Existing Conditions:

Data and trends impacting transportation in northeastern Illinois

2026 Regional Transportation Plan

Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

About the 2026 Regional Transportation Plan

Northeastern Illinois is collaborating to develop the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).

Due for adoption in 2026, the RTP will summarize the region's vision for its transportation system and identify the investments and strategies needed to get there.

Understanding current conditions

This report helps answer the question, “what are the challenges and opportunities to achieve the transportation system the region wants?”. By understanding conditions affecting transportation, stakeholders are empowered to make informed decisions about what actions are needed next.

2026 RTP goal areas

Strengthen connections between people and places

Prioritize safety and public health

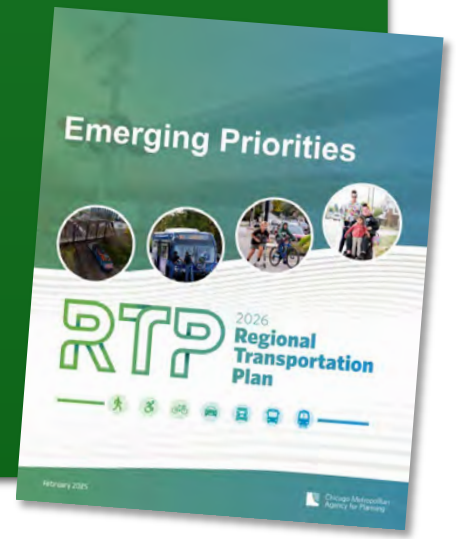
Mitigate pollution and invest in resilient infrastructure

Support economic prosperity and inclusive growth

Strategically govern, fund, and preserve the system

In February 2025, CMAP published the *Emerging Priorities* report. This document summarizes preliminary research and stakeholder feedback from the early stages of the plan development process – ultimately identifying 5 goal areas.

Building off this milestone deliverable, the *Existing Conditions* report uses data to help set high-level context about opportunities and challenges within each goal area.



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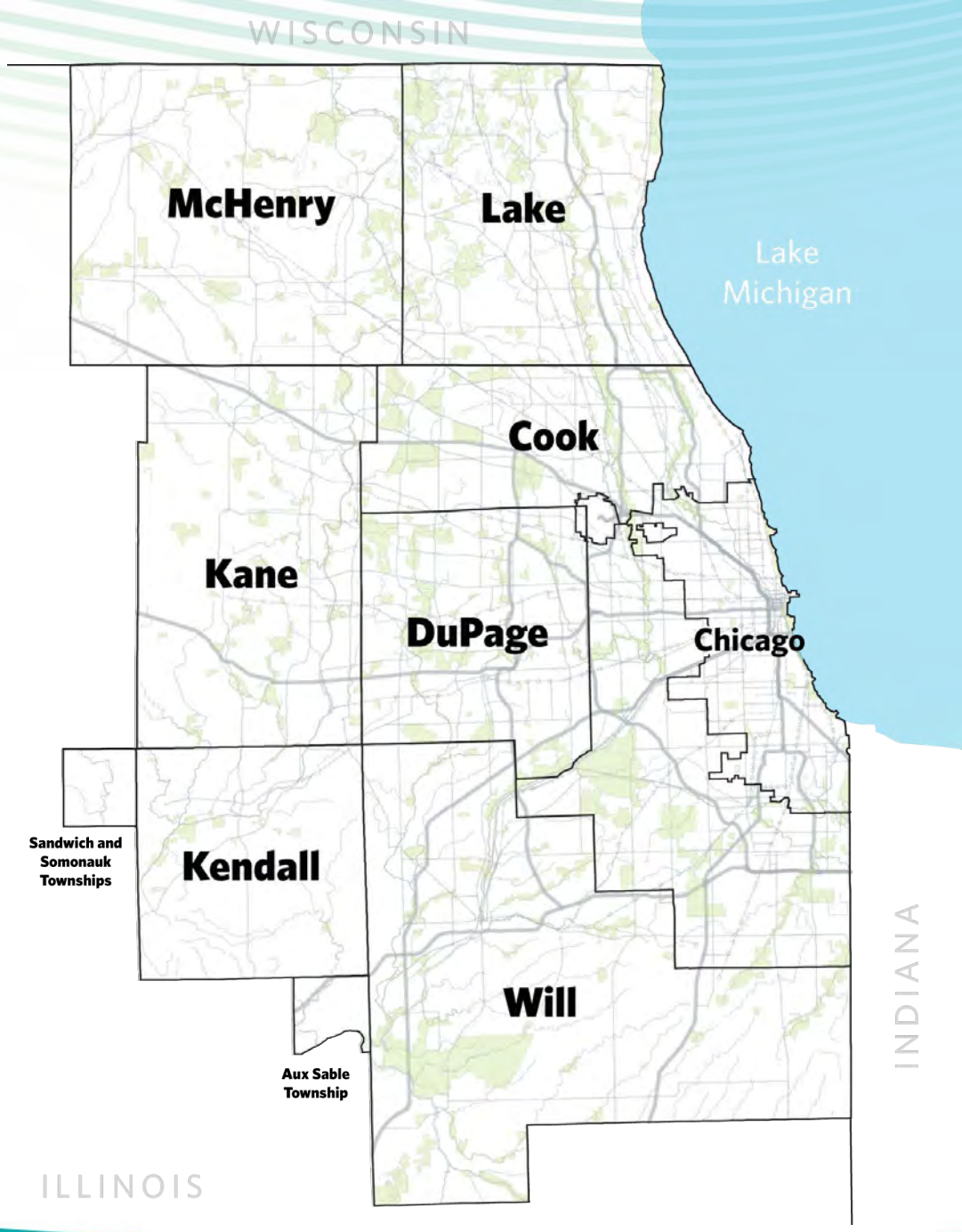
About the region

Northeastern Illinois includes 7 counties, 284 municipalities, and 8.4 million residents

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) serves the counties of Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will – as well as Aux Sable township in Grundy County and Sandwich and Somonauk townships in DeKalb County.

CMAP is the state-authorized regional planning agency and federally designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for northeastern Illinois. State law gives CMAP the responsibility to effectively address development and transportation challenges in the region. As the MPO, CMAP is responsible for allocating federal transportation funds and managing the transportation planning process.



The region stands out nationally for its robust population and economy

Northeastern Illinois is an established metropolitan area with a diverse population, strong economy, and legacy transportation system. Mirroring national trends, the region continues to experience shifts in its population.

8.4 million residents

3.3 million households

$742 billion gross regional product

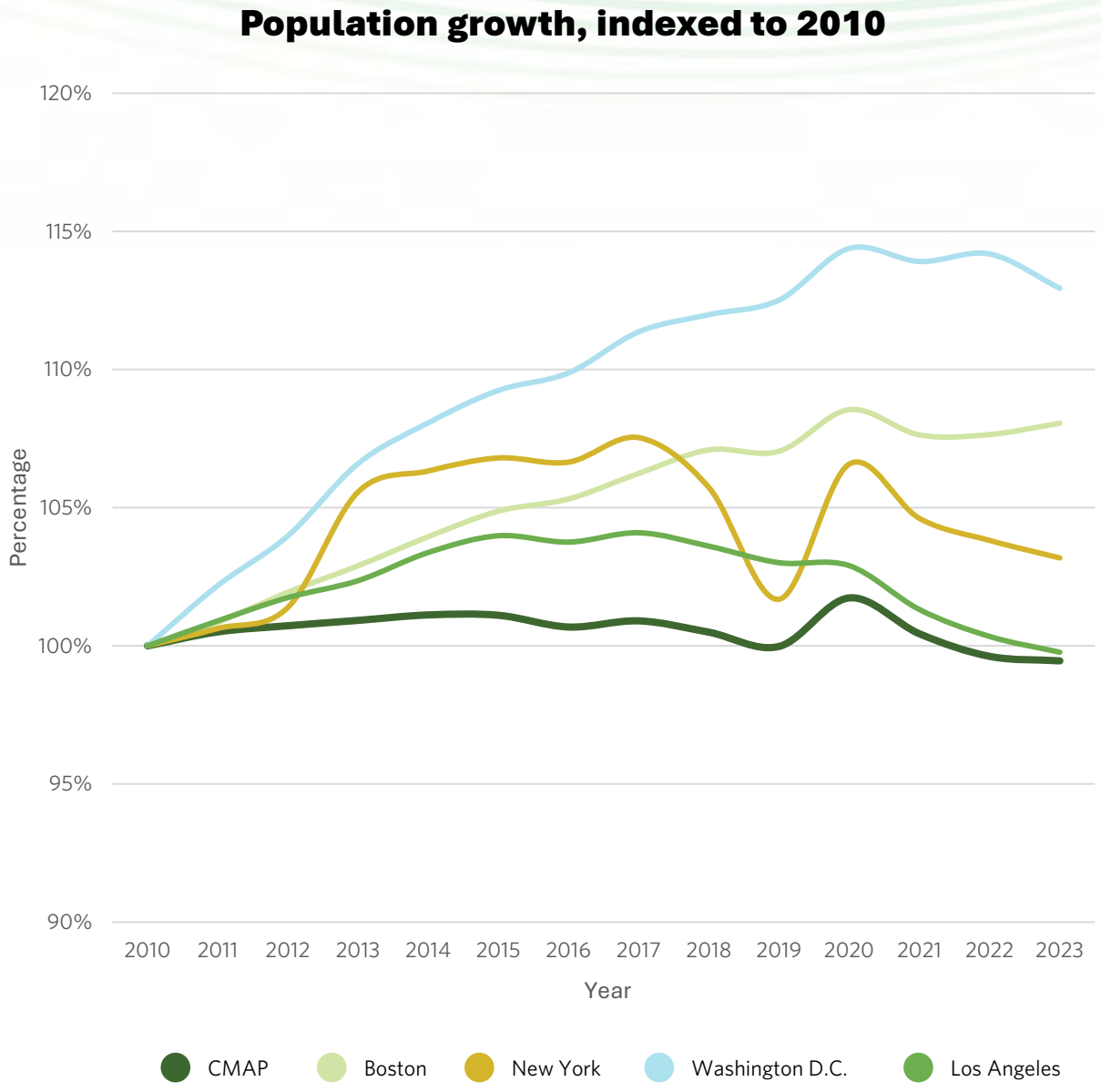
4.5 million jobs

Total population has remained stable, with a slight decrease in recent years

From 2010 to 2020, northeastern Illinois' population increased slightly from 8.4 million to 8.6 million. After 2020, it decreased back to 8.4 million.

The region's experiences with population growth are consistent with national trends for other historic metropolitan areas, many of which have seen slower growth following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year estimates (2023), Decennial Census (2010).



Total number of households increased, but household sizes have become smaller

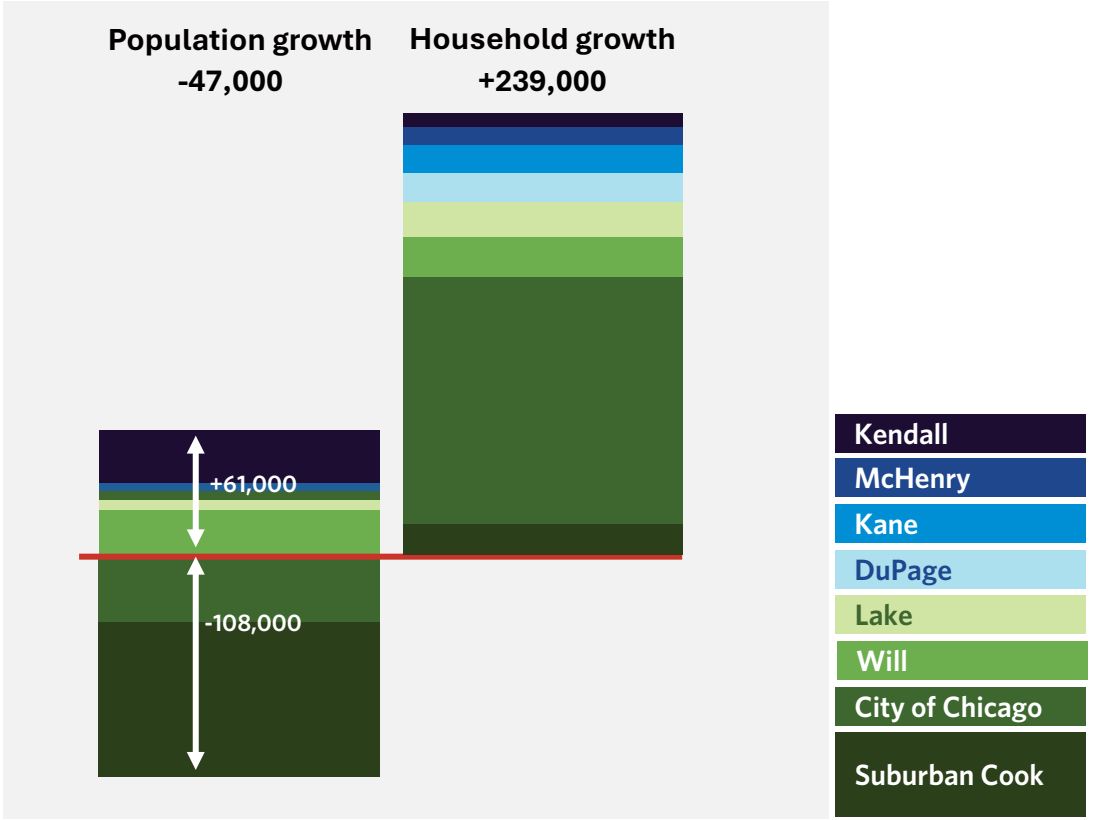
While net population change was minimal between 2010 to 2023, the region added 240,000 new households during the same period. These dynamics highlight that the average number of people per household is becoming smaller.

Consistent with lower national birth rates since the 2008 recession, there are fewer households with children in the region today – having decreased from 36 percent of all households in 2010 to 30 percent by 2023.

At the same time, other forms of household composition have grown in number:

- People living alone: approximately +135,000 households
- Married couples without children: over +100,000 households
- Non-family arrangements, like roommates or non-married couples: over +50,000 households
- Cohabiting relatives: about +50,000 households

Population and household growth in CMAP region, 2010 to 2023



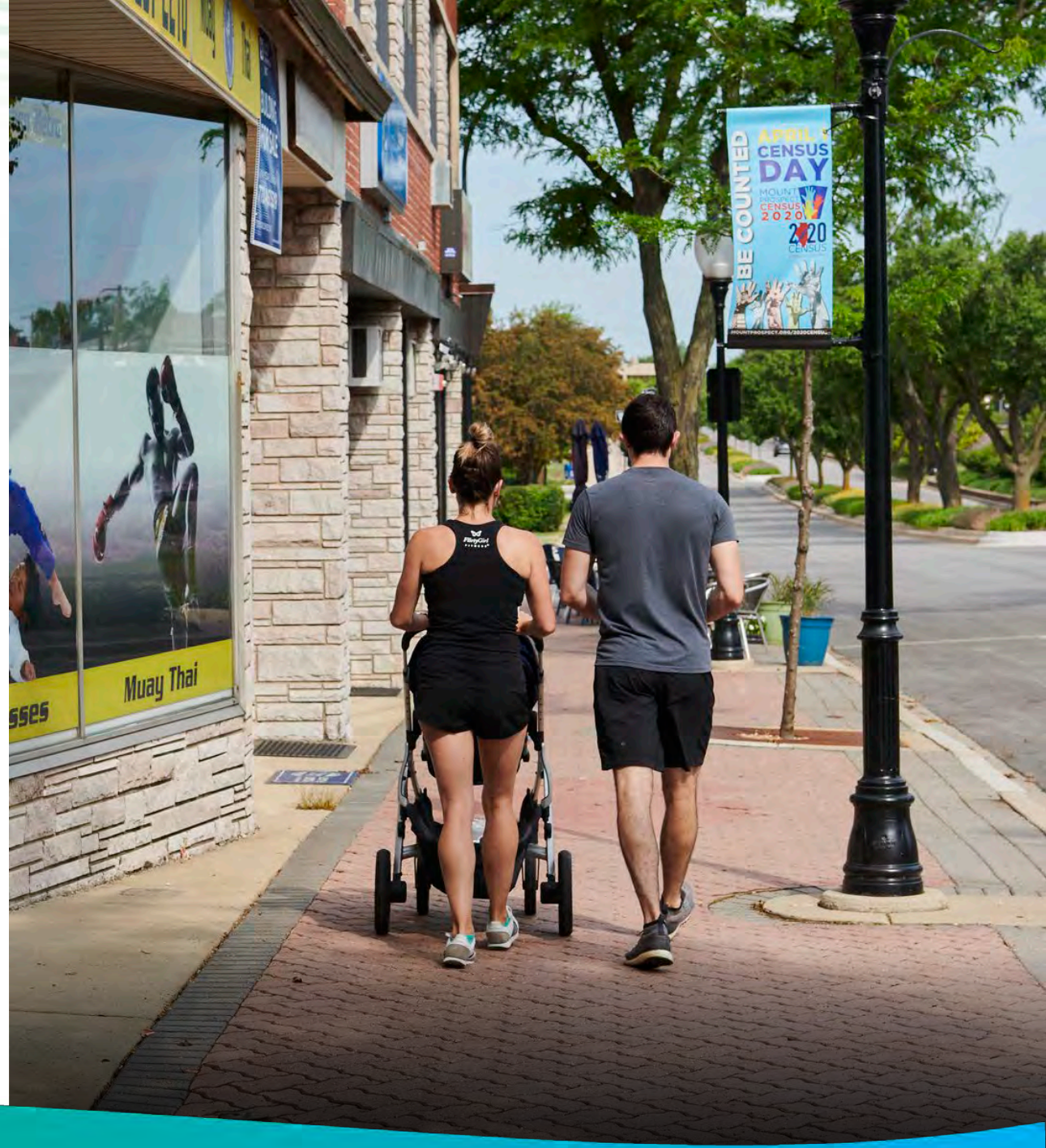
Source: ACS 1-year estimates (2023), Decennial Census (2010).

Household growth is concentrated in Chicago

While there is household growth across northeastern Illinois, it has been particularly concentrated in the city of Chicago, which added 134,000 new households between 2010 and 2023, more than 55 percent of the region's total new households.

At the same time, however, new households are emerging in the collar counties, leading to an increase in greenfield development — construction on previously undeveloped land — particularly in former agricultural areas. The transportation needs of these newly developed areas may have significant implications for the operation and maintenance of the regional transportation system.

Source: ACS 5-year estimates (2010, 2023).



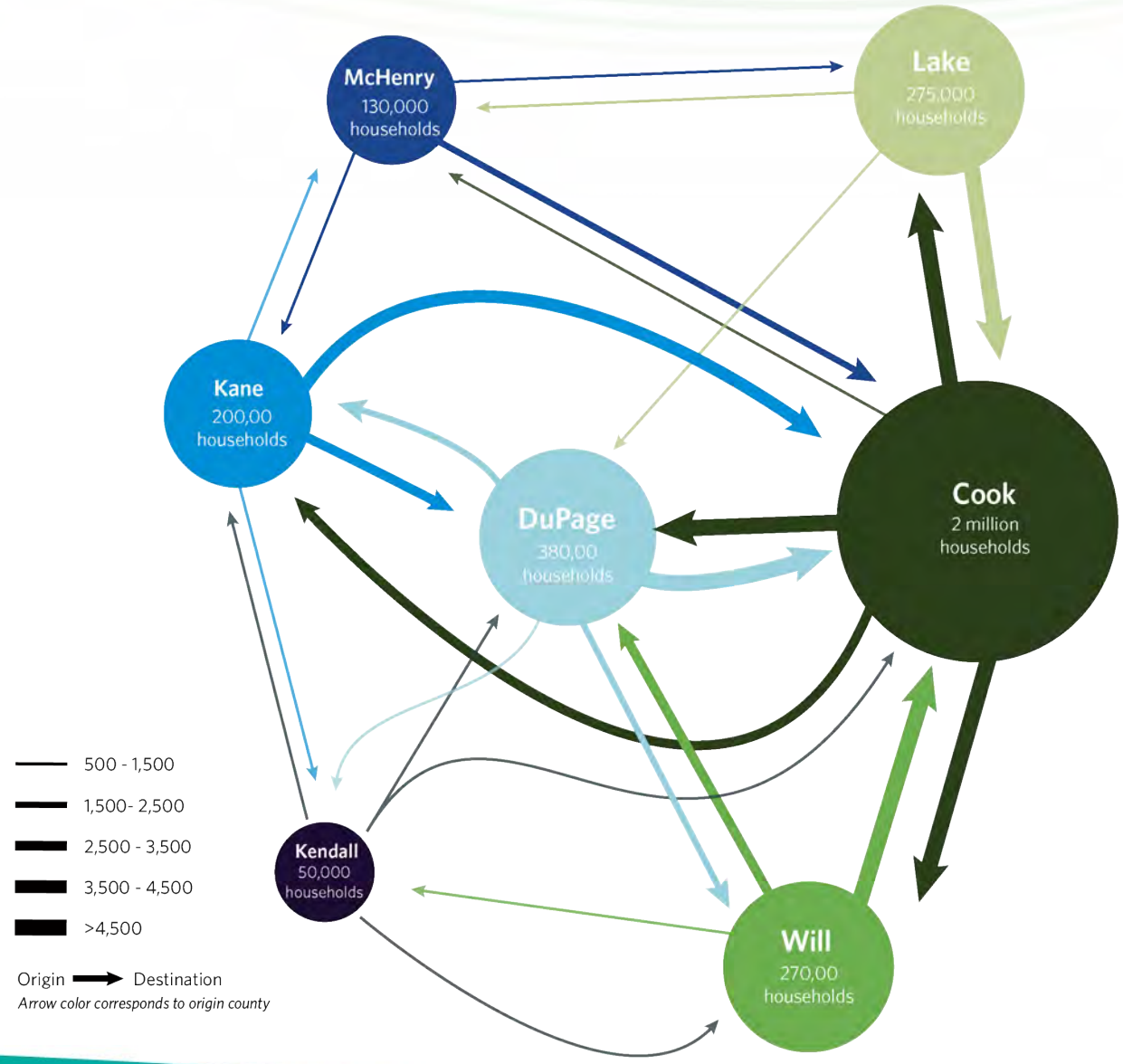
Movement within the region is dynamic

While the regional population has remained stable, residents are moving between counties:

- Cook County remains the most populous, with some population exchange occurring with DuPage, Lake, and Will counties.
- Will and Kane counties are experiencing the largest net in-migration from within the region, receiving 2,500 and 1,900 net households, respectively, each year.
- Kendall County has the smallest population and is growing at the fastest rate, averaging about 18 percent growth each year.

Source: Internal Revenue Service statistics of income.

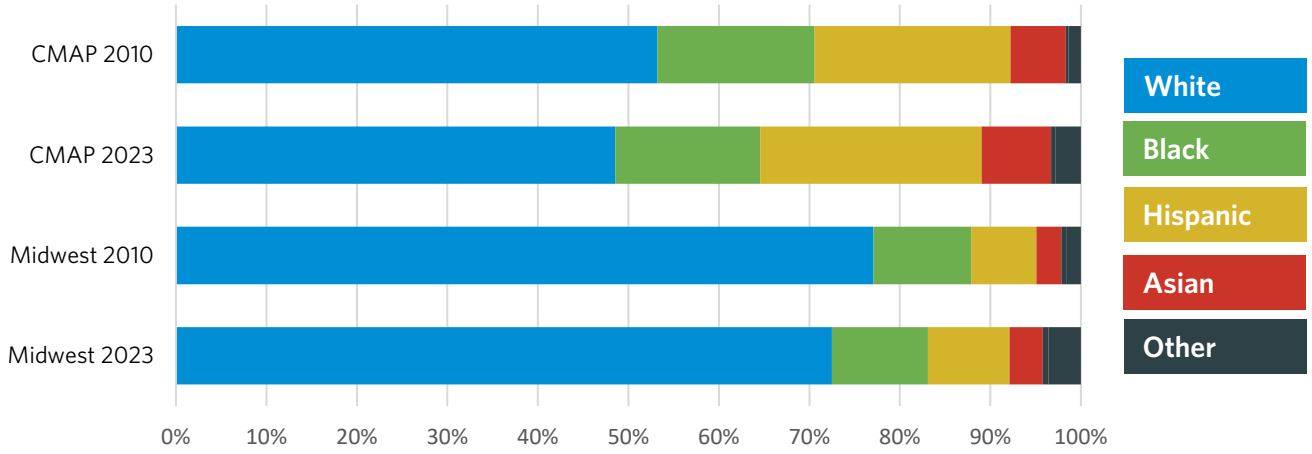
Average annual households that moved within region by county, 2011 to 2021



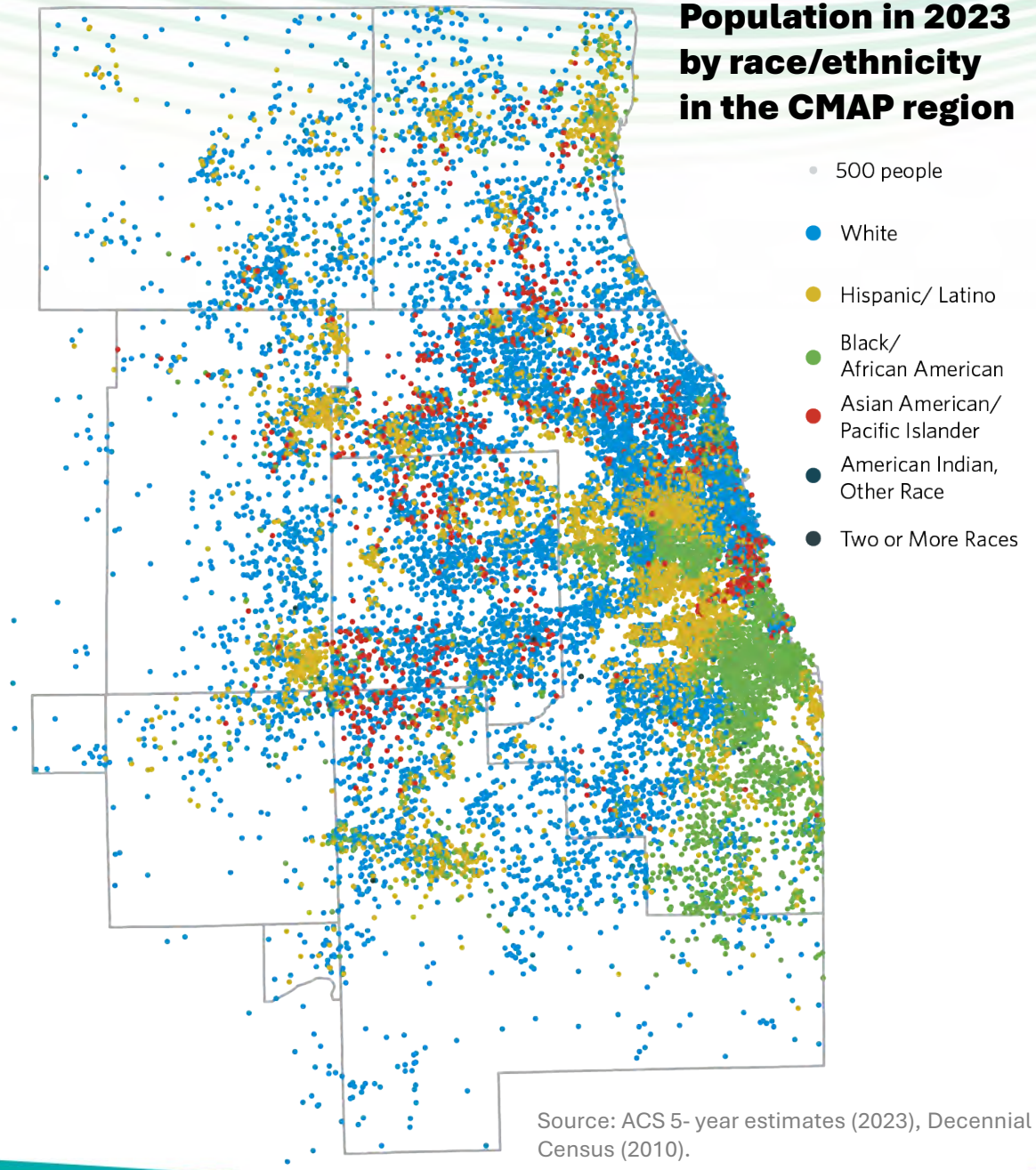
The region is becoming more diverse

The 8.4 million residents of northeastern Illinois represent a wide range of racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. In recent years, the region has grown more diverse: Hispanic (+250,000), Asian (+135,000), and multiracial (+123,000) populations have each increased, making up a larger share of the total population. At the same time, however, the number of Black residents declined by more than 100,000 — a decrease of 7 percent.

CMAP region share of population by race/ethnicity



Population in 2023 by race/ethnicity in the CMAP region

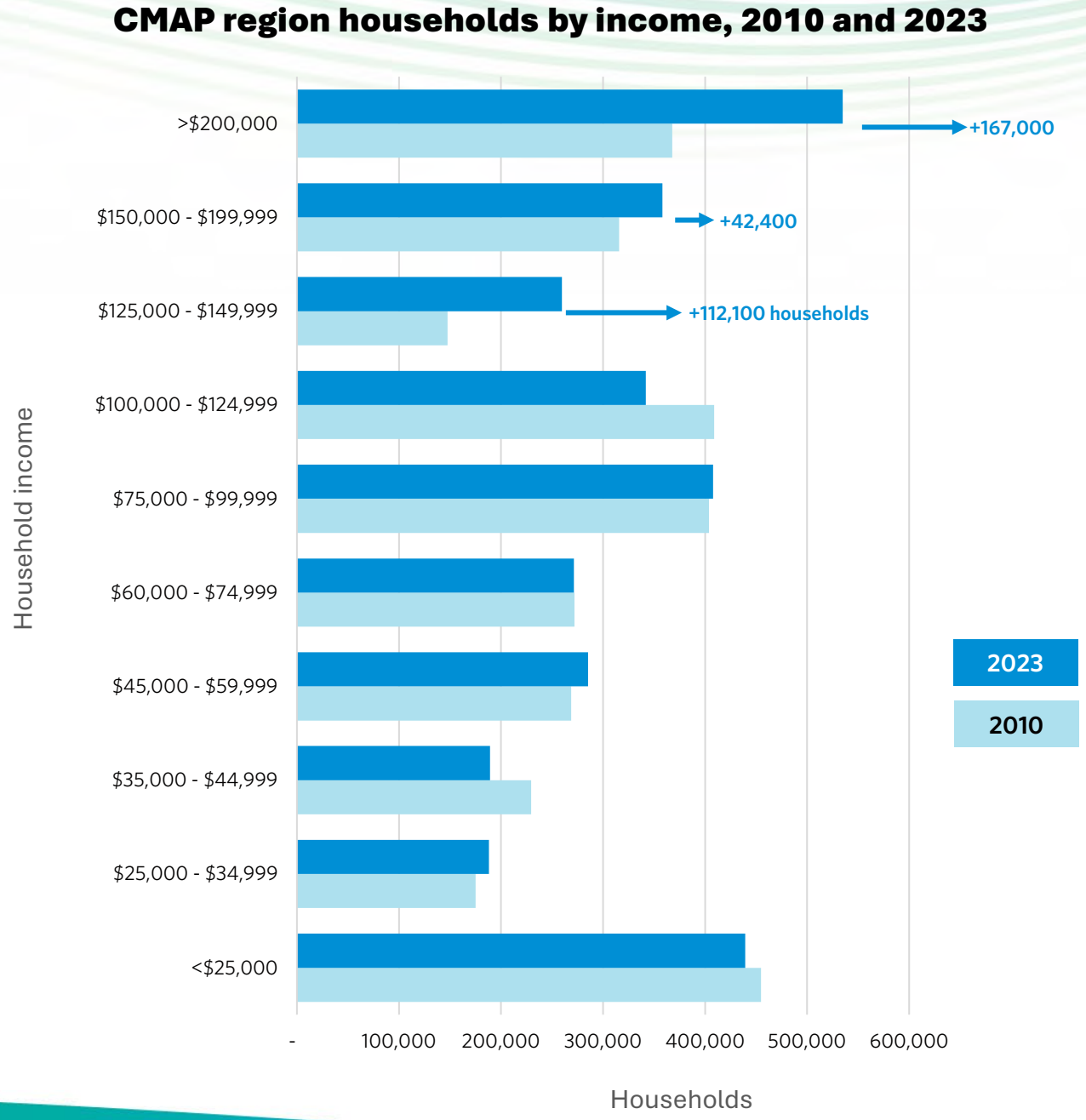


Source: ACS 5- year estimates (2023), Decennial Census (2010).

Incomes are rising, but growth is uneven

Between 2010 and 2023, the share of households earning more than $125,000 grew by nearly 40 percent. During the same period, households earning low- to middle-incomes stayed relatively constant, with the share of those earning less than $75,000 decreasing by less than 2 percent.

This suggests that resources may be growing for some households but remain stagnant for others.



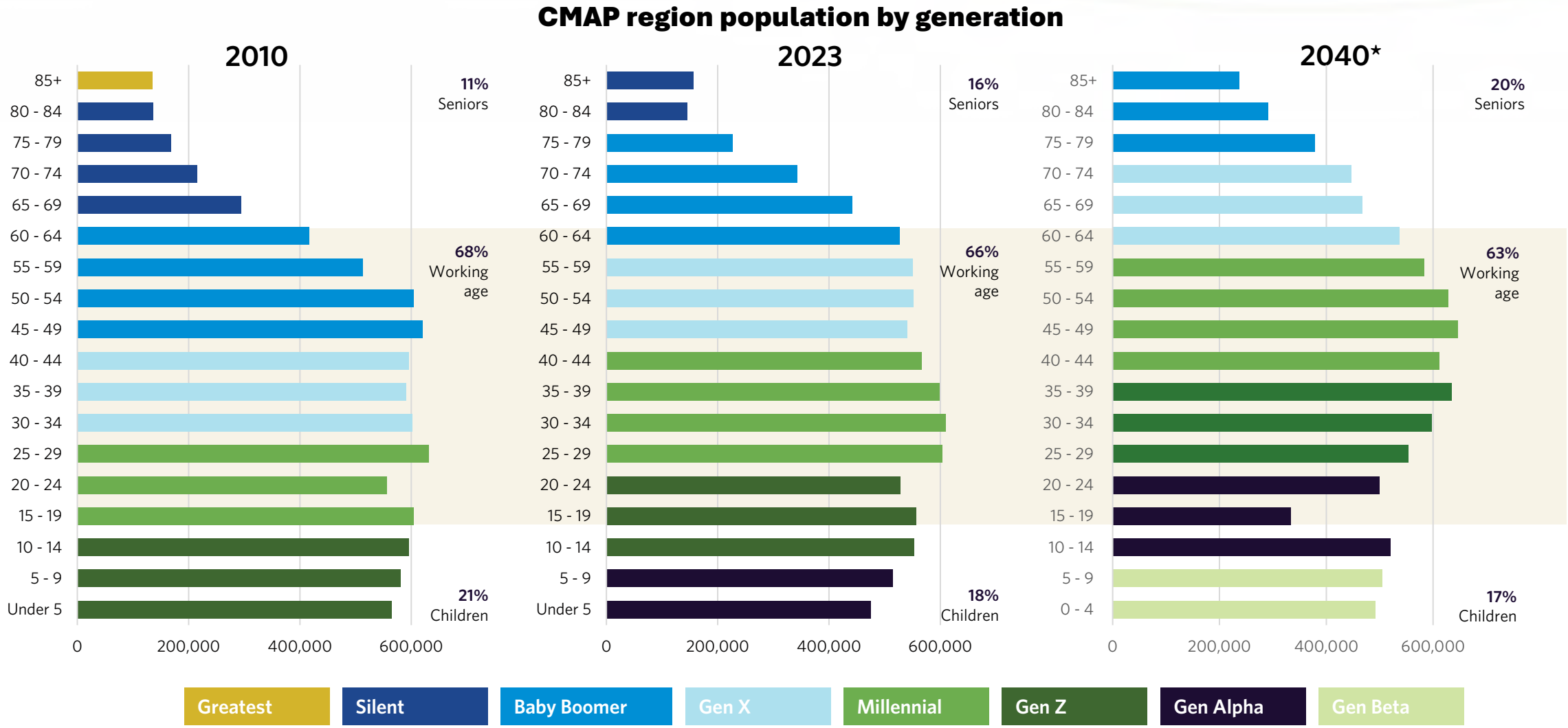
Source: ACS 5-year estimates (2023), Decennial Census (2010).

