



Recommendations Report | April 2024

# Vision Zero Northwest Side



# Table of Contents

---

## CONTEXT + PROCESS

---

- 03 » **Introduction**
- 04 » **Why Vision Zero Northwest Side?**
- 05 » **Increasing Safety Across Communities**
- 06 » **Stories from Community Members**
- 10 » **Community Engagement and Partnerships**

## COMMUNITY NEEDS

---

- 13 » **West Town**
- 15 » **Humboldt Park**
- 18 » **West Humboldt Park**
- 19 » **Belmont Cragin**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

---

- 23 » **Guiding Principles**
- 25 » **Strategies and Actions**

# Introduction

---

## The challenge

**Even one life lost in a traffic crash is unacceptable. By changing how we design, use, and view our streets, we can make them safer for everyone.**

More than 100 Chicagoans die in traffic crashes every year, and thousands more are injured. The City of Chicago and the Department of Transportation (CDOT) believe that even one life lost in a traffic crash is unacceptable. We all have the right to walk, bike, take public transit, and drive on streets that are safe for everyone, regardless of who we are or where we live.

That's why in 2017, Chicago committed to Vision Zero, an international movement to eliminate death and serious injury from traffic crashes. Vision Zero is both a commitment and the approach to making streets safer for all road users, and it comes with a toolbox of proven interventions, strategies, and outside-the-box ideas that have saved lives around the world.

Vision Zero is an ambitious goal that requires changing how we design, use, and view our streets. In doing so, we can make them safer for everyone. Improving transportation infrastructure and designing safer streets can help ensure that neighborhoods are more welcoming, healthy, accessible, and economically vibrant.

## Why Vision Zero Northwest Side?

While crashes happen in every neighborhood, some communities are more impacted by traffic violence than others — especially Black and Brown communities and those experiencing high economic hardship. The Belmont Cragin, Humboldt Park (including the West Humboldt Park neighborhood), and West Town community areas have all been identified as high crash areas that include several high crash corridors.

