

Chicago Avenue

**A Blueprint
For Complete Success**

Executive Summary

Chicago Avenue is a microcosm of its namesake city in many ways. Chicago Avenue, like the city, is a place that people want to be. It stretches from Lake Michigan, past the Magnificent Mile, across the Chicago River, and through diverse neighborhoods. Chicago Avenue extends into the suburbs and past Frank Lloyd Wright’s famous Home & Studio. Along its way, it shapes each neighborhood differently but it is always the center of commercial and social activity.

Using the latest in urban design ideas, Chicago Avenue will undergo a “road diet.” This will shift the mode balance back toward pedestrians, transit, and bikes. Over time, much of the street has yielded to the demands of cars at the expense of other users. While motor vehicles remain a vital part of the urban fabric, the proper balance needs to be restored. The narrower street will not only improve safety, it will also open space for environmental and aesthetic improvements.

The Blueprint Plan for Chicago Avenue does just that. It ensures that all users’ demands are balanced, making the street and the city of Chicago a place that people will want to continue to spend time in for years to come.



Introduction

The Blueprint Plan implements complete street design for Chicago between Damen and Milwaukee on Chicago Avenue. The design will not only focus on Chicago Avenue itself, but will also include changes to surrounding streets to complement changes made along the corridor.

The affected blocks are part of the larger West Town community and include the neighborhoods of Eckhart Park, East Village and Ukrainian Village.

The goal for the streetscape will be to improve safety, reduce environmental impact, spur economic development, and improve service on the city’s second busiest bus route.



Image: CDOT

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Context

The Chicago Avenue corridor of study is a primary commercial street in the West Town Community. The neighborhood formed in the city's early years as manufacturers began to locate along the shores of the Chicago River. The Galena and Chicago Rail line was constructed in 1848, bringing additional industrial jobs and immigrants. The area still bears the mark of the original immigrants from Germany in the northern portion of the community, Poles in the east and central areas, Italians in the south, Ukrainians in the near west, and Russian Jews in the far west.[1]

Throughout its history, the West Town community has undergone several transformations. Puerto Ricans migrated from Lincoln Park in the 1960's, traveling west along Division Street before locating in the former Russian Jewish section of West Town. Mexican immigrants also located to the area in the 1960's just east of the Ukrainian Village neighborhood.

Today, the community is currently undergoing gentrification which started in the mid 1990's. The current path of gentrification follows the same paths followed by the Puerto Rican and Mexican immigrants the previous decades. This gentrification has caused some conflict in the area as new residents change the character with new buildings and customs.[2]



Figure 1: Street life on Chicago Ave
Author photo

Scope

The Blueprint Plan implements complete street design for Chicago between Damen and Milwaukee on Chicago Avenue. The design will not only focus on Chicago Avenue itself, but will also include modest changes to surrounding streets to complement the changes made along the commercial corridors. The area impacted is part of the larger West Town community and includes the neighborhoods of Eckhart Park, East Village and Ukrainian Village. The goals for the streetscape will be to improve safety, reduce environmental impact, spur economic development, and improve the reliability and speed of the #66 bus, Chicago's second most traveled bus route.

This report will be broken into three sections: Conditions & Recommendations, The Blueprint Plan & its Alternatives, and Implementation.

Related Plans

Previously drafted plans have informed the design and implementation of the Blueprint Plan.

- **GoTo2040** The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), adopted the GoTo2040 plan in 2010, promoting reinvestment in existing areas and transit. As a core neighborhood of the city with good transit access, the Chicago Avenue corridor is a prime example of a neighborhood that GoTo 2040 seeks to encourage future reinvestment in.
- **The Chicago Streets for Cycling 2020** This plan proposes 645 miles of on-street bikeways. Chicago Ave is listed as a "Crosstown Bike Route" in the plan. *The Blueprint Plan diverges from this designation, identifying nearby streets better suited for cycling.* Routes planned in the area include Milwaukee Avenue as a Spoke Route and Augusta, Wood, Nobel, and Erie as Neighborhood Routes.
- **The Chicago Pedestrian Plan** Sets the ambitious goal of zero pedestrian deaths. With two pedestrian deaths in the three years of data that were reviewed, Chicago Avenue is in need of improvements.
- **The CTA** is currently developing a plan for bus rapid transit (BRT) on Ashland Ave through the midpoint of the project area. This plan is expected to attract more pedestrians to the area and improve service on the city's most used bus route.
- **A Plan for Chicago's Near Northwest Side** Members of the West Town Community along with Skidmore Owings & Merrill, created this plan in 2002. The plan establishes a vision for a "community of linked and distinctive urban neighborhoods."
- **Complete Street Guidelines** Completed in 2013 by Chicago's Department of Transportation (CDOT), these guidelines bring many other plans together and will inform many of the proposed changes by clarifying complete streets best practices.
- **Tree Plan** The West Town Chamber of Commerce report details the status of trees along Chicago Ave, many of which are unhealthy or dead.

Conditions & Recommendations

There are many opportunities to change the built environment to improve pedestrian space, economic development, transportation mode priority, and environmental impacts. The core of these improvements will be a road diet with bus improvements for Chicago Avenue. The Chicago Pedestrian Plan recommends road diets for “streets with four or more lanes and less than 23,000 vehicles traveling on it daily.” With 17-18,000 vehicles a day and four lanes, Chicago Avenue fits this criteria. The road diet would reduce travel lanes from most of the street from two lanes to one lane in each direction. A center turn lane would be added when appropriate to ensure that traffic continues to move efficiently. Pedestrian islands will be used where left turns are impractical due to one way streets.

