

March 8, 1999

Report links aggressive driving to urban sprawl

(Chicago) Aggressive driving may be less a product of an angry mind and more a result of an unhealthy transportation system.

A study by the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP) found that places with more aggressive driving deaths are usually newer, sprawling communities where the car is the only way to get around.

The study found a statistically significant relationship between places with high aggressive driving death rates and lack of bus, rail, walking and biking options. Residents in places with lower transit use were 61% more likely to die in an aggressive driving crash than people who live in areas where more people take the train or bus.

"This report is a cautionary tale for the Chicago region," says Jacky Grimshaw, Director for the Chicagoland Transportation & Air Quality Commission (CTAQC). "Not only do we need to make our existing transportation systems stronger in the city and throughout the region, but the suburban communities also need to invest in Pace, Metra, and new transit alternatives that encourage suburban ridership. We need to give people the opportunity to get off the Stevenson, out of the Hillside Strangler, and away from the breeding grounds of rage. Without a comprehensive investment in regional public transportation, aggressive driving fatalities will certainly increase as Chicagoland expands."

Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky(D-09), an ardent supporter of better public transportation throughout the region, said "Without fast, safe and affordable transportation options, we are forcing people into their cars, onto the crowded roadways, and into potentially caustic driving situations. This report confirms that, besides the environmental and economic consequences, we can also add public safety to the list of costs incurred by inadequate transportation options."

In 1996 (the most recent year for available federal data), the large metro area with the highest death rate was Riverside-San Bernadino, California, with 13.4 deaths per 100,000 residents. It was followed by Tampa, Phoenix, Orlando, Miami, Las Vegas, Ft. Lauderdale, Dallas, and Kansas City. Most of these regions have weak transit systems that keep people in their cars. The Chicago area had an aggressive driving rate of 4.5 per 100,000 residents.

The Chicagoland Transportation & Air Quality Commission offers the following recommendations to improve regional transportation and reduce the threat of road rage.

- The General Assembly needs to make funding available to preserve our existing transit systems. The CTA desperately needs capital improvements on the Blue and Brown Lines as well as improvements to its rolling stock. Metra's successful North Central line to Antioch needs to be "double tracked" to accommodate ridership.

- Make "seamless transfers" available between transit systems. Local transit agencies should work together so commuters can move easily throughout the regional transit system, which will result in more commuting options for more people.

- Don't neglect pedestrian and bicycle traffic. The city and suburbs should provide facilities to make biking and walking to work easier. By repairing dangerous sidewalks and installing better bike racks, municipalities can ensure bike and pedestrian safety, and encourage more people to discover these healthy commuter alternatives.

- The General Assembly must encourage smart development around city centers and transportation hubs. Investment in suburban city centers and development around Metra and CTA stations will significantly reduce the number of car trips throughout the region, resulting in less congestion as well as innumerable environmental, aesthetic, and quality of life benefits.

The study was conducted by the Surface Transportation Policy Project, a coalition of over 200 professional, environmental and community organizations working for a balanced transportation policy that protects the environment, promotes social equity and makes communities more livable.

The Chicagoland Transportation and Air Quality Commission (CTAQC) is a coalition of 140 environmental, public policy, religious, labor, and neighborhood groups from throughout the six-county Chicago metropolitan region. CTAQC works to improve air quality and create more travel options by supporting transit, bicycle and pedestrian improvements.