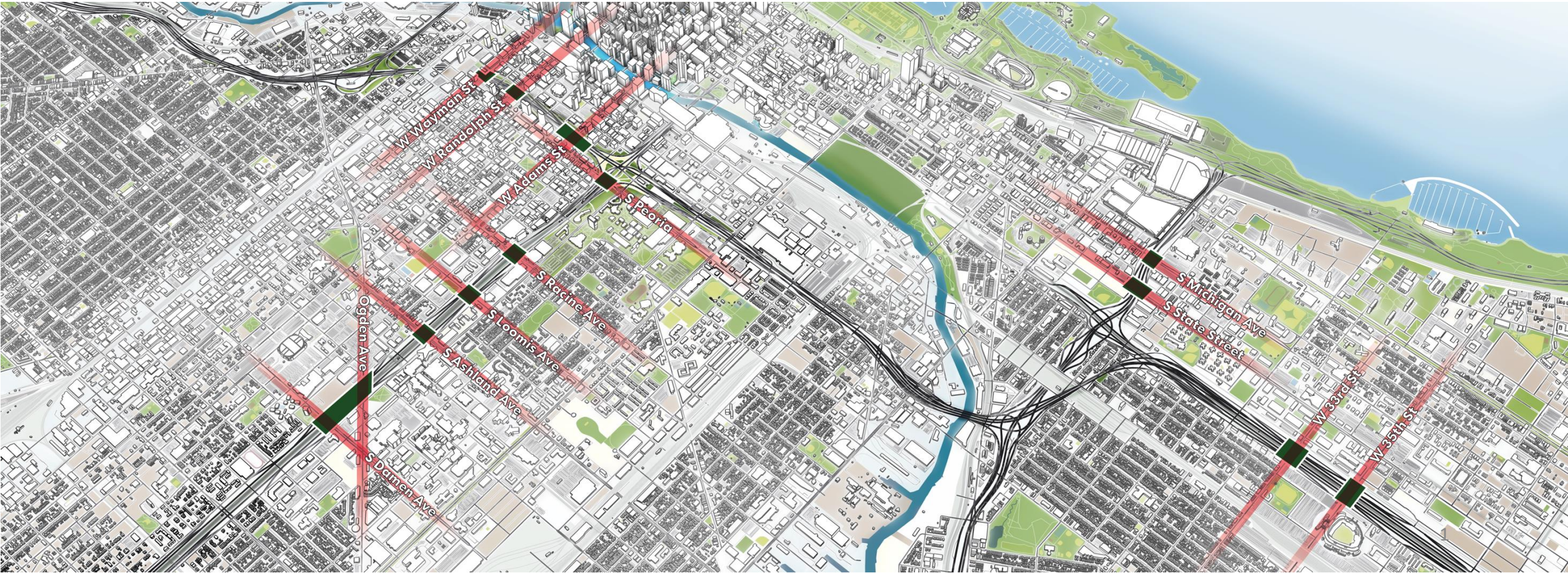
The Path To The Cap

CCAC
CHICAGO CENTRAL AREA COMMITTEE

A Roadmap to Developing
Transformational Highway Caps In Chicago
November 2026



Pro-Bono Planning Team

Special Thanks To Our Expert Team

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- Andrew Broderick, SmithGroup
- Mathew Cermak, Chicago Title Insurance Company
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CHICAGO TITLE INSURANCE COMPANY
NATIONAL COMMERCIAL SERVICES | CHICAGO

GREENSTONE PARTNERS

HNTB

MKSK

Perkins&Will

PPP Law, LLC

SMITHGROUP

SOM

01 Introduction and Context

A Legacy of Connection and Disconnection



A Legacy of Connection and Disconnection



A Legacy of Past Plans to Cap Highways















- Central Area Plan (City of Chicago) (2003)
- Kennedy Expressway Green Corridor (PerkinsWill) (2003)
- 2009 Central Area Action Plan (City of Chicago)
- CCAC 2014 Illinois Medical District
- Prairie Quilt (Horizon Lines) (2026)
- Fifield/Ratio Architects (2020)
- Central Area Plan 2045 (City of Chicago) (2025)

Reconnecting Communities

Mitigating Community Harms of Transportation Infrastructure

MPC research documenting the equity and environmental harm that transportation infrastructure has historically caused in our region.

- Compiles a list of the top 22 project ideas to reconnect communities disrupted by transportation infrastructure.
- Includes freeway capping ideas for Eisenhower and Dan Ryan Expressways for west and southside neighborhoods respectively.

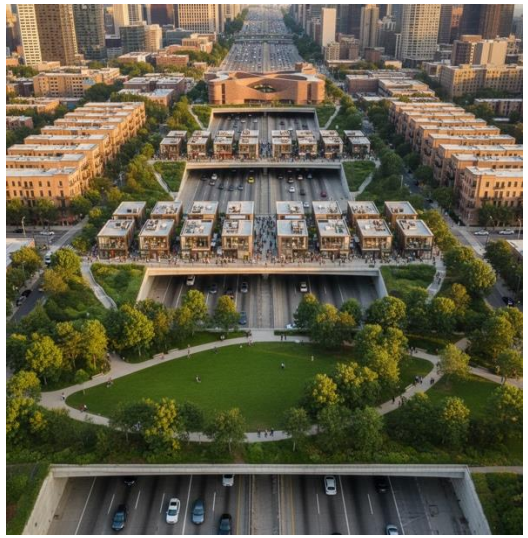


Source: Metropolitan Planning Council

Horizon Lines Competition

Visions for 2050

A signature initiative of World Business Chicago focused on surfacing, sharing, and advancing bold ideas for Chicago's future



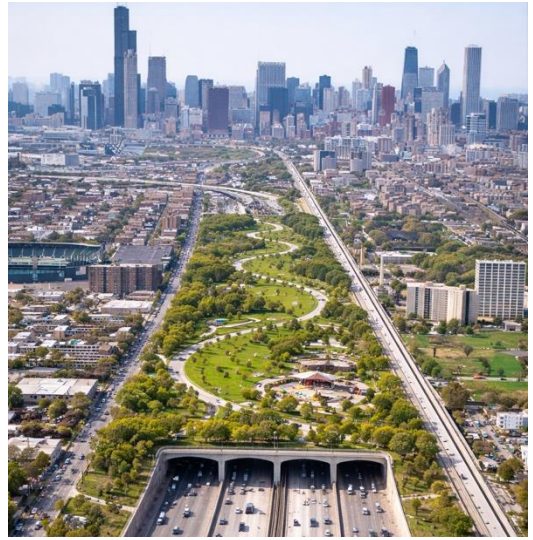
The Spine, Jungle Co



Prairie Quilt, HOK



The Kennedy District, Hinterlands



Reconnecting Communities, MPC

Central Area Plan

A Blueprint for a Connected Chicago

Central Area Plan 2045 serves as a guide for the next 20 years of the city and identifies several opportunities for the future of growth in Chicago.

- Expand housing, jobs, and reuse vacant office space.
- Prioritize sustainability, equity, and reduced car dependence.
- Improve transit, walking, biking, and public open spaces.
- Create safer, greener connections over major infrastructure barriers.

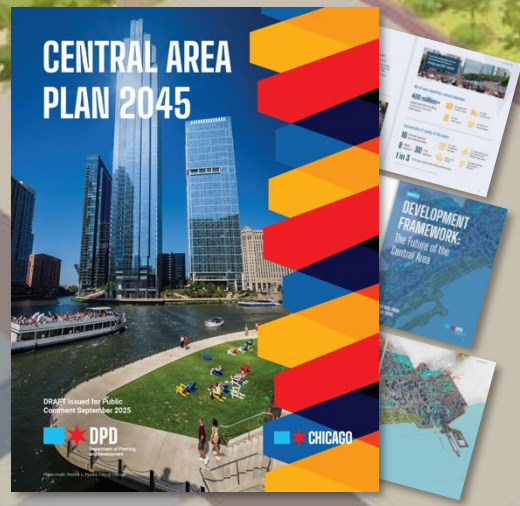


Places to Connect Neighborhoods and Expand Opportunities

Chicago has several significant opportunities, ranging from large parks over major expressways to retail bridges and pedestrian-friendly green bridges that will connect divided neighborhoods and make a significant impact on the surrounding areas and residents.

As Chicago thinks about its long-term built environment, now is the ideal time to move ahead with these projects.





Potential for Future
Highway Cap

Central Area Plan 2045

Creating a Path

National Capping and Green Bridge Successes



Boston, MA

The "Big Dig" (Rose Kennedy Greenway)

- 1991 - Dec 2007 (16 years of construction)
- Multi-block greenway cap
- 17 acres
- Reconnected neighborhoods to the waterfront
- Catalyst for private investment, unlocking >$7B in adjacent development
- Created 100,000 jobs tied to follow-on projects
- 1.4M trackable visitors + downtown vitality boost



Seattle, WA

Olympic Sculpture Park

- 2005 - 2007 (1 ½ years of construction)
- Green cap
- 9 acres
- Created a cultural destination that attracts >425,000 visitors annually
- Helped reestablish public waterfront access
- Created a barrier-free pedestrian spine
- Reduced water needs by nearly 95,000 gallons per week during the dry season by incorporating a 3.5-acre meadow



Columbus, OH

Long Street Bridge and Cultural Wall

- 2011 - 2014 (3 years of construction)
- Single-block cap
- 0.22 acres
- Addressed the divide created by I-71, reconnecting neighborhoods.
- Wider sidewalks, bike lanes, on-street parking, and irrigated trees/landscape
- Introduced 240ft Cultural Wall that celebrates people and history of neighborhood figures



Dallas, TX

Klyde Warren Park

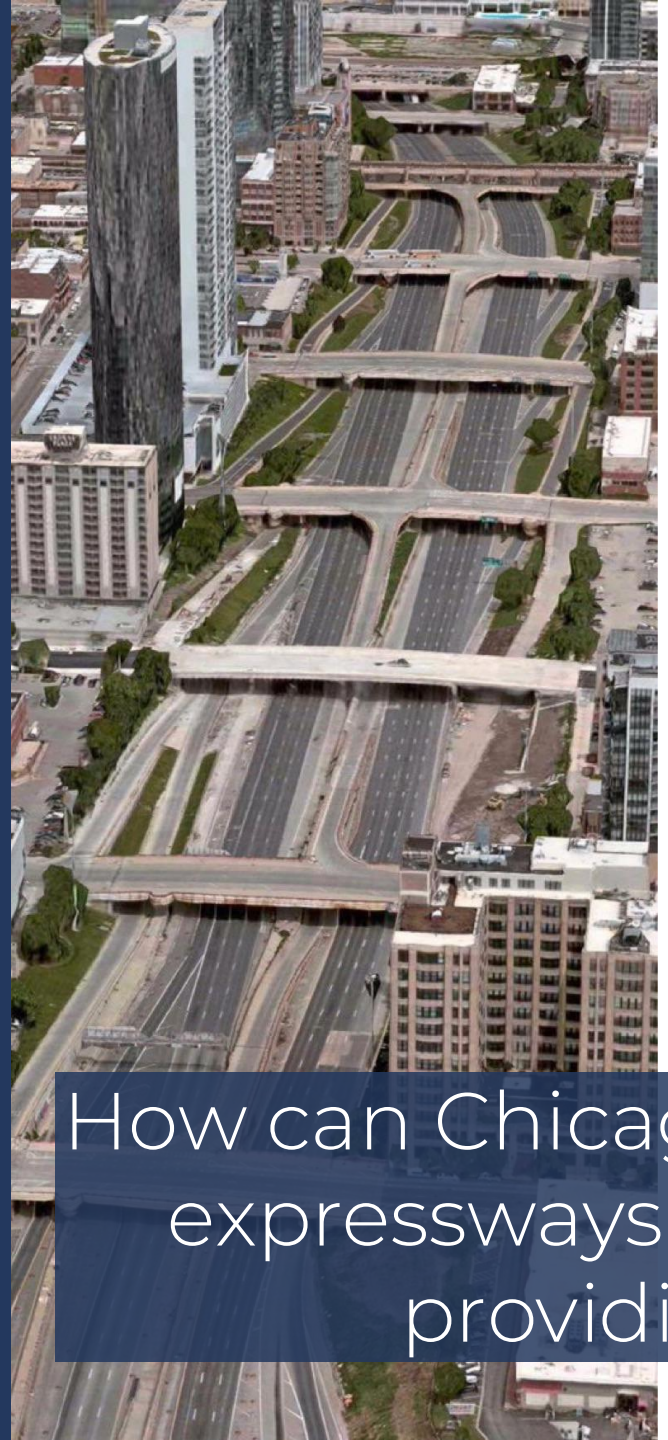
- 2009 - 2012 (3 years of construction)
- Multi-block cap
- 5.2 acres
- Reconnected Uptown and Downtown
- Attracts ~1.5M visitors annually
- Became a major hub for arts and culture
- Since opening, economic reinvestment in the area exceeded $6.2B
- Planned future phase will extend the deck an additional 1.5 - 1.65 acres



Chicago, IL

Millennium Park

- 1998-2004 (7 years of construction)
- Transformed a physical barrier (active rail & parking lots) into a world-class public commons
- Attracts 15 to 20 million visitors annually
- $2.5B local economic benefits every year
- $200M in annual tax revenue for the City
- Catalyzed $10B in private investments

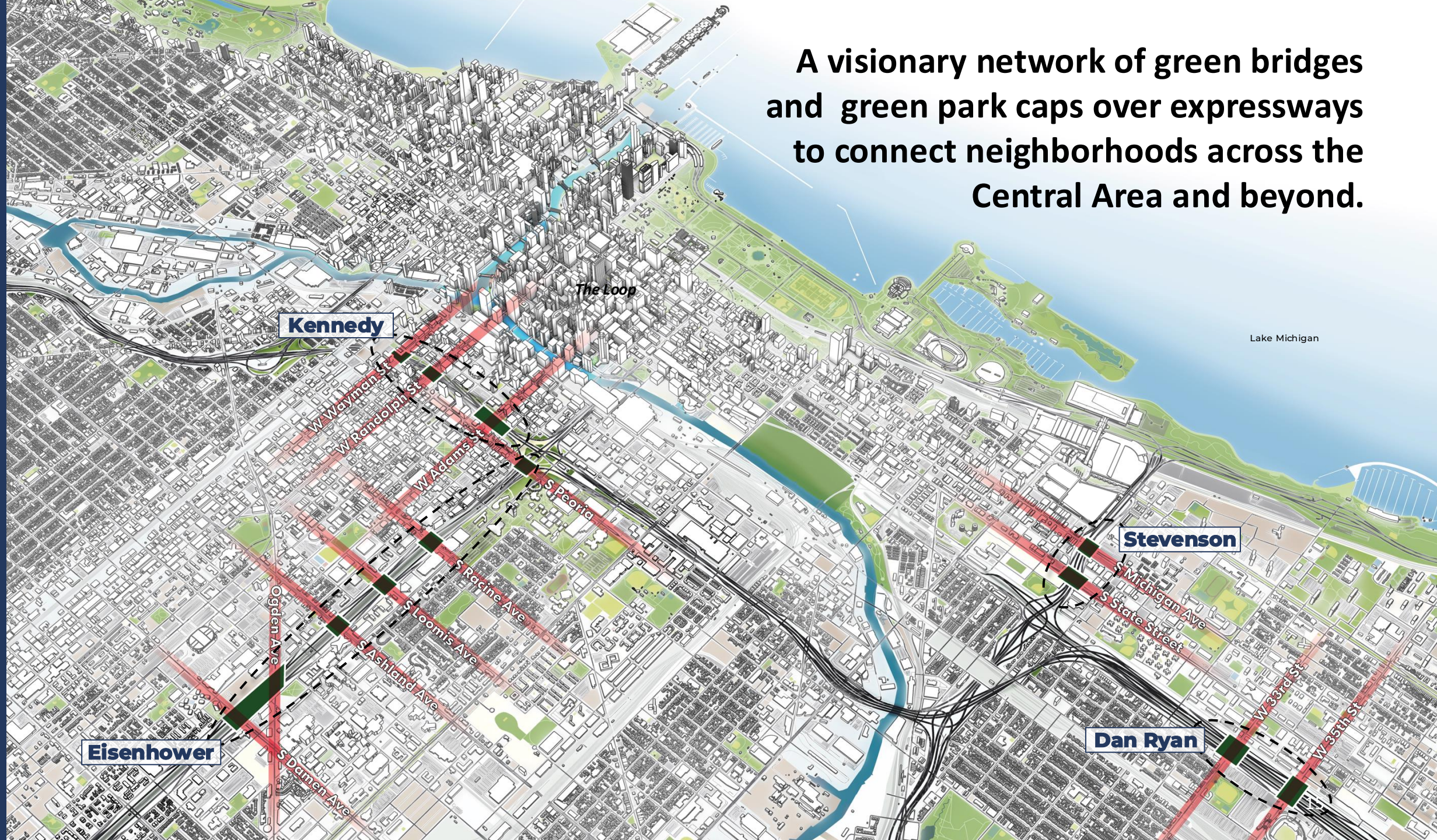






How can Chicago implement green bridges or ‘caps’ atop expressways to better connect neighborhoods while providing new public and green spaces?

02 The Big Idea



CCAC+ The Path To The Cap

Why Caps?

Guiding Principles for Capping Expressways

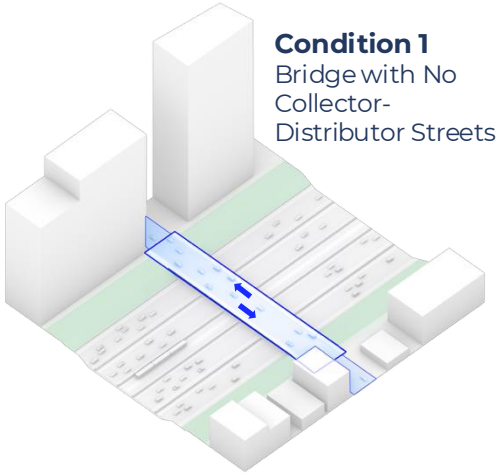
- **Quality of life:** Caps and green bridges enhance quality of life by adding public assets back to the community
- **Equity & Displacement:** Caps address historic disinvestment and repair divided neighborhoods
- **Safety:** Caps enhance safety for people walking, biking, and rolling on streets
- **Open Space:** Caps introduce acres of green open space that create opportunities for recreation, increased well-being, and healthy living
- **Sustainability & Resiliency:** New green spaces help cities mitigate heat island effects and manage stormwater
- **Economic Development:** Caps catalyze new development, connect business districts, and strengthen access to jobs and education

Existing Conditions

Bridge & Highway Configurations

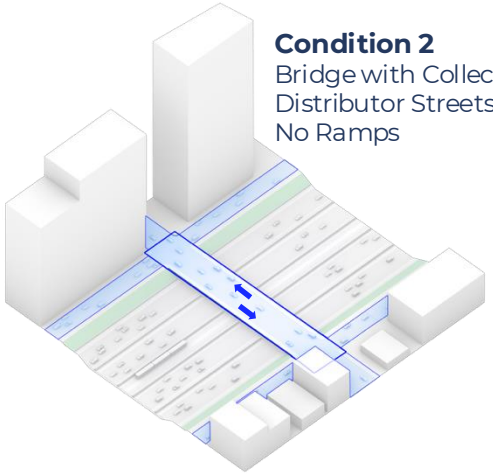
Each of Chicago's major expressways, including the Kennedy, Dan Ryan, Eisenhower, and Stevenson, features unique bridge and ramp conditions. These configurations reflect how each highway was built and how it evolved over time.