Removing one lane of traffic would free up 11 feet of ROW for other uses. This would be allocated primarily to additional pedestrian space and bio-swales. The many one way streets along the corridor limit the need for turn lanes and signalized intersections. While there are currently two stop signs and seven traffic lights on Chicago Ave, traffic calming measures could improve safety while removing all of the stop signs and two traffic lights. This would improve the travel for all modes.



Figure 3
Chicago Avenue
Existing Conditions
Image made using
Streetmix.com



Figure 4
Chicago Avenue
As Planned
Image made using
Streetmix.com

Land Use

The Chicago Avenue corridor is saturated with multi-family residential zoning. The residential zones are encompassed by strong commercial zoning, particularly along the major thoroughfares including Chicago Avenue. Industry remains plentiful to the east along the Chicago River, and to the south, located along the railroad tracks. With the exception of Eckhart, Superior, and Commercial Parks, the area lacks essential open space (Figure 5).

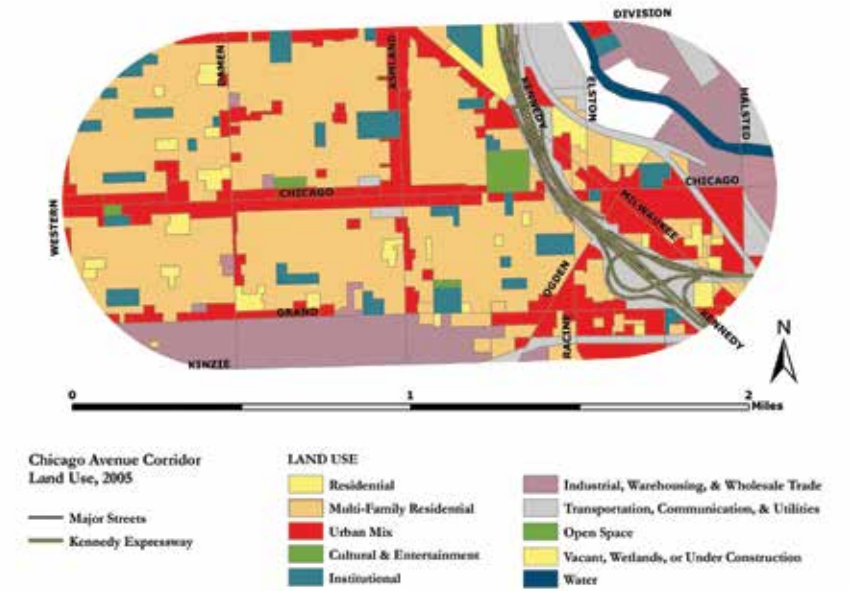


Figure 5: Land Use
CMAP 2005 [3]

Demographics

The Chicago Avenue area consists of fourteen census tracts. Within the fourteen census tracts there is a total population of 40,543 residents. The average age of the residents in the area is 32 years and the median household income for the area is \$69,750. In terms of employment 17,499 have a primary job. Of those with a primary job, 75% work within ten miles of their job, and 31.9% access their job via public transit. The median household income for the area is \$69,750. In addition, 94.6% work outside of the area, primarily in the Loop (Figure 6)[4].

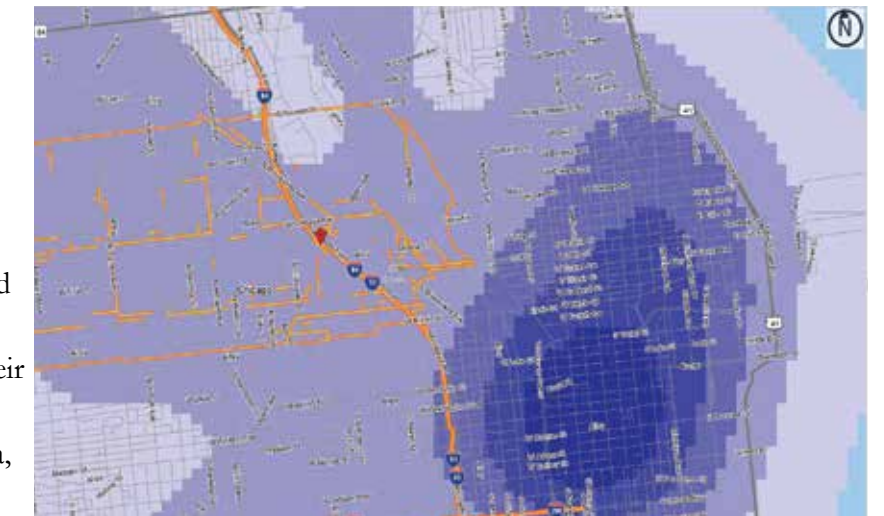


Figure 6: Where residents work
US Census 2011

Pedestrians

The pedestrian friendliness of Chicago Avenue is critical for three reasons. First, users of all modes become pedestrians for some portion of their trip. Second, a number of vulnerable populations use Chicago Avenue. There are ten private and public elementary schools, seven nearby high schools, and two large parks within one-half mile of the Chicago Avenue Corridor. In addition to many children, the former St. Bonaventure Catholic Church on the northeast corner of Noble and Chestnut is scheduled to be converted to a senior assisted living home. Finally, Between 2009 and 2011 there were 85 pedestrian crashes (see figure 7) in the study area including two fatalities, one at Chicago Ave at Damen, and another at Chicago Ave at Ashland. Pedestrian infrastructure is poor (See Figure 8). With the goal of zero pedestrian deaths, this area is a high priority for pedestrian improvements.

