

A photograph of a yellow and black steam locomotive, number 4004, on a track. The locomotive is positioned in the center-left of the frame, facing right. It has a yellow body with black accents and the number '4004' visible on its side. In the background, there is a multi-story brick building with many windows and bare trees, suggesting a winter or early spring setting. The overall tone of the image is somewhat muted, with a blueish tint.

BRINGING THE TRAIN BACK: Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) for the UP-West Line METRA Extension

Exploring the reconnection of DeKalb to
Chicago passenger rail for the first time since
1971.

Project Background & Context

The Gap: DeKalb currently lacks direct commuter rail; the UP-W line terminates 15 miles east in Elburn.

NIU: Northern Illinois University is the only state university in Illinois without direct passenger rail access.

Economic Growth: The City of DeKalb's EAV has grown from 592 Million in 2019 to \$1.4 Billion in 2026

2023 Feasibility Study



Ridership Estimate:

Between 200 and 250 daily riders



Daily Train Trips:

12 round trips extended from Elburn to DeKalb



Travel Time:

90-105 minutes from DeKalb to downtown Chicago



Operating Cost:

\$10-11 million, annually (FY 2023 dollars)*

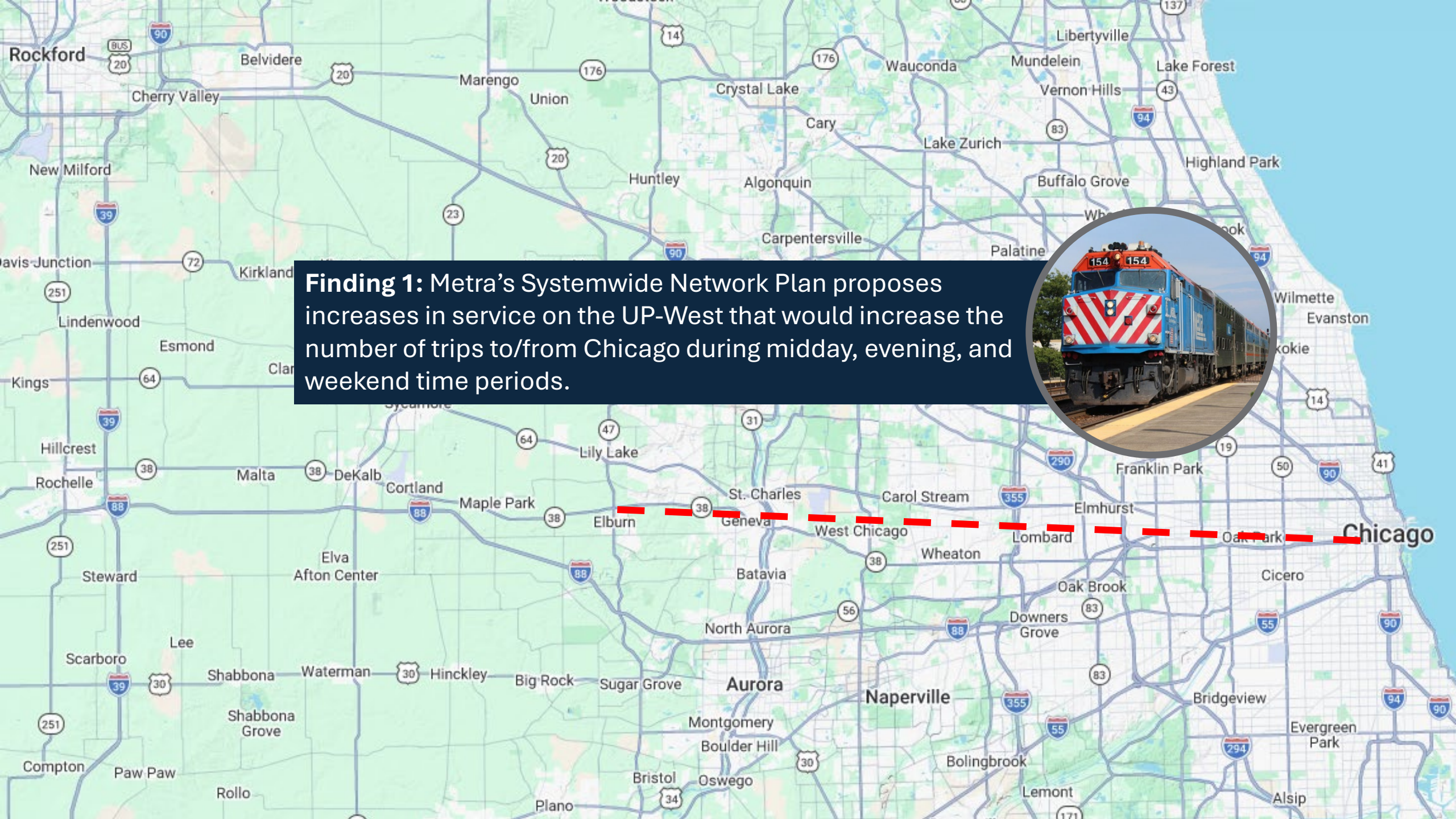


Capital Cost:

\$385 million (FY 2023 dollars)#

*Based on 12 round trips per day

Based on third mainline track from Elburn to DeKalb

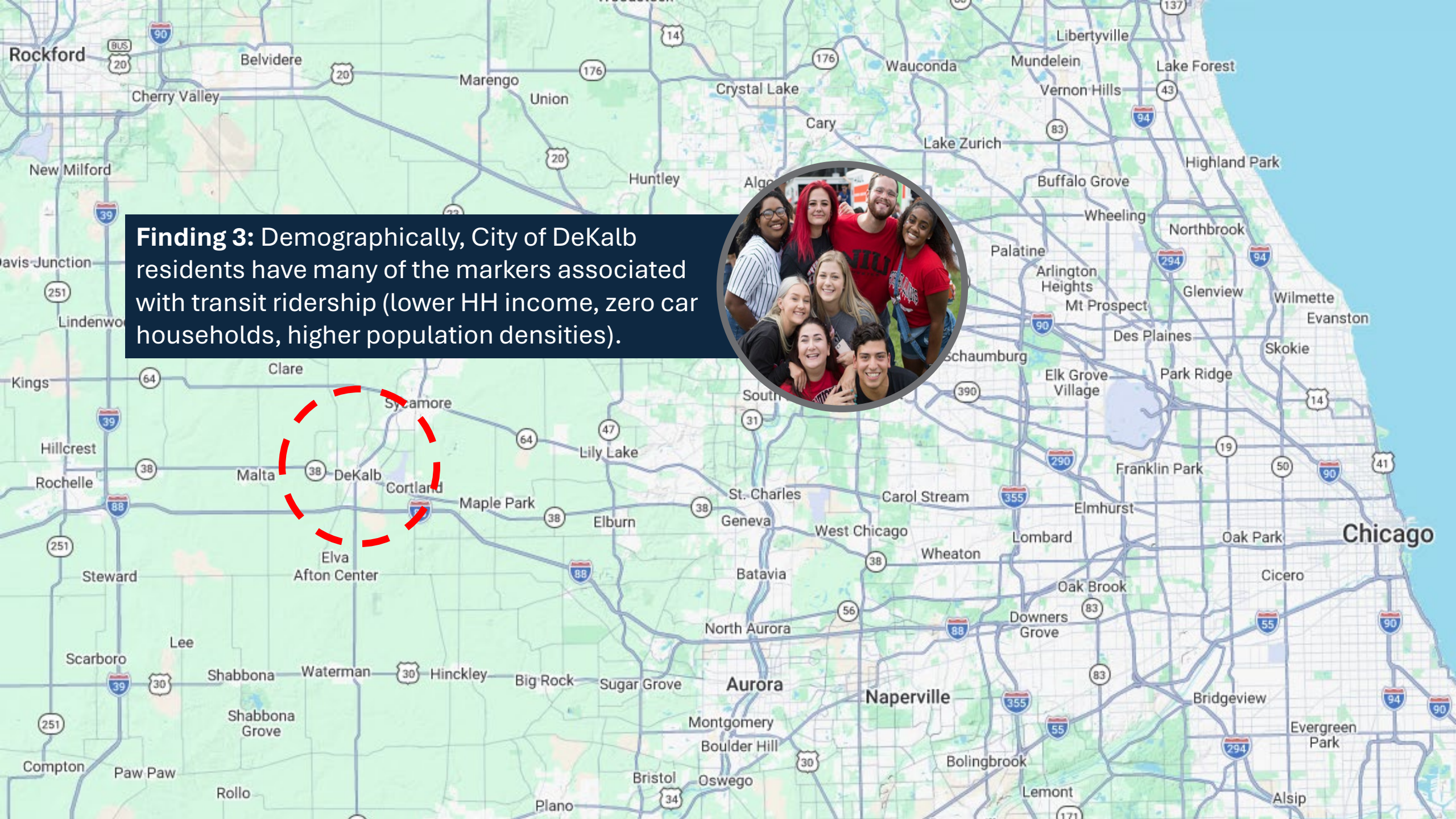


Finding 1: Metra's Systemwide Network Plan proposes increases in service on the UP-West that would increase the number of trips to/from Chicago during midday, evening, and weekend time periods.

Finding 2: DeKalb Public Transit has experienced substantial ridership growth on Route 12 between 2019 and 2025. Timed transfers to the UP-West are an important factor in this growth.



Finding 3: Demographically, City of DeKalb residents have many of the markers associated with transit ridership (lower HH income, zero car households, higher population densities).



Finding 4: There is a strong travel market between the Chicago metropolitan area and DeKalb, with Northern Illinois University serving as a primary destination.



Finding 5: There is also a significant travel market from DeKalb to the Chicago metropolitan area, both downtown Chicago and intermediate UP-W stations, including Wheaton, Elmhurst, and Oak Park.



