

State of the Region



Moving Forward with Better Transportation Choices



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FROM THE STAFF OF THE Chicagoland Transportation and Air Quality Commission

We would like to preface this report with a statement of appreciation to the people who participated in the eleven *Connecting Communities* caucuses in 2003 and early 2004. Your participation and wisdom is very much valued by our staff. We remain dedicated to seeing that your ideas are thoughtfully and powerfully communicated to the official planners of the region.

We release this report as the state budget is released, but the message is pertinent to many levels of government. The public is not satisfied that their concerns have been heard or their needs met. Times are tough. They are tough on private budgets and they are tough on public budgets. We can not afford to ignore the opportunity to make inexpensive efficiency improvements to our system. We can not afford to continue building new capital projects but allow existing investments to deteriorate.

Official planners and other observers of the process should understand the context for the recommendations contained in this report. Caucus participants are primarily people who use autos as their most frequent means of transportation; over 70 percent of caucus participants use an auto more often than any other mode. Yet their greatest concern is for flexible choices.

Given that most of the results for this process are from focus groups rather than broader based survey data, the Center for Neighborhood Technology acknowledges the limitations of the information. Nevertheless, we believe the information is critical for the following reasons:

- This is the only process in the region that maintains a regular, cyclical feedback loop for stakeholders with attention to previous recommendations.
- Although the process was very open-ended there was remarkable unanimity across the region on major themes.
- Caucuses were similar to focus groups. Private corporations stake millions of dollars on what they hear in focus groups; public decision-making can hardly be hindered by comparable information.

Again, wholehearted thanks from all of us to all of you who made this report possible, with a special thanks to our local partners:

Andersonville Development Corporation, Break the Gridlock, Citizen Advocacy Center, Crerar Memorial Presbyterian Church, Dundee Township, DuPage Babysitting Co-op, Edgewater Development corporation, Human Action Community Organization, Lake County Conservation Alliance, League of Women Voters: Lake County, League of Women Voters: Oak Park/River Forest, Livable Communities Alliance and Lincolnway SCAT, McHenry County Defenders, Oak Park Greens, Palatine/Willow Road Community Mobilization Team, Pilsen Alliance, Shut this Airport Nightmare Down, South Suburban COPE, and Village of Park Forest.

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Public Budgets Fail to Respond to Public Priorities

The transportation system underlies or has an impact on virtually all essential features of daily life: economic development, health and safety, environmental preservation, and community cohesion. Even seemingly unrelated areas like medical care and education are affected by the transportation system, especially in terms of access to critical resources.

Consider the recent debate on the role of the transportation system on the rising obesity rates in the United States. The national movement for “Safe Routes to School” arises from a public awareness that higher traffic volumes and speeds discourage daily exercise by children. The proportion of overweight children between the ages of six and eleven has tripled since the 1970s.¹ Lack of exercise has educational as well as health consequences; children who are sedentary for long periods become overweight and “overweight children achieve lower scores on standardized achievement tests.”²

McHenry County Caucus
There has been more discussion of the cost of inactivity.

We are conscious of the role of transportation when we talk about community economic development in terms of a new train station or highway interchange. Some of the other effects of transportation are less easily seen and touched. Consider the increased asthma risk to some children and adults on ozone action days. Or consider the wheelchair user who is virtually housebound for lack of ramped sidewalks or accessible transit. What of the young adult in McHenry County who can not attend community college for lack of a car?

Although transportation is interwoven with other aspects of our daily lives, we are not woven into the apparatus that decides how the system will respond to our needs. If the system does not meet our needs at all, we have no meaningful opportunity to make that known.

The existing transportation planning structure in the six counties of northeastern Illinois is poorly equipped to determine the region’s overall needs.³ As a result, state, county, and local budgets fail to respond to the questions the public is asking.

Kane County Caucus
Powerful interests are pushing the outer beltway behind closed doors.

The body that develops long-range transportation plans for the region, the Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS), has no decision-makers with expertise in health, safety, economic development, community development, environmental, or historic preservation. When engineers dominate planning it seems that the solution to every problem is a major construction project that will facilitate higher travel volume and speed.

