

RTP

2026

Regional Transportation Plan

Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

Acknowledgments

The 2026 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) was made possible by collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders across northeastern Illinois. The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) is appreciative of all those who generously contributed their time, expertise, and perspectives throughout the planning process. Below is an acknowledgment of some of the many valued partners that helped develop the 2026 RTP.

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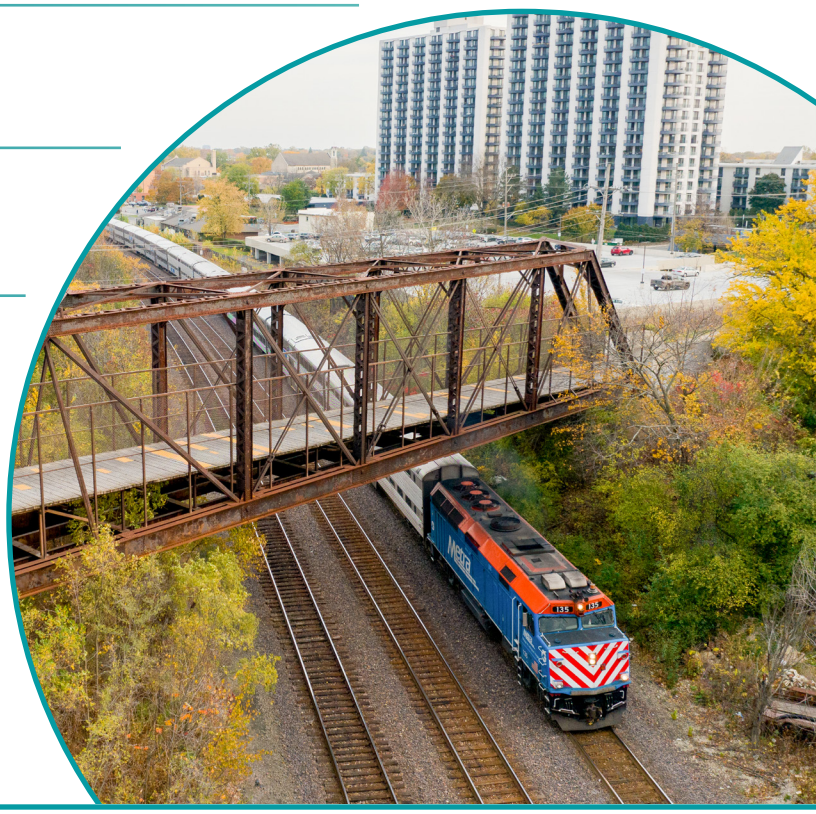
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Please note: The 2026 RTP was adopted by the CMAP Board and MPO Policy Committee on October 14, 2026. For information on subsequent amendments to the adopted plan, visit CMAP's RTP Amendments webpage.

Making the most of our moment

Before the sun rises, northeastern Illinois is already moving.

Freight trains thread through the region's rail yards, sorting cargo bound for every corner of the continent. On expressways and arterials, the first trucks of the day roll in every direction, keeping supply chains running before most businesses open their doors. Along the region's waterways, barges carry bulk goods to and from port facilities that connect northeastern Illinois to global markets. At the region's international airports, aircraft land and take off roughly every 30 seconds, linking the region to hundreds of cities around the world.[1] And across local communities, early-shift workers make their way to bus stops and rail platforms, beginning journeys that will carry them across neighborhoods and county lines, and back again by nightfall.

This is what a world-class transportation network looks like — not as a diagram on a page, but as a dynamic and evolving system that unites a region of 8.6 million people.

Northeastern Illinois did not arrive here by accident. Today's transportation network is the result of generations of bold, sustained investment in infrastructure: the elevated rail lines that shaped Chicago's urban form, the expressways that connected the region's suburbs to its core, and the freight corridors that turned a prairie crossroads into the logistics capital of North America. Each generation of regional leaders inherited a system built by those who came before and chose to sustain and strengthen it. The transportation network that exists today is the outcome of those choices — and one of the greatest economic and civic assets any metropolitan region in the world can claim.

That inheritance now stands at a crossroads.

The infrastructure that makes all this possible — bridges, tracks, signals, roads, port facilities, runways — is aging. Much of it was built for a different century, and a significant share has not received the sustained investment needed to keep it performing at its best. Funding streams that once supported the system are losing ground to rising construction costs and changing travel patterns. The region's safety record is moving in the wrong direction, and extreme weather is testing the resilience of critical infrastructure.



At the same time, the region is sitting on unrealized potential. Many communities built around transit stations experience infrequent service, and freight corridors remain constrained by at-grade crossings that were identified for improvement decades ago. Critical bike networks stop at municipal borders rather than at key destinations. The transit system — which serves almost a million trips each day — could serve many more with greater frequency, improved reliability, and more seamless connections across the region.

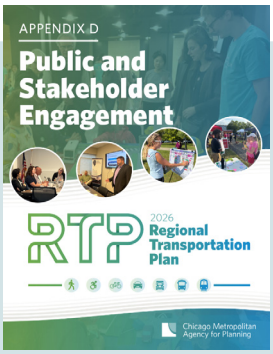
The question northeastern Illinois must answer is *what kind of region will our residents inherit by 2050*?

The answer is not written yet. But it will be shaped, in large part, by the transportation decisions made today. Every child heading to school, every worker commuting across county lines, and every older adult accessing essential services will live with the transportation system this generation chooses to leave behind.



The 2026 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) takes that responsibility seriously. It begins with an honest accounting of what the region has: a transportation system, forged over generations, that connects and empowers people and communities. That system was not built by any single agency or level of government, but rather, through generations of collective effort — by people across every level of government, every trade, and every community who chose, repeatedly, to build for future generations.

The strategies in this plan recognize that our best transportation future will not be built from scratch. Instead, it will require preserving what works, repairing what is failing, and unlocking the region's untapped potential as a transportation hub that, when it functions as it was designed to, is second to none. It will also require making deliberate choices about where development occurs, what infrastructure is built, and who maintains it — decisions that have the potential to either honor or burden future generations.



Robust engagement ensures that the 2026 RTP is not solely a CMAP plan — it is a shared blueprint for transportation stakeholders across northeastern Illinois.

The RTP frames the region's responsibilities through five interconnected chapters: mobility, safety, climate, economy, and the financial foundations necessary to support progress. These chapters are not parallel topics; they are five aspects of a single question: how can northeastern Illinois lead a transportation system worthy of what it has inherited? Each chapter closes with a set of strategies that converge in a final section on priority investments, which represent the projects and programs that best translate the plan's goals into action.

Taken together, this plan is an argument for urgency. The early-shift worker waiting at an unsheltered bus stop, the freight operator navigating a corridor in need of improvement, and the family living near an interchange that floods after heavy rain — none of them are waiting for 2050. They are experiencing the consequences of deferred decisions today. At the same time, every infrastructure choice made now carries obligations that will reverberate for generations. The transportation system northeastern Illinois leaves behind will reflect, in large part, the choices this plan recommends and the actions the region takes.



The Northeastern Illinois region

8.6 million residents

2.6 million acres of diverse land uses spanning agriculture, industry, natural areas, urban centers, and suburban communities

284 municipalities

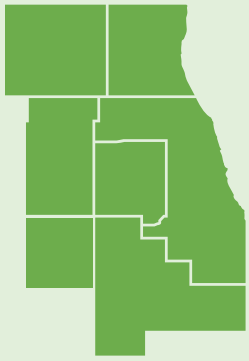
3.3 million households

22nd largest economy in the world if the region was considered a separate country. Surpassing countries such as Ireland and Sweden.



4.5 million jobs in the region

$779 billion generated in gross regional product, surpassing that of 39 individual states.



About the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)

CMAP is the federally designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) and the state-designated regional planning agency for northeastern Illinois. The region includes Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will counties, as well as Aux Sable Township in Grundy County and Sandwich and Somonauk townships in DeKalb County. CMAP supports the region by conducting research, developing plans, and coordinating investment across transportation, land use, economic development, and the environment. The 2026 RTP is one of CMAP's core planning responsibilities and is developed in partnership with local governments, transportation agencies, and residents across northeastern Illinois.

The regional transportation system underpins northeastern Illinois' economy and quality of life. This network includes extensive infrastructure assets across aviation, freight, roadway, maritime, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian infrastructure. In 2023, the transportation network facilitated more than 331 million transit trips, 372 million tons of truck cargo, and 57 billion regional vehicle miles traveled (VMT), reflecting the scale of daily movement that connects people to jobs, goods to markets, and communities to one another.

About the regional transportation planning process

The development of the RTP is a recurring process required by both state and federal law. Federal requirements ensure that investments in the regional transportation system are non-discriminatory, environmentally responsible, and financially viable. State mandates promote consistency with statewide plans and require consideration of how transportation intersects with other topics, such as economic activity and land use. Together, these requirements ensure that the RTP is well-rounded and collaborative.

In CMAP's 20-year history, the agency has fulfilled these responsibilities through individual comprehensive plans for the region — GO TO 2040 and ON TO 2050, and their subsequent updates. To enable more focused planning on specific topics and greater flexibility as regional needs evolve, CMAP is transitioning to a "family of plans" approach. Under this model, a long-term regional vision will guide a series of topic-specific planning efforts. At the time of publication, northeastern Illinois is collaborating to develop The Century Plan, which is scheduled for adoption in 2027. The Century Plan will serve as the region's overarching vision and inform future RTP cycles.

The 2026 RTP is one of the first plans developed under this new approach to regional planning. As a result, northeastern Illinois' current comprehensive plan — ON TO 2050 — continues to serve as a foundation for the RTP. The RTP carries forward ON TO 2050's principles of inclusive growth, prioritized investment, and resilience, and builds on its mobility chapter, which commits to a modern multimodal system that adapts to changing travel demand, a system that works better for everyone, and making transformative investments.



ON TO 2050 guiding principles

Inclusive growth: Growing our economy through opportunity for all

Prioritized investment: Carefully targeting resources to maximize benefit

Resilience: Preparing for rapid changes, both known and unknown

Three core questions guided the RTP development process:

- What transportation system does the region want?
- What are the challenges and opportunities ahead?
- And how will the region implement its transportation goals?

To answer these questions, the RTP process took a thoughtful and measured approach. Transportation plans from across the region, as well as recent consensus-driven plans and studies from both CMAP and partners, were reviewed. Research and data analysis provided insights into existing conditions and future needs and helped identify key policy considerations. CMAP's Existing Conditions Report established a data-driven baseline for the plan by assessing current transportation trends, system performance, and regional needs. The Emerging Priorities Report identified key issues and opportunities likely to shape northeastern Illinois' transportation future, helping focus the RTP on the most pressing strategic challenges ahead. Crucially, performance-based planning informed the evaluation and prioritization of investments.

Coordination and collaboration with regional partners informed every aspect of the RTP. CMAP's Transportation Committee, Board, and MPO Policy Committee provided critical feedback and guidance. Resource groups comprised of key partners and stakeholders helped shape congestion management strategies, the financial plan, as well as the list of constrained Regional Capital Projects (RCPs) and the accompanying list of priority investments. Engagement with implementing agencies, professional associations, community groups, advocacy organizations, and business leaders strongly influenced the plan throughout its development. Additionally, nearly 1,800 residents shared their transportation experiences and perspectives via public questionnaire.

About the transportation system

Northeastern Illinois has invested in the development, operation, and ongoing maintenance of transportation infrastructure for more than a century. Today, the region supports a large and highly connected multimodal network that facilitates both passenger and freight movement, serving as the region's backbone as a nationally and internationally significant transportation hub.



Aviation

Northeastern Illinois is home to a diverse network of aviation facilities that support regional and international travel, air cargo, and broader economic activity.

- 2 international airports
- 49 million airplane boardings (2023)
- 2 million tons of air freight cargo transported (2023)



Freight

Freight is a critical element of northeastern Illinois' economy and transportation system. In 2023, the region's freight network moved nearly 700 million tons of goods to, from, and within the region, with a total value of more than $1 trillion.

- 3,900 miles of freight rail
- All six Class I freight railroads
- More than 200,000 jobs (2024)



Roads & bridges

The roadway network ranges from limited access interstate highways that support regional and interregional travel to local streets that provide direct access to residential and commercial land uses.

- 34,000+ miles of public roadways
- 3,660 bridges
- 425 miles of interstate highways



Sidewalks & bike paths

Active transportation infrastructure is a critical resource in the region. These facilities also play an important role in improving transportation safety, expanding mobility options, and supporting regional public health and environmental goals.

39,000+ miles of sidewalk

6.8 million Divvy bike and scooter rides (2025)

1,400 miles of bikeways



Transit

Northeastern Illinois is served by an extensive public transit network. In 2024, transit riders in the region took 367.6 million unlinked passenger trips, ranking third nationwide in total transit usage, behind only New York City and Los Angeles.

391 train stations

11 commuter rail lines

273 bus routes



Waterways

Northeastern Illinois is served by three ports and six navigable waterways, which support the transport of industrial materials and bulk commodities into, out of, and through the region.

The Illinois International Port handled over 9 million tons of goods (2023)

336 miles of navigable water

The Joliet Regional Port handled over 7 million tons of goods (2023)

Learn more about the infrastructure, vehicles, and people who move northeastern Illinois in the **Transportation System Inventory report**





Strengthen connections between people and places

Transportation connects people to a diverse range of destinations. Decades of investment have positioned northeastern Illinois as an international transportation hub, supported by an expansive network of roads, bridges, airports, ports, rail, and transit. This vast array of transportation assets is the backbone for the region's economic prosperity and quality of life.

Regional transportation needs are dynamic and continue to evolve. The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped when and how residents travel, affecting congestion patterns, remote work, and transit ridership. In this changing landscape, the need for reliable, safe, and accessible travel options remains essential.

The region's wealth of transportation assets provides a strong foundation for strengthened connections, but the system remains unfinished and, in some respects, under stress. This chapter examines three dimensions of that challenge:

- **Reliability:** congestion affects the daily movement of people and goods across every county in the region and extends beyond peak-hour traffic alone.
- **Multimodal choice:** driving remains the dominant mode, but reducing congestion, serving more residents, and achieving climate and safety goals depend on expanding transit, walking, and biking.
- **Accessibility:** for many residents — particularly people with disabilities and older adults — the current system does not function effectively.

None of these challenges can be addressed by any single agency acting alone. Congestion does not stop at jurisdictional boundaries, transit riders routinely cross county lines, and the hundreds of municipalities responsible for sidewalks and local roads collectively determine whether the regional system is accessible. The strategies that follow require coordinated action across all levels of government, planning disciplines, and community partners.

Greater reliability and efficiency are critical for regional mobility

Northeastern Illinois' vast transportation network supports millions of trips each day, reflecting the movement of both people and goods. However, persistent congestion limits mobility, resulting in frustrating and costly delays.



Some level of congestion is typical in major metropolitan areas, but it is particularly acute in northeastern Illinois, which frequently ranks among the most congested in the country. While some congestion is predictable — such as rush hour traffic — unexpected delays result from crashes, construction, extreme weather, major events, and other disruptions. This unpredictable congestion undermines travel reliability.

Travel time reliability — measured by the worst delays compared to normal travel times — reveals where unpredictable congestion most frequently disrupts traffic flow. Across northeastern Illinois' seven counties, segments of roads and highways experience unreliable

travel conditions. Among the least reliable corridors are I-90 and I-94 on Chicago's North Side, I-290 throughout Cook County, and I-80 in southern Cook County.[2] Because these corridors serve dense residential areas and major employment centers, congestion challenges significantly affect the movement of both people and goods.

Aging infrastructure is a significant contributor to unreliable travel times and exacerbates congestion.[3] Long-term deferred maintenance leads to frequent and unexpected disruptions, including signal outages and lane closures due to pavement failures. As a historic transportation hub with expansive infrastructure, northeastern Illinois faces substantial maintenance needs. For example, more than 70 percent of expressways owned by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) are over 50 years old.[4] Prioritizing system preservation will help reduce long-term costs, minimize disruptions, and support a more efficient and reliable network.

Bailey Werner

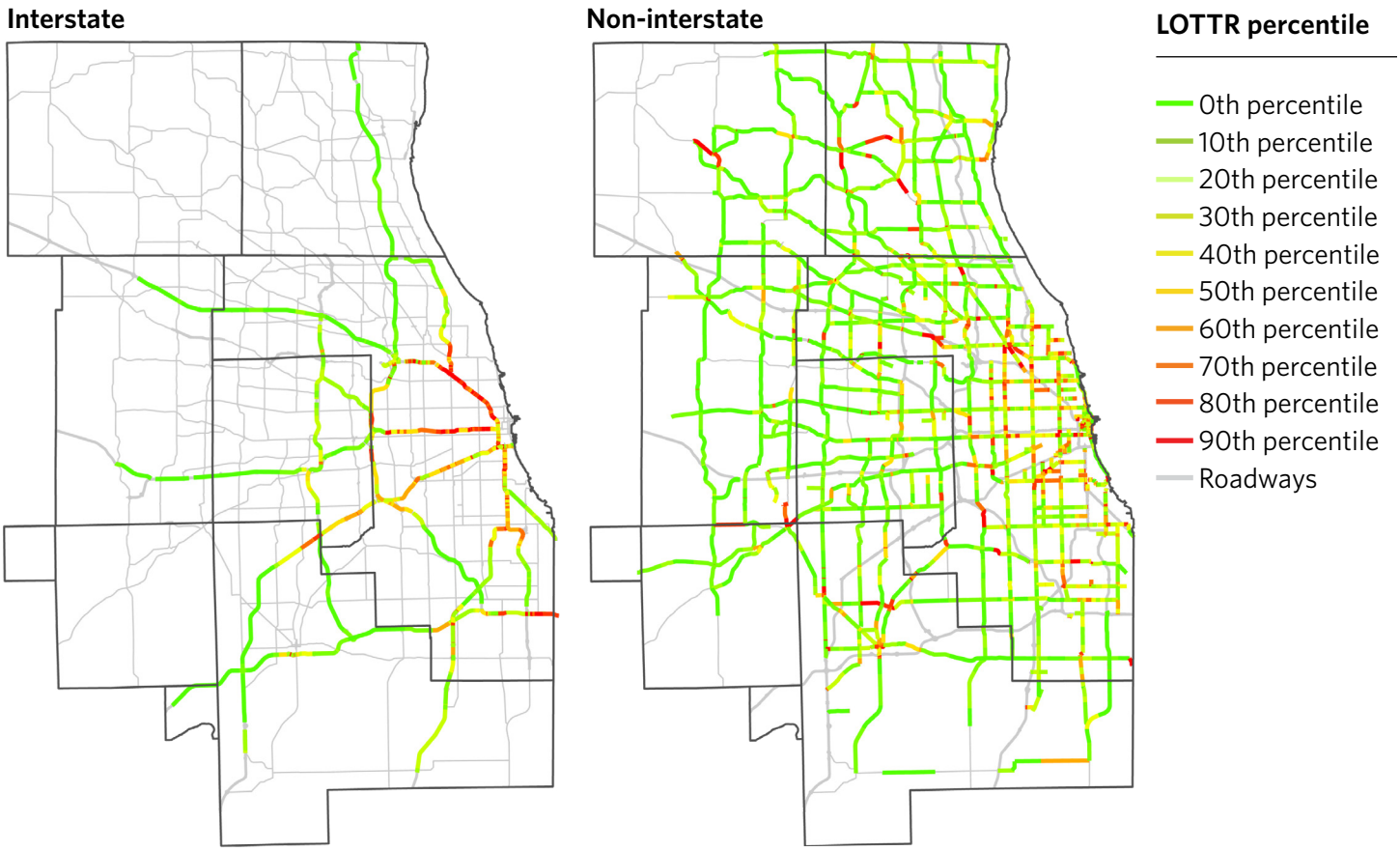
Bike and Metra commuter

Bailey Werner's commute from Chicago's Near Northwest Side to Libertyville shows how stronger connections can expand access to opportunity across northeastern Illinois. Her trip combines biking to her local Metra station, riding commuter rail to Libertyville, and biking the final stretch to her office. For Bailey, maintaining transit as a cost-effective alternative to driving is especially important, and increasing the availability of protected bike lanes would make the journey feel even safer. Her story illustrates how many transit users bring bikes and scooters aboard to solve the "last mile" challenge between stations and destinations. Bailey's experience reflects how coordinated investments in biking and transit can create a more flexible, connected transportation system that helps improve mobility.

"I bike, take the train, and bike again — it's what makes my commute work."



Figure 1: Interstate and non-interstate level of travel time reliability (LOTTR) on the National Highway System, 2022



Source: FHWA National Performance Management Research Data Set. LOTTR is defined as the ratio of the 80th percentile travel time to normal travel time (50th percentile).

Recent changes in travel behavior have also reshaped congestion patterns. Northeastern Illinois experienced a three-fold increase in the number of residents who work remotely in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic. Increased remote work means that more people have greater flexibility during weekday afternoons — resulting in more local trips to run errands, participate in social events, and other outings. As a result, average speeds during the 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. window are now lower than pre-pandemic levels, indicating heightened congestion challenges outside of traditional rush-hour periods.

Economic activity also influences congestion. Growth in e-commerce and supply chain disruptions have increased freight-related delays, particularly at rail crossings. Freight rail travel times have more than doubled — from an average of about 5 hours in 2016 to approximately 13 hours in 2025. With more than 1,400 at-grade crossings, the region experiences significant delays where rail and roadway networks intersect. In 2023 alone, these crossings contributed an estimated 4,220 hours of additional vehicle delay. Investing in the efficient movement of northeastern Illinois' vast freight network is essential to support reliable mobility for both people and goods.

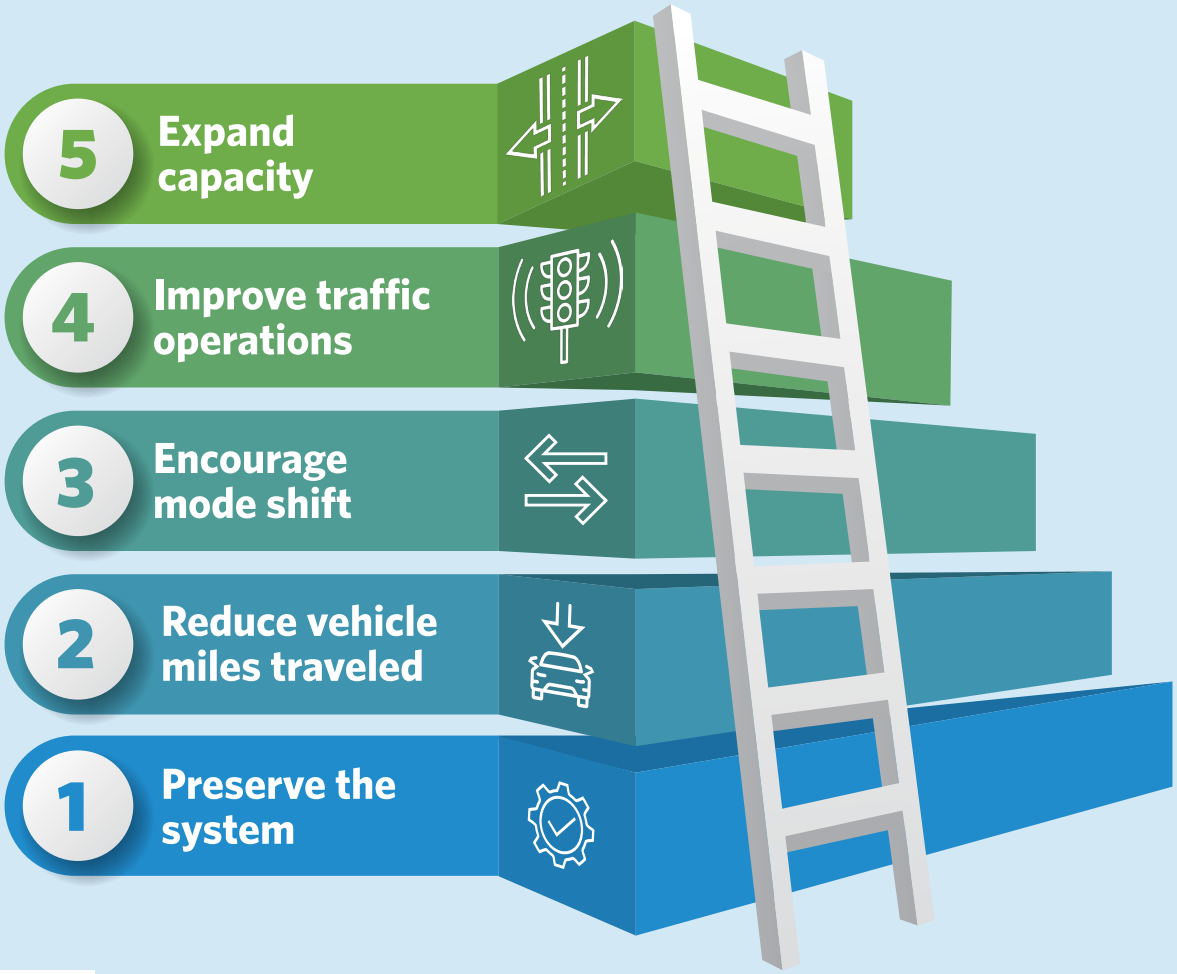
Congestion is a shared challenge that affects the transportation system's ability to provide safe, reliable, and efficient connections. The tools to address it are held by multiple levels of government, community partners, and planning disciplines. Regional efforts to mitigate congestion must be as comprehensive and multijurisdictional as its underlying causes.

Strategies for addressing congestion

To address congestion, transportation agencies should prioritize strategies that are the most effective, efficient, and practical — maximizing limited resources while delivering a better, more reliable transportation system.

The *Congestion Management Strategy Guidebook* introduces the Mobility Solutions Ladder, a framework that prioritizes optimizing the existing system and improving travel choices before expanding capacity through:

- System preservation to ensure that transportation infrastructure remains in good working condition and supports travel reliability.
- Strategies to reduce VMT and encourage mode shift to rebalance how the system is used — reducing car traffic while increasing multimodal access to destinations.
- Actions to improve traffic operations through technology and improved incident management to minimize unexpected slowdowns.



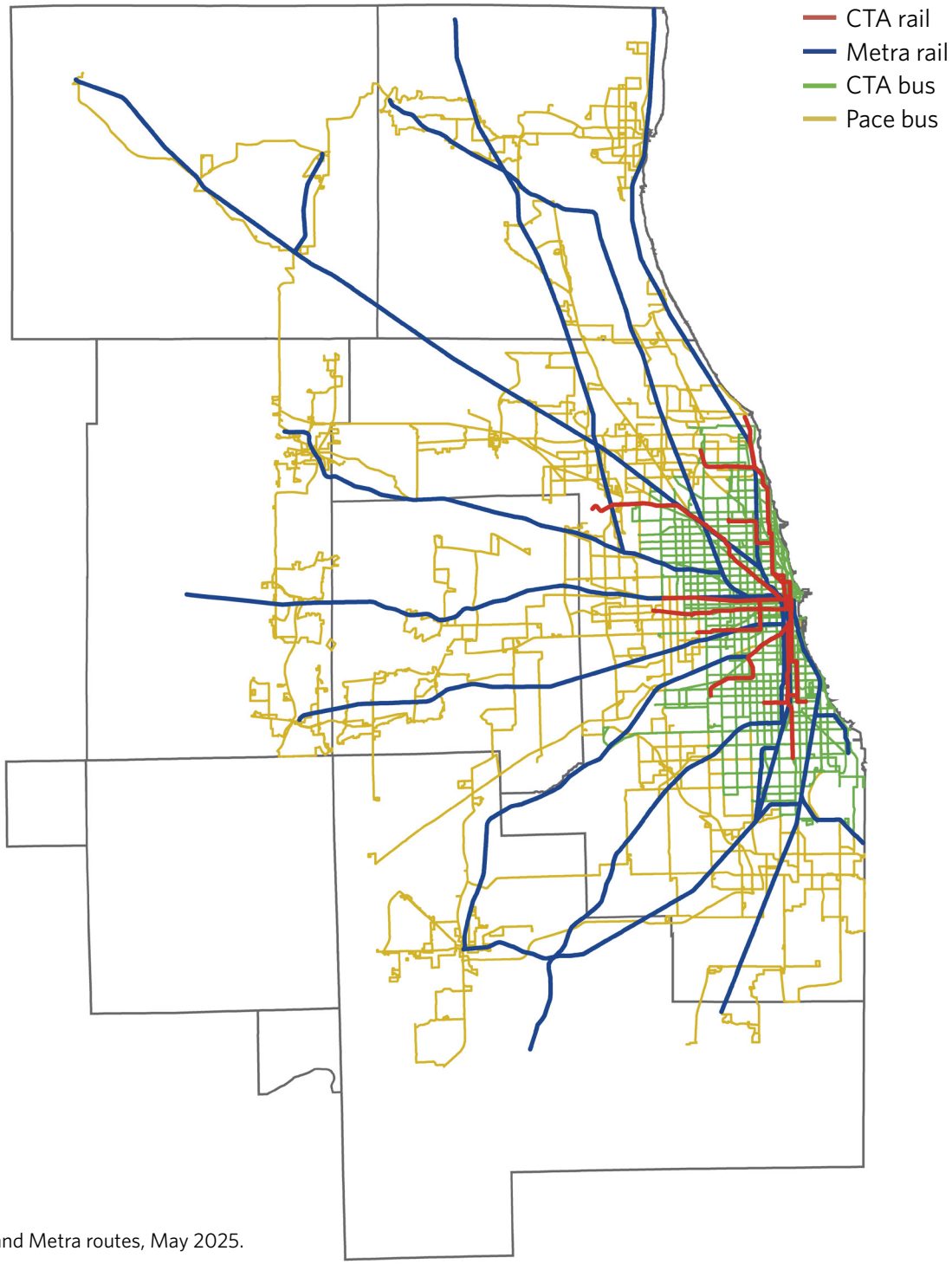
cmap.is/cmp
Together, these strategies reduce congestion and improve mobility. For more information, check out the full guidebook.

Multimodal options are essential to shift more trips to non-driving modes

Driving remains the most common way people travel in northeastern Illinois. Shifting more trips to transit, walking, rolling, and other non-driving modes is essential to reduce congestion and improve mobility across the region.

