

A Case for Building the Western Avenue Green Line Station



Introduction

The Northwest Neighborhood Alliance, an advocacy group for West Town, Humboldt Park and Logan Square, hereby calls upon the city of Chicago, the Chicago Transit Authority, and the Northern Illinois Transit Authority to construct a CTA Green Line station at Western Avenue. We believe that such a station would fill a critical gap in Chicago's transit network, and would both maximize the potential of our existing transit infrastructure and provide additional, faster options for getting around the city.

The Hole in the Network

Currently, the Green Line is the only CTA rail line which crosses Western Avenue without a station. Unlike other gaps in the network, such as the nearby California Blue Line station, closed since 1973, this hole is not the result of station closures, but a relic of the way that Chicago's original elevated rail network was built. Historically, the route that would later become the Green Line had stations on Oakley Boulevard and Campbell Avenue, as Western Avenue did not yet exist. Before the construction of Western Avenue, these two neighborhood streets were once busy thoroughfares. Now, however, Western Avenue is the major north-south route in this part of town - and with both the Oakley and Campbell stations long gone, the lack of any station between Damen Avenue and California Avenue leaves a noticeable gap in the Green Line's east-west service.



This history sets a potential Western Green Line station apart from other gaps in the network. This missing station is not the result of strategic cutbacks or optimizations. It is a station that was never built in the first place. As a result, the potential for growth and ridership at this location is huge.

Precedent: Damen Avenue Green Line Station

In 2024, construction was completed on a brand-new Green Line station at Damen Avenue & Lake Street, a location which had been without a Green Line connection since 1948. Its construction had been initially proposed in 2002 as part of a study investigating the construction of “infill stations” on the Green Line. This study also led to the construction of the nearby Morgan Green Line station in 2012, as well as the Cermak-McCormick Place Green Line station in 2015 on the South Side.

The Damen station was completed for a total of around \$80 million, the funding for which comprised both local tax-increment financing money and state grants. Like the Damen station, a potential Western Avenue Green Line station would be located within the Kinzie Industrial Corridor tax-increment financing district, meaning that similar funding sources could be appropriated for this project.

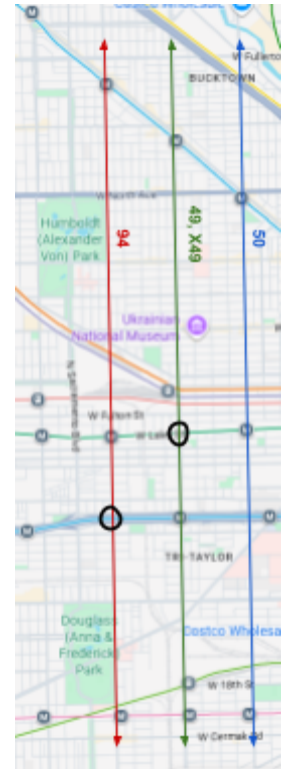
The creation of the Damen Green Line station took seven years from its initial announcement in 2017, but there is reason to believe that a Western Green Line station could be done more quickly. Initial plans for the Damen station anticipated a three-year schedule including utility work. Delays were partially due to the pandemic and accompanying supply chain problems, as well as due to complications with the preparatory work and the bidding process. Additionally, we must consider the impact of the recent restructuring of the Regional Transportation Authority into the Northern Illinois Transit Authority as part of the 2025 Illinois transit funding law. This reorganization is intended to bring reform and coordinated management of the CTA, Metra, and Pace. With this greater focus on cooperation, we could very well see planning and construction proceed faster.

Connection to the Western Avenue Bus Corridor

It's impossible to talk about a potential Western Avenue Green Line Station without talking about the Western Avenue buses, Route 49 and its companion express line Route X49. They are among the CTA's most popular routes, and as such, the 49 was one of the first routes to be added to the CTA's [Frequent Network](#)¹, a collection of bus routes which are scheduled to arrive every ten minutes or less, even on weekends.

As will be outlined in this section, the Western Avenue bus lines provide faster service, shorter wait times, easier Metra connections, and more diverse hours of operation than either of the parallel bus corridors on Damen Avenue or California Avenue.

