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Vision Development Description, Appendix 1: description of Common Ground process

The regional vision has been developed over the course of approximately one year. The vision has built on goal-setting work done in the recent past by CMAP's predecessor agencies (NIPC and CATS), and has particularly relied on the results of the Common Ground process. This process, conducted by NIPC between 2000 and 2005, involved thousands of members of the public from around the region, and served as the basis of the NIPC Framework Plan.

In early 2007, when CMAP began its work on the *GO TO 2040* plan, a deliberate decision was made not to redo or repeat Common Ground. Instead, CMAP determined that the goals identified through Common Ground would be used as the basis for the *GO TO 2040* regional vision. It was recognized that these goals would need to be updated, revised, and supplemented to create a consensus regional vision to reflect CMAP's mission, and that was the purpose of the vision development process that is described below.

The following pages provide more detail about the Common Ground process and its results. Please note that this information was taken from the NIPC Framework Plan, the document that resulted from the Common Ground process.

Chapter 4

The Common Ground Planning Process

In a region with 272 municipalities, more than 1,200 government units, and 8 million people, effective regional planning requires effective and extensive collaboration. When NIPC initiated the process of developing a new comprehensive regional plan, the Commission recognized that traditional means of planning and collaboration would not be sufficient. It was time to consider exercising NIPC's mandated mission for a regional plan. After extensive dialogue with state, regional, county, and local leadership, this need was affirmed.

NIPC initiated *Common Ground: A Blueprint for Regional Action* to address continued increases in population and the need to achieve balanced, sustainable growth benefiting all of the region's communities. In doing so, NIPC has set a new standard for engaging the public in creating a shared vision for the future of the region.

Common Ground is part of an emerging approach known as "community-based regionalism" in which individual local jurisdictions remain the basic unit of planning and government, while the importance of working together and looking at all issues from both a local and regional perspective is recognized. Common Ground's four inter-related objectives are to:

- Prepare and adopt this *2040 Regional Framework Plan* based on a publicly created, comprehensive vision for the region's 35-year future.

NIPC has set a new standard for engaging the public in creating a shared vision for the future of northeastern Illinois.



▲ Participants in the Common Ground process collaborated using a set of decision-support tools such as facilitated discussion, networked computers, and keypad polling.

- Provide a new approach supported by the best available technology for community-driven regional planning in northeastern Illinois.
- Assist local planning efforts by providing best practices, utilizing new technology, and facilitating intergovernmental cooperation.
- Strengthen the link between land-use planning and infrastructure investment across the region.

Leadership Workshops

The 2040 Plan process began with a series of leadership workshops. In striving for maximum public involvement, it was necessary to first broaden

NIPC's traditional networks and constituencies. The workshops were held in 12 locations representing a different part of the region. These workshops engaged many businesses and civic organizations that had not previously worked with one another or been involved in past regional planning efforts.

As part of its outreach effort, NIPC conducted breakfast meetings throughout the region to talk with leaders and activists about whom should be engaged to broaden the participation. Participants collaborated using a set of decision-support tools such as facilitated discussion, networked computers, and keypad polling. Many people from different professional backgrounds met one another for the first time, even though they lived and worked in the same parts of the region.

Each workshop produced a broad and comprehensive set of issues and challenges facing its part of the region. The early Common Ground process had identified 52 issues and challenges; these leadership workshops identified an additional five issues and five challenges, raising the total to 57.

Regional Forum

As the second step in the planning process, Common Ground was launched publicly with a large Regional Forum in October 2001 at the Stephens Convention Center in Rosemont. While the leadership workshops were divided by geography, this Regional Forum assembled these people together at a single location to include a broader public involvement. The event brought together approximately 850 people of diverse ages, races, and ethnicities from the city, from the suburbs, and from rural communities. The forum was facilitated by *AmericaSpeaks* using the same technology that assisted the large-group process *AmericaSpeaks* later used in New York City to convene 5,000 people to plan for the rebuilding of Lower Manhattan after Sept. 11, 2001. NIPC has since brought this technology in-house with expert staff support.

Regional Forum participants sat down at tables with people from all across the region and shared information about what they valued in their communities and in the region. Using decision-support tools such as facilitated discussion, networked computers, and keypad polling, the participants reviewed, clarified, and prioritized the issues and challenges developed by the leadership workshops. Some of the challenges receiving the most attention were education, housing, the environment, and providing benefits for all parts of the region.

Regional Forum participants also made commitments to work more closely with one another and with the Common Ground process to build a new community-based regional plan and a new form of regional governance based on communities working together.



AmericaSpeaks Connects Policy Makers, Citizens¹

AmericaSpeaks is a Washington, D.C.-based organization that uses round-table discussions and technological tools to connect decision makers with citizens. The firm is working toward “a national infrastructure for democratic deliberation that institutionalizes the links between decision makers and citizens in determining public policy.”

To this end, *AmericaSpeaks* is currently:

- Developing partnerships with other organizations to create coordinating institutions.
- Recruiting and training a national network of volunteers and facilitators.
- Developing public outreach processes to ensure diverse and representative participation.
- Increasing legislators’ knowledge of and commitment to public deliberation.
- Developing appropriate technologies to facilitate effective deliberation.
- Designing new public spaces for deliberation and dialogue.

