

SOUTHWEST SIDE NEIGHBORHOOD BIKE NETWORK

Neighborhood Taskforce Meeting #1



MEETING SUMMARY

Southwest Side Neighborhood Bike Network

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Wednesday, April 05, 2023

1:00 – 2:30 pm

Virtual Meeting - Microsoft Teams

ATTENDEES

CDOT Representatives

David Smith, Complete Streets Director

Brad Huff, TY Lin – Bikeways Program Manager

John Pickering, TY Lin – Bikeways Planner

Sid Shah, Sam Schwartz Engineering – Pedestrian Program Manager

Nyya – Lyft/Divvy

Taskforce Members

Dixon Galvez Searle – Southwest Collective

Brian Kopinski – PODER Works

Andrew Spaulding – McKinley Park Resident

Luis Ramirez – Gage Park Latinx Council

Tony Adams – McKinley Park Development Council

Alfredo Romo - Neighbors 4 Environmental Justice

INTRODUCTION TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD BIKE NETWORK

David Smith, Complete Streets Director, from the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) introduced the Southwest Side Neighborhood Bike Network initiative to the Taskforce and provided an overview of the state of bicycling in Chicago. The focus area concentrates on the McKinley Park, Gage Park, and Brighton Park neighborhoods (Southwest Side). The Divvy bike share system also recently expanded into Chicago's southwest side.

David stressed the importance and benefits of Complete Streets, streets that are designed for all users and modes, and how a connected network of bike routes will not only help make biking a convenient option for people to get around but make the streets safer for all modes no matter if you are walking, biking, or driving.

In Spring 2023, CDOT released the *Chicago Cycling Strategy*, which will guide the planning and implementation of Chicago's bike network. The document lays out three Strategic Pillars to achieve an equitable transportation system: A Connected Citywide Network, Serving Local Trips, and Providing Low-Stress Options. The Strategy acknowledges that each neighborhood has its own set of needs, contexts, and perspectives, and that each community is in a different stage of network development. CDOT aims to use this *Strategy* to partner with the Taskforce to identify and build a connected neighborhood bike network on the Southwest Side that best responds to the community's needs.

Outcomes

With help from the Taskforce, CDOT is looking to identify and design at least 10 miles of new bike routes to be installed on the Southwest Side beginning in 2023 and continuing into 2024. Long-term projects beyond 2024 will also be identified. The Taskforce will also help develop other recommendations to make biking safe, convenient, and appealing to the community and guide CDOT as to how to best engage their neighborhoods.

Timeline

The Neighborhood Bike Network process is meant to allow for meaningful conversations with the Taskforce and the communities while still moving to quickly install a protected bike network. The primary objective of this effort is to identify, design, and install projects in Gage Park, McKinley Park, and Brighton Park in 2023. This is the first of three planned Taskforce meetings, but other interim touchpoints and meetings may be scheduled throughout the process in addition to community outreach which will occur throughout the program.

WHAT TRANSPORTATION RELATED INITIATIVES IS YOUR GROUP WORKING ON IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD?

Environmental issues and **public health** concerns were a common response to the type of efforts neighborhood groups are involved with in the Southwest Side. A heavy concentration of industrial land uses, and their effects, including **poor air quality** and **heavy industrial traffic** influence neighborhood initiatives and prioritize public health. Goals and priorities for community groups in the Southwest Side include: measures to improve public health, restricting additional industrial land uses, mitigating truck traffic, and improving air quality. Other Taskforce members noted their community groups host community bike rides and promote bicycling as a viable means of transportation, especially for short local trips and trips to school.. Taskforce members noted how these issues create physical, cultural, and political barriers within the Southwest Side and how bicycling can play into meeting neighborhood goals by addressing issues of air pollution, disjointed street network, lack of transit, and dangerous driving behavior.

Other initiatives include:

- State legislation to address Environmental Justice
- Community impact study to identify environmental issues
- Youth engagement programs
- Promotion of bike lanes to new Alderpeople
- Language classes and workforce development

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Who's not here that should be? Who should we make sure we engage?

Additional outreach to the **schools** and **parks** including the **Advisory Councils** were commonly mentioned as important groups to engage with. CDOT will follow up on additional contacts mentioned, including:

- McKinley Park Development Council*
- St Gall School**
- Local/informal bike groups

**CDOT noted McKinley Park Development Council was a member on the Taskforce*

*** CDOT has been in contact with St Gall School*

How can CDOT reach out and involve all stakeholders? And what is the most effective way?

