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PART
Plan of Action for Regional Transit
Northeastern Illinois

B10: Making the transportation system more welcoming and accessible for all

September 22, 2023

Executive summary

Despite recent progress, northeastern Illinois' regional public transportation infrastructure does not guarantee equal access for all. Significant barriers exist for some regional residents, such as those that live with a disability or have limited English proficiency. For these members of the community, the region's public transportation infrastructure and the areas surrounding it often include persistent and significant barriers that limit their ability to make effective use of the system. These barriers make it harder to move about the region to access the goods and services they need for everyday life. These barriers have also resulted in residents with disabilities taking fewer trips than the average resident.

Since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, the region has made significant strides in removing these barriers, but several remain today. Accessibility improvements are needed both on and off the transit system to provide safe and convenient travel for all. To enable the region to achieve the goal of accessible mobility for all, the state should:

- **Require and fund a detailed regional plan with a clear timeline for full transit system accessibility**. This plan could build upon existing efforts like the Chicago Transit Authority's *All Stations Accessibility Program* (ASAP)
- **Identify, prioritize, and fund off-system and last mile accessibility improvements** on facilities not controlled by transit agencies like sidewalks and local roadways
- **Dedicate investment toward accessible wayfinding and signage**, either directly or through partnership with private and nonprofit partners

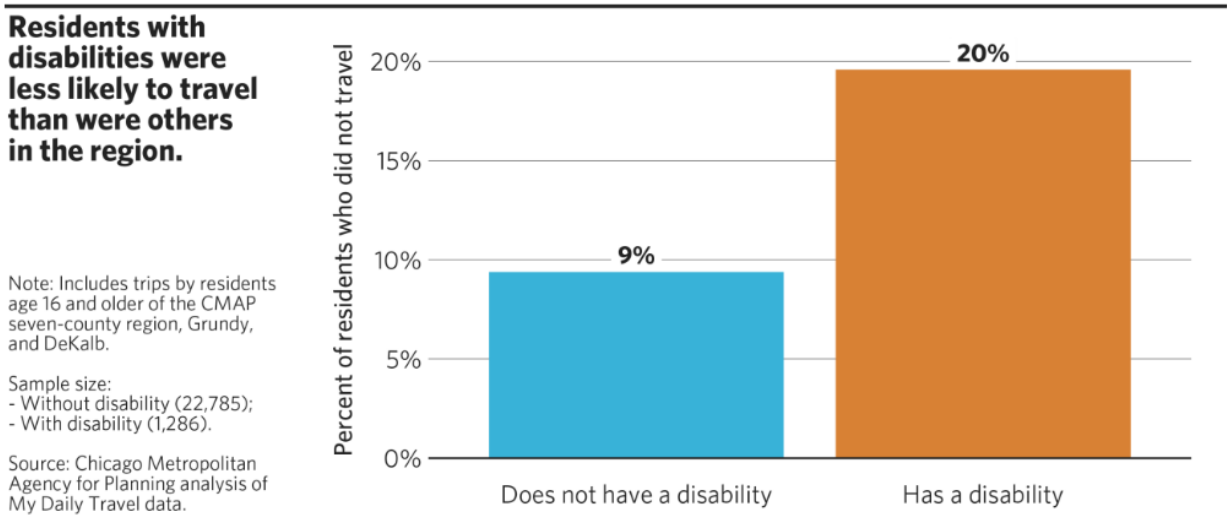
- **Improve two-way rider communication**, including on accessibility issues and cross-system real-time travel information

Investments like the ones mentioned above would make significant progress towards the goal of a fully accessible transit system in northeastern Illinois.

The challenge: Many regional travelers cannot access public transit because of physical, visual, technological, language, or other barriers

Public transportation plays an important role in providing access to important opportunities across employment, healthcare, education, housing, and community life. This role often becomes essential for those living with a disability. Nationally, people with disabilities are more than twice as likely as those without disabilities to live in a household without access to a personal vehicle.[1] However, current infrastructure — both on and off the transit system — continues to present barriers that make transit systems not equally accessible to all residents, with particular concerns for residents with a disability or other mobility challenges. In the region, residents who are wheelchair users or visually impaired often find themselves navigating a transportation system that does not always accommodate their needs. As a result, these residents are less likely to travel throughout the region than the general population (**Figure 1**).[2] Similar challenges are borne by residents who do not speak English proficiently.

Figure 1. Pre-COVID-19 travel surveys show the impact of disabilities on residents' travel choices on an average weekday, 2019



In the seven-county CMAP region, 832,569 residents (9.8 percent) live with a disability, and 437,271 residents (5.4 percent) have limited English proficiency.[3] Key physical infrastructure barriers include the absence of step-free access to transit service, broken or missing sidewalks,

and missing curb cuts. Informational and technological barriers include non-existent or inaccessible signage and wayfinding, inconsistent fare payment systems, overreliance on smartphone access, and the accuracy and availability of real-time arrival information. For many of these residents, these barriers leave them with travel options that are at best inconvenient or uncomfortable, and at worst impossible to use.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990) requires public transit service providers – including Metra, Pace Suburban Bus (Pace), and the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) – to ensure accessible transportation options to individuals with disabilities. This includes accommodations for people with mobility impairments (e.g., difficulty walking or climbing stairs) as well as visual and hearing challenges. Features such as wheelchair lifts or ramps, designated seating areas, and securement systems should ensure safety while traveling. At transit stations and other facilities, the installation and maintenance of ramps, elevators, automated doors, and accessible ticketing and information systems help riders access and navigate the system. Communication with passengers should use alternative formats like braille, large print, or electronic text, as well as auditory announcements of real-time information for passengers with visual or hearing impairments.

The region's transit agencies have made significant progress towards full compliance with the ADA. Every bus and train on the region's transit system is now accessible. Most of the region's existing rail stations have been upgraded with elevators, ramps, and other accessibility improvements in recent years. Transit agencies have identified strategies to complete these efforts, including comprehensive plans like CTA's *All Stations Accessibility Program* (ASAP). Additional projects are underway, including several funded by large competitive federal grants recently obtained by both CTA and Metra.[4] Pace has also begun construction on a first-of-its kind transfer station for its paratransit service made possible by *Rebuild Illinois*.[5]

While these programs are significant for improving transit access for those living with disabilities, they only speak to on-system accommodations. Since all transit trips start and end with other modes like walking, biking, or rolling,[6] the responsibility to make transportation infrastructure more accessible is shared across transit agencies and the agencies and local governments that maintain the public rights of way within which they operate. Many of the greatest remaining barriers to transit fall outside the region's buses and train stations, along roads that are unsafe to walk or roll on due to inadequate or missing sidewalks, excessive speed, lack of safe crossings, or other deficiencies.[7] For example, while the majority of CTA bus stops and rail stations have full sidewalk coverage within a half mile, the same is not true for Metra stations and Pace bus stops. Further, while the CTA bus and rail systems are more likely to have good sidewalk connectivity, those sidewalks are only as useful as their weakest links – whether it is a missing curb cut, a broken slab, or traffic signals not accessible to visually impaired travelers.

