

St. Louis: From Carthage to Rising Phoenix

BASIC INFORMATION ¹		World Rank	Similar to
Urban Area Population: 2000	2,078,000	146	Sapporo, Vienna, Tampa-St. Petersburg
Urban Land Area: Square Miles: 2005	830	32	San Juan, Sydney, Tampa-St. Petersburg
Urban Land Area: Square Kilometers: 2005	2,150		
Population per Square Mile	2,500	670	Tampa-St. Petersburg, Quebec, San Juan
Population per Square Kilometer	1,000		
Urban Area Projection: 2007 ²	2,170,000	156	---
Urban Area Projection: 2020	2,350,000	176	---
Consolidated (Metropolitan) Area Population: 2006	2,860,000	---	San Diego, Lisbon, Sapporo

UPDATE

St. Louis: Rising Like a Phoenix

27 April 2007

This is an updated Rental Car Tour. The purpose is to describe the substantial redevelopment that has occurred in the core of St. Louis in just a few years. Few, if any cities (municipalities) in the world have faced the decline St. Louis has seen in the last 60 years. That was the perspective of the original Rental Car Tour, which is presented here without revision for comparison to the rapidly changing situation (starting on page 6). That article concluded with:

Large metropolitan areas are becoming less and less necessary. They stand a good chance of losing out to history, victim of their own misgovernment and more recent misguided land use policies. Whither St. Louis?

Whither St. Louis, indeed. The three years since publication of the 2004 edition have been among the best years the city (municipality or local authority area)³ of St. Louis has seen since before World War II. The transformation is stunning.

No, the city is not growing --- more than 100 percent of the population growth since 2000 has been in the suburbs. Domestic out-migration continues, with a loss of 52,000 between 2000 and 2006, while the rest of the metropolitan area gained 30,000. What has changed is the health, appearance and function of the core.

The Pervasiveness of Downtown Residential Redevelopment: Throughout the United States, Canada and elsewhere in the high-income world, there has been a reversal in core residential development in the last few years. Planners in Portland, Oregon, like to think that their “Pearl District” is unique as a core residential redevelopment. In a recent Portland presentation I asked the rhetorical question, in what US metropolitan

area is downtown residential redevelopment not occurring? My subsequent review is shown below (Table 1). Out of the nation's 54 metropolitan areas with more than 1,000,000 population, residential redevelopment is occurring downtown in 54 and not occurring in zero. In some downtown areas the activity is more intense than in others. However, Portland's Pearl District is by no means the most significant.

Table 1
Metropolitan Areas with New Downtown Residential Development (2007)

Rank	Metropolitan Area (CSA/MSA)	Activity	Rank	Metropolitan Area (CSA/MSA)	Activity	Rank	Metropolitan Area (CSA/MSA)	Activity
1	New York	YES	19	St. Louis	YES	37	Greensboro-Winston Salem	YES
2	Los Angeles	YES	20	Tampa-St. Petersburg	YES	38	Austin	YES
3	Chicago	YES	21	Pittsburgh	YES	39	Louisville	YES
4	Washington-Baltimore	YES	22	Sacramento	YES	40	Grand Rapids	YES
5	Boston	YES	23	Charlotte	YES	41	Hartford	YES
6	San Francisco-San Jose	YES	24	Cincinnati	YES	42	Jacksonville	YES
7	Philadelphia	YES	25	Portland	YES	43	Memphis	YES
8	Dallas-Fort Worth	YES	26	Orlando	YES	44	Oklahoma City	YES
9	Houston	YES	27	Kansas City	YES	45	Buffalo	YES
10	Atlanta	YES	28	Indianapolis	YES	46	Greenville-Spartanburg	YES
11	Miami-Fort Lauderdale	YES	29	Columbus	YES	47	Richmond,	YES
12	Detroit	YES	30	San Antonio	YES	48	Birmingham	YES
13	Phoenix	YES	31	Las Vegas	YES	49	Albany	YES
14	Seattle-Tacoma	YES	32	Milwaukee	YES	50	Rochester	YES
15	Minneapolis-St. Paul	YES	33	Virginia Beach-Norfolk	YES	51	Dayton	YES
16	San Diego	YES	34	Salt Lake City	YES	52	New Orleans	YES
17	Denver	YES	35	Raleigh-Durham	YES	53	Fresno	YES
18	Cleveland	YES	36	Nashville	YES	54	Knoxville	YES

Residential Redevelopment in Central St. Louis: Few core cores of urban areas would have seemed to be less viable candidates for redevelopment than St. Louis. Downtown, along with parts of the Central West End and Midtown had been abandoned by businesses and residents. Many buildings had been torn down, commercial high-rises, residential high rises and single-family houses. Those that remained were largely empty.

Yet, there are few places in the United States where residential redevelopment has been more intense than St. Louis (Plates 18-58 & 60-70).⁴ To call it the St. Louis “Pearl District” would be to understate the accomplishments. It starts in the old downtown area, with some buildings taller than were ever built in Portland before 1960. Old office buildings of 20 stories and more have been or are being converted into condominiums and apartments. Retail stores of the variety that households would use while at home have been opened. It appears that just about all of the empty buildings have been or are in some stage of redevelopment.

This is no concentrated, small area like the Pearl District. This is big city development that can only occur in a big city, or at least one that was big decades ago. That is a condition met by St. Louis, but not by Portland. In 1950, St. Louis was one of the nation's largest cities, ranking 8th in size. The city was very dense, with more approximately 14,000 persons per square mile (6,000 per square kilometer). If it had been maintained, that density would place it behind only New York and San Francisco among the nation's largest cities today.

