



COOK COUNTY TRANSIT PLAN



SEPTEMBER 2023

HONORABLE TONI PRECKWINKLE, PRESIDENT
COOK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

ZAHRA ALI, CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
BUREAU OF ADMINISTRATION

JENNIFER "SIS" KILLEN, P.E., PTOE, SUPERINTENDENT
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND HIGHWAYS

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Cook County Resident,

I am pleased to present the Cook County Transit Plan, complete with resources, ideas and support to strengthen the region's transit system. While the County doesn't operate transit services, we partner with transit agencies including the Chicago Transit Authority, Metra and Pace, on projects that improve the rider experience. The Transit Plan identifies key priorities for the entire transit system and pinpoints ways the County can help, including projects to help people safely get to transit stations, improve bus speed and make reliability improvements for those with jobs close to transit.

Transit benefits everyone who lives, works and visits Cook County by decreasing the number of vehicles on our streets, cutting congestion and reducing harmful emissions, including the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change.

My administration approaches all projects and plans through an equity lens as outlined in my [Policy Roadmap](#). As a result, we focus our attention on lower income and historically under-resourced communities that rely on transit the most.

For example, the County's Fair Transit South Cook pilot offers up to a 50% fare reduction on Metra's Electric and Rock Island lines in addition to increasing service on Pace Route 352 Halsted. In partnership with Metra and Pace, Fair Transit creates affordable access and more reliable transportation for communities that have some of the longest commutes in the region.

Our transit system provides many benefits for the residents of Cook County, but it also faces many challenges. During the COVID-19 pandemic, ridership took a sharp and prolonged hit. This put a serious strain on transit system finances, which goes beyond the Cook County Transit Plan and will require a collective effort among government and business leaders to resolve. In addition, the basic organization and formulas for allocating transit service were established 40 years ago. This report demonstrates how needs have changed since then.

It is time to reimagine the way we govern transit as well as how we pay for it. The County will work with the transit agencies, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, business leaders, the General Assembly and the Governor to create a system that is appropriately financed and organized to provide the transit service that residents of the County and the region deserve.

Sincerely,



Toni Preckwinkle
Cook County Board President

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Cook County would like to thank the following organizations that served on the Transit Plan Steering Committee or Technical Advisory Committee:

Access Living
Active Transportation Alliance
Center for Neighborhood Technology
Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership
Chicago Department of Planning and Development
Chicago Department of Transportation
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
Chicago Transit Authority
Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce
Civic Consulting Alliance
Cook County Bureau of Economic Development
Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways
Cook County Land Bank
Elevated Chicago
Illinois Department of Transportation
Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Illinois Tollway
Metra
Metropolitan Planning Council
Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District
Northwest Municipal Conference
Pace
Regional Transportation Authority
Shared Use Mobility Center
South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association
Southwest Conference of Mayors
UIC Urban Transportation Center
West Central Municipal Conference

Cook County would also like to thank the thousands of Cook County residents who provided feedback into the development of the plan.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TRANSIT IS CRITICAL FOR COOK COUNTY	6
COOK COUNTY: A KEY PARTNER FOR TRANSIT	7
WHAT WAS THE PROCESS TO DEVELOP THE TRANSIT PLAN?	11
OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE TRANSIT IN COOK COUNTY	12
TRANSIT SERVICES IN COOK COUNTY	13
CONDITIONS FOR TRANSIT SUCCESS: POPULATION AND ECONOMY	16
KEY OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE TRANSIT	22
TRANSIT ACTION PLAN	28
WHAT ARE COOK COUNTY'S STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE TRANSIT?	32
FARE INTEGRATION	34
BETTER BUS SERVICE	36
BETTER ACCESS TO TRANSIT	38
BETTER BUS STOPS	40
ACCESSIBILITY IMPROVEMENTS	42
MORE FREQUENT SERVICE FOR LONGER HOURS	44
SERVICE TO NEW AREAS	46
WHAT ARE THE ACTIONS COOK COUNTY CAN TAKE?	48
FARE INTEGRATION STUDY	50
PLANNING, DESIGN, OR CONSTRUCTION OF REGIONAL TRANSITWAYS	52
RAIL STATION ACCESSIBILITY IMPROVEMENTS	54
MIDDAY SERVICE PILOTS	56
IMPORTANCE OF PARTNERSHIPS	58
HOW DO WE GET THINGS DONE?	59
FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES	60
WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE COUNTY?	64
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS	65
WHAT WERE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INPUT?	66
HOW SHOULD COOK COUNTY PRIORITIZE INVESTMENT IN TRANSIT?	69
ADVISORY STAKEHOLDERS	71
WHAT DID WE HEAR?	72
HOW DID IT INFORM THE PLAN?	73

TRANSIT IS CRITICAL FOR COOK COUNTY

Public transit is an essential part of the transportation system in Cook County, helping hundreds of thousands of residents get to work, school and beyond each day. Yet this critical service faces challenges. The Cook County Transit Plan identifies strategies to make transit more convenient, efficient and attractive.

Cook County's transportation system is one of its greatest assets – key to the national and international movement of people and goods, and central to the economic vitality of the region. Residents in the County have access to eight Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) rail lines, 127 CTA bus routes, 91 of 148 Pace bus routes and 11 Metra commuter rail lines, in addition to South Shore trains and water taxi services. Roughly 90% of the transit trips in the six-county Chicagoland region begin or end in Cook County, with public transit providing residents vital access to jobs, healthcare, education and other necessary services. By providing a good alternative to driving, effective public transit service also reduces air emissions and helps fight climate change.

Nevertheless, the transit system does not serve everyone as well as it could. For example, many stations cannot be accessed by people with disabilities. Other people would like to use transit but cannot because service is infrequent or nonexistent at times they need to travel. Additionally, the transit system faces immense financial strain following the COVID-19 pandemic. A collaborative effort to improve transit service is critical for the future of Cook County and the region.

The Cook County Transit Plan's recommendations are designed to meet the following goals:

- Increase overall transit ridership
- Increase seamlessness of transit services
- Focus on the needs of transit reliant communities

In its 2023 two-year operating budget and five-year capital improvement plan, the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) stated that Chicago area mass transit faces a fiscal cliff in late 2025, when the federal relief allocated to transit agencies to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 will cease.

This Transit Plan refines how the Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways (DoTH) can improve transit for the residents of Cook County. It identifies potential partnerships to make key transit investments to serve Cook County residents and pilot new ideas. Previous collaborative efforts such as the [Fair Transit South Cook](#) pilot and the [Invest in Cook](#) program showcase DoTH's potential for involvement in public transit projects. Other possible projects, programs and policies that DoTH could help facilitate are explored in this plan including strategies to implement better bus service, accessibility improvements, access to transit (bike and pedestrian access), better bus stops, additional transit service (span, frequency, routes or stations) and fare integration. By helping to implement these transit improvement strategies, DoTH can continue to improve transit and improve the lives of those who live or work in Cook County.

This plan is a natural continuation of efforts by DoTH to support transit investments. It could not come at a more critical time. Agencies across the region are collaborating to address financial challenges wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic and map out the future of transit. The County, transit service boards, Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), State of Illinois, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) and other stakeholders are actively collaborating to ensure continued funding and reform governance for transit in the Chicagoland area. The Cook County Transit Plan complements these efforts by laying out how the County can invest in the future of transit.

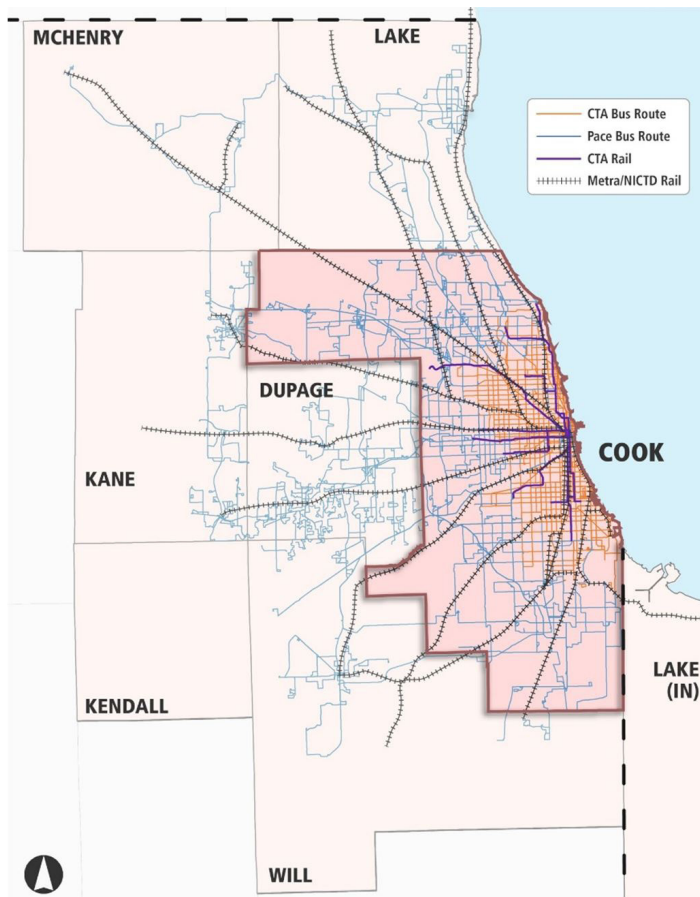
COOK COUNTY: A KEY PARTNER FOR REGIONAL TRANSIT

Although Cook County doesn't operate transit services, it plays a major role in funding the transit system and appointing directors to the transit agency boards. RTA sales tax of 1.25% is collected on purchases in Cook County to fund transit operations. The sales tax is the largest source of revenue for RTA, and Cook County provides the largest share of that revenue. Furthermore, a small amount (\$2 million) is transferred from Cook County to CTA each year by statute. Cook County commissioners and the President of the Board of Commissioners appoint directors to Metra and to RTA, helping provide direction to those agencies.

Cook County is at the center of the regional transportation system. Currently, DoTH has jurisdiction over 561 miles of roadway, in addition to being responsible for the maintenance of bridges, pavement, traffic signals and other critical infrastructure needs in the County. DoTH administers, plans and manages transportation projects, providing aid in the development of infrastructure to improve Cook County residents' quality of life and enhance the competitiveness and productivity of the area's industries.

[Connecting Cook County](#), DoTH's 2016 Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), functions as the strategic framework for DoTH. The LRTP acknowledges the importance of transit by stating the following: "to successfully compete, the County must complement its extensive road network with improved transit and fully embrace other modes such as walking, biking, car sharing and ride sharing. These modes must not be afterthoughts to a system based on the automobile but must instead be essential components of a suite of transportation options, offering families and businesses realistic, high-quality choices. Of these modes, public transit is the single-most important" (pg. 50).

The Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways goes beyond transportation; by promoting and investing in our region, we accelerate economic growth and foster thriving communities.



In the time since the LRTP was published, the department has steadily increased its investments in local-level priority transit projects and fostered opportunities for cross-agency collaboration with each of the region's transit service boards.

The LRTP established the following priorities:

- Prioritize transit and other transportation alternatives
- Support the region's role as North America's freight capital
- Promote equal access to opportunities
- Maintain and modernize what already exists
- Increase investments in transportation

DoTH has a key role to play in the future of public transit for Cook County and this plan builds on past work. DoTH's LRTP prioritizes public transit, reflecting transit's key role in the regional transportation network. DoTH is well positioned to bridge the City of Chicago/suburban transit boundary, particularly in places where demographics and density provide transit opportunities. This plan will serve as a guideline for DoTH as it works to identify which transit investments can make a difference.



Existing Transit Infrastructure Improvement Opportunity

Union Station is a hub for hundreds of thousands of Metra and Amtrak riders. However, its layout reduces passenger capacity and its ventilation system results in poor air quality within the station. Furthermore, it does not allow for significant service expansion without reconfiguration. Following the Union Station Master Plan, Amtrak is leading an effort to improve passenger circulation, ventilation and station access while expanding slots available for new train service.

WHAT WAS THE PROCESS TO DEVELOP THE TRANSIT PLAN?

The Cook County Transit Plan reflects a two-year process that incorporated an in-depth review of existing conditions, a market assessment and a compilation of potential transit investments within the region that have been identified by transit agencies, municipalities and other organizations. Cook County is rich in transit infrastructure, and CTA, Pace, Metra and Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD) services are critical to the strength of the region's economy. This plan seeks to build on the strength of the existing transit network by improving the usefulness and extent of transit.

Public Outreach Identified Four Key Improvement Themes

Overall, residents, businesses and communities across Cook County are excited about transit investments from the County. They seek:


- **Transit improvements** in areas lacking service, with service prioritized outside the Chicago Loop and outside of traditional business hours
- **Intermodal connections** and consistent station infrastructure and amenities, particularly in south and west Cook
- **Coordination**, technical assistance and implementation funding, especially for smaller municipalities and communities
- **Equity** at the forefront of improvements with investments targeted in under-resourced communities

TRANSIT PLAN PROCESS



April 2020

Completed Existing Conditions Analysis

 Advisory Stakeholder Meetings (Steering Committee, Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), Transportation Equity Network (TEN))



Cataloged Ongoing Regional Transit Projects, Programs and Policies

 Listening Sessions  Focus Groups



Identified Additional Projects, Programs and Policies

 In-Person Engagement



Developed Evaluation Criteria

 Listening Sessions  Focus Groups



Evaluated Projects, Programs and Policies

 Public Survey  Feedback Session



September 2023

Compiled Final Report

OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE TRANSIT IN COOK COUNTY

Transit provides vital connections and moves millions of people throughout Cook County. It has the promise of being a safe, affordable and convenient travel option for people of all ages and abilities. However, transit need and access vary widely depending on where one travels in Cook County.

Targeting efforts where gaps exist between demand and available service can help improve quality of life, especially in historically under-resourced neighborhoods and communities. This chapter summarizes the key challenges and opportunities facing transit in Cook County.

TRANSIT SERVICES IN COOK COUNTY

Cook County has a long history of public transportation: Chicago's first rail line opened in 1892 and the City's famous elevated central Loop structure is more than 120 years old. Transit was key to the development of Chicago and its suburbs during the early 20th century, with growth following the rail lines that are now part of the Metra system. By the 1940s, Chicago opened its first subway lines. Since then, transit services have continued to grow, and public transportation has remained central to many thousands of visitors and residents who utilize trains and buses to access jobs, healthcare, goods and other services every day. This section provides a brief overview of the main transit providers in the County.

