

# 794 BY COMPARISON

## LONG-TERM OPPORTUNITY ASSESSMENT

MILWAUKEE, WI. LAKE INTERCHANGE - INTERSTATE 794

NOVEMBER, 2024



# KEY HIGHLIGHTS

## REMOVAL OF I-794 THROUGH DOWNTOWN MEANS LONG-TERM ECONOMIC BENEFITS, PLANNER FINDS

*Removing Downtown Section of I-794 Would Generate Billions in Disposable Income, Hundreds of Millions in Taxes, add 3,000+ Housing Units and Better the Long-Term Outlook of Region, New Report Shows*

Distinguished Urban Planner Larry Witzling has developed new estimates of huge economic value for Milwaukee by removing the Downtown section of I-794. Larry Witzling has been an urban planner in Milwaukee for 50 years and holds Professor Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee.

## 30-YEAR OUTLOOK

Witzling recently calculated the development capacity of the I-794 corridor over the next 30 years – a timeframe on par with freeway planning. What could we expect if the Downtown section was replaced with a street grid?

Over 30 years this is what Witzling estimates as the outcomes:

- \$1.1 billion in added property value- paid not by taxpayers but by private investment
- 3,000+ housing units (with revenues allocated for 20% affordable housing)
- \$3 billion in added cumulative disposable income Downtown
- \$475 million in new property taxes
- \$60 million in city sales tax

In addition, we will see a stronger Downtown destination with:

- New retail, restaurants, hospitality and entertainment
- New employers attracted to locate Downtown
- New long-term jobs
- High-energy public spaces
- Improved local business markets
- Larger long-term tax base



# OUTLINE

OVERVIEW TO DATE

WHAT IS BEING STUDIED / WHAT IS MISSING

DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY OVER 30 YEARS

ASSESSMENT OF OPPORTUNITY BENEFITS / DRAWBACKS

ALIGNMENT WITH STAKEHOLDER GROUPS' LONG-TERM GOALS

# GOALS

DIRECT ATTENTION TO MISSING POINTS OF DATA AND MAKE  
STAKEHOLDERS AWARE OF POTENTIAL MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

UNDERSTAND HOW STAKEHOLDER GROUPS CAN WORK TOGETHER  
TO PRODUCE BEST OUTCOME





# OVERVIEW TO DATE

## INFRASTRUCTURE NEARING END OF USEFUL LIFE

Interstate 794 elevated structure between the Milwaukee Public Market and the North end of the Hoan Bridge, built in 1970's, is nearing the end of its useful life (Note: not the Hoan Bridge itself). The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) estimates it would cost \$300m to replace.

## WisDOT CONDUCTING *LAKE INTERCHANGE STUDY*

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation is studying various options for the infrastructure in coordination with The City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County and Federal Highway Administration.

## OPTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION

The *Lake Interchange Study* is narrowing down three options: Reconstruct elevated infrastructure as-is (benchmark), Reconfigure and reconstruct elevated infrastructure, Do not Reconstruct – utilize at-grade street grid and open land for new uses.

Infrastructure nearing end of useful life



# WHAT IS BEING STUDIED

## WisDOT CONDUCTING *LAKE INTERCHANGE STUDY*

The Study consists of evaluating automobile transportation infrastructure. It evaluates three options considering traffic analysis, transportation system linkages, and road design improvements for safety, accommodation, and connectivity.

The Study states that alternatives will be analyzed with consideration of traffic operations, multimodal connectivity, costs, impacts, and constructability.

### PROJECT NEEDS

**AGING INFRASTRUCTURE**  
originally built in 1974-1975



**COMMUNITY  
CONNECTIVITY**

**SYSTEM  
LINKAGES**

**ROADWAY  
DEFICIENCIES**

**BICYCLE and  
PEDESTRIAN  
SAFETY**

**TRAFFIC  
SAFETY**



### STUDY GOALS

The following study goals will help guide the development and evaluation of alternatives for the Lake Interchange.

**ENGAGE** stakeholders and public throughout the process.

**ADDRESS** deteriorating freeway infrastructure.

**ACCOMMODATE** traffic volumes without capacity expansion.

**MINIMIZE** impacts on existing transportation infrastructure.

**MINIMIZE** construction impacts.

**INCREASE** connectivity for all including bikes and pedestrians.

**PROVIDE** opportunities for workforce development.

**IMPROVE** safety, operations, and access to Downtown, Third Ward and Lakefront.

**STRIVE** to improve compatibility of transportation infrastructure with local plans and development.



# WHAT IS MISSING

## STUDY OF LAND USE OPPORTUNITIES AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS

What is not being studied is the question of land use and the economic benefits. The East-West portion of I-794 is 0.9 mile and takes up 14 city blocks of land - some of the most valuable in the state - situated between the lakeshore, the Milwaukee River and Menomonee Valley. What is the development capacity of this area? Could it benefit all Milwaukeeans in a more useful way? What other opportunities are possible in this corridor?

