50% to 70% of the time.

Feedback on Design Features Shown in Renderings

Street Crossing Improvements (Top 4)

1. High Visibility Crosswalks **(89%)**
2. Street Lighting **(68%)**
3. Wayfinding Signage **(67%)**
4. Pedestrian beacons **(66%)**

Bike Facilities

- Dedicated Bike Lanes **(90%)**
- Buffered Bike Lanes **(89%)**

Trailhead Locations *(Like or Somewhat Like)*

- New OPRT Eastern Trailhead in Schererville, IN **(90%)**
- Central Park connection in Dyer **(80%)**
- Future Recreation space in Sauk Village Comprehensive Plan north of Sauk Trail and west of US30 **(76%)**
- Torrence Ave **(73%)**
- Sauk Village Park near water tower and Wagoner Elementary **(64%)**
- Future Park in Sauk Village's Comprehensive Plan on Vacant land near Deer Creek **(55%)**
- State St **(54%)**
- Future Park in Ford Heights' Strategic Plan on Vacant land south of 17th St **(54%)**
- Wentworth St **(49%)**

Focus Groups and Open Houses

Chicago Heights

Focus group + open house: March 6, 2024.

Opportunities

- Interest in access to local recreational trails and support for of projects that promote walking and cycling in Chicago Heights. Several attendees noted key connections, including the VA Home, Sauk Trail, and access to public bus stop near the trail.
- One attendee noted there is a vacant lot south of Hickory St, and suggested that it could be utilized for the trail alignment.

Challenges

- Concerns about personal safety at trailheads and parks, and suggested surveillance at trailheads, lighting, and Emergency Call Boxes.
- Some attendees considered the active railroad a safety concern, especially at 16th St, State St, and Edgewood Ave.
- Trail maintenance is a priority. Many noted the existing OPRT is not properly maintained, and are concerned the trail extension will also not be well maintained.

Sauk Village, Ford Heights, and Lynwood

Focus group + open house: October 25, 2023.

Opportunities

- Interest in access to local recreational trails and other recreational opportunities. Would like to see vacant land along the trail alignment used for parks and other recreational opportunities, such as skate parks, dog parks, etc. One attendee advocated for north-south connectivity to the trail extension.
- One attendee suggested that wayfinding signs along the trail include key destinations in the community.

Challenges

- Concerns about personal safety at trailheads and parks, and suggested solar-powered lighting and Emergency Call Boxes.
- Concerns about maintenance especially under the Lynwood Underpass.

Dyer, Schererville, and Griffith

Focus group + open house: February 8, 2024.

Opportunities

- Interest in access to local recreational trails. Several attendees noted key connections, including the new Metra South Shore Station and Briar Cove.
- Many drive to recreational trails and would like to see a parking lot at the Airport Rd trailhead, instead of a pocket park.
- Many attendees stressed the importance of safety features in the trail design including considering a bridge over railroad track crossings at Edmond Dr and addressing sidewalk gaps.
- Interest in additional trail amenities including benches, solar-powered lighting, public art, and water fountains.
- Interest in a connection to Erie Lackawana.

Challenges

- Concerns the trail extension will contribute to perceived safety issues along the IL-IN border, and encouraged the project team to consider a trail gap to limit pedestrians and cyclists crossing state lines.
- Land along the trail extension is potentially a brownfield. An analysis to rule out soil toxicity before trail construction is recommended.

Inactive rail corridor at the Plum Creek crossing (east of Sheffield Avenue in Indiana)

4 section Trail Extension Recommendations

TRAIL RECOMMENDATIONS

A main objective of this extension feasibility study is to identify several alignments that would create a continuous trail between the existing eastern terminus of the OPRT, at the Thorn Creek Trail in Chicago Heights, Illinois, and the Pennsy Greenway in Schererville, Indiana.

Throughout the study process, six alignment options were identified to complete the trail network. The different alignment options were developed from a comprehensive planning process that included research and analysis through the Existing Conditions Report phase, on-the-ground site visits, community and stakeholder outreach, and Project Partner and Steering Committee input.

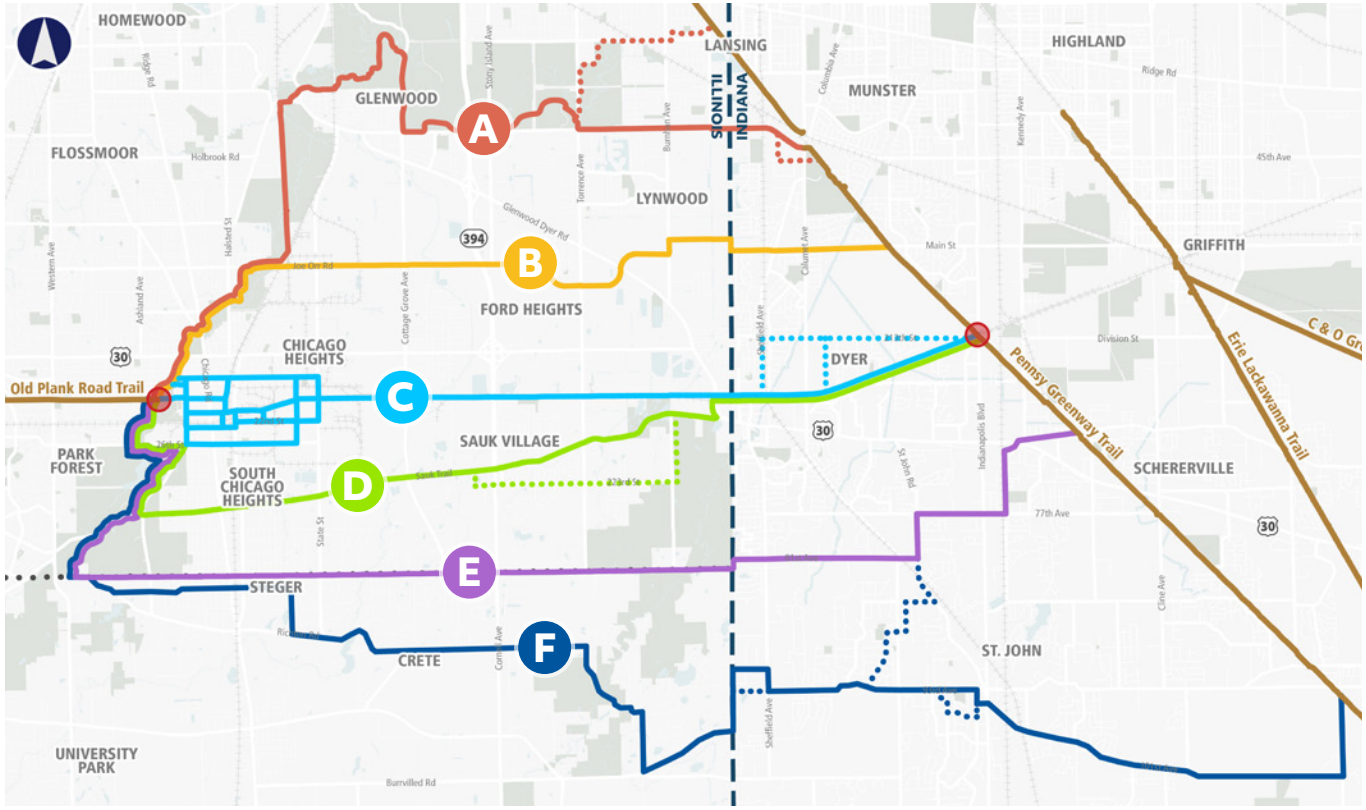
Railroad crossing on 23rd Street in Chicago Heights

Trail Alignment Options Overview

The six conceptual alignments are listed below and shown on the map to the right. Each is further detailed on the following pages.

- **A** Alignment #1: Brownell Woods
- **B** Alignment #2: Joe Orr Road
- **C** Alignment #3: Inactive Norfolk Southern Railroad Tracks
- **D** Alignment #4: Sauk Trail
- **E** Alignment #5: Steger Road
- **F** Alignment #6: 35th Street > Richton Road > 93rd Avenue > 101st Street

Figure 4. Trail Alignment Options



Alignment A: Brownell Woods

The Brownell Woods alignment travels the furthest north and primarily takes advantage of existing trails in Cook County forest preserves (e.g., Thorn Creek trail system). This option provides a more scenic, low-stress experience for pedestrians and bicyclists of all abilities, however the connection eastward to the Pennsy Trail is more lengthy.

Alignment Routing | Length: ~13 miles

Existing OPRT eastern terminus > Thorn Creek Trail System > Glenwood Lansing Road > 45th Street > Pennsy Greenway Trail (near Calumet Avenue)

*Alternate Option 1: At Torrence Ave, continue traveling north on the Thorn Creek Trail System. Then take 186th St > Walter St > Shultz Dr > Wentworth Ave > Pennsy Greenway Trail.

**Alternate Option 2: On 45th St, travel south on existing sidepath near GE Chicago Distribution Center. Travel east on Superior Ave > Pennsy Greenway Trail.

Challenges / Barriers

- Glenwood-Lansing Road: This segment has a high traffic volume (13,500 ADT) and significant ROW constrictions and encroachments. Eagle Academy School and Van Der Griend Farm Stand are the biggest pinch points. The north side seems more feasible.
- Connection into Pennsy Greenway near Calumet/45th: Slight discontinuity in Pennsy Greenway trail.
- Requires several railroad track crossings.
- Major Intersection Crossings: Several crossings required at major intersections with wide footprints and heavy traffic volumes (Chicago Rd, Halsted St, Joe Orr Rd, Torrence Ave, Burnham Ave, Calumet Ave).

Alignment B: Joe Orr Road

While not as far north as the Brownell Woods alignment (A), the Joe Orr alignment still requires a nearly 2.5 mile detour via the Thorn Creek trail system to reach Joe Orr Road. This option provides a mixture between utilizing an existing, low-stress trail system and developing a new sidepath on a higher stress, higher trafficked roadway.

Alignment Routing | Length: ~10 miles

Existing OPRT eastern terminus > Thorn Creek Trail System > Joe Orr Road > Burnham Avenue > 204th Street > New Roadway into Indiana > Main Street > Pennsy Greenway Trail (at Main Street)

*Requires ROW acquisition

Challenges / Barriers

- Joe Orr Road: The right-of-way varies but there would likely be some areas where acquisition is required. Joe Orr is proposed to be extended between Torrence and Burnham, and the project is in the right-of-way acquisition stage. A sidepath is not included as part of this project; however, it appears that space is available to install one within the right-of-way.
- Connection into Indiana: There is no current roadway extending east of 204th St across state borders into Indiana. A road adjacent to the airport has been platted but not built so right-of-way is available, and can potentially be used for a path if on-street is not desired.
- Requires several railroad track crossings.
- Major Intersection Crossings: Several crossings required at major intersections with wide footprints and heavy traffic volumes (State St, Torrence Ave, Burnham Ave, Calumet Ave).

Alignment C: Inactive Norfolk Southern Railroad Tracks

The most direct and low-stress route is to utilize inactive Norfolk Southern (NS) Railroad Tracks for the majority of the trail. An on-street path would be needed through Chicago Heights until the NS tracks are reached (see pages 38-39 for a more in-depth review of the on-street alignments).

Alignment Routing | Length: ~9.75 miles

Existing OPRT eastern terminus > Thorn Creek Trail System > 16th Street > State Street > Inactive rail line > Pennsy Greenway Trail (at Airport Road)

Challenges / Barriers

- 16th Street: The street width varies, providing space for marked shared lanes or potentially a bike lane. These bike facilities would seem adequate due to the low traffic volume. A sidepath would likely require property acquisition.
- State Street: A sidepath would be recommended on State Street. Crossing seven Union Pacific railroad tracks would be required. Utilizing Wentworth instead of State Street was explored, but there is a future development which makes this infeasible.
- Inactive Norfolk Southern (NS) Railroad Tracks: Extensive coordination with NS and easement would be needed for entire stretch of the inactive railroad tracks.
- Further reviews of structures would be needed, potentially new bridges (see pages 40-41 on for more details on environmental crossings).

Alignment D: Sauk Trail

This route would construct a new sidepath along Sauk Trail. While this is also a fairly direct route, a sidepath would require right-of-way acquisition, specifically in locations where there is limited potential to easily acquire right-of-way. Additionally, it would not be a comfortable or low-stress route, due to intersection crossings and roadway traffic volumes.

Alignment Routing | Length: ~12 miles

Existing OPRT eastern terminus > Thorn Creek Trail System > Sauk Trail > US 30 / Lincoln Hwy > Inactive railroad tracks

*Alternate Option 1: From Thorn Creek Trail System, travel west on Sauk Trail to Sauk Point Dr. Travel south on Sauk Point Dr > 223rd St > Burnham Ave > Sauk Trail > US 30 > Inactive railroad tracks.

Challenges / Barriers

- Challenging right-of-way acquisition required.
- Requires railroad track crossings.
- Major Intersection Crossings: Several crossings are required at major intersections with wide footprints and heavy traffic volumes (Chicago Rd, State St, Collage Grove Expwy, Torrence Ave)

Alignment E: Steger Road

This route would construct a new sidepath along Steger Road. Similar to Alignment D, there would be significant right-of-way acquisition required. Additionally, user comfort would be low utilizing this route for a long distance, due to proximity of traffic and frequent intersections. This would also require traveling 2.5 miles along Thorn Creek from the OPRT terminus to this trail connection at Steger Road.

