

Northeastern Illinois Priority Investments

Leveraging federal funding opportunities
for transformative infrastructure



Chicago Metropolitan
Agency for Planning

February 2024



MESSAGE FROM THE CHICAGO METROPOLITAN AGENCY FOR PLANNING

Investing in northeastern Illinois infrastructure builds regional and national connections. As the third largest U.S. metropolitan area, our region is strategically located at the center of the country and the global economy. We connect people and goods through our expansive rail network, major highways, O’Hare and Midway International airports, a world-class port on Lake Michigan, and more.

Our region is connected and united. For the second year in a row, transportation partners worked together to reach consensus around priority projects that will strengthen northeastern Illinois’ transportation system for generations to come. These transformational projects have the potential to reverberate beyond the region to the rest of the country to foster wide-reaching economic strength, climate resiliency, multimodal accessibility, and safety for all users.

This booklet represents the highest-priority projects across the region for 2024. It reflects collaboration between the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT), the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Metra, Pace, the region’s seven counties, and the CREATE Program partners.

Our region has a vision, reflected in ON TO 2050, the comprehensive plan for northeastern Illinois. As a legacy transportation system, implementers are working to maintain historic infrastructure while meeting current challenges with innovative and sustainable solutions. The projects described below reflect efforts to improve the lives of those who live, work, travel, and conduct business in northeastern Illinois.

With the Infrastructure and Investment Jobs Act’s (IIJA) support, our region is empowered to reimagine our transportation system to be more equitable, sustainable, resilient, accessible, and safe for our nearly 8.6 million residents and the countless others who depend on northeastern Illinois to thrive.

Sincerely,

Erin Aleman
Executive Director
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

PRIORITY PROJECTS

Through decades of partnership and collaboration, the region has identified transportation projects with impactful, multimodal outcomes that will achieve an array of goals, such as equity, transit access, economic prosperity, and climate resilience. IIJA funding for these projects has the potential to create reverberating effects that improve conditions for communities both locally and nationally. Priority projects are organized based on mode and improvement type.

Transforming the region's transportation system

Northeastern Illinois is addressing transportation challenges head on with the support of IJJA. These priority projects will have transformative effects, making our transportation hub more resilient, inclusive, and accessible.



I-290 Blue Line Modernization

The I-290 Blue Line Modernization is a first-of-its kind multimodal corridor priority project for the region given its many economic, safety, resilience, and mobility benefits. IDOT and CTA have formed a partnership to invest in comprehensive and coordinated improvements to the Interstate-290 multimodal corridor that includes both the I-290 Eisenhower Expressway and the CTA Forest Park Blue Line.

This investment will reduce congestion, improve traffic flow and transit speeds, make stations fully accessible, and save time for travelers. Corridor improvements will help advance economic growth, job access, and inclusion in traditionally economically disconnected areas. It will also improve climate resilience by mitigating hazards and decreasing congestion-related emissions.

To achieve this transformative change, project partners are focused on implementing the following components:

- **Accessibility, mobility and safety improvements:** IDOT and CTA will continue to improve safety and mobility by bringing the I-290 multimodal corridor to a state of good repair. CTA will increase access to transit along the corridor by modernizing stations through ADA improvements, construction of a new substation building, and other customer experience improvements. Track replacement will also address slow zones to improve transit speeds and reliability.

- **Maywood flood relief project:** IDOT is leading efforts to construct a relief sewer that will mitigate flooding impacts in the communities surrounding I-290 as well as flood-related closures on I-290. This project is an advance contract component of IDOT's more comprehensive I-290 Blue Line Modernization planned improvements and is in partnership with the Village of Maywood, Cook County, and the Greater Chicago Metropolitan Water Reclamation District.

I-290 Blue Line Modernization impacts

- 🕒 **\$2.7 billion** in travel time savings
- 📈 **\$68 million** increase in economic activity
- 🚗 **6% reduction** in vehicle crashes
- 🚶 **90% reduction** of slow zones on CTA's Blue Line

Project costs

- 💰 At a projected cost of more than **\$5.6 billion**, this is one of the most comprehensive multimodal improvements in the country. Partners in this project include IDOT, CTA, and supported by CMAP and the [I-290 Blue Line Coalition](#).