**Belmont Cragin**



**Humboldt Park**



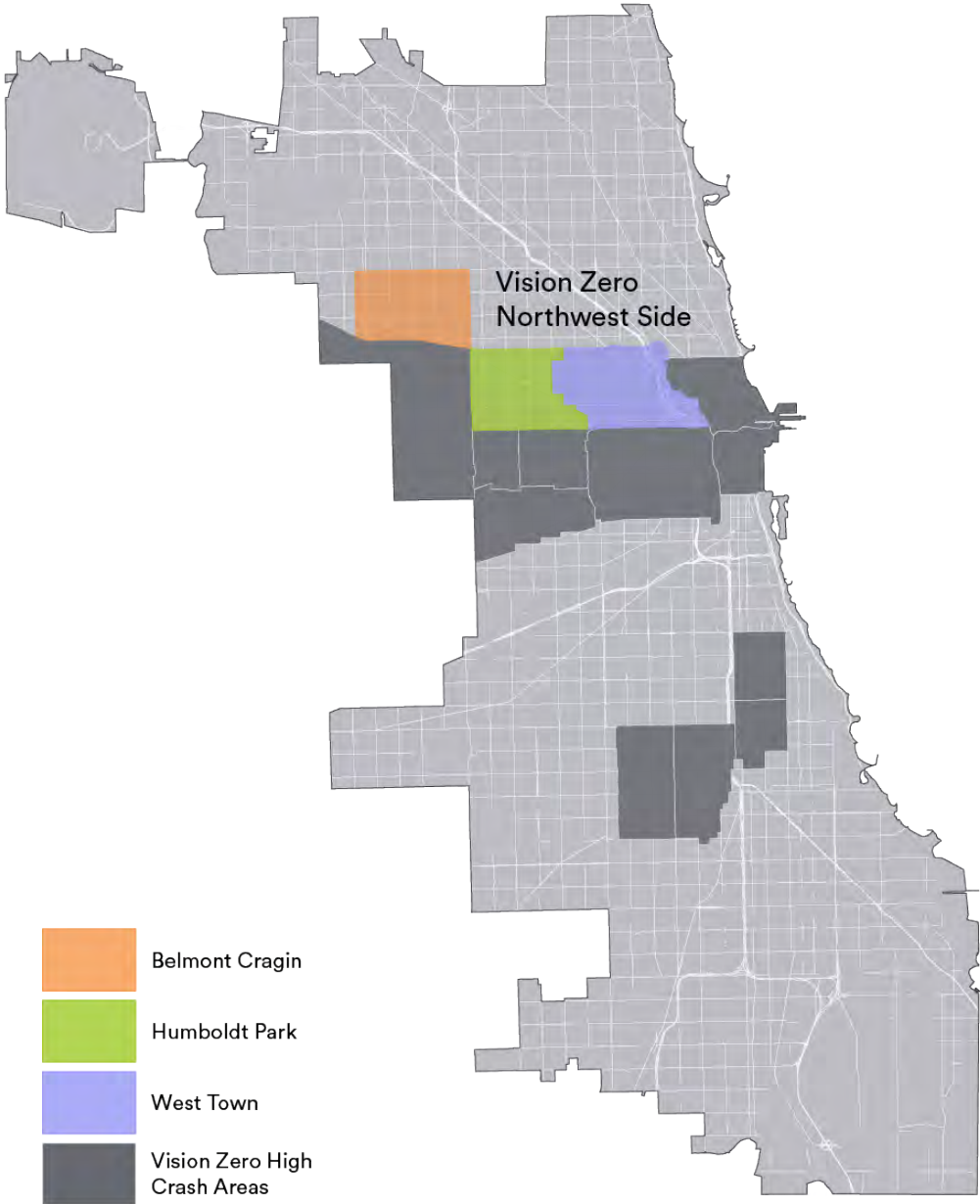
**West Town**



# Increasing Safety Across Communities

The Vision Zero Northwest project covers the West Town, Humboldt Park, and Belmont Cragin community areas, which have been identified as high crash areas. These community areas are distinct from each other and contain several unique neighborhoods.

The West Town community area includes many neighborhoods, such as Wicker Park, Ukrainian Village, and Noble Square. The Humboldt Park community area includes the West Humboldt Park and Humboldt Park neighborhoods. West Humboldt Park's transportation safety needs are so distinctive from the rest of its community area that it will be discussed separately within the plan recommendations.





## Stories from Community Members

The Northwest Side experiences more crashes than many areas of the city, but this isn't the only disparity. Disparities in transportation access, affordability, and quality, as well as personal safety exist on the Northwest Side, and not everyone has equal access to the full range of transportation options. For example, while all neighborhoods on the Northwest Side have Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) bus service, access to CTA rail lines varies.

Many individuals face additional barriers when choosing a mode of transportation. For people with visual impairments, parents with young children, and people with limited financial resources, safe transportation options can be limited. Understanding road users' experiences, challenges, motivations, and hopes is key to creating safe streets for all. The archetypes on the following pages reflect just some of the rich stories heard from people on the Northwest Side and how they approach using the street. This collection is an aggregate of experiences and insights with direct quotes from real community members and stakeholders.

The recommended strategies and interventions in this document provide starting points for applying an equitable lens when resolving for traffic crashes on the Northwest Side.

“

[There's] a mix [of new Divvy users]. There's [people who were already riding] and new bicyclists. It's out of necessity. People need to get to school and work. And what I'm hearing is even if I don't know much about biking or how to use it, I need this. I need to get from A to B. I don't have money to take the bus. I don't have a ride. My mom's working two jobs. I need this now.”

— Community Stakeholder, Belmont Cragin





## Alex (Humboldt Park, 32 years old)

**MODES:**



“ The first time I took my five-year-old son out to ride on the street was from his school. That’s five blocks north on California Avenue. We rode in the bike lane, which is not protected. I felt that I had a responsibility to teach him about how safe he needs to be, and how unsafe at times people when they drive cars can be as well.”

## Paula (Belmont Cragin, 40 years old)



**MODES:**



“ Because of recent violence and all the reckless drivers, I need to drive my kids around; before they used to walk. I’ve had to rearrange my schedule to make it happen, so now I’m multi-tasking and taking phone calls and video calls in the car.”



## Tiffany (West Town, 28 years old)

**MODES:**



“ I bike everywhere and will continue to evangelize the practice of bike commuting.”



