

ENGLEWOOD NATURE TRAIL

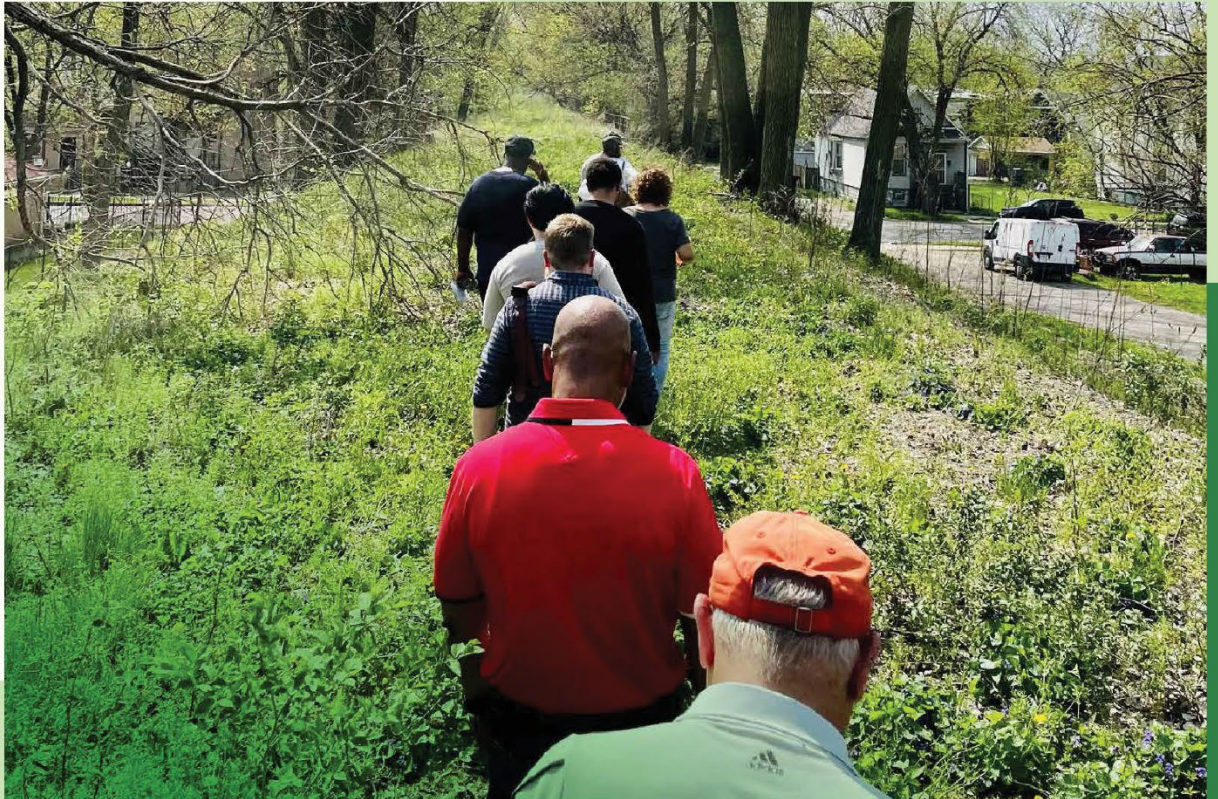




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Project Website: ATIPEnglewoodTrail.cnectchicago.com



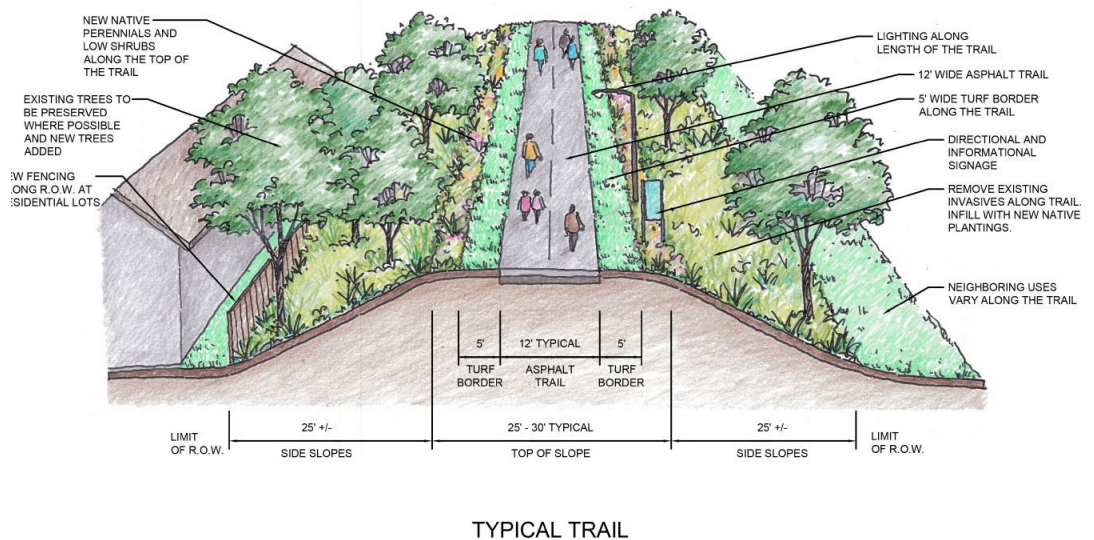
1. Basic Project Information

Project Description

The Englewood Nature Trail Project will utilize 1.75 miles of an unused former railroad right-of-way to create a multi-use, grade separated trail intended to serve the most vulnerable roadway users – bicyclists and pedestrians. This project will be a significant community asset in Chicago’s southside community areas of Englewood and West Englewood, as the new multi-use trail will improve safe access to active transportation and quality of life. The east-west trail will be located between West 58th Street and West 59th Street, from Hoyne Avenue to Wallace Street. (See **Appendix D** for Maps) There will be twelve access points spaced intermittently along the length of the trail, all of which will be ADA compliant. The trail will also provide access to urban agriculture, park space and plazas where community members can enjoy a reactivated public space. See **Figure 1** for a typical trail cross section.

The Englewood Nature Trail will provide a crucial link in an urban active transportation network that connects residents to community assets within Englewood and West Englewood and facilitate travel to other communities and access to public transportation. The project will provide a safe, accessible, and inviting urban trail that promotes active transportation in an area that has suffered from years of disinvestment and has been economically burdened by high transportation costs.

Figure 1. Typical Englewood Nature Trail Cross Section



Beyond promoting active transportation, the proposed project will foster community wealth-building in historically marginalized community areas by facilitating access to jobs, schools, and other community assets. It would reduce emissions that are harmful to the health of residents and the environment, in line with the [2023 Chicago Climate Action Plan Addendum](#) that targets a 67% reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2040. Safety and well-being will be enhanced by providing an off-street trail and creating an attractive park space for residents of all ages and abilities.

