

Access Unlimited *A Compact Complete Streets Policy Guide*



City of North Chicago

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Introduction

Access Unlimited is a compact complete streets policy guide for the City of North Chicago and a building block for future amendments to the Transportation section of the City's Comprehensive Plan. These policies can be used to help the City of North Chicago prioritize and plan for street and transportation system improvements that will serve all users: pedestrians of all abilities, cyclists, transit riders and users of motor vehicles. The goal of this guide is to promote best practices by providing residents and visitors alike with improved, more enjoyable and safer access to their destinations. In order to do so, the idea is to deliver recommendations for support programmatic improvements, those involving non-infrastructure means for promoting transit, cycling and walking; and guidelines for physical improvements to the City's street, sidewalk, rail and trail systems.

Access Unlimited endorses planning and designing our community to include viable alternatives to automobile travel for both local and regional trips. Consequently, implementing future improvements for non-motorized transportation needs to be treated similarly to improvements for motorized transportation, thus encouraging a variety of options that are needed and beneficial to the community. The intent is to provide a holistic approach to surface transportation needs and yield a more convenient, safe, sustainable and efficient transportation network.

For this guide to have a true and lasting impact, City staff, advisory committees, and elected officials will have to be cognizant of this document and recommend projects and programs that strive to achieve the goals set forth by way of its policies. All involved will have a role in seeking funding from a variety of sources and adapting plans whenever possible to accomplish the overall vision. Implementation of the policies outlined in Access Unlimited will be overseen by the Department of Economic Development with coordinated planning assistance from other departments.



COMPLETE STREETS

Why Plan for Motorized AND Non-Motorized Travel Options?

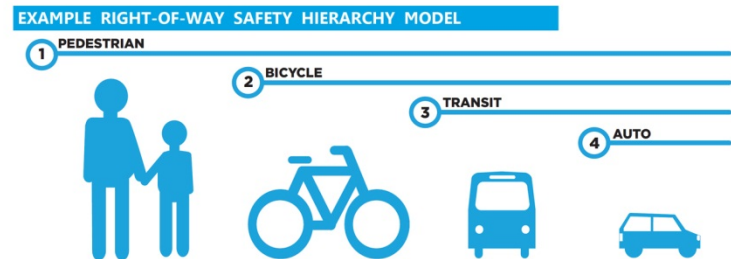
Almost all trips begin and end with walking, yet in the latter half of the 20th century roadways were built to optimize motor vehicle traffic while pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit were often neglected. Conversely, recent data from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics is showing that the annual vehicle miles traveled nationwide peaked in 2005 and has been steadily declining since. Now, in order to help reverse the negative effect of over 50 years of purely auto-focused development we must look to a new paradigm.

North Chicagoans experience life through their daily commutes, summer festivals, block parties, and even views from their front porches. These types of public activities are often a reflection of a community's overall vitality, and conditioned on the nature of surrounding streets. So, in order to move away from the narrow perspectives of the past, it is important to build and maintain our roads for healthy business districts, vibrant neighborhoods, and high quality of life. More importantly, we must remember to measure success on safety, choices, and livability.

Every society needs places to gather, conduct business, and recreate. In North Chicago, residents and visitors also deserve a system that supports choices of how one gets to and from those destinations. Thus when we say, "Access Unlimited", we mean designing streets for all users and all modes. We mean looking past the project level, to the surrounding community and economic systems. We mean planning for a viable transportation network for getting to work, school, shopping or even just leisure activity.

This great City is also geographically compact enough to be efficiently navigated by cycling or walking, provided that proper facilities and improvements are available. With many utilitarian trips being less than two miles from home, often times these trips can be done by foot or bike. For instance, local schools are sites of high traffic congestion at drop-off and pick-up times on school days. By providing opportunities to increase the number of trips to similar community destinations utilizing non-motorized vehicle or pedestrian modes, there is the potential to reduce traffic congestion in these areas and beyond. This also encourages a healthy alternative that will reduce pollution and noise while improving the community's quality of life.

Overall, the safety and convenience of all users of the transportation system including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, freight, and motor vehicle drivers should be accommodated and balanced in all types of transportation and development projects so that even the most vulnerable – children, elderly, and persons with disabilities – can travel safely within the public right-of-way.



