

Arts

Identity

In the midst of the area's decline during the 1960s and 1970s, artists discovered and settled in the Wicker Park area. Drawn by unique spaces, convenient location, affordable prices and a gritty urban feel, the influx of artists still defines the image and perception of the community. The artists are viewed as local assets – assets that need protecting. In the mid 1980s, there were more than 70 arts organizations active in the area, and the Chicago Cultural Plan sought to support the activities of non-profit arts organizations to elevate the City's cultural environment. By the early 1990s, Wicker Park contained the largest number of artists per zip code of any location between New York City and Los Angeles. The business community has, in large part, responded to the soul of the area pioneered by these artists as illustrated by the types of stores that have settled in the area, the creative and often quirky signage associated with them, and the posters and postcards that market the businesses and community as a creative destination.

Today, only a few arts organizations remain, but they are powerful anchors and advocates in the community. The membership organization Near Northwest Arts Council (NNWAC) and the non-profit organization Around the Coyote are both recognized City-wide and draw large numbers of visitors a year to multiple events and openings. Institutions like these maintain and further support the creative character of the community despite the changes that have pushed many artists into other neighborhoods.

In an effort to better understand the arts community and the challenges it faces, the SSA commissioned a Cultural Audit of the area in 2007. The Audit surveyed a large number of local artists and discovered that a number of key attributes draw artists to WPB:

- The local creative organizations;
- Identity as an artist community;
- Access to public transit and expressways;
- The look and feel of the neighborhood; and
- Affordable space.

The last asset – affordable space – is, however, a luxury found in diminishing quantities. The surveyed artists themselves said that the number one reason to leave WPB is due to the increasing costs for housing and studio space. Other noted reasons to leave WPB include a major life changing event, like having a child, and the perception that the number of artists in the area is shrinking. What is clear is that the arts continue to play a strong role in the community, and, despite fears of a form of artist cleansing, artists from all backgrounds are naturally drawn to the collage of cultures, uses and people that comprise the area. Finding ways to help artists to live and / or work in WPB while visibly utilizing their talents in WPB's continuing evolution are key challenges to address by the SSA and their partners.

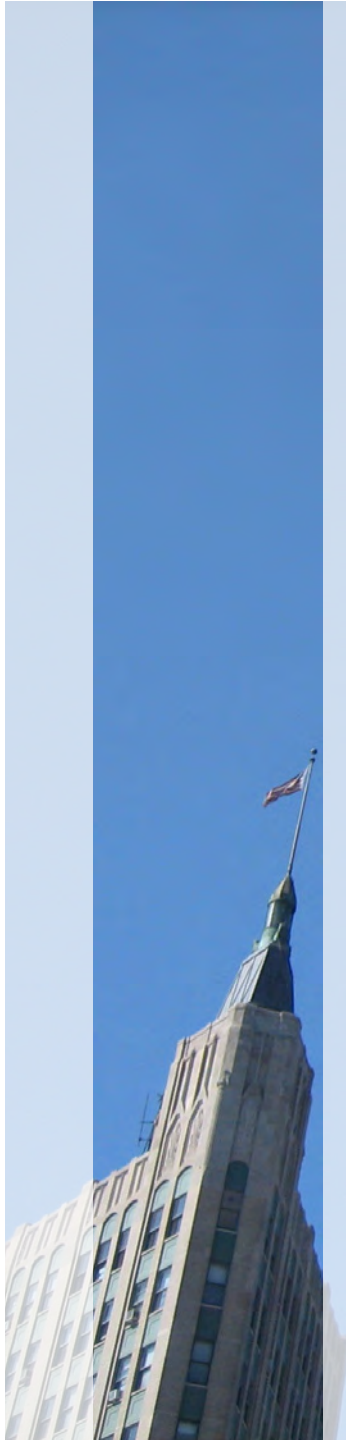
Festivals and Block Parties

The summer months in WPB offer a menu of block parties, festivals, and continuous street activities that stretch late into the night. Among the most well marketed events are the Wicker Park Fest on Damen Avenue and the Do Division Street Fest. Combining food tents, local artisans, and a lineup of live music, the fests take over the street, promoting the local vibe and enticing Chicagoans to come and experience the neighborhood.

The Bucktown Arts Fest in Holstein Park is equally as successful on a smaller scale, attracting more of the artisans and craft makers in the City. From hand made scarves and pottery to fine art, the festival's tents form a maze of creative energy. DEPARTMENT in Wicker Park and Renegade Craft Fair on Division Street both invite a similar feel, promoting niche product lines like handmade spectacle frames, hand puppets,



Source: Roberto Lopez,
1988-1992 Archives



and solar panel hand bags. The music scene and product lines at these events speak to the cultural diversity of WPB, where within one stretch of booths you can find anything from hand made “urban” head wear, to shawls crocheted by a group of public knitters. An appreciation for hand made, unique, and personalized products is highly apparent, and the need for a more permanent location for such activity should be considered.

The Around the Coyote’s Art Festivals exemplify the success of WPB in maintaining an aura of novelty and providing art gallery and studio spaces that serve the artist population. Bringing a national spread of artistic talent to WPB, these bi-annual events also celebrate the art being created in WPB and help to protect valued studio space such as the Flatiron Building from wholesale redevelopment for different uses. While many artists have left the area, others have remained and benefited from the area’s expanding affluence. Now, WPB is nationally recognized as an arts destination, fueled by a mixture of history, local institutions and the diverse festivals that provide continued venues for creative expression.

Figure 44. Crime Snapshot for September 2007
 Source: www.ChicagoCrime.org
 (Note, the data is available by block only and not by specific address. When mapped, it appears that all of the activity is concentrated at the corners.)

