

E. The Full Cost of Congestion

In addition to the delays that Chicago area residents experience on a daily basis, traffic congestion also affects air quality, other aspects of the natural environment, the economy and goods movement. Ideally, these impacts would be included in estimates of the full cost of congestion. Just adding secondary economic effects, goods movement and productivity improvements led the chief economist at the U.S. DOT to double his estimates of the national economic costs from congestion compared to the figures reported by TTI.¹⁶

For Chicago, the Metropolitan Planning Council estimated that excess commuting time cost the Chicago region about 87,000 jobs in 2008.¹⁷ Both the regional highway and rail networks in Chicago have become increasingly congested, reducing mobility and the reliability of freight movement as the number of rail cars per day is projected to increase to about 67,000 by the year 2020. The existing network in Chicago consists of nearly 2,800 rail-miles with about 37,500 rail cars traveling through the region each day.¹⁸ Freight in Chicago currently accounts for about \$3.2 billion in local income and the employment of over 117,000 people, adding over \$8 billion to the regional economy.¹⁹

But these economic costs still do not include other important but difficult to quantify burdens on the region, such as lower air quality (from pollution) and other damage to the natural environment. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), for example, determined that the Chicago region is in non-attainment for the national ambient air quality standards for ozone as well as fine particulate matter.²⁰ CMAP, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and the MPO for the region, notes that:

Transportation greatly affects the quality of our natural resources and environment. In both urban and rural areas of northeastern Illinois, transportation projects can improve access to natural areas, but can also degrade them with congestion and pollution.²¹