

Welco Corners-Gardner Alignments



Over the years, Route 66 took multiple paths through or around Joliet. Originally, the highway passed through Welco Corners, then went through Joliet on its way to Wilmington. Later, Joliet was bypassed, with the highway instead going through Plainfield; the initial bypass then skirted Wilmington and other towns along the original route until rejoining at Gardner.

Portions of the first bypass paralleled the original route between Wilmington and Gardner. This is the road, currently designated IL 129, that can be seen on the northwest side of the tracks, across from what is now marked as Historic US 66 (IL 53). There was a bridge spanning the tracks near Braceville, but its removal turned this into a dead end approaching Gardner.

Years later, the bypass route altered somewhat, using the alignment that would later become Interstate 55. Past Gardner, the original route became the I-55 frontage road. That original pathway was updated to a four-lane highway, and much of the southbound lanes can still be seen along this alignment, although some portions were destroyed during construction of the interstate.

Yellow (1926-1939): Original SBI 4, which became US 66 in 1926; became Alt 66 from 1939-1966

Violet (1939-1956): Original bypass route through Plainfield; portions later became I-55

Green (1956-1977): Final alignment, which became the original path of I-55; overlays portions of both the 1926 and 1939 routes.

Some additional notes:

- For the most part, only the original alignment through Joliet is signed as Historic US 66.
- Route 66 took multiple alignments through Joliet itself; the original went directly through the downtown area.
- The designation of "Alt 66" (as shown on the map) for the original alignment ended in 1966; it was one of only three alignments designated as "Alt 66" for the entire route. The others were in Oklahoma City and Los Angeles.
- The alignment south of Joliet to near Wilmington was upgraded to a divided four lane in the 1950s.
- The original alignment between Manhattan Road and Elwood used Chicago Avenue, then taking Mississippi Road into Elwood; this was bypassed when the four-lane improvement was constructed.
- Northbound IL 129, the original Joliet bypass, ends at a ramp to I-55; the southbound exit from I-55 to IL 129 no longer exists, as the bridge crossing northbound I-55 was removed – the remains of the exit ramp, which exited to the left, can still be seen from the southbound lanes of I-55.
- The IL 129 alignment of Route 66 dead-ends near Braceville; the bridge leading into Gardner was destroyed in 2003.

Driving the Various Alignments

The Original Path Southbound/Westbound

You can follow the original alignment by taking the Joliet Road exit from I-55, then follow the signage for the historic route through Joliet and then south to Gardner. This entire route is drivable, including most of the original Elwood alignment using Chicago Road (the small portion where Chicago Road continued from US 66 no longer goes through).

The Original Path Northbound/Eastbound

You can follow the original alignment by following the historic route signs out of Gardner and continuing through Joliet; this includes the original alignment passing through Elwood, taking Mississippi to Chicago Road until rejoining IL 53. Stay on IL 53 until it turns off of Joliet Road, continuing on Joliet Road until it merges onto I-55 at Welco Corners.

The Original Bypass Southbound/Westbound

You can follow this by ignoring the Joliet Road exit from I-55, continuing on to the IL 126 exit into Plainfield. At the IL 59 intersection, turn south and continue until IL 59 merges onto I-55. Note that you will not be able to exit to IL 129, as that ramp, and bridge, has been removed (if you look to the left from I-55 you can see the original exit, although all pavement is gone). Instead, continue to the next exit, which indicates it will take you to IL 129, then follow the signage to resume on IL 129. Once you are paralleling Historic 66 (IL 53), stay on IL 129 until you come to the intersection with the sign indicating IL 129 has no outlet; at this point, cross the tracks and turn on to IL 53 and continue to Gardner.

The Original Bypass Northbound/Eastbound

Heading out of Gardner, stay on IL 53 until you come to the first left across the tracks that will take you to IL 129, then cross the tracks and continue on IL 129. Stay on IL 129 until it merges onto I-55, then continue to the IL 59 exit. Once on IL 59, head north to the IL 126 intersection, then turn right. The highway here is rather short and will merge with I-55.

The Final Bypass

This is, in essence, I-55.