

## Robert McClory Bike Path

The Robert McClory Bike Path (Green Bay Trail) is a 25-mile trail that runs the length of Lake County, IL. Built on the bed of the abandoned North Shore railway, this trail now parallels the Metra Union Pacific North Railroad, which travels in a straight north-south direction from Chicago to Kenosha, Wisconsin.

The bike path offers a scenic and leisurely route through many of Chicago's beautiful North Shore communities, alternating between tree-lined residential streets and quaint downtown areas, wooded forest preserves and park paths, light industrial and commercial districts, and wide country lanes through prairie grasses.

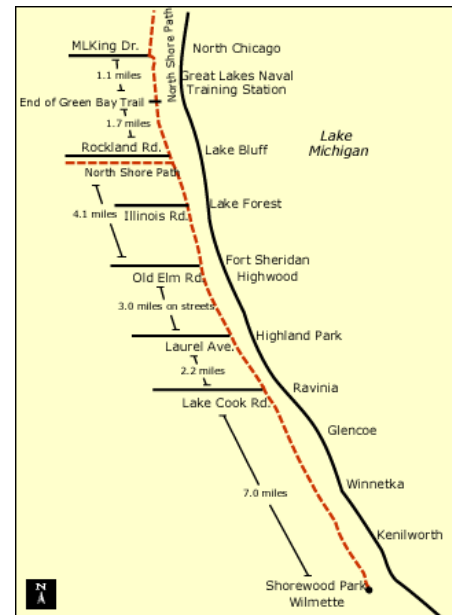


Image Courtesy of mikebentley.com

## History

The Robert McClory Bike Path has a long and rich history in Highland Park and the surrounding North Shore communities.

### Pre-1800: Trail Marker Trees

Near the Braeside Metra Station at the southern tip of the trail is a uniquely bent tree that has been identified as an *Indian Trail Tree*. Identified across North America, and especially prevalent in the Great Lakes region, trail trees are hardwood trees that were intentionally shaped by Native Americans in order to distinguish trails or other important places. While these trees are said to pre-date Columbus, the first report of these trees by settlers occurred in Illinois in 1800s. On May 6, 1911, the Chicago Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution erected the first recorded plaque recognizing Indian Trail Trees. The plaque mentions eleven other similarly shaped trees near the Green Bay Trail, which connects to the Robert McClory Bike Path in Cook County, and can be seen today near the intersection of Sheridan and Lake Cook Road, not far from the tree at Braeside Station.

### 1800-1900: From Trail Trees to Train Tracks

The routes marked by trail trees were utilized by settlers as early as the 1800s. One such route was the Green Bay Military Road, which was designated as an official post road by the U.S. government in 1833. This road crossed through Lake County, connecting Fort Dearborn in Chicago to Fort Howard in Wisconsin. In 1836, the first

stage coaches began to follow this road, carrying passengers from Chicago to Green Bay, Wisconsin. Lake County welcomed its first railroads by the mid-nineteenth century. The Chicago and North Western Railway began servicing the area in the 1850s, but demand for an alternative rail service led to the creation of the Chicago and Milwaukee Electric Railway in the late 1890s. This railroad, later known as the North Shore line, would eventually become the foundation of the Robert McClory Bike Path.

### **1900- Present: Rails back to Trails**

The North Shore Line was an interurban electric freight and passenger service that ran from the Chicago Loop to downtown Milwaukee. The growth of Illinois' north shore communities during the Roaring Twenties led to the expansion and modernization of the North Shore Line in the early twentieth century. Although the railway faced financial hardships during the Great Depression, it continued to experience high rates of ridership even into the World War II era. Following the end of World War II, however, the North Shore Line experienced a sharp decrease in ridership. An increase in automobile sales and the completion of major expressways only added to the financial strain facing the railroad, and the service was eventually discontinued in 1955. By 1963, the railroad had been completely abandoned.

In 1965, rails were removed and paved over and the railroad was converted into the Green Bay Trail, which linked the communities of Wilmette, Kenilworth, Winnetka, Glencoe, and Highland Park. The Green Bay Trail connected to the North Shore Trail in Lake County, forming a long recreational path stretching from the northern suburbs of Chicago all the way to the Wisconsin border where the North Shore Line once operated. In 1997, the Green Bay Trail and the North Shore Trail were collectively renamed the Robert McClory Bike Trail after Republican congressman Robert McClory who served Lake County for 20 years, and was said to be an avid bicyclist and jogger along these trails.

