

1.0 Purpose and Need

The proposed project would erect a structural deck over a four-block section of Interstate 670 (I-670) in downtown Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri. The project, known locally as the South Loop Project, would create approximately 5.5-acres of new, arterial street level property above I-670 between Wyandotte Street and Grand Boulevard. This new property will be used in a variety of capacities, including passive green space, community gathering, and public and private events.

This Purpose and Need section will discuss the community challenges, as well as the project history and project study area.

1.1 Project Area Description and Study Overview

Project Study Area Description

The South Loop Project is located in Kansas City, Missouri (KCMO), between the southern edge of the Central Business District (CBD) and the northern edge of the Crossroads Arts District. The project boundaries, shown in **Figure 1-1** and **Figure 1-2**, are the westbound and eastbound traffic lanes of Truman Road (15th Street) on the north and south, respectively, 50-feet west of Broadway Boulevard and 50-feet east of Grand Boulevard. The project study area is a rough rectangle approximately 2,300 feet in length (from east to west) and 260 feet wide (north to south), although the project study area width varies due to the configuration and location of Truman Road and its right-of-way (ROW). I-670 within the project study area is constructed approximately 20 feet below-grade under Truman Road, although this depth of I-670 varies throughout the corridor. I-670 connects with I-35 in the southwestern portion of the downtown loop and connects with I-70 and U.S. 71 in the southeast portion of the loop. Truman Road functions as an urban arterial allowing freeway and local traffic to access Downtown. Bridging the interstate in the project area are (in the order of west to east) Broadway Boulevard, Central Street, Wyandotte Street, Baltimore Avenue, Main Street, Walnut Street, and Grand Boulevard.