Working Groups

More than 275 people signed up for working groups to develop regional goals and a new form of regional governance. These volunteers organized themselves into five working groups broken down by topic in four geographic clusters. Four meeting locations were chosen so that the working groups could convene in their area. The groups working on the north part of the region met in Palatine; the south groups met in Orland Park; west groups met in Lisle; and the groups working on the central part of the region met in downtown Chicago. These groups worked for eight months, meeting monthly and communicating via WebCouncil, an online meeting and discussion tool.

Each group devised its own mission statement, did research on critical issues, and presented information to one another. Each group conducted a detailed Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis. Through working together, the groups developed a collective and deep understanding of the issues facing the region. They were also learning how to work with others from across traditional lines of geography, race, and background. This work set the stage for the drafting of regional goals.

Goals-Writing Workshops

In June 2002, the 20 working groups assembled as five groups for a series of goals-writing

workshops. Each group was to draft goals based on their lessons learned during the previous eight months for a particular topic area. The goals created by engaged, diverse participants gained greatly in the details and the richness that resulted from this collaborative effort. The goals written by each group were shared with the rest of the working-group participants via WebCouncil. People shared feedback and made revisions. The goals then were taken out for review and affirmation by a larger group.

The working groups represented a major time commitment for participants who had other jobs and responsibilities, and their effort was deeply appreciated. Using working groups to draft the goals themselves — rather than leaving the responsibility to NIPC staff — has been an integral part of Common Ground and the process of community-driven regional planning.

While the general scope of goals written by staff might have been similar to the goals written by the groups, they would have differed greatly in the details and lacked the richness that results from such a collaborative effort. Further, by having participants actually work together to write parts of the plan, Common Ground created a higher sense of ownership for this regional vision. This ownership and identification with a regional perspective is necessary to take collaboration to a new level while retaining traditional lines of responsibility.

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Diverse Group Speaks its Mind at Youth Forum²

At the NIPC-sponsored Youth Forum, part of the 2002 American Planning Association National Conference, 71 percent of the participants were between the ages of 14 and 19. Slightly more females (59 percent) than males attended the forum. The majority of attendees were from the City of Chicago (72 percent) with the remainder from the surrounding suburbs. The group was racially diverse. In response to a question on race, 35 percent of the group identified themselves as white, 32 percent identified themselves as black or African American, 19 percent as another race, and 14 percent as two or more races. Separately, 23 percent of the group identified themselves as Hispanic.



Student participants at the Youth Forum emphasized the need to address racial and ethnic intolerance and poverty, and they expressed concerns about the environment and the need to find alternative fuel sources and alternative forms of transportation.

Youth had been a strong presence at the Regional Forum, but they were not able to make the evening meetings that were a part of the working groups. Therefore, NIPC conducted a separate Youth Forum in April 2002 in conjunction with the annual American Planning Association National Conference that was held in Chicago. Nearly 100 youth came together on a Saturday morning to conduct their own SWOT analysis for the region.

The participants emphasized the need to address racial and ethnic intolerance and poverty. The youth believed that more equitable access to better education as well as improvements to the built environment and public transit could help considerably to address issues of intolerance and inequity. They also expressed concerns about the environment and the need to find alternative fuel sources and alternative forms of transportation. The results from the Youth Forum were shared with the participants in the working groups.

Goal-Review Workshops

Between November 2002 and March 2003, several meetings and goal-review workshops were held to get broader feedback on the goals. Although the goals working groups were diverse, it was felt that workshops were needed to discuss issues for traditionally under-represented groups, such as African Americans, Latinos, and youth. Several meetings and workshops were

also held to review the goals with elected officials and planners who had not been a part of the working groups. There was also a special workshop in McHenry County to talk about farmland issues.

These additional workshops resulted in revisions and additions to the regional goals, and key changes were made to strengthen goals in the areas of housing, farmland, and freight transportation. Furthermore, these additional workshops permitted NIPC to continue to expand its network of organizations and people willing to work together to build and implement a new form of community-based regional planning.

Commission Endorsement

After this public review process, the Commission voted in March 2003 to endorse the 52 regional

goals and the set of five core themes. The themes were crafted to provide a condensed summary of the 52 goals that could be easily communicated to new audiences. (See Figure 1.)

