



# CULTURAL

# MILE

# ACTION

# PLAN



CHICAGO  
LOOP  
ALLIANCE



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## **WHO WE ARE:**

The Chicago Loop Alliance (CLA) creates, manages and promotes high-performing urban experiences, attracting people and investment to the Loop. Through its many initiatives, CLA improves the Loop by increasing investment, retaining business, helping to solve transportation challenges, improving placemaking and greenspaces, and supporting workforce development opportunities.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Cultural Mile is the portion of Michigan Avenue between the Chicago River and Roosevelt Road. Originally called the Michigan Boulevard, the area was developed after the Great Chicago Fire into a fashionable lakefront promenade. In Daniel Burnham's 1909 Chicago Plan he emphasized the preservation of open space in Grant Park, creating the street's unique one-sided frontage. The unobstructed views offered on Michigan Boulevard encouraged development on the stretch, with architects creating beautiful buildings representative of many late 19th and early 20th century architectural movements. Michigan Boulevard became home to museums, theaters, hotels, and private clubs, cementing the area as a cultural district – a legacy that lives on to this day.

The Cultural Mile, with its iconic streetwall and lakefront parks, still serves as the front door to Chicago. Today, the Cultural Mile is one of the richest cultural, commercial, and educational districts in the nation. Its abundant museums, parks, public art, and other cultural institutions draw locals and visitors alike to the Loop, serving as a vital economic driver to the entire city. The Cultural Mile Action Plan seeks to capitalize on the street's many assets, leveraging them to improve conditions on Michigan Avenue.

Michigan Avenue is by many measures a well-functioning street, but there is much that could be improved. The great success of the Millennium Park Campus has led to considerable development on the northern stretch of the street, but other areas seem overlooked and lagging behind, resulting in a number of desolate and underutilized spaces. Areas of the street that are further away from well-known cultural institutions suffer from vacancy and a lack of identity. Physical infrastructure on the street needs repair, and heavy pedestrian traffic leads to sidewalk congestion.

### PURPOSE:

- To suggest a series of recommendation to stimulate the Cultural Mile stakeholders.
- To provide a guide for the future of the Cultural Mile Organization.
- To establish a series of goals to accelerate the forward momentum of the Cultural Mile.

The Cultural Mile Action Plan was written by the Chicago Loop Alliance on behalf of the Cultural Mile organization. CLA began engaging Cultural Mile stakeholders in early 2018, holding monthly meetings with the intention of improving the street through collective action. CLA gathered input from many different stakeholders, each with a distinct vision for what the street could be, and synthesized the feedback, organizing it into three general categories. The recommendations of the Cultural Mile Action Plan focus on three categories: **Programming**, **Streetscape**, and **Investment**. The Chicago Loop Alliance will continue these outreach efforts in 2019.

The first category, Programming, offers a number of low cost and easily implemented programming initiatives to be deployed on the street. Most of these are designed to take existing and underutilized assets and capitalize on them, bringing increased pedestrian traffic and vibrancy to the entirety of the Cultural Mile. The second category, Streetscape, takes a look at the design of the street, offering some solutions to problem areas that arose during the engagement process. The last category, Investment, consists of larger infrastructure projects, many beyond the scope and capabilities of the Cultural Mile organization. The Action Plan calls for the Cultural Mile organization to be an advocate for these projects, exerting influence and encouragement to the appropriate agencies.





# EXISTING CONDITIONS

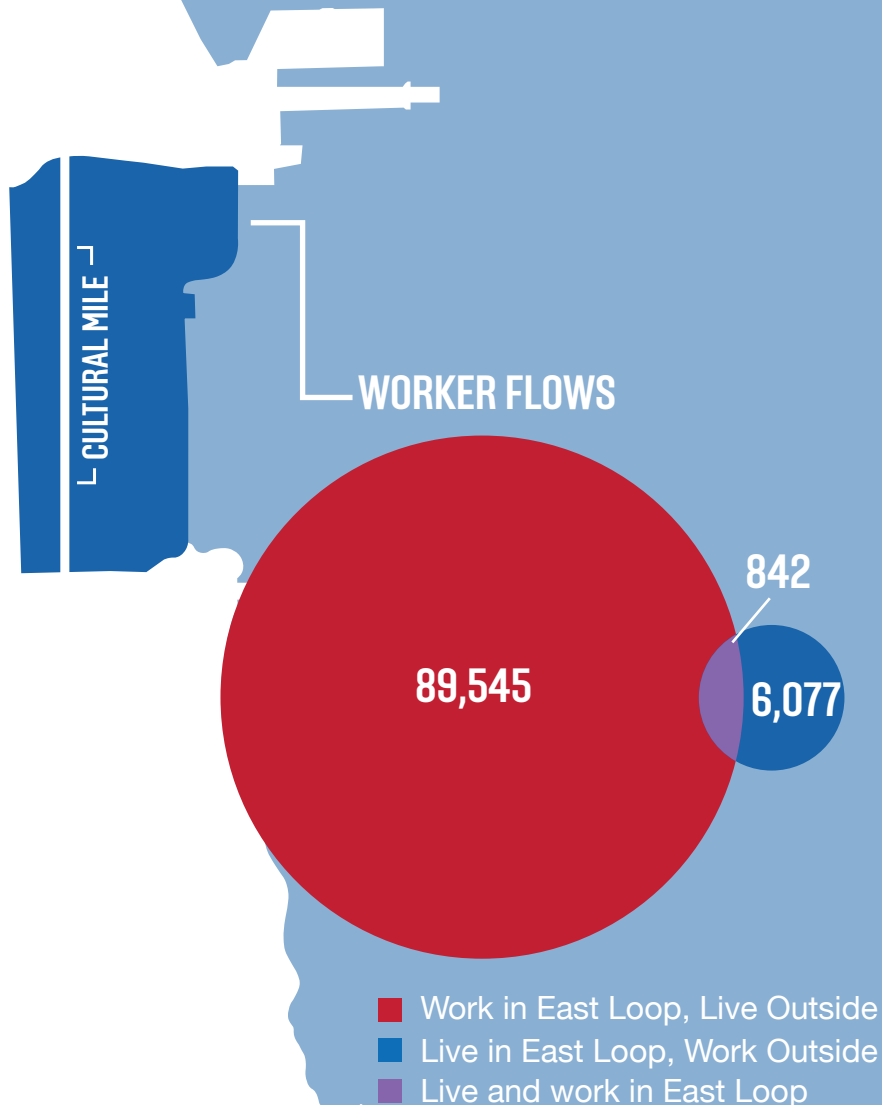


## POPULATION & DEMOGRAPHICS

The Cultural Mile is comprised of Michigan Avenue from the Chicago River south to Roosevelt Road. The greater Cultural Mile is made up of three census tracts running the length of the Cultural Mile, spanning from State Street to Lake Michigan.

Despite the area being heralded as a live/work/play district, only 6,919 people live in the greater Cultural Mile. Residents are primarily clustered in residential developments on North Michigan Avenue, South Michigan Avenue near Grant Park, and in Lake Shore East.

The greater Cultural Mile's population swells by more than 80,000 during the work day, as 89,545 workers who live outside the area work within the area.







CHICAGO RIVER

CULTURAL MILE  
BOUNDARIES

MICHIGAN AVENUE

ROOSEVELT ROAD





## HISTORIC MICHIGAN BOULEVARD DISTRICT

As early as 1836 Michigan Avenue was designated as a one-sided boulevard to grant the public access to the lakefront. The streetwall of Michigan Avenue defines the western edge of Grant and Millennium Parks and forms a famed and distinguished image of downtown Chicago. It's a dramatic backdrop to the lakefront parks and summer festivals, and creates a Chicago identity known to the world. This is an incredible asset for the Cultural Mile and should be leveraged as such.

In 2002, in anticipation of the development boom resulting from the debut of Millennium Park, the Chicago City Council designated a 12-block stretch, spanning from Randolph to 11th street, as a Chicago Historic District. This designation ensured that the historic architecture along the street would be preserved, while still allowing for new construction and renovation. Today the streetwall's buildings are composed of office, hotel, residential, and cultural uses, and capture the architectural essence of Chicago's "golden era" from 1882-1930. The buildings preserved in the historic district are historically, socially, culturally, and architecturally significant to the City of Chicago and contribute greatly to the imageability of the Cultural Mile.



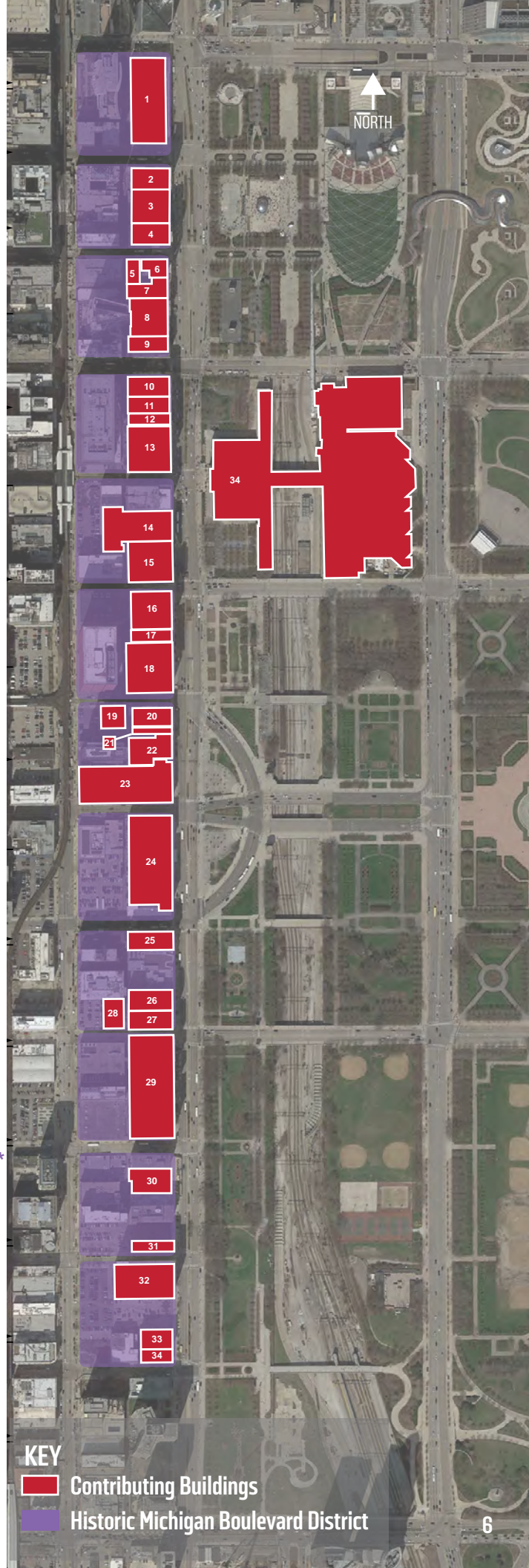
# CONTRIBUTING BUILDINGS

The Historic Michigan Boulevard District occupies the west side of Michigan Avenue from Randolph Street to 11th Street and includes the Art Institute on the east side of the street. This District has 34 buildings considered to be contributing to the Historic District, highlighted below.

