



B4: Fare integration

October 4, 2023

Executive summary

One of northeastern Illinois' greatest assets is its interconnected transportation network. Regional residents and visitors can and often do rely on a combination of options – bus, rail, bike, sidewalk, wheelchair, car, and more – to move throughout northeastern Illinois, and beyond. Those combinations matter, because each element of the broader transportation network builds on the rest, with complementary benefits that yield a transportation system far greater than the sum of its parts.

To take advantage of some of these options, travelers are required to pay a user-fee. Transit fares are one such example. These fares, as well as other user fees, generate critical revenue for the transit and transportation system. But they also influence which mode(s) regional travelers are most likely to choose, as well as what trip(s) they will be willing and able to make.

The existing structure of transit fares does not always encourage travelers to use the travel option that best meets their needs. The region's transit providers – the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Metra, and Pace Suburban Bus – offer overlapping but at times inconsistent systems of pricing, transfer, and fare collection approaches. Today, riders must manage multiple payment methods during transit trips that combine Metra with Pace and/or CTA. Discounted transfers are not available to and from Metra, except for those with monthly passes (which carry significant upfront cost). This complexity and fare “penalty” may discourage riders from transferring between modes – rather than allowing them to choose the most convenient option. This, in turn, reduces overall transit ridership by limiting the types of trips riders will consider making by transit. Price-sensitive riders may also choose slower or less convenient modes, which impacts their quality of life. Additionally, complementary connections that could

extend the reach of the region's transit network (e.g., South Shore Line (SSL) commuter rail to Indiana or the Divvy bikeshare system) are not integrated with CTA, Metra, or Pace.

A different, more integrated approach is possible. Fare integration is the unification of different modes of public transport under a single payment system and/or a single combined or coordinated fare with transfer discounts applicable regardless of which agency operates service. It offers several advantages to transit riders, including a simplified and convenient trip, time and cost savings, enhanced access to opportunity, and increased equity. Fare integration has been a goal in the region for decades, but despite recent progress, the region has not yet fully achieved it.

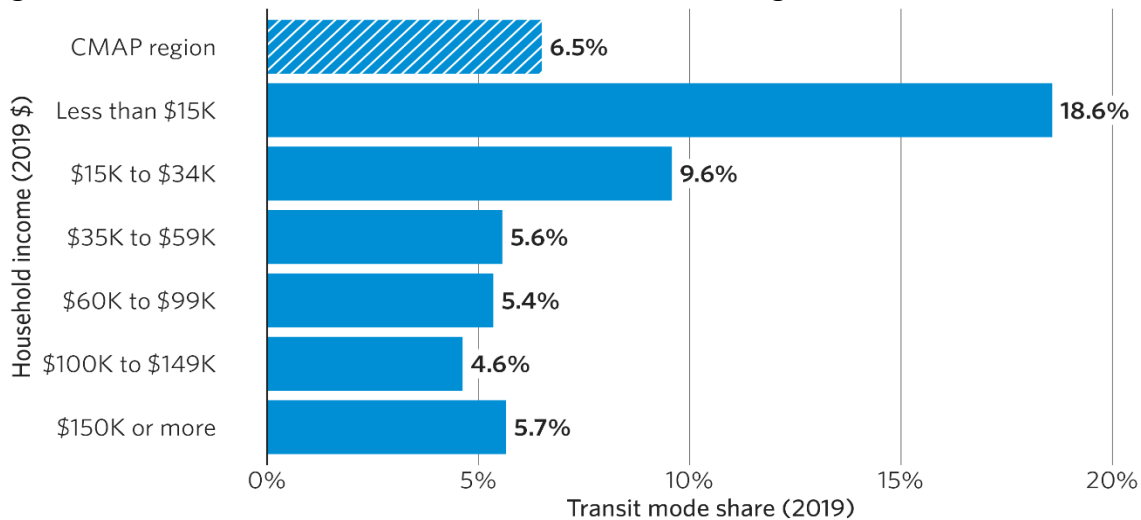
State action can play an integral part in helping to overcome these challenges. To truly integrate fares and ensure that the region provides a world-class transit experience to residents and visitors, CMAP recommends the state:

- **Unify fare system administration and payment methods.** The state should establish a structure that enables a fully integrated fare system, including a regional owner of fare policy decision-making and a fixed timeline for implementation. These requirements should be paired with the funding necessary to achieve full integration, including both initial capital and ongoing operations and maintenance.
- **Enable free or discounted interagency transfers.** The state should require that all transit providers offer free or discounted transfers between services, including for both single-ride and multi-day pass products. The state should account for any potential revenue losses in the overall transit funding structure and empower the regional fare policy owner to oversee implementation.
- **Align fare structures across agencies for similar trips.** The state could extend the previous recommendation by requiring the agencies to align fare structures for similar trips on the region's transit network (e.g., for travelers who live in neighborhoods of Chicago primarily served by Metra and not CTA). This recommendation would take on additional importance as Metra considers evolving its system to adopt a "regional rail" approach that would see parts of the system operate more like a rapid transit service similar to CTA rail service (*more details available in the companion memo on the [PART webpage](#)*).¹ As above, the state should also account for revenue losses and governance implications.
- **Integrate with complementary modes and systems.** The state should encourage and facilitate fare integration with other complementary modes, including other regional transit/rail service providers (e.g., South Shore Line, Amtrak), and micro-mobility (e.g., Divvy bikeshare). The state should also expand data-sharing requirements for private mobility providers to better assess how they can support regional transit.

The challenge: The region lacks a truly integrated fare system. This makes transit less convenient and the region less equitable than it could be.

While transit is used by riders of all incomes, it disproportionately serves lower-income residents in the region, as shown in **Figure 1**. This makes transit fare pricing a significant equity focus. Integrated fare systems remove barriers related to different payment methods and can create more equitable fare structures across various transit operators. Thoughtful fare policy that transcends individual agencies can also allow customers – including the most price-sensitive – to pick the option that makes the most sense for their needs.

Figure 1. Household income of transit users in the CMAP region, 2019



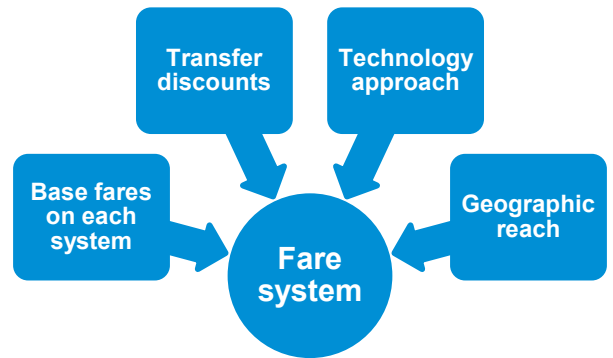
Source: CMAP analysis of My Daily Travel Data

Similarly, fare integration to encourage interagency transfers would leverage the region’s expansive network of bus service, provided by CTA and Pace, to connect riders to and from rail services, especially those operated by Metra. This benefit would be maximized through enhanced service coordination and increased bus service frequency, especially from Pace (see companion memos on these topics on the PART [webpage](#)).

Integration also includes more than just fares. Connections with other modes of transportation matter too. This interconnectivity encourages multimodal travel, where passengers can choose the most efficient and convenient combination of modes to reach their destination. When transit is a more competitive option, the region and state benefit from improved quality of life, reduced traffic congestion, reduced reliance on private vehicles, and progress towards other priorities identified in ON TO 2050, the region’s comprehensive plan.

Many metropolitan areas, especially those that have multiple transit agencies like northeastern Illinois, have implemented or are moving toward some degree of fare integration across services. As shown in **Figure 2**, fare integration comprises distinct but interrelated components, including the fare products themselves (how much the customer pays to complete the trip); the cost of transferring between modes; the technology used to sell, collect, and validate fares; and the geographic reach of a particular fare product or policy. The sections that follow will explore some of the challenges associated with these components.

Figure 2. Components of fare integration



A customer experience that is still too complex



Uncoordinated fare and transfer structures disincentivize transit trips that combine Metra with Pace or CTA by requiring customers to pay **two fares** and use **two different payment methods**. CTA and Pace have largely integrated their fare systems: they both accept the Ventra card for payment, and the two agencies offer joint passes and discounted pay-as-you-go (paygo) transfers. However, the same is not true of trips between Metra and CTA/Pace: a customer transferring between these modes, in most cases, must pay two fares (increasing costs) using two different payment methods (increasing complexity). Metra customers can use funds stored in a Ventra account to buy Metra tickets and passes but cannot pay for travel directly using a Ventra card. Metra customers validate their fares by showing a paper or app-based ticket or pass to a conductor on board the train while in transit. CTA and Pace customers tap and go using a Ventra card or virtual card loaded with stored value funds or a pass.

The region is making progress with the Regional Connect Pass


The region has taken steps to improve the customer experience and encourage multimodal transit ridership. As previously noted, CTA and Pace continue moving toward complete integration of their fares, both through the provision of joint passes and discounted transfers and through a compatible fare collection system (Ventra). The Ventra app allows management of CTA/Pace and Metra fare products in one place. Additionally, Metra, CTA, and Pace now offer the Regional Connect Pass, a \$30 CTA/Pace monthly pass available to holders Metra monthly passes. Under current fare structures, these passes allow for unlimited trips across all three transit providers for \$130 per month with no time restrictions, replacing and improving upon the previously offered Link-Up and PlusBus passes.² Under Metra’s new proposed fare

structure for fiscal year 2024, the Regional Connect Pass would remain \$30, but the \$100 “Super Saver” Metra monthly pass would be replaced by a zone-based Monthly Pass, ranging from \$75-\$135.³

The Regional Connect Pass is a step in the right direction. However, it does not address all existing barriers to fare integration. Most importantly, its benefits are only available to transit riders who rely on monthly passes. There are no single-use (“paygo”) or short-duration options such as 1-, 3-, or 7-day passes. There is also still room for improvement to prioritize simplicity and ease of use for customers. The Regional Connect Pass is actually two separate passes – one for Metra and one for CTA/Pace – sold as a “bundle discount” at the point of sale. The Metra pass is stored and validated within the Ventra mobile application (or, optionally, as a paper ticket), while the CTA/Pace pass is associated with a Ventra card and validated by scanning a tap reader.

An uncoordinated fare system limits residents’ options. Fare integration can improve existing inequitable fare pricing by reducing the financial and logistical barriers to accessing public transportation. It can also encourage people to use the mode, or modes, that best meet their needs. This is particularly beneficial for low-income households or those who rely on public transit as their primary mode of travel. For price-sensitive riders, uncoordinated fare and transfer structures may discourage travelers from choosing the fastest and most convenient transit option. This impact is especially significant for trips that could rely on Metra for part of the trip but would require a transfer to Pace or CTA to complete the journey. This not only negatively impacts quality of life but also underutilizes the region’s robust transportation assets.

CMAP analysis shows that residents with low income spend **16%** of their income on transportation versus **6%** for those with high income



Source: CMAP. Improving equity in transportation fees, fines, and fares report, 2021

Table 1 shows a series of example trips, illustrating differences in travel times and fare costs depending on the mode used.^a As shown, all three example trips take less time on Metra but cost more than a CTA and/or Pace trip using Ventra. The difference in price reflects both the lack of discounted transfers and Metra’s higher base fares, even in areas with CTA rail service.

^a Costs shown reflect Metra’s current fare structure as of 2023, not the proposed fare structure for 2024.

Table 1. Comparison of example trip costs and travel times (all fares as of 2023)

Origin	Destination	CTA/Pace Only		Including Metra	
		Cost	Time	Cost	Time
West Pullman	Loop	\$2.50* (CTA only)	62 min	\$5.50 (Metra only) (\$3.00 with Fair Transit pilot)	45 min
Andersonville	Hyde Park	\$2.50* (CTA only)	82 min	\$6.75 (Metra + CTA rail) (\$4.50 with Fair Transit pilot)	63 min
Melrose Park	Union Station	\$2.50* (CTA + Pace)	63 min	\$7.75 (Pace + Metra)	48 min

* Includes discounted transfer that is only available when using Ventra. Cash fares would require two full fare payments.

