

Cincinnati Interstate 75 Corridor
Context and Criteria
June 2, 2009

The Cincinnati City Council is interested in developing policy guidance for conduct of the Brent Spence Bridge segment of the Interstate 75 corridor project. To this end, the Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee has requested City staff to define the neighborhood context through which the project traverses, and to identify departmental goals and opportunities associated with the project.

Context

The Brent Spence Bridge study area in Ohio extends along the I75 corridor from the Ohio River to and including the Western Hills Viaduct and associated interchange. Within this larger study area are several sub-areas that are defined by their unique qualities or features.

East of I75: Primarily residential north of the Central Business District (CBD)

- Central Business District
- West End and Over the Rhine – residential and historically significant
- Uptown incorporating CUF (Clifton Heights, University Heights, and Fairview)
- Important Attractions – Music Hall, Convention Center

West of I75: Primarily commercial and industrial

- Gateway to Western Neighborhoods including Camp Washington, South Fairmont and Lower Price Hill
- Important Attraction – Union Terminal
- Queensgate

Area East of Interstate 75:

The Cincinnati Central Business District is defined by Fountain Square, but has numerous public spaces including the Carew Tower, Cincinnati City Hall, the Isaac M. Wise Temple, the Duke Energy Convention Center, Paul Brown Stadium, and the Red's Great American Ballpark. Cincinnati is also home to a large number of fortune 500 companies.

Cincinnati has received significant recognition including "Most Livable City" (1993); "Number Five US Arts Destination" American Style Magazine, summer 2004; Esquire Magazine "Cities that Rock," April 2004, and Forbes Magazine "Best Cities for Young Professionals" 1st in Ohio, and 18th overall, June 2007.

The West End neighborhood is home to City West, a project that has transformed this community, once devastated by the construction of I75, into a mixed-income development.

Over the Rhine (OTR) is defined by its history and its progress. Once the center of German culture and one of the most densely populated neighborhoods in the Midwest, OTR today is the focus of a redevelopment project, the Gateway Quarter, that has been successful in attracting young professionals and empty nesters to the neighborhood. With the completion of the School for Creative and Performing Arts, renovation of the Emery Theater, and private investment in theatre and art galleries, the neighborhood is experiencing a renaissance. OTR is home to many local historical landmarks including, Cincinnati Music Hall, Findlay Market, Ensemble Theatre, Know Theatre, the Brewery District, and Washington Park. Historical churches include Old St. Mary's Church, the oldest standing church building in Cincinnati, still holding Mass in German and Latin every Sunday. Today Over the Rhine is one of Cincinnati's most creative, culturally and economically diverse neighborhoods.

Uptown is an amalgamation of close-in residential neighborhoods that support the University of Cincinnati and medical center complex, the City's second largest employment center. CUF is the neighborhood most immediately proximate to the Brent Spence Bridge segment of the Interstate 75 corridor project. CUF is an acronym for the communities of Clifton Heights, University Heights, and Fairview.

Clifton Heights provides student housing for the University of Cincinnati. The Clifton Heights Business District provides services to college students and is located along Calhoun and McMillan Streets between Vine/Jefferson and Clifton Ave. adjacent to the UC campus.

University Heights is primarily a campus residential community, and home to Good Samaritan Hospital.

Fairview, also serving the University of Cincinnati residential community, features significant examples of Italianate architecture and offers incredible views of the City from the surrounding hillsides.

Recognizing that the area north of the CBD and east of I75 has a primarily residential character, it is important that the proposed Collector/Distributor (CD) system reflects the residential nature of the communities, and includes sidewalks, landscaped medians, trees and bike paths.

Area West of Interstate 75:

The Western Hills Viaduct is the entrance to the Center City. It features pure 1930's art deco architecture and was built in conjunction with Union Terminal and the Post Office. The City has a strong desire to maintain the historic character of this gateway.

The area west of I75 is primarily commercial and industrial, and displacement, disruption and relocation of businesses is of primary concern. Improved access to I75 from the industrialized Mill Creek valley and the western neighborhoods is considered critical for continued economic viability.

West of Uptown, and North of Queensgate, is Camp Washington, gateway to the western neighborhoods. Historically an important military training camp during the Mexican War, Camp Washington is now a residential community and home of the renowned Camp Washington Chili.

