

RECONNECTING INDEPENDENCE BOULEVARD

I-290 LAND CAP PROJECT

Reconnecting Communities Pilot Grant Application 2024





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Project Website: ReconnectingIndependenceBlvd.cnectchicago.com



1. Overview

The City of Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) is pleased to submit an application for \$10 million in FY2024 RCP funds to construct the Reconnecting Independence Boulevard: I-290 Land Cap Project. This land cap across the I-290 Eisenhower Expressway at the Independence Boulevard bridges will restore a broken link in Chicago's boulevard system, a continuous band of greenspace which was separated by expressway construction in the 1950's. **(Figure 1)** The land cap will reconnect disinvested communities on either side of I-290 by filling the gap between northbound and southbound Independence Boulevard with more inviting, safe, and accessible bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

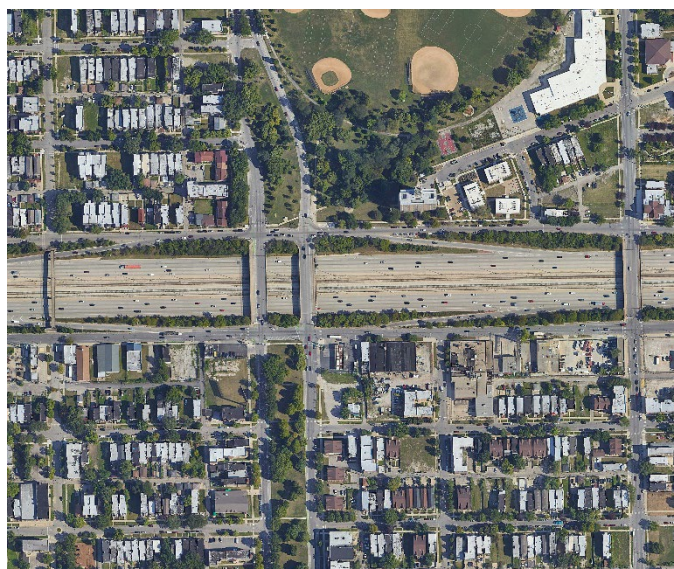
The Independence Boulevard bridges are within the study area of the [I-290 Eisenhower Expressway \(Mannheim Road to Racine Avenue\) Phase I Study](#), completed by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) in 2017. The bridges (Structure numbers: [016-2071](#) & [016-2070](#)) are listed in poor condition and are slated to be replaced by IDOT, as these bridges are under IDOT jurisdiction. Bridge replacement is the perfect opportunity to enhance bicycle and pedestrian accommodation and restore lost greenspace that would connect communities on the north and south sides of I-290. By adding the land cap as part of bridge reconstruction as opposed to a later date, there are multiple benefits, such as significant cost savings, the ability to minimize disruptions during construction, and to realize construction synergies. IDOT and CDOT are closely collaborating to amend the Phase I Study document and include a land cap as part of the bridges' replacement. IDOT is in full support of the project, as described in the Letter of Endorsement. See [Appendix C](#).

Independence Boulevard is part of the [Chicago Park Boulevard System](#), a 26-mile continuous stretch of 8 parks, 19 boulevards, and 6 squares, and it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places ([ID: 12000040](#)). I-290 expressway construction severed connectivity along Independence Boulevard and fragmented a once cohesive community. The surrounding community areas, North Lawndale and East and West Garfield Park (referred to collectively as Garfield Park in the rest of this application) have faced disinvestment and lack of opportunities, as a consequence of this gap in the Chicago Boulevard System. See [Appendix L](#) for more about the historical significance of the project site.

Figure 1. Before and After Aerial Image of Independence Boulevard over I-290



Before I-290 Construction



After I-290 Construction



Greenspace that defines Independence Boulevard on either side of the bridges and throughout the entire network of boulevards is absent across I-290. In its place are two individual spans for northbound and southbound vehicular traffic separated by a gap over 100 feet wide, with narrow sidewalks at the edge of the pavement on each side. Pedestrians must navigate sidewalks and curbs that are not ADA compliant and endure the noise of a busy highway to cross the bridges and access Garfield Park's basketball, baseball, and soccer fields. Without a bus route on Independence Boulevard, walking, rolling, or biking are the primary modes of transportation for residents without access to personal vehicles who wish to cross the bridges.

CDOT has already worked with the community to [design enhancements](#) to Independence Boulevard south of the I-290 bridges, and construction is underway. This design would be extended over I-290 as part of the Reconnecting Independence Boulevard land cap. The design will activate the new greenspace through a new pedestrian path, signage, lighting and landscaping. Placemaking elements were created in partnership with the community to reflect the neighborhood and its history. Additionally, the design will improve safety by slowing traffic, adding crosswalks, ADA ramps, bump outs, roadway lighting, and modernizing traffic signals. The project's qualitative benefits include improvements to safety, air quality, new greenspace, and health benefits related to improved quality of life. The project Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) is **1.31**. See *Appendix A* for the Benefit Costs Analysis Technical Memo.

2. Location and Maps

Interstate I-290 crosses the entire West Side of Chicago, dividing neighborhoods and communities, many of which are disinvested and burdened. The Reconnecting Independence Boulevard: I-290 Land Cap Project seeks to cap an area between two existing bridges along Independence Boulevard at I-290 (*Figure 2*). The proposed project will provide new areas of greenspace and pedestrian facilities. A portion of Independence Boulevard was removed during the construction of I-290 and replaced with the existing bridges over the expressway. This project would reestablish this long-broken connection and restore continuity to the Chicago Park Boulevard System.

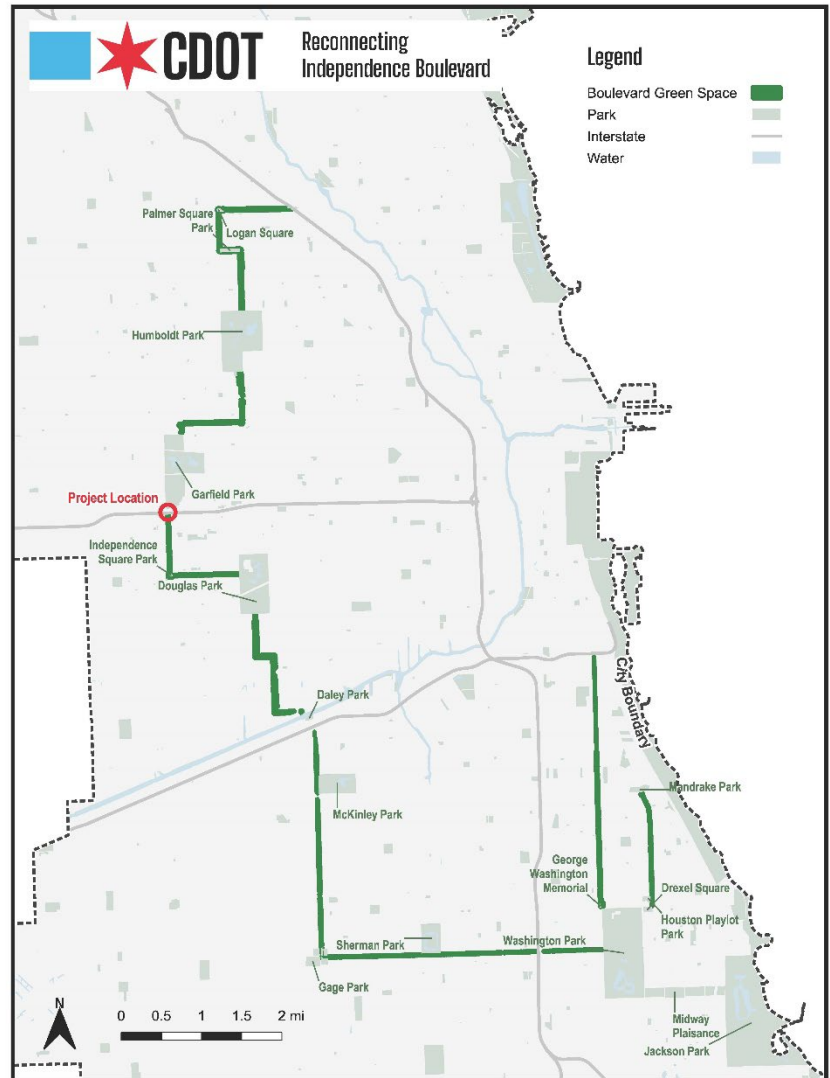
The project will create a vital connection for residents on each side of I-290, reestablishing connections that were ruptured by construction of the expressway. The project is located within the Garfield Park community area, serving as a critical connection to the North Lawndale community. Three census tracts are directly adjacent to the site: 17031260900, 12031270500, and 127031260800.

