

# Transportation Advisory Committee Handbook

Published 2/12/13



# About The Active Transportation Alliance

Based in Chicago, the Active Transportation Alliance is a non-profit advocacy organization serving the seven-county Chicago region. We've been working since 1985 to improve conditions for bicycling, walking and transit and to engage people in healthy and active ways to get around.

Our mission is to make bicycling, walking and public transit so safe, convenient and fun that we will achieve a significant shift from environmentally harmful, sedentary travel to clean, active travel. We advocate for transportation that encourages and promotes safety, physical activity, health, recreation, social interaction, equity, environmental stewardship and resource conservation.

We envision a Chicago region with half as many crashes and where half of all trips are made by walking, biking and transit.

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Oak Park residents participate in a community workshop to gather their input about enhancing active transportation options in their community.

# What's a Transportation Advisory Committee?

Active Trans is working with a growing number of Chicago residents who are getting involved in their communities to encourage active transportation and help improve conditions for biking, walking and transit. You can make a difference in your own back yard by participating in a local group, or by starting one if there isn't one in your neighborhood. Transportation Advisory Committees may be organized by a local elected official's office, by a community organization, or by an independent group of residents. Regardless of how they're organized, these volunteer-led groups are connecting local elected officials to a voice of the community that cares about safer, more accessible streets for all Chicagoland residents.

Transportation Advisory Committees may serve a number of different roles in a community:

- Providing guidance to local officials on bicycle, pedestrian and transit issues
- Providing a venue for input from local residents
- Reviewing and giving feedback on local transportation infrastructure projects
- Promoting safe street behavior to the community
- Educating other residents about healthy transportation choices
- Hosting fun events to get the community biking and walking
- Advocating for projects that will improve biking, walking and transit
- Connecting Active Trans' work and resources to your community

Most importantly, your local committee can be what your community wants it to be!

**GET INVOLVED** in an existing committee! Find a listing of committees at <http://www.activetrans.org/in-your-community>

# Getting organized in your community

## KICKING OFF THE COMMITTEE

If there's not already a Transportation Advisory Committee in your community, you can be the one to get your neighbors organized! Getting together with like-minded neighbors is fun and easy. This checklist can serve as a starting point for kicking off your committee. Keep in mind that building a committee is a long-term approach to community improvement. It can take time and patience to get your committee up and running and to build relationships in your community, but you can have an impact even with shorter-term projects as you get started.

**CONTACT ACTIVE TRANS:** Let us know you're interested in starting a committee so we can help you along the way. We may have also heard from one of your neighbors who we can put you in touch with! You can start by emailing one of the staff contacts listed in the beginning of this handbook.

**GATHER A CORE GROUP OF 3-4 VOLUNTEERS:** You'll find it easier to get a group together if you start with a couple of committed friends and neighbors who can share tasks and responsibilities with you.

**SCHEDULE YOUR FIRST MEETING:** Get together with your core group at a coffee shop or other informal meeting place, using this handbook to start the dialogue and begin planning.

**DECIDE ON AN INITIAL PROJECT:** People are more motivated by specific projects than by committees. Pick something fun and motivating that you can all get behind, like starting a community bike ride or creating a new parklet on a street that lacks good public space. Consider identifying at least one short-term, simpler project that can happen within a few months to give your group some momentum. (See the "Project Ideas" section.)

**ASSEMBLE YOUR TEAM:** Invite more volunteers to join your committee. You want to build a constituency that represents the community and that local officials will listen to.

- **Meet with your elected official(s):** Start developing a relationship with your alderman or village board early on by engaging them in your initial project. Let them know constituents want to address local transportation issues and invite them to be part of the process. Local officials also may want to help take the lead in organizing a committee so that they can benefit from volunteers and community input. Depending on the level of participation of elected officials, you may want to adjust your plans for kicking off your committee and establishing goals.

### ORGANIZING GEOGRAPHY:

In the City of Chicago, we generally recommend committees organize at the ward level in order to coordinate with ward-level funding and decision-making. However, sometimes ward boundaries don't correspond well with community identity boundaries – in some places a group may have better success organizing by neighborhood. In the suburbs, we recommend organizing at the city or village level. Your group should determine which organizing approach is best for your community.

