



ACCESS TO TRANSIT PROGRAM

2022 Call for Projects and Applicant Program Guide

Call for Projects open March 25, 2022 through May 20, 2022



Contents

- About the Program** 1
- Eligible Applicants** 2
- Eligible Projects** 2
 - Category A: Bicycle and Pedestrian Transit Accessibility..... 2
 - Category A Funding Guidelines*..... 2
 - Category A Requirements*..... 3
 - Category B: Phase I Engineering for Bicycle and Pedestrian Transit Access Projects 3
 - Category B Funding Guidelines*..... 4
 - Category B Requirements*..... 4
- How to apply**..... 4
- Project Selection Process** 4
- Timeline** 5
- Project Examples** 6
 - Brookfield..... 6
 - Chicago Ridge..... 7
 - Richton Park 8

About the Program

The RTA launched the Access to Transit program in 2012 to fund small-scale capital projects that improve access to the regional transit system for pedestrians and bicyclists. Depending on the project type, the Access to Transit program uses RTA funding and leverages local funds with federal [Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program \(CMAQ\)](#) funding to help implement recommendations from planning studies completed through the RTA's [Community Planning](#) program or the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's (CMAP) [Local Technical Assistance](#) (LTA) program. To date, the program has funded 37 projects in municipalities throughout the region for a total investment of roughly \$22.5 million in Federal, RTA, and local funds. Detailed information on past projects is available on [RTAMS.org](#).

Investing in pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure around transit provides a number of benefits for both local municipalities and the RTA system, such as:

- Increased transit ridership, which helps reduce congestion and vehicle emissions
- Better first and last mile connections that make it safer and easier for riders to get to and from transit service
- Lower demand for driving and for commuter parking
- Pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods that promote public health through active transportation
- Support for transit-oriented development by fostering active, walkable places

The RTA selects new Access to Transit projects via a competitive application process that considers projects' adherence to program criteria, as detailed below, and CMAQ Program requirements.

The funding source for selected projects will depend on the type of activity. For applicants seeking Phase II engineering and Construction funding, the RTA staff will combine all selected projects into a single CMAQ application. **Project funding is contingent upon the application being approved to the FFY2024-28 CMAQ program**, which is finalized in the fall of 2023. If CMAQ funding is approved, projects are transferred to their respective sponsoring municipalities who are then responsible for implementation. Applicants seeking only Phase I engineering will receive funding directly from the RTA and will not be included in the combined CMAQ application.



Eligible Applicants

The Access to Transit program is open to municipalities and counties that have completed, or are in the process of completing, a planning or implementation project through either the RTA's Community Planning program or the CMAP's LTA Program. The plans should specifically recommend bicycle and/or pedestrian access improvements to transit. This includes municipalities that have participated in corridor studies as a partner. Applicants must have CTA, Metra, or Pace service in their community and be located within the RTA's six-county service area (Cook, DuPage, Lake, McHenry, Kane, Will).

Eligible Projects

There are two types of eligible projects in the Access to Transit program. Category A includes Phase II engineering and construction for small-scale, bike and pedestrian infrastructure improvements that are based on recommendations from Community Planning or LTA studies with transit-related components. Category B includes only Phase I engineering for small-scale, bike and pedestrian improvements as described under Category A. Projects should generally be based on recommendations from a previous plan. Unlike Category A, acceptable plans for Category B applicants include those completed outside of the RTA Community Planning and CMAP Local Technical Assistance programs.

Category A: Bicycle and Pedestrian Transit Accessibility

Eligible projects must be able to demonstrate the ability to increase ridership, improve access to existing transit services, and contribute to reduced vehicle emissions. The RTA may request that applicants revise their proposals after submittal in order to align with CMAQ program requirements. Projects related to commuter parking are not eligible for funding unless parking changes are needed in the context of improved pedestrian, bicycle, and transit facilities.

