



PORTFOLIO

FOR COMPLETION OF MASTER'S IN URBAN PLANNING AND POLICY

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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS CHICAGO
UPP595





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About

Loop

Making systems work for us.

Purpose

I began my journey towards urban planning with a frustration over how **our built systems make life unnecessarily harder for people without cars**, and the wide-reaching implications this has to health, housing, inequality, economic disparity, and environmental concerns. Initially, I got invested while training for a half marathon with long runs through the city, where **it became extremely clear to me that pedestrians were an afterthought** in the city I was running through.

As I began to get more involved advocating around issues in our urban form, **so many related fields came back to transportation**. Apartments were being blocked because they had too little parking, leading to a housing crisis. Segregation was continuing to split apart sections of the city where expressways tore apart neighborhoods. Flooding increased after impermeable surfaces drained water into century-old sewers. Asthma rates among children increased because tire pollution and exhaust fumes blew into their school playgrounds. And yet, traffic was terrible, and **no one seemed to like having to go anywhere**.

I know that **localized solutions can remedy these issues**, and helping to solve these systemic problems would be an impactful goal for my future working life. Solving wicked problems like climate change, the housing crisis, or the transit death spiral requires building positive-feedback solutions, which start small and grow. I hope to **benefit future generations by developing resilient systems that generate positive feedbacks**.

There's a wholesale change needed in the way we structure our cities, and in how we make decisions, that I am getting involved in improving. I don't yet know what work I will do in the field, whether for transportation or in ways that interact with it. But, **my priority is to promote simple changes that improve daily outcomes**, and I will continue to advocate for safer, cleaner, and more efficient transportation options in my community.

Background

- I pursued an undergraduate degree in music composition at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL, which entailed spending a lot of time organizing musicians to create new works. I eventually decided that I could have a more tangible beneficial impact outside of music.
- I worked more than five years at the Alumni Relations department of Northwestern University. I learned a lot about how to work with large datasets, and non-profit fundraising.
- I returned to being a student full-time while pursuing my masters degree in urban planning and policy at UIC, learning theories and practices of urban development. In my free time, I participate in and support advocacy groups working on transportation and housing issues in Chicago.

Austin Busch

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Education

August 2023 – May 2025

MASTER OF URBAN PLANNING & POLICY, University of Illinois Chicago

Left prior workplace to transition into a career in planning and public policy, focusing on urban mobility, supportive land use policies, system administration, and project funding.

- Vice President of Urban Planning and Policy Student Association (UPPSA)
- Project Manager for 60-page Climate Action Plan for River Forest, IL
- Public Transit Planning and Management (PTPM) Certificate

Class of 2017

BACHELOR OF MUSIC, Northwestern University

Student of the Bienen School of Music, with focus on music composition.

- Coordinated and produced large ensemble recitals featuring 40+ musician

Experience

June 2024 – May 2025

MAYORAL FELLOW, City of Chicago

A one-year fellowship working in the executive branch of the city, on assignment out to multiple city departments and stakeholders for concurrent project-based work.

- Facilitated design and publishing of a “New Ideas” booklet for the 2024 Fellows Cohort, and submitted three policy proposals
- Coordinated the publication of the Mayor’s Youth Council policy proposal booklet
- Drafted a strategic plan for innovation for the Department of Technology and Innovation concerning cross-departmental project management
- Prepared informational memos and presentations on transportation policy topics
- Researched parking minimums, bus rapid transit, and library facility co-locations
- Supported grant applications for federal funding opportunities

January 2024 – May 2024

GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANT, University of Illinois Chicago

Assisted with intro-level undergraduate course, “Concepts in Geography”.

- Demonstrated classroom management in two weekly discussion sections of 20+ undergraduates
- Graded assignments, tracked attendance, and developed supplementary presentations

October 2017 – August 2023

PROGRAM ASSISTANT, Northwestern University Alumni Relations

Supported the Leadership Annual Giving team, stewarding and cultivating \$1000+/year donors for all University programs, and supporting six volunteer boards.

- Maintained and analyzed alumni giving records, ensuring accuracy and completeness
- Organized weekly stewardship and biannual solicitations mass mailings to donors
- Produced materials for 12 annual volunteer board meetings in six cities
- Tracked team budget expenditure, and processed staff travel expenses and orders
- Responded to donor support phone line and email, representing the University

A photograph of the interior of Grand Central Terminal in New York City. The space is vast and ornate, featuring tall, fluted columns supporting a high ceiling with a decorative pattern of circular medallions. A large arched window is visible in the background. In the foreground, several people are sitting on long wooden benches. A prominent red text overlay reads "Artifacts" in a large, bold, sans-serif font. To the right of the text, there are three small blue rectangular shapes of increasing size from left to right.

Artifacts





Policy Writing and Project Coordination

10 Bright Climate Future 2035

14 New Ideas 2025

17 Taipei, Taiwan: City as a Living Lab

Bright Climate Future 2035

2nd Semester | UPP506 | 10% Project Ownership | (Project Manager Role)

As part of a 13-person team developing a **60-page climate action plan** for suburban River Forest, IL, worked as an overall project manager, led research into built environment and energy policies, and coordinated the report's graphic design and presentation. The end product was a bold, well-packaged strategy to decarbonize the village through community-driven processes.

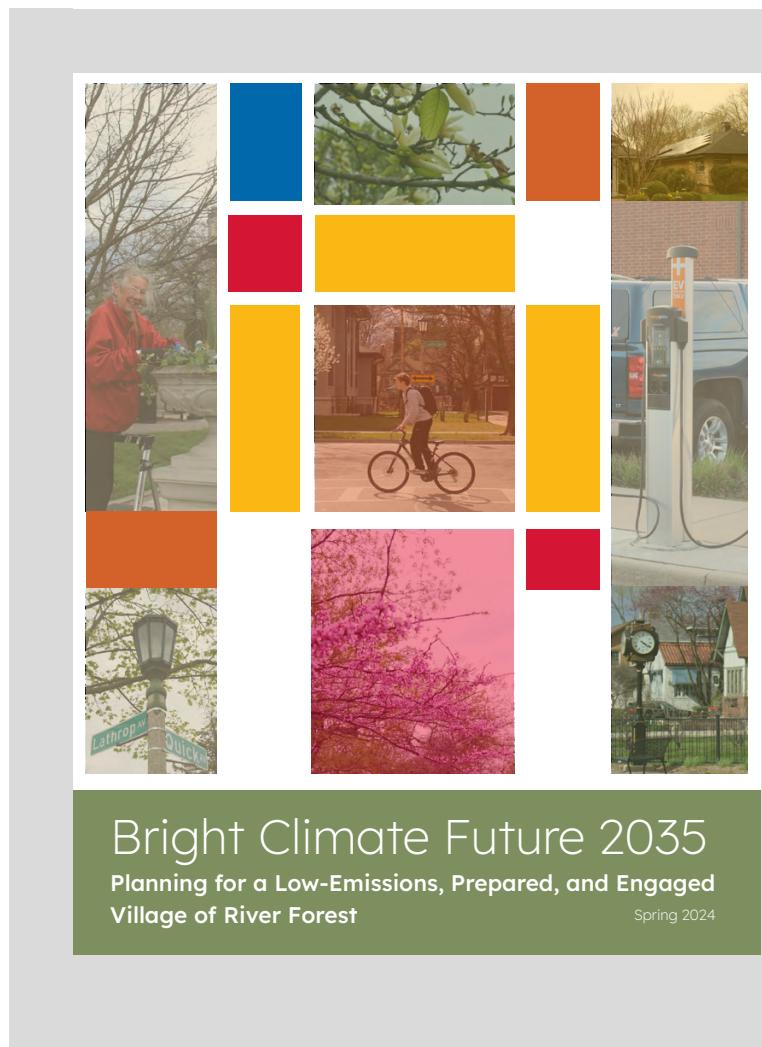
Key Contributions:

- Co-led project through the recommendations and drafting phases
- Acquired novel data sources on building footprints from County Assessor's Office and EV Ownership from Secretary of State's Office
- Coordinated a comprehensive built environment retrofit process write-up
- Presented recommendations to municipal leaders with Q&A

Key Takeaways:

- This plan was the result of a difficult process with a 12-member group, but the end result was something I am especially proud of. The document itself is a thoughtful, clear, and engaging design that explains concepts visually. The plan itself was optimistic but pragmatic, with clear goals directly related to research about initial conditions.
- Leading the chapter on Buildings & Energy expanded my understanding of the difficulties in tackling climate change outside of my principal field. This artifact demonstrates my multi-disciplinary interests in addressing systemic problems through clear communication, pragmatic suggestions, and iterative improvements.

Available here: [Full Contributions to Report](#)



Goals

Considering River Forest's current trajectory, *Bright Climate Future 2035* imagines three climate futures for the Village, beyond a business-as-usual approach. These future outcomes are not mutually exclusive, and are intended to be reached in tandem. Each individual future outcome is expressed in a goal, which guides the actions recommended in *Bright Climate Future 2035*.



