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The logo for the South Lakefront Corridor Transit Study. It features the text "South Lakefront Corridor" in a blue, sans-serif font, with "Transit Study" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font below it. The text is flanked by two vertical blue bars. Below the text are three wavy blue lines representing water.

# South Lakefront Corridor Transit Study

## Public Involvement Overview

*prepared for*

**Chicago Department of Transportation**

*prepared by*

Cambridge Systematics, Inc.

*with*

URS

O-H Community Partners

EJM Engineering

MKC Associates

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## Preface

This Public Involvement Overview issued in November 2012 summarizes key input from the Public Advisory Committee, Key Stakeholder Meetings, and Public Meetings received during the course of the study, as well as key study outcomes. An Existing Conditions Report and a Comprehensive Report for the study are available as separate documents; the latter contains a detailed description of the potential projects to be considered for implementation.



# Acknowledgments

The authors of this report wish to acknowledge the following for their guidance and input during this study:

## *The Technical Advisory Committee*

Staff representatives of:

- Regional Transportation Authority
- City of Chicago Department of Housing and Economic Development
- Chicago Transit Authority
- Metra

## *The Public Advisory Committee*

Aldermen representing the study area including:

- Alderman Willie Cochran - Ward 20
- Alderman Pat Dowell - Ward 3
- Alderman Leslie A. Hairston - Ward 5

Representatives of the following organizations and institutions:

- Apostolic Church of God
- Active Transportation Alliance
- Blind Services Association
- Bronzeville Chamber of Commerce
- Center for Neighborhood Technology
- Chatham Business Association
- Claretian Associates
- Developing Communities Project
- Friends of the Park
- Illinois Institute of Technology
- Metropolitan Planning Council
- Quad Communities Development Corporation (QCDC)
- Southsiders Organized for Unity and Liberation (S.O.U.L.)
- Southeast Chicago Development Corporation (SEDCOM)
- South East Chicago Commission
- The Community Builders
- University of Chicago
- Urban Partnership Bank
- Washington Park Consortium

We would also like to thank the Metropolitan Planning Council for providing the facilities for the project PAC meetings.



**Rationale for the Study** The South Lakefront Corridor includes a diverse assortment of neighborhoods from vibrant, active communities to struggling communities overburdened with vacant lots. Each of these neighborhoods, despite their differences, relies on the same bus routes, rail lines, and roadways to meet their diverse transportation needs. Over the years, community leaders have expressed a desire for improvements to the public transportation services to meet the area’s current and future transportation and economic needs. This study was commissioned by the Chicago Department of Transportation and funded by the Regional Transportation Authority to identify gaps in the existing public transportation network.

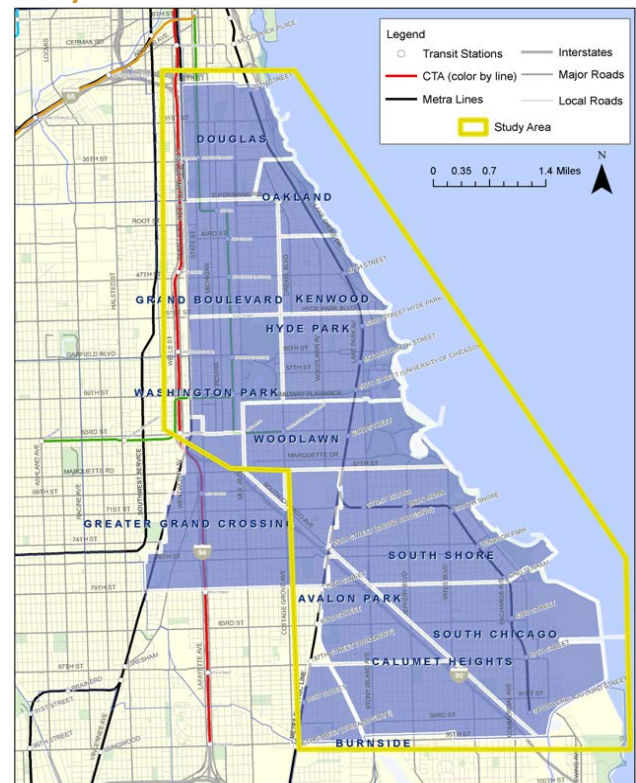
**Study Purpose** The purpose of this study was to identify public transportation improvements that will enhance mobility for residents of the study area communities and increase access to jobs located throughout the city and surrounding areas. The study evaluated the costs and benefits of several transit improvement alternatives in order to recommend candidate projects, programs, and policies that merit more rigorous evaluation.

