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Abstract:

With a location right outside the Loop in Chicago, UIC is fortunate to have a variety of public transportation options that serve campus. However, UIC is also located at the junction of two major expressways, encouraging commuting by car.

As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, transportation planners expect people will both telecommute and drive more, migrating from public transportation. In Chicago, vehicular traffic is currently about 90% of its pre-pandemic levels, while transit ridership remains depressed by about 65%. At UIC, a significant shift toward private cars would have implications for university land choice, budgets, and climate action planning. To understand what scale of change to expect, UIC administered a return-to-work survey in August 2020, and gathered statistically significant data about staff expectations regarding their commute for the duration of 2020. Most academic research has been focused on regions or has relied on pre-pandemic understandings of travel behavior, so this research really filled a niche.

As the university reopens, UIC is making substantial changes to our transportation demand management and parking program. Many staff plan to switch from public transportation to driving, but only for the duration of the pandemic; UIC has responded to this knowledge by creating more commuter choice and working to emphasize the flexible nature of its parking and transportation programs to staff and students. UIC is collecting information about program implementation and iterating as the pandemic recovery unfolds, with the goal of ensuring that people return to (or adopt) sustainable commutes as part of their pandemic recovery process.

Using academic research, baseline survey research, and a pandemic-specific survey, UIC has been able to craft responsive programs that work both as pandemic response and as transportation demand management for the post-pandemic era.