



2026

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



# North Branch Trail

*Illinois*



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The North Branch Trail follows the North Branch of the Chicago River for 25.5 miles through Cook County. The trail was originally a dirt path often used for horseback riding; though it's now paved, an unpaved equestrian pathway still parallels the main trail.

## About the Route

At the north entrance to the trail are the Chicago Botanical Gardens. In partnership with the Forest Preserves of Cook County (FPCC), the Chicago Botanical Gardens extended the North Branch Trail first through the Gardens and then through Turnbull Woods to the Green Bay Trail by the Braeside Metra station in Highland Park.

The Chicago Botanical Gardens, which includes more than two dozen gardens on 385 acres is definitely worth a visit. Winding through the Garden's McDonald's Woods, the multi-use path provides access to the many beautiful features of the garden. Wayfinding and interpretive signs along the route describe the moraine, wetland, and woodland regions that are part of the Garden's landscape. A wooden boardwalk passes through wetland areas to avoid any damage to the natural ecosystem. Here are bicycle racks near the Garden's Visitor Center for cyclists who would like to further explore the grounds. Chicago Botanical Gardens does have an admission fee, but they have free admission days and discounted admission options as well.

Continuing south, the trail features a 4.4-mile loop around Skokie Lagoons and Erickson Woods. Because the loop's west side runs along I-94, trail users will find heavy traffic noise, but may take the eastern side of the loop for a more peaceful experience.

Heading south towards West Foster Ave, the trail meanders through forests and fields as it parallels the Chicago River's North Branch. Trail users will travel for more than a dozen miles through many wooded areas and lagoons and along golf courses. Keep an eye out for wildlife, especially deer. Passing by a mix of residential and commercial areas, the trail provides connections between communities and an alternative for both commuting and recreation.

Amenities are plentiful, with parking lots, bathrooms, and picnic areas available throughout the route. Though several road crossings occur along the way, they are clearly marked and have electronic buttons for those crossing.

## Connections

The North Branch Trail connects to the [Green Bay Trail](#) by the Braeside Metra station in Highland Park.



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**States:** Illinois

**Counties:** Cook

Length: 25.5miles

**Trail end points:** County Line Rd. (Highland Park) to W Foster Ave. (North Park)

**Trail surfaces:** Asphalt

**Trail category:** Greenway/Non-RT

**Trail activities:** Bike, Horseback Riding, Inline Skating, Walking, Wheelchair Accessible, Cross Country Skiing

## Parking & Trail Access

The North Branch Trail runs between County Line Rd. (Highland Park) and W Foster Ave. (North Park).

Parking is available at:

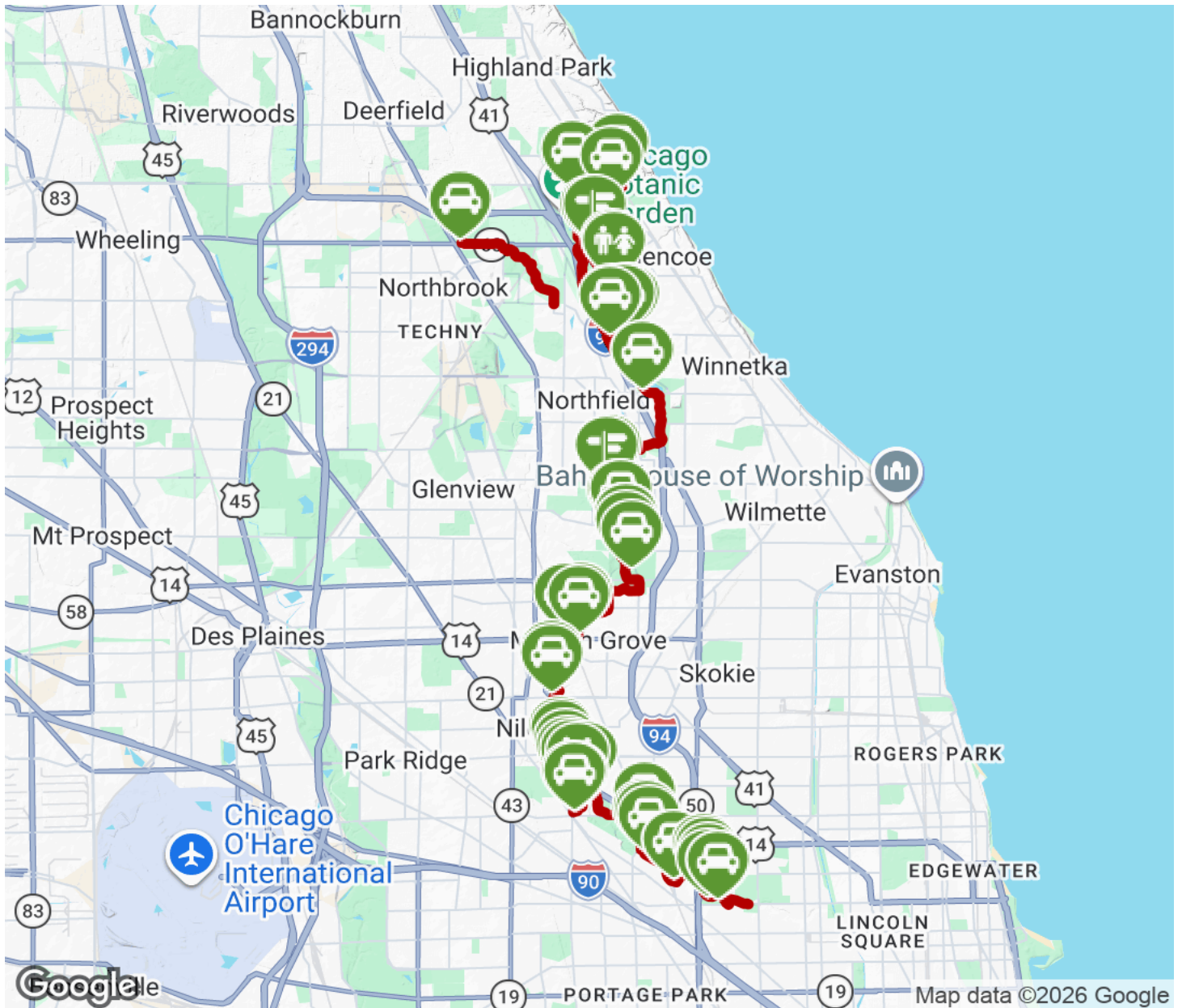
- 40 Blackhawk Rd. (Highland Park)
- 4498 W Foster Ave. (Chicago)

Please see [TrailLink Map](#) for all parking options and detailed directions.



# North Branch Trail

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Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



**TrailLink**  
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

**TrailLink.com**