1. Chicago Cultural Center - 78 E Washington St
2. Michigan Boulevard Building - 30 N Michigan Ave
3. Smith, Gaylord & Cross Building - 20 N Michigan Ave
4. Montgomery Ward Building - 6 N Michigan Ave
5. Chicago Athletic Association Annex - 71 E Madison St
6. Willoughby Tower - 8 S Michigan Ave
7. Chicago Athletic Association - 12 S Michigan Ave
8. The Gage Group Buildings - 18, 24, 30 S Michigan Ave \*\*
9. University Club - 34 S Michigan Ave
10. Monroe Building - 104 S Michigan Ave
11. Illinois Athletic Club - 112 S Michigan Ave
12. Municipal Courts - 116 S Michigan Ave
13. People's Gas - 122 S Michigan Ave \*\*
14. Orchestra Hall - 220 S Michigan Ave
15. Railway Exchange - 224 S Michigan Ave
16. Straus Building - 310 S Michigan Ave
17. Karpen Building - 318 S Michigan Ave
18. McCormick Building - 332 S Michigan Ave
19. Buckingham Building - 59 E Van Buren St
20. Chicago Club - 81 E Van Buren St
21. Fine Arts Annex - 480 S Michigan Ave
22. Fine Arts Building - 410 S Michigan Ave
23. Auditorium Building - 430 S Michigan Ave
24. Congress Hotel - 520 S Michigan Ave
25. Harvester Building - 600 S Michigan Ave \*
26. Musical College - 624 S Michigan Ave \*
27. Blackstone Hotel - 636 S Michigan Ave
28. Blackstone Theater - 60 E Balbo Dr
29. Hilton Hotel - 720 S Michigan Ave
30. Hotel Essex - 808 S Michigan Ave
31. Crane Company Building - 836 S Michigan Ave
32. Karpen-Standard Oil Building - 910 S Michigan Ave
33. Graphic Arts Building - 1006 S Michigan Ave \*
34. Sherwood Conservatory of Music - 1014 S Michigan Ave \*
35. Art Institute of Chicago - 111 S Michigan Ave

\* Columbia College \*\* National Louis University

In forming the historic district, the City of Chicago struck a deal with affected property owners - property owners agreed to the historic designation in exchange for the formation of a Tax Increment Financing district, and an agreement that the streetscape would be maintained by the City of Chicago. That TIF has since expired, but the City still maintains the median plantings and all circular planters in the district, ending at Randolph. To preserve a visual consistency on the street, CLA should work with the city to extend planters north to the river.



## KEY



Contributing Buildings



Historic Michigan Boulevard District

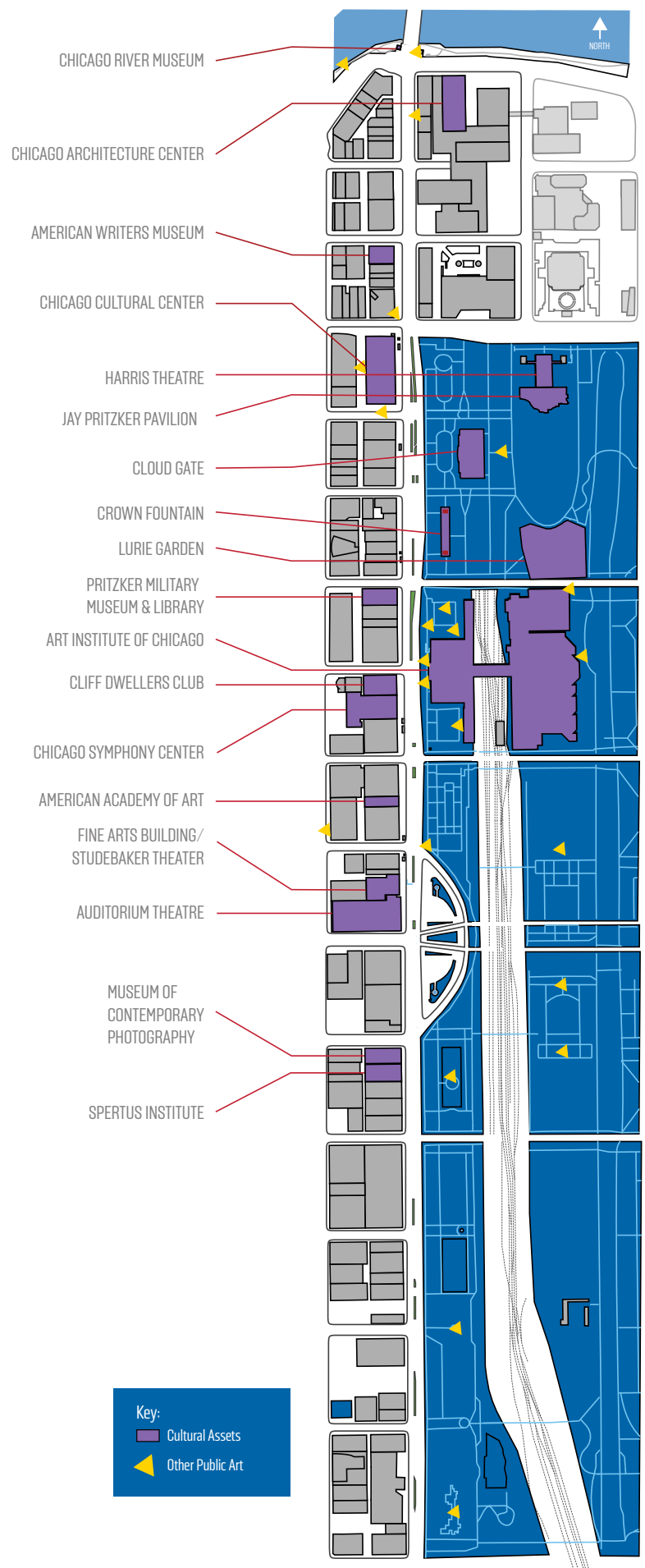


# CULTURAL ASSETS

Culture is integral to every city's success. Robust cultural programming facilitates an interchange of ideas that reinforces social connection. The impact of culture on Chicago's identity as a city cannot be understated – if Chicago didn't have its summer festivals, public concerts, recreational amenities, historic buildings, public art, and world class museums, what would be left of the Chicago identity? The many cultural attractions concentrated along the Cultural Mile are a tremendous asset to the entire city, boosting the local economy while having a transformative potential to inspire and unite all Chicagoans.

This stretch of Michigan Avenue has long been known as a cultural district, today it's home to retailers, residents, offices, and restaurants, yet the abundance of cultural institutions along Michigan Avenue continues to define the stretch. Boasting world class museums, artist's studios, serene parks, iconic architecture, outstanding theaters, and public art, the Cultural Mile serves as Chicago's "center stage." In the summer, physical spaces along Michigan Avenue are transformed into dynamic places with programming like Millennium Park's Summer Film Series and Grant Park's SummerDance. In the winter, tourists flock to Millennium Park's ice rinks and Maggie Daley Park's skating ribbons, and year-round thousands of locals and visitors alike can be found in the wide array of museums on Michigan Avenue.

The role of culture factors heavily in the Loop's economic development. Cities renowned for their culture attract and retain creative talent – and the companies that employ them. Culture fosters innovation, as creative thinking can lead to new business models and ways of problem solving. The cultural institutions of the Cultural Mile are a tremendous asset and should be leveraged as such. Collaboration between businesses and cultural institutions will benefit all. Cultural Mile restaurants should educate their wait staff about what exhibits are being shown at the Art Institute, while museums docents should recommend restaurants to hungry tourists. This collaboration will lead to a more vibrant, robust and identifiable Cultural Mile.





## 'ARTS IN THE LOOP' ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY

In early 2018 the Chicago Loop Alliance released the 'Arts in the Loop' Economic Impact Study, helping to gain a deeper understanding of the impact the large collection of arts and cultural assets in the area have on Chicago's economy. The study found that, in total, the arts in the Loop are responsible for a whopping \$2.25 billion in economic impact each year. It also found that the Arts have a major impact on Loop employment, being responsible for 15,500 full time equivalent jobs each year.

The full study can be viewed online at:  
<https://loopchicago.com/assets/Uploads/3960ca3ae8/Arts-in-the-Loop-Study.pdf>.