By 2050, VMT is projected to grow nearly 6 percent on interstates and up to 16 percent on arterial roads, reaching approximately 60 billion miles annually. Growth at this scale would increase congestion, lengthen travel times, and place additional strain on infrastructure maintenance needs. Investments in demand management and mode shift are essential to mitigate these impacts.

Figure 2: Public transit routes in northeastern Illinois mainly support trips to and from the urban core



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

The relationship between transportation and land use strongly influences how far people travel, what travel options are available to them, and how efficiently the transportation system operates overall. This is especially true for the region's transit network, which includes 11 commuter rail lines, 8 rapid transit rail lines, and 273 bus routes. Service is most frequent in areas with higher population density, particularly Chicago and its inner-ring suburbs. Since population density and land use patterns significantly determine access, transit-oriented development can make transit a viable option for more communities.[5]

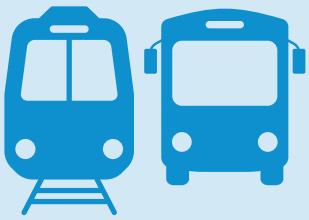
How, where, and when residents use transit is evolving. The current system is mostly designed for trips to-and-from the urban core, with the most frequent service supporting the traditional nine-to-five commute schedule. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, however, ridership recovery has been significantly higher for both the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) and Metra during weekends and midday periods, rather than typical rush hours. To address these shifts and ensure that transit is a reliable option for a wide variety of trips, transit agencies are planning to invest in more frequent transit services that provide stronger connections across the region.



Population, jobs, and households are all expected to grow across the region

This growth will lead to greater demand for travel, especially on the region's suburban and rural roads connecting residents to job centers. Multifaceted strategies to mitigate congestion will be crucial to prevent longer, more unreliable travel times.

Sidewalks and bikeways play a critical role in supporting local mobility and first- and last-mile connections. In 2023, 38 percent of commutes were by modes other than driving alone, including transit, carpooling, walking, and biking. Many of these trips begin as a pedestrian trip, making infrastructure like sidewalks, curb ramps, and crossings essential. Addressing gaps in bicycle and pedestrian networks through safe, dedicated infrastructure is critical to strengthen connections within and between communities.



Transit reform and funding in northeastern Illinois

In 2025, Governor J.B. Pritzker signed the Northern Illinois Transit Authority Act, which enacts a series of reforms and identifies nearly $1.5 billion in new revenues for the transit system. Reforms are scheduled for implementation starting in 2026 and will continue over multiple years.

Progress is needed to make transportation accessible to everyone

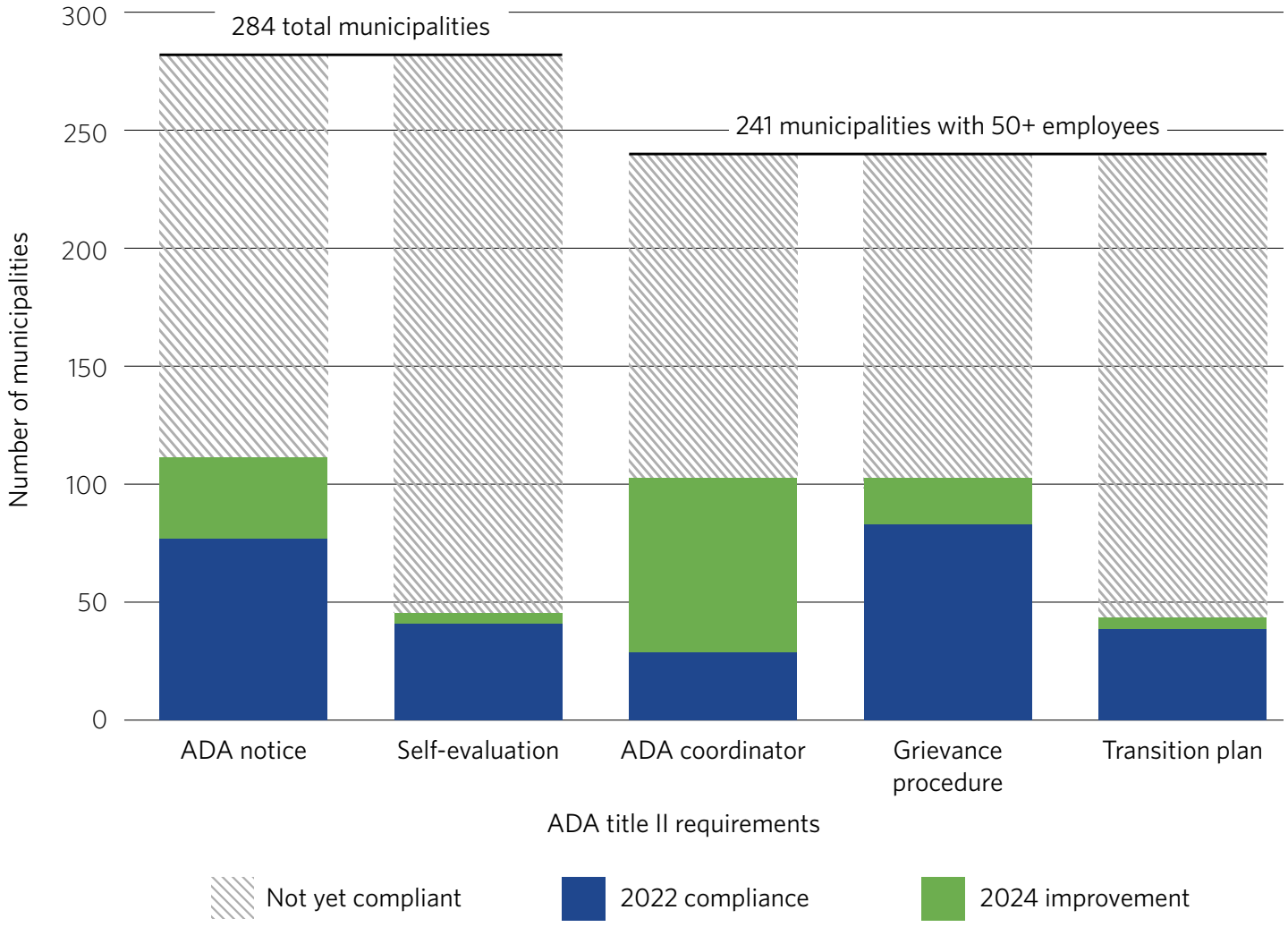
For the regional transportation system to function effectively, it must be accessible to all people, regardless of their ability. While recent investments have made crucial progress in accessibility, significant gaps remain.

Today, 1 in 5 residents with disabilities does not travel on an average day, compared to fewer than 1 in 10 residents without disabilities — signaling that there are accessibility barriers that make travel difficult or, in some cases, impossible. Addressing these shortcomings is critical to improve access to transportation and enable a higher quality of life for all.

Northeastern Illinois is home to more than 800,000 residents with disabilities — approximately 10 percent of the population. All people have the potential to experience some form of a disability during their lives, but it becomes increasingly likely with age. In recent years, the region's population of residents aged 65 and older have become a greater share of the total population — with this trend forecasted to continue for decades to come. Ensuring transportation infrastructure and services are accessible across all life stages is critical to supporting independence and mobility.

Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) remains uneven. As of 2025, only 15 percent of municipalities in the region had completed an ADA-required accessibility evaluation of their roads and sidewalks, and just 18 percent of those required to have an accessibility transition plan actually had one in place. Although accessible transportation options — such as paratransit, Dial-a-Ride, and ride-hailing services — have increased in recent years, they are often fragmented, underfunded, or cost-prohibitive. Greater coordination and sustained investment are needed to create a system that works for all users.

Figure 3: Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act remains uneven across the region's municipalities



Source: CMAP analysis of a 2022 phone-based survey, 2024 web-scan of municipal sites, and IDOT data.

Transit is a particularly important mode for people with disabilities. While agencies have made progress improving the accessibility of transit facilities, nearly one-third of rail stations in the region remain inaccessible for people who need elevators, ramps, audio and visual announcements, or other features to navigate transit effectively. Continued investment in transit station improvements — including efforts by CTA, Metra, and Pace — will help close gaps. These investments provide benefits beyond ADA compliance, including improved safety, better wayfinding, enhanced real-time information, stronger connections between neighborhoods, and increased economic opportunity. Improving station accessibility is both a civil rights obligation and a strategic investment in the region's mobility and economic strength. Together, these improvements move the region closer to its goal of providing universal access to northeastern Illinois' expansive transit system.

Improving mobility requires more than expanding roadway capacity. Strengthening connections between people and places depends on strategic investments in congestion mitigation, multimodal networks, and fully accessible infrastructure. Achieving a more efficient and effective transportation system will require agencies, stakeholders, and communities to collaborate in new and more coordinated ways. If successful, northeastern Illinois can make transformational improvements to regional mobility and quality of life.

Ben Chargot

Client Success and Training Specialist, Access Living

Ben Chargot relies on public transit not just for convenience, but for independence. As a staff member at Access Living — a disability rights organization — with a visual impairment, Ben navigates Chicago using the CTA alongside his guide dog Keating. He relies on features like audible announcements, tactile warning strips, and accessible station design to travel safely and confidently. His daily commute on the Brown Line connects him to work, colleagues, and the broader city without assistance. Ben points to the need for more consistent accessibility features, including additional elevators and clearer real-time communication. His experience underscores that a truly effective transportation system is one that works for everyone — enabling independence, dignity, and equal access to opportunity.

"Public transit gives me independence — I can get where I need to go on my own."



Strategies to strengthen connections between people and places

Objective: Improve the reliability of the transportation system

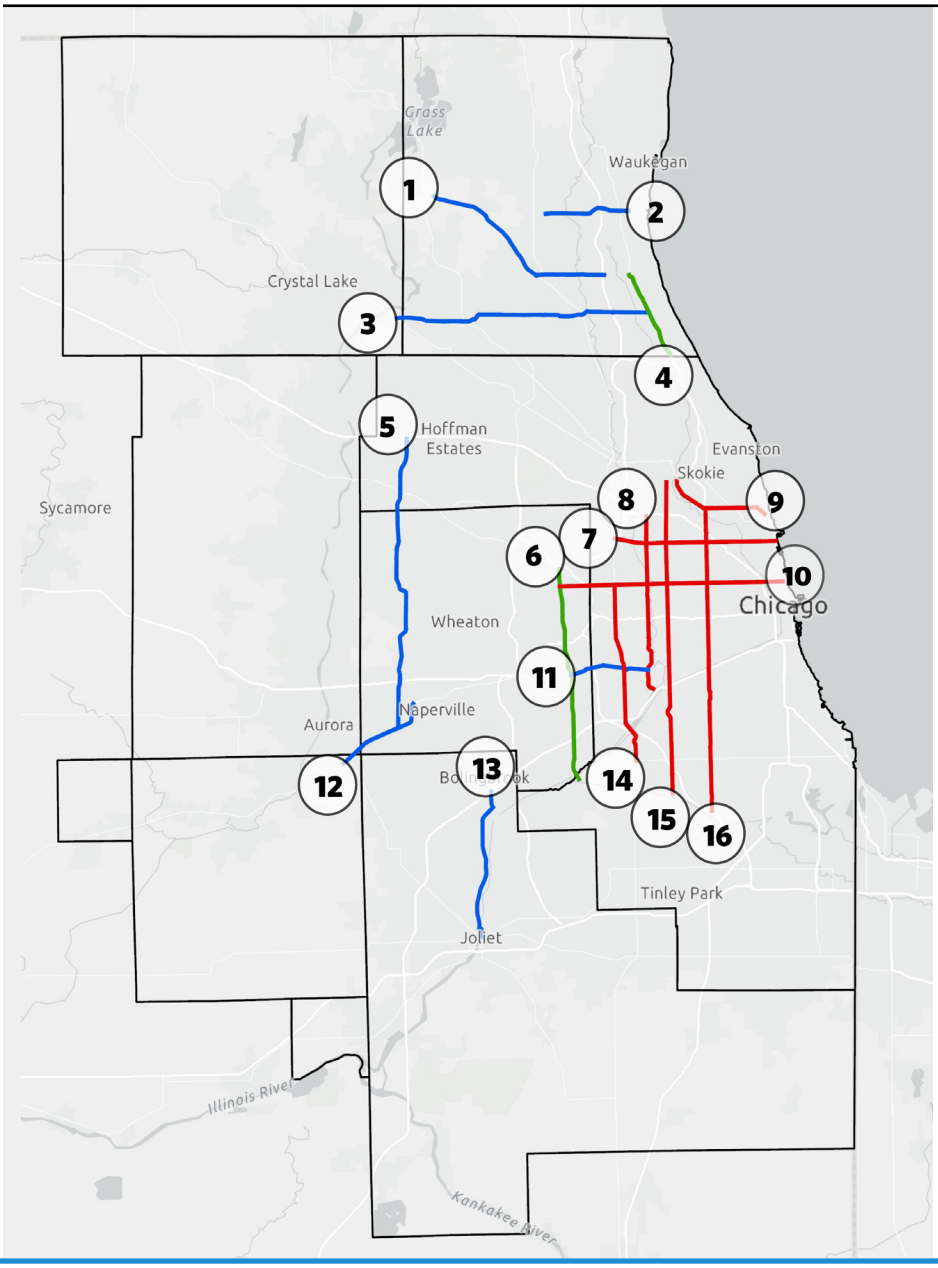
Plan proactively for asset lifecycle management to minimize disruptions

Transportation agencies should implement asset management practices that account for the full lifecycle of their facilities — from construction to maintenance and eventual replacement. Keeping roads, bridges, bikeways, and transit infrastructure in good condition reduces operational limitations that reduce efficiency (such as slow zones on rail tracks or load-posted bridges on roadways) and minimizes the risk of unexpected disruptions that create congestion.

Advance comprehensive corridor planning

Regional agencies and stakeholders should collaborate on corridor plans to manage congestion. No single agency has all the tools needed, and congestion does not stop at jurisdictional borders. Coordinated planning across agencies and disciplines can improve outcomes, particularly along the region's most congested and unreliable corridors.

Figure 4: Arterial corridors with high levels of unreliable travel times should be prioritized in regional congestion management efforts



1. IL 60
2. IL 137/Buckley Rd
3. IL 22
4. US 41
5. IL 59
6. IL 83
7. IL 19/Irving Park Rd
8. IL 171
9. US 14
10. IL 64/North Ave
11. US 34/Ogden Ave
12. US 34/Ogden Ave
13. IL 53
14. US 45
15. IL 43/Harlem Ave
16. IL 50/Cicero Ave

- Traditional suburban arterial
- Limited-access arterial
- Multi-use urban corridor

CMAP's ongoing congestion management process has identified a set of corridors that experience high levels of unreliable travel times. Moving forward, these segments should be prioritized in regional corridor planning efforts to address congestion.

Implement demand management measures

The region should explore congestion pricing. By introducing a direct cost for the use of the most congested roadways during peak periods, congestion pricing can shift travel to different times, routes, destinations, or modes. When paired with flexible work arrangements and mode shift strategies, congestion pricing has the potential to reduce vehicle travel when and where there is high demand, improving overall system reliability.

Deploy intelligent transportation systems (ITS) and operational improvements

Transportation agencies should implement ITS strategies, including signal optimization, transit signal priority, and a regional traffic management center. The region should also improve operational tactics, such as traffic incident management, to reduce unexpected slowdowns from crashes and other incidents while enhancing safety.

Objective: Invest in transit and active transportation to promote mode shift

Develop a more integrated regional transit system

As the region transitions to the Northern Illinois Transit Authority, it should focus on coordinated service planning and routing, seamless transfers, integrated fares, and strategic capital investments. Improved coordination will ensure efficient travel for riders and maximize the cost-effectiveness of capital investments.

Implement a regional rail service model

The region should provide all-day, frequent regional rail service, taking advantage of its vast rail network to serve more trip types. A regional rail approach would align with today's travel needs — supporting downtown-oriented trips, suburb-to-suburb trips, and city-to-suburb trips — while also expanding travel options on weekends and during off-peak hours.

Enable faster and more reliable bus service

The region should prioritize transit within the roadway through measures such as transit signal priority, queue jump lanes, improved stations, and, where appropriate, dedicated lanes. Transportation partners should advance planning, funding, staffing, and enforcement mechanisms for dedicated bus infrastructure, while remaining sensitive to local conditions, including freight activity, emergency access, and bicyclist and pedestrian safety.

Improve the connectivity of sidewalks, bikeways, and related infrastructure

To increase active transportation, transportation agencies should invest in well-connected networks of infrastructure for biking, walking, and other forms of micromobility. While regional active transportation systems have expanded, significant gaps remain. Additional investment in sidewalks, crossings, and local bicycle infrastructure is needed to support everyday travel and improve access to transit.

Objective: Achieve universal accessibility

Invest in transit stops, stations, and vehicles

The region should invest in the transit system to improve accessibility, safety, and the overall rider experience. Accessibility features — including audio and visual announcements, Braille and large print signs, tactile surfaces, elevators, ramps, and platform-train gap fillers — are essential. Modernized passenger information, improved wayfinding, enhanced safety and security features, and rehabilitated station facilities are critical to optimize the experience for all riders and make transit a preferred travel option for more people.

Ensure local infrastructure is fully accessible

The region should invest in sidewalks that are well-connected, in good condition, meet accessibility standards, and are maintained for safe, comfortable, and reliable use in all seasons, improving access to destinations for all. Stakeholders should improve door-to-door accessibility, ensuring safe and convenient access between transportation modes and final destinations.

Strengthening connections between people and places is the transportation system's fundamental purpose, and achieving it is a shared responsibility. But a system that connects people while putting their safety at risk is not a fully realized system. The next chapter examines the growing traffic safety crisis on the region's roads. Addressing this challenge is not separate from improving mobility — it is essential to achieving it and requires the same collaborative regional approach.

RTP indicators to track regional mobility	Today's trendline	Desired trendline
Interstate and non-interstate travel time reliability The percentage of roads in the region considered reliable by comparing the worst delays to normal travel times during morning rush, midday, evening rush, and weekends		
Incident clearance time The median number of minutes before a traffic incident (crash or other roadway obstruction) is addressed		
VMT per household The average number of miles driven by individual households in the region over the course of a year		
Trips to work via modes other than single occupancy vehicles (SOV) The share of commute trips completed by non-SOV modes, including working from home, carpooling, walking, biking, and taking transit		
Population near high-frequency transit The percentage of population residing within 1/2 mile of high-frequency transit stations		
Municipal ADA transition plans The number of municipalities with an ADA transition plan		



Prioritize safety and public health

All people deserve access to a safe transportation system. National and local trends, however, indicate the region — and the country as a whole — is experiencing a roadway safety crisis. This trend began as early as 2014, when traffic fatalities started to rise, ultimately peaking at more than 700 lives lost in 2021 — the deadliest year on the region's roads in decades. While northeastern Illinois has seen modest improvements in recent years, the region has significant progress to make to achieve zero traffic-related deaths by 2050.



Through the countywide safety action plans, CMAP and regional partners are working toward **zero traffic deaths by 2050**.

Historically, transportation planning has prioritized the fast and efficient movement of vehicles, often at the expense of safety. Today, the region's mobility, climate, and economic goals depend on investments that serve a broader range of users — including people walking, biking, and taking transit alongside those who are driving. Achieving this vision will require the region to challenge longstanding practices and treat safety as a shared responsibility across all modes and levels of government.

Understanding the factors driving the current crisis is a critical first step. This chapter examines three interconnected issues: the increasing severity of crashes and the forces behind it, the disproportionate risks faced by certain populations, and the Safe System Approach (SSA), which provides a framework for mitigating the structural causes of traffic deaths.[6] Shared responsibility is central to the SSA and reflects a system where multiple levels of government design roadways, set speed limits, make land use decisions, and enforce laws. Progress will require all of them to work from the same framework. The strategies in this chapter focus on speed management, roadway design, protective infrastructure, and prioritized investment in communities and corridors where risk is greatest.

Traffic crashes are becoming more deadly

Figure 5: Serious injuries caused by traffic crashes in northeastern Illinois

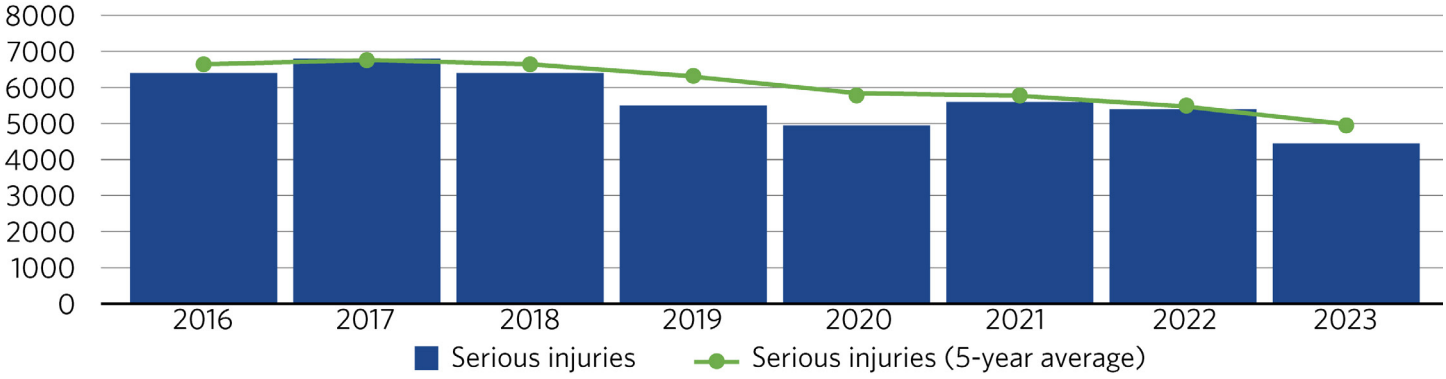
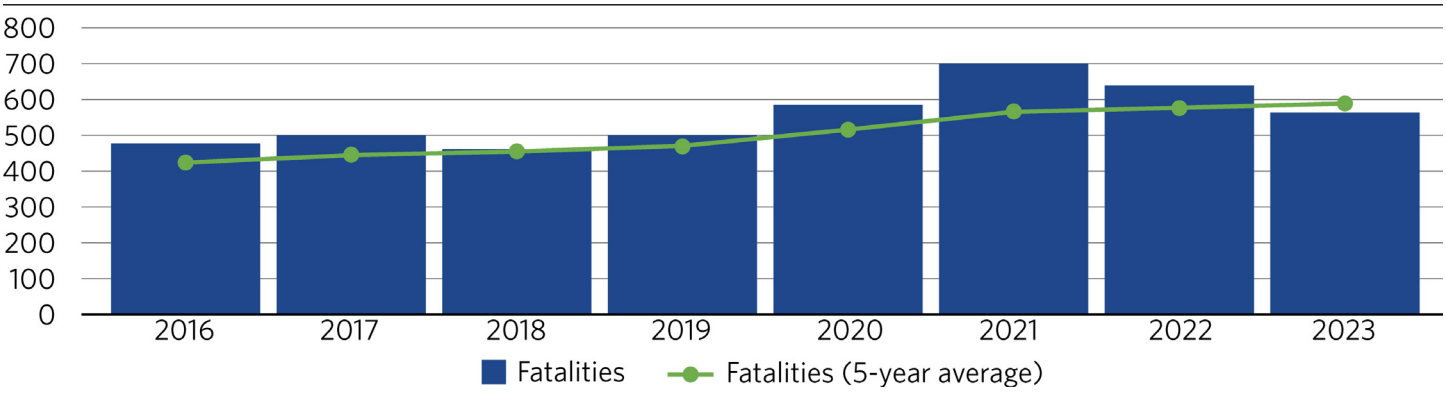
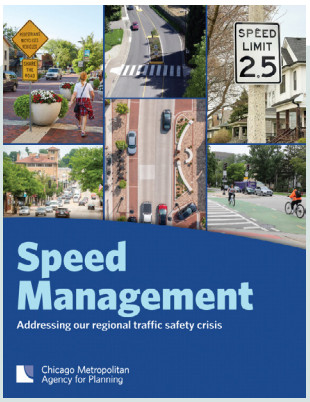


Figure 6: Fatalities caused by traffic crashes in northeastern Illinois



Deaths and serious injuries caused by traffic crashes remain significant, regionwide challenges that cost lives and devastate local communities. Following the onset of COVID-19, the region experienced a sharp increase in traffic fatalities alongside a decline in serious injuries. In subsequent years, crashes resulting in serious injuries have declined but traffic fatalities remain elevated — indicating that crashes are becoming more deadly. These grave outcomes cost lives and send the region in the opposite direction of its safety targets.

Changes in the size, weight, and shape of the vehicle fleet have made crashes more deadly. Consumer demand for larger vehicles has grown steadily over the past 50 years. In 1975, smaller vehicles like wagons and sedans accounted for about 80 percent of vehicles produced nationally; by 2021, that share had declined to approximately 30 percent. Meanwhile, larger vehicles such as SUVs increased from 2 percent to more than 55 percent of vehicles produced. In addition to being larger and heavier, these vehicles often have higher and more blunt front ends, which increase the force of impact in collisions. As a result, these changes increase the kinetic energy in crashes — resulting in more fatal outcomes, even at lower speeds.



The Speed Management Report explores the factors that contribute to speed-related traffic safety risks and provides recommendations on road design, speed limits, education, and fair enforcement.

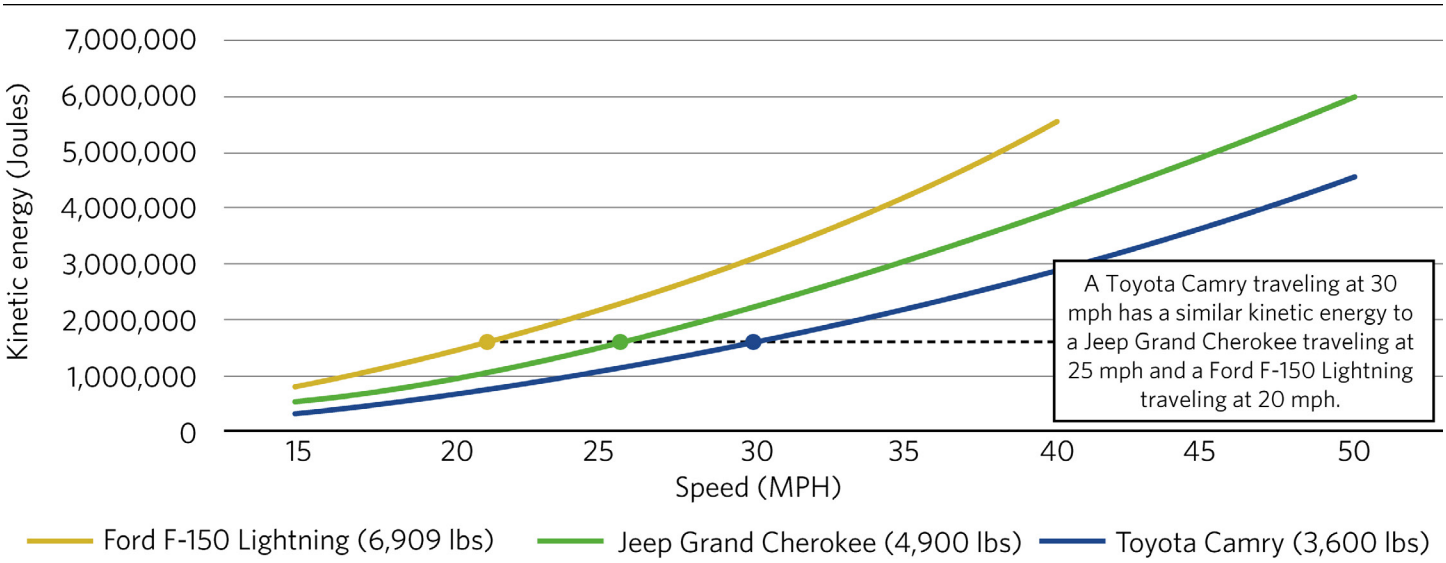
What is kinetic energy, and why does it matter in traffic safety?

Kinetic energy is the energy embodied in a moving object, such as a vehicle in motion. The Safe System Approach aims to reduce the kinetic energy in crashes and prevent crashes from being fatal by reducing the speed and/or mass of a vehicle.

Speeding is also contributing to the increasing number of fatalities. From 2019 to 2023, speed accounted for more than 43 percent of traffic fatalities — making it a leading cause of deadly crashes.[7] Speed-related fatalities increased sharply during the pandemic and remain above pre-pandemic levels.

Speed limits play a critical role in improving safety outcomes. Higher speeds affect a driver's reaction time and field of vision, decreasing their ability to avoid hazards in the roadway and increasing the distance needed for a vehicle to fully stop to avoid a crash. Current speed limits do not account for the recent trend towards larger and heavier passenger vehicles. Ultimately, speed limit policies and speed management strategies should prioritize the safety of all road users, especially in highly populated areas where pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users share the roadway.