## Norman (Northwest Side resident, 78 years old)

**MODES:**



“ If I’m going somewhere where I can cross small streets, residential streets, then I can get around. When it comes to the major intersections that are around us – Armitage, Grand, Cicero, Fullerton Avenues– those are a roll of the dice.”

## Alfonso (Northwest Side resident, 37 years old)

**MODES:**



“ I drive fast, but if I am up north I drive slower. It depends on the area. In places I don’t know or I just want to get through, I’m driving faster. Sometimes I race with other people on the road, just because it’s fun. I’ve seen the new bike stations and bike lanes. I think they’re good, but I just think they need their own space separate from cars.”



## Monica (Northwest Side resident, 15 years old)

**MODES:**



“ I usually walk here because I live pretty close by. But lately, my mom or my sister drive me. They drop me off and pick me up because they’re scared about the violence that’s been going on. I’m a brown woman and they don’t want anything to happen to me. I understand that it’s for my safety, but I would like to walk. It’s also better for the environment.”





66 Chicago  
66 Chicago  
66 Chicago

Due  
7m  
26m

CHICAGO  
BUS  
ROUTES



Metra  
Station



66 CHICAGO

BUS  
ONLY



## Community Engagement and Partnerships

Over the course of many months, the project team set up booths at community festivals, held focus groups at senior and family housing sites, presented at community round tables, engaged with community leaders and alder persons, distributed an electronic survey, and equipped teens with tools to interview their neighbors and conduct on-the-road observations. In total, over 40 learning sessions were conducted that ranged from one-on-one interviews to small focus groups to larger community events, where 50 stakeholders were engaged at a time.

In addition, the project team documented community members' perspectives on traffic safety in a video, which includes both their words and their literal perspectives through first-person Go-Pro cameras.<sup>01</sup>



01. Greater Good Studio, "Vision Zero Northwest Side," <https://bit.ly/VisionZeroNW>.

## Community Partners

This plan is the culmination of a community-centered planning process, which included input from community organizations, residents, and other stakeholders, and proposes Vision Zero solutions for the entire Northwest Side and the specific neighborhoods within it. It highlights current conditions across the area and within specific neighborhoods, while laying the foundation for solutions. Partner organizations helped ensure that community residents and stakeholders were at the center of this planning process.

Community partners on the Northwest Side included:



**Northwest Side Community Development Corporation and Northwest Center**



**West Humboldt Park Development Council**



**Puerto Rican Cultural Center**





## Severe and Fatal Crash Locations



- Fatal motor vehicle crash
- Fatal bicycling crash
- Fatal pedestrian crash

- - More severe crashes
- - Fewer severe crashes
- Community Area

West Town Traffic Crashes	Seriously Injured	Killed
› People in motor vehicles	211	8
› People biking	56	3
› People walking	77	3
› <b>Total across all modes</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>14</b>