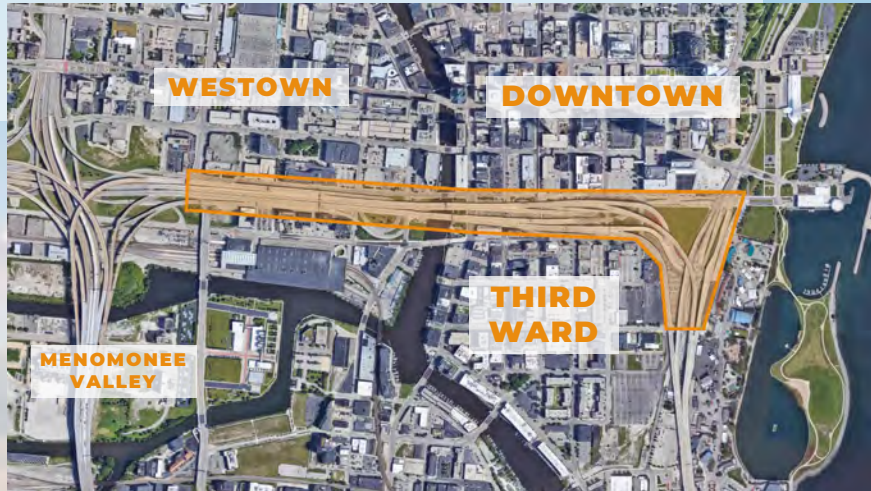
## CONNECT STRATEGIC PLAN INITIATIVES

The 794 corridor is uniquely situated as the dividing line between multiple stakeholder groups. As such, it could become the physical connection point between The Menomonee Valley, Westtown, Downtown, The Third Ward, Summerfest and the Lakeshore.

The Third Ward Strategic Plan



Potential to connect multiple stakeholder groups





# WHY RETHINK 794

## WHAT DO WE WANT TO BECOME AS A CITY?

The consideration of this 794 segment is not only one of transportation, but largely about land use. A new generation of residents are choosing to live, work and visit downtown. This has also attracted a wave of employers to locate downtown to attract and retain talent in the state. Nowhere else in Wisconsin has an equivalent momentum of growth in such a focused area. The opportunity to re-envision 10 blocks in the city center of Milwaukee is one of the most significant steps Wisconsin can take to build on this growth.

## A GENERATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

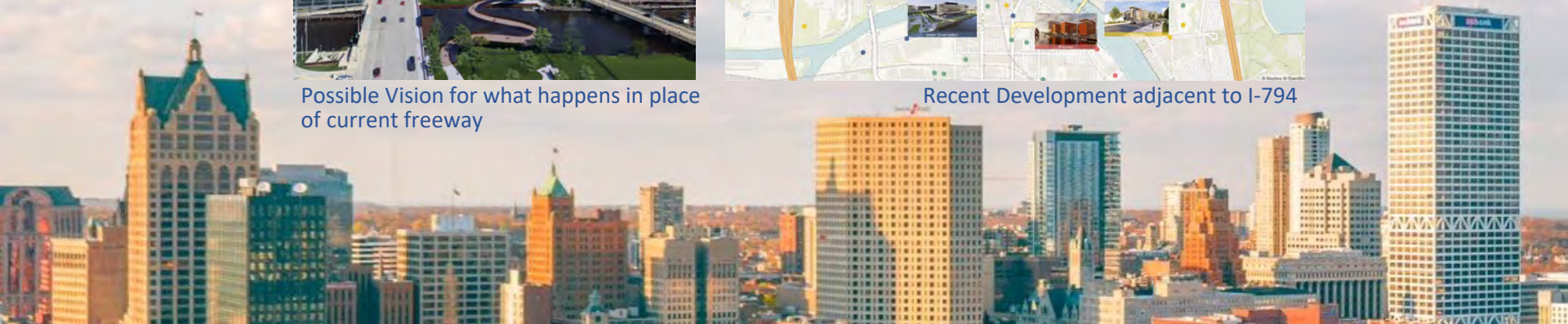
- Connect Downtown, Third Ward, Westtown, Menomonee Valley & Lakeshore into cohesive city center.
- I-794 is overbuilt and underutilized for current and future traffic projections.
- Publicly owned land means corridor can develop with strategic vision for the most benefit to residents.
- Development would make Wisconsin's largest city keep pace with national peer cities & regions.
- Surrounding development momentum signals quicker build-out than Park East freeway removal.
- Support current stakeholders' growth while attracting regional and national employer relocations.
- Would save and generate tax dollars.