In many locations these conditions overlap, creating complex layers of infrastructure unique to each site that must be accounted for when considering a cap.



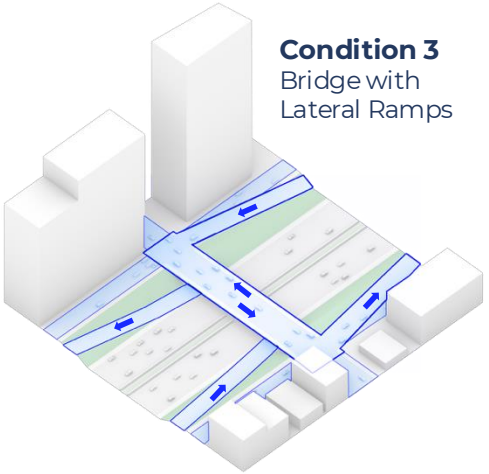
Condition 1
Bridge with No Collector-Distributor Streets

The most simplistic form of a highway bridge includes no other intersecting elements.



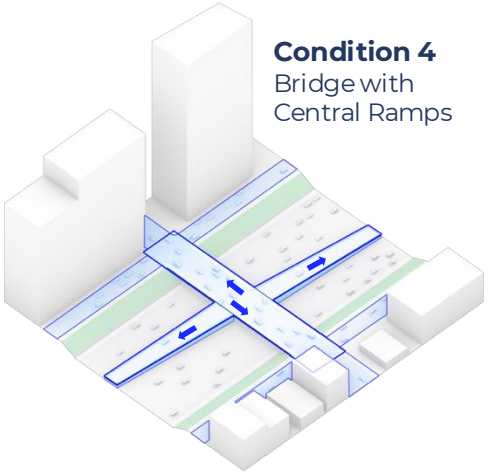
Condition 2
Bridge with Collector-Distributor Streets & No Ramps

Bridges can be accompanied by 'Collector-Distributor' side streets (running parallel with the expressway) that allow for circulation on and off the highway below.



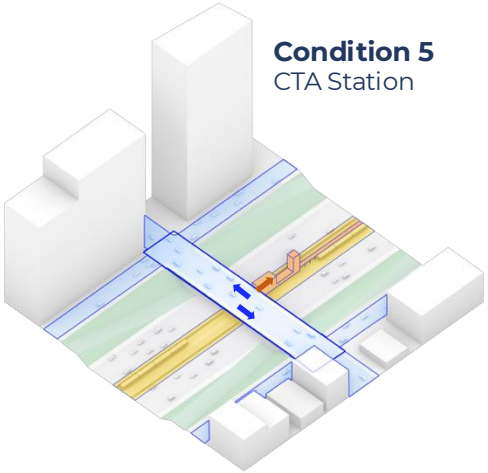
Condition 3
Bridge with Lateral Ramps

Lateral ramps draw vehicles onto and off of the highway below; they can occur singularly or in grouping up to 4 per bridge.



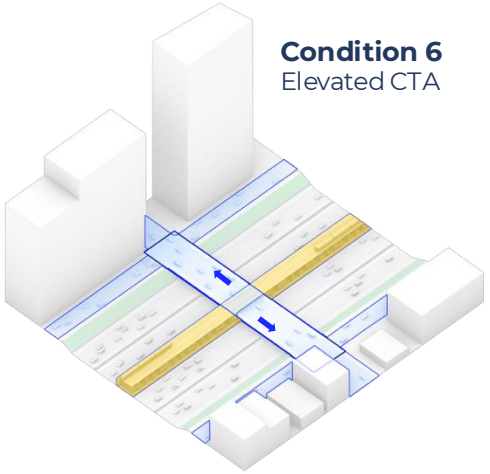
Condition 4
Bridge with Central Ramps

Central ramps draw vehicles onto and off of the highway below; they can occur on one side of the bridge or on both sides.



Condition 5
CTA Station

Each highway interfaces distinctly with the CTA rail line and stations. Where stations align to bridges, there are entry points located next to highway bridges.



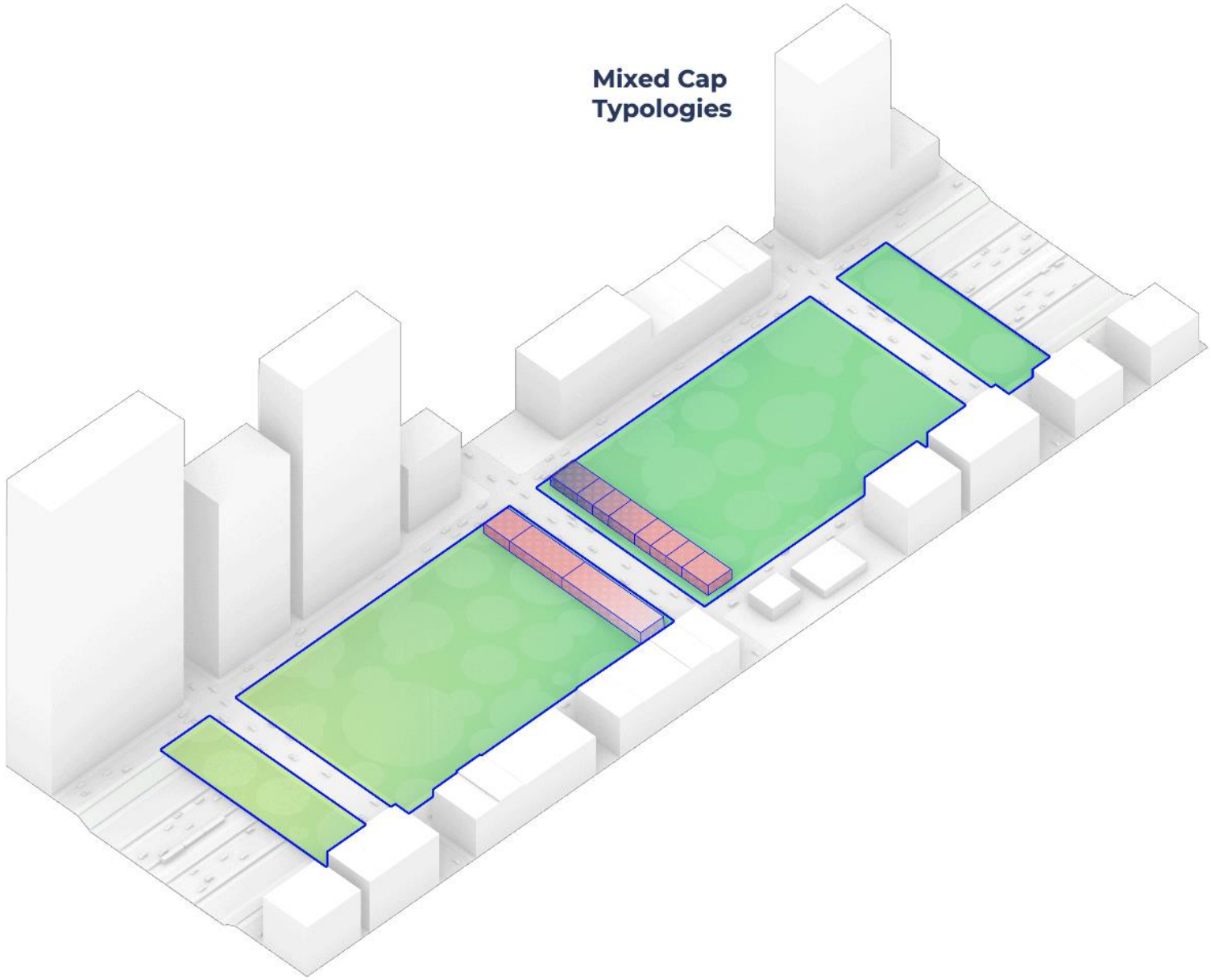
Condition 6
Elevated CTA

Several highways have conditions in which the CTA rail line extends over highway bridges either perpendicular or parallel.

Proposed Typologies

Adaptive Implementation

Options for bridge and cap configurations are endless. Through this exploration, we will uncover how to evaluate a site and decide what type of cap might be most useful. We will also look at several Chicago case study sites to uncover how a series of potential solutions may further be evaluated. And lastly, we will provide a clear implementation plan articulating the 'Path to the Cap'.



Proposed Typologies

Retail Bridge

A “Retail Bridge” is a new or existing bridge designed to create an economic connection across a highway. These bridges feature a continuation of buildings that take on similar uses to those on either side of the highway. Whether restaurants, coffee shops, shopping, or nightlife, Retail Bridges can mend connective gaps between two disparate economic corridors or neighborhoods.

Retail Bridges play an important role in reconnecting economic corridors divided by expressways while transforming crossings into an extension of the business district.







Images: The Cap at Union Station, Columbus, OH

Proposed Typologies

Retail Bridge

Case Study: The Cap at Union Station

Location: Columbus, OH

Site Size: 1.12 Acres

Project Delivered: 2004

Funding Sources:

- **ODOT** - $1.3 million (14% of total) on cap platforms.
- **City of Columbus** - $415k (4% of total) on title searches, preliminary architectural design, utility connections
- **Continental Real Estate Companies**: $7.8 million (82% of total) on conventional loan, mezzanine debt, equity

General Description:

The Cap at Union Station is a $7.8 million retail development that reconnects downtown Columbus with the Short North arts and entertainment district.

Composed of three separate bridges – one for through-traffic over the highway, and one on either side for the retail structures – the Cap provides 25,496 square feet of leasable space.



Image Credits: MKSK

Credit: FHWA Center for Innovative Finance Support Project Profile – The Cap at Union Station

Credit: Urban Land Institute Case Study – The Cap at Union Station

Proposed Typologies

Crafting Signature Public Spaces

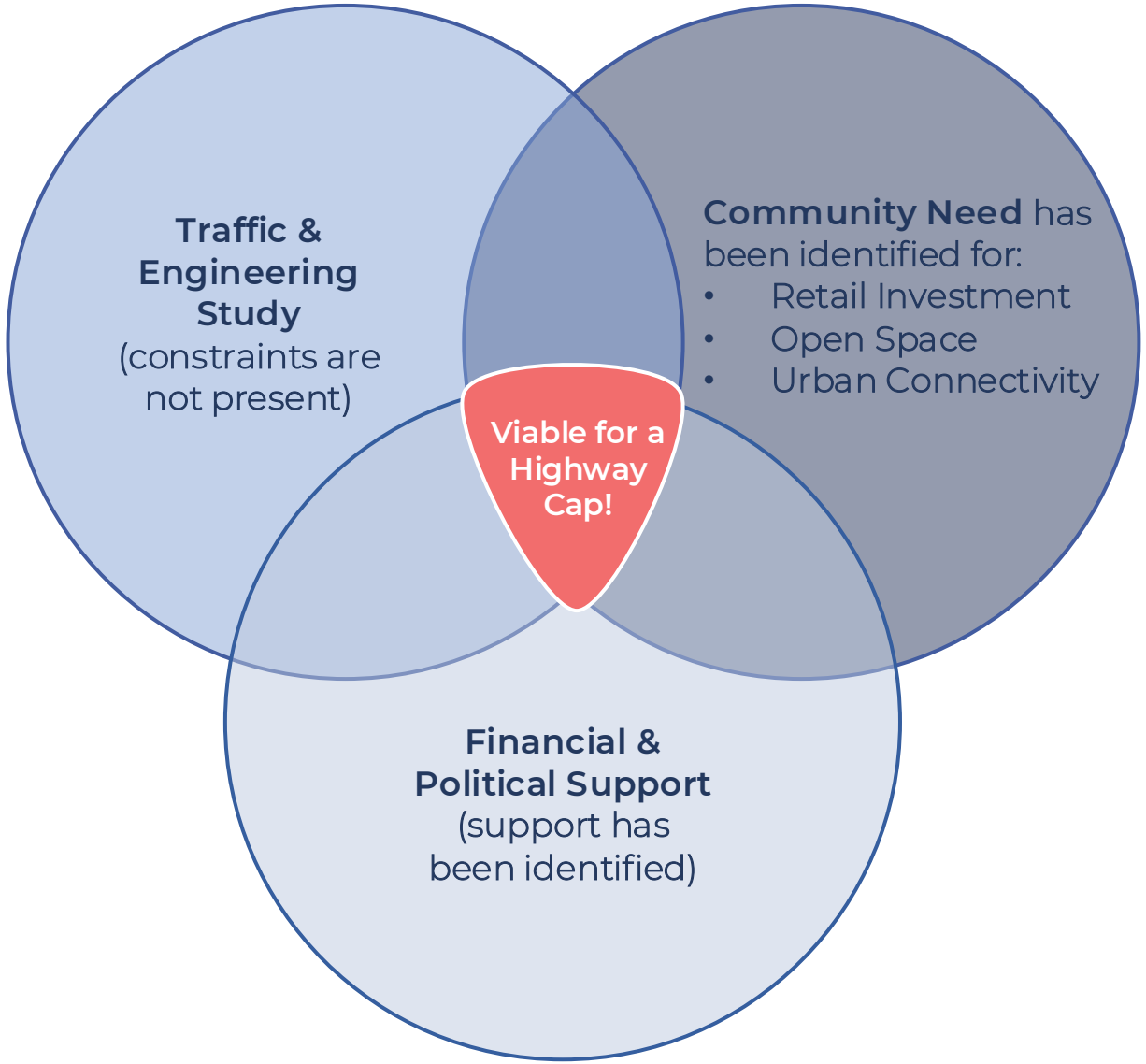
Once a series of cap configurations is determined for a given site, that site may be fully designed to meet the needs of the community. Those needs will vary based on the site location, the typology of cap, and by understanding what additive elements this given cap or bridge can provide to the adjacent neighborhoods.

The example at the right highlights how a range of uses, both large scale and small can be interwoven by cross-circulation to provide greater cohesion and amenities to the neighboring communities. This is just one solution. Each distinct site will garner its own unique solution, depending upon a range of variables.



Images: Klyde Warren Park, Dallas, TX

CCAC+ The Path To The Cap



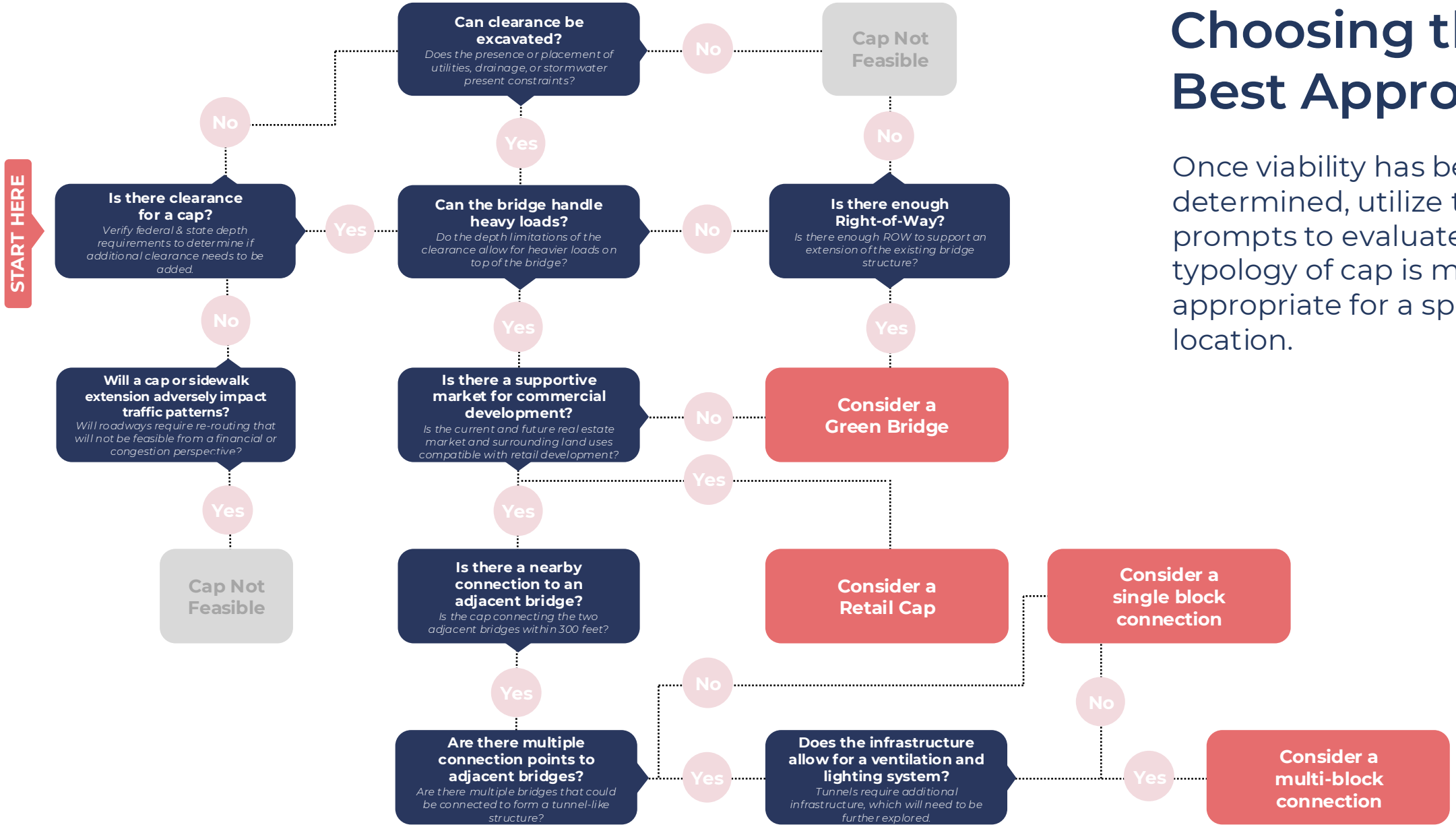
Is a Highway Cap Viable in our City?