» Map and crash data source: IDOT Crash Data, 2016-2021





## Existing Conditions

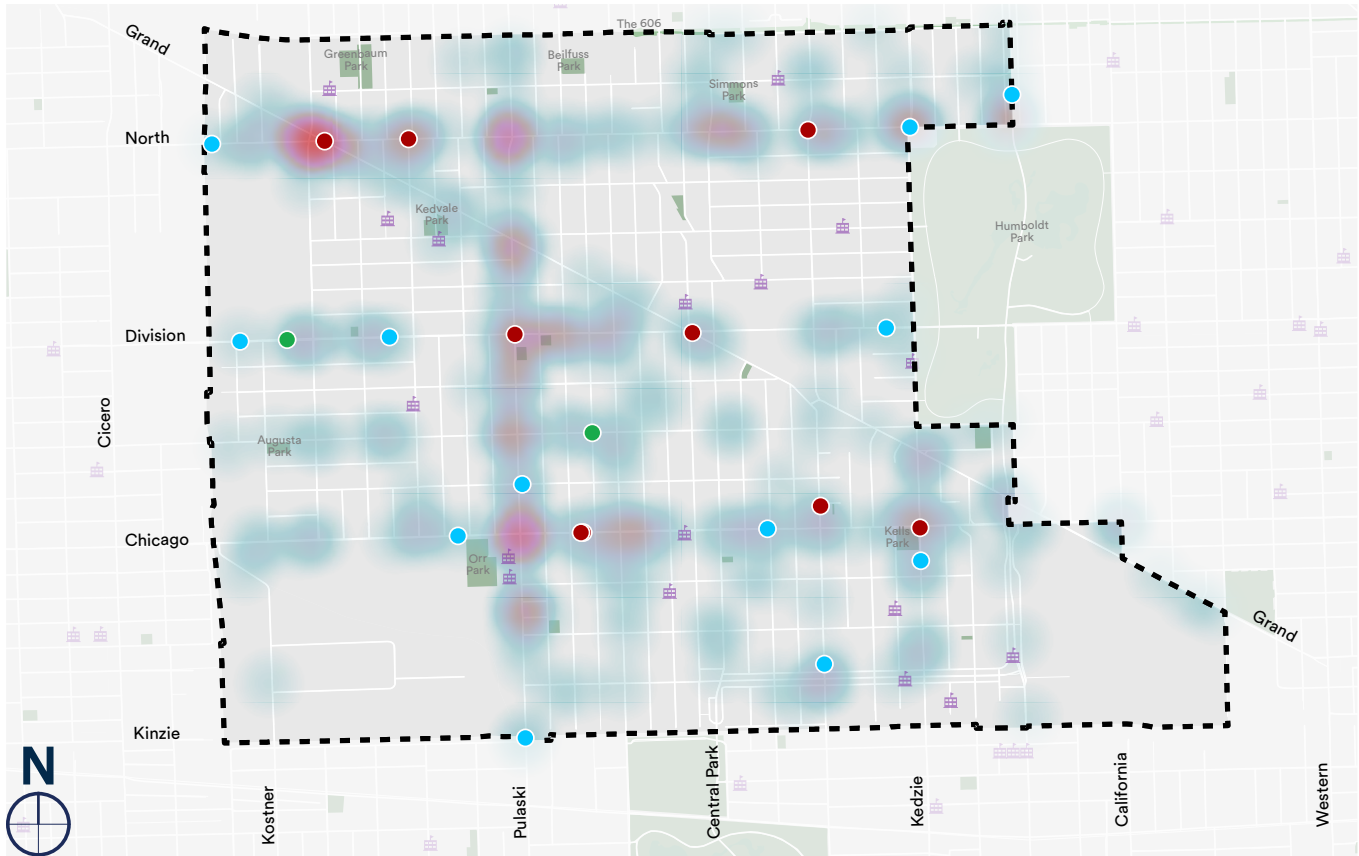
West Town features a wide range of transportation options. Though 80 percent of West Town households own a car, almost 50 percent of West Town residents commute to work by walking, bicycling, or via public transit. In addition to cycling infrastructure and bike parking on key corridors, the Bloomingdale Trail provides a safe, off-street walking and bicycling connection. There are four CTA rail stations in West Town and several key bus routes. Notable recent improvements in the neighborhood include pedestrian and bike safety infrastructure on Milwaukee Avenue and Augusta Boulevard and dedicated bus lanes on Chicago Avenue.

## Challenges & Opportunities

Insights from neighborhood residents, institutions, and community leaders highlighted several ways to improve transportation safety in West Town. Visitors driving in West Town reported the need to be alert and to share the road with cyclists. Neighbors reported aggressive, distracted driving and difficulty navigating confusing intersections, new infrastructure, and obstructed bike lanes. Stakeholders supported expanding the bike network and moving toward protected bike lanes where feasible. Ensuring safe and easy access to CTA rail stations and providing pedestrian safety amenities near schools were also priorities. Finally, neighbors would like to see better maintained bike lanes and greater sustainability features in street infrastructure, including more street trees.



## Severe and Fatal Crash Locations



- Fatal motor vehicle crash
- Fatal bicycling crash
- Fatal pedestrian crash
- - More severe crashes
- - Fewer severe crashes
- Community Area

Humboldt Park Traffic Crashes	Seriously Injured	Killed
› People in motor vehicles	239	13
› People biking	20	2
› People walking	65	9
› <b>Total across all modes</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>24</b>
» Map and crash data source: IDOT Crash Data, 2016-2021		



### **Existing Conditions of Humboldt Park & West Humboldt Park**

Many Humboldt Park and West Humboldt Park residents use a variety of modes to get around. And, even though about three-quarters of Humboldt Park households own at least one car, almost a quarter take public transportation to work. Despite there not being a CTA rail station in the Humboldt Park community area, residents access CTA rail service in adjacent neighborhoods via bus.

