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New report reveals how transportation costs burden residents with low income

First-ever comprehensive look at equity of transportation fees, fines and fares in northeastern Illinois

CHICAGO, April 8, 2021 — Residents with low income spend 16% of their income on transportation, compared to 6% for those with high income, according to a new [report](#) from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

This is one of the critical findings in CMAP's first comprehensive analysis of how transportation fees, fines and fares — such as tolls, traffic violation fines and transit fares — burden people with low income, people of color and residents with disabilities. The report also provides policy recommendations to improve transportation equity in metropolitan Chicago.

“Our transportation system is a literal route to opportunity for residents, connecting them to jobs, education and vital services,” CMAP Executive Director Erin Aleman said. “By making transportation costs more equitable, we can ensure that everyone in our region is able to thrive and get to the places they need to go.”

The report's key findings include:

- The cost of driving is unaffordable for many households with low income, but it's not because of fees. Vehicle registration fees and motor fuel taxes are typically less than 1% of a household's income.
- Unpaid fines can be financially devastating to those living paycheck to paycheck. For example, paying a fine for failure to obey a stop sign requires 16 hours of minimum-wage work.
- Households with low income take 20% more transit trips than other households.
- Expanding reduced fares to all residents with low income would result in them taking an estimated 15% more transit trips.

The report's recommendations include offering reduced transit fares and vehicle registration fees to all residents with low income. The report also recommends increasing access to I-PASS for residents without bank accounts and adopting income-based fines, among other strategies.

Illinois and the region have already implemented some recommendations including:



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- An Illinois criminal justice reform bill [signed](#) in early 2021 rescinds license suspensions and license renewal holds due to failure to pay traffic violation fines, among other reforms.
- The Illinois Tollway substantially [reduced](#) fees for missed tolls in 2020.

The report was developed with extensive input from transportation agencies, researchers and advocates across the region. For a full list of partners, click [here](#).

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About CMAP

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) is northeastern Illinois' comprehensive planning organization. The agency and its partners developed and are implementing ON TO 2050, a long-range plan to help the seven counties and 284 communities of our region address transportation, equity, environmental and other quality-of-life issues. Visit [CMAP's website](#) for more information.