

Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)

Safe travel for all: How northeastern Illinois built a regional hub for transportation engagement

OVERVIEW

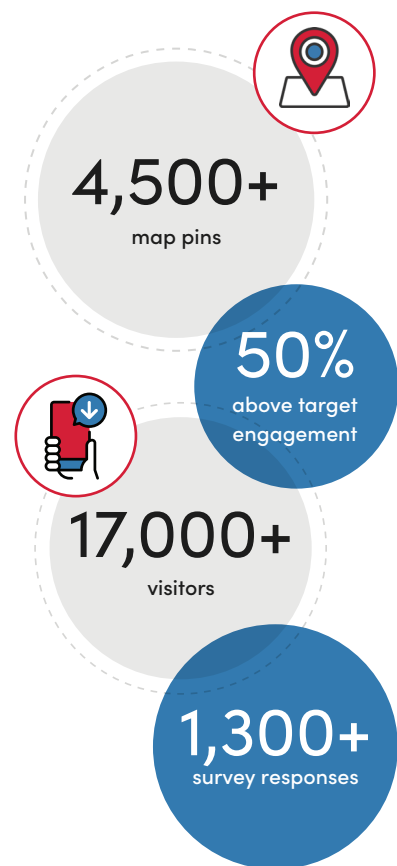
A surge in traffic fatalities across northeastern Illinois prompted the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) to rethink its approach to regional transportation safety. The agency built a centralized, branded engagement hub using Engagement Cloud to meaningfully engage residents and stakeholders who are not traditionally included in transportation planning. Through “Safe Travel for All,” CMAP gathered insights from thousands of citizens across six counties to shape traffic safety action plans that help them qualify for federal funding. By combining bilingual tools, interactive hotspot mapping, surveys, and accessible content, CMAP exceeded overall participation targets by 50% in every county while meeting federal engagement requirements.

SITUATION | UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEXITIES OF REGIONAL SAFETY CHALLENGES

Beginning in 2020, CMAP observed an alarming rise in traffic fatalities across the Chicago metropolitan region (a trend mirrored nationally).

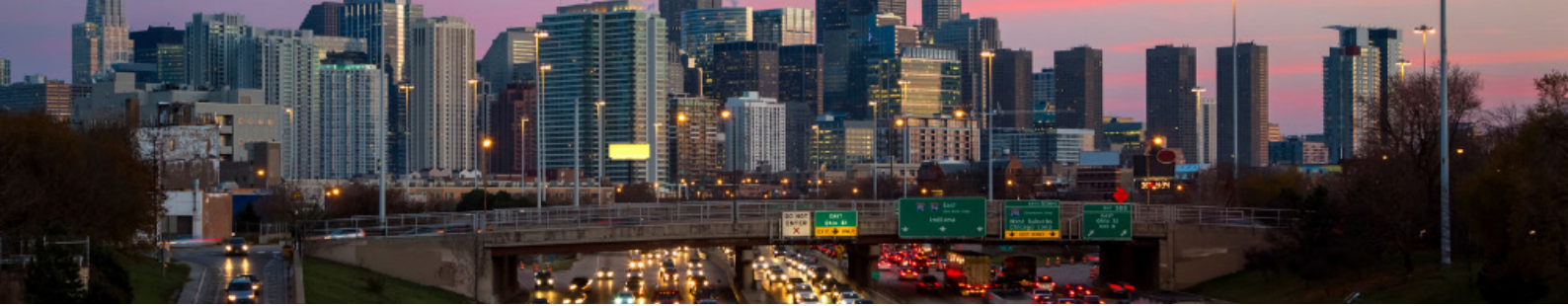
MUST HAVE SOLUTION

Engagement Cloud



The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning’s ‘Safe Travel for All’ hub allows for meaningful community engagement – rooted in lived experiences, two-way communications, and meeting people where they are – and helps inform a holistic approach to traffic safety. As a result, the agency and its partners developed six safety action plans that will help municipalities and counties obtain government funding for roadway improvements, representing communities’ desires to improve traffic safety and save lives.”