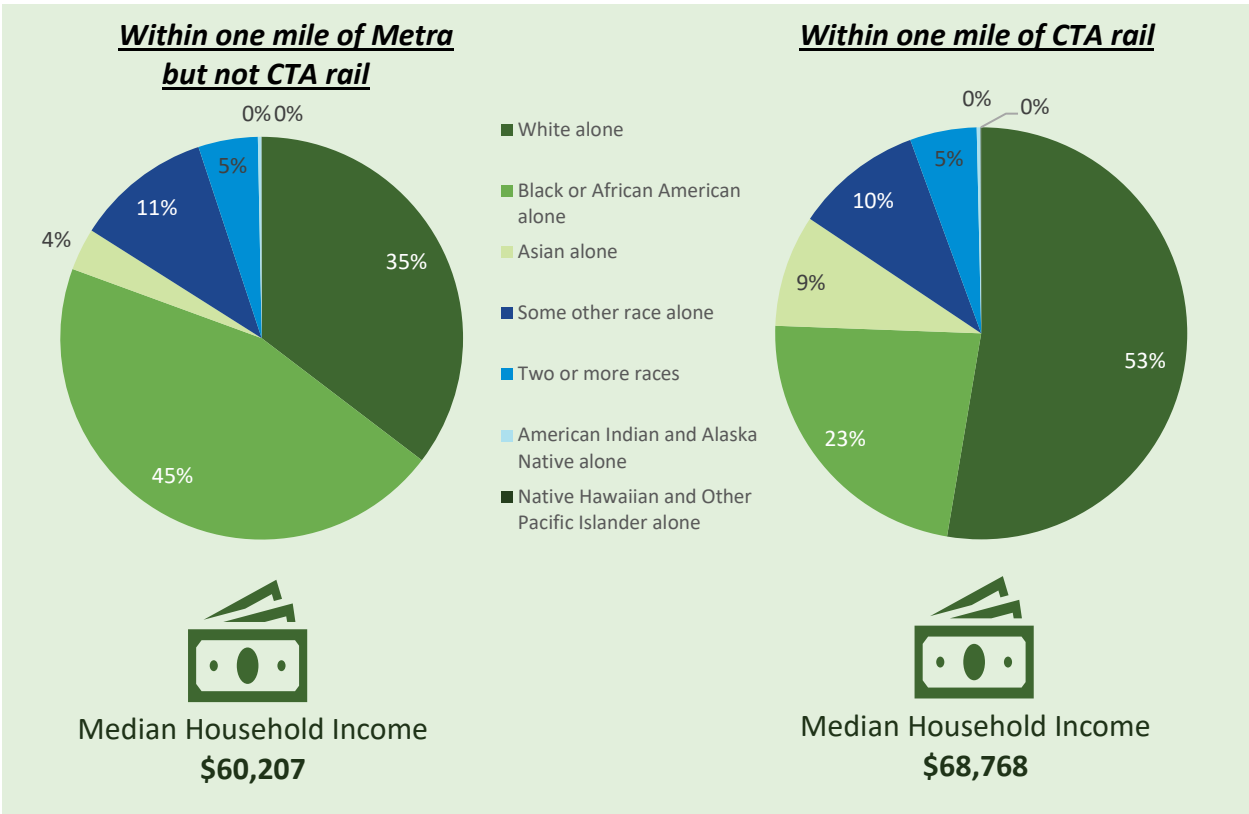
Fare integration reduces barriers to transit for the most vulnerable residents in the region

Some communities have limited access to specific modes of transportation. Large swaths of Chicago and surrounding suburbs, particularly the south side of Chicago and the nearby south suburbs, live close to Metra stations but not to CTA rail stations. These neighborhoods tend to have lower average incomes and higher shares of people of color compared with neighborhoods near CTA stations (see **Figure 3** and **Figure 4**). Fare integration can help address this geographic equity gap by enabling passengers to use multiple transportation modes without additional costs or complexity. This promotes connectivity between underserved areas and the rest of the transit system, unlocks access to employment and other opportunities, and ensures that more neighborhoods have equal access to transportation options.

The inequity of the disparate fare structures is particularly visible in the city of Chicago. Metra has over 70 stations within Chicago (and two more under construction). However, Metra fares are significantly higher than CTA’s fares, even though Metra serves many city neighborhoods that currently lack CTA rail service. While Chicago has Metra stations in zones A through C, most of the C-zone stations are on the Far South Side (**Figure 5**), meaning Metra’s most expensive stations in Chicago serve many of its lowest-income residents.

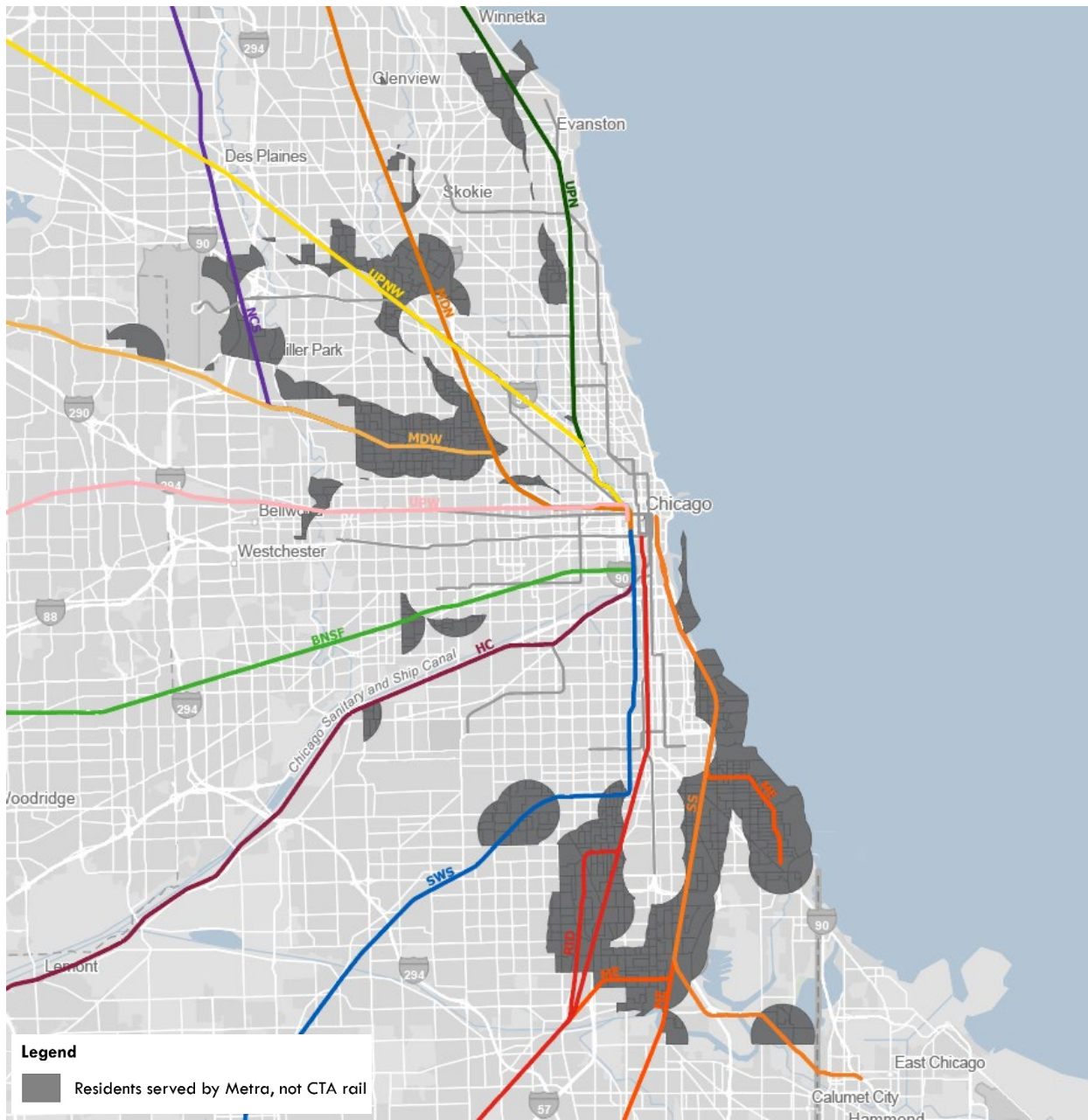
Metra’s proposed 2024 fare structure, if adopted, would make significant progress toward addressing this disparity, both by lowering Metra’s lowest zone fares and by expanding that lowest fare zone to the Chicago city limits and beyond into the inner suburbs. This new lowest fare zone (referred to as “Zone 2”) would entirely contain CTA’s existing service area.⁴

Figure 3. Demographics of residents living within one mile of CTA rail stations, versus those living within one mile of Metra stations but not within one mile of CTA rail stations



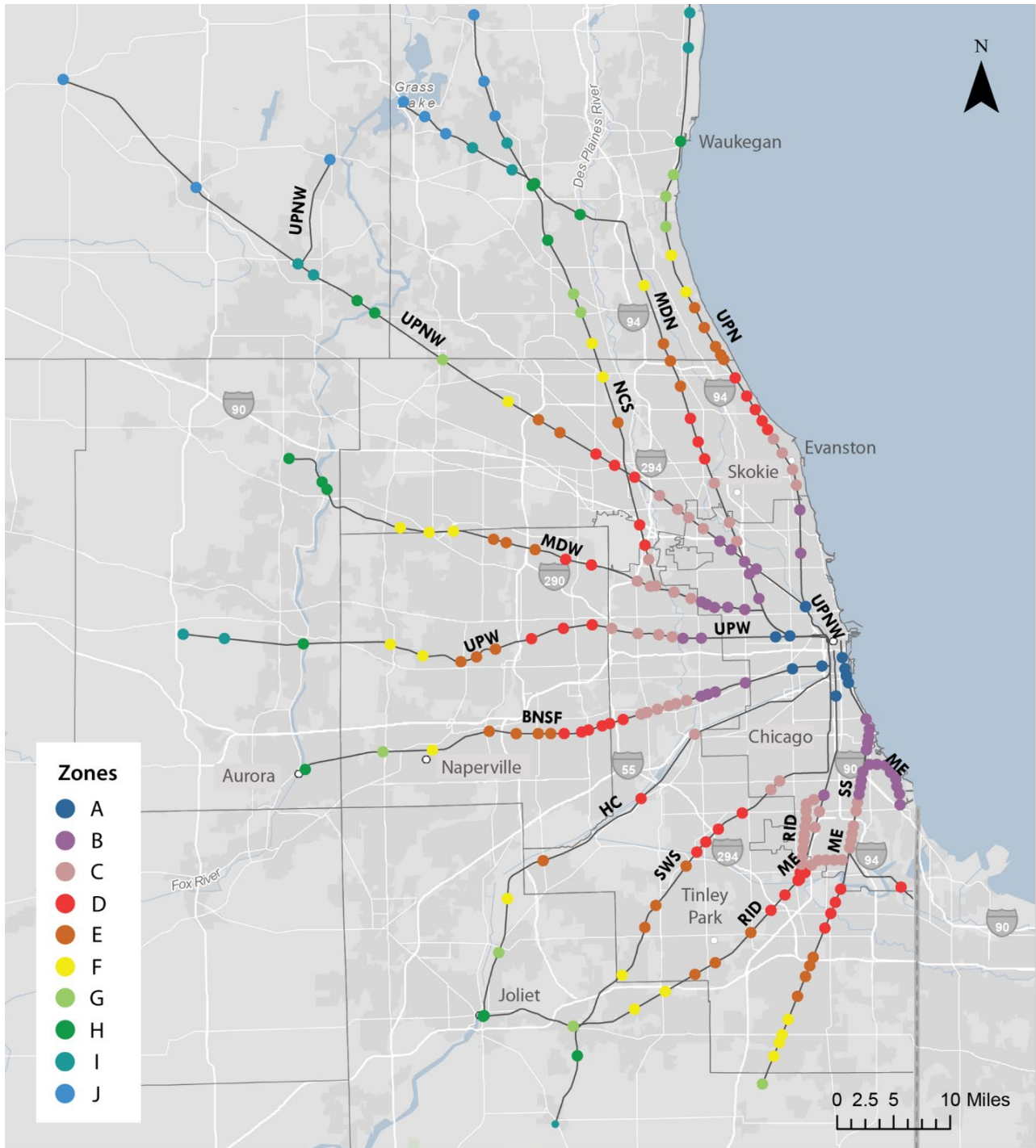
Note: Analysis includes block groups within the City of Chicago, block groups intersecting any municipality with a CTA rail station, and any other block groups intersecting a one-mile buffer of CTA rail.

Figure 4. Areas in and near Chicago served by Metra, not by CTA rail



Note: Analysis includes block groups within the City of Chicago, block groups intersecting any municipality with a CTA rail station, and any other block groups intersecting a one-mile buffer of CTA rail.

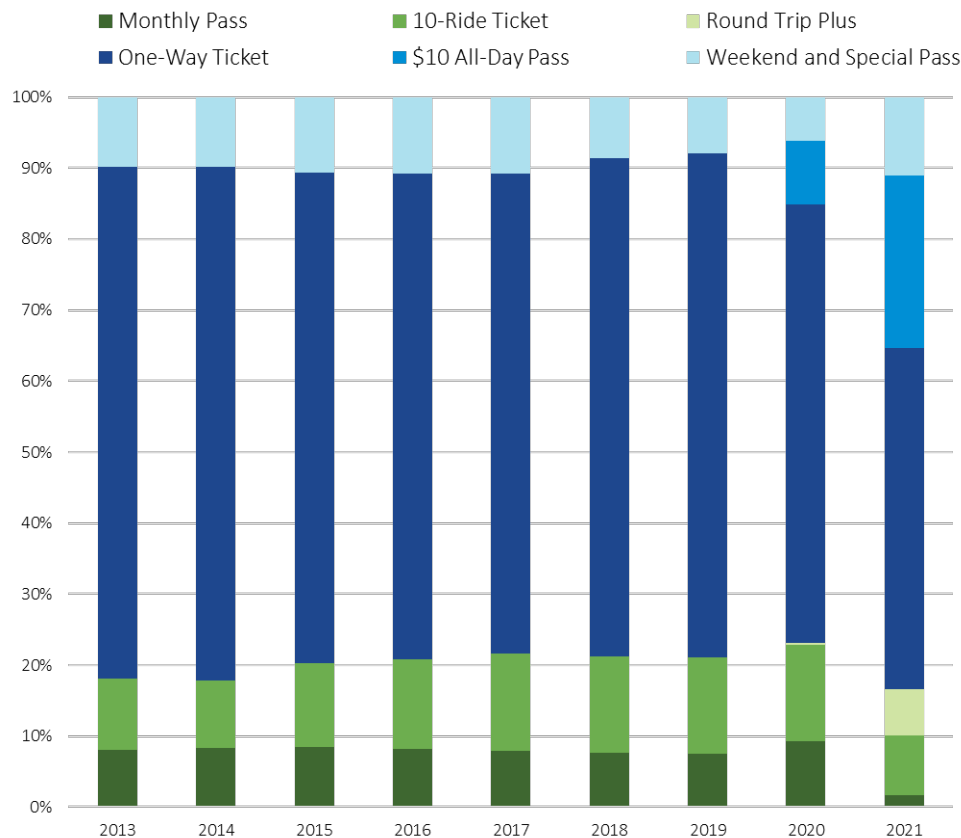
Figure 5. Metra fare zones (as of 2023)



Note: Fares zones are shown as of FY 2023. Metra is considering significant changes to its zones and fares in FY 2024.⁵

Existing integration efforts have been most successful for transit riders who rely on monthly passes, and who can thus benefit from the Regional Connect Pass product. However, while transit monthly passes provide convenience and cost savings for frequent transit users, they can also contribute to inequitable outcomes. Pre-purchasing a monthly pass can present a significant obstacle to those who cannot afford the higher upfront cost. In addition, the market for monthly passes continues to shrink. Purchases of Metra monthly passes were declining prior to COVID-19 and the decline accelerated at the onset of the pandemic. As shown in **Figure 6**, monthly passes now represent less than 5% of all Metra ticket sales (although they are a higher share of ridership).