The engineers and planners at CATS are out of step with the people of the region – the people who pay for the engineer/planner decisions. CATS is required by federal

law⁴ to consider public priorities in relation to long-range transportation plans (see description of federal laws below). CATS has tried to create the appearance of conformity with federal public involvement mandates by holding public “open houses” but only after the plan is essentially final. This format prohibits the development of consensus; without consensus CATS is free to adopt its plan without any modifications.

CATS has neglected and negated public comment, but other groups have provided the region with detailed documentation of public preference. Three different constituencies were engaged in robust public outreach efforts in the early 2000s. The Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT), through its *Connecting Communities* summits, engaged grassroots coalitions, regional civic organizations, faith-based and user groups in a fiscally constrained visioning process. Chicago Metropolitan 2020 formulated a business-led vision for the region and the Common Ground visioning process directed by the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission targeted municipal leaders as its primary constituency. In spite of diverse interests, these thousands of residents and leaders voiced remarkably similar themes – more transit and more walkable communities were probably the two most consistent themes.

North-Northwest Cook County Caucus

Could the aging population (55 plus) be a stronger voice for public transportation?

Under the best of circumstances, the collection and analysis of public priorities is an evolving discipline. This region lags far behind most other large metropolitan regions in applying public involvement best practices. In the area of transportation planning, public involvement is more than good policy – it is the law. The Federal Highway Administration describes the “three Cs” of public involvement – cooperative, continuing, and comprehensive. Public involvement is not synonymous with public information. It is not a press conference but a continuous dialogue. High quality public involvement synthesizes what was heard and then asks the public to validate whether the interpretation of priorities is accurate.

CNT Works to Bring Federal Reforms to the Region

CNT helped to form a national coalition, the Surface Transportation Policy Project, which was instrumental in securing reforms in national transportation law over a decade ago. The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and its successor the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), transformed “the highway bill” into a transportation bill that encouraged *efficient* and *equitable* use of transportation funds and did not mandate one mode over another.

“This national work came from CNT’s mission. CNT’s mission is promote livable, sustainable communities where the undervalued resources and inherent advantages of the urban environment, both built and natural, are captured to benefit everyone— individuals, communities, and regions. Using rigorous and innovative research,

education and economic development programs, CNT has focused particularly on the interrelated issues of transportation, energy, and the environment as these affect and are affected by economic markets and public policy.”

CNT has worked since 1991 to bring federal reforms to the northeastern Illinois region. Immediately after ISTEA was passed, CNT and seven co-sponsors began the Chicagoland Transportation and Air Quality Commission (CTAQC), a coalition that now includes nearly 200 organizational members representing thousands of the region’s residents. In 1995, CTAQC published its first *Citizen Transportation Plan*, a guide for prudent, equitable transportation, and land use investment. The plan was developed with the help of scores of activists who focused on their areas of expertise: open space, economic development, senior citizens, the disabled, pedestrians, bicyclists, transit, and more. The plan guided CTAQC’s advocacy for six years as CTAQC sought to have the public’s voice incorporated into the official CATS planning process. By the beginning of the new millennium, CTAQC needed to refresh its understanding of trends in public sentiment. A complete description of the *Connecting Communities* summits and the public involvement process on which these caucuses are based is included at the end of this report.

The Official Planning Process is Ongoing

As CTAQC advanced the public’s priorities through the *Connecting Communities* process, the official transportation planning process was ongoing. CATS adopted the 2030 Regional Transportation Plan (2030 RTP) on October 9, 2003. The plan outlines the investment of over \$60 billion. The 2030 RTP adopts some of the terminology that was pervasive across the region and across the different stakeholder groups (the grassroots, business, and municipal interests described above). However, it carefully preserves the status quo in terms of committing no additional funds to transit or to projects fostering walkable communities. It also does a disservice to older parts of the region – the parts where a majority of the taxpayers live. The proportion of funds dedicated to maintenance of the existing system was reduced and over 50 percent of new project dollars are directed to sparsely populated areas on the fringe of the region.⁵ A “Critique of the Process and Product of the Official Transportation Planning Agency” is attached to this report.



