

## INTRODUCTION

Three distinct neighborhoods in Chicago share common goals: to revitalize their historically underserved neighborhoods and to reestablish positive connections between their neighborhoods, the surrounding communities and the city as a whole. Through

**“All this retail has developed along Clybourn & Elston Avenues, but there is no bus service. If you want to go from one store to another, you have to walk.”**

**– Near West Resident**

stakeholder input, this summary will document how members of the Near North, Near West, and Mid South Study Areas wish to reconnect their communities through transit amenities, pedestrian improvement, and commercial development.

The Metropolitan Planning Council met with stakeholders from each of the three neighborhoods at the Reconnecting Neighborhoods Project Launch in

November, 2007 and then through several community meetings held from February through March, 2008 to discuss the opportunities, strengths, and challenges present in the physical environment of their neighborhoods and surrounding communities. Participants gave valuable input in the form of traditional surveys, key pad polling, map exercises, and open forum discussions to help shed light on the needs and desires of the community and how they would like to see these changes enacted.

# MID SOUTH STUDY AREA



Bursting with potential, the Mid South enjoys connectivity with some of Chicago's most popular and active neighborhoods. While new development is coming to the Mid South, the amenities needed are slower to arrive.

This Mid South community is focusing on transit options, access, and safety in order to promote a more livable neighborhood. Many members of the discussion spoke specifically of

bus routes that had problems with consistency of service, poor scheduling, and lack of connectivity to trains, retail, or other essential services.

The centrality of the Mid South to the City of Chicago's Olympic bid has brought feelings of both excitement and trepidation to this largely residential and historically African-American community. Through Reconnecting Neighborhoods' outreach efforts and through past planning efforts, including the Quad Communities Quality of Life Plan, residents have voiced a strong desire for smaller, independent retailers and service providers, with some national chains, where appropriate.

Affordable housing remains a great concern, and ensuring that current residents will be able to afford to live here after development takes place is a top priority for long-time

residents. Some meeting participants are uncertain how current and future development will affect them.

The accessibility and quality of service of public transit have also been key concerns for those stakeholders who have been engaged in the process to date.

At a Reconnecting Neighborhoods Launch on November 6, 2007, local stakeholders provided the following feedback:

- Need for Metra stop at Oakwood Blvd.
- Improve safety and decrease loitering/trash of transit stops, especially for late night riders
- Partnerships with government and transit agencies to ensure quality development along transit nodes
- Chicago's role in funding transit; how to hold the city/state accountable
- Community is in the middle of good transit systems with no way to access them quickly, causing many to resort to their cars
- Access to key employment clusters through the region
- Job training initiative to increase employment and safety
- Development of Black Metropolis Historic Area Designation
- More dependable bus service and schedule
- Later service hours, better shelters and seating, reexamining routes, and improved weekend scheduling of bus routes

**“We need bus lines to circulate through [our area], just south of Hyde Park. As more people are buying property, it makes sense to connect the community via bus lines.”**

**– Mid South Resident**

- Better retail around Green Line stations
- Locally-owned alternative transit/bus service connected to tourism
- Bike infrastructure (parking/connections with transit)
- Better marketing of what the CTA already has

Three community-specific meetings held on February 20, 27, and March 5, 2008 generated a significant amount of feedback. On the average, 45.5% of Mid South residents that participated drive a car to get to work (as compared to 17% of the Near North Study Area meeting participants.) Some participants questioned the low Metra ridership numbers that were presented in the Reconnecting Neighborhoods Inventory Report. Stakeholders have expressed the desire to make transit more accessible to pedestrians and the elderly, increase service within the study area, strengthen the connections between the Mid South and surrounding communities such as McCormick Place, greater Bronzeville, and Hyde Park, create improved connections to the vast greenspace of the lakefront, and have more reliable scheduling.