Understanding the Potential:

- Ask whether existing and future traffic and engineering conditions pose constraints for adding a highway cap
- Determine if community need has been identified for additional retail services, open space, and/or urban connectivity
- Discover if there is financial and political backing and support for a cap initiative
- The viability for a highway cap project resides at the nexus of these three critical factors

Choosing the Best Approach

Once viability has been determined, utilize the prompts to evaluate what typology of cap is most appropriate for a specific location.



Eisenhower Expressway



Eisenhower Expressway

Context



University of Illinois Chicago

The study area extends from Halsted St to Damen Ave



The 1901 Project



Illinois Medical District

FULTON MARKET
WEST LOOP
GREEKTOWN
NEAR WEST SIDE
WESTHAVEN PARK
CTA GREEN LINE
UNITED CENTER
CTA PINK LINE
WHITNEY M. YOUNG HIGH SCHOOL
CREDIT UNION 1 ARENA
UIC HALSTED
VAN BUREN ST
RACINE
CONGRESS PKWY
PEORIA ST
MORGAN ST
HALSTED ST
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS CHICAGO
RACINE AVE
LOOMIS ST
MALCOLM X COLLEGE
5TH THIRD ARENA
ILLINOIS MEDICAL DISTRICT
CTA BLUE LINE
OGDEN AVE
RUSH UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER
ASHLAND AVE
LITTLE ITALY
JOHN H. STROGER JR. HOSPITAL OF COOK COUNTY
ILLINOIS MEDICAL DISTRICT
PAULINA ST
TRI - TAYLOR
DAMEN AVE
JESSE BROWN MEDICAL CENTER (VA)
UI HEALTH UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS HOSPITAL & CLINICS
N

ON / OFF RAMP
CTA PINK LINE & STATION
CTA GREEN LINE & STATION
CTA BLUE LINE & STATION
RAMP/FRONTAGE ROAD
BRIDGE
EXPRESSWAY

Eisenhower Expressway

Key Guiding Principles

Quality of Life

Safer crossings, improved transit station access, and open space for the thousands of people who live, work, and play in the area.

Economic Development

Connections across the Eisenhower could stitch major employment, entertainment, and residential centers to the region as well as better access to transit and a more unified public realm.

Challenges & Considerations

CTA Blue and Pink Lines pose significant design challenges. Accommodating station entrances, major elevation changes, and ongoing repair work will constrain the dimensions of potential highway caps in this study area.



Image Credit: Google Earth



Image Credit: EXP

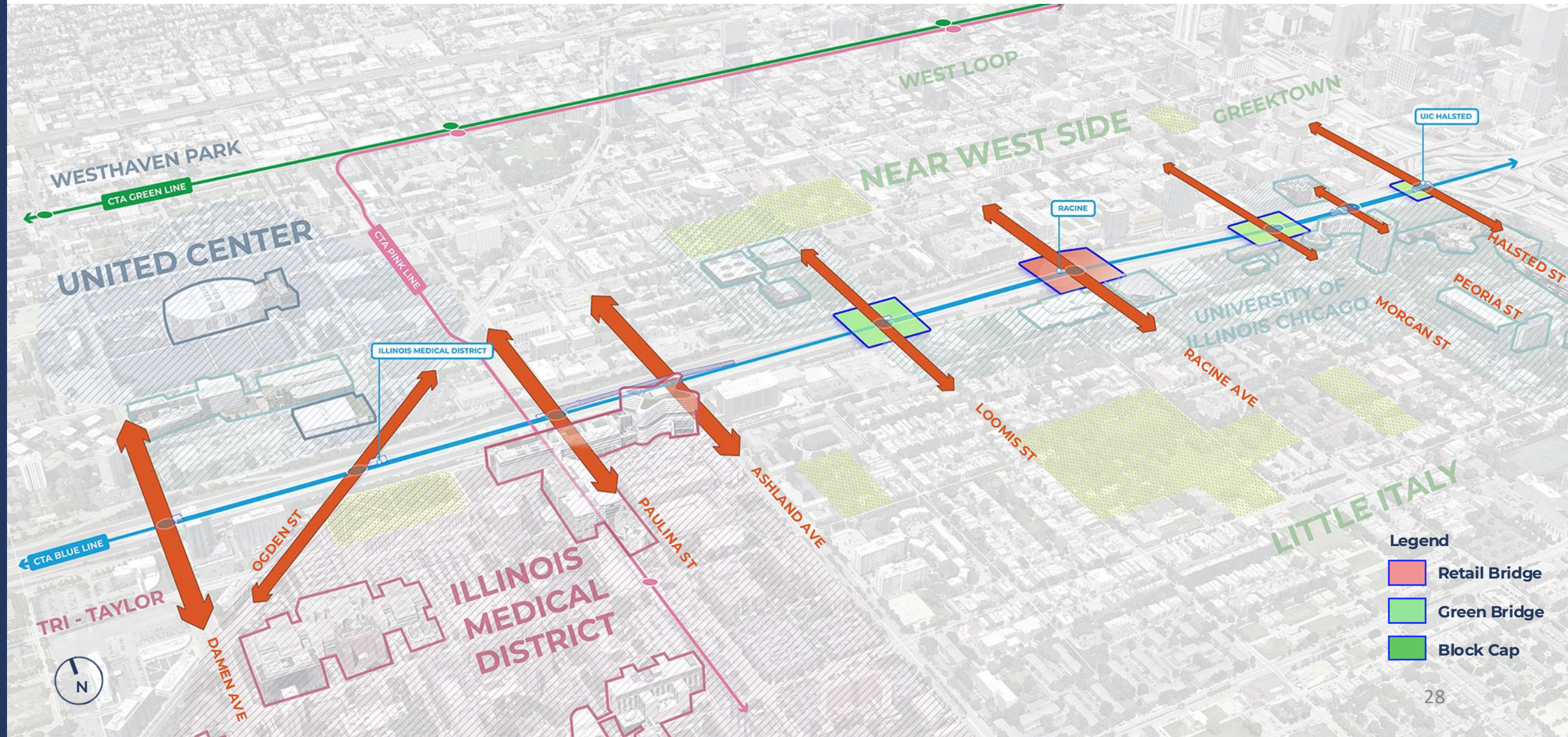


Image Credit: Marc Monoghan/WBEZ

Eisenhower Expressway

Reconnection Possibilities

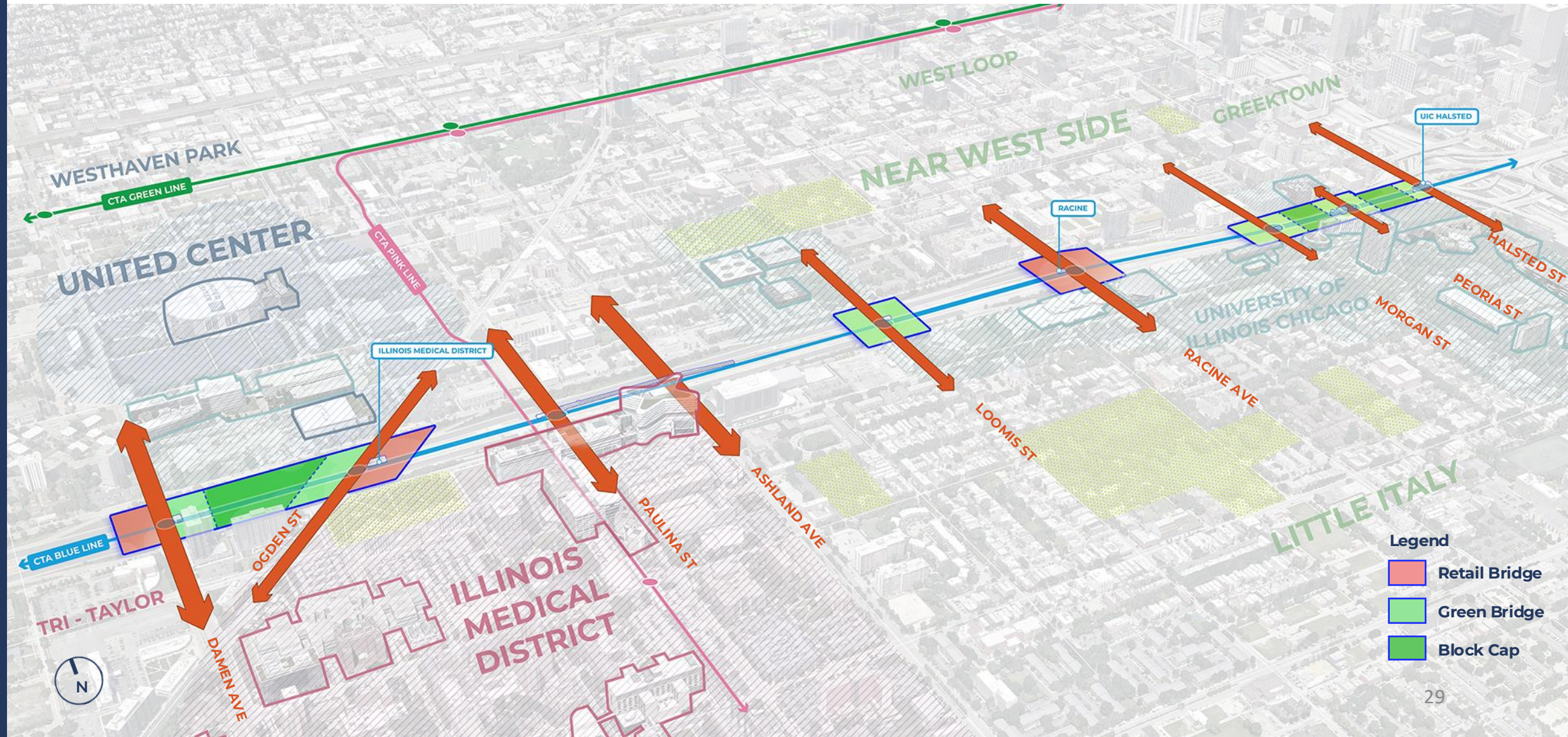
A phased approach is possible, with early strategic investments setting the stage for more ambitious, long-term visions for reconnection.



Eisenhower Expressway

Reconnection Possibilities

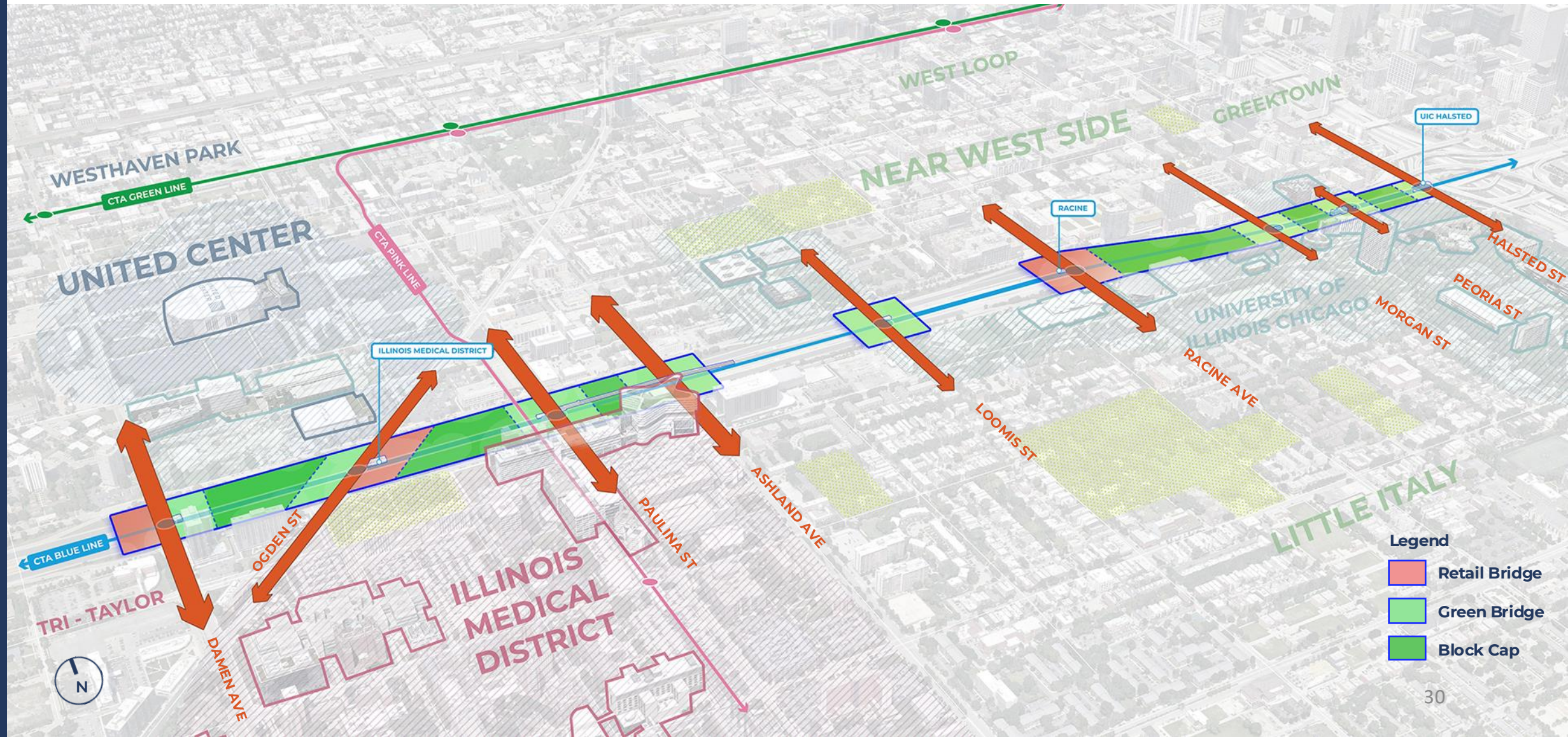
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Eisenhower Expressway

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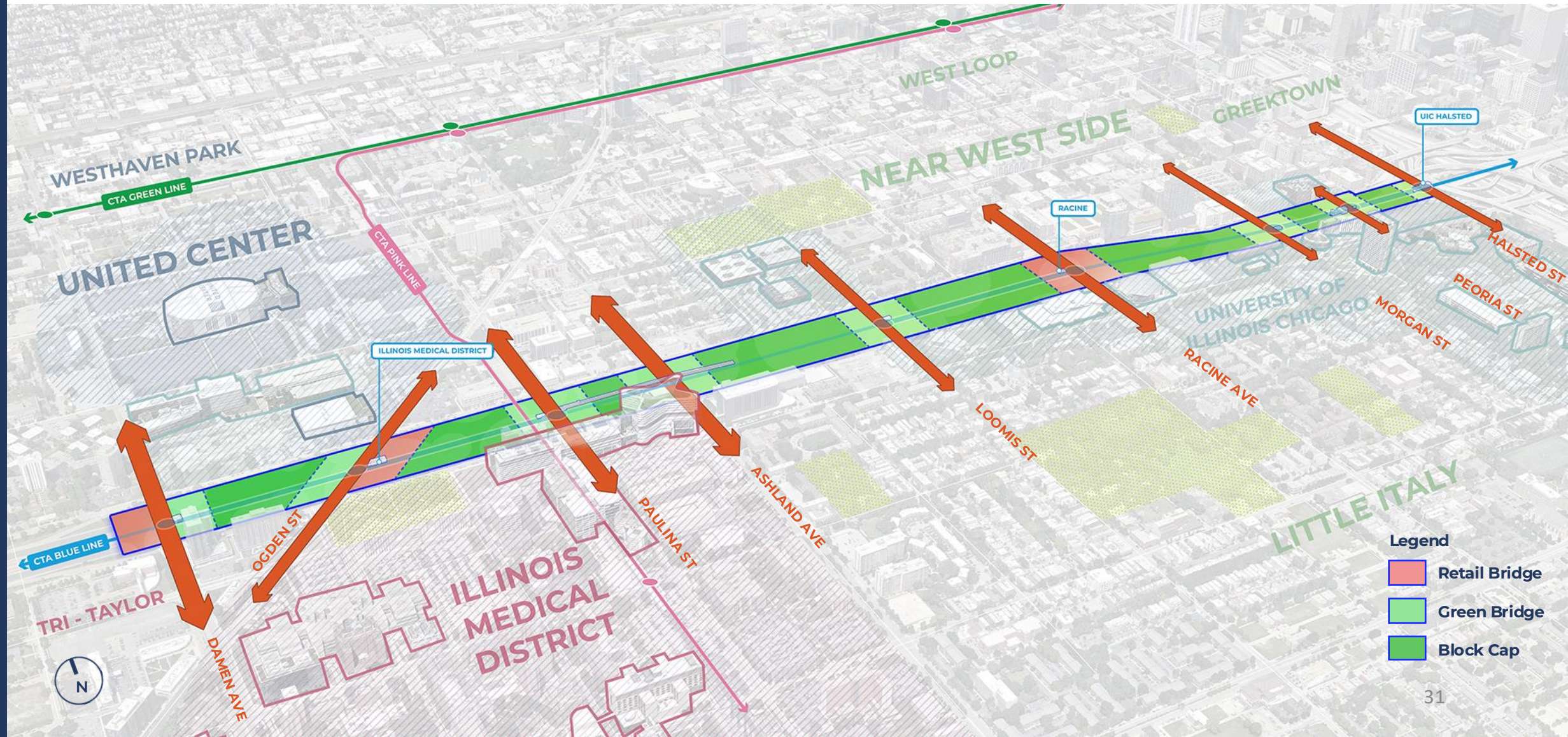
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Eisenhower Expressway