West Cook County Caucus

Connecting Communities – The Only Continuous Feedback Loop

Connecting Communities caucuses were held between June of 2003 and January of 2004, overlapping finalization of the 2030 RTP. Caucuses can be most

simply described as scaled-down versions of the summits (see the description of the summits at the end of this report). Rather than seeking 35 to 50 people as in each summit, CTAQC sought a “focus group” of 12 to 15 participants for the caucuses, with at least half having attended the original summit. The three exercises of the summits were scaled back to two: a survey and a facilitated exercise that asked three questions (participants responded to the questions in teams of two or three). The questions – What has improved? What remains unsolved? What are some new ideas? – were methodically discussed and documented for each recommendation from that area’s summit. Local partners had the responsibility to read, edit, and then sign off on the draft caucus report.

CNT acknowledges the limitations of the information obtained through the focus groups. Nevertheless, we believe the information is critical for the following reasons:

- This is the only process in the region that maintains a regular, cyclical feedback loop for stakeholders with attention to previous recommendations.
- Although the process was very open-ended there was remarkable unanimity across the region on major themes.
- Caucuses were similar to focus groups. Private corporations stake millions of dollars on what they hear in focus groups; public decision-making can hardly be hindered by comparable information.

The group responses to the three questions provide the “meat” of this report. Simple survey data was also collected from each caucus, to verify the information gathered. The overall recommendations of this report were submitted to the local partners for review before publication, as the caucus reports had been.

The caucuses provide richly nuanced information about the impact of regional transportation policy on real people and real communities. The public, in its collective wisdom, seeks prudent, fair, and economical changes in the way transportation investment is managed. People seek ways to integrate transportation decisions into other facets of community life. They hope for consistent, incremental improvement over time on the ground they travel. Large, expensive single-mode projects, especially transit projects are desirable but are not the sum total of how the public expects planning energy and funds to be spent.

Two to three years after summit recommendations were first developed, the public has very modest and sensible expectations about what level of progress should be expected. Caucus members were very aware of the basic adjustments that would make today’s system work better, at little cost. They noticed and applauded small changes. They wondered, questioned, or even condemned the total failure to move forward in areas where large gain is possible at small cost. The regional and local themes of the caucuses are discussed on the following pages. The individual caucus reports and the compiled caucus recommendations are attached to this report.

The Public Focuses on Quality of Life

The overarching tenor of the caucuses was realism, while the overarching theme was frustration with the lack of incremental progress on inexpensive system enhancements. Malcolm Gladwell, author of *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*⁶ asserts that major social revolutions spread in the same way that epidemics do. When the right conditions are present, overlooked phenomena generate a “contagious” reaction that spreads like an “epidemic.”

Despite the reference to pathology, Gladwell applies his thesis to positive change more often than negative. He makes the case that expensive marketing campaigns may be ineffective while unfunded and poorly predicted trends in public perception may transform society. In Illinois there are glimmers of recognition that a dynamic shift is taking place in the public’s investment preferences. The policy advisor to the Secretary of the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) points out that roadway connectivity, a national objective of the 1950s, is virtually complete; what the public focuses on now is the quality of life aspects of transportation and “congestion mitigation is only one aspect of quality of life.”⁷

Official resistance to the fine-tuning of our existing transportation system is baffling, given the high level of public support for inexpensive enhancements and careful stewardship of existing investments. Are the weak public involvement processes of the official transportation planning agencies unable to discern the intense support for basic upgrades like transit connectivity and safety improvements for pedestrians and cyclists? Or is the existing planning apparatus too cumbersome and uncoordinated to make the shifts the public desires? Or does the allure of expensive capital projects overshadow all other planning practices and principles? Whatever the cause, the public is increasingly restive.

The Highest Priorities

It is fair to say that in both the *Connecting Communities* summits of 2001-02 and the caucuses of 2003-04 that transit improvements and walkable communities were the highest priorities. A summary discussion of regional priorities follows.

Transit

When transportation implementers or municipalities made small improvements over the last two years, people in this region noticed. Three positive developments were repeatedly mentioned at caucuses throughout the region: bikes on buses (Pace and CTA), new, accessible buses (CTA and Pace) and the Chicago Card/smart card debut. Innovations that affect only one part of the region, such as the new bus shelters in the city of Chicago, were uniformly popular where they appear. There was no ambiguity or dissention about the cost/benefit equation for these improvements – there was overwhelming public support.