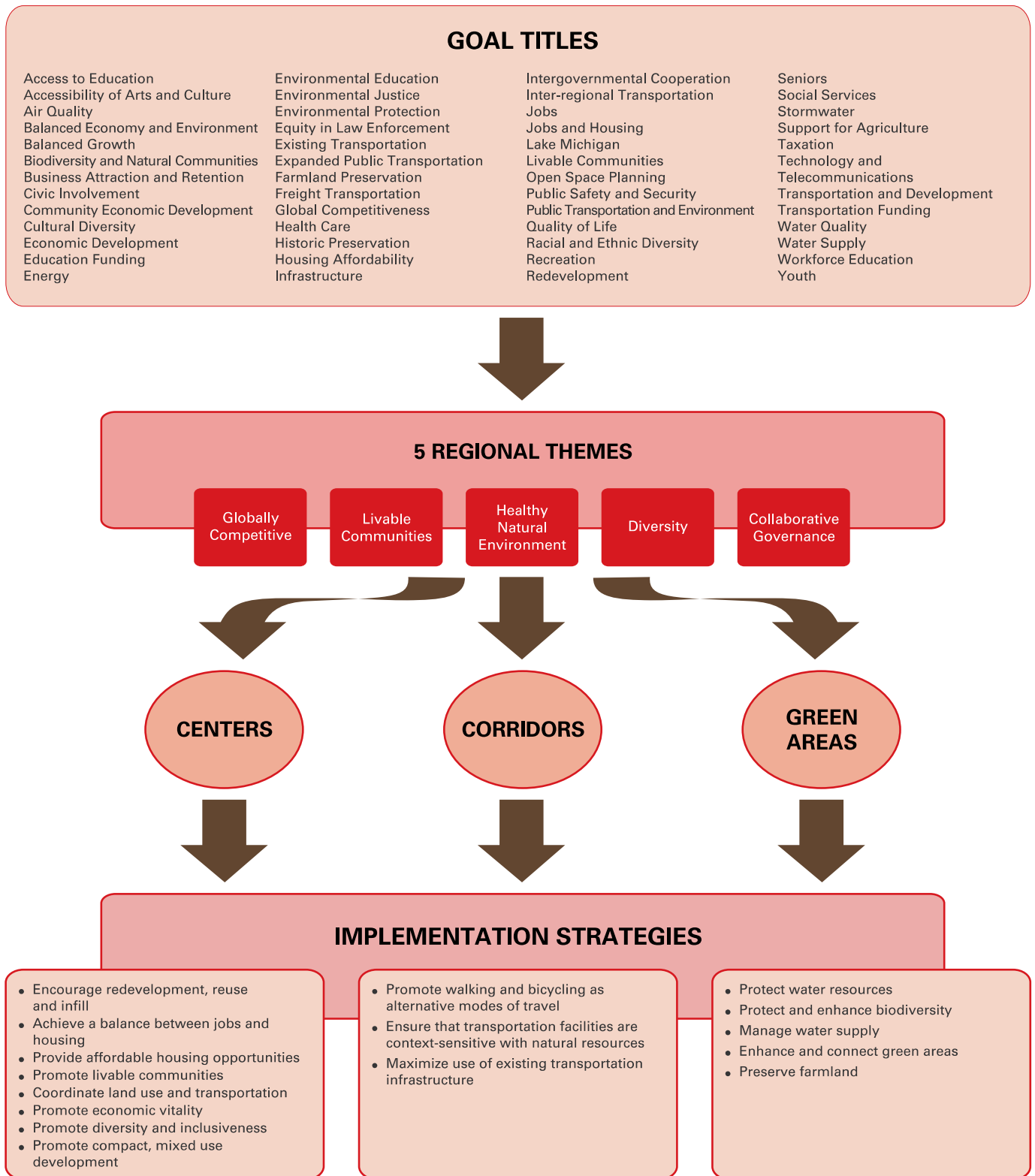
Creating a Framework

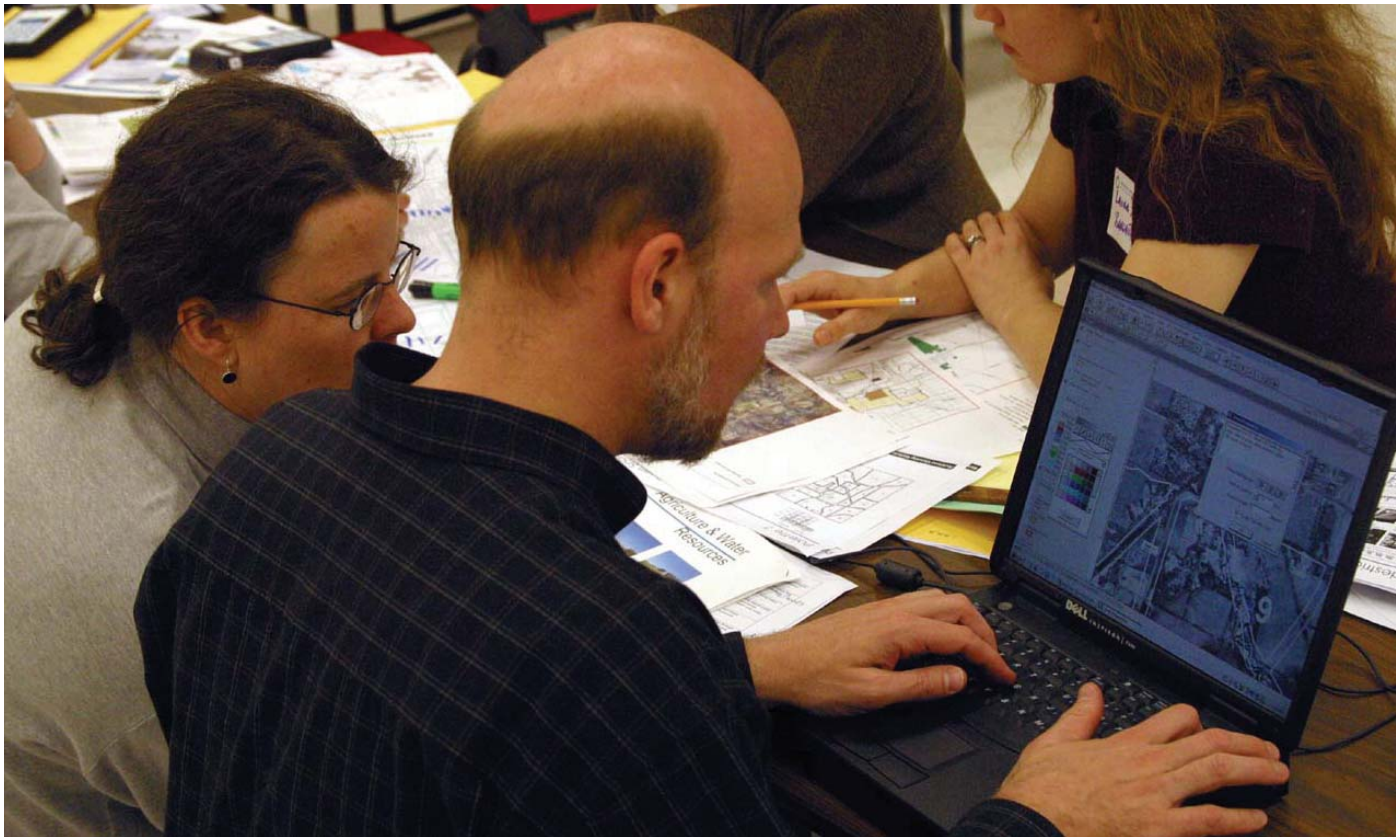
With the establishment of the goals and themes, NIPC turned its attention to a key part of its organizational mandate: creating a regional land-use plan. While NIPC does not have direct land-use authority over any part of the region, it is the state-authorized regional land-use planning agency. Therefore, to affect planning in northeastern Illinois, NIPC looked to create a framework that could respect and support local planning and foster greater local collaboration, while honoring the vision produced through Common Ground and the need to integrate with transportation planning.



▲
In spring 2003, a special goal-review workshop was held in McHenry County to specifically address farmland issues.

