



2026

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



Southwest Commuter Path

Wisconsin



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All it takes is a short ride on Madison's 5.6-mile South ?west Commuter Path to understand the critical role it plays in getting people around town. Not only does it pass within a mile of the State Capitol complex and through the southern part of the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus, but it also connects with a handful of trails that loop the city or head across the countryside.

The paved path follows the route of the Illinois Central Railroad branch built in 1887 between Freeport, Illinois, and Madison. The crushed-stone [Badger State Trail](#) uses that route as it heads 40 miles south to the Illinois border, where it meets the Jane Addams Trail. Financial difficulties in 1980 forced the railroad (by now the Illinois Central Gulf) to stop using the line. A succession of railroads—the Chicago, Madison and Northern, the

Central Wisconsin, and the Wisconsin and Calumet—all failed to return the line to profitability. The tracks were pulled in 1999, and the trail opened two years later.

Beginning where the Southwest Commuter Path meets a scenic trail through Brittingham Park on Monona Bay, you'll head through a warehouse district alongside a still-active rail yard where some old buildings have been upgraded to loft apartments. In 0.3 mile, you'll cross West Washington Avenue with its view of the Capitol dome, about a mile away.

Across the tracks you'll see a vintage depot for the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad. Designed by noted Chicago architect Charles Sumner Frost, the imposing 1903 structure is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Closed in the 1960s, it's now home to several shops, including one that rents, sells, and repairs bicycles. A diesel engine and railroad cars flank the depot.

After the depot, the path passes the university's Kohl Center for basketball and hockey and Camp Randall Stadium, home of the Badgers football team and named for a Civil War-era Army training camp at the site. Other university-¿related buildings are scattered about, and students regularly use the trail.

In a couple of blocks, you enter established residential neighborhoods with wooded lots and homes that back up to the trail. Residents have planted wildflowers along several stretches of trail. The Dudgeon-Monroe neighborhood, for instance, plants and maintains a prairie-themed border.

Although there could be frequent street crossings, you'll find that the rail-trail rolls below the major roads as you're heading out of town. The spans are labeled so you can track your location. Ramps and stairways lead up to the neighboring streets.

At 5.5 miles from the start, you'll come to a mixing zone for



Southwest Commuter Path

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States: Wisconsin

Counties: Dane

Length: 5.6 miles

Trail end points: Brittingham Park on Lake Monona west of N. Shore Dr. and S. Bedford St.

(Madison) to Capital City State Trail at

Arrowhead Park near Chalet Gardens

Court (Fitchburg)

Trail surfaces: Asphalt

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Bike, Inline

Parking & Trail Access

To reach the eastern trailhead from US 12/US 18, take Exit 263 toward downtown Madison on John Nolen Dr. Go 1.9 miles and turn left onto N. Shore Dr. Go 0.4 mile, and turn left onto W. Brittingham Place. Take an immediate left into Brittingham Park (3-hour parking at all times). The trail is 0.1 mile east.

Parking near the western endpoint is available near the Capital City State Trail at Dawley Conservancy in Fitchburg. To reach the western trailhead from the intersection of US 18/US 151/Verona Road and County Road PD/McKee Road, take McKee Road east. Go 0.9 mile to S. Seminole Hwy., turn left, and then go 0.4 mile and turn left into the parking lot for Dawley Conservancy. To find the trail, take the short path in back of the parking lot north for 0.1 mile, turn left onto the [Capital City State Trail](#), and then go 0.5 mile to the junction with the Southwest Commuter Path. Turn right (north) toward Madison.



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