



SPECIAL REPORT
ADDENDUM TO THE
Connecting Communities Summit

Moving Forward: Inspiring the Community

The Inspiration Cafe* is a nonprofit organization that provides supportive services designed to assist men and women in exiting homelessness with dignity and respect. The Café patrons desire a transportation system that works efficiently and is responsive to the needs of people transitioning out of homelessness. Their request is for a system that supports the creation of local jobs and access to those jobs while enriching the fabric of communities. The four male and five female attendees, six of whom are African-American, two bi-racial and one white, optimistically offered suggestions to improve quality of life for all, especially those who are reintroducing themselves to the community.

Walking is the most popular mode of moving around for the meeting participants. The group is comprised of avid transit users, who took an astounding 729 trips in the last month, making transit the second most popular mode of transportation. Solo car usage, car with others and biking are the next most used methods of transportation. Everyone in the group uses transit and all have a bus stop located near their residences or their most regular shelter for the homeless, with 71% of the group experiencing service more than once per hour. Only two meeting attendees indicated car ownership.

With heavy transit use and walking as the primary means of getting around, the Inspiration Café meeting attendees are a good measure of how well transit works in the Chicagoland region. Participants focused their efforts first on improving public transportation and secondly on how to strengthen its relationship with community and economic development.

The most important local priority is the ability of transportation decisions to directly influence economic development. Scenarios that support local jobs and access to those jobs were designated as the main priorities for the region. The ability to travel safely via all modes of transportation, pedestrians and car drivers, as well as the option to use multiple modes to move freely, were significant concerns for their community.

Inspiration Café members are very mobile and travel

throughout the Chicagoland region. Top destinations include the Loop and lakefront for business and recreation destinations such as the Art Institute, the lakefront and Navy Pier. All travel to Chicago's Uptown neighborhood to visit the Café on a regular basis from dispersed locations. Visits to health care services in the downtown area require an efficient public transit system. Many also visit locales such as the Woodfield Mall in Schaumburg and the Lincoln Square neighborhood in Chicago. Grocery stores and public government aid offices are also frequented destinations.

Meeting attendees rank public involvement as the number one way to develop a public transportation system that works effectively. Suggestions and scenarios developed by participants stress access for all members of the community but especially children, the disabled and others who express need for extra assistance. CTA Red Line station enhancements at Howard, Wilson and Lawrence, according to meeting participants, are the first steps to aid everyone in using Chicago's public transit system. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines offer suggestions on how to best promote access for people with special needs. Meeting attendees suggested following those regulations when undertaking station enhancement projects. Other station improvements include the addition of restrooms for added convenience, comfort and sanitation. The construction of benches and heating lamps at all bus and train stops are also needed. The option to sit at waiting areas is very important, especially for seniors, the disabled and families. An overall improvement in station maintenance, convenience and access assists everyone in using public transportation. Cars that park at bus stops should be towed away quickly. Seniors and those in wheelchairs cannot access the bus because of parked vehicles, forcing the bus to stop in busy intersections, which make it difficult and hazardous to board the bus. Wheelchair users are often unable to use the ramp on some buses and trains, prohibiting them from taking advantage of public transit in some situations.

All meeting attendees have easy access to bus stops. However, bus routes are in need of improvement to

*Inspiration Café is located at 4554 North Broadway in the heart of Chicago's Uptown neighborhood. Through the invitation of Grace Yang, The Center for Neighborhood Technology was able to meet with an enthusiastic group of Café guests on June 13th, 2002.

accommodate the participants' reliance on transportation by bus. Participants identified five bus routes that need 24-hour service: #76 Diversey, #11 Lincoln, #78 Montrose, #36 Broadway and #92 Foster. These routes cover a large section of the area most frequently traveled by meeting participants. Although the #151 Sheridan bus currently operates 24 hours a day, better scheduling and response to user trends must be addressed. Often busses come two or three at a time, after patrons are forced to wait for prolonged periods of time. Bus bunching is a significant problem encountered on many different bus routes, especially the #151 Sheridan. Better scheduling and increased service frequency is necessary for all bus routes.

Participants noted that the first step to influence a better bus system is the placement of transfer stations every two square-miles. These stations would more easily link the entire bus system and make passage from one part of the city to the next much easier, assisting those who work and live in different parts of the region. The addition of shuttle bus routes on Ashland Avenue from Irving Park Road North to Touhy Avenue and on California Avenue from Lawrence Avenue to Roscoe Street will alleviate congestion and overcrowding on those particular bus routes. Shuttles offer convenience and speed not always realized by busses. The environmental impacts of busses were also noted. Participants suggested the introduction of low emission busses such as an ethanol mix or oxydiesel systems, which would decrease pollution and improve air quality.

The improvement of transportation schedules throughout the region for CTA, Metra and Pace services to accommodate reverse commuters is supported by all the participants. Since many jobs are not available locally, schedules to assist those who depend on public transit but work during unusual hours need to be upgraded. Ignoring

reverse commute issues and failing to provide sufficient schedules decreases the opportunities for Inspiration Café members to swiftly get back on track with finding housing and employment opportunities. In addition, reverse commuters generally need to use more than one mode of transportation to access their jobs. The implementation of a universal transit card would increase the ease and availability of the transportation system, especially for those needing to transfer between Pace, CTA and Metra.

The meeting attendees were eager to promote walkability and they envisioned a plan for a car-free downtown area. They suggested restricting cars from entering the Loop, but allowing transit to function as usual, including more busses and shuttles. Parking garages on the fringe of the area would supply parking needs and shuttle service would be established to move people to the final destination. Not permitting cars in the area promotes a healthy atmosphere without the perils of traffic. Participants agreed that reduced noise, congestion and air pollution while developing a safer environment to move around in would be a wonderful change for the downtown.

The Inspiration Café vision is for a transportation system that is efficient and meets the needs of all users. Promoting access to the entire Chicagoland region was a focal point of the meeting. Attendees understand how a strong transportation system can enhance economic opportunities and dramatically improve community fabric. The Inspiration Café group is motivated and enthusiastic about their suggestions for an expanded range of transit options and confident of the positive difference it would make in their lives.

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.