
TRANSPORTATION **FACTS**

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About northeastern Illinois as prepared by the
Chicago Area Transportation Study

The Chicago Area Rail System - 1976 to 2006

Introduction

In 1977, the Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS) published a report, Freight Movements in the Chicago Metropolitan Region, that presented the results of a series of goods movement studies that included data on air, highway, waterway and rail freight. Among the products of this study were a series of maps depicting the extensive rail freight network in Cook, DuPage, Lake, Kane, McHenry and Will counties in northeastern Illinois and Lake and Porter counties in northwest Indiana. The maps confirmed the routes and branch lines of all 29 railroads operating in the region.

The Chicago Area Rail System in 1976

At the beginning of 1976, 29 railroads were operating in the 8 county northeastern Illinois/northwest Indiana region. A total of 17 railroads entered the area via 40 routes. Another 12 railroads moved rail freight strictly within the region. Beginning about the same time, the railroad industry underwent a long period of bankruptcies, mergers, realignments and abandoned of rail rights-of-way that resulted in extensive changes to both the national and regional rail systems. Exhibit 1 lists the railroads that were operating in the region in 1976.

Exhibit 1 Railroads Operating in the Chicago Region in 1976

Atchison Topeka and Santa Fe
Baltimore and Ohio
B and O Chicago Terminal
Belt Railway Company
Burlington Northern
Chesapeake and Ohio
Chicago and North Western
Chicago and Eastern Illinois
Chicago Heights Terminal and Transfer
Chicago and Illinois Western
Chicago Milwaukee St. Paul and Pacific
Chicago River and Indiana
Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific
Chicago, South Shore & South Bend
Chicago Short Line

Chicago and Western Indiana
Chicago, West Pullman and Southern
Elgin, Joliet and Eastern
Erie Lackawana
Grand Trunk Western
Gulf Mobile and Ohio
Illinois Central
Illinois Northern
Indiana Harbor Belt
Louisville and Nashville
Manufacturers Junction Railway
Norfolk and Western
Penn Central Transportation Company
Soo Line

The Chicago Area Rail System in 2006

In 2006, we still see 29 railroads operating in the region. Sixteen of these railroads cross the borders via 30 routes. Of the 29 railroads 13 operate entirely within the region. On the surface, it appears that little has changed since 1976. However, the rail network has actually undergone extensive changes. For instance, only 5 of the railroads serving the region in 1976 still exist in 2006. They are: Belt Railway of Chicago; Chicago South Shore and South Bend; Elgin Joliet and Eastern; Indiana Harbor Belt; and, Manufacturers Junction Railway. In addition, rail consolidation across the United States has resulted in just 6 major railroads serving the region. They are: the Burlington Northern/Santa Fe; Canadian National; Canadian Pacific; CSX; Norfolk Southern; and, the Union Pacific. These 6 railroads account for 23 of the 30 routes that now cross the borders of the region. In addition, 24 of the current 29 railroads either did not operate in the region or did not exist in their present form in 1976. Exhibit 2 shows the railroads operating in the region and those components of the 1976 system that they have absorbed.

Exhibit 2 Railroads Operating in the Chicago Region in 2006 and those Railroads and Branch Lines Absorbed since 1976

Amtrak

Chicago and Western Indiana (part)
Penn Central (part)

Belt Railway of Chicago

Burlington Northern Santa Fe

Burlington Northern
Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe
Illinois Northern (part)

Calumet Transload & Railroad

Canadian National

Grand Trunk Western
Illinois Central
Gulf Mobile and Ohio (part)
Chicago and Illinois Western
Soo Line (part)

Canadian Pacific

Chicago Milwaukee St. Paul and Pacific (part)
Soo Line (part)

Central Illinois Railroad

Burlington Northern/Santa Fe (part)
Illinois Northern (part)

Chesapeake and Indiana

Chesapeake and Ohio (part)

Chicago-Chemung

Chicago and North Western (part)

Chicago Fort Wayne and Eastern/Rail America (accesses Chicago region via CSX)

Penn Central (part)

Chicago Heights Switching Co.

