



Connecting Communities

North-Northwest Cook Caucus

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A Chicagoland Transportation and Air Quality Commission project in partnership with:
Palatine/Willow Road Community Mobilization Team



The northern and northwest suburbs of Cook County are a complex mix of old and new communities. Their development and vitality in part relate to their proximity to transportation infrastructure. Whether they can attribute their growth to rail lines or tollway interchanges, these suburbs are rich with transit and associated infrastructure that makes for healthy communities.

The group took note of minor progress and major barriers to their highest priority recommendation: more rail transit service. Improvements in the bus system were more readily apparent; creative ideas for building on those gains were offered by the group. Several of the suggestions by the 2001 summit were reasonably inexpensive or require a shift of attitude rather than funding. Subsequently, significant disappointment was voiced at the minimal headway made on safety improvements for cyclists and pedestrians, transportation planner accountability, and integration of transit services.

Extend rapid transit/rail service

Long-term projects such as the Yellow Line (CTA) extension to Old Orchard and the Star Line (Metra) were welcome but concern was expressed that funding problems or right-of-way issues could stall these projects, perhaps indefinitely. With the aging of the region's population, caucus attendees hoped that demand for transit would become stronger. In the meantime, they proposed that Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) systems might be built more easily and quickly and accomplish the same purpose as some rail projects. Recent incremental upgrades such as extended hours on the Purple Line (CTA), North Central (Metra) service enhancements, and the new Glenview (Metra station) were heartily endorsed.

Expand bus and shuttle service to provide an alternative to car travel

Bus improvements in the last two-and-a-half years were more immediately apparent to the group. Examples included expanded service on Milwaukee Avenue. Planning efforts like Pace's Vision 2020 and Pace's North Shore Bus Study were seen as good representations of the region's needs. New improvements that were highly

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 views on progress toward their summit recommendations. 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 North-Northwest Cook County Summit Report, June 2001:

"North-Northwest Cook County, which stretches from the shores of Lake Michigan to just short of the Fox River, encompasses historic 19th Century railroad suburbs, postwar towns of ranch homes, and newer townhome and subdivision developments on former cornfields. 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."

desired by this group were mainly focused on east-west access, particularly to O'Hare Airport.

Funding impediments were seen as a significant barrier to the effort to "get folks out of their cars." Traffic signal priority and increased service were suggested as prudent ways to increase the appeal of existing bus lines. To further encourage bus use, participants suggested introductory free service on new routes, mini-buses for low-volume routes, and integration of the taxi system with the bus system.

Improve the ease and safety of biking and walking for short trips

In 2001 one of the big recommendations of summit attendees was improving the ease with which people could walk or bike. Upon evaluating progress to date, caucus participants saw some improvements in ease of use. Installation of bike racks on Pace buses was repeatedly mentioned as a plus. New sidewalks on

Lake Street in Glenview, better access to transit stations for pedestrians and cyclists, and better forest preserve connectivity also received favorable mention. Metra's policy of continued resistance to accommodating bicyclists cries out for revision. There was the hope among participants that the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) is currently paying higher regard to stakeholders in the Palatine Willow Road than it was in 2001; the final IDOT plan for the corridor is yet to be unveiled.

Safety concerns for pedestrians and cyclists that were raised two-and-a-half years ago have not been addressed systematically. Participants cited a general lack of safe, well-lit crossings and the failure of municipalities to plan for cyclists as intended users of roads. Another unresolved safety measure is to ensure that sidewalks are shoveled after a snowfall.

Overall, there was a strong sense that poor implementation of pedestrian and bicycle safety had less to do with funding than attitudes. Attendees called for support of bicycling as a legitimate travel mode and vigorous enforcement of traffic safety, especially toward drivers who endanger pedestrians. Potential allies in this "Safe Routes" campaign might be elementary school districts.

Transportation planners must be accountable and Integrate transit fares and services

Progress on these recommendations was much more negative than for the transit, bicycle and pedestrian recommendations reported above. The group viewed public involvement as positive but was skeptical that real change in transportation decision-making could occur. Participants noted that even though more public input was solicited in the past few years, the actual impact of that public input on transportation plans had been barely noticeable. "Infighting" and a "turf mentality" were cited as contributors to a flawed system. The suggestion was made for new leadership of the official transportation agencies: "people who want the common good, not preservation of power."

The immediate regional challenge as seen by participants of this caucus is to coordinate all transit services including Metra, develop revenue-sharing agreements, decrease competition between the providers, and communicate innovations and incentives offered under a universal fare system. There was hope that the region was beginning to step in that direction, with the General Assembly mandate for a study of transportation planning in the region. The failure over several years to make reasonable strides in integrating transit fares and service epitomized the negative impacts of infighting rather than cooperation. Sporadic cooperation, like that

between CTA and Pace, was seen as a positive. The introduction of a "Smart Card" that works for both agencies was favorably received; participants expressed the hope that paratransit access would be integrated into the new Smart Card. Uses of the Smart Card as an ID or for tollway payments were also projected as possible future considerations for planners.

Inspired by some of the small changes in pedestrian and bicycle amenities in the northern suburbs and steps towards regional cooperation, this group was optimistic that big changes were on the way. While large capital projects like rail transit projects appear to be complicated, there was hope that bus rapid transit could fill the void. Participants were interested in seeing better safety enforcement for bikes and pedestrians and a new opportunity to bring bikes on Metra, not just Pace and the CTA. Finally this group anticipated that a universal farecard is on the horizon and that improvements to regional planning are necessary and possible.



*Participants consider changes in North/Northwest Cook County...
...then post their ideas for all to see.*



The scenic Lake Michigan shoreline provides local residents with myriad opportunities for fun and relaxation.