



# Next Grand Plan for Chicago to Start Taking Shape

Erica Gunderson | February 23, 2016 7:21 pm

What will Chicago be like in the year 2050?

Will we be whisked through traffic jams in self-driving cars, well-connected public transit that never gets delayed by freight trains or ill-timed buses? Will our population have mushroomed as climate change draws people to the Great Lakes from parched regions of America? And if so, how and where will all those new people live?

These are just some of the really big questions that planners will start wrestling with as a new grand plan is launched to make Chicago more competitive with other American cities.

More than a hundred years ago, Daniel Burnham said, "Make no little plans, they have no magic to stir men's blood." He and Edward H. Bennett created the 1909 Plan of Chicago which sought to transform a crowded, dirty city into a paradise – and parts of it happened, like our glorious lakefront park system, double-decker Wacker Drive and the Michigan Avenue Bridge.

But even Daniel Burnham couldn't foresee things like the automobile, so the plan of Chicago continues to evolve.

Our most recent regional plan was unveiled in 2010 by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning or CMAP, called [GO TO 2040](#). True to its name, it looked 30 years into the future, and some parts of GO TO 2040 are either underway, in the planning stages or at least being considered, like the Elgin/O'Hare expressway construction, extending the

CTA's Red Line south to the city limits and developing a West Loop transit center around Union Station.

Most importantly CMAP points to LTA grants (some 150 projects regionwide) from a new plan for the Fox River waterfront in Algonquin and Carpentersville.

But that's all so six years ago! The new plan to be launched Wednesday will look another 10 years into the future.

Tonight we're revealing the new name publicly for the first time: [ON TO 2050](#). As its name implies, we're now looking ahead another 10 years.

CMAP says plans are not meant to exist longer than a 10-year period, and while they could have gotten away with a small update as is required by law every few years, they felt it was time for a new plan because of changes since 2010 in such things as climate projections, focus on sustainability and technology.

The big launch takes place on Wednesday at CMAP offices in the Willis Tower, but our cameras were allowed into a dress rehearsal for the big launch.

CMAP has transformed a meeting room in its offices into something like an Apple store – but instead of Apple store “geniuses,” 500 stakeholders attending the launch will get to talk with planners at different stations arranged by area of interest and expertise.

CMAP executive director Joseph Szabo says it's the start of a process to gather input from stakeholders like municipalities and regional agencies – and ultimately from all of us – about what the new plan should cover. They'd like to engage the public through a three-year process where people can talk about what they consider important in their quality of life, economic prosperity and transportation needs.

While ON TO 2050 is in its beginning stages, planners do have an idea what will be in the new plan – a strong focus on transportation. This is where CMAP really has teeth because the agency controls the purse-strings for federal dollars allocated to big projects.



**Aerial rendering of key recommendations in the Lakemoor the future land use plan, including conservation neighborhood design, mixed-use town center, and commercial/industrial development.**



**Detailed rendering of Lakemoor town center with pedestrian crosswalk, new village hall, mixed-use buildings, residential, and Morrison Park expansion near Route 120 improvements (sidewalks, trees, median) for walkability.** One big idea from the 2040 plan that has gotten traction with IDOT is congestion pricing on new lanes of I-55 – a program where drivers can pay a toll for access to exclusive lanes. Another big idea involves relieving freight train congestion that not only drives Amtrak and Metra riders crazy, it also causes a bottleneck around Chicago that affects the national freight system.

Beyond transportation, ON TO 2050 looks at encouraging walkable, transit-oriented communities; so-called “infill development” where new construction is encouraged on vacant land in built-up areas with existing infrastructure, rather than extending development and utilities into sprawling undeveloped areas; fixing tax policy that currently encourages big box stores and sprawl; encouraging green infrastructure; storm water management and conserving our precious water resources; and strategies to prepare for climate change.

Above all, they’re hoping to get communities to play well together. Szabo envisions a strong region where there is less concern about the borders between the city of Chicago and suburbs and more concern about collectively working together.

That leaves the biggest question of all: How likely is any of this to happen within our lifetimes? Conveniently, the former head of CMAP Randy Blankenhorn is now Gov. Rauner’s Secretary of Transportation, so there’s some hope that Springfield will be receptive (of course, much depends on whether they ever pass a state budget).