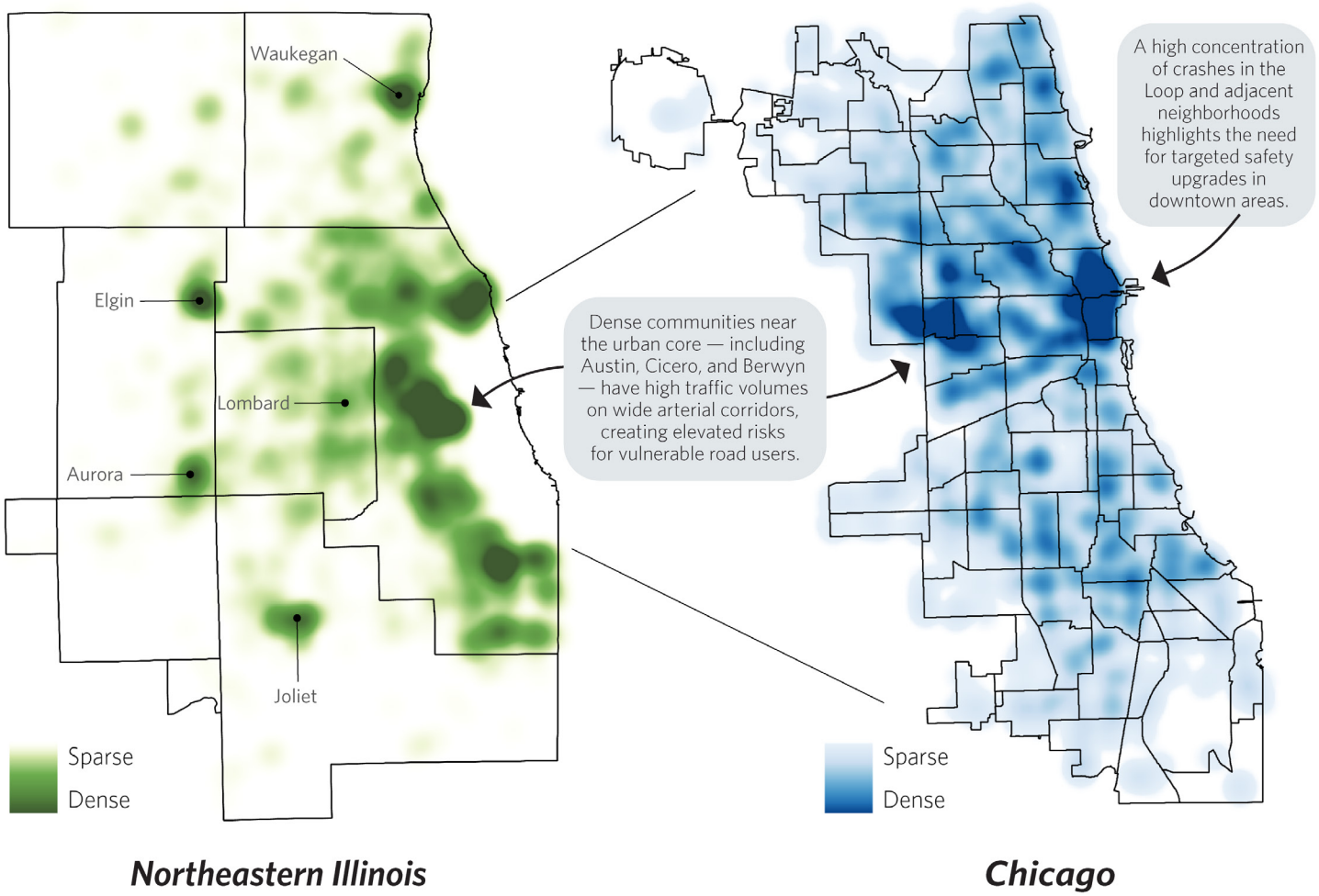
Figure 7: When traveling at the same speed, heavier vehicles carry more kinetic energy than lighter vehicles



Source: CMAP analysis of car and driver and EPA data, 2022.

Figure 8: Pedestrian and bicycle crashes are concentrated in city and suburban centers, 2020 to 2024

Heatmap of bicycle and pedestrian fatal and serious injury crashes, 2020-2024

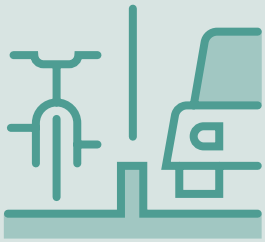


Note: Scales differ between the two maps. Crash densities are not directly comparable.
Source: CMAP analysis of IDOT crash report data

Some road users experience greater risk and harm

Traffic safety affects all road users, but fatal and serious injury crashes disproportionately affect certain segments of the population. Despite being involved in less than 3 percent of all traffic crashes, bicyclists and pedestrians account for more than 25 percent of crash fatalities. People of color are also overrepresented in harmful safety outcomes, with Black residents experiencing a traffic fatality rate of more than 14 deaths per 100,000 people — nearly triple the rate for white and Hispanic residents. Children and older adults also face elevated risks. These outcomes are often the result of greater exposure to crash risk, such as long commutes or dependence on modes like walking and biking.

Following the onset of COVID-19, crashes involving bicyclists and pedestrians initially declined, likely due to fewer people driving in response to pandemic restrictions. However, between 2020 and 2023, fatalities among these groups increased and remain above pre-pandemic levels. People outside of vehicles are particularly vulnerable to serious or fatal injuries when involved in a crash because they lack the external protection that cars provide. Infrastructure such as medians, connected sidewalks, improved crosswalks, and protected bike lanes significantly reduce these risks.



What we heard from you

In the RTP's public questionnaire, both drivers and bicyclists ranked protected bike lanes as a top priority.

Terry Witt
Retired veteran and bicycle advocate

At 80 years old, Terry Witt sees bicycling as more than recreation — it is a pathway to safer streets, better health, and stronger communities. A longtime Bartlett resident, Terry uses local trails, side paths, and bike lanes for errands, exercise, and connections to Metra service into Chicago. He credits biking with improving his heart health, physical fitness, and mental clarity, while also reducing travel costs and reliance on cars. Terry values recent investments that make biking safer, including separated paths, raised crossings, and improved intersections, but believes continued advocacy is needed to make streets safer for everyone. His experience highlights how thoughtful transportation design can save lives, expand options, and support wellbeing at every age.

"The infrastructure is really being built for safety — that's what helps people feel comfortable getting on their bikes."



Some segments of the population also face higher exposure to safety risks. Historical policies and practices that entrenched neighborhood segregation by race, ethnicity, and income continue to affect traffic safety outcomes today. High-volume and high-speed roads are common in areas with a high proportion of low-income residents and people of color, increasing traffic safety risks for those who live there. People in these communities also tend to have longer commutes and rely on non-driving modes, like walking, biking, and taking transit — all of which increase their exposure to fast-moving vehicles. Strategic planning and prioritized resources to save lives are especially crucial in areas where risk and harm are greatest.

Improving roadway user safety is essential for the region's overall success. In response to worsening trends, transportation partners have adopted the SSA, a framework that addresses safety in complex systems by preventing crashes, reducing severity, and ultimately saving lives.

The SSA has been effective in preventing fatalities and serious injuries from crashes. Sweden, largely credited with pioneering the implementation of SSA strategies, reduced traffic fatalities by approximately 50 percent between 2000 and 2014 after implementing SSA practices. New Zealand, despite growing traffic volumes and prior failures to meet traffic safety targets, also achieved the lowest roadway fatality year in decades just a few years after implementing an action plan based on the SSA. Multiple other countries that have advanced comprehensive and systemic approaches to traffic safety have seen safety outcomes improve significantly — contrasting sharply against recent trends in our region, state, and broader nation.[8]

Figure 9: The Safe System Approach is a holistic and comprehensive approach to address roadway safety



Source: FHWA, USDOT.

CMAP and its partners are applying the SSA to planning and implementation efforts. The six countywide safety action plans developed through CMAP's Safe Travel for All program were an important step to integrate SSA principles and improve safety in the region.[9] These plans emphasize proactive, data-driven strategies and expand the range of tools and funding available to improve safety. Continued regional alignment will be critical to sustaining progress.

Preventing fatal and serious injury crashes requires a collaborative and multifaceted approach. Policies and practices that prioritize safety must be embedded in roadway design, land use decisions, and system operations. Education and the fair enforcement of violations also play important roles in fostering a culture of shared responsibility.

Traffic-related injuries and deaths are unacceptable and preventable. Reducing risk requires layered interventions, including safer roadway design, context-sensitive speed management, protective infrastructure, and a shared commitment to safety. Through sustained investment and regional collaboration, northeastern Illinois can achieve a safer transportation system.

Strategies to prioritize safety and public health

Objective: Reduce fatal and serious injury crashes across all modes through a Safe System Approach

Develop a regional Safe System Approach framework that fosters a culture of shared responsibility

Building on the 2025 countywide safety action plans, the region should develop a regional safety framework that incorporates local priorities and federal guidance. This framework should inform transportation policy and practice, while fostering a culture of traffic safety among transportation professionals and road users.

Integrate multimodal street design principles into policy, planning, and design

Transportation agencies should embed SSA principles into the design, construction, and maintenance of multimodal roadways. Ensuring safe access for people walking, biking, using mobility devices, and accessing transit will improve safety, expand mobility, and support public health through increased physical activity and reduced pollution.

Objective: Manage speeds to match context and reduce crash severity

Set context-appropriate speed limits

Transportation agencies should evaluate and adjust speed limits to recognize their impact on traffic safety, especially in urbanized transportation corridors with high levels of pedestrian and bicyclist activity. Roadway context and operational features should inform posted speed limits and prioritize reduced risk of injury.

Control unsafe vehicle speeds through roadway design and speed-management tools

The region should expand the use of traffic-calming measures and multimodal street design principles that encourage appropriate speeds and reduce crash severity. These include raised pedestrian crossings, speed humps, curb extensions, speed feedback signs, signal timing, and more. Transportation agencies should review standards and practices to support the broader deployment of these tools.

Objective: Prioritize safety investments where risk and harm are greatest

Implement protective infrastructure that reduces crash risks

Transportation agencies should expand the use of protective infrastructure such as sidewalks, raised medians, and concrete barriers for bike lanes, as well as improve signals and crossings to provide near-term safety benefits. Investments should be prioritized in areas with the highest levels of safety risks and multimodal conflict.

Advance proactive, systemic safety improvements along corridors and at intersections with an increased risk of severe crashes

While crash history is one important indicator of safety risks, it is critical to understand what roadway or intersection qualities contribute to crashes and to use that knowledge to identify and implement solutions systemically to prevent future crashes in locations that share those features.

Invest in railroad and track-adjacent infrastructure to improve visibility and access control for safer crossings

Transportation agencies should enhance safety measures at rail crossings through improved signaling, lighting, and auditory warning systems. Technologies that support emergency response — such as real-time routing during train blockages — should be deployed. Protections at informal crossing locations should also be implemented to reduce high-risk exposure. Where possible, separate road users from transit passengers boarding trains using over- or underpasses.

Strengthen safety decision-making through improved data and transparency

The region should ensure that data on traffic safety and roadway characteristics are easily accessible, continuously improved, and as complete and accurate as possible. Safety trends should be regularly analyzed and summarized for stakeholders to support data-driven decision-making that aligns with improved safety outcomes.

A safer transportation system is foundational to achieving the goals of this plan. People will not walk, bike, or take transit in large numbers unless those options feel safe. Reducing emissions depends on mode shift, and mode shift depends on safety. Investments in safe roadway design, speed management, and protective infrastructure also improve air quality, reduce noise pollution, and support public health. The next chapter explores those connections in greater detail.

RTP indicators to track traffic safety

	Today's trendline	Desired trendline
Traffic fatalities The five-year rolling average of traffic fatalities in the region	↗	↘
Traffic-related serious injuries The five-year rolling average of traffic-related serious injuries in the region	↘	↘
Speeding-related fatalities The number of traffic fatalities where speeding is cited as a major cause	↗	↘
Non-motorized traffic fatalities and serious injuries The number of traffic fatalities and serious injuries that involve pedestrians and cyclists	↗	↘
Locally adopted safety action plans The number of local governments that have formally adopted local safety plans	↗	↗





Mitigate pollution and invest in resilient infrastructure

Transportation plays a central role in northeastern Illinois' climate and environmental outcomes. As a major source of emissions, the transportation sector contributes to air pollution that harms public health and affects the climate. At the same time, strategies to reduce emissions — especially from car and truck travel — can help northeastern Illinois meet regional emission-reduction targets. Meeting these targets is crucial to mitigate the effects of climate-related harms, such as flooding and extreme heat.

The region's transportation system is highly vulnerable to the effects of a changing climate. Recurring flooding and extreme heat threaten residents' wellbeing as well as the system's reliability, asset longevity, and fiscal outlook. This chapter examines both dimensions of that relationship: transportation as a source of pollution affecting public health and the environment, and the transportation system as infrastructure that must be made more resilient to the conditions ahead. Coordinated regional action across public and private sectors is essential to address both challenges — reducing the emissions the transportation system generates while protecting the system from climate impacts. Together, these efforts will help ensure continued access to the transportation infrastructure and services that northeastern Illinois residents and businesses depend on for decades to come.

LaShawn Miller

Founder of Finding Justice, community garden leader

LaShawn Miller views transportation, health, and the environment as deeply connected. At Finding Justice — a flower and vegetable garden on Chicago's West Side — she works to improve community wellbeing through fresh food, outdoor activity, and education. Living just four blocks away, she often walks to the garden and uses transit to reach destinations across the city. She also encourages residents to pick up produce locally, reducing the need for longer car trips. Her experience shows how transportation choices affect climate outcomes, public health, and daily quality of life — especially when communities have safe, reliable ways to walk, bike, and use transit.

"I try to keep a low carbon footprint — walking and taking transit is part of that."



Transportation is a major source of regional emissions

Transportation contributes to air pollution in several ways. Gasoline and diesel-fueled vehicles release gases like carbon dioxide and methane that affect the climate. Transportation activity produces air pollutants like ozone, fine particulate matter, and nitrogen oxides, which harm air quality and public health. Reducing these forms of pollution from the transportation sector is essential to meet climate goals, improve air quality, and protect public health — especially in areas near high levels of transportation activity.

ON TO 2050 calls for the region to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 80 percent between 2005 and 2050. The *Comprehensive Climate Action Plan for Greater Chicago* calls for a similar but more ambitious target to reduce GHG emissions by 86 percent by 2050. Achieving these goals requires deep reductions across all sectors, including reducing regional transportation emissions by 91 percent. The region has made progress, having reduced transportation emissions by 31 percent from their 2005 peak. Fully achieving this goal by 2050, however, will require broader and more sustained regional action across sectors.

In 2019, transportation accounted for roughly one-third of regional GHG emissions, making it the second largest emitting sector. On-road vehicles produce the majority of transportation emissions, with three categories accounting for 97 percent of those emissions: passenger cars, passenger trucks, and freight trucks.[10]



1/3 of regional GHG emissions come from the transportation sector

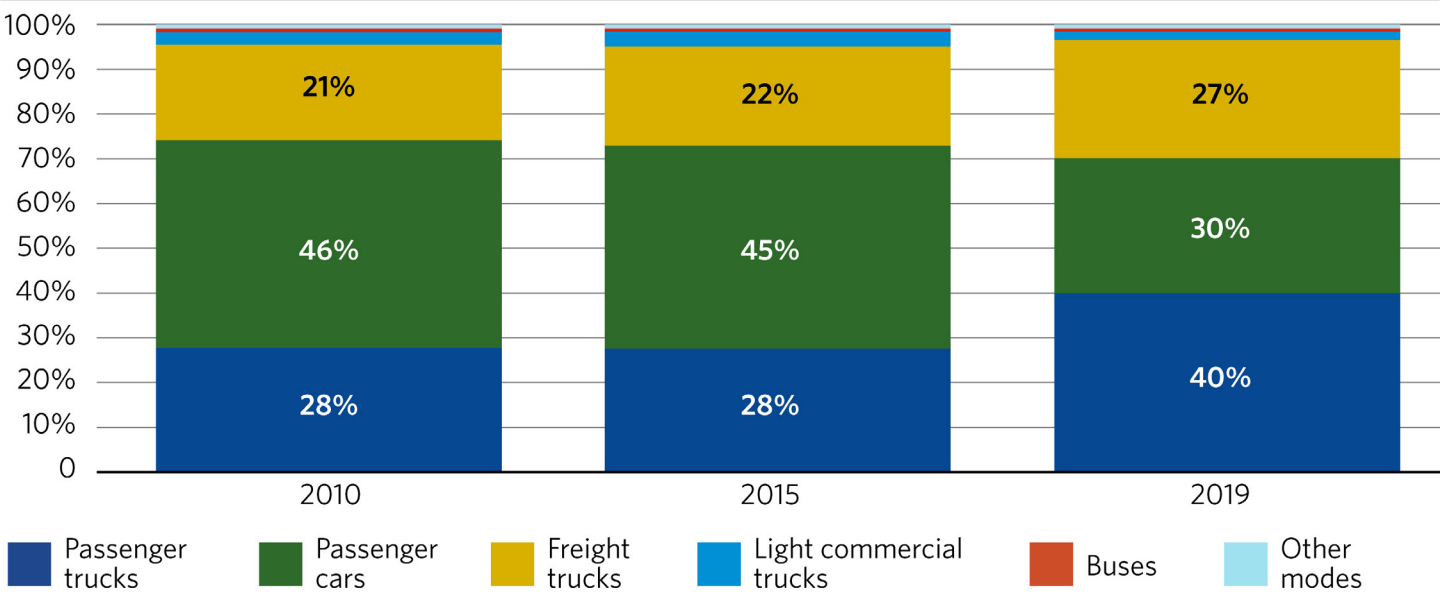


83 percent of transportation emissions come from on-road travel

Source: CMAP 2019 GHG inventory.

Recent trends indicate that consumer preferences are changing the composition of transportation emissions. Between 2010 and 2015, passenger cars produced the largest share of on-road emissions. From 2015 to 2019, however, that share declined and passenger trucks became the largest source, increasing from 28 to 40 percent of all on-road emissions.[11] Larger vehicles like SUVs and trucks emit more air pollution than smaller passenger cars. This shift in consumer preferences undercuts recent gains in vehicle fuel efficiency and complicates the region's ability to meet its emission-reduction targets.

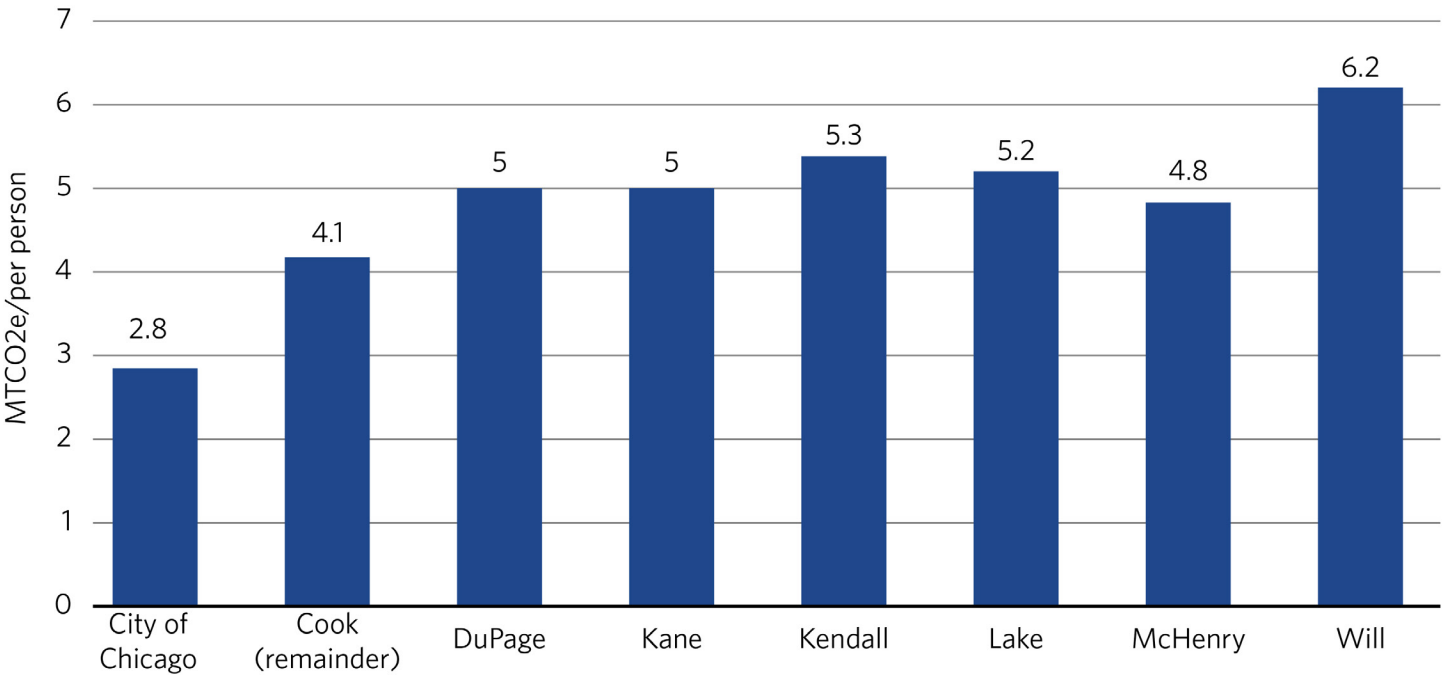
Figure 10: Trucks are becoming a greater share of the region's on-road transportation emissions



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

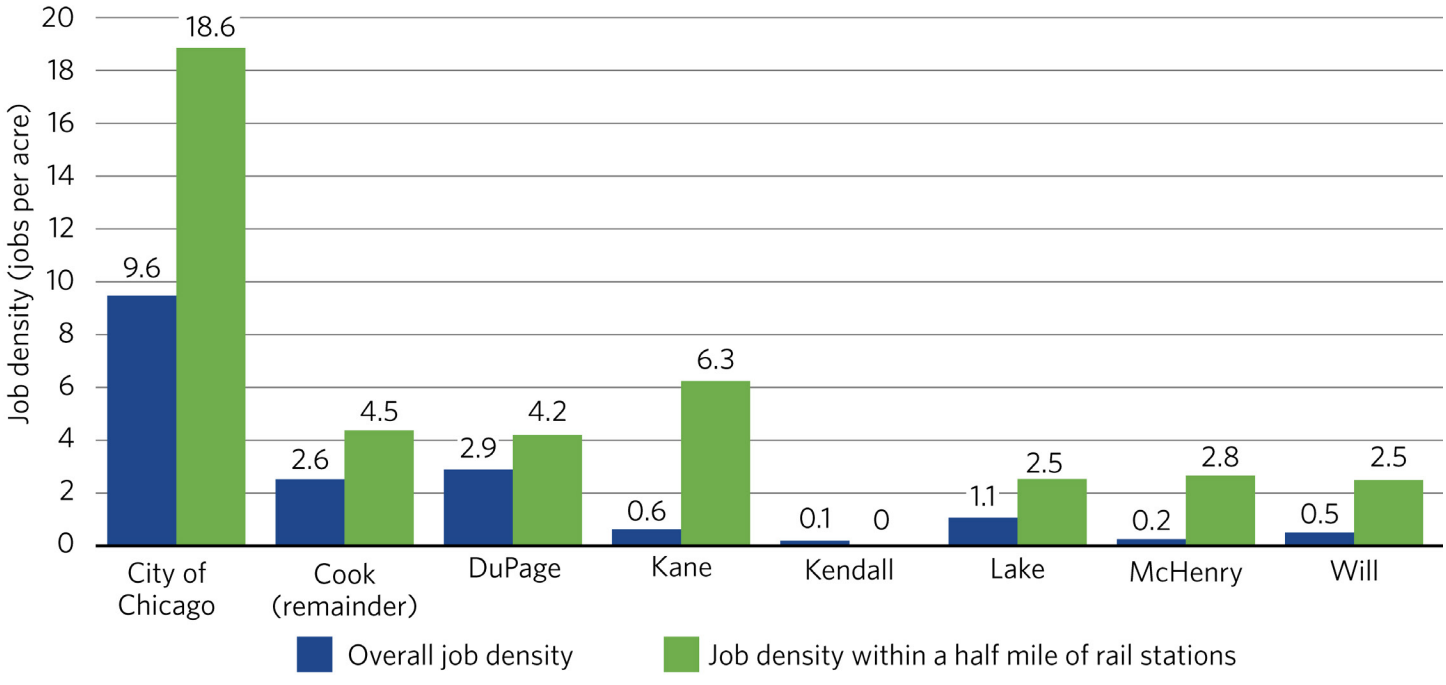
Land use and development patterns also affect regional emissions. Residents' travel options are shaped by the built environment where they live, work, and spend time. Less dense areas tend to have destinations spaced farther apart and fewer multimodal transportation options. As a result, residents in these areas often take longer trips and rely more heavily on personal vehicles, resulting in higher transportation-related GHG emissions per capita. By contrast, denser, transit-oriented development supports shorter trips and greater access to transit, walking, and rolling. Enabling more multimodal travel is critical to the region's ability to meet its emission-reduction goals.

Figure 11: Per capita transportation emissions vary by county due to land use and development patterns



Source: CMAP 2019 GHG inventory

Figure 12: Job density is higher near transit

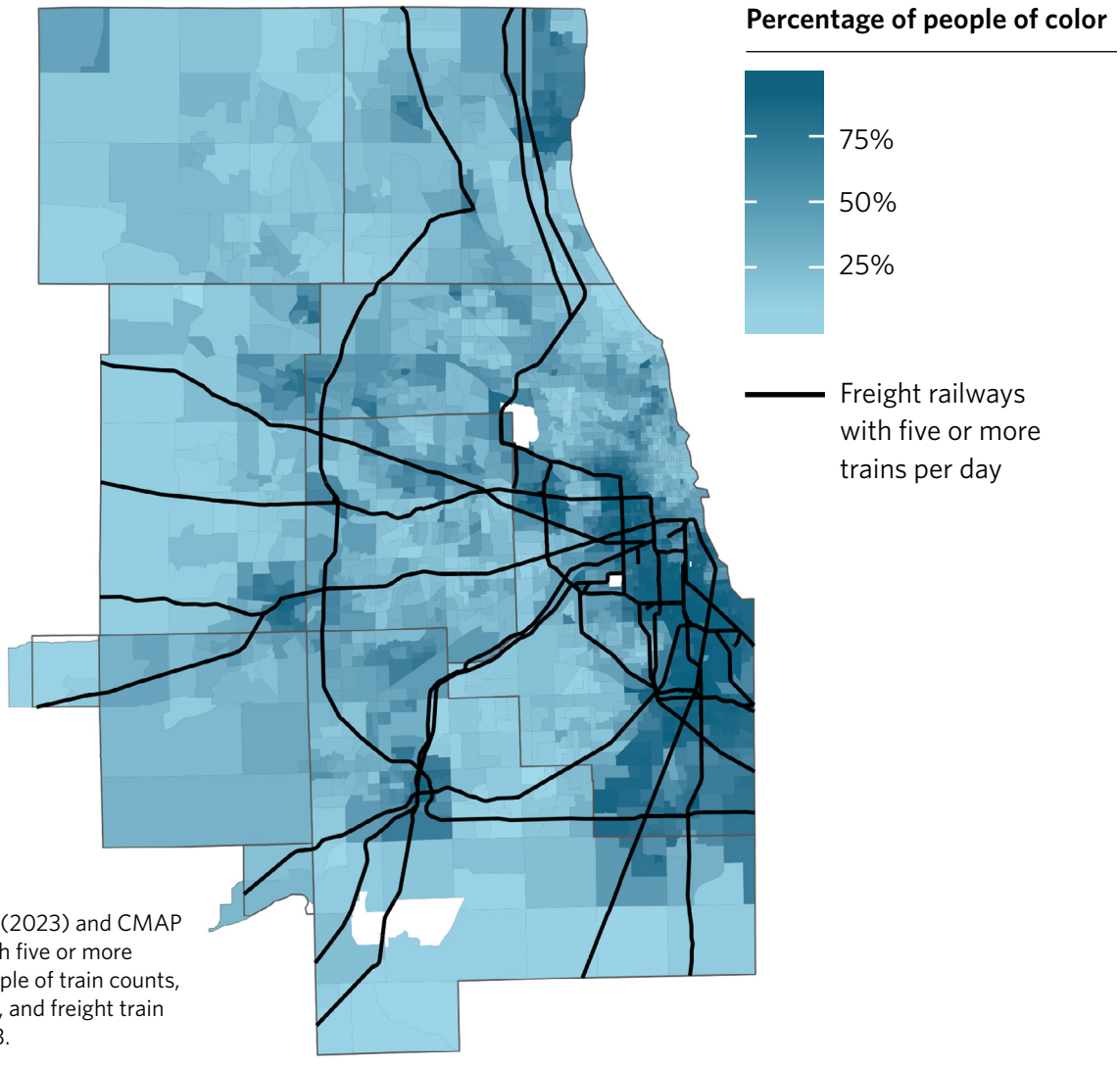


Air pollution from transportation negatively affects public health

In addition to GHGs, transportation emits pollutants that degrade air quality. Ozone, fine particulate matter, and nitrogen oxides have harmful effects on respiratory health. Despite progress, the region still fails to meet federal ozone standards established through the Clean Air Act, meaning that pollution levels continue to exceed health-based targets. Nitrogen oxides have declined because of cleaner fuels and more efficient engines, but not enough to consistently prevent unhealthy air quality days. Prolonged exposure to these pollutants can cause serious long-term health effects, including heart disease, some cancers, cognitive impairment, and premature death.[12]

Some communities experience higher exposure to transportation-related air pollution because of their proximity to highways, intermodal yards, rail corridors, ports, and airports. These communities often have high proportions of low-income residents and people of color. For example, census tracts where more than 80 percent of residents are people of color are, on average, about one mile from the nearest freight rail line (Figure 13). By contrast, census tracts where 20 percent or fewer residents are people of color are, on average, 4.25 miles from the nearest freight line.[13] These disparities reflect the legacy of historic policies and practices that reinforced segregation by race and income — pushing marginalized groups toward more environmentally hazardous areas. Looking ahead, planning efforts should prioritize emission-reduction strategies and access to green spaces in communities that are disproportionately burdened by transportation-related pollution.

Figure 13: More polluting freight railways are found in communities with higher levels of residents of color



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.

Extreme weather threatens regional mobility

While northeastern Illinois' transportation system contributes to air pollution, it is also increasingly affected by a changing climate. The region's main climate-related transportation challenges are more frequent and severe flooding and more days of extreme heat — hazards that disrupt operations and threaten residents' ability to travel safely and reliably.

Extreme heat is expected to become more common in northeastern Illinois. The number of days above 95 degrees Fahrenheit is projected to rise from an average of 2 to approximately 45 days per year by the turn of the century.[14] While all residents will experience these high temperatures, some populations will face disproportionate burdens, including bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit riders. Most bus stops in the region are unsheltered — including 79 percent of CTA bus stops and 92 percent of Pace bus stops — leaving riders exposed to the elements.[15] Other groups, including older adults, young children, and some people with disabilities, are especially vulnerable to the health risks of extreme heat. As dangerously hot days become more common, providing shade, shelter, and other cooling measures will be increasingly important.

