

CENTRAL CANAL TOWPATH

OVERVIEW

In the 1840's the Central Canal was envisioned as part of an eight-canal system to cross the state and link major points of commerce. After three years of construction and the introduction of railroads, debts halted the project, leaving the Central Canal with no connections to other navigable waterways. In 1881 the Indianapolis Water Company purchased the canal. The Central Canal is a primary source of drinking water for the Indianapolis metropolitan area and receives its water from the White River in the Broad Ripple area. An 8.2-mile segment of the historic canal towpath was studied as part of the 1994 Indianapolis Greenways Plan. This segment begins at its source, the White River in Broad Ripple, and ends at the I-65 overpass. The canal area south of the I-65 overpass in downtown Indianapolis is part of the "Canal Walk" which extends into the White River State Park and terminates at White River. This area is a beautifully developed urban promenade with landscaped walkways on either side and connections to businesses, housing and major institutions. The beautification and rehabilitation of the canal in the downtown area is responsible for the successful redevelopment efforts that have occurred in that area in recent years. The 8.2-mile segment included in the 1994 Indianapolis Greenways Plan was envisioned as a greenway trail, primarily for pedestrian use, with a focus on pedestrian safety and access to various attractions along the corridor. Since 1994, much of the corridor has been developed with these uses in mind.

Phase 1 of the Central Canal Towpath was developed in 1996 and included the section of trail between 30th Street and 52nd Street. This portion of the trail is adjacent to the Indianapolis Museum of Art and Butler University. To accommodate the high percentage of joggers on this trail the surface is constructed of compacted crushed limestone, a more resilient surface than asphalt. Crossing Michigan road has been accomplished by the construction of a boardwalk passing under the Michigan Road Bridge.

Phase 2 construction began in 1997 and included the greenway trail from 52nd Street to College Avenue in Broad Ripple Village. This section of trail is also constructed of crushed limestone. A renovated historic bridge has been converted for pedestrian use and has been placed alongside the Illinois Street Bridge to facilitate safer crossings in this area.

The next phase of development occurred in the section of the greenway between College Avenue and the Monon Trail in the heart of Broad Ripple Village. Indy Greenways and the Broad Ripple Village Association have worked together to begin development of an urban pedestrian plaza near the location of the former parking deck over the Canal. Connection to the greenway trail across the canal is now provided by a new scenic pedestrian bridge, which spans the canal adjacent to the College Avenue Bridge. Walkways on the north side of the canal have been built and now connect to the Monon

trail. Walkways on the south side of the canal are planned along with terraced and landscaped canal banks and additional pedestrian crossings and bridge improvements. The removal of the parking deck over the canal in Broad Ripple has provided an opportunity to create a unique pedestrian environment and a crucial link between the north and south sides of the canal which is expected to create a more unified village experience. Additional parking spaces have been allocated in nearby locations to offset those formerly on the deck.

The Indianapolis Museum of Art (IMA) owns the property between the White River and the canal just west of the museum grounds. This property contains a man-made lake and many unimproved nature trails. Development of this property into an Art and Nature Park is currently being designed by the IMA in partnership with Indy Parks Greenways. The IMA has commissioned a design firm experienced in Art and Nature Park development to design this amenity. To access this area an historic bowstring bridge from Montgomery County was acquired by the Historic Landmarks Foundation and has been restored by Indy Parks Greenways and now spans the canal at the base of the hill, which overlooks the lake property.

MASTER PLAN UPDATE RECOMMENDATIONS

2001 to 2006

1. Make crossing improvements at the connection to the White River Greenway Trail.
2. Work with the Broad Ripple Village Association to complete the vision plan for the canal between College Avenue and the Monon Trail.
3. Work with the Indianapolis Museum of Art in the development of the Art and Nature Park.
4. Continue to provide existing trail upgrades (include widening the space between existing light blue IWC maintenance bollards to provide access to strollers and bicyclists with trailers)
5. Assist in preparation and implementation of a community access plan to identify bike routes and alternative means of access from neighborhoods to community facilities and greenways.
6. Coordinate a connection with the downtown Canal Walk to link it to the overall greenway system.

2007 to 2012

1. Continue to provide existing trail upgrades.
2. Study the segment of the canal from 30th Street to the I-65 overpass to determine feasibility of greenway development.

1994 Public Vision Statements

The vision statements for the Central Canal Greenway build upon the existing usage of this greenway corridor. Since the canal is already used as a trail system, the Indianapolis

Greenways Plan recommends the continuation of these uses and focuses on enhancing pedestrian safety, adding user amenities, providing access to various attractions along the corridor, and implementing clean-up programs.

User safety along the Central Canal Greenway is a major concern because of the numerous road crossings. For this reason, crosswalks at all road crossings and automated walk signals at major road crossings are recommended. An alternate trail along the east side of the White River is also proposed to allow pedestrians and cyclists to bypass the portion of the canal trail with the most road crossings. The alternate route could start at the Monon Rail corridor and reconnect with the canal path near 56th Street. In order to provide a safer crossing of Michigan Road, the path could be constructed under the Michigan Road bridge with a connection to the White Rive trail. To prevent pedestrian/bicycle conflicts, bicycle traffic could be routed along Kessler Boulevard-pedestrian traffic should be directed to the opposite side of the canal through the areas where the canal shoulder is narrowest. The paths should be adequately marked with identification signage, particularly at intersections and crosswalks, and have benches at appropriate locations. Using a serpentine design where the paths follow the natural land and periodically widen and narrow could increase trail efficiency. Canal improvements should conform to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements by providing paths that are a minimum of 5 feet wide.

The Canal Path should be linked with various destinations, ultimately Butler University, the Indianapolis Museum of Art and Downtown Indianapolis. The canal could provide direct access to these facilities from many neighborhoods in the area, including Broad Ripple, Rocky Ripple, and Crows Nest. Access to Butler University provides students an additional route for traveling to Broad Ripple or Downtown and links the public with university facilities such as Holcomb Gardens. The canal path also provides access to the Indianapolis Museum of Art and could be incorporated into a proposed sculpture garden west of the Museum. Because the canal is owned by IWC, any improvements need to be closely coordinated with them to ensure water company operations are not adversely affected.

While the corridor is already used by many residents of the area, any expanded public use should coincide with measures to protect IWC from recreational users of the corridor. In addition, the trail should be cleaned up and regularly maintained and user amenities should be provided to promote and complement use of the canal trail.

South of I-65, the Corps of Engineers/Sasaki study considers a 3.7-mile-long segment of the canal. Their plans call for a strong pedestrian/bicycle linkage between stretches of the corridor that are already intensively used and in areas that are planned for development in the downtown area.