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PRESS RELEASE

Business-Sponsored Civic Group Releases Report Warning of "Regional Gridlock"

Calls for a Streamlined Regional Growth and Transportation Commission

CHICAGO, March 4 --[Chicago Metropolis 2020](#), a nonprofit civic organization, called today for dramatic changes in land use and transportation policies in order to avoid "regional gridlock."

In a report released today, Chicago Metropolis 2020 proposed the consolidation of the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Metra, the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), Pace, the Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS), the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC), the Illinois State Toll Highway Authority, and other relevant agencies into a single commission with responsibility for regional land use and transportation policy and long-term planning.

The report, [The Metropolis Plan: Choices for the Chicago Region](#), presents a menu of other policy recommendations that would lead to healthier growth for the Chicago region.

Flanked by business and other civic leaders from throughout the Chicago region, Chicago Metropolis 2020 President and CEO George A. Ranney, Jr. warned that if the current haphazard policies and development patterns continue, the resulting traffic congestion and loss of open space will compromise both the region's economic competitiveness and its quality of life.

"If you think traffic is bad now, just wait," Ranney said. "If we develop our region for the next 30 years like we have for the past 10, we will choke ourselves. It's happening already in other parts of the country, and we cannot let it happen here. The time to make real changes is now."

The Metropolis Plan: Choices for the Chicago Region uses state of the art computer modeling to measure how the Chicago Region may look and function in the year 2030 if current policies and development patterns continue under a "Business as Usual" scenario. The analysis finds that traffic congestion and other important quality of life indicators will worsen significantly if corrective actions are not taken.

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The report also presents a series of significant policy changes that will lead to healthier regional growth over the next three decades. For example, a series of regional growth policies, which the report refers to as The Metropolis Plan, could accomplish the following by 2030 relative to “Business as Usual”:

- Allow the average Chicago area resident to spend 155 fewer hours in a car – the equivalent of four work weeks.
- Spare 300 square miles of open space from development – the equivalent of DuPage County.
- Save nearly \$4 billion in local infrastructure costs.
- Save the average family in the Chicago region \$1,000 a year in travel-related expenses.

The policy changes called for under The Metropolis Plan could be accomplished with less public spending than is currently projected by government agencies for the Chicago region. “We’re talking about smarter spending,” said Frank Beal, Chicago Metropolis 2020 Executive Director. Beal also emphasized that every concept embraced in The Metropolis Plan had been tried successfully somewhere else in the United States or abroad.

The extraordinary findings generated by The Metropolis Plan are the result of three basic kinds of policy changes: 1) Coordinating transportation investments with land use planning so that residents of the region are able to live closer to where they work and shop; 2) Investing in more attractive public transportation; and 3) Paying more attention to the science of traffic management, such as traffic signal coordination, the use of arterial road systems, traffic standards for residential subdivisions, and “value pricing” on the region’s expressways.

Specifically, *The Metropolis Plan: Choices for the Chicago Region* calls for the following kinds of policy changes.

- **Invest in strong “regional centers” – places like Joliet, Aurora, Naperville, Schaumburg, and Waukegan – that are an important part of the multi-centered Chicago region.** Investment in these areas, which have solid infrastructure, good access to transportation, and plenty of vacant land, reduces 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 would incorporate 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.
- **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 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.
- **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. These stations 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.
- **Help communities build more walkable neighborhoods and business districts.** Residents of our region have consistently expressed a strong desire for communities that are more hospitable to pedestrians and bicyclists.
- **Establish an arterial grid of boulevards and parkways to diffuse congestion naturally and allow cars to move more freely at lower speeds.** The Plan would also use "value pricing" on our tollways; tolls would be highest at hours of peak travel and lowest during off-peak times, thereby spreading the traffic burden more evenly throughout the day.
- **Restore and protect our region's prairie reserves, woodlands, and wetlands.** The population of region grew 11 percent between 1990 and 2000 while the amount of land consumed by residential development grew twice as fast. The Metropolis Plan would take pressure off of some of Illinois's most valuable open spaces.

Chicago Metropolis 2020 executives emphasized that the recommendations in the report reflect the preferences of the region's residents. In the course of preparing its report, the group conducted regional workshops, met with groups ranging from business leaders to organized labor, and conducted a public opinion survey of 1,450 Chicago area residents.

“We recorded what people told us about how they would like our region to grow,” said Frank Beal. “The purpose of the Metropolis Plan is not to tell people how they should live; it is to listen to how people would like to live and then help them get there,” he said.

A full copy of *The Metropolis Plan: Choices for the Chicago Region*, including a comprehensive list of state, regional, and local policy changes that must be implemented in order to achieve the goals of the report, can be found at www.chicagometropolis2020.org.

Ranney identified three priorities in the immediate future:

- Creating a Regional Growth and Transportation Commission for Northeastern Illinois that would streamline the existing planning and transportation agencies into a single commission with responsibility for regional land use and transportation policy and long-term planning.
- Adopting an Intergovernmental Growth Management Act that would provide a mechanism for counties and municipalities to create and implement plans that are consistent with healthy regional growth.
- Enacting a state housing program that for the first time would give the State an active role in housing and requires communities to establish plans enabling people to live near their work.

[Chicago Metropolis 2020](#) is a nonprofit organization created by The Commercial Club of Chicago in 1999 to address regional challenges ranging from traffic congestion to early childhood education.

Chicago Metropolis 2020 has program areas in Early Childhood Education; Justice and Violence; Housing; and Land Use and Transportation.

Chicago Metropolis 2020’s unifying vision is that the region’s governments, businesses, and residents must cooperate to make the kinds of informed choices that will make the region attractive and economically competitive 10, 50, and 100 years from now.

Chicago Metropolis 2020 was created by the same organization that commissioned Daniel Burnham’s 1909 Plan of Chicago, a forward-looking document that helped to make Chicago the robust and beautiful city that it is today, and the 1999 Chicago Metropolis 2020 report recommending some 190 policies to keep the region globally competitive.

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