The region's transportation system is also vulnerable to flooding, which disrupts operations, blocks emergency vehicles, damages infrastructure, and makes travel more dangerous and less reliable. In northeastern Illinois, 34 percent of non-local roads and 8 percent of bridges face high or very high flood risk. In the future, an even greater share of infrastructure will be vulnerable as storms become more intense and frequent.[16]

When flooding happens, everyone is affected. Many transit stops in northeastern Illinois are outside and at ground level. When these locations are inundated with water, people who rely on transit face mobility challenges. Drivers also get stuck on flooded roads, creating dangerous and time-consuming conditions. As vehicles reroute to seek alternative roads, local congestion increases, causing delays for commuters, emergency responders, and freight movement.

In addition to disrupting travel, recurring flooding damages roads, bridges, rail lines, and other transportation assets. The region already faces significant needs related to aging infrastructure, and more frequent flooding will compound those challenges and further strain the system's long-term financial outlook. Solutions that mitigate flooding and reduce and manage stormwater are essential to protect the reliability of northeastern Illinois' transportation infrastructure.



34%
of non-local roads have high or very high flood risk



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



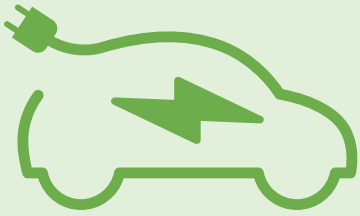
64%
of CTA bus stops and 47% of Pace bus stops are exposed to flooding



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

Reducing pollution and improving resiliency is critical

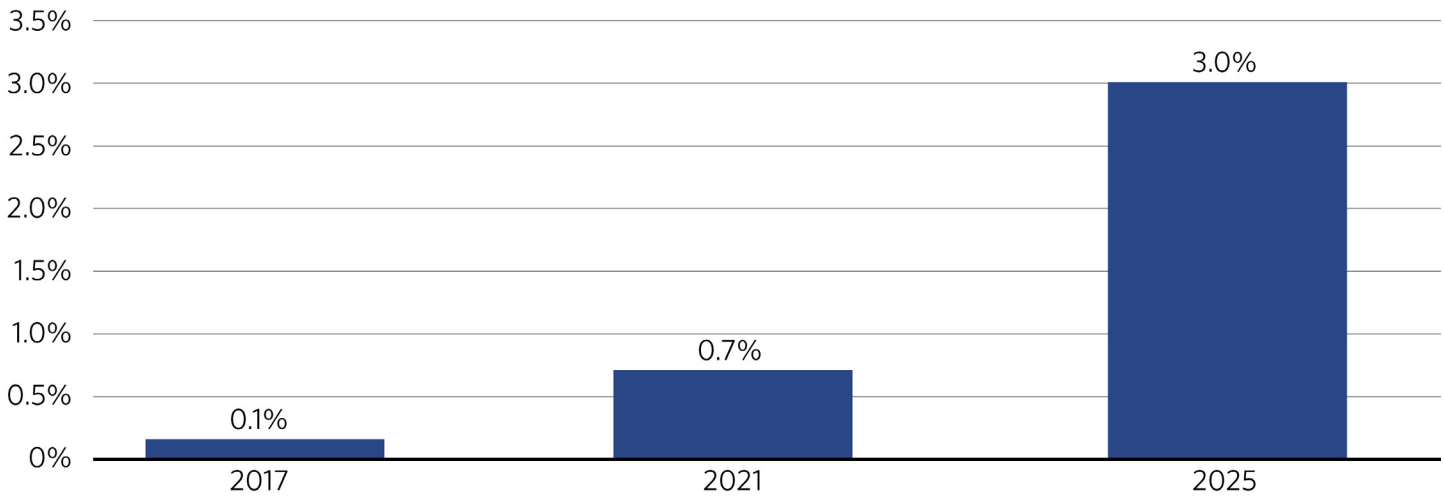
To protect northeastern Illinois' environment, communities, and transportation infrastructure, the region should reduce emissions and improve resilience. Cutting emissions from the transportation sector improves air quality and public health outcomes. Because on-road travel is the largest contributor to transportation emissions, reducing VMT and shifting more trips to lower-carbon modes like transit and active transportation supports the region in meeting its emission-reduction targets. While recent increases in electric vehicle adoption are promising, accelerating the transition to electric vehicles is essential to achieving the region's climate goals.



106,000+

new electric vehicles registrations between 2017-2025

Figure 14: Electric vehicles are becoming a larger share of the region's passenger fleet



Source: Illinois Secretary of State.

How can green infrastructure be integrated into the transportation system?

Green infrastructure incorporates natural features to help manage stormwater. Solutions like bioswales, rain gardens, and permeable pavements can prevent local streets from becoming flooded. Trees and vegetation can offer additional climate benefits, such as providing shade that protects people from extreme heat.

The region should also invest in transportation infrastructure that is resilient to flooding and extreme heat. Considering climate projections in transportation project design, maintenance, and operations can improve the system's resilience under extreme weather conditions. For example, recent studies have found that incorporating climate-resilient features can decrease maintenance frequency by 20 percent and extend pavement life by up to 15 years.[17] Resilient infrastructure includes elevated bridges and roadways, naturalized detention basins, upgraded drainage systems, and other improvements. Additionally, strategic project siting and the use of nature-based solutions further reduce flood risk and provide shade, helping protect residents from extreme heat.

Looking ahead, the region has potential to leverage the transportation system to advance the climate goals established in ON TO 2050 and the Comprehensive Climate Action Plan. Through targeted investment and strategic planning, northeastern Illinois can become a national example of resilient transportation infrastructure that reduces pollution, supports mobility, and protects public health.

Strategies to mitigate pollution and invest in resilient infrastructure

Objective: Reduce emissions and improve public health

Accelerate the shift toward electric passenger vehicles and trucks

The region should accelerate the adoption of electric passenger and freight vehicles to reduce emissions from on-road travel. Local and state agencies should use a mix of requirements and financial incentives for both residents and the trucking industry to achieve a fully electrified vehicle fleet that aligns with regional climate goals.

Build out charging infrastructure to support vehicle electrification

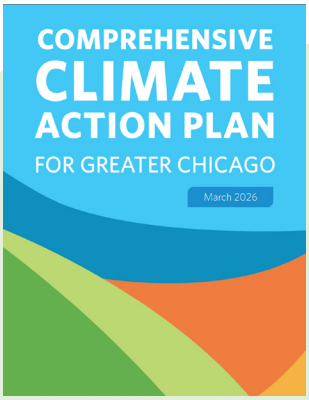
The region should expand the electric vehicle charging network for both passenger and freight travel to support rapid vehicle electrification. Transportation partners should invest in chargers along expressways and major routes, new and existing developments and multifamily housing, commercial and industrial freight hubs, and curbside locations. Agencies should collaborate with utilities to ensure sufficient power supply through the expansion of distributed energy resources.

Modernize transit rolling stock to reduce emissions and improve system performance

The region should replace aging transit vehicles to reduce GHGs per passenger mile, improve air quality, and support safety and reliability across the network. While full transit fleet electrification remains a long-term goal, current operational constraints — including shared freight rail infrastructure, existing track agreements, and limited availability of electric vehicles and locomotives — require a flexible approach.

Reduce VMT through mode shift

The region should reduce emissions by improving the efficiency of both passenger and freight movement. Because on-road travel produces most transportation emissions, the region should prioritize investments that shift trips from driving to lower-emission forms of travel, such as transit, walking, and rolling. Complementary efforts to manage congestion more effectively can further reduce VMT and related emissions.



The Comprehensive Climate Action Plan for Greater Chicago identifies 14 strategies to reduce transportation emissions. These strategies focus on electrifying vehicles across all modes, expanding the use of low-carbon fuels, and reducing vehicle miles traveled through compact land use, accessible transit, and active transportation options. Together, these actions reduce emissions while improving public health, increasing access to opportunity, and strengthening the economy.

Reduce pollution from transportation activity where harm and risk are greatest

The region should target investments in projects and programs that reduce particulate matter, ozone, and nitrogen. These investments should be prioritized in areas with the highest concentrations of pollutants to improve air quality and public health.

Use low carbon materials

Transportation partners should increase the use of concrete, steel, and other materials from low-to-zero emission production methods. "Buy clean" procurement policies and increased use of low-carbon materials in transportation projects reduce lifecycle emissions and support regional climate goals.

Objective: Increase the resilience of infrastructure vulnerable to extreme weather

Use best available data in project design

Transportation agencies should design and build transportation assets to withstand more frequent and severe storms. The region should adopt the best available data on climate vulnerability and future projections when planning constructing infrastructure.

Incorporate resilience into transportation planning and programming

The region should integrate resilience into long-range planning, management, and investment prioritization. When programming transportation funds, agencies should require resilience criteria in project evaluations and scoring.

Incorporate green infrastructure into stormwater management projects

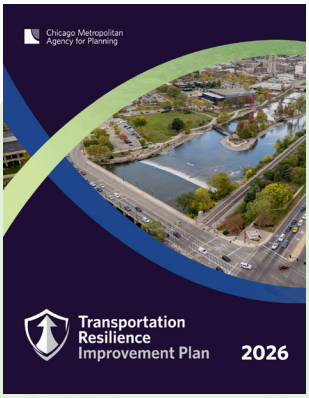
The region should invest in constructing and maintaining bioswales, stormwater detention facilities, permeable pavement, and other forms of green infrastructure. Combining these approaches with conventional stormwater systems, such as drains and sewers, reduces heat impacts while improving air and water quality, habitat, and quality of life.

Invest in infrastructure at transit stops and stations that protect riders from extreme weather

The region should expand bus shelters, tree canopy, and other protective features to reduce exposure to extreme weather and support safe, reliable transit. Investments that improve transit rider comfort and safety during extreme temperatures and severe storms are important for health, safety, and accessibility.

Improve communication tools for disruptions and preparedness

The region should assess and strengthen communication tools to respond to extreme weather, such as rerouting traffic and transit during flooding. Effective communication among agencies, operators, residents, emergency responders, and neighboring communities is critical to minimize disruptions and improve safety.



In partnership with regional stakeholders, CMAP developed the **Transportation Resilience Improvement Plan (TRIP)** to identify vulnerabilities in the regional transportation system and make it more resilient to extreme weather. TRIP will be adopted by reference through the 2026 RTP's adoption process

TRIP provides a roadmap to inform transportation planning and decision-making throughout the region. It meets the Federal Highway Administration's Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation Program requirements for a resilience improvement plan — and will help position northeastern Illinois to compete for program funds as well as other resilience funds.

Objective: Protect and enhance natural resources

Design and maintain assets to reduce stormwater runoff and improve water quality

The region should minimize runoff that pollutes the region's lakes, rivers, and wetlands by incorporating green infrastructure and other stormwater best practices into transportation projects. Operations and maintenance should also follow best practices for snow and ice control to reduce water pollution from road salt.

Minimize infrastructure expansion impacts on natural assets

Transportation and land use planners should work together to assess and reduce the effects of infrastructure expansion on wetlands, natural habitat, and open space. Conservation strategies applied during planning and design prevent encroachment, fragmentation, and further degradation of high-quality natural areas, which provide benefits like recreation, flood mitigation, groundwater recharge, and biodiversity.

The investments in this chapter are not only environmental imperatives — they are also economic ones. A transportation system that floods regularly fails to serve riders reliably and carries growing resilience-related costs. Coordinating those investments across agencies, watersheds, and jurisdictions is what makes them effective. The next chapter examines how transportation investment and economic opportunity are intertwined, and what it means when the system's benefits are not distributed equally across the region.

RTP indicators to track climate goals	Today's trendline	Desired trendline
Transportation GHG emissions GHG emissions produced by activity in the transportation sector	↘	↘
Ozone exceedance days Average number of days each year when ozone levels exceed U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards	Remaining the same	↘
EV charging stations The number of charging stations for electric vehicles	↗	↗
EV registrations The number of fully electric vehicles registered in the region	↗	↗





Support economic prosperity and inclusive growth

The region's economy depends on a reliable transportation system, which influences where employers locate, how easily workers can reach jobs, how efficiently goods move through supply chains, and how well the region connects to other metropolitan areas. As a result, the transportation network is both a reflection of the region's economic health and a powerful tool for strengthening it. The decisions made today will play a critical role in supporting long-term economic prosperity and ensuring that growth is shared across communities.

Northeastern Illinois benefits from a strong economic foundation. The region's legacy transportation assets — including an extensive network of roadways, rail lines, and waterways — do far more than move people. They knit together neighborhoods, connect businesses with customers and suppliers, and position the region as a global economic center. Together, these assets anchor a diverse regional economy that produces nearly $780 billion in goods and services each year and have the potential to support future growth.[18]

Inclusive growth, however, is not guaranteed. While transportation can unlock opportunity, its benefits and burdens are not distributed evenly. Mismatches between where people live and where jobs are located create barriers for some residents, limiting access to employment and education. Transit access varies widely across neighborhoods, with some communities facing long commutes and few alternatives to driving. Congested freight corridors also affect nearby communities by increasing exposure to air pollution, noise, and unreliable travel times. Addressing these disparities is essential for ensuring that the transportation system works for everyone.

This chapter examines the relationship between the transportation system and the broader economy across three areas: how the system connects workers to jobs; how the region maintains its role as an intercity and global freight hub; and how the benefits of that system can reach more people and communities. By aligning transportation investments, land use decisions, and affordability strategies across jurisdictions, northeastern Illinois can expand access to opportunities, lower household costs, and support long-term, inclusive economic growth.

Connecting the region's workforce to economic opportunity

The transportation network supports economic activity by connecting residents to jobs. More than half of the region's jobs are located within a mile of an interstate highway and 48 percent are within walking distance of high-frequency transit service.[19] Job density is highest in Chicago, where more than 1.1 million jobs are accessible by rail transit. Across the region, job density is higher near transit than countywide average — underscoring the role of transportation in supporting economic activity.[20]



Access to public transit, however, remains uneven. While Chicago and many inner-ring suburbs benefit from a dense transit network, some suburban areas have limited service, leaving residents with few alternatives to driving. Approximately 47 percent of households and 45 percent of jobs are in areas with partial or no access to bus or rail transit.[21] These gaps limit access to job opportunities for workers and reduce the available labor pool for employers, affecting the region's overall competitiveness.

Figure 15: Number of jobs accessible in a 30-minute drive, by travel zone

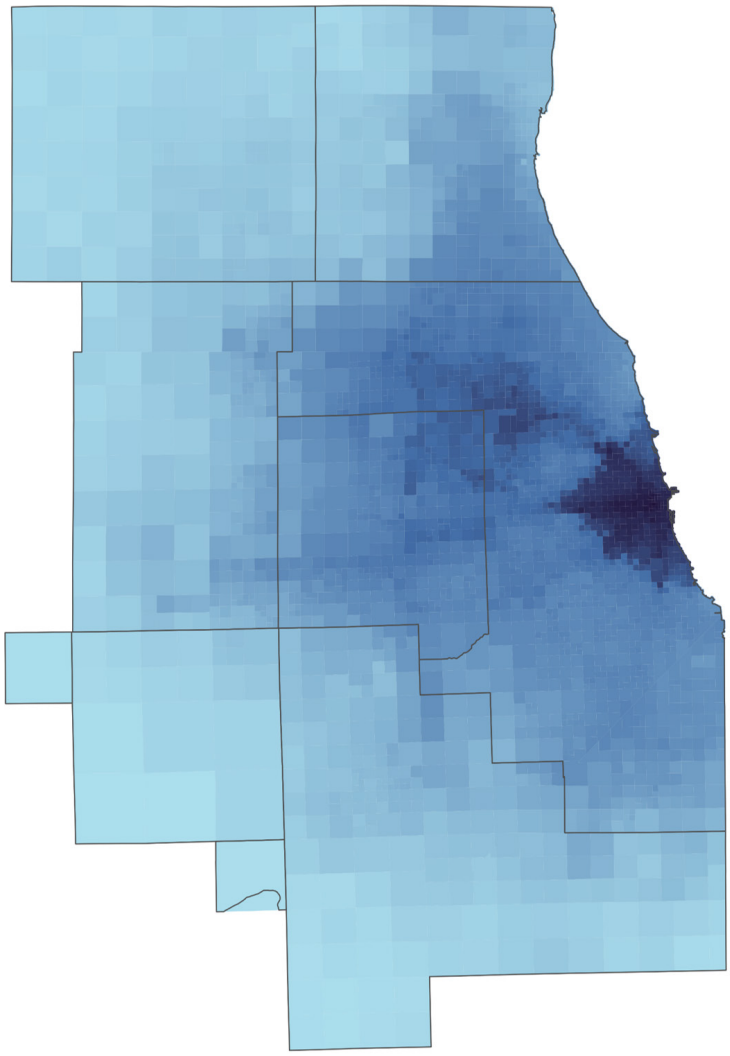
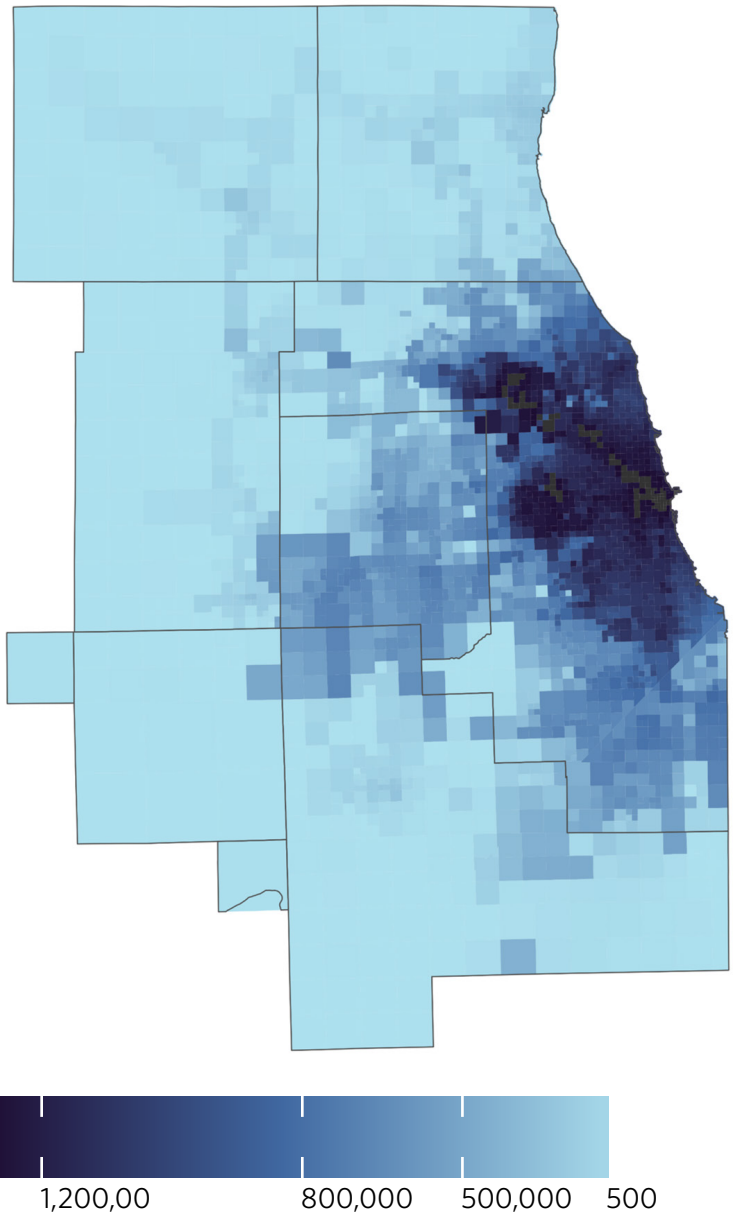


Figure 16: Number of jobs accessible in a 60-minute transit ride, by travel zone



Source: Travel demand model, CMAP.

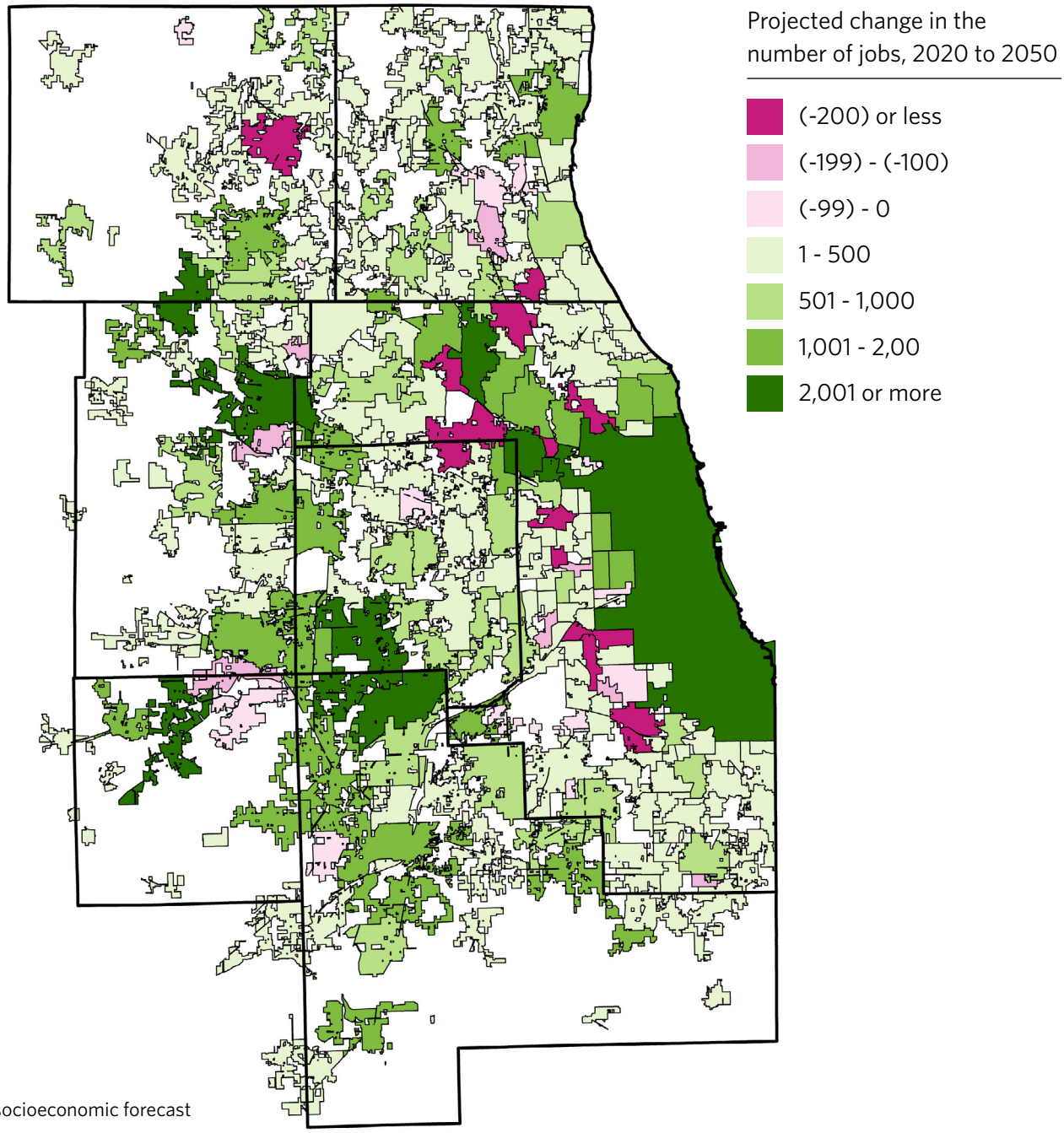
Recent development patterns have compounded these challenges. Over the past several decades, growth has occurred disproportionately in areas without existing transit access. Between 2010 and 2024, new housing development was disproportionately concentrated in lower-density areas that are difficult to serve frequently with transit, leading to longer trips and increased reliance on personal vehicles.[22]

In contrast, investing in areas with existing infrastructure can expand multimodal options for more people at a lower cost. Concentrating development in areas already served by transportation infrastructure is not only a mobility and economic strategy — it is also a fiscal one. Extending infrastructure into new areas creates long-term maintenance obligations that may exceed the revenues generated by that growth. Infill development — building on vacant or underutilized land in already developed areas — supports higher transit ridership, shorter trips, and more walkable and bikeable communities, helping to create more vibrant neighborhood centers that attract people and businesses.[23] `

Transportation infrastructure also shapes development patterns. Where and how the region invests in transportation influences where employers choose to locate and how neighborhoods develop. These dynamics reinforce themselves: transportation investments shape land use patterns, and land use decisions determine how productive transportation investments can be.

Greater economic activity is possible when development is concentrated near transit and multimodal corridors. Workers can reach more jobs without a car, reducing household transportation costs that are often the largest expenses people face. Employers gain access to a broader labor pool, making it easier to find and retain workers. Neighborhoods attract residents and businesses, generate stronger tax bases, and create vibrant community centers. Dense, transit-oriented development also reduces the net cost of long-term maintenance obligations that strain public budgets.[24]

Figure 17: By 2050, jobs are projected to grow in different parts of the region



Source: CMAP socioeconomic forecast

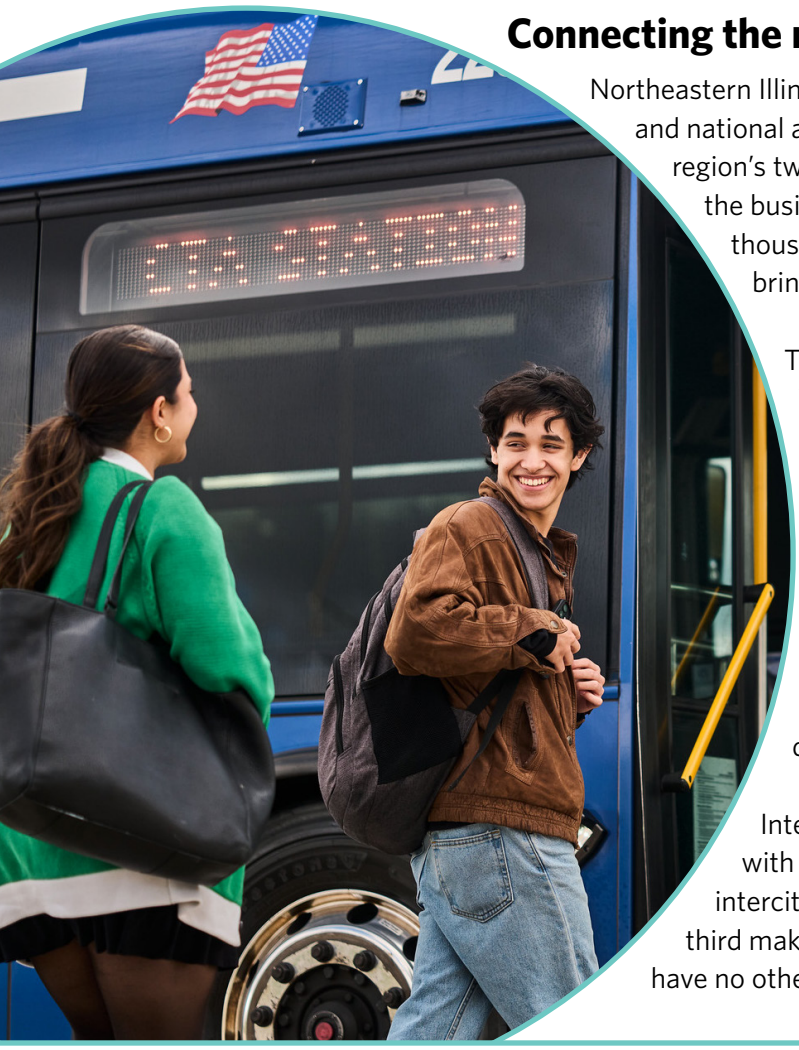
The reverse is also true. When growth occurs primarily in areas without transit access, households become more car-dependent, commutes grow longer, and the economic benefits of regional transportation investment are harder to reach for people without reliable access to a vehicle.[25] Infrastructure is extended further to serve dispersed growth, creating obligations that outlast the revenues they generate.

By working together, municipalities, transit agencies, and regional partners can build a shared framework to prioritize transportation investments for greater economic growth. Rather than each community navigating development considerations in silos, a collaborative approach can share regional resources, elevate best practices, and build consensus around regional economic strategy.

Many large metropolitan regions — including Denver, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Portland, Seattle, and Washington D.C. — have seized these opportunities through a centers and corridors framework, which aligns transportation investments with land use planning and provides multimodal connections to key destinations. Northeastern Illinois' transit network, economic centers, and rail corridors provide a foundation to do the same. In areas where transportation or economic conditions could be strengthened, a shared framework can guide development to be more compact, diverse, and connected to multimodal options — helping local economies reach more people at a lower long-term cost.

NITA
NORTHERN ILLINOIS TRANSIT AUTHORITY

The 2025 passage of the Northern Illinois Transit Authority Act changed the rules for development near transit. The Act's "people over parking" provision limits minimum parking requirements for new developments near rail stations and high frequency bus routes. Implementation of these rules will look different in every community; collaborative implementation will support positive outcomes both locally and regionally.



Connecting the region to other metropolitan areas

Northeastern Illinois' connections to other Midwest population centers — and national and global destinations — are a major economic asset. The region's two international airports, O'Hare and Midway, rank among the busiest in the world.[26] Aviation in the region supports tens of thousands of jobs,[27] anchors a robust air cargo industry,[28] and brings millions of travelers to the region each year.[29]

These regional gateways are complemented by a strong intercity bus and rail network. Amtrak service links the region to 33 states and the District of Columbia, with Chicago's Union Station serving as the busiest rail terminal outside the Northeast Corridor.[30] Intercity bus service further expands connectivity by providing flexible and affordable travel options, including "last mile" connections to major destinations such as O'Hare and Midway. Chicago's Greyhound terminal, which serves multiple bus operators, supports roughly 80 daily arrivals and departures during peak season.[31]

Intercity bus services are particularly important for travelers with limited transportation options. Approximately two-thirds of intercity bus passengers make less than $40,000 annually, and a third make less than $20,000.[32] A quarter of intercity bus passengers have no other travel options.[33] Students, seniors, people with disabilities,

and individuals seeking medical or social services disproportionately rely on these services.[34] By enabling affordable long-distance travel, intercity transit strengthens the region's connectivity and economic competitiveness.