Because of the multi-jurisdictional nature of these connections, addressing off-system accessibility barriers requires integrated planning and coordination between municipalities, roadway agencies, and transit agencies. More investment and coordination in technology and

infrastructure are needed to create safe and accessible routes to and from transit so that everyone can travel independently regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities.

Trip planning is another recurring challenge for people with disabilities. These travelers must navigate complex connections, which may include dial-a-ride services across multiple service providers and with varying eligibility criteria and pricing. They must ensure that all train stations along a journey are accessible. This complexity is amplified by the sometimes-unpredictable status of elevators at train stations and transit centers, which can effectively render an otherwise accessible facility inaccessible with little warning. New efforts to support Mobility as a Service (MaaS) aim to simplify access to transportation by providing a single mobile app with real-time arrival, routing, and elevator availability information that allows users to plan trips and pay for various travel modes within a region. These systems can also make the system more accessible for residents with limited English proficiency by providing more options for accessing transit information in various languages. This vision for seamless multimodal trip planning and real-time information requires deliberate actions to integrate current offerings and ensure people with disabilities can confidently navigate their journeys without encountering unexpected barriers.

Ultimately, all users will benefit from a system that is more accessible, regardless of their abilities. Planning and incorporating accessibility features will deliver safe access and a better user experience for everyone from new parents and the recently injured to one-time visitors and daily riders.[8] Many accessibility improvements aimed specifically at passengers with disabilities are also beneficial to the general public, such as level boarding on trains and buses, adequate sidewalk widths, curb ramps, real-time information available in multiple formats and media, etc.

Regional context

On-system accessibility

In the 1980s, the disability community led a broad campaign for for accessible, fixed route public transportation both on a national level and locally in northeastern Illinois. This advocacy took the form of protests and lawsuits that garnered significant public attention and eventually culminated in the 1990 passage of ADA.[9] Among other things, this act required the following:

- All new buses purchased after 1990 must have lifts/ramps and stop announcements.
- All new rail stations built after 1990 must be accessible.
- All rail stations identified as “key stations” must be made accessible.
- Accessible paratransit service must be provided for people who are unable to ride fixed route transit with the following minimum requirements:
    - Service must be available within ¾ miles of wherever fixed route service is provided.
    - Service must have the same days and hours of fixed route service.

- Fares for the service can be no more than double the base, fixed route fare.

Three decades since the passage of the ADA, the region's transit agencies have made significant strides in realizing the statutory and moral mandates of this act.

Today, all CTA buses and railcars are fully accessible, equipped with hydraulic wheelchair ramps and securement areas, level boarding, automated audio and visual route identification and stop announcements, and other features. Pace buses are also made fully accessible through similar features, and the agency provides paratransit services for the entire RTA service area. All 11 Metra train lines operate trains that are fully accessible to customers with disabilities, as modified railcars, level boarding, and other accommodations have improved travel options. 103 of 145 CTA stations (71 percent) have been upgraded with elevators, ramps, and other improvements to make them accessible, with fully funded plans to make 14 more stations accessible, increasing this figure to 117 (81 percent) (**Figure 2**). Additionally, 190 of 242 Metra stations (79 percent) are fully ADA accessible, and 11 are partially accessible (5 percent). There is ongoing construction and/or design underway for 13 additional stations that will bring them to full accessibility, bringing the figure to 203 of 242 station (84 percent) (**Figure 3**).

