

## **\$380M revamp of Gateway Arch Park in St. Louis offers a how-to guide for Cleveland on reconnecting downtown, waterfront**

**By Steven Litt, cleveland.com**

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ST. LOUIS, Missouri — In 2015, they finally fixed the mistake on the Mississippi.

St. Louis and a slew of government, business, and private donors built a 250-foot-wide landscaped pedestrian bridge over the interstate highway trench that had long severed the city's downtown from the soaring Gateway Arch — its most famous symbol.

Designed by the mid-century modern architect Eero Saarinen as the centerpiece of a new national park that opened on the riverfront in 1965, the arch was a 630-foot-high arc of stainless steel that rocketed the eye into the sky. It was intended to celebrate the city's role as the launchpad for America's westward expansion after the Louisiana Purchase and the Lewis and Clark expedition.

But for decades, pedestrians trying to reach the arch and the surrounding 90-acre park from downtown had to scuttle along narrow sidewalks on streets that bridged the highway trench and crossed two busy, three-lane highway access roads.

"It was absolutely miserable and dangerous," said Mike Ward, former superintendent of Gateway Arch National Park, now Midwest deputy regional director of the National Park Service. "It was a regular sidewalk, with no crosswalk, and there were no signs to tell you where you were going."

Now the connection from downtown to the park flows so smoothly that you hardly notice that there's an interstate highway underneath you as you cross the pedestrian bridge.

### Lessons for Cleveland

That seamless connection suddenly became deeply relevant to Cleveland in May. That's when Jimmy and Dee Haslam, co-owners of the NFL Browns, proposed extending the downtown Mall north to the city's lakefront over railroad tracks and the Ohio 2 Shoreway, like the pedestrian bridge in St. Louis.

The Mall, part of which doubles as the green roof of the Huntington Convention Center of Cleveland, is the parklike, three-block-long space co-designed in 1903 by Chicago architect Daniel Burnham as the heart of the city's civic and government center, known as the Group Plan District.

### Transforming downtown Cleveland: Hunter Morrison looks back at 1980-2000

A spectator takes a picture before the Cleveland Orchestra performs the "Star-Spangled Spectacular" on Mall B in downtown Cleveland on July 1, 2015. A fireworks display followed Tchaikovsky's "1812" Overture. Conductor Thomas Wilkins led the Cleveland Orchestra with works by Gould, Gershwin, Williams, and others. Baritone Nathan Gunn performed selections from Copland's "Old American Songs" and Lerner & Loewe's "If Ever I Would Leave You." (Lisa DeJong/The Plain Dealer) (Lisa DeJong/The Plain Dealer) The Plain DealerThe Plain Dealer

Flanked by neoclassical public buildings including City Hall and the Cuyahoga County Courthouse, the Mall terminates abruptly at its north end, where the convention center's below-grade ballroom edges the chasm created by the railroad lines and the Shoreway.

Extending the Mall north over the divide would improve access to lakefront attractions including the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, the Great Lakes Science Center, and the city-owned FirstEnergy Stadium, home of the Browns, where the team's lease expires in February 2029.

The harbor can be reached via sidewalks on West Third and East Ninth streets, but the long, unpleasant walk is interrupted by busy garage driveways, freeway ramps, and intersections.

Lakefront pedestrian bridge debate going nowhere fast as city stays mum on topic

A 2015 photo of the wasteland north of the Huntington Convention Center and south of lakefront attractions around North Coast Harbor. Cleveland hasn't figured out how to bridge this gap over the past century. Steven Litt, The Plain Dealer

By coming up with their new idea, the Haslams have reignited the perennial debate in Cleveland over how to create a stronger link between downtown and the city's greatest natural asset — Lake Erie.

In a series of articles running today and next Sunday, The Plain Dealer and cleveland.com will look first at the St. Louis project and then at another big waterfront effort in Cincinnati to see what lessons they hold for Cleveland. A third article will summarize takeaway lessons from both cities.