According to the 2016 Englewood Line Trail Health Impact Assessment the two community areas have lost about 66% of their population since a peak in 1960, exacerbating disinvestment. There are around 54 acres of vacant land surrounding the Englewood Nature Trail. As described in Criterion #1, the rail corridor currently serves as an impassible barrier separating the adjacent properties on its north and south sides. Community residents and organizations such as Grow Greater Englewood, Voices of West Englewood, and Greater Englewood Chamber of Commerce have long advocated for a trail in this



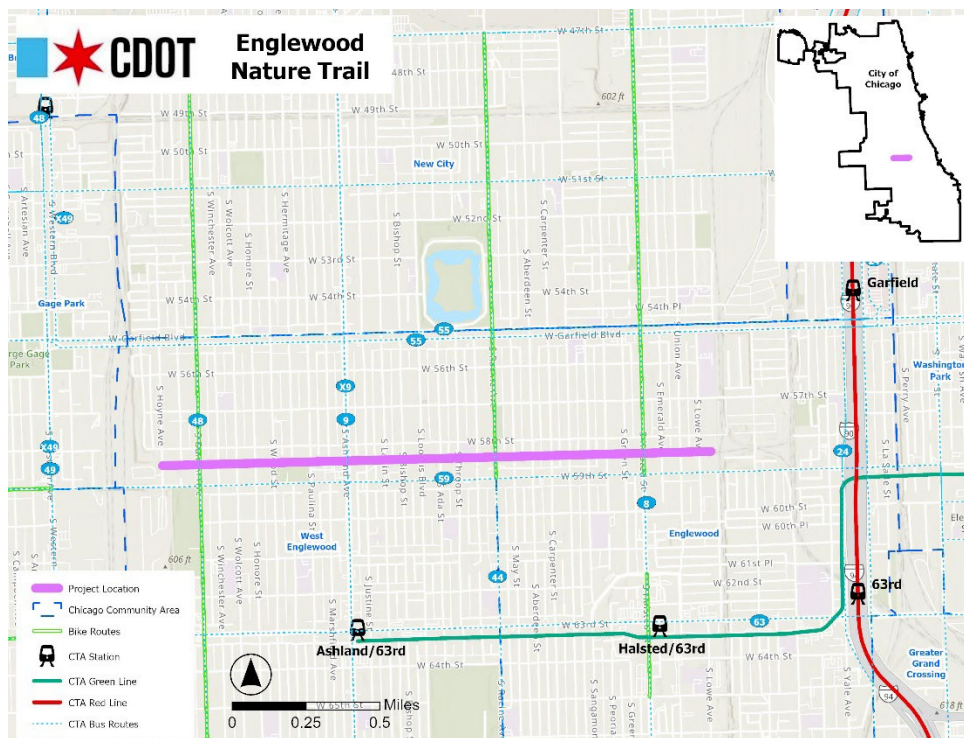
location. In 2014, the project was included in the [Green Healthy Neighborhoods Plan](#), and has since been supported by a number of other plans and citywide initiatives including the [2021 Strategic Plan for Transportation](#), and the [Vision Zero Action Plan](#). This project also fits with the City of Chicago’s [2023 Chicago Cycling Strategy](#), which states that of the next 150 miles of planned bikeways, 85% of projects are low-stress bikeways such as the Englewood Nature Trail. In 2023, the City completed more than 50 miles of bikeways, including 27 miles of new and upgraded protected bike lanes. Furthermore, the City has shown commitment to constructing this project as it acquired the rail corridor in 2018 and has since incurred \$7.8 million in preliminary engineering and design engineering costs.

Project Location

The trail will be a new east-west off-street multi-use route in Englewood and West Englewood, urban communities located on the South Side of Chicago (see **Figure 2**). Englewood and West Englewood are marginalized communities facing depopulation and disinvestment of many of the communities’ assets. According to the United States Department of Transportation’s Equitable Transportation Community Explorer (USDOT ETC), 100% of the population within the project area is disadvantaged (**Appendix E**).

The community areas rely heavily on transit for commuting to work. According to the [2023 Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning \(CMAP\) Community Data Snapshot for Englewood](#), over of 30% of residents travel to work by transit and approximately 47% do not have access to a vehicle. In a similar [2023 community snapshot](#) from CMAP 30% of residents in West Englewood rely on transit to travel to work and 35% do not have access to a vehicle. Many of these commuters are burdened with high transportation costs (see **Appendix E** for Transportation Cost Burden). As indicated on the Key Destinations Map in Criterion #1: Mobility and Community Connectivity below, the project would provide an important connection to existing transportation systems, including sidewalks, bicycle-sharing facilities and lanes, and public transportation facilities. The Englewood Nature Trail will transform the

Figure 2. Project Location Map



active transportation network in the area, connecting to bike lanes on Damen Avenue, Racine Avenue, and Halsted Avenue. make connections with the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) Bus Routes #48, #9 #X9, #44, and #8. Additionally, there are two CTA train lines that service the area near the trail, and four stations nearby including the Green Line Ashland/63rd and Halsted/63rd stations, and the Red Line Garfield and 63rd stations.



Lead Applicant

The Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) is the sole project sponsor of the Englewood Nature Trail Project and has ultimate responsibility for assembling funding and delivering the final project. CDOT is responsible for public way infrastructure in Chicago, including planning, design, construction, maintenance, and management. CDOT manages over 4,000 miles of streets within the City of Chicago; and as of January 2024, maintains 55.3 miles of grade-separated bikeways and more than 300 bridge and viaduct structures.

CDOT has extensive experience in managing Federal-aid highway program funds. In a typical year, CDOT manages a federal program valued at approximately \$100 million but which can exceed \$300 million. This includes/has included STP, CMAQ, TAP, Major Bridge, HPP, NHFP, and INFRA. Projects range from resurfacing of arterial streets to major structure reconstructions such as Wacker Drive, the Canal Street Viaduct, and the Wells Street Bridge. In addition to its federal program, CDOT also manages a state funded program of over \$100 million per year and a local program in excess of \$200 million. The department works closely with its partners at the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to ensure projects are delivered on time and within budget.

Other Public and Private Parties

No private or non-private entity will receive a direct and predictable benefit if the project is awarded.

2. Grant Funds, Sources, and Uses of All Project Funding

The project cost is \$91.4 million, and the total construction cost and construction-related expenses is \$83.6 million; \$82.8 million of construction costs is eligible for ATIIIP funding. This application requests \$12 million in funding to complete construction of the full length of the project, which represents 14% of the total construction eligible costs. In addition to ATIIIP funds, construction of this project will also be completed with \$42.3 million of Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP-L) funding (**Table 1**).

CDOT is committed to the delivery of this project and has allotted \$23 million in local funds. (please see **Appendix C** for the Letter of Funding Commitment). Furthermore, the City has shown commitment to constructing this project as it acquired the rail corridor in 2018 and has since incurred \$7.8 million in preliminary project engineering costs.

Table 1. Project Funding Source for Construction

Funding Source	Cost	% of Construction Cost
Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP)	\$3,000,000.00	4%
Other Local Funds	\$5,101,242.00	6%
<i>Total Local Funds</i>	<i>\$8,101,242.00</i>	<i>10%</i>
ATIIIP Request Funding	\$12,000,000.00	14%
<i>Total ATIIIP Funding</i>	<i>\$12,000,000.00</i>	<i>14%</i>
TAP-L	\$42,300,000.00	51%
Other Federal Programs*	\$20,404,969.00	25%
<i>Total Federal Funding</i>	<i>\$74,704,969.00</i>	<i>90%</i>
Total Construction Cost	\$82,806,211.00	100%



*The project team will seek an additional \$20.4 million in federal funding. The project team remains committed to pursuing future federal grant programs, as they are released.

See the Budget Narrative included in **Appendix A** and the SF 424C form submitted as part of this application for a detailed list of project construction costs.

3. Merit Criteria

Criterion #1: Mobility and Community Connectivity

The Englewood Nature Trail Project will enhance mobility and community connectivity in the historically marginalized Englewood and West Englewood community areas. The trail will connect the neighborhoods by converting 1.75 miles of unused former railroad right-of-way that currently serves as an impassible barrier separating the adjacent properties on the north and south sides of the corridor into a grade separated, multi-use trail for people who bike, roll, or walk. The project will provide access to the trail from both the north and south at reasonably located intervals to ensure equal access for communities along both sides of the trail.

