

HEALTH ON WHEELS



CLEVELAND'S OLD EUCLID AVENUE CORRIDOR HAS A NEW LOOK FOR ITS FAST NEW BUS LINE AND, IT IS HOPED, A PROMISING FUTURE AS A MEDICAL POWERHOUSE.

BY VERNON MAYS / IMAGE CREDIT Robert Benson Photography



PERHAPS NO PLACE IN AMERICA EMBODIES THE RISE AND FALL OF RUST BELT CITIES QUITE LIKE EUCLID AVENUE IN CLEVELAND. THE AVENUE GAINED FAME WORLDWIDE IN THE LATE 1800S AS MILLIONAIRE'S ROW, WHERE THE LIKES OF JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER BUILT LAVISH MANSIONS THAT RIVALED THOSE OF NEW YORK'S FIFTH AVENUE. BUT BY THE 1960S, ONE OF THE MOST EXCLUSIVE ADDRESSES IN AMERICA HAD BEEN REDUCED IN PLACES TO A SLUM OF ABANDONED COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS, EMPTY LOTS, AND HOUSING WHERE NOBODY WOULD REALLY WANT TO LIVE.



TOP

The typical street section downtown includes a raised median that incorporates a BRT station in the center of the street.

LEFT

The Euclid project incorporates an ambitious public art component that includes large concrete planters. Striped pavement introduces rhythm and a human scale to the streetscape.

OPPOSITE

While unified as a single street, the corridor is conceived as a sequence of several distinct districts.

IMAGE CREDITS

Craig Kuhner, this page;
 Courtesy Sasaki Associates, opposite

Fortunately for Cleveland, the story hasn't ended. Euclid Avenue is being reborn. After rounds and rounds of community-wide planning, backed by high-dollar investments from the public and private sectors, and stimulated by transportation money from the state and federal governments, the Euclid corridor has emerged as the focus of development—and optimism—for Cleveland's revival as a center for culture, arts, and medical technology.

The thread tying all this together is a \$200 million infrastructure project that was completed in 2008, with civil engineering, traffic, and transit services provided by a prime consultant, Wilbur Smith Associates of Cleveland, and with planning and landscape architecture services provided by Sasaki Associates of Watertown, Massachusetts. The initiative's most visible by-product is the HealthLine, a sleek new bus rapid-transit (BRT) system that runs along Cleveland's historic main street and connects the city's two largest employment hubs: the downtown business district and the University Circle neighborhood.

The Euclid Corridor Transportation Project was a massive undertaking, involving the excavation of a 6.8-mile-long stretch of roadway beginning at the heart of the city, Public Square, and extending beyond municipal borders into the city of East Cleveland. In its place, workers laid a new road surface accompanied by upgraded utilities, new curbs, sidewalks and planters, lighting and communications systems, landscape plantings, four miles of dedicated bike lanes, and an array of public art.

"It's fair to say the spine—the Euclid Avenue investment—has gotten everyone focused on a new way of rebuilding Cleveland," says Lillian Kuri, a program director at the Cleveland Foundation,

which has invested more than \$7.5 million to catalyze development along Euclid in the heart of University Circle alone. "Now we, as a community, need to stay focused on what it is going to take to fill the corridor."