Urban trend

Chicago and Toronto are famous for having created dynamic and beautiful urban waterfronts over the past century, showing what's possible in cities on the Great Lakes.

But the new developments in Cincinnati and St. Louis are especially pertinent to Cleveland because they were accomplished by smaller Midwest peer cities trying to promote walkability rather than move traffic through town as quickly as possible.

Both projects are part of a recent trend in which U.S. cities are repairing damage caused by highways from the 1950s to the 1970s when they ripped across waterfronts, plowed through low-income minority neighborhoods, and destroyed city parks.

Examples include Boston's Big Dig, completed in 2007, which buried the I-93 Central Artery in a 1.5-mile tunnel under new surface streets and parks, and the 5-acre Klyde Warren Park in Dallas, installed over a downtown freeway in 2012.

Zakim Bunker Hill Bridge

--FILE-- This May 18, 2006, file photo shows the Leonard P. Zakim Bunker Hill Bridge, part of Boston's Big Dig, which is considered to be nation's most complex highway project. Commuting in the Boston area could soon become trickier as vacationers and students flood back into Boston in the next few weeks for what is traditionally one of the most gridlocked times of the year on Boston's roadways. (AP Photo/Steven Senne) ASSOCIATED PRESS

Jack Marchbanks, director of the Ohio Department of Transportation, thought of St. Louis immediately when he reviewed the Cleveland proposal during a meeting in June. He urged Cleveland officials to visit Gateway Arch National Park, telling them: “Your vision is grander,” and that it would “one-up” the project in St. Louis.

That remains to be seen, but the Cleveland-St. Louis comparison is apt in many ways. Both are culturally rich but racially divided blue cities located in politically red states.

St. Louis and Cleveland have also attempted to revive their downtowns through sports, entertainment, and tourism, including waterfront attractions built largely or entirely at public expense. Cleveland built architect I.M. Pei’s Rock Hall building on its waterfront in 1995, but St. Louis got there first when it completed the Gateway Arch in 1965.

#### I.M. Pei and the Rock Hall

On a clear day, sunlight sculpts the dramatic forms of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, designed by the late, internationally renowned architect I.M. Pei, who designed the Louvre’s glass pyramid in Paris and the East Wing of the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. Steven Litt, *The Plain Dealer*

With the completion in 2018 of a \$380 million renovation of Gateway Arch National Park that included the new pedestrian bridge, St. Louis has decisively surpassed Cleveland in connecting its downtown to its waterfront.

#### Impact on city

St. Louis officials said it’s too soon to gauge the economic impact of their big project, in part because the coronavirus pandemic suppressed activity over the past year and a half.

But they describe the park as part of \$8 billion in new and upcoming investments in the center city. These include the federal government’s \$2 billion Geospatial-Intelligence Agency West Headquarters, the 200-acre Cortex innovation district, and the Brickline Greenway, a string of multi-purpose pathways and parks designed to connect the Gateway Arch Park to Forest Park, the site of the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair, 8 miles to the west.

Such projects are seen as a corrective to decades in which interstate highways facilitated an exodus that left downtown and the center city looking drab and troubled.

“If we don’t have a metropolitan city that is in a renaissance, that’s a place people want to move to, the entire region and state suffers,” said Susan Trautman, CEO of Great Rivers Greenway, the St. Louis regional parks agency.

#### Gorgeous landscape

If the Gateway Arch Park’s influence is hard to quantify separately from other big investments in the city, its physical and visual impact is easy to grasp. It’s gorgeous.

Curving paths sweep down from the new pedestrian bridge toward the curved glass entry of the park's newly expanded history museum. The view from inside the museum lobby, looking east toward downtown, frames the St. Louis skyline and the Old Courthouse, now under restoration, where Dred Scott sued for his freedom in a case ultimately decided by the 1857 Supreme Court ruling that legitimized slavery.