▼ **Figure 1: How Regional Goals Blend into Themes and Implementation Strategies**





▲
Common Ground participants developed their vision for 2040 by identifying the places where they wanted to see concentrations of development, the transportation corridors needed to connect them, and the natural and open areas that should be preserved.

Cluster Workshops

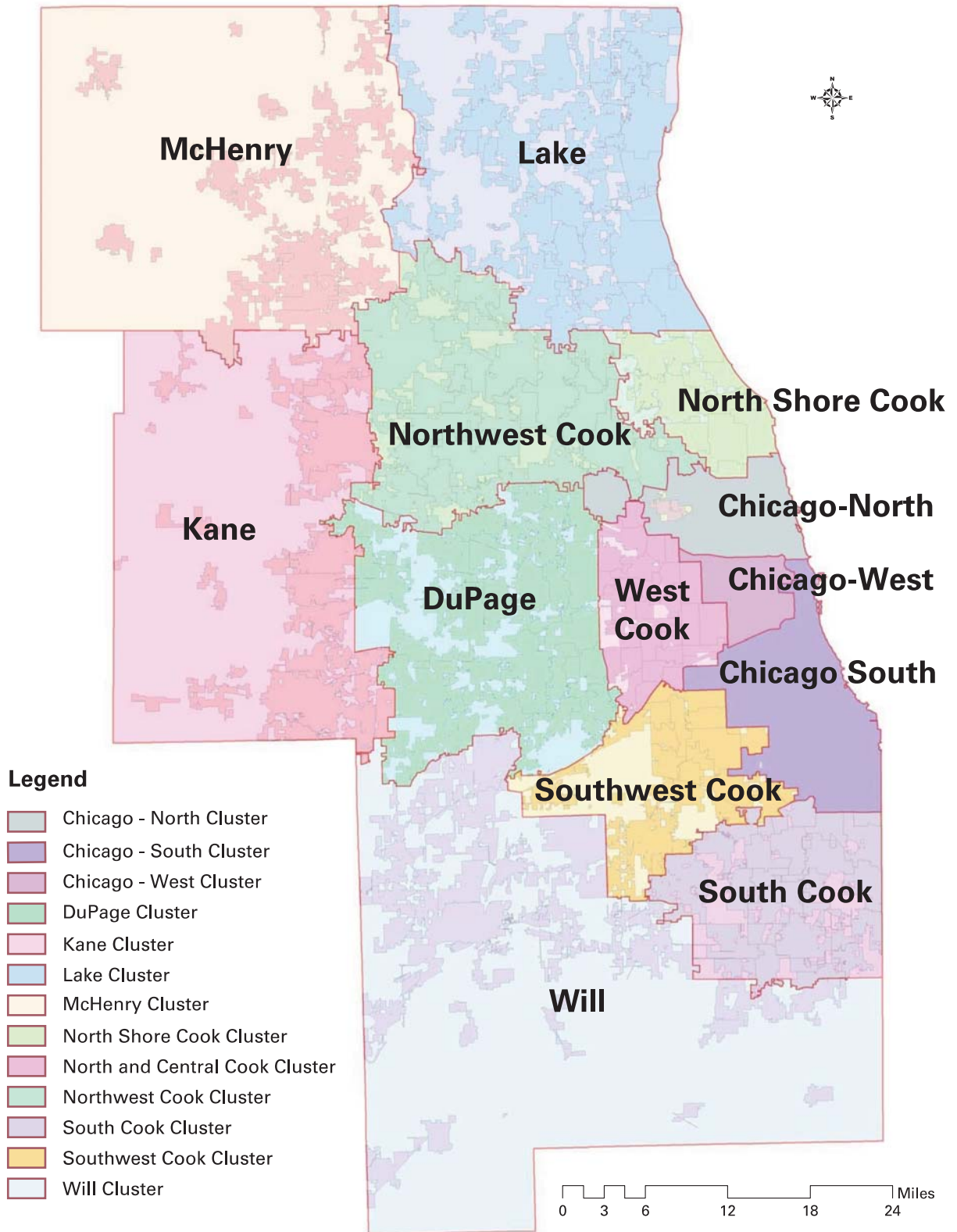
NIPC conducted workshops in 2004 with the 13 clusters of municipalities that were formed earlier in the process. These workshops brought together elected officials from municipalities; local, county and regional planners; and other constituents to translate the Common Ground goals into a land-use framework to guide future growth in the region.

