

2022-2023

ANNUAL REPORT

EQUITY PROTECTED BIKE LANES BUS SAFETY NEIGH
ORITY VOLUNTEER SAFE STREET



ACTIVE
TRANSPORTATION
ALLIANCE

Dear Supporters,

As the Executive Director of the only sustainable transportation advocacy organization focused on the Chicago region, it's my delight to invite you to take a brief tour of the work we've been doing to cultivate healthy, sustainable, and equitable communities where walking, biking, and public transit flourish.

2022 and 2023 were years of unprecedented progress for our movement. Dozens of major infrastructure projects across the region created safe places for people to walk and bike where they did not exist before. We now have more concrete protected bike lanes, pedestrian bump outs and islands, and easy trail connections. Illinois and Chicago passed bold new laws that put us on the path towards a more sustainable and equitable transportation system. Chicago and our whole region stand out as one of the few places in the country that saw at least a 50 percent increase in cycling since 2019.

We flexed our collective muscles and made walking, biking, and transit issues in the 2023 Chicago municipal elections. We put forth a bold vision for not only saving our transit system, but making it thrive. We showed up at public meetings, hearings, open houses, workshops, charettes, and on Zoom to fight for our shared vision of safe streets for all. And through it all, we created new and exciting opportunities for our members, supporters, and partner organizations to strive for our vision of a thriving region abundant with walking, bicycling, and public transit.

Here's to the past that inspires us, the present that unites us, and the future that beckons us onward—together.

With heartfelt appreciation,



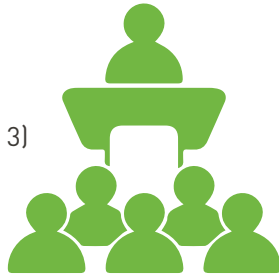
Amy Rynell
Executive Director
Active Transportation Alliance



Advocacy by the numbers

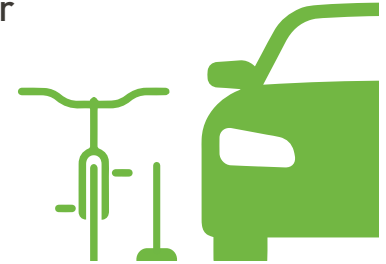
Attendance at Chicago's inaugural mayoral candidate forum on sustainable transportation. (See page 3)

200



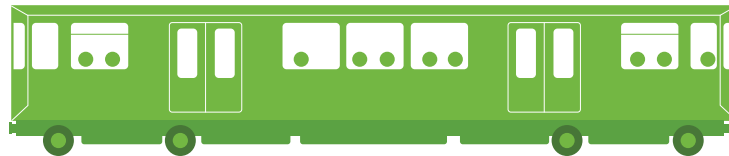
Miles of newly installed or upgraded protected bike lanes in 2022 and 2023.

33 (See page 4)



Number of new L stations that will be built in Chicago's southernmost neighborhoods along the 5.6-mile Red Line extension, (See page 7)

4



Number of organizations and municipalities that we united to push for a more robust statewide plan for improving walking and biking.

(See page 9)

69

We made walking, biking, and transit key issues in the 2023 Chicago municipal election.

Here's how we did it:

1

We sought input from an array of partner organizations on developing an election platform focused on improving sustainable transportation. In partnership with the Transportation Equity Network, **we hosted a half-dozen listening sessions** with community-based organizations around the city to develop the platform.



2

We used the platform as the basis for a **candidate questionnaire** and asked each candidate for city council and mayor to complete it.