Figure 6. Metra ticket sales by ticket type, 2013-2021



Source: Metra

See the [PART webpage](#) for the companion memo on fare affordability and CMAP’s recommendations on lowering the upfront cost of passes through fare capping.

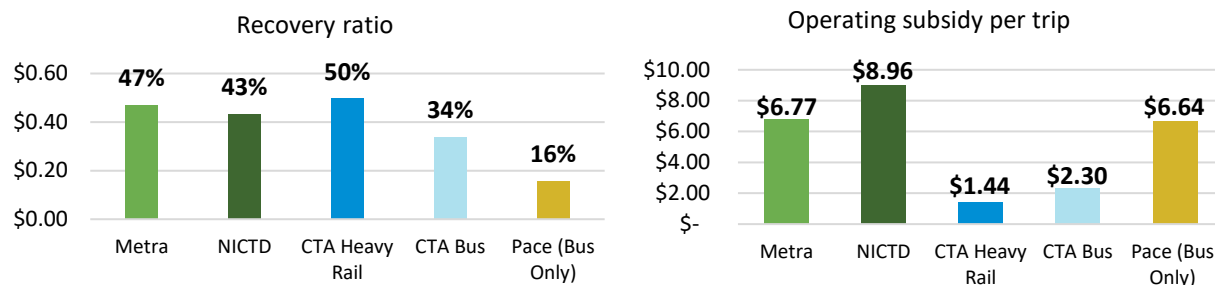
Changes to the fare structure have regional impacts

Even though fare policies are currently set independently by each transit operator, decisions made by one entity may have consequences for the rest. This is most apparent when considering the connections between fare policies and overall operating subsidies.

For each of the region’s transit operators, fares make up only part of the overall cost of providing service. As shown in **Figure 7**, that share – referred to as the “farebox recovery ratio” – varies significantly between operators. The region’s rail services, operated by Metra, CTA, and NICTD, maintained the highest recovery ratios before COVID-19. However, because the overall cost of providing Metra trips is higher than that of CTA rail, Metra’s operating subsidy on a per trip basis is also the greatest of the three service boards. CTA and Pace bus services both maintained lower recovery ratios than rail. As with Metra vs. CTA rail, CTA bus trips have a lower per-trip subsidy than Pace bus trips.

By law, the RTA transit service boards must collectively meet a farebox recovery ratio requirement, set at 50 percent of costs (with exclusions).^b Fare policies set by one agency can consequently have an impact on the fare recovery required of the others.

Figure 7. Operating subsidy per trip and farebox recovery ratio among Chicago-area transit agencies, by mode, 2019



Source: HNTB analysis of 2019 National Transit Database (NTD) data

Because of Metra’s role in providing rail service throughout the region, its fare policy decisions also have a regional impact even when only considering Metra riders. For example, Metra’s monthly Super Saver Pass provides the most discount to the longest, most expensive trips through elimination of zone-based pricing.⁶ This means shorter trips, especially those originating in or near Chicago, are minimally discounted. The Super Saver discount builds on previous revisions to the zone system that also benefited the longest trips, including fare changes in 2018 which merged the four outermost zones and capped fares for trips exceeding

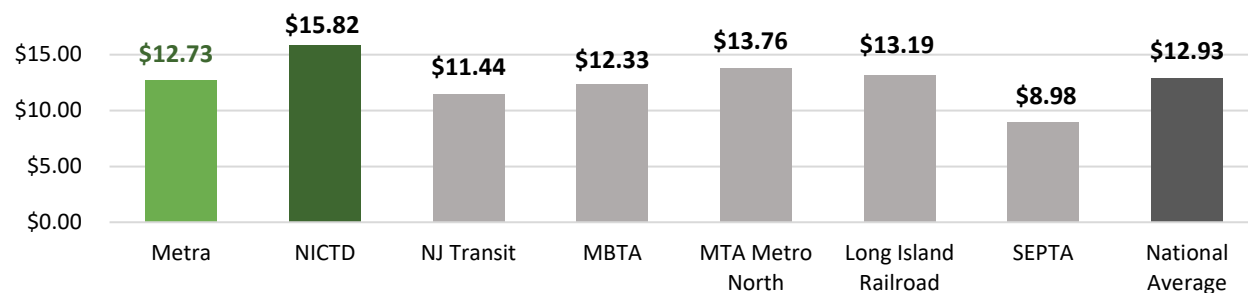
^b The Regional Transportation Authority’s (RTA) enabling legislation allows certain expenses to be excluded from the recovery ratio calculation, which is why even prior to the pandemic, the actual ratio of system-generated revenues to total operating expenses was less than 50%. In 2019, the share without exclusions was 39%. Other “system-generated revenues,” including advertising and concessions, are also factored into the recovery ratio calculation.

45 miles. While still pending at the time of this memo, it is important to note that Metra’s 2024 fare proposal would restore zone-based monthly passes and reduce paygo fares for most riders.

Ultimately, the only way to simultaneously address both challenges – relatively high subsidies for higher-income customers and proportionately higher fares for lower-income customers – is for Metra to either cut its operating costs or identify strategies to strategically adjust fares in a manner that benefits its most transit-dependent customers and generates increases in ridership to offset revenue losses. Neither strategy is easy. Metra’s operating costs are similar to its U.S. commuter rail peers (see **Figure 8**), validating that operating cost reductions without service cuts or significant adjustments to existing service models are not realistic. Growing ridership is likely the better strategy, and fare integration – in the form of discounted interagency transfers – may be one approach to attract new riders and boost the agency’s bottom line.

See the companion PART memo on regional rail for more information on how the state can support Metra’s evolution to a regional rail service model. The draft PART report includes additional information on potential reforms to the farebox recovery ratio requirement. Both are available on the PART project [webpage](#).

Figure 8. Operating cost per passenger trip among peer commuter rail agencies, 2019⁷



Source: HNTB analysis of 2019 National Transit Database (NTD) data

Any proposed changes to the fare system, in terms of new technology or new interagency transfer fare products, should be carefully examined through an equity lens to evaluate relative impacts and benefits to different communities.

Additionally, while the loss in fare revenue since COVID-19 has posed a significant challenge to the region’s transit agencies, it also means that the opportunity cost of further reductions in fares is reduced – in short, with revenues already down, there is less to lose by experimenting with new incentives to draw riders back to transit.

Regional transit cannot exist in a silo

Today, connections to and from transit rely on complementary modes that are not fully integrated into the current regional transit system. Multimodal “first- and last-mile” connections are a force multiplier for good transit service. Transfers to bikeshare could be embedded in passes and single ride fares to encourage their use and help transit riders make connections to and from transit. See **Appendix 2. Transit-micromobility integration case studies** for case studies on integrating micromobility with transit.

The Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD) South Shore Line (SSL) shares the Millennium Station terminal and five additional stations with Metra in the City of Chicago. However, NICTD is not permitted to carry passengers taking trips within Chicago, except to and from the Hegewisch station which is only served by the SSL. Additionally, the SSL fare system remains mostly separate, with different fare media, a different pricing structure, and no transfer discounts. The one exception is that NICTD offers free rides between Hegewisch and Chicago to seniors with RTA’s Reduced Fare Card; this is required by law as Hegewisch is technically considered a Metra station and the fare from that station is set by Metra, although it is only served by SSL.⁸

Like NICTD, Amtrak also operates along several of Metra’s lines and stops at some Metra stations. Metra stations shared with Amtrak include Joliet (Rock Island, Heritage Corridor), Summit (Heritage Corridor), Naperville (BNSF), LaGrange (BNSF), Homewood (Metra Electric), and Glenview (Milwaukee District North). Co-ticketing with commuter rail is something Amtrak has done elsewhere. For example, in Connecticut, Amtrak accepts tickets for CTrail’s Hartford Line⁹ between New Haven, CT and Springfield, MA and for Shore Line East¹⁰ between New Haven and New London, CT; Amtrak departures are also incorporated into the CTrail timetables.

Cross-honoring of Metra tickets on Amtrak would provide additional mobility options. On some corridors, this could significantly increase available service. For example, on the Heritage Corridor line, there are only three scheduled Metra round trips per weekday and no service on weekends. Including Amtrak’s service on this corridor would more than double the daily weekday departures and add weekend service to stations like Summit. A similar model could be also considered for future overlapping services, such as on Metra-operated train service to Rockford, anticipated to begin in 2027.



CASE STUDY: HEGEWISCH STATION

The Hegewisch Metra station on Chicago’s Far South Side is served only by the SSL, and only SSL fare products can be used there.

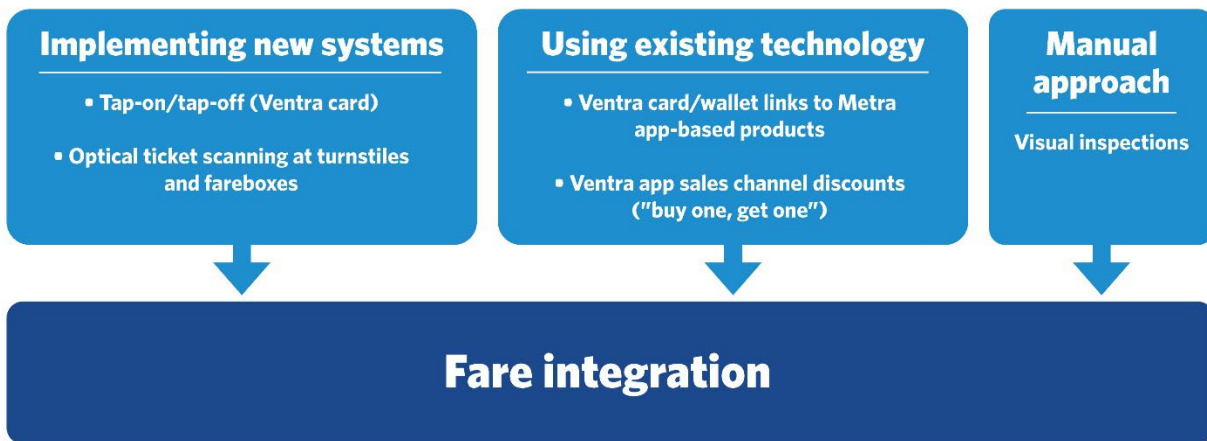
However, by statute, Metra sets the fares for this station because it is in Illinois, necessitating that NICTD place that station in its own fare zone to align that station’s fares with Metra.

Technological challenges have stymied full integration...

Fully integrating Metra fares with Pace and CTA is complex due to different fare structures (zone-based versus flat fares, respectively), different collection method (visual inspection versus tap-on validation), and separate back-office systems for processing electronic fare payment transactions. Metra also lacks the infrastructure to conveniently accept Ventra cards, though this may be a possibility in the future with Metra’s ongoing procurement of more than 600 new ticket vending machines.¹¹ Metra’s zone-based fare structure means that even if the system accepted Ventra, passengers could not simply “tap and go” as they do on CTA and Pace; calculating the correct zone fare would also require “tapping off” in order to “end” the journey. This is a significant departure from the current system and a fundamental difference as compared with CTA and Pace, which operate flat fare systems.

It is also important to note that there are many fare collection technologies in use, each of which offer unique advantages and capabilities. These include the tap-on system used by Pace and CTA today, paper and app-based tickets validated with visual inspection, as employed by Metra, as well as other options such as optical scanning of QR codes. When considering how to integrate Metra’s fare system with that of CTA and Pace, there are several different technology strategies that could be pursued, as summarized in **Figure 9**.

Figure 9. Technological approaches to fare integration



The first box represents the introduction of new technology to partially or fully integrate the systems:

- Implementing tap-on/tap-off infrastructure on Metra’s system, allowing Metra to accept the Ventra card. This could be compatible with all types of fare products (paygo, passes), and has the added benefit of producing a rich origin-destination data set of Metra passenger trips.
- Implementing QR code scanning on Pace and CTA’s systems (and optionally also on Metra’s), allowing printed or app-based tickets (like those Metra currently uses) to also

be read at CTA turnstiles and on CTA and Pace buses. This could be compatible with all types of fare products.

The strategies in the second box involve better leveraging the region's current system:

- Using “buy one get one” discounts in the Ventra app to offer a point-of-sale discount on one product when purchasing another – this is how the Regional Connect Pass works today. It is suitable for passes but not for paygo fares.
- Integrating the back-office system used by CTA and Pace with Metra's back office, so that the system can detect when a traveler uses both systems within a set window of time (e.g., two hours), automatically applying a discount. This is suitable for paygo fares but not for passes.

