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Freeway Removal in Milwaukee: Three Case Studies

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FREEWAY REMOVAL IN MILWAUKEE:
THREE CASE STUDIES

by

Alex Snyder

A Thesis Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

FREEWAY REMOVAL IN MILWAUKEE: THREE CASE STUDIES

by

Alex Snyder

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2016
Under the Supervision of Professor Amanda Seligman

A growing number of cities are choosing to remove parts of their urban freeway network to make room for alternative land uses. This study examines the history of two freeway spurs in Milwaukee—the Park East Freeway and Interstate 794—which were both targeted for demolition. Park East was demolished in 2002, but Interstate 794, which was considered for partial demolition on two separate occasions, was eventually rebuilt. This study asks what the cases of Park East and I-794 can tell us about the attributes of a successful freeway teardown project. This study traces the history of both freeways from the 1950s to the present, drawing on a mix of newspaper coverage, archival sources, planning documents, and relevant scholarly studies. This thesis makes two arguments. First, it argues that the cases of Park East and I-794 support the idea that freeway removal efforts may need: (1) An adequate window of opportunity; (2) a strong advocate for the teardown option; (3) strong business support, and; (4) reasonable assurances from teardown proponents that the removal option will “do no harm.” Second, it argues that the I-794 outcome can be partly explained by a major state investment in the freeway in the 1990s.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
I-794	Interstate 794
MMAC	Milwaukee Metropolitan Area Chamber of Commerce
SEWRPC	Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
WisDOT	Wisconsin Department of Transportation

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Introduction

In 2002, Milwaukee's Park East Freeway came tumbling down. For three decades, the half-mile spur of elevated highway had stood as a relic of an ill-fated attempt to encircle the city's downtown with a freeway loop—a controversial project halted in the 1970s by a mix of public opposition, new federal regulations, and litigation. Demolishing Park East had long been the goal of Mayor John Norquist and others who viewed the freeway as a physical and economic barrier to downtown Milwaukee's development and growth.

The fall of Park East marked another milestone in an emerging trend in the United States: By the 1990s, freeway removal or relocation projects had taken place in or were underway in New York, San Francisco, and Boston, as well Portland, Oregon, and Oakland, California.¹ “I predict this is just the beginning,” Norquist wrote in 2000, “With property values skyrocketing near demolished freeways, urban expressway deconstruction could be one of the biggest public works projects of the 21st century.”²

But Park East is only part of Milwaukee's freeway removal history. Norquist and others had also campaigned for a partial demolition of Interstate 794, a freeway spur that, like Park East, also stood as a relic of more optimistic plans. But Norquist's campaign to tear down I-794 was met by stiff resistance from state, county, and suburban officials and was eventually abandoned in the same deal that sealed Park East's demise. A decade later, state transportation

1. Institute for Transportation and Development Policy and EMBARQ, *Life and Death of Urban Highways*, 2012, <http://bit.ly/1UwAEqg>; City of Seattle, *Six Cased Studies of Freeway Removal*, Seattle Urban Mobility Plan, 2008, <http://bit.ly/1GVITcc>; Raymond Mohl, “The Expressway Teardown Movement in American Cities: Rethinking Postwar Highway Policy in Post-Interstate Era,” *Journal of Planning History* 11, no. 1 (February, 2012): 92; Massachusetts Department of Transportation, “The Big Dig,” *MassDOT*, <http://www.massdot.state.ma.us/>; Brett Jackson, “Replacing Oakland's Cypress Freeway,” *Public Roads*, 61, no. 5 (March/April 1998), <http://1.usa.gov/1PmolJJ>.

2. John Norquist, “Tear it Down!” *Blueprint Magazine*, Fall 2000.

officials fielded a tentative proposal to tear down another part of the freeway. By then, Interstate 794 was rapidly nearing the end of its structural lifespan, and the cost of rehabilitation work on the overbuilt freeway segment was projected to be, in the words of one transportation official, “astronomical.”³ But this proposal was also met with stiff resistance, and I-794 was ultimately rebuilt rather than dismantled.

This study asks what the cases of Park East and I-794 tell us about the attributes of a successful freeway teardown. It traces the history of both freeways from the 1950s to the present, drawing on a mix of newspaper coverage, archival sources, and planning documents, and relevant scholarly studies. This thesis makes two arguments. First, it argues that the cases of Park East and I-794 support the idea that freeway removal efforts may need: (1) An adequate window of opportunity; (2) a strong advocate for the teardown option; (3) strong business support, and; (4) reasonable assurances from teardown proponents that the removal option will “do no harm.” Second, it argues that the I-794 outcome can be partly explained by a major state investment in the freeway in the 1990s.

The significance of this research is twofold. First, this study examines the Park East teardown in a more comprehensive way than has previously been achieved. Park East has been widely written about by scholars and non-scholars alike, but perhaps never so comprehensively. Second, by studying the case of I-794, this study broadens our understanding of the freeway removal trend in the U.S. To date, most of the literature on this topic has focused on successful freeway removal projects (with “success” here being defined as a demolished freeway). Demolished freeways are, however, only part of the picture; Many freeway segments considered

3. Pete Millard, “State Weighs Tearing Down Hoan Bridge,” *Milwaukee Business Journal*, August 21, 2008. <http://bit.ly/1RuKYda>.

for demolition have instead been rerouted or rebuilt. Understanding failed removal attempts is an important part of understanding the necessary conditions for freeway removal to take place.

The author believes this research will be of interest to a relatively wide audience, including public policymakers and community leaders who have an interest in pursuing a freeway teardown project in their communities. This may beg the question: Why would anyone want to demolish an urban freeway in the first place? The answer to that question is multifaceted. For all their benefits, these highways also create a host of problems and challenges. They are sources of noise pollution, air pollution, traffic congestion, and are widely considered to be unsightly in their appearance. For all of these reasons, freeways tend to have a depressive effect on nearby property values. They consume amounts of urban space that could be used for other amenities, such as public parks, residences, and businesses. Urban freeways also create physical and psychological barriers between different neighborhoods, especially for non-motorized forms of traffic. Finally, they are extremely expensive to maintain and rebuild.

Literature Review

As the number of freeway removal projects grow, so too has interest in the topic as a subject of research. This body of research is relatively small, but two generalizations can be made. First, this research generally falls into one of two categories: Studies that have measured a removal project's specific impacts—such as traffic impacts or land value prices—and studies that have attempted to tease out the attributes of successful removal projects. This study falls into the latter category of literature. A third but emerging category places the removal trend within a broader historical context. Beyond these categorical classifications, freeway removal research

thus far has placed a heavy emphasis on *successful* freeway removal projects (that is, those that proceeded to demolition phase). Relatively little attention has been given to freeways where the demolition option was considered but ultimately rejected. By examining the demolition of I-794, this study helps fill a gap in the current body of research.

Thus far, research examining the specific impacts of freeway removal has found only positive outcomes. In 2004, for instance, Chang Deok Kang and Robert Cervero examined the examined property value impacts from a freeway removal project in Seoul, South Korea. Between 2003 and 2005, the municipal government tore down a 9.4 km elevated freeway, replacing it with an urban greenway that restored the Cheonggyecheon stream, which resulted in a significant and positive impact on housing prices.⁴ In a similar 2009 study, Cervero, Kang, and Kevin Shively examined land value impacts resulting from two freeway removal projects in San Francisco—the Embarcadero Freeway, an elevated, double-decker highway 2.6 km in length that formerly ran along the waterfront, and the Central Freeway, of which 1 km was removed and replaced with the Octavia Boulevard. In both instances, the researchers found that the removal of these freeways had a positive impact on nearby land values.⁵ Finally, in 2013, Jason Billings, Norman Garrick, and Nicholas Lownes assessed the travel pattern impacts of three freeway removal projects: the Embarcadero Freeway and Central Freeway in San Francisco and the Park East Freeway in Milwaukee.⁶ They found that while these removal projects reduced traffic capacity in the corridor, they also had a redistributive effect on traffic, diffusing previously concentrated traffic streams over adjacent streets and other freeways. In San Francisco, evidence

4. Chang Deok Kang and Robert Cervero, "From Elevated Freeway to Urban Greenway: Land Value Impacts of the CGC Project in Seoul, Korea," *Urban Studies* 46, no. 13 (2009): 2771-794.

5. Robert Cervero, Junhee Kang, and Kevin Shively, "From Elevated Freeways to Surface Boulevards: Neighborhood and Housing Price Impacts in San Francisco," *Journal of Urbanism* 2, no.1 (March 2009): 31-50.

6. Jason Billings, Norman W. Garrick, and Nicholas E. Lownes, "Changes in Travel Patterns Due to Freeway Teardown for Three North American Case Studies." *Urban Design International* 18, no. 2 (2013): 165-81.

suggests some highway users might actually have switched to light rail. In all cases the researchers concluded that “the fears involved with removing freeways are unwarranted and that overall the changes seem to be beneficial to the city.”⁷

In his 2012 article, Raymond Mohl put the urban freeway removal trend in a historical context. Mohl chronicled completed removal or relocation projects in six U.S. cities and provided overviews of similar projects in progress or under some level of consideration in more than a dozen cities.⁸ Mohl interpreted recent interest in urban freeway removal “as a contemporary response to some of the now perceived failures of mid-century urban transportation planning and policy.”⁹ All of this activity, he argued, “suggests the outlines of a loosely organized national expressway teardown movement” resulting from “a fundamental shift in the nation’s transportation politics.”¹⁰ But he noted this movement has thus far only succeeded in removing “expendable” freeway segments, such as the remnants of never-finished freeway projects. “Realistically,” he wrote, “no one expects that main-line expressways that carry heavy auto and truck traffic through metropolitan areas will get torn down.”¹¹

A final category of research deals with the attributes of successful freeway removal projects. This thesis draws on an evaluative framework of “necessary conditions” for freeway removal developed within this vein of research. The initial list of conditions for freeway removal was developed by Francesca Napolitan in her 2007 master’s thesis.¹² This thesis was later condensed into a published article of the same title, co-authored by P. Christopher Zegras,

7. Jason Billings, Norman W. Garrick, and Nicholas E. Lownes, "Changes in Travel Patterns Due to Freeway Teardown for Three North American Case Studies." *Urban Design International* 18, no. 2 (2013):181.

8. Raymond Mohl, “The Expressway Teardown Movement in American Cities: Rethinking Postwar Highway Policy in Post-Interstate Era,” *Journal of Planning History* 11, no. 1 (February, 2012): 89-103.

9. *Ibid.*, 91.

10. *Ibid.*, 96.

11. *Ibid.*, 97.

12. Francesca Napolitan and P. Christopher Zegras. "Shifting Urban Priorities? Removal of Inner City Freeways in the United States." *Transportation Research Record*, no. 2046 (2008): 68-75.

Napolitan's thesis adviser.¹³ This literature review relies most heavily on Napolitan's thesis, where core concepts are explained more comprehensively. Napolitan's list of conditions was later expanded in 2009 by Kim Tucker Henry in her own master's thesis.¹⁴

Shifting Urban Priorities (2007)

In "Shifting Urban Priorities: Removal of Inner City Freeways in the United States," Napolitan worked "towards a theory of highway removal" through three case studies where the removal option was considered: the Park East Freeway in Milwaukee (the same freeway examined in this thesis), the Central Freeway in San Francisco, and the Whitehurst Freeway in Washington D.C.¹⁵ As mentioned earlier, Park East was closed for demolition in 2002 following a lengthy campaign by the Norquist administration. A terminal portion of San Francisco's Central Freeway, which was damaged in the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, was demolished in the early 2000s after a lengthy referendum process. In Washington, D.C., the Whitehurst Freeway was rebuilt rather than dismantled. Here, "a strong community movement against the freeway never really appeared. The movement seemed to have its mind set on a rehabilitation scheme, citing primarily cost and traffic concerns."¹⁶

Drawing on these case studies and explanations of national and international studies of large-scale infrastructure projects, Napolitan developed a set of "necessary conditions" for

13. Francesca Napolitan, "Shifting Urban Priorities: The Removal of Inner City Freeways in the United States," (master's thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), <http://bit.ly/1L9Sc9G>.

14. Kim Tucker Henry, "Deconstructing Elevated Expressways: An Evaluation of the Proposal to Remove the Interstate 10 Claiborne Avenue Expressway in New Orleans, Louisiana" (master's thesis, University of New Orleans, 2009), <http://bit.ly/1Ulg3oJ>.

15. Francesca Napolitan, "Shifting Urban Priorities: The Removal of Inner City Freeways in the United States," (master's thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), 41, <http://bit.ly/1L9Sc9G>.

16. Francesca Napolitan and P. Christopher Zegras, "Shifting Urban Priorities? Removal of Inner City Freeways in the United States," *Transportation Research Record*, no. 2046 (2008): 72.

freeway removal to occur. Her basic argument appeared in two forms, which differ from each other enough to warrant discussion of both. First, she argued that:

Urban highway removal will occur in locations where a policy entrepreneur for freeway removal exists and a window of opportunity occurs such that they are able to push the idea to a wider audience. Once the window has been opened, and the idea of freeway removal has gained legitimacy as a valid option, there must be an individual or collective group who supports the opportunity cost for removing a freeway in order to benefit in another area. Ultimately for the alternative of freeway removal to be selected over other alternatives, those in power must value other benefits more than they value the benefits associated with freeway infrastructure.¹⁷

Later, however, she argued that freeway removal will only take place when

(1) the one precondition is met: the condition of the freeway must be such that there is concern over its integrity and structural safety, (2) a window of opportunity exists; the window may be the precondition itself or an event like a public hearing, or planning process, or a temporary closure of a roadway, (3) the value of mobility must be lower than other objectives such as economic development, quality of life, etc., and (4) those in power must value other benefits more than they value the benefits associated with freeway infrastructure for the alternative of freeway removal to be selected over other alternatives.¹⁸

There are two major differences between these arguments. The first references a “policy entrepreneur,” a condition that is not found in the second. Beyond this, the “value of mobility” condition in the second argument does not appear in the first version of the argument, but appears closely related to condition (4) which is apparent in both statements. These concepts were defined as follows:

Integrity and Safety Concerns: Napolitan argued that freeway removal would only gain serious consideration if there were concerns about the freeway’s integrity or safety. Both the

17. Francesca Napolitan, “Shifting Urban Priorities: The Removal of Inner City Freeways in the United States,” (master’s thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), 123, <http://bit.ly/1L9Sc9G>.

18. *Ibid.*, 126-127.

Park East and Whitehurst freeways were intact, she argued, but they were nearing the end of their structural lifespans and would eventually need to be rebuilt or rehabilitated. San Francisco's Central Freeway, by contrast, was partially damaged in the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake. Napolitan described this condition as "precondition"; that is, that it must be in place before freeway removal can even be considered.

Policy Entrepreneur: Napolitan borrowed this concept from political scientist John Kingdon, who defined the policy entrepreneur as someone who invests "their resources—time, energy, reputation, and sometimes money—in the hope of a future return. That return might come to them in the form of policies of which they approve, satisfaction from participation, or even personal aggrandizement in the form of job security or career promotion."¹⁹ As Napolitan noted, "Policy entrepreneurs can be found in many parts of the policy community including within government agencies, elected or appointed officials, special interest groups, community organizations, and research organizations."²⁰ Napolitan argued that "Urban highway removal will occur in locations where a policy entrepreneur for freeway removal exists and a window of opportunity occurs such that they are able to push the idea to a wider audience."²¹ In other words, the success or failure of a given freeway removal project may well hinge on whether there is a leader or group actively advocating for the removal option.

A Window of Opportunity: A "window of opportunity" was defined as the thing that allows the teardown option to gain serious consideration. It can be any number of things, such as

19. John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, Second Edition (New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1995), 122, quoted in Francesca Napolitan, "Shifting Urban Priorities: The Removal of Inner City Freeways in the United States," (master's thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), 39-40, <http://bit.ly/1L9Sc9G>.

20. Francesca Napolitan, "Shifting Urban Priorities: The Removal of Inner City Freeways in the United States," (master's thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), 40, <http://bit.ly/1L9Sc9G>.

21. Francesca Napolitan, "Shifting Urban Priorities: The Removal of Inner City Freeways in the United States," (master's thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), 123, <http://bit.ly/1L9Sc9G>.

“the precondition itself or an event such as a public hearing, planning process, or temporary roadway closure.”²² The window of opportunity for Park East and Whitehurst, she argued, was the deteriorating physical condition of the freeway. The window of opportunity for Central Freeway was both the freeway’s physical condition and a community-involved planning process.

Decreased Value of Mobility: Napolitan defined “mobility” as “the quality of moving from one point to another. The greater mobility [*sic*], the greater the ease with which one can move around.”²³ The 1950s, she argued, was a period in which the goal of enhancing mobility was put ahead of all other considerations, including quality of life and environmental concerns. But the narrow goal of enhancing mobility came at a high social cost as highways were run through neighborhoods, parklands, and environmental corridors. “The anti-freeway revolts of the 1960s and 1970s,” she wrote, “were a testament to the public’s apparent growing value for other goods over mobility. Grassroots groups fought to keep freeways out of their neighborhoods in a desire to maintain community cohesion and preserve their quality of life.”²⁴ From this perspective then, the freeway removal projects represent a continuation of a long-standing tension between mobility and other values.²⁵

Those in Power and What they Value: The term “those in power” was defined as an “individual or collective group,” including the voting public.²⁶ In Milwaukee, Napolitan saw power as being embodied within Mayor John Norquist and his administration, which campaigned to tear down the freeway and succeeding in convincing “governmental officials, businessmen and the general public of the benefits of tearing down the Park East Freeway and

22. Francesca Napolitan, “Shifting Urban Priorities: The Removal of Inner City Freeways in the United States,” (master’s thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), 126, <http://bit.ly/1L9Sc9G>.

23. *Ibid.*, 26.

24. Francesca Napolitan, “Shifting Urban Priorities: The Removal of Inner City Freeways in the United States,” (master’s thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), 27, <http://bit.ly/1L9Sc9G>.

25. *Ibid.*, 123.

26. *Ibid.*, 121.

subsequently gained their support.”²⁷ In the case of Central Freeway in San Francisco “competing neighborhoods used the referendum process” to decide the fate of the freeway.²⁸ For the Whitehurst Freeway, they write that “proponents for freeway removal were not in a position of power,” and Mayor Marion Barry and the National Capital Planning Commission opted to keep the freeway.²⁹ “Ultimately,” Napolitan wrote, “for the alternative of freeway removal to be selected over other alternatives, those in power must value other benefits more than they value the benefits associated with freeway infrastructure.”³⁰

Napolitan and Zegras noted that this theory of freeway removal applies only to freeways with limited utility. They suggested that the Whitehurst Freeway might have survived because it retained a greater degree of connectivity; it was not merely a stub but part of a loop that allowed it to act as a bypass for some commuters and one “with few viable alternatives and difficult connections to larger networks on both ends.”³¹

Deconstructing Elevated Expressways (2009)

In her 2009 master’s thesis, “Deconstructing Elevated Expressways: An Evaluation of the Proposal to Remove the Interstate 10 Claiborne Avenue Expressway in New Orleans, Louisiana,” Kim Tucker Henry expanded Napolitan and Zegras’ conditions.³² Henry theorized that freeway removal projects would share many of the same attributes of government-backed

27. Francesca Napolitan, “Shifting Urban Priorities: The Removal of Inner City Freeways in the United States,” (master’s thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), 122, <http://bit.ly/1L9Sc9G>.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., 123.

31. Francesca Napolitan and P. Christopher Zegras, “Shifting Urban Priorities? Removal of Inner City Freeways in the United States,” *Transportation Research Record*, no. 2046 (2008): 74.

32. Kim Tucker Henry, “Deconstructing Elevated Expressways: An Evaluation of the Proposal to Remove the Interstate 10 Claiborne Avenue Expressway in New Orleans, Louisiana” (master’s thesis, University of New Orleans, 2009), <http://bit.ly/1Ulg3oJ>.

megaprojects common before 1970. Her expanded list of necessary conditions for urban highway removal drew on Alan Altshuler and David Luberoﬀ’s book *Mega-Projects: The Changing Politics of Urban Public Investment* (which Napolitan also consulted).³³ Henry’s expanded framework consisted of Napolitan’s list and five additional conditions.