The population is becoming older

Between 2010 and 2023, the share of seniors in the population grew from 11 percent to 16 percent. At the same time, the share of children declined from 21 percent to 18 percent. As the region's population has aged, the number of working-age adults has decreased.

Source: ACS 5-year estimates (2023), Decennial Census (2010).

Aging trends are expected to continue



* CMAP socioeconomic forecast

Source: ACS 5-year estimates (2023), Decennial Census (2010).

An aging population has implications for the transportation system

A growing population of adults over 65, coupled with fewer children and working-age residents, is likely to have significant impacts across northeastern Illinois. In particular, an aging population may have long-term implications for the regional transportation system — potentially increasing the need for mobility options that support aging in place.

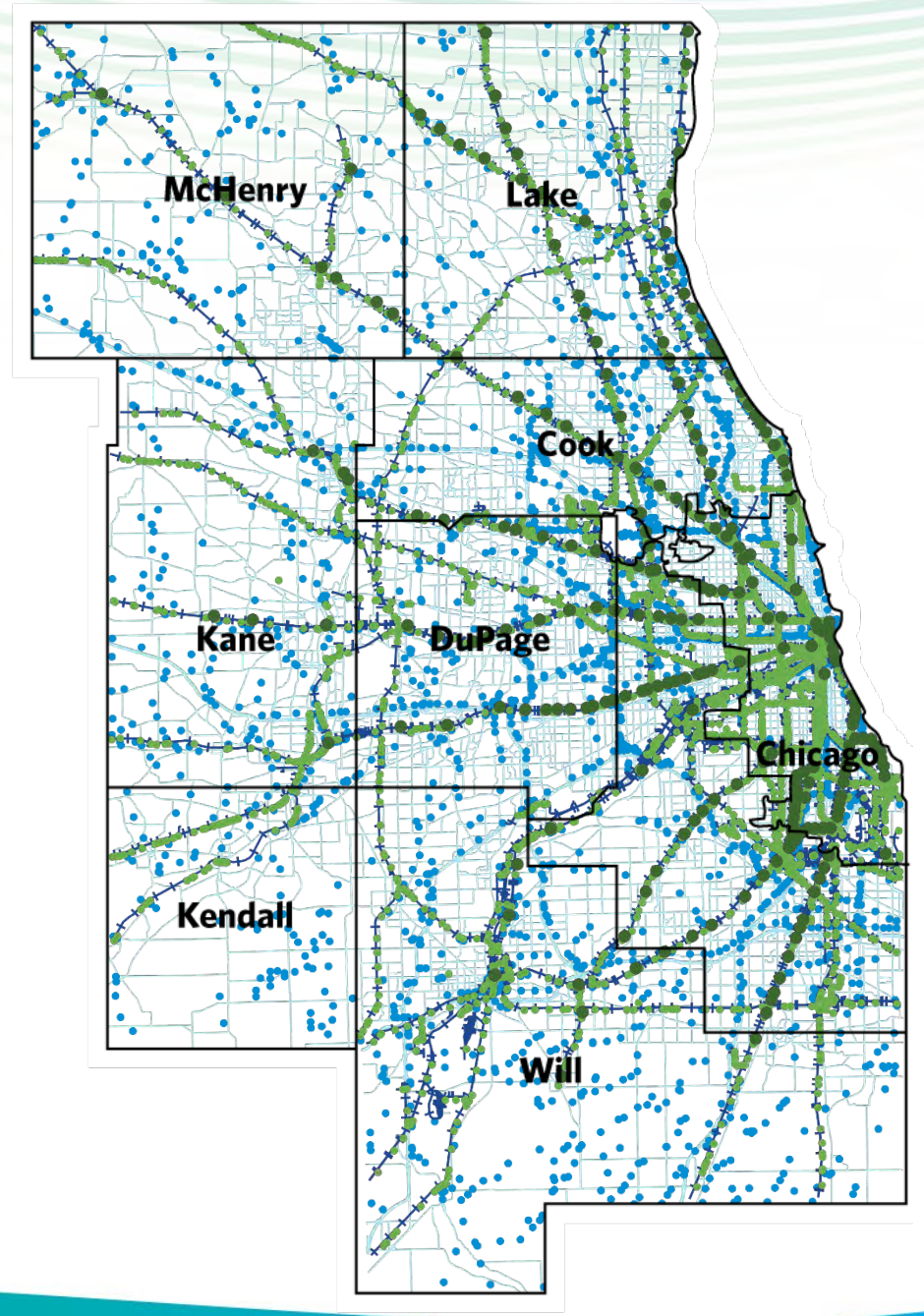
About the transportation system

Northeastern Illinois has an extensive, longstanding transportation system

The region has been investing in building and operating transportation infrastructure since the mid-19th century. Northeastern Illinois' expansive multimodal system is noteworthy — earning the reputation of an international transportation hub. Investing in maintaining key transportation infrastructure contributes to the region's future success.

Today, both people and goods move throughout the region by relying on these critical assets:

- 29,989 miles of federal roads
- 3,650 bridges
- 7,200 miles of rail lines
- 1,646 rail crossings
- 387 train stations



The region is a critical hub for freight and intercity travel

Northeastern Illinois is a key destination for intercity travel. Featured as the center of the Federal Railroad Administration's Midwest Regional Rail Plan, Chicago's Union Station serves more than 3 million passengers each year — making it the third busiest railroad terminal in the United States. Additionally, Chicago's Greyhound Station accommodates an average of 55 buses each day, providing service to more than 500,000 passengers.

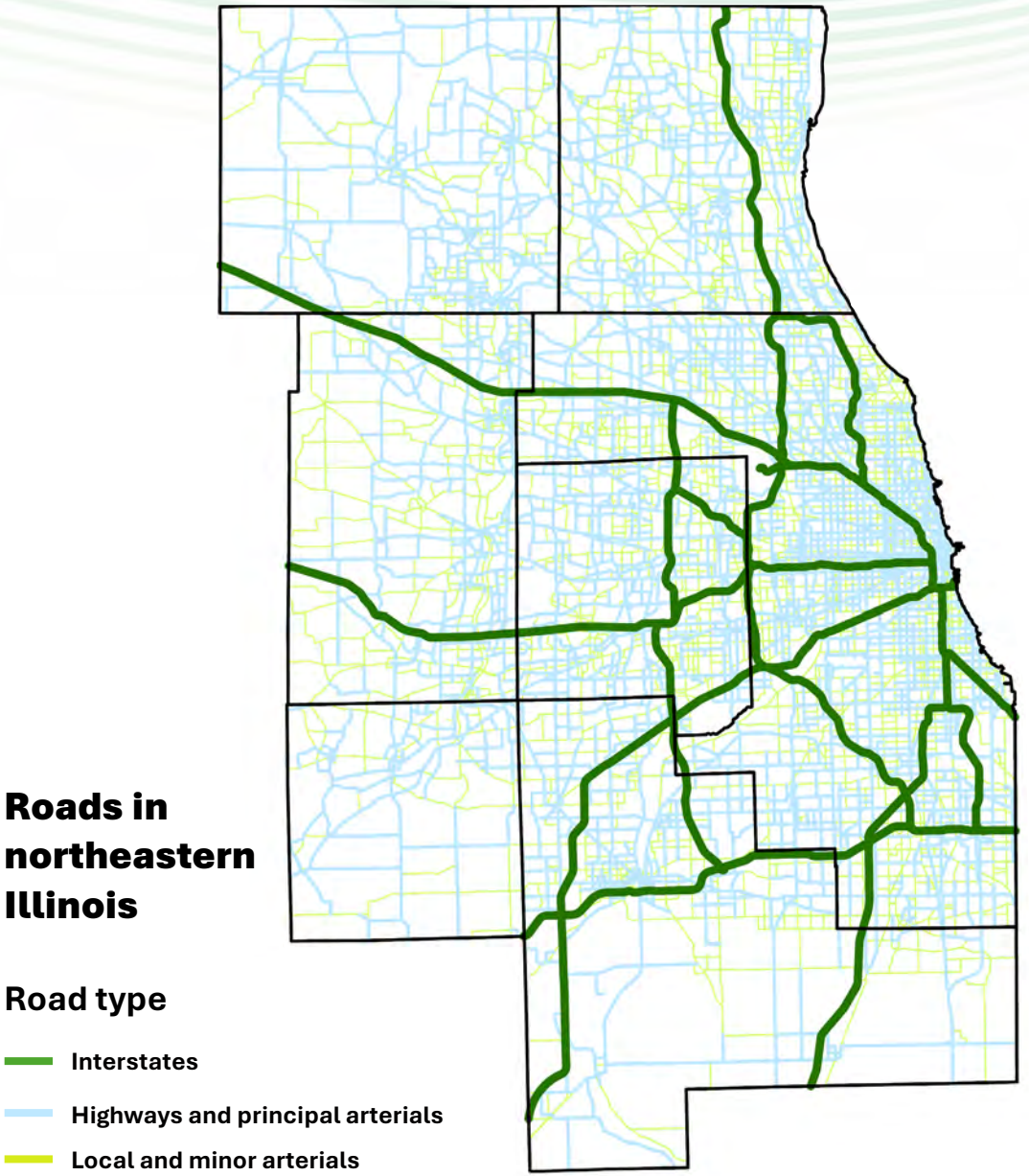
This infrastructure is also crucial to the freight network, positioning the region to be economically competitive at the national and global level. One out of 4 freight trains in the United States pass through northeastern Illinois, totaling about 500 freight trains each day. The region's status as an international freight hub has and will continue to play a critical role in economic stability and growth.

Source: *Northeastern Illinois Priority Investments 2025-2026*, CMAP.

Roads provide essential connections for people and goods

Northeastern Illinois has more than 30,000 miles of roads, which include highways, arterials, and local roads. Depending on their design, roads serve different purposes:

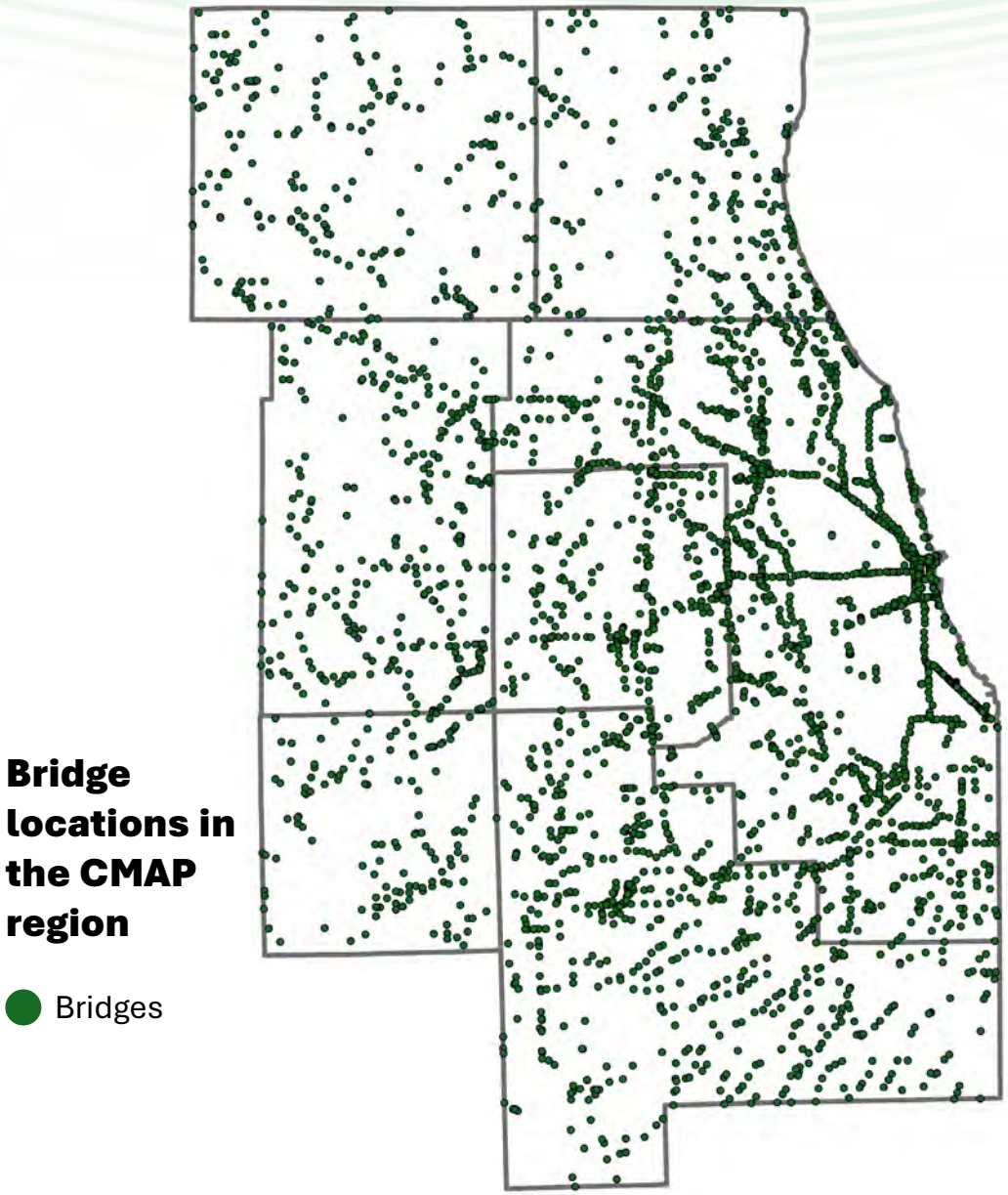
- The **interstate system** facilitates travel through the region, state, and country.
- **Highways and principal arterials** facilitate long-distance, high-speed travel. These roads provide direct connections between regional economic centers and transportation hubs, like airports and freight.
- **Local roads and minor arterials** are designed for shorter-distance connections between homes, businesses, schools, and more. These facilities prioritize access to local destinations within and across communities.



The region has a vast network of highly used bridges

There are 3,660 bridges in northeastern Illinois that accommodate more than 84 million vehicles each day. Most of the busiest bridges are located along the I-90 and I-94 corridors, representing critical routes for commuters, transit riders, and freight movement.

Bridges are some of the oldest transportation structures in the region – with some dating back to the 1890s. The average age of bridges in northeastern Illinois is about 50 years, with a significant share of bridges having been built earlier — especially in the 1950s and 1960s.



Bridge locations in the CMAP region

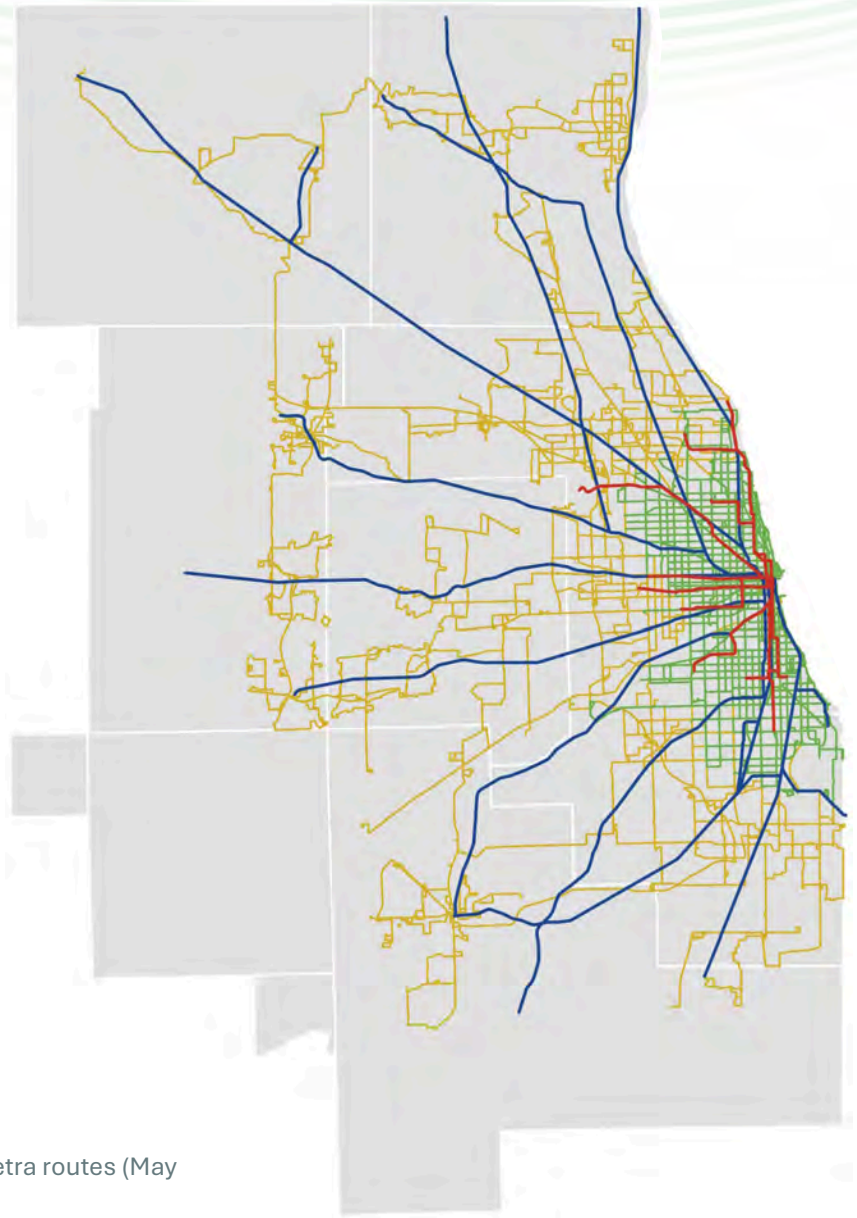
Bridges

Transit enables regional mobility

Northeastern Illinois boasts an extensive transit network, featuring 11 commuter rail lines, 8 rapid transit rail lines, and 273 bus routes. In 2023, transit riders in the region took 331.1 million trips, placing third nationwide in total transit usage.

Paratransit and on-demand services also provide critical connections, especially for older adults and residents with disabilities. As the designated provider of paratransit services in the Regional Transit Authority (RTA) service area, Pace completed more than 2.5 million paratransit trips in 2022. Additional on-demand services are provided by local governments, like municipalities, townships, and counties.

Agency	Annual unlinked trips	Annual passenger miles traveled	Fleet size
Chicago Transit Authority	279,146,501	1,090,677,628	3,355 (1,480 rail cars, 1,875 buses)
Metra	31,988,076	706,105,653	1,409
Pace	16,049,954	112,988,031	2,224



Public transit routes in northeastern Illinois

Source: CTA, Pace, and Metra routes (May 2025).

Airports connect people and goods to the region

In addition to 11 public airports, northeastern Illinois is home to two international airports: O'Hare and Midway. Both play critical roles facilitating travel into the region, bringing in nearly 96 million passengers in 2023. This extensive infrastructure supports economic activity, like business and tourism.

In addition to helping people travel, airports also transport commodities. In particular, O'Hare International Airport contributes significantly to the regional freight network. In 2023, O'Hare handled 1.9 million metric tons for cargo – ranking 7th nationwide for total landed weight of airport cargo.

Source: Federal Aviation Administration air carrier activity information system.

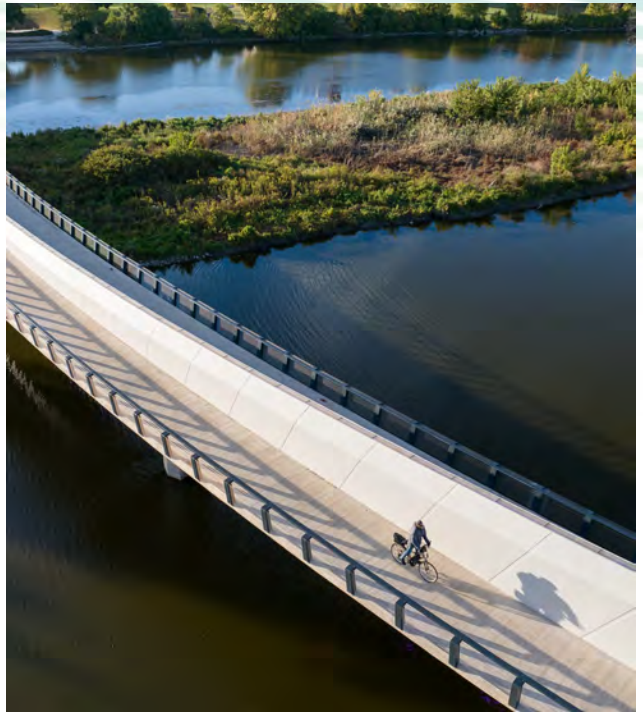
Image source: Chicago Department of Aviation.

Ports and waterways serve both economic and recreational purposes

There are three ports and six navigable waterways in northeastern Illinois. These resources support commerce by facilitating the transport of materials into and through the region. In 2022, the Illinois International Port District received and shipped more than 10 million tons of commodities, making it the busiest port in the region. The Joliet Regional Port followed closely, handling over 9 million tons.

In addition to their economic impact, the region's waterways provide recreational opportunities and support diverse ecosystems.

Source: US Army Corps of Engineers waterborne commerce statistics center.

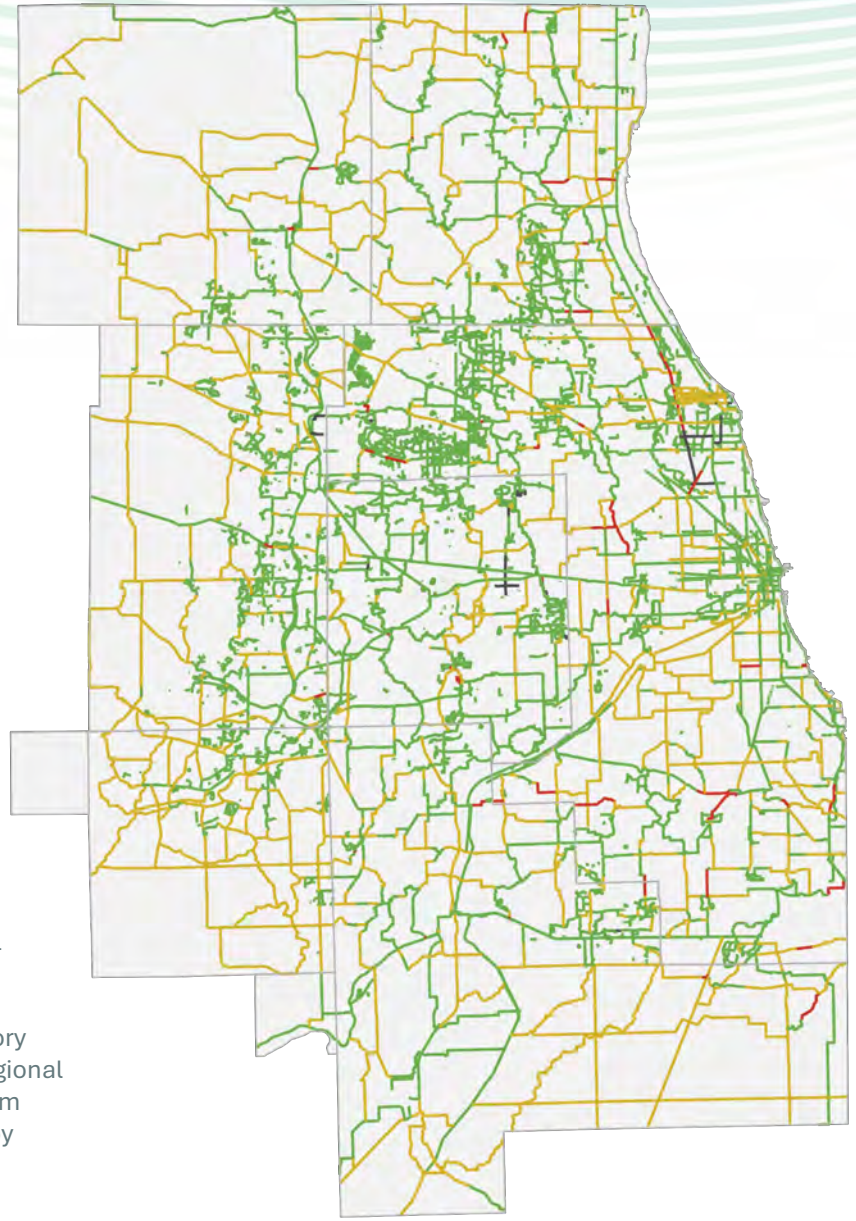


Bikeways provide recreational opportunities and safe connections

The region benefits from an expansive network of bikeways, greenways, and trails that residents use for both recreation and transportation. Completing and expanding this network will increase the safety and comfort of cyclists, pedestrians, and other active transportation users.

Bikeways by status

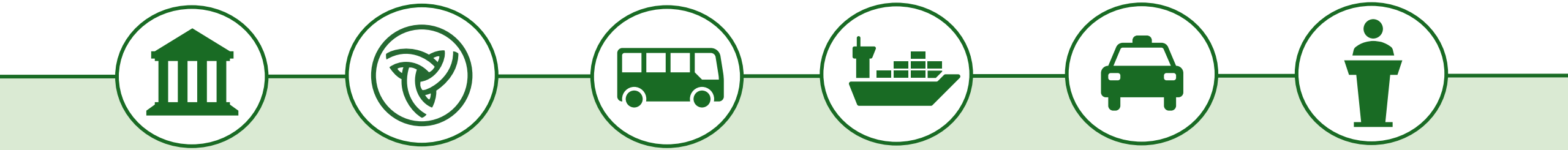
- Existing
- Planned
- Programmed
- Inactive



Note: The maps might exclude local bikeways in some areas.

Source: IDOT bicycle facility inventory system, which includes CMAP's Regional Greenways and Trails Plan, data from IDOT, and additional data entered by municipal staff.

The transportation system is administered by a variety of public and private entities



Federal regulatory agencies, such as the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

State and regional agencies, like the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), the Illinois Tollway, and DOTs at each of the seven counties in the region

Transit providers, including CTA, Metra, and Pace, as well as the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA)

Freight transportation providers, including all six Class I railroads and the Illinois International Port District

Private providers of transportation services such as intercity buses, rideshare companies, employer-based shuttles, bike and scooter rentals, and more

Municipalities and other local units of government

Strengthen connections between people and places

Connecting people across the region

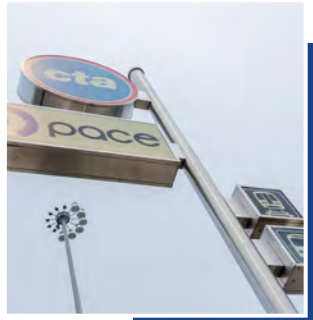
The region has a vast and complex transportation system spanning all modes of travel. Three key concepts determine how well this system functions: mobility, connectivity, and accessibility.

Together, these three concepts form the cornerstones of a vibrant region, improving health outcomes, strengthening safety, supporting a strong economy, and so much more.

As the region recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that the transportation system adapts to evolving needs. Commute patterns have shifted, congestion remains a persistent challenge, and accessible transportation options are more essential than ever.

Mobility

The ability to travel efficiently from one place to another, often measured by speed and ease of movement



Connectivity

How well different parts of the transportation network are linked, ensuring seamless travel between destinations

Accessibility

Beyond movement, how easily people can reach jobs, schools, healthcare, and other essential services

Commute patterns

Changes in commuting patterns in recent years will have lasting impacts on transportation and travel in the region. Understanding these shifts is key to improving mobility for all.

2026 Regional Transportation Plan

Pandemic-related commuting changes persist

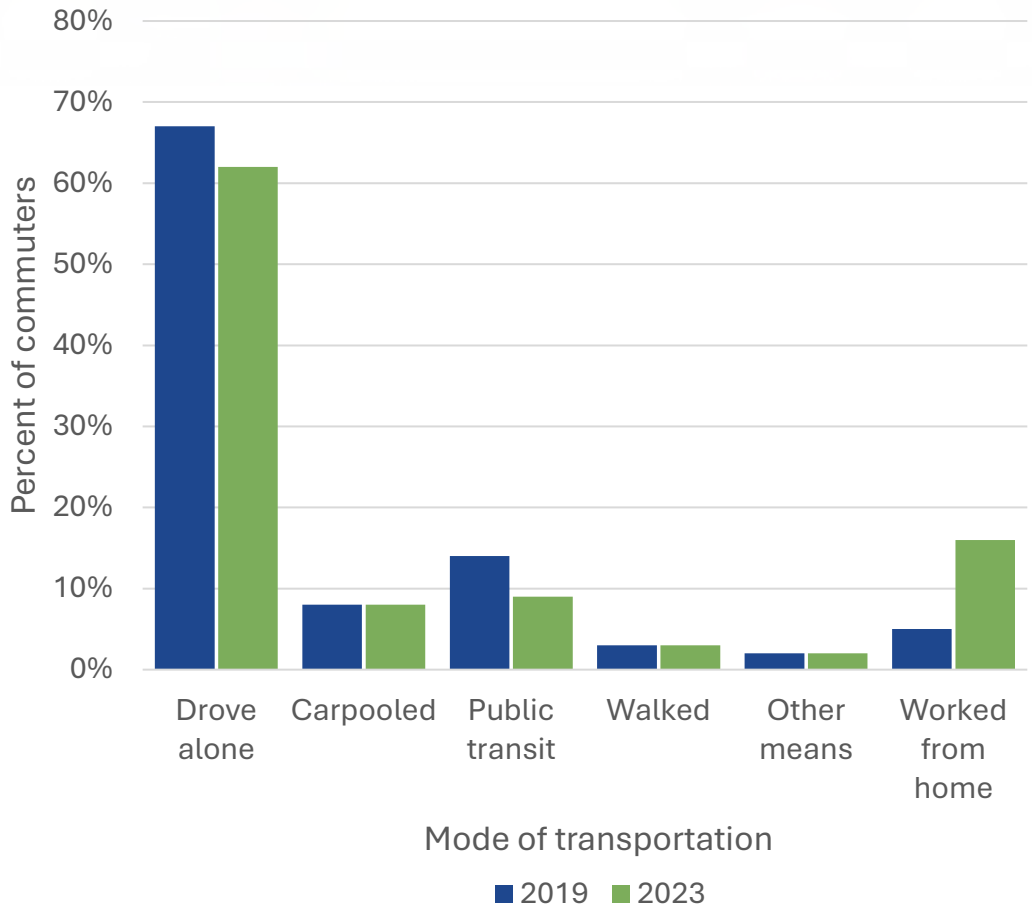
Shifts in rates of driving alone, taking transit, and working from home post-pandemic appear to be meaningful and long-lasting:

- Fewer people are driving alone to work, but it is still the top commute mode choice.
- Transit commutes remain below pre-pandemic levels. While transit ridership declined significantly at the start of the pandemic, commutes by transit rebounded to nine percent of all commutes in 2023 and continue to make gains.
- Working from home tripled compared to pre-pandemic levels and was second only to driving alone as the top commute mode choice.

The decline in driving alone and transit ridership for commuting is likely being offset by the growing prevalence of remote work. Despite this rapid growth, 60 percent of workers in the region have jobs that do not typically offer remote work. This underscores the continued importance of investing in multimodal access to job centers that serve the needs of onsite workers.

Source: *Mobility Recovery*, CMAP (2023).

Changes in mode of transportation to work, 2019 and 2023

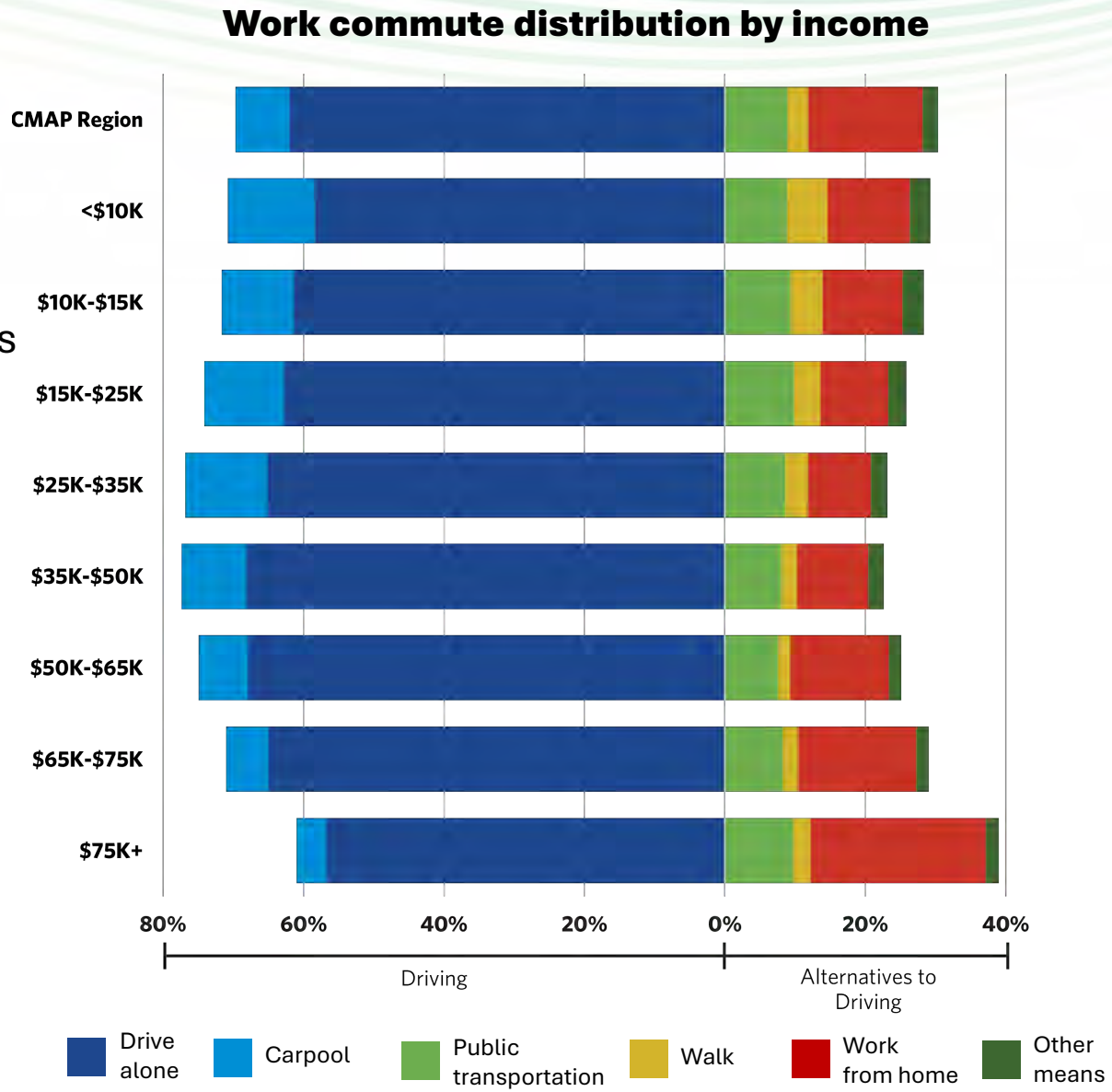


Source: ACS 5-year estimates (2023).