- **Reach out to community stakeholders:** Get to know organizations that represent your community. Share your goals for transportation in your community, and listen to theirs. Your committee will be stronger with participation from community-based organizations that have already earned the respect of local officials. There may be a local organization that is interested in taking the lead in organizing a committee too.
- **Host a kick-off event to invite more volunteers:** Invite your community to a small, fun event where you can engage people in your initial project and invite more people to join your committee. If a local official or community organization is interested in taking ownership of the committee, volunteer to help them put together the kick-off event.

**ESTABLISH YOUR GOALS:** You've assembled your team and grown your group of volunteers into a committee. Now it's time to identify transportation issues in your community and focus on shared goals and projects. Narrow it down as a group to your top 1-3 goals – keep it manageable to ensure you can succeed.

**HOLD AN INITIAL MEETING WITH ELECTED OFFICIAL(S):** Share your committee's goals with your local officials and set up a regular meeting. Identify ways you can work together to accomplish the goals.

## BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE COMMITTEE

Building an effective committee is an important facet of organizing and creating change in your community. Getting together with like-minded people is fun and invigorating, but groups can easily become stale and ineffective if they don't take the time to establish a structure, organization, and goals that motivate and empower participants. Building an effective committee is an iterative process and each community and group will likely have a unique organization. The key is to create buy-in from participants for a structure, organization, leadership, and goals that will enable the group to thrive. You may revisit decisions regarding organization and goals annually (or another predetermined span of time agreed upon) to ensure effectiveness. Establishing channels of communication for your group and to the community is also an important aspect of creating a successful committee. Here are some items to consider when you are working with your group to build your committee:

**GROUP STRUCTURE:** Consider the impact different organization structures might have on your committee in your community.

- **Independent group:** Organizing residents in your community as an independent group can allow you to speak more freely and reduce time spent on coordination and consensus-building. But as an independent group, you may not be recognized as a voice of the community, and may need to work harder to be listened to.
- **Elected official or municipal agency:** Groups that are officially organized under an alderman, village board member or municipal agency can create a stronger connection between community members and local decision-making. Community members can work with local elected officials to help organize a committee.

- **Community-based organization:** Working within an existing community-based organization can provide you access to resources (e.g., meeting space), networks, relationships or expertise. But the committee could be limited by the organization's agenda and standing with local officials.

**LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION:** Consider establishing a committee organization that enables participants to be engaged, make decisions, and stay on-task.

- **Leadership:** Your group should identify a leader or co-leaders to chair your committee. Your chair should set meeting dates and agendas and lead your meetings. Also assign a secretary to take meeting minutes and assist the chair with communicating to your group.
- **Committee meetings:** Establish a regular, predictable meeting time for your group to check in on progress and make decisions.
- **Decision-making process:** Your group may be comfortable with an informal decision-making process, or members of your group may prefer some ground rules or by-laws. Each group is different, but as the number of committee members grows, it's best to discuss your decision-making process to ensure everyone is on the same page.
- **Sub-committees:** As your group grows, you should consider creating sub-committees that enable participants to engage in the issues that they are most passionate about. But also keep in mind that dividing into sub-committees too early or with too few people can also divide your energy and focus. Some ideas for sub-committees include: schools & parks, education and encouragement, events and fund raising, etc. One item to keep in mind is that bike issues tend to dominate, so if the group is also interested in pedestrian and/or transit issues it is best to have sub-groups that focus on these issues specifically to maintain bike/ped/transit balance.
- **Committee membership:** Having the right members in your committee is key to the effectiveness of the group. Here are some things to consider when identifying/selecting your group:

**Formal vs. informal membership:** Is the committee open to anyone to participate in, or will there be a set list of committee members who participate in decision making? Keep in mind that even with formal committee membership, your committee can always remain open for others to volunteer and participate without formally serving on the committee.

**Size:** How many members will be in the committee? Sometimes less is more. Having a few people who are actively engaged is often more effective than a large number of group members who are not actively participating.

**Technical expertise and perspective:** Consider recruiting members who have particular knowledge and experience — e.g., planner, engineer, etc. — and may bring a variety of perspectives — e.g., transportation, health, environment, education, etc.

**Diversity:** Consider recruiting members that have different backgrounds and ethnicities that can provide insight into active transportation issues in diverse communities.