Both neighborhoods have access to robust pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure, including the Bloomingdale Trail at the 606, longstanding bike lanes on key corridors like Paseo Boricua on Division Street, and several Divvy stations. New pedestrian islands on North Avenue have made it easier to cross, locals have reported. Stakeholders said they are more aware of the importance of sharing the road. Drivers said they are more on the lookout for cyclists, while cyclists said they feel more respected by drivers than before. The racial backgrounds of people using forms of micro-mobility is growing more diverse, though some long-time residents are weary of the perceived connection between multi-modal transportation options and the risk of gentrification.



## Challenges & Opportunities

Community members identified several challenges to traveling safely in Humboldt Park. Streets like Grand and Milwaukee Avenues, because they run on an angle against the standard Chicago grid, include complex intersections that require particular attention to navigate safely. The lack of consistent safety interventions poses challenges, such as around Humboldt Park (the park), where the extent and condition of safety improvements vary depending on which side of the park one is on. Infrastructure maintenance was a stakeholder priority, with concerns about sidewalk condition, damaged signs, and general neighborhood upkeep and beautification. Residents also cited the pandemic as a cause for a recent uptick in unsafe driving behavior.

Many of the strategies to improve traffic safety in Humboldt Park deal with engagement and communications. For example, more consistent implementation of safety measures will require coordination and agreement among multiple wards and community organizations. It will be essential to engage in meaningful conversations with residents and other stakeholders to build community support for multi-modal transportation options. Both widespread messaging and targeted stakeholder outreach are key, as is partnering with community leaders, such as West Town Bikes, which offers a bike shop, educational programming, and events. With growing concerns about traffic safety, continuing to leverage a suite of interventions that promote safe street behavior – from education to strategic enforcement – while also addressing broader community safety issues is vital.





