



Project Coordination Office

Chicago, IL



Division of Infrastructure Management
Project Coordination Office

COLLINS
ENGINEERS INC.



Abstract/Executive Summary

Chicago has become a leader in urban infrastructure management by prioritizing the efficient use and coordination of its Right of Way (ROW), one of the city's most critical public assets. The Project Coordination Office (PCO), administered by Collins Engineers, Inc. and under the direct supervision of the Chicago Department of Transportation Division of Infrastructure Management (CDOT DIM), provides effective management of this resource. Through innovative tools like dotMaps and collaboration with city agencies, utility providers, contractors, and community members, the PCO proactively mitigates project conflicts, streamlines citywide construction coordination, and creates a reduction in restoration material wasted due to duplication.

This paper shares how Chicago's adaptive strategies in ROW coordination optimize urban infrastructure, leveraging technological innovation, close collaboration between city agencies and utility providers, and efficient multimodal transportation planning. Case studies—including the 2024 Democratic National Convention, the annual Chicago Marathon, and recurring local-level block parties and festivals—demonstrate how the PCO addresses complex coordination challenges, benefiting both large-scale events and community-level activities.

By examining the PCO's practices, this paper underscores that proactive ROW management not only enhances urban efficiency and resilience but also serves as a replicable model for cities seeking to maximize public assets and meet the evolving needs of their communities.

Overview

INTRODUCTION

The irony of urban infrastructure lies in its dual nature: the most conspicuous attributes of a city—its roadways—are also among its most inconspicuous yet vital public assets. Roadways are essential to daily life for millions, serving as both transportation corridors and critical infrastructure hubs. Their protection, maintenance, and improvement are not only central to public governance but also a fundamental mission for local institutions tasked with preserving their integrity.

Construction progress



Public roadways, however, are far more than surfaces for transportation—they are the protective covering of a vast network of critical utilities. Beneath the asphalt, stone pavers, and concrete lies the infrastructure that powers and sustains urban life for over 2.7 million City of Chicago residents: water and sewer mains delivering clean water and removing waste; gas lines and electrical conduits supplying energy to homes and businesses; and fiber optic cables connecting residents to the digital world. These systems are managed not only by public agencies but also by several private utility companies, each with their own essential infrastructure to maintain. The installation and maintenance of these utilities, while essential, inevitably disrupt this shared public good. This makes it all the more critical to safeguard the long-term integrity of the Right of Way (ROW) by strategically coordinating utility operations managed by private stakeholders and public agencies with roadway preservation efforts led by local governments.

In Chicago, this coordination is made possible by the Project Coordination Office (PCO), administered by Collins Engineers, Inc. under the direct supervision of the Chicago Department of Transportation Division of Infrastructure Management (CDOT DIM). The PCO plays a pivotal role in aligning the city's ROW maintenance with the management of its underground assets, reducing conflicts, minimizing disruptions, and extending the lifespan of public infrastructure.

This responsibility becomes even more pressing ahead of large-scale events—such as the 2024 Democratic National Convention and the annual Bank of America Chicago Marathon—both of which place intense demands on the city's infrastructure. Smaller, block-level gatherings, including the neighborhood block parties and festivals that define Chicago's vibrant communities, also require precise coordination to prevent service disruptions and preserve public safety. Through strategic planning and execution, the PCO helps sustain the infrastructure that makes Chicago accessible, efficient, and prepared for events of all scales.

The following sections outline the PCO’s comprehensive coordination strategies—from its daily management of utility operations to the proactive measures it takes ahead of large-scale and block-level events. By leveraging technology, fostering cross-agency collaboration with private utility providers, and streamlining communication, the PCO plays a key role in strengthening the reliability and resilience of Chicago’s ROW.

