



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Connector Transitway

Chicago Central Area

Booming central area is straining 'L' – expansion essential if growth is to continue. 'Connector' rail line would ease crowding, triple size of core, and promote neighborhood revitalization at modest cost

THE CHALLENGE

- **Central area has become city's economic engine.** CBD employment at record high – accounts for half of city jobs, projected to grow 60K-90K per decade.
- **Core dependent on rail.** Daily rail trips now exceed 1M, most to or from CBD. Between 2006 and 2014, rail work trips rose, auto fell. 85% of downtown development built near rail stops.
- **'L' nearing capacity.** Since 1998, most new downtown professional workers have chosen to live in city, take 'L' to work. 'L' ridership highest since at least 1960 – projected to increase by ~15K/year. Even if Red-Purple bypass built, all north, northwest side rail lines will operate at max capacity during peak in 10 years.
- **Downtown has outgrown old 'hub and spoke' rail pattern.** Major destinations such as North Michigan Ave., Navy Pier inaccessible by 'L,' Metra, or both.
- **Fast-growing downtown residential population faces gridlock.** Central area on track to add 100K residents between 2000 and 2020. Travel within core for these and other downtown users increasingly arduous. Buses average 3-5 MPH during peak – walking speed.
- **Loop approaching full buildout.** Of 101M-130M GSF of development projected by 2035, rail-accessible core can absorb only 38M. Absent rail expansion, new development in now-marginal sites outside core will be riskier, less dense, more auto-oriented.
- **42% of central area land inaccessible by rail.** Lack of rail access a major impediment to development – some large sites vacant for decades.



Proposed Connector route

THE PROPOSAL

- **14-mile grade-separated rail line ('Connector')** would add needed capacity in fastest-growing part of city. Project would link downtown 'L' lines to all four Metra operations; serve destinations such as Michigan Ave., Navy Pier, museums, McCormick Place; provide access to large underutilized tracts near CBD. ~80% of central area land (up from 58%) would be rail accessible. Absorbing residential growth in central area, providing bypass at North/Clybourn would ease burden on north side 'L.' Complements current initiatives such as Red-Purple Modernization, Loop Link.
- **Automated operation, enclosed platforms would reduce cost, permit frequent service, eliminate 'polar vortex' concerns.** Vancouver SkyTrain has no operators on trains, recovers most of operating cost from fares. Enclosed platforms as on O'Hare People Mover would protect riders from elements.
- **Rail right-of-way and vacant land would reduce cost and complexity of land acquisition.** 70% of route would run on or adjacent to existing rail right-of-way, vacant land, or public property. Union Pacific, BNSF, Canadian National have expressed willingness to discuss. Property owners along Carroll Ave. rail ROW supportive of project.
- **Connector local share could be raised through special service area (SSA).** Levy of 25 basis points (0.25%) on central area commercial property would raise half of \$750M MOS capital cost. Predictability of SSA revenue attractive to bond markets; interaction with transit TIF district(s) TBD.
- **Line could be built in phases to reduce financial burden.** Two-mile first phase ("minimum operable segment" or MOS) would connect Union Station to Columbus/Illinois. Extensions could be built opportunistically depending on financing availability and developer interest. Large sites offer opportunities for public-private partnerships.
- **Connector would improve access to underserved areas,** including Pilsen, Cabrini-Green, and Bronzeville, and facilitate redevelopment of south lakefront, home to growing, diverse community with high percentage of minority professionals.



Connector model – London's Docklands Light Rail