



A coalition to bring better transit to the Chicago region

March 23, 2007

The Transit Future is Now

Would it improve your day-to-day commute if there were better communications when trains were stalled? How about if schedules were actually posted at bus stops and you were notified if your bus was late? Is it unreasonable to expect to board a clean train in the morning to get to work?

Public transit users in the Chicagoland area have recently been forced to endure major setbacks in their daily trips on the CTA, Metra, and Pace—whether it is slow zones on the Blue Line, stations under repair on the Red and Brown lines, delayed Metra trains when it rains or snows heavily, or lack of bus frequency in the middle of winter.

The significant drop in quality of service is a result of a veritable transit crisis in Northeastern Illinois, due both to lack of funding at the state and local levels and the overall funding mandates of the Regional Transportation Authority. Limited funding has left our transit system sorely lacking appropriate maintenance, sufficient operating costs, and investment for expansion projects.

As operating funds have dwindled in recent years, capital funds have been used to fill the gap, resulting in poor maintenance of the current system. This method of financing is not sustainable for much longer, and it has left the Regional Transportation Authority—the parent agency for the CTA, METRA, and PACE—almost entirely void of operating funds.

Congress provided capital funds for Illinois in the 2005 SAFETEA-LU Act, but these federal dollars require a local match in order to expend the funds. The state has failed to provide the capital match, which costs the state money while our infrastructure continues

to deteriorate. Consequently, the President ordered a \$116 million rescission for the state of Illinois, a process that sends federal money back to the US Treasury. The General Assembly has the power to prevent rescissions, which would allow those federal transportation funds to go towards transit.

In addition to the funding crisis, there is a huge and inequitable funding disparity within the RTA that needs to be addressed. For over 20 years, the RTA has not been structured to provide equitable transit funding throughout the region. In 1983, the method of funding was changed, ignoring transit ridership and other system performance measures in favor of an arbitrary formula based on geography.

As a result, the CTA is facing a structural deficit with no way to get to black, and it has not been able to maintain its commitment to provide quality service. The funding formula needs to be changed and equity restored to the system.

Launching the Campaign

In response to this urgent transportation crisis, the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) has

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To sign up for regular updates, send an email to transitfuture-subscribe@cnt.org.

launched a campaign of advocacy and communications aimed at the grassroots members of our CTAQC coalition (Chicagoland Transportation and Air Quality Commission). CTAQC has close to 200 organizations with diverse constituencies in our six-county region who all share a common interest in transportation.

CNT's Transit Future campaign is different from the RTA's Moving Beyond Congestion campaign because of the targeted audience we intend to reach. As a public agency, there are limits to the positions taken and advocacy that the RTA can do. On the other hand, our partner CM2020 (Chicago Metropolis 2020) is not doing grassroots outreach but is working directly with members of the General Assembly.

To fill the void that exists, CNT's campaign will galvanize organizations and stakeholders that have a vested interest in the future of public transit in Northeastern Illinois, and engage them to communicate directly with their legislators and the Governor to advocate for transit reform and adequate funding.

The Transit Future campaign believes that the resolution of the transit crisis requires several changes that we can achieve through advocacy on a grassroots level and with citizen mobilization. The first step requires some short term, low-cost transit system improvements, which are necessary to prove to transit users that increased funding and organizational reform will result in palpable day-to-day improvements.

We will advocate for:

- *Priority bus lanes for buses;*
- *Restricted parking on major bus routes paralleling rapid transit construction corridors;*
- *Cooperative traffic and incident management planning;*
- *Improved cleanliness on buses and rail cars and on rail stations and platforms.*

Not only do we want situations to improve right now, we do not want to fall behind the rest of the world in building a world-class 21st Century Transit System. We can all agree that we do not like congestion,

high transportation costs and global warming effects. Transit Future will help to create a vision that voices the interests of every sector and every part of the Region in the rapid growth of transit as an answer to these serious issues.

This is how we will do it:

- *Widespread distribution of the Campaign's Platform and fact sheets about the transit crisis*
- *Convening of broad-based coalition built on CTAQC's 200 member organizations*
- *Web-based solicitation of proposed improvements from transit riders on a system-wide and route and rail-line basis*
- *Web-based voting on transit service improvement priorities*
- *Inform and educate Legislators to understand the needs of our coalition*
- *Weekly email updates*
- *Outreach to and engagement of the media*

Finally, Transit Future will conduct research that seeks to document the stake of every Illinois legislative district in transit reform. We will develop a series of maps depicting the transportation costs in each legislative district in the region. These maps will expose the real cost of transportation as compared with the relatively small tax burden of transit, and will examine transit's impact on household income, property values near transit, local retail near transit, and available transportation options for residents.

Our ultimate goal is to reform transit governance and planning. The RTA must exert financial and planning authority for CTA, Metra, and Pace in order to ensure exemplary service. Our transit system requires adequate funding of a 21st century transit system based on clear measures of performance, which will be determined through public input on quantifiable and qualitative performance measures.