In these workshops, participants developed their vision for a desirable future in 2040 by identifying the places where they wanted to see concentrations of development, the transporta-

tion corridors needed to interconnect them, and the natural and open areas that should be preserved. A separate workshop was held for the City of Chicago, where a diverse group of participants engaged in a similar exercise for the city to identify significant areas and major corridors for 2040.

During this year, NIPC conducted cluster workshops with municipal elected officials; local, county and regional planners; and other constituents to apply this land-use concept to the six-county region and produce a map depicting a desired framework to guide future growth and planning to support that growth.

▼ Figure 2: Municipal Clusters³



The participants were able to “paint” their centers, corridors, and green areas on the maps directly over the digital information needed to support decision making.

Paint the Region

The participants in these workshops used a program developed by NIPC called “Paint the Region.” The tool provided participants with multiple layers of data about their areas in map form, including information about existing and proposed transportation networks and natural resources. The participants were able to “paint” their centers, corridors, and green areas on the maps directly over the digital information needed to support decision making.

At the workshops, participants were divided into groups of five to 10 people, and the groups worked with a discussion facilitator, a technical facilitator, keypads, reference material, and a network of computers and projectors running the Paint the Region computer program.

The Paint the Region tool allowed participants to digitally add centers, corridors, and green areas to the regional landscape. The Paint the Region screen is divided into three parts (see Figure 3). The central part of the screen acts as a canvas where the cluster boundaries and multiple reference layers could be switched on or off, and centers, corridors, and green areas could be painted. On the right side of the screen is a list of reference layers that could be turned on or off to help participants make decisions about the location of different features. These reference layers include the existing road network, rail network, employment centers, open spaces, streams and lakes, wetlands, floodplains, etc. It also included a layer of aerial photographs that could be magnified to determine exact location of any feature. To the left of the canvas is a set of tools for painting 2040 features that included different types of centers, corridors, and green areas.

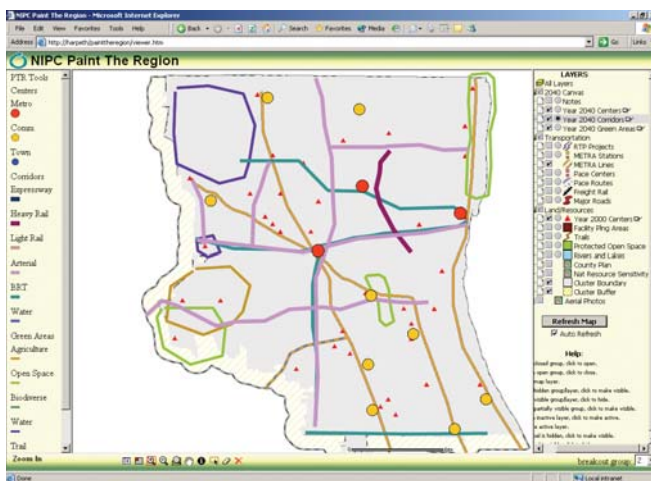


Figure 3: Paint the Region Interface

At these sessions, participants discussed potential centers, corridors, and green areas for each cluster. The painted maps from different tables were digitally overlaid at the end of the workshops so the assembled group could observe the ideas and features and develop a consensus.

Paint the Region Palettes

Paper copies of the palettes shown in Figure 4 were provided to Common Ground participants. These included brief explanations of characteristics and illustrations of different types of centers, corridors, and green areas. The same features were included on the Paint the Region interface as digital tools that participants could use to “paint” the region.

