

DIVIDED BY DESIGN

LEAH FERRY & KASANDRA REA



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HISTORY OF AKRON

Akron, Ohio, founded in 1825 along the Ohio & Erie Canal, played a pivotal role in the transportation and industrial growth of the region. Its name, derived from the Greek word "akros," meaning "high point," reflects its location on a summit near the canal.

The city gained prominence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as the Rubber Capital of the World. Companies like Goodyear, Firestone, and B.F. Goodrich established headquarters there, driving economic growth and innovation in the tire and rubber industry. This boom brought a significant influx of workers, contributing to Akron's rapid population growth.

Today, Akron is a diverse city known for its historic contributions, thriving healthcare and education sectors, and cultural landmarks like the Akron Art Museum and Stan Hywet Hall & Gardens. Its industrial past is complemented by ongoing efforts to revitalize downtown and connect its communities through green initiatives, such as the Towpath Trail.



Main Street, looking North from Quarry, AKRON, Ohio.



INNERBELT PROPOSAL

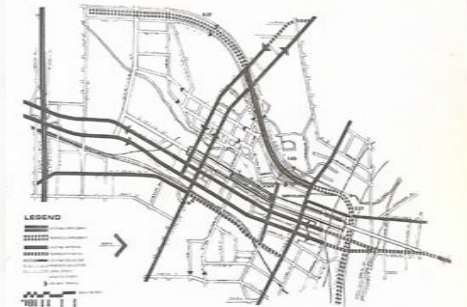


The Akron Innerbelt was proposed in the 1960s as part of efforts to redevelop areas near the central business district, which had been impacted by industrial decline and urban blight. Planners aimed to modernize the city, attract investment, and revitalize downtown Akron, making it more appealing to businesses and residents. The project was also tied to broader urban

O-2 Akron Beacon Journal Saturday April 3, 1969

WHY THE PLAN?

Additionally, the Innerbelt was intended to alleviate traffic congestion in downtown Akron by providing a high speed, limited access freeway. This would divert vehicles from heavily trafficked city streets, improve commuting times for suburban drivers, and support the growing demand for automobile infrastructure in post war America.



DOWNTOWN CIRCULATION: EXISTING AND PROPOSED

Innerbelt is solution to traffic woes

BUILDING, DIVIDING, RECONNECTING

1962-1965

Plans for the Innerbelt take shape, primarily targeting African American neighborhoods for highway development.

1965

The Innerbelt project is estimated to cost \$47.4 million, with construction expected to begin within two years.

1971

Property acquisition begins, leading to the displacement of entire communities.

1975

The State of Ohio approves Innerbelt construction, forcing many African American families from their homes.

1983

Construction continues, with more residents losing land through eminent domain.

1999

Akron Mayor Don Plusquellic advocates for the redevelopment of the Innerbelt.

2017

Mayor Dan Horrigan announces the decommissioning of the Innerbelt.

2021

Consultant Liz Ogbu/Studio O is hired, and an Advisory Group is formed to facilitate community discussions on the Innerbelt's history and future.

2022

The Reconnecting Our Community initiative launches. The Innerbelt Reunion event is held at the Akron Urban League, bringing together former residents to honor lost neighborhoods.

2023

The Innerbelt History Collection is launched on the Summit Memory website. Akron receives a Reconnecting Communities grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation to fund a master plan for the site. The Phase 1 report of the Reconnecting Our Community initiative is released.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE A



ALTERNATIVE ROUTE B



ALTERNATIVE ROUTE C



WHY ROUTE B?

The construction of Route B led to mass displacement and lasting harm to the Black community, as it cut through densely populated neighborhoods, forcing thousands of residents out and demolishing homes, businesses, and churches. This destruction not only uprooted families but also caused significant economic and social disruption. Many Black owned businesses collapsed, and the severing of community networks made recovery difficult. Additionally, displaced families faced immense challenges in securing new housing due to redlining and a lack of institutional support, leading to long term wealth loss and deepening racial disparities in homeownership and economic stability.

