

A Snapshot of the Amstutz Expressway

April 18, 2025

Waukegan, Illinois

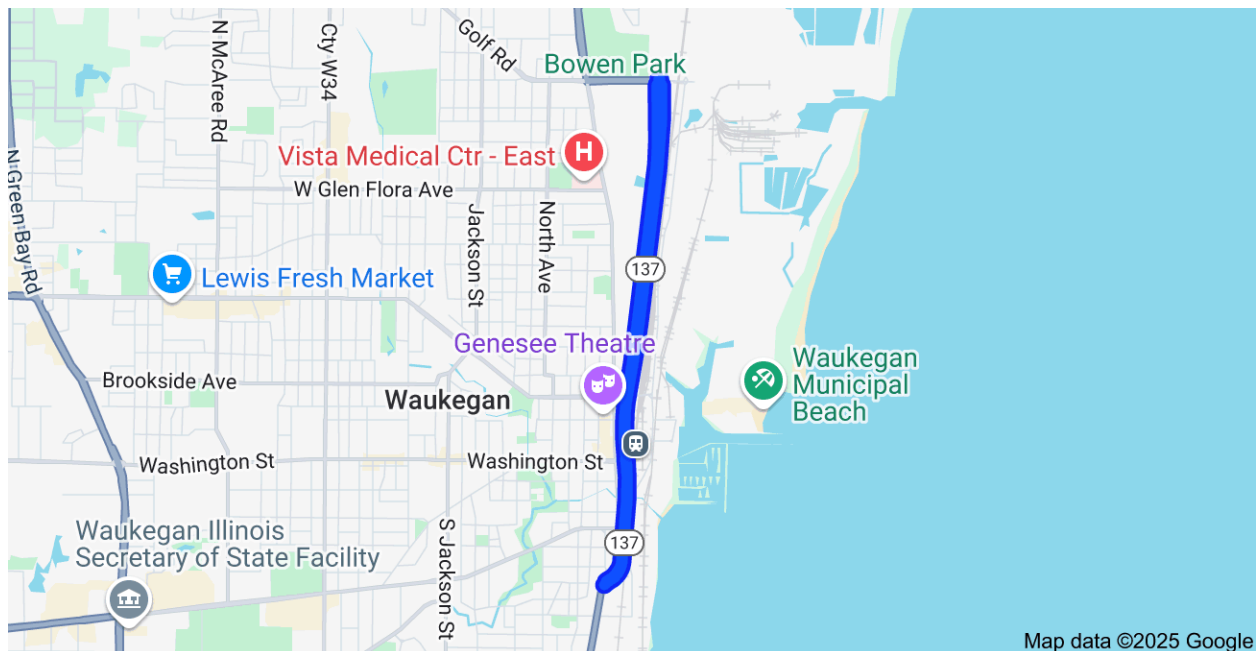


Prepared by the Shared-Use Mobility Center as part of the US Department of Transportation's Thriving Communities Program, a technical assistance program that aims to ensure that communities have the technical tools and organizational capacity to compete for federal funding and deliver quality infrastructure projects that enable their communities and neighborhoods to thrive.

Overview

The Amstutz Expressway is a 2.9 mile north-south freeway that bisects the eastern side of the city of Waukegan. The four-lane freeway runs along the coast of Lake Michigan and was originally constructed to connect industrial areas located on its lakefront to I-94 and Kenosha through planned extensions. However, the extensions never materialized and the expressway instead now acts as a barrier between downtown Waukegan, its lakefront, and several surrounding neighborhoods, many of which have been historically marginalized and underserved. The Amstutz expressway also lacks bicycle and pedestrian facilities and does not connect with other major highways at its northern or southern ends.

Since the early 2000s, the City of Waukegan has developed various plans detailing a vision that reimagines sections of the Amstutz Expressway to transform the roadway into a connected and safe corridor. These efforts center around the goals of promoting mobility, improving neighborhood connectivity, enhancing job access, and fostering community development. Waukegan has pursued various federal, state, and regional grant opportunities (including the US Department of Transportation's Reconnecting Communities and Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development grants), but has had little success moving this project forward.



