

# 2020-2021

## ANNUAL REPORT



ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION  
ALLIANCE

Dear Friends,

We couldn't have imagined two years ago what it would mean to experience a pandemic and the impact on our lives and livelihood. Nor could we have predicted how significant a mobility disruption it would be. The pandemic has profoundly altered how and where we work, and how, when, and why we get around. We've all seen the headlines, and we've all had our own experiences. Commuting way down. Public transit use down. Walking and cycling up.

In these turbulent times, the Active Transportation Alliance remained an anchor in the storm fighting for a world-class sustainable transportation network that prioritizes safety, accessibility, equity, affordability, and clean energy — a testament to our 35 years of service to the region.

Thanks to our bold community of donors, policy makers, grassroots activists, transportation experts, and other stakeholders, Active Transportation Alliance was able to effectively adapt and pivot to be strategic and responsive in this moment. Your support and collaboration helped us stay the course while blazing new trails in improving walking, biking, and public transit across the Chicago region.

We tackled the underlying inequities in the region's transportation system — which were only exacerbated by the pandemic. Black, Latinx, and lower income neighborhoods and towns have less access to bike lanes and trails, unsafe walking conditions, and much higher rates of traffic violence from poor street design. Yet we know how vital active forms of transportation are at the personal level for access to jobs, healthcare, services, and recreation, and at the community level as we seek to recover and emerge from this pandemic stronger. So we focused on addressing these inequities.

We pursued projects and policies that enhanced walking, biking, and public transportation infrastructure in response to the realities that COVID-19 has created. We successfully pushed for new and sustained sources of government funding for sustainable transportation. And we sparked deep, insightful community conversations about local transportation needs.

This annual report tells the story of how these victories are paving the way to create a clean, safe, and equitable transportation system for our region. These achievements not only strengthen walking, biking, and public transit opportunities, but ultimately cultivate the thriving, vibrant communities that our residents deserve.

Thank you for supporting us in making metropolitan Chicago stronger.



Amy Rynell  
Executive Director



## Mission of the Active Transportation Alliance

*Active Transportation Alliance works to improve conditions for walking, bicycling, and public transit in order to create healthy, sustainable, and equitable communities. We envision a future where all people in Chicagoland have access to a safe, seamless, convenient, and connected transportation environment that is abundant with walking, bicycling and transit options.*



# Advocacy by the numbers

**100 PERCENT**



The percentage of costs that the state of Illinois now covers for walking and biking infrastructure on state roads.

(See page 12)

**70**

Number of Illinois bike shops that Active Transportation Alliance rallied together so that they could be designated as “essential businesses” early in COVID pandemic.



**16 BIKES**



Number of bicycles that new Metra bike cars can accommodate (versus 5 bikes in standard Metra cars), thanks to advocacy efforts of Active Transportation Alliance and Ride Illinois.

**\$50 MILLION**

Amount that the state of Illinois now dedicates to walking and biking projects annually, as a result of our efforts. (See page 13)



**\$1.4 MILLION**

Amount of Cook County-administered grants that went to projects from municipal walking and biking plans we developed.



# Active Transportation Alliance responds to the pandemic

*From the start, we recognized that the pandemic would have major impacts on walking, biking, and public transportation in Chicago as well as on the city's broader transportation landscape. To get a better understanding of community needs during the pandemic, we embarked on a listening tour with more than 100 stakeholders. These conversations helped lay the groundwork for our advocacy work during the pandemic.*



## Shared streets for walking and biking

Starting early in the pandemic, Active Transportation Alliance urged Mayor Lightfoot and the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) to dedicate more street space to people walking and biking. City officials ultimately launched a network of shared streets that restricted access to drivers, allowing more space for people to walk and bike. We provided input on the initial plans and has continued to work with CDOT and aldermen across the city to improve and expand the program.

## Public transit must be safe and accessible

Throughout the pandemic, we have fought hard to keep the region's buses and trains running without interruption, while ensuring that they are safe places for passengers and workers.