As shown in the FHWA STEAP Report, 90% of residents near the project area identify as Black, and 34% of the population earns income below the federal poverty level. (See *Appendix J*) This area also experiences high levels of environmental burden and health vulnerability, with the USDOT ETC Explorer Tool (*Appendix I*) rankings at the 93rd and 97th national percentiles, respectively. The communities in this project area have faced systemic disinvestment in community assets and cut off from economic opportunities. As a result, According to the University of Illinois [Fact Sheet: Black Population Loss in Chicago](#) the Black population has declined since 1980 in North Lawndale (-42%), East Garfield Park (-43%), and West Garfield Park (-51%).

The area around the project is served by the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) Blue line train, with the nearest stops at Kedzie-Homan Avenue and Pulaski Avenue approximately 0.5 miles to the east and west of the project, respectively. Buses 7 and 126 run along I-290 and provide east-west connections. No north-south bus serves the project area along Independence Boulevard. See *Appendix B* for Study Area Maps. Pedestrians and cyclists can traverse I-290 at Independence Boulevard via existing protected bike lanes and sidewalks.

As described in Criteria 2, the Independence Boulevard bridges are 0.5 miles away from a major park, several schools, a hospital, a commercial corridor, and an industrial corridor. As shown in the FHWA STEAP Report, 42% of residents near the project area do not own a vehicle. (See *Appendix J*) However, as described in Criteria 3, traffic conditions make this connection unpleasant and unsafe. Local agencies have acknowledged the dire need of improvement of the active transportation network across I-290 and are partnering in a unified effort to upgrade and modernize the I-290 corridor, with the goal of improving mobility, accessibility, and quality of life for motorists, transit riders, and residents.

Figure 2. Project Location within the Chicago Boulevard System



3. Merit Criteria

Criterion #1: Equity and Justice40 Initiative

Harmful Historic Policies

I-290 is a physical barrier that divides and hinders mobility, resulting in harmful social, environmental and public health outcomes for North Lawndale and Garfield Park residents. Construction of the expressway destroyed homes and businesses, displacing entire communities and leaving remaining residents with a significant obstacle. The damage is especially felt along Independence Boulevard where



the I-290 is an obstacle in the Chicago Park Boulevard System, impacting the quality of life and social fabric of the community.

Construction of the expressway directly displaced residents as homes were forcefully taken and destroyed to make way for the new interstate. According to a report by the [Metropolitan Planning Council](#), estimates suggest nearly 13,000 residents throughout the city were displaced during construction of the interstate. As residents were displaced, social cohesion suffered, leading to extreme demographic shifts. White residents began to move out of the area as Black residents bought and rented homes. Absentee landlords often refused to maintain properties and they quickly fell into disrepair. Black homeowners were subject to financial discrimination and found it difficult to maintain their property, devastating Black wealth. The area eventually became stigmatized as poor and undesirable, imposing economic decline and the health and social conditions that often follow poverty.

The intent of I-290 was to efficiently move suburbanites to their downtown job, but this came at the expense of communities next to the expressway. This has not changed. Recognizing that Chicagoans are still paying the price of harmful past actions, the City plans to set a new course by improving community safety, cohesion, and quality of life through enhanced connectivity over and around this interstate expressway, beginning with the capping project at Independence Boulevard. See [Appendix L](#) for more about harmful historical policies.

Addressing Existing Needs

Harmful historic policies continue to echo in the North Lawndale and Garfield Park communities. All three census tracts adjacent to the project site are identified as Historically Disadvantaged Communities by the CEJST Report ([Appendix G](#)). The area is largely low-income and suffers from a lack of economic opportunity. The USDOT ETC Explorer Tool ([Appendix I](#)) shows that census tracts adjacent to the site are at the 97th national percentile for poverty and unemployment, and at the 96th percentile for housing cost burden. The EJ Screen Community Report ([Appendix H](#)) shows that 66% of households half a mile from the project site are low income, compared to 35% across the City; and the unemployment rate is 19%, twice the rate for Chicago. As described in Criteria 5, the City has a menu of policies that aim to rebuild the local economy equitably. The Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project will boost the local economy by activating the area by installing signage, lighting, landscaping, and placemaking elements.

The area also faces transportation insecurity. The census tracts are rated the 96th national percentile for transportation cost burden and the 68th for transportation safety. ([Appendix I](#)) According to the Policy Map Community Report, only 58% of residents near the project area own a vehicle ([Appendix K](#)), a transportation system that works for pedestrians and other forms of active transportation is imperative. Currently the lack of safe and accessible sidewalks is a clear obstacle to people trying to get to work, and that may be contributing to such a high unemployment rate. As mentioned in Criteria 2, there are a few employers within 0.5 miles of the project site. In addition to an economic boost, the Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project will also improve pedestrian access across the I-290, helping residents travel to and from their jobs.

Environmental injustice and high instances of public health issues are also prevalent near the site. The EJ Screen results ([Appendix H](#)) show that the 0.5-mile area around the project site exhibits a significant environmental burden. Residents experience high rates of asthma and have a 13.7% health value, which is at the 98th state percentile, and a rate of heart disease at the 85th state percentile. The very serious health disparities observed near the project site are likely due to the unacceptable air quality. These communities experience diesel particulate matter at concentrations at the 91st state percentile and toxic releases to the air at concentrations at the 93rd state percentile. As described in Criteria 6.1, the



Reconnecting Independence Boulevard will include substantive nature-based solutions that will improve noise pollution and air quality. The land cap will extend a pedestrian path, currently under construction south of I-290, to connect to Garfield Park. According to a [2022 FHWA Benefits of Highway Caps study](#), a highway cap park can improve public health by improving opportunities for active recreation and active transportation. This project is expected to be transformational for the community, the Benefit Cost Analysis estimates that the community will see \$15.6 million in health benefits in the first 20 years of the land cap. See *Appendix A*.

Efficient Construction

As described in the Overview, the land cap construction over Independence Boulevard will be completed concurrently with the planned bridges' replacement. From this perspective, Reconnecting Independence Boulevard will leverage existing construction efforts and spare the community from multiple consecutive construction projects on the bridges. RCN funds will make it possible to construct the Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project during the bridges' reconstruction and realize construction synergies and minimize disruptions and reduce total construction costs.

As part of the [I-290 Eisenhower Expressway \(Mannheim Road to Racine Avenue\) Phase I Study](#), IDOT evaluated construction impacts and found that construction will not cause any residential, business, public facility, or other displacements or relocations. To ensure movement of people and goods across the bridges, only single lane closures will be employed. Pedestrian access and access to properties will be maintained throughout construction.

Criterion #2: Access

Safety and improving mobility for pedestrians and bicyclists in the transportation system is and has been a top priority for the City of Chicago as evidenced through its many planning and policy initiatives over the past decade including: [Chicago Pedestrian Plan](#), [Chicago Streets for Cycling Plan](#), [Complete Streets Design Guidelines](#), [Make Way for People Initiative](#), [Make Way for Play Guide](#), [High Crash Corridors Framework Plan](#), [Vision Zero Chicago Action Plan](#) and most recently its new [Strategic Plan for Transportation](#) with a major focus on safety and equity in the transportation system. Additionally, the City considers improving I-290 connections a priority. CDOT received a Reconnecting Communities Planning Grant in 2023 for the Chicago Reconnecting West Side Communities to study I-290 connections. Work to kick-off this study is underway. Reconnecting Independence Boulevard will deliver on these plans by extending [Independence Boulevard enhancements](#) across the I-290 expressway, installing a pedestrian path away from vehicles and surrounded by landscaping.