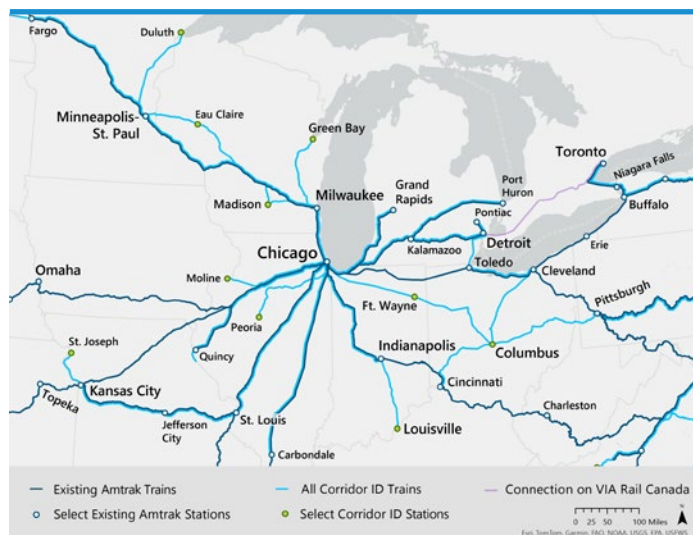


Chicago Hub Improvement Program

[Amtrak's Chicago Hub Improvement Program \(CHIP\)](#) will transform regional and intercity passenger rail service, connect job centers, reduce carbon emissions, and more:

- Expand service in the Midwest to boost local economies
- Deliver faster and more reliable service
- Improve rider accessibility and experiences on both Amtrak and Metra
- Modernize Chicago's nearly century-old Union Station to provide improved accessibility to passenger platforms
- Improve safety and yield environmental benefits from fewer vehicles on the roads
- Promote equity, social justice, and environmental justice

The first phase includes a series of projects to upgrade Chicago's Union Station. Additional improvements will include new connections and trackage to better separate passenger and freight trains, as well as the repair or replacement of century-old bridges.



Chicago Union Station is a hub for current routes and additional services now being studied under the Federal Railroad Administration's "Corridor ID" program.



The Chicago Hub Improvement Program is Amtrak's top National Network priority

Union Station impacts



3rd busiest passenger railroad station in nation



3.3+ million Amtrak riders annually



30+ million Metra riders annually



16 Amtrak intercity rail lines



6 Metra commuter rail lines



409 train movements each day

Recent discretionary grant awards



This program received more than **\$101 million** in December 2023 from USDOT's Federal-State Partnership and Corridor Identification and Development programs.

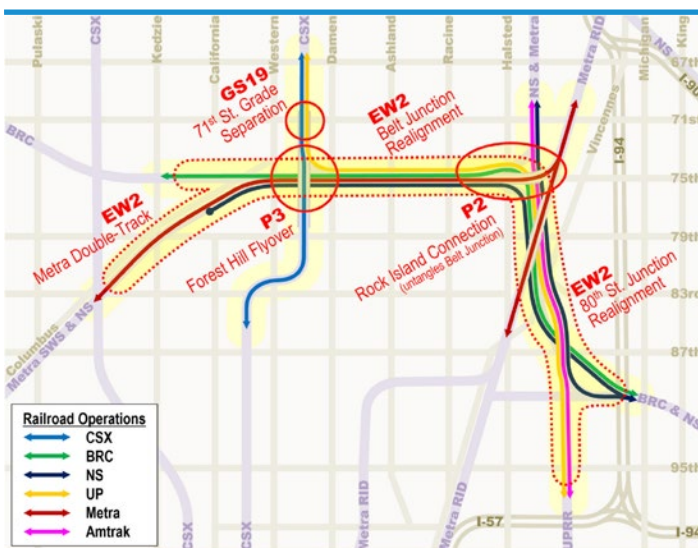


75th Street Corridor Improvement Project

The [75th Street Corridor Improvement Project](#), the largest project in the [Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency \(CREATE\) Program](#), will deliver widespread economic and environmental benefits to:

- Increase passenger and freight rail efficiencies, improve service performance, and improve safety and traffic delays
- Advance national goals to support the country's supply chain, enhance rail service, and improve conditions for Justice40 communities
- Eliminate the [most congested rail chokepoint in the Chicago terminal](#) — the Belt Junction — where 30 Metra and 90 freight trains cross paths each day

Priority next phases include the Belt Junction and 80th Street Junction Replacements, including the replacement and upgrade of 86 viaducts at 14 locations.