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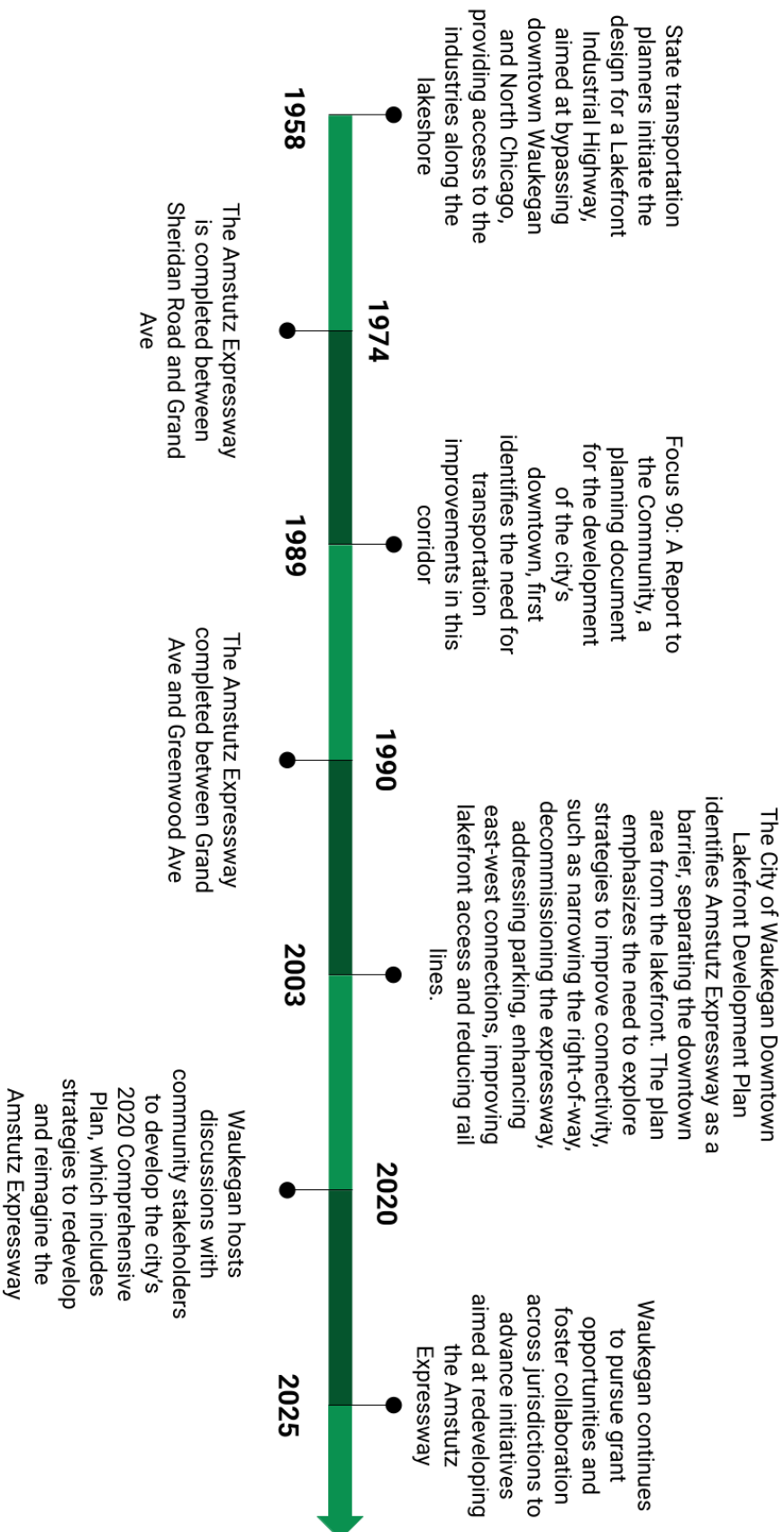
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History of Plans and Recommendations for the Amstutz Expressway

- **1989 - Focus 90: A Report to the Community:** This analysis recognized the isolating nature of the Amstutz, and explored the possibility of constructing a mixed-use development over the expressway with parking for Metra commuters, community spaces, businesses, and potential future lakefront projects.
- **2000 - Waukegan Intermodal Transit Facility Study:** With goals to reinforce a pedestrian link from downtown to the lakefront, and enhance transit connectivity, the study recommended converting the Amstutz Expressway into a green boulevard with reduced traffic speeds and pedestrian walkways.
- **2002 - Urban Land Institute's Strategy for Redeveloping the Lakefront:** Recommendations included closing the Amstutz Expressway and realigning the railroad tracks along the corridor to create better connections between downtown and the harbor.
- **2003 - Waukegan's Lakefront Downtown Master Plan:** Plans to consolidate infrastructure, increase development area, and reduce barriers included narrowing the Amstutz and decommissioning it as an expressway, as well as creating a decked park over the road with a new Waukegan town square.
- **2020 - Waukegan's Comprehensive Land Use Plan:** This planning document suggests reorganizing Waukegan's transportation infrastructure, particularly working with IDOT to remove the Amstutz Expressway south of Grand Avenue and shifting Amstutz Traffic to Sheridan Road to re-energize downtown Waukegan.