Commute trends reflect differences in access and choice

While many jobs are easy to get to by transit – like commutes to downtown – others are dispersed throughout the region with limited multimodal connections. Driving alone to work peaks among households earning $35,000 to $50,000, and households earning above $75,000 are the least likely to drive alone to work.

These trends suggest that while lower-income households may rely on transit due to limited access to vehicles, higher-income households (whether multiple-job or one high-paying-job) may have more flexibility in their mode to work. These commuters often live in areas with a range of transportation choices and may choose transit to avoid congestion, parking costs, or time spent driving.



Source: ACS 5-year estimates (2023).

Working from home is more often an option in high wage jobs

On a typical day, 25 percent of households earning over $75,000 work from home — well above the regional average of 16 percent.

In northeastern Illinois, workers with the option to telework are concentrated in industries such as insurance, real estate, and professional and financial services.

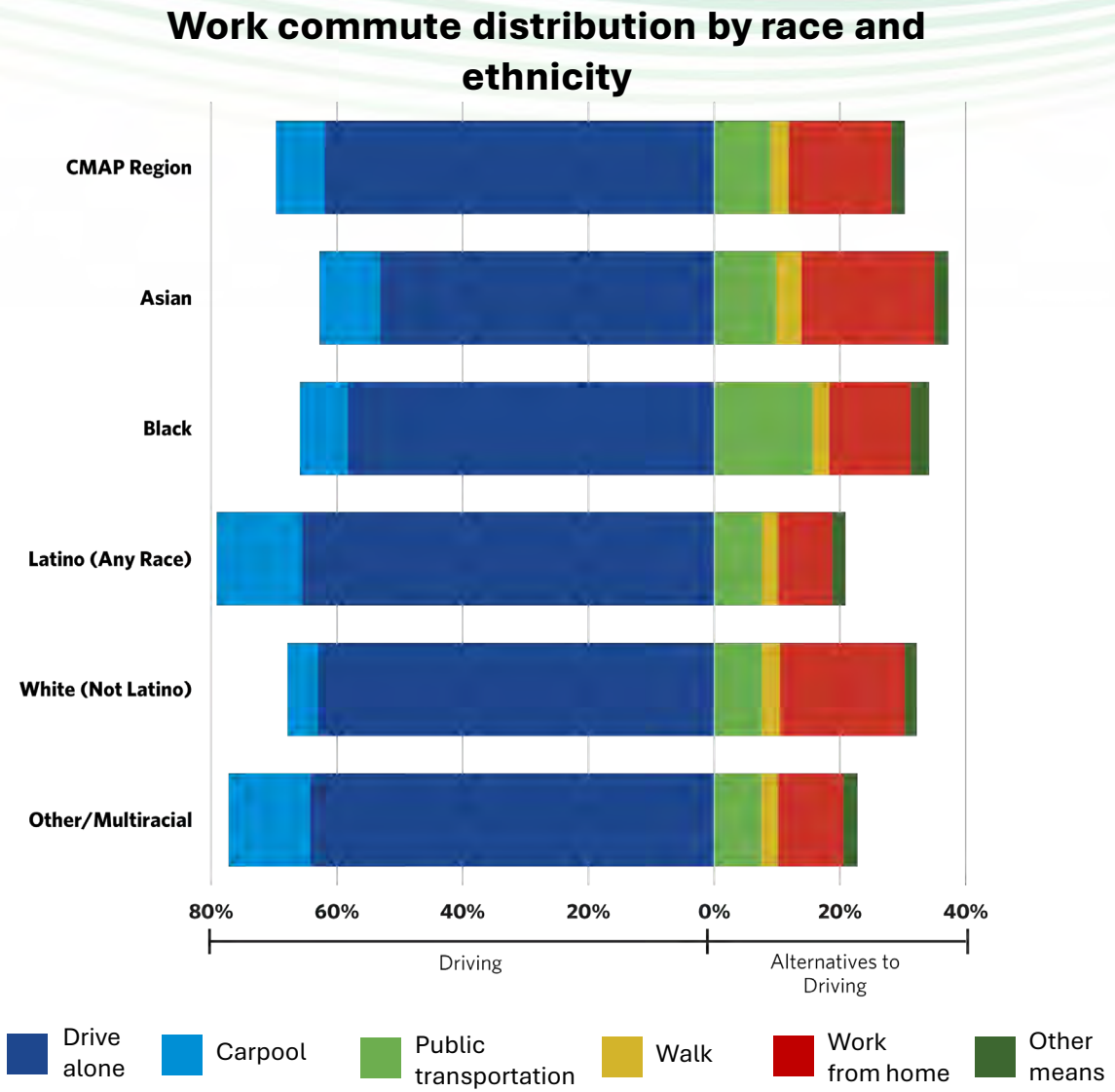
Source: *Mobility Recovery*, CMAP (2023).

Commute patterns reflect differences in access and economic opportunity

While driving is the dominant commute mode across all racial and ethnic groups, there are significant variations, especially among those who take transit or work from home:

- 16 percent of Black workers commute by transit, more than any other group.
- Latino and multiracial workers both drive to work and carpool more often.
- About a fifth of Asian and white workers work from home, above the regional average of 16 percent.

Commute patterns across racial groups show meaningful differences in how residents across the region travel to work, demonstrating varied levels of access to destinations, job centers, and more.



Note on data interpretation: Race and ethnicity categories in this chart may overlap. Since the ACS collects them separately, individuals who identify as Hispanic or Latino may also appear in other racial groups. As a result, totals may exceed 100 percent, and some individuals are counted in multiple categories.

Source: ACS 5-year estimates (2023).

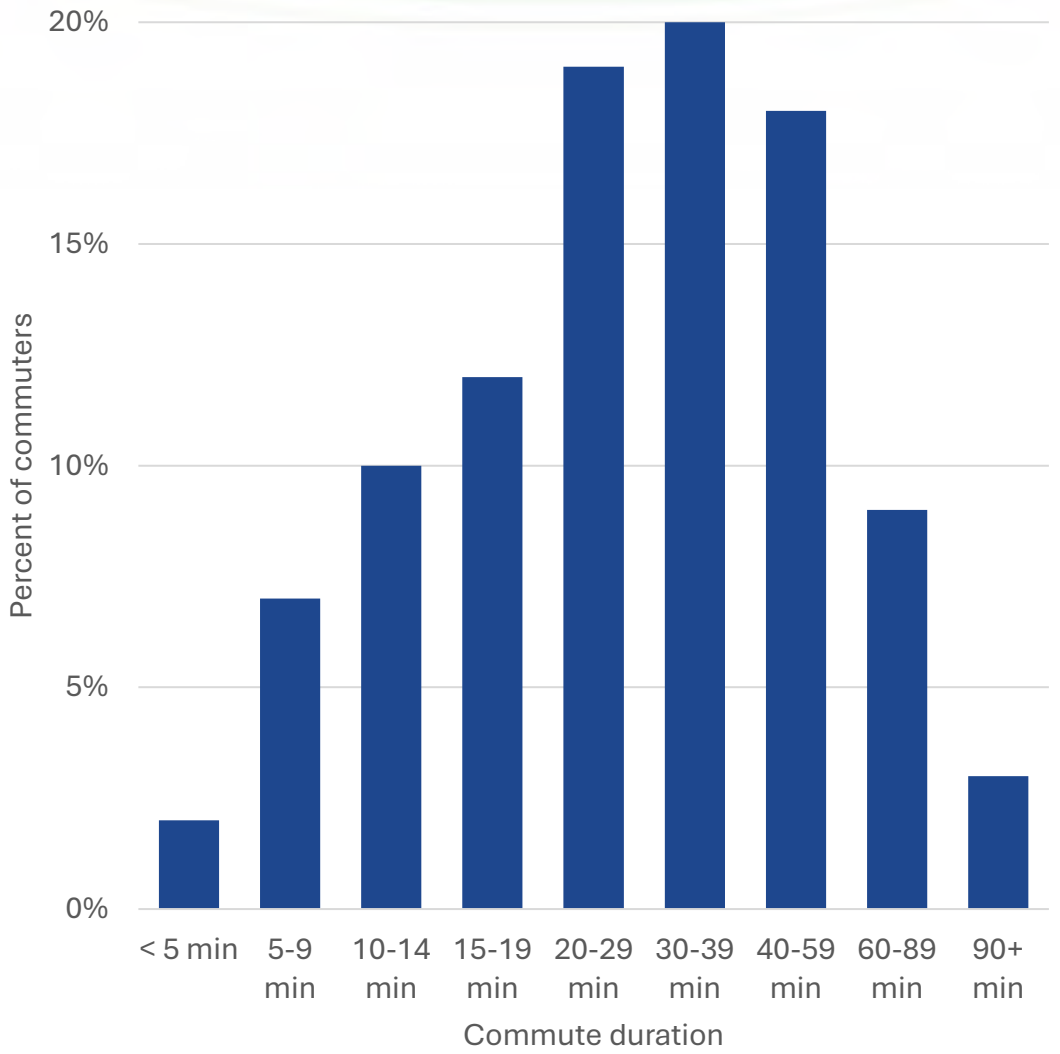
Commute times vary widely based on mobility options and proximity to destinations

The average commute time in northeastern Illinois is 33.5 minutes, but some commuters have long trips (12 percent are an hour or longer) while others have relatively short trips (9 percent are under 10 minutes).

This variation reflects differences in the built environment across the region. While some live near their workplaces, others travel long distances by car and transit to access jobs.

Reliability is key for all commutes, but particularly for the longest commutes, where congestion and disruptions can exacerbate long travel times. Minimizing disruptions on our roadways and providing fast and frequent transit service will help commuters get where they need to go, on time and dependably.

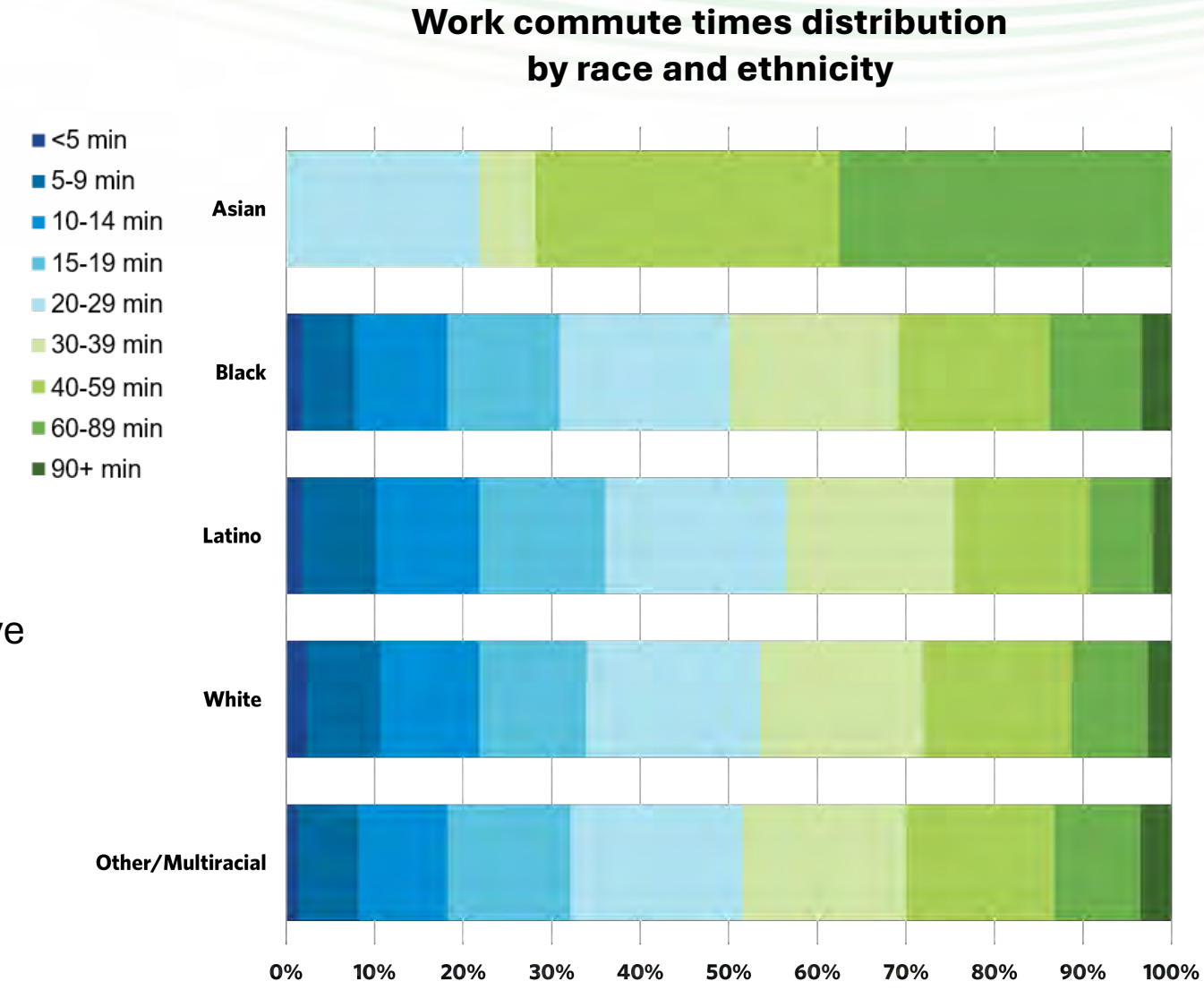
Distribution of commute times to work



Source: ACS 5-year estimates (2023).

Commute times are unevenly distributed, reflecting lack of access to jobs

Asian, Black, and multiracial or other racial groups experience commutes of 40 minutes or longer more frequently than the regional average. For many, these long trips reflect limited proximity to job centers and often involve lengthy car rides or complex transit journeys with multiple transfers. Improving the consistency and reliability of commute times can expand access to economic opportunities across the region.



Source: ACS 5-year estimates (2023).

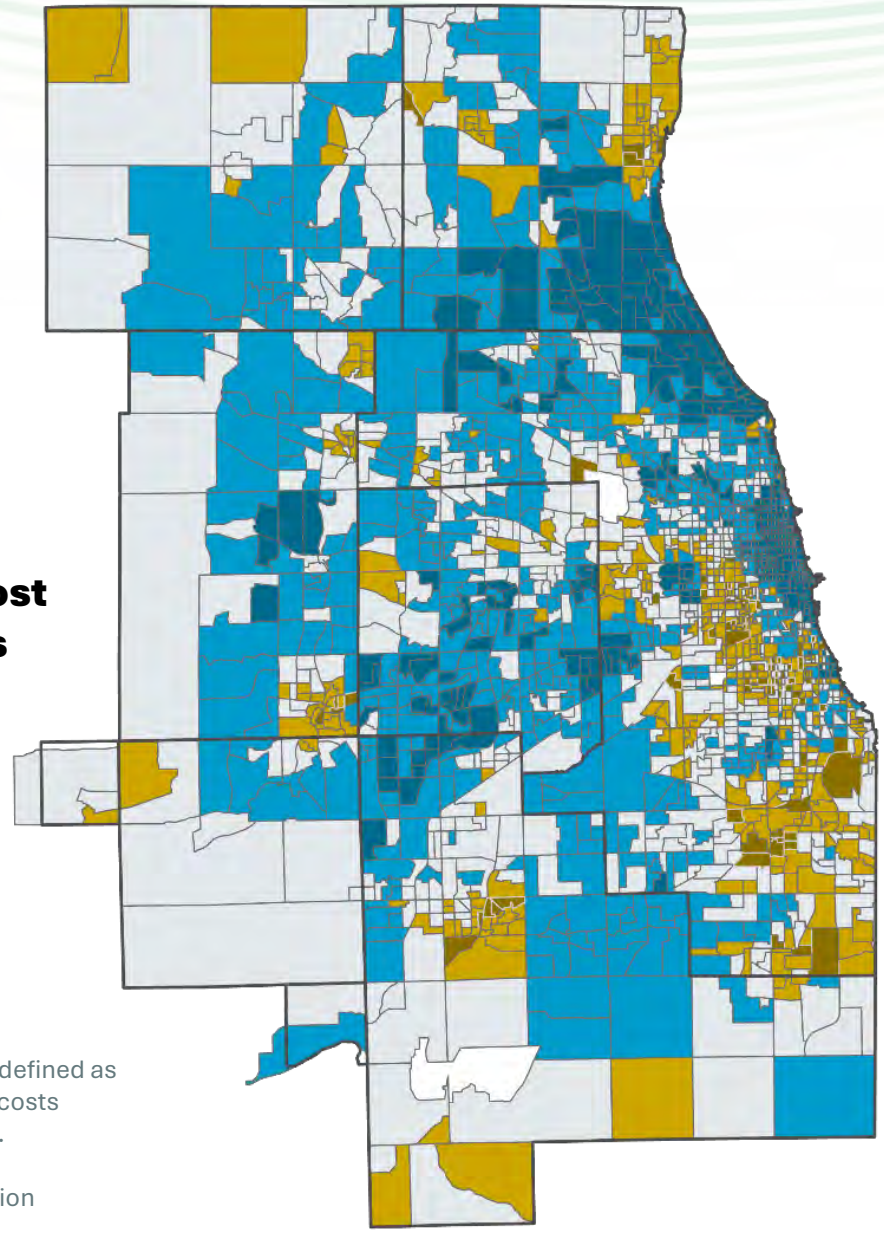
Transportation costs create barriers for many households

Transportation affordability remains a significant challenge for many households across the region, particularly those with lower incomes. While the cost of owning and maintaining a personal vehicle continues to rise, transportation fees, fines, and fares can also place a greater burden on residents who are already economically vulnerable.

Transportation cost burden measures the percentage of income that a household spends on transportation. When households spend a higher share of their income on transportation, they have less available resources for daily needs like food, medical care, housing, and more – contributing to financial stress.

Addressing transportation affordability — both in terms of direct costs like fares and fees and indirect costs such as time spent in unreliable systems — is essential to supporting the region's long-term economic health and mobility goals.

Transportation cost burden by census tract (2021)



Transportation cost burden is defined as the household transportation costs divided by the median income.

Source: Bureau of Transportation Statistics (2021).

Congestion and reliability

Understanding congestion trends in northeastern Illinois is essential to improving mobility, reducing delays, and supporting economic activity. Congestion affects freight movement, commuter travel, transit reliability, and overall transportation system performance.

Reliability is a cornerstone of an effective transportation system. Identifying reliability challenges on both roadways and transit can help guide strategies that improve performance across all modes of travel.

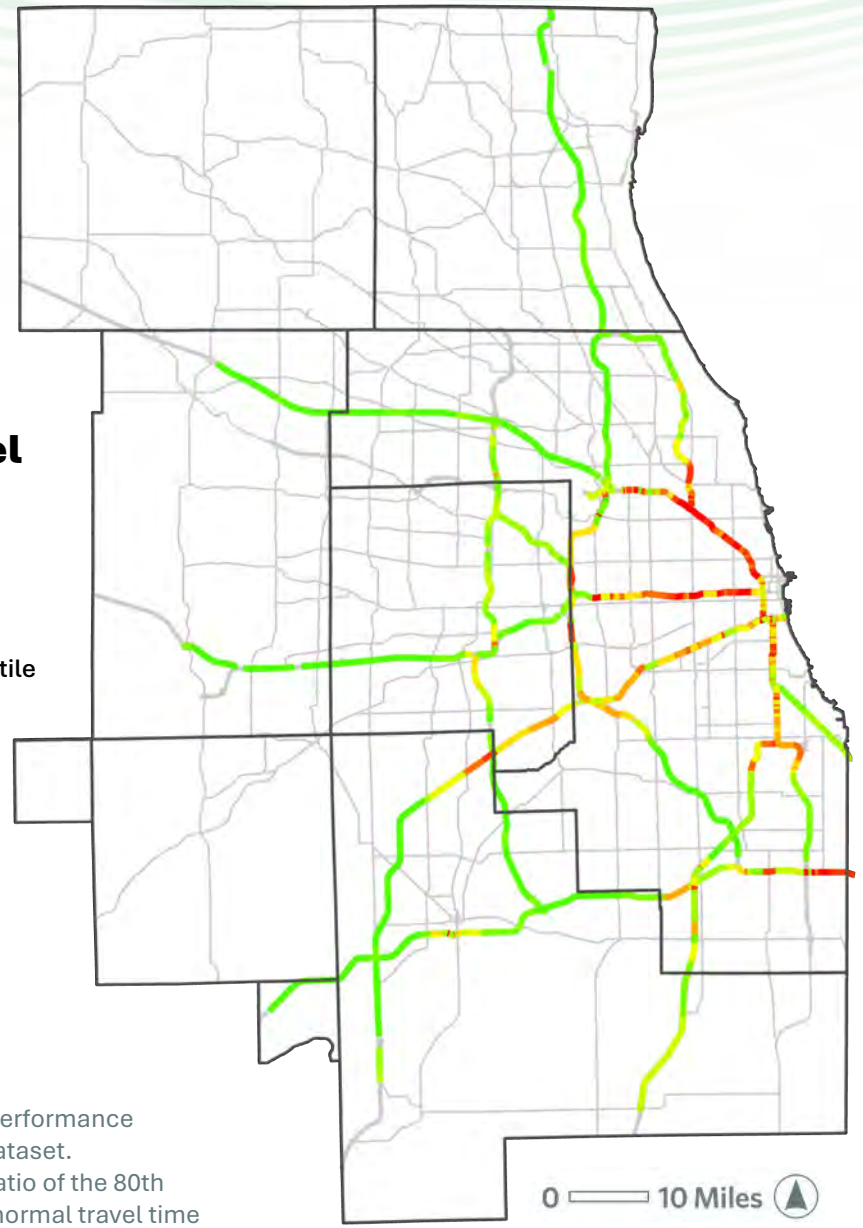
RTP 2026 Regional Transportation Plan

On the Interstate system, travel times are least reliable close to the urban core

Congestion is a significant problem in northeastern Illinois. While much of it is predictable — like rush hour traffic — unexpected delays from crashes, construction, weather, or special events make it more difficult to get around on time. These unpredictable slowdowns affect how reliably people and goods can reach their destinations.

Travel time reliability compares the worst delays to normal travel times. Some of the least reliable corridors include I-90 in the northern part of the City of Chicago, I-290 throughout Cook County, and I-80 in South Cook County. As these routes connect to key job centers and serve as critical freight corridors, reducing unexpected delays is important for people and goods moving across the region.

Interstate level of travel time reliability (LOTTR) (2022)



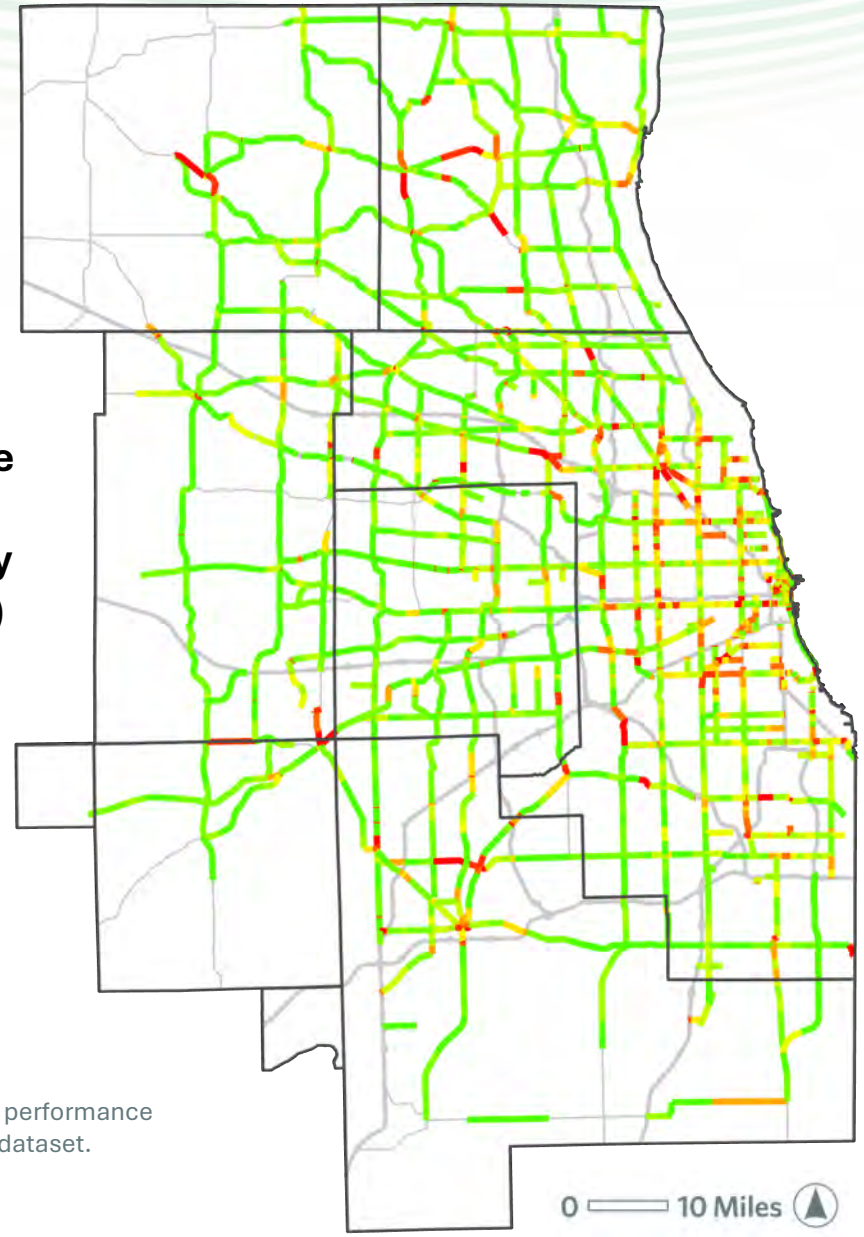
Source: FHWA national performance management research dataset.
LOTTR is defined as the ratio of the 80th percentile travel time to normal travel time (50th percentile).

Unreliable travel times on non-Interstate highways undermine access to key regional centers

Many non-interstate highways in the region, especially in Cook County, face serious reliability issues that affect daily travel. These routes serve dense residential areas and major employment hubs, where delays have greater consequences for commuters and the movement of goods. Improving travel time reliability on these critical corridors requires targeted strategies that address the root causes — such as poor signal coordination, frequent crashes, or localized flooding. Without action, these problems will continue to limit mobility, reduce economic productivity, and pose challenges to everyday travelers.

The ongoing Congestion Management Strategy initiative will explore targeted strategies on these key corridors to plan for comprehensive and holistic approaches that successfully connect people across the region.

Non-interstate level of travel time reliability (LOTTR) (2022)



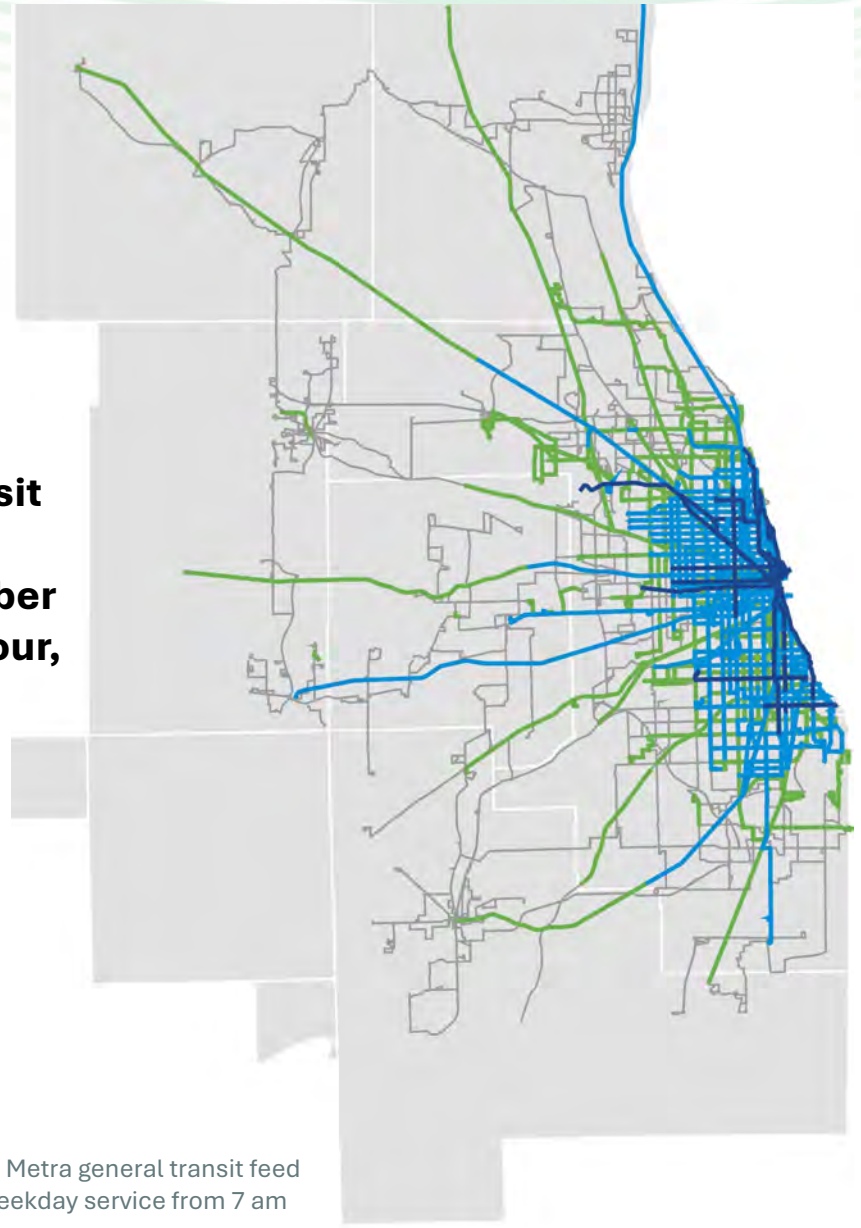
Source: FHWA national performance management research dataset.

Transit access varies across the region

While Chicago and surrounding suburbs benefit from a dense network of rail lines and bus routes with higher frequency, many outlying areas have limited or no access to frequent transit service. The current system is mostly designed around trips to and from the central core, which does not always match today's more varied travel patterns. Outside of Cook County, scheduled service is often less frequent, with longer wait times between trips. Although transit providers offer regular service during rush hours, many suburban communities face limited transit options throughout the day.

Addressing these gaps will likely require not only changes to the transit network itself, but also transit-supportive land use decisions that make it easier to serve more places effectively with transit.

Weekday morning transit frequency, in average number of runs per hour, April 2025

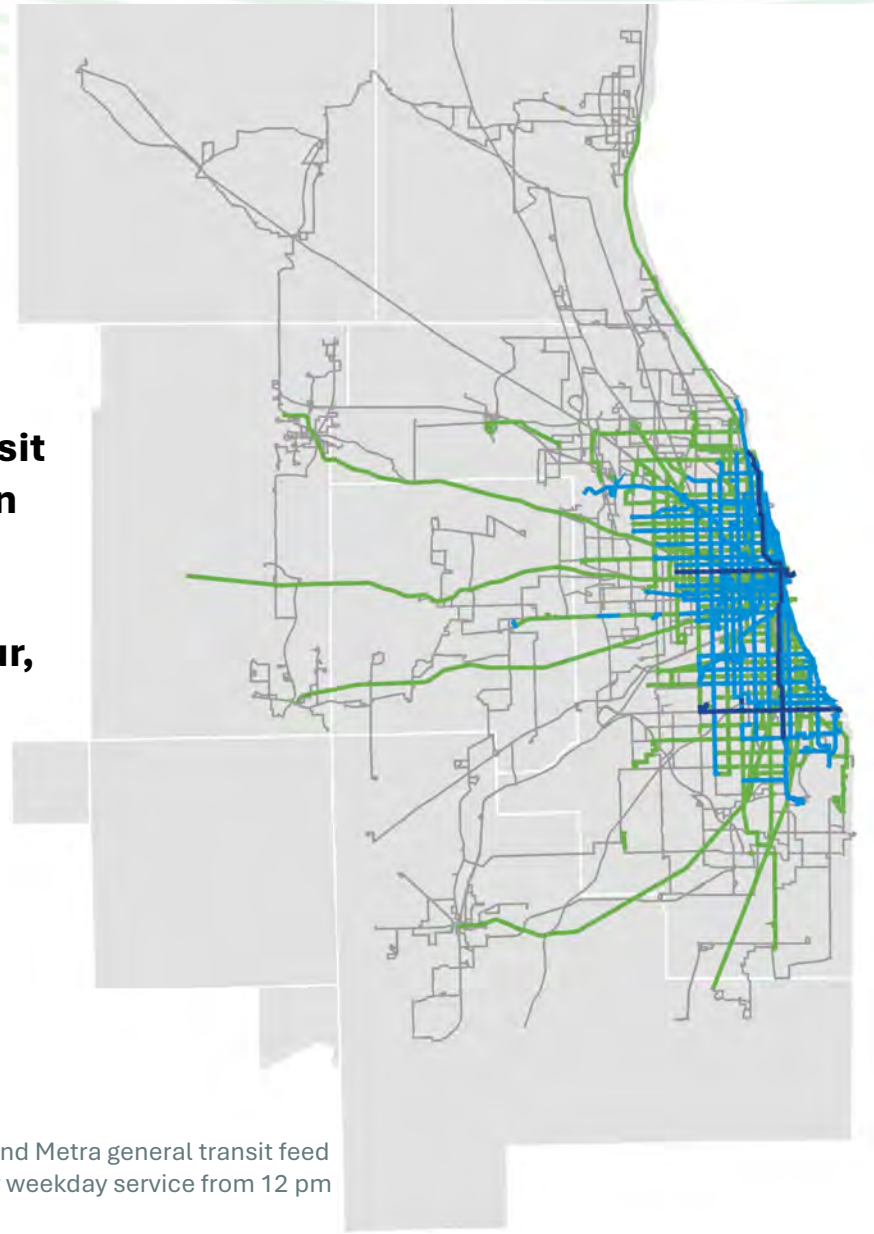


Source: CTA, Pace, and Metra general transit feed specification files for weekday service from 7 am to 9 am (April 2025).

