

Bridging the Gap: Infrastructure improvements to improve economic development along the I-
290 Corridor.

A Research Paper

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Master of Regional Planning

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the disamenities associated with the Eisenhower Expressway (I-290) along the Forest Park Branch of Chicago's Blue Line, their impacts on economic development and neighborhood connectivity within the corridor, and potential policy interventions to mitigate these challenges. Despite the corridor's access to major employment centers, significant regional attractions, and proximity to the Loop, development outcomes have lagged compared to other transit-served areas of the city. It argues that economic development along the corridor has been constrained by the barrier effects of the expressway, which isolates the transit line from surrounding neighborhoods and limits opportunities for transit-oriented growth. Through a review of literature, analysis of corridor conditions, and assessment of public policy, the study proposes and analyses interventions to address these issues. This project contributes to broader discussions of public policy interventions that can mitigate the disamenities associated with urban freeways, with particular attention to improving economic development around the unique configuration of a rapid transit line running within a highway corridor.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sam Sokoloff is from Leawood, Kansas. He is pursuing a Masters in City and Regional Planning at Cornell University, where he is also a Barclay Jones Fellow and a candidate for the Infrastructure Policy, Management, and Finance Certificate. He is interested in the intersections of transportation policy and economic development, with a particular focus on improving public transportation and land use in North America. Sam graduated from the University of Kansas in 2023 with a Bachelor of General Studies in Political Science with minors in Public Policy and Environmental Studies. Growing up in suburban Kansas City, much of his youth was shaped by reliance on automobiles, but an early visit to Chicago sparked his appreciation for urban life and public transit. During the Summer of 2025, Sam interned at CDM Smith in Chicago and took the Blue Line to work every day. His daily commute inspired this exit project, and hopes that it can further the policy discussion surrounding the future of the corridor. Sam hopes to continue working in transportation policy, contributing to the economic, environmental, and fiscal sustainability of North America's transportation systems.

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1. 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem Statement

Economic development along the I-290 Eisenhower Expressway multimodal corridor fails to live up to its potential. Despite close proximity to attractions such as the United Center, Rush Medical Center, UIC-Halsted, and the Loop, economic development in this corridor lags behind most of the city. As of 2023, the Pulaski–Congress and Kedzie–Homan Blue Line stations have the fourth- and fifth-highest numbers of vacant lots within a half-mile radius across the CTA system, with a combined total of 1,392 vacant parcels in their catchment areas.¹ The Eisenhower Corridor has the lowest residential density even among Chicago’s major multimodal expressway corridors, with 4.7 dwelling units per acre compared to 7.4 along the Kennedy Expressway and 5.3 along the Dan Ryan Expressway.² The corridor is characterized by inadequate pedestrian infrastructure, including narrow sidewalks, close exposure to heavy traffic, and long crossing distances required to reach transit stops or the opposite side of the highway.³ For this study, I will explore potential improvements along the corridor from the Racine to Cicero Blue Line stops that could potentially mitigate the disamenities that stem from the expressway in an effort to increase economic development along the corridor.

¹ Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University, "Data Highlighting the ETOD Implications of Vacant Land Near Transit." DePaul University, March 5, 2024, <https://housingstudies.org/releases/Data-Highlighting-ETOD-Implications-Vacant-Land/#:~:text=High%20levels%20of%20vacant%20land,demolition%20of%20distressed%2C%20deteriorating%20structures>

² Christopher Ferrell et al., "Appendix B, Chapter 11. Reinventing the Urban Interstate: A New Paradigm for Multimodal Corridors." Transportation Research Board. 2011, <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/read/14579/chapter/11#88>.

³ Mary Tyler, "I-290 Reconstruction: Creating a Modern Multimodal Corridor." Illinois Economic Policy Institute, November 9, 2021, <https://i-290blue.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/i-290-analysis-final-11.8.21.pdf>

There are significant disamenities related to urban freeways in Chicago more broadly. The effect of these disamenities increase with proximity to the central business district (CBD). It is estimated that because of the disamenities of freeways, Chicago's population within 5 miles of the city center is 20% smaller. If freeway disamenities were fully mitigated, neighborhoods within two miles of a freeway would experience a 4.7% increase in rents and an 8.3% increase in population. Barrier effects associated with freeways are the effects that result from physical disconnection the freeway creates within a neighborhood, increasing travel times for those crossing the highway. Barrier effects include increased travel times and reduced access to consumption of nearby amenities. Barrier effects alone account for about half of the total disamenities from freeways, and when barrier effects are the only disamenity removed from a hypothetical Chicago without urban freeways, the population within 5 miles of the CBD increases 14%, compared with 20% for total mitigation of disamenities. Mitigation policies that do not address barrier effects are unlikely to significantly improve quality of life.⁴

⁴ Jeffrey Brinkman & Jeffrey Lin, "Freeway Revolts! The Quality of Life Effects of Highways." September 2024, <https://direct.mit.edu/rest/article/106/5/1268/113170/Freeway-Revolts-The-Quality-of-Life-Effects-of>

Comparison of transit patronage and corridor urban form for Chicago’s multimodal corridors.⁵

Table B-5. Comparison of transit patronage and corridor urban form for Chicago’s multimodal corridors.

| Ridership/Component Measure | Eisenhower | Kennedy | Dan Ryan |
|--|------------|---------|----------|
| Transit Line Ridership (Daily Boardings) | 20,070 | 59,390 | 42,460 |
| Corridor Transit Commuter Mode Share | 24% | 28% | 31% |
| Density (DUs/Ac.) | 4.7 | 7.4 | 5.3 |
| Diversity (Entropy Index.) | 0.61 | 0.91 | 0.86 |
| Design (4-Leg Int./Ac.) | 0.18 | 0.15 | 0.15 |

In 2024, the City of Chicago received a \$2 million grant from USDOT’s Reconnecting Communities Grant program to study potential mitigations of the harms caused by the I-290 freeway and the negative effects of this phenomenon.⁶ With close proximity to the Loop, multiple amenities, and multiple transit lines, this corridor has immense potential to become a vibrant urban neighborhood. To understand how we got here, it’s important to first examine the past.

1.2 History

Inspired by Daniel Burnham’s 1909 Plan of Chicago, which envisioned a grand boulevard along Congress Street, the expressway was designed to link downtown with the

⁵ Ferrell et al. “Reinventing the Urban Interstate, A New Paradigm for Multimodal Corridors.” 2011. Appendix B, Chapter 11, Page 88. <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/read/14579/chapter/11#88>.

⁶ Chicago Mayor’s Press Office, “City of Chicago Receives \$2 Million Federal Grant to Reconnect West Side Communities,” City of Chicago Office of the Mayor, April 16, 2024, https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mayor/press_room/press_releases/2024/april/west-side-reconnection-grant.html.

growing western suburbs. The Burnham Plan recommended a comprehensive network of widened streets and boulevards, new parkways, expanded lakefront parks, and a regional highway system connecting Chicago to its suburbs.⁷ Although Burnham's plan was not adopted in its entirety, elements of the plan have weaved themselves into the physical makeup of modern Chicago.

Americans increasingly adopted automobiles throughout the beginning of the 20th century. Ford's Model T released in 1909, creating an automobile that the masses could afford by utilizing the efficiency of the assembly-line.⁸ The introduction of affordable automobiles led to a significant growth in their adoption by the American public, in turn leading to significant increase in automobile usage. An increase in automobile usage, along with lobbying from the motoring industry, led to calls for the development of grade-separated expressways.

⁷ Chicago Architecture Center, "1909 Plan of Chicago." <https://www.architecture.org/online-resources/architecture-encyclopedia/1909-plan-of-chicago>.

⁸ Richard Klein, "The Evolution of Local Dealerships: The Backbone of the U.S. Automobile Industry," Cleveland State University, November 13, 2019, <https://pressbooks.ulib.csuohio.edu/evolution-of-local-dealerships/chapter/chapter-one-early-years-of-the-u-s-automobile-industry-1896-1939/>.

City of Chicago, “Congress Street Expressway.”⁹



The City Council established this as the formal first priority of a comprehensive superhighway system in 1940. While work was supposed to begin quickly after World War 2, required utility relocations, poor subsurface conditions, need for communication with three railroads, municipalities, and even a cemetery added time and cost to the project. Construction began in 1949, but the first portion of the freeway from Austin Boulevard to Laramie Avenue was not completed until December 1954, and the full route from Mannheim Road to Racine Avenue was not completed until 1960. The I-290 Blue Line Corridor was a novel form of transportation engineering at the time, becoming one of the first multimodal corridors in the United States with both a rapid transit line and controlled-access expressway.¹⁰

⁹ J. Edwin Quinn, “Congress Street Expressway,” Ryerson and Burnham Art and Architecture Archive, 1950–1952, <https://artic.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/mqc/id/8706>.

