

Chicago Tribune CHICAGOLAND

Let there be light under the 'L'

Groups push to improve area by Green Line stop



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Getting Around

Novelist Nelson Algren wrote that "Every day is D-Day under the 'L.'"

The space under the "L" station at 63rd Street and Cottage Grove Avenue has that battlefield vibe — noisy, dark, gritty and claustrophobic.

But community planners, developers, the city and the CTA are working on changing the feel of the Woodlawn intersection through new construction that will open it up to more sunlight, and make street and "L" station design changes to add light and improve safety. The idea is to make the Green Line terminal more of a neighborhood bright spot.

"There's not a lot of crime that happens under there, but there is the appearance of it," said LaShunda Gonzalez, Choice Neighborhoods director for the Preservation of Affordable Housing, or POAH, a Boston-based affordable housing nonprofit organization that is putting up new buildings on the corner. "It's very dark. ... The staircase and walkways are littered."

A key problem is that the station is right over the intersection, like a roof, and the buildings around it are crowded close to the "L" support pillars, blocking out the sun. The most prominent structure is the vacant four-story Washington Park National Bank building on the southwest corner, a 94-year-old structure so dilapidated a small tree is growing on top.

So what's happening around the 63rd and Cottage Grove station? A new building called Woodlawn Station, a mix of retail and apartments, is going up on the northeast corner, developed by POAH and to be completed by June.

A building on the southeast corner will be torn down and another new POAH building, all retail, is going up. This means Daley's, a Woodlawn institution since 1892, is going to move across the street into the new Woodlawn Station building this coming fall.

The new southeast corner building will be set farther back from the sidewalk than the current one and will have a plaza, allowing for more sun and space, Gonzalez explained. POAH wants to have windows on the second floor of the building face the "L" platform. She said this approach to a transit station is similar to the way attitudes have changed toward the Chicago River — viewing it as an asset rather than something to turn your back on.

The CTA and the city's Transportation Department also want to change the look of the station, and the streets and sidewalks around it, though the station itself will not be rebuilt. One of the CTA's oldest stops, it was first built in 1893, and a new station went on the site in 1991. Plans to improve the area around the station are still being worked out, including cost and the time of construction, but could include different lighting to accentuate the beauty of the steel "L" structure, new canopies, new crosswalks and reconfigured stairs, said CTA and city officials.

Aiding in the discussion among developers, CTA officials, community organizations and residents on the intersection is **Elevated Chicago**, a partnership of groups with a goal of improving the areas

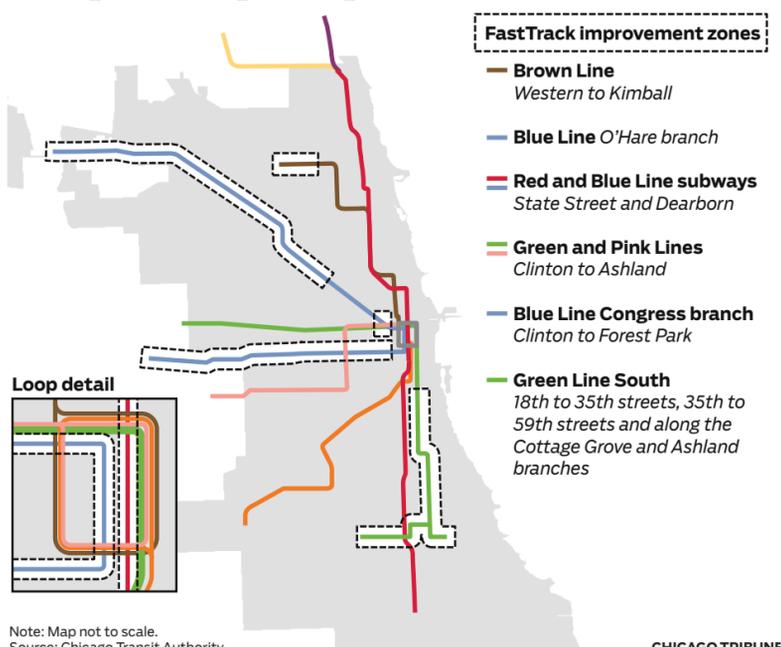


The CTA Green Line stop at 63rd Street and Cottage Grove Avenue casts uninviting shadows onto the streets beneath it.



Daley's, a Woodlawn institution since 1892, will move across the street into the new Woodlawn Station building this fall.

CTA plans to speed up train service



around "L" stations with community input. Members include the **Center for Neighborhood Technology**, the **Metropolitan Planning Council** and the **Chicago Community Trust**.

Elevated Chicago Director Roberto Requejo said the group wants to promote transit-oriented development with a focus on equity, stressing the need for affordable housing and ensuring that residents have a voice in what areas around transit look like.

Transit-oriented development, also known as TOD, means high-density retail and residential projects near transit stops. The idea is to promote walking and transit use, and keep down the need for cars. The work being done around 63rd and Cottage Grove fits the TOD definition.