Renovation of Gateway Arch National Park in St. Louis holds lessons for Cleveland lakefront

WEDNESDAY, AUG. 11, 2021 - This is the Gateway Arch which houses a Museum and Visitors Center Tuesday in St. Louis, Mo., A tram elevator brings visitors to the top of the Arch which stands 630 feet tall and is the largest man-made monument in the United States. ©Photo by Jerry Naunheim Jr. ©Jerry Naunheim Jr.

The arch towers in the center of the park beyond the museum entrance, but a rise in the landscape blocks the view of the Mississippi from that point. The hill beyond the museum lures you forward toward the crest, where a vast lawn rolls gently down through the legs of the arch to grand staircases and wheelchair-friendly ramps descending to the river and a regional bike path.

Along the way, the park presents sweeping vistas that evoke idealized American prairies and forests, with pools of shade and reflecting ponds that mirror Saarinen's arch.

Connecting to Lake Erie

Apart from a temporary extension of the downtown Mall to the lakefront during the Great Lakes Exposition in 1936-37, Cleveland has lived for decades with an ugly gash between downtown and the waterfront attractions at North Coast Harbor.

Planning Cleveland's 21st century

Cleveland mayor Frank Jackson signaled approval of an idea floated by the nonprofit Green Ribbon Coalition for a downtown land bridge linking the downtown Mall to North Coast Harbor. He spoke Wednesday in an interview about an upcoming Urban Land Institute conference on the city's future. Steven Litt, The Plain Dealer

To start a new discussion about solving the problem, the Haslams spent \$1 million to draft a concept plan showing how extending the Mall and revamping the Shoreway could create a new connection to Lake Erie.

Self-interest is certainly part of the picture. Extending the Mall would make it easier and more enjoyable to walk from parking downtown to FirstEnergy Stadium on game days than current routes. It could also unleash new private development including offices, hotels, and housing on publicly-owned land around the stadium.

All of it could create jobs, generate tax revenue, and burnish the city's image. It will also require an as-yet-undetermined public investment, although the City of Cleveland has initially estimated the cost of extending the Mall and revamping the Shoreway at \$229 million.

Earlier this month, the Indians agreed to a \$435 million public-private deal with Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, and the State of Ohio to renovate Progressive Field and extend their lease, which expires in 2023. Such a negotiation will inevitably ensue with the Haslams. Their as-yet-undetermined role in development around the stadium could be part of those discussions.

But in a larger sense, the Haslams are using their clout to try to leverage a downtown waterfront connection that Clevelanders have sought and failed to achieve for decades, much as leaders in St. Louis tried for decades without success to realize Saarinen's original vision of a seamless link to the Mississippi riverfront.

#### Power of a deadline

St. Louis and the National Park Service first tried to ameliorate the longstanding disconnect between downtown and the Gateway Arch in the mid-1980s by adding a massive, 1,200-space parking garage on the north side of the park.

But the garage made things worse. Built by Bi-State Development, a public development and transportation authority, the garage turned the park into a one-way, in-and-out destination located off a freeway that didn't require visitors to set foot in downtown — much like North Coast Harbor in Cleveland.

On top of its flaws, Gateway Arch Park was not in the least accessible to people with disabilities.

Two things changed the situation. Around 2007, the impending 50th anniversary of the Gateway Arch in 2015 created a new sense of urgency. At the same time, former Republican U.S. Senator John Danforth, who was devoted to the riverfront, asked St. Louis lawyer Walter Metcalfe, a friend, and colleague, to make a fresh attempt at finding a fix.

"He's a civic-minded guy but also ultra-connected to [the city's] Fortune 500 companies, to philanthropic organizations," Ed Hassinger, chief engineer and deputy director of MoDOT, the Missouri Department of Transportation, said of Metcalfe. "He had the juice."

Metcalfe said his method was simple: "Just find out the obvious needs that bind everybody together, so nobody gets in the way, and put a [completion] date on it," he said.

