



**SPECIAL REPORT**  
ADDENDUM TO THE  
Central Neighborhoods of Chicago  
*Connecting Communities* Summit

## **Best Practice High School Students: Taking Steps in Transportation Reform**

Best Practice High School is a recently opened small school located in the heart of Chicago, just west of the Loop. The Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) was provided the opportunity to conduct an abbreviated summit at Best Practice High School and the students' voices were strong.\* The students of Best Practice are expert urban travelers, which made the Connecting Communities Summit there an event of fruitful ideas and enriching discussion. At Best Practice High School, the decision-makers of tomorrow have concerns and recommendations that they are eager to share today.

The students at Best Practice High School come from all over the city, but the majority in our group was from the central neighborhoods of Chicago. The diversity of the group reflected the diversity of the locale – the teenagers were predominantly black (75%), a substantial minority (17%) were Hispanic, and 8% were white. A quarter of the group was female, and three-quarters were male. As recent recipients of drivers' licenses and as regular CTA commuters, the group had much to say about public transit and roads.

The top destinations for the students at Best Practice High School were downtown, shopping at the intersection of Pulaski and Congress, as well as the North Riverside and Brickyard Malls. The students are also going to work at various locations throughout the city. Sports stadiums, such as the nearby United Center, as well as restaurants, movies and concert venues are also popular destinations. The surveys revealed that congestion and job accessibility are the primary concerns of the students. Safety in travel and the ability to use multiple modes to get around are also key concerns.

Automobile use with other people and transit were the two most frequently used modes of getting around by the students. As transit users, the students at Best Practice are on the move. Three-quarters of the group took transit in the last month, and among those transit users, the average number of transit trips was 28 trips per month. Of the ten families in the group that have children under the age of 14, in six families (60%) children are driven to school, while in three families (30%) children are bused to school and in two (20%), children walk to school every day (total is over 100% because one survey indicated multiple modes). Every survey respondent has bus service accessible within one mile of their home, while nearly every respondent (92%) has train service available near their home. The group cited their most frequent ways of getting around as follows: 1) car, with others; 2) transit; 3) walking; 4) car, alone; and 5) biking.

Improvements in transit service are an important priority for the group. There was consensus that bus service needs to have greater frequency on the routes that go down Ogden Avenue, Damen Avenue, and Pulaski Avenue. Participants cited the need for transit improvements as the primary way that they would enhance travel in the region. Making improvements to train service was discussed as one of the most exciting things that the students gained from the session – the project to add a new Green Line stop at Damen Avenue was proposed by several groups of participants. Adding new stops on both the Green Line and the Blue Line were common suggestions, as was the addition of more frequent service on the Metra line to Glen Ellyn. One unique idea that came out of the session was to have an express underground train service going from the suburbs into the city.

\* At the invitation of Ms. Sonja Kosanovic, CNT conducted a mini-summit during class time on December 12, 2001. The session consisted of a brief "visioning session" an abbreviated version of the "Transopoly" game, and surveys. Thirteen students participated in the session.

Making neighborhoods friendlier to walkers was a main theme of the participants. Although there are not many regular walkers in the group, they indicated that designing neighborhoods that are walkable was the top ranking priority for planning in the Chicagoland region. Street lighting improvements for safety on the sidewalks was a significant recommendation of the students. The students addressed the need for improved sidewalks all over the region of the central neighborhoods of Chicago, as well as at particular locales, such as Kinzie Street around Central Avenue, and on Sacramento Avenue from North Avenue to Kinzie Street. Improvements to sidewalks, such as adding street furniture like benches and heat lamps was also suggested. Improving safety and mobility for children ranked as the second priority to improve travel in the region.

The group at Best Practice was quite opinionated about car use and roads. Too much traffic, too many stop lights, and paying too much for parking were common complaints of the group. Congestion on the expressways was a widely acknowledged problem for the students. Several "Park and Ride" locations were proposed to encourage people to use transit instead of making their travel solely by car. Transportation to critical institutions, such as hospitals, should be made as inexpensive as possible. The students also proposed making road improvements by widening Lake Street.

Another priority for students was developing areas that have deteriorated. Students pointed to a need to improve the West Garfield Park area, and to create more cultural destinations on the West Side, such as museums. One group suggested developing restaurants on sites that are currently vacant land, as a means of improving economic vitality in communities that need more development. Frequently cited issues were that the region should reuse and rebuild areas that are deteriorated, and that there should be a fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of transportation.

Making the bike route along Damen Avenue a continuous path ranked high amongst the students, even to those who were not avid bicyclists. Several unique ideas, such as a river taxi boat, and the *Segway*, (an electric- motorized personal transportation invention) were also discussed as interesting possibilities for transportation in the future. The students at Best Practice High School remarked that they were surprised at the end of our session that they were involved in transportation decisions. As one student said, "Big changes are possible! I thought aldermen did most of the work in planning." The comment resonated throughout the group, which identified public involvement in regional planning as a high priority for the region.

### *Connecting Communities Regional Partners*

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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).