Below are several specific needs and challenges that were identified by residents and stakeholders at these meetings:

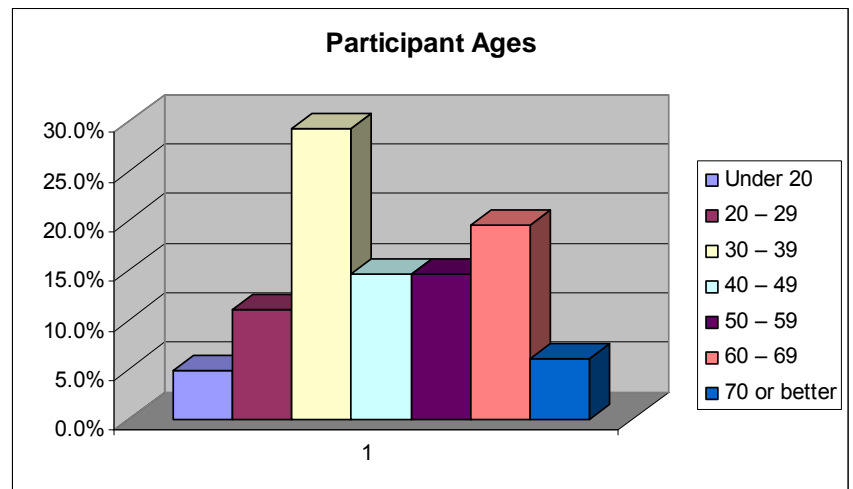
- Need for connections within the North Kenwood and Oakland neighborhoods like the kind provided by the University of Chicago with its dedicated bus service.
- Need for connection between north Kenwood and Hyde Park
- The Pershing Rd. bus is badly needed for residents who work on Saturday & Sunday or church goers.
- El stops need better lighting and increased security as well as more maintenance and cleaning.

- More shelters, benches, and trash cans are needed
- Need for improved transit and accessibility between 39<sup>th</sup> and 47<sup>th</sup> on and Drexel Boulevard.
- More frequency of bus service to reach nearby train stops

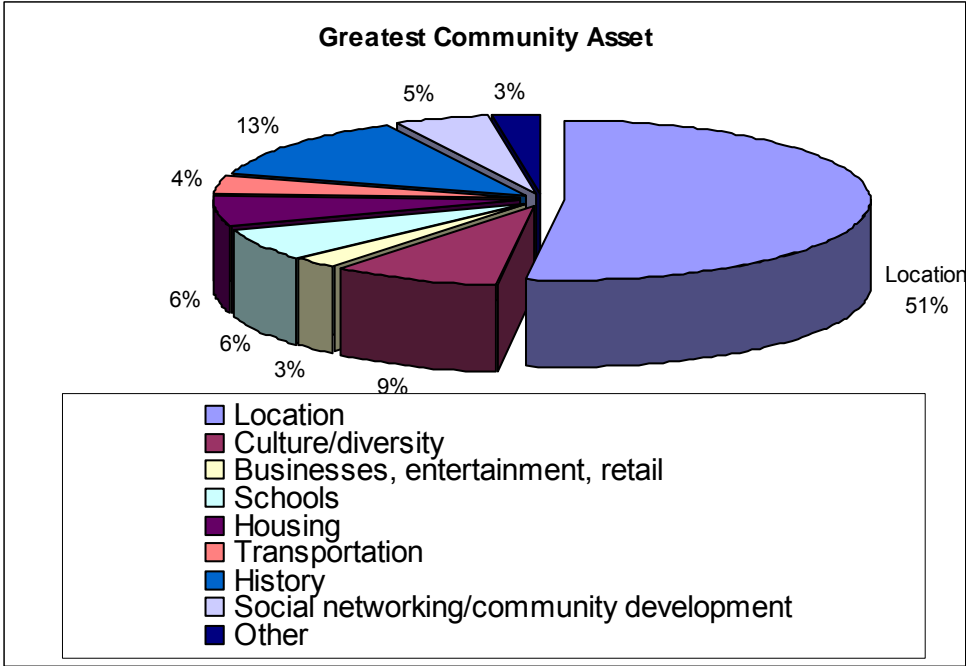
**“I work from home most of the time, When running errands or visiting others, it is easier to drive and depend on myself.”**