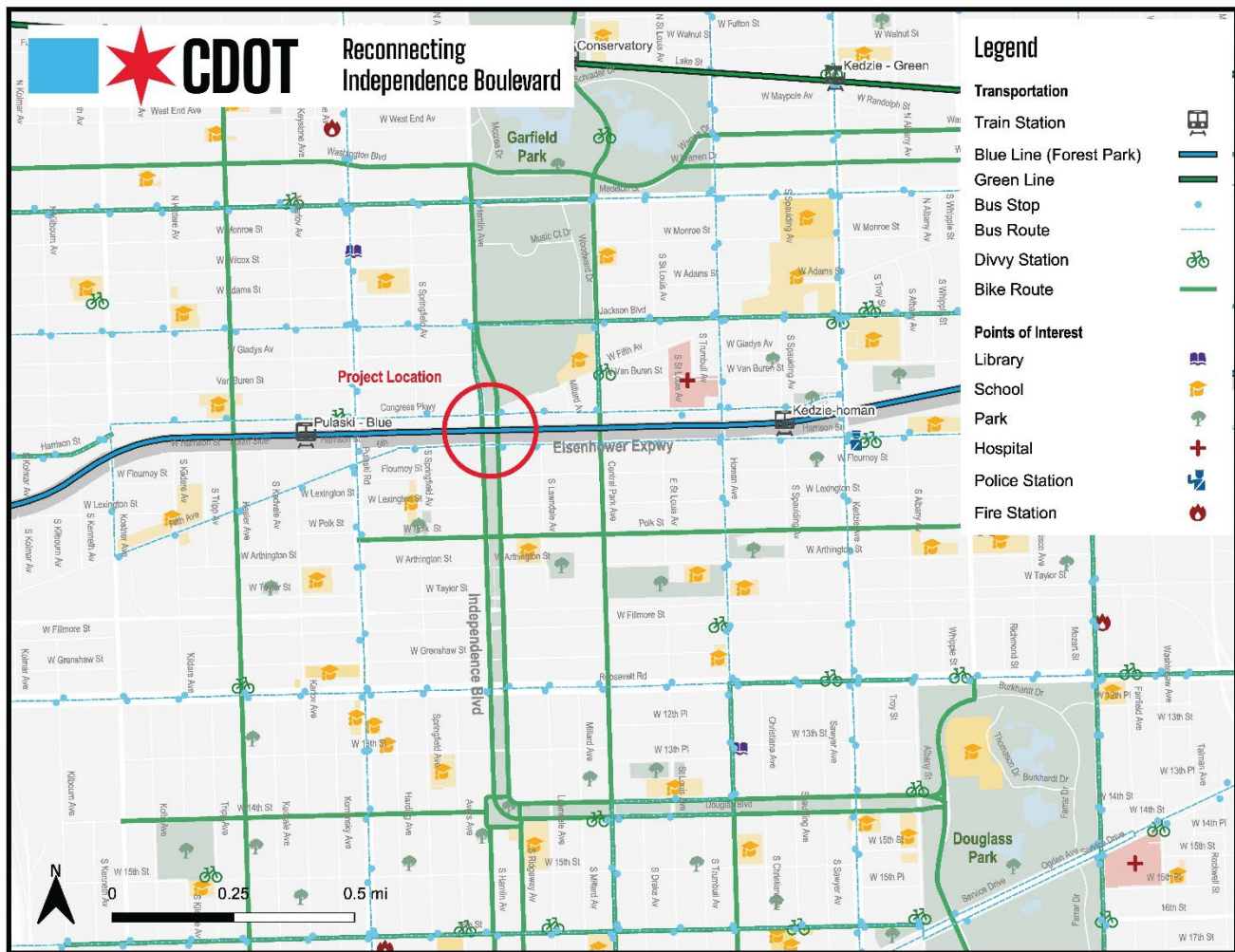
Independence Boulevard has protected bike lanes, however, the position of the bike lanes changes at Harrison Street, the southern edge of this project. See *Figure 3*. At this intersection the bike lanes move from the center of the roadway to the outer edge of the roadway, forcing cyclists to cross two crosswalks to continue on Independence Boulevard. As part of the Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project, the current bike lane alignment will be evaluated and will potentially be realigned or otherwise improved. Sidewalks are provided on the outer edges of the existing bridges, but curb ramps on the bridge structures are not ADA compliant. The Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project will improve the intersections of Independence Boulevard with Harrison Street and Congress Parkway, providing safer and more comfortable routes that are fully accessible for pedestrians and bicyclists.

This project will restore a pedestrian-first boulevard, completed in 1891 and destroyed in the 1950's. Reconnecting Independence Boulevard means repairing connectivity to educational, cultural, recreational, health, and economic opportunities for residents of the disadvantaged North Lawndale and

Garfield Park communities, repairing the break I-290 created in this unique and historic active transportation infrastructure.

Independence Boulevard leads directly from residential neighborhoods on the south side of I-290 into Garfield Park on the north side, where Independence Boulevard becomes Hamlin Boulevard. Garfield Park is one of the original parks that anchored the [Chicago Boulevard System](#) on Chicago’s west side. The 172-acre park is home to the Garfield Park Conservatory, a premier Chicago cultural institution and community anchor providing educational programming, community relations, and visitor services since its opening in 1908. Near the I-290 Independence Boulevard bridges, the park includes basketball courts, soccer fields, and baseball fields. The park also includes gardens, lagoons, recreational paths, and a field house designated a Chicago Landmark. Reconnecting Independence Boulevard will deliver an improved pedestrian path, broadening opportunities for community members to safely and comfortably walk, roll, or bike to the park.

Figure 3. Reconnecting Independence Boulevard Transportation and Points of Interest Map



The [2018 West Side Vision Zero Plan](#) highlights the community’s desire to “Implement programs that encourage safe active transportation to and from schools”. The Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project will make this goal easier to accomplish. Five Chicago Public Schools are within walking distance of the project, and the Legler Regional Chicago Public Library is 0.6 miles away from the

Independence Boulevard bridges. See **Table 1**. The Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project will provide a pedestrian path away from vehicles.

Table 1. List of Key Destinations

Community Resource	Name	
Schools	Daniel Webster Elementary School	Gregory Elementary School
	Leif Ericson Elementary Scholastic Academy	Genevieve Melody Public School
	Providence St Mel School	Holy Family Ministry School
Places of Worship	Greater Star Missionary Baptist Church	Greater Rock Missionary Baptist
	Home Life Christian Ministries	Chicago Independence Boulevard Seventh-day Adventist Church
	Gospel Temple	Chicago Community Mennonite
	People's Church of the Harvest	New Morning Star MB Church
	Divine Tree of Life Missionary	Philemon Restoration Project
Other	Legler Regional Library Chicago Public School	RML Specialty Hospital
	Homan Square Community Center	Divvy Stations (3)

In addition to parks and schools, Independence Boulevard is also culturally significant for the numerous places of worship near the project, being home to 10 places of worship, 4 of which are a few blocks away from the I-290 bridges. See **Table 1**. Reconnecting Independence Boulevard will play a key role in strengthening this network of places of worship.

U.S. Census data from 2018 to 2022 employment data of the project area estimates that the top three industries for employment are Health Care and Social Assistance (21%), Transportation and Warehousing (14%), and Retail Trade (12%). See **Appendix K**. In addition to the schools and library in the area, the RML Specialty Hospital is 0.5 miles from the Independence Boulevard bridges. Madison Street west of Hamlin Boulevard is a dense commercial corridor less than 0.5 miles directly north of the project. The commercial corridor is home to a mix of local and franchise restaurants and retail stores.

The northeast edge of the [Roosevelt/Cicero Industrial Corridor](#) is 0.5 miles away from the Independence Boulevard bridges. This industrial corridor extends south and west and provides 2,861 jobs to the neighboring communities. According to the CEJST report (**Appendix G**), the estimated unemployment rate within 0.5 miles of the project is 19%, twice the rate of the metro region. The Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project will provide a safer, more inviting crossing for potential customers and employees that move north and south across I-290. This will not only increase access to existing jobs and goods and services, but will also bring more jobs, boosting the local economy.