Benefits to Complete Streets

- **Health:** Improved cycling and walking conditions will provide residents with an opportunity to safely and efficiently walk, run or ride a bicycle in a utilitarian fashion. As community residents age, the opportunities for keeping residents active is an important component of a healthy community. Cycling and walking are excellent ways to improve cardiovascular health.
- **Quality of Life/Environmental:** Non-motorized transportation facilities provide members of the community with an opportunity to enjoy the natural areas of the community for recreational, utilitarian or pure enjoyment purposes. In addition, improved cycling and walking facilities can provide residents with feelings of safety and comfort regardless of the mode of transportation being used. With improved non-motorized facilities residents will have a choice of options for their mode of travel. Increased usage of biking and walking versus use of motorized vehicles has the potential to reduce traffic and parking congestion and improve air quality. Improved access to public transit enhances the lives of community residents of all ages and may be particularly beneficial to residents as they age and decrease their usage of personal motor vehicles.
- **Infrastructure Preservation:** Cycling and walking provides a low-cost mobility option that places fewer demands on local roads. Moreover, safe options for pedestrian and bicycle travel can lead to increased “choice users”. The corresponding reduction in the number of automobile trips may lead to reduced wear-and-tear on local roads and thereby reduced transportation maintenance costs.
- **Increased Transportation Choices:** Residents, employees and visitors to North Chicago benefit by having a range of transportation options from which to choose. With a variety of transportation choices, any trip by any mode can be a safe and pleasant means to accomplish the desired transportation needs of residents, employees, and visitors. Good pedestrian facility design that includes adequate accessibility features can help ensure that even persons with disabilities or frailties can continue to enjoy some level of mobility. If a range of transportation options are provided, people of all ages and abilities will have access to appropriate transportation services and choices.
- **Independent Mobility for Children:** Improved neighborhood walking surfaces and safe routes provide options for children to transport themselves to community destinations; children have the opportunity to lead more active and independent lives dependent on an adult’s availability to supply transportation with a motorized vehicles.
- **Economic Development:** Planning for more non-motorized transportation is an effective economic development tool from two perspectives. Safe and efficient pedestrian and bicycle facilities allows residents to spend less money on automobile operation and maintenance costs and then spending may shift to other consumer purchases. Secondly, Lake County is popular among recreationists for its lakefront and natural landscape. An improved trail and road network can attract bicycle enthusiasts from across the region to spend more time in the community and contribute to the local economy.

Current Barriers to Complete Streets

If it is so beneficial for the individual and the community to have opportunities to bicycle and walk, why don't more people engage in these activities? Often there are obstacles or barriers that make it difficult, and sometimes nearly impossible, to safely or conveniently bike or walk as an alternative to driving. The barriers to alternative transportation choices include those affecting the physical environment; personal, social, and perceptual barriers; and organizational and institutional barriers. An awareness and understanding of the barriers that influence people's decisions or ability to walk are the first steps for individuals, organizations, and communities to understand the actions that will effectively reduce or eliminate such barriers. Some of the more common barriers to biking and walking are explained in more detail in the following section.

Physical Barriers: Physical barriers consist of partial or non-existent sidewalks paths, poor quality walking surfaces, nonexistent or inappropriate bicycle and pedestrian crossing treatments, lack of bike lanes and other accommodations, high speed traffic, etc. The barriers may be large, such as inadequate spacing for a cyclist on a busy roadway or as small as the worn away cross-walk and other markings at an intersection. Each obstacle presents a different level of difficulty for pedestrian and cyclist populations. For example, a road with a high volume of fast-moving traffic may present a greater challenge for children or older people than it would for the average adult. Potential bicycle commuters may be deterred from riding to a train station if quality covered and secure bicycle parking is not provided. There are a variety of ways to address these physical barriers through improvements related to engineering, education, maintenance, and enforcement.

Personal, Social and Perceptual: According to a 2008 National Survey, one in five adults age 16 or older had not taken a trip by foot during a thirty-day period in the summer of 2008. The survey reported that the number one reason for not walking is that respondents were either too busy or did not have the opportunity to walk. Other reasons or perceptions for not walking included:

- Not in the habit of walking or cycling
- Walking is boring
- Walking or biking is dangerous; not safe place to walk, drivers are too aggressive
- Other modes of transportation are faster; there is not enough time to walk or bike
- Walking is painful for me
- Weather conditions preclude walking or biking

It may be impossible to overcome some of these barriers, but those related to dangerous conditions, interaction with motorists and certain perceptions related to biking and walking may be overcome through a combination of planning, engineering, education, encouragement and enforcement.