Transit service is less frequent during off-peak periods

During midday, weekends, and other off-peak hours, long wait times between transit trips are common outside the CTA service area. For people whose work or daily activities fall outside the traditional 9-to-5 schedule, these gaps make relying on transit more difficult. Expanding off-peak service and improving connections in areas with limited transit options can make the system more convenient and responsive to a wider range of travel needs.

Weekday midday transit frequency, in average number of runs per hour, April 2025



Source: CTA, Pace, and Metra general transit feed specification files for weekday service from 12 pm to 2 pm (April 2025).

Transportation for people with disabilities

There is a diverse landscape of transportation resources for people with disabilities

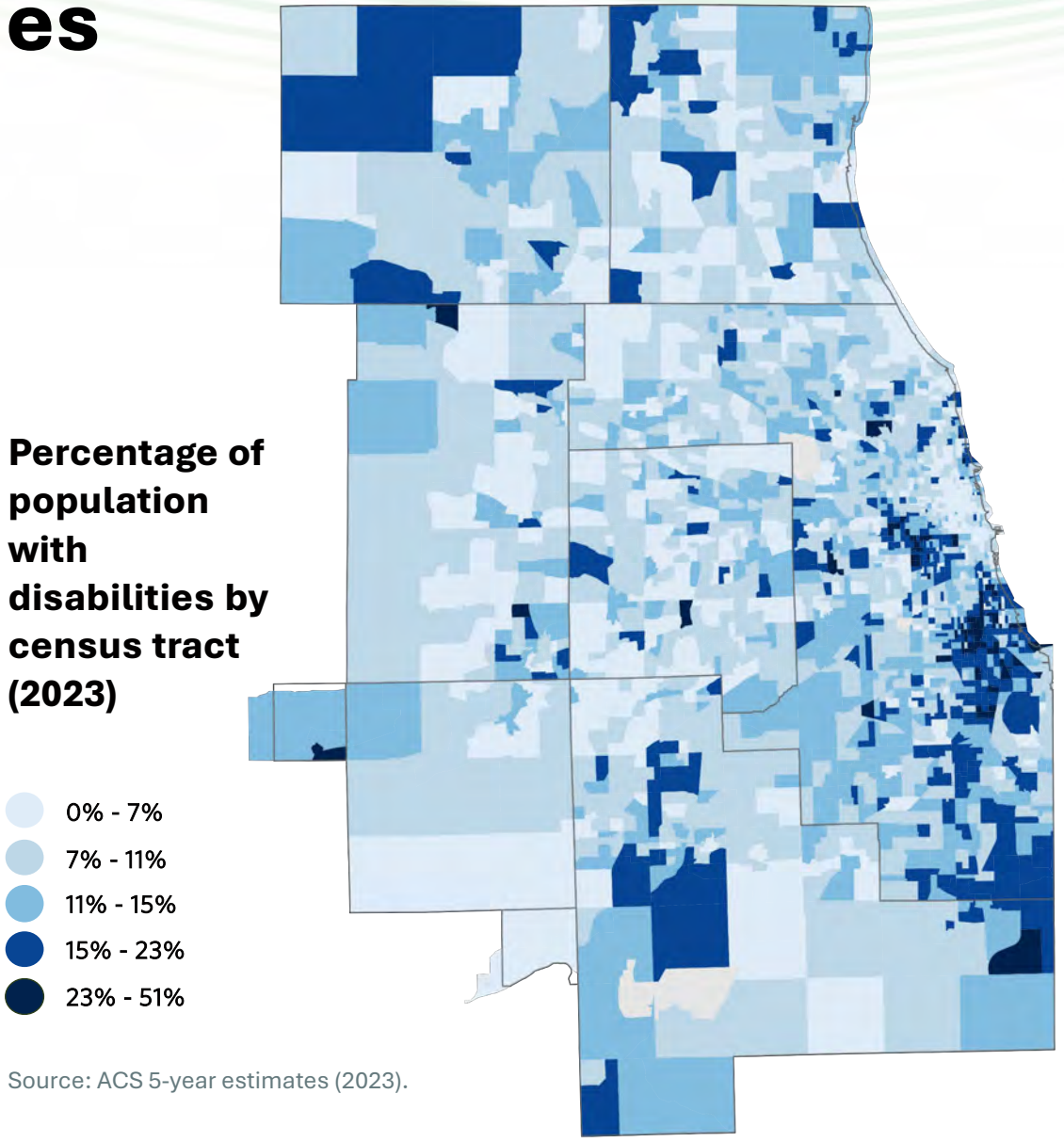
2026 Regional Transportation Plan

Serving people with disabilities

Many people in the region live with disabilities that affect how they travel, including mobility, visual, hearing, and cognitive differences. In northeastern Illinois, this includes nearly 880,000 people — about 10 percent of the region's 8.4 million residents. As the population ages, even more residents are likely to experience changes in ability that impact how they move through the region.

Reliable and frequent transit service is critical, as it offers an affordable and dignified travel option for many people with disabilities. Additionally, accessible transportation options — such as paratransit, Dial-a-Ride services, sidewalks and crosswalks, and ride-hailing services like Lyft or Uber — are essential for supporting independent travel. While these options have increased over the years, they are often disconnected, underfunded, or too costly to meet the mobility needs of those living with disabilities. These barriers can make it harder to reach healthcare, jobs, shopping, and other destinations. Addressing gaps through better coordination, investment, and design can help create a transportation system that works better for everyone.

Percentage of population with disabilities by census tract (2023)

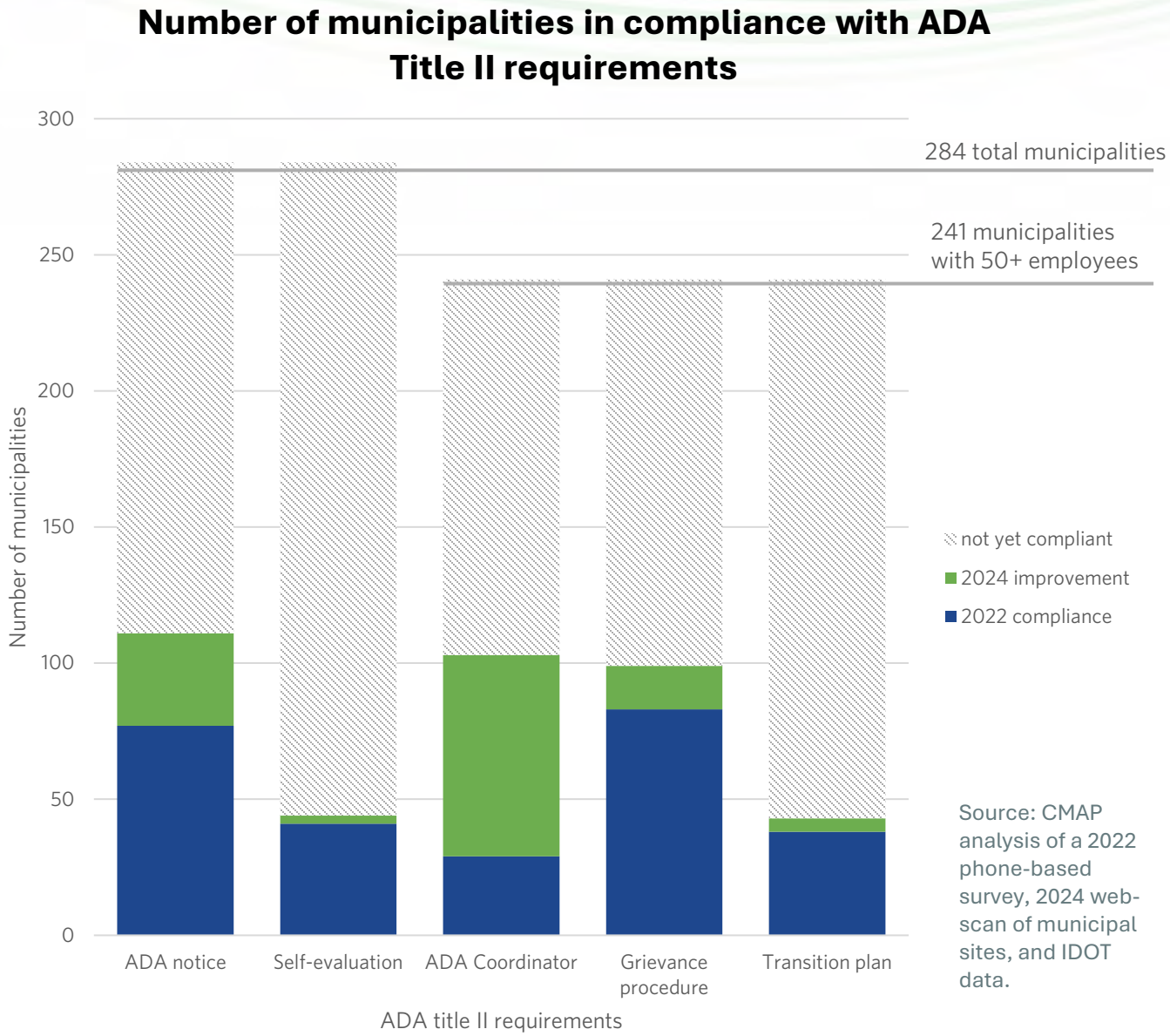


Source: ACS 5-year estimates (2023).

Progress towards ADA compliance is needed

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires all public entities to ensure that people with disabilities have access to public services, programs, and activities. At the time of publication, only 15 percent of municipalities in the region have completed a self-evaluation plan, and just 18 percent of those required to have a transition plan have one in place.

Addressing physical barriers in the public right-of-way is critical to improving access and enabling fuller participation in civic life for all.

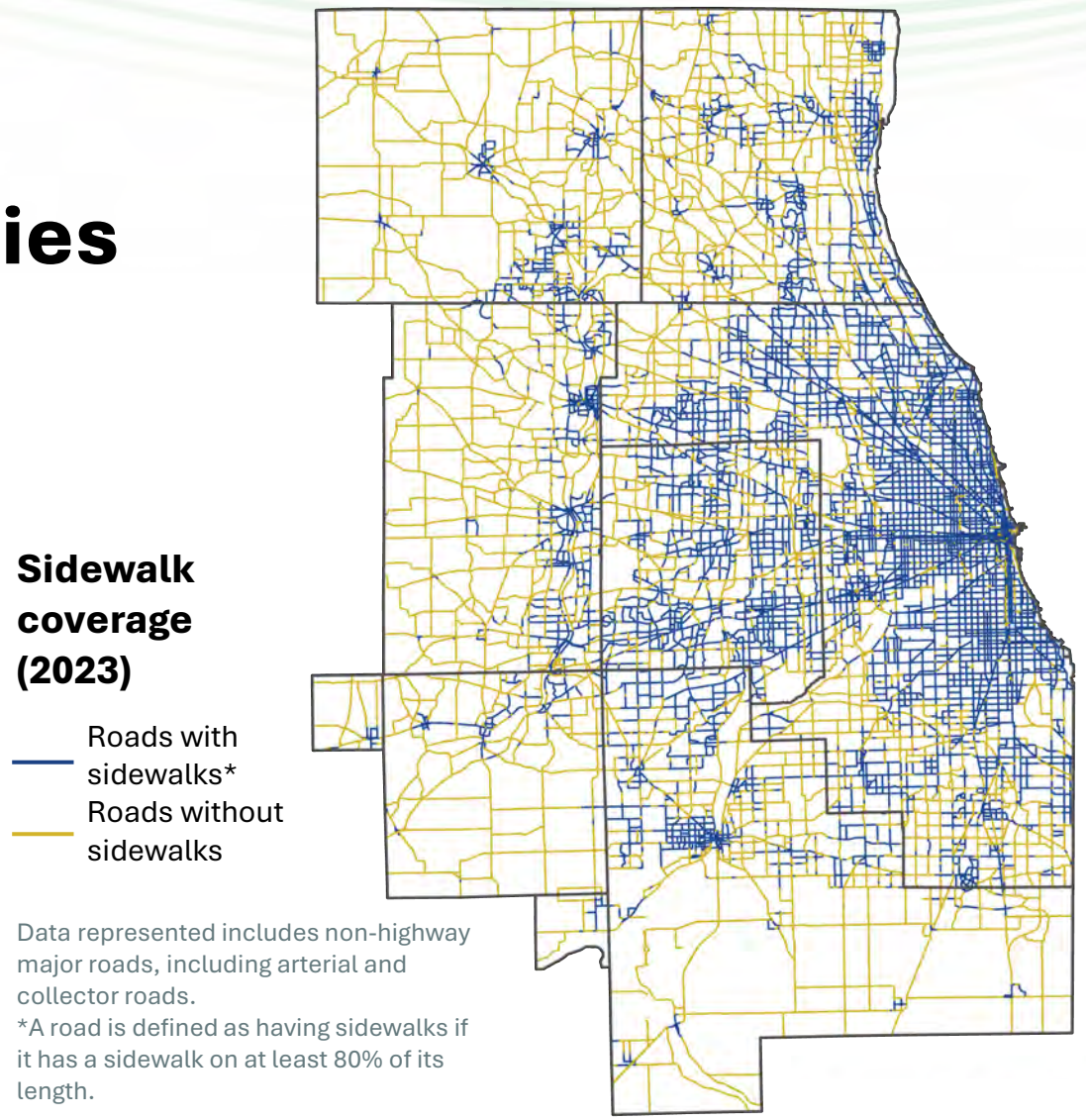


Sidewalk coverage affects accessibility for all residents, especially people with disabilities

Sidewalks are essential for people of all ages and abilities to safely reach transit, schools, jobs, and other destinations. When sidewalks are missing, in poor condition, or do not meet ADA standards, they create barriers for people using wheelchairs, walkers, strollers, or other mobility aids. Incomplete or poorly maintained sidewalk networks also weaken the overall effectiveness of the region's transit system by limiting access to stops and stations. Better sidewalks networks improve safety, comfort, and access for everyone.

38 percent of people commute to work via modes other than driving alone — by working from home, taking transit, carpooling, walking, or biking — and many of these trips begin as a pedestrian trip. As travel patterns shift and more people look for alternatives to driving, sidewalks remain a critical — but often overlooked — component of a well-functioning transportation system.

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates (2023).



Data represented includes non-highway major roads, including arterial and collector roads.
*A road is defined as having sidewalks if it has a sidewalk on at least 80% of its length.

Source: Ecopia (2023), IDOT Illinois roadway information system (2023).

Transit is becoming more accessible, but barriers persist

Many people with disabilities are unable to use the full transit system because stations and stops can be hard to access and use. Today, 67 percent of Metra and CTA stations are accessible. These stations include features like audio and visual announcements, Braille and large print signs, tactile strips, elevators or ramps, and platform-train gap fillers. Riders who depend on these features face challenges when their closest station is not accessible.

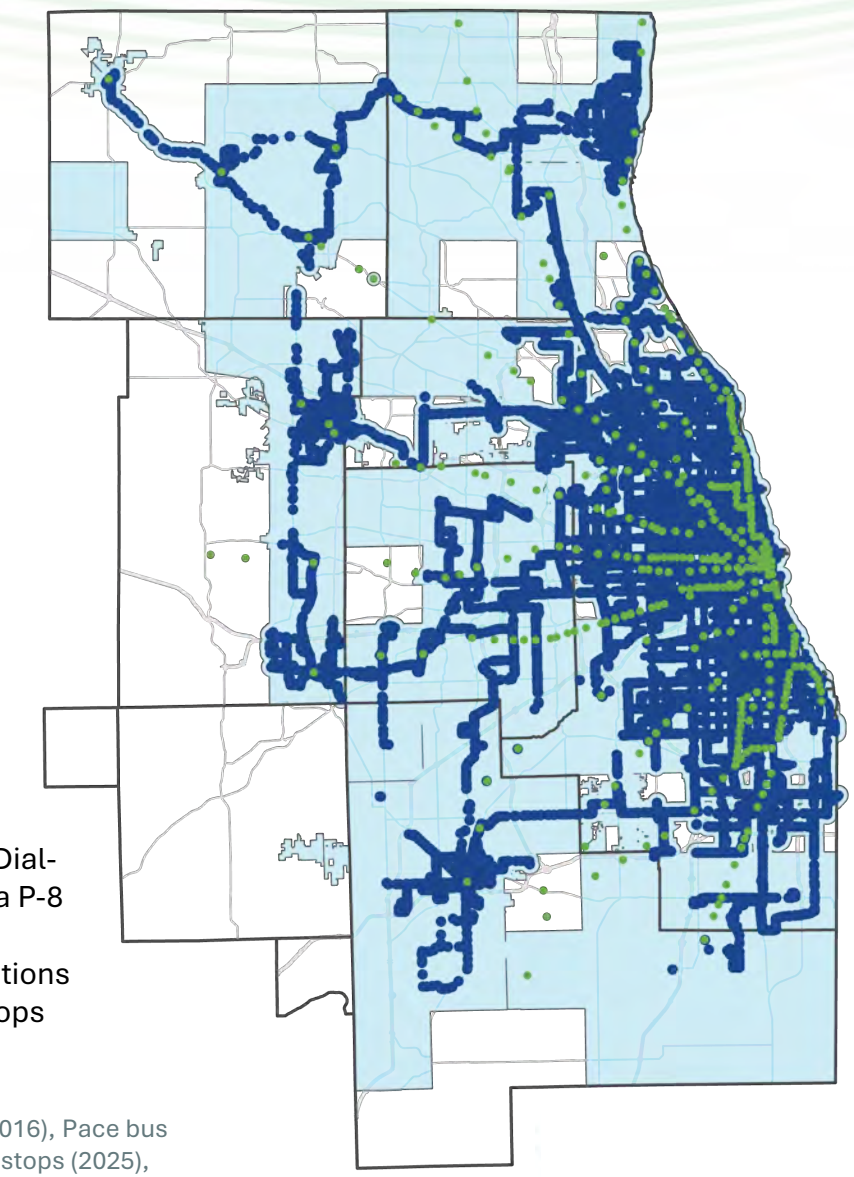
Upgrading the rest of the transit system requires continued investment, but it will allow more people — especially those with mobility challenges — to travel independently while making the entire system safer, more reliable, and easier to use for everyone.

Residents navigate an array of paratransit and on-demand services

Northeastern Illinois offers a variety of mobility options for older adults and people with disabilities. Pace operates paratransit services alongside fixed-route transit, while many local governments provide on-demand programs within their communities. Metra also offers P-8 shuttle services to help riders access the nearest accessible station.

These services are vital, but can feel fragmented for residents who navigate an array of public and private providers operating at the local, county, and regional levels. Riders often face limited-service hours — often 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. — which can be challenging for trips outside this window. Fare structures vary, and information about available services are not centralized.

The complexity of these options can make travel more difficult. Stable funding and regional coordination are essential to improve these gaps and provide more reliable transportation options.



Source: Dial to Ride (2016), Pace bus stops (2025), CTA bus stops (2025), CTA stations (2025), Metra P8 (2025).

Prioritize safety and public health

Improving travel safety is a top priority

People across northeastern Illinois emphasize the need for safer roads, stronger policies, and better infrastructure that protects people who walk and bike.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in travel patterns and riskier driving behavior have increased traffic deaths, making this challenge even more urgent. Despite some progress, fatal and serious crashes continue to pose a major concern. Governments at all levels must continue to work together to make streets safer and reduce the number of lives lost on the road.

Serious and fatal crashes remain a persistent challenge

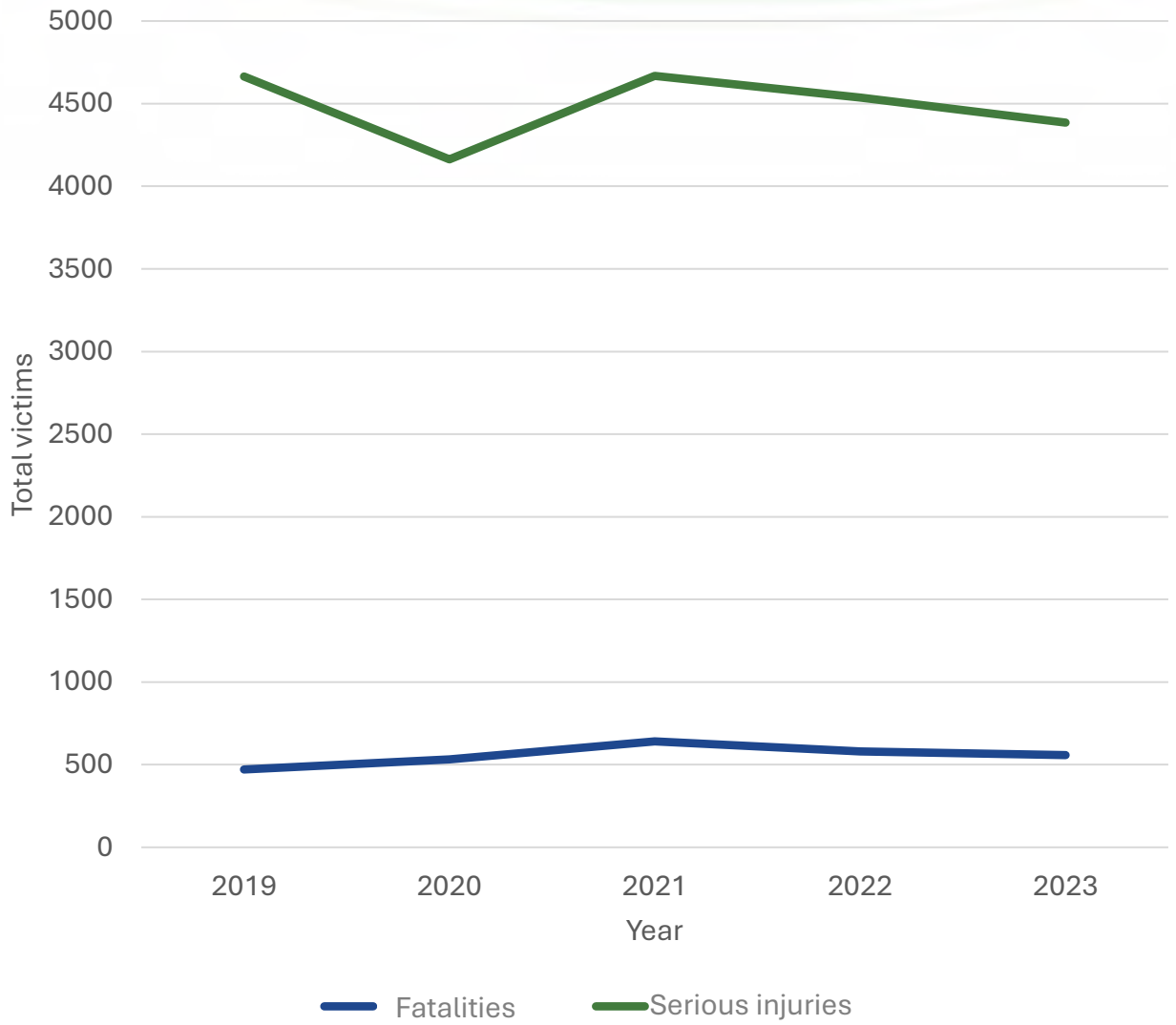
Across northeastern Illinois – and the United States more broadly — a large proportion of crashes result in deaths and serious injuries.

2026 Regional Transportation Plan

The pandemic has had a long-lasting effect on travel safety

After the onset of COVID-19, the region experienced a sharp drop in serious injuries due to fewer cars being on the road. However, a concerning trend emerged: while serious injury crashes declined, traffic fatalities have remained elevated, indicating that crashes in the region are becoming more deadly. Between 2019 and 2021 alone, traffic fatalities rose by 41 percent.

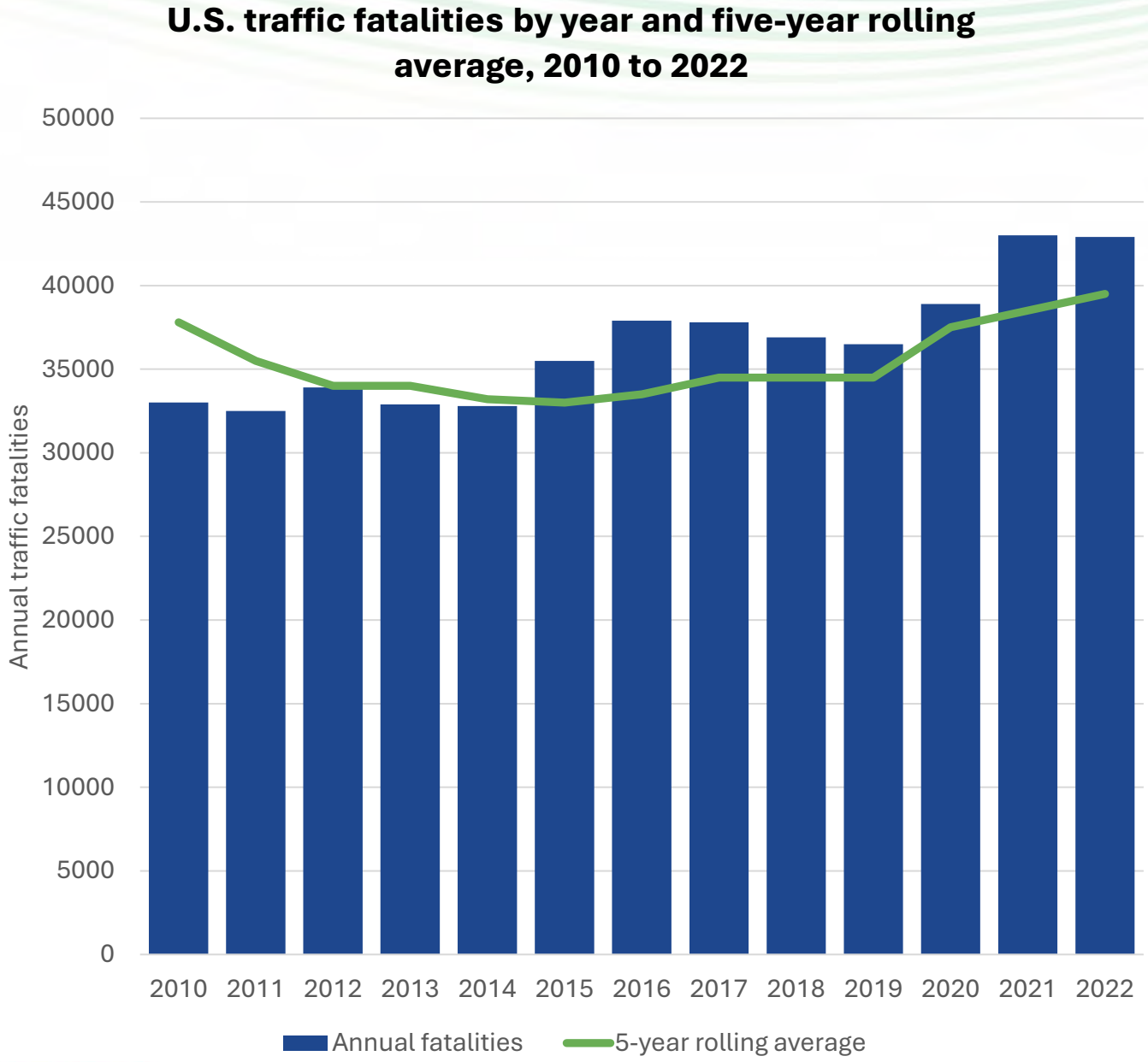
Fatalities and serious injuries, CMAP region, 2019 to 2023



Source: *Speed Management*, CMAP (2024).

Crash fatalities have been trending upward

Although the extraordinary conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic led to a spike in fatal and serious crashes, the increasing risk of traffic deaths in northeastern Illinois began as early as 2014.



Note: 2022 values are National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates.

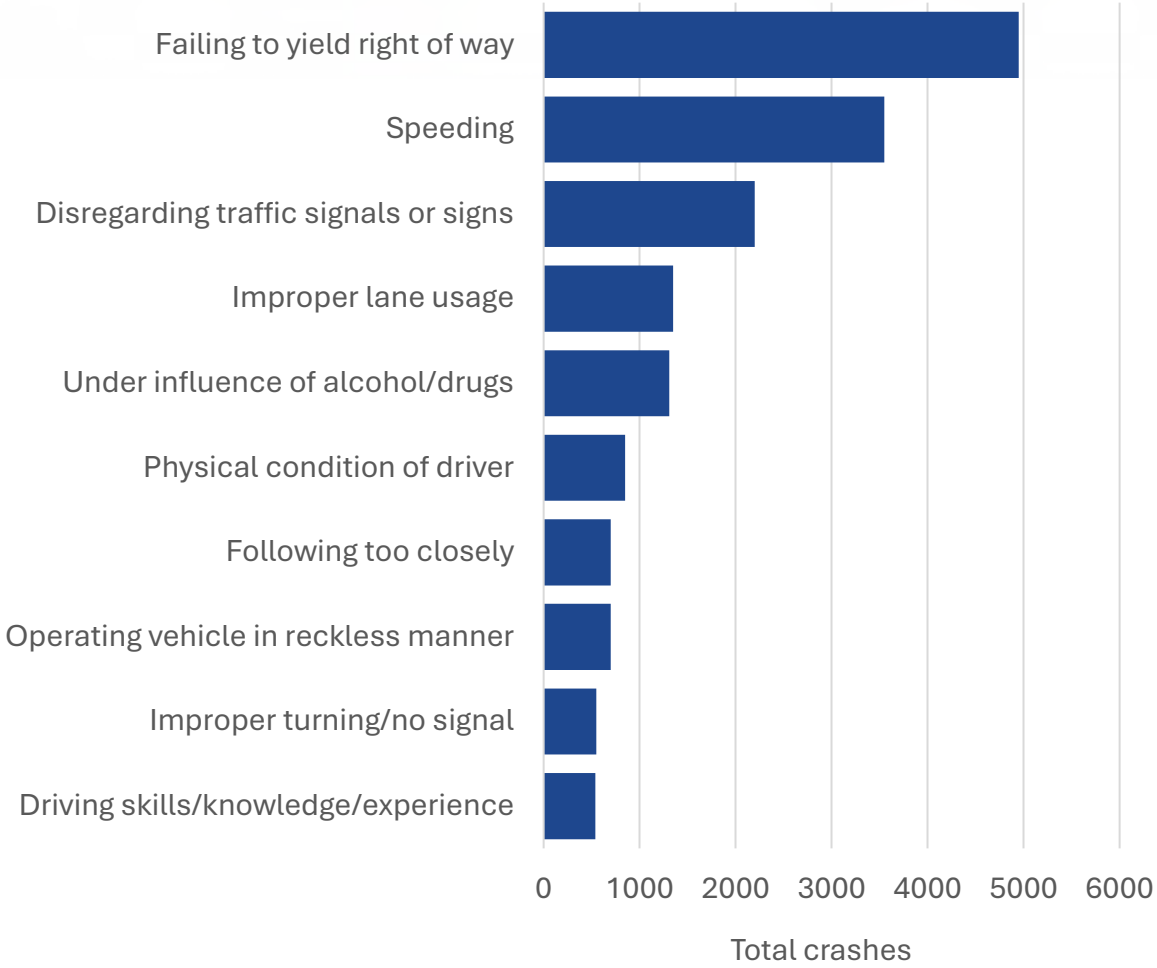
Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration fatality analysis reporting system.

Speeding is a major cause of serious and fatal crashes

There is a relationship between speeding, driver behavior, and roadway design. For decades, transportation planning has prioritized the fast and efficient movement of vehicles — often to the detriment of more vulnerable users like bicyclists and pedestrians. Faster roadway speeds have a significant impact on crash severity, with higher speeds leading to more fatalities and serious injuries.

By holistically improving roadway design and supporting a culture of safety in transportation, northeastern Illinois can make progress reducing harmful crashes.

Crashes resulting in fatalities or serious injuries by primary cause, CMAP region, 2019 to 2023



Source: CMAP analysis of IDOT traffic safety data.

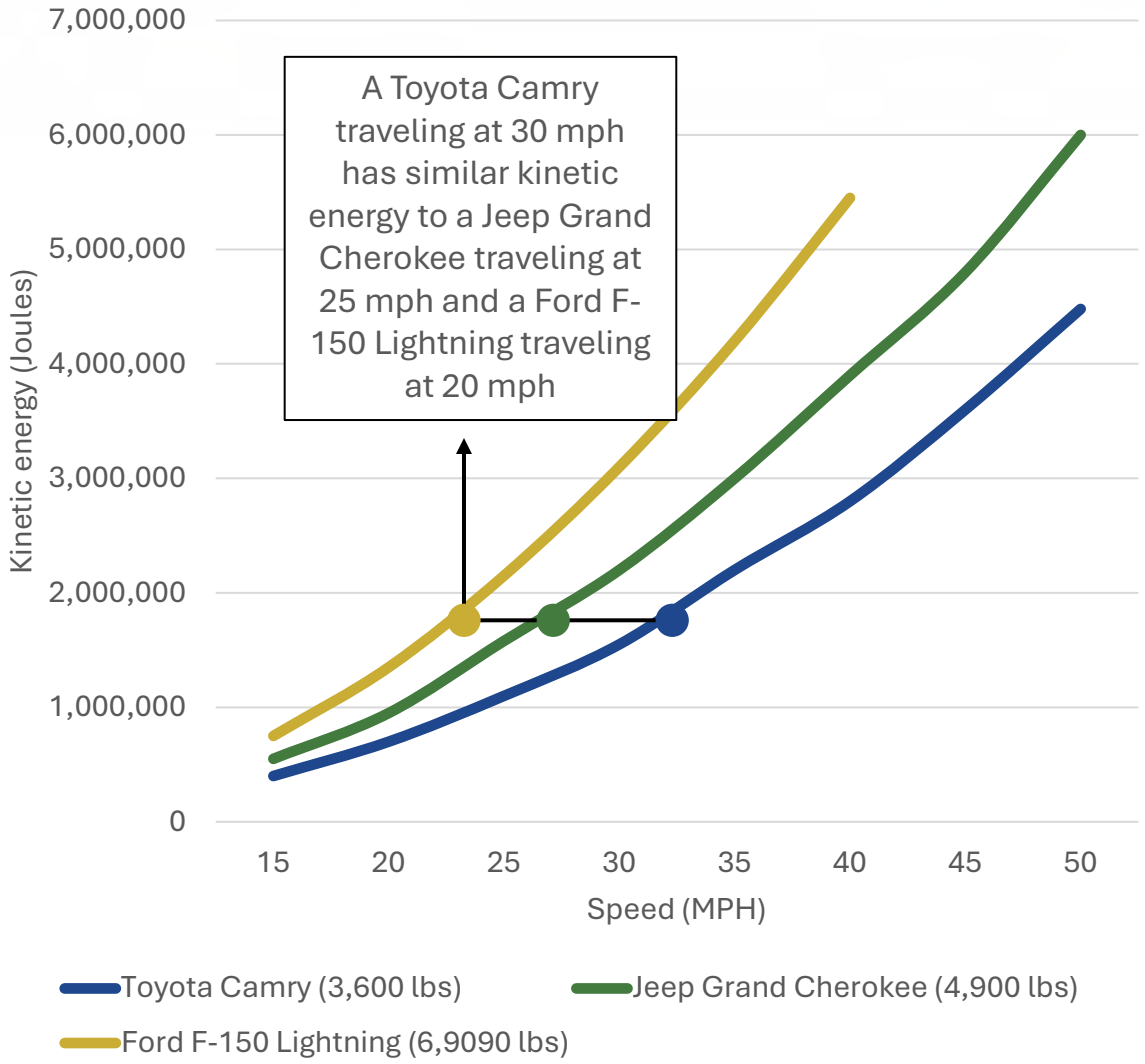
Heavier and taller vehicles are increasing the risk of deaths and serious injuries

Between 1975 and 2021, the share of large vehicles like SUVs grew from 2 percent to 55 percent of all new cars nationwide. Vehicles have also become heavier. In 1975, the average pickup truck 4,000 pounds; by 2021 it weighed more than 5,200 pounds. Many electric vehicles weigh even more. For example, Ford's F-150 Lightning — one of the most popular electric pickup trucks — weighs over 6,500 pounds.