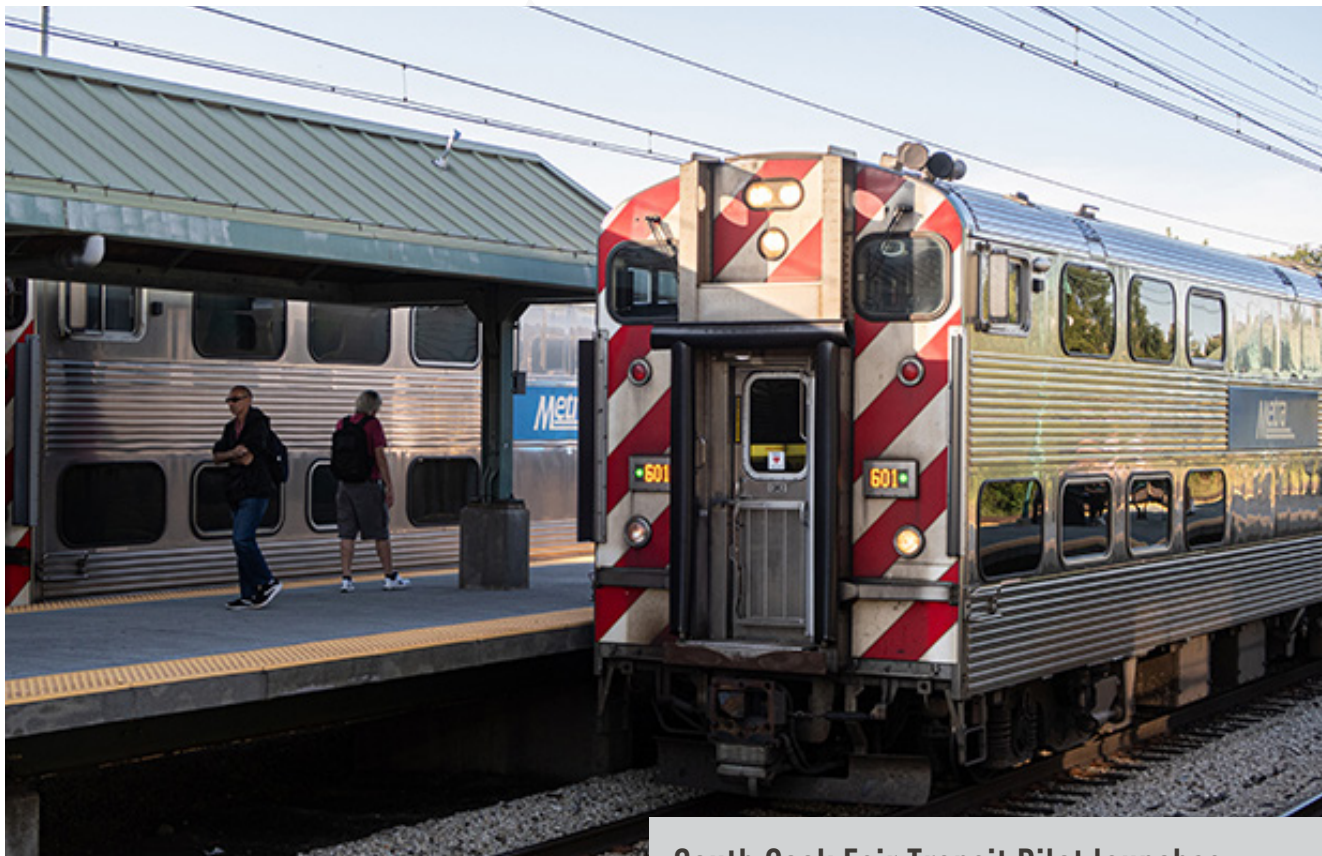
- We partnered with transit operators to persuade CTA and Pace to change their bus boarding procedures and provide PPE to drivers to reduce the risk of spreading the virus on transit.
- We took the fight to Washington D.C. to win federal relief for transit agencies facing financial crises due to reduced ridership during the pandemic.
- CTA began providing free masks to riders who needed one on buses and trains — a recommendation of ours that came to fruition.

## Advice on how to use transit safely

During the early days of the pandemic, we developed a shareable infographic featuring tips on COVID safety practices while using public transportation. The infographic — developed with the Cook County Department of Public Health and offered in both English and Spanish — was covered in local media, and elected officials shared it with their constituents. We also worked with the health department to produce a similar infographic on staying safe while walking and biking.

