

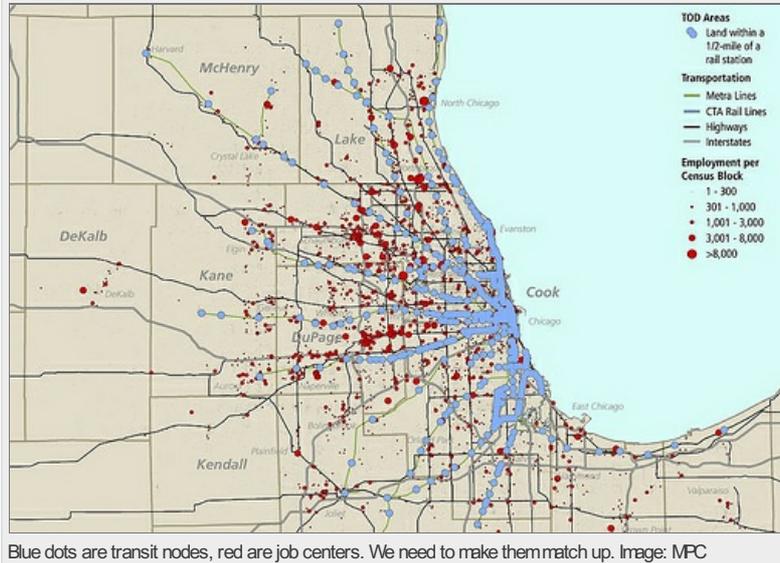
# STREETSBLOG CHICAGO

Tuesday, March 4, 2014

16 Comments

## To Grow Transit Ridership, Chicagoland Needs to Build Near Transit

by John Greenfield



Testifying before the Northeastern Illinois Public Transit Task Force Friday, the [Metropolitan Planning Council](#)'s Peter Skosey argued that the region could significantly increase transit ridership by encouraging jobs and development near existing stations.

Governor Pat Quinn created the 15-member task force last summer in the wake of the controversial ouster of Metra CEO Alex Clifford. Clifford, who received a \$871,000 severance, claimed he was forced out by Metra board members because he wouldn't bow to political pressure on hiring and contract decisions. At the end of the month, the task force is expected to issue recommendations for creating a fiscally and ethically sound regional transit system. The public can [provide input for the report here](#).

Speaking during the public comment portion of the meeting, Skosey said the MPC wants to provide backup for the task force as it pushes for transit reform. "We aren't the only ones holding our breath and waiting for this important report to come out," he said. "We want to embolden you guys to be as bold as you can be in your recommendations."

After noting that reducing corruption and inefficiency in public transportation governance is key for making the regional transit system more viable and building public support for more transit investment, he launched into a discussion of how to increase ridership.



Peter Skosey. Photo: John Greenfield

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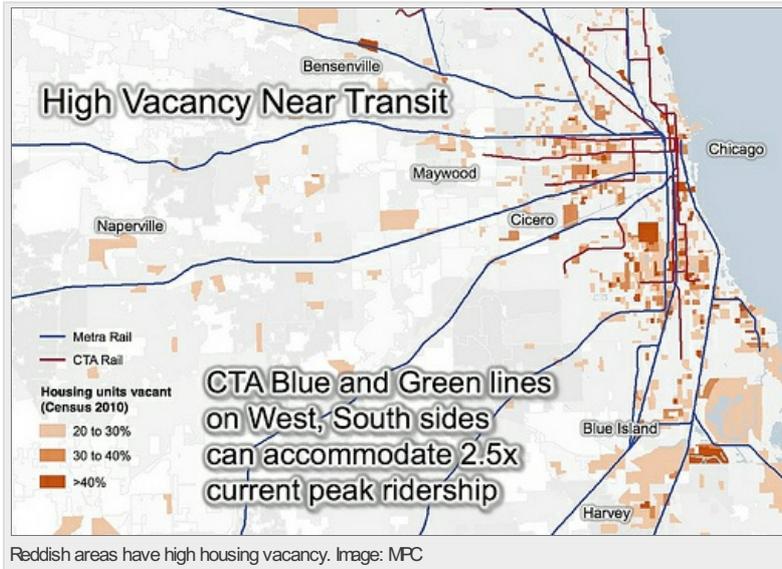
“What should come with the car free lease is a CTA monthly pass and a bike locker.”

Skosey noted that Chicagoland's [GO TO 2040 plan](#) calls for doubling transit ridership by 2040. The region is currently adding 12 million new transit trips annually, but we need to be adding 21 million trips a year to meet that goal, he said. It won't necessarily require doubling the amount of transit spending to achieve that milestone but rather better strategy and urban planning, he added.