Alignment Routing | Length: ~16 miles

Existing OPRT eastern terminus > Thorn Creek Trail System (through various forest preserves) > Steger Road > Patterson Street (Indiana) > 77th Avenue > Alexander Street > Old Lincoln Highway > Pennsy Greenway Trail (at Old Lincoln Hwy)

*Alternate Option 1: From Thorn Creek Trail System, travel west on Sauk Trail to Sauk Point Dr. Travel south on Sauk Point Dr > 223rd St > Burnham Ave > Sauk Trail > US 30 > Inactive railroad tracks.

Challenges / Barriers

- Challenging right-of-way acquisition required.
- Requires railroad track crossings.
- Major Intersection Crossings: Several crossings are required at major intersections with wide footprints and heavy traffic volumes (Chicago Rd, State St, Collage Grove Expwy, Torrence Ave, Wicker Ave, US-30)

Alignment F: 35th Street > Richton Road > 93rd Avenue > 101st Street

This route provides a more low-stress route through many residential areas. It is one of the least direct, though, and require traveling 2.5 miles along Thorn Creek from the OPRT terminus to this trail connection at Steger Road.

Alignment Routing | Length: ~22 miles

Existing OPRT eastern terminus > Thorn Creek Trail System (through various forest preserves) > Steger Road > Richton Road > 235th Street/35th Street > Dorsetshire Drive > Richton Road > Old Post Road > Burville Road > State Line Road > 91st Avenue > Sheffield Avenue > 93rd Avenue > Kelliman Street > School Street > Joliet/101st Avenue > Joliet/101st Avenue > Clark Road > Pennsy Greenway Trail (at Clark Road)

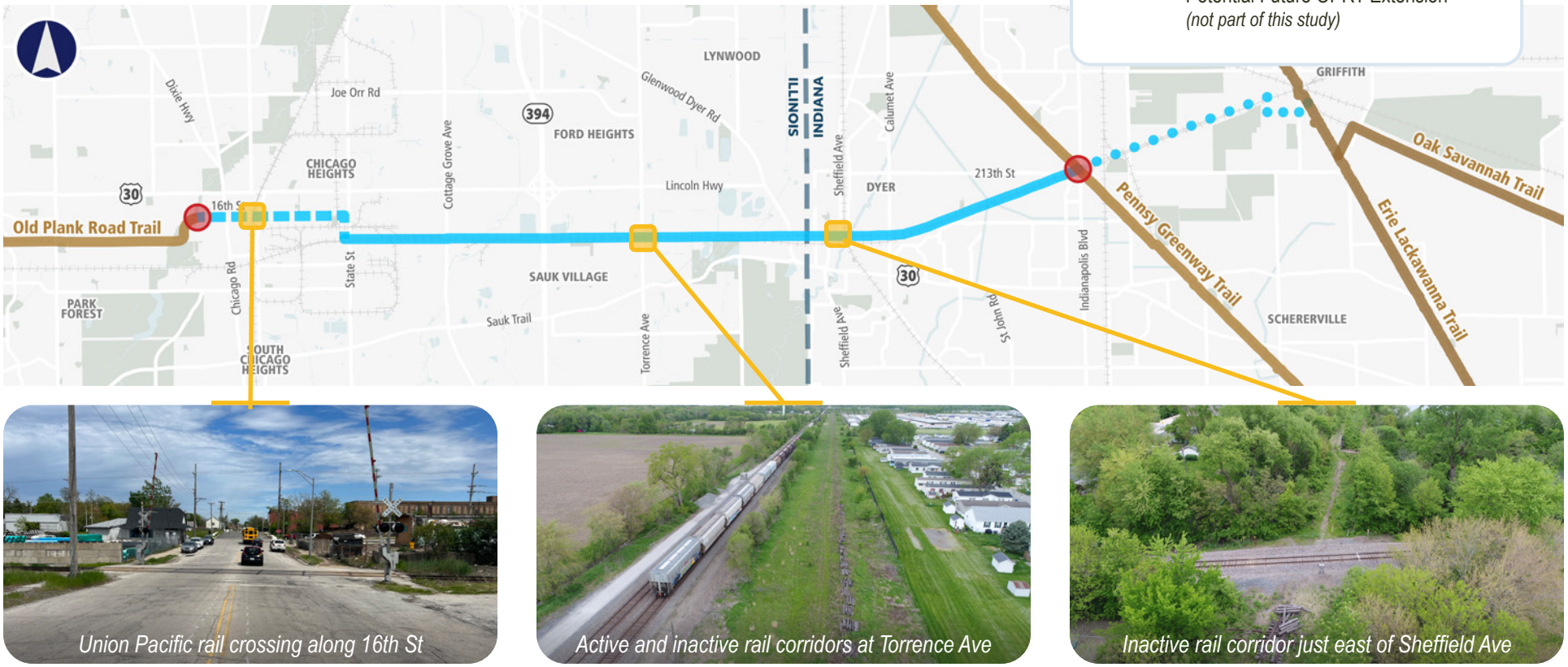
Challenges / Barriers

- Challenging right-of-way acquisition required.
- Requires railroad track crossings.
- Several major intersection crossings.

Preferred Alignment

After further analysis of each alignment option and additional stakeholder/community feedback, Alignment C: Inactive Norfolk Southern Railroad Tracks was selected as the preferred alignment. This alignment has the shortest distance connecting the existing eastern terminus of the OPRT and the Pennsy Greenway, as well as dedicated space already along the inactive rail line for the majority of the alignment. This alignment was also the most highly supported at community outreach events. An additional future connection to the Erie Lackawanna Trail and Oak Savannah Trail can be implemented more seamlessly with this particular alignment, further strengthening regional connectivity. See **Appendix B** for more detailed design drawings.

Figure 5. Preferred Alignment



Union Pacific rail crossing along 16th St

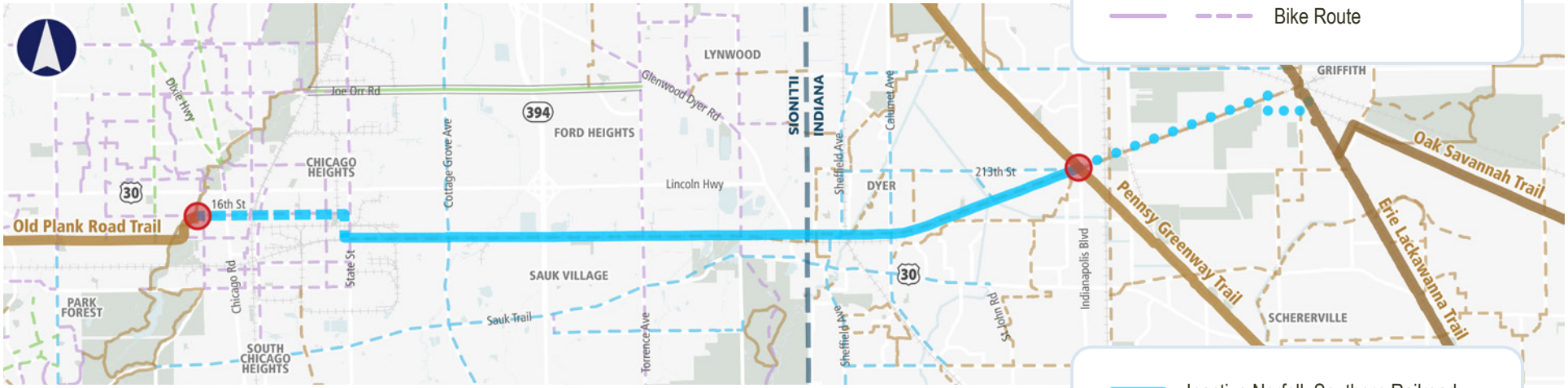
Active and inactive rail corridors at Torrence Ave

Inactive rail corridor just east of Sheffield Ave

Preferred Alignment Connectivity to Planned and Existing Bike Network

The preferred alignment has the potential to increase local connectivity for people biking or walking based on existing and planned local and regional bike facilities, as seen in **Figure 6**. This particular area in the region is currently a “bicycling desert” with little to no current bike connectivity. However, this alignment has the opportunity to fill in a regional gap, as well as provide a key corridor for local existing and planned facilities to connect. These include routes along Cottage Grove Ave, Torrence Ave, Sheffield Ave, and Calumet Ave.

Figure 6. Preferred Alignment Connectivity to Planned and Existing Bike Network



On-Street Alignment Considerations

OPRT Existing Terminus to Wentworth Avenue

The inactive Norfolk Southern railroad rail corridor is discontinuous through the City of Chicago Heights. Thus, an on-street bike route is necessary to connect the existing terminus of the Old Plank Road Trail and the west end of the inactive rail corridor. Several options were considered including:

Alternate 1: Thorn Creek Trail System > 16th Street > State Street > Inactive rail line

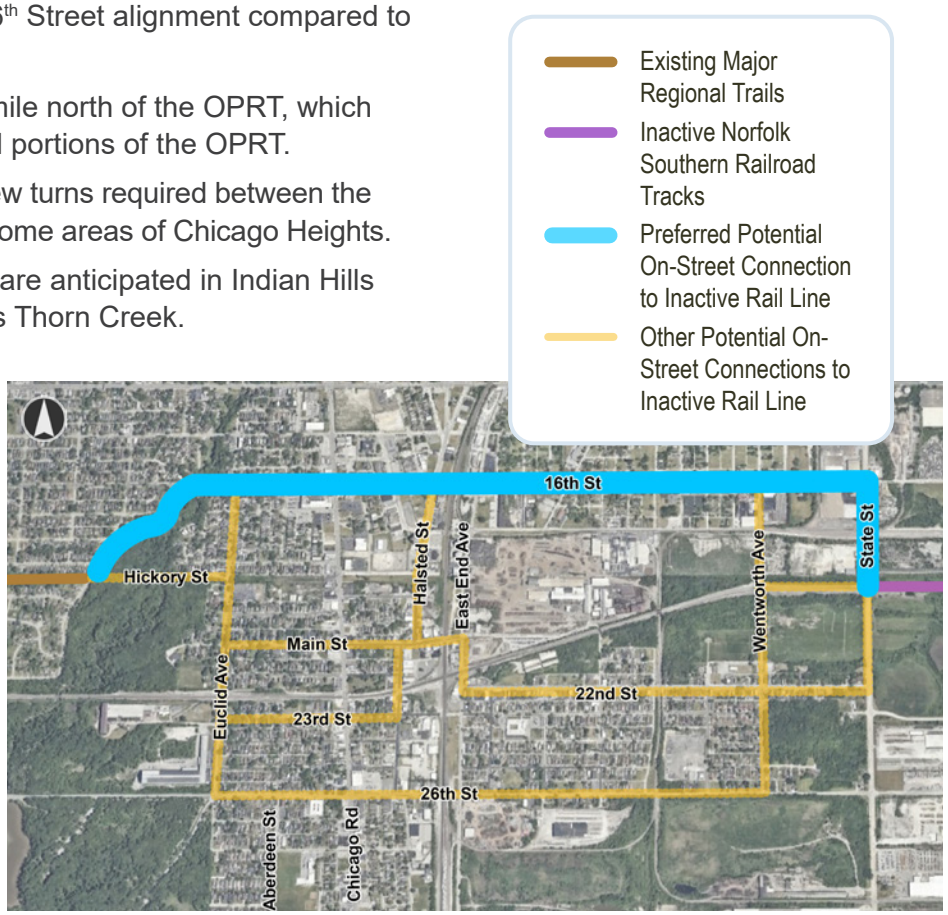
Alternate 2: Thorn Creek Trail System (cross at 16th St or 16th Pl to Euclid, travel south on Euclid) > Main Street > Cross railroad tracks near Butler Avenue > Travel alongside railroad tracks to State Street > Inactive rail line

Alternate 3: Thorn Creek Trail System (cross at 26th, travel north on Euclid) > 23rd Street > East End Avenue > 22nd Street > State Street > Inactive rail line

Alternate 4: Thorn Creek Trail System (cross at 26th, travel east on Euclid) > Wentworth Avenue > 22nd Street > State Street > Inactive rail line

The preferred route was determined to be Alternate 1, which utilizes 16th Street as the major east-west route between the Thorn Creek Trail and State Street. Advantages of the 16th Street alignment compared to other potential on-street routes are as follows:

- **Minimal Out-Of-Way Travel:** 16th Street is only about one-quarter of a mile north of the OPRT, which minimizes the distance cyclists need to travel between the off-street trail portions of the OPRT.
- **Intuitive Wayfinding:** A route through 16th Street is easy to follow, with few turns required between the trail segments. The route avoids the one-way streets that are present in some areas of Chicago Heights.
- **Limited Environmental Impacts:** No tree removals or wetland impacts are anticipated in Indian Hills Woods because the alignment would use the 16th Street bridge to cross Thorn Creek.
- **Relatively Low Cost:** Because this route largely takes advantage of existing infrastructure, construction costs are minimized.
- **Protected Major Street Crossings:** Cyclists will be able to easily and safely cross busy streets.16th Street is signal controlled at Chicago Road and all-way stop-controlled at Halsted Street, East End Avenue, Center Avenue, Shields Avenue, and Wentworth Avenue.
- **Connectivity to Local Destinations:** 16th Street runs through the heart of Chicago Heights, and passes School District 170 offices, city hall, the Pace Transportation Center, and other key community destinations.
- **Low Traffic Volumes:** Traffic on 16th Street averages less than 1,500 vehicles per day, so cyclists can comfortably ride on-street.



