

A black and white photograph of the Chicago Loop skyline, featuring several tall skyscrapers. A magenta semi-transparent band is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the title text. Below the band, the lower part of the image shows a street-level view of the Loop, including a elevated train platform and a 'PARK' sign with a downward arrow.

# CHICAGO LOOP ALLIANCE TRANSFORMING WABASH REPORT *LAYERS OF TRANSFORMATION* 2015

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The following business, civic and cultural leaders participated in charettes or workshops and/or provided counsel throughout the Transforming Wabash initiative.

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# Transforming Wabash Avenue

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## Acknowledgements

CLA is grateful for the resources, time and energy that the Wabash planning team volunteered for this initiative.

A special thanks is owed to **David Broz** and Gensler for the maps and graphics in this report.

**Charles Smith** generously hosted all of the charettes at CannonDesign.

**Zach Borders** and Civic ArtWorks provided the online platform for the invaluable Transforming Wabash public engagement.

Finally, thank you to **Martin Stern**, CLA's President of the Board, for providing wisdom and guidance throughout the Transforming Wabash initiative.





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*Above is a picture of the 'L' on Wabash Avenue in 1900. Below is a side by side comparison of Wabash Avenue in 1907 and 2013 (Detroit Publishing Company).*



# Executive Summary

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With the rumble of the elevated train ('L') overhead, Wabash Avenue in the Loop is truly an authentic Chicago street. Wabash has a rich history as a maker and manufacturing district, as it once had jewelry, film, piano, casket, and furniture artisans lining the street. Today, Wabash is still characterized by an eclectic mix of uses which include boutique hotels, design and architectural firms, Jewelers Row, educational institutions, authentic Chicago restaurants, and a growing residential population.

Despite these assets, Wabash Avenue is an underperforming street in terms of commercial and residential rents compared to its neighbors, Michigan Avenue and State Street. Although the 'L' is a unique and defining feature of Wabash, it also makes the corridor dark and loud, and the streetscape is marked by litter, pigeons, and unmaintained planters. In order to improve the Wabash experience and make it economically competitive, the Chicago Loop Alliance (CLA) started its Transforming Wabash initiative in late 2013. The purpose of this initiative has been to engage stakeholders throughout Wabash Avenue and the Loop, as well as the general public, to identify recommendations for revitalizing and transforming this unique Chicago street.

Over the course of the past year, CLA has gathered input through a series of charettes, technical workshops, and an online engagement campaign. Additionally, CLA has provided participants with information on two upcoming transit projects affecting the street. The Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) will be constructing a new 'L' station at Washington Street and Wabash Avenue, along with Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) stations adjacent to Wabash Avenue at Washington and Madison Streets. The recommendations in this report anticipate how these transit improvements will affect Wabash Avenue.

The final Transforming Wabash charrette took place in September 2014. The planning team presented draft recommendations to Wabash stakeholders.

The final recommendations focus on:

**Promoting and strengthening the distinct districts that currently exist on Wabash Avenue - including retail, hotel, education, and maker - through consistent branding, cleaning and safety services, and placemaking;**

**Improving the pedestrian experience on the street and enhancing connections to key cultural attractions through gateway installations, wayfinding signs, and placemaking;**