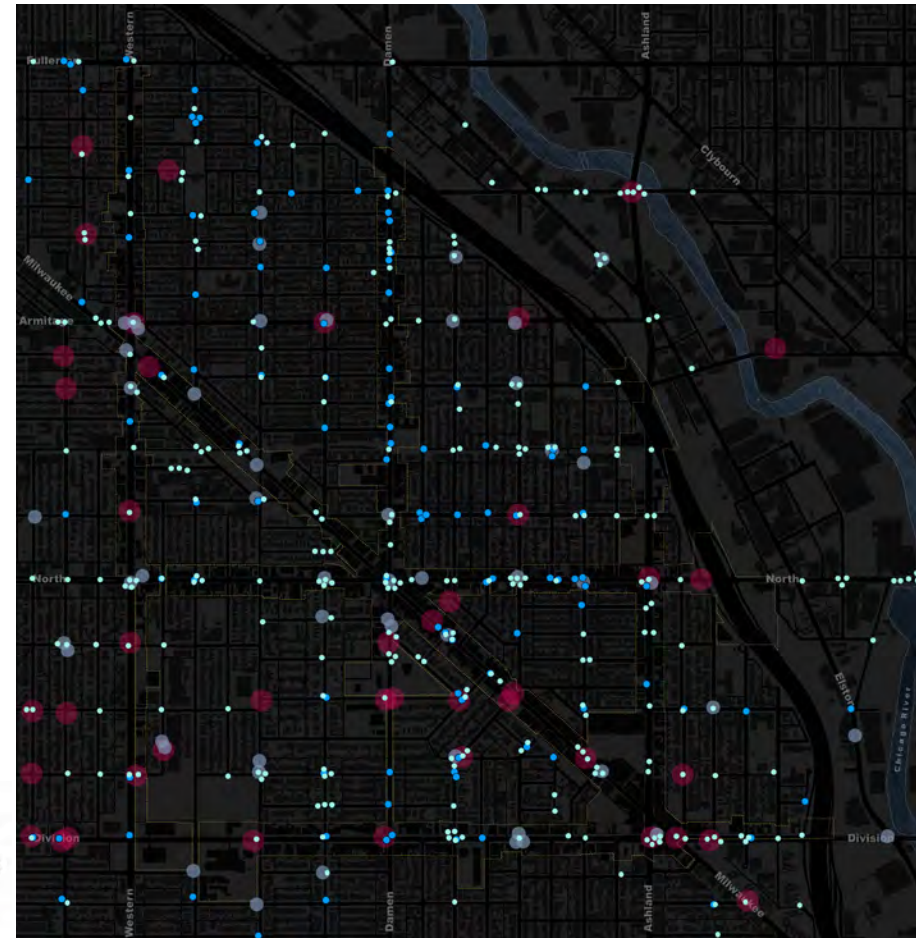


Quality of Life

Crime and Public Safety

With the new development that has occurred in WPB in recent years bringing with it a surge in population and street activity, overall crime in the area has decreased. The prostitution and drug dealing once notorious at the intersection of Milwaukee, North, and Damen has subsided. In keeping with the area’s shifting demographic and relatively new wealth, the criminal activity in WPB today comprises mostly petty crimes including theft, graffiti, and vandalism, though armed robberies do occur, and gang violence resurfaces on occasion.

Data from www.ChicagoCrime.org spatially locates crimes by type, identifying the local concentrations of certain crimes. WPB’s major corridors experience the highest concentrations of crime. This is common across many cities and in many



Graffiti

[How would you like to see WPB change? “Keep it the same, with a bit less graffiti.”]

neighborhoods where closed storefronts and / or late-night pedestrian activity are often more enticing targets than occupied residential blocks. Burglary in WPB has more prominence in the north, where rent is considerably higher and the street activity is less lively. Thefts are more common at the major intersections along Milwaukee and North Avenues.

The Chicago Alternative Policing Program (CAPS) is a City program aimed at reducing gang violence and crime in general. CAPS enables any resident to report or offer an opinion about the state of affairs on their block, in essence, putting part-time detectives on every street at all times of the day. The major retail corridors are less likely to benefit from the program, as the population there is more transient and the hustle and bustle of activity is enough to mask unwanted activity. That theft and assault in Wicker Park and Bucktown are largely contained within the bounds of the SSA is therefore not surprising. However, the area’s evening and late-night social scene keeps the corridors populated, and therefore safer around the clock than areas that shut down in the evenings.

Graffiti, tagging, and unwarranted public art continue to both plague and bless WPB with public displays of personal expression. Some forms of graffiti provide pleasant alternatives to blank walls like those along and under the Bloomingdale rail corridor and small political statements sketched on the sidewalk. Unfortunately, much of the local graffiti are personal signatures, permanent acid-etching into storefront windows, and visual vandalism on the sides of delivery trucks. Business owners and residents alike view these un-artful types of graffiti as detrimental to the image and morale of the corridors and damaging, both visibly and fiscally, to the commercial marketplace. While graffiti is used as a tool for representing gang affiliations and territories, the majority of the tagging in WPB is seen simply as the result of a destructive individual carrying a paint can or marker with them as they walk, tagging things as they go. Business owners note that the City’s 311 graffiti reporting service is ineffective and would like better education about graffiti removal and prevention. It was also noted, however, that as the area has improved, acts of graffiti and vandalism have declined in the center of WPB with the more frequent acts pushed largely to the SSA’s fringes.

Although there is no doubt that the majority of graffiti in WPB ails local businesses and persists as an activity harmful to local interests, some graffiti holds an important role in the culture that is WPB. Graffiti *artists* claim public canvases, “perform” at live venues during concerts, and create temporary art installations at cafes, bars, and galleries, taking part in and enhancing WPB’s creative environment.



The difference between artistic expression and vandalism with paint and acid etching.



Trash and Street Cleaning

["I like the grit. I don't want it all to be beautiful."]

Perceptions of trash in WPB and along the commercial corridors vary greatly among local observers as does personal tolerance to littered streets and sidewalks. The SSA provides street cleaning five days a week, canvassing all 13 miles of sidewalk Thursday through Monday – even sending out the cleaning crews early on Sundays to prepare for the brunch crowd. In the Summer of 2007, the SSA also commissioned a district-wide power-washing of the sidewalks, and to most non-Chicagoans, the streets and sidewalks in WPB appear close to pristine. Some residents, while appreciative of the neighborhoods' improved cleanliness and upkeep, have indicated they are weary of becoming too clean and hopeful the WPB will retain some of its grit.

Business owners, in contrast, feel that WPB should be kept much cleaner, and are quick to place the blame not on the SSA, but on offending property owners and landlords who have become complacent as a result of the SSA cleaning service.

["Because they pay a tax, they expect the work to be done for them. It needs to be more of a partnership."]

Active business owners believe that all businesses should be responsible and able to manage the upkeep of their properties and sidewalks, allowing the SSA to focus more on marketing and tangible physical improvements to the corridors.

Most people agree, however, that the streets in the SSA suffer from a lack of trash cans. People also agree that littering, dumping, and general disrespect for the public environment render several areas particularly unpleasant: the alley south of Milwaukee underneath the "L", the highway underpasses, the Polish Triangle, and tree wells throughout the area.

Snow Removal

In addition to street cleaning, SSA #33 provides snow removal in response to more than two inches of accumulation. Some confusion regarding this detail persists, leaving many sidewalks un-shoveled after small snowfalls. Again, business owners fault irresponsible landlords and building managers with empty commercial spaces who do not maintain their frontages and therefore endanger customers and passersby with their sidewalks of slush and ice.

Drivers note that bicycle lanes are difficult or impossible to see during and after snowfall.

Transportation

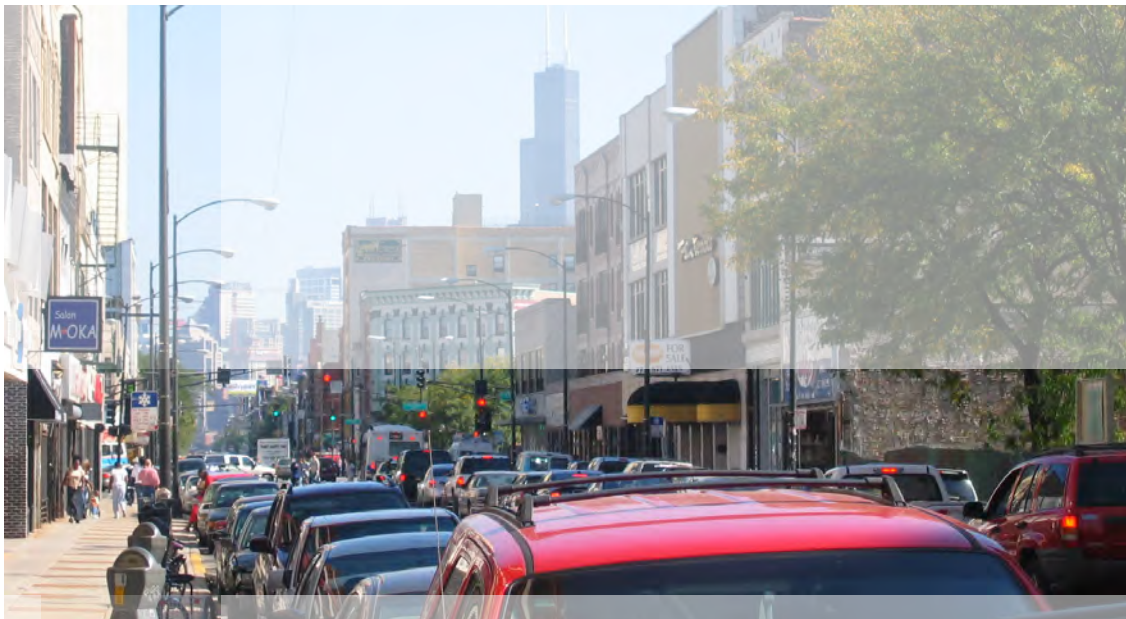
Transportation is a vital component to the success of any neighborhood in the City of Chicago. Without quality transportation options, a neighborhood cannot thrive due to limitations on access and resulting over-reliance on a singular means of travel. The Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods are so successful in part because of the area's abundant transportation options. WPB has close proximity to the Kennedy Expressway and includes three intercity rail stops, nine bus routes, frequent taxi service, and car-sharing. However, there is a significant amount of traffic congestion in the SSA due to a city-wide dependence on the automobile.