Figure 2. Accessibility status of CTA rail stations

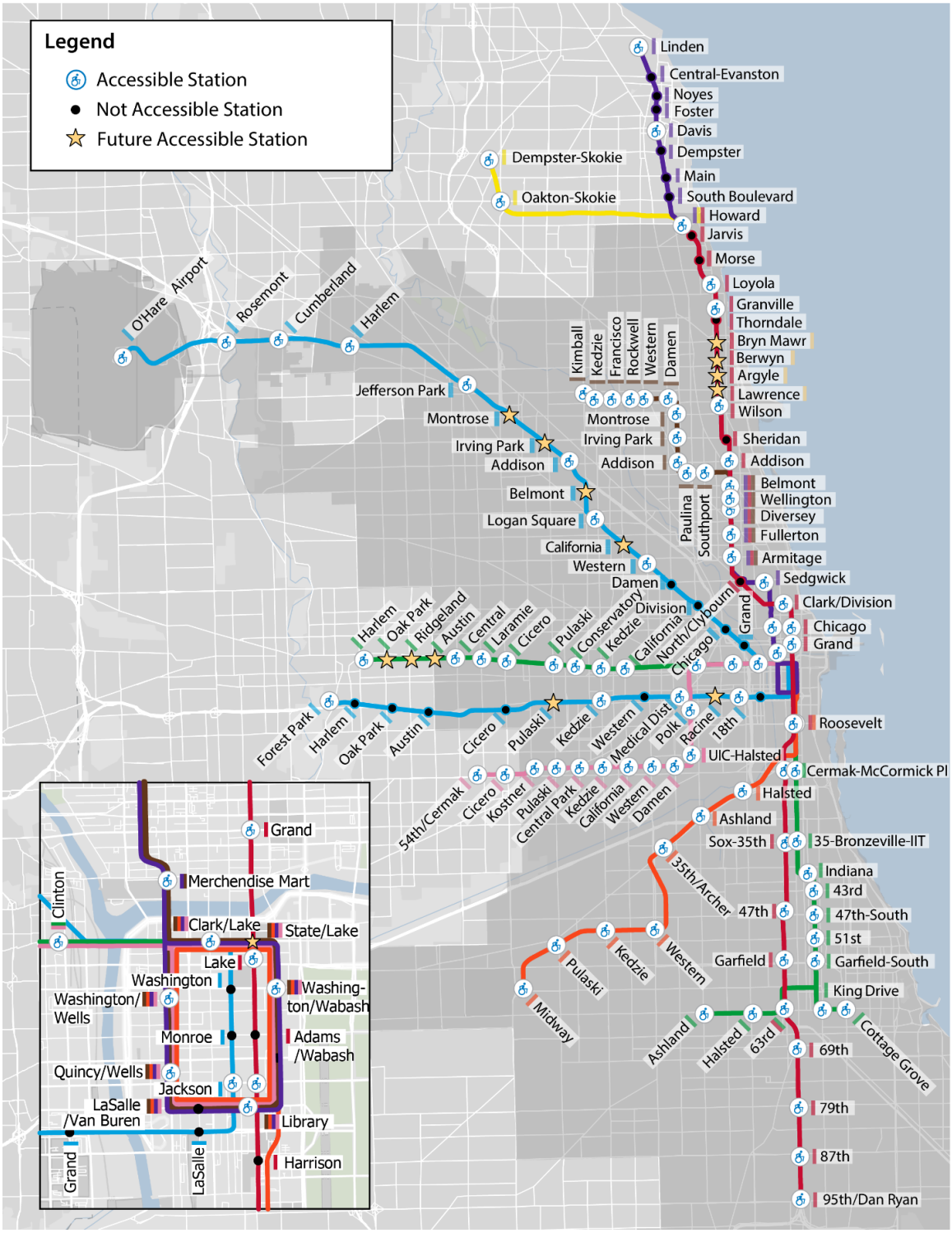
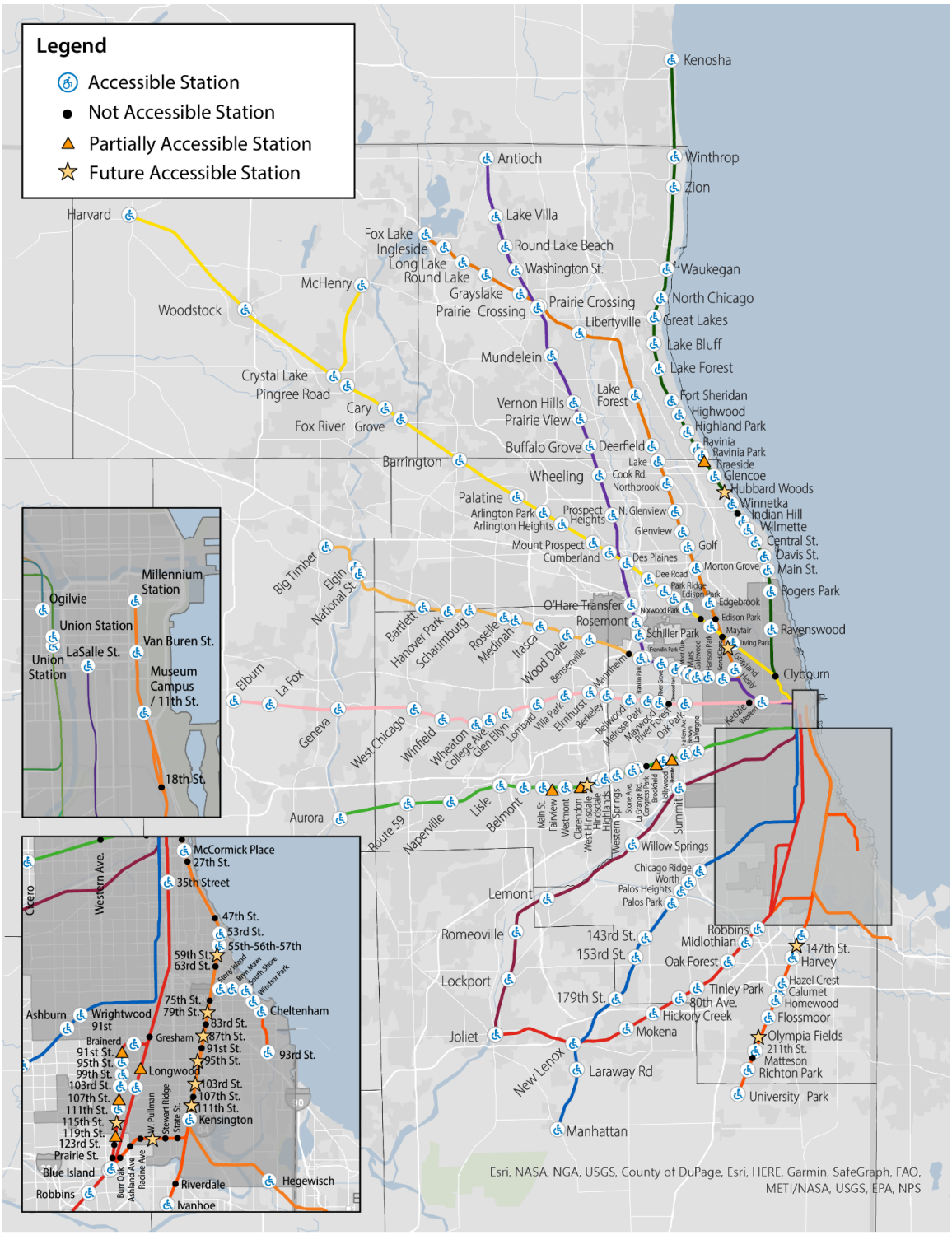


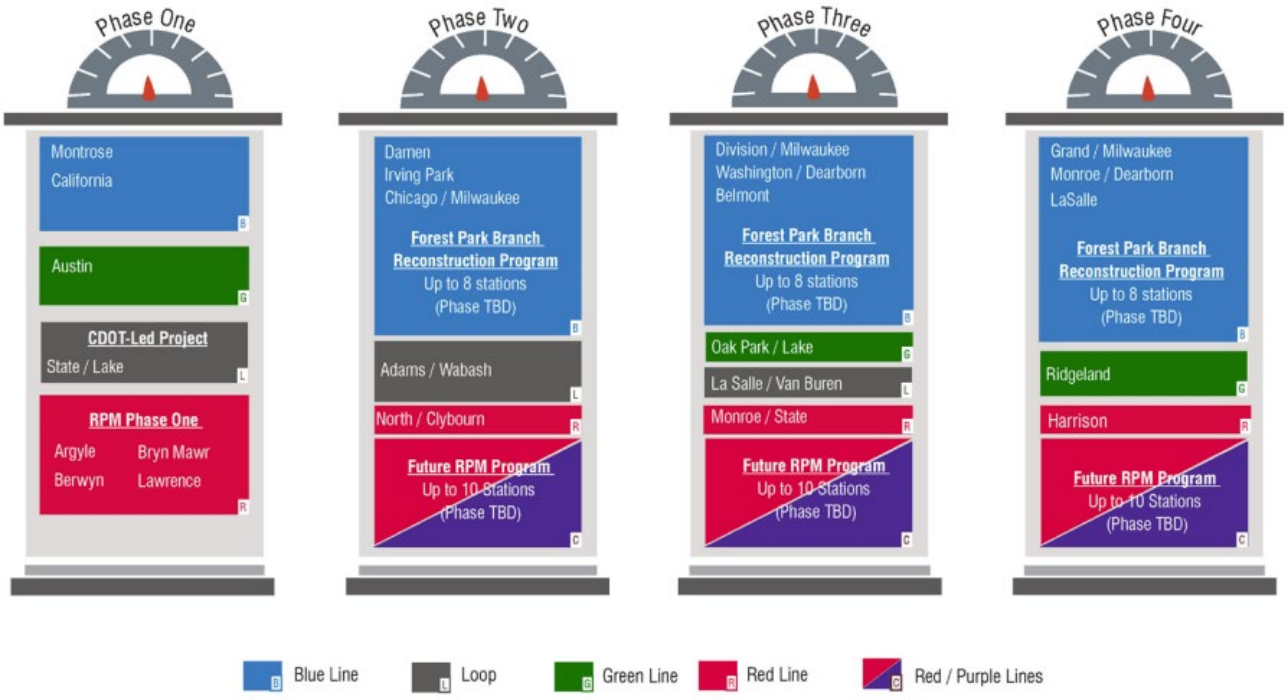
Figure 3. Accessibility status of Metra stations