Route B was chosen due to a combination of urban renewal policies, racial bias, and economic convenience. City planners labeled these Black neighborhoods as "blighted," making them targets for clearance rather than investment. Compared to Route C, this path was cheaper and easier to acquire, as it required fewer costly property buyouts and faced less political resistance. Additionally, the city prioritized the needs of businesses and suburban commuters over

of the existing community, valuing downtown access over the livelihoods of displaced residents.

Despite the widespread displacement it caused, the Innerbelt ultimately failed to serve its intended purpose, remaining underused before eventually being closed. What remains is a lasting scar on the community, where lost homes, generational wealth, and cultural history cannot be fully restored. While efforts are now underway to reclaim the land, the damage inflicted by its construction continues to shape the city's landscape and the lives of those affected.



URBAN PLANNING & INFRASTRUCTURE

The Akron Innerbelt played a transformative role in reshaping the city's road network and urban infrastructure. The introduction of freeway infrastructure, particularly through downtown Akron, led to major changes in road networking, traffic flows, and the connectivity between neighborhoods.

URBAN ALTERATION

The construction of the Innerbelt caused significant urban restructuring, particularly affecting residential areas and businesses, especially in the predominantly African American neighborhoods. Thousands of residents were displaced, and over 100 businesses were impacted. The freeway eliminated many streets that once served as vital links between neighborhoods, which disrupted the city's layout and contributed to the fragmentation of Akron's urban grid. This was particularly detrimental to lower income and minority populations who faced the brunt of the displacement.

FRAGMENTATION

Alongside the freeway, two large collector streets were designed to accommodate local traffic and distribute

vehicles to surrounding areas. These roads, often as wide as the freeway itself, expanded the road network but also added to the fragmentation of the urban grid. The design created a disconnected system, making it harder to navigate Akron's downtown and surrounding neighborhoods without using the freeway. These wide roads, built primarily for motor vehicles, also presented challenges for pedestrians and cyclists, as they were not designed with non motorized users in mind.

TRAFFIC FLOWS

One major shortcoming of the freeway was its northern terminus, which caused traffic congestion and bottlenecks. Intended as a seamless extension, the freeway ends abruptly near downtown, transitioning into Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. This mismatch between the freeway and surrounding infrastructure disrupted traffic flow and connectivity between neighborhoods. The short stretch of the Innerbelt (2.24 miles of the planned 21.5 miles) also hindered Akron's integration into the regional highway system, limiting efficient traffic movement across the city.

CONNECTIVITY

The freeway's introduction created significant disruptions to neighborhood connectivity. Streets that once provided easy access across Akron were cut off or altered by the freeway, which not only divided neighborhoods but also made it more difficult to move freely between them. The presence of the freeway and its associated collector roads further fragmented the city, making it harder for residents to commute across Akron without relying on the freeway. As a result, downtown Akron and surrounding neighborhoods became more isolated from each other, with limited pathways for pedestrians and cyclists to connect across the city.

TRANSITION

In recent years, Akron has begun rethinking the freeway's impact on its urban environment. New planning efforts aim to transform the abandoned freeway section into a more community focused space. These efforts include ideas like converting the land into parks and reestablishing pedestrian friendly connections between downtown and nearby neighborhoods that were disrupted by the original freeway design. These changes reflect a broader shift toward improving the quality of life in Akron by undoing some of the damage caused by the freeway and restoring connectivity between neighborhoods.

These major changes to road networking, traffic flows, and neighborhood connectivity have sparked important discussions about the legacy of urban highways. Akron is working to balance the need for infrastructure development with fostering a more integrated and accessible urban environment for its residents. The future of the Innerbelt, including its transformation into a community corridor, will play a key role in reshaping the city's urban landscape and enhancing neighborhood connectivity.



SOCIAL & ECONOMIC IMPACTS

The Akron Innerbelt had significant social and economic impacts due to the splitting of neighborhoods, altering transportation patterns and affecting local businesses, property values, and the environment.

TRANSPORTATION

The construction of the freeway significantly altered Akron's transportation landscape, particularly in how residents navigated the city. While the freeway provided faster routes for regional traffic, it also disrupted local routes, severing connections between neighborhoods. This shift led to a dependency on the freeway for commuting, while making it more difficult for residents to travel between neighborhoods without relying on the highway. Additionally, local traffic congestion increased, especially near the freeway's terminus, where infrastructure mismatches led to bottlenecks.