# 250

Cultural Assets

# 15,500

Full Time Equivalent Jobs

# 77,800

Average Daily Loop Arts Attendance

# \$2.25 billion

Total Economic Impact

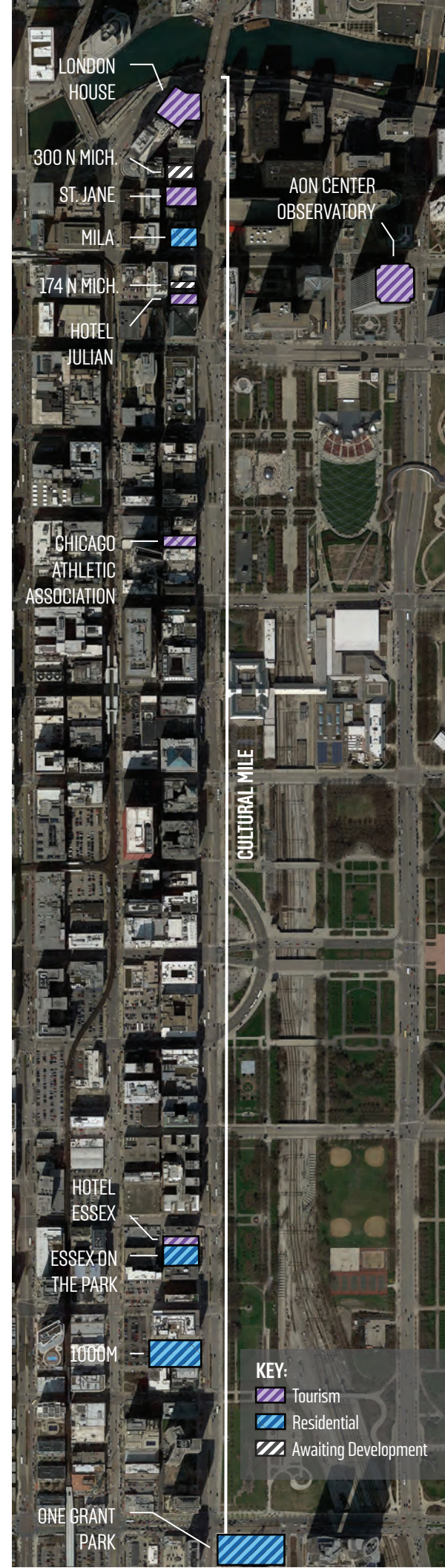


# NEW DEVELOPMENTS

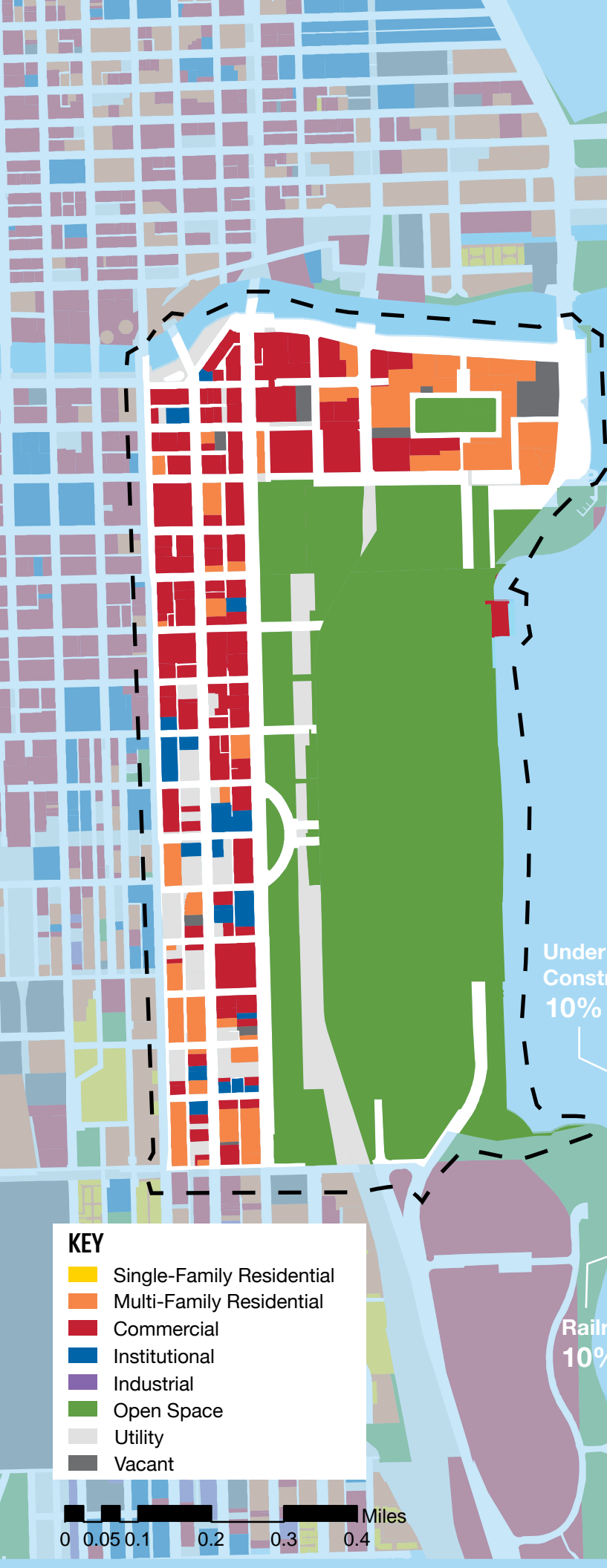
Historically the stretch of Michigan Avenue that forms the Cultural Mile has been overshadowed by the famed Magnificent Mile to the north of the river or State Street two blocks to the west. During the mid-1990s demand for Loop office space dramatically shifted west, closer to commuter train stations. New office buildings with more efficient floor plates and more cost effective building systems attracted large credit tenants to leave the East Loop, and the iconic buildings that housed them became threatened with obsolescence. Properties at 6 N Michigan and 11, 310, 318, 332 and 888 S Michigan were all converted from office to residential condominiums. Plans for the development of Millennium Park fueled speculation and its opening marked the beginning of a period of renewal for the northern stretch of the street. Since then, there have been two distinct clusters of development on Michigan Avenue – one along the two-sided stretch between Randolph and the river, and another toward the southern end of Grant Park, south of 8th Street.

The northern cluster – on a stretch of Michigan Avenue that was long populated by souvenir shops – has been bustling with both new construction and adaptive reuse projects in recent years. Notable developments in the last five years include MILA, a 41-story, 402-unit luxury apartment building, the restoration and opening of the 241-room Chicago Athletic Association Hotel, and the openings of the 452-room London House Hotel, the 218-room Hotel Julian, and the 365-room St. Jane Hotel. 333 North Michigan, 150 N Michigan and Millennium Plaza have either renovated or repositioned their retail with exciting new offerings like the Nutella Café, The Blackhawks Store and Stan's Donuts. Properties at 174 N Michigan and 300 N Michigan have also been acquired by developers who are currently seeking approvals for mixed-use developments. Tourist attractions like the Chicago Architecture Center's new river-side location and a planned sky deck at the Aeon Center indicate tourist traffic flows will increase in this area.

On the southern end of the Cultural Mile there is a new sense of energy as a number of developments are sprouting up around the South Grant Park. The South Loop has long been projected to be “the next big thing” in Chicago’s housing market. There was considerable development in the new millennium, but that momentum came to a halt after the recession. Things have been picking up remarkably since then, as housing units in Census Tract 3301 have increased by 58 percent since 2009. Developers are viewing South Michigan Avenue as a more affordable, less congested alternative to the West Loop or River North for young professionals. Two large residential projects are currently being built on the Cultural Mile. 1000M, a 74-story, Helmut Jahn-designed luxury apartment building, will break ground in 2019 at 1000 S Michigan. As the furthest south building over 1000 feet in the city, it will alter the skyline as well as southern Michigan Avenue. Two blocks to the north the 56-story Essex on the Park is rising on the site of a former parking structure. The project, developed by Oxford Capital, will add 479 high-end apartment units to South Michigan. Oxford Capital is concurrently redeveloping the neighboring Essex Inn. Booming development continues beyond the boundaries of the Cultural Mile, with towers rising farther south on Michigan as well as on Roosevelt Road overlooking Grant Park.

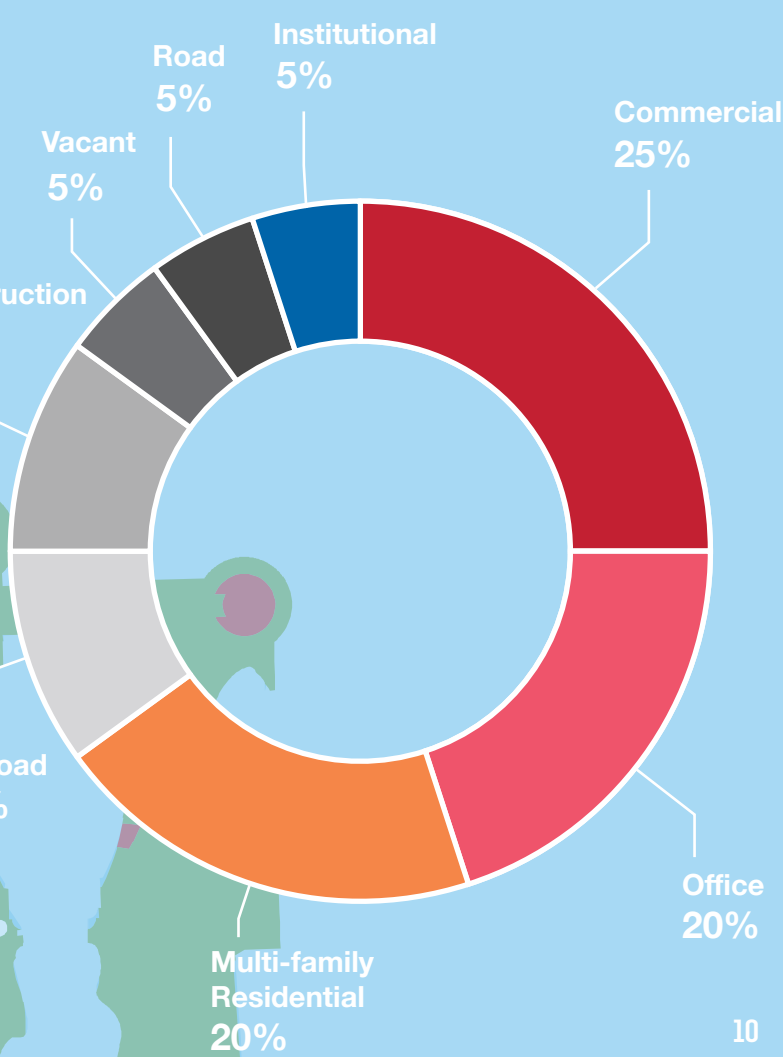






## GREATER CULTURAL MILE LAND USE

Land use maps help inform what parts of the city are used for what purpose. This graphic helps us identify what major activities are happening in the greater Cultural Mile – composed of three census tracts that stretch from State to Lake Michigan. The largest land use in this area is recreational open space, occupying 40 percent of land. This should come as no surprise considering the area is home to Millennium, Grant and Maggie Daley parks. 42 percent of land use is classified as other, which includes water, roads and various utilities. The remaining land use in the district is highlighted in the pie graph below.



- KEY**
- Single-Family Residential
  - Multi-Family Residential
  - Commercial
  - Institutional
  - Industrial
  - Open Space
  - Utility
  - Vacant



## ACCESS & TRANSIT

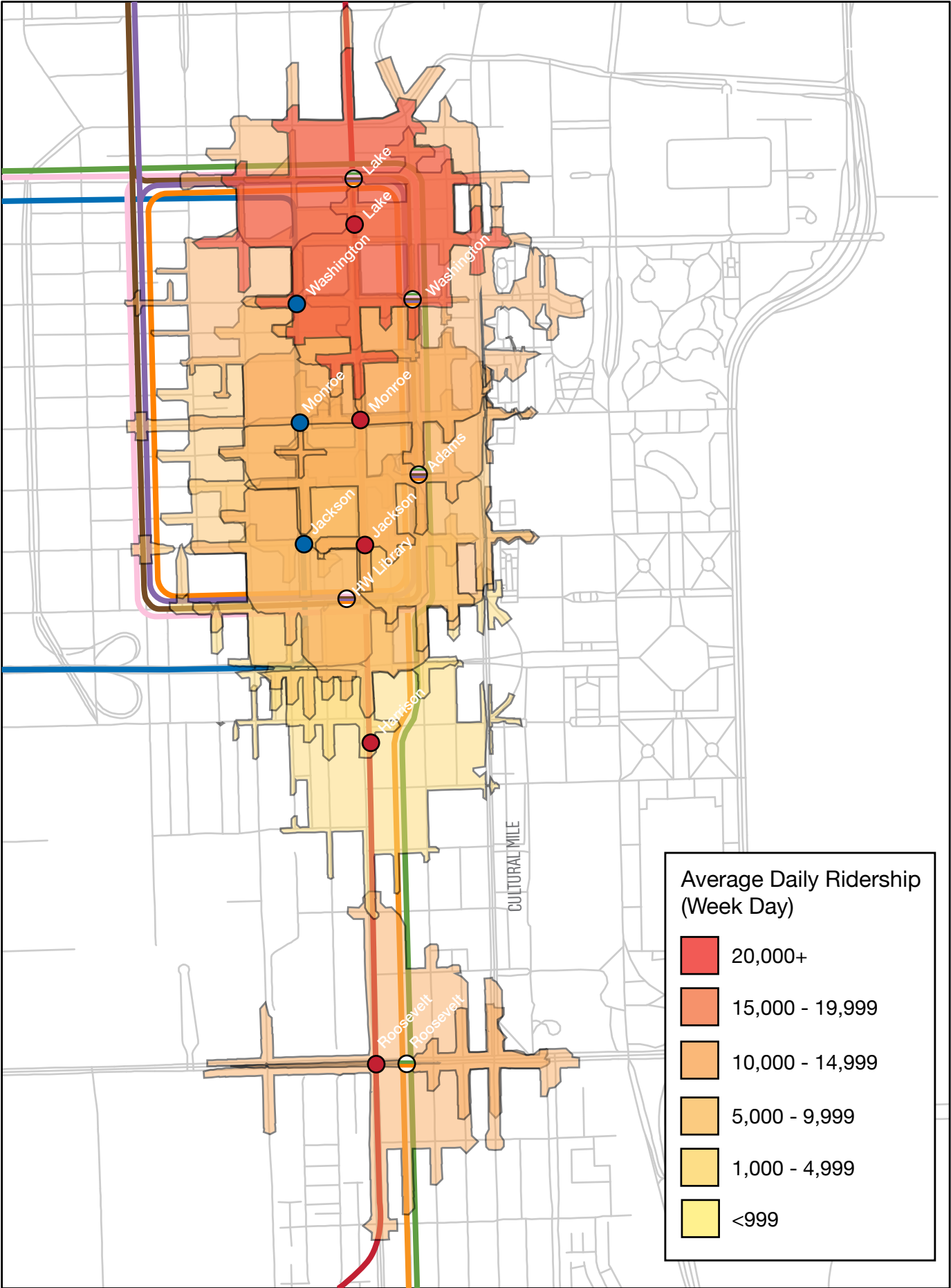


The East Loop (from Lake Michigan to State Street) has 6,919 residents and 90,387 primary jobs. 89,545 of those workers live outside of the Loop. In addition to those workers, the Loop is a major tourist destination – Chicago attracted some 55 million visitors in 2017, with many presumably headed to the Loop. With such large numbers descending upon the Loop every day, easy access to transit is essential. The Cultural Mile is indeed easily accessible by transit: three Metra stops can be directly accessed from Michigan Avenue, two CTA L stops lie one block west on Wabash Avenue and one block further, on State Street, the CTA Red Line has five stops serving the entire length of the Cultural Mile.