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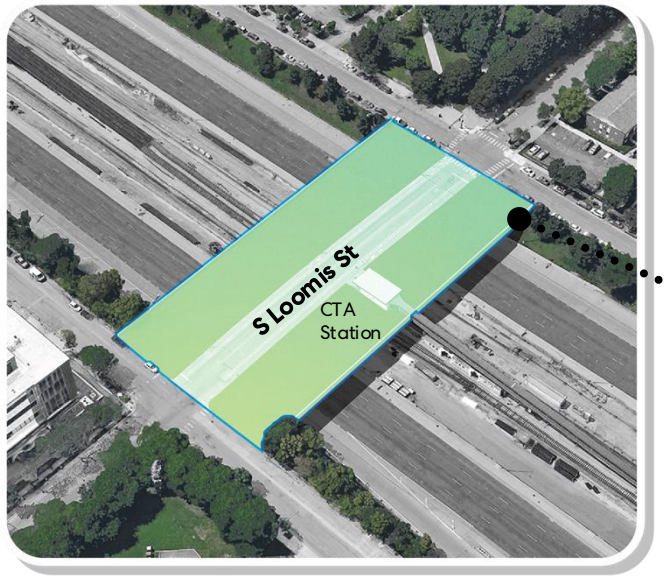
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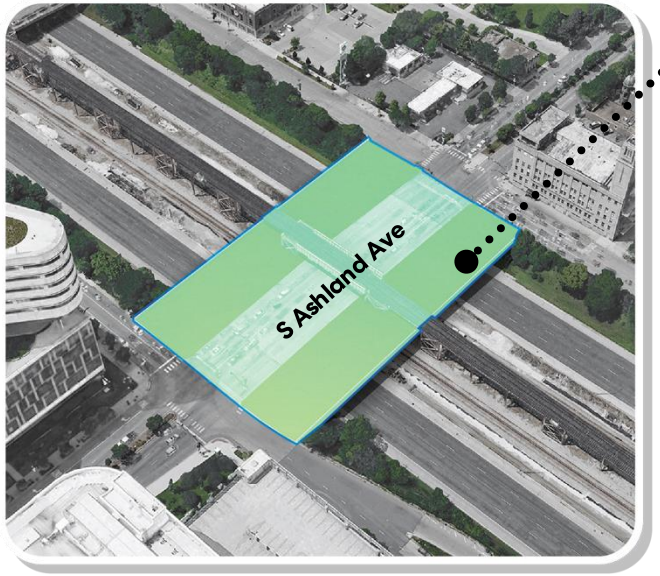


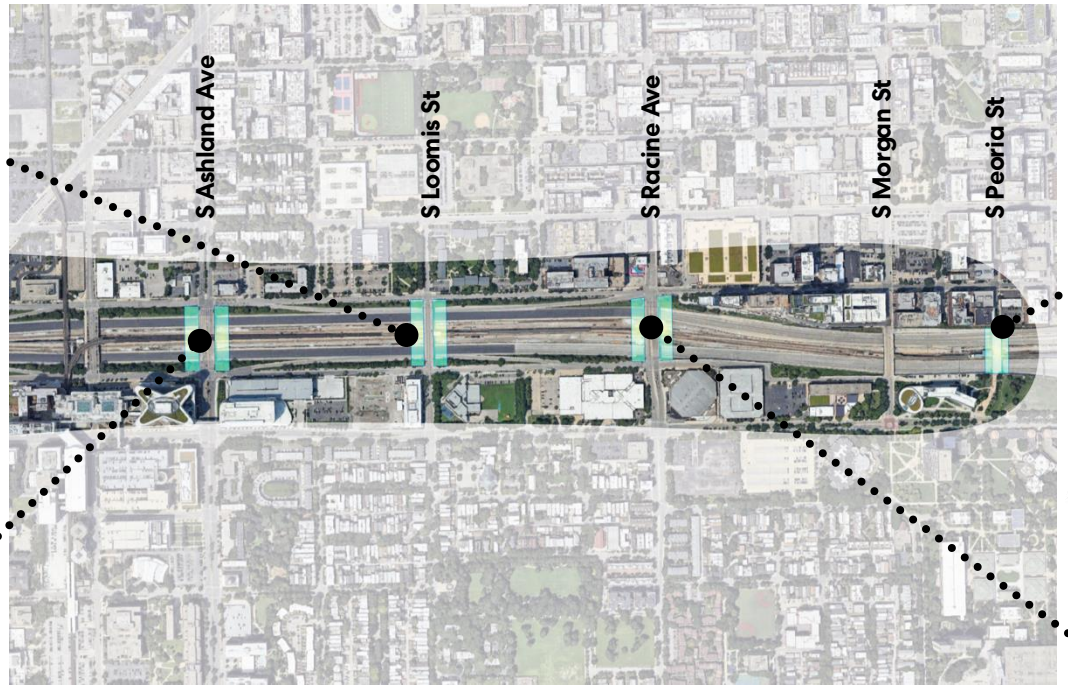
Eisenhower Expressway (I-290)

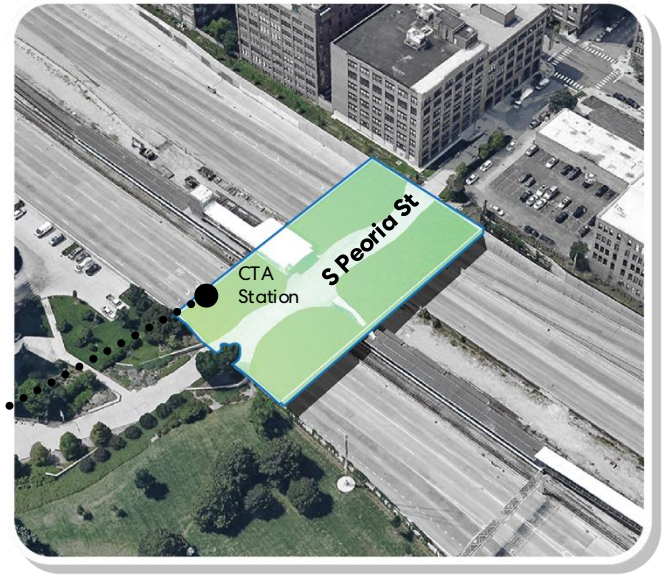
Where to start?

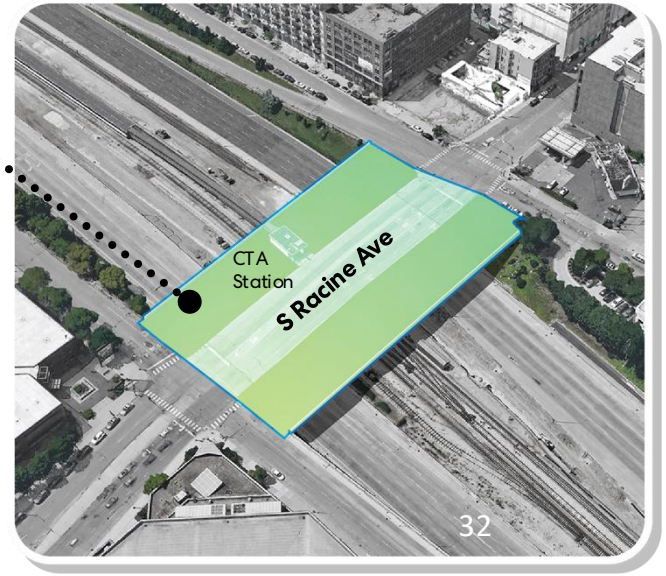
- Four Green Bridges with existing CTA Station connection improvements







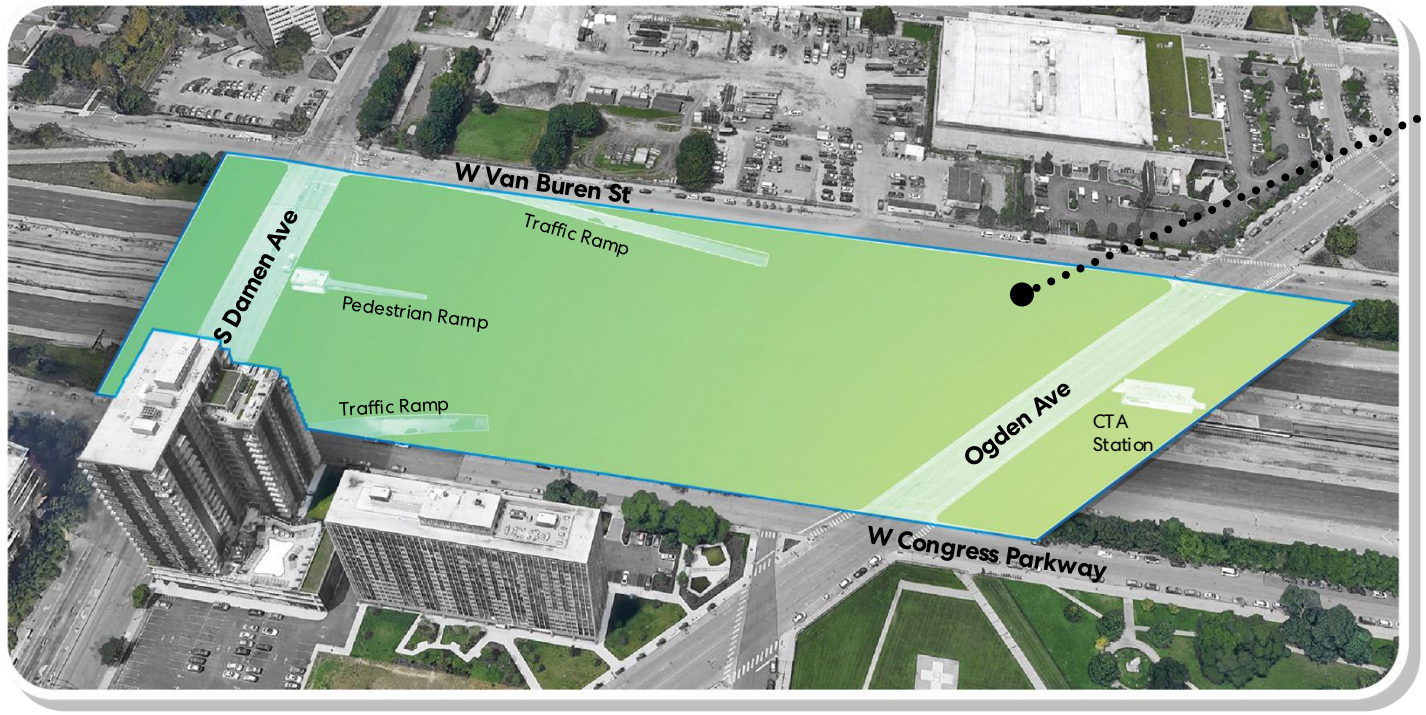


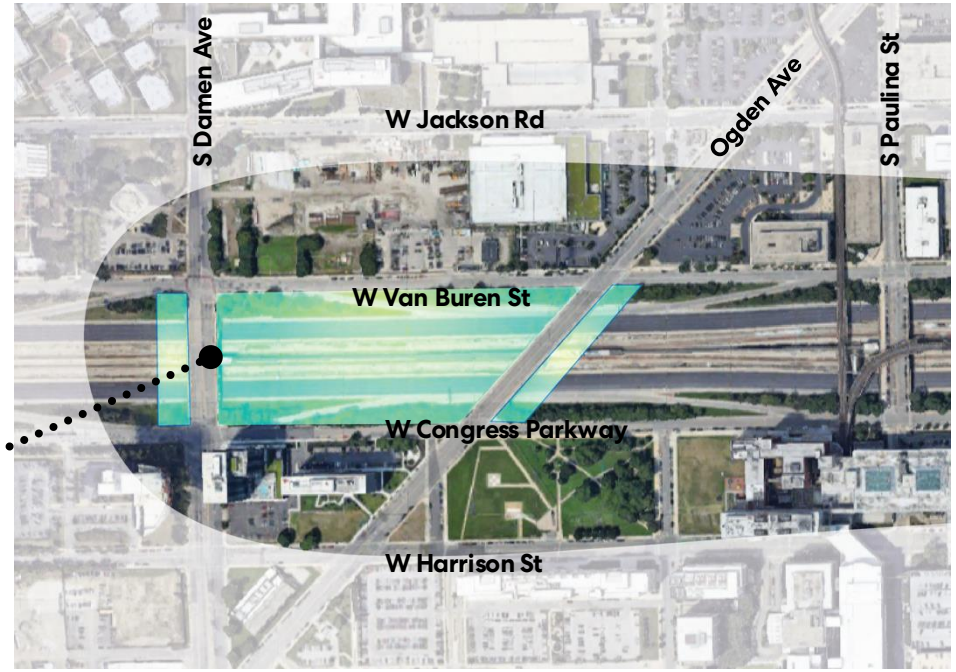


Eisenhower Expressway (I-290)

Where to start?

- Full cap from Damen to Ogden while preserving traffic ramps and improving CTA station connections





Kennedy Expressway



Kennedy Expressway

Context



Fulton Market

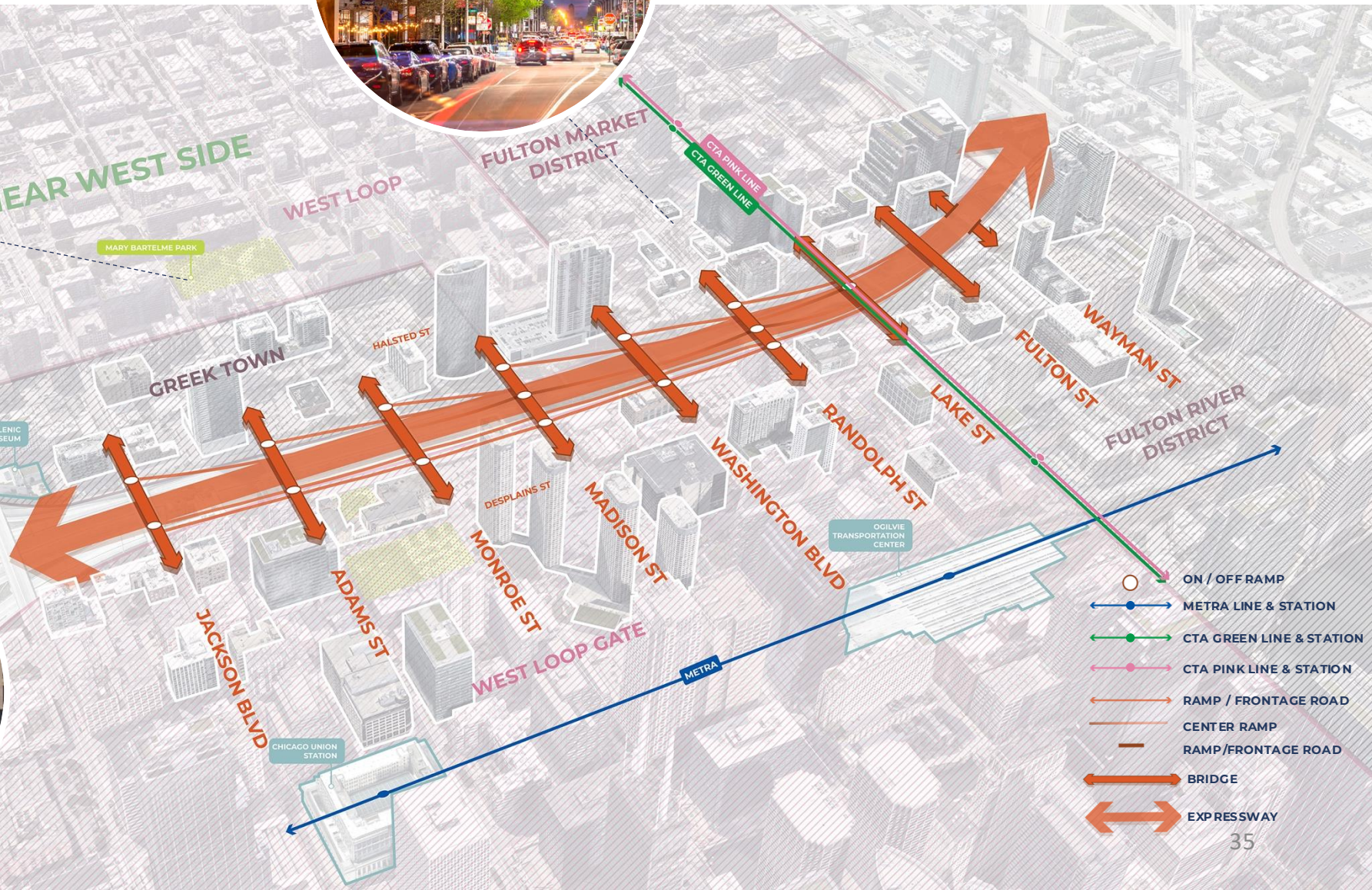
The study area extends from Jackson Blvd to Wayman St



Mary Bartelme Park

Greektown





Kennedy Expressway

Key Guiding Principles

Safety

Provide much needed protection between high-speed vehicles and pedestrians.

Economic Development

A retail or green bridge could build on the development of this neighborhood or increase the foot traffic and demand for the West Loop and Loop properties.

Challenges & Considerations

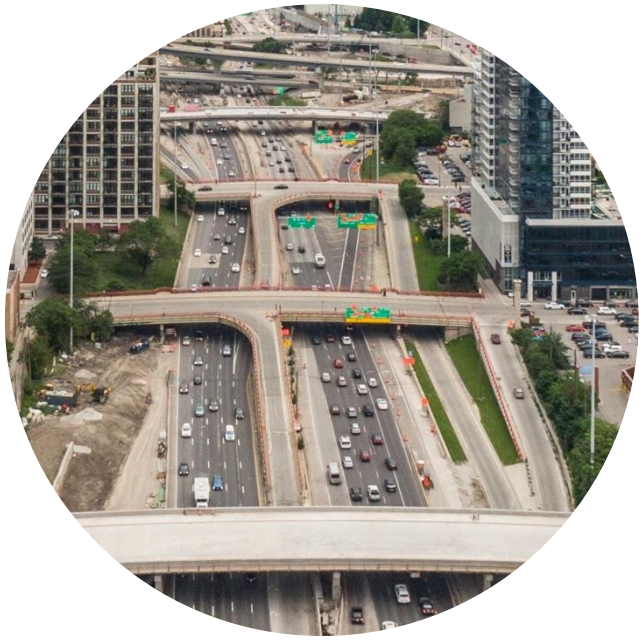
The location and frequency of highway on/off ramps along the potential may create significant engineering and traffic impacts. IDOT recently completed upgrades to these bridges - less necessary and may be politically unfavorable.