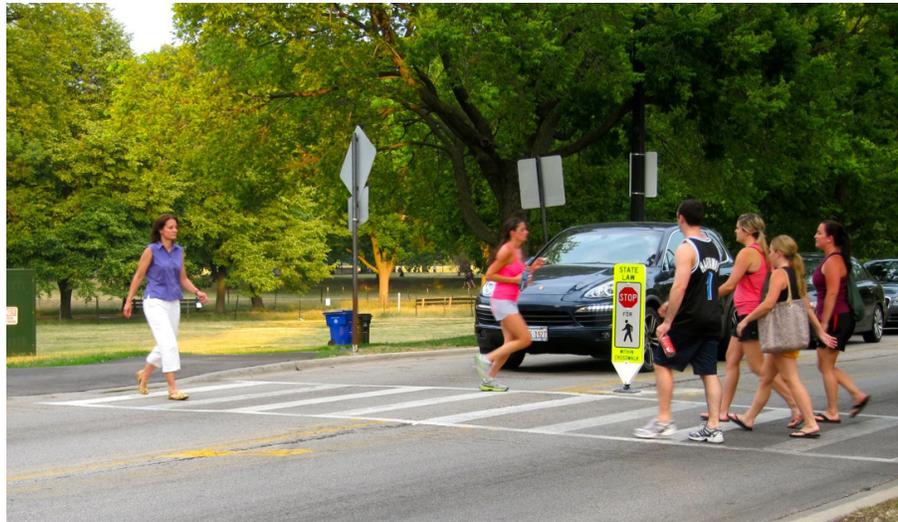
**SETTING GOALS:** For committees to be effective it is important to establish goals that drive the activities of the group. You should strive for all committee members to buy into the group goals. Goals should be documented in writing and used to make decisions and assess progress throughout the year. To achieve the best results, these goals should follow the SMART method. They should be:

- **Specific:** It should be clear what the desired outcome is for each goal. This eliminates potential confusion about the work to be accomplished.
- **Measurable:** It should be possible to determine how successfully a goal has been achieved.
- **Attainable:** Goals should not be too easy to reach – they should entail a reasonable degree of stretch. At the same time, they shouldn't be so difficult that they could be perceived as “impossible,” de-motivating the group.
- **Relevant:** Define goals that are pertinent to the overall focus of the committee.
- **Time-specific:** Ensure the clarity of the goals by setting key milestones or deadlines for them.

**COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR COMMUNITY:** Take advantage of free online tools to keep members of your committee connected to each other and to your community.

- **Email list or Google Group:** Establish a way for your committee to communicate online and for you to contact members of the community about projects you are working on. Whenever your group does something visible, be sure to collect email addresses from people in your community who are interested in the project. (Also see the “Events” entry below.) Enlist your secretary or a technologically savvy member to create an email list (listserv) or a Google Group. From time to time, you may contact this list with updates on projects or a call to action if you need help.
- **Social media:** Facebook and Twitter are easy ways to keep momentum going on your projects. Create a Facebook page and/or a Twitter handle or hashtag to share progress, post engaging questions or call your members to action. Enlist the support of two or more members to post content regularly.
- **Blog:** Share more in-depth news about projects by creating a blog for your group. You can post related news articles as well. Make sure to include pictures to accompany all entries and keep posts short. Is there a member of your group who likes to write or would make a good editor? This can be time-consuming, so consider having a couple people committed to generating regular content for posts.
- **Community newsletters:** Local churches, schools, community organizations and elected officials with newsletters may be willing to publish information about your committee's activities.
- **Flyers:** Libraries, community centers or grocery stores may have bulletin boards where you can post flyers. Local bike shops and other businesses may also be interested in posting your flyers at their register or in their window.

- **Events:** Neighborhood street fairs, school events, farmers markets or 5K runs may have opportunities for you to set up a table to talk to members of your community about your committee's activities.
- **Active Trans calendar and committee listing:** Active Trans keeps a calendar of events related to biking, walking and public transit (<http://www.activetrans.org/calendar>) as well as a listing of committees on our website (<http://www.activetrans.org/in-your-community>). Attract more local supporters by reaching out to Active Trans members in this way.
- **Chainlink.org:** Inform Chicago's existing biking community about work your group is doing by posting on this site aimed at connecting cyclists. The Chainlink (<http://www.thechainlink.org>) is your one-stop, Chicagoland resource to connect and meet other cyclists to share information on bikes, routes, rides and events.



Bike Walk Lincoln Park worked with Alderman Michele Smith to identify locations for improved “stop for pedestrians” crosswalk signage.

## THE FIVE “E”S:

Transportation advocates and planners often break down their strategies into five categories. Consider which areas are the greatest priority for your group to help focus your goals and projects.

