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CHICAGO WILL LAUNCH CTA BUS SERVICE ON LOOP LINK DECEMBER 20; ALL LANES FOR GENERAL TRAFFIC TO BE OPENED ON MADISON AND WASHINGTON

Transportation Improvement Project Expected to Ease Congestion, Modernize Traffic Flow, Enhance Safety and Improve Loop Connections to Neighborhoods

Mayor Rahm Emanuel, CDOT, and CTA today announced that CTA bus service on The Loop Link – a major modernization of the downtown transportation network – will begin Sunday, December 20th, with the opening of the red CTA bus lanes and raised boarding platforms on Madison and Washington Streets. In addition, all general traffic lanes will be open for cars on those two major downtown streets.

The Loop Link aims to make it easier, safer, and more reliable for commuters to travel the downtown area by providing a balanced separation of CTA bus, bike and regular traffic. The Loop Link will use dedicated lanes on Washington, Madison, Clinton and Canal to move people through downtown, improving reliability and speed for six bus routes in the area and extending benefits to neighborhoods throughout the city where these routes originate.

"The Loop Link will deliver fast, safe, and reliable access for all Chicagoans to the vast array of economic and cultural opportunities that are available in the heart of the city," Mayor Emanuel said. "Whether you live on the South Side, the West Side or the North Side, the Loop Link is part of the city's efforts to widen access to jobs and educational opportunities for all of Chicago's residents."

The Loop Link will improve CTA bus service on six routes by eliminating bottlenecks on the most congested portion of the routes and speeding their passage through downtown. Improving service reliability downtown is expected to have a positive ripple effect on the portions of these routes outside downtown, benefiting neighborhoods throughout the City. The six routes are the J14, 20, 56, 60, 124 and 157. A seventh route, the 19, provides service to and from the United Center for Bulls and Blackhawks home games.

The CTA buses on the Loop Link serve a number of Chicago neighborhoods, including South Shore, Little Village, Austin and Logan Square to name a few, and the service provides critical links to Union Station, Ogilvie Transportation Center, CTA subways and Navy Pier. More than 1,000 CTA bus trips will traverse the Loop Link each day.

Service is scheduled to start initially at seven of the eight new raised CTA bus boarding stations on Washington and Madison, with the eighth station on Madison east of Wabash expected to open in January. City workers will be completing final touches on some of the stations after the December 20th launch.

Work on the Canal Street leg of the Loop Link is scheduled to be completed in spring 2016. In addition, work is continuing on the Union Station Transit Center, a new off-street CTA bus-boarding center just south of Union Station that will help relieve traffic congestion around the train station that serves 120,000 people each day. Another major ongoing downtown transportation project that will continue through 2016 is the new Washington-Wabash CTA station that will replace two century-old stations at Madison and Randolph with a single state-of-the art, fully accessible station with wider platforms.

CDOT, the CTA and Loop Link stakeholders are launching an outreach and education campaign today ahead of the December 20th launch to familiarize transit riders, bicyclists, motorists and pedestrians with the features of the Loop Link.

“CDOT has been working very hard to wrap up major work on the Loop Link and deliver on schedule the benefits of this project to Chicago’s bus riders, bicyclists, pedestrians and motorists,” CDOT Commissioner Rebekah Scheinfeld said. “We’ve been talking about addressing downtown Chicago’s traffic congestion for decades now, and thanks to Mayor Emanuel’s leadership, we are finally getting the job done, improving reliability and safety for all modes of transportation in this major corridor.”

“The Loop Link will provide quicker and more reliable bus service to CTA customers,” said CTA President Dorval R. Carter, Jr. “This project will improve their transit experience and may attract new customers who want an affordable, convenient way to get across the Loop.”

Improvements included in the Loop Link project: red pavement and enhanced signage clearly delineating the CTA bus lanes; raised station platforms to provide easier boarding; early signals for buses at key intersections to get ahead of traffic; distinct bus stations with large canopies, CTA Bus Tracker screens, and generous amounts of seating for waiting customers.

Eastbound Washington will feature a red bus-only lane that will be served by four island bus-boarding platforms. Two general traffic lanes will remain for traffic through the Loop. A bike lane against the southern curb on Washington will be protected from auto and bus

traffic. Madison Street will have similar lane configurations and four bus-boarding platforms. A new westbound bike lane will be installed on Randolph Street in 2016.

Clinton Street also features a red CTA bus only lane and two general traffic lanes. A two-way bike lane has been installed on Clinton, similar to Dearborn Street.

The routes for two buses, the #J14 and #124, will be modified in the eastbound direction in order to take full advantage of the Loop Link corridor. Beginning Sunday, December 20th, the #J14 Jeffery Jump bus route will run on Washington instead of Monroe between Clinton and Michigan Avenue; and the #124 Navy Pier bus route will run on Washington instead of Wacker between North Wacker and Michigan Avenue. Both routes currently use Madison in the westbound direction.

City officials urge motorists to pay close attention to lane markings and new signage as they become accustomed to the new, modernized traffic configuration.

For cars and other motor vehicles, the Loop Link includes 20 new left turn and right turn arrows at key intersections designed to improve traffic flow. These dedicated turn signals will increase turning capacity and reduce conflicts with people walking and biking.

Cars will be prohibited from driving in the red, CTA bus only lanes. To prevent conflicts at the locations where motorists must cross the CTA bus lane to access a right turn lane, CTA buses will have a "queue jump," or a special traffic signal before general traffic. This will allow buses to cross the intersection first; motorists will then be able to cross the CTA bus lane behind any buses. This will position right-turning motorists to the right of the CTA bus lane in a dedicated right turn lane at the intersection. Motorists will have a protected right turn arrow and bicyclists will have a dedicated bicycle signal, eliminating conflicts between right turning cars and either bicyclists or pedestrians.

In addition, right turns have been restricted at four locations on the Loop Link corridors, where traffic patterns showed there were relatively few turning vehicles and nearby alternatives:

- Washington to southbound LaSalle
- Madison to northbound Dearborn
- Madison to northbound Wacker
- Jackson to southbound Canal

City officials are also advising bicyclists to pay close attention to the pavement markings and safety signage on the new green bike lanes. Bicyclists are required to yield to pedestrians who are crossing the bike lane.

Likewise, pedestrians are urged not to walk or stand in the green bike lanes and to obey signals when crossing at intersections. At 19 crosswalks, the crossing distance has been shortened to make it safer and easier for pedestrians to cross.

The effort to tackle downtown congestion and improve safety has long been supported by a number of business and civic organizations and downtown stakeholders, including the Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC), the Active Transportation Alliance, the Chicago Community Trust and the Chicago Loop Alliance.

Much of the civic work and advocacy for the Bus Rapid Transit concept and the Loop Link and has been supported by the Rockefeller Foundation. The Foundation has been committed to the success of the city's effort to address downtown congestion and make bus service more appealing, by providing support for technical analysis, education, branding and communications.

For more information on the Loop Link, go to www.transitchicago.com/looplink

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