As described in Criteria 5, the existing land use near the project area is dedicated to a combination of recreational and commercial activities. There are also mid to high density housing buildings. While no changes to the existing land use is planned, the City remains committed to preserving the City's existing housing density. City Council has enacted short-term bans on demolishing multi-unit buildings to make way for single family homes [in certain areas in the past](#). This is a measure that could be considered in the Garfield Park and North Lawndale communities if it is deemed necessary.

Despite the division caused by I-290 and lack of public and private investment, Independence Boulevard continues to be a community center for North Lawndale and Garfield Park. The Reconnecting



Independence Boulevard project is poised to punch above its weight, accelerating community connectivity, quality of life, and healing beyond the immediate vicinity of the project.

Criterion #3: Facility Suitability

Existing conditions of Independence Boulevard prohibit safe and easy movement for residents to the north and south of I-290. The expressway bisects East Garfield Park directly and creates a barrier to community cohesion that radiate beyond the immediate vicinity of the project site. It deters access to goods and services, and limits economic development opportunities. It deprives residents of greenspace and detracts from the landscape and architecture along the boulevard. The car-centric design poses a threat to the safety of pedestrians, particularly for the large number of residents who do not own a vehicle. The project will provide substantial improvements to the quality of life to a disadvantaged population.

The I-290 corridor spans four lanes in each direction with CTA Blue Line rapid transit tracks and stations in the median, plus frontage roads and entrance and exit ramps at cross streets. Together, these features create a nearly 400-foot-wide barrier between communities to the north and south. See *Appendix B* for Study Area Maps. While there are currently two bridges that span the width of I-290 at Independence Boulevard, they do not provide adequately safe, comfortable, or inviting environments for their use. The mobility limitations imposed on the community are felt most profoundly by people without access to motor vehicles and people with limited mobility, two groups that are over-represented in the adjacent neighborhoods when compared to Chicago overall. This, coupled with a lack of north-south bus routes, contributes to a severe over-reliance on personal vehicles, a costly burden.

Pedestrians wishing to access the two existing bridges must cross traffic lanes at intersections near ramps where traffic speeds onto and off of the expressway. Traffic laws and speed limits are frequently ignored by motor vehicle drivers. Along the bridges, excessive noise, a lack of greenery, and exposure to weather make the experience extremely unpleasant.

Car-centric design and close proximity to motor vehicle traffic make the experience of crossing Independence Boulevard as a pedestrian or cyclist uncomfortable and dangerous. The area is one of eight High Crash Areas identified in the City's ([Vision Zero Chicago Action Plan](#)). The sidewalks on the bridges are narrow, with some sections inaccessible to people with disabilities or in a poor state of repair. Inclement weather or nighttime travel can make this trip over even more dangerous. These conditions lead to increased traffic safety risk and stress for people walking or bicycling. As seen in *Figure 4*, there were 14 collisions involving pedestrians or bicyclists near the bridges between 2019 and 2023. Community leaders have shared the public safety dangers along I-290 particularly in the evening, 44% of all crashes between 2019 and 2023 occurred at night and 43% of bicycle or pedestrian crashes occurred at night. The Reconnecting Independence Boulevard Project will include lighting along the land cap and will evaluate lighting at the intersections to reduce crashes. These challenges are even more significant for people who use wheelchairs or other mobility assistance devices. The Benefit Cost Analysis estimates that the project's safety improvements will lead to \$9.2 million in benefits the first 20 years of the land cap. See *Appendix A*.

I-290 presents other negative externalities that create barriers to economic development. The expressway itself is unsightly and renders adjacent areas less-desirable through noise pollution, exacerbated urban heat island effect, and a car-centric design. The expressway presents a generally

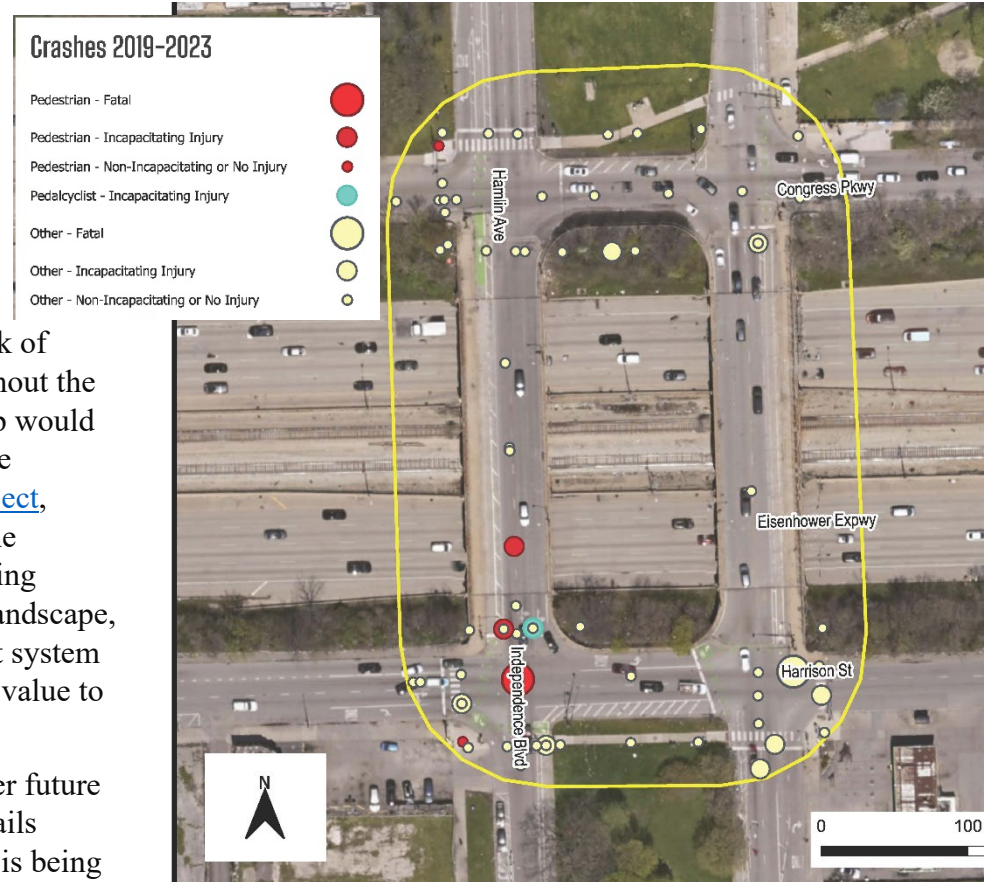
unpleasant atmosphere and deters potential visitors from the area. Housing near I-290 is less desirable, lowering property values. The character of the area contributes to low foot-traffic and in turn, lower demand for goods and services. Coupled together, these factors present little incentive for new businesses to expand into the area.

Figure 4. Reconnecting Independence Boulevard over I-290 Crashes, 2019-2023

The proposed project will provide a more natural and inviting link that physically and visually reconnects communities and allows people to travel more safely and freely. The benefits of this link would extend beyond the project site and help establish a wider network of active mobility routes throughout the west side of Chicago. The cap would be a substantial addition to the [Independence Boulevard Project](#), which has several goals for the boulevard, including: improving accessibility, enhancing the landscape, and creating a complete street system that increase the Boulevard's value to each adjacent community.

This land cap aligns with other future plans for the area. A rail to trails project, The Altenheim Line, is being planned .3 miles south of the bridges on Independence Boulevard. It lists Independence Boulevard as a key north-south connection to this trail, and recommends a public outdoor space off of the boulevard ([Altenheim Line Framework Plan](#)). A larger land cap project which includes the project site was evaluated as part of a Metropolitan Planning Council report ([Reconnecting Communities: Mitigating Community Harms of Transportation Infrastructure](#)) which rated the project highly, citing its promise to increase mobility between communities, connect green areas, and promote economic development.

By connecting neighborhoods across I-290, this project will be a foundation for economic development. The Independence Boulevard land cap is highly suited to ameliorate the damage of the existing car-centric design along Independence Boulevard given its strategic location between two large parks and near a dense but struggling local commercial corridor. The combination of recreational and commercial infrastructure near I-290 have the potential to attract more investment and boost local businesses. By adding greenspace and pedestrian amenities, this project will provide a safer option for pedestrians wishing to travel between them. The project will foster a stronger sense of place and enhance the character, attracting more people to the area. The project is an opportunity to make the area more attractive to existing and future residents and businesses.





