



Connecting Communities

Calumet Region

April 7, 2001

Recommendations

Expand Commuter Rail

Establish new high-quality rail service from the eastern part of the Calumet region to Chicago. The corridor roughly defined as between the Bishop Ford Freeway and the state line is without such service. Provision of such service would offer the region an alternative to congestion on the existing roadway network.

Expand Pace Service

Expand the hours of operation of existing Pace bus service, provide additional service along arterial streets where there are gaps in the network, especially along Cicero, Kedzie, Cottage Grove, Burnham and Joe Orr Rd. Establish express routes along expressway corridors in the eastern part of the region to connect with downtown Chicago. Expand the hours of paratransit service to include post-afternoon operation. Provide shuttle van service from senior and apartment complexes to mainline bus routes, transit centers and medical facilities.

Revitalize Downtowns with Transit

Steer new retail and commercial development to sites near transit centers, especially existing communities' downtowns. Existing and planned Metra stations and Pace Transportation Centers should be prime candidates for focused retail recruitment and retention.

Improve Access to Transit Service Information

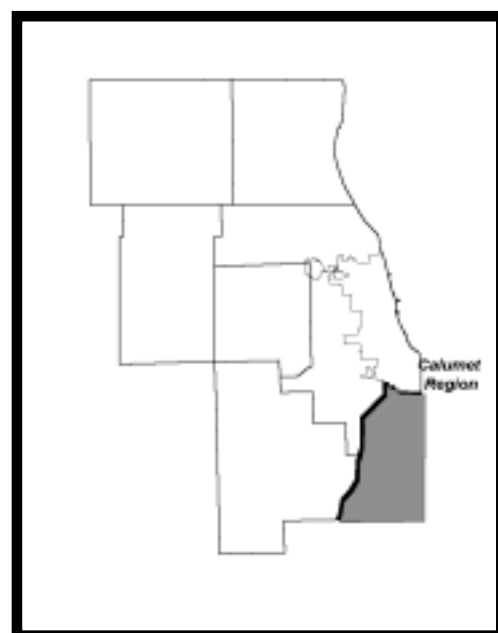
Increase the number of outlets where information on transit service may be obtained. Community service sections of local telephone directories should prominently list telephone numbers, service maps and schedules for area transit. Bus stops, rail stations, village halls, community centers and post offices should provide transit maps and schedules.

Redevelop Brownfields

Focus coordinated redevelopment efforts on existing abandoned industrial sites or brownfields, including de-contamination and investments in existing transportation assets leading to these sites; sites in Riverdale, Dixmoor and Harvey are of particular concern. Brownfields are also potential locations for additional retail centers, especially in underserved communities. The Calumet region is laced with highways, railroads and waterways, making industrial retention and brownfield site redevelopment advantageous for various commercial enterprises and the community.

Expand Walking & Bike Trails

Expand the region's multi-use trail network, filling in gaps in the existing network, especially along Thorn Creek. Establish a system of bike lanes and paths to connect residential subdivisions, shopping districts, job centers and educational institutions. Construct sidewalks around and connecting medical facilities, schools and retail/commercial centers with their surrounding residential communities. Incorporate bike lanes and sidewalks into all roadway rehabilitation projects.



Community Assets

From post-war bedroom communities and industrial towns bordering Chicago on the north to productive farmland in its far southern reaches, the Calumet region, or South Suburbs of Chicago, are a study in contrasts. Spanning parts of two counties, southern Cook and eastern Will, the Calumet region was once the industrial powerhouse of the Chicago metropolitan area. Its strategic placement at the southern tip of Lake Michigan led to the construction in the early 20th Century of railroads, waterways and highways that still criss-cross the region today. Heavy industry found the Calumet region well-suited for easy access to markets throughout the Midwest and on both coasts. Steel and auto production came to dominate the region's industrial sector.

Post-War suburban expansion fueled by easy access to the automobile and fast electric commuter trains brought new residents to old towns like Riverdale, Harvey, Homewood and Flossmoor. The booming American economy of the post-War era fueled industrial expansion as more industries migrated south from Chicago for cheaper land and more space. The steel mills and auto assembly plants in Riverdale and Chicago Heights hummed. Culture followed to meet the needs of a growing population. Thornton College, now South Suburban, Governors State University and Prairie State College opened and expanded. Recreational pursuits were easy to come by as the region's creeks and rivers became corridors for the Cook County Forest Preserve District.