### ENGINEERING

Improving the physical transportation infrastructure, such as adding bike lanes and crosswalks

### EDUCATION

Teaching people about transportation choices and instructing them on safety skills for biking, walking and driving

### ENCOURAGEMENT

Using fun events and activities to get people biking and walking in the community

### ENFORCEMENT

Partnering with local law enforcement to ensure traffic laws are obeyed

### EVALUATION & PLANNING

Gathering and using data, such as traffic crash locations and bike counts, to make your community's efforts more effective.

# Project ideas

Your committee can set its own goals and decide what projects to take on based on the interests and skills of your committee members or the needs of your community. Below are projects other committees have taken on. Some projects may be short-term while others may take years to complete – consider keeping short-term, easier projects in the mix to keep your group motivated and to build momentum as you get started. Refer to the “Resources” section for more information on how to tackle some project ideas.

## Support a new bikeway project in your neighborhood

Identify locations for bike corrals and People Spots in your neighborhood and build support to make them happen

Tackle a hazardous intersection or block by putting forward a vision for change and advocating to implement it

Identify needed improvements to your transit stations that can be funded locally through Menu or TIF funding (see the “Working with Decision-Makers” section)

Organize ward bike rides to engage residents in biking in your community

Conduct a walkability assessment and identify small improvements that can have a big impact on making your ward more pedestrian-friendly

Organize an education campaign or bike light distribution event to promote safe biking in your ward

Conduct outreach to local businesses and community stakeholders to build support for improving conditions for biking, walking and transit.



Residents can play an important role in bringing safer and better streets to communities with projects like this protected bike lane on Jackson Blvd.

# Working with decision-makers

It's important to build relationships with the people and agencies whose decisions impact the active transportation environment in your community. We encourage you to meet regularly with elected officials, police and transportation agency representatives, and to learn about the policies and funding programs that frame their work.

## VILLAGE BOARD MEMBERS AND ALDERMEN

These elected officials set budgets and often policy directives for local public works departments. Communicating with them can help get your issues on the table when key decisions are being made.

Elected officials often look for ways to boost community relations, and may want to help promote local events. For instance, if your committee is trying to start a community bike ride, your alderman might publicize it in their newsletter and attend the event.

## CHICAGO ALDERMEN

Aldermen can help fund projects. Each year, Chicago aldermen are given a certain amount of "menu" money to spend on infrastructure projects in their wards. This includes sidewalks, speed humps, and bikeways. Your committee can contact a local alderman to express interest in allocating menu money for a specific project.

In Chicago, aldermanic support is absolutely necessary for any infrastructure project. The Chicago Department of Transportation must always coordinate with the ward office on local projects.

## PUBLIC WORKS AND LOCAL DEPARTMENTS OF TRANSPORTATION (DOTS)

Talking with the people who do on-the-ground work of planning, designing and building transportation facilities can inform your goals and approach. Inviting city staff to participate in committee meetings can help communicate local needs and encourage the best results for specific projects.

## CTA, PACE AND METRA

Even though transit facilities are placed on the public streets and sidewalks, there isn't always coordination with the public or with municipalities about their placement and accessibility. When local groups have good relationships with these agencies, they can facilitate inter-agency communication as well as public input.

## LOCAL POLICE

Enforcement is a key component to creating safe streets, but not all police are aware of newer state and local laws that protect people walking and biking. Your committee can invite police to participate in a meeting, or send representatives to bring up these issues at police meetings within the community.

In Chicago, every police district has a Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) representative that holds regular community meetings. Your committee

A Complete Streets policy is a commitment by an agency to accommodate all users of the roadway in all of their future roadway projects — with few exceptions. To learn more about Complete Streets please visit [activetrans.org/completestreets](http://activetrans.org/completestreets).

members can attend these to represent your interests and ask for reports on traffic safety. Suburban communities may be divided in similar ways. Neighborhood watch meetings are also a great way to reach out.

#### LEARN ABOUT LOCAL POLICY

Many municipalities and agencies have established policies that shape the built environment. For instance, they may have a Complete Streets policy, an active transportation or bicycle plan, or requirements for new developments to include bike parking and transit access. It's good for your committee members to be informed about these policies, because they could benefit the projects that you are promoting. Your committee may also decide to push for policy change to better support your initiatives.

#### TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (TIF)

TIF is a funding mechanism to support economic development in specific areas of a municipality. Transportation improvements can strongly boost local economies, so your committee's initiatives may qualify for TIF funding. You can research your local TIF process as a funding option for projects.