The Metra stops on Michigan Avenue bring a combined 13,423 commuters to the Cultural Mile every weekday. The new CTA superstation on Washington and Wabash sees an average of 10,843 embarkments every weekday. The Cloud Gate sculpture is about 800 feet away from the station, beyond the famed Michigan Street Wall – the question is, could something be done to incentivize workers heading home to take 15 minutes out of their day to walk one block further east for some peace and quiet in the park before they start their commute? Similarly, the CTA Red Line is the city's busiest line and has a combined 58,090 average weekday embarkments from the 5 stations spanning from Roosevelt to Lake, all 2 blocks away from the Cultural Mile.

It is generally believed that most people are willing to walk a quarter of a mile, meaning that the Cultural Mile is well within walking distance from most L stations in the loop. To measure what parts of the Cultural Mile are underserved by transportation, a GIS Network Analyst Walk Shed study was conducted. This study reproduced how pedestrians use the street network, visualizing what areas can be accessed within a quarter mile walk from CTA stations, and highlighting where the highest concentrations of riders are. The graphic to the right displays these “walk sheds.” The study shows that the area around the Congress Plaza is underserved by CTA rail transit, as well as a long stretch of South Michigan Avenue between Balbo Drive and 11th, highlighting the need for a better connection to the southern end of the Cultural Mile. Of course, there are many CTA buses that run up and down Michigan Avenue, not represented in the study.

# CTA STATION WALKABILITY STUDY

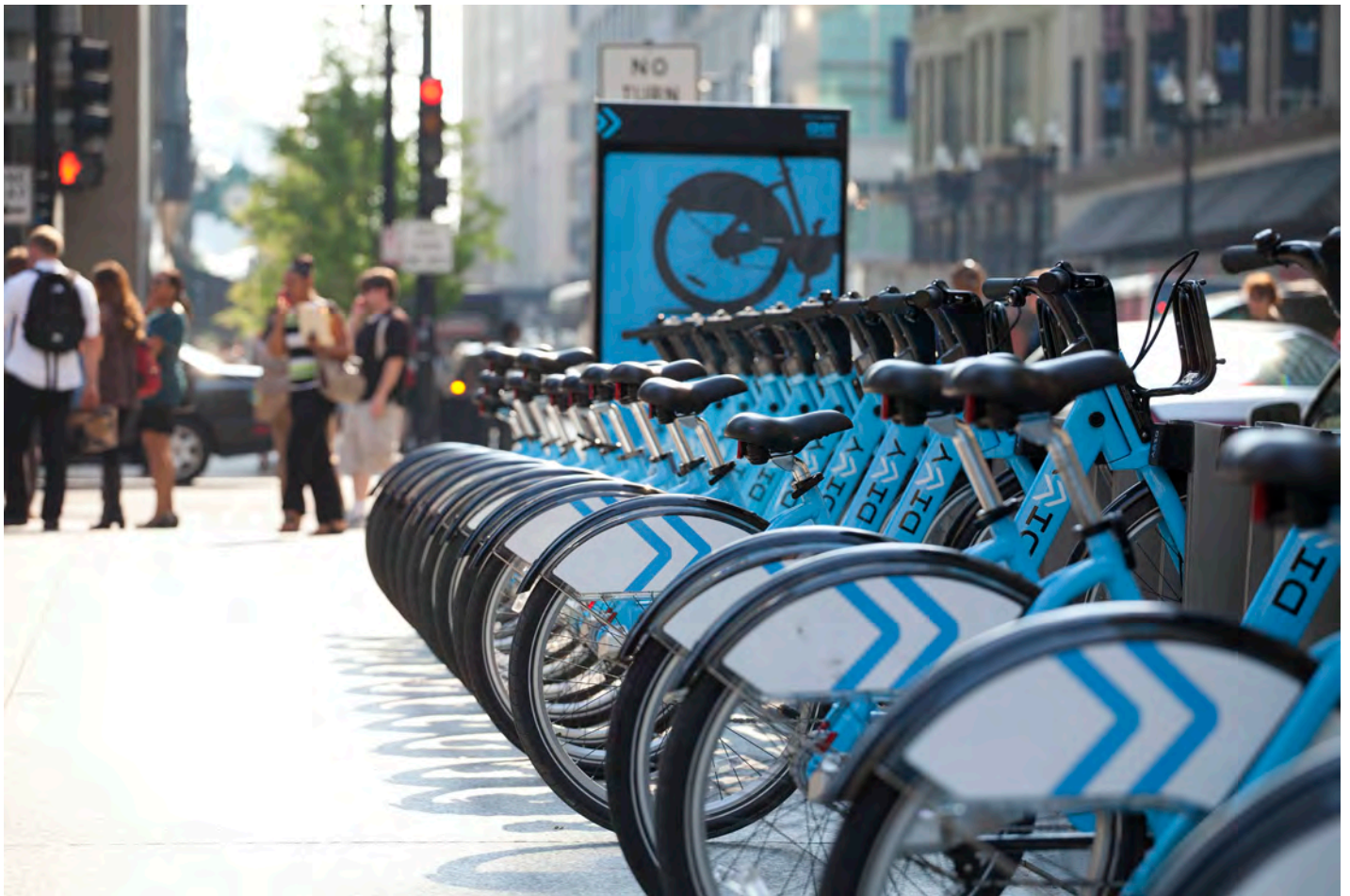




## PEDESTRIANS & BICYCLES

Pedestrians are ubiquitous in the Loop streets during the weekday and are increasing on the weekends. As such, serious consideration should be given to pedestrian safety and maneuverability. The Chicago Loop Alliance has two pedestrian counters on North Michigan Avenue, recording hundreds of thousands of pedestrians weekly at the intersections of Michigan and Wacker, and Michigan and Washington. Northern Michigan Avenue has considerable pedestrian congestion, dependent on the time of day, and this is exacerbated by the number of intersections that only have a crosswalk on one side of the street. A pedestrian safety study was conducted, doing a hot spot analysis of vehicular/pedestrian crashes from 2015 to the present. The hotspot analysis displays areas where crashes are happening above a “random” level. The study indicated that an unusual amount of pedestrians have been hit on northern Michigan, with hot spot clustering between Randolph and Monroe.

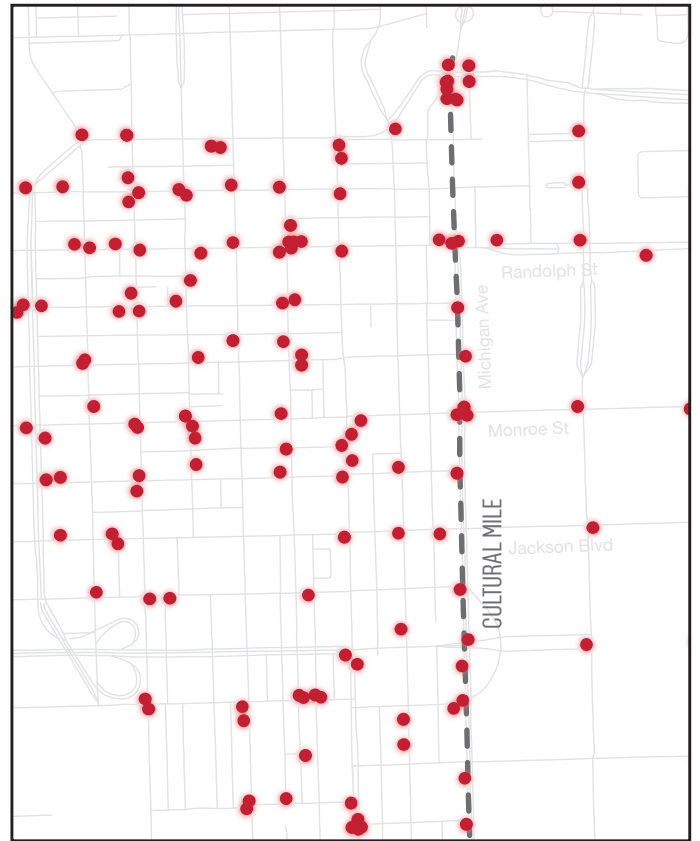
Since passing its Streets for Cycling Plan 2020, the City of Chicago has greatly improved bicycle infrastructure in the Loop. Further, the Divvy bike sharing program has been a tremendous success since its debut in 2013. Bike sharing can be an effective means of filling gaps in transit infrastructure, and a fun way for tourists and locals alike to get out and explore the city. There are seven Divvy docking stations directly on Michigan Avenue, with another two stations less than a block away. However, the heavy traffic and confusing lanes make Michigan Avenue a less than an ideal street for biking. A narrow bike lane has been recently implemented at the corner of Michigan and Randolph, presumably to aid cyclists using Randolph to access the Lakefront Trail. Vehicular/bicycle crashes were also studied for this plan, showing a hot spot of bicycle crashes on the Michigan Avenue Bridge.



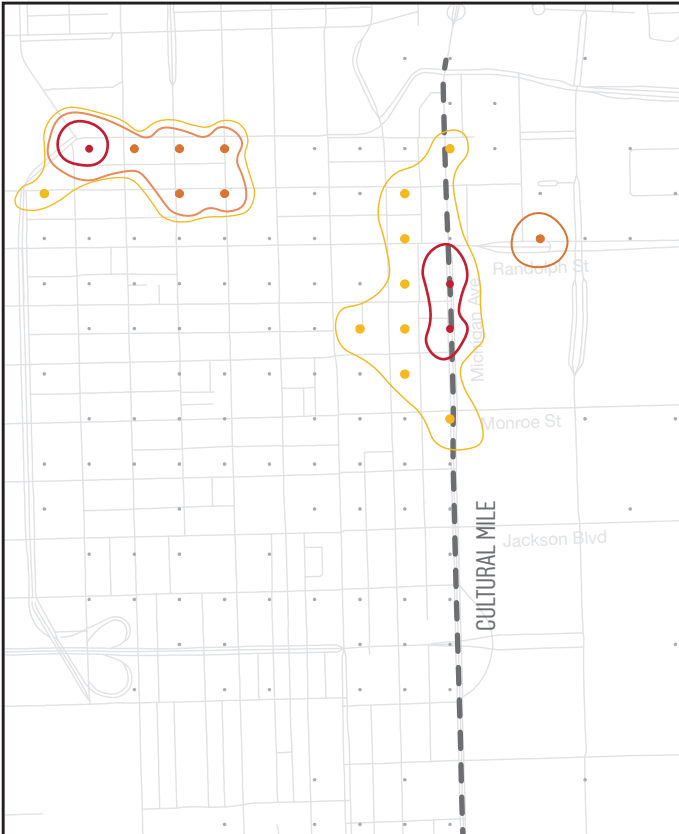
PEDESTRIANS HIT BY CARS 2015 - PRESENT



BICYCLISTS HIT BY CARS 2015 - PRESENT



PEDESTRIAN CRASH HOT SPOTS



BICYCLISTS CRASH HOT SPOTS



- Bike Crashes
- Pedestrian Crashes
- Hot Spot - 90% Confidence
- Hot Spot - 95% Confidence
- Hot Spot - 99% Confidence





## PARKING

Abundant parking is a necessity for a high-performing downtown. As such, Millennium Garages is a tremendous asset serving the Cultural Mile. The underground garages are a much preferable alternative to surface parking lots, providing over 9,000 parking spaces yet allowing for a more human-oriented environment on the surface. Millennium Garages consist of four underground garage facilities, all of which are located in close relation to the Cultural Mile, beneath sections of Millennium Park, Grant Park and Maggie Daley Park (see the map on the opposite page).

In total, the four garages constitute the largest downtown underground public parking system in the United States, with a total of 9,176 parking spaces and 3,820,000 square feet of parking surface area. The facilities are proximate to numerous major office buildings, hotel & residential developments, retail activity and cultural & recreational attractions along the Cultural Mile. The garages are also connected to the Chicago Loop through the underground pedway system, providing easy, secure and weather-free access to office and retail sites throughout downtown Chicago.

