

MEETING SUMMARY

Belmont Cragin Neighborhood Bike Network

Neighborhood Taskforce Meeting #1

Wednesday, January 27, 2021

4:30 – 6:00 pm

Virtual meeting; Microsoft Teams

ATTENDEES

CDOT Representatives

David Smith, Bicycle & Pedestrian Program Manager

Amanda Woodall – Divvy Program Manager

Brad Huff, TY Lin – Bikeways Program Manager

John Pickering, TY Lin – Bikeways Planner

Shameka Turner, Sam Schwartz Engineering – Program Manager SAFE Ambassadors

Johntuanay Johnson, Lyft – Outreach Coordinator Divvy

Taskforce Members

Adam Becker – Lurie Children’s Hospital

Deborah Maddox – Chicago Park District

Fabian Cisneros – Northwest Side Community Development Corporation

Irma Aponte – 30th Ward Representative

Jan Gudell – Resident + Neighborhood Advocate

Jason Estremera – Northwest Side Community Development Corporation

Jeremy Cuebas + BCYLC – Northwest Side Housing Center

Juan Cruz – Bikes and Roses + Communities United

Julia Gerasimenko – Active Transportation Alliance

Julio Rodriguez – Northwest Side Housing Center

Kevin Wunder – 36th Ward Representative

Lois Planthaber – 30th Ward Representative

Luigi Derango – Chicago Park District/Chopin Park

Lynda Lopez – MBAC Representation/Active Transportation Alliance

Maricela Mariscal – Communities United

Reid Mackin – Belmont Central Chamber of Commerce

Ruth Rosa – Lurie Children’s Hospital

Vanessa Valentin – 36th Ward Representative

Zair Menivar – 31st Ward Representative/NWSHC Youth Council

INTRODUCTION TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD BIKE NETWORK

David Smith, Bicycle & Pedestrian Program Manager, from the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) introduced the Neighborhood Bike Network initiative to the Taskforce and provided an overview of the state of bicycling in Chicago. In 2021, the city's bikeshare program, Divvy, will be expanding into the community and there is a need to provide people with the option to bike by creating safe, dedicated places to ride. David stressed the importance and benefits of biking that will only be convenient if there is a safe, connected neighborhood network that is supported by the community.

Racial Equity Impact Assessment

The Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) will help guide this effort. An REIA is a series of questions to help understand the impacts of a project (both positive and negative), especially as they relate to minority populations and those who have previously been underrepresented or left out of the decision-making process. These questions will help guide our conversations throughout the process. At the end of this effort, CDOT will develop a report to summarize the process and findings.

The Northwest Side Housing Center (NWSHC) recommended focusing on Step 3 of the REIA (Measure the Benefits and Burdens). Based on their experience, this was the part of the REIA which took the most time.

Outcomes

With help from the Taskforce, CDOT is looking to identify and design approximately 10 miles for a bicycle network in 2021 and develop recommendations for longer term projects. The Taskforce will also help develop other recommendations to making biking safe, convenient, and appealing to the neighborhood. This network, along with other recommendations from the Taskforce, will be used to make biking a viable form of transportation for all ages and abilities.

Timeline

The Neighborhood Bike Network process is meant to allow for meaningful conversations with the Taskforce and the Belmont Cragin community while still moving quickly. The primary objective of this effort is to identify, design, and install bicycle infrastructure in Belmont Cragin in 2021. This is the first of three Taskforce meetings, but other interim touchpoints and meetings will be scheduled.

WHAT TRANSPORTATION RELATED INITIATIVES IS YOUR GROUP WORKING ON IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD?

General feedback from the Taskforce reflected a community that has been advocating for new bike infrastructure and has an appetite for a neighborhood network. The large youth population has been the spark that brought this Taskforce together and have been citing concerns over the lack of safe and inclusive bike infrastructure. Some efforts taken on by Taskforce members include community rides, walkability studies, and CTA improvements – all of which have all been community driven.

Other common themes include:

- Bicycling as means of transportation to employment, particularly for young men of color
- Connecting bicycling and micromobility to business development
- Community outreach and a “boots on the ground” mentality to meet and talk with the residents at times and places convenient to residents
- Programs to lower obesity which incorporate the health benefits of biking

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Who's not here that should be? Who should we make sure we engage?

Belmont Cragin has the highest percent of young people in Chicago and reflect the largest demographic of current bicyclists, according to the Taskforce. It will be imperative to involve the **younger people as they have a large voice in their community** and are effective about spreading the word for a neighborhood bike network. Members suggested contacting **representatives at schools as well as public parks**.

