Oak Park enjoys the service of two train lines and seven stations: three Blue Line stations at Austin, Oak Park and Harlem and four along the Green Line elevated tracks at Austin, Ridgeland, Oak Park and Harlem. Few suburbs in the region enjoy such extensive access to fixed rail transit. At the same time auto traffic continues to grow along suburban arterials and freeways – especially at peak commuting times. The best traffic reduction strategy finds ways to convince people to use alternative modes of travel.

Transit commuting held steady among Oak Parkers during the 1990s at about 22 percent of all trips. Although above average for most communities, local reliance on transit remains well below current transit capacity. Transit use could rise quickly if the right incentives are applied to enhance demand. In addition, since commuting accounts for only about one in four trips, attracting demand for shopping, social and recreational trips could also increase transit ridership.

Developing housing and commercial activity near rail transit stops that caters to residents and customers from outside Oak Park who already travel by rail represents another strategy. Attracting newcomers requires changes to the current mix of residential and commercial uses in the districts adjoining each station. The crucial ingredients include increased density and attention to public amenities. If people need only walk a short distance from their home to take the train the convenience level remains high. Additionally, people will be more likely to walk where they feel secure and the surroundings offer interesting and beautiful things to see along the way.

New development near rail stations does increase densities, but increasing density alone does little to improve a commercial district and surrounding neighborhood. There are many innovative ways to organize the scale, form and texture of developments to weave increased density into the fabric of the existing infrastructure and housing. Good planning offers useful advice about how to envision and implement these innovations. Good development takes the planning to heart and proceeds in a deliberate and phased manner. The long term sustainability of suburban communities relies crucially upon a mix of residential and commercial densities tied to alternative transportation modes.