**– Mid South Resident**

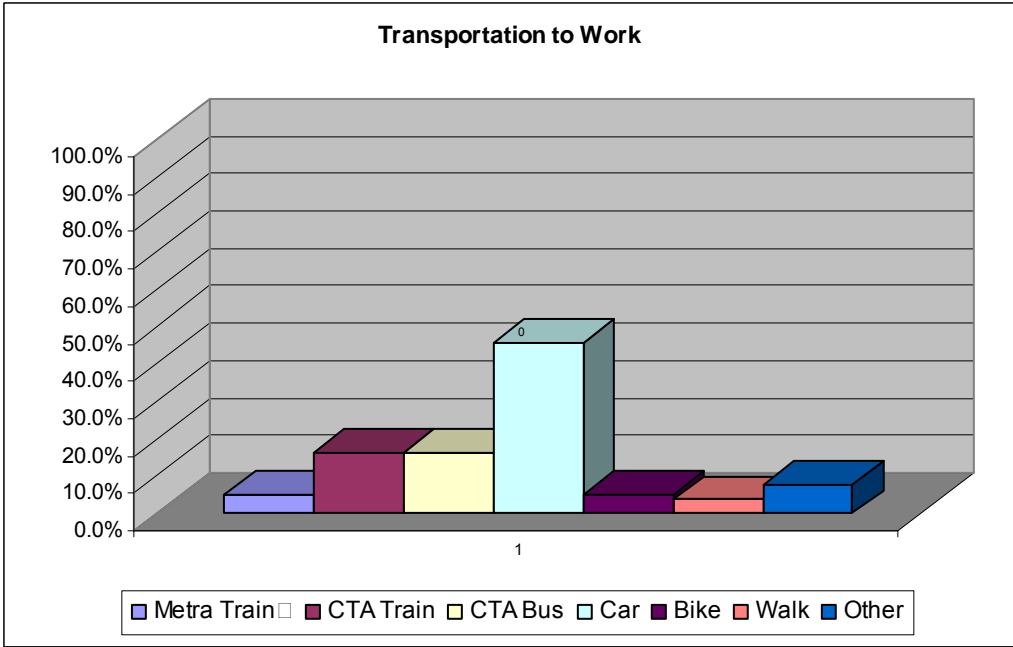
- Pedestrian routes, especially during winter evenings, are poorly lit and feels dangerous
- Too many buses at “crush-capacity” during rush hour.
- Too many transfers to get to my place of employment



Age distribution of study area participants (n=82)



Greatest community asset (n=79)



Mode of transportation to work (n=79)

# NEAR NORTH STUDY AREA



Map Generated: Mon May 19 15:28:40 2008

Commercial development in this area has tended towards one of two extremes; high end retail and limited ‘corner store’ establishments. Residents of this neighborhood feel that they need more development ‘in the middle ground’ to better meet the needs of the community as a whole. Most residents who have participated in the project to date believe that improving the streetscapes of their neighborhoods will fundamentally improve the local retail experience and market.

Residents of the Near North Study Area are concerned about growth – they want to have a say in how it is executed. Their community, like many so close to the Central Business District, has a striated mix of land use zoning, but residents feel these uses could be better coordinate to better serve the diverse retail and transit needs of this dense community, as well as ease the ever worsening congestion in the area.

At the Reconnecting Neighborhoods Launch on November 6, 2007, Near North stakeholders provided the following input:

- There is an over-emphasis on car planning in the area, with the big boxes and parking lots
- Lack of community input for planning, and a need for community identity

- Need to reach consensus on appropriate density of residential developments
- Division/Clybourn may have transit and retail, but it is not a neighborhood center
- Better integration of streetscapes, lack of interconnectivity of sidewalks and street grid, and improvements to the pedestrian environment as a whole were expressed as a key component to making the neighborhood more family-friendly.
- It's a mess at Clybourn/Division intersection; need better design for pedestrians
- Traffic congestion at Clybourn/Division intersection
- Parking (for cars *and bikes*)
- Planning for Clybourn, New Orleans, and Larrabee
- Land-use barriers preventing retail
- Bus stops relocated with more consideration for the elderly and children
- Social activities for families, especially those with children, were cited as lacking in the study area.