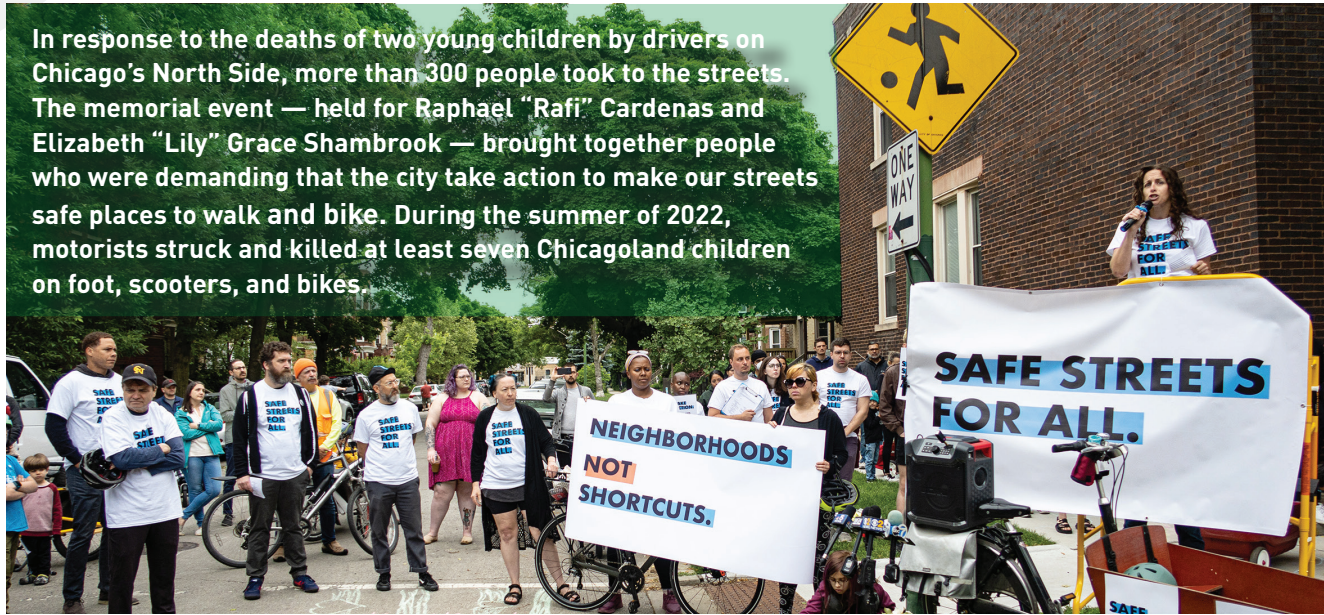


3

After Brandon Johnson was elected, the new mayoral administration invited Active Transportation Alliance to **participate in a committee** to develop the administration's priorities around transportation. Alongside several other partner organizations, we were successful in getting our platform priorities adopted in the final transition report. The priorities included lowering speed limits, investing in dedicated bus lanes, and creating a connected and protected bike network.

Safe and easy options for walking and biking

In response to the deaths of two young children by drivers on Chicago's North Side, more than 300 people took to the streets. The memorial event — held for Raphael "Rafi" Cardenas and Elizabeth "Lily" Grace Shambrook — brought together people who were demanding that the city take action to make our streets safe places to walk and bike. During the summer of 2022, motorists struck and killed at least seven Chicagoland children on foot, scooters, and bikes.



A protected and connected bike network

After several years of asking for solid infrastructure to keep people safe while using protected bike lanes, it was a big win when the City of Chicago announced plans to **use concrete curbs for protected bike lanes and upgrade all existing protected bike lanes with new concrete curbs.**

The announcement came after years of grassroots advocacy calling for more robust barriers for Chicago's bike lanes, as well as recent mobilization efforts in response to a devastating string of fatal crashes, including four that tragically took the lives of children.

Along with the commitment to a more robust type of protection for people biking, the city also saw a dramatic increase in the number of protected bike lanes and off-street trails. The Chicago Department of Transportation **installed or upgraded more than 18 miles of protected bike lanes in 2023, building on more 25 miles in 2022.** This progress was largely made possible by the Chicago Works capital program, which, thanks to our local campaign, included unprecedented local funding for walking and biking infrastructure.



Advocacy in action

We must learn from fatal crashes

When fatal crashes occur on Chicago streets, survivors and advocates will now have more information they can use to address the underlying unsafe conditions. Active Transportation Alliance successfully lobbied Chicago City Council to pass an ordinance that requires **a detailed investigation after a fatal crash to identify contributing factors.**



Support for tomorrow's leaders

- Our bi-monthly suburban and city advocacy video chats enable our members and supporters to stay connected to the latest developments in our campaigns and learn about ways to get involved.
- We launched a new leadership development program to support on-the-ground action across the region. Training sessions are available online and in person.
- To help trail projects in the region move forward and encourage residents to get involved, we held a series of webinars featuring updates about trail progress in the city and suburbs. As a result, more than a dozen local trails projects have been featured in webinars and on the organization's blog.



Speed cameras threshold remains

The epidemic of speeding on our streets is taking a rising toll on the lives of Chicagoans and is disproportionately impacting Black and Brown residents on the South and West Sides. In fact, speeding is the most common factor in serious and fatal crashes. Even small reductions in speed — just five miles per hour — greatly increases the likelihood of a victim surviving a crash.

When an ordinance was proposed in Chicago City Council to raise the speed camera ticketing threshold near parks and schools, we joined forces with other safety advocates to fight back. **We waged a campaign to educate key city council members about the safety benefits of maintaining the current speed threshold.** The proposed ordinance, which would have made it legal to exceed the speed limit by 10 mph, was successfully defeated by a majority of council members.

Better trails, a better region

In the past couple of years, we've been hard at work making sure trails are not just maintained but are expanded and connected to one another.

Here are some of the projects we've been working on:

- As the effort to extend the **Old Plank Road Trail** to the Pennsy Greenway in Indiana picks up speed, we've been leading community engagement for the project.
- We've closely partnered with Cook County as it makes critical improvements to the **Des Plaines River Trail** and works to extend the trail to the Salt Creek Trail.
- An \$800,000 federal grant was secured for developing the **Lake Calumet Trail**, thanks largely to our efforts.
- We contributed to the **City of Chicago's vision map for trails**, which aims to add 48 miles of new trails to an existing 79-mile network.
- We've been working with advocates leading trail development work on projects like the **East Branch DuPage River Trail** and extending the **North Channel Trail** in Evanston.