This project will not affect the movement of goods regionally along I-290 or locally across the expressway. The land cap will be constructed over I-290 without impacting capacity or traffic operations, including truck traffic, after construction is complete. [Commercial trucks are prohibited on Chicago's boulevards](#), including Independence Boulevard south of I-290 and Hamlin Boulevard north of I-290. Therefore, the benefits of Reconnecting Independence Boulevard will be realized without any adverse effect on the movement of goods.

This project is an opportunity to mitigate the effects of the expressway and address the barriers described above. Residents who have long suffered from I-290's damaging effects will benefit significantly from the new amenity. If left unimproved, the site will continue to limit the accessibility and mobility of residents resulting negative safety, public health and economic outcomes.

Criterion #4: Community Engagement and Community-based Stewardship, Management, and Partnerships

A Community-Centered Approach

East Garfield Park and West Garfield Park are majority Black communities in Chicago, and all census tracts within the project area are identified as USDOT Disadvantaged Census Tracts. The City recognizes that these communities have experienced decades of disinvestment, and the residents have not had an opportunity to shape their neighborhood to meet their needs and priorities. For this project, CDOT and IDOT took a community-centered approach and considered the public input from recent local planning efforts, such as the [Vision Zero West Side Plan](#), completed in 2019, the [North Lawndale Neighborhood Bike Network](#), completed in 2021, and [Independence Boulevard Improvements project](#) (from Harrison Street to S Lawndale Avenue), which is currently underway. These plans place an emphasis on safety and improving pedestrian connectivity. The community has voiced interest in projects that will foster community cohesion, improve quality of life, improve access to greenspace, and enhances community assets. The Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project will address all of these community concerns.

The community wants Independence Boulevard to be: • Safe • Clean • A Gathering Location • Connects Surrounding Neighborhoods
 Suggestions include: • More Lights • Public Art • Gathering Spaces • Pathways (Based on Independence Boulevard Improvements Project Community Feedback, 2022)

As part of the Independence Boulevard Improvements Project, a Community Meeting was held in August 2022 at the Greater Rock Church. Project goals were shared, such as improving accessibility and walkability, enhancing the landscape, adding site amenities, and creating a complete street system that increases the Boulevard's value to each adjacent community. At this meeting, CDOT reviewed existing conditions, historic images, and ideas for potential improvements. The community was encouraged to share input. A summary of community input is available in *Appendix F*. The Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events also held an Open Boulevards Open House in October 2022 which CDOT attended to receive community feedback on conceptual designs of Independence Boulevard improvements. The input and community priorities voiced at these meetings guides the development of the Reconnecting Independence Boulevard land cap design which provides a safe and connected pedestrian path over I-290. As noted in the call-out above, community members prioritize safety, gathering location, connects surrounding neighborhoods, and pathways. The North Lawndale Neighborhood Bike Network Task Force also highlighted the community's interest in projects that promotes safe routes to parks and community assets including the boulevard system. See *Appendix F*.



Three Chicago neighborhoods are the focus of the Vision Zero West Side Plan – Austin, North Lawndale and Garfield Park. The Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project is within the Garfield Park Community and just north of North Lawndale, providing greater connectivity to this community and the prominent community resources of Douglas Park and Garfield Park. As part of this plan, multiple engagement events took place between 2017 and 2019, allowing the community to truly lead the planning process. These events included: pop-up meetings at community events, three open houses, West Side “round table” with dozens of community groups and stakeholders, and a West Side Event Series. These events engaged 800+ West Side residents and resulted in 285 written surveys collected. Priorities from the Vision Zero Plan align with the Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project.

Through both of these projects, it was and continues to be a priority for the City to meet community members where they are, by going to schools’ events, community festivals, and providing stipends for participation in the Vision Zero West Side Plan. This recognizes that community members may be overburdened and not have time to attend a separate community open house, thus supplementing traditional outreach methods with authentic community-based engagement. A summary of community input is available in *Appendix F*.

This project was further led by community guidance and priorities through Metropolitan Planning Council’s (MPC) initiative: [Reconnecting Communities: Mitigating Community Harms of Transportation Infrastructure](#). The Independence Boulevard land cap was identified and prioritized as one of the top 22 projects in the City. Overall, 6 caps over I-290 were listed as top projects. This is consistent with IDOT and CDOT’s plan to continue their efforts to implement capping where feasible, with Independence Boulevard leading the way as the first land cap.

MPC took a citywide community-based approach to identify and prioritize potential projects which would reconnect communities. They did this by establishing an Advisory Committee, which included members of Transportation Equity Network (TEN), a group of approximately 40 community-based organizations with an interest in increased participation in transportation efforts around the region. MPC then developed a public interactive web-based engagement tool to collect project ideas from community members. They also held an “open house”, coordinated with students at Rush University, and attended Chicago Public Schools events to engage community members and to promote the tool. MPC then prioritized the projects based on project characteristics from the Reconnecting Communities program and 22 top projects emerged. The MPC report provides the City with a significant head start on a framework for continued stakeholder engagement. A summary of community input is available in *Appendix F*.

Additionally, IDOT took a community-based approach to planning for the [I-290 Eisenhower Expressway \(Mannheim Road to Racine Avenue\) Phase I Study](#), completed in 2017. Using a Stakeholder Involvement Plan as guidance, they established a Corridor Advisory Group/Task Force which consisted of municipalities, agencies, and interest groups. A total of 22 CAG/TF meetings were held. In addition to CAG meetings, IDOT attended and held one-on-one meetings with individual project stakeholders, village boards, village staff working groups, agency meetings, interest groups, town hall meetings, public hearings, and more. A summary of community input is available in *Appendix F*. As this project consists of a much larger scope than the Independence Boulevard land cap, it is necessary to take this engagement in collaboration with the more recent community initiatives led by CDOT and MPC.

Community members have expressed their support and excitement for this project in Letters of Support in *Appendix E*. These include Elected Officials, Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, North Lawndale Community Coordinating



Council, local non-profits, local churches, and more. These community members will remain engaged throughout the final design and construction of this project, through public meetings and through the continuation of the Independence Boulevard Improvements project. While CDOT and IDOT have taken a community-based approach to this project, the City of Chicago is committed to funding the Independence Boulevard land cap. as stated in the Letter of Funding Commitment (*Appendix D*) and IDOT is in full support of this project as stated in the Letter of Endorsement (*Appendix C*).

Criterion #5: Equitable Development

Through Chicago's [Boulevard Enhancement Program](#), the City is activating the greenspace by adding a pedestrian path, signage, plazas, lighting, and landscaping. Another goal of the program is to create an identity for the Historic Boulevards by introducing distinctive light poles and a patterned stamped crosswalk, while also incorporating the neighborhood and its history within the design of each Boulevard segment. As described in Criteria 4, the community is interested in celebrating the community's history using African American art, which has been incorporated into the enhancements underway along Independence Boulevard. These design features would be extended into the Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project.

The community living next to the Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project has faced decades of disinvestment. The ETC Report shows that 100% of the census tracts in the project area are classified as Disadvantaged, furthermore the project area has a 94% Social Vulnerability percentile rank. See *Appendix I*. Within 0.5 miles of the project area, 27% of land is zoned as residential. Of the land zoned for residential 2.5% allows low density apartment buildings and 83.3% allows medium to high density apartments. According to the U.S. Census ACS, 86% of housing stock in the project area are duplexes or units in small and large apartment buildings, the home ownership rate is 25%, and 62% of renters in the project area were cost burdened between 2018 and 2022. See *Appendix K*.

