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d Regional planners look at 2040

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Regional planners on Wednesday unveiled a sweeping vision for the [Chicago](#) area's future that calls for raising the state gas tax, increasing the region's slice of the state road funding pie and emphasizing the renovation of existing roads rather than the construction of new ones.

The plan also foresees reduced commuting costs, more parks and open space, and more locally grown food to combat inner-city "food deserts" linked to health problems, especially in African-American communities.

Called Go to 2040 and based on three years of research and public hearings, the plan was released by the [Chicago](#) Metropolitan Agency for Planning, a little-known agency responsible for land-use and transportation planning in the seven-county [Chicago](#) area. The agency's board, composed of elected officials and other appointees from throughout the region, [formally adopted the plan Wednesday](#).

"Our goal today is to motivate you to act. Today must be a beginning and not an end," the agency's executive director, Randy Blankenhorn, told several several hundred guests, including Mayor Richard Daley and Sen. Dick Durbin, who gathered in a tent in Millennium Park.

In its call for change, Go to 2040 deliberately echoes Daniel [Bumham](#) and Edward Bennett's Plan of [Chicago](#), which was published in 1909 and helped give [Chicago](#) its nearly continuous chain of lakefront parks and such pieces of civic infrastructure as double-deck Wacker Drive. But the new plan is more comprehensive than its celebrated predecessor, addressing education and tax reform as well as public works.

In 2040, the plan predicts, the [Chicago](#) region's 284 municipalities will have about 11 million residents, 2.4 million more than today. While the plan says traffic jams will not get worse if its recommendations are implemented, there is no expectation that they will improve either – and they are now among the nation's worst.

To fund road maintenance and public transit, the plan calls for raising the state's existing 19-cents-per-gallon gas tax by eight cents in the short term, with annual increases pegged to the rate of inflation and rising construction costs. And in a shot at downstate interests, the plan complains that even though the [Chicago](#) area has two-thirds of the state's population, it gets only 45 percent of Illinois' road funds.

"This so-called '55/45 Split' needs to be addressed," the plan asserts.

For years, regional planners have advocated many of the plan's goals, such as ending auto-dependent sprawl and creating compact, walkable communities. Instead, new jobs and housing migrated ever farther outward from [Chicago](#) as buyers snapped up inexpensive homes on the metropolitan fringe. But CMAP, which the state legislature established in 2005, aims to change the image of the powerless planner – and, in the process, change the course of the region's growth.

While the agency has no power over the gas tax or how state road funding is split up, it is authorized to rank all proposed federally funded transportation projects in the region, thus determining which are most likely to get funding and how fast. In making the rankings, the agency will take into account a wide range of land-use factors, such as provision for open space, access to public transit and affordable housing, as well as alternatives to driving, such as transit, walking and bicycling. Previously, land-use and transportation policies were considered separately.

On the other hand, CMAP does not have the authority to interfere with local land-use and zoning decisions.

Local leaders say the plan's success hinges on whether municipalities think regionally rather than fighting each other for jobs and sales tax growth.

"It just depends on whether everyone buys in and continues to support the plan," said June Johnson, [Schaumburg](#)'s director of transportation.

The projects that made the agency's transportation wish list reflect its shift in priorities. Among them: the proposed extension of the CTA's Red Line southward from its current terminus at 95th Street to 130th Street. The proposed outer-ring Prairie Parkway in Kane and Kendall counties, on the other hand, was related to a lower funding priority.

As part of the plan's emphasis on fixing existing roads, it asks federal officials to revise the "New Starts" program, which funds major new transit projects. That would allow older systems like the CTA, Metra and Pace to use these federal grants for badly needed maintenance and modernization of existing systems.

–[Blair Kamin](#) and [Richard Wronski](#)