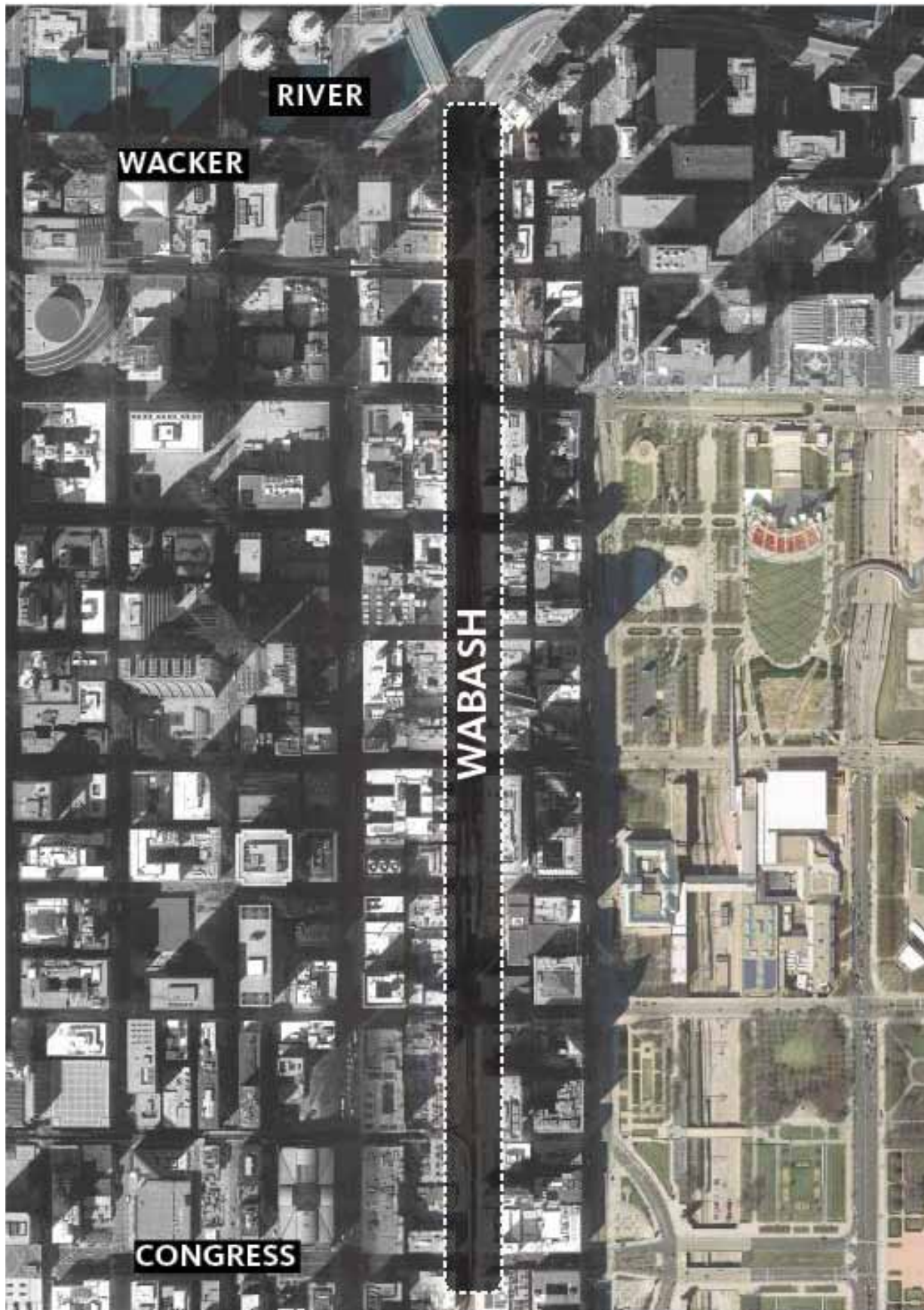
**Improving Wabash Avenue as a multimodal transportation corridor by use of clearer pavement markings, pedestrian bump-outs, and a marked bike lane;**

**Using lighting features to enhance the new 'L' station, add a spectacular lighting feature along the entire length of the 'L' tracks, and up-light historic building facades;**

**Branding Wabash Avenue as a maker district to differentiate it from other streets in the Loop, and attracting new start-ups and entrepreneurial opportunities to fill vacant upper-level floors.**

The 'L' makes Wabash Avenue a unique street - one that delivers a truly authentic Chicago experience. The Transforming Wabash initiative focuses on how to celebrate the street and embrace its maker history while bringing it into the 21st century. The recommendations for Wabash should be viewed as '**layers of transformation**,' where each recommendation can be a stand-alone project, or implemented in tandem with others. It is recognized that no single project will truly transform the street, and it will be the accumulation of projects and interventions that will elevate the Wabash experience.





*The Wabash Avenue study area is from Wacker Drive on the north to Congress Parkway on the south.*



# I. Introduction

Wabash Avenue is a unique street in Chicago's Loop. Situated between Michigan Avenue and State Street, Wabash Avenue is defined by the 'L' tracks above as well as an eclectic mix of uses. These uses can be roughly summarized as: lodgings to the north, a central retail district highlighted by historic Jeweler's Row and the Macy's department store, and educational institutions in the southern end of the street. There are both convenience and destination retailers, a range of food and beverages options, and a growing residential presence, all within close proximity to world-class arts and cultural venues.

