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CITY COUNCIL PASSES SMART STREETS ORDINANCE TO IMPROVE TRAFFIC SAFETY AND PUBLIC TRANSIT EFFICIENCY

CHICAGO — City Council today passed the Smart Streets Pilots Ordinance, a new measure establishing two downtown pilot programs that aim to improve traffic safety, enhance protections for pedestrians and bicyclists, and speed up public transportation. The ordinance, which was introduced in January by Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and Ald. Hopkins (2nd Ward), La Spata (1st Ward), Martin (47th Ward), Reilly (42nd Ward), and Vasquez (40th Ward), will allow the City to use existing infrastructure and new technology to enforce parking violations, such as cars parked in bike lanes, bus-only lanes, bus stops, and crosswalks, and enable camera-based management of parking in commercial loading zones.

“The passage of this ordinance is an exciting step toward a safer and smarter transportation system,” said Mayor Lightfoot. “While we continue to deepen our robust investments in infrastructure improvements, these pilot programs give us another tool in our toolbox to improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists, as well as speed up our bus network.”

The Smart Streets Pilots will encourage safer driver behavior and better parking compliance with the goal of reducing crashes and pedestrian and cyclist fatalities while also ensuring that Chicago’s growing network of bike lanes and bus lanes are working to their full potential. Similar programs exist in cities around the country, including those already operational in New York, San Francisco, and Seattle — and those actively in the planning stages in Los Angeles and Washington D.C.

The City will now begin the process of identifying camera vendors and potential camera locations. The pilots will operate until June 2025 within the boundaries of Lake Michigan to Ashland Avenue and from North Avenue to Roosevelt.

Smart Streets Pilot

This first pilot authorizes the City to ticket registered vehicle owners by mail for various infractions, including parking in bike lanes, bus-only lanes, crosswalks, bus



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



stops, and no parking zones. This will help discourage drivers from illegally parking in places that put our most vulnerable road users — people walking, biking, rolling, and taking transit — in dangerous situations, such as forcing bicyclists to merge with motor vehicle traffic.

This pilot will also promote a more reliable, efficient, and accessible bus service by deterring drivers from parking in bus-only lanes or at designated bus stops. Chicago's growing bus priority network is key to combating congestion, providing equitable rapid transit, and lowering emissions. One driver illegally parked in a dedicated bus lane creates slowdowns for dozens of passengers stuck behind the parked car, creates longer wait times for people waiting at bus stops, and ultimately makes bus trips longer and less predictable. Free-flowing bus lanes without illegally parked or idling cars will improve rider experience and operational performance of Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) buses. Additionally, parked cars at bus stops create challenges and sometimes hazardous conditions for riders with disabilities when buses are blocked from accessing the curb.

The ordinance allows for cameras to be fixed on City poles or City or CTA vehicles. Once data is collected, it will be individually reviewed and then sent to the Department of Finance (DOF) to be processed. Warning notices without fines will be issued for the first 30 days after each new camera is installed and activated. Through the Clear Path Relief program, low-income drivers will continue to be eligible for reduced-priced tickets and other vehicle-related debt relief.

“The Smart Streets Pilots will help keep our streets safe and our bus-lanes moving,” said Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) Commissioner Gia Biagi. “By deterring drivers from illegally parking in bike lanes, bus-only lanes, bus stops, and crosswalks, we create better streets for all road users. We look forward to implementing the Smart Streets Pilots to evaluate how these initiatives can work best on a citywide scale.”

“CTA continues to partner closely with CDOT to advance bus priority on our streets,” said CTA President Dorval R. Carter Jr. “Our buses equitably serve all neighborhoods in Chicago, and their reliability and speed impacts half a million riders each day. I thank Mayor Lightfoot and the aldermen for advancing this important legislation and ensuring we have another tool to enforce accessible bus stops and faster bus rides.”

Smart Loading Zone Pilot

This second pilot will use license plate reading camera technology to facilitate more efficient driver or company payment within commercial loading zones designed for



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the loading and unloading of commercial vehicles. The pilot aims to prevent double-parking that puts drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians in unsafe conditions; decrease vehicle idling; reduce emissions; and create a more efficient system for payment and drop-offs for commercial drivers.