PCO facilitating the weekly Focus Group Meeting (FGM)



CDOT’S PROJECT COORDINATION OFFICE

Cities of all sizes face the ongoing challenge of managing public way projects while minimizing disruptions caused by the open cutting of streets and traffic control measures required to install and maintain critical underground utilities. Even short-term sidewalk or lane closures can inconvenience residents, commuters, and businesses, and these frustrations only multiply when construction returns soon after previous work. A lack of coordination among the independent renewal and maintenance efforts of various utility stakeholders and public agencies can lead to inefficiencies and resource duplication, deepening public frustration and creating unnecessary disruption in the public way

Chicago’s urban landscape adds another layer of challenge. Each year, the city develops infrastructure improvement plans and works alongside a complex landscape of utility-led projects pursuing their own schedules, all while hosting major events like the 2024 Democratic National Convention, the NASCAR Chicago Street Race (2023–2025), and the annual Chicago Marathon (since 1979). These events are vital to revitalizing the urban core, attracting both residents and visitors. However, they also intensify the challenge of preserving the accessibility and integrity of the public ROW while accommodating necessary subsurface improvements and installations.

To tackle these complexities, the Chicago Department of Transportation Division of Infrastructure Management (CDOT DIM) established the Project Coordination Office (PCO). Since 2012, Collins Engineers, Inc. has administered the PCO, developing lasting processes to coordinate construction activities throughout Chicago. For over a decade, the PCO has successfully streamlined public way infrastructure oversight and also built something even more valuable: an institution rooted in trust, collaboration, and shared goals.

The PCO’s success stems from a combination of deep technical expertise and a collaborative, coordination-first culture. Its multidisciplinary team—including civil engineers, urban planners, and field specialists—brings a wide range of skills spanning program management, utility review, traffic operations, and field reporting and documentation. Yet technical expertise alone is not what makes the PCO effective—it is the relationships built over time. The PCO

has cultivated a cooperative environment where public agencies and private utility providers align with a shared vision of respectful coordination, supported by the PCO's recognition and enforcement of CDOT's Rules and Regulations. This acknowledgment of the PCO's authority has helped build trust and has been a key contributor to their overall effectiveness. Private utility companies recognize that aligning subsurface activities benefits them directly, reducing restoration costs on necessary service installations while preventing delays. Meanwhile, residents across all of the City's 50 wards gain from improvements to ROW infrastructure, reliable services, and more efficient use of taxpayer dollars. Beyond day-to-day coordination, this trust extends to large-scale event planning and operational continuity. As agencies and utility providers experience the reliability of PCO-led coordination on routine projects, they come to rely on these processes when preparing for major events. Whether managing the complexities of citywide infrastructure upgrades, high profile events like the Democratic National Convention, or smaller-scale neighborhood events such as block parties, the PCO acts as a central clearinghouse, mediating between stakeholders and leveraging technology to maintain a bird's-eye view of ongoing work and ensuring the right parties are engaged at the right time.

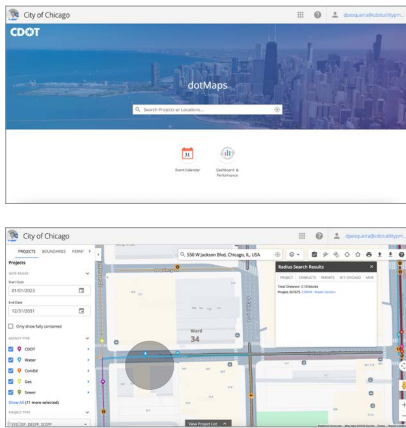
*Lead service line replacement
(NRDC, 2024)*



At the core of it all, the PCO stands at the intersection of subsurface infrastructure and Chicago's bustling above-ground operations, working to keep the City's streets functional, efficient, and resilient—no matter the scale of the event or project. Achieving this requires a structured approach to coordination, real-time data tools, and continuous stakeholder engagement. The PCO utilizes key technologies to monitor, analyze, and plan ROW activities, ensuring minimal disruptions while maximizing efficiency. By integrating these tools into a comprehensive workflow, the PCO facilitates seamless communication between public agencies and private utility providers.

The following sections outline the PCO's step-by-step approach to coordination, which involves continuous monitoring throughout a project's life cycle. From plan reviews and permitting oversight to real-time collaboration with stakeholders, the PCO supports project delivery while minimizing disruptions and maintaining the integrity of Chicago's infrastructure.

dotMaps interface



OUC PROJECT WORKFLOW

Effective coordination of public ROW projects in Chicago begins with the submission of each agency's multi-year capital construction program, known as a Capital Improvement Program (CIP), and its projected schedule to CDOT. These programs are submitted in a standardized data format, which the PCO compiles, maps, and visualizes using dotMaps—a geospatial tool designed to centralize project tracking and conflict mitigation. DotMaps is a cloud-based GIS platform that provides an interactive, real-time view of planned infrastructure projects. This tool enables public and private stakeholders to proactively identify and resolve potential conflicts before they impact construction timelines. For public-facing transparency, CDOT also maintains ChiStreetWork, an online infrastructure map portal that allows residents to view construction projects, special events, and street impacts citywide. ChiStreetWork supports coordination by making infrastructure activity more accessible to the public, while also providing a broader view of how different efforts may intersect across neighborhoods.