While 1950 was the population peak, the city had been even more important earlier. In the 1900 and 1910 censuses, St. Louis was the fourth largest city in the nation, following New York, Chicago and Philadelphia. As a large city, its core was extensive. Not only was there the substantial downtown, but there was also a commercial strip westward to Midtown (2.5 miles or four kilometers), which is the location of St. Louis University. Midtown had both high rise residential and office buildings. The strip continued, with less sparse

commercial development to the Central West End (another two miles or 3.2 kilometers), with one of the nation's most remarkable churches, the Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis at the eastern entrance (Plate 17). By 2005, St. Louis had fallen to 52nd in the nation.

In the ensuing years, the corridor has been abandoned, disused and generally fallen into disrepair. Some pockets have been preserved, such as the Cathedral neighborhood, and the hospital district just south of the Forest Park Parkway (Barnes-Jewish, and Children's Hospitals). But now, development is occurring at many points along this corridor, seemingly wherever there is a historic multi-story building available for use. It is a generally narrow corridor, one to three blocks wide, but is much wider in the downtown area.

One of the focal points of the redevelopment is the corner of Lindell and Grand, in Mid Town. The St. Francis Xavier Church of St. Louis University occupies the southwestern corner (Plate 85), with much of the university behind. Through all of the years of decline, the university has managed to remain vibrant (not unlike the University of Chicago or the University of Southern California, both also in neighborhoods that have had difficult times). Opposite the church, a block away, is the Continental Building (Plate 84), which has been vacant for decades. This 22-story tower has now been redeveloped into condominiums. There are other candidates for renovation to the north of the Continental Building on Grand Avenue (Plate 83).

There are a number of residential towers along and near Lindell Boulevard between Mid Town and the Central West End that managed to survive, while just a few blocks away the city was being dismantled (Plates 80 and 81). There are also many stately houses from the turn of the 20th century, many in the private streets for which St. Louis is famous.

The main thoroughfare of the resurrecting corridor is Washington Avenue, which is the former home of the International Shoe Company. Washington Avenue was so crime-ridden a decade ago that the few remaining businesses near downtown routinely locked their doors *during the daytime*. No longer. Washington Avenue is now home to chic restaurants and cafes that would be the envy of any redevelopment.

The density of the new development is directly related to the density of high rise buildings available for redevelopment. The long largely unbroken canyon formed by Washington Avenue high-rises is nearly fully under redevelopment from 18th Street to the Convention Center, a distance of 0.8 miles (1.3 kilometers).

Unlike the Pearl District and Chicago, there are not many new buildings yet in the revitalized St. Louis. There is a more than 20 story condominium building in the Central West End, with at least four floors of parking. As in Portland and Chicago, parking will be found obviously close to new development or hidden behind multistory windowless facades. There is not yet, however, much of a market for new buildings. Unlike Chicago there are still a good number of pre-World War II buildings to be redeveloped. This is also unlike Portland, where there were few significant pre-World War II buildings to begin with (in the Pearl or elsewhere). It is also different from Toronto, where most of the construction has been new. In 1950, Toronto was smaller than St. Louis and thus had a smaller stock of older large buildings. Further, Toronto became the economic dynamo of Canada, especially as the politics of language drove the relative decline of Montreal as the nation's leading urban area. Finally, Toronto's stock of old buildings never emptied out, as Canadian cities were fortunate to miss the social and economic upheavals that afflicted American central cities, especially in the Midwest and Northeast.

There is more to come. The St. Louis Cardinals are committed to developing a central city community called "Ball Park Village." Baseball is quite a phenomenon in St. Louis. Only the New York Yankees have won more World Series titles (the World Series is named after the *New York World*, a now defunct newspaper that sponsored the event in its early years). With the help of taxpayers, as in so many US urban areas, they have constructed a new baseball park, which will be the focal point of the new development. They celebrated their first year in the new downtown stadium by winning the World Series again.

Planning Failures: As in other cities, the progress in St. Louis comes after multiple failed attempts. One of the grandest urban planning failures was the “St. Louis Centre,” a multi-story enclosed shopping stretching between the Famous-Barr department store (now like Marshall-Field, Meier & Frank and others, a Macy’s) and the Dillard’s Department Store (Plates 59 & 75-77). Eventually the Dillard’s closed and its building appears to be a candidate for redevelopment. The customers never came to the new center, which stretched ponderously over at least two downtown streets, producing a streetscape as pleasing as beneath a Chicago rail overpass. The businesses finally left St. Louis Centre as well. One of the more recent project announcements involves St. Louis Centre, which will be converted to residences.

Stable, not Growing Cities: The huge new development has not driven the population up. From 2004 to 2006, the US Bureau of the Census indicates an increase of little more than 1,000 people. Over the same period, the metropolitan area has gained 30,000.

The metropolitan area population trend indicates that the core population gains are being more than offset by losses in the rest of the city. This parallels the Chicago experience, where the city’s population is dropping, despite the huge expansion of residential development in the core. Similarly, in Toronto, which besides Chicago and New York probably has the largest volume of new development in North America, the central city has gained few new residents. The 2006 Census indicates that 95 percent of the Toronto area population growth was in the suburbs. Data is not yet available to determine whether the former core city of Toronto, gained or lost. The city of Portland, like Chicago and Toronto, has captured little of its metropolitan area growth, despite the Pearl District. All of this indicates that returning central cities will be different than they were in their heyday, but better than they were in the interim.