As listed in Criteria 6.3, there are several transportation and economic development projects ongoing in the area. This is the result of the City's commitment to invest in communities that have been systematically cut off from opportunities. However, significant investment in a community can be destabilizing and decrease affordability. The Chicago [2021 Affordable Requirements Ordinance](#) addresses issues of displacement in neighborhoods seeing rapid development and outlines Community Preservation areas in communities where there is evidence of displacement based on housing market and demographic changes. The Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project area is within a Community Preservation area. There are several programs that aim to assist legacy residents and promote inclusive economic development. Programs available within the project area include, but are not limited to:

- [Neighborhood Lending Program \(NLP\)](#) provides loans and grants to prospective homebuyers and to single family and 2-4 multifamily property owners to help cover home improvement expenses.
- [City Lots for Working Families \(CL4WF\)](#) program sells vacant, city-owned lots to developers of affordable two-flat and single-family homes intended for buyers with incomes up to 140% of Area Median Income (AMI). [Building Neighborhoods and Affordable Housing Program \(BNAH\)](#) provides grants up to \$60,000 to prospective homeowners of single-family homes built under the CL4WF program in North Lawndale and Garfield Park.
- The [Chicago Low Income Housing Trust Fund \(CLHTF\)](#) provides rent subsidies to owners of qualified buildings or developments who rent at an affordable level to household earning below 30% (AMI).



- The project area is also part of the [Midwest TIF](#) and so far there are three affordable housing projects on previously underutilized land within 0.5 miles of the project area. These three affordable housing projects total 135 new housing units and 97% of these units will be leased at 30% to 60% Average Median Income (AMI).

Prior to the I-290 construction, the North Lawndale and Garfield Park community areas were thriving cohesive communities connected by Independence Boulevard. The [2023 We Will Chicago City Plan](#) recognizes that highway projects like the construction of the I-290 forced economic stagnation of neighborhood economic development. Reconnecting Independence Boulevard supports the economic development pillar in the We Will Chicago Plan by advancing the goal to promote South and West side neighborhood destinations to tourists and residents alike by enhancing the Chicago Boulevard System. Additionally, this project will also advance the stated goal of growing community wealth through local control over neighborhood assets, like the Chicago Boulevard System, through extensive community engagement in the project area, as described in Criteria 4.

Reconnecting Independence Boulevard will encourage public and private investments to support greater commercial and mixed-income residential development near public transportation and make the area more walkable. As noted in a [2022 FHWA Benefits of Highway Cap Parks Report](#), highway cap parks can contribute to economic revitalization and increase residential population. US Census data shows that the population in the area has decreased by 20% between 2000 and 2020. See *Appendix K*. The project area is part of a neighborhood commercial district and is adjacent to a business park district. With the project's proximity to a variety of land uses, it is particularly well suited to contribute to the economic development of the community.

The City leverages funds to invest in locally owned small businesses. The City makes available up to \$5,000,000 in grants to local businesses through the [Neighborhood Opportunity Fund \(NOF\)](#) to help fund new construction or rehabilitation of existing buildings. The NOF program aims to develop sustainable neighborhood growth by providing Build Community Wealth Bonuses to grant awardees whose primary residence is in an NOF eligible area or hire new employees who maintain their primary residence in an NOF eligible area. The Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project is in a NOF eligible area, which is determined by the Chicago Department of Planning and Development based on a concentrated disadvantage scoring system that indicate relative poverty.

The [TIFWorks program](#) subsidizes training for employees for companies located in TIF districts so locally based businesses are better equipped to grow. The [Chicago PACE program](#) provides owners and developers of commercial properties low-cost, long-term financing for energy efficiency, sustainability and renewable energy infrastructure deployed in new or existing buildings. Existing local businesses in the Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project area are eligible to access these funds to help them grow and participate in the community's economic development.

The City also encourages new development is equitable. The City has developed a [transparent process](#) to sell City-owned vacant lots, and has determined sold land can be used for development of affordable housing, mixed-use developments, community-owned open space, or urban agriculture.

The 2022 [Connected Communities Ordinance \(CCC\)](#) prioritizes equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD) in Chicago. One of the many goals for this ordinance is to advance Chicago's ongoing effort to bring [ETODs](#) to disinvested and low-income neighborhoods while addressing the negative impacts of a car-centric built environment. The CCC introduces greater flexibility in [parking minimums](#). Parking requirements are eliminated for affordable housing developments near the Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project. Additionally, parking requirements can be reduced by 50% for other developments



and make a 100% parking reduction possible through a Special Use permit. Housing developments cannot provide more than one parking space per unit and would require administration adjustment to be allowed to build more than one parking space for every two units. The ordinance also provides significant incentives for additional affordable housing and requirements on pedestrian-friendly designs.

Criterion #6.1: Climate Change Mitigation and/or Adaptation and Resilience

According to a [2022 FHWA Benefits of Highway Caps study](#), environmental benefits include “noise reduction; localized air quality improvements; stormwater filtration and management; reduced heat island effects; and carbon sequestration from park landscaping”. Additionally, the Chicago Climate Action Plan (CAP), which serves as the City’s resiliency and local GHG reduction plan, identifies trees and forest buffers along highways as a Nature Based Solution to help reduce heat islands, air pollution, and noise. Furthermore, the [National Climate Resilience Framework](#) recommends that Nature Based Solutions are incorporated into public infrastructure. Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project will bring all these benefits to the North Lawndale and Garfield Park communities. The Benefit Cost Analysis estimates that the reduction in CO2 emissions, improved air quality, and benefits related to new greenspace are valued at \$644,827 for the first 20 years of the land cap.



Photo 1. Southeast view of the Independence Boulevard Bridges and I-290

During the [I-290 Eisenhower Expressway \(Mannheim Road to Racine Avenue\) Phase I Study](#), noise receptors were installed along the corridor, including four around the Independence Boulevard bridges. Noise levels around Independence Boulevard were among the highest, registering a 76 dB(A) noise level, while the corridor ranged from 63 to 78 dB(A). Currently, there are no noise barriers protecting the community from the gap equivalent to almost an acre in between the Independence Boulevard bridges and Congress Parkway and Harrison Street. A land cap will provide a much-needed barrier from the I-290 expressway. Furthermore, the

land cap may have approximately twenty trees and additional landscaping, which will serve as a Nature Based Solution to mitigate noise from the expressway even further. It would also mitigate noise from vehicular traffic along the I-290 Independence Boulevard entrance and exit ramps and the vehicular traffic traveling along Independence Boulevard. The City will follow the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard to minimize potential impacts and improve climate resiliency.

The new landscaping and trees will also contribute to the City’s goal of planting 75,000 trees. The CAC states that these 75,000 trees will increase carbon sequestration, improve air quality, reduce the urban heat island effect, and improve thermal comfort to encourage active transportation. This project aligns with the [U.S. National Blueprint for Transportation Decarbonization report](#) goal to expand active transportation options by adding a pedestrian path separated from vehicular traffic and adding trees and landscaping to encourage mode shift and reduce emissions.

The [CAC Addendum](#) sets a target to reduce GHG emissions by 67% by 2040. Data analysis completed for the CAC Plan estimates that prioritizing projects that expand a first-class walking and biking network will contribute to that goal by reducing GHG emissions by 6%. The CAC Plan outlines a goal



for the establishment of a robust outdoor air quality monitoring system to evaluate the City's progress towards its GHG emission reduction goals.

According to the EJ Screen (*Appendix H*), the area within 0.5-mile radius experiences national percentiles of over 94 for air pollutants associated with highways. While a land cap by itself cannot drastically improve air quality, it can help mitigate some air pollutants. As stated in the I-290 Phase I Study Report, CO impacts are generally localized, high concentrations are limited to 300 to 600 feet of heavily traveled roadways. Vehicle emissions are the major source of CO, and a land cap can help reduce the amount of CO members of the community breathe in from the I-290 expressway.

Heat islands in Chicago are common and poor air quality can make extreme heat deadly and air quality. One of the deadliest climate disasters in the US happened in Chicago in 1995 during a heat wave where [739 people living in Chicago's south and west sides lost their life](#). Similar events have occurred in Chicago since. The CAC reports that those living near large amounts of asphalt—like a highway—must deal with the combination of worse air pollution and higher temperatures. Low-income communities must face heat island effects without air conditioning or resources and are at highest risk during extreme heat. The ETC explorer reveals that the Climate & Disaster Risk Burden percentile for the census tracts in the project area is 94%. The Reconnecting Independence Boulevard is in an area where poverty and proximity to worse air quality overlap, and will directly deliver on the [National Climate Resilience Framework](#) objective to continue to “continue to invest in creating green spaces to mitigate extreme heat and air pollution” while also upholding the CAC's goal to invest in projects that will bring Climate Justice to Chicago.

