

BIG MARSH

ACCESS ACTION PLAN



IMPROVING OPTIONS FOR BIKING,
WALKING, AND TRANSIT ACCESS



ACTIVE
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The Opportunity

As plans move forward to bring several new park and trail developments to the Lake Calumet region on Chicago's Far South Side, ensuring future visitors will be able to access these areas on foot, by bike, or via public transit will be an important consideration for local community members and public officials. Additionally, the recent creation of the Pullman National Monument in the nearby historic neighborhood of Pullman has the potential to draw thousands of new visitors to the area, all of whom will benefit from robust transportation alternatives.

Most importantly, the redevelopment of natural areas near Lake Calumet will provide the people that live in surrounding neighborhoods, such as Pullman, Riverdale, Roseland, and Hegewisch with much needed open space and recreational opportunities.

Our Focus: Safe Bicycle Access to Big Marsh

With the development of so many new cultural and recreational attractions on the Far South Side, many opportunities exist to advocate for more healthy transportation options that serve these destinations.

Given this context, Active Transportation Alliance and community partners decided to study one destination, the planned eco-recreation park at Big Marsh, in order to maximize the impact of our limited time and resources.

Recognizing the central role community voices have in addressing these needs, Active Transportation Alliance convened a working group of community members and public officials to lead a process to identify barriers and challenges to bicycle access to the Big Marsh and nearby Millennium Reserve sites.

Based on community input, data collection and analysis, this Access Action Plan lays out concrete recommendations for improving site access by bicycle.

WHY FOCUS ON BICYCLE ACCESS?

This Access Action Plan focuses on bicycle access to Big Marsh for two reasons:

- Big Marsh is too far from residential areas and public transit stops and stations to reasonably consider walking as a mode of access.
- The Big Marsh development is intended as an eco-recreation park with a strong focus on bike trails, thus providing bicycle access should be prioritized to the fullest extent.

The problem: a bicycle park with no safe bicycle access

A bike-focused park like Big Marsh should be accessible by bike. Forcing people to put their bike into a car and drive to the park will exclude non-drivers and car-free individuals from accessing the park, and in particular will diminish the value neighboring communities will be able to derive from the facility.

The existing conditions present significant barriers to bicycle access to the Big Marsh site, as well as limited options for mitigating these barriers. To the West, there are a limited number of streets that cross the Bishop Ford Expressway. The few options that exist are wide

streets with fast moving traffic entering and exiting the expressway. To the East, railroad tracks and the Calumet River create barriers and limit the options for accessing the Big Marsh site. Heavy truck and rail traffic in the area reflect the continued presence of active industry nearby and can contribute to stressful conditions for biking.

While these barriers to bicycle access are significant, they are by no means insurmountable. The potential benefit improved bicycle access can provide to both local communities and the region at large justify the investment of time and resources.

Existing Conditions on Priority Bike Routes Near Big Marsh



Northbound Stony Island Avenue near 116th Street.
Photo: Google Street View October 2015.



Southbound Stony Island Avenue near 116th Street.
Photo: Google Street View October 2015.

STONY ISLAND AVENUE – 103RD STREET TO 122ND STREET

The current entrance to the Big Marsh site is located on Stony Island Avenue, making the street a top priority for improving bicycle access. While the segments of Stony Island Avenue leading to the Big Marsh site have a low overall volume of traffic, the high proportion

of trucks making up this traffic may deter biking by creating a stressful environment for less confident cyclists. Some space currently occupied by wide shoulders could potentially be reallocated to create more comfortable conditions for biking. Unlike other nearby routes, Stony Island Avenue is solely under the jurisdiction of CDOT, eliminating the need to coordinate improvements across multiple agencies.



Northbound Doty Avenue near 112th Street.
Photo: Google Street View October 2015.



Northbound Torrence Avenue approaching 122nd Street.
Photo: Google Street view October 2015.

DOTY AVENUE – 103RD STREET TO 115TH STREET

For people accessing Big Marsh from the west via 115th Street or 111th Street Doty Avenue provides a connection to Stony Island Avenue and the entrance to Big Marsh. Doty Avenue faces many of the same barriers to biking as Stony Island Avenue, including a high proportion of truck traffic, which can create a stressful environment for biking. However, the overall level of traffic is low and wide, unpaved shoulders could provide space for future bike accommodations, such as a protected bike lane. Unlike other nearby routes, Doty Avenue is solely under the jurisdiction of CDOT, eliminating the need to coordinate improvements across multiple agencies.

TORRENCE AVENUE – 103RD STREET TO 130TH STREET

Torrence Avenue provides access to Big Marsh from the south, east, and west by linking 130th and 126th Streets to Stony Island Avenue via 122nd Street. The current street configuration features two travel lanes in each direction and narrow shoulders, which create stressful conditions for cycling.