THE LOW-EMISSIONS VILLAGE

Future outcomes:

- Delay or avoid the worst consequences of extreme climate change
- Become a model community for future transformation
- Enjoy cost savings from increased efficiency

Goal:

65% reduction in localized greenhouse gas emissions from a 2007 baseline within 10 years.



THE ADAPTABLE & PREPARED VILLAGE

Future outcomes:

- Reduce risk of expensive property damage and health outcomes
- Protect and improve natural ecosystems
- Prevent declining property values

Goal:

Upgrade infrastructure to be resilient to new environmental risks resulting from a global temperature increase of 2 degrees celsius.



THE ENGAGED & INFORMED VILLAGE

Future outcomes:

- Increase community buy-in
- Participation is inclusive of diverse voices from across the community
- Community feels secure and prepared for the future ahead

Goal:

Empower each community member to take ownership of the actions and results of their current and future practices regarding environmental stewardship and climate change mitigation.

ACTION

1.1 Weatherization: Reduce Energy Consumption by Retrofitting Buildings To Be Insulated from External Temperatures

The Low-Emissions Village | The Adaptable & Prepared Village | The Engaged & Informed Village

WHY

River Forest's current built environment consists largely of older, detached houses that were originally constructed before modern standards for building insulation. Weatherization retrofits can reduce the cost to heat and cool these houses, as well as lower the associated GHG emissions produced. While some retrofitting of houses has likely occurred already, it is unclear to what extent this has occurred, and how effective these retrofits have been in increasing building performance. The proposed sub-actions address immediate diagnostics and upgrades for existing houses, as well as long-term updates to the Village's building code for replacement projects.

WHAT

1.1.1 Develop in-person and online community education programs on a recurring basis to teach residents how to prepare houses for seasonal efficiency upgrades.

1.1.2 Develop a community hub for easy access to acquire materials and borrow equipment required to implement seasonal upgrades.

1.1.3 Update building codes to efficiency metrics at or above recommended standards for the [IECC Climate Zone 5](#)¹⁹, and require permitted home improvement projects to meet these metrics.

1.1.4 Encourage new multi-family home development within the Village to increase residential density in more efficient housing.

HOW

- Encourage the use of smart thermostats in all housing units, including adopting municipal requirements for their installation in rental properties.
- Encourage the use of LED lighting for all fixtures, including adopting municipal requirements for their use in commercial properties.
- Develop a public education program covering seasonal weatherization for homeowners, in partnership with the library, historical society, and other community institutions.
 - The program should include online and annual in-person instruction.
 - For winter preparation, weather sealing and stripping techniques should be demonstrated. For summer, window film, reflective curtains, and airflow should be emphasized.

- Additional gardening programs about ivy, trellis, and tree maintenance should also be developed in partnership with local community organizations.
- In partnership with the local library, enable DIY diagnostics via a tool lending library for home efficiency detection, including thermal leak detectors, thermal imaging cameras, and plug-in power meters.
- Consider co-locating a centralized distribution and training hub for window sealing tape, window insulation film, and weather stripping for all residents each fall.
- Adopt building codes that require new roofs and roofing replacement projects to utilize [“Cool Roof” materials](#)²⁰ to reflect unwanted heat, including green roofs, reflective paint, or brighter colors.
- Adopt building codes requiring new construction and extensive retrofitting projects to meet insulation standards as appropriate for [IECC Climate Zone 5](#):
 - Attic: R60 or higher
 - Wall cavities: R13 or higher
 - Floor: R30 or higher
- Adopt building codes that require new windows and window replacements have a U-value of 0.3 or lower, and a SHGC-value of 0.35 or lower, for [Energy Star’s Northern Climate Zone](#).²¹
- Encourage [“passive building” principles](#)²² to be incorporated into new structures and extensive retrofitting projects, with specific metrics for airtightness to be inspected with a [blower door test](#).²³

¹⁹International Code Council. (2021). Chapter 3: General Requirements. Retrieved from <https://codes.iccsafe.org/content/IECC2021P2/chapter-3-ce-general-requirements>

²⁰U.S. Department of Energy. (n.d.). Cool Roofs. Retrieved from <https://www.energy.gov/energysaver/cool-roofs>

²¹U.S. Department of Energy. (n.d.). Energy-Efficient Window Coverings. Retrieved from <https://www.energy.gov/energysaver/energy-efficient-window-coverings>

²²Passive House Institute US. (n.d.). Passive Building Principles. Retrieved from <https://www.phius.org/passive-building/what-passive-building/passive-building-principles>

²³U.S. Department of Energy. (n.d.). Blower Door Tests. Retrieved from <https://www.energy.gov/energysaver/blower-door-tests>

Alternative Funding Sources

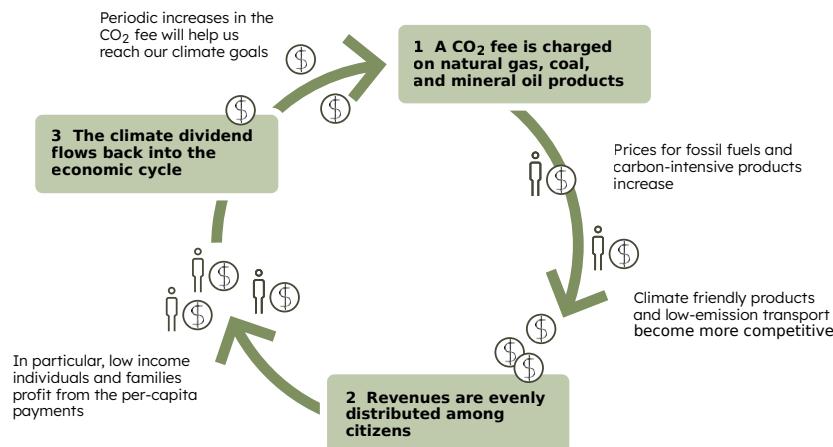
It is clear that River Forest will not meet the goal of reducing emissions by 65% without some ability to fund necessary community upgrades. While a portion of the required changes may be paid for with the existing grant or rebate programs listed above, River Forest is at a disadvantage when applying for federal grants, as most are targeted towards low-income residents and communities.

While this is a drawback for higher-level government funding, it shows that the community has considerable locally-held resources to make the required changes, and should consider how various funding schemes might allow this to happen. Most of the recommended actions in *Bright Climate Future 2035* have high up-front costs, but see returns such as lower energy bills, better health outcomes, and reduced flood risk over a longer timespan. The following financial solutions are suggestions of ways to amortize the initial cost over a longer time period, within the constraints of municipal financing:

AN ENERGY EMISSION FEE AND DIVIDEND PROGRAM

- **How it works:** Utility bill taxes for natural gas and electricity, as well as motor fuel sales taxes, would include a local fee commensurate with the amount of GHG emissions associated with the usage of such fuel. The entirety of the program's revenue would be rebated as a dividend to all residents with equal apportionment.
- **Why it works:** On average, every resident would not be gaining or losing money. In practice, the highest emitters would be losing money, and the lowest emitters would be financially rewarded. As high emitters are thus incentivized to reduce emissions, the overall average emissions will gradually lower.
- **Why it's recommended:** While introducing a new tax is difficult, the rebate structure is in line with equitable practices. Larger homeowners will be incentivized to make significant improvements to their home HVAC efficiency, while smaller homeowners with less energy consumption per capita will see a rebate.

Figure 29: An example of a carbon dividend cycle⁶⁷



A NEW TIF DISTRICT

- **How it Works:** Increases in property value are set aside for a special taxing body, which can distribute funds towards a variety of local projects.
- **Why it works:** River Forest is a desirable place to live, but also a costly place to do public works projects. Since these benefits are widespread throughout the community, a TIF ensures those benefits are reinvested at the community level as well. The Village can consider building a new TIF District in our recommended transit improvement corridors.
- **Why it's recommended:** As little new housing is built in River Forest, a lack of housing supply with steady or increasing demand will increase property values. Local property value increases can be reinvested to local projects.

⁶⁷ RobbieanMorrison. CO2 (or carbon) fee and climate dividend scheme. 2017. Wikimedia. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ccl_climate_dividend_cycle_english.svg

New Ideas 2025

Summer | Internship | 20% Project Ownership (Design Team Lead)

Participated in the annual **public policy proposal publication** as part of the 2025 cohort of mayoral fellows. Policy proposals engage multiple city departments and agencies to elucidate on opportunities to improve outcomes for city residents. The final publication is fully designed and produced by fellows.

