



# *Connecting Communities*

## **Lake County**

**July 24, 2001**

### ***Community Assets***

Waterways led the first settlers to Lake County. In the early 1800s, communities began sprouting along the Des Plaines River and natural harbors along Lake Michigan. By the end of the century, railroad lines had replaced waterways as spurs to development. Today, Lake County seeks a balance between natural areas, agriculture, industry, older cities and newer suburbs; it is now home to 644,356 inhabitants, an increase of 25% over the 1990 population.

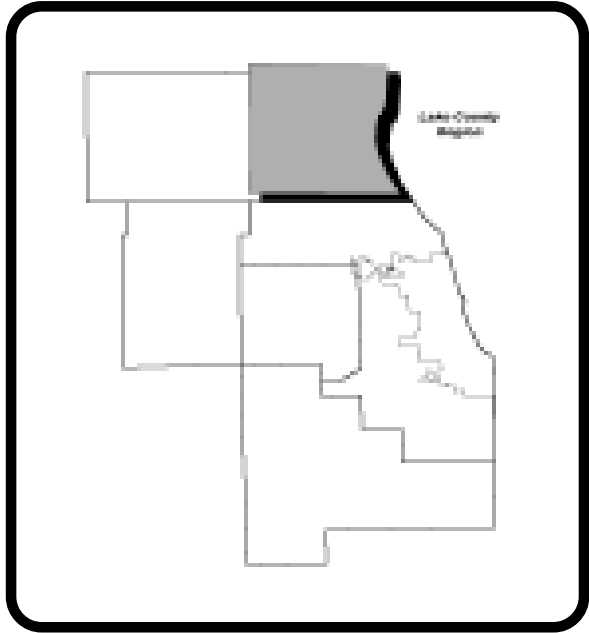
For more than a decade, Lake County has been engaged in a spirited debate about the environmental impacts of development. In 2000, Lake County residents passed a ballot initiative authorizing the Forest Preserve District to spend \$70 million on open space and natural area preservation and improvements. The new Independence Grove Preserve recently opened and completion of the Des Plaines River Trail is in sight. There are three state parks in Lake County: Volo Bog, Illinois Beach and Chain O'Lakes.

Lake County's employment and population growth represent an economic asset as well as a challenge to natural areas. New residential developments continue to sprout on undeveloped land in central and western Lake County. The Lake-Cook Road Corridor is home to corporate headquarters like Baxter Healthcare and the Walgreens Company as well as regional offices of many others. Lake County has become a retail draw with Hawthorn Center in Vernon Hills and Gurnee Mills outlet shopping center in the community of Gurnee.

### ***Who We Are***

We came from across Lake County but primarily from its Central and North Central sections. Some of us were from older cities that developed along the rail lines, like Highland Park, Zion and Mundelein. Others came from newly developing areas like Prairie Crossing. Most of us are active in other groups that

seek to improve the quality of life in Lake County, like the League of Women Voters or the Sierra Club. We represented senior citizen groups, faith-based organizations, transit riders, disability activists and official organizations like the County Planning Department, the Soil and Water District and the office



of a State Representative. We strongly believe that the public should be involved in decisions about land use and transportation in our communities.

We are concerned about the health of our physical environment. Air and water quality are important issues that we feel should be considered when making decisions about transportation investments and where growth is going to occur. We are also concerned about traffic congestion, the ability to use multiple travel modes to get around, efficient connections between modes, access to the transportation system by seniors and the disabled, and job access for Lake County residents and non-residents alike.

## ***How We Get Around***

We reach most of our destinations by car, driving alone. Our second and third most-used modes are “by car, with others,” and on foot. Transit and biking are less realistic options for many of our trips. With the automobile at present being the only reasonable way to reach most destinations in Lake County, we have on average just more than two cars per household, a rate of about one car per person. We are trapped between our desire to protect air quality, water quality and natural habitats and the reality that we cannot get around without relying heavily on cars. About half of us do walk to perform errands in our own communities each week.

More than half of us indicate the presence of transit service near our homes, more often rail than bus, but only one-tenth of us enjoy service that is more frequent than once an hour. As a reflection of our expressed support for better transit, 54% of us used transit in the last month. Four of those present represented households with children. Of those children, all ride the bus to school, though half sometimes walk or are driven.

## ***Challenges and Solutions***

### **Environment impacted**

Steady employment and population growth have led to stifling traffic congestion, which has negative consequences for our natural environment. The pattern of development that has occurred in Lake County has resulted in over-dependence on the automobile for many trips. Increased air and water pollution have been the result. Rapid commercial and residential development has devoured acres of open space and natural animal habitat.

The region’s transportation network has not kept pace with the demands of more people traveling within and to the county from other parts of the region. Much of our highway and transit network was designed for trips between the County and Chicago. Travel to Chicago still constitutes a significant share of daily trips, but many Lake County residents are traveling to destinations in the County and the Chicago region that are inaccessible except by car. The east-west access roads to the Tri-State are overwhelmed with traffic, and back-ups sometimes extend for miles. East-west transit service is almost non-existent, providing little alternative but to drive for most intra-county trips.