Other community groups not present, but suggested, include:

- After School Matters*
- Representatives from the Parks District, specifically Riis Park*
- Senior organizations, such as Senior Suites

**CDOT noted both After School Matters and representatives from Riis Park had been contacted and they will continue to reach out these stakeholders and others that had been recommended.*

How can CDOT reach out and involve all stakeholders? And what is the most effective way?

When asked how best to reach out and notify the community of the neighborhood bike network, Taskforce members responded that taking a “**boots on the ground**” mentality has been most effective. Online-only outreach such as surveys, has not been as effective and the focus should be on real-time conversations. Meeting with **Block Club groups, intercepting people outside of popular commercial areas, and door-to-door knocking are effective**, well received forms of outreach, especially when the outreach is coming from “**trusted messengers**” from the neighborhood. Taskforce members also suggested being proactive with talking to members of the community and having a clear and concise message that can be distributed through trusted community voices. It is important to show residents reciprocity—show them how their feedback and cooperation in this process will lead to concrete changes in their neighborhood. They stressed they would be available and willing to help with outreach efforts and to spread the message to their personal networks. Other ideas mentioned were the possibility of compensating community residents for their time and expertise.

PERCEPTIONS OF BIKING IN BELMONT CRAGIN

Who is biking in Belmont Cragin and what is the perception of biking? Why do you think that is?

In Belmont Cragin, there is a high percentage of youth and young people who make up the majority of existing bicyclists. To these users, it is viewed as their main form of transportation due to the **affordability relative to car ownership** and being **more reliable and quicker than CTA buses**. These Taskforce members mentioned it is overall the best, easiest, and quickest way to reach their destinations within the community and to downtown and other parts of the city.

Older individuals perceive benefits to biking to include getting **exercise** and helping to **nurture independence** in younger people. However, even with the perceived benefits, older people have reservations regarding lack of existing bike infrastructure and have safety issues as a large portion of the community is a High Crash Corridor as defined by Chicago's Vision Zero plan.

With business owners, there is a **perception that bike infrastructure will lead to parking removal and worsened traffic congestion**.

Who's not biking in your community? Why is that?

People who are not currently biking or who are interested but concerned view biking on streets as unsafe due to the lack of infrastructure.

STREETS, DESTINATIONS, CONNECTIONS, AND BARRIERS

What are the important destinations in your neighborhood?

When asked where people are going today on their bikes, **recreation and high schools** were mentioned most frequently. Taskforce members told of groups of young people, especially in warmer months, biking between parks in their neighborhood as well as their primary means of getting to school.

- Parks, specifically:
 - Riis Park
 - Cragin Park
 - Bloomingdale Trail
- High Schools, specifically:
 - Steinmetz High School
- Shopping Centers, specifically:
 - Tony's Market
 - Belmont/Laramie forthcoming grocery store
- Transit/Healy Metra station
- Milwaukee Avenue bike lanes
- Commercial areas/Employment centers

What are the important streets in your neighborhood?

Asked what streets are important in the community, east-west commercial corridors including **Belmont** and **Diversey Avenues** were seen as vital connections, especially to get east and to downtown. However, these streets were also mentioned as being high stress with a need of better bike infrastructure to make them more inclusive and welcoming to new people biking.

- Belmont Avenue
- Diversey Avenue
- Fullerton Avenue
- Narragansett Avenue

What are the barriers to biking in your neighborhood?

The biggest barrier members of the taskforce experience to biking in their neighborhood is the **lack of bicycle infrastructure**. Diversey is the only east-west route in the community with existing marked shared lanes and is popular with people biking, but uninviting for less experienced bicyclists. Taskforce members responded positively that more people would be encouraged to bike if there was a low-stress, connected bicycle network.

Barriers include:

- Lack of existing bike infrastructure
- Lack of bicycle parking at destinations
- High-stress streets, specifically:
 - Belmont Avenue

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- Fullerton Avenue
- Cicero Avenue
- Dangerous/unpredictable behavior by motor vehicles
- Lack of outreach and community input

What are streets would you like to see bike infrastructure on?

