

# Chicago Street Improvement Project Lifecycle

Keeping street improvement projects moving forward & on track



Advocates have a key role in creating better conditions for walking and biking in their community.

Everyone wants safe and accessible streets, but building them isn't always easy. It's important for leaders like you to speak up and inform elected officials that street safety is a priority in your community. See an intersection that's impossible to cross or a busy street sorely in need of a bike lane? Let your local officials know!

When talking with neighbors and elected officials about a project, it helps to understand how projects are identified and when and how you can contribute.

Here's a description of the lifecycle of large street improvement projects—such as streetscapes—in Chicago and how you can help ensure their success.



## PRIORITIES & NEEDS

Chicago's Department of Transportation (CDOT) has authority over thousands of miles of roads, so it must prioritize how resources are used for improving walking, biking and transit. This happens in a variety of ways:

- 1. Citywide and community plans:** Some street improvement projects are prioritized based on goals in existing plans like Streets for Cycling Plan 2020.
- 2. Regular maintenance:** The city performs routine maintenance on its streets that provides opportunities to make walking and biking improvements. For example, CDOT may add or restripe a bike lane or crosswalk when resurfacing a street.
- 3. Elected officials and residents:** Some projects are prioritized based on direct input from residents or the aldermen themselves.
  - a.** Elected officials often prioritize projects that pop up frequently in citizen reports. Anyone in the city can contact 311 or your alderman's office directly to report an issue.
  - b.** Community needs are also identified by local committees and citizen groups. People like you can join a community organization or transportation committee in your area to connect with others who share your concerns about street safety. You can also influence change through **Participatory Budgeting** in two ways: giving input in meetings where community projects are identified, then voting on how your tax dollars are spent on selected projects. For more info, visit [pbchicago.org](http://pbchicago.org).

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## IDENTIFYING FUNDING

Once a project is prioritized, the next question is how to pay for it. City officials finance projects with local, state and federal funding — often combining two more or more sources.

Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Program and the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) are a few federal funding sources used for pedestrian and bike projects.

Accessing state and federal money typically requires a local match of around 20 percent, which frequently comes from tax increment financing (TIF) district or aldermanic menu funds. They aren't easily accessible throughout the year, so securing them often delays projects.

## PRELIMINARY DESIGN AND ENGINEERING

After funding is identified, this occurs in two ways:

**1. Scoping:** Before creating a design concept, CDOT acknowledges how all modes of transportation—walking, biking, transit and driving—are used at the proposed project site through a design evaluation.

**2. Design:** Once the design evaluation is finished, CDOT uses the information gathered to draft and develop alternative design concepts.

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT

When design concepts are complete, CDOT presents a draft of the plan to the local alderman. For larger scale projects like the Streets for Cycling 2020 implementation or streetscapes, CDOT will go through a public process to get community feedback. CDOT is able to determine issues and evaluate the impact of each design from residents.

This is where some good community organizing skills pay off. You can organize support for a project by encouraging neighbors, local community organizations and businesses to contact local officials about the need for the project.

**1. Gather your neighbors together** to attend public meetings to provide feedback. The Active Transportation Alliance can help connect you with other supportive residents and promote strong turnout at key meetings.

**2. Organize events and use social media** to engage other community members about a new project.

## FINAL DESIGN

As soon as public feedback is incorporated, final project plan is complete.

## CONSTRUCTION AND EVALUATION

**1. Construction:** Once the final design is approved, CDOT develops drawings and project specifications in preparation for contractor bidding.

**a.** After a contract is awarded, CDOT informs the community of when construction will begin, which can take up to 4-12 months, depending on the complexity of the project.

**2. Evaluation:** The local alderman and CDOT will monitor and evaluate the project implementation, responding to community feedback along the way. Stay engaged with your local Elected officials to make sure the project has the desired impact on the community.