While Wabash Avenue has many assets, it remains an underperforming street compared to Michigan Avenue to the east and State Street to the west. There are lower commercial and residential rents, no cohesive landscaping or management plan for the street, lower pedestrian and vehicle counts than its neighboring streets, and it is not uncommon to see flocks of pigeons and litter along the sidewalk. Additionally, the bare 'L' tracks can make the street appear dark and loud, which can be unwelcoming to shoppers, workers, tourists and Chicago residents.

Despite these challenges, there is great opportunity to improve the urban experience for all of Wabash Avenue's users. Chicago Loop Alliance (CLA) began its Transforming Wabash Initiative in late 2013 with the purpose of engaging Wabash Avenue stakeholders, as well as the general public, to identify ways to improve and transform this distinctive Chicago street.

## 1.1 About CLA

CLA is an organization with more than 30 years of downtown management experience, whose mission is to create, manage and promote high-performing urban experiences that attract people and investment to the Loop. CLA completed its five year Strategic Action Plan in 2013 and Transforming Wabash was identified as a Catalytic Initiative. CLA's Strategic

Plan provided the guiding framework for the Transforming Wabash Initiative.

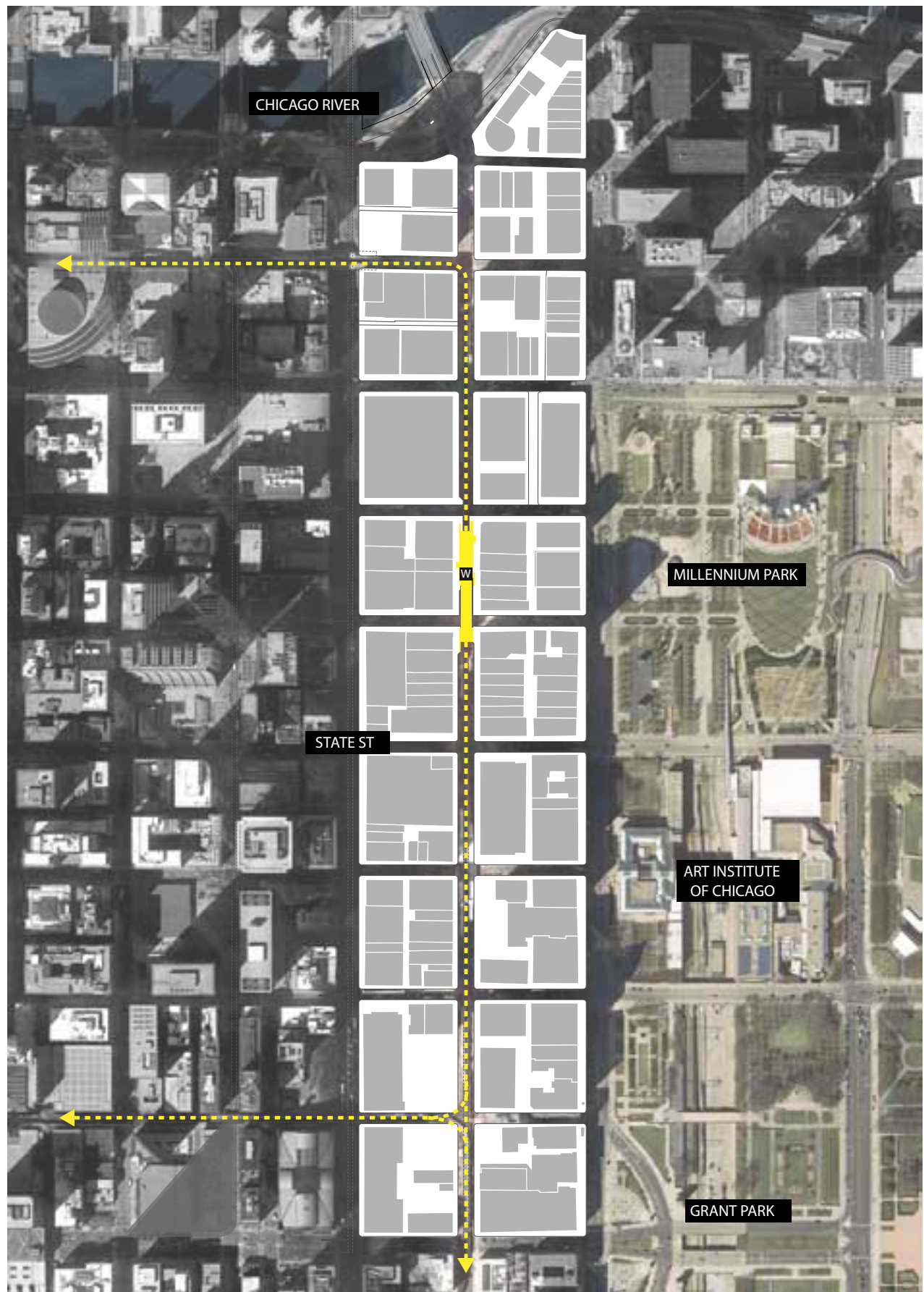
## 1.2 Planning Process

To secure input from Wabash Avenue stakeholders as well as the general public, CLA held three charrettes, and four technical workshops. CLA also partnered with Civic ArtWorks to create an online participation component that allowed for continual input from the public during the outreach process. Additionally, there are two major transit investments planned for Wabash Avenue - the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) stations adjacent to Wabash Avenue and the new 'L' station at Wabash and Washington - making the timing of this initiative very opportune (See more in Section IV).

Following this section is background information on Wabash Avenue, an explanation of the planning process and principles, and a summary of the proceedings from the Wabash charrette and workshop sessions. The second half of the plan contains the vision, goals, and project recommendations resulting from the Transforming Wabash process.



*The view looking north from Wabash Avenue.*



*The study area consists of 9 blocks or 18 block faces. Wabash Avenue is in close proximity to famous cultural amenities like Millennium Park and the Art Institute. The map also depicts the 'L' that runs above Wabash Avenue in yellow.*