Current Conditions

- Traffic
 - Annual Average Daily Traffic: 5,750
 - Lower than Sheridan Road (8,250), Washington Street (17,100), and portions of McAree Road (6,450)
- Safety (data from 2023)
 - Number of crashes: 45 on the Waukegan portion of the corridor
 - 37 in clear weather conditions (32 of which in daylight)
 - 7 involved serious injuries, including one to a pedestrian
 - 7 were at "mile 0.270000" of the Amstutz and involved a stop sign
- Transportation Access
 - Percent of Waukegan Residents without access to a vehicle: 9.1%
 - Percent of North Chicago Residents without access to a vehicle: 9.2%
 - Percent of Lake County Residents without access to a vehicle: 4.6%
 - The Environmental Protection Agency's EJScreen tool shows areas along the Amstutz Expressway corridor reach the 65th percentile in Transportation Access Burden

- Rail
 - Union Pacific North (UP-N) Line is the 3rd highest utilized Metra commuter rail line with 383,000 trips taken in November of 2024
 - UP-N has seen the highest level of post pandemic ridership recovery. November 2024 saw 79% of weekday ridership and 115% of weekend ridership compared to November 2019
 - In 2018, the Waukegan Metra station had an average of 764 weekday boardings

Major Challenges

- Right of Way (ROW)
 - The Amstutz is surrounded by IDOT-owned ROW. The extended ROW is identified as a barrier in Waukegan's plans, and narrowing the ROW is a major goal of the city which will require significant collaboration and coordination with IDOT in order to explore possible redevelopment plans.
- Rail
 - Waukegan's 2003 Lakefront Redevelopment plan details plans to reduce the number of rail lines, move Metra lines to the west and/or reconfigure commuter and freight rail lines and yards to strengthen downtown assets

Images



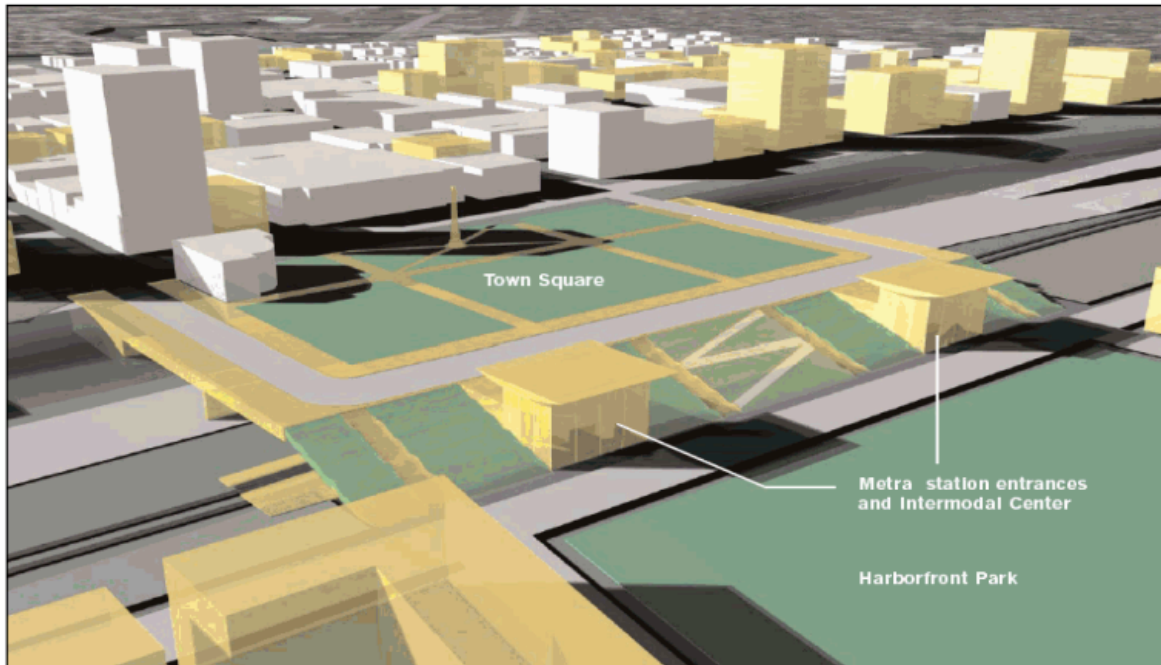
Aerial view of Waukegan's downtown, harbor, and lakefront from the 2003 Lakefront Downtown Master Plan, the city's guiding plan for the design and development of Waukegan's downtown and lakefront. While the Amstutz was included in these drawings, its removal or reconfiguration was discussed in the plan. Mixed-use, transit-oriented developments, improved public transit facilities, and a capped park from downtown, over the Corridor, and to the lakefront is included in the plan. Better connections to these existing and planned neighborhoods is necessary for them to come to fruition. Credit: City of Waukegan