[“There's been a sea change since the 1980s. Everyone now owns a car, which didn't used to be the case with local residents.”]

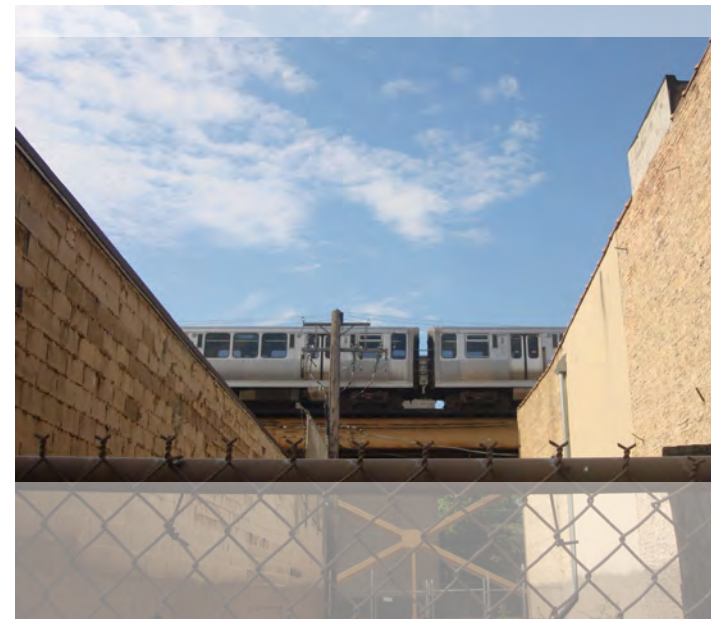
This limitation affects the mobility of the residents, employees, and patrons of the neighborhoods, and negatively impacts the image of the community. Traffic congestion can only be improved by reducing the number of vehicular trips in the area. There is not one single solution to this problem, but rather a combination of many strategies that will increase transit use, car-pooling, car-sharing, bicycling, and walking. Reducing vehicular trips is not going to be accomplished over night, but it is necessary to start addressing the problem now. Neighborhoods throughout the United States are facing this predicament, which directly affects the economy, the environment, and people's overall quality of life.

[“How can we encourage change, get people to try walking or biking even just for one day?”]

The goal of this portion of the report is to provide a full understanding of the local transportation network. Extensive data was collected for all 13 miles of the SSA in an effort to comprehensively evaluate walking, bicycling, transit, traffic, parking and loading zones.



Traffic along Milwaukee Avenue.



The "L" overhead.

The Pedestrian Environment

The unique pedestrian environment is the nexus that enhances retail opportunities along the SSA's commercial corridors; it connects the neighborhood to transit options including bikes, buses, taxis and trains. A good pedestrian environment has many different characteristics, some within the realm of the sidewalk and its amenities and some related to the buildings that line the corridors. The book *Great Streets* by Allan B. Jacobs has aptly defined the requirements for great streets which include:

- Places for people to walk with some leisure;
- Physical comfort (shade and sunshine);
- Qualities that engage the eyes;
- Transparency (usually with windows and doors); and
- Buildings that are not the same but complement one another in height and appearance, maintenance, and good quality of construction and design.

The City of Chicago Zoning Ordinance has a specific section titled Pedestrian Streets (17-3-0500). It defines pedestrian streets as having most or all of the following characteristics:

- A high concentration of existing stores and restaurants which abut a street with a right-of-way of 80 feet for less;
- A continuous or mostly continuous pattern of buildings that are built abutting or very close to the sidewalk;
- Doors and entrances that abut the sidewalk;
- Storefront windows that abut the sidewalk; and
- Very few vacant stores.

Within the SSA as defined by the zoning ordinance, Division Street (from Marshfield to Leavitt) and Milwaukee (from Division to North) are pedestrian streets. The six corner intersection radiated on all streets from the center is also a pedestrian street (North from 1900 to 2100, Damen from 1500 to 1700 and Milwaukee from 1500 to 1700). There are development standards set by the zoning ordinance with respect to building location, transparency, doors and entrances, off-street parking requirements, parking location, driveways and vehicle access, prohibited uses and special uses. For example, the ordinance requires the following with regards to parking and automobile access:

- Off-Street Parking Requirement (17-3-0504-E) – No off-street parking is required for non-residential uses on lots abutting pedestrian streets unless such uses exceed 10,000 square feet of gross floor area.
- Parking Location (17-3-0504-F) – All off-street parking spaces must be enclosed or located to the rear of the principal building and not be visible from the right-of-way of the pedestrian street.
- Driveway and Vehicle Access (17-3-0504-G) – Vehicle access to lots located along pedestrian streets must come from an alley. No curb cuts or driveways are allowed from a pedestrian street.

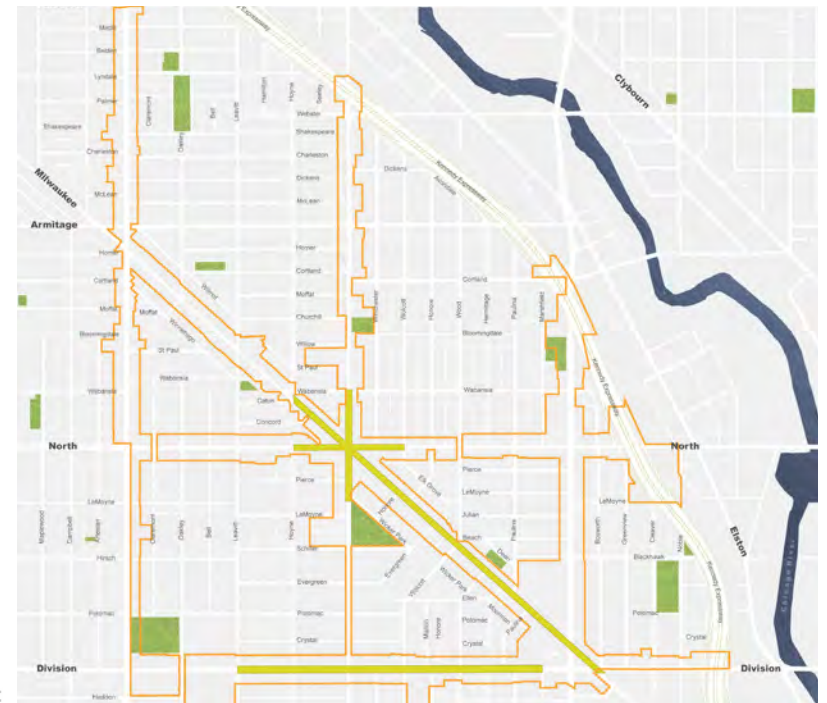


Figure 45. Designated Pedestrian Streets
Source: City Zoning Map

■ Pedestrian Street

Measuring the Quality of the Pedestrian Environment

The pedestrian environment is derived from a mix of both positive and negative attributes that impart comfort and safety, or conversely difficulty and even uncertainty. The pedestrian environment can be wonderful at an area midblock, with trees and cafes, but if the adjacent intersection is difficult or dangerous to cross, the continuity is ruined. If both sides of the street are attractive, but the roadway is heavily traveled and vehicular speeds are high, there is little connectivity between the two sides of the roadway. If the sidewalk is void of trees, bench seating, and in disrepair, the experience for the pedestrian can be unpleasant.

