



2024

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



Illinois Prairie Path

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The Illinois Prairie Path (IPP) was one of the nation's first rail-trail conversions. It consists of five connected trail segments with three main branches that converge at Volunteer Park (West Liberty Drive at South Carlton Avenue) in Wheaton.

The 62-mile trail follows the historical path of the Chicago Aurora and Elgin Railroad. Beginning in 1902, the electric railroad provided passenger service from the western suburbs into downtown Chicago. With the railroad in decline, some routes were transferred to bus service. The partial completion of the Eisenhower Expressway (I-290) in 1955 spelled the end for this once mighty railroad: by 1959 passenger and freight service on the line were finished. A letter to the editor by noted naturalist May Theilgaard Watts in the Chicago Tribune in September

1963 argued for the novel idea of converting the former corridor into a footpath. That letter sparked the efforts of a determined group of Chicagoans and ultimately gave rise to the unprecedented conversion of railroad to public trail.

The Illinois Prairie Path's 16-mile Main Branch is the most urban of its corridors. Beginning in Wheaton, the IPP's Main Branch follows city streets on extrawide bicycle-friendly sidewalks. Distinct green trail markers shepherd you eastward through the lively shopping district. As you leave downtown Wheaton, Metra commuter rail tracks share the corridor, allowing you about 2 miles of rail-with-trail experience.

The trail maintains a distinct urban ambience, passing through the heart of the western suburbs. In Villa Park, about 8 miles from the trailhead, a restored train depot houses historical displays and offers water and restrooms. As you approach the museum, a short connector trail on the left links with DuPage County's [Great Western Trail](#).

In about 7 miles, the trail crosses First Avenue (IL 171) in Maywood, and a short trek along Maybrook Drive leads to a bicycle-pedestrian bridge over the Des Plaines River. The Main Branch eastern terminus is shortly thereafter in Concordia Cemetery, adjacent to the Forest Park Transit Center. Free parking is spotty at this end, so plan on a return trip along the corridor.

The 13-mile-long Aurora Branch begins at the south end of Illinois Avenue Park at a junction with the [Fox River Trail](#). The IPP travels north on asphalt along the river through commercial areas and older neighborhoods for a mile; then the surface changes to hard-packed crushed stone that makes up the majority of the branch.

In another 5 miles, look for the trail connection on the left; this is the IPP's Batavia Spur, which heads 6 miles west to Batavia. Your journey on the Aurora Branch is likely to be



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States: Illinois

Counties: Cook, Du Page, Kane

Length: 62 miles

Trail end points: Forest Park CTA Station at Van Buren St. (Forest Park) to spurs in Aurora, Batavia, Elgin, and Geneva that all end at points along the Fox River Trail

Trail surfaces: Asphalt, Concrete, Crushed Stone

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Bike, Inline

Parking & Trail Access

Access the Aurora trailhead by taking Interstate 88 to Farnsworth Avenue South; go 1.1 miles. Turn right on Indian Trail and after 1.5 miles turn left on Aurora Avenue for just under 1 mile. Take a right onto Illinois Avenue and the trailhead is on the right just before the Fox River.

To reach the Maywood endpoint from I-290, take 1st Avenue North. The trail is about 0.3 mile north on the left between Quincy and Wilcox Streets; no parking available.

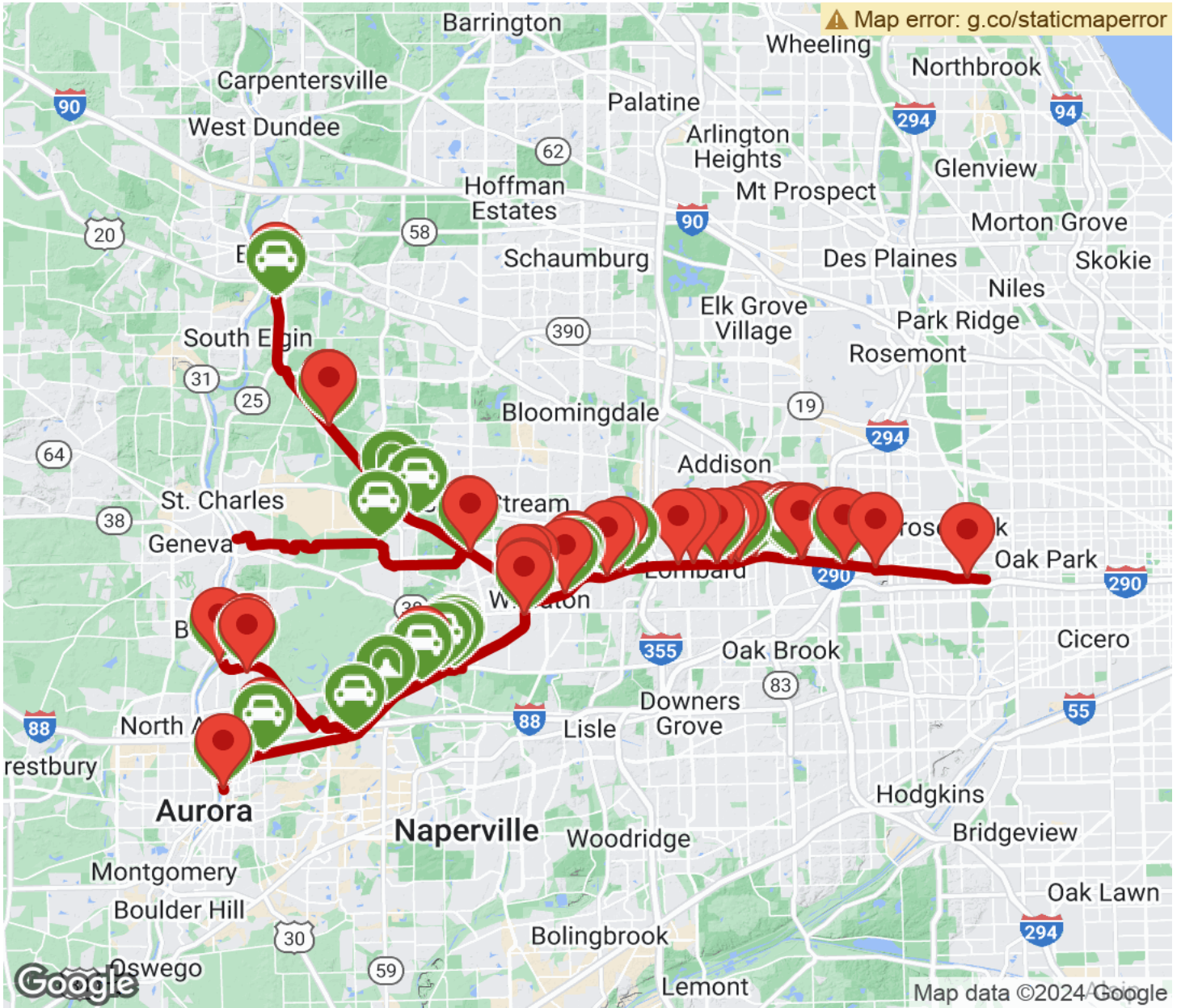
To reach the Wheaton trailhead, take I-355 to Roosevelt Road. Go west 3.6 miles. Turn right on West Street and go 0.4 mile. Make a left onto Liberty Drive. The trailhead is at the intersection with Carlton Avenue. Look for street parking.

The Elgin trailhead is on Raymond Street in Elgin. From I-90 take the State Street exit south for 2.7 miles. Turn left onto National Street and go just under 0.5 mile then turn right onto Raymond Street. The trailhead is about 1.3 miles ahead on the right between Purify Drive and Riverview Drive.



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Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



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