The Western Avenue bus connects to the Brown Line, the Orange Line, the Pink Line, and both Blue Line branches - but not the Green Line. Construction of a Western Green Line station would allow for direct transfers between the Green Line and Route 49, improving connectivity, allowing for new, faster trips, and helping Chicago get the most out of its transit network.



Western Avenue Bus Ridership

The 49 is consistently in the top three highest ridership routes in the city, thanks in part to both its frequency and speed, as well as its connections to other routes.

The two nearest buses to the Western Avenue bus are Route 94 California and Route 50 Damen. In terms of ridership, however, the 49 Western and the X49 Western Express clobber them both.

In January of 2026, total average daily ridership for the 49 and X49 buses was 16300 passengers - more than the ridership of the 94 and the 50 combined. This trend has been consistent month after month. For these riders, transferring to the Green Line in order to reach the Loop means a ten-minute walk to Damen or California stations. This not only makes trips longer, but it makes our system less flexible and less accessible.

A Green Line station at Western and Lake would be poised to take advantage of one of the most active bus corridors in the city.

¹ <https://www.transitchicago.com/cta-launches-new-frequent-network-for-buses/>

Ridership Comparison between California Avenue, Western Avenue, and Damen Avenue Bus Routes			
Month / Year	Total Average Daily Ridership		
	94	49 + X49 ²	50
September 2025	10626	20365	8937
October 2025	10057	19445	8750
November 2025	9321	17660	8191
December 2025	8290	16327	7307
January 2026	8030	16300	7791
February 2026	9183	18403	8660
March 2026	8743	17678	8435

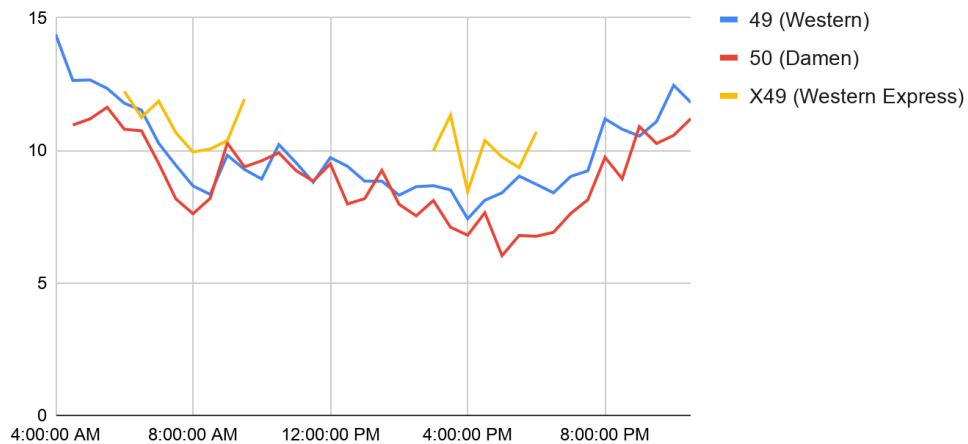
<https://chicagotransitlab.com/>, built from publicly-available data by volunteers

² Routes 49 and X49 are combined for ridership totals to illustrate total ridership along the Western Avenue corridor. Note that, even by itself, the 49 has consistently higher ridership than either the 50 or the 94 buses.