The Office of Underground Coordination (OUC), housed within the CDOT Division of Infrastructure Management, is the City of Chicago's centralized authority for reviewing work that impacts the subsurface public way. Its primary role is damage prevention: ensuring that utility and construction projects do not interfere with existing underground infrastructure. To that end, the OUC conducts plan reviews for all proposed work involving excavation or disturbance below the ROW, coordinating across a network of 29 public and private member agencies. Projects that require an OUC review and the subsequent process for submitting are detailed in the CDOT Rules and Regulations for Construction in the Public Way (2019). These projects are required to submit their full design package for review through the City's electronic document management platform. The PCO tracks these submissions as part of its coordination process, helping agencies proactively resolve conflicts before final permits are issued.

The PCO supports this mission by integrating OUC-reviewed project data alongside CIPs, event logistics, and other ROW considerations into dotMaps and its broader coordination framework. By aligning with the OUC's rigorous standards and workflow, the PCO reinforces a citywide culture of damage prevention and collaborative project planning—ensuring safer, more efficient use of Chicago's public way.

PCO'S UTILITY COORDINATION

To manage this complexity, the PCO identifies and resolves “conflicts”: instances where two or more projects overlap in location, timing, or scope. While the OUC focuses on subsurface issues like utility strikes or encroachments, the PCO's coordination extends to surface-level conflicts. These may include misaligned restoration schedules, staging conflicts, or cases where completed roadway surfaces are at risk of being reopened by subsequent work. The PCO uses dotMaps to detect potential conflicts across a range of data sources, including CIPs, OUC submissions, as well as active or proposed permits. Identified conflicts are translated into tabular reports that are shared with affected utilities and agencies to facilitate scheduling updates and coordination discussions.

CDOT construction crews resurfacing street with asphalt



Once a conflict is logged, PCO staff coordinate with affected public agencies, private utilities, and private developers to confirm project schedules, scopes, and potential impacts. Communication methods range from email and shared tracking documents to formal meetings and agreements. While some conflicts are resolved with minimal exchange, others may require the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). These documents consolidate restoration responsibilities across agencies and aim to reduce cost, preserve street quality, and improve pedestrian, cyclist, and motorist access by memorializing that mobilization for restoration is only to occur once following the completion of all other work.

The PCO also leads the development of Perimeter Restoration Agreements (PRAs) on behalf of CDOT's Public ROW Inspections unit. These exhibits establish restoration requirements around private developments that trigger CDOT criteria. Whether drafting an MOU or PRA, PCO staff must enforce CDOT's Rules and Regulations for Construction in the Public Way, while working to uphold the long-term integrity of the ROW and seeking equitable agreements between affected parties.

The PCO's coordination approach is responsive by design; tailored to the urgency and frequency of emerging conflicts. Whether a time-sensitive construction risk or a longer-term sequencing challenge, their communication strategies are adaptive so that stakeholders are engaged at the right moment with the right level of detail.

Beyond resolving technical conflicts, the PCO supports broader coordination efforts by convening regional and topical meetings that bring together key stakeholders in the public ROW. For example, the PCO, on behalf of the City, hosts a weekly meeting to bring together CDOT and other city departments and utility companies performing work in the city's highly congested central business district to specifically address project updates and mitigate construction

issues as they arise. The PCO also serves as a central participant in a weekly forum led by CDOT and hosted at the Office of Emergency Management and Communications (OEMC), where it helps identify potential traffic impacts from construction and supports the mitigation of issues related to special events or other high-impact activities involving city and regional stakeholders.

