



Connecting Communities

The North Side of Chicago

May 19, 2001

Community Assets

High-rises along the lakefront define the North Side of Chicago for many. For others, it's the miles of bungalows stretching to suburbia and O'Hare International Airport. Chicago north of North Avenue is this and more. Early settlements in the farming communities of Lakeview and Ravenswood were transformed by waves of immigrants, as population mushroomed north and northwest along streetcar and railroad lines. New industrial facilities opened along the railroads and North Branch of the Chicago River, providing employment for expanding residential neighborhoods nearby. By 1893, most of what is today the North and Northwest Sides of Chicago were annexed.

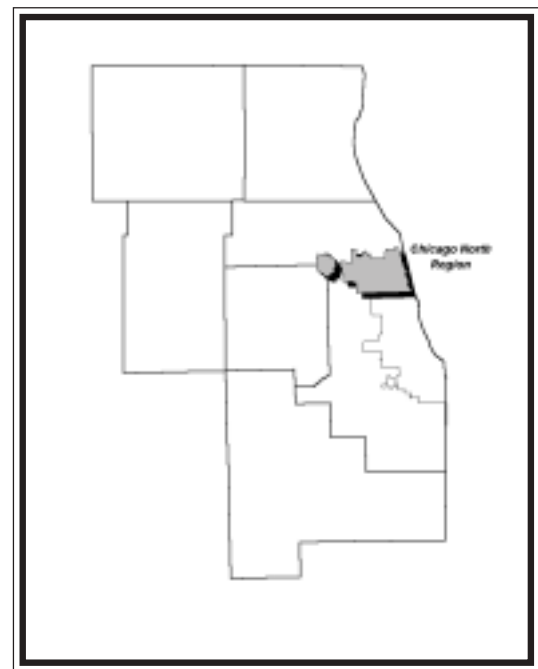
Transportation today is still key to the economic and community life of the North and Northwest Sides. As the 2000 census data show, new residents still flock to the convenience of the North Side. Neighborhoods close to the Kennedy Expressway, a conduit to jobs in the Northwest Suburbs, are bustling with new residents. Other North Side communities are home to immigrants from across the globe. The wall of high-rises along the north Lakefront is home to significant numbers of seniors and disabled persons, putting them within walking distance of neighborhood retail and transit. The importance to the North and Northwest Side of transportation infrastructure and the access to employment, services and recreation it affords cannot be underestimated.

The North Side Chicago

Connecting Communities Summit

The North Side of Chicago is extremely diverse. Latinos and African-Americans are migrating to formerly German and Scandinavian communities, as are Asians, Africans and Eastern Europeans. Participants in our summit represented all the major population groups. Seniors and disabled persons were there to make their voices heard. Thirteen students from North Side College Prep High School added a welcome youth component. Several summit participants commented favorably on the dialogue between age groups present.

Bicyclists, transit riders, environmentalists, motorists, and one public official rounded out those in attendance. We came from across the North Side, with communities along the northern lakefront predominating.



How We Get Around

There is a wealth of transit service available to us. We take advantage of transit service; it is our number one method of getting around our communities. Many of us make 30 to 50 transit trips per month. Biking ranks second as our mode of choice. Our third most preferred mode is by car, driving alone. On average, we make six walking trips a week to perform errands, with additional walking trips at the beginning and end of our transit trips.

The ratio of women to men at the summit was virtually equal. Twelve households had children under 14 years of age. Of those, half walked to school with the remainder either traveling by transit or being driven. On average, households averaged 2.6 members and had 1 ½ cars.

The top destinations we want to reach locally are employment, school, shopping and recreation. Downtown Chicago and the Northwest and Western Suburbs are primary destinations for employment. The thirteen North Side College Prep students present made sure their concerns about transportation were heard. The inadequacy of CTA service to their campus, to after-school employment and to shopping and recreation were well-documented. Major shopping trips warrant visits to the Elston and Clybourn retail corridors and to shopping malls in Skokie, Lincoln Village and along Clark Street. For recreation, the parks along Lake Michigan and Forest Preserves to the Northwest are popular destinations.

Our Vision

Our vision for the North and Northwest Side of Chicago reflected most of the goals outlined in the first Citizen Transportation Plan, with special emphasis on walkable neighborhoods. Survey results revealed that we want to be involved in local and regional planning, we believe properly planned transit can be an economic asset and that priority should be placed on reusing assets and preserving the infrastructure the region has invested in. We believe that the effect of transportation projects on air and water quality are important considerations and that a mix of housing, jobs and services in communities creates economic efficiency and supports transit use. The benefits and burdens of those transportation projects the region builds should be fairly distributed.