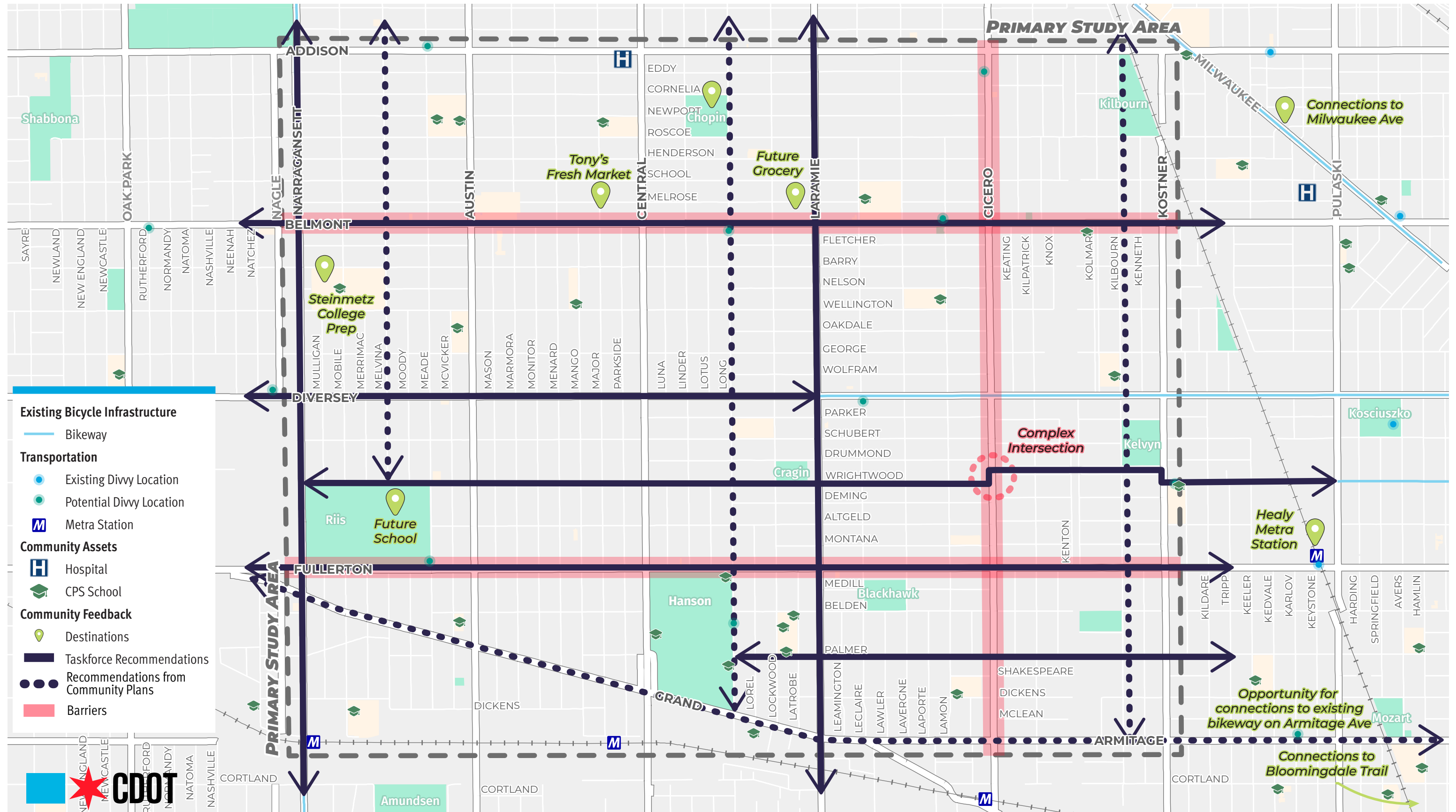
Members of the Taskforce mentioned many **east-west commercial corridors** as the most important and beneficial connections in the neighborhood. However, many of these commercial corridors are stressful to bike on and are not inviting to new or inexperienced bicyclists. Lower stress, neighborhood streets can provide useful connections and could be candidates for commercial corridor alternatives.

- Commercial corridors are vital and heavily used, but are stressful experiences for many people biking, specifically:
 - Diversey Avenue
 - Belmont Avenue – “Heart of Belmont Cragin”
 - Fullerton Avenue
- Neighborhood streets adjacent to commercial corridors and are low-stress, specifically:
 - Laramie – good alternative to Cicero Avenue
 - Wrightwood – good alternative to Diversey/Fullerton Avenues
 - Palmer – good alternative to Fullerton/Armitage avenues

BELMONT CRAGIN NEIGHBORHOOD BIKE NETWORK

When reviewing this map, keep in mind...

Did we get the Destinations right?
Are the Taskforce Recommendations & Barriers accurate?
Anything else we missed?



Existing Bicycle Infrastructure

— Bikeway

Transportation

● Existing Divvy Location

● Potential Divvy Location

M Metra Station

Community Assets

H Hospital

🎓 CPS School

Community Feedback

📍 Destinations

➡ Taskforce Recommendations

⋯ Recommendations from Community Plans

🚫 Barriers