# We're working for better access to public transit

*People in the Chicago region deserve access to reliable, affordable public transportation, no matter where they live. When transit service is inadequate and when agencies increase fares and cut service in response to declining revenue, communities of color suffer the most. And, of course, underfunding of public transit has serious environmental implications.*

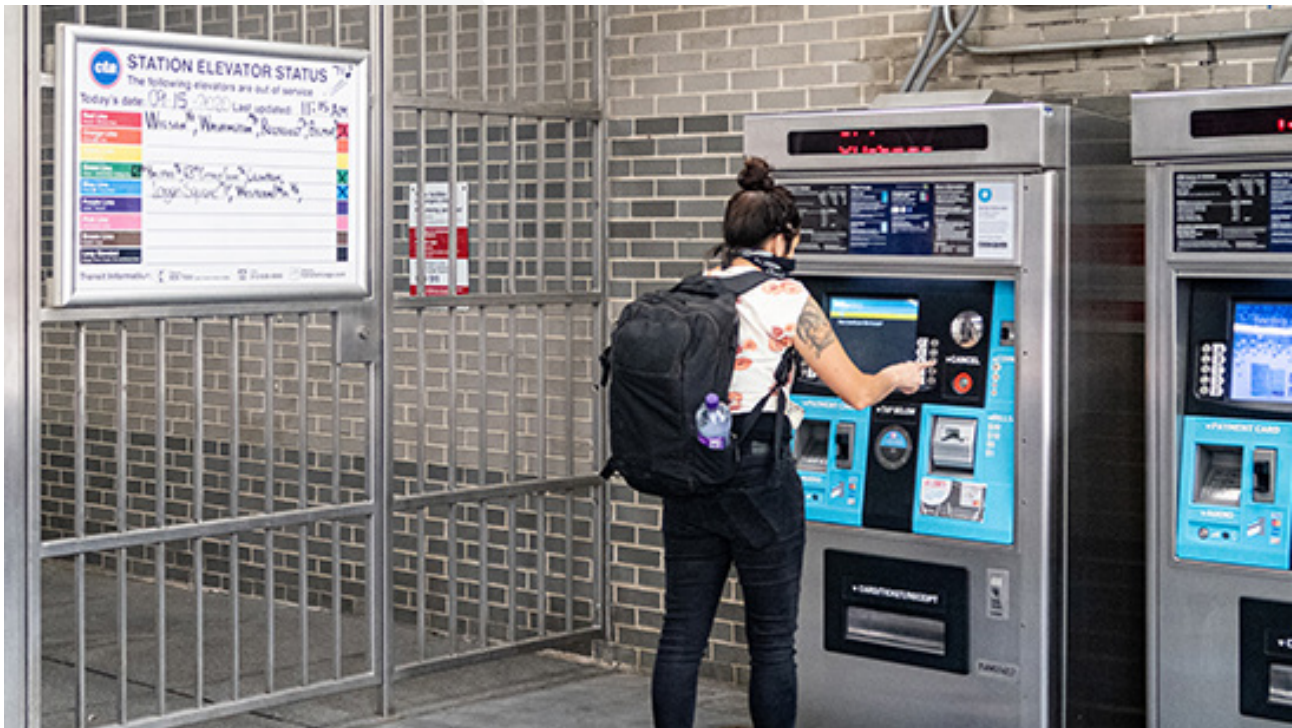


## Dedicated bus lanes moving forward

The city of Chicago rolled out “pop up” bus lanes on two major sections of two of the highest ridership bus routes in Chicago. We have been campaigning for several years for the city to move forward with such an initiative, and the need for dedicated bus lanes in Chicago has only grown during the pandemic.

## South Cook Fair Transit Pilot launches

After fighting for years to upgrade the Metra Electric line, South Side and South Suburban residents finally saw major progress in 2020. Cook County agreed to fund a pilot project that enhances service and offers half-price fares for all riders. We have been working with a grassroots coalition of community leaders to make these improvements for many years.