Route 12 (Elburn) runs

Mon - Fri

St at I Rd	Lincoln Hwy & Pearl St	Locust St & 2nd St	Pleasant St & 10th St	Elburn Train Station - Arrival	Elburn Train Station - Departs	
M	5:40 AM	5:42 AM	5:45 AM	6:10 AM	6:10 AM	
M	6:10 AM	6:12 AM	6:15 AM	6:40 AM	7:35 AM	8:00 AM
M	7:20 AM	7:22 AM	7:25 AM	7:50 AM	8:20 AM	8:47 AM
M	8:50 AM	8:52 AM	8:55 AM	9:20 AM	9:20 AM	9:47 AM
M	10:00 AM	10:02 AM	10:05 AM	10:30 AM	10:40 AM	11:07 AM
M	11:50 AM	11:52 AM	11:55 AM	12:20 PM	12:30 PM	12:57 PM

Mon - Fri Afternoon Timepoints

St at I Rd	Lincoln Hwy & Pearl St	Locust St & 2nd St	Pleasant St & 10th St	Elburn Train Station - Arrival	Elburn Train Station - Departs	Pleasant St & 10th St	Locust St & 2nd St
M	1:45 PM	1:47 PM	1:50 PM	2:15 PM	2:20 PM	2:47 PM	2:50 PM
M	3:45 PM	3:47 PM	3:50 PM	4:15 PM	4:25 PM	4:52 PM	4:55 PM
M	4:45 PM	4:47 PM	4:50 PM	5:15 PM	5:40 PM	6:07 PM	6:10 PM
M	5:45 PM	5:47 PM	5:50 PM	6:15 PM	6:35 PM	7:02 PM	7:05 PM
M	6:40 PM	6:42 PM	6:45 PM	7:10 PM	7:50 PM	8:17 PM	8:20 PM
M	7:50 PM	7:52 PM	7:55 PM	8:20 PM	8:30 PM	8:57 PM	9:00 PM
M	8:50 PM	8:52 PM	8:55 PM	9:20 PM	9:20 PM	9:47 PM	9:50 PM
M	9:30 PM	9:32 PM	9:35 PM	10:00 PM	10:15 PM	10:42 PM	10:45 PM
M	10:55 PM	10:57 PM	11:00 PM	11:25 PM	11:25 PM	11:52 PM	11:55 PM



Sat - Sun Morning Timepoints

St	Locust St & 2nd St	Pleasant St & 10th St	Elburn Train Station - Arrival	Elburn Train Station - Departs	Pleasant St & 10th St	Locust St & 2nd St	
AM	7:52 AM	7:55 AM	8:20 AM	8:20 AM	8:47 AM	8:50 AM	8:53 AM
10 AM	9:52 AM	9:55 AM	10:20 AM	10:25 AM	10:52 AM	10:55 AM	10:58 AM

Sat Afternoon Timepoints

5 PM	1:47 PM	1:50 PM	2:15 PM	2:15 PM	2:42 PM	2:45 PM	2:48 PM
6 PM	5:47 PM	5:50 PM	6:15 PM	6:15 PM	6:42 PM	6:45 PM	6:48 PM
7 PM	10:57 PM	11:00 PM	11:25 PM	11:25 PM	11:52 PM	11:55 PM	11:58 PM

Sun Afternoon Timepoints

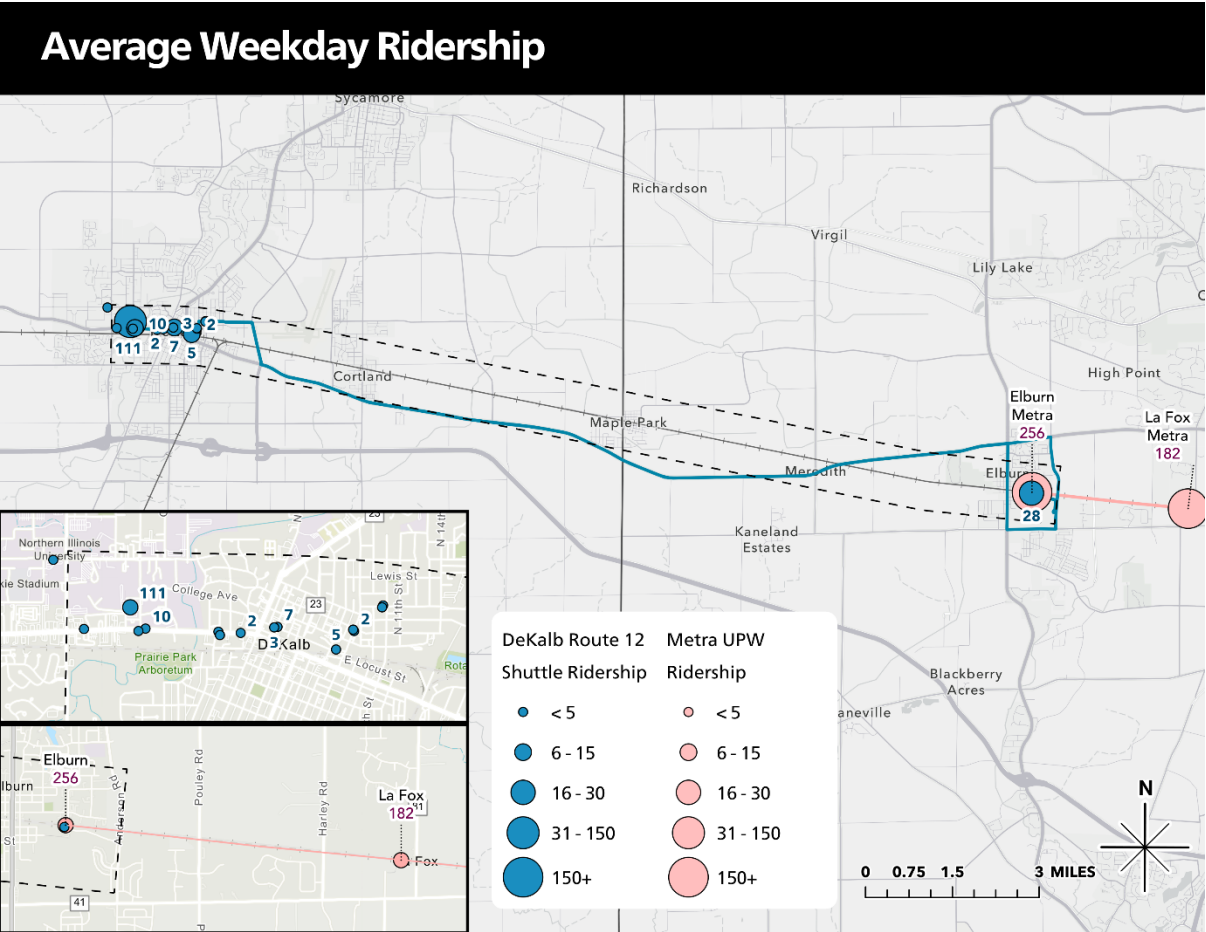
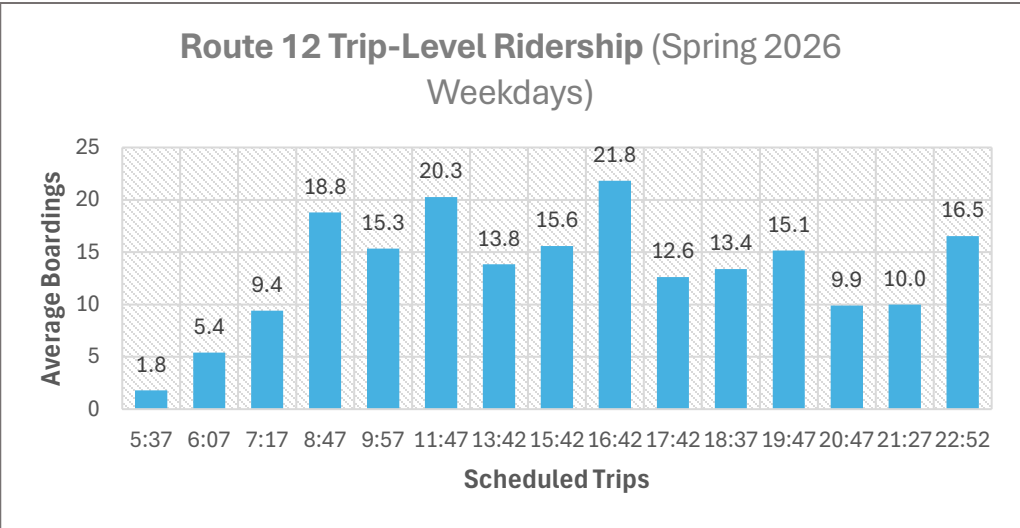
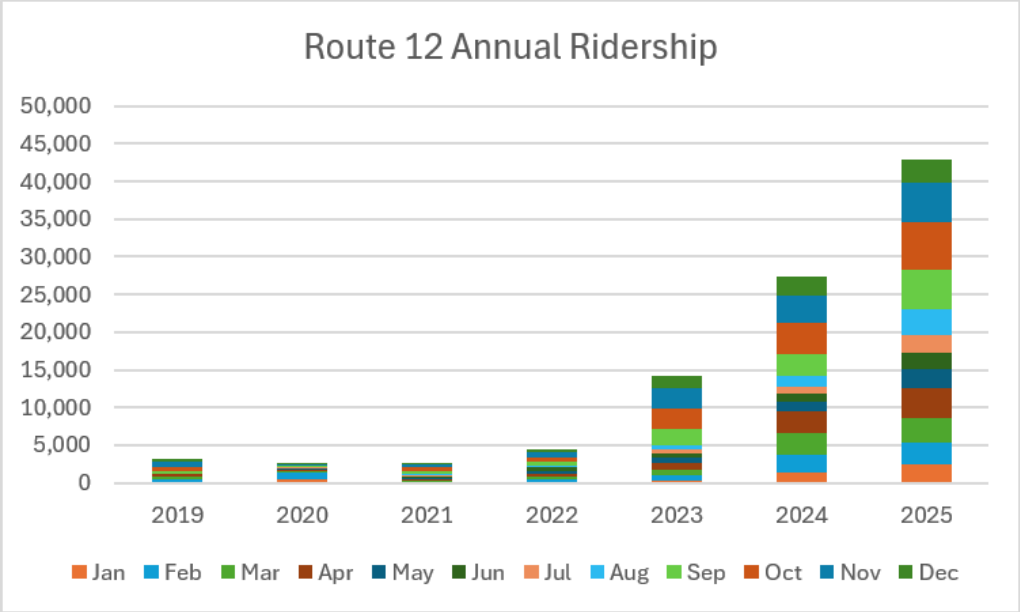
7 PM	1:50 PM	2:15 PM	2:15 PM	2:42 PM	2:45 PM	2:48 PM	2:51 PM
	3:55 PM	4:20 PM	4:20 PM	4:47 PM	4:50 PM	4:53 PM	4:56 PM
		6:20 PM	6:20 PM	6:47 PM	6:50 PM	6:53 PM	6:56 PM
		8:20 PM	8:20 PM	8:47 PM	8:50 PM	8:53 PM	8:56 PM
			11:25 PM	11:52 PM	11:55 PM	11:58 PM	12:01 PM