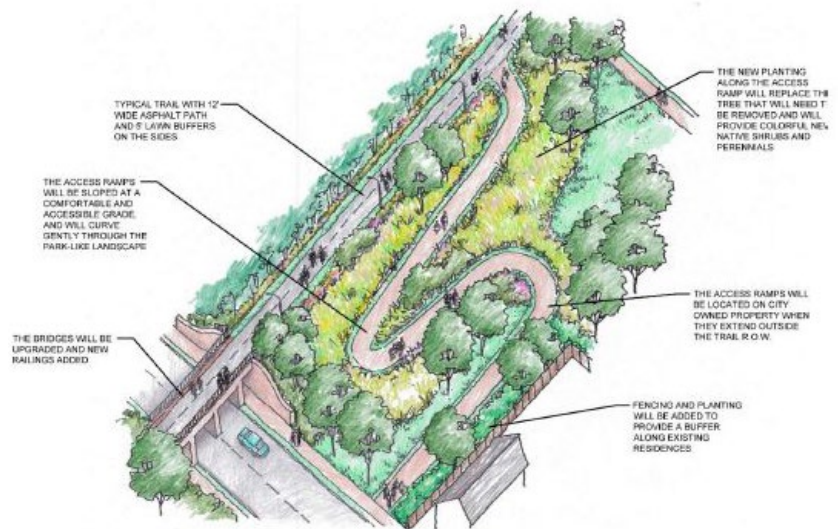
The Englewood Nature Trail Project will provide a critical link, not only in the neighborhood trail network, but also in the Citywide trail network. This project is part of the [2022 Citywide Vision for a Connected Trails Network](#) which intends to add approximately 48 miles of new assets that would tie into the existing 79-mile network ([map](#)). The vision also commits over \$15 million to jumpstart a list of key projects citywide, including the Englewood Nature Trail.

The trail will tie into existing bike lanes on Damen Avenue, Racine Avenue, and Halsted Avenue. Bicycle access on other adjacent streets will follow [CDOT's 2023 Chicago Cycling Strategy](#)

guidelines to continue to improve bicycle facilities throughout the Englewood and West Englewood neighborhoods, allowing better access to the proposed trail. The only vehicular access to the trail will be at Hoyne Avenue and at Halsted Street (south) for emergency services, maintenance, or police vehicles. The mainline trail and all access ramps will be ADA compliant. See **Figure 3** for the proposed ramp on Damen Avenue.

As identified in the [2023 Englewood Agro-Eco District Land Use Plan](#) and discussed in greater detail in Criterion #2 below, the project closely aligns with grassroots initiatives to use the trail not just as a physical connector, but also a connector of opportunity along the corridor – thematically linking active living, access to nature, and urban agriculture. In addition, it will promote better accessibility to

Figure 3. Englewood Nature Trail Damen Avenue



Damen Avenue Ramp



community destinations and resources as well as realize significant safety, health, and climate benefits by providing a dedicated right of way for people walking and biking, tying into high-frequency transit lines, and catalyzing new neighborhood destinations.

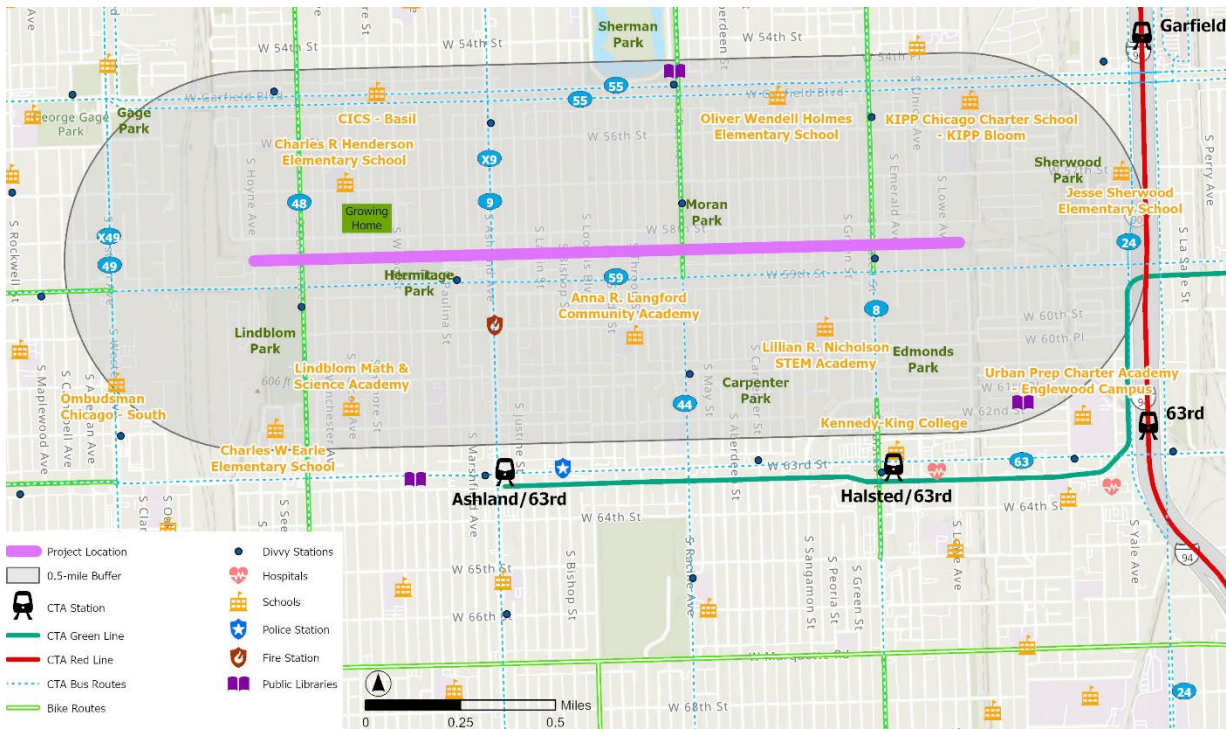
Key destinations along the rail line that will experience greater connectivity include Lindblom Math and Science Academy and Park, Hermitage Park, Moran Park, Growing Home (urban agriculture farm along the corridor). Ten additional schools as well as other key destinations are located approximately within a half mile of the project corridor. These key destinations are outlined in **Table 2** and **Figure 4** below.

Table 2. List of Key Destinations

Community Resource	Name	
Schools	Oliver Wendell Holmes Elementary School	KIPP Chicago Charter School - KIPP Bloom
	Lindblom Math & Science Academy	Ombudsman Chicago - South
	Charles W Earle Elementary School	CICS - Basil
	Jesse Sherwood Elementary School	Charles R Henderson Elementary School
	Anna R. Langford Community Academy	Urban Prep Charter Academy – Englewood Campus*
	Lillian R. Nicholson STEM Academy	Kennedy-King College*
Parks	Edmonds Park	Sherman Park
	Sherwood Park	Lindblom Park
	Carpenter Pak	Hermitage Park
	Gage Park	Moran Park
Other	Public Libraries* (3)	Fire Station (1)
	Growing Home Urban Agriculture Farm	Divvy Stations (8)
	Police Station* (1)	Hospital* (1)

*Denotes resource just outside of the half-mile project corridor buffer

Figure 4. Key Destinations Map





The trail will improve transportation options for low-income and people of color within the Englewood and West Englewood community areas. Such communities face disproportionate transportation costs as a percent of their household income. According to USDOT ETC, 97% of the population within the census tracts surrounding the project area experience transportation cost burden (**Appendix E**). As discussed in the Project Description, 30% of Englewood and West Englewood residents rely on transit to get to work and 47% of Englewood residents and 35% of West Englewood residents do not have access to a vehicle.

Though the transportation cost burden within the project area is high, the USDOT ETC indicates that transportation access risk within the project area is relatively low (**Appendix E**). The trail would tie into the transportation infrastructure within the surrounding community. This transportation infrastructure includes two CTA Red Line stations within one mile of the project and two stations on the CTA Green Line just over a half-mile from the project area. Furthermore, it is near several major bus routes, including the east-west routes of the #55, #59, and #63 buses and the north-south routes of the #8, #9, #X9 (express), #24, #44, #49, #X49, and #48 buses. The trail itself would connect to the existing bike network between Halsted Street and Damen Avenue, adding additional transportation access.

