



December 19, 2024

Thank you Chairman Dillard and RTA board for this opportunity to speak.

I am Amy Rynell, Executive Director of the Active Transportation Alliance. I also served as the co-chair of *The System We Want* Working Group for the Plan of Action for Regional Transit.

Americans often view transit outside of the US, from Europe to Bogota and beyond, as something that's amazing but also something we could never have. The reasons given range from our car culture to residential development patterns to government structure and taxation differences, and so on.

Based on analysis from ENO Center for Transportation, the CMAP Plan of Action for Regional Transit, and advice from the Transit Center, a delegation from Illinois spent a week with transit leaders in Germany. We focused on learning from a couple regions in Germany – Munich and Berlin - that are comparable to Northeastern Illinois in a number of ways really important to thinking about what is possible here:

- While the Munich region’s population is about half of ours, its population density is similar and it has a higher number of registered vehicles per resident. Munich region has more than double the number of riders than us annually.
- Berlin’s region is similar in terms of square mileage but has a much lower population density of 523 people per square mile compared to our 870 people per square mile. Despite that, they have nearly 5 times the amount of transit rides annually – 1.5 Billion. Their residents take on average 245 trips per year compared to Chicago region residents average just 36 trips per year.
- More information from DB E.C.O North America, Inc., in the table below:

Comparing Northeastern Illinois to Munich and Berlin			
The regions are comparable in size, scope, and density			
City	Chicago	Munich	Berlin
Population	2,665,039 (2022 est.)	1,510,378 (2023)	3,598,006 (2022)
Area	228 sq mi	120 sq mi	344 sq mi
Population Density	11,703/sq mi	12,590/sq mi	10,456/sq mi
Registered vehicles per 1000 Residents	505	550	337
Region	Chicagoland (MSA)	Oberbayern	Berlin-Brandenburg
Population	9,441,957 (2020)	4,810,496 (2021)	6,132,081 (2022)
Area	10,900 sq mi	6,800 sq mi	11,700 sq mi
Population Density	870/sq mi	711/sq mi	523/sq mi
Gross Domestic Product (2022)	\$832.9B	€320.0B (\$336.5B)	€290.7B (AA\$314.6B)
Annual Regional Ridership (2023)	340 million	740 million	1.5 billion
Average transit trips per resident	36.0	153.8	244.6



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Their regional governance model enables great service in these German regions. It's not just about the money. Germany has built a deliberate and thoughtful product that people want to use - we can continue to learn from how they are organized and operated. They are working across the state, county and municipal levels of government to establish service levels and operational expectations that are common sense and effective.

What stood out the most to me was their regional vision that was squarely focused on the users of the system. This was elucidated by a few quotes from representatives of their regional transit organizations:

1. Their motto is "one network, one timetable, one ticket". Information is integrated and the whole system is oriented around the rider.
2. "Mobility doesn't end at the city boundaries". While obviously that is true everywhere including here, they organize, integrate, and fund their system regionally with that mentality – not by one off projects or happy coincidences.
3. "We (the myriad of organizations operating transit) collectively compete with the car, not with each other." Increasing mobility options and mode shift are the focus. Eyes on the prize.

What's the result?

- **High service availability:** Highly frequent, all day, bi-directional service with regular connections by design
- **High service integration:** Timed, cross-platform intermodal transfers, with minimal infrastructure required
- **Focus on the user experience:**
 - Integrated fares
 - Integrated schedule
 - Integrated customer information

We have the skills and know-how and bones in our region to do this. It is not rocket science. The essential difference is one of vision. We are in desperate need of a transformative vision for transportation in Illinois that will guide the legislation, policies, and funding investment.

RTA has been doing some good work to "meet the moment" but it is imperative that we look beyond the moment towards a rider-centered, regionally integrated, well-funded system. This is not the time to whittle around the edges.

The easier the system is to use, the more reliable it is, the more frequently it comes, the safer it is, the more people that will ride it. And the ripple effect of more ridership is powerful, not only for transit funding, but for cleaner air, reduced congestion, population growth, and economic activity.

Now is the time. I urge you to work with our state leaders on envisioning an integrated regional system a global region like ours demands.

Thank you for your time.

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