

# Time To Focus On Bikes, Not Cars, Cook County Transit Plan Says

Ted Cox | July 13, 2016



Cyclists near Milwaukee, Ogden avenues on Sept. 30.

DOWNTOWN — Cook County released a 25-year transportation plan Wednesday, and Chicago bike advocates immediately endorsed it for its commitment to cycling and walking.

"Overall, we're pleased with the outcome," said Kyle Whitehead, spokesman for the Active Transportation Alliance. "The county commits to being a more vocal advocate for increased spending on biking, walking and public transit."

The plan, "Connecting Cook County: 2040 Long-Range Transportation Plan," was light on specifics, but big on goals for getting the county engaged in the fight for "transportation alternatives," such as biking and walking, as well as transportation funding.

"It's not a wish list," said County Board President Toni Preckwinkle. "It's a framework for how we're going to proceed."

According to a county news release, the plan makes plain that "bicycles and pedestrians should be a priority, and new development should include accommodations for both."



Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle released a transit plan for the next 25 years.

Whitehead said it would potentially address a long-term "funding disparity" in support for cyclists and pedestrians.

"The overall majority of transportation funding is being spent on roads and highways," he said. "We're advocating for increased sidewalk spending" as well as "increased spending on biking.

"We know that in the City of Chicago, a relatively low-cost investment — protected bike lanes and off-street trails — can make a real difference in terms of growing cycling around the city and around the region," Whitehead added. "The county is taking the position that biking, walking and transit need to be prioritized over moving vehicles as quickly as possible. That's an important line in the sand."

The plan also committed to improving the Chicago area's economic position as a central U.S. transportation hub through freight traffic — a persistent Preckwinkle issue — to maintaining and modernizing existing transportation systems and to reaching so-called transit deserts, including areas of the South, West and Far Northwest sides.

"We're also encouraged by the plan's focus on growing transit investment and ridership. It rightly calls out transit as the single most important mode," Whitehead said. "Our transit system hasn't expanded significantly in decades, and we need to raise more revenue for transit at the local, county and state level so we can access additional federal dollars to fund major expansion projects. This type of investment is a proven way to increase job access and economic development in communities suffering from disinvestment, like many on the South Side and south suburbs."

"The policy priorities of the 'Long-Range Transportation Plan' are focused on making sure all Cook County residents can connect with jobs throughout the county," Preckwinkle said. "Connecting Cook County' is the first step in making that goal a reality."