A regional [transportation demand management](#) program, which would help coordinate the services of the transit agencies, as well as car-sharing, bike-sharing, emergency ride home and other services, would be a step in the right direction, he said. "In fact we're engaged in conversations right now with the RTA and IDOT on just how to do that for this region."

Skosey noted that better land use, with more people living and working near transit, will lead to higher ridership. He showed a map with blue dots illustrating half-mile radii around transit stations in the region, with red dots marking large employment nodes, which are largely centered around highways and interstates.

"You see the existing mismatch, how we could start to bring those two dots closer together," he said. "Clearly developing new transit lines and office towers is an expensive proposition. This situation didn't arise overnight. It literally arose over several decades, so it's going to take time to redress it, but it is a goal that we should really keep in our sights."



Skosey showed another map illustrating that while CTA Blue and Green lines on the South and West sides have a lot of empty seats, there is also high vacancy in the housing stock in these areas. If the land around these stations could be repopulated, the transit infrastructure would already be in place to serve the additional residents. He also mentioned the Southeast Side as an area that is well-served by Metra rail lines but has a relatively low population, making it a good candidate for infill development.

Region-wide, there's an opportunity for one-half-million new residents to live within a quarter-mile of transit, as well as room for over 100 million square feet of commercial space, Skosey said. He cited a large mixed-use building proposed for the south suburban Tinley Park Metra stop as an example of a developer taking advantage of this opportunity.

"TOD must be a priority," Skosey said. He urged the transit task force to recommend encouraging TOD as part of their report, noting that it may be possible for the state or other government entities to provide financial incentives for transit-friendly development.

Skosey concluded by addressing the funding issue, pointing out that Chicago [spends far less per capita](#) compared to peer cities like Washington, D.C., San Francisco, New York and London. He listed a host of possible strategies to increase local funding, including a vehicle miles traveled fee, indexing motor fuel taxes to inflation, property tax hikes, congestion pricing and carbon tax value capture, and more.

"New funding options can provide operations and capital expansions necessary to attract new riders and better serve existing riders," he said. "None of them are particularly politically exciting. If you are a legislator in Springfield or a county board member, you don't want to vote for any of these things, I'm sure. But they have to be considered."

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*Wewilliewinkleman*

Remember this is the same Metropolitan Planning Council that helped the city re-write its zoning ordinances in 2002.

<https://www.metroplanning.org/multimedia/publication/234>

You woulda thought that they would have been considering this long ago when the whole zoning map was open for change.

— david vartanoff

In response to "Why Would a Developer Choose to Include Fewer Parking Spots?"

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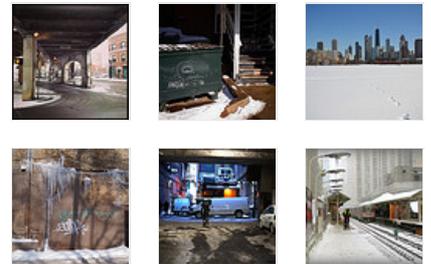
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How much are we going to pay them to reinvent this year's wheel?

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*http://westnorth.com/Payton Chung*

The city's new zoning ordinance text is just one small part of fostering TOD throughout the region. "The whole zoning map" was never "open for change"; ultimately the decision to change the map was left up to each individual alderman. Nor did the zoning change in 100s of towns across the region.

Also, MPC did not receive funds from the city for its zoning work in 2002.

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*peterskosey*

Thanks for the acknowledgement We Willie. You are correct, MPC worked on the zoning re-write of 2004 and pushed heavily for consideration of a TOD zone. While unsuccessful on that score then, the City recently adopted a TOD zone. Nonetheless, opposition to reduced parking requirements and increased density remains high in many neighborhoods and, collectively, we should be doing all we can to support those changes. MPC will continue to push for TOD in Chicago and the region.

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*Wewilliewinkleman*

I have gone over the 2002 zoning ordinance. And yes, the whole zoning map was open for change.

However, most of it was a sop to people who were concerned with tear downs in single family neighborhoods where the zoning permitted denser housing. It created half zones like 3.5, 4.5 and 5.5 in residential neighborhoods. It lowered FARs as well as set backs, side yards and rear yards. It created new height limits in these zoning categories too. It got rid of overlay zoning. Mostly this affected lake front neighborhoods where the city has its best transit.