**West Cook County
Caucus**
Get Metra to talk
to CTA.

In general, the Regional Transit Authority (RTA) and Metra were assigned most of the responsibility for poor performance on coordinating services among transit systems. Poor connectivity between CTA and Metra was a recurring theme throughout the region; the issue arose in virtually every Cook County or city of Chicago caucus. In outlying suburban caucuses there were occasional mentions of Pace/Metra connectivity issues.

Connectivity was seen as a challenge not only between transit systems, but for connecting to Metra by other modes of transportation. The inability to take bikes on Metra, even during weekend and non-peak periods, was raised in virtually all Cook County caucuses and in DuPage County. In several other caucuses, the lack of sidewalk access to Metra stations from surrounding developments was raised as an issue.

DuPage County Caucus Integration between train and bus is unsolved.

There was a high degree of knowledge about and approval of the cooperation between Pace and the CTA on sharing fare card technology. The CTA and Pace received more mixed reviews than Metra for overall service issues. Pace received some criticism for low visibility and occasional criticism for service cuts, but got high marks for its Vision 2020 Plan, the “blueprint” for future bus enhancements in the region. CTA complaints typically were in regards

to accessibility at stations (for populations with disabilities) or the condition of the stations themselves, but the new fare cards and the express buses were extremely popular. The CTA bus shelters being installed by the city of Chicago also received high marks.

Major capital projects were offered as examples of progress in some parts of the region; specific information is found in the individual caucus reports at the end of this document. There was no universal or consistent trans-regional consensus on specific capital projects.

Walkable Communities

Responsibility for creating walkable communities was seen as scattered between state, regional, and local officials and between public and private entities. People in suburban Cook County and several of the collar counties frequently made the recommendation that sidewalks should be required in all new private developments. In the city, some newer retail developments were seen as unduly geared to auto traffic, with negative consequences for pedestrians.

Caucus participants at every one of the eight caucuses held in suburban Cook and the collar counties found fault with action on sidewalks at the municipal level. This included poor connectivity of the network, the lack of municipal pedestrian (and bicycle) plans, unsafe pedestrian access to schools, limited transit access, wide lanes of traffic that were difficult to cross, lack of street lighting, inadequate traffic enforcement, and lack of snow removal policies.

South Side of Chicago Caucus Snow removal at bus stops remains poor.

Pedestrian travel and bicycle travel were closely linked in some parts of the region. Different rates of progress were seen between the two modes though. In many communities there had been perceptible improvements in bicycle amenities; people were eager to identify other areas where further attention would promote cycling. In the case of pedestrian encouragement, there was very little reported progress and in some cases almost no success to build on.

In the city, where there is an elaborate network of sidewalk infrastructure, there was some sense that many cycling improvements were evident, but that walking was becoming more difficult and more dangerous. The lack of snow removal policies and enforcement was mentioned frequently in city neighborhoods as a simple and inexpensive, but neglected, area of pedestrian encouragement.

In suburban Cook County and several of the collar counties, the state was specifically mentioned as needing to improve its efforts to promote walkability (and bikeability) along state roads. Failure to plan for and build pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure along state highways, as well as the difficulty of crossing some state highways was mentioned in several areas. The inequitable state funding for sidewalks (50% state contribution to 50% local match) versus roadway funding formulas (80% state contribution to 20% local match) was described in detail at the Kane County caucus while other communities discussed funding issues generically.

Central Neighborhoods of Chicago

Provide incentives to businesses who promote bicycle use by employees.

Other forks in the road . . .

There were sub-themes that resonated in certain areas but not universally across the region. There was a much higher awareness of and concern for the impact of transportation on the natural environment in the collar counties. The purchase of land to preserve open space and the success of open space initiatives were clear signs of progress in Lake, McHenry, DuPage Counties, and the Southwest Metro region. Kane County residents feared that their carefully crafted, publicly approved land management plan had been eroded by the proposal to construct a highway through the county agricultural preservation zone.

Lake County Caucus

What do we do when we've widened all we can?