The 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project's footprint

CREATE Program impacts



Modernize rail network that sees **500 freight trains** and **800 passenger and commuter trains** pass through every day

- The US rail network depends on northeastern Illinois: 1 out of every 4 US freight trains pass through Chicago



CREATE will generate **\$31.5 billion** in economic benefits

CREATE Project costs



\$5.8 billion for 70 projects. As of January 2024, 33 projects have been completed.

75th Street Corridor Improvement partners



Amtrak, Metra, IDOT, Cook County, the City of Chicago, and Class I railroads are project partners. All of the 6 Class I railroads that operate in North America serve Chicago and are partners in the CREATE Program.



The linchpin to Amtrak's CHIP and the 75th Street Corridor Improvement project is the Rock Island Intercity Improvement project, with improvements for multiple Amtrak and Metra routes (more details on page 10).

Strengthening transit for an inclusive and resilient region

The region's transit system plays a central role in economic prosperity, climate resilience, and mobility. In 2022, the regional transit system provided more than 284 million passenger trips. As the region continues to recover from COVID-19, more people are returning to transit to get to jobs, healthcare, education, social events, and more. To ensure that regional transit options are accessible and reliable for generations to come, transportation partners have prioritized projects that expand existing infrastructure and facilitate the transition to zero emission fleets.



Red Line Extension

CTA's [Red Line Extension \(RLE\)](#) will extend the line 5.6 miles from the existing terminal at 95th/Dan Ryan to 130th Street and add 4 new fully accessible stations. RLE will connect more than 100,000 residents to 25,000 additional jobs within a 45-minute commute. Over the life of the project, RLE is estimated to deliver more than 2,500 jobs annually, nearly \$2 billion in pay to workers on the project, and more than \$5 billion in total business output to Cook County. Additional benefits to the region will include improved air quality, more equitable access to transit, and increased multimodal connections.



Expansion of free and reduced fares

RTA coordinates hundreds of thousands of reduced fare and ride free programs for qualified riders in the region. The individuals using these programs depend on transit access, so expanding them can help make the region's transit more equitable. The agency will support and expand these programs across CTA, Metra, and Pace to include more riders with low incomes, seniors, and people with disabilities.



Southwest Division Garage Electrification

The expansion and modernization of Pace's Southwest Division will support the agency's strategic goals and the region's commitment to a greener future. These initiatives include future-proofing the facility to accommodate a phased transition to an all-electric fleet as well as the Pulse 95th Street Line implementation and express bus services along I-294.