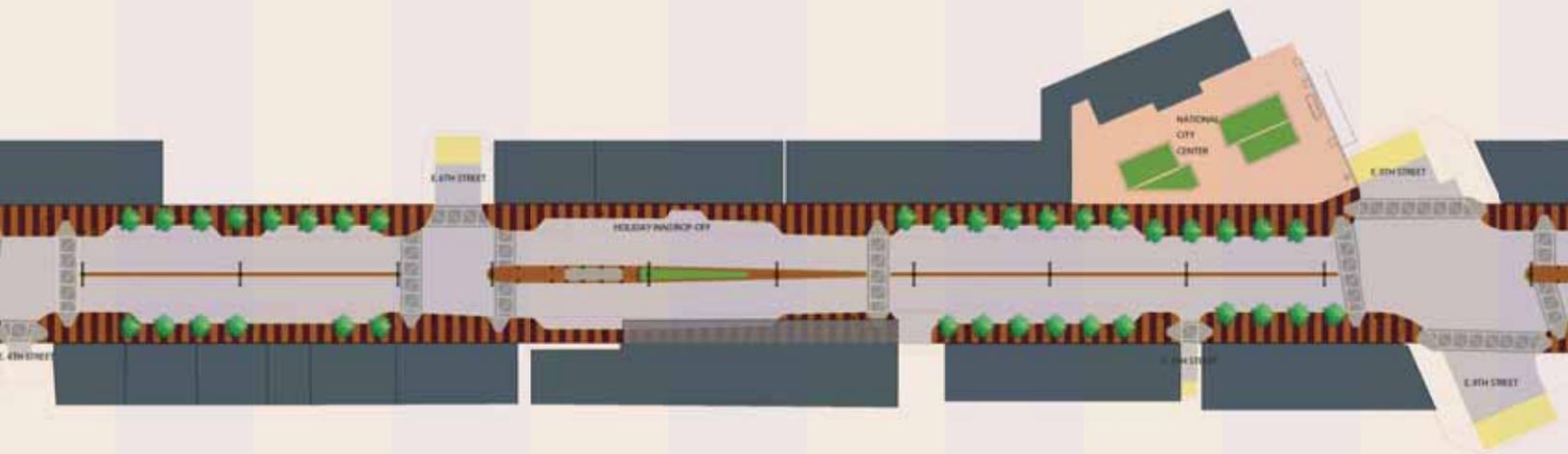
Ironically, transit is nothing new along Euclid Avenue, which once was served by electric streetcars. But almost as soon as the trolleys were sold off in the 1950s, city leaders began discussing plans to connect Cleveland's two employment hubs with rapid transit. Early proposals envisioned a subway. After decades of inaction, the conversation switched to light rail. Then a study of transportation alternatives in the early 2000s produced a final verdict: a high-efficiency bus line.

The planning and approvals process was "like a roller coaster," says Maribeth Feke, the director of programming and planning for the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority. The BRT project became a certainty in 2004 when the authority received \$82 million in funding through the Federal Transit Administration's New Starts program, which supports new local transit investments.