Challenges and Solutions

Congestion and safety concern us. Traffic congestion has become unbearable as North Side neighborhoods continue their population boom. On weekday mornings and evenings and warm weather weekends, many of our streets become impassable. Traffic congestion, a shortage of parking and noise detract from the benefits of living in our part of the region. It seems *everyone else in metropolitan Chicago is regularly attempting to visit or pass through our communities in their cars.* Cyclists and pedestrians who attempt to co-exist with cars risk injury and have to contend with noxious fumes. Buses crawl along in the same traffic. Those of us fortunate enough to have rail as an option tolerate crowded conditions and erratic service as the CTA struggles to handle crushing crowds.

Our elderly and disabled neighbors are literally trapped in their homes during many parts of the day, unsure if they'll be able to navigate crowded streets. Some bicyclists, who fear street traffic, use sidewalks, further complicating pedestrian trips. These dangers are especially evident at the intersection of Lake Shore Drive, Hollywood and Sheridan Road in Edgewater. Hundreds of thousands of vehicles pass through this intersection

daily in an attempt to access Lake Shore Drive. Attempting to cross this intersection on foot represents a challenge to the population of seniors and the disabled who live in the vicinity. The noise and air pollution detract from the quality of life of our community.

The Elston, Clybourn and Clark retail corridors are also strangling in traffic congestion. The corridors have developed along a more suburban, auto-centered model with the result being intolerable traffic congestion. The nearby Kennedy Expressway and inadequate public transportation to the corridor promote car use and congestion around these retail sites.

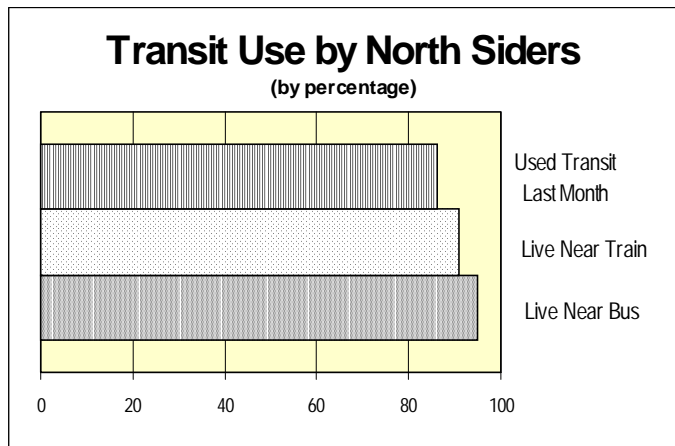
We feel that drastic measures need to be taken to address the negative affects that so much traffic congestion is having on our communities. Some public officials have been supportive of our efforts by facilitating the installation of various traffic calming or speed reduction measures. In some instances, these measures are simply band-aids, or divert traffic to other communities. Among suggestions we proposed to deal with congestion were improvements in rail transit to make it a more attractive alternative for those who continue to drive. Park & ride lots should be placed at key rapid transit stations in the city and in suburbs north and northwest of Chicago to siphon away traffic traveling through our communities. Additional accessible Metra stations should be built, especially adjacent to existing CTA rail lines to improve interconnectivity between those modes. New Metra stations should be constructed at Peterson and Ravenswood Avenues and at Howard Street. Additional accessible CTA stations, complete with secure bike and car parking, should be built along the Yellow Line at Dodge St. and Crawford Ave. Barring the wholesale removal of Lake Shore Dr., suggested by several of us, safe pedestrian passages need to be constructed at the Hollywood/Sheridan intersection and others along the roads leading to the Drive.

To provide alternative transportation to the Elston, Clybourn and Clark corridors, we suggest buses operating frequently in a shopping loop from area CTA and Metra stations. Bus traffic flow should be improved with traffic signal prioritization. Alternate parking scenarios should be investigated to clear major streets of parked cars.

Despite the presence of public transit, there is room for improvement. Our overwhelming support of public transportation makes us well-suited to point out the areas where we feel improvements need to be made. We advise creation of faster transit service between the eastern and western sectors of the North Side. Many of us travel to the Northwest and Western suburbs and

existing travel options in the region are geared toward people traveling to and from downtown Chicago. There has been an expansion of employment at centers away from the Loop. We suggest that planners recognize this and provide more non-auto alternatives to accommodate these new travel patterns. Alternatively, the significant flow of people from the west to the cultural and recreational activities on the lake could be addressed by similar creative solutions.

In order to deal with inadequate transit east and west across the North Side, the speed and frequency of buses along east-west arterial streets needs to be increased. Express bus routes, similar to one in existence on Western Ave., should be established. New routes need to be considered along sections of arterial streets lacking them. Express bus service should be initiated from the end of the Brown Line to the Blue Line at Jefferson Park and continuing to O'Hare. Additional or improved bus service along north-south streets would connect people with the Blue Line, for easier access to the Loop and O'Hare commercial areas. All new bus routes should be disabled-accessible.



Ultimately, we feel an entirely new rapid transit line should be constructed connecting the Red Line with the Blue Line with possible continuing service to O'Hare. We feel rail transit has the best chance of providing commuters with an attractive alternative to their cars for east-west trips.

