



Chicago Metropolitan
Agency for Planning

Proposed MEGA Project

Joint I-290 Blue Line Modernization Project



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Illinois Department
of Transportation

Project overview

The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) and the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) are partnering to invest in improvements to the Interstate-290 multimodal corridor that includes both the CTA Forest Park Rapid Blue Line and the I-290 Eisenhower Expressway.

Once-in-a-generation investment opportunity

The new Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provides a tremendous opportunity to secure National Infrastructure Project Assistance (also known as “Megaprojects” or “MEGA”) funds for this project. IDOT and CTA, in partnership with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), are collaborating on a joint grant application for MEGA Projects. In addition to MEGA, partners will pursue all possible funding options through IIJA.

Partners are working closely with local, state, and federal stakeholders to bring attention to this important project and its benefits, as well as facilitate conversations and foster support.

Project need¹

The CTA Forest Park Blue Line currently operates under 70 percent slow zone order and stations on that branch remain inaccessible. The I-290 corridor is one of the most congested expressways in the country. It is also one of the most unsafe roadways in the region.

I-290 needs modernization due to aging pavement and bridges. Transit facilities need repair, and they are inaccessible to customers with disabilities, impacting transit access and use. The track has not been fully rehabilitated since the multimodal asset was originally constructed in 1958. Overall, the need for transit in this area is higher than the rest of the region. There is also lack of access to pedestrian and bicycle amenities.

Program details

The 13-mile, \$5.5 billion (YOES²) multiple-phase project, spanning from downtown Chicago (in the east) to Mannheim Road in Hillside (in the west) consists of³:

IDOT

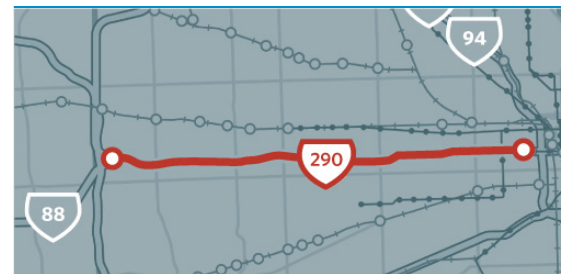
- The addition of one high occupancy toll (HOT) 3+ (three or more occupants per vehicle or transit vehicle required for non-tolled use, or one/two occupants per vehicle paying a toll) lane in each direction to I-290 between 25th Avenue and Austin Boulevard.
- The conversion of one existing general-purpose lane in each direction from Austin Boulevard to west of Racine Avenue to HOT 3+ use.
- Provisions for express bus service (EXP) and high-capacity transit (HCT), which includes a heavy rail or bus rapid transit extension.

Elected officials, transportation leaders, and advocates agree this transportation project is the **highest priority** for the region, given the many economic, safety, and mobility benefits as described below.

*I-290 crash rates

24 - 70% higher compared to other Chicago area freeways
*western parts of the corridor

I-290 bridges: 50+ years old
Pavement life: approx. 30 years
Bridges life: approx. 50 years



Background:

The I-290 Eisenhower Expressway / CTA Blue Line corridor, built in the 1950s, demonstrated innovation and a shared vision of multimodal cooperation. It was a first-of-its-kind project to construct transit in the median of a grade-separated highway. Both the transit line and the highway provided the “express” access from the western suburbs to downtown Chicago.



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CTA

- CTA is currently completing phase one of a four-phase plan to reconstruct the Forest Park Branch track and make stations accessible. CTA's current project includes replacement of track from UIC Station to west of IMD Station. Additionally, to deal with power reliability concerns, CTA will construct a new substation building within CTA ROW near the Morgan Street Viaduct. Finally, Racine Station, including the Loomis Street entrance will be reconstructed for ADA and customer facing improvements.
- Future phases of work continue along the branch west of IMD through Forest Park and include track replacement, substation upgrades, station renovations for full ADA accessibility, and reconstruction of Des Plaines Yard and Forest Park Terminal.

Regionally Significant Project (RSP)

CMAQ's ON TO 2050 plan identified both I-290 Eisenhower reconstruction, managed lanes, and CTA Forest Park Blue Line reconstruction as constrained regionally significant projects. RSP projects advance the three principles of ON TO 2050 by promoting inclusive growth, strengthening resilience, and prioritizing investment.

Combined benefits

This investment will provide countless benefits to Chicago and the entire northeastern Illinois region. By eliminating a key chokepoint, it will **reduce congestion**, **improve traffic flow** and transit speeds, make stations fully accessible, and **save time for travelers**.

It will advance **economic growth** and **jobs** (the size of the economy), **prosperity** (the quality of growth), and **inclusion** (the distribution of growth) in traditionally economically disconnected areas. This includes the creation of **+19,000 construction-related jobs** ⁴.

It will also improve **resilience** and **environmental justice** by building healthy and safe environments, increase **transit access**, and address **climate change** by improving the exiting transit experience and creating opportunities for express bus service.

It will **not** result in the displacement of residences or businesses.

Other benefits of the full Program once completed include:

- Enhances safety
- Improves freight movement
- Builds bicycle and pedestrian facilities near stations and interchanges in the project corridor
- Creates a multi-use trail connecting the Illinois Prairie Path and Columbus Park
- Coordinates construction work minimizing environmental impacts and impacts to the community

- I-290 RSP #30
- CTA Blue Line Forest Park reconstruction RSP #93
- Pace's proposed bus rapid transit also identified, as well as a high-performing potential segment of Pace's proposed express bus network

Austin Concept Rendering



Cicero Concept Rendering



- Generates cost-savings through coordination and economies of scale
- Accommodates Pace express bus service
- Reconstructs three bridges (Cicero, Laverne, and Lombard) that are obsolete/in poor condition and upgrades bridges spanning the multimodal corridor
- Enhances resilience along the corridor through key stormwater drainage and flood mitigation improvements/investments
- Improves transit access within economically disadvantaged communities with modernized, ADA-accessible stations
- Reconstructs full track system (between the Cicero Station and Austin Station) to improve ride quality and remove slow zones

Travel time savings

- *25% in the free lanes
- *56% in the managed

Lanes

- *#1 truck bottleneck in the U.S.

MEGA Investment

I-290 is set to have a cost of \$3.8 billion and Blue Line Forest Park reconstruction will cost \$2.4 billion. IJA provides \$5 billion in competitive grants for states, local governments, tribes, and other related organizations with \$1 billion being given out for FY2022. The federal government will award 50% of the funding to projects greater than \$500 million and 50% to projects between \$100 million and \$500 million.

The federal requirements for MEGA funds include projects that meet these criteria:

- Likely to generate national or regional economic, mobility, or safety benefits
- In significant need of federal funding
- Cost effectiveness
- One or more stable and dependable funding or financing sources (related, non-federal funds) available to construct, maintain, and operate the project, and to cover cost increases

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Given this **pivotal moment** in our industry with the infrastructure funds, we can continue Burnham's legacy and invest in 290 and the Blue Line together to create a multimodal corridor — a real game-changer that can deliver the biggest, boldest impact to our entire region.

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— **Erin Aleman**, Executive Director, Chicago Metropolitan Area for Planning (CMAP)

CTA Blue Line Vision Study Area