“The Smart Streets Pilots Ordinance is a strong step forward to ensuring that sustainable and equitable forms of transportation, such as buses and cycling, are safer and more efficient,” said Darlene Hightower, President and CEO of the Metropolitan Planning Council.

“This ordinance is a necessary step in the fight to drive down traffic fatalities and crashes in our City. I am proud to support this measure to help address the problem of illegal parking and standing which create unsafe and slow road conditions for people commuting through my ward daily,” said Ald. Brendan Reilly, 42nd Ward. “These pilots will help us see the full benefits of investments we have made as a City in bike lanes, bus-only lanes, and commercial loading zones.”

“In my years representing some of the densest parts of the City, I know firsthand the significant challenges downtown faces with traffic safety, slow bus speeds, and double parking. I welcome the Smart Streets pilot in my ward as an important tool for improving traffic safety and ensuring drivers are following the rules of the road,” said Ald. Brian Hopkins, 2nd Ward.

“This is an essential first step in ensuring our infrastructure works as it’s designed. Our buses will be faster and our bike lanes safer because of the ordinance being passed today,” said Ald. Daniel La Spata, 1st Ward.

“As Chicago expands its existing network of bike and bus lanes, we can enhance safety, equity, and efficiency by enforcing parking restrictions on those lanes. Cyclists deserve to arrive safely at their destinations and bus riders deserve fast and reliable service, each without having to encounter illegally parked vehicles blocking their way. This ordinance will help ensure that our bus and bike lanes remain free of blockages, and will work well in tandem with the recently approved ‘Complete Streets’ ordinance, which will help ensure that more bike and pedestrian safety infrastructure is included in significant resurfacing projects,” said Ald. Matt Martin, 47th Ward.

“The Smart Streets pilot is an excellent step toward improving our transportation system. Public transportation is a public good, but far too often the lack of awareness and enforcement impedes the ability of people to commute reliably and safely — whether on bus, bike, or other means,” said Ald. Andre Vasquez, 40th Ward. “Coupled with the Bike Lane Enforcement that our office introduced, I believe



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



this measure will save lives. I look forward to the day this pilot expands citywide and leads to safer streets for all.”

“Under Healthy Chicago 2025, Chicago’s five-year plan to close the racial life expectancy gap by addressing the root causes of health, CDPH is working toward a Chicago where all neighborhoods promote optimal health and well-being. We are excited about this pilot program, which brings new tools to make our streets and sidewalks safer for bus riders, bikers, and drivers. We hope to see immediate benefits to public health in the pilot area, which has the city’s highest concentration of fatal and serious injury crashes, and that the pilot will provide lessons that can be replicated in neighborhoods across Chicago,” said Dr. Allison Arwady, Commissioner, Chicago Department of Public Health.

“The Illinois Public Health Institute supports the passage of the Safe Streets Ordinance, which will pilot strategies to promote safe streets for all Chicagoans, making our roads safer for pedestrians, bikers, and drivers. Improving safety in the public way is central to promoting active transportation and a healthy lifestyle for all Chicagoans. This pilot will further our vision of equitable and safe streets, moving us toward a healthy Chicago, together,” said Elissa Bassler, CEO of the Illinois Public Health Institute

This ordinance builds on actions by the Lightfoot Administration to keep Chicago’s streets safe through infrastructure investments and design. In 2022, CDOT implemented pedestrian safety improvements at approximately 400 intersections, including bump outs, curb extensions, and refuge islands. CDOT continued to expand and improve Chicago’s bikeway network, adding nearly 40 miles in 2022 and surpassing 100 miles added since Mayor Lightfoot took office. Chicago has averaged about 40 miles of new bikeway investments per year, compared to an average of 23 miles prior to 2020. Last year, CDOT began a new program to upgrade all existing plastic delineator-protected bike lanes to concrete curbs to provide increased safety for all road users. CDOT also partnered with CTA on expanding bus priority zones and bus lanes on Chicago Avenue and on advancing [Better Streets for Buses \(BSB\)](#) planning process in 2022.

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