Specifically, Henry theorized that successful freeway removal projects (1) would have strong businesses support; (2) that the teardown would originate from the public sector and be “sold” to various constituencies; (3) that the teardown would promise to “do no harm” by imposing few (if any) costs to constituencies or local neighborhoods; (4) that negative impacts would be greatly mitigated; and (5) a given freeway teardown might be federally-funded, but that it would be pursued to accomplish local goals, with little concern for national objectives. Henry’s complete evaluative framework appeared as follows:

Table 1 Henry’s Expanded Necessary Conditions

Necessary Conditions	Definition
Integrity and Safety Concerns	Concerns over integrity and safety of structure.
Window of Opportunity	Some event that enables a freeway removal alternative to gain serious consideration.
Decreased Value of Mobility	Value of mobility is lower than other objectives such as economic development.
Power Brokers Value of Freeway Less than other Benefits	Power brokers value other benefits more than they value the benefits associated with freeway infrastructure.
Support of Business Enterprises	Spearheaded by business enterprises with very direct interest at stake

33. Alan A. Altshuler and David Luberoﬀ, *Mega-Projects: The Changing Politics of Urban Public Investment* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003).

Public Entrepreneurship	Originated in public sector and were then “sold” to prospective constituencies.
“Do No Harm” Principle	Not imposing more than trivial costs on neighborhoods or the natural environment
“Mitigated” Negative Impacts	Negative impacts “mitigated” as far as possible.
“Bottom-Up Federalism”	Main constituency and support are local, with little if any regard for national purposes. May be federally funded.

Source: Kim Tucker Henry, "Deconstructing Elevated Expressways: An Evaluation of the Proposal to Remove the Interstate 10 Claiborne Avenue Expressway in New Orleans, Louisiana" (master's thesis, University of New Orleans, 2009), 48.

Henry applied this framework to five other freeway removal or relocation projects, including Park East in Milwaukee. She was, however, unable to do so for the Claiborne Avenue Expressway because the teardown option was still under consideration at the time she wrote her thesis. She found that “all conditions were present in the majority of the selected case cities and were unanimously consistent across all cases for some conditions.”³⁴ She described the Claiborne Avenue Expressway teardown proposal as lacking four of the conditions from her framework, including concerns about the freeway’s safety, leadership from local power brokers, boosterism from local business leaders, and policy entrepreneurship.³⁵ To date this project has not proceeded to demolition and seems unlikely to do so.

This study utilizes a revised list of the “necessary conditions” proposed by Napolitan, Zegras, and Henry. Specifically, it evaluates the Park East and I-794 teardown proposals on the

34. Kim Tucker Henry, “Deconstructing Elevated Expressways: An Evaluation of the Proposal to Remove the Interstate 10 Claiborne Avenue Expressway in New Orleans, Louisiana” (master’s thesis, University of New Orleans, 2009), 106.

35. Kim Tucker Henry, “Deconstructing Elevated Expressways: An Evaluation of the Proposal to Remove the Interstate 10 Claiborne Avenue Expressway in New Orleans, Louisiana” (master’s thesis, University of New Orleans, 2009), 126-127.

following criteria: (1) Integrity and safety concerns, (2) decreased value of mobility, (3) window of opportunity, (4) policy entrepreneurship, (5) business support, and (6) the proposal's promise to "do no harm" (see table 2). The reader will note that this list excludes several of the conditions outlined earlier. For example, Napolitan's condition that "those in power must value other benefits more than they value the benefits associated with freeway infrastructure" was omitted here because it does not seem to tell us much about the attributes of successful freeway removal projects. Henry's "'mitigated' negative impacts" condition was excluded because this condition would be easily satisfied by the "do no harm" condition; after all, if a given teardown promised to "do no harm," then logically, negative impacts would have already been mitigated. Henry's "bottom-up federalism" and "public entrepreneurship" conditions were also excluded because their influence on a teardown one way or another was not made clear, nor were they self-evident.

Table 2 Evaluation Criteria

Condition	Explanation
Integrity or Safety Concerns	Napolitan suggested that there must be integrity or safety concerns before the teardown option could be considered.
Window of Opportunity	Describes an event, process, or condition that allows the teardown option to gain serious consideration. Napolitan suggested the window of opportunity can be any number of things, such as the physical condition of the freeway itself, or a temporary road closure or planning process.
Decreased Value of Mobility	Describes the value of mobility relative to other urban priorities or goals, such as economic development or quality of life considerations. Napolitan defined mobility as “the quality of moving from one point to another.”
Policy Entrepreneur	Someone who invests their resources in a particular cause in the hope of some future return. We might expect to find that teardown proposals spearheaded by a persistent and well-connected advocate or group of advocates tend to succeed and that those teardown proposals lacking a clear policy entrepreneur tend to fail.
Support of Business Enterprises	Henry theorized that business support might be a key component of any teardown effort.
“Do No Harm” Principle	Henry argued that the successful teardown proposal would embody a principal of “do no harm.” If this proves to be a key condition of freeway removal projects, we would expect to find that the freeways are only demolished when it has been shown that the removal option will not result in significant traffic congestion or jeopardize major business interests.

Ultimately, Napolitan’s “value of mobility” condition did not prove to be a useful condition by which to analyze any of the teardown proposals in this study. There are several reasons for this. First, there is a problem with how the term “mobility” was used, which was defined as “the quality of moving from one point to another.”³⁶ The looseness of this definition

36. Francesca Napolitan, “Shifting Urban Priorities: The Removal of Inner City Freeways in the United States,” (master’s thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), 26, <http://bit.ly/1L9Sc9G>.

aside, this term clearly cannot refer to a *general* quality of movement because freeways cater exclusively to motor vehicle traffic and exclude other forms of movement (such as bicycle and pedestrian traffic). Thus, what Napolitan refers to as “mobility” would be more accurately referred to as *auto-mobility*.

This leads to a second problem, which is that it is too simplistic to suggest that a reduction in urban freeway miles automatically equates to a reduction in mobility. As readers will see in Chapter 3, some stakeholders viewed Park East and I-794 as barriers—albeit largely psychological ones—to pedestrian movement between Milwaukee’s central business district and adjacent neighborhoods. Although one could argue that the Park East teardown harmed the mobility of some Milwaukee motorists, this loss of mobility potentially resulted in a gains for non-motorized forms of mobility. Thus, it would be too simplistic to suggest that the demolition of freeway infrastructure automatically reduces a city’s overall level of mobility.

Finally, there is little evidence to suggest that there was an overall reduction in the value of (auto)mobility. Certainly, if we only consider the views of Mayor John Norquist, his planning director Peter Park, and other urban freeway critics who were tied to the project, there would seem to be some evidence to suggest the teardown of Park East was marked by a decrease in the value of auto-mobility. But what of other stakeholders involved in the project? It would be inaccurate to suggest that they also had viewed auto-mobility the same way. Take for example former Governor Tommy Thompson, who played a significant leader in the 1999 agreement to tear down Park East. Thompson’s propensity for highway-building and expansion projects has been well-documented. As James Conant, professor of government and politics, noted, “transportation was a particular interest of Tommy Thompson. Road building was an area where he could reward those who supported him, and he aggressively pushed his road-building

agenda.”³⁷ Even Napolitan acknowledged this. “We might question,” she noted, “whether a true change in the value of mobility occurred or whether the mobility value was simply ‘shifted’ to another part of the metropolitan area” because the Park East deal included concessions for expanded automobile infrastructure by way of a rebuilt (and expanded) downtown interchange.³⁸

This thesis contributes to freeway removal research in three ways. First, it tests a slightly modified version of the existing freeway removal evaluative framework. Second, it enhances the scholarly understanding of the current freeway teardown trend in the U.S. by examining two instances in which the teardown option was rejected. Finally, it examines the Park East teardown in considerably greater detail than has been previously attempted.

Organization of Study

This study is organized into two parts. Part 1 provides the necessary background information to contextualize and evaluate the Park East and I-794 teardown proposals. Following this introduction, chapter 1 provides a brief overview of Milwaukee’s freeway revolt with an emphasis on how it affected Park East and I-794. Chapter 2 examines the building of Lake Parkway, a 3.8-mile state highway that extends I-794’s reach into Milwaukee’s southeastern suburbs. Fully understanding the history of this state highway extension is important to understanding reactions to later I-794 teardown proposals.

Part 2 of this thesis examines the teardown efforts themselves. Chapter 3 summarizes early efforts to tear down Park East and a portion of I-794. Chapter 4 examines a final proposal

37. James Conant, *Wisconsin Politics and Government: America’s Laboratory of Democracy* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006): 111.

38. Francesca Napolitan, “Shifting Urban Priorities: The Removal of Inner City Freeways in the United States,” (master’s thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), 122, <http://bit.ly/1L9Sc9G>

to tear down the north-south (Hoan Bridge) segment of I-794 a decade later. The conclusion evaluates each teardown attempt within the aforementioned evaluative framework and considers the future of I-794 and Lake Parkway.

Limitations

As with any case study, there are some limitations. First, the cases of Park East and I-794 are highly suggestive—and support some aspects of teardown theory—but the findings of this study may not be generalizable to all teardown efforts; more case studies are needed, especially those dealing with lesser-known removal projects and unsuccessful teardown attempts. Second, these findings may also be temporally specific. As values and beliefs about transportation options change over time, we may find that the political, economic, and technical resources needed to execute freeway removal projects also change.

Chapter 1

Park East and Lake Freeway in Milwaukee's Freeway Revolt, 1958-1982

This chapter traces the history of the construction of Park East and I-794 from the 1950s through the early 1980s—a period of time covering Milwaukee's "golden age" of freeway construction as well as the city's freeway revolt. Both Park East and I-794 were relatively late additions to the county's expressway and relatively short in length, although planners extended both roadways in subsequent years. Like many other latecomers, both Park East and I-794 were met by significant public opposition, which succeeded in greatly curtailing plans for both roadways. By the early 1980s, both roadways stood as unfinished relics of more optimistic plans. They became, in a very real sense, highways to nowhere. Park East ended abruptly in the corridor that had been wiped clear of houses for the unbuilt portion highway. I-794 dumped traffic into a quiet neighborhood in southeastern Milwaukee. Lacking connectivity to both the broader freeway system and any real significance as destination connectors, the better part of both freeways carried relatively light traffic. As this chapter will show, the freeway revolt that had halted Park East and I-794, effectively set the stage for later removal efforts.

Planning for Milwaukee's freeway system was initiated in the 1940s in response to rising motor vehicle congestion resulting from a post-war boom in automobile sales. Between 1945 and 1953, motor vehicle ownership in the City of Milwaukee increased by 61 percent.¹ Rising congestion was resulting in longer commutes, higher crash rates, and, some contended, a general economic loss to the city. "If substantial additions to traffic ways are not provided within the

1. Richard Cutler, *Greater Milwaukee's Growing Pains, 1960, 2000: An Insider's View* (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 2001), 76.

next few years,” one consulting firm warned the City of Milwaukee in the early 1950s, “motorists will experience rapidly increasing delays and accidents. Additional congestion would bring further economic losses diffused throughout every segment of the local economy, and result in noticeably accelerated depreciation in property values.”²

Milwaukee’s freeway program started slowly but soon picked up pace. Construction on the initial mileage started in the early 1950s under the charge of the city. In 1954, the city turned over responsibility for building freeways to Milwaukee County, and its newly-created expressway commission.³ In 1956, the county freeway program received a major boost with the creation of the Federal Interstate System. Urban freeways added to the interstate system were eligible for a 90 percent federal construction subsidy. Under this arrangement, progress on the county’s planned system proceeded rapidly. Between 1962 and 1967, the county built an average of 9.5 miles of freeway annually.⁴

The Park East and I-794 freeways were both late additions to the Milwaukee County’s freeway plans. Park East debuted in the county’s expressway plans in 1958 as the “Northbelt Expressway.” It extended from the city’s North-South Expressway (today I-43) just north of Milwaukee’s central business district, easterly towards Lake Michigan.⁵ It was added to the system “to provide greater access to the central business district and to relieve the anticipated traffic overload on the Central Interchange sections of the North-South and East-West Expressways.”⁶ In 1964, both the Northbelt Expressway, along with its westerly cousin, the

2. Richard Cutler, *Greater Milwaukee’s Growing Pains, 1960, 2000: An Insider’s View* (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 2001), 66-67.

3. James J. Casey, *The Politics of Congestion: The Continuing Legacy of the Milwaukee Freeway Revolt*, Essays in Public Works History, #20, (Kansas City: Public Works Historical Society, 2000), 6-7.

4. Richard Cutler, *Greater Milwaukee’s Growing Pains, 1960, 2000: An Insider’s View* (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 2001), 70.

5. Milwaukee County Expressway Commission, Annual Report, 1958, 2.

6. Milwaukee County Expressway Commission, Annual Report, 1958, 2.

North Avenue Expressway, together became the Park Freeway.⁷ By the early 1970s, the easterly extension of this freeway was commonly referred to as *Park East*; the westerly extension was referred to as *Park West*.

The early genealogy of Interstate 794 is a bit more complicated. The east-west portion of I-794 dates to some of the county's earliest plans and was originally part of the East-West Freeway (today I-94).⁸ The North-South portion of I-794 was added to the county's planned system in 1963 as the "Lakefront Expressway."⁹ The addition of the Lakefront Expressway, later shortened to Lake Freeway, promised to fulfill a long-held dream of many south shore residents and suburbanites who desired a more direct route to Milwaukee's downtown. Talk of such a connection dated to at least the 1930s.¹⁰ It remained a matter of debate, however, whether such a connection should span the mouth of the city's inner harbor via a high-level bridge or lift bridge or whether it should tunnel under the harbor or skirt along the water's edge.¹¹

Freeway planners scored a major victory in July 1964, when Lake Freeway and a portion of the East-West Freeway were added to the interstate system under the designation of Interstate 794, thus ensuring the federal government would cover 90 percent of the freeway's cost.¹² Local freeway planners appear to have secured this interstate designation based on Milwaukee's

7. Milwaukee County Expressway Commission, Annual Report, 1964, 3.

8. Parsons, Brinckerhoff, Hall & MacDonald and Ammann & Whitney and the Milwaukee County Expressway Commission, *General Plan, Milwaukee County Expressway System*, 1955, 2, 18.

9. Milwaukee County Expressway Commission, Annual Report, 1963, 3; Howard, Needles, Tammen & Bergendoff Consulting Engineers, *Lake Front Expressway*, prepared for Milwaukee County Expressway and Transportation Commission, 1963.

10. Howard Needles, Tammen and Bergendoff and the Milwaukee County Expressway & Transportation Commission, *Draft Environmental/Section 4 (f) Statement Administrative Action for The Park and Lake Freeways, Milwaukee, Wisconsin*, 1971, 4.

11. "However Harbor Mouth Is Passed, Stay on Ground," editorial, *Milwaukee Journal*, November 19, 1949, latest edition, <http://bit.ly/22VZQKt>; "High Level Bridge over Harbor Useless to Much of City," editorial, *Milwaukee Journal*, November 1, 1946, <http://bit.ly/1ndVDkV>.

12. Rex Whitton to Harvey Grasse, July 21, 1964, in State Highway Commission of Wisconsin, *The Lake Freeway Plan: An Interstate Connection of the Port of Milwaukee*, July 1965, n.p.; Milwaukee County Expressway Commission, Annual Report, 1964, n.p.

industrial significance at the time and the fact that I-794 would provide a highway connection to the city's port. Although now an aging "rust belt" city, Milwaukee was still a major industrial and shipping center in 1964. It was the 11th largest city in the United States, surpassing cities such as San Francisco and Dallas, and the county of Milwaukee ranked ninth in the nation in terms of industrial production. Milwaukee's port was also booming; it ranked second in the nation in terms of overseas exports and fifth in overall tonnage. In 1964 it processed more than 6.2 million tons of cargo—a 41 percent increase over the previous year.¹³

The interstate designation came with some conditions, however. The state of Wisconsin was required to build, "satisfactory connections ... both south and north of the Interstate spur" and that construction on these connections would be started "prior to or concurrently with the construction of the Interstate spur."¹⁴ Specifically, these connections consisted of a "connection to the existing street system at the south end of the Lake Freeway in the vicinity of Lincoln Avenue" and a "connection at the north end to connect to the North Belt [i.e., Park East] Freeway."¹⁵ The latter of these conditions referred to a plan to encircle the city's central business district with freeways also unveiled in 1964. This plan involved extending Lake Freeway north from its terminus southeast of downtown to a linkup point with Park East in Juneau Park. The other three sides of the freeway loop would consist of the east-west leg of I-794, the north-south freeway, and Park East. Many believed this freeway loop was necessary to bolster the city's

13. State Highway Commission of Wisconsin, *The Lake Freeway Plan: An Interstate Connection of the Port of Milwaukee*, July 1965, n.p.

14. Robert Paddock to Harvey Grasse, August 6, 1964, and E.L. High for Robert Paddock to Harvey Grasse, September 4, 1964, in State Highway Commission of Wisconsin, *The Lake Freeway Plan: An Interstate Connection to the Port of Milwaukee*, July 1965.

15. State Highway Commission of Wisconsin, *The Lake Freeway Plan: An Interstate Connection to the Port of Milwaukee*, July 1965, 4.

central business district in the new motor age.¹⁶ “If the area grows as predicted, the number of vehicles entering Downtown in future years will increase substantially,” a consulting firm cautioned the city in 1964. “Such an increase, if forced onto existing streets, would create such serious congestion that the growth would be greatly inhibited if not prevented entirely.”¹⁷ Encircling downtown with freeways, they argued, would help usher the city’s central business district into a new period of growth by allowing motorists to traverse the area without ever using a local street, thereby reducing travel times and congestion on local streets.¹⁸

Steady progress was made on Milwaukee’s freeway system until the late 1960s, at which point several intervening factors dampened future prospects. New federal laws required greater relocation assistance to displaced families and that more consideration be given to the environmental impact of each new roadway. At the local level, Milwaukee County, which had previously advanced unlimited funding for the county freeway program, was now faced with a “soaring” budget and capped yearly spending at \$8.3 million annually (\$56.7 million in 2015 dollars). “Funding will now control progress,” the commission noted in its 1968 annual report.¹⁹ Public opposition to freeway building was also starting to coalesce. By the late 1960s, freeway projects across the nation were hitting roadblocks as angry citizens fought to save their communities, parks, and cities. By 1968, urban freeway projects were under fire in at least 25 cities across the nation, from Boston to Los Angeles.²⁰ The protests and lawsuits that were born from this unrest collectively became known as America’s “freeway revolt.” In Milwaukee, discontent concerning the county’s freeway program was tied to a number of issues, including

16. Howard, Needles, Tammen and Bergendoff, *Milwaukee’s Downtown Freeway Loop – Key to the Future*, Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee County Expressway Transportation Commission, c.1964.

17. *Ibid.*, 7.

18. *Ibid.*, 19-23.

19. Milwaukee County Expressway Commission, Annual Report, 1968, 2, 13.

20. Raymond Mohl, “The Interstates and the Cities: The U.S. Department of Transportation and the Freeway Revolt, 1966-1973,” *Journal of Public Policy* 20, no. 2 (2008): 202.

the destruction of affordable housing, low payments to displaced homeowners for their property, and a planning process that kept exact highway alignments secret until late in the process.²¹

Between 1959 and 1971, Milwaukee County's freeway program destroyed more than 6,300 housing units and displaced almost 20,000 people.²²

While freeway opponents made their feelings known at the local level, a quiet but equally-significant revolt was taking place among policymakers in Washington. Indeed, as several historians have demonstrated, freeway opponents were usually only successful to the extent they were willing or able to take their fight to the courtroom.²³ Several significant pieces of legislation—including the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1966, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969—created legal avenues for freeway opponents to stall or block contentious urban highways.

In Milwaukee, public sentiment hostile to the Park East and Lake Freeway first emerged in the mid-1960s.²⁴ In April 1966, eastside attorney Malcom K. Whyte launched an appeal to county officials to reconsider the need for the Park East Freeway, which he characterized as a “wasteful, harmful, and extravagant project.”²⁵ Although Whyte's initial pleas failed to sway

21. Richard Cutler, *Greater Milwaukee's Growing Pains, 1960, 2000: An Insider's View* (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 2001), 79-81.

22. John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* (Menomonee Falls, WI: Burton & Mayer Inc., 2008), 395.

23. For a history of the national freeway revolt, see: Raymond Mohl, “Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities,” *Journal of Urban History* 30, no. 5 (July 2004): 674-706; Raymond Mohl, “The Interstates and the Cities: The U.S. Department of Transportation and the Freeway Revolt, 1966-1973,” *Journal of Policy History* 20, no. 2 (April 2008): 193-226; Zachary Schrag, “The Freeway Fight in Washington, D.C.: The Three Sisters Bridge in Three Administrations,” *Journal of Urban History* 30, no. 5 (July 2004): 648-673.