Chicago Peoria and Western (at Corn Products, Summit)

Chicago Rail Link

Chicago West Pullman and Southern
Chicago Rock Island and Pacific (part)

Chicago, South Shore and South Bend (operates on NICTD tracks)

CSX

Baltimore and Ohio
Baltimore and Ohio Chicago Terminal
Chicago Rock Island and Pacific (part)
Penn Central (part)
Louisville and Nashville
Chesapeake and Ohio
Indiana Harbor Belt (part)

Elgin Joliet and Eastern

Illinois Railways (enters Chicago region via Burlington Northern/Santa Fe)

Burlington Northern/Santa Fe (part)

Indiana Harbor Belt

Iowa Chicago and Eastern (enters Chicago region via Metra)
Chicago Milwaukee St. Paul and Pacific (part)

Iowa Interstate (enters the Chicago region via CSX and Metra over the former Chicago Rock Island and Pacific)

Lake Michigan & Indiana

Manufacturers Junction Railway

Metra

Chicago Milwaukee St. Paul and Pacific (part)
Chicago Rock Island and Pacific (part)
Chicago and Western Indiana (part)
Illinois Central (part)

Norfolk Southern

Norfolk and Western
Chicago and Western Indiana (part)
Penn Central (part)
Erie Lackawana
South Chicago and Southern
Chicago River and Indiana

Northern Indiana Commuter Transit District (passenger only)

South Chicago and Indiana Harbor

Chicago Short Line

South Chicago and Southern

Penn Central (part)

Union Pacific

Chicago and North Western
Chicago and Eastern Illinois
Penn Central (part)
Gulf Mobile and Ohio (part)
Chicago and Western Indiana (part)

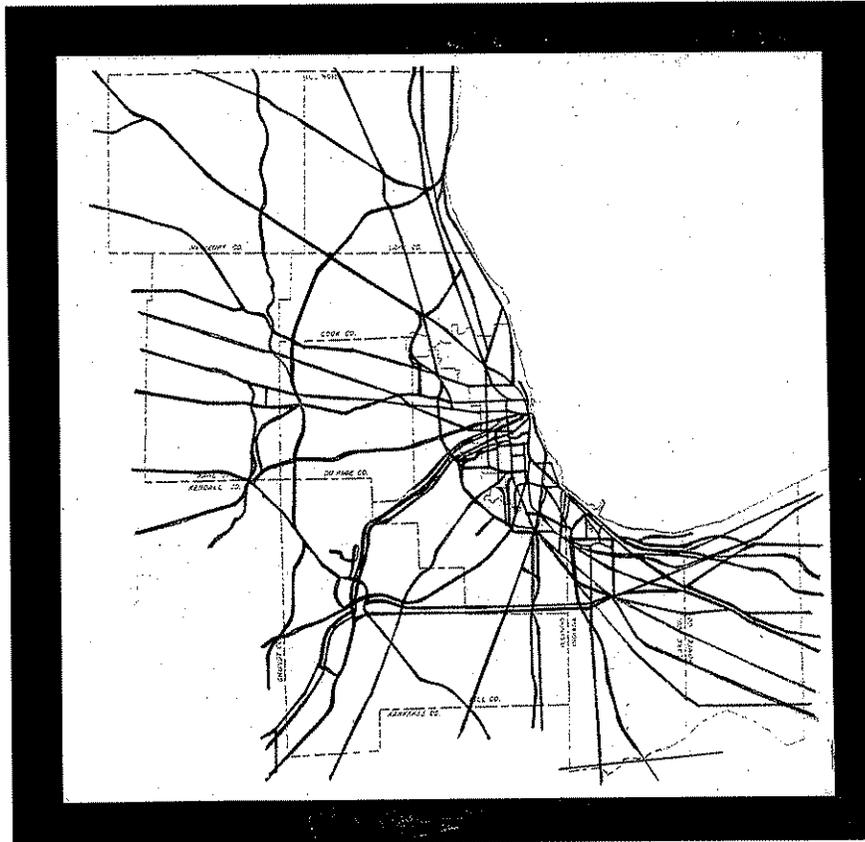
Wisconsin and Southern

Chicago Milwaukee St. Paul and Pacific (part)