Elburn Bus Schedule

Full-service schedule meets the train

- 15 out of 29 trips on weekdays
- 5-7 times on weekends
- Exploring adding more weekend service

DeKalb Public Transit Route 12 Ridership

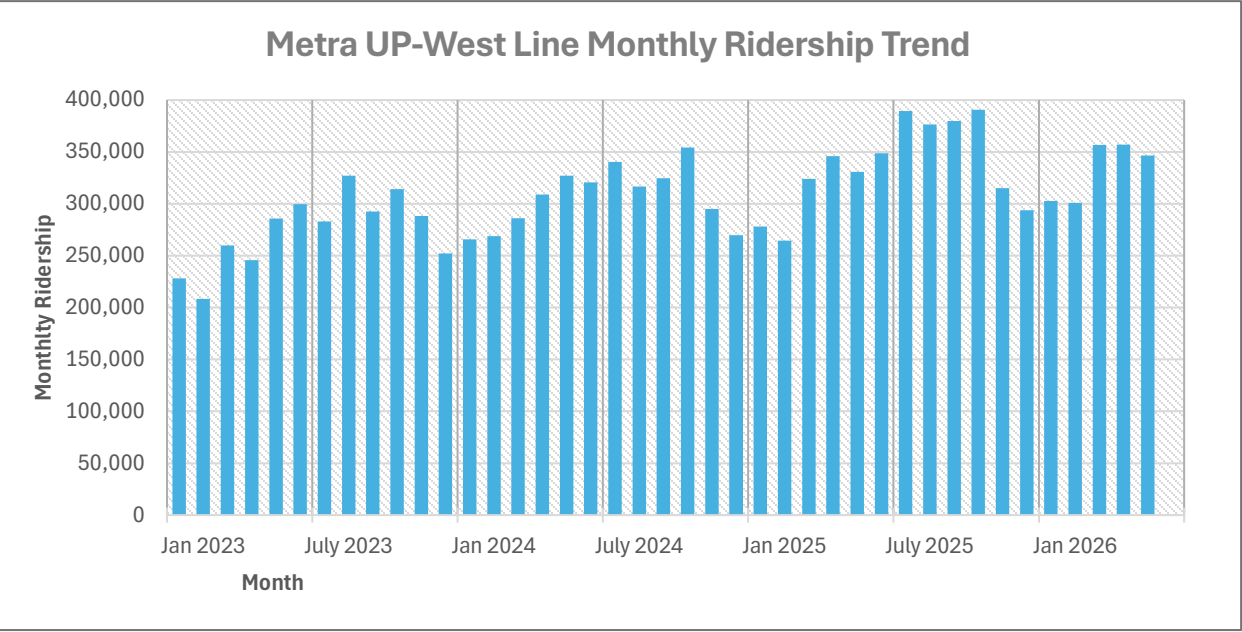




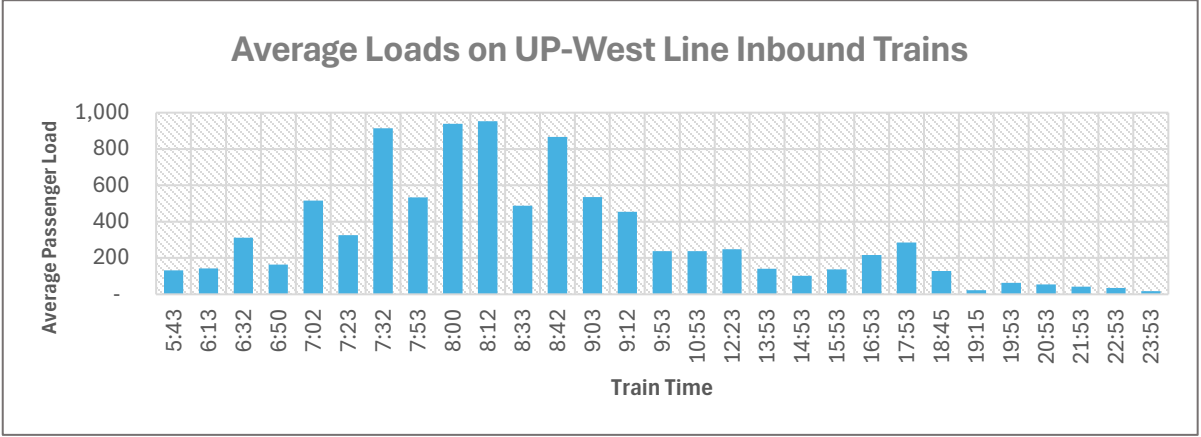
- Train Theme Bus Wraps

Metra UP-West Ridership

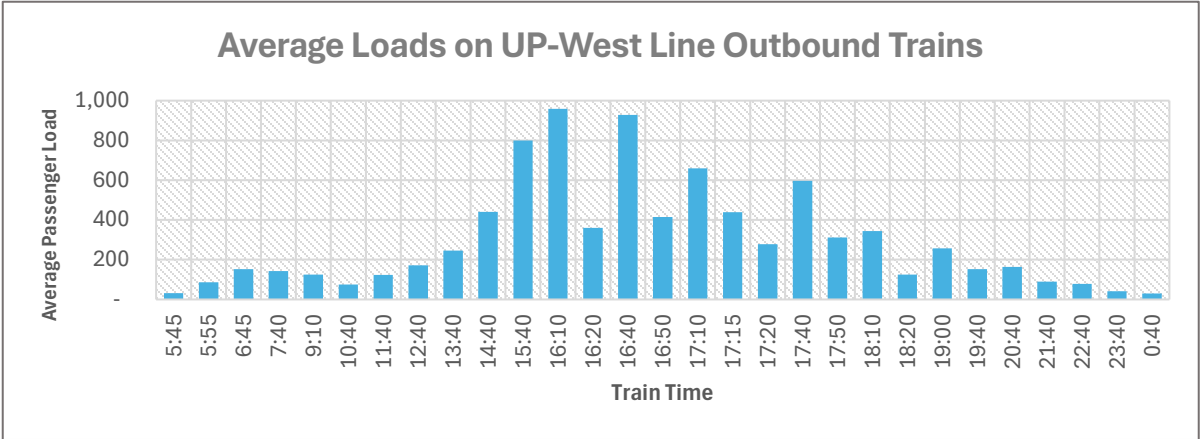
Metra UP-West Line Monthly Ridership Trend



