

## Chicago Bikeways Progress Report

April 2019

Safe, low-stress bikeways built for all ages and abilities are proven to encourage more people to use bikes as everyday transportation. When more people bike as everyday transportation, Chicago becomes safer, healthier, more sustainable and more equitable.

Since 2011, Chicago's bike network has grown rapidly. **Despite this progress, 60 percent of Chicagoans still do not have access to safe, low-stress bikeways for all ages and abilities.**

As a new mayor and city council prepare to take office, it's critical we ensure Chicago build upon its success to create bikeways for all ages and abilities that are accessible to all Chicagoans. **That's why we've called on the city to build 100 miles of new bikeways by 2023.** Mayor Lightfoot and 24 city council members have endorsed this goal.



## Priorities for new mayor & city council

**GOAL:** Build at least 100 miles of new high-quality bikeways by 2023, including 65 miles of new or upgraded protected bike lanes, 25 miles of Neighborhood Greenways and 10 miles of off-street trails.

**65 miles of protected bike lanes:** The Streets for Cycling 2020 Plan identifies 60 miles of Spoke Routes, streets prioritized for biking that provide connections from the city limits to the downtown. However, since 2011, only 12 miles (18 percent) of Spoke Routes have been completed with bikeways for all ages and abilities, such as protected bike lanes.

**25 miles of Neighborhood Greenways:** The Streets for Cycling 2020 Plan identified 310 miles of neighborhood streets for bike routes called Neighborhood Greenways. However, since 2011, fewer than five miles of Neighborhood Greenways have been installed citywide. Neighborhood Greenways are a low-cost way to create all-ages-and-abilities bikeways to connect within and between Chicago's diverse neighborhoods.

**10 miles of off-street trails:** This includes at least 7 new miles of a multimodal Chicago River Trail, such as El Paseo on the South Branch and a new connection from Lake Street to Ping Tom Park. By 2023, Chicago could be less than 3 miles away from a continuous Chicago River Trail. Other trail projects include the Englewood Line Trail (2 miles), the Chicago portion of the Weber Spur Trail on the Northwest Side (1.75 miles) and extending the 606 to the Chicago River Trail segment in Lincoln Yards (0.25 miles).

## Our vision: Create Bikeways for All

To get more people biking as everyday transportation, we need bikeways for all ages and abilities. As such, we evaluate progress on Chicago's bike network based on the vision we co-created with community partners and supporters, Bikeways for All.

Bikeways for All expanded upon Chicago's existing bike plan to identify more than 180 miles of streets and trail corridors as candidates for protected bike lanes, Neighborhood Greenways and urban trails.

**Bikeways designed for all ages and abilities include:**

- **Protected bike lanes** that are separated from car traffic by some type of physical barrier, such as bollards, parked cars or concrete curbs. Appropriate for arterial streets.
- **Neighborhood Greenways** are residential streets that are optimized for walking and biking by using different techniques to calm traffic, such as curb bump-outs, pavement markings and signage. Appropriate for residential streets.
- **Urban trails** are off-street paths where motorized traffic is prohibited. Opportunities for trails often exist along rail corridors, waterways, and forest preserves.

## What about buffered bike lanes?

Buffered bike lanes use painted stripes to create extra space between people biking, parked cars and moving cars in the travel lane.

They are proven to help reduce "dooring" crashes that occur when drivers or passengers open car doors into the path of people on bikes. Buffered bike lanes also narrow vehicle travel lanes, which can slow down car traffic and make streets safer.

While these are improvements over conventional bike lanes, buffered bike lanes still require people on bikes to ride next to vehicle traffic, which is stressful for many individuals. They can also be easily blocked by double-parked cars and other obstructions.

For these reasons, we see buffered bike lanes as important transitional infrastructure, but they fall short of providing a comfortable experience for all ages and abilities and should eventually be upgraded to protected bike lanes.