Metra currently validates fares via visual inspection (the third box above). While CTA and Pace could allow visual inspection of a paper or app-based ticket as one way of accepting inter-agency fare products, this is not in line with recent changes made by CTA and Pace to reduce the need to visually inspect fares and would not be scalable due to additional personnel requirements. While the PlusBus and Link-Up fare products were once offered as stickers affixed to Metra monthly passes and visually validated by CTA and Pace employees, those products transitioned to the Ventra card, as has their successor, the Regional Connect Pass.

Full tap-on/tap-off integration with Metra would create the most seamless fare system, but likely also the most expensive and complex to implement. It would require both the installation of validation equipment throughout Metra's 240+ stations – at a one-time capital cost likely to exceed \$100-150 million – as well as ongoing maintenance likely to exceed \$10 million per year.

Tap-on/tap-off equipment installed on platforms would transition fare payment from on-board to off-board and would require periodic onboard inspections to validate that fares have been paid (this is known as a proof of payment enforcement approach). Enforcement would involve issuing fines, which would require the introduction of a new workforce to perform inspections, as Metra's police department would not have adequate resources to take on this responsibility, nor would it likely be well received by the public to have uniformed police officers performing this role. Granting Metra the authority to have non-sworn inspectors issue such fines would require state legislation. This would mirror an analogous recommendation to enable proof of payment on buses, which is discussed in the companion PART memo on faster and more reliable bus service (available on the PART [webpage](#)).

Other than visual inspection, any integration that involves processing of fully integrated fare products would require Metra to integrate its Ventra back office with CTA's back office, or for the region to procure an entirely new fare collection system. This presents a timing challenge to align with the next Ventra system procurement, which is already underway. The contract would either have to be modified to add the desired Metra functionality, or implementation would have to wait until the next fare system procurement, which is years away.

The procurement approach could also have significant cost implications (competitive procurement versus change order) and infrastructure cost implications (installation and maintenance costs of card readers, ticket vending machines, and portable validation equipment throughout Metra’s system, which serves a six-county region of more than 3,700 square miles).¹² As CTA and Pace invest in the \$100+ million next generation upgrade to their fare payment system, known as Ventra 3.0, there are timely opportunities to explore both immediate- and long-term fare integration initiatives with Metra, and to future-proof the system for potential future changes and emerging technologies that may not yet be envisioned or ready to proceed.

...so have competing priorities and long-term funding challenges...

The region’s transit operators and the RTA continue to advocate for the additional funding necessary to invest in transit service frequency, address state of good repair (SOGR) backlogs, and deliver critical capital investments. Ridership declines following the pandemic have only intensified and accelerated this need for funding.

Now, a fiscal cliff looms. Agency operating budgets are under threat as fare revenue remains below pre-pandemic levels. Transit fares remain a vital source of transit operating revenues under the current funding structure, contributing to financial pressures for the transit agencies and underscoring the imminent need to rethink how the region approaches fares.

Transit agencies cite a lack of dedicated funding as a major obstacle in undertaking additional fare integration measures. Competing priorities, including SOGR needs, fleet conversions and procurement, and staffing shortages often require significant time, money, and political capital. Additionally, pilot initiatives (among operators or third parties) may create long-term expectations without long-term funding, leading to financial or political strain. For a fare integration plan to be viable, operations need to be sustainably funded and consideration given to any upfront capital investment.

Further steps toward integration may also prove difficult without a well-defined “orchestrating” entity that provides oversight and/or funding assistance. See the **What peers are doing** section and **Appendix 1**. Fare integration case studies for discussion of how peer regions are achieving fare integration through regional entities and working groups.

The farebox recovery ratio requirement also contributes to a less integrated fare system. Illinois state law requires the regional transit system to cover half of operating costs through fares – a unique requirement among U.S. transit agencies. When there is pressure to have each rider cover an average fare – and when this requirement is distributed individually among each service board – the requirement may hinder experimentation and introduction of transfer discounts. Where the operators have overlapping service, the requirement may also incentivize

competition over collaboration. Rethinking the farebox recovery ratio as the region reimagines fares and its transit system could unlock new opportunities.

...and so have ownership and governance

“Ownership” of the system may itself be a challenge to full integration. Ownership, procurement, and integration of the equipment and back-office systems would require multiple intergovernmental agreements (IGAs) and/or memorandums of understanding (MOUs) between service boards and any funding partners unless centrally managed. Among peer regions that have successfully implemented fare integration, they are either operating under a single agency (Boston), the fare system is governed by an independent entity (Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) in the Bay Area, VBB in Berlin), or an interagency board expressly charged with this mission oversees fare integration (One Regional Card for All [ORCA], Seattle). In the case of VBB in Berlin, which coordinates fare policy across dozens of transit operators, this regional role is part of a more expansive “network manager” role that also encompasses service planning and coordination among operators. For more information on fare integration in peer regions, refer to the

What peers are doing section and **Appendix 1.** Fare integration case studies.

Integrating fares also requires the alignment of policies and business rules among participating agencies. Examples include:

- Consistent pass durations (e.g., standardizing a calendar monthly pass, such as Metra’s, or a rolling 30-day pass, such as Pace’s or CTA’s)
- Transfer windows (e.g., transfers are applied within two hours)
- Validity and expiration dates of purchased fare products

Alignment of business rules is an important pre-requisite to full integration, and a designated regional “owner” of fare policy can help to both identify and resolve these issues.

Regional context

Fare integration is not a new idea in northeastern Illinois and has been a shared policy goal among the service boards and RTA over the past decade. The Regional Transportation Authority Act (RTA Act), which established the RTA and governs its activities and relationships with the service boards, requires the RTA to develop and regularly update a strategic plan, in which RTA is encouraged to “promote transfers by riders among the Service Boards, transportation agencies, and public transportation modes, which may include “...a universal fare instrument that riders may use interchangeably on all public transportation funded by the Authority...”¹³ The region has seen some positive developments in regional integration, as summarized below in **Table 2** and discussed in further detail in **Appendix 4.** Regional fare integration initiatives.

Table 2. Overview of recent fare reform efforts in northeastern Illinois

Initiative	Agencies	Key findings
Universal fare card project (2005-2006)	RTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Study of feasibility and business case for a universal fare card (UFC) with a focus on how to integrate Metra into a UFC system.• Findings: UFC alone unlikely to induce ridership but enables fare policy changes that could.
Ventra (2013-present)	CTA, Metra, Pace	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A result of 2011 state legislation requiring a universal fare system, the Ventra system allows riders to use credit or debit cards or prepaid Ventra cards on all transit systems.• First procured by CTA in 2013, then joined by Pace. Metra introduced digital ticketing in 2015.

<p>South Cook Mobility Study (2018-2019)</p> <p>Fair Transit South Cook Pilot Program (ongoing)</p>	<p>Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways (CCDOTH)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The South Cook Mobility Study examined a variety of capital and operating transit investments to improve mobility outcomes in disadvantaged and underinvested parts of south Cook County. • Led to Fair Transit South Cook pilot program offering discounted fares to all riders of the ME and RI lines and service increase to Pace Route 352 – Halsted. • Since the start of the Fair Transit South Cook program, ridership on Metra’s ME and RI lines has increased as a share of overall Metra ridership and has recovered faster from pandemic-related ridership declines.¹⁴
<p>Regional Connect Pass (2022)</p>	<p>CTA, Metra, Pace</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metra fare product that offers unlimited rides on Metra, CTA, and Pace at a reduced cost when purchased with Metra’s “Super-Saver” flat-rate monthly pass.
<p>Fare Integration Working Group (2023)</p>	<p>CCDOTH, CMAP, CTA, Metra, Pace, RTA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working group to discuss and evaluate strategies for bringing more seamless and integrated fares to the region’s three transit agencies.





What peers are doing

Many metropolitan areas, even those like northeastern Illinois that have multiple independent transit agencies, have implemented or are moving toward some degree of fare integration across transit services. Peers have taken different approaches, but there are several common themes:

- **Full integration happens gradually:** Integration can and often does happen gradually. This can mean that a smaller number of operators integrate initially, with others joining later. It can also mean partial integration, such as a single fare medium, followed by integration of fares and passes. CTA and Pace have integrated their technologies, offered discounted paygo transfers, and introduced joint pass products over the years. CTA, Pace, and Metra have worked together to offer the Regional Connect Pass as well. Additional policy opportunities can provide riders with new integrated fare options without, or in advance of, a major capital investment such as a Metra tap-on/tap-off system.
- **Regional entities or joint boards provide critical leadership:** Most peer regions that have achieved interagency fare integration have done so through a formalized regional working group or an independent regional body that can set policy and business rules and bring funding to cover implementation costs, ongoing costs, and revenue losses from discounted transfers.
- **Geographically targeted approaches are common:** There are many reasons why a fare integration initiative may be implemented in a specific part of the region rather than regionwide. In the San Francisco Bay Area, the patchwork of agencies and complex funding structure often result in discounts that, due to bilateral agreements and supporting funding from specific jurisdictions, are only available in certain parts of the system (for instance, the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART)-Muni “A” Fast Pass). The Fairmount Line pilot in Boston is a somewhat different example of a mission-focused, geographically specific strategy, similar to the Fair Transit South Cook fare pilot.
- **Integration can involve both challenges and costs:** Seamless integration between tap-on urban transit and zone-based commuter rail often presents challenges and additional expenses. Like northeastern Illinois, most commuter rail systems feature zone-based fares, in contrast with their flat-rate local bus and rapid transit counterparts; and historically most of these systems used a fare validation system dependent upon visual inspection of tickets or passes. Northeastern Illinois is not alone in facing this challenge to full fare integration, as it is consistent with systems in the Boston, New York, and Philadelphia regions, as well as many other legacy agencies. In addition, solutions must also address governance and revenue-sharing challenges.

Examples of fare integration programs elsewhere in the United States and abroad are summarized in **Table 3** below and detailed in **Appendix 1**. Fare integration case studies.

Table 3. Fare integration in peer regions

Agency	Region	Key findings
	Seattle, Washington	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seamless regional fare integration is managed by a joint board. • All transfers are free within a two-hour window; riders who use more than one system only pay the highest single fare among the services used.
 Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority	Boston, Massachusetts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zone-based commuter rail passes also include unlimited access to lower-fare local buses and subways. • One commuter rail line operating entirely within city limits is fully integrated with local buses and subways for free transfers via flat fare pricing and tap-on collection equipment.
 METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION	Bay Area, California	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most transit operators in the region (24 out of 27) use the same fare payment system. • Ad-hoc regional collaboration on the united fare payment system is evolving into full fare integration, including free transfers between agencies and modes.
	Berlin, Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fare policy is set by a regional network manager that also sets service levels • The fare for a given origin-destination is the same regardless of which service or operator is used for the trip. • Tickets are zone-based with a variety of options for individual trips and passes.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Unify fare system administration and payment methods

To provide a seamless and affordable experience across multiple travel modes, the state should expand upon the previous mandates contained in the RTA Act, articulating specific principles for integration, including a requirement for a regional entity to be responsible for implementation. To ensure satisfactory progress, the state should establish a fixed timeline with defined metrics for achieving fare integration.

Early work would include commissioning a detailed analysis of potential scenarios, including ridership, cost, revenue, and equity impacts. As informed by studies, the entity would recommend a preferred fare integration scheme, including transfer discounts, technology strategy, delivery method, revenue sharing, and governance. Fare capping should also be considered (see the [PART webpage](#) for the companion memo on fare affordability and recommendations on fare capping). The entity would also identify and maintain common business rules, including standardizing monthly pass durations, transfer periods, etc.

The regional entity could also be tasked with procuring and managing the fare system, including potentially inheriting the existing Ventra system or taking over certain functions such as contracting and capital expenses. Existing systems and equipment could be brought into the system via IGAs with CTA, Pace, and Metra. The entity could be equipped with financial levers to incentivize participation among the service boards or given direct control through legislative mandate.



A unified fare payment system would require both capital and operating funds to implement. The state should consider investing in technology to support a unified payment approach (e.g., tap-on payment for all systems, QR code readers). This would also include the necessary back-office integration. The state would provide funding to complete integration, including ongoing operations and maintenance (O&M) costs to ensure that the approach is accounted for in the overall transit funding structure, and as a funding backstop for any potential revenue losses attributable to fare integration. Any consideration of lost fare revenue should also be evaluated in the context of any potential changes to the farebox recovery ratio requirement.

Implementation Steps

- **Legislative actions:**
 - Define integration and establish a fixed timeline
 - Establish governance/decision-making structure to oversee implementation (*companion recommendations on regional governance are available on the [PART webpage](#)*)
 - Provide funding to complete integration, including O&M costs and covering revenue losses



- **Local/regional actions:**
 - Regional entity and transit providers to collaborate on procurement and/or business rules
 - Local governments to consider funding supports for particular priorities (e.g., Cook County support for Fair Transit pilot project)

Rationale




- Simplify the user experience and make it easier and more convenient to rely on transit
- Unified payment methods/administration would also enable greater coordination and other fare reforms (see complementary recommendations)

Evaluation^c





Policy

Category	Rating	Rationale
 Mobility	High	Reducing friction for interagency transfers through a unified payment system is likely to increase transit ridership and increase mobility options.
 Equity	High	Disadvantaged groups tend to have higher reliance on transit. When transit is easier to use, it increases access to jobs and opportunities.

^c 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).



 Economy	Medium	No significant positive or negative impact (but enables improvements that would yield benefits; see subsequent recommendations).
 Environment	Medium	No significant positive or negative impact (but enables improvements that would yield benefits; see subsequent recommendations).
 Regional benefit	Regional	A more integrated systems makes the region more connected and more competitive.