Photo: Steven Gross

A roadmap for improving transit

Sounding the alarms about a fiscal cliff

While transit ridership is on the rebound from pandemic lows, service is not meeting rider needs. Even more troubling, the system is heading toward a significant fiscal cliff. In short, we're at a very challenging crossroads with public transportation in the region. **If no action is taken, the agencies will be faced with difficult choices to cut service, raise fares, or both.**

In response to this crisis, Active Transportation Alliance co-led a process alongside public officials to develop long-term solutions to transit funding and governance. These recommendations will now be taken up by the Illinois General Assembly as our campaign to save transit moves into its next phase.



The Red Line Extension takes big steps forward

After many years of inaction, plans to extend the CTA Red Line made significant strides in 2022 and 2023. The city's major north-south L line is now on track to extend to the southernmost neighborhoods and fulfill a decades-old promise. A key hurdle for moving ahead was cleared in 2022 when **Chicago City Council approved a "transit TIF,"** which provides the match funding needed to unlock the investments from federal sources. And the federal investment came the following year when the **federal government announced a \$2 billion grant for the project.** The 5.6-mile extension will begin at 95th Street and head south to 130th Street, allowing access to four new stations along the way.



Let's get serious about bus lanes

After years of planning and study, CTA and CDOT released a plan that highlights opportunities for **making buses faster and easier to use** along key bus corridors. Active Transportation Alliance has been engaged throughout the process of developing the **Better Streets for Buses Plan**. Now we're working with partners in the Transportation Equity Network to prepare.

Encouraging CTA to step up to its challenges

As most transit riders in Chicago know, our transit system has serious reliability problems. **There is little transparency and accountability from the agency** while it struggles to meet the demand for staffing and better service.

Here are some of the ways Active Transportation Alliance has been working to create a better transit system in Chicago.

- We've been part of a coalition that has held press conferences and rallies, while working with alderpeople to generate greater visibility for the serious issues currently afflicting our transit system.
- We successfully pushed CTA to be more transparent by incorporating more data and statistics in its Meeting the Moment Scorecard.
- We impelled CTA to hold additional trainings for rail operators in 2024 to meet demand and restore service levels.

Equitable transit-oriented development takes root

In 2022, Chicago City Council passed landmark legislation to promote more development near transit within the city's South and West Side neighborhoods. The legislation, which Active Transportation Alliance helped gather support for and push across the finish line, intends to **transform low-income neighborhoods into thriving, dynamic areas by investing in affordable housing and businesses around public transportation**. Known as equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD), the ordinance will improve safety for pedestrians and other road users while also capping the amount of required on-site parking in new residential developments at one spot per two units. In the long term, the legislation will serve as an important step in connecting residents to jobs, schools, services, and recreation without cars.



Our impact goes beyond the Chicago region

New state laws promote safer travel for everyone

Many of the most dangerous roads for people walking or biking in our region fall under the jurisdiction of the Illinois Department of Transportation. Until this year, state law mandated that all intersections on IDOT roads must accommodate turning for the largest trucks on the road. That means building bigger intersections that enable dangerous driving. Accommodating the largest trucks also meant that there was no space at intersections for building meaningful protection for people walking and biking like pedestrian islands and sidewalk bumpouts. We started the process for removing this requirement, allowing communities across the state to put the safety of people walking and biking first when designing intersections on state roads.



Road deaths are preventable

The State of Illinois mandated the creation of a task force that will create a set of policy recommendations to eliminate traffic fatalities in the state. Active Transportation Alliance worked with champions in the Illinois General Assembly to pass the bill that brings together government officials, advocates, and other stake holders and deliver a report by the end of 2024.

We mobilized around Illinois' first-ever Active Transportation Plan

As IDOT began developing its statewide plan for improving walking and biking, **we rallied together 69 organizations and municipalities** that expressed their support for a series of recommended policies and programs for the plan. Policy and program recommendations addressed funding, staffing, education, speed limits, maintenance, and street design. We believe these recommendations will set the state up for success in improving active transportation options and safety for all.



Turning the tide on emissions with good state policy

Here are some of the steps we've made at the state level toward policies that reduce greenhouse gases in Illinois:

- We've been working with Illinois' leading environmental organizations and coalitions to make active transportation advocacy squarely as one of their priorities.
- In partnership with the Metropolitan Mayor's Caucus and the Metropolitan Planning Council, we hosted an event series to cultivate municipal champions to support pedestrian/biking investments.
- We used public testimony, media attention, and letter writing to pressure our metropolitan planning organization to look more closely at the harm caused by roadway expansion.



Big jump in state funding for walking and biking

Thanks to efforts of the Active Transportation Alliance, one of the most important state funding sources for walking and biking improvements awarded its largest annual amount ever in 2022. The funding source — called the Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program — dedicated \$125 million for eligible projects like biking and walking paths, trails, streetscape beautification work, and other improvements.

The increase came about thanks to a statewide campaign led by Active Transportation Alliance during the 2018 election cycle. We also provided a variety of technical assistance to help communities successfully apply for these funds.



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