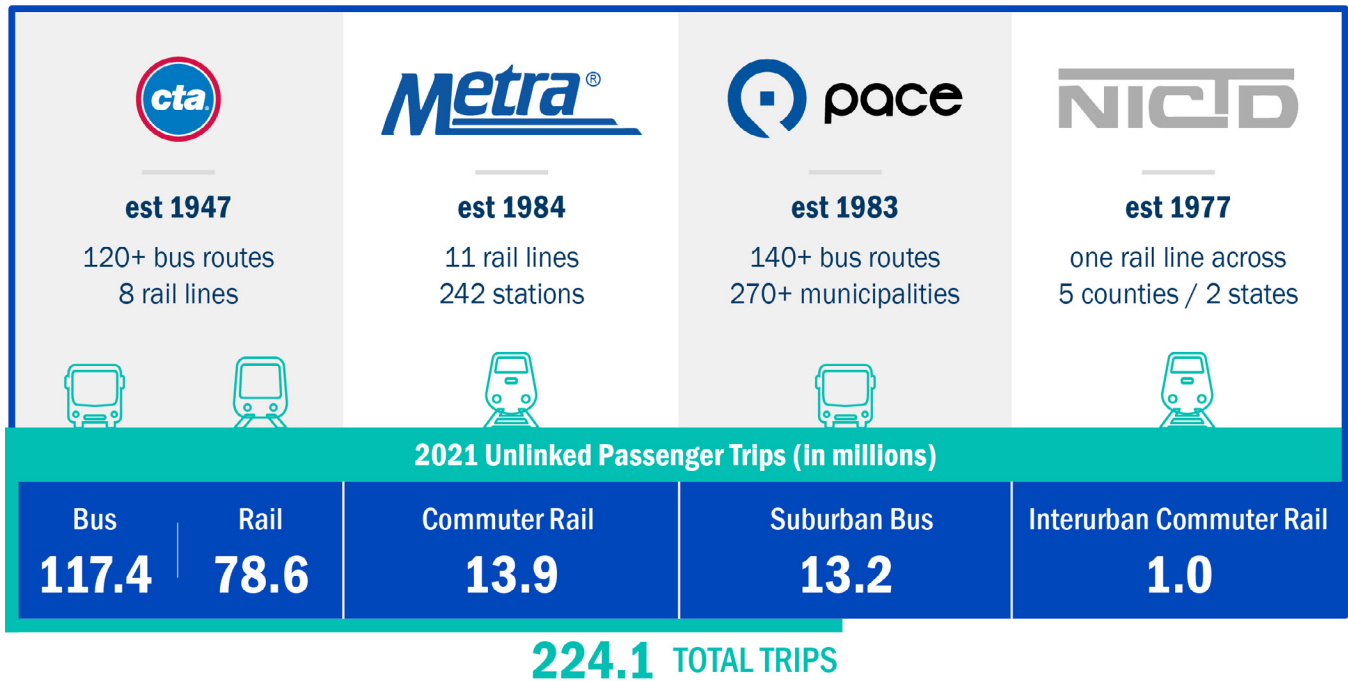
Main Providers

- **Chicago Transit Authority (CTA):** The CTA operates buses and trains serving the City of Chicago and 35 nearby suburbs. Approximately 117.4 million bus trips and 78.6 million rail trips were taken on CTA services in 2021.
- **Metra:** Metra is the Chicago region's commuter rail network. Approximately 13.9 million trips were taken on Metra services in 2021.
- **Pace Bus:** Pace operates most suburban and intercounty bus services in the region. Approximately 13.2 million trips were taken on Pace services in 2021.
- **NICTD South Shore Line:** NICTD operates the South Shore Line train with service from Millennium Station in Chicago to the South Bend International Airport in South Bend, IN.

Zero Emission Fleet Conversion

In 2019, Chicago's City Council passed a resolution to electrify the CTA's entire bus fleet by the year 2040. In 2022, CTA released Charging Forward, a roadmap for meeting this goal. Pace has also committed to this in Driving Innovation and is working on a fleet transition plan. This spring, the Illinois General Assembly passed legislation requiring the service boards to purchase zero-emission buses for their fleets in 2026 and after. Metra is also working toward decarbonizing its fleet and supporting vehicles.

Current statute prohibits Cook County's motor fuel tax-based funding from assisting agencies with decarbonizing their fleets. Updating this legislation, along with addressing the erosion of motor fuel tax revenue as electric vehicles become more commonplace, could open the door for tapping Cook County dollars.



Demand Response Service

- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Complementary Paratransit: Pace operates the federally mandated ADA paratransit service across the entire six-county region, including throughout Cook County.
- Pace On Demand is a reservation-based, shared-ride service in 10 designated service areas throughout the suburban region. The services are open to the general public and passengers book online or call to reserve their trip in advance. The Pace On Demand service zones in Cook County are located in Arlington Heights-Rolling Meadows and Hoffman Estates.
- There are 15 additional Dial-a-Ride programs in Cook County. Each individual Dial-a-Ride service is operated independently and financially supported by Pace. Each has a different reservation system, fare payment and eligibility requirements. Eight of the Dial-a-Ride services are open to the general public. These services are operated by the municipalities or townships where they are located.
- Connect2Work was a pilot program offering discounted Uber rides throughout the day to employees working within Bedford Park. Pace recently began pilots of rideshare-based service to the O’Hare cargo area and late-night service to the area around the Harvey Transportation Center, partly funded by Cook County.

Other Transit Services in Cook County

In addition to the above services, Amtrak provides rail service from Chicago's Union Station to cities throughout the United States. In Cook County, Amtrak services also stop in Homewood, Summit, Glenview and LaGrange. Chicago Water Taxi offers a direct link from the Metra and Amtrak train stations at Chicago Union Station and Ogilvie Transportation Center to Michigan Avenue, North Avenue and Chinatown via the Chicago River. Additionally, Pace administers the region's vanpool program and ridematch software for carpools.



Cook County is also the nation's freight rail hub

The region's rail-rich, intermodal transit network moves more than just passengers. Chicagoland remains the freight hub of North America; it is traversed by all six of the Class I railroads, and approximately a quarter of all freight trains and half of all intermodal trains in the nation pass through the region annually. A number of these freight rail lines are shared with Amtrak and commuter rail service, and freight operations must be considered as Cook County addresses endemic challenges to commuter rail mobility.

CONDITIONS FOR TRANSIT SUCCESS: POPULATION AND ECONOMY

Cook County has undergone demographic and economic changes that have influenced the way people utilize transit service. Today, Cook County has approximately 2% fewer jobs and residents than in 1970. The population drop has not been evenly distributed across the County: some areas have experienced gains, others losses and some others have experienced little or modest changes. Since 1970, the City of Chicago and inner ring south Cook suburbs have been losing jobs and population while suburban areas in the northwest and southwest parts of Cook County have been gaining them.

Regional Shifts in Population

As a result of changes in jobs and population in recent decades, many workers on the south side of Chicago and south Cook County travel farther to access employment opportunities. South Cook residents have an above-average commute time (as compared to all of Cook County) and often commute to dispersed employment destinations outside of Chicago's Loop. South Cook County has robust transit infrastructure and is served by many modes, presenting an opportunity to better leverage existing infrastructure assets for 21st century needs.

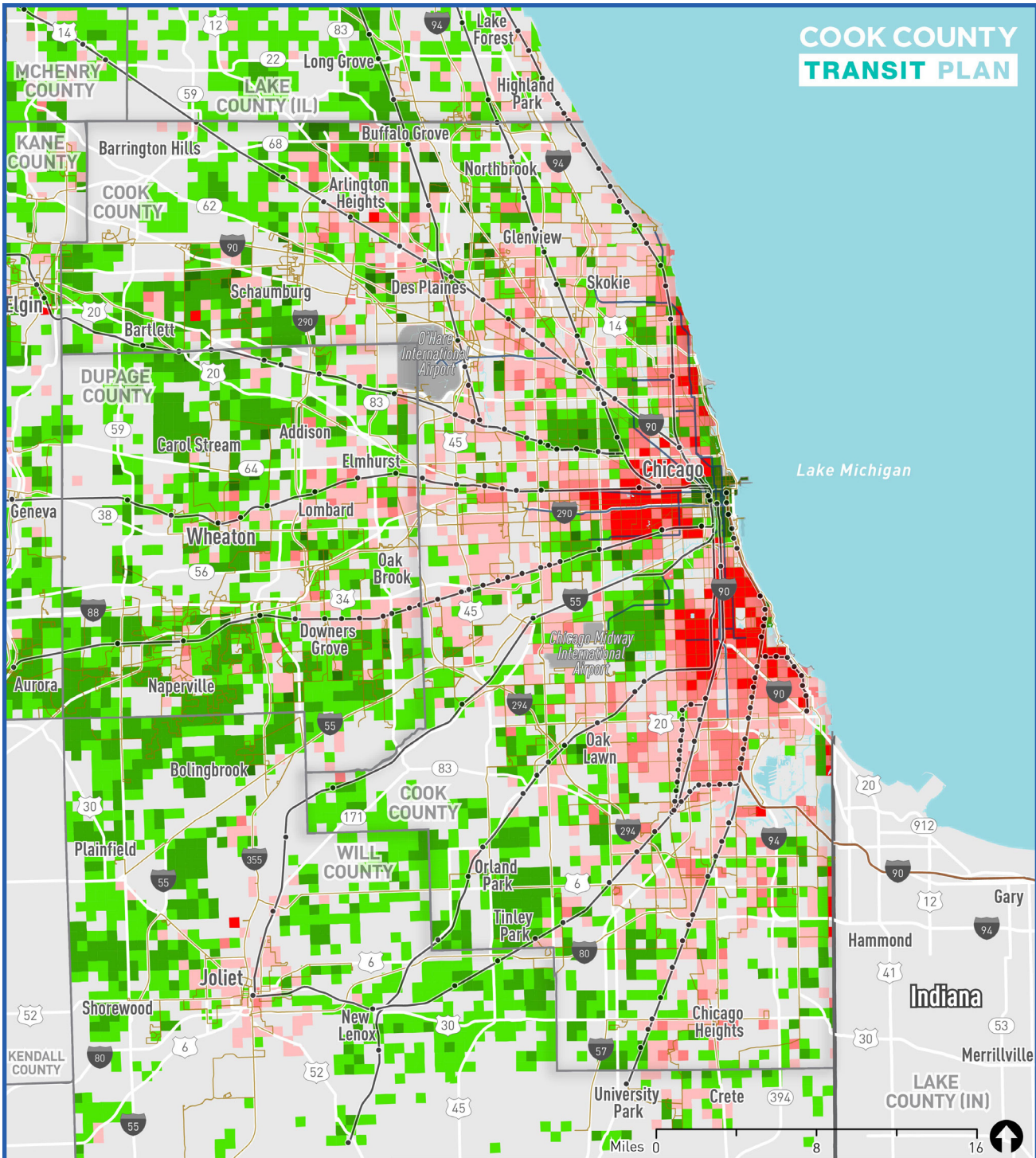
North and northwest Cook County, which include regional job centers like Schaumburg and Evanston as well as numerous primarily residential communities, experienced substantial population and employment gains throughout the 20th century and into the 21st. This shift coincided with increasing automobile ownership and settlement in typically lower density subdivisions and office parks which are harder to serve with transit than older communities.

Matching transit service to transit demand is key for any transit system: considering demographic and employment changes in Cook County is important for the future of transit in the region.

Demographic and economic changes in Cook County have influenced the way that people utilize transit service.

Cook County has experienced a geographic shift in population and jobs that is not evenly distributed.

COOK COUNTY TRANSIT PLAN



Population Change 1970 - 2020

Estimated change in residents per acre

- High Population Loss
- Little to No Population Change
- High Population Gain

Transit Routes

- Metra Lines
- NICTD South Shore Line
- CTA Rail Lines
- CTA/Pace Bus Routes

Data Source: CMAP



Population Growth and Density

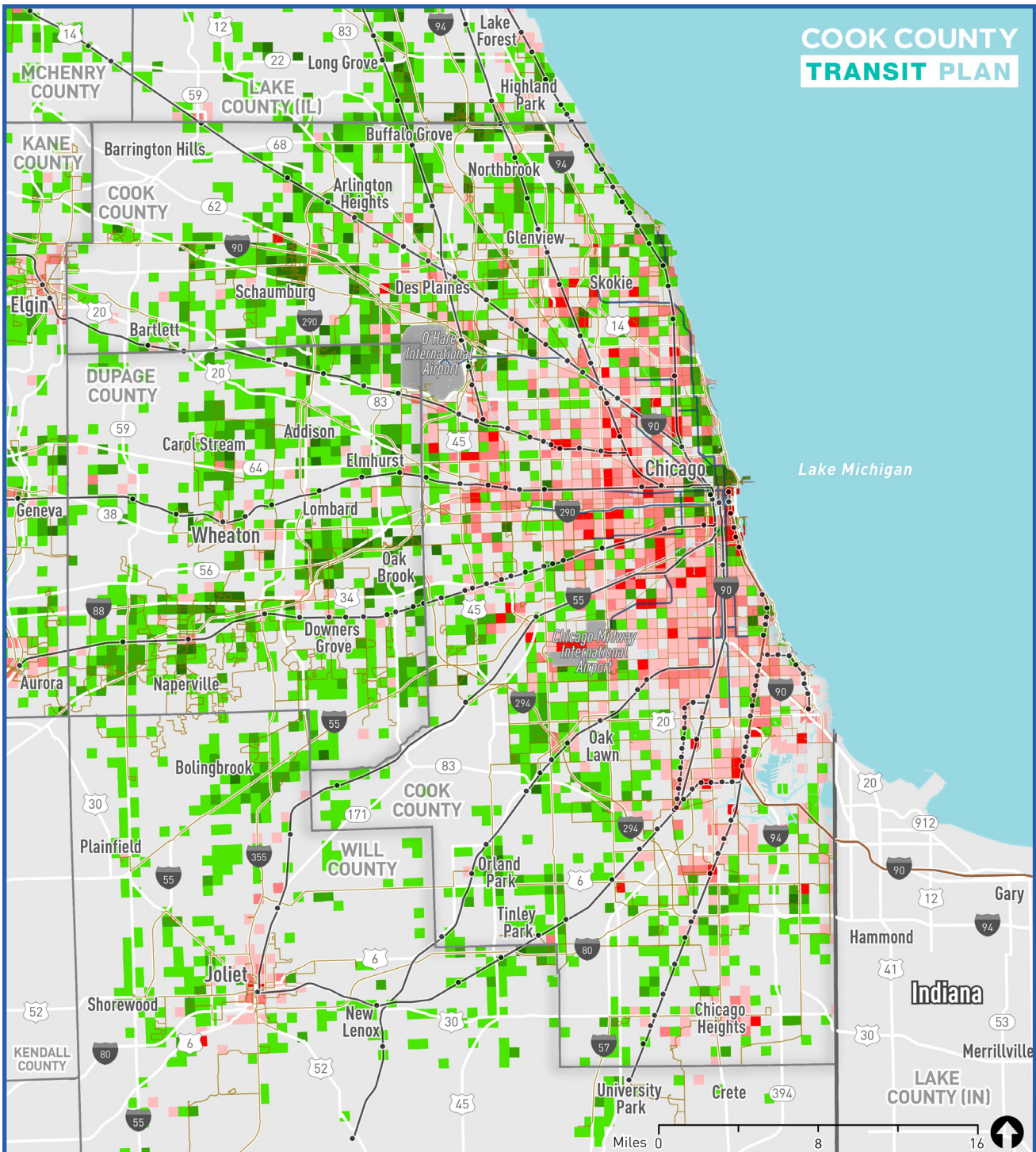
Slightly more than half (51%) of the residents in Cook County live in densely populated areas that can support frequent transit at least every 15 minutes. Most of Chicago has historically had this level of scheduled peak period service. Population density is key for transit demand.

Outside of Chicago and at its edges, residents might find it harder to use transit for certain trips or to do so without using a car for the first leg of the trip. As shown in the figures above, urban areas have been losing population and more suburban and exurban areas have been gaining it: this pattern is a challenge for effective transit service, since population has shifted to lower density and difficult to serve areas.