## Transit fares become more affordable

As local public transit agencies worked to regain riders lost during the initial phase of the pandemic and better serve essential workers, CTA and Metra began offering low-cost transit passes on a permanent basis. These changes save riders money and encourage people to ride more often throughout the day — two goals outlined in our Fair Fares Chicagoland campaign. In addition to lower all-day passes on CTA and Metra, the 25-cent transfer penalty for people moving between CTA buses and trains has been eliminated.



Photo: Flickr user Jacob G.

## Belmont Flyover complete

After working with partners for many years to advance the Belmont Flyover project, it's exciting to see one of the biggest chokepoints in Chicago's transit system removed.

## Responding to Chicago transit shutdowns

For the first time ever, Chicago leaders shut down the transit system in response to the protests and civil unrest that were happening in Chicago following the killing of George Floyd. We led a campaign against the shutdowns and gathered dozens of comments on how the sudden halt of our public transit system affected vulnerable residents.

# Our focus: safe and inviting options for walking and biking

*People should be able to walk and bike in their communities without fearing for their lives. In too many Chicagoland communities, this is simply not the case. That's why we work on creating policies and infrastructure that make walking and biking easier, safer, and more inviting.*



Photo: Steven Gross

## More trails, more connectivity

The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened interest in trails not only as recreational assets, but also as transportation corridors that provide low-stress walking and biking connections within and between communities.

**Through our Trail Connect Chicagoland campaign**, we have been working with advocates and public officials across the region to advance trail projects that move us closer to a seamless network. We saw progress on several key projects during 2020 and 2021, including the Chicago River Trail, Lake Calumet Regional Trails, Des Plaines River Trail, I&M Canal Trail, and Skokie Valley Trail.

One important trail project starting to take shape is **a walking and biking trail over Lake Calumet**, which would connect the Pullman community to Big Marsh Park. After years of working with partners across Chicago's Southeast Side to develop ideas for a new trail, we're closer than ever to that vision becoming reality. Community leaders and elected officials have vowed to work together to support the project that would create better access to parkland in this often-neglected part of the city surrounded by heavy industry.



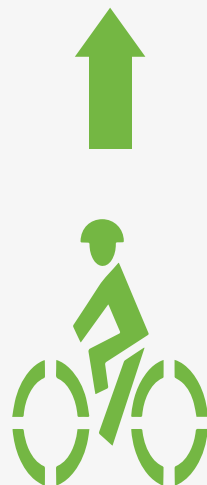
## A growing need for protected bike lanes:

*While the COVID-19 pandemic has reconnected many Chicagoans to the joys of biking, that experience has come with a growing realization that most of the city's streets that connect neighborhoods are not safe or comfortable for biking. This has led to louder and more frequent calls to create a bike network that works for all residents.*

We published a policy brief outlining four of the biggest barriers to building more protected bike lanes in Chicago.

The document charts a path forward on how advocates can work together to overcome them.

Since congestion along Chicago's much-loved Riverwalk prevents it from being an easy cycling connection between the Lakefront Trail and the Loop, Active Transportation Alliance has been leading an effort to **add a safe, low-stress biking alternative to Upper Wacker Drive**. Design concepts are now being discussed with city officials.



When the city of Chicago announced 100 miles of "new and upgraded" bike lanes coming over the next two years, our first question was — how many miles of protected bike lanes are included? While the plan included only 12 miles of new protected bike lanes, **this represents a 50 percent increase in protected bike lanes in the city**.

Active Transportation Alliance released a first-of-its-kind interactive report that **highlights the gaps in Chicago's network of protected bike lanes and bike trails** and what can be done to fill them. It uses maps of the proposed bikeway network that shows jurisdictions and crash rates while highlighting the infrastructure needed and the barriers that have been stalling progress.



## Responding to Kevin Clark's Death in Logan Square

In 2020, Kevin Clark was hit by a driver and killed while riding his bike in Logan Square. Kevin — who gained fame as the drummer in the 2003 *School of Rock* film, starring Jack Black — was killed at an intersection that has long been recognized as treacherous for people walking and biking. Two years prior Active Transportation Alliance developed a report outlining a series of community-informed recommendations for making the intersection safer. Sadly, the city did nothing to change the intersection at that time.

In response to Kevin's death, we worked directly with his family and local elected officials to demand the city to act. Just days after the crash, we held a large rally near the crash site calling for change. Extensive media coverage focused on Kevin's story and his family's conviction that the intersection needed to be fixed to honor Kevin's legacy. Pressure from all these efforts finally spurred the city to install protected bike lanes and traffic calming measures at the intersection.



