

Draft RTP objectives and strategies



RTP

2026
**Regional
Transportation
Plan**



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Introduction

Building on the goals and objectives identified in the 2026 Regional Transportation Plan's (RTP) [*Emerging Priorities*](#) report, CMAP has prepared a draft list of strategies for inclusion in the RTP. The proposed strategies were informed by:

- **Stakeholder engagement:** Ongoing input from the CMAP Board, committees, Financial Plan and Regional Capital Projects resource groups, industry associations, community groups, advocacy organizations, and residents.
- **Policy research:** Research and analysis conducted by CMAP and consultant partners on topics such as asset management, intercity bus and rail, emerging technologies, new revenue sources, and more.
- **Recent and ongoing regional initiatives:** Work such as the Comprehensive Climate Action Plan, Transportation Resilience Improvement Plan, Plan of Action for Regional Transit, Transit is the Answer, regional freight assessment, Congestion Management Strategies Guidebook and countywide safety action plans.

CMAP is seeking feedback on the proposed RTP strategies in advance of the draft plan being released in June 2026.

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Goal: 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 approaches that account for the full lifespan of their facilities, from installation through replacement. Keeping roads, bridges, bikeways, and transit infrastructure in good working condition reduces the need for operational limitations that reduce efficiency (e.g., slow zones on rail track or load-posted bridges on roadways), as well as the risk of unexpected disruptions that create sudden and potentially severe congestion.
- **Advance comprehensive corridor planning:** Agencies and stakeholders throughout the region should work together to pursue corridor plans to manage congestion. No single agency has all the tools to manage congestion, nor does congestion stop at jurisdictional borders. Coordination across levels of government, planning disciplines, and community partners creates a strong foundation for improved congestion management, particularly for the region's most congested and unreliable corridors.
- **Implement congestion pricing and other demand management measures:** Northeastern Illinois should advance congestion pricing. By introducing a direct cost for the use of a roadway during peak periods, congestion pricing can smooth traffic flow by shifting travel to alternative times of day, alternative routes, alternative destinations, or alternative modes. Paired with strategies to promote mode shift and flexible work arrangements, congestion pricing reduces travel when and where there is high travel demand, improving the reliability of the system.
- **Deploy ITS technologies and other operational improvements:** To smooth traffic flow, transportation agencies should implement Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) strategies, including optimized signal timing, transit signal priority, and a regional traffic management center. The region should improve implementation of operational strategies, such as traffic incident management, to reduce unexpected slowdowns from crashes and other incidents and to improve safety.

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

- **Develop a more integrated regional transit system:** To achieve a fully coordinated regional transit system, agencies should collaborate on service planning and routing, improved transfers, integrated fares, and infrastructure investments. Improving regional coordination will ensure seamless travel for riders and maximize the cost-effectiveness of capital investments.

- **Implement a regional rail service model:** The region should undertake providing all-day, frequent regional rail service, taking advantage of the region’s 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.
- **Implement a regional BRT network to enable faster and more reliable bus service:** The region should make investments that prioritize transit within the roadway, including transit signal priority, queue jump lanes, improved station infrastructure, and separation from mixed traffic in some locations. Transportation partners should also advance planning, funding, increased staff capacity, and enforcement mechanisms to develop a regional BRT network. Stakeholders should strategically address dynamics that are specific to local contexts, which may include interactions with emergency vehicles, freight activity, bicyclists, pedestrians and more.
- **Improve the connectivity of sidewalks, bikeways, and related infrastructure:** To increase active transportation, agencies should invest in well-connected networks of infrastructure for biking, walking, and various forms of micromobility. While the region has made progress on providing trail connections between communities, many regional gaps remain to be filled. In addition, increased investment is needed in sidewalks, crosswalks, and local bicycle infrastructure that support everyday non-motorized travel and access to transit within communities.

Objective: Achieve universal accessibility

- **Make all transit stops, stations, and vehicles fully accessible:** The region should invest in accessibility improvements across the entire transit system to improve mobility for all, including through audio and visual announcements, Braille and large print signs, tactile strips, elevators, ramps, and platform-train gap fillers.
- **Ensure local infrastructure like sidewalks are fully accessible:** The region should invest in sidewalks that are well-connected, in good condition, and meet accessibility standards. Sidewalks should be 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.

Goal: Prioritize safety and public health

Objective: Reduce fatal and serious injury crashes across all modes through a Safe Systems approach

- **Develop a regional Safe Systems framework that fosters a culture of shared responsibility for traffic safety:** Building off the countywide safety action plans that were adopted in 2025, northeastern Illinois should develop a regional framework that incorporates local insights and priorities as well as federal guidance. In addition to adjustments to transportation policies and practices, partners should foster a culture among transportation professionals and all road users that promotes a sense of shared responsibility for safety outcomes.
- **Integrate Complete Streets principles into transportation policy, planning, and design:** Regional partners should implement a Safe Systems approach by embedding Complete Streets guidance into the planning, design, and maintenance of multimodal roads — ensuring that people who are walking, biking, using accessibility devices, and accessing transit are protected from crashes with vehicles. Advancing Complete Streets will improve safety while promoting public health through increased physical activity, reduced air pollution, and reduced traffic noise.