# West Humboldt Park



## Challenges & Opportunities

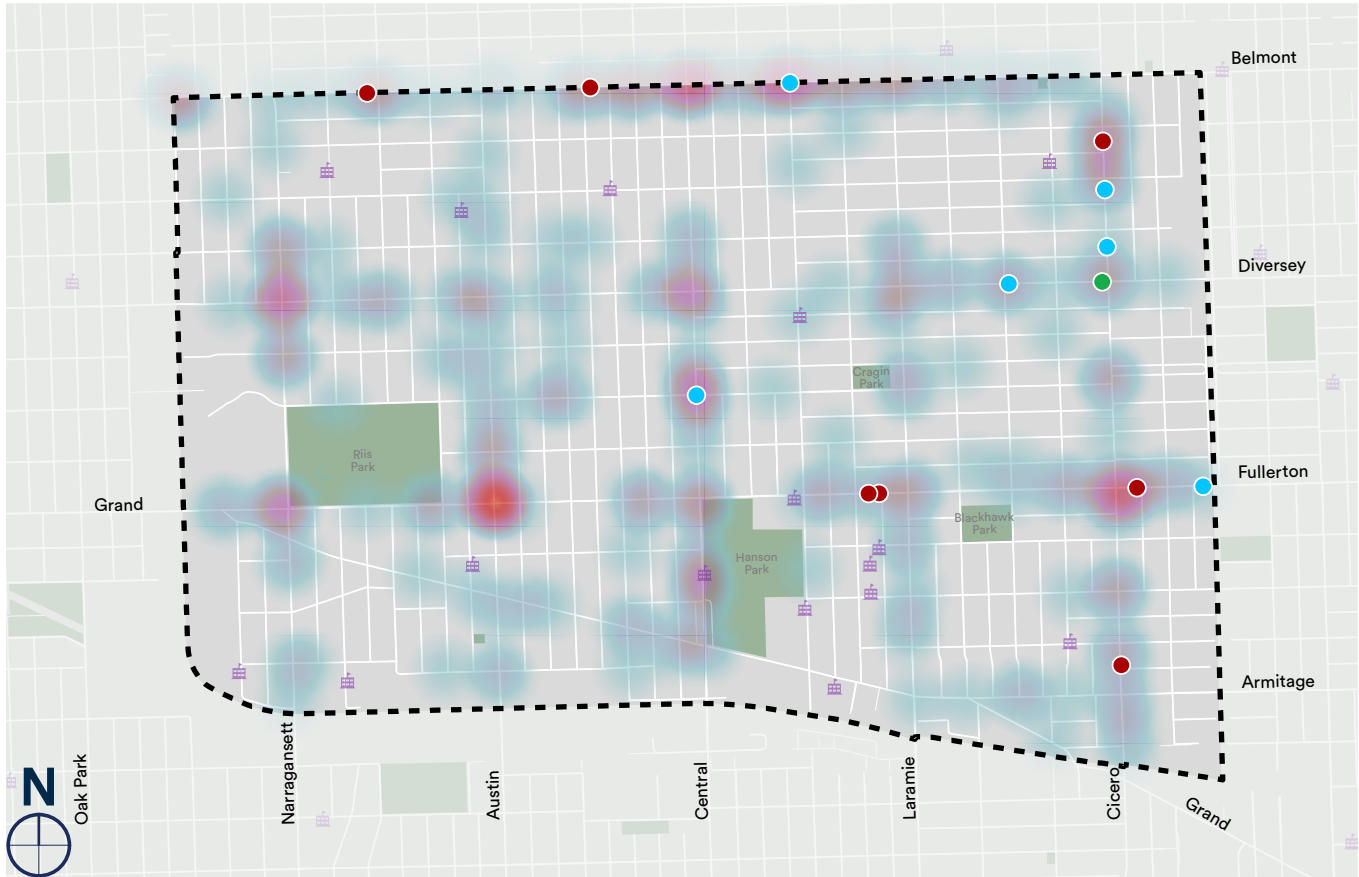
West Humboldt Park residents said that car ownership is often essential, due to historic disinvestment, limited transportation options, and the need for more micro-mobility infrastructure. The City installed a dedicated bus lane on Chicago Avenue, and responses from the community varied from supportive to skeptical. In addition to Chicago Avenue, residents make frequent use of buses on Pulaski Road. Beyond transportation-specific challenges, other conditions discourage walking and bicycling trips, including the lack of neighborhood amenities like grocery stores, occurrences of drug use, and other public safety concerns. Residents said that unsafe street behaviors, such as speeding, disregarding stop signs, and crossing medians to travel the wrong way against traffic make streets less safe.

Stakeholders identified several ways to improve transportation safety in West Humboldt Park. There is the opportunity to improve existing bicycling infrastructure and to expand the bike network. This includes increasing the number of Divvy bike share stations in the neighborhood. The presence of schools and community organizations in the vicinity of Chicago Avenue creates the opportunity to saturate nearby local streets with safety improvements, and CDOT has been working in coordination with leadership at Nash Elementary School in nearby Austin to install new safety features, but maintenance of this new infrastructure is a concern. Further community outreach and engagement, in partnership with local community organizations, would help grow support for additional traffic safety and micro-mobility efforts.

01. West Humboldt Park crash data are included within the Humboldt Park data on page 13 as it is contained within the Humboldt Park Community Area.

# Belmont Cragin

## Severe and Fatal Crash Locations



- Fatal motor vehicle crash
- Fatal bicycling crash
- Fatal pedestrian crash
- More severe crashes
- Fewer severe crashes
- Community Area

Belmont Cragin Traffic Crashes	Seriously Injured	Killed
› People in motor vehicles	196	6
› People biking	18	1
› People walking	72	7
› <b>Total across all modes</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>14</b>

» Map and crash data source: IDOT Crash Data, 2016-2021





## Existing Conditions

Belmont Cragin has historically been a more auto-centric neighborhood compared to the other Vision Zero Northwest Side areas. Public transit options are limited, with only one Metra station and no CTA rail service. Until recently, there has been limited safe bike and pedestrian infrastructure, with Divvy access arriving in 2021. A lack of transportation options has contributed to a heavy reliance on cars, with 85 percent of households owning at least one.