Protected bike lanes



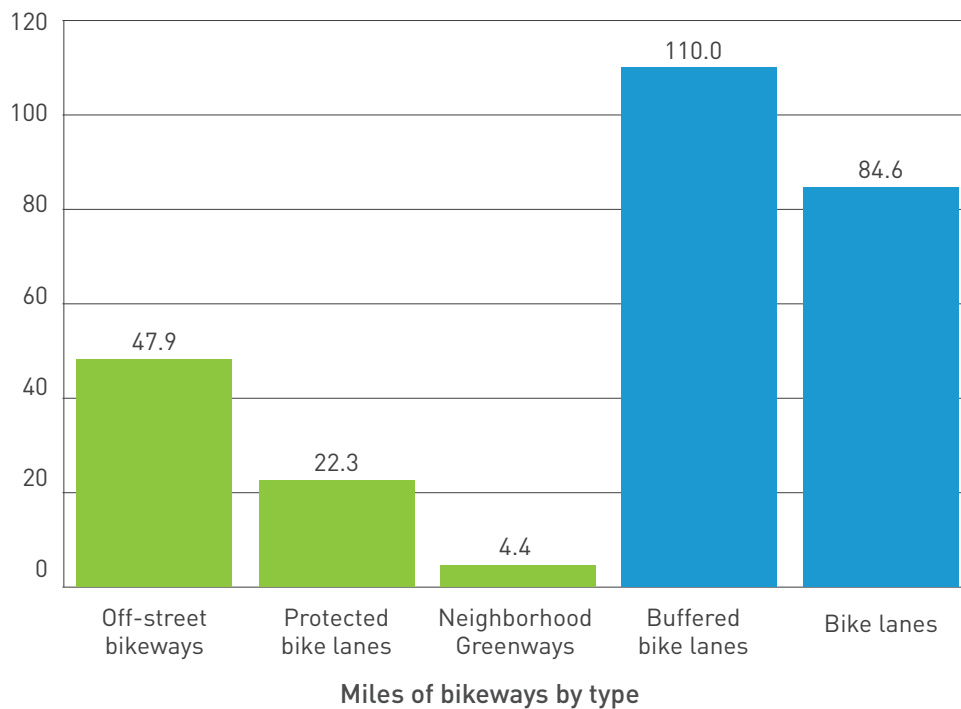
Neighborhood Greenway



Urban trails

## The state of bikeways in Chicago today

Chicago has more than 200 miles of on-street bikeways and almost 50 miles of off-street trails. While the city has more than 50 miles of marked shared lanes, Active Trans does not believe these facilities provide any meaningful accommodation for people on bikes and does not include them in our tally of bikeways.



## Chicago's bike network has boomed since 2011

Since 2011, Chicago has installed more than 22 miles of low-stress protected bike lanes and 4.4 miles of neighborhood greenways. The city also installed more than 100 miles of buffered bike lanes.

Five miles of new trails have been added since 2011, including the 606 and new segments of the Chicago River Trail. The recently completed Lake Front Trail separation project effectively created another 18 miles of trail. More trail projects are in the development pipeline, including El Paseo, the Englewood Line and new Chicago River Trail segments along the North and South Branches.

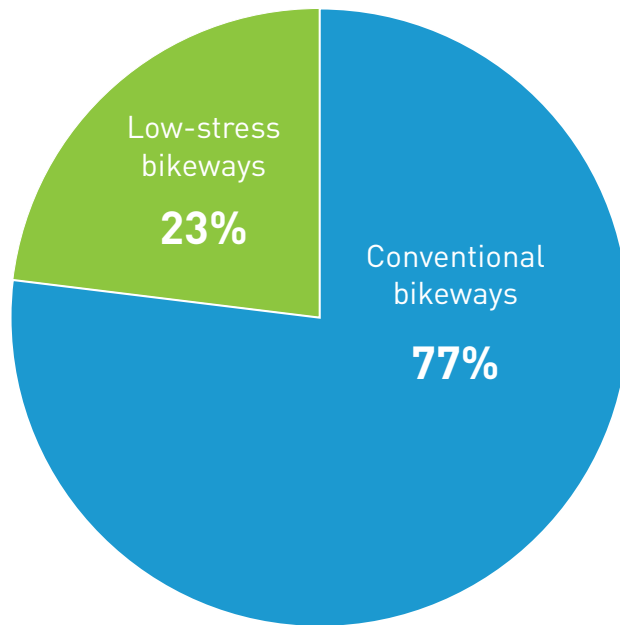
### Timeline of Chicago biking milestones 2011-2019