Image Credit: Google Earth



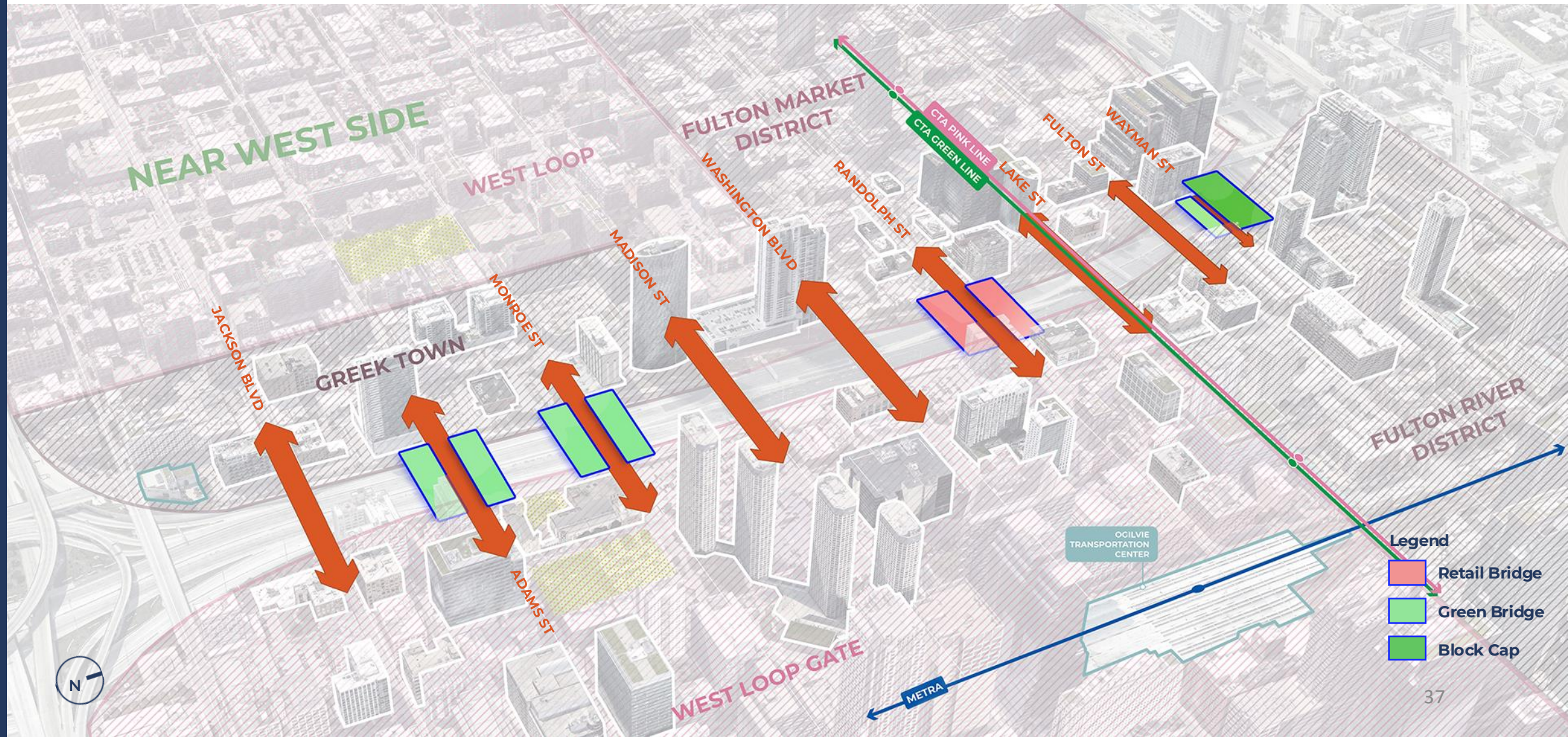
Image Credit: Hotel Chicago West Loop



Kennedy Expressway

Reconnection Possibilities

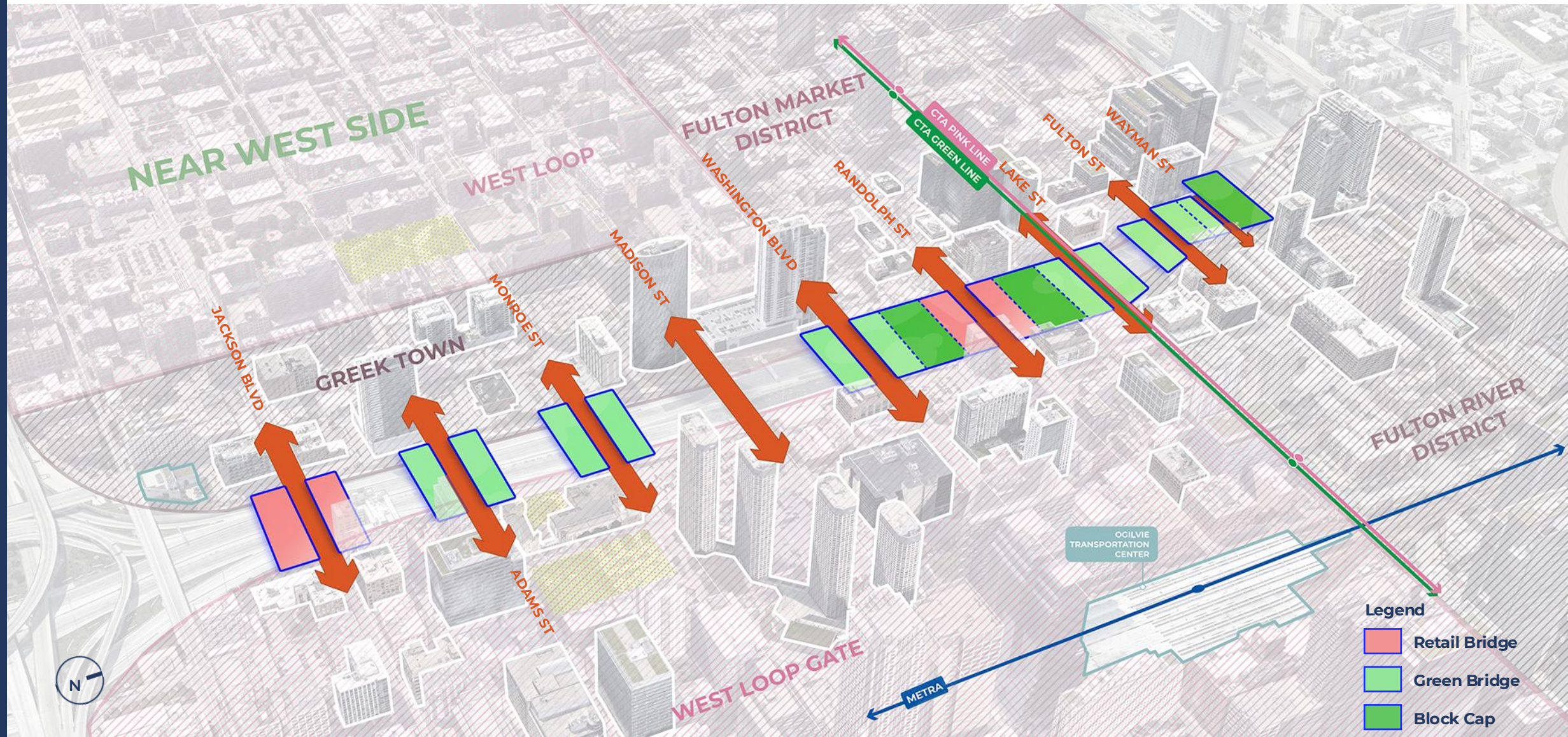
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Kennedy Expressway

Reconnection Possibilities

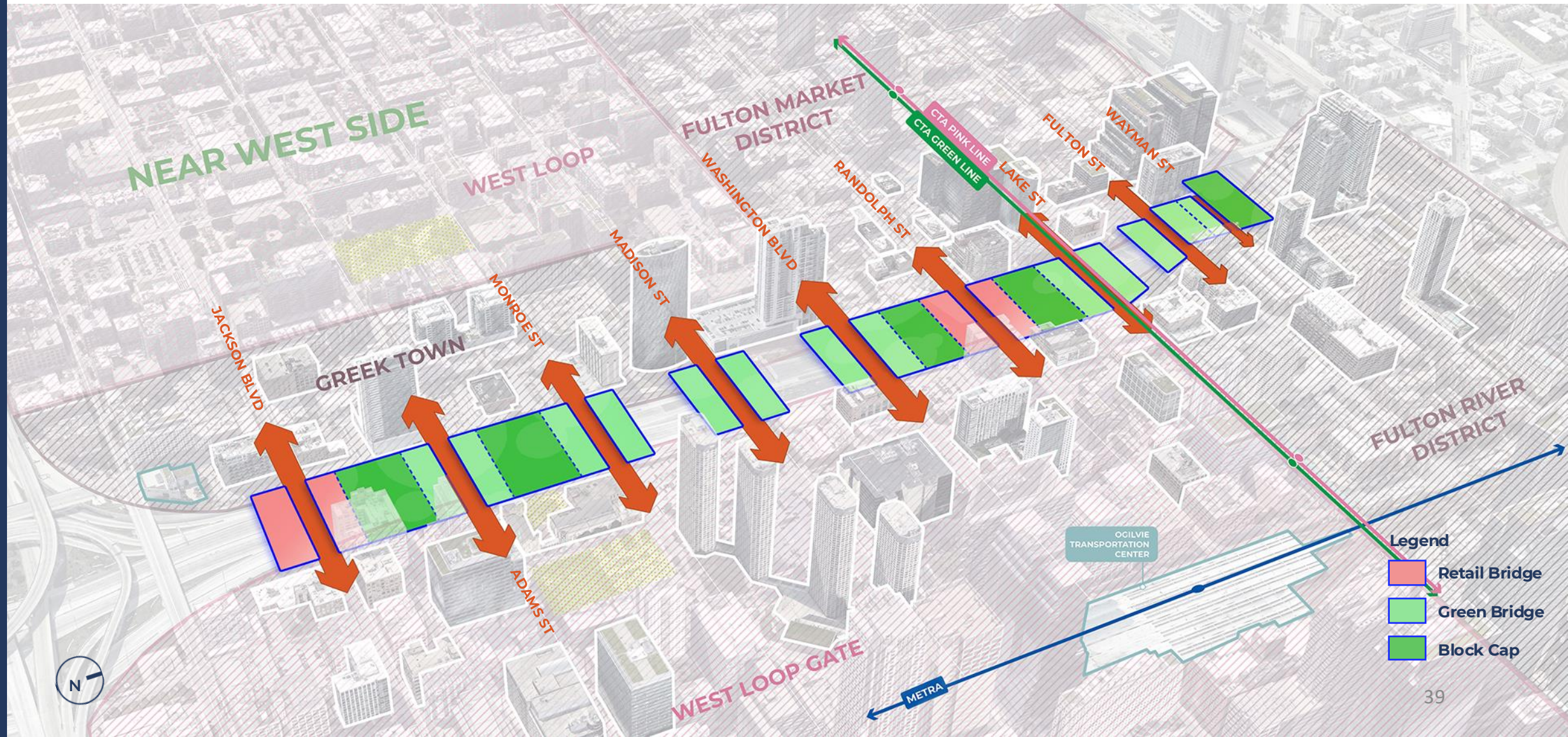
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Kennedy Expressway

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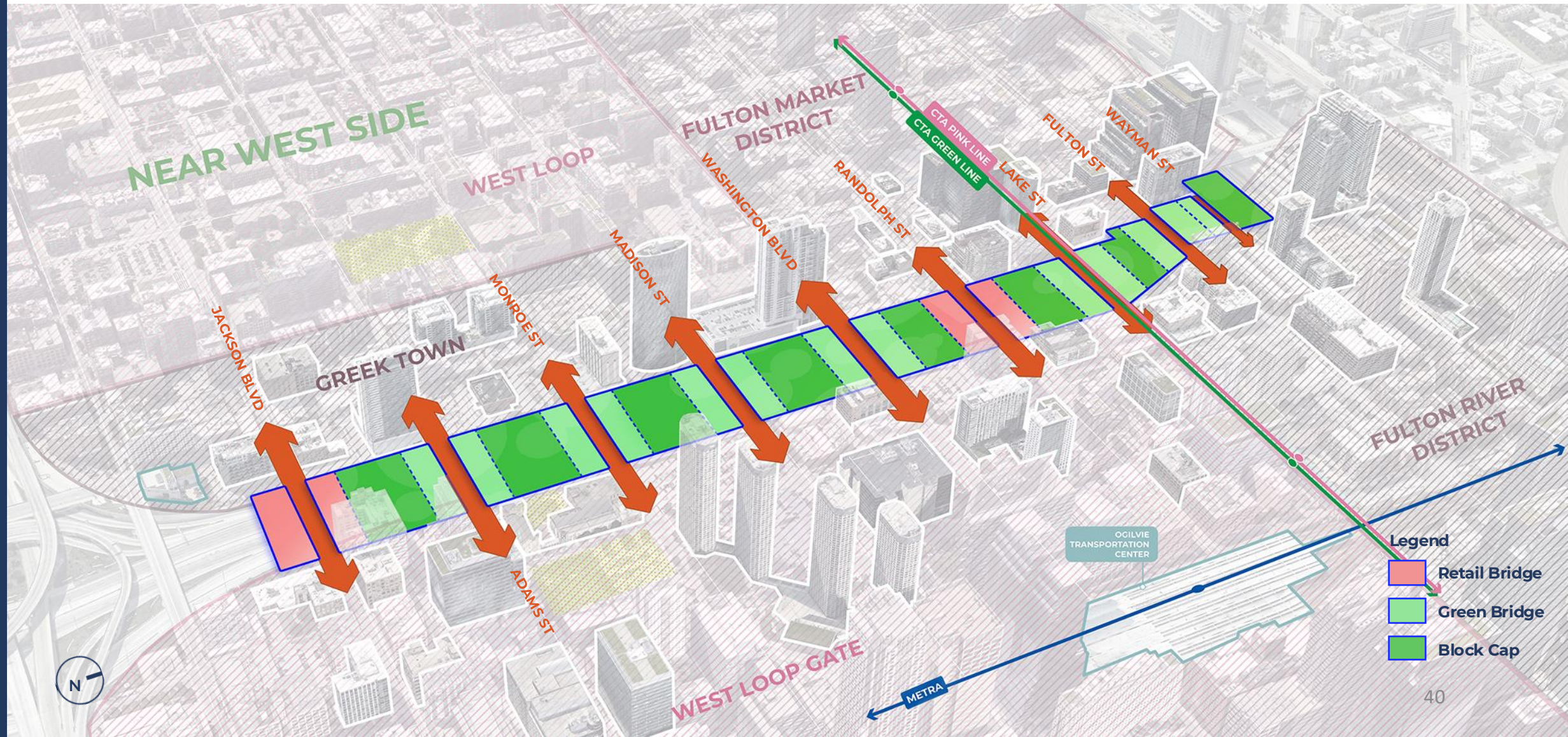
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Kennedy Expressway

Reconnection Possibilities

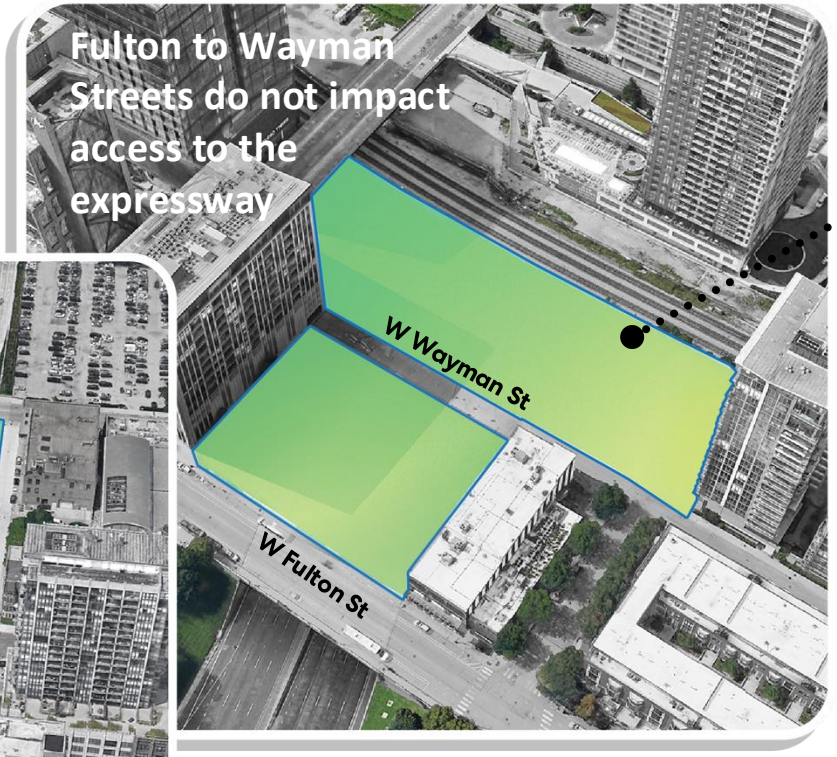
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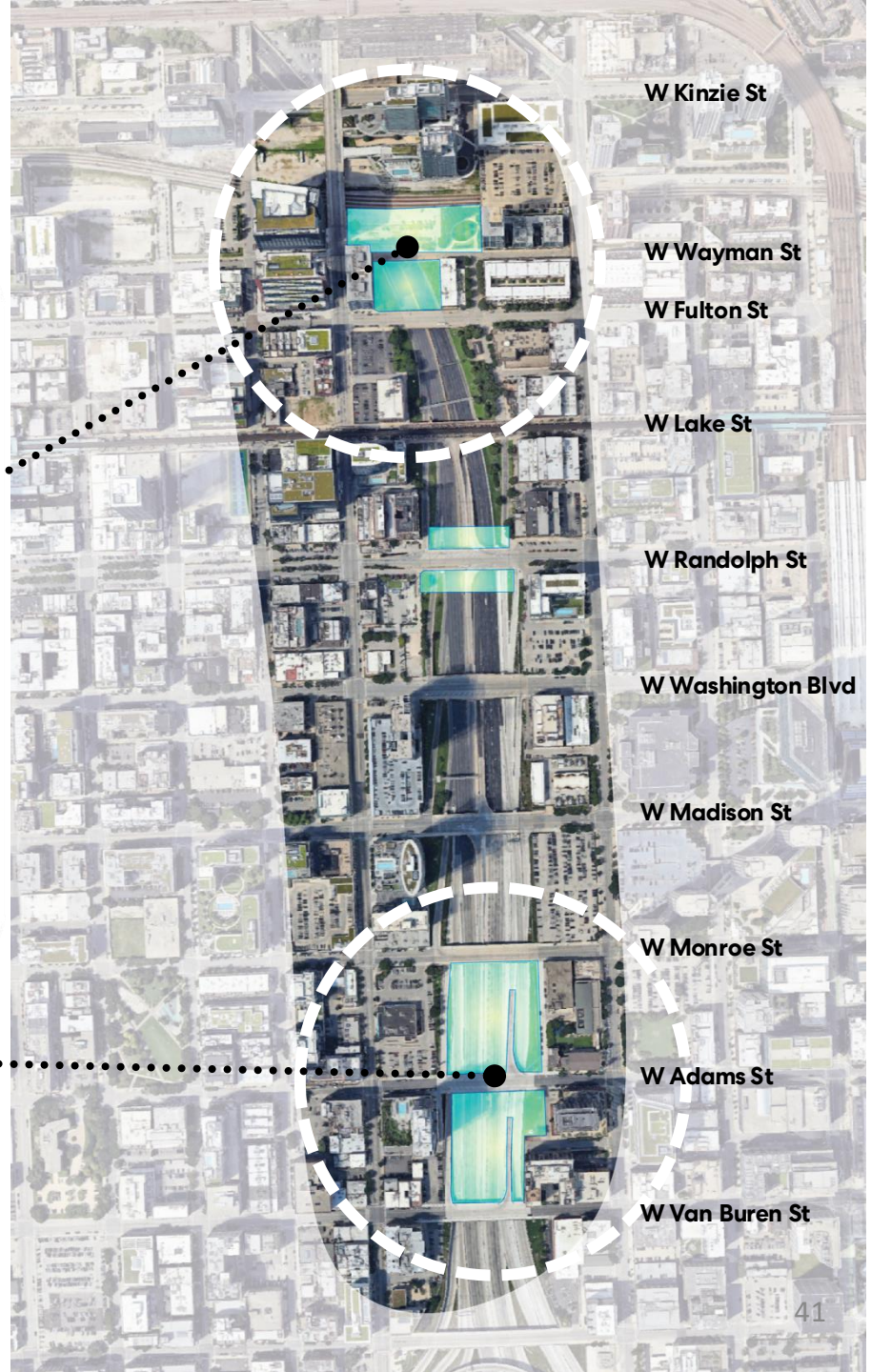
Kennedy Expressway

Where to start?

