



MEMORANDUM

To: CMAP Transportation, Regional Economy, and Climate Committees

From: CMAP Staff

Date: November 9, 2022

Subject: Conclusion of Mobility Recovery and plans for upcoming transit system report

Purpose: Presentation on the agency's Mobility Recovery initiative, including a preview of the project's final recommendations and a review of CMAP's ongoing work to prepare for the development of the transit system report required by the Illinois General Assembly. The presentation will include an overview of potential opportunities for members of CMAP's working committees to engage in the report development process.

Action Requested: Discussion

In mid-2020, at the request of the region's seven County Board Chairs and the City of Chicago's COVID-19 Recovery Task Force, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) initiated a project to plan for the durable, medium- to long-term transportation challenges prompted or worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Through this project, referred to as the Mobility Recovery initiative, CMAP and stakeholders have worked together to understand these challenges and develop strategies for the region in response.

After two years of work, the Mobility Recovery effort is approaching its conclusion. This memo provides an overview of the anticipated final project recommendations, which include strategies to invest in a stronger and more financially secure transit system, to encourage safe and active travel, and to balance the impacts and benefits of increased freight and e-commerce activity.

CMAP is now planning for its upcoming work to advance these recommendations. As required by [Public Act 102-1028](#), CMAP is preparing to develop and submit a report of recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly of the State of Illinois on several topics related to the transit system of northeastern Illinois. This work will leverage the recommendations of the Mobility Recovery initiative, as well as other relevant efforts such as the RTA's strategic plan. The scope, timeline, and approach are outlined below.

Mobility Recovery initiative

Project background

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly reshaped the ways people and communities travel in the region, creating durable shifts in the number of people using the transportation system, as well as when and where they take their trips.

Travel patterns changed nearly overnight in March 2020, as residents adjusted to restrictions, closures, remote work, and online learning. In the pandemic's early months, compared to pre-COVID levels, car travel fell by nearly 50 percent, congestion by 40 percent or more, and regional transit ridership by as much as 80 percent, resulting in higher travel speeds and more traffic deaths on our roads.

Over the last two years of the region's recovery, much of that travel has resumed. However, the transportation system will need to accommodate new and different demands moving forward. For example, transit ridership remains well below 2019 levels, in part because more regional workers will continue to work remotely, at least part of the time, compared to pre-pandemic levels. But the transit system remains critical to the region's broader success. Residents, visitors, and regional businesses rely on the mobility and accessibility the system enables – for trips to work, to school, to healthcare, and so much more. Without sufficient fare revenue, transit services oriented around peak commute times need funding alternatives that ensure frequency, reliability, speed, and safety for all riders. To ensure the transportation system continues to provide access to opportunities throughout the region, officials must plan for a system that is operationally and financially resilient to these shifting demands.

While transit ridership has continued to regrow, trips by personal vehicles have already returned to near or above pre-pandemic levels. But many of those trips are now happening at different times, with fewer trips during the traditional “rush hour” and more spread out throughout the day. They are also happening in new places, with more trips based around the home and fewer around a place of work – leading to new demands for travel, including on active and sustainable modes, in communities throughout the region. And for some types of vehicles, like trucks, vehicle volumes quickly [exceeded](#) pre-COVID levels early in the pandemic, reflecting the significant increase in freight activities like e-commerce. While there are economic benefits to this activity, and to the region's broader role as the freight hub of North America, it comes with tradeoffs including increased emissions and impacts to air quality.

Based on these factors, CMAP embarked on developing a plan using research and data analysis along with stakeholder input to develop recommended strategies that address these transportation challenges.

Project approach

Over the last two years, staff and consultants have worked to develop a plan for the region to overcome the mobility challenges posed or exacerbated by the pandemic. This work included:

- Extensive stakeholder engagement through a steering committee and engaging the Transportation Equity Network (TEN)
- Policy research on relevant efforts in U.S. and global peer regions

- Travel modeling and assessment of shifts in transportation, travel patterns, housing, employment, and hybrid and remote work, including implications for congestion, emissions, and transportation system finances
- Development of recommendations for how the region should act in response to these shifts

Stakeholder Engagement

To guide the project, CMAP convened a steering committee of regional stakeholders from more than 30 organizations representing transportation agencies, the region's transit service providers, the CMAP Board, counties, municipalities, civic groups, and advocacy organizations. The steering committee provided insights into the region's needs, reacted to technical research, and offered guidance on implementation and solutions toward recovery from the pandemic. In addition to regular meetings, staff also met with steering committee members in one-on-one or small group discussions regularly over the project to gather additional feedback.