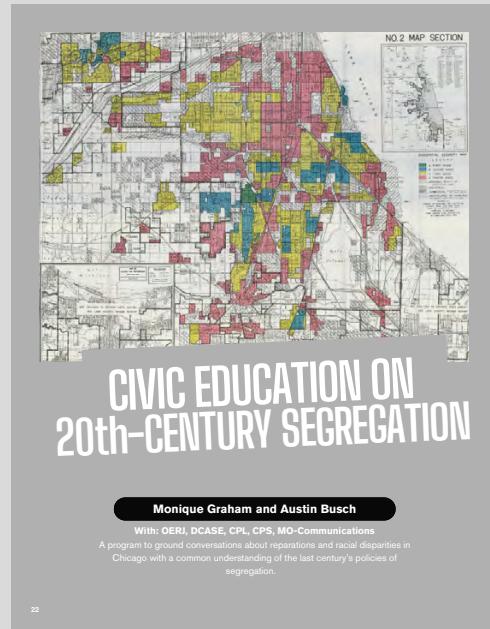
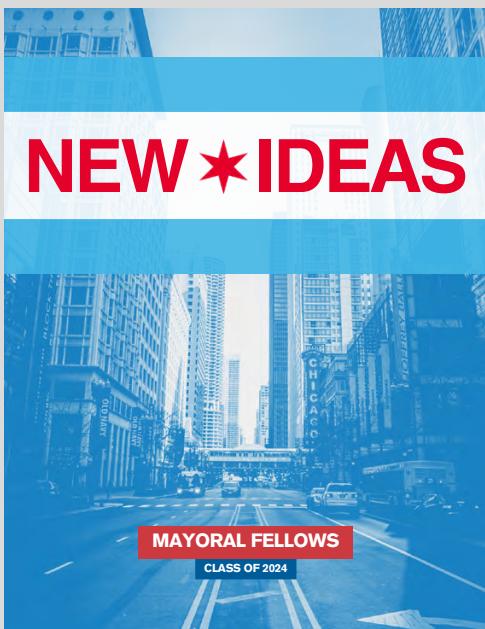
Key Contributions:

- Authored three policy proposals included in submission:
 - » Civic Education for 20th-Century Segregation
 - » Traffic-Light Events
 - » Business Impact Mitigation Loans
- Coordinated design process with small team
- Facilitated proofing and printing

Available here: [Full Contributions to Report](#)

Key Takeaway:

- The internship, and this project as the capstone at the end of it, emphasized the intricacies of starting something new in a municipal bureaucracy of siloed departments. Coordination between these intra-governmental stakeholders is crucial to success, and this project provided a way to communicate across a wide range of city areas the potential for coordinated action in novel policy areas.



Civic Education on 20th-Century Segregation

WHY IT MATTERS

Mayor Johnson's [Executive Order No. 2024-1](#), the Black Reparations Agenda, details numerous historic policies employed by multiple levels of government in the Jim Crow era that "legalized and perpetuated racial segregation and discrimination". The inequitable use of eminent domain for urban renewal projects, as well as the racial covenants and lending practices that led to segregation in public housing, redlined neighborhoods, and white flight to suburbs, are direct results of institutional policies. Chicagoans are not frequently reminded of this history which continues to be reflected in public health and economic disparities between neighborhoods. Anecdotal experiences from citizens have also highlighted limited knowledge of redlining and its long-standing consequences among its beneficiaries and students at different levels of education. Therefore, a common public understanding of these historic and systemic segregation policies, led by community expertise at all education stages, will help guide constructive civic dialogue about overcoming geographic disparities, and will elevate conversations around the need and purpose of reparations.

HOW IT WORKS

This program will help residents of all ages understand how past policies and governmental decisions have impacted the development patterns of the city, and make a case for prioritizing equity when considering public programs to mitigate past harms.

Direct civic education will target different educational levels, from children in school to adults visiting the library. Educational resources will be developed in collaboration with community members and organizations, leading to an adoptable curriculum program or supplement for local educational systems to incorporate as part of their regular civics curriculum, in partial fulfillment of [Section 27-20.4 of the Illinois School Code](#). This coordinated approach should bring together existing non-profit and philanthropic educational work with museum curators, academic researchers, and local community organizations to direct learners towards local resources.

To advance the conversation in the realm of public information and news media, a simultaneous communications strategy for city departments and officials should be developed. With a coordinated communications effort, the city can ensure topics like urban renewal, redlining, and housing covenants are in the public vernacular.

NEXT STEPS

- OERJ should bring together community-based conversation leaders to collaborate with teachers to develop an adoptable curriculum for students at Chicago Public Schools (as well as private or suburban schools) about the lasting local impact of discriminatory policies. This will consist of educational materials, reading lists, and recommended guest speakers and field trips.
- CPL should develop branch exhibits featuring material collections, and books such as [Richard Rothstein's The Color of Law](#), [Mehrsa Baradaran's The Color of Money](#), [Ben Austin's High-risers](#), and [Linda Gartz's Redlined](#). This can be expanded in a programming series and social media activation highlighting the CPL's Chicago Department of Urban Renewal Records [digital archive](#).
- DCASE should consciously promote and provide support for work that contextualizes the effects of segregation policies, such as [Redefining Redlining](#), the [Maxwell Street Market](#), and the [National Public Housing Museum](#). DCASE should also renew efforts towards the [Chicago Monuments Project](#), to continue reconsidering historical narratives long held in physical form, and create new or recontextualized artistic dedications.
- OERJ can coordinate the development of a public official communication guide for use by the Mayor's Office speechwriters, press contacts, and city and departmental communications staff. Prepare and regularly update talking points, factoids, and historical events that can be quickly incorporated into relevant speeches, panel discussions, and press releases.

TRAFFIC-LIGHT EVENTS

Austin Busch
With: OEMC, BACP, CDOT, CTA
A suite of policies to encourage car-free travel to major events.

BUSINESS IMPACT MITIGATION LOANS

Austin Busch
With: BACP, DPD, DOF, DOL
Support local businesses through periods of lost revenue due to city construction projects.

Traffic-Light Events

WHY IT MATTERS

Major events are predictable causes of traffic congestion, as large numbers of people travel to and from a specific geographic area. Though major events already undergo traffic planning and coordination, this planning typically has not prioritized space-efficient transportation options such as transit or biking. Instead, attendees increase local congestion by opting for ride hail services, and neighboring areas are leveled for surface parking lots. This impedes the quality of life for residents near major event spaces, reduces the safety of pedestrians, and worsens the experience of event attendees. By giving pedestrians, bikers, and bus riders prioritization, event attendees will be encouraged to choose options that relieve local congestion, reduce transportation costs, and encourage local business development.

HOW IT WORKS

Local street closures will be formalized with deployable barriers to all safe pedestrian and cyclist routes onto neighborhood grids. Consolidated bus boarding areas with dedicated priority lanes and off-board payment queues will speed up transit through event areas, and increase transit capacity in the venue's vicinity. Likewise, ride hail services will be compelled to use geofencing to organize a designated waiting lot and utilize queue-based operations, as practiced at O'Hare airport.

Where possible, nearby parking lots will be considered for redevelopment into mixed-use districts, with development fees directed towards parking consolidation in park-and-ride lots with shuttle service or CTA rail access. TIF districts may be enacted to enable transit signal priority and bus queue infrastructure. Event surcharges will go towards covering an amortized event transportation fee, which will provide free transit and bike share access to and from events, modeled by similar programs in San Francisco and Seattle.

NEXT STEPS

- Organize a standing working group on major events led by OEMC, involving Choose Chicago, CDOT, BACP, CTA representatives, and Divvy representatives.
- Develop actionable plans for event transportation management at major venues: Wrigley Field, Guaranteed Rate Field, Soldier Field, the United Center, and Grant Park.
- Apply lessons learned from major sporting venues to large concert halls and special events, including major parades, street festivals, music festivals, and road races.
- Review alternatives for clear bag policies, including bike and pedestrian valets to store personal effects or bike helmets outside of the venue itself.
- Designate special event zones and adopt ordinances requiring Transit Network Providers to follow operating protocols that geofence event geographies.
- Partner with CTA and RTA to develop an integrated transit pass with major event tickets, and work with City Council to require adopting the pass as an event permit precondition for large ticketed events.

Business Impact Mitigation Loans

WHY IT MATTERS

Major construction projects including large private developments, public road repaving, and transit system improvements have a propensity to disrupt longtime local businesses that rely on foot traffic to maintain a stable cash flow. While the end result of this construction may improve sales at nearby businesses, the interim construction period must be weathered, and vulnerable businesses may not survive. Project planning that leads to partial closures instead of complete access control leads to longer project timelines, effectively driving up construction project costs. Providing flexibility to construction planning by offering affected businesses favorable loans can lead to faster, cheaper construction of city infrastructure upgrades while promoting community stability.

HOW IT WORKS

In a program informed by examples in Seattle, Cleveland, and the Twin Cities, businesses that will have access impeded by a city-funded construction project can apply for mitigation loans that will cover the period of constrained access during construction projects. Loan amounts will be determined by reported taxable revenue, using a three-year pre-project baseline average to calculate lost revenue during the project period.