Over the last decade of the 20th century, the Calumet Region has continued to undergo change, with a continued influx of blacks and Hispanics seeking the American dream of a single family home on a larger lot. Residential development continues to take place on the fringes of the region, with new housing developments being built in Richton Park, Country Club Hills and Park Forest. The Calumet region also struggles to cope with economic decline in older portions of the region as new investment occurs in undeveloped agricultural areas to the south and west and in Indiana.

Who We Are

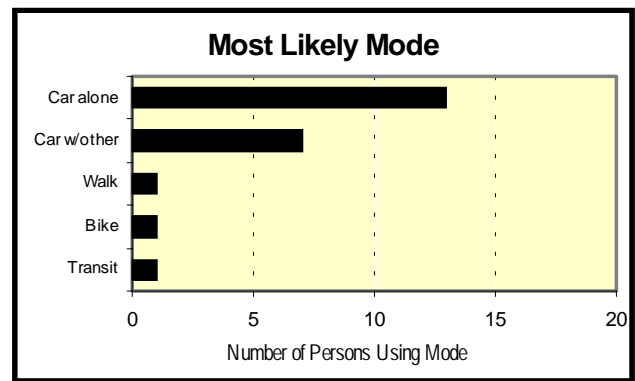
The Calumet region is probably the most racially diverse of any Chicago suburban area. Year 2000 census data show that the African-American population continues to grow, with equal numbers of both blacks and whites in many towns that had been exclusively white just two decades ago.

Participants in the Citizen Transportation Plan *Connecting Communities* summit on April 7, 2001, reflected this diversity with whites making up 64 percent, African-Americans 32 percent, Native Americans 5 percent and bi-racial or other groups, 5 percent. Represented among us were members of faith-based organizations, disabled persons, bicycling advocates, environmentalists, transit riders and motorists.

We came from across the region, from the rural town of Beecher to the inner-ring suburbs of Riverdale and Calumet City. Women predominated, making up 73 percent of those in attendance. Unfortunately, there was no participation from youth. Of the persons attending, a smaller number than the general population had children under 14 in their households.

How We Get Around

Following the typical suburban pattern, we reach the majority of our local destinations by car, driving alone. "Driving alone" ranked first in survey results of summit participants, followed closely by "driving, with others."



Biking, walking and transit were less frequently used options. On average, we take one opportunity per week to walk to perform errands, but four people walk almost every day and 14, some of whom are rural, don't walk to do errands at all. Two people took transit on a daily basis in the previous month, however the remainder took an average of less than one trip by transit in the prior month. On average, our households average two cars and 2.7 members.

The top destinations that we want to reach locally are Lincoln Mall and the other stores in the U.S. 30 corridor, Orland Square Mall to the west on 159th Street, River Oaks Shopping Center in Calumet City and Governors State University in University Park. Primary employment destinations for us and our neighbors are either of the Ford plants in Ford Heights or Hegewisch or downtown Chicago.

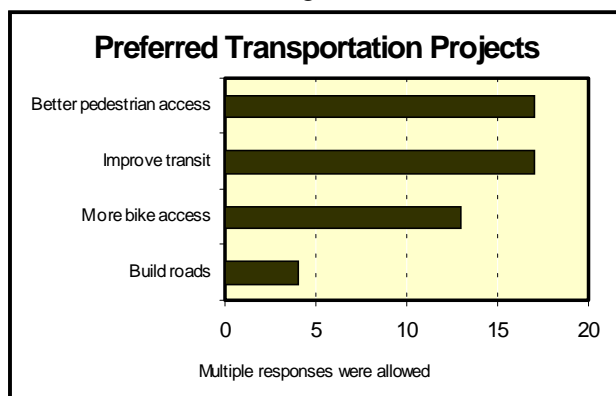
Our Vision

We desire a region that understands the relationship between transportation and pollution and undertakes efforts to mitigate transportation's negative effects on air quality and open spaces. We want to maintain and preserve the region's existing assets, reinvest in abandoned industrial sites, or brownfields, and encourage economic development in depressed communities.

Our vision for the Calumet region reflected all of the goals as outlined in the first Citizen Transportation Plan. Survey results revealed that we strongly support the principle of public involvement in local and regional planning processes to bring about our vision for our communities. We also expressed a strong desire to be able to shop at traditional suburban downtowns with a mix of housing, jobs and services. We expressed a preference for walkable, pedestrian-scale communities with easy access to shopping, schools, recreation and medical facilities. We envision a community where all residents can take advantage of the region's amenities by transit, walking or by bike. The ability of seniors, the disabled and children to have full, meaningful lives with transportation independence is important to us.