Population Change, 1970-2020

Area of Cook County	Total Population 1970	Total Population 2020	Change (%) 1970-2020
Chicago	3.4 million	2.8 million	-17%
North Suburbs	818,000	1.1 million	36%
South/Southwest Suburbs	729,000	902,000	24%
West Suburbs	586,000	574,000	-2%
Cook County	5,533,000	5,376,000	-3%

COOK COUNTY TRANSIT PLAN



Employment Change 1970 - 2020

Estimated change in jobs per acre

- High Job Loss
- Little to No Job Change
- High Job Gain

Transit Routes

- Metra Lines
- NICTD South Shore Line
- CTA Rail Lines
- CTA/Pace Bus Routes

Data Source: CMAP

Employment Growth and Density

Transit demand often follows job density, since commuting is the most frequent reason riders utilize transit. According to the 2019 American Community Survey, Cook County has 2.6 million jobs, and 39% of jobs in the County (approximately 1 million) are in locations that can support frequent transit. Some of the major job centers include the following:

- The Loop and areas immediately surrounding it
- Illinois Medical District
- The Near North Side
- Hyde Park
- Downtown Evanston and Northwestern University
- O'Hare and Midway Airports, and the areas adjacent to both
- I-90 corridor in northwest Cook

The distribution of employment centers and the mix of industries has changed in the region over time. There are other jobs centers across the county, although most of these are more difficult to serve with fixed-route transit due to dispersed land use patterns and lower densities. The figure above highlights key changes in employment in Cook County.

Employment Change, 1970-2020

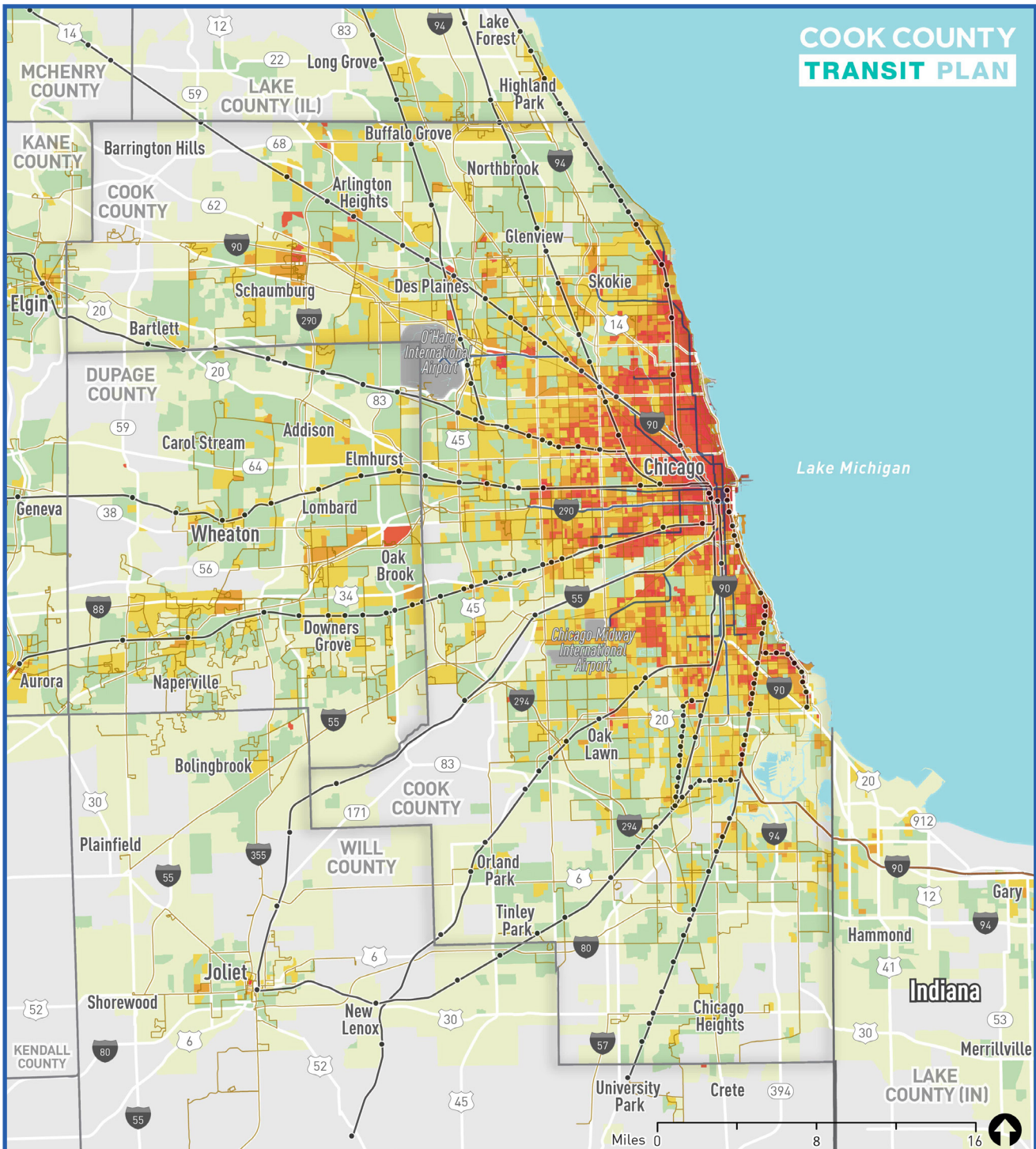
Area of Cook County	Total Jobs 1970	Total Jobs 2020	Change (%) 1970-2020
Chicago	1.9 million	1.4 million	-25%
North Suburbs	319,000	707,000	121%
South/Southwest Suburbs	186,000	247,000	32%
West Suburbs	268,000	247,000	-8%
Cook County	2,673,000	2,601,000	-3%

Composite Transit Demand

Demographic factors, population and employment density, vehicle ownership and other factors combine to determine composite transit demand. The areas of Cook County with the highest transit demand include the following (as can be observed in the figure on the following page):

- The west and southwest sides of Chicago
- Illinois Medical District
- The south Lakefront
- The Red and Brown line corridors in Chicago
- Evanston
- The Loop
- I-90 corridor in northwest Cook
- Niles/Skokie
- Little Village/Berwyn/Cicero/Oak Park

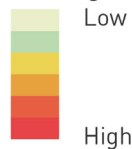
COOK COUNTY TRANSIT PLAN



Composite Transit Demand

Estimated demand for transit services calculated by employment and adjusted population count per acre

Scoring



Transit Routes

- Metra Lines
- NICTD South Shore Line
- CTA Rail Lines
- CTA/Pace Bus Routes

Data Source: American Community Survey, 2018 5-Year Estimates; CMAP

KEY OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE TRANSIT

EXISTING METRA LINES ARE AN OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE ALL-DAY MOBILITY

- Transit access to jobs falls sharply outside the reach of CTA rail. Metra travels through neighborhoods that do not have access to frequent transit, especially in the south and west sides of Chicago. With the exception of the Rock Island and Metra Electric lines, most Metra corridors in Cook County do not offer frequent trips during off-peak periods such as weekends or weekday midday times.
- Along several Metra lines, there are long distances between stations. Within Cook County, many of these service gaps are located in high-need areas. Opportunity to expand access to Metra service through the development of infill stations exists. Recognizing these opportunities, Metra has begun work on new stations on the Rock Island Line in Auburn Gresham and along the Union Pacific North Line in the Edgewater / West Ridge area.
- Metra fares can be out of reach for many low-income residents who reside near Metra stations. The South Cook Fair Transit pilot presents a model for making Metra more affordable for low-income residents and service workers who may not work a traditional 9-to-5 schedule. The County, Metra and RTA should explore an income-based reduced fare program to put Metra within financial reach for the entire region.

IMPROVING SERVICE LEVELS OUTSIDE OF THE PEAK TIMES IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE SERVICE TO THOSE WHO NEED IT MOST

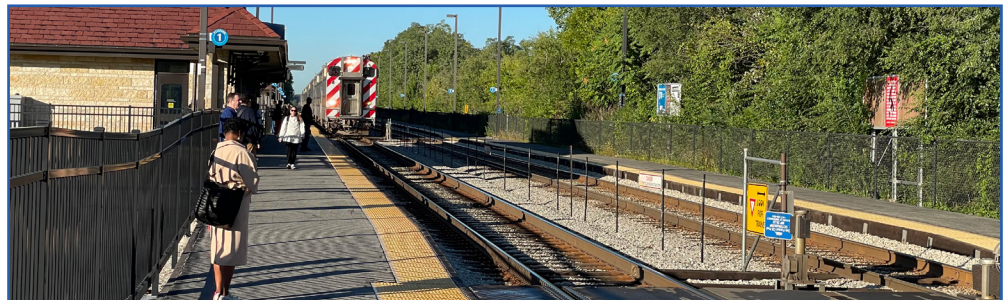
- Pace, Metra and CTA have all focused service to get people to and from jobs. For Metra and CTA, this includes concentrating service to the Loop, which has historically been one of the biggest ridership markets.
- The pandemic has transformed the experience of office work, with all indicators being that some form of remote work will continue to be a reality. This suggests that the peak-commute market to the Loop may not recover or will be replaced by different service demand. Even with reduced downtown work trips, the majority of transit trips still occur during the morning and afternoon peaks.
- Lower income and predominantly Black and immigrant neighborhoods have travel patterns that are much less peak focused. Midday and evening service are equally important for job access, when mainline transit services typically operate less frequently. Among the key steps forward are pilots that can demonstrate new ways of providing off-peak service and understand tradeoffs with other service needs.

IMPROVING CROSSTOWN BUS SERVICE IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE MOBILITY, ESPECIALLY IN LOWER-INCOME AND BIPOC (BLACK, INDIGENOUS, AND PEOPLE OF COLOR) COMMUNITIES

- Bus service provides critical crosstown trips for many Cook County residents of color who are lower-income and who work and reside in the Loop in fewer numbers. Providing crosstown service routes in corridors that bypass downtown will make trips faster and more direct.

ENCOURAGING TRANSIT-SUPPORTIVE LAND USE IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE MOBILITY AND AFFORDABILITY

- Development patterns are segregated into residential and commercial or other land uses in much of Cook County, yet mixed use development is the most conducive to increasing demand for transit. It also helps ensure residents have access to employment opportunities and amenities. Several CTA rail lines have large amounts of underdeveloped land immediately adjacent to existing stations, particularly on the south and west sides. Encouraging mixed use, dense development in the south and west sides of Chicago and south Cook along transit corridors can increase transit access and address the housing/jobs imbalance in under-resourced communities.



Improved frequency and longer hours on crosstown services makes transit a more reliable and convenient means of travel.

Many areas lack frequent midday bus service despite the demand. This situation is particularly disadvantageous in under-resourced communities where travelers are more likely to ride during off-peak periods. Travel patterns suggest the following areas could benefit from more routes with additional midday frequency:

- East-west corridors on the south side of Chicago
- North-south corridors from southwest Chicago to the west and south side
- North-south corridors from the west to northwest sides of Chicago

Value of Bus Lanes is Maximized with Automated Enforcement

Cities throughout the country, including Chicago, have implemented bus lanes and intersection treatments to improve speed and reliability. The bus priority treatments only work if they are not blocked by parked cars or vehicles illegally using the lanes. Due to repeated bus lane blockages, cities like New York City and Seattle have utilized automated cameras to enforce bus lanes. There are currently eight locations in Seattle that have cameras, while in New York cameras on buses as well as static locations may record infractions. In Seattle, city and state legislative action was required to allow for enforcement.

In a major step forward, Chicago passed an ordinance in spring 2023 to allow camera enforcement of bus lane, bike lane and crosswalk blockages. Like any fine-based enforcement mechanism, issuing tickets via automatic camera enforcement could affect low-income drivers the most. This can be mitigated by incorporating policies to issue one or more warnings before any monetary fines, having fines start very low and incrementally build with number of offenses, and/or instituting a sliding scale of fine amounts based on income.

IMPROVING BUS SPEEDS IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE SERVICE

- Congestion in many of Cook County's urban neighborhoods slows down buses and makes transit less attractive. Slower service also costs CTA and Pace more operating dollars just to maintain existing service. Faster, more reliable buses can reduce agency costs and improve the rider experience.
- Ridership has been more resilient on routes that have received transit priority and limited-stop treatments. Transit priority treatments include everything from bus lanes to spot treatments like queue jumps and transit signal priority (see "Better Bus Service" below). The Jeffery Jump, Loop Link and Pace Pulse are excellent regional models to showcase how investments in transit priority can help make bus service more competitive. Pace's shoulder-running express bus services also demonstrates the ridership growth benefits that come from eliminating the effects of congestion.



SOURCE: ANDY RYAN



SOURCE: RTACHICAGO.ORG

FOCUSING ON FIRST-MILE/LAST-MILE TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO BETTER UTILIZE EXISTING TRANSIT INVESTMENTS

- Many areas in suburban Cook County are home to residents with very high transit need and low mobility, or offer quality job opportunities with low education requirements, but the land use in these areas is often not supportive of fixed-route transit. First-mile/last-mile and demand response services increase mobility and job access in areas like this.



SOURCE: RTACHICAGO.ORG

Providing first/last mile access to existing transit stations can improve mobility in low density areas.

The areas adjacent to many Metra stations are low-density and not pedestrian friendly. Metra stations are often designed to be accessed by car. However, especially in south Cook County, there are large proportions of zero-vehicle, low-income, populations and residents with disabilities who are within two miles of a Metra station yet who may have challenges reaching the station. There are also many office and industrial areas in proximity to Metra that could be more accessible to transit-reliant communities who are more likely to travel during off-peak periods.

Improving walkability, bike access and the built environment near stations is important to improving access to transit. Another strategy is to use demand response services, which are similar to Uber and Lyft, and are generally hailed on a smartphone application, or by calling the transit agency. This usually includes connections to fixed-route transit and major destinations that are difficult to serve with fixed-route transit. Demand response is almost always more expensive to provide on a per-trip basis than regular fixed-route transit.

TRANSIT ACTION PLAN

The Cook County Transit Plan seeks to better integrate transit in the county, address challenges related to ridership and reliability and improve limited transit access in the region.

This chapter outlines the seven strategies that are the most effective paths forward for Cook County to support transit as determined by analysis along with community and stakeholder feedback. Also, project spotlights are featured to better illustrate the kinds of opportunities or projects, programs and policies the County can support.

OBJECTIVES OF THE COOK COUNTY TRANSIT ACTION PLAN

The goals of the Cook County Transit Plan are:

1. Improve the seamlessness of transit
2. Increase overall transit ridership
3. Focus on the needs of transit-reliant communities

Improve the Seamlessness of Transit

Some Cook County residents—particularly those who travel between Chicago and surrounding municipalities—use multiple service providers and modes. Fare integration and improved transfer facilities could make these trips easier and encourage more people to use transit.