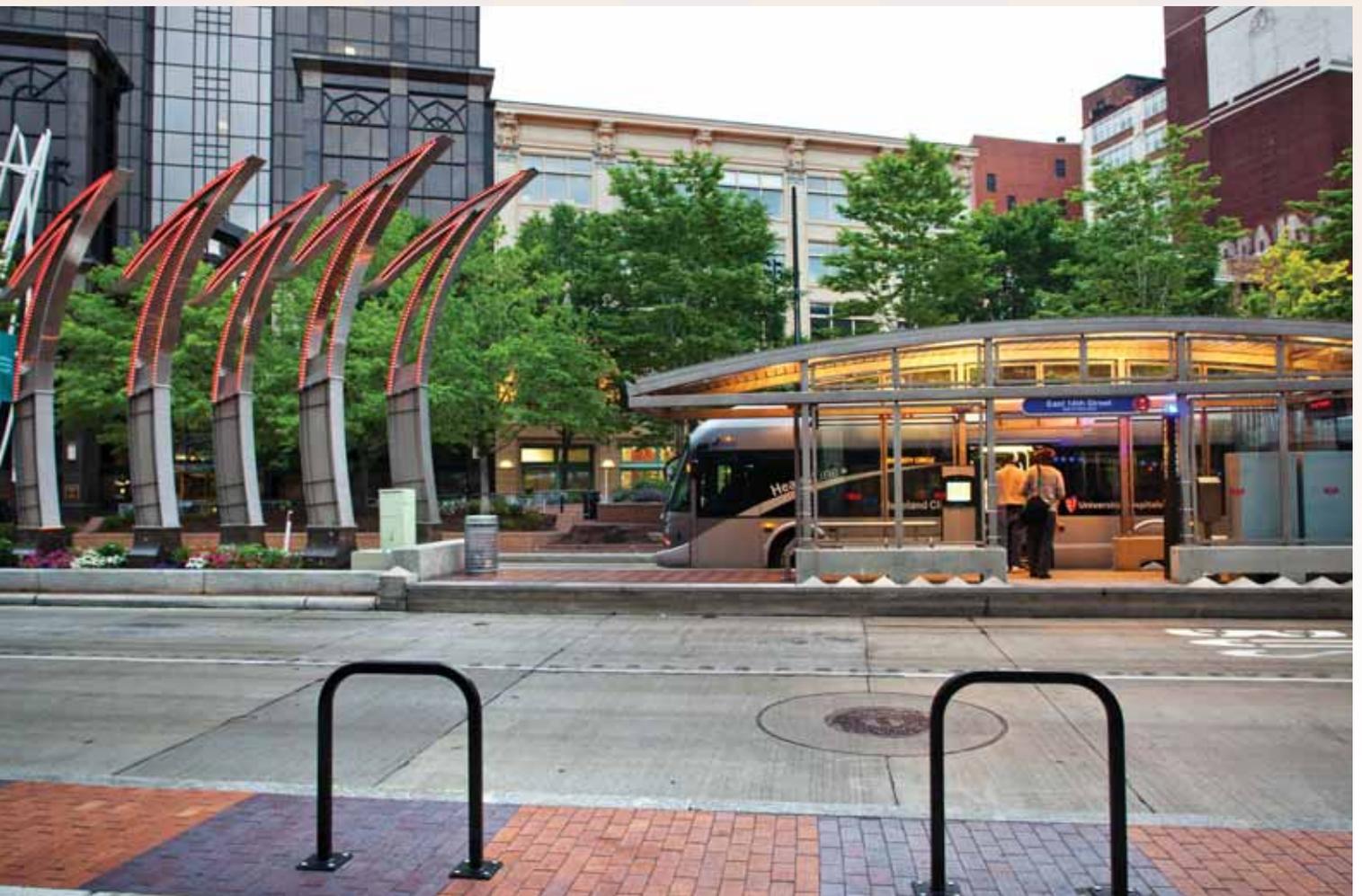
The development of Euclid Avenue's HealthLine (a name adopted after two prominent institutions along the corridor, Cleveland Clinic and University Hospitals, sponsored the naming rights) occurred during the parallel rise of BRT in other cities such as Los Angeles and Eugene, Oregon, which were also seeking alternatives to light rail. Within a year of its opening in 2005, Los Angeles's Metro Orange Line was transporting three times the projected number of riders and stimulating plans for mixed-use development near station stops. In January 2007, the EmX Green Line, which connects the downtowns of Eugene and Springfield,

THE LANDSCAPE DESIGN UNIFIES THE ENTIRE SEVEN-MILE CORRIDOR BUT IS FLEXIBLE ENOUGH TO ALLOW NEIGHBORHOODS' IDENTITIES THEIR DUE.





LOCAL INSTITUTIONS AND PRIVATE DEVELOPERS ARE LEVERAGING THE POTENTIAL OF THE CORRIDOR AS A RALLYING POINT FOR REMAKING THE CITY, WITH NEARLY \$5 BILLION IN REAL ESTATE INVESTMENTS COMMITTED ALONG EUCLID AVENUE.





OPPOSITE TOP

In the Downtown district, the corridor incorporates sections of on-street parking to serve retail stores, with columnar trees that accommodate the narrowed sidewalks in those areas.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM

The station at Star Plaza, in the heart of Cleveland's vibrant Playhouse Square district, is complemented by the freestanding steel sculpture *Chorus Line Luminaries* by the artist Stephen Manka.