For areas covered by a Tax Increment Financing district, loans of up to three years may be allowed as a financing cost for project construction. Areas under the Neighborhood Opportunity Fund would be offered similar terms, expanding access to South and West side corridors. Businesses that are eligible for the Build Community Wealth Bonus would be prioritized, with more favorable interest rates and loan forgiveness. The city would act as a guarantor for businesses that cannot otherwise receive traditional bank loans, with a regular review process to ensure the program is achieving community stability goals at an acceptable cost.

BACP will coordinate the outreach effort, acting as a trusted resource to direct impacted businesses toward beneficial programs. In doing so, points of contact will be developed, enabling direct communication about updated project impacts.

NEXT STEPS

- Create an implementation plan with DPD to coordinate loan terms, acceptable credit risk, and application process, and develop the required financing structures with DOF.
- Direct DOL to review existing fund constraints for TIF and NOF agreements. DOL should also create a standard agreement that can be quickly adapted to each project and business.
- Empower BACP to coordinate with CDOT, CTA, CHA, and other departments developing major infrastructure projects to distribute program application information during project outreach.
- Write a Business Impact Mitigation Checklist, and integrate it into current procedures.

Taipei, Taiwan: City as a Living Lab

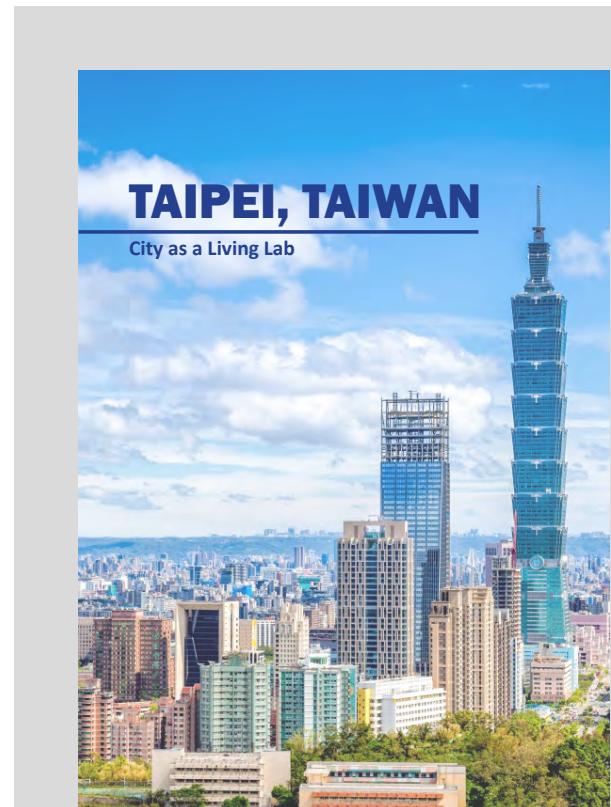
2nd Semester | UPP 508 | 25% Project Ownership

Reported on **global trends in urban planning**, centering on Taipei's information technology planning and the various social impacts made in this policy area. Historical research covered the creation of the city's Department of Information Technology and the public planning of the "Smart City" concept. Policy research covered the role of youth democratic movements and digital policy debate platforms, as well as public access wifi system planning and COVID-19 health response.

Available here: [Full Version](#)

Key Takeaway:

- This project covered a relatively-new topic of urban policy that has rapidly changed daily life, but is rarely discussed in a coordinated municipal approach. It introduced me to a range of economic development trends, the impact of digital pilot projects, and new forms of democratic deliberation for a local government.



UI Taipei

In 2007, the Taipei City Government launched a second ICT planning initiative, UI Taipei, which aimed to transform Taipei into a "ubiquitous and intelligent" city. As part of this initiative, was the formal establishment of the DOIT as the primary instrument for the initiative. The lessons of CyberCity were to focus future ICT initiatives on user-focused design away from a more technologically deterministic position. In other

words, ICT initiatives should be focused on fulfilling the need for a public good rather than implementing a novel technological service for the sake of technological process. Based on these conclusions, the UI Taipei initiative was focused on a three-pronged approach based on "E-government, e-community, and e-life". The UI Taipei initiative was successful enough that in 2012, the DOIT was upgraded to become

a first-level agency within the Taipei City Government, showcasing the increasing emphasis being placed on smart city initiatives in Taipei.

UI Taipei:

1. E-government
2. E-community
3. E-life

vTaiwan

[vTaiwan](#) was the premiere digital project to be borne of the g0v. Beginning in 2016, it presented a novel digital solution for democratic consensus-building, focused on developing policies for digital economy regulations. Through four stages, the platform develops policy recommendations with widespread public input. (GovLab, n.d.)

With up to 31,000+ participants voting in individual policy debates, the platform saw robust public engagement. This went on to directly affect central

government policy on specific issues, notably in the cases of the regulation of Uber and FinTech. (Horton, 2018)

The central government created a similar service in 2017, [Join](#), leading to conflicting dominance between the activist-led vTaiwan and the central government's own service. vTaiwan was specifically focused on policy in the digital economy, while Join is a broader forum for all policy areas. Both projects have been overseen by Audrey Tang, an activist participant in the Sunflower Movement who

was subsequently appointed as a minister without portfolio in the central government's Executive Yuan.

Scan to watch a 2018 mini-documentary on the vTaiwan project.



Stage:

- Proposal Stage
- Opinion Stage
- Reflection Stage
- Legislation Stage

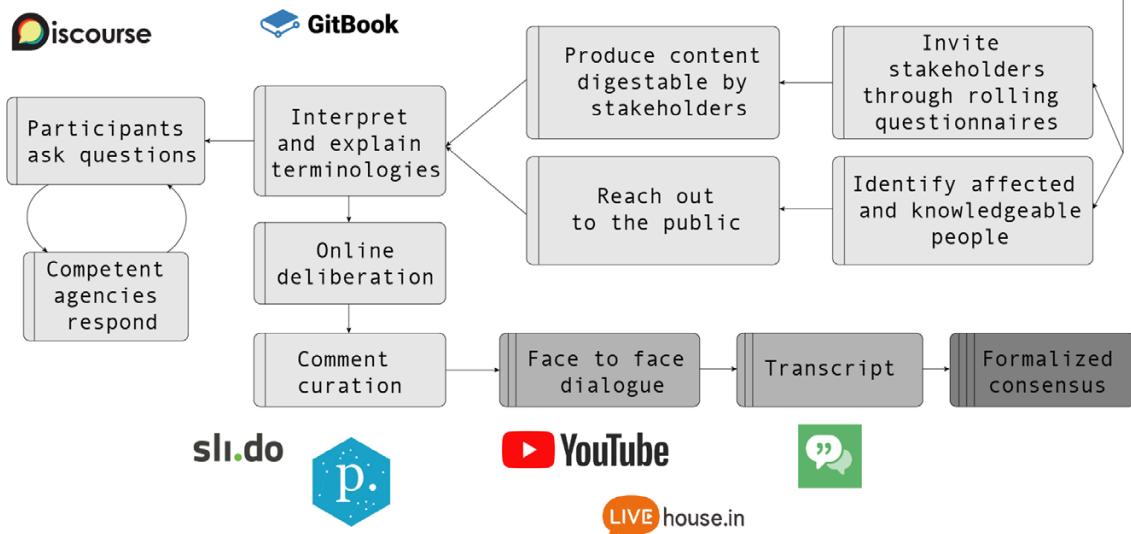


Fig. 13 A guide to the four stages of policy develop through the vTaiwan platform. Credit: info.vtaiwan.tw



Report Writing and Qualitative Analysis

- 20 Project Financing for the Réseau Express Métropolitain
- 22 Memo on Grand/Hubbard Corridor Complete Streets Improvements
- 24 Placemaking Assessment of Pella, Iowa
- 24 Skokie Swift Community Profile

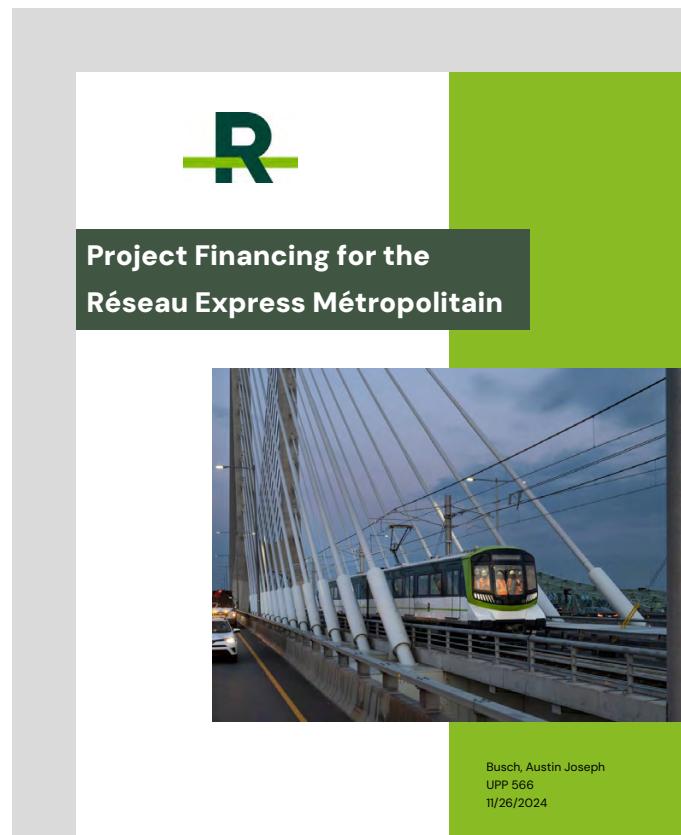
Project Financing for the Réseau Express Métropolitain

3rd Semester | UPP 566 | 100% Project Involvement

Detailed the **novel public-private funding strategy** for Montreal's REM light rail project, including funding agreements, capital and operating costs, risk allocation, and project performance measures. Discussed potential applications of these practices for transit projects within the U.S.

