



## Pre-Pilot Community Partner Meetings Summary

November 2020

### Meeting Overview

Cook County, in partnership with the region's transit agencies, is launching a three-year pilot in early 2021 to improve transit service and lower costs for the residents of the south side of Chicago, south suburban Cook and north Will counties. As part of the pilot's outreach efforts, the County hosted two virtual community partner meetings to build awareness, momentum and understanding for Fair Transit South Cook.

- Community Partner Meeting 1 was held on Monday, November 9, 2020, at 2 p.m. (34 participants)
- Community Partner Meeting 2 was held on Wednesday, November 11, 2020, at 6 p.m. (18 participants)

Participants represented the following organizations: Greater Roseland Chamber of Commerce, Environmental Law and Policy Center, Historic Pullman Foundation, CMAP, South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association, Community TV Network, University of Chicago, Coalition for Equitable Community Development, Illinois House of Representatives, Jackson Park Advisory Council, Crossroads Collaborative, CDOT, Pace Suburban Bus, Metra, and Cook County. A few unaffiliated community members attended as well.

Both meetings provided an overview of the pilot's history and purpose, outreach program, role of community partners, community partner toolkit and opportunities for questions and discussion.

Please see the pilot web page: [www.cookcountyil.gov/fairtransit](http://www.cookcountyil.gov/fairtransit) for the presentation and other informational materials.

### Highlights from the Presentation

#### Background

The County, in partnership with Pace and Metra, developed the Fair Transit pilot to build on previous efforts to better understand and identify opportunities to improve our transit system. These previous efforts highlighted the need to advance transit and multimodal transportation options in portions of Cook County with high transit dependency but limited access to transit, and to deploy specific strategies to increase ridership.

#### Goals

The goals of the pilot are to improve service options, reduce Metra fares on Metra Electric and Rock Island lines and provide seamless transfers.



The pilot is focusing on South Cook because a large percentage of residents in South Cook spend 50% or more of their income on transportation. Also, residents in this area tend to experience longer commute times, do not own a personal vehicle and transportation access has been further complicated by decades of economic disinvestment. Several opportunity zones have been established in south Cook and improved transit could further catalyze economic development.

This pilot aims to increase ridership, which is extremely important as Metra's ridership has declined significantly on both the Metra Electric and Rock Island lines over the past 20-30 years. Recently, COVID-19 has exacerbated the decline in ridership. The pilot will provide relief to existing riders (transit-dependent, critical workers, weather impacted riders), encourage new riders to take transit instead of driving and further agency commitment to equitable transit service and coordinated enhancements.

### **Community Outreach and Engagement**

Public engagement is a key component of Fair Transit and the role of community partners is crucial to kick-start the pilot. Implementation of the pilot requires a robust outreach program, including press conferences, pop-up events, community meetings, surveys and promotional campaigns.

There will be additional community partner meetings at key intervals to continue engagement. The pilot team will provide a community partner toolkit for anyone interested in promoting Fair Transit.

The pilot team has also launched a pre-pilot survey, which will be live until December 31, 2020. Information about the survey can be found at the pilot web page and in the community partner toolkit.

### **Pilot Timeline**

Transit improvements starting early 2021 include a 50% reduction in fares on Metra Electric and Rock Island lines and improved Pace service and frequency on the Halsted 352 route. The pilot will be evaluated at key milestones, culminating in a final report with lessons learned and recommendations for next steps.

### **Discussion Questions**

Both meetings allotted time for discussion and to jumpstart the discussions, attendees were asked four main questions:

1. How can we best share information about the pilot with the south Cook community?  
What will resonate with your network?
2. In addition to the goals of reduced fares, improved service and simplified transfers – what else can the pilot do to get people back on transit and/or out of their cars in favor of transit?



3. What does a successful pilot look like? What ideas do you have for how we might measure success?
4. Thinking about pre- or post-COVID circumstances, what challenges do south Cook residents face when taking transit?

## Discussion

Below is a summary of community comments and questions paired with pilot team answers from both meetings.