To quantify the experiencing of walking along the SSA's corridors, a thorough survey was undertaken evaluating each block based on 21 different attributes, both positive and negative.

Positive attributes include:

- Trees, additional landscaping, awnings, pedestrian lighting, seating, newspaper stands, trash cans, private and public art, cafés, and curb cuts with ADA approved tactile warning mats.

Equally important, however, and often times more difficult to control is maintenance of these amenities. For example, a beautiful tree placed in a tree pit with a broken grate is both ugly and dangerous which can diminish its positive qualities.

Negative attributes surveyed include:

- Missing or dying trees, poor upkeep of tree planters or boxes, poorly maintained landscaping, newspaper stands or trash cans that are inappropriately placed, in disarray or poorly maintained and broken, driveways along the walk, broken sidewalks or other obstructions, and un-striped or worn pedestrian street crossings.

One issue that stands out along the corridors of Wicker Park and Bucktown is the poor upkeep of tree pits. Metal grates are broken or rusted, and if they are not in place, the pits have become repositories for trash. Some business owners have taken the responsibility of maintenance into their own hands and have placed additional landscaping, bricks or mulch to brighten the pits.



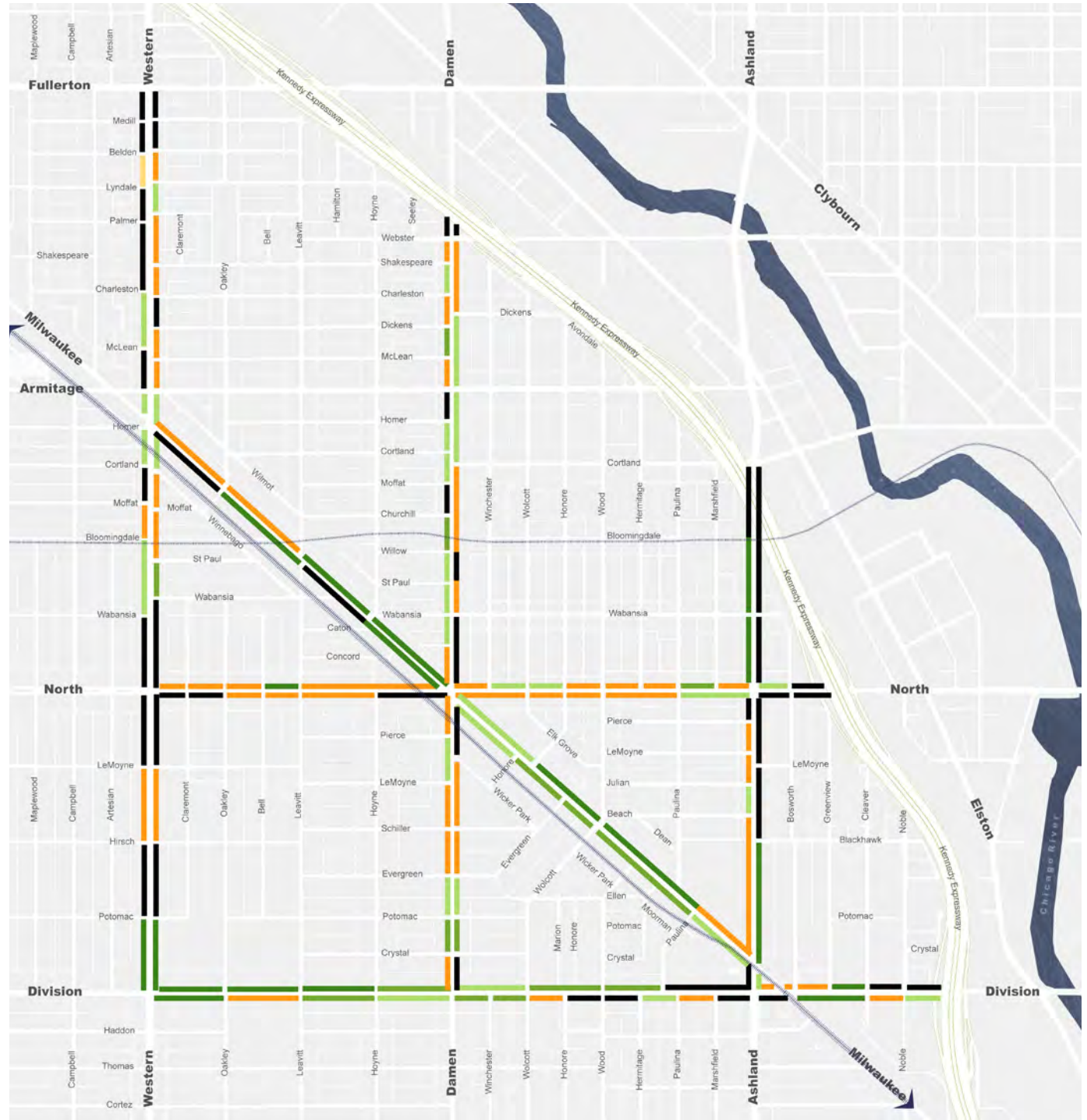
Positive attributes include awnings, seating, and landscaping.

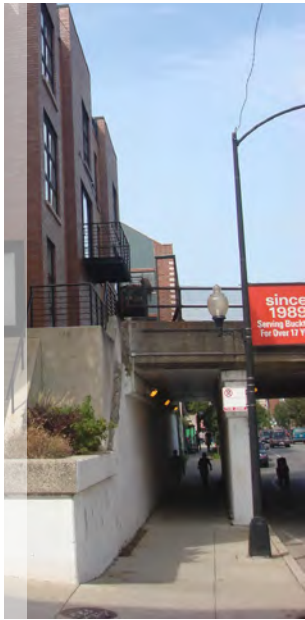
Negative attributes include rusted, raised tree grates and cracked or uneven sidewalks.

The corridor roadways, even the narrow ones, divide the street due to the speed and volume of traffic. This is unmitigated by long stretches without highly visible and safe crosswalks. The combination of poor pedestrian safety as well as the poor condition of major WPB gateways including the Polish Triangle, North Avenue at the Kennedy underpass and areas along Ashland and Western Avenues greatly impacts the perception of street life in the SSA.

The project team walked each street and methodically noted the good and bad qualities of the SSA's six corridors. These physical attributes were tabulated and assigned points based on a system described in detail in the Appendix. Points were tallied for each block to generate an average for all six corridors within the SSA. During the walks, the team noted their observations, which are summarized below and listed in greater detail in the Appendix.

Figure 46. Pedestrian Conditions
Source: Point System based on Field Survey

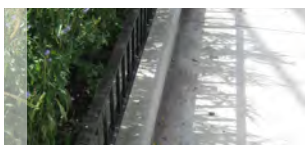




Damen Avenue.

Damen Avenue Score: 16.1

Damen Avenue has a somewhat intimate scale (although hindered at times by the speed of vehicular traffic) that lends itself to a stroll along shops, restaurants, and cafes that line the roadway, particularly north of North Avenue. Though the street has relatively few trees, many of the business owners have made efforts to create and tend to additional landscaping in front of their stores. Some shop owners have gone so far as to add their own bench seating, add interesting visuals in their windows, and create unique logos placed above entranceways. The Bloomingdale underpass creates a divider, and the underside of the “L” is unappealing, particularly on the east side. The intersections at Armitage, Wabansia, and Miliwaukee/North are difficult to cross and have few amenities. Wicker Park’s park lacks pedestrian lighting and fails to engage the corridor.



