

2023 Federal Advocacy Agenda – DRAFT for discussion (as of 9/6/2022)

**Subject to change based internal and external feedback during review period*

Introduction

Northeastern Illinois and its communities have experienced drastic and defining changes over the past four years since adopting the region's long-term comprehensive plan, ON TO 2050. A global pandemic disrupted economies, deepened inequities, and changed the ways people move throughout the region. But northeastern Illinois has new opportunities to make transformative investments in the region with the unprecedented funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Guided by three principles — inclusive growth, resilience, and prioritized investment — ON TO 2050, and the updates to the plan, provides a vision for how to overcome these new and persistent challenges and foster a more inclusive and thriving region.

As the region's federally designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO), the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) will take full advantage of new opportunities provided within the IIJA to address challenges facing the region. The region's transportation system requires adequate funding and bold action to address today's problems and anticipate tomorrow's opportunities. The region must take immediate and coordinated action to mitigate climate change by reducing emissions while we adapt to our already changing weather patterns. Additionally, the region's economy is not keeping up with peers and is held back by vast and entrenched inequity.

To address those challenges, the federal agenda aligns with CMAP's three core focus areas: Transportation, Climate and Regional Economic Competitiveness.

Transportation

The \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act offers an incredible opportunity to strengthen the transportation system in northeastern Illinois. It provides more funding for the region's transportation programs to address the ways people travel, challenges with congestion, air quality and resilience, and improvements that can keep bicyclists and pedestrians safe. MPOs like CMAP were established to bring together government officials from across entire regions to prioritize projects, ensure federal funding is being obligated in a timely manner, and track the progress of federally-required performance targets for the transportation system.

As Congress and the Administration continue to work with state and local agencies on IIJA implementation, CMAP is ready and has the capacity to work with state and federal partners to address the region's safety, emissions, and resilience challenges. To do this, MPOs still need increased flexibility and direct access to federal funding to better address those challenges facing major metropolitan regions.

Increase local access to federal resources for successful IIJA implementation

CMAP supports:

- Fully funding newly authorized programs within the IIJA, such as the Healthy Streets program for resilience improvements and the Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment program for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.
- Increasing transparency and coordination with regions around new IIJA Carbon Reduction and PROTECT resilience formula funding to ensure those programs are not being transferred or flexed to fund projects with minimal carbon reduction impact and resilience improvements.

- Establishing a pilot program that gives direct funding and project selection authority to large MPOs for a portion of funding allowing regions to directly address carbon reduction, resilience, and safety.
- U.S. DOT providing a formal schedule for when grant awards will be announced following the application window for competitive grants and giving successful grantees a target date for a completed grant agreement. All of this should be available on a publicly accessible dashboard to identify and address delays in the time between grant awards and grant contracts.

Increase local support for safe and complete streets

CMAP supports:

- Expanding MPO programming authority for Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funds, reflecting responsibilities for achieving Federal Highway Administration Safety Performance Management goals, and making the 15 percent vulnerable road user (for safety improvements for non-motorist) set-aside for HSIP permanent.
- Identifying dedicated resources to provide local governments with comprehensive Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) support.

Sustainably fund the transportation system

CMAP supports:

- Increasing the federal motor fuel tax rate, indexing it with inflation, and developing new innovative funding mechanisms, such as a national per-mile road usage charge and federal freight transportation fee in the long term.
- Requiring the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) develop a highway formula modernization report recommending changes to better align apportionment formulas to support states and MPOs in meeting national surface transportation and performance measurement goals.
- Offering greater flexibility for states and regions to impose user fees by removing federal restrictions on tolling the interstate system and removing restrictions on commercial activity on the Interstate system.

Climate

Northeastern Illinois is home to the second largest transit agency in the country and has the second most transit travel of any urbanized area outside of New York. At the height of the pandemic, Congress reinforced the necessity to support transit systems nationwide by providing direct operating assistance over three COVID relief funding packages from March 2020 to March 2021. The region received more than \$3.37 billion over that period to make up for lost public funding and operating revenues. This funding will not be able to sustain the region's transit system indefinitely with an expected budget shortfall of \$730 million beginning in 2026.

As more commuters turn to driving over transit due to the pandemic, CMAP analysis indicates gridlock and longer travel times may cost the region \$1.2 billion annually in productivity costs. Much work remains to respond to the risks of climate change posed by the emissions generated by our transportation system. As the region works to build more financial and operational resilience into the day-to-day reality of roads and rails, the region must also commit to reducing emissions. To prevent the most severe impacts of climate change, northeastern Illinois needs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 10 percent annually to approach net zero by 2050.

