



211th Street Park Forest Station Area Pedestrian Access Improvement Plan

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Transportation
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Metra



Project Background and Overview

This 211th Street Park Forest Station Area Access Improvement Plan, part of the RTA's Community Planning program, examines the Park Forest sections of the Metra 211th Street Electric Station, specifically addressing ways to improve access to and from the southeast parking lot in Park Forest, while establishing transit-oriented development (TOD) and pedestrian-friendly elements within the station area. As part of the plan development, the RTA convened a group of interested parties in October 2014 to examine, discuss and provide input regarding access improvements. Participating agencies included the Villages of Park Forest, Matteson and Olympia Fields; the RTA, Pace, Metra, CMAP, Cook County, the Active Transportation Alliance, and the South Suburban Mass Transit District. IDOT contributed to the recommendations of this report.

This plan builds on previous initiatives undertaken by the Village. These include:

- The recently completed CMAP Local Technical Assistance project that developed a comprehensive transportation network by identifying actions the Village can take to improve and enhance active transportation opportunities for bicyclists and pedestrians. The plan can be found here: [CMAP Park Forest Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan](#)
- The 2013 RTA Park Forest Developer Discussion Panel, in which the RTA and the Urban Land Institute convened a developer panel to offer guidance to the Village as they work to attract TOD investment near the Station. For more information visit the RTA RTAMS Page: [Park Forest Developer Panel RTAMS Page](#)
- The Park Forest/Lincoln Highway Station Transit-Oriented Development Implementation Study, completed in 2012, examined elements of the RTA Community Planning project in greater detail, providing an updated market study, a detailed streetscape plan, financial incentives, and marketing approaches based on the RTA-funded Community Planning project.
- The RTA Community Planning project: 211th Street Metra Transit –Oriented Development Study, which was completed in 2008, created a station area plan. For more information visit the RTA RTAMS Page: [211th St RTAMS Page](#)

While previous studies provide guidance for long term access improvements that are coupled with redevelopment initiatives, this Access Improvement Plan focuses on small scale, short term improvements that are based on current conditions and offer benefits to transit riders in the near term. The improvements recommended in this plan will create a multi-modal transit-oriented development (TOD) environment which should attract more riders to the station, facilitate walking, biking, and taking transit to the station, and encourage construction of new multifamily residences as well as possible convenience retail associated with the train station and surrounding neighborhood.

211th Street Metra Electric Station and Service Overview

The 211th Street Metra Station is located at Lincoln Highway/ US 30/ 211th Street and Olympian Way, at the Metra Electric Line Main Line railroad tracks. While the station building itself is located in Park Forest, the larger station area extends into the Villages of Park Forest, Matteson, and Olympia Fields. The service runs between Chicago’s Millennium Station and University Park. The station is located approximately 28 miles from downtown Chicago, and has a travel time to Millennium Station of one hour. Express trains provide a travel time of approximately 45 minutes. According to 2014 Metra data, average weekday boardings are 855.