Northeastern Illinois is well positioned to benefit from future investment in intercity transit. Its location at the center of the national rail network creates opportunities tied to potential Amtrak expansions across the Midwest. Planned improvements to Chicago's intercity bus facilities will also enhance service in the region. Integrating intercity bus and rail into regional transportation planning efforts will strengthen northeastern Illinois' role as a national and global transportation and economic hub.

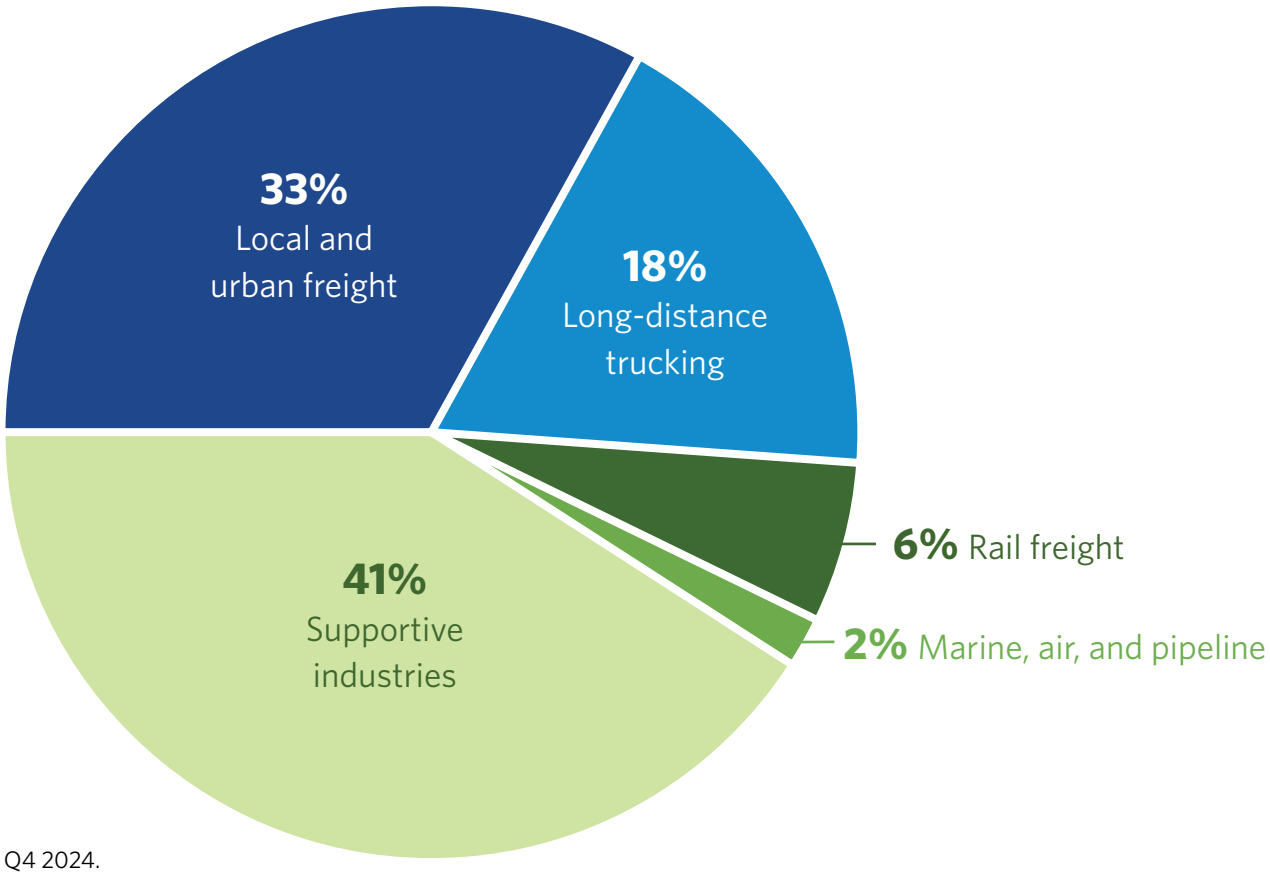
Maintaining our competitive edge as a global freight hub

Northeastern Illinois is a critical hub for freight movement. The region transports nearly 700 million tons of goods valued at more than $1 trillion each year,[35] and nearly 1 in 3 rail cars in the U.S. originates, terminates, or passes through Illinois.[36] Freight supports more than 210,000 jobs, particularly in trucking, warehousing, and logistics.[37] Between 2015 to 2024, employment in transportation and logistics grew by 14 percent — outpacing average job gains across the regional economy.[38] The region also has a 50 percent higher concentration of workers employed in the transportation and logistics sector than the U.S. overall — reflecting its specialized role as a global transportation hub.[39]



Regional Freight System Assessment
Explore data and insights on the freight industry in CMAP's Regional Freight Landscape, the first report in a series on the trends and policies shaping the movement of goods in northeastern Illinois.

Figure 18: The freight sector supports job opportunities across multiple types of goods movement

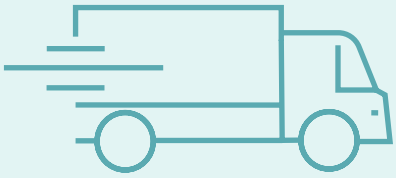


Source: Lightcast, Q4 2024.

The freight system's performance has major economic implications. Congestion on the region's railways and truck routes creates delays that increase costs for businesses and consumers. According to the Texas A&M Transportation Institute, truck congestion in northeastern Illinois costs an estimated $1.9 billion in lost time and wasted fuel.[40] Truck travel times are least reliable near major industrial areas, including the South and West sides of Chicago, the areas surrounding O'Hare, south suburban Cook County, and Will County.[41] In these areas, bottlenecked roads cause major delays for both goods and people.

Freight activity has become increasingly concentrated in Will County. Between 2005 to 2024, the number of intermodal terminal lifts in Will County more than tripled, and the county is now home to two of the region's four busiest terminals.[42] This growth is likely to continue: all three new terminals that are planned or proposed for the region are in Will County or neighboring Grundy County.

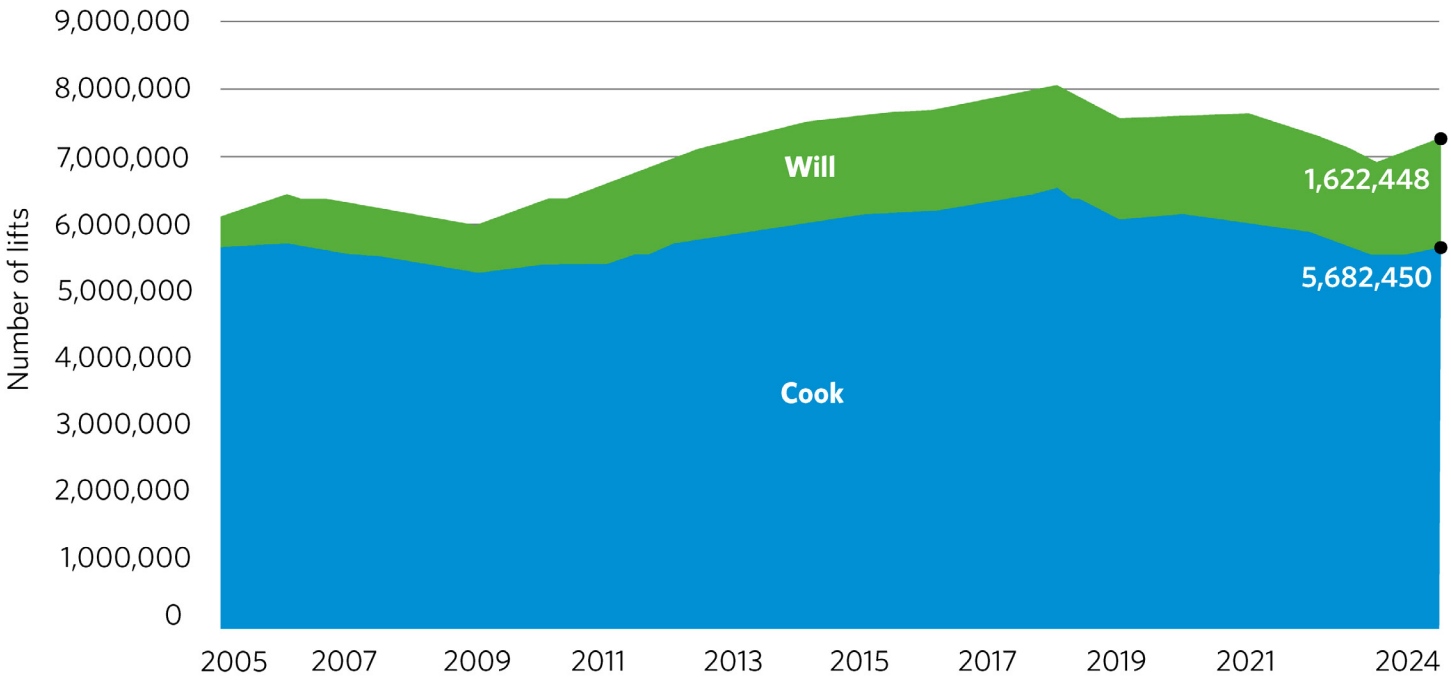
This concentration brings both economic opportunity and local challenges. Increased truck volumes strain roadways, contribute to congestion, and raise safety concerns at key intersections. Communities near freight facilities are also more exposed to noise and air pollution.[43] Improving freight efficiency in Will County and across the region is essential to reducing these impacts while supporting continued economic growth.



Anticipated growth in demand for goods and services is expected to increase freight volumes across the network.
Trucks stuck in congestion delay deliveries, increase emissions, and reduce economic productivity.

Without strategic improvements to roadway capacity, interchange efficiency, and multimodal freight connections, these additional volumes are likely to exacerbate congestion and extend truck travel times, particularly on corridors that already serve as primary links between suburban job centers, industrial hubs, and the urban core.

Figure 19: Intermodal freight activity in Will County more than tripled over the past two decades



Source: CMAP, railroad companies

Erik Varela

Executive Director, Illinois International Port District

Erik Varela sees the Port of Chicago as an economic engine that quietly powers everyday life across northeastern Illinois. Spanning more than 2,000 acres, the port connects the Great Lakes, inland waterways, railroads, and highways to move goods efficiently throughout the region and nation. Under Erik's leadership, the port supports jobs, business growth, and critical supply chains — handling materials like steel for bridges, cement for roads, lumber for homes, and food ingredients found on store shelves. The port is a community partner, with environmental restoration efforts and new trail connections planned for nearby neighborhoods. Erik's story reflects how transportation infrastructure can strengthen prosperity, create opportunity, and reinforce the region's position as a global hub.

"The steel for bridges, the cement for roads — it all comes through here."

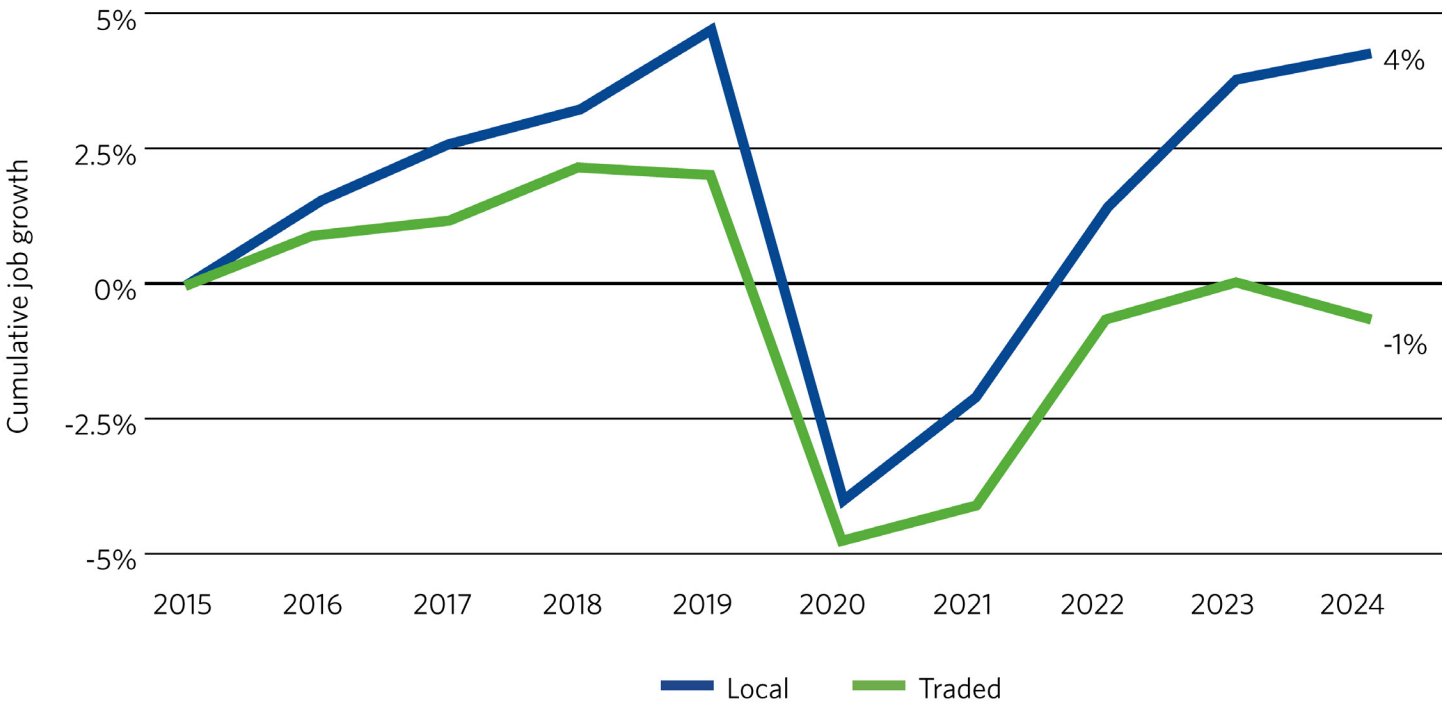


Investing in inclusive growth is critical for the region's success

Inclusive growth means that the benefits of investment are broadly shared. A more reliable transportation system can shorten commutes, improve access to jobs and services, and reduce transportation costs. Workers spend less time and money commuting, employers gain access to a larger workforce, and communities become more attractive for investment. Efficient freight movement reduces truck gridlock on local streets, improves air quality, and supports timely delivery of goods. Together, these outcomes enhance quality of life across the region.

However, several trends limit the region's ability to achieve inclusive growth. Over the past two decades, economic growth in northeastern Illinois has lagged behind some peer regions and the nation overall. Recent job growth has been concentrated in local-serving industries, rather than traded clusters that export goods or services beyond the region and contribute more to growing the regional economy. Between 2015 and 2024, the region lost approximately 10,000 jobs in traded sectors while gaining nearly 100,000 local ones — meaning that for every job lost in traded clusters, the region gained ten in local clusters.[44]

Figure 20: Traded clusters have struggled to rebound after recent economic disruptions



While recent job gains are mostly concentrated in sectors that contribute less to the region's economic competitiveness, industries that rely on transportation infrastructure are among the region's strongest. Many of these jobs provide opportunities for workers without a college degree. From 2010 to 2024, the region added 5,500 living wage jobs in distribution management, creating opportunities for early career workers in warehousing, supply chain, and logistics.[45] Strategic investment in the transportation sector expands access to these opportunities and supports long-term, sustainable economic growth.



Fostering inclusive economic prosperity also includes managing the essential costs that residents face. Transportation is one of the largest expenses that most households have, with car ownership costing approximately $10,000 per year.[46] Expanding access to lower-cost modes — such as transit, walking, and biking — can reduce these costs. Targeted programs can further support affordability for students, seniors, or low-income residents.

Achieving inclusive growth requires coordinated action across jurisdictions and agencies. By aligning transportation investments with economic goals, northeastern Illinois can create a transportation system that supports both businesses and residents and ensures that everyone shares in the success.

Strategies to support economic prosperity and inclusive growth

Objective: Strengthen northeastern Illinois' role as a global economic hub and gateway to the Midwest

Integrate intercity bus and passenger rail into the regional planning process

Intercity bus and rail services play a crucial role in connecting northeastern Illinois to other population centers. These travel modes should be included in transportation planning efforts at state, regional, and local levels. Through collaborative processes, transportation implementers can inform service locations and frequency, support first- and last-mile access, advance related infrastructure projects, and identify funding and partnership opportunities.

Improve multimodal access to connect the region's urban core to its international airports

Transportation partners should strengthen multimodal connections between Downtown Chicago and O'Hare and Midway. Frequent, reliable transit service can reduce congestion, improve travel time reliability, and support passenger travel.

Objective: Use transportation investment to strengthen economic centers, expand access, and reduce household costs

Promote strategic infill development in centers and along corridors

Regional partners should identify centers and corridors where coordinated transportation investment and local planning decisions can deliver the greatest benefit. This includes urban neighborhoods, suburban downtowns, and growing exurban areas. These investments should maximize the impact of limited public resources and support progress across safety, mobility, climate, and economic goals.

Support transportation affordability

With transportation costs among the largest household expenses, regional partners should implement policies, programs, and planning approaches that provide affordable travel options. Actions should include supporting transit oriented land use, reforming transportation fees and fines, and maintaining programs that address resource disparities — such as reduced transit fares for students, seniors, and low-income households — to expand access to jobs, education, and essential services.

Objective: Promote the efficiency and reliability of the regional freight network

Invest in projects that mitigate freight congestion and improve operations

Northeastern Illinois should continue supporting the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program and sustain recent progress on implementing its priority projects. The region should also advance efforts that reduce truck bottlenecks, improve freight rail travel times, and expedite intermodal transfers, with a focus on high-impact locations that most benefit regional economic productivity. Improvements that reduce impacts to emergency vehicles, residents, and businesses, such as highway-rail grade separations, should be prioritized.

Foster safe travel for truck drivers

Transportation implementers should support safer conditions for truck drivers through infrastructure improvements, better routing information, and expanded access to rest areas and parking. Reducing congestion at key bottlenecks can also improve safety and reliability.

Support the transition to electric freight vehicles

The region should provide sufficient charging infrastructure to support the private sector in reducing air pollution and remaining competitive as vehicle technologies evolve. Transportation agencies should identify incentives and reliable funding opportunities to expedite the industry's transition to alternative and renewable fuels, in coordination with utilities and private-sector stakeholders.

Improve urban freight operations and last-mile delivery

Local agencies should implement policies to improve safety and reduce congestion, such as designated freight zones and off-peak delivery incentives. Local implementers could enact dedicated freight zones or schedules, incentivize deliveries outside of peak traffic hours, and more. Regional partners should support guidance, pilots, and best practices to assist local implementation.

Strengthen goods movement by water

Public and private stakeholders should improve the safety and efficiency of maritime freight: maintaining infrastructure, dredging waterways used by commercial vessels, and improving port access, while facilitating strong environmental stewardship and limiting the threat of invasive species.

The economic case for northeastern Illinois' transportation system is ultimately the case for investing in it. A system that connects workers to jobs, goods to markets, and businesses to customers generates returns that far exceed the cost of maintaining it. Realizing those returns, however, requires both a well-functioning system and coordinated decisions about where to focus investment and development, so that the system's benefits are expanded rather than diluted. The next chapter examines the financial foundation that makes this possible — where the revenues come from, the challenges they face, and what a more sustainable path forward requires.

RTP indicators to track economic outcomes	Today's trendline	Desired trendline
Jobs near high frequency transit Percent of regional jobs within one half mile of high frequency transit		
Chicago freight terminal carload transit time The average number of hours freight trains spend within the Chicago rail terminal district		
Truck Travel Time Reliability A ratio that compares the worst freight travel times to normal travel times		
Motorist delay at rail crossings The estimated average daily delays in hours for motorists for at-grade highway-rail crossings		



Strategically govern, fund, and preserve the system

Every chapter in this plan describes something the region needs its transportation system to do better: move people more reliably, keep them safer, adapt to a changing climate, and support a growing economy. Achieving each of those goals requires its own strategies — and many come with a price tag. This chapter examines the financial foundation that underlies them across three areas: the condition of aging infrastructure and what it will cost to bring the system to a state of good repair; the revenue landscape that funds it and why that landscape is increasingly unstable; and the regional coordination necessary to ensure that available resources are directed where they will deliver the greatest long-term benefit.

Maintaining, operating, and improving the regional transportation system requires sustained investment and coordination. The region's transportation assets are vast and diverse, including highways, local roads, bridges, trains, buses, stations, and bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Significant portions of this system — many of which are more than a century old — require varying levels of improvement and modernization. To achieve the region's transportation goals, it will be critical to preserve this infrastructure while improving safety, reliability, and fiscal responsibility.

In recent years, regional and state leaders have secured more reliable revenue sources that support and strengthen the transportation system. In 2019, Rebuild Illinois was enacted as the largest and most far-reaching capital program in state history. The program also made valuable policy changes to address motor fuel tax (MFT) underperformance by doubling the rate and indexing it to inflation. Rebuild Illinois nearly doubled the funding provided by previous capital programs and has helped bring more transportation assets into a state of good repair.[47]

A similar transformational investment, the 2025 Northern Illinois Transit Authority (NITA) Act, reformed regional transit governance and funding. The legislation identified new revenue sources and shifted others to secure sustained annual funding to stabilize transit operations and prevent future service cuts. It also established NITA to replace the Regional Transportation Authority and to oversee and coordinate the region's transit service boards, consolidating planning, funding allocation, and performance standards under one agency. These funding solutions avert a significant budget shortfall, while the policy changes advance long-term goals for integrated fares, improved accessibility, coordinated capital planning, and frequent, reliable service.[48]

While Rebuild Illinois and the NITA Act make progress toward securing robust, long-term transportation revenues, funding challenges persist. Because the state lacks a permanent capital fund program, lawmakers must pass a new capital bill before 2030 — Rebuild Illinois' final year — to ensure continued support. Existing transportation revenue sources also remain unstable amid a changing landscape. Given the scale of investment the region's transportation system requires, action is needed to identify more durable funding sources that keep pace with system costs and do not depend on periodic reauthorization.



The ability of the region and state to make and sustain necessary transportation investments is hindered by the fact that associated costs have outpaced current revenue streams. High construction costs, project delivery challenges, and fragmented regional investment decisions make it difficult to keep the transportation system in good condition while also making progress on other forward-looking goals.

As the region's transportation assets continue to age, decisive action is needed. Decision makers must reinvest in legacy infrastructure and address years of deferred maintenance in addition to prioritizing improvements that support regional goals related to mobility, safety, climate resilience, and economic competitiveness. Success will not come easily; it will require significant investment at a time when costs already outpace funding. Crucially, establishing new funding sources is essential to make these investments possible.

Legacy infrastructure needs and cost growth require significant capital investment

While northeastern Illinois benefits greatly from its legacy transportation assets, much of the network is aging and requires significant reinvestment. Sustained construction cost inflation and project delivery challenges strain the region's ability to preserve the system.

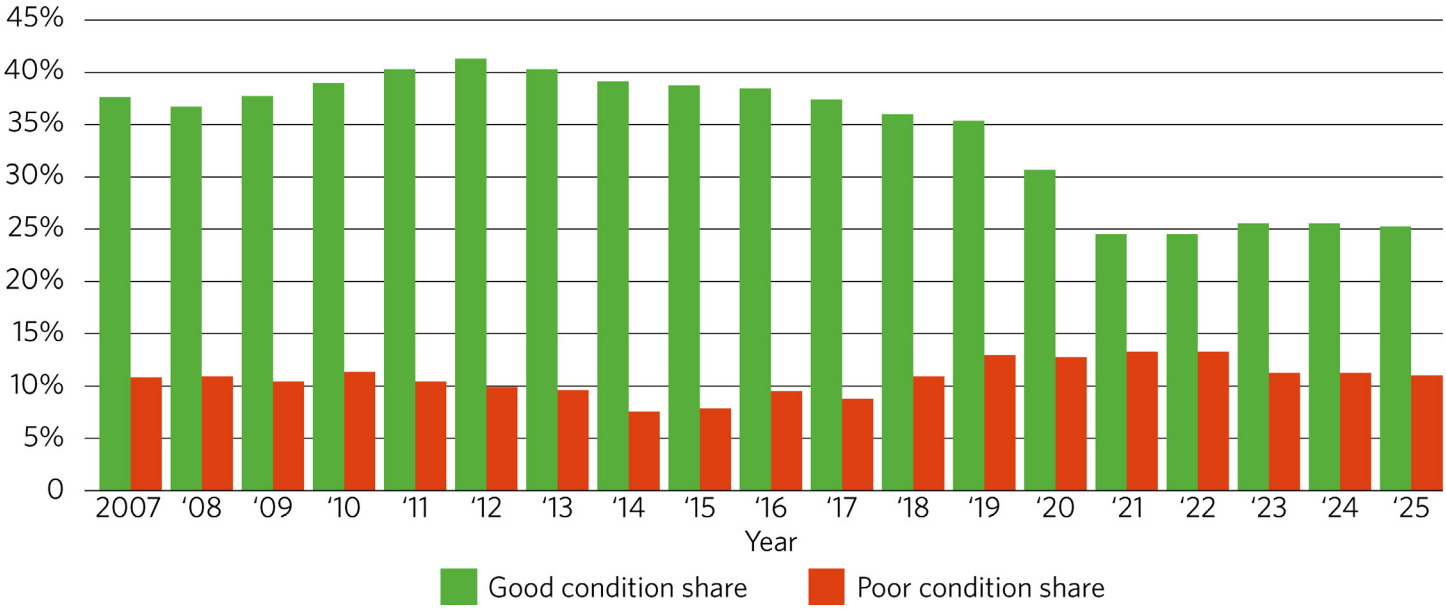
Aging infrastructure and deferred asset maintenance

Decades of irregular funding patterns have left the regional transportation system deteriorating faster than it is being repaired. Underinvestment erodes system performance in multiple ways. For transit, it drives up operating costs and degrades service. For roadways, it creates safety hazards, including potholes and cracking, and forces agencies to rely on frequent resurfacing cycles in place of more durable reconstructions. Maintaining assets is not only about avoiding costly repairs; it also ensures the system delivers on safety, resilience, and reliability goals. With limited funding and aging assets, the region routinely settles for maintaining the status quo rather than pursuing transformational change.

One long-term consequence of underinvestment is declining roadway asset condition. For example, bridges on the region's National Highway System (NHS) have significantly worsened over the past decade (Figure 21). Since 2016, the share of bridges in poor condition has fluctuated around the federal guideline threshold of 10 percent, while the share of bridges in good condition has declined or stagnated.[49] Limited resources have been redirected toward preventing bridges in fair condition from slipping into poor condition rather than maintaining those in good condition. Even with this shift, the region struggles to meet federal bridge standards.

NHS pavement conditions have also declined over this period. In comparison to the Illinois Tollway, which can rely on a steady stream of toll revenue to regularly replace and reconstruct aging infrastructure, the broader expressway network depends on varied and less predictable funding sources. While the Tollway has maintained relatively strong asset condition and low average age, other transportation implementers cannot maintain their assets at the same pace. Prolonged funding constraints have forced system leaders to prioritize stopgap maintenance measures instead of long-term rehabilitation, weakening the system's overall resilience.

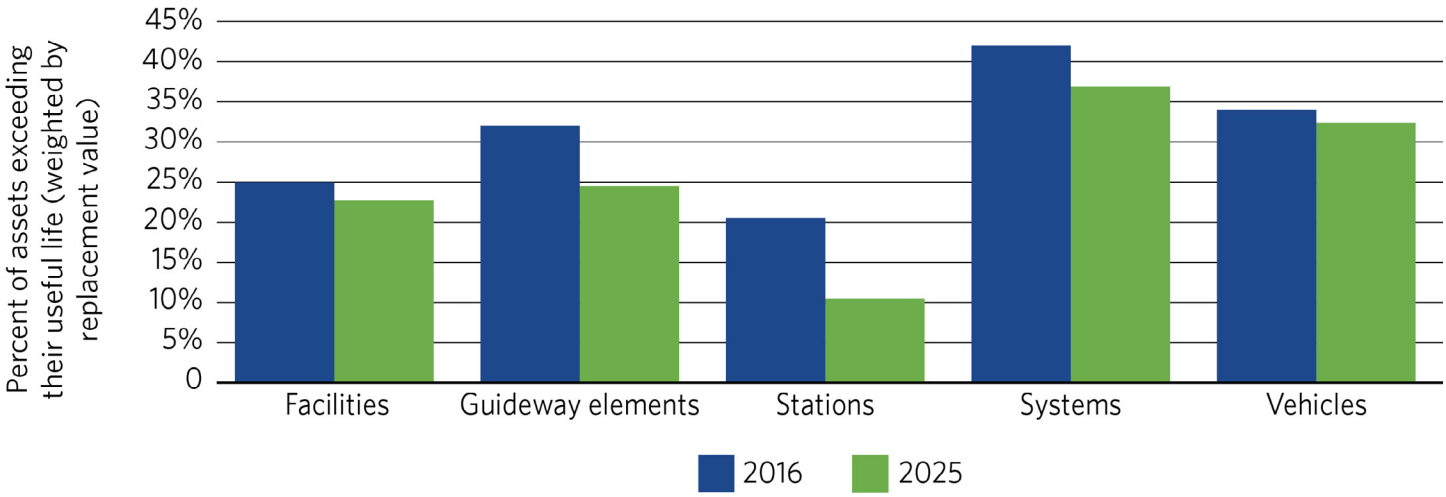
Figure 21: Bridge conditions on the region's National Highway System have worsened over the past decade



Source: FHWA National Bridge Inventory, 2025

The region's commuter rail infrastructure faces a parallel challenge that existing funding programs are not designed to address. Metra trains cross 926 bridges every weekday. Of the bridges Metra owns directly, half are more than a century old, and another 30 percent are more than 75 years old — the functional life of a steel bridge. These structures are currently safe for travel, but they have exceeded their designed lifespan and are becoming more expensive to maintain with each passing year. Unlike highway bridges, which benefit from dedicated federal funding programs, railroad bridges used for passenger rail service have no dedicated funding source at the federal or state level. This gap places the burden squarely on transit agencies and their capital programs, which are already strained by broader state-of-good-repair needs.