Only two of the communities where summits were held made recommendations regarding roads. These are communities where controversial tollway construction projects have been proposed: Lake County and the Southwest Metro region. In those places, caucus participants were able to point to specific intersections where signalization, turning lanes, or other modifications had improved the flow of surface traffic. Unmet demand

still exists for improvements on local roads; in keeping with the IDOT policy advisor's admonition about the public's focus on quality of life outcomes, roadway improvements were described in terms of aesthetics (landscaping) and pedestrian access and safety, not just in terms of auto mobility.

Caucus participants, like summit participants, are people who use autos as their primary means of transportation, with over 70 percent using an auto more often than any other mode. Roadway access is available to them; what they seek now is more choice of mode and higher quality of life.

Equity implications of our region's transportation investments framed another sub-theme of our region's transportation investments. Residents in the north and northwest parts of the region believe they can support community development on a solid base of transportation assets; they are enthusiastic about current projects like double-tracking of the North Central Metra line and CTA service increases. However residents of communities to the south struggle with very basic transportation-related development issues.

Community economies are closely tied to and dependent on the quality of the local transportation infrastructure. Residents of the southern communities of the region project a clear sense that some of their existing transportation assets are not secure (controversies over Dan Ryan Expressway access or the condition of the Metra Electric are example). Both the South Side of Chicago and the Calumet summits in 2001 developed major recommendations for using transit-oriented development (TOD) to jump start local economies. No other part of the region had such explicitly articulated economic development goals in relation to transportation improvements. Both of these communities reported little improvement in that area in the last two years. The continued deterioration of brownfields (abandoned and often contaminated industrial land, most of which is near existing transportation infrastructure) in the south part of the region is another example of how transportation and development policies ignore hidden assets of existing communities, focusing instead on building new projects on the fringes.

Calumet Caucus
More public
transportation leaves
parking lots for
development.

Many Voices Make a Chorus

The full caucus reports are attached. A snapshot of each caucus can be found below.

Calumet – June 24, 2003

This part of the region, more than any other, struggles with the impacts of economic disinvestment. There is a sense of urgency about maximizing the potential benefits from transportation infrastructure. These Calumet area stakeholders advocated for investments in transit-oriented development and brownfield redevelopment, rather than an airport on the fringes of the region, as the way to remedy a lack of local jobs, long commutes, and struggling town centers.

DuPage County – July 8, 2003

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.

Central Neighborhoods of Chicago – July 23, 2003

The Central Neighborhoods of Chicago are a part of the region that everyone from northeastern Illinois may visit, work in, or travel through at some point. It is crucial that the people who live here are not overlooked when it comes to making decisions about their neighborhoods and their community. The City of Chicago needs to anticipate the rapid growth of businesses and better coordinate and plan transportation service. Well-connected bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure is an effective way to manage the increasing congestion we see on the streets of Chicago. The city needs to carefully examine how it determines which neighborhoods need increased transit service and new development to make sure that the overall transportation system is efficient and equitable.

Lake County – October 29, 2003

Some recommended improvements were perceived to have been stalled by a lack of intergovernmental agreements, incentives, and cooperation. Lake County's strong desire for coordination and cooperation was expressed in terms of improved connectivity and cooperation between transit agencies and with respect to coordination across modes (i.e; sidewalks and parking options at rail stations, new grade crossings that would benefit both rail and road travel). Another theme woven through all the recommendations was a desire for more coordinated planning to facilitate travel by people with disabilities.

South Side of Chicago – November 5, 2003

New transportation investment – or lack of investment – will have an impact south of Pershing Road for decades. Caucus participants expressed doubt about several proposed projects and about the lack of community input in selecting projects. The most highly desired major projects included the Gray Line¹ and CTA Red Line extension to 130th Street (with certain concerns about the alignment of the latter project). Participants were very skeptical of plans to close several South Side ramps as part of the Dan Ryan (I-90/94) reconstruction plan.

McHenry County – November 12, 2003

This part of the region is growing rapidly. Participants continue to feel strongly that sprawl is out of control and that more planning and foresight must go into development. There is an increasing fear that public open space and agricultural land that defines McHenry County is disappearing forever. This group would like to see elected officials, planners, and policymakers take the opportunity to make some unique and innovative choices to shape new developments in McHenry County.