Kevin Clark's mother speaks at a vigil honoring her son.

*"Kevin's crash is just one of thousands that have happened in and around that intersection in just the past several years. Everyone in this neighborhood knows how dangerous it is. The city knows how dangerous it is.... To CDOT and IDOT and anyone else who can affect change with our streets: fixing that intersection is the bare minimum that you can do. Chicago is a beautiful place to ride a bike. But it needs to be a safer one."*

Matt Portman, a cousin of Kevin Clark, spoke at a vigil near the intersection where Kevin was killed.



A ghost bike to memorialize Kevin Clark was installed at the intersection where he was killed.

**Divvy turned many heads** when it introduced its first electric-assist bikes while also continuing its ongoing expansion of the service to all 50 wards. Thanks in part to the biking boom during the pandemic, Divvy surpassed 4 million rides in 2021, breaking its previous record of 3.81 million in 2019.

After testing two pilot programs, the Chicago City Council OKed a citywide electric scooter sharing program. Our recommendations concerning safety and convenience were included in the final policy.



### Support and guidance for suburban advocates:

Active Transportation Alliance continues to work with advocates in suburban communities across the region fighting for better biking options. Here are just a few of the suburban citizen-led groups we're supporting and some of the projects we're helping with.

*A ride organized by Elgin Community Bikes.*

Bike Walk Oak Park is working on making its Greenways Plan a reality and creating a dedicated funding source for walking and biking improvements through the village's capital improvement plan.

Cycle Brookfield, a newly established membership-based non-profit, is working on safety improvements that enhance walking and biking access to the Brookfield Zoo.



Friends of the East Branch DuPage River Trail are pushing for the funding and construction of the East Branch DuPage River Trail in DuPage County, which would connect the Illinois Prairie Path, Great Western Trail, and Morton Arboretum.

# We're creating a healthier, more equitable region

**100**



Number of community partners, elected officials, municipal staff, and residents across the city and suburbs we met with on a listening tour to understand the impact of the pandemic on local communities.



**31**

Number of alerts we issued in 2020 and 2021, urging supporters to take action on specific advocacy initiatives. In response many thousands of supporters took action.

**75**



Number of public online events Active Transportation Alliance held in 2020 and 2021, including webinars, discussion forums, and interviews with advocates and policymakers.

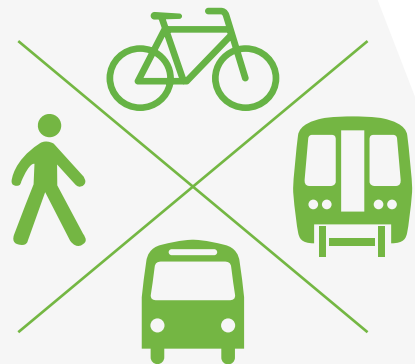
**35**

Number of years that we have been campaigning for safer, easier sustainable transportation options in the Chicago region.

**15,500**



Number of people who rode their bikes on DuSable Lakeshore Drive in 2021 during our flagship fundraiser, Fifth Third Bike the Drive.



# We're asking leaders to rethink car-centric funding

*Transportation funding in Illinois and across the country has long been inequitable, favoring cars and trucks while leaving behind people who walk, bike, and use public transit. Recent years have provided opportunities to begin to shift this reality through transformational policy change.*

## Historic federal infrastructure law passed

Knowing that the 2021 infrastructure legislation would present a historic opportunity to improve and expand sustainable transportation in the Chicago area, we led a campaign to encourage the Chicago-area Congressional delegation to make a bold commitment to walking, biking, and public transit in the bill. We rallied hundreds of area residents to share their transportation priorities with their representatives and we hosted virtual events where members of Congress spoke at length about sustainable transportation issues.

Our efforts — and the work of many other advocacy organizations — paid off. The law's unprecedented level of funding for cleaner, healthier transportation includes a 60 percent increase in the largest federal program for walking and biking infrastructure and additional funding for many other programs that could be used to build new bikeways.