24. Richard Cutler dates the first public freeway opposition in Milwaukee to a public hearing in September 1965. On September 30, 1965, attendees at a federally-required public hearing expressed anger and disappointment over ambiguity as to whether or not their properties would be acquired for one of three freeway segments. In some cases, attendees had been waiting as long as a decade for a decision. See: Richard Cutler, *Greater Milwaukee's Growing Pains, 1960, 2000: An Insider's View* (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 2001), 76; Paul G. Hayes, “Answers on Freeway Planning Leave Few Hearing Satisfied,” *Milwaukee Journal*, October 1, 1965, <http://bit.ly/1ZeICU2>; “Hearing on X-Way Shifts Ripped,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 1, 1965, <http://bit.ly/1ZeICU2>.

25. “Park Freeway Halt, Reappraisal Sought,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 8, 1966 <http://bit.ly/1MEKrmG>

county officials, he succeeded in rallying members of the public sympathetic to his cause, and the Lakefront Preservation Committee was later formed. Over the next year, Whyte and his associates appealed to government officials at all levels, raised questions about the freeway's necessity, and expressed concerns about its impact on the lakefront.²⁶ Ultimately, however, these efforts failed to halt the road; the Lakefront Preservation Committee disbanded in early 1967 after suffering a stunning defeat in a city referendum the organization itself had forced through signature-gathering.²⁷

For its part, the county expressway commission continued to defend the freeway, insisting that, "All reasonable alternatives had been analyzed during a decade of design development, agency reviews, public hearings, and resulting approvals."²⁸ They argued that existing freeway facilities would be unable to serve projected traffic levels and that traffic congestion, if unchecked, would threaten the economic well-being of the city.²⁹ Proponents of

26. "Good Freeway Questions," editorial, *Milwaukee Journal*, April 8, 1966, <http://bit.ly/1QXAr9>; Richard Glaman, "A Late Protest," editorial, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 14, 1966, <http://bit.ly/1OUATbI>; "Whyte's X-Way Attack Hailed," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 28, 1966, <http://bit.ly/1XkJTKa>; "Two Hearings Set on Whyte's Park Freeway Protest," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 21, 1966, <http://bit.ly/1G7MHG5>; "Review Asked of Need for Park Freeway," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 3, 1966, <http://bit.ly/1Lcx5A1>; "Won't Alter Freeway Plans, Commission Informs Whyte," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 4, 1966, <http://bit.ly/1KoP3LH>; "Park Freeway Alternative Possible," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 10, 1966, <http://bit.ly/1VUIWH2>; "Supervisor to Seek new X-Way Data," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 12, 1966, <http://bit.ly/1NUK9Oc>; "Lake Front Group Will Continue Fight to Block Freeway," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 26, 1966, <http://bit.ly/1M74ycr>; "US May Reconsider Park X-Way Loop," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 31, 1966, <http://bit.ly/1LMsm9I>; "X-Way Foes Lose 1 Fight, Hold Their Ground in 2nd," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 10, 1966, <http://bit.ly/1NUK9Oc>; "New Group Will Lead Park Freeway Fight," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 20 1966, <http://bit.ly/1jqP251>; "Park X-Way Dispute Kept Alive by Board," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 22, 1966, <http://bit.ly/1MTPqnL>; "Group Criticizes Park Freeway," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 18, 1966, <http://bit.ly/1GeXhe8>; "Commission Prepares to Acquire Layton Site," *Milwaukee Journal*, September 12, 1966, <http://bit.ly/1MbvrCf>; "Lake X-Way Budget OK'd Despite Plea," *Milwaukee Journal*, October 26, 1966, <http://bit.ly/1W5be0m>; "Freeway Foe Attacks Lakefront 'Speedway'," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 15, 1967, <http://bit.ly/1NW19nr>; "X-Way Foes Hits 'Distorted' View," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 16, 1967, <http://bit.ly/1OUAZjx>; "Paul G. Hayes, 'Old Friends are Freeway Foes,'" *Milwaukee Journal*, March 24, 1967, <http://bit.ly/1MGn7oC>; James W. McCulla, "Lakefront Freeways Backed," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 5, 1967, <http://bit.ly/1hWZq2M>;

27. "Committee Opposing Freeways Disbands," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 16, 1967, <http://bit.ly/1MTShgF>.

28. Milwaukee County Expressway Commission, Annual Report, 1966, n.p.

29. "Expressway Loop in Downtown to be Pressed," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 4, 1966, <http://bit.ly/1M8o3Bs>.

the freeway also pointed to the agreement with federal highway authorities regarding Lake Freeway, which stipulated that the state was obligated to connect the harbor bridge at its northern and southern termini.³⁰

At about this same time, the southern part of the Lake Freeway encountered its own difficulties. In the mid-1960s, Milwaukee County approved a southerly extension of Lake Freeway from its terminus at the southern tip of Jones Island to Layton Avenue, some 3.5 miles further south.³¹ This extension had come as part of an agreement with the Federal Bureau of Public Roads as part of the conditions for part of Lake Freeway (I-794) being added to the interstate system.³² At about this same time, the Southeast Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC), which had recently become the regional transportation planning organization for the Milwaukee metropolitan area, recommended extending the freeway further still to the Illinois State line.³³ These plans, however, came under fire from various stakeholders over a variety of issues, including the freeway's anticipated impact on county parklands, as well as the loss of homes and impact on property tax revenue.³⁴

30. "Park Freeway Alternative Possible," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 10, 1966, <http://bit.ly/1VUIWH2>.

31. Milwaukee County Expressway and Transportation Commission, Annual Report, 1966, 6.

32. The responsibilities of the Bureau of Public Roads were later absorbed by the Federal Highway Administration. Consoer, Townsend, and Associates, *Lake Freeway Southerly Extension Location Report*, Prepared for the Milwaukee County Expressway Commission, October, 1966, 1.

33. Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, *Recommended Regional Land Use and Transportation Plans*, Planning Report No. 7, Vol. 3 (1966): 25, <http://bit.ly/1L215ML>.

Note: The Federal Highway Aid Act of 1962 required that a metropolitan planning organization assume control of regional transportation planning to remain eligible for new highway funds after July 1, 1965. For Milwaukee, this role was assumed by SEWRPC, which was created in 1960 to serve the counties of Kenosha, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Walworth, Washington, and Waukesha. As James Casey notes, the county expressway commission, "continued to fulfill its statutory mandate under Wisconsin law as it pertained to Milwaukee County. But with the leadership of SEWRPC there was a new and important shift for freeway planning at a regional rather than county level." See: James J. Casey, *The Politics of Congestion: The Continuing Legacy of the Milwaukee Freeway Revolt*, Essays in Public Works History, #20, (Kansas City: Public Works Historical Society, 2000), 12.

34. "River Parks Opposed for Freeway Use," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 10, 1966, <http://bit.ly/1NWObG3>; "X-Way Route Draws Opposition," *Milwaukee Journal*, November 18, 1966, <http://bit.ly/1LPSRv8>; Gerry Hinkley, "Freeway Plans Presently Affect Three Suburbs," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 13, 1967, <http://bit.ly/1GtLpoI>; "Freeway Shift Urged to Preserve Tax Base," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 13,

The early 1970s proved to be a pivotal time for both Park East and Lake freeways. Although Whyte's organization had long since disbanded, public opposition to the freeways had not. Through the late 1960s and early 1970s various unsuccessful attempts were made to stop the Park East Freeway, including two federal lawsuits.³⁵ Progress on the freeway continued, however, and by the end of 1971 nearly all of the properties needed for Park East had been acquired and cleared, leaving a long, vacant scar through the city's eastside.³⁶ The portion of Park East Freeway that was actually built was completed in stages between 1968 and 1971, with the second half scheduled to open by 1974.³⁷ That September, however, a new coalition of community organizations known as the Lakefront Defense Committee filed a lawsuit in state court on the grounds that land in Juneau Park could not be used for the freeway.³⁸

The linchpin of this lawsuit was a 1936 agreement between the city and county in which the city had conveyed use of land (which at the time was submerged beneath Lake Michigan) to the county to "be used exclusively as a public park, parkway, amusement or recreation

1967, <http://bit.ly/1GXycPY>; "Park Panel Reaffirms Opposition to X-Way," *Milwaukee Journal*, October 29, 1971, <http://bit.ly/1hYbYa1>.

35. "Housing Group Seeks Park Freeway Delay," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 13, 1969, <http://bit.ly/1X6OkYZ>; Park Freeway Roadblock Swept Aside," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 2, 1969, <http://bit.ly/1OFGsFK>; "Freeway Opponents Take Another Defeat," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 19, 1970, <http://bit.ly/1kxQsd>; Steve Tatarsky, "Need, Costs of Freeway Links Disputed," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 8, 1970, <http://bit.ly/1W93A4Y>; John Carman, "Lake X-Way Data Faulty, Foes Charge," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 5, 1971, <http://bit.ly/1OMz41S>.

See also: *Hanley v. Volpe*, 305 F. Supp. 977 (E.D. Wis. 1969); *Hanley v. Volpe* 322 F. Supp. 1306 (E.D. Wis. 1971).

36. Milwaukee County Expressway and Transportation Commission, Annual Report, 1971, 7.

37. Milwaukee County Expressway and Transportation Commission, Annual Report, 1968, 5; *Ibid.*, 1969, 8; *Ibid.*, 1970, 6; *Ibid.*, 1971, 17; Scott Jacobs, "Section Will Open on Park Freeway," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 8, 1971, <http://bit.ly/1jD8X0b>.

38. "1936 Deed Dug Up in X-Way Challenge," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 3, 1971, <http://bit.ly/1jU9OcS>; Michael O. Zah, "Lake X-Way Route in Park Prohibited," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 28, 1972, <http://bit.ly/1W2nuE9>

For more on this group, see: "X-Way Foes Vow All-Out Fight," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 2, 1971, <http://bit.ly/1LkorQb>; "Protest Ribbons Hung on Trees in X-Way Path," *Milwaukee Journal*, November 2, 1971, <http://bit.ly/1ZRqouS>; "Lake Freeway Foes Win a Round," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 13, 1972, <http://bit.ly/1OOJtZw>; "Freeway Foe Says Public Deceived by Road Officials," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 5, 1972, <http://bit.ly/1hNWDJ6>; Jerry Wilkerson, "New X-Way Ideas Meet Swift Attack," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 11, 1973, <http://bit.ly/1jQxQW6>; H. Carl Mueller, "Parkway Urged for Lakefront," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 2, 1974, <http://bit.ly/1Pup5ys>.

grounds.”³⁹ This agreement further stipulated that were this land ever used for anything other than park purposes, ownership would revert back to the city.⁴⁰ In April 1972, the presiding judge granted a permanent injunction against the construction of Lake Freeway through Juneau Park.⁴¹ The first court decision was appealed to the state Supreme Court, which then modified the ruling to stipulate that the freeway could proceed—but only if the county were to acquire the city’s interest in the contested property.⁴²

Both sides claimed victory, but the ruling ultimately favored freeway opponents.⁴³ By 1973, the city had already proved unwilling to deed the necessary land to the county.⁴⁴ Additionally, a 1971 federal Supreme Court ruling had stipulated that freeways could traverse public parkland where no other reasonable alternatives existed.⁴⁵ Early the following year, federal transportation and land management officials expressed dissatisfaction with the existing plan to route Lake Freeway through Juneau Park. They encouraged local authorities to reconsider previously dismissed alternatives, give more weight to public opinion, and explore creative ways to deal with motor vehicle traffic.⁴⁶ Freeway supporters hatched various plans for circumventing the Juneau Park impasse, including proposals to tunnel under Juneau Park, make use of an

39. This agreement was widely reported to be a deed, however, the court decision references a lease. See: *Cobb v. Milwaukee*, 60 Wis. 2d 99 (1973), 208 N.W.2d 848.

40. *Cobb v. Milwaukee*, 60 Wis. 2d 99 (1973), 208 N.W.2d 848.

41. Michael O. Zah, “Lake X-Way Route in Park Prohibited,” *Milwaukee Journal*, April 28, 1972, <http://bit.ly/1W2nuE9>.

42. *Cobb v. Milwaukee*, 60 Wis. 2d 99 (1973), 208 N.W.2d 848; “Lake X-Way over Hurdle,” *Milwaukee Journal*, June 29, 1973, <http://bit.ly/1W2IP1v>.

43. “Backers, Foes Hail Lake X-Way Ruling,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 30, 1973, <http://bit.ly/1hNT1H3>.

44. In 1971 the Milwaukee’s city council passed a resolution that would have deeded the disputed parkland to the county, thereby permitting the construction of the crucial interchange. However, Mayor Henry Maier subsequently vetoed this resolution, and the council declined to override his veto. See: “Veto on X-Way Land Upheld,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 8, 1971, <http://bit.ly/1Gq9b53>.

45. “Court Ruling Could Snarl Lake X-Way,” *Milwaukee Journal*, March 2, 1971, <http://bit.ly/1RYVCuW>; *Citizens to Preserve Overton Park v. Volpe*, 401 U.S. 402 (1971)

46. Ladley, K. Pearson, “Freeway Plans Jolted,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 24, 1972, <http://bit.ly/1jzjAla>.

abandoned rail corridor to the west, or cap the freeway with an artificial slope from an overlooking bluff.⁴⁷ None of these plans, however, ever came to fruition.

Even as momentum for Lake Freeway sputtered and stalled, work began on the federally-funded harbor bridge. This came as a surprising twist, considering the earlier requirement that the freeway segment would only be built if the state had started its required highway connections. But in 1965, state highway office had requested that the Bureau of Public Roads “remove all conditions placed upon the approval of the Lake Freeway.”⁴⁸ They did just that—state highway officials having apparently given enough assurances they would adhere to their side of the deal. Construction on the harbor bridge began in 1970 and continued through 1974. The bridge was largely finished at that point, but it still missing key road connections on both ends.⁴⁹ Those were either already underway or initiated in 1976, and the bridge opened to motor vehicle traffic the following year, dedicated as the “Daniel Webster Hoan Memorial Bridge,” after the city’s second socialist mayor.⁵⁰

47. “X-Way Panel Given New Lake Plan,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 17, 1973, <http://bit.ly/1hNZfH3>; Jerry Wilkerson, “Freeway Compromise in the Works,” *Milwaukee Journal*, June 11, 1971, <http://bit.ly/1RqJjXr>; H. Carl Mueller, “Maier Leans to Lake X-Way Plan,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 7, 1974, <http://bit.ly/1M1uwOH>; Jerry Wilkerson, “New Freeway Loop Plan Includes Lanes for Buses,” *Milwaukee Journal*, October 8, 1975, <http://bit.ly/1PxT88e>; H. Carl Mueller, “O’Donnell X-Way Plan Gets Strong Support,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 9, 1975, <http://bit.ly/1hQY7m0>; Jerry Wilkerson, “Freeway Terracing Proposed,” *Milwaukee Journal*, March 4, 1976, <http://bit.ly/1MSMgRo>; Jerry Wilkerson, “The Park-Lake Freeway: A Look at Some Possibilities,” *Milwaukee Journal*, April 13, 1976, <http://bit.ly/1GRdQYR>; Dean A. Showers, “Freeway Push Renewed,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 13, 1979, <http://bit.ly/1PCzNC2>; Lawrence Sussman, “Plan Calls for Park Atop Two Tunnels,” *Milwaukee Journal*, June 10, 1979, <http://bit.ly/1OQsqGr>.

48. G.H. Bakke to Robert Paddock, July 9, 1965, in State Highway Commission of Wisconsin, *The Lake Freeway Plan: An Interstate Connection to the Port of Milwaukee*, July 1965; Rod Clark, “The I-794 ‘Agreement,’” typewritten report, Box 1, Folder “Milw Lake Arterial,” General Policy Files of Wisconsin Governor Anthony S. Earl, 1987/026 (Series 2960), Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

49. Milwaukee County Expressway and Transportation Commission, Annual Report, 1977, 7-8; Averty Wittenberger, “Funds to Connect Harbor Bridge Ok’d,” *Milwaukee Journal*, February 24, 1976, <http://bit.ly/1LrM35r>.

50. Alex P. Dobish, “At Last, a Bridge to Somewhere,” *Milwaukee Journal*, November 5, 1977.

When the Hoan Bridge opened, only 14,500 vehicles per day used the new facility—a low figure for the six-lane facility designed to carry upwards of 100,000 vehicles daily.⁵¹ A year later, usage had climbed to 18,900 vehicles per day, but that was still less than a fifth of the bridge’s maximum design capacity.⁵² Meanwhile, a mile to the west, Interstate 94 carried 114,000 vehicles per day.⁵³ Those involved with the project often downplayed the lack of traffic. “We never anticipated that the facility would operate at its capacity until the freeway is extended,” said the deputy director for the county’s public works department.⁵⁴ The county expressway and transportation commission asserted a more optimistic view, insisting the traffic numbers passing over the bridge were actually “a remarkable record indicating the need for this facility is real.”⁵⁵ It was, however, hard to disguise the true nature of the highway spur. In the mid-1970s, the Hoan had gained a reputation as Milwaukee’s “bridge to nowhere”; it was a reputation the bridge retained even after opening to traffic.⁵⁶

The demise of the downtown freeway loop and southerly extension of Lake Freeway sputtered and gradually died. In 1977, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) rejected the Lake Freeway’s environmental impact statement, indicating local planners needed to give more consideration to the freeway’s impact on parklands.⁵⁷ The FHWA also indicated that the southern leg of the freeway would not be approved until an acceptable impact statement for the

51. Milwaukee County Expressway and Transportation Commission, Annual Report, 1977, 7.

52. “Hoan Bridge Usage Is Slowly Climbing,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 13, 1978, <http://bit.ly/1PLoWFP>.

53. “Hoan Bridge Area Gets More Traffic,” *Milwaukee Journal*, January 3, 1978, <http://bit.ly/1iuck8L>.

54. “Hoan Bridge Draws Jones Island Traffic,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 10, 1977, <http://bit.ly/1MoEqKk>.

55. Milwaukee County Expressway and Transportation Commission, Annual Report, 1977: 7.

56. Paul Delany, “They Call it ‘Bridge that Leads to Nowhere,’” *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, November 7, 1976, <http://bit.ly/1ZIUISb>; “Planners Call for Road Link to Hoan,” *Milwaukee Journal*, June 23, 1981, <http://bit.ly/1UgDf9l>.

57. Jerry Wilkerson, “US Rejects Impact Study of Lake Route,” *Milwaukee Journal*, March 4, 1976, <http://bit.ly/1RmNsOj>.

northern section had been completed.⁵⁸ State money for freeway construction had largely dried up. In June 1981, SEWRPC finally scrapped plans for Lake Freeway's southerly extension, substituting in its place "a four-lane limited access surface arterial highway facility" extending from the southern tip of the Hoan Bridge to an arterial street some three miles to the south, paralleling an active rail line. From here, the roadway would continue to the Illinois state line through the corridor of the never-built Lake Freeway.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, Milwaukee's downtown loop gradually lost supporters and finally died.⁶⁰ In March 1982, the Wisconsin State Assembly passed a bill scrapping the unbuilt portion of Park East and another bill that scrapped the unbuilt portion of the Lake Freeway.⁶¹ Both bills were signed into law the following month.⁶²

Thus, by the early 1980s, the stage had largely been set for later freeway teardown efforts. A combination of local opposition and shifting national legislation had halted both Park East and I-794. By the early 1980s, both the Park East and I-794 freeways stood as monuments to much more optimistic plans, carrying only a fraction of the traffic for which they had been designed. But although the county's freeway program was essentially over, investment in I-794 was not.

58. Jerry Wilkerson, "US Rejects Impact Study of Lake Route," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 4, 1976, <http://bit.ly/1RmNsOj>.

59. Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, *Amendment to the Regional Transportation Plan—2000, Lake Freeway South Corridor*, June 1981, <http://bit.ly/1M2Zqaj>.