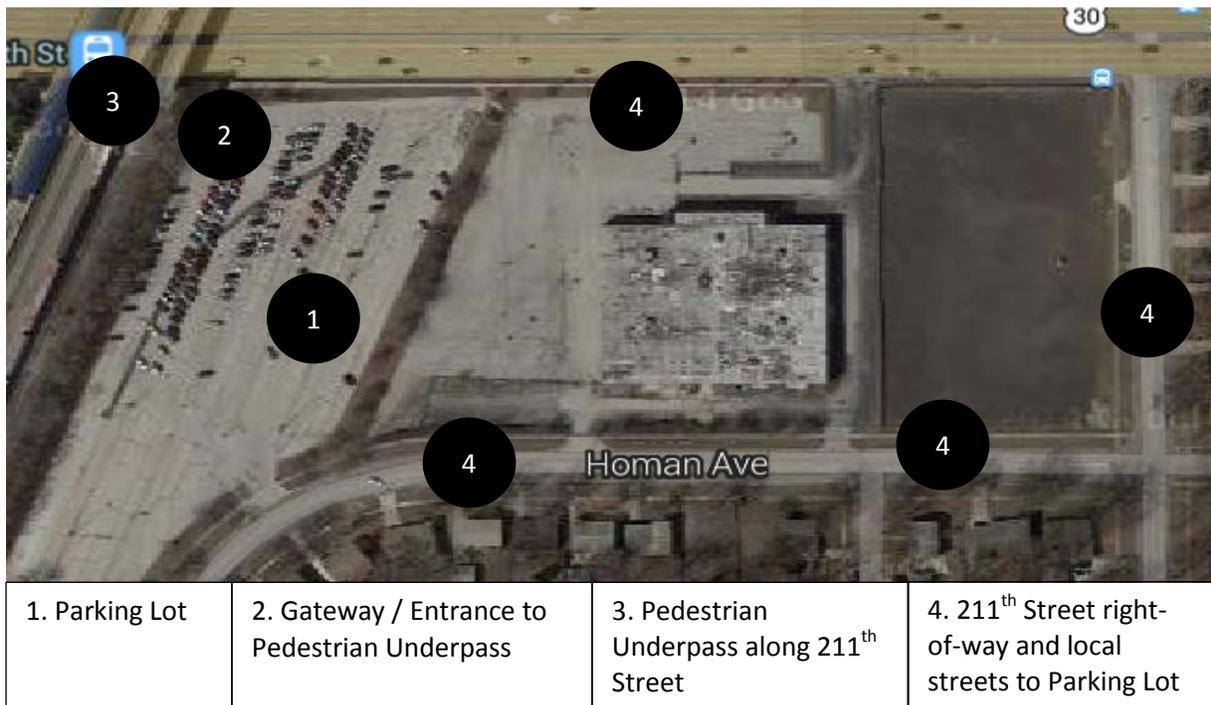
The Electric Line is unique amongst Metra service, as it is powered by electricity provided by overhead catenaries. All stations on the line are raised above grade. This provides the challenge of limited access to the station platforms. Additionally two inter-city freight tracks, owned by the Canadian National Railway, run on the east side of the commuter tracks. The Metra station entrances are located on the west side of tracks. Patrons of the Park Forest Parking Lot, as well as those arriving on foot or via bicycle must use a pedestrian walkway along the south side of 211th Street to walk under the railroad tracks in order to reach the station entrance.

The station building has a distinctive mid-century modern architectural style. It is recommended that the Village of Park Forest incorporate elements of this style into the recommendations of this plan.

Access Plan & Station Area Issues and Recommendations

The plan focuses on the following sub-sections of the Park Forest station area, as identified in the aerial below:

Exhibit 1: Station Area with Sub-Sections



1: Parking Lot

Due to the location, configuration, and parking space utilization rate of the Parking Lot, Park Forest has the unique opportunity to examine how this area can best accommodate current and future trends and conditions. The Parking Lot area has the potential to provide improved access and accommodations for those walking, bicycling, and driving to the Parking Lot, improve ADA access, and foster transit-oriented development while still providing enough parking spaces to serve auto demand.

The Parking Lot, owned by the Village of Park Forest, has a northern boundary along 211th Street, which is a commercial corridor, and a southern boundary along Homan Avenue, which is an established residential area. The Parking Lot is currently oriented toward automobile access, consisting of rows of marked auto parking spaces, in a configuration that does not compliment other users of the Parking Lot, such as walkers and bicycle riders. A majority of the parking spaces are not used on a consistent basis.