West Cook –November 19, 2003

This group would especially like to see more public participation in discussions about major capital projects like the East-West Corridor. The choice to expand transit or widen the highway will have serious impacts on communities. At the local level, participants would like to see planners of these communities adopt more European models for providing transportation choice. If everyone is included in planning and new and innovative ideas are considered, change is more effective and meaningful.

Kane County – December 3, 2003

The public wants roads to be made safe for all types of travelers; this should include special attention to vulnerable travelers like pedestrians and bicyclists. Additionally, more attention and consideration needs to be given to estimates and impact studies of environmentally insensitive projects like the proposed outer beltway road project. If a project demonstrates significant negative impacts on the environment, it should not be pursued. More attention needs to be paid to the question of to whom projects are benefiting and how transportation in Kane County fits into a regional vision.

North-Northwest Cook County – January 13, 2004

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 and 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 anticipates that a universal farecard is on the horizon and that improvements to regional planning are necessary and possible.

Southwest Metro – January 22, 2004

This group was keenly aware of the planning decisions local municipalities make and the relationship these decisions had on the environment and character of their communities. Participants want municipalities and local elected officials to be accountable for their actions and expect developers and builders to respect the environment and accommodate multiple types of travel. This group would like local municipalities to coordinate their plans and consider alternatives before making decisions in favor of expensive projects.

North Side of Chicago – January 27, 2004

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 placed a high emphasis on making the small and inexpensive repairs and maintenance work that would improve the overall condition of the transit system. They hope that planning and implementation for transportation and this community will become more consistent and progress more quickly and efficiently.

The Public Has Reasonable Expectations

The recommendations listed below are easily within reach in the next few years. The public is aware of and supportive of incremental improvements over the last few years, but dissatisfied with the rate of progress. While the residents are interested in large-scale “dream” projects, they want some measure of attention redirected to the here and now.

The public is realistic about what is possible in a short time frame. They are intrigued by the potential benefits of Intelligent Transportation Systems, but do not

expect to find digital schedule data on every corner within the next year. People are simply frustrated by the insufficient attention over the last two or three years to system maintenance and incremental system improvements.

The public has a reasonable expectation that substantial progress on these simple and inexpensive remedies should be evident within the next few years. In order to accomplish that goal, the region will have to make small, but significant, changes in the way it thinks about “regional” versus “local” responsibilities. If we continue to focus on building big systems that have little relationship to the surrounding area or to other nearby systems we will continue to throw good money after bad projects.

Recommendation One: Integrate Transit Systems

There are few areas of public policy where decision-makers can proceed without making some segment of the population unhappy. Integration of the region’s transit systems may be a singular exception to that policy conundrum. Transit integration is universally desired throughout the region. The RTA’s failure to coordinate among its three service boards is an inexplicable waste in the eyes of the region’s populace. This issue was raised at every single caucus; usually it was raised multiple times at each caucus (see the supplemental report, “Combined Comments from Facilitated Exercise”).

A good deal of the public’s emphasis is on *fare card coordination*. Caucus participants, city and suburban, had a high degree of awareness about recent CTA innovations like the Chicago Card and the Chicago Card Plus. They also were aware that CTA and Pace cooperate on farecards. Metra received unfavorable reviews for its unwillingness to coordinate with other service boards; the RTA was seen as ineffectual and indifferent to obvious public priorities.

Coordinated schedules and dissemination of information were other ways in which the public feels transit agencies do a poor job of working together. There were tales from across the region of buses that pull away moments before the train’s arrival and vice versa. People understand that new stations linking different systems can not be built overnight, but cannot understand why paper schedules with connecting information can not be provided, even after several years of asking.

Paratransit coordination was often raised as a specific concern within the larger issue of transit coordination. Paratransit that does not cross municipal boundaries is virtually useless. Paratransit should be a regional rather than local function and coordinated across municipal boundaries.

Transit agencies were not the only ones held accountable for poor coordination. Municipalities were chastised for failure to disseminate transit information too. Towns and cities that find space to park private vehicles on streets and lots can not find the space for display cases with transit schedules. *Libraries, businesses, park districts and others should be engaged* in helping the public gain access to transit information.