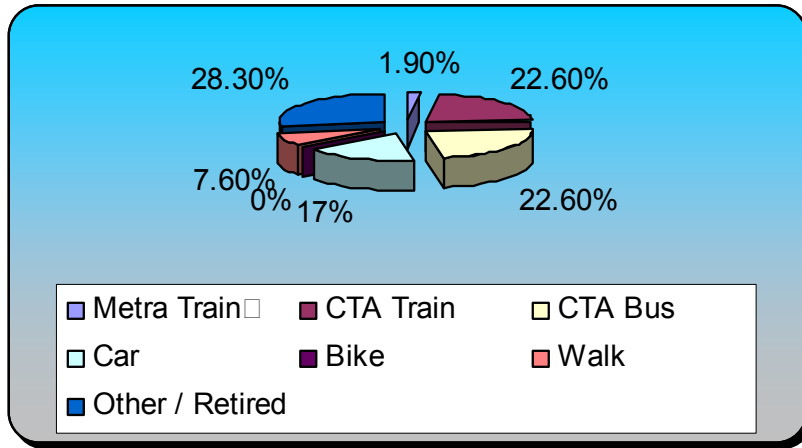
**“Where I live is probably the most isolated place in the neighborhood for accessing transit - I am about a half mile in all directions from all bus and train lines.”**

**– Near North Resident**

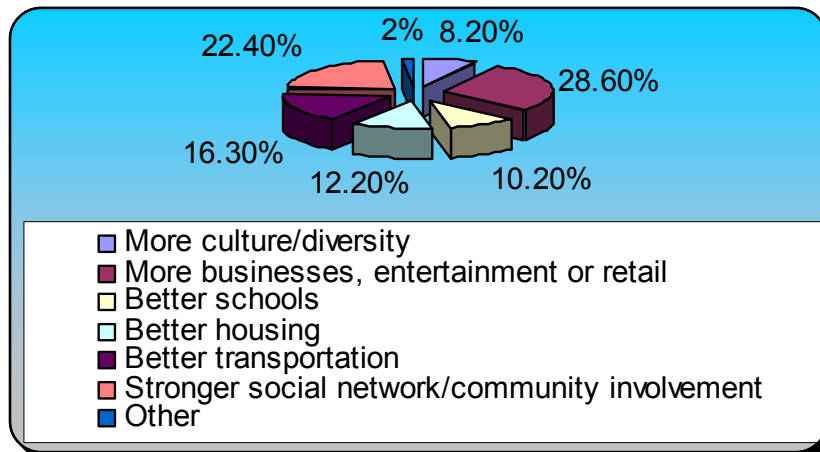
A follow up meeting on March 26, 2008 resulted in the following list of desired changes in the community:

- More affordable retail options, especially grocery stores, restaurants and clothing stores. Many residents travel to the K-Mart shopping center on Ashland/Milwaukee for less expensive alternatives.
- Additional Laundromats, the closest is on Ashland/Milwaukee.
- The closest pharmacies (CVS at Clark/Division or Clybourn/North) are too far for seniors to walk.
- Restoring bus service on Clybourn Street
- Recreational facility to fill the void left by the closing of New City YMCA

- Improving safety and programming at local parks. Stanton Park is located behind North Town Village but it is too dangerous to use. People usually go to Seward Park (located at Clybourn/Orleans/Division).
- Including increased green space in future planning



Main mode of transportation to worksite (n=53)



Desired changes in the study area (n=49)

# NEAR WEST STUDY AREA



Madison Street in many ways epitomizes the challenges of the Near West, a historically vibrant commercial corridor in the Near West Study Area in need of redevelopment. While most residents are encouraged by the residential redevelopment taking place, they feel much work is still needed to create an inviting pedestrian environment, and attracting retailers to the community.