Criterion #6.2: Workforce Development and Economic Opportunity

In the past, to further enhance local project benefits, the City of Chicago has used local hiring agreements when permitted by the funding agency. Ensuring that disadvantaged populations and youth have access to employment opportunities is a high priority for the City. The City has put in place numerous initiatives to increase diverse hiring in high quality skilled jobs. The initiatives include incentives for contractors, workforce development programs, and partnerships with local non-profits and chambers of commerce. All City contractors are subject to the Illinois Prevailing Wage or, if federally funded, the Davis Bacon Act. Furthermore, City contractors must have written sexual harassment policy and respect worker's rights for collective bargaining.

The Chicago Residency Ordinance requires construction contractors to utilize at least 50% of all labor hours by Chicago residents, and at least 7.5% of all labor hours by residents in the project area. The City encourages contractors that 15% of their workforce is female and 70% are minority workers. Similar incentives also encourage contractors to have diverse management. The City provides monetary incentives, ranging from 0.5 – 6% of the contract value, to hire City residents, people from socio-economically disadvantaged areas, women, minorities, and ex-offenders, and union-supported apprentices.

The City has invested in local workforce programs to increase access to well-paying jobs. The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership is the largest workforce development system in the nation, serving more than 140,000 people annually. The partnership connects employers and job seekers, and can provide training, coaching, paid internships, and more. The Chicago Department of Family and Support Services also works with community partners to connect Chicagoans to well-paying jobs at workforce centers and re-entry support centers. The network of workforce programs in Chicago is vast, and has programs for all Chicagoans, including ex-offenders, unhoused or at-risk people, people with limited English



proficiency, individuals who are low skilled and low income, out-of-work or out-of-school youth, and veterans.

Apprentice training programs must be union-authorized and must sponsor graduates from the Chicago City Colleges (CCC) or Chicago Public Schools (CPS). This apprenticeship program benefits low-income students of color; 25% of CPS students are bilingual and nearly 71% qualified for free or reduced lunch in the 2021-2022 school year. At the CCC 75% of students identify as students of color. Additionally, the Chicago Department of Procurement Services (DPS) works with 45 local non-profit agencies and/or chambers of commerce that represent the interest of small, minority and/ or women owned businesses. DPS meets with these agencies on a quarterly basis and conducts an annual review of City of Chicago and Assist Agencies partnerships. These partnerships help small businesses and M/WBE firms learn of procurement opportunities; and provide a channel for DPS to receive feedback about the procurement process.

Criterion #6.3: Planning Integration

The Independence Boulevard land cap project is identified in community, regional and state plans. Providing safe connectivity and enhancing greenspace for surrounding economically disadvantaged communities, as well as bridging a critical gap in the citywide boulevard system, is a priority for the City and State.

Within the [I-290 Eisenhower Expressway \(Mannheim Road to Racine Avenue\) Phase I Study](#), completed in 2017, the Preferred Alternative is summarized as achieving stakeholder goals and objectives, one of which is Coordinate with Planned Land Uses and Area Developments, specifically: “The potential for “caps” or decking over I-290, if desired by municipalities to provide additional recreational or commercial activities, can be accommodated where the proposed roadway profile and drainage allows, and subject to cost participation/maintenance, in the Reconstruction Section...” and another goal is to Improve Community Cohesion, specifically: “The potential for “caps” or decking over I-290, if desired by municipalities to provide additional recreational or commercial activities, can be accommodated in the Reconstruction Section...”. Please see the Letter of Endorsement from IDOT ([Appendix C](#)) and the Letter of Funding Commitment from CDOT ([Appendix D](#)) to demonstrate their dedication to seeing this project through construction.

Additionally, Bridge Repair and Replacement at I-290 Eisenhower Expressway – At Independence Boulevard is included in the [2025-2029 State of Illinois Highway & Multimodal Improvement Program \(June 2024\)](#), and regional [Transportation Improvement Program \(TIP\)](#) through Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP). The land cap project is not yet included, but is a priority for CMAP and IDOT, and will be added to the TIP. Please see CMAP’s letter of support ([Appendix E](#)).



By 1950 the overcrowded neighborhood was reaching its historic population peak of 70,000, with only 16 percent of homes owner-occupied. This was also the era of suburban growth and new highways, including the Congress (later renamed Eisenhower) Expressway, whose construction through the middle of our neighborhood in 1956 caused displacement of hundreds of families. The east-west highway created a barrier that effectively cut off the south section of the neighborhood... - Garfield Park Quality of Life Plan 2005

The transportation barrier of I-290 is recognized in numerous local plans, including the 2005 [East Garfield Park Quality of Life Plan](#), which recognizes this highway as a barrier which has both divided and shaped the community. An objective of this plan is to preserve open space/land in the midst of development, specifically emphasizing smaller neighborhood-scale parks, community gardens and other public greenspaces, especially in underserved areas. This additional greenspace created in the Independence Boulevard land cap provides an opportunity to enhance not only connectivity but additional greenspace for those in adjacent disadvantaged communities.

Improving safety and connectivity in the disadvantaged East and West Garfield Park Communities is identified as a priority in the [Vision Zero West Side Plan](#), completed in 2019, and [Independence Boulevard Improvements project](#) (from Harrison St to S Lawndale Ave), which is currently underway. The Vision Zero West Plan prioritizes making walking, biking and rolling safer for community members. It also focuses on expanding safe active transportation options for economically disadvantaged communities.

The land cap project is also in Metropolitan Planning Council's (MPC) report: [Reconnecting Communities: Mitigating Community Harms of Transportation Infrastructure](#). The Independence Boulevard land cap was identified and prioritized as one of the top 22 projects in the City. MPC is a local planning and policy organization addressing regional built environment issues through a racial and economic justice lens. They work to create Thriving Communities, Equitable Infrastructure and Just Public Systems for everyone who calls the Chicago region home.



Garfield Park and North Lawndale neighborhoods to the north and south of the highway. This project proposes adding a highway cap between Independence Boulevard and Homan Avenue to increase the mobility of residents between both communities and connect the green areas on both sides. The project would also improve cyclists' experience by building bike lanes on Independence Boulevard; this Boulevard is designated as a crosstown bike route in the Chicago Streets for Cycling Plan 2020. This highway cap would also improve the transit rider experience on the existing bus routes 7 and 126 and at the Kedzie-Homan train station. In addition, according

to community members, this project should incorporate spaces for retail and micro-retail to promote access to diverse members of the community to retail locations to start and grow businesses in the area. - MPC Reconnecting Communities Report 2023



4. Other Selection Considerations

The Reconnecting Independence Boulevard supports the following Selection Considerations:

1. This project will enhance safety.

As described in Criteria 6.3, CDOT developed a Vision Zero West Side Plan, where the community identified safety from vehicular traffic as a primary concern. This project will improve safety by slowing traffic, adding crosswalks, ADA ramps, bump outs, roadway lighting, and modernizing traffic signals.

2. This project will bring community transformation.

As described in Criteria 2, despite years of marginalization and lack of resources, there are several key commercial destinations within 0.5 miles. Additionally, the project area is of cultural significance for the community, with over 10 places of worship, 4 within steps of the Independence Boulevard bridges. CDOT has worked with the community to develop a boulevard design that will activate the new greenspace by adding a pedestrian path, signage, lighting and landscaping. Placemaking elements were created in partnership with the community to incorporate the neighborhood and its history within the design.

3. This project will bring improvements to a Qualified Opportunity Zone.

This project is located within a qualified Opportunity Zone.

5. Project Readiness: Environmental Risk

Planning and Constructability

The replacement of the Independence Boulevard bridges is listed in the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) ([ID 01-20-0011](#)), which will be updated to include the proposed land cap. The replacement of these bridges is part of the [I-290 Eisenhower Expressway Project](#), which was identified as a regionally significant project in the [Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning \(CMAP\) 2022 ON TO 2050 Plan Update](#). CMAP is the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization. Additionally, the Chicago Boulevards System is identified in [Chicago's 2022 Connected Network of Trails and Corridors Vision](#) as an asset to be maintained and improved.

Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project will extend boulevard treatments across the bridges by creating greenspace for landscaping and comfortable, safe, and inviting active transportation facilities between the existing car-centric ss.