The following list of improvements are eligible for Access to Transit Category A projects, either individually or combined:

- ADA accessibility improvements, crosswalks, pedestrian signal heads, sidewalk connections, wayfinding signage
- Bicycle infrastructure (lane striping, protected lane construction, parking, etc.)
- Bus stop infrastructure, rail station warming shelters
- Other innovative projects that support small-scale access improvements to transit

Category A Funding Guidelines

Funding guidelines for the Access to Transit program are as follows:



- Project budgets must be no greater than \$1 million and no less than \$150,000. (Phase II Engineering plus Construction)
- With most projects, the 20% local match required by the CMAQ program will be equally shared between the RTA and the applicant, with each contributing 10% of the total project budget.
- The RTA may provide the full 20% match rate for smaller municipalities and those with lower tax bases or median incomes based on the economic and demographic characteristics of the area served. Eligible applicants may contact the RTA to determine if they qualify for this exemption.
- Phase I engineering must be funded by the applicant as it is not an eligible expense for Category A funding.

Category A Requirements

Phase I Engineering

Applications for Category A projects will be accepted if Phase I engineering is complete or preliminary planning is complete and the project can move immediately into Phase I engineering. Phase I engineering must begin immediately after the RTA confirms that the project has been selected to the Access to Transit program, with a goal of obtaining Phase I approval by the CMAQ application deadline (see Program Timeline for more details).

Applicants will be removed from the RTA Access to Transit Program if Phase I Engineering is not completed by March 2023.

Phase I engineering is required to be completed in a manner that preserves eligibility for federal funding. This requires the work to be completed by local government staff or by a consulting firm hired under a Qualification Based Selection (QBS) process. These requirements are available in the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) Bureau of Local Roads Manual (Chapter 5, Section 5.06) available for download on the [IDOT website](#).

Category B: Phase I Engineering for Bicycle and Pedestrian Transit Access Projects

In order to address a frequent barrier to securing funding and completing projects, the RTA will accept applications for Phase I engineering from municipalities of high need. Under Category B, eligible applicants can be awarded full reimbursement of the cost associated with developing Phase I engineering for bicycle and pedestrian improvements. Projects must be acceptable improvements as defined under Category A. Funding is allocated exclusively for municipalities with lower tax bases or median incomes based on the economic and demographic characteristics of the area served. Additionally, completed Category B projects may be considered for future funding opportunities through Access to Transit Category A funding.

Category B Funding Guidelines

Funding guidelines for the Access to Transit program are as follows:

- Project budgets must be no greater than \$55,000 and no less than \$5,000.
- Category B applicants seeking only Phase I engineering will receive funding directly from the RTA and will not be included in the combined CMAQ application with Category A applicants.

Category B Requirements

Support

Applicants are required to demonstrate that their projects are generally based on recommendations from a completed plan. Unlike Category A, acceptable plans include those completed outside of the RTA Community Planning and CMAP Local Technical Assistance programs.

To determine which municipalities qualify as high need the RTA relies on CMAP's [Community Cohorts](#) grouping tool, which measures the level of local capacity and technical assistance need for communities in the region. Municipalities and City of Chicago Community Areas in [cohorts 3 and 4](#) are eligible for the local match assistance described above and are eligible to apply to Category B.

How to apply

An application form and list of required attachments are available at the [Access to Transit program web page](#). Please submit your application (including form and attachments) as a single PDF file via email to applications@rtachicago.org. Applicants may apply for more than one project, although separate applications are required for each project and category. The RTA strongly encourages potential applicants to contact the RTA if you have any questions prior to submitting your application.

Project Selection Process

RTA staff and representatives from CMAP and the Service Boards (CTA, Metra, and Pace) will review all applications. Applications will first be screened for eligibility and then selected based on the project's readiness, ability to increase ridership, local support, and Service Board support.

For Category A projects, if a project is selected for the Access to Transit program and the RTA secures CMAQ funding for it, the project sponsorship is transferred from the RTA to the applicant. The applicant (sponsor) is then responsible for working with IDOT to oversee the project to completion. The RTA requires all project sponsors to enter into an Intergovernmental

Agreement (IGA) that confirms the local match funding arrangement and the program standards. Project sponsors are required to front the 20% match payments and will be reimbursed by the RTA for the predetermined local match contribution according to the invoicing process established in the IGA.

For Category B, accepted applicants will enter into an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with the RTA that confirms the funding arrangement and the project standards. Once an IGA has been executed, the applicant can begin procuring engineering services. Applicants are required to front engineering expenses and then seek reimbursement by the RTA according to the invoicing process established in the IGA after receiving approval from the RTA. If a proposed project includes the right-of-way of another entity (County DOT, Metra, IDOT, etc.) applicants should submit letters of support or interest with the application.

