

ON TO 2050 update summary

September 2022 draft

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Introduction

Northeastern Illinois has seen significant change over its history, rising above adversity to determine its own future. Important shifts in our economy, technology, and infrastructure promise continued innovation and prosperity. But our future success is not guaranteed. A host of both new and enduring challenges risk lasting damage and decline. The past four years have shown that we cannot foresee every obstacle. Yet, the ON TO 2050 update maintains a clear vision of what priorities need to be advanced to achieve an inclusive and thriving region.

Metropolitan Chicago brings immense assets to this work. We are home to a diverse and talented population of 8.6 million residents. Their skills and ingenuity reflect a heritage of creating products at the forefront of technology, life sciences, business services, advanced materials, and clean energy. World-class institutions of education, research, and culture make us an international destination, and rich natural resources support a tradition of agriculture, recreation, and resilience. Together, these assets provide for a vibrant quality of life across different and unique communities. Many people have found a place in northeastern Illinois to build their families, homes, and businesses. But we are leaving too many communities behind. Our history is marred by the ongoing effects of discrimination and disinvestment, with marginalized groups still unable to share in much of the region's progress. We are among the most segregated large metropolitan areas in the U.S.,¹ and the consequences hold us all back. A more equitable region will be a more prosperous and resilient region. Achieving our goals requires action now so that people of color, those with disabilities or low incomes, and other marginalized groups can contribute their full potential to regional success.

Despite the disparities that divide us, we are one region, on the move. Our futures are inextricably linked as commerce and workers flow continuously across local borders. Each day, more than half of us cross a county boundary or into and out of Chicago to work, often relying on the nation's second largest transit network and 10 interstate highways. More than 1,100 miles of trails and extensive on-street bikeways provide active connections across the region. And we are the hub of North American freight, 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. Over \$3 trillion in goods move through the region annually. These facilities support the most diversified large metropolitan economy in the U.S., but they are under continued threat from inadequate investment and extreme weather.

A changing climate already impacts our lives. Our streets and sewers must handle greater flash flooding, heat waves, and extreme storms. The hardest impacts fall most often on marginalized communities. To prevent the most severe impacts of climate change, northeastern Illinois needs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 10 percent annually to approach

¹ John R. Logan and Brian Stults. 2021. "The Persistence of Segregation in the Metropolis: New Findings from the 2020 Census" Diversity and Disparities Project, Brown University, <https://s4.ad.brown.edu/Projects/Diversity>

net zero by 2050. A cleaner, more efficient economy will require transformative change, but we have a strong foundation to build from, if we act now.

Northeastern Illinois adopted ON TO 2050 in October 2018, after a three-year process featuring extensive [research](#), [analysis](#), and [public outreach](#). The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) — along with its many partners and stakeholders — developed the plan to have a long time horizon and enduring value for guiding regional priorities on transportation investments, development, the environment, the economy, and other issues affecting quality of life. Recent shifts have refined the region’s approach in important ways but also underscore the enduring value of the path ON TO 2050 lays out. The ON TO 2050 update maintains the plan’s principles, policies, and goals, while refreshing key technical components of the plan in accordance with federal law.

The plan update is organized as follows:

- **The region today** describes how the experience of the last four years reaffirms ON TO 2050’s principles of inclusive growth, resilience, and prioritized investment.
- **Progress toward our goals** celebrates implementation successes over the last four years and reiterates the key goals of the plan’s Community, Prosperity, Environment, Governance, and Mobility sections.
- **Key findings from the update process** provides analysis on important changes in our forecasted population, transportation investments, and funding resources.
- **Where we go from here** maps the path forward to put ON TO 2050’s recommendations and strategies into action.
- **Appendices** cover many aspects of plan development in greater detail.

The region today

Seizing our destiny will depend as much on our values as our strengths. The region has made great strides in the past four years to heed calls for change and achieve its goals, even as it grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic. These experiences have reemphasized and refined the principles that must shape our future. Inclusive growth, resilience, and prioritized investment continue to guide ON TO 2050.

Resilience

Metropolitan Chicago’s communities, infrastructure, and systems must be able to thrive in the face of uncertainty of any type. In the four years since the adoption of ON TO 2050, our resilience has been tested in ways we could not foresee — most profoundly by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic re-exposed the complex factors that make disadvantaged communities — particularly people of color and those with low income — more vulnerable to

crisis. These experiences reinforced the need to further invest in resilience strategies that strengthen communities' ability to adapt to both known and unknown challenges.

Above all, the region endured a tremendous human cost from COVID-19. More than 20,000 residents of northeastern Illinois died, leaving behind families, friends, and neighbors to grieve their loss. Others are still grappling with the virus's long-term health and economic effects. A CMAP survey found that by mid-2021, nearly 3 in 10 regional residents had lost income or work hours due to the pandemic. Even as conditions improved, declines in jobs and consumer spending led to mounting challenges, particularly for women, people of color, those with low income, the leisure and hospitality industry, and small businesses. In countless ways large and small, the pandemic disrupted the lives of all our residents.

The COVID-19 pandemic also posed enormous challenges to the region's transportation system. Travel patterns changed drastically, as residents adjusted to restrictions, closures, remote work, and online learning. 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.

As the region recovers, travel is increasing. But the transportation system will need to accommodate new and different demands moving forward — particularly on the region's extensive transit network. Ridership remains well below 2019 levels, and more regional workers will continue to work remotely, at least part of the time, compared to pre-pandemic levels. 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.