North Avenue.

North Avenue Score: 11.1

["North Avenue is impossible to cross. There is a new light on the other side of the highway. Wicker Park wants one too."]

North Avenue has an intimate scale that is supported by a building scale that works well along with a two-lane roadway supported by on-street parking. As with many of the sidewalks, public amenities diminish near the busy intersections. This is because the sidewalk size is reduced due to the roadway widening, bus stops that squeeze pedestrians, and newspaper stands or trash cans that block the sidewalk. With the new landscaping and roadway plan implemented by the City of Chicago, the minor streets along North Avenue have “bulb-outs” that have reduced the crossing distance for pedestrians and protected the on-street parking with a beautifully landscaped area. Bike parking has also been provided on the minor streets due to the limited size of the sidewalk on North Avenue.

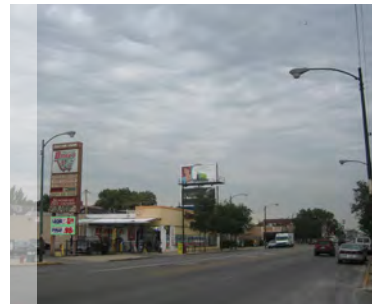


Division Street.

Division Street Score: 16.5

["We love the cafes, but they are taking over the sidewalks. It's hard to move along with bikes and strollers."]

Division Street contains a 25-foot wide sidewalk that allows many different types of activities to take place. Cafes and restaurants provide seating adjacent to the facility or near the curb. The seating is typically protected on both sides by large tree planters. There are many bike racks, yet often bicyclists lock their bikes to street signs, trees and wrought iron surrounding tree grates. Many trees grates and wrought iron are rusted or broken. West of Damen, the speed of the vehicular street traffic picks up and is especially high near the hospital. To the east, Division’s pedestrian amenities diminish near Ashland. The street lacks pedestrian-scaled lighting, and newer buildings lack awnings and character to complement the more historic or authentic properties.



Western Avenue.

Western Avenue Score: 9.4

Western Avenue is an area in transition. Operating as a dividing line between neighborhoods, Western Avenue has heavy vehicle volumes. Despite the highway feel, Western Avenue is beginning to experience new three and four story residential development with ground floor commercial space. Western Avenue has one of the lower average scores, with an average of 9.4 (Ashland Avenue received the lowest score.) Western Avenue is void of pedestrian lighting, and the pedestrian can feel overwhelmed on the small sidewalk with heavy traffic volumes. There are many driveways on Western serving car-oriented commercial land uses such as gas stations and grocery stores, which create conflict points between vehicles and pedestrians.





Ashland Avenue.

Ashland Avenue Score: 7.9

Ashland Avenue is characterized by heavy traffic volumes and can feel very vehicle-dominated with gas stations, a shopping mall served by a large parking lot, and access to I-94 at North Avenue. Similar to Western Avenue, Ashland Avenue is beginning to experience new three and four story residential development with ground floor commercial space that lends itself to a potential pedestrian equilibrium. Due to some of the negative attributes, Ashland Avenue has the lowest average pedestrian environment score of the SSA's corridors, with a score of 7.9. Although Ashland

Avenue has many street trees, the upkeep of the tree pits is minimal. Ashland has been enhanced with pedestrian lighting and a landscaped median, but it still contains many commercial driveways that deter walk-ability. The underpass of I-94 is unattractive and hampers Ashland's role as a potential connector between neighborhoods.



Milwaukee Avenue.

Milwaukee Avenue Score: 14.6

The current scale of the buildings on Milwaukee Avenue, combined with the narrow sidewalks can at times give the corridor a crowded feel, especially between North Avenue and Division Street. North of North Avenue, this intensity is diminished due to shortened building height, less activity and major gaps in the retail fabric. The high volume of pedestrians, bicyclists and cars, along with active retail uses that include sidewalk cafes, valet service, loading, bike parking, light poles, parking meters, and street signage add to Milwaukee Avenue's

perceived "crowdedness" and energy, as do the ubiquitous clusters of newspaper stands. Despite the crowdedness, Milwaukee's historic character and density enliven the pedestrian atmosphere and are qualities that should be preserved.

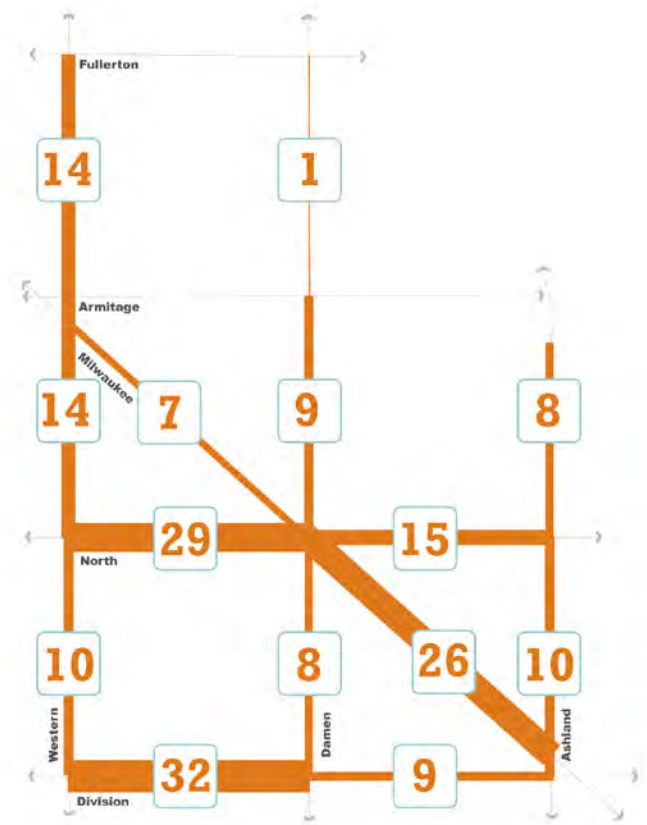
Pedestrian Accidents

The Chicago Department of Transportation provided year 2004 through 2006 pedestrian accident data for the six corridors of the SSA. With fast vehicular travel speeds, Western, North and Division have higher proportions of pedestrian accidents. However, pedestrian accidents appear to be declining, with 77 reported in the SSA in 2004, 65 in 2005, and 50 in 2006. A full table documenting pedestrian accidents between 2004 and 2006 is included in Table 4 in the Appendix.

Intersections and Pedestrians

Most of the intersections in the SSA can be improved to more suitably accommodate pedestrian crossings. The problem with these intersections is two-fold and interrelated. The first issue is that many crosswalks do not line up with the corner curb cut, which does not provide clear direction for pedestrians, especially those with disabilities. The second issue is that some intersections have curb cuts that round the entire corner as opposed to a single curb cut at an exact location. This is a safety issue for the visually impaired as they have no direction once they step off the curb and into the street. All busy intersections should have new pedestrian signals that give a countdown of the number of seconds left to cross the street. These are in place at the intersection of Ashland, Division, and Milwaukee and should be installed at other locations in the SSA.

Division Street, west of Leavitt Street near St. Elizabeth Hospital, has fast vehicle speeds, and crossing the roadway is difficult. This is caused by a lack of on-street parking or other options to slow vehicles down. There is an unsignalized crosswalk on Division Street that serves the Hospital. Many pedestrians cross at this location, despite the high speed and volume of traffic on Division Street and the lack of a protected crossing.



