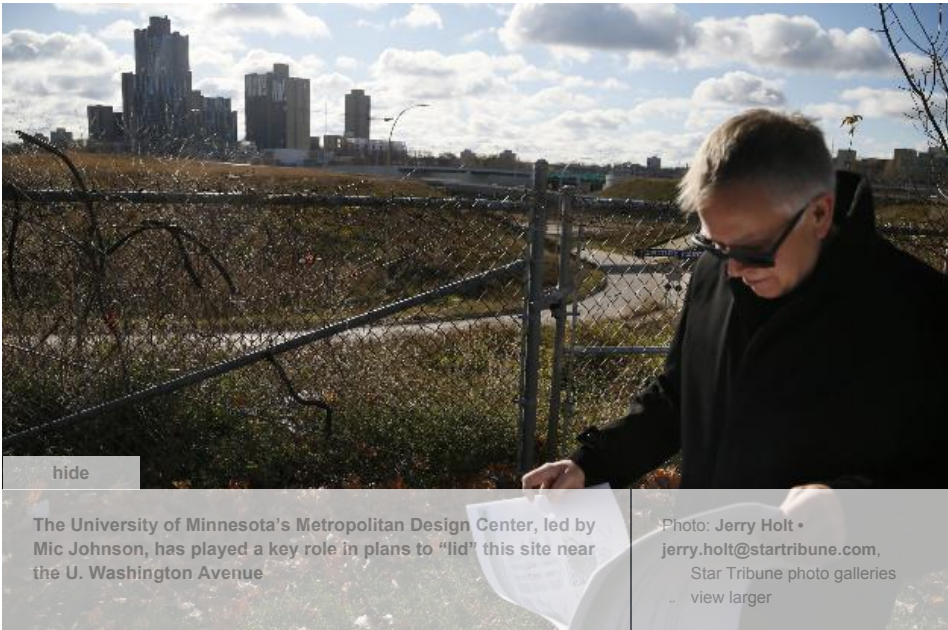




Momentum builds for a lid over I-35W in downtown Minneapolis

Article by: [KRISTEN LEIGH PAINTER](#), Star Tribune Updated: November 23, 2014 - 6:33 AM

Planners are exploring putting a lid over a portion of I-35W in downtown Minneapolis, adding green space – and tax base.



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The University of Minnesota's Metropolitan Design Center, led by Mic Johnson, has played a key role in plans to "lid" this site near the U. Washington Avenue

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A coalition of [Minneapolis](#) leaders believe the freeway snaking through the city's core should be buried alive.

Across the country, cities are covering loud highway trenches with lids, or caps, that block out noise, restore old neighborhood connections and yield development opportunities.

In Minneapolis, planners have their eye on covering a portion of Interstate 35W that separates Downtown East and Cedar-Riverside neighborhoods, running from Washington Avenue S. to about 5th Street.

A lid over that gap would create 17 acres of green space above the highway and the chance to put up new buildings on both sides.

Still in the early concept stages, the project team has yet to nail down a cost estimate or get a funding proposal in place, but they say the payout will be greater than the risk. Already, a challenge is emerging: gaining the support of residents in Cedar-Riverside.

The first step is to look at the successes and failures of lidding projects elsewhere, said Charles Zelle, commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Transportation, which, as the primary

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Chicago's Millennium Park is an example of a successful lid project. The park is a 24.5-acre lid over sunken railroad tracks.

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landowner, would take the lead role on the project.

"When you think about capturing both park and revenue-generating space, it becomes very interesting," Zelle said. "We want to be careful in our planning but we don't want to be closed to new ideas."

San Diego, Seattle and Columbus, Ohio, have all put lids over highways. Chicago's Millennium Park is a 24.5-acre lid over sunken railroad tracks.

St. Louis is building a park over Interstate 44 by the Gateway Arch, and Los Angeles is mapping out a lid project over Hwy. 101 downtown. Denver is embroiled in a fight over putting a lid on a portion of Interstate 70, though opposition is centered on the widening of the already-expansive freeway to be covered.

Dallas connected a museum district by building a 5.2-acre park over a recessed eight-lane freeway, using both public and private funds. "What they did in Dallas is extraordinary," said Jacob Frey, the Minneapolis City Council member who represents the downtown area. "That project is literally paying for itself in property tax revenue."

Minnesotans may be familiar with Duluth's Leif Erickson Park, which sits atop an I-35 tunnel that was built using a cut-and-cover technique. And [Edina](#) is exploring a lid over Hwy. 100 at W. 50th Street.

"We are really at step one out of a dozen or a hundred different steps," said Bill Neuendorf, Edina's economic development manager. "It's an exciting concept, and we will look and see if this thing has legs to go somewhere."

The project in Minneapolis has been aided by concepts developed at the University of Minnesota's Metropolitan Design Center.

"By developing the air rights above highways in areas of high demand, we can generate revenue that can help us repair our state's roads and other infrastructure," said Tom Fisher, dean of the College of Design at the U. "We also wanted to show what a family-friendly neighborhood in the city might be like, with child-safe playspace separated from traffic."

The lid trend is also shaped by planners who are attempting to fix systems developed in the past that are now perceived as misguided. When transportation goals in the 1950s and '60s sought to move people faster and farther, interstates and highways carved up cities and severed neighborhoods in the process.

"Now, more and more, because urban land is more valuable and because people have a different take on how cities should function and a better understanding of how these things are harmful, there's a broad trend in cities to try and heal some of the rifts created," said Rachel MacCleery, senior vice president at the Urban Land Institute in Washington, D.C.

While many cities put green space atop highway lids, anything can be tried, MacCleery added. "Every city's situation is unique, and what makes sense from a land-use perspective will, in many cases, be buildings," she said. "There were things that were there before these highways came through, and it might make sense for these uses to return."

Forging a connection to the U is one of 10 goals outlined in Minneapolis Downtown Council's 2025 Plan, which also suggests "green corridors over the Interstate 35W freeway trench." After U students made models of the I-35W lid earlier this year, MnDOT staffers plunged into research on the concept.

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Supporters of a lid over Interstate 35W say linking downtown and the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood would result in greater livability for residents on both sides, but some Cedar-Riverside residents worry the project would price them out of their neighborhood.
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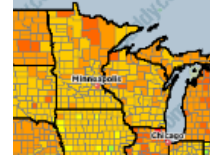
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