## II. Wabash Avenue Assets

### 2.1 Infrastructure

In 2005 the City of Chicago completed an infrastructure upgrade on Wabash Avenue. This project included new curbs, sidewalks, planters, street lighting, limited street furniture, Jewelers Row branding elements, and repainting the 'L' to the current bordeaux color. Because of the infrastructure upgrades, there are a total of 85 planters on the street, all with built-in watering systems. The planters are varying states of upkeep, however, and many are unplanted and full of cigarettes. Additionally, there are 126 lamp posts, most of which are vintage style and in good shape. There are 81 u-racks for bikes, and a November 2013 bike survey found 85 bikes parked along Wabash Avenue in one day. There are also trash cans and typical street amenities along Wabash Avenue but no benches or places to sit.

**Key Opportunity:** Wabash Avenue has a solid base of infrastructure and amenities to build upon.

### 2.2 Transportation & Access

The pedestrian and vehicle counts for Wabash Avenue reveal that it is performing at a lower level than State Street and Michigan Avenue. CDOT's 2008 pedestrian counts recorded 198,000 people on State Street, 168,700 on Michigan Avenue, and 132,900 on Wabash Avenue in a ten hour weekday count. IDOT's 2010 average annual daily travel (AADT) counts also reveal that there are significantly fewer vehicles on Wabash Avenue; State Street had 18,400 vehicles (from Lake to Congress); Michigan Avenue had 37,100 vehicles (from Randolph to Madison); and Wabash Avenue had 7,900 vehicles from (Wacker to Congress). The lower vehicle counts can be explained in part by the fact that Wabash is a one-way street, and also by the obstacle the 'L' tracks create.

Public transportation is an integral part of Wabash Avenue. There are currently three CTA 'L' stations located on Wabash Avenue at Adams, Madison, and



*The Jewelers Row Identity markers and planters were part of the 2005 infrastructure upgrade on Wabash Avenue.*

Randolph Streets. The closest Metra station is by Millennium Park (corner of Michigan Avenue and Randolph Street) and it is estimated that there are 4 million annual riders. Wabash Avenue cross streets carry east-west CTA buses, and these buses are also essential elements of the downtown transportation network. In addition, there are large transportation infrastructure projects planned for Wabash Avenue that will be detailed in the next section of the report.

**Key Opportunity:** Wabash Avenue is a transit-rich street, and upcoming projects will further it as a transportation hub in the Loop.

## II. Wabash Avenue Assets

### 2.3 Destination Retail

Chicago's Loop contains about 5.9 million square feet (SF) of retail space in about 300 properties. Retail on Wabash accounts for approximately 30% of this space (2.1 million SF). The destination retail is largely concentrated near the Macy's store and includes Ann Taylor Loft, Lane Bryant, Cacique, and stores in the Sullivan Center and Palmer House. Jewelers Row has 329 jewelers and draws people from all over the Midwest for significant purchases.