### **Connectivity**

The Robert McClory Bike Path is a well-connected trail, acting as a point of access to a number of other bike paths in the area. Beginning at the border of Lake and Cook counties, it connects to the Green Bay Trail in the south. From there, the trail passes through Highland Park, Highwood, Fort Sheridan, Lake Forest, Lake Bluff, Naval Station Great Lakes, North Chicago, Waukegan, Beach Park, Zion, and Winthrop Harbor before finally connecting to the Kenosha County Bike Trail at the Wisconsin border. Along the way, the trail intersects with the East-West North Shore Bike Path in Lake Bluff, and overlaps with both the U.S. Bicycle Route 37 and the Grand Illinois Trail. The trail also passes the Metra UP-N stations at Braeside, Ravinia, Highland Park, Highwood, Fort Sheridan, Lake Forest, Lake Bluff, and Great Lakes.

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## Skokie Valley Bike Path

The Skokie Valley Bike Path is a 10-mile trail that follows U.S. Route 41 from Lake Cook Road to IL 176. Built on the bed of an abandoned railway, this trail now shares a right-of-way with ComEd and runs parallel to Union Pacific Railroad. The pathway is straight, flat, well-paved, and maintained from start to finish, with only a few major road crossings that are clearly marked and include crosswalks.

Mile-markers at every half mile make this an ideal trail for building mileage and speed. Although the route traverses a primarily urban and lightly industrialized district, riders and joggers can still enjoy the flourishing prairie grasses, wildflowers, and wildlife that populate the area.

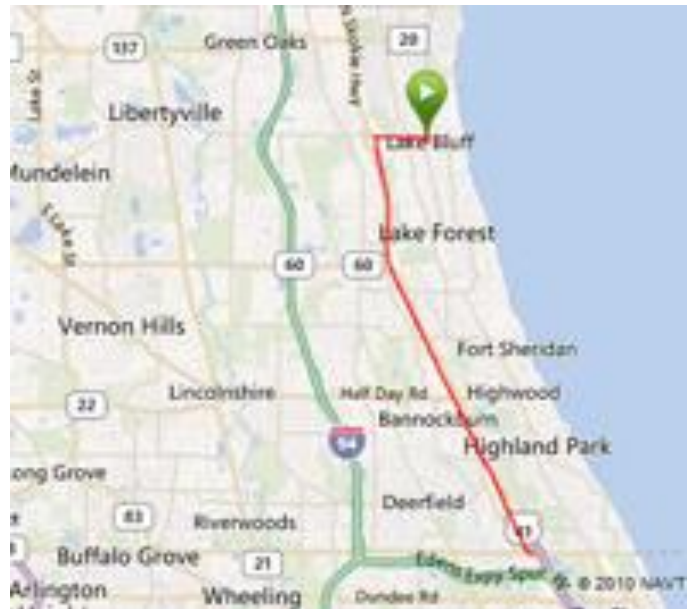


Image Courtesy of [aboutbicycles.com](http://aboutbicycles.com)

## History

The corridor now occupied by the Skokie Valley Bike Path was owned and managed by three different rail companies since the early twentieth century before eventually being converted into a trail for recreational use. In 1924, the Chicago North Shore and Milwaukee Railroad, also known as the North Shore Line, sought to construct a bypass line through the Skokie Valley which would allow for increased speed of transportation services. The new line was known as the Skokie Valley Line and ran parallel and adjacent to the Chicago and North Western Railroad, just 50 feet to the west. When the North Shore Line discontinued services in 1963, the Chicago and North Western Railroad relocated its line to the North Shore rails, which were better maintained. The CNW continued to utilize this rail corridor until 1995, when it merged with Union Pacific Railroad. Union Pacific Railroad filed for abandonment of these tracks in 2001. Rails were removed between 2004 and 2005 and paved over.

## Connectivity

The Skokie Valley Trail begins in the south at Lake Cook Road and Skokie Boulevard. From here, it runs north through the communities of Highland Park, Lake Bluff, and Lake Forest. The trail reaches its end at State Route 176/Rockland Road, where it connects to the North Shore Bike Path; from here, the trail connects to the Des Plaines

River Trail to the west and the Robert McClory Bike Path to the east. The Lake County Division of Transportation (LCDOT), the Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways (CCDOT), and the Village of Northbrook are currently collaborating on an initiative to connect this trail to a disconnected branch of the Skokie Valley Bike Trail in Cook County. This project will involve a trail extension and bridge over Lake Cook Road, and is tentatively scheduled to begin in 2020.

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