LOCAL

The freeway's construction displaced over 100 businesses and thousands of residents, notably in lower income and predominantly African American neighborhoods. Many businesses, unable to relocate, were forced to shut down, leaving economic voids in affected areas.

Residents, particularly those in marginalized communities, faced the challenge of relocating, which led to a loss of community ties. This displacement not only created immediate financial strain but also led to long term social impacts, as neighborhoods were fragmented and families were uprooted.



VALUE SHIFTS

The introduction of the freeway caused significant shifts in property values. Properties closest to the freeway or on streets impacted by the construction experienced a drop in value. The noise, air pollution, and congestion associated with the highway made these areas less desirable for potential buyers. Conversely, neighborhoods further from the freeway saw an increase in demand, as residents sought areas less affected by the freeway's disruptive presence.



ENVIRONMENT

The construction of the freeway also had notable environmental consequences. The alteration of the urban landscape resulted in the loss of green spaces and natural areas, while the increase in vehicle traffic led to higher levels of air and noise pollution. The environment surrounding the freeway became less livable, impacting residents' health and quality of life. Additionally, the expansion of paved surfaces contributed to the urban heat island effect, which increased local temperatures and further strained the city's natural resources.



Generalized Land Use
Figure 9



Where did all those people go?

"In a nutshell, it can't possibly be put in a nutshell"

A Road to Nowhere: How the Construction of Akron's Innerbelt Displaced Thousands

By Noor Hindi, Senior Writer for The Devil Strip

Innerbelt is solution to traffic woes

BENEATH ITS editorial about Polk says the Beacon Journal properly exhorted us to persevere with new plans and projects for the Akron area. Yet, in a test of character to finish what has already been started. In this and similar recent editorials, the editors have omitted mention of the downtown Innerbelt.

Akron's Innerbelt had been intended as an efficient route to downtown between the West and North Expressways. Apparently the editors and Akron's planners think its completed misdirection, the Innerbelt is too pretty to promote full use by the citizens who own it.

Both have been busy defending the cost of building one North Hill Viaduct with concrete bridges with traffic lights at Elizabeth Park.

Do Akron parents want to bequeath to their children more taxes to correct to day's incomplete plans?

Besides that, Bridges' Innerbelt sure future tax is the certain burden resulting from choosing two bridges to replace the viaduct. Bridges' frontage is not-taxable. Property tax from elsewhere in Akron will have to pay maintenance costs for those numerous replacements.

Akron income tax allocations will also be diverted to them at the added expense of maintaining other Akron streets, bridges and viaducts.

The bridges will never contribute to their own maintenance. The City of Akron spent \$240,116.50 in maintaining the North Expressway bridge in 1975.

Our history is replete with our mistakes because we did not have the courage to stop and reassess our direction. Casca repair is our most recent example.

A proper mark of area pride would be completion of the Innerbelt — a project that has already been started, is now raining, and, like Casca, is unquestionably worthwhile.

The \$30 million for two impractical bridges should be reallocated to a less-expensive viaduct replacement and to the Innerbelt. With available tax money, and with the North Expressway bridge aging, why not finish the Innerbelt?

STEPHEN DUBETZ
Summit County engineer
Akron

Editor's note: A contract was awarded last month for completion of the Innerbelt from its current terminus at W. Exchange Street to Thornton Street. That phase is to be completed in 1980. The final section, the interchange with the West Expressway, is not scheduled to be started until 1980.

WHEREAS, It is desirable for the City of Akron to give consideration to the appointment of a committee in compliance with the Federal Urban Renewal Program, and to the City of Akron has become a subject of major and

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AKRON:

Section 1. That the City of Akron is hereby requested, consisting of representatives of the City Planning Department, and the City Department, together with the Planning Committees, to comprise an official committee for the planning and execution of projects.

Section 2. That the City of Akron is hereby requested, consisting of a representative of the University of Akron, and the City Department, together with the Planning Committees, to comprise an official committee for the planning and execution of projects.

