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## **New public opinion survey reveals disparities in northeastern Illinois; shows residents support equitable investments**

*Respondents value access to open space and transportation, but express concerns about congestion, cost of living*

CHICAGO, October 7, 2021 — Residents of northeastern Illinois support transportation dollars going toward communities with the highest needs, according to a new public opinion survey by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP).

The survey examines residents' attitudes toward key quality-of-life issues in the region. The results show that residents value attributes like their access to open space and ability to get places. At the same time, they express concerns about traffic congestion, the quality of infrastructure, the economy and housing. The findings also reveal economic and racial disparities across metropolitan Chicago.

The survey, completed by 2,340 residents in Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry and Will counties, was conducted for CMAP by Embold Research from June 28 to July 5, 2021.

The findings identify advantages and challenges in the region, including:

- 65% of residents are satisfied with their overall quality of life.
- About 8 in 10 say it's easy to travel to destinations like groceries, parks and open space, and shops and restaurants.
- People of color are twice as likely as white residents to say it's hard for them to get to their place of work.
- 90% say it is important that investment in roads, bridges and transit go toward communities with the greatest needs.
- 57% say they are worried and uncertain about the local economy.

"The lived experiences of survey respondents describe the complexity of our region's challenges," said Erin Aleman, executive director of CMAP. "We look forward to working together with our partners across the region to help solve these problems as we work toward our vision of an inclusive and thriving northeastern Illinois."

The survey also uncovers how COVID-19 has affected residents' practices and preferences:

- 27% expect to drive more frequently post-pandemic than before COVID-19 restrictions.



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- A majority support the continuation of enhanced neighborhood streets to support walking and biking, and dedicated areas for curbside pickup.
- 63% of employed respondents would live elsewhere if they no longer had to commute.

For more key findings and information about the survey, please visit the [survey page](#) or the fact sheet below.

The results were first revealed Oct. 7 at CMAP's inaugural [State of the Region event](#).

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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 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.



## Public opinion survey: key findings

### Overview

In October 2021, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) released results of a new public opinion survey of northeastern Illinois. The survey was completed by 2,340 residents 18 and older in Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry and Will counties. It was conducted for CMAP by Embold Research from June 28 to July 5, 2021.

The findings reveal residents' attitudes toward key quality-of-life issues — including transportation, open space and housing — and identify successes and challenges across the region. The survey also uncovers how COVID-19 has affected practices and preferences.

### Quality of life

- 65% of residents are satisfied with their overall quality of life.
- Residents are most satisfied with:
  - their ability to get to the places they want to go on a regular basis (74%)
  - their access to open space (70%)
  - air and water quality (68%)
- They tend to be less satisfied with:
  - the value of services provided by their local government (47% satisfied, 36% dissatisfied)
  - access to housing they can afford (52% satisfied, 33% dissatisfied)
- Residents name cost of living and congestion among their top quality-of-life concerns, when asked in an open-ended question.

### Access to work and amenities

- About 8 in 10 residents (78–82%) say it's easy for them to travel to destinations like groceries, parks and open space, and shops and restaurants.
- 69% of employed residents say it's easy to travel to their place of work; 14% say it's hard.
- In Cook County, 16% of employed residents say it is hard to travel to their place of work, while just 11% of those in other counties say so.
- 53% say it's easy to travel to arts, culture and entertainment; 20% say it's hard.
- Residents living in community cohort 4 areas — considered “very high need” — are less satisfied with their access to good jobs, open space, and air and water quality.



## Transportation

- Residents in cohort 1 communities — considered “low need” — rate the quality of their roads, sidewalks and bicycle infrastructure much higher than those living in cohort 4 communities (considered “high need”).
- 90% say that it is very or somewhat important that investment in roads, bridges and transit go toward communities with the greatest needs. This view is shared by residents both outside and inside Cook County; white residents and residents of color; and residents in each major income bracket.
- After being informed that “there is limited funding and land to build more roads and bridges,” residents think the most effective way to address traffic congestion is:
  - Invest in public transit (71%)
  - Charge higher tolls during busy times (14%)
  - Add tolls to existing highways (9%)
  - Increase the gas tax and adjust it for inflation (6%)
- The top traffic safety concern is “drivers who are distracted” (51%), followed by “poor quality of roads” (30%).
- Prior to COVID-19 restrictions, half of Chicago residents took some form of transit multiple times a week. Just 13% of those outside Cook County did so.
- One-third of Chicago residents say they used rideshare multiple times per week, while just 12% of those outside Cook say so.