The Parking Lot has a current parking utilization rate of 46%. This underutilization is occurring for the following reasons:

- available and more convenient direct access parking at the north-west section of the 211th station area
- the close-by Matteson Metra station is a few blocks south of the Parking Lot
- perceived lack of easy access from the Park Forest Parking Lot to the Metra station entrance

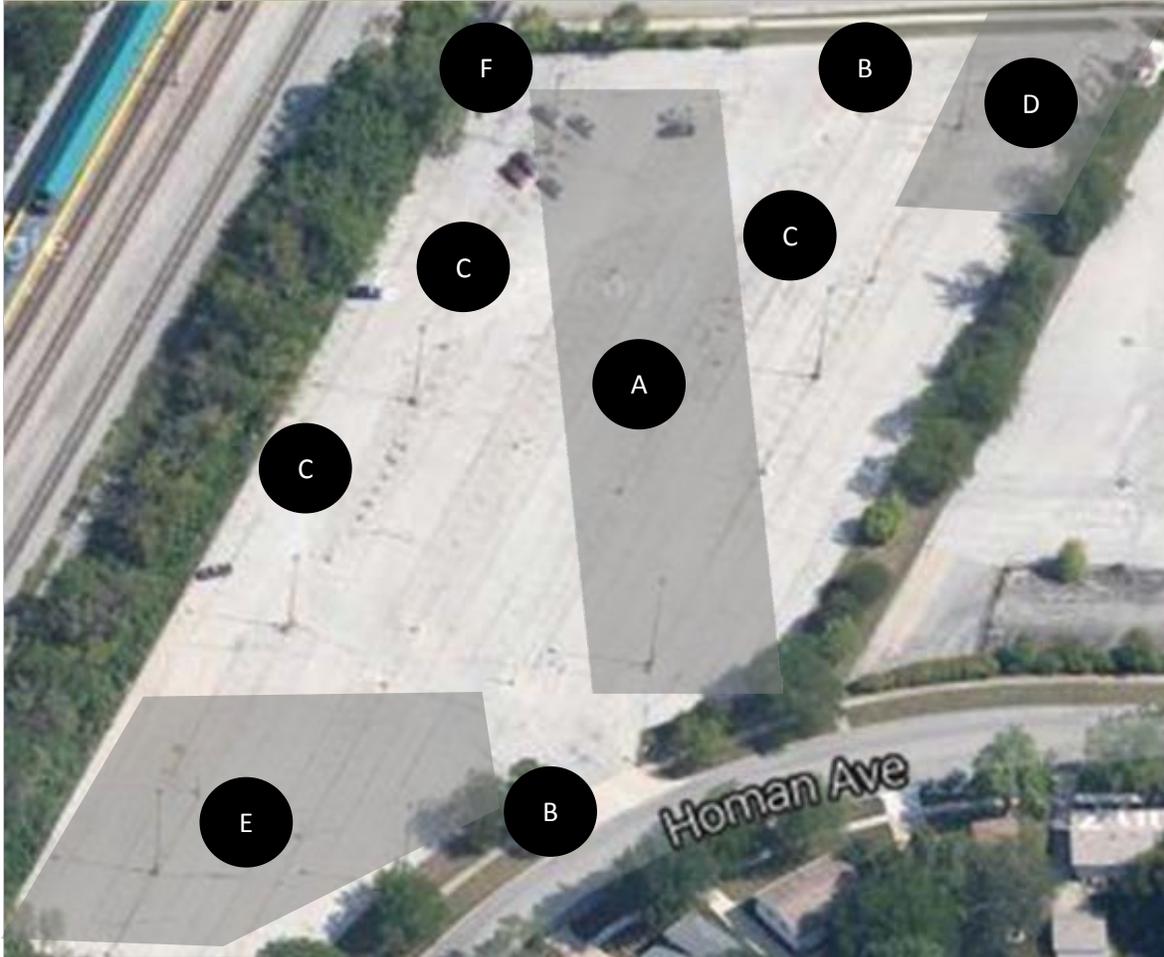
The current ADA parking area and access ramp are located on the very far northeast corner of the Parking Lot area. The location is approximately 280 feet from the Pedestrian Underpass, in the eastern-most location that seems to guide patrons away from the Metra station rather than towards the Metra station. This seemingly inconsistent location for the ADA parking area was selected to best accommodate the grade difference that exists between the Parking Lot and the sidewalk along 211th Street. The grade difference between the Parking Lot and sidewalk is at its lowest point on this eastern portion of the Parking Lot. Even though the ramp is located where the grade difference is at its lowest point, the relatively short length of the ramp creates a noticeable incline. A curb edge protector is in place as a safety feature, as the incline can cause a mobility aid such as a wheelchair to increase speed down the ramp, becoming unstoppable, and continue on into oncoming traffic on 211th Street. The curb edge protector will stop the wheelchair from entering into the street. The photograph in Exhibit 2 shows the ADA ramp with a curb edge protector, the increasing slope of the grade separation, and the distance between the ADA parking area and the entrance to the Pedestrian Underpass.