Queensgate, located south of the Western Hills Gateway, and west of downtown Cincinnati is dominated by industrial and commercial activity.

Queensgate is home of the Cincinnati Museum Center located in historical Union Terminal. Until 1970, the Cincinnati Reds played at Crosley Field, located at the intersection of Findlay and Western Streets.

Since the Western Hills Viaduct, Eighth Street Viaduct, Union Terminal, and Post Office were all constructed in the Art Deco style of the early 1930s and are architecturally and historically significant, it is critically important that the CD on the west side of I75 in the vicinity of Union Terminal and the Post Office provide a similar experience to that provided by Central Parkway and the CD serving the east side of I75, having a civic character with appropriate landscaping and streetscape elements.

Eighth St. viaduct is currently being restored to assure its structural integrity and preserve its original design.

The Western Hills Viaduct, an aging bridge structure, is currently being evaluated to determine the best strategy of restoration or replacement. If it requires replacement, the sense is that historic elements should be restored/reflected in the replacement design. Staff expressed no particular desire to either maintain or discard the current double deck design, but the design of I75 and its connections to the viaduct on the west and Central Parkway on the east is important.

Intermodal and Other Infrastructure Coordination:

- Facilitate East-West movement across Mill Creek Valley, Railroads and I75 for all modes (car, bus, bike and pedestrian);
- Accommodate rail transit movements (both high speed commuter and light rail) along the entire I75 corridor, and provide or preserve river crossing opportunities (including the Clay Wade Bailey Bridge);
- Coordinate opportunities for local infrastructure improvements with I75 widening project (including Western Hills Viaduct, Waldvogel Viaduct, 6th Street Expressway, Waterworks and MSD sewer improvements);
- Pursue opportunities to improve intermodal connectivity with rail and river barge operations in the corridor;
- Improve access to interstate for the major trucking operations existing in Queensgate;
- Partner with freight rail operators. (NS and CSX have major north-south freight movements through the Mill Creek Valley, and CSX has an important east-west freight corridor that intersects the project corridor.) Consider possible window for expansion of Queensgate Yard operations and a fourth main to support passenger rail. (Midwest Rail Initiative and 3C Corridor, including the "low build" alternative that provides for double stack running along the corridor;
- Conserve right of way for planned location of proposed passenger rail terminals for both the 3C Corridor and Midwest Regional Rail Initiative, the western locations (either LWH/Plum Street or Union Terminal) are considered preferable long-term alternatives to the eastern boathouse location.

- Establish feasible utility corridors. Utility corridors might include water, sewer, gas, electric, and fiber optics. Significant benefit could ensure to the City in terms of potential cost-savings and revenue.

Operations and Function:

- Minimize interstate's impact on local road network. Where the two systems connect, safety is a priority, but consideration should be given to urban context, balancing geometric decisions with protection of urban fabric;
- Emphasize lane continuity, minimize weaves, and provide clear signage. Lane choice and continuity should be intuitive and follow driver expectations;
- Use urban street designs instead of ramp configurations where local and interstate systems meet;
- Improve access from Northbound I75 (especially to important attractions like Union Terminal, Music Hall and Uptown neighborhoods/hospitals);
- Improve accessibility to the interstate by developing a collector distributor system that reflects the character of the neighborhoods it transverses;
- Reduce "spaghetti". Where possible, simplify access and allow the local network and collector/distributor to function as circulator system;
- Maintain or improve existing access to and from the interstate system, but integrate the ramp network into the city street grid as directly as possible. The roadway, especially the free-flow and/or collector-distributor elements should be sensitive to the urban character of the areas traversed.

Aesthetics and Design:

- Design an exceptional, dynamic, and innovative interpretation of the structural form (bridge type) selected. The bridge should be a recognizable symbol of the region that complements the existing river crossings, and is an affirmative statement of this generation's contribution to history;
- Explore enhancements to existing bridge should it remain;
- Design proposed structure with complementary replacement of existing structure in mind.
- Consider the view both of the bridge and from the bridge;
- Avoid use of fracture-critical elements in bridge design;
- Emphasize sustainability of structure, life cycle cost, material selection, and maintenance of traffic in design criteria;
- Design bridges, ramps, retaining walls and appurtenances, and landscape throughout the corridor to enhance the sense of place;
- Design corridor, structures and accouterments for easy cleaning and maintenance activities.