Larger, heavier vehicles impact safety significantly. Even at slower speeds, their greater mass can exert the same force as smaller vehicles traveling at higher speeds. This increases the danger of crashes, especially for cyclists, pedestrians, and occupants of smaller vehicles.

Source: *Speed Management*, CMAP (2024).

Kinetic energy of top selling U.S. vehicles of different weights, traveling at various speeds, 2022



Some travelers face greater safety risks

Crashes resulting in deaths or serious injuries remain a major challenge across northeastern Illinois. However, some travelers face higher risks than others.

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Bicyclists and pedestrians are disproportionately represented in serious and fatal crashes

Despite being involved in less than 3 percent of total crashes, bicyclists and pedestrians account for more than 25 percent of crash fatalities.

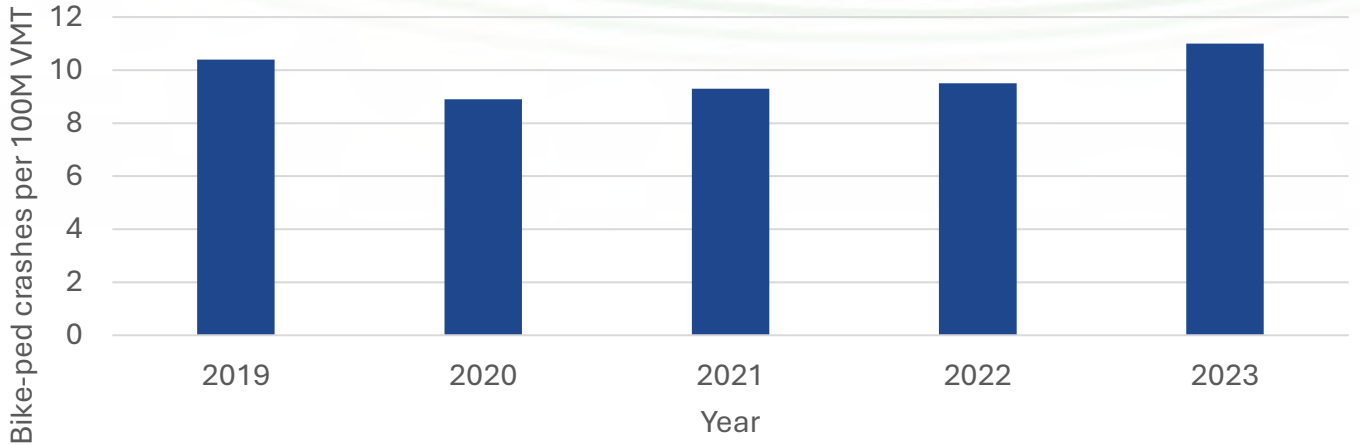
Crashes with bicyclists and pedestrians are increasing

Although the region experienced a drop in crashes involving bicyclists and pedestrians following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rate has since risen rapidly — eventually surpassing pre-pandemic levels.

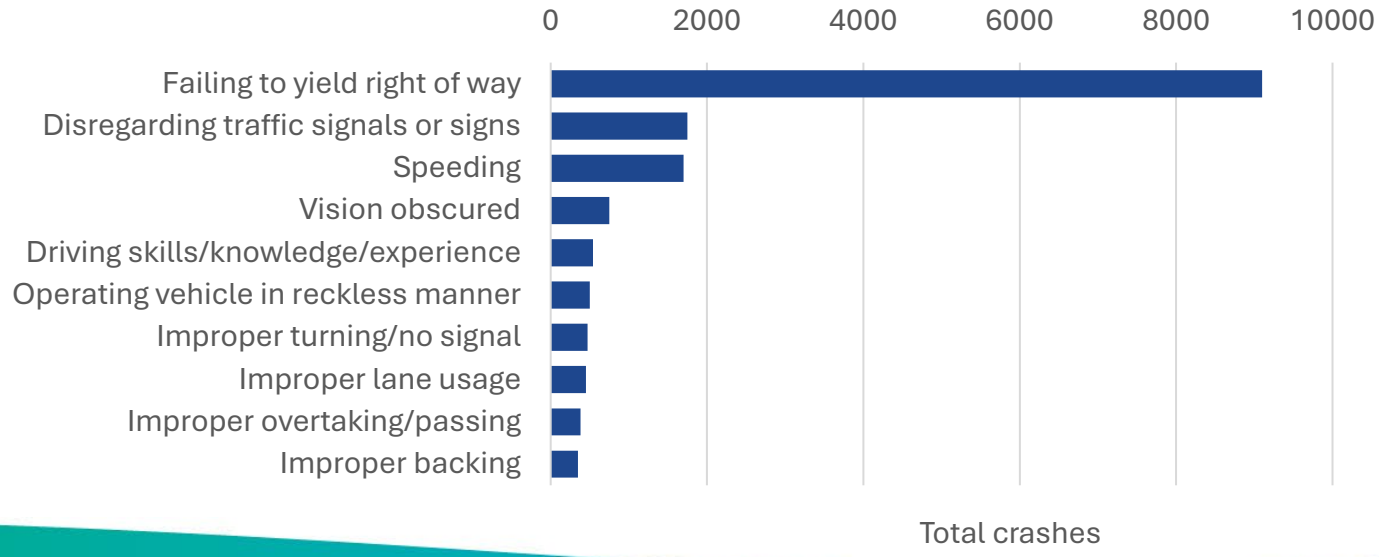
Speeding remains a top concern, but failure to yield stands out as a leading cause of serious and fatal crashes. Contributing factors include roadway design, lack of protective infrastructure, and unsafe driving behaviors.

Source: CMAP analysis of IDOT traffic safety data.

Bike and pedestrian crash rate, CMAP region, 2019 to 2023



Bike and pedestrian crashes by primary cause (top 10 categories), CMAP region, 2019 to 2023



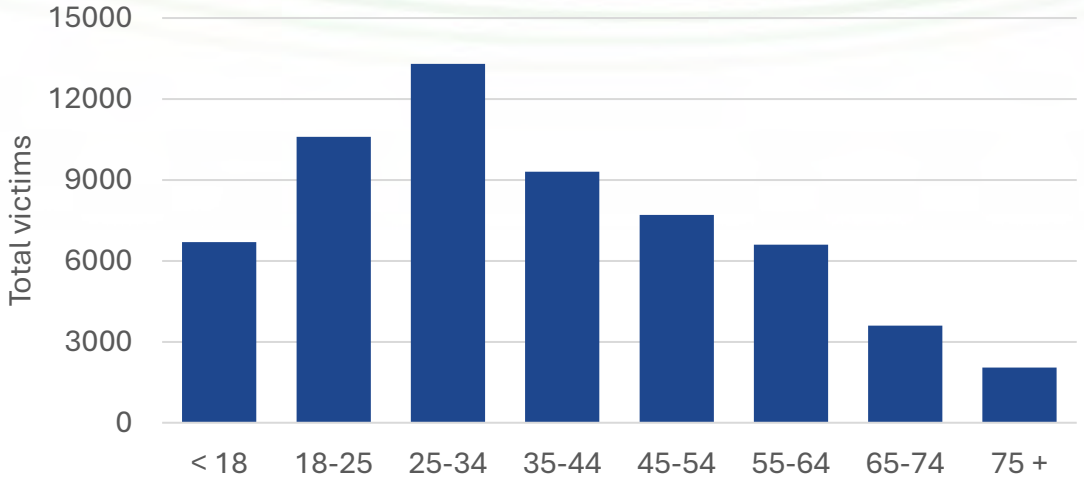
Younger and older residents are overrepresented in crashes with bicyclists and pedestrians

Compared to the age distribution of all fatal and serious crashes, younger and older residents make up a disproportionate share of bicyclist and pedestrian crash victims.

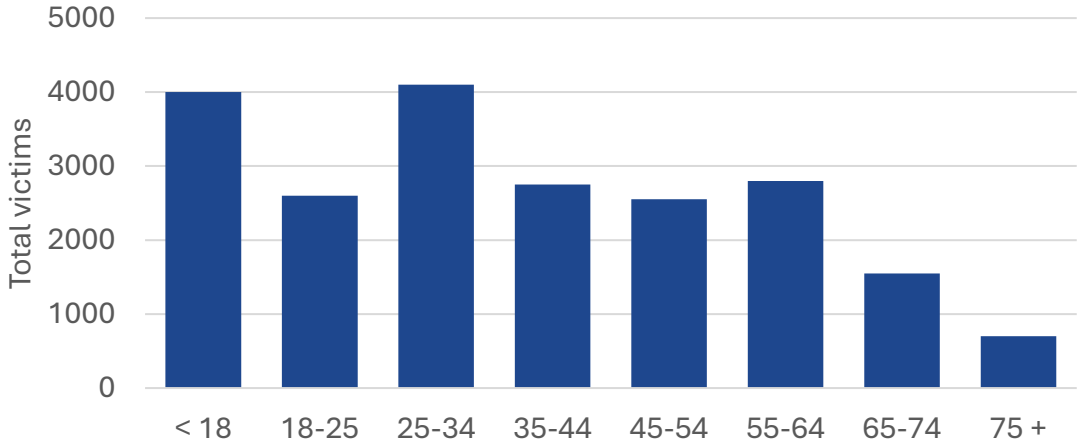
Many residents do not drive for a wide range of reasons. A significant proportion of people under the age of 18 do not hold a driver's license, and a growing share of adults choose not to drive. Aging residents often turn to walking and biking when they are no longer able or willing to drive. In these instances, active transportation like walking and biking provides essential connections to transit and other important destinations.

Source: CMAP analysis of IDOT traffic safety data.

Victims of fatal and serious injury crashes by age, CMAP region, 2019 to 2023



Bicyclist and pedestrian victims of fatal, serious, and moderate injury crashes by age, CMAP region, 2019 to 2023

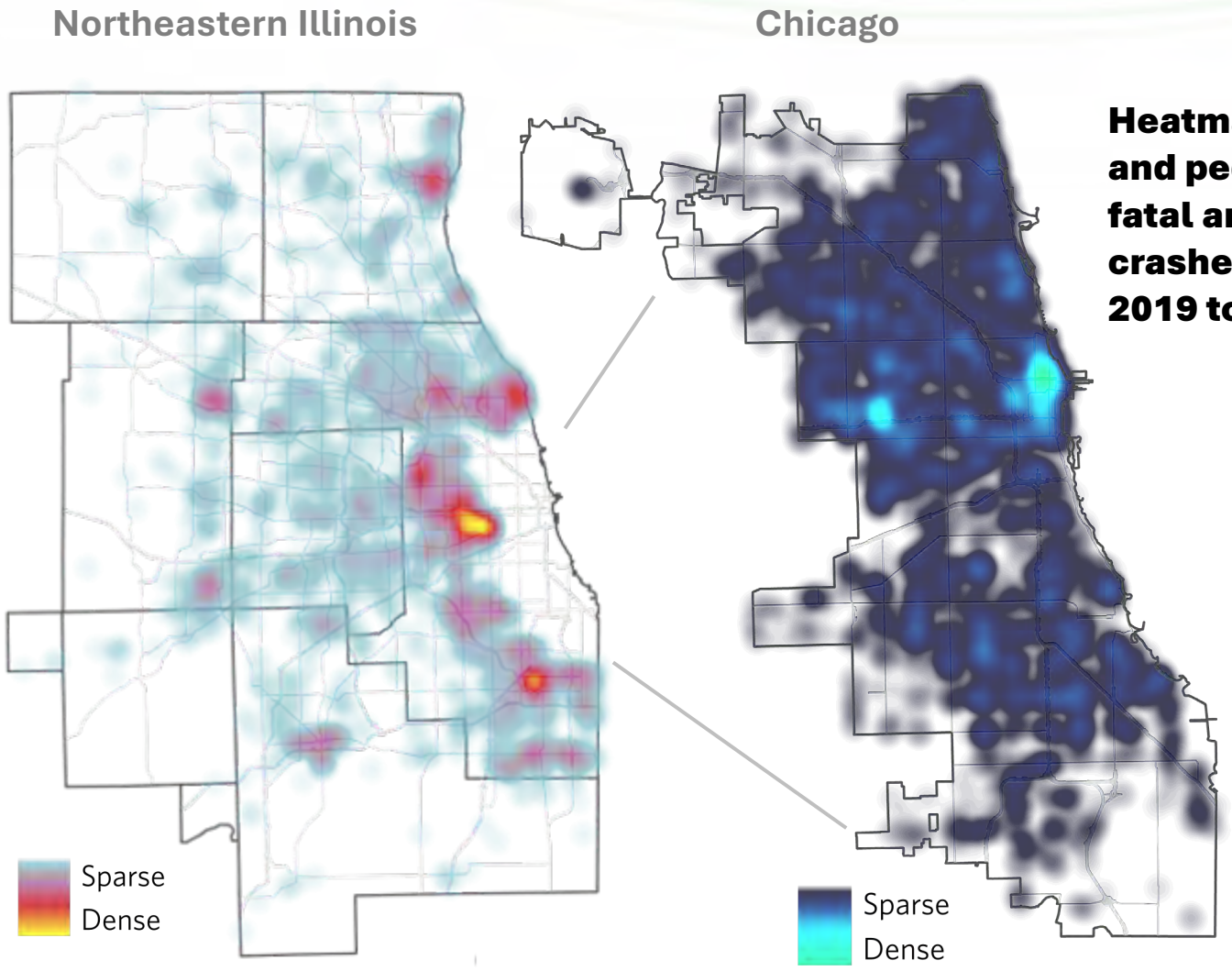


Some areas face greater safety risks

As the region's urban core, Chicago faces concentrated traffic safety concerns, particularly for bicyclists and pedestrians. As more suburban centers develop, fatal and serious crashes are becoming an increasing challenge in communities throughout the region.

There is a long history of high-volume roads — like highways and busy arterials — being built in areas experiencing chronic disinvestment. High speeds and lack of multimodal options make these roads both a safety risk and a barrier to mobility for residents living nearby.

Source: *Speed Management*, CMAP (2024).



Heatmap of bike and pedestrian fatal and serious crashes, 2019 to 2023

Source: CMAP analysis of IDOT traffic safety data.

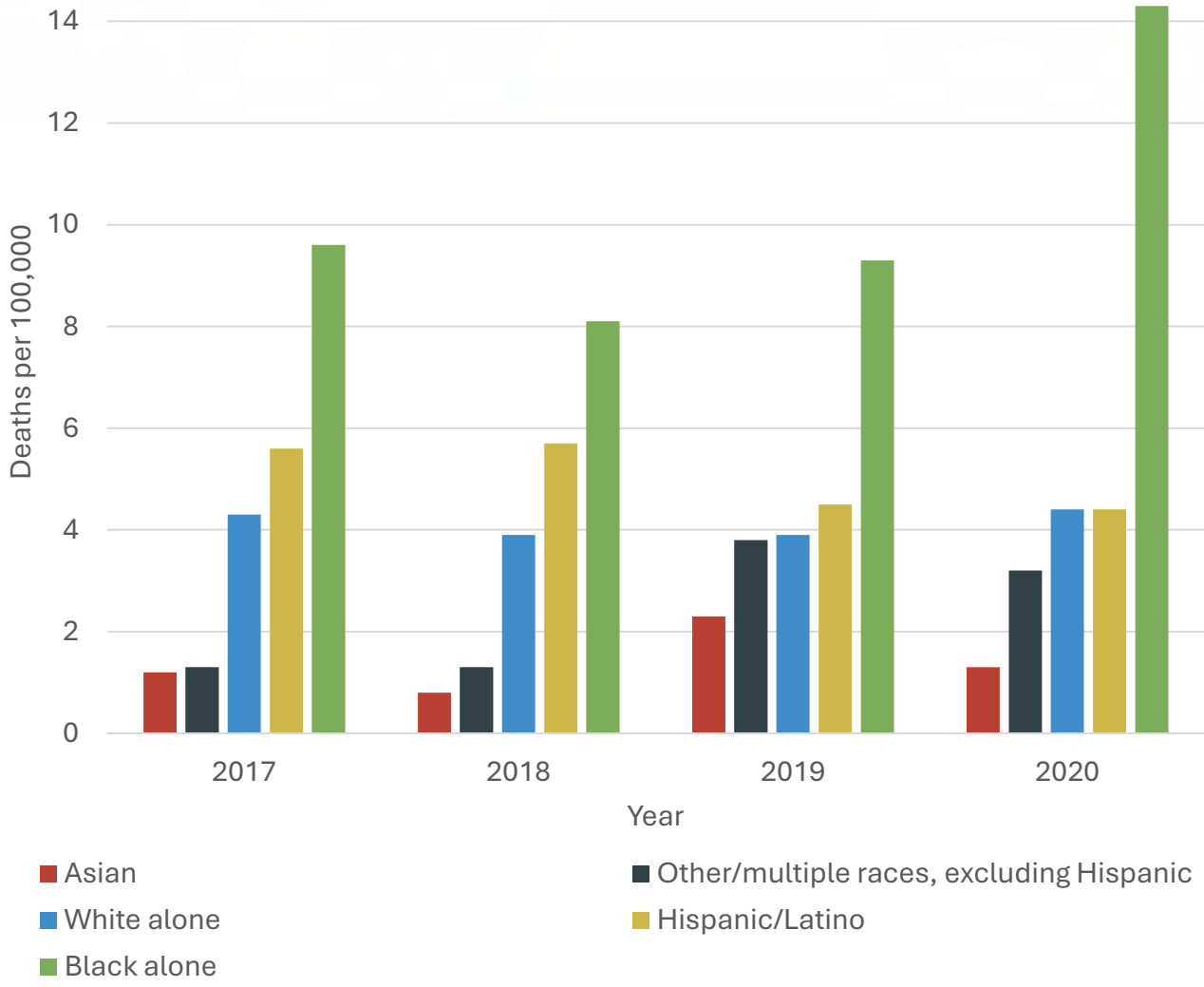
Exposure to traffic safety risks are disproportionate

From 2017 to 2020, Black residents in northeastern Illinois experienced the highest rate of traffic deaths. In 2020, the fatality rate for Black residents reached more than 14 deaths per 100,000 people — nearly 3 times the rate for White and Hispanic residents.

These outcomes reflect long-standing disparities in access to safe streets and reliable transportation options. Addressing these patterns will require strategic safety improvements and a deeper understanding of where and why these risks are greatest.

Source: *Speed Management*, CMAP (2024).

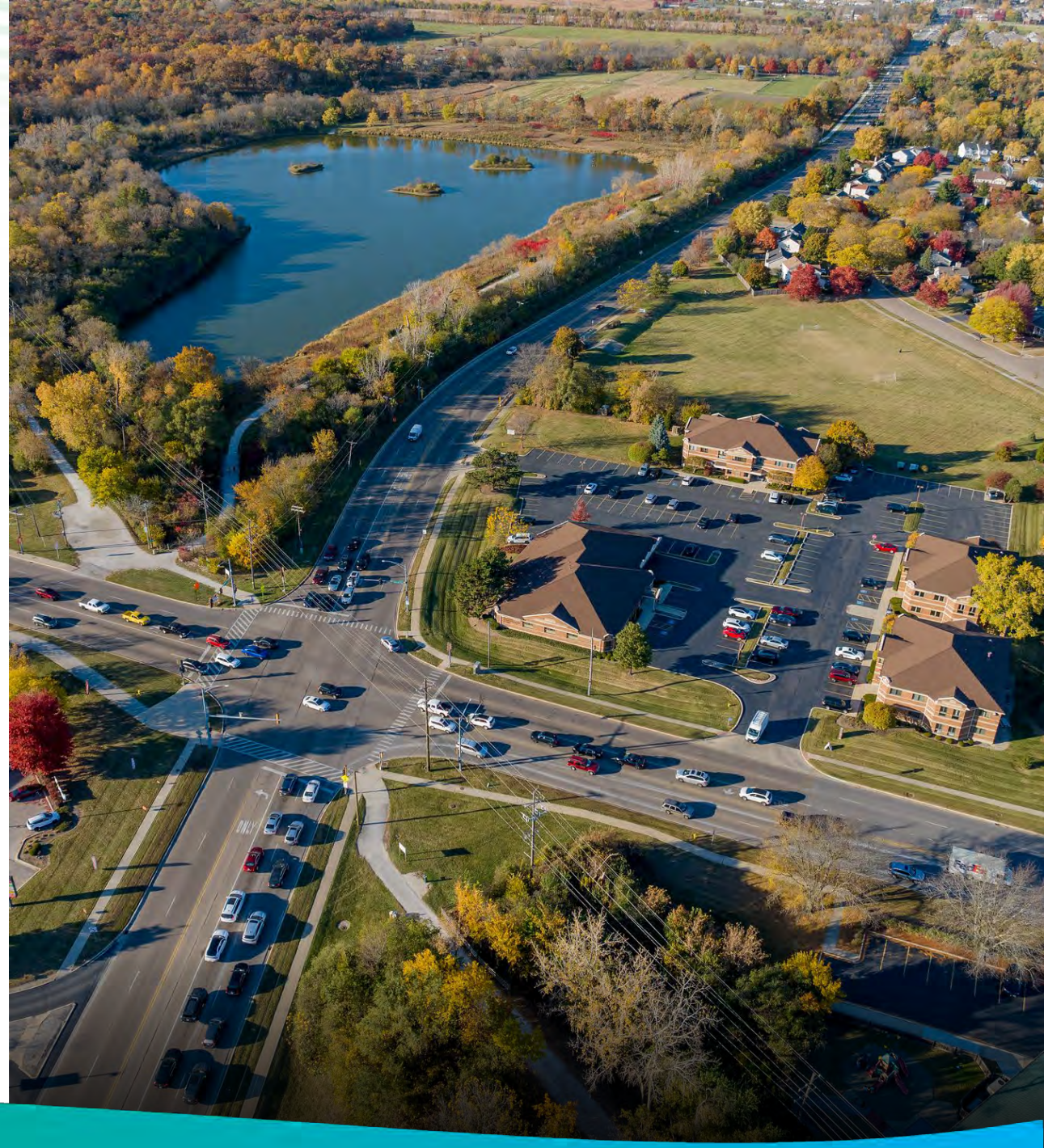
Traffic fatality rate by race in northeastern Illinois, 2017 through 2020



Mitigate pollution and invest in resilient infrastructure

The transportation system affects — and is affected by — environmental conditions

Transportation both contributes to pollution and faces increasing risks from extreme weather. Reducing emissions from the transportation system, strengthening infrastructure to withstand flooding and heat, and protecting natural resources are essential to building a more sustainable and reliable transportation network.



Understanding transportation air quality in the region

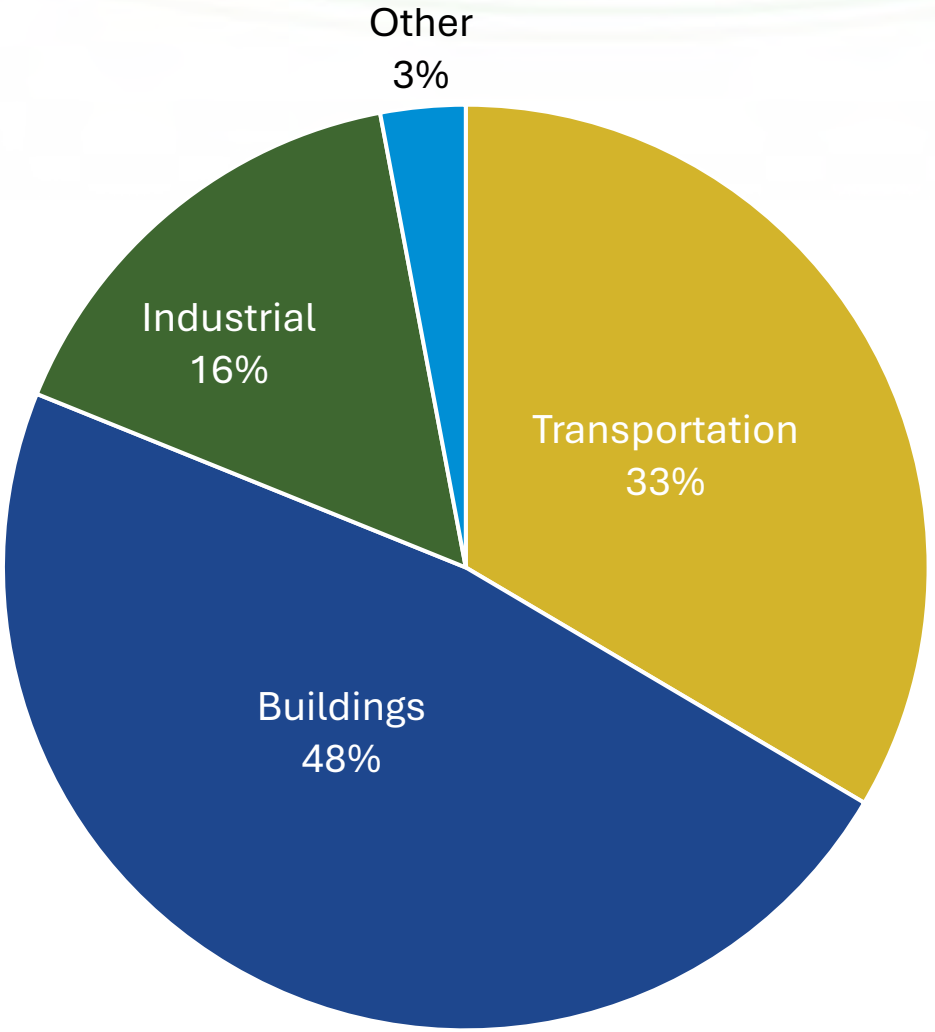
The transportation sector is a major source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and air pollutants like fine particulate matter and ozone-forming gases. Understanding what drives these emissions is key to safeguarding public health and improving air quality.

2026 Regional Transportation Plan

The transportation sector represents a major share of regional GHG emissions

On-road vehicles — mainly cars and trucks — account for 83 percent of transportation GHG emissions. From 2010 to 2019, total GHG emissions in the region fell by nearly 9 percent, but emissions from transportation rose by 2 percent. As other sectors reduce emissions, transportation is becoming a larger contributor.

Greenhouse gas emissions in the CMAP region, 2020



Source: *Regional greenhouse gas emissions inventory*, CMAP (2022).

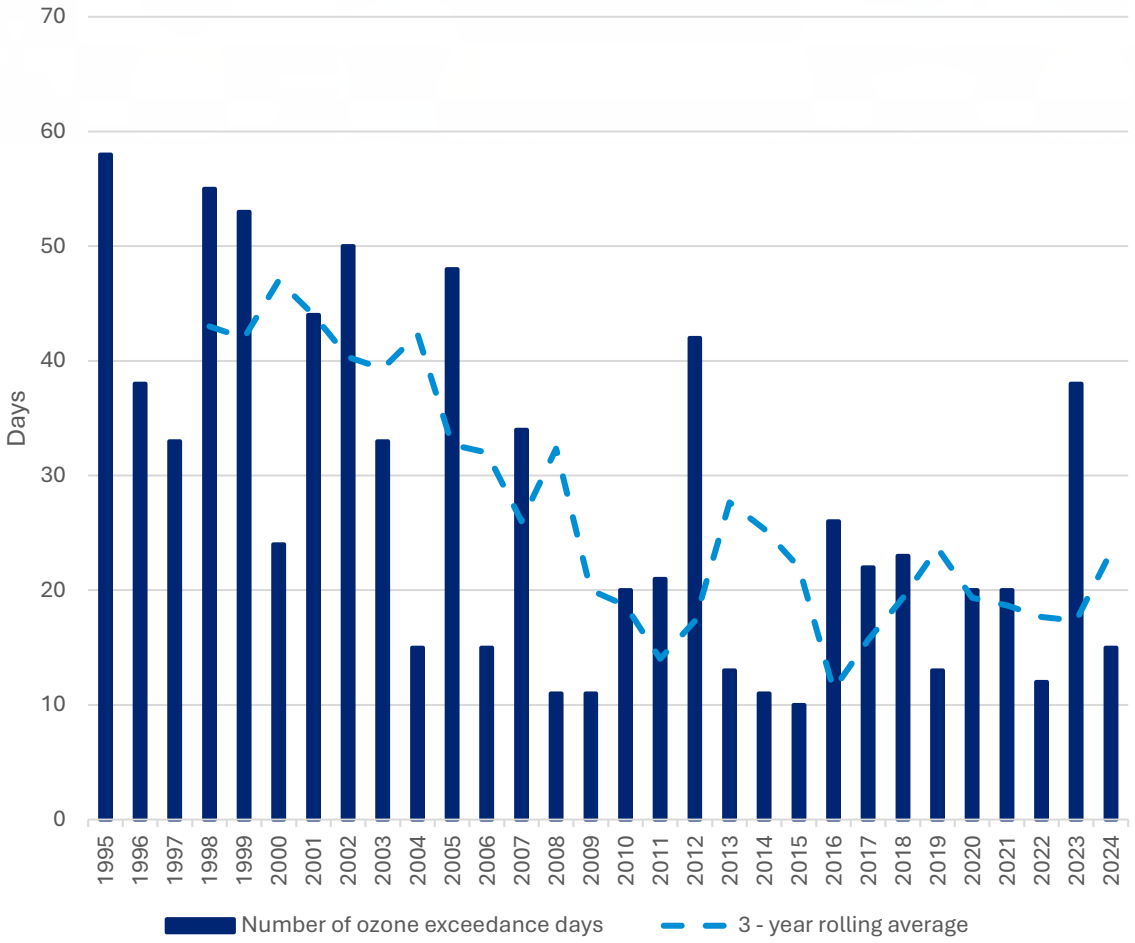
Air quality has improved, but progress has slowed

In addition to greenhouse gases, transportation produces harmful air pollutants. Fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and ozone (a component of smog) pose serious health risks. While the region has made progress, air quality improvements have stalled. Northeastern Illinois still fails to meet federal ozone standards established through the Clean Air Act, meaning pollution levels do not meet health-based targets.

Pollutants like nitrogen oxides have decreased due to cleaner fuels and improved engines, but not enough to consistently prevent unhealthy air quality days.

Note: An ozone monitor that records an 8-hour average value above the standard is considered an exceedance. This chart represents the total number of exceedances across all monitors in the region, reflecting contributions from all sources of pollution.

Total number of ozone exceedance days, 1995 to 2024

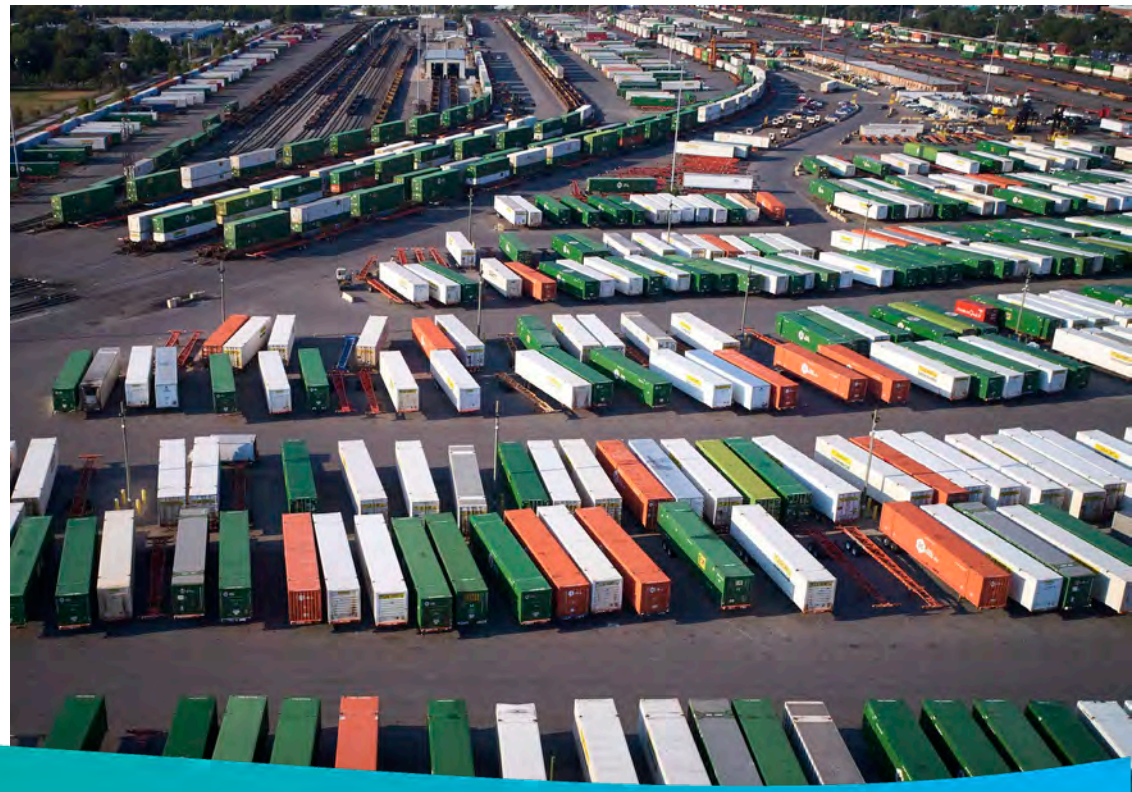


Source: US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) outdoor air quality data.

Who bears the burden of poor air quality?

People living near highways, freight yards, rail corridors, ports, and airports are more likely to be exposed to transportation-related pollution. These conditions contribute to serious health problems – including asthma, heart disease, and other chronic illnesses – and can lead to premature death.

Making progress on cleaner air requires targeted efforts focused on areas with the highest exposure and health risks.