Process

Category	Rating	Rationale
 Administrative feasibility	Medium	Back-office integration and procurement complexities are to be expected.
 Political feasibility	Medium	Decision-making relies on other governance shifts, which may create tensions.
 Timing	Long (incremental)	The transition may be gradual and there may be opportunities for incremental progress. Procurement is likely to be a significant schedule driver. The identification and allocation of a funding source could take several years.
 State span of control	Medium	The state can and should provide funding support but will likely not exert direct control over the fare system. Besides an ongoing oversight role, state control is most direct during initial phases to empower a regional entity to pursue fare integration.

Net cost / investment

Cost depends on the selected approach as well as the discounts offered. The most complete integration would be implementation of a tap-on/tap-off system for Metra, which could carry a capital cost exceeding \$100-150 million, pending further study and preliminary engineering; capital costs would also include eventual replacement of new infrastructure every 5-10 years. Operating cost includes maintenance of new infrastructure and staff costs associated with periodic fare inspections on Metra. Note that operating costs also do not include potential revenue losses due to discounted transfers (see next recommendation).

Category	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
 Operations & Maintenance	At least \$10M per year if adding tap-on/tap-off to Metra system					
 Capital	Over \$100-150M in one-time capital cost depending on technology, with periodic replacement every 5-10 years					

Recommendation 2: Enable free or discounted interagency transfers

The State of Illinois should require free or discounted transfers among regional transit providers in northeastern Illinois. CTA and Pace have already largely integrated their fares, so this policy change would primarily impact transfers between Metra and CTA/Pace. However, the state could also consider requiring the elimination of the interagency transfer fare between Pace and CTA. Offering transfers on both paygo fares and unlimited ride passes would also help make better use of regional transportation assets.

To compensate for any potential losses in revenue, the state should provide “make whole” funding in the overall transit funding structure. The state would also define transfer policy goals and empower the regional transit fare policy owner to establish a revenue-sharing structure as part of system implementation.

Implementation steps






- **Legislative actions:**
 - Define interagency transfer policy goals
 - Provide funding to cover revenue losses
 - Establish governance/decision-making structure to oversee (*companion recommendations on regional governance are available on the [PART webpage](#)*)
- **Local/regional actions:**
 - Regional entity and transit providers to develop MOUs for revenue sharing, subject to regional fare policy governance shifts
 - Local governments to consider funding supports

Rationale


- Reforms would build on existing integration (e.g., Regional Connect Pass, CTA/Pace integration)
- Reforms would make regional travel more affordable and coordinated across modes, with the potential to address fare equity issues




Evaluation

Policy

Category	Rating	Rationale
 Mobility	High	A more coordinated and affordable transfer structure will encourage travelers to choose the fastest and most convenient transit option, regardless of mode or operator. Discounted interagency transfers will also lower the cost of some trips and encourage more ridership.
 Equity	High	If revenue losses are covered, the discounts should lead to more mobility options and increased ridership. Discounts will disproportionately benefit the most disadvantaged communities.
 Economy	High	Fare reductions lower transportation costs for disproportionately low-income users, increasing their access to opportunities.
 Environment	High	Discounted transfers make the system easier and less expensive for specific types of trips, which may lead to more transit trips and less dependence on private automobiles. This can mitigate congestion and pollution.
 Regional benefit	Regional	A more integrated system makes the region more connected and more competitive.



Process

Category	Rating	Rationale
 Administrative feasibility	Medium	Requires interagency cooperation and building consensus on oversight.

 Political feasibility	High	Fare integration is politically popular, although it may be costly to achieve.
 Timing	Near/ Medium/Long (incremental)	Continued gradual phase-in is possible, but major changes may need to be timed around Ventra contract renewal.
 State span of control	Medium	The state can and should provide funding support but will likely not exert direct control over the fare system.

Net cost / investment

Ridership modeling is needed to determine the customer response and would also likely be used to determine specific pricing levels which in turn will impact revenue. However, analysis of “worst case” scenario in which no new ridership is generated still likely yields an impact of less than \$25 million per year in foregone fare revenue. This is based on 2019 Metra ridership and the reported percentage of Metra passengers making transfers to/from CTA and Pace today. These existing riders would receive a discount, resulting in some revenue losses. Any new induced riders to the transit system would represent net new revenue, which is not represented in this estimate.

Category	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
 Operations & Maintenance	<\$25M/year potential revenue loss					
 Capital	See previous recommendation for capital cost					

Recommendation 3: Align fare structures across agencies for similar trips

The state should consider amending the RTA Act to establish a principle of fare structure alignment in which travelers pay the same fare for a given trip (origin-destination), regardless of which mode or agency they select for the trip. For instance, a trip between the same start and end points on Metra or CTA (e.g., traveling from Oak Park to downtown Chicago or from Rogers Park to Hyde Park) would cost the same fare.

One approach to this recommendation would take the form of “flattening” Metra’s inner fare zones, such as creation of a “City zone” to lower fares on Chicago’s Far South Side where Metra Electric and the Rock Island District serve a market where CTA rail service is not available. This is partially addressed in Metra’s proposed fare structure for 2024, in which Zone 1 is a “downtown zone” and Zone 2 includes Chicago and the inner suburbs, similar in scale to the areas currently served by CTA. However, even if adopted, the proposed fares are still higher than CTA fares.¹⁵ This approach would not require one fare for all transit trips – as with Metra’s current and proposed fare zones, there could still be variation for trips based on length and other factors. Such a structure could still also accommodate premium fares on some categories of service, such as a future O’Hare Express service using the MD-W and NCS corridors. But aligning fares for the *same* trip between transit modes would encourage travelers to select the mode that best meets their needs, rather than being encouraged to take a slower or less convenient option because it is cheaper.

A domestic example of an aligned commuter rail fare zone structure can be seen in Boston, where the innermost commuter rail fare zone – encompassing most of the subway service area – has the same fare as the subway system. In Berlin, fares are set by the regional network manager, VBB, and are expressly mode/agency agnostic. Fares are based only on the origin and destination. (See **Appendix 1** for further discussion).

As with free or discounted interagency transfers, the state should provide “make whole” funding to compensate for any potential losses in revenue. A regional entity, in coordination with transit providers, should oversee the alignment to determine pricing, applicable geography, etc.

Implementation steps




- **Legislative actions:**
 - Amend RTA Act to establish principle of fare structure alignment
 - Provide funding to cover revenue losses
 - Establish governance/decision-making structure to oversee
- **Local/regional actions:**
 - Regional entity and transit providers to consider models of fare alignment, with interim and final goals and timelines



Rationale

- Existing fare disparities create equity concerns in lower-income areas where Metra is the primary rail service provider. Particularly on the Far South Side of Chicago, where the Metra Electric and Rock Island lines have frequent service and closely spaced stations that more closely resemble rapid transit similar to CTA’s rail system, the fare disparities appear to be more a function of the administrative division between the two agencies, rather than justified by the type of service provided or the beneficiaries of it. Coupled with the lower-income neighborhoods served by these Metra lines, which do not have direct access to CTA rail service, this is a significant equity issue.
- Consistent fares irrespective of mode or operator enables travelers to choose the mode that works best for their journey, and potentially encourages less direct competition and more coordination between service boards. This would be enhanced by governance reforms to further remove incentives for the service boards to compete for the same riders (*companion recommendations on regional governance are available on the [PART webpage](#)*).
- Alignment across regional fare structures will require regional coordination on fare levels, along with the associated impacts on revenue-sharing and funding allocation. Given prior hurdles to advancing fare integration efforts, a designated “owner” of fare policy decision-making would be best placed to address these challenges.





Evaluation

Policy

Category	Rating	Rationale
 Mobility	High	Allows customers to rationalize travel choices, improving mobility outcomes.
 Equity	High	Metra is a higher-cost rail option in many lower-income and highly urbanized parts of the region, including parts of Chicago and its inner suburbs. Aligning Metra fares in these areas to parity with CTA would benefit transit dependent populations and promote equitable access to rail-based transit options.
 Economy	High	Fare reductions lower transportation costs for disproportionately low-income users.

 Environment	Medium/ High	Discounted fares make the system easier and less expensive for specific types of trips, which may lead to more transit trips and less dependence on private automobiles. This can mitigate congestion and pollution.
 Regional benefit	Regional	A more integrated system makes the region more connected and more competitive, especially in the most transit-intensive parts of the region.

Process

Category	Rating	Rationale
 Administrative feasibility	High	Requires interagency cooperation. Agency-specific revenue loss implications could vary (based on fare levels and ridership shifts).
 Political feasibility	Low/ Medium	There may be political concerns with the state exerting control over service board fare policies.
 Timing	Near	Fares are already adjusted on an annual basis.
 State span of control	Medium	The state can direct RTA and the service boards to adjust fare policy. However, success will require collaboration with stakeholders at the local, regional, and federal level.



Net cost / investment

The costs of this recommendation would vary significantly depending on the desired approach, as well as the broader context of fare policy reforms. The estimates below are intended to be conservative and represent a “worst-case” analysis. They do not include any induced transit ridership demand nor adjust for regular fare increases that CMAP recommends the service boards pursue to assist in closing the budget gap.

If Metra were to reduce its fares to align with CTA fares in overlapping zones, the agency would see lower fare revenues from current customers. Those fare revenue reductions would be partially offset by increased fares from riders switching from CTA. CTA could see revenue reductions related to those switching riders (as could Pace, to a significantly lesser extent). The overall impact on the transit system would be a reduction in fare revenue. Under current

funding distribution formulas, this revenue loss would be most concentrated at CTA. The state should account for these costs and ensure the regional fare policy owner is empowered to mitigate any negative impacts of these or similar changes.

It should be noted that Metra’s proposed 2024 fare changes would reduce Metra’s fares for most customers and thus partially implement this recommendation. As a result, the potential future revenue loss to Metra should those fares be further reduced in the future to align with CTA and Pace fares would be less than is shown in the table below. Similarly, these figures do not account for any potential fare adjustments in response to inflation, as recommended in other PART materials. If adopted, Metra’s 2024 fare structure will provide an opportunity to test the hypothesis regarding ridership shifting from CTA to Metra with reductions in Metra fares.

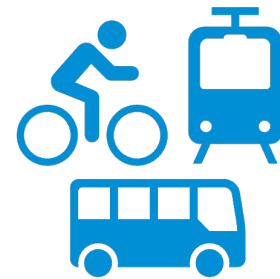
Category	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
 Operations & Maintenance	“Worst case” potential revenue losses of alignment of \$30-100M across the regional transit service boards. Amounts would vary based on parallel fare changes and could be offset by induced ridership.					
 Capital	N/A					

Recommendation 4: Integrate transit with complementary modes and systems

The state should amend the RTA Act to require the service boards to pursue fare integration with complementary modes (bikeshare, etc.) and transit systems (such as SSL commuter rail service). This action would make best use of the region’s existing infrastructure assets, while extending the reach and benefits of the transit system.

Micromobility integration

Integrating first-/last-mile modes like bikeshare with transit can aid riders in making connections to and from rail stations/bus stops and incentivize sustainable travel connections with transit. CTA and CDOT conducted a demonstration project to incorporate Divvy station location and bike availability information into the Ventra app trip planner, with a plan to eventually allow Divvy bikes to be paid for with the Ventra app.¹⁶ Technological barriers with the Ventra app and equipment at Divvy stations made rollout of the full integration challenging; however, since 2020, transit riders can see Divvy station information in the Ventra app and automatically launch the Divvy app to check out bikes.



Fare integration between micromobility and transit would build upon the success of the Divvy/CTA pilot. Like integration among transit agencies, integrated transfers between micromobility and transit could include seamless payment, discounted transfers, or both. An approach to discounting could target the first-/last-mile connectivity of micromobility in extending the reach of the transit system by, for example, offering a 15-minute free Divvy ride when transferring from CTA, Pace, or Metra service (transfers being validated through the Ventra account).

The benefits of this integration would also lay the groundwork for a more robust integration of bikeshare into the regional public transit ecosystem. Bikeshare and other micromobility services offer a relatively low-cost way to augment the reach of the region’s transit network. For example, integration with transit would enhance, and be enhanced by, plans to expand docked bikeshare beyond the current Divvy service area to encompass more of Cook County and the collar counties.

The state can also build upon Chicago’s precedent-setting data-sharing requirements by mandating transparent sharing of trip data as a condition of Ventra/micromobility integration. With the competitive micromobility landscape in northeastern Illinois (including but not limited to the publicly owned Divvy system), there will be strong incentives for other private operators to participate.

Understanding connections with TNCs

Regional stakeholders have also expressed interest in how the transit system could better integrate fares and payments with other modes. One commonly raised topic is that of the ride-hailing services operated by Uber and Lyft, also known as transportation network companies (TNCs).

The companion PART memo on demand-responsive services (available on the PART [webpage](#)) notes that there are opportunities to leverage these TNC services to expand the options available for users who rely on ADA paratransit. However, there is also interest in whether TNC services could be used to augment the existing fixed-route system for non-paratransit users.

Recent studies have shown that, overall, TNCs have increased congestion and reduced transit ridership.¹⁷ Their per-passenger costs are also significantly higher than those of fixed-route transit services. While there may be some smaller travel markets where greater integration could be warranted (e.g., overnight trips like those served by Pace’s recently launched Pace Connect service¹⁸), it would be important for regional policymakers to better understand how these systems are currently complementing *or* competing with the regional transit system.