Natalie Kuriata | Principal, Communications & Engagement | Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning



As the metropolitan planning organization for the region, CMAP needed a scalable, inclusive way to understand safety challenges across urban, suburban, and rural contexts. Traditional crash data alone wasn't enough, especially given severe underreporting of bicycle and pedestrian incidents and known equity gaps in reporting.

“Traffic safety is a very complex issue, and it’s one that has historically only been understood through crash reports,” said Victoria Barrett, program lead for the Safe Systems Program. **“There are many, many reasons why people do not file crash reports.”**

Police-reported crash data often fails to capture the lived experiences of vulnerable road users and communities facing barriers to reporting. “We know that bicycle and pedestrian crashes are severely underreported ... maybe as much as 40%,” stated Barrett. “There is an equity component; people who may be undocumented, or in certain neighborhoods, are less likely to report a crash to the police. Some people bike and walk by choice, and some by need – and those differences matter.”

Additionally, CMAP received a nearly \$4 million U.S. Department of Transportation Safe Streets for All grant that required documented stakeholder input. The agency needed an engagement strategy that could both meet federal requirements and reflect real lived experiences across dozens of communities.

SOLUTION | COUNTY-SPECIFIC CARE

CMAP partnered with Granicus to launch “Safe Travel for All” using the Sentiment & Feedback capability in Engagement Cloud. The branded, centralized hub housed six county-specific safety action plan pages, each tailored to local context and needs while maintaining consistent quality across the region.

Through the hub, CMAP and its county partners deployed a suite of engagement tools designed to broaden participation and improve access to information – including online surveys, interactive mapping features, subscription-based newsletters, and multilingual, accessible content tailored to diverse audiences.

Residents could flag dangerous locations, share near-miss experiences, and comment on safety concerns, bringing attention to areas where no crashes had been officially reported. Importantly, the platform allowed engagement across county lines, reflecting how people actually live, work, and travel throughout the region.

“Public engagement on traffic safety is so essential to understanding the issues that people are facing in their day-to-day lives,” said Barrett.



By prioritizing inclusive, equity-centered engagement, CMAP also worked to elevate unheard voices, surface hidden safety risks, and ensure transportation investments reflect the needs of all residents – particularly those who rely on walking, biking, and transit every day.

This digital-first approach proved critical when project scopes shifted at the federal level, ensuring CMAP could continue gathering feedback without losing momentum.

“That breadth and constant online presence that we had with this website was essential,” explained Barrett. **“Everyone had access to all counties, which really encouraged participation because people live and work across jurisdictions.”**

RESULTS | PAVING THE WAY FOR SAFE STREETS INITIATIVES

Across all six counties, CMAP uncovered patterns that traditional data alone could not. While bicycle and pedestrian crashes made up a small share of total crashes, engagement data reinforced that these incidents accounted for up to one-third of fatal and serious injuries, strengthening the case for people-first safety strategies.

“We heard peoples’ stories about how safety is changing how and where they’re choosing to travel,” said Barrett. **“It’s a livability issue; it’s not only mobility, but really quality of life. It’s about making every project we do as safe as it can be, and as comprehensive in addressing the safety needs as it can be.”**

The community feedback exceeded engagement expectations by 50%, directly informing safety priorities, policy recommendations, and high-injury network analysis. **Participation included:**

- ✔ 4,500+ map pins
- ✔ 1,300+ survey responses
- ✔ 17,000+ hub visitors

The engagement process helped communities understand and support future safety improvements, from roadway redesigns to everyday resurfacing projects. “People have strong opinions, but if we can explain why changes are happening and how they work, people are ready for that conversation,” explained Barrett. “Engagement primes a community to accept new ideas and changes. It became a shared educational experience; we’re learning from the community, and the community is learning about what’s possible.”



With six federally qualifying safety action plans completed, CMAP made communities eligible for ongoing Safe Streets for All funding – positioning local governments to move from planning to implementation with public trust already established.

“Everyone is touched by traffic safety,” said Barrett. **“Many of the people we interacted with knew someone who had been killed or seriously injured in a crash. We had so much gratitude from the public for what we were trying to do.”**

*This story highlights the hard work and innovation that earned Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning recognition as a winner in the 15th Annual **Granicus Digital Government Awards**, honoring exceptional achievements in digital government.*

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