Figure 1-1: Project Location Map

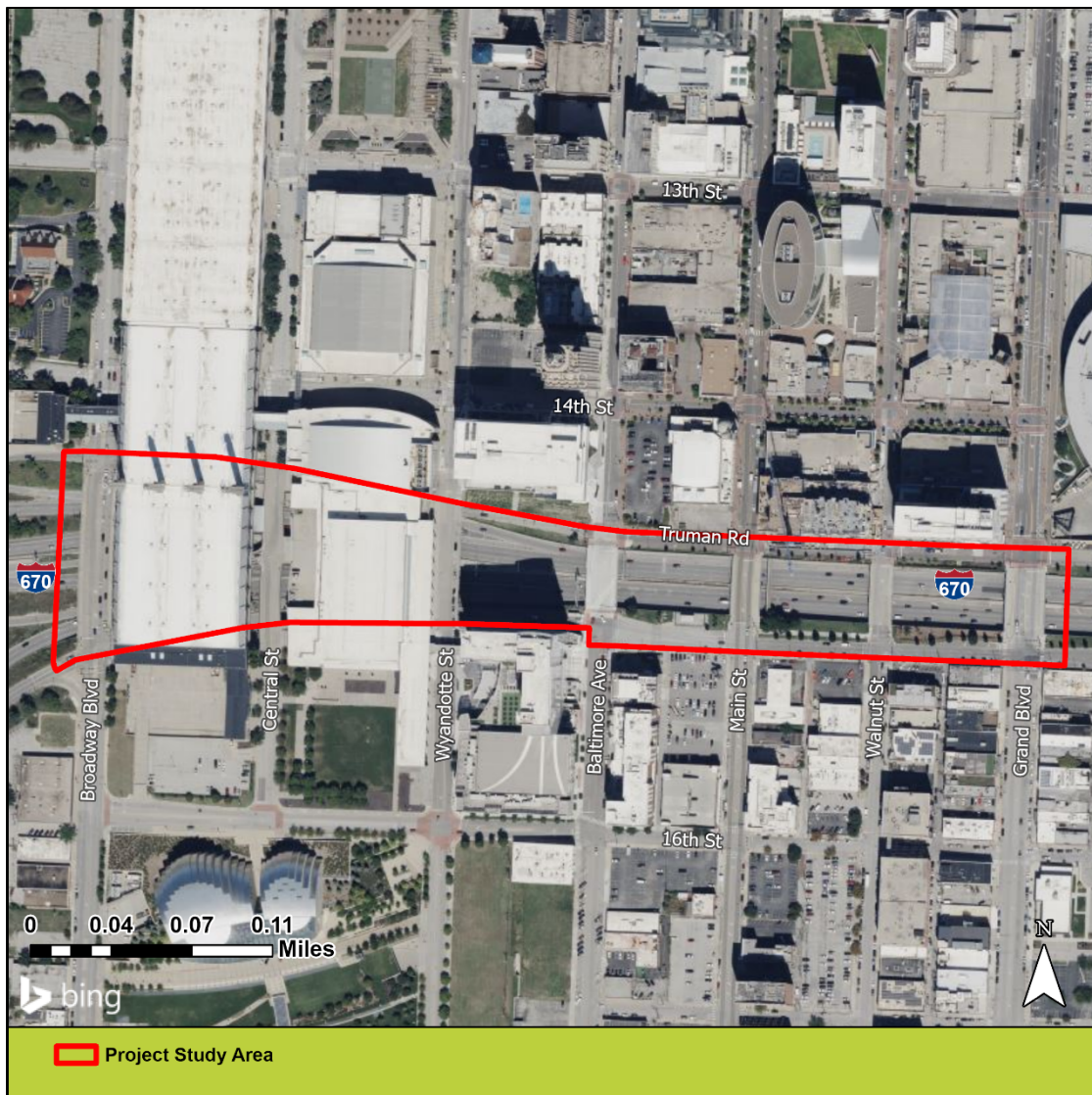


Figure 1-2: Project Study Area Map

Study Overview

The Port Authority of Kansas City (Port KC), the Downtown Council of Kansas City (DTC), and KCMO proposes to build a structural deck over a four-block section of I-670 to construct a multimodal, green mobility hub with a climate responsive design, creating regional job access, green and healthy living space, and private development. Located on the south side of Kansas City's CBD on top of a below-grade portion of I-670, the project would establish a 5.5-acre multimodal connector and destination to spur adjacent investment, while also addressing community challenges created when I-670 was constructed over five decades ago.

I-670 operations under the proposed South Loop Project will remain without capacity reduction or reconfiguration of entrance or exit ramps. Lateral width of I-670 will be maintained as well as lane and shoulder configuration and, therefore, capacity will not be negatively affected within the project study area [Commitment 1]. Existing guardrail and barrier protection will be eliminated along the center median and replaced by the central tunnel wall. Existing raised pavement sections behind existing low-profile curb will be removed and replaced with shoulder pavement and barrier in some locations. As a result of these improvements, some locations may have slight improvements to the lateral offset. No other notable existing obstacles exist in the tunnel limits that could be feasibly modified. Additionally, vertical clearance issues will be addressed during final design. A minimum of 15'6" vertical clearance will be met and included in the final design documentation [Commitment 2]. Design exceptions for the project may include the following:

- Minimum vertical clearance of 15'6";
- Variance for overhead sign size within the tunnel; and,
- Locations where existing shoulder widths do not meet current criteria.

Design exceptions identified during final design will be designed and approved under coordination with the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The project would also replace the Walnut Street bridge over I-670, which is nearing the end of its useful life, to prioritize open green space and alternative modes of transportation. The other three bridges over I-670, the Main Street, Baltimore Avenue, and Grand Boulevard bridges, were replaced in 2015, 2021, and 2016, respectively, and are in good condition.

The segment of I-670 within the project limits was built in 1968, while the remaining portions to the west were constructed over the next two decades and completed in 1991. In 2007, the KCMO, conducted a feasibility study to produce methods to mitigate the barrier that I-670 created, which separated city districts. The feasibility study first envisioned a structural deck or "link" and explored engineering considerations for future planning and design. In 2017, an economic impact study was completed and estimated the project would generate approximately \$490 million in economic benefits to Kansas City over its first 20 years.

Since the early 2000s, KCMO has seen significant investments near the project area, including the Power & Light District, T-Mobile Center, Loews Kansas City Hotel, Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, and the KC Streetcar line on Main Street. However, the project area and its vicinity are characterized by car-oriented streets and bridges and a lack of multimodal hubs and connections, with amenities characteristic of a civic gathering space and regional destination.

Port KC, in coordination with KCMO and the DTC, are the project sponsors providing planning, conceptual design, and public engagement and outreach leadership for the South Loop Project. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and conceptual design planning stages of the project are being coordinated with FHWA and MoDOT to meet all applicable NEPA and

state and federal technical design requirements related to Interstate highways. Prior to final design, any design exceptions will be obtained for any design elements not meeting technical requirements [Commitment 3]. FHWA has determined the NEPA class of action for this project is an Environmental Assessment (EA). This EA and NEPA process for the South Loop Project was initiated on September 27th, 2023.

