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MAYOR EMANUEL ANNOUNCES 'PASEO', PATH TO CONNECT PILSEN, LITTLE VILLAGE

Rails to trails project will provide opportunity for recreation, culture and beautification

Mayor Rahm Emanuel, Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) Commissioner Rebekah Scheinfeld, Chicago Department of Planning and Development (DPD) Commissioner David Reifman, Alderman Danny Solis (25th), Alderman George Cardenas (12th), community members and community organizations today announced Paseo, a rails to trails project that will create a four-mile, multi-purpose path connecting the Pilsen and Little Village neighborhoods. The project will bring new opportunities for recreation, culture and beautification.

"Paseo is a community vision years in the making that is finally being realized. This is a strategic opportunity to adapt outmoded infrastructure into an important amenity that will enhance the quality of life for residents," said Mayor Emanuel. "It will move forward as a vibrant reflection of the unique cultural assets that characterize Pilsen and Little Village."

It will be built at grade along a largely abandoned BNSF Railway. Paseo centers around a community promenade that will feature a trail, gathering spaces, gardens and public art that celebrates Latino culture.

"CDOT has been working closely with stakeholders from the community and our sister agency, DPD, to make this exciting rails-to-trails project a reality, one that will help improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists and beautify the entire corridor through Pilsen and Little Village," said CDOT Commissioner Scheinfeld.

The trail will have three main sections to be planned and built in phases along the right-of-way, most of which is adjacent to existing streets. The sections include:

- Sangamon Street, between 16th and 21st streets
- Cermak Road and Blue Island, between Sangamon and Rockwell Avenue

- 26th Street, between Rockwell and an off-street location at 32nd Street and Central Park Avenue

“As a cultural and recreational amenity, the Paseo will be an important addition that connects existing residents and businesses with other community assets and open spaces,” said Alderman Solis.

BNSF will start cleanup activities in May on the Sangamon section under an agreement with the USEPA. The BNSF-funded environmental work will replace existing tracks and topsoil. CDOT, DPD and the City’s Fleet and Facilities Management department have coordinated with BNSF and USEPA to include a multi-purpose path, storm water friendly sub-base, planting medium, and related environmental features. Portions of the rail corridor along Cermak and Blue Island already incorporate environmentally friendly drainage features that would be incorporated into the entire route.

“The trail is going to have its own local identity, so there’s no mistaking it with other rail-conversion projects like the 606,” said Alderman Cardenas. “There’s no comparison beyond the previous owner being a railroad company.”

Significant portions of the former rail corridor are in the abandonment process by BNSF, which will lead to its phased acquisition by the City of Chicago starting later this year. Funding for its complete build-out will include local and federal sources, pending final designs.

Planning for the Paseo was initiated by LISC approximately 10 years ago. It is part of a Pilsen-Little Village land use planning process initiated in 2013 by DPD and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) with assistance from the Pilsen Neighbors Community Council (PNCC) and ENLACE. The plan is intended to preserve the character and affordability of the neighborhood, expand cultural and open space assets and accommodate shifts in business and industrial uses in the two communities. As part of that process, the City of Chicago will host a housing fair from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, April 16 at Arturo Velasquez Institute, 2800 S Western Ave. City agencies and vendors will provide information about housing resources to preserve affordability and foster home improvements.

“We are excited that our dream of having a Paseo that connects Pilsen and Little Village is finally being realized,” said Teresa Fraga, PNCC Board Member who has led the community advocacy efforts for the Paseo project for over 20 years.

This winter, CDOT concluded a feasibility study along the western portion of the trail to determine path alignments, options for street crossings, and preliminary concepts for gateway areas. Detailed designs for the entire route will be developed in coordination with community stakeholders and residents.

The trail surface on the Sangamon section is anticipated to be available for public use later this summer. BNSF work on the other sections could begin this fall.

This is one piece of Mayor Emanuel's comprehensive strategy of investments in the City's parks system in neighborhoods for residents across Chicago; the Mayor will unveil this new plan in a speech he will deliver on Tuesday.

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