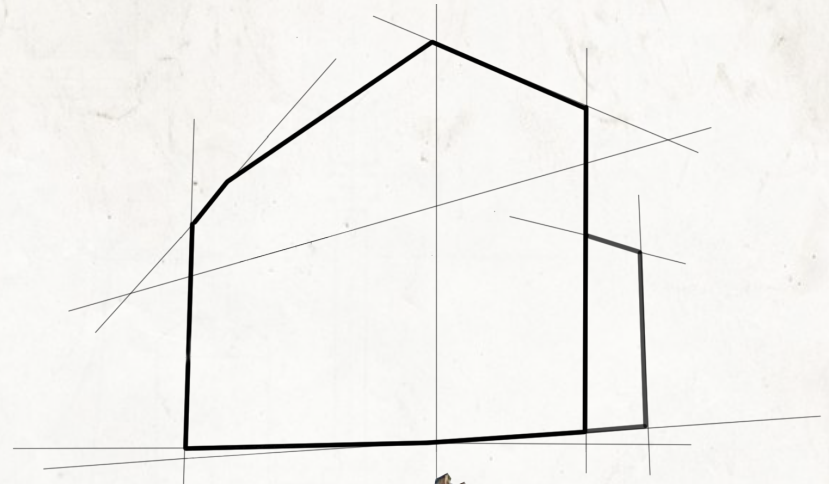
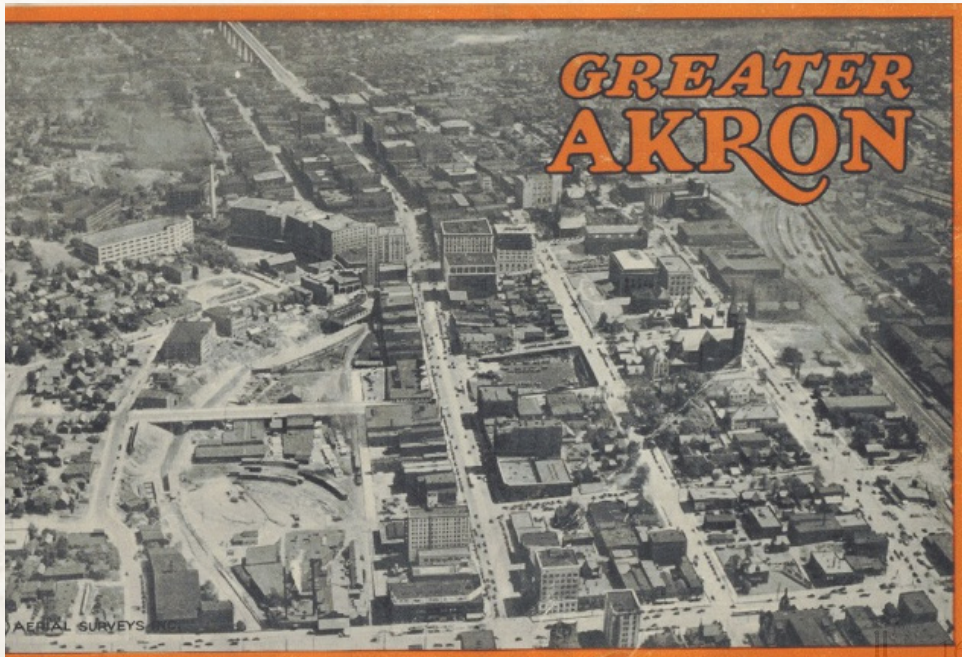
Section 3. That the City of Akron is hereby requested, consisting of a representative of the University of Akron, and the City Department, together with the Planning Committees, to comprise an official committee for the planning and execution of projects.

EFFECTS ON THE COMMUNITY

The construction of the Akron Innerbelt in the 1960s and 1970s had lasting effects on the community. It displaced many residents, particularly in the East Akron area, where a large African American community lived, and demolished homes, businesses, and cultural landmarks like the Ebenezer Baptist Church. The highway also divided neighborhoods, disrupted social ties, and

contributed to the decline of downtown Akron. Historic buildings were lost, and the city saw increased air and noise pollution. While the Innerbelt improved transportation, it led to economic and social fragmentation, and its legacy of disconnection continues to impact Akron's urban planning and redevelopment efforts today.

"When the urban renews huff and puff and blow your house down"



DISPLACEMENT

"...persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence..."