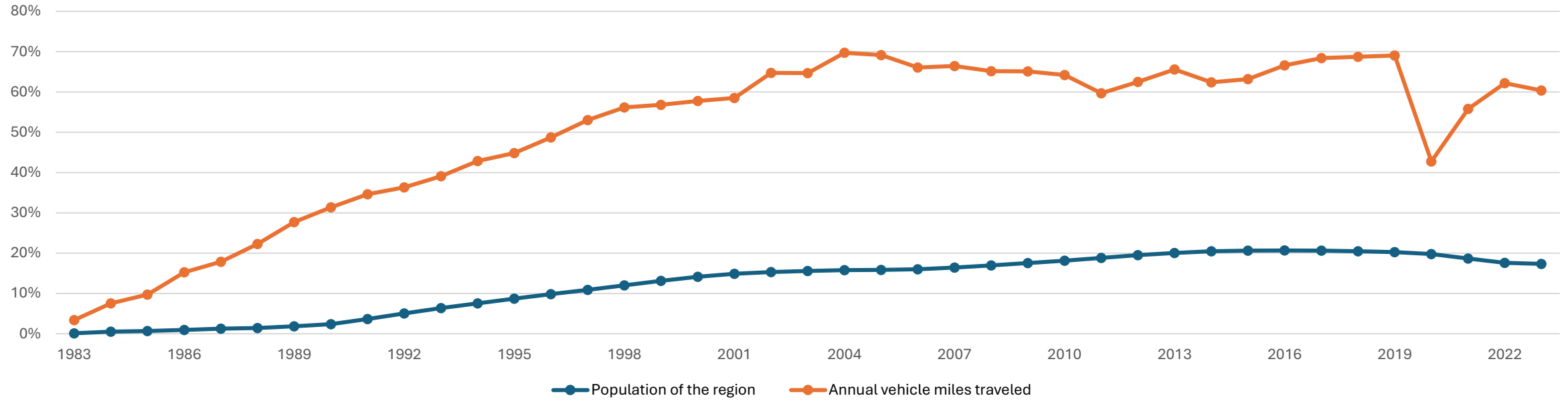


Vehicle miles traveled have largely leveled off

Emissions from on-road vehicles are tied to two main factors: fuel efficiency and vehicle miles traveled (VMT). While VMT in the region grew for decades, far outpacing population growth and driving up transportation emissions, it began to level off around 2000.

Despite gradual population and job growth in the 2000s and 2010s, VMT remained relatively steady, with declines during the Great Recession and COVID-19 pandemic. VMT has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Percent change since 1983 in annual VMT and population, CMAP region



Source: IDOT Illinois travel statistics.

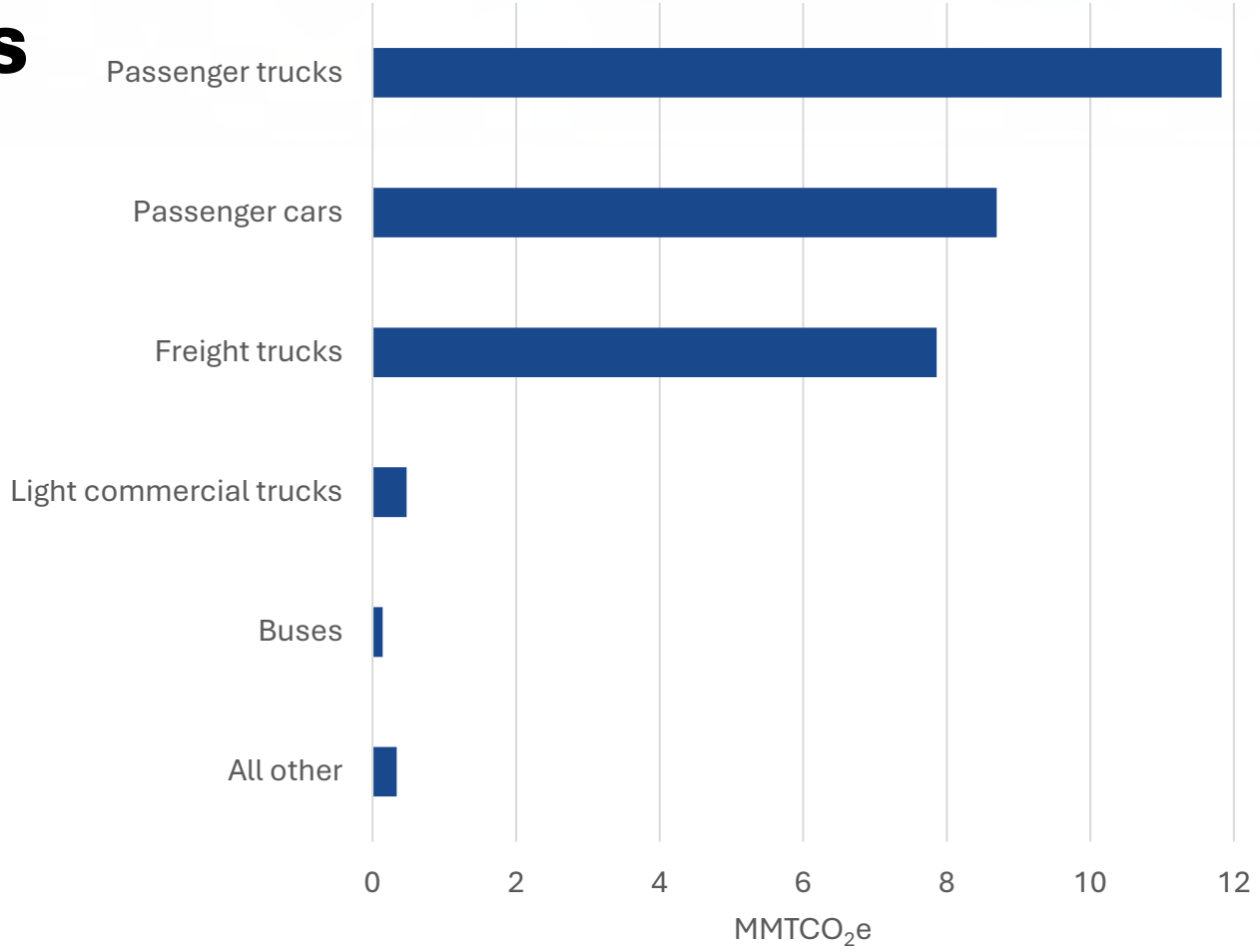
Larger vehicles are impacting emissions trends

Passenger trucks: Even with stable VMT and significant improvements in fuel economy, a shift toward larger vehicles is partially offsetting gains. Passenger trucks are the top GHG emissions source of all on-road vehicle types, reflecting the growing market preference nationally for sports utility vehicles (SUVs) and pickup trucks. Larger vehicles emit more pollution per mile, despite all vehicles becoming more efficient in recent years.

Freight trucks: The freight network is an essential part of the region's supply chain and economy, but also a significant source of GHG emissions. If regional freight demand grows, emissions from trucks may increase unless cleaner options and mode shifts are prioritized.

Source: USEPA automotive trends report (2024).

On-road GHG emissions by vehicle type, CMAP region, 2019



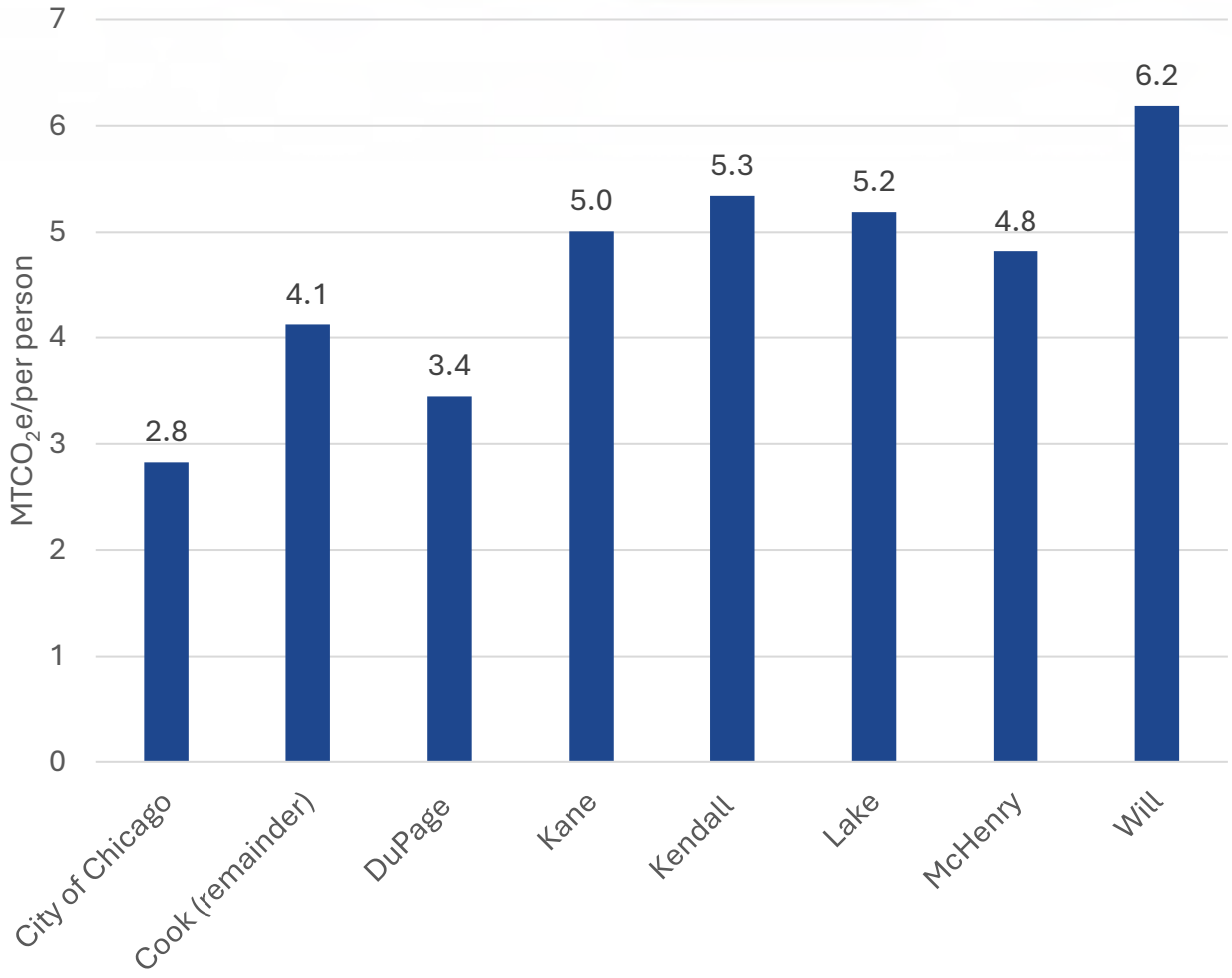
Source: *Regional greenhouse gas emissions inventory*, CMAP (2019).

The built environment influences on-road emissions

Land use patterns influence how people travel as well as the transportation emissions associated with their trips. Denser areas with compact development, such as Chicago and Cook County, have lower per-person transportation emissions because residents live closer to destinations and have more alternatives to driving. In lower-density areas, longer travel distances and auto-oriented development result in higher per person emissions.

Investments in walking, biking, and transit options can help reduce VMT and pollution.

Transportation GHG emissions per capita by county, 2019



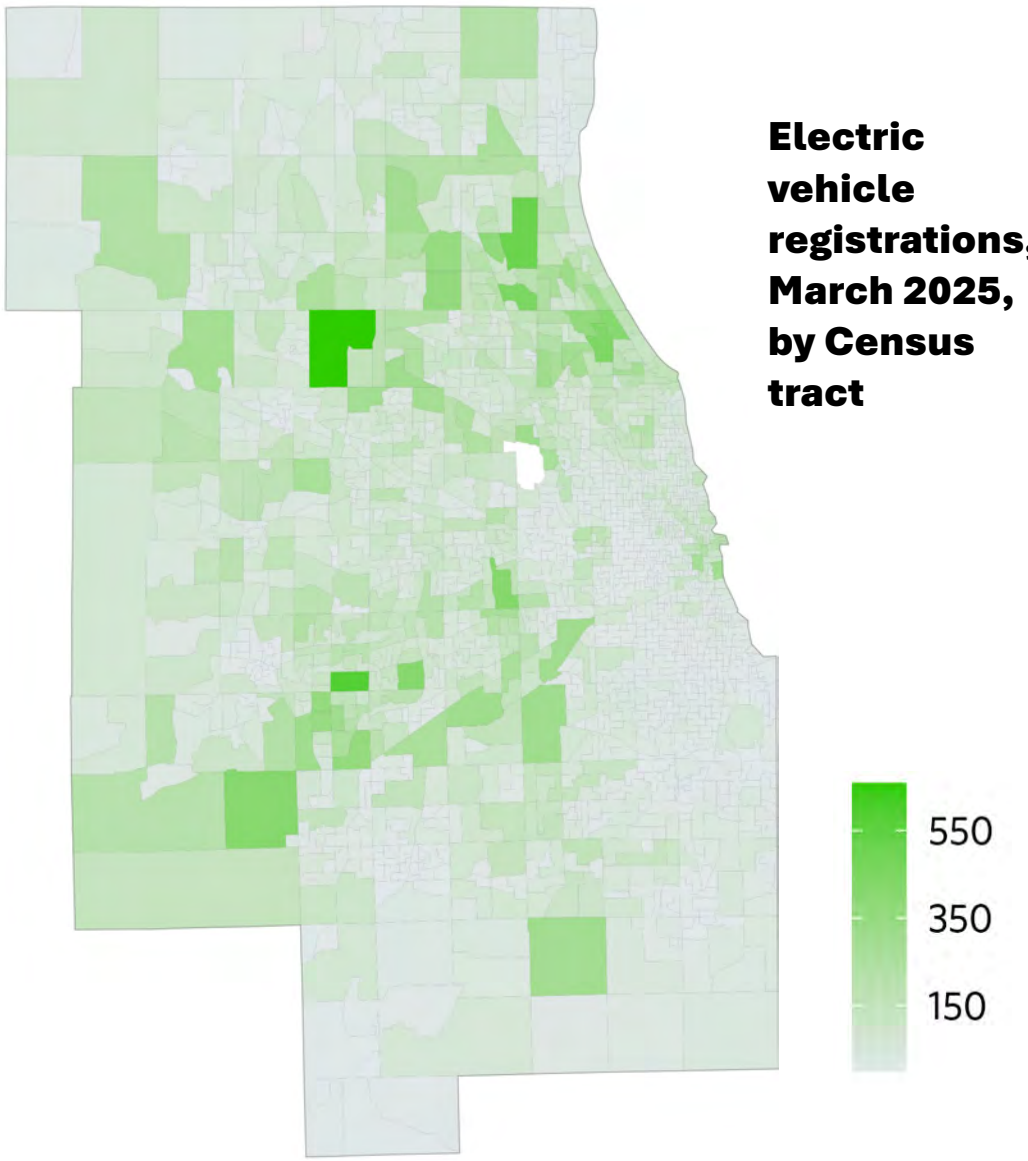
Source: *Regional greenhouse gas emissions inventory*, CMAP (2022).

Electric vehicles are key to reducing emissions, but adoption is uneven

Electric vehicles (EVs) reduce emissions, but adoption remains uneven. Higher-income areas have greater EV ownership, while other areas have less EVs due to vehicle cost and limited access to charging. These same communities often face higher exposure to traffic pollution and industrial emissions.

Providing access to cleaner vehicles and charging options in more parts of the region will help reduce pollution and expand the benefits of cleaner transportation.

Electric vehicle registrations, March 2025, by Census tract

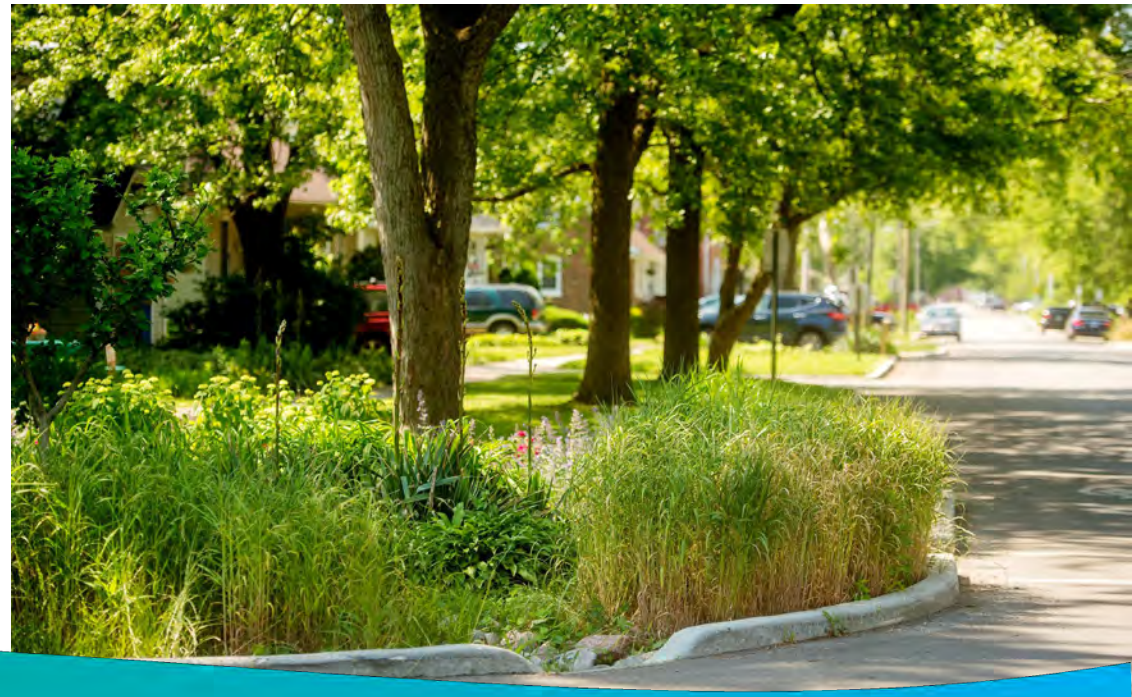


Source: Illinois Office of the Secretary of State.

Transportation activities and infrastructure can harm our water quality and supply

In developed areas, hard surfaces such as roads and parking lots prevent rainwater from soaking into the ground, increasing runoff that carries pollutants — like road salt, oil, fertilizers, and vehicle emissions — into rivers, lakes, and shallow groundwater.

This runoff degrades water quality, harming aquatic ecosystems and threatening drinking water supplies. In some cases, communities have had to switch drinking water sources, incurring significant costs. Pollutants such as road salts are especially persistent, accumulating over time and further diminishing water quality for both people and wildlife.



Understanding vulnerable transportation infrastructure and users

Extreme weather impacts include events like flooding, heatwaves, and storms that can damage transportation infrastructure and disrupt access, especially for vulnerable users.

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Transportation is at risk for extreme weather

The region is already experiencing more frequent and intense heat and storms, with conditions expected to worsen in the future.

- Days over 95°F are expected to increase from 2 days to 18 days annually by mid-century.
- Days where precipitation is at a maximum level will increase from 8 percent by mid-century to 23 percent by late-century.
- More severe storms will increase associated risks of flooding, heavy precipitation, and extreme wind.

A large majority of the region's transportation assets are in high or very high flood risk areas. Transit riders, active transportation users, and transportation workers are among the most vulnerable to extreme heat.

Source: *Transportation Resilience Improvement Plan (TRIP): Risk-based Vulnerability Assessment*, CMAP (2024).

Flooding poses the greatest threat to infrastructure

Flooded roads, tracks, and bridges lead to more disruptions for travelers and weaken infrastructure. In rural areas where there are limited alternative routes, flooding can be particularly disruptive, requiring travelers to journey long distances around impassable floods. Furthermore, roads damaged by flooding may fall into poor condition, ultimately increasing traffic congestion.

Flood risk affects the entire transportation system. Accelerating infrastructure deterioration across the region will result in increased maintenance, repair, and replacement costs.

Source: *TRIP: Risk-based Vulnerability Assessment*, CMAP (2024).

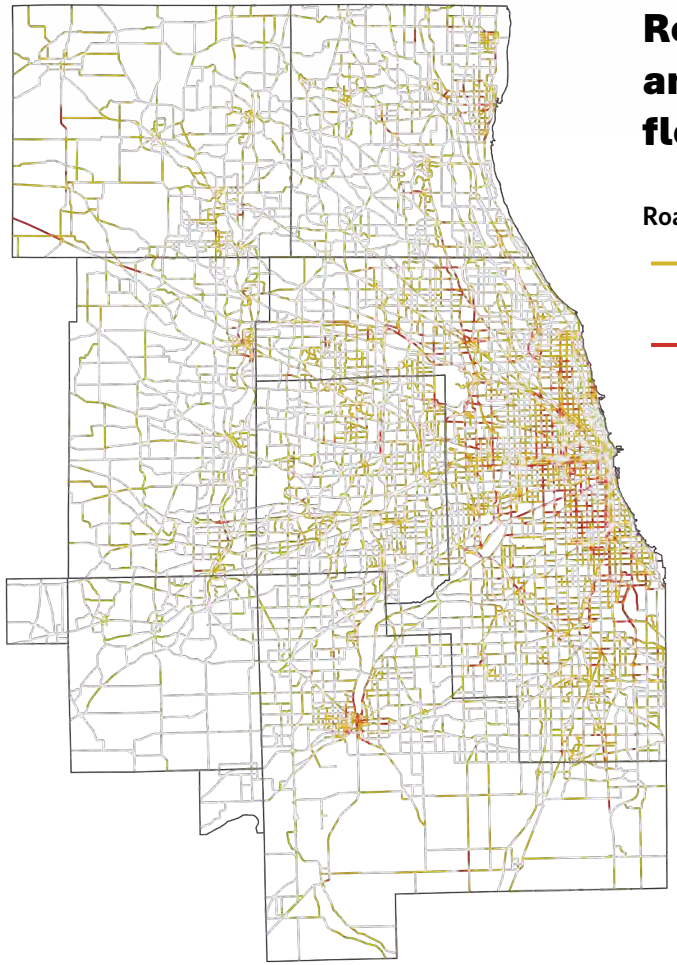
34% of **roads** have high or very high flood risk

64% of **CTA bus stops** and 47% of **Pace bus stops** are exposed to flooding

36% of **CTA stations** and 31% of **Metra stations** are exposed to flooding

61% of **regional trails** have high or very high flood risk

Vulnerability to flooding along roadways and bridges



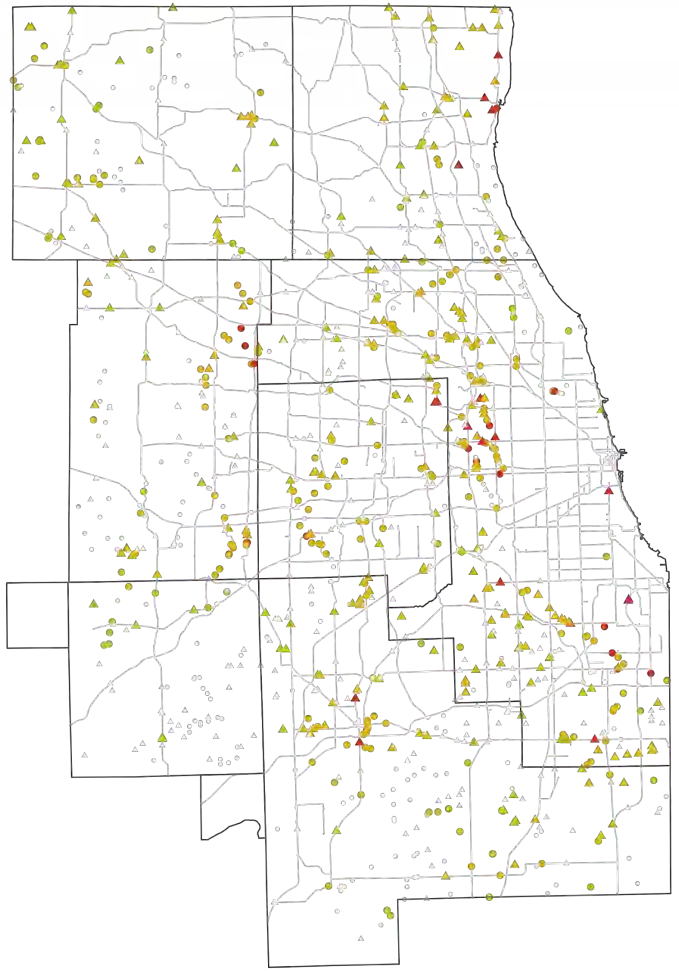
Roads with high and very high flood risk scores

Roads

- High (29 percent of the region's roads)
- Very high (5 percent of the region's roads)

Note: Risk is defined as the weighted combination of asset exposure (60 percent) and criticality (40 percent).

Source: *TRIP: Risk-based Vulnerability Assessment*, CMAP (2024).



Bridges and culverts with high and very high flood risk scores

Bridges

- High (7 percent of the region's bridges)
- Very high (1 percent of the region's bridges)

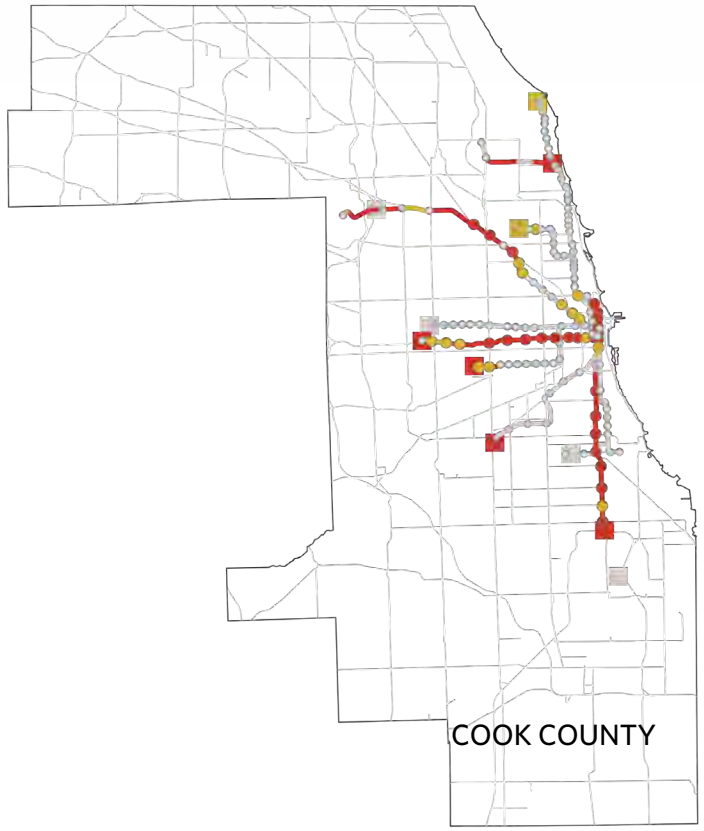
Culverts

- High (18 percent of the region's culverts)
- Very high (1 percent of the region's culverts)

Note: This map shows culverts within the IRIS database, and as such, smaller culverts are not included.

Source: *TRIP: Risk-based Vulnerability Assessment*, CMAP (2024).

Vulnerability to flooding along transit lines and stations



CTA rail lines, stations, and yards with high and very high flood risk scores

CTA rail lines

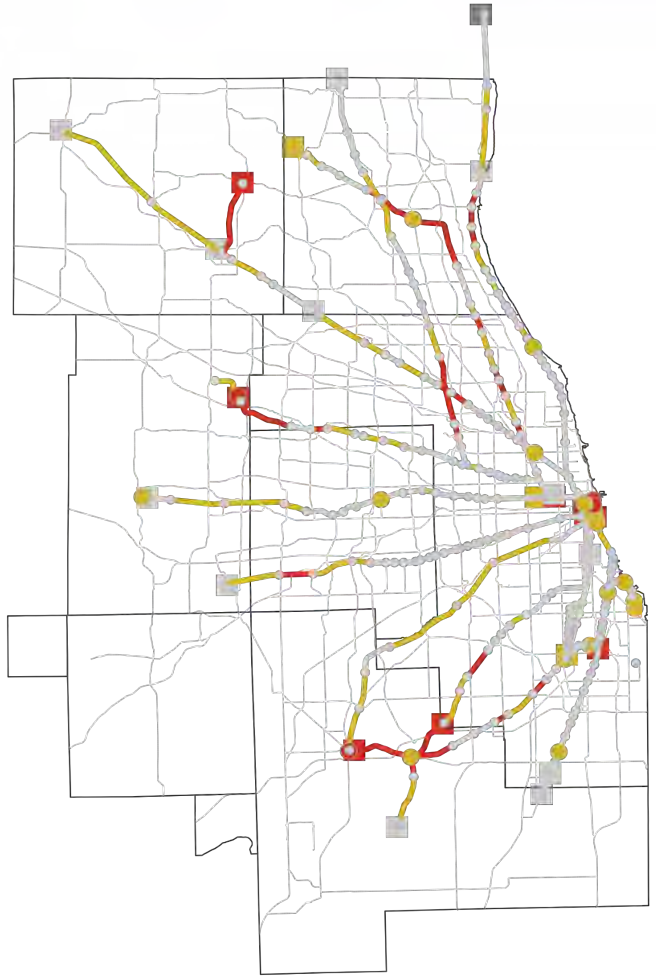
- High (33 percent of CTA rail lines)
- Very high (44 percent of CTA rail lines)

CTA rail yards

- High (18 percent of CTA rail yards)
- Very high (45 percent of CTA rail yards)

CTA rail stations

- High (12 percent of CTA rail stations)
- Very high (20 percent of CTA rail stations)



Metra rail lines, stations, and yards with high and very high flood risk scores

Metra rail lines

- High (32 percent of Metra rail lines)
- Very high (22 percent of Metra rail lines)

Metra rail yards

- High (12 percent of Metra rail yards)
- Very high (36 percent of Metra rail yards)

Metra rail stations

- High (8 percent of Metra rail stations)
- Very high (2 percent of Metra rail stations)

Note: Risk is defined as the weighted combination of asset exposure (60 percent) and criticality (40 percent).
Source: *TRIP: Risk-based Vulnerability Assessment*, CMAP (2024).

Transit riders and assets are most vulnerable to extreme heat

The number of days over 95°F are expected to increase from 2 to 18 days annually by mid-century. Extreme temperatures threaten rail infrastructure, electrical service, and backup power that is essential for train service.

Extreme heat poses a serious health risk. Transit riders and transportation workers are particularly vulnerable to dangerous temperatures as many transit assets are unsheltered. For example, 79 percent of CTA bus stops and 92 percent of Pace bus stops are unsheltered. Residents that rely on these transit services may not have access to alternate transportation options – leaving them exposed to extreme temperatures.

70% of **CTA bus stops** have high or very high transit rider vulnerability for extreme heat

38% of **Pace bus stops** have high or very high transit rider vulnerability for extreme heat

72% of **CTA stations** have high or very high transit rider vulnerability for extreme heat

45% of **Metra stations** have high or very high transit rider vulnerability for extreme heat

Source: *TRIP: Risk-based Vulnerability Assessment*, CMAP (2024).

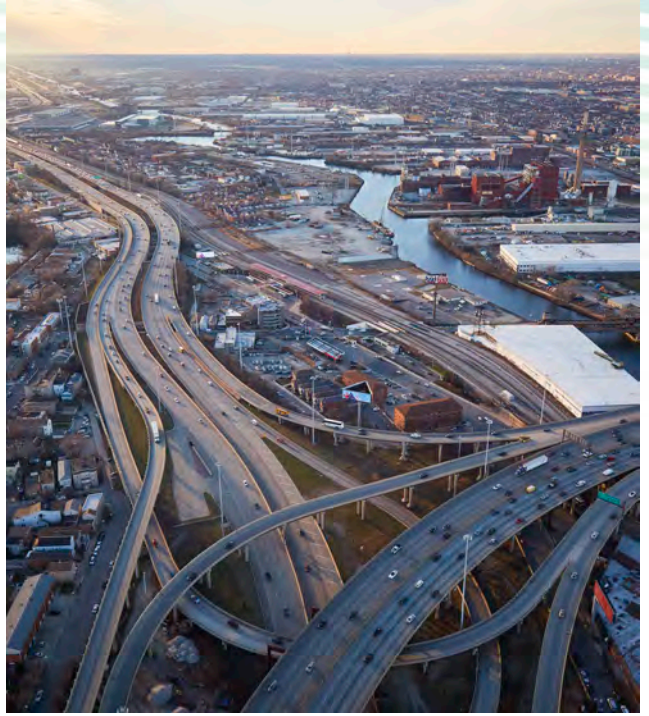
Transit system vulnerability has implications for transit-dependent populations

People who rely on transit are disproportionately exposed to extreme weather, as they may not have alternative transportation options. As flooding and heat intensify, their ability to travel safely and efficiently will be at greater risk. Proactive regional investments to protect riders from these events will help ensure safe and reliable travel for all.

Support economic prosperity and inclusive growth

Transportation is an economic driver

Northeastern Illinois' economy is powered by its extensive, interconnected transportation system. A vast network of roads, rails, and waterways connects people and goods to key destinations across the region. To promote economic prosperity for all, these critical connections should be maintained and strengthened.



Northeastern Illinois is a hub for economic opportunity

With more than 4.5 million jobs and a Gross Regional Product (GRP) of $742 billion, the region's economy is larger than that of 39 individual states — offering ample opportunity for both workers and businesses.

Source: Lightcast.

2026 Regional Transportation Plan

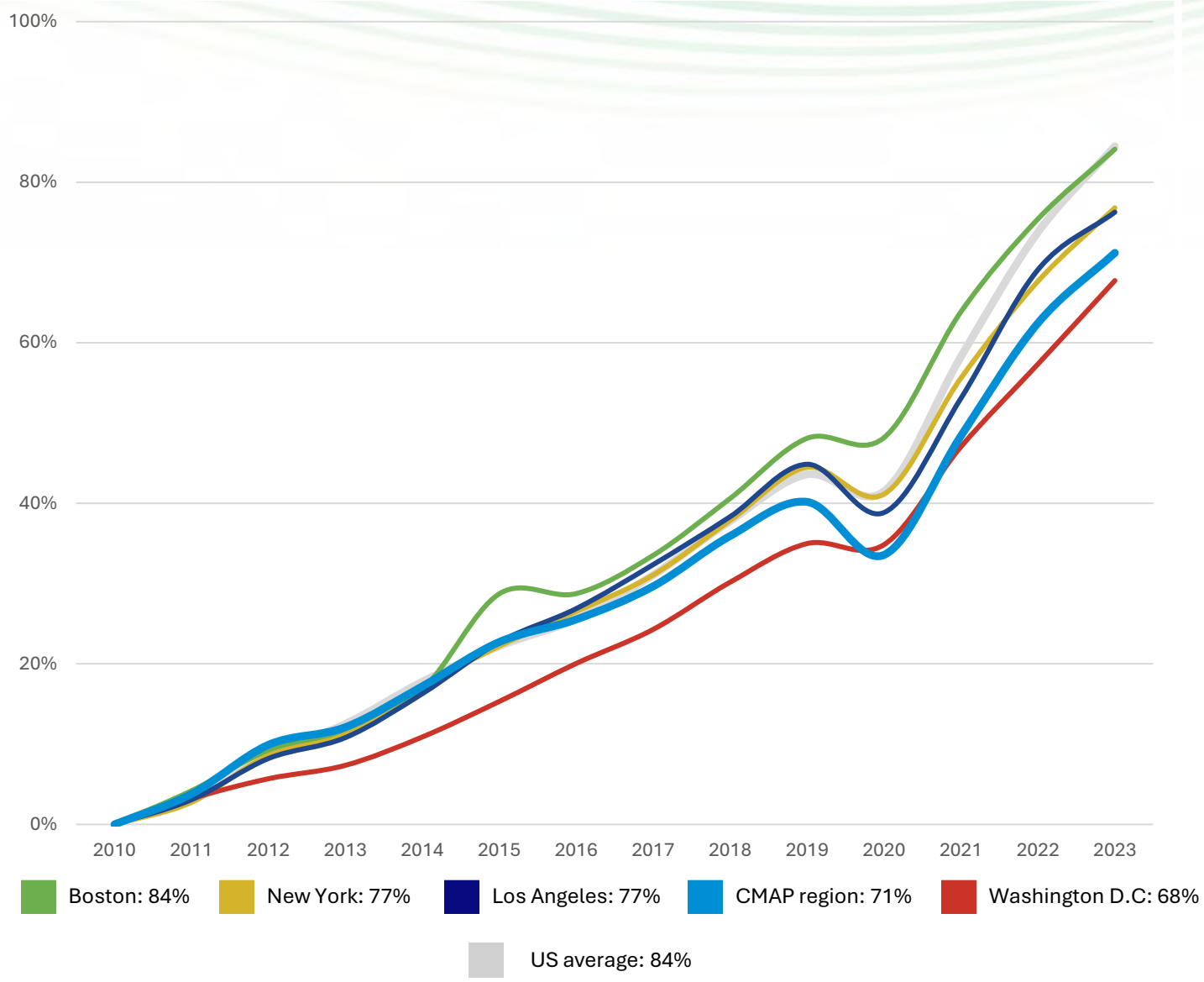
Source: Lightcast.