Metcalfe also made the project a personal mission.

"I was willing to make this the first thing I did in the morning and the last thing I did at night, every day," he said.

Joined by then-mayor Francis Slay in 2008, Metcalfe's working group grew to include corporate, civic, and philanthropic leaders, plus representatives of the National Park Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Coast Guard.

Renovation of Gateway Arch National Park in St. Louis holds lessons for Cleveland lakefront

A slide from a presentation by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates illustrates the core concept of the firm's design for the \$380 million renovation of Gateway Arch National Park completed in 2018. Courtesy Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates

In 2009, the group recommended holding an open design competition in which proposals would be publicly shared and vetted. A jury of nationally respected planning and design experts selected a proposal designed by Boston-based Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, the same firm that led a 2003 makeover of Blossom Music Center, the summer home of the Cleveland Orchestra.

#### Early money

In 2011, the St. Louis project landed a critically important grant of \$20 million federal TIGER grant, short for Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery. The grant application succeeded in part because it was heavily matched by \$25 million from MoDOT and \$10 million raised privately through the Gateway Arch Park Foundation.

When it was awarded, the grant gave the project a sense of momentum and inevitability.

“It was, ‘oh, this vision is real, this can really happen,’ ” said Trautman, the Great Rivers Greenway CE

The TIGER grant also helped build support in 2013 for Proposition P, which imposed a 3/16th of one-cent sales tax in St. Louis and St. Louis County, raising \$90 million for the project. The measure passed with the approval of 67.2% of city voters and 52.75% of county voters in part because it provided money for additional regional parks across the region.

Private donors then provided a stunning \$250 million, of which \$29 million was devoted to an endowment fund for long-term maintenance. Some 26 individuals, corporations, and foundations gave more than \$1 million apiece.

#### Taming traffic

Beyond money, the Gateway Arch project required figuring how to re-route vehicles away from the highway access roads that had made it so dangerous to enter the park from downtown.

Here, the planners got lucky. In 2014, Missouri and Illinois finished the new I-70 Stan Musial Veterans Memorial Bridge over the Mississippi, which funneled commuter traffic deeper into downtown and away from the riverfront. That made it possible to close the two three-lane arterials between the park and downtown and to span the I-44 trench with the pedestrian bridge as the new main entrance to the park.

#### Renovation of Gateway Arch National Park in St. Louis holds lessons for Cleveland lakefront

A panel of before, during, and after photos show the construction of the landscaped pedestrian bridge at Gateway Arch National Park in St. Louis. Courtesy Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates

The designers also persuaded Bi-State Development to demolish its 1,200-car garage, which had cost \$8.4 million to build in 1986, and on which construction bonds had just been paid off by the early 2010s.

Eliminating the garage expanded the park by 9 acres, creating space for an outdoor concert arena. And it involved replacing a dangerous, five-way intersection outside the garage with pedestrian- and bike-friendly pathways to the neighboring Washington Avenue Arts District and Laclede's Landing, the only remaining portion of the city's 19th-century waterfront.

#### Parallels to Cleveland

In Cleveland, the potential impact of the Haslam proposal on regional traffic patterns poses a hurdle similar to that faced by engineers in St. Louis.

Extending the Mall would require removing the elevated highway ramp just south of FirstEnergy Stadium that connects the Shoreway to the Main Avenue Bridge over the Cuyahoga River and Cleveland's West Side.

#### Browns Cleveland lakefront plan

Images from the Browns' downtown Cleveland lakefront plan. Nelson Byrd Woltz, Osborn Engineering, CallisonRTKL, AoDK Architecture

That disconnect would send Shoreway traffic onto downtown streets, adding minutes to east-west commutes — something likely to raise objections from drivers accustomed to zooming along the lakefront without hitting a traffic light.