Final coordination efforts include PCO field visits to confirm that completed work adheres to approved OUC plans, restoration standards outlined in MOUs or PRAs, and CDOT Rules and Regulations. As part of this process, the PCO also plays a role in memorializing recent restoration efforts to the public ROW by supporting the implementation of moratoriums. These moratoriums protect recently completed infrastructure by restricting non-emergency impacts for a defined period of time to preserve the quality, safety, and longevity of the City's investments.

Through these layered and evolving processes, the PCO demonstrates its growing capacity to address the infrastructure coordination challenges unique to a large and dynamic city like Chicago. These innovations have positioned the PCO to anticipate and respond to increasingly demanding conditions. This same approach underpins the PCO's work in event-based coordination, where tailored solutions are required to manage utility and space impacts for large-scale events and local community celebrations alike.

PCO field team capturing the status of a street



Case Studies



In one instance, the City prioritized reopening the renovated CTA Damen Green Line station ahead of the DNC, but construction at the nearby CHA Westhaven Park Apartments, located within the moratorium zone, was running behind schedule. With paving required before CTA's grand opening, and the risk of federal law enforcement ordering the site cleared if it appeared to pose a security concern, the PCO worked closely with all parties to bring the site into compliance and protect both projects from further delay.

In a city as vibrant and event-rich as Chicago, public ROW coordination does not stop at infrastructure; it must also respond to the unique demands of the city's dynamic cultural, political, and recreational calendar. From internationally watched events like the 2024 Democratic National Convention to beloved citywide traditions like the Bank of America Chicago Marathon, and from bustling neighborhood festivals to grassroots block parties, each event requires deliberate, proactive planning to minimize conflicts, maintain public safety and access to critical services. The PCO plays a central role in this work, helping to identify conflicts early, align stakeholders, and keep the city moving; whether it's hosting the world or celebrating a neighborhood. The following case studies highlight how this coordination takes shape across three different scales of event activity.

CASE STUDY 1: DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION (DNC) 2024 – COORDINATION AT A NATIONAL SCALE

Hosting the 2024 Democratic National Convention placed Chicago on a global stage, bringing tens of thousands of visitors, international media, dignitaries, and heightened security to the heart of the city. For the PCO, this meant coordinating an unprecedented volume of activity across public and private entities, all within a compressed timeframe and under intense scrutiny.

Unlike standard construction coordination, which often follows a routine permitting and conflict resolution workflow, the DNC required an adaptive, event-specific strategy. The PCO supported CDOT's efforts by helping balance the needs of federal, state and local government agencies, in addition to other utility and public way stakeholders, while minimizing disruption to ongoing city functions. Key challenges included managing work moratoria, securing the public ROW, real-time adjustments, and public communications. To meet these demands, the PCO relied heavily on dotMaps, the City's centralized GIS platform for project coordination and conflict mitigation. The platform allowed staff to layer event footprints onto existing and planned infrastructure work, flag potential conflicts early, and generate detailed views of how event logistics would interact with the built environment. dotMaps became an essential real-time decision-making tool, helping the PCO visualize impacts, share updates across agencies, and coordinate responses under evolving conditions.

This technology-driven approach allowed the PCO to serve as a centralized convener, bridging the gap between infrastructure demands and public-facing needs, while demonstrating Chicago's capacity to host global events without sacrificing operational excellence.

CASE STUDY 2: CHICAGO MARATHON

Unlike one-time events like the DNC, the Bank of America Chicago Marathon is a recurring, high-impact event that tests the city's operational coordination year after year. With over 45,000 runners passing through 29 neighborhoods and hundreds of thousands of spectators lining the route, the Chicago Marathon presents complex operational challenges that few events rival. While many cities successfully host large-scale races, Chicago's PCO offers a model for how a centralized coordination body can enhance planning, reduce conflicts, and streamline communication across agencies, contributing to the Marathon's safe and seamless execution.

Open trench by agency and private development ahead of Chicago Marathon



In the months leading up to race day, the PCO plays a central role in keeping the 26.2-mile route safe, accessible, and free of conflicting infrastructure work. This involves aligning dozens of ongoing or planned construction projects, many of which are already in motion, and proactively sequencing or pausing utility and city work that might otherwise interfere with event logistics. A critical part of this process is reviewing ROW conditions and ensuring that no active work zones or construction-related street openings intersect with the Marathon route or the key ingress and egress corridors needed for emergency response, transit, and logistics.

