

By Solvie Karlstrom | Published: February 23, 2011 | Comments : 0



Credit: Chicago Tourism Bureau

Home to one of the largest and oldest transit systems in the country, the Chicago metropolitan region has long been a national transportation hub, moving 2 million bus and rail riders each day and 2.31 billion tons of freight each year. [GO TO 2040](#), the regional plan of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), is guiding the area toward affordable and innovative ways to increase transit, fleet and freight efficiency, earning the region a place among the top 15 Smarter Cities for transportation.

### Bus/Train Tracker

Transit riders are benefiting from an efficiency boost with the help of [Bus Tracker](#) and [Train Tracker](#), real-time arrival information systems that can be

accessed online, on mobile devices, or via text ([watch the video here](#)). Local businesses as well have the option of running Bus Tracker on a screen display or message board for their customers. “The idea is, these businesses get screens that show bus tracker, and that’s a draw for customers,” says Jennifer Henry, transportation policy analyst for [NRDC’s Center for Market Innovation](#). “It makes it easier for customers to say, oh, I DO have time to get a cup of coffee and a doughnut, so I think that I’ll sit in a nice warm coffee shop for another six minutes.”

With Bus Tracker information free and accessible to the public, business owners can develop their own applications to display the information, or they can download the Do-It-Yourself Bus Tracker Display, available free of charge on the [Chicago Transit Authority](#) website. For now, Train Tracker is available only for phone use.

### Low- and No-Emission Car Fleets

Thanks to a \$1.9 million American Recovery and Reinvestment grant, Chicago is also endeavoring to be electric vehicle-ready by 2012, with 280 [electric vehicle charging stations](#) throughout Chicago and its surrounding suburbs. Tom McKone, principal for the [Civic Consulting Alliance](#), a nonprofit firm assisting with implementation of the region’s [Climate Action Plan](#) says the hope is “that you get more massive adoption and [that] the manufacturers focus on delivering electric vehicles to Chicago.”

The stations are to be installed at the O’Hare and Midway airports, in downtown parking garages, grocery store parking lots, and Illinois Tollway plazas, and will be set to fully charge electric vehicles in less than 30 minutes. The city fleet will be among the first of the new stations’ users to power the new heavy-duty electric city vehicles, like electric refuse trucks, which are slated to come online soon.

The city has designated nearly 40 charging stations for I-GO Car Sharing, a local nonprofit that will add solar canopies to its stations to power I-GO vehicles with clean electricity. I-GO, which views itself as an extension of the public transit system, became the first car-sharing service in the nation to offer customers a seamless integration with the region’s public transportation system. In 2009, I-GO partnered with the Chicago Transit Authority to give users access to I-GO cars and CTA bus and rail services with a single I-GO/CTA smart card.

The region has taken a number of steps to increase the efficiency of its fleet as well, including purchasing hybrid vehicles and using biodiesel and ethanol whenever possible.

Another approach has been to [train taxi drivers](#) in the tactics of “eco-driving,” driving and maintenance techniques that can increase gas mileage; these include starting and stopping slowly, regularly checking tire pressure, and unloading heavy and unnecessary cargo before driving. As of December 2010, all new taxi drivers are required to receive training and are tested before licensing.

“Taxi drivers themselves have to pay for the fuel they use,” says McKone. “It’s a great opportunity because it hits their pocketbook. It can save them money, and it’s actually going to create a safer drive as well.”



Transit Access in Chicago Metropolitan Region (light green lines indicate location of metro region with darker brown regions showing transit access), Credit: [CNT H+T Affordability Index](#)

## Innovation in Freight and Passenger Rail to Create Jobs

Six of the country's seven largest railroad carriers have terminals in the Chicago Metro region, bringing nearly 500 freight trains through the region each day. The freight traffic creates economic and industrial growth for the region—but also pockets of congestion, bottle-necked traffic at rail crossings, and increased air pollution.

The Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program ([CREATE](#)) is an unprecedented public-private partnership between the [U.S. Department of Transportation](#), the State of Illinois, the City of Chicago, six private rail companies, Chicago's commuter rail service [Metra](#), and Amtrak, organized to increase the efficiency of freight movement in Chicago.

Through a total of 71 projects over the course of 20 years, the program has outlined a plan to strategically upgrade four widely used corridors, increasing capacity and improving rail network connections throughout the region. To date, 10 projects are complete. Fully implemented, the program is expected to create 172,000 jobs and prevent the emission of 1.61 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent each year.

Additionally, 42 municipalities in Chicago's south suburbs were awarded \$2.3 million in competitive federal funding through the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Sustainable Community Challenge Grant program to implement a multi-jurisdictional, rail-focused revitalization strategy. The plan emphasizes development around transit, intermodal freight industries, green manufacturing and environmental stewardship and aims to attract 13,000 jobs and \$2.3 billion in new income to the area over the next 10 years.

"Chicago's south suburbs are poised to thrive with its transportation infrastructure and proximity to Chicago and international freight hubs," said Scott Bernstein, president of the Center for Neighborhood Technology, a Chicago-based non-profit that helped design the plan. "Our innovative redevelopment strategy serves as a model for communities across the country similarly endowed with passenger and freight rail assets."

### Learn More

- The [Chicago Transit Authority](#) operates in the City of Chicago and 40 surrounding suburbs.
- The [Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning \(CMAP\)](#) is the official regional planning organization for the northeastern Illinois counties of Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will.
- [GO TO 2040](#), developed and being implemented by CMAP, is a comprehensive regional plan to guide the Chicago metropolitan region toward a sustainable future.
- [The Chicago Climate Action Plan](#) details steps for individuals and organizations to take in order to support a more livable climate for the city and for the world.
- [The Chicago Regional Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program \(CREATE\)](#) is a public-private partnership between the [U.S. Department of Transportation](#), the State of Illinois, the City of Chicago, six private rail companies, Chicago's commuter rail service [Metra](#), and Amtrak, organized to increase the efficiency of freight movement in Chicago.
- [Bus Tracker](#) and [Train Tracker](#) are real time arrival information systems that can be accessed online, on mobile devices, or via text ([watch the video here](#)).