In July, the Ohio Department of Transportation awarded Cleveland \$2.5 million to study the issue. As one ODOT official put it, "we want to ensure that the proposed actions are not creating gridlock within the City of Cleveland."

The problem may seem tricky to solve, but just as the new I-70 Bridge in St. Louis relieved pressure along the Mississippi riverfront, the upcoming completion of the new Opportunity Corridor boulevard in Cleveland in 2022 could take pressure off the Shoreway by adding a new route for east-west regional traffic 3.5 miles south of the lakefront.

Too, in Cleveland, just as in St. Louis, a deadline may help focus the community's attention, with the expiration of the Browns' lease functioning as the equivalent of the 50th anniversary of the Gateway Arch in St. Louis.

#### Managing big projects

Guiding a big, complicated infrastructure project involving numerous design disciplines and government agencies is not Cleveland's forte, which suggests that it will need a new regional administrative body of some kind, perhaps a lakefront development authority, that could function efficiently across election cycles.

In St. Louis, Metcalfe's civic committee formed a technical advisory group of specialists in relevant agencies to work out details. The group "framed the discussion in a way that it could be successful," instead of looking for ways to kill it, Hassinger said.

The group then morphed into a six-way partnership to oversee construction. It involved the city, MoDOT, the Gateway Arch Park Foundation, Bi-State Development, the National Park Service, and the Great Rivers Greenway.

\$380M revamp of Gateway Arch Park in St. Louis offers a how-to guide for Cleveland on reconnecting downtown, waterfront

Images of the recently renovated Gateway Arch National Park in St. Louis, provided by Gateway Arch Park Foundation. Gateway Arch Park Foundation

Politics also matter. Cleveland is about to elect a new mayor, following 16 years under Frank Jackson. Cuyahoga County could have a new executive next year. Without their support, and help from Columbus, a big lakefront project is unlikely.

In St. Louis, local, state, and federal politicians in both major parties grew enthusiastic about the riverfront project, seeing it as an opportunity to cooperate on something popular and fundamentally apolitical.

“Maybe it’s impossible due to the politics of the world we’re in now,” Metcalfe said. “But in St. Louis, this was a place where they could go to press conferences together and make announcements together.”

#### Glossing history

Despite the brilliance of the Gateway Arch Park as an urban oasis, it’s hard not to view it without some ambivalence. In his recent book, “The Broken Heart of America,” Harvard historian and Missouri native Walter Johnson, slammed St. Louis as a hotbed of white supremacy, from its role as the military headquarters for the 19th-century Indian Wars to the police killing of Michael Brown, an unarmed Black man, in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson in 2014.

Johnson and other critics have pointed out that the national park on the riverfront grew out of a rigged city election over a bond issue in 1935 that paid for the destruction of 400 warehouses, apartments, and commercial buildings in a 37-block district, where many Blacks lived and worked.

The expanded, 150,000-square-foot museum at the base of the arch gets at some of this history with exhibits that, in their words, describe how westward expansion “robbed” Native Americans of their land, and by showing photos of the waterfront demolition that led to the creation of Gateway Arch National Park.

Nevertheless, the 2018 ribbon-cutting for the completed project underscored a message of exclusion and sparked an #ArchSoWhite Twitter hashtag in protest when it failed to include a single Black dignitary. Snubbed Black leaders later held their own ceremony.

Given this record, it’s hard to escape the impression that Saarinen’s shimmering arch was and remains part of a civic effort to gloss over St. Louis’ deeply troubled racial history with an iconic urban logo.

But the park's renovation also became a rallying point for a divided city and region, underscoring its importance as a democratic gathering space. The park has been a focal point for everything from Black Lives Matter protests to the 2019 victory celebration over the St. Louis Blues winning the Stanley Cup.

However it is viewed, the park is now far more of an asset to St. Louis than it was in the past. And it offers evidence that coming up with a brilliant fix for Cleveland's disconnected waterfront — the mistake on our lake, if you will — should be possible.