



# *Connecting Communities*

## **North-Northwest Cook County**

**June 18, 2001**

### ***Community Assets***

North-Northwest Cook County, which stretches from the shores of Lake Michigan to just short of the Fox River, encompasses historic 19<sup>th</sup> Century railroad suburbs, postwar towns of ranch homes, and newer townhome and subdivision developments on former cornfields. Home to international commercial enterprises such as Motorola, United Airlines and Sears, northern Cook County and its office corridors and industrial parks provide employment for hundreds of thousands of Chicago-area residents.

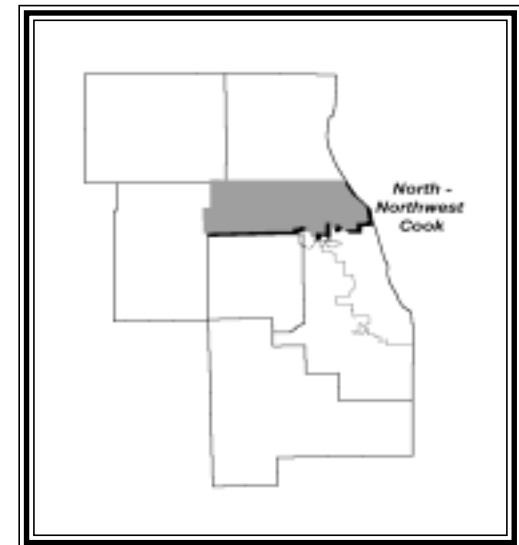
Older communities such as Evanston, Park Ridge, Palatine and Winnetka originally took root along railroads. Newer edge cities like Schaumburg and Hoffman Estates sprouted seemingly out of adjacent tollway interchanges. Laced with commuter rail, rapid transit and tollways, the communities of North-Northwest Cook County continue to prosper. Transportation continues to play a big role in the lives of businesses and residents in this region. Debate rages today over tollway and rail expansion and over the fate of the region's number one job generator, O'Hare Airport.

### ***Who we are***

We came from across the region, from Wheeling and Evanston, from Arlington Heights and Des Plaines and from communities old and new. What brought us together was our concern for the quality of life of our communities and a desire to see a transportation system that could enhance, not detract from it. Meeting at a church in downtown Des Plaines, we discussed the critical transportation issues that concern us: the congestion that strangles our towns, the lack of safe routes for pedestrians and cyclists, and the lack of public input in transportation decisions. We are concerned about the limitations placed on people with disabilities because of paratransit service boundary limitations. We are concerned about the environment, urban sprawl and road

congestion, the results of too great a reliance on cars by government and individuals.

Women (57%) slightly outnumbered men (43%) at the summit, and our ages spanned the college years through retirement years. Our households have 2.5 members; 98% of our families have at least one car.



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

Although we expressed a strong desire for more transit options, right now our primary means of getting around our communities is in a car by ourselves. "By car, with others" and on foot are our second and third most likely modes. Almost two-thirds of us walked recently to perform errands, reflecting our expressed desire for walkable neighborhoods. Those of us who walk do so about 5 times per week. The desirability of walking for local trips is reflected in how our children get to school. Thirteen families indicated that a child under 14 was in the home; in 54% of those families, youngsters walk to school.

Seventy-nine percent of us indicate the presence of transit service that is at least hourly within one mile of our home. Although 70% of us have taken transit in the

last month, it ranks fourth in usage among us. Several of us ride transit daily, taking as many as 55 to 60 trips per month. Biking is our least used mode to reach the places we want to go in North-Northwest Cook County.