This coordination is carried out through regular engagement with key city departments and utilities, including CDOT, the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), the Chicago Park District, OEMC, and both public and private utility providers. This allows for real-time updates, route adjustments, and field verification ahead of the event. Leading up to the race, the PCO works to verify that public ROW restoration is completed, with a focus on curb lanes and sidewalks that support crowd control, staging areas, emergency access, and the course itself.

As race week approaches, the PCO helps establish and enforce a construction moratorium along the Marathon route to prevent last-minute disruptions. Just as crucial is the post-race coordination: the PCO supports demobilization planning so that paused projects can resume quickly and safely without unnecessary delay.

While the DNC required a temporary pivot in planning processes, the Marathon has driven permanent improvements to the city's operational playbook. Each year's lessons inform more refined workflows, seasonal constraints, and enhanced agency collaboration. Through its leadership, the PCO contributes to the planning and coordination that make citywide events possible, with a focus on precision, equity, and minimizing disruption to daily life.

CASE STUDY 3: LOCAL BLOCK PARTIES & FESTIVALS

While large-scale events like the DNC and the Marathon grab headlines, it is the City's thousands of block parties, parades, and neighborhood festivals that most regularly demonstrate the PCO's value to Chicago residents. These hyperlocal events may span only a single city block or a few intersections, but they require collaboration to maintain safety, accessibility, and minimal disruption to surrounding work.

From May through October, the city processes more than 4,000 block party permits annually. For smaller events like these, coordination may not involve the same citywide scale but still demands careful attention to local infrastructure work, permitting timelines, and safety considerations. The PCO supports these efforts by working alongside CDOT's permitting team, OEMC, the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE), private utilities, and aldermanic offices to identify and resolve potential conflicts—such as overlapping dig sites, restoration delays, or temporary equipment staging—that might otherwise interfere with community gatherings.

Even at a neighborhood level, events introduce added complexity to public ROW management. Temporary street closures, crowd control infrastructure, and changes to traffic flow can all impact ongoing construction, utility work, or routine operations. In response, the PCO applies the same proactive strategies it uses for major events: mapping proposed closures against planned work, engaging early with stakeholders, and contributing to a unified planning process that accounts for both logistical needs and neighborhood impacts.

*Block Club's block party
(Block Club Chicago, 2024)*



The ability to pivot from national-scale coordination to block-by-block review reflects the PCO's commitment to serving the full spectrum of Chicago life. Whether it's the Mexican Independence Day Parade in Little Village, a summer market in Bronzeville, or a weekend street fest in Andersonville, the PCO helps neighborhood traditions unfold safely and smoothly—cementing its role as an everyday partner in the cultural rhythm of the city.

Conclusion

As the City of Chicago continues to grow, so too does the complexity of managing its public Right of Way. The work of the PCO demonstrates that proactive, sustained coordination is key to preserving the long-term value of Chicago's infrastructure while meeting the evolving needs of a modern urban landscape.

One of the clearest lessons from coordinating events of all scales is that technical expertise alone is not enough. What sets the most successful efforts apart is intentional communication: knowing the audience, listening to stakeholder needs, fostering trust, and translating complexity into clarity. These are the practices that enable effective cross-agency coordination and they remain at the heart of the PCO's approach.

The recurring nature of events like the Bank of America Chicago Marathon and the city's thousands of neighborhood festivals and block parties has created a powerful feedback loop for learning. While the Marathon forces a citywide alignment of infrastructure and logistics each fall, hyperlocal events challenge us to remain responsive at the street level. Together, these recurring experiences sharpen the PCO's coordination systems, improve foresight, and reinforce the importance of adapting to community rhythms.

Ultimately, the PCO's role is not just to facilitate infrastructure work or manage closures; it is to serve as a bridge between technical and civic priorities. This means understanding how environmental, social, and economic factors intersect with infrastructure; staying attuned to the needs of each neighborhood; and continually evaluating and sharing what works.

The strength of the PCO's work depends not just on what they do, but on how it is shared. As the region prepares for increasingly complex infrastructure and event planning challenges, the PCO is committed to growing partnerships, communicating best practices, and helping build a more coordinated, resilient public way for Chicago and beyond.



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