¹⁰ FHWA & IDOT, “I-290 Eisenhower Expressway Final Environmental Impact Statement,” S-1, FHWA & IDOT, June 2017, https://www.eisenhowerexpressway.com/info_center/feis.aspx.

The Blue Line's Route replaced the Garfield Park elevated line, which had served the West Side since the 1890s. Built by the Metropolitan West Side Elevated Railroad Company, it was part of the city's third elevated railway system and was the first to use electric traction. The line extended west from downtown along Van Buren and Congress streets, reaching the city limits at 48th Avenue (now Cicero Avenue) and eventually stretching into Forest Park, where the Blue Line terminates today. The line was terminated in 1958, replaced by the freeway-running Congress Line, which is now the Blue Line.¹¹

The construction of the I-290 Multimodal Corridor displaced thousands of people and forever changed the neighborhood that was there before it. The construction of the corridor "displaced an estimated 13,000 people and forced out more than 400 businesses in Chicago alone." The community was also very multi-ethnic. Nearly 40% of the population at the time was African American, but there were also sizeable Greek, Jewish, Italian and Mexican communities. At the time, this area was considered a slum, and like many other American cities, highway construction was used as a method of urban renewal to clear slums. However, many who lived there did not consider their neighborhood a slum and were upset with its destruction.¹²

1.3 Current Regional Planning Efforts

Regional planning efforts around the I-290 corridor are gaining momentum through a combination of federal support, coalition advocacy, and interagency coordination. In 2024, the City of Chicago received a \$2 million federal planning grant through the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program to explore ways to improve safety, connectivity, and quality of life

¹¹ Chicago-L.org, "Metropolitan Main Line & Garfield Park Branch," <https://www.chicago-l.org/operations/lines/garfield.html>.

¹² Robert Loerzel, "Displaced: When the Eisenhower Expressway Moved In, Who Was Forced Out?" *WBEZ 91.5 Chicago*, accessed November 19, 2025, <https://interactive.wbez.org/curiouscity/eisenhower/>.

on the West Side.¹³ The grant supports planning for infrastructure improvements such as expressway caps, with Senator Durbin emphasizing the need to reconnect neighborhoods long divided by I-290. Complementing this effort, the Connect I-290 Blue Coalition brings together community organizations, transportation agencies, elected officials, and advocates to push for a comprehensive rebuild of both the I-290 Eisenhower Expressway and the CTA Blue Line Forest Park Branch. The coalition's goals include modernizing transit infrastructure, redesigning the expressway for safety and accessibility, improving pedestrian connections, and promoting transit-oriented development. To support these efforts, IDOT, CTA, and CMAP signed a Joint Statement of Understanding in December 2023 and established a Corridor Development Office (CDO) to coordinate planning, design, and community engagement. Partner agencies also include CDOT, Cook County, and Pace Suburban Bus.¹⁴ Previous environmental impact statements continue to inform the planning process, shaping future improvements to the corridor.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review synthesizes work on economic disamenities related to urban freeways and design interventions that can mitigate these disamenities. The reviewed studies address measurement and valuation of freeway disamenities, design and policy responses that mitigate disamenities (caps, multimodal redesign, pedestrian/bicycle investments), and evidence on local economic effects of the proposed corridor improvements. Together they establish the

¹³ *Blue Line Forest Park Branch Feasibility/Vision Study*. Chicago Transit Authority. <https://www.transitchicago.com/bluweststudy/>

¹⁴ Vana, Jennie. "I-290 Eisenhower Expressway/Blue Line Corridor project gets boost." *Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning*. September 11, 2024. <https://cmap.illinois.gov/news-updates/i-290-eisenhower-expressway-blue-line-corridor/>

scale of the negative externalities generated by urban freeways and assess potential pathways for mitigation.

Brinkman & Lin (2024) provide quantitative evidence that urban freeways create significant disamenities. Their findings indicate a 20% smaller population within areas adjacent to freeways within 5 miles of the CBD compared to hypothetical areas that lacked these freeways to begin with. They find substantial disamenities are mitigated, such as increases in rents of ~4.7% and population increases of ~8.3% under mitigation scenarios where freeways are removed. Land values of parcels near freeways within 5 miles of Chicago's central business district (CBD) grew slower than other parcels in the CBD, while outside the CBD the land value of these parcels grew faster. Brinkman & Lin identify barrier effects, those being the travel times and reduced access to amenities due to severed street networks, as contributing roughly half of the total disamenity burden. This is significant as it points to interventions such as caps that address spatial severance as a potentially substantial mitigation effort.¹⁵

Reinventing the Urban Interstate, A New Paradigm for Multimodal Corridors provides steps to mitigate harms from urban freeways and proposes interventions to improve them. The book includes evidence specifically related to the underperformance of the Eisenhower Corridor's Blue Line Branch in relation to other multimodal CTA/Expressway corridors in Chicago. The Eisenhower Branch has the worst performing land use and ridership out of the other corridors.¹⁶

Douglas Houston and Michelle E. Zuniga's "Put a park on it: How freeway caps are reconnecting and greening divided cities." provides an overview of freeway caps as

¹⁵ Jeffrey Brinkman and Jeffrey Lin, "Freeway Revolts! The Quality of Life Effects of Highways," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 106, no. 5 (2024): 1268–84.

¹⁶ Christopher Ferrell, *Reinventing the Urban Interstate: A New Paradigm for Multimodal Corridors*, vol. 145 (Washington, DC: Transportation Research Board, 2011).

greening/reconnection strategies. The paper focuses on particular case studies such as Dallas' Klyde Warren Park, highlighting the economic development spurred by the project.¹⁷ Samuel Lindgren's "A Sound Investment? Traffic Noise Mitigation and Property Values." measures the benefits of noise mitigations by its capitalization into property values.¹⁸ Jamey Volker and Susan Handy conducted a meta-study of the economic impacts on local business related to investments in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, informing the research project by addressing the specific value of different infrastructure improvements and their impacts on economic development.¹⁹

3. ANALYSIS OF CURRENT CONDITIONS

3.1 Geographic Scope

The scope of this project will examine the I-290/Blue Line Corridor between the Racine and Cicero Blue Line and adjacent land usage. This encompasses the portion of the I-290 Blue Line Corridor west of the Racine stop within the City of Chicago.

3.2 Physical/Infrastructure Conditions

The I-290 Blue Line Corridor was engineered to efficiently move cars and people to and from downtown, yet the trench it's created has left a lasting scar across Chicago's West Side. This design severs the urban grid, making it difficult for pedestrians and cyclists to cross from one side to the other. The CTA Vision Study and IDOT's I-290 Environmental Impact Statement

¹⁷ Douglas Houston and Michelle E. Zuñiga, "Put a Park on It: How Freeway Caps Are Reconnecting and Greening Divided Cities," *Cities* 85 (2019): 98–109.

¹⁸ Samuel Lindgren, "A Sound Investment? Traffic Noise Mitigation and Property Values," *Journal of Environmental Economics and Policy* 10, no. 4 (2021): 428–45.

¹⁹ Jamey M. B. Volker and Susan Handy, "Economic Impacts on Local Businesses of Investments in Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure: A Review of the Evidence," *Transport Reviews* 41, no. 4 (2021): 401–31.

both acknowledge that the corridor's trench design has severed the urban grid, creating barriers for pedestrians and cyclists.²⁰ Existing CTA Blue Line stations are difficult to access for pedestrians. Transit riders are required to cross busy roads, intersections, and freeway off ramps, and once they get onto the bridge, they are funneled onto narrow sidewalks.²¹

The Forest Park Branch of the Blue Line is in a significant state of disrepair. As of September 2025, train speeds on the portion of the corridor between the Forest Park and Illinois Medical District stops are restricted to speeds below 35mph due to deficient track conditions, with speeds on much of the corridor restricted to below 15mph.²² Stations in the middle of the highway are often difficult to get to for pedestrians, and there are a lack of amenities nearby or within the stations. According to the CTA's Forest Park Branch Vision Study, the infrastructure is nearly 60 years old and beyond its useful life. The study recommends reconstructing the entire branch due to deteriorating tracks, outdated stations, and poor rider experience. The same study notes that while many stations are technically ADA-compliant, they still require modernization to improve access, safety, and comfort.²³

3.3 Economic and Demographic Conditions

The stretch of Chicago's West Side along the I-290 corridor shows mixed and in many places stagnant population trends compared with city averages. While the Near West Side has seen population growth over the last two decades, other communities within the I-290 corridor

²⁰ "Blue Line Forest Park Branch Feasibility/Vision Study." Chicago Transit Authority. Accessed November 2, 2025. <https://www.transitchicago.com/bluweststudy/>

²¹ Mary Tyler. "I-290 Reconstruction: Creating a Modern Multimodal Corridor." Illinois Economic Policy Institute. November 9, 2021. <https://i-290blueline.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/i-290-analysis-final-11.8.21.pdf>

²² CTA. "L' System Slow Zone Map." September 2025.