Based on its proximity to this infrastructure, the Englewood Nature Trail would increase lower-cost transportation options for the surrounding community by making transit and cycling more accessible. This will help create new connections in a community that has historically faced disinvestment and barriers to opportunity.

Additionally, the project would promote active transportation options and green infrastructure, helping to reduce emissions that are harmful to the health of residents and the environment. Promotion of active transit projects within the City of Chicago, such as the Englewood Nature Trail, is in line with the [2023 Chicago Climate Action Plan Addendum](#) that targets a 67% reduction in GHG emissions by 2040.

Criterion #2: Community Support

The Englewood and West Englewood communities have long advocated for a trail project in their community. The Englewood Nature Trail Project is centered around equitable investment in these historically marginalized communities. Englewood and West Englewood are predominantly Black communities facing multiple socio-economic burdens as discussed in Criterion #1 and Criterion #5. The City has been engaging the Englewood community about the project for many years, and this outreach has had a significant impact on the project design and conception.

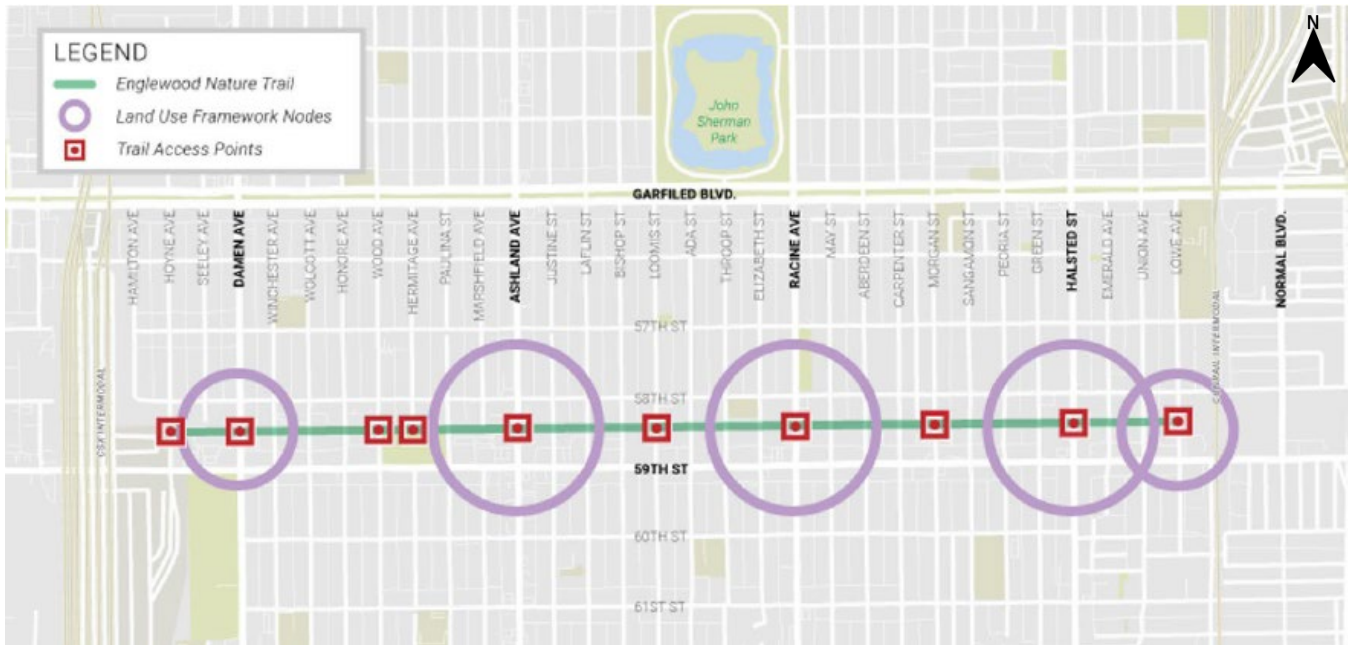
The development of the Englewood Nature Trail was first proposed in the [2009 New Englewood Remaking America \(ERA\) Trail Community Vision Plan](#). The proposed trail then became part of the [2014 Green Healthy Neighborhoods Plan](#) (GHN Plan). The GHN Plan had an 18-month community outreach component that brought together residents, community organizations, and community developers. The GHN Plan presents community-backed planning strategies that will complement and maximize the positive impact of the Englewood Nature Trail by identifying potential redevelopment opportunities for vacant land along the trail alignment that reflect the communities' priorities.

The City has continued to develop planning strategies identified in the GHN Plan into the [2023 Englewood Agro-Eco District Land Use Plan](#). This land use plan was truly community-led as it was stewarded by the local organization Grow Greater Englewood. The land use plan envisions ecological, agricultural, and business uses for vacant land next to the trail to support local entrepreneurship and enhance quality of life. Engaging the community early and often beyond the trail alignment and design



has ensured that the Englewood Nature Trail design is compatible with the community today and will support future community-led development efforts. For example, the Englewood Nature Trail design includes five trail access points strategically placed to complement the land use plan (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Trail Access Points at Land Use Framework Nodes



The Englewood community has also provided feedback on the trail design itself at 15 community input opportunities including public meetings, community design charrettes, and walking tours conducted between October 2015 and November 2023. See **Appendix J** for recent Public Hearing presentation. The project team also completed stakeholder coordination with property owners along the trail. The Project Development Report (PDR) ([weblink](#) or **Appendix H**) contains detailed public meeting summaries. Throughout the many community touchpoints, the community has expressed support for the project, and is excited for the community wealth building opportunities this trail will bring to Englewood and West Englewood.

The community engagement approach is centered on bringing community members into the planning and implementation process as partners to ensure that the results of the project meet the community’s needs and provide maximum benefits to its residents. To that end, included in **Appendix B** are the Letters of Support received for this project, including Grow Greater Englewood and Greater Englewood Chamber of Commerce.

While this project is highly collaborative and community-driven, the City of Chicago is the sole project sponsor of the Englewood Line Trail and has ultimate responsibility for assembling funding and delivering the final project.

Criterion #3: Commitment to Increasing Walking, Biking, and Other Types of Active Transportation

The City of Chicago is committed to promoting walking, biking, and all other types of active transportation. The City utilizes design guidelines and policies, regulatory measures, and financial



incentives to encourage active transportation. This commitment is evidenced by numerous plans, initiatives, and official guidelines that aim to promote and enhance active transportation.

Commitment to and Improvement of Traffic Safety

Ensuring the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists is a critical component of multiple city-wide plans and initiatives, including the [2021 CDOT Strategic Plan for Transportation](#), [2017 Vision Zero Chicago Action Plan](#), and The [2023 Chicago Cycling Strategy](#). The [2018 Vision Zero High Crash Corridors Framework Plan](#) identified Englewood as one of eight High Crash Areas in Chicago, communities that experience both high traffic injury or death and economic hardship. These plans utilize data-driven and equity-focused approaches to identify areas in need of safety improvements and establish procedures for measuring the efficacy of safety interventions.

