



Connecting Communities

North Side of Chicago Caucus

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A Chicagoland Transportation and Air Quality Commission project in partnership with:
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The North Side of Chicago *Connecting Communities* Caucus was itself an example of why the "choice" theme was so prominent in the summits of 2001 and 2002. The scheduled date arrived with a snowstorm - usually a meeting organizer's worst nightmare. In a reversal of conventional wisdom, the turnout was larger than the advance registration. Most participants came on transit, and a few walked. People in this compact, transit-rich section of the city find themselves fortunate to have a variety of travel options despite adverse weather.

Attendees expressed remarkably strong agreement on major themes. The group strongly supported recent innovations like bike racks on buses and universally criticized the poor connectivity between transit systems. In assessing transit access for persons with disabilities, these Northsiders noted improvement in bus access but stagnation in rail station access.

Develop East-West Transit Alternatives

Caucus participants felt some minimal strides had been made to improve east-west transit. New technologies, like traffic signal priority and GPS (global positioning systems) capacity on buses, seem to offer a solution to congestion-induced bus scheduling problems. Plans to use GPS to offer precise bus arrival information was seen as a near-term benefit. There was a sense that the city had unexercised opportunities to make economical street-side improvements to support east-west transit growth, like an improved pedestrian environment, increased density, stronger parking enforcement policies, and more bus shelters.

The express bus on Irving Park Road met with wide approval; participants wished there was more than one east-west express option. The group recommended a continuum of transit investment over time. They felt that a highly successful express bus route might evolve into a dedicated bus lane or a bus rapid transit system; if ridership continued to grow, that corridor should be considered for rail.

Provide Alternatives to Alleviate Congestion

Two problematic corridors were identified at the summit in 2001: Lake Shore Drive/Hollywood and Clybourn. By the date of the caucus, a positive impact could be seen in the Lake Shore Drive corridor with the addition of

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 the North Side of Chicago *Connecting Communities* Summit Report, May 2001:

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.

new CTA bus service. The Clybourn corridor was still seen as problematic; many people mentioned the need for bus service along both Elston and Clybourn.

Caucus attendees offered other ideas to reduce congestion -- safer and more numerous bicycle alternatives, non-rush hour Purple Line Express service, more in-city Metra stops and business-sponsored shuttle service.

Increase Inter-connectivity of Existing Transit Network

Participants at this caucus were dismayed by the lack of movement on this recommendation; they were unable to identify any sign of progress and moved directly to a detailed critique of the responsible parties. They found fault with Metra for its lack of cooperation on a universal fare card, failure to improve physical connectivity with CTA, and lack of accessibility for persons with disabilities. Many people pointed out that Metra conductors frequently fail to collect fares; this seemed to provide

evidence that the existing system is working poorly, even for Metra. Participants saw the new CTA Chicago Plus Card as the technological innovation that would “force Metra to support smart cards.” There was also agreement that all the service boards could do more through signage and announcements to help riders understand the existing opportunities for transfer from one system to another.

Upgrade Existing Transit Infrastructure Using Universal Design Guidelines

In general, progress on making the CTA bus system accessible was widely and favorably noted. The new buses, with floor level matching curb level, were a welcome addition to the fleet. Rail station rehabilitation was a source of continuing concern however; both CTA and Metra stations were cited as persistent obstacles to transit access. The CTA Red Line and the Metra Ravenswood station were seen as facilities most in need of station rehabilitation.

Caucus attendees had important insight into how lack of attention to detail can impede access and mobility. They understood the expense involved in providing station elevators; what they didn’t understand was why poor maintenance is permitted to create additional barriers. For instance, roof leaks above stairways create hazards for all riders, but have a disproportionate impact on riders who must move with caution. In emphasizing the “universality” of Universal Design, caucus participants linked transit access for persons with disabilities back to general policies on pedestrian access, transit-oriented development, and parking enforcement.

Expand Lakefront Path and Bike Lanes

The group noted a good foundation to build from the increasing bike paths and services in Chicago. Since their 2001 summit, the CTA had significantly improved policies about transporting bikes on trains and buses. The city has provided new lanes, better signage in some locations and more bike racks, but has not met the demand for bicycling facilities.

Access to Evanston from the end of the Lakefront Path is still problematic. Another ongoing problem is the “disappearing bike lane” at intersections. Six-corner intersections are especially hazardous to navigate--bike lane striping disappears just as turning auto traffic puts cyclists at most risk.

The group identified additional incentives to biking like covered parking at CTA stations and other destinations, filters on bus exhaust pipes, exclusive bus-bike lanes,

and enforcement of existing laws. On the latter point the group wanted bicyclists who endangered pedestrians ticketed as well as autos that endanger bicyclists or park in bike lanes. If Chicago wants to really make its mark as a city that bikes there should be “rest stops” with bike parking, cafes and showers.

While this group was pleased that there had been some movement on their recommendations, they hoped that the decision-makers of the region would continue to make change occur. They emphasized making the small and inexpensive repairs and maintenance work that would improve the overall condition of the transit system. They hoped that transportation planning and implementation will become more consistent and move more quickly and efficiently.



Participants learn about important issues for the Chicago region.



The North Side of Chicago is a diverse and walkable community.