



CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND: REGIONAL TRAILS

The benefits of regional trails extend well beyond fitness and leisure pastimes; they have the potential to drive economic development as well as increase property values. A National Association of Homebuilders study identified trails as the number one amenity potential homeowners cite when they are looking at moving to a new community. Trails also improve connectivity between communities for people and connectivity between opens spaces for wildlife. The trail's corridor can become an integral element in the green infrastructure network of a region.

BACKGROUND: THE CAL-SAG TRAIL

Planning initiatives as far back as the 1970s promoted a multi-use path along the Little Calumet River and Calumet-Sag Channel. Work began in earnest eight years ago, when representatives from several south suburban municipalities; county, state and federal agencies; and non-governmental organizations held a series of meetings to advance the initiatives to get to pavement on the ground.

When complete, the Cal-Sag Trail will be is a 28-mile multi-use trail system extending from Lemont (enabling connectivity with the Centennial Trail and the I&M Canal Trail) eastward to Burnham (and the Burnham Greenway Trail.) The Cal-Sag Trail will provide alternative means of transportation, increased connectivity to the region's trail network, linkages with transit, opportunities for economic development, enhanced environmental sustainability and greater community health, all in compliance with the objectives of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's GO TO 2040 regional master plan. Further, it will become an important element of the Millennium Reserve's core area, facilitating improved public access and environmental restoration.

A benefit resulting from the Cal-Sag Trail is the establishment of a variety of benefits to the communities through which it passes. These may include: trail-oriented residential and business development, historical and environmental education, community festivals and events space, recreational and cultural facilities, public art, local bike loop networks, links to local attractions and the like.

SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT

The Cal-Sag Trail Signage + Wayfinding and Development Plan is a two-phase project funded through a Federal Transportation, Community and System Preservation Grant with the local match provided by the Friends of the Calumet Sag Trail. The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) is responsible for the administration of the project along with City of Blue Island. The Project Team is led by URS Corporation and includes Catt Lyon Design and Terracom Public Relations. The Project has been divided into two phases and this document represents the work of the first phase by the Project Team.

The goal of the Signage and Wayfinding and Development Plan is to develop a series of signage and wayfinding elements, including gateway designs, which facilitate navigation to the Cal-Sag Trail and once on the Trail. The Signage and Wayfinding system will also provide community and interpretive information through a variety of traditional and newer, high-tech media.

In addition to the Signage and Wayfinding system, the project includes the Development Plan which proposes a series of civic spaces, performance and gathering areas, real estate development, environmental restoration initiatives, public art programs and other strategies. The proposals of the Development Plan were derived from the participation of residents and stakeholders in a series of public meetings held with all the member agencies of the Cal-Sag Trail Coalition (City of Blue Island as the Project's Lead Agency, City of Palos Heights, Alsip Park District, Village of Palos Park, Village of Riverdale, Village of Dolton/Dolton Park District, City of Calumet City, Village of Burnham and the Forest Preserve District of Cook County.)

The Project puts forward a Preliminary Signage and Wayfinding Plan for the Cal-Sag Trail to a 50% level of completion, including a cost estimate. The improvements proposed within the Development Plan are crafted to a conceptual level approaching 30% completion, including cost estimate and initial implementation strategies.

The Signage and Wayfinding will be fully advanced to 100% completion, including specifications and estimate of probable cost for inclusion in the final contract documents for the Cal-Sag Trail engineering plans in the subsequent second phase of the Project. Also, during the upcoming second phase, the proposed improvements of the Development Plan, having been reviewed and approved by each agency, will be advanced to 60% completion, including draft specifications and cost estimate. These efforts will be closely coordinated with the Friends of the Calumet-Sag Trail during this organization's preparation of its Capital Campaign.