Looking west along 16th Street between Aberdeen and Chicago

Looking west along 16th Street at Chicago Heights City Hall

Looking east along 16th Street near Hodges Park

Wentworth Avenue near 17th Street and railroad crossing

Wentworth Avenue to State / Inactive Norfolk Southern Right-of-Way

Two options were considered between the intersection of 16th Street / Wentworth Avenue and State Street / Norfolk Southern right-of-way. Initially, consideration was given to routing the OPRT along Wentworth Avenue between 16th Street and the railroad right-of-way. However, Nufarm is planning an expansion, which would extend across and close Wentworth Avenue. The alternate route continues along 16th Street between Wentworth Avenue and State Street and down State Street between 16th and the Norfolk Southern rail corridor. Considerations are described below:

- A sidepath is desirable along 16th Street because of the heavy utilization of on-street parking west of State Street.
- A sidepath would likely be on the south side of 16th Street because there is diagonal parking present on the north side west of State Street.
- Space within the parkway on 16th Street is limited. It may be necessary to acquire right-of-way and/or relocate the south curb a few feet to the north to provide space for a path. There are some grading/cross-slope issues that need to be addressed east of Wentworth Avenue.
- The west side of State Street was selected for a sidepath because a pedestrian refuge island could more easily be installed within the existing roadway geometry near the NS right-way than at the State/16th intersection.
- There are some grading challenges on the west side of State Street that could require construction of a retaining wall.
- There is the potential for right-of-way acquisition on the west side of State Street.
- The crossing of seven Union Pacific tracks is a challenge. However, these tracks are perpendicular to the roadway, operate at very low speed, and carry minimal train traffic. Reconfiguration/relocation of the existing rail crossing equipment and the installation of new pedestrian gates will be required.

Additional Evaluations

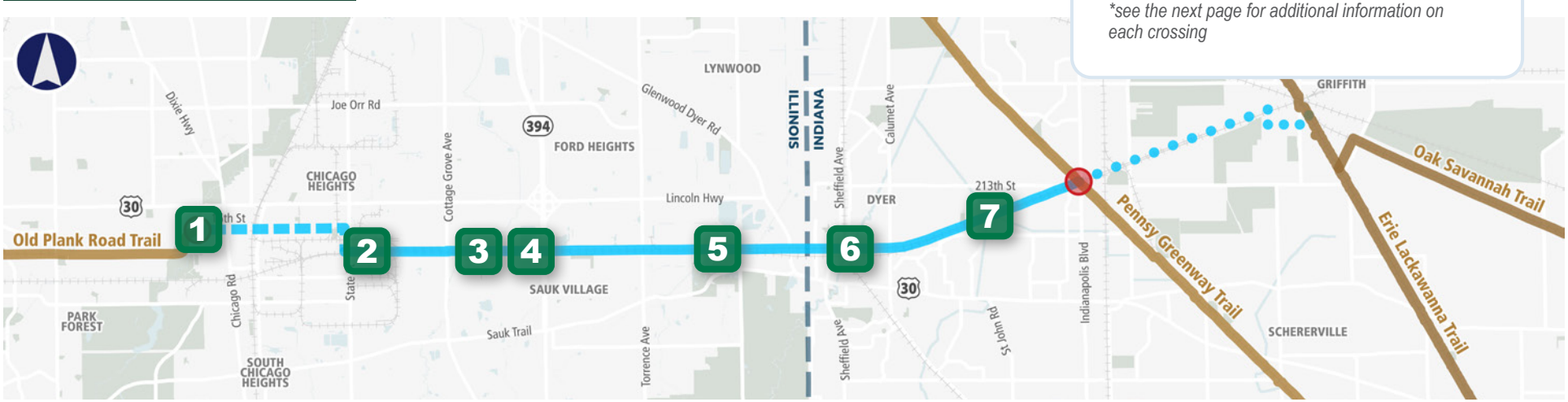
- **23rd Street:** The street does not have controlled crossing at Chicago Rd or East End Ave. It is closed at the railroad tracks The street is one-way westbound and narrow. Parking reductions would be necessary at least on one side of the street to convert to two-way.
- **26th Street:** A bike route on this street would be a 1-mile detour from the trail and traffic volume is high (5,000 ADT).
- **Main Street:** No controlled crossing at Chicago Rd or East End Ave. The street is one-way and too narrow. Parking reductions are needed on at least one side of street to convert to two-way.

Environmental Considerations

A field analysis was conducted along the preferred alignment noting areas where additional environmental considerations may need further attention in the design phases of the OPRT extension, primarily creek crossings. The alignment crosses three creeks and three ditches that carry water beneath existing structures in varying conditions. Where possible, utilizing these existing structures may reduce the cost and environmental impact of the OPRT construction. When construction on a structure is required, it may be possible to modify the structure without replacing it entirely, otherwise a full replacement of the structure may be required.

Engineering and construction of the OPRT extension would follow guidelines and regulations outlined by United States Army Corps of Engineers, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Indiana Department of Environmental Management and local agencies designed to minimize the environmental impact of construction to wetlands and open waters and mitigate for unavoidable impacts when they occur.

Figure 7. Creek Crossing Locations



1 *Thorn Creek*

The OPRT alignment over Thorn Creek would utilize the existing bridge. It is anticipated that no major construction will be needed at this crossing, only striping and signing to accommodate bikes.

2 *Third Creek*

The alignment over Third Creek would cross the single span concrete box bream bridge. Visual inspection of the bridge indicates the bridge to be in poor condition. A full structure replacement is suggested.

3 *Deer Creek*

The alignment over Deer Creek would cross a five span ballasted deck timber trestle. At this location a deck replacement is suggested.

4 *Unnamed Ditch*

The alignment over this ditch crosses two cell concrete box culverts in good condition. It is anticipated that only minor modifications will be needed at this crossing to accommodate the OPRT extension.

5 *Lansing Ditch*

The alignment over Lansing Ditch crosses a three span open deck steel beam. The proposed scope of work for improvement at this location includes a deck replacement.

6 *Plum Creek*

The alignment over Plum Creek crosses a Single Span Steel Deck Girder structure. It is anticipated that no major construction will be needed at this crossing, only striping and signing to accommodate bikes.

7 *Dyer Ditch*

The alignment over Dyer Ditch crosses a Single Span Ballasted Beam Span. The proposed scope of work at this location includes a deck replacement.

Railroad and Utility Coordination

As seen in **Figure 8** (next page), the preferred alignment crosses active railroad tracks at three locations. Additionally the preferred alignment would be within an inactive railroad right-of-way. Therefore, coordination with railroad and utility companies was initiated as part of this study. Coordination was initiated with Norfolk Southern (NS), Enbridge, Inc. (Enbridge), CSX Transportation, Inc. (CSXT), Wisconsin Central Ltd. (WCL/Parent company is CN) and Union Pacific (UP) to obtain existing information, agreement requirements, and start entering into agreements. Additionally, a JULIE request was made to acquire information on underground utilities. This request provided information regarding major pipelines within the potential trail alignment. These are shown in the proposed trail alignment concept exhibits in **Appendix B**.

The preferred alignment within an inactive railroad right-of-way would typically require an easement agreement, purchase of the property, or abandonment by the railroad. However, a portion of the NS property may transfer to Enbridge, and a portion of the property would remain with NS. Enbridge has a lease agreement with NS that was entered when Enbridge installed Pipe 78 along the inactive rail corridor. The term of the lease ends in 2034 with the option for Enbridge to purchase the property from NS. With the pending transfer of ownership agreement in place, Cook County prepared a Letter of Intent Agreement (LOI) to initiate with both NS and Enbridge an agreement to utilize the inactive rail corridor and proceed with the preliminary engineering study (Phase I). As of the completion of this feasibility study report, the LOI has not been executed.

Enbridge will require a Crossing Application and Land Use Request for work on Enbridge property. There are no application or plan review costs but there could be costs for Enbridge observation during construction.

Base maps with aerials and right-of-way information of the preferred trail alignment were provided to NS Real Estate and Enbridge Grade Crossing group for review. NS did not provide a review of the submittal. Enbridge provided marked pipeline information and comments.

UP railroad crossing at 16th Street in Chicago Heights, IL

CN railroad crossing with the Pennsy Greenway Trail in Indiana

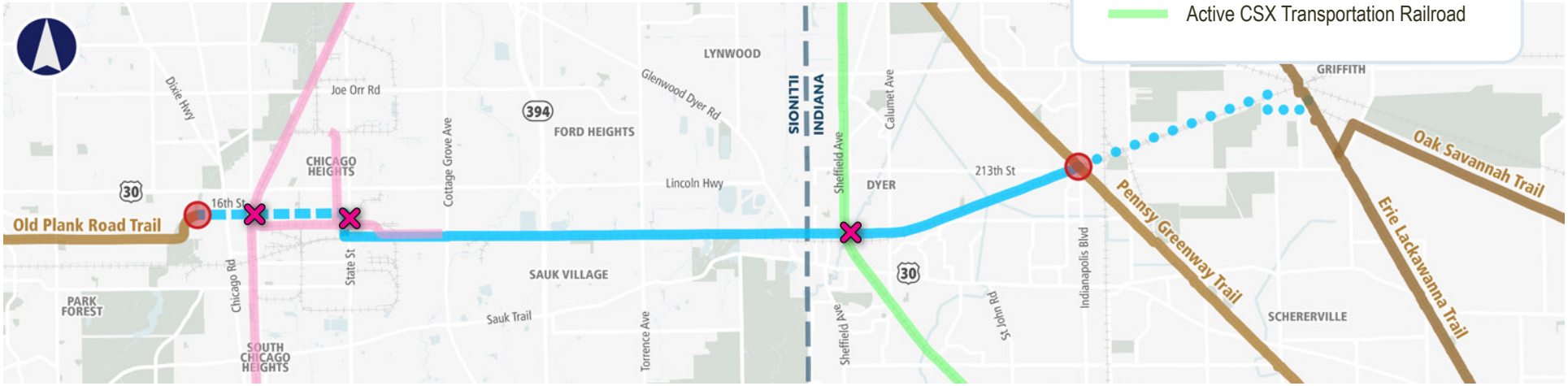
Enbridge does not take exception to the proposed scope of work unless a deep excavation is required in close proximity to a pipeline.

The proposed trail extension crosses CSXT and UP tracks as shown in **Figure 8**. CSXT Public Projects was notified of the project and provided an exhibit with proposed alignments for crossing CSXT. Proposed path work within CSXT property may require a Preliminary Engineering (PE) Agreement for the railroad plan review and design depending on the level of impact and a Construction Engineering and Inspection (CE&I) Agreement for the construction phase.

UP was notified of the project through the Public Projects Portal. UP will require a Reimbursement Agreement (RA) to be reimbursed for plan reviews. After entering into a RA, a field Diagnostic Team meeting will be conducted with stakeholders to assess the condition of the crossing(s) and proposed scope of work.

The preferred alignment currently does not impact WCL/CN. Coordination with WCL/CN was to confirm property ownership.

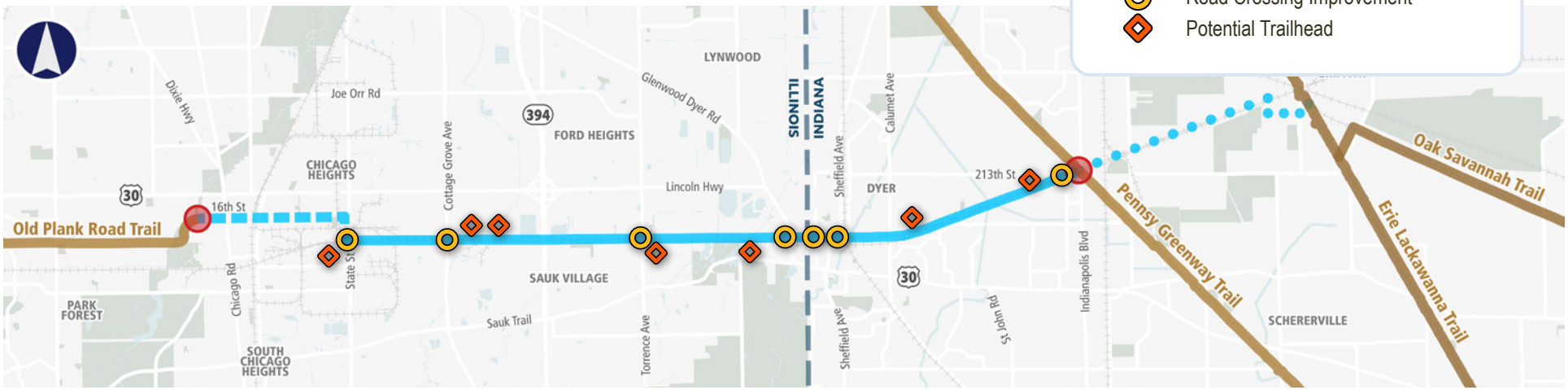
Figure 8. Preferred Alignment Railroad Crossings



Infrastructure Improvements

Some potential pedestrian and bicycle-friendly improvements at key crossing locations along the preferred alignment were identified based on community engagement findings, existing conditions review, and evaluation of the alignments. The locations are highlighted in **Figure 9**. Most improvement recommendations will need further engineering study and may require coordination and approval from the Forest Preserves of Cook County, Illinois Department of Transportation, Cook County, or local municipalities. Some additional visualizations of key locations are included on the following pages.