Synthesizing the Map

NIPC staff analyzed the results from these workshops, and through a series of cluster synthesis meetings and a regional synthesis meeting, created the regional map of centers, corridors, and green areas that is an integral part of the *2040 Plan*.

The process began by synthesizing the multiple maps for a single cluster that were produced at each workshop. The proposals for centers were compared with information available in municipal and county plans and other relevant data, such as population growth, job growth, and existing density. The maps representing each cluster were then quilted together to form a single map for the region. This quilted map was shared with land-use, transportation and environmental planners from across the region for review and feedback.

Building the Common Ground Map

NIPC took the preferences articulated in public workshops and developed the detailed map shown in Figure 5. This early map represents the “cores” or “activity hubs” of the centers. These cores are the places where urban activities would be concentrated, intensified and expanded outward. Within a center, as one moves away from the core, the intensity of urban activities may gradually decline along with the decline in densities and change in land use.

On this map, the City of Chicago is illustrated with the same color as a Community Center. This symbolizes that the community areas within Chicago, with their current populations, densities and land-use mix, are already at Community Center level. Therefore, they were planned for accordingly within the future regional framework.

Corridors are the primary transportation links among centers. The corridors illustrated in Figure 5 include five types of regionally significant corridors: highway, arterial, passenger rail, bus rapid transit, and water transport. Three of these — highway, arterial and passenger rail — are illustrated on the map as either “existing” or “proposed.” “Existing” indicates corridors already in service; the “proposed” status indicates corridors that are new or that would be improved by additional lanes, medians, tracks, stations, or other improvements. BRT and water transport do not exist as significant regional systems; therefore, they are under “proposed” status.

Tools and Outputs

The tools and outputs described here were integral pieces of the Common Ground process.

Regional Growth Transect Overlay

The Growth Transect map in Figure 6 is one output of the Paint the Region process. This map shows urban areas in a transparent red overlay; growth areas in transparent yellow overlay; and rural/agricultural areas on the outer peripheries of the region, identified by light green. The transparent purple islands are very low-density urban areas.

Employment Centers

The Employment Centers map in Figure 7 illustrates existing employment subcenters, one of the reference layers used for Paint the Region process.

▼ Figure 4: Paint the Region Palettes

PALETTE OF CENTERS

Symbol	Centers in Suburban Context	General Characteristics / Description	Illustrations	Pop. Density (residents/acre)	Job Density (jobs/acre)
	Metropolitan Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major urban hubs for commercial activities, services, amenities and residential land uses Major destination for people around the region Areas with high density of employment and population Significantly impacts the regional economy, traffic and land use patterns Examples: Arlington Heights, Oak Park, Schaumburg, Waukegan, Joliet 		20 or more	20 or more
	Community Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderate size urban or suburban hubs with retail activities and residential land uses Important destinations primarily for the people from surrounding communities or towns Impacts traffic and land use patterns at local and sub-regional level Examples: Mundelein, Lake Forest, Des Plaines 		10-20	10-20
	Town Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small suburban or rural hubs with moderate to low density residential land uses and some commercial or retail activities Residents depend on nearby Community or Metropolitan Centers to meet their needs Examples: Peotone, Woodstock, Richmond 		5-10	Less than 10

TRANSPORTATION WISH LIST

Mode of Transportation	Illustrations
Bus (CTA / PACE)	
BRT (Bus Rapid Transit)	
Commuter Rail (CTA, Metra)	
Light Rail	
Pedestrian / Bicycle	
Transit Oriented Development	

PALETTE OF CORRIDORS

Symbol	Corridors	General Characteristics / Description	Illustrations	Pedestrian and/or Bike Possibility	Gross Width (impact areas)
	Rail Corridor (CTA, Metra)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About two mile wide stretch along a rail right of way Characterized by its capacity to carry heavy passenger volumes Have an exclusive right-of-way, high speed and high platform loading Examples in Chicago region include CTA transit rail and Metra commuter rail 		Yes	2 miles
	Expressway Corridor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About two mile wide stretch along the length of an Expressway Highly accessible by cars and other heavier automobiles Fast moving vehicular traffic, limited access only via interchanges Land uses and development activity are significantly impacted by the presence of an expressway May create a physical barrier between communities, and cause noise and air pollution 		No	2 miles
	Arterial Corridor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About one mile wide stretch along the length of an Arterial road Primarily meant for through vehicular movement; can also be shared by bicycles and pedestrians have direct access to adjacent land uses 		Yes	1 mile
	Light Rail Corridor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About one mile wide stretch along a light rail right of way May use shared or exclusive rights-of-way, high or low platform loading Electric railway with single car or multi-car trains typically with lower passenger carrying capacity compared to heavy rail Also known as "streetcar," "trolley car," and "tramway" 		Yes	1 mile
	Bus Rapid Transit Corridor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About one mile wide stretch along a Bus Rapid Transit route Rapid transit buses travel along dedicated lanes or special guideways that allow higher speeds, generally serving permanent station stops A less expensive and a more flexible option than light or commuter rail 		Yes	1 mile
	Water Transport Corridor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used to transport people and goods for non-recreational and recreational purposes The mode of transport includes freight barges, water taxis, cruise lines, tour boats etc 		No	NA