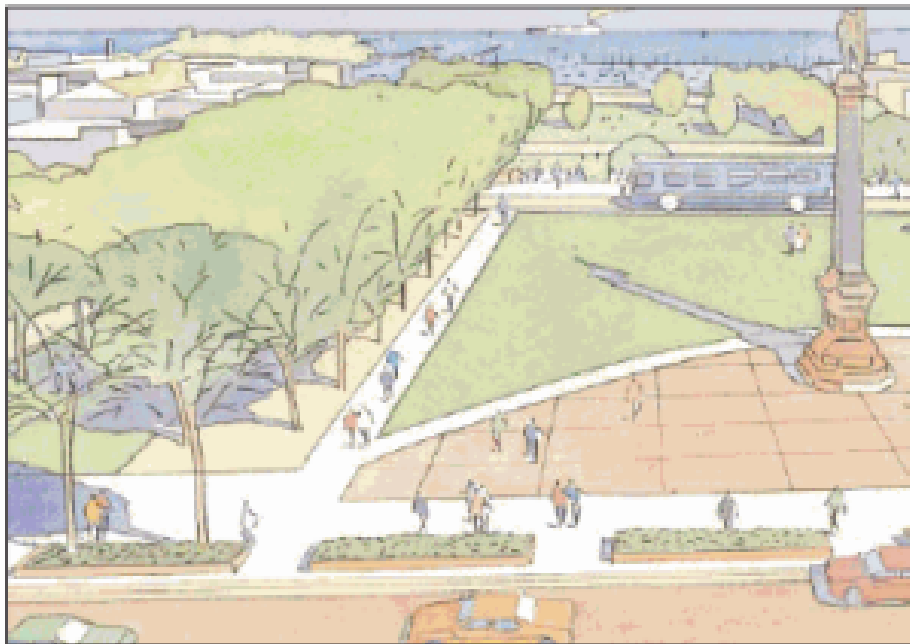
A view of downtown Waukegan from the Amstutz Expressway, looking southeast. The highway design of the roadway limits both access and visibility to downtown Waukegan from the road. The Waukegan Metra Station and Waukegan Harbor and Marina, both located out of frame to the left of the photo, are cut off from downtown Waukegan by the expressway, making access difficult. Credit: City of Waukegan



A view of the Amstutz Expressway from Washington Street, looking North (the Metra commuter rail station is behind the ramp on the right side of the photo). The unusually low amount of traffic on the Amstutz means there is sometimes a minute or more between cars passing. The road often feels abandoned due to its lack of connections and use. This photo was taken at 5:00pm on a weekday. Credit: City of Waukegan



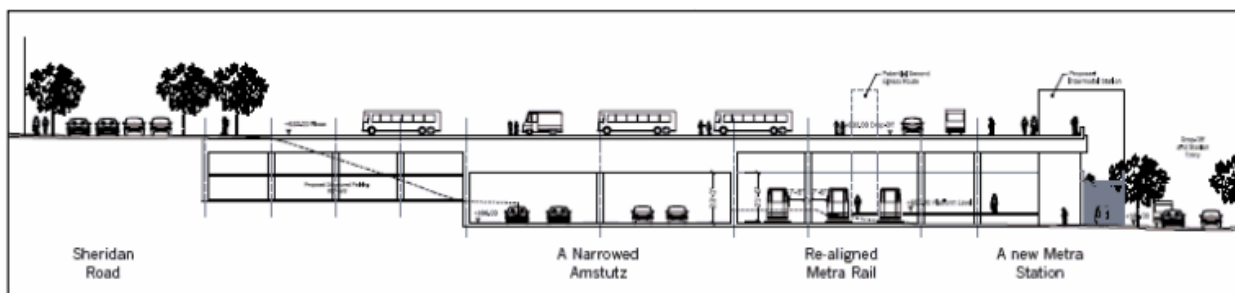
Rendering of the planned capped park over a narrowed or removed Amstutz Expressway, railroad tracks, and Metra commuter rail station. The feasibility of this pedestrian connection and other possible pedestrian bridges over the corridor will be investigated in this project. A narrowed or removed Amstutz Expressway makes the capped park more practical. Credit: City of Waukegan



Rendering of the capped park and bus transit hub extending over the narrowed or removed Amstutz Expressway, railroad tracks, and Metra commuter rail station to the lakefront. This welcoming and easy-to-traverse access to lakefront amenities and downtown will be a critical connection to transit, downtown jobs and businesses, and neighborhoods along the lakefront. Credit: City of Waukegan



Aerial map view of the planned capped park over a narrowed or removed Amstutz Expressway, railroad tracks, and Metra commuter rail station with 5-minute walk radius overlay. Walk times will be shortened by removing the circuitous and hazardous conditions that are presently existent, as well as creating a welcoming environment and removing hazards that will make walking trips more comfortable and convenient. Credit: City of Waukegan



A cross-section through the capped park, Amstutz Expressway, and Metra commuter rail station. This concept includes the possibility of a narrowed or redesigned Amstutz Expressway. The results of the feasibility study will inform the Cities of the best path forward and what to include. Credit: City of Waukegan