As noted above, the majority of CTA bus and rail stations also have complete sidewalk access within a half mile of the station, according to CMAP's most recent sidewalk inventory.[10]

In addition to the station renovation projects currently underway, there are several ongoing programs in the region aimed at improving on-system accessibility. In 2018, the CTA launched ASAP with the objective of achieving complete accessibility for individuals with mobility impairments within the next two decades. The CTA intends to achieve this by renovating or reconstructing its 42 currently inaccessible rail stations and actively rehabilitating or replacing its 162 elevators. The proposed upgrades also include accessible entrances and doors, accessible routes from curbs to platforms, and wayfinding options that could make navigating the environment easier and more intuitive for all users. **Figure 4** shows planned implementation phases over the next two decades.[11]

Figure 4. CTA All Stations Accessibility Program (ASAP) phasing



In 2022, the CTA and Metra received $185 million from the federal All Stations Accessibility Program earmarked for accessibility improvements at their stations.[12] CTA plans to use this money to modernize and make accessible the Irving Park, Belmont, and Pulaski stations on the Blue Line serving the northwest side of Chicago. Metra plans to use this money to make similar improvements to the 59th/60th Street Station, and the 95th Street-Chicago State University Station on the Metra Electric line.

Although the ADA does not require commuter rail systems like Metra to operate complementary paratransit service as it does for rapid transit and bus systems, Metra also voluntarily operates the P-8 shuttle service. This service is temporarily available to carry

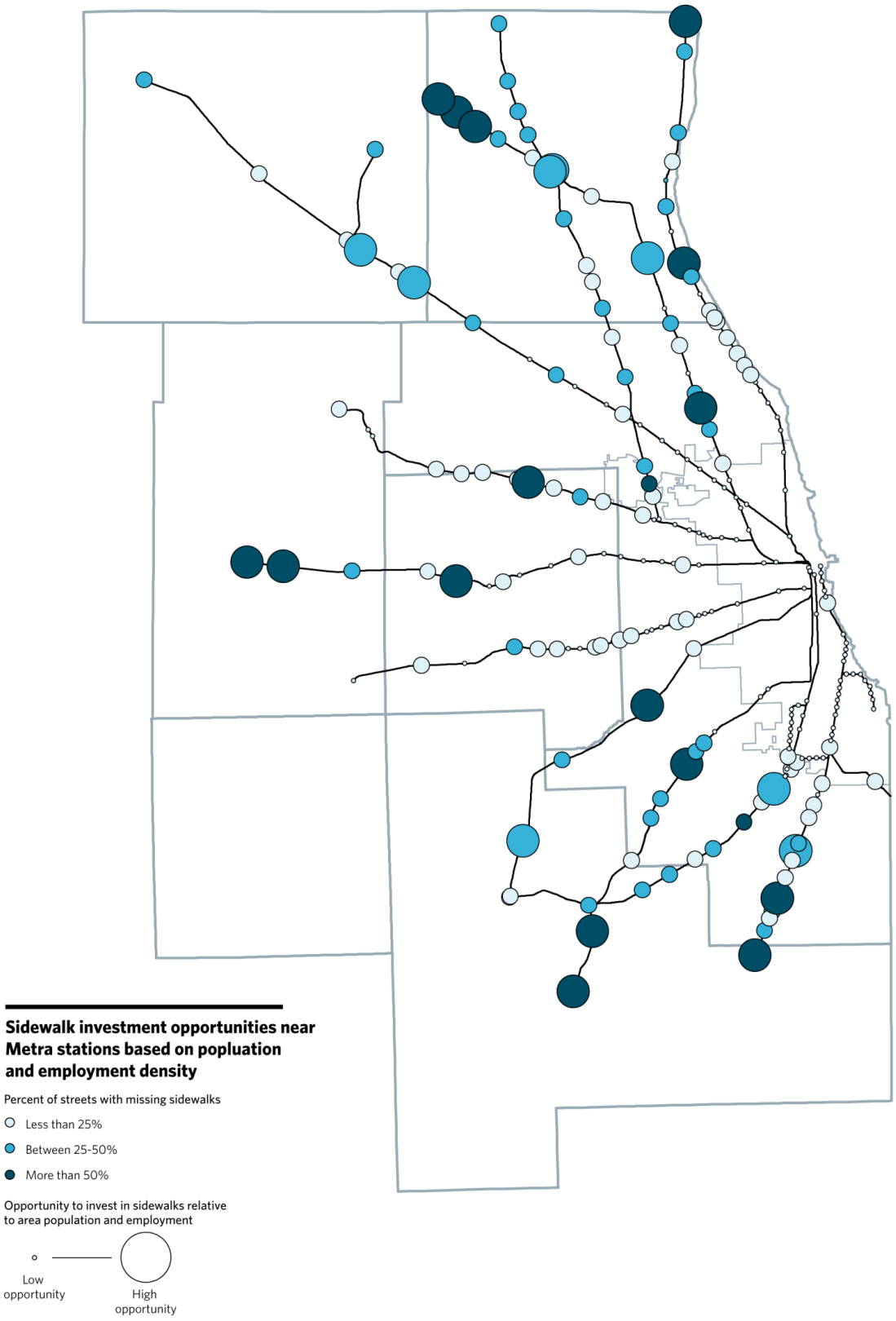
passengers between a qualified origin (within a half-mile of a non-accessible Metra station) to the next accessible station of the same line.[13]

Off-system accessibility

On-system accessibility, the dimension that CTA, Metra and Pace have the most direct control over and the focus of the previous paragraphs, is only a portion of what makes a transit system accessible. A traveler with a disability cannot access the vehicle, stop, or station if there are not continuous and step-free sidewalks between their trip's origins and destinations and where they access the transit service.