Challenges and Solutions

Good transit enhances economic development efforts. Good transit service is an incentive for prospective employers. To stem the social consequences of unemployment and under-employment, we also view transit as necessary to connect those most in need in our communities with economic opportunity in other parts of the Chicago region. We feel redevelopment of brownfields for new job-generating industrial and commercial development would benefit our region. Provision of attractive, convenient transit service to these redevelopment sites is a priority. Downtown Chicago, the Ford Assembly Plants and suburbs to the northwest of Chicago are logical destinations for improved transit service from the Calumet region.



Jobs and economic development are a high priority. As the Calumet region has aged and many industrial jobs have migrated elsewhere, the need for economic development has become an important priority of local elected officials and residents. The need to develop more job opportunities is the backdrop to discussions in local media, in city councils and township halls and was so at the *Connecting Communities* summit. We feel there is a dire need for economic development and job creation in the older industrial communities of our region. Several communities have been hit hard by industrial decline and are suffering disinvestment and other social problems.

Relieving congestion would improve our quality of life. Relieving congestion points in the existing transportation network would enhance economic development opportunities, improve access to jobs and improve our quality of life. Several viaducts and railroad grade crossings along 159th Street and the junction of the Bishop Ford Expressway and Kingery Expressway are the most congested spots in the area. Viaduct expansion and grade separations would alleviate railroad/highway congestion and better transit service would entice some out of the cars clogging congested highways. Bus service should be increased along Torrence Avenue and Halsted Street, major North-South arterials that parallel the Bishop Ford. The lack of commuter rail service in the eastern part of the region is a disincentive to use transit. Parking lots and station amenities should be improved at existing Metra Electric stations, but are only a short-term solution to the congestion faced by the communities in the eastern segment of the region. Express bus service should be expanded along existing expressways to speed travel to the Loop and to the west for coordinated connections with existing Metra service to downtown.

More transit means more choices. We believe that greater investment in attractive, convenient transit service is preferable to construction of additional road capacity. We are not satisfied with transit service in our region. Despite survey results that indicate the private auto is our overwhelmingly chosen mode for local trips, we are willing to use quality public transit if it is provided. The level of service provided in this region is inadequate for our families' needs.

Pace is the primary transit service provider in the Calumet region as Metra maintains only one service route, the Electric District line between University Park in the southwest part of the region and Chicago. As currently configured and provided, there are many gaps in existing bus service. The geographic coverage and duration of service need to be expanded. The primary Pace transfer points in the region are the Harvey Transportation Center and the Chicago Heights Transportation Center, leaving many residential districts without convenient access to bus service. Bus service is infrequent, often once an hour or less, and usually does not operate much past weekday rush periods and rarely on weekends.

Additional north-south bus service should be established on Cicero Ave., Pulaski Rd. and Cottage Grove Ave. and east-west service augmented on 159th Street, Lincoln Hwy/211th Street and instituted on Joe Orr Rd. All the shopping areas and hospitals have Pace service, but unless one lives on the Pace route that directly serves these regional destinations, they cannot effectively be reached except by car. Shuttle van service should be added to connect apartment complexes and senior centers with expanded bus service on arterial

streets, nearby transit centers and medical facilities. To further improve the attractiveness of transit, improve lighting along sidewalks, at transit centers and at bus stops. To enhance safety, implement cooperative agreements between police departments that may have jurisdiction over transit routes passing through more than one community.

We are in agreement that transportation is one of many assets that can build economic and community strength in the Calumet region. The diversity of our backgrounds did not dilute our unity of vision. We want the Calumet region to be a vibrant, socially and economically diverse region with more and better transportation choices. We need to strengthen our communities so that all residents can meet their needs close to home. And we want better transit, bike and pedestrian access to education, jobs, shopping and medical care for all, including seniors and the disabled. In order to achieve these goals, we want our public officials to act cooperatively to insure our voices are heard and we want to be a part of the decision-making process that determines what projects get built in our communities.

The Calumet *Connecting Communities* summit participants came as individuals and as members of groups. Some of the groups that helped plan the summit include:

Human Action Community Organization
Lincolnway-South Corridor Against the Tollway
RURAL

Shut This Airport Nightmare Down
Ministers Conference of South Cook County

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.