- Two options for a Multi-Block Cap north



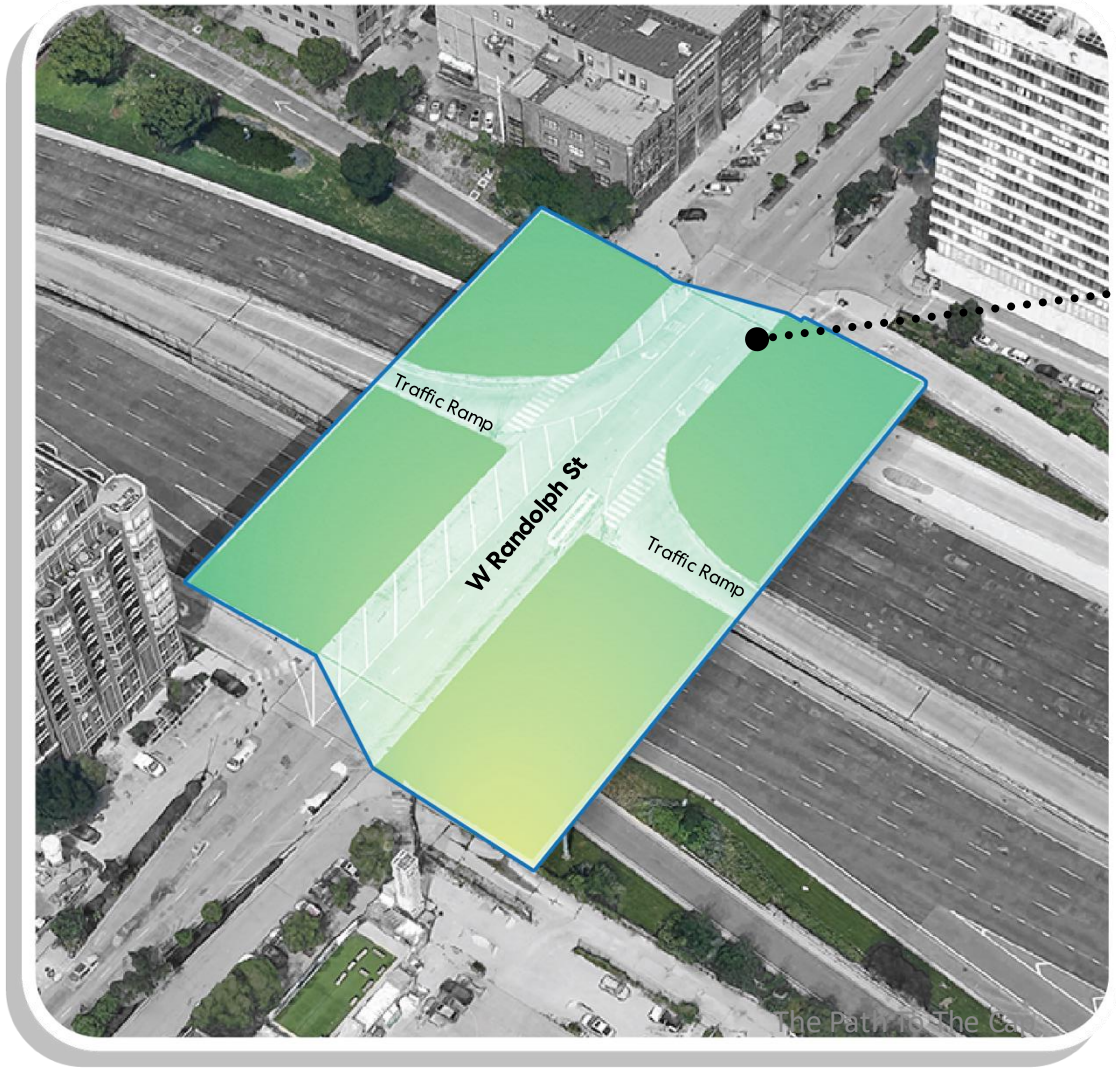


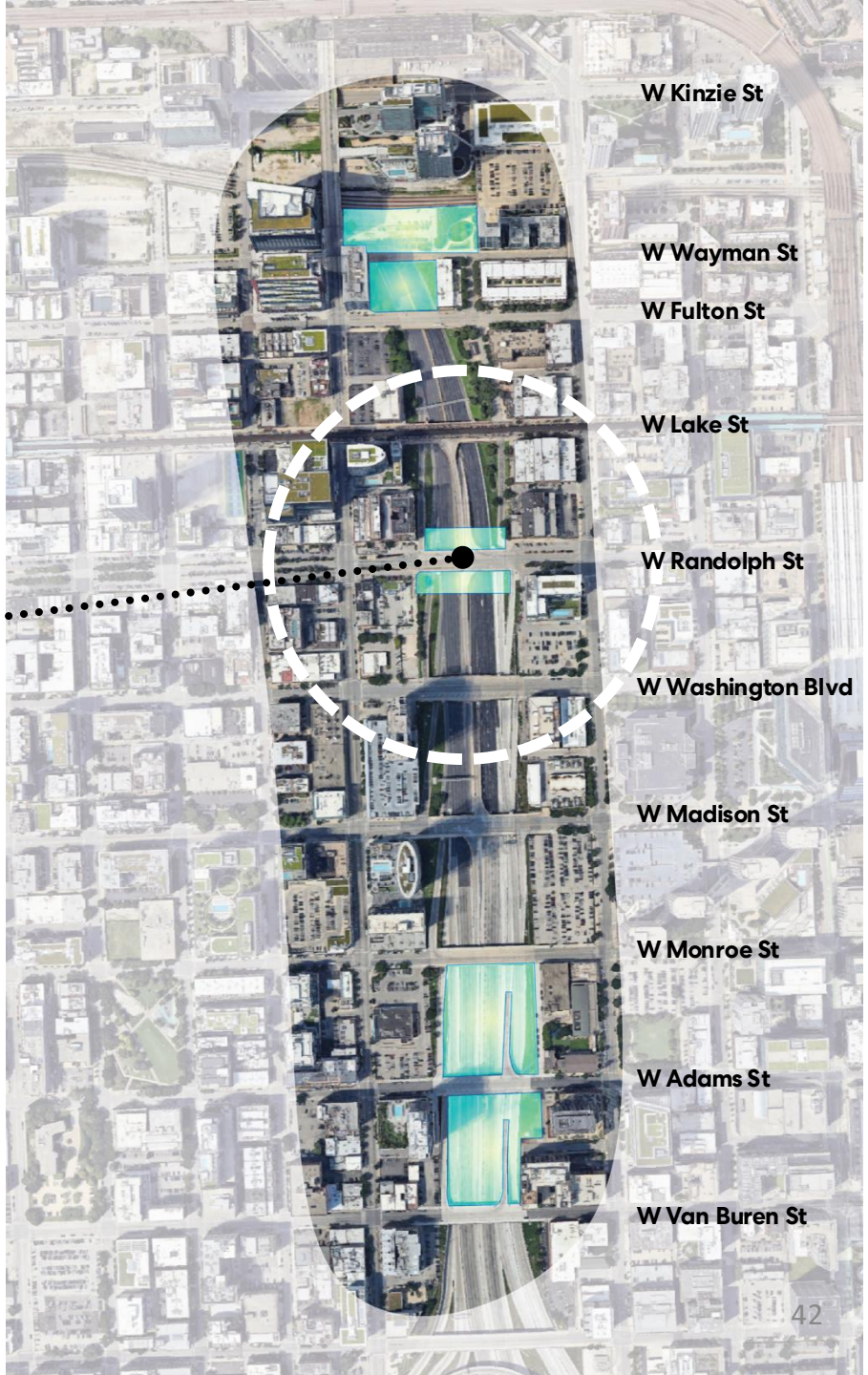


Kennedy Expressway

Where to start?

- Green Bridge or Retail Bridge at Randolph Street





Dan Ryan Expressway



Dan Ryan Expressway

Context



Rate Field Chicago White Sox Stadium



Sox-35th CTA Station

The study area extends from 31st to Pershing Rd



Dan Ryan Expressway

Key Guiding Principles

Equity

Creating a highway cap or green bridge on this site would reconnect the urban fabric between communities and destinations that have been systemically severed.



Image Credit: Eric Allix Rogers

Economic Development

Access to the Metra, CTA Red Line, buses, and Amtrak, creates upward economic mobility opportunities for area residents. This study area includes the largest volume of publicly owned land, potentially easing the acquisition and construction process.



Image Credit: Flickr: Zol87

Challenges & Considerations

Growth opportunities may be limited and are dependent on development interest and residential growth.

Status of the White Sox stadium is influx.

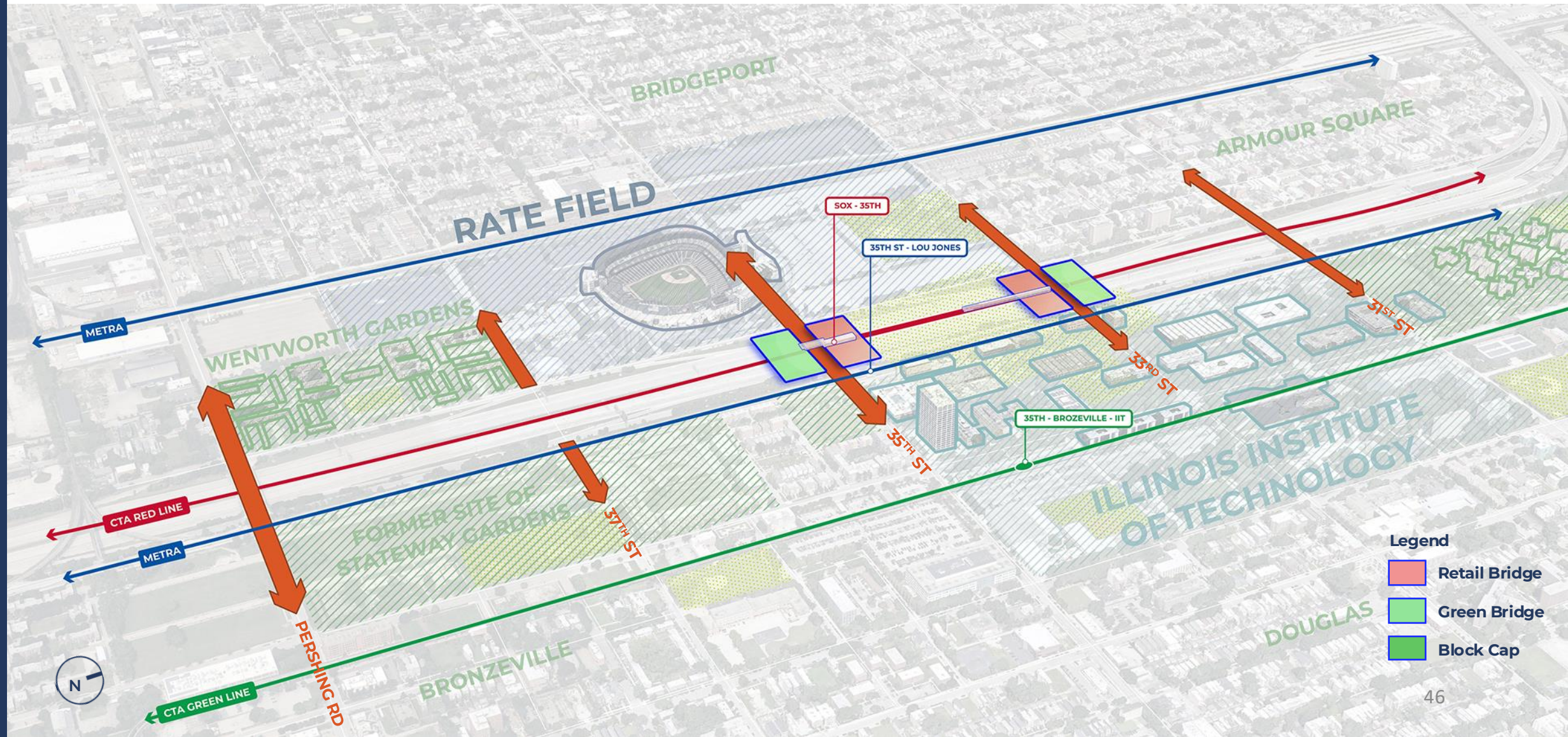


Image Credit: Major League Baseball

Dan Ryan Expressway

Reconnection Possibilities

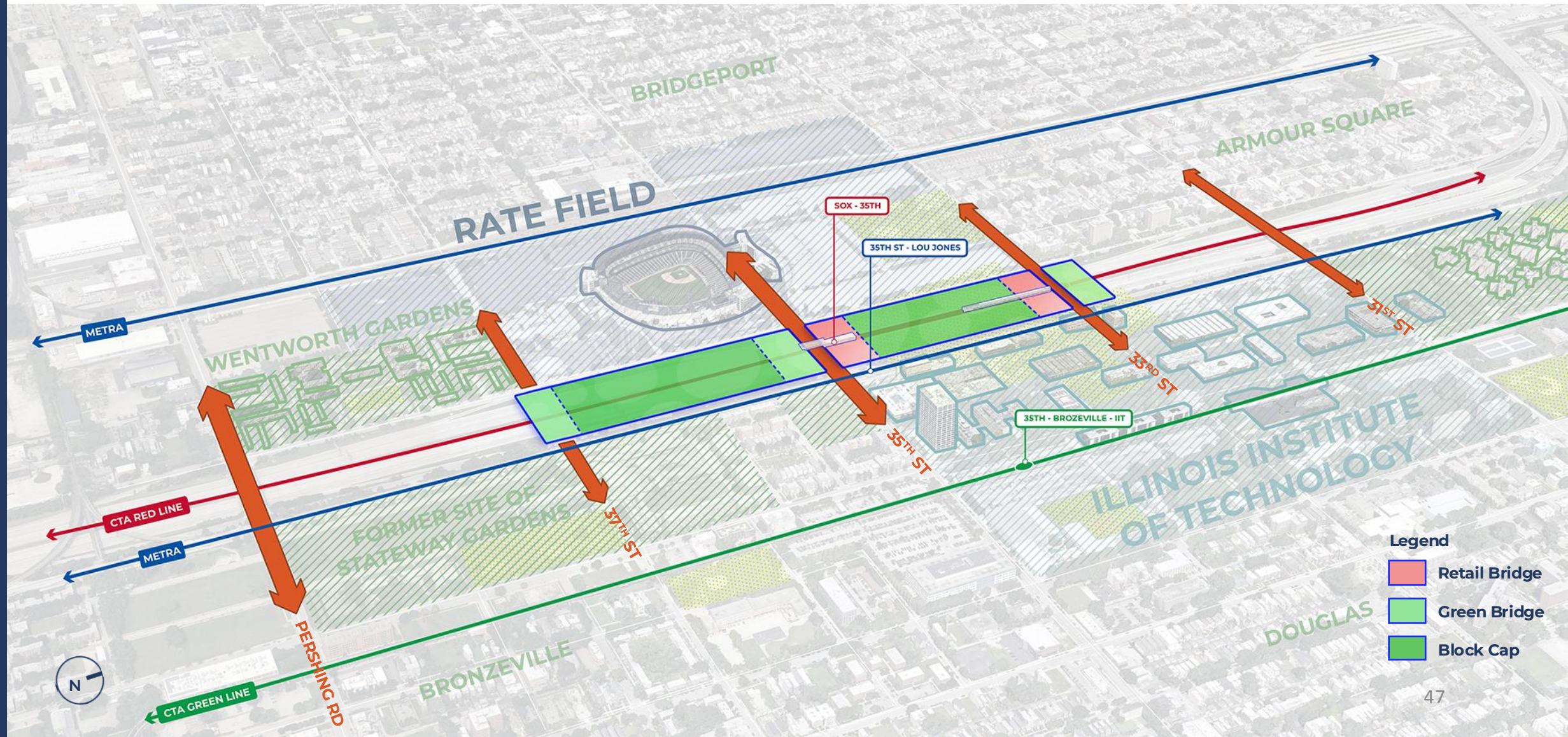
A phased approach is possible, with early strategic investments setting the stage for more ambitious, long-term visions for reconnection.