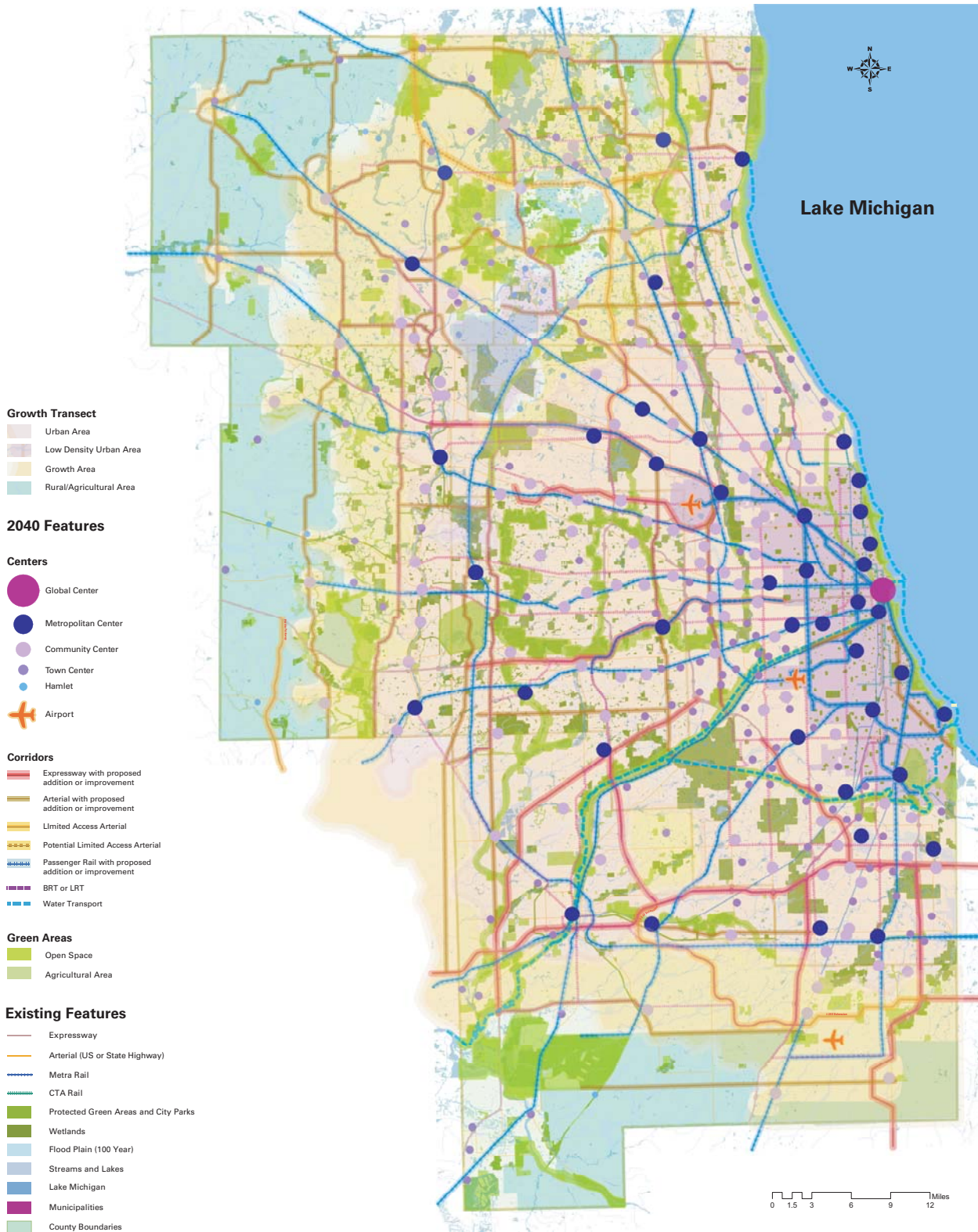
PALETTE OF GREEN AREAS

Symbol	Centers	General Characteristics / Description	Illustrations
	Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land used for crop cultivation with limited residential land uses Generally found in the mostly rural parts of the region Plays important role in rural economy and in preserving a healthy natural environment 	
	Open Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forest preserves, state and local parks, other recreational open spaces No development activity Generally available for public use and enjoyment 	
	Biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special category of open spaces that need to be protected for their contribution to biological diversity in the region Sensitive resource areas, vulnerable to development activity Examples: upland prairies, wetlands, oak savannahs 	
	Water Resource Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant water bodies like, rivers, streams, lakes, creeks Important to preserve the quality and quantity of water in the region Also serves as recreational amenity 	
	Trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes trails along land or water features like railway lines, streams or through green open spaces Permits activities like walking, bicycling, horseback riding, canoeing and kayaking Widths of these corridors may vary from narrow – such as an abandoned railway corridor, to broad – such as a large, linear forest preserve adjacent to a river 	