Much work also remains to respond to the risks of climate change posed by the emissions generated by our transportation system. While COVID-related shifts may have slightly reduced regional greenhouse gas emissions in 2020, these gains may have already been reversed by increased truck traffic. As we work to build more financial and operational resilience into the day-to-day reality of our roads and rails, we must also commit to reducing emissions. Failure to deliver on this priority will have devastating consequences for future generations as challenges we are facing today from increased precipitation and higher temperatures only accelerate.

As the COVID-19 pandemic fades, northeastern Illinois must keep these factors in mind, so that we emerge even more resilient than before — whether to additional impacts from the pandemic, the realities of a changing climate, or other challenges. And we must continue to adapt our infrastructure, natural systems, and social structures to mitigate the risk of future shocks and stresses while ensuring all our communities can recover in the face of change.

Inclusive growth

Today, our children's chances of upward economic mobility are still shaped by their race or ethnicity, where they live, their disability status, and their socioeconomic status. Large disparities remain across nearly all indicators of success, perpetuated by historical legacies and modern-day policies. And the region is failing to close these gaps. Regions with more economic and social equity provide greater access to opportunity for all residents and enjoy longer, stronger periods of prosperity and growth. To achieve its full potential, our region needs to fully commit to inclusive growth programs and policies in order to grow our economy by enabling opportunity for all.

Much has also changed since ON TO 2050 was adopted. During the pandemic, the murders of George Floyd and other Black lives reignited a movement for racial justice. Voices throughout the region have called for action on disrupting patterns of exclusion and ending systemic racism. Doing so requires the urgency of this moment to result in meaningful policy change centered on creating equitable outcomes for all people.

Today, northeastern Illinois is wasting much of its human capital — embodied in the talents and skills of marginalized residents — even as it becomes more diverse. People of color accounted for more than half (51.6 percent) of the region's total population for the first time in 2020, and now one in four residents identify as Hispanic. But our changing economy excludes and marginalizes many people of color. CMAP analysis indicates that lower-income residents across demographic groups have left the Chicago metropolitan region over the last decade, contributing to a net decline of over 69,000 Black residents. More policies and resources that enable inclusive growth — like improving career pathway programs and investing in disinvested areas — are needed to reverse these trends by providing greater economic opportunity for marginalized residents in northeastern Illinois.

The transportation system, particularly the transit system, also has a significant role to play in enabling inclusive growth by providing access to amenities and job centers. Research shows shorter travel times are a significant indicator of upward economic mobility², yet Black residents in northeastern Illinois have to [spend more time](#) than other residents traveling to access daily needs like jobs, education, doctor appointments, and grocery stores. Households with low income, older residents, and people of color also tend to take fewer trips compared to white residents but are more likely to use transit, given its affordability relative to the high costs of owning and operating a personal vehicle. And residents with disabilities are significantly more likely to stay at home due to accessibility challenges that hinder access and contribute to physical and [social isolation](#). Persistent racial disparities in educational

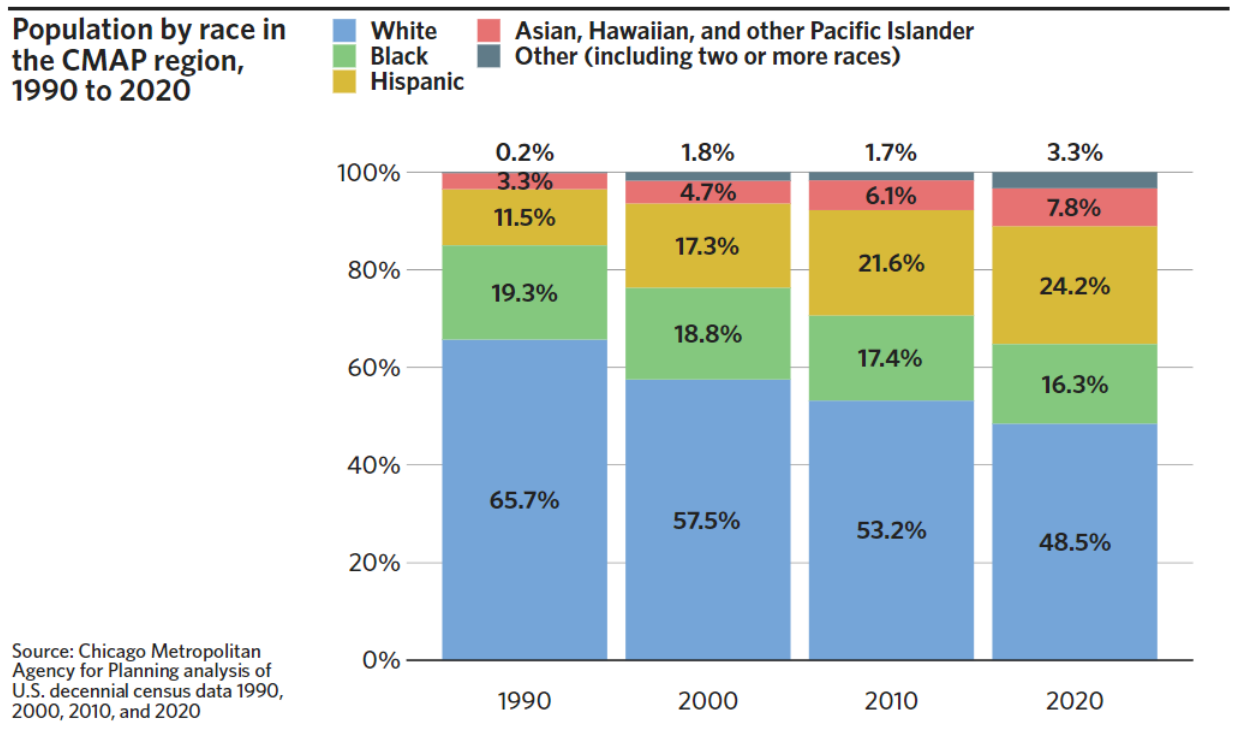
² Chetty, Raj, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, and Emmanuel Saez. 2014. "Where Is the Land of Opportunity? The Geography of Intergenerational Mobility in the United States." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 129 (4): 1553–1623.