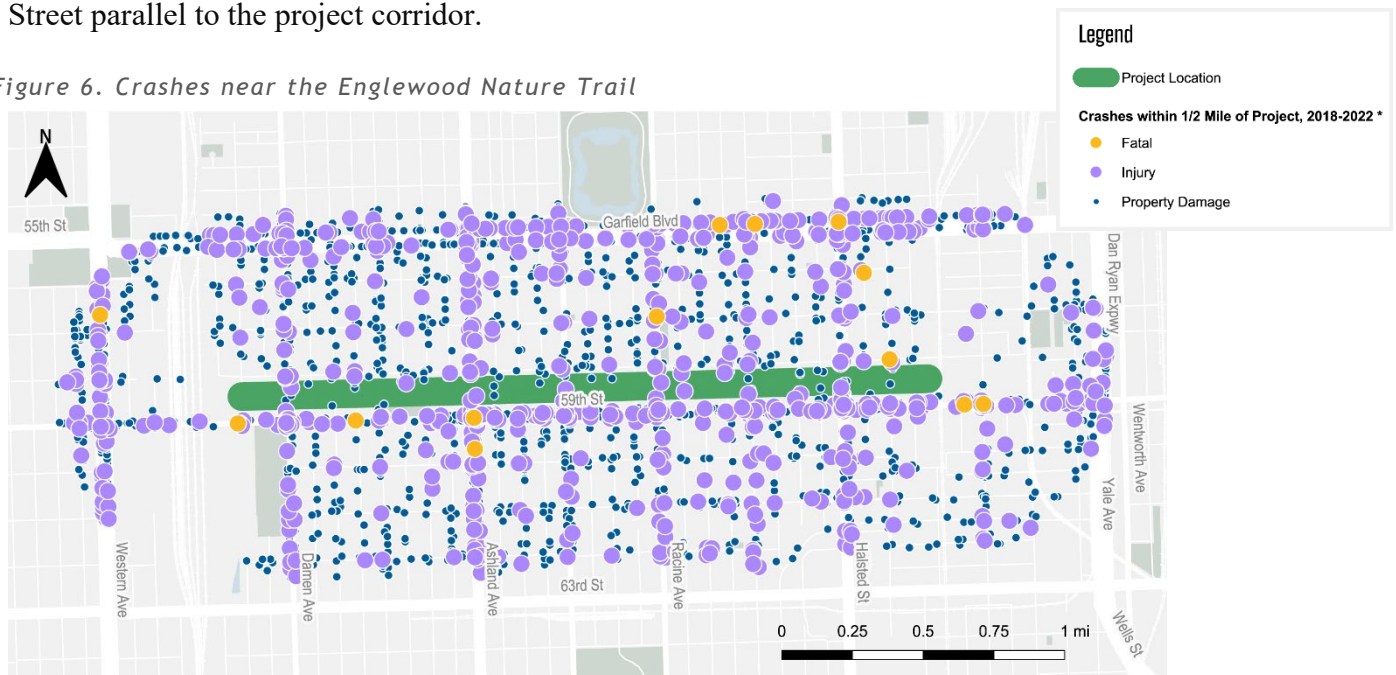
The [Vision Zero Action Plan](#) identifies four goals to reach zero fatalities on Chicago roadways, two of which will be directly supported through the construction of the Englewood Nature Trail Project:

1. To invest equitably in communities that are most affected by severe traffic crashes, such as High Crash Areas, like Englewood.
2. To make streets safer for all users by creating a grade-separated trail as a designated area for these vulnerable roadway users.

Between 2018 and 2022, there were 4,545 crashes located within a half-mile of the Englewood Nature Trail. Of these, 14 were fatal, 1007 involved an injury, and 3,524 involved only property damage.

Figure 6 shows a significant number of these crashes, including five fatalities, were located along 59th Street parallel to the project corridor.

Figure 6. Crashes near the Englewood Nature Trail



Regulations

This project aligns with the City of Chicago’s efforts to promote equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD). Since 2013, Chicago has advocated for compact mixed-use development by passing the first transit-oriented development ordinance. The City updated its ETOD plan with the adoption of the [Equitable Transit-Oriented Development Policy Plan](#) in 2021. The plan seeks to continue its efforts



supporting ETOD while addressing the disparities of the 2013 policy plan. In July 2022, Chicago passed the [Connected Communities Ordinance](#), which aims to promote investment in low-income neighborhoods while addressing the negative impacts of a car-centric built environment. The [Englewood Agro-Eco District Land Use Plan](#) includes the potential for the construction of neighborhood commercial centers, which include restaurants, retail, services, and a mixed-use buildings.

In 2023, CDOT released [Guidelines for Travel Demand Study and Management Plans](#) which requires developments located within half-mile of train or rapid bus service to complete a Travel Demand Management (TDM) Plan, and not a traffic impact study. This additional requirement builds on the Connected Communities Ordinance as it requires developers to incorporate strategies that encourage the use of alternative transportation, including biking and walking.

Financial Incentives

Developers are offered incentives to construct compact-mixed use development projects near transit in lower-income neighborhoods to create more walkable communities. The City launched [two ETOD development grant programs](#) in 2023 for capital investments in housing, mixed-use facilities, and small businesses that aim to improve sidewalk safety, walkability, and bicycling.

Community Design Policies

The City has established numerous community design policies that prioritize pedestrian safety, comfort, and accessibility. In 2013, CDOT updated its [Complete Streets Chicago Design Guidelines](#), which is a series of strategies and tools that seeks to create safe transportation network for all users, regardless of ability or destination. The [2017 Vision Zero Chicago Action Plan](#) recommends policies and features that advance principles of the USDOT's Safe Systems Approach, including building a network that provides choices for all modes of travel. The grade-separated design of the project is one example of a Safer Roads countermeasure, as it separates pedestrians and bicycles from vehicles and eliminates the need to cross lanes of traffic for travel.

Dedicated bicycle lanes are important infrastructure improvements, and efforts to expand the bike network are showing success; the total network of bikeways throughout Chicago grew 31% from 2018 to 2022. The [2023 Chicago Cycling Strategy Plan](#) shows the City's continued commitment to expanding and improving the existing bicycling network, with a focus on promoting safer bikeways. The plan sets a goal that for the next 150 miles of bikeway installations, 85% of planned projects will be low-stress bikeways (neighborhood greenways, protected bike lanes, or off-street trails) and that 70% of Chicagoans will live within a half mile of a low-stress bikeway. The Englewood Nature Trail would represent a significant step toward realizing this goal. The plan analyzed the citywide bike system and determined neighborhoods that lack infrastructure and should be prioritized. One of these communities is Englewood. This project is a crucial step to address the gaps in bike infrastructure in the area.

Criterion #4: Financial Completeness

The total cost of the project, including preliminary engineering, design engineering and construction is \$91.4 million. The total previously incurred costs are estimated at around \$7.8 million, of which 100% is locally funded. The total construction costs are \$82.8 million. A total of \$42 million in federal funding has already been secured through the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP-L) which is 51% of the construction costs.



This project is scalable, and a minimum ATIIP funding of \$5 million will help CDOT complete construction of this project in a timely manner. If funding through the ATIIP program is reduced, the City of Chicago is committed to securing other funding sources to make the project whole.

For more details about the budget and funding sources, please see Section 2: Grant Funds, Sources, and Uses of all Project Funding above as well as the Budget Narrative in **Appendix A**.

Criterion #5: Equitable Development

The Englewood Nature Trail will be in the Englewood and West Englewood Community Areas in the South Side of Chicago. These communities are majority Black communities and have faced long-term deliberate disinvestment. The project area is 79% Black and only 2.3% white (see **Appendix G** for Policy Map Community Report); and according to USDOT ETC analysis, face burden rates of over 90% across the Climate and Disaster, Environmental, Health, and Social Vulnerability components. (See **Appendix E** for USDOT ETC Report).

The community has faced a multitude of economic challenges in the past 20 years. According to USDOT ETC analysis, the project area has a 98% unemployment indicator and 94% poverty line indicator and transportation cost burden indicator. According to Policy Map Data, as of Q3 2023 14% of homes and 24% of businesses in the project area are vacant and there are an additional 50 vacant land parcels along the trail.