Increase Overall Transit Ridership

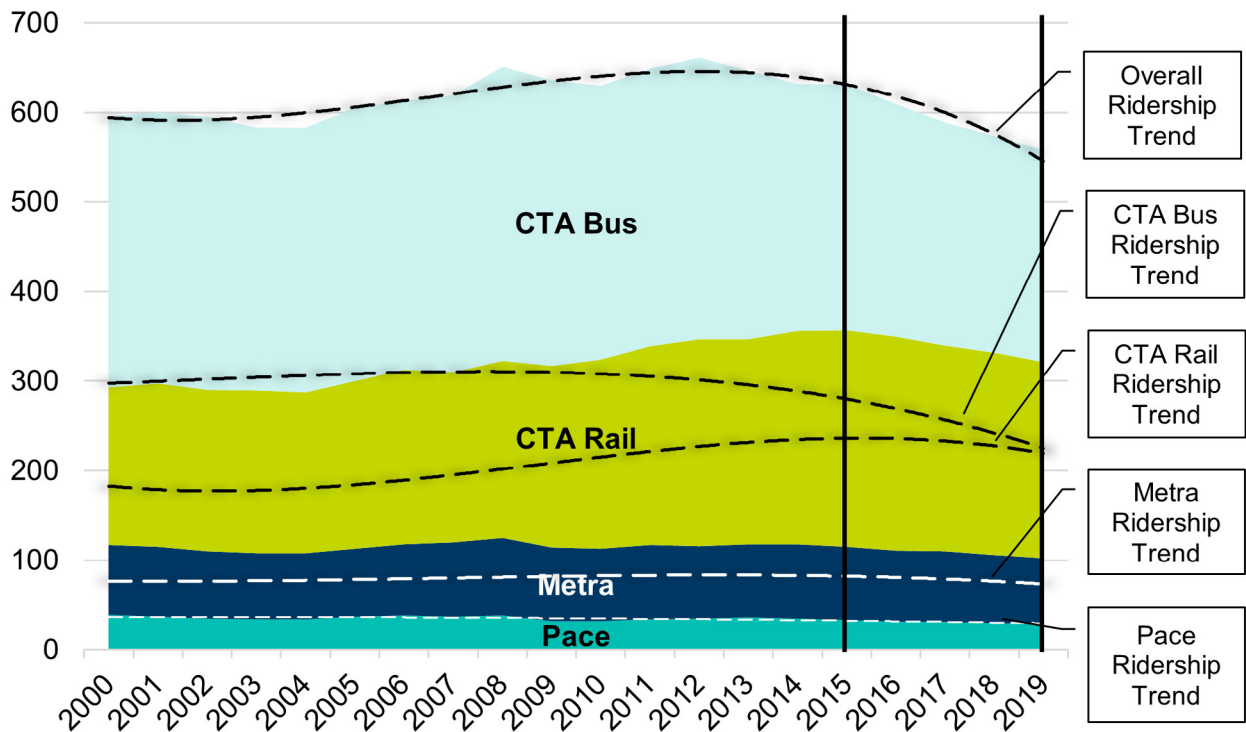
Although transit service remains of key importance for thousands of people in the region, transit ridership has been decreasing since 2015. The COVID-19 pandemic led to dramatic decreases in ridership, but since the steepest pandemic-related declines in 2020, ridership has steadily recovered, although it remains well shy of pre-pandemic levels.

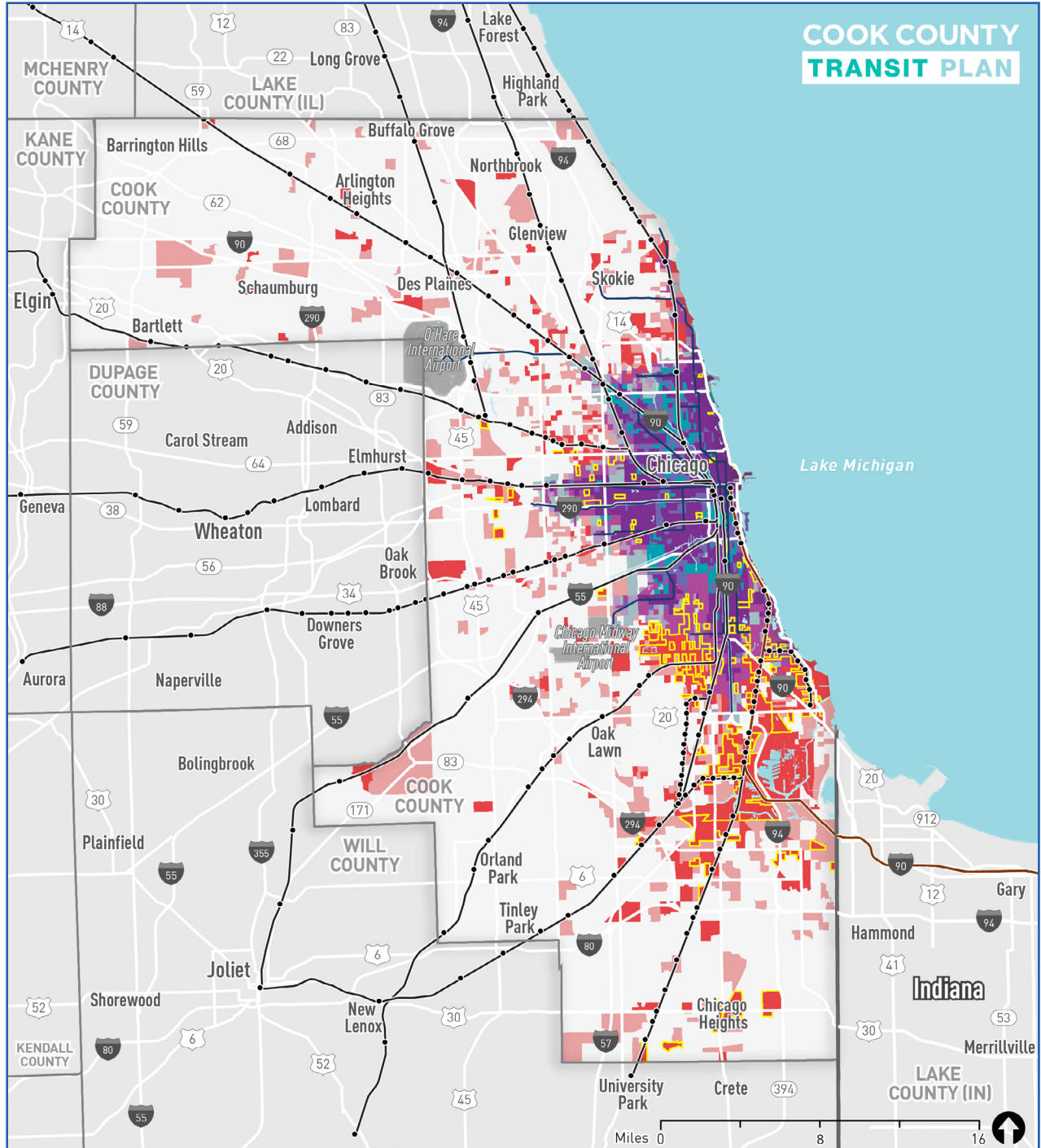
Focus on the Needs of Transit Reliant Communities

The 2018 [South Cook County Mobility Study](#) acknowledged the transit gaps facing residents of south Cook County, who tend to be lower income, have very long commutes and spend an outsized portion of their income on transportation. Demographic data suggest that many low-income households do not have easy access to high-quality transit.

There are a number of neighborhoods with concentrations of transit-reliant residents in Cook County, and the strategies in this plan should prioritize improving transit access and reliability in these neighborhoods. For instance, the map on page 30 identifies where transit access to jobs is low, where unemployment is high and where car ownership is low. These factors together point to communities that are the most transit-reliant and where better transit access is most needed.

Ridership by Mode (in millions)

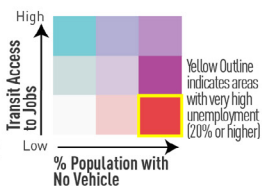




Transit Underserved Areas Unemployment & Vehicle Availability

Shows percent of population with no vehicle, low or moderate access to transit, and areas with high unemployment rates

Zero Vehicle Population vs. Transit Access to Jobs During AM Peak + Unemployment

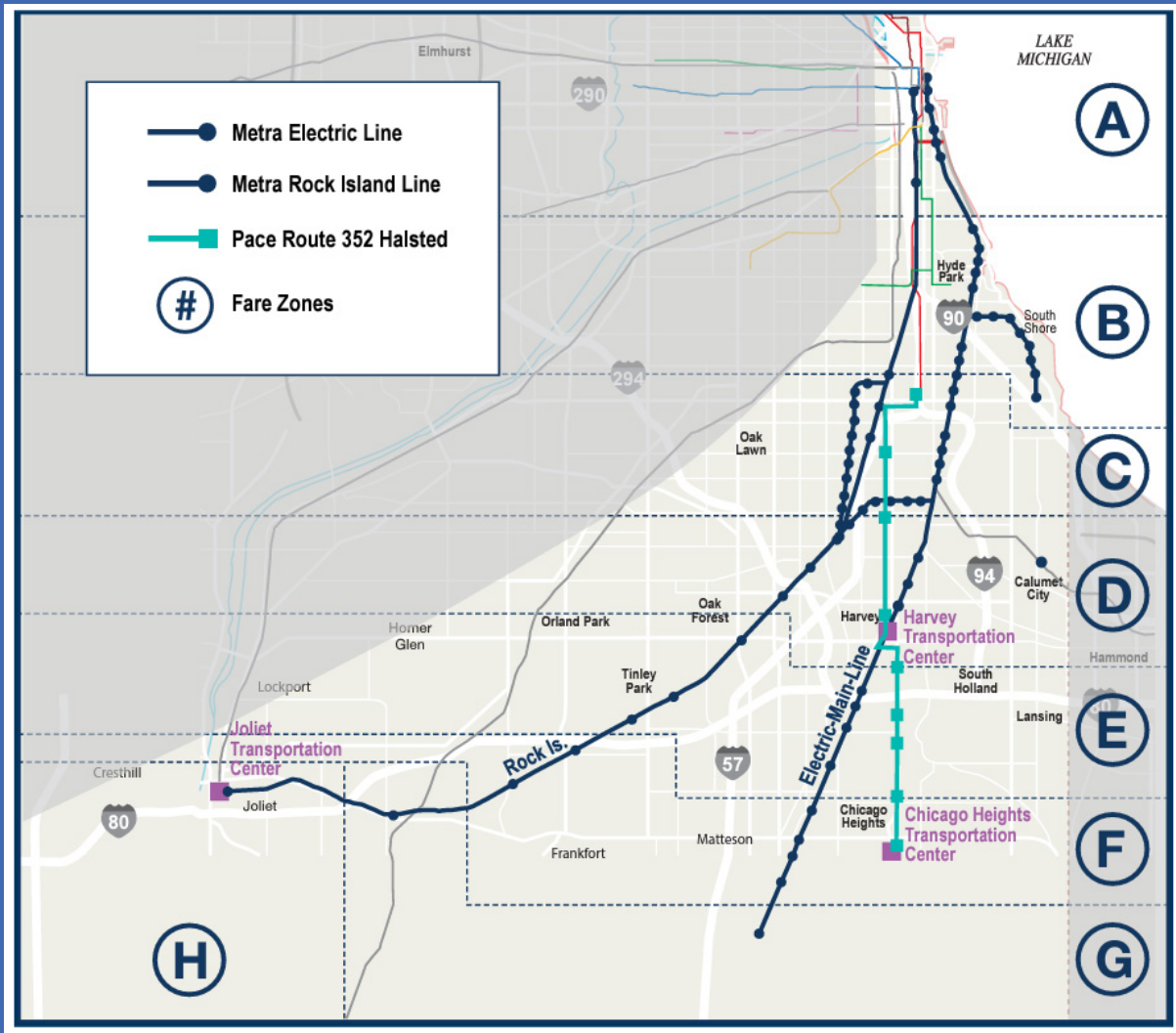


Transit Routes
 — Metra Lines
 — NICTD South Shore Line
 — CTA Rail Lines

Data Source: American Community Survey, 2018, 5-Year Estimates; University of Minnesota Accessibility Observatory

Cook County has taken a first step in addressing affordability for transit-reliant communities

One example of Cook County addressing fare integration is the Fair Transit South Cook program, which was made possible by Cook County and its regional transit partners. This program offers riders discounted fares on the Metra Electric District and Rock Island lines and expands service on Pace’s 352 Halsted route. These improvements extend the reach of frequent and reliable transit into south Cook County.



WHAT ARE COOK COUNTY'S STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE TRANSIT?

In identifying the County's priorities the Transit Plan considered the many ways in which people use and reach transit, as well as the many ongoing initiatives in the region. The seven strategies identified to improve transit in Cook County are:

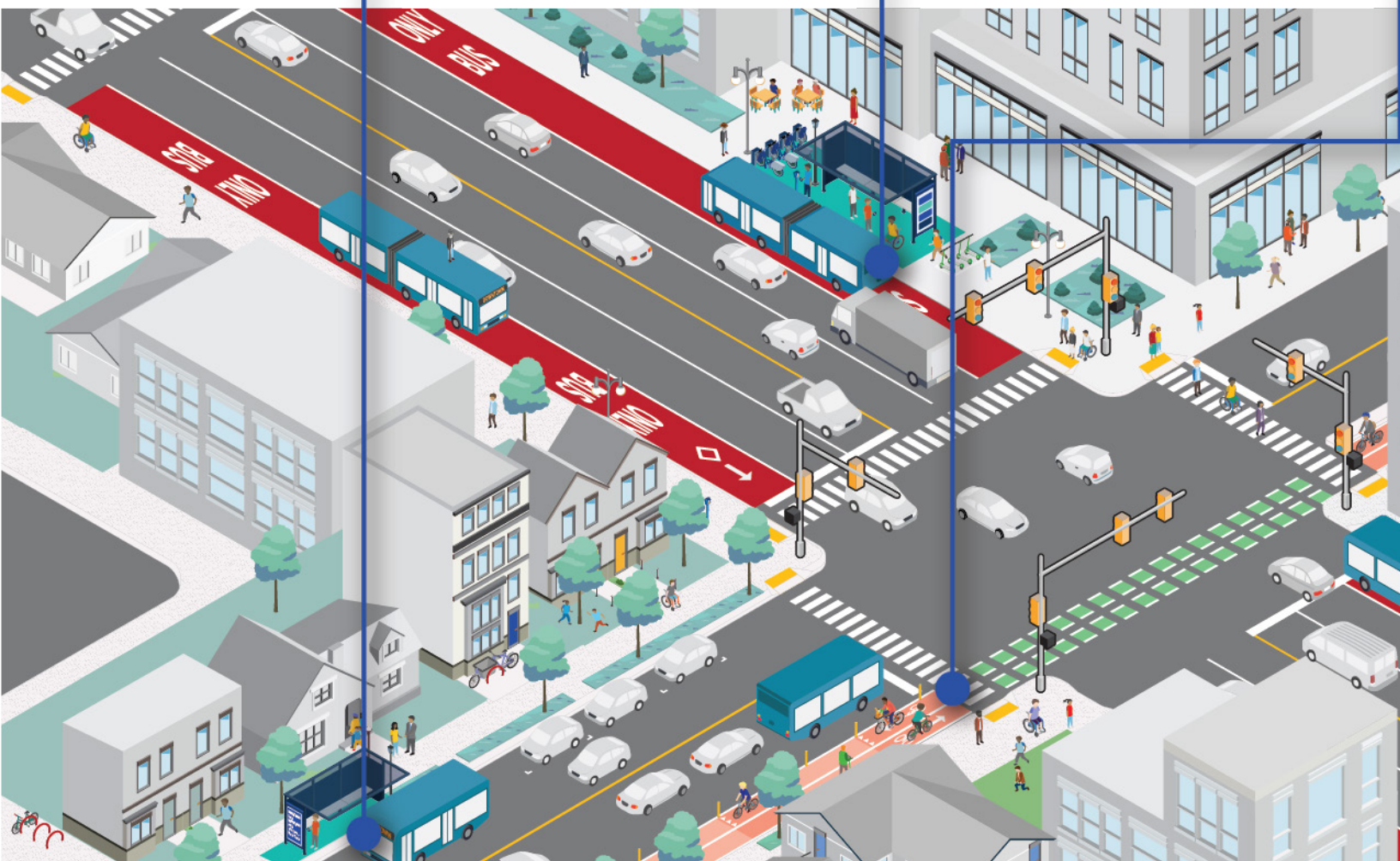
More Frequent Service & Service to New Areas



Fare Integration & Better Bus Stops



Better Access



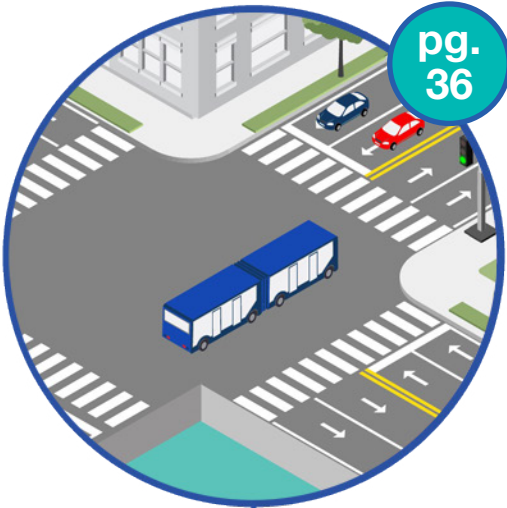
Access to Transit

pg. 38



Better Bus Service

pg. 36



Accessibility Improvements

pg. 42



For illustration purposes only. Not all strategies will be applicable in all locations.



