



Overview

Transportation equity cannot be achieved without equity in housing and land use. The ability of a transportation system to equitably serve communities is heavily shaped by land use, the collective decisions we make about where and how we build key destinations such as homes, schools, parks, and businesses. Furthermore, policies that shape housing availability and affordability can either constrain or facilitate access to transportation for populations who stand to benefit most from that access.

How housing & land use intersect with transportation

Car-oriented development is unjust

Land use can be understood as the collective decisions we make about where we put 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. Chicago at one time had the largest streetcar system in the world, with a fleet of over 3,200 passenger cars and over 1,000 miles of track.¹

In *Barrio America: How Latino Immigrants Saved the American City*, the author A. K. Sandoval-Strausz describes the built environment of the United States pre-automobile: “The cities of early America had been ‘walking cities’ – settlements of no more than a mile or two across, their size limited by people’s need to get from place to place on foot.”

Starting in the mid-twentieth century, however, 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. This forced reliance on costly car travel is one of the key inequities of car-oriented land use.

Highways facilitated White flight and divided communities

Much of the shift to car-oriented land use was driven not by simple market forces, but by intentional efforts of White people to live in segregated communities far from increasingly diverse Chicago neighborhoods. North Lawndale, for example, had once been a majority Jewish neighborhood and drastically shifted in the mid-1960s



amid departing White families. By 1960, 90 percent of residents in North Lawndale were African-American.² Subsequently, Chicago lost one-third of its White residents during the 1970s.³

This phenomenon of “White flight” was often facilitated by explicitly racist housing policies, such as redlining and racially restrictive covenants. Transportation infrastructure like highways were often used as tools to build physical barriers between communities while enabling White suburban residents to maintain easy access to job centers such as the Loop. Highway construction also disproportionately impacted Latinx and African American residents of Chicago. Communities in the Near West Side had the largest population of Black Chicagoans in the 1950s, an area that was demolished to make way for the Eisenhower Expressway.⁴

Transportation investments contribute to displacement and gentrification

More recently, as dense, walkable communities have once again become desirable, these trends have reversed, with Whiter and more affluent people returning to cities and displacing long-time Black and Brown residents as housing prices increase. Displacement pressure is often greatest along existing rapid transit lines or where new transportation investments, such as the 606 Trail, are being made. In 2016, the Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University reported that the price of single-family homes within a half mile of the 606 Trail had risen 48.2 percent over the three years since the 606 broke ground.⁵ Logan Square, which has had a

wave of transit-oriented development, has been losing its Latinx population. Between 2000 and 2014, about 19,200 Hispanic residents moved out of Logan Square, a 35.6 percent decrease, according to Census data.⁶

Displaced residents are often relocating to now-emptying car-oriented suburban communities, exacerbating their displacement by increasing their reliance on cars and the associated expenses. This dynamic is often described as the “suburbanization of poverty.” Between 2010 and 2016, the number of suburban Chicago residents living below the poverty line increased by 270,000, a 54 percent increase.⁷

Quick facts

- One in 10 Cook County residents live in a transit desert, areas that lack access to high-quality transit (Center for Neighborhood Technology).
- Four out of five of the region’s job centers lack access to reliable public transit (CNT).
- Properties within one-fifth of a mile of the Western segment of the 606 saw a 22 percent price premium (approximately \$100,000) over properties further from the trail.

Active Trans position

Active Transportation Alliance promotes affordable, mixed, and compact land uses that support walking, biking, and public transit. We believe transportation planning and investment should be made in concert with policies that maintain and grow the availability of affordable housing and end displacement.

Policy solutions

- Prioritize Equitable Transit Oriented Development
- Require Community Benefits Agreements alongside new major public investments
- Invest in maintaining and expanding affordable housing to job centers
- Expand investment in transit improvements to job centers

Local opportunities for action

- Elevated Chicago Work Plan
- Metropolitan Planning Council Our Equitable Future Agenda
- Neighborhood level:
 - El Paseo Community Advisory Group
 - Obama Center/Jackson Park Community Benefits Agreement
 - Southeast Side Development
 - Englewood Line
- 606 Demolition Ordinance
- Development for All Ordinance

¹ <https://news.wttw.com/2016/06/01/ask-geoffrey-look-back-chicagos-streetcar-era>

² A.K. Sandoval-Strausz, Barrio America, 26.

³ A.K. Sandoval-Strausz, Barrio America, 120.

⁴ <https://interactive.wbez.org/curiouscity/eisenhower/>

⁵ <https://chicago.curbed.com/2016/11/1/13489884/chicago-real-estate-report-single-family-home-prices-606-trail>

⁶ <https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20160516/logan-square/logan-squares-hispanic-population-dropped-by-19000-since-2000/>

⁷ <https://www.wbez.org/shows/wbez-news/a-growing-number-of-suburban-chicagoans-are-living-in-poverty/6c7aada5-e345-4808-8913-262d4bd2fcef>