

2019/2020 Local Technical Assistance and Community Planning Programs

Application Number: 1

Project Title: Regional Sidewalk Connection Plan

Applicant: Active Transportation Alliance



Project Description:

The lack of interconnected sidewalk networks in the Chicago region is a clear barrier to inclusive growth. When people can't safely and conveniently walk to local destinations, they're much more likely to take those short trips in a car. This car dependency for short trips is crippling the region and damaging the safety, health, sustainability and equity of our communities. And many of the area's most vulnerable residents, including older adults and people with disabilities, are suffering the most.

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's (CMAP) new Sidewalk Inventory and the region's ON TO 2050 goals are big steps forward. For too long the safety of people walking and the infrastructure needed to support it have been overlooked by local, state, and federal leaders. Thanks to the new data, the region's sidewalk problems are harder to ignore, but the data alone won't lead to progress. The issue is layered and funding is limited so, despite broad public support for pedestrian safety, the inaction is likely to persist without additional steps.

More work is needed to leverage this new data into action. Why is the region's sidewalk network so disconnected? Why are the networks in some communities thriving while others suffer? How is this problem affecting the most vulnerable residents? What can be done to fix it and who should pay? How do we begin to tackle and prioritize improvements in a region with 30,000 miles of roads, 40% of which have no sidewalks? These are the types of questions our project seeks to answer.

The Active Transportation Alliance, in partnership with other non-profit advocacy groups, is seeking technical support from CMAP and/or a consultant to develop a report that identifies the policy barriers to building safe and accessible sidewalk networks and recommends policy solutions. The report will educate elected officials at the local, state, and federal levels about the issue and suggest a path forward as a region. It will help residents understand why their neighborhood lacks sidewalks and what they can do to fix it.

The report will include best practices from local municipalities and cities across the U.S. that have safe, connected networks. It will feature a strong racial and social justice lens and highlight policies that prioritize the needs of people with the greatest needs. The recommendations will be specific and actionable so elected officials can understand the steps that need to be taken, and advocates can hold them accountable.

Our project will use data and policy analysis to make the case for stronger regional collaboration on pedestrian safety and walkability. These issues have broad public support, but leaders lack the context and urgency needed to act. The project will help advance implementation of the dozens of active transportation plans in towns across the region. It will support the mobility goals of ON TO 2050, particularly in the areas of safety, sustainability, and inclusive growth.

Project Location: CMAP region of Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will Counties