



SPECIAL REPORT
ADDENDUM TO THE
Connecting Communities Summit

Recent Immigrant Community Suggests User - Friendly Transportation System in Chicago Region

The Bosnian Herzegovinian American Community Center* (BHACC) is dedicated to providing tools to assist members of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian-American community in the process of adapting to the new surroundings of Chicago. As the newest immigrant community in Chicago, the 45,000 Bosnian-Herzegovinian-Americans concentrated on Chicago's north side are bridging the gap between a new atmosphere and the traditions of their homeland. Community members gathered at a mini-summit to discuss issues relating to community, economic development and transportation on June 7, 2002 at the BHACC. This community enthusiastically offered suggestions for an efficient and user-friendly public transportation system.

With the aid of a translator, the thirteen meeting participants discussed the ease and difficulty of moving throughout Chicagoland. The group was comprised of one male and twelve female attendees, all over the age of 30. They strongly asserted their hopes for an efficient, safe and well-maintained transportation system. This population understands the relationship that links economic development, community well-being and transportation. Accessing the employment, cultural, health and entertainment destinations that abound in Chicago was an important theme of the meeting.

Public transit and walking are the most commonly used modes of transportation for the Bosnian-Herzegovinian-American community. All meeting participants arrived to the BHACC by one of these modes. This attests to their high level of dependence on a public transit system and a safe pedestrian environment. Most attendees expressed apprehensiveness about taking the "El", because they lack the confidence needed to navigate the train system effectively. The preferred mode of transportation is via bus and also foot when possible, although automobiles are a widely used method of getting around. Nearly all participants have a bus stop located nearby their homes, and about half experience transit service more than twice an hour. Just under half of the participants indicated that they live near a train station.

The Bosnian-Herzegovinian-American community is very mobile. Community members frequently travel to the suburbs to attend religious services and visit family and friends. Lake Michigan and Navy Pier are top destinations for recreation

and leisure activities. Their culture and lifestyle dictate frequent trips to neighborhood markets and grocery stores. Transportation, particularly public transit, is integral to the community's mobility. Without an efficient and user-friendly transportation system, community members risk becoming distant from other Bosnian-Herzegovinian-Americans who live in other parts of the region.

Participants highlighted various congestion points throughout Chicago's north side and downtown areas. Clark Street is seen as a major congestion spot, often causing significant delays in bus travel. Other clogged thoroughfares are Irving Park Road, Kimball Avenue, Kedzie Avenue and Lawrence Avenue. Special emphasis was given to Devon Avenue because of its lively markets and pedestrian-filled sidewalks. A significant portion of the downtown area was also a concern to participants because heavy traffic congestion decreases air quality, causes noise pollution, and threatens pedestrian safety. Facilitating business development and pedestrian access to those areas is a significant point of interest for this group.

Walking is one of the most frequently used modes of transportation by the participants. Sidewalk improvements are needed to increase safety and encourage walkable neighborhoods. Walkable neighborhoods promote a sense of community that encourages and welcomes exploration by those new to the area, alleviating some of the stresses associated with adapting to a new place. The sidewalk and pedestrian infrastructure on Irving Park Road is especially in need of attention so walkers can travel freely and safely. The participants complained of fast drivers, poor sidewalk conditions and a lack of stop signs in that area, as well as many other areas they walk through on a daily basis.

Participants use buses most frequently to get around. Much attention was given to bus enhancements. Bus shelters along Devon Avenue need seats, lights and better signage. Shelters must also offer adequate covering to protect patrons from the elements. Increased service frequency is suggested for the following routes: #22 Clark, #81 Lawrence, #92 Foster, #49B Western and #82 Kedzie/Homan. Suggestions for improving these routes include supplying an appropriate number of buses to accommodate ridership trends. Improving the overall

* The Bosnian Herzegovinian American Community Center, located at 1255-59 West Devon Ave. in Chicago, has served their community since 1994. Center Director Zumra Kunosic was the host of this event.

schedule results in a better and more efficient transportation system that helps to avoid bus bunching. Buses must also be maintained better to ensure a pleasant and comfortable transit experience. The microphones for bus drivers are in need of improvement, to enhance communication while using transit.

A major local priority is to significantly improve travel options for the mobility-limited as well as safety for transit users, pedestrians and drivers. Participants also recognized that safe travel for children via all modes promotes travel independence and a sense of security for parents and children. Three households from the group have children under the age of fourteen. All three children primarily walk to school, but occasionally take the bus and/or car rides.

Several suggestions were offered for improving bicycle infrastructure, although the participants themselves were not avid bicyclists. The addition of bike lanes on Southport Avenue from Clark Street to Clybourn Avenue as well as on Clark Street from Howard Street continuing to the downtown area was suggested. Designating bicycles as shared users of the road increases safety for all, since pedestrians do not have to risk sidewalk collisions and cyclists are better able to move with the flow of traffic.

Many participants indicated being unfamiliar with Chicago's train system. Information presented in a clear fashion is necessary to end their discomfort. It is also important for bus drivers to announce the upcoming stops on bus routes. Published materials in Bosnian with explanations of transfers, fare cards, automatic fare machines and hours of operation, in addition to maps, is desired by the Bosnian-Herzegovinian-Americans. Signs displaying schedule and route information must be of adequate size and color to ensure easy readability by those with impaired vision. To best achieve this, participants encourage transit agencies in

Chicago to develop a relationship with all communities to ensure that everyone's travel needs are met. The BHACC members are also very excited by the opportunity to participate in a democratic process that includes their voices as members of the public. New immigrants who are not familiar with the transportation system are overwhelmed by a lack of information and communication and language barriers which restrict their transit use. Ensuring the availability of information to all users would significantly increase access to economic and recreational opportunities and it would raise the travel independence of the community.

Introducing shuttle bus service to this community offers great travel potential, since they are primarily concentrated on Chicago's north side. Shuttle routes originating on Foster Avenue to various points throughout the region are desired. Suggested shuttle routes to Navy Pier and the lakefront will increase access to recreational and leisure activities as well as to downtown. Shuttles are highly recommended by the participants because they offer the conveniences of significantly shorter and more comfortable commutes. A pool of riders is guaranteed since destination ideas are planned with community members. The shuttles would operate only when needed, during peak hours of use.

Excited by the opportunity to influence transportation for Chicagoland, meeting attendees offered many suggestions for improving mobility across the region. Bus routes received the most attention. Participants envisioned increasing frequency and providing bus station enhancements. They are in need of better information on how to navigate the transportation network. Their vision is clear for ways to improve transportation throughout the region. The Bosnian-Herzegovinian-American community envisions an efficient, safe and well-maintained public transportation system.

Connecting Communities Regional Partners

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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

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Interreligious Sustainability Project
League of Women Voters of Illinois
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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.