Possible Vision for what happens in place of current freeway



Recent Development adjacent to I-794





# THE OPTIONS



## REBUILD & RECONFIGURE

- Simplifies on/off ramp connection with street grid
- Maintains direct interstate connection for thru-traffic
- Opens up 4.5 city blocks of development in city center
- Modernizes mainline configuration
- Improves safety



## REPLACE WITH STREET GRID [DO NOT RECONSTRUCT]

- Simpler and safer traffic patterns
- Disperses traffic throughout street grid
- Reduces traffic speeds throughout downtown
- Maintains all access/ expands access with 6<sup>th</sup> Street connection
- Opens up 10 or more city blocks of development in city center
- Connects Third Ward, Downtown, Westtown & Lakeshore
- Opportunity for transit-oriented development near Intermodal Station

## REPLACE IN KIND [BENCHMARK]





# GROWTH FROM WITHIN

## DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY

Development Capacity is a metric to evaluate development on a timeline equivalent with investments in long-term infrastructure spending. It forecasts long-term community development, as opposed to short-term market studies.

Conditions for urban development capacity modeling include:

- Government owned land under I-794 allows for greater prediction of development
- Use a long timeframe to mitigate market peaks and valleys
- A focus on undeveloped land with significant value
- Ensure supportive environmental conditions
- Regulate and reduce risk through local policies

## GROWTH FROM WITHIN THE CORE

The following diagrams show a growth strategy focused on near term infill that supports current business and builds on the momentum of surrounding development. Strengthening the core of the city utilizes utilities and infrastructure already in place while providing more residents with exceptional proximity to jobs, transit, parks and cultural amenities.