Dan Ryan Expressway

Reconnection Possibilities

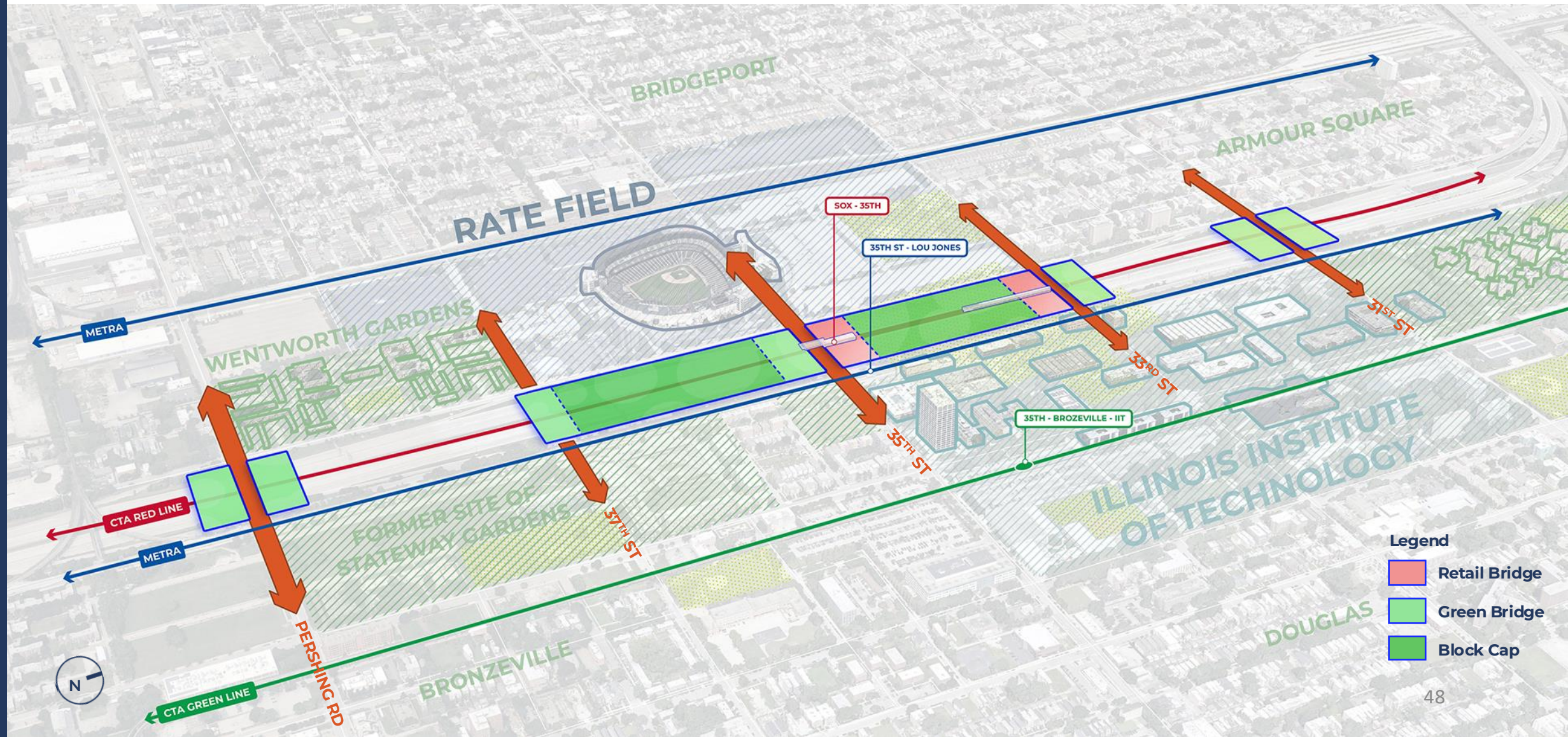
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Dan Ryan Expressway

Reconnection Possibilities

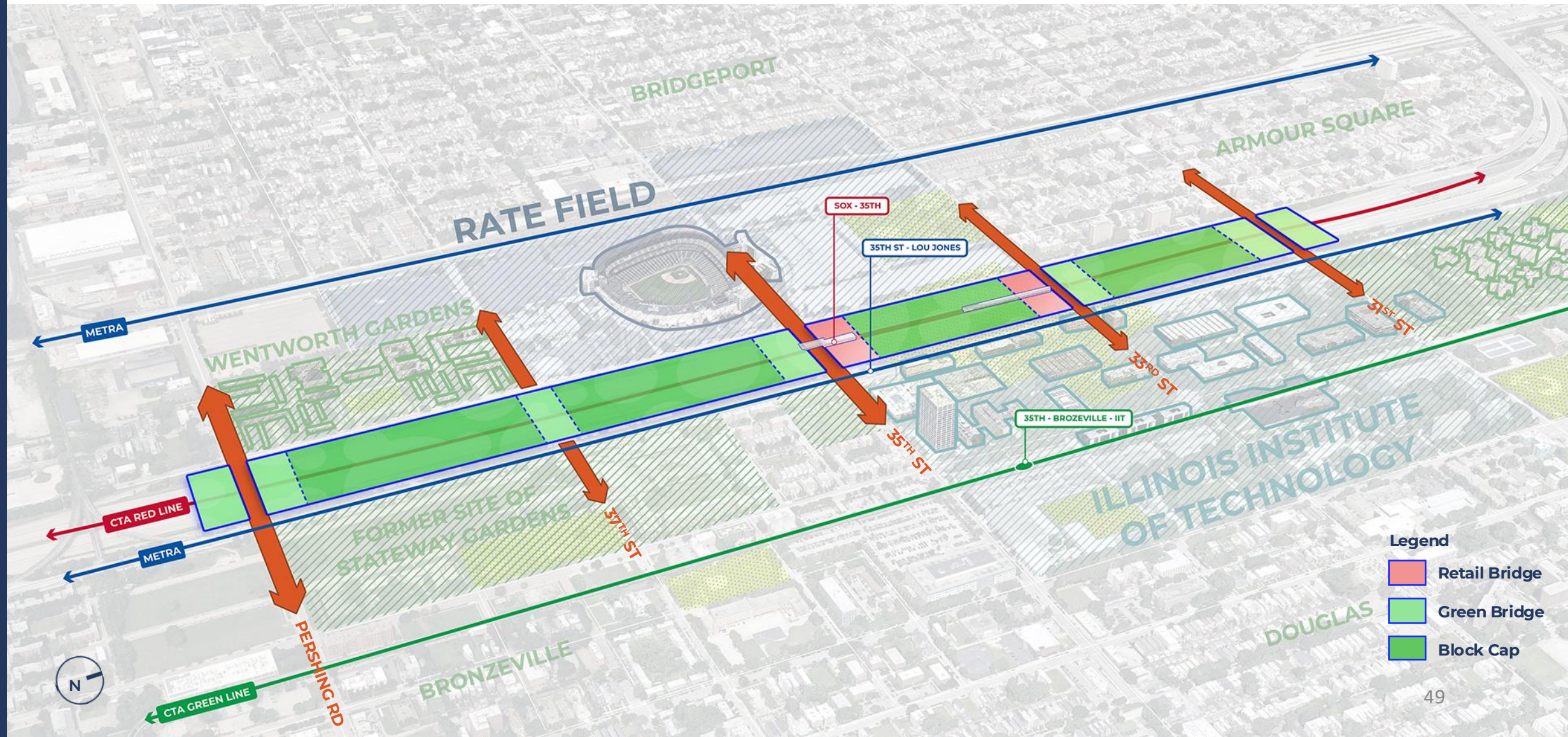
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Dan Ryan Expressway

Reconnection Possibilities

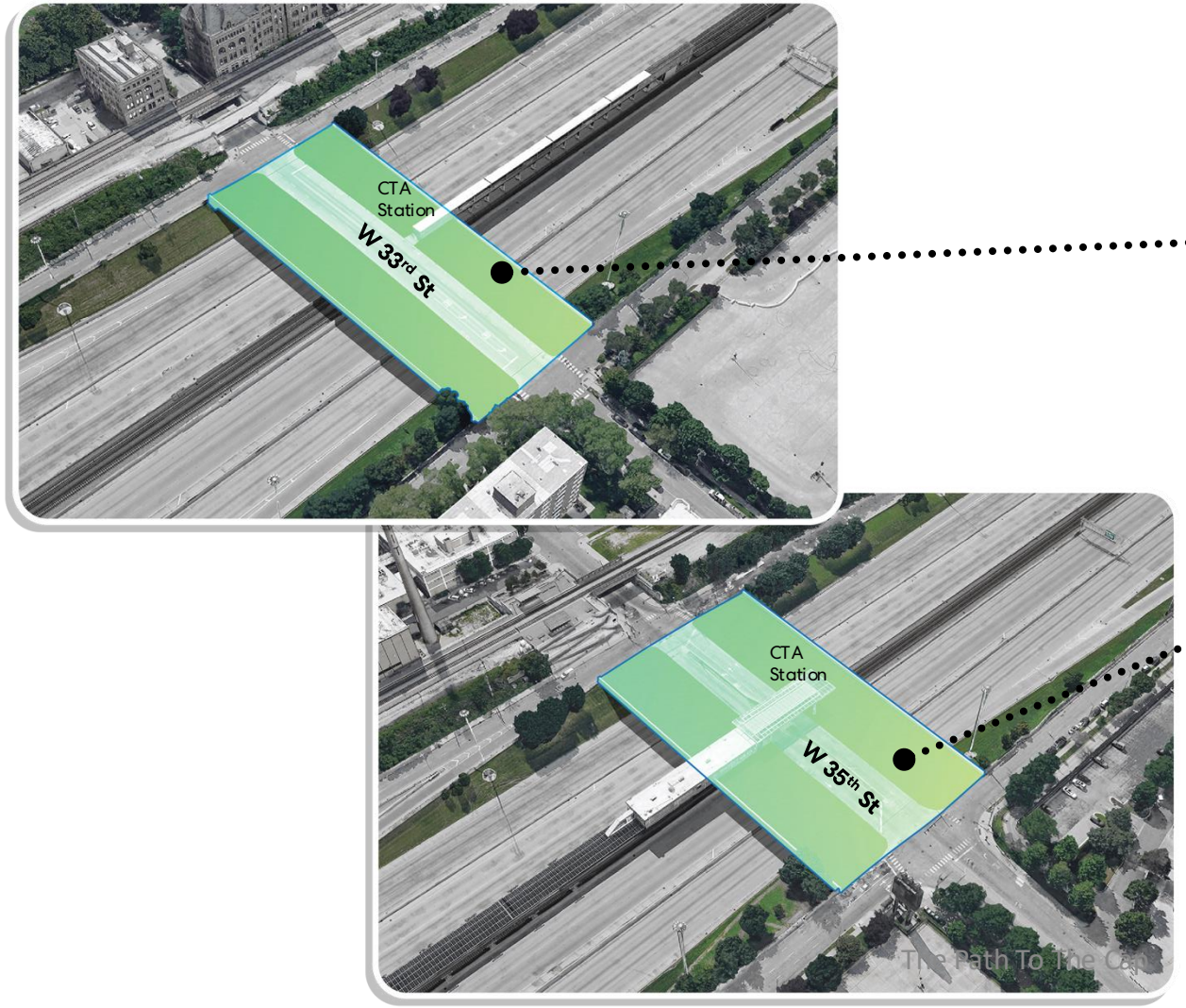
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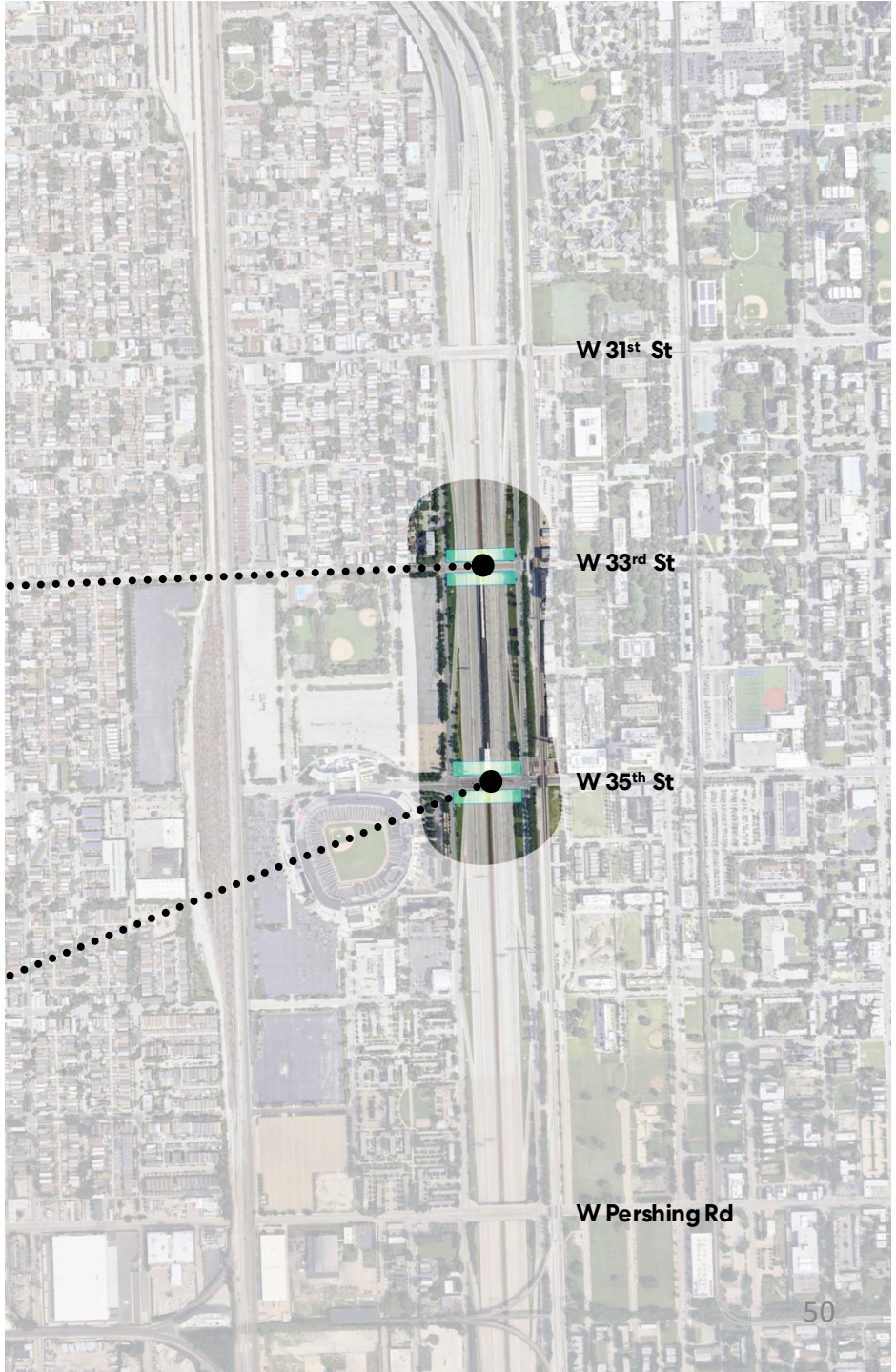


Dan Ryan Expressway

Where to start?

- Green Bridges with connections to existing CTA station





Stevenson Expressway



Stevenson Expressway

Context

The study area extends from State St to Martin Luther King Dr



Motor Row



McCormick Place



Proposed Bronzeville Lakefront Development

CHINATOWN
MOTOR ROW
MCCORMICK PLACE
NORTH ARENA
WINTRUST ARENA
SOUTH BUILDING
WEST BUILDING
INSIGHT HOSPITAL
INSIGHT MEDICAL CENTER
CTA RED LINE
METRA
CTA GREEN LINE
STATE ST
MICHIGAN AVE
MLK DR
BRONZEVILLE
PRAIRIE SHORES
N

ON / OFF RAMP
METRA LINE & STATION
CTA GREEN LINE & STATION
CTA RED LINE & STATION
RAMP/FRONTAGE ROAD
BRIDGE
EXPRESSWAY

Stevenson Expressway

Key Guiding Principles

Equity

These neighborhoods have been historically disconnected from destinations and services within the City, creating an opportunity to bond the urban fabric.



Image Credit: Bronzecomm

Economic Development

Retail, green bridge or cap could connect residents to south loop and visitors to businesses in adjacent neighborhoods.



Image Credit: Andrew Jameson

Challenges & Considerations

Structural limitations associated with CTA Green Line may increase the cost and complexities of highway cap exponentially.
Adjacent institutions may limit adjacent development potential.