LEFT

New street trees mesh with the existing landscape at Cleveland State University, which has made a switch by embracing the Euclid corridor.

IMAGE CREDITS

Craig Kuhner, this page and opposite bottom; Courtesy Sasaki Associates, opposite top

Oregon, opened along a strategic corridor that serves two colleges and a regional medical center. Today, according to the National Bus Rapid Transit Institute, 18 American cities have some form of a bus rapid-transit system in operation or under development.

Cleveland was among the first cities to send a delegation to Curitiba, Brazil, to observe how the city's groundbreaking BRT system shortened travel times with features such as dedicated travel lanes for buses, prepaid tickets for passengers, and raised platforms that allow fast boarding and unboarding. "When they got back, there was a renewed sense that it could work here," says Feke.

A key issue in advancing the project was developing consensus among Cleveland stakeholders, including powerful institutions such as Cleveland State University, the Cleveland Clinic, Case Western Reserve University, and University Hospitals. The design team met with local property owners, businesses, and residents to get their input, and hosted workshops to gather ideas on plants, parking, traffic operations, bike lanes, and other issues. "The real challenge was working through the process with the stakeholders," says Jason Hellendrung, ASLA, the Sasaki principal who shepherded the project through six years of design and construction. "A lot of people weren't convinced. We went building by building and block by block to tweak the design for parking spaces, café zones, and station locations."

To breathe new life into the public realm, Sasaki wove new landscape elements into the existing city fabric. Specific design moves included introducing median platforms, where possible, to reduce the number of bus stations that would take up space on the sidewalks; providing splashes of colorful planting in medians; creating a rhythm of pavement striping to provide human scale; and placing streetlights in the median as signature design elements. Freestanding bus stations, designed by architects at

Robert P. Madison International of Cleveland, are handsome compositions of concrete, steel, and glass.

The landscape design provides a structure that helps to unify the entire corridor, yet it is flexible enough to allow individual identities in neighborhood districts. In the downtown district, clay-brick paving, laid in a pattern of orange and brown alternating stripes, lends a human scale to the urban setting—an issue that was important to developers. Sturdier concrete unit pavers are used in crosswalks along the entire corridor. Outside of downtown, sidewalks are made of concrete that is scored to resemble large square pavers.

The city committed to replanting the urban forest, and nearly 1,400 street trees were added. To help them survive the harsh urban environment, the trees are placed in shared planters with a soil profile designed by the soil scientist Timothy Craul, Affiliate ASLA, of Penn State. In the downtown district, continuous soil trenches running beneath the sidewalks are designed to maximize the amount of soil available for root growth. In many neighborhoods, open planters in the sidewalk feature a raised lip around the edge to protect the beds from a harmful influx of salt used to melt snow and ice. In addition, trees along the corridor are irrigated from water lines installed during the street's reconstruction.

Twenty-six varieties of tree species were planted along the corridor; they are mixed within the districts to avoid creating a monoculture. The corridor is organized in eight districts, each featuring three to seven different species. "We looked at each area individually," says Hellendrung. "If we were pinched for planting zones, we would use narrower trees, such as Armstrong red maples or columnar European hornbeams. Where we had wider soil volumes, we used oaks or, in the downtown, ginkgoes. In some cases, where older trees remained, we would also try to match them with new plantings across the street."



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At East 71st Street, the right-of-way broadens to 120 feet. So Sasaki introduced tree planting in the medians: oaks in the MidTown district, flowering crabapples at the edges of the Cleveland Clinic district, and American elms in University Circle. Within the districts, trees were varied to provide seasonal interest or contrasting or complementary relationships.