The bill contains the largest ever federal investment in public transit, allowing us to advance long-promised projects like the Red Line Extension and a network of bus-priority streets. Another big win is the new All Stations Accessibility Program, which earmarks \$1.75 billion for retrofitting historic transit stations like CTA 'L' stops to make them wheelchair accessible.

## Bike funding and reform at state and federal levels

Getting the Illinois Department of Transportation to eliminate its 20 percent local match requirement for walking and biking improvements on state roads was a long and arduous battle, requiring many months of work on the part of Active Transportation Alliance, its partners, and lawmakers across Illinois. The legislation passed with strong bipartisan majorities in both chambers.

IDOT now must cover all the costs for walking and biking improvements on state-controlled roads — as it has always done for motor vehicle infrastructure on state roads. Thanks to this effort that Active Transportation Alliance spearheaded, we'll see safer street designs throughout Illinois, particularly in lower-income communities that wouldn't have been able to afford the local match requirement.



## Walking and biking funding:

*Here's what else we've done to create more funding options for walking and biking—and ensuring that those funds are properly spent:*

For the first time ever Illinois' long-term capital program includes **dedicated funding for walking and biking projects**. Since Active Transportation Alliance achieved this win in 2019, we've been working to ensure that these new funds — \$50 million annually — are spent as efficiently and effectively as possible.

We partnered with the Illinois Public Health Institute to **help prepare communities across the state to apply for \$105.6 million in available funds** for sustainable transportation infrastructure.



New legislation allows the state of Illinois and **Chicago collar counties to spend gas tax funds on walking and bicycling infrastructure** like sidewalks and bike lanes. Before this bill, gas tax revenue only went toward building new roads. As the main force behind the bill, we testified before House and Senate committees and organized advocates to file witness slips before key votes.