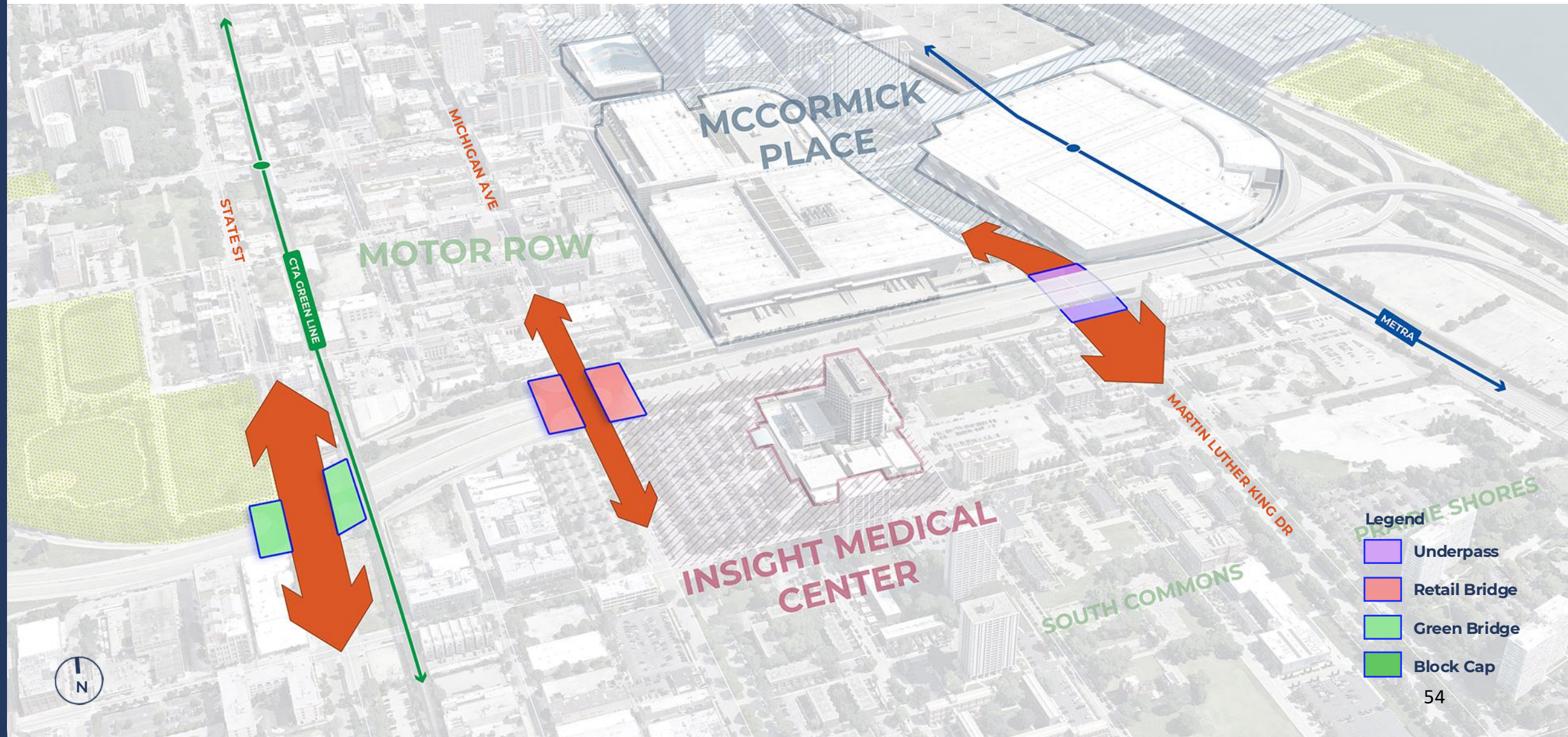


Image Credit: Google Earth

Stevenson Expressway

Reconnection Possibilities

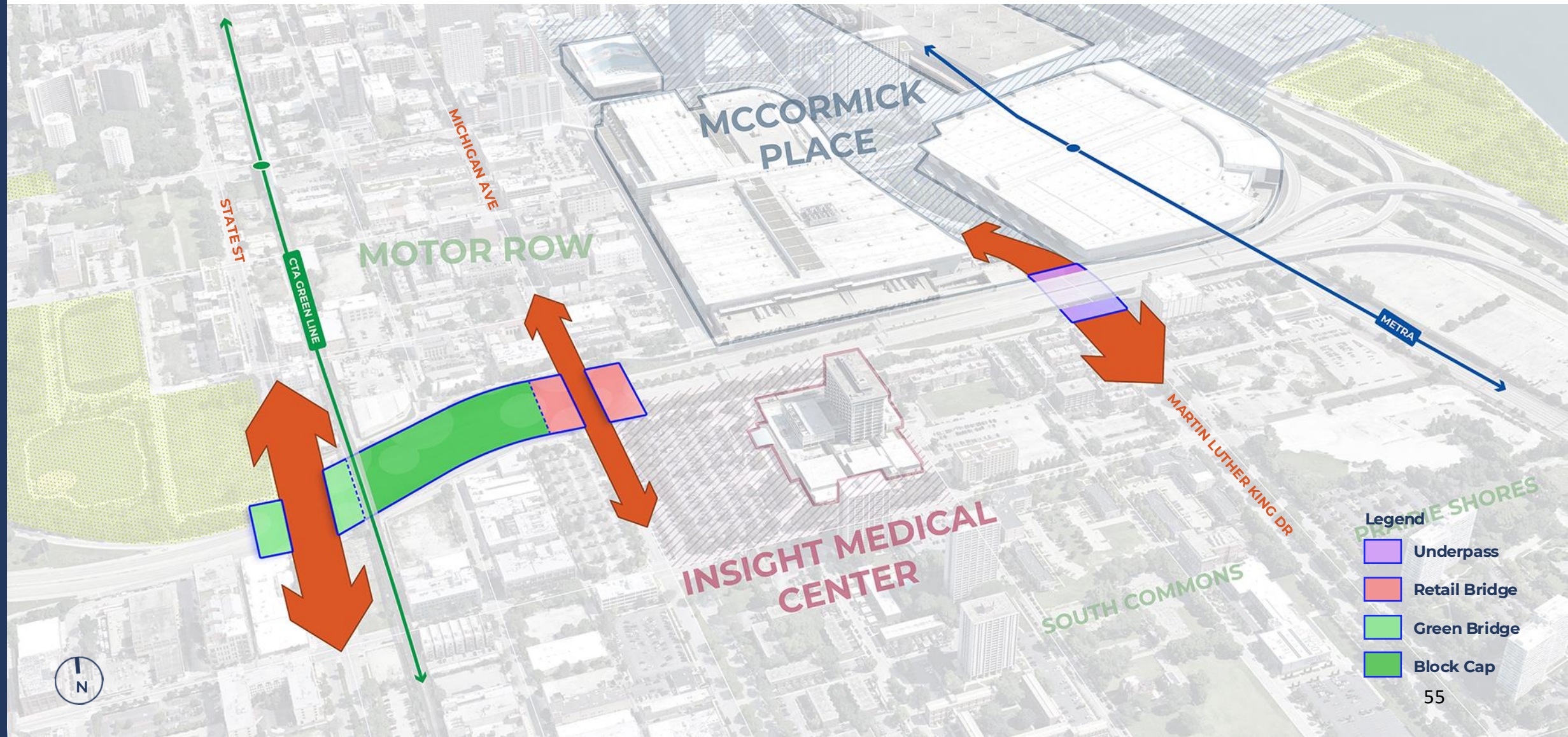
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Stevenson Expressway

Reconnection Possibilities

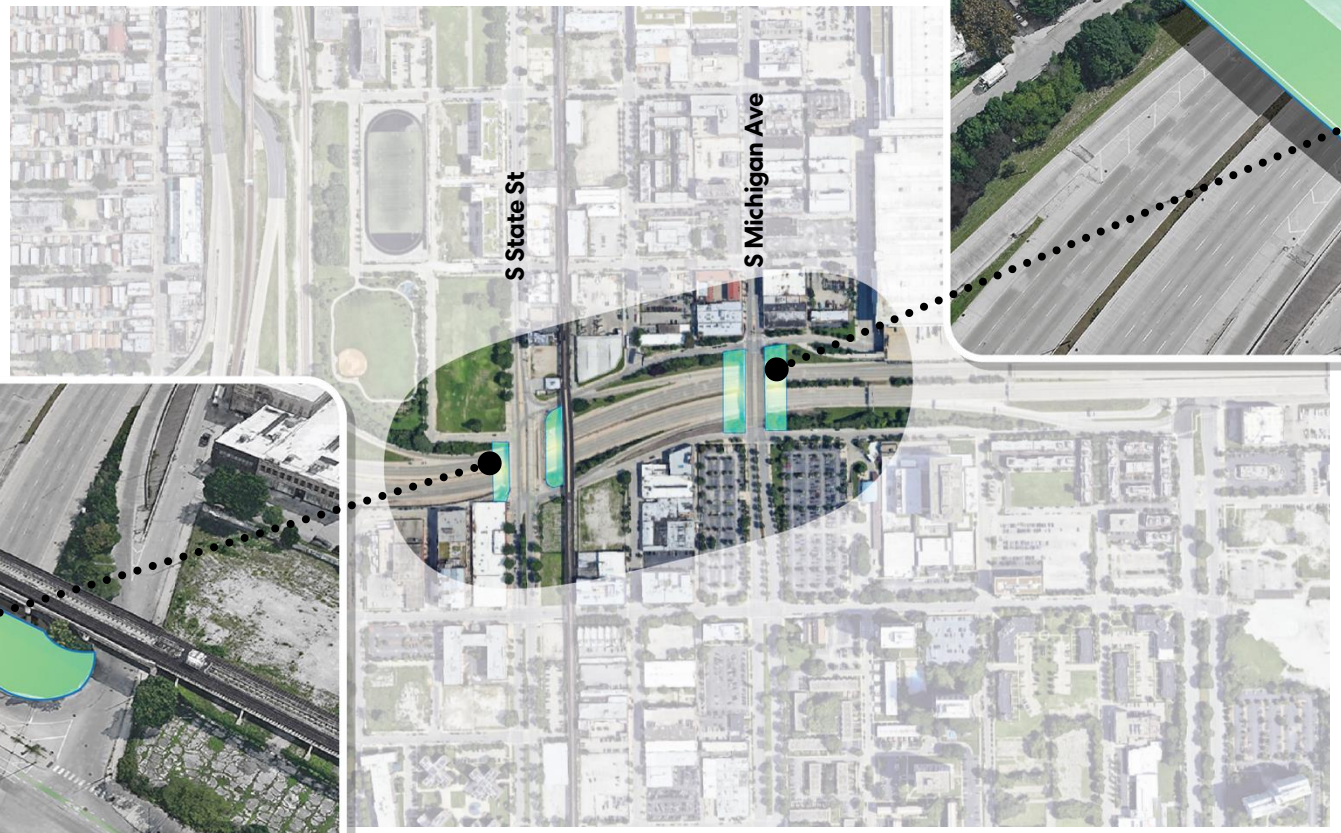
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Stevenson Expressway

Where to start?

- Green Bridges with improved pedestrian infrastructure



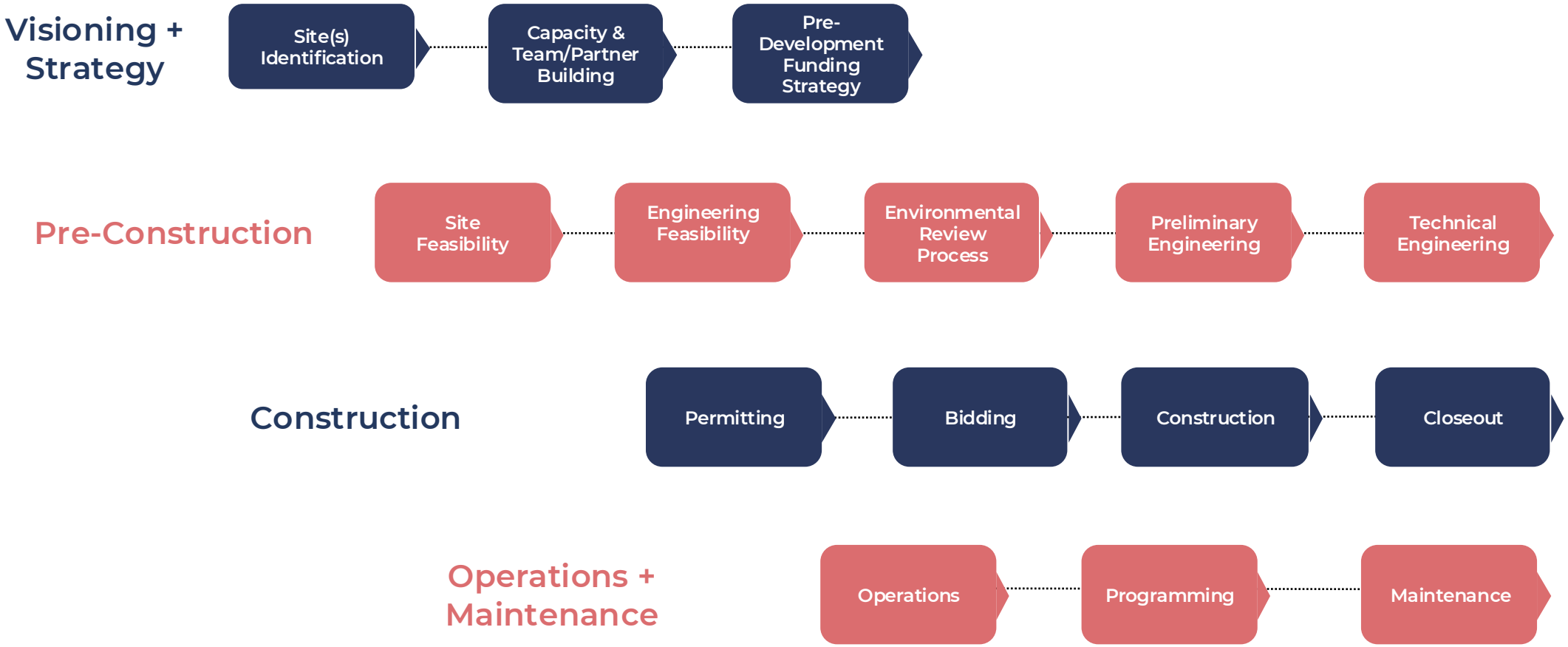




03 The Funding Opportunity

Process for Implementing

Build community, government and private sectors partnerships – *a coalition of support*



Funding Pathway



Visioning + Strategy

- Private sector
- Philanthropic
- Public private partnerships



Pre-Construction

- Federal Funding
- State
- Regional
- City
- Private sector development and philanthropic



Construction

- Philanthropic capital grants
- Federal, state, and local grants
- Federal credit programs
- Private sector development
- Private value capture



Operations and Maintenance

- Local revenue streams: SSA, etc.
- Private sponsorship
- Philanthropic endowment
- Public-private conservancy

Significant Chicago Public Realm Projects

We get big projects done!

Millennium Park

Year Completed: 2004
Total Project Cost: $475 million
Primary Funding Source: Public/Private



Image Credit: Massivart

Chicago Riverwalk

Year Completed: 2009-2016
Total Project Cost: $132 million
Primary Funding Source: Public



Image Credit: Time Out Chicago

The 606

Year Completed: 2015
Total Project Cost: $95 million
Primary Funding Source: Public/Private



Image Credit: Choose Chicago

Cap Typology Cost Summary

Based on Project Costs of Constructed Precedents



Green Bridge

Price / Sq Ft: $504

Includes:

- Bridge Structure, Sidewalks, Plaza, Landscape / Planting, Seating, Overhead Structure, Lighting, Public Art



Retail Bridge

Price / Sq Ft: $665

Includes:

- Bridge Structure, Sidewalks, Plaza, Landscape / Planting, Retail Space, Overhead Structure



Block Cap

Price / Sq Ft: $1,040

Includes:

- Bridge Structure, Sidewalks, Plaza, Landscape / Planting, Seating, Overhead Structure, Lighting, Public Art, Community Buildings, Bandshell, Playgrounds, Interactive Fountains, Bridge Structure

Note: Cost ranges have been extrapolated from best practice national examples and adjusted to account for inflation over time considering regional cost modifiers applicable to Chicago, IL. Costs do not include highway lane reconfiguration allowances or provisions for tunnel ventilation, fire protection, access points, etc.

Sources:
ODOT Construction Cost Change Over Time, 2026
Design Cost Data/BNI Data 2026 Regional Cost Modifiers

Cap Project Development Costs

Select Examples in Other Cities

Long Street Bridge

Cap Type: Green Bridge
Location: I-70, Columbus, OH
Size: 1.0 acres
Year Completed: 2014
Total Project Cost: $12.5 million
Approx. Cost / Acre: $12.5 million
Primary Funding Source: Public



Image Credit: MKSK

Cap at Union Station

Cap Type: Retail Bridge
Location: 670, Columbus, OH
Size: 1.0 acres
Year Completed: 2004
Total Project Cost: $7.8 million
Approx. Cost / Acre: $7.8 million
Primary Funding Source: Public-Private



Image Credit: MKSK

Klyde Warren Park

Cap Type: Block Cap
Location: Woodall Rodgers Fwy, Dallas, TX
Size: 5.2 Acres
Year Completed: 2012
Total Project Cost: $110-112 million
Approx. Cost / Acre: $21 million
Primary Funding Source: Public-Private



Image Credit: Office of James Burnett

The Path to the Cap

Rough Cost Estimates 2026

Width = the measurement along the expressway lanes perpendicular to the road bridge

Green Bridge: $500/sf

Retail Bridge: $665/sf

Cap: $1,040/sf

	Dan Ryan	Kennedy	Eisenhower	Stevenson
Distance Across Expwy	425ft	400ft	380ft	300ft
Green Bridge (30'-50' Wide)	$6-12m	$6-12m	$5-10m	$4-8m
Retail Bridge (40'-80' Wide)	$11-22m	$10-22m	$10-20m	$8-16m
Block Cap (500'-1200' Wide)	$220-530m	$200-500m	$195-475m	$155-375m

**Note: Cost ranges have been extrapolated from best practice national examples and adjusted to account for inflation over time considering regional cost modifiers applicable to Chicago, IL. Costs do not include highway lane reconfiguration allowances or provisions for tunnel ventilation, fire protection, access points, etc.*

Sources:
ODOT Construction Cost Change Over Time, 2026
Design Cost Data/BNI Data 2026 Regional Cost Modifiers

Financing Mechanisms

- **Federal Loan Programs**
  - Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA)
  - Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF)

- **Federal Grant Programs**
  - Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program
  - Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) / RAISE Grants

- **State and Local Incentives**
  - Tax Increment Finance (TIF)
  - Enterprise Zone Abatement and Special Service Area (SSA) Tax Overlays

- **Philanthropic Capital and Private Development Contributions**

- **Mega Project Designation and Job Creation Incentives**

Example of a Diversified Capital Stack

Financing Stack	Percent of Total	Source
Federal Grants (Reconnecting Communities + Bridge Investment Program)	25 – 30%	Federal
TIFIA Loan	40%	Federal
TIF Increment	10-15%	Local
IDOT/NITA Funding	10%	State/Regional
Enterprise Zone Incentives and Private Development	5-10%	Private
Philanthropic	2-5%	Philanthropic

04 Implementation


Kennedy
The Loop
Lake Michigan
W Wayman St
W Randolph St
W Adams St
S Peoria
S Racine Ave
S Loomis Ave
S Ashland Ave
Ogden Ave
S Damen Ave
Eisenhower
Stevenson
S Michigan Ave
S State Street
W 33rd St
W 35th St
Dan Ryan

Next Steps

Charting the Course

So what's next? The Path to the Cap provides a framework to get started but now, a series of action steps will be needed to grow momentum and feasibility toward the development of caps in Chicago.

Site identification based upon existing and future development opportunities, capacity building through community support, and developing initial funding procurement strategies will be needed to enable momentum to continue to grow.

Visioning & Strategy

Site(s) Identification

- Prioritize initial sites
- Engage in pre-development feasibility planning
- Address regulatory and structural constraints proactively

Capacity & Team/Partner Building

- Build capacity through community partnerships, Aldermanic support, and municipal /regional agency collaboration.

Pre-Development Funding Strategy

- Assemble a Diversified Financial Stack

Founded in 1956, Chicago Central Area Committee convenes leading global experts to identify opportunities and address challenges facing Chicago as the city charts a strategic course for the built environment of its central area.

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