**Study Area** The South Lakefront Corridor study areas is bounded by the lakefront on the east; the Stevenson Expressway on the north; the Dan Ryan Expressway, Norfolk Southern rail yard and Cottage Grove on the west; and 95<sup>th</sup> Street on the south. The study area currently is served by the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) Red and Green rapid transit lines, CTA local and express bus routes, and the Metra Electric District commuter rail trains. The study area encompasses all or part of the following 13 communities: Douglas; South Chicago; Grand Boulevard; Washington Park; Oakland; Avalon Park; Kenwood; Calumet Heights; Hyde Park; Greater Grand Crossing; Woodlawn; Burnside and South Shore. The communities in the study area, though each have their own unique characteristics, share common transit corridors and historically have faced a similar array of economic and social challenges. These challenges include concentrations of low- to moderate-income residents, comparatively high unemployment rates, and limited retail and service businesses.

**Study Work Scope** The study scope included analysis of existing transit service and infrastructure conditions in the study area, analysis of demographics and travel markets, analysis of existing land use and development

opportunities, identification of needs and opportunities for improvements, and development and evaluation of example projects for further study. The study also included an extensive public and stakeholder involvement component.

## Study Area



**Public Involvement** A major activity of this study was the public involvement effort and coordination with key stakeholders. A Public Involvement Plan was prepared early in the study process which identified key stakeholders and specified strategies that were used to inform and invite stakeholders and the public to participate in the study. The goal of the Public Involvement Plan was to allow the general public and key stakeholders opportunities throughout the study process to influence the transportation decisions being made for their community. The Public Involvement Plan had three objectives:

1. Identify stakeholder priorities for future transit operations, infrastructure improvements, and transit-oriented and economic development to meet current and future needs;

2. Review and refine the recommendations based on stakeholder priorities; and
3. Promote and build broad public awareness of the recommendations

The Public Involvement Plan included the following key strategies; formation of a Public Advisory Committee, hosting a series of public meetings, an information sharing campaign, and individual stakeholder meetings.

The Public Advisory Committee (PAC) served as the core group responsible for overall advice and guidance throughout the study process. The PAC assisted the City and the project team with building partnerships and sharing information with elected officials and community leaders as well as the general public. The PAC advised the project team on how to best engage the broader community. Formal meetings were held with PAC members throughout the project and were particularly helpful in forming the presentations at public meetings.

Public meetings provided an opportunity for local residents, community leaders, and business owners to hear updates on the transit study, offer their opinions, share their concerns, hear other view points, and provide

the project team with a snapshot of community concerns and reactions to particular proposals. Three public meetings were held to encourage dialogue between the project team and the general public.

Individual Stakeholder Meetings were conducted with individuals recognized as community leaders, elected or appointed officials, agency staff members, and neighborhood activists.

In order to reach a broad spectrum of community members, the information sharing campaign relied on a combination of traditional and new communication techniques to share information about the study. Fact sheets, e-blasts, and e-newsletters were sent to people who sent a note to the e-mail address, Facebook friends, and to the public meeting attendees. PAC members also were asked to send the materials to their networks and to include study information in newsletters and other communication methods that they managed.



