



Overview

Policing impacts the ability of many residents to access and utilize our transportation system. Concerns about harassment and targeting by law enforcement, as well as concerns about personal security, keeps some individuals from feeling safe and comfortable using streets and other public spaces. Historically marginalized communities, including poor people and people of color, have often experienced a disproportionate amount of traffic enforcement, while areas where traffic violations present a genuine public safety hazard are not effectively policed. Minor traffic violations and fines can also lead to increased involvement in the criminal justice system, often due to underlying issues such as poverty and inability to pay fines.

How justice & policing intersect with transportation

Fear of law enforcement and public safety concerns keep people off the streets

In Chicago and surrounding communities, a lack of trust between law enforcement and community members discourages some people from accessing public spaces and using streets. This includes people who fear being targeted or harassed by police as part of aggressive enforcement strategies as well as undocumented people fearful of immigration enforcement. Perceptions about public safety also lead many individuals and families to limit how, where, and when they access streets and public spaces. These conditions may impact decisions about what trips people take and how they take them, including preferences for using a personal car over walking, biking, or taking public transit.

Traffic enforcement has disproportionately targeted Black and Brown people

A number of recent reports from Chicago journalists have uncovered troubling patterns in how citations for traffic violations are issued in the city. Specifically, larger numbers of tickets for violations such as biking on the sidewalk, parking in a bike lane, and failing to clear sidewalks of snow are being issued in several neighborhoods that are home to predominantly Black and Brown residents. At the same time, places where these infractions have been reported out of



concern for public safety, such as in the busy central business district, have seen fewer tickets issued to violators. These trends undermine the ability of traffic enforcement to achieve important public safety goals.

Minor traffic violations often lead to financial hardship or increased exposure to criminal justice system

Reporting from ProPublica Illinois highlighted how many poor Chicago residents are burdened by ticket debt, creating financial difficulty and even driving some people into bankruptcy. Stops for minor traffic or vehicle violations can lead to secondary charges for unrelated offenses and further increase the number of people engaged in the criminal justice system. Traffic stops leading to the shooting of unarmed Black people have been among the incidents that have driven much of the organizing around the Black Lives Matter movement and other police accountability efforts.

Quick facts

- 56 percent of all Chicago bike tickets are issued in majority Black communities (Chicago Tribune).
- Out of 10 ZIP codes with highest amount of ticket debt, eight are majority Black (ProPublica Illinois).
- According to WBEZ, "In the winter of 2015-2016, Lincoln Park property owners were ticketed for snowy sidewalks twice. Englewood saw 72 tickets."

Policing on transit

Last fall, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority announced it was hiring 500 more police officers to combat fare evasion on the New York subway system. Transit advocates across the country have been considering the harmful impacts of policing as a strategy to collect fares, particularly on low-income people of color. Locally, there are also some indicators of increased enforcement. In January, Metra announced it was considering using police officers to help with fare collection, prompting fears of over-policing. Mayor Lori Lightfoot also recently suggested adding more foot patrols and more cameras in response to an increased amount of crime on CTA. Active Trans will be watching closely for possible equity implications and harm to marginalized communities.

Active Trans position

Active Trans strongly condemns any use of traffic enforcement to target specific members of our communities. We believe efforts to improve traffic safety should prioritize infrastructure improvements and education. Enforcement has a role to play in improving traffic safety but cannot be separated from broader conversations around police accountability and reform. We believe in restorative justice and that the goal of enforcement should be to address and prevent harm, not unduly punish people.

Policy solutions

- Implement community-led police reform initiative
- Integrate restorative justice practices into traffic enforcement
- Update police policies and practices to prioritize enforcement of dangerous moving violations and address inequitable enforcement patterns
- Fully fund Vision Zero High-Crash Corridor Framework Plan

Local opportunities for action

- Grassroots Alliance for Policy Accountability
- #NoCopAcademy Campaign
- Vision Zero Chicago
- Restorative Justice Community Court

Endnotes/citations/source material

[MTA will spend \\$249M on new cops to save \\$200M on fare evasion](#), Streetsblog NYC

[No more free rides? Metra considers ideas to crack down on fare evasion](#), Streetsblog Chicago

[Hiring more cops to chase down Metra fare evaders is a waste of money](#), Chicago Sun Times

[Lightfoot calls three-year surge in CTA crime 'totally, fundamentally unacceptable'](#), Chicago Sun Times