The intractable problem in American cities remains the dreadfully inept education systems, which are an inducement for people to move out of the city when the children are old enough to go to school, or to never move into the city to begin with.

As was noted in the original article, former New York Mayor Rudi Giuliani and those who have followed him administering American cities have agreed upon the necessity for controlling crime. The lack of order is one of the reasons that the American central city renaissance, now in full bloom, took so long to begin in earnest.

Driven by the Market: Not surprisingly, tax incentives are playing a parting the new development. But, still, this is progress. No amount of tax incentives would have spurred development in the environment of the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s or 1990s, because the market for central city housing simply was not there.

St. Louis has nothing like Metro, the Portland land use command center. Nor is there a city agency dressed up like Santa Claus (The Portland Development Commission). Yet things are happening here and with significance beyond belief.

Moreover, the subsidies are small compared to the amounts that have been expended in Portland’s Pearl District, from city bonded indebtedness expected to rise to \$225 million, 10 year property tax abatements and impact fee forgiveness, which the Portland Development Commission calls “gift certificates” for developers on its website.⁵ The St. Louis redevelopment, like most of the others around the county, represents a fortunate convergence of public policy and the market.

Further, no one should offer a juvenile assessment to the effect that the St. Louis redevelopment has anything to do with light rail. St. Louis, as noted below, is home to one of the least unsuccessful new light rail lines in the nation. Few of the new residences are remotely within walking distance of the line. Nearly all of the new development on Washington Avenue, in the Central West End and Midtown is beyond walking distance. For light rail cheerleaders to connect this development to the rail line would require its removal to a new route on Washington Avenue (in cheerleading, cause does not have to precede effect).

Elsewhere Downtown: Downtown has other interesting architecture. There is the city hall, which locals claim is copied from the Hotel de Ville in Paris. When a colleague visited from the Conservatoire National des Arts et Metiers in Paris, he scoffed at the comparison. He was right. There are a few lines and designs, but the Hotel de Ville is the light color typical of Paris buildings. The St. Louis city hall is dark and that difference erases the visual impact of any similarities. Nonetheless, it is a striking structure. A central tower was blown down by a tornado in the 1930s and never replaced (perhaps setting up the tradition of not fixing things that have failed, as noted in the original article). Plates 13 to 16 and 78 illustrate some of downtown’s features other than the redevelopment.

Housing Affordability: Another advantage of not having command and control land use like Portland or San Diego is that housing affordability has been maintained. As late as a decade ago, there were no markets in the United States with seriously unaffordable housing prices relative to incomes. That has changed radically as excessive land use regulation, often called “smart growth” has rationed land for developed and driven the price of housing “through the roof.” St. Louis and other metropolitan areas that have resisted the temptation to turn themselves into social engineering experiments have benefited from continued housing affordability. Based upon 2006 data (Table 2),

- The cost of buying and financing the median priced house in the Portland area, over a 30-year mortgage loan, was \$300,000 more than in the St. Louis area, the equivalent of 5.5 years of median household income.
- The cost of buying and financing the median priced house in the San Diego area, over a 30-year mortgage loan, was \$1,028,000 more than in St. Louis, the equivalent of 18 years of median household income.

St. Louis Savings	Relative to Portland	Relative to San Diego
Annual Mortgage Payments	\$10,000	\$34,300
30-Year Mortgage Payments	\$300,000	\$1,028,000
Years of Median Household Income	5.3	18.0

With differentials such as these, it is no wonder that a “sea-change” in migration patterns is underway over the last decade, during which these disparities have developed. US Census estimates indicate that 3.97 million people have migrated from the most unaffordable housing markets to more affordable markets in just six years (2000-2006).⁶ For example, San Diego, which had been among the fastest growing US metropolitan areas over the past 60 years, experienced a net out-migration more than twice that of Pittsburgh, which has been the most depressed large metropolitan area over the same period of time. If the population most recent annual population change rate should continue, metropolitan St. Louis will pass San Diego within five years (see *Rust Belt San Diego*).⁷ The same census estimates show unprecedented in-migration to more affordable Midwestern and inland Eastern metropolitan areas that had experienced decades of out-migration.⁸

Signs of Life on the North Side: Devastation reigns just to the north of the western part of the corridor. The northern section of the city of St. Louis, as indicated in the earlier report, is one of the most devastated urban landscapes in the world. There are empty blocks (formerly full of houses) and blocks where half or more of the lots no longer contain houses. There are, however, signs of life. Just to the north of the Central West End there are now suburban style houses and town houses that have been erected on the wide swaths of vacant land that were the result of the city’s decline. This transformation can be seen in Plates 71 to 74. The first plate (#71) shows a section of Olive Avenue in the state it has been in for decades. The latter three

plates show the new suburban style housing that is being developed. There are additional patches of new suburban style development, mixed in among empty buildings and vacant lots in other parts of north St. Louis (Plates 86-88). Perhaps the best possible future for the city of St. Louis would be the ongoing rebuilding and densification of the corridor between downtown and the Central West End, and suburbanization of the north.

Rising like a Phoenix: Perhaps what makes the St. Louis redevelopment so impressive is that it was so unlikely. There is more redevelopment in New York, Chicago and Toronto. Many other city have successful redevelopment areas, such as the downtown Kansas City area, itself a competitor in significance with Portland's Pearl District, Seattle, Denver, Cleveland, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Dallas, Houston, Austin, Atlanta, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Indianapolis, Louisville, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Nashville, Philadelphia, Boston, Washington, Baltimore, Milwaukee's (with its impressive Ninth Ward) and others.