60. "Downtown Loop's Future in Doubt, State Official Says," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 5, 1982, <http://bit.ly/1MQ0EKe>; "Downtown Loop Loses Key Backers," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 12, 1982, <http://bit.ly/1M1oVaY>; Robert H. Edelman, "Civic Panel Alters Stand, Opposes Freeway Loop," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 12, 1982, <http://bit.ly/1MQ4cMq>; Robert H. Edelman, "Dreyfus Might Oppose Downtown Loop," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 13, 1982, <http://bit.ly/1W1q1JB>.

61. "Assembly Kills 2 Freeways," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 3, 1982, <http://bit.ly/1NRfOjD>.

62. Downtown Loop, Lake South Plans Are Laid to Rest," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 20, 1982, <http://bit.ly/1MzUUQ3>; Chapter 233, Laws of 1981, April 26, 1982, <http://1.usa.gov/1NFK7Hj>; Chapter 234, Laws of 1981, April 26, 1982, <http://1.usa.gov/1jXugdM>

Chapter 2

Building Lake Parkway, 1978–2000

This chapter explores the story of Lake Parkway, a 3.8-mile state highway extension of I-794. Initially known as “Lake Arterial,” this four-lane, controlled access highway marked an important shift in the significance of I-794. Before Lake Parkway, the majority of I-794 had served little purpose either as transportation facility or as an economic development tool; it carried relatively low volumes of traffic for its size and dead-ended awkwardly in a quiet Milwaukee neighborhood. Lake Parkway, however, radically altered the function of the I-794 corridor. The parkway extended the interstate spur’s reach into Milwaukee’s southeastern suburbs, dramatically increasing the amount of daily traffic that passed over the freeway’s Hoan Bridge. The parkway also transformed I-794 into an economic development tool. The parkway provided certain suburban communities with quicker access to Milwaukee’s central business district and to the interstate system, which quickly became major selling points for many businesses, developers, and would-be residents. The freeway that had once gone nowhere, now went *somewhere*—bringing benefits to the suburbs. In a very real sense, the building of Lake Parkway created the suburban stakeholder group that would later rally to defeat both I-794 teardown proposals.

To the casual observer, the scrapping of the unbuilt parts of Park East and Lake Freeway in the early 1980s might seem to have signaled the end of the road for both freeways. But in the case of I-794, the story was not quite over. Although a southerly extension of I-794 via Lake Freeway was no longer politically or fiscally viable, some planners and politicians at the county

and state level continued to push for an extension of the freeway by way of a state highway. In fact, this push began even before the state had officially scrapped plans for the southern extension of Lake Freeway. In August 1978, the secretary of Wisconsin's transportation department advised SEWRPC that while it supported a southerly extension of I-794 via Lake Freeway, it would be at least another decade before the department had enough money to build this highway.¹ Instead, the secretary suggested that the commission explore non-freeway alternatives.² Harout Sanasarian, a county supervisor and SEWRPC commissioner, immediately initiated the push for this less expensive roadway.³

The impulse to extend I-794 further south lingered for several political and pragmatic reasons. Of practical concern, the Hoan Bridge dumped traffic onto residential streets, irritating local residents and causing traffic problems.⁴ The original 1960s agreement between federal and state highway authorities had stipulated that the Hoan Bridge would receive an adequate road connection at its southern end. In fact, as early as 1974, Robert Paddock, the federal highway official who had been involved in the freeway's authorization, had threatened to recoup the federal investment in I-794 if such a connection was not made.⁵

Much like the earlier Lake Freeway, placing an arterial highway at the southern end of the Hoan Bridge proved to be a contentious proposition. Many residents in Milwaukee's Bay View neighborhood and the City of St. Francis opposed the roadway for the pollution, excessive

1. Southeastern Regional Planning Commission, *A Transportation Systems Management Plan for the Kenosha, Milwaukee, and Racine Urbanized Areas in Southeastern Wisconsin 1979*, Community Assistance Planning Report No. 26: 8, <http://bit.ly/1OdVZTO>.

2. Ibid.

3. Avi Lank, "County Oks Memorial Dr. Bridge Plan," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 11, 1978, <http://bit.ly/1GSQ2ZP>; "Study Asked by Sanasarian," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 13, 1978, <http://bit.ly/1RFvNPN>.

4. "Lake Arterial Highway is Still Best Proposal." *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 17, 1985, <http://bit.ly/1OdfJ9U>.

5. Jerry Wilkerson, "Finish Freeways, US Warns," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 3, 1974, <http://bit.ly/1TO7W1x>.

noise, and extra traffic they felt it would bring.⁶ For some, the planned highway extension brought a sense of *déjà vu*. “We’re going through the same thing we went through in 1967 with the freeway,” an exasperated St. Francis resident explained at a planning meeting. “I thought this was a dead issue.”⁷

But the issue was far from dead. By 1984, state plans called for a 3.1-mile, four or five lane controlled-access highway, complete with noise barriers for much of the way, stretching from the Hoan Bridge’s southern terminus to Layton Avenue to the south, following the aforementioned rail corridor.⁸ Supporters of the highway attempted to downplay the planned roadway’s striking similarities to a freeway, pointing to subtle differences in roadway design and the road’s planned lower speed limit. Not everyone was convinced. “It is being called an arterial,” one resident observed, “but it has many of the aspects a freeway would have.”⁹

The highway almost did not survive its initial planning phase. In 1985, the state legislature’s Joint Finance Committee axed the highway’s design and engineering funds from the state budget, instead directing the state’s transportation department to build a short connection between I-794 and a nearby arterial street.¹⁰ Had such a mandate been executed, it might well have met the letter—though perhaps not the intent—of the original 1960s highway agreement.¹¹

One of the politicians behind this purse-string attack was a young assemblyman who would later become Milwaukee mayor. In 1974, John Norquist was elected to the Wisconsin State Assembly at the age of 25. By 1977 he was one of 19 state legislators—most of whom

6. Janean Marti, “Hoan Bridge Highway Spurs Concern,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 15, 1981, <http://bit.ly/1M8aoyA>.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Robert M. Riepenhoff, “Plans for Arterial Opposed,” *Milwaukee Journal*, March 29, 1984, <http://bit.ly/1YVpSvs>.

9. *Ibid.*

10. State Panel Scales Down Hoan Link, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 11, 1985, <http://bit.ly/1VJOLFX>; “Panel Votes to Kill Hoan Bridge Highway,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 14, 1985, <http://bit.ly/1N4j8Vw>.

11. *Ibid.*

were young and college-educated—who had been instrumental in stopping two controversial freeway projects in Milwaukee. Norquist and his colleagues believed that urban freeways were undercutting the vitality of cities by incentivizing suburban living and siphoning off the city’s middle class residents. They were also critical of SEWRPC, which they believed held a suburban bias and characterized as being mostly concerned with cutting the commute times of suburbanites.¹² “Why do we have to make living in the suburbs so attractive?” asked one of Norquist’s colleagues. “The planners say the freeways are a way into the city; we say they are a way out of the city.”¹³

In the end, the legislature’s attack on Lake Arterial was only temporarily successful. Governor Tony Earl vetoed the assembly’s directive to connect the freeway to an existing arterial, calling the committee’s language “too restrictive.”¹⁴ Shortly thereafter, Frank Mayer, the Wisconsin administrator for the FHWA, reminded the state of its earlier agreement to provide an arterial link to the interstate spur at its southern end and urged the state to continue to push the Lake Arterial. “Any unilateral action to do otherwise at this time would raise serious questions with respect to the State of Wisconsin’s intent to fulfill the prior commitment,” he said. “Should that situation occur, FHWA would have no choice but to require reimbursement of Federal-aid Interstate highway funds invested in I-794.”¹⁵

From the FHWA’s perspective, the north-south part of I-794 had been approved for the interstate system on the premise that it would provide adequate highway connections to the north

12. H. Carl Mueller, “Influential Legislators Work to Halt Freeways,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 7, 1977, <http://bit.ly/1KNoSyJ>.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Governor’s Veto Message, July 24, 1985, *State of Wisconsin Assembly Journal*, Eighty-Seventh Regular Session, 308, <http://bit.ly/1LE920h>;

15. Frank M. Mayer to Lowell B. Jackson, May 29, 1985, Box 1, Folder “Milw Lake Arterial,” General Policy Files of Wisconsin Governor Anthony S. Earl, 1987/026 (Series 2960), Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

and south. In 1983, however, with the freeway loop dead, the FHWA had indicated that stub-end treatments at the north and a four-lane highway connection to the south would fulfill this obligation.¹⁶ But no such leniency was extended to the southern part of the freeway. If the State of Wisconsin was now unwilling to build the agreed roadway connection, Mayer cautioned, then I-794 would be removed from the interstate system, and Wisconsin would have to repay the federal government's investment in the north-south portion of I-794—estimated at \$59.2 million.¹⁷

Repayment was not even the only issue at stake. In a letter to a county supervisor, Mayer also threatened to block the county from completing a planned lakefront park and parking garage structure (today the O'Donnell Park structure). This structure required the use of land purchased by the federal government for the Juneau Park portion of Lake Freeway. "We cannot make any final decision regarding the disposition of these lands," Mayer wrote, "until the commitment on the south end of the Hoan Bridge and the payback question is resolved."¹⁸ Mayer later attempted to soften his threats by saying that repayment would be a measure of "last resort."¹⁹

Mayer's letters suggest repayment was largely a black-and-white issue, but an internal Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) analysis painted a more complicated picture. Never made public, this analysis questioned whether a binding contractual agreement with federal highway officials had ever existed, especially since the original enforcement mechanism

16. Robert Anthony, "Downtown Loop Killed from Plan," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 2, 1983, <http://bit.ly/1RgWu0L>.

17. Media reports, politicians, and planners routinely put the potential federal payback between \$80 million to \$90 million, but an internal WisDOT report places the repayment as about \$59.2 million. See: Ernie Wittwer, "The Process of Federal Payback Related to I-794," typewritten report; Rod Clark, "The I-794 'Agreement,'" typewritten report; Rod Clark, "Applicability of Alternate Payback Procedures," typewritten report; Rod Clark, "A Payback Initiative Would Be Counterproductive and Potentially Embarrassing to FHWA," typewritten report, Box 1, Folder "Milw Lake Arterial," General Policy Files of Wisconsin Governor Anthony S. Earl, 1987/026 (Series 2960), Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

18. Larry Sandler, "US May Bar Lakefront Terrace Park," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 8, 1986, <http://bit.ly/1LCUIoH>.

19. "US Avoids Threats on Hoan Bridge," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 3, 1986, <http://bit.ly/1Oop8vf>.

of the agreement—that is, the withholding of federal funds—had been lifted in 1965 without additional conditions.²⁰ This analysis also questioned the legal and historical precedent of requiring repayment.²¹ There was, in the words of one highway official, little “benefit which could conceivably accrue to the FHWA from forcing the issue.”²² Moreover, even if the FHWA did force a repayment, one WisDOT employee showed how the department could shuffle money between various state projects and programs to substantially soften the blow of a federal repayment.²³ Ultimately, this careful and thorough analysis of the situation never made it into the public eye. For many, Lake Parkway seemed to be a scenario with two possible outcomes: build Lake Parkway or prepare for a federal repayment.

Mayer’s repayment threat provided the perfect impetus for Lake Arterial proponents to renew their push for the highway.²⁴ In 1986, SEWRPC created a task force “to guide a citizen-based effort to seek a consensus as to how to resolve traffic problems while preserving community values,” in affected neighborhoods and communities.²⁵ This 28-member task force, which was led by Sanasarian, included residents and public officials from the City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, and various suburban communities.

Among those representing the state was State Senator John Norquist. For his part, Norquist did not believe the threat of a federal payback was real. He pointed to other Milwaukee

20. This report was compiled in four parts by two separate WisDOT employees.

21. Rod Clark, “The Process of Federal Payback,” and “Applicability of Alternate Payback Procedures,” typewritten reports, Box 1, Folder “Milw Lake Arterial,” General Policy Files of Wisconsin Governor Anthony S. Earl, 1987/026 (Series 2960), Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

22. Rod Clark, “A Payback Initiative Would Be Counterproductive and Potentially Embarrassing to FHWA,” General Policy Files of Wisconsin Governor Anthony S. Earl, 1987/026 (Series 2960), Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

23. Ernie Wittwer, “The Process of Federal Payback Related to I-794,” typewritten report, Box 1, Folder “Milw Lake Arterial,” General Policy Files of Wisconsin Governor Anthony S. Earl, 1987/026 (Series 2960), Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

24. “Blackmail’ Is Charged on Lakefront Highway,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 10, 1986, <http://bit.ly/11XKf6u>.

25. Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, Report of the Hoan Bridge South Task Force, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, Memorandum Report No. 6, December 1986: 1, <http://bit.ly/1M3h91b>.

freeway segments that had been truncated without penalty, as well as a freeway in San Francisco that had been torn down amidst a similar payback threat—a threat that was never acted upon.

“Past performance of the Federal government indicates that coercion is only applied successfully to those who meekly accept it,” Norquist wrote to Sanasarian. “The payback issue should have legitimacy in the debate over the Hoan Bridge options.”²⁶

Ultimately, the Hoan Bridge Task Force did just what Lake Arterial supporters hoped it would. In a “nearly unanimous” final vote in 1986, the Hoan Bridge Task Force recommended a four-lane arterial from the southern tip of the Hoan Bridge to Layton Avenue—largely reinstating plans that had been killed the previous year.²⁷ It is not clear what affect the threat of a federal payment had on the task force, although one county supervisor, who was similar to Norquist in his view of urban highways, likened the payback threat to a gun held to the task force’s head.²⁸ According to the task force’s final report, Lake Arterial promised to remove “excess traffic” from the Bay View neighborhood, thus “permitting the return of a pedestrian-oriented environment.”²⁹ In an unexpected turn of events, Norquist actually voted in favor of the parkway, later explaining that he “went along with the plans for the Lake Arterial in the belief that it would take pressure off the Bay View area.”³⁰

Lake Arterial received enthusiastic support from Wisconsin’s new governor, Tommy Thompson, who immediately introduced it to the state’s Transportation Projects Commission in

26. John Norquist to Harout Sanasarian, May 30, 1986, Box 19, Folder “Hoan Bridge South-Task Force 1987,” John Norquist Papers, Mss 200, Archives Department, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

27. John Plewa, Timothy Carpenter, John Norquist and Richard Gobschmidt to Ronald Fiedler, January 30, 1987, Box 19, Folder “Hoan Bridge South-Task Force 1987,” John Norquist Papers, Mss 200, Archives Department, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

28. “Money Issue Hangs over Road Plan,” *Milwaukee Journal*, March 19, 1986, <http://bit.ly/2107mjK>.

29. John Norquist to Harout Sanasarian, May 30, 1986, Box 19, Folder “Hoan Bridge South-Task Force 1987,” John Norquist Papers, Mss 200, Archives Department, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

30. John Norquist to Harvey Shebesta, August 18, 1987, Box 49, Folder “South Lake Drive,” Wisconsin Department of Transportation Secretary’s Subject File, Series 2341, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

a special meeting of the commission.³¹ A decision by this commission, which the governor chaired, was needed to reverse the legislature's 1985 attempt to thwart the highway. "This thing has been mapped and de-mapped and now we're mapping it again," Thompson said.³² The project was later forwarded to the state legislature's Joint Finance Committee and ultimately approved by the full legislature as part of a larger transportation bill.³³

Building the parkway proved to be a lengthy and expensive project. An early timeline called for construction to start in 1990 and the parkway to open in 1994.³⁴ But construction was delayed until 1992, and the roadway did not open until September 1999.³⁵ By then, Lake Parkway's cost had ballooned in size, estimated to be \$147 million, or double the cost of the Hoan Bridge Task Force's original estimate even when adjusted for inflation.³⁶ The four-lane, limited-access highway featured wide lanes, noise barriers, and grade separation at most intersections, prompting some to quip that state highway planners had actually just built a freeway in disguise.³⁷

31. Charles E. Friederich and Dave Hendrickson, "Thompson Sets Date for Lake Road Project," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 6, 1987, <http://bit.ly/1Oo1LAF>; "Lake Arterial Plan Paves Way for Pet Projects," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 15, 1987, <http://bit.ly/1Vm5twg>.

32. Neil H. Shively, "Road Panel Backs \$48.5 Million Lake Arterial," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 16, 1987, <http://bit.ly/1QPEXT5>.

33. *Ibid.*; Neil Shively, "Loftus Says Decision on Hoan Bridge Project Broke Legislative Rules," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 6, 1987, <http://bit.ly/1LsPvec>; "Thompson Stands by Hoan Project," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 6, 1987, <http://bit.ly/1XwTBJ7>; 1987 Wisconsin Act 27, July 31, 1987, <http://1.usa.gov/1SQKeku>.

34. Neil Shively, "Road Panel Backs \$48.5 Million Lake Arterial," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 16, 1987, <http://bit.ly/1QPEXT5>.

35. "Construction Starts on Lake Parkway," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 9, 1992, <http://bit.ly/1T4Ml6t>; Phil Nero, "Expect a 2-Year Delay on Lake Parkway," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 14, 1994; "Construction to Link I-794," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 7, 1995; Lake Parkway opening speech, Tommy G. Thompson Center Digital Collection, Marquette University, September 29, 1999, <http://go.mu.edu/1MVtDYc>.

36. The Task Force's estimate for the parkway in 1986 was \$49 million. By 1999, an equivalent expenditure would have been about \$74.5 million according to Consumer Price Index data. See: Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, Report of the Hoan Bridge South Task Force, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, Memorandum Report No. 6, December 1986: 112, <http://bit.ly/1UHI1c1>; Pete Millard, "Lake Parkway Nears Completion," *Milwaukee Business Journal*, February 21, 1999, <http://bit.ly/1MCeaNF>.

37. Larry Sandler, "No, It's Not a Freeway, Really, Honest," Road Warrior column, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, June 25, 2001, <http://bit.ly/1PIFHZx>.

The building of Lake Parkway had two major impacts. First, it resulted in an immediate increase in the number of vehicles that passed over the Hoan Bridge every day. Between 1999 and 2000 the bridge experienced a 41 percent increase in traffic. A decade later, the number of vehicles traveling over the bridge was up by 87 percent from 1999 levels, although the facility was still only at about half capacity.³⁸ The second more significant impact was economic in nature. Long before it even opened, community leaders in Milwaukee's southeastern suburbs were vigorously marketing their communities to prospective businesses and developers, with the new highway as a key feature.³⁹ As the suburb of Cudahy noted in its 1999 downtown master plan, its downtown would "now be only ten minutes ... from Downtown Milwaukee along a new, easy to drive transportation corridor."⁴⁰ By the early 2000s, several suburbs near the parkway had secured new businesses and residential developments, citing Lake Parkway as the decisive factor.⁴¹

By the end of the 1990s, I-794's Hoan Bridge was no longer a "bridge to nowhere." Persistent efforts by county and state officials paid off, and in the 1990s the freeway's reach was extended into Milwaukee's southeastern suburbs, not by Lake Freeway as once planned, but by a

38. For this analysis, data for 1991-2000 was obtained from WisDOT's annual report, *Wisconsin Highway Traffic Volume Data*. Data from 2001-2010 was obtained directly from WisDOT.

39. Tom Daykin, "Walgreens, Osco Battle for Prime Locations," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 25, 1995, <http://bit.ly/1lvldB2>; Tom Heinen, "Parkway Delay Angers Officials," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, June 20, 1995; Mark Savage, "Company Decides to Relocate Near Airport," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 18, 1995, <http://bit.ly/1H9t8xN>.

40. Vandewalle & Associates, *Downtown Master Plan*, City of Cudahy, Draft, April 19, 1999, 7, <http://bit.ly/1PMrEeE>.

41. For various references to the parkway's expected or actual economic impact, see: "3 South Shore Suburbs See Property Values Rise the Most," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 21, 1996, <http://bit.ly/1WJCC3n>; Pete Millard, "Lake Parkway Nears Completion," *Milwaukee Business Journal*, February 21, 1999, <http://bit.ly/1QpVvG4>; Pete Millard, "Lake Parkway Paying Off in Improved Traffic Flow, Economic Development," *Milwaukee Business Journal*, December 26, 1999, <http://bit.ly/1PAEQEK>; "Residential Plans Unveiled for Harnischfeger Property," *Milwaukee Business Journal*, April 23, 2000, <http://bit.ly/1O3DSz0>; HNTB Corporation, *The Lake Parkway: Evolution of a Roadway*, Wisconsin Department of Transportation, May 2001, 80-82; Tom Daykin, "Parkway Helping Revitalize Area," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, July 27, 2001, <http://bit.ly/1MSHEML>; Graef, Anhalt, Schloemer & Associates, Inc. and Planning & Design Institute, *City of St. Francis Comprehensive "Smart Growth" Plan*, Final Plan, June 17, 2003, 5; Pete Millard, "Firm Plans \$12 million St. Francis Housing Project," *Milwaukee Business Journal*, November 7, 2004, <http://bit.ly/1WZFM32>.