The exception to the overall plan is the section through the heart of the Cleveland Clinic. Clinic administrators begrudgingly accepted the placement of BRT stations in the vicinity of their new heart center, Feke says, but they wanted to create a distinctive landscape on their campus. The clinic selected Peter Walker and Partners (PWP) Landscape Architecture of Berkeley, California, whose design along the corridor is layered with rows of trees and columnar pedestrian lights, with evergreens clustered at the intersections. The firm’s design creates a monumental focal point at East 93rd Street, where a broad allée of yellow poplars with a stepped reflecting pool forms a cross axis that aligns with the main clinic entrance at the Sydel and Arnold Miller Family Pavilion.

Working in tandem with the planting, the lighting design along the corridor also offered an opportunity to create identity for the corridor and the transit system. To distinguish the downtown district, Sasaki worked with Cleveland Public Power and Cooper Lighting to produce customized dual-arm lamps positioned in the center of the avenue. At the edge of Cleveland State University, single-arm lights begin to appear on the sidewalks. “We still wanted to use median lighting to provide added light and create an identity there,” says Hellendrung. “So we used small bump lights.” In parts of University Circle and sections of MidTown, uplights illuminate the trees at night.

Public art is an important element of Euclid’s revival, as well. More than \$2 million of integrated art or stand-alone artworks



OPPOSITE TOP

Planters that are integral to the stations provide opportunities to add bold colors to the street.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM

The design provides comfortable seating—either in the form of commissioned artworks or off-the-shelf stainless steel units—for HealthLine patrons.

LEFT

In University Circle, loading platforms are located curbside and sidewalks are scored concrete.

IMAGE CREDITS

Craig Kuhner, this page and opposite

were coordinated through Cleveland Public Art, a nonprofit that works to improve public spaces. In addition to creating unique opportunities for placemaking, the art program yielded planters, tree grates, lighting, benches, litter receptacles, and paver designs that are integral parts of the corridor experience.

The net result is a boon for the city—an attractive, efficient transit system. But what matters most in Cleveland is that local institutions and private developers have delivered or committed to nearly \$5 billion in real estate investments along the corridor. Ambitious new developments are leveraging the potential of the renewed Euclid corridor and using it as a rallying point for remaking the city.

Planned to open in 2013, for example, is the new Cleveland Medical Mart & Convention Center, a downtown marketplace combining showrooms, an exhibition hall, and conference facilities targeted to the medical industry. With construction moving ahead, at least three developers are renovating old downtown buildings into new hotels. And operators of a planned downtown casino have signed a lease to use parts of the historic Higbee Building, on Public Square, as the first phase of their gaming hall.

Farther east, Cleveland State University has altered its master plan to embrace Euclid Avenue, rather than turn its back on the corridor. Now CSU buildings are being planned with their front doors on Euclid and with a mind to how they engage the street and reinforce the greenway that is being created. In addition, a three-mile-long section of Euclid encompassing much of MidTown is now being promoted as the “Health-Tech Corridor,” an innovation zone to promote business, neighborhood, and physical development by attracting supply chain businesses serving the health care industry.

At the center of the Health-Tech Corridor is the massive Cleveland Clinic, which in recent years has added more than \$1 billion in new facilities. Farther east, in University Circle, University

Hospitals is spending \$900 million in campus improvements, including its Seidman Cancer Center and the Center for Emergency Medicine. Also in University City, spending in the arts is topped by the current \$350 million expansion project at the Cleveland Museum of Art, and other mixed-use and residential projects along Euclid are moving quickly ahead.

Job growth in University Circle has been trending at 1,000 jobs a year over the past five years, says Chris Ronayne, the former planning director of Cleveland and current president of University Circle Inc., a nonprofit development and advocacy group. “The upside benefit is as much about the development and, frankly, the revitalization of Cleveland’s most important historic main street as it is the transit itself,” he adds. “But there’s no way we could have leveraged what we’ve leveraged without the Euclid Corridor when it comes to development, placemaking, and urban revitalization.” ●

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Project Credits

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