To address these concerns, the Parking Lot can be reconfigured by focusing on the following elements: improving pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular access and circulation; adding effective signage and lighting for pedestrians, bicyclists, and car drivers; identifying ADA related improvements; reducing the number of existing parking spaces; evaluating the need for multi-family residential and commercial uses to create a TOD environment; and creating a “Gateway”, which is addressed in the next section of this report, to serve as the parking lot activity point.

Exhibit 2: ADA ramp with a curb edge protector and sidewalk to Pedestrian Underpass



Exhibit 3: Parking Lot Improvements



<p>A: Create access path and reconfigure parking spaces as appropriate</p> 	<p>B: Add informational and directional wayfinding and signage</p> 	<p>C: Add pedestrian lighting throughout</p> 	<p>D: Reserve segment for future mixed-use commercial</p> 	<p>E: Reserve segment for future residential use</p> 	<p>F: Create Gateway Section</p> 
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Recommendations for the Parking Lot:

- A:** Create 10 foot wide access path that traverses the Parking Lot. This path will allow pedestrians and bicycle riders access to the pay box, bicycle parking, and Metra station area with minimal auto conflict. The final design of the access path will be in alignment with any reconfigured parking spaces
- B:** Add wayfinding and signage throughout the parking lot: these improvements will provide direction for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motor vehicles on how to navigate into and out of the Parking Lot, as well as to identify the location of the ADA parking, bicycle parking, pay box, and entrance to the Metra station. The wayfinding and signage would be both directional and informational
- C:** Provide pedestrian scale lighting throughout the Parking Lot area, along the access path, and dispersed among the parking spaces
- D:** Reserve a segment of underutilized Parking Lot space for future commercial use. Exact dimensions and access requirements to 211th Street will need to be determined with further study
- E:** Reserve a segment of underutilized Parking Lot space for future multi-family use. Exact dimensions will need to be determined with further study

Additional recommendations:

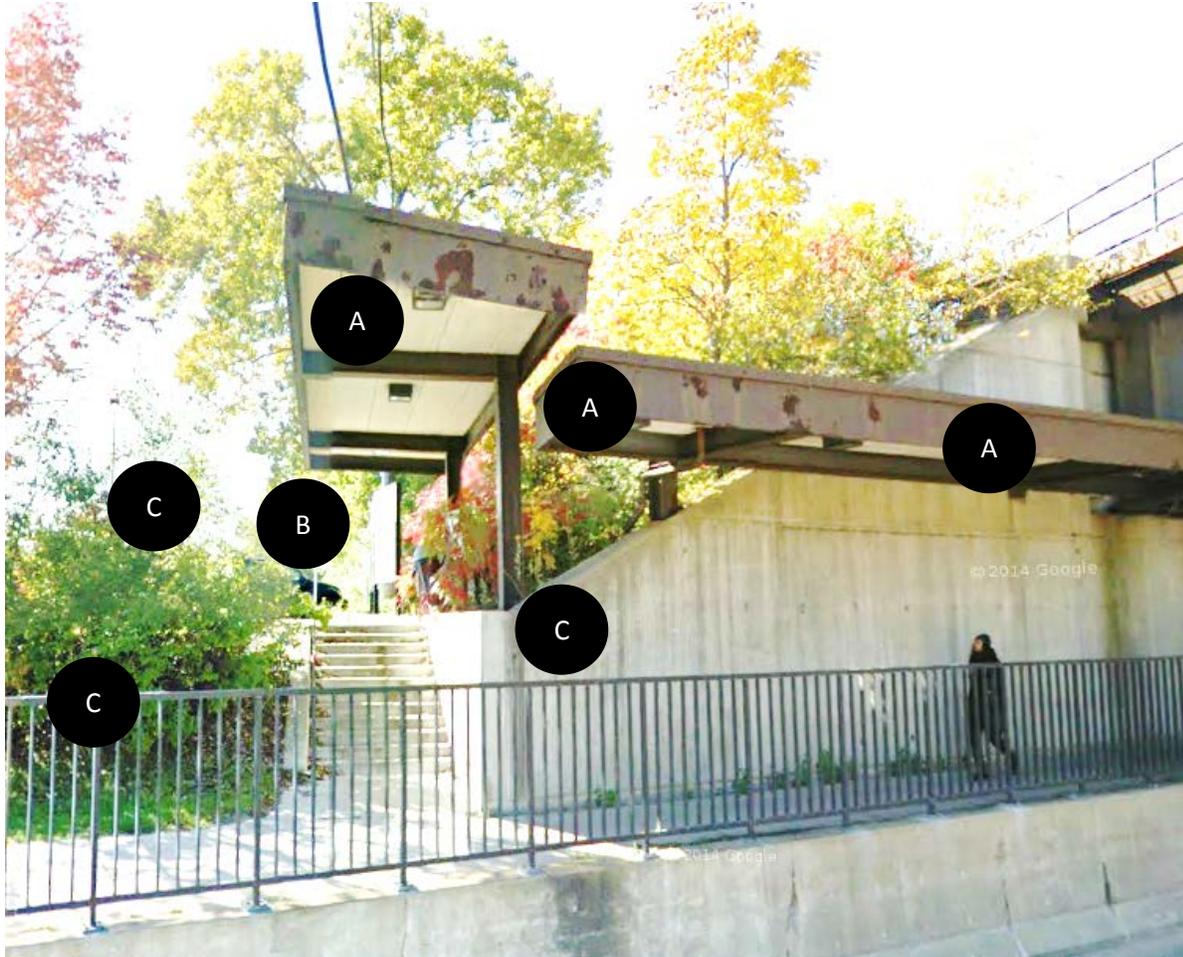
- Investigate best options to redesign, relocate and reconstruct the ADA parking area and ADA access ramp. The new ramp should be ADA compliant, have an increased length or unique shape to provide as flat a slope as possible, and be located as close to the Gateway as possible. Specific details to be determined through additional study
- Reconfigure, repave and restripe the Parking Lot surface to accommodate the access path, maximize parking and more efficiently locate the ADA parking spaces
- Create a Gateway section, as detailed below

2: Gateway

The Gateway serves as a transition point from the Parking Lot to the Pedestrian Underpass. This area is the Parking Lot “activity point”, and as such, can offer a centralized location for the activities such as bicycle parking, parking pay boxes, and access to the Metra station entrance. Currently, these activities are not clearly marked, are poorly organized, or are missing altogether. Additionally, there is a grade separation between the proposed Gateway and Pedestrian Underpass sections, which separates the Pedestrian Underpass to a level that cannot be seen from the Parking Lot, often times leaving new and infrequent users unsure of how to get to the Metra station entrance. The pay box structure is not well lighted or signed, and is not covered, possibly exposing users to inclement weather while making a payment. There is no bicycle parking in this area, which prevents riders from having easy access to the station. By covering the pay boxes; and adding brighter lighting, covered bicycle parking, and directional

signage, the space proposed for the Gateway can become clearly organized with defined functions. The Gateway will be a welcoming and friendly space for all users, and provide efficient flow and access between the Parking Lot and Pedestrian Underpass.

