The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) initiated the North Lake Shore Drive (NLSD) Phase I Study in 2013 to improve NLSD from Grand Avenue to Hollywood Avenue. The study is anticipated to continue through 2021 with many opportunities for input throughout the project process. Please visit the project website, northlakeshoredrive.org, to provide comments and view previous meeting materials.

As part of the study, the project team is working with stakeholders to develop a plan that improves safety and mobility for all users. The following is an overview of current issues and the proposed improvement concept for the Michigan Avenue junction.

There are three categories of alternatives being examined as part of the NLSD Phase I Study: Context Tailored Treatments; Transitways; and Managed Lanes. The top performing alternatives from these categories can be layered on top of one another in combination, or serve as standalone NLSD corridor designs. The following information addresses only the design features associated with the Context Tailored Treatments category.

North Lake Shore Drive Corridor

Michigan Avenue and Oak Street junction

NLSD looking south towards Michigan Avenue and Oak Street
The section of NLSD near Michigan Avenue and Oak Street is one of the most dangerous and congested locations within the project corridor. The Oak Street “S-curve” between E. Lake Shore Drive and Division Street experiences approximately 150 crashes per year.

- The curve was designed for operating speeds of 25 mph (southern curve) and 45 mph (northern curve), but the posted speed limit along most other parts of the Outer Drive in this area is 40 mph. During off-peak hours, the prevailing speed of traffic approaching this area has been measured as high as 68 mph. Narrow 10-foot lane widths compound safety issues on the Oak Street curve. Over half (56%) of the crashes that occur annually at this location were crashes involving fixed objects, such as the median or shoulder barrier walls.

- When drivers enter the curve at too fast of a speed, abrupt stops or braking occurs which results in southbound traffic backing up through the Michigan Avenue and LaSalle Drive junctions. This area experiences some of the heaviest congestion on NLSD.

- NLSD is protected by concrete barriers north and south of Oak Street Beach. However, during severe storms, waves from the lake can overtop the barriers and enter the roadway, disrupting traffic and creating a safety hazard.

- The existing Michigan Avenue junction allows northbound vehicles to travel from Michigan Avenue to either the Inner Drive or the Outer Drive. Southbound vehicles on NLSD exit to Michigan Avenue by crossing an at-grade intersection with northbound Inner Drive.

- Seven bus routes access or travel on the Outer Drive at this location. Routes #143 Stockton/Michigan Express, #146 Inner Drive/Michigan Express, #147 Outer Drive Express, and #148 Clarendon Michigan Express enter and exit NLSD at Michigan Avenue, while routes #134 Stockton/LaSalle Express, #135 Clarendon/LaSalle Express, and #136 Sheridan/LaSalle Express continue south past the Oak Street “S-curve” and into the downtown area. An eighth route, the #151 Sheridan, also operates in this area on Inner Drive/Michigan Avenue.

- The Oak Street pedestrian tunnel is the most heavily traveled pedestrian access point on the lakefront, accommodating nearly 22,000 pedestrians and bicycles on peak summer Saturdays. All of these people must cross one or more legs of the Oak Street/Michigan Avenue intersection at grade. Former pedestrian tunnels across the south and east legs of that intersection have been closed due to poor condition and the lack of ADA compliance.

- The Lakefront Trail is also subject to flooding caused by waves and icing during winter months, which results in frequent trail closings.
New park land and shoreline, an adjusted “S-curve,” and additional park entrances would enhance safety, operations, and access at the Michigan Avenue junction.

- **New park land and shoreline** would be created using fill to buffer NLSD and the Lakefront Trail bicycle path during storms. The proposed shoreline protections would safeguard roadway infrastructure and improve the safety of people driving on NLSD. In addition, the new park land and shoreline provide the opportunity for improved lakefront amenities, such as a lakefront promenade.

- **The Oak Street “S-curve” would be realigned with less tight curves** to reduce congestion and improve safety. The realignment, along with the additional shoreline protections, would shift Oak Street Beach to the east.

- **Entrance and exit lanes would be located in tunnels beneath NLSD** and connect with Michigan Avenue just north of the Michigan/Oak intersection. The existing crossover intersection between the southbound exit ramp and northbound Inner Drive would be eliminated, creating a simplified and more intuitive design.

- **Lanes on NLSD would be adjusted to achieve a consistent width of 11 feet**, providing traffic with more room to maneuver and improving safety.

- **A CTA bus turnaround and layover area** would be created between Division Street and Michigan Avenue in the Inner Drive median. A northbound bus-only curbside area on Inner Drive just north of Oak Street would allow northbound buses to lay over and then turn around via the median facility. This facility would provide greater flexibility for CTA bus operations in a part of the corridor with high bus traffic volume.

- **The orientation of the northbound entrance to NLSD from Michigan Avenue would be switched to the left lanes on Oak Street.** This would allow the existing median bus stop for Inner Drive buses (CTA route #151) to be relocated to the right (curbside) lane, improving safety and convenience for transit riders.

- **A wide, ADA-compliant pedestrian and bicycle overpass** would be provided at Oak Street to allow people walking and biking to cross over the Outer Drive and reach the trail, park, and beach.

- **Another ADA-compliant pedestrian bridge** would be created at Division Street.

- **Pedestrian underpasses** would be located at the east end of E. Lake Shore Drive and at Banks Street. These underpasses, along with the bridges at Michigan Avenue/Oak Street and Division Street, would improve access to the park and beach for people walking and biking. They would also help fulfill a project goal of providing pedestrian access at least every quarter mile.

- **The Lakefront Trail would be grade-separated from east-west access paths.** The bicycle trail would be grade-separated from every pedestrian access point and would run beneath the entrances to the two bridges and over the entrances to the two underpasses.
Q: Why are the shoreline protections needed?
A: During storms, waves often overtop the shoreline sea wall. This damages the Lakefront Trail and at times washes onto the Outer Drive, endangering the safety of trail users and people driving. As a result, the Lakefront Trail and the Outer Drive are sometimes closed during these incidents. The shoreline protections will serve to buffer the Lakefront Trail bicycle path and NLSD from these waves, while at the same time providing additional park land in an area where there is little green space.

Q: Have the bridge designs been finalized yet?
A: The designs shown are meant to illustrate the general features (scale, alignment) of the proposed bridges, but detailed design work has not been completed.

Q: Are you planning to increase vehicle speeds in this area?
A: The NLSD Phase I Study is not proposing an increase in the maximum posted speed limit along the NLSD corridor. However, the 25 mph speed restriction at the Oak Street curve would be eliminated as a result of the proposed improvements.

Q: With Transitways and Managed Lanes alternatives still under consideration, what potential modifications associated with Transitways and Managed Lanes features are being considered?
Transitways: One of the alternatives still under consideration includes the addition of dedicated bus lanes in the NLSD corridor. Access to this facility would be provided by an underground tunnel from Michigan Avenue for northbound buses, and a bus-only exit lane at Division Street for southbound buses.

Managed Lanes: The evaluation of Managed Lane alternatives is ongoing. Northbound access to and from the managed lanes is proposed for the Michigan Avenue junction.

How can I comment on this proposal?
We welcome comments on the project and the Foster Avenue concept. Please visit our online comment form on the project website (northlakeshoredrive.org), email info@northlakeshoredrive.org, or mail feedback to NLSD Study c/o Civiltech Engineering, 30 N. LaSalle St., Suite 2624, Chicago, IL 60602.

For more information about the overall study, or to join our mailing list, please visit the project website northlakeshoredrive.org

We look forward to continuing to work with you to Redefine the Drive.