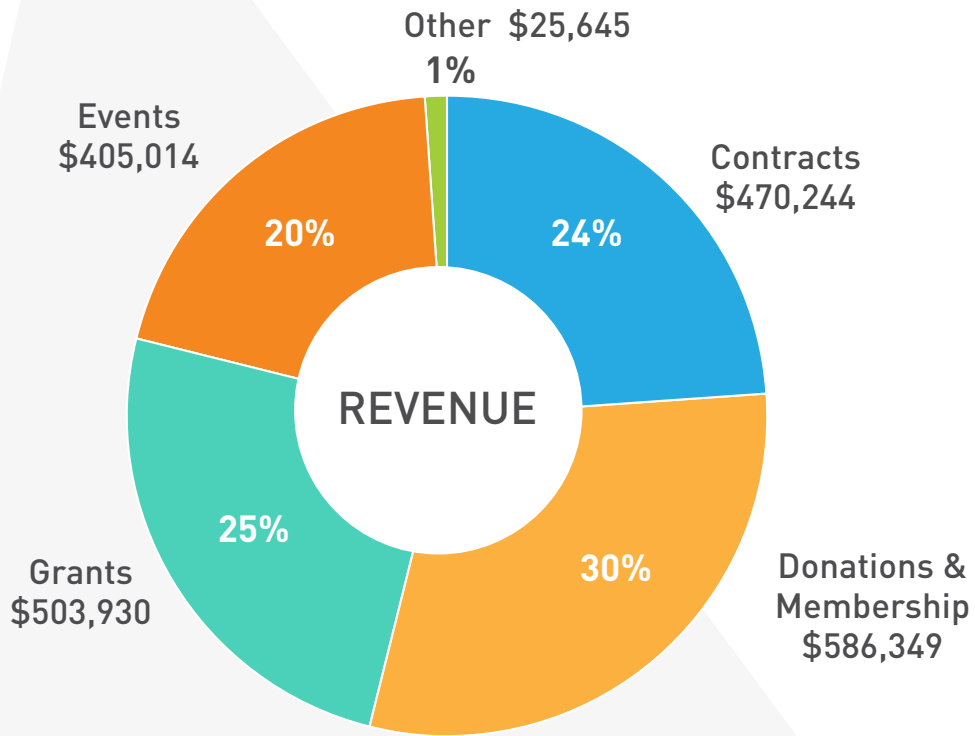


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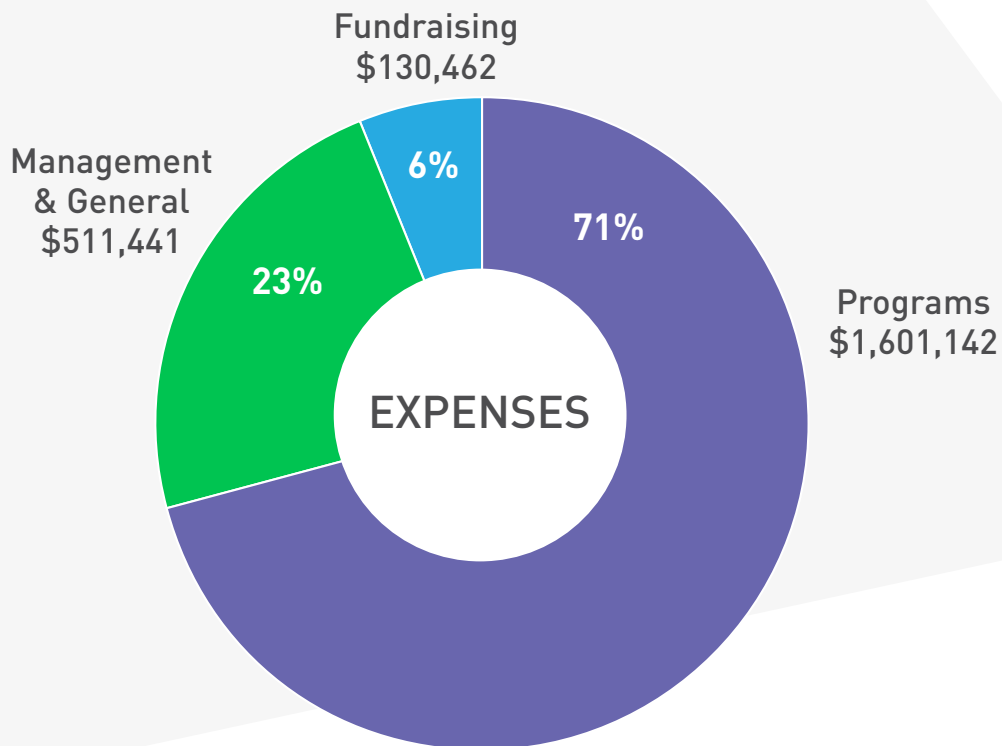
## Stay connected

The movement for cleaner, healthier, and more equitable transportation needs you. Stay in the loop about Active Transportation Alliance events and advocacy efforts at [activetrans.org](http://activetrans.org).