It was after ordinance went into effect that the alderman came in and where possible "downzoned" to the lowest possible zoning, even when it did not make sense. This was done despite the fact that most neighborhoods east of Western Avenue could be considered a hodgepodge of building styles (i.e. four story brownstones and courtyard buildings mixed in with single family homes.) The trouble with the ordinance is Metropolitan Planning Council never lobbied for effective change of the aldermen's prerogative over zoning issues within their wards. The MPC and the Daley administration basically gave the alderman what they wanted — a way to satisfy their inner NIMBY constituents who were all wound up about tear downs. And it was the zoning ordinance of 2002 that put in place the 1 to 1 ratio of parking spaces to units.

The so called "TOD" zoning is just another name for PUD, planned unit developments. And a PUD basically can negotiate for anything.

TOD is just another charming name for the same old thing. I wonder how many of the developers will throw TOD around so they can look all sparkly and sustainable as they ask the taxpayers to subsidize their buildings with TIF money?

The end result of the 2002 zoning ordinance was to create less density instead of more where it should have been. That was always my criticism of the ordinance. Now to try to fix what they wrought, they are trotting out TOD.

All I am saying is what may look good on paper when it is written (2002) may not look so good in (2014). And remember the same could be said 10 to 12 years down the line. Hey maybe this wasn't such a good idea. But what the heck try it anyway.

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*Dennis McClendon*

I think you're confusing the zoning ordinance with the zoning map. The ordinance received a substantial rewrite, but the remap was never done. Indeed, in Chicago, which has no comprehensive plan, what would guide a zoning remap?

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*oooBooo*

Want to double transit use? Make it useful. Loop centric transit is the problem. But instead of addressing that we get the usual 'make driving more expensive and difficult' routine. That's the failure of Chicago transit. Instead of building transit that works for where people live and want/need to go Chicago area transit advocates focus on ways to punish motorists for not having jobs in the loop.

And that building in Tinley? The developer is getting property and sales taxes kicked back. (<http://www.tinleypark.org/DocumentCenter/Home/View/966>) Taxes right to corporate cronies. Maybe instead of giving away tax monies to cronies they could be used for rail lines or something?

But of course this isn't really about transit at all, but a reshaping of how everyone lives whether they like it or not.

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*MLKendricks*

To densify the South and West sides, the city and county have to reconcile with what's been 60 years of Redlining and Benign Neglect of city services in the black areas of town. Englewood and Bronzeville have solid transit fundamentals. Lots of trains and buses and close to downtown.

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*rohmen*

Good point. And if serious efforts are ever made to "repopulate" the vacant housing stock/land along stretches of the green and blue, I would hope that it is done in a way that also includes improving services for the communities that are already based there first, rather than just bulldozing/gentrifying the area and squeezing those communities further out into near-west and near-south suburbs.

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*Ryan G-S*

Thanks for the detailed coverage, John.

All of the slides from Peter's presentation, as well as some of MPC's background research, are available in this blog post: <http://www.metroplanning.org/news-events/blog-post/6878>

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*Social\_werkk*

I hope you submitted that as a public comment. I couldn't agree more.

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*Social\_werkk*

Gentrification means more money for the city because property values will rise as more White people move into the neighborhood. A lot of cities don't care about the people who are pushed out—they just care about the rising dollars in their coffers.

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*Rob Rion*

Yes, the region should find a way to re-populate the south and west sides of Chicago that are near transit. However, I don't think anyone who currently lives or works far from transit are going to move to be closer. Some companies will but not all and still not all residents will either. Some kind of transit needs to be developed along the tollways and expressways like what was done along I-55. But it needs to have lots of frequencies, at least hourly, to make it work. Not sure where the money will come from.

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*http://gridchicago.com John Greenfield*

Sure thing, thanks for posting the link.

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*http://gridchicago.com John Greenfield*

One positive way these areas could be repopulated would be to build affordable housing near the transit stations and market it to former Chicago Housing Authority residents who were displaced when high-rise housing was demolished under the Daley administration. Many of these residents moved to Section 8 housing in the suburbs, where it's far more difficult to access job and educational opportunities without a car.

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*Social\_werkk*

I agree, John. My public comment focused on the need for affordable housing near transit. I live on the South side and I'm pretty surprised by the vacancies near transit.

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*eric4653*

Nobody is going to take transit from a sprawling exurb to a sprawling suburban office park. The job and

population densities are too small, and expensive investments like rail are not financially justified. Good transit exists to the Loop because many people are going to the same place (or because it was built 100 years ago, and the cheapest system is the one that already exists). If and when the suburbs densify, then they will get rail between them. But not before.

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