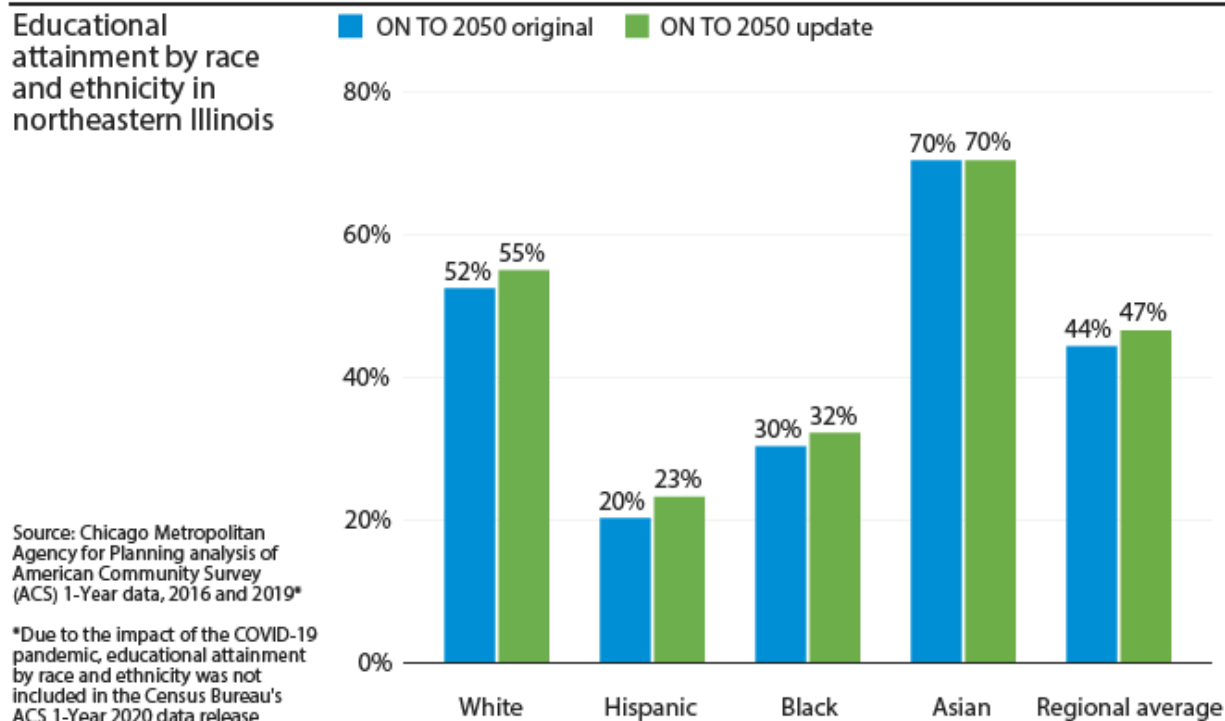
attainment, unemployment, transportation access, and many other measures undermine efforts to sustain inclusive growth.

Disparities in local economic development can also impair residents' access to quality housing, schools, public services, and other resources. These inequities greatly shape the choices and opportunities available to residents, particularly members of marginalized communities. Solutions to promote vital places and drive investment in disinvested areas are required to comprehensively promote inclusive growth and build a more equitable region.

Federal policy has already begun to shift toward advancing racial equity. Executive orders have significantly increased the responsibility of federal agencies to account for racial disparities in their policies, and the Justice40 initiative aims to ensure that at least 40 percent of federal climate investments go to underserved communities affected by poverty and pollution. Still, more work is needed regionally to help advance these goals in our own communities, including through our infrastructure and technical assistance investments.



Educational attainment by race and ethnicity in northeastern Illinois



Prioritized investment

One positive development from the last four years is that both state and federal leaders and policymakers have made significant progress to fund the region's transportation system. ON TO 2050 places major focus on the need to provide resources to fully fund the region's transportation needs using sustainable, long-term resources.

In 2019, the State of Illinois approved [Rebuild Illinois](#), a capital plan that not only committed \$33.2 billion to repair and enhance the region's bridges, roads, railroads, and transit assets, but also secured future funding sources through a combination of policy changes and fee increases. The most significant of these is the decision to double the motor fuel tax and index it to inflation, a key ON TO 2050 recommendation. However, work remains to be done as more of our vehicle fleet electrifies or becomes more fuel efficient in the future, necessitating the region's transition from the gas tax to a road user charge model to maintain stable funding for transportation.

In 2021, the federal government approved the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#) (IIJA). Northeastern Illinois will receive a portion of the more than \$567 billion in transportation funding between 2022 and 2026. After decades of stagnant funding, the bill represents a significant funding increase over existing federal transportation programs, including through the development of new formula funds that will come to CMAP on behalf of the region. It also introduces wide-ranging new programs and requirements aimed at accelerating investments

that mitigate against climate change and more equitably address how investments flow to marginalized communities. While IJIA is a positive step forward, the federal government has not approved new or increased sources of transportation revenues that would ensure funding continues. We must continue to seek sustainable, adequate revenue sources for transportation investments, like expanding the sales tax base to include services, pricing parking, or imposing a regional fee on transportation network company rides.

We must carefully use this money to invest in our transportation system. The overall condition of the system has continued to decline since the adoption of ON TO 2050. Our roads and bridges could be in better shape. The region's transit agencies face large state of good repair backlogs. And many expressways must be rebuilt over the next 30 years. The region will need to prioritize additional funding resources for maintenance to meet these needs. Even with these generational investments, long-term sustainable funding for the transportation system remains elusive.