St. Louis has a story to be told. Planners have had little to do with it, because the element of central planning so crucial to smart growth (and Portland) has been absent. Thank the market, with a bit of help from government.

The rising Phoenix of downtown redevelopment may find its most eloquent expression in St. Louis.

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

St. Louis: From Carthage to the Future?

27 May 2004

Not since the Romans sacked Carthage has a major city has lost more of its population than St. Louis. The city of St. Louis peaked at 857,000 in 1950, but by 2002 was estimated to have fallen to 336,000 --- a loss of 61 percent. Though smaller East St. Louis, across the Mississippi in Illinois, has fallen 65 percent from 90,000 to 31,000 since 1960. At present, there appears to be only one other major world city that has lost more than 50 percent of its population --- Pittsburgh. And despite a resurgence of development in the St. Louis core, the losses continue. From 2000 to 2002, the city lost three percent of its population, an annual rate that would take it to under 300,000 before the 2010 census.

St. Louis has been losing for a long time. When Chicago captured most of the railroad business in the 1870s, St. Louis slipped from being the most important city west of the Alleghenies. It has been slipping ever since, having been upstaged by Detroit (is that possible?), Cleveland and Minneapolis-St. Paul, not to mention a number of western and southern urban areas.

But the St. Louis central city population loss, while record setting, is typical of what has happened to the core areas of world urban areas. For example, the core of Antwerp, within the city boundaries as they existed before a 1982 municipal consolidation, has lost 53 percent of its population since 1920. And dense sections in the cores of New York and Paris have lost more than 70 percent of their population since peaking. The pre-1932 city of Tokyo has lost more than 60 percent of its population since the 1920s. The phenomenon is not limited to the high-income world. The central wards of Mexico City have lost more than 40 percent of their population since 1960. Manila is dropping and so are some central wards in Mumbai, one of the world's poorest cities. Argentine officials were predicting a city of Buenos Aires population increase, expected to reverse a 16,000 resident loss since 1947. In fact the subsequent census showed a loss of nearly 200,000 people since 1990, more than 10 times the loss in the previous 40 years.

It seems puzzling, however, why St. Louis has lost so much of its former population. Ask where urban decay is at its worst and you will be told about Detroit, Liverpool, Glasgow, Cleveland or Newark. Each of these core cities has suffered substantial losses, but none has approached the 60 percent mark.

Driving around St. Louis, the urban blight is obvious, especially on the north side. Here are the abandoned gargantuan 19th century gothic churches --- Roman Catholic and Lutheran --- that would be the pride of virtually any middle sized new world community if they were not falling down. Where thousands once worshipped every weekend, and many daily, are boarded windows and the few that are exposed are broken. There are the vacant lots. Plenty of room for infill. But these are not building sites that have been passed over; they are rather plots that used to be occupied by large detached homes and row houses.

What happened here happened in many US central cities --- it could be called the South Bronx effect --- buildings were destroyed, perhaps by random arson, perhaps by acts of arson hired by building owners looking for insurance companies to restore the property values of rental units that had fallen into disrepair in neighborhoods where poverty level incomes drove market rates virtually to the floor.

The difference, however, is that only one-half of the South Bronx effect has occurred in St. Louis. In the South Bronx there has been a revival. For the most part, the areas that looked in 1980 like Berlin when Hitler died are today model neighborhoods of suburban single-family dwellings, modern row houses and moderately sized multi-unit buildings (much smaller than the old eight to twelve level buildings that used to occupy the area).

Not so in St. Louis. Berlin has not been rebuilt here, though there have been modest attempts to reclaim some areas, as urban pioneers have developed small plots of new suburbanization in the city. Perhaps the best perspective on the vast openness of north St. Louis is on an approach from the east by an American Airlines regional jet. There below will be seen empty blocks (the American term for a plot of land surrounded by streets), half empty blocks and few blocks without at least one disused lot.

Why is it that St. Louis has lost so much more of its population? Unlike Chicago, Detroit, Newark, Kansas City, Cleveland, Washington and Los Angeles, St. Louis never suffered from the urban disorders that resulted in burning down large sections of urbanization. Here, the destruction occurred little by little, and has amounted to a lot.

But much of the St. Louis population loss record is a statistical artifact. As was noted above, the cores of urban areas have generally lost population. Often this is masked by municipal consolidations (as in Antwerp, Indianapolis or Toronto), annexations (such as Houston or Kansas City) or the large swaths of "Greenfield" land on the awaiting development within the city limits (as in Munich, Nagoya or Rome, the latter of which is bleeding population nonetheless). It appears that the principal reason that St. Louis has lost more population than any other large city is that the city itself happened to incorporate more of the metropolitan area's blight than elsewhere. And, while there has been rampant misgovernment through the decades, it does not appear to have been any worse here than in other Midwestern or Eastern cities.

But like in Europe, to think of the city of St. Louis as St. Louis is to miss the point completely. The St. Louis urbanized area has been one of the slowest growing in the United States, yet has added 50 percent to its population since 1950. While the urbanized area has grown by 700,000 people, the suburbs have added 1.2 million. Even in the Carthage of municipal decline, most of suburban growth has come from the nation's smaller towns and rural areas.

A few years ago, the "live on top of one another" Sierra Club honored St. Louis as one of the urban areas most threatened by sprawl. They didn't explain how it was that their favored light rail transport system hadn't made St. Louis look like Taipei, much less Basle. But, in fact, over the last decade, the expansion in urban land area was at virtually the same rate as population growth. All of which brings us to the reality that

intellectually honesty and the smart growth goal of stopping sprawl can only be reconciled by policies that mimic the orphan producing population strategies of China.