FARE INTEGRATION

Fare policy is a key element of a successful transit system, influencing everything from the use of the system for different kinds of trips to the agency budget to the affordability of a ride.

How Can Fare Integration and other Fare Policy Initiatives Be Accomplished?

Fare policy is a key interest for DoTH. As Cook County's jobs have shifted to more suburban areas, the commutes of many residents taking transit increasingly require transfers between multiple modes or service providers. Fare integration makes these transfers more seamless and can take several forms, including a regional fare pass that allows access and payment for all transit operators.

Affordability plays a major role in the choice to ride transit and in the equity of mobility outcomes. The Fair Transit South Cook pilot, a partnership between DoTH, Metra and Pace, dramatically lowered the cost to riders on the Metra Electric and Rock Island lines serving the south suburbs and south side of Chicago, leading to more robust ridership recovery on those lines during the pandemic.

There are many other ways to adjust fares to promote equity, maximize the use of the system and meet budget goals. Cook County can play an important role in supporting a regional fare capping initiative, expanded reduced fare programs and seeking additional paths to integrate fares.

"I think fare integration would increase ridership overall if people could switch without worrying about how to pay the fare. That would especially help on the southeast side, where we don't have access to CTA but great access to Metra Electric line."

– Feedback Session Participant

“The Fair Transit Program helps a lot when you’re trying to balance your household. It has opened that door so there’s just a little bit more that you can do with your life.”

– Octavia Saffold,
Metra Rock Island
Rider

What are some of the actions Cook County can take?

- **Develop an optimal approach to fare integration** by carrying out a study with the RTA, CMAP and the transit agencies including, for example, an expansion of the existing Regional Connect Pass (an add-on to a Metra monthly pass that allows purchasers unlimited rides on CTA and Pace as well), upgrading Ventra to allow for discounts on linked trips involving more than one service operator or other approaches.
- **Understand the implications of implementing fare capping** for riders on CTA, Pace and Metra by supporting a study of the initiative. Fare capping would allow riders who buy single-use tickets to pay only up to the cost of a monthly pass.
- **Consider supporting an income-based reduced fare program** that could make transit more affordable for low-income riders across the County, particularly on more expensive transit services.
- **Consider supporting expanded student pass programs** that could make transit more affordable for a population likely to use transit, helping build ridership as well as rider loyalty. CTA has the U-Pass program, but Metra doesn’t currently have a pass program for college students.




Recommended Projects,
Programs or Policies in
Cook County

How does this incorporate what we heard?



Partner and coordinate with other agencies

Coordination



Make equity part of the decision-making process

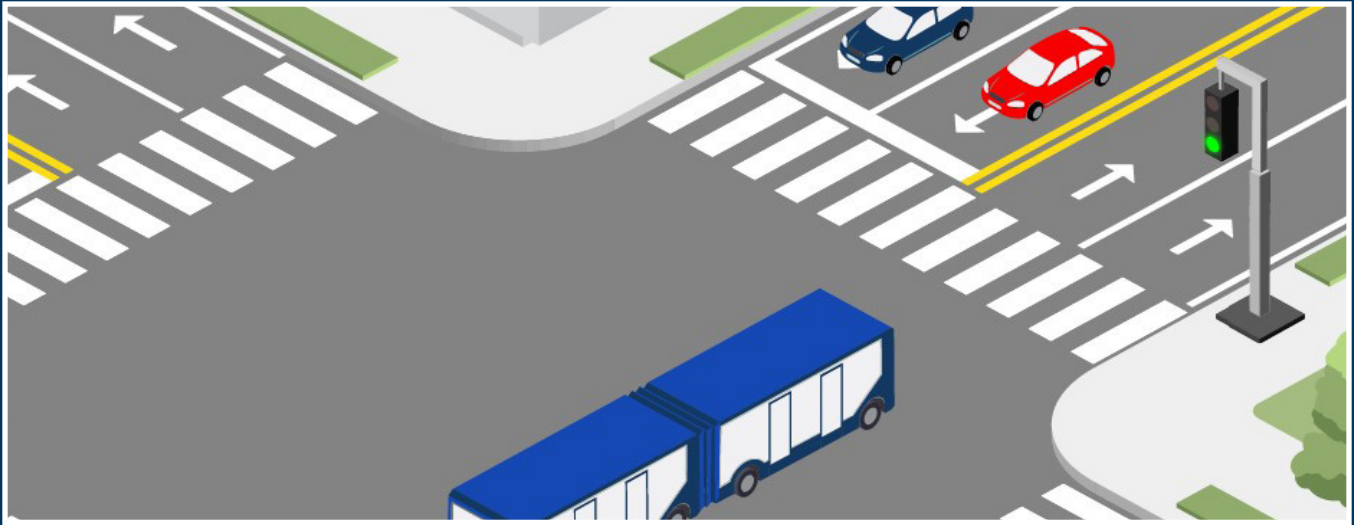
Fare policies should improve affordability and provide seamless transfers

Equity at the forefront



More access for more people

Intermodal connections



BETTER BUS SERVICE

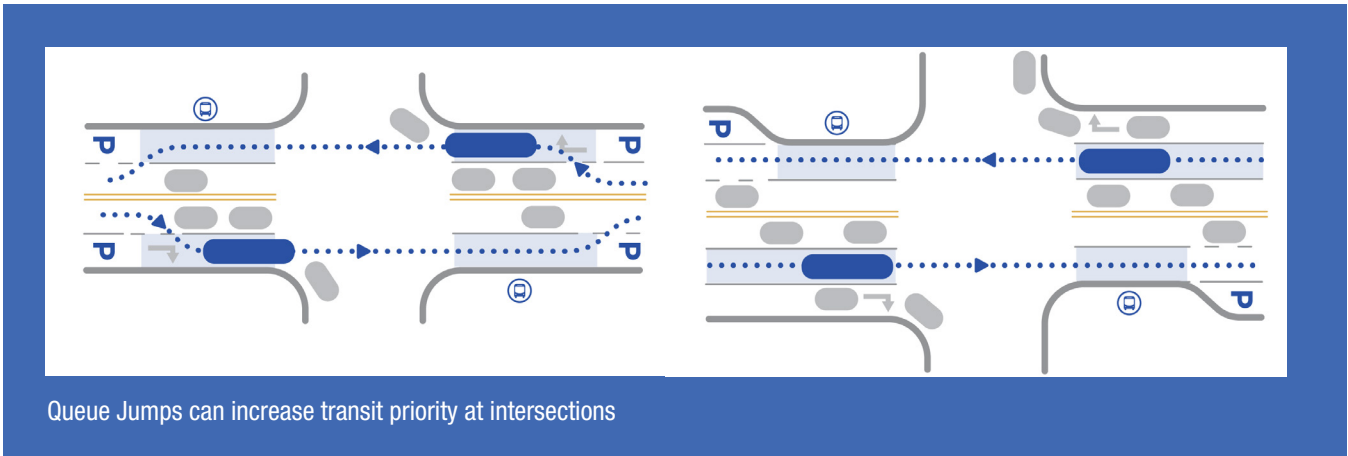
CTA and Pace buses are perceived as slow and unreliable when compared to rail service or driving. Transit service is most attractive when it is faster than or similar to driving speed. Various strategies can be put in place to give transit priority over private vehicular traffic.

How can Better Bus Service be Accomplished?

Riders have seen significant improvements that make service more attractive where cities and transit agencies have implemented transit priority strategies. Bus speed and reliability improvement strategies that support a better bus service include:

- **Dedicated transit lanes**, including grade separated busways, exclusive curbside lanes, and exclusive median lanes, although these will have limited application because of trade-offs with other roadway users.
- **Part-time and shared lanes**, which include peak period-only bus lanes, lanes shared with select other modes and the use of expressway shoulders.
- **Transit signal priority**, which helps to time signals to get buses through intersections faster and more reliably.
- **Queue jumps**, and other “spot” treatments that help buses move faster by allowing them to pass other vehicles in the line at intersections.

Cook County can play an important role in building and funding bus-supportive infrastructure to improve transit speeds and reliability. It can also play an important funding role in supporting efforts by Pace and CTA to improve bus speeds. It should also be noted that enforcement of treatments is important to ensure the usefulness of these investments over time.



7

Recommended Projects, Programs or Policies in Cook County

What are some of the actions Cook County can take?

- **Support the Better Streets for Buses** program by providing funding and/or partnering with CTA and CDOT for transit corridor improvements.
- **Support the Pace Pulse Program and Bus-on-shoulder Projects** through funding and/or partnering with Pace for planning, design and/or construction of transit corridors. Cook County has jurisdictional authority of a section of the proposed Pulse 95th Street line on Roberts Road, 103rd Street and 107th Street and can directly aid in moving implementation forward on those streets.
- **Support the Regional Transit Signal Priority (TSP)** program through funding and/or partnership for the planning, design or construction of TSP along CTA and Pace bus corridors.
- **Fund projects that shift near-side stops to far-side stop placements** to improve bus speed and reliability.

How does this incorporate what we heard?

Improve bus speeds and reliability

Create a high-quality bus network

Improve service outside the loop

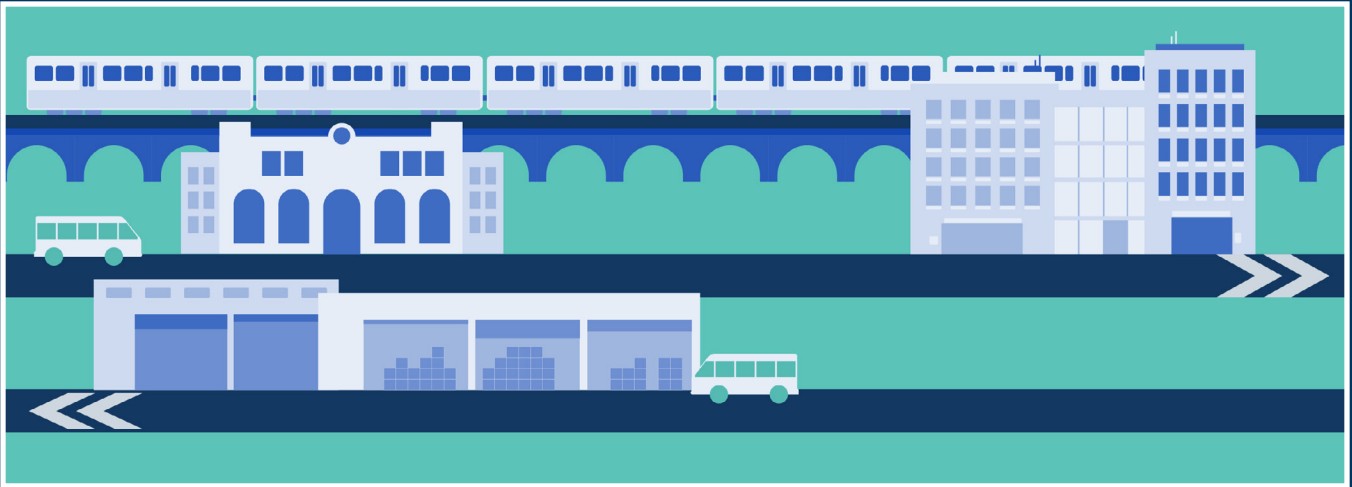
Transit Improvements

Make equity part of the decision-making process

Equity at the forefront

More access for more people

Intermodal connections



BETTER ACCESS TO TRANSIT

For people to be able to use transit, they must be able to get to it and from it. Walking, riding bikes or scooters, taking paratransit or utilizing rideshare are just a few of the ways people do this. Improving the quality of access and providing a variety of mobility options can extend the reach of transit.

How can Better Access to Transit be Accomplished?

Cook County is the second most populous county in the country. Comprised of 134 municipalities, the built environment and transit service options vary widely depending on geography, and that can make identifying and implementing universal solutions to transit access an impossible task. Since the major transit services in the region are largely provided along fixed roadway and existing rail corridors, offering more robust options to access transit is essential to improving mobility for all residents of Cook County. Localized solutions are needed, built out of larger recommendations based on best practices and past successes. Strategies to improve local access to transit options are often known as first mile/last mile connections. There are many types of services to improve access to transit and options are rapidly expanding.

“We have to look at the entire environment when we look at transit. Where do the sidewalks go? Are they maintained? Are signals accessible? Audible and visual?”

– Feedback Session Participant



Major access to transit options to consider include:

- Walking
- Bicycling / bike share
- Scooter share
- Shuttle services
- Rideshare
- Mobility on-demand (MOD)

It is also important to encourage transit supportive land use through policies that promote access to more services, employment opportunities and housing near transit. While Cook County does not operate transit services, it has a significant role in supporting transportation investments and can offer additional support to assist with first mile/last mile connections.

What are some of the Actions Cook County can Take?

- **Support programs to expand bike share and scooter share programs in new areas** in partnership with Chicago and suburban municipalities.
- **Fund programs to fill in sidewalk gaps** near transit stops.
- **Implement additional mobility-on-demand options** to improve access in lower-density but job-rich areas. This could be a partnership with rideshare companies or operated directly by an agency. Examples include Pace’s recently begun pilots serving the O’Hare cargo area and the Connect2Work pilot in Bedford Park (in partnership with DoTH and the RTA).

How does this incorporate what we heard?

Coordination

Partner and coordinate with other agencies

Equity at the forefront

Make equity part of the decision-making process

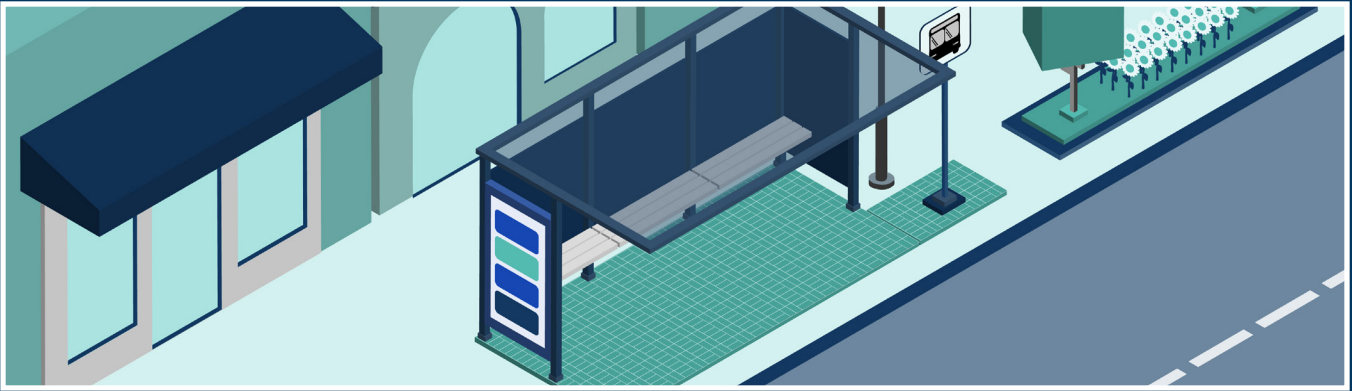
Fare policies should improve affordability and provide seamless transfers

Intermodal connections

More access for more people

Improve multi-modal connections to transit

Improve safety and the built environment around stations and stops



BETTER BUS STOPS

Bus shelters are an important component to providing dignified, safe and comfortable facilities for transit users. Providing protection from rain, snow and sun, having a place to sit at a bus stop and a well-lit street make it more inviting for riders to wait for the bus. Shelters, in combination with street lighting and up-to-date arrival information, can also increase a feeling of safety. Improved bus stop amenities can lead to improved ridership.