1.2 Purpose and Need Summary

The purpose of the South Loop Project is to address community challenges that were created when I-670 was constructed in the late 1960's. Those community challenges are:

- A physical separation between economic and cultural districts in the vicinity of downtown Kansas City; and
- Transportation infrastructure that prioritizes vehicles over any other transportation mode.

The South Loop Project EA will identify and evaluate improvements intended to construct a structural deck over I-670 in downtown Kansas City. To address these transportation issues, proposed improvements are expected to:

- Repair the physical separation between the economic and cultural districts that occurred when I-670 was constructed. The construction of the below-grade I-670 physically separated the CBD and the adjacent Crossroads Arts District. Proposed improvements will reconnect those districts.
- Enhance multimodal connections for residents of adjacent neighborhoods and the broader community. The current design of I-670 and the surrounding transportation infrastructure in the project area prioritizes vehicles over any other mode of transportation. Proposed improvements will enhance existing, and create new, multimodal connections.

1.3 Elements of the Purpose and Need

The transportation-related challenges identified in **Section 1.2** are further discussed in detail in this section.

1.3.1 Physical Separation of Economic and Cultural Districts

The formerly connected CBD and adjacent Crossroads Arts District have been physically separated since the construction of I-670 in the late 1960s. The Interstate segment was built 20-feet below-grade, requiring significant excavation.

An early plan for Kansas City's Downtown Loop was written into Kansas City's City Plan Commission's 1943 report, "*Suggested Location of Inter-Regional Highways*." The report suggested passing the freeways through blighted areas that would be cheap to acquire. The highways, the plan said, could boost those areas economically. However, the construction of I-670 physically separated the CBD and adjacent districts and created new social and economic barriers while exacerbating the existing economic challenges of nearby properties, especially those reliant on pedestrian pass-by activity. The introduction of the Interstate decreased the walkability of the area. The only connection between the two districts was, and currently is,

Today, the land directly south of the proposed South Loop Project, as well as other locations within a half-mile of the proposed project, are considered to have higher than average low-income and minority populations. Low-income households generally do not have access to a vehicle and will rely on pedestrian, bike, or transit for their transportation needs. The socioeconomic characteristics for Census Block groups around the project study area are shown in **Figure 1-3**.



Data from the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) was used to identify Federally Designated Zones according to census tracts near the project study area. A Federally Designated

Zone is defined by the USDOT as a qualified Opportunity Zone (an economically distressed community), Empowerment Zone (an economically distressed community eligible to receive tax incentives and grants), Promise Zone (a high poverty area within select urban, rural, and tribal communities), or Choice Neighborhood (a neighborhood program that supports locally driven strategies that address struggling neighborhoods). There are no Empowerment Zones or Promise Zones within a half mile of the project study area. Additionally, Historically Disadvantaged Communities are shown; a community is considered a Historically Disadvantaged Community if the project is located in certain qualifying census tracts, the project is located on Tribal land, or the project is located in any territory or possession of the United States.

While properties immediately adjacent to I-670 have seen substantial reinvestment in commercial, entertainment, and residential development over the past decade, the effects of the Interstate barrier to the economic, cultural, and residential neighborhoods limits the potential for additional investment. In addition to the separation of districts, the I-670 bridges above the highway suffer from a car-oriented landscape and design. Reconnecting the two sides of I-670 through common shared community spaces and multimodal connections will potentially accelerate redevelopment within those districts.

1.3.2 Enhance Multimodal Connections for Adjacent Neighborhoods and the Broader Community

The current design of the transportation infrastructure in the South Loop Project area primarily prioritizes vehicles over any other mode of transportation due to the design of the arterial street network. While the corridor does include a sidewalk network and transit facilities, these currently only exist on the arterial street network, limiting connectivity. The car-centric design creates a barrier to opportunities for those without an automobile who are looking for access to opportunities, such as well-paying jobs in the CBD. The introduction of green space between the two districts would create continuity of space, reconnect neighborhoods and, easier access for pedestrian and bike modes of transportation.