However, Belmont Cragin residents have more options now than ever before, due to an organized community effort to bring better and safer transportation options to the neighborhood. Community leaders, both in government and local organizations, have worked with CDOT to inform the community about the traffic safety and multi-modal transportation options. Residents are learning to navigate the new transportation landscape with the help of multi-lingual engagement materials, posters that explain how to use the new infrastructure, courses like the Northwest Center's Pump the Brakes program, and community bike rides.

## Challenges & Opportunities

While there have been many improvements, there is more to be done. Expanding micro-mobility and pedestrian safety infrastructure, encouraging commuter rail use, and improving the public transit experience would help bring about safer, more accessible and attractive transportation options.

Residents reported that, while safety interventions have helped, some drivers adjust their routes to avoid them and continue traveling at high speeds. Installing new safety infrastructure in a more systematic way, such as with the neighborhood bike network, helps people travel safely while discouraging the shifting of dangerous driving behaviors onto other streets. Other residents shared stories about broken signs, faded crosswalks, shattered bus shelters, and bike lanes covered in snow – each emblematic of historical





inequities in our city – and expressed worry about maintenance of new infrastructure.

Residents would like to see safety infrastructure that includes more green elements, such as street trees, landscaped curb extensions, and permeable surfaces. Residents shared that they are still adjusting to new safety infrastructure, and while many have embraced the new amenities, others were unsure how to navigate the changing streetscape, while others complained about what appeared to them as “road clutter.”

#### ENGAGEMENT SPOTLIGHT:

### Belmont Cragin

#### — Encouraging multi-mobility

Community involvement has been pivotal in helping shape the future of transportation in Belmont Cragin. The 2016 Belmont Cragin Quality of Life plan highlighted the need for Divvy access, and the 2019 Avenues for Growth plan included a comprehensive vision for transforming transportation in the area. Local organizations such as the Northwest Development Corporation, the Northwest Center, and the Belmont Cragin Youth Leadership Council have led advocacy efforts to expand micro-mobility options. These efforts have spurred action.

The summer of 2021 saw major bike infrastructure improvements in Belmont Cragin, including 11 new Divvy stations, implementation of the first phase of a neighborhood bike network, and more than 100 new bike racks. Adding greenery throughout Belmont Cragin has been a collaboration between the City and local community, with businesses installing planters along Fullerton Avenue and residents planting in the roundabouts. Many traffic calming and pedestrian safety infrastructure projects have also been built, which could encourage people to walk to Belmont Cragin’s commercial corridors by making trips easier and more pleasant.



COFFEE  
& bakery





## Guiding Principles

The Plan follows three guiding principles:

### **Principle 1** Look at traffic safety holistically

Non-transportation-related barriers keep people from choosing to walk, ride a bike, or take transit. City agencies must coordinate on issues such as community safety, storm water flooding, and lack of proximity to jobs and neighborhood amenities that impact people's transportation decisions.

### **Principle 2** Center culture and community

Streets that reflect the rich culture of surrounding communities, with places to see and things to do, invite people to stay and not just pass through. Culturally-responsive artwork can enhance community pride and foster a greater sense of belonging. A range of destinations, gathering places, and greenery also motivate people to slow down and stay a while.

### **Principle 3** Prioritize sustainability

Northwest Side residents expressed interest in more green infrastructure in their neighborhoods, where truck volumes and industrial uses contribute to pollution and create unsafe and unpleasant street conditions. In addition to improving traffic safety, street infrastructure can provide much-needed environmental benefits.





*Recommendations listed in this plan are informed by community and stakeholder feedback, crash data, and guiding principles of transportation equity.*



**The Plan aims to encourage micro-mobility, make infrastructure work better, and promote good behavior through the following strategies:**

- » Improve public transit experiences
- » Make walking and micro-mobility safe, accessible, and desirable
- » Build and maintain safe streets infrastructure that is widespread, systematic, and visible
- » Improve and expand street safety education for all modes of transportation
- » Leverage enforcement mechanisms appropriately

## Strategies and Actions

### Improve public transit experiences

#### ACTIONS:

- › Expand awareness of public transit options with easier-to-read maps, more information on reduced-fare programs, and improved transit wayfinding signage.
- › In coordination with the CTA, enhance bus stop amenities and pedestrian infrastructure with more comfortable seating, rain protection, lighting, and digital bus displays.
- › Improve travel time and reliability on high-ridership corridors by identifying and implementing bus priority infrastructure on high-ridership corridors.