3.5-mile Lake Parkway.⁴² This new roadway not only increased usage of the freeway's Hoan Bridge, it also piqued the interest of businesses and developers. But while many suburban politicians and business interests rejoiced in their new highway, some civic leaders in Milwaukee were hatching plans of their own.

42. Lake Parkway was later extended to Edgerton Avenue, bringing its total length up to 3.8 miles.

Chapter 3

The First Teardown Efforts, 1989-2011

This chapter examines attempts to tear down the Park East Freeway and a significant part of I-794 under Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist, who entered office in 1988. As we will see in this chapter, the Park East teardown idea met most of the “necessary conditions” outlined in the introduction to this thesis, but I-794 did not. The Park East removal option had a good window of opportunity, strong business support, and strong political leadership from Mayor John Norquist and others in his administration. Critically, Norquist was able to address the biggest concern of project stakeholders—traffic congestion. The situation for I-794 was notably different. The idea benefited from the leadership of the Norquist administration, but this alone was not enough to overcome other complications. For one, the window of opportunity for tearing down the east-west section of I-794 was complicated by the opening of Lake Parkway. Business support was also mixed, with businesses in Milwaukee generally in favor of removal while those in the suburbs were opposed. Even more importantly, Norquist never succeeded in dispelling the fears of teardown opponents. The east-west section of the freeway carried significantly more traffic than the busiest section of Park East and some claimed unacceptable levels of traffic congestion or even gridlock would result if the freeway were replaced with a boulevard. In addition to this, eliminating this section of freeway, many feared, would undercut the value that Lake Parkway had created in the suburbs.

Norquist began his campaign to tear down Park East almost immediately after assuming office in 1988. At the time, the Milwaukee Brewers were looking to replacing their aging 1950s

facility, County Stadium. As the team considered possible site locations, Norquist made a quiet bid for a downtown spot east of the Milwaukee River on land then occupied by the Park East spur.¹ But the Brewers lacked interest in the downtown site, citing accessibility and parking concerns, and instead favored a spot very near its existing ballpark.² Talk of a downtown stadium lingered on into the mid-1990s, with revival attempts made by a state senator and, later, by a group of downtown restaurant and tavern owners.³ But the Brewers were unswayed and in 1996 broke ground on the present-day Miller Park, built in the parking lot of their old facility.

Early critics of the Park East stadium plan—at least as they pertained to the freeway—cited traffic congestion and access to downtown as major concerns. “The area is congested enough already,” the editorial staff of the *Milwaukee Sentinel* argued in 1990, “imagine the human and vehicular gridlock that would occur each time the Brewers played at home.”⁴ An alderman who represented downtown also balked at the idea and argued that tearing out the freeway would also be a mistake. “If you take down a portion of the freeway, you would be denying quality access to a portion of the city,” he said.⁵ And as one 1994 news report put it:

1. Jeff Benthoff, “Park East Studied as Site for Stadium,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 25, 1989, morning edition, <http://bit.ly/1Pjn0k6>; Marilyn Marchione and Lawrence Sussman, “Park East Site on Stadium List,” *Milwaukee Journal*, November 25, 1989, <http://bit.ly/1RpLXAz>; Thursday Architects, *Water Street BallPark Option B*, commissioned by the City of Milwaukee, c.1990, in the author’s possession.

2. Chris Foran, “Latest Stadium Site Forces Hand of Norquist, CMC,” *The Business Journal*, February 19, 1990; Chris Foran, “Park East Developers: Project Back on Track,” *The Business Journal*, May 14, 1990; Marilyn Marchione, “Brewer’s Aren’t Buying City’s Pitch for Downtown,” *Milwaukee Journal*, July 8, 1990, <http://bit.ly/20zIfpE>; Marilyn Marchione, “Highway May Become Study Focus,” *Milwaukee Journal*, July 17, 1990, <http://bit.ly/1KNjop1>.

3. “Retractable Domed Stadium to Be Proposed for Downtown,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 5, 1994, <http://bit.ly/1mJaKmw>; “George’s Stadium Idea Faces Costly Obstacles,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 6, 1994, <http://bit.ly/1OFaL50>; Rick Romell, “Stadium Could Take Up 4 Blocks,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 7, 1994, <http://bit.ly/1TKivCU>; Tom Daykin and Rick Romell, “A Stadium Downtown,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 7, 1994, <http://bit.ly/1ZSzRkw>; “Centerfield Drive,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, editorial, February 14, 1994, <http://bit.ly/1mLDQ3R>; Rich Kirchen, “Group Pushes for Stadium Downtown,” *Business Journal*, September 16, 1995.

4. “Stadium Options Open,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 28, 1989, <http://bit.ly/1HddPnF>; “Park East No Place for New Stadium,” editorial, *Milwaukee Journal*, May 16, 1990, <http://bit.ly/1PO6ICv>.

5. Tannette Johnson, “Henningsen Calls Park East Stadium Site ‘Stupid,’” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 27, 1989, <http://bit.ly/1O81liH>.

“While Park East doesn’t serve its intended function, it plays a valuable role in moving cars and trucks through the city’s heart, transportation planners say. It provides convenient access to downtown and the lower east side.”⁶ To top it all off, the article continued, “vehicles that now use the Park East would be forced onto city streets not built to handle as much volume as the freeway.”⁷

In the early 1990s, the Norquist administration quietly initiated talks with state transportation officials about the possibility of tearing down the east-west section of I-794.⁸ The exact outcome of these talks are not known, but in a brief—and little-known—1992 study, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation projected what might happen if this section of freeway was replaced with an eight-lane “divided urban boulevard.”⁹ WisDOT asserted that such a roadway “would have a very poor level of service, considerable congestion, and stop and go traffic conditions during peak periods” and would cost an estimated at \$70 million to \$100 million. The study was also confident that the state would have to repay the federal government for its share in the east-west part of the freeway and possibly do the same for the north-south section.

As far as the public was concerned, tearing down any part of I-794 did not become a matter of debate until 1995. In the spring of that year, Peter Park, then an adjunct professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, led an urban design studio class in which he asked students

6. “Location...Location...Location,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 7, 1994, <http://bit.ly/1XfegQ7>.

7. Tom Daykin and Rick Rommell, “A Stadium Downtown,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 7, 1994, <http://bit.ly/1ZSzRkw>.

8. In an April 1993 memorandum to other WisDOT employees, Robert Packee described having “the first meeting of the [I-794 Aesthetics] Task Force that was formed as a response to the City’s request to tear down I-794 from the Marquette Interchange to the Lake front.” See: Robert Packee to Thomas Walker, Roger Schrantz, Fred Ross, Lee Crook, Ernie Wittwer, Dan Pritchard, and Ron Sonntag, April 7, 1993, Box 20, Folder 92, Secretary Subject’s File, Wisconsin Department of Transportation, 2007/090, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

9. East-West (I-794) Arterial Study, December 1, 1992, Box 20, Folder 93, Secretary Subject’s File, Wisconsin Department of Transportation, 2007/090, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

to envision what could be done with the freeway after it had reached the end of its structural lifespan.¹⁰ As Park later explained, he felt Milwaukee would be better served if I-794 were replaced with “a beautiful and memorable street modeled after the grand boulevards that have worked for almost 100 years in Milwaukee and other great cities like Boston, New York, Paris, and Edinburgh.”¹¹ Park’s students recommended that nearly all of I-794 be torn down, the Hoan Bridge included, and that it be replaced with an at-grade boulevard.¹² The class later pitched this idea to local public officials, including Mayor Norquist, who, in the words of one reporter, “urged the class not to be daunted by objections from the state Department of Transportation.”¹³ In 1995, Norquist appointed Park his planning director.¹⁴

The vision Park and his students proposed provoked a predictable response from WisDOT. In an op-ed piece in the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Robert Packee, district director for the state transportation department, said the idea was unfeasible due to the heavy traffic the highway carried through downtown. Packee, who had expressed earlier opposition to the Park East stadium idea, said a replacement boulevard would have to be ten lanes wide, and even still such a road would result in “more traffic jams, more business disruptions, more accidents, and more air pollution” than the freeway it replaced.¹⁵ Growing congestion and gridlock, he asserted, would

10. Whitney Gould, “Replace I-794 with Boulevard, Planners Urge,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, May 12, 1995.

11. Peter J. Park, “Boulevard Would Help Revitalize Downtown,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 6, 1995.

12. “Taking Down the Freeway: Take 1, A Civic Vision for Milwaukee,” *Crit*, The Journal of the American Institute of Architecture Students, vol. 38 (Winter 1997): 35-37.

13. Whitney Gould, “Replace I-794 with Boulevard, Planners Urge,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, May 12, 1995.

14. Kathy Bergstrom, “Tear it Down, Make it Over,” *Milwaukee Business Journal*, December 8, 2002, bizjournals.com, <http://bit.ly/1QpWu9J>; Rich Kirchen, “Norquist Fueled Downtown’s Renaissance,” *Milwaukee Business Journal*, January 6, 2008, bizjournals.com, <http://bit.ly/1oXcFoE>.

15. Robert Packee, “Boulevard Won’t Solve Traffic Woes,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 24, 1995, <http://bit.ly/1JzNhOq>.

also threaten the economic development of the city.¹⁶ Packee argued that rebuilding the freeway in an aesthetically-pleasing manner, complete with decorative lighting and green space, would be better than tearing it down. “That,” he said, “would make it a much more attractive asset to the community—and an efficient transportation facility.”¹⁷

That same year, however, the Park East teardown idea gained new momentum. In September 1995, federal transportation department officials informed Norquist they were open to his plan but that he needed the support of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, as well as to consult with SEWRPC and Milwaukee County.¹⁸ That October, Norquist proclaimed that the freeway would “very likely” come down “within the next year or so.”¹⁹ What had once been a relatively quiet campaign was now an open promise. “It doesn’t serve any purpose,” he said. “It divides downtown. It interrupts the Riverwalk. I don’t know anyone who likes it very much.”²⁰ In its place, he envisioned a revitalized corridor of mixed-use commercial and residential buildings. “It could really be a handsome street.”²¹ By the end of the month, WisDOT officials had indicated a willingness to discuss Norquist’s ideas but said they wanted to see a specific proposal that would address traffic concerns, as well as who would cover the cost of demolition.²² They did, however, reaffirm their opposition to any such plans for I-794.²³

Razing Park East gradually garnered some serious support from downtown business interests. “The Park East Freeway is a monument to bad city planning,” said Gary Grunau, a

16. Robert Packee, “Boulevard Won’t Solve Traffic Woes,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 24, 1995, <http://bit.ly/1JzNhOq>.

17. Ibid.

18. Rodney Slater to John Norquist, September 29, 1995, Box 27, Folder 23, Secretary’s Subject File, Wisconsin Department of Transportation, 2007/090, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI; Larry Sandler, “Officials Open to Freeway Talks,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 29, 1995.

19. Mike Nichols, “Norquist Declares End of the Road,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 5, 1995.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Larry Sandler, “Officials Open to Freeway Talks,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 29, 1995.

23. Ibid.

major Milwaukee real estate developer and chairman of the downtown Riverwalk business improvement district. “It makes all the sense in the world to tear it down.”²⁴ This sentiment was echoed by Mark Brickman, president and CEO of a major Milwaukee commercial real estate brokerage. “Right now,” Brickman said, “downtown is bifurcated by this freeway. Tearing it down would reunite the downtown.” In March 1997, Grunau said mustering support for the teardown would be one of the district’s “top priorities” of the year.²⁵ The editorial staff of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* newspaper also expressed interest in the teardown, characterizing the freeway stub as being “little more than a long exit ramp—a mere shadow of what it could have been.”²⁶

Not everyone shared these sentiments, however. Some business owners viewed the freeway as vital to their business or to downtown as a whole. Robert Gold, owner of a grocery store built at the terminus of the freeway spur in land that had at one time been cleared for the never-built portion of the freeway, noted in 1997 that he had “a nice on/off ramp for our customers and for people in downtown.”²⁷ The most vocal critic of the teardown idea, however, was George Watts, owner of a high-end downtown kitchenware store and restaurant. “The Park East freeway is absolutely vital to downtown,” he said, adding that thought Norquist’s efforts were an attempt to “build a Potemkin village held together by government funds.”²⁸

Efforts to tear down both Park East and I-794 became part of the City of Milwaukee’s planning process for a downtown master plan. Part of this process involved a multi-day

24. Mike Dries, “Revved-Up Park East Freeway Talks Bring Strong Response,” October 14, 1995.

25. Mike Dries, “Park East Demolition Gains Support,” *Business Journal*, March 30, 1997, <http://bit.ly/1SEzLfu>.

26. “Tear Down Park East? It’s Worth Exploring,” editorial, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, May 29, 1997, <http://bit.ly/1IABKZk>.

27. Mike Dries, “Park East Demolition Gains Support,” *Milwaukee Business Journal*, March 30, 1997, <http://bit.ly/1SEzLfu>.

28. Mike Dries, “Revved-Up Park East Freeway Talks Bring Strong Response,” October 14, 1995.

workshop series, held in March of 1998, during which business leaders and members of the general public were asked to identify “the location of the freeway and interstate system in the year 2040,” as well as to indicate which downtown streets would function as two-way streets, one way streets, and which would be boulevards. In total, about 300 people, organized into small groups, participated in the workshop series. All of the groups removed Park East, and all but two groups converted I-794 to an at-grade boulevard. Of those that kept I-794 in place, one group kept the freeway as-is; the other tunneled the highway underground.²⁹

Norquist’s push to tear down Park East cleared a major hurdle in 1998. That August, SEWRPC released a study it had done at the request of the city that examined how removing a major portion of the freeway might impact traffic.³⁰ This study found that traffic congestion on downtown arterial streets would likely “remain relatively modest” and that any resulting congestion would mostly be concentrated at intersections leading up to the small remaining stub of the freeway.³¹ Many motorists that had once used the corridor, the study said, would take other routes (most notably I-794), thereby reducing the overall usage of the Park East corridor from 51,700 vehicles per weekday to about 30,600 vehicles per weekday.³² With traffic congestion fears now largely alleviated, the project became an easier sell. In fact, Milwaukee County Executive Tom Ament later cited the study as a key reason he supported the project. “In concept, I support the removal of the Park East Freeway because I believe that this can be accomplished without creating congestion in the Downtown area,” he said.³³

29. A. Nelesseen Associates, Milwaukee Downtown Plan, 1999, 4, 42, bit.ly/1OdJVgE.

30. Larry Sandler, “Freeway Stub Removal Estimated at \$13 million,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 11, 1998, <http://bit.ly/1ZqVnjA>.

31. Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, “Analysis of Existing and Year 2020 Traffic Impacts of the Termination of the Park East Freeway at N. 4th Street,” staff memorandum, July 1998, 16-17.

32. *Ibid.*, 15.

33. F. Thomas Ament to Tommy G. Thompson, September 18, 1999, Box 58, Folder 1241 “I-794 1998-‘99, Thomas Ament Papers, Mss 2984, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, WI.

But just as the Park East teardown was gaining serious momentum, similar plans for I-794 hit major roadblocks. In August 1998, Mariano Schifalacqua, the city's engineer, announced that the city was studying the feasibility of tearing down the east-west portion of the freeway, from Sixth Street to the lakefront.³⁴ Doing so, Schifalacqua said, would simplify the upcoming reconstruction of the state's Marquette Interchange, potentially saving the state \$200 million in construction costs for a project then estimated to cost \$460 million.³⁵ Schifalacqua's announcement marked the first time anyone had publically acknowledged that city officials were exploring the demolition of I-794.

This announcement was met by a strong—and perhaps predictable—response from public officials representing Milwaukee's southeastern suburbs. “We see a ‘connected’ Lake Parkway as vital to our economic well-being as we approach the millennium,” said St. Francis City Administrator Ralph Voltner. Tearing down part of I-794, he said, would “jeopardize” the millions spent on the Lake Parkway extension.³⁶ It was a sentiment echoed by many others. A resolution introduced by five county supervisors said I-794 would greatly impair the flow of traffic and “do serious harm to the economic vitality” of Milwaukee's southeastern suburbs “at a time when they are poised to realize the benefit of an enhanced transportation link through the Lake Parkway.”³⁷ The city council of St. Francis argued that tearing down I-794, “would result in the Lake Parkway being a complete waste of money, time, land, and convenience to the

34. Larry Sandler, “City: Razing I-794 Saves Millions,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 24, 1998; Kurt Chandler, “Tear ‘Em Down,” *Milwaukee Magazine*, September 1998.

35. This study was being done within the larger context of a debate over when the Marquette Interchange should be rebuilt and what form that rebuild should take. See: Larry Sandler, “City Officials Say Interchange Should be Fixed, Not Rebuilt,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, December 10, 1996, <http://bit.ly/1OpynXN>; Larry Sandler, “Mayor Says City Could Cover Spur Removal,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, March 26, 1998, <http://bit.ly/1Q3n8ch>.

36. “James H. Burnett III, “St. Francis Criticizes Milwaukee over Plan to Study Razing I-794,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, September 12, 1998, <http://bit.ly/1O1M7HB>.

37. Supervisors Ryan, Lutzka, Czaja, Nyklewicz, and Borkowski, “A Substitute Resolution,” File No. 98-539, November 3, 1998; F. Thomas Ament to Tommy G. Thompson, September 18, 1999, Box 58, Folder 1241 “I-794 1998-‘99, Thomas Ament Papers, Mss 2984, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, WI.

public.”³⁸ Within months, the idea to tear down part of I-794 had garnered positions of opposition from five county supervisors, four suburbs, two state assembly representatives, the editorial board of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* newspaper, and Milwaukee County Executive Tom Ament.³⁹

Not everyone was opposed to the idea, however. Replacing I-794 with a boulevard found favor among many residents and business owners in Milwaukee’s Third Ward, a neighborhood partially encircled—and some would say cut off—by the freeway. The Historic Third Ward Association, the neighborhood’s business improvement district organization, publically endorsed studying the idea further. Einar Tangen, the organization’s president, explained that, “from the Third Ward’s perspective, reuniting the city’s fastest area of increasing land values with the downtown and augmenting the opportunities to live and work in the city are good things for us and the city as a whole. ... The only relevant issue is how accessibility to the Ward and the rest of downtown is maintained.”⁴⁰

In early 1999, Harley-Davidson, the popular American motorcycle manufacturer, announced it was interested in opening a museum at the former Schlitz brewery site, which was then separated from downtown by Park East. But the company’s commitment to the area was contingent on Park East being torn down. From the company’s perspective, was a visual and

38. Common Council of the City of St. Francis, Resolution No. 2196, “Resolution Opposing Any Plans to Eliminate or Diminish Interstate Highway 794,” September 15, 1998, Box 58, Folder 1241 “I-794 1998-‘99, Thomas Ament Papers, Mss 2984, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, WI.

39. “Razing I-794 Could Save Money, but Snarl Downtown Traffic,” editorial, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 25, 1998, <http://bit.ly/1Mwwc5Z>; Tom Held, “3 Supervisors Urge Rejection of Any Plan to Tear Down I -794” *Milwaukee Journal*, September 15, 1998, <http://bit.ly/1kP2JeN>; “No Good Case for Razing I-794,” editorial, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, September 24, 1998, <http://bit.ly/1OuRRhC>; James H. Burnett III, “Feelings on Freeway Follow Geography,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 7, 1998, <http://bit.ly/1OgAvDv>; Larry Sandler, “DOT Won’t Rule-Out I-794 Study,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 7, 1998, <http://bit.ly/1Tj32Jo>.

