



Overview

In the advocacy community, the discussion of transportation and equity often centers around very specific trip types and a few key destinations – namely between home and work or school. But to qualify as a truly livable place, communities need to be abundant with travel options that provide access to all basic services and neighborhood amenities. The ability to walk with a neighbor to the grocery store, bike with the family to a local park, wheelchair to weekly worship, board a bus to run errands, and hundreds of other types of trips has a profound impact on peoples' overall quality of life. Communities that connect everyday destinations with walking, biking and public transit options benefit the mental, physical, economic, environmental, and social health of all their residents.

How land use & access to basic services intersect with transportation

Car-oriented development is unjust

Land use can be understood as the collective decisions we make about where to build different community resources, like housing, schools, businesses, and parks. Historically, Chicago and many surrounding communities featured dense, walkable development oriented around train lines and street cars. Starting in the mid-twentieth century, land use patterns in the Chicago area were increasingly oriented around automobile transportation. As destinations like job centers and retail were built further apart, relying on personal cars to access these destinations was no longer optional, but required. The subsequent takeover of sprawl development and the way it forces reliance on costly car travel is one of the key inequities of car-oriented land use.

Designing for all ages and abilities

AARP defines a livable community as “one that is safe and secure, has affordable and appropriate housing and transportation options, and has supportive community features and services. Once in place, those resources enhance personal independence; allow residents to age in place; and foster residents' engagement in the community's civic, economic, and social life.” Disabled Americans require accessible infrastructure, buses, and trains to enjoy full integration in their communities and it will only become a more important need in the Chicagoland region.



The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) has projected that large increases in the number of people over 85 will draw the region's median age upward from 35.7 in 2010 to 39.4 in 2050. As our region changes, it must keep up with growing needs. Easy access to basic services and amenities with robust transportation options is a top priority not only for older adults, but also for people who cannot drive and who lack access to a personal vehicle.

Suburbanization of poverty

A new reality is confronting American communities: more poor people now live in the suburbs than in cities. A Brookings report found that between 2000 and 2010, suburban poverty grew 53 percent. According to a 2012 report commissioned by the Lake County Community Foundation, nearly 40 percent of all residents of Lake County are in rent- or mortgage-burdened homes, and one in 10 has inadequate access to food.

The culmination of recent economic downturns and the housing market crash in suburban communities, paired with low-income families fleeing Chicago due to gentrification/displacement in some neighborhoods and disinvestment in others, have resulted in pressures of poverty in suburban communities that are often ill equipped to address these issues. A report from the Brookings Institute in 2010 analyzed the gaps in social services in the suburbs. Suburban regions rely on a relatively small number of social service organizations amid a much larger region. Thirty-four percent of nonprofits surveyed reported operating in more than one suburban county, and 60 percent offered services in more than one suburban municipality.

Compounding the problem is that shortcomings in suburban development – long travel distances, lack of transit service, hostile walking and biking environments, job sprawl – exacerbate forced car reliance for poor people: an additional cost burden they can scarcely afford. A future where poverty is concentrated in sprawling suburbs, affluence resides in cities, and where poor people are literally stranded without options is all too easy to imagine.

The municipal haves and have nots

Chicago and its surrounding suburbs are in an everlasting battle to attract and retain residents. Chicagoland families want to live in places that offer a mix of local businesses, cultural hubs, quality schools, diverse job opportunities, affordable housing, green space and recreation, and more. Yet the pressure to compete for these services and amenities can cause municipal leaders to make concessions to large developers – who frequently insist on cookie cutter, sprawl-style, cheap site designs – or risk losing the development to the next town over.

Despite their good intentions to become more livable communities, small, under-resourced municipalities that are desperate for new tax revenue and jobs may exacerbate forced car reliance for their residents.

Quick facts

- Commuting time is the single strongest factor in the odds of escaping poverty (Harvard study).
- The annual cost of owning and operating a vehicle in Chicago is \$8,473. In the outer suburb of Plainfield, IL, the cost is \$15,046 (CNT H+T Index/Total Driving Costs).
- More than one-half of a million people with disabilities report never leaving home due to transportation issues (T4America – Stuck Without Options).
- Two-thirds of transportation planners and engineers have not begun considering age-friendly development in their practice.
- Individuals in compact, connected metro areas tend to live longer, safer, healthier lives than their peers in metro areas with sprawl (SGA – Measuring Sprawl 2014).
- A national survey by the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center found that among adults age 60 and older, one third have a disability that limits physical activities, vision, or hearing, and 71 percent use medical equipment or mobility aids.

Active Trans position

Active Transportation Alliance understands that creating a balance of compact, affordable, mixed, inviting land uses, coupled with ensuring access to basic services and amenities, are essential elements of truly multi-modal communities. We commit to joining with our partner organizations to vigorously advocate for community-driven solutions to neighborhood development.

Policy solutions

- Promote age-friendly planning practices
- Educate leaders on suburban infill (the process of developing vacant or under-used parcels within areas that are already largely developed) and other densification practices
- Advocate for equitable transit-oriented development
- Expand investment in transit access to job centers
- Support policies that expand affordable housing near transit
- Require Community Benefits Agreements alongside new major public investments

Local opportunities for action

- Chicago Aging Collaborative
- Access Living
- Elevated Chicago

Endnotes/citations/source material

[Aging in Place, Stuck without Options: Fixing the Mobility Crisis Threatening the Baby Boom Generation](#)

[AARP Livability Index](#)

[Planning Complete Streets for an Aging America](#), AARP
[Job Sprawl and the Suburbanization of Poverty](#), Brookings Institution

[Suburbanization of Poverty Isolates a Growing Number of Americans](#), Streetsblog USA

[How suburban sprawl hurts the poor](#), Vox