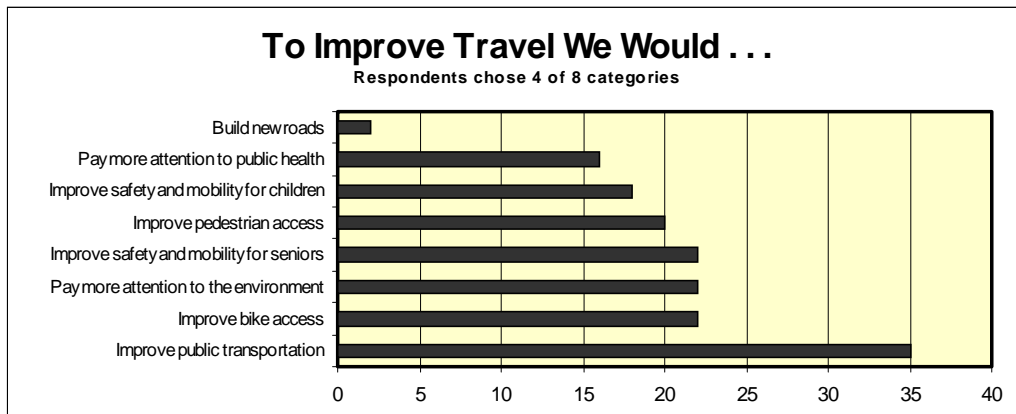
### **Challenges and Solutions**

Congested roadways plague our part of the region. Palatine-Willow Road, Lake-Cook Road, and Golf Road become parking lots for cars during rush hours, making them unattractive for non-motorized users and causing bus schedule disruptions. Excessive auto traffic leads to safety challenges for users of the transportation network as well as congested conditions. Negative environmental consequences are detrimental to our communities, our families and ourselves. Air and water resources and species habitat are negatively affected. Children, the disabled and seniors have difficulty navigating communities divided by these high-capacity roads. The network of sidewalks along these roads and in many residential subdivisions is incomplete, with sidewalks abruptly dead-ending, leaving walkers and young cyclists unsure of how to proceed.

There is a lack of sufficient east-west transit available in North-Northwest Cook County. The service routes that are provided are widely spaced and many operate at such wide time intervals, that using transit is unattractive. Information about service schedules is difficult to find and often inaccurate.

Sprawl continues to devour the open space remaining, with untold human and environmental costs. So-called “leapfrog” development that occurs outside the traditional built-up area makes it difficult for cyclists and walkers to access goods and services within a reasonable distance of their homes. Residents have only their cars as a means to reach their destinations.

We feel there are ways to improve the ability of people to access the places they want to go without relying solely on the private automobile. In fact, we rank road expansion last in our suggestions for methods to improve the North-Northwest Cook transportation network. Our number-one priority is to improve public transportation.



**Bus and rail transit provide alternatives.** We want options when it comes to which mode is available to reach our preferred destinations. We value highly the ability to use multiple modes to get around. We offered a range of solutions to provide real alternatives to traffic gridlock in North-Northwest Cook County. Expanded bus and shuttle service should be part of the solution. Roads like Arlington Heights, Golf, Milwaukee Avenue, Palatine-Willow and Roselle should have frequent bus service connecting the various employment and retail destinations with residential neighborhoods and rail transit stations.

A common desire expressed among summit participants was for expansion of the Chicago Transit Authority’s Yellow (formerly Skokie Swift) Line. We feel the line is not meeting its full potential. The Yellow Line’s present terminal is at Dempster Street in Skokie. Trains make no stops between there and the Howard Street station on the Evanston-Chicago border. The line passes several important north-south streets and residential neighborhoods in Skokie and South Evanston without stopping. Stations should be established at Oakton and Dodge to allow connections with existing bus service. There continues to be significant job growth along the Lake-Cook Road corridor north of Dempster Street. In order to provide an additional travel option for commuters to the city as well as access for city residents to jobs in that corridor, the Yellow Line should be extended to the booming office area in Northbrook. Additional stations should be established along an extended Yellow Line at important destinations like Old Orchard Shopping Center. Parking will need to be provided at new transit stations as well as increased at some existing stations.

We are enthusiastic about extending the Blue Line to Schaumburg. To improve job access to the Elk Grove

business parks and the Woodfield/Schaumburg area, we proposed that commuter rail service be established on the Union Pacific freight rail line that forms an arc from west of O'Hare, then north toward Northbrook and into Lake County. This new rail line should have station locations, in addition to Elk Grove, at the crossings of the Metra UP Northwest Line in Des Plaines, Bensenville, Milwaukee Avenue and in Northbrook for a connection with the Metra Milwaukee North Line.

A common concern is improving access from throughout our region to O'Hare Airport. We suggested new bus service from communities such as Barrington, Des Plaines, Evanston, Northbrook and Randhurst Shopping Center to the airport, providing travelers an option other than the crowded roadways leading into the field.

Existing and new transit service should operate with schedules and fares coordinated to allow easy connections between modes. In some places there are no options for connecting service; in other places buses leave just before trains unload their passengers. Reverse commuters should have more transit options so that they are not all forced to drive to the job centers near our communities. We feel that above all, convenient and safe transit service needs to be provided in order to get people out of their cars. Government policies have failed to adequately consider the downsides of car travel on communities and the environment.

**Pedestrian and biking improvements are highly valued.** Biking and walking are often unpleasant and sometimes downright dangerous because of the dominance of cars in our neighborhoods. We should treat bikers and pedestrians as priority users. All major intersections should have pedestrian signals; pedestrian lights should last longer. We would like to see bike racks on buses as well as policies that allow bikes on trains during non-rush hour travel times.

Existing and future residential and commercial developments must include complete networks of sidewalks and bikeways. Local and regional governments should promote bike- and pedestrian-friendly policies that increase the safety of these modes and further encourage their use as a means to reduce auto dependence. We would like to see an increase in funds committed to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. We would like to investigate the

possibility of wider bike routes that are shared paths with pedestrians.