Three of the garages are interconnected at the northern end of Grant Park and a fourth parking facility approximately 1,000 feet to the south.

The facilities feature a system of 28 automated entry/exit gates, 48 pay-on-foot machines, proximity key-card access for monthly permit holders and substantially meet the requirements for accessible parking spaces as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the current laws and codes. All four garages have been rehabilitated within the last 20 years. The Millennium Lakeside garage is the newest garage built in 2015.

Having over 9,000 parking spaces connected to the Cultural Mile is an enormous benefit to the Cultural Mile. The millions of visitors, many arriving by automobile, are provided with close-in parking to the many cultural amenities on Michigan Avenue and the many supporting office, retail, food & beverage and residential functions along the street. It will be critical to continue to provide clean, well-lit, easily navigable parking to service Cultural Mile patrons. Promotion parking programs should be investigated to encourage more attendance to Cultural Mile offerings.

### IMPROVING CONNECTIONS

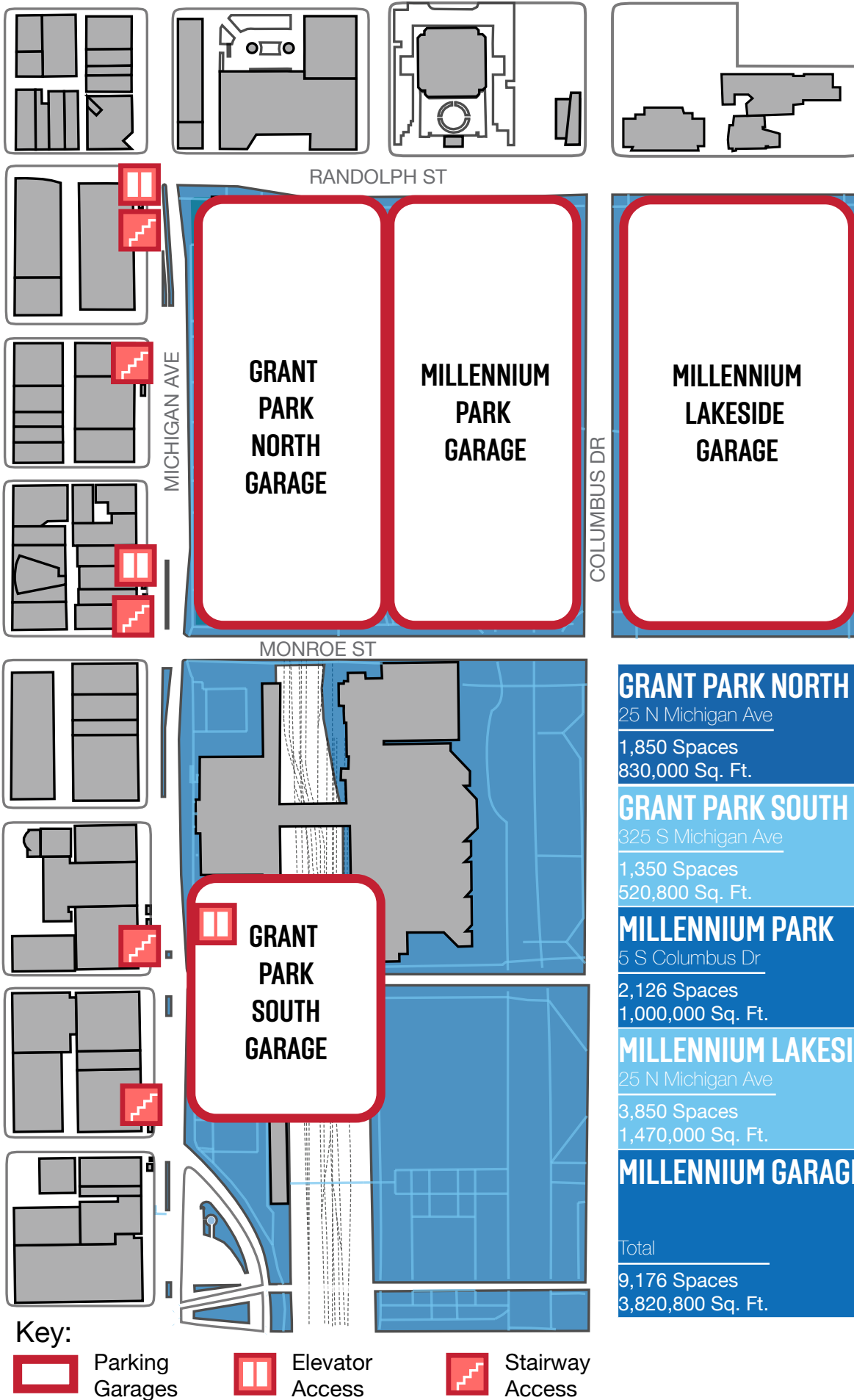
Currently, Millennium Garages is undertaking an extensive scope of work to improve the pedestrian connection to the garages. In 2019 this will include:

- Lobby/Stair renovations at Grant Park North and Grant Park South
- Elevator modernization at all garages to improve handicap accessibility
- On-going restoration throughout the year consisting of structural and concrete repairs



# MILLENNIUM GARAGES

(AND ACCESS POINTS FROM CULTURAL MILE)

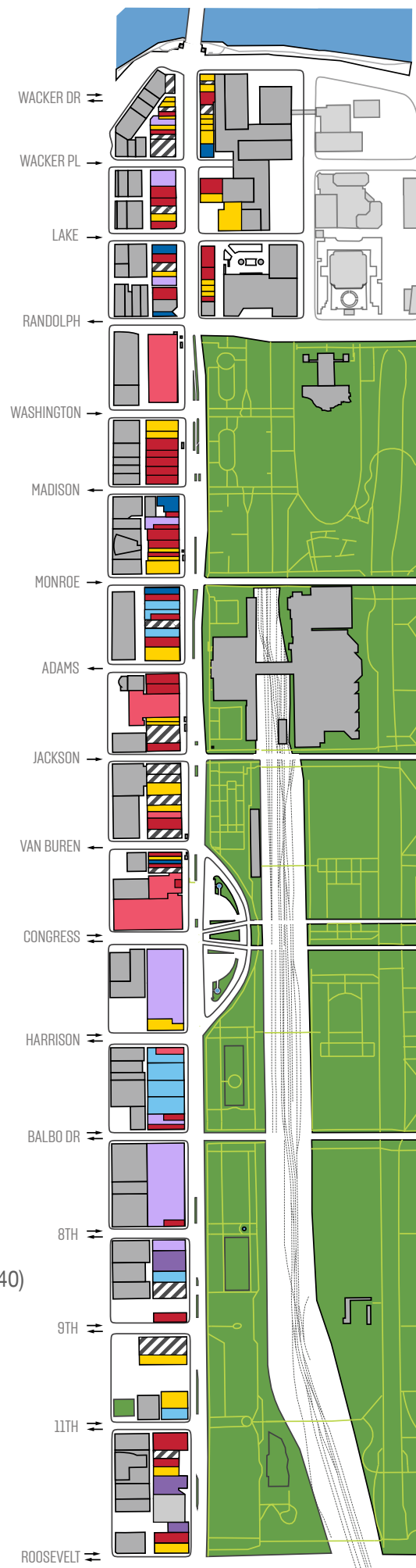
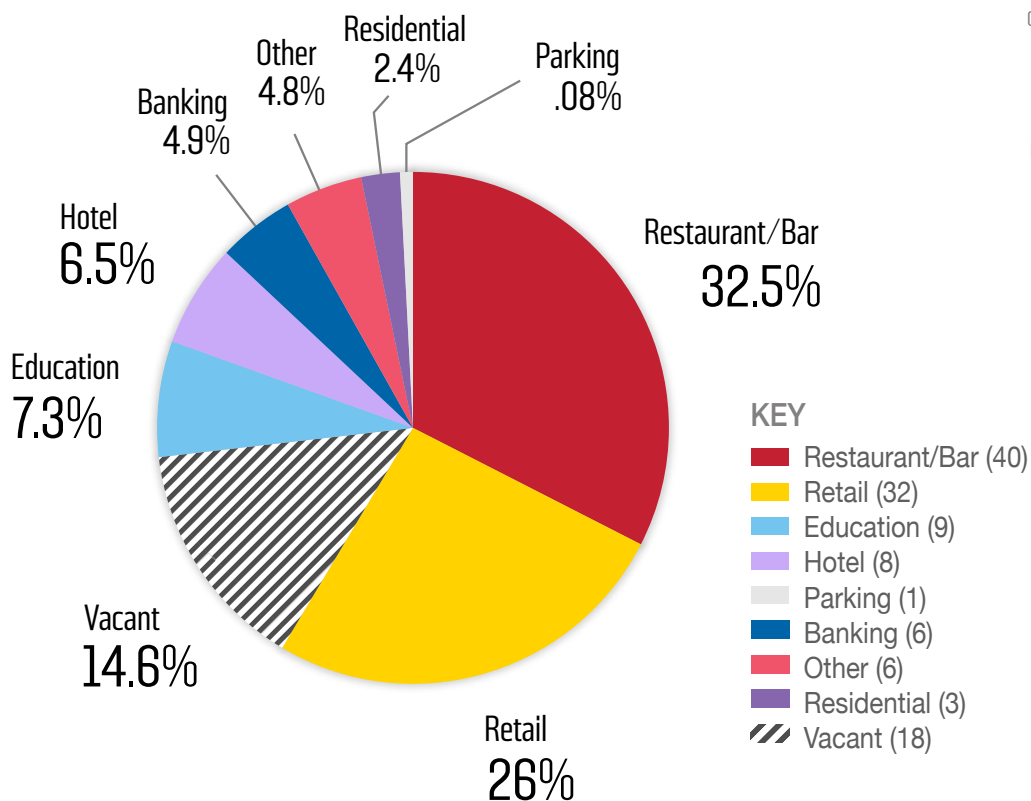


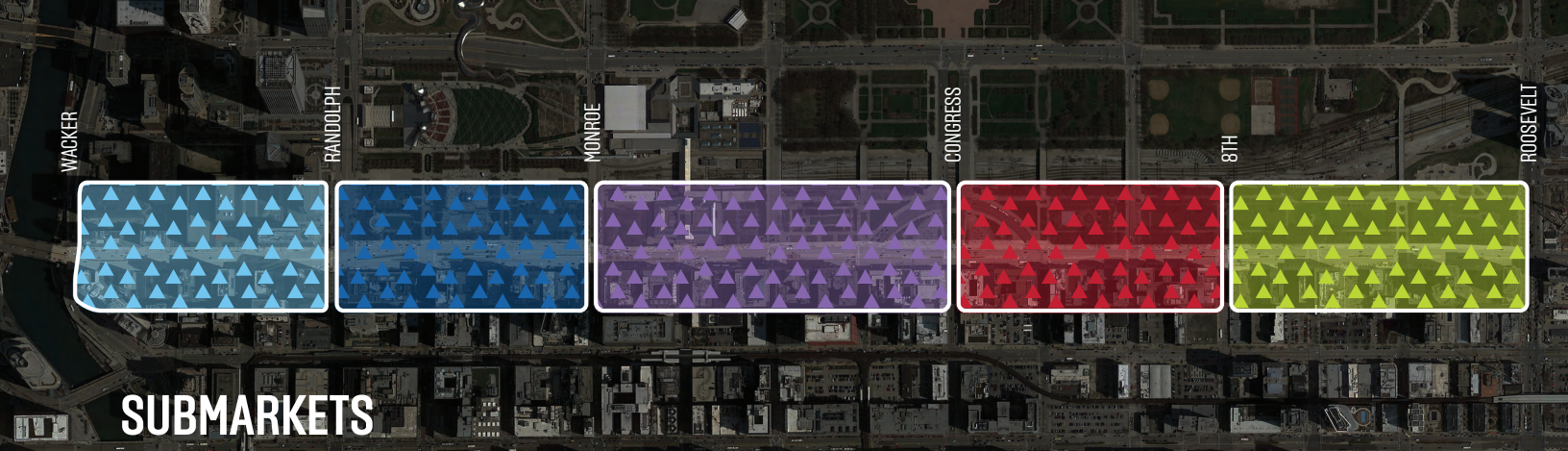
# BUSINESS INVENTORY

In August 2018 the Chicago Loop Alliance conducted a business inventory on the Cultural Mile, cataloguing every ground level business on Michigan Avenue from Roosevelt to the river. Conducting a business inventory provides insights to how a street is performing, what trends are developing, and what areas could be improved upon.