Figure 22: Despite improvements, transit assets exceeding their useful life continue to make up a large share of the system



Note: The systems category includes communications, train control, traction power, and fare collection systems.
Source: Regional Transit Authority, 2025

The region's transit investment backlog similarly underscores the mismatch between current conditions and system goals. While transit asset conditions have moderately improved in the last decade, 25 percent of the regional transit assets are still beyond their useful life. Today, the regional transit system faces a $30 billion capital price tag to replace and repair its backlog.[50] Guideway elements, such as grade separations and track improvements, are foundational to to efficient service and represent nearly half of this need. Across other transit categories, aging assets pose operational risk: vehicles that exceed their useful life require more frequent maintenance and tend to be less reliable. Even with recent funding increases in the NITA Act, including an annual allocation for transit capital projects, total need far exceeds available funding.

The deferred maintenance that strains the system today is, in large part, the product of investment decisions made decades ago — what to build, where to build it, and what revenue structures would sustain it. The decisions the region makes now will shape the maintenance obligations its successors inherit.

Rising construction cost growth

Project delivery costs make up a significant share of transportation system expenses, and construction costs have grown faster than available revenues for decades. The sharp inflation that followed the COVID-19 pandemic widened this gap, deepening longstanding funding shortfalls for system maintenance and modernization.

Since 2003, the National Highway Construction Cost Index (NHCCI), which tracks construction labor and material costs, has risen steadily and has consistently outpaced growth in transportation capital revenues. Between 2020 and 2023, the NHCCI rose by 66 percent, reflecting unprecedented short-term growth.[51] Because the NHCCI is based on state highway contract data, this increase also signals reduced purchasing power for federal construction dollars. Other indicators show similar trends. The Producer Price Index for construction materials climbed 32 percent over the same period, nearly twice the rate of overall consumer inflation.[52]

Sustained inflation creates compounding fiscal challenges. Even if construction cost growth returns to historic norms, the elevated baseline ensures that costs will remain high relative to revenues, weakening the system's ability to meet state of good repair needs and exacerbating fiscal uncertainty. Project delays also carry steeper consequences, as each deferral results in greater cost escalation.

Project delivery challenges

Capital projects experience delays for many reasons, including permitting, property acquisition, and coordination across multiple agencies and public utilities. Because these projects typically depend on tight sequencing, schedule setbacks can have cascading timeline effects on other projects and can lead to additional inflation, compounding costs, and disrupted funding strategies. For example, a study of project delays in Texas between 2012 and 2014 found that for a freeway reconstruction in a large metropolitan area, a three-month delay produced an additional cost of $4 million, or $1.3 million per month.[53] In today's high inflation construction environment, even brief delays on major projects can have significant cost implications. Over time, this exacerbates deferred maintenance and undermines efficient project delivery.

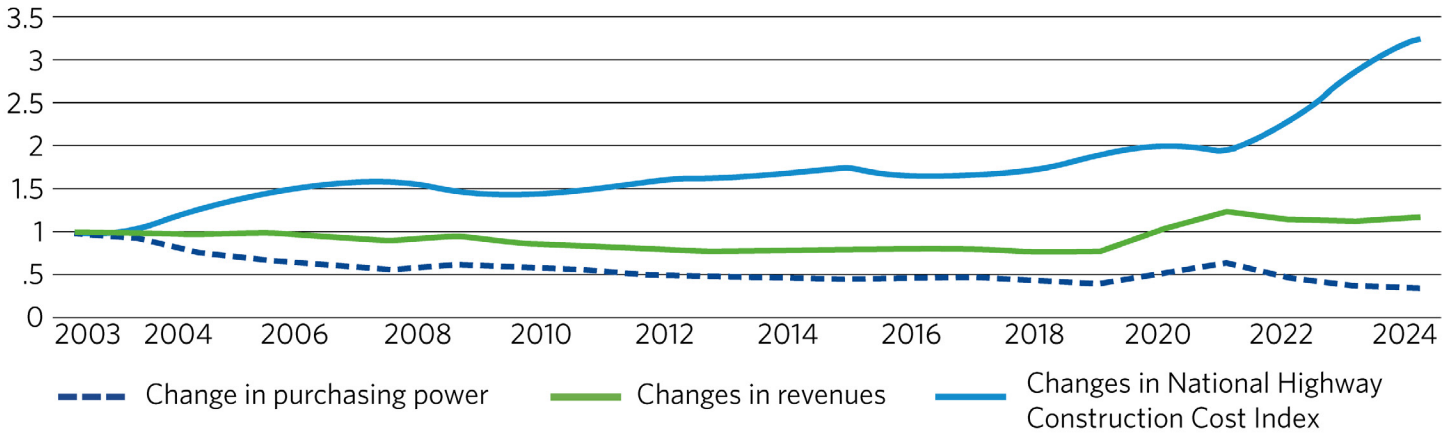
The high costs of maintaining an expansive legacy network — combined with aging assets, sustained cost growth, and project delivery challenges — underscore the importance of securing sufficient and durable funding sources. Strategic investment is essential not only to maintain today's system, but also to preserve it as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible for the future.

The transportation system relies on revenue sources that are vulnerable to risk

Regional transportation funding consists of a mix of federal, state, local, and system-generated revenues. While recent legislative developments have stabilized some funding streams, several revenue sources are not keeping pace with rising costs. The purchasing power of transportation capital revenue — measured by comparing key revenue sources like motor fuel taxes and vehicle registration fees with construction costs — has steadily declined since 2008, with sharp drops following the pandemic. Although costs have begun to stabilize, they remain elevated and continue to outpace revenue growth, meaning available funds buy less than they once did.

This imbalance creates significant challenges. Capital projects face rising costs due to high inflation, while system-generated revenues have become less effective, with federal and state allocations remaining modest. As a result, the region's current funding streams are insufficient to meet critical infrastructure needs.

Figure 23: As total transportation revenues decreased and construction cost growth spiked, transportation purchasing power declined in recent years



Note: Select capital revenues include state motor fuel tax receipts and state motor vehicle registration receipts.
Source: CMAP analysis of Illinois Office of the Comptroller data and National Highway Construction Cost Index, 2025.

Key transportation revenue sources have weakened over time

The MFT has long been a critical revenue source for the transportation system. However, greater vehicle efficiency, improved technology, and changing travel patterns have reduced fuel consumption, weakening the MFT's long-term stability. Despite being indexed to inflation, MFT rates no longer capture the true cost of driving or differences in mileage among drivers, resulting in weaker revenues. Since 2020, the MFT rate has increased by an average of just 1.9 percent per year, far below the average 10 percent annual increase in construction costs.[54] The region can no longer rely on the MFT to keep pace with rising construction costs and infrastructure needs.

State-imposed motor vehicle registration (MVR) fees are another major source of revenue for regional capital transportation investments. Unlike MFT, MVR fees are flat fees and not indexed to inflation, limiting their long-term sustainability.

Illinois' sales tax is another source of transportation funding that requires structural change to keep pace with the broader economy. The state primarily taxes the sale of goods rather than services. As a result, increasingly service-driven consumer spending is not captured in this revenue source, contributing to diminished returns. Modernizing the sales tax to include a wider range of services would increase state and regional sales tax revenues that are critical for transit operations.[55]





In 2025, a coalition of Illinois policy and civic leaders released **Modernizing Illinois' Sales Tax: A pathway for a sustainable future**, which outlines the potential impacts of updating the state's sales tax system. Building off recommendations in the **Plan of Action for Regional Transit**, the report details how specific reforms could apply sales tax to more consumer services, address revenue shortfalls, and ensure sustainable funding for essential public services like transit.

The report concludes that reform could generate nearly $2 billion annually in new state revenue and provide much-needed financial stability.

Jeanette Chavarria-Torres
President, DCH Construction and Hauling

Jeanette Chavarria-Torres believes that maintaining and modernizing the region's infrastructure is essential to a dependable transportation system and a strong economy. As president of DCH Construction and Hauling, a 100% woman-owned business, she leads a key partner in major roadway projects across northeastern Illinois, including reconstruction work on I-294.

Her entrepreneurial path began early. As a child, she helped her father with bookkeeping tasks — from writing checks to processing payroll — and by high school she was already dreaming of running her own trucking company. Her father agreed to mentor her, but only after she committed to earning a business degree.

While still in college, Jeanette incorporated DCH and began building the company into a trusted hauler for large contractors. Today, DCH not only helps keep critical materials moving efficiently from point A to point B, but also creates opportunities for smaller trucking firms, many of them owned by women and rooted in working-class communities. Her story shows how investment in infrastructure supports both economic growth and the people who make it possible.

"Maintaining and modernizing infrastructure is essential for a healthy economy, and high quality of life."



Transportation revenues across local, state, and federal funding streams are vulnerable to risk

The region's transportation revenues face four distinct categories of risk: uncertainty in federal funding levels, constraints on local match capacity, instability in the state's allocation formula, and demographic trends that are reducing demand-based revenue streams.

Federal funding uncertainty: The region's transportation system relies on federal highway and transit funding allocated through the state. Growth in federal highway and transit funding to Illinois remained modest between 2000 and 2023, with compound annual growth rates of 0.8 percent and 2.1 percent, respectively. Given the persistent high-cost environment, this growth has been insufficient to meet the region's needs. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) represented a historic federal investment in infrastructure, providing Illinois with substantial road, bridge, and transit funding through fiscal years 2022 to 2026.[56] With that program set to expire in 2026, advocates are calling for IIJA funding levels to serve as the baseline of future infrastructure packages and for stronger formula funding in place of discretionary grants. However, uncertainty remains. Reductions in current federal funding levels would have significant and negative impacts on the region's capital funding outlook.

Local match constraints: Local match funding is essential for leveraging federal dollars, especially for competitive grants. For example, the CTA's Red Purple Modernization program — a multibillion-dollar, multiphase project that includes bypass and station reconstructions and signal improvements — is supported by $1.1 billion in local match funds.[57] However, recent administrative actions have restricted competitive transportation funding, potentially increasing local match requirements. Even at current levels, securing local match funding is difficult, especially in historically disinvested communities with limited fiscal capacity. When local matches are insufficient or delayed, the region loses the ability to pursue federal and state funding opportunities that advance transportation projects.

State allocation instability: Historically, the state has allocated transportation funding to subregions through informal geographic agreements rather than performance-based criteria. Although northeastern Illinois' share has been relatively stable in recent years, these arrangements leave the region without statutory protection and with funding levels that do not reflect its share of VMT, transit ridership, or economic activity. A durable, transparent framework directs transportation dollars where infrastructure is most used, where needs are greatest, and where investment will generate the broadest benefits for both the region and the state. In the absence of any such framework, the region remains exposed to risk, especially as fiscal pressures and competing priorities grow.



Demographic and demand shifts: Lower-than-expected population growth reduces economic activity, VMT, and transit ridership. In addition to stagnant MFT growth, these trends affect revenues such as sales taxes, tolls, and transit fares. CMAP's current socioeconomic forecast projects only modest growth through 2050, reflecting a long-term plateau with broad implications for transportation revenues.[58] Demographic shifts, including declining household size and migration patterns, are also driving uneven demand across travel modes. These changes affect formula-based federal and state funding as well, meaning the region must prepare for potential reductions in revenue allocations.

As transportation costs continue to outpace historical levels, the region's revenues remain insufficient to support long-term system needs. This fiscal constraint limits the projects the region can advance, forcing programming decisions with multigenerational consequences. Without predictable funding that aligns with maintenance and improvement needs, the region risks falling further behind on its transportation goals. New funding sources — including regional surcharges that do not depend on state distributions — are urgently needed to support capital and operating investments in Illinois' transportation system.

Regional collaboration is necessary to make improvements that optimize transportation operations and funding outlook

In addition to ongoing infrastructure maintenance, achieving a state of good repair requires modernization and enhancement. Bold, strategic investment in climate, accessibility, and safety is essential for the region to remain competitive for federal funding and provide residents with high-quality multimodal transportation options. However, insufficient and fragmented investment can limit progress.

Regional transportation stakeholders have repeatedly come together to address demands for a stronger transportation future. Through decades of coordination, agencies and partners have aligned strategies to strengthen the regional economy, improve efficiency, and expand accessibility. Leaders have identified projects to advance these strategies and successfully implemented critical improvements.

Coordination is not just a governance preference — it is a strategy for stretching limited revenues further. Coordinated planning improves competitiveness: in recent years, collaboratively led projects have secured millions in federal and state funding that would have been more difficult to secure independently. These initiatives have led to real progress. Agencies that once worked separately are now jointly planning, sharing resources, and collaborating more strategically. Programs like CREATE demonstrate what long-term, cross-agency partnerships can accomplish. Since the program began in 2003, stakeholders including the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT), IDOT, and Metra have leveraged state, federal, and private rail industry funding to construct more than 70 critical rail and roadway improvements.[59] These upgrades have improved safety, added capacity, and helped accommodate growth in both freight and passenger traffic.



Other recent efforts reinforce the strength of regional collaboration. The I-290 Blue Line Corridor partnership between IDOT and the CTA is leveraging state transportation dollars and securing competitive IIJA funding to modernize stations, expand accessibility, and mitigate flooding on roadways and in nearby communities.[60] Similarly, Pace and Metra are partnering on the Harvey Intermodal Transportation Center to improve transfers between the two transit networks, expand accessibility, and increase paratransit options.[61] By recognizing shared goals, agencies are coordinating to implement large-scale efforts while also reducing costs that would have been greater if pursued independently.

Despite recent achievements, a lack of robust and dependable revenues is slowing the region's progress on its shared priorities. While agencies have established initiatives to bring transit stations into ADA compliance, several projects are unfunded and behind schedule. Most of the region's priority grade separation projects — some identified decades ago as key to improving safety and mitigating congestion — remain in early phases. As of 2024, only 47 percent of the 2009 Regional Greenways and Trails Plan had been completed or programmed, and full implementation of secure, safe, sufficient bikeways and sidewalks near transit will likely take decades.

Strategic regional coordination and decision-making are especially important to advance transportation priorities, especially during times of rapid change. For example, given the speed at which technology is advancing, northeastern Illinois will need to consider how to integrate new technologies into the transportation system. These decisions will have long-lasting implications for agency operations and for how people and goods move throughout the region. In this changing landscape, it is crucial that decision-makers take a coordinated and collaborative approach to protect transportation operations, improve the region's fiscal outlook, and enhance residents' quality of life.

Strategies to govern, fund, and preserve the system

Objective: Plan for system modernization and make progress towards a state of good repair

Invest in the region's capacity to implement preservation, modernization, and reconstruction projects

Transportation implementers should invest in proactive asset lifecycle planning to meet the region's growing needs. Targeted action should include the bolstering of available revenues, interagency coordination, and staff capacity and expertise. Additionally, adopting emerging technologies to assist with infrastructure monitoring and maintenance should be explored strategically.

Improve data for better asset management decision-making

With limited resources, data-driven decision-making is crucial for effective asset management. Regional partners should work together to improve the quality and availability of asset condition data. Through interagency coordination and data-sharing partnerships, the region should provide regular reporting on the condition of the system's infrastructure, including roads, bridges, tracks, and more.

Strengthen regional coordination around aging infrastructure

Northeastern Illinois should engage in regional collaboration to monitor state of good repair needs and ensure the region's funding is sufficient to maintain and modernize transportation infrastructure. In particular, stakeholders should coordinate regularly on the performance-based allocation of funding, as well as decisions regarding current or future sources of infrastructure funding.

Objective: Maintain and expand revenue sources

Explore implementing a road usage charge (RUC)

The region should explore shifting revenue reliance away from the MFT toward a user fee that charges motorists based on the number of miles they drive. Recognizing that implementation questions remain, transportation stakeholders should conduct a RUC feasibility study that develops recommendations, informs future pilot programs, and raises implementation considerations.

Expand tolling on more transportation facilities

Northeastern Illinois should establish more tolling on facilities throughout the regional transportation system. As a substantial and reliable funding source, the region should prioritize tolling to offset the costs of necessary road

reconstructions and other forms of maintenance that are critical to preserve and modernize northeastern Illinois' aging infrastructure.

Pursue durable revenues that grow with the economy and align with travel behavior

The region should continue to monitor its funding landscape and impacts from changes in the vehicle fleet, travel patterns, consumer preferences, revenue durability, and more. When existing revenues underperform or lose buying power, state and regional leaders should add new or different revenues to ensure the system has sufficient and durable funding sources. Notably, the sales tax should be expanded to include services to better capture changes in the regional economy.

Establish a regional revenue source

Northeastern Illinois should pursue a dedicated source of regional funding to provide stable and consistent revenue for future infrastructure investments. Given the region's unique and significant investment needs, partners should pursue distinct revenue sources that can help match federal funds, implement regional transportation priorities, and advance modernization initiatives.

Objective: Enhance government collaboration to optimize the system's operations, performance, and fiscal capacity

Use collaborative performance-and data-driven practices to guide investment decisions

With aging assets and increasingly expensive maintenance costs, regional partners should work together to manage limited resources efficiently. Transportation planning and programming decisions should be based on data and performance measures to maximize benefits.

Streamline project delivery

Project implementation delays can disrupt transportation operations and impose substantial costs over time. Northeastern Illinois should improve the efficiency of project delivery through strategies such as increasing public sector capacity, reassessing project scopes in the face of rising costs, and addressing context-specific sources of delay.

Monitor and strategically prepare for emerging technologies

Transportation stakeholders should jointly monitor technological innovations related to electric vehicles, unmanned aircraft systems, intelligent transportation systems, autonomous vehicles, and artificial and predictive analysis to assess the potential benefits and risks to the region's transportation system. As emerging technologies rise to the forefront, the region should guide their deployment in ways that prioritize efficiency, fiscal sustainability, and a high quality of life for residents.



CMAP's **Advancing a road usage charge in Illinois** explores how a per-mile road usage charge could provide a more sustainable, flexible way to fund transportation by better aligning revenues with how people use the road system. The paper outlines why Illinois should advance a road usage charge feasibility study and identifies key considerations for designing a program that supports regional priorities around mobility, safety, economic prosperity, and greenhouse gas reduction.

BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION on Transportation Infrastructure Funding and Policy

To coalesce around a unified vision for the future of transportation, the Illinois General Assembly established the **Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation Infrastructure and Funding**. The commission's final report recommends accelerating project delivery, expanding workforce capacity, maximizing investments, driving sustainable outcomes, and securing adequate funding sources.

Anticipate necessary provisions when considering the introduction of automated vehicles

When considering potential proposals to integrate unmanned automated vehicles (UAVs) into the regional transportation system, agencies should prevent outcomes that impair operations, weaken revenue sources, or threaten residents' well-being. The region should establish agreements that provide consistent access to data collected by UAV companies. Transportation agencies should also consider improvements to ensure the safe and efficient operation of UAVs, such as highly visible signs, signals, and road markings. Given the fast pace of technological innovation and market competition, conditions and agreements should be regularly reassessed to determine if adjustments are necessary.

Protect the transportation system's cybersecurity

Transportation implementers should make provisions to prevent ransomware attacks, data breaches, infrastructure attacks, and other forms of infiltration into online systems. The region should also protect residents from phishing, spam, or other fraudulent attempts to access their payment information for transportation-related fees, fines, and fares.

The strategies in this chapter are necessary but not sufficient on their own. New revenues are a prerequisite for solving the problem; they are not, by themselves, the solution. Revenue decisions and investment decisions are two sides of the same coin, and the region cannot address one while ignoring the other. The financial constraints documented in this chapter are precisely why the investment decisions that follow are critical. With needs far outpacing available revenues, every dollar directed toward a transportation project is a dollar not available for another. The next section identifies the specific projects and programs that the region has determined, through a rigorous performance-based process, are the strongest candidates for that investment.

RTP indicators to track system condition and solvency	Today's trendline	Desired trendline
Interstate and non-interstate pavement in poor condition The percentage of roadways on the NHS determined to be in poor condition		
Buses past useful life Percent of buses in the region's fleet that have surpassed their determined useful life		
Rail vehicles past useful life Percent of rail vehicles in the region's fleet that have surpassed their determined useful life		
Transportation capital revenue purchasing power index An index that compares the change in state capital revenue sources, such as the MFT and motor vehicle registration fees, to transportation costs		
Bridges in poor condition the percentage of bridges determined to be in poor condition		



Priority investments

Maximizing regionwide benefit under financial constraint

Planning for the region's transportation future requires confronting a fundamental challenge: transportation needs far outpace available revenues. Aging infrastructure, climate risks, safety concerns, and shifting travel patterns are increasingly straining the transportation assets on which the region relies. While there is no shortage of transformative ideas for meeting these challenges, limited resources require disciplined, strategic decisions on the investments that will provide the greatest benefit to northeastern Illinois.

In the context of this plan, the value of specific transportation investments depends on how effectively they advance the RTP's goals to:

- 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

A strategic and forward-looking process that assesses projects using a consistent set of evaluation criteria — a performance-based evaluation framework — is the region's primary tool for collaboratively and transparently translating these goals into investment decisions.

As noted in greater detail in this chapter, the RTP identifies a list of priority investments — a focused set of regional capital projects (RCPs) and programs that most substantially advance regional goals. This set of priority projects and programs is the culmination of a rigorous process of analytical evaluation, stakeholder engagement and consensus-building that sought to identify the investments that are best positioned to deliver broad, transformative impacts for northeastern Illinois as a whole.

Evaluation of project benefits: By applying uniform criteria across all projects, the evaluation process illustrated the relative value of each proposed investment and its effects on a range of performance areas, including safety, mobility, emissions reduction, and system preservation.

Engagement: Through robust stakeholder engagement — such as community events, a public questionnaire, and resource group meetings — residents and partners contributed insights about local context and lived experience that data alone could not provide.

Assessment of trade-offs: Investments with greater regional benefits often come with higher financial costs, and investments that perform well in some of the RTP's goal areas may underperform in others. Prioritization therefore required weighing trade-offs to determine the most broadly beneficial path forward.

Building momentum behind transformative investments

The **RTP's priority investment list** elevates a focused set of programs and projects that most substantially advance regional goals. The list is not a ranking or a prescribed sequence of steps; it is a strategic platform for building momentum behind investments capable of delivering broad, transformative impacts across northeastern Illinois. All fiscally constrained RCPs, including those not on the priority list, deliver meaningful benefits to the communities and corridors they serve and remain eligible for federal funding and approvals. Among them, the priority investments are the ones the region is prepared to champion most actively — the investments where the region's collective ambition and resources are best aligned to deliver lasting, regionwide change.



Priority projects represent a refined subset of capital projects that are particularly impactful and illustrative of the regional vision. These projects deliver measurable progress toward core outcomes in specific locations across the region, demonstrating how RTP strategies translate into tangible, on-the-ground transportation improvements.



Priority programs, by contrast, are categories of recurring investments that establish long-term strategic direction while preserving flexibility in implementation. These programs promote coordination across jurisdictions and agencies and enable the bundling of smaller, related investments — recognizing that certain strategies are most effective when deployed across the region, not just in one location.

Together, the 15 priority investments elevated through the planning process form a balanced, performance-driven strategy for actualizing the region's goals. They are designed to deliver meaningful, regionwide benefits by enhancing safety, mobility, and reliability across the transportation system. By combining location-specific projects with systemwide programmatic investments, the list represents a roadmap for turning the regional vision into concrete action while maintaining flexibility to adapt as priorities, conditions and opportunities evolve over time. Listed in alphabetical order, these priority investments are not ranked and do not imply any order of relative importance.

- **Advancing regional rail**
- **Chicago Hub Improvement Program**
- **Connect 290 Blue**
- **Connected sidewalks, bikeways, and micromobility infrastructure**
- **CREATE 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project**
- **Faster, more reliable buses**
- **I-55 improvements**
- **I-90/I-94 reconstruction (Hubbard Street to 31st Street)**
- **North DuSable Lake Shore Drive improvements**
- **Red and Purple Modernization next phases**
- **Randall Road improvements**
- **Regional Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)/transportation management center**
- **Transit station accessibility**
- **Transportation decarbonization**
- **US 45 – Rollins Road to IL 120**

Advancing regional rail

Advancing regional rail requires strategic investments and collaboration with freight partners to remove operational constraints and modernize aging rail assets, creating a faster, more reliable, and better-connected transit network. By addressing foundational infrastructure needs, these projects enable a shift to a regional rail model that aligns with today's travel patterns — offering frequent, all-day, regionally integrated rail service. Key projects include:



Photo: Joseph Cermak

A2 Crossing Modernization:
Reconstruction of the busiest railroad intersection in the Midwest, where more than 300 trains pass through each weekday. Components of the A2 Interlocking and Tower A2 are more than a century old and need to be replaced to maintain Metra's reliable regional rail service.



Rock Island improvements project:
Infrastructure upgrades on the Metra Rock Island District Line that would increase operating capacity, improve safety, and improve service reliability, helping enhance coordination between freight traffic and Metra trains.



O'Hare express service:
Improvements on the North Central Service Line that would allow future express train service between O'Hare Airport and downtown Chicago, capable of moving thousands of travelers in as little as 25 minutes.

Chicago Hub Improvement Program

The Chicago Hub Improvement Program (CHIP) is a transformative investment in the future of passenger rail in the Midwest and beyond. CHIP is made up of two components: Chicago Union Station projects and hub infrastructure projects.

Chicago Union Station projects include the concourse, platforms, and the trainshed. The projects are designed to expand capacity, improve passenger flow, upgrade safety, increase accessibility, and modernize the overall station experience for all Amtrak and Metra riders.

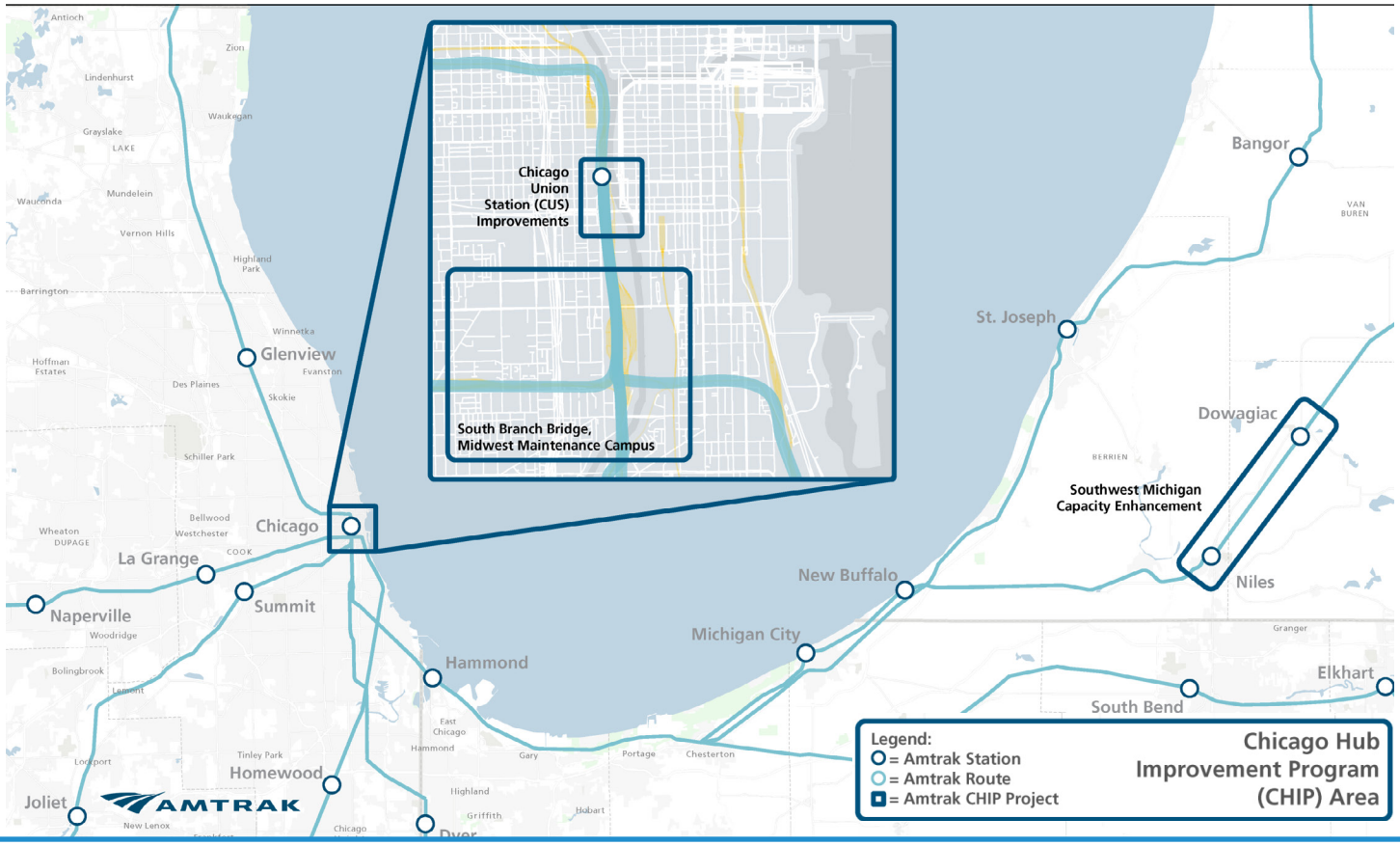
Hub infrastructure projects will modernize bridges, add network connections, and expand yard maintenance and storage capacity — all of which lead streamline operations, create more efficient train movements, and reduce delays.

As the nation's rail crossroads, Chicago plays a vital role in both intercity and regional passenger service. However, aging infrastructure has not kept pace with rising demand, leading to congestion, delays, and safety concerns. CHIP is designed to address these challenges. Through targeted investments in essential infrastructure, the program will strengthen reliability, enhance safety, and generate economic growth through job creation and business investment. CHIP prepares the region's rail network to meet the needs of future generations.