The Near West enjoys proximity to both the Blue and Green lines; however, access to these lines is difficult and often impractical for many residents. The Eisenhower Expressway serves as both a physical and a psychological barrier between this community and the Blue Line. Residents reported that the area surrounding the Blue Line stop feels neither safe nor inviting, and pedestrians can often have difficulty crossing the

**“We don't have enough direct bus transportation -- everything feels just a little bit out of the way. A bus running directly through our neighborhood on a regular basis would be great.”**

**– Near West Resident**

intersections to make it to the station. “It would be great if the Green Line had a stop at either Damen or Western. This would be very beneficial for quite a few reasons. The city is trying to build up this neighborhood, yet if you want to catch a train, one has to walk all the way to either Ashland or California. It would make sense to have a stop at

Damen because of its proximity to the United Center for games, concerts, events and the possibility of the Olympics,” noted one resident.

At the heart of this neighborhood is the United Center, which draws people from all over the region, and indeed, the country, for large scale events that range from basketball and hockey to live entertainment and traveling circuses. In order to accommodate these events, the United Center is circumscribed by a great deal of flat parking lots. Yet these lots are seen as underutilized by some local residents who want to see smaller affairs like farmer’s markets and street festivals, and new retail development.

At the November 6, 2007 Reconnecting Neighborhoods launch, the general issues for the Near West discussion group were the need for a Green Line stop on Damen, the “wasteland” or “dead-zone” character of the United Center parking lot and its bearing on the overall pedestrian and retail environment of the neighborhood. The need for better retail options and streetscapes that create pedestrian-friendly corridors along several main streets such as Madison, Damen and Ashland. The following are several needs cited at the Launch:

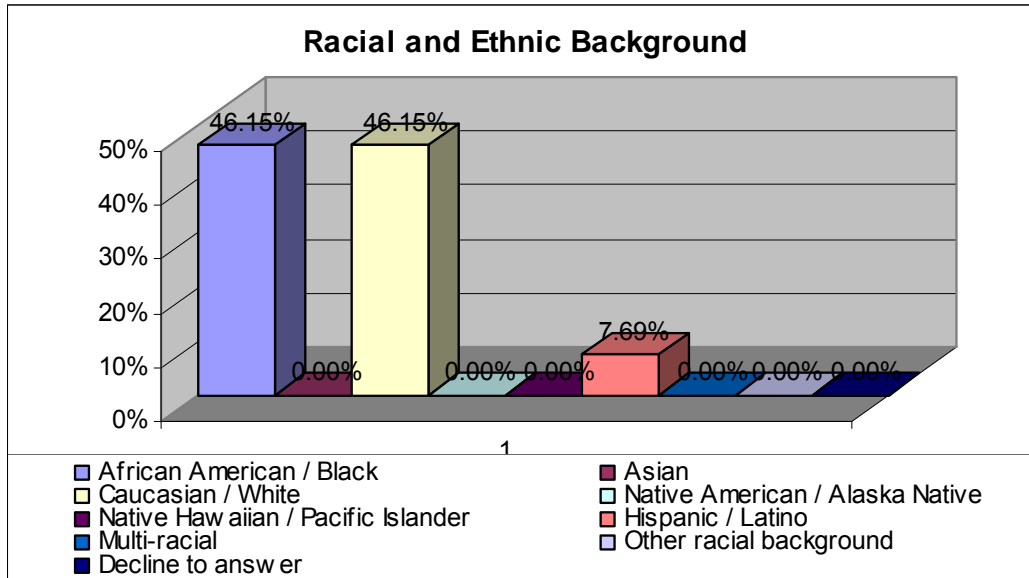
- Need for greater density and mixed-use development
- Additional Green Line stops, especially along Damen
- Retail and commercial development around the United Center
- Need for more green space
- Access to full service grocery store
- Improved Frequency and reliability of bus service

- Sensitivity towards current residents regarding safety concerns, encourage involvement
- Restore pedestrian environment via development of streetscapes
- Improving perceived and actual security in the area
- Expansion of services for seniors and handicapped individuals