Of the 123 ground level storefronts on the Cultural Mile, the most common type of establishments are restaurants. The 40 restaurants on the Cultural Mile, ranging from full service, high-end eateries across from Millennium Park to quick fast casual lunch spots on North Michigan, make up 32.5 percent of the business mix on the street. The next most common establishments are retail, with 32 stores occupying 26 percent of Cultural Mile storefronts.

Many of the retailers are souvenir shops catering to the abundant tourist traffic on the street. When this business inventory was conducted there were 18 vacancies (14.6 percent), with two notable clusters – one on the west side of the street on North Michigan and the other on the block between Jackson and Van Buren. Educational institutions and hotels are the fourth and fifth most common use, while a scattering of banking, parking, and residential round out the ground level business mix.





## SUBMARKETS

The spatial arrangement of the street's business mix indicates the presence of existing and emerging sub-markets along the Cultural Mile. Starting from the south, stretching from Roosevelt Road to 8th Street is submarket 1. An emerging residential area, this sub-market is marked by a number of new and under-construction residential towers. There are a handful of vacancies that should be filled as more and more residents move into the area.

Submarket 2, from 8th to Congress is primarily occupied by two large, historic hotels, the Hilton and the under-developed Congress Hotel. The block between those two hotels consists of a number of education buildings, as well as another hotel. This district seems quite healthy, although the large hotels make for long, unvaried blocks. Also, as the CTA walkability study showed, this area is underserved by rail transit. The Hilton combats any monotony one might feel on the block with beautifully maintained planters, while the block that is home to the Congress would benefit from significant investment with repositioned retail and streetscape beautification.

Submarket 3, stretching from Congress to Monroe, is home to many of the cultural institutions that draw people to the Cultural Mile – the Art Institute, the Auditorium Theatre, and the Chicago Symphony Center, to name a few. However, it is also representative of some issues that affect the street – vacancies, underutilized public space, and a retail stock that could be improved upon. The block between Jackson and Van Buren is particularly concerning. It has a 50 percent vacancy rate and no anchor tenants to draw traffic to the block. One block north lays the large vacant storefront left from the Chicago Architecture Center's move up the street, compounding the feeling of underutilization one senses on this stretch. Retail on this stretch could be improved – the high tourist traffic has souvenir shops thriving, but there little to drawing locals and commuters to the stretch.



Millennium Park spans the east side of Michigan Avenue from Monroe to Randolph, and proximity to the park serves the businesses in submarket 4 quite well. From Monroe to Washington there are a number of restaurants, ranging from upscale to fast-casual, and zero vacancies. This is a robust and vibrant stretch of Michigan Avenue.

Sub-market 5, spanning from Randolph to the Chicago River, is unique in that it's the only two-sided stretch of the Cultural Mile. The area is in transition and has been seeing considerable development over the past decade. The east side of the street feels lively with a number of occupied shops and restaurants on the stretch. Pedestrian counters show the east side of the street also sees more foot traffic than the west side, due to traffic from Millennium Park to the shopping north of the river. In comparison, the west side seems less successful but poised for a rebirth. Three hotels have opened over the past three years, all of which will have retail on the street level. Other vacant buildings are in the process of being redeveloped (300 N Michigan and 147 N Michigan). Many of the remaining vacancies on the street will be filled as these developments near completion. The relocation of the Chicago Architecture Center will result in more and more tourist traffic in this sub-market.



# PROCESS



## PROCESS

The Cultural Mile is a unique street that serves many different stakeholders, each with a distinct vision for what the street can be. Since the beginning of 2018, the Chicago Loop Alliance has been engaging many different Cultural Mile stakeholders at monthly meetings with the intention of improving the street through collective action. The first step was to gain a better understanding of the street, which in turn would inform how participants can envision the future of the Cultural Mile. Next came a period of soliciting ideas for improvement at the Cultural Mile meetings, conducting facilitation exercises and brainstorming possibilities for the street. This process will continue to seek input from additional stakeholders and property owners.



## UNDERSTANDING THE STREET

Street design has a significant impact on the quality of the urban environment, affecting everything from real estate prices to our own mental and physical well-being. Beautification and design can seem like unnecessary expenses, but a well-designed and well-maintained street correlates to increased foot traffic which boosts retail sales, deters crime and leads to a positive downtown brand.

To understand how the street was functioning, the Chicago Loop Alliance sent staff out to assess the conditions of the streetscape on Michigan Avenue. CLA staff took careful records, inventorying things like businesses, vacancies, sidewalk cafes, and planter locations. They also noted areas of disrepair, pedestrian pinch points, and both underutilized and vibrant spaces.

The Chicago Loop Alliance presented the streetscape conditions to the Cultural Mile organization in June, 2018. Photography of the entire street was provided for attendees to reference, and CLA staff pointed out some areas where they felt the street could be improved. A few problem areas leapt out from their survey. The first was the state of disrepair of canopy entrances to the parking and transportation facilities underground. Others were inconsistencies with planter maintenance, pedestrian pinch points from existing sidewalk uses, and the number of one sided crosswalks on key east-west pedestrian corridors.





## SOLICITING IDEAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

With a shared base understanding of the street and surrounding district, the Cultural Mile organization began to formulate ideas on how to improve conditions on the street, many of which are represented in this Action Plan. In July 2018 Kevin Dunphy, Planner and Architect at CannonDesign, led a group facilitation exercise to imagine the future of the Cultural Mile. Meeting attendees were given “yes, please” and “no, thank you” stickers to place on a map of the Cultural Mile, to denote areas where they would like to see improvements or areas they feel are performing successfully. Participants could also place dollar and heart stickers on places they feel could benefit from more investment or areas that they love. Participants were also given a number of “amenity” stickers to place to aid in the mapping of Cultural Mile assets and amenities.

The ideas solicited from the facilitation exercise were recorded and synthesized, and then presented upon in the next meeting. Overall the group’s feedback regarding the street was very positive, indicating Michigan Avenue is generally a well performing street. The suggestions of the group were divided into three general categories: programming, investment, and beautification. One reoccurring theme in the following months was a desire to improve programming, as stakeholders agreed that activity in the parks benefits surrounding businesses and institutions. The biggest concern with the built environment was the poor condition of the elevator kiosks along the street.

## FINE TUNE & STRATEGIZE

The facilitation exercise led to over 50 suggestions for improvements that could be made to the street. These suggestions were discussed at length at the Cultural Mile meetings succeeding the exercise. While some ideas were ruled out due to infeasibility, other suggestions evolved as stakeholders shared local knowledge. Suggested improvements were measured on terms of feasibility, logistics, and cost.

Many suggested improvements were found to be the responsibility of groups without representation at the Cultural Mile meetings, and the Chicago Loop Alliance has been reaching out to those parties such as CDOT, DCASE, DPD, the Chicago Park District and SP Plus, to invite them to Cultural Mile meetings to better inform the planning process. Implementation will be an ongoing process, with “low lift” programming initiatives beginning in 2019. The Chicago Loop Alliance will continue to serve as an advocate for larger investment and capital improvement projects in and around the Cultural Mile.



# RECOMMENDATIONS



## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chicago Loop Alliance has synthesized the feedback received from Cultural Mile stakeholders to offer the following preliminary recommendations for the street. Recommendations are organized into three general categories: **Programming**, **Streetscape**, and **Investment**.

1. **Programming** offers a number of low cost and relatively easily implemented programming initiatives to be employed on the street. Most of these are designed to take existing and underutilized assets and capitalize on them, bringing increased pedestrian traffic and vibrancy to the entirety of the Cultural Mile.
2. **Streetscape** takes a look at the design of the street and existing streetscape, and offers some solutions to problem areas that arose during the engagement process. These recommendations may require funding mechanisms not currently available to the Cultural Mile, or may be contingent on the involvement of exterior government agencies for completion. This report advises further investigation into the feasibility of these recommendations.
3. **Investment** consists of larger infrastructure projects, many beyond the scope and capabilities of the Cultural Mile. The Action Plan calls for the Cultural Mile to be an advocate for these public and private projects, exerting influence and encouragement to the appropriate agencies.



## RECOMMENDATIONS: PROGRAMMING

### 1.1 ACTIVATE UNDERUTILIZED SPACE

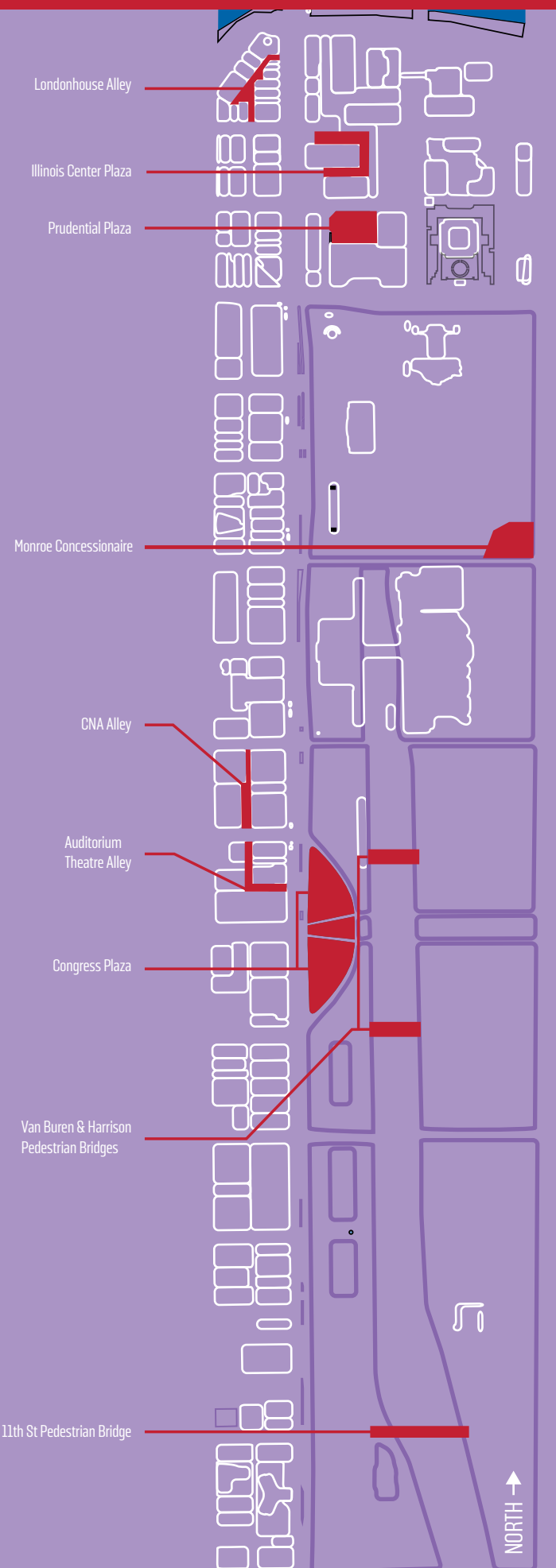
There are a number of underperforming spaces along the Cultural Mile that could be activated through relatively low-lift programming initiatives. Re-imagining space can be as simple as putting a few seats and tables in an overlooked plaza. The Chicago Loop Alliance's ACTIVATE event series is a placemaking initiative that encourages office workers, residents and visitors to see the Loop anew by transforming underutilized public spaces with interactive engagements, art installations, live music, and unanticipated adventures. CLA has identified a number of spaces proximal to Michigan Avenue that would be promising locations for a 2019 ACTIVATE (see map to the right).