IDOT is the owner of the existing facility, and they fully support the project as described in the Letter of Endorsement. See [Appendix C](#). Right-of-way acquisition, other than temporary easements for construction, will not be required. The Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project will maintain local and regional connectivity during construction by closing only one bridge at a time.

Proposed Schedule

RCP funds will be used for the construction of a land cap on the Independence Boulevard bridges over I-290. The Reconnecting Independence Boulevard Project is currently in the Preliminary Engineering stage, also described as Phase I, and is expected to receive all environmental and design approvals and authorization to let before the September 30, 2027 obligation date.



Table 2. Proposed Schedule

Project Milestone	Status	Completion Date
CMAP TIP approval	Complete	February 2020
Coordination with Illinois DOT	Ongoing	June 2025
Start of preliminary designs	Complete	October 2009
Start of NEPA process	Complete	October 2009
Coordination with FHWA	Ongoing	June 2025
Public Meeting 1	Complete	November 2009
Public Meeting 2	Complete	May 2011
Public Meeting 3	Complete	October 2013
Public Hearing	Complete	January 2017
Final Environmental Impact Statement	Complete	June 2017
Section 106 Effects Assessment Report	Complete	April 2017
Phase I Amendment Start	Complete	November 2024
Geometric Approval of Scope Amendment	Pending	December 2025
Section 106 Approval of Scope Amendment	Pending	March 2026
Section 4(f) Approval of Scope Amendment	Pending	June 2026
Preliminary Design Approval	Pending	September 2026
Final Plans and Specifications	Pending	October 2026
Authorization to Let / Funds Obligated	Pending	January 2027
Construction Notice to Proceed	Pending	April 2027
Construction Start	Pending	April 2027
Construction End	Pending	October 2029

NEPA & Permitting

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was completed in June 2017 as part of the I-290 Corridor Improvements Project. Since then, the City of Chicago has prioritized the Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project and plans to work with IDOT to include the land cap in the Phase I documentation as an amendment. The Phase I Amendment process will start in November 2024. Section 106 approval is expected by March 2026 and Section 4(f) approval by June 2026.

The Section 106 Effects Assessment Report was completed in April 2017 and FHWA determined that the I-290 Expressway Eisenhower would have no adverse effect on historic properties. The Independence Boulevard bridges is not Section 106 eligible, since per FHWA, all interstate bridges are exempt. In May 2017, the I-290 project received concurrence and notification that the project qualified



as an exception for 4(f) approval. Similar concurrence is expected for the Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project.

Permit applications will be submitted after development of final engineering plans. The expected permits for the Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project include: SWCD Review of Erosion and Sedimentation Control Plans and permits related to temporary construction activities. CDOT and IDOT are in close collaboration to complete the Phase I Amendment process and subsequent completion of final plans and construction.

Project Support

The I-290 Phase I Study received feedback from a Corridor Advisory Group which included elected officials, and a Task Force which included representatives of transportation agencies, interest groups, and land use planning groups. The project study group met individually with the aldermen of the 24th and 28th wards that border the expressway; the Chicago Transportation Authority (CTA) and CDOT were also invited. Concerns from the wards included the noise impact and abatement process potential effects of the project on arterial traffic, improvements and connectivity of the CTA Blue Line Train and other transit services in conjunction with the project.

During the I-290 Phase I Study, 3 public meetings and 2 public hearings were held, and 1,787 public comments were received and considered. Approximately 65% of the comments were received from individual stakeholders representing themselves, followed by 24% from public organizations, 6% from federal agencies, and 5% from units of local government. No state agencies commented on the draft EIS. A few of the top concerns were transit and transit connections, infrastructure improvements, noise and safety. As outlined in the Phase I Study Report, the project team worked to ensure that full and fair participation opportunities by all potentially affected communities and special effort was also made to advertise the public meetings within EJ communities. In addition, public meeting notices and website content was also provided in Spanish, and Spanish translations and accommodations for individuals for disabilities were also available. See *Appendix F* for a summary of public engagement for the project.

The community living near the project site has also been engaged by CDOT through other projects, as described in Criteria 4. CDOT and IDOT are pursuing the Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project in response to this community feedback.

Risk and Mitigation

The applicant completed an EIS in June 2017 in which environmental resources, impacts and mitigation were discussed. The EIS document identifies a need for noise mitigation and recommends noise barriers along the bridges. See the project Overview for more information about the bridges' improvements. The APE document confirms the project will have no adverse effect on the Chicago Park Boulevard System Historic District. The landscaping and pedestrian path on the Independence Boulevard land cap will follow the Independence Boulevard design south of the project area. Therefore, it is expected that this effect determination will not change following the Phase I Amendment to add the Reconnecting Independence Boulevard project. The City of Chicago and Illinois Department of Transportation are confident that the Phase I Amendment process and design and final approvals will be completed by November 2026.

CDOT has extensive experience in managing federal-aid highway program funds. In a typical year, CDOT manages a federal program valued at approximately \$100 million but which can exceed \$300 million. These programs include STP, CMAQ, TAP, Major Bridge, HPP, NHFP, and TIGER. Projects range from resurfacing arterial streets to reconstructing major structures such as the 43rd St



Pedestrian/Bike Bridge over Lake Shore Drive, the Navy Pier Flyover, and the 606 Trail. CDOT also manages a state funded program of over \$100 million per year and a local program in excess of \$200 million. The department works closely with its partners at IDOT, Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways, and the FHWA to ensure projects are delivered on time and within budget.

6. Benefit Cost Analysis

This benefit-cost analysis (BCA) was conducted for the development of the Chicago Department of Transportation Reconnecting Independence Boulevard: I-290 Land Cap Project for submission to the U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) as a requirement of a discretionary grant application for the Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP). The analysis was conducted in accordance with the benefit-cost methodology as outlined by U.S. DOT in the Benefit-Cost Analysis Guidance for Discretionary Grant Programs, released in December 2023. The period of analysis corresponds to 20 years and includes 3 years of construction and 20 years of benefits after operations of the highway cap park begin in 2029.

The Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) is seeking grant funding for the Reconnecting Independence Boulevard: I-290 Land Cap Project (the Project), located in West Chicago at the intersection of Independence Boulevard with I-290 in Cook County, Illinois. This application seeks funding for the construction of a highway park cap to reconnect communities north and south of I-290 through providing a greenspace.

The capital cost for this Project is expected to be \$20 million (\$16.6 million in discounted 2022 dollars). With a service life of 60 years, the expected residual value that exceeds the 20-year project operating period is approximately \$13.3 million in undiscounted dollars and \$5.8 million in 2022 discounted dollars. The residual value is added to the total benefits of the project as per U.S. DOT guidance.

The Project offers qualitative and quantitative benefits that enhance its value and impact on West Chicago disadvantaged communities. The project will provide newly usable land, contribute to air quality improvements, stormwater filtration and management, and improved health outcomes measured in Quality Adjusted Life Years (QALYs). By reconnecting the North Lawndale, East Garfield Park, and West Garfield Park community areas divided by the highway through closing a gap in the Chicago Park Boulevard System with a highway cap park, the Project fosters community cohesion, and the potential for increased property prices. The creation of new greenspace connected with the existing and proposed community fabric and greenspace network will offer new recreational opportunities and improvements to pedestrian safety. Enhanced mobility for non-motorized users, noise reduction, and overall aesthetic improvements further contribute to a better quality of life. Together, these benefits support the goals of the RCP through sustainable urban development, equitable access to resources, and long-term economic growth.

The Project quantitative benefits are derived from the highway park cap construction in the “Build” scenario. *Appendix A* presents a summary of the Project impacts, benefits and costs. The discounted benefits include safety benefits tied to pedestrian injury reduction (\$9.2 million discounted), reduced CO2 emissions costs (\$1,713 discounted), stormwater and air quality enhancements (\$5,964 discounted), value of land created by the highway cap park (\$638,863 discounted), and health benefits related to quality adjusted life years (\$15.6 million discounted).



Using a 3.1 percent discount rate (2 percent for Carbon emissions), this leads to an overall discounted Net Present Value (including residual value of assets) of \$5.1 million and a Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) of **1.31**.