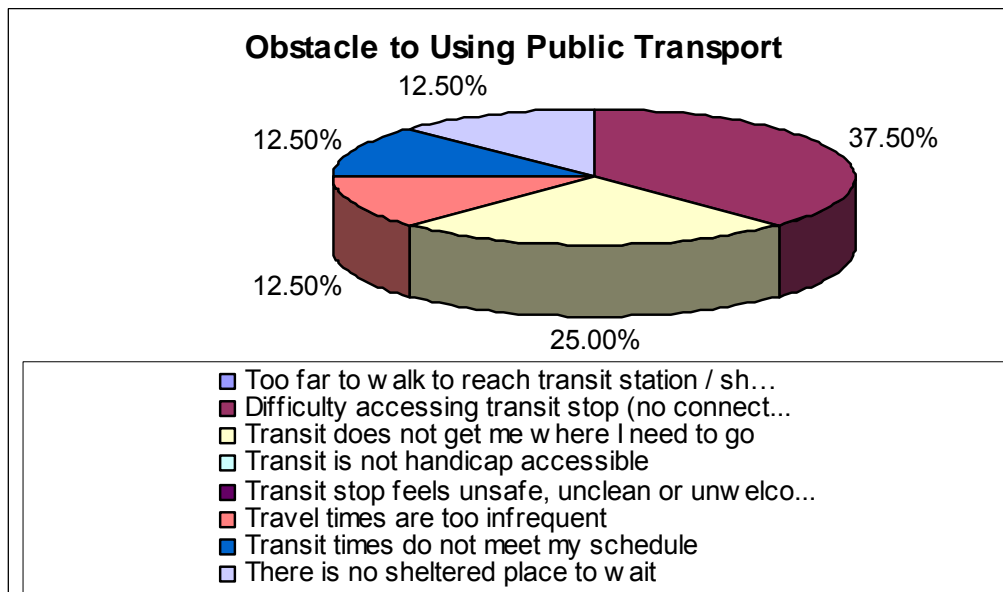
A follow up meeting on April 27, 2008 resulted in the following list of desired changes in the community:

- Westbound access at Ashland to the Green Line
- A new stop along the Green Line, perhaps at Damen or Western.
- Restaurants and retail within walking distance of study area
- Having the bus come at regularly scheduled times and not clumping together.
- More viable bike lanes that allow bikes and cars to travel safely together.
- More direct bus transportation, current transit feels just a little bit out of the way, a bus running directly through our neighborhood on a regular basis is needed.
- Buses are not reliable on Armitage. Metra is great but doesn't go close to where I work in the Gold Coast. The Blue Line also isn't convenient for working in the Gold Coast so that has left me with walking, riding my bike or driving and I don't feel safe riding my bike along Clybourn.
- Anywhere in the corridor between Grand and Lake is without local east-west service after 6:40pm. Even once bus service is extended until 10pm, unless you're going to be at home by 10, there is then no return trip option from anywhere else, neither weekends nor weeknights. Once the bus stops running, the area is transit-dry without long walks to rail, or if a north-south bus is going your way (which still is often a 10 minute walk or more, depending on location).
- There is a fifteen minute walk minimum to the Blue Line. Bus routes are plenty but service can be spotty, especially the north/south routes west of Western (California bus, etc.)

- Need for staple food items - a small market at the west end of Armitage at Racine, lunch spots - a little deli - for soup and sandwiches and salads where you can sit in or take away.



Demographics of Study Area participants (n=13)



Obstacles to using public transit (n=8)