- 2011** – Chicago's first protected bike lane installed on Kinzie Street
- 2012** – City publishes Streets for Cycling 2020 bike network plan
- 2013** – Divvy bike share program launches
- 2015** – 606 opens; Chicago marks 100 miles of new bike lanes built in 4 years; first curb-protected bike lane installed in Douglas Park
- 2016** – Chicago named best big city for biking by *Bicycling Magazine*; Big Marsh bike park opens on Far South Side
- 2017** – Randolph protected bike lane opens in the Loop; North Branch Trail extension completed
- 2018** – Lakefront Trail separation completed; concrete curbs added to Dearborn, Milwaukee and Elston protected bike lanes
- 2019** – City announces Divvy expansion plan to bring bike sharing to all wards by 2021

# Despite progress, far too few bikeways in Chicago are Bikeways for All

Despite the progress since 2011, the vast majority of bikeways in Chicago do not create the safe, low-stress environment proven to encourage more people of all ages and abilities to use bikes as everyday transportation.

In order to encourage people of all ages and abilities to bike, our entire network must consist of Bikeways for All. Currently, only 23 percent of Chicago's bikeways are designed for all ages and abilities.

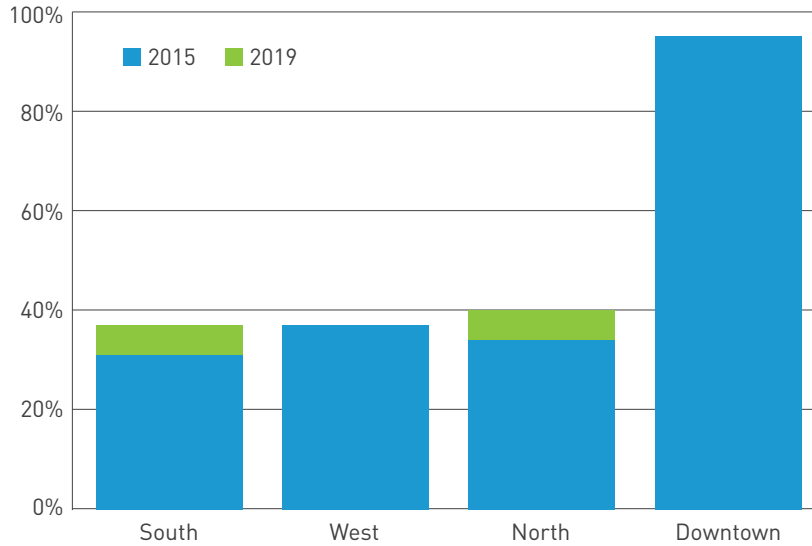


**Chicago bike network**  
Miles of low-stress vs. conventional bikeways

In addition, the bike network must serve all Chicagoans. That means putting all-ages-and-abilities bike-ways within one-quarter mile of residents. However, only 40 percent of Chicagoans live within one-quarter mile of an all-ages-and-abilities bikeway, with residents on the South and West Sides less well served than the North Side and downtown. Despite the growth of the bike network detailed above, these numbers have not changed much in recent years.



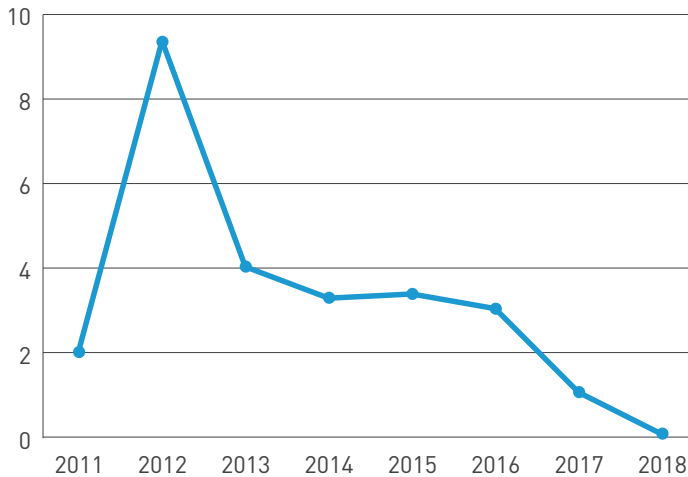
### People within one-quarter mile of low-stress bikeways 2015 VS. 2019