²³ Chicago Transit Authority, "Forest Park Branch Vision Study Fact Sheet." Winter 2017, https://www.transitchicago.com/assets/1/6/CTA_Blueline_Factsheet_011917_FINAL_FINAL.pdf.

have experienced little growth or decline relative to the city as a whole.²⁴ Besides the Near West Side neighborhood, communities along the corridor have experienced significant population loss, have much lower median household incomes than the Chicago average, and have a higher proportion of vacant housing stock.

Demographics of neighborhoods along the I-290 Multimodal Corridor

| | Population change 2000-2023 (%) | Median Household Income (\$) | Vacant housing (%) |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Near West Side ²⁵ | 42.4 | \$110,651 | 7.7 |
| East Garfield Park ²⁶ | -1.7 | \$36,811 | 12.3 |
| West Garfield Park ²⁷ | -32.1 | \$38,179 | 23.0 |
| Austin ²⁸ | -15.9 | \$44,883 | 8.8 |
| North Lawndale ²⁹ | -25.2 | \$37,247 | 18.6 |
| City of Chicago | -6.5 | \$75,134 | 9.6 |

3.3 Land Use & Development Patterns

The I-290 corridor between Racine Avenue and Cicero Avenue is characterized by fragmented and underutilized land usage. Much of the corridor features abandoned or dilapidated structures, expansive surface parking lots, and vacant or underused parcels, even in areas directly

²⁴ Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, "Near West Side Community Data Snapshot." July 2025. https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/Near-West-Side.pdf

²⁵ Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, "Near West Side Community Data Snapshot." July 2025. https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/Near-West-Side.pdf

²⁶ Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, "East Garfield Park Community Data Snapshot." July 2025. https://cmap.illinois.gov/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/East-Garfield-Park.pdf

²⁷ Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, "West Garfield Park Community Data Snapshot." July 2025. https://cmap.illinois.gov/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/West-Garfield-Park.pdf

²⁸ Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, "Austin Community Data Snapshot." July 2025. https://cmap.illinois.gov/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/Austin.pdf

²⁹ Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, "North Lawndale Community Data Snapshot." July 2025. https://cmap.illinois.gov/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/North-Lawndale.pdf

adjacent to CTA Blue Line stations. This pattern contrasts sharply with the rapid reinvestment occurring nearby in the Near West Side, where higher-density, mixed-use development has accelerated in recent years.³⁰ Within the corridor itself, several “hot spots” present notable redevelopment potential—particularly around Racine Avenue, Ogden Avenue, and the United Center’s large surface parking lots, which could accommodate infill or mixed-use projects that capitalize on strong transit access and proximity to major employment and institutional anchors. However, the prevailing urban form, characterized by low density, limited active street frontage, and auto-oriented land use, continues to suppress investment and hinder the creation of vibrant, walkable station areas along the I-290 corridor.

Land use characteristics of neighborhoods along the I-290 Multimodal Corridor

| | Transportation and other land use (%) | Vacant land use + open space (%) |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Near West Side ³¹ | 43.0 | 7.5 |
| East Garfield Park ³² | 33.3 | 28.3 |
| West Garfield Park ³³ | 40.3 | 16.4 |
| Austin ³⁴ | 32.2 | 9.3 |
| North Lawndale ³⁵ | 32.6 | 23.2 |

³⁰ Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, "Near West Side Community Data Snapshot." July 2025. https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/Near-West-Side.pdf

³¹ Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, "Near West Side Community Data Snapshot." July 2025. https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/Near-West-Side.pdf

³² Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, "East Garfield Park Community Data Snapshot." July 2025. https://cmap.illinois.gov/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/East-Garfield-Park.pdf

³³ Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, "West Garfield Park Community Data Snapshot." July 2025. https://cmap.illinois.gov/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/West-Garfield-Park.pdf

³⁴ Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, "Austin Community Data Snapshot." July 2025. https://cmap.illinois.gov/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/Austin.pdf

³⁵ Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, "North Lawndale Community Data Snapshot." July 2025. https://cmap.illinois.gov/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/North-Lawndale.pdf

3.4 Transit Use & Accessibility

Ridership along the Blue Line corridor between Racine and Cicero remains below its potential, reflecting a combination of accessibility challenges, design deficiencies, and weak surrounding land use. Transit ridership increases when adjacent to dense development, and the elasticity of transit ridership and density is 0.09.³⁶ In the case of the Forest Park branch, the surrounding land use actively undermines the cost-effectiveness and ridership potential of the Blue Line. This not only constrains economic development but also limits the fiscal return on both the City's land base and the public investment in the CTA system. Blue Line stations along the corridor are often difficult to get to. Chicago's Blue Line Racine station requires residents to walk more than 300 feet to get across I-290. At the Racine station, roughly 1.2 million square feet of otherwise developable land within a quarter mile of the platform entrances is used by the highway itself. Compared with the Blue Line's Damen station, built along an elevated railway above an alley, only about 80,000 square feet are used by the track infrastructure within a quarter mile.³⁷ Although there are other variables that account for transit ridership, the difference in ridership between the Damen and Racine Blue line stations is stark. In July 2025, the Damen-Milwaukee station had an average weekday ridership of 4,346 people, while the Racine station had a ridership of only 515 people.³⁸ The closer development is to the transit stop, the greater the benefits of transit are, since transit's greatest catchment area is within 0.25 mi. This both affects

³⁶ Jeremy Mattson, "Relationships between Density, Transit, and Household Expenditures in Small Urban Areas," *Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives* 8 (2020): 100260.

³⁷ Yonah Freemark, "Transit Stations along Highways Expose Riders to Pollution and Limit Development Opportunities." Urban Institute, July 18, 2024, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/transit-stations-along-highways-expose-riders-pollution-and-limit-development>

³⁸ Regional Transportation Authority Mapping and Statistics. "CTA Rail Ridership by Station." Accessed November 20, 2025. <https://www.rtams.org/ridership/cta/stations>

property values and the cost effectiveness of transit, thereby affecting the potential value of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD).³⁹

Ridership along the Forest Park Blue Line is also well below ridership along other multimodal corridors. In July 2025, boardings per station along the Forest Park Blue Line branch averaged 882 per weekday, while the Kennedy branch averaged 2,774 and the Red Line within the Dan Ryan Expressway multimodal corridor averaged 2,250 (Appendix 1A-1C for full ridership figures).⁴⁰ Part of this might be due to the deficient conditions of track structure along the Forest Park Branch, but surrounding land usage in the Eisenhower corridor is not as dense compared to other multimodal corridors, such as the Kennedy corridor of the Blue Line.⁴¹

In recent years, Chicago has greatly expanded the reach of its bikeshare program, Divvy, throughout the city. This expansion of Divvy has corresponded with a buildout of protected bike infrastructure, and as of September 2025 there are over 500 miles of protected bike lanes throughout the city.⁴² Along the I-290 corridor within Chicago city limits, there are Divvy bikeshare docks near all Blue Line stations, however, protected bike lanes are absent from the bridges that these docking stations are near. The only bridges that cross I-290 in Chicago with protected bike lanes are at Keeler Ave, Independence Blvd, and Paulina St. Of these streets, only the Keeler Ave bridge has a connection to a CTA Blue Line station, and the Divvy bike rack is at the Paulina St. entrance nearly two blocks away.⁴³

³⁹ Erik Guerra and Robert Cervero. "Is a Half-Mile Circle the Right Standard for TODs?" Spring 2013. Access Magazine. <https://www.accessmagazine.org/spring-2013/half-mile-circle-right-standard-tods/>

⁴⁰ Regional Transportation Authority Mapping and Statistics, "CTA Rail Ridership by Station." Accessed November 20, 2025, <https://www.rtams.org/ridership/cta/stations>

⁴¹ Ferrell et al. "Reinventing the Urban Interstate, A New Paradigm for Multimodal Corridors." 2011. Appendix B, Chapter 11, Page 88. <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/read/14579/chapter/11#88>.