### **Public transit investments key**

If we had more travel options we could use our cars less. More transit service should be available for east-west trips. East-west roads like Grand Ave., IL 176, IL 22/Half Day Rd. and IL 60 need transit bus service scheduled at times when people will use it, to reach employment, shopping and to connect with Metra rail service. Retail employees are often not served by buses which are geared to the departure of the last shopper. The most congested of these roads should have dedicated bus/bike lanes to allow users of these more environmentally friendly modes to speed past auto traffic. The College of Lake County on the outskirts of Grayslake needs additional bus service to the Fox Lake and Grayslake Metra stations. The successful network of shuttle bus service connecting nearby office complexes with the Lake-Cook Road Metra station should be a model for other areas.

We could also use the transit assets we have more effectively. Better connections to job sites in the county are essential. Coordinating the schedules and fares of the existing transit systems would help us use transit more often. Better dissemination of transit schedule information and better signage would encourage more use. Metra service should be expanded on the North Central line, added on the EJ&E line and extended to Gurnee and Wadsworth along a freight rail line branching from the Metra Milwaukee North Line. New stations and additional short- and long-term parking at stations would also increase the number of transit riders.

Existing services need to be made handicapped accessible to accommodate the needs of seniors and the disabled. Service times and routes need to be expanded to improve the universe of options available to this growing segment of our population.

### **The pedestrian and cycling environment**

Many trips that are now completed by car could be diverted to walking or cycling if the appropriate infrastructure was in place. Sidewalks are too few and where they exist are not connected to any larger network. Sidewalks are especially important around schools and where lacking, should be installed.

For more individuals to choose the bicycle for short trips, the cycling environment must be made safer. Priority should be given to constructing more bike

lanes and paths and improving intersections to make them safe for cyclists and pedestrians. We have a growing network of regional trails, but more needs to be done. Among the routes that need to see paths and lanes for cyclists are Milwaukee Avenue, Lake-Cook Road, IL 137, IL 83, St. Mary's Road and Everett Road. There should also be a bike lane parallel to the Metra North Central line.

Connections, where missing, need to be constructed between existing trails. Trails should be established between downtown Waukegan and North Chicago to the Lakefront Trail heading north from Lake Bluff. A full complement of bike connections needs to be built connecting communities with their Metra stations.

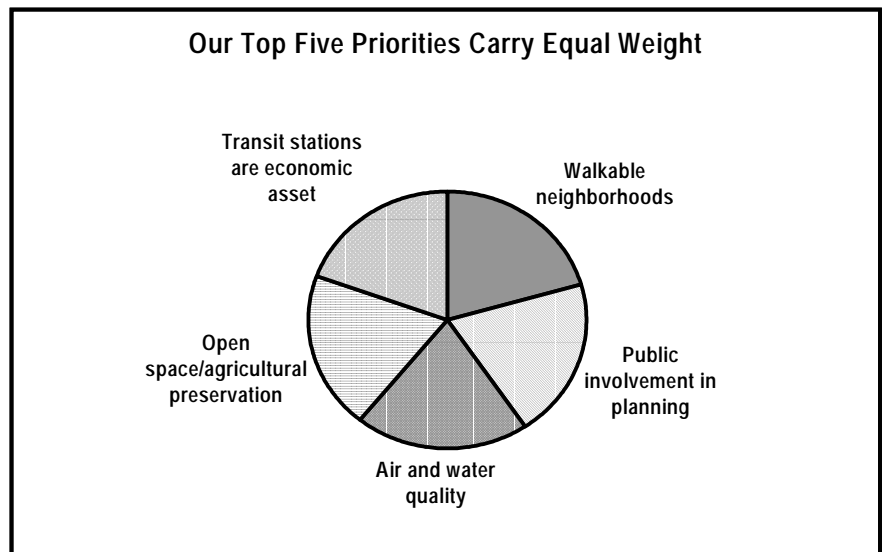
### **Congestion relief, other ideas**

Lake County's healthy growth rate has led to increased traffic congestion. Traffic back-ups on the county's road network decrease efficiency and lessen safety for non-auto users of the system. The sprawl of new residential and commercial development has led to over-dependence on the automobile for even the shortest trips.

Roads are a necessary component of our transportation system. We suggest targeted projects to relieve bottlenecks. The intersection of IL 176 and Rte 60 is one example. Many of the east-west roads connecting central and western Lake County with the Tri-State tollway and US 41 are congested and need to be widened. We had many additional ideas to lessen traffic congestion in Lake County. Economic incentives should go to those who choose to live near and use public transit. Employers should adopt flextime to stagger the impact of rush hours. Traffic lights need to be synchronized and high-occupancy vehicle lanes built to encourage carpooling. Travelers should be able to use the Internet to get "real-time" congestion information. Underused parking lots, like those at Lakehurst and Hawthorn Center, should be used as shuttle centers. Transit providers should be sure to schedule services to coincide with major events in Chicago and look at smaller buses to reduce costs and lessen community impact. Where suitable, bridle paths should be constructed.