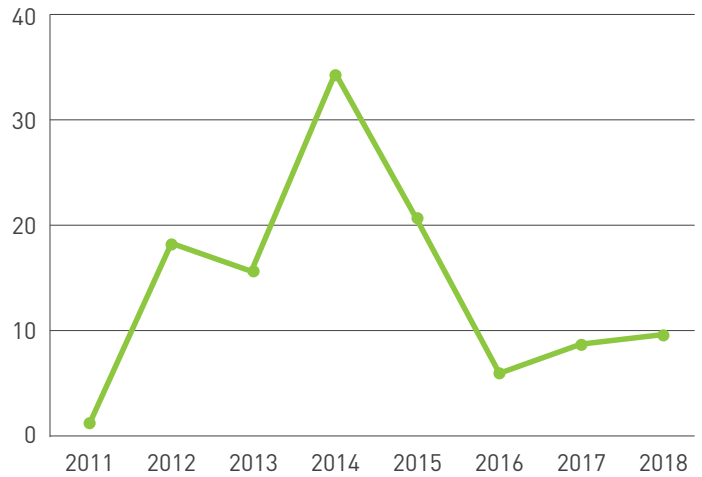
Between 2015 and 2019, South and North Side communities saw a small increase in the number of people living near low-stress bikeways. West and downtown communities saw no change.

## Progress of new bikeways installation has slowed

After an initial surge in building protected bike lanes and buffered bike lanes, the growth of Chicago's bike network slowed considerably starting in 2015. A number of factors contributed to this slow-down, including staffing vacancies at Chicago DOT, funding shortfalls, resistance from certain aldermen and resistance to spending to improve existing facilities (e.g., adding curb separation to protected bike lanes) instead of expansion.



Miles of protected bike lanes  
Installed by year



Miles of buffered bike lanes  
Installed by year

## Neighborhood Greenways lag behind other types of bikeways

As a city of neighborhoods, Chicago boasts many quiet residential side streets that are ideal for Neighborhood Greenways. Cities like Portland and Vancouver have proven that Neighborhood Greenways are a great tool to encourage more people to walk and bike as everyday transportation.

While our city is well suited to a robust Neighborhood Greenway network, **fewer than 5 of the 250 miles of on-street bike lanes are Neighborhood Greenways.**

In a hopeful sign, several miles of new Neighborhood Greenways were installed in 2018, a trend that needs to accelerate under the city's new leadership.

Active Trans has called on the City of Chicago to build 25 miles of Neighborhood Greenway projects by 2023.

## Chicago does not have a clear plan for growing our network of urban trails

The overwhelming success of the Lakefront Trail and the 606 have shown there is pent up demand for urban trails in Chicago. However, transformative projects like the Chicago River Trail lack a clear plan for completion, while long-discussed projects like the Englewood Line and El Paseo continue to languish.

The city needs a clear plan for growing our network of urban trails and ensuring these public investments enhance equity by proactively addressing impacts on issues such as housing affordability and displacement.

Active Trans has called on the City of Chicago to release a detailed plan of off-street trail projects



PHOTO: Jeff Banowitz

## Take action: Join us in creating Bikeways for All

Ensuring our city builds upon the growth of our bike network will take persistent advocacy. We can't do it without you.

Active Trans will work with our members and supporters to push the mayor, city council, the Chicago Department of Transportation and other decision makers to build the bike network Chicago deserves.

Over the next four years, we'll focus on the goal of building at least 100 miles of new high-quality bikeways by 2023, including 65 miles of new or upgraded protected bike lanes, 25 miles of Neighborhood Greenways and 10 miles of off-street trails.

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You can join us in this work by visiting [activetrans.org/AdvocacySignup](https://activetrans.org/AdvocacySignup) to sign-up for email alerts and opportunities to get involved.



*Bikeways data used in this report is from Chicago Department of Transportation; Population data from US Census Bureau.*



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