Reported Pedestrian Accidents, 2004 - 2006
Total: 192

Figure 47. Reported Pedestrian Accidents, 2004-2006
Source: CDOT

Bicycling

["As part of our effort to make Chicago the most environmentally friendly big city in the nation, one of our main goals is to promote environmentally friendly lifestyles. Bicycling is a great way to get around Chicago. It's fun, fast, healthy and good for our environment." - Mayor Richard Daley

The City of Chicago has been recognized in the past as one of the best American cities for bicycling.¹⁰ Residents use their bicycles to get to work, to shop, as recreation, and for exercise in the City. As vehicular traffic and the congestion associated with it continue to increase in the future, bicycling is expected to become a more popular alternative means of transportation for many residents. There are numerous benefits that will be provided as bicycling increases in the City. In addition to less traffic congestion, the additional exercise provides health benefits to the individual riders, and the amount of emissions will be reduced which benefits the environment.

Home to **["the Hipster Highway"]** and **["the Rat Patrol"]** that cycles the neighborhood on double and triple-story bikes, bicyclists are a large part of the transportation system in WPB, and the number of bicyclists in the area is expected to continue to grow in the future. In order to assess the existing bicycling conditions in the neighborhood, we surveyed the existing bicycle facilities, rode bicycles on the study area roadways, and observed the behavior of bicyclists as they rode along the streets of the SSA.

Existing Bicycle Conditions in the Study Area

Wicker Park Bucktown is one of the most bike friendly communities in the City of Chicago. There are three marked bike lanes (along Damen Avenue, Division Street, and Milwaukee Avenue), a significant amount of bicycle parking on the sidewalks, retailers that serve the specific needs of bicyclists, and, most importantly, many people (residents, employees, patrons, and visitors) that bike in the neighborhood. The intersection of Milwaukee Avenue, North Avenue, and Damen Avenue has some of the largest bicycle volumes for intersections throughout the City of Chicago.



Bicycles parked along Damen.



Triple-story bicycle in WPB.

¹⁰ "The Best Cycling Cities", Bicycling Magazine, November 2001.

But even for an area that supports and encourages bicycling as much as Wicker Park Bucktown does, a minimal number of trips made in the area are done so with a bicycle compared to with a motor vehicle. As part of the data collection and interview process, we asked people if they biked in the neighborhood and if not, why not. The biggest factor that people state for their reluctance to bicycle is fear/lack of safety. Improving the safety, both perceived and actual, for bicyclists will significantly increase the number of people who use bikes for their trips. WPB is self-described as a neighborhood of

[“aspiring cyclists” and “suicidal cyclists”].

Bicycle theft was noted as another deterrent to potential riders.

All roadways in Chicago are technically bike routes, though some are much more difficult for bicyclists to navigate than others. Pavement markings exist to denote bicycle lanes, to make drivers more aware of bicyclists, and to remind drivers to share the road. However, drivers and cyclists alike comment that it is often impossible to see the bike lanes in the winter weather. The existing marked bicycle routes in the SSA are shown in Figure 48. Besides these designated routes, it is important for the SSA and their partners to promote bicycling on the side streets as well. With more space and less traffic, these residential streets offer potential to further enhance WPB’s bike culture.

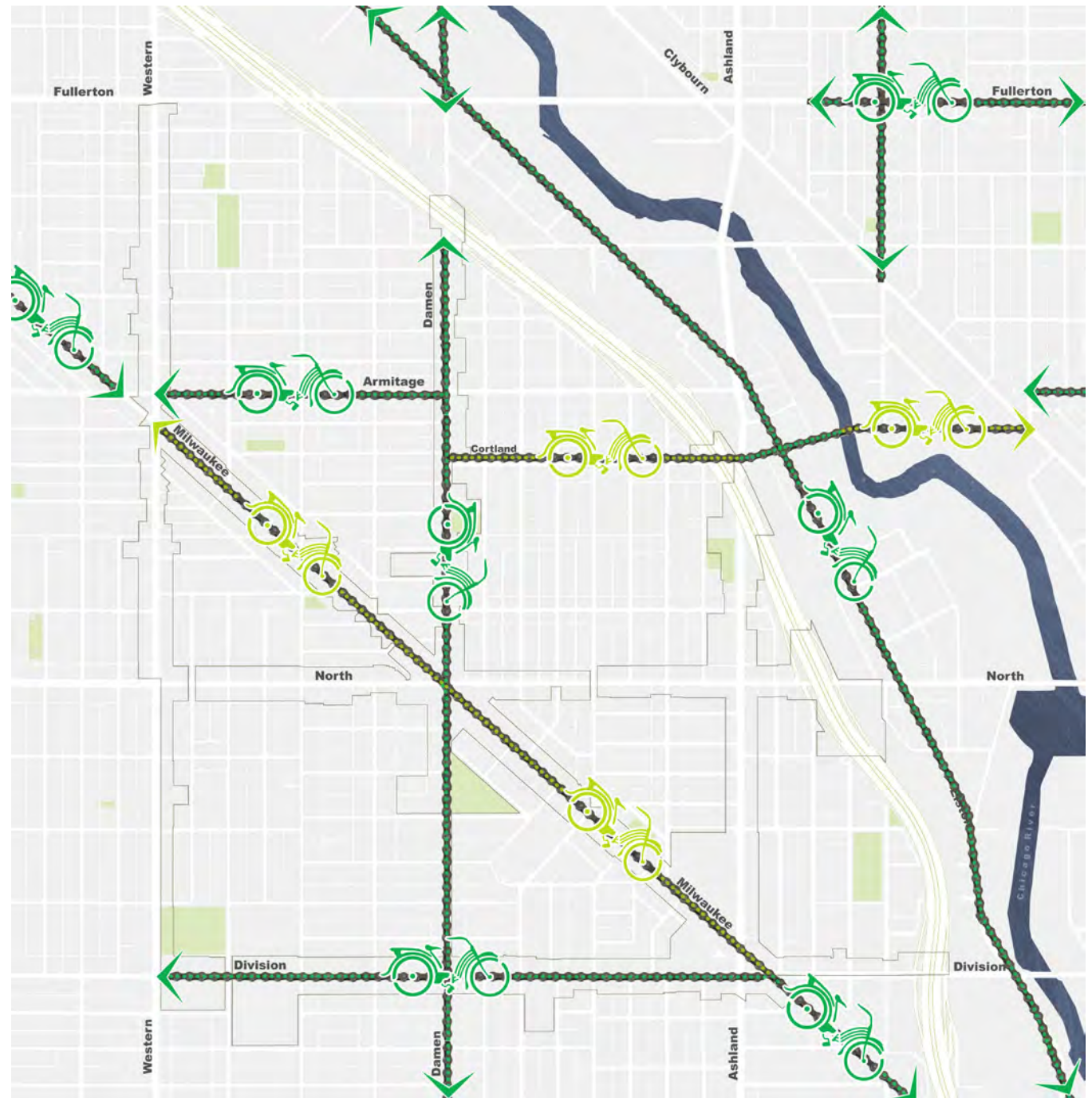


Figure 48. Existing Bicycle Lanes
Source: Chicago Bicycle Map

There are two types of bicycle lanes in the City of Chicago, marked bicycle lanes and marked shared lanes.

- A marked *bicycle lane* is a bikeway that includes a portion of the roadway which has been designated by striping, signing, and pavement markings for the preferential or exclusive use of bicyclists.¹¹ Marked bike lanes are typically 5-6 feet in width.
- Marked *shared lanes* are travel lanes that have permanent markings indicating that the lane is to be shared by motor vehicles and bicycles, but there is no segregation or designation as to the space that the bicyclist should use and the space that the motor vehicle should use.

Of the six roadways that were studied as part of the WPB Master Plan, three are marked bike routes (Damen Avenue, Milwaukee Avenue, and Division Street) and three are not marked at all (Ashland Avenue, Western Avenue, and North Avenue). The characteristics of each roadway with respect to bicycling are discussed below.



