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# Envisioning what 2040 holds for city

Mary Schmich  
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How old will you be in 2040?

While you recover from the answer, here are some thoughts on 2040 from students at Whitney Young High School in Chicago.

"I'll be 49," said Moriah Martinez, who as of Friday in a Whitney Young lunchroom was 17. "I kind of think it would be nice. You have wisdom with age."

"Fifty," said Vinca Merriman, who is 18. She glanced at Martinez. "My parents are, like, 52. I'll be my parents' age. So weird."



**Mary Schmich**  
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Whitney Young is a magnet school near the Loop that draws students from all over the city. Many

come by train. Merriman rides down from [Rogers Park](#), Martinez from Uptown. When the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning invited students to come up with contest projects envisioning Chicago in the year 2040, the girls immediately thought about the "L," and how it binds the city's far-flung parts.

So they took a camera down into the tunnels to collect riders' visions of a future when 2.8 million more people will live in the Chicago region.

By 2040, said one rider, gay marriage will be legal. One predicted the disabled would be more accepted. Technology, warned one, would keep making life faster, but not necessarily better. One woman predicted a Daley would still be mayor. Several people declined to be interviewed on the grounds that by 2040 they'd be dead.

The 2040 contest has prompted Martinez and Merriman to collect their own thoughts about the future as well. We talked about those ideas Friday while students from around the school prepared to put their projects on display.

Some of Martinez's predictions: Sewage will be used as household fuel. Tourists will explore space. There will be more mixed-race couples. China will be the planet's superpower, and that will be OK.

"One thing I'm really sad about," said Merriman, "is I think there will be no bookstores. Everybody will shop online."

And almost no one, they said, will use the phone for speaking. Even now, they think it's strange to see people talk on the phone instead of text.

Some things they hope will happen: Teachers will be better paid. The [CTA](#) will be improved, though it's not so bad.

"People should stop complaining about the trains," said Martinez. "These trains do not cost too much."

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Looking 32 years ahead may make older people think about 32 years ago.

1976. Pause on that thought.

"What do you remember from your childhood that doesn't exist anymore?" Merriman's father, a professor, recently asked her.

"VHS," she said.

Martinez's stepfather, who's black and runs his own contracting company, told her the other day that when he was growing up, a black person could hardly have dreamed of being a CEO.

Merriman and Martinez aren't old enough to have wide vistas on the past, but they can look around their neighborhoods for evidence of how cities change.

"When I was younger, there were gang shootings around my day-care center," said Martinez. No more.

Merriman remembers the drug dealers who used to hang out in a playground next to a school near her house. They're gone.

They like changes but worry about the implications of gentrification, the displacement of the poor. More than anything, they say, Chicago's challenge in 2040 will be bringing its disparate peoples together. They especially dislike how the South Side feels so much farther than the North Side from the Loop's prosperity. They want better transportation and development to change that.

The 2040 project is designed to get young people like Martinez and Merriman to imagine the city they'd like to live in. Imagining is the first step of creation.

Whatever 2040 brings, here's one safe prediction: It will come faster than they think.

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