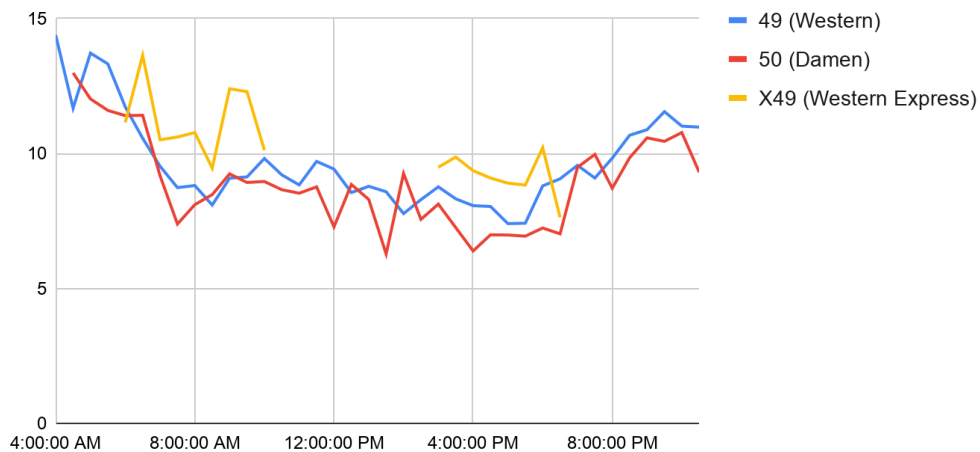
Western Avenue Bus Speed

One reason for the 50 Damen bus's low ridership is that the X49 Western Express and 49 Western buses outperform the 50 in terms of average speed. Between Fullerton Avenue and Lake Street, buses on Western Avenue consistently match or outpace buses on Damen Avenue. This effect is particularly visible during rush hour, when Damen Avenue buses lag behind those on Western Avenue by one to three miles per hour.

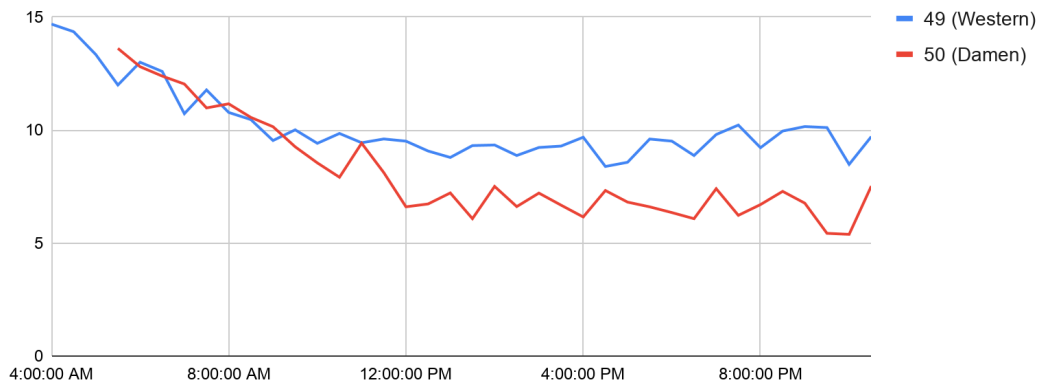
Wednesday, 2026/07/22: Fleet Average Speeds: 49, X49, 50



Thursday, 2026/07/23: Fleet Average Speeds: 49, X49, 50



Saturday, 2026/07/25: Fleet Average Speeds: Western & Damen between Fullerton and Lake



*Data collected from CTA's official bus tracker API using an open-source script.
All code used can be found at github.com/strongtownschicago/cta-speed-test*

Throughout the day, on both weekends and weekdays, buses on Western Avenue consistently outpace those on Damen Avenue by one to five miles per hour.

While this might not seem significant, a practical example can help illustrate the impact on travelers. The trip between Fullerton Avenue and Lake Street is approximately 2.2 miles. A bus traveling at an average speed of six miles per hour would complete this trip in 22 minutes. A bus traveling at an average speed of nine miles per hour cuts this trip down to 14 minutes and 40 seconds, saving a little over seven minutes. Someone who rides the bus to and from work every day would save **over four hours per month** by taking the faster bus.

Western Avenue Bus Frequency and Transfer Viability

In addition to being faster than its contemporaries, the 49 bus is also more frequent than either of its parallel routes. It is part of the CTA's new [frequent network](#), and as such targets a 10-minute frequency or better. This 10-minute threshold is even without considering the X49, which provides additional service.

Frequency is particularly valuable when considering transfers. While riders can schedule a single-seat trip based on the next bus, they cannot plan for the long gaps that can sometimes arise as a result of infrequent service on the connecting route. Every transit rider has had the experience of arriving at their transfer point, only to find that the previous bus has already left. On Western Avenue, the wait for the next bus is guaranteed to be no longer than 10 minutes, making it more valuable as the second leg of a cross-town route than either the Damen bus or the California bus.