Improvements

- Road diet to reduce number of lanes pedestrians cross
- Sidewalk bump outs to improve visibility, reduce distance of pedestrian crossings, and to make crossing one direction of traffic easier
- Stop for pedestrians “State Law” signs and pedestrian refuge islands at non signalized intersections
- Speed camera on Chicago at Noble and Wolcott
- Increased widths of sidewalks
- Better landscaping and less intense heat island effects with bioswales
- Low albedo surfaces to lower lighting requirements and heat islands
- Countdown signals and continental crosswalk markings
- Full spectrum lighting with neighborhood branding
- Wayfinding to BRT and the Blue Line, and to promote the commercial corridor

Each of these improvements is targeted at safety and comfort for pedestrians. Narrower traffic lanes and speed cameras will reduce vehicle speeds. Slower vehicles can stop in shorter distances and cause less severe injuries when a crash occurs. Improvements to the sidewalk, lighting, and crosswalks will make pedestrians more visible. Finally, wider sidewalks, branding, and landscaping will make the neighborhoods more pleasant, encouraging a healthy and environmentally friendly transportation.

If the budget does not allow for all pedestrian improvements to be made, short term priority should be given to the road diet and crossing improvements. The road diet will be difficult to implement later and the crossing improvements are relatively inexpensive compared to the benefit. Lighting, speed cameras, and branding can be put in place when funding becomes available.

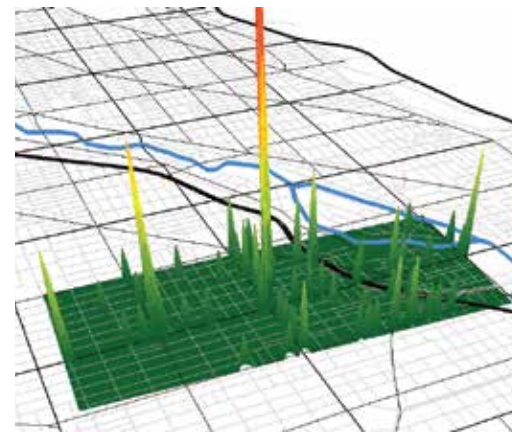


Figure 7: Pedestrian Crashes 2009-11
Source: IDOT



Figure 8: Looking for a crosswalk
Author photo

Bikes

Chicago Avenue does not currently have a bike lane, though it is listed as a “Crosstown Bike Route” in the *Streets for Cycling 2020* plan. However the area already has many good cycling streets (Figure 9). Milwaukee Ave has protected bike lanes and is heavily used. Designated bike lanes are also installed at Hubbard and Augusta respectively.

Chicago Avenue is used by area cyclists as a connector to Milwaukee Avenue. Improved signage will direct cyclists to the ample streets that are more friendly. Currently these signs are inadequate. The 161 cycling accidents in the area are concentrated at intersections on the arterial streets. (see Figure 10) Milwaukee Avenue has the highest concentration of accidents, however no data is currently available on accidents since the protected bike lane was installed on Milwaukee.

Improvements

- New signs to neighborhood bikeways
- Improvements to neighborhood streets to improve bike access
- Traffic calming-Bumpouts discourage bike use but also slow auto traffic.

While a bike lane on Chicago is not recommended, it is expected that cyclists will continue to use Chicago as a bike route due to its connection to Milwaukee, abundance of destinations, and lack of alternatives to cross the highway and river. Though Chicago Avenue is not a friendly place to bike today, the speed reductions achieved with the road diet will allow for bikes to mix more comfortably with cars.

Divvy bike share locations are available approximately every quarter mile throughout the corridor (Figure). These serve both neighborhood trips and trips downtown, which can be reached within the allotted 30 minute rental period.



Figure 9: Divvy and Bike Locations
Chicago Data Portal

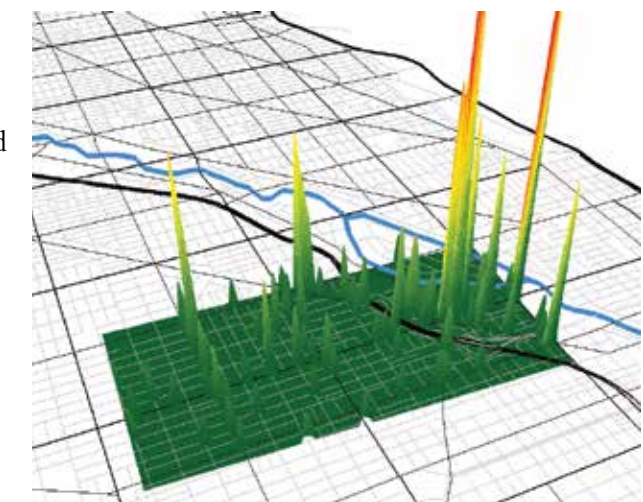


Figure 10: Bike Crashes 2009-11
IDOT

Transit

Improving transit is one of the Blueprint Plan’s key goals. The #66 Chicago operates twenty-four hours between Austin Avenue to the west, and Columbus Drive to the east. The #66 Chicago bus currently has the second most monthly boardings for CTA bus routes with 706,246 [2]. Nearby east-west bus routes surrounding the corridor include the #65 Grand and the #70 Division. While the #65 Grand has seen a slight increase in ridership over the last five years, its average yearly ridership is more than three times less than the #66 Chicago. The #70 Division’s ridership is two and a half times less than the #66 Chicago. In addition, ridership on the #70 Division has remained stagnant over the last fifteen years, so much so that the CTA reduced the service hours on the #70 in February, 2010. The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), describes both the #65 Grand and the #70 Division as “support routes,” while the #66 Chicago is defined as a “key route.” Within the corridor (Figure 6), the #66 Chicago also intersects several key north-south bus routes including the #9 Ashland, the most used CTA bus route; the #49 Western; and the #8 Halsted. North-south support routes in the corridor include the #50 Damen and the #56 Milwaukee.[7].