## COVID-19 and transportation

- 32% of residents worked from home instead of their place of work since March 2020.
- Three-quarters of those who worked from home say they would want to work from home half of the time or more when things return to normal, if they could choose.
- Only 50% say they expect to be working from home when things return to normal.
- 63% of employed respondents would live elsewhere if they no longer had to commute.
- 27% of residents say they expect to be driving or riding in a car more frequently after things return to normal than before COVID-19 restrictions.
- 27% say they expect to use public transportation less frequently than before restrictions.
- 33% say they expect to walk, run or hike more often than before COVID-19 restrictions when things return to normal.
- 21% say they expect to ride a bicycle more than before, although 17% say they expect to ride a bicycle less than before.
- 69% support the continuation of enhanced neighborhood streets to support walking and biking when things return to normal.



- 65% support the continuation of dedicated areas for curbside pickup for food and shopping.
- 48% support using street or parking spaces for outdoor dining or events when things return to normal; 35% do not. Residents of Chicago, Cook County and Lake County are slightly more inclined to believe they should continue.

## COVID-19 and personal finances

- 29% of residents said they lost income or hours since March 2020.
- 46% of those making less than \$35,000 in annual household income said they lost income or hours.
- 23% of residents said they had difficulty paying for food, groceries or essential expenses since March 2020.
- 44% of those making less than \$35,000 in annual household income said they had this difficulty.
- 12% of residents said they worked less or left the workforce to take care of children or other family members. This was higher among Latino/a residents (17%) and Black residents (14%) than white residents (9%).
- 14% of women reported working less to take care of others, while 10% of men did.
- 17% of women reported losing a job or business, while 13% of men did.

## Climate

- More than two-thirds of residents say they've experienced or seen at least one of the various impacts of more extreme weather and climate change in the last few years. The most common:
  - extreme heat (34%)
  - extreme winter storms (31%)
  - damage to infrastructure or road closures from extreme weather (29%)
  - increased flooding of roadways (28%)
  - increased flooding of properties (26%)
- 56% of residents think local governments are not doing enough to reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.
- When presented with a list of individual behaviors that could improve air quality and reduce emissions, residents said they would:
  - walk for short trips more often instead of traveling by car (33%)
  - work from home more often (24%)
  - purchase an electric vehicle (21%)
  - take public transit more often (20%)
  - ride a bicycle for short trips more often (17%)



- carpool more often (9%)

## Regional outlook

- Residents are more optimistic about their local communities than the region as a whole:
  - 32% of residents say metropolitan Chicago is headed in the right direction; 68% say it is on the wrong track.
  - 57% say their own town, village or city is headed in the right direction; 43% say it's on the wrong track.
  - 64% say their own neighborhood is headed in the right direction; 36% say it is on the wrong track.
- 65% of residents say they feel at least a moderate sense of belonging to the town, village or city where they live; just 41% feel the same about northeastern Illinois.
- 57% say they are worried and uncertain about the local economy.
- 58% say that it's very likely or somewhat likely that they'll move away from northeastern Illinois in the next few years.

## Methodology

Embold Research conducted a survey of 2,340 residents 18 and older across Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry and Will counties from June 28 to July 5, 2021. The modeled margin of error is 2.6%.

Respondents were recruited into an online survey instrument via Dynamic Online Sampling and SMS. Post stratification was done on region, gender, age, race, education and past vote history with 2020 voters.

CMAF's [community cohorts](#) are based on the percent of a community's population living in [economically disconnected or disinvested areas](#), population size, median household income and tax base per capita. Communities in cohort 1 are considered low and very low need; cohort 2 are moderate need; cohort 3 are high need; cohort 4 are very high need.