40. Einar Tangen, letter to the editor, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, September 9, 1998, <http://bit.ly/1ODMESS>.

physical barrier between the brewery site and downtown.⁴¹ It was Harley's interest that convinced Governor Tommy Thompson to support Norquist's plan for Park East. As Gary Grunau explained years later:

When I made the deal ... [Harley-Davidson Chief Executive Officer] Jeff Bluestein ... to buy the building [in Schlitz Park], he said, "We gotta get that freeway down." So Jeff and I and Scott Sampson on a Friday morning in January drove out to Madison and met with Tommy Thompson. ... And in [a] one hour meeting that morning when Tommy realized the effect of what Harley could have ... he said, 'We'll get that down.' So Tommy called Norquist and Ament and within two weeks they agreed to take it down.⁴²

Both the Park East and I-794 teardowns were intertwined in broader negotiations on how to spend \$241 million in federal money in danger of being lost unless the state, county, and city could agree how to spend it. As a *Journal Sentinel* story explained: "The mayor wanted to use some of the money to get rid of the Park East. The governor wanted to spend some of the money on rebuilding the Marquette Interchange, a plan that could go forward without deciding I-794's fate. They compromised to reach a deal."⁴³

When Milwaukee's downtown master plan was released in early 1999, it identified tearing down Park East⁴⁴ as a major catalytic project, supported by the Harley Davidson museum and a six-story "mixed use entertainment complex" as "activity generators."⁴⁵ Tearing out the freeway would have other benefits besides economic development, however, especially when it came to reconnecting the urban street grid. As the plan noted,

41. Tom Daykin and Larry Sandler, "Harley Museum, Road Plan to Kick-Start Downtown," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, April 27, 1999, <http://bit.ly/1N2lfHr>.

42. Gary Grunau, interview by Steve Walters, *Wisconsin Eye*, September 6, 2012, <http://bit.ly/1VQFsWh>.

43. Larry Sandler, "Deal Creates Different Fates for Freeways," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, May 3, 1999, <http://bit.ly/1N2UC4c>.

44. At this stage, the teardown of Park East was only planned to take place from the freeway's Fourth Street exit ramp onward. A complete teardown was later pursued.

45. A. Nelesen Associates, *Milwaukee Downtown Plan, Catalytic Projects*, 25, <http://bit.ly/1QYq99S>.

Elevated highways do not physically preclude pedestrian travel beneath them. There are some sidewalks beneath them, and large areas under these highways are used for parking. However, these highways do present significant psychological barriers to pedestrian travel: they loom over the street blocking the sun and are, altogether, out of scale for pedestrians. . . . Few pedestrians intentionally walk through these areas. This pedestrian “disconnection” diminishes the value and vibrancy of the severed neighborhoods, especially to the northwest.⁴⁶

The plan further noted that,

The greatest impediment to the Gateway Neighborhoods’ tapping the Downtown market is real or perceived barriers between them and Downtown. For example, in interviews with Downtown and neighborhood representatives and in the public workshops and briefings on the draft Downtown Plan, it was often mentioned that the Park East Freeway was seen as a barrier that separated the Historic King Drive and Brewers Hill neighborhoods from Downtown. Removing that barrier is seen as a way to encourage more visitors, business investment, and potential residents to come to the neighborhoods.⁴⁷

Although the downtown plan it did not preclude the possibility that I-794 might be torn down some day—and indeed even mentioned it as a possibility—the plan did not identify the teardown as a catalytic project. Perhaps still feeling the political sting that his I-794 proposal had provoked, Norquist told one reporter: “You don’t want to poke a stick into every beehive that comes along.”⁴⁸ Indeed, he never pushed the issue again, not even in December when a combination of factors, including outdated bracing methods and extreme cold lead to the partial failure of the Hoan Bridge, shut down much of the freeway for the better part of a year and

46. A. Nelesseen Associates, *Downtown Master Plan*, 1999, 127, <http://bit.ly/1KHLgAB>.

47. *Ibid.*, 169.

48. Whitney Gould, “Master Plan’s Goal is a Vibrant Place to Live, Work and Play,” *Journal Sentinel*, May 2, 1999, <http://bit.ly/1NrYjQY>.

arguably provided an ideal window of opportunity to re-evaluate I-794.⁴⁹ But by then even Norquist joined the chorus of public officials calling for the bridge's immediate repair, offering Governor Thompson the "city's full cooperation" expediting the bridge's rehabilitation.⁵⁰

The Park East teardown had the endorsement of the governor, the county executive, and key business interests, but that did not stop a last-ditch effort to block the plan by its most outspoken critic. In July 2000, George Watts—who had run against Norquist in the mayoral election that April—called for Norquist's resignation over the Park East issue and threatened a recall election if he did not.⁵¹ "This will be absolutely devastating, economically, to downtown," Watts forecasted. "It's our welcome mat to the world, and (Norquist) wants to pull it out."⁵² In a vehement op-ed piece published in the *Journal Sentinel*, Watts denounced Norquist's plan as "crass stupidity" that would cause a litany of ills, including increased traffic congestion, noise, and pollution.⁵³ It would also cost downtown jobs, he said, and increase traffic deaths and delay emergency vehicles. He named more than a dozen businesses and organizations that would be hurt by the demolition project. In short, Watts argued, taking down Park East would be nothing short of "city suicide."⁵⁴ In the ensuing months, he launched a "Save our Spur" campaign that included signature-gathering and calling on state and federal officials to halt the project.⁵⁵ He

49. Summary Conclusions of the Forensic Investigation for the Hoan Bridge, Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, July 10, 2001, <http://1.usa.gov/25nK0cM>; Tom Held, "Drivers' Patience Pays off as Most Lanes Reopen on Hoan Bridge," October 10, 2001, JSOnline, <http://bit.ly/25nJoUB>.

50. John Norquist to Tommy Thompson, December 22, 2000, Box 23, Folder "DOT-2001 – Hoan Bridge," Constituent Correspondence of Governor Scott McCallum, 2004/017 (Series 2819), Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

51. Larry Sandler, "Watts Campaigns to Save Freeway Spur," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, July 10, 2000.

52. Tom Daykin, "Park East Freeway Fast Way to Start and Argument," *Journal Sentinel*, May 28, 1999.

53. George Watts, "It Would Be City Suicide to Take down Freeway Spur," op-ed, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, December 10, 2000.

54. Ibid.

55. Larry Sandler, "Watts Campaigns to Save Freeway Spur," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, July 10, 2000, metro edition.

also filed a lawsuit in federal court, contending the project's environmental impact assessment was faulty.⁵⁶

Public opinion over the matter is difficult to evaluate but appears to have favored the teardown. In July 2000, Watts' campaign conducted a telephone poll of 300 Milwaukee residents and, according to one newspaper story, found that, "45% of likely Milwaukee voters were against knocking down the freeway spur, with 25% in favor and the rest undecided or declining to state an opinion." However, at a public information hearing earlier that month, 21 written comments had been left in favor of removal and only 11 opposed the project.⁵⁷ A public hearing in December 2000 followed suit: 68 percent of the 199 statements given were said to favor removing the freeway, with only 32 percent opposed.⁵⁸ At that same meeting, Grunau claimed he had spoken with all the organizations Watts had named in his earlier editorial, stating that 10 of those supported the demolition project and four of them did not think it would affect them one way or the other.⁵⁹

Despite Watts' efforts, Park East fell relatively swiftly. In late 2000, SEWRPC announced that traffic congestion in the area would be even lower than previously forecasted if a new bridge was built over the Milwaukee River.⁶⁰ By late 2001, the demolition proposal had won all necessary endorsements from federal, state, and local agencies and committees.⁶¹ The

56. Larry Sandler, "Watts Sues to Save Spur," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 29, 2001.

57. Larry Sandler, "Watts Says Polls Show Support for Keeping Park East Freeway," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, July 24, 2000, <http://bit.ly/1JtAA83>.

58. Larry Sandler, "Park East Freeway Ramp Could Be Sealed Friday," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, January 25, 2001, <http://bit.ly/1JtAuNK>.

59. Larry Sandler, "Speakers Divided on Razing Freeway Spur," *Journal Sentinel*, December 14, 2000.

60. Larry Sandler, "New Figure Reduce Spurs' Traffic Impact," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, November 6, 2000, <http://bit.ly/1Q0gwLi>; Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, "Evaluation of Year 2020 Traffic Impacts of Two New Potential Sixth Street and Fourth Street Termination Options for the Park East Freeway," staff memorandum, October 2000.

61. Tom Held, "Park East Campaign Wins Key Endorsement," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, June 3, 1999, final edition; Larry Sandler, "Park East Freeway Ramp Could Be Sealed Friday," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, January 25, 2001, metro edition; Larry Sandler, "Plan to Protect Gipfel Brewery Site Backed," *Milwaukee Journal*

freeway's demolition was initially delayed by Watts' lawsuit and environmental contamination found in Park East's soil.⁶² However, in March 2002 a U.S. district judge threw out Watts' lawsuit. Watts called the outcome "a heartbreak for Milwaukee's future." "When people see what's going to happen," he said, "I think they're going to be outraged."⁶³ In June 2002, with the environmental contamination cleaned up, the ramps feeding Park East were closed and demolition began.⁶⁴

And so Park East was torn down but I-794 was spared the wrecking ball. As we saw in this chapter, the Park East teardown idea met most of the "necessary conditions" outlined in the introduction to this thesis, but I-794 did not. The Park East teardown idea benefited from a good window of opportunity, strong business support, and strong political leadership. It also promised to "do no harm," by showing that virtually no traffic congestion would result from the freeway's absence. The situation for I-794 was very different. Although it too had the support of the Norquist administration, this alone was not enough to overcome other complications, such as the opening of Lake Parkway. A notable difference between the two teardown proposals is that Norquist never succeeded in dispelling the fears of teardown opponents. The east-west section of the freeway carried significantly more traffic than the busiest section of Park East and many feared unacceptable levels of traffic congestion would result from the freeway's absence. Not only this, many also feared demolishing this section of freeway would undercut the value that Lake Parkway for Milwaukee's southeastern suburbs. This was, however, not the last time I-794

Sentinel, February 17, 2001, state edition; Tom Daykin, "Council Panel Gives Nod to Park East Street Upgrades," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, February 27, 2002.

62. Larry Sandler, "Park East Razing Delayed until Spring," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, September 26, 2001, Waukesha edition; Larry Sandler, "Watts Loses Fight to Save Freeway Spur," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, March 18, 2002.

63. Larry Sandler, "Watts Loses Fight to Save Freeway Spur," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, March 18, 2002.

64. Larry Sandler, "Park East Freeway Ramps Begin Closing," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, June 5, 2002.

would be considered for demolition. As the first decade of the 2000s drew to a close, I-794 approached a critical juncture. To keep the freeway safe and operational, the state transportation department would have to invest hundreds of millions of dollars into the reconstruction of the roadway. Faced with the high projected cost of this work, even WisDOT officials began to wonder whether the demolition option might make sense after all.

Chapter 4

The Second I-794 Teardown Proposal, 2008-2011

This chapter examines the second and final proposal to tear down the Hoan Bridge (north-south) portion of I-794, which took place from 2008 to 2011. As we will see in this chapter, this proposal met very few of the “necessary conditions” outlined in the introduction of this study. Although the teardown proposal had a good window of opportunity, it lacked any real form of policy entrepreneurship and only garnered business support within the City of Milwaukee. This proposal also failed to meet the “do no harm” condition. Although traffic congestion was not a major concern, as it had been in Norquist’s earlier attempt to tear down the east-west section of the freeway, the freeway’s suburban constituency felt a boulevard replacement would undercut the economic value the freeway and Lake Parkway had created in their communities. Ultimately, a strong coalition of suburban and county leaders rallied to save the Hoan Bridge, and the state eventually rehabilitated and rebuilt the freeway instead of tearing it down.

By 2008, much of I-794 was reaching the end of its structural lifespan, with parts of the freeway dating to the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹ Although many of the piers supporting the Hoan Bridge portion of the freeway did not need to be replaced, the freeway’s driving surface was in rough shape. As one observer noted, years of spot repairs had turned the freeway’s

1. As noted earlier, I-794 was built in different phases. At least part of the original freeway was built in the 1960s, as evidenced by a 1968 photo of the Marquette Interchange just prior to its opening. See: “Heart of County’s Freeways About to Start Beating,” *Milwaukee Journal*, December 22, 1968, <http://bit.ly/1PxDwBM>.

driving surface into something of resembling “a patchwork quilt.”² The high projected cost of the necessary repair and reconstruction work prompted some state transportation officials to examine alternatives, including a study that examined whether the Hoan Bridge was really needed at all.³ “We’re looking at the feasibility of tearing (the Hoan Bridge) down because the cost of rehabilitation is astronomical,” said Frank Busalacchi, the state secretary of transportation.⁴

By nearly anyone’s measure, the work required to repair the freeway was projected to be very expensive. State transportation officials estimated this work would cost between \$200 million and \$240 million.⁵ The long-term outlook was even more costly. By 2025, another \$250 million to \$300 million would be needed to replace the freeway’s Lake Interchange, and a total replacement of the bridge would be needed in 2050, estimated to cost a staggering inflation-adjusted \$2 billion to \$3 billion.⁶

Like the early proposal to tear down the east-west portion of the freeway, reaction among suburban politicians was both immediate and negative. “Anybody who talks about tearing down the Hoan Bridge is out of their mind,” said State Representative Christine Sinicki.⁷ Milwaukee County Supervisor Patricia Jursik, who represented St. Francis, Cudahy, South Milwaukee, and part of Oak Creek, organized a “coalition” of elected officials who opposed any further replacement studies. “Replacing I-794’s Hoan Bridge with ground level lift bridges is not a satisfactory alternative,” she said in a press release. “Much of the rapid development in the

2. Ann-Ellse Henzi, “Questions about the Hoan Bridge’s Future,” WUWM.com, July 7, 2009, <http://bit.ly/1jQyQt6>.

3. Pete Millard, “State Weighs Tearing down Hoan Bridge,” *Milwaukee Business Journal*, bizjournals.com, August 21, 2008, <http://bit.ly/1UZcPsq>.

4. Ibid.

5. Tom Held, “Hoan Analysis Recommends Land Roadway,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, jsonline.com, October 3, 2008, <http://bit.ly/1N1AEbi>; Tom Held, “Time Running out on Hoan Bridge Replacement,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, jsonline.com, October 28, 2009, <http://bit.ly/25BweTV>.

6. Ibid.

7. Tom Held, “Future of Hoan Bridge Uncertain,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, jsonline.com, September 2, 2008, <http://bit.ly/1ToXbW0>.

southern portion of Milwaukee County is due to vital transportation links like the Hoan Bridge.”⁸ Sinicki, along with two other county supervisors, as well as the mayors of St. Francis, South Milwaukee, and Cudahy, sent a letter to Busalacchi requesting that the state plan for the upkeep of the Hoan Bridge and notify her group of any further planning.⁹

Later that month, a former *Journal Sentinel* reporter leaked the details of a draft feasibility study done by the consulting firm HNTB at the request of WisDOT.¹⁰ The freeway, HNTB concluded, was “oversized for its current and projected traffic capacity,” and said there was the possibility “to create a roadway that meets appropriate capacity” while simultaneously freeing up land for other uses.¹¹ HNTB recommended replacing the bridge with a ground-level boulevard and lift bridge and provided two redevelopment scenarios: one maximizing public space and another maximizing the area’s private development potential. The first scenario was projected to bring 5,000 residential units valued at just under \$2.2 billion. The second scenario was projected to bring 9,900 housing units valued at \$5.7 billion. This development was projected to result in 1,361 to 8,090 jobs and \$3.1 million to \$18.2 million yearly tax revenue, respectively.¹² Land sales alone were estimated to bring \$90 million to \$204 million.¹³

Then there was the savings to be gained from the more conservative roadway itself. HNTB projected that the boulevard option would cost more in the short term, but interchange reconstruction in 2025 would actually make it the cheaper option by \$80 million. However, the

8. “Coalition of South Shore Milwaukee County Leaders Oppose Hoan Bridge Demolition,” press release from Supervisor Patricia Jursik, September 8, 2008, <http://bit.ly/1IZ9aX4>.

9. Milwaukee County, press release, September 8, 2008, accessed December 10, 2014, <http://bit.ly/241f01G>.

10. Gretchen Schuldt, “Lower Hoan, Downsized Freeway Could Mean Billions in Development,” Milwaukee Rising blog, September 29, 2008, <http://bit.ly/1TUKj7j>.

11. HNTB, “Hoan Bridge & Harbor Redevelopment Design Sketchbook,” c.2008, 2, obtained from WisDOT via open records request.

12. *Ibid.*, 36-37.

13. *Ibid.*, 38.

boulevard would require more regular maintenance, and the costs savings difference between the two options would narrow over the next three decades—that is, until it was time to completely rebuild the Hoan Bridge, an extremely expensive undertaking.¹⁴ The time cost to suburban commuters who used the bridge was projected to be relatively modest. A traffic study done about this same time projected that the boulevard option would result in a delay of about two to three minutes for any given motorist. In addition, the opening of the proposed lift bridge would stall traffic for six minutes once a day.¹⁵

News of the HNTB study ignited something of a political firestorm. “We were told there was no plan, then this shows up,” said State Representative Christine Sinicki.¹⁶ “I’m thoroughly disgusted with the way this all developed,” said Tom Zepecki, the mayor of South Milwaukee.¹⁷ Several politicians even donned t-shirts inscribed with “SOB,” which may have had a double meaning, but officially stood for “Save Our Bridge.”¹⁸ “Before the mighty arch of the Hoan Bridge, south siders were often treated as the poor step-sister of the larger community,” said Jursik in a press release, “The recent renaissance within Bay View and the greater south shore coincides precisely with the building of the Hoan Bridge in 1977. We must not permit the DOT to steal our glass slipper, the Hoan Bridge.”¹⁹

Other organizations, notably those in the City of Milwaukee, urged state authorities to study all available alternatives. The Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce also endorsed the idea of further studies, advocating no particular plan but an examination of all

14. HNTB, “Hoan Bridge & Harbor Redevelopment Design Sketchbook,” c.2008, 18.

15. HNTB, Lake Parkway Travel Time Analysis, obtained from WisDOT via open records request.

16. Tom Held, “Hoan Analysis Recommends Land Roadway,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, jsonline.com, October 3, 2008, <http://bit.ly/1N1AEbi>

17. Tom Held, “South Shore Officials Criticize Hoan Bridge Report,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, jsonline.com, October 4, 2008, <http://bit.ly/1IygDvZ>.

18. Ibid.

19. Milwaukee County, press release, August 3, 2009, accessed December 10, 2014, <http://bit.ly/1Tijqth>.

options. “The dumbest thing we could do,” said Steve Baas, a spokesperson for the organization, “is wait until the Hoan Bridge is in critical shape and have to rush to make a decision or shut it down while we wait to make a decision.”²⁰ The *Journal Sentinel* took no formal stance on the teardown issue, except to say that the idea was at least worth studying. “Tearing down the Hoan Bridge?” they asked. “Not without a very good reason. But that’s why the study should be done,” the *Journal Sentinel* argued, to “find out if there is a good reason to tear down the bridge.”²¹

The debate over the fate of the interstate bridge heated up quickly. In August 2009, a group of local and state leaders announced they had formed an organization known as the Coalition to Save the Hoan.²² This group, which was spearheaded by Jursik, argued that the Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce’s request for more information articulated a “hidden assumption” that the bridge should be torn down. They also balked at WisDOT’s cost estimate for rehabilitation work, then estimated at around \$200 million.²³ For a time, the MMAC seemed to be pitted against Jursik and her coalition. The MMAC continued its plea for further studies of all possible options, asking that the future of the I-794 corridor would be “driven by facts, not fear.”²⁴ Jursik, however, continued to insist that there was nothing worth studying, that I-794 and the Hoan Bridge fulfilled all the needs.²⁵ She also charged MMAC with conspiring with WisDOT and HNTB to secure the bridge’s demise. “For the MMAC to suggest that we

20. “Hoan Bridge Deserves Study,” editorial, *Milwaukee Business Journal*, August 28, 2008; Steve Schultze, “Study Requests Raises More Concern for Future of Hoan Bridge,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, July 29, 2009, jsonline.com, <http://bit.ly/1mpZpH2>; “Tear down the Hoan Bridge? Not without Good Reason,” editorial, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, July 31, 2009; Steve Schultze, “Study Request Raises More Concern for Future of Hoan Bridge,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, July 29, 2009.

21. “Tear Down the Hoan Bridge? Not Without Good Reason – Which Is Exactly Why a Study of the Bridge is a Good Idea,” editorial, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, jsonline.com, July 31, 2009, <http://bit.ly/1IH9xLn>.