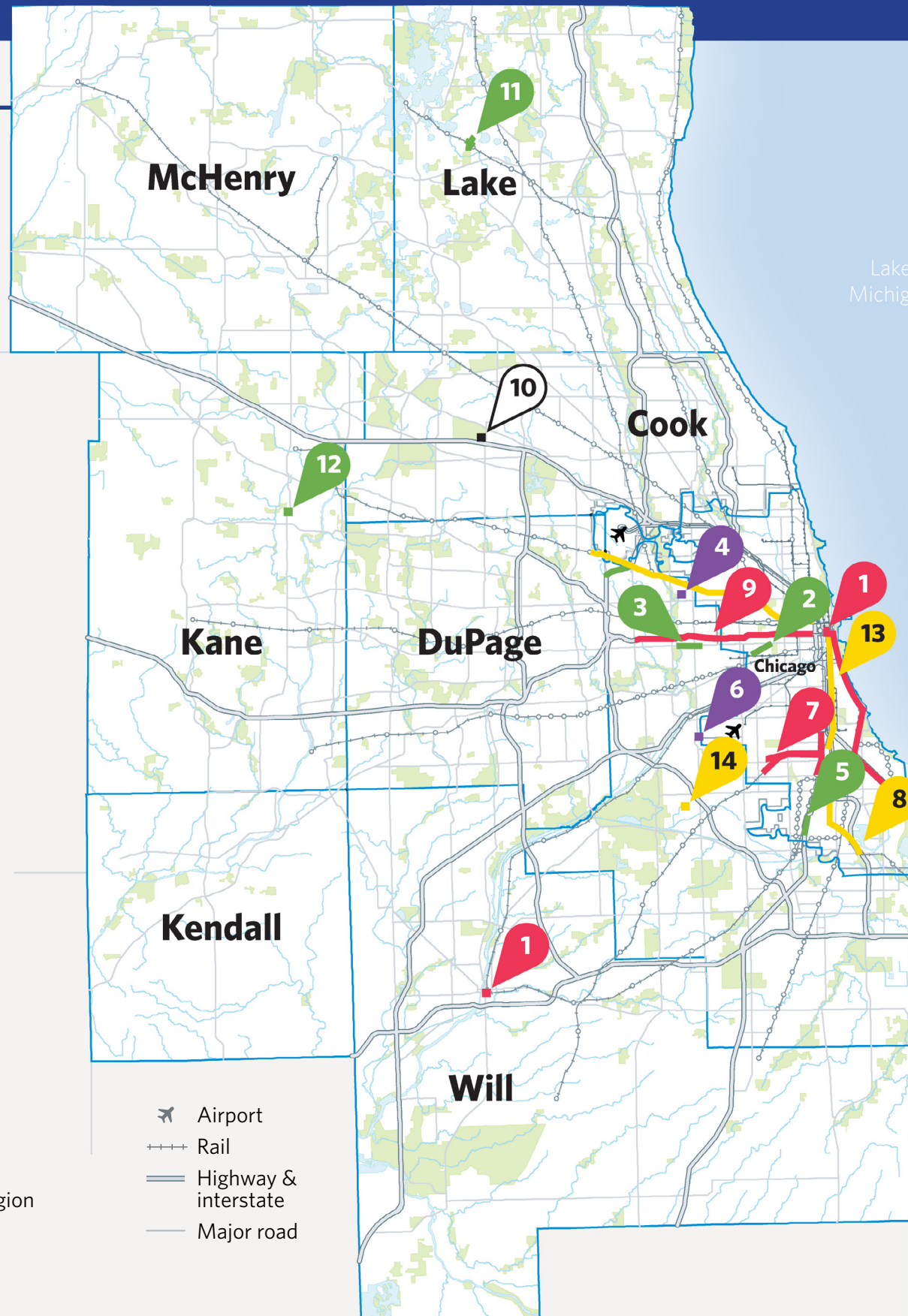
The Southwest Division will ultimately be able to house 65, 40-foot battery electric buses under roof-mounted charging technology. Other improvements include expanding bus storage, parts storage, and repair areas; removing and replacing lifts; new loading docks; electrical upgrades; installing charging infrastructure; and general facility improvements.

NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS PRIORITY INVESTMENTS

Priority programs

-  **Accessibility**
-  **Bridges and grade separations**
-  **Decarbonizing transportation**
-  **Bus priority**
-  **Safe Travel for All Roadmap**
-  **Greenways and trails**

NOTE: Priority programs are implemented throughout the region and are not reflected as individual points on the map.



Priority projects

- 1 Chicago Hub Improvement Program**
Amtrak, IDOT, Michigan DOT, CDOT, Metra, Cook County
 - 2 Ogden Avenue Corridor Improvements Project**
CDOT
 - 3 West Side Community Connectivity**
CDOT
 - 4 Grand Gateway Grade Separation**
Cook County, IDOT, Metra, Illinois Commerce Commission
 - 5 Overcoming Expressways**
Cook County
 - 6 65th Street and Harlem Avenue Grade Separation**
CREATE, IDOT, CDOT, Cook County
 - 7 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project**
CREATE, IDOT, CDOT, Cook County, Metra
 - 8 Red Line Extension**
CTA
 - 9 I-290 Blue Line Modernization**
IDOT, CTA, CDOT
 - 10 Regionwide Arterial Traffic Management Center**
IDOT
 - 11 Cedar Lake Road Realignment**
Lake County
 - 12 Randall Road at Hopps Road Intersection Improvements and Grade Separation**
Kane County
 - 13 Rock Island Intercity Improvements**
Metra, Amtrak
 - 14 Pace SW Division Garage Electrification**
Pace
 - 15 Expansion of free and reduced fares**
RTA
- Transformative projects ● Priority grade crossings
● Corridor improvements ○ Regionwide
● Transit / passenger rail Note: Alphabetical by sponsor, not ranked by priority

Investing in the region's passenger and freight rail

The region's rail system is one of northeastern Illinois' most critical assets that improves air quality, allows travelers to avoid congested highways, and connects people to jobs, education, entertainment, and other amenities. Regional IJA opportunities are targeted at projects that enhance operational capabilities and help to serve new ridership patterns. Priority projects include bridges, signal systems, tracks, interlockings, and other vital improvements.