Active Legislation: RTA Reform

Illinois State Representative Julie Hamos, a longtime transit advocate and head of the Mass Transit Committee in the Illinois General Assembly, has introduced a bill to restructure the RTA. The RTA currently distributes funding resources to the three Service Boards (CTA, Metra, and Pace) according to the 1983 Regional Transportation Authority Act, which bases funding priorities on geography instead of ridership levels or system performance measures. The act fails to give the RTA authority to coordinate the three Service Boards, demand accountability based on performance measures, or plan for transportation on a regional level. The impact of this flawed structure over the past two decades is a deteriorating transit system, lack of coordination among Service Boards, and constant rivalry for funding.

In response to this transit crisis, Rep. Hamos sponsored and introduced Bill HB1841 to the General Assembly, which grants the RTA appropriate regional planning powers and responsibilities, including the power to require a Service Board to change its fare and transfer charges, the power to intervene in and arbitrate disputes between Service Boards, the power to conduct financial audits, and the power to create a “Regional Transit Innovations Fund.” The Bill also provides that the RTA will establish regional goals, objectives, and performance standards for the Service Boards based on the forecasts, assumptions, and plans of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP). To that end, the Bill also calls for the RTA to use CMAP’s research as a basis for designing its 5-year plan, Annual Capital Improvement Plan, and other capital improvement plans.

The Transit Future campaign is in support of these legislative changes and hope they spur additional dialogue about the transit funding crisis. You can find more information on the Bill [here](#).

Planning Ahead... the Olympics

While it is obvious how transit fits into our everyday lives, it is also important to understand how it fits into a regional outlook for economic prosperity. Recently, Chicago has been put under the microscope by those wondering if we are up to hosting the 2016 Summer Olympic Games. Such a monumental event would certainly test the critical functions of our transit system.

The recent visit to Chicago by the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) allowed committee members and media to tour the proposed site for the \$366 million Olympic Stadium in Washington Park on two buses. While Mayor Daley has asserted that no public taxpayer money would be used for the Games, one has to hope that there is a plan for moving athletes, visitors, and everyday Chicagoans around as seamlessly as the USOC was shuttled here and there.

The potential to highlight the world-class city that Chicago is to visitors and viewers from around the world is undoubtedly appealing and very real. The prospect that Olympic visitors and area residents will get bogged down in transportation delays and waylaid by decaying transit infrastructure is also very real.

At a time when we are highlighting the region as worthy of hosting the attention of the world at the 2016 Summer Olympics, do we really want to limit our options for safe and reliable transportation?

Look to this column in upcoming Transit Future newsletters to learn more about the “ripple effects” that could occur if Chicago’s transit service and system continues to decline.

Demand Reform Now

Right now is the time to quit complaining about mass transit woes and expect a higher quality of service that living with the nation's second largest transit system should mean.

What can you do? Start by documenting each time you wait unreasonable periods of time for the bus or when the train gets 'stuck' on the tracks with no explanation as to why. Send these stories to your legislators: state representative, and state senator as well as the Governor. Don't know who they are? You can find who represents you and how to contact them at CNT's Civic Footprint website- civicfootprint.org. Also, please send us a copy of your correspondence so we can track our efforts.

What will Transit Future do? We will be tapping our coalition of over 200 broad-based organizations to advocate and lobby our legislators for the reform that we hear from citizens like you. We will be launching a web-based system to hear proposed improvements from transit riders on a system-wide and route or rail-line basis as well as a web-based voting on transit service improvement priorities. Our coalition will take these issues to our legislators, the RTA, and the media with the expectation of both immediate improvements and long-term goals based on clear measures of performance.

Keep informed: Sign up for Transit Future's weekly email news to be a part of the discussion. We will keep you informed of the issues, continue to give you

talking points and tips for contacting your legislators, as well as share with you the ideas and thoughts of other citizens. Our campaign is just getting started and you can be a voice in reforming the RTA.

To sign up for the listserv for weekly updates, send an email to transitfuture-subscribe@cnt.org.

Note: We will be moving this newsletter to subscribers of that listserv, so to stay informed please sign up.

If your organization would like to be a part of this coalition, please contact Transit Future Project Manager David LeBreton @ dlebreton@cnt.org.

The Center for Neighborhood Technology has launched the Transit Future campaign in response to the Chicago region's transit crisis.

CNT's mission is to promote the development of more livable and sustainable communities. We strive to recognize, preserve and enhance the value of hidden assets and undervalued resources inherent in our urban environment to make households, neighborhoods and regions more efficient, more economically viable, and more equitable.

We recognize that Chicago's mass transit system is an undervalued asset and the Transit Future campaign will work to promote a system that benefits all residents of Northeastern Illinois.



Make sure to forward this on to anyone who cares about transit in the Chicagoland region.