



ULI Chicago | The Front Stoop Series

“Resilience Series: Clean, Smart, & Equitable: Building Tomorrow’s Infrastructure”

A Conversation with:

Gia Biagi, *Commissioner*, Chicago Department of Transportation
Sara Disney Haufe, *Director of Traffic Engineering, Chicago*, Sam Schwartz
Scott Goldstein, *Principal*, Teska Associates

On September 9, 2021 ULI Chicago peers engaged in a virtual discussion on “Clean, Smart, & Equitable: Building Tomorrow’s Infrastructure” as part of the Front Stoop Series. The conversation included facilitator Scott Goldstein, *Principal*, Teska Associates and Gia Biagi, *Commissioner*, Chicago Department of Transportation and Sara Disney Haufe, *Director of Traffic Engineering, Chicago*, Sam Schwartz. The following is a summary of the discussion.

The pandemic provided a unique opportunity to reframe how we think of infrastructure

The mass shift to working from home resulted in underutilized roadways which allowed the city to expand on how that existing infrastructure could be used. One example is the creation of the [Shared Streets Program](#) which temporarily closes streets to allow for increased pedestrian and bike use. The outdoor dining programs were also expanded making greater use of the public way. Both of these examples began as responses to facilitate social distancing while supporting the local economy. The result of the programs is a shifted public perception of how we would like to make better use of our roads for more than just vehicular traffic.

Having options for the mode of travel creates resiliency

CDOT has been guiding its decisions for infrastructure investment by trying to achieve mobility justice by asking themselves “how do we make it as affordable and accessible to move around the city?” Some people choose not to have a car and some people cannot afford to have a car so the network of transportation infrastructure needs to be more than just roadways. Creating connections through different transportation options facilitates a resilient transportation network which feeds into the economic strength of a city.

The way infrastructure gets implemented is as important as the physical infrastructure itself

The lack of community engagement on infrastructure projects has contributed to many of the challenges our cities currently face. Some of these challenges include disproportionately low investment in the modernization of infrastructure and, historically, in the construction of freeways that have fragmented communities of color. This is why the city is so deliberate in their roll out of new infrastructure and programs to ensure community buy-in which helps for a lasting positive impact.

The city also wants the private sector to be innovative in the implementation of infrastructure for their projects. There are a number of specifications the city must adhere to because they are proven to work, but they are not necessarily the best or most affordable way to build something. When the private sector is innovative, the city can point to those projects as an example of a better way to do something which can raise the bar for the city’s design standards.

Written by Spencer Blaney, Project Manager/Architect, MAP Strategies