The report examined a unique public-private partnership model with a range of possible applications in the U.S., as well as project delivery best practices. This capped a semester of researching transit funding within the United States federal system, and demonstrated an interest in reviewing how non-U.S. approaches could be applied to current funding constraints.

Available here: [Full Version](#)



POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

Quebec has a particularly local political environment, with multiple parties existing only at the provincial level. The REM was approved following the Quebec Liberal Party (QLP) winning the National Assembly election in 2014, with financing and project bids finalized immediately prior to their ouster in the following 2018 election.

The initial REM project served ridings primarily represented by the QLP, particularly in the service areas of the south shore and the western island. The furthest suburban reaches also benefited opposition parties, however, ensuring each party had a stake in the project. The later proposal for the REM de l'Est served a different political constituency, as it proposed to cover the northeast of the island, whose Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) representatives won a provincial majority in 2018.

Figure 5 – Vote share by riding in the Montreal area, 2014 Quebec Provincial Election.¹¹

Grand Montréal Greater Montreal



Élections générales du Québec, 2014 Quebec Provincial Election, 2014

	Winning Vote Strength (%)	VOTE	
Liberal Party LEADER: Philippe Couillard	41.52%	70 SEATS	
Parti Québécois LEADER: Pauline Marois	25.38%	30 SEATS	
Coalition Avenir Québec LEADER: François Legault	23.05%	22 SEATS	
Québec Solidaire LEADERS: Françoise David/Andrés Fontecilla	7.63%	3 SEATS	

REM PROJECT CAPITAL BUDGET

CAPITAL BUDGET SOURCES

The primary sources of capital budget came from CDPQ Infra (receiving 51% of project equity), the provincial government of Quebec (24.5% equity) and the federal government of Canada (24.5% equity). Effectively, these sources are loans that will be paid back through the system's operations, with the public transit subsidy covering operations and capital reimbursement. Additional smaller capital budget sources included crown corporation Hydro-Québec and the ARTM.

REM financing package – September 2023

Funding Body	Total Funding Amount	Overrun Funding
CDPQ Infra	CA \$4.58B	+CA\$1.65B
Québec government	CA\$1.28B	Unchanged
Canada Infrastructure Bank	CA\$1.28B	Unchanged
Hydro-Québec	CA\$295M	Unchanged
ARTM	CA\$512M	Unchanged
TOTAL	CA\$7.95B	

Hydro-Québec and ARTM provided funding through one-time grants. Hydro-Québec is a local utility crown corporation, operating in a quasi-public role with a high degree of influence from the provincial government. Specifically the funding provided was noted to cover the cost of fixed equipment for electrification, enabling Hydro-Québec to provide power. Hydro-Québec expects to see some return due to a new, reliable energy customer. ARTM will recoup their cost in a 50-year land-value capture taxing program, as aforementioned.

Memo on Grand/Hubbard Corridor Complete Streets Improvements

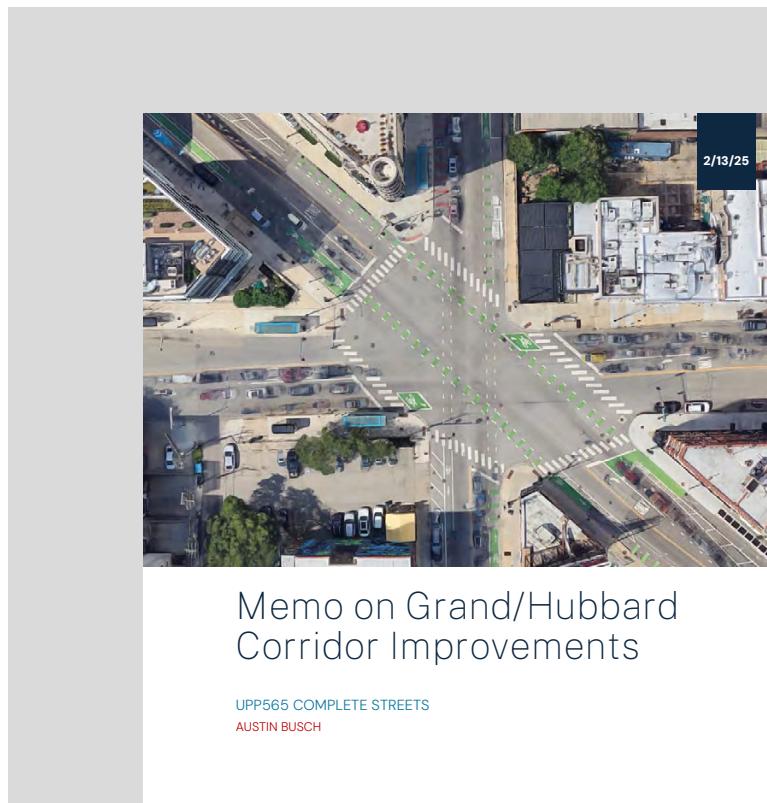
4th Semester | UPP 565 | 100% Project Involvement

Provided **overview of need for street design improvements** along two parallel corridors, incorporating existing planning efforts into a work request for engineering and design work with the associated changes.

Later work in the semester expanded on this concept as a separate group presentation, developing a full proposal taking into account current conditions and a larger focus on reconfiguring the traffic network around the corridor.

This demonstrates an ability to research detailed information about corridor segments, synthesize existing planning efforts, and develop proposals to enhance the transportation network within existing constraints.

Available here: [Full Version](#)

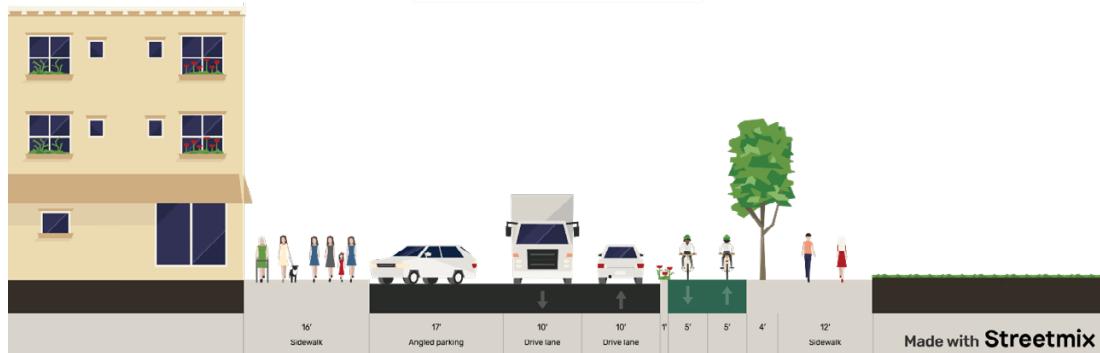


Road Width and Lane Markings

Grand is 55 ft. from curb to curb, and 80 ft. from property line to property line.



Hubbard St



- The bi-directional bikeway will begin at Ogden, with the Ogden-Ashland section upgrading the single-direction bike lanes with added protection. Signals for crossing Ogden will be partially complicated by this.
- Wayfinding guidance for bike to Kinzie Street from the Hubbard/Green intersection will allow limited interaction with arterial streets, given the underpass of Halsted and the configuration at the start of Milwaukee Avenue. A potential study on utilizing Green Street north of Hubbard to connect with Milwaukee Avenue may also be recommended.
- The bi-directional bikeway will end at Milwaukee Avenue, with future consideration of a continuation to the North Branch Transitway at Jefferson.

Along this central segment of the corridor, bike lanes and buffer space will be consolidated to the south lanes of the roadway, and the south parking will be removed. The north parking will become angled parking, increasing the spaces available on this side of the street to offset the loss. Bioswales on the corner angles will help reduce pedestrian crossing distance while adding greenery and community space. An expansive pedestrian promenade along the railbank will encourage strolling and viewing the art, with ample benches, trees, and landscaping. The bikeway will be raised to sidewalk level, with landscaping separating the pedestrian and cycling space.

Intersections near viaducts will require careful treatment due to reduced visibility around corners. Neckdowns on intersecting streets, raised crosswalks, or traffic circles may reduce this impact. The raised bikeway and paint will also signify to approaching driver that caution ahead is required. Improved lighting has also been recommended in the Update plan.

