

Embarking on a New Path

Ron Burke, Executive Director, Active Transportation Alliance

I recently decided to leave my post as Executive Director of the Active Transportation Alliance after nearly nine years. The decision was difficult because of my affection for the mission and the wonderful staff and supporters of Active Trans.

It has been an amazing ride, starting in the early 1990s while I worked for the American Lung Association and partnered with the Chicagoland Bicycle Federation to steer federal transportation dollars to biking, walking and transit projects. I came to work for Active Trans in August of 2010 and quickly learned that undoing decades of government-subsidized car dependency is hard. Turns out most Americans want to drive, especially when government makes the alternatives inconvenient and unsafe!

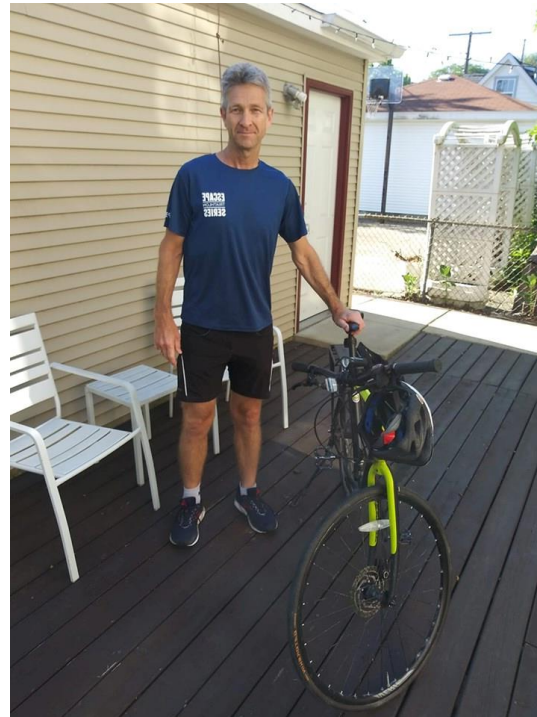
Clearly, we haven't won yet. Cars are still king and other travel modes are too often forced to fight among themselves for the small scraps of space and funding not dominated by cars. Too many people die in crashes. Too much money is wasted to accommodate single occupancy vehicle trips. Too many people are economically stung by the one-two punch of suburban sprawl and car dependency.

But we are on the right path! Cycling has become mainstream and is surging across Chicagoland, and policies in Chicago and other cities now require agencies to design streets to work for everyone, not just people in cars.

Divvy bike share, protected bike lanes, the 606 trail, Pace bus on shoulder routes, pedestrian countdown timers, laws that allow bikes to take the lane and that require bike/walk education in elementary schools, Lakefront Trail separation, Loop Link...these are ideas that were barely on the radar 10 or 15 years ago but are reality today.

I am proud that Active Trans, including our community partners and thousands of members and supporters, helped create these wins while fundamentally changing what the public expects from transportation and community design.

We see these new attitudes on display when Mayor Lightfoot and other elected officials endorsed our policy recommendations during the recent elections. And with the recently approved state capital bill that includes the first ever state-funded grant program for biking and walking projects at \$50 million/year and a significant, permanent increase in transit capital funding.



I believe we are on the cusp of a transportation revolution in which more people in metropolitan areas will swap car ownership for a suite of alternatives, and that will lead to less driving and parking. I am excited to keep fighting for this revolution in my new role as Head of Micromobility Policy and Advocacy for Lyft in the central U.S.

Why Lyft? Let me give you my personal reasons, not speaking on behalf of Active Trans. First, I appreciate that Lyft was created with goals to reduce driving, inequity, and air pollution, and that the founders continue to believe in this vision. I realize that ride share, scooter share, and bike share aren't perfect today, but I believe they already offer many benefits compared to traditional car travel and will improve over time. I think this emerging ecosystem of alternatives, with transit as the backbone, is key to reducing car ownership/use and to building the political will necessary to change policies that currently prioritize single occupancy car trips over more efficient, safe, and equitable modes.

A transportation system that relies on moving and storing 4000-pound cars that sit idle 95 percent of the time, and are mostly empty when moving, is remarkably inefficient and unaffordable. I believe new mobility can help wring that inefficiency out of the system. By allowing people to pay for the trips, not the cars, families and communities can save money and become healthier and more livable.

I look forward to taking a new path on my journey in support of better transportation. I will continue to volunteer and financially support Active Trans, and I hope you will, too. We have an outstanding staff and board to lead our work, but the strength of our movement depends on all of us working together.

My last day will be July 5th. The Active Trans Board of Directors has worked with me on a transition plan. Our long-time Deputy Executive Director, Melody Geraci, will serve as Interim Executive Director while the board searches for my successor.