Average Loads on UP-West Line Inbound Trains



Average Loads on UP-West Line Outbound Trains



DeKalb County Origins to UP-West Destinations

Weekday Origin DeKalb County Trips with Destinations Adjacent to UP-W Stations

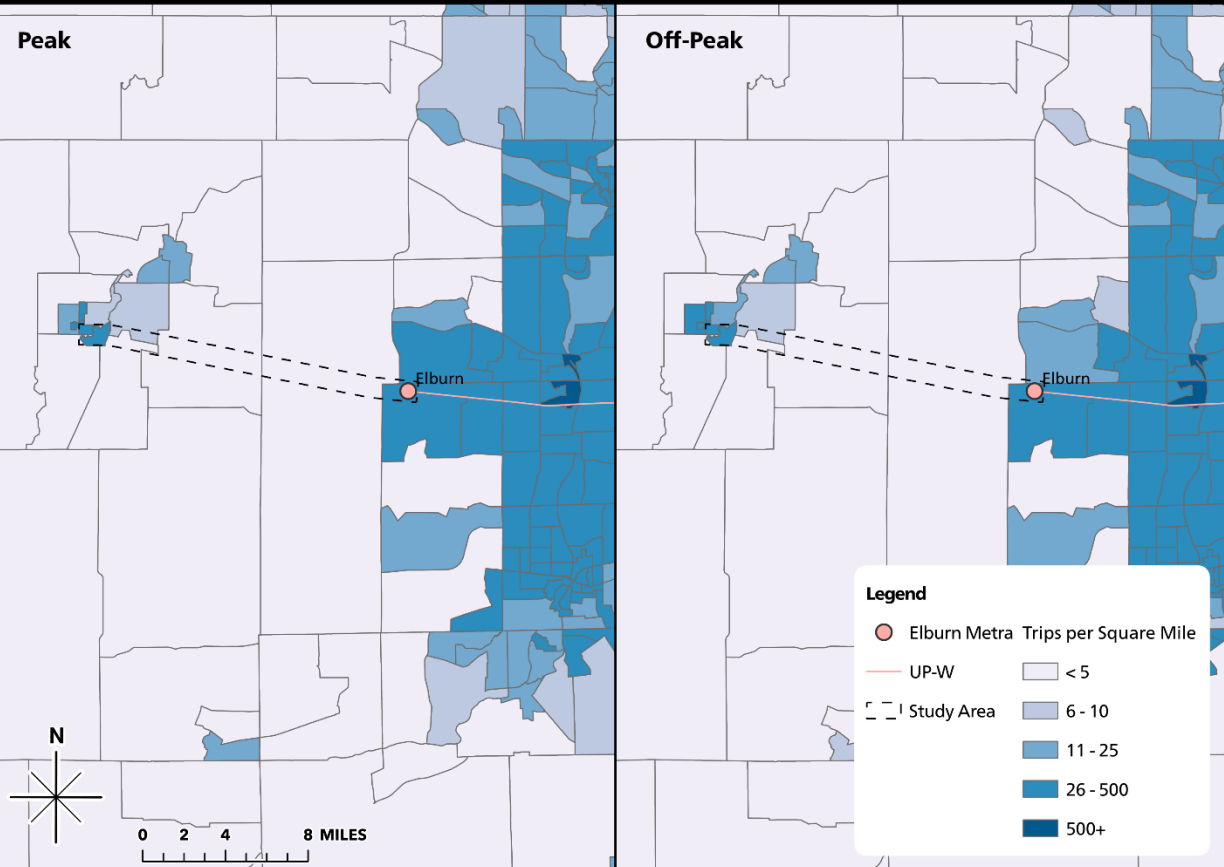


Weekend Origin DeKalb County Trips with Destinations Adjacent to UP-W Stations

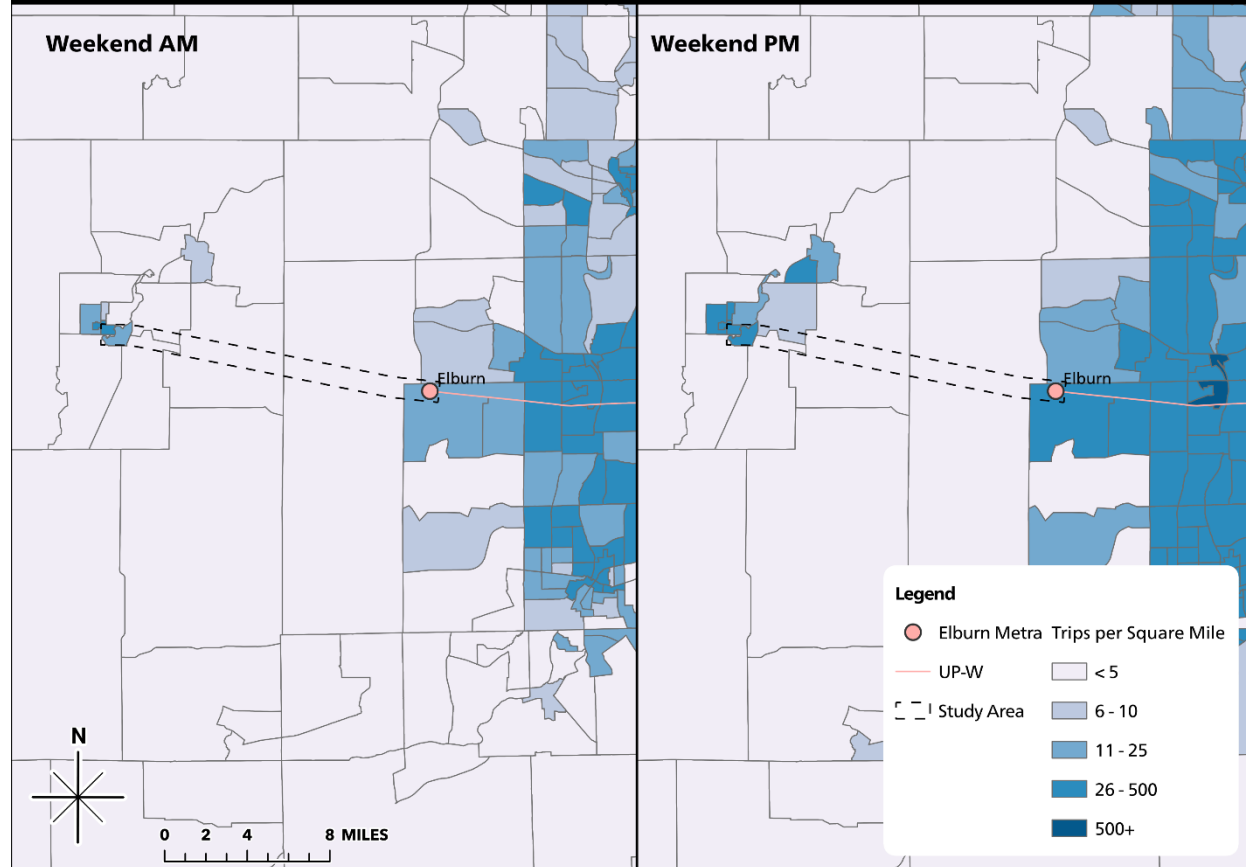


UP-West Origins to DeKalb County Destinations

Weekday Trips with Origins Adjacent to UP-W Stations

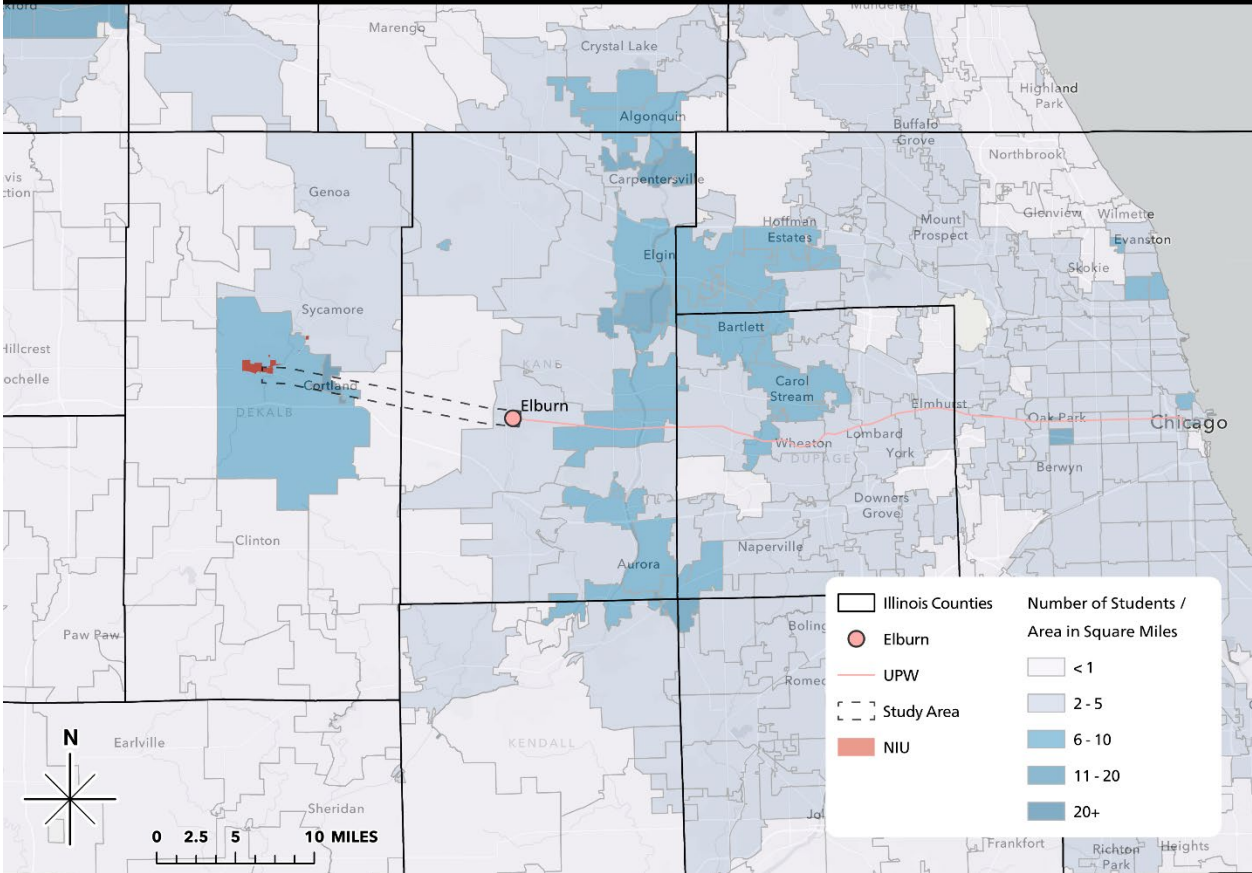


Weekend Trips with Origins Adjacent to UP-W Stations

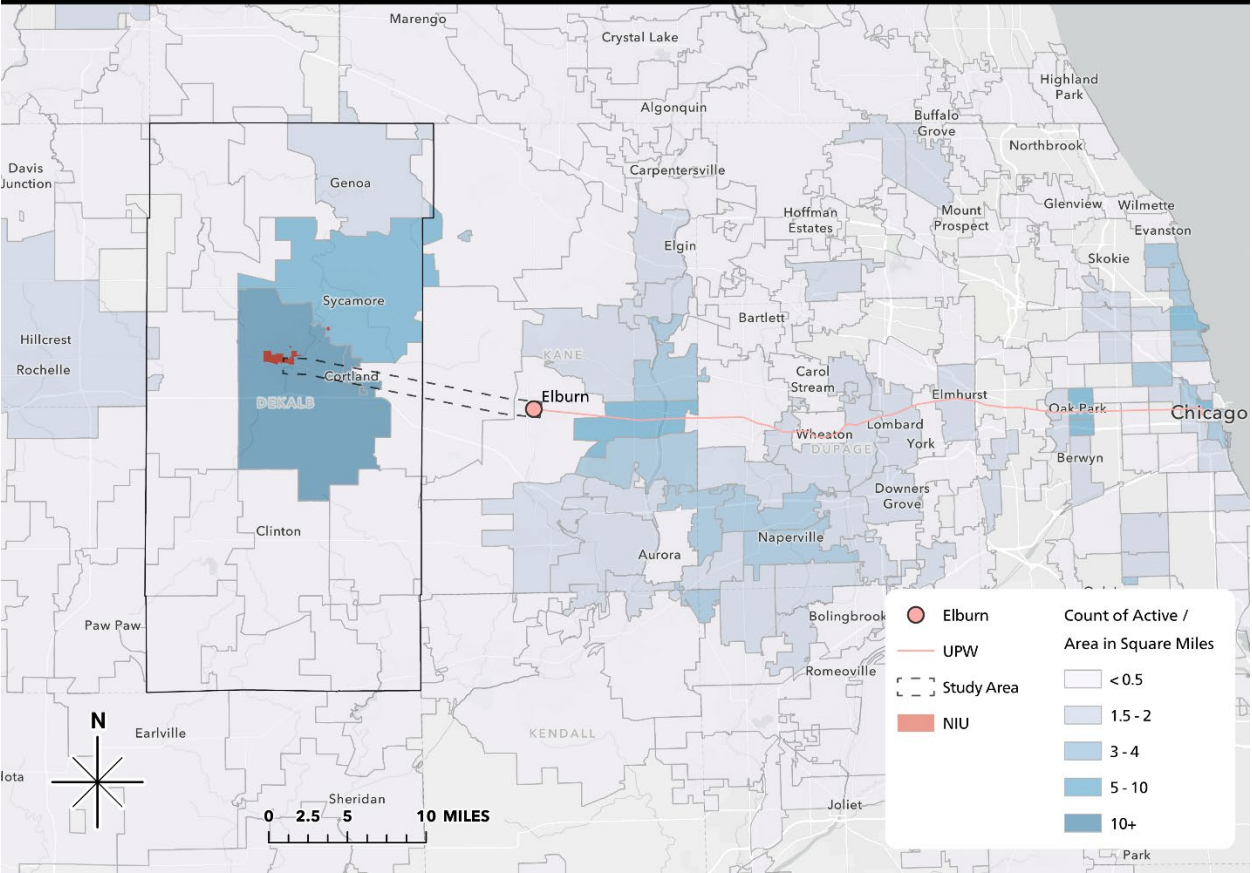


NIU Travel Markets

Student ZIP Codes

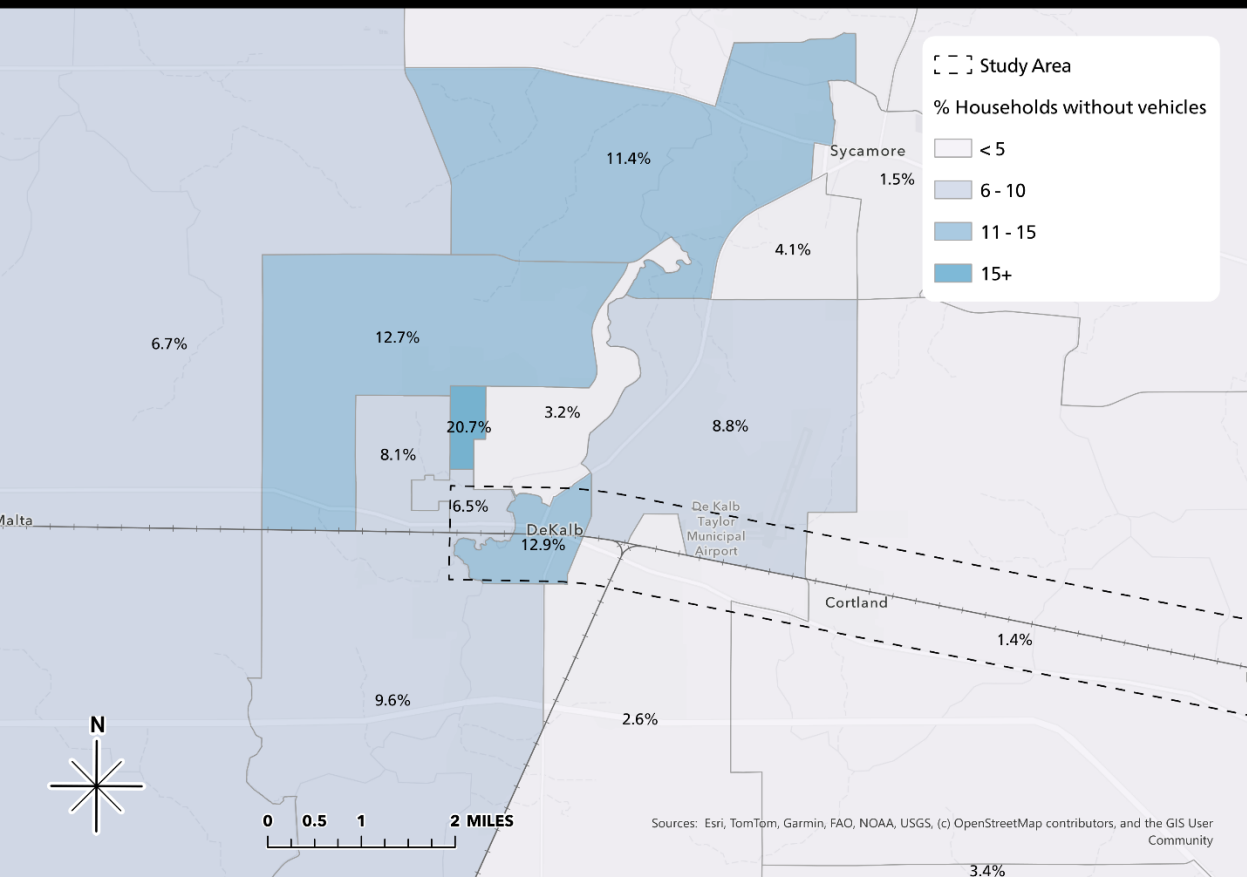