22. Patricia Jursik, Marina Dimitrijevic, Chris Larson, and Christine Sinicki, Milwaukee County press release, August 3, 2009, accessed December 10, 2014, <http://bit.ly/1TijqtH>.

23. Tom Held, “South Shore Officials Criticize Hoan Bridge Report,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 4, 2008, <http://bit.ly/1IygDvZ>.

24. Steve Baas, “Don’t Fear the Facts on the Hoan Bridge Debate,” *Milwaukee Business Journal*, August 16, 2009, <http://bit.ly/1QyAD2P>.

25. Patricia Jursik, Milwaukee County press release, August 18, 2009, <http://bit.ly/1mdbGiu>.

should just get the facts now is really a smokescreen for advancing the HNTB study in my opinion,” Jursik said in a letter to the MMAC’s president.²⁶

Over the next several months, Jursik and other members of the Hoan coalition worked diligently to pressure state officials to drop any study of alternatives and instead simply rebuild the bridge. They held informational meetings and luncheons, gathered signatures, and passed a county board resolution requesting that WisDOT study repairing the Hoan Bridge before considering other alternatives.²⁷ In November 2009, Jursik and other members of the Hoan coalition presented Governor Jim Doyle with the signatures of more than 8,000 constituents opposed to tearing down the Hoan.²⁸

In the City of Milwaukee, political support for the boulevard option was weak at best. The city engineer and public works commissioner requested that the state prepare an alternatives analysis, but Mayor Tom Barrett was publically quiet on the issue.²⁹ Barrett’s silence may have been partly due to what happened (or *did not* happen in the Park East corridor). Although some of the land in the freeway’s footprint has been redeveloped, the majority of it remains empty—an outcome observers have blamed on mismanagement by county officials, the economic recession, turnover at the Department of City Development, and excessive bureaucracy.³⁰ But whatever the

26. Tom Held and Steve Schultze, “Hoan Bridge Battle Heating Up,” *Journal Sentinel*, August 2009, <http://bit.ly/1HX6hWA>.

27. “County Board Calls for Long-Term Study of Hoan Bridge,” press release from Patricia Jursik, Marina Dimitrijevic, and Chris Larson, September 2009, <http://bit.ly/1M5yPIv>; “Hundreds Attend Bay View Town Hall Meeting on Hoan Bridge,” press release from Marina Dimitrijevic, September 24, 2009, <http://bit.ly/1Z1PRQV>; “Newsmaker Luncheon: The Future of the Hoan Bridge,” press release from Patricia Jursik, October 27, 2009, <http://bit.ly/1U8Z732>.

28. “Coalition to Save the Hoan Presents Petitions to Governor,” press release from Patricia Jursik, November 2009, <http://bit.ly/1NJ72TF>.

29. Jeffrey Polenske and Jeffrey Mantes to Frank Busalacchi, November 30, 2009, in “City of Milwaukee Attempts to Delay Re-Decking of Hoan Bridge,” press release from Patricia Jursik and Christine Sinicki, November 2009, <http://bit.ly/21Sy8xM>.

30. Mark Kass, “The Park East Runaround: Why Nothing is Happening Here,” *Wisconsin Interest*, 41-45, <http://bit.ly/241n3eX>; Dave Umhoefer, “Milwaukee County Executive Candidate Jeff Stone Says Regulations

cause, vacant land in Park East likely made a teardown of I-794 a politically tougher sell. One Milwaukee alderperson introduced a resolution outlining a list of requirements for WisDOT, including a demand that any replacement roadway “remain elevated over all land uses currently beneath” the Hoan, including a regional sewer treatment plant, a summer music festival park, and the city’s port.³¹ In essence, the alderman was requesting a lower version of what was already in place. Additionally, three Milwaukee alderpersons were actually members of the Hoan coalition.³²

As the debate over the future of the bridge lingered on, the bridge itself continued to crumble. By the summer of 2010, WisDOT hired a contractor to install netting around parts of the freeway to catch falling concrete.³³ This was a standard safety practice, but one that instilled little confidence in the freeway’s structural integrity. At about this same time, Governor Doyle commissioned an engineering inspection of the bridge and repair work to keep the bridge structurally sound until a longer-term solution was decided.³⁴

The fate of the Hoan Bridge—and the rest of I-794—was definitively decided in early 2011. At that time, Wisconsin’s newly-elected governor, Scott Walker, announced that the state would re-deck and re-paint the bridge, perform concrete overlays and surface repairs of the freeway’s Lake Interchange, and fully replace the east-west section of I-794 between the Marquette and Lake Interchanges beginning in about 2013—all at an estimated cost of \$300

Have Prevented Development of the Park East Corridor,” PolitiFact Wisconsin, <http://bit.ly/1O6YeSS>.

31. This resolution was referred to the Public Works committee and ultimately put on file (but never voted on) by the council. See: Alderman Robert Bauman, “City Mulling List of Conditions for Any Changes to Hoan Bridge,” news release, June 19, 2009, <http://bit.ly/1Z1tZoM>.

32. Steve Jagler, “The Summer of Crumbling Concrete,” OnMilwaukee.com, July 2010, <http://bit.ly/1NQeWWS>; Patricia Jursik, “History of the Hoan Bridge,” Coalition to Save the Hoan, Slide 23, <http://bit.ly/1M5LdrU>.

33. “Hoan Bridge Continues to Crumble; Netting is Not a Long-Term Fix,” press release from Patricia Jursik, <http://bit.ly/1QhM3JU>.

34. Joe Yovino, “Contracts Awarded for Hoan Bridge Repair Work,” [dailyreporter.com, http://bit.ly/1jRvypj](http://bit.ly/1jRvypj); Daniel Bice, “Doyle Donor Gets Heftier No-Bid Job from State,” <http://bit.ly/1jRuDFr>.

million.³⁵ Walker’s decision to repair the freeway was hardly surprising. In the late 1990s, when serving as a state representative for Wauwatosa, Walker had been among those who expressed opposition to tearing down the east-west portion of the freeway.³⁶ More recently, while campaigning for governor, Walker had used the Hoan Bridge as a backdrop—quite literally—to illustrate why federal money earmarked for a light rail project should instead be used to repair the state’s deteriorating roads.³⁷ More directly, the freeway also served the interests of the governor’s suburban constituency. “The Hoan isn’t just any bridge,” Walker said in a press release announcing the overhaul, “it’s a landmark of Milwaukee and a vital connection for Bay View, St. Francis, Cudahy, South Milwaukee and Oak Creek residents to downtown Milwaukee.”³⁸

And so, by 2011, a second proposal to tear down part of I-794 came and went. As we saw in this chapter, this second proposal met few of the “necessary conditions” outlined in the introduction of this study. Although this teardown proposal had a better window of opportunity than Norquist’s earlier attempt, it lacked any real form of policy entrepreneurship and only garnered business support within the City of Milwaukee. Like Norquist’s campaign a decade earlier, WisDOT’s proposal also failed to meet the “do no harm” condition; although traffic congestion was not a major concern, the freeway’s suburban constituency felt a boulevard replacement would undercut the economic value realized through the Lake Parkway extension.

35. Office of Governor, press release, April 2, 2011, accessed December 10, 2014, <http://1.usa.gov/1N1IhhA>.

36. Tom Held, “3 Supervisors Urge Rejection of Any Plan to Tear Down I -794” *Milwaukee Journal*, September 15, 1998, <http://bit.ly/1kP2JeN>.

37. Larry Sandler, “Train Money Should Be Rejected, Walker Says,” *Journal Sentinel*, August 16, 2010, <http://bit.ly/1OkNNfi>.

38. Office of Governor, press release, April 2, 2011, accessed December 10, 2014, <http://1.usa.gov/1Y6hZQp>.

Conclusion

What can the cases of Park East and I-794 tell us about the attributes of a successful freeway teardown? Here we start by examining how Park East compared in the evaluation categories identified in the introduction. Next, we consider the Norquist's proposal to tear down the east-west section of I-794 in the 1990s. Finally, we turn our attention to the final I-794 tear down proposal for the Hoan Bridge. A summary table of findings is presented at the end of this section. The cases of Park East and I-794 support the idea that freeway removal efforts may need: (1) An adequate window of opportunity; (2) a strong advocate for the teardown option; (3) business support, and; (4) reasonable assurances from teardown proponents that the removal option will "do no harm."

Park East Teardown

1989-2002

The Park East Freeway spur was first targeted for demolition by the John Norquist administration starting in 1989. Although initially unsuccessful, Norquist continued his campaign against the freeway spur for much the 1990s, finally securing its demise in a pivotal 1999 agreement with the state and county over how to spend \$241 million in federal funds. Demolition work began in 2002.

Integrity and Safety Concerns

Park East had several years of service life ahead of it when it was torn down in 2002. Although it was nearing the end of its structural lifespan, it was by no means there yet. Park East was completed in parts between 1968 and 1971. Freeway facilities typically last about 40-50 years.¹ When Norquist began his campaign to tear down Park East, the freeway was only about two decades old. In 1999, the year the freeway's fate was decided, the facility still had at least a decade of service life ahead of it, WisDOT having actually resurfaced the freeway just four years earlier. It would be fair to say that Park East was aging, but it was not at the end of its design life.

Window of Opportunity

The teardown of Park East had two (possibly three) windows of opportunity. The initial window of opportunity was the Brewers' consideration of other stadium options in the late 1990s and early 1990s. The second window of opportunity was the planning process for the Milwaukee's downtown master plan in the 1990s. This window was further enhanced by the availability of federal money to cover a significant portion of the freeway's demolition.

Business Support

The Park East teardown appears to have enjoyed strong support from downtown Milwaukee business interests. This was evident as early as 1995, when area restaurant and tavern owners still held out hope that a downtown stadium might materialize. Later, the teardown option had the support of business interests, including a prominent developer and a downtown business improvement district. A key supporter was also Harley Davidson. Business owner

1. Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, *A Regional Freeway System Reconstruction Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin*, Planning Report No. 47, May 2003, 81-83, <http://bit.ly/1TvYYYZ>.

George Watts campaigned vigorously against the teardown option, but his views on the freeway do not appear to have been widely accepted.

Policy Entrepreneurship

Policy entrepreneurship was clearly evident in the case of Park East. This role was filled by John Norquist, who vigorously promoted the teardown option from the late 1980s through the late 1990s. Peter Park and Gary Grunau were also influential in this regard. Without the efforts of Norquist and others, it is conceivable, perhaps even very likely, that state transportation officials would have rebuilt, rather than demolished, the freeway.

“Do No Harm” Principle

One of the triumphs of the Park East teardown option is that it made reasonable assurances to “do no harm.” In the case Park East, the possibility of traffic congestion after a teardown appears to have been the major concern among critics. Although the freeway did not serve its intended purpose, some argued, Park East still moved significant volumes of traffic that might overwhelm surface streets. Few people seemed to believe that tearing down the half-mile freeway spur would undercut the economic vitality of Milwaukee’s downtown (save for the likes of George Watts). After all, even with Park East out of the picture, motor vehicle traffic moving to and from downtown would continue to be served by other main-line freeways, such as I-94 and I-43, as well as the regional freeway spur of I-794. A secondary concern, if Tommy Thompson’s contingent support of the teardown is any indication, may have been the redevelopment potential of the corridor.

By 1999, Norquist and other teardown proponents had effectively addressed both of these concerns. The issue of traffic congestion had been largely dealt with by SEWRPC's traffic study, done at the request of the city in 1998. With the issue of traffic out of the way, it was much easier for stakeholders in the project to see the freeway as an unnecessary or, as Norquist and others argued, a barrier to something better. Governor Thompson's support was secured in 1999 with assurance from Harley Davidson that they would locate their company museum in a former Schlitz brewery complex.

*First I-794 Teardown Proposal
East-West Segment
c.1992-1999*

The east-west segment of I-794 was targeted for demolition by the John Norquist administration starting in the early 1990s. Norquist's proposal to replace this part of the freeway with a boulevard sparked far more controversy and eventually died in the 1999 agreement between the state, county, and city over how to spend \$241 million in federal funds.

Integrity and Safety Concerns

Like Park East, integrity and safety concerns were not especially evident in the proposal to tear out the east-west segment of I-794. The freeway was certainly aging but in no danger of collapsing and would not need to be rebuilt until the 2010s.

Window of Opportunity

The window of opportunity in the case of I-794 was multifaceted and complicated. By the late 1990s, the state was planning for the reconstruction of Milwaukee's massive Marquette Interchange, which had opened in 1968. The design of this interchange depended on the freeways that fed it. A ground-level boulevard might have resulted in a less expensive interchange design, potentially saving the state millions while simultaneously opening up land near downtown for other uses.

But Norquist's teardown efforts came at the exact moment that a major investment in the corridor was well underway. When Norquist first floated the idea of tearing down the east-west section of I-794, state transportation officials had already broken ground on the Lake Parkway, which had been nearly a decade and a half in the making. Up to that point, virtually all planning efforts for the I-794 corridor at the county and state level had emphasized enhancing—rather than diminishing—the significance of the freeway. At no point in the planning process is there evidence that anyone had ever questioned the existence of the freeway. Norquist's proposal to demolish a major section of I-794 was not merely inconsistent with years of planning; it called into the question the most basic assumption on which all those years of planning had been built—and at precisely the moment those efforts were to pay economic dividends to Milwaukee's southeastern suburbs.

Policy Entrepreneurship

John Norquist and Peter Park served as policy entrepreneurs for the tearing down of the east-west segment of I-794. More effort seems to have been put into Park East, however, perhaps because it was viewed as the more politically feasible.

Business Support

The teardown of the east-west section of I-794 appears to have had strong support from business owners in the Third Ward neighborhood, who viewed the freeway as a barrier between their neighborhood and downtown. Suburban business owners were generally opposed to the idea. The situation was perhaps best summarized by a 1998 news headline: “Feelings on Freeway Follow Geography.”²

“Do No Harm” Principle

Although a partial teardown of I-794 could have brought significant benefits to the City of Milwaukee, it also stood to result in a great deal of harm—at least according to the state transportation department and various suburban officials. Like Park East, traffic congestion was a major concern for I-794. The busiest section of the east-west segment of freeway carried almost double the traffic that Park East did. State transportation planners forecasted that any replacement boulevard for this part of the freeway would provide a mediocre level of service to motorists at best and “gridlock” at its worst. Another major concern was a teardown’s economic impact. Milwaukee’s southeastern suburbs seem to have benefited significantly from an extension of the freeway, and they feared demolition would jeopardize the value Lake Parkway (in conjunction with I-794) had created.

Tearing down I-794 would also have undercut years of work by state and county officials to optimize the corridor for people driving cars. If the east-west leg of the freeway had been eliminated at about the same time as Park East was demolished, some of the traffic Lake Parkway had been built for might never have materialized or reverted to old routes leaving

2. James Burnett III, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 7, 1998, <http://bit.ly/1OgAvDv>.

Milwaukee County again with a “bridge to nowhere”—perhaps this time accompanied by a newly-minted *parkway* to nowhere.

In a final twist of irony, tearing down I-794 also threatened the Park East teardown. When SEWRPC developed its traffic forecasts for the Park East teardown, it did so with the assumption that I-794 would remain in place and some of the “spillover” traffic after Park East was no more. A proposal to tear down I-794 would require a reassessment of the traffic studies that supported the Park East removal, potentially jeopardizing that project.

Was the I-794 teardown even feasible? There is some evidence that WisDOT’s 1992 forecast of “gridlock” warranted skepticism. Why so? First, state transportation department had a self-interest in keeping the corridor in place as-is given all the planning that had gone into Lake Parkway. Indeed, WisDOT officials like Robert Packee, noted earlier for his editorial rebuttal to Peter Park’s teardown suggestion, had spent significant amounts of time working on the Lake Parkway plan.³

Moreover, experience elsewhere suggests that high traffic volumes do not automatically make freeway teardowns unfeasible. A notable high-profile example of this occurred in September 1996, when the California transportation department closed down of San Francisco’s Central Freeway to demolish the highway’s upper deck, which had been damaged in the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake. Prior to the closure, commuters were warned to brace for what was almost certain to be nightmarish traffic congestion, possibly even gridlock. At the time, the freeway moved about 80,000 vehicles per day.⁴ But a traffic Armageddon never materialized; the

3. For references to Packee’s involvement in the project, see: HNTB Corporation, *The Lake Parkway: Evolution of a Roadway*, Wisconsin Department of Transportation, May 2001, 29, 33, 81

4. “Commuters Brace for Nightmarish Traffic Jams,” *Lodi News-Sentinel*, August 23, 1996, <http://bit.ly/1KRsiYc>.

flow of traffic actually seemed to improve with the freeway closed.⁵ The city's mayor suggested that perhaps the freeway was not needed after all.⁶ As noted earlier, this segment of freeway was eventually demolished. The parallels between I-794 and Central Freeway are intriguing. In 1998, just prior to the opening of Lake Parkway, the busiest section of I-794 moved an average of 79,730 vehicles per day, with a weekday-only average of 88,830.

More recently, WisDOT's own rebuilding of the east-west section of I-794 in the 2010s also suggest a lower-capacity roadway was possible. During this time, the east-west section of the freeway was completely rebuilt from the ground up. This was accomplished in two phases: First the eastbound lanes were closed, demolished, and rebuilt. During this phase, traffic traveling easterly and westerly operated on the westbound *shared* the same side of the freeway. Once that side reopened, the same was done to the westbound lanes.⁷ Even with only half of the freeway usable at any given time, downtown Milwaukee was never overwhelmed with unmanageable traffic or the dreaded "gridlock."

All of this is not to say the Norquist's proposal might not have result in *some* traffic problems or delay. Nor is it meant trivialize the engineering considerations of such a massive project. But it does suggest that Norquist's proposal was not unfeasible outright, and that it might have benefited from a closer look from an objective third party.

5. "S.F., Commute a Breeze," *Lodi News-Sentinel*, August 27, 1996, <http://bit.ly/1Q9KjQz>; "S.F. Commuters Find Clear Streets," *Lodi News-Sentinel*, September 4, 1996, <http://bit.ly/1QMbuEz>.

6. "Mayor Floats Idea of Razing Freeway," *Lodi News-Sentinel*, September 7, 1996, <http://bit.ly/1TcUmbI>.

7. Lydia Mulvany, "Changes Coming to I-794 Hoan Bridge as Construction Work to Start," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, jsonline.com, <http://bit.ly/1SlXMrQ>; "I-794 Lake Freeway/Hoan Bridge Get Around Guide – Late 2014 Thru Late 2015," projects.511wi.gov, <http://bit.ly/1oxp4yT>.

*Second I-794 Teardown Proposal
Hoan Bridge Segment
2008-2011*

In 2008, WisDOT examined the feasibility of replacing the Hoan Bridge segment of I-794 with an at-grade roadway and lift bridge. Like the earlier proposal to tear down the east-west segment of the freeway, this proposal sparked a political firestorm from Milwaukee's southeastern suburbs, which the freeway predominately served. The Hoan Bridge was later re-decked, rather than removed.

Integrity and Safety Concerns

I-794's integrity and safety was of some concern by 2008. The Hoan Bridge was built in the first half of the 1970s and opened to motor vehicle traffic in 1977. It was in no apparent danger of collapsing, but at nearly four decades old, it would soon require significant restoration and reconstruction work. Some parts of the Hoan Bridge were shedding chunks of concrete, prompting the state transportation department to install netting to catch this potentially lethal debris.

Window of Opportunity

The window of opportunity for I-794 was the freeway's deteriorating condition, the high cost of necessary reconstruction work, and the HNTB traffic and economic development study which recommended a boulevard replacement for the freeway.

Business Support

A teardown of the Hoan Bridge appears to have piqued the interest of the Historic Third Ward Association and the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area Chamber of Commerce. However, these organizations merely called for further studies, not necessarily for the freeway to be torn down.

Policy Entrepreneurship

In contrast to the Park East teardown, what the Hoan Bridge teardown lacked was the vigorous support of a clear policy entrepreneur. Mayor Tom Barrett remained publically quiet on the matter, and there appears to have been no consensus amongst council members about the best course of action.