Two intersecting roadways will be considered for cul-de-sac treatment or removal: Union at the intersection of Hubbard/Milwaukee, and Loomis at the intersection of Hubbard/Ogden. Loomis has only one business entrance and should be simple to reconfigure, but Union is a more complex closure requiring study. Union is potentially impeding traffic flow on Milwaukee due to signal timing, though, so we consider this a potentially worthwhile trade-off.

Placemaking Assessment of Pella, Iowa

1st Semester | UPP 501 | 100% Project Ownership

Reviewed existing **design guidelines** for unique Midwestern heritage community, toured site for documentation of outcomes, and provided critique of the overall impact on neighborhood character.

This is included as qualitative writing and field piece, covering novel topics in Midwestern planning and municipal codes.



Figure 4 - Examples of modern designs utilizing elements of Dutch architecture in the Transitional District. Top left: a Domino's in a strip mall. Top right: de Autowasplaats, a car wash. Bottom: Pella's Walmart location.

Skokie Swift Community Profile

1st Semester | UPP 502 | 100% Project Ownership

Adapted **community profile presentation** to specifically discuss the role of the CTA's Skokie Swift on the history, built environment, and policies of the village of Skokie. Discussions about major employers and educational destinations led to analytical discussion about the line's resultant ridership and future potential.

This is included as a particular example of public presentation on a planning topic in a concise, comprehensive, and focused narrative.

Key Takeaway:

- This presentation developed a style which utilizes strong visual communication to guide a fast-paced, comprehensive, and compelling narrative. Slide count was increased, text was simplified, and color-coded navigation aided topic transitions.

Parking Minima

Off-Street Spaces Required Per Unit Under Current Zoning Codes in Skokie*

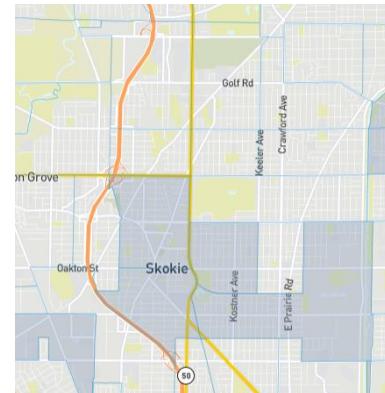
Number of Bedrooms	Detached, and 2-Unit Multifamily	Townhouse	3+ Unit Multifamily and Residences in Mixed Uses				B3 district transit oriented developments; NX and TX districts	CX district	
			General		Resident	Guest			
Studio	2	2	0	0.9	0.1	0.9	0.1	1	0.25
1 or 2	2	2	0	1.35	0.15	1.35	0.15	1	0.25
3 or more	2	2	0.5	1.8	0.2	1.35	0.15	1	0.25

* Total parking is required is rounded to the nearest whole number of spaces

Village of Skokie. Zoning. Sec. 118-218. - Required number of off-street motor vehicle parking spaces.
https://library.municode.com/il/skokie/codes/zoning?nodeId=SUHITA_CH118ZO_ARTXIOREPALOFA_S118-218RENUOREMOVEPASP

Disadvantaged Areas

- Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool
- Designed for use in the Justice40 Initiative
- 4 out of 13 census tracts considered disadvantaged



Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool. "Explore the map". Accessed November 29, 2023, from <https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/en/#11.89/42.03104/-87.74161>.

CTA Bus Route	Average Daily Ridership (2019)	Average Daily Ridership (2022)
54A - North Cicero/Skokie Blvd.	710	335
97 – Skokie	2,797	1,731
201 - Central/Ridge	2,164	1,345

Pace Bus Route	Average Daily Ridership (2019)	Average Daily Ridership (2022)
208 – Golf Road	1,995	1,322
210 – Lincoln Avenue	177	203
215 – Crawford-Howard	1,211	886
250 – Dempster Street	2,649	1,714

Available here:

[Full Presentation Slides](#)

Chicago Transit Authority. Annual Ridership Report. 2019-2022. Retrieved November 1, 2023 from <https://www.transitchicago.com/ridership/>.

Regional Transportation Authority Mapping and Statistics. Pace Bus Ridership by Route. October. 2019-2022. Retrieved November 1, 2023 from <https://rtams.org/ridership/pace/routes?month=October&dayName=weekday>.



Modeling and Data Analysis

- 27 Comparisons of Ridesharing and CTA 'L' Ridership (2019-2023)
- 28 Model Impact Traffic Study
- 30 Model Public Housing Pro Forma

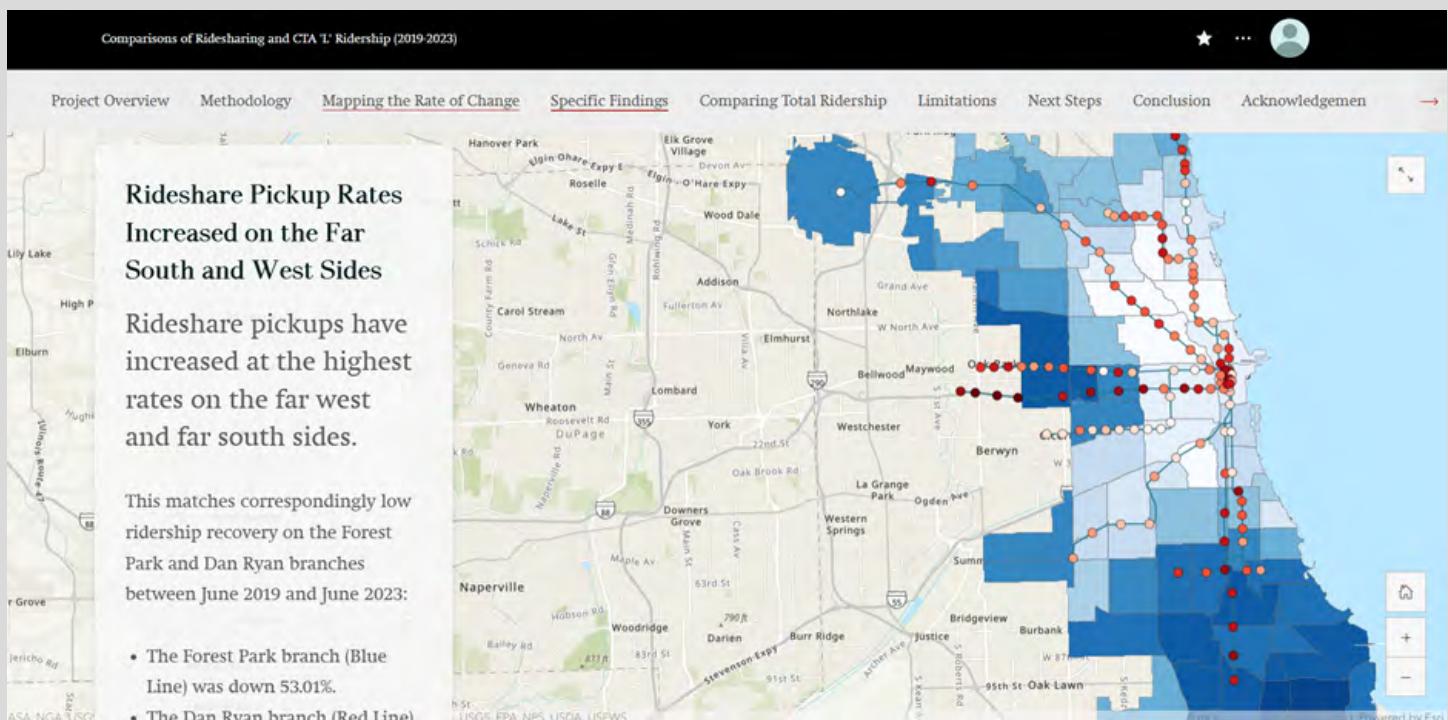
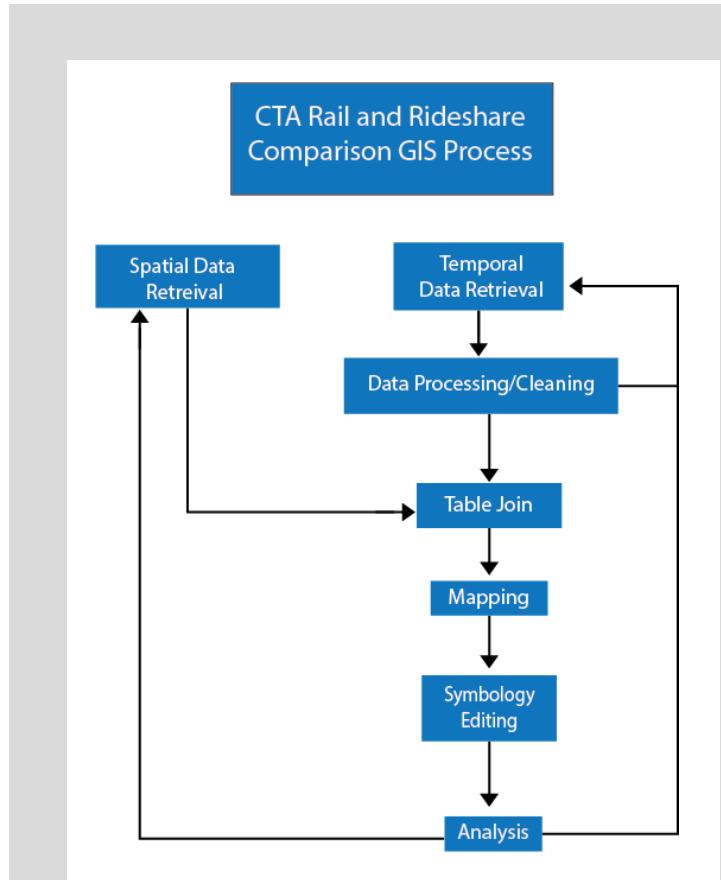
Comparisons of Ridesharing and CTA 'L' Ridership (2019-2023)

1st Semester | UPP461 | 50% Project Involvement

Analysis of CTA rail ridership data pre- and post-pandemic in comparison with City of Chicago rideshare data, analyzing travel demand trends between modes with accessible public data. The final presentation was made as a ArcGIS Storymap to visualize specific highlights of the changing travel patterns.