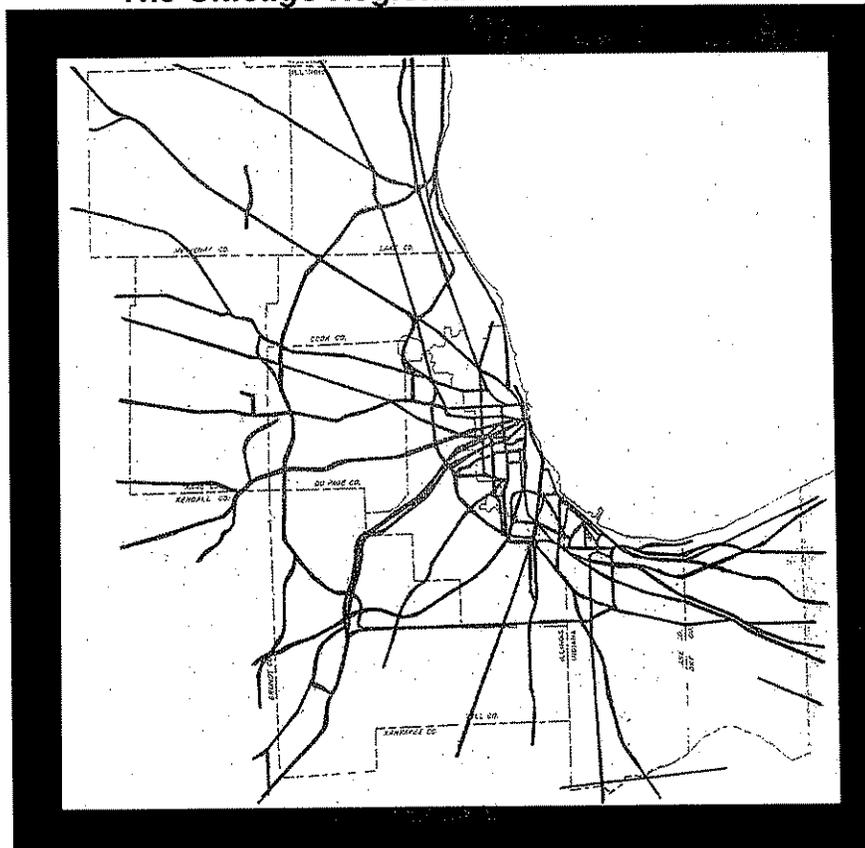
Regional Rail System Maps

The extent of the changes in the regional rail system can be seen in the two maps shown below. Map 1 shows the system as it existed in 1976 before the mergers and subsequent abandonment and downgrading of many of the routes and branch lines. The changes that took place between 1976 and 2006 are revealed in Map 2. Diminished rail service is particularly noticeable on the south side of Chicago and in Lake and Porter counties in Indiana.

MAP 1
The Chicago Regional Rail Network in 1976



MAP 2
The Chicago Regional Rail Network in 2006



Some Examples of the Rail System Realignment

As shown in Map 2, the regional rail freight network has undergone an extensive realignment. Selected examples of how this realignment occurred follow. The Louisville and Nashville Railroad was completely abandoned inside the region. The Burlington Northern and the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe merged and became the Burlington Northern/Santa Fe. The Penn Central, which later became Conrail, was divided up and acquired by other carriers. Metra, the commuter rail carrier for northeastern Illinois, acquired part of the defunct Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad. Switching railroads, such as the Indiana Harbor Belt abandoned sections of their systems that served declining industrial areas.

Track-age Rights

Track-age rights is an agreement between railroads whereby the trains of one carrier are allowed to utilize the tracks of another to reach destinations they do not directly serve. This type of operating arrangement existed in and prior to 1976 and it continues in 2006. There are two main differences, however. The first is that most of the railroads currently utilizing track-age rights did not exist in 1976. The second difference is that some routes that once provided track-age rights no longer do so, while other routes now have track-age rights agreements that previously didn't exist. This is due, in part, to the routes now used by the current railroads and to the abandonment or downgrading of previously utilized routes.

Abandoned Routes and Branch Lines

In the 1976 study, the 29 railroads provided information on the individual segments that comprised their main routes and branch lines. A total of 201 segments of the regional system were identified. This figure excluded track-age rights operations and minor industrial spurs. As the regional rail system evolved, 31 segments were abandoned totally and another 20 were cut back or downgraded. Lines were abandoned throughout the region, but most of this occurred on the south side of Chicago and in Lake and Porter counties in northwest Indiana. These 51 line segments represent 25% of those in existence in 1976.