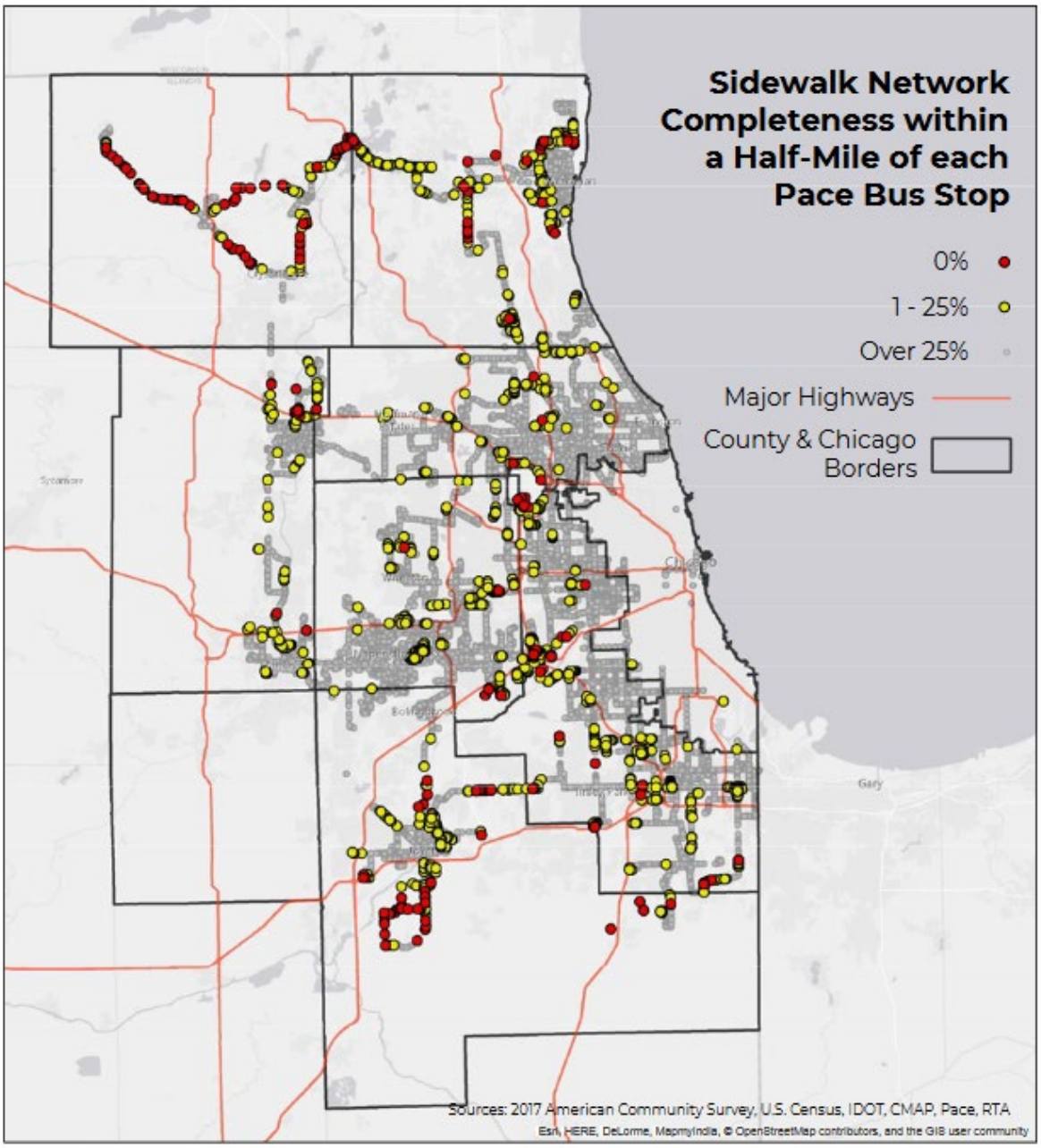
To better understand these gaps, CMAP has assessed the location and condition of connections on local and regional sidewalk networks. Recent analysis based on the agency's sidewalk inventory has found that these missing connections are unfortunately common. For example, only 35 of Metra's 242 stations (14 percent) have sidewalks on one or both sides of nearly all roads within one half mile. Eighteen stations (7 percent) have less than 50 percent sidewalk coverage (**Figure 5**).[14]

Figure 5. Sidewalk network completeness near Metra stations



Similar gaps exist for Pace bus stops throughout the region. A 2019 analysis of CMAP's sidewalk inventory from the Metropolitan Planning Council found that only 1 percent of Pace bus stops had full sidewalk coverage within a half-mile (**Figure 6**).[15]

Figure 6.Sidewalk network completeness near Pace bus stops



Note: 100% completeness means there are sidewalks on both sides of all streets radiating from a specific bus stop for the specified distance (either ½ or ¼ mile). A bus stop with sidewalks on only one side of all streets radiating from it would have a sidewalk completeness of 50%.

By comparison, only three of 144 CTA train stations have less than 90 percent sidewalk coverage within one half mile: Rosemont and Cumberland on the Blue line and Ashland on the Orange line. But this first, high-level glimpse into pedestrian access lacks information on other aspects of ADA accessibility like sidewalk quality, snow and ice conditions, curb cuts, tactile paving, signalized crosswalks, lighting, bus shelters, and connections to other features like bike and pedestrian pathways. Because of the multi-jurisdictional nature of these connections, improvements to these off-system accessibility barriers requires integrated planning and coordination between municipalities, roadway agencies, and transit agencies.

