

Building a New Chicago

March 29, 2012

This month we celebrated an important date: the 175th anniversary of Chicago's founding. It's reason to celebrate, but also reason to reflect.

As we confront our challenges today, we should remember what Chicagoans before us achieved together. We are a City of big shoulders because we stand on the shoulders of giants.

And today we should remember not just our City's founding, but also Chicago's second birth. Because only three decades after Chicago became a city, Chicago suffered one of the worst disasters in America's history: the Great Chicago fire.

We know what Chicago lost in the fire: how it laid entire neighborhoods to waste, how it left 100,000 people homeless, how it caused millions of dollars in damage.

But Chicago's identity was not forged by the Great Fire, but by the great fortitude of its people in its aftermath – by their ability to re-imagine a city and raise a new Chicago from its ashes.

Within a year of the fire, nearly \$50 million dollars of new buildings had been completed. Within the next decade, City Hall would issue 10,000 permits for new buildings. One of the most important was the International Exposition Hall, a building of glass and steel that rivaled anything in London or New York.

It was in that building, only nine years after the Great Fire, that Chicago hosted the Republican Convention that launched James Garfield to the White House. More crucial for Chicago, the convention helped re-launch our City on the national stage. The event was such a success, and Chicago such a powerful symbol of resilience, that both parties hosted their conventions in Chicago four years later.

A little more than two decades after the Great Fire, Chicagoans welcomed the world to the Columbian Exposition, showcasing the metropolis they were building. By 1900, Chicago had become the world's fifth-largest city and the envy of the world for its architecture and infrastructure.

The resolve of that generation to rebuild the City they loved, their grit and their guts, are important for us to remember today -- because we, too, are at a crossroads

as a City. The decisions we make in the next two to three years will determine what Chicago will look like in the next 20 to 30 years -- the type of City our children will inherit.

By neglecting to invest in our infrastructure for nearly four decades, we have allowed Chicago's foundations to decay and our strengths to decline. We know that as long as our city rests on a 20th century foundation, we won't be able to compete in a 21st century economy. If we don't take action, Chicago will face another lost decade. That is something Chicagoans cannot afford, and I, as your Mayor, will not accept.

Whether it is renewing our parks or repairing our pipes, repaving our roads or rebuilding our rails, retrofitting our buildings or revitalizing our bridges, we must restore Chicago's core. So today, I am unveiling a comprehensive infrastructure initiative for our City's future. Simply put, this is a plan for Building a New Chicago.

Building a New Chicago means that we will create 30,000 jobs over the next three years. Building a New Chicago means we will invest \$7.2 billion in our City's infrastructure.

Some of our investments will be funded through reforms, some through efficiencies, some through cuts in our central offices, some through direct user fees, and some from our Infrastructure Trust. But, all of it is secured.

None of these funds will come from an increase in property or sales taxes. In fact, the new jobs we create from Building a New Chicago – along with the new jobs and businesses it will attract – will expand our city’s revenue base and reduce pressure on taxes. Economic growth, not higher taxes, is an answer for our fiscal challenges.

Our plans are comprehensive because our needs are comprehensive -- because no city in America relies on its infrastructure more than Chicago. While our infrastructure challenges are not unique, our resolve and determination to see them through is.

Chicago is the nation’s inland port and its transportation and logistics hub. We have the second busiest airport and the only North American airport that’s a hub for two major carriers. More than one-fourth of all rail freight passes through Chicago. Our roads, our runways and our rails have been the roots of Chicago’s strength and our

leg-up against the competition. But the age of our infrastructure is no longer a leg-up, it is holding us back.

Let's take public transportation as an example: we can all see the strain on the CTA. But when I speak to employees who are new to Chicago -- as I did at recently at United Airlines -- they tell me how they enjoy the ease of their commutes. The CTA helps Chicago make the most of its urban density, which is one of our economic strengths and selling points. It connects our communities, providing 1.6 million trips each day. In fact, the CTA provides more rides in a single month than all of the rides on Amtrak in a full year.

