

DEMOGRAPHIA



CINCINNATI: NEEDLESS MYOPIA

FAST FACTS		Similar To
Metropolitan (Labor Market) Population	1,980,000	Portland, Stockholm, Goiania, Brisbane
Urbanized Area* Population	1,500,000	
Urbanized Land Area: Square Miles	672	Melbourne, Sao Paulo, Montreal
Urbanized Land Area: Square Kilometers	1,740	
Population per Square Mile	2,200	Boston, Edmonton, Brisbane
Population per Square Kilometer	900	
2 nd largest urbanized area in Ohio		
Urbanized Area Atlas: Rand McNally: Purchase at petrol stations & bookstores.		
*Continuously built up area		

20 November 2003

Cincinnati was the first major city inside the Northwest Territories that were to become Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin. Outside the original 13 states, only New Orleans was larger during the early and middle 19th century. By 1820, Cincinnati had passed the westernmost major city in the original states, Pittsburgh. By 1840, Cincinnati had become the sixth largest city in the nation, following only New York, Baltimore, New Orleans, Philadelphia and Boston. In the 1870 census, Cincinnati was passed by two other Midwestern cities, St. Louis and Chicago. Eventually even tortoise paced Pittsburgh passed Cincinnati, both in city and metropolitan population. But the rankings could well change again.

New Orleans was of French origin, having been inherited as a result of the Louisiana Purchase. Cincinnati, on the other hand, was the product of American expansion, sharing the ethnic heritage of the original 13 states. As a result, Cincinnati is a veritable treasure trove of middle and late 19th century architecture. Surely Cincinnati has more from this era than any city not on the eastern seaboard. This can perhaps best be seen just north of the downtown area (central business district), in the “Over-the-Rhine” neighborhood. Here will be found marvelous, but decrepit, architecture that may be the nation’s most important historical district awaiting gentrification.

Today, however, Over-the-Rhine is the poorest neighborhood in the Cincinnati area. Home to a largely African-American population, this district has been rocked in recent years by civil disorders comparatively unique to Cincinnati and reminiscent of the late 1960s. The “Over-the-Rhine” name comes from a canal, long gone, that used to occupy the alignment of Central Parkway, itself home to late 19th Century commercial masterpieces.

The downtown area is compact and dense and may be one of the most attractive such districts in the nation. Unlike other downtowns (such as Columbus, Cleveland, Indianapolis and

Minneapolis), the older buildings from before World War II still dominate. The tall, inspirationless international-style boxes are not to be found here, except in a supporting rather than leading role. The tallest building, Carew Tower, has the profile that would be expected from an early 1930s building, tapering off toward the top, not unlike towers of similar vintage in New York's Manhattan.

The city's early development was the result of its location on the Ohio River, which flows into the Mississippi River 400 miles further west and south. Downtown is on the north shore of the river, while Covington and Newport, in Kentucky, are on the south shore. A suspension bridge crosses the river, designed by John Roebling, who also designed the Brooklyn Bridge. This bridge, however, was in place 17 years earlier (1866). The Kentucky side of the river is also blessed with considerable historic architecture. One of the best city entries in the country is from the south on Interstate 75. Traveling north from Lexington, the highway starts downhill toward the river a few miles south of downtown. As a bend is rounded, a spectacular view of downtown Cincinnati is revealed with a more unobstructed vista than obtained on the similar western approaches to downtown Pittsburgh or downtown Portland.

Cincinnati is surrounded by an 84-mile ring road (Interstate 275) that is often well beyond the limits of urbanization. Nonetheless, the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Planning Commission (the metropolitan area also stretches into southeastern Indiana) projects virtually all future employment and population growth to be outside this ring. This is particularly obvious in the northern suburbs. Substantial commercial development is taking place along Interstate 71, north of the ring and toward the state capital, Columbus (the "Phoenix" of the Midwest). Somewhat less development is occurring along Interstate 75, toward Dayton, itself a metropolitan area of 1,000,000 residents whose suburban counties meet the suburban counties of Cincinnati (Outside the 6 New England states <Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont>. U.S. metropolitan areas are composed of complete counties).