Revelers at a 2018 ACTIVATE

### 1.2 POP-UP RETAIL

The Cultural Mile has a 14.6 percent storefront vacancy rate, with clusters of vacancy around Jackson Boulevard, 9th Street, and on northern Michigan Ave between Lake Street and Wacker Drive. Pop-up retail programs are a popular way to combat vacancies, making storefronts more attractive to lessees while improving the vibrancy, safety, and economic health of the street. The Cultural Mile could facilitate a pop-up retail competition, similar to programs seen in Dayton, OH, and Pittsburgh, PA. This would work particularly well on northern Michigan Avenue, an area that is in transition and already sees high numbers of pedestrian traffic.



## RECOMMENDATIONS: PROGRAMMING

### 1.4 CONGRESS PLAZA MARKET

The Congress Plaza is a beautiful civic space from the days of Daniel Burnham that is tragically underperforming. Located between the serenity of Grant Park and the energy of the Loop, the plaza has tremendous potential. The Chicago Loop Alliance's #CitySeats program puts temporary seating out on Wabash Avenue in the summer months to give people respite and offer a place for lunch. A similar initiative should be considered for the Congress Plaza. Food trucks have yet to take off in Chicago in the ways they have in other cities, and some blame regulatory roadblocks. City of Chicago ordinance states that food trucks can't set up within 200 feet of a brick and mortar restaurant. The eastern periphery of Congress Plaza satisfies these requirements, which presents an exciting opportunity to re-imagine Congress Plaza as a European-style outdoor food market.



*The Congress Plaza sitting empty*



*Art Institute Chicago's annual Wreathing of the Lions*

### 1.3 INCREASE WINTER PROGRAMMING

The winter months are the hardest to figure out for Chicago businesses. As temperatures plunge, it's easy for potential patrons to lose the motivation to venture outdoors. Among Cultural Mile stakeholders, there was a consensus that there should be more programming during the winter along the Cultural Mile, particularly in the Jay Pritzker Pavilion.

Further discussion demonstrated that there was in fact plenty of existing programming during the winter, and that the issue seemed to be more one of lack of awareness. The Action Plan recommends both increasing the amount of programming in the winter and using the Cultural Mile and CLA networks to share and promote existing activities.



*Skating Ribbons at Maggie Daley Park*



## RECOMMENDATIONS: PROGRAMMING



*A rendering of a lighting installation projected onto the Auditorium Theater (Credit: Gensler)*

### 1.5 BUILDING PROJECTIONS

The historic and architecturally significant building facades that make up the Michigan Avenue streetwall are a great asset for the Cultural Mile. A lighting installation using projectors to illuminate the street wall would capitalize on this asset, transforming the street in a celebration of Chicago's legacy of amazing architecture. Such a project would encourage greater use of Grant Park and could bring energy to one of the more overlooked stretches of the Cultural Mile south of Jackson Boulevard.

### 1.6 SUMMER OUTDOOR ART MUSEUM

Increasing arts programming was a recurring theme at the Cultural Mile meetings. While public art is bountiful on the northern end of Michigan Avenue, stakeholders felt the southern end is lacking in both art and programming. The Action Plan recommends collaborating with SAIC and Columbia College students to create an outdoor art exhibit in Grant Park somewhere south of Jackson Boulevard.

### 1.7 BRANDING

Having an established brand would better allow the Cultural Mile to serve as an advocate for the changes it wishes to see on Michigan Avenue. The Cultural Mile is currently a bit of an unknown entity, and stakeholders should have an in-depth discussion of how the Cultural Mile should be represented and promoted moving forward.



*The CCMA's branding efforts included these plaques at both ends of the Cultural Mile*

## RECOMMENDATIONS: STREETScape

### 2.1 WAYFINDING

Wayfinding systems help create a legible city. There are many instances where wayfinding could be greatly improved on the Cultural Mile. On State Street, for example, transit users rise from below with little to orient the unfamiliar to the many attractions on the Cultural Mile. Signage assisting tourists toward the attractions on the Cultural Mile would be a boon to business. Cultural Mile stakeholders felt that wayfinding should be improved across the Loop, specifically citing Millennium Garages and the Pedway. Creating and implementing a cohesive Cultural Mile wayfinding system would greatly increase awareness of the Cultural Mile brand, in addition to its many offerings.



*CLA Banners on State Street celebrating Chicago's Public Art*

### 2.2 BANNER PROGRAM

A number of Cultural Mile institutions hang banners in front of their properties to promote events and programming, but there is no cohesive banner programming. Cultural Mile institutions should collaborate to do “street takeovers” promoting Cultural Mile events. Creating such an immersive experience would aid in fostering awareness for the Cultural Mile.

### 2.3 IMPROVE CROSSWALKS

This recommendation is twofold. In the initial Cultural Mile meetings stakeholders brought to attention the fact that east-west crossings at Randolph, Madison, and Adams only have crosswalks on the north side of the intersection. This results in overcrowded sidewalks waiting to cross, especially at Michigan and Randolph. The Action Plan encourages a CDOT study of these intersections to see if there is potential for improvement, such as “Barnes Dance” scramble style intersections.

Crosswalks can also be an exciting placemaking opportunity as a number of cities abandoned the bland zebra-striped crosswalks we're familiar with in favor of colorful, patterned and eye-catching designs. A number of crosswalks on Michigan Avenue are in close proximity to cultural institutions that could work with local artists to re-think their crosswalks. This would improve east-west connections to the Cultural Mile, as well as increase visibility for participating cultural institutions.



*Example of a colorful crosswalk in Madrid designed by Bulgarian artist Christo Guelov. (Photo Credit Rafael Perez Martinez)*



## RECOMMENDATIONS: STREETSCAPE



*CLA's fall plantings on State Street*

### 2.4 PLANTER PROGRAM

The western side of the Cultural Mile is lined with 87 planters – 21 circular planters that are maintained by the City of Chicago, and 66 granite planters with trees whose maintenance is the responsibility of the adjacent property owners. While some of these planters are magnificently planted, a number sit empty, often serving as trash receptacles. As part of SSA #1-2015, the Chicago Loop Alliance maintains planters on State Street with four yearly plantings. Contingent on a funding mechanism, a similar program could be implemented on Michigan Avenue.

Another option would be to identify problem planters and work with community gardening and urban farming groups to plant something new and interesting in the planters. The uniformity of a commercial planting program has its appeal but focusing more on sustainable and native plantings could distinguish the Cultural Mile from other downtown streets.

A third option would be to create a planter competition amongst Cultural Mile property owners, incentivizing them to outdo one another with impressive plantings. The Cultural Mile could fundraise some seed money to get the competition going.



## RECOMMENDATIONS: STREETSCAPE

### 2.6 LIGHTS

During its “gilded era” heyday, Michigan Avenue was lined with monumental six-globed streetlights known as Boulevard Electroliers, adding an aura of grandeur to the street that helped Chicago earn its “Paris on the Prairie” nickname. In the 1950s they were replaced with more modern fixtures. In the 1990s city planners returned the Boulevard Electroliers to the street. Recently the City of Chicago again decided to test out a new lighting program replacing a few of the historical lights on North Michigan. The Action Plan calls to bring back the Boulevard Electrolier to North Michigan, to provide a unified and cohesive streetscape that pays homage to the grand history of the Cultural Mile.

### 2.7 SIDEWALK CAFES

The Cultural Mile has a vibrant outdoor dining scene in the warmer months. The Mile’s unique location straddling urban and natural makes it an ideal place to dine outdoors. Street Cafes should be encouraged and expanded. The Chicago Loop Alliance has implemented a successful street café program on neighboring Wabash Avenue, providing business owners assistance in completing permits and offering standardized designs for outdoor cafés. A similar plan could be adopted to expand these offerings to Michigan Avenue.



*Boulevard Electrolier style street lights*

### 2.5 CONNECTION TO MUSEUM CAMPUS

The Cultural Mile is located between two hubs of tourist activity – the Magnificent Mile and the Museum Campus, and essentially serves as a path connecting Chicago’s premier retail district to the museums to the south. The Action Plans calls for investigating how to improve that sense of connection, incentivizing tourists to walk the stretch and stop at the many offerings along the way.



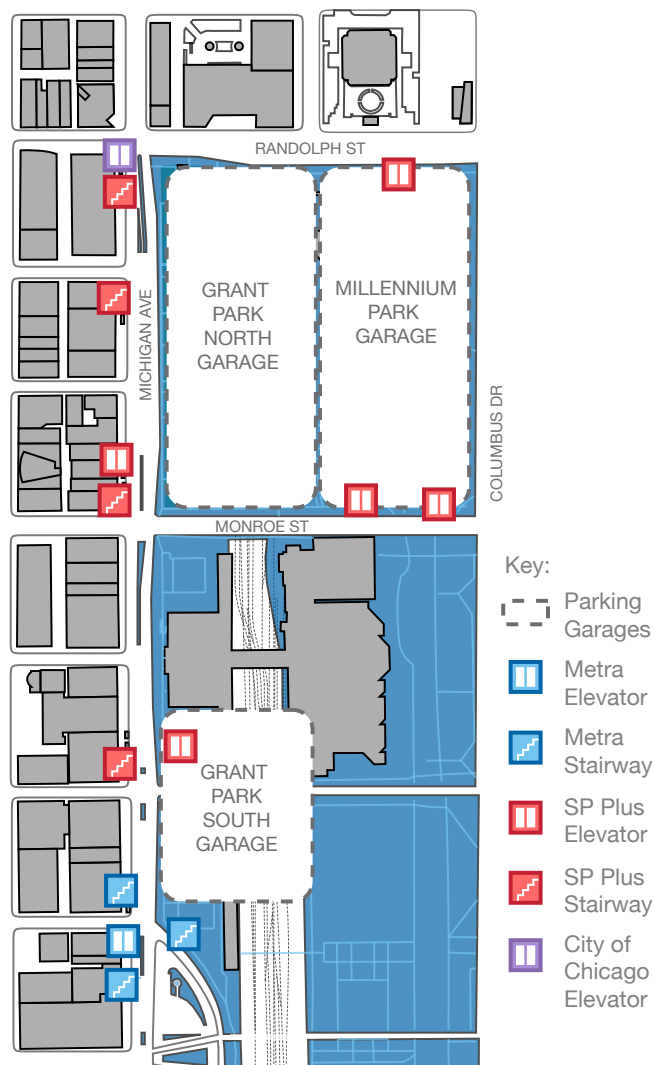
*Chicago's Museum Campus, just southwest of the Cultural Mile*



## RECOMMENDATIONS: INVESTMENT

### 3.1 REPAIR ELEVATOR KIOSKS

The elevator kiosks leading to Metra stations and Millennium Garages are an eyesore on the Cultural Mile. The elevators are in a state of disrepair, with chipped paint, missing stone, graffiti, and neglected maintenance. This makes the Cultural Mile seem uncared for and proves to be a major hurdle for people with disabilities in navigating the street. Millennium Garages has unveiled a plan and a general timeline for the renovation of the kiosks they are responsible for. Metra owns the kiosk on Van Buren and is also in the initial phases of a renovation for that station. However, the kiosk on Michigan and Randolph belongs to the City of Chicago, and there is no available timeframe for repairs. The Action Plan recommends working with other affected parties to advocate for timely renovations to all the kiosks.