While the existing roadway network includes adjacent sidewalks, the lack of pedestrian-mode design and transit-supportive amenities limits the use of the area as a viable mobility hub. As shown in **Figure 1-4**, existing and planned multimodal facilities run throughout downtown. Existing services moving through or surrounding the South Loop Project area include the KC Streetcar, RideKC MAX bus rapid transit (BRT), numerous RideKC local bus routes, and rideshare services such as IRIS, Rideshare KC, Kansas City BCycle, and RideKC Bike. KC Streetcar and MAX BRT are recent major federal funding investments; both transit services, and the broader community, would benefit from enhanced connectivity.

Opportunities exist to capitalize on planned and active transportation networks extending from the proposed South Loop Project area into adjacent neighborhoods, such as the Crossroads Arts District, the CBD, Paseo West, Hospital Hill, Parkview, 18th and Vine, Westside, and Quality Hill neighborhoods. Grand Boulevard, along the east end of the project area, serves as a transit emphasis corridor - the primary north-south bus corridor serving downtown Kansas City. Grand Boulevard is also a primary bicycle corridor, with existing bike lanes and planned cycle track improvements.

The completion of the South Loop Project will add additional east-west connections from the South Loop Project area along Truman Road which will connect to facilities like the “Greenline,” a planned bicycle and pedestrian trail loop facility serving neighborhoods, including the ones

listed above, thus creating an extended network of transportation options. The new Truman Road and “Greenline” facilities, which would connect to the South Loop Project area, run through areas with environmental justice populations. As a result, the neighborhoods would directly benefit from safer and more equitable transportation facilities leading directly to the South Loop.

