

## Transportation Needs Put Focus on Improvements

The NICTI Alternatives Analysis defines, evaluates, and selects the most promising and affordable mobility improvement to further the economic position of the Rockford region. It will improve the quality of life for residents and workers in the Rockford area, provide transportation choices, and expand the job market and employee base. Overall, the benefits derived from an improved transportation network between the Rockford region and the Chicago metropolitan region provides opportunity for growth both for the near-term and in the future.

Several inter-related conditions and trends found in the study area contribute to the need for improvements in the transportation system. These include:

***Growth in Population and Employment.*** The study area is projected to experience robust growth in population and employment. Future job growth is projected to grow substantially. At the same time, study area population is expected to grow from 7.5 million to 8.9 million between 2000 and 2030. Based on growth expectations, more trips will have origins or destinations in growing regional employment and activity centers located northwest of the City of Chicago. The potential demand for transit services is expected to increase as growth expands in these surrounding suburbs of Rockford and Chicago. The location of this population and employment growth in the study area poses challenges to the efficiency and connectivity of the existing transportation system.

***Growth in Activity and Employment Centers.*** The location of several large activity and employment centers, including concentrations of high-density housing and mixed uses, hospitals, and commercial centers generate significant daily trips, and attract many visitors from the Rockford region. These activity centers include the Schaumburg Convention Center, Woodfield Mall, O'Hare Airport, and growing employment, commercial, and entertainment districts in the Northwest suburbs of Chicago. O'Hare employment levels are projected over the 2000 to 2030 period to steadily increase; and employment is projected to steadily increase in the Schaumburg area as well. Currently, transit access to these areas from the Rockford region is limited to a privately owned shuttle service along I-90. Under these conditions, transit travel time is lengthy, infrequent, and does not efficiently accommodate the diverse travel needs of travelers from the Rockford region. The service is infrequent enough to limit the flexibility of commuters. [Study Map with Activity Centers](#)

***Changing Travel Patterns.*** Historic travel patterns focused on downtown. Chicago's rail transit network has developed in a radial manner, with multiple lines emanating from a relatively small geographic area within or adjacent to CTA's historic Loop elevated train structure. A growing number of regional trips have origins and/or destinations outside of Chicago. Changes in regional travel patterns and shifting geographic distribution of employment have strained the region's transportation system. These trends have resulted in an increase in city-to suburb, suburb-to-suburb, and intra-regional commuting. Because of the location of growth in Northern Illinois, and

corresponding changes in travel patterns, this radial transit network is not effective for serving many of the growing areas in and around the Rockford region.

***Lack of Efficient Modal Connectivity.*** The lack of efficient modal connectivity between transit systems in the vicinity of employment centers in the Rockford region and with employment centers in the Chicago metropolitan area causes lengthy travel times for commuters on the Tollway. The majority of travelers do not transfer to Metra, CTA rail, or Pace buses at existing transit stations in the study area. Direct transit connections between the Rockford region could elevate the attractiveness of transit to long-distance commuters and travelers, reduce travel times, and provide an effective alternative to automobile travel, particularly during the many periods of high congestion throughout the study area.

***High Concentration of Transit-Reliant Residents.*** The most recent Rockford MPO Long Range Transportation Plan substantiates some of the population in the Rockford region is reliant on transit for mobility and access to jobs. Overall, the demographic characteristics of the area point to a need for improved local bus service, and the introduction of commuter buses. These services will improve mobility and accessibility for residents that rely on transit as their primary means to travel to distant employment opportunities and other regional destinations.

***Increase in Congestion and Travel Times.*** Traffic congestion and travel times continue to increase throughout the Chicago and northcentral Illinois region. Chicago is ranked third in the nation for lengthy commute time, and is ranked fourth highest in congestion levels with 72% of its freeway and lane miles congested during the peak-periods. The average Chicago commuter experiences 50.1 hours of additional travel time annually compared to the national average. Average commute time for travelers using the I-90 in the vicinity of the Rockford region is worsening which will ultimately result in a lengthening of travel time.