Marked lane.



Shared lane.

Damen Avenue

Damen Avenue has a marked bicycle lane on both sides of the roadway from Division Street to Webster Avenue. The dedicated bicycle lane is not continuous for the entire stretch of Damen Avenue in the City. The dedicated lane runs from 87th Street to 79th Street, then from 71st Street to 63rd Street, Roosevelt Avenue to Congress Parkway, Lake Street to Webster Avenue (within the SSA), Fullerton Avenue to Diversey Avenue, and finally from Irving Park Road to Balmoral Avenue. The gaps between these sections are marked as shared lanes.

Though Damen Avenue provides a fairly good north-south bicycle route through the neighborhood, there are still aspects that make it difficult for bicycle riders. The section of Damen Avenue, south of North Avenue, underneath the CTA Blue Line Station, is difficult for bicycles to navigate. Damen Avenue narrows at this location in order to accommodate the supporting structures for the rail line. The vehicular lanes remain the same width but the space for the bicycle lanes is removed and bicycles have to merge into the vehicular lane. It was observed on a few instances that vehicles were not expecting to see bicyclists merge and would honk at the bicyclists.



Site of observed vehicular and bicycle conflicts.

¹¹ <http://trails.shawneeok.org/page/definitions>

Being “doored” is another issue that is common with any shared bicycle lane, as car doors opening from vehicles that are parked on the side of the street pose a threat to cyclists riding by. Many drivers, especially those that are not familiar with parking in a bicycle lane, will open their driver’s side door without first checking for the presence of bicyclists. Mayor Daley recently introduced an ordinance that would fine motorists that open their car door into the path of bicyclists, but it will take time to change this behavior.

Division Street

Division Street also has a marked bike lane on both sides of the roadway, from Western Avenue to Milwaukee Avenue. This is the only section of Division Street that has a marked bike lane in the City. Division Street is a recommended bike route from California Avenue to Lake Michigan.

Bicyclists on Division Street face many of the same challenges as those on Damen Avenue. However, there is a greater number of trucks and loading that occupy the bicycle lane on Division Street than Damen. We did observe many more instances of trucks using the marked bicycle lane to park or unload on Division. This may be due to the concentration of retail shops on Division Street as well as to the fact that Division Street is wider, which encourages double-parking or loading in the bicycle lane.



Truck parked in bicycle lane while unloading.

Milwaukee Avenue

[“Milwaukee is the most heavily traveled bike corridor after the Lakefront trail.”]

Milwaukee Avenue has a marked shared bicycle lane on both sides of the roadway, from Western Avenue to Division Street. To the south of Division Street, Milwaukee Avenue has a marked bicycle lane to Kinzie Street in the Loop. Milwaukee Avenue is a heavily used commuter route for bicyclists to get to and from the Loop.

Even though the bicycle lane is marked as a shared lane, vehicles on Milwaukee Avenue are aware of the presence of bicyclists. This is due more to the high amount of bicyclists on Milwaukee Avenue as opposed to the pavement markings. It is apparent that vehicles slow down and become more aware of bicycle traffic when there are more bicyclists on the road.

North Avenue

North Avenue does not have any bicycle markings and is not a recommended bicycle route. Despite those factors, we did observe a fair amount of bicycling on North Avenue. North Avenue, between Western Avenue and Ashland Avenue, has many of the same characteristics that Milwaukee Avenue has: a high volume of pedestrians, retail and restaurant land uses, and low vehicle travel speeds during most of the day. These similarities are why North Avenue has bicycle traffic, even though it does not have a marked bicycle lane.

It is assumed that the reason that there is not a bicycle lane on North Avenue is because of the rush hour parking restrictions on both sides of the street. This adds an additional travel lane on North Avenue during the rush hours. Any pavement markings on North Avenue for bicyclists would be confusing to both vehicle and bicyclists during the rush hours.

Ashland Avenue and Western Avenue

[“Cyclists know better than to ride on Western.”]

Both Ashland and Western Avenues have two lanes of travel and a lane of parking in both the northbound and southbound directions. Vehicles can travel at a high speed at numerous locations on both of these roadways. Due to the volume and the speed of the traffic as well as the small amount of space that bicyclists have to share, there is not much bicycling activity on these two roadways.

Existing Bicycle and Pedestrian Count

Land Strategies conducted a count of the bicycles and pedestrians at the intersection of Milwaukee Avenue, North Avenue, and Damen Avenue in October 2007 between the hours of 4:30 PM and 6:30 PM. The peak hour of the intersection, for bicycles and pedestrians, was 5:15 PM to 6:15 PM, with **[423 bicyclists]** counted going through the intersection during the weekday peak hour. This is a very high number during one hour of the day and is representative of the popularity of bicycling in the area. The bicycle and pedestrian counts are shown in Figure 131 in the Appendix.

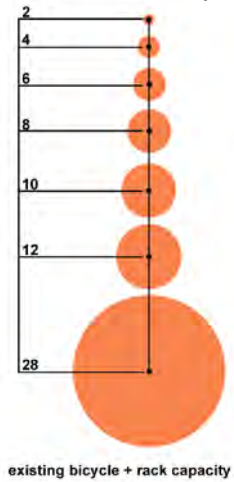
Bicycle Parking

Land Strategies surveyed the existing bicycle parking racks available on the SSA streets. Figure 49 maps the bicycle parking density in the neighborhood.

As can be seen from the density drawing, the highest density of bicycle parking is located in the proximity of the intersection of Milwaukee Avenue, North Avenue, and Damen Avenue. Division Street has a good amount of bicycle parking as well.

Land Strategies also conducted bicycle parking turnover counts on the 1600-1800 block of Damen Avenue and the 1200-2000 blocks of Milwaukee Avenue. Parked bicycles were counted between 3:30 PM and 4:30 PM and the same locations were checked again one to two hours later to see if the parked bicycles were still there. The purpose of this count was to determine what percentage of bicycles was parked in the short-term (assumed mostly as patrons) and which were long-term (mostly employees or residents). A turnover rate of 42.5% was observed on Damen Avenue and a turnover rate of 43% was observed on Milwaukee Avenue. This high turnover rate demonstrates that people do bicycle in the neighborhood to access the retail and restaurants.