⁴² City of Chicago Office of the Mayor, "'Mayor Brandon Johnson, CDOT Celebrate 100 Miles Of New Bikeways With Completion Of Milwaukee Avenue Improvements." *Press release*, September 23, 2025. https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mayor/press_room/press_releases/2025/september/100-miles-bikeways.html

⁴³ Chicago Data Portal, "Divvy Bicycle Stations Map." Accessed October 25, 2025, <https://data.cityofchicago.org/Transportation/Divvy-Bicycle-Stations-Map/bk89-9dk7>; City of Chicago, "Existing

3.5 Stakeholders

A range of stakeholders influence planning and redevelopment efforts along the I-290 corridor between Racine and Cicero, each with distinct priorities and constraints. The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) plays a central role through its Forest Park Branch Vision Study, which focuses on maintaining reliable service and advancing long-term infrastructure renewal for the Blue Line.⁴⁴ The City of Chicago has long been interested in revitalizing the West Side, hoping to promulgate a positive image of the area and increase attraction for visitors and residents.⁴⁵ As of 2024, The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), and the Chicago Metropolitan Planning Agency (CMAP) created a Corridor Development Office (CD) with “a commitment to improving mobility, accessibility and quality of life for motorists, transit riders, residents and corridor communities” along the I-20 corridor. As part of this effort, IDOT provided \$6.25 million, the CTA \$3.5 million, and CMAP \$1.25 million to fund a Chief Development Office that “provide[s] strategic support toward program visioning, coordinating and sequencing projects, developing funding plans, supporting coordination with federal partners, tracking progress, and strategic communications and messaging.”⁴⁶ Residents along the corridor express ongoing concerns about connectivity across the corridor, pedestrian safety, local economic development, jobs associated with the reconstruction of the corridor, and access to I-290.⁴⁷ The West Loop neighborhood is going

Bike Network.” Accessed October 25, 2025, <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/complete-streets-chicago/home/bike-program/existing-bike-network.html>

⁴⁴ Chicago Transit Authority, "Blue Line Forest Park Branch Feasibility/Vision Study." Accessed October 31, 2025. <https://www.transitchicago.com/bluweststudy/>

⁴⁵ City of Chicago Office of the Mayor, "We Will Chicago Pillar 3 of 8: Economic Development." February 2023, https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/dcd/we_will/we_will_documents/cpc/WWC_EconDev_CPC.pdf

⁴⁶ Chicago Transit Authority, "I-290 Eisenhower Expressway/Blue Line Corridor project gets boost." September 11, 2024, <https://www.transitchicago.com/i-290-eisenhower-expresswayblue-line-corridor-project-gets-boost/>

⁴⁷ Illinois Department of Transportation and U.S. Department of Transportation, *I-290 Eisenhower Expressway Final Environmental Impact Statement: Chapter 4, Public Comments and Agency Coordination* (June 2017), https://www.eisenhowerexpressway.com/pdfs/feis/chapter_04.pdf.

through a large, continued development boom, so it is likely developers will take keen interest in infrastructure improvements near this neighborhood.⁴⁸ Institutional stakeholders such as UIC, the Medical District, the United Center, and local business associations have a vested interest in improved access, connectivity, and urban design outcomes that support both neighborhood and regional economic growth.

4. CASE STUDIES

4.1 Cap at Union Station - Columbus, OH

The Cap at Union Station is a mixed-use expanded bridge project in Columbus, OH that connects Downtown Columbus with the Short North Arts & Entertainment District over I-670. The development is composed of 25,500 sq ft of retail spanning I-670 on three parallel bridges, a center bridge that carries traffic, and outer bridges with retail. The construction of the mixed-use bridge was funded through a \$7.8M public-private partnership between Continental Real Estate Companies, a local real estate developer, the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), and the City of Columbus. ODOT paid \$1.3 million for the construction of the three bridges, Columbus spent \$440k on preliminary design (\$75k reimbursed by Continental Real Estate Companies) and utilities extension. Continental Real Estate Companies used a \$4.2 million conventional loan, \$1.3 million in mezzanine debt, and \$500k in equity to fund the project.⁴⁹ The project resulted in a reconnection of Downtown Columbus and Short North Arts District, creating a vibrant retail corridor.

⁴⁸ Jack Crawford, “A Full Breakdown of West Loop’s Development Boom,” *Chicago YIMBY*, March 31, 2023, <https://chicagoyimby.com/2023/03/a-full-breakdown-of-west-loops-development-boom.html>.

⁴⁹ FHWA Office of Innovative Program Delivery, *The Cap at Union Station – Joint Development*, https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ipd/pdfs/value_capture/case_studies/the_cap_at_union_station_joint_development.pdf.

4.2 Klyde Warren Park - Dallas, TX

Klyde Warren Park in Dallas, TX is a 5.2-acre deck park that connects Uptown with the Dallas Arts District and Downtown Dallas. The project provided green space in Downtown Dallas, reconnected separated neighborhoods, mitigated some of the immediate environmental harm associated with the freeway below, and has spurred significant economic development in the area nearby. Phase 1 of the project was funded by a \$110M public-private partnership between the State of Texas, City of Dallas, private donors, and Federal government.

The economic benefits associated with Klyde Warren Park are significant. The park has increased nearby office and retail leasing rates and attracted an incremental \$900+ million in development in the six years following its initial \$110M capital funding. Between 2009 and 2014, the area within $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile saw \$1.1 million of residential development per acre per year, compared to roughly \$133,000 per acre per year in the surrounding neighborhoods. Klyde Warren Park has attracted significant commercial development, averaging approximately \$2.2 million more development per acre per year within a $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile radius than in the surrounding neighborhoods. Nearby land values have also increased from \$125/SF to \$250/SF or higher over the past decade.⁵⁰ Local trolleys have also increased ridership by 61% since the park opened.⁵¹ Part of the economic development success story associated with Klyde Warren Park is its prime location. Situated between multiple museums and the Uptown district, the park created an inviting connection between multiple attraction points in the heart of Downtown Dallas. The

⁵⁰ HR&A Advisors Inc., *Economic Value and Benchmarking Study of the Dallas Park System* (February 2016), <https://www.hraadvisors.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/HRA-Economic-Value-of-Dallas-Parks-Study-Final.pdf>.

⁵¹ Douglas Houston and Michelle E. Zuñiga, “Put a Park on It: How Freeway Caps Are Reconnecting and Greening Divided Cities,” *Cities* 85 (2019): 98–109.

conditions for a freeway-cap structure to serve as a multiplier for these already existing investments were already there.⁵²

Klyde Warren Park has also brought multiple environmental benefits to Dallas. The new tree canopy created by the park sequesters ~18,500 lbs of CO₂ annually and canopies intercept ~64,000 gallons of stormwater per year;⁵³ permeable landscaping and subsurface cisterns improve stormwater retention and reduce runoff, ambient temperatures in the park are 1–9°F cooler than nearby streets, and vegetation and deck structure mitigate noise and reduce exposure to traffic emissions. The project was awarded LEED Gold certification for its sustainable features including solar panels, a geothermal cooling system, low water usage, and LED lighting.⁵⁴

4.3 Fifth Street Pedestrian Bridge - Atlanta

The Fifth Street Pedestrian Bridge in Atlanta, GA is a multi-modal bridge between Georgia Tech's main campus and the Technology Square District in Midtown Atlanta.⁵⁵ The project was built in 2006 for just \$10.3 million, and has resulted in multiple benefits including reducing highway noise, creating new urban green space, and facilitating Georgia Tech's

⁵² Jeffrey Tompkins, "Highway Caps Should Be A Solution, If They Make Cents." Associated Construction Publications, January 2025, <https://acppubs.com/BE/article/A0518F88-highway-caps-should-be-a-solution-if-they-make-cents>

⁵³ Congress for the New Urbanism, *USDOT Ladders of Opportunity Every Place Counts Design Challenge Case Study: Klyde Warren Park*, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://www.cnu.org/sites/default/files/Spokane%20Case%20Study%204%20-%20Dallas.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Douglas Houston and Michelle E. Zuñiga, "Put a Park on It: How Freeway Caps Are Reconnecting and Greening Divided Cities," *Cities* 85 (2019): 98–109.