Key Contributions:

- Became familiar with Open Data Portal functionality
- Calculated change in ridership at all stations and in ridesharing quantities
- Visualized through online mapping tools



Model Impact Traffic Study

3rd Semester | UPP 562 | 100% Project Ownership

Completed a **model analysis of a new employer's traffic impact** on a regional transportation system, including economic workforce modeling, geographic forecasting, baseline and alternative scenarios, and cost-benefit analysis.

This example exhibits technical writing and quantitative analysis skills as needed.

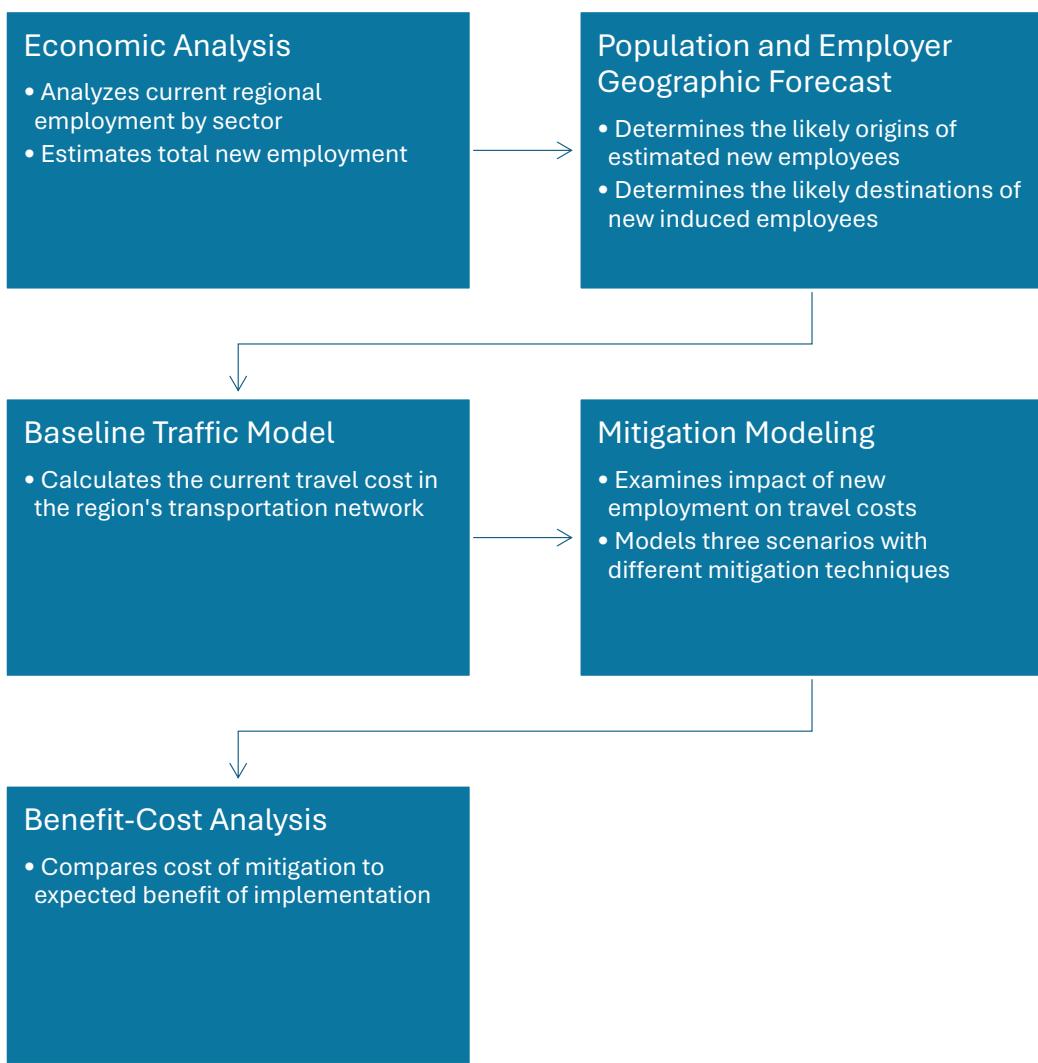
Available here: [Full Version](#)

Impacts on the Transportation Network Generated by New Employment at the Proposed Disconnected Semiconductors Facility

Published on 11.21.24 by Austin Busch
on behalf of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area Planning Agency

Methodology

Figure 1 – Descriptive workflow of the study modeling technique.



Executive Summary

The introduction of a new plant for Disconnected Semiconductors in the Northridge neighborhood is expected to lead to localized traffic impacts throughout the twin cities region, as the region's workforce increases by 5%. The following study was commissioned to estimate the increased stress on the region's existing transportation network, and determine possible mitigation strategies to decrease the traffic burden associated with the added employment.

Without mitigation efforts in place, the introduction of Disconnected Semiconductors and the associated employment will add an annual travel cost of \$2,459,507 to the local transportation network. Three different scenarios were analyzed, which can reduce the annual travel cost through infrastructural and programming investments. The lowest annual cost achieved by a mitigation strategy totals \$1,723,008.

Analysis

Overall, the use of either mitigation strategy alone or in combination produces an overall benefit over the no-mitigation scenario, decreasing the travel cost burden associated with the new plant's employment.

Table 4 – Total cost and cost per employment for four scenarios

Scenario	Description	Annual Total Cost of Scenario	Cost per Direct Employee	Cost per Total Area Employment Increase
2	No Mitigation	\$2,459,506.62	\$1,229.75/year	\$410.85/year
3	New Bridge	\$1,739,728.92	\$869.86/year	\$290.61/year
4	TDM Program	\$2,240,466.23	\$1,120.23/year	\$374.26/year
5	Bridge + TDM	\$1,723,007.95	\$861.50/year	\$287.82/year

While this study has not calculated the local economic impact in favor of new employment at the Disconnected Semiconductors plant, it is able to determine the annual travel cost associated per employee, which can be extrapolated to compare with an economic impact analysis. Dependent on mitigation scenarios, this may be in the range of \$862–1230 per direct employee, or \$288–\$411 per regional employment increase.

Table 5 – Benefit-cost analysis of four mitigation scenarios.

Scenario	Description	Cost Increase over Baseline	Annual Amortized Cost of Implementation	Benefit-Cost Ratio	Priority
2	No Mitigation	\$2,459,506.62	\$0	n/a	n/a
3	New Bridge	\$619,343.74	\$1,120,385.19	1.64	High Priority
4	TDM Program	\$2,090,466.23	\$150,000.00	2.46	High Priority
5	Bridge + TDM	\$452,622.76	\$1,270,385.19	1.58	High Priority
5.2	^ TDM portion	-	-	1.11	Low Priority

Model Public Housing Pro Forma

3rd Semester | UPP 533 | 25% Project Ownership

Prepared a **sample pro forma for a public housing concept** in Wilmette, IL. Funding reviewed included state grants and LIHTC, with variations for different unit mixes and rates of return. Presented as a group with recommendations on proceeding with development.