# 10-YEAR OUTLOOK

**+1,000**  
UNITS

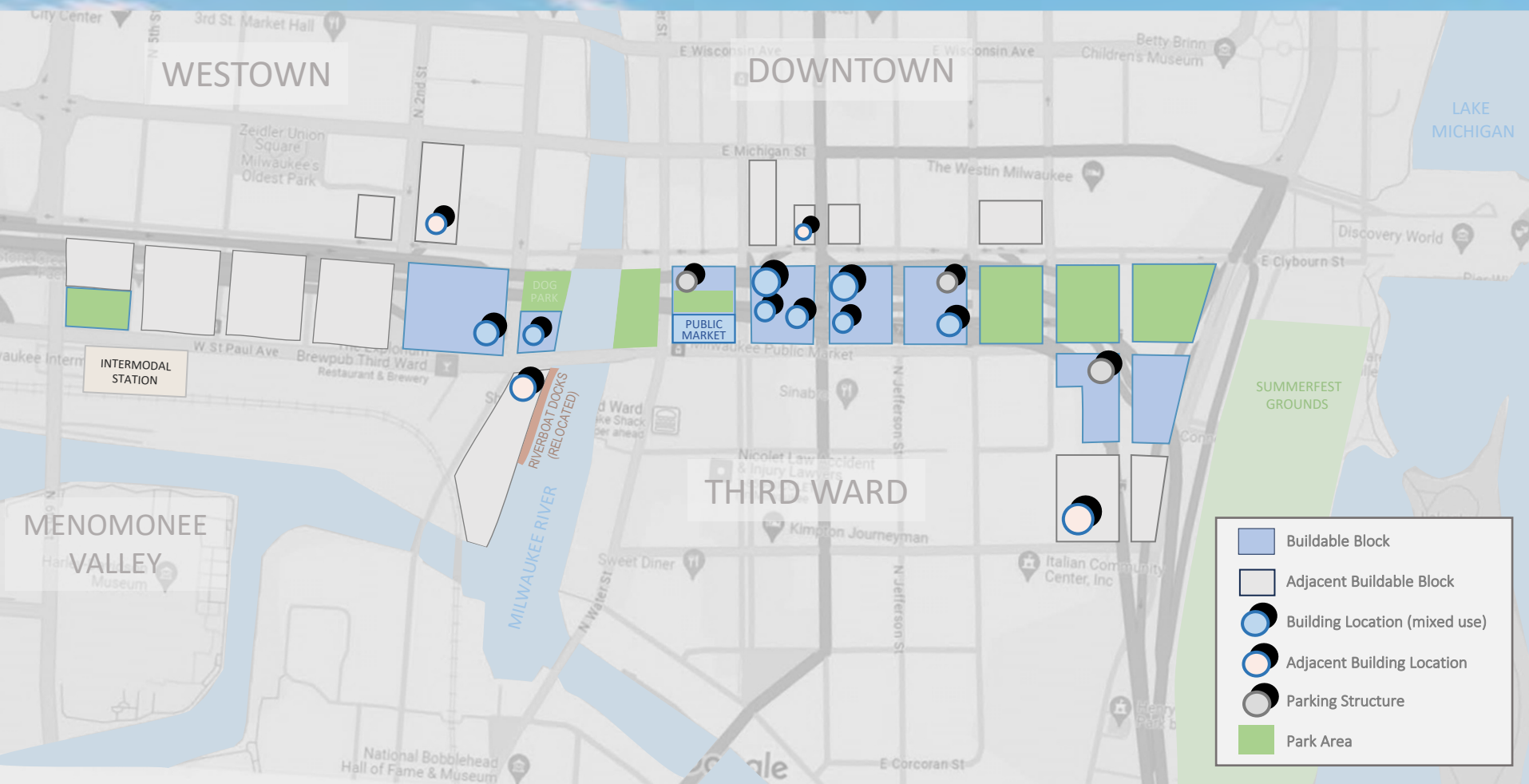
**+1,400**  
RESIDENTS

**+\$58M**  
LOCAL DISPOSABLE \$/YR

**+\$300M**  
TOTAL PROPERTY VALUE

**+\$150M**  
TOTAL PROP. TAX COLLECTED

In the first 10 years, new buildings are concentrated in strategic locations to anchor blocks and support existing businesses. The pedestrian mall of N. Broadway is expanded to connect to the Third Ward and Downtown. Yet to be developed land becomes public park space activated with large sculpture art, sport courts and events.