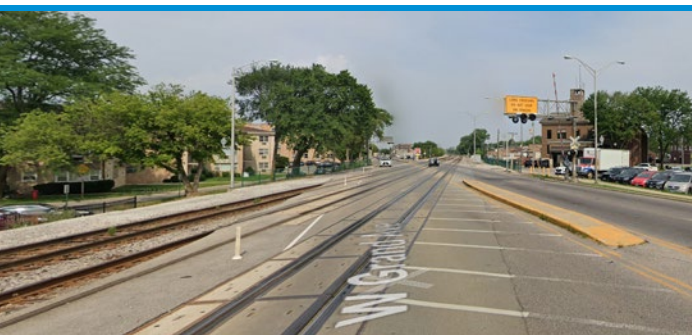
Rock Island Intercity Improvement

The Rock Island Intercity Improvement (RI3) project includes construction of an additional main line on Metra's Rock Island Line, expansion and improvements to the 47th Street Yard, platform improvements at Joliet, and signal modernization with grade crossing and interlocking improvements. The project will support the re-routing of Amtrak service onto the Rock Island Line — improving on-time performance, reliability, and capacity for intercity rail operations. In coordination with CREATE's 75th Corridor Improvement Project rail-rail flyover connection and Amtrak's CHIP, RI3 will reduce congestion and freight conflicts.



65th and Harlem Avenue Grade Separation

Each day, 9,850 vehicles and 185 CTA and Pace buses pass through the 65th Street crossing, which is on a state designated truck route. An additional 17,500 vehicles pass through the adjacent intersection on Harlem Avenue at 63rd Street. These grade crossings are near the Belt Railway Company of Chicago's Clearing Yard, which dispatches more than 8,400 railcars daily — making it one of the busiest rail yards in Chicago. The [65th and Harlem Avenue Grade Separation project](#) will construct an overpass to eliminate the at-grade road crossing, enhance multimodal facilities, and advance Justice40 goals by improving safety, air quality, emergency response times, and transit reliability.



Grand Gateway Project

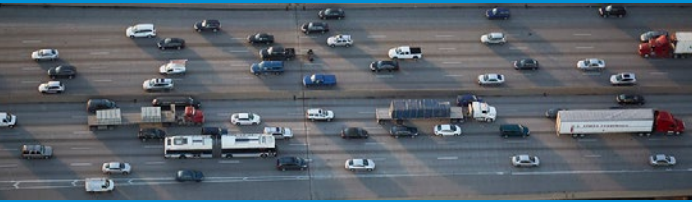
The National Transportation Safety Board labeled the Grand Avenue and Metra at-grade rail crossing in Elmwood Park "inherently dangerous" in 2008. It also recommended a grade separation to improve safety where more than 25,000 vehicles and 128 passenger and freight trains pass daily. The [Grand Gateway Project](#) — a partnership between IDOT, the Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways, Metra, and the Village of Elmwood Park — is committed to resolving safety and mobility issues at this crossing. It will improve safety, access, and mobility while also reinvigorating the surrounding central business district.



Northeastern Illinois is an international freight hub. The region moves over **\$564 billion** in goods weighing 269 million tons through truck, rail, water, and air freight.

Investing in multimodal connections and innovative technology

ON TO 2050, the region's comprehensive plan, calls for a well-integrated, multimodal transportation system that can seamlessly move people and goods within and through northeastern Illinois' seven counties. The following priority projects aim to reduce congestion, improve safety, and enhance overall mobility for all users.



Regional Arterial Traffic Management Center

A new regional traffic management center (TMC) will improve safety and mobility by optimizing existing resources, increasing operational coordination and resource sharing, and introducing innovative improvements to the system while expanding service. A TMC study will also consider a new advanced traffic management system, a network of technology that communicates information about traffic flow and safety.



Cedar Lake Road Realignment

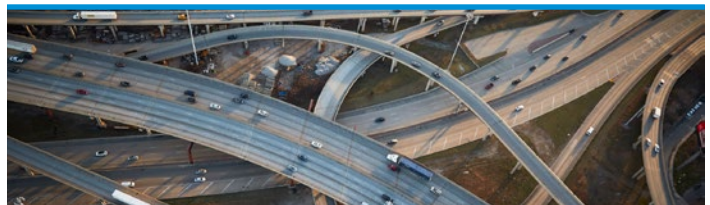
The Cedar Lake Road Realignment project will realign the roadway around Round Lake's downtown while also adding new bike paths and sidewalks, mitigating local flooding, and improving bus and rail transit facilities. The project will result in an 86 percent reduction in travel delays, a 36 percent decrease in the frequency of crashes, and create a more walkable central business district.