Objective: Manage speed to match context and reduce crash severity

- **Support setting context-appropriate speed limits:** Transportation agencies should review and assess posted speed limits to evaluate their impact on traffic safety, especially in urbanized transportation corridors where bicyclists and pedestrians are more likely to be present. Roadway context and operational features should inform posted speed limits, which should prioritize the safety of travelers.
- **Promote appropriate vehicle speeds through roadway design and speed-management tools:** Northeastern Illinois should integrate more traffic-calming measures and Complete Streets features that both encourage driving at safer speeds and reduce kinetic energy from vehicles. Deployments include raised pedestrian crossings, speed humps, curb extensions, speed feedback signs, signal timing, and more. Transportation stakeholders should assess their design standards and operating practices to ensure that speed management tools can be easily deployed when feasible.

Objective: Prioritize safety investments where risk and harm are greatest

- **Implement protective infrastructure that reduces crash risks:** Transportation implementers should provide more protective infrastructure such as sidewalks, raised medians, concrete barriers for bike lanes, and more. These investments should be prioritized in locations with high levels of exposure to safety risks between

multiple modes. Protective infrastructure should reduce crash risks for all road users, especially those who are not in vehicles, such as bicyclists and pedestrians.

- **Advance proactive, systemic safety improvements along corridors and at intersections with a history of severe crashes:** Using the crash hot spots and high-risk typologies identified in the countywide safety action plans, regional partners should continue to monitor these areas and research underlying causes behind the high crash rates. Context-based design solutions that reduce crash risk and severity should be prioritized for these locations.
- **Invest in railroad and track-adjacent infrastructure to improve visibility and access control for safer crossings:** Transportation implementers should increase the amount of safety provisions near railroad crossings, including signaling, lighting, and auditory warnings, while also implementing new technologies that improve safety, such as real-time rerouting of emergency vehicles when freight trains are crossing. Additionally, locations with high rates of informal crossings should be protected to prevent high-risk exposure.
- **Strengthen safety decision-making through improved data and transparency:** Northeastern Illinois should ensure that data on traffic safety and roadway characteristics are comprehensively documented, easily accessible, and continuously monitored. Safety trends should be regularly analyzed and summarized for stakeholders to support data-driven decision-making that aligns with improved safety outcomes.

Goal: 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 cars and freight vehicles to reduce emissions from on-road travel. Local and state agencies should implement a mix of sales requirements and financial incentives for residents and the trucking industry to achieve a fully electrified vehicle fleet that is aligned with the region's 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 sustain electrification. Transportation partners should invest in chargers along expressways and major routes, at new and existing developments and multifamily housing, at commercial and industrial freight hubs, and curbside. Transportation partners should collaborate with utilities to ensure sufficient power to meet charging demand, including through expansion of distributed energy resources.
- **Reduce vehicle miles traveled through mode shift:** The region should reduce emissions through efficient movement of people and goods. With on-road travel contributing most to transportation sector emissions, the region should prioritize shifting more trips from driving to lower-emission forms of travel, like transit, walking, and rolling. Complementary efforts to more effectively manage congestion can further reduce vehicle miles traveled and emissions from transportation.
- **Reduce criteria pollutants from transportation activity where harm and risk are greatest:** The region should make targeted investments in transportation projects and programs to reduce particulate matter, ozone, and nitrous oxide. Agencies should prioritize investments in areas with the highest exposure to pollutants to improve air quality and public health for local communities.
- **Use low carbon materials:** Transportation agencies should increase their use of cement, steel and other materials that come from low-to-zero emissions production methods. "Buy clean" procurement policies and increased use of low-carbon materials in transportation infrastructure will reduce lifecycle emissions in support of the region's climate goals.

Objective: Increase the resilience of infrastructure vulnerable to extreme weather

- **Use best available climate data in project design:** Transportation partners should design and build assets relying on the best available data on climate vulnerability and future projections to ensure the long-term viability and safety of the region's

investments. Transportation assets should be built to withstand larger storms and more severe flooding events that could cause impacts over a project's lifespan.

- **Incorporate resilience into transportation planning and programming:** Transportation partners should incorporate resilience into planning processes such as long-range planning, asset management, and investment prioritization, and programmers should incorporate resilience criteria into project evaluations and scoring to further advance resilience investments.
- **Incorporate green infrastructure when designing projects that manage stormwater:** The region should invest in the construction and maintenance of bioswales, stormwater detention facilities, permeable pavement, and other green infrastructure to reduce climate risk and ensure long-term functionality. Combining green infrastructure alongside gray stormwater infrastructure will lessen the impacts of flooding and heat while providing co-benefits like improved air and water quality, habitat condition, 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 infrastructure to reduce exposure to extreme weather and ensure safe and reliable transit. Investments that improve transit rider comfort and safety during extreme temperatures and severe storms are necessary to improve health, safety, and accessibility.
- **Improve communication tools for disruptions and preparedness:** The region should assess and improve communication tools to better respond to extreme weather, such as rerouting traffic and transit during flooding events. Systems that enable communication between transportation implementers, operators, users, emergency managers, and neighboring communities are critical to minimizing disruptions and improving safety.