Transit asset condition in northeastern Illinois by federal performance measure category, 2020 category	Percent
Buses beyond useful life	6.7%
Rail vehicles beyond useful life	30.2%
Non-fixed route vehicles beyond useful life	43.4%
Track with performance restrictions	5.7%
Facilities in marginal or fair condition	20.6%
Non-revenue vehicles beyond useful life	37.7%
Rail equipment beyond useful life	62.6%

Source: National Transit Database

This need to prioritize investments using transparent, accountable, and data-informed decision-making also applies beyond the transportation system investments that are central to CMAP's purview. Limited resources shape how all levels of governments make decisions on how capital investments, technical assistance, and other public resources are deployed in the region.

Some communities have a wealth of expertise and resources to develop strategies for meeting local needs, while others struggle to raise revenues for public services and basic infrastructure. Much of these disparities are due to structural issues; for instance, the way the state disburses shared revenues (like sales tax proceeds) does not effectively support municipalities with a very low tax base. Efforts are ongoing to address these gaps but are currently inadequate to the scale of the need. Nonetheless, progress is possible. For example, in the last cycle, CMAP and the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) completely reworked the [call for technical assistance](#) to target planning support to the needs of historically marginalized communities. This included rethinking the types of assistance CMAP offers, moving away from just developing comprehensive plans and recognizing the granular support communities need to implement plans. In addition, CMAP has begun to cultivate peer learning and exchange by partnering

communities of different capacity levels in working groups on issues of shared concern. These efforts further underscore how partners at all levels of government must collaborate to develop and implement creative solutions to reinvest in communities.

Progress toward our goals

Since ON TO 2050 was adopted, the region has made substantial progress on a number of ON TO 2050 recommendations. This section celebrates the implementation successes of the last four years and reiterates the key goals of the plan's Community, Prosperity, Environment, Governance, and Mobility sections.

Prosperity

Northeastern Illinois will thrive by making the region more competitive, expanding economic opportunity, and reducing inequity. Global forces — like the COVID-19 pandemic, the transition to clean technologies, and an aging and diversifying society — have only sharpened the need to work together to face today's greatest opportunities and challenges. At the same time, northeastern Illinois' long-term future success will depend on more fundamental factors like the region's industry mix, talent pools, and progress toward racial equity.

Individual communities play a pivotal role in our economy. Many took swift action to counter the pandemic's worst impacts on workers and small businesses. Cook County launched an innovative [business advising program](#) to help entrepreneurs navigate resources and adapt to new pressures. Lake County, Woodstock, Batavia, Chicago Heights, and many others connected business owners with emergency low-cost loans and provided grants to improve health precautions or meet short-term expenses. The countless actions of individuals, nonprofits, companies, and governments helped to sustain our communities and position the region for a strong recovery.

New initiatives are also already underway to build a more resilient and inclusive future. [mHUB](#), the leading innovation center for physical product development and manufacturing, has assisted over 450 startups since launching in 2017. Together, these companies have raised more than \$1 billion in capital — establishing new sources of growth that leverage our [traded industry clusters](#). Other cluster initiatives like the Chicago Metro Metal Consortium, the Chicagoland Food and Beverage Network, P33, and Current can help unlock the region's full potential. New partnerships in our multimodal freight industry are also rallying support to rehabilitate key infrastructure and improve environmental justice. CMAP developed a [master plan](#) for the Illinois International Port District and secured more than \$21.5 million in [Rebuild Illinois funding](#) that will maintain the port as a vital maritime connection and community resource.

Efforts to increase upward economic mobility are also tapping into the region's greatest asset — its people. The [Illinois Equity in Attainment Initiative](#) brought together 25 colleges and universities to publicly commit to eliminating racial and socioeconomic gaps in degree completions by 2025. Each institution is implementing a comprehensive, evidence-based plan to achieve annual graduation targets for Black, Latino, and low-income students. The Education Systems Center at Northern Illinois University is also leading the push to improve a regional system of [middle-skills pathways](#) that lead to industry credentials and quality jobs. This work will help to expand proven models for ensuring individuals see career progression as they navigate the complex world of education, skills training, and work.

Environment

ON TO 2050 calls for the region to intensify climate mitigation efforts by moving away from fossil fuels while also preparing to recover from the effects of climate change. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions requires compact infill development, improved pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and increased investments in public transit as well as aggressive expansion in renewable energy systems, energy efficiency and retrofits, and electrification of our transportation system. Local governments and transportation agencies are taking the lead in this transformation. Plans and strategies to reduce fossil fuel use, like Chicago's [Climate Action Plan](#), [CTA](#) and [Pace](#)'s commitment to zero emissions by 2040, and Metra's piloting of zero emission locomotives and trainsets reveal both the urgency and innovation supporting this work.

CMAP continues to provide data on greenhouse gas emissions and support partners in climate action planning, most recently by helping the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus develop strategies for local governments. Illinois jumpstarted its transition to 100 percent clean energy with the [Climate and Equitable Jobs Act](#). Local governments are reducing barriers to renewable energy, with over 50 communities recognized by the [SolSmart](#) program for supporting solar energy development. CMAP is collaborating with partners to support the transition from fossil fuels, including investigating electric vehicle infrastructure needs and other transportation mitigation strategies and policies.