To improve travel outside the region, an Amtrak station should be constructed at Milwaukee's Mitchell Airport. High-speed rail service should be developed to serve it and the entire Midwest.

Waukegan's port facility should be the base for ferry service to Chicago, Michigan and Wisconsin points. Additional rail service between the Metra UP-North Line and the North Central line and a revival of service along former North Shore Line interurban routes would provide yet further travel options for the region. On a larger scale, the motor fuel tax should be raised to encourage more transit use.



### ***Our Vision***

We, the residents of Lake County feel that ensuring the environmental health of our communities is paramount. This goal is best achieved by preserving open space. This can best be done by encouraging development in existing communities, rebuilding existing infrastructure and providing well-coordinated, accessible transit as an alternative to auto use. Our vision for Lake County will be achieved through public involvement in planning and through tax incentives that encourage smarter development. Our existing infrastructure should be maintained and non-auto alternatives for local trips must be provided. Any new transportation investments should not unduly burden any one community. Their benefits should be shared as we build vibrant, mixed-use communities that are walkable, bikable, easily accessible by transit and have the range of services the community needs. This is the Lake County we want to leave for our children and our neighbors' children.

## Recommendations

**Maintain existing communities in order to preserve open space.** Develop intergovernmental agreements to support planning efforts in communities. Invest public dollars in the communities where people already live. Use a combination of fiscal incentives and disincentives to steer new housing, retail and commercial development to sites near transit stations, especially in communities' downtowns. Recognize that development patterns geared solely to access by car will lead to more congestion, which reduces air and water quality and leads to habitat degradation. Continue to expand the forest preserve district and protect farmland and other open spaces to ensure adequate migratory corridors for wildlife.

**Establish a grid network of accessible transit bus service throughout the developed parts of the county.** Increase hours and days of service; make all transportation 100% accessible. Regular bus service should be operated on all major east-west and north-south highways. Bus service should be scheduled to connect with other routes and existing and proposed Metra service. Install signal preemption technology to enhance bus efficiency. Expand scheduled, accessible bus service to College of Lake County, especially connections from nearby Metra stations. Combine school bus service with public transportation as in the Waukegan model.

**Expand rail service.** Improve coordination with other modes. Increase the frequency of service on the Metra North Central line, converting it to a "full-service" route with reverse-commute, evening and weekend service. Allow more long-term parking in existing and expanded lots at outlying stations to facilitate use of the line to access O'Hare Airport. Establish service along the existing Canadian Pacific Rail/Amtrak line as a branch of the Metra Milwaukee North line to Gurnee and Wadsworth and along the Elgin, Joliet and Eastern to improve access to Northwest Cook and DuPage County. Explore advanced technologies like monorail, magnetic levitation trains and high speed rail.

**Create communities where walking is a pleasant option for completion of trips, continue to expand the region's multi-use trail network and create a network of safe bike/bus lanes on the region's east-west and north-south roads.** Require the construction of sidewalks in all new residential and commercial developments. Connect new and existing sidewalks to form a seamless network, including connections between residential neighborhoods, schools, retail districts and transit service. Improve lighting for better security. Complete the Des Plaines River Trail. Construct a radial network of bike lanes and paths from Metra stations to their surrounding communities. Allow bikes on trains and buses.

**Make targeted improvements to existing road network to relieve traffic congestion.** Coordinate traffic signals. Explore user fee alternatives to tolls. Add left turn lanes and additional lanes approaching major traffic bottlenecks. Add additional traffic lanes to Milwaukee Ave., Buckley Rd., IL 22, IL 176 and the Tri-State Tollway. Build an overpass where the Metra North Central line crosses IL 60. Blend road improvements into the surrounding environment with appropriate landscaping. Construction projects should be scheduled outside of primary travel periods and users should be charged for the cost of road construction, maintenance and other negative impacts resulting from auto use.

The Lake County *Connecting Communities* summit participants came as individuals and as members of groups. The people who helped plan the summit came from the following groups:

Citizens Organized for Sound Transportation  
Lake County Conservation Alliance  
Woods & Wetlands Group-Sierra Club  
Lake County League of Women Voters

### ***Connecting Communities Regional Partners***

Business and Professional People for the Public Interest	Independent Voters of Illinois-Independent Precinct Organization
Chicago Design Consortium	Interreligious Sustainability Project
Chicago Metropolitan 2020	League of Women Voters of Illinois
Chicago Rehab Network	Metro Seniors in Action
Chicagoland Bicycle Federation	Metropolitan Planning Council
Citizen Action-Illinois	Mid America Institute on Poverty
Council for Disability Rights	Sierra Club
Environmental Law and Policy Center of the Midwest	Sustain
Friends of the Chicago River	



***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).***