Employee ZIP Codes

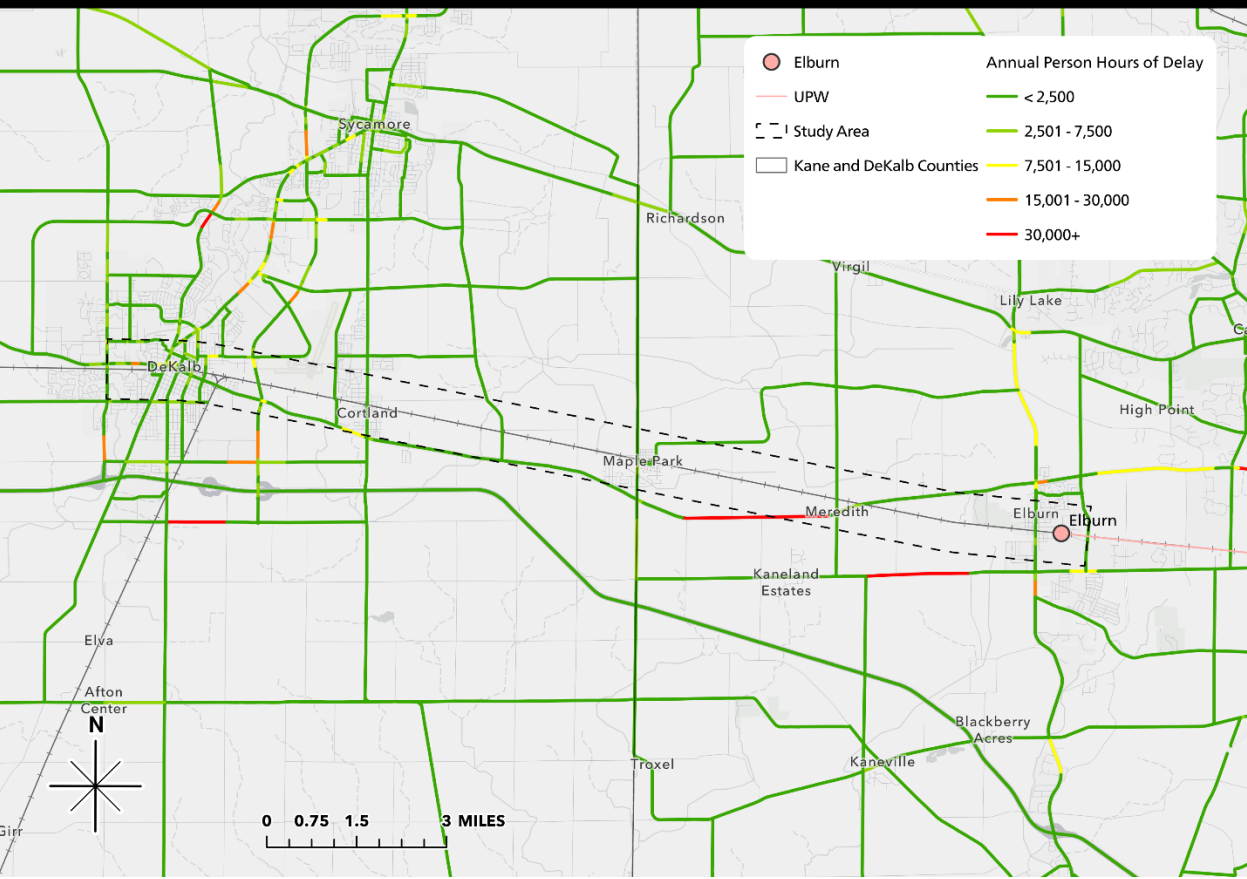


Vehicle Access and Roadway Congestion

Vehicle Access

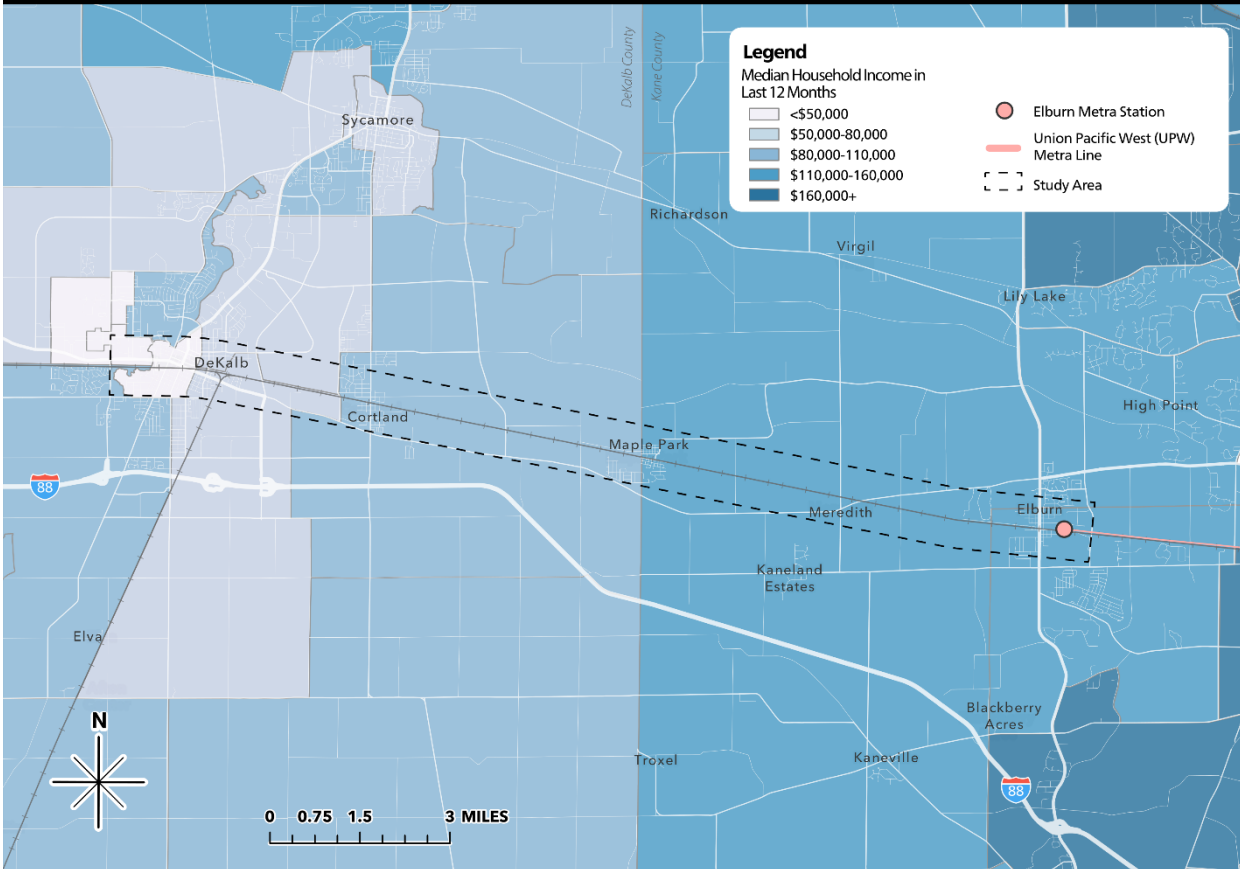


Congestion

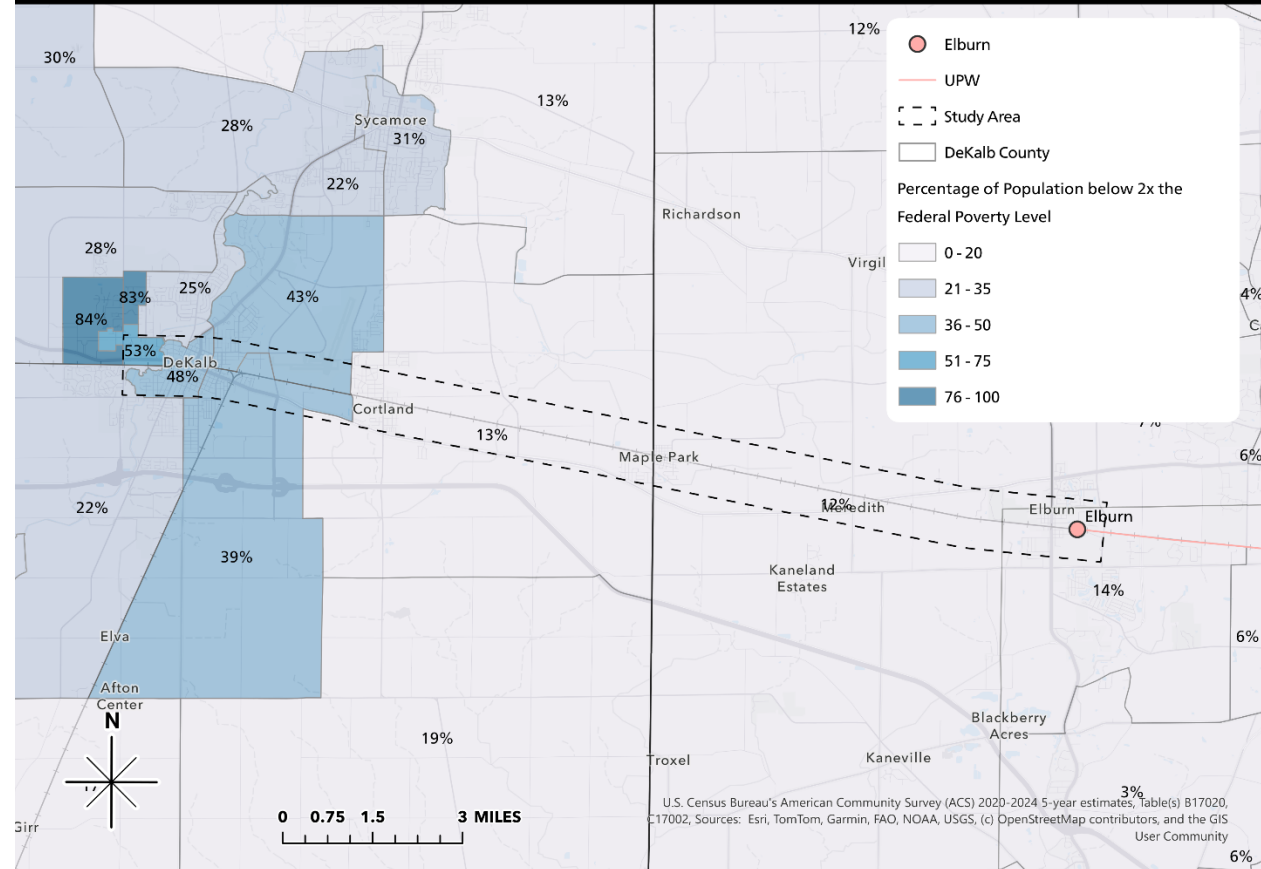


Demographics

Median Household Income

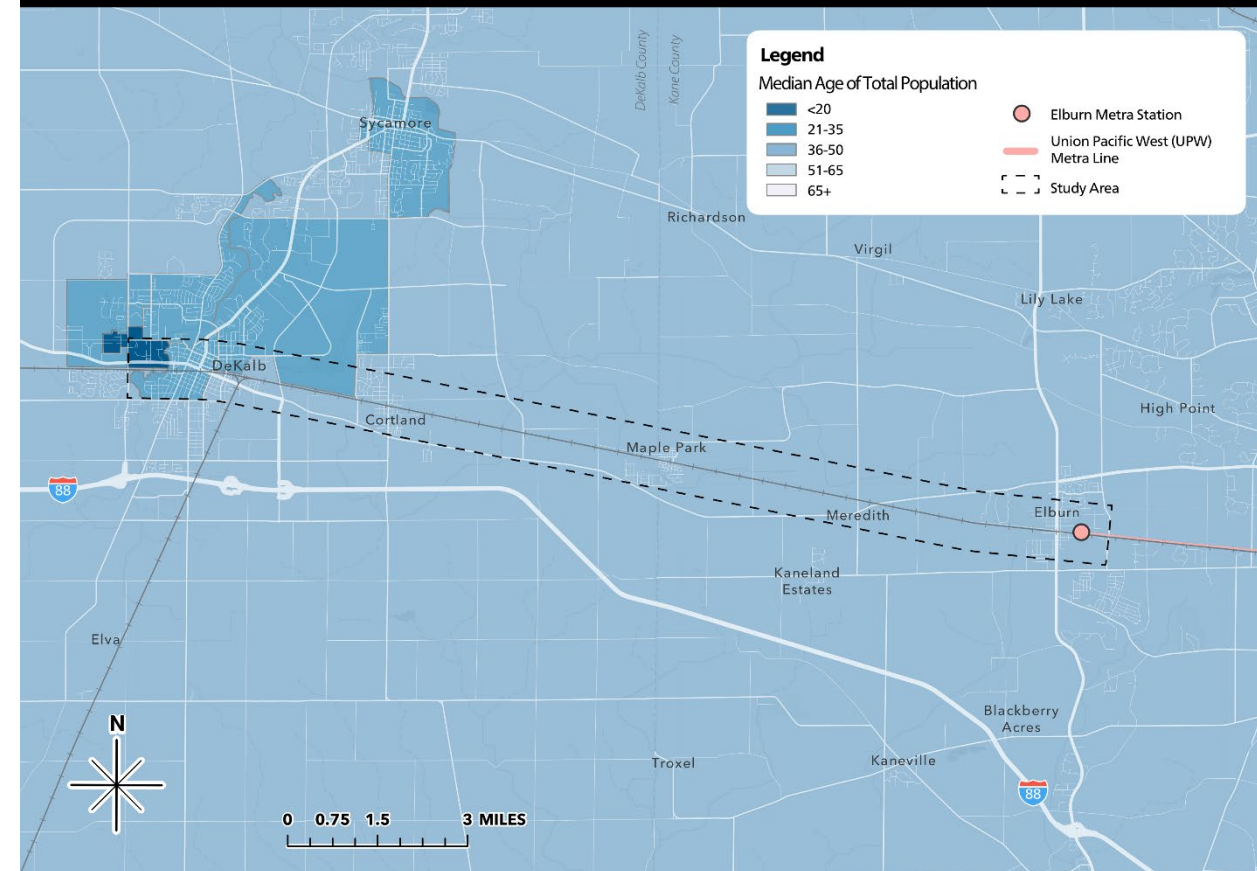


Poverty

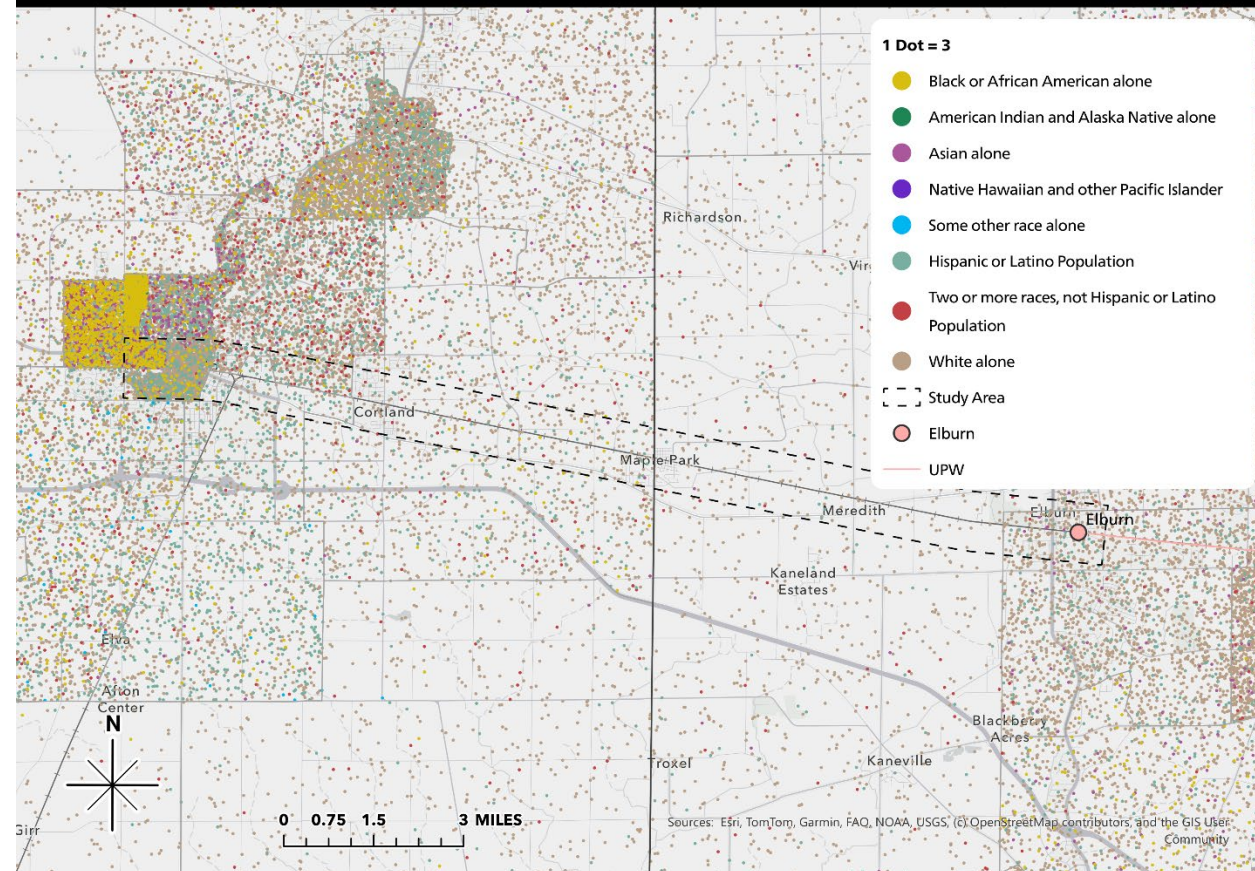


Demographics

Median Age

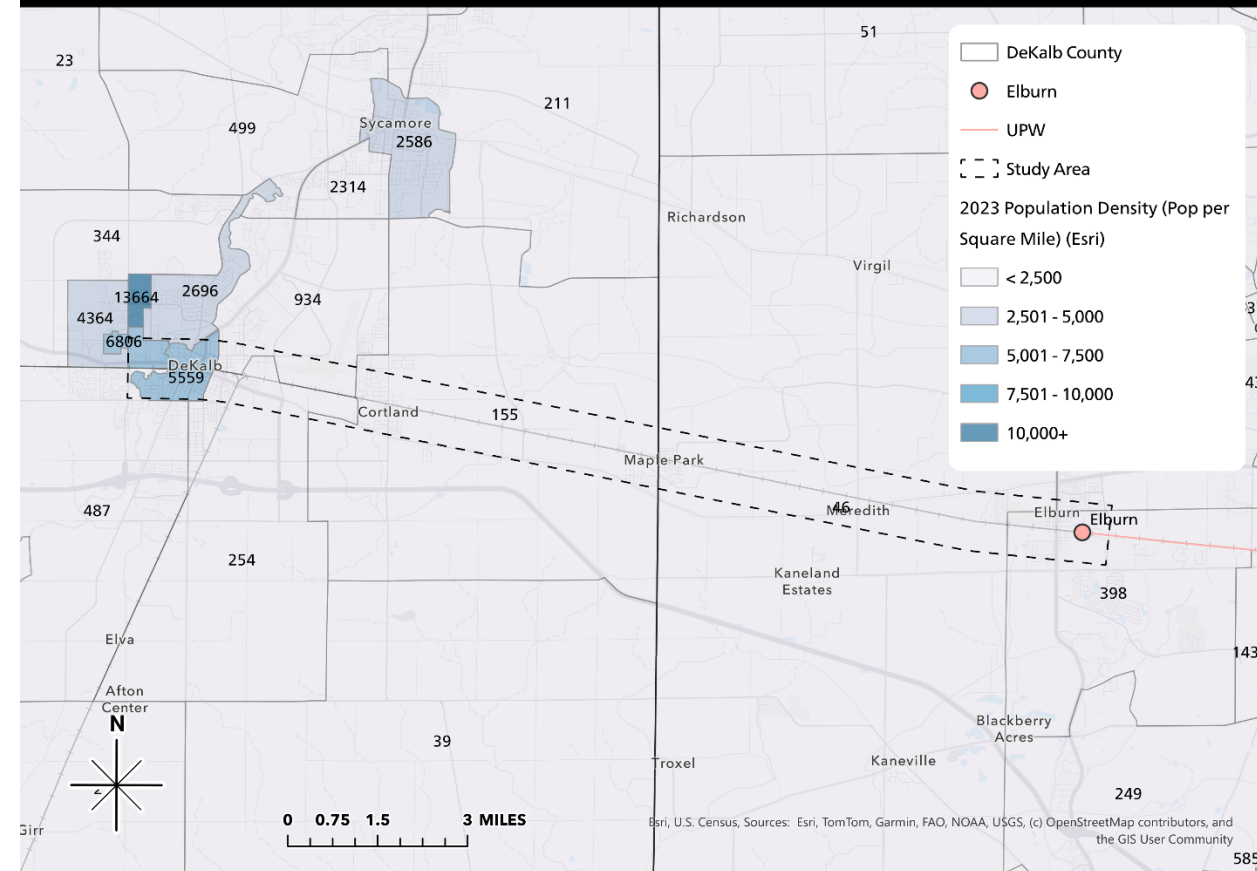


Race and Ethnicity

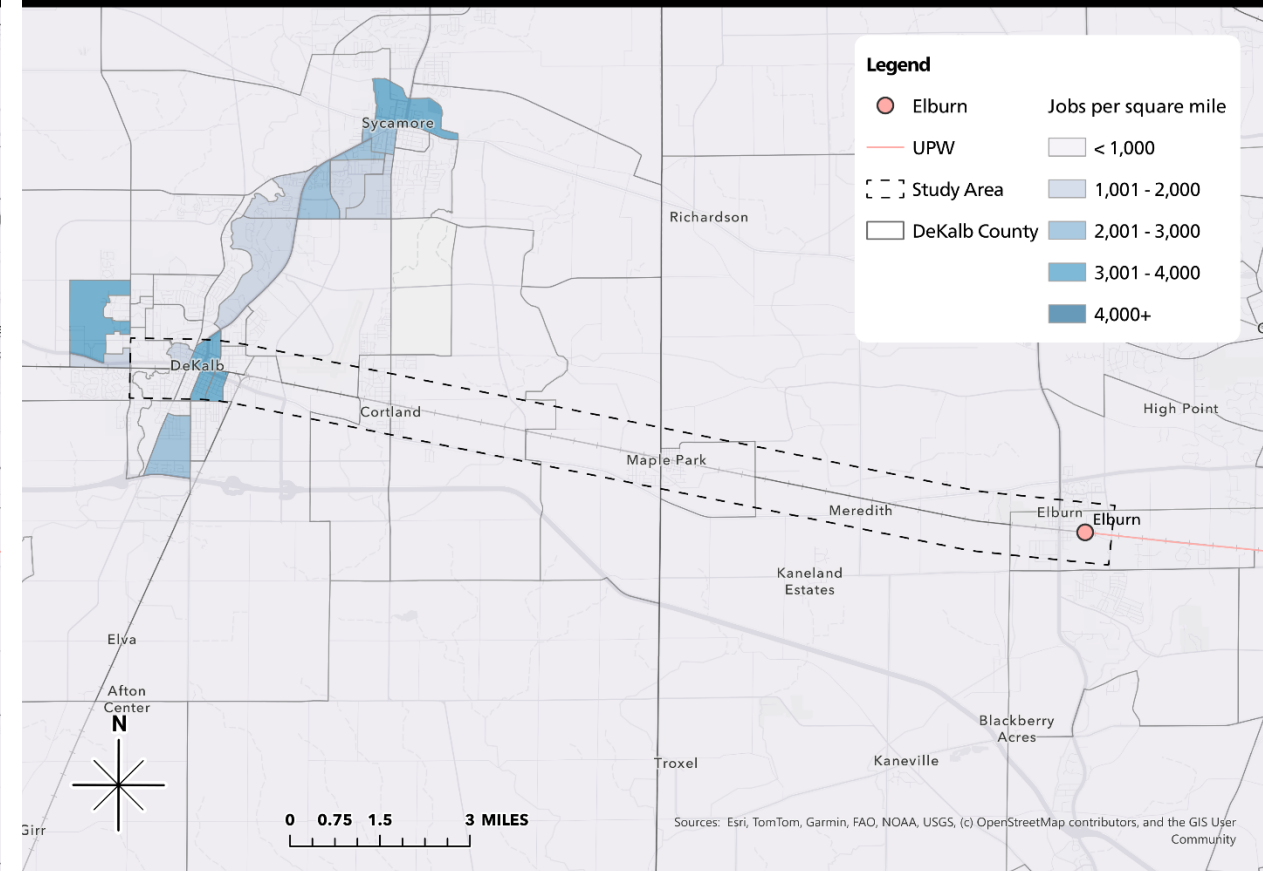


Demographics

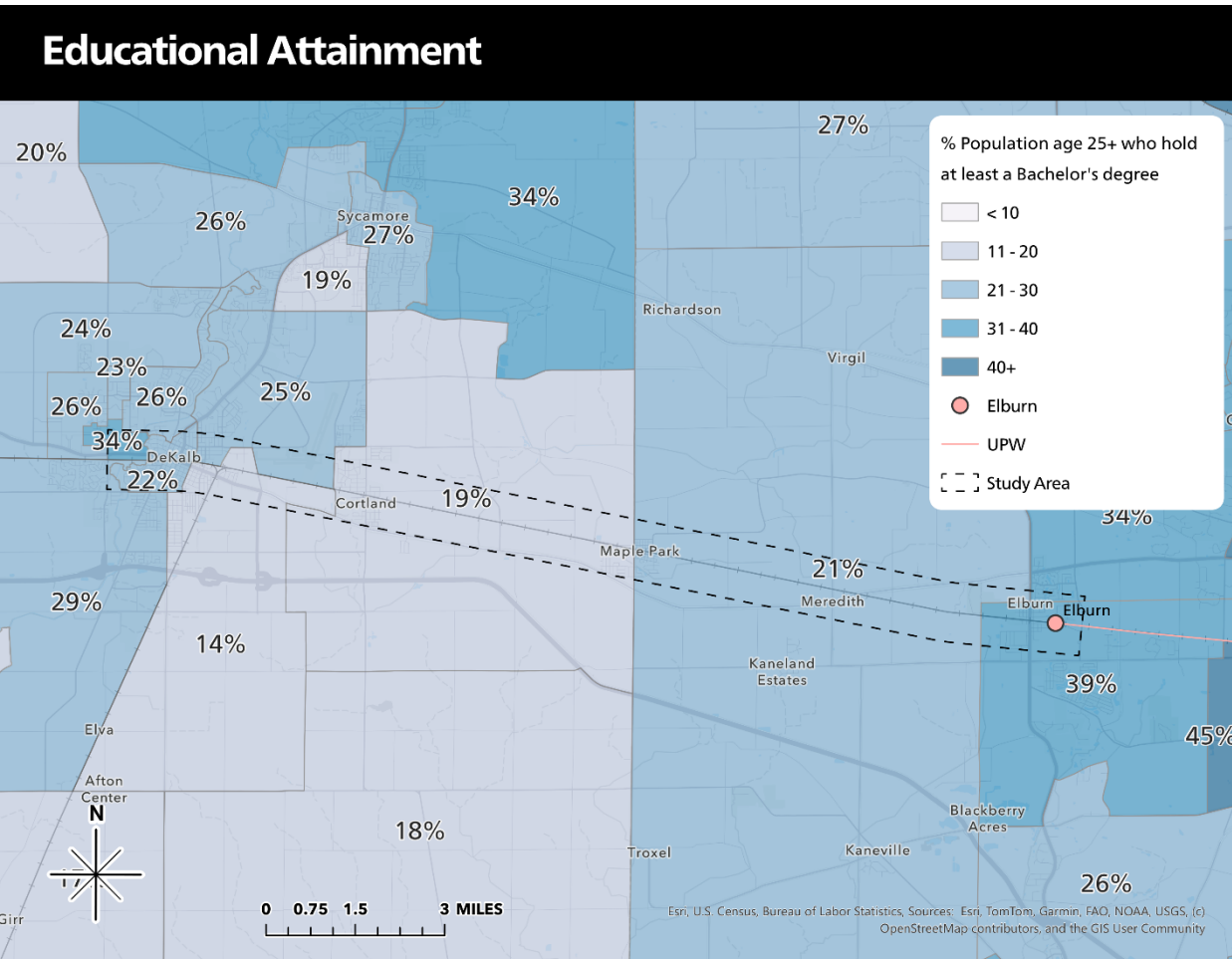
Residential Density



Employment Density



Demographics



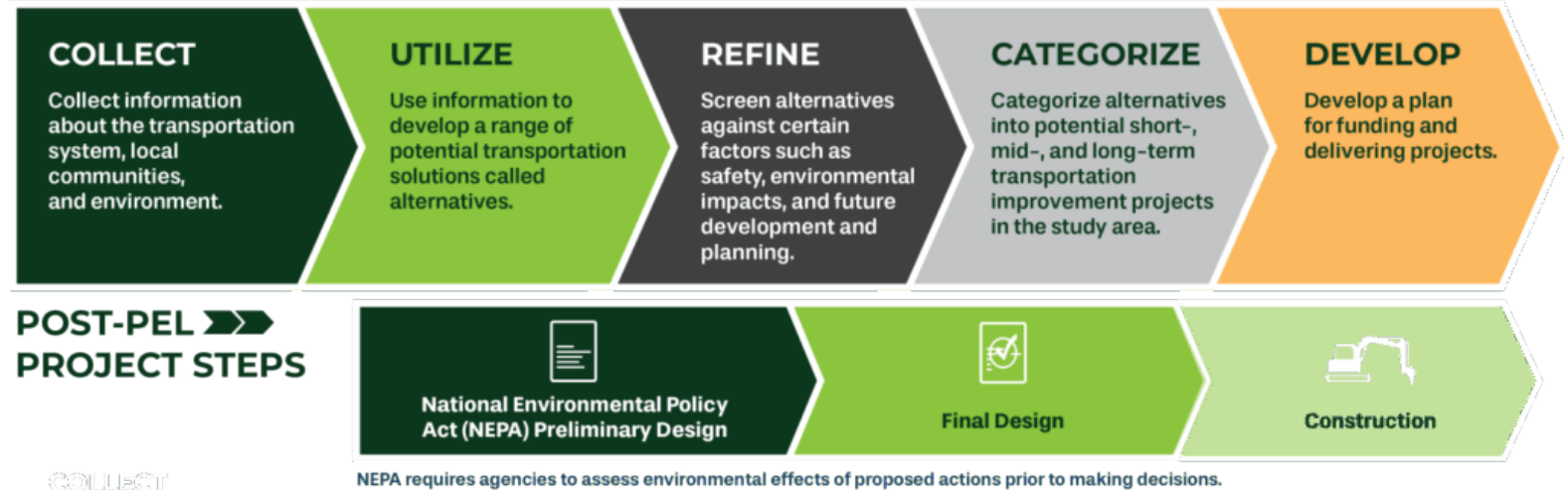
Next Steps: What is a PEL Study?