Planning for climate resilience requires managing risk from future climate impacts. Recognizing the increased frequency and intensity of storm events due to climate change, Lake County updated development standards to reflect today's storms. Building off a project with the Central Council of Mayors, CMAP is currently working with transportation, stormwater, and emergency management departments to assess the vulnerabilities of the region's transportation network to climate impacts. While climate change will bring more rain to the region, drinking water shortages are a threat in areas that are growing the fastest. Communities in Will County banded together to work with the Illinois State Water Survey to better understand their water quantity and quality constraints and make more informed decisions about infrastructure investment.

Community

The changes and challenges since ON TO 2050 was adopted only further emphasize the importance of reinvesting in communities, targeting resources, encouraging collaboration on fiscal and economic issues, preserving high-quality open space and agricultural assets, and promoting housing choice.

The region cannot succeed without concerted investment to rebuild jobs, amenities, and resources in areas where people with low income live. Investment for continued economic growth and success for the entire region must include investments in communities with limited resources to rebuild. CMAP worked with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), and other partners to make it easier for high-need communities to apply for federal infrastructure funds. High-need communities can now use [transportation development credits](#) as local match for Surface Transportation Program (STP), Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ), and Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) applications. Since 2018, nine projects have been funded using this option.

ON TO 2050 also calls for creative approaches to support disinvested communities. The [Southland Development Authority](#) launched in 2019 as a new collaboration among business, civic, and political leaders to make coordinated investments in the south suburbs. It builds on a multi-year planning process led by CMAP and its partners to pursue structural changes in weak market areas with extensive assets and often-overlooked opportunities for redevelopment.

ON TO 2050 envisions action not just by CMAP, but by many different groups. Communities across the region have been exploring strategies to make the homes in their area ready for an aging population, increasing diversity, and changing living patterns. The [City of Chicago](#) permitted accessory dwelling units, or coach houses, for the first time in 63 years. [Accessory dwelling units](#) provide housing opportunities for older adults, empty nesters, and young adults who want to live close to family members. The Village of Northbrook adopted its first [inclusionary housing ordinance](#) to increase the amount of housing affordable to people with moderate and low incomes. The [Metropolitan Mayors Caucus](#) formed a collaborative that brings together over 50 municipalities to share strategies on how to prepare communities as the population becomes older.

Governance

Governments must lead together and collaborate through governance solutions and innovations in order for northeastern Illinois to become an inclusive, thriving region. We can build on ongoing efforts to raise the region's ability to address our problems, including better coordination, technical assistance, municipal capacity-building, and tools for driving data-driven decision-making.

The pandemic forced governments to rethink service delivery and governance processes, rapidly adapting and innovating to meet the needs of the region's communities in transformative and inspiring ways. In 2020, CMAP joined state, county, and municipal partners to coordinate pandemic relief through the [Regional Economic Recovery Task Force](#). CMAP partnered with Cook County to develop an [equity-based model](#) to distribute \$51 million of CARES Act relief funds to its 129 municipalities. This collaborative effort ensured Cook County's most vulnerable communities had resources to continue delivering services during the crisis, while creating lasting partnerships.

As recommended in ON TO 2050, CMAP developed and implemented a new [Capacity Building Program](#), an innovative suite of technical assistance offerings designed to increase the capacity of local governments to support historically marginalized communities. The program helps communities make visible changes — clean up properties, begin construction, enhance public spaces — while advancing their long-term vision.

CMAP also helped foster governmental collaboration through the award-winning McHenry County [Coordinated Investment Study](#). This ambitious plan convened more than 100 governments to identify strategies for coordinated investment and service provision. The county quickly implemented a key recommendation of the study, staffing its first-ever shared services coordinator position.

Mobility

ON TO 2050 called on the region to take bold steps toward a well-integrated, modern, multimodal transportation system that seamlessly adapts to changing travel demands and reliably moves people and goods. At the time the plan was adopted, the region's transportation network already wrestled with changing travel patterns and rapidly evolving technologies. In the years since, the transportation system has been even further tested by the enormous challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated shutdowns. Innovation and cooperation continue to be important to improve regional mobility and ensure a system that works better for everyone.

Even with progress on funding our transportation system at the federal and state level, the region must also change how it allocates these funds to support critical regional goals. To this end, CMAP established the Surface Transportation Program (STP) Shared Fund in 2018 with the goal of allocating funds toward projects that result in regional benefit. The STP Shared Fund dedicates 15 percent of the region's overall STP funding and focuses on supporting larger-scale, multijurisdictional projects that improve regional performance measures and enhance equitable access to the transportation system.

As noted earlier, the region must prioritize maintenance because the overall condition of the transportation system has declined since the adoption of ON TO 2050. To help, CMAP

established the [Pavement Management Program](#) in 2018. Incorporating systematic processes for pavement preservation and maintenance and repair activities in annual work programs allows municipalities to prioritize investments that extend the life of their pavement assets. CMAP secured IDOT State Planning and Research grant funds, which allowed the program to create pavement management plans for approximately 40 municipalities.

Growing the economy inclusively will require leveraging the transportation system to address equity and mobility challenges in northeastern Illinois. CMAP and a consortium of regional partners released recommendations for improving equity in transportation fines, fees, and fares. Furthering these goals, the Illinois Tollway instituted violation forgiveness programs, reduced late fees for unpaid tolls, and expanded its programs to subsidize tolls for households with low income in the region. The state also passed the SAFE-T Act in 2021, ensuring Illinois will no longer suspend driver's licenses for drivers with unpaid fees.

CMAP will be improving safety and access for people with disabilities throughout the region by developing a program to help communities plan for and implement needed accessibility improvements. [Only 22 municipalities](#) — 11 percent of the region — currently have Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) transition plans as required by Title II of the ADA.