Exhibit 4: Gateway Improvements



<p>A: Intensify Lighting</p> 	<p>B: Cover amenities: Add bicycle parking, extend the overhang to cover bicycle parking. Install a “Bus Shelter” type covering for the pay box</p> 	<p>C: Add directional signage</p> 
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Recommendations for the Gateway:

A: Provide improved pedestrian lighting throughout the Gateway, including: overhang extensions at bicycle parking areas, the stairway, and the entrance to the Pedestrian Underpass. Install a security camera for added safety

B: Improve coverings and overhangs. Extend the overhang that currently exists over the stairway. Incorporate the architectural and design style of the west side of the railroad tracks into the Gateway. Use the extended overhang to provide coverings for bicycle parking. Paint existing overhang. Install a “bus shelter type” lighted covering to shelter the pay box area, which Metra will address by installing a Brasco type shelter and concrete pad at the pay box area. Add trash receptacles

C: Add informational and directional signage at the top of the Gateway for the following elements: pay box, bicycle parking, entrance to the Pedestrian Underpass, and Pace Bus Stop

C: Add informational and directional signage at the bottom of the Gateway pointing up to the following elements: bicycle parking, Parking Lot, ADA parking, and the Pace Bus Stop (note that signage to address the return trip will be posted in the Pedestrian Underpass)

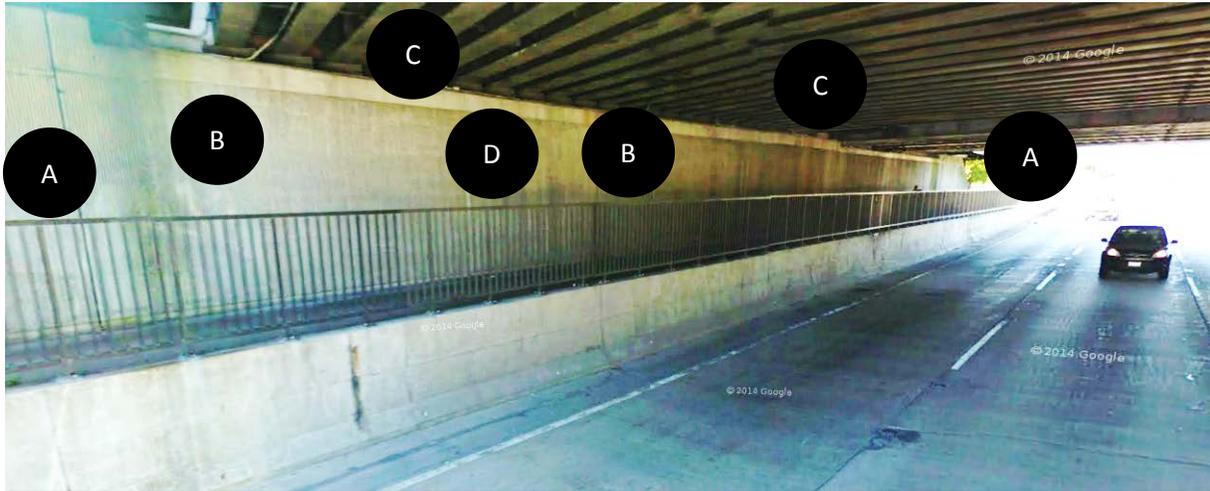
3: Pedestrian Underpass along 211th Street