As with micromobility, the state could require transportation network companies (TNC) to share trip data in the 7-county region, building on existing requirements for TNC trips within Chicago. This would help the region understand how different public and private systems fit within the overall transportation network outside of Chicago (e.g., whether and how often residents are using TNCs to connect to a Metra station or a Pace bus stop). This data would allow regional policymakers to better weigh the costs and benefits of any potential investment in stronger integration with TNCs, before committing significant resources.

Integration with other transit systems

The state should also pursue opportunities to integrate fares and coordinate service between Metra and the NICTD SSL. NICTD’s plans to increase the frequency of its SSL services and launch the new West Lake Corridor branch in nearby northwest Indiana can benefit Illinois residents through synchronized service and integrated fares, especially because many of these trains will make stops in Chicago. Metra and NICTD may also enjoy procurement scale economies and cost sharing if a new fare system is implemented. Metra and NICTD already have revenue and cost-sharing arrangements that could serve as a model. The state can amend the RTA Act to encourage fare coordination and integration between the SSL and the three RTA service boards. The prohibition on SSL trains picking up northbound riders and dropping off southbound riders at shared Metra stations could also be revisited.



Additionally, Metra and Amtrak could offer co-ticketing along shared routes such as Metra’s Heritage Corridor, BNSF, Metra Electric, and Milwaukee District North lines. A similar model could be applied to any future Metra-operated service between Rockford and Chicago.

Implementation steps






- **Legislative actions:**
 - Amend RTA Act to establish principles and goals for fare integration with other modes and services including non-RTA service board transit agencies (e.g., NICTD, Amtrak) and micromobility operators (e.g., Divvy, other bikeshare and scooter share operators)
 - Direct IDOT to consider co-ticketing arrangements on state-supported intercity rail corridors
 - Require data sharing among private micromobility operators as a condition of fare and payment integration
 - Require trip data sharing requirements for TNC’s in the 7-county region or statewide to understand how these private services fit within the overall transportation context
 - Provide “make-whole” funding for any operating revenues losses due to potential transfer discounts to/from micromobility
- **Local/regional actions:**
 - Regional fare policy owner and transit service providers to coordinate with complementary services (e.g., NICTD SSL, Amtrak, Divvy, micromobility providers) on fare and payment integration implementation, if mutually agreed upon
 - Counties and municipalities to explore expansion of Divvy or other bikeshare operators to more of the region, with a focus on first/last-mile connections to transit
 - CTA and/or future regional fare policy owner to incorporate micromobility payment integration in future Ventra app updates, including the potential for discounted transfers

Rationale




- Improves preferred first/last-mile connections by reducing barriers and increasing incentives for their use, extending the reach of the transit system. See **Appendix 2**. Transit-micromobility integration case studies for case studies on micromobility-transit integration.
- Leverages existing services and assets: for example, the SSL and Amtrak both already stop at multiple Metra stations; some of the largest and busiest Divvy stations in the region are at major transit facilities.


Evaluation

Policy

Category	Rating	Rationale
 Mobility	Medium/ High	Extending the reach of the transit system with more complementary modes encourages transit for trips that might otherwise be made by car or not made at all.
 Equity	Medium/ High	Enabling car-free or car-light living disproportionately benefits those with lower incomes. As the Divvy system and multiple private micromobility operators now operate throughout Chicago, this would be accessible to all.
 Economy	Medium	Impacts on access to economic opportunities would be more limited, although specific effects would vary based on the scale of integration.
 Environment	Medium	Impacts on emissions and environmental sustainability would be more limited, although specific effects would vary based on the scale of integration.
 Regional benefit	Urban	Currently primarily benefits Chicago residents but could be expanded regionwide.

Process

Category	Rating	Rationale
 Administrative feasibility	Medium	Requires interagency cooperation and potential revenue sharing, including with out-of-state and/or private entities. Agency-specific revenue loss implications could vary (based on fare levels and ridership shifts).
 Political feasibility	Low/ Medium	The state/RTA exerting control over service board fare policies may be unpopular. There would be farebox recovery implications if revenue-sharing with non-RTA transit operators and/or private entities. However, some elements, such as Divvy integration, could be more popular.
 Timing	Medium	Would require technology upgrades that likely need to be aligned with a future fare system procurement.



 <p>State span of control</p>	Medium	The state can direct RTA and the service boards to adjust fare policy. However, success will require collaboration with stakeholders at the local and regional level, e.g., the Chicago Department of Transportation and Lyft as the owner and operator of Divvy, respectively.
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Net cost / investment

Capital costs would depend on the technology/payment solution; if other agencies were to be set up to use the Ventra app and/or Ventra tap-on technology, the cost could be significant. Cross-honoring of existing Metra tickets on SSL and/or Amtrak would have minimal to no capital cost. Other solutions may carry back-end development costs associated with new fare integration.

Integration with micromobility would likely be app-based since that is already the preferred payment method for Divvy and other micromobility operators. Account-based linking/integration could likely be achieved through back-end development costs of perhaps \$10-\$20 million.

Fare integration with NICTD/Amtrak likely results in some fare revenue no longer being captured by the service boards, which would require state support to backfill. The amount of potential revenue lost would require travel demand modeling but is likely less than \$10 million.¹⁹

Category	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
 <p>Operations & Maintenance</p>	<p>Integration with Divvy: \$2.5-5M.²⁰</p> <p>Integration with NICTD/Amtrak: Depends on solution, requires additional travel demand modeling. Likely under \$10M for NICTD based on NICTD's fare revenue in 2022.</p>					
 <p>Capital</p>	<p>Integration with Divvy: \$10-20M</p> <p>Integration with NICTD/Amtrak: Depends on solution.</p>					

Recommendation 5: Grant authority to transit agencies to enforce fare violations

The state should grant transit providers the authority to perform fare inspections and issue fare violation tickets using non-law enforcement transit personnel.

Many of the fare integration strategies discussed in the previous recommendations would result in Metra moving fare collection/validation from onboard the train to the platform. On the Metra system, a transition to off-board fare payment would shift the responsibility of conductors or other onboard personnel from collecting fares to verifying fares. Not every transit passenger on every vehicle would need to be checked, but checks would need to be frequent enough to incentivize compliance. The penalty for non-compliance would likely be a fine. Any fines and enforcement strategies should also be structured to mitigate equity concerns.

Implementing fare inspectors would result in a new operating cost to the agencies. However, it is assumed that fines would be set at a level to offset both lost fare revenue from non-compliance and the cost of enforcement. It could also be implemented in tandem with the transit ambassadors program recommended in the draft PART report. Therefore, this recommendation can be cost neutral.

Enabling fare enforcement by agency staff would also unlock service improvements, as seen in peer regions like San Francisco and Washington, D.C.²¹ For example, these changes would allow (but not require) CTA and Pace to implement strategies like offboard fare collection and all-door boarding on buses. These strategies can substantially speed up bus service and would align with the broader PART recommendations to improve bus speed and reliability.

See the companion PART memo on bus speed and reliability (available on the PART [webpage](#)) for additional discussion on these connections.

Implementation steps

Legislative action

- Amend the RTA Act and the Metropolitan Transit Authority Act to allow transit providers to issue fare violation tickets using non-law enforcement transit personnel
- Mandate that fines be set such that the program is revenue neutral: revenue generated by fines covers program costs plus any estimated fare revenue loss associated with transitioning to proof of payment
- Establish graduated fine structure to address equity concerns

Local and regional actions






- RTA and the region’s transit providers to implement fare validation, inspection, and fine issuance where necessary
- Expand informational enforcement signage

Rationale





- The transit providers currently do not have the authority to issue fines for non-compliance of fare payment policies
- Unifying fare system administration by implementing tap-on/tap-off on Metra would shift fare collection off-board (e.g., proof-of-payment), requiring non-law enforcement transit personnel to conduct periodic inspections and validate fare payment.
- Enabling the transit providers to enforce fare payment via fines will also assist with speeding up buses on CTA and Pace by transitioning to proof-of-payment for bus rapid transit routes, as recommended in the draft PART report (see companion memo for more details).

Evaluation

Policy



Category	Rating	Rationale
 Mobility	Medium	As a direct strategy, would not have significant impacts on regional mobility. However, it would allow for secondary strategies (e.g., regional rail implementation and all-door bus boarding) that could have significant positive mobility effects.
 Equity	Medium	Additional enforcement and introduction of new fines are likely to raise equity concerns. These can be mitigated through graduated fine structures and the use of non-sworn inspectors rather than police.
 Environment	Medium	Unlikely to significantly alter GHG emissions (although like mobility, could have significant positive secondary effects).
 Economy	Medium	Unlikely to significantly impact economic growth (although like mobility, could have significant positive secondary effects).
 Regional benefit	Regional	Regional transit riders benefit from the more integrated fare system that this strategy could enable.

Process

Category	Rating	Rationale
 <p>Administrative feasibility</p>	Medium	If implemented, this would require agencies to create a new inspection/enforcement workforce and partner with other agencies for processing and collection of violations.
 <p>Political feasibility</p>	Medium	The public supports enforcement of fare policies and would favor faster service. However, proof of payment often generates a perception that some passengers can ride for free. It may also exacerbate concerns about unhoused individuals using the transit system for shelter. Complementary social services will be important to help address these concerns. <i>(See companion memo on safety and security, available on the PART webpage)</i>
 <p>Timing</p>	Near/ Medium	Timing would depend on when the unification of fare systems is implemented and appropriate staff are in place. Complementary recommendations (e.g., those related to all-door bus boarding) could require additional time to implementation.
 <p>State span of control</p>	Medium	The state can enable the transit agencies to inspect and issue fines for payment non-compliance via legislative amendment. However, as recommended, the state would not necessarily mandate its implementation, and so success would require partnerships with transit providers and other relevant stakeholders.

Net cost / investment

Implementing fare inspectors would result in a new operating cost to the agencies. However, it is assumed that fines would set at a level to offset both lost fare revenue from non-compliance and the cost of enforcement. It could also be implemented in tandem with the transit ambassador program as recommended in the draft PART report. Therefore, this recommendation can be cost-neutral.

Category	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
 Operations & Maintenance	Could be designed to be revenue-neutral by offsetting staffing costs from enforcement fines					
 Capital	N/A					

Appendix 1. Fare integration case studies

Seattle, Washington

In the nine-county Puget Sound region of Washington, Sound Transit provides regional transit in light rail, commuter rail, and express bus service along with at least ten other agencies that provide overlapping local and regional service via seven types of transit modes. The transit system in the Puget Sound is seamlessly integrated through shared fare collection technology.

The region uses the ORCA card which is a smart card that carries different types of transit passes and fares, valid on all transit modes in the region including bus, rail, ferry, monorail, and streetcar.²² Riders can use the ORCA mobile app to store a regional monthly pass (PugetPass), load money into an E-purse, or purchase a regional day pass. Depending on the mode and operator, customers use their ORCA card to tap onto the system before or while boarding. Light rail and commuter rail customers tap off again when exiting trains. Tap-on/tap-off technology on light rail and commuter rail allows for integration of distance-based fares with the rest of the regional transit system.²³

Fares are automatically calculated through the ORCA system, and within a two-hour window, free transfers are offered across almost all transit modes and operators, excluding Washington State Ferries. If a second trip has a lower fare than the first, the customer pays no additional fare; if a second trip is more expensive, the customer pays only the incremental difference. Similarly, if an ORCA Card user has a monthly pass and an E-purse at the same time, the monthly pass will cover the unlimited number of trips for one month up to a certain fare, and the E-purse will cover any additional fares beyond the limit.

The ORCA Joint Board serves as an independent governing, policy-setting body that oversees all activities related to the design, implementation, operation, and maintenance of the ORCA system. Membership includes one representative from each participating agency, and the Board meets regularly to discuss various ORCA system activities, including fare revenue distribution.²⁴ All fare revenue collected through the ORCA system is distributed based on ridership during the previous year and in proportion to the base fare of each system.²⁵ Sound Transit redistributes the revenue received from the PugetPass to each of the agencies, based on the number of rides each agency provided to PugetPass riders and the average fare per boarding received by agency. Additionally, the Puget Sound Regional Council supports the continued improvement of transit integration in the region, releasing an annual Transit Integration Report documenting transit coordination activities that are underway and anticipated.²⁶

Boston, Massachusetts

In Boston, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), a state agency, provides transit service to 175 cities and towns in the Greater Boston Area covering the eastern half of

the state of Massachusetts. MBTA's services include local bus, commuter bus, subway (light rail and heavy rail), commuter rail, and ferry services.

MBTA's contactless fare payment system, the CharlieCard, is accepted as a tap-and-go fare payment platform on bus and subway services. CharlieCard is not accepted on the commuter rail system (except the Fairmount Line, see below). Paper CharlieTicket fare media are also available for refillable stored value and passes to be used on buses and subways. Commuter rail tickets and passes can also be printed on CharlieTickets, which are printed with scannable bar codes and information for visual verification by a conductor. Finally, the commuter rail system also offers an app-based mobile ticketing option which is not compatible with any other modes.

