

Executive summary

Despite progress, Chicago's suburbs are falling behind on biking

Chicago's suburbs are home to dozens of communities that have embraced biking. Despite these signs of progress, our region is not tapping into all the health, economic and environmental benefits biking can bring. Unless we take more concerted action, Chicagoland risks falling behind other metropolitan areas that have seized on biking as a key component of sustainable, equitable and healthy communities.

Active Transportation Alliance's report [Suburban Bikeways for All](#) documents how the current state of biking in Chicago's suburbs is lagging while outlining the policies, planning efforts and infrastructure necessary to get our region back on track.

The problem: Chicago's suburbs struggling to make headway on better biking

Most suburbs are not designed to be bike friendly. Car-centric development and land use patterns make biking in most suburbs difficult. What's lacking are Close, Comfortable, and Connected bike networks that encourage more people to use bikes as everyday transportation.

Too few communities have the right policies and plans in place. Metropolitan Chicago is home to more than 280 municipalities, but only a few dozen have the key policies and plans in place necessary to support better biking. While some communities may lack the leadership or will, many communities also lack the resources necessary to support these important activities – a critical barrier to equitable progress.

The number of people biking to work in the suburbs is falling. The Chicago region has data on biking to work from the U.S. Census Bureau but lacks data on biking for other reasons. Based purely on observations, it appears that biking overall has increased in recent years with more bikes on streets, trails and at Metra stations. However, outside of Cook County, the percentage of people who reported biking to work has fallen by roughly half since 2006. Over the same period, the City of Chicago saw this

percentage more than double. Note that biking to a Metra station won't necessarily be counted as biking to work.

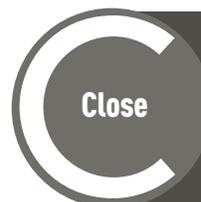
Bike crashes remain stubbornly high. The number of injuries and fatalities related to bike crashes have remained relatively consistent since 2006. This lack of progress shows that additional investments in new bike infrastructure and other safety improvements are needed.

Large gaps remain in the regional trail network. Active Trans estimates there are approximately 4,000 miles of trails and paths suitable for biking in the region. While this number is surely impressive, too often these trails are disconnected and/or difficult to reach without a car.

The solution: *Suburban Bikeways for All*

Experience has shown that providing a safe, easy to use, and well-connected network of low-stress bikeways leads to more bicycling and the many health, environmental and economic benefits that go along with it.

[Suburban Bikeways for All](#) highlights the "Three Cs" — key characteristics of successful suburban bike networks:



Frequent destinations like schools, transit and retail districts should be within two miles of each other and homes.



Bike infrastructure should consist of low-stress bikeways, including multi-use trails, physically protected bike lanes and neighborhood greenways (quiet residential streets optimized for biking with signs and markings).



Suburban bike networks should be seamlessly connected to residential neighborhoods and other destinations without interruption.



How to create bikeways for all

Creating these high-quality bike networks requires the right combination of community planning and local, regional, state and federal policy and funding. *Suburban Bikeways for All* identifies the following policy and planning tools as being key to the long-term success of communities.

Local actions by suburbs

- Pass a local **complete streets policy** to ensure all road users are considered in future transportation plans and projects
- Adopt and implement an **active transportation plan** to create a connected network of low-stress bikeways, like protected bike lanes and off-street trails
- Pursue **funding** and adopt transportation budgets that include a fair share for walking and biking, tapping into federal, state, and local dollars
- Track progress on local biking goals through **project prioritization and performance metrics**
- Create a forum for community input and accountability by establishing a **bicycle & pedestrian advisory council**
- Incorporate a **vision zero** goal to eliminate traffic fatalities into local plans and policies
- Encourage cycling and improve safety by **calming and slowing traffic** at intersections and on local streets
- Embrace **land use** policies that encourages development that is mixed-use and puts key destinations close together, like schools, work, shopping and residences

Regional actions

- Prioritize non-motorized modes of transportation like bicycling in the upcoming regional plan, ONTO2050
- Create incentives for bike- and walk-friendly development near transit stations, including conversion and expansion of major job centers into mixed use destinations connected by rapid transit
- Ensure regionally programmed funding sources, like the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program and Surface Transportation Program, prioritize active modes such as bicycling and walking



- Provide additional training and technical assistance to suburbs with limited staff capacity
- Assist communities with limited local funds in raising local match money for federally funded projects

State actions

- Invest state dollars in bikeways projects and programs, including targeted support for planning and construction in high-need communities
- Implement the Illinois State Bike Transportation Plan, in particular:
 - » Dedicate state funding for complete streets facilities like bike lanes and sidewalks, and prioritize such projects
 - » Track the number and quality of complete streets projects
 - » Develop biking and walking safety standards and assign adequate “highway safety” funds to achieve the standards
 - » Update IDOT design manuals, and the bikeway selection tables, to reflect modern standards for how best to accommodate biking and walking
- Evaluate and report on the implementation of state Complete Streets to date and make improvements

Federal actions

- **Maintain and grow federal funding sources** for biking projects in the Chicago suburbs, including the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) program, Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) and TIGER Grant program.