Similar to on-system accessibility, there are also several recent efforts in the region aimed improving off-system accessibility. Complete Streets policies provide a framework for road design that is inclusive of the needs of all road users, regardless of mode, age, or ability level. They generally encourage or require road designs that include amenities like sidewalks, bike lanes and traffic calming. The State of Illinois passed a complete streets policy in 2007 that required IDOT to establish design and construction standards for bicycle and pedestrian ways.[16] The Active Transportation Alliance provides assistance to municipalities in creating and adopting Complete Streets policies, with over 50 Illinois jurisdictions, including Chicago and Cook County, passing a Complete Streets policy to date.[17]

In 2021, the Illinois State Legislature passed HB270, which removed the local match required whenever pedestrian facilities are constructed on state-owned roadways. Before this legislation, if a state-owned roadway was constructed or reconstructed, IDOT would cover the total cost of vehicular lanes, but if the local municipality wanted sidewalks, bike lanes, or side paths, they would have to cover 20 percent of the cost of this infrastructure. If the local match could not be met, then these pieces of infrastructure would be omitted from the final design. This often resulted in local municipalities failing to request this infrastructure in the first place.[18] This new legislation now requires the state to fully fund sidewalks and bike lanes if they are included in a project as long as the project occurs along a state-owned roadway within a community within one mile of an urban area with a population of at least 1,000 people.

CMAP also offers free trainings on the requirements of the ADA through its ADA program. The program is structured into four modules. It is intended to educate communities about the law and its provisions. The trainings support municipalities in self-evaluating and completing ADA transition plans, as well as implementing and funding infrastructure improvements that increase accessibility within their jurisdiction.[19]

Signage, wayfinding, and communication

In addition to infrastructure improvements, there are many technological and information needs yet to be addressed before full system accessibility can be achieved. It is important to note, however, that any improvements would build on significant efforts already undertaken by the region's transit providers. For example, CTA was one of the first transit agencies to implement real-time, GPS-based train and bus tracking technology. Metra recently launched a new website, metratracker.com, to provide similar real-time information about train arrivals

and departures. And as discussed below, Pace has taken significant steps to improve the availability and usability of real-time travel information across many platforms.

However, these tools are still not yet completely accessible for all users. For example, smartphone adoption is increasingly prevalent, but it is not universal, leaving some residents with limited access to real-time travel information or transit fare products. In the seven-county region, 12 percent of households still do not have access to a smartphone, and 6 percent do not have access to a computer of any kind.[20] Additionally, signage and wayfinding are available, but not always coordinated – and in some cases, may not be useful to riders with visual impairments. And while transit agencies make significant efforts to provide information in multiple languages, such as English and Spanish, some travelers may still confront a system that they cannot understand.

The lack of consistency and integration of accessible features across the transportation system can make it harder for people with disabilities to rely on public transit. Significant progress has been made in these areas, and ongoing work promises to further accommodate these riders. But some may find available services too complex and unsafe to use, leading them to take other modes of travel. A recent customer survey conducted by CTA in 2022 showed a downward trend in areas such as personal security, cleanliness, consistency of wait times, and the accuracy of Bus Tracker and Train Tracker — an internet-based program that lets riders access real-time bus and train information.[21] Riders' continued challenges underscore the need for better accommodations both on and off the transit system to improve vulnerable users' experience and make transit a more competitive option for all travelers.

To address some of these challenges, Pace is implementing a Mobility as a Service (MaaS) pilot project to modernize its system and create a better passenger experience for all riders. Pace has partnered with the mobile app company Transit for a two-year pilot program to provide enhanced trip planning, bus tracking, and fare payment options.[22] The agency has also expanded its current technology-based initiatives by evolving the long-running Intelligent Transportation Systems[23] and Assistive Technologies programs. These steps and other similar initiatives are gradually improving transportation accessibility, efficiency, and safety for both Pace and CTA buses. Doing so will reduce wait time through improved transportation scheduling and real-time transit information for customers, a benefit that is of particular importance for passengers with disabilities with limited alternative travel options. And looking ahead, an open-source multi-modal trip planner that integrates both transit and demand-responsive services would better address these trip-planning needs.[24]

For more information, see the companion PART memo on paratransit and other demand-responsive transit services, available on the PART webpage.[25]

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Complete and fund a regional, detailed plan and timeline for full transit system accessibility

ADA requirements set a minimum standard for modern accommodations in public life, but more can be done to ensure full, step-free accessibility and reliability for all transit riders. Accelerating implementation of CTA's ASAP initiative would help to achieve longstanding goals at 42 transit facilities at the region's core. Additional resources — through a combination of local, state, and federal sources — will be needed to shorten ASAP's 20-year horizon for implementation, alongside other enabling capital projects. But CTA's strategic plan offers greater public visibility and accountability for finding viable, long-term funding solutions.

For Metra, the same level of institutional commitment will be required to identify, plan for, fund, and implement upgrades across its remaining 41 inaccessible and partially accessible stations. This can be accomplished through its own strategic plan, or through a more comprehensive effort that builds on CTA's ASAP program to optimize upgrades across the regional rail system. A regional approach may be needed as Metra does not own many of its stations, as they are under the jurisdiction of the local communities.

Pace similarly does not own many of its largest transit centers, which are located at CTA stations including at Forest Park, Jefferson Park, Howard, Dempster-Skokie, Midway, and Rosemont. While Pace does own several standalone suburban transit centers, the majority of these were constructed after the passage of the ADA and are already accessible.

The state should require the development of a regional accessibility plan with a clear timeline and identification of investments needed to achieve full transit system accessibility. This should include on-system priorities, such as ramps and elevators at CTA and Metra stations. Any plan should build on the robust efforts already underway in the region, including CTA's ASAP plan, Metra's ongoing accessibility investments, and CMAP's ongoing work to support ADA transition planning efforts by local governments.

The plan should identify and prioritize specific accessibility projects, provide initial cost estimates, and propose a timeline with milestones and targets to be accomplished at each stage of the accessibility initiative. This timeline should provide a roadmap for implementing necessary changes within a realistic and achievable timeframe. By requiring and then funding a detailed regional plan with a clear timeline, the state can demonstrate a commitment to achieving full accessibility for all passengers. This will foster a more inclusive and equitable transportation network overall, providing equal opportunities for everyone to access and use public transit facilities.

Rationale

People with disabilities are often more reliant on public transportation for their daily needs, but parts of the public transportation system today remain inaccessible. While there are several ongoing programs to improve accessibility on the transit system, they have long timelines and lack a fully funded path to 100 percent system accessibility. Accelerating the implementation of accessible infrastructure is crucial to ensure inclusivity and meet legal obligations.