# 20-YEAR OUTLOOK

+2,000  
UNITS

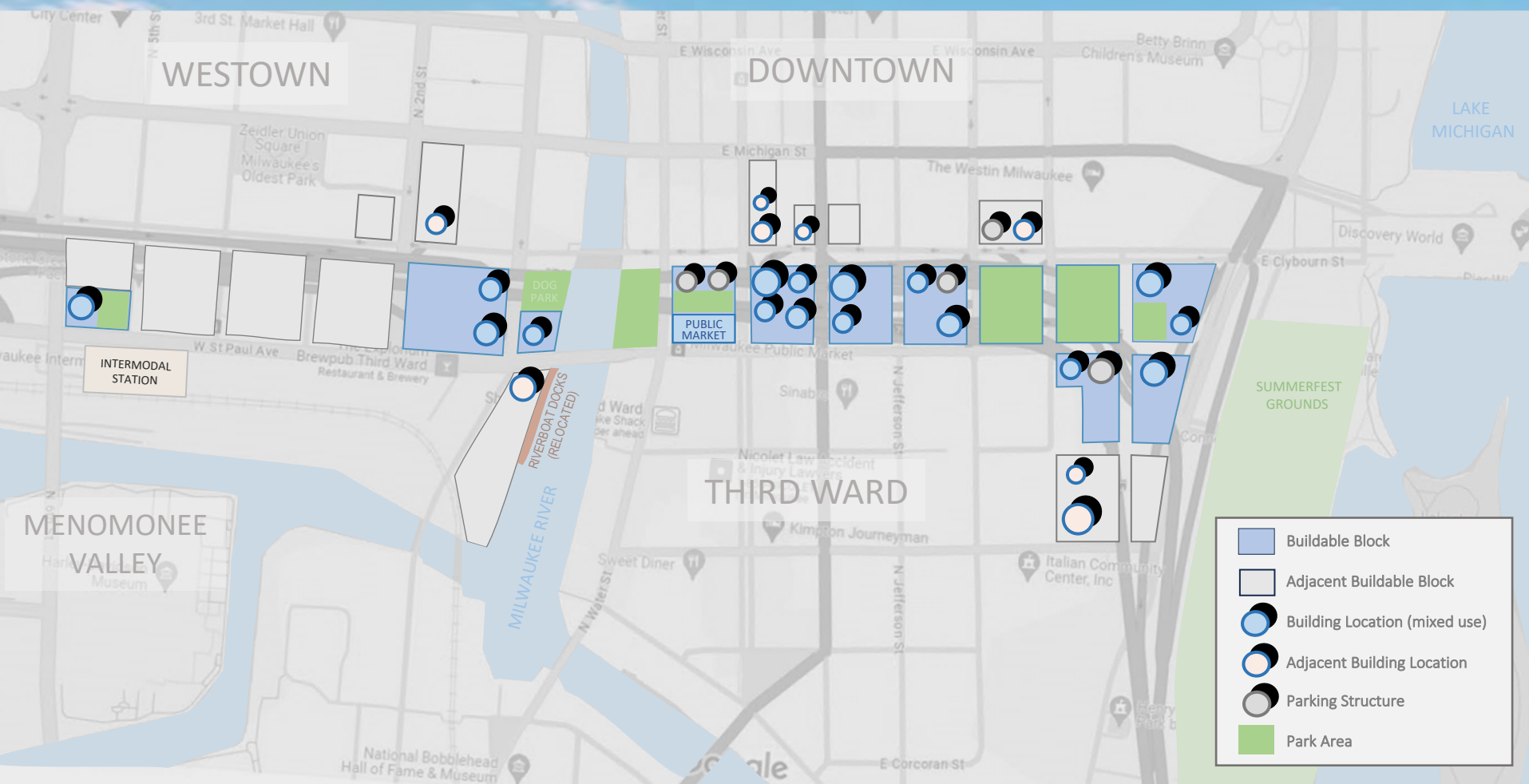
+2,800  
RESIDENTS

+\$117M  
LOCAL DISPOSABLE \$/YR

+\$700M  
TOTAL PROPERTY VALUE

+\$300M  
TOTAL PROP. TAX COLLECTED

As momentum picks up a new neighborhood begins to form and attractive real estate entices not just regional, but national business relocations. More young workforce talent is retained in state. The city uses land to incentivize and generate revenue for affordable housing goals. Clybourn Blvd. becomes a shopping designation for visitors.