Figure 9. Crossing Improvement Locations



Locations with Visualizations (see pages 46-53

- *State Street | Cook County jurisdiction*
- *Cottage Grove Avenue | Cook County jurisdiction*
- *Torrence Avenue | IDOT jurisdiction*
- *Old Lincoln Highway | IDOT jurisdiction*
- *Lake Street | Local jurisdiction*
- *Sheffield Avenue | Local jurisdiction*
- *Airport Road | Local jurisdiction*

Potential Improvements Toolkit

The images below show potential design tools that could be applied along the entire preferred alignment, when and where appropriate, and are shown on the following pages in visual representations of future trail improvements. Implementing a variety of these tools in conjunction with one another can help ensure a safer, more enjoyable experience for all users accessing the OPRT. In many cases, additional study and approval will be needed before implementing any improvement.

Conventional Bike Lanes

Designates an exclusive space for bicyclists using pavement markings and signage. The bike lane is located adjacent to vehicular travel lanes and flows in the same direction as traffic.

Image Source: Scott Willis, WAER News

Buffered Bike Lanes

Like conventional bike lanes, but paired with a designated buffer space separating the bicycle lane from the adjacent motor vehicle travel lane and/ or parking lane.

Image Source: NYC Street Design Guide

Bike Crossing Markings

Intersection crossing markings guide the path of cyclists through the intersection and alert drivers to the presence of cyclists. These makings can be colored green in high-traffic areas to further alert motorists and cyclists of potential conflicts.

Source: Roseburg, OR News-Review

High Visibility Crosswalks and ADA Accommodations

High visibility crosswalks increase awareness of crossing paths. Curb ramps enable people in wheel chairs to cross and detectable warning pads direct people with visual impairments through crosswalks.

Bicycle / Pedestrian Crossing Signs

Pedestrian and/or bicycle crossing signs warn drivers that a school, pedestrian or bicycle crossing is ahead. “Must stop for pedestrians in crosswalk” signage can also be used.

Image Source: NACTO

Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon

Rectangular rapid flash beacons (RRFBs) are highly visible, using flashing yellow LED lights to supplement standard pedestrian crossing warning signs at mid-block and other unsignalized crossing locations.

Raised Crosswalk

Typically serve as a tool for traffic calming by bringing the level of the roadway to that of the sidewalk. They also force vehicles to slow down before passing over the crosswalk while also providing a level pedestrian or bicyclist path of travel from curb to curb.

Image Source: Rural Design Guide

Wayfinding Decision Signage

Signage helps people walking and biking to navigate to key destinations along preferred routes. Decision signage is typically placed at the junction of multiple destinations. Signage should provide distance, destination, and directional information.

Trail Maps / Kiosks

Map kiosks offer an easy way to help people navigate their way through a large trail system, as well as to connect to nearby destinations or sites of interest. Kiosks should be placed where individuals can stop and pull off to the side of the trail when viewing.

Source: Mount Vernon Parks, WA

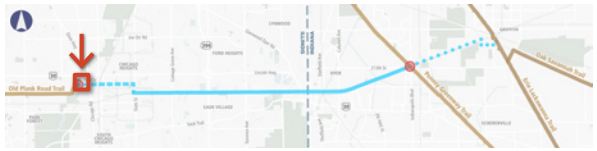
Bike Lanes at Intersections

Shown on 16th Street | Chicago Heights, IL

between Euclid and Aberdeen

Existing Conditions

PREFERRED ALIGNMENT LOCATOR MAP



Potential Future Conditions

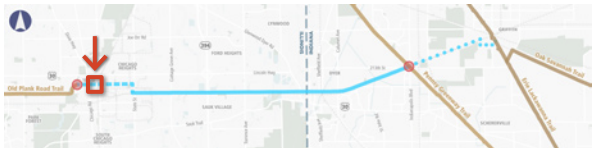
Buffered Bike Lanes

Shown on 16th Street | Chicago Heights, IL

between Vincennes and Oak

Existing Conditions

PREFERRED ALIGNMENT LOCATOR MAP



Potential Future Conditions

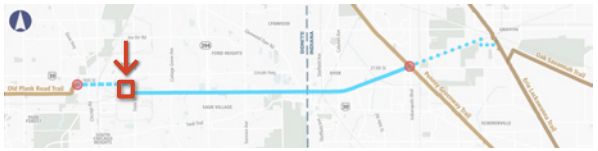
Trailhead

Shown at Wentworth Ave
Chicago Heights, IL

Note: Wentworth Avenue is no longer in the preferred alignment, however improvements in this visualization can be applied to other locations.

Existing Conditions

PREFERRED ALIGNMENT LOCATOR MAP



Potential Future Conditions

Trail-Oriented Development (TrOD) Opportunity Area

Shown at Torrence Ave
Sauk Village, IL

Existing Conditions

PREFERRED ALIGNMENT LOCATOR MAP

Potential Future Conditions

New OPRT Extension

Trail Entrance with Select Amenities

Trail-Oriented Development (TrOD) Opportunity

Accessible Parking Lot

Pedestrian Crossing Improvement

Shown at Torrence Ave
Sauk Village, IL

Existing Conditions

PREFERRED ALIGNMENT LOCATOR MAP

Potential Future Conditions

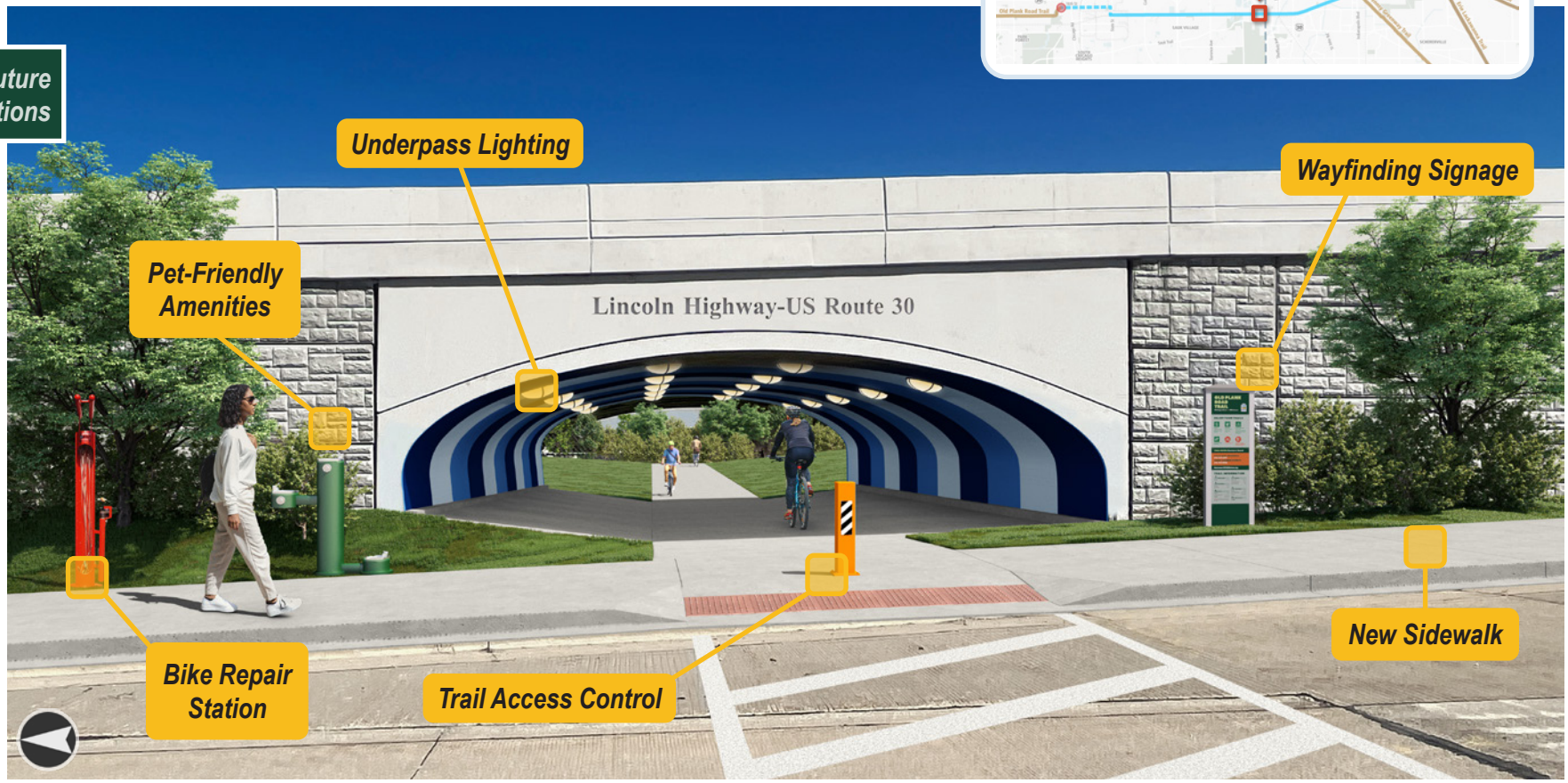
Underpass

Shown at Lincoln Highway – US Route 30
Lynwood, IL

Existing Conditions

PREFERRED ALIGNMENT LOCATOR MAP

Potential Future Conditions

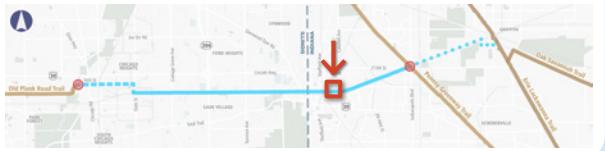


Connection to Community-Oriented Space

Shown near Central Park
Dyer, IN

Existing Conditions

PREFERRED ALIGNMENT LOCATOR MAP



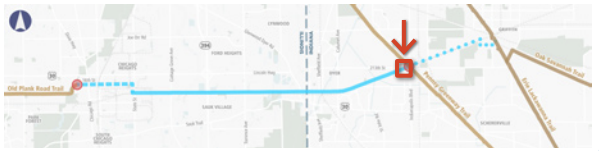
Potential Future Conditions

Regional Trail Connection

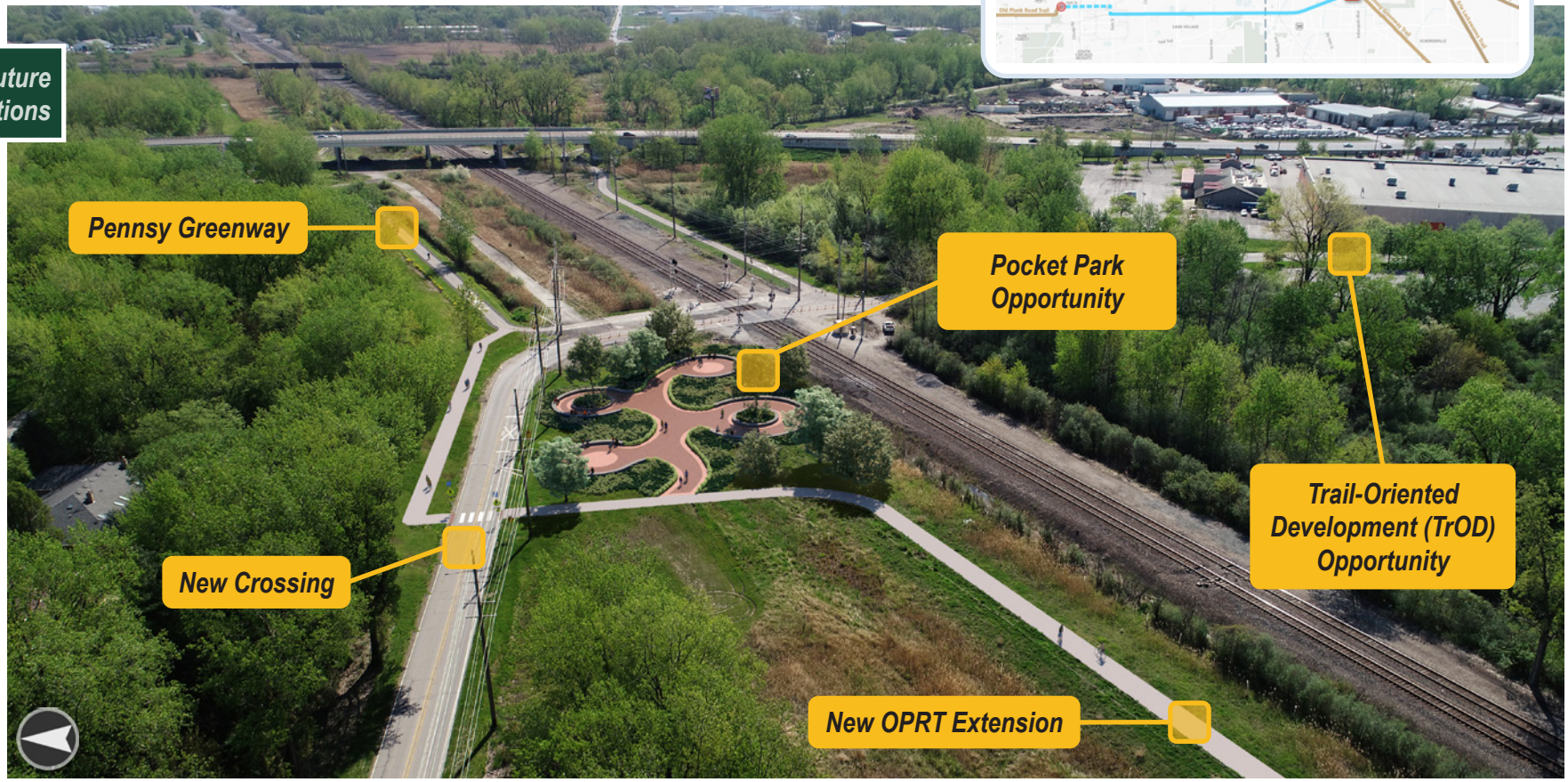
Shown at Pennsy Greenway Trail / Eagle Dr
Schererville, IN