Six steering committee meetings

2021: February, March, November

2022: February, July, October

CMAP also recognized the importance of engaging directly with representatives of community groups in this work. To gather this feedback and input, staff also regularly met with members of the [Transportation Equity Network \(TEN\)](#). TEN members participated in five focus group events to help the CMAP and consultant team prepare for steering committee events and two large group workshops in April and August of 2022. Members shared firsthand accounts of how the pandemic had influenced their communities, articulated their expectations for change, and provided feedback on potential recovery policy and project recommendations. They also reiterated a consistent message that returning to the status quo would not be sufficient.

What is TEN?

A coalition of community groups, equitable transportation advocates, civic organizations, and other stakeholders whose mission is to work with decision makers to embed racial equity and mobility justice into transportation through community-driven decisions and investments.

Report recommendations

This memo summarizes the report's recommendations and supporting strategies (which fall into three broad categories). The final report will be published this fall and include additional details, context and visualizations presenting the rationale for their implementation.

Category	Recommendations
Invest in a stronger and more financially secure transit system	<i>Enable faster and more reliable bus service</i> Accelerate the installation of bus priority infrastructure; enable automated camera enforcement for bus lanes; support bus priority projects through increased staffing capacity <i>Develop a more integrated and affordable transportation system</i> Integrate regional fare and transfer structures; improve integration between transit and complementary modes; fund and implement subsidized fares for travelers with limited incomes <i>Identify and enacting new revenues for transit</i> Support public transit with new or additional revenues from the road system; consider broadening the state sales tax base; pursue additional reforms to increase public transit funding at the state level; reform the farebox recovery ratio requirement
Enable expanded travel by safe and active modes	<i>Invest in infrastructure that increases the safety and attractiveness of active and sustainable modes</i> Promote the adoption of complete and safe streets; enable local camera enforcement for speeding and bike lane obstruction; build continuous networks of bike lanes, sidewalks, and paths <i>Update development regulations and land use to reflect changing travel demand and make active and sustainable modes realistic choices</i> Pursue transit-oriented redevelopments of underutilized surface parking lots; incentivize transit-supportive land use and development in proximity to existing transit nodes
Balance the benefits and impacts of e-commerce and other freight activity	<i>Accelerate the electrification of freight systems</i> Facilitate the electrification of freight vehicles in vulnerable communities; advance state regulations to accelerate electrification at a regional scale <i>Work with employers to increase options for employee commutes</i> Promote transportation demand management (TDM) strategies and other investments that connect regional residents to warehousing, TDL, and other hard-to-access job opportunities; develop more comprehensive state and local requirements or incentives that promote access to regional opportunities

Next steps

CMAQ is now planning for subsequent work to advance the recommendations outlined above, both through its own activities and collaboration with regional implementers.

Staff anticipate that the bulk of the agency's efforts on these topics in FY23 will be to implement the recommendations that relate to region's transit system, specifically through the

development of the transit system report required by the Illinois General Assembly. This focus is reflective of the importance of the regional transit system to all of CMAP's goals, as well as the magnitude of the challenge facing the system. As that work proceeds, CMAP will continue to identify opportunities to advance all the recommendations outlined above, including through its funding programs, regional coordination, and preparation for the next regional planning process.

Transit system report

Project background

As required by [Public Act 102-1028](#), CMAP is now preparing to develop and submit a report of recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly of the State of Illinois on several topics related to the transit system of northeastern Illinois. The Act requires that the report will address changes to the recovery ratio, sales tax formula and distributions, governance structures, regional fare systems, and any other changes to State statute, Authority, or Service Board enabling legislation, policy, rules, or funding that will ensure the long-term financial viability of a comprehensive and coordinated regional public transportation system that moves people safely, securely, cleanly, and efficiently, and that supports and fosters efficient land use.