Chicago Union Station impacts

- **3rd busiest** passenger railroad terminal in the U.S.
- **3.3 million** Amtrak riders annually
- **15.1 million** Metra riders annually
- **400+** train movements each day
- **17** Amtrak intercity routes
- **6** Metra commuter rail lines

Figure 24: Chicago Union Station is a hub for passenger rail routes across the Midwest

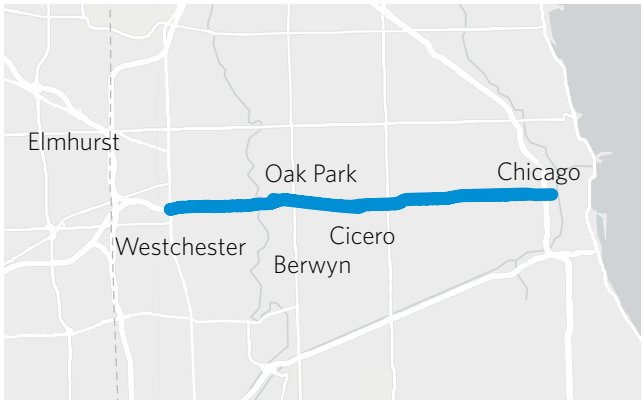


Connect 290 Blue

Connect 290 Blue is a first-of-its-kind, multimodal initiative that includes improvements to both the I-290 Eisenhower Expressway and the CTA Blue Line Forest Park Branch. The corridor plays a critical role in regional mobility across all travel modes, and investment in its core infrastructure will deliver significant economic, safety, resilience, and community benefits. Given its importance, IDOT, the CTA, and CMAP established a joint governance structure to advance a unified corridor vision and coordinated program of projects.

The I-290 corridor is among the most congested expressways in the nation and urgently needs modernization to repair aging infrastructure. The Forest Park Branch of the Blue Line — last rebuilt in 1958 — now operates under slow-zone restrictions for more than 70 percent of its length, requiring trains to operate at reduced speeds for safety. Rail stations along the branch also need significant upgrades: only four of the eleven stations are accessible, making them more difficult to use for families and those with mobility challenges.

This investment will reduce congestion, improve traffic flow and transit speeds, and make stations fully accessible. Improvements will also help advance economic growth, job access, and inclusion in areas that have been historically disconnected from economic opportunity — in part because the expressway itself is a physical barrier. In addition, the program will strengthen corridor resilience by mitigating flood risks and reducing emissions associated with congestion.

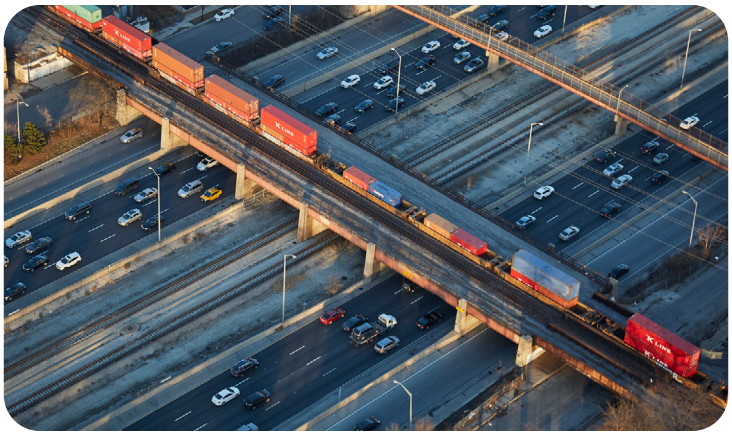


Connect 290 Blue — RCPs 13114, 22185.

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 the CTA's Blue Line

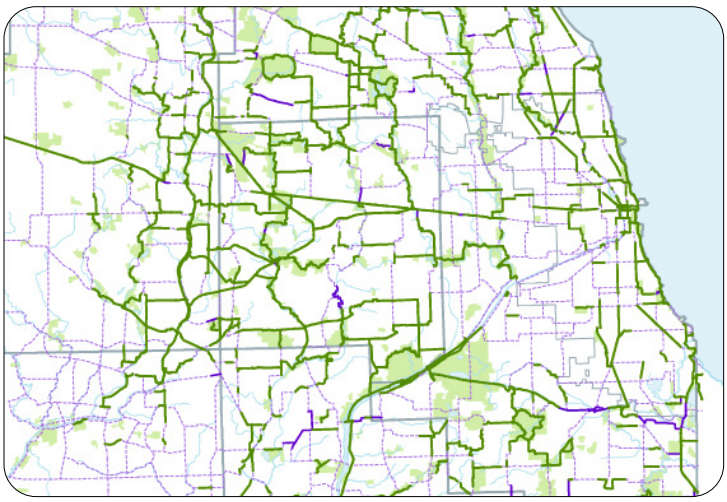




Connected sidewalks, bikeways, and micromobility infrastructure

Safe, connected, and accessible pedestrian and micromobility networks are essential components of the region's transportation system. This priority focuses on targeted investments that close gaps in the regional trail and bikeway network, strengthen first- and last-mile connections to transit, and improve routes for people traveling outside of vehicles. These investments strengthen safety, expand access, and create a more seamless multimodal system.

The region's transportation agencies are aligning their efforts to deliver active transportation improvements across northeastern Illinois:

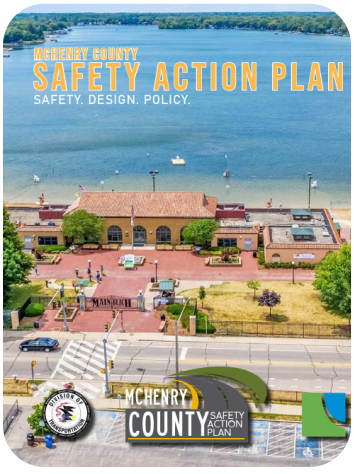


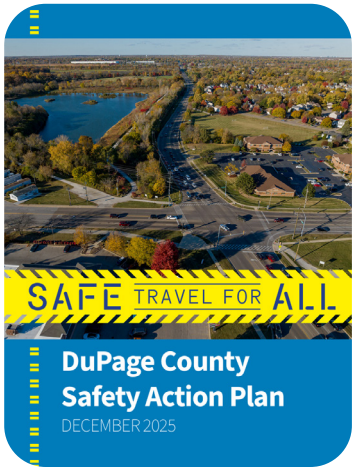
CMAP's Regional Greenways and Trails Plan outlines a network of continuous greenway and trail corridors that link communities across the region and provide scenic beauty, natural habitat, and recreational opportunities.

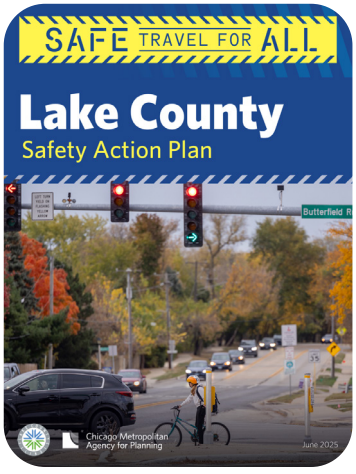




Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will counties have each adopted countywide safety action plans that provide data-driven road maps to reduce fatalities and serious injuries, with a strong emphasis on protecting people walking and biking.









CREATE 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project

The **75th Street Corridor Improvement Project (CIP)** is the largest initiative in the CREATE program, a public-private partnership dedicated to enhancing the efficiency of the region's rail network. By modernizing critical rail infrastructure, the project will deliver significant economic, environmental, and mobility benefits.

The 75th Street CIP is designed to alleviate congestion at the Belt Junction — the most congested chokepoint in the Chicago freight terminal. Six major railroads — two passenger and four freight — converge at the 75th Street corridor on Chicago's South Side, where several at-grade crossings cause major delays for both trains and roadway traffic. Improvements include two rail-to-rail grade separations, as well as a flyover to reroute the Metra SouthWest Service to the less congested LaSalle Street Station.

The next critical phase of the 75th Street CIP is the **P2 Flyover**. This project will provide significant benefits to the region and beyond by:

- Faster travel times and expanded service for passengers on the Metra SouthWest Service line and Amtrak's Cardinal service
- Greater capacity for the freight rail system, leading to reduced freight rail delay and avoiding diverting up to 8% of the region's freight traffic onto trucks
- Significantly increased operational and maintenance efficiency from combining Metra's SouthWest Service and Rock Island lines north of 75th Street, removing the need to maintain 44 single-track bridges that are over a century old
- Eliminating over 48,000 hours of combined delay for freight and passenger trains in the Chicago network over the next 30 years

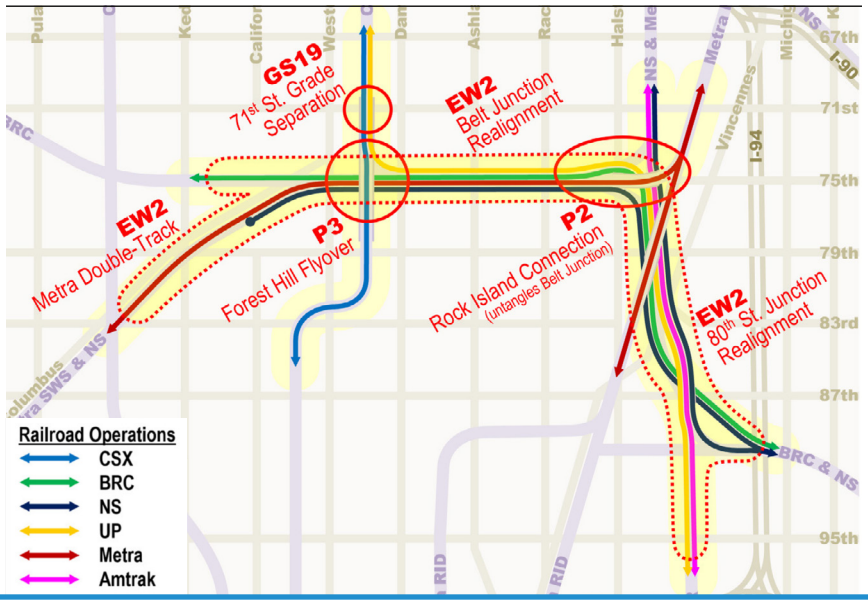
CREATE Program impacts

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

The national rail network depends on northeastern Illinois: **1 out of every 4 U.S. freight trains** pass through Chicago

Generates **$31.5 billion** in economic benefits over 30 years

Figure 25: The 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project's footprint





Source: CREATE

Faster, more reliable buses

Slow bus speeds make buses less reliable for riders and more expensive for transit agencies to operate, ultimately reducing the competitiveness of the region's transit system as well as economic access for residents. Bus priority projects provide a cost-effective way to provide faster service on key corridors. Proven strategies — including bus lanes, queue jump signals, and upgraded passenger stations — offer improved reliability, comfort, and faster travel times.[62]

The region's transportation agencies are working together to provide faster, more reliable bus service:


Photo: CTA

CTA and CDOT are working to implement the **Better Streets for Buses Plan** with two major projects:

- The **Bus Priority Zone program** addresses pinch points along major bus routes that experience traffic congestion, insufficient space for bus boarding, or bottlenecked intersections through the addition of bus priority infrastructure.
- The **Bus Priority Corridor Study** will develop concepts for continuous bus priority improvements along five key transit corridors: 55th St and Garfield Avenue; Cottage Grove Avenue; Fullerton Avenue; Pulaski Road; and Western Avenue.


Photo: Pace

Pace's Pulse program is expanding on the success of the Milwaukee Line and Dempster Line to provide arterial bus rapid transit service in heavily traveled corridors.



Photo: Pace

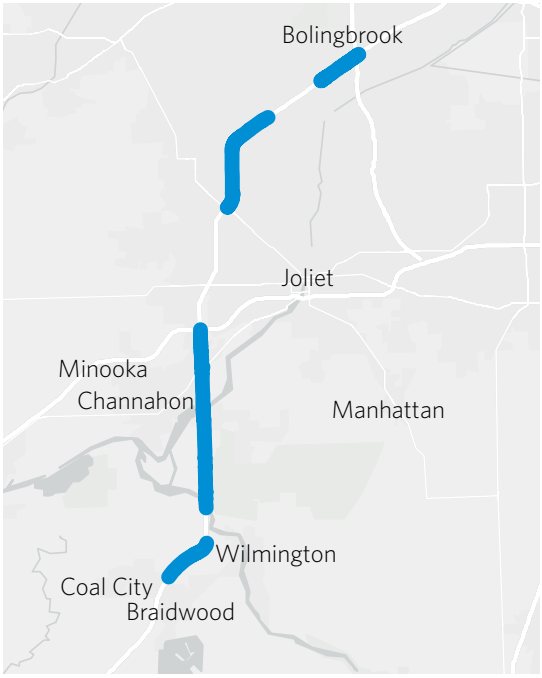
Pace's Bus-on-Shoulder program improves reliability and supports congestion relief by allowing buses to bypass traffic on routes that travel on heavily congested I-55, I-94, and I-90.

The growing emphasis on bus reliability reflects its effectiveness in attracting and retaining riders. It also highlights a broader regional focus on targeted operational investments that enhance rider experience without requiring major system expansions.

I-55 improvements

Improvements along the I-55 corridor from I-355 to Coal City Road address critical state of good repair needs and enhance reliability along a major freight corridor in Will County. Railroads handle approximately 1.6 million containers and trailers annually at terminals in Will County.[63] The I-55 corridor is the backbone of that system, serving large logistics parks, intermodal rail terminals, and distribution centers. By modernizing I-55 in an area of concentrated industrial development, these investments ensure that infrastructure upgrades keep pace with the growth of freight traffic.

The projects are expected to reduce bottlenecks and support a more efficient flow of goods while mitigating the impacts of heavy truck traffic on nearby communities. These investments directly advance priorities identified through a collaborative planning process with Will County, the Federal Highway Administration, IDOT, and CMAP — known as the *Will County Community Friendly Freight Mobility Plan* — which named I-55, IL-53, and Weber Road as key truck bottleneck locations in need of improvement.[64] Key projects include:



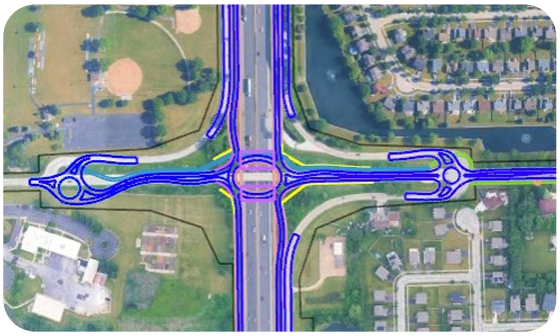
I-55 improvements — RCPs 13111, 13106, 14109.



I-55 from I-355 to IL 53 (Bolingbrook Drive): Reconstructing and adding lanes to a 2.6-mile section of I-55 in northern Will County, the project will expand the interstate from three to four lanes in each direction. This segment connects to IL-53 (Bolingbrook Drive), identified in the Will County freight mobility plan as a significant truck bottleneck location serving logistics and distribution activity.



I-55 from I-80 to Coal City Road: This investment modernizes and adds lanes to a 9.8-mile section of I-55 in west Will County to bring the corridor into a state of good repair while accommodating growing traffic volumes. This segment directly serves three large logistics parks and two intermodal rail terminals, making it one of the most freight-intensive stretches of expressway in the region.

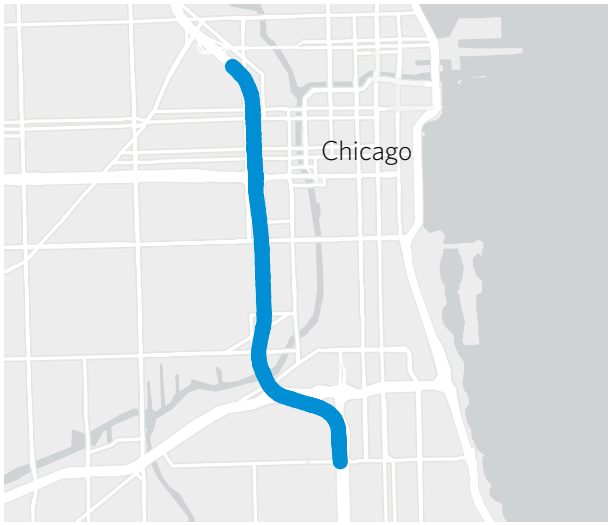


I-55 from Weber Road to US 30, at Airport/Lockport Road and at IL 126: To improve access to I-55 in northeast Will County, the project will construct a new full interchange at Airport Road and expand the interchange at IL 126 to improve access to I-55 in northwest Will County. Weber Road was identified in the Will County freight mobility plan as a significant truck bottleneck location, and new interchange access at Airport/Lockport Road will improve connections to industrial and logistics activity in the corridor.

I-90/I-94 reconstruction (Hubbard Street to 31st Street)

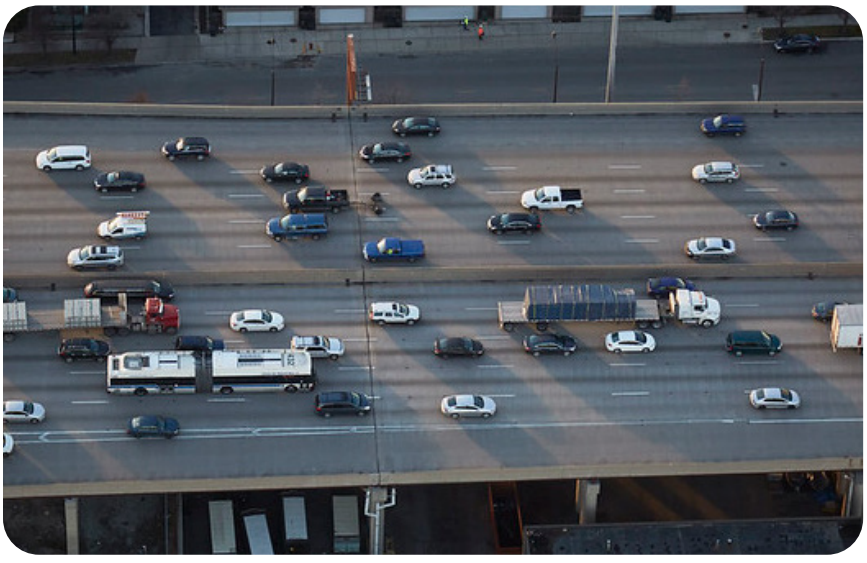
The **I-90/I-94 Kennedy and Dan Ryan Expressway reconstruction** addresses significant structural and operational deficiencies along a four-mile stretch on both sides of the Jane Byrne Interchange. The proposed reconstruction project preserves critical infrastructure and improves safety for more than 275,000 motorists who use the expressway each day.

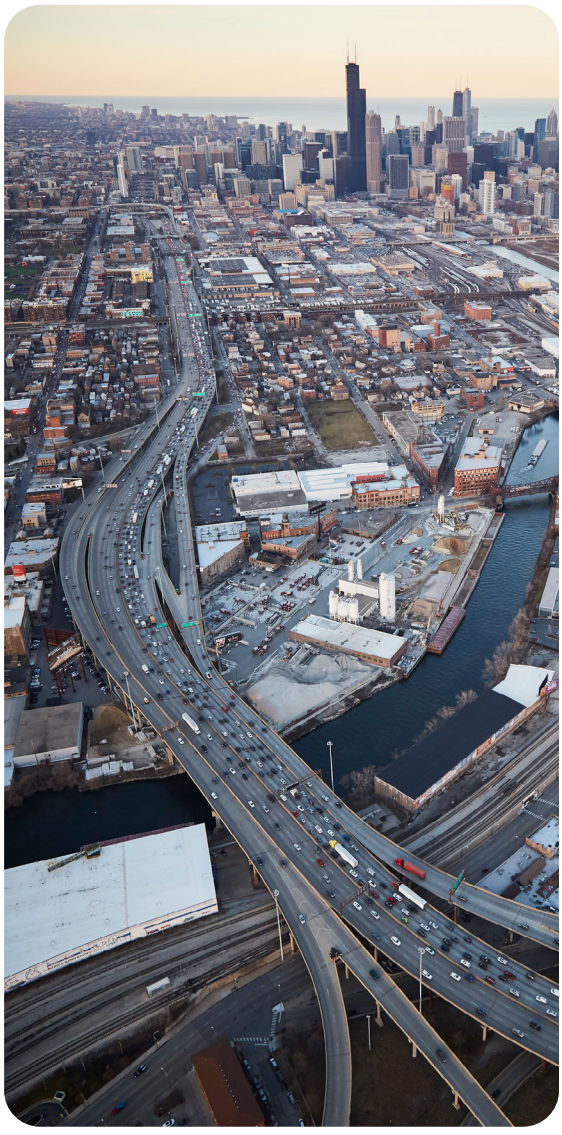
This investment builds on the success of IDOT's I-90/I-94 rehabilitation project, which revitalized the Kennedy Expressway from the Edens Expressway junction to Ohio Street. Completed in 2025, the project included rehabilitating 36 bridges and the Reversible Lane Access Control System, installing new signage and LED lights, pavement patching, and structural painting. Together, the projects ensure long-term reliability on one of the region's most heavily traveled expressway segments.



I-90/I-94 reconstruction (Hubbard street to 31st street) — RCP 11175.





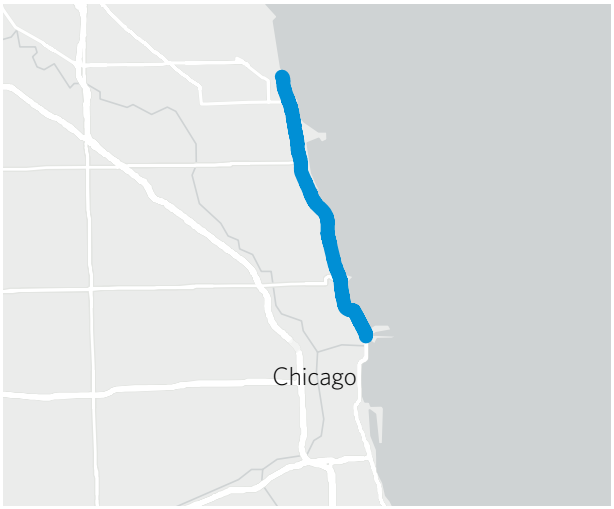


North DuSable Lake Shore Drive improvements

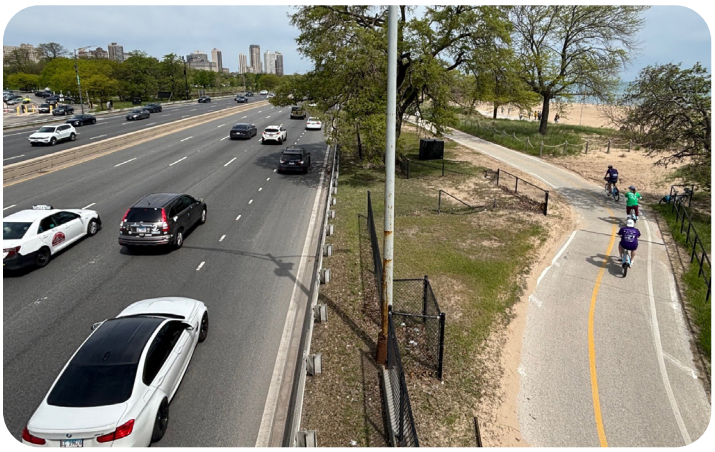
The North DuSable Lake Shore Drive (NDLSD) improvements project reconstructs and modernizes aging infrastructure between Grand Avenue at Navy Pier and Hollywood Avenue in Edgewater. The project improves safety, reliability, accessibility, and multimodal connectivity on a highly traveled corridor that has significant implications for how residents and visitors access Lake Michigan and the surrounding recreational spaces.

Originally constructed in the 1930s through the Works Progress Administration, the NDLSD is now overdue for complete reconstruction or major rehabilitation. Increased use of both the NDLSD and the park spaces alongside it — including Lincoln Park, the Lakefront Trail, and nearby beaches — has overburdened the original design, leading to safety concerns, congestion, and constrained access to the lakefront.

REDEFINE THE DRIVE
NORTH DuSABLE LAKE SHORE DRIVE



North DuSable Lake Shore Drive improvements — RCP 12120.





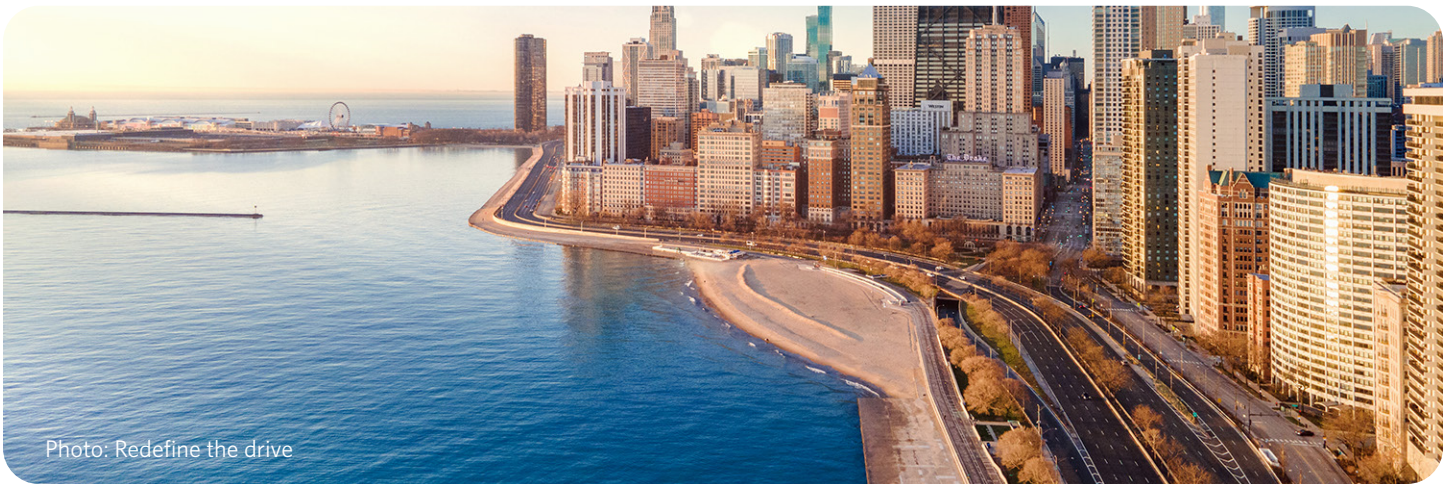


Photo: Redefine the drive

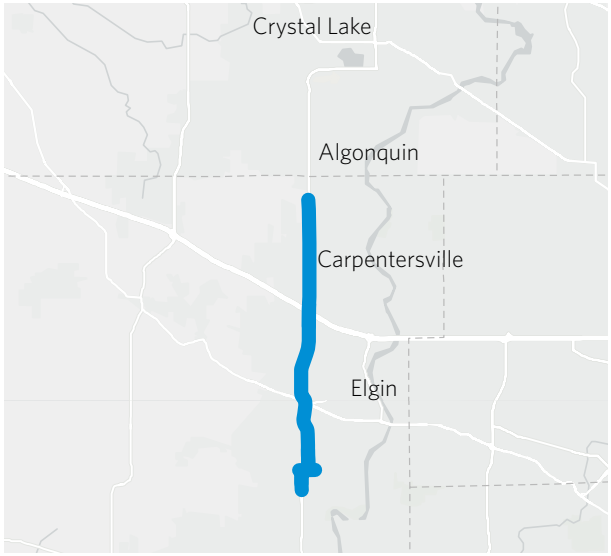
Randall Road improvements

Randall Road improvements include a coordinated set of projects along a 10-mile stretch of the corridor in Kane County. The projects address state of good repair, reliability, and traffic safety on a key north-south connection between west suburban communities.

Randall Road at I-90: The project will reconfigure the Randall Road interchange at I-90 by adding a new ramp to improve connectivity. It will also widen a half mile section of Randall Road between Point Boulevard and Alft Lane and add bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

Randall Road from north of Stearns Road to south of Longmeadow Parkway: This investment completes ongoing add-lane work along a 10-mile section of Randall Road in northeast Kane County, increasing the cross-section of this major arterial from two to three lanes in each direction to address capacity constraints.

Randall Road grade separation and intersection safety improvements at Hopps Road: The project realigns Randall Road's intersection with Hopps Road, increases the cross-section from two to three lanes in each direction, and constructs a grade separation over the Canadian National Railroad to eliminate conflicts, enhance safety, and accommodate future traffic growth. The project also incorporates drainage improvements to strengthen resilience and includes a multiuse path to close a key gap in the bicycle and pedestrian network.



Randall Road improvements — RCPs 43211, 43208, 94338.



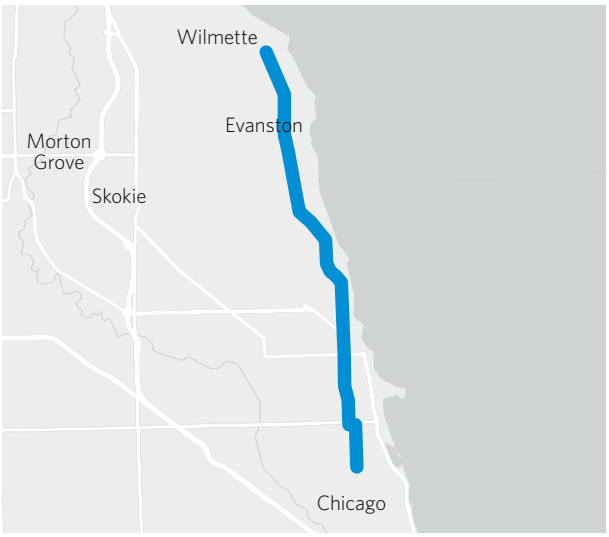
Photos: KKCOM



Red and Purple Modernization next phases

Building on the success of phase one, the next phases of the CTA's **Red and Purple Modernization (RPM)** program will replace aging infrastructure and completely rebuild the 9.6-mile Red and Purple Line corridor between Belmont and Linden, the busiest transit corridor in the Midwest. The RPM program is necessary for the CTA to increase train capacity, enhance accessibility, improve rider experience, and support local and regional growth.