Bus Headway Comparison between California Avenue, Western Avenue, and Damen Avenue Bus Routes			
Day	94 (California Avenue) ³	49 (Western Avenue) ⁴	50 (Damen Avenue) ⁵
Monday - Friday (Morning Rush)	Every 6-15 minutes	Every 6-10 minutes	Every 6-15 minutes
Monday - Friday (Daytime)	13-14 minutes	7-9 minutes	15-16 minutes
Monday - Friday (Evening Rush)	12 minutes	8-10 minutes	11-15 minutes
Saturday	15-20 minutes	10 minutes	11-19 minutes
Sunday	12-20 minutes	10 minutes	14-21 minutes

Data gathered from CTA's official schedules.

Note that actual headways will be longer if fewer than 100% of scheduled buses are in service.

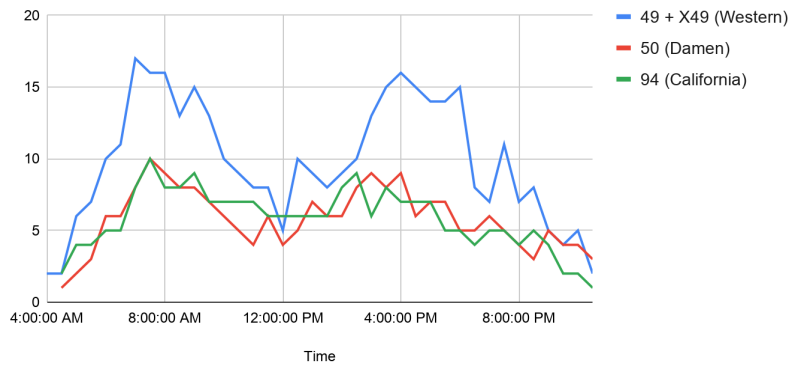
Another way to see this difference in service is by tracking the number of buses present on these three corridors at a given time. To demonstrate this, we tracked the number of buses present on Western Avenue, Damen Avenue, and California Avenue throughout the day on a few different days on an average week in July. The results can be seen in the following charts.

³ 94 service: https://www.transitchicago.com/assets/1/6/bus-tt_94.pdf

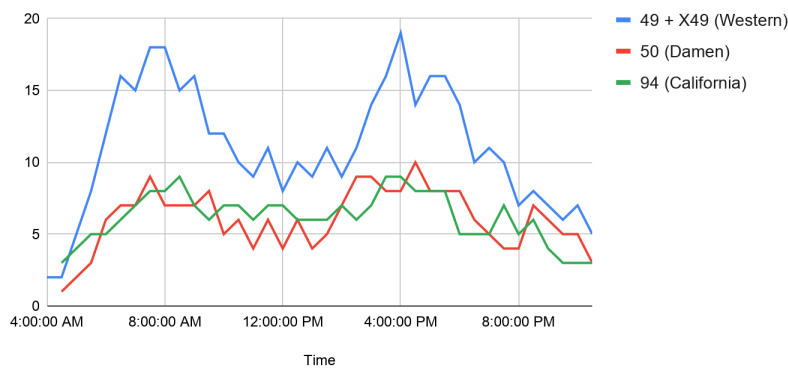
⁴ 49 service: https://www.transitchicago.com/assets/1/6/bus-tt_49.pdf

⁵ 50 service: https://www.transitchicago.com/assets/1/6/bus-tt_50.pdf

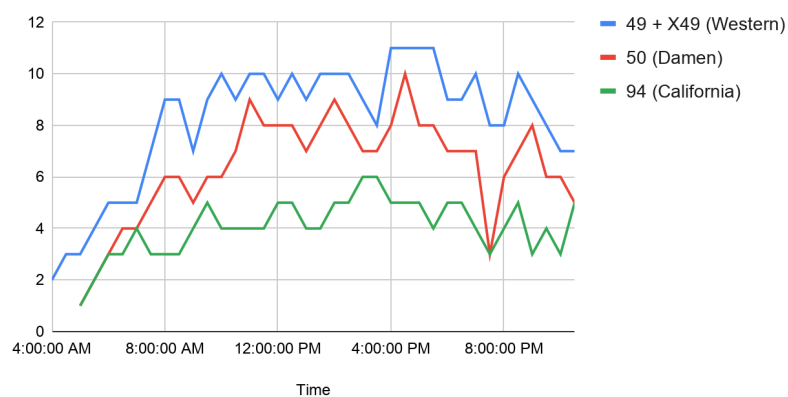
Wednesday, 2026/07/22: Bus Count between Fullerton & Lake