The bus and subway systems offered discounted transfers: bus-to-bus transfers are free, subway-to-bus transfers are free, and bus-to-subway transfers incur only the incremental difference in cost between the bus fare and the slightly higher subway fare, such that the total cost of the trip is equal to a subway fare. Customers who use the commuter rail system can purchase a mobile app-based monthly pass, which does not offer any transfers to other modes nor is it accepted on those modes; or for an additional \$10 customers can instead purchase a physical monthly pass encoded on a CharlieTicket, which also includes unlimited access to the bus/subway systems, creating a seamless single-medium payment option between commuter rail and bus/subway.²⁷

The innermost zone (Zone 1A) in MBTA's zone-based commuter rail network has the same fare as the subway system, although historically paygo transfer discounts have not been available due to the complexity of combining a zone-based system with a flat rate system without tap-on/tap-off equipment, which MBTA's commuter rail system does not have. However, one of MBTA's commuter rail lines, the Fairmount Line, which operates entirely within the City of Boston and predominantly serves lower-income communities of color who lack direct access to the subway system, was recently converted to be fully integrated with the subway system. This entailed adjusting the fare zone for some of the outer Fairmount Line stations from Zone 1 to Zone 1A and placing fare validation equipment on all platforms, so customers now have the option to tap on with a CharlieCard and access free transfers to the entire MBTA subway and bus systems. Because the line operates within a single fare zone, there is no need to tap off as the fare is the same for all Fairmount Line customers regardless of boarding and alighting station. Monthly subway passes are accepted as well.²⁸

CharlieCard-compatible fare collection equipment has gradually been introduced on other regional transit authorities in Massachusetts that offer local bus services that overlap the MBTA system, primarily through connecting service at MBTA commuter rail stations. While the use of a consistent fare medium across agencies is a convenience for customers, there are currently no interagency transfer discounts offered.

Bay Area, California

Transit in the nine county San Francisco Bay Area of California is comprised of 27 transit operators that provide a variety of modes of transit including local bus, commuter/intercity bus, light rail, commuter/regional rail, ferry, and cable car. While each operator is independent, they all fall under the governance of the MTC, which is the agency responsible for transportation planning, financing, and coordination in the Bay Area region, and serves as its metropolitan planning organization (MPO).²⁹

Twenty-four transit agencies in the Bay Area use the same fare collection technology: the Clipper Card. Universal acceptance of the Clipper Card makes fare payment easier for users, only needing one account for all passes and cash value instead of separate payment forms for each transit operator. Clipper Card is available as a physical card or as a digital card linked to the tappable payment system of a smart device (such as Apple Pay or Google Pay). Passes and cash value can be managed via an app, at ticket machines in stations, or at ticket offices and customer support centers. This provides users with a variety of ways to load their cards, including being able to use cash in person at stations prior to boarding transit.³⁰

Clipper Card also allows for integration of passes and transfer discounts between operators that have agreements to do so. Transfer discounts and shared passes are not universal across the Bay Area but are typically geographically based and between operators that users commonly transfer between. These discounts are managed through ad hoc bilateral agreements between the applicable agencies. An example of this is the shared daily and monthly passes as well as fare capping offered between four bus operators in the East Bay.³¹ Another example is the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA, or Muni) offering a fifty-cent discount to riders transferring in from regional modes like ferries and heavy rail. Muni and BART also offer a joint monthly “A” Fast Pass which allows unlimited rides on Muni and on BART at stations located within San Francisco only.³² Additionally, Clipper has enabled Caltrain, a commuter rail operator, to offer a tap-on/tap-off option to track transfers to local buses and light rail that are free for Caltrain monthly passholders.³³

Aided by the governance structure of MTC and the payment integration of Clipper, the region is starting to test wider fare integration and transfer discounts via pilot programs. This is the result of the 2021 Bay Area Transit Fare Coordination and Integration Study, a collaborative study between transit agencies and MTC that provided recommendations for new fare policy options based on research, forecasting and modeling, and input from stakeholders and the community.³⁴ A Special Committee of the Clipper Executive Board called the Fare Integration Task Force is overseeing the implementation of various fare integration initiatives and pilot programs as a result of the study.³⁵

One pilot program is the Clipper BayPass Pilot Program which offers unlimited rides across the entire region on the 24 transit operators that accept Clipper to select college students and affordable housing residents. The BayPass program started its two-year test period in August 2022, and MTC is offsetting the estimate \$3.8 million in lost fare revenues as a result of the

program over this period to the transit operators.³⁶ Another upcoming pilot program is a universal no-cost/reduced cost transfer pilot program set to be kicked off in 2023 that will standardize transfers discounts based on the transfer type without changing the underlying fare structures of participating agencies and modes.³⁷ Local-to-local transfers would be discounted the amount of the second and subsequent legs of a trip; local-to-regional transfers would be discounted the equivalent of the local fare; and regional-to-regional would be discounted a flat \$2.50, which is equal to the maximum transfer discount allowed per transfer of any kind. This pilot program would be available to all users and is estimated to cause a net loss of fare revenue across the entire region of \$22.5 million, which MTC would offset to transit operators. The total losses of the program are estimated at \$28.5 million, of which \$6 million is estimated to be offset by revenue from induced trips that otherwise would not have been taken without this discount program.³⁸

Berlin, Germany

Verkehrsverbund Berlin-Brandenburg (VBB) is the public transportation coordinating authority in Berlin, Germany and the surrounding state of Brandenburg. VBB was formed to cohesively reconnect the region via public transit following the German Unification Contract in 1990. A variety of transit modes are operated in the region including buses, tram, urban rail, and suburban rail. While the Berlin region has dozens of individual transit operators, VBB is responsible for regional fare policy decisions (as well as other regional policies, such as service frequency). Operators are then responsible for providing services consistent with those regional policies and goals.³⁹

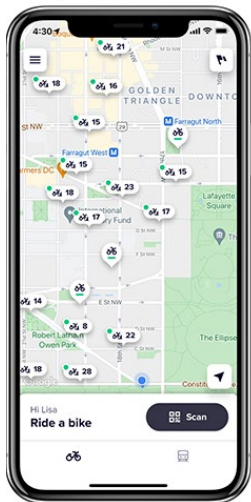
VBB has adopted a regional integrated fare structure that incorporates many of the principles outlined in this memo. For example, transfers between modes in a single direction within specific geographic areas (zones) are free with single⁴⁰ and four-trip tickets.⁴¹ A trip from a given origin to destination costs the same, regardless of the mode(s) taken or which operator(s) provided the service. And the system's daily, weekly, and monthly passes incorporate all transit modes, with different prices to accommodate passes that extend farther out into the region.

VBB also provides additional fare products to accommodate specific needs, such as group travel passes, short-haul tickets for journeys of only a few stops, and discounted monthly passes that only allow travel after the morning peak.

Appendix 2. Transit-micromobility integration case studies

Washington, D.C.

Transit users in Washington, D.C. with a registered SmarTrip card have free and unlimited access to use Bike & Ride facilities at Metro stations to secure their personal bikes before boarding transit.⁴² Bike & Ride facilities have card-controlled, video-monitored, sheltered bike parking with capacity for over 100 bikes. Bike facilities also host 'fix-it' stations with tools and air pumps for repairs. Safety features include bright lighting and steel mesh walls as well as emergency call boxes.



For transit riders who would like to utilize bikeshares, Metro offers ten free rides on Capital Bikeshare to customers via integration with their SmarTrip transit app.⁴³

Additionally, Washington, D.C. launched the Ride Report Micromobility Dashboard⁴⁴ in early 2023 which shows real-time data on e-bike and scooter use throughout the city. The Dashboard also hosts information on vehicle trips and use per day.



Germany

The bikeshare program Call a Bike, hosted by the national railway Deutsche Bahn, is available throughout Germany in 80 communities.⁴⁵ One app works everywhere in the country and pricing is standardized. However, programs differ in some cities; the first 30 minutes of a trip are free in Hamburg and Stuttgart and those cities offer electric power assisted bikes (pedelecs) and cargo pedelecs not available in other cities.⁴⁶ In addition to the Call a Bike program, Berlin is planning to expand micromobility options through e-scooter and e-bike fleets and car-sharing programs in a partnership between the city's public transit operator (BVG) and Vianova, a mobility data platform provider.⁴⁷

Appendix 3. Metra fare zone demographics

Figure 10. Metra fare zones as of 2023⁴⁸

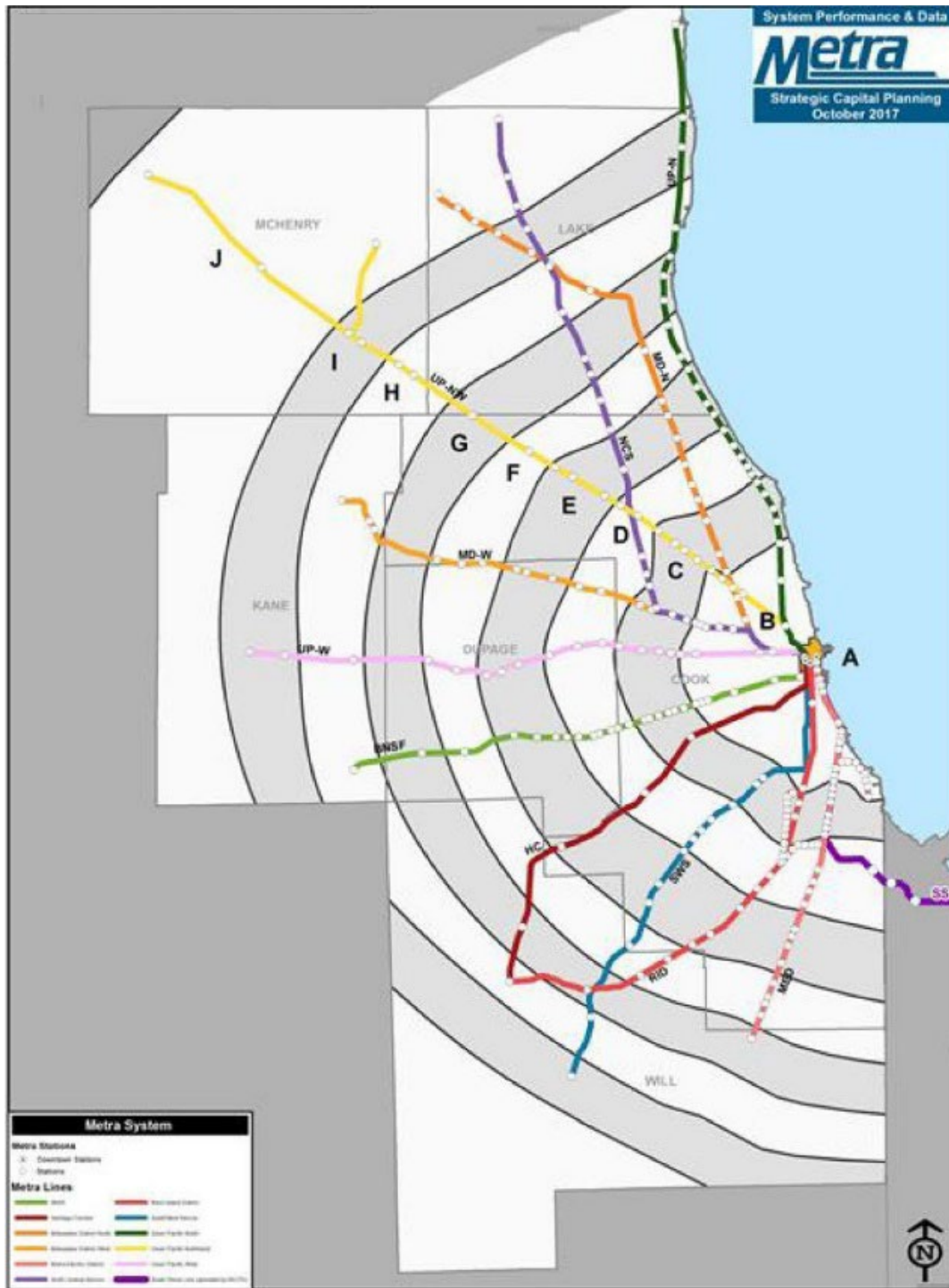
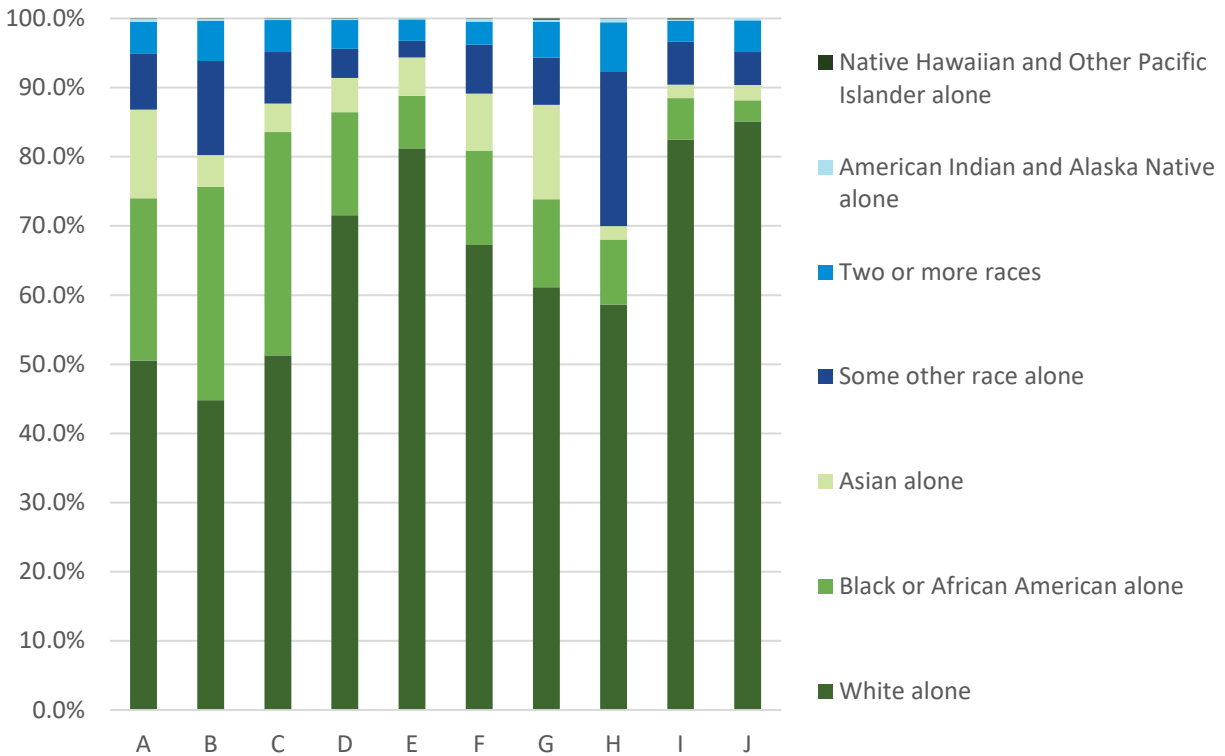


