



**SPECIAL REPORT**  
ADDENDUM TO THE  
*Connecting Communities* Summit

## **Deaf and Hearing Impaired Communities Express Travel Needs**

Chicagoland's deaf community recently engaged in a mini-summit on improving transportation for their needs. The meeting took place at the St. Francis Borgia Deaf Center\* on Saturday June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2002. The hearing-impaired participants offered suggestions for system wide improvements as well as targeted projects to improve service and access, to achieve the same level of mobility as the rest of the population. Attendees envisioned a transportation system that is efficient, accessible, well connected and on schedule. In addition, participants recommended a train system that connects all parts of our region and country. They felt the government should allocate more money for subsidizing the transportation system. In addition to improved service for the community, they expressed a concern for safety during travel.

The mini-summit group was comprised of fifteen community members, including seven males and eight females ranging in age from 21 to 66 years old. Meeting attendees were primarily White along with one African-American and one bi-racial attendee. The mini-summit was conducted with two interpreters who narrated and signed to facilitate communication. Various levels of hearing capability were represented. Some members of the group were fully deaf without the function of speech, while others were able to hear with the aid of hearing devices. A few attendees were able to communicate verbally.

Many mini-summit participants travel from the suburbs to the Loop area for work, leisure, and recreational activity via all modes of transportation. Other frequent travel destinations include Skokie, Navy Pier, the Chicago Hearing Society, locations in Southeast Chicago, and the lakefront. Locally, they pay visits to doctors, grocery stores, and other nearby businesses. Public transit is the primary mode of transportation for

meeting attendees. In the previous month, they took a total of 75 trips via public transit. They determined that more attention should be given to the public transit system in order to improve mobility in the region. Thirteen members own cars, although they use single occupancy vehicles less frequently than car-pooling. Only four participants indicated walking as a means to accomplish daily errands. Improving pedestrian infrastructure was indicated as a primary regional concern. Accordingly, safe and walkable neighborhoods are desired by many participants who would like to walk more but do not feel comfortable doing so currently. Many also emphasized the importance of enhancing bicycling infrastructure throughout the region since bikes were the group's second most frequently used mode of transportation.

Various statements made throughout the meeting stressed that increased communication is fundamental to improving access for the deaf and hard of hearing community. Drivers, transit users, bicyclists and pedestrians require the availability of more information to ensure swift and safe travel. Advances in teletypewriter (TTY) technology make it possible for many people to receive information otherwise not available. Participants enthusiastically proposed incorporating text message updates for all types of transportation. Yet, the technology must be available beyond the convenience of home TTY devices. Messages could be sent to cell phones, home TTY devices, or other media to alert patrons of potential delays so they can adjust their travel patterns accordingly. Transit system information would best be provided through use of scrolling marquees at train stations, on the trains, at bus stops and on the buses. Some meeting attendees experienced missed connections and bus drivers passing by stops since they could not hear oral explanatory messages. Automobile drivers also desire

\* The Catholic Office of the Deaf is an agency of the Archdiocese of Chicago serving deaf and hard-of-hearing people in Cook and Lake Counties. There are approximately 6,000 deaf people in Chicago, not including those hard-of-hearing. This summit was made possible with the assistance of Fr. Joseph A. Mulcrone, Director of the Catholic Office of the Deaf.

accommodations in the way of text messages on roadside signs. This technology is currently available on a limited basis. Wide spread availability of this technology would increase their overall comfort when traveling via any mode of transportation, especially public transit.

A primary focus of the hearing-impaired community at the mini-summit was that significant improvements are needed for the safety and mobility of senior citizens, hearing and non-hearing populations throughout the region. Street crossing is a potentially dangerous situation, especially in the presence of emergency vehicles traveling at great speeds. Attendees suggested adding blinking lights and a vibrating box on crosswalk posts to ensure safety for the deaf and deaf-blind. These devices are currently in use in some suburban areas of Chicagoland and also in Europe. Blinking lights fixed to stop lights in intersections have the added advantage of alerting deaf drivers to oncoming emergency vehicles. They suggested sidewalk improvements for the entire Northwest side of Chicago. Pedestrians are severely threatened in the 8000 West Addison Street area where the St. Francis Borgia Deaf Center is located. They demanded immediate attention be given to pedestrian improvements in the area.

Improving access to areas particularly on the Northwest side of Chicago was also discussed at length. Increased frequency on numerous bus routes was suggested: #52 Kedzie/California, #152 Addison, #78

Montrose, #50 Damen, #81 Lawrence and #69 Cumberland/East River. Participants at the meeting often suffer from waiting for unusually long periods of time at bus stops without appropriate seating or signage to indicate the bus schedule. Then buses sometimes arrive in groups of two or three. Many feel that paying attention to user trends would help to improve the schedule system-wide and that it would help alleviate the problem of bus-bunching. It would also be a significant improvement for the aforementioned bus routes to have around-the-clock service. Many members of the deaf community depend solely on public transit, so routes that do not offer service during night or weekend hours significantly decreases the range of travel options for business and recreational destinations.

The deaf and hearing impaired community's vision is for an efficient, accessible, well connected, and on-schedule transportation system throughout the region. Focusing on overarching safety principles, participants strongly discouraged cell phone use while driving to significantly decrease risk for other drivers and pedestrians. Adding pedestrian infrastructure such as blinking lights and improved crossing areas is also a top priority. Most importantly, swift and accurate information regarding the status of all modes of transportation is a recommendation with resounding support. The special needs of this community are essential to their safety, mobility, and travel comfort around the region.

### *Connecting Communities Regional Partners*

Business and Professional People for the Public Interest  
Chicago Design Consortium  
Chicago Metropolis 2020  
Chicago Rehab Network  
Chicagoland Bicycle Federation  
Citizen Action-Illinois  
Council for Disability Rights  
Environmental Law and Policy and Policy Center of the Midwest

Friends of the Chicago River  
Independent Voters of Illinois-Independent Precinct Organization  
Interreligious Sustainability Project  
League of Women Voters of Illinois  
Metro Seniors in Action  
Metropolitan Planning Council  
Mid America Institute on Poverty  
Sierra Club  
Sustain



The Citizen Transportation Plan is a project of the Chicagoland Transportation and Air Quality Commission, part of the Center for Neighborhood Technology, 2125 W. North Ave., Chicago, IL 60647, 773-278-4800, ext. 2030. Visit us on the web at [www.cnt.org/2030](http://www.cnt.org/2030).