Thursday, 2026/07/23: Bus Count between Fullerton & Lake



Saturday, 2026/07/25: Bus Count between Fullerton & Lake



*Data collected from CTA's official bus tracker API using an open-source script.
All code used can be found at github.com/strongtownschicago/cta-speed-test*

Throughout the day, even at off-hours, the number of buses present on Western Avenue between Fullerton Avenue and Lake Street far outpaces the number of buses on Damen Avenue or California Avenue, even at off hours when the Western Express (X49) is not running. This is a key part of how the CTA achieves 10-minute frequencies throughout the day.

Achieving high frequencies takes more equipment, more personnel, and more money. The result is that people waiting for a bus on Western Avenue generally experience shorter wait times than those taking buses on California or Damen. In some cases, like on weekends, the difference is significant. Establishing the Frequent Network has improved the quality of transit for many users. However, without a Western Avenue Green Line station, the city is not getting the most value possible for its investment. We should be making the most of this investment by providing a transfer point to the Green Line at Western Avenue and Lake Street.

Night Service

The Western Avenue bus is the only north-south route in the area which runs 24 hours a day. Providing late-night service is not just a question of convenience, but of equity. For those working second jobs, or jobs with unconventional hours (both of which are more common among lower-income families), having nighttime access to and from jobs is critical for maintaining financial stability.

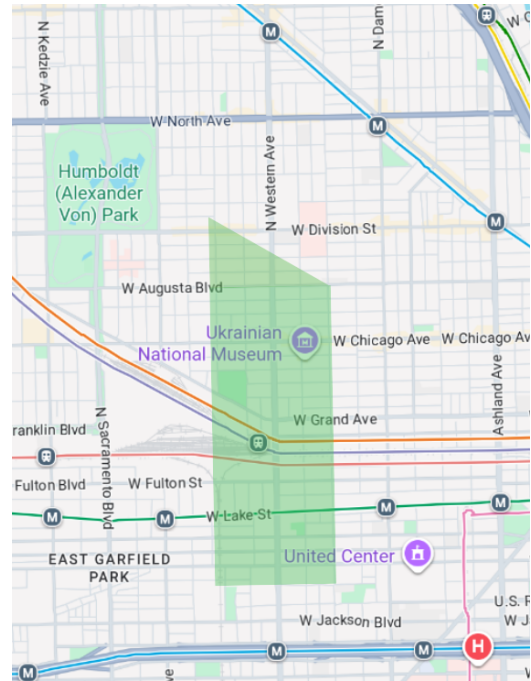
The Green Line begins operating at 4:45 a.m. and ends at 12:45 a.m. On Damen Avenue, the last Route 50 bus stops at the Green Line before 11 p.m. This leaves almost a *two-hour gap* where riders disembarking from the Green Line at the Damen station would have no north-south bus connection.

While ridership at these hours is low, providing nighttime service is a necessary part of maintaining a transit system that serves everyone. Adding a Green Line connection to the Western Avenue bus would provide a better north-south transfer option for off-hours riders, reducing the risk of leaving transit riders stranded.

Last-Mile Distance for Commuters

Many commuters in West Side neighborhoods like West Town, Ukrainian Village, Garfield Park, and Humboldt Park take the 49 bus to the Blue Line on their way to downtown. The Blue Line is heavily used, particularly at rush hour, and can be prone to overcrowding. A Green Line station at Western Avenue and Lake Street would provide another commuting option to relieve pressure on the Blue Line's crowded O'Hare branch. Furthermore, such a connection would, for many people, shorten the bus ride to their rail transfer. A Green Line station at Western and Lake would make their commutes both less crowded and shorter in length. For many, it would even put access to rail transit within walking distance.

The distance between Blue Line (O'Hare Branch) and Green Line Western Avenue stops would be approximately 2.2 miles. With a Green Line stop in place at Western and Lake, anyone living south of Augusta Boulevard would now be closer to the Green Line than to the Blue Line. This alternative path would provide a shorter, less-congested path to and from downtown.