Evaluation[a]

Policy

Category	Rating	Rationale
 **Mobility**	High	Continued improvements to transit facilities region-wide will provide riders more transportation options, with the potential to shorten total travel times and create greater flexibility in origins and destinations.
 **Equity**	High	Improving the accessibility to transportation and community resources improves inclusivity, independence, and equal opportunities for all.
 **Economy**	Medium	May allow riders with disabilities and other users to access more job opportunities and local businesses, as well as reducing ADA costs if more riders can use the fixed route system.
 **Environment**	Medium	Accessibility upgrades have the potential to enable people with disabilities to transition from ADA paratransit and dial-a-ride services to fixed route services, which have lower per-passenger emissions. However, shift is unlikely to make a significant impact on vehicle emissions.
 Regional benefit	Regional	Accessibility upgrades have the potential to improve ridership for people with disabilities on fixed-route services and could redirect many who may otherwise rely on costly demand-responsive option, reducing the strain that related funding has begun to put on the overall system.

[a] To evaluate different recommendations, CMAP developed a rubric for both policy impact and process difficulty. Policy evaluations are ranked from low to high. "High" means the recommendation would lead to significant improvements in the policy outcome (e.g., greater mobility or additional access to economic opportunities); "Medium" means the recommendation would have a neutral or minimal impact (e.g., no significant impact on transit ridership); and "Low" means the recommendation would worsen policy outcomes (e.g., having a disproportionate impact on low-income communities). For the "Regional benefit" category, the options are "Urban," "Suburban," and "Regional," designating where benefits are concentrated. For all process evaluation categories except timing, the scale ranges from "Low" (difficult) to "High" (easy or relatively straightforward). For "Timing," the options are "Near" (implementation could happen between now and 2026), "Medium" (implementation could occur between 2026 and 2028), and "Long" (implementation would likely be beyond 2028).

Process

Category	Rating	Rationale
Administrative feasibility	High	ASAP (and prior efforts) have demonstrated the transit service boards' ability to implement regular upgrades via strategic planning and in many cases, existing funding streams. Coordination across transit providers and other public agencies may help to optimize resources systemwide.
Political feasibility	High	Funding programs already exist for such upgrades but will need to be expanded to accelerate implementation.
Timing	Near/ Medium/ Long	Projects will be phased over time; planning efforts could be completed in the near term, with additional funding accelerating projects that are already in the pipeline.
State span of control	Medium	The state has the authority to direct and fund these investments, but success would require partnerships with agencies at many levels of government.

Net cost / investment

The costs shown here are illustrative. Accessibility project costs vary considerably based on project characteristics and can be implemented incrementally based on available funding. The amounts shown here would be a significant down payment and would also be sufficient to leverage significant federal grants. Please note that these costs are inclusive of figures for the highly related planning and capital investments noted in recommendation #2 below.

Category	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Operations & Maintenance	Planning efforts could cost $1-2M (includes related planning in Recommendation #2).					
Capital	$50-80M	$50-80M	$50-80M	$50-80M	$50-80M	$50-80M

Recommendation 2. Identify and fund a plan for improvements to off-system accessibility on facilities not controlled by transit agencies (e.g., sidewalks, curb ramps)

Control over the sidewalk network surrounding transit stations falls largely outside of the control of the transit agencies, with municipalities, counties and state and local DOTs primarily responsible this right of way. Varying priorities and funding availability make it difficult to systemically identify and address accessibility gaps in the sidewalk network. A plan should be developed for identifying and fully funding improvements to off-system accessibility on facilities not controlled by transit agencies. The plan should be cross-jurisdictional and should identify specific accessibility projects, provide initial cost estimates, and propose a clear timeline with milestones and targets to be accomplished at each stage of the accessibility initiative. This timeline should provide a roadmap for implementing necessary changes within a realistic and achievable timeframe. In identifying these projects, special attention should be first paid to the half mile area around transit stops and stations. However, potential improvements outside of this area should still be documented and addressed as additional funding becomes available.

By creating a fully funded, detailed regional plan for off-system accessibility improvements with a clear timeline, the region can work to ensure that the fully accessible transit system is situated in a built environment that complements it. This will foster a more inclusive and equitable transportation network overall, providing equal opportunities for everyone to access and utilize public transit facilities.

Rationale

Investment in creating a fully accessible transit system will have limited benefit if the area immediately surrounding the station remains inaccessible. While there are several ongoing programs to improve accessibility on the transit system, programs to improve the sidewalk conditions surrounding transit stations are jurisdictional and inconsistently funded. This absence of coordination maintains a built environment that is not inclusive for those living with disabilities. Coordinating and funding the provision of accessible infrastructure around transit stations crucial to ensure inclusivity for people living with disabilities, as well as the general public.

Evaluation

Policy

Category	Rating	Rationale
 **Mobility**	High	Continued accessibility improvements to areas surrounding transit stations regionwide will provide all riders more choice in how to access existing transit service, as well as expand the amenities available via transit. It also benefits the general public, not only those who use transit.
 **Equity**	High	Allowing individuals with disabilities to have equal access to transit and surrounding community resources promotes inclusivity, independence, and equal opportunities for all.
 **Economy**	Medium	May allow riders and non-riders with disabilities to access more job opportunities and local businesses.
 **Environment**	Medium	Accessibility upgrades have the potential to enable people with disabilities to transition from ADA paratransit and dial-a-ride services to fixed route services, which have lower per-passenger emissions. However, shift is unlikely to make a significant impact on vehicle emissions.
 **Regional benefit**	Regional	Accessibility upgrades have the potential to improve ridership for people with disabilities on fixed-route services and could redirect many who may otherwise rely on costly ADA paratransit and dial-a-ride option, reducing the strain that related funding has begun to put on the overall system. Additionally, more connected and accessible sidewalk networks provide a benefit to all sidewalk users, regardless of their transit usage.

Process

Category	Rating	Rationale
 **Administrative feasibility**	High	CMAP has already demonstrated its capacity to maintain a sidewalk inventory for the region, and most municipalities have an ongoing capital improvement or public works program that would be able to absorb any new projects into their existing workflow. Pursuing off-system access to transit may be somewhat a matter of prioritizing planned investments to focus on where the benefits are maximized.

Political feasibility	Medium	The diversity of government entities with jurisdiction over roadways could present some political challenges in implementing identified accessibility improvements, particularly if the improvements are to be pursued in a timely manner. Regional entities like counties may be able to help achieve a regional approach.
Timing	Medium	Improvements will require lead time for planning, prioritization, construction, agency coordination, and community input.
State span of control	Medium	While the state contributes some capital funding, this recommendation would largely be implemented by CMAP and local governments.

Net cost / investment

Potential costs and investments are included in the table for recommendation #1 above. It is also important to note that while accessibility upgrades will require additional upfront funding, e.g., for new sidewalk construction and curb cut installation, future maintenance should be a relatively small expense. Additionally, this has the potential to reduce the financial strain of operating costly ADA paratransit service.