Ogden Avenue Corridor Improvements Project

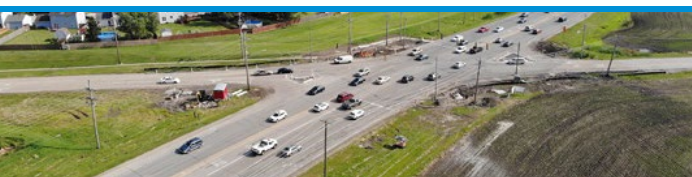
The [Ogden Avenue Corridor Improvements Project](#) reimagines Ogden Avenue — from Pulaski Road to Roosevelt Road in the North Lawndale community of Chicago — as a multimodal transportation corridor, a hub for community activity, and a catalyst for economic development. The project will:

- Improve safety for all users
- Repurpose and activate public spaces
- Transform the corridor to deliver economic and community development goals



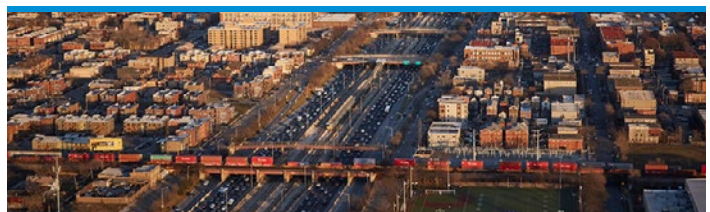
Overcoming Expressways Strategy

The web of interstate highways and railroads in the Chicagoland region creates barriers for residents trying to reach everyday destinations using travel modes other than driving. The South Cook Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Transit Access Study will identify and conceptualize crossings for residents constrained by expressways in south suburban Cook County. It will recommend new pedestrian bridges, bridge modifications, sidewalks, and multi-use paths for residents to reach destinations such as parks, jobs, and schools, and promote safety and physical activity in historically disadvantaged areas.



Randall Road at Hopps Road Intersection Improvements and Grade Separation

The Randall Road at Hopps Road intersection realignment and grade separation will improve safety, relieve congestion, and accommodate projected future traffic growth. The area sees 40,000 vehicles daily and is a primary north-south corridor in Kane County. Traffic projections show a growth of 40%-45% by the year 2050. The proposed project will also improve the climate resiliency of the corridor with a new drainage system and include a multi-use path that will close an existing gap for bicyclists and pedestrians.



West Side Community Connectivity

The West Side I-290 Blue Line corridor plan will provide economic, safety, and mobility benefits to the entire region. The plan will improve community safety, cohesion, and quality of life through enhanced connectivity over and around the I-290 Blue Line corridor by bringing the benefits of equitable transit-oriented development to disinvested and low-income neighborhoods.

The region's freight assets include all 6 of the nation's Class I railroads, 10 interstate highways, one of the world's busiest cargo airports, a world class port, and water connections to both the Great Lakes and Mississippi River System.

The CMAP region has nearly 3,200 places where railroads cross highways. About half of these are "separated," with the railroad over or under the roadway. But more than 1,600 highway-rail crossings are "at grade." In 2019, regional partners prioritized 47 grade crossings to mitigate risks related to safety and traffic delays.



Metra owns 446 bridges, over half of which are over 100 years old. 210 of their bridges need capacity improvements to meet modern standards.

Through ON TO 2050 — the region's comprehensive plan — northeastern Illinois has committed to mitigating the negative effects of freight and promoting inclusive growth.



PRIORITY PROGRAMS

Priority programs are essential categories of investment, critical to securing a more sustainable, safe, and inclusive transportation system for northeastern Illinois. These programs represent distinct improvement types that are required across many locations throughout the region. While these programs may not be as extensive in scope or cost as the priority projects, they play a crucial role in advancing regional, state, and national goals as well as enhancing the overall quality of life. The region continues to seek funding for all of these priority programs.