MADE
IN
AKRON

SEPERATION



Mr. Pete Crossland
c/o Ohio House of Representatives
District 7
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Mr. Crossland:

My name is Francis Kuhn and I own a house located at 1111 Rhodes Avenue, Akron, Ohio (W.D.-5). The house is within the boundaries of the proposed Innerbelt and is scheduled to be acquired by the City of Akron for the Akron Innerbelt. I was recently informed that acquisition of additional houses in this area would commence sometime in June if approval was received by the City of Akron from the State of Ohio. I recently contacted Mr. Owens, Manager of Right-of-Way Acquisition for the City of Akron, and he informed me that they do not have the right as yet to recommence acquiring property for the Innerbelt because the state has not as yet approved said acquisition. As you know, the city is advancing the monies for acquisition.

I would like to give you a little history of this area. I have owned the house since 1955. Around the middle of 1965, the property was to be acquired for an urban renewal project (Opportunity Park) but later the boundaries were changed and the house was excluded. Approximately eight to ten years ago, the house was shown to be within the boundaries of the proposed Innerbelt and, therefore, was slated to be acquired by the city. However, various changes were made and the outside limits of the take area have been changed from time to time. I have been told on no less than three occasions that my house was to be acquired in the near future only to have that changed at a later date. A few years ago I was told that my house was on the list to be acquired and that it was within the first five properties to be acquired. I was later told that for some unknown reason my name was taken off the list.

Just last year the City of Akron threatened to condemn the house because of an electrical problem. It was not a major problem; however, I was told it was necessary to hire an electrician and bring the electric service up to the existing code even though the house was built prior to the code they referred to. Shortly thereafter, the tenant moved and I suggested that the city buy the house which would have represented a savings to the city of approximately \$5,000 to \$10,000. (Since there was no tenant, no RAP Program and I would not have had to have the house rewired at a cost of \$1,000) Since the house was in a good state of repair, I did have the house completely rewired at a cost of \$1,000. I had been told by the Law Department to either fix the electric service, board it up or tear it down. Evidently no one was interested in saving money.

I presently have a fine tenant (a woman with two children) renting the house. Houses on either side of my house have been torn down for the Innerbelt and more and more the remaining areas rapidly deteriorating. It has been deteriorating for quite some time. I recently had a conversation with my tenant and she stated that she is becoming more and more afraid to live in this area especially because of the absence of houses in the area. Her mother lived next door but was recently relocated and her house was torn down.

I bring this matter to your attention because I feel I have waited patiently without taking any necessary legal steps to insure that my rights are protected. I would appreciate anything you can do to expedite this matter because I am sincerely afraid that something may happen in this area either to the house or to the occupants. If this happens, then I will hold the city entirely responsible because of the fact that the city has allowed this situation to continue to deteriorate to the point where I now feel it is very dangerous.

May I please hear from you relative to this matter.

Very truly yours,

Francis C. Kuhn
Francis C. Kuhn
3616 Darrow Road
Stow, OH 44224

DISPOSITION

"...the arrangement or placement of people in a specific area..."

DISPLACEMENT

The construction of the Innerbelt sparked frustration and uncertainty among property owners, who faced repeated threats of displacement. Many homeowners were not only at risk of losing their primary residences but also their rental properties, which provided essential income. The prolonged process of land acquisition and demolition left residents in a state of limbo, unable to make long term decisions about their futures.

One property owner expressed growing distress, stating that they wanted the city to either take their property immediately—since the demolition of surrounding buildings had left them isolated—or they would pursue legal action.

Others shared similar sentiments, feeling trapped as their neighborhoods crumbled around them, while officials delayed compensation or clear relocation plans. Some residents reported that once vibrant streets became eerily empty, making their remaining homes unsafe and devalued. The uncertainty and lack of support only deepened the frustration, adding another layer of harm to a community already facing forced displacement.

AS SHOWN IN IMAGE A



IMAGE A

SEPARATION

The letter from the House of Representatives' Department of Public Services instructed Akron officials to focus on acquiring only the "most important" properties for the Innerbelt project, prioritizing those in poor condition or unsafe areas. This approach created a separation, distinguishing certain properties as less worthy of preservation based on their physical state rather than their community value. While presented as a solution, the letter also clarified that the project would not receive state funding, leaving property owners without the necessary support. This decision exemplified how urban renewal efforts could mask dispossession, isolating homeowners and leaving them vulnerable without adequate resources for relocation or rebuilding.