What is a Planning & Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study?

The PEL process considers environmental, community, and economic goals early on while planning future projects.

This process is outlined by the Federal Highway Administration and weighs:

- Transportation issues & priorities
- Environmental resources & concerns
- Stakeholder & public concerns



Source: Idaho Transportation Dept.

Funding & Partnership



TOTAL PROJECT COST:
~\$500,000 CONTRACT VALUE.



STATE SUPPORT: \$400,000 IDOT
GRANT (FTA 5303 FUNDING)



LOCAL CONTRIBUTION:
\$100,000 LOCAL MATCH
FUNDED VIA CITY OF DEKALB
AND NIU



Infrastructure & Route Realities

- **The Corridor:** Utilizes a 15-mile stretch of track owned by Union Pacific (UP) Railroad.
- **Key Upgrade Potentials:**
 - Construction of a third mainline track or improvements to existing siding alongside existing tracks.
 - Identification of DeKalb passenger terminal.
- **Estimated Capital/Operating Scale:** Prior studies noted major capital investments (\$258M–\$388M) and recurring operating budgets requiring regional funding solutions like a transit district

PEL Study Project Scope

PEL / Alternatives Analysis Plan

Public Involvement Plan and Outreach

Existing Conditions

Purpose and Need Statement

Evaluation Criteria for Alternatives

Define and Screen Alternatives

Alternatives Analysis Report

