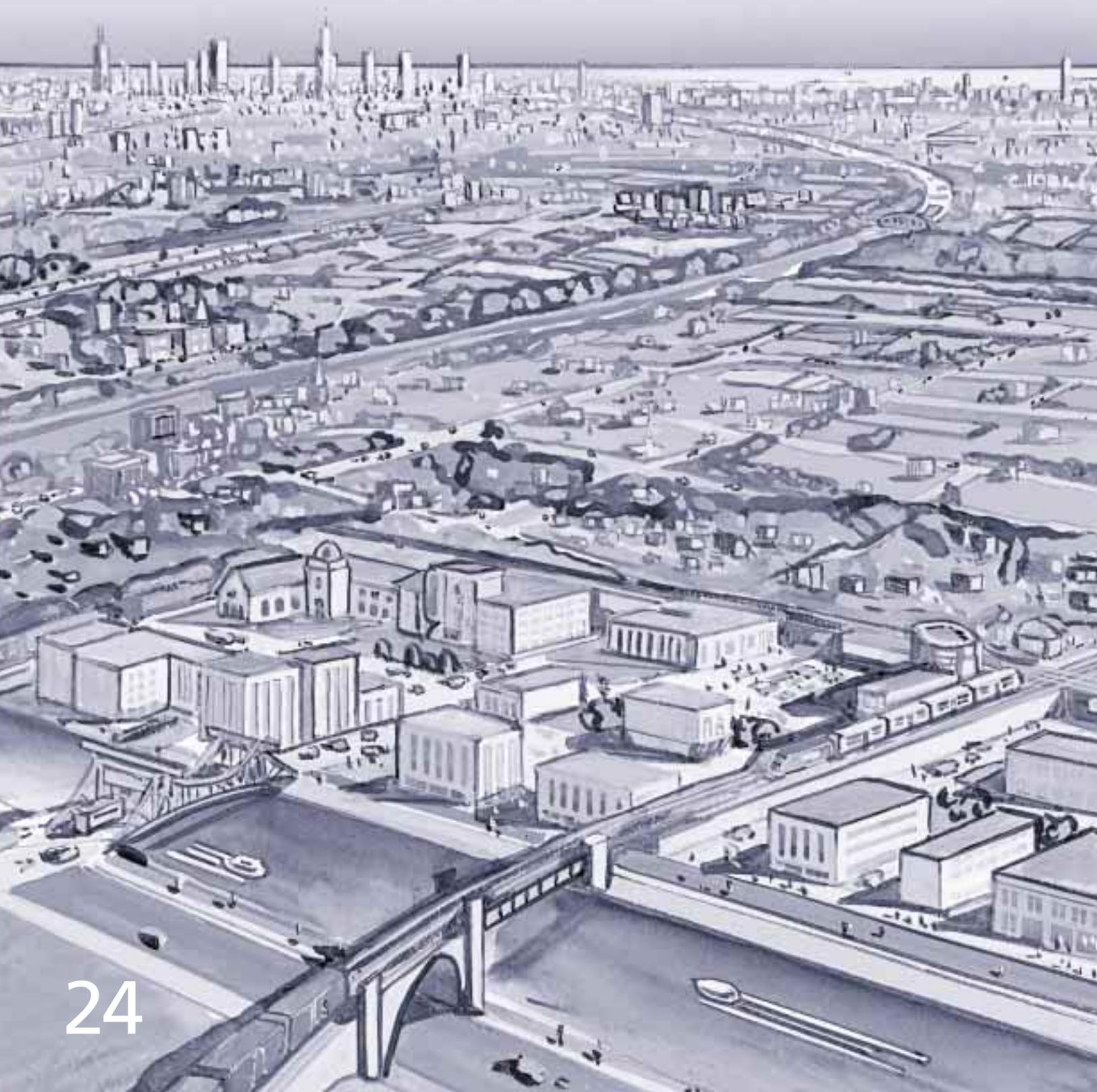


# The Metropolis Plan

## CHOICES FOR THE CHICAGO REGION

### Chicago Metropolis 2020

The Chicago metropolis is leading the way in developing a regional identity and collaboration. This article describes the blueprint for the region developed by community leaders and offers lessons to Philadelphia's metro on how to build a vision for a region.



## The Metropolis Vision

The Metropolis Plan is a vision for the kind of place our region could be in 2030. It is rooted in the wisdom of the participants in our Community Leaders Workshops. Over a period of four months, we held a series of workshops around the region in which we solicited input from many of the people who know and care about the future of our region: mayors, business leaders, members of the clergy, environmental experts, transportation planners, and other community leaders.

We unrolled maps at these workshops and asked the participants the question at the core of how our region will grow and develop: We are expecting 1.6 million new residents by 2030; where should they all go?

These leaders made choices that reinforced the principles developed in the original Chicago Metropolis 2020 report: redevelop existing urban centers and abandoned areas; encourage growth in the Chicago Loop; protect open spaces; provide greater choices in housing and transportation.

These choices were evaluated and refined using our land use and transportation computer models. Thus, we could test the growth and development ideas proposed by these community leaders and determine how they would affect outcomes that

people in the region care about: traffic congestion, time spent commuting, air quality, transit ridership, economic opportunity. We were able to see a different future.