“Do No Harm” Principle

Like the earlier proposal to tear down the east-west segment of I-794, the proposal to tear down the Hoan Bridge segment of the freeway posed both benefits and drawbacks. This segment of the freeway carried substantially less traffic than the downtown section of the freeway (less than the busiest part of Park East, in fact). And as HNTB’s traffic analysis showed, a boulevard replacement for the freeway would only result in a modest delay to commuters of a few minutes each way. The far greater concern for politicians and residents of Milwaukee’s southeastern suburbs was the teardown’s potential impact on the economic value that the freeway and Lake Parkway had created. So threatening was the proposal, that leaders representing communities in

the southeastern part of the county banded together to create the bipartisan Coalition to the Save the Hoan, which held public meetings, gathered signatures, and actively petitioned the governor's office to reject the teardown proposal.

It can be noted here that teardown critics never actually showed that a boulevard would undercut the value that Lake Parkway had created. But the burden of proof was not on teardown proponents to demonstrate that a certain freeway or freeway segment is necessary; it was on teardown proponents to show that it that it is was not, which neither teardown proposal ever succeeded in doing.

Summary of Findings

The cases of Park East and I-794 support the idea that freeway removal efforts may need: (1) An adequate window of opportunity; (2) a strong advocate for the teardown option; (3) strong business support, and; (4) reasonable assurances from teardown proponents that the removal option will “do no harm.” Second, it argues that the I-794 outcome can be partly explained by a major state investment in the freeway in the 1990s. The absence of these key conditions in the case of I-794 may help explain why the freeway was not torn down, although other factors may also have been at play. This thesis examined I-794 through the narrow lens of the teardown proposals themselves. An examination of relations between of urban-suburban relations as well as city-state relations may provide other clues as to why the I-794 teardown was rejected.

Ultimately, this study uncovered another condition that future scholars may wish to consider: The absence of organized political opposition. Opposition to Norquist's Park East teardown proposal was relatively light, save for a last-ditch campaign by George Watts. By

contrast, the campaign to save I-794 appeared to be well organized—especially when it came to saving the Hoan Bridge.

Has I-794 at last cemented itself as a permanent part of Milwaukee’s built environment? Some Milwaukee-area leaders are planning for that scenario. In 2010, County Representative Patricia Jursik spearheaded the creation of a SEWRPC advisory committee predicated on an extension of Lake Parkway. In April 2012, this committee issued a formal recommendation that Lake Parkway be extended southward another six miles from its current terminus at Edgerton Avenue.⁸ This extension would save commuters approximately five minutes of travel time (reducing travel time in the corridor from 15 minutes to 10 minutes) and possibly reduce motor vehicle crashes in the corridor. But the parkway extension would run very near several dozen residential units, as well as 12 commercial or industrial buildings and 20 acres of parkland and 27 acres of wetlands—all to the tune of more than \$207 million.⁹ More than 20 percent of the parkway extension was forecasted to handle less than 9,000 vehicles per weekday.¹⁰ Despite the projected impact and low demand for such a facility, SEWRPC added the parkway to its regional transportation plan in June 2014.¹¹

8. Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, Study of a Lake Parkway (STH 793) Extension from Edgerton Avenue to STH 100 in Milwaukee County, Memorandum Report No. 201, April 2012, <http://bit.ly/1VC8AEr>.

9. Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, Study of a Lake Parkway (STH 793) Extension from Edgerton Avenue to STH 100 in Milwaukee County, Memorandum Report No. 201, April 2012, 14-15, <http://bit.ly/1VC8AEr>.

10. Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, Study of a Lake Parkway (STH 793) Extension from Edgerton Avenue to STH 100 in Milwaukee County, Memorandum Report No. 201, April 2012, 14, <http://bit.ly/1VC8AEr>.

11. The Lake Parkway extension may not be built any time soon, however. SEWRPC has noted that the total estimated cost of its 2035 transportation plan “exceeds the existing and reasonably expected revenues available to implement the plan” and therefore created a “fiscally-constrained” version of its plan. This version retained all of the arterial expansion projects recommended in the original full plan with the exception of Jursik’s Lake Parkway extension. See: Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, *Review and Update of the Year 2035 Regional Transportation Plan*, Memorandum Report No. 215, June 2014, 4, 113, <http://bit.ly/1Ok0mfW>.

Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, *Review and Update of the Year 2035 Regional Transportation Plan*, Memorandum Report No. 215, 4, <http://bit.ly/1Ok0mfW>.

Throughout the planning process, neither SEWRPC nor Jursik's task force clearly articulated what problem this new highway was intended to solve.¹² A press release from Jursik in December 2012, however, hinted at the purpose behind the extension. "An extended Lake Parkway will provide the necessary transportation infrastructure to promote economic development in Milwaukee County's South Shore and around the Port of Milwaukee and General Mitchell International Airport," she wrote. "We are part of the increasingly powerful lake corridor mega-region that stretches from Gary, Indiana through Chicago, Illinois to Ozaukee County, Wisconsin."¹³ But in an age of growing environmental concerns, does it make sense to build a \$207 million highway that solves no existing transportation problem in the hopes that it will spur (car-dependent) development further afield from the City of Milwaukee? It is a question I leave to the reader.

Despite the recent reconstruction and re-decking of I-794, the debate over the future of the freeway may not be over yet. In about 40 years' time, the piers and supports holding up the Hoan Bridge, which are original to the freeway's 1970s construction, will reach the end of their structural lifespan, necessitating a full reconstruction of the bridge. At about the same time the east-west section of the freeway will also need major maintenance. Such work is anticipated to cost billions of dollars. Will the State of Wisconsin pay for a complete reconstruction of the bridge? Or will it opt for a less-expensive roadway? The answer to that question may very well depend on which scenario is planned for by state and local leaders.

12. Meeting minutes indicate the committee spent most of its time discussing road design details and intersection treatments. See: Southeastern Wisconsin Planning Commission, Minutes of the First Meeting, Advisory Committee on the Lake Parkway Extension Study, August 26, 2010, <http://bit.ly/1OiE6Bt>; Second Meeting, October 28, 2010, <http://bit.ly/1LgbVOK>; Third Meeting, February 16, 2011, <http://bit.ly/1LgbVOK>; Fourth Meeting, June 13, 2011, <http://bit.ly/1Z8eZX2>; Fifth Meeting, September 26, 2011, Sixth Meeting, November 14, 2011, <http://bit.ly/1Z8fgJQ>; Seventh Meeting, March 26, 2012, <http://bit.ly/1LgiYeg>.

13. Milwaukee County Press Release, Supervisor Patricia Jursik, December 5, 2012, <http://bit.ly/1LgtGNq>.

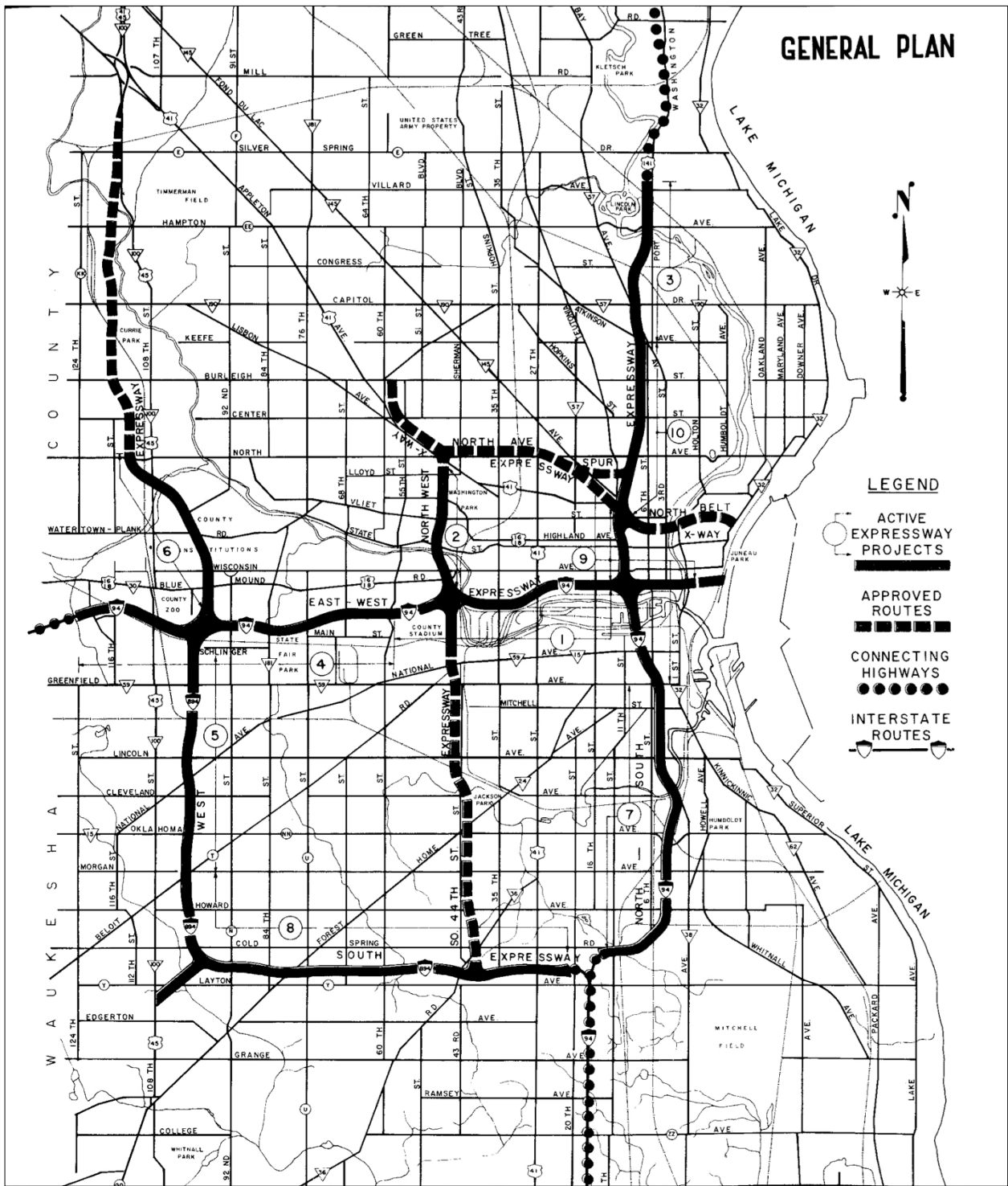
Table 3 Summary of Findings

	Park East Freeway (1989-1999)	I-794 East-West segment (c.1992-1999)	I-794 Hoan Bridge segment (2008-2011)
Were there integrity & safety Concerns?	No. The freeway was aging but in no danger of collapsing and had many years of service life ahead of it.	No. The freeway was aging but in no danger of collapsing and had many years of service life ahead of it.	Yes. By 2008, the freeway was structurally sound but rapidly deteriorating. Safety nets were installed to catch falling concrete.
Was there a window of opportunity?	Yes. A downtown stadium was the initial window. Later, the window became the downtown planning process, augmented by the potential availability of federal funds for the project.	Partially. The window was similar to that of Park East, but also included the planned reconstruction of the Marquette Interchange. The impending opening of Lake Parkway complicated this window.	Partially. The window was the freeway's deteriorating condition and the HNTB study recommending a boulevard replacement for the freeway. Recent development resulting from Lake Parkway complicated this window.
Was there strong business support?	No. This support came from developer Gary Grunau, the business improvement district he chaired, and Harley-Davidson. Some opposition was expressed by George Watts and others.	No. There was some support from business interests in the City of Milwaukee, but not in the suburbs.	No. There was some support from business interests in the City of Milwaukee, but not in the suburbs.
Was there policy entrepreneurship?	No. The teardown option originated within and the Norquist administration. Norquist and others lobbied for a boulevard replacement.	No. The teardown option originated within and the Norquist administration. Norquist and others lobbied for a boulevard replacement.	No. Mayor Barrett was publically quiet on the issue and there does not appear to have been any consensus among councilmembers.
Did the teardown promise to "do no harm"?	No. The major concern among project stakeholders was traffic congestion; Norquist addressed his concern with a traffic modeling.	No. The major concerns among stakeholders were traffic congestion and the teardown's impact on the economic value of Lake Parkway; Neither of these concerns were addressed by teardown proponents.	No. The major concern was the teardown's potential impact on the value created by Lake Parkway. This concern was not addressed by WisDOT's teardown proposal.

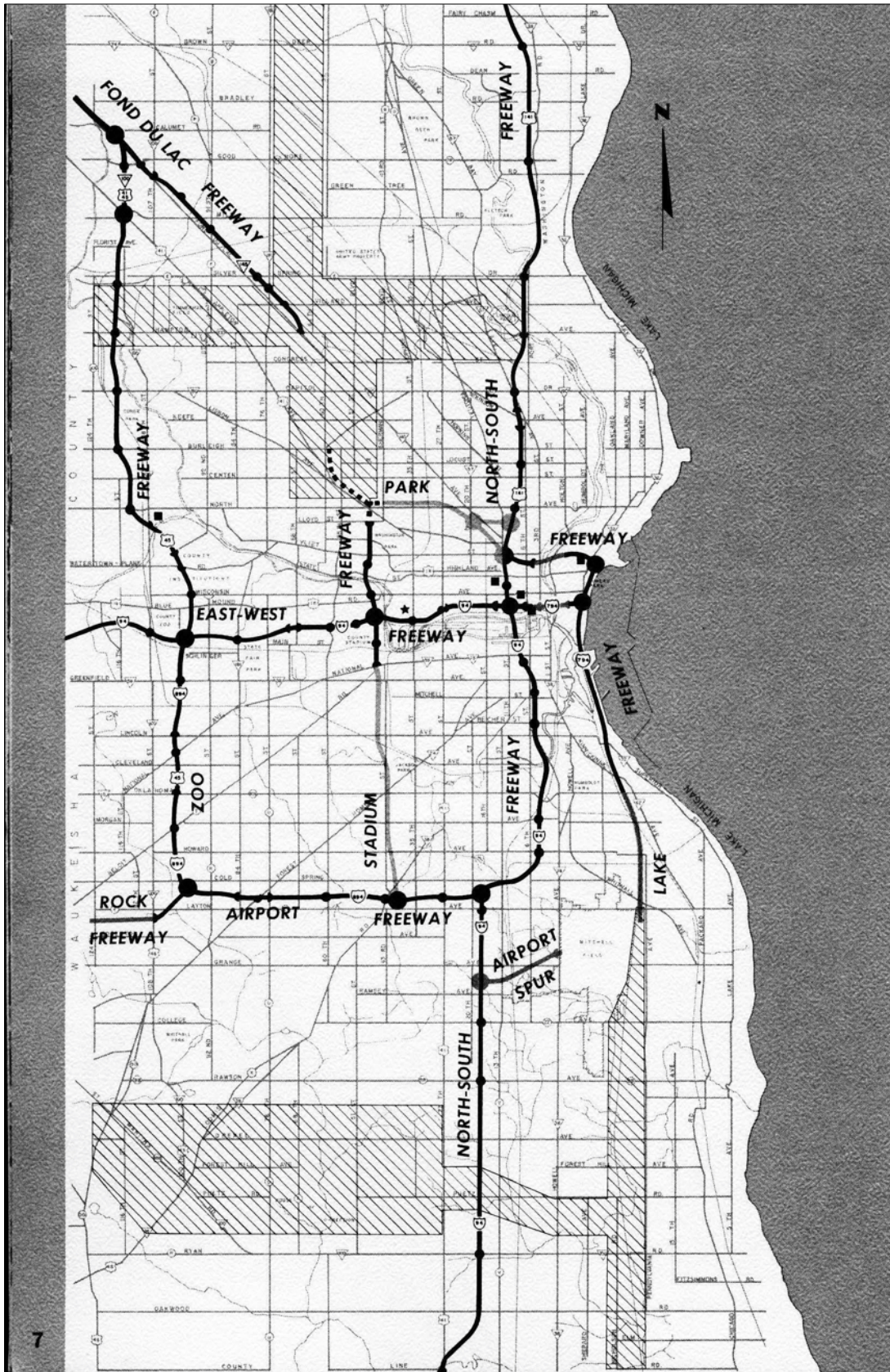
Appendix



A view of downtown Milwaukee (top) c.1964 and the planned downtown freeway loop (bottom). Source: Howard, Needles, Tammen and Bergendoff, *Milwaukee's Downtown Freeway Loop – Key to the Future*, Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee County Expressway Transportation Commission, c.1964.



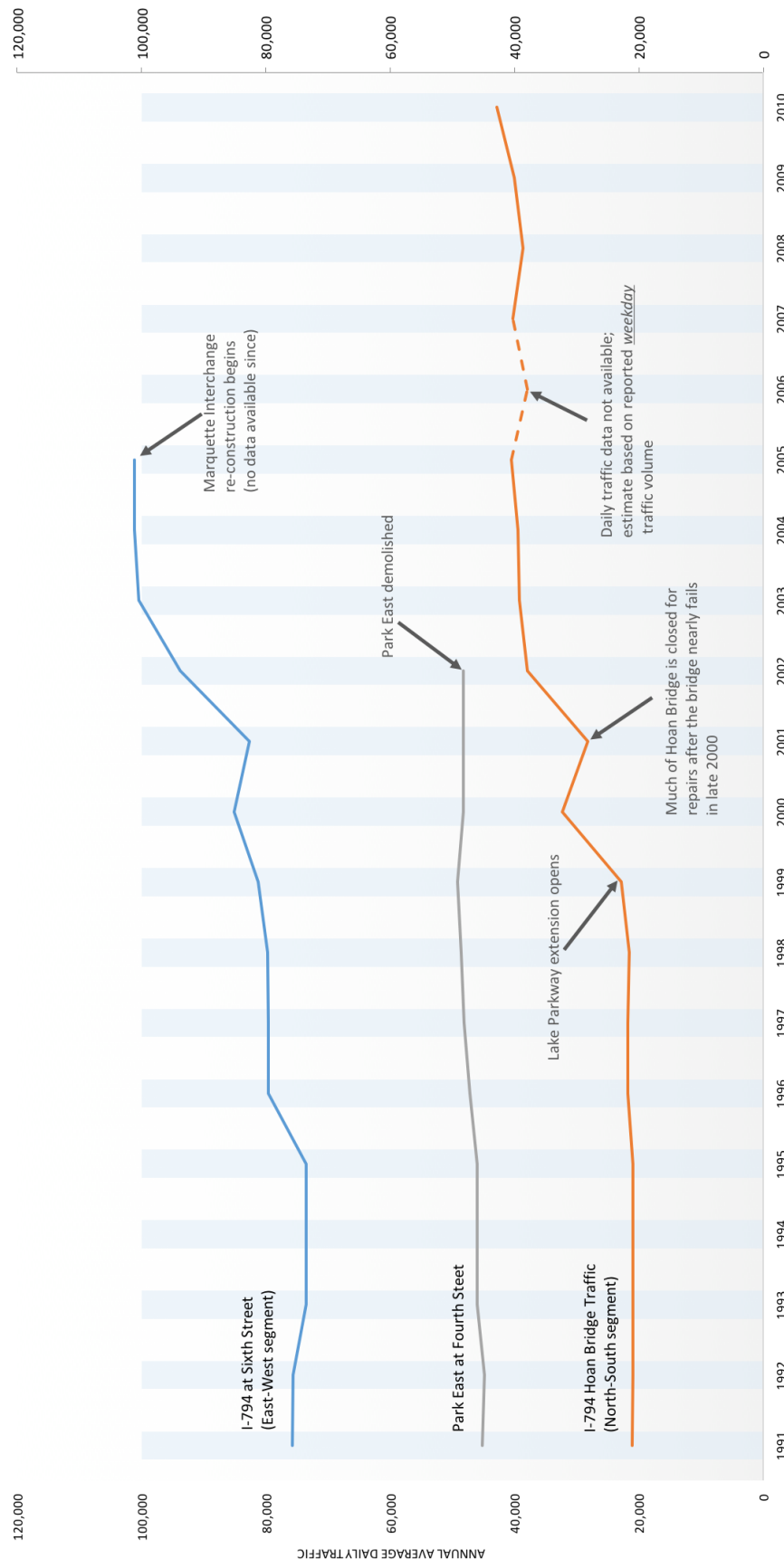
A map of Milwaukee County's active expressway projects and approved routes in 1960. Source: Milwaukee County Expressway Commission, Annual Report, 1960, 3.



A map of Milwaukee County's active expressway projects and approved routes in 1968. Source: Milwaukee County Expressway Commission, Annual Report, 1960, n.p.

Lake Freeway vs. Park East

Annual Average Daily Traffic Volumes, 1991-2010



Data for 1991 -2000 was obtained from WisDOT's annual report, *Wisconsin Highway Traffic Volume Data*. Data from 2001-2010 was obtained directly from WisDOT.