Even the city has major sections that are still vibrant. The south side, for example, is generally composed of smaller, single family housing developed before World War II. There are neighborhoods here that are as strong as any in the newer suburbs. There are also narrow, one-way streets, with uninterrupted rows of parked cars, reminding one of Essen or Stuttgart. The difference is that in St. Louis, the cars are parked on the street, not on the sidewalk (or in British English, the “pavement”). So much for mixed use. There is also the Central West End, with its trendy cafes and nightlife --- one of the most attractive entertainment venues to be found in North America.

The main street of St. Louis is the Interstate 270 freeway that with Interstate 255 forms a ring road. The north-south section of Interstate 270 is probably the busiest roadway between Chicago and Denver. It is located seven to ten miles beyond the western boundary of the city, and along it will be the suburban churches that are doing better than the disused facilities in the city and commercial office developments, some qualifying as edge cities (large suburban commercial centers). The road itself is generally the Los Angeles standard 8 lanes, but expands to 10 in some places.

Extending west from Interstate 270, the Interstate 64-US 40 corridor looks like Silicon Valley or the Arlanda Corridor leading to Stockholm’s international airport. Nearly uninterrupted low-rise office buildings line the freeway, often housing banking, insurance and information technology firms. Again, there is a religious presence. Most prominent (sorry Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod) is the attractive new Mormon Temple, adjacent to Missouri Baptist University, on land the Mormons purchased from the Baptists. Anyone familiar with religion in America knows that Mormons and Baptists (or Mormons and Roman Catholics or Mormons and Pentecostals) have their differences. The local urban myth is that, in a spirit of cooperation, the two religious groups got together to make the project happen. The reality appears to be that the Baptists had no idea who they were selling the land to, and wouldn’t do it again.

There is the Page Avenue Extension --- the Missouri-364 freeway that extends nearly 10 miles from Interstate 270 into suburban St. Charles County to the west. This freeway, a few miles north of Interstate 64-US 40 may be the most significant addition to a US urban freeway system since the 1980s. There was considerable controversy, but the freeway went ahead anyway. It is a world-class design of up to ten lanes and has made a considerable improvement to traffic conditions on the Interstate 70 Missouri River bridge just a few miles to the north.

An inner ring road was also built, Interstate 170. Local NIMBYism pretty much kept one half of it from being built and for decades the locals have struggled through a congested interchange with Interstate 64-US 40 not built to freeway standards. The southern extension of the roadway is not likely to ever be built. The result is that arterial traffic and air pollution is more intense, and that development finds a warmer welcome further out where the traffic is not so bad.

The city itself is surrounded by inner ring suburbs built between the wars and immediately after World War II. In many other urban areas, these suburbs would be a part of the central city. The St. Louis area has many governments --- the smallest municipalities have fewer than 500 people. But that should not impel anyone to suggest municipal consolidation. Things are doing just fine throughout most of the area and larger municipalities tend to cost more per capita, be more remote from the people, and more susceptible to special interest controls (whose interests alone are served by the “economies of scale” of larger municipalities).

The suburb of Clayton deserves special attention. This city, abutting the city of St. Louis on the west, is to St. Louis what the north shores are to Chicago or Milwaukee. Large homes, rich churches and affluence rule. But unlike the north shores, Clayton has a traditional downtown area. Clayton was one of the nation’s first “edge cities,” and developed a very strong core with buildings that rise 20 levels or more from the sidewalks. Most

of the edge cities found in America or Europe area surrounded by parking lots. Here, the parking lots are under the buildings and the building entrances are on the sidewalks, within feet of the streets. In recent years, there has been a revival of development in Clayton, with new commercial and residential towers. One, however, needs to keep things in perspective. It would be a mistake to conclude that this is where St. Louis is growing. It is not.

The growth is outside these inner suburbs in the newer and newest suburbs. The most attractive are to the west, where the huge single-family housing that has constituted so much of new residential construction since the 1980s has been built.

St. Louis is *the* city of rivers. Here, North America's two longest rivers meet, the Mississippi and the Missouri. There is barge traffic on both, but it is most impressive on the wider of the two, the Mississippi. Boats pushing configurations of barges as long as passenger trains used to ply the river, avoiding all sorts of obstacles, especially the piers that support the bridges. Across the Mississippi the urban area continues into the state of Illinois, which has perhaps one quarter of the metropolitan area population, and where I live.

As the city of rivers, St. Louis might also be thought of as a city of bridges. And it is --- the city of broken-down bridges. At times nearly as much of downtown St. Louis' bridge capacity has been lost as the city has lost population. Here has been a policy of neglect not generally found elsewhere in the misgoverned cities of the middle and eastern US. When the automobile deck of the MacArthur Bridge caved in four decades ago, no one bothered to fix it. Freight trains still operate on the other deck.

The Eads bridge, part of a "Philadelphia lawyer" transaction that made it possible for St. Louis to build its first light rail line without spending local money (federal law precludes similar shenanigans in the future) was closed to vehicular traffic for years, and has only recently reopened. The Eads is an historical and architectural treasure, having been built in the 1860s. Cars use the top deck (after perhaps a decade of being closed); light rail uses the lower deck. The problem with this bridge, however, is that it goes from nowhere to nowhere. To use it requires traveling through the urban blight of East St. Louis, and then being dumped off on the periphery of a downtown area that has long since seen its better days.