Express bus service is highly regarded wherever it is offered. Agencies should create more express bus service; municipalities should experiment with parking and other enforcement measures to maximize efficiency of express buses.

Recommendation Two: Provide Inexpensive Transit Amenities.

Expensive equipment and systems will be poorly used if people must wait in unsafe or unpleasant conditions. The lack of *bus shelters* in many suburban communities is a deterrent to bus use, often compounded by disconnected or non-existent sidewalks.

North Side of Chicago Caucus
Stairways are dangerous, rain gutters directly on stairways.

Pedestrian infrastructure near transit leaves much to be desired in some suburban communities. This is true for some rail stations and bus stops. A small investment to complete and connect sidewalks within a half mile of each station/bus stop could save millions of dollars that the region currently intends to spend on parking and roadway expansions.

Bike parking at stations exemplifies the adage, “build it and they will come.” The popularity of bicycling as one leg of a commute grows in proportion to the availability of amenities. Even covered bike parking can be offered more economically than auto parking and consumes less valuable land – land which can be devoted to generating jobs and tax revenue through transit-oriented development.

Within the city of Chicago there was a higher degree of satisfaction that the basics near transit were generally available, but there was also high interest in maximizing those benefits. “More bike shells” (covered parking), more signage and brochures on how to use bikes on transit, even “espresso carts” at CTA stations are examples of ways to enhance the transit connection with other modes. Chicagoans generally like the new bus shelters and desire more of them, particularly at neighborhood bus stops.

Snow removal near city and suburban transit nodes was an inexpensive recommendation made in all parts of the region.

Southwest Metro Caucus
Connect sidewalks to something meaningful.

Recommendation Three: Improve the Sidewalk Network throughout the Region

Invest in building the missing links in the sidewalk network. *Provide ramped sidewalks* at every intersection in the region. *Retrofit sidewalks* that are deteriorated or where the roadway system has encroached on the pedestrian realm. *Require sidewalks in all new developments*, commercial, industrial, and residential. Where sidewalks are not feasible or desirable, *pave the shoulders along rural roads*.

Recommendation Four: Start with Paint to Inexpensively Reclaim Pedestrian and Bicyclist Terrain.

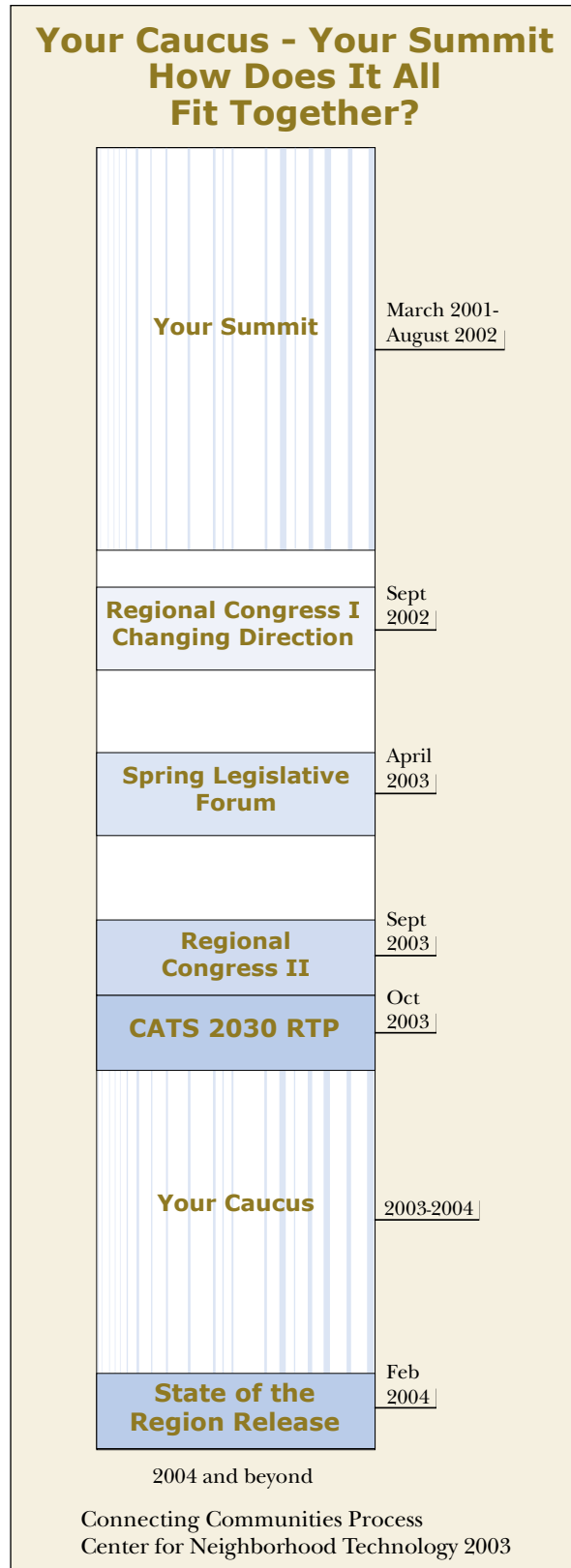
Pedestrian crosswalks should be more visible. Focus on areas where large concentrations of children travel or should travel. Over time reconfigure corners, narrow crossing distances and recalibrate lights to further improve pedestrian safety and mobility. *Bicycle lanes should be striped* at an increased pace on arterials throughout the region. Over time, resolve the conflicts at intersections where striping now disappears, provide better directional signage for cyclists, and install more bike parking.

