



# Bloomingtondale Trail

*History, background and frequently asked questions*

## **What is the Bloomingtondale Trail?**

The Bloomingtondale Trail is envisioned as a multi-use recreational trail built along an elevated rail line along Bloomingtondale Avenue (approximately 1800 North) from Ashland (1600 West) to Ridgeway (3732 West).

*Length:* 2.65 miles

*Viaducts:* 37

Property owner: Canadian Pacific Railway owns the embankment, most of which are located in City street rights-of-way.

## **How long has the idea been around?**

The concept of using the Bloomingtondale rail line for recreation purposes dates back a decade, when city planners began a preliminary study of how the property might be developed—including whether the line should be retained or removed. A 1998 plan listed the line as a lower priority future project, noting that some rail traffic was still active on the line. No specifics were discussed—just a concept of someday reusing the property.

In 2004, the project was listed in the City's Logan Square Open Space Plan, and the project took on a higher priority.

Since that time, the City and important community partners—including the Trust for Public Land and the Friends of the Bloomingtondale Trail, among others—have worked to secure support and funding for the project.

## **Who all is involved?**

Many partners have helped move the Bloomingtondale Trail from concept to reality. At the City of Chicago, the Department of Housing and Economic Development oversees the overall planning of this linear park. DHED has been strategically acquiring land along the trail for access point parks. Its predecessor department, the Department of Planning and Development, included the

Bloomington Trail is in 2004 Logan Square Open Space Plan—the plan that gave the Trail its momentum.

The Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) is overseeing the engineering and design of the Bloomington Trail and will oversee construction.

The Chicago Park District will own and manage the completed project, as well as parks to be developed along the embankment in preparation for the Trail.

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) has assisted the Department of Housing and Economic Development in the acquisition of key parcels to serve as access parks and will assist FoBT in future fundraising efforts for the trail. TPL coordinates private organizations' involvement in this multi-party, public/private effort.

The Friends of Bloomington Trail (FoBT) formed in 2003 as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. The organization advocates for the project and is helping build community support.

The Bloomington Collaborative is working group of representatives from City departments, the Chicago Park District, the Trust for Public Land, Friends of the Bloomington Trail, Logan Square Neighborhood Association and more than a dozen other organizations and agencies that meets periodically to review progress, generate ideas, report on organizational activities and facilitate communication among all participants involved in making the Bloomington Trail a reality. DHED and TPL co-chair the Bloomington Trail Collaborative.

The most important partner is...you. Community input and involvement have been and will continue to be crucial to the project's development. In addition to information already collected by FoBT, the design team will meet with the community to hear their ideas and goals for the project. TPL will be hosting, among other things, a series of events where the team and public will work collaboratively on the Bloomington Trail's design.

### **How much will it cost?**

Current estimates for the full buildout of the Trail are between \$50 million and \$70 million. However, until a design concept is in place, these numbers are just estimates.

### **How long will it take?**

The construction schedule has not yet been determined, and is largely dependent on securing funding. The Phase I design should take about 18 months. Phase II design will take about one year. The construction schedule depends on what is built, and how it is phased.

### **Why does it take so long?**

Any project of this magnitude takes years to go from concept to construction. A project of this complexity has additional challenges. For example, there are 37 viaducts to be renewed or replaced in this project. (There are only 52 bridges over the Chicago River.) At least seven sites will be developed with access ramps that are sloped gently enough for wheelchair accessibility, and most ramps will also need to integrate into city parks. And the location and magnitude of the project call for a design that is both community-oriented and world-class.

Lastly, the funding process takes time—especially true in these times of dwindling funding for infrastructure capital projects.

### **Why is this a CDOT project?**

Actually the project involves a number of agencies, as described above.

But CDOT is leading the design, engineering and construction of the embankment because we are experienced in bridge and bikeway engineering, have existing relationships with railroads, and the project has secured federal transportation funds.

In addition to recreation, the trail is expected to serve transportation purposes by encouraging people to walk or cycle instead of driving for some trips and will provide improving access to the Metra Clybourn (UP) Station and CTA Damen (Blue Line) Station, which has high-capacity bicycle parking.

CDOT has completed two other rails-to-trails projects now operated by the Park District: the Major Taylor Trail on the South Side and the Sauganash Trail on the North Side.

