

## **Morgan Street 'L' Station Helping Fuel West Loop Boom, CTA Says** **July 11, 2014 | By Josh McGhee**

CHICAGO — A section of the West Loop once riddled with vacant stores has become a booming section of the city thanks in part to the Morgan Street "L" Station, the CTA and the local alderman agreed.

Findings from an informal CTA study showed that since the station opened in May 2012, residential and business development in the surrounding neighborhood has continued at a "faster pace than nearly all other markets within the city during the post-recession period," CTA spokeswoman Catherine Hosinski said.

"Our Morgan Street station is a great example that if we provide clean, safe transportation [hubs], that can help attract new businesses to the area," Hosinski said. "That increases the neighborhood's vibrancy and also attracts new employers, whether it be small businesses or even large companies like Google."

The CTA conducted its study by analyzing information available through the City of Chicago's data portal and comparing the number of building and business licenses issued in the two years before the station opened, a 21-month-period during the construction of the station and after the station opened. The CTA also used ridership information and commercial rental data, Hosinski said.

The study showed:

- A more than 20 percent increase in new business licenses.
- New construction and demolition permits spiked from one to 15. (The new construction/demolition permits issued after the opening of the station were compared to a 21-month period during the construction from August 2010 through May 2012)
- Average weekday ridership increased 30 percent between May 2013 and May 2014, according to information reflecting a 12-month rolling average over a 36-month period.
- Average weekend ridership increased more than 20 percent.

"It's been a big plus for the community. I'm glad I stood with the community to make this happen," said 27th Ward Ald. Walter Burnett Jr., who said he pushed to use Tax Increment Financing money to help pay for the project.

The only way to fund the project was with the help of TIF money, and the new station would help bring in economic development to the area, Burnett told the naysayers.

"I told them, 'It's going to pay for itself,' and it has," he said. "One of the main reasons [Google] came was for the transportation in the area. Now more businesses are moving, and it helps current business owners."

In June 2013, Google announced it would move its regional headquarters to the West Loop in part because of the new station. A stream of restaurants also opened within walking distance of the station,

including Fulton Market Kitchen, The Garage, Vera Chicago, Graham Elliot Bistro and Green Street Meats.

The station's impact was felt in the area almost immediately after plans for its construction were announced in August 2010, Hosinski said. In the 21 months before the station opened, the number of new business licenses doubled, commercial properties that sat vacant for years were leased, and new spaces have been constructed, Hosinski said.

The station "is a strong and recent example of how increasing access to modern, affordable public transportation creates local economic growth," Hosinski said. "Since the Morgan station opened two years ago, it has been a key factor, among others, in attracting new residential developments and businesses to the West Loop neighborhood."

While Hosinski admitted that the West Loop was showing signs of becoming a booming neighborhood before the station was built, she said its presence has contributed to the migration of commuters and residents to the area.

"You look at the heart of most of Chicago neighborhoods and you're going to see a CTA station," Hosinski said. The Morgan Street Station "is helping transform the West Loop from a destination to a community."

After the real estate crash, the West Loop "was kind of stagnant. The "L" stop came after the crash and helped stabilize the community," Burnett said. "Now you have condo owners back, and more developers at the table trying to develop."

He also said setting aside spots for people in the community who wanted their kids to go to Skinner West Elementary School, 1260 W. Adams St., has brought families to the West Loop.

"It's all hand-in-hand: accessibility and educational things for the families to live here. Everyone's benefiting from it," he said. "It's close to Downtown with easy access to transportation. It's a no-brainer."