This project will not only enhance connectivity in the near future as described in Criterion #1: Mobility and Community Connectivity, but it will also provide access to future jobs. As detailed in Criterion #2: Community Support, following years of community-led project planning, the community and the Chicago Department of Planning and Development produced the [Englewood Agro-Eco District Land Use Plan](#) for the vacant lands along the trail. This land use plan directly addresses the high unemployment and envisions empty storefronts, and vacant land as an urban agriculture district in Englewood and West Englewood.

In 2011, the City amended the zoning ordinance to formalize urban farms. According to the [2022 Growing for Chicago Project Summary](#), nearly 27 acres of City facilitated urban farms have been developed. The planned Agro-Eco District will make Englewood and West Englewood a leader in this burgeoning economic sector in Chicago. The district will be home to urban farms, food processing and manufacturing centers and retail spaces. There is already a growing system of six urban farms near the trail led by Black and Brown farmers, such as [Growing Home](#). This district is poised to be a key job center in Englewood, West Englewood, and surrounding areas. This transformative plan will provide economic, education, and career opportunities; and at the center will be the Englewood Nature Trail connecting the district.

Unfortunately, the community has had to grapple with severe public health challenges as well. According to ETC analysis, the project area has a health vulnerable index of 97%; and faces asthma prevalence (98%), high blood pressure prevalence (98%), and diabetes prevalence (98%) among the population. According to US Census estimates, the project area experiences a population loss of 17% between 2010 and 2020, compared to a population increase of 2% in Cook County (see **Appendix G** for Policy Map Community Report).

The [2016 Englewood Line Trail Health Impact Assessment](#) (HIA) documents the disparities listed above and identifies how the Englewood Nature Trail could have significant positive impacts in the



community. The HIA concludes that the trail will likely have a strong positive health impact due to improved mental health and increased physical activity. The HIA outlines a monitoring plan to track the effects of the Englewood Nature Trail (see **Table 3** below).

Table 3. Selected Proposed Indicators for Long-term Monitoring of Equity and Health Impacts

Indicator	Agency Responsible for Monitoring	Timing
Trail users report feeling safe on and in the areas near the trail	Community partners and Chicago Department of Public Health	Short Term
Increased percentage of adults and youth that engage in the recommended amounts of physical activity within the 1.0-mile buffer zone of the trail	Chicago Department of Public Health	Short Term
Decreased asthma hospitalization rate for children <5 years and older adults aged 65+ living within 1.0 mile of the trail	Chicago Department of Public Health	Long Term
Decreased diabetes and high blood pressure prevalence in the 1.0-mile buffer zone around the trail site	Chicago Department of Public Health	Long Term
Unemployment rate among adults 16 or older in the 1.0-mile buffer zone around the trail	Chicago Department of Public Health	Medium Term
Improved economic opportunities in the communities surrounding the trail	Chicago Department of Planning and Development and/or their workforce development partners (e.g., Greencorps Chicago)	Medium Term

The Englewood Nature Trail will reduce existing disparities in Englewood and West Englewood by enhancing access to jobs and catalyze a new job center in a growing sector of the economy. Beyond economic wealth, the trail will also increase health wealth in the community by bringing new biking and walking infrastructure away from vehicle traffic to increase active transportation.

Criterion #6: Other IDOT Goals and Priorities

Safety

The Englewood Nature Trail will ensure the safe use and support mobility of all users of the transportation system in line with the strategic principles of the [FHWA Complete Streets Design Model](#). In 2013, the City adopted the [Complete Streets Chicago Design Guidelines](#) which outlines policy and design approaches that seek to ensure the safety of all roadway users. As outlined in the [2022 CDOT Strategic Plan for Transportation Year 1 Update](#), the City has continued to incorporate Complete Streets Design at every opportunity to make transportation safer for all users. The project will also comply with design guidelines outlined in [Chapter 42 Bicycle Guidelines from IDOT’s Bureau of Local Roads and Streets \(BLRS\) Manual](#).

The [2023 Chicago Cycling Strategy Plan](#) addresses roadway safety for bicyclists, setting a goals of creating low-stress bikeways (e.g. neighborhood greenways, protected bike lanes, or off-street trails) for 85% the next 150 miles of bikeway installations and that 70% of Chicagoans will live within ½ miles of these bikeways. Furthermore, construction of this project supports the [2017 Vision Zero Action Plan’s](#) goals of creating safer streets for all users via the installation of a grade-separated bikeway that separates



motorized vehicles from bicycles and pedestrians. As an effort to prioritize pedestrian and bicyclist safety, the following access points will include upgraded sidewalks to ensure safe connections to the trail: Hoyne Avenue, Damen Avenue, Wood Street, Ashland Avenue, Loomis Boulevard, Racine Avenue, Morgan Street, Halsted Street, and Lowe Avenue.

The [2016 Englewood Line Trail Health Impact Assessment](#) (HIA) HIA surveyed residents about their safety concerns. The community perceives several areas along the trail alignment as unsafe and noted this as a reason for not choosing active modes of transportation. This trail has the potential to provide the community with a safe grade-separated trail and increase walking, cycling, and other active transportation in the community. Additionally, the trail and access ramps will be continuously lit, and the project will create additional active spaces to address these specific community safety-related concerns.

Access to Jobs and Key Destinations

As described in Criterion 1, the Englewood Nature Trail will provide access to schools, jobs, services, and retail destinations. The trail will re-activate adjacent corridors that have historically served as focal points of pedestrian activity, shopping, services, transportation, public spaces, and quality-of-life amenities for residents, creating a community asset that supports new residential and commercial investment in its vicinity.

Multiple schools, parks, and Garfield Boulevard, part of the [citywide boulevard system](#) are located within three blocks of the trail. Recently, several abandoned lots near the trail have been converted into productive community-led urban agriculture sites. The trail will serve as a physical connector between these agriculture sites and encourage the continued development of the area, known as the [Englewood Agro-Eco District](#), which is poised to be a key local job center in the future.

Since the Englewood and West Englewood community areas do not have large job centers today, this trail is also enhancing access to existing jobs in the City's Central Business District and beyond. The Englewood Nature Trail will improve access to the City's bike and public transit network. As described in Criterion 1, the trail will be part of the City's bike network, connect to several public transit bus routes, and is near four public train stations along two train lines.

Economic Competitiveness

In the past, to further enhance local project benefits, the City of Chicago has used local hiring agreements when permitted by the funding agency. Ensuring that disadvantaged populations and youth have access to employment opportunities is a high priority for the City. The City has put numerous initiatives to increase the number of skilled workers and increased diverse hiring. The initiatives include incentives for contractors, workforce development programs, and partnerships with local non-profits and chambers of commerce.

The Chicago Residency Ordinance requires construction contractors to utilize at least 50% of all labor hours by Chicago residents, and at least 7.5% of all labor hours by residents in the project area. The City encourages contractors that 15% of their workforce is female and 70% are minority workers. The City provides monetary incentives, ranging from 0.5 – 6% of the contract value, to hire City residents, people from socio-economically disadvantaged areas, women, minorities, and ex-offenders, and apprentices.

The City has invested in local workforce programs to increase access to well-paying jobs. The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership is the largest workforce development system in the nation, serving more than 140,000 people annually. The partnership connects employers and job seekers, and can provide



training, coaching, paid internships, and more. The Chicago Department of Family and Support Services also works with community partners to connect Chicagoans to well-paying jobs at workforce centers and re-entry support centers. The network of workforce programs in Chicago is vast, and has programs for all Chicagoans, including ex-offenders, unhoused or at-risk people, people with limited English proficiency, individuals who are low skilled and low income, out-of-work or out-of-school youth, and veterans.