It must be mentioned, however, that the renaissance occurring in the nation's core areas of the core cities has begun even in St. Louis, with old warehouse and other commercial building stock being converted into condominiums. Like elsewhere, however, this is a very specialized market, limited by the inferior education performance of the central city school district and concerns about personal safety. Cities, following the lead of former Mayor Rudi Guiliani, have been more successful in making cities more safe than in restoring acceptable public education.

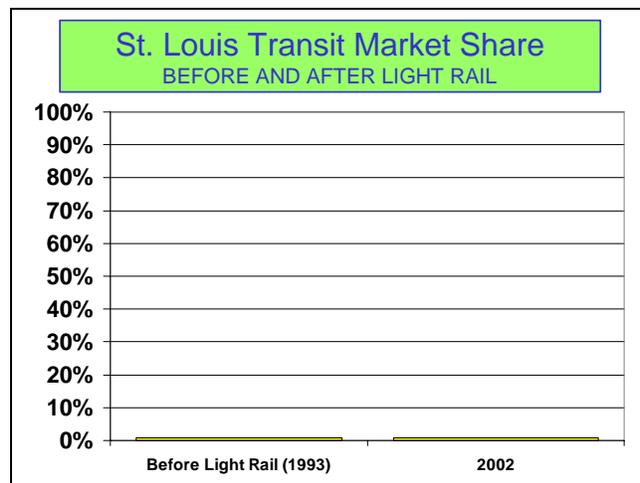
The Martin Luther King Bridge is one of two former toll bridges in the area, formerly owned by the city of East St. Louis. After years of allegedly "raking off" the toll revenues, state officials managed to take control of the bridge from the misgoverning Illinois city and rebuilt it, of course closing it during the project. More recent improvements have made this facility work much better, in effect providing a non-stop alternative to Interstate 70 for westbound travel (they still haven't figured out how to do it eastbound). Another smaller Illinois city owned the toll McKinley Bridge, and the story was the same. Millions for local coffers, but not one cent to maintain the bridge. Facing condemnation, the bridge has passed to state control and will be refurbished. Now it is closed.

The keystone of the central St. Louis Mississippi River bridge system is the "Poplar Street Bridge," which carries Interstates 55, 64 and 70 and US 40 across the most formidable water barrier between the Pacific and the Atlantic. The Poplar Street Bridge has considerable capacity, but not enough. Those who believe that providing additional roadway capacity creates its own highway demand need to visit St. Louis. With two of five downtown area bridges closed, one forever, traffic is intense on the main bridge. Closure does not seem to have freed up more space for traffic. I wonder why? Isn't it a law of physics that putting more in a

confined place makes things less crowded? If the current urban planning religion is right, then less freeway capacity should mean less traffic. Perhaps the remaining bridge capacity should also be closed. Then there would be no traffic? Or, at least, so runs the sophomoric logic.

The St. Louis light rail line is one of the nation's least unsuccessful. For awhile it carried the highest volume of any new US line, principally because of the Mississippi River bridge road rationing policy and the fact that the line really was two. Unlike most light rail lines, the original St. Louis line entered downtown from two directions. And, of course, downtown is the only destination in an American urban area to which there is material transit demand. For commuters from Illinois, it was attractive to park free in the heavily guarded East St. Louis station parking lot, avoid the Poplar Street Bridge and travel to downtown, while not paying for parking in the core. But the limits of this market were clear when an approach to the Poplar Street Bridge was closed for months due to an accident. Little change in traffic on the bridge or light rail occurred.

Indeed, the mile-long Poplar Street Bridge today carries perhaps four times as many people as the entire light rail system, which has been expanded to more than 40 miles. The problem, of course, is that most people crossing the Poplar Street Bridge are not going downtown, and downtown is the only place where transit can



take most people close enough for them to walk to their destination in an automobile competitive time.

The modest failure of the light rail line (having made no difference whatever in traffic) has become more than modest with the expansion of the line eastward into the cornfields of Illinois. Recent data has shown that the line, now twice as long as before, carries fewer people than the original section. In a sense what light rail has done for local transit patronage is the same as taking a rock that was rolling down a hill and placing it higher on the hill. It still rolls down. Transit's share of travel in the area remains so small that it can barely be spotted on a bar graph.

Downtown is a story in itself. Here is one of the first Louis Sullivan skyscrapers, the Wainwright Building. Here also is a stock of high-rise, pre-World War I commercial office buildings that has few peers. But much of it is empty, though downtown Detroit may be even more empty.

Once, I decided that downtown St. Louis would be a nice environment for the jogging intended to make me less unfit. At 6:30 in the morning I arrived on a weekday, and began running on the sidewalks of downtown. Part of my agenda was to take a survey of buildings --- how many were occupied and how many were not. The unoccupied were leading when my lack of attention to the infrastructure caught up with me. This was not a problem in my normal running environment at suburban O'Fallon, Illinois (there is also one in Missouri --- the two are the area's fastest growing suburbs) city park. Unfortunately I stepped into a sidewalk pothole and fell. Worse, it was in front of a number of homeless men with their wine bottles. Doubtless they thought I was one of them. Even worse, my injuries were sufficient to stop my running for months and I have since decided that bicycles and walking make more sense. But not downtown.