Existing Conditions

PREFERRED ALIGNMENT LOCATOR MAP



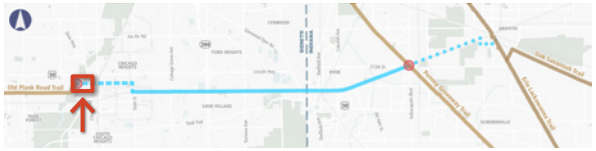
Potential Future Conditions



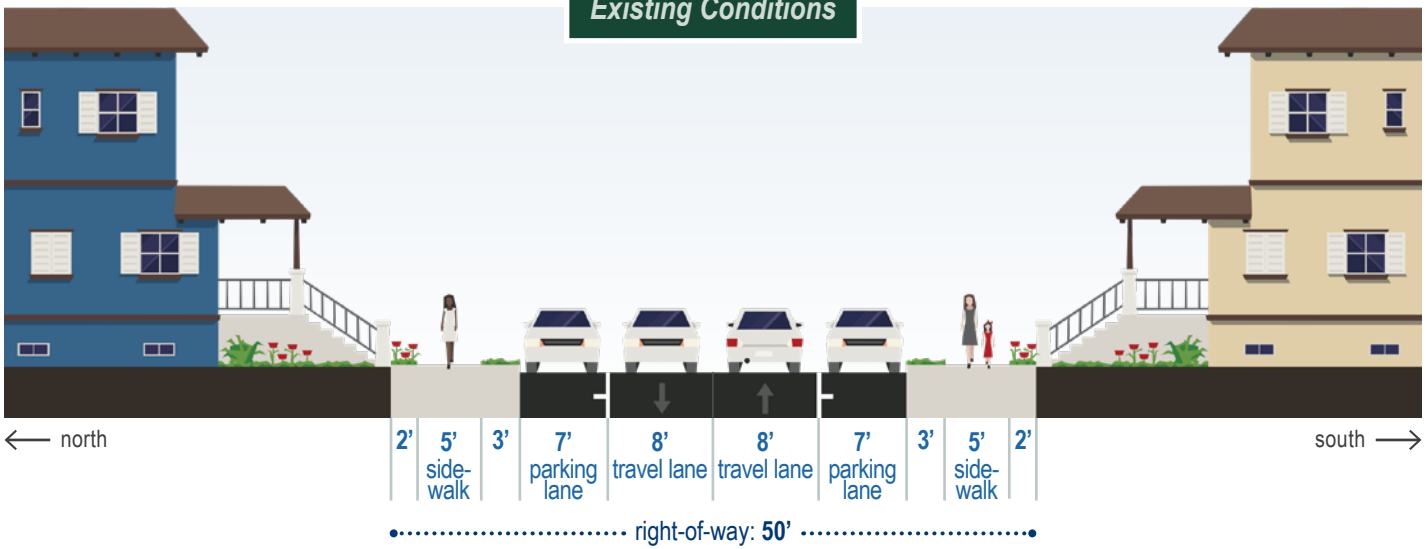
16th Street | proposed bike lanes

Between Euclid and Chicago
Chicago Heights, IL

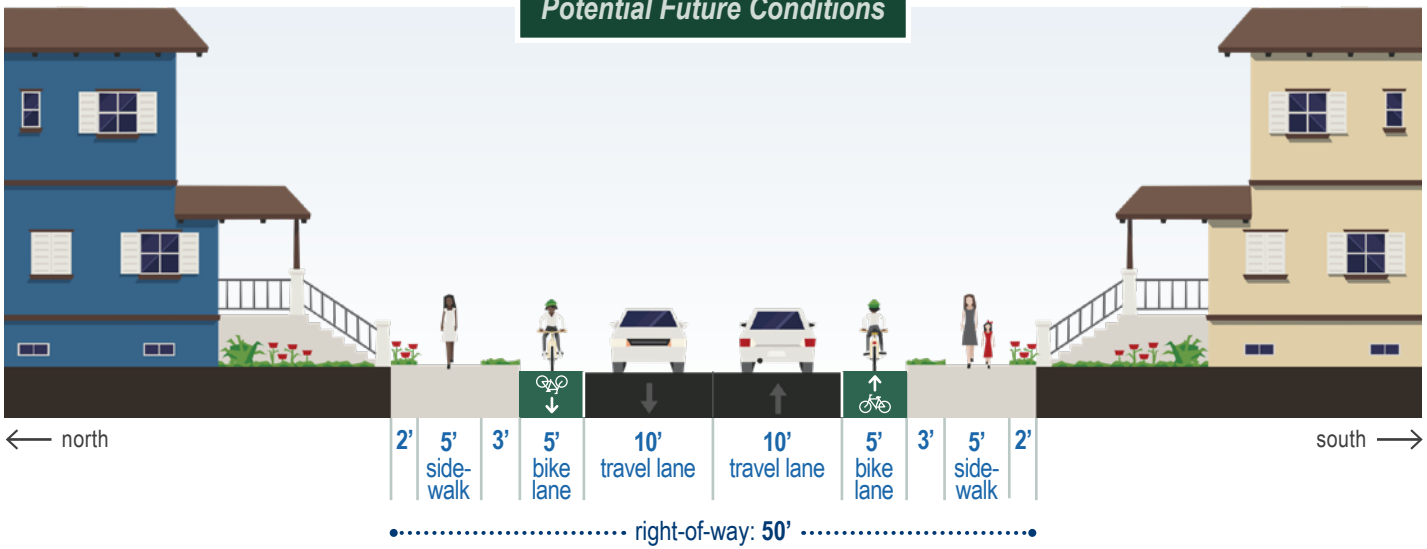
PREFERRED ALIGNMENT LOCATOR MAP



Existing Conditions



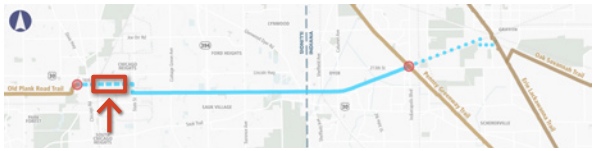
Potential Future Conditions



16th Street | proposed buffered bike lanes

Between Chicago and Wentworth
Chicago Heights, IL

PREFERRED ALIGNMENT LOCATOR MAP



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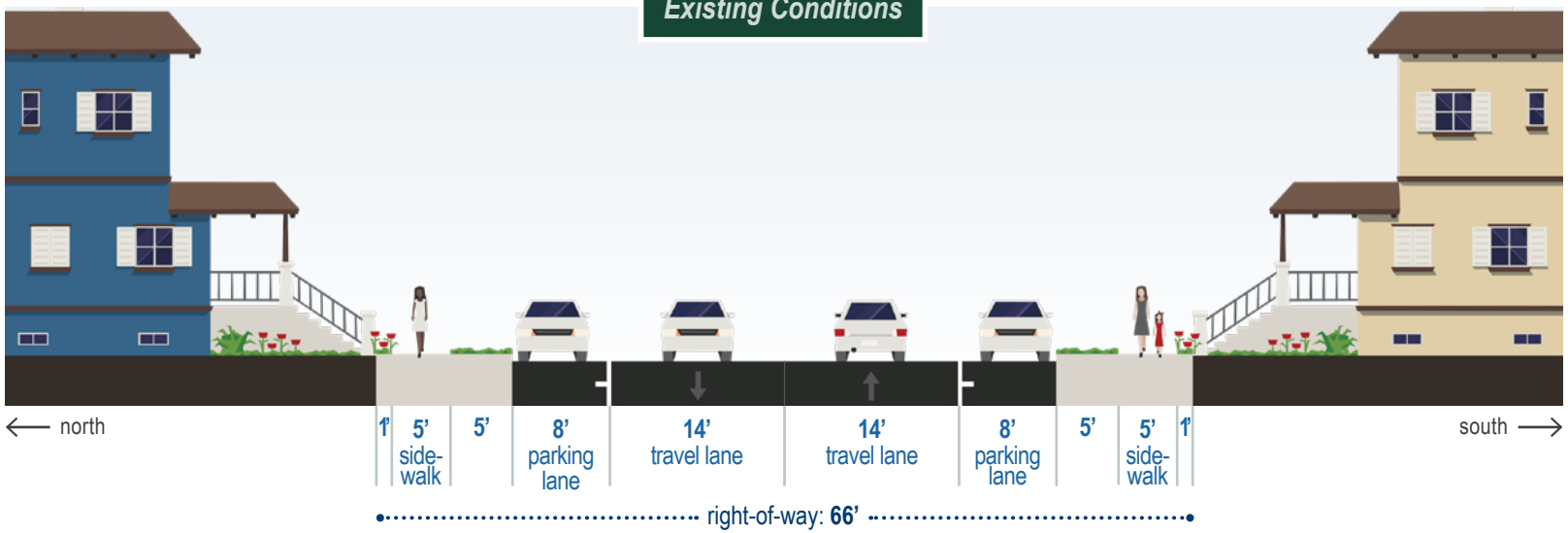
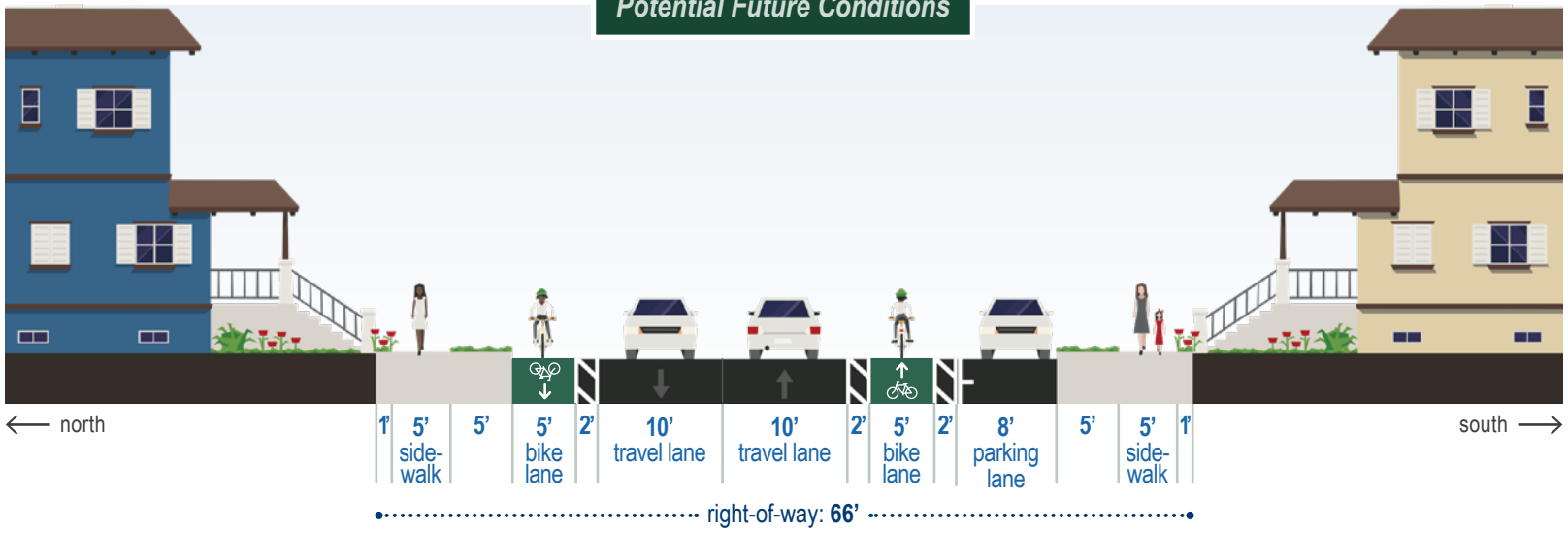