# 2020 Financial Information

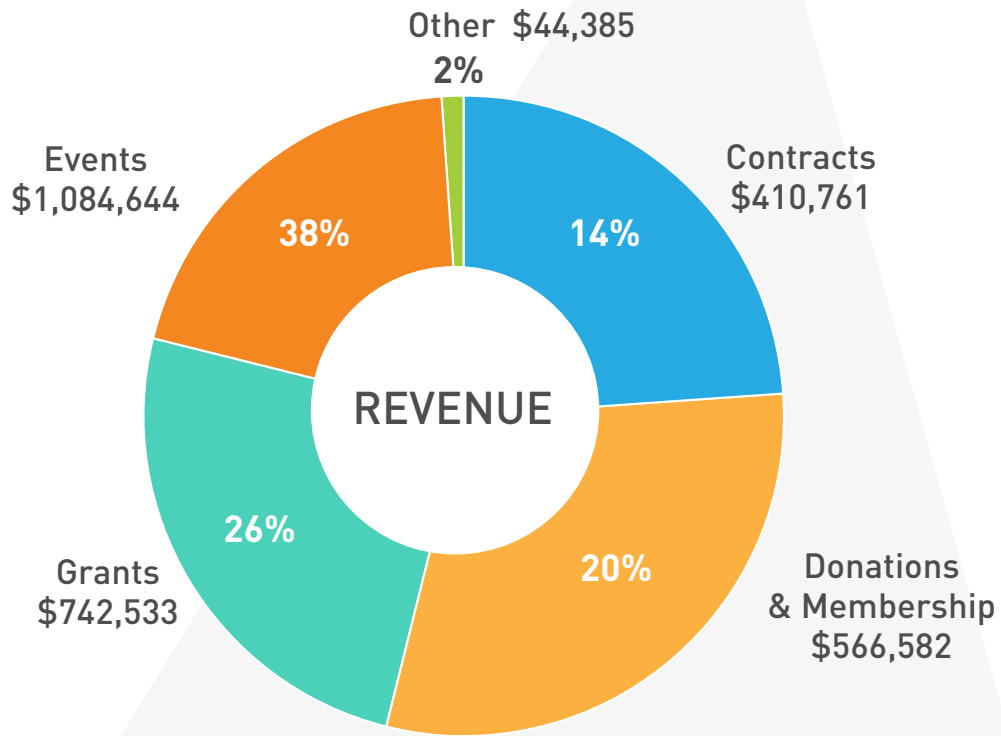


**TOTAL REVENUE \$1,991,182**

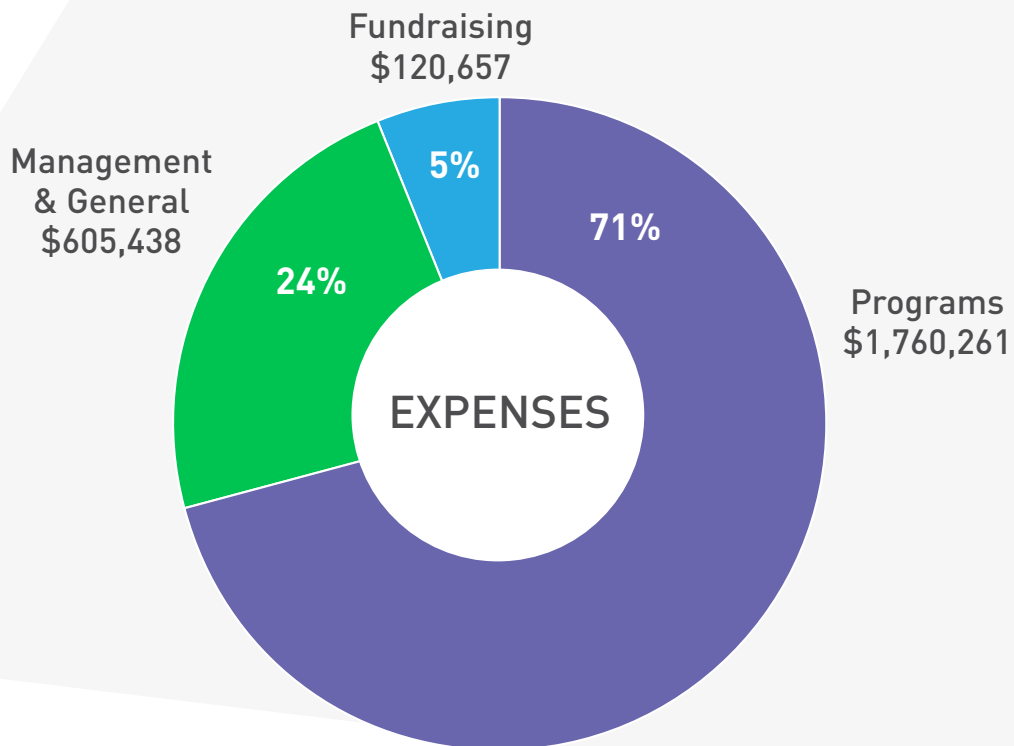


**TOTAL EXPENSES \$2,243,045**

# 2021 Financial Information



**TOTAL REVENUE \$2,848,905**



**TOTAL EXPENSES \$2,486,356**

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*“As a recent car-free transplant to Chicago, I joined Active Transportation Alliance to help make the city safer for cyclists and pedestrians.”*

Katie Mead, Active Transportation Alliance member

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*“Over the years, Active Transportation Alliance has become an indispensable national leader in transit policy. I’m so proud to have you as a partner and advisor in my work.” U.S. Rep. Jesús “Chuy” García, 4th District*

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*"I don't look at support for Active Transportation Alliance as a donation. It's an investment in the infrastructure of the city and making the city a better place."* Stan Day, co-founder and chairman of SRAM

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William Waldron,  
 Active Transportation Alliance supporter

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