⁵⁵ Project for Public Spaces, "Interstate Bridge in Atlanta Remade into Pedestrian-friendly Mini-park." December 6, 2006, <https://www.pps.org/article/interstate-bridge-in-atlanta-remade-into-pedestrian-friendly-mini-park>

expansion across I-85.⁵⁶ In 1997, the Georgia Tech Foundation purchased largely vacant and underdeveloped land on the east side of I-85. This would eventually become the Technology Square (Tech Square) district, officially opened in 2003. Since the bridge's completion in 2006, the Tech Square district has transformed into one of Atlanta's strongest innovation hubs. The district is now home to more than 2 million square feet of private, public, and Georgia Tech-controlled real estate. From 2012-2019, 35 corporate innovation centers and labs have opened up around the area.⁵⁷ A 416,500 square foot Phase 3 expansion of Tech Square is slated to open in 2026.⁵⁸ Although the Fifth Street Pedestrian Bridge is not a sole catalyst for economic development in the area, its construction is frequently mentioned as an important milestone in the development of the area, and a key means of connecting Tech Square to the Georgia Tech campus.

5. POLICY DISCUSSION

5.1 Goals

The primary goal of this project is to analyze what design interventions can increase economic development in this corridor. As stated previously, the corridor has significant untapped potential for economic development, yet is hindered from achieving it due to the disamenities from the freeway. This need for economic development is accentuated by the City

⁵⁶ Sue McCraven, "Untried bridge design transcends function in first GDOT design-build project." *PCI Journal*, January-February 2008, https://www.pci.org/PCI_Docs/Publications/PCI%20Journal/2008/Jan_and_Feb_2008/Fifth%20Street%20Pedestrian%20Plaza%20Bridge%20Becomes%20Landmark%20at%20Georgia%20Tech.pdf

⁵⁷ Georgia Tech Office of the President, "'Oh, by the way . . ." The Tech Square Story." Georgia Institute of Technology, November 7, 2019, <https://president.gatech.edu/blog/oh-way-tech-square-story>

⁵⁸ Scheller College of Business, "Tech Square Phase 3." Georgia Institute of Technology, <https://www.scheller.gatech.edu/about-scheller/tech-square/tech-square-phase-3.html5>

of Chicago's financial situation, as the city is facing a projected budget deficit of \$1.15 billion for fiscal year 2026.⁵⁹ Chicago's rental market is also seeing significant strain, and more housing is sorely needed.⁶⁰ This area of the city, characterized by proximity to the Loop, major employment centers and attractions, and transit access, lacks density and economic development, particularly compared to Chicago's other multimodal corridors.

We can measure economic development using metrics such as value of residential and commercial investments, property values, economic impact, and retail spending in \$.

5.2 Solutions

Soundwalls

The introduction of noise barriers like soundwalls can have a positive effect on economic development. Noise barriers can have a significant positive impact on increasing property values. According to research from Samuel Lindgren at the Swedish National Road and Transport Institute, home prices increased by an average of 10-12 percent after the installation of noise barriers. This was an \$11,000 to \$13,000 nominal increase in home price per property. The installation of these noise barriers came from a noise mitigation program conducted by the Swedish Road Association. Average investments were approximately just below \$8,400, but this produced net benefits averaging \$3,120 to \$5,515 per property. This implies that for a road barrier project to justify its costs, it would only need to benefit 1.4 to 1.7 properties. Not only that, but lower quality properties in particular reaped the benefits of noise barriers more than

⁵⁹ Bryce Hill, "Chicago finds 39 ways to get \$1.65B more to spend." Illinois Policy Institute, September 29, 2025, <https://www.illinoispolicy.org/chicago-finds-39-ways-to-get-1-65b-more-to-spend/>

⁶⁰ Randolph Taylor, "Chicago rental market 2025: Why rents are soaring." eXpcommercial, June 17, 2025, <https://creconsult.net/chicago-rental-market-2025/>

higher quality properties.⁶¹ Research from Washington state also indicates a significant home value appreciation benefit to soundwalls. Utilizing hedonic pricing analysis, soundwalls were shown to increase home values by 15.24% within 300m and 6.96% for homes within 300-600m.⁶²

Noise mitigation can also be used to increase the attractiveness of the transit riders experience for those waiting at stations in the middle of the busy expressway. Soundwalls along highway-median stations could potentially limit noise exposure for transit riders by as much as 13 decibels. Passenger shelters are an additional way to shield transit riders from the highway noise coming from the expressway, and when combined with soundwalls, have the potential to reduce noise from the highway by over 15 decibels.⁶³

There is no available literature that studies specifically the economic benefits associated with investments in soundwalls at median-running transit stops. Nonetheless, the newly built REM regional rail service in Montreal uses enclosed and heated highway-median stations to improve passenger comfort, particularly during harsh winters.⁶⁴ This design choice was not necessary, the REM could have built a cheaper system without enclosing and heating the stations, instead opting for highway-median stations with minimal protection like in Chicago. However, REM is incentivized to increase ridership, as the private investor responsible for building the line, Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec, is paid by the Canadian and

⁶¹ Samuel Lindgren, , "A sound investment? Traffic noise mitigation and property values." *Journal of Environmental Economics and Policy* 10, no. 4 (2021): 428-445.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21606544.2021.1911861?#abstract>

⁶² Nakakeeto, Gertrude, Jaren Pope, Rahman Shaikh, and Eric Asare, "The impact of Highway Noise Barriers on the Housing prices of Neighborhoods." (2017).

⁶³ Alexander Schaffer, *Passenger Exposure to Noise at transit platforms in Los Angeles*, UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation, 2012.

⁶⁴ Réseau express métropolitain, "The REM and winter." March 9, 2021, <https://rem.info/en/news/rem-and-winter>

Quebecois government on a passengers per kilometer basis, therefore giving them incentive to increase ridership on the line.⁶⁵ Designing enclosed stations increase passenger comfort, creating a more hospitable ridership experience.

The probability of failure to block sound itself is low. As long as the walls are high enough to block the sound, the sound should be mitigated. Nonetheless, there are some side effects that should be accounted for upon construction of the soundwalls. Soundwall construction will increase the cost of future capping or expanded bridge projects, since these soundwalls would need to be knocked down. Soundwalls also fail to ameliorate the disamenities stemming from the barrier effects of freeway development. The application of soundwalls as a tool for economic development should be prioritized for adjacency to commercial and residential properties when capping or expanded bridge construction does not make economic sense. Neighborhoods further away from the Loop are prime candidates for soundwall construction, as they provide immediate noise reduction and the likelihood of the highway capping near them is small in the short-term.

Complete Streets

Infrastructure improvements that enable safer biking and micromobility usage within the corridor can also promote economic development. A 2020 meta-study of complete streets corridor improvements found that these improvements had either positive or non-significant impacts on corridor economic and business performance.⁶⁶ The value of bicycle infrastructure

⁶⁵ Réseau express métropolitain, "Part 2 | Information about the agreement with the ARTM and its rate mechanisms." March 26, 2018, <https://rem.info/en/news/information-about-agreement-artm-and-its-rate-mechanisms>

⁶⁶ Jenny H. Liu and Wei Shi, *Understanding Economic and Business Impacts of Street Improvements for Bicycle and Mobility—A Multi-City Multi-Approach Exploration*. No. NITC-RR-1031-1161, National Institute for Transportation and Communities (NITC), 2020.

investments increases closer to the urban core. In their study of Portland, Oregon, Clifton et al. observed that while cyclists spent less per shopping trip outside the downtown area, they outspent all other travel modes when shopping downtown. When accounting for both spending per trip and trip frequency, the study showed that bicyclists' total monthly spending on food and beverages exceeded that of drivers.⁶⁷ A study from Davis, California suggests that bicyclists prioritize shopping downtown more than drivers and spend just as much per trip. Monthly spending for cyclists downtown was \$248.62, while monthly spending for drivers downtown was only \$182.10. Bicyclists made 58.1% of their purchases downtown, while drivers only made 45.4%.⁶⁸ Protected bike lanes are an effective way to increase the utilization of biking. A longitudinal study of 14,011 block groups in 28 U.S. cities over 6 years finds that the installation of protected bike lanes increases bicycle commuting rates by 4.3x compared to block groups that did not install them.⁶⁹