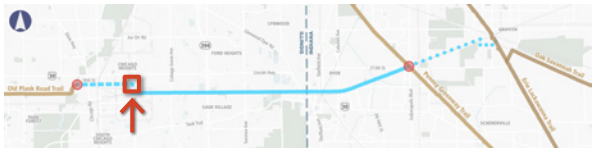
Potential Future Conditions



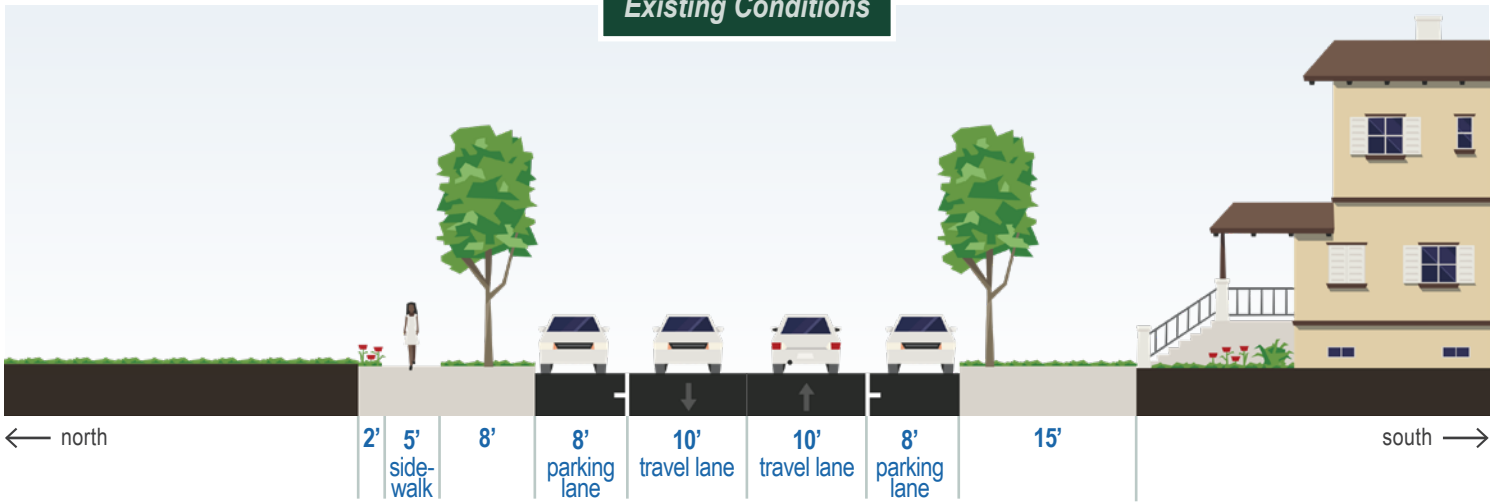
16th Street | proposed sidepath

Between Wentworth and State
Chicago Heights, IL

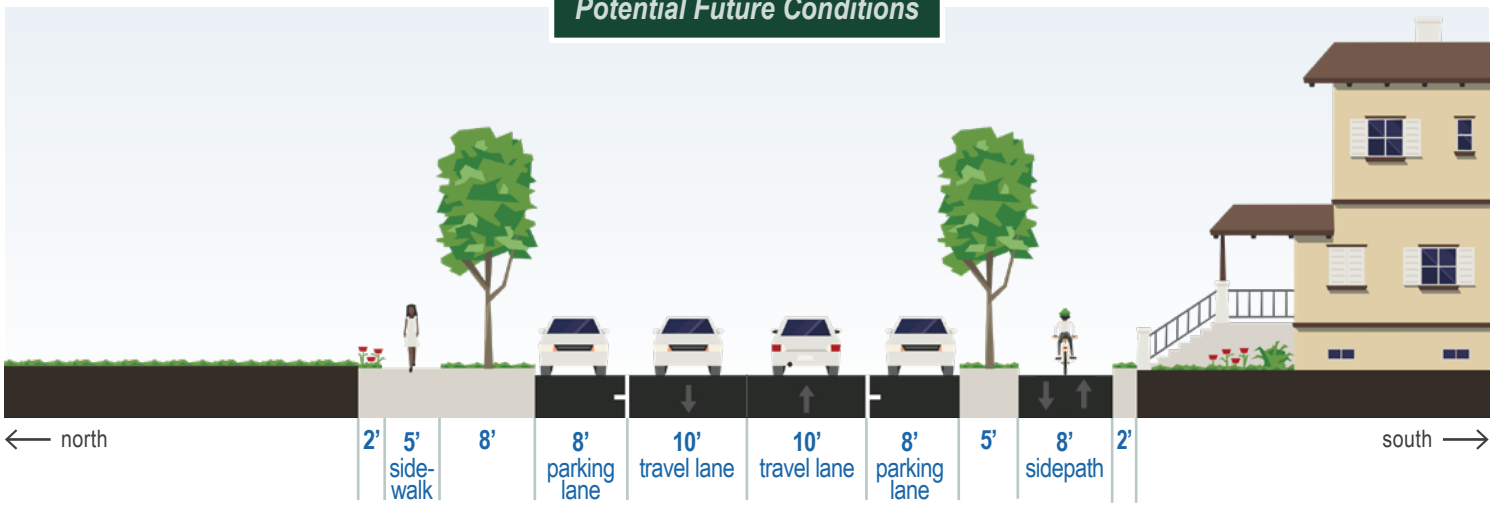
PREFERRED ALIGNMENT LOCATOR MAP



Existing Conditions



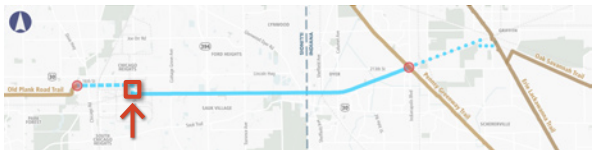
Potential Future Conditions



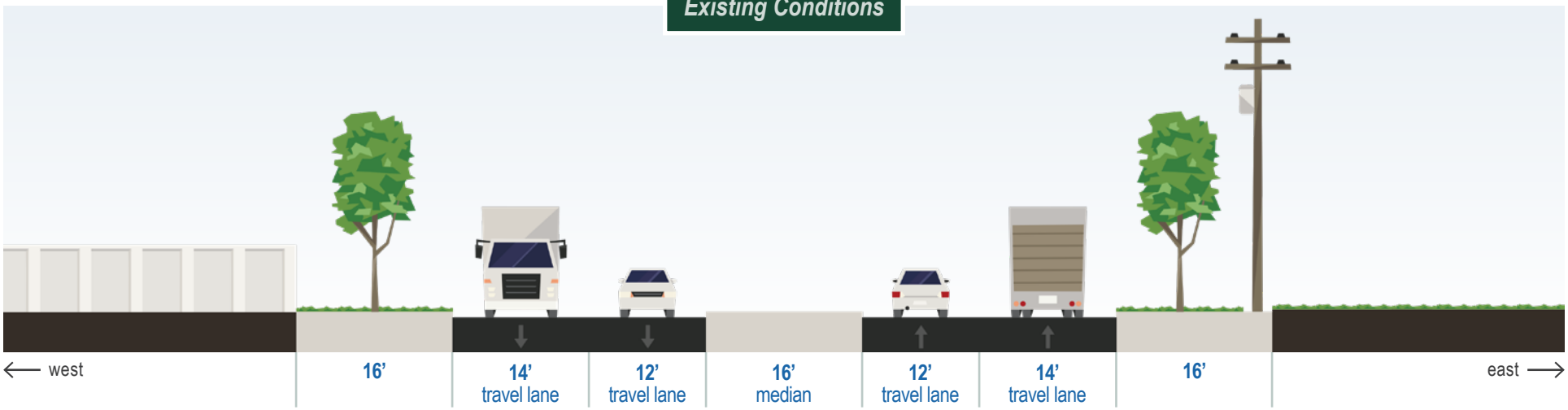
State Street | proposed sidepath

Between 16th and Railroad Tracks
Chicago Heights, IL

PREFERRED ALIGNMENT LOCATOR MAP

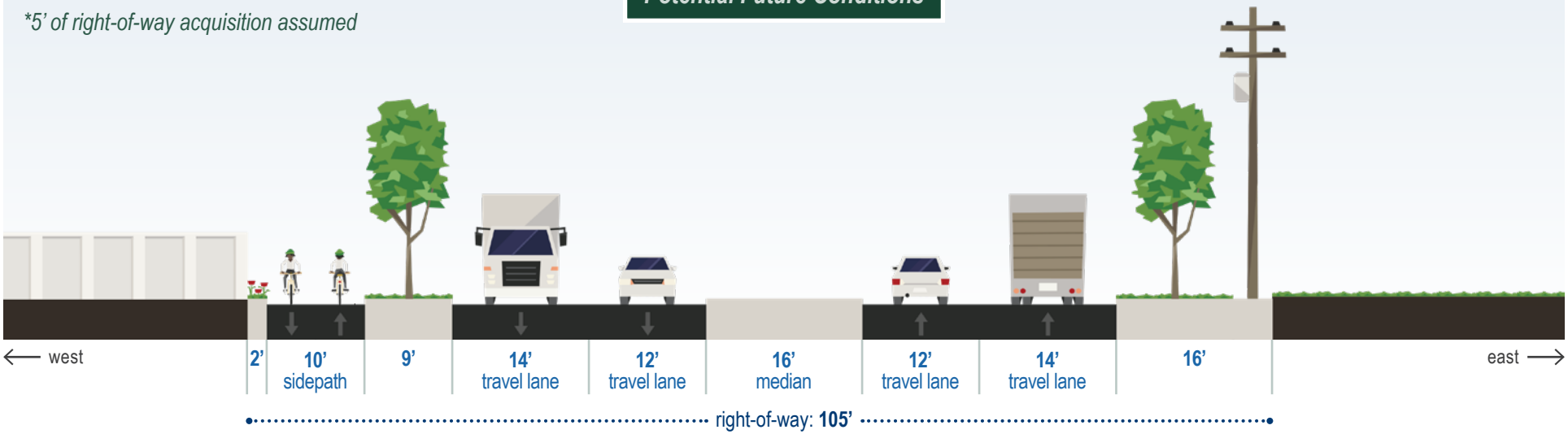


Existing Conditions



Potential Future Conditions

**5’ of right-of-way acquisition assumed*



Trailhead Locations

Trailheads offer potential for improving trail accessibility. Trailheads also offer an opportunity to promote community connectivity and support local economic development through increased trail usage. The OPRT Extension presents numerous opportunities for trailhead locations. This plan identifies nine potential trailheads based on their proximity to existing or planned key community destinations, as well as vacant or underutilized lots for private developments or trail amenities.

The potential trailheads identified in this plan require review of additional considerations, including proximity to wetlands and floodways, as well as the ownership of the land. It is essential to assess the environmental impact and regulatory constraints related to potential wetland areas. Additionally, understanding the ownership of the land is crucial for determining whether land acquisition will be necessary.

Potential trailhead at Torrence Avenue

Table 1. Potential Trailhead Opportunities and Considerations

Location	Municipality	Opportunity	Considerations
State Street	Chicago Heights	Potential Trail Gateway Entrance with seating and other trailhead amenities	
17th Street	Ford Heights	Potential connection to future park or green open space identified in Ford Heights Strategic Plan	
Vacant land near Deer Creek	Sauk Village	Potential connection to future park or green open space identified in Sauk Village Strategic Plan	
Sauk Village Park near Water Tower and Elementary School	Sauk Village	Potential connection to existing future Sauk Village Park	
Torrence Avenue	Sauk Village	Potential connection to future industrial park identified in the Sauk Village Comprehensive Plan. Potential parking lot and other trailhead amenities	Potential land acquisition for parking lot and increase in truck traffic along Torrence Avenue due to future industrial park
North of Sauk Trail and West of Lincoln Highway	Lynwood	Potential connection to future recreation or open space identified in Lynwood Comprehensive Plan	
U.S. Route Lincoln Highway Underpass	Lynwood	Potential trail terminus in Illinois and parking lot and other trailhead amenities	Potential land acquisition for parking lot
Central Park	Dyer	Potential connection with Central Park	
Airport Road/Pennsy Greenway	Schererville	Potential Eastern Terminus in Indiana with a potential pocket park or parking lot and other trailhead amenities	Potential land acquisition for pocket park and/or parking lot

Trail-Oriented Development Opportunities

Trail-Oriented Development (TrOD) describes the development in and around a trail that enhances a visitor's experience of the trail. TrOD projects have two benefits, contributing to the economic vitality of the community and encouraging visitors to use the trail. TrODs can vary in scale and can be located on the trail or along parcels near the trails. Incorporating TrOD designs into the trail will make the trail more welcoming not only to trail users, but also for retail and other activities that have synergy with a trail. TrODs on the trail can include trail amenities such as furniture, dog water fountains, or public art. TrOD projects on the trail can increase the number of visitors on the trail and spur development in areas surrounding the trail.

Table 2. TrOD Projects by Investment

Low Investment	Moderate Investment	High Investment
Outdoor furniture	Public art	Trail widening
Landscaping	On-site bike rentals	Sidewalks
Bike parking	Bike tools stations	Bike and pedestrian bridges
Dog water bowls and fountains	Canopy or shade structures	Trail extensions
Bike tire pump	Open space for events	Park or pocket park
Water station	Wayfinding signage	
	Dedicated bike storage and lockers	

Outdoor furniture

Public art installation

Bike and pedestrian bridge

Case Study

Tammany Trace Trail

Mandeville, Louisiana

The Tammany Trace Trail is a 31-mile mostly wooded trail that passes through five towns in St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana. The trail was originally the Illinois Central Railroad corridor that had been abandoned. The corridor was converted into asphalt path with pedestrian bridges.

The Brooks' Bike Shop opened along the trail next to a park. The business added bike parking, benches, outdoor lighting, and opened their restroom to all trail users. The shop grew to become an informal information center for all trail users. The shop was so successful that they opened a secondary location along the trail.

The Tammany Trace Trail draws on its history of being an old railroad corridor to develop a sense of identity. For example, the Covington Trailhead is designed to resemble an old-fashioned railroad station. The trailhead features a covered 'waiting platform' and a bandstand among other amenities.