How can Better Bus Stops be Accomplished?

There are over 200 CTA and Pace bus routes with service in Cook County. Upgrading and maintaining bus stops with inadequate amenities is important to supporting a safe and comfortable trip for all transit riders. In particular, the following are strategies for creating better bus stops:

- Providing shelters, especially at high ridership bus stops, to protect people from the elements.
- Maintenance to keep stops functional, such as snow and garbage removal and repairs and maintenance to any stop infrastructure and amenities.
- Ensuring ADA accessibility to the stop so all riders can access the service.
- Finally, lighting, sidewalks, crossings and other elements that impact one's ability to get to and from the stop are important to the comfort and safety of riders.



“In the suburbs we don’t have that sign that names the stops and streets like they have in Chicago so one knows where their stop is.”

– Feedback Session Participant


What are Some of the Actions Cook County Can Take?

- **Supporting programs** through partnership with Pace to fund additional bus shelters in high ridership areas.
- **Funding projects** through partnership with jurisdictions that include improvements to street lighting, sidewalk installation, pedestrian crossings and bus stop infrastructure on transit corridors.
- **Coordinating with CTA and Pace to improve ADA accessibility** around bus stops.

Adding Shelters in Chicago


The current City of Chicago contract with JCDecaux defines the maintenance of 2,200 shelters. The contract does not allow for additional shelters, which limits CTA’s ability to add or move shelters. Cook County could consider funding shelter expansion within the City of Chicago if contract terms were to change.

How does this incorporate what we heard?



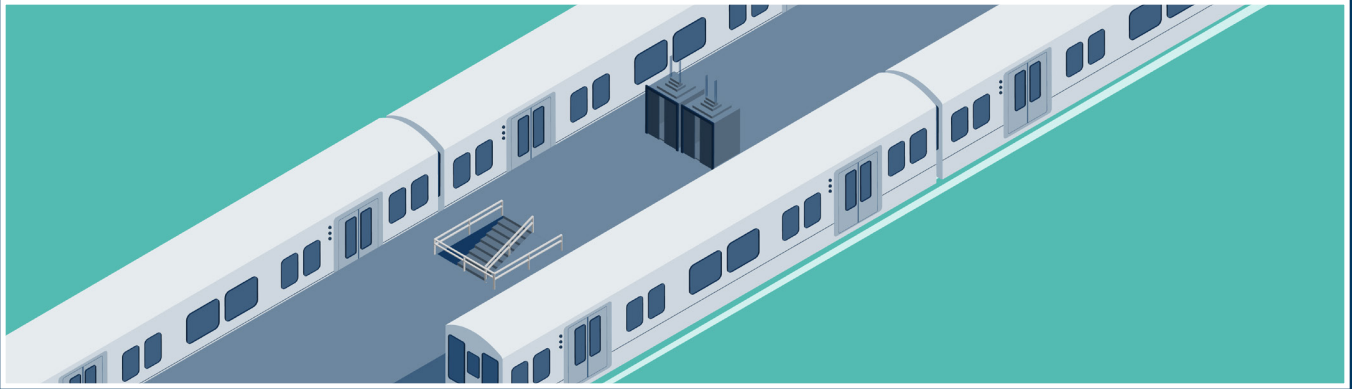
Coordination

- Provide consistent stop amenities
- Increase availability of information at stops and stations
- Improve existing transit infrastructure



Transit Improvements

- Coordinate with agencies and municipalities



ACCESSIBILITY IMPROVEMENTS

When people with disabilities have better connectivity to public transit, they have better access to jobs and services, which enhances their overall quality of life and the local economy. The west and south regions of the county have higher concentrations of residents with disabilities. Improving ADA access is a key component to ensuring transit systems support all current and potential riders.

How can Accessibility Improvements be accomplished?

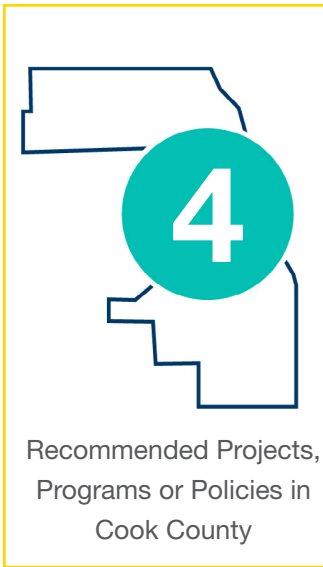
The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires newly constructed or reconstructed transit stations and stops to accommodate persons with disabilities and requires sidewalks to be ADA accessible.

These two ADA requirements work in conjunction since travel along a sidewalk is usually needed to access a station or bus stop. Transit must be safe and accessible for all individuals to fully prioritize transit, which involves making all components of the transit trip ADA-accessible. There are many components involved in improving accessibility, such as:

- Identifying areas where pedestrian infrastructure is lacking, needs repair, or does not meet ADA standards.
- Identifying barriers to accessibility in getting to or from a stop or station, such as lack of elevators or escalators, having to cross a busy road, etc.

“It is also important to consider the maintenance of accessibility elements like elevators. In many stations that have elevators, most of the time they are not fully functional.”

– Feedback Session Participant



- Implementing ADA-compliant infrastructure for new areas and upgrading infrastructure in areas that currently do not meet ADA requirements.
- Upgrading Metra and CTA rail stations that are not ADA-accessible, especially those stations which have high ridership or are key transfer points.

Improving accessibility benefits all riders, including older patrons who have difficulty with stairs as well as those with carts and strollers. There is a strong overlap with race as well: nearly 15% of Black residents have disabilities, while other racial groups face disability rates of 7 – 10%. With the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, additional federal dollars are available to improve rail station accessibility. Cook County can assist by contributing to the local match required to secure federal funding for these projects.

What are Some of the Actions Cook County Can Take?

- **Support programs that address accessibility** such as CTA’s All Stations Accessibility Program and the upcoming Metra Station Accessibility Plan.
- **Provide expertise and support for CMAP’s ADA Program** to help municipalities update their ADA transition plans, policies and infrastructure.

How does this incorporate what we heard?

Partner with agencies and municipalities

Coordination

Make equity part of the decision-making process

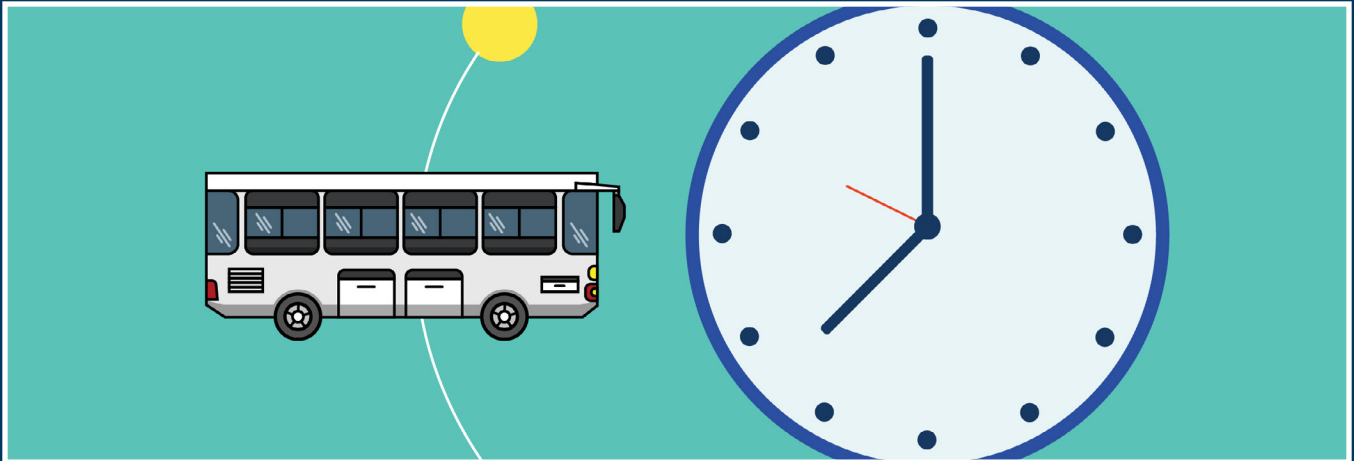
Equity at the forefront

More access for more people

Design better end-to-end services for riders with disabilities

Improve safety and the built environment around stations and stops

Intermodal connections



MORE FREQUENT SERVICE FOR LONGER HOURS

Transit service consists of two fundamental elements: frequency (how often the service operates) and service span (how long service runs during the day). When services run frequently, riders can travel when they need to. When service hours are limited, transit may be incompatible with people's schedules and fewer people may use transit due to the risk of getting stranded.

How Can More Frequent Service for Longer Hours Be Accomplished?

Transit access varies widely depending on where one lives in Cook County. Targeting service improvement where gaps exist between demand and service can help improve transit quality, especially in historically under-resourced neighborhoods and communities. There are strategies to improve existing transit service:

- Provide more frequent service:** When services run frequently, riders can travel when it is convenient for them and avoid having to set aside as much buffer time to wait on a train or bus arrival. Conversely, infrequent service provides riders with little flexibility, especially for those who have to transfer to another line. Improving service frequencies improves convenience and has the potential to attract more riders. Midday and weekend frequency improvements are particularly important, since the high farebox recovery required by statute makes it less likely for off-peak service to be operated frequently.



“Even if they get the job, they don’t have a way to get there.”

– Feedback Session Participant

Evening, weekday and midday ridership has traditionally been lower than during weekday rush hour. Productivity goals and standards should be balanced with the mobility needs of those who need it most.

- **Providing service for longer hours:** Services that run for longer hours each day allow people to travel when they want. This added flexibility helps make transit a feasible option even when personal schedules change. Service workers in particular need service later in the evening. A lack of evening and weekend service makes traveling to work, school, shopping and other activities more challenging.

What are Some of the Actions Cook County Can Take?

- **Initiate a new program to define processes for piloting additional off-peak frequency** for midday, evening or weekend service on CTA, Pace or Metra routes in partnership with the agencies.
- **Initiate a new pilot for off-peak service expansion** on CTA, Pace or Metra routes in partnership with the agencies.

Metra’s 2022 Strategic Plan has targeted frequent, all-day service as a priority as it de-emphasizes its focus on peak commute times. Rail capacity on shared freight railroad track is key to making this a reality. Cook County is a partner in the CREATE program, which has taken meaningful steps to improve regional rail capacity.

How does this incorporate what we heard?




Partner with agencies and municipalities

Coordination



Make equity part of the decision-making process

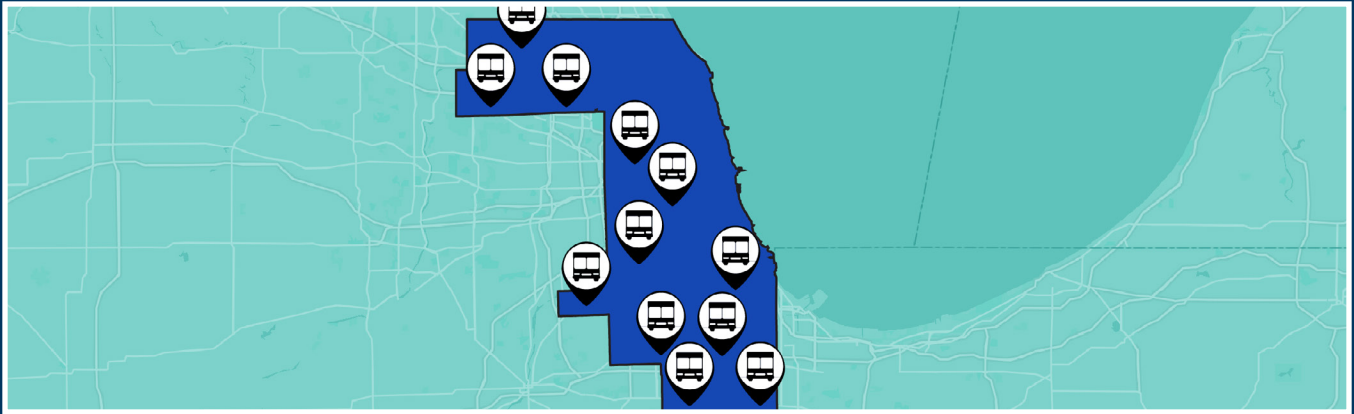
Equity at the forefront



Improve service outside the loop

More frequent service outside business hours

Transit Improvements



SERVICE TO NEW AREAS

Development patterns continue to evolve. Suburban jobs and lower-density suburban housing have been traditionally difficult to serve with transit due to dispersed development patterns. However, opportunities to improve access exist when considering population and employment density. These may be seen as opportunities for CTA, Pace and Metra to provide additional or new service, or to leverage existing investments with connecting service.

How Can Service to New Areas be Accomplished?

Transit demand is driven by a number of factors:

- Population density
- Employment density
- Socioeconomic characteristics
- Development patterns
- Major activity centers
- Travel flows

Some areas within Cook would benefit from an increase in fixed-route transit service based on current transit demand. In particular, fixed-route transit service can be added to the following underserved areas:

- South Cook County
- South Chicago



“When expanding transit to new areas it’s not just servicing transit-sparse areas, it’s connecting areas together so it’s not just focused on getting to and from the Loop. There needs to be a better structuring of transit with multiple hubs.”

– Survey Participant

Targeted efforts to increase transit access in areas with low mobility and high unemployment could greatly improve the economic integration of areas with both low levels of mobility as well as very high unemployment. However, offering new services can be costly and often cost-inefficient as unserved areas generally have lower population and job densities than places with existing service. New fixed-route or demand response service needs to be chosen very carefully given the costs for maintaining existing service and the present financial restraints of the transit system

What Are Some of the Actions Cook County Can Take?

- **Initiate new demand responsive services as pilots in transit reliant communities** including areas in south Cook County and south Chicago in coordination with CTA and Pace. This could be a partnership with rideshare companies or operated directly by an agency.
- **Fund studies of the feasibility of infill stations**, such as Metra’s Station Optimization Study process, to help communities determine whether new stations could enhance mobility.

Cook County has a patchwork of general public, elderly and disabled demand response services that supplement traditional federally required paratransit. These are often run by local governments, sometimes funded in partnership with social service agencies. Service hours, eligibility and service areas vary.

Leveraging existing demand response services to provide better job access in suburban areas is a regional opportunity. Both Lake and DuPage Counties have better coordinated their countywide demand response services to improve mobility and control costs. This can be an opportunity in Cook County as well; a coordination study would be a first step.

How does this incorporate what we heard?



Partner with agencies and municipalities

Coordination



Make equity part of the decision-making process

Equity at the forefront



Improve service outside the loop

Focus in areas lacking in transit service

Transit Improvements

WHAT ARE THE ACTIONS COOK COUNTY CAN TAKE?