Determine Locally Preferred Alternative

Environmental Report

Implementation Plan

Request to Enter FTA Project Development

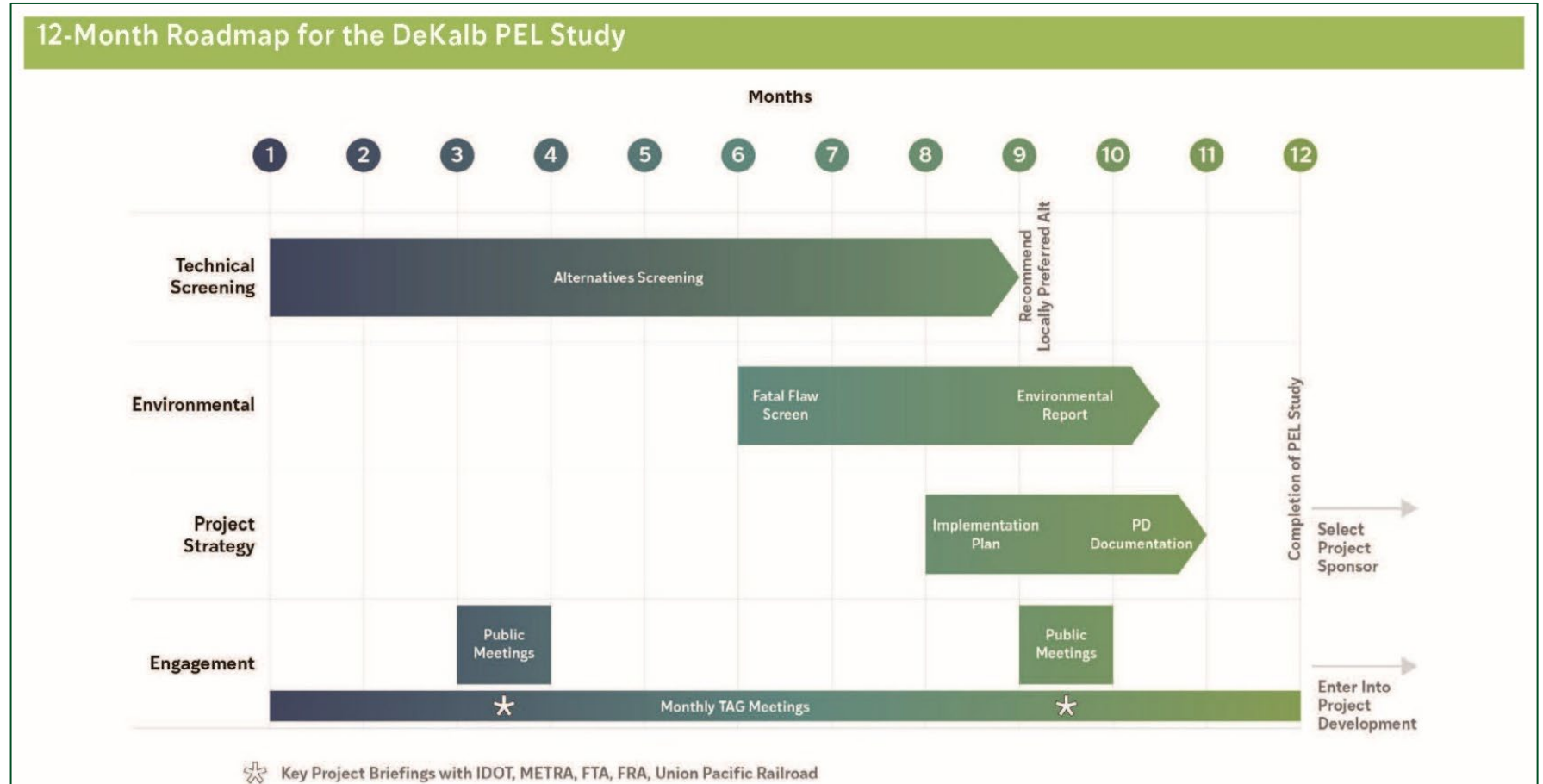
Final Report

Roadmap

Technical Screening

Environmental Screening

Project Roadmap



Desired Outcomes Discussion

Access

Economics

Equity

Environmental

FY 27 Rep. Underwood Community Project Funding Selection



Project Title: DeKalb
Metra Rail Extension
Preparation



Project Sponsor: City of
DeKalb Transit



**Amount
Requested:** \$1,200,000



Project: This funding
would be used to
advance the extension
of Metra commuter rail
service along the Union
Pacific West Line
between Elburn and
DeKalb, Illinois.



Questions?