## Make walking and micro-mobility safer, easier, and more desirable

### ACTIONS:

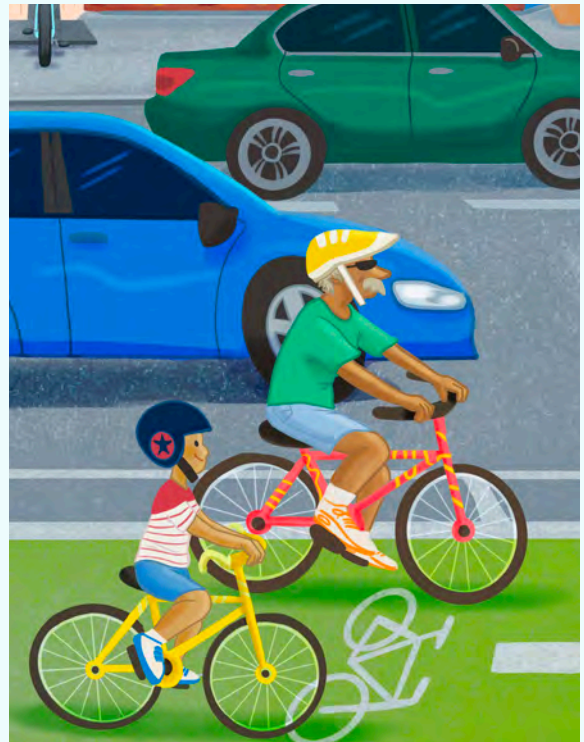
- › Implement traffic-calming measures, and ensure that pedestrian infrastructure is accessible and well-maintained near schools, parks, senior centers, and grocery stores.
- › Make the walking environment more pleasant and comfortable with streetscape elements such as landscaping and lighting.
- › Expand low-stress bike networks with protected bike lanes along key corridors and amenities such as secure bicycle parking.
- › Expand Divvy and scooter infrastructure, awareness, and access by highlighting the diversity of micro-mobility users and promoting reduced-fare programs.
- › Explore alternative micro-mobility programs and incentives for individuals to better meet the needs of more people, such as those with disabilities, families with young children, and youth.
- › Partner with local organizations, businesses, and housing developments to offer micro-mobility amenities and support education, access, and awareness.
- › Support the function of arterial streets as connections between neighborhoods through branding, streetscape elements, micro-mobility improvements, and wayfinding.



## Build and maintain safe streets infrastructure that is widespread, systematic, and visible

### ACTIONS:

- › Consider the impacts of safety improvements not only on the streets on which they are located, but on nearby streets which may see an increase in "cut-through" traffic.
- › Where new and potentially unfamiliar infrastructure is located, integrate more color, artwork, and lights to make more visible.
- › Prioritize locating safety infrastructure and programming where children, older adults, and families spend time.
- › Increase funding for both City-led and community-supported maintenance projects.
- › Coordinate across departments to enhance capacity for efforts such as trash removal, snow clearance, and flood mitigation.





## Improve and expand street safety awareness and education for all modes

### ACTIONS:

- › Ensure that informational signage around new interventions is clear, consistent, highly-visible, and multilingual.
- › Tailor a social marketing campaign with a curriculum, messaging, and toolkit of resources that helps people adapt their behavior.
- › Integrate educational campaigns into formal trainings, certification programs, and community settings.



## Leverage enforcement mechanisms appropriately

### ACTIONS:

- › Prioritize automated enforcement and explore alternatives to traditional enforcement strategies for traffic safety and education.





## Credits

This community engagement process and resulting recommendations report were a collaboration between the Chicago Department of Transportation, the consulting firm Greater Good Studio, and various community partners.

Greater Good Studio is a design firm dedicated to the social sector. They partner with organizations and communities to design human-centered solutions and build capacity for social innovation.



---

### Illustrations by:

**ESTEFANIA  
THOMPSON** 

*Estefania Thompson is a Latina visual storyteller with a love for beautiful, expressive, and minimal illustrations.*