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

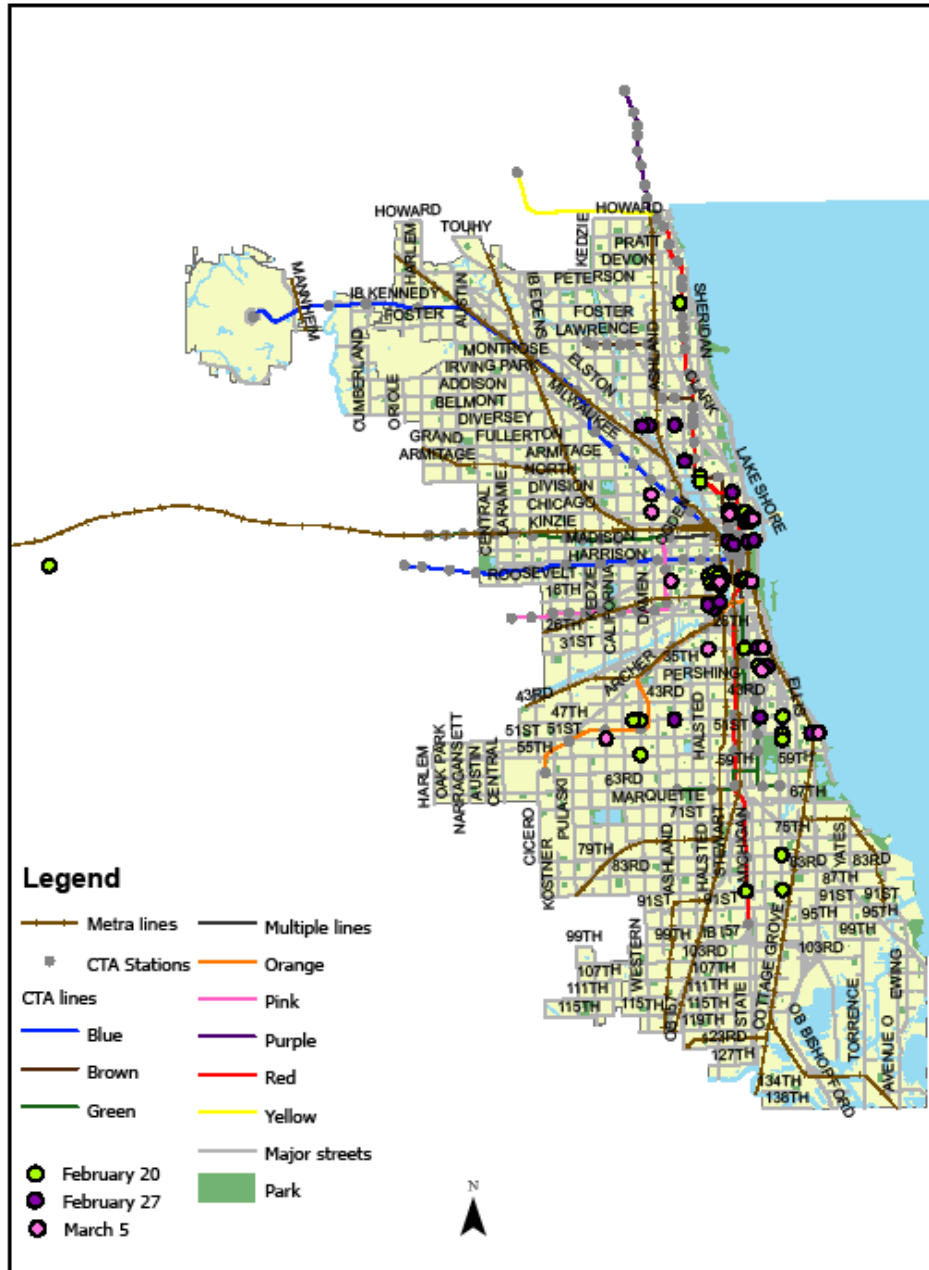
Though each neighborhood has an identity unique unto itself, residents in all three study areas share many of the same basic concerns:

- Increased accessibility for people of all ages, abilities, to different modes of transit
- Establishment of new and support of existing local business, and the assistance needed to grow these businesses to meet the needs of residents and visitors alike
- An increase in the level of safety, via greater police presence, redesign of public spaces, repair of roads and sidewalks, and an upgrade in visibility of public spaces

Respect for the needs and desires of current residents who call these neighborhoods home, as well as smart planning options for future development that is mindful of the growing population of the city as a whole