Another trailhead, Koop Drive Trailhead, is designed with children in mind. The Trailhead is marked by a ranger station and features the Kids Konnection Playground which is designed for children both abled and with special needs. There are six trailheads in total, all with their own key point of interest. Bike rentals are available at five of the trailheads.

Many shops and restaurants have opened near the trailheads that are in more populous areas, such as the Mandeville Trailhead, or the Camp Salmen Nature Park.

Source: Brooks' Bike Shop

TrOD Opportunity Typologies

Each parcel considered as a possible TrOD location has the potential to develop in different ways depending on size and surrounding land use. In the context of the preferred OPRT alignment, three TrOD opportunity typologies were developed as considerations for future development.

Open Space

- Parcel Size: Small
- Example(s): Parks, walking paths, pocket parks

Fox River Trail (East Dundee, IL)
Max Freeman Park adjacent to the Fox River Trail
Image Source: Google Earth

Monon Trail (Indianapolis, IN)
Connection to Marott Park from the Monon Trail
Image Source: Google Earth

Mixed-Use

- Parcel Size: Medium / Large
- Example(s): Existing or future mixed-use developments

Tow Path Trail (Cleveland, OH)
Apartments with commercial / dining / entertainment
Image Source: Bear IC

Monon Trail (Indianapolis, IN)
Java House coffee on ground floor with apartment units above
Image Source: AirBnb

Commercial

- Parcel Size: Medium / Large
- Example(s): Pop-up shops along trail, shopping district

Prairie Path (Villa Park, IL)
Commercial corridor and Metra station near Prairie Path
Image Source: Google Earth

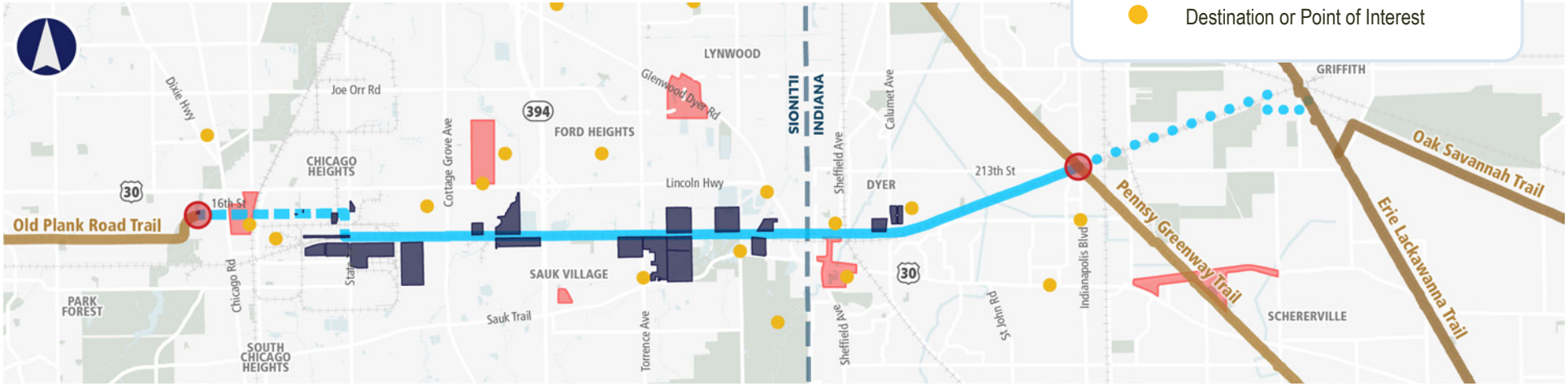
Fox River Trail (East Dundee, IL)
Dukes Blues n BBQ adjacent to the Fox River Trail
Image Source: Google Earth

TrOD Parcels along the Preferred Alignment

The OPRT extension will be located in urban, industrial, and semi-rural areas. TrOD projects are a useful tool to make every section of the trail extension welcoming and lively. As part of the OPRT extension project, TrOD designs can be incorporated at trailheads and at connections with other green space. This is an opportunity to develop underutilized parcels along the trail extension for the public benefit.

Parcels that are not explicitly developed were identified along the preferred alignment as potential opportunities for trail-oriented developments. The parcels vary in size, ownership, and wetland designation. Parcels at select locations along the trail can provide additional space for a trailhead with several service amenities, a parking lot, or a pocket park.

Figure 10. Potential TrOD Parcels



Personal Safety Considerations

Throughout the engagement process for the OPRT extension, community members consistently voiced concerns of personal safety on the trail. Given the length of the trail, multiple jurisdictions it would cross, and varying land uses it would travel through, trail safety best practices are included below.

The OPRT extension design should consider deploying Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principals where possible. CPTED informed designs enhance safety by installing safety related infrastructure, increasing eyes on the trail, and encouraging community ownership over the trail. These principles can be further defined by five design strategies:

- **Natural Surveillance:** Ensure good sight lines so that the trail is visible by other trail users, while also protecting from severe wind and noise.
- **Natural Access Control:** Ensure that paths are well defined, and there is signage that reminds users to remain on the 'official' path.
- **Territoriality Boundary Definition:** When a trail is near private residential area, clearly define what is private and what is public with plants and signage.
- **Legitimate Activity Support:** Clearly specify through signage what types of activity are allowed on the path, such as bicycling, skateboarding, walking, etc.
- **Management and Maintenance:** Only trail designs that can be maintained should be implemented, smart selection of flora and other materials is imperative.

[3]https://www.cpted.net/

Safety-Related Infrastructure

Safety-related infrastructure can include lighting at key trail locations, if not along the entirety of the trail. According to the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) guidelines, lighting should be considered in the following locations:

- In tunnels and at overpasses
- Trailheads
- Bridge entrances and exits
- Public gathering spaces
- Along streets
- Along crosswalks
- On signage
- Where the path crosses another path or sidewalk

Reflective stripping is not a source of lighting, but can be a good method to mark trail edges. Locations where reflective stripping is appropriate include:

- Where a trail runs near a street
- At trail access points

Key locations along the trail may also be equipped with emergency phones and cameras. Key locations along a trail head may include trail entrances, parking lots, and popular spots along the trail.

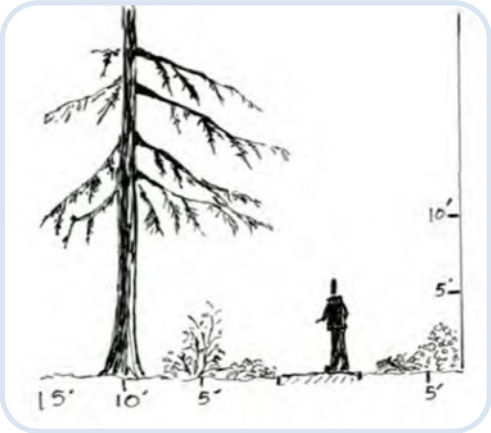
Rest areas can be installed along the trail to shorten long stretches of paths. Rest areas can feature benches, drinking water, shelter, trash cans, and wayfinding signage.

Users on the trail may not immediately be able to identify their location on the trail. Signage that communicates location along the trail at regular intervals should be installed to facilitate quick response by emergency services. Creating an emergency locator system that allows emergency responders to quickly identify locations can significantly reduce emergency response time. Mile markers may be useful, however, having signage every mile may be too sparse for average users, especially pedestrians.

Eyes on the Trail

Inducing consistent eyes on the trail can be achieved through several design strategies including; trail width, landscaping, and having several destinations along the trail.

The width of the trail is very important. Having narrow paths may make users feel uncomfortable and unsafe. By contrast, wider trails are easier to navigate and increase general visibility by other users. A sense of open space can also be curated by the selection of flora along the trail. For example, placing smaller plants at the edge of the trail can soften hard walls of trees or other heavy vegetation. This will also limit the amount of tree branches that could extend onto the trail and impede visibility and accessibility.



Source: Green City Partnerships

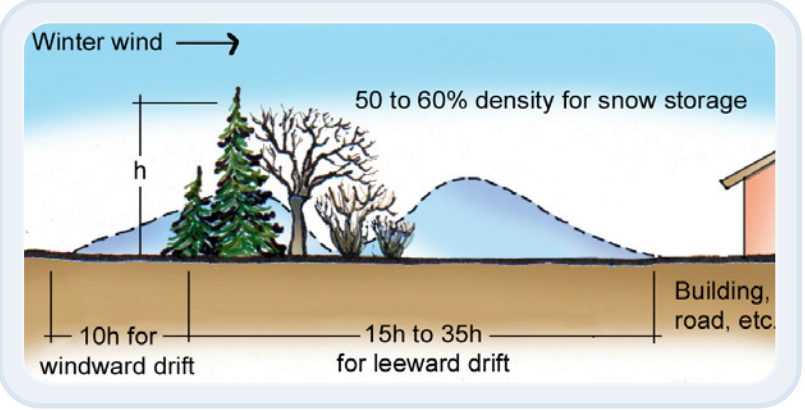
Best practice at locations where trails intersect or where there is a curvature in the trail is to only use plant species that remain low and widely spaced tall conifers to ensure a broad area of view year-round. Shrubs can be installed along the trail. However, it is important that the plants selected will not easily overrun the trail. Shrubs that can easily overrun trails need pruning and maintenance more often, otherwise, they will limit visibility and narrow the trail.

There are several design strategies that can be implemented for continual trail maintenance including:

- Use existing stumps or fallen logs as protection for new plants
- Place sturdy wood stakes near young trees
- Place signage that informs users to stay off the new plants
- Strategically place large wordy debris along trail edges

These design strategies have the added benefit of defining the trail edge and serve as evidence of trail maintenance.

In areas that experience seasonal snow, it is also important to consider drifting snow by including snow storage.



Source: USDA National Agroforestry Center

Visibility along the trail can be increased by ensuring open spaces at trailheads and other entrances such as near parking lots. Additionally, the trail can be made visible from nearby destinations, such as schools, parks and retail. Another possibility is to make the trail visible from the adjacent road. However, this would require a balancing act between visibility and exposure to noise and air pollution associated with vehicle usage.

Community Ownership

Placemaking leads to a general sense of community ownership over a trail. This can make the trail more inviting, increasing foot traffic on the trail and preventing crime. Placemaking can also take several forms, and can be used to form a cohesive program along the trail. Placemaking elements include art installations, play spaces, open areas to accommodate public events and gatherings. Placemaking installations can be located throughout the trail to create a welcoming and cohesive trail.

Plum Creek crossing near the inactive rail corridor (just east of Sheffield Avenue in Indiana)

section 5

Trail Extension Implementation

TRAIL IMPLEMENTATION

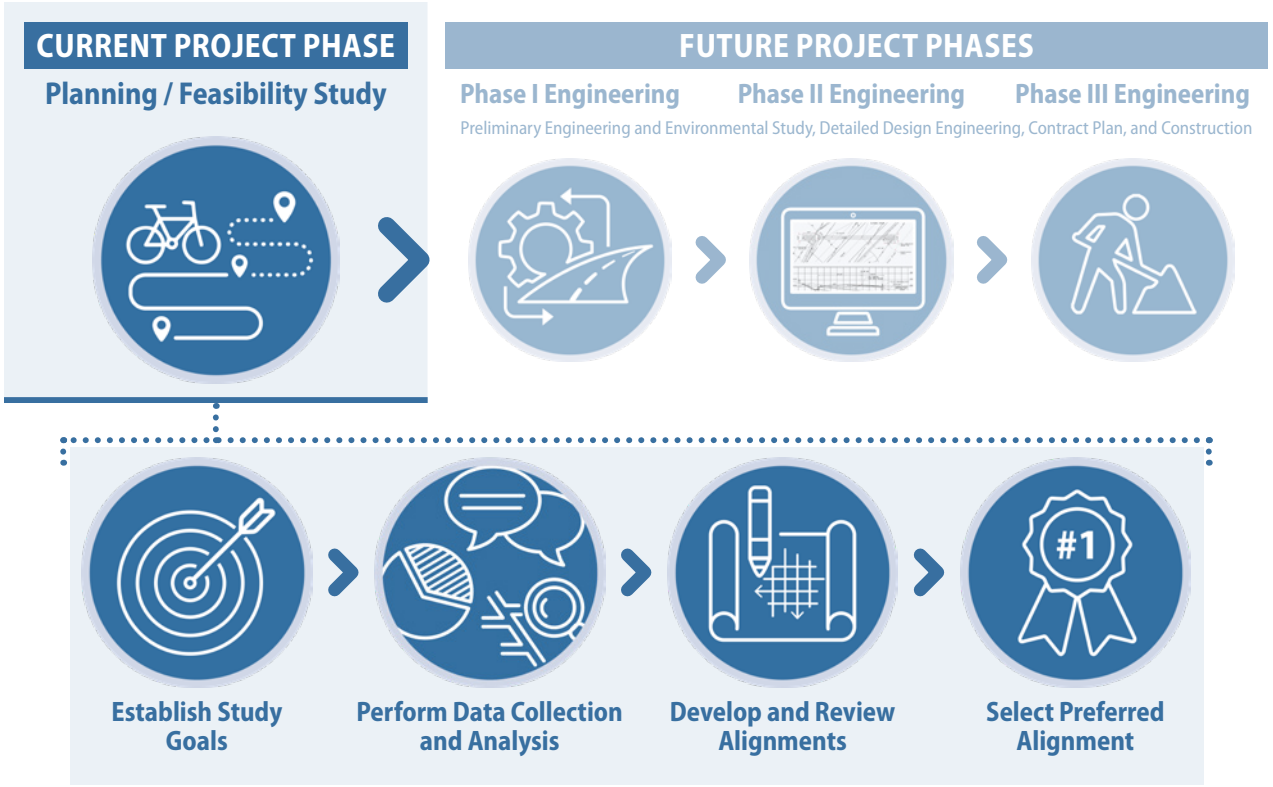
One of the goals of this study is to have an implementation plan for the preferred trail alignment. Implementation will take time, funding, and further study to determine the most feasible solutions.