Wabash Avenue also has a natural grocery store and other convenience retail including Staples, CVS, and Starbucks, which serve the surrounding office and visitor populations. Wabash Avenue also contains many small businesses, such as Central Camera and Designs by Rosa, which add character and diversity to the street.

There is a growing restaurant scene on Wabash Avenue. A mixture of classic and new restaurants can be found, including Miller's Pub, The Exchequer, and Vapiano, along with new fast casual food options such as Protein Bar.

**Key Opportunity:** Compared to State Street, Wabash Avenue has lower rental rates and higher storefront vacancies, which creates an opportunity to continue to attract unique and diverse retailers and restaurants to the street.

*Pictured right are select retailers on Wabash Avenue that illustrate the eclectic mix of amenities on the street.*





## 2.4 Office Uses

The Loop contains about 106.9 million SF of competitive office space, accounting for about 45% of the office space in Chicago (2010 Census). Wabash Avenue has about 6% (6.6 million SF) of the Loop's office space in the project area, in both modern and vintage buildings. The vacancy rate for Loop office space is about 14%, while the vacancy rate for the East Loop (including Wabash Avenue) is about 21.7%. There is a growing trend to outdate office space along Wabash Avenue into hotel, educational, and residential uses.

As of June 2014, Loop office effective rents grew to the highest they have been since the recession. The availability of upper floor space and lower rents on Wabash is attracting start-ups that can't find space or have been priced out of River North and West Loop.

**Key Opportunity:** Lower rents and great transit accessibility can be used to promote Wabash Avenue to an assortment of office tenants, including start-ups, design firms and traditional companies.

## 2.5 Residential Growth

In 2012, Chicago experienced more residential growth in its downtown than any other large U.S. city. Notable new buildings on Wabash include the Heritage and Legacy, which take advantage of protected Lake Michigan views. Vintage buildings are being utilized for adaptive reuse projects offering a variety of housing and price options that are amenable to students, young professionals, empty-nesters and second-home owners. The 2010 Census reported that the Loop's population doubled in the past ten years, and 53% of this increase is due to residents in their 20s and 30s. There are more than 2,100 residents and 1,880 students living in the buildings along Wabash and the occupancy rate stood at 94.2% in 2Q 2013.

**Key Opportunity:** Strategically promote Wabash Avenue and attract more people to live along the street to create a more robust, 24/7 district.



*CNA, a business and personal insurance agency, has its headquarters located on 333 S. Wabash Avenue (the red building pictured above).*



*Infinite Chicago completed its renovation of the Steger Building into luxury student apartments in 2014. The building is located at Jackson and Wabash, and was originally built in 1911 for Steger and Sons Piano Manufacturing.*

### 2.6 Proximity to Art & Culture

Wabash Avenue is in close proximity to a number of world-class arts and cultural venues. Among these venues are the Art Institute of Chicago, which attracted 1.5 million visitors in 2012; the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which sold 382,000 tickets in 2012; and the Auditorium Theater, which had 250 events and 260,000 patrons in 2012. Additionally, Millennium Park attracts 5 million visitors a year, and this will likely increase with the opening of Maggie Daley Park. The Chicago Cultural Center is also a major asset of the street, located on Washington Street between Wabash and Michigan Avenues. Beyond the assets listed above, the Loop hosts an array of festivals and concerts during the summer season that attract 2.5 million visitors annually.

**Key Opportunity:** Wabash Avenue's proximity to cultural assets will be a boon to the district's success; improved pedestrian connections on the east-west streets will be crucial to drawing visitors to Wabash Avenue.

### 2.7 Growing Education Presence

Wabash Avenue is home to many educational institutions, including the facilities of Roosevelt University, DePaul, School of the Art Institute, Harold Washington College, Illinois Institute of Art, and the International Academy of Design and Technology. There is also a massage therapy school, the Cortiva Institute, and the Success Barber School. These institutions make up 1.7 million SF of classroom and administrative space on Wabash Avenue.

CLA's 2014 Education Study found that throughout the entire Loop and South Loop there are 13,800 faculty and staff, and 58,025 students enrolled in higher education institutions. Collectively, these institutions generate \$174 million dollars in annual economic benefit within the Loop, and \$3.2 billion dollars