

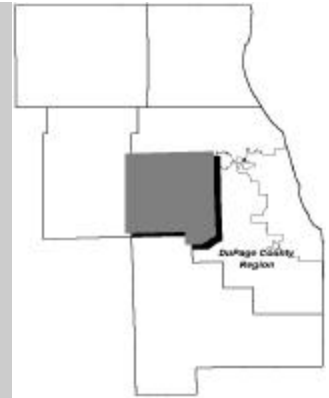


# Connecting Communities

## DuPage Region Caucus

### July 8th, 2003

A Chicagoland Transportation and Air Quality Commission project in partnership with: Citizen Advocacy Center • DuPage Babysitting Co-op • Mothers and More • Illinois Prairie Path



A strong desire for choice and change was identified during the DuPage County *Connecting Communities* summit in February 2002. Over a year and a half later some summit participants reconvened for a *Connecting Communities* caucus to discuss progress made over the past year and a half. While many of the summit recommendations were capital projects that may not be instituted for another twenty to thirty years, there were suggestions that could be addressed in a shorter time frame:

- decision-makers need to take a meaningful look at incorporating bus service into communities to connect people's homes to downtowns and train-stations;
- pedestrian infrastructure needs to be accessible and not an afterthought to roadway projects;
- more attention and money needs to be directed toward preserving open space.

#### Maximize Use of Transit

While there have been several improvements in transit, participants felt that there were still many opportunities for improvement. Participants noted that train stations and grade separations have recently been planned and discussed. Bus shelters are still absent in various communities and access to Pace buses has decreased in places like Wheaton. Metra's refusal to allow bikes on their trains impedes residents from using bikes to connect to stations. One participant noted that local governments appear to place more emphasis on cars than transit - and more emphasis on transit is needed! Twenty-four hour access to train stations would maximize use by allowing transit riders to wait in stations during inclement weather. Additionally routes should be advertised and promoted by businesses located near bus and train lines.

#### Make Our Communities Safe for all Travelers

Pedestrians, pedestrians, pedestrians. While there have been new sidewalks, trails, and bikeways built in places throughout the county, there are still some impediments to pedestrian travel. This group was adamant that more grade separations at railroad

*Connecting Communities* caucuses are a public involvement follow-up to the *Connecting Communities* summits that involved over 500 people from throughout northeastern Illinois. The caucuses are designed to take a "snapshot" of a community's perceptions of the implementation of recommendations formulated during the summits. Some recommendations were major projects that could only be accomplished over a long time period. Others were practical, short term, and inexpensive solutions to community mobility deficits.

#### Excerpt from DuPage Region *Connecting Communities*, February 2002:

"Although DuPage County is the most built-up county outside of Cook County, its population still grew nearly 16% from 1990-2000. More than 900,000 people, about a third of all collar-county residents, live in DuPage County. A once homogenous population is now accented with diverse neighbors. Transportation options must diversify to meet new needs. The county was 15% minority in 2000, with communities like Addison, Oak Brook and Wood Dale having minority populations of 20-50%.

DuPage County was originally home to various Native American communities. Trappers and traders made up the first wave of Europeans in the early 1800s. Early American settlers came to the area in the first part of the 1830s and lived near present-day Naperville, DuPage County's oldest city. The farmland areas that dominated DuPage County at the turn of the last century have largely disappeared. The DuPage River bisects the county with two branches meandering through communities such as Warrenville, Downers Grove, Naperville, Wheaton, Lisle, and Glen Ellyn. An extensive bicycle and pedestrian trail system that stretches through the county is another asset drawing visitors and residents to explore the beauty of the area and reminding us even now of the natural features that drew early settlers."

crossings are needed. Intergovernmental cooperation between the different cities in DuPage County on sidewalk issues is crucial for this part of the region. Cooperation would allow better connections between sidewalks and increase pedestrian access between each city. Poor snow removal policy was one complaint. Also, sidewalks are only built on new road widening projects

and not built along existing and older roads. Building sidewalks with pedestrians in mind is crucial to this group. "Carriage sidewalks" – the sidewalks that run next to streets without parkways – should not be built in these communities because they are too close to the road and discourage sidewalk use. Walking and biking should be promoted as forms of transportation that are healthy activities and good for the community. One vocal participant strongly expressed that they wanted CATS<sup>1</sup> to be abolished and NIPC to be given more control in planning communities.

### **Preserve and Protect our Environment**

There were several improvements in DuPage County that demonstrate local and regional support to protect the environment. Participants cited examples of transit-oriented development and a DuPage County Forest Preserve District open space initiative that were sensitive to the environment. Other steps in the right direction include the development of mixed-use buildings near rail lines and the purchase of fuel-efficient trucks for the forest preserve. Building from these successes, this group felt that Metra and many of the city governments in the county promoted parking at Metra Stations while discouraging bus travel to stations. People recognize this dilemma of parking lots surrounding train stations – while it encourages people to use trains by providing a way to get from home to the train station, it encourages car usage, typically at the expense of bus transit. One individual cited the proposed widening of Route 53 as evidence that there are still allowances for cars and unsolved concerns about protection of the environment. This group wants a change in policy to encourage alternatives to cars. Once this policy is in place local governments should promote it vigorously.

### **Use our Taxes to Give us Choices**

Caucus participants felt that there really needs to be a shift in the thinking and activities of policy and decision makers. A carbon tax on fuel would be one way for people to change their orientation towards cars. Many in this group felt that car owners should be taxed for the amount they cost society so that the hidden costs of automobiles could be more easily compared with the costs of transit. The public should hold elected and appointed officials accountable, ensuring that public commentary is actually addressed. Transit planning needs to be brought to the voters of DuPage County. There need to be more opportunities for the citizens of these communities to actively take part in transportation decisions.

DuPage County has grown rapidly. People who attended this caucus were interested and aware of the changes taking place in their community. They want to be involved and they want the public officials to listen to their concerns and suggestions. Priority needs to be placed on pedestrians, connections between homes and downtowns and train stations through improved bus service, and preservation of open space.



*Participants read over the summit report recommendations in smaller groups...*



*...and evaluated which issues had or had not improved.*



*Caucus participants posted their group results and discussed the issues for the entire region.*

The Chicagoland Transportation and Air Quality Commission is a coalition of non-profit organizations from this region that bring federal transportation mandates to local actors. CTAQC keeps its constituents and members informed about transportation, land use, environmental justice, and other related issues.

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