- Other than the surveys, what metrics will be used to assess pilot efficacy?
  - Partnerships with organizations, community leaders and members
  - Increase of ridership
  - Anecdotal stories from South Cook County residents
- Seems like the marketing items bury the lead: "Metra fares cut in half!"
  - The pilot team should be highlighting the drastic fare cut
- Have you thought about reaching out to employers with workers in the South Cook Pilot area?
  - That will be something the pilot team will investigate.
- If possible, can you disclose some of the findings from the feasibility study for upgrading the Harvey Station and can we get a copy of these slides?
  - There was an application where Cook County was able to fund some of the earlier plans for the Harvey Transportation Center.
  - The town hall that Metra and Cook County hosted in Harvey included several testimonials from individuals that benefited from the study and a survey.
  - The pilot team is open to sharing more information about this with community partners.
- Part of the plan was also to have CTA onboard with seamless transfers. What efforts are being made to make this happen?
  - CTA will hopefully be encouraged by the launch of the pilot and become a more active part of developing an integrated transfer system.
- What can the Coalition for a Modern Metra Electric (CMME) do to help in this process?
  - Getting the word out during this difficult time. Spread the right message that some people cannot telecommute, and this is the right time to implement this pilot.
  - A CMME representative requested that all the promises made as part of this pilot will be implemented, such as improving the quality of the stations, increased security, updates to lighting and overall aesthetic improvements that would make Metra lines more attractive and safe.
  - The Coalition appreciates the team for "igniting the pilot."



- Does the pilot contemplate additional service on Metra Electric or just the reduced fares (which are wonderful!)?
  - Metra is committed to looking at the stops schedule to make changes. If ridership grows during this pilot it, will give Metra opportunities to add additional stops, extra trains, etc.
  - If community partners have ideas on how service can be improved, please let the pilot team know.
- Is Ventra/Cubic working on the technology side of the seamless transfer? That is going to take time!
  - The pilot is still in the infancy stages and will take time to figure this out, but the pilot team is up for the challenge.
- Difference between Harvey station and improvement of the 59<sup>th</sup> station and getting off at 60<sup>th</sup>. What other seamless transfers are important? There is a long gap south of 63<sup>rd</sup> and we should be thinking now of ways to grow those stops. There have been problems with service scheduling tweaking and multiple changes in schedules due to breaking down trains.
  - Growing the ridership is going to bring new opportunities to address these issues.
- Trains on the weekend are a great resource for families to go down to the museums and downtown for shopping. Advertising to families is an important way to get more ridership, particularly for reduced fares and maybe even reducing the fares further for children. Advertising the increased frequency of trains would make a difference in ridership. Also, highlight the women who are involved in the trains themselves like station masters and conductors.
- Metra Electric station design is underway for five stations along the line. A complete rebuild of the Oakenwald wall in Bronzeville along the line's right of way was just completed as well.
- There should be some interim things that can be done at stations that have misaligned steps and doorways that could be fixed.
- Can notification of the pilot be sent to Ventra users?
  - Working with Metra, Pace and the County to make sure that all the lists are utilized in sharing this message. We will do our best to get the word out through Ventra as well.
- The office of State Representative Nick Smith (D-34) extends support for the bus/train line interconnectivity upgrades which is aimed to increase access to parks, stores, and other public spaces. The upgrades and lower fares should hopefully foster a better quality of life for constituents and we can't wait for the pilot to begin. Thank you!
- Share information about the amount of climate change improvements and CO2 reductions that would occur when taking the train. A lot of people don't think about that and don't have information on it. People can take their bikes on the train and ride their bikes to other places downtown or the southside. The trains as a green mechanism might be an important thing to discuss.



- Some people in the community feel that because fares are lowered, there will be a rush of CTA riders on the Metra and safety may be a concern. What safety measures will be in place to help people feel safer in riding with additional ridership?
  - Metra has a robust security system and is confident in its services.
  - Metra will continue to operate at the level that Metra expects and that there are no concerns that exist.
- Can you describe the connection between Amazon in Peotone, Pace and Metra? Metra needs to share connections within and between Chicago and Cook to various employers like Amazon.
  - Early on, the pilot team knew that there would be opportunities with the Metra Electric stopping at University Park and how Pace was servicing the Amazon campus. There were not enough transportation dollars to make that area more efficient for Pace to be able to service those campuses in Peotone.
  - Cook County looked at ways where there could be easy transit connections with Pace and Metra to service the Madison campus.
  - President Preckwinkle has stated that the County stands ready to find ways to partner with both Metra and Pace to bring more workers to these campuses.
- Will there be information captured on how the pilot impacts climate change?
  - The pilot team will try to incorporate this in future surveys.
- I have heard people say that the stations are too far away from where they live, so more information about how to get to Metra Electric stops would be helpful.
  - The pilot's ad campaigns will highlight and demonstrate how close these stations are to South Cook destinations. The campaigns will highlight local businesses and other attractions that people can get to using the within the pilot area.
  - The pilot team will keep thinking about this as well to provide holistic transportation services.