# 30-YEAR OUTLOOK

+3,000  
UNITS

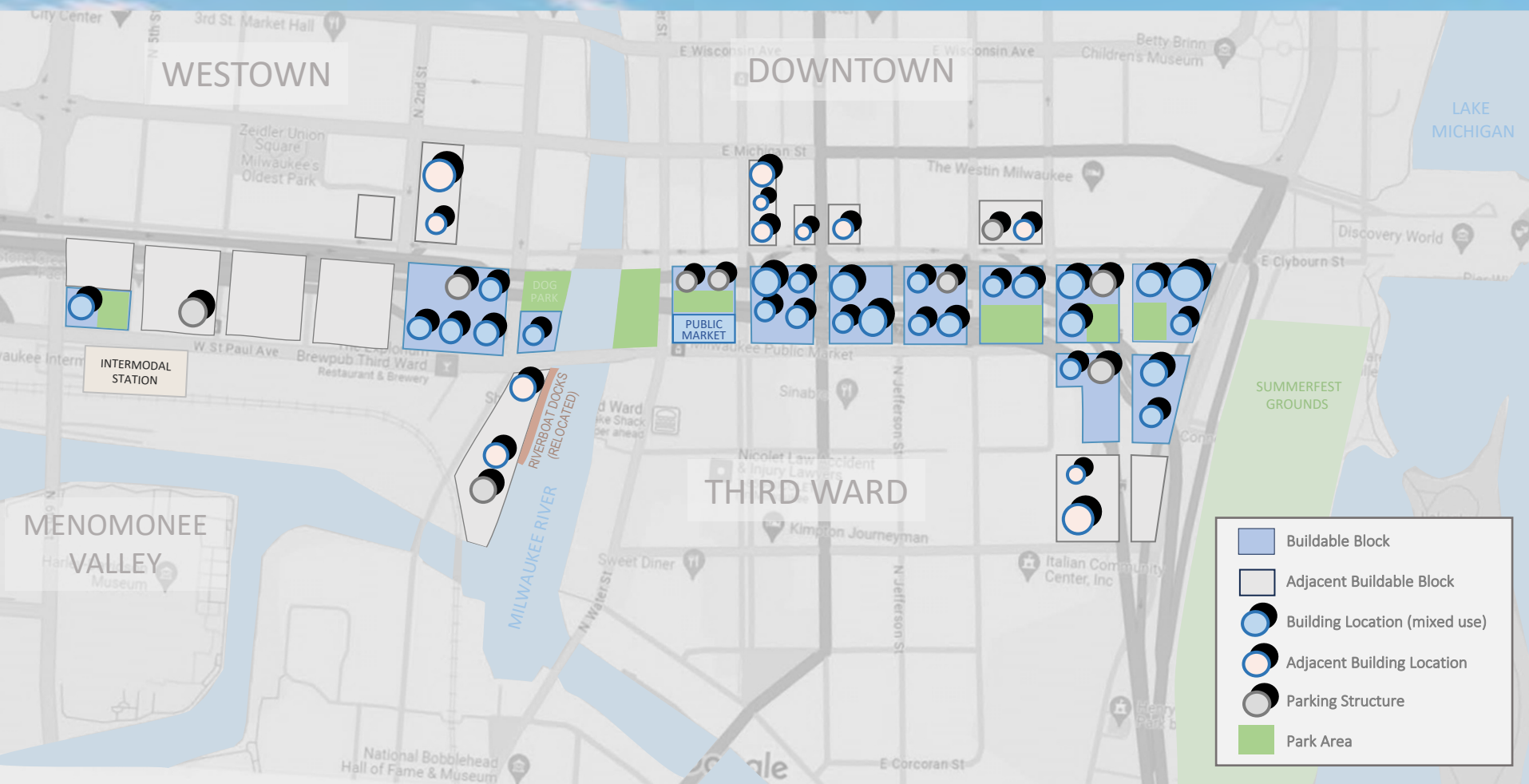
+4,200  
RESIDENTS

+\$175M  
LOCAL DISPOSABLE \$/YR

+\$1.1B  
TOTAL PROPERTY VALUE

+\$475M  
TOTAL PROP. TAX COLLECTED

After 30 years, development reaches ~90% capacity with a thriving mix of housing (market rate & affordable), shops, office, hotels, park and community space. Buildings and streets create a seamless connection between Westtown, Downtown, The Third Ward and the Lakeshore. Of the original park space, a few smaller public parks remain.



# OPPORTUNITY

## A GENERATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

After 30 years of development in place of the 794 segment, the total benefits amount to:

- \$475M in property taxes
- \$60M in city sales tax
- \$3B in cumulative additional disposable income
- \$1.1B in added property value
- 3,000+ housing units (20% affordable)

In 794's place we would see:

- New retail, restaurants, hospitality and entertainment
- New employers attracted to locate Downtown
- Improved transit/ multimodal connections
- High-energy public spaces
- Improved local business markets
- Larger long-term tax base



## Development Capacity Analysis

		NEW UNITS BUILT 100 units built each year for 5 years	NEW PARKING 1.1 spaces per unit	PROPERTY VALUE of units built during each 5 year interval \$350,000/ unit	PROPERTY TAX COLLECTED during each 5 year interval: mil rate of \$26 per \$1,000 of value
from	through				
2025	2030	500	550	\$ 175,000,000	\$ 22,750,000
2025	2035	1,000	1,100	\$ 350,000,000	\$ 45,500,000
2025	2040	1,500	1,650	\$ 525,000,000	\$ 68,250,000
2025	2045	2,000	2,200	\$ 700,000,000	\$ 91,000,000
2025	2050	2,500	2,750	\$ 875,000,000	\$ 113,750,000
2025	2055	3,000	3,300	\$ 1,050,000,000	\$ 136,500,000
After 30 years					<b>\$ 477,750,000</b>

## Local Spending and Sales Tax

		NEW UNITS BUILT 100 units built each year for 5 years	AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE	POP. INCREASE	LOCAL SPENDING \$3,500/mo. per person for each year	LOCAL DISPOSABLE INCOME per year over 5 years	CITY SALES TAX REVENUE Sales tax revenue city: 2%
from	through						
2025	2030	500	1.4	700	29,400,000	\$ 147,000,000	\$ 2,940,000
2030	2035	1,000	1.4	1,400	58,800,000	\$ 294,000,000	\$ 5,880,000
2035	2040	1,500	1.4	2,100	88,200,000	\$ 441,000,000	\$ 8,820,000
2040	2045	2,000	1.4	2,800	117,600,000	\$ 588,000,000	\$ 11,760,000
2045	2050	2,500	1.4	3,500	147,000,000	\$ 735,000,000	\$ 14,700,000
2050	2055	3,000	1.4	4,200	176,400,000	\$ 882,000,000	\$ 17,640,000
After 30 years						<b>\$ 3,087,000,000</b>	<b>\$ 61,740,000</b>



# JOBS

## ECONOMIC IMPACT COMPARISON

The number of jobs created by development would be more than double that of rebuilding this section of 794 infrastructure. If the downtown section of 794 was replaced with at-grade streets, building and construction jobs would be ongoing for 30 years. Those jobs would be steady over time compared with the one-time jobs involved with rebuilding infrastructure.

## PRIVATE SECTOR JOBS

Construction trades, maintenance, management, retail and hospitality jobs would be created in the private sector by constructing upwards of \$1B in buildings. Compare this with the jobs in road construction/maintenance paid for by public tax dollars costing nearly \$300M.

The Third Ward Strategic Plan



Recent Development adjacent to I-794





# SUCCESS OF PARK EAST REMOVAL

## 20 YEARS AFTER REMOVAL

The Park East Freeway spur [shown below in red] was removed in 2002. It was part of a failed plan to loop Milwaukee's downtown with freeways [the green portion was never built].

Since removal there has been over \$2.5 billion of investment in place of the freeway and on adjacent parcels including the Fiserv Forum [\$525 million], "Deer District", and "North End" development.