The regional economy is growing modestly

Since 2010, the regional economy has grown 71 percent and added 430,000 new jobs.

While this growth rate is generally in line with other metropolitan areas, it is slower than peers like Los Angeles, New York, and Boston — as well as the national average of 84 percent.

Cumulative GRP growth by region, 2010–2023



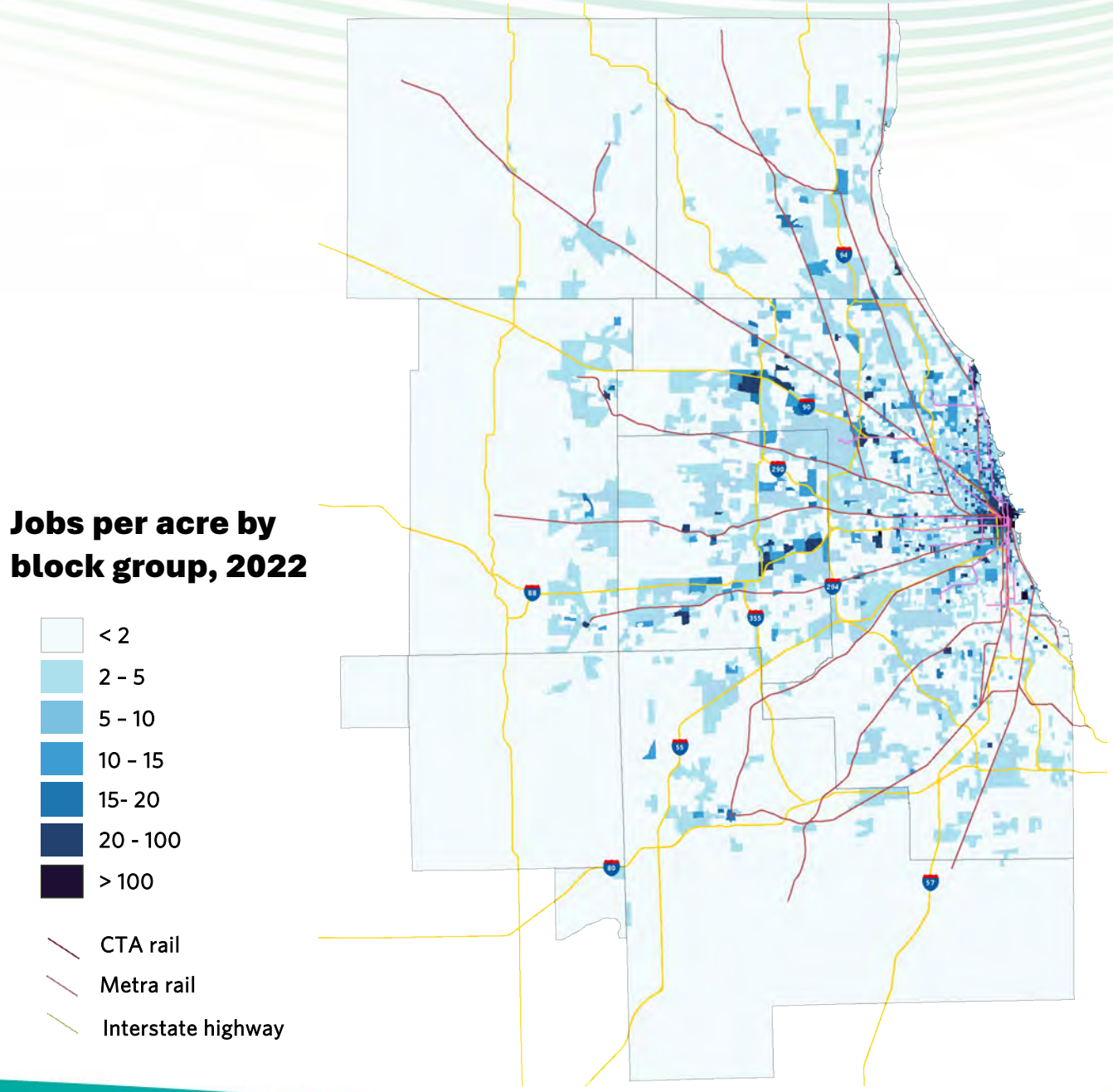
Source: Lightcast.

Jobs are concentrated in downtown Chicago and suburban centers

Underscoring the critical role of transportation in the regional economy, most jobs in the region are located near major transportation assets such as highways and transit routes. Areas with dense employment include the Chicago Loop, Deerfield, Oak Brook, Naperville, and Schaumburg.

Over half of the region's jobs — 52 percent — are within one mile of an interstate, and more than one-third are within walking distance of a transit station. Additional modes, like walking and biking, provide essential connections for short-distance travel.

Source: Census Bureau Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) (2022).

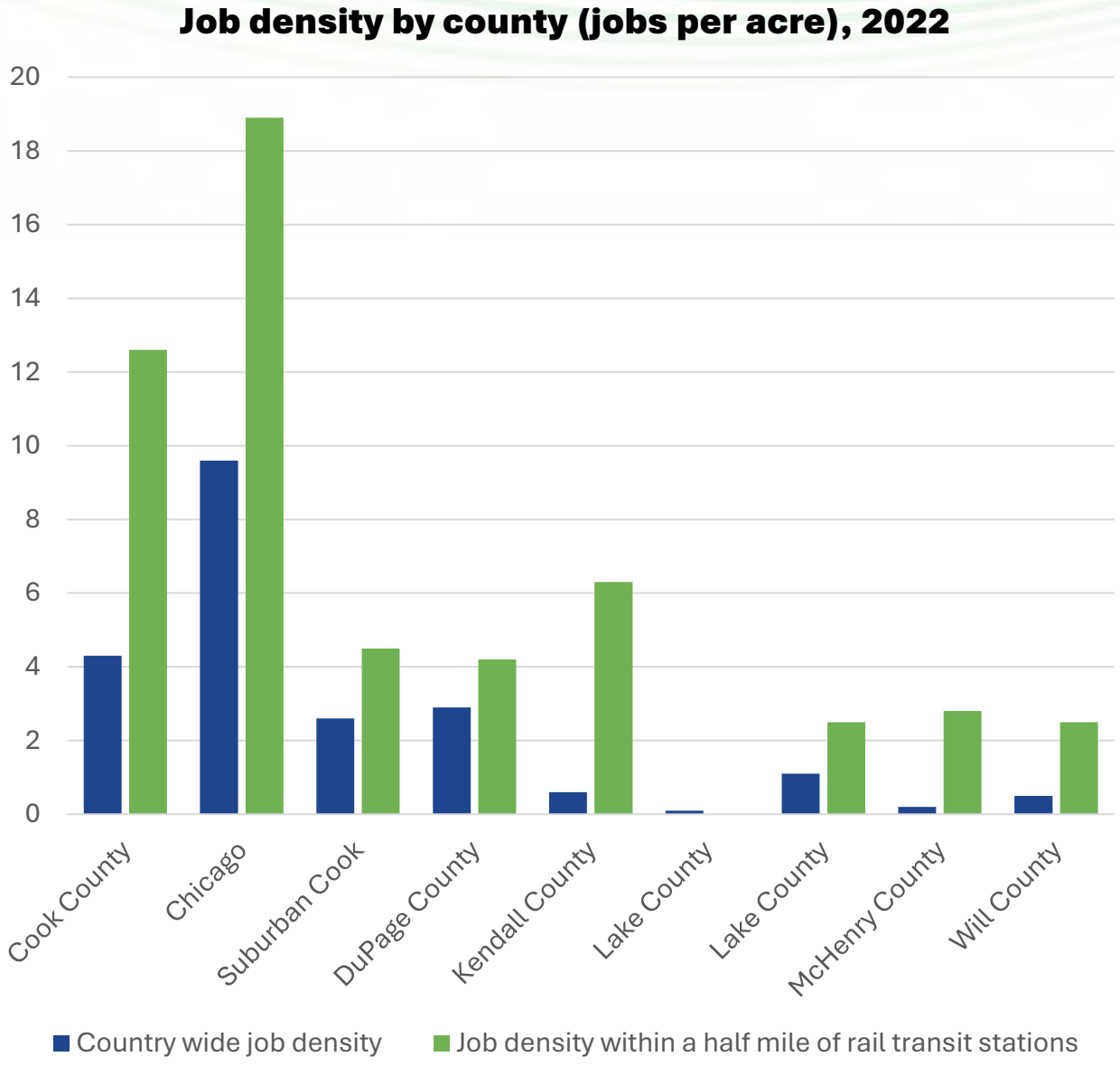


Transit attracts employers and connects residents to jobs

Despite representing only 5 percent of the land area in the region, 35 percent of jobs are within a half mile radius of CTA and Metra stations. In all six counties within the RTA service area, job density is higher near transit than the countywide averages. The Chicago Loop has the highest job density — accounting for nearly a third of all positions in the region that are accessible by rail transit.

This concentration of employment opportunities near transit indicates that many workers rely on this mode of travel — leading a significant portion of employers to want to locate near key points of access.

Source: LEHD (2022).

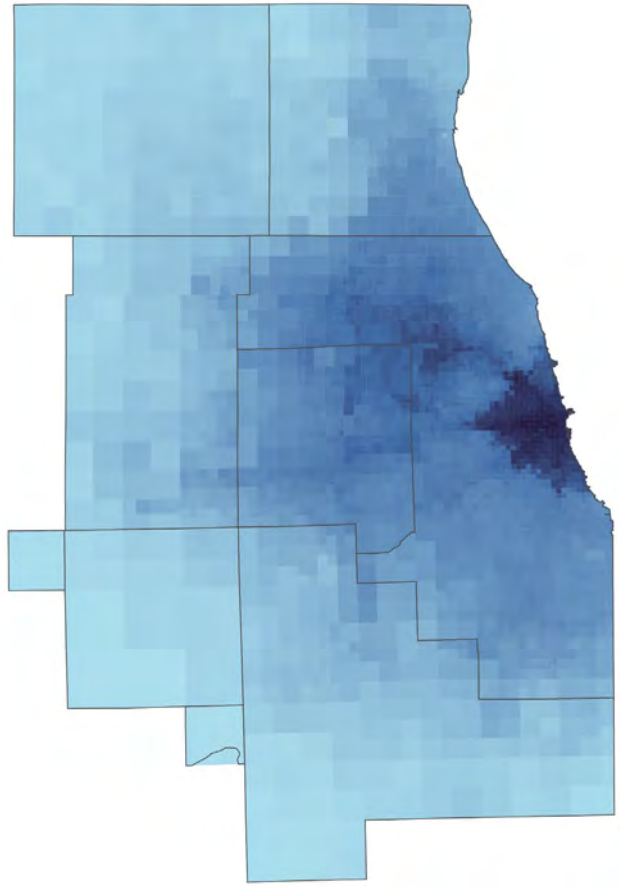


Transit largely provides access to jobs in the urban core

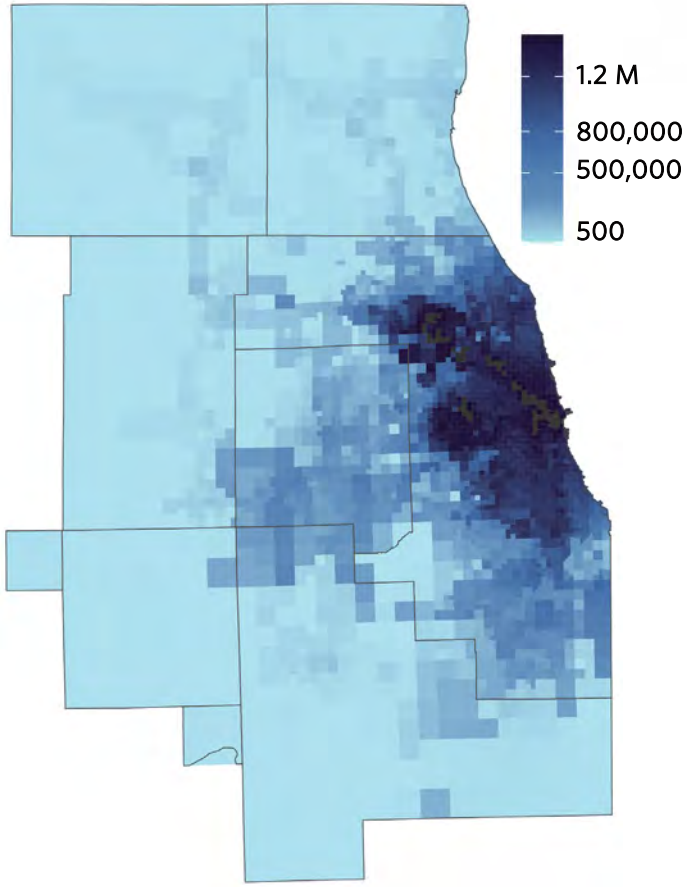
While most residents can reach a high number of jobs through a 30-minute drive, transit substantially increases the number of employment opportunities — particularly in dense urban areas in Cook and DuPage counties.

Jobs located in lower-density areas and beyond the reach of the transit system are less accessible to the region's residents.

Number of jobs accessible in a 30-minute drive, by travel zone



Number of jobs accessible in a 60-minute transit ride, by travel zone



Source: Travel demand model, CMAP.

The region’s freight network is extensive and economically important

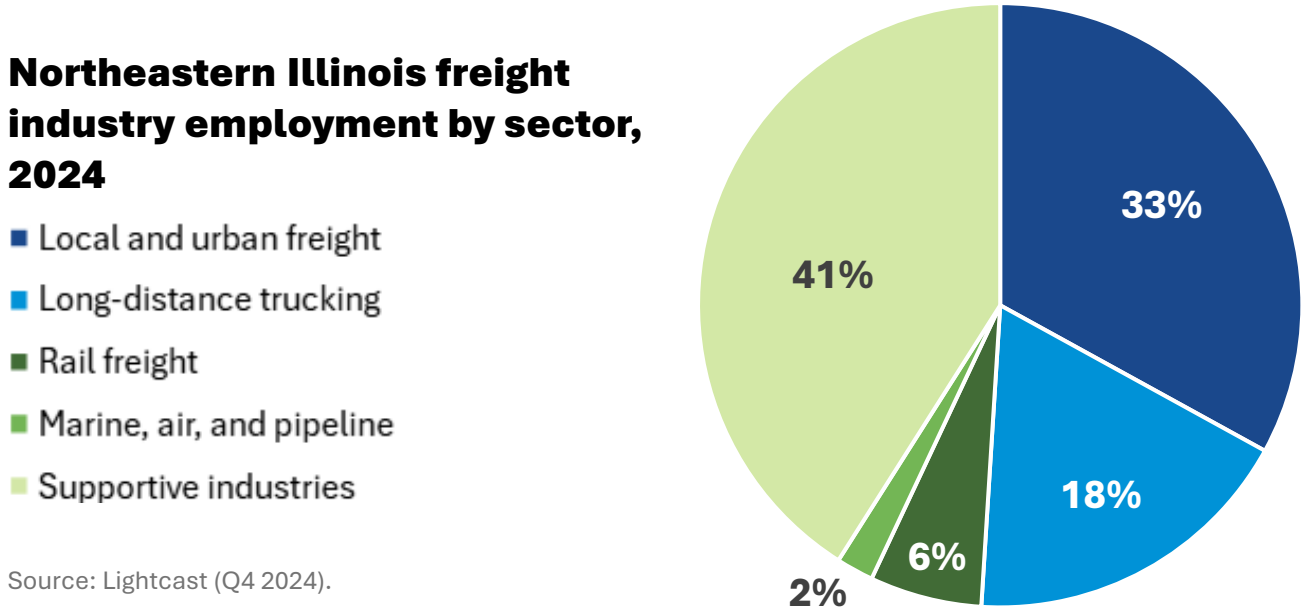
Freight activity throughout northeastern Illinois supports the movement of goods across the region, nation, and world.

RTP 2026 Regional Transportation Plan

Freight activity fosters job opportunities in the region

The freight industry in northeastern Illinois provides more than 210,000 jobs, the majority of which are in trucking and industries like warehousing and logistics. These opportunities are growing; employment in the transportation and warehousing sector has grown 11 percent since 2020, outpacing the region's overall job growth of 7.8 percent.

Northeastern Illinois freight industry employment by sector, 2024

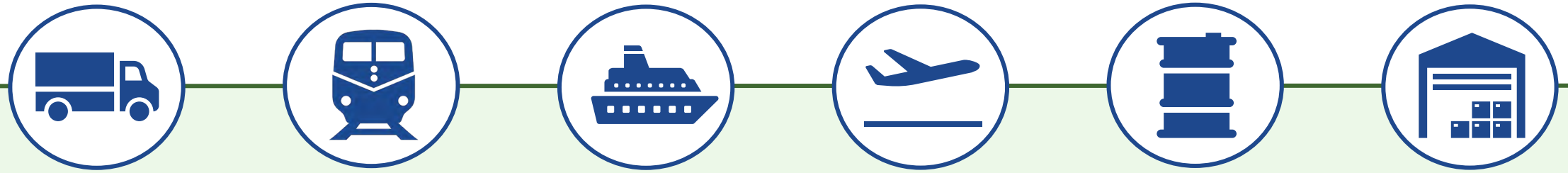


Source: Lightcast (Q4 2024).

- Local and urban freight: 69,260 jobs
- Long-distance trucking: 38,884 jobs
- Rail freight: 13,163 jobs
- Marine, air, and pipeline freight: 3,167 jobs
- Supportive industries - warehousing, freight arrangement, packing, packaging: 86,062 jobs

Northeastern Illinois is a multimodal freight hub

In 2023, the regional freight network transported cargo valued at more than $1.5 trillion — making it the second-highest US region by freight value. The network includes:



A **trucking** industry made up of over 12,000 establishments with 108,000 employees. Transports a wide range of goods

A **rail** network that transports more than 11 million rail cars each year. Crucial for moving bulk goods, like natural materials

Three **marine** ports with access to the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River. Ships dense and heavy goods, such as fuels and construction materials

Two **international airports**, including O'Hare — one of the nation's largest air cargo hubs. Transports small, high-value goods, including pharmaceuticals and electronics

Pipelines that transport crude oil, natural gas, and refined petroleum products

More than 1,800 **freight support** establishments, including a rapidly growing warehouse sector

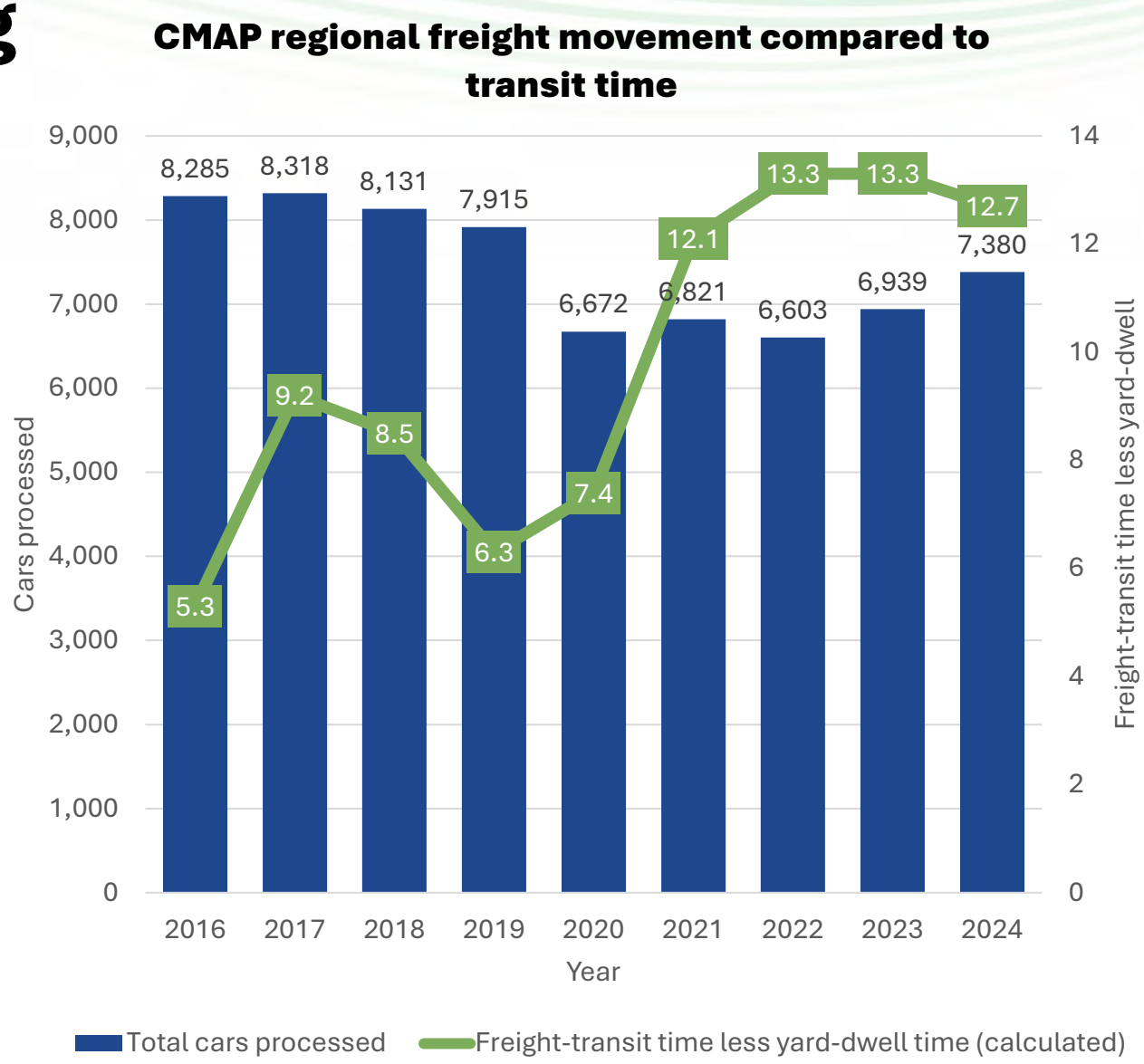
Source: *Freight Assessment*, CMAP (2025).

Freight trains are spending more time traveling through the region

Since the onset of COVID-19, the region has seen shifts in freight movement — mirroring broader national trends in the types of goods transported and how they move through the system.

Due to pandemic-related industry changes supply chain disruptions, freight transit time has increased — more than doubling from an average of about 5 hours in 2016 to more than 13 hours in 2023. While longer freight train travel times have implications for regional and national economies, they can also cause delays for people riding passenger trains on the same lines.

Source: Chicago Terminal Time Series.

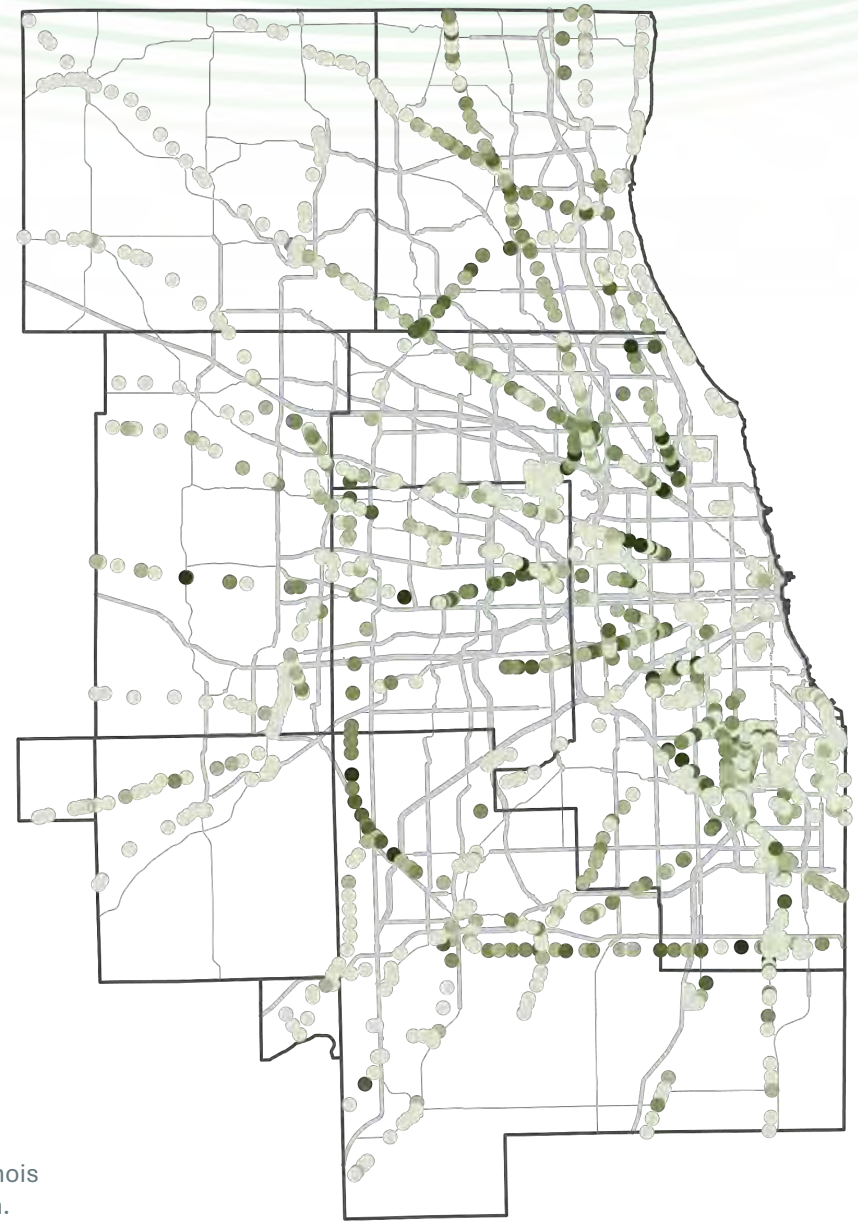


While progress has been made, delays remain a challenge

Northeastern Illinois has more than 1,400 at-grade crossings where roads intersect with rail activity. These crossings can cause congestion when blocked by train activity, inhibiting mobility for people, businesses, and essential resources like emergency services. High-conflict crossings occur where dense freight and passenger rail corridors intersect with major roadways.

Delays at these crossings have significant impacts on road traffic. In 2023, freight rail caused an estimated 4,224 hours of annual vehicle delay, while passenger rail contributed another 1,649 hours. Managing efficient freight movement is essential to improve overall travel time reliability across the region for people and goods.

Average railroad crossing delay hours per weekday



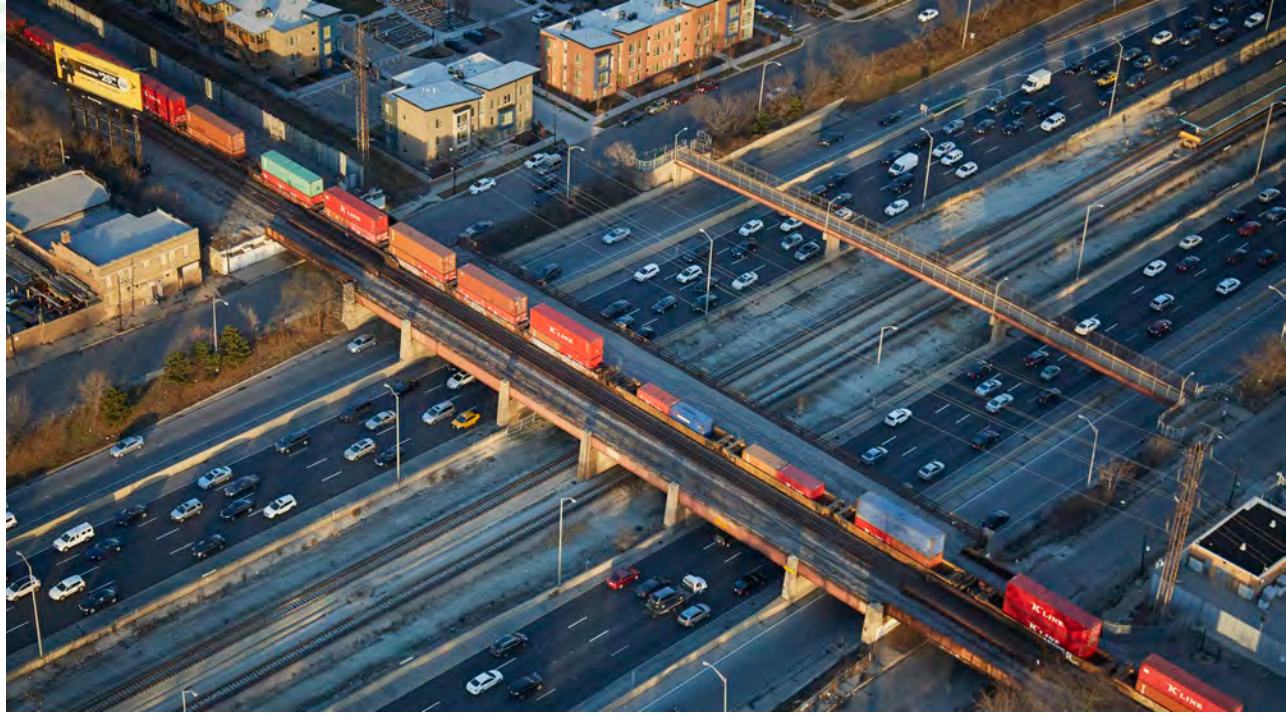
Source: CMAP analysis of Illinois Commerce Commission data.

Regional partners have invested in improving freight efficiency

The Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) program is a $4.6 billion public-private partnership to improve rail transportation throughout northeastern Illinois — one of the largest programs of its kind. To date, CREATE partners have completed 35 of the 70 projects, with several more underway.

CREATE investments will continue to improve the efficiency of freight operations, decrease freight-related delays, and reduce emissions from train and truck idling.

Source: Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program, CREATE, 2025.



Communities living near freight activity face distinct challenges

The regional freight network provides significant economic benefits, but those who live near high-activity areas — like railyards, truck routes, and intermodal terminals — face disproportionate burdens. Oftentimes, these communities face greater exposure to air pollution, noise levels, and safety risks associated with trucks and railroad crossings.

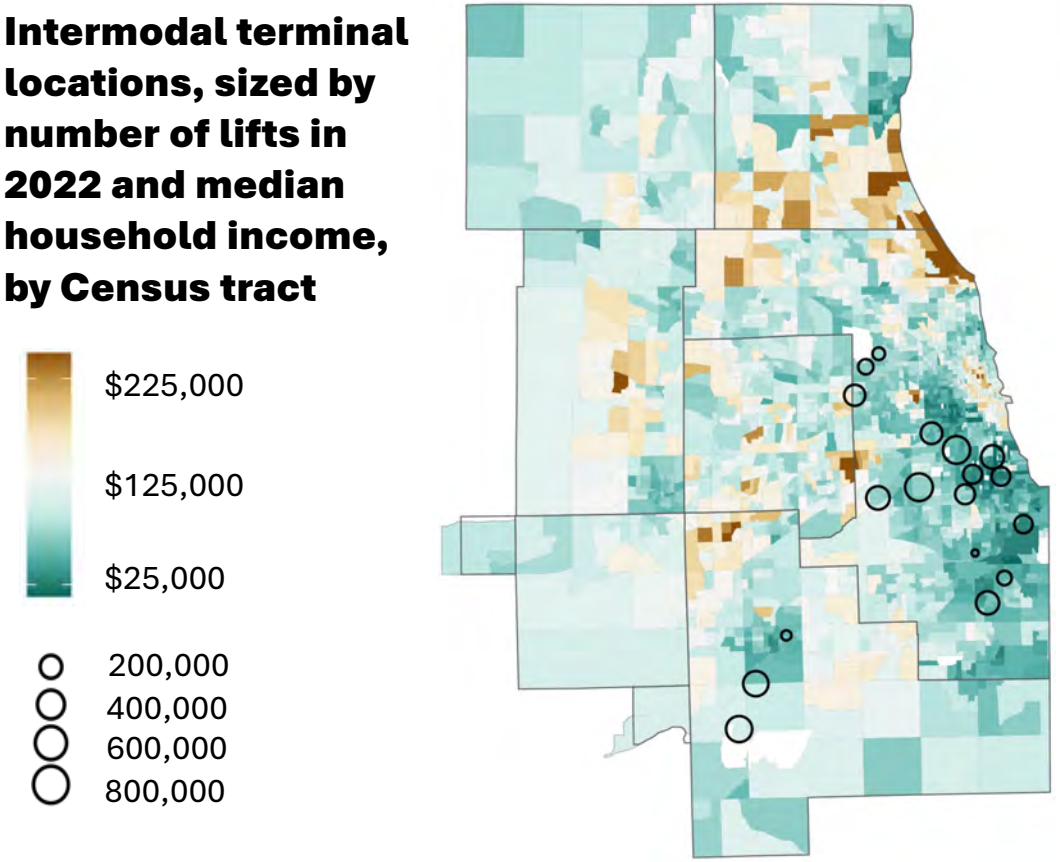
Residents, advocacy partners, and government decision-makers have emphasized the need to improve the balance between freight activity and public health for nearby communities.

Low-income communities of color are more exposed to high levels of freight activity

Freight railways and percentage of residents who are people of color, by Census tract

Source: ACS 5-year estimates (2023) and CMAP analysis of freight railways with five or more trains per day, based on a sample of train counts, activity at yards and terminals, and freight train flows through the region (2023)

Intermodal terminal locations, sized by number of lifts in 2022 and median household income, by Census tract



Source: ACS 5-year estimates (2023) and CMAP analysis of terminal lifts for terminals still in operation as of April 2025, based on data from CMAP, railroad companies, and the Intermodal Association of North America.

Strategically govern, fund, and preserve the system

It is critical to preserve northeastern Illinois' expansive and historic transportation system

The region is home to one of the most vital and expansive transportation systems in the country. Generations of investment built a multimodal network that connects communities across the region and links northeastern Illinois to national and global markets.

The region cannot rely on past investments alone. Many parts of the system require substantial reinvestment to remain safe, efficient, and reliable. Achieving a state of good repair is not just a maintenance goal — it is a foundational requirement for continued economic strength, mobility, and long-term resilience.