The two O'Fallons are interesting. O'Fallon, Illinois is growing like a 1960s Los Angeles suburbs. But, for the most part, the new houses are nicer than then and much larger, and considerably less expensive than one would pay for the same thing on the West Coast today. But O'Fallon, Missouri is growing even faster. And, unlike its Illinois cousin, O'Fallon, Missouri is adding office space as fast as a Silicon Valley suburb in the 1980s. The St. Louis metropolitan area also has two Troys, one on each side of the river. Strong residential

growth is now reaching the Illinois edition and there is talk of an improved roadway that would represent a second east side beltway from Troy, Illinois to Waterloo (the St. Louis one, not the Brussels one). There is the usual opposition from the land use fundamentalists, who claim that building more roads will attract development. They apparently haven't been along the right of way from Troy to Waterloo, where development is well underway without the road and seems likely to continue. Nor have they apparently seen Atlanta, with the world's largest expanse of sprawl without cross-town freeways. It is also the world's least dense, in part because the density increasing influence of quality urban highways has not been present.

Infrastructure is the big story in St. Louis. Here is practical squalor along side gold plated pork barrels. Where else can be found a new international class airport with no service? Local officials were bent on propping up Scott Air Force Base and hired the usual "tell me what I want to know" consultants who enunciated the need for a new passenger airport on the Illinois side. And so we have "Mid-America" Airport, with considerable federal "investment." Never mind that no US urban area the size of St. Louis supports more than one passenger airport. Two airlines have provided service briefly in the years the facility has been opened, but for the most part, the arrival and departure monitors have been blank. Unlike Montreal's Mirabel Airport, an ill-conceived facility now closing after more than 20 years, Mid-America might be said to have never opened. Predictably, local officials have every intention of extending, at federal taxpayer expense, the light rail line further across the cornfields to the vacant terminal. Why not? It certainly meets what appears to be the metropolitan area criteria, to spend money, lots of it, without making a difference.

But that's not the end of the airport story. For years, the airport that has airplanes --- Lambert St. Louis International Airport --- was an important hub, for Trans World Airlines (TWA). When this, the second of the nation's two historic international carriers (the other was Pan American Airways, which was swallowed by Delta Airlines in 1991) was bought by American Airlines a few years ago, St. Louis' hub status seemed secure. But things have not gone well for the airline industry, and American Airlines has significantly reduced its flights to and from St. Louis.

There is a fear, not unjustified, that the airport could become a shell of its former self, following in the footsteps of Kansas City, which has been seeking a new hub airline since long forgotten Braniff closed. Concourse D, the newest at the airport, is now largely closed. Sometimes the airport has the feeling of a morgue. Indeed, Lambert may have become the nation's first regional jet hub, with many of the remaining American Airlines flights being handled by Canadair and Brazilian jets with a seating capacity of 50 or fewer. But, in a sense, this may represent St. Louis becoming more like what the industry will be in the future. With the regional jets, it is possible for an airline to cost effectively serve many more markets and to provide much better service to customers, but providing more frequent service. That's the theory, though not yet the reality in St. Louis.

Meanwhile, true to its tradition of building things it doesn't need and neglecting what it does, authorities are proceeding with an expensive expansion of the now nearly half empty airport. Like the nation's traveling public, St. Louis owes a debt of gratitude to Herb Kelleher and Southwest Airlines. Over the years, Southwest, the low fare airline that makes money where high fare airlines lose it, has expanded its service in St. Louis and now has its own terminal.

But there is a good side to all of this. Like virtually all large US urban areas, St. Louis is a fine place to live. The standard of living is high. The new developments in the suburbs are attractive, and virtually anything that can be found in New York or Los Angeles can be found here. There are even signs of life in the city. As noted above, there is a rebirth of residential living occurring in the core. Again, it is not so significant as to shift the balance of growth from the suburbs, but in a place that has been dead so long, signs of life are significant and more than welcome.

Having not yet fallen for Portland style land rationing or San Francisco style impact fees, housing is still very affordable here. New two-story 2,500 square foot houses are being advertised for \$170,000 in some suburbs.

Like Atlanta, the competitiveness and regulatory freedom of the market is providing opportunities for home ownership for whole socio-economic groups that are denied access where policies based upon taste and myth raise housing costs. Perhaps one day political correctness will come to recognize the nexus between poverty and smart growth --- that strategies that raise prices are incompatible with any interest in more widely distributing income or reducing poverty rates.

St. Louis, like so many other slow growing metropolitan areas of the American East and Midwest faces the potential of a future much better than the past. With traffic congestion exploding in places like Atlanta, and already intolerable on the West Coast, and officials in Oregon and California determined to drive middle-income people out of the housing market with their smart growth land rationing policies, there are serious competitive opportunities for places like St. Louis.

But it will take a vision and action. It is not sufficient to spend years and hundreds of millions rebuilding Interstate 70 without an ounce of additional capacity, no matter how many cutesy brick-faced overpasses replace their ugly gray concrete predecessors. Nor will a “standing in place” rebuild of Interstate 64 (as currently planned) add anything to the area, except for some construction spending. If St. Louis (or Detroit, Cincinnati or Louisville) does not seize the initiative, then Columbia, Effingham and Springfield (both Illinois and Missouri) will. Already Milwaukee, long a competitive laggard, is hyping its comparatively good traffic in seeking new businesses and residents. Large metropolitan areas are becoming less and less necessary. They stand a good chance of losing out to history, victim of their own misgovernment and more recent misguided land use policies. Whither St. Louis?

(Note: The original photographs are reproduced as Plates 1-12).

¹ From <http://www.demographia.com/db-worldua.com> (2007.03 edition). Later editions will show more current data. For definitions of urban terms see <http://www.demographia.com/db-define.pdf>.