Description of the *Connecting Communities* Public Involvement

By the beginning of the new millennium, CTAQC needed to refresh its understanding of trends in public sentiment. CTAQC began a series of *Connecting Communities* summits in 2001, a cycle that continued through the first half of 2002. Summits were carefully designed three-hour sessions that included group visioning, individual surveys, and a planning game called TransopolySM (a game developed by CNT to provide a hands-on budgeting and decision-making tool). Summits were held in each collar county, in locations in suburban Cook County and in the city of Chicago. There were eleven summits in total. Seventeen regional partners helped to recruit a broad base of stakeholders. Forty-two local partners assured that the summits were grounded in community issues. Eight mini-summits were held to gain the input of under-represented populations: high school students, immigrant groups, hearing-impaired populations, and the homeless.

The summit visioning, surveys, and game yielded extensive documentation of the public's choices for each area. The raw data was consolidated into a four-page report for each geographic region. Most importantly, before the report was published, summit participants reconvened to amend and then approve the draft before it was final.

Once all nineteen summits and mini-summits were documented, the public's priorities were consolidated in *Changing Direction: Transportation Choices for 2030*. *Changing Direction* has been distributed to the General Assembly, all the mayors in the region, and to planning organizations. In addition to the report, CATS was provided with all the background documentation from each





Southwest Metro Caucus

summit. *Changing Direction* was released to the public at the first annual Regional Congress on a Saturday in 2002; over 300 people attended and developed strategies for carrying the message to their individual communities.

CTAQC has continued to maintain its information loop through a series of regional and local meetings (see timeline). The annual Regional Congress and Spring Legislative Forum are opportunities for stakeholders from throughout the region to collaborate and learn from one another. The *Connecting Communities* caucuses were an opportunity to focus on the specific recommendations of each summit area and assess local conditions, progress and barriers in the time since the summit.

Supplements:

- Local *Connecting Communities* Caucus Reports (Eleven)
- Combined Comments from Facilitated Exercise – Eleven Caucuses
- Critique of the Process and Product of the Official Transportation Planning Agency

(Footnotes)

¹ Surface Transportation Policy Project, *Mean Streets 2000*.

² Sigrid Quendler, Link Between Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Academic Achievement, Vienna University, Austria, August 2002.

³ The Chicago region is the only regional planning body in the nation that is separate from the land use agency, composed almost exclusively of one demographic segment, not geographically representative, controlled by the state department of transportation, and with committees composed primarily of transportation bureaucrats.

⁴ ISTEA, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 and its successor bill, TEA-21, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century.

⁵ To view a map of these investments visit <http://www.cnt.org/tsp/trans/ctaqc/cs/thirtyrtp.htm>

⁶ Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, Back Bay Book, 2002.

⁷ Mike Moss, IDOT Conference, Rend Lake Resort, September 12, 2003.