When asked about how to best engage with the community, Taskforce members responded that CDOT could attend meetings and bike rides hosted by their organizations. In addition to presenting at community group meetings, CDOT could attend walking tours, host and provide information at community organizations, host pop-up events at community destinations (parks, schools, transit stations), and target local schools at pick-up and drop-off times. Events at parks in coordination with Taskforce members where attendees can provide input while learning bicycle maintenance skills could be hosted in conjunction with local bike shops. In addition to engaging with residents, having a local bike shop presence at these organized events could help promote and strengthen community ties to a bike-friendly lifestyle. Stakeholders mentioned the importance of having translated materials into languages represented in the community.

Other community events suggested:

- Farmers Market at Plant Chicago
- Local school councils and parent groups at schools
- Environmental Justice walking tours
- Outreach at local bike shops (Blue City Cycles + Sanchez Bikes)
- Freebies for Families – monthly event hosted Southwest Collective
- Attend monthly meetings for McKinley Park Development Council
- Business outreach, specifically at bike shops

Who has been left out of previous conversations and how can we engage with them?

There are many immigrant communities in the neighborhoods where English is not a first language. Having **translated material** not only in **Spanish** but in **Mandarin** and **Cantonese** would be important in reaching all residents. Members noted there are many people biking to work that may not speak English or **work atypical times** who would have good knowledge.

PERCEPTIONS OF BIKING IN THE SOUTHWEST SIDE

Who is biking in the southwest side and what is the perception of biking? Why do you think that is?

While the community is auto-dominated, members noted the **prohibitive cost of owning a motor vehicle** and **lack of public transportation** options as a factor to why people bike. **Younger people in school** and day workers traveling to areas lacking transit are often seen on bikes. When asked why more people don't bike, members reiterated concerns about environmental issues, a disjointed street grid, and the heavy commercial trucks that saturate the streets.

STREETS, DESTINATIONS, CONNECTIONS, AND BARRIERS

Does the proposed focus area make sense?

CDOT asked the group if the proposed focus area, bounded by: 59th Street, Shipping & Sanitary Canal, Central Park Avenue, Western Avenue, Pershing Avenue, and Ashland Avenue, generally made sense as a network area to study. General consensus was that the area makes sense but could be **expanded to the east to include Damen Avenue**. This would include a larger portion of the 12th Ward and include Damen Avenue, an important north-south bike route in the area. CDOT will expand the area to include Damen Avenue.

What are the important destinations in your neighborhood?

- Parks
- Schools
- CTA Orange Line Stations
- Work/Employment

Additionally, the group mentioned there are many destinations outside of the community they would like better access to.

What are the important streets in your neighborhood?

Archer Avenue was most commonly discussed as an important street, not only to the neighborhood, but how it is the main connector to access downtown. However, Archer Avenue is busy, in poor condition, and is not considered a low-stress route. All of which discourages many people from biking on the street. Members emphasized the importance of **creating a low-stress route on Archer Avenue**. **Western Avenue** is also important due to its connectivity that spans the city and how it is a direct route that connects to the CTA Western Orange Line station. Other suggestions focused on **neighborhood streets**, specifically those that have traffic signals, are good routes as they typically do not experience as much traffic or truck activity. Streets where schools were located on tended to have existing traffic calming features such as speed humps and bump-outs and were found to be good low-stress alternatives to nearby commercial streets.

What are the barriers to biking in your neighborhood?

The **disjointed street network** combined with the **heavy truck activity** were the main barriers to biking. **Industrial land uses** exacerbate both truck activity and environmental issues and create high stress, unpleasant streets on which to bike. The **Shipping & Sanitary Canal** north of the neighborhoods and sprawling railroads create pinch points and funnel all traffic, both motor vehicles and bikes, onto the few streets that do provide access. Trucks can be commonplace on some neighborhood streets which further discourages the notion of a low-stress neighborhood street.

Other barriers include:

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- Intersection of Western/Pershing
- Industrial land uses between 47th and 51st Streets
- 35th Street
- Pershing Road

Next steps

- CDOT to schedule one-on-one conversations and target touchpoints
- CDOT to set up shared public calendar where members can input their upcoming events
- CDOT to develop engagement survey
- Taskforce to share additional community contact information