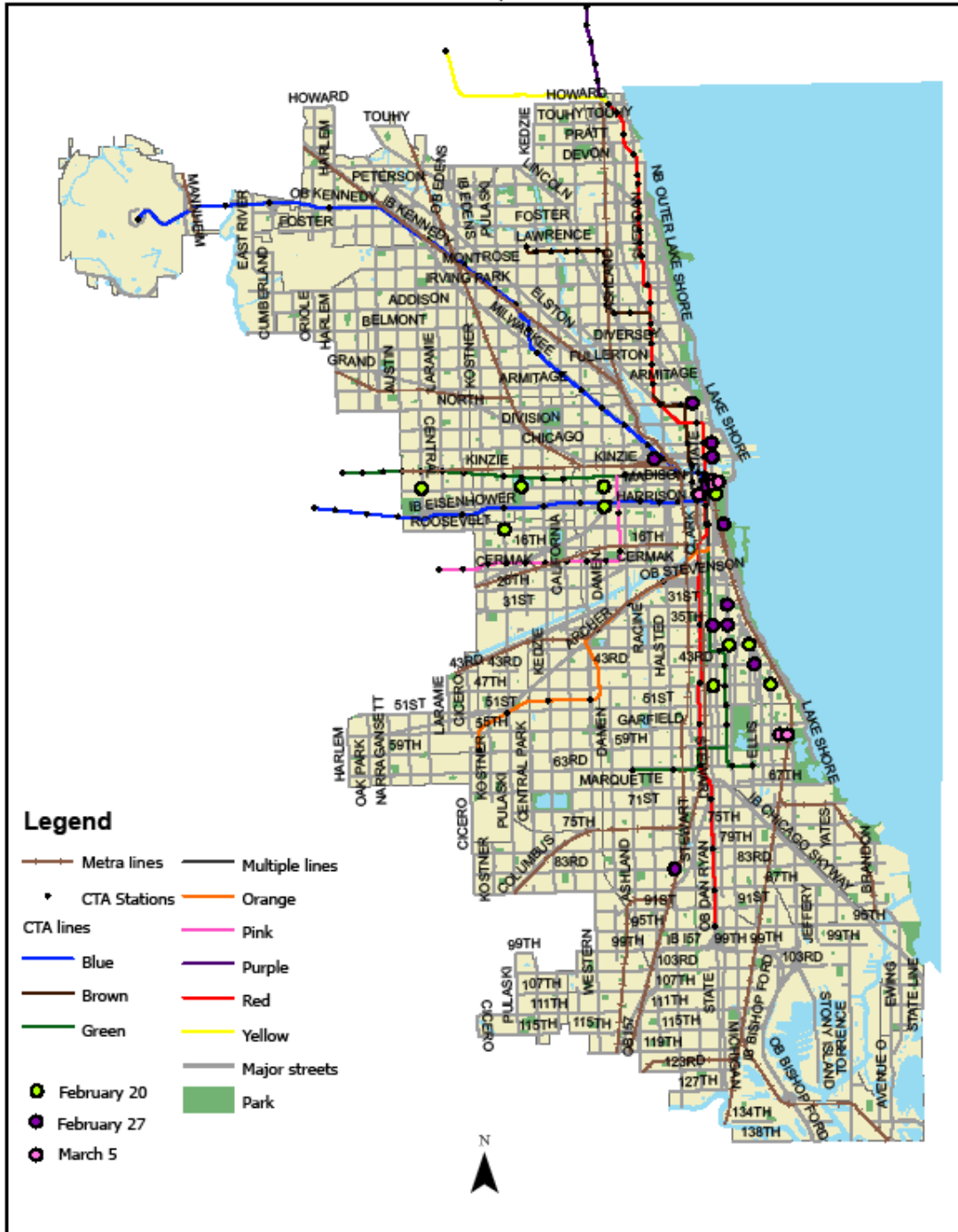
# Reconnecting Neighborhoods

Mid-South  
Where do you shop?



# Reconnecting Neighborhoods

Mid-South  
Where do you work?





# Reconnecting Neighborhoods

Near North

Where do you work, shop, and play?