Complete streets projects can also increase property values. Out of 37 projects surveyed by Smart Growth America, 10 projects reported data on property values and investment. Of those 10 projects, 8 projects had higher property values and 2 reported no change. In Dubuque, IA property values increased 111%. The reinvention of Edgewater Drive in Orlando, FL as a complete street led to property value increases of 80 percent in adjacent areas since it was proposed. Investment due to complete street projects has followed. Both Washington, DC, and Raleigh, NC, experienced significant new development along their Complete Streets corridors,

⁶⁷ Kelly Clifton, Kristina M. Currans, Christopher D. Muhs, Chloe Ritter, Sara Morrissey, and Collin Roughton, *Consumer behavior and travel choices: A focus on cyclists and pedestrians*, 2012, <https://carrefour.vivreenville.org/storage/app/media/publications/Articles-de-fond-Encyclopedique/infrastructure-cyclable/consumer-behavior-and-travel-choices-focus-cyclists-and-pedestrians.pdf>

⁶⁸ Popovich, Natalie, and Susan L. Handy, "Bicyclists as consumers: Mode choice and spending behavior in downtown Davis, California." *Transportation research record* 2468, no. 1 (2014): 47-54, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3141/2468-06>

⁶⁹ Ferenchak, Nicholas N., and Wesley E. Marshall, "The link between low-stress bicycle facilities and bicycle commuting." *Nature Cities* (2025): 1-5.

with projects including apartment complexes and hotels valued at approximately \$63.3 million and \$25.5 million, respectively.⁷⁰

Bicycle infrastructure such as protected bike lanes are cheap and quick to build, as well as being easily removable. Quick-build bike lanes can be installed on bridges and along the corridor using just paint and plastic delineator poles. Quick-build lanes also allow for real-time public engagement, so the public and businesses can comment on the effectiveness of their installation, and alterations can be made based on feedback and effectiveness.⁷¹ Due to this, the cost of failure is low, since the project can be quickly scrapped and reverted if it is a failure. Potential side effects are also a negligible concern, as paint and plastic flex-posts can be easily removed. Outside of potential complaints from nearby residents and business owners, there is little risk to pursuing this pilot bike lane initiative.

Pedestrian-focused interventions such as traffic calming and pedestrianization can boost economic development, especially in urban areas. Lancaster, CA spent \$11.5 million on traffic calming and pedestrianization in their downtown area, and within four years generated \$273 million in economic output and attracted \$130 million in private investment according to estimates by the California Redevelopment Association.⁷² After Midosuji Avenue was briefly pedestrianized, the number of visitors increased by 125%, they stayed 15% longer, and walked 59% longer distances. The number of people visiting shops rose by about 131 percent, while

⁷⁰ Geoff Anderson and Laura Searfoss, "Safer Streets, Stronger Economies: Complete Streets Project Outcomes from Across the Country," Smart Growth America and the National Complete Streets Coalition, March 2015, <https://wordpress.smartgrowthamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/safer-streets-stronger-economies.pdf>.

⁷¹ Alta Planning + Design and the California Bicycle Coalition, "Quick-Build Guide: How to Build Safer Streets Quickly and Affordably." 2020, <https://altago.com/wp-content/uploads/Quick-Build-Guide-White-Paper-2020-1.pdf>

⁷² Congress for the New Urbanism, "Lancaster Boulevard." Accessed November 20, 2025, <https://www.cnu.org/what-we-do/build-great-places/lancaster-boulevard>

sales grew by roughly 136 percent compared to the previous year, and average visitor stay length on a typical Saturday increased by approximately 86 percent year over year.⁷³

Pedestrianization can be introduced experimentally with traffic cones and the hosting of special events. Chicago already does this with the city's street festivals. Blocks are closed to traffic for a period of time (usually over a weekend), and pedestrians are to freely walk on the street while sampling the wares of local vendors. Chicago's Wicker Park neighborhood has recently experimented with pedestrianization pilots with the "Meet me on Milwaukee" event.⁷⁴ To reduce risk of failure of targeted pedestrianization projects, pilot projects using movable barriers and speed bumps should be initiated before concrete is poured.

Pedestrian bridges are an infrastructure improvement already utilized along the I-290 corridor. The largest pedestrian bridge is at the UIC-Halsted stop, connecting the West Loop neighborhood from Peoria St. with the University of Illinois Chicago campus. The bridge was rehabilitated in 2015 as part of the Jane Byrne Circle Interchange Project.⁷⁵ The rehabilitation improved pedestrian accessibility at the eastern end of the corridor by bringing the amount of pedestrian crosswalks required to cross the highway from three crosswalks to one.⁷⁶ Other bridges include a bridge at Kildare Ave, Springfield Ave, Albany Ave, and Maplewood Ave. These pedestrian bridges are a bit wider than a standard sidewalk, utilize metal fencing to protect pedestrians and bicyclists from the freeway, and include ramps for accessibility. However, these

⁷³ Yoshimura, Yuji, Kaoru Yamaoka, and Paolo Santi, "Quantifying tactical urbanism: Economic impact of short-term pedestrianization on retail establishments." *Cities* 160 (2025): 105803, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0264275125001039>

⁷⁴ Quinn Myers, "Milwaukee Avenue in Wicker Park Goes Car-Free During Inaugural Pedestrian Pilot," *Block Club Chicago*, September 2, 2025, <https://blockclubchicago.org/2025/09/02/milwaukee-avenue-in-wicker-park-goes-car-free-during-inaugural-pedestrian-pilot/>.

⁷⁵ Jane Byrne Interchange and the Illinois Department of Transportation. "Peoria Street Bridge and CTA Station - Work Completed Fall 2015!" https://circleinterchange.org/completed_projects/peoria_cta.html

⁷⁶ Christy Levy, "Circle reconstruction brings new entrance to campus." University of Illinois Chicago, May 27, 2014, <https://today.uic.edu/circle-reconstruction-brings-new-entrance-to-campus/>

pedestrian bridges do not connect to Blue Line stops.⁷⁷ The economic impact of these bridges is unknown.

Major Bridge-Deck Redevelopment

Develop mixed-use platforms over I-290 bridges with retail, offices, or community spaces, similar to Cap at Union Station in Columbus, Ohio. Projects such as this are able to leverage private sector investment to help pay for capping infrastructure, while also becoming economic development in and of themselves. In the case of the I-290 expressway, the value that the expanded bridge deck structures that include commercial developments provide is increased further by its proximity to transit.

Previous research indicates a significant economic impact for retail that increases the closer a property gets to a rail transit station. Using research of Midtown Atlanta, GA, a city where commuters are much less reliant on transit compared to Chicago, found that the price per square meter of real estate falls by \$75 for each meter away from a transit station.⁷⁸ Other research indicates that as the quality of a pedestrian environment around a station improves, distance from a station becomes a greater determinant of condo value. Michael Duncan assesses the quality of the pedestrian environment as a measurement of the amount of people-serving jobs within a 400m radius of the parcel. It also follows that the extent to which the quality of the pedestrian environment affects home value declines as homes get further away from the station. The analysis shows that commercial activity has a strong positive relationship with housing

⁷⁷ Author's assessment using Google Street View imagery, accessed October 24, 2025, location: I-290 Pedestrian Bridge at Kildare Ave, Springfield Ave, Albany Ave, and Maple Ave, Chicago, IL, Google Maps, <https://www.google.com/maps>

⁷⁸ Arthur C. Nelson, "Transit Stations and Commercial Property Values: A Case Study with Policy and Land-Use Implications," *Journal of Public Transportation* 2, no. 3 (1999): 77–95.

values within roughly 0.1 kilometers of a station. This effect gradually weakens with increasing distance, becoming statistically insignificant around 0.9 kilometers and approaching zero by about 1.6 kilometers. These findings suggest that homebuyers place greater value on proximity to areas with more commercial activity near transit stations.⁷⁹

The example of the Columbus Cap at Union Station did not include adjacency to a high-capacity rail transit line, but the potential upside for building this form of development here is even higher due to its proximity to the Blue Line. According to a meta-study of property valuation adjacent to rail stations, commercial properties within ¼ mile of the station sell or rent 12.2% higher than residential properties within the same range. The gap across studies indicates a 4.2% price premium for non-commercial properties, and a 16.4% premium for commercial properties near rail stations.⁸⁰

The Cap at Union Station project in Columbus was successful partly due to its ability to attract tenants willing to pay 25-30% higher rents than those in the surrounding area. Considering the amount of vacant land on the west side of the corridor, it's likely that any kind of solution such as this would be applied to bridges towards the eastern side such as at Morgan St. or Racine Ave. Bridges at these locations particularly would stitch together the UIC-Halsted campus with an already dense West Loop neighborhood, and connect to the UIC-Halsted and Racine Ave Blue Line stations respectively. The retail premium associated with adjacency to the

⁷⁹ Duncan, Michael, "The impact of transit-oriented development on housing prices in San Diego, CA." *Urban studies* 48, no. 1 (2011): 101-127.