The #66 Chicago also intersects the O’Hare branch of the Blue Line at the intersections of Chicago, Milwaukee, and Ogden Avenues. The Chicago Avenue station serves 4,200 passengers each weekday. This is greater than the nearby Grand & Milwaukee station which serves 2,650 passengers each weekday, but more than 25% less than the 5900 passengers served at the Division & Milwaukee station each weekday.



Figure 11: Bus stop locations
City of Chicago Data Portal [5]

Improvements

- Only have bus stops at intersection with traffic signals
- Relocate bus stops from near-side to far-side (beyond the intersection) to provide an increased flow of bus and auto traffic
- Provide ADA compliant bus shelters at all of the bus stations along the corridor
- Create of a bus only lane eastbound from Willard Street (I-90 bridge) to Carpenter Street
- Install signal priority for the Chicago Avenue bus at intersections with traffic signals

There are 17 bus stops for the #66 Chicago along the corridor. A high number of bus stops, along with a high frequency of service, often causes “bus bunching,” or several buses, off of their schedule at the same location. Figure 12 shows bus bunching in the corridor during the Friday afternoon rush hour period. To alleviate bus bunching, and to provide a public transit service that is faster and more reliable, the first step to address transit in the area is to reduce the number of bus stops on Chicago Avenue to only locations where there is a traffic signal, approximately every ¼ mile.

There are thirty-four #66 Chicago bus stops in the corridor (seventeen east and seventeen west), ten are located at the far side of the intersection, while the remaining twenty-four are near-side located. Near-side located bus stops slows a bus by forcing the bus to stop at an intersection though there may be a green light. In addition, near-side bus stops can limit pedestrian access to the intersection, particularly disabled pedestrians. Near-side bus stops also slow vehicular traffic, especially vehicles attempting to make a right turn. Far-side bus stops allow the bus to pass the intersection before collecting passengers, and provide the bus easier access to enter the flow of traffic, as there is a traffic gap created by the traffic signal. Therefore, it is advantageous for the second step addressed is to relocate the remaining twenty-four bus stops to the far side of the intersection to enhance transit in the corridor. Once Chicago Avenue goes undergoes construction for a road diet, space will be allocated at the far-side of every signaled intersection for a bus stop.

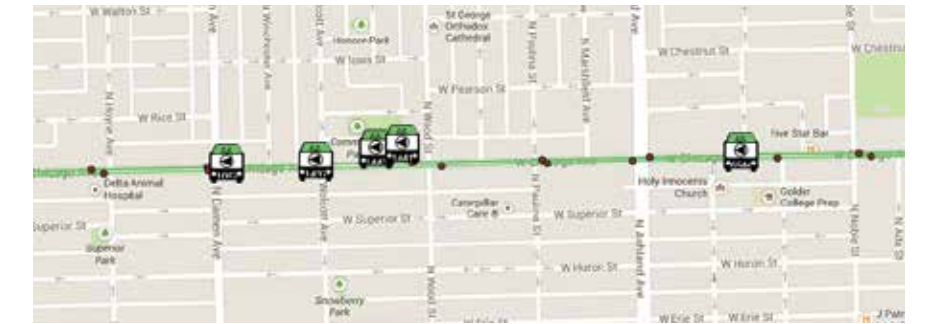


Figure 12: Bus bunching during the afternoon rush period
CTA bus tracker [6]

Currently, bus infrastructure is lacking within the corridor. Seven of the thirty-four bus stops in the corridor have bus shelters and a majority are located on sidewalks that are too narrow. Figure 12 is an image of a bus shelter at the intersection of Chicago and Ashland Avenues. This intersection is a key transfer point between two of the city's most used bus routes. The shelter is inconveniently placed on a narrow sidewalk, hindering pedestrians, especially those who are disabled. Each bus stop in the area should be equipped with a bus shelter that provides seating, a map of Chicago transit, and is easily accessible for all passengers. Future bus shelters will be equipped with ADA technology and a bus tracking device to enhance perception of bus reliability and ease of use.

As part of the road diet, an eastbound bus only lane would be created between Willard and Carpenter Street. This area has minimal parking (four paid parking spaces), has wide traffic lanes due to the bridge over the Kennedy Expressway, and intersects the Blue Line Chicago station. A bus only lane will increase travel times for the #66 Chicago and provide easier access to the Blue Line station. These four spots must be relocated within the same ward (27th), and can be relocated to the eliminated bus stops.

The city has recently begun using signal priority for buses in Chicago. We believe that this should be implemented along with signal upgrades in the corridor. The #66 Chicago buses will be equipped with signal priority devices that will alert the traffic signal of an oncoming bus. The traffic signal would then switch itself to green on Chicago Avenue, allowing the bus to pass through the intersection more efficiently.

