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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

April 19, 2013

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**Mayor Emanuel, CTA and CDOT Announce Next Steps in Pursuit of Bus Rapid Transit on Ashland Avenue**

*CTA, CDOT will begin next phase of study, community engagement efforts to develop vision for center-running BRT, which will improve service and benefit local communities*

Mayor Emanuel, the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) and the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) today announced plans to develop a vision for faster and more reliable transit in Chicago, which will include studying center-running BRT on a 16-mile stretch of Ashland Avenue between 95<sup>th</sup> Street and Irving Park Road. CTA and CDOT will also begin working with local stakeholders on developing a plan that would create faster, more reliable bus service by increasing bus speeds by more than 80 percent during peak travel times and create economic benefits for business and residents along the entire corridor.

Today's announcement is based on a year-long assessment of various BRT alternatives along Ashland and Western avenues. Through the results of this analysis, CTA and CDOT will prioritize BRT for Ashland Avenue to meet the needs of bus riders in this corridor, which has the highest ridership on CTA's bus system and connects to seven CTA "L" stations, two Metra stations and 37 bus routes.

"Bus Rapid Transit is one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to expand and modernize our city's transit network for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and is an important component of my plan to create a world-class transit system," said Mayor Rahm Emanuel. "We will work with our local communities to best determine how to maximize the positive impacts BRT would provide to riders, while boosting local economic development and improving quality of life for all city residents."

According to the proposed design, a dedicated center bus lane in each direction would have limited stops – every ½ mile and at CTA stations as well as traffic-signal priority at intersections. New amenity-filled bus-boarding stations with enhanced, landscaped medians between stations will benefit bus riders, as well as area residents and businesses.

The vision to redesign streets to make transit more efficient includes bus-only lanes, transit signal priority and balancing the needs for all users, including autos. This vision maximizes street potential, enhances the pedestrian environment and represents the highest BRT standard.

In addition to faster travel, proposed BRT on Ashland will:

- Save about 8 minutes per trip based on the current average trip length on the #9 Ashland bus of 2.5 miles
- Preserve approximately 90 percent of parking on both sides of the street
- Enhance streetscapes with more than 75 blocks of new streetscaping, including medians, better lighting, wider sidewalks and more greenery
- Allow the potential for pre-payment for faster boarding, similar to CTA 'L' stations
- Preserve approximately 95 percent of loading zones for delivery trucks

“Ashland Avenue has the highest CTA bus ridership with more than 30,000 riders per weekday,” said CTA President Forrest Claypool. “By introducing BRT, we will be providing one in ten Chicagoans with access to faster and more reliable transit, allowing a rail-like experience at a lower cost.”

“Our goal is to balance the needs of riders, drivers, residents and businesses in this corridor,” said CDOT Commissioner Gabe Klein. “This configuration will allow us to provide the fastest bus trips and minimize disruption to traffic flow while retaining landscaped medians, as well as almost all parking and loading zones.”

While BRT analysis and design efforts will continue in 2013 for 16 miles of Ashland Avenue from Irving Park Road to 95<sup>th</sup> Street, implementation would be phased and the first phase is being designed for the central area from Cortland Ave. (1800 N) to 31<sup>st</sup> Street.

Preliminary estimates show that BRT can be implemented for approximately \$10 million per mile. Planning and design analysis to this point have been funded by FTA grants, which were supported by U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) and other members of the Illinois congressional delegation.

“More efficient transportation creates more livable communities and boosts economic development,” said Durbin. “This new route will help alleviate congestion and improve bus service along the Ashland corridor, making affordable mass transit a more attractive option for thousands of Chicagoans. I applaud Mayor Emanuel for his leadership on this project.”

Identifying Cortland Avenue to 31<sup>st</sup> Street as the first section of future implementation would provide connections to CTA rail lines, Metra and bus lines, as well as large employers like the Illinois Medical District and popular destinations like UIC, Malcolm X College, and the United Center. Though construction will initially focus on this five-mile area, improvements made during the initial phase will provide benefits for the entire 16-mile corridor through increased speeds for buses.

“For many of our 20,000 District employees and 75,000 daily visitors, BRT would offer an affordable and reliable travel option,” said Warren Ribley, Executive Director of the Illinois Medical

District Commission. "BRT will also provide quicker access to work allowing employees to increase productivity and reduce the stress of their daily commute."

"One in four households within walking distance of Ashland Avenue currently do not have a car," said Metropolitan Planning Council Executive Vice President Peter Skosey. "By implementing BRT, a community that is not served well by the rail system will have better access to jobs and connectivity to the overall transit system."

"The Ashland BRT route will offer Chicago's older residents access to critical healthcare facilities and services; it will help working families have shorter commutes; and it will provide low-income individuals with affordable transit alternatives," said Bob Gallo, State Director for AARP Illinois. "We support principles of complete streets because it enhances mobility and independence, facilitates employment opportunities and fosters social engagement."

Today's announcement is the result of a planning study by CTA and CDOT, in partnership with the Department of Housing and Economic Development (DHED) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), which included dozens of community meetings and several open houses throughout 2012 where input was collected from Chicagoans throughout the corridor and beyond.

"We know that BRT has been a magnet for economic development in other cities, including over \$4 billion in private investment along Cleveland's HealthLine" said DHED Commissioner Andrew Mooney. "Because it allows for a faster trip between neighborhoods and business districts while increasing foot traffic, BRT has also increased sales for businesses along routes in other cities. Fordham Road in the Bronx experienced a 71% increase in retail sales compared with pre-construction of the BRT and we expect the same in Chicago."

The project will now move into its concept engineering and environmental design phase where CDOT and the CTA will comprehensively analyze the route on a block-by-block basis. As it has been since CDOT and CTA first began discussing the Ashland/Western BRT concepts more than a year ago, public input will be a crucial component of developing the final plans.

Additionally, the implementation of BRT on Ashland would be phased to allow for flexibility and incremental progress. The planning study included an analysis of BRT on Western Avenue as well. Additional analysis for this corridor may be pursued in the future.

For more information, please watch this video: <http://youtu.be/6p1YGHLqDo8>.

This link additionally provides key information: <http://www.transitchicago.com/ashlandbrt/>.

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