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MAYOR LIGHTFOOT INTRODUCES ORDINANCE TO LAUNCH SMART STREETS PILOTS

CHICAGO — Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot joined Aldermen Hopkins, La Spata, Martin, Reilly, and Vasquez to introduce to City Council today a new measure that aims to improve traffic safety, enhance protections for pedestrians and bicyclists, and speed up public transportation. The Smart Streets Pilots Ordinance would establish two small-scale pilots downtown that 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 enforcement for parking in commercial loading zones.

“As traffic fatalities have risen at an alarming rate both locally and nationally in recent years, it is critically important that Chicago use every tool available to improve safety for all road users,” said Chicago Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot. “That’s why we are proud to introduce an ordinance that will enable two pilots downtown to create safer streets and a better transit experience. By testing a small-scale pilot in 2023, the City will be better able to evaluate how these initiatives will work best when implemented on a citywide scale.”

Traffic fatalities have risen sharply in Chicago and in many other large cities since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, with Chicago’s annual fatalities in 2021 more than 50% higher than in 2019. In 2021 alone, more than 170 people were killed in traffic crashes in Chicago. The Smart Streets Ordinance will encourage safer driver behavior and better parking compliance with the goal of reducing crashes and creating safer streets. Similar programs exist in cities around the country, including those already operational in New York and Seattle and those actively in the planning stages in Los Angeles and Washington D.C.

The ordinance would establish two two-year pilot programs within the boundaries of Lake Michigan to Ashland Avenue and from North Avenue to Roosevelt.

Smart Streets Pilot



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This first pilot would authorize the City to ticket registered vehicle owners by mail for various infractions, including parking in bike lanes, bus-only lanes, crosswalks, bus stops, and no parking zones. This pilot would 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 would 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 on the front of City or CTA vehicles. Once data is collected, it will be individually reviewed and then sent to Department of Finance (DOF) to be processed. When the City begins camera enforcement of parking or standing violations in areas with posted signs, the ordinance proposes a 30-day warning period for first-time violators, and anyone ticketed within 30 days of the installation of a new camera. Through the [Clear Path Relief program](#), low-income drivers will continue to be eligible for reduced-priced tickets and other vehicle related debt relief.

“This legislation will help encourage better driver behavior and increase safety for people walking, biking, and taking transit,” said Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) Commissioner Gia Biagi. “As we continue to invest heavily in infrastructure safety improvements, including expanding our network of bike and bus lanes, this program will make our transportation system safer, smarter, and more efficient.”

“CTA's bus priority network and bus stop infrastructure are key to delivering a better rider experience to more than half a million daily bus riders, especially those with disabilities, who are often negatively impacted by illegal parking,” said CTA President Dorval R. Carter Jr. “This initiative will help to amplify the benefits of bus priority projects such as Loop Link and Bus Priority Zones. I am thankful to Mayor Lightfoot for bringing this enforcement mechanism to Chicago that has worked very



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well for our peers in improving bus service.”

Smart Loading Zone Pilot

This second pilot would use license plate reading camera technology to facilitate more efficient driver or company payment and to enforce parking violations within commercial loading zones designed for 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 and reduce emissions, and create a more efficient system for payment and drop-offs for commercial drivers.

“Buses and bikes both need dedicated space on our roadways to maximize their potential as healthy, affordable, and sustainable transportation options for Chicagoans,” said Amy Rynell, Executive Director, Active Transportation Alliance. “Obstructed bus and bike lanes are more than an inconvenience for transit riders and people on bikes. Slow, unreliable bus service means missed work shifts and health care appointments. Blocked bike lanes put people on bikes in harm’s way, sometimes with deadly consequences. The Smart Streets Pilot Ordinance will provide all of us an opportunity to develop new tools to make our streets safer and our transit more reliable and complement the ongoing work to make more dedicated space for buses and bikes on our roadways.”

“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 Alderman 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 Alderman 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 introduced today,” said Alderman 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



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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,” said Alderman 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 Alderman Andre Vasquez, 40th Ward. “Coupled with the Bike Lane Enforcement that our office introduced last month, I believe this measure will save lives. I look forward to the day this pilot expands citywide and leads to safer streets for all.”

The introduction of 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-protected lanes to concrete curbs to provide increased safety for all road users.

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