The report must also consider recommendations related to racial equity, climate change, and economic development, as well as the RTA's own strategic planning work. In addition, the Act requires that the report development include meaningful public engagement and the support of a steering committee composed of "representatives of business, community, environmental, labor, and civic organizations." Finally, the report must be approved by CMAP's Board and MPO Policy Committee prior to submission to the Governor and General Assembly on or before January 1, 2024.

In developing the report, staff and steering committee members will draw from the extensive body of work conducted on these topics in recent years, including the Mobility Recovery effort outlined above. Other inputs will include but will not be limited to:

- Invest in Transit and the RTA's ongoing strategic planning efforts
- COVID response efforts underway at CTA, Metra, and Pace
- Relevant prior CMAP work, such as Equity in Transportation Fees, Fines, and Fares
- Recommendations and principles from ON TO 2050

Project approach

CMAP is actively putting together an approach and team that can deliver the information requested on the timeline required by the State. CMAP will manage the overall project, coordinating as needed between consultants, staff, and stakeholders.

The development of the report will be guided by a steering committee, members of which will also serve on one of three topical working groups. More details on the content to be addressed by each of the three working groups is available in the "Anticipated deliverables" section below. CMAP staff are currently reaching out to potential steering committee members to round out membership within the three topical working groups.

Steering committee members will engage with CMAP staff, consultants, public sector subject matter experts, and the results of the public engagement process as they develop project recommendations.

CMAP staff will also ensure that both steering committee members and other regional stakeholders are kept apprised of the project's overall progress. In addition to the steering committee process, this will include regular presentations to CMAP's MPO Policy Committee, Board, and working committees, as well as other venues as needed (such as the RTA Board).

Additionally, CMAP will conduct meaningful public engagement as part of the report development process. Staff anticipate that this will include engagement with the public and community organizations via a public opinion survey, the CARE program, focus groups, and/or other techniques to be determined.

Anticipated deliverables

Project deliverables will include:

1. An approved report of recommendations to be submitted to the Illinois General Assembly that provides solutions to the immediate crisis in ways that also address longstanding problems. The report will set the context of the challenges facing the system and the consequences of inaction. The report's recommendations will give special attention to areas where the state has an important role in addressing these challenges, although areas of combined state and regional action will also be included. Topics to be explored within each working group will likely include:
 - a. **Defining the system we want (WG1)**, including
 - i. How to provide seamless transfers and affordable access across modes such as changes to the fare structures and transfer discounts,
 - ii. Investing in faster, more frequent, and more reliable bus service, and
 - iii. Incentivizing transit-supportive land use in the context of existing transit nodes, in support of ongoing preliminary conversations about regional rail
 - b. **Identifying how to pay for such a system (WG2)**, including
 - i. New revenues, such as a broader state sales tax base, new revenues from the road system, state funding reforms, and/or others
 - ii. Operational savings, such as assessing the cost implications of investments identified in WG1, and
 - iii. Maximizing the value of existing resources, including strategies to rebuild ridership and its associated fare revenue and other input into future fare revenue policies
 - c. **Determining how to implement this system (WG3)**, including:
 - i. Changes to governance and funding distribution necessary to support recommendations identified in WG1 and WG2
 - ii. Any other changes necessary to implement identified solutions
2. A steering committee that is highly engaged and prepared to champion recommendations
3. An approach to advancing identified recommendations alongside regional partners, including any required legislative, communications, or coordination activities

Timeline

Activity/Milestone	Timing
Complete scoping, procurement, and project planning	July – Dec. 2022
Engage Board, MPO Policy Committee, and working committees in project planning	Oct. 2022 – Dec. 2022
Milestone: Convene steering committee	Jan. 2023
• Hold steering committee and subcommittee meetings • Provide regular updates to the Board, MPO Policy Committee, and working committees • Conduct public engagement • Develop and finalize recommendations through the steering committee process, leveraging CMAP staff and consultant support	Jan. – Sept. 2023
Milestone: Board and MPO approve report content	Oct. 2023
• Complete design of report document (if needed) • Socialize recommendations with potential champions and involved parties (e.g., members of the ILGA, state officials, regional stakeholders)	Nov. – Dec. 2023
Milestone: Finalize and submit report to legislature	On or before Jan. 1, 2024