⁸⁰ Debrezion, Ghebreegziabiher, Eric Pels, and Piet Rietveld, "The impact of railway stations on residential and commercial property value: A meta-analysis." *The journal of real estate finance and economics* 35, no. 2 (2007): 161-180, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11146-007-9032-z>

Blue Line is likely sizable, although also likely not enough to cover costs of construction, and the public stakeholders will probably have to provide some funding for initial construction costs.

Other projects like this have generated significant economic impact. In St. Louis, MO the CityArchRiver project revitalized the grounds of the St. Louis Arch with new landscaping, trails, and a “land-bridge” over I-44. This project cost \$380 million to construct and took 5 years to complete. Recent economic impact analysis commissioned by the Gateway Arch Park Foundation found that the park generated \$572.1 million in economic impact and \$30.7 million in tax revenue throughout the St. Louis region. This would imply that the project would pay for itself in 12.6 years through generated tax revenue alone. The construction of the park from 2013-2018 generated \$572.1 million in economic impact and \$30.7 million in tax revenue.⁸¹

Freeway Caps

Construction of partial or full freeway caps over sections of I-290 to create pedestrian-friendly spaces, parks, or retail zones could transform the corridor. A project such as a freeway cap could connect 1 or multiple blocks, almost completely mitigating the disamenities associated with the freeway localized within the neighborhood. Previous research also indicates that proximity to greenbelt has a significant, positive effect on residential property values, in some instances up to 20% of value. Linear greenspaces, such as freeway caps, "maximize the number of properties that can be positioned adjacent or nearby to them."⁸² Freeway caps can completely mitigate the disamenities associated with freeways, as they remove freeways from the street

⁸¹ Lindsay Pattan, "CityArchRiver Economic Impact Study finds Gateway Arch National Park, Riverfront and Kiener Plaza Renovations are integral to Downtown's resurgence." Gateway Arch Park. June 23, 2025, https://www.archpark.org/images/uploads/Press_Release_-_CAR_Economic_Impact_Report_FY2024_-_FINAL-1.pdf

⁸² <https://www.nrpa.org/globalassets/journals/jlr/2005/volume-37/jlr-volume-37-number-3-pp-321-341.pdf>

surface. Although the creation of an urban park and the mitigation of freeway-related disamenities tend to raise nearby property values, the magnitude of these increases is typically greater in neighborhoods with denser, multifamily housing and smaller lots than in areas dominated by single-family homes and larger parcels. Unlike bridge-deck redevelopments, freeway caps can accommodate much larger park spaces, which often command a higher property-value premium than smaller parks.⁸³ Projects such as Klyde Warren Park pay for themselves partly due to their prime location in the CBD. A park cap that connects UIC and Rush Medical Center to the West Loop could potentially spur further economic development on both sides of the corridor.

A major concern with freeway caps is the sheer cost. While Fifth Street Pedestrian Bridge only cost \$10.2 million (\$17,372,630 in 2025), and Columbus' Cap at Union Station cost \$7.2 million in 2002 (\$14,305,138 in 2025), freeway cap projects are significantly more expensive. Estimated costs of freeway cap projects in the United States range from \$320 million to \$667 million per mile.⁸⁴ The construction of the Rose Kennedy Greenway in Boston, known as “the Big Dig”, is an infamous example of the significant cost associated with freeway caps. The project faced significant delays and cost overruns, costing \$24 billion upon completion. However, the project successfully reconnected the historic North End neighborhood with the rest of Boston, and has helped catalyze \$7 billion in private investment.⁸⁵ The cost-benefit analysis of

⁸³ Crompton, John L., and Sarah Nicholls. "Impact on property values of distance to parks and open spaces: An update of US studies in the new millennium." *Journal of Leisure Research* 51, no. 2 (2020): 127-146.

⁸⁴ Brinkman, Jeffrey, and Jeffrey Lin. "Freeway revolts! The quality of life effects of highways." *Review of Economics and Statistics* 106, no. 5 (2024): 1268-1284.

⁸⁵ Jeffrey Tompkins, “Highway Caps Should Be a Solution, If They Make Cents.” Associated Construction Publications, January 2025. <https://acppubs.com/BE/article/A0518F88-highway-caps-should-be-a-solution-if-they-make-cents>.

the project does not justify itself in dollars spent, however, the urban fabric of Boston is still improved due to its creation.

Consideration of a freeway cap should also note the large width of the I-290 multimodal corridor. Due to the train tracks and station in the middle of the freeway, this corridor is simply wider than our other case studies, so any freeway cap would have to cover more acreage, increasing costs, likely leaving the cap on the higher side of previous cost estimates. For instance, at Racine Ave, the corridor spans 114.4m.⁸⁶ The Fifth Street Pedestrian Bridge in Atlanta, GA only spans 70m, and the Cap at Union Station in Columbus, OH spans 66m.⁸⁷ The Klyde Warren Park Freeway Cap extends approximately 69m.⁸⁸ Both major bridge-deck redevelopments and freeway caps would contend with the problem of greater surface area, however, freeway caps cover a much larger surface area.

Another concern with freeway cap projects is ongoing maintenance and upkeep costs. If the project is not built in an area where property tax valuation increases can cover the cost of upkeep, public money will become required to maintain the condition of the cap. This problem can however be mitigated by limiting the amount of complications and programming tied to the park. A simple, no-frills open green space could suffice to mitigate the barrier effects of the freeway. For potential additional value add, programming, pop-up retail, playground equipment,

⁸⁶ Google Earth, “Satellite view of Racine Ave & I-290, Chicago, IL.” accessed November 2, 2025, <https://earth.google.com/web/@41.87597427,-87.65221011,181.04297717a,31103.76279466d>

⁸⁷ Google Earth, “Satellite view of 5th Street Pedestrian Plaza, Atlanta, GA.” Accessed November 2, 2025, <https://earth.google.com/web/search/Fifth+Street+Pedestrian+Plaza+Atlanta+GA/@33.77144335,-84.39007926,290.861876a,324.06465144d,34.99999995>; Google Earth, “Satellite view of Cap at Union Station, Columbus, OH.” Accessed November 2, 2025, <https://earth.google.com/web/@39.9742475,-83.00287241,228.78815856a,279.91199681d,35y>

⁸⁸ Google Earth, “Satellite view of Klyde Warren Park, Dallas, TX.” Accessed November 2, 2025, <https://earth.google.com/web/search/Klyde+Warren+Park,+Woodall+Rodgers+Freeway,+Dallas,+TX/@32.78995935,-96.80120891,138.24075236a,331.86444671d,34.99999875y>

and other amenities the community might value can be added on later. However, the cost of these amenities must be factored into a cost-benefit analysis of the cap. Freeway caps are significantly more expensive than a major bridge-deck redevelopment, but in the case of projects such as Klyde Warren Park, have led to significant increases in investment and property valuation.

Matrix

| Alternatives | Maximized property values (\$) | Maximizing retail sales (\$) | Maximizing investment (\$) | Cost (\$) | Cost to Reverse (\$) |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|----------------------|
| Soundwalls | Medium | - | - | Low | Low-Medium |
| Complete Streets | Medium | Medium | Medium | Low | Low |
| Bridge-Deck Redevelopment | Medium-High | - | High | Medium-High | High |
| Freeway Cap | High | - | High | High | High |

I considered a variety of factors when completing this matrix, drawing on both academic literature and observed outcomes from comparable projects. The ratings reflect how each

intervention generally performs on property-value increase, retail impacts, private investment potential, capital cost, and the difficulty of reversing the intervention once built.