Westbound 103rd Street and Stony Island Avenue.
Photo: Active Trans



Eastbound 115th Street near Bishop Ford Expressway and 115th Street Doty Road access ramp.
Photo: Google Street View October 2015



103RD STREET – COTTAGE GROVE AVENUE TO TORRENCE AVENUE

103rd Street connects neighborhoods to the east and west of Big Marsh to the park site via Stony Island Avenue. 103rd Street is an arterial with two travel lanes in either direction serves several important destinations, including the Olive Harvey College, Gately Park, and the 103rd (Rosemoor) Metra Station.

115TH STREET – COTTAGE GROVE AVENUE TO DOTY AVENUE

115th Street connects to the neighborhoods to the west of Big Marsh, including Pullman and West Pullman, as well as the 115th St. Metra Station and the Major Taylor Trail. Among the nearby streets that cross the expressway, 115th has the lowest overall traffic volume. However, similar to 103rd and 111th Streets, this route lacks direct access to Doty Avenue and forces cyclists to ride on the expressway access ramp before turning on to Doty Avenue. Given the proposed connection to Big Marsh across Lake Calumet and the overall low-volume of traffic, 115th provides the most feasible route for bike trips to Big Marsh originating to the west.



Northbound Torrence Avenue approaching 122nd Street.
Photo: Google Street view October 2015.



Westbound at approximately 2000 West 122nd Street.
Photo: Google Street View October 2015.

122ND STREET – STONY ISLAND AVENUE TO TORRENCE AVENUE

122nd Street provides access from Torrence Avenue to Stony Island Avenue and the Big Marsh entrance. Compared to other priority routes, 122nd Street faces fewer significant challenges. With low traffic volume, decent pavement conditions, and a paved shoulder, 122nd Street can provide comfortable bicycle access with minor improvements.

130TH STREET – INDIANA AVENUE TO TORRENCE AVENUE

130th Street is a wide arterial roadway with two vehicle travel lanes in each direction. Several segments of 130th east of the Bishop Ford Expressway already feature a sidepath. However, these segments are not connected and west of the expressway no bicycle or pedestrian accommodations exist.

The solution: local network of priority bike routes



Bike Access Improvement Priorities

While the access points to the Big Marsh site are limited, decisions still need to be made about where to prioritize bike improvements.



NEAR TERM PRIORITIES (1-3 YEARS)

Improved Signage: Install wayfinding signs to direct people to Big Marsh and other signs to alert motorists to the presence of people riding bicycles.

- **Recommended Locations:** Stony Island Avenue, Doty Avenue, 122nd Street

Pavement Maintenance & Street Sweeping: make the existing shoulder a more functional space for people riding bicycles by filling in cracks and potholes and keeping the shoulders free from debris with regular sweeping.

- **Recommended Locations:** Stony Island Avenue, Doty Avenue, 122nd Street

MEDIUM TERM PRIORITIES (3-5 YEARS)

Install Protected Bike Lanes: Create a low-stress space for cycling by installing barrier protected bike lanes.

- **Recommended Locations:** Stony Island Avenue, Doty Avenue

Road Diets: Four lane roadways with less than 20,000 vehicles per day are good candidates for consolidating travel lanes. Eliminating unnecessary space could allow for the installation of bike lanes on the street.

- **Recommended Locations:** 115th Street, Torrence Avenue

Diverging Diamond and Ramp Access: One design option for accommodating bicycles near expressway entrance ramps is the Diverging Diamond, which would allow for a center running bike lane over the Bishop Ford Expressway at 115th Street. Alternatives would need to be further explored to provide safe access from eastern entrance/exit ramp to Doty Ave, such as a sidepath or ramp.

- **Recommended Locations:** 115th Street





Long Term Vision for Bike Access to Big Marsh

As documented above, great deal can be done within the next five years to provide safe access to Big Marsh and other destinations on the Far South Side and in the greater Lake Calumet region. However, we believe there are also longer term options that should be incorporated into future planning and development.

INSTALL SIDEPATHS ON 103RD AND 130TH STREETS

103rd - In addition to providing access to Stony Island Avenue, Big Marsh and Lake Calumet, 103rd connects to other key destinations including Olive Harvey College and Gately Park.

130th - Sections of 130th east of I-94 already feature a sidepath. However, west of I-94 no bicycle or pedestrian accommodations exist. Extending the existing sidepath further west to Indiana would improve bicycle access to Big Marsh from these areas and also provide residents with much needed space for pedestrians to safely walk along 130th.

BUILD BRIDGE ACROSS LAKE CALUMET

The Millennium Reserve Steering Committee report includes a trail network map featuring a bridge across the Lake Calumet near 115th. This would provide a direct link to the Big Marsh site from the West and eliminate the need to utilize Doty and Stony Island Avenues. Constructing this bridge would not be able to happen until Lake Calumet is opened up to recreational access, but is a key long term goal Big Marsh access advocates can support.

OPEN ACCESS POINT ON EAST SIDE OF BIG MARSH

The current access point on the west side of the Big Marsh site requires visitors approaching the destination from Torrence Avenue to travel almost a mile west to Stony Island in order to arrive at the entrance. An eastern access point would facilitate easier access for visitors whose point of origin is east of Big Marsh.