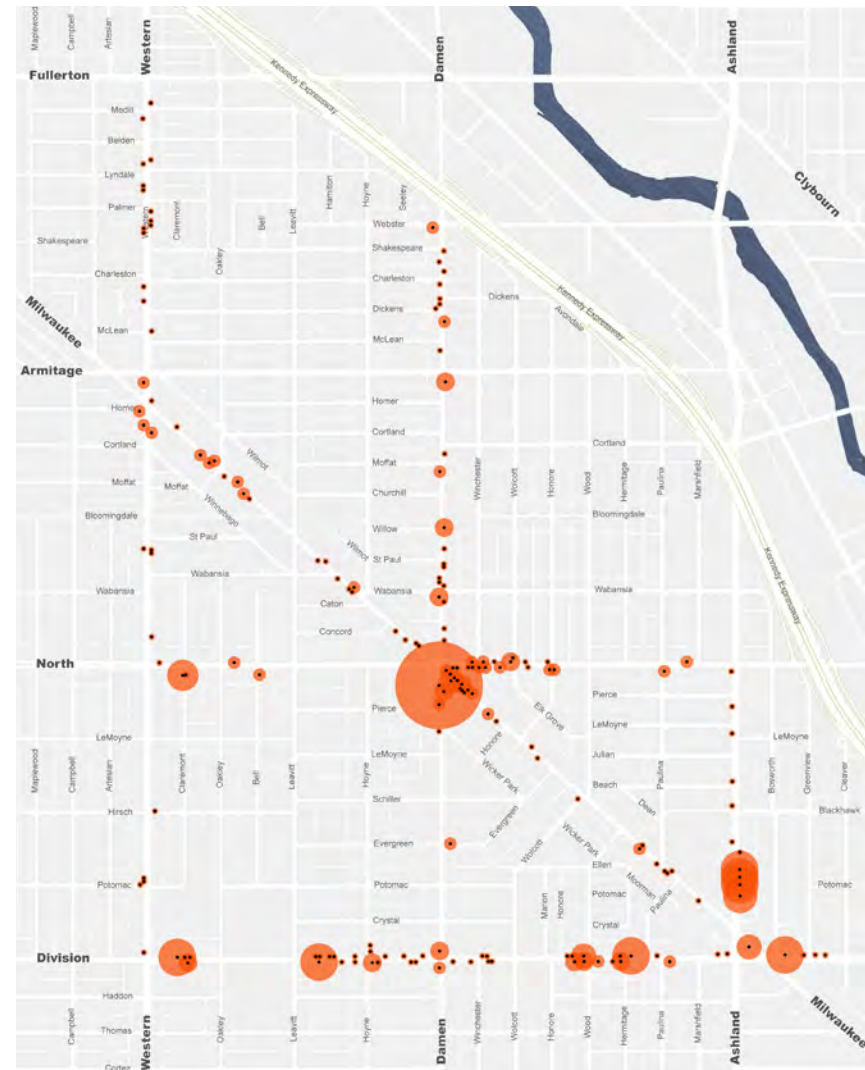
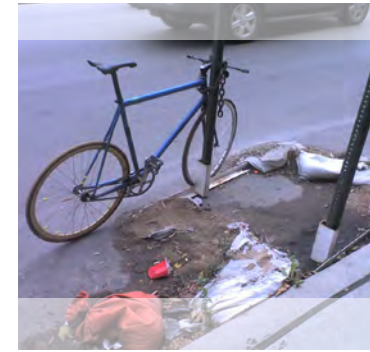
Figure 49. Bicycle Parking Resources
Source: Field Survey



Additional bicycle parking is being proposed by the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) at the Damen Avenue station. There will be just under 100 bicycle parking spaces provided inside the station and they will be secure. "Where more bike parking has been installed, they've been used more," says Brian Steele, spokesman for Chicago Department of Transportation. The construction is expected to be completed by early 2009. This additional parking is expected to increase the bicycle traffic in the neighborhood.

From direct observation it is clear that bicycles are parked **everywhere** in the Wicker Park Bucktown neighborhood. They

are parked on bicycle racks designed for bike parking, parking meters, street signs, construction signs, ornamental fencing. Any secure vertical object that can support a bicycle is used for bicycle parking. In many instances we observed bicycles parked to parking meters when there was an abundance of bicycle parking available at bike racks.



Bicycle parking does take up space on the sidewalk. Most bicycle parking racks are designed to minimize conflict with pedestrians. Unfortunately, when people park their bicycles on objects not designed for bicycle parking, the parked bikes can become an obstacle for pedestrians.

Bicycle Safety

[“Education about road etiquette needs to target both bikers and drivers. Many drivers don’t realize they are violating the bike space. Many bikers have an attitude and a level of aggression that make coexistence difficult and dangerous.”]

As discussed earlier, the biggest hurdle in increasing bicycle ridership on public streets is safety. Many people that would like to use a bicycle as a means of transportation do not feel safe riding in the street, having to share space with motor vehicles. Land Strategies obtained data from CDOT in regards to bicycle accidents in the Wicker Park Bucktown area from 2004 – 2006, which documents an increase in bicycle accidents from 40 in 2004 and 40 in 2005 to 57 in 2006. It should be noted, however, that the data only represents bicycle accidents that were reported to the Chicago Police Department. The full data set is included in Table 5 in the Appendix.

Based on the data provided by CDOT, it appears that the roadways with the most bicycle accidents in 2006 (Damen Avenue, Division Street, and Milwaukee Avenue) are the roadways with the most bicycle traffic. Roads that have minimal bicycle traffic, like Ashland Avenue and Western Avenue, have fewer potential conflicts. The alarming trend from 2005 – 2006 is the significant increase in accidents on Damen Avenue, Division Street and Milwaukee Avenue, all of which contribute to the higher accident figure for 2006. The increases could be due to a number of factors including a significant increase in bicycle traffic, more accidents reported to the police, an increase in vehicular traffic on the roadway and weather conditions. In order to increase the amount of bicycling in the area, measures must be taken to increase the safety of riders and re-establish the priority given to bicyclists on the roadways.

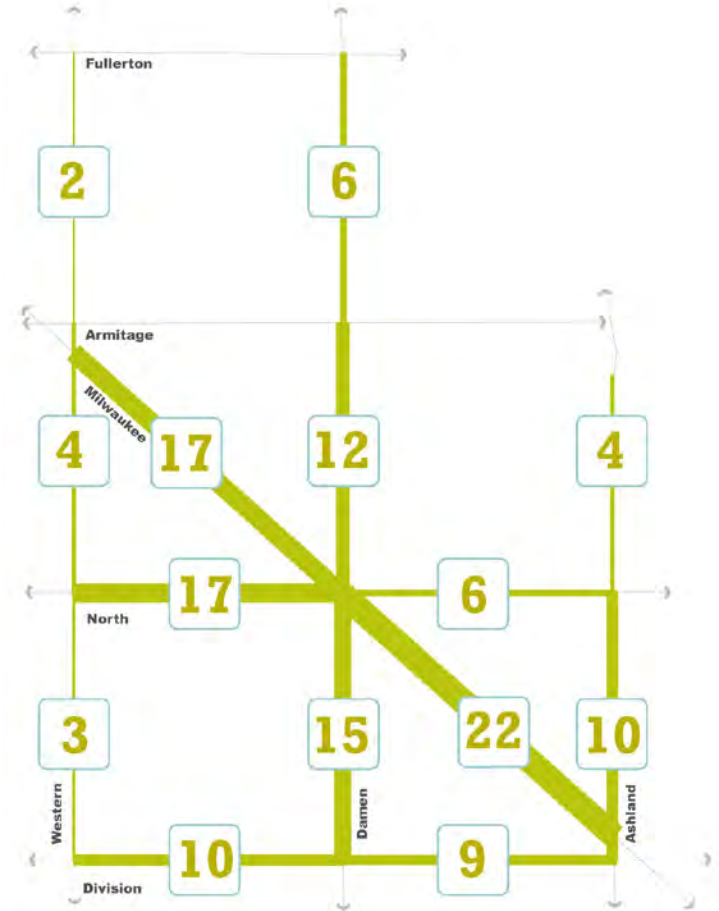
Bike 2015 Plan

In January of 2006, the City of Chicago published its Bike 2015 Plan. The goals of the Bike 2015 Plan are to increase bicycle use and reduce the number of bicycle injuries. The plan itself lists 150 strategies to satisfy the objectives that are laid out to accomplish the two aforementioned goals. Many of the strategies listed in the Bike 2015 Plan will be utilized in the Recommendations section of the WPB Master Plan.

Bloomingdale Trail

[“The Bloomingdale Trail would be fantastic.”]

The Bloomingdale Trail is a proposed multi-use bicycle trail/linear park that will run along the elevated Bloomingdale Line. There is no timeframe on the construction of this project. The proposed trail is described in greater detail in the Environmental Conditions and Open Space section above.



Reported Bicycle Accidents, 2004 - 2006
Total: 137

Figure 50. Reported Bicycle Accidents, 2004-2006
Source: CDOT