The image above illustrates the zone in which households would benefit from shorter commutes to the Loop thanks to a potential Western Avenue Green Line station.

Direct Route to West Loop and Fulton Market

For residents living in West Town and Near West Side, it can be surprisingly difficult to get to the West Loop, one of the city's up-and-coming centers of employment, restaurants, and new housing. For instance, a trip from Western Avenue and Chicago Avenue to the Fulton Market district would involve taking the Route 49 bus to Madison, then transferring to the 20 bus - a trip of roughly 30 minutes in light traffic. Assuming one makes their connection, this trip is doable, and one that many West Town residents will take at some point.

However, if you were to start farther to the west at Sacramento Boulevard and Chicago Avenue, one could actually make this trip *in less time*, thanks to the direct Green Line connection at California and Lake.

This sort of awkwardness is familiar to frequent transit users. Getting around Chicago is as much about knowing the quirks of the system as it is about distance. A station at Western and

Lake would clean up some of this messiness and allow for more direct routes that involve the Route 49 bus.

Connections to Metra

Western Avenue boasts transit infrastructure that is not present on any of the other nearby north-south routes: namely, direct access to Metra stations. Riders of the 49 bus are able to connect directly to the Milwaukee District North, Milwaukee District West, North Central Service, and BNSF Metra lines. As we move towards deeper interconnectivity between CTA, Pace, and Metra, something that elected officials have stressed as a priority, these kinds of connections will become more valuable.

The existence of a Western Green Line station would create an indirect transfer point to these existing assets. The future Western Green Line station would be within half a mile of the existing Western Avenue Metra station, located at 420 N. Artesian Ave. (a half block west of Western Avenue), much closer than the Damen or California Green Line stations. The existence of a Western Green Line station would allow transit riders to disembark the Green Line at Western Avenue, walk or take a short bus ride north to Hubbard Street, then transfer directly to a Metra train without needing to walk four blocks from Damen or California.

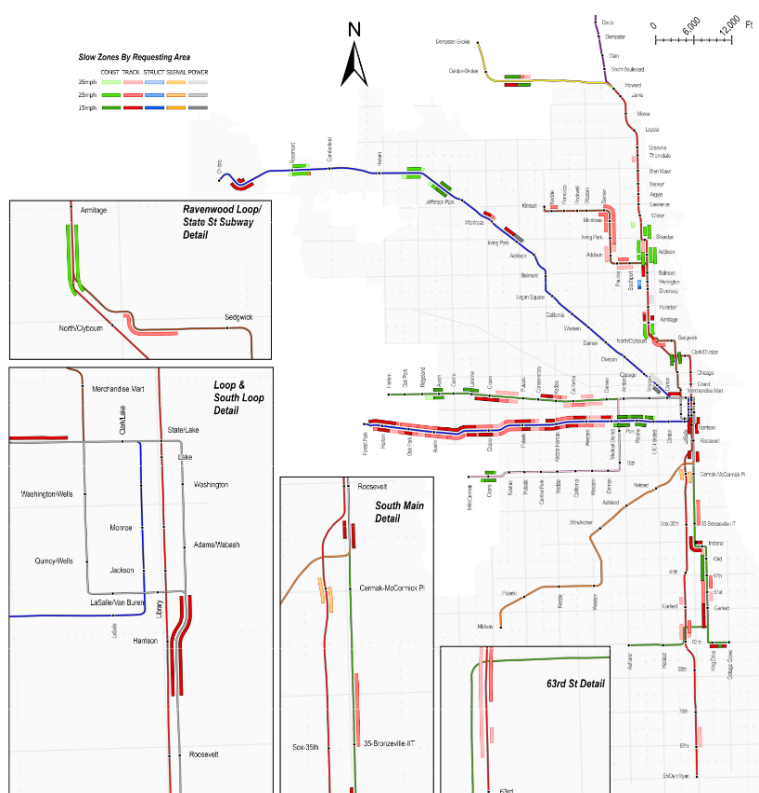
As Metra transitions from a commuter-oriented system to a regional rail network, these kinds of connection points allow the system to serve a more diverse set of trips that do not start and end in the Loop.