In addition to the #66 Chicago, key routes intersecting the corridor such as the #8 Halsted, #9 Ashland, and the #49 Western will also be equipped with signal priority devices to use in the corridor. However, signal priority systems would be installed only when funds become available as signal priority systems can cost up to \$35,000 per intersection.

Chicago Avenue is a key transit route for the City of Chicago. It is the second most used route in the CTA's entire system, spans the entire east-west portion of Chicago, and operates twenty-four hours. However, steps are needed to be taken to prove riders a transit system that is fast and efficient. The steps above, when completely addressed will dramatically enhance service on the #66 Chicago.



Figure 12: Narrow sidewalk due to bus stop
Author photo

Vehicles

Chicago Avenue between Milwaukee and Ashland has an average daily traffic count (ADT) of 17,900; and an ADT of 17,100 between Ashland to Damen [8]. Chicago Avenue does not connect to the freeway, but it may be used by vehicles in route to highway ramps at Augusta or Ogden. While the area has an industrial history, the only large industry in the area is located along the river to the east and south along the Metra tracks. Even though there is no highway exit, the river limits the number of east-west streets in the area, making Chicago Avenue one of the primary streets to reach the River North and Loop neighborhoods. Many businesses along Chicago Avenue provide customers a limited amount of off street parking in addition to on street parking throughout the corridor.

We found that the community is anti- commercial vehicle (Figure 13): *“This sign was installed on Winchester and Chicago. These signs should be installed at every street entering the East Village. The city will save on infrastructure repair costs and we will have a better lifestyle.”* -East Village Facebook

While legally restricting large vehicles is one way to manage their movement, the same goals can be achieved using street design. There are few businesses that would produce significant commercial traffic on Chicago Avenue. By narrowing the street and using sidewalk bump outs to reduce turning radius, commercial vehicles that have alternative routes will find them. However, local businesses will still be able to receive deliveries. A small increase in the number of loading zones may impact parking. Loading zone hours would be limited to mitigate their impact and midblock medians may also be used for this purpose.

Improvements

- Little or no reduction in parking
- Fewer stop signs and traffic signals
- Better timing at traffic signals
- Speed cameras at Noble and Wolcott
- Fewer bus stops - and far side bus stops that get buses out of the travel lane

These improvements, while having some negative impacts on vehicles, are within recommended design criteria. The addition of a center turn lane will provide a place for turning vehicles to get out of the travel lane, potentially improving the driving experience for motorists who must frequently switch lanes today to avoid turning vehicles. The abundance of four lane alternate routes such as Grand and Division also limit the negative impact of a road diet.



Figure 13: Residential truck restrictions
East Village Blog [9]

Economic Development

While Chicago Avenue has witnessed some commercial success lately, over the last several decades many business have relocated from Chicago Avenue to nearby areas including Division Street and Milwaukee Avenue. Once a place that used to draw people into the area, today Chicago Avenue has a significant number of vacant storefronts and unused lots. With the Blueprint Plan, Chicago Avenue has the potential to regain its status as a successful commercial corridor for the area and region. To assist in the reinvestment of the Chicago Avenue commercial destination, enhancements to the corridor’s streetscape are essential. Enhancements to the streetscape will revitalize Chicago Avenue by enticing locals and non locals alike to spend time in the corridor.

Improvements

The streetscape has been poorly maintained along the entire corridor (Figure 14). The cost to repair existing infrastructure is so high it would be better to replace it all. In addition, there is much historic character to the structures in the area. Rebuilding the streetscape could highlight the historic assets of the area.

Currently, the sidewalk widths along Chicago Avenue are eleven feet wide. To improve the streetscape along the corridor, we propose that the widths of the sidewalks be extended to sixteen feet. A wider sidewalk will provide additional space for pedestrian travel and sidewalk cafes. When the sidewalks are widened, bioswales will also be installed along the corridor. Bioswales reduce pollution and flooding while offering a scenic landscape.

Katherine Wakem, a representative from the West Town Chamber of Commerce and the SSA manager for the area, listed new lighting fixtures as her top priority regarding streetscape enhancement. The current lighting along Chicago Avenue is corroded and outdated. New light full-spectrum fixtures will be visually appealing and improve energy efficiency. In addition, the light fixtures will also provide the opportunity for neighborhood branding via banners and be a place to hang seasonal decorations.



Figure 14: Infrastructure showing its age
Author Photo

Along with the corroding light fixtures are a multitude of rust-covered or missing signs. Way finding signs along the corridor should be replaced with new signage that use West Town Community branding. The signs will orient shoppers, transit riders, and cyclists alike. To help the community understand the changes to the streetscape, educational information will be included on each wayfinding sign. This will include information about the history of the community, the environmental benefits, and the safety benefits. Both the new light fixtures and way finding signs will be installed either during the widening of the sidewalk, or at a period after once funding becomes available.

Currently, a fifteen lot area lays vacant at 1850 W Chicago Avenue. We propose that this former industrial site be developed into an environmentally friendly public plaza (Figures 15 & 16). The plaza will be developed to become the central focal point of not only the Chicago Avenue corridor, but the entire West Town Community. The plaza will be built with permeable pavers, and provide open space for concerts, farmers markets, festivals, and additional public activities. A pathway at the center of the plaza will lead visitors to the fountain, as well as to a new entrance for Commercial Park. The alley between the plaza and Commercial park is currently constructed of red brick. The brick alley will be retrofitted to become a green alley, using guidelines from the Green Alley Handbook. In addition to connectivity to Commercial park the plaza will also have three bioswales in the plaza that will contribute to the commercial corridor’s greenspace.

These improvements will benefit both the commercial businesses and the residents of the area. An enhanced streetscape will entice both businesses and residents to relocate to the revised area. Property values will rise, as will commercial activity. Rising property values are critical to the success of the entire plan as a special property tax is applied to fund the Special Service Area (SSA).



Figure 15: Vacant lot at 1850 W Chicago
Author Image



Figure 16: Proposed plaza connecting to Commercial Park
Author Image

Greenspace, & Environment

The Chicago Avenue corridor is relatively flat with aging infrastructure and suffers from periodic basement flooding. West Town is no exception. Replacing existing pipes would be expensive and require many streets to be torn up. The more affordable alternative is to prevent water from entering the sewer during peak periods. The city should continue to implement green and permeable alleys through the region as part of ongoing replacements. In areas with flooding problems, we also recommend the addition of bioswales along traditional streets. These take in water from drainage access points and permeable parking lanes, reducing demand on the sewer system. In addition to the flooding benefits, these bioswales will provide space for much needed landscaping for tree roots to grow. Katharine Wakem, SSA Manager for the area emphasized that the area has spent considerable money on improving the trees, but were limited by the space available. Bioswales will remove this limitation, greatly enhancing the tree options.



Figure 17: Bioswale
CDOT photo

Beyond water management, there are several opportunities for the neighborhood to become more environmentally friendly. Chicago currently has much more lighting than it needs. New low wattage lighting fixtures will reduce power consumption while maintaining or improving visibility. Improvements on Cermak Rd. were able to reduce energy usage by 42% by switching from sodium vapor to full spectrum lights, and by using wind and solar power for lighting. The Blueprint Plan does not include solar and wind, most of the energy savings achieved will be from more efficient lighting and traffic signals. In addition, these lights limit light pollution, helping migrating birds.

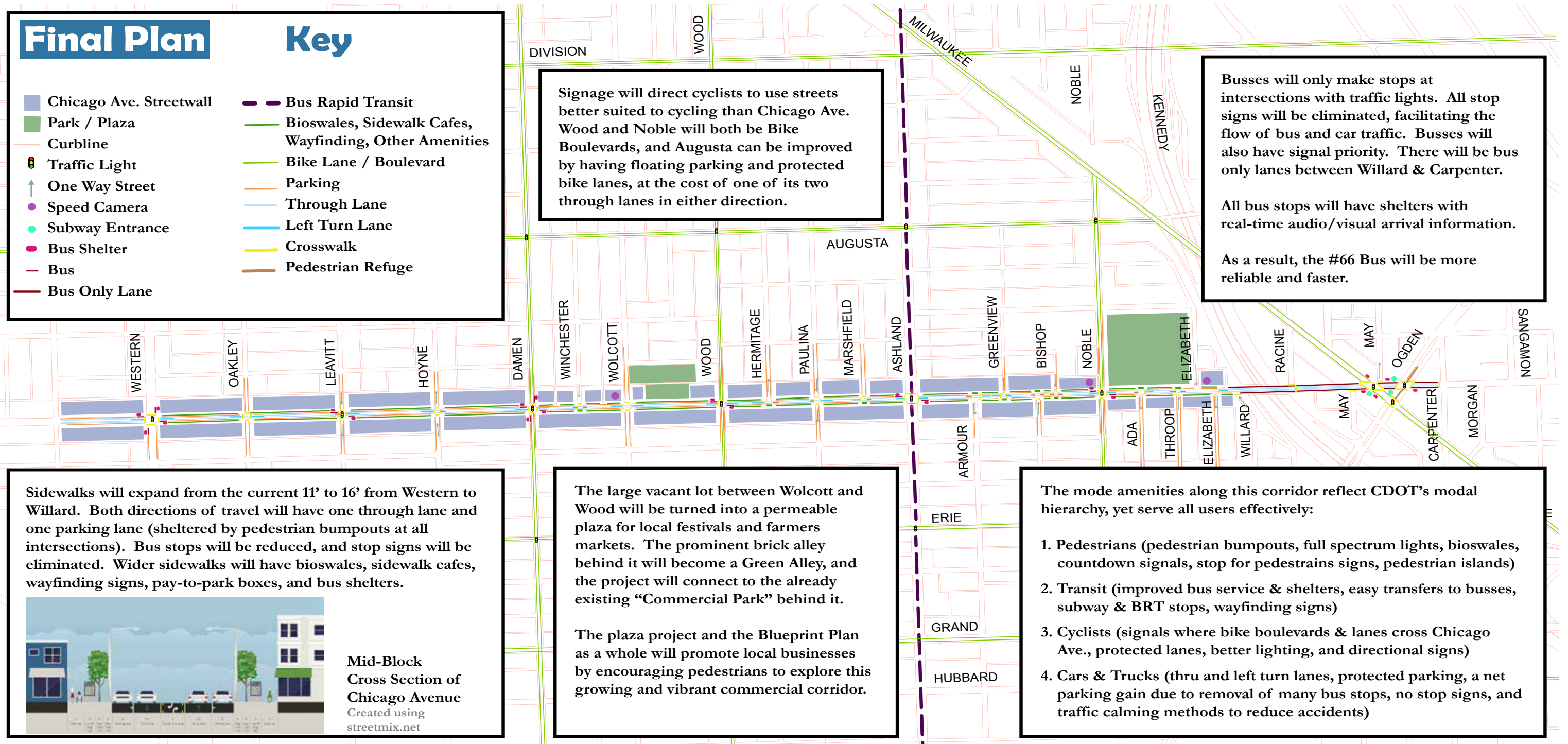
Improvements

- Bioswales with curb cuts
- Permeable pavers for parking lanes and the plaza
- More space for trees
- Low albedo surfaces to reduce lighting requirements and mitigate heat islands
- Photocatalytic concrete near vulnerable populations
- Low wattage white lights
- Dark sky lighting for birds
- Green alley by Commercial Park

The SSA will also consult with the Morton Arboretum to determine the appropriate native plants to place in bioswales, and work with Chicago's Department of Forestry to plant new trees.



Figure 18: Trees struggle to survive
Author photo



Implementation

The third and final section, Implementation, examines the financial and stakeholder challenges to implementing the proposals from section two. This will look at and analyze existing funding sources including SSAs and tax increment financing (TIF) to evaluate future potential for these. Funding for other local and national complete street projects were studied to replicate their funding sources.

Stakeholders

The Chicago Avenue corridor is intersected by four aldermanic wards of Chicago. The majority of the area east of Ashland Avenue is represented by Alderman Walter Burnett Jr. of the 27th Ward. Other impacted aldermen include Proco Joe Moreno of the 1st Ward to the west, 32nd Ward Alderman Scott Waguespack to the north and west, and to the south 26th Ward Alderman Roberto Maldonado. An additional key stakeholder is the West Town Chamber of Commerce. The mission of the West Town Chamber of Commerce is to further promote the business in the community, particularly along the Chicago Avenue corridor. The West Town Chamber of Commerce also oversees the corridor's SSA. The SSA is an additional property tax levied on property owners in a specific district. Funds from the tax are managed by the West Town Chamber of Commerce. The West Town Chamber of Commerce then allocates the funds to enhance the public space within the SSA.

United States 5th District Congressman Mike Quigley, who represents the study area, is a major advocate for better stormwater management. Congressman Quigley will be a critical ally in securing federal and state money to fund the improvements to Chicago Avenue targeted at improving stormwater management. Quigley will also be important in securing CMAQ funding for transit improvements that reduce congestion.

There are also over a dozen neighborhood groups in the area, with a sole focus on improving the quality of life for the community. These groups meet regularly and play a major role in shaping the community. Additional stakeholders include local public and parochial schools. From design and development to implementation and construction, each stakeholder is an essential player in producing a successful project for the community. Finally, Chicago's Project Coordination Office will be consulted to ensure that other stakeholders involved in street construction projects will work in tandem along the corridor.

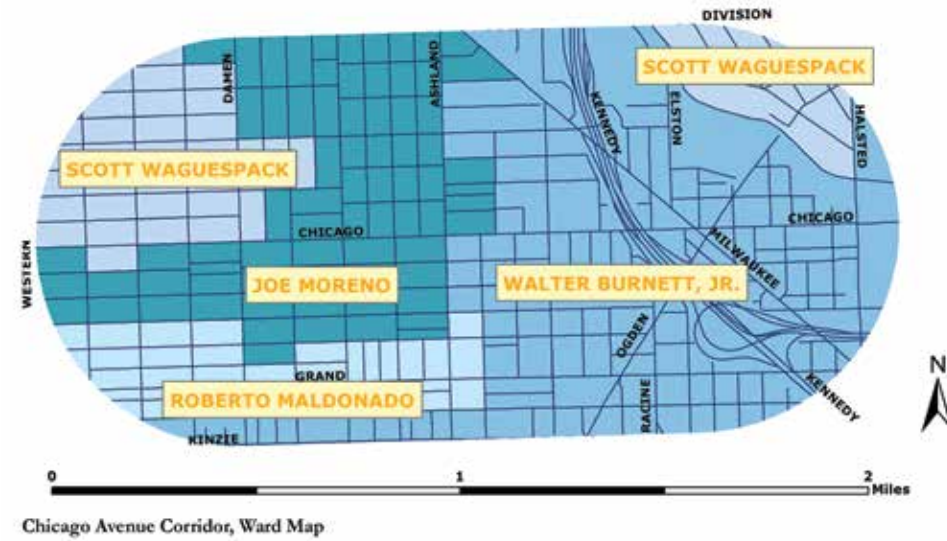


Figure 19: Four different alderman oversee the corridor
Author image

Funding

The cost to implement this program is expected to be similar to the Lawrence Avenue road diet. Lawrence Avenue received similar treatments in 2013 at the cost of \$12M for a one mile stretch[8]. Our study area is also about one mile long and will receive similar pavement, traffic signal, and pedestrian improvements. The bulk of these cost will come up front with the reconstruction of the pavement surface, bioswales, and sidewalks. Many proposed environmental improvements were also made along Cermak Ave and cost 21% less than similar projects in the city.

As important as the upfront construction costs are the long term costs. The stormwater improvements will benefit the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD) and homeowners. Energy efficient lighting and signals will pay for themselves over time. There will be fewer lanes of traffic to pave and plough, however increased traffic per lane will mean more frequent resurfacing. Initial landscaping will be put in by CDOT, but ongoing landscaping maintenance will be managed by businesses and the SSA.

The entire Chicago Avenue corridor is part of Special Service Area (SSA), #29, West Town[4]. The SSA is operated by the West Town Chamber of Commerce, and had a budget of \$431,378 for fiscal year 2011[5]. As of 2011, in SSA #29, for every \$100 thousand in assessed property values, each property owner was charged an additional tax of \$263. After speaking to the West Town Chamber of Commerce regarding our project, they would be very interested in taking on a major role in funding the streetscape improvements and ongoing maintenance.

Improvements to the the CTA bus and Blue Line subway station can be funded using the adopt a station program. A local or national business would pay for improvements to the station and be able to brand or potentially name the station.

The SSA and CDOT will provide the majority of project funding. Other sources include the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District, aldermen's discretionary funding, public-private partnerships, state funding, the National Fish and Wildlife's Chi-Cal Rivers Fund, and federal funding including the Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) grant.



Figure 20: The West Town chamber manages the SSA
<http://www.westtownssa.org/>

Alternative Considerations

The trajectory of this plan reflects the modal hierarchy identified by CDOT in CDOT's Complete Streets Guidelines. Other modal balances were considered before selecting the current trajectory of the Blueprint Plan. The following alternatives were considered:

Bus

Since the #66 is one of the most used bus lines in Chicago, exploring the removal of a lane of traffic and/or parking to make room for bus lanes (either bus only, bike/bus, or Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)) was reasonable. Like the Blueprint Plan, a Chicago Avenue BRT would have required the elimination of stop signs and many bus stops to streamline the speed and performance of the #66 bus. One of the primary concerns with a BRT or a bus lane option was that if it were placed along the center of the street (as the Ashland BRT is) that there would not be enough room for stations on a median (Figure 19). BRT would not be optimally placed along the outer lanes of Chicago Avenue because it would endanger pedestrians by having no or few stop signs but seven lanes to cross two traffic lanes: one left turn lane, two bus lanes, and two parking lanes.



Figure 21: BRT leaves little space for parking
Streetmix.org

The only reasonable way to have BRT on Chicago Avenue would be to eliminate all parking. Removing parking is a complicated task due to the parking meter deal; difficult because all of the metered parking must be relocated within the ward from which it was removed and local resistance. It would be difficult, but not impossible to do, yet that does not make it wise. Many businesses are located on Chicago Avenue, and without parking on the street, express buses and motorists without parking have little reason to think of Chicago Ave as anything greater than a conduit to wherever else in Chicago they may be going -- not as a destination. Therefore, BRT is not a reasonable option for the stakeholders that the Blueprint Plan seeks to promote.

Bus lanes have the same spatial (and resulting economic) challenges as BRT. Adding bus lanes is possible but it has few benefits for other modal users, especially pedestrians, who would still need to cross seven lanes, although unlike the BRT plan, they could do so with the aid of stop signs. This would be similar to Chicago Ave's current streetscape, with the exception that one of the travel lanes in either direction would be changed to bus lanes or shared bus and bike lanes.

Bike

As mentioned, a shared bus and bike lane could be implemented swiftly and inexpensively on Chicago Avenue, however that does not guarantee that the street will be safer for cyclists or for other modal users, particularly pedestrians, who would still face the daunting task of crossing seven lanes (five lanes with pedestrian bumpouts). There are some intersections where pedestrian islands can be installed instead of having left turn lanes, making the crosswalk effectively just two lanes wide, but this type of intersection would be the exception to the rule of 5-lane crosswalks, and it is best to have a crosswalk that extends across no more than four lanes.

Simple bike lanes also do not make complete sense for Chicago Avenue. Adding a bike lane would require the removal of one traffic lane in either direction, and while that would leave ample room for buffered bike lanes, it still would not fully address the needs of pedestrians to cross the street safely, nor would it ease conflicts between bicyclists and buses, who often weave around each other in what can be dangerous and counterproductive ways.

The Blueprint Plan has the foresight to use nearby streets that are better suited to cyclists because of their lack of buses and because of lower ADTs. By directing cyclists to nearby bike boulevards and other streets with bike lanes the Blueprint Plan activates the entire area using complete street principles.

Environment

Unlike the complete streets project on Cermak and Blue Island, the full spectrum lights will not be powered by wind or solar collectors, due to an unfavorable cost/benefit ratio. The wind and solar panels are expensive and do not provide enough energy to reliably power the street lamps.

Plan Trajectory

Since CDOT is aiming for zero pedestrian deaths in its Pedestrian Plan, the Blueprint Plan has made pedestrian safety and ease of crossing a priority while also making the #66 Bus, the second most used bus route in the city, more efficient and reliable.



Figure 22: Bike lanes would reduce pedestrian space
Streetmix.org



Figure 23: Wind and solar power lights increase project cost
wbez.org

Conclusion

With a history of reinventing itself, the Chicago Avenue corridor has the opportunity to become a top tier complete street worthy of its namesake city. By addressing safety, economic development, and the environment using complete street principals on Chicago Avenue, every user of the corridor will benefit. While pedestrians continue to be the first priority, the Blueprint Plan ensures that all users benefit from the street.

Each improvement recommended contributes to this goal of a complete street. Many of the changes are best implemented at once as part of a rebuild of the street, while others can be implemented as funding becomes available. The primary stakeholders to implementing this plan have been outlined and it is clear that the support needed is achievable. The reasons to move forward are compelling.



Figure 22: Existing Chicago Avenue streetscape
Author photo

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