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Testimony for Committee on Economic, Capital and Technology Development

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Good morning, I am Audrey Wennink, Director of Transportation for the Metropolitan Planning Council, which is a nonprofit urban planning and policy organization working to improve the Chicago region.

Thank you for the opportunity to address your committee. It is critical for transportation capital investments in the City of Chicago to generate the most public benefits per dollar. We encourage more transparency in how project priorities are identified by the Chicago Department of Transportation. For the projects in the Capital Improvement Plan it is critical to be able to clearly describe how they were chosen, what plans they align with and the anticipated benefits.

As Chicago makes future transportation investments, we must prioritize the environment – transportation is now the sector that is the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. While car traffic went down during the COVID-19 lockdown, now it is already up to nearly pre-COVID levels, despite many people still working from home. As the COVID crisis recedes and people return to being more mobile, we must make sustainable transportation choices the most attractive ones, which means prioritizing investments in biking, walking and transit.

A major component of those investments should be related to safety. Over the past ten years an average of 40 pedestrians and 5 cyclists have died each year on Chicago roadways, with many more suffering severe injuries. A large share of these preventable deaths are occurring in communities of color. The City has completed a Vision Zero traffic safety West Side Action Plan and is developing

other neighborhood Vision Zero plans. CDOT needs dedicated funding to implement these plans.

The City should accelerate investment in bicycle lanes. Only 280 miles of bike lanes have been developed despite a goal of 645 miles in the 2020 Streets for Cycling Plan. Providing dedicated bike lanes is especially critical in areas where Divvy bikeshare expansion was just rolled out such as the South and West sides – people will not ride bikes if they don't feel there is a safe place to do so.

The COVID crisis has shown us that transit is a lifeline that has kept our city moving and enabled our essential workers to get to work in grocery stores and hospitals. We need to prioritize making buses move more quickly by investing in a comprehensive network of dedicated bus lanes on City streets.

Finally, we encourage city funding of the Make Way for People placemaking program at CDOT, which upgrades pedestrian plazas and spaces. In addition to improving street safety and promoting walkable communities, this initiative supports economic development for local businesses and neighborhoods. It should be funded.

In summary, we encourage the City to prioritize investments such as bike lanes, pedestrian public spaces, safety and bus lanes that are relatively low in cost but have tremendous community benefits. Thank you.