

Midtown Greenway

Minneapolis, Minnesota

QUICK FACTS

Project Type
Rail trail

Location
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Usage
Up to 5,460 bicyclists daily

Length
5.5 miles (8.8 km)

Year Constructed
First segment opened in 2000, most recent segment opened in 2007; connection across Mississippi River and into St. Paul proposed

Project Cost
\$36 million

Funding
Federal, state, county, and city governments; Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority

Organizational Leads
City of Minneapolis, Midtown Greenway Coalition, Hennepin County

Maintenance and Upkeep
City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority



As a key section of the Midtown Greenway, the Martin Olav Sabo Bridge allows pedestrians and bicyclists to cross busy Hiawatha Avenue without encountering motor vehicle traffic. (Shutterstock/nikitsin.smugmug.com)

THE MIDTOWN GREENWAY is a commuter trail in Minneapolis that was built in stages between 2000 and 2007, with future extensions still to come. The Greenway provides healthy and safe automobile traffic-free connections between key destinations in south Minneapolis and facilitates access to the heart of downtown due to its links with other bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

The Midtown Greenway has come to be known as a “bicycle freeway” because it includes separate one-way paths for each direction of bicycle travel and a parallel two-way pedestrian path. The creation of the Greenway has led to an explosion of residential and commercial development along the surrounding corridor.



The Midtown Greenway connects popular Minneapolis neighborhoods with parks and open space. (*The Midtown Greenway Coalition*)

Project Background

Bicycling in Minneapolis. With more than 200 miles (322 km) of bikeways, cycling as a means of transportation has become a way of life for many in Minneapolis. Due in part to the completion of the Midtown Greenway, Minneapolis experienced a 76 percent increase in cycling between 2007 and 2013. The city's bike-share system, Nice Ride Minnesota, also supports trail use and includes 170 stations, many located along Minneapolis's bicycle freeways.

Minneapolis Mayor Betsy Hodges explained that active transportation has flourished in her city—despite its harsh winters—because of the emphasis that local leaders have placed on improving conditions for bicyclists. The mayor stated, “Minneapolis has long been recognized as one of the best bicycling cities in the country. . . . We have the second-highest rate of people biking to work among large U.S. cities, including winter commuting. Much of this is possible because of our city's efforts to maintain off-street trails year-round.”

The Midtown Greenway—a “bicycle freeway.” The Midtown Greenway runs 5.5 miles (8.8 km) east to west along a former rail corridor in south Minneapolis. The trail connects the Uptown neighborhood, the Mississippi River waterfront, the Chain of

Lakes park area, and various bicycling routes, including the Southwest Light-Rail Transit and Hiawatha Trails.

Following the example of Minneapolis's Cedar Lake Trail, which was built between 1995 and 2011 and was the first in the United States to implement the “bicycle freeway” concept of segregated travel lanes, the Midtown Greenway includes two unidirectional paths for bicyclists and a multidirectional path for pedestrians.

Before the first segment of the Midtown Greenway opened in 2000, the freight railway corridor where the Greenway was eventually built had become littered with trash; it had not been operational since the early 1990s. Recognizing the potential of the corridor as an active transportation route, the Midtown Greenway Coalition was formed in 1995 to advocate for the railway's transformation into the bicycle freeway that it is today.

Neighborhoods adjacent to the corridor range from Uptown, a long-popular commercial and entertainment district, to industrial areas that had experienced significant disinvestment. Residential neighborhoods of varying densities also line the corridor.

The Midtown Greenway Coalition worked with the city of Minneapolis and other public agencies throughout the process of planning and constructing the Greenway. The coalition



continues to engage with local residents, businesses, and private developers to ensure that the Greenway is protected and continually improved.