Objective: Protect and enhance natural resources

- **Design and maintain assets to reduce stormwater runoff and improve water quality:** Hard surfaces, which prevent rainwater from soaking into the ground, produce stormwater runoff that pollutes the region's water bodies. Transportation partners should minimize the impact of transportation assets by incorporating green infrastructure when designing projects that manage stormwater. Ongoing operations and maintenance should 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 impacts of transportation infrastructure expansion on wetlands, habitat, and open space. Applying conservation strategies throughout the planning and design process can prevent a project from encroaching, fragmenting, and further degrading high-quality

natural assets, which provide regional benefits like recreation, flood reduction, and groundwater recharge.

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Goal: 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:** Recognizing the crucial role that intercity bus and rail services play in connecting northeastern Illinois to other national population centers, this type of travel should be included in transportation planning efforts at state, regional, and local levels. Through collaborative processes, transportation implementers can inform the location and frequency of services, support first- and last-mile access to stations, advance related infrastructure projects, and identify funding and partnership opportunities that strengthen regional and national connectivity.
- **Improve multimodal access to connect the region's urban core to its international airports:** Transportation partners should implement more multimodal connections between Chicago's downtown and the region's two international airports: O'Hare and Midway. Frequent transit services to and from these major international gateways can mitigate adjacent congestion, improve the reliability of travel times, and support positive traveler experiences and time-sensitive air cargo movements, benefiting residents, visitors, and the regional economy.

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

- **Promote transit-oriented development:** Connections to the regional transit system — like train stations and bus stops — offer strong anchors for communities to develop vibrant local economies that could support a diverse range of housing options, job centers, and commercial activity. Regional partners should make the most of these assets by prioritizing policies, incentives, and investments that support strategic developments near areas with frequent transit services.
- **Prioritize multimodal access to regional destinations:** To develop and maintain employment and commercial centers that are truly regional in their impact and reach, the region should concentrate new developments and reinvestments in areas with existing connections to transportation assets, like roads, transit, freight lines, aviation, waterways, and more. Prioritizing investment in existing transportation corridors empowers businesses to access regionwide opportunities, connects workers to employment opportunities, and minimizes the high costs associated with expansion, such as new construction and utilities that can strain public resources.
- **Promote transportation affordability:** With transportation costs ranking as one of the highest expense categories for most households, regional partners should implement policies, programs, and planning approaches that provide affordable

options to travel throughout northeastern Illinois. Actions should include advancing transit-supportive land use planning, reforming transportation fees and fines, and maintaining programs that account for resource disparities for specific populations, such as reduced transit fares for students, seniors, and low-income households, helping 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 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 also reduce impacts to emergency vehicles, residents, and businesses, such as highway-rail grade separations, should be prioritized.
- **Foster safe travel for truck drivers:** In addition to making travel times more reliable, transportation implementers should support safe travel for the trucking profession. Improvements may include modernizing deteriorating infrastructure, strengthening roadway routing information for truckers, and providing sufficient access to rest areas and truck parking. Complementary measures to mitigate congestion in the region's truck bottlenecks can further support safety and supply chain reliability.
- **Support the transition to electric freight vehicles:** The region should provide sufficient charging infrastructure to support companies' goals to reduce air pollution from the goods-movement sector and remain 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:** Transportation stakeholders should implement policies that improve safety and reduce congestion, especially in dense areas with a high volume of travel. Actions may include implementing dedicated zones or schedules, incentivizing 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 work together to improve the safety and efficiency of maritime freight, which provides low-cost transportation of bulks goods to regional industries and contributes to economic competitiveness. Stakeholders should coordinate to maintain the asset condition of maritime infrastructure, dredge waterways used by commercial vessels,

and provide access to port facilities, while facilitating strong environmental stewardship and limiting the threat of invasive species.

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Goal: Strategically 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. Improvements may include the bolstering of available revenues, interagency coordination, and staff capacity and expertise. Additionally, emerging technologies that can 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

- **Implement a road usage charge (RUC):** The region should explore shifting revenue reliance away from the motor fuel tax toward a user fee that charges motorists based on the number of miles they drive. Recognizing that implementation questions remain, transportation stakeholders should begin by conducting 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 the use of 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 consider impacts resulting 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 can rely on sufficient and durable funding sources. Notably, the sales tax should be expanded to include services to more closely 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 unique and significant investment needs of the region, partners should pursue distinct revenue sources that provide the means to 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 efficiently manage limited resources. 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 incur substantial costs to the region over time. Northeastern Illinois should improve the efficiency of project delivery through strategies such as increasing the public sector's capacity to deliver projects, reassessing project scopes in the face of rising costs, and addressing context-specific sources of project delays.
- **Monitor and strategically prepare for emerging technologies:** Transportation stakeholders should jointly monitor technological innovations pertaining to electric vehicles, unmanned aircraft systems, ITS, autonomous vehicles, and artificial and predictive analysis to consider their 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.
- **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.