1970's Plan for Freeway loop around downtown



Development in Park East Since Removal in 2002





# COMMON GOALS

The State, County, City and adjacent communities share these common goals:

- Improve health, safety, wellness and quality of life
- Community building and prosperity
- Provide opportunity for all residents
- Improve outcomes of most disadvantaged
- Population and Job Growth of region
- Attract and retain business and talent
- Improve and maintain fiscal health of region
- Become a sustainable and resilient region



Grow the  
Downtown population  
to 40,000 residents  
by 2040

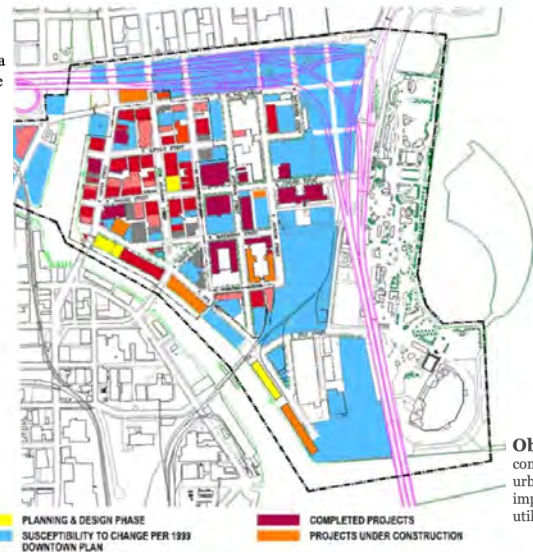
Add ~15,000  
housing units  
Downtown  
by 2040  
20% of Units  
Affordable

Grow  
Downtown  
jobs to 100,000  
by 2040

B Leverage public land for the development of affordable and mixed-income housing, including encouraging a percentage of affordable units when soliciting and reviewing proposals for publicly owned land.



The State of Wisconsin Department of Transportation has recommended a new design for the I-794 Interchange at Lincoln Memorial Dr. when it needs to be constructed at some point in the future. This Plan strongly recommends re-examining alternatives that will provide added acreage for new development, including replacing the interchange with an at-grade conventional intersection or modern roundabout.



Connecting MKE calls for exploring the eventual removal of the I-794 Lake Interchange and replacing it with a traditional connected grid of comfortable multi-modal streets, public spaces, and high-density mixed-use development.



**Objective:** Create a new series of multi-modal connections that further weaves the Valley into the urban grid and its adjacent neighborhoods. New and improved connections activate previously under-utilized Valley areas.

## MILWAUKEE COUNTY GOALS

### Create Intentional Inclusion

- 1A Reflect the full diversity of Milwaukee County at every level of county government.
- 1B Create and nurture an inclusive culture across Milwaukee County.
- 1C Increase the number of Milwaukee County contracts awarded to minority and women-owned businesses.

### Bridge The Gap

- 2A Determine what, where and how we deliver services based on the resolution of health disparities.
- 2B Break down silos across Milwaukee County government to maximize access and quality of services offered.
- 2C Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions.

### Invest in Equity

- 3A "lowest upstream" to address root causes of health disparities.
- 3B Enhance Milwaukee County's fiscal health and sustainability.
- 3C Disassemble barriers to diverse and inclusive communities.

Our mission is to improve metro Milwaukee as a place to invest capital, grow business and create jobs.

For more than 150 years, the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MMAC) has been serving area businesses as a private, not-for-profit organization. Today we represent 1,800+ member businesses with more than 300,000 employees in Milwaukee, Waukesha, Washington and Ozaukee counties and beyond.



## Vision

MMSD envisions a healthier, cleaner, resilient region.

## Mission

MMSD protects public health and the environment through world-class, cost-effective water resource management, leadership, and partnership.

## Mission

To strategically invest in Wisconsin to enhance the economic well-being of people and their businesses and communities

## Vision

An Economy for All, where every Wisconsinite has the opportunity to thrive

**WISCONSIN**  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## BEYOND I-794: BUILDING AN EQUITABLE, JUST, AND INCLUSIVE MILWAUKEE FOR ALL

The removal of I-794 may benefit some, but it is essential to recognize that this decision alone does not address the deep-seated inequities and injustices faced by Milwaukee's Black neighborhoods. True progress will require a sustained, community-driven effort to repair the damage caused by urban renewal, redlining, and divestment and to create a city where every neighborhood can thrive.



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

*Q: Would the removal concept remove all of I-794 / The Hoan Bridge?*

A: None of the DOT concepts propose removing the Hoan Bridge or any part of I-794 to the South of it. The proposals focus only on the section of raised highway through Downtown from 6<sup>th</sup> Street to the North end of the Hoan Bridge.

*Q: What would happen to the rest of I-794 if the downtown portion was removed?*

A: The Hoan Bridge and the rest of I-794 to the South would likely become part of Wisconsin Highway 794, which is the designation for the Lake Parkway, says WisDOT southeast regional spokesman Dan Sellers.

*Q: Would this add time to commutes?*

A: The DOT is studying how traffic patterns would likely shift in each scenario. To take the same route of I-794 through Downtown on city streets adds nearly 3-5 minutes of time. We believe the added benefits to the city center outweigh this additional time.