But sections of our track are more than a century old; 22 stations are more than 90 years-old. Slow zones cost Chicagoans 11,000 hours every day and \$61 million every year.

Chicago can't be a City on the move if we can't move our people to work. It's that simple.

That's why over the next three years, with the help of the Governor and the State, we are making a comprehensive investment in the CTA, with a focus on the Red Line, the backbone of our system.

We are also making investments in the Blue Line, to take time off the trip between Downtown to O'Hare. Over the next ten years, we will fix 26 miles of slow zones.

In the next three years we will renovate, repair, or rebuild more than 100 stations, some of which haven't been refurbished since President Roosevelt – that's Teddy Roosevelt.

At 20 stations we are performing major renovations include building new viaducts, roofs, and entryways. At five of our oldest stations, we are literally tearing them down and building new stations from scratch. On the Green Line, we will finally, after years of debate, connect McCormick Place and the surrounding Motor Row neighborhood to downtown, by building a new station at Cermak and 22nd street.

I have seen what more stations and better service can do for our communities. Look at what's happened to neighborhoods along the Brown Line since we began its revitalization when I was a Congressman. Ridership across the CTA is up, but the Brown Line has had the biggest increase – which shows you the return on investment

With more people riding the CTA than at any time in 20 years, with the cost of gas and congestion rising, we can't wait. To compete with other cities, to draw the best workers and businesses to Chicago, we need a strong and vibrant CTA.

We will make commutes quicker by investing in our bus network. We are adding our first 16 miles of Bus Rapid Transit Route on Jeffrey Boulevard this year. We plan to add a similar route in the Central Loop next year.

And because Chicago's future depends on its success in a global economy, traveling to Chicago is just as important as traveling through Chicago. We must ensure that our airports remain launching pads for our exports and keep us linked to the world. Thanks to the vision and determination of both Mayor Daleys and the O'Hare Modernization Project, Chicago is very well positioned.

We are doubling down on our strength and on O'Hare's modernization, because there is no way to imagine a modern Chicago without a modern airport system.

We are well on our way to achieving this goal, building two new runways that will be ready by 2015. Both runways are built to handle the newest generation of aircraft that specialize in long haul flights -- so that

Chicago can stay connected with markets in Asia, Latin America and Europe, and the rest of America.

Our goal is to reduce delays at O'Hare by 80% and raise the airport's capacity by 300,000 passengers per year by 2015. To help us accomplish this goal, I call on the airlines to begin planning with us today, so we can add a fourth and final runway.

Think about it this way: these infrastructure investments mean that in three years, O'Hare's capacity will grow by the size of Midway's total capacity. That is the same as building a third major airport for Chicago, but in my view, far more cost-effective and strategic.

But we can't just invest in the infrastructure that strengthens Chicago's connections to the world. We must invest in the infrastructure that sustains our own markets and neighborhoods.

Ask a Chicagoan where they're from, and chances are they'll tell you: Rogers Park, Hyde Park, Humboldt Park, Albany Park.

We have to renew the parks that root us in our neighborhoods.

Over the next five years we will acquire 180 new acres of parklands. We will build 20 new playgrounds and 12 new parks. We are also building six new community buildings and eight new artificial turf fields.

By this fall we will complete work on 100 basketball courts in communities across the City – so that 150,000 young adults will have a new court within a half-mile of their homes.

In 2014 we will complete the Bloomingdale trail, turning an old train track into three miles of nature trail, bike and running paths that will connect four distinct Chicago communities.

These investments mean that in five years, every Chicagoan will live within a 10-minute-walk to an improved neighborhood park. Our parks and playgrounds will be catalysts for stronger communities and a better quality of life for all of Chicago's families

We are also making our original highway, the Chicago River, into our next recreational frontier. We all know the value of our 27 beautiful miles of lakefront and its role as our front yard, but our River can be just as valuable as a recreational backyard for our neighborhoods.