Strengthen the transit system to reduce emissions

CMAP supports:

- Prioritizing current funding streams for mass transit systems with the greatest infrastructure needs and highest number of passengers, and increasing federal support to these systems for operating costs.
- Increasing funding for transit from the Highway Trust Fund and other transportation system user fees.
- Providing greater flexibility to use toll revenues to pursue multimodal transportation system goals such as providing high-speed, high-reliability transit service to improve expressway corridors.
- Revising federal requirements to eliminate the funding disparity between transit projects and highway projects, such as increasing the federal share under the FTA's New Starts program from 60 to 80 percent for projects extending the transit system.
- Creating a demonstration grant to provide reduced fares for low-income riders to help close transit equity gaps.
- Creating a uniform Buy America waiver process across U.S. DOT's agencies (FHWA, FTA) for projects that are proven to substantially improve air quality.

Plan for a climate resilient future

CMAP supports:

- Allowing MPOs to use Resilience Improvement Plan to qualify for the 90 percent federal share for formula funds within the urbanized area covered by the plan.
- Increasing eligibility and coordination for water and wastewater infrastructure and planning funding to regions. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency should leverage the ability of regional planning agencies to assist disadvantaged communities in accessing federal and state funds.
- Increasing investments that maintain the health, recreational use, and economic benefits of Lake Michigan and the Great Lakes by providing long-term stable funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.
- Modernizing policies related to flooding, including making risk information available for property sales and reforming the National Flood Insurance Program to develop long-term solutions for properties that suffer repetitive losses or are at high risk of flooding.

Regional Economic Competitiveness

Northeastern Illinois will thrive by making the region more competitive, expanding economic opportunity, and reducing inequity. With six Class I railroads, one of the nation's largest and fastest-growing air-cargo hubs, and the only maritime connection between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River system, and more than \$3 trillion in goods moved annually, the region remains North America's freight hub. This massive concentration of freight activity in northeastern Illinois provides a competitive advantage that helps to drive the regional economy. However, this level of freight activity raises significant infrastructure challenges, including increased congestion directly impacting communities and passenger rail networks.

To address these and other region-wide economic challenges, more comprehensive federal support should be given to MPOs. The federal government should continue, through agencies like the Economic

Development Administration (EDA) and the U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in partnership with U.S. DOT, to support regional economies by providing increased funding for regional innovation, cluster-focused initiatives, and housing coordination. The federal government should also consider ways to ensure federal investments are comprehensive and strategic through increased coordination with regional transportation planning processes and state, county, and local economic plans.

Support the flow of people and goods through the region and country

CMAP supports:

- Establishing a separate Office of Multimodal Freight within U.S. DOT to develop a comprehensive assessment of freight system needs with high quality data sets that will inform competitive and formula freight programs based on need and significant national impact.
- Requiring rail carriers to provide descriptions of how existing and future passenger rail service would be impacted in the event of a merger between rail carriers.
- Prioritizing communities that see increased freight traffic and delays due to Surface Transportation Board approved-rail mergers for programs that target mitigation against the negative impact of freight such as the Railroad Crossing Elimination Program.
- Creating a grade crossings data collection program that is transparent, regularly updated, uses quality public data, and supports communities most impacted by freight movement.

Strengthen inclusive economic growth regionally

CMAP supports:

- Amending the national highway goals in 23 U.S.C. § 150 to add a measure for how well the transportation system connects people to jobs and services.
- Ensuring federal investments from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) are comprehensive and strategic through increased coordination with MPOs, especially in regions where an Economic Development District is not feasible.
- Continuation of American Rescue Plan Act EDA programs and funding levels that supported regional economic development, such as the Build Back Better Challenge, the Good Jobs Challenge, and the Economic Adjustment Assistance program.
- Support place-based housing mobility solutions, including funding for regional housing authority-led efforts.

Increase opportunities for comprehensive planning support

CMAP supports:

- Requiring the FHWA and HUD to provide MPOs comprehensive technical assistance and support for the newly authorized regional housing coordination plan process, and ensuring MPOs have maximum flexibility to fund everything that is individually eligible within the housing coordination process.
- Making programs like the Thriving Communities Initiative permanent through the reauthorization process so that investment decisions across transportation, land use, and housing have long-term federal support from HUD and DOT.
- Providing targeted assistance and funding through programs like the Thriving Communities Initiative for community capacity building that includes Phase 1 engineering support, a key barrier for many disadvantaged communities in making projects a reality.

- Creating a joint office between DOT, HUD, and the EDA that provides comprehensive support to regions with federal funding opportunities at the intersection of transportation, housing, and economic development.

DRAFT