## Stakeholder Identified Issues and Resulting Study Objectives

Issue	Objective
<p><b>Safety</b> – Stations located in areas perceived to be unsafe deter people from using transit for social purposes or at night.</p>	<p>1. Improve safety and security features.</p>
<p><b>Travel Times</b> – Trips with long travel times discourage people from using transit. Many residents are beyond walking distance of Metra and CTA transit stations, thus requiring them to take the bus to the train, adding travel time to their trips. Long bus travel times also result when buses pick up riders at every stop and/or require transfers.</p>	<p>2. Provide better coverage with high-capacity, high-speed modes, targeting areas where walking distances to stations are above 0.5 miles.</p> <p>3. Enhance travel time and reliability.</p>
<p><b>Key Linkages</b> – Transit travel to and from destinations outside of the Loop can be very challenging. East-west travel has been identified as particularly time-consuming, sometimes requiring travel into the Loop to make connections.</p>	<p>4. Identify and strengthen connections and travel options within major east-west corridors to serve work and discretionary trips.</p>
<p><b>Customer Comfort</b> – Travel can be challenging for specific groups, such as seniors and mothers with children. In addition, waiting for buses and trains can be unpleasant.</p>	<p>5. Improve station and bus environment for users who are waiting.</p>
<p><b>Frequency of Service</b> – High-traffic bus stops and rail stations sometimes do not adequately accommodate the volume of riders.</p>	<p>6. Improve frequency of service to match demand, especially bus service, in key areas.</p>
<p><b>Seamless Travel</b> – Some neighborhoods are served by commuter rail while others are served by CTA rapid transit. CTA bus service connects to both Metra and CTA rail, but fare transfers are allowed only to CTA rail. In addition, there is limited ability to transfer from cars to CTA (i.e., parking/park-and-ride options).</p>	<p>7. Integrate the network of transit service so users can easily go from one mode or one transit provider to another.</p> <p>8. Offer more integrated, seamless transfer and fare policies. (Take into account prior and ongoing work on fare integration and recognize service board discretion in setting fares.)</p>
<p><b>Knowledge of Services</b> – Methods for getting real-time information on bus/rail schedules, travel options, and tracking information are not well known by some riders and non-riders. Additionally, some transit riders do not have access to smart phones or Internet service (i.e., seniors, low-income individuals).</p>	<p>9. Increase creative marketing efforts to ensure that those who have Internet access are aware of these features.</p> <p>10. Increase information options for those without Internet access.</p>
<p><b>Economically Viable Neighborhoods</b> – Study area residents must sometimes travel great distances and make complicated trips on transit for work, shopping, entertainment, and other trips due to a lack of options in their neighborhoods. In addition, some station areas are not integrated with pedestrian and bike networks and limit walking and biking access to the transit system.</p>	<p>11. Highlight opportunities to cluster development around existing transportation hubs, particularly rail stations.</p> <p>12. Complement the transit system improvements with pedestrian, bicycle, and other enhancements to station access.</p>

## Study Outcome

Transit service and facility improvement ideas were identified through a robust public involvement process. A total of 37 improvements were suggested. The alternatives were grouped into the following categories and examples from each category were further analyzed:

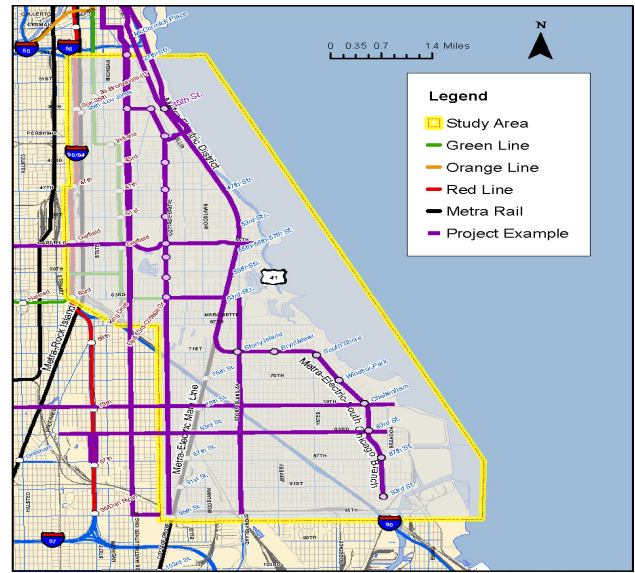
1. Improvements to Existing CTA Bus Network;
2. Improvements to Existing CTA Rail Network;
3. North-South Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Streetcar;
4. East-West BRT or Enhanced Bus;
5. Changes to Metra Electric District Rail; and
6. Other Improvement Ideas.