With the help of private funds, we will complete two new boathouses this year, to anchor the River to surrounding neighborhoods. We will build two more boathouses next year. The boathouses will offer canoeing, sculling, and kayaking. My goal and my vision is that our River will no longer be something we drive over, or dump raw sewage in, but somewhere we take our families to enjoy.

Revitalizing our river, adding parklands, and restoring our parks will be our generation's addition to the Burnham plan, so we are true to Chicago's motto as a "City in a Garden."

As we invest to make the most of our River, we must do the same with our Lake. With water becoming as vital to economic growth as energy, Chicago has a huge advantage -- it's called Lake Michigan.

While other cities and states fight over water and suffer long bouts of drought, we can be a world leader when it comes to water management. Water can be an economic engine for Chicago, creating jobs and opportunity.

But by neglecting our water infrastructure over the years, we have squandered our natural advantage. Last year there were more than 3,800 pipe breaks in Chicago, revealing the system's age. They cost the City tens of

millions in dollars and Chicagoans thousands of hours in lost time from street closings and congestion.

To make up for a century of neglect, we are beginning an aggressive program to rebuild.

We will replace or repair 900 miles of water pipe over the next decade; 750 miles of sewer line will be relined or rebuilt; over 160,000 catch-basins will be reconstructed.

We have the world's largest water filtration system and we will modernize both plants. By 2020, the investments we make will save nearly 170 billion gallons of fresh water – that's close to all the water Chicagoans consume in their homes in two years.

The scope and scale of Building a New Chicago will also require stronger partnerships and better ways of investing in people.

To train the welders, masons, plumbers, laborers, motor truck drivers, hoisting engineers, electricians, bricklayers, and pipe fitters for these 30,000 jobs, we will need a strong partnership with organized labor.

We are working with trade unions to develop training and apprenticeship programs that are fair to taxpayers and put people in every part of our city back to work. The

New Chicago we are building will be one where all Chicagoans, of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, will have a fair chance to learn a trade and pursue a good-paying career. And I am proud that one of the first unions to sign up are the Laborers, whose home we are in today.

Building a new Chicago also requires the coordination of our efforts. All of our partners, in the Public Utilities and the Private Sector, as well as in the City Council and our Sister Agencies, have been briefed on our long-term strategic plan. We will ensure that our partners are working in sync and are held accountable to the same standards and goals.

We are reforming the Aldermanic Menu, so that it will strengthen critical infrastructure in our communities. We are reforming tax increment financing, so that it is better aligned with our infrastructure needs.

We are saving money by completing projects at the same time. We can no longer afford to repave streets in the summer, only to rip them up next spring to repair pipes underneath.

So when Peoples Gas replaces high pressure gas mains, they are also repairing the streets, sidewalks, and ramps that run over them.

When Com-Ed replaces lines of cable, they are doing the same. Through better coordination we are minimizing costs and maximizing savings for taxpayers.

And as we renew our infrastructure, we are working to create a comprehensive plan to expand high-quality broadband and wi-fi across the City.

We are not only repairing Chicago's past, we are preparing for Chicago's future.

And as we repair hundreds of miles of water pipe and sewage line in the next ten years, we will repave 900 miles of road. With the resurfacing we perform under our normal course of work, we will repave 2,000 miles of road in the next decade – close to half of all roads in Chicago.

But there is one road more important than any other for our future: the road to opportunity we provide our children in our schools. We must invest in the infrastructure that strengthens our children's skills and supports their success.

We know that Chicago has one of the most educated workforces of any city because of the people we attract. We know that Chicago is a magnet for graduates from the Big Ten states and from our own four-year institutions in

the state of Illinois. But at the same time, we are failing to provide a world-class education for Chicago's own children.

In my visits to schools throughout the City, I have seen the difference these investments can make. I've seen how at schools like Nathan Hale, there isn't enough space. Third graders have to go across the street for classes in trailers.