Redundancy for the Forest Park Blue Line branch

As of 2026, both the Green Line's Harlem Branch and the Blue Line's Forest Park Branch are in deteriorating condition, and as such, both have sections designated as "slow zones", where the train must slow down in order to prevent derailing on deficient tracks.⁶ However, the Blue Line's slow zones are much worse than the Green Line's, both in severity and frequency.

84% of the Blue Line's Forest Park Branch is currently classified as a slow zone, compared to 40% of the Green Line's Lake Street Branch. The most severe classification of slow zones, where trains are limited to 15 miles per hour, is present on 31% of the Blue Line's Forest Park Branch, as opposed to only 15% of the Green Line's Lake Branch. This means that the Green Line can often provide a faster trip than the Forest Park Branch, even if it involves an extra transfer to a bus at one end.

Building a Western Green Line stop gives Route 49 riders a faster option to get to the western neighborhoods and suburbs. And while there is a plan in the works to resolve these slow zones, they provide a case for why redundancy is needed within our transit network.⁷



⁶ https://www.transitchicago.com/assets/1/6/Slow_Zone_Map_-_May_2026.pdf

⁷ <https://www.transitchicago.com/sze/>

Social Impact

Demographic Trends

Many studies based on United States Department of Transportation data have reported on the fact that young people today are less likely to own a personal motor vehicle than they have been in decades prior.⁸ There is much debate over the cause.⁹ Some point to shifting urban planning trends, while others point to the increasing financial burden of owning, fueling, and maintaining a car. Either way, the result is that more teens than ever are waiting to get their drivers licenses, and fewer young adults are buying cars, choosing instead to navigate the city in other ways. With these shifting trends, it is undeniable that cities like Chicago must maintain and expand access to transit, making adjustments as needed to make sure that the system is capturing the increasingly-diverse mix of trips being taken on the network.

Lowering Transportation Costs

For many, the cost of maintaining a personal vehicle is a necessary burden of keeping access to jobs and housing. According to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, lower-income households spend as much as 30% of their income just on transportation.¹⁰ Families that are forced to own a car spend more of their income on transportation than those that do not own a car. This burden falls heaviest on families that are already struggling. By increasing access to transportation, Chicago can help to alleviate cost-of-living concerns for families that are currently forced to rely on a car to get around.

Transit as Social Justice

Like the Damen Green Line Station, a potential station at Western and Lake would be serving a neighborhood that has historically been a target of disinvestment and neglect. Providing better rail transit access to the Near West Side was a primary goal of the Damen station, one stated explicitly by both Mayor Brandon Johnson and then-Ald. Walter Burnett Jr., who were both present at its ribbon-cutting ceremony.

For families that are struggling to make ends meet, transit is more than just a convenience; it is a necessity. Whether by car or by bike or by train, the ways that people are able to get around the city affects their job prospects, their housing options, and their access to social services.

⁸ <https://maxmautner.com/2026/04/21/teen-drivers-license-decline.html>

⁹

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/why-are-young-people-driving-less-evidence-points-to-economics-not-preferences/>

¹⁰ <https://www.bts.gov/data-spotlight/household-cost-transportation-it-affordable>

The inequities along the Lake Street corridor are painfully visible. The neighborhoods between Grand Avenue and the Eisenhower Expressway have been historically disenfranchised, both in general and specifically in terms of transportation options. The deteriorating track quality of the Forest Park Branch of the Blue Line is only the latest example of this sort of neglect. By constructing a station at Western and Lake, the CTA would be bringing transit access closer to those who need it most, especially those who cannot afford a car. Families should never have to choose between access to transportation and access to low-cost housing. For all of the reasons already stated, making smart transit decisions matters even more for neighborhoods that have a history of being deprived of access to these systems.

Conclusion

We, the members of the Northwest Neighborhood Alliance, believe strongly that the construction of the Western Green Line station is a critical step towards boosting transit ridership on the West Side of Chicago. In a time when Chicago's transit budget has seen new constraints and new challenges, we must maximize the impact of the infrastructure that has already been built. Chicago has one of the greatest transit systems in North America, and we need to be taking full advantage of both our rail lines and our extensive bus network.

We are calling on our elected officials to cause the process of constructing this station to begin.