Goals

1. Incorporate the ideas outlined in this guide into all aspects of the project development process for surface transportation plans within the City of North Chicago.
2. Create a balanced, highly interconnected and attractive surface transportation network which is consistent with other relevant policies of the City.
3. Manage stormwater and improve water quality by reducing impervious surfaces, narrowing street widths where suitable to the context, planting street trees, and, where appropriate, increasing stormwater infiltration along streets through the design of the public right-of-way.
4. Promote the use of the latest and best “complete streets” design standards, principles, policies, and guidelines within the context of the community.
5. Enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.



Recommendations

The City of North Chicago's surface transportation network ought to accommodate the needs of all current and future users. In order to do so, project identification, planning, scoping, and design for new construction, reconstruction, resurfacing, rehabilitation, repair, and maintenance within the public right-of-way should actively work toward meeting the following guidelines.

1. Accommodations for all users of the surface transportation network should be balanced in accordance with the latest and best “complete streets” standards, principles, policies, and guidelines, **except** under one (1) or more of the following conditions:
 - a. Where the cost of providing such accommodations would be disproportionate given the need or probability of use, or
 - b. Where severe topographic or natural resource constraints prohibit such accommodations, or
 - c. Where conditions or restrictions outside the purview of the City of North Chicago prohibit such actions.
2. Where segregated facilities cannot be provided for pedestrians and cyclists, the constructed roadway should reflect the character of shared space, with appropriate mechanisms to calm vehicular traffic and provide a safe, reliable, integrated, and interconnected surface transportation network. In cases where one or more of these conditions occur, staff will evaluate the project and make a recommendation to the City Council for their decision.
3. Where projects involve other jurisdictions, the City will work with those jurisdictions to ensure compliance with these policies to the fullest extent. Prior to seeking bids, staff should report to the City Council on the detail of how the project does or does not comply with the concepts outlined in this guide.
4. Roadways, sidewalks, shared-use paths, street crossings, pedestrian signals, signs, street furniture, transit stops and facilities, and all connecting pathways should be designed, constructed, and operated to limit maintenance, and maintained so that all users of the surface transportation network can travel safely, reliably and independently.
5. The implementation of these policies should reflect the context and character of the surrounding built and natural environments, and enhance the appearance of such.

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6. The City will implement these policies by evaluating and revising relevant City plans, rules, regulations, and programs as appropriate to incorporate them by reference and to utilize the most current and most effective design guidelines and other tools when designing projects.
7. A system of performance measurements should be established to gauge the success of these policies with regards to the previously stated Goals.
8. These policies should be reviewed at least every five years to determine their success and make any needed revisions.



Resolution

RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE CREATION AND ADOPTION OF ACCESS UNLIMITED: A COMPACT COMPLETE STREETS POLICY GUIDE

WHEREAS, the City of North Chicago seeks to develop a compact complete streets policy guide to help assure City right-of-ways are designed, operated and maintained to be safe and accessible for all pedestrians, transit riders, bicyclists, and drivers, regardless of age or ability; and

WHEREAS, this guide shall be referred to as Access Unlimited; and

WHEREAS, the City of North Chicago seeks to incorporate the ideas from Access Unlimited into future amendments to the Transportation section of the City's Comprehensive Plan, other related ordinances and the design of right-of-ways improvements projects; and

WHEREAS, the development and adoption of Access Unlimited will draw these various elements into a single cohesive document that can be enhanced and clarified where necessary; and

WHEREAS, having Access Unlimited will better position the City of North Chicago to partner with the Illinois Department of Transportation, Lake County Department of Transportation and our neighboring municipalities as the concepts behind complete streets become more prevalent; and

WHEREAS, the idea is to deliver recommendations for support programmatic improvements and guidelines for physical improvements to the street, sidewalk, intersection and trail systems.

WHEREAS, the Mayor and Aldermen have found the guidelines in Access Unlimited are needed to maintain the character and integrity of our community.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Mayor and Alderman of the City of North Chicago, Lake County, Illinois that:

1. The City Council of the City of North Chicago hereby adopts Access Unlimited: A Compact Complete Streets Policy Guide; and
2. These policies shall be reviewed at least every five years to determine their success and/or needed revisions.