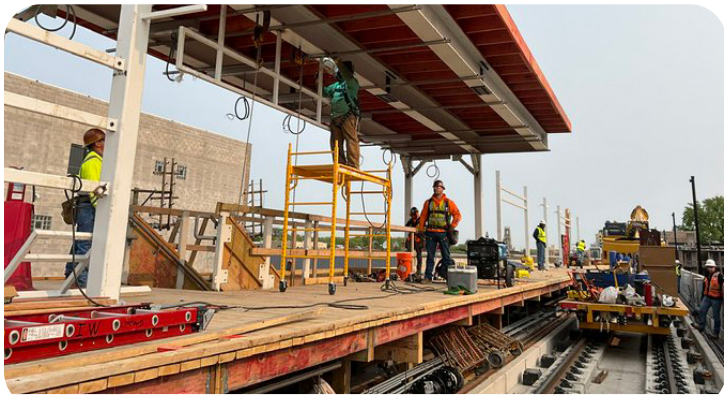
Much of the elevated structure, embankment, track, equipment, and stations on the shared Red and Purple Line corridor were originally built in the early 1900s and is at the end of its useful life. The infrastructure requires frequent maintenance and the enforcement of slow zones, which reduce the transit system's performance and require riders to navigate constrained stations with access limitations. Rebuilding stations, tracks, and infrastructure will restore the corridor to a state of good repair, increase operating speeds, improve efficiency, and expand access for people with disabilities.



Red and Purple Modernization next phases — RCP 23188.

The project will also include safety enhancements such as upgraded lighting, wider platforms and staircases, and better maintenance access. By reinvesting in this core transit infrastructure, the RPM program positions CTA to meet current and future ridership demand and ensures that the corridor can continue serving as an anchor for connectivity and economic activity for another century.

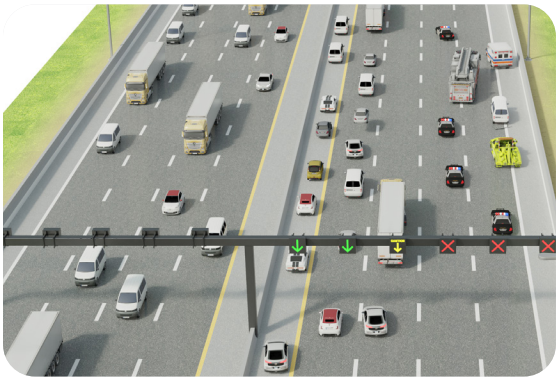




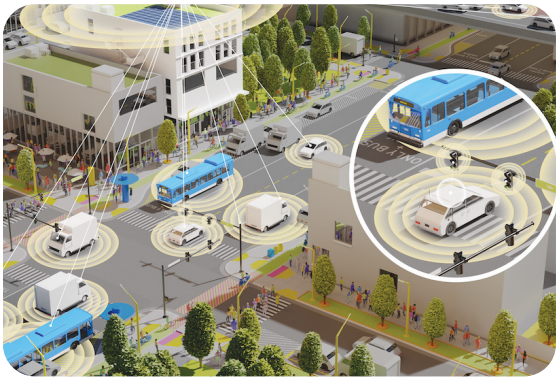

Photos: CTA

Regional intelligent transportation systems/transportation management center

Unpredictable congestion causes delays for people and goods traveling on key corridors across northeastern Illinois. This priority advances a coordinated set of system management investments that optimize traffic flow and make travel times more consistent without expanding roadway capacity:



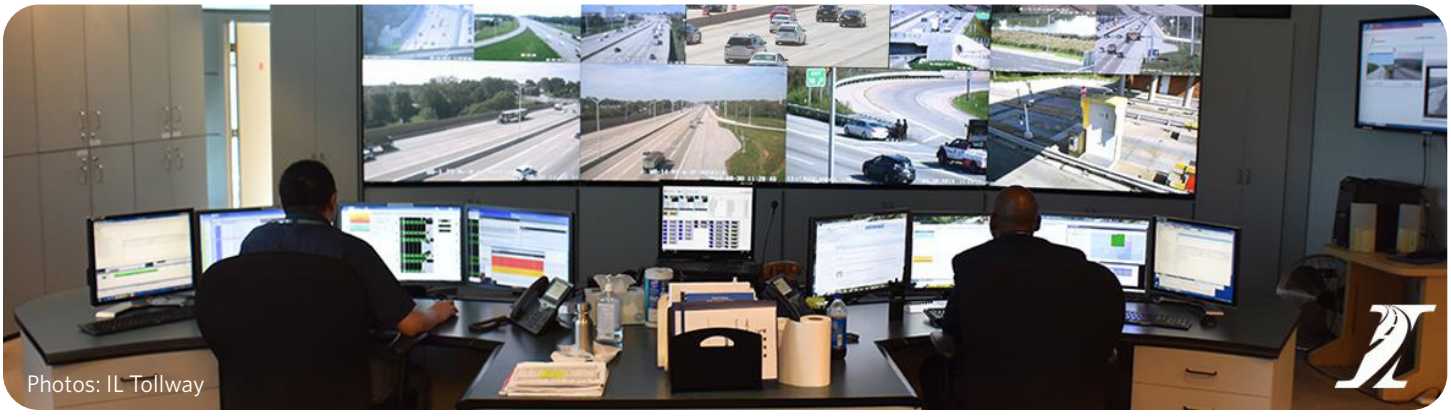
Regional traffic management center (TMC): IDOT, in partnership with county agencies, is advancing a regional TMC to serve as a centralized hub for real-time traffic monitoring and coordinated response. By integrating data and operations across jurisdictions, the TMC will help enhance traffic operations, improve incident response and clearance times, and enable more effective use of existing infrastructure.



Intelligent transportation systems (ITS): Investments in ITS — including coordinated traffic signals, digital highway signs, and automatic incident detection — provide tools to actively manage congestion and respond to roadway disruptions as they occur. These technologies offer a cost-effective strategy to improve safety, reliability, and overall system performance.







Photos: IL Tollway

Transit station accessibility

Despite recent progress, the region's public transportation infrastructure is not fully accessible to all residents. Investing in transit station accessibility means improving existing infrastructure and adding critical accessibility features — such as elevators, ramps, and visual and auditory wayfinding communications — so that transit is a strong travel option for people of all abilities. Expanding accessibility strengthens network connectivity, broadens access to jobs and services, increases ridership potential, and improves overall system performance.

This priority supports the continued implementation of rail station accessibility initiatives at the CTA and Metra:



The CTA's **All Stations Accessibility Plan** establishes a long-term road map to achieve 100 percent station accessibility by 2038. In addition to delivering step-free access, the program includes the rehabilitation or replacement of all 160-plus existing station elevators, as well as enhancements to rail system signage.



Metra's strategic plan, **My Metra, Our Future**, identifies system accessibility as a top priority. The plan outlines the agency's goals for station modernization. Metra is currently drafting a more detailed "Access for All" framework to describe how Metra will meet its accessibility needs at stations, including upgrading stations and funding the necessary improvements.



Photo: CTA


Photo: Metra



Photo: CTA

Transportation decarbonization

The transportation sector is a leading contributor of greenhouse gas emissions in northeastern Illinois, making transportation decarbonization essential to the region's emission reduction goals.[65] This priority includes investments that reduce emissions, expand electric vehicle charging, modernize transit fleets, and support the transition to cleaner technologies. Each relying on expanded charging infrastructure, these efforts improve air quality, strengthen energy resilience, and position the region to lead in the transition to zero-emission technologies.

The region's transportation agencies are already advancing key decarbonization initiatives:

- **IDOT's National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Program** deploys funding to build a comprehensive public charging network that is convenient, accessible, reliable, and equitable, supporting electric vehicle adoption across Illinois

- The **CTA's Charging Forward Plan** and **Pace's Zero-Emission Bus Transition Plan** detail how each agency will transition to a fully electrified bus fleet by 2040, reducing emissions while improving rider experience

- **Metra's Next-Gen Regional Rail Fleet Initiative** includes several low- or no- emission locomotives, including acquiring first-in-the-nation Battery-Electric Multi-Unit trainsets, zero-emission alternative fuel locomotives and switcher locomotives, and cleaner remanufactured locomotives.

Achieving the region's decarbonization goals will require multiple pathways. Where electrification is operationally feasible, it remains the preferred long-term direction. Where it is not — due to shared infrastructure, freight agreements, network configuration, or capital funding availability — investment in modern, lower-emission rolling stock still deliver meaningful emissions reductions, air quality improvements, and reliability gains that advance the same goals. Reducing vehicle miles traveled through expanded transit access and non-motorized travel options is another essential pathway, complementing vehicle-level improvements by reducing the total number of trips made by car. Recognizing that transit represents a small proportion of transportation emissions, agencies will continue to prioritize high-quality, frequent service while advancing fleet electrification as funding and technology improve.

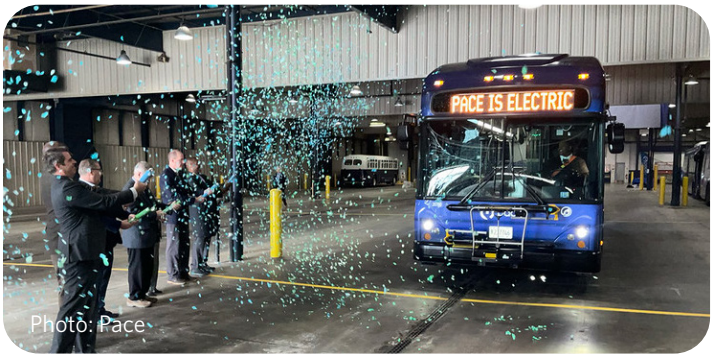


Photo: Pace



Photo: Pace

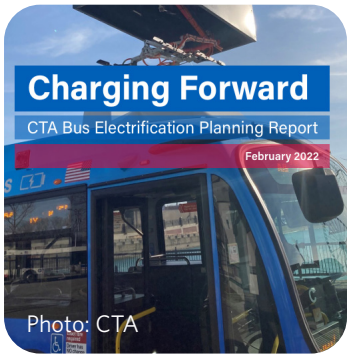


Photo: CTA



Photo: Pace


Photo: Metra

US 45 – Rollins Road to IL 120

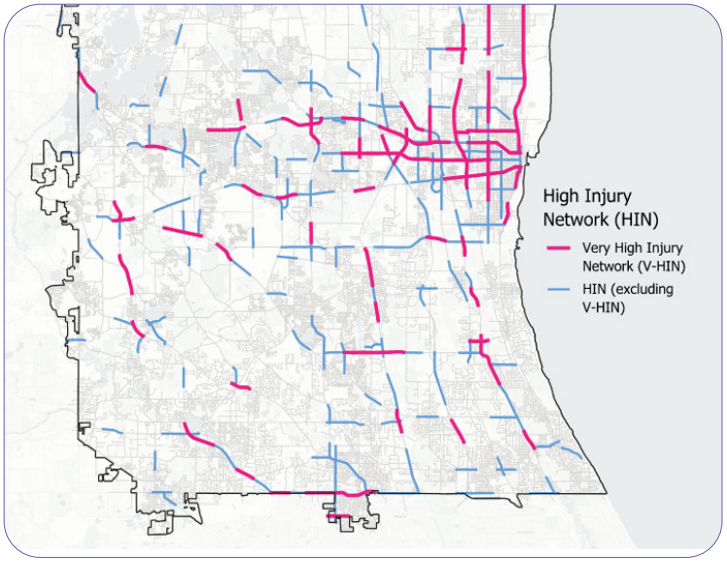
Proposed improvements on **US 45 (Lake Avenue) from Rollins Road to IL 120** address traffic safety and reliability issues on a key corridor in central Lake County. The project would widen a 1.6-mile segment of US 45 from one lane to two lanes in each direction, increasing capacity and improving traffic flow on this major arterial. With this segment having been identified as a High and Very High Injury Network in Lake County's Safety Action Plan, the project will also include intersection improvements at Rollins Road and IL 132.

This investment will help alleviate longstanding north-south mobility challenges in Lake County and address a bottleneck on a route with significant truck traffic. Improvements will enhance key routes between the Villages of Gurnee and Grayslake, improving access to commercial, educational, and recreational destinations. By enhancing operational efficiency and corridor capacity, the project improves regional connectivity, reduces recurring delays, and delivers more reliable travel times for all users.



US 45 from Rollins Road to IL 120 — RCP 13135.







Regional capital projects

Priority investments do not represent the entire universe of important transportation projects. The RCP process surfaces a broader set of investments that meet specific eligibility criteria to receive federal funding and obtain certain federal approvals.

Regional capital projects are classified into two distinct categories:

Fiscally constrained projects: eligible for federal funds
Fiscally constrained projects include the priority investments as well as a larger set of projects that are strong candidates for investment based on performance across evaluation criteria, estimated cost, and alignment with current regional priorities. Committed projects — those already fully funded — are automatically constrained because their full costs have already been covered by existing funding sources.

Fiscally unconstrained projects: not eligible for federal funds
Projects that are unconstrained either require further study or cannot currently be completed within the limits of the region's forecasted revenues. Visionary or illustrative projects are automatically unconstrained because they are in an early, exploratory stage and require further detail before they can be included in the regional planning process.

The region's fiscally constrained projects are diverse across geography, mode, and project type. The total cost of completing 101 constrained projects is an estimated $65.8 billion in 2025 dollars. Of these costs, 55 percent are for maintaining and modernizing the existing transportation system, reflecting the substantial state of good repair needs across the region's transit and roadway networks.

More information about the regional capital projects process can be found in the **RCP Benefits Report**. A full list of constrained and unconstrained projects can be found in the **Financial Plan for Transportation**.

Looking ahead

Priority investments and fiscally constrained projects should be understood as strategic commitments, not guarantees. A project's inclusion as a fiscally constrained RCP reflects regional judgment that it is a strong candidate for funding at a particular point in time. However, it does not guarantee funding or project delivery. Given funding constraints, it is imperative that the region evaluate new projects as they are proposed and revisit the list of constrained RCPs. Doing so ensures that investment decisions continue to demonstrate value as conditions, funding availability, and regional needs evolve.

The region has a strong track record of translating RTP goals into tangible investments across northeastern Illinois. Projects identified in previous plans have progressed from planning to implementation in communities throughout the region, demonstrating how long-term priorities shape funding decisions over time. Since 2010, more than $6.1 billion has been invested in completed RCPs, with an additional $14.4 billion underway to be completed by 2030, supporting safer streets, more reliable transit service, and improved access to economic opportunity.

This track record reinforces the RTP's role as a framework for long-term regional decision-making, rather than a static list of projects. While individual projects may evolve as they move through design, engineering, and funding processes, the plan provides a consistent structure for continuously evaluating priorities and aligning investments with regional goals. As a result, the RTP serves as a living, performance-driven guide for directing limited resources toward the investments that best serve northeastern Illinois. The performance framework evaluates not only the near-term benefits of each investment but also its long-term contribution to the region's fiscal outlook.



Conclusion

The work begins here

A plan is a promise. The 2026 Regional Transportation Plan commits northeastern Illinois to a clear direction: protect what works, repair what is failing, and unlock the untapped potential of a system that, when it operates as designed, is second to none. But a plan is only a promise, and a promise requires follow-through.

The conductors threading freight trains through the region's rail yards experience the transportation system that this plan is about — not as a document, but as a dynamic network with real challenges. The early-shift worker taking transit to work three transfers away feels the gaps this plan is trying to close. The bridge carrying 50,000 vehicles a day is not made safer by the words on these pages. What does make a difference — what determines whether northeastern Illinois is better positioned in 2050 than it is today — is the concrete action that occurs after the plan is adopted.

That work is long, nonlinear, and requires sustained participation from residents, local governments, transportation agencies, and elected officials at every level. Stakeholder participation in planning and programming is critical to informed decision-making. Yet the process itself can appear complex and confusing. The plan therefore ends with a guide to that participation: when decisions are made, how the public can influence them, and why engagement at every stage of the process matters.

How transportation projects are built

The 2026 RTP is the first step in a multistage process that turns regional goals into physical realities. Understanding where this plan fits within that process — and where other decisions are made — is essential for anyone who wants to shape the transportation system we leave to the next generation.

Step 1
Long-range planning (you are here)

The RTP establishes the region's goals, identifies challenges and opportunities, and sets priorities for investment over a 20-year horizon. Federal law requires CMAP to update the RTP at least every four years. At this stage, the region decides what it values, where it wants to go, and what kinds of investments it is willing to make. Regional priorities identified here shape every decision that follows.

Step 2
Short-range programming

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is the RTP's near-term counterpart. Where the RTP identifies long-horizon priorities, the TIP commits federal funding to specific projects within a four-year window. Projects must be consistent with the RTP to receive federal transportation funds, meaning that what the region decides now, in this plan, determines what is eligible for funding in the years ahead. CMAP updates the TIP regularly, sometimes as often as eight times a year, and each amendment is an opportunity for public input at either CMAP's Transportation Committee or MPO Policy Committee. Depending how far a project is in its planning process, the TIP describes an increasing amount of detail.

Step 3
Project-level planning and environmental review

Before a major transportation project can be built, it must first be studied. Project sponsors conduct corridor studies, alternatives analyses, and environmental reviews to assess impacts and identify the preferred approach. For federally funded projects, this process is governed by the National Environmental Policy Act and produces either an Environmental Impact Statement or an Environmental Assessment. These studies must include public involvement, and their formal comment periods are among the most consequential opportunities for community members to shape specific projects.

Step 4
Design and right-of-way

Once a project clears environmental review, it moves into engineering and design, which establishes exact alignments, station locations, land configurations, bicycle infrastructure, stormwater features, and access points.

Step 5
Construction

Construction is the most visible stage, but by the time equipment arrives on-site, most of the major decisions have already been made.

Step 6
Operations, maintenance, and performance monitoring

The transportation investment cycle does not end when construction is complete. Infrastructure must be operated, maintained, and periodically reconstructed — the same cycle of investment previous generations carried out and the current generation must sustain. CMAP monitors the regional transportation system's performance and reports on progress toward the targets established in this plan. That performance data shapes future RTP updates, TIP decisions, and funding priorities. The cycle is continuous.

How to stay engaged



Connect with CMAP directly
CMAP holds public meetings on the RTP, the TIP, and major planning studies. Governing body meetings — including the Transportation Committee, the MPO Policy Committee, and the CMAP Board — are open to the public. Sign up for updates, review proposed TIP amendments, and submit public comments at cmap.illinois.gov.



Explore the CMAP Data Hub
The Data Hub provides public access to the transportation performance metrics, socioeconomic trends, and project information that inform the decisions in this plan. Use it to track progress, identify gaps, and make the case for investment in specific communities or corridors. Visit datahub.cmap.illinois.gov.



Participate in project-level processes
When a corridor study, environmental review, or design process opens in your community or along a corridor you use, continue to advocate for the regional transportation goals highlighted in this plan. The region's goals are only as strong as the projects that carry them forward.



Engage your local government
Decisions about zoning, local road maintenance, sidewalk construction, and transit-supportive development are often made at the municipal level. Local comprehensive plans and capital improvement programs compound over time into the regional system this plan seeks to improve.



Hold the region accountable
CMAP regularly publishes updates on the state of the region's transportation system. When the region makes progress, celebrate it. When safety trends move in the wrong direction, when transit assets age without reinvestment, or when access gaps persist, that information belongs in public debate.

Two sides of the ledger

The challenges documented in this plan are real and require substantial resources. New revenue is not optional — it is a prerequisite for making the region's vision a reality. The tools are within reach. Expanding tolling on facilities that currently have none, shifting from a motor fuel tax toward a road usage charge, establishing a dedicated regional revenue source, and modernizing the sales tax to reflect how today's economy generates wealth — these are the specific mechanisms this plan identifies, and the region should pursue them with urgency.

But revenue is only one side of the ledger.

Think of the regional transportation system as a ledger with two columns. On one side are the revenues — the tolls, fees, taxes, and other funding sources the region raises to build and maintain its transportation system. On the other side is the obligation to maintain every mile of that system, indefinitely, at whatever cost the market requires. For decades, northeastern Illinois has added new roads, extensions, and facilities to the ledger, and the obligations they carry have grown faster than revenue can keep pace with. The result is the deferred maintenance backlog that this plan documents.

More revenue will help close that gap. But if the region takes on obligations faster than revenues can offset, the gap will persist regardless of what new funding sources are secured. That is the case when new development occurs in places where the long-term cost of extending and maintaining transportation infrastructure exceeds the economic activity it generates. The challenge is not only revenue levels, but the commitments the region makes — what it builds, where it builds, and how it structures long term stewardship.

New revenues are necessary, but they are not a substitute for more coordinated decision-making. Every dollar raised from users and taxpayers carries a responsibility that the agencies and governments entrusted with those resources direct them as effectively as possible. That means making investment decisions that reflect long-term stewardship rather than short-term convenience, coordinating across jurisdictions to avoid duplication and inefficiency, and making the difficult tradeoffs that performance-based planning requires. The region cannot ask more of its taxpayers and users without also asking more of its transportation agencies and local governments — more transparency, more coordination, and more accountability for how public resources are used.

These are not easy conversations. They involve multiple levels of government, hundreds of municipalities, and deeply rooted patterns of development and investment. But they are the conversations this region must have — because the alternative is a ledger that grows harder to manage with every deferred decision.

This generation's choice

The introduction to this plan opened with a scene that repeats itself every morning: freight trains sorting cargo, trucks keeping supply chains moving, and early-shift workers making their way to platforms and bus stops. That system did not build itself. It was built — project by project, generation by generation — by people who decided that the region's future was worth investing in.

The question this plan poses is whether we will make the same choice.

Northeastern Illinois has the infrastructure, the talent, and the institutional capacity to be the thriving transportation hub that its residents deserve — one that is safe, reliable, accessible, and built to last. Getting there requires more than a plan. It requires sustained engagement from residents who know their communities, advocates who press for accountability, local leaders who align their decisions with regional goals, and transportation agencies that earn public trust through impactful investments.

The 2026 RTP is one step. The next step belongs to all of us.



Glossary

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
Federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination based on disability and requires accessible public facilities, services, and transportation.

ADA transition plan
A plan that identifies barriers to accessibility in public infrastructure and outlines how and when they will be removed.

Air quality conformity
A federal requirement ensuring that transportation plans and programs do not worsen air quality or delay attainment of national air quality standards.

Amtrak
The federally supported national passenger rail service that connects Chicago and northeastern Illinois to destinations across the U.S. Amtrak services are centered at its hub in Chicago's Union Station, serving additional stations throughout the region.

Arterial road
A major roadway intended to carry high volumes of traffic over relatively long distances, often connecting communities, employment centers, and expressways.

Asset lifecycle management
A planning approach that manages infrastructure from construction through maintenance, rehabilitation, replacement, and eventual retirement to maximize performance and value over time.

Bus rapid transit
A bus-based transit service designed to operate more quickly and reliably than standard bus service, often using features such as dedicated lanes, transit signal priority, and enhanced stations.

Capital program
A funding program or package used to support long-term investments in transportation infrastructure, such as reconstruction, modernization, or expansion projects.

The Century Plan
The long-term regional vision for northeastern Illinois that will guide future planning efforts.

Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)
The federally designated metropolitan planning organization and the state-designated regional planning agency for northeastern Illinois.

Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program
A public-private partnership that advances rail and roadway projects to improve the efficiency, safety, and reliability of the Chicago region's freight and passenger rail network.

Chicago Transit Authority (CTA)
Operates one of the nation's largest public transportation systems, covering the City of Chicago and 35 surrounding suburbs. CTA service is provided by bus (127 routes) and rail (8 lines).

Complete Streets
A transportation approach that plans, designs, and operates streets to safely serve all users, including people walking, biking, taking transit, and driving.

Congestion pricing
A strategy that charges drivers a fee to use a roadway during peak travel periods to reduce congestion and improve travel time reliability.

Corridor planning
A coordinated planning process focused on improving transportation performance, safety, and access along a specific roadway, transit line, or travel corridor.

Decarbonization
The process of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, particularly from transportation and other major sectors.

Deferred maintenance
Needed maintenance or repair work that has been postponed, often resulting in worsening asset conditions and higher long-term costs.

Demand management
Strategies intended to reduce or shift travel demand, especially during peak periods, by encouraging changes in travel time, route, destination, or mode.

Dial-a-Ride
A demand-response transit service that provides flexible routing and scheduling, typically serving older adults and people with disabilities.

Electric vehicle (EV)
A vehicle powered fully or partially by electricity rather than gasoline or diesel.

Environmental Assessment
A federal environmental review document prepared under the National Environmental Policy Act to determine whether a project is likely to have significant environmental impacts.

Environmental Impact Statement
A detailed federal environmental review document prepared under the National Environmental Policy Act for projects expected to have significant environmental impacts.

Fine particulate matter
Very small air pollution particles that can enter the lungs and bloodstream and harm human health.

First- and last-mile
The first and final segments of a trip that connect a traveler to or from a main transportation service, such as transit.

Fiscal constraint
A federal requirement that long-range transportation plans and programs demonstrate that sufficient funding is reasonably expected to be available to implement proposed projects.

Grade separation
An infrastructure improvement that separates different travel movements, like a road and rail traffic, at different elevations to improve safety and reduce delay.

Greenhouse gas (GHG)
A gas, such as carbon dioxide or methane, that traps heat in the atmosphere and can impact the climate.

High-frequency transit
Transit service that operates often enough to minimize wait times and provide convenient, reliable travel.

Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT)
The agency that plans, constructs, operates, and maintains Illinois' extensive transportation network, including highways, bridges, airports, public transit, and rail.

Infill development
Development on vacant, abandoned, or underused land within already developed areas, often where infrastructure already exists.

Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)
The federal infrastructure law enacted in 2021 that provides funding for roads, bridges, transit, rail, and other infrastructure programs.

Intelligent transportation systems (ITS)
Technology-based tools used to improve transportation operations, such as coordinated traffic signals and real-time traffic monitoring systems.

Intercity bus
Bus service that connects cities or metropolitan areas and provides longer-distance travel beyond local transit service

Intermodal
Relating to the movement of people or goods using more than one transportation mode.

Local cluster
Industries that primarily serve local markets, such as retail or personal services, and support day-to-day economic activity within region.

Metra
The primary commuter rail system in northeast Illinois, connecting Downtown Chicago to the surrounding six-county region with 11 lines and 243 stations.

Metropolitan planning organization (MPO)
The federally required regional body responsible for transportation planning and programming in urbanized areas.

Micromobility
Small-scale transportation options, such as bicycles and scooters, used for short trips and connections to other modes.

Motor fuel tax (MFT)
A tax on gasoline and diesel fuel that helps fund transportation infrastructure.

Multimodal
Involving multiple forms of transportation, such as walking, biking, transit, driving, freight, and aviation.

National Environmental Policy Act
The federal law requiring environmental review and public involvement for certain transportation and infrastructure projects.

National Highway System (NHS)
A federally designated network of major roads important to the nation's economy, defense, and mobility.

Nitrogen oxides
Air pollutants produced largely by combustion engines that contribute to smog, poor air quality, and respiratory health problems.

Nonattainment
A designation for an area that does not meet federal air quality standards for a particular pollutant.

Northern Illinois Transit Authority (NITA)
The regional transit oversight agency established by state law to replace the Regional Transportation Authority and coordinate transit planning, funding, and performance.

ON TO 2050
The current comprehensive regional plan, which continues to provide a policy foundation for the 2026 Regional Transportation Plan.

Pace Bus
The premier suburban transit provider, safely and efficiently moving people to via 134 fixed routes to work, school, and other regional destinations. Pace also provides paratransit, vanpools, and on-demand services for northeastern Illinois.

Priority investment
A project or program identified in the Regional Transportation Plan as especially important for advancing regional goals and delivering broad public benefit.

Regional capital project (RCP)
A transportation project evaluated through a regional process for its benefits, eligibility, and consistency with regional goals and fiscal constraints.

Regional rail
A service model that provides more frequent, all-day rail service across a metropolitan region and supports a wider range of trip types than traditional commuter rail.

Resilience
The ability of transportation infrastructure and systems to withstand, adapt to, and recover from disruptions such as flooding, extreme heat, or other stresses.

Road diet
A roadway reconfiguration that reduces the number or width of travel lanes to improve safety, support multimodal use, and calm traffic.

Road usage charge (RUC)
A transportation funding mechanism that charges motorists based on the number of miles they drive rather than fuel consumption.

Regional Transportation Authority
The former regional transit oversight agency for northeastern Illinois, replaced by NITA. It was the unit of local government created to oversee finances, secure funding, and to conduct transit planning regionwide in close coordination with the CTA, Pace, and Metra.

Regional transportation plan
A federally mandated, long-term, multimodal blueprint guiding transportation investment and policy across northeastern Illinois. Updated every four years as a core component of the state-mandated regional comprehensive plan, it directs funding for highways, transit, and other transportation infrastructure over a 20- to 30-year horizon.

Safe System Approach (SSA)
A framework for traffic safety that acknowledges human mistakes and vulnerability and emphasizes shared responsibility and layered protections to prevent fatal and serious injuries.

Slow zone
A section of rail infrastructure where trains must operate at reduced speeds due to asset condition or safety concerns.

State of good repair
A condition in which transportation infrastructure is functioning as intended and does not require significant backlog repair or replacement.

Stormwater runoff
Rainwater or melted snow that flows over hard surfaces instead of soaking into the ground, often carrying pollutants and contributing to flooding.

Tolling
Charging users a fee to travel on a roadway or facility, often as a source of transportation revenue.

Traded cluster
Industries that export goods or services beyond the region, contributing to economic growth and competitiveness.

Transit-oriented development
Development located near transit that supports walking, transit use, and a mix of housing, jobs, and services.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)
The short-range program that identifies federally funded transportation projects expected to be implemented over a four-year period.

Travel time reliability
A measure of how consistent travel times is from trip to trip, especially compared to worst-case delays.

Useful life
The expected service life of a transportation asset before major rehabilitation or replacement is needed.

Vehicle miles traveled (VMT)
The total miles driven by vehicles within a given area and time period.

Appendices

A. Administrative Policies and Procedures

B. Air Quality Conformity Documentation

C. Financial Plan for Transportation

D. Public and Stakeholder Engagement

E. Regional Capital Projects Benefits Report

F. Socioeconomic Forecast

G. System Performance Report

H. Transportation System Inventory

I. Travel Demand Model Documentation

Endnotes

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La Agencia de Planificación Metropolitana de Chicago (CMAP) es la organización de planificación integral del noreste de Illinois. La agencia y sus socios desarrollaron ON TO 2050, un plan a largo plazo destinado a ayudar a los 7 condados y 284 comunidades de la región a implementar estrategias que aborden el transporte, la vivienda, el desarrollo económico, los espacios abiertos, el medio ambiente y otros aspectos relacionados con la calidad de vida. Visite el sitio web de CMAP para obtener más información.



RTP 2026 Regional Transportation Plan

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