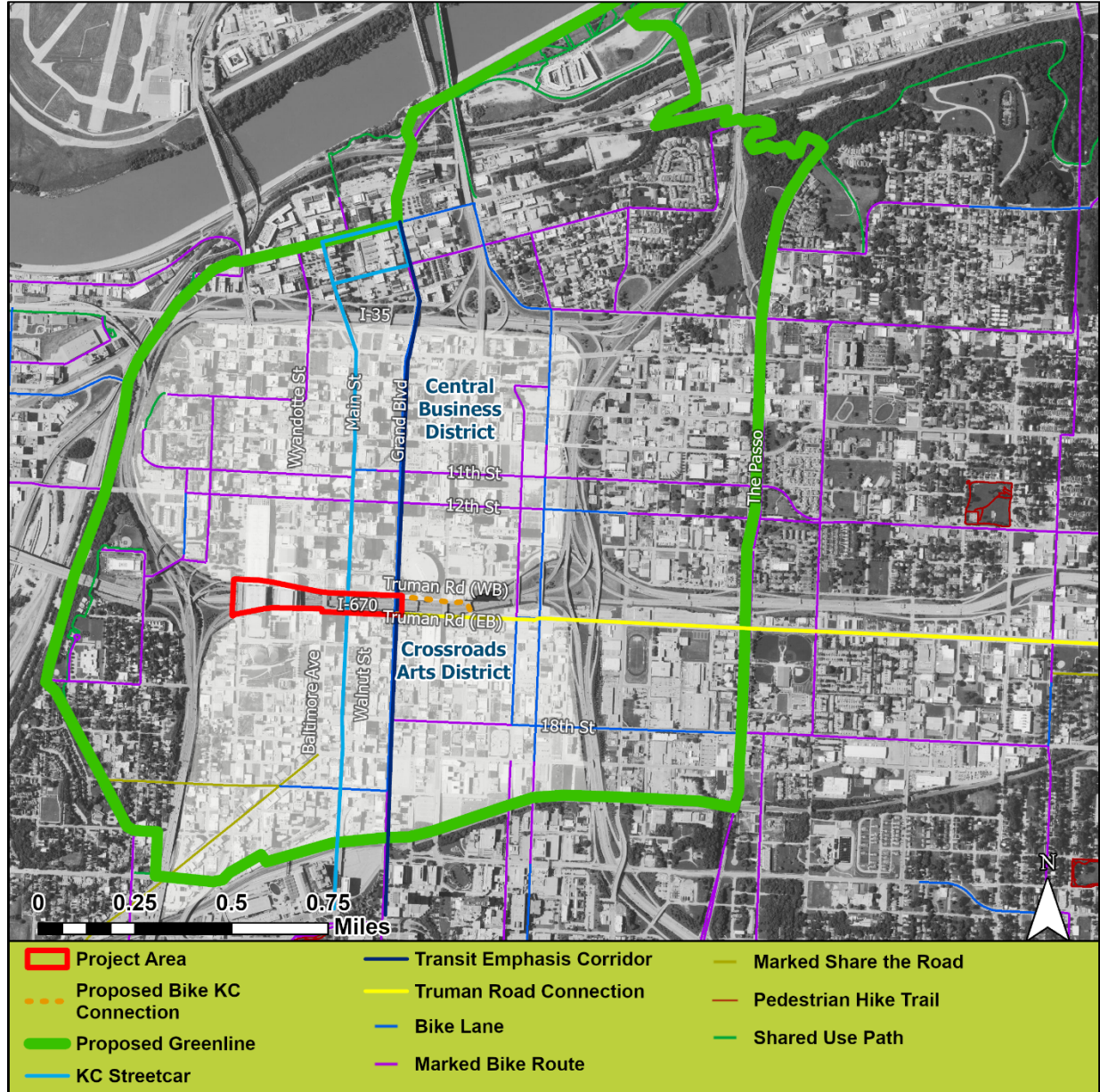


Figure 1-4: Transportation Surrounding the South Loop

Source: Bike KC, KCMO, ESRI



Figure 1-5: I-670 Corridor in the South Loop Project Area: Figure 1-5 shows an overhead view of the below-grade section of the I-670 corridor that runs through the South Loop project study area, dividing the CBD and the Crossroads Arts District. This view is from Grand Boulevard looking west.

1.4 Logical Termini and Independent Utility

Logical termini for transportation projects are the rational end points for a transportation improvement and serve as general geographical boundaries for a review of any environmental impacts triggered by the study. Based on these criteria, the logical termini for the South Loop Project EA are:

- East Terminus: 50-feet east of the Grand Boulevard intersections with Truman Road eastbound and westbound.
- West Terminus: 50-feet west of the Broadway Boulevard intersections with Truman Road eastbound and westbound.

The east terminus relates to the T-Mobile Center multi-use arena and adjacent Power and Light District, which is the current eastern-most activity center in the project study area. The local transportation system (Oak Street and further east) changes in character to serve the government building district to the north and light industrial uses to the south. The west terminus is directly west of Bartle Hall Convention Center and Ballroom, which limits further potential development above I-670 for the South Loop Project.

The South Loop Project has independent utility. It will function on its own, without further construction of adjoining segments. Traffic analyses will be completed to determine potential

traffic impacts to the surrounding system, including I-670 and adjacent arterials that connect to the project study area. Transportation improvements within the project study area, such as improvement or replacement of bridges, have recently been completed or identified for future improvements. This allows the construction of projects with independent utility that improve the overall system, but whose construction does not restrict, or otherwise alter, planning and construction of adjacent projects. However, certain proposed project elements may constrain future improvements on I-670. Those elements include:

- The proposed construction of a structural deck over I-670 may limit the ability to expand the number of lanes on I-670 as well as reconfigure existing ramps and lane configurations.
- The property created above I-670 will function as a park or recreational facility and will qualify for Section 4(f) protections as noted in Section 3.5 of this report; therefore, further improvements to I-670 below the property may be restricted or encounter complicating factors in order to avoid impacting the property. As a result, MoDOT and KCMO will enter into an air rights agreement that allows KCMO to occupy the space above I-670 for 99 years, with an option to renew for another 99-year term. This agreement shall satisfy the requirements of 23 CFR 774.11(i) by reserving the property for future transportation use and establishing the park as a temporary use.
- Project elements specifically associated with tunnels, which are critical to continued efficient operation of I-670 and the adjacent freeway system, may constrain future improvements to I-670. These elements may include lighting, signing/wayfinding, fire protection, ventilation, and other required safety elements.

The South Loop Project does not restrict consideration of other foreseeable transportation improvements beyond those previously identified on I-670 in this Purpose and Need section. This project, as well as other transportation solutions, are evaluated in coordination with existing statewide improvement and long-range transportation plans to minimize conflicts with goals and improvements detailed in those plans. The proposed project, in TIP #611200, is estimated to cost approximately \$217.2 million dollars, with a mix of local, state, federal, and private funding sources. Federal sources are expected to constitute approximately \$103.6 million dollars while non-federal are expected to constitute approximately \$113.6 million dollars. While long-term maintenance costs have not been developed, private sector Project Partners are working to establish a 501(3)(c) non-profit organization to manage the maintenance and programming for the proposed project. The project delivery method will be Construction Manager/General Contractor (CM/GC). This project delivery method allows a construction manager to be engaged during the design process to provide constructability input.