The Metropolis Plan calls for the following kinds of investments and policy changes:

- **Invest in strong “regional cities”— places such as Elgin, Joliet, and Aurora — that are an important part of the multi-centered region that we have become.** Similarly, a strong Chicago downtown is essential to our region’s future. By developing strong centers in each major area of our region, we can provide a better mix of housing, jobs, and services in these areas. In turn, these strong regional cities would provide an urban lifestyle outside of Chicago, create strong local transit hubs, and reduce the need for some workers to travel long distances between work and home. Similarly, The Metropolis Plan calls for reinvesting in neighborhoods that have seen decades of neglect, such as Chicago’s South Side and the south suburbs. These areas have solid infrastructure, good access to transportation, and plenty of vacant land. Overall some 40 percent of new households under The Metropolis Plan would live in homes built on redeveloped land or infill — thereby reducing pressure on environmentally sensitive areas that might otherwise fall prey to development.





- **Remove distortions to the housing market, such as overly restrictive local zoning ordinances, that artificially limit housing choices for residents of the region.** The Metropolis Plan incorporates a broader mix of housing types in each part of the region, allowing the market to respond better to the demand for moderately priced housing near job centers. This would have three profoundly beneficial effects. First, it would provide opportunities for more residents of the region to find affordable housing near their jobs. Second, it would help to decrease traffic congestion for all residents of the region by decreasing the number of commuters making long trips between work and home. Third, it would dramatically reduce air pollution, which is a function of how much time we spend in our cars every day. Indeed, coordinating land use policy and transportation investments in a way that allows workers to live closer to their jobs is one of the most significant environmental improvements that we can make.
- **Make better use of our existing rail infrastructure.** One of the region's richest resources is our remarkable rail system, which includes 380 rail stations. One of the clear messages from our community workshops was that these rail stations should be focal points for future development. They have the potential to be anchors for retail and housing development. They should also be part of a seamless transit system in which passengers can move easily from bus to commuter train

to subway. Under The Metropolis Plan, a third of all new housing would be built within a half mile of a passenger rail station.

- **Invest in transit modernization to make public transportation — and buses in particular — more attractive.** The evidence is clear from around the country that building more and bigger highways alone is not an effective strategy for dealing with traffic congestion. A better strategy is to encourage more use of public transit — and the best way to encourage more use of public transit is to make it more convenient and attractive. Among other transit investments, The Metropolis Plan calls for the development of a new Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system that would connect our regional cities and serve all six counties in the region. Bus Rapid Transit offers many of the attractive features of rail transit, such as dedicated lanes to avoid road congestion and stations with raised platforms to allow level boarding and off-bus fare collection. Thus, BRT is more comfortable and efficient than traditional bus service but far more cost effective than light rail.
- **Help communities build more walkable neighborhoods and business districts.** One of the near universal themes to emerge from our workshops is the desire for communities that are more hospitable to pedestrians and bicyclists. This is not merely an aesthetic consideration; it is a matter of public health. Some two thirds of Americans are now obese or overweight. One

recognized way to improve our health and life expectancy is to walk a mere 20 minutes a day, which would happen naturally if we were to live in more walkable neighborhoods and business districts.

- **Reinforce the use of expressways for long trips (for which they were originally intended), the use of arterial streets for shorter trips, and the smart design of communities and subdivisions to promote the flow of traffic.** There is a science to managing traffic, and all too often we have ignored it. The Metropolis Plan would establish a system of boulevards and parkways to facilitate shorter trips by auto. This kind of arterial grid naturally diffuses congestion and allows cars to move more freely at lower speeds, providing

convenient access to the most possible locations. Meanwhile, The Metropolis Plan calls for the use of “value pricing” on the region’s expressways. Under this system, tolls would be highest at hours of peak travel and lowest during off-peak times, spreading the traffic burden more evenly throughout the day. The plan also call for local “connectivity” standards to increase the linkages among streets, reduce the reliance on congested arterials, and improve the traffic flow through and within communities.

- **Restore and protect our region’s prairie reserves, woodlands, and wetlands.** One risk associated with regional growth is the destruction of open space. While the six-county population grew by 11 percent between 1990 and 2000, the



amount of land consumed by residential development grew by 21 percent. The Metropolis Plan would spare some 300 square miles from development. As a result, more than two thirds of new households would be within walking distance of a park or open space. The Metropolis Plan also dramatically reduces the number of acres of impervious surface, which improves water quality and reduces flooding.

## Conclusion

The Metropolis Plan delivers what residents of the Chicago region want: protected open space; walkable communities; investment in our existing urban area; economic opportunity for people for all income groups, and less of what we don't want: traffic, congestion, pollution, and sprawl.

We can build a more attractive region — and one that is productive and economically competitive. When Daniel Burnham prepared his 1909 Plan of

Chicago, he recognized that the region's vitality grew from its attractiveness as a center of commerce and industry. Our economy has evolved since then, but one fundamental challenge hasn't changed at all: We must be able to move people and goods efficiently.

The Metropolis Plan is not just about building more attractive communities and saving open space; it is about making the next 100 years as good for business in the Chicago region as the last 100 years have been. And it is about making sure that every person and community in the region has opportunity to share in that prosperity. A region that is better designed for its residents will also have a stronger economy.

Chicago Metropolis 2020 is a nonprofit organization created by the Commercial Club of Chicago in 1999 to advocate for better regional planning and smart investments to promote the region's long term health. This article is excerpted from a longer report released in 2003 and is printed here with Chicago Metropolis 2020's permission. For more information, visit [www.chicagometropolis2020.org](http://www.chicagometropolis2020.org).