Infrastructure changes needed to accommodate the disabled and seniors. Our population of seniors and disabled persons is strongly independent. They represent one of the fastest growing segments of our community. It should be our responsibility to ensure their continued independence by updating existing infrastructure to accommodate their needs. Few rail transit stations on the North Side are accessible. The key stations of Howard, Wilson, Lawrence and Bryn Mawr

need to be rebuilt quickly using universal design guidelines. Many bus routes are not accessible. The timetable for adding accessible buses needs to be accelerated. Bus and station signage needs to be improved.

Biking and walking form a foundation to be built upon. Many of us already bike for a significant share of our local trips. The key to increasing the number of those trips and encouraging others to do so is the continued adoption of policies to make cyclists safer on streets. The network of on- and off-street paths should be dramatically increased. All major east-west streets should be striped for bicyclists, helping to provide alternatives in these corridors. Major radial or angle streets should be so designated. The North Branch Trail, so popular among cyclists region-wide should be extended through the Caldwell Woods Preserve along the Chicago River to a connection with the Brown Line and continuing as an on-street route to the Lakefront. To encourage safer cycling, the Lakefront Path should be extended, in a manner that enhances pedestrian safety, from its present end at Ardmore to the North Shore Suburbs. To encourage bike and transit use, secure bike storage and related service facilities should be available at key transit stations.

The oldest form of transportation is sometimes overlooked. Walking offers a solution to some of the transportation problems that afflict our region. The safety concerns we raise need to be addressed, especially where pedestrians share space with cars and cyclists, if we are to realize the full potential of walking to divert trips from other modes. We cannot stress enough our concern with how our communities have been overrun by cars driven by people who are only passing through, unfairly burdening us with noise, air pollution and discomfort.

Our Charge

Our primary values were best described by one of us who used the term "placemaking." We want communities that are easy to leave when necessary, but places that are so pleasant we want to stay for as many of our daily pursuits as possible. We want to reduce overall car use to enhance our communities.

In expressing our vision for how the North and North-west Sides of Chicago can become more attractive places to live and raise our families, we rely on the essential values we share. We care about our neighbors and are concerned about their physical health and that of the environment we share. We value the diversity of our communities and demand equality of access to its assets. We want a pleasant, affordable, well-coordinated and safe transportation system that is easy to use.

Preamble: *As an incentive to reduce private car use, we recommend the following steps be taken.*

Develop East-West Transportation Alternatives

New express bus service should be established along all east-west arterial streets. New accessible bus, trolley or jitney service should be established along arterials and portions of arterials now lacking service. Install traffic signal prioritization for buses. Develop a comprehensive neighborhood parking plan to clear arterials of traffic. Construct an east-west rapid transit line connecting the Red Line with the Brown Line at Kimball and the Blue Line at Jefferson Park. Operate through service along this route from North lakefront communities direct to O'Hare Airport.

Provide Meaningful Alternatives to Alleviate Congestion at Lake Shore Drive and Hollywood and along Elston and Clybourn Corridors

Construct additional accessible Metra Stations with bike and car parking along the Union Pacific North Line at Howard Street and at Peterson Avenue. Increase the speed of service along the CTA Red Line including expanding Purple Line Express service and adding accessible stations with parking to the Yellow Line. In the interim, construct grade-separated walkways to increase pedestrian safety. Consider diversion of motorized traffic from Sheridan to other routes. Add service to Elston and Clybourn Streets, connecting on either end with Brown, Red, Blue Line and Metra trains at Clybourn (Armitage) and a new accessible UP North Line station along the Brown Line. Consider trolleys and jitney service for residents and visitors.

Increase Inter-connectivity of Existing Transit Network

Construct additional accessible Metra stations at Howard Street, near Belmont and the Kennedy Expressway, and in Ravenswood near an existing Brown Line station to facilitate connections between CTA rail and Metra service. Improve directional signs, information and fare coordination to ease transfers between these modes.

Upgrade Existing Transit Infrastructure Using Universal Design Guidelines

Rebuild all CTA Red Line Stations, equipping them with elevators, escalators and other appropriate features in accordance with universal design standards to accommodate seniors and disabled persons. Ensure appropriate curb cuts on sidewalks leading to stations. Station upgrades should be accelerated at Howard, Bryn Mawr, Lawrence and Wilson, as there is a significant population of seniors and disabled in adjacent communities. Speed the introduction of accessible buses to the CTA fleet.

Expand Lakefront Path to Evanston, Add Bike Lanes to Existing Streets

Create a safe, well-marked, multi-use connection from the end of the Lakefront Path at Ardmore to Evanston and North Shore communities. Add bike lanes to all streets at ½ mile intervals and radial or angle streets to encourage more bicycling. Step up enforcement of traffic laws and enlist the support of community organizations and volunteers to improve the safety of pedestrians, cyclists and motorists. Provide bike parking and related services at transit stations at major employment centers.

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

48th Ward
Break the Gridlock
Chicago Rehab Network

Lawrence Avenue Development Corp.
North Side College Prep High School

***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.