AS SHOWN IN IMAGE B

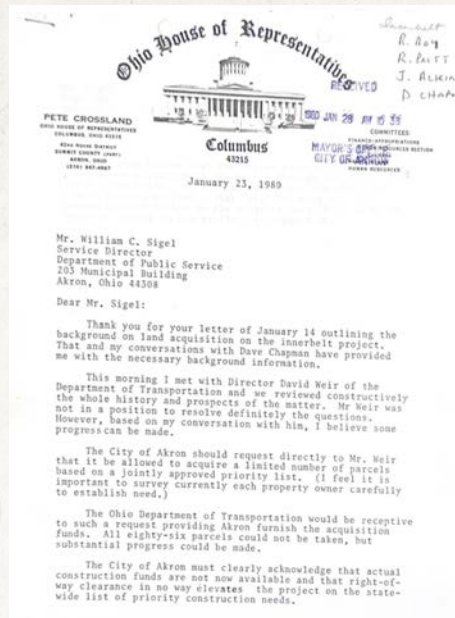


IMAGE B

DISPOSITION

The letters written to property owners and officials during the planning of the Innerbelt project reflect a clear sense of disposition, where certain neighborhoods and residents were treated as expendable or less deserving of attention. The

tone and content of these letters often reflected a dismissive view of the community, suggesting that homes in these areas were not worth preserving or investing in. Property owners were often left with little more than vague promises and threats of demolition, creating a sense of dispossession. The language used in these letters emphasized the value of physical condition over community ties, contributing to the separation and marginalization of these neighborhoods. This disposition not only stripped residents of their homes but also their sense of belonging and stability, reinforcing a systemic disregard for their needs and well being.

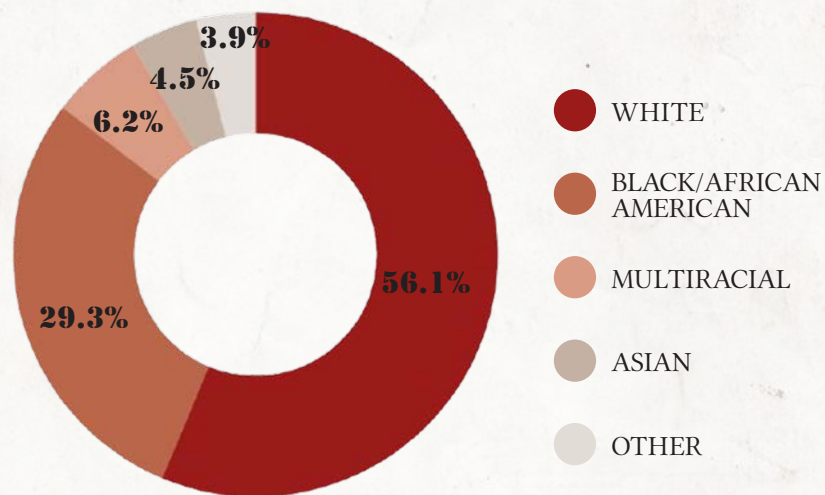
AS SHOWN IN IMAGE BELOW



2022 DEMOGRAPHICS

Akron has a diverse population with a median age in the late 30s. The city faces a significant poverty rate, while the median household income is moderate. Property values are relatively affordable, and a large portion of the population is employed.

In terms of diversity, the city is predominantly White, followed by a substantial Black or African American community, along with smaller populations of Multiracial and Asian residents. This demographic mix reflects Akron's unique social and economic dynamics.