The Pedestrian Underpass connects the Park Forest Parking Lot area to the Metra station entrance. It is located on the south side of the 211th Street right-of-way, and spans approximately 165 feet. It is the only accessway from the Parking Lot and east of the railroad tracks to the station area. All users of the Park Forest Parking Lot or the sidewalk east of the Metra tracks must utilize the Pedestrian Underpass to get to the Metra station entrance. As such, the Pedestrian Underpass area must accommodate bi-directional movement from users that may be walking, bicycling, using mobility aids, toting luggage, pushing strollers, or utilizing similar devices. The concrete pathway is raised above the roadway level, and has a protective fence to provide further separation from vehicular traffic. Due to the heavy volume of cars and trucks along 211th Street, the Pedestrian Underpass can be quite noisy, creating an unpleasant environment. Even though lighting currently exists, it is not bright enough to fully illuminate the pathway, resulting in a darkened and drab environment. Snow removal can have a negative impact on sidewalk conditions during periods of heavy snowfall. IDOT is responsible for snow removal along 211th Street, while the Village of Park Forest is responsible for clearing snow in the Pedestrian Underpass. Often times when IDOT plows the snow along 211th Street, a slushy mixture of snow gets pushed onto the Pedestrian Underpass, creating a difficult user experience when IDOT and Village snow removal efforts are not coordinated. Additionally, birds tend to populate the Pedestrian Underpass area, creating a potentially distracting experience for users.

By adding amenities such as wayfinding, sound reduction, improved lighting, and artwork, the underpass can be transformed from an eyesore to an environment that provides a pleasant user experience.

Addressing environmental issues such as bird protection and snow removal will further position the Pedestrian Underpass as a viable access option.

Exhibit 5: Pedestrian Underpass Improvements



<p>A: Add wayfinding and signage at both ends of Underpass</p> 	<p>B: Install noise adsorbing sound panels where appropriate</p> 	<p>C: Improve lighting</p> 	<p>D: Create mural-type artwork</p> 
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Recommendations for the Pedestrian Underpass are detailed below. It is suggested that all recommendations for the Pedestrian Underpass be further developed in cooperation with IDOT, as the specifications of some recommendations must conform to the FHWA Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD).

- A:** Add detailed wayfinding and signage at both west and east ends of the Pedestrian Underpass to serve users making the trip from the Gateway to the Metra station as well as users returning from the Metra station to the Gateway and Parking Lot areas
- B:** Explore options for sound reduction, such as noise reducing panels
- C:** Improve lighting by adding more wall-mounted light fixtures and increasing the intensity. The lighting should only be directed to the walls and sidewalk
- D:** Create mural-type artwork

Additional recommendations:

- Install screening that will protect users from birds that tend to nest in this area
- Work with IDOT to create snow removal options
- Improve maintenance of sidewalk by investigating best practices for similar situations, and explore drainage and guard rail options to abate snow that is plowed into the Underpass

4: 211th Street Right-of-Way and Local Streets to Parking Lot

This section consists of two segments: the 0.2 mile segment of 211th Street from the Pedestrian Underpass east to Indiana Street, and the 0.3 mile segment of local roads that starts at 211th Street and Indiana Street, follows Indiana Street to Homan Avenue, and continues along Homan Avenue to the Parking Lot entrance. Both of these segments can be better utilized to connect the east side residential areas to the station area. The 211th Street segment connects near-by residents to the Metra station, via direct access along the south side of 211th Street. A Pace bus stop for Route 357 – Lincoln Highway is located along this segment, on the southwest corner of 211th Street and Indiana Street. There is no shelter or bench at this bus stop (see Exhibit 7). A sidewalk provides access for a majority of the segment, from the 211th Street Pedestrian Underpass east. A missing sidewalk segment exists for approximately 250 feet, from the former commercial entrance to Indiana Street.

This 211th Street segment can be improved to provide greater pedestrian access to the Pace bus stop, the neighboring residential area, and the Pedestrian Underpass. Simple improvements of completing the missing sidewalk segment, adding bus stop amenities, and installing pedestrian scale lighting will create consistent and hospitable pedestrian access along 211th Street.