### **Why is an embankment in City right-of-way?**

On June 12, 1872, the Chicago and Pacific Railroad was granted an easement to install tracks on "Bloomingdale Road." For public safety, the Chicago City Council passed an ordinance on July 27, 1910 requiring the railroad (now the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railway) to elevate the tracks by the end of 1913. (Similar ordinances occurred on other railroads.) As railroads changed and merged over the years, this easement and embankment eventually became part of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

### **The High Line project in New York is already partially completed. Why is the Bloomingdale Trail still in the planning stages?**

Though both are multiuse paths, each project has a unique history, challenges and opportunities:

- The Bloomingdale Trail first received public funding for design and planning in late 2007 -- after twice being rejected for funding. The High Line has received significant private funding from celebrities and broke ground in 2006.
- The Bloomingdale Trail still carried occasional freight traffic as recently as earlier this decade when service to remaining customers was rerouted through another railroad. The last train on the High Line was in the 1980s.
- The Bloomingdale Trail will be 2.65 miles long while the High Line is only 1.45 miles long -- if the last segment is secured.
- The Bloomingdale Trail right-of-way is not in danger of imminent redevelopment for other uses, as the High Line had been. That is because the Bloomingdale lies mostly over city street rights-of-way, while much of the High Line is on easement over increasingly valuable land held by private owners.
- The Bloomingdale Trail will be on a series of filled embankments and bridges which have different environmental testing requirements than the High Line, which is on an elevated structure (like a freight version of the Brown Line or Green Line E)

### **Who is handling the design?**

CDOT selected ARUP North America as the project designer. ARUP was one of 23 firms that responded to a request for proposals seeking qualified firms for the work. Among its projects are engineering the "Water Cube" aquatics center for the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, the world's largest highly sustainable public space.

The ARUP team features nine sub-consultants, including:

- Chicago-based Ross Barney Architects, which has worked on several Chicago projects including Wacker Drive and the Chicago Riverwalk
- Brooklyn-based Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, which worked on New York City's Brooklyn Bridge Park.
- Chicago-based Burns & McDonnell engineers, which has worked on many large Chicago infrastructure projects.
- Chicago Public Art Group, which has brought Chicago neighborhoods and artists together on a variety of projects

### **Didn't Canadian Pacific at one time offer the property to the city, and the city turned it down?**

No.

The embankments and bridges are currently the property of the CP, much of which are located in city street right-of-way. The City will take possession of the embankment when it completes the necessary steps to be sure it can construct a safe, quality facility that complies with applicable laws and standards to serve the adjacent communities and the general public.

The Canadian Pacific, asking the City to maintain a facility it and predecessor railroads used commercially for decades, made a vague suggestion at a 2009 meeting that they would "throw a strip of asphalt up there." It was not a formal offer and did not include any necessary structural repairs, railings, ADA-compliant access ramps, bridge reconstruction, lighting, protection for adjacent landowners, or environmental remediation.

Such a facility would be unsafe, fail the Park District's land acquisition standards, and be unsustainable as it would leave the City with immediate repairs and no resources to maintain 37 bridges and 37 embankment segments that are nearly a century old. Instead, the City is dedicated to properly serving the public interest as it pursues this project with the goal of achieving the best long-term results.

### **What will the access points be?**

Three Chicago Park District parks also border the embankment wall and are scheduled to become access points: Walsh Park at 1722 N. Ashland, Churchill Field Park at 1825 N. Damen, Albany-Whipple Park at 1803 N. Albany.

Albany-Whipple, which opened in 2008, was acquired and improved (by the former Department of Planning and Development in partnership with the Trust for Public Land) specifically to serve as a future trail access site.

The City (in partnership with the Trust for Public Land) has acquired land at 1803 N. Milwaukee and is working to acquire land at 1813 N. Kimball to be developed into future access parks, and the Park District owns property to expand Walsh Park at 1830 N. Ashland – however these sites are off-limits to the public until work is completed. We also anticipate that the western trail head will be developed in cooperation with the adjacent McCormick-Tribune YMCA (3701 W. Cortland).

Additional access will be determined during design and engineering, including at least one location between Humboldt Boulevard and Western Avenue, with the target of having all trail users within approximately ¼-mile from an exit point.

**In addition to the access points, what other facilities are close to the trail?**

Students at Stowe Elementary (3444 W. Wabansia), Yates Elementary (1839 N. Richmond) and Moos Elementary (1711 N. California) can see the embankment from some classrooms or their schoolyards. Drummond Elementary (1845 W. Cortland), two playlots, and St. Mary's of the Angels Church are within a block of the trail.

The route intersects the Damen Avenue bike lanes, Milwaukee Avenue marked shared lanes, and signed routes on Humboldt Boulevard, Central Park Avenue and California Avenue, and provides access to the Elston Avenue bike lanes from Caldwell Woods to downtown and the Cortland/Armitage Avenue bike lanes to Lincoln Park Zoo and the Lakefront.

Within ¼ mile or so of the trail are Humboldt Park, CTA Blue Line stations at Damen and Western, the Clybourn Metra Station, two Chicago Public Library Branches, three small parks, four bike shops, and a variety of shops and restaurants on Ashland, Damen, Milwaukee, Western, California, Kimball, Armitage and North Avenues.

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