This chapter provides potential timelines, next steps for railroad and utility coordination, cost estimates, and information on intergovernmental agreements for ongoing maintenance to ensure this vital trail connection is feasible and can be realized.

Space for the OPRT extension near Pennsy Greenway

From Planning to Construction: Overall Process Timeline

As the trail extension design progresses, the studies will be separated between Illinois and Indiana. Within Illinois, Sauk Village received TAP-L funding in 2023 for the Phase I Study to take place tentatively in 2026. Within Indiana, a Preliminary Engineering Study has begun for the segment between Central Park in Dyer and the Pennsy Greenway in Schererville. The remaining segment to progress to a Phase I Study is the segment from the state line through Central Park. An overview of the overall study process is depicted in the graphic to the right and on the following pages. This includes: Preliminary Engineering (Phase I), Detailed Engineering (Phase II), and Construction (Phase III).



Preliminary Engineering (Phase I)

Phase I Engineering is the preliminary engineering phase of a project. During this phase, a variety of data are collected to satisfy FHWA processing and reporting requirements and to guide the engineer's approach to project design. Detailed studies regarding safety and traffic, noise, socio-economic and environmental impacts, structural engineering, and drainage are reviewed. More than one project design may be proposed. The project, along with the alternatives, then progresses through public involvement where public and agency feedback is collected. This feedback is considered and used to refine preliminary project design and to select an alternative. The state department of transportation (DOT) oversees this process to ensure compliance with FHWA engineering requirements. Once the state DOT grants a project design approval, it is eligible to use federal funding for future phases. Projects that have financial backing at a local level for Phase I Engineering tend to be better positioned to receive federal funding in future project stages. The OPRT extension has already secured funding for Phase I engineering for the segments detailed on the previous page.

Detailed Engineering (Phase II)

Detailed Engineering (Phase II) is where the project contract documents are developed. During this phase, the Phase I engineering plans are further refined to show greater detail and specification, as well as materials and cost estimates such that the project will be ready for construction. Land acquisition needs and necessary easements are clearly identified and obtained through the federal right-of-way acquisition process. All permits, clearances, and approvals are obtained.

Construction (Phase III)

Construction (Phase III) is the physical construction of the project by contractors with engineering oversight to ensure compliance with plans, specifications and permits. Funding for Phase II Engineering, Construction and Construction Engineering for the Illinois segments of OPRT will be sought from numerous funding programs including ITEP, Invest in Cook (IIC), IDNR Illinois Bicycle Path Program, IDNR Recreational Trails Program (RTP), and CMAP Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP-L). Indiana offers similar state and federal resources through their Department of Transportation and Department of Natural Resources.

Looking east along the inactive rail corridor at Torrence Avenue

CSX / Amtrak rail crossing along inactive rail corridor in Indiana

Illinois Logical Termini

Additional coordination is needed to extend the OPRT across the Illinois-Indiana border. Until a plan and design is mutually agreed upon, the OPRT trail extension has an eastern logical terminus in Illinois at the Lincoln Highway – US Route 30 underpass in Lynwood. A trailhead and parking lot may be feasible at this location, and would connect to an existing sidepath on the east side of US Route 30. This six-mile extension would continue to enhance this regional trail and foster greater connectivity to and around the surrounding communities.

Next Steps for Utility and Railroad Coordination

Advancing coordination with utility and railroad companies is critical to the realization of this project. Recommended next steps are outlined below.

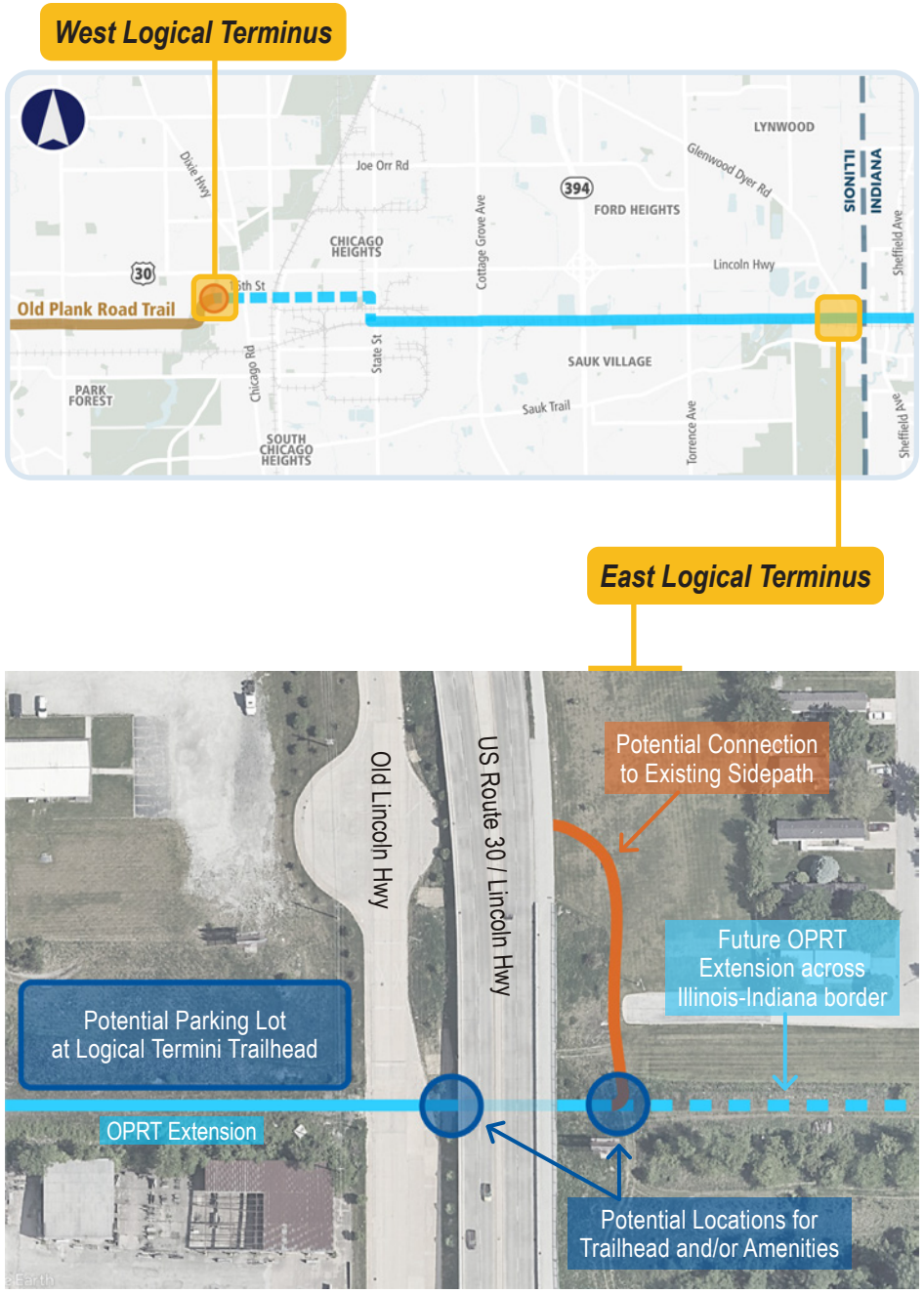
Norfolk Southern (NS): Obtain an executed Letter of Intent Agreement between Cook County and NS (for Illinois portion of trail). Further easement and land use coordination will be required with NS (and / or Enbridge). Next steps include title search and real estate appraisals.

Enbridge, Inc.: Obtain an executed Letter of Intent Agreement between Cook County and Enbridge (for Illinois portion of trail). Further easement and land use coordination will be required with Enbridge (and / or NS). Next steps include title search and real estate appraisals. Complete Crossing Application when design plans are available.

Union Pacific (UP): Confirm trail location and enter into a Reimbursement Agreement (RA). Complete a field Diagnostic Team Meeting.

CSX Transportation: Confirm trail location and enter into a Preliminary Engineering (PE) and/or Construction Engineering and Inspection (CE&I) Agreement. Determine the agency who will execute the agreement and provide the advanced FAE amount.

Wisconsin Central Ltd. (WCL/Parent company is CN): No further coordination is anticipated since the preferred trail alignment does not cross nor impact WCL/CN.



Logical Termini at Lincoln Highway / US 30 underpass in Lynwood, IL

Cost Estimates for Engineering and Construction

The following tables provide a high-level breakdown of the cost estimate components separated by state (Illinois and Indiana).

Table 3. Cost Estimates for Illinois Corridor

Item	Cost
Construction Costs	
Trail Costs + On-Street Striping & Signage	$6,550,000
Structure Costs	$500,000
Total Construction Cost	**$7,050,000**
Engineering Phases and Right-of-Way Costs	
Phase I Engineering	$600,000
Phase II Engineering (12% of Construction Cost + Railroad Review Fees)	$881,000
Phase III Engineering (15% of Construction Cost+ Railroad CM Fees)	$1,098,000
Norfolk Southern/Enbridge Easement Fees	$210,000
Total Engineering and Right-of-Way Cost	**$2,789,000**
TOTAL PROJECT COST	**$9,839,000**

Notes

- *Estimate does not include trailhead parking or other amenities*
- *Alignment assumed to use 16th Street to cross Thorn Creek*
- *Trail will not be lighted*

Table 4. Cost Estimates for Indiana Corridor

Item	Cost
Construction Costs	
Trail Costs	$3,700,000
Structure Costs	$100,000
Total Construction Cost	**$3,800,000**
Engineering Phases and Right-of-Way Costs	
Engineering Phases (40%)	$1,500,000
Norfolk Southern / Enbridge Easement Fees	$125,000
Total Engineering and Right-of-Way Cost	**$1,625,000**
TOTAL PROJECT COST	**$5,425,000**

Notes

- *Trail segment from Central Park in Dyer to the Pennsy Greenway in Schererville is already in the Engineering Phase I stage*
- *Indiana alignment utilizes Edmond through Dyer Public Works: no separate bridge over Plum Creek or CSX is required*
- *Estimate does not include trailhead parking or other amenities*
- *Trail will not be lighted*

Intergovernmental Agreements

The existing OPRT benefits from an Intergovernmental Agreement that established the OPRT Management Commission whose purpose is to create an appropriate agency to manage, provide for, and develop and maintain the existing OPRT. More information about Intergovernmental Agreements for trail projects and recommended amendments to the existing OPRT Intergovernmental Agreements are detailed below.

In the case of trails that may fall in several jurisdictions along its length, the jurisdictions in question enter an “Intergovernmental Agreement” to formalize partnerships. While agencies may already have an established cost sharing agreement or a supplemental agreement, Intergovernmental Agreements are most effective in securing commitment to the projects detailed in the document over the long term.

An Intergovernmental Agreement is a legal document and, in the case of the State of Illinois, follows the definitions outlined in the **Intergovernmental Cooperation Act (5 ILCS 220/)**. In the State of Indiana, such agreements are governed by **Indiana Code Chapter 6 Local Participation in Establishment of Recreational Trails (IN Code 8-4.5-6**. Following the creation of the document, the involved parties must approve the ordinance/resolution.An Intergovernmental Agreement can address the establishment, construction, cost sharing, and/ or long term maintenance of a trail or portion of a trail. The document is crafted to suit the scope of the project and the type of partnership that the agencies want to pursue.

Intergovernmental Agreement Scope

The scope of each agreement varies. The following are a few observations from reading several of these documents.

- Agreements can cover the establishment of a whole trail or additions to a trail.
- Agreements typically cover several terms and conditions, but most do not cover all; however, cost and liability items are always included.
- Maintenance plan or long-term programmatic endeavors are not always included.
- An agreement can be established for the development of tools related to trail operations. For example, several agencies in the Boulder, CO region entered an agreement for the development and maintenance of a mobile phone application that provides users with trail information.
- It is possible to annex relevant documents such as operation policies, maintenance policies, etc.

A few systems for maintenance and operations include:

- Every section of the trail will be maintained by the jurisdiction the trail lies within.
- One agency is responsible for providing maintenance and/ or operation services while agencies agree on a cost sharing arrangement.

OPRT Intergovernmental Agreement

The existing OPRT Intergovernmental Agreement established the Old Plank Road Trail Management Commission whose purpose is to create an appropriate agency to manage, provide for, and develop and maintain the existing Old Plank Road Trail. Municipalities along the Old Plank Road Trail Extension have also entered into an Intergovernmental Agreement to formalize their commitment to the project.

In the future, the OPRT Management Commission intergovernmental agreement should be amended to:

1. List out specific maintenance guidelines, standards, and goals for the commission to uphold.
2. Include municipalities along the Old Plank Road Trail Extension in the Management Commission.

The OPRT Management Commission would be limited to the segments of the OPRT within Illinois. Local municipalities will maintain the segments of the trail in Indiana.

Looking west near Cottage Grove Avenue and by Ford Heights and Chicago Heights, IL


OLD
PLANK
ROAD
TRAIL
Extension
Feasibility Study