Figure 11 and Figure 12 show the racial and income makeup, respectively, of the areas within one mile of a Metra station, by fare zone. Residents of fare zones closer to Chicago are more

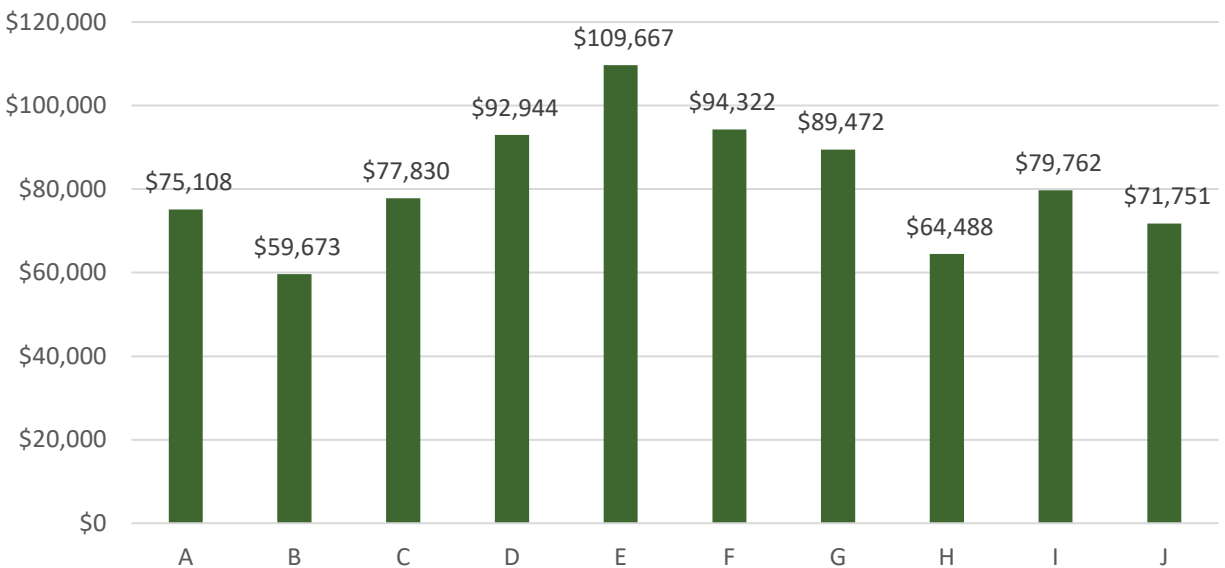
likely to be people of color and lower income than residents of fare zones further away from the city.

Figure 11. Demographics by Metra fare zone



Source: HNTB analysis of 2016-2020 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates

Figure 12. Median household income by Metra fare zone



Source: HNTB analysis of 2016-2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Appendix 4. Regional fare integration initiatives

Universal Fare Card Project (2005-2006)⁴⁹

RTA, in partnership with consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton, prepared a study in 2005 and 2006 examining the feasibility and business case for a universal fare card (UFC). Then, as now, a significant portion of the study focused on how to integrate Metra into such a system as well as the benefits and potential costs. The study found that a UFC alone is unlikely to induce ridership, but that it enables fare policy changes that could induce ridership. The study also found that, at the time, there were few examples of tap-on/tap-off commuter rail fare collection in North America. That has changed since the study was published as there are now several examples (see **Appendix 1**).

The study considered a range of fare integration scenarios from the low-tech and low-cost (Metra monthly pass stickers affixed to CTA/Pace fare media) to the costliest options, including tap-on/tap-off on platforms as well as on-board validators on Metra. It found that the latter scenarios best met the goals of fare integration, but the study stopped short of recommending a preferred option among the alternatives presented.

Ventra (2013-present)

In 2011, Governor Pat Quinn signed legislation requiring a "universal fare system" that allows riders to use credit or debit cards or prepaid cards on all transit systems, effective January 1, 2015.⁵⁰ That legislation resulted in the Ventra system being implemented in 2013, first procured by CTA.⁵¹ Pace joined the system via IGA with CTA and amendments to the contract with system operator Cubic Transportation Systems prior to the initial rollout of the system.⁵² The system also allows customers to pay at turnstiles and on buses using their personal contactless credit and debit cards, which also receive the same discounted transfer privileges as those who pay with Ventra cards; personal cards can also be loaded with transit passes.

CTA continues to be the primary client of Cubic and manages the contract. Metra joined later and has its own contract with Cubic; at the time of the initial rollout, Metra did not participate in nor accept Ventra in any form.

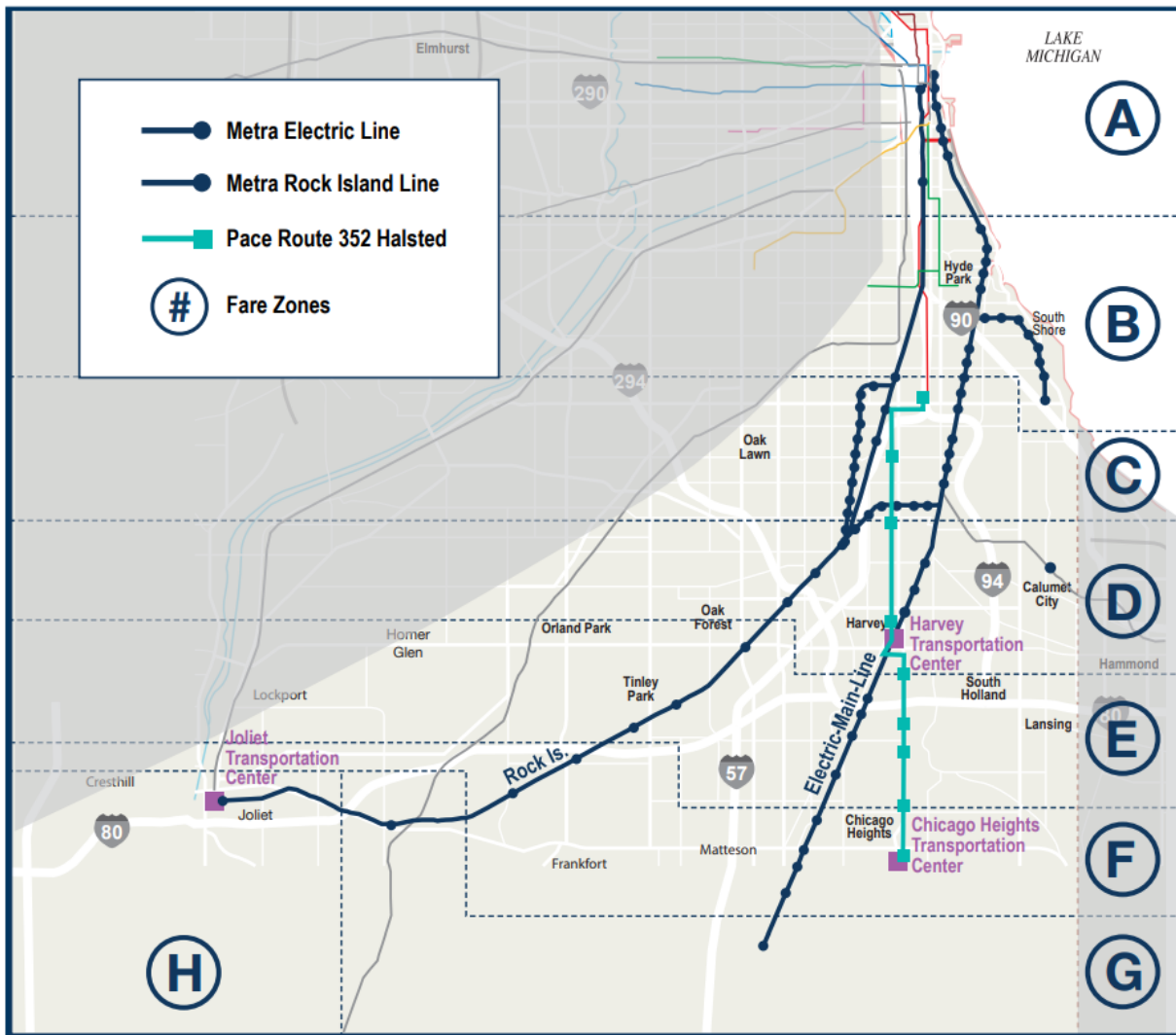
In 2015, the system introduced the Ventra app,⁵³ offering digital Metra ticketing, marking the first time that Metra offered any form of ticketing other than analog paper tickets. The app also offers integrated trip planning, real-time service information across all three service boards, Ventra account management (including managing of Ventra cards), and the ability to use a Ventra card as a form of payment when purchasing a Metra ticket or pass. In 2020, virtual Ventra cards were introduced,⁵⁴ allowing customers to add a Ventra Card to Apple Wallet or Google Wallet, providing the same Ventra Card benefits right from their device.

South Cook Mobility Study (2018-2019)⁵⁵ and Fair Transit South Cook Pilot Program (ongoing)⁵⁶

Led by the Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways (CCDOTH), the South Cook Mobility Study (SCMS) examined a variety of transit investments – both capital and operating – to improve mobility outcomes in disadvantaged and underinvested parts of south Cook County. The alternatives included new CTA rail extensions, Metra extensions, express bus service, Metra frequency enhancements, and fare integration. The Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA’s) Simplified Trips on Project Software (STOPS) ridership model was used to evaluate the potential ridership impacts of each alternative, and the study also looked at operating costs and potential impacts on fare revenue. Among several fare integration scenarios tested, one included free transfers between Metra and CTA/Pace, focusing on the Rock Island (RI) and Metra Electric (ME) lines. The modeling found that free transfers would induce a significant number of CTA-only trips to become CTA + Metra trips while also inducing new transit trips, resulting in increased boardings on both systems.

In 2021, CCDOTH launched the Fair Transit South Cook pilot program to offer discounted fares to all riders of the ME and RI lines. The pilot also includes a service increase to Pace Route 352 – Halsted, as shown in Error! Reference source not found.. CCDOTH targeted these transit corridors as part of their sustained focus on the Southland: many of the communities that rely on these lines experience higher rates of unemployment and poverty, as well as longer and more expensive commutes. The ME and RI discount varies by fare zone up to a 50% reduction in fares. Since the start of the Fair Transit South Cook program, ridership on Metra’s ME and RI lines has increased as a share of overall Metra ridership, and has recovered faster from pandemic-related ridership declines.⁵⁷

Figure 13. Fair Transit South Cook pilot area and fare zones



Source: CCDOTH

Regional Connect Pass (2022)

In June 2022, CTA, Metra, and Pace introduced the Regional Connect Pass, a new fare product that, when coupled with Metra’s new “Super Saver” flat-rate monthly pass, offers Chicago area residents unlimited rides on all three systems at a reduced cost and with greater flexibility (no day or time restrictions). With the Regional Connect Pass, customers who purchase a \$100 Metra monthly pass have the option to purchase a CTA/Pace monthly pass for an additional \$30. This reduces the combined price for both passes from \$175 when purchased separately to \$130. The Regional Connect Pass replaces two similar passes previously available to Metra monthly pass holders: the Link-Up Pass, which for \$55 a month included rides on CTA during weekday rush hours and on Pace at all times; and the PlusBus Pass, which for \$30 a month provided unlimited rides only on Pace.

Under Metra’s new proposed 2024 fare structure, the Regional Connect Pass add-on would remain \$30, but the “Super Saver” Metra monthly pass would be replaced by zone-based monthly passes, ranging from \$75-\$135.⁵⁸

Fare Integration Working Group (2023)

A Fare Integration Working Group (FIWG) was convened beginning in Fall 2022, consisting of representatives from CTA, Pace, Metra, RTA, CMAP, and CCDOTH. The FIWG met in a series of workshops and small group meetings to discuss strategies for bringing more seamless and integrated fares to the region’s three transit agencies. Discussions focused on establishing the goals of fare integration, identifying lessons learned from peer regions, developing fare integration scenarios and evaluation criteria, evaluating scenarios, and developing immediate and long-term recommendations for next steps.

In exploring the broad topic of “fare integration,” the FIWG’s work specifically focused on identifying fare products and policies to incentivize interagency transfers, as well as identifying technology solutions and methods to enable interagency transfer discounts, prioritizing simplicity and ease of use for customers. Specifically, two core tenets were identified that define the value proposition behind seamless transfers and the FIWG’s work:

1. Ease of transfer and reduced complexity can improve the customer experience and increase systemwide transit ridership.
2. Transfer discounts can reduce barriers to using transit, expanding access to opportunity for lower income riders.^d

The FIWG’s final report is anticipated in the second half of 2023.

^d FIWG’s efforts were *not* intended to address topics outside this core focus area, such as setting individual agencies’ regular base fares; means-tested and other fare subsidy programs such as youth fares; integration with modes other than fixed route transit; or establishing precise revenue-sharing formulas for interagency fare products.

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