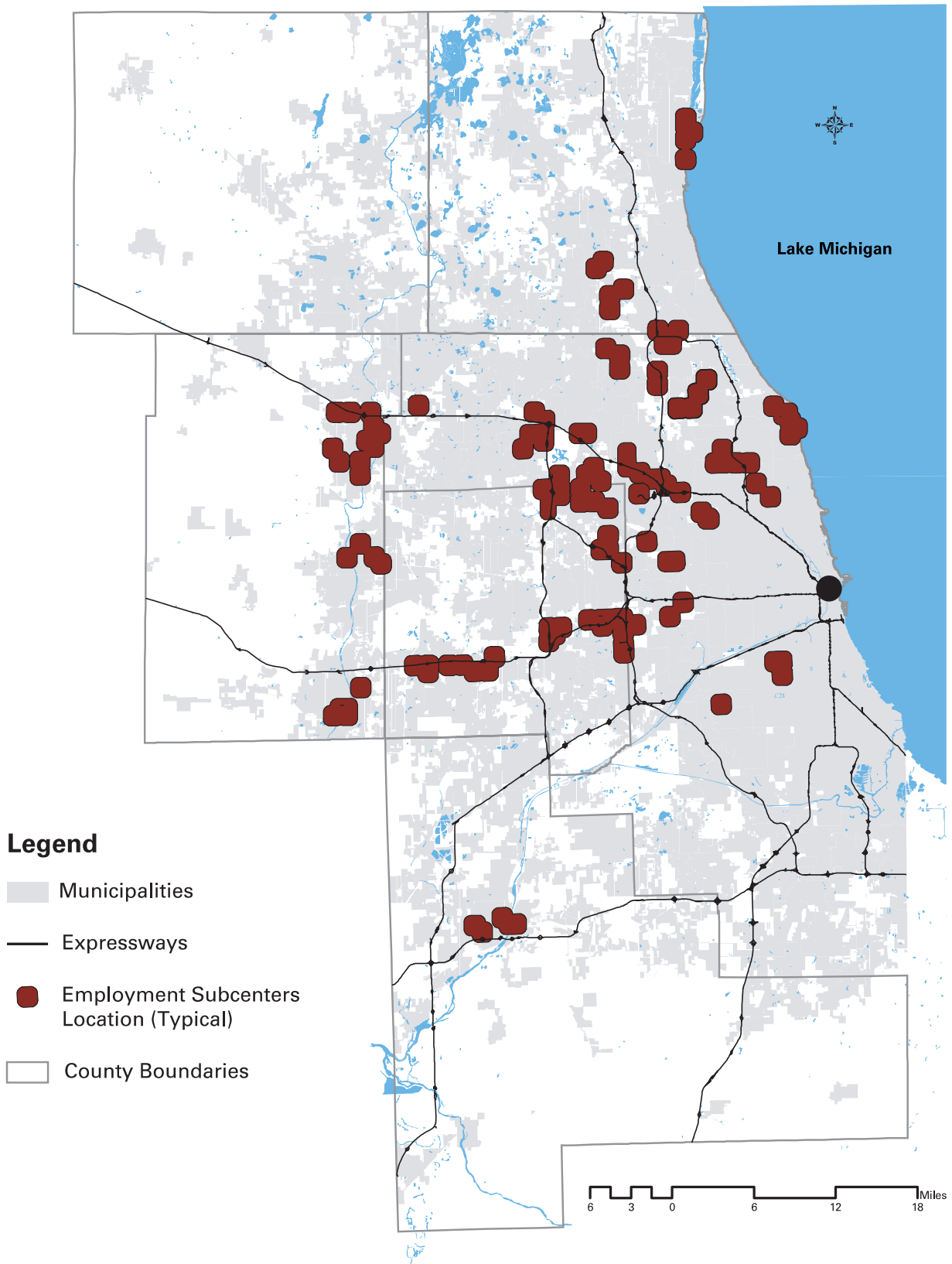
▼ Figure 5: Common Ground Map⁴



▼ Figure 6: Growth Transect



▼ Figure 7: Major Existing Employment Subcenters⁵





Learn More

End Notes

¹ *AmericaSpeaks*, <http://www.americaspeaks.org/>.

² *Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission*, http://www.nipc.org/cg/events/youth_0402.asp/.

³ Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission is the source of all data and geography, unless cited otherwise.

⁴ *Geography sources*: DuPage County, Kane County, Lake County, McHenry County, Will County, City of Chicago, Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (open space), USFWS National Wetlands Inventory (wetlands), FEMA (floodplains), USGS National Hydrology Dataset (streams and lakes). Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission is the source of all data and geography, unless cited otherwise.

⁵ *Data sources*: Department of Economics and CUED at University of Illinois-Chicago, Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission. *Geography sources*: USGS National Hydrology Dataset (streams and lakes). Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission is the source of all data and geography, unless cited otherwise.

Related Resources

- *Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission*, <http://www.nipc.org/>.
- *AmericaSpeaks*, <http://www.americaspeaks.org/>.
- *American Planning Association*, <http://www.planning.org/>.