Economic Development:

- Reduce the right-of-way footprint of the I75 corridor and reclaim developable land, create "shovel ready sites" with infrastructure in place.

- Respect the City's existing development plans in selection of alternatives;
- Emphasize business retention in existing location, minimize the number of displaced businesses, and consider the ability of displaced business to relocate inside City limits; Consider relocation incentives (bonus for relocating within the City limits). Understand that construction activity limits might be as important as final right of way meets and bounds;.
- Apply context sensitive solutions strategies that balance optimum geometrics and impact avoidance tactics to save existing buildings and reduce burden on business operations;
- Recognize that maintenance of traffic and **effective communication** throughout construction are critical to the City's economic welfare. Share experience during FWW reconstruction and emphasize transparency;
- Investigate opportunities for major employer (UPS, USPO) business expansion in Queensgate area;
- Coordinate time of day access and construction activities;
- Maintain Queensgate as a flexible template and affordable location for changing business opportunities;
- Consider expansion of the Convention Center;
- Reinvest economic development benefits using value recapture methods.

Public Safety:

- Stress appropriate design of ingress and egress for emergency personnel to both depressed (trenched) and elevated (bridge) sections of roadway. Bridges should include pre-piped waterway for emergency response;
- Provide full shoulders for both emergency vehicles and buses, on the bridge and throughout the corridor.

Environmental and Green Elements:

- Coordinate MSD sewer improvement projects necessary to support higher density land use and economic development resulting from the transportation investment;
- Employ storm water best management practices to advance water quality improvement and quantity management of local waterways; Vacant public lands and rights of way should be made available for storm water management. Design capacity not just for highway runoff, but include secondary and cumulative impacts (land use expectations);
- Separate storm water runoff from combined sewers within the project limits to reduce combined sewer overflows, improve water quality and support smart redevelopment;
- Support sustainable construction practices and materials and design; consider carbon footprint and lifecycle impact. Recycle and reuse;
- Design the I75 corridor to provide shade, cleanse air and storm water, and enhance aesthetics;
- Advance the goals of the Millcreek Greenway Project, returning a liability to a community asset;
- Emphasize importance of air quality in design elements.

Other Considerations:

- Balance the desire for creating community amenities with the ongoing cost of maintenance (particularly structures and plantings);
- Understand significance of overall cost of project;
- Equilibrate construction staging and overall length of construction period – balancing maintenance of traffic, cost, design considerations, location and disruption;
- Develop position on alternative financing options;
- Understand economic impact – local vs. regional and national economic benefit;
- Establish priority compared with other local investments in transportation, infrastructure and public services.

The City recognizes that in order to accomplish its goals for the corridor, it will need to assume responsibility for evaluation of City assets, plans and priorities. The following activities have been identified as necessary groundwork for policy development and decision-making:

- Waterworks – Provide list of specific projects planned along corridor;
- Parks – Provide both approved plan and list of specific projects under development;
- Recreation – Provide plans for Camp Washington Center, Queensgate Ball Fields, and other projects along I75 corridor;
- MSD – Provide Wet Weather Improvement Plan;
- MSD – Provide details of “Sewers to Creeks” program including specific locations;
- DOTE – Develop an access management plan for corridor;
- DOTE – Develop criteria for prioritizing quality and benefit of connections and access points. Consider quality/quantity tradeoffs;
- DOTE – Prepare position paper on expanded rail capacity needs in the corridor and initiate regional conversation with NS and CSC about opportunities for coordinated infrastructure planning;
- DOTE – Identify feasible utility corridors;
- DOTE (OEO and MSD support) – Provide Millcreek Greenway Plan and translate into specific corridor improvements;
- DOTE (Architecture) – Develop a design concept for I75 corridor that emphasizes theme and variation, community calibration;
- Planning – Identify locations within neighborhoods for place making;
- Planning – Research sources of funds for complementary projects;
- Economic Development – Research incentives for relocating inside City;
- Community Development – Develop retention plans with major employers affected by project;
- Finance – Evaluate fiscal and economic impact of project;
- All Departments – Evaluate budget impacts of complementary projects, both capital and operating
- T&I Subcommittee – Develop position on alternative financing;