While all of these improvements have some merit, it was not possible to evaluate them all. Projects were chosen for analysis based on the goals and objectives, and subsequent evaluation criteria, developed by the stakeholders. The study evaluated the following 9 potential projects and provided estimates of ridership potential, capital costs, and operating costs for each.

1. New Bus Route on 83rd Street
2. Enhanced Bus Service on King Drive
3. Rail Station Enhancements
4. Cottage Grove Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)
5. Cottage Grove Streetcar
6. 55th Street/Garfield Boulevard Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)
7. 79th Street Enhanced Bus
8. Gold Line
9. Transit-Oriented Development

An additional 11 projects were identified and described, but estimates of ridership and costs were not developed. The complete list of projects is shown in the following table. Of particular interest to many stakeholders was the analysis of MED alternatives, and whether any of these alternatives should be advanced for further study and eventual implementation. This study analyzed only one of these alternatives – the Gold Line. Based on several factors, including funding opportunities, cost-effectiveness, and development potential, the Gold Line project is not recommended to advance.

## Locations of Example Projects



However, the upcoming regional fare payment system mandated by the Illinois legislature to be implemented by 2015 may have an impact on ridership patterns in the South Lakefront Corridor. These impacts should be monitored and analyzed to discover any indications that the Gold Line, Gray Line, or extension of Green Line may produce sufficient ridership for cost-effective operation.

The study identified a corridor of relatively high population density without high-speed transit service between 35<sup>th</sup> and 55<sup>th</sup> Streets centered along Ellis Avenue. To address this issue and in response to public comment, BRT and streetcar alternatives on Cottage Grove Avenue were evaluated. The BRT is the lower-cost alternative, but with correspondingly lower ridership projections. It is recommended that both alternatives be reviewed further, considering the City of Chicago's BRT plans and with community input, to determine the optimum mode.

## Projects by Category

Project Category	Candidate Projects
Improvements to CTA Bus Network	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. New Bus Route on 83<sup>rd</sup> Street</li> <li>2. King Drive Express Bus Service</li> <li>3. Bus Priority on South Lake Shore Drive</li> <li>4. Shelters and Real-Time Bus Arrival Information</li> <li>5. Restore Bus Route on 31<sup>st</sup> Street</li> </ol>
Improvements to CTA Rail Network	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. CTA Rail Station Enhancements</li> <li>2. Track/Structure Repairs (to eliminate Slow Zones)</li> <li>3. Extend Green Line to Dorchester Avenue</li> <li>4. New CTA Station at 26<sup>th</sup>/27<sup>th</sup> Street</li> </ol>
North-South Corridor BRT and Streetcar	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cottage Grove BRT</li> <li>2. Cottage Grove Streetcar</li> <li>3. Cottage Grove Express Bus Route</li> </ol>
East-West Corridor BRT and Enhanced Bus Service	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 55<sup>th</sup> Street/Garfield Boulevard Corridor BRT</li> <li>2. 79<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Enhanced Bus</li> <li>3. 35<sup>th</sup> Street Enhanced Bus</li> </ol>
Changes to Metra Electric District Rail	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gold Line</li> <li>2. CTA – Metra Fare Integration</li> <li>3. Gray Line</li> <li>4. Conversion of South Chicago Branch to LRT</li> </ol>
Transit-Oriented Development	Evaluate TOD Potential at Stations

The study also identified a need to improve travel in the east-west direction, particularly on 79th Street, 83rd Street, and Garfield Boulevard. Route #79 ranks as the highest ridership bus route in the CTA system. Physical improvements to the 79th Street corridor, such as queue jump lanes and transit signal priority, could significantly improve speed and reliability for this route which represents a relatively large segment of CTA’s riders. These improvements will be difficult to implement in this narrow corridor, but are relatively low cost and are recommended.