Accessibility

Accessibility is vital to make northeastern Illinois more inclusive and thriving. Everyone in our region — including people with disabilities — needs options to get to work, visit family and friends, access goods and services, and enjoy all the region has to offer. Through each of the seven counties' Americans with Disability Act transition plans, CTA's [All Stations Accessibility Program](#), and Metra's accessibility initiative, implementers are advancing projects that will ensure that the region's transportation system is accessible to all.



Bridges and grade separations

Northeastern Illinois' infrastructure is aging. In particular, arterial, highway, and rail bridges throughout the region are deteriorating and in need of rehabilitation or replacement. With a significant portion of the region's bridges being more than 100 years old, more bridges require improvements each year. Transportation implementers in northeastern Illinois continue to seek funding for their growing capital needs, to build grade separations and maintain aging bridges to meet the desired standard of reliability and safety. These improvements are essential to maintain local, regional, and statewide connections for efficient freight and personal travel.



Decarbonizing transportation

Northeastern Illinois is committed to decreasing transportation emissions by transitioning to more electric vehicle (EV) use. Public transit agencies and local governments are seeking to invest in EVs and to transition public transportation fleets to be fully electric. To accelerate the EV adoption rate, state and regional transportation partners are pursuing strategies to increase access to charging infrastructure. For example, IDOT received initial funding to expand EV charging infrastructure throughout the state, through the [Electric Vehicle Deployment Plan](#). Additionally, each of the regional transit agencies received funding to procure electric trains and buses. Building off these foundational efforts, [CTA](#), [Pace](#), [Metra](#), and local governments continue to pursue funding to transition toward fully electric fleets, maintain new vehicles, and invest in zero-emission technology.





Bus priority

Transportation agencies across the region are working together to provide faster, more reliable transit that benefits everyone. Pace's Bus on Shoulder program continues to expand with routes on I-55, I-94, and I-90. As part of its Driving Innovation strategic vision plan, Pace also committed to expanding its Pulse network of arterial bus rapid transit to provide fast, frequent, and reliable bus service in heavily traveled corridors of the region. CTA and CDOT recently released the Better Streets for Buses Plan, which lays the foundation for an organized program of bus priority improvements on Chicago's streets. This includes advancing bus rapid transit corridors as well as developing additional bus priority zones, which target pinch points along major bus routes that experience traffic congestion, insufficient space for bus boarding, or bottlenecked intersections.



Safe Travel for All Roadmap

Traffic safety is an urgent priority for northeastern Illinois. To improve travel safety in the region — CMAP, in partnership with IDOT, Metra, counties, and several municipalities — received a Safe Streets and Roads for All grant. The first-ever Safe Travel for All Roadmap provides technical assistance to develop county safety action plans. Additionally, Vision Zero is Chicago's commitment to eliminate death and serious injury from traffic crashes.



Greenways and trails

More than 1,100 miles of trails and extensive on-street bikeways provide active connections across the region. IIJA funding provides multiple opportunities to implement strategic initiatives, such as CMAP's Northeastern Illinois Greenways and Trails Plan and Chicago's Citywide Vision for a Connected Network of Trails and Corridors. Through these efforts, implementers are expanding the network of trails and bikeways that provide community connections, travel opportunities, and accessibility throughout the region.



Infrastructure investments in the nation's transportation hub also strengthen Illinois, the Midwest, and the U.S.

Our priority investments help achieve the nation's transportation goals:

- ✔ Advance equity and Justice40 goals
- ✔ Support livable, accessible, and healthy communities
- ✔ Keep the nation's supply chain moving
- ✔ Support the National Roadway Safety Strategy
- ✔ Reduce emissions and congestion within the transportation sector
- ✔ Build a more resilient future for the nation's freight hub

WHY HERE?



Illinois was **ranked #1** for infrastructure by CNBC America's Top States for Businesses 2021



\$3 trillion in goods move through northeastern Illinois each year by truck, rail, water, and air freight



Served by all **6** of the nation's Class I railroads, **10** interstate highways, and O'Hare International Airport (one of the world's busiest cargo airports)



Northeastern Illinois' expansive transportation system includes **29,989** miles of federal roads, **3,650** bridges, **7,200** miles of rail lines, **1,646** rail crossings, and **1,200+** bike trail miles



Local businesses spanning industries like finance, health, and manufacturing have access to a **diverse, educated, and globally connected workforce**



Our competitive advantage: Transportation and logistics firms represent a **\$20.6 billion** industry and employ **106,000** workers throughout the seven-county Chicago metropolitan area