After declining for several decades, traffic fatality rates in the region began climbing upward in 2010 and have continued to rise since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Perhaps the most fundamental duty of any transportation provider is to protect the safety of those in the public right of way. As a result, CMAP and its partners established a Regional Safety Action Agenda to affirmatively address the growing numbers of traffic fatalities and serious injuries. By focusing on engineering, education, emergency services, enforcement, and equity, the Safety Action Agenda is addressing long-term regional traffic safety in a comprehensive, equitable, data-driven, and collaborative way.

Key findings from the update process

In updating ON TO 2050, CMAP reviewed and reconsidered many plan elements. Staff worked with partners to revisit how we should measure whether our transportation system is meeting our goals, what progress we have made on [key performance targets and indicators](#), and how anticipated changes in ON TO 2050 [will impact emissions](#) in the region. For additional details about the many elements reviewed when updating ON TO 2050, please see the technical appendices to this report.

This section highlights key findings from three of the most important features of the update:

- The **socioeconomic forecast**, which helps the region understand how we will grow and change over the next 28 years by considering how we have grown in the past. A strong understanding of the future level and distribution of jobs and population is critical to

decision-making about transportation and land use investments recommended by ON TO 2050.

- The determination of **regionally significant projects**, which identifies capital investments in the region's expressways, transit system, and arterials with impacts and benefits that are large enough to warrant additional consideration through the regional planning process.
- The development of a **financial plan for transportation**, which prioritizes how the region will use anticipated transportation funds between now and 2050, including how much will go to operating and maintaining the current system compared to expanding it.

Socioeconomic forecast

As part of the plan update process, CMAP is required to create a new forecast of regional population and jobs over the 28-year plan horizon to 2050. More information about this process can be found in the [Socioeconomic Forecast appendix](#).

The findings from this new forecast combined with analysis of the 2020 decennial census reaffirm that many of the trends found in ON TO 2050 remain. While Illinois was one of only three states that lost population between 2010 and 2020, all seven counties in northeastern Illinois grew over the last 10 years. And yet, as a region, northeastern Illinois' population growth trajectory has slowed in recent decades and continues to lag behind peer regions. Compared to the period between 1990 and 2000, when the regional population grew by 11.6 percent, metropolitan Chicago grew by 3.5 percent between 2000 and 2010, and by only 1.7 percent between 2010 and 2020.

A key driver of slow population growth in the region is prolonged net declines of Black residents. Nevertheless, due to Hispanic and Asian population growth, northeastern Illinois continues to diversify. As of 2020, the white (not Hispanic or Latino) population now accounts for less than half — 48.5 percent — of the region's population for the very first time. The region also continues to get older, as the baby boom generation ages and birth rates for younger generations decline. The growing senior population — age 65 and older — accounts for 14.5 percent of the population as of 2020, compared to 12.3 percent in 2015.

To account for these high-level trends, as well as the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on northeastern Illinois' economy and regional employment levels, CMAP produced a revised socioeconomic forecast that estimates the characteristics of the seven-county Chicago metropolitan region's population and employment in the year 2050. Compared to the prior forecast, which projected that the region would add 2.3 million new residents and 920,000 new jobs between 2015 and 2050, CMAP now projects that the region will add 1.5 million new residents and 600,000 jobs between 2020 and 2050.

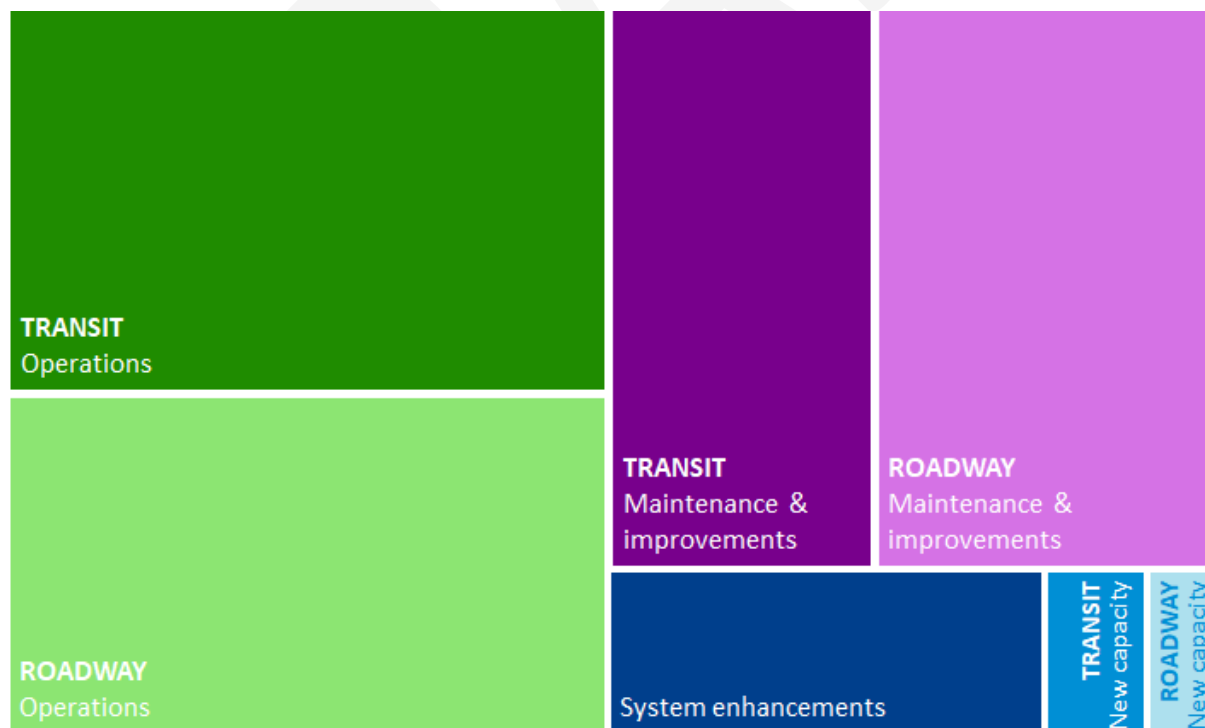
In the face of prolonged lackluster population growth, an aging and diversifying population, widespread racial and economic disparities, and aging and obsolete infrastructure, it remains critical that the region prioritize strategic and sustainable development practices — including prioritizing infill development, targeting resources in disinvested areas, and protecting natural resources — over greenfield development and expansion.