**We would like to try some innovative ideas.** We would like more standard transit, bike and pedestrian options. In addition, we believe the region should try some innovative approaches to solving the congestion and air quality problems that are choking us, literally and figuratively. Some of the ideas that were proposed included: express lanes for buses only, high-speed rail to the Milwaukee and Gary-Chicago airports, education programs on how to use transit, bus shuttles operated by employers, the "Yellow Bike" program, urban growth boundaries, berms separating sidewalks from fast moving traffic, and hydrofoil water bus service from Waukegan to Navy Pier, with connecting bus service. We applaud the abundance of ideas offered, although we did not try to reach any consensus on which of these innovations we most strongly support.

### ***Our Vision***

Individually and collectively we need to examine our attitudes and values regarding why we travel so much and who needs to travel in our families. We need to look at staggered work hours and more funding for transportation alternatives. Neighbors need to be in the habit of sharing information about their needs. Having such knowledge enables people in the same community to combine trips as well as car pool to work and to children's after-school activities.

We, the residents of North-Northwest Cook County share a concern for the environment and the economic health of our communities and our neighbors. We feel very strongly that walkable communities and transit-oriented development build stronger and more satisfying neighborhoods. Existing communities should be enhanced, maintained, and where necessary, rebuilt. We want to preserve open space, not just as land "to be developed," but as having intrinsic value. We desire communities that offer equal access to persons with disabilities and are not isolated from the rest of the world. We believe that if the public is involved in local and regional planning, community goals will be better realized. Transportation is a right. Transportation provides residents access to employment and integrates our community with the larger Chicago region. Transportation should provide these benefits without unduly burdening our physical environment with pollution.

## Recommendations

**Extend rapid transit/rail service.** Extend the CTA Blue Line from O'Hare Airport to the Schaumburg/Woodfield area. An intermediate station should be located to serve industrial parks in Elk Grove Village. Upgrade the level of service provided by the CTA Yellow Line. Add intermediate stations along the existing route, to serve south Evanston and Skokie at Dodge and at Oakton. Extend the Yellow Line north from its terminal at Dempster Street to Lake-Cook Road. The Old Orchard Shopping Center, Lake-Cook Road and a point between Willow Road and Dundee Road should be three of several intermediate stations. Extend a branch of the Yellow Line south to connect with the Blue Line at Jefferson Park. Add commuter rail service along an existing Union Pacific line connecting Northbrook, Glenview, Des Plaines, O'Hare and business parks west of O'Hare Airport. Increase frequency of rail service, especially Metra weekend service and Purple Line evening and weekend service. Integrate parking facilities.

**Expand bus and shuttle service to provide an alternative to car travel.** Increase the schedule frequency of existing bus service, *especially along major east-west arterials*. Priority for new and expanded bus service should be on Palatine-Willow Road, Milwaukee Avenue, Golf Road and Lake-Cook Road. Use express buses or bus rapid transit. Provide new bus service from local communities to O'Hare Airport. Establish local service loops (small shuttle buses making frequent stops, with a lower fare) connecting major employers, shopping malls, hospitals, transit stations and villages.

**Improve the ease and safety of biking and walking for short trips.** Priority should be given to ensuring pedestrian and bicycle safety, including changes in traffic signalization, dedicated routes and physical barriers separating motorized vehicles from walkers, bikers and other non-motorized travelers. More funding should be dedicated to pedestrian and bicycle improvements. Provide adequate bike parking, bike racks on buses, CTA-style access on Metra trains. Incorporate sidewalks and bike lanes and paths into existing residential and commercial developments. All new developments should be required to include these amenities. Establish new dedicated multi-use paths along the railroad right-of-way from Barrington to Chicago and along the Lakefront from Lake-Cook Road to Evanston. Connect all Forest Preserves with multi-use paths.

**Transportation planners must be accountable.** Current funds must be used to support direct service rather than high administrative costs. Correct the fundamental flaws in RTA funding that enrich one service board at the expense of the others. Advocacy is needed to ensure representation of all social sectors, not just the powerful. Better regional coordination is needed, as is a focus on moving people rather than moving cars.

**Integrate transit fares and services.** Use the existing system more efficiently. Provide an integrated fare card, preferably a smart card. Provide more options like the Link-Up pass. Investigate the expansion of zoned systems and/or the role of advanced technology to integrate zoned systems with flat-rate systems.

The North/Northwest Cook *Connecting Communities* summit participants came as individuals and as members of groups. The people who helped plan the summit came from the following groups:

Evanston Sustainability Circle  
Interfaith Housing Center of the North Suburbs  
Palatine-Willow Road Community Mobilization Team

### ***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 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](http://www.cnt.org/2030).*