On the same day I visited Hale, I went to a school in Sauganash, where they had smart classrooms and new laboratories. Where there was a chalkboard at Hale, Sauganash had a computer screen.

We need to provide a world-class education not just at Sauganash, not just at Hale, but for all of our students. That's why we are building new laboratories and gyms. We are replacing old roofs and windows. We are expanding schools and adding tech-ready classrooms.

We are repairing more than physical foundations: we are laying the groundwork for higher expectations and student achievement. We will relieve overcrowding at schools like Jones College Prep, Southeast Area Elementary School, Edison Park, and Bell.

We are investing in college and career programs at high schools like Lindblom, Richards, Roosevelt, Schurz, Simeon and Sullivan. More than 6,000 students will be able to participate in programs for pre-engineering, culinary arts and hospitality, business, digital media and information technology.

From kindergarten to college, from cradle to career, we must rebuild the infrastructure that supports our students. And in today's economy, few investments are more vital than the ones we make in our community colleges.

That's why, with the State's help and the Governor's help, we are making an unprecedented investment in our City Colleges.

We are building an entirely new campus for Malcolm X College so that it can serve as our center of excellence in the healthcare field, so that our students can compete for the 85,000 new healthcare jobs that will be created in the next decade.

At Olive Harvey College, we are taking what was supposed to be a temporary facility built in the 1970's and replacing it with a state-of-the-art campus. Students at Olive Harvey will be able to prepare for the more than

18,000 jobs that will be created in the transportation, distribution, and logistics sector.

Similar investments will follow at our other city colleges – each of them connected to a particular sector where jobs are available today and growing in the future.

To build a brighter future for our children, we can also use the energy that powers Chicago more effectively. As Mayor, I know I can't lower global energy prices. But I can make sure that we do a better job of using the energy we have right now.

That's why we are investing in what I call the sixth energy source: efficiency. While there is coal, gas, oil, nuclear and renewables, we can also tap efficiency to power our future. Investing in energy efficiency creates jobs today and sustainable development for tomorrow.

That's why we are embarking on the largest retrofit project anywhere in the country: "Retrofit Chicago." We will reduce energy consumption in City buildings by 25% over the next three years.

Retrofit Chicago will be the first project financed by the Chicago Infrastructure Trust, the only infrastructure trust of its kind for a municipality. The Trust will pool the resources and expertise of private-sector lenders,

providing a steady stream of financing for Building a New Chicago.

Already, five leaders in infrastructure finance have expressed interest in investing in Chicago's publicly owned properties – that will stay Chicago's publicly owned properties.

This model of private financing for public infrastructure is happening all over the world, but not here in America.

I was honored to welcome President Clinton to Chicago this month to unveil the Trust. As I said then, we can't be satisfied with solutions that are too small for Chicago's ambitions. We can't allow dysfunction, whether in Washington or Springfield, to delay our economic development. The Chicago Infrastructure Trust provides us with the breakout strategy we need, to make the investments we need, so we can take control of our destiny.

We know that Chicago reinvents itself each generation. But Chicago never reinvents itself by itself. Chicago's reinvention is driven by people who are willing to make tough choices and tackle big challenges.

Building a new Chicago is a bold plan. But boldness is nothing new to Chicago. It's in our bones. It's part of our DNA.

After the Great Fire and into the first decades of the 20th Century, we built the foundation for Chicago to be at the forefront of the greatest economic expansion the world had ever seen. In this second decade of the 21st Century, we are building the foundations for Chicago to be a leader in the global revolution of ideas and innovation. We will aim high in our hope and in our work. And we will deliver.

And when we do, we will ensure that the promise of Chicago's future is as bright as its past. We will ensure that Chicago's next generation can stand tall, because they can stand on our shoulders. We will ensure that Chicago's children can succeed because of the challenges we conquered, because of the foundations we restored, because of the New Chicago that we are building.

Thank you, God Bless you, and God Bless Chicago.