

February 4, 2026

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302 N. Chicago Street
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Dear civic leaders,

Thanks to the success of the transit bill in the General Assembly, Northeastern Illinois has a powerful opportunity to transform public transportation for the 21st century. Over the next several months, our region will begin the transition to a more unified, reliable, rider-centered public transportation system. You will have the opportunity to appoint leaders to the Northern Illinois Transit Authority Board that can help shepherd us towards a vibrant transit future. As advocates, we urge you to reflect upon the qualifications necessary for the most effective and forward-thinking NITA board.

Leading a transit agency is a complex role. Given the challenges our region's transit system has faced over the past few years rebounding from COVID, we deserve experienced, world-class leaders who are ready to tackle the system's challenges on day one.

There is a lot to do in the coming years. The new NITA board will be responsible for setting new service standards to guide transit planning and deployment, replacing decades-old arbitrary funding formulas. NITA will unify outreach and planning processes between the service boards and implement an integrated fare system so riders can easily transfer throughout the region. The new Office of Disability Policy and Planning offers the opportunity to set a national standard for accessible transit. The board will also establish new safety measures: an interdepartmental police task force, a transit ambassador program, a safety response group, a safety subcommittee, and an office of safety and experience. Many board members will serve dual appointments on both the NITA board and individual service boards (CTA, Metra, and Pace) to ensure close alignment and coordination. The transition committee should provide for a clear onboarding process so board members can hit the ground running with a strong understanding of the challenges and opportunities they face.

To do all of that and more, Northeastern Illinois needs NITA board members who can demonstrate the following:

1. **Bold vision for an expansive, accessible, and reliable transit system.** They must share in the legislature's vision for expanding connections and access across the system. They will need to guide the agencies to coordinate schedules and fares, increase service, and overcome bureaucratic hurdles to prioritize the rider experience. They must be firmly committed to achieving a fully accessible system that serves all riders, including people with disabilities.
2. **Regional perspective for breaking down geographical & political barriers.** Chicagoland is strongest when the city, suburbs, and counties work together. The legislature was able to overcome decades-old silos to pass unifying legislation. Now it is your turn to do the same. Rebuilding faith in the transit system and rebuilding ridership is not a matter of service board vs service board or of city vs suburbs. After a global pandemic rocked the system, we are facing a generational shift in travel patterns that affects our region as a whole. It will take our region working together to build the world-class transit system residents want and the next generation deserves.
3. **Experience with financial oversight.** The NITA board will oversee the millions in operating budgets for the three service boards. Stewardship of these funds is important. NITA board members should thus have a proven understanding of financial management, experience navigating the complexities of funding programs, and a commitment to transparency that gives diverse stakeholders confidence in the process.
4. **Long-time practice of consistent and recent transit use.** A commitment to using Illinois' transit systems during their tenure as a leader is important, and we need board members who have an existing practice of regular public transit ridership. First-hand experience is critical to understanding the challenges that riders experience daily.
5. **Record of a commitment to values of equity, transparency, collaboration, and accountability.** Board members should foster strong and trusting relationships with advocates and community stakeholders by investing time in listening and understanding. They need to be able to effectively lead the region's transit agencies and collaborate with local, state, and federal partners.
6. **Championing public transit.** For too long, public transit has been treated as a mode of last resort rather than the most efficient, sustainable, and equitable transportation option and the backbone of our regional economy. Riders deserve leaders who are enthusiastic about public transit, who understand the profound impact it has on the daily lives of our residents, and who are ready to fiercely advocate for a strong, fully funded, accessible, and reliable system at the local, state, and federal levels while demanding excellence from the transit agencies themselves.

Don't just take it from us. The NITA legislation echoes our concerns in calling for "diverse and substantial relevant experience and expertise for overseeing the planning, operation, and funding of a regional transportation system." The Act calls on you, as appointing authorities, to strive to reflect "the ethnic, cultural, economic, racial, and geographic diversity of the metropolitan region."

We are at a critical juncture. Bold action can lead to a renaissance for public transit in Chicagoland with a sustainable system, flourishing economy, and connected communities. But timid adherence to the status quo could keep us locked in old silos and squander this golden opportunity. Transportation is now literally driving the climate crisis, car dependence is eating up a devastating share of everyday living expenses, and gridlock traffic is slowing our economy. We need a thriving transit system to get us moving on the right path, and we need visionary leaders to get us there.

In the transition ahead, the needs and concerns of transit riders deserve attention, and we urge you to demonstrate a commitment to building a strong, safe, reliable, and accessible transit system that riders can trust. This starts with a rigorous search for NITA Board candidates that have the experience and qualifications outlined above.

Signed,

Active Transportation Alliance
A Just Harvest
Better Streets Chicago
Center for Neighborhood Technology
Clean Power Lake County
Climate Cabinet
Climate Reality Project Chicago Metro Chapter
Elevated Chicago
Environmental Law & Policy Center
The Equiticity Racial Equity Movement
Metropolitan Planning Council
The Nature Conservancy in Illinois
Ride Illinois
Sierra Club Illinois Chapter