² Urban area rankings: Projections for 2020 among 205 urban areas with more than 2,000,000 population (<http://www.demographia.com/db-worldua2015.com>)

³ This clarification is needed because some analysts, principally outside the United States misunderstand the difference between cities as municipalities and cities as metropolitan areas or urban areas. The result has been to produce faulty research that attributes city, as in local authority area or municipality, data to metropolitan areas.

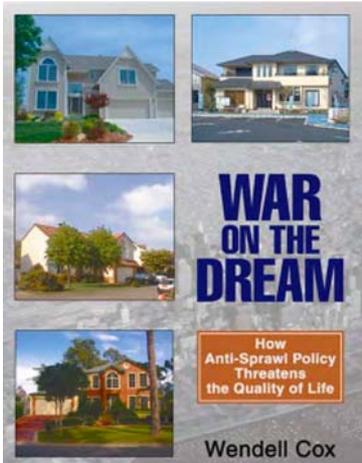
⁴ The principal subjects in each of the plates are or have been redeveloped into residential buildings. There are a number of additional buildings not included in the plates.

⁵ http://www.pdc.us/housing_serv/hsg_development/dev-fee-waivers.asp, accessed 16 April 2007.

⁶ Calculated from US Bureau of the Census data. See: <http://www.demographia.com/db-metmigramm.htm>

⁷ http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20070419/news_lz7e19cox.html.

⁸ Calculated from US Bureau of the Census data. See: <http://www.demographia.com/db-2005migdom.pdf>



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Urban Tours by Rental Car: About the Series

Urban Tours by Rental Car offers perspectives on urban development obtained by automobile tours through urban areas. Rental cars are not the favored method for visiting cities, especially those outside one's own country. Instead, tourists and urban planners favor packaged tours or local public transport systems. Both are splendid ways for seeing the city as it used to be --- the very reason for most tourist visits. The historical core areas contain monuments, prime government and religious edifices and quaint neighborhoods that are often centuries old. This is particularly important to tourists from the newer urban areas of the American, Canadian or Australian West, where history extends not far before World War II. It is further understandable that few tourists travel thousands of miles to see the newer suburban areas that look very much like home. But most tourists do not profess to be students of the urban area.

For the urban planner interested in understanding the whole urban area, it is not enough to study the core alone, regardless of its architectural attractiveness, romanticism, history or affirmation of an individually preferred life style. No one, regardless of the depth of their education can develop reliable conceptions from an unrepresentative sample, and urban cores are the very essence of unrepresentative samples. Both public transport and packaged tours miss the larger part --- the expanse of sprawling residential and business development that rings virtually all major urban areas. They may be of little interest to many urban planners, but they should be.

Stripping away regional architectural facades, one might as well be in the suburbs of Phoenix, Portland, Perth or Paris. Here, the automobile is king, because no public transport system has been developed that can effectively serve destinations outside the core (at least at a price any society can afford). While public transport market shares are higher in European suburban areas than in the New World, much of the difference is attributable to lower incomes and less automobile access. Indeed, public transport's principal weakness, lack of automobile competitiveness, is itself a contributing factor to the rising motorization occurring from the suburbs of Copenhagen and Nagoya to the suburbs of Lagos and Mumbai. To oversimplify this phenomenon as being a "love affair with the automobile" is the equivalent of saying that Singaporeans or Brazilians have a love affair with air conditioning. Human beings prefer comfort to discomfort and they prefer free time to time over which they have no control.

It is no wonder that tourists return to the United States thinking that all Paris looks like the second arrondissement (less than one percent does) and that urban planners think all of Milan looks like the architectural treasures that surround the Cathedral. In fact, the sprawling suburbs of Europe, Japan, Canada and Connecticut resemble one another in many ways. For any seeking to study the urban area in its entirety --- not just the favored haunts of core-dwelling elites --- there is no alternative to "getting behind the wheel." Thus, *Urban Tours by Rental Car*



North St. Louis: Disused Church #1

1



North St. Louis: Disused Church #2

2



North St. Louis: Disused Church #3

3



North St. Louis Residential Area Near Disused Church #1

4



Suburbanizing the Ruins: Near Church #3

5



Urban Fringe: O'Fallon, Illinois

6



Mormons & Baptists on I-64

7



I-64 Corridor West (Similar to Stockholm Arlanda Corridor)

8



“Main Street” (I-270 Ring Road or Beltway)

9



Urban Rail in the Cornfields: Illinois

10



Urban Rail in the Cornfields: Illinois

11



Arrivals and Departures (Nill) at Mid-America Airport

12



The Arch, Gateway Mall & Old Courthouse

13



City Hall

14



Southwestern Bell (AT&T Centre)

15



Former Globe-Democrat Building

16



Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis

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Downtown

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Downtown

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Downtown: Old Courthouse

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Downtown

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St. Louis Centre

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Washington Avenue

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Washington Avenue



Washington Avenue

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Mid-Town

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Central West End

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**Central
West
End**

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Mid-Town

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Mid-Town

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Mid-Town

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Mid-Town

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St. Louis Centre

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St. Louis Centre

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St. Louis Centre

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Parking Lot : Downtown

78



Convention Center & Dillard's Building

79



**Residential Building
Central West End**

80



Residential Buildings: Central West End

81



Central West End

82



Mid Town

83



**Renovated
Continental
Building
Mid Town**

84



St. Louis University: Mid Town

85



Signs of Life on the North Side

86



Signs of Life on the North Side

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Signs of Life on the North Side

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