Funding for the Midtown Greenway came from a variety of sources, including government funds (federal, county, state, city, and neighborhood), the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority, and a congressional earmark. Private funds—including from real estate developers—also have been used to improve access to the trail, by way of pedestrian and bicyclist bridges and ramps. Segments of the Midtown Greenway opened in phases beginning in 2000, with the most recent section—the pedestrian- and bicyclist-only Martin Olav Sabo Bridge—coming on line in 2007. The bridge connected two existing sections of the Greenway and eliminated the need for trail users to cross the seven-lane Hiawatha Avenue at street level. At 20 feet (6 m) below grade, the Midtown Greenway is well lit and snow is plowed in the winter less than 24 hours after it falls, making it accessible at all times of the year. Ramps along the Greenway allow users to exit the trail to reach local places of employment, shops, residences, and restaurants.

The Midtown Greenway forms connections to Minneapolis's growing transit and trail network, allowing rail and bus riders to complete their journeys by walking or bicycling. The Hiawatha Trail connects the Greenway to the Lake Street Midtown station on the 12-mile (19 km) Blue Line light-rail service. Trail users can also connect to the Cedar Lake Trail via the Kenilworth Trail to reach downtown and Target Field Station, a major transit hub, and the meeting point of two light-rail lines, heavy-rail commuter service, and numerous bus routes.



The Midtown Greenway includes separate lanes for opposing directions of bicycle traffic, as well as dedicated space for pedestrians. (Tim Springer)

Development, Quality of Life, and Economic Impacts

The Midtown Greenway has transformed commuting options and improved the quality of life in many Minneapolis neighborhoods, and the real estate community has taken note.

Along the Midtown Greenway route, at least 11 separate projects, ten of which are residential, were developed between 2004 and 2014. According to Hennepin County Commissioner Peter McLaughlin, property values along the corridor have increased by over 90 percent in the past ten years.

The Midtown Greenway Coalition is strongly in support of development along the trail and frequently provides feedback to developers to make sure that project designs help ensure the continued success of the Greenway. Soren Jensen, the coalition's executive director, explains, "The Midtown Greenway has helped spark more than \$750 million worth of new housing developments along its edges. It has truly helped to revitalize south Minneapolis, as well as helping to spark the biking renaissance in Minneapolis."

Highlights of the numerous recent projects developed along the Midtown Greenway include the following:

- >> **The Midtown Exchange**, a \$190 million project that redeveloped a formerly abandoned Sears distribution center, which is the second-largest building in Minnesota in terms of leasable space. Completed in 2006, the 1.2 million-square-foot (111,500 sq m) development included a mix of office, residential, hotel, and retail space, with multiple access points and entrances along the Midtown Greenway.
- >> **Elan Uptown**, a 591-unit, \$150 million residential development built in 2013 that includes a three-block public promenade along the Greenway and direct trail access for residents.
- >> **Track 29 City Apartments**, a 198-unit, \$38.5 million residential development that includes a ramp and public promenade for Midtown Greenway users, as well as bike storage and a bicycle repair facility.
- >> **Lime**, a \$36.5 million mixed-use project with 171 apartments and 8,500 square feet (800 sq m) of retail space. The Midtown Greenway Coalition worked with project developers to ensure that the building did not create shadows that would lead to icing on the Midtown Greenway in winter.
- >> **Greenway Heights**, a \$9.1 million, 42-unit affordable housing complex with two-, three-, and four-bedroom family apartments built directly adjacent to the Midtown Greenway.
- >> **MoZaic**, a \$45 million, 77,000-square-foot office (7,200 sq m) and retail development along the Midtown Greenway that includes a ramp and pedestrian bridge that connects to the trail. A second phase of the project is in development (more information on page 26).



The development of the Midtown Greenway offers lessons for other cities in how urban trails can form a crucial component of a region's transportation network. The Greenway has attracted residential, office, and retail development along its corridor, and developers have found that prospective tenants see trails as an attractive asset that sets their projects apart from others in the region.

With higher property values along trail corridors and the continuing expansion of bicycle infrastructure, Minneapolis is illustrating the role that bicycle freeways can play in revitalizing once-underused corridors in a healthy and economically beneficial way.

Users of the Midtown Greenway in Minneapolis can connect directly to residential areas, offices, and entertainment districts on foot or by bicycle.
(Micah Taylor)