Financial plan for transportation

As part of the plan update process, CMAP is required to establish a new financial plan for transportation that prioritizes how the region will use the anticipated \$526.0 billion in transportation funds between now and 2050, including how much will go to operating and maintaining the current system versus enhancing or expanding it. More detail about the financial plan is in the [Financial Plan for Transportation appendix](#).

The IJIA and Rebuild Illinois will help the region make critical investments in its transportation system. The financial plan for the ON TO 2050 update contains sufficient revenue to operate and maintain the existing system in its current condition, as well as selectively expand the system. Almost 90 percent of anticipated future funding goes to operating and maintaining the current system in the financial plan, compared to about 4 percent for adding new capacity.

ON TO 2050 update forecasted expenditure allocations, 2023-2050



While the vast majority of funds supporting this program come from local, state, and federal revenues, the financial plan does lay out five “reasonably expected” revenues forecasted to generate an additional \$38 billion necessary to meet the transportation system’s future needs. These revenues are anticipated resources CMAP determines the region must take action to implement over the 28-year plan horizon in order to sustain the transportation system. In previous versions of the financial plan, raising the gas tax and indexing it to inflation was considered a reasonably expected revenue but has now been recategorized due to the affirmative action taken by the state in Rebuild Illinois. For the ON TO 2050 update, the reasonably expected revenues include proceeds from:

- **Replacing the state motor fuel tax with a road usage charge** of 2 cents per mile
- **Enlarging the sales tax base to include additional consumer services** in order to grow the tax base by 15 percent in line with the practices of other large states
- **Establishing a regional transportation network company (TNC) fee** by charging a 5 percent fee on rides served by companies like Uber and Lyft
- **Tolling major highway reconstructions and new highway capacity** to help rebuild the existing system and better manage congestion
- **Expanding priced parking throughout the region** and improving the efficiency of curb management

Together, these measures can help the region meet the long-term challenges of investment needed to maintain, operate, enhance, and expand the region’s transportation system. While none are easy, it is imperative that northeastern Illinois continue to seek sustainable, adequate transportation revenue sources beyond one-time capital bills in order to deliver the transportation system that is required to become the prosperous, equitable region we envision.

Complicating this already challenging picture is the fact that our transit service boards, CTA, Metra, and Pace, are still struggling with the financial impacts of the pandemic. Ridership remains well-below 2019 levels, and more regional workers will continue to work remotely, at least part of the time, compared to pre-pandemic levels. Consequently, the region must explore funding alternatives. Budgeting for operation of the existing system as forecast in the financial plan is only one part of this puzzle. New funding sources and operational strategies may be needed to help transit agencies attract riders and deliver frequent, reliable, convenient and safe services, especially for transit-dependent residents.

Regionally significant projects

The resources developed in the financial plan are put into specific uses by the regionally significant projects (RSPs) development process for the plan update. RSPs are capital investments in the region’s expressways, transit system, and arterials with impacts and benefits

that are large enough to warrant additional consideration through the regional planning process. These include large reconstruction projects as well as additions to the system. The federal government requires regional planning agencies to demonstrate “fiscal constraint” by showing that sufficient resources will be available to construct projects recommended in the plan.

RSPs support ON TO 2050’s principles, particularly emphasizing the need to use the region’s limited resources to invest in existing infrastructure to modernize and improve asset condition to achieve a state of good repair. Projects are prioritized into two categories: “constrained” and “unconstrained.” Only constrained projects are eligible to receive federal transportation funds and obtain certain federal approvals. These constrained projects can help the region meet today’s needs, adapt to changing mobility patterns for goods and people, and support economic success overall. Projects that are categorized as “unconstrained” require further action, such as additional study, and/or cannot be completed within the limits of the region’s forecasted revenues.

To identify candidate RSPs, CMAP solicited projects from partner agencies. Regional transportation implementors submitted both unconstructed projects previously identified in ON TO 2050 and new projects considered for the first time under the plan update process. A total of 76 projects were considered. Candidate projects meet one of the following thresholds:

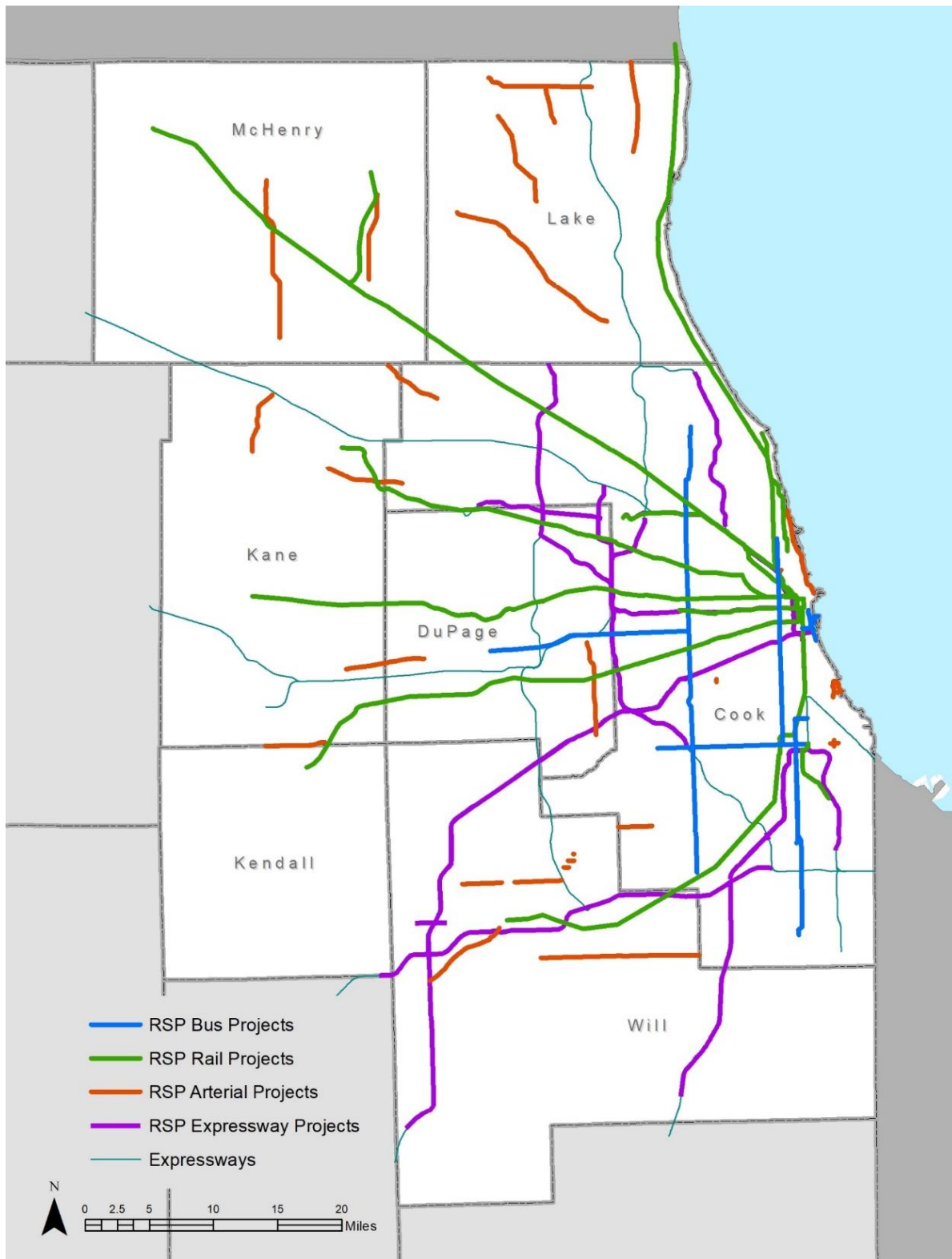
- Costs at least \$100 million and either
 - Changes capacity on the National Highway System or is a new expressway or principal arterial, or
 - Changes capacity on transit services with some separate rights of way or shared right of way where transit has priority over other traffic
- Costs at least \$250 million and improves the state of good repair for a particular highway or transit facility

Evaluation of each project focused on the current need, the modeled benefit with 2050 population and employment, and the degree to which the project fits with ON TO 2050 planning priorities. See the [Regionally Significant Projects Benefits Report appendix](#) for more details about methodology.

The ON TO 2050 update carries forward many projects from ON TO 2050, as well as adds in select new projects proposed by partner agencies. In total, 71 RSPs are constrained in the ON TO 2050 update, 21 transit projects, 25 expressway projects, and 25 arterial projects.

Many types of projects do not meet the technical thresholds for RSPs but are nonetheless important to consider for funding and implementation as systematic enhancements to the transportation system. This includes a wide variety of smaller projects like Intelligent

Transportation System (ITS) investments, intersection improvements, bike trails, accessibility improvements, and safety countermeasures that can help make progress toward a seamless, multimodal transportation system.



Where we go from here

Since 2020, we have reoriented our work to meet our new and long-standing challenges and help the region seize the opportunity before us. Through the mobility recovery project, we are working with our regional partners to develop a visionary mobility strategy for the post-COVID world. Through the Community Collaborative, we are committed to developing a durable and meaningful way to involve historically underserved communities in the transportation decision-making process. Through the Safety Action Agenda, we are building a coalition to make sure our streets are safer for everyone. Through our ADA work, we are helping create a region that is more accessible for everyone. It is critical that we bring the insights and recommendations from these efforts to bear on the next regional plan, including how we identify and evaluate the region's highest priority transportation projects.

Despite this progress, there are many areas where we need to dig in. We do not yet have a clear understanding of the pandemic's durable impacts on how people and goods move around the region. Freight and logistics may be our regional strength, but freight congestion is only expected to increase. This activity will likely further impact Black and Latino communities that are already disproportionately harmed by emissions from the transportation sector. Transit, a critical part of our transportation system, is facing a funding crisis. And, given the evidence before us, we need to weave climate resilience into all we do. The next plan must speak to each of these topics deeply.

We also recognize that, in order to effectively engage in this work, we will need new analytical tools and decision-making processes to better evaluate policies and projects. CMAP is committed to working with our stakeholders and partners to better leverage our data and expertise to support and prioritize future investment in accordance with the region's long-term goals.

Transportation touches everything. It is about people, quality of life, equity, opportunity, and jobs. It's about keeping people safe. It is about our economic strength and resiliency. It's about our environment and climate. If we are going to thrive and compete as the third-largest metropolitan area in the country, we need big, bold, sustainable solutions to our transportation challenges. Our core principles of inclusive growth, resilience, and prioritized investment are even more relevant today. We are ready to convene, prioritize, and build consensus. Help us drive transformative change in our region.