Apprentice training programs must be union-authorized and must sponsor graduates from the Chicago City Colleges (CCC) or Chicago Public Schools (CPS). This apprenticeship program benefits low-income students of color; 25% of CPS students are bilingual and nearly 71% qualified for free or reduced lunch in the 2021-2022 school year. At the CCC 75% of students identify as students of color. Additionally, the Chicago Department of Procurement Services (DPS) works with 45 local non-profit agencies and/or chambers of commerce that represent the interest of small, minority and/or women owned businesses. DPS meets with these agencies on a quarterly basis and conducts an annual review of City of Chicago and Assist Agencies partnerships. These partnerships help small businesses and M/WBE firms learn of procurement opportunities; and provide a channel for DPS to receive feedback about the procurement process.

Environmental Protection

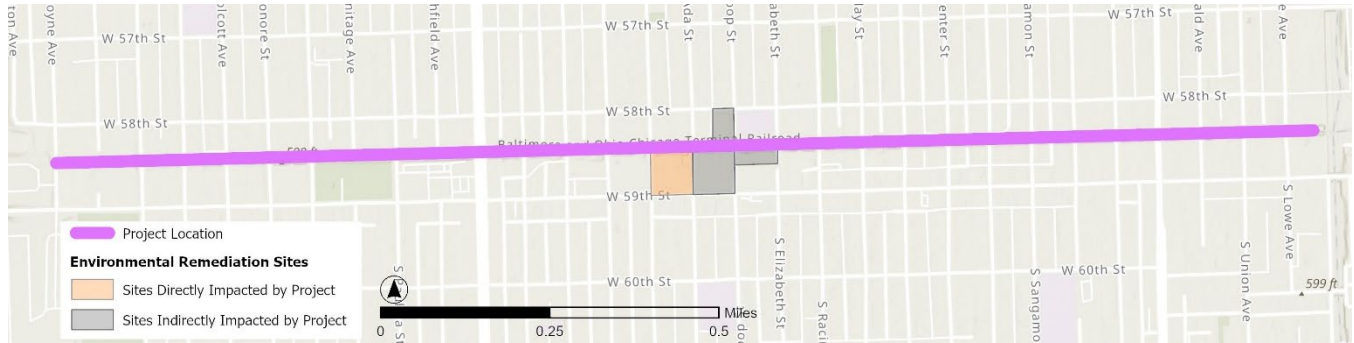
In addition to advancing a mode shift toward active transportation, the Englewood Nature Trail will incorporate and support Chicago's sustainability and climate resilience goals and create a safe route for cyclists and pedestrians. Under the updated [Chicago 2022 Climate Action Plan \(CAP\)](#), this trail would fall under Pillar Three, which seeks to deliver a zero-emissions mobility network that would enable Chicagoans to choose active transportation or micromobility for 45% of all trips by 2040. This project would introduce a viable active transportation network to the Englewood and West Englewood community areas.

The [2023 Chicago Climate Action Plan Addendum](#) targets a 67% reduction in GHG emissions by 2040 by following five pillars identified in the CAP. According to [IDOT's 2023 Carbon Reduction Strategy](#), the completion of a project similar in scope to the Englewood Nature Trail would have potential reduction between 30 and 70 metric tons of carbon dioxide per year.

The project would also help correct the environmental injustice this community suffers due to its industrial legacy and historical racist zoning policies. All adjacent census tracts are designated as Justice40 disadvantaged areas, demonstrating the economic and environmental injustices that burden the community (see **Appendix F** for the EJ Screen Report). The original elevated railway was constructed as a part of a former industrial corridor along West 59th Street. This leaves behind several environmentally contaminated lots, including two clusters of parcels (see **Figure 7**), that are adjacent to the Englewood Nature Trail. These parcels are heavily contaminated with lead, which is a known toxin particularly detrimental to the cognitive development of young people.



Figure 7. Environmental Remediation Sites



One of these clusters will be remediated as a part of this project to construct an ADA compliant ramp to access the trail. The City of Chicago is committed to remediating the other contaminated parcels as a separate but complementary project to the Englewood Trail using local funding. While the use of those remediated properties has not been determined (preliminary ideas are for a farmer’s market or park space), the removal of dangerous lead-contaminated soil will pave the way for their reutilization and will be a tremendous improvement for the quality of life in this neighborhood and near the multi-use trail and recreational space.

The project represents a significant change of land use patterns. The trail represents a shift from industrial to green space. The trail will also foster reutilization of adjacent land from vacant lots to urban, retail spaces, and more.

Quality of Life

The project will help implement the [Green Healthy Neighborhoods](#) strategy reutilizing land for new resources. Residents of all ages and abilities will be able to access and enjoy the Englewood Nature Trail. The proposed site plan includes 12 at-grade ADA-accessible access ramps at regularly spaced intervals along the length of the trail. The trail would increase residents’ access to park space, which comes with a range of physical, mental, and behavioral health improvements.

Additionally, the planned greenspace and tree canopy will bring multiple indirect benefits to users and non-users. Green space is an effective climate resilience strategy that mitigates the urban heat-island effect and reduces stormwater runoff. Additional services provided by green space include aesthetic value, noise reduction, and a secure habitat for native species.

The trail will also enhance the safety of the community by establishing active spaces and supporting collaboration with schools, community organizations, and economic development efforts. In a survey on perceptions of safety in the community conducted for the [2016 Englewood Line Trail Health Impact Study](#), residents listed crime as a reason for avoiding areas near the trail. Completion of the trail will improve features of the built environment that respondents suggested may be linked to crime, such as vacant structures, lighting, and isolation.

4. Project Readiness and Environmental Risk

Technical Feasibility

Phase I: Preliminary Engineering is complete and documented in the Project Development Report ([weblink](#) or **Appendix H**) Phase II: Design and Contract Plan Preparation is currently underway.



Approximately \$6.13M in local funds are secured to complete Phase II between Q1 2024 and Q4 2025. Right-of-way acquisition will take place in Q4 2025 with secured state and local funds.

The City of Chicago has delivered similar trail projects in the recent past and is confident that it will be able to deliver the project in a timely manner. The cost estimate and project schedule for this project has been informed by other recent elevated rail trail projects in Chicago, such as the Bloomingdale Trail in the Humboldt Park/Wicker Park neighborhoods. The City anticipates a similar construction process and will apply lessons from that project to this current effort. This cost estimate also includes a 15% construction contingency.

Engineering and Design Studies and Activities

The project will comply with design guidelines outlined in [Chapter 42 Bicycle Guidelines from IDOT's Bureau of Local Roads and Streets \(BLRS\) Manual](#) as well as additional design criteria approved by CDOT.

Statement of Work

The Englewood Nature Trail will closely maintain the existing vertical profile of the railroad property and consist of a 12 foot wide bituminous surface path with an adjacent 5 feet wide grass area on each side of the trail. The existing 26 bridges are intended to be rehabilitated per the recommendations contained in the approved Abbreviated Bridge Condition Reports. See Exhibit 4 in Volume 1 of the PDR ([weblink](#) or **Appendix H**).

A total of 28 retaining walls will be constructed. An aerial plan view and profile plan view, proposed typical sections, and retaining wall locations are included in Volume 2 of the PDR ([weblink](#) or **Appendix H**). The project will include detention for stormwater during rain events. New underdrains will be provided to capture stormwater runoff at the access ramp areas and route it to designated detention systems. The Location Drainage Study is included in Volume 3 of the PDR ([weblink](#) or **Appendix H**).

There are a total of twelve proposed access ramps along the entire length of the elevated trail. Ramps that are a minimum of 10 feet wide will allow for access by emergency vehicles or maintenance vehicles (BLRS 42-3.02(h)). All access ramps, except for Halsted Street (north) and Halsted Street (south) are 10 feet wide, which will be 8 feet wide and 12 feet wide, respectively. The access ramps will be constructed with bituminous pavement matching the mainline trail pavement section. Sidewalks that are in poor condition and connect to the access ramps for the path will be reconstructed and ADA compliant.