Within each of these strategies we have identified a set of 35 projects, programs and policies the County can support through direct investment, studies and other actions to help accomplish the Plan's goals for transit. The actions for each strategy include the following:

- New programs
- Expanding programs
- New pilots
- New studies
- Providing expertise
- Supporting programs
- Funding projects
- Supporting policy changes

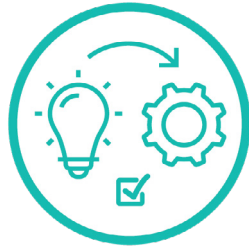
EVALUATING THE PROJECTS, PROGRAMS, STUDIES, PILOTS AND POLICIES

In order to illustrate examples for the types of projects, programs, studies, pilots and policies the County identified and evaluated, there are four project spotlights presented in this plan (remaining projects are compiled in the appendix):

- Fare Integration Study
- Planning, Design or Construction of Regional Transitways
- Rail Station Accessibility Improvements
- Midday Service Pilots

For each of the identified projects, the County reviewed the project need and description. The County then considered what role it could take on to support the initiative and evaluated the list against a set of key criteria:

KEY CONSIDERATIONS IN COUNTY SUPPORT



Ease of Implementation: How difficult or easy is it for the County to implement?



Public Support: Was there strong support from the public?



Relative Contribution: Can the County make a significant contribution compared to the relative cost?



Stakeholder Support: Is it supported by the stakeholders?



Equity Considerations: What impacts if any would it have on transit-reliant populations?

The project highlights on the following page show a summary of these key considerations.

FARE INTEGRATION STUDY

Fare Integration and other Fare Policy Initiatives

New Study: A Path to Fare Integration in the Chicago Area

Project Spotlight



Project Need

Currently a CTA train rider who transfers to a CTA or Pace bus to complete a trip does not have to pay an additional fare or pays only a nominal transfer fee. However, a Metra rider who wants to transfer to a CTA bus to complete a journey needs to pay the full additional fare. Additionally, a CTA rider transferring to Metra pays the full Metra fare. While Metra tickets can be purchased using the Ventra phone app, Metra does not accept the Ventra card. Fare integration—which allows riders to more easily and cheaply take trips that involve transfers between services offered by different agencies—would make regional trips easier and encourage more people to use transit. Removing the cost penalty of transferring between modes will make transit a more viable option for travelers. This will also make transfers more convenient.

In addition, reducing the cost of transit for the region’s low-income residents through programs like Fair Transit South Cook can make regional trips more affordable.

A study is needed to understand how best to move the region toward better fare integration. The planned overhaul of the Ventra system (“Ventra 3.0”) in the next 1 – 2 years is an opportunity for Metra and CTA/Pace to build in the technology to allow for new multiagency passes and discounts on transfers involving single use tickets. There are also other approaches, such as converting Metra to a system in which riders tap a fare card when they enter or leave a station. This would allow for seamless travel between CTA/Pace and Metra. A study would explore the costs and benefits of alternative approaches.

Opportunities for Cook County to Support

- **Support the transit agencies** in a study that can help the region assess the best approach to fare integration



Key Considerations



Public Support



Stakeholder Support



Equity Considerations

Public Support: Residents in suburban Cook are particularly supportive of improving fare integration in the County.

Stakeholder Support: This new fare integration study is important to stakeholders.

Equity Considerations: While Metra customers tend to be wealthier and non-minority, the lines and stations where fare integration would be most helpful to riders are in lower-income and minority areas, giving a significant potential benefit.

PLANNING, DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF REGIONAL TRANSITWAYS

Better Bus Service

Supporting Programs: CTA and the City of Chicago's Better Streets for Buses and Pace Pulse Network implementation

Project Spotlight



Project Need

Transit service is most attractive when it is faster than or similar to driving speed. The City of Chicago and CTA have been collaborating on the Better Streets for Buses Plan. The purpose of this plan is to identify bus corridors within the CTA service area with the greatest need for improvement and to select which corridors should be prioritized for further study of bus rapid transit (BRT) investments as well as more immediate improvements to bus service.

Outside of Chicago, there are seven corridors in the near-term priority Pulse Network that Pace identified for development within the next 10 years. Cook County has jurisdictional authority of a section of the proposed 95th Street Pulse line on Roberts Road, 103rd Street and 107th Street and can directly aid in moving the implementation forward on those streets.

Opportunities for Cook County to Support

- Consider **providing funding and/or partnership to the implementation** of CTA's Better Streets for Buses and Pace's Pulse Program for multiple or individual corridors

Implementing Speed and Reliability Improvements May Require Updated Level of Service Definitions

Level of service (LOS) is a classification system used to describe the quality of the mobility for cars provided by a transportation system. It provides a measurement of the number of vehicles that a roadway or intersection can accommodate over a given period of time.

When looking at speed and reliability improvements, LOS requirements present a barrier to reallocating road space and can make potential transit enhancements more challenging to implement.

Several cities and national organizations have started supplementing vehicle based LOS calculations with multi-modal LOS calculations. These account for the number of people traveling through a corridor rather than the number of vehicles, and thus are able to account for the fact that buses move people through intersections more efficiently than in individual cars.

Legislative action may be required to update LOS standards to reflect all street users, not just cars.

Key Considerations



Public Support



Stakeholder Support



Equity Considerations

Public Support: Residents in Chicago are particularly supportive of improving bus speeds in the County.

Stakeholder Support: These programs are very important to stakeholders and Cook County can support CTA and Pace by helping them to leverage a federal match.

Equity Considerations: Bus riders are more likely to be minority, low-income and from a zero-vehicle household than general population-- improving bus speed and reliability directly benefits under-resourced communities.

RAIL STATION ACCESSIBILITY IMPROVEMENTS

Accessibility Improvements

Supporting Programs: CTA's All Station and Accessibility Program (ASAP) and Metra Station Accessibility Plan (MSAP)

Project Spotlight



Project Need

Chicagoland has one of the oldest and most extensive rail systems in the country, connecting people to jobs, goods and services across the region. Not all of the 242 Metra stations and 142 CTA stations are accessible. CTA's ASAP and the future Metra MSAP focus on making all of the remaining non-accessible rail stations fully accessible. Updating these stations will require unique approaches that consider the adjacent buildings, amount of space available at the property, consideration of the impacts of construction and more. Improvements for accessibility include rehabilitating and replacing elevators and improving wayfinding and signage. Funding is the biggest barrier these plans face. The 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides additional federal dollars to improve rail station accessibility.

Opportunities for Cook County to Support

- Provide funding to advance planning and commit funds as local match to help CTA and Metra leverage federal funds for later phases



Key Considerations



Stakeholder Support



Equity Considerations

Stakeholder Support: Upgrading accessibility at rail stations is a widely supported priority for transit riders in the region.

Equity Considerations: ADA upgrades at rail stations make transit service more accessible to residents with disabilities.

MIDDAY SERVICE PILOTS

More Frequent Service for Longer Hours

New Pilot: Partner with CTA, Metra and Pace to select corridors with demand for non-peak frequency for a pilot to improve midday service frequency.

Project Spotlight



Project Need

Census travel to work data show that there are much higher concentrations of workers who travel outside of the traditional rush hour in the west, southwest and south sides of Chicago and in south Cook County. Because peak period transit service is meant to accommodate an approximately eight-hour workday, it may not work as well for part-time workers. Women are much more likely to work part time than men and may be more negatively impacted by infrequent midday service. Focusing on improving the frequency of the routes between these areas can help improve transit options for transit-reliant commuters who are more likely to travel during off-peak periods.

A travel demand analysis identified multiple areas where bus ridership is low, but travel demand is high. The majority of the bus routes in these areas are infrequent during midday periods. Lack of all-day, frequent transit service severely limits the ability to rely on transit as a dependable and convenient means of traveling for all trip purposes.

Opportunities for Cook County Support

- **Provide further assessment** of the identified transit routes that could benefit most from an increase in midday frequency
- **Partner with CTA, Pace and Metra** to identify locations and implement a new pilot to test midday service improvements
- **Advertise the improvements** to the communities and work with the local municipalities
- **Assess the performance of the pilot** over time to determine next steps



Key Considerations



Ease of Implementation



Public Support



Relative Contribution



Stakeholder Support



Equity Considerations

Ease of Implementation: Funding a pilot in partnership with the other agencies is relatively easy for the County to support.

Public Support: In feedback sessions and surveys, Cook County residents said that providing more frequent service for longer hours was the highest priority for them.

Relative Contribution: Cook County is interested in funding new pilots to trial solutions to improve mobility options in the region.

Stakeholder Support: Piloting a new service is important to stakeholders in order to test ideas for mobility improvements.

Equity Considerations: Transit-reliant communities are more likely to travel on transit all day and not just during peak periods.

IMPORTANCE OF PARTNERSHIPS

Cook County does not provide transit services. Implementing the plans, policies and programs identified in the Cook Transit Plan will require coordination with CMAP, RTA, CTA, Metra and Pace, as well as local governmental agencies such as CDOT and other municipalities. Cook County anticipates supporting implementation of all seven investment strategies, with CTA, Metra and Pace serving as the leads.

The figure on this page outlines the partnership opportunities within each investment strategy. Cook County is committed to helping the region, municipalities and transit agencies improve transit service and infrastructure.



HOW DO WE GET THINGS DONE?

Each year, DoTH develops a Multi-Year Transportation Improvement Program (MYP) to detail how it will invest in the region's transportation network over the next five years. Improvements are listed by project, phase and estimated cost. MYP development is driven by the policy priorities laid out in the LRTP, in addition to Cook County's Policy Roadmap, the guiding document for all Offices Under the President. The MYP also lays the foundation for collaborative efforts with other agencies responsible for providing transportation services in the region, including the transit agency service boards.

DoTH's revenue that funds the implementation of the MYP is comprised of a mix of state motor fuel tax (MFT), federal and state grants and local agency reimbursements. Additionally, the 2019 Rebuild Illinois capital bill provided DoTH with two new sources of revenue: the Transportation Renewal Fund (TRF) and Rebuild Illinois Bond Funds, but MFT remains the primary funding source for DoTH's operations and projects. The department will continue to use these resources to support transit infrastructure investments throughout the County.

Federal funding programs require local transit agencies to provide at least a 20% funding match. Recent, federal investments in infrastructure will largely be distributed to state and local governments through grants, meaning the County has an opportunity to collaborate with the region's transit agencies and provide local match support for priority projects. To apply for those federal funding opportunities, a community often needs to have completed early phase planning and feasibility studies or engineering. Frequently, early project phases like feasibility studies and preliminary engineering are the most difficult for low-to-moderate income municipalities to fund, increasing existing disparities in transit service and innovation.

Over the past seven years, Cook County has developed a competitive grants program – Invest in Cook – that has distributed over \$45 million to improve regional mobility. In 2022, nearly \$9 million in Invest in Cook grants were distributed across 39 municipalities and three townships. The 2022 grants have funded two transit, 16 pedestrian, 11 bicycle, one freight and 13 road projects.

Invest in Cook is anticipated to remain a key mechanism to implement the priorities identified in the Transit Plan. Prospective applicants should ensure that their grant proposals are consistent with the goals in Connecting Cook County as well as in the Cook County Transit Plan.

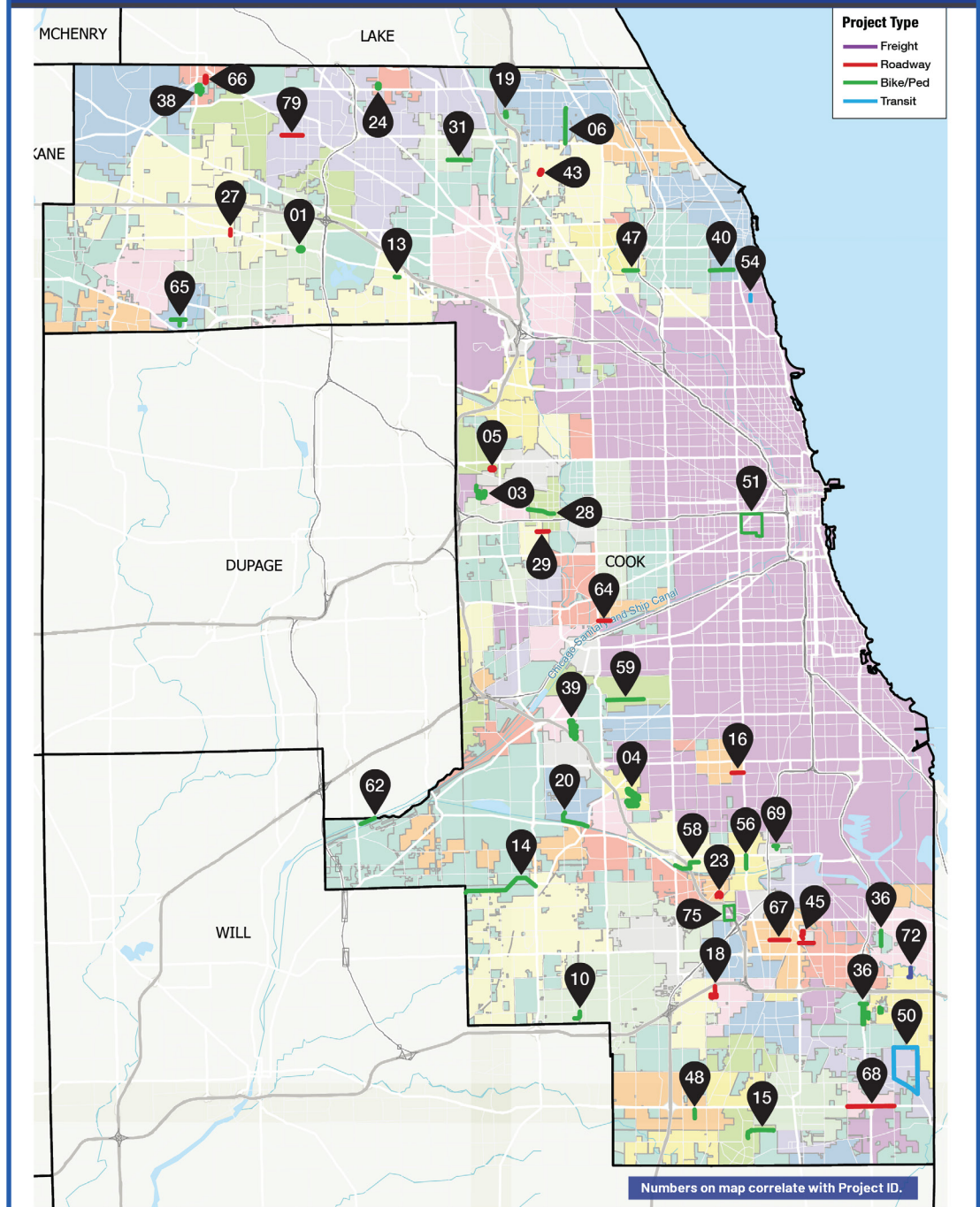
There are also opportunities to fund transit improvements as part of the County’s regular multimodal investment program. For example, the County may provide a match for federal grant applications as opportunities arise, as it has done with a \$21 million match commitment for improving Chicago Union Station and a \$5 million commitment to reconstruct the Metra 95th Street/Chicago State University station. The Fair Transit South Cook pilot invested more than \$20 million in its first two years. The County will use the Transit Plan to help guide its future investments in transit.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

The County, transit providers and municipalities can consider applying for grant programs listed on the following pages, individually or in partnership, to assist in funding the Cook County Transit Plan strategies. The grants include opportunities for research and technological innovation, planning, engineering feasibility studies and construction.

Some of the grants would be applicable to network-wide projects, corridor studies, transit line and service improvements. Others would be applicable to specific spot improvements, such as accessibility at bus stops. The recommended funding sources below primarily include safety, pedestrian and bike facilities (for first/last mile connections) and transit-related grant programs.