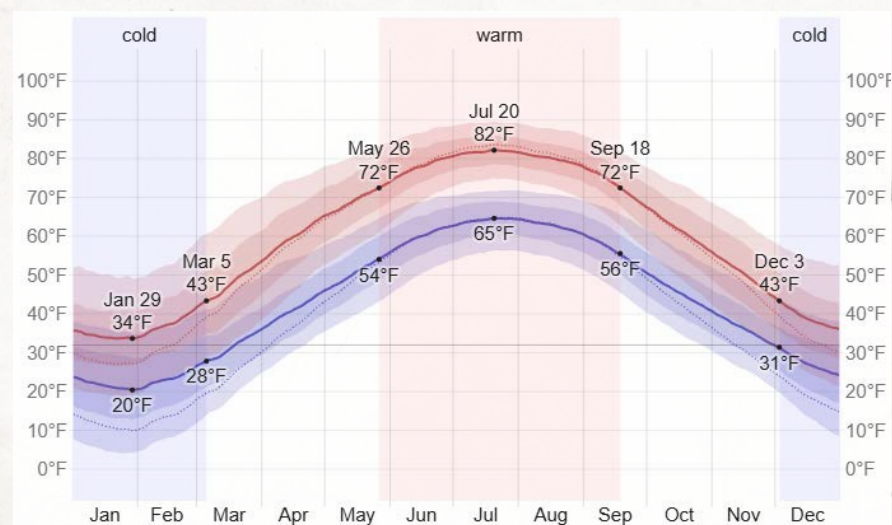
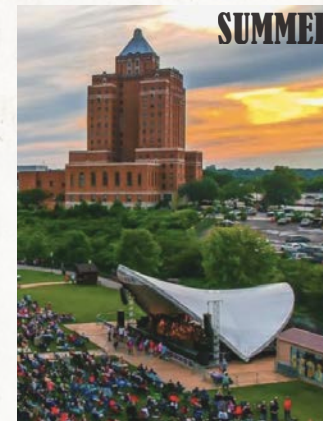


THEN VS. NOW

Before the Akron Innerbelt project, the city's demographics were shaped by its industrial base, with many residents working in manufacturing, especially in rubber and tire production. Akron had a diverse, working-class population living in close-knit neighborhoods. However, as industries declined and urban sprawl increased, the Innerbelt's construction contributed to

demographic shifts. Manufacturing jobs left, and population numbers decreased, while gentrification led to an influx of more affluent residents in some areas. Many lower-income families were displaced, and certain neighborhoods saw a decline. Today, Akron's demographics are more diverse, but the city still faces economic inequality, with some areas revitalized and others struggling.