Recommendation 3. Fund investments in accessible wayfinding and signage through public investments and collaborations with private/nonprofit partners

Improvements to on- and off- system accessibility are not limited to traditional infrastructure improvements. Barriers to accessibility may also include wayfinding and signage. For example, for visually impaired travelers, the inclusion of braille or audio prompts in wayfinding can make the difference between an accessible and an inaccessible trip. The ADA requires the audible announcement of transit stops on transit vehicles but does not extend this requirement beyond the transit vehicle itself. Digital wayfinding can also open opportunities for creating a system that is accessible for those with limited English proficiency.

The state should also support ongoing efforts to improve transit's digital accessibility and ease of use. Any regional accessibility plan should include common principles about the use of technology for improving digital accessibility, with a goal of making the transit system easier to navigate – both for riders with a mobility challenge and the general public. These efforts should also build on existing efforts to improve user experience with technology, such as Pace's partnership with the Transit app which will incorporate its demand-responsive services into the app's trip planning functions.[26] However, there is limited dedicated funding for making these

types of improvements. Dedicated funding should be created through public investment and collaboration with private and nonprofit partners.

Rationale

For transit systems, accessibility can mean more than physical infrastructure upgrades. It can also mean signage and wayfinding that acknowledges the varying needs of all current and potential users. Often, accessibility upgrades of this nature are less expensive and simpler to implement than other accessibility infrastructure improvements, such as elevators. Providing dedicated funding to support these types of improvements is another step towards a fully accessible transit system.

Evaluation

Policy

Category	Rating	Rationale
Mobility	High	More accessible wayfinding and signage ensures that riders with limited vision or hearing have access to the transit system.
Equity	High	Allowing individuals with disabilities to have equal access to transit and surrounding community resources promotes inclusivity, independence, and equal opportunities for all.
Economy	Medium	May allow riders with disabilities and other users to access more job opportunities and local businesses
Environment	Medium	Accessibility upgrades have the potential to enable people with disabilities to transition from ADA paratransit and dial-a-ride services to fixed route services, which have lower, per-passenger emissions. However, this shift is unlikely to make a significant impact on vehicle emissions.
Regional benefit	Regional	Accessibility upgrades have the potential to improve ridership for people with disabilities on fixed-route services throughout the region.

Process

Category	Rating	Rationale
 **Administrative feasibility**	Medium	Depending on the improvements made, transit authority staff may need to develop new proficiencies in how to maintain the new wayfinding and signage. The benefits are also maximized if wayfinding is seamless between service boards, requiring regional coordination among the service boards and RTA.
 **Political feasibility**	High	Aligns with regional, state, and federal accessibility goals, and investments are relatively low-cost.
 **Timing**	Near/ Medium	Most improvements could be made relatively quickly, with limited pre-planning required. Some more significant investments could require additional planning and lead time.
 **State span of control**	Medium	While the state contributes some capital funding, this recommendation would largely be implemented by CTA, Metra, Pace, and RTA.

Net cost / investment

A one-time investment of $20 million could enable strategic upgrades on the region's transit network. However, costs could scale depending on interest and identified projects. With additional funding, the region's transit providers could make additional improvements.

Category	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
 **Operations & Maintenance**	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
 **Capital**	$20M	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Recommendation 4. Improve two-way rider communication on accessibility and cross-system real-time travel information

Currently, mechanisms for communication between the transit agencies and the public are primarily one way. Posted signage, public announcements and social media posts provide opportunity for transit agencies communicate information to the public. Periodic customer surveys administered by the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) and formal commendations, comments and complaints provide opportunity for the public to communicate information to the transit agencies. Some two-way communication mechanisms do already exist, such as customer service agents, bus operators, conductors, and call buttons at stations and on vehicles. However, most of these mechanisms are agency specific, with limited formal channels to communicate across transit agencies. A more robust, two-way communication mechanism would provide more opportunity to gather real time customer feedback on accessibility problems like uneven platforms and elevator issues, as well as other service-related concerns.

Ideally, this mechanism would also allow for more robust data-sharing related to real-time travel information, e.g., the MaaS approach developed jointly by Pace and the Transit app. In addition to providing a mechanism for two-way communication, this approach would provide enhanced trip planning, bus tracking, and fare payment options, a benefit that would be of particular value for passengers with disabilities or limited English proficiency.

Rationale

A transit system that is fully accessible, both on and off system, will still have accessibility concerns arise from time to time as a variety of users with unique needs interact with the system. Additionally, regular wear and tear will likely create new accessibility issues that will need to be addressed. The development of this system would allow for these issues to be identified as they occur, thus facilitating a timely resolution. Additionally, this system would allow for the timely identification of non-accessibility related issues like broken A/C on a train car, or safety related issues that are challenging for a large transit network to realize in real time. Additionally, the MaaS component of this investment would be of particular benefit to travelers with disabilities who may need to plan complex, multi-modal trips over several transit agencies.

Evaluation

Policy

Category	Rating	Rationale
Mobility	Medium	These tools should improve the ease of use for the system, but the overall impact on ridership is likely to be limited in the near term.
Equity	High	Allowing individuals with disabilities to have equal access to regional rail facilities and surrounding community resources promotes inclusivity, independence, and equal opportunities for all.
Economy	Medium	May allow riders with disabilities and limited English proficiency access more job opportunities and local businesses.
Environment	Medium	May enable people with disabilities to transition from ADA paratransit and dial-a-ride services to fixed route services, which have lower, per-passenger emissions. However, this shift is unlikely to make a significant impact on vehicle emissions.
Regional benefit	Regional	Would benefit riders throughout the region, including those transferring between and across transit providers.

Process

Category	Rating	Rationale
Administrative feasibility	Medium	Each service provider already provides real time, trip planning data on some level. However, a comprehensive approach would require expansion and integration across services.
Political feasibility	Medium	This would require coordination across the transit service providers.
Timing	Near/ Medium	Several third-party applications already provide a platform for this type of service, and near-term opportunities exist to leverage existing data. However, expanded integration would be a more complex process.

State span of control	Medium	The state could provide funding and direct the transit agencies to pursue this objective. However, success would also rely on partnerships with public and private sector stakeholders.

Net cost / investment

Developing a new application or modifying an existing application would also require upfront capital investment. Operating costs would include hosting, maintenance, and staffing the application (or payments to private providers, if pursued via a public-private partnership). To maximize the value of investment, transit providers could combine this approach with the complementary recommendation on two-way rider communication for safety and security and cleanliness topics.

Category	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Operations & Maintenance	*See Recommendation #2 from the companion memo on safety and security, available on the PART webpage.*					
Capital						

Endnotes

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