Invest in Cook 2022



**CONNECTING
COOK COUNTY**

SOURCE: [HTTPS://WWW.COOKCOUNTYIL.GOV/INVESTINCOOK](https://www.cookcountyil.gov/investincook)

Funding Program and Awarding Agency	Categories	Potential Partnering Applicants	Potential Relevant Cook County Transit Plan Strategies
Access to Transit (RTA)	Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities	Municipalities	Better Access to Transit
Advanced Transportation Technologies & Innovative Mobility Deployment, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)	Roads, Bridges and Major Projects, Advanced Transportation Technologies, Transit Station and Transit Line	Municipalities, Transit Agencies, County	Better Bus Service
All Stations Accessibility Program (ASAP), Federal Transit Administration (FTA)	ADA, Public Transit	Municipalities, Transit Agencies, County	Better Bus Stops, Better Access to Transit and Accessibility Improvements
Areas of Persistent Poverty Program, FTA	Bus Stops/Stations, Public Transit	Municipalities, Transit Agencies	Potentially all
Bus and Bus Facilities Competitive Grants, FTA	Bus Stops/Stations, Public Transit	Transit Agencies	Better Bus Stops, Better Access to Transit and Accessibility Improvements
Bus and Bus Facilities Formula Grants, FTA	Bus Stops/Stations, Public Transit	Municipalities, Transit Agencies, County	Better Bus Stops, Better Access to Transit and Accessibility Improvements
Capital Investment Grants, FTA	BRT, Transit Stations, Public Transit	Municipalities, Transit Agencies, County	Better Bus Service and Service to New Areas
Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality Improvement Program, CMAP	Roads, Bridges and Major Projects, Air Quality, Transit Station and Transit Line	Municipalities	Better Access to Transit
Congestion Relief Program, FHWA	Roads, Bridges and Major Projects, Multimodal Solutions, Transit Station and Transit Line	Municipalities	Better Access to Transit
Enhancing Mobility Innovation	Innovative Mobility, Software Solutions for Public Transit	Municipalities, Transit Agencies, Private Companies and Non-Profit Organizations, Institutions of Higher Learning	Fare Integration
Highway Safety Improvement Program, IDOT	Safety, pedestrian improvements	Municipalities	Better Access to Transit
Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program IDOT	Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities	Municipalities, Transit Agencies, Schools, Non-Profit Organizations	Better Access to Transit
Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity, US Department of Transportation Office of the Secretary (USDOT OS)	Roads, Bridges and Major Projects, High Impact Infrastructure Projects, Transit Station and Transit Line	Municipalities, Transit Agencies, County	Several categories

Funding Program and Awarding Agency	Categories	Potential Partnering Applicants	Potential Relevant Cook County Transit Plan Strategies
Local Federal Rail Safety Program (Section 130), IDOT/Illinois Commerce Commission	Safety, Grade Crossing, Safety, Transit Line and Streetscape	Municipality	Better Access to Transit
Metropolitan Transportation Planning Program, FTA	Planning Funds, Public Transit	State/CMAP	Potentially all
Pilot Program for Enhanced Mobility, FTA	Accessibility, Public Transit	Municipalities, Transit Agencies, County	Potentially all
Pilot Program for Transit Oriented Development, FTA	TOD Infrastructure, Public Transit	Municipalities and County	Better Access to Transit
Public Transportation Innovation, FTA	Innovation, Public Transit	Municipalities and Transit Agencies	Potentially all
Railroad Crossing Elimination Grants, Federal Railroad Administration	Safety, Grade Crossing, Efficiency, Transit Line and Streetscape	Municipalities, Metra and County	Better Access to Transit
Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program, FHWA	Roads, Bridges and Major Projects, Highway Barriers, Transit Line and Streetscape	Municipalities, Transit Agencies, County	Better Access to Transit
Research, Development, Demonstration and Deployment Projects, FTA	Innovation, Public Transit	Municipalities, Transit Agencies, County	Potentially all
Safe Streets and Roads for All, USDOT OS	Safety, Vision Zero, Transit Station and Streetscape	Municipalities, Transit Agencies, County	Better Access to Transit
Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation (SMART) Grants, USDOT OS	Innovation Technology, Public Transit	Municipalities, Transit Agencies, County	Fare Integration and Better Bus Service
Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STP) - Local, CMAP Councils of Mayors	Roads, Bridges and Major Projects, Infrastructure Projects, Transit Station Accessibility, Transit Stations, Transit Line and Streetscape	Municipalities	Better Access to Transit and Accessibility Improvements
Surface Transportation Program (STP) - Shared Fund, CMAP	High impact Infrastructure, Transit Station Accessibility	Municipalities	Better Bus Service and Better Access to Transit

Funding Opportunities are current as of December 2022, and subject to change as new opportunities and programs may become available in the future. Each of these have unique application requirements and deadlines to consider as well.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE COUNTY?

The Cook County Transit Plan is the roadmap for the County's increased investment in transit. Cook County's role is to be a funding partner to upgrade service, facilities and programs.

Implementation priorities include:

- **Fund small to medium-sized projects.** Smaller projects, consistent with Cook County's goals, can improve accessibility, mobility and ridership. Cook County could fund 100% of smaller projects, especially if it avoids using federal funding, which can mean additional administrative burdens. Projects may be delivered faster to the region in select cases where Cook County investment could be used instead of federal dollars.
- **For larger projects, provide local match to leverage federal and state dollars.** Thus far, projects receiving \$1 in Invest in Cook investment have leveraged \$3 of additional federal, state and local dollars.
- **Fund startup of new programs.** Cook County is currently funding investments that are designed to test potential equity, job access and ridership improvements with fare and service pilots. By funding startup costs, agencies have less up-front risk in trying different improvement strategies.
- **Helping the region compete for additional funding.** As local agencies compete nationally for competitive funding grants, Cook County can help advocate for and support local agencies investment priorities.
- **Provide support for policy implementation.** Implementing the recommendations in this plan and, more broadly, securing the new funding and governance reform needed to stabilize the transit system, will require changes in transit agency policies and enabling legislation. Cook County will be an engaged participant in those efforts.

The Cook County Transit Plan's recommendations are designed to meet the following goals:

- Increase overall transit ridership
- Increase seamlessness of transit services
- Focus on the needs of transit reliant communities

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

The development of the Cook County Transit Plan was an extensive two-year process. Public and stakeholder feedback was gathered at multiple stages of the plan and more than one hundred potential transit investments were organized into seven different potential investment strategies. These investment strategies were then refined and prioritized based on feedback from a second round of outreach, which informed the development of final recommendations, many of which were illustrated in the Transit Action Plan. The following chapter summarizes the public involvement process and findings that informed this plan.

WHAT WERE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INPUT?

Over the course of the two-year planning process, the project team engaged industry professionals and transit agencies through advisory committees, community stakeholders and partners for small group conversations and feedback on proposed solutions. The project team also conducted public outreach through a survey, in-person engagement and website.

Echoing plan goals, the engagement process was designed to be equitable, meaningful and actionable.

The process engaged over 75% of Cook County's zip codes across six touchpoints:

1. Advisory Stakeholder Meetings (Steering Committee, Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), Transportation Equity Network (TEN))
2. Listening Sessions
3. Focus Groups
4. Feedback Sessions
5. Public Survey
6. In-Person Engagement

The listening sessions were designed to understand transit use patterns, transit needs and lived experiences of a representative group of Cook County residents.

Focus groups convened industry experts to understand land use, site selection and employee programs that incentivize transit.

Insights gathered during listening sessions and focus groups informed a potential list of program, policy and project recommendations that became a set of seven draft strategies presented for feedback during a second round of engagement.

Feedback sessions, public survey and in-person engagement worked to prioritize seven different strategies and understand which will have the greatest positive impact on residents' quality of life and their experiences on transit.

In partnership with the project team, 35 community-based organizations helped recruit participants for engagement sessions and promote the public survey. Relational recruiting ensured engagement reached residents whose voices are often left out of the conversation. During engagement, the project team heard from individuals with disabilities, residents experiencing homelessness, Spanish-speaking residents, immigrant populations, students, LGBTQ+ residents and caregivers with children.

To compensate organizations and individuals for their time, stipends were provided. Providing stipends was a new approach for the County and further emphasizes commitment to equity in the planning process.

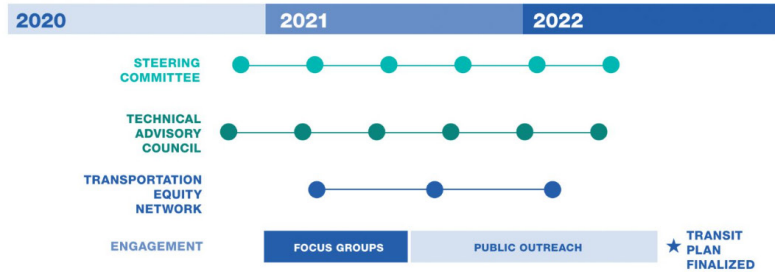
Engagement efforts focused on those who are often left out of the conversation, including individuals with disabilities, residents experiencing homelessness, Spanish-speaking residents, immigrant populations, students, LGBTQ+ residents and caregivers with children.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is a critical element of the process as the County seeks to understand the lived experiences of those who rely on transit. The first step is a series of *listening sessions* aimed at understanding transit use, needs and lived experiences of a representative group of Cook County residents. In addition, there will be a series of *technical focus groups* aimed at understanding topics such as planning and land use, project procurement and prioritization, as well as large employer site-selection. Both the listening sessions and focus groups will inform a potential list of project recommendations.

Public surveys via our website will be released throughout the planning process at key moments for feedback on draft recommendations. Larger public meetings will also be scheduled as recommendations are developed.

TRANSIT PLAN ENGAGEMENT TIMELINE

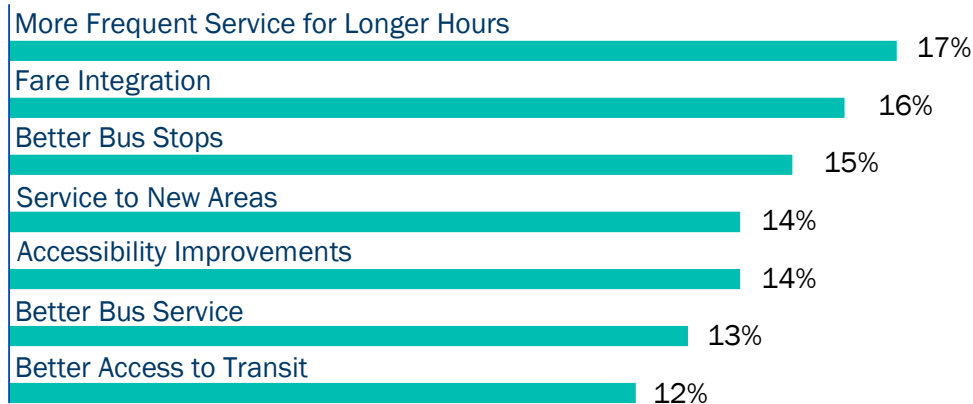


Engagement timeline is tentative and is subject to change

Investment Strategy Prioritization Survey

An on-line survey was developed to understand the support for potential transit investment strategies. There were 3,766 total respondents. An analysis of survey data shows that results were consistent despite geography or demographics. Respondents' top priorities related to more frequent service, later evening service, better bus service and service to new areas. Fare integration was most important to suburban residents

HOW SHOULD COOK COUNTY PRIORITIZE INVESTMENT IN TRANSIT?



Listening Sessions Participants



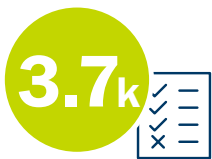
Feedback Session Participants



Focus Groups Participants



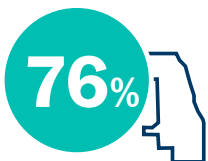
In-Person Feedback Received



Public Survey Respondents



Stakeholder Advisory Meetings



of Cook ZIP Codes



Paid Out in Stipends

Meaningful Engagement Partnerships

To ensure transparency and equity in the planning process, TEN was included as a key advisory stakeholder. TEN is a coalition of community groups, equitable transportation advocates, civic organizations and other stakeholders throughout Cook County working to embed racial equity and mobility justice into transportation via community-driven decisions and investments.

At six formal touchpoints, TEN provided feedback on the engagement process, shared outreach via their network and reviewed draft plan deliverables and recommendations to ensure equity goals of the plan were met. TEN received a stipend as compensation for their time and expertise.

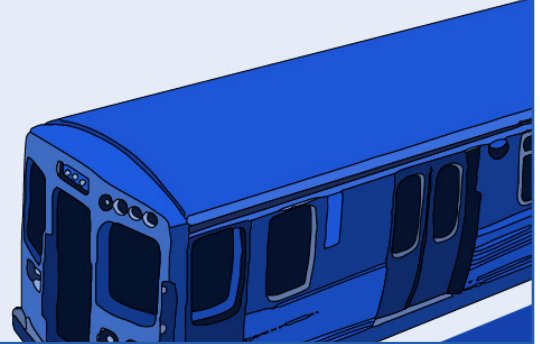
**Help shape Cook County's
first ever transit plan!**

Learn more and participate at:
cookcountytransitplan.com/survey



**COOK COUNTY
TRANSIT PLAN**

PARTICIPATE.



**Be a part of Cook County's
first ever transit plan!**

**MAKE YOUR
TRANSIT BETTER!**



**COOK COUNTY
TRANSIT PLAN**

ساعد في تشكيل
خطة وسائل النقل الأولى
من نوعها في مقاطعة كوك!
نرغب في معرفة آرائك!

تعرف على المزيد وشارك عبر الرابط: countytransitplan.com/survey

Survey materials and promotional graphics were translated into 5 languages including: English, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic and Polish.

The following organizations were represented in the advisory stakeholder groups:

Access Living	Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Active Transportation Alliance	Illinois Tollway Authority
City of Chicago Department of Transportation	Metra
Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership	Metropolitan Planning Council
Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce	Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District
City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development	Northwest Municipal Conference
Civic Consulting Alliance	Pace
Center for Neighborhood Technology	South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning	Regional Transportation Authority
Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways	Shared Use Mobility Center
Cook County Bureau of Economic Development	Social Service Agencies
Cook County Land Bank Authority	Southwest Conference of Mayors
Chicago Transit Authority	Transportation Equity Network
Elevated Chicago	University of Illinois Chicago
Illinois Department of Transportation	Urban Transportation Center
	West Central Municipal Conference

WHAT DID WE HEAR?

Engagement efforts highlighted four consistent themes. Overall, residents, businesses and communities across Cook County are excited about transit investments from the County. Residents and communities throughout Cook County seek:

- **Transit improvements** in areas lacking service, with service prioritized outside the Chicago Loop and for longer hours outside of traditional business hours
- **Intermodal connections** and consistent station infrastructure and amenities, particularly in south and west Cook
- **Coordination**, technical assistance and implementation funding and especially for smaller municipalities
- **Equity at the forefront** of improvements with investments targeted in under-resourced communities

Each theme above is reflected in the seven different investment strategies in the final plan recommendations.



Transit improvements



Intermodal connections



Coordination



Equity at the forefront

Cook County is well positioned for ongoing engagement opportunities including:

1. Continued involvement of a technical advisory stakeholder group to provide feedback during the implementation phase
2. Continued public engagement, especially in under-resourced municipalities in suburban Cook
3. Establishing a Countywide process to formalize stipends in exchange for feedback during public engagement
4. Provide continued coalition building and support for transit agencies and smaller municipalities across the county

HOW DID IT INFORM THE PLAN?

The results of all public engagement directly supported plan recommendations and strategies. The plan engaged with residents and community-based organizations early in the process to hear about their lived experiences on transit. Engagement session insights informed strategies and plan recommendations. The engagement added value to the planning process and affirmed strategies and recommendations were in line with community needs. The strategies and recommendations were further vetted through advisory stakeholders, DoTH staff and leadership.