	Fixed	Min	Max
Housing Units		40	60
Sq ft per unit	1500	60000	90000
ACQUISITION			
Site Acquisition	\$1	\$1	
Assesed Value (Zillow 2022)	\$426,540		
TOTAL LAND & ACQUISITION	\$1	\$1	
HARD COSTS			
Construction Hard costs per sq foot	\$ 300.00	\$ 18,000,000.00	\$
Contingency @ 10% of hard costs		\$ 1,800,000.00	\$
TOTAL HARD COSTS		\$ 19,800,000.00	\$
SOFT COSTS			
Furnishings per unit	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 40,000.00	\$
Insurance	\$ 50,000.00	\$ 50,000.00	\$ 50,000.00
Marketing/Leasing	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Application fees	\$ 25,000.00	\$ 25,000.00	
Lender Fees	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 150,000.00	
Construction Loan Interest Rate	7.00%	\$1,386,000.00	\$
Legal Costs	\$ 200,000.00	\$ 200,000.00	\$
Title and Mortgage Recordings	\$ 50,000.00	\$ 50,000.00	\$
Building Permits	\$ 250,000.00	\$ 250,000.00	\$
Other soft costs	\$ 300,000.00	\$ 200,000.00	\$
Contingency @ 10% of soft costs		\$ 238,100.00	\$
TOTAL SOFT COSTS		\$ 2,619,100.00	\$
Max Developer Fee percent of TC 0%-10%	5.00%	\$ 1,120,955.05	\$
Deferred Amount		\$ 1,787,151.59	\$
TOTAL USES (TOTAL DEVELOPMENT COSTS)		\$23,540,056.05	\$34,758,571.05
DCR by year 15	1.15		
FUNDING SOURCES			
ComEd Grant	\$100,000.00	\$100,000	
45L Tax Credit	up to \$5K per	\$200,000	
IAHTC		\$213,270	
State Capital Funding - Legislative Initiative	\$750,000	\$750,000	
Congressional Community Project Funding	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	
LIHTC 9%		\$16,989,634	
FHLBank	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000	
Deferred Developer Fee		\$1,787,152	
TOTAL SOURCES		\$23,540,056.05	

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1925 WILMETTE AVENUE, WILMETTE, IL 60091

RESIDENTIAL

32 Low Income
08 Very Low Income
40 Total Units
\$1,682.00 – \$ 2,332.00 (80% AMI)
\$1,051.00 – \$1,457.00 (50% AMI)

Square Footage:
Total Development Size:
1,500 sq. ft. per unit
60,000 Square Feet

POPULATION SERVED

- DINKs
- Young families
- Aging Adults and Seniors

Affordable to low-income households!

DEVELOPMENT BUDGET OVERVIEW

Land Acquisition	\$1
Hard Costs	\$19,800,000
Soft Costs	\$2,619,100
Developer Fee (8.8%)	\$1,972,881

TOTAL FUNDING NEEDED
\$24,391,981.89

PROJECT RISKS & LIMITATIONS

FINANCING DECISIONS - RISKS AND LIMITATIONS

- Dependence on LIHTC awards, congressional earmarks, and fluctuating IHDA rates pose a significant financial risk.
- Currently planning on equity contribution from HOOC
- Alternatives
- Wilmette offers limited affordable housing development incentives

RESTRICTIVE UNIT MIX REQUIREMENTS

- Funding conditions may limit operating income due to rent caps, impacting revenue potential.
- Smaller building designs are necessary to adhere to zoning limitations, affecting total unit numbers and impacting revenue.

BUDGET VOLATILITY

- Operating expenses such as property insurance and local taxes may increase unexpectedly, straining the budget.
- The temperamental budget may lead to drastic losses if unexpected expenses arise, threatening project viability.

RESTRICTIVE SERVICE PARTNERSHIP

- Without full financial and social commitment, the provider may undermine collaborative goals and project success.
- Misaligned objectives between provider and developer can cause operational conflicts.
- Dependence on a single provider risks service delivery if their



Civic Involvement and Advocacy

32 RTA Public Comment: Chicago/Halsted Project

33 Guest Commentary: Why Chicago Still Hasn't Fixed the Loop

RTA Public Comment: Chicago/Halsted Project

2nd Semester | Community Involvement | 50% Project Ownership

As part of a **public comment to the RTA Board of Directors** in the February 2024 meeting, testimony about CDOT's extant plans for the rebuilding of the Chicago/Halsted intersection was used to highlight the importance of this location and the lack of transit allocation in line with the stated plans, goals, and policies of all involved organizations.

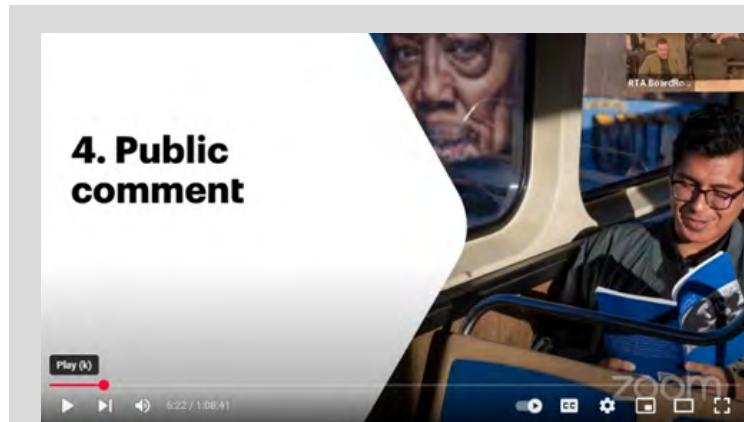
The following month saw the publishing of a memo crediting the public comment and outlining many of the same discussion points made, as well as an accompanying letter from the Chairman of the RTA board to the Commissioner of CDOT encouraging adoption of the recommendations. The revised plan under construction now includes full bi-directional bus-only lanes along Chicago Avenue.

Recording here:

[https://www.youtube.com/live/
NL7kFNMCIx8&t=318](https://www.youtube.com/live/NL7kFNMCIx8&t=318)

Memo available here:

[https://www.rtachicago.org/uploads/files/
meeting-materials/Board-Meetings/2024/
March/5a_Chicago_Halsted_bus_memo.pdf](https://www.rtachicago.org/uploads/files/meeting-materials/Board-Meetings/2024/March/5a_Chicago_Halsted_bus_memo.pdf)



Memorandum

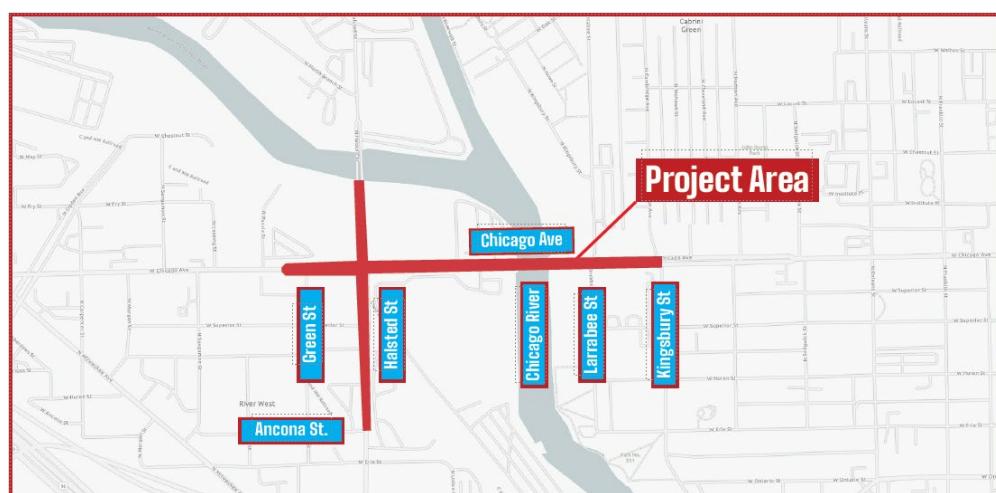
175 W Jackson Blvd
Suite 1550
Chicago, IL 60604
312 913 3200
rtachicago.org

To: Board of Directors
From: Leanne P.
Redden, Executive
Director
Date: March 21, 2024

RTA Review of Chicago Avenue and Halsted Reconstruction Project

At their February board meeting, the RTA Board of Directors heard public comments from two local transit advocates – Austin Busch and Carsten Lohan – who expressed concern about the lack of priority given to bus transit in the planned reconstruction of the Chicago Avenue River Bridge and redesign of the nearby Chicago Avenue and Halsted Street intersection. The advocates argued the new bridge and redesigned corridor should include fully dedicated bus lanes in both directions – not just partial, one-way “queue jump lanes” as currently proposed by the project team. RTA board members thanked the advocates for bringing attention to the issue and directed staff investigate this further and propose possible intervention by the RTA.

Project Background



Guest Commentary: Why Chicago Still Hasn't Fixed the Loop

Summer | Community Involvement | 100% Project Ownership

Spoke at length about the history and decision-making process around Chicago's historical attempts to develop a crosstown rapid transit line, which helped form **the basis of a documentary-like production** for a YouTube channel focused on transportation funding. Multiple segments of the initial interview were used, in addition to ongoing written communications about research and historical overview.

Available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OMX2nPALphQ>



Since 1923.

Why Chicago still hasn't fixed the Loop



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632K views 8 months ago 1 product

If you want better transit in your city: <https://forms.gle/CsfQuHABB5HNUmzv7>

Stormy Kara's AMAZING video about Western + Ashland BRT: This Could be Chicago's First True BRT

Follow on instagram: /theflyingmooseca ...more