Interstate 75 is currently undergoing expansion to eight lanes north of the I-275 ring. In the continual pursuit of federal largesse, local officials hope to eventually build a light rail line along this corridor. Of course, the principal justification is to relieve future congestion in this right of way that has more potential for expansion than perhaps any other in the world. This particular circus train is justified by locals who point out that nearer the core of the city it is far too expensive to expand the freeway. But, of course, they have never produced the cost per person mile data that would demonstrate light rail to be more cost effective than highway expansion (for good reason, there is none). Neither have projections been produced to indicate that the proposed light rail line would actually perform the function of a single freeway lane (also for good reason, the computer programs cannot be sufficiently tortured in the light of day). Fortunately, with most employment and residential growth expected outside the I-275 ring, there should be little need to expand I-75 inside the ring.

Few American urban areas have better transport infrastructure and fewer still have as much potential for expansion. And few urban areas of 1.5 million have so many miles of 8-lane freeway. Except for part of the Ronald Reagan Cross County Highway and portions of the I-275 ring, virtually all freeway that is not eight lanes is six lanes. Moreover, most freeway alignments have room for at least one more lane in each direction, and some even more. The Ohio Department of Transportation has much to be proud of in what it has built here. But all of this potential will be of little use if the current "hand-wringing" regional leadership by those not suffering from such myopia.

The 2002 light rail election illustrates the desperateness of the situation. Voters were asked to approve a light rail system that, after built, would leave public transport with a market share less than present. The problem, of course, is that future automobile and truck traffic growth here, like in Paris, Perth, Portland and Phoenix, will far more than swamp the growth in public transport ridership. Here, even worse than so many other places, anti-automobile ideologues masquerading as planners and policy makers spend most of their effort addressing the needs of the one percent to the exclusion of the 99 percent. Voters rejected the plan by a near-record 69 to 31 margin.

Through 2030, regional plans call for spending 57 percent of available funding on public transport and 43 percent on roadways (Public transport has a market share of one percent, while roadways have 99). The same planners (presumably with a straight face) project this more than 100 to one per person mile ratio of public transport skewed spending to produce a *smaller* public transport market share in 2030 than today. At the same time, local transport planners project work trip travel times to increase from the present 24 minutes one-way to 59 minutes in 2030. That's more than Tokyo. That's leadership?

Cincinnati has one of the nation's most attractive physical settings. Here also is an urban area that has begun to grow again, having emerged as one of the fastest growing urban areas in the "flyover" country of the Midwest, itself also experiencing increased growth.

Cincinnati is at a public policy crossroads. Will Cincinnati be derailed on the railroad siding of yesterday? Or will Cincinnati muster the courage to become the tomorrow for which it is so well positioned? That is the real question.

Cincinnati Style Chili

There is an important food footnote. Regional foods have disappeared from most areas of the United States as regional cultures have been replaced by what might be called the "great American culture." But regional fare has survived in Cincinnati, the city of "chili." A number of restaurant chains feature "Cincinnati-style" chili, such as "Gold Star" and "Skyline." These chains have "secret" recipes, which apparently includes chocolate, allspice, cumin and cinnamon. Chili can be had many ways, including up to "5-Way," which includes spaghetti, beans, beef, onions and cheese. Cincinnati style chili can be found in Indianapolis, Columbus, and Louisville, but little beyond.

A ready market awaits in St. Louis.



Downtown, Across Ohio River from Covington, Kentucky
Roebling Bridge (1866)



Carew Tower and PNB Building: Downtown (Right)



Central Parkway, Downtown



Over-the-Rhine



Over-the-Rhine



Residential District: Covington



Interstate 275 Ring, East Side



Suburban Commercial Development: I-71 North of I-275 Ring



Suburban Office and Residential Development: I-75 North of I-275 Ring



I-75 North of I-275 Ring: World's Widest Freeway Corridor?



Skyline Chili, Downtown

By Wendell Cox

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