The Indiana Street/ Homan segment provides access to the Parking Lot. Currently, the route lacks wayfinding signage for pedestrians, bicyclists, and car drivers. Even though the Parking Lot affronts 211th Street, there is no entrance on 211th Street. There is no signage providing direction on how autos can enter the Parking Lot from 211th Street, Indiana Street, or even Homan Drive. Bicyclists on portions of Indiana Street or Homan Drive may have an equally difficult time locating the Parking Lot entrance due to the lack of signage. Wayfinding and directional signage in this section will improve users' ability to locate the Parking Lot. Access improvements to the Parking Lot therefore include wayfinding and directional signage for pedestrians, bicyclists, and car drivers.

Exhibit 6: 211th Street Right of Way East of Railroad Tracks and Local Streets Improvements



<p>A: Continue 211th Street sidewalk to Indiana Street</p> 	<p>B: Add a Pace Bus Shelter with bench at Indiana Street</p> 	<p>C: Add pedestrian lighting along sidewalks</p> 	<p>D: Add wayfinding and directional signage to Parking Lot for autos, bicycles, and pedestrians</p> 
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Recommendations for the 211th Street Right of Way and Local Streets are detailed below. It is suggested that all recommendations for the 211th Street segment be further developed in cooperation with IDOT, as the specifications of several recommendations must conform to the FHWA Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD).

A: Fill in sidewalk gap to create a continuous sidewalk network from the Pedestrian Underpass to Indiana Street, providing pedestrian access from the Pace Bus Stop and residential areas to the Metra station. New and existing sidewalk segments should be at least 5 feet wide, include a buffer from the roadway, and incorporate ADA improvements such as tactile strips, where appropriate

B: Install a Pace Bus Stop Shelter, pad and bench at the southwest corner of 211th Street and Indiana Street

C: Add pedestrian lighting along the 211th Street, Indiana Street, and Homan Street sidewalks

D: Add wayfinding and signage to direct drivers and bicyclists to the Parking Lot entrance

Exhibit 7: Current Pace Bus Stop at southwest corner of 211th Street and Indiana Street: no 211th Street sidewalk access, no bus shelter, no bench



Potential Funding Sources

The Village may consider the following funding and grant opportunities to fund aspects of the recommended improvements to the Park Forest Metra Station area. Partnerships with agencies such as Pace and Metra may also be a viable option for some of the report recommendations.

Agency	Program	Purpose	Program Description	Eligibility	Website
Cook County Bureau of Economic Development	Various	Housing and Economic Development: Capital, Planning, and Operating	Various programs including BUILT in Cook Loan Fund, Emerging Business Development Loan Fund, BUILT 50-40 Loan Program, Tax Incentives, No Cash Bid Program, and Business Incentives.	Various	http://blog.cookcountyil.gov/economicdevelopment/cook-county-economic-development-toolbox/
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)	Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ) & TAP Program	Transportation: Capital and Operating	This grant program provides funding for projects that improve air quality, such as pedestrian and bicycle facilities or projects promoting greater transit ridership, including new additional commuter parking. These federal funds are administered locally by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP).	Transportation agencies, counties, municipalities, townships, park districts, forest preserve districts, local unit of government, and library districts	http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/mobility/strategic-investment/cmaq
CMAP / IDOT	Surface Transportation Program (STP)	Transportation: Capital	Funding for road projects that improve public transportation or bicycle and pedestrian facilities. These are federal funds administered locally by CMAP.	Contact your CMAP Planning Liaison	http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/about/involvement/committees/advisory-committees/council-of-mayors/surface-transportation-program
Illinois Department of Transportation	Grants	Capital Infrastructure and Planning	IDOT has several programs that provide state assistance in improving highway and rail access improvements to new or expanding industrial, distribution or tourism developments. The focus of these programs is the retention and creation of Illinois jobs. Funding may be available for transportation improvement projects related to facilities that provide direct access to economic development projects.	Local government or state agency	https://www.illinois.gov/dceo/ExpandRelocate/Incentives/grants/Pages/Biz-Idot.aspx