A Preliminary Site Assessment completed in general accordance with Chapter 27 of the IDOT BDE Manual, the Illinois State Geologic Survey publication "A Manual for Conducting Preliminary Environmental Site Assessments for Illinois Department of Transportation Infrastructure Projects," and Section 20-12.04 of the BLRS Manual. Recognized Environmental Conditions were found along the project corridor. A Preliminary Site Investigation (PSI) was conducted in August 2023 for a limited sample of soil borings on top of the trail and at trail access points to determine the presence of special waste. The PSI found soils containing





hazardous waste lead that will require proper off-site disposal. Additional environment soil testing and a final soil remediation plan will be prepared during Phase II. See Volume 4 of the PDR ([weblink](#) or **Appendix H**).

CDOT operates its programs without regard to race, color, and national origin in accordance with [Title VI](#) of the Civil Rights Act. CDOT assures that no person shall, as provided by Federal and State civil rights laws, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity. CDOT further ensures every effort will be made to ensure non-discrimination in all programs and activities, whether those programs and activities are federally funded or not.

Environmental Risk

Detailed Project Schedule

The City of Chicago acquired the Norfolk Southern Railway property in 2018 and already owns the majority of property needed for the trail and the access points. The main trail and ten of the twelve proposed access ramps will be located on City of Chicago property. The proposed access ramps at two locations will require the acquisition of additional right-of-way in order to be constructed and maintained. The locations requiring additional right-of-way are:

1. Between Damen Avenue and Winchester Avenue, south of the railroad embankment. Approximately 0.56 acres on eight parcels will be acquired using OSLAD grant funding. The property is owned by six property owners and is currently vacant.

2. Vacant lot south of the trail Elizabeth Street and Racine Avenue. Approximately 0.93 acres on one parcel will be acquired using local funding.

Right-of-way acquisition will be completed in accordance with 49 CFR 24, 23 CFR 710. Acquisition of these parcels would allow for additional access points along the trail to be constructed, giving residents greater opportunity to utilize the trail and travel to key destinations on either side of the trail more easily.

Statement of Work

Environmental Permits and Reviews

IDOT in consultation with the FHWA determined that this project will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and, therefore, met the criteria to proceed as a State Approved Categorical Exclusion (CE). IDOT has addressed all environmental requirements for this project and determined that it met the following requirements of the CE Programmatic Agreement (approved October 14, 2020). IDOT, on behalf of FHWA, approved the CE on January 8, 2024 (see **Appendix I**). The Project

Table 4. Project Schedule

Project Milestone	Completion Date*
TIP Conformity	Received June 14, 2023
Phase I Engineering	Completed Q3 2023
FHWA/IDOT Design Approval	Completed Q4 2023
Phase II Engineering	Q3 2023- Q3 2025
NEPA Categorical Exclusion Approval	Received January 8, 2024
ROW acquisition	Q4 2025
Specifications of estimates	Q4 2025
State and Local approvals	Q4 2025
Procurement	Q1 2026
Construction Start	Q2 2026
Construction Complete	Q1 2028



Development Report was updated in 2024 and includes preliminary engineering, environmental assessments, permitting need, agency coordination, and public engagement ([weblink](#) or **Appendix H**). Public engagement descriptions are included in Criterion #2: Community Support and Letters of Support are included in Appendix B.

Federal, State and Local Approvals

This project is included in the ONTO 2050 Transportation Plan and in the Transportation Improvement Program, endorsed by the CMAP, the region’s Metropolitan Planning Organization. The ONTO 2050 Transportation Plan was found to conform by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) on October 12, 2022. The TIP was found to conform by FHWA and FTA on June 14, 2023. Volume 1 of the PDR ([weblink](#) or **Appendix H**) outlines various state approvals to be attained in later phases of the project.

Assessment of Project Risks and Mitigation Strategies

CDOT has prepared a matrix of potential project risks and mitigation strategies below.

Table 6. Assessment of Project Risks and Mitigation Strategies

Risk	Description	Mitigation Strategy
Labor and Materials	Increased costs associated with labor and materials due to uncertainty in the supply chain and inflation create challenges when budgeting for a project being constructed in 2026.	A 15% contingency line item was included in the budget.
Public Engagement	Fear of gentrification and displacement have been identified as concerns in past public processes.	The Task Order Request for the Englewood Line Trail Planning and Urban Design Framework, outlines expected public participation activities to be undertaken supporting project development and delivery. <i>This has been completed as part of the Phase I: Preliminary Engineering.</i>
Special Waste	The PSI found soils containing hazardous waste lead that will require proper off-site disposal.	Off-site disposal facilities will be identified prior to construction. Additional environment soil testing and a final soil remediation plan will be prepared during Phase II.

5. Administration Priorities and Departmental Strategic Plan Goals

The Englewood Nature Trail supports the following Administration Priorities and Departmental Strategic Goals:

Table 7. Administration Priorities and Departmental Strategic Plan Goals

Administration Priority	Englewood Nature Trail Project
Safety	Safety and well-being will be enhanced by providing a grade separated trail for the most vulnerable roadway users – bicyclists and pedestrians. The trail and its twelve access ramps will all be ADA accessible. To address the community’s concerns about personal safety, the trail and its access ramps will be continuously lit.
Climate Change and Sustainability	Trail will establish a new zero-emissions mobility route, which will be part of the bike network in the community, promoting mode-shift toward active transportation and resulting in fewer GHG emissions.



Equity	As described in the Project Description, the project is located in two majority Black community areas that have been historically marginalized. This project will bring long overdue investment to a project area that is identified by the USDOT ETC explorer as 100% disadvantaged, has a transportation cost burden indicator of 94%, and is located in EJ40 census tracts.
Workforce Development, Job Quality, and Wealth Creation	Access to jobs in other parts of the city via public transportation will be enhanced. Within Englewood, the trail will serve as a physical connector of the future Englewood Agro-Eco District and will help to reactivate the community with a complementary land-use plan that allows for mixed-use development.

6. FHWA Priority Selection Considerations

The Englewood Nature Trail supports the following FHWA Priority Selection Considerations:

- 1. This project will connect twelve schools in Englewood and West Englewood, including two high schools and one college that are incredibly significant sites of academic excellence serving a majority of Black and Brown low-income students.** See **Figure 4** for a Map of Key Destinations in the project area.

[Kennedy-King Community College](#) is one of seven colleges comprising the City Colleges of Chicago (CCC). Across all CCC colleges, a full tuition is provided to any Chicago high school graduate who earned a 3.0 GPA or higher. At Kennedy-King, students can participate in [free workforce training programs](#) designed to increase the number of Black people on a path to earning 30% above the current area living wage.

[Lindblom Math and Science Academy High School](#) is one of eleven public selective enrollment high schools and middle schools which provide advanced education to students across the City of Chicago. The school building is designated a City landmark and is a jewel in the West Englewood community.

[Urban Prep Academies](#) Englewood Campus is the first public charter high school for boys in the whole country. The school was founded by a group of Black education, business, and civic leaders to improve educational opportunities available to Black boys. Urban Prep is distinguished by the fact that for 15 consecutive years, 100% of their students have been accepted to four-year colleges and universities.

- 2. This project will serve as the spine to a future Agro-Eco Business District.**
The planned Agro-Eco District directly addresses the high unemployment and envisions empty storefronts, and vacant land as an urban agriculture district in Englewood and West Englewood. This land use plan will make Englewood and West Englewood a leader in this burgeoning economic sector in Chicago.
- 3. This project will deliver a new pedestrian and cycling trail, community placemaking, and foster future economic development to a disadvantaged community.**
The project area is 79% Black and only 2.3% white (see **Appendix G** for Policy Map Community Report); and according to USDOT ETC analysis, face burden rates of over 90% across the Climate and Disaster, Environmental, Health, and Social Vulnerability components. According to USDOT ETC analysis, the project area has a 98% unemployment indicator and 94% poverty line indicator and transportation cost burden indicator.