Passenger Railroads

Until the 1980's, all of the region's commuter rail services were provided by the freight railroads. In 1985, the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific went out of business, followed by the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific in 1986. Metra, the commuter rail carrier in northeastern Illinois, had been using the tracks and facilities of the freight railroads to run its trains. When these two railroads went out of business, Metra purchased those routes in northeastern Illinois that were used for commuter rail services and began running its own trains. Thus, Metra became one of the operating railroads in the newly emerging regional rail system. Then, in 1987, when the Illinois Central Gulf Railroad was purchased by the Canadian National Railroad, Metra was able to purchase the three ICG operated electric commuter rail lines, bringing to 7 the number of routes under its direct control.

In 1990, the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District assumed control of the passenger services of the Chicago, South Shore and South Bend Railroad (CSS&SB). The CSS&SB continues to operate as a freight railroad. The NICTD provides commuter rail

services to residents of Lake, Porter, La Porte and St. Joseph counties in Indiana while Metra controls this line's operations in Illinois.

Amtrak, which was created in 1971, operates its trains on the tracks of the nation's freight railroads. However, Amtrak does own some of the rail lines on which its trains are operated. Besides the busy Northeast Corridor in the eastern United States, Amtrak owns a route between Kalamazoo, Michigan and Chesterton, Indiana. While this line covers just a short distance inside the region, it does cross the borders and it does connect with other lines in the system. In addition, the lead tracks into Chicago Union Station are now owned by Amtrak.

Coming Changes to the Region's Rail System

There have been substantive changes to the region's rail system since 1976. Today, it continues to evolve. Plans have been approved that will greatly reduce the congestion that slows the movement of freight and passenger trains into, out of and within the northeastern Illinois/northwest Indiana region. Improvements proposed by the Chicago Regional Environmental and Transportation Efficiency project (CREATE) include the development of four rail transportation corridors for freight traffic and an express corridor for commuter and Amtrak passenger train operations. This will be accomplished by upgrading facilities that already exist in these corridors. The improvements include the construction of passenger/freight rail flyovers, rail-to-rail grade separations and elimination of rail-to-highway grade crossings.

In northwestern Indiana, the Four-Cities Consortium has developed a plan, in conjunction with freight railroads, to reduce rail and traffic congestion in the four Lake County communities just east of the Illinois/Indiana state line (Hammond, Whiting, East Chicago and Gary). The plans call for heavily used rail lines that currently operate mostly at grade, to be relocated to an improved, grade separated right-of-way. This would move freight through the area more efficiently and also reduce traffic congestion on local roads by eliminating grade crossings.

Conclusion

The region's rail system has been evolving throughout most of its history. In addition to changes in the ownership of the railroads, there have also been changes in their operations. Over time, many rail lines have been downgraded, abandoned or lost previously vital connections. Occasionally, as conditions changed, some of these same lines were upgraded or even brought back into service. Even more change is on the horizon in both northeast Illinois and northwest Indiana as plans are about to be implemented to ease rail congestion throughout the region.

DID YOU KNOW?

Twenty-nine railroads operated in the region in 1976 and also in 2006.

Of the original 29 railroads serving the region in 1976 only 5 continue to operate in 2006.

In 1976, 17 railroads crossed the borders of the region via 40 routes.

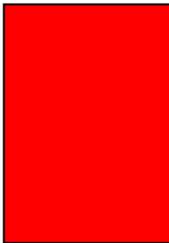
In 2006, 16 railroads cross the borders of the region via 30 routes.

Eight former privately owned rail routes are now owned by 3 passenger railroads: Metra, the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District and Amtrak.

Twenty-five percent of the rail routes and branch lines operating in 1976 have been either totally or partially abandoned.

Sources:

- Freight Movements in the Chicago Metropolitan Region, CATS Technical Memorandum 77-018, Alan Fijal, January 1977.
- Chicago Area Rail Junctions – Web Site: www.dhke.com/CRJ
- Chicago regional Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Project (CREATE) – Web Site: www.createprogram.org/faq.php
- The Four Cities Consortium – Web Site: nwitimes.com/articles/2007/02/12/business



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