*Q: Will this impact Port of Milwaukee (Jones Island) traffic?*

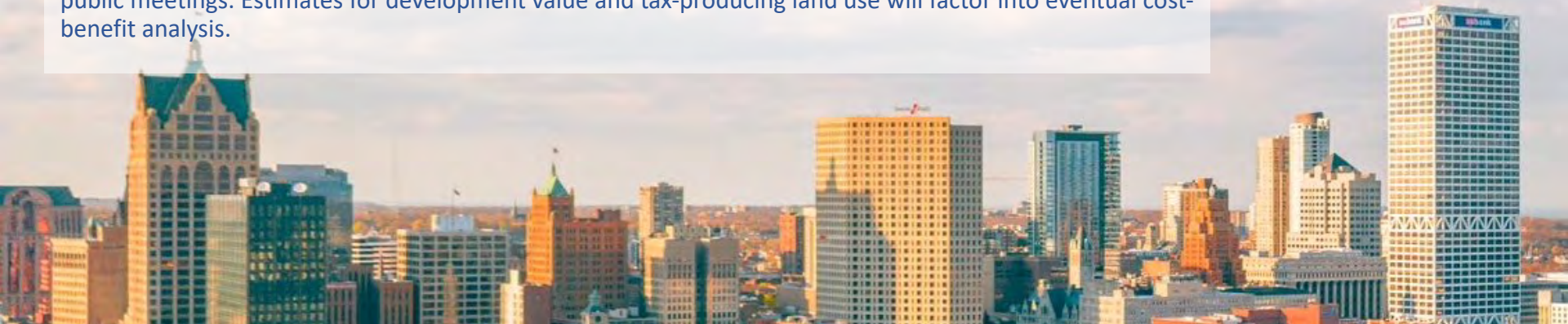
A: The DOT is studying traffic patterns, some Port Milwaukee traffic would disperse to E. Bay Street for a stretch of 1-mile where it then connects with the Interstate system.

*Q: If I-794 through downtown was replaced with city street grid would it include a lift-bridge?*

A: Yes, a movable bridge would likely remain at Clybourn St. like the bridges at Michigan St. and Wisconsin Ave. Steps to mitigate bridge openings during peak (car) traffic times can be considered.

*Q: What are the costs of each option being considered?*

A: The DOT is studying each options associated construction costs and will share those figures in upcoming public meetings. Estimates for development value and tax-producing land use will factor into eventual cost-benefit analysis.





# LEARN MORE

RETHINK 794

<https://www.rethink794.com>

LAKE INTERCHANGE STUDY – WisDOT

<https://www.794lakeinterchange.wisconsin.gov>

MOVING MILWAUKEE FORWARD

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhgVwXkWgrM>

AUGMENTED REALITY

[www.i794.com](http://www.i794.com)

RECONNECTING COMMUNITIES FEDERAL PROGRAM

<https://www.transportation.gov/reconnecting>

FREEWAY FIGHTERS NETWORK

<https://freeway-fighters.org>

DOWNTOWN PLAN – MILWAUKEE AREA PLANS

<https://city.milwaukee.gov/DCD/Planning/PlansStudies/AreaPlans/Downtown>

BEYOND I794: ENVISIONING A MORE JUST AND INCLUSIVE MILWAUKEE

<https://hyfin.org/2024/04/10/beyond-i-794-envisioning-a-more-just-and-inclusive-milwaukee/>

HOW HISTORY OF SOUTHEASTERN WI FREEWAYS AFFECT THE I-794 DEBATE

<https://www.milwaukeeemag.com/how-the-past-of-southeastern-wisconsin-freeways-affects-the-i-794-debate/>

BRIDGING DIVIDES: THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF COLLABORATION IN HIGHWAY REMOVAL

<https://www.planetizen.com/features/132676-bridging-divides-crucial-role-collaboration-highway-removal>

# CREDITS

Rethink 794 is a volunteer group advocating for the removal of the 794 segment through downtown to benefit the public and grow Milwaukee: This document is authored by Larry Witzling, Taylor Korslin, Gregg May, and Carl Glasemeyer. Other volunteers with Rethink 794 include: Montavious Jones, Xu Zhang, Gard Pecor, John Everitt, Jeff Bentoff, and Greg Walthers.

Wisconsin Department of Transportation: Diagrams used from WisDOT Lake Interchange Study

Background Photo credits: Nate Vomhof

Document photos: Downtown Plan, Third Ward Plan, Menomonee Valley Plan, City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

Dedicated in memory of bold civic leader and Alderman Jonathan Brostoff. Thank you for your support and unwavering commitment to bettering the Milwaukee community.