WEATHER



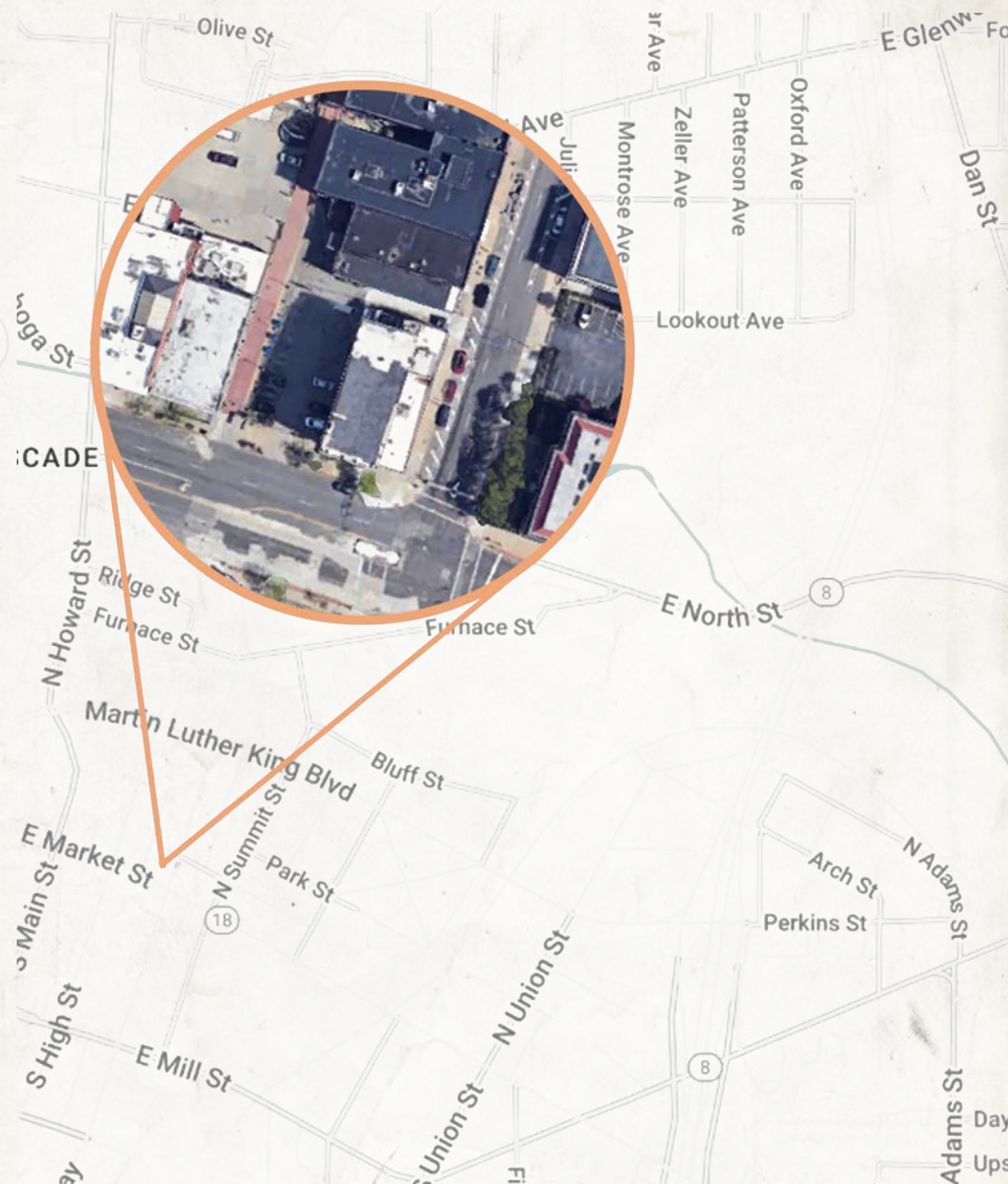
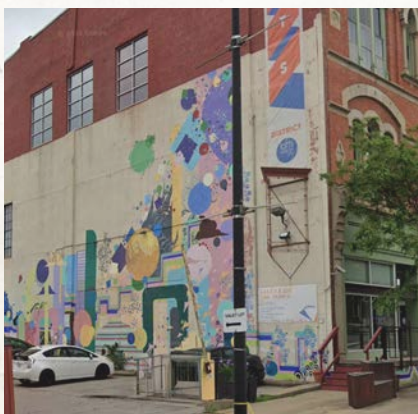
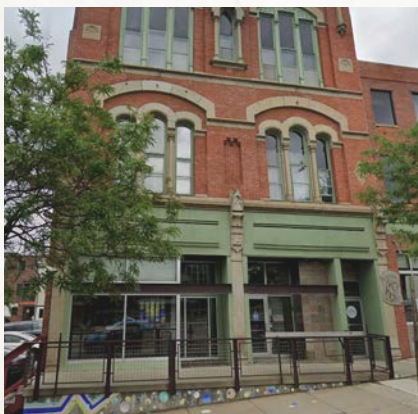
59 E. MARKET STREET, AKRON

Akron blends culture, history, and community with landmarks like the Akron Art Museum, Summit Artspace, and Civic Theatre. Outdoor spaces such as Lock 3 Park and Cascade Plaza host events, while dining and shopping spots like the Lockview, Northside Marketplace, and The Bomb Shelter add local charm. The Goodyear Airdock reflects Akron's industrial past, and essential services like Akron Children's Hospital, Summa Health, and the Akron Summit County Public Library support residents and visitors.



TRANSPORTATION

The METRO Regional Transit Authority operates several bus routes through downtown Akron, with Route 1 (West Market) stopping at E. Market Street & Summit Street. For intercity travel, the Greyhound station at 631 S. Broadway Street offers 19 buses daily. Parking options include the High/Market Parking Deck at 40 S. High Street, with 595 spaces and rates starting at \$1, and the Cascade Parking Garage at 10 W. Mill Street, which provides around 2,000 spaces. The Dart St. Surface Lot between Mill and E. Market Streets offers \$6 all day parking on weekdays and free parking on weekends and holidays.



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