There is a complex web of transportation entities that operate and maintain the system

Federal agencies — like the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Railroad Administration — provide capital funding and enforce transportation regulations.

State government provides capital funding, like Illinois' recent Rebuild Illinois program. The Illinois Department of Transportation also owns and maintains interstate and some non-interstate roads.

Transit agencies own and operate the region's transit assets, like locomotives, tracks, and bridges. In some instances, transit agencies operate on assets owned by other stakeholders, like freight railroads and local- or state-owned roads.

Local governments — like municipalities, townships, and counties — own and maintain non-interstate roads and other assets like bridges, sidewalks, and bike paths.

Private providers of transportation also play key roles transporting both people and goods.

Northeastern Illinois is home to a vast amount of transportation infrastructure

2,500 miles of interstate pavement

6,600 miles of non-interstate pavement

+3.5 million square feet of bridge deck area

387 train stations

11,700 miles of bikeways

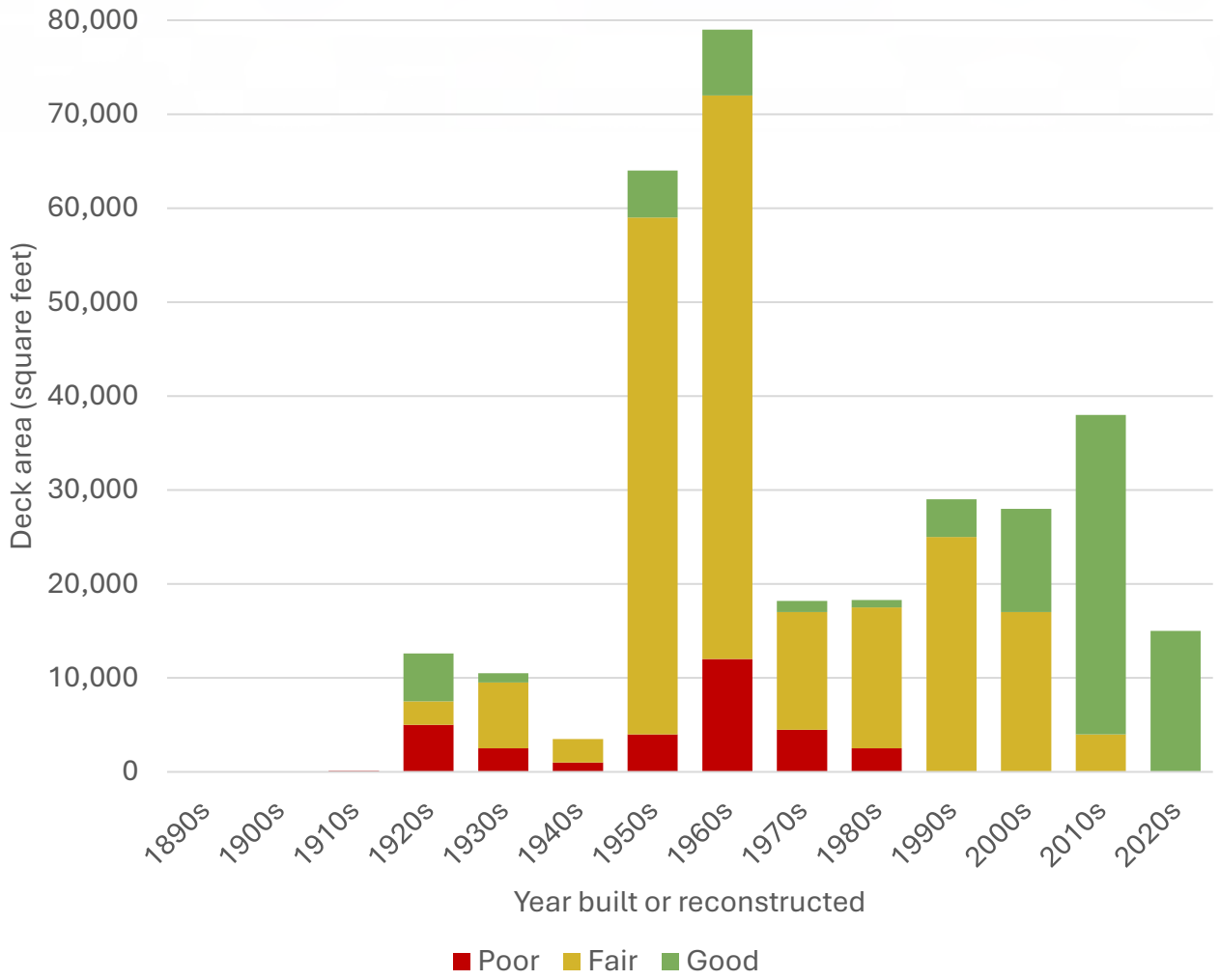
7,200 miles of rail lines

A large share of the region's transportation infrastructure was built several decades ago

While some assets are over a century old, much of the region's transportation infrastructure was built in the 1950s and 1960s and is now nearing the end of its useful life.

Meeting this challenge will require coordinated planning, sustained investment, and a shared commitment among transportation agencies to modernize the system and extend its value for future generations. The financial plan component of the RTP will play a critical role in outlining these reinvestment needs.

National Highway System bridge deck area condition by decade built or reconstructed

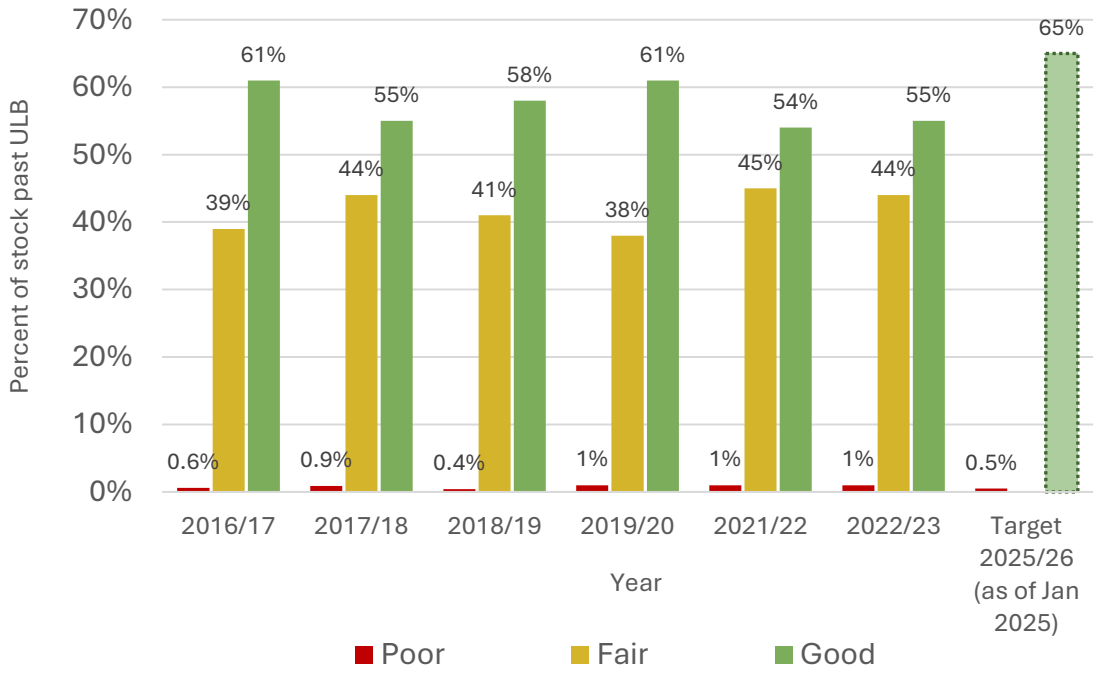


Source: FHWA national bridge inventory (2024).

Road conditions vary across the region's highways

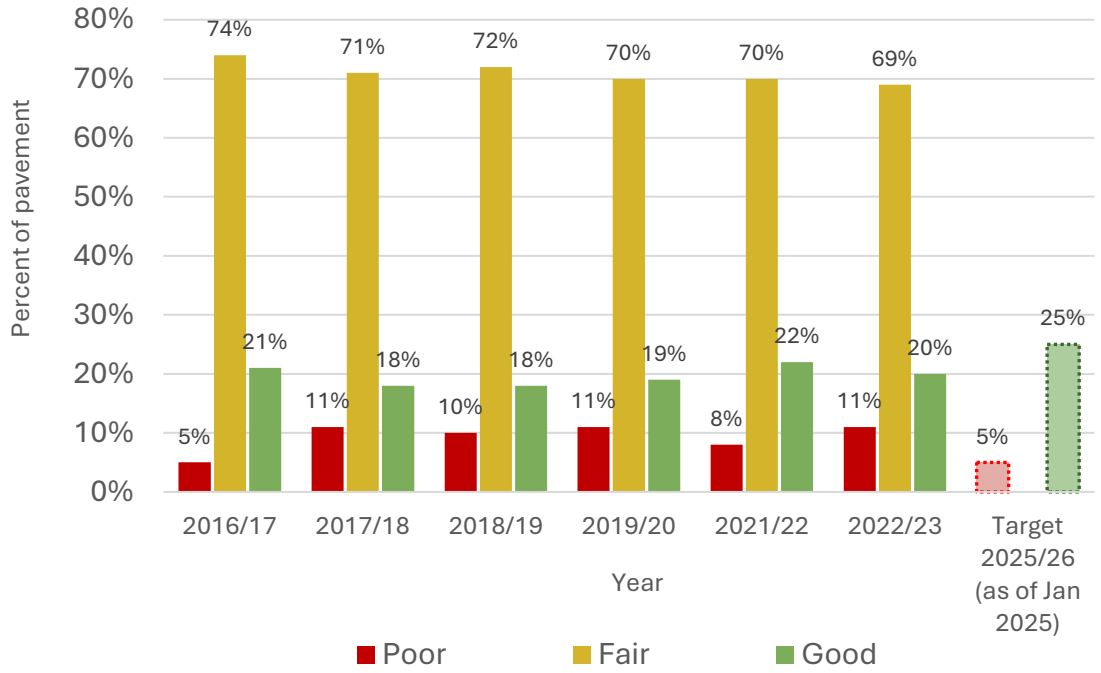
While interstate roads are generally in better condition, many non-interstate roads on the National Highway System (NHS) show signs of wear and aging. Improving the condition of these key corridors presents an opportunity for regional partners to collaborate, share strategies, and identify sustainable approaches to support long-term maintenance across the entire system.

Interstate pavement condition



Source: IDOT.

Non-interstate pavement condition



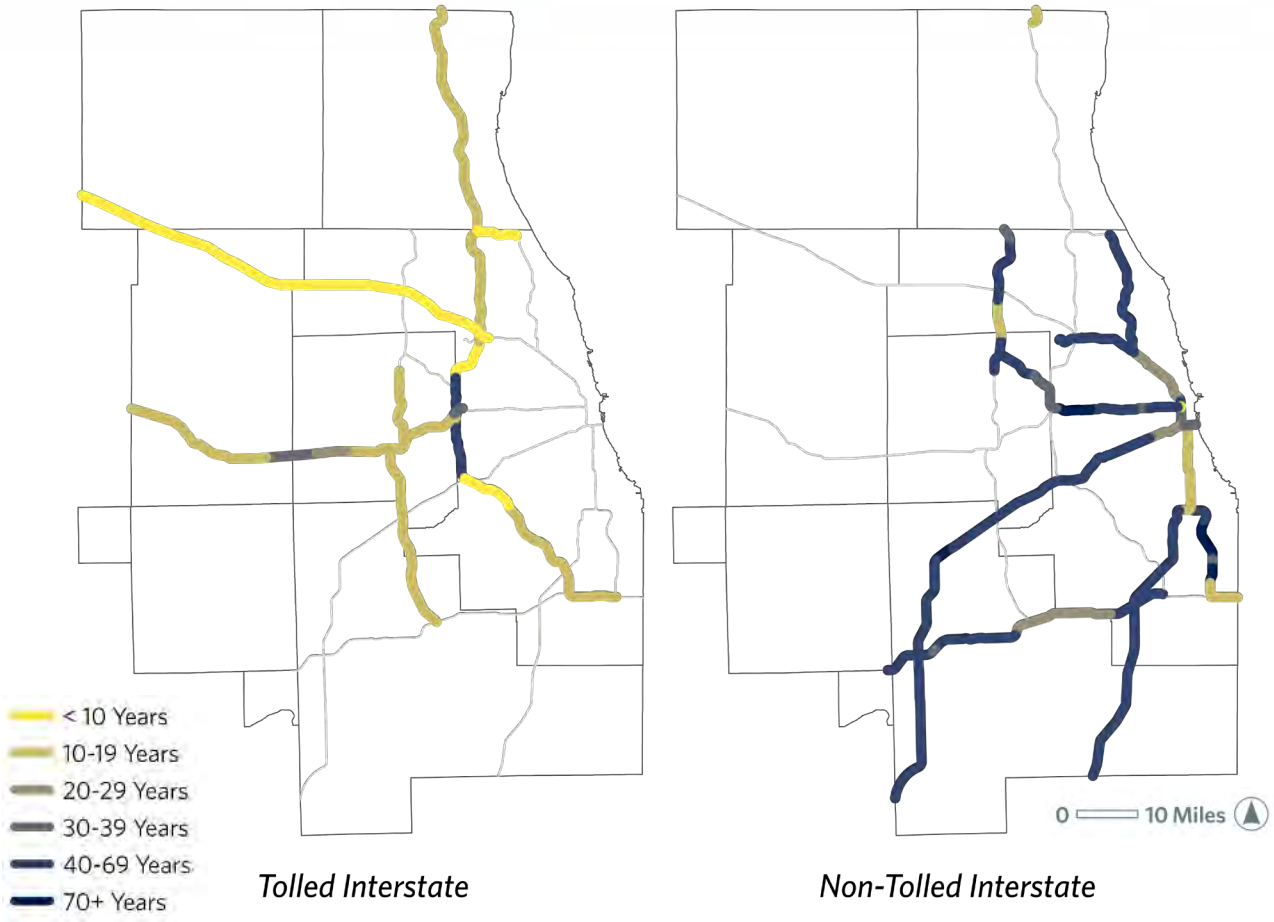
Note: Non-interstate pavement condition includes all non-interstate components of the NHS.

Stable funding supports stronger asset condition

The Illinois Tollway funds its 300-mile system through toll revenue, providing a steady source of funding for operations, maintenance, and long-term investments. This stable revenue has supported regular replacement and reconstruction of aging infrastructure, helping the Tollway maintain its system in relatively strong condition with a lower average asset age.

In the broader expressway network across northeastern Illinois, varying funding sources and investment cycles can make it more challenging to maintain assets at the same pace. This underscores the importance of consistent funding and proactive asset management across all parts of the regional system.

Tolled interstate and non-tolled interstate ages in the CMAP region

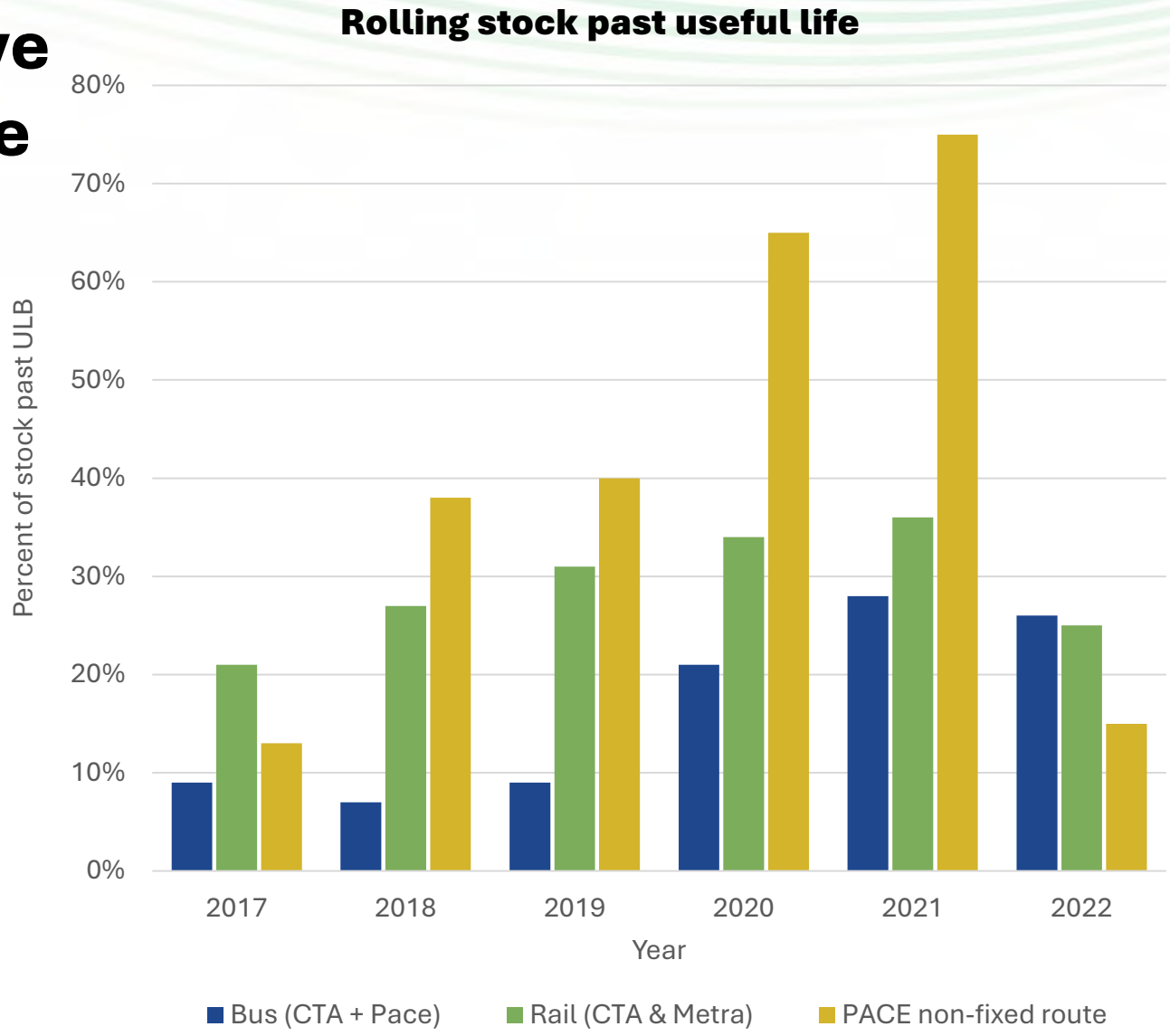


Source: CMAP analysis of IDOT and Illinois Tollway construction records (2025).

While recent investments have preserved the transit fleet, the system faces challenges

In addition to maintaining infrastructure such as stations, tracks, and bus garages, transit agencies must also manage their fleets. This rolling stock includes buses, railcars, vans, and other passenger vehicles that keep the system running.

Vehicles that exceed their useful life benchmark (ULB) tend to require more frequent repairs and experience reliability challenges. Recent investments have helped reduce the share of vehicles past their ULB. However, aging fleets remain a challenge. Continued investment is essential to sustain progress and prevent a growing backlog in the future.



Source: National transit database.

Some key transportation revenue sources have weakened over time

In 2019, the Illinois General Assembly tied a portion of the state's motor fuel tax (MFT) to inflation — an important measure to strengthen this historically reliable revenue source for transportation projects. Despite this change, improvements to fuel efficiency and greater electric vehicle ownership continue to erode MFT revenues.

As the transportation landscape continues to change, northeastern Illinois may need to explore new or different approaches to generate sufficient revenue to meet investment needs.

Source: *Plan of Action for Regional Transit*, CMAP.

Historic and projected motor fuel consumption in Illinois, 2008-2040

Source: IDOT and Illinois Department of Revenue (IDOR).

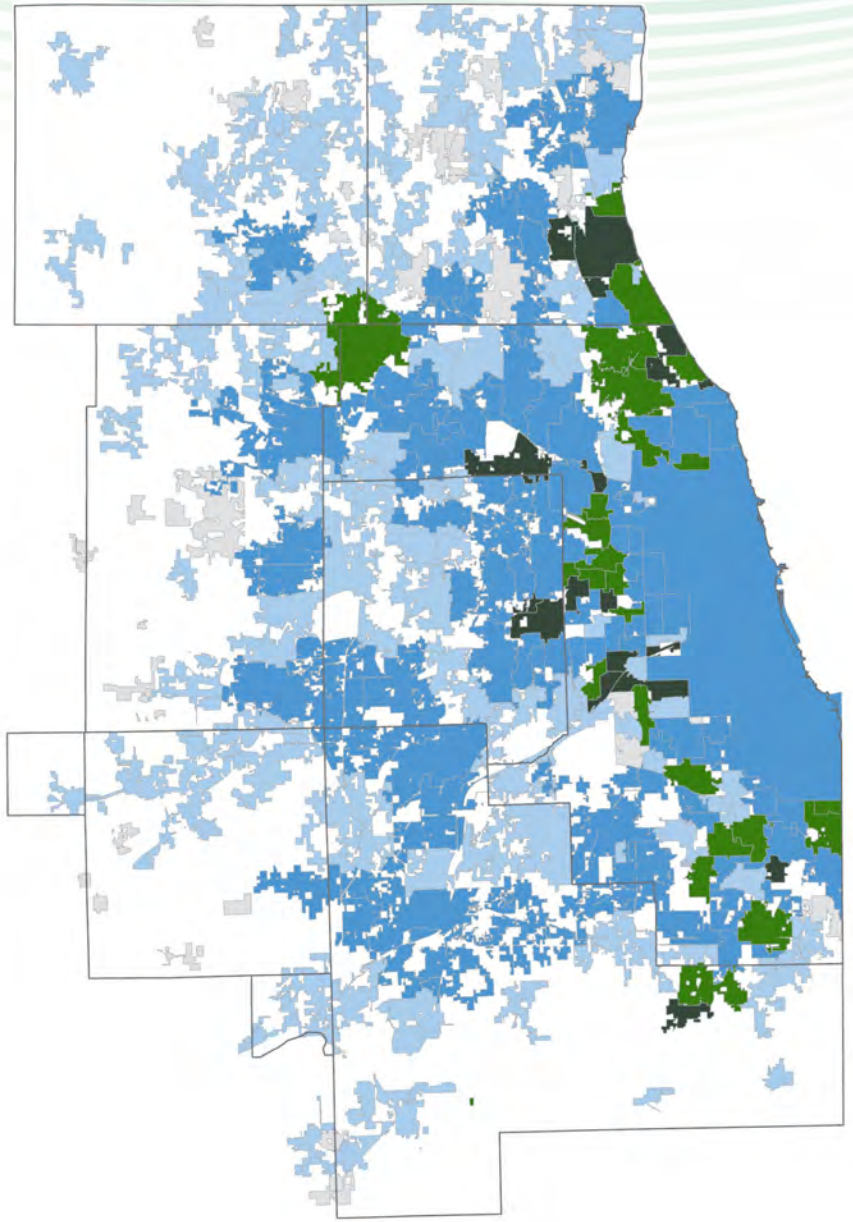
Local governments have varying capacity to build and maintain infrastructure

Municipalities rely heavily on revenues from property and sales taxes. Property tax comprised 47 percent of municipal revenues in 2023, while sales tax accounted for another 31 percent. Remaining resources come from a variety of sources, such as state disbursements and local fees – which includes some MFT revenues. These resources vary widely across the region, which can affect local governments' capacity to provide essential services.

Without sufficient revenue, local governments face challenges to pursue transportation projects, maintain existing infrastructure, and hire and retain skilled staff.

Source: *Tax Policy and Land Use Trends*, CMAP.

Municipal revenue per capita by municipality, 2023

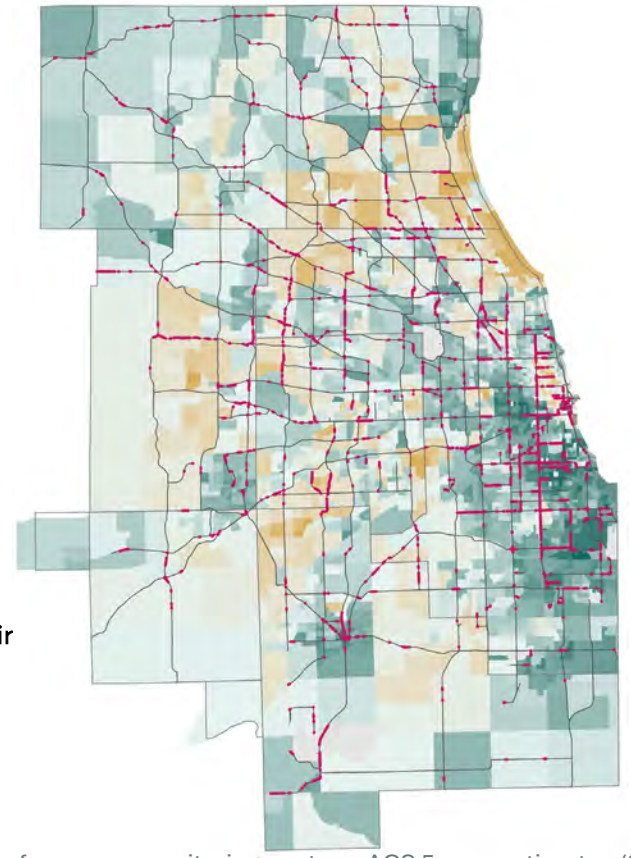


Source: IDOR.

Reinvestment is needed to address long-standing maintenance gaps

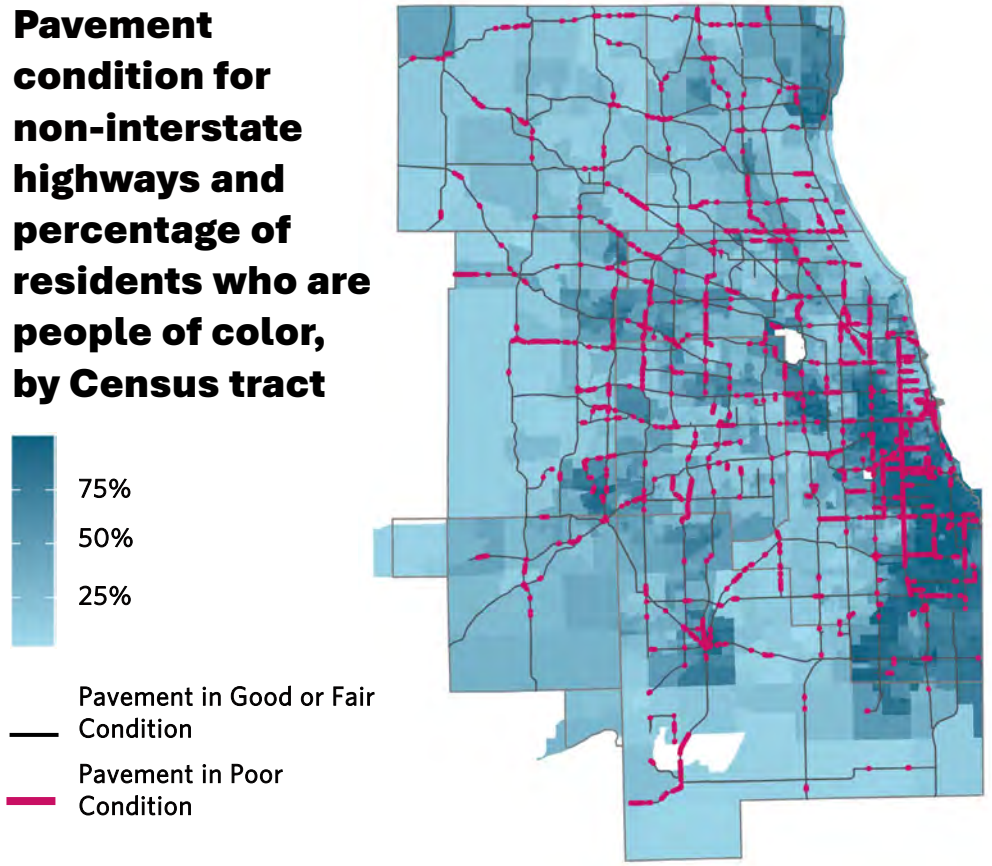
Maintenance needs vary significantly across the region, with some communities experiencing more severe backlogs due to prolonged disinvestment. Addressing these gaps through focused reinvestment is essential to ensure all communities benefit from a safe and reliable transportation system.

Pavement condition for non-interstate highways and median income, by Census tract



Source: FHA highway performance monitoring system, ACS 5-year estimates (2023).

Pavement condition for non-interstate highways and percentage of residents who are people of color, by Census tract



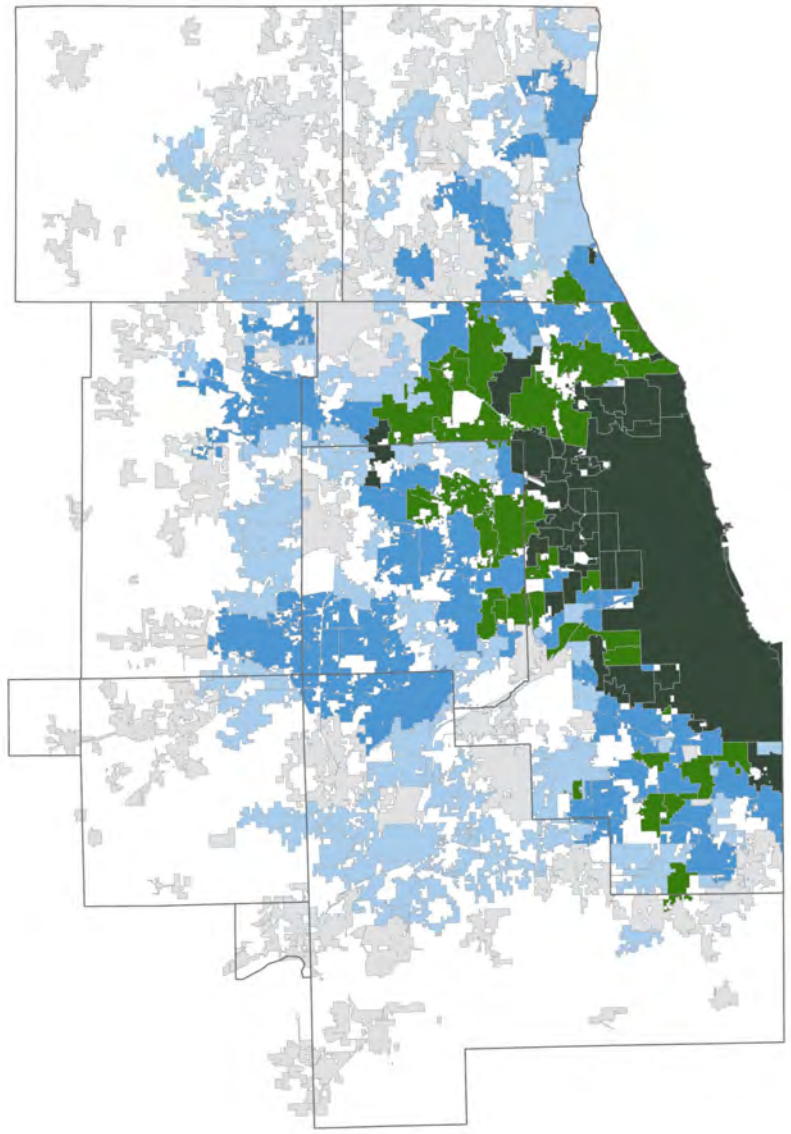
Note: NHS excluding interstate highways, ACS 5-year estimates (2023).

Low-density development patterns increase costs to connect the region

Between 2010 and 2020, the region converted 26,000 acres of agricultural land to other uses. While some of this land became protected open space, most was developed for housing, businesses, and other purposes. New development in low-density areas increases the distance between homes, jobs, services, and transit, reducing access and making it harder to connect communities to the regional transportation system.

This pattern also drives higher costs by expanding roads, bridges, utilities, and other infrastructure across long distances. Additionally, low-density land uses are difficult and costly to serve with transit, further reducing options to reach jobs and essential resources. At the same time, these areas often generate less municipal revenue per acre, straining local budgets and the total costs to operate and maintain the transportation system.

Municipal revenue per acre by municipality, 2023



Source: IDOR.

Rising costs challenge the transportation system

The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped travel behavior and introduced new pressures to the region's transportation system. A sharp drop in transit ridership during the pandemic — combined with the expiration of federal relief funding — has left transit agencies facing a projected $770 million annual operating budget shortfall.

At the same time, construction costs have surged due to inflation and supply chain disruptions. Between 2022 and 23 alone, highway construction costs rose nearly 12 percent, far exceeding what most transportation implementers had planned in their budgets.

Progress is possible through regional coordination and strategy

While increased investment is essential to improving the operation and maintenance of the regional transportation system, agencies can also enhance coordination on strategies that boost efficiency and reduce long-term costs.

- Performance-based planning and programming
- Transportation asset management strategies
- Traffic demand management
- Project prioritization and delivery
- Innovative financing
- Growth management strategies

Looking ahead

Setting the stage for regional transportation planning

Every day, people across northeastern Illinois rely on the transportation system to get where they need to go. The *Existing Conditions* report examines how well the system is working for them. It provides a snapshot of the region's transportation landscape today—highlighting key data, trends, and challenges. By documenting how the system currently functions and where gaps or inefficiencies exist, the report lays a foundation for data-driven decision-making. It also highlights variations in how communities are served, areas experiencing disproportionate burdens, and infrastructure gaps that must be addressed to ensure the network functions effectively for everyone.

In the development of the RTP, the *Existing Conditions* report works in tandem with the *Emerging Priorities* report, which was released earlier in 2025. The *Emerging Priorities* report sought to answer the question "What is the future transportation system we want?" by capturing early research findings and input from transportation stakeholders –laying a preliminary foundation for the RTP's goals and objectives. The *Existing Conditions* report builds on this work by identifying potential challenges and opportunities to achieve the region's transportation vision.

Together, these reports shape the direction of the RTP, providing the context and guidance needed to identify effective strategies, evaluate investment options, and make informed decisions that improve people's mobility options and access to opportunity.

Forward, together

Developing a strong regional transportation plan requires more than data — it demands shared purpose, collaboration, and a clear understanding of where we stand today. The 2026 RTP *Existing Conditions* report provides foundational information that supports the continuous, cooperative, and comprehensive transportation planning process. This data-driven baseline will inform inclusive engagement and strategic discussions about how northeastern Illinois can achieve its transportation vision.

Looking ahead, residents and transportation stakeholders will help shape RTP strategies and prioritize investments. These conversations will explore trade-offs, elevate regional opportunities, and define a path forward that reflects regional consensus and delivers benefits to people throughout northeastern Illinois. Informed by the current state of key transportation issues, the region is positioned to move forward — together — toward a more connected, reliable, and resilient system.

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) is the region's comprehensive planning organization. The agency and its partners developed and are now implementing ON TO 2050, a long-range plan to help the seven counties and 284 communities of northeastern Illinois implement strategies that address transportation, housing, economic development, open space, the environment, and other quality-of-life issues.

Visit cmap.illinois.gov for more information.

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RTP 2026 Regional Transportation Plan

Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning