

Chicago Tribune

CTA has its work cut out for years to come

By Jon Hilkevitch, Jemal R. Brinson, Ryan Marx | October 26, 2015

The new CTA Cermak-McCormick station that opened this year on the Green Line and the demolition of the Madison/Wabash Loop elevated station house downtown were merely warmups.

The Chicago Transit Authority has amassed a lengthy, complex and expensive list of projects that amount to IOUs to the transit-riding public, going well beyond the agency's longtime promise to provide "on time, clean, safe and friendly service."

The total of the projects runs well into the billions of dollars and — because of eye-popping costs, regulatory red tape and assorted NIMBY issues (like the proposed Brown Line flyover bridge in Lakeview) — it's murky in some cases when ribbon-cuttings will be held.

The transit agency is budgeting \$2.3 billion in capital improvements in fiscal 2016 through 2020. But an additional 2.4 million people are expected to be living in the seven-county Chicago region by 2040, according to the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. Transit is pitched as the smart alternative to driving, but many existing transit lines are operating at maximum capacity.

The Regional Transportation Authority recently estimated that the CTA, Metra and Pace need more than \$36 billion over the next 10 years to eliminate a backlog of deferred maintenance and replacement. The CTA's share is \$22.4 billion, the vast majority of that for the rail system, the RTA said.

Forty-eight of the CTA's 146 rail stations are not accessible to people with disabilities, according to the transit agency, and 43 percent of the stations are past their useful life, as are more than 50 percent of elevated rail structures.

Here is the CTA's plan to rebuild. It is a good start, but only a start, because the work never ends. If you dare say you are done, then you are really done.

Cost estimate of all CTA projects: \$7.9 billion

List of projects with graphics: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-getting-around-cta-has-its-work-cut-out-for-years-to-come-20151024-htmlstory.html>

Sources: CTA annual budget