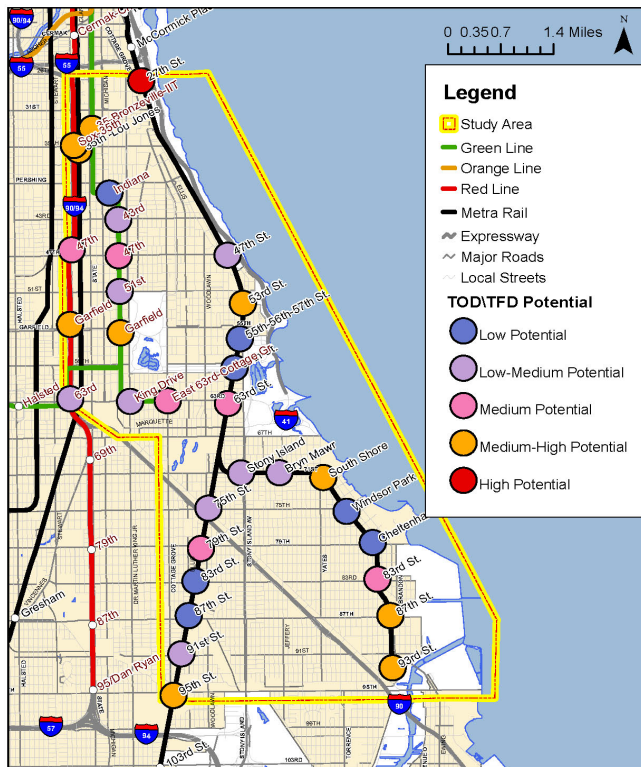
There is a one-mile gap without east-west bus service between 79<sup>th</sup> and 87<sup>th</sup> Streets. The community identified this gap as a mobility issue and the study included evaluation of a bus route on 83<sup>rd</sup> Street from the proposed Lakeside development on the east to the Walmart at Stewart Avenue and 83<sup>rd</sup> Street. The evaluation showed that a bus route along 83<sup>rd</sup> Street would be cost-effective, although it is not clear how many of the projected riders will be diverted from other bus routes as opposed to the route attracting new riders to the system. A JARC grant has been obtained to provide some of the operating cost of this route however, the local match has not been identified. It is recommended that this project be implemented when local match funding is identified, and

that ridership in the corridor, including routes #79 and #87, is monitored to determine the net ridership increase.

The number of trips between the study area and area surrounding Midway Airport is high, but the transit share of these trips is relatively low. A BRT service on Garfield Boulevard would provide a higher level of service in this corridor and could increase the transit share of trips to the Midway Airport area. Implementation of gold standard BRT would substantially impact parking availability in the corridor, and this requires further discussion within the community. It is recommended that this alternative be reviewed further, considering the City of Chicago’s BRT plans and community input.

The two remaining example project improvements, rail station enhancements and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD), also are recommended for advancement. Guidance to promote station enhancements and TOD are provided in the report.

## Rail Stations with TOD Potential



## Study Achievements

The study developed a degree of consensus on the main transit-related issues and problems in the study area and on the most important transit system investments and related community development projects so that they can be advanced to more detailed study. Many of these improvements are relatively low cost projects that will improve mobility for these communities. Even low cost projects involve operating costs for which funding is currently very constrained. Higher-cost improvements, such as the gold standard BRT or streetcar alternatives, are worthy of consideration when local financing is available.

## Next Steps

### Identify Potential Funding

- Identify local funding to match any existing or potential Federal grants for new services;
- Identify sources of ongoing operating funding; and
- Be ready to pursue new Federal grants under a new transportation bill for the highest priority projects.

### Establish Clear Priorities

- Continue to monitor station conditions and identify those most in need of attention;
- Evaluate priorities for BRT and other new corridor services in Chicago DOT BRT Plan;
- Monitor ridership and need for more service on express bus routes and on Metra once fare integration is implemented; and
- Evaluate demand for Gold Line.

### Advance Implementation

- Ensure representation of study area stations in CTA's maintenance and capital programs;
- Work with communities to implement enhancements around stations;
- Recommend that Metra implements programmed station improvements once the state bonding funds are released;
- Recommend that aspects of the Gold Line proposal are considered in Metra's current and future strategic planning processes;
- Consider incremental improvements;
- Conduct more detailed evaluation of traffic and parking impacts of corridor improvement proposals and discuss options with the community; and
- Pursue TOD and market the candidate neighborhoods.

### For more information, contact:

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