*The existing Route 66 marker on Adams and Wabash*

### 3.2 ROUTE 66

Route 66, known as the Main Street of America, runs from Michigan Avenue and Adams Street all the way to Santa Monica, CA. Unfortunately, this staple of Americana is a tragically underutilized asset, marked only with a single sticker-covered sign. The Action Plan recommends investigating a more fitting way to honor this historic road. The Cultural Mile could partner with an iconic American motor company like Harley Davidson or Ford to sponsor a commemorative art piece. Or, work in tandem with parties in Santa Monica to create an interactive installation at both the start and end of Route 66.



*The Congress Hotel overlooking the Congress Plaza at Ida B. Wells Drive and Michigan Avenue*

### 3.3 REDEVELOP THE CONGRESS HOTEL

The historic Congress Plaza Hotel originally opened for business in 1893 for the World's Columbian Exposition. Over the past half century, the hotel has changed hands a number of times, yet no owner has been able to revive the landmark to its former glory. However, the Cultural Mile has experienced a boom of hotel renovations over the past decade. Stakeholders made note of this underutilized asset and felt the Cultural Mile organization should support and advocate for any future plans to redevelop the hotel. The hotel is undercapitalized – it is well-suited for conventions and is a tremendous retail opportunity. The CTA walkability study showed that this area is under served by rail transit and redeveloping the hotel would bring some much-needed vibrancy to the stretch.

### 3.4 PEDESTRIAN COUNTERS

Pedestrians are an essential element of downtown vitality, and monitoring pedestrian traffic provides useful data for retailers, real estate agents and city planners alike. The Chicago Loop Alliance monitors pedestrian counts at two intersections on Michigan Avenue in addition to the entirety of State Street. Expanding pedestrian counts on the Cultural Mile would give insights to the numbers, habits and behavior of pedestrians, data which could be used to better lobby for streetscape improvements or to recruit business.



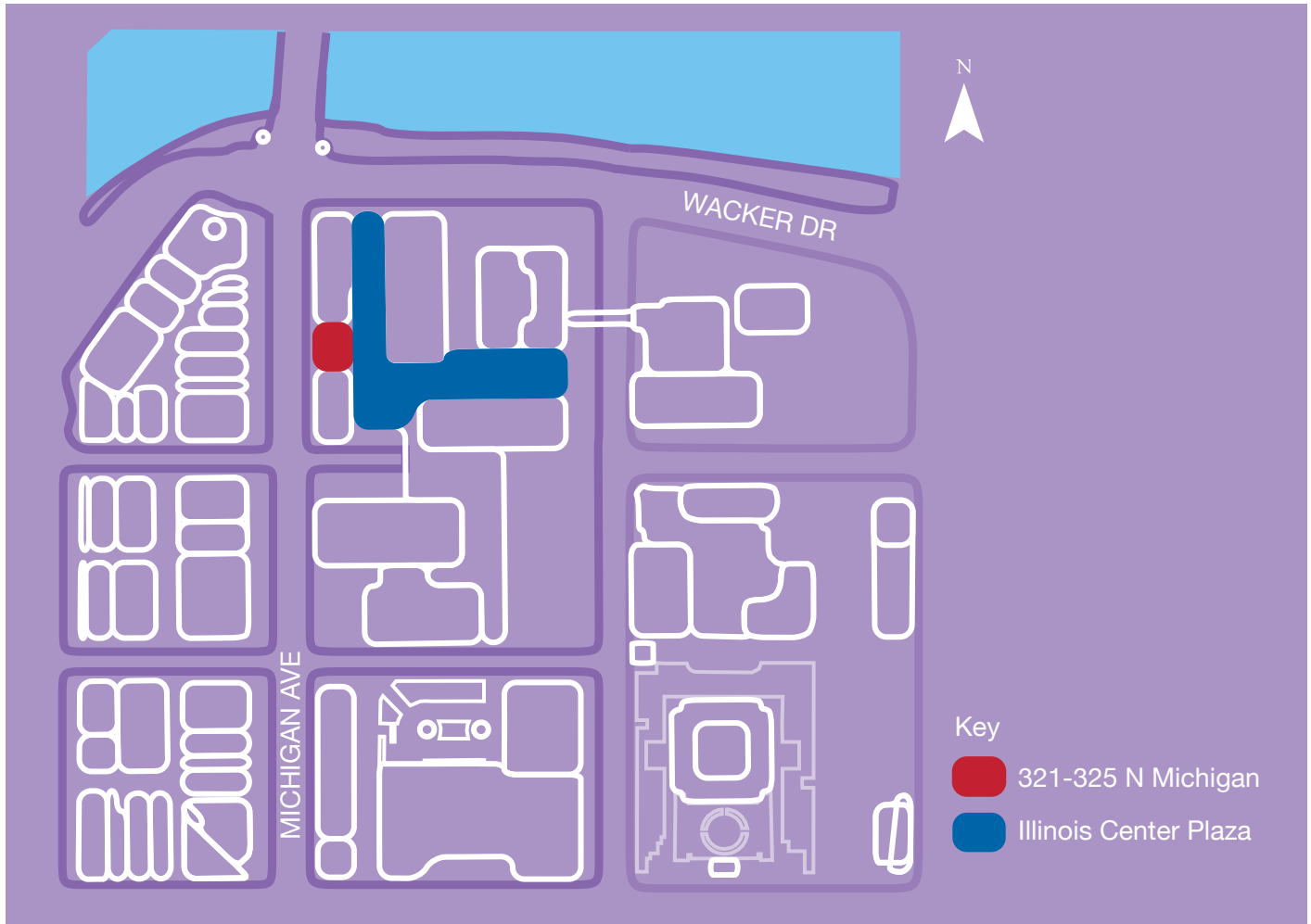
*The John Alexander Logan statue in South Grant Park*

### 3.5 FRAMEWORK FOR SOUTH GRANT

While the northern portion of the Cultural Mile is a hub of activity, in large part due to the success of the Millennium Park Campus, less attention has been paid to South Grant Park. During the engagement process, the desire for a better connection with the south end of Grant Park was expressed. Many of the strategies in the 2002 Grant Park Framework Plan have not come to realization. In 2016 The Friends of Downtown worked with area stakeholders to imagine the future of the park. The Cultural Mile should support any continued efforts in this regard.



## RECOMMENDATIONS: INVESTMENT



### 3.6 ACCESS TO ILLINOIS CENTER PLAZA

Although CLA usually focuses on public way improvements, from time to time they also advocated for transformative private sector developments. In 2008 CLA sponsored the Urban Land Institute (ULI) Technical Assistance Panel entitled Michigan Avenue: Light Life and Culture to analyze east west connections to and from Michigan Avenue. The ULI Panel suggested design approaches to make the Illinois Center plaza more accessible from Michigan Avenue to Wacker Drive.

The Panel specifically suggested a design intervention calling to replace the low-rise structure at 321-325 N Michigan with stairs leading to the Illinois Center Plaza. The stairs would mimic the Spanish Steps in Rome, and were to be erected with landscaping, lighting and flanking retail from Michigan Avenue to the elevated plaza. Recently the northern access along East Wacker Drive, adjacent to the newly relocated Chicago Architecture Center, has been redeveloped to encourage pedestrian access to the plaza. The opportunity to revitalize Illinois Center Plaza by increasing access remains not fully achieved, as does the importance of promoting east west linkage.

## RECOMMENDATIONS: INVESTMENT



*An underutilized stretch of the Pedway (Credit: Cragin Spring)*

### 3.7 PEDWAY IMPROVEMENTS

The pedway is a system of underground tunnels linking in the Loop linking public and private buildings, CTA and commuter train stations, and the Millennium and Grant Park parking garages. The pedway spans over 40 blocks and is a potentially great civic asset that is underutilized and underperforming. The “main stem” of the pedway connects Millennium Station (on the Cultural Mile) with shopping at Block 37 and Macy’s, and civic buildings like the Daley Center and Thompson Center. Other pedway branches connect to the booming Lake Shore East neighborhood, providing a vital connection to the many residents that live there. The Environmental Law and Policy Center, in partnership with the Chicago Loop Alliance, completed a Main Stem Revitalization study calling for infrastructure upgrades, improvements in wayfinding and placemaking. The Action Plan echoes a call for these improvements.



*A CLA Street Team employee gives directions on State Street*

### 3.8 EXPLORE FORMATION OF BID

Many of these recommended improvements and projects are difficult to implement without a reliable funding mechanism. A Business Improvement District (BID) is a public/private partnership in which property owners volunteer to pay an additional tax used to supplement services like cleaning, maintenance, security, and placemaking, giving districts a competitive edge. This report recommends a further investigation into the feasibility of a BID formation or expansion on the Cultural Mile.





# IMPLEMENTATION



## IMPLEMENTATION

This section contains implementation tables with estimates for costs and time frames for the Cultural Mile Action Plan's recommendations. Many of the programming recommendations are inexpensive and should be implemented in the near-term to continue the momentum the Cultural Mile organization has been building. While these recommendations form a holistic vision for the Cultural Mile, funding availability and timing can be constraining and out of the Cultural Mile's control. As such, each of these recommendations could be implemented as a stand-alone project. The tables also outline potential partners or required stakeholders for each recommendation.

General timelines are provided for each recommendation, using the following classification system.

Timeline	Cost
Short: 0-2 Years	Low: < \$25,000
Medium: 2-5 Years	Medium: \$25,000 - \$500,000
Long: 5-10 Years	High: > \$500,000

Following are implementation tables for each recommendation area: Programming, Streetscape, and Investment.





## IMPLEMENTATION: PROGRAMMING

Recommendation	Timeline	Cost	Potential Partners
Activate Underutilized Spaces	Short	Low	Chicago Loop Alliance, Property Owners
Increase Winter Programming	Short	Low	DCASE, Millennium Campus, Chicago Park District, Cultural Mile Stakeholders
Congress Plaza Market	Medium	Low	CDOT, Chicago Loop Alliance, Food Truck Operators
Summer Outdoor Art Museum	Medium	Low	Chicago Park District, SAIC, Columbia
Pop-Up Retail	Short	Medium	Chicago Loop Alliance, Property Owners
Branding	Medium	Low	Chicago Loop Alliance, Cultural Mile Stakeholders
Building Projections	Medium	High	Property Owners, Cultural Institutions, Projection Artists



## IMPLEMENTATION: STREETSCAPE

Recommendation	Timeline	Cost	Potential Partners
Sidewalk Cafes	Short	Low	Chicago Loop Alliance, Michigan Avenue Restaurants
Improve Crosswalks	Long	Medium	CDOT, DCASE, Art Institute of Chicago
Planter Program	Short	Medium	Chicago Loop Alliance, Property Owners, Urban Gardening Programs
Banner Program	Long	Medium	Cultural Institutions, Chicago Loop Alliance, Property Owners
Lights	Medium	Medium	CDOT/DEO
Wayfinding	Medium	Medium	Choose Chicago, CDOT
Connect to Museum Campus	Medium	Medium	Field Museum, Adler Planetarium, Chicago Park District, DCASE





Recommendation	Timeline	Cost	Potential Partners
Pedestrian Counters	Short	Medium	Chicago Loop Alliance, Property and Business Owners
Revisit Framework Plan for South Grant Park	Medium	Medium	Chicago Park District, Friends of Downtown, SITE Design, South Loop Stakeholders
Formation of BID	Medium	Medium	Chicago Loop Alliance, Property Owners
Fix Elevators	Medium	High	Metra, SP Plus, Disability Advocacy Groups, Alderman's Office
Route 66	Long	High	Chicago Symphony Orchestra, DCASE, CDOT, Potential Large Corporate Sponsor
Redevelop Congress Hotel	Long	High	Congress Hotel Ownership, Cultural Mile Stakeholders
Access to Illinois Center Plaza	Long	High	Illinois Center, Property Owners
Improve Pedway	Long	High	ELPC, Chicago Loop Alliance, CDOT







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