Soundwalls modestly increase nearby property values by reducing noise and visual blight, justifying a medium rating. I could not find literature on the effects of soundwalls related to increasing retail sales or increasing commercial investment. However, it follows that increased property values would result in an increased interest in investment. The cost of construction is medium-low relative to other solutions, coming in at \$4.16 million per mile from 2020-2022.⁸⁹

Complete streets projects often result in increased property values, increased retail sales, and increased investment, although the magnitude of each increase varies significantly depending on the context of their implementation. Major complete streets projects in downtown shopping districts seem to have the largest impact on property values, retail sales, and increased investment.⁹⁰ Therefore, complete streets projects make more sense on the eastern side of the corridor near the West Loop district, where there is already a plethora of dense economic activity. Therefore, as applicable to the whole corridor, I ranked the overall impact of complete streets projects on property values and retail sales as medium. Fortunately, these projects are relatively low-cost to implement as pilot, and can be done using cones, planters and paint to test the viability of the street treatments. If the pilots are effective, concrete and landscaping can be used to solidify the change. Due to this, I ranked the cost to build and cost to reverse as low.

Bridge-deck redevelopment projects can increase property values and bring in new investment. Projects such as the Fifth Street Pedestrian Bridge in Atlanta, GA catalyzed \$100s of

⁸⁹ Federal Highways Administration, "Summary of Noise Barriers Constructed by December 31, 2022." Updated July 2023, https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/noise/noise_barriers/inventory/

⁹⁰ Arthur C. Nelson and Robert Hibberd, "Complete Streets as a Redevelopment Strategy." *Cityscape* 26, no. 2 (2024): 311-382.

millions of dollars in new investment in Midtown Atlanta, while the Cap at Union Station project created an entirely new retail project over a highway. Through mitigation of the barrier effect disamenity associated with the freeway below, along with the creation of a new amenity above, they're able to increase property values in adjacent neighborhoods. As with other projects, the increase in economic development associated with bridge-deck redevelopment is associated with the context of the surrounding neighborhoods. I could not find evidence related to an increase in retail sales associated with bridge-deck redevelopments, though these developments themselves could increase retail sales by increasing pedestrian traffic. However, bridge-deck redevelopments can catalyze investment in underutilized areas of the city by connecting them with a key anchor. That benefit comes at a cost, and it is difficult to deconstruct a bridge-deck redevelopment project, but it is much cheaper to build these projects compared to complete freeway caps.

Freeway caps are the most expensive form of treatment, however, also the most comprehensive in mitigating the disamenities associated with urban freeways. A freeway cap would completely cover the freeway, and examples such as the Klyde Warren Park resulted in \$100s of millions of dollars in investment and significant increase in property values. I could not find evidence tying an increase in retail sales associated with freeway caps, however, it's logical that a total mitigation of disamenities associated with the freeway would result in increased retail activity due to increased travel across the corridor. However, the cost of this infrastructure solution would be very high, and it is also extremely difficult to reverse. It's possible that Chicago could invest in an expanded bridge-deck solution first, then implement a broader cap for an area with anchors on both sides of the freeway trench.

6. CONCLUSION

There are a variety of infrastructure improvements that can incentivize economic development along the I-290 corridor, however, the context in which these solutions are applied significantly impacts the efficacy of their implementation. Often, the development of bridge deck structures and freeway caps is aided by advantageous existing surroundings, with key anchors supporting the economic development potential of the project. Building a freeway cap in a neighborhood where there is largely vacant land and no anchor is not going to generate the same amount of investment and broader economic development as a freeway cap where there are already attractive anchors that just need a more seamless connection. Klyde Warren Park, St. Louis' CityRiverArch project, and Columbus' Cap at Union Station all benefited from connecting attractions and/or dense, walkable neighborhoods to the CBD. Nonetheless, major bridge-deck redevelopment projects such as Atlanta's Fifth Street Pedestrian Bridge helped revitalize a largely vacant and underdeveloped portion of Midtown Atlanta by connecting that area to Georgia Tech. Georgia Tech had a strategic vision starting in the late 90s to incorporate this part of Atlanta into the Georgia Tech campus, and this attractive land bridge was a relatively cost-effective way to stitch these two parts of campus together. The I-290 corridor benefits from multiple anchor destinations, but capping the freeway would not stitch any anchor to the CBD directly. For a fraction of the price of a freeway cap, a major bridge-deck redevelopment could mitigate many of the disamenities associated with the I-290 freeway.

There is a lack of empirical studies that separate the effects of the bridge-deck developments specifically relative to other improvements or broader regional real estate trends on effects on property values, investments and retail sales. However, there is empirical evidence showing that parks have a positive impact on property values, mitigation of disamenities related

to the barrier effects of freeway increases property value, and that there is a significant boost to commercial property values and retail sales that increase with proximity to transit. Commercial development could also benefit from additional value capture associated with proximity to the Blue Line. Mixed bridge-deck redevelopments provide many benefits associated with increased economic development, but greater research on the effects of these infrastructure solutions would help bolster the case for their application.

Major-bridge deck redevelopments have the potential to mitigate many of the disamenities associated with urban freeways at a fraction of the construction cost of full freeway caps. In cities such as Columbus, OH, Atlanta, GA, and St. Louis, MO, they have led to millions of dollars in economic development and investment in the neighborhoods they connect to. These caps can include amenities such as commercial properties or park space, but what is included on top of the bridge deck is up to the community. Another benefit of choosing this form over a comprehensive freeway cap is that a full freeway cap can be built later if the community wants it.

Solutions such as road diets and pedestrian improvements can be easily experimented with and removed if needed. These solutions can be implemented cost-effectively and at scale while being easily reversible. Due to this, road diets should be piloted throughout the corridor to increase bicycle and pedestrian safety, and pedestrianization pilots should be utilized in commercial areas to attract increased business. If these efforts fail the road space can quickly be reverted to its prior form.

Economic impact is the primary focus of this study. However, equity concerns, particularly associated with property value and rent increases that could lead to displacement in lower-income neighborhoods within the corridor, should be accounted for before construction of

any proposed solution. It is crucial that any economic development within these corridors includes the development of affordable housing so that residents within these communities are not displaced. Incentivizing Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) developments, providing Housing Choice vouchers to qualifying residents, and eliminating regulatory burdens such as parking minimums and limits on residential density can increase local housing supply and affordability.⁹¹

7. APPENDIX

1A) Eisenhower Multimodal Corridor July 2025 Ridership⁹²

| Station | Avg Weekday Ridership (July 2025) |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Cicero-Congress | 970 |
| Forest Park | 390 |
| Harlem-Congress | 980 |
| Illinois Medical District | 810 |
| Kedzie-Homan-Congress | 250 |
| Oak Park-Congress | 180 |
| Pulaski-Congress | 920 |
| Racine | 470 |
| UIC-Halsted | 350 |
| Western-Congress | 220 |
| Avg Boarding per Station | 882 |
| Total Avg Weekday Ridership | 9,706 |

⁹¹Yonah Freemark, Lindiwe Rennert, Noah McDaniel, Yipeng Su, Nicholas Finio, Chester Harvey, Gerrit Knaap et al. *Guide to Identify and Mitigate the Negative Effects of Gentrification Caused by Transportation Investment*, Urban Institute, 2025.

⁹²"CTA Rail Ridership By Station." Regional Transportation Authority Mapping and Statistics. <https://www.rtams.org/ridership/cta/stations>

1B) Kennedy Multimodal Corridor July 2025 Ridership⁹³

| Station | Avg Weekday Ridership (July 2025) |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Addison-O'Hare | 1,778 |
| Cumberland | 2,515 |
| Harlem-O'Hare | 1,586 |
| Irving Park-O'Hare | 2,927 |
| Jefferson Park | 4,716 |
| Montrose-O'Hare | 1,748 |
| Rosemont | 4,148 |
| Avg Boarding Per Station | 2,774 |
| Total Avg Weekday Ridership | 19,418 |

1C) Dan Ryan Expressway Red Line Branch Ridership⁹⁴

| Station | Avg Weekday Ridership (July 2025) |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Sox-35th | 2,945 |
| 47th | 1,443 |
| Garfield | 1,647 |
| 63rd | 1,315 |
| 69th | 2,088 |
| 79th | 2,766 |
| 87th | 1,575 |
| 95th/Dan Ryan | 4,222 |
| Avg Boardings Per Station | 2,250 |
| Total Avg Weekday Ridership | 18,001 |

⁹³ "CTA Rail Ridership By Station." Regional Transportation Authority Mapping and Statistics. <https://www.rtams.org/ridership/cta/stations>

⁹⁴ "CTA Rail Ridership By Station." Regional Transportation Authority Mapping and Statistics. <https://www.rtams.org/ridership/cta/stations>

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