TOD is a nice, green idea. But in recent years some TOD projects, such as the high-rise apartment buildings near the Cali-

fornia Avenue Blue Line stations in Chicago's Logan Square neighborhood, have increased fears of gentrification and rising rents.

Elevated Chicago has given out grants to entities that are working on projects to improve life around "L" stations — including 63rd and Cottage Grove on the Green Line, and Logan Square on the Blue Line. POAH got a \$50,000 grant to hire transportation planners to provide technical assistance for work at 63rd Street. Also receiving a grant is **Sunshine Enterprises**, a Woodlawn-based group that works to help small area businesses secure loans.

The Metropolitan Planning Council is talking with community residents to help decide what to do with the historic bank building, bought by the Cook County Land Bank late last year, said MPC manager Kendra Freeman. The Land Bank, which will look at community ideas

station on an average weekday, which is lower than at most stations, the CTA said.

CTA plans for ride-share money

The CTA says it will use money from new ride-share fees to make track improvements that will shave up to six minutes off "L" rides.

The City Council OK'd a 15-cent fee hike that kicked in this year on Uber and Lyft rides — pushing city fees on ride-share trips to 67 cents — to help the CTA bankroll upgrades systemwide; it will go up an additional 5 cents next year. The new pool of money will be funneled to the CTA. Dorval Carter, CTA president, has said the transit agency would use the money to leverage \$179 million in bonds to pay mostly for track improvements, along with updating security cameras and lighting.

The CTA is announcing details of its "FastTrack" improvement zones on Monday, which will fix up portions of the Red, Blue, Brown, Green and Pink lines over the next three or four years. The plans include electric power improvements on the Blue Line and track work on the Blue Line O'Hare branch and Red Line tracks in the Loop. Construction will start later this year.

"We're talking about replacing track, rebuilding the track bed and upgrading the power in some places so we can move more trains through a certain portion of the system faster than we can currently," Carter said in an interview. "It's the kind of nuts-and-bolts work that if we don't do it results in a severely reduced quality of service."

Transit agencies have been scrambling to find money for infrastructure upgrades since the state has not had a capital bill

since 2009.

Electric joy rides

Ever wondered what it's like to drive an electric car? You can get your chance at this year's Chicago Auto Show, Feb. 10-19.

The test drives are sponsored by the Chicago Area Clean Cities Coalition, a nonprofit that focuses on decreasing transportation-related pollution for the six-county area. Consumers who want to test drive electric cars, including the 2018 Nissan LEAF, 2018 Chrysler Pacifica Hybrid, and 2018 Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV can register during Auto Show days at the Clean Cities tent at McCormick Place's South Building, Gate 2.

"For many, this will be the first time they've had a chance to check out the great performance and environmental benefits of electric vehicles," said Samantha Bingham, coordinator of Chicago Area Clean Cities.

Test drives will be 10 a.m.-8 p.m. weekends and 10 a.m.-7 p.m. weekdays. You can find out more about the auto show, the largest in North America, at ChicagoAutoShow.com.

Infrastructure plan questions

Last week's column addressed questions over the president's promised infrastructure plan. President Donald Trump touted a \$1.5 trillion proposal in his State of the Union speech last Tuesday, down from a \$1.7 trillion figure he cited a week earlier and up from the \$1 trillion figure his administration has discussed since before the 2016 election.

This reader has her doubts about a plan that would result in more tolls.

"Mary, I'd laugh about the President's proposal for funding his grand infrastructure plan if it wasn't so pitiful. More tolls? Just look at how that has worked with the former Elgin-O'Hare Expressway turned I-390 toll road.

"Folks in my area (Roselle/Schaumburg) used to hop on the expressway to drive from Roselle Road west ... to Lake Street. But, in July 2016, when the state began charging 65 cents in tolls for that little run, most of us said 'No way!' We are now using local streets to reach the same destinations, sacrificing only a few extra minutes. Trucks, too, have switched, and local streets are now populated with semis ...

"When is the government going to get the message? People are getting tolled and taxed beyond reason. A plan to improve infrastructure through piling more taxes and tolls on the middle- and lower-income masses isn't going to happen. Especially when we see tax cuts putting millions of dollars into the pockets of the wealthy." — *Marsha Pedersen, Roselle*

Transportation song quiz

Last week's transportation song was about a 1948 California plane crash — the writer invented names for passengers because some media accounts only called them by their legal status. The song was "Deportee (Plane Wreck at Los Gatos)," by Woody Guthrie, about a crash that killed 32 people, including 28 migrant farm workers being deported back to Mexico. David Sykuta of Springfield was first with the answer.

This week's transportation song is about something that happened while waiting in line for transit, or as they say across the pond, "beginning in a queue." What's the song and who performed it? The winner will get a Tribune notebook, and glory.