Timeline

2022		
	CATEGORY A	CATEGORY B
March	Call for Projects opens March 25	Call for Projects opens March 25
May	Applications due on May 20	Applications due on May 20
May - July	Application review, selection and notification. Successful applicants begin Phase I engineering	Application review, selection and notification Successful applicants begin Phase I engineering after IGA is executed.
2023		
January	CMAQ Program Call for Projects Released	
January -February	RTA staff prepares CMAQ application	
February - March	RTA Submits CMAQ Application on behalf of selected applicants	
March	Phase I engineering deadline	
August	Recommended CMAQ Program of Projects released for public comment	
October	CMAQ Program of Projects finalized	

Project Examples

The following pages describe prior Access to Transit projects, which may be useful for 2022 applicants to consider.

Brookfield

Completed in 2020, the Village of Brookfield, using Access to Transit funds, installed 24 covered bicycle racks at the Congress Park Metra Station and 12 such racks at the Brookfield Metra Station. These stations have some of the highest active transportation use among all stations on the BNSF line. These improvements will increase bike parking availability (a need identified in the Village's 2020 Master Plan), leverage Brookfield's existing bicycle facilities, and improve multi-modal access to the Village's Metra stations.



New covered bicycle parking at the Brookfield station provides better access to Metra's BNSF line.

Chicago Ridge

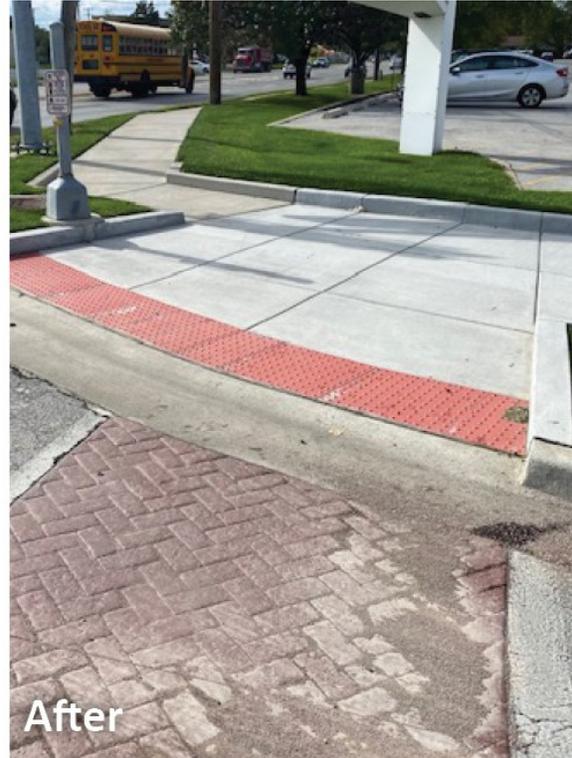
Completed in 2021, the Village of Chicago Ridge, using Access to Transit funds, installed an improved pedestrian crossing on Ridgeland Ave to better connect the Chicago Ridge Metra station with the east side of the corridor. This was a recommendation from The Ridgeland Avenue Corridor Plan, a multi-modal corridor plan for Ridgeland Avenue from 79th Street to 135th Street in the communities of Burbank, Oak Lawn, Chicago Ridge, Worth, Alsip, and Palos Heights, completed through the RTA's Community Planning program. The improvements include high visibility crosswalks, a landscaped pedestrian refuge, signage and pedestrian gates at the railroad crossing.



A high visibility crosswalk with pedestrian refuge provides a safer crossing of Ridgeland Avenue to the Chicago Ridge Metra station and to Pace bus service.

Richton Park

Completed in 2020, the Village of Richton Park, using Access to Transit funds, installed pedestrian infrastructure along Sauk Trail, providing improved safety and accessibility in their Town Center for people walking to and from transit services. Project improvements include crosswalks, sidewalk connectors and ADA accessibility improvements in close proximity to the Richton Park Metra station and along Pace Route 362. This project was based on recommendations from the Village Comprehensive Plan completed in 2014.



Improved sidewalks with curb ramps and tactile warnings along with high visibility crosswalks provide improved pedestrian access to the Richton Park Metra station.