# Ways Active Trans can help

Active Trans has over 7,000 members in Chicagoland who support our mission to improve conditions for biking, walking and public transit. Our policy of “praise loudly and criticize softly” has allowed us to work with key decision-makers to see that projects and policies we support are implemented throughout the region. We want your committee to succeed in your goals and we’re here to help.

## CONNECT WITH OTHER LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE

We can put you in touch with Active Trans members who live in your community. Tap into our growing network of supporters who already place a high priority on bike and pedestrian infrastructure. Connecting with our supporters can be a great place to recruit members to your group or to find like-minded people to support your projects. Meet local organizers in other wards and communities, get tips and tricks and find out what they’re working on. Active Trans holds events all over the city in support of our work and the work of our partners. Join us at one of our events or ask us to invite our supporters to one of your committee’s meetings or events!

## CONNECT WITH CITY AGENCY STAFF AND ELECTED OFFICIALS

Working collaboratively with staff from the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT), the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) and other city agencies can help get projects done quickly and with the results your group is hoping for. Active Trans can help put you in touch with the agency you need to work with for your specific projects. In many cases, city agencies are hoping for public input and support to advance projects, such as bikeways and bike parking. Similarly, Active Trans can help you connect with your alderman or village board members.

## TALKING POINTS AND FACT SHEETS

Whether you’re presenting your committee’s goals to the alderman or organizing support from members of the community, we recommend doing your homework by putting your background research and talking points down on paper. This helps your group stick to the same message. It can also be helpful to leave something behind in meetings that clearly and concisely explains your project or goals. Active Trans can provide some sample materials so you may not have to start from scratch.

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND ADVICE

Active Trans staff have years of experience advocating for better transportation infrastructure and can help connect you with technical resources and other information you need to move your projects forward. For example, we can provide tips and materials to help recommend ways to improve street crossings at dangerous intersections, or to improve transit stations and bike infrastructure.

## ORGANIZING ASSISTANCE AND MATERIALS

Need help running meetings or deciding what to focus on? Our community liaison and campaign staff can provide sample committee materials and are available to chat with you about prioritizing topics and managing meetings.



ACTIVE  
TRANSPORTATION  
ALLIANCE

**ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION ALLIANCE** is Chicagoland's voice for better biking, walking and transit. Active Trans' goal is to achieve a significant shift from environmentally harmful, sedentary travel to clean, active travel by making active transportation convenient and fun.

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## Resources

**Chicago Advocacy Bingo:**

Simple ways residents of your community can engage in transportation advocacy:  
<http://www.activetrans.org/bingo>

**Chicago Bike Corrals:**

<http://chicagobikes.org/bikecorrals.php>

**Chicago plazas and People Spots:**

[http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/cdot/supp\\_info/make\\_way\\_for\\_people.html](http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/cdot/supp_info/make_way_for_people.html)

**Chicago Streets for Cycling Plan 2020:**

<http://www.chicagobikes.org/public/SFC.php>

**Chicago Pedestrian Plan:**

<http://chicagopedestrianplan.org/>

**Walkability assessment tool:**

<http://chicagoconservationcorps.org/blog/wp-content/uploads2/2011/09/NWATinstructions.pdf>

**NACTO Cities for Cycling Guide:**

<http://nacto.org/cities-for-cycling/design-guide/>

**Complete Streets, Complete Networks:**

<http://www.atpolicy.org/Design>

**SRTS national website:**

<http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/>

### HELPFUL MAPS

**Chicago wards:**

<http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/about/wards.html>

**Maps showing Chicago ward redistricting:**

<http://media.apps.chicagotribune.com/ward-redistricting-2012/index.html#41.84920058952951,-87.63025760650635,12.0.0>

**Chicago Special Service Area map:**

<https://www.cityofchicago.org/content/dam/city/depts/dcd/ssa/12SSAMapCitywide.pdf>

**TIF maps:**

<http://www.cookcountyclerk.com/tsd/tifs/Pages/TIFMaps.aspx>

### CTA, METRA, CONTACT INFORMATION (WEBSITE)

**CTA site:**

<http://www.transitchicago.com/>

**CTA projects:**

[http://www.transitchicago.com/news\\_initiatives/planning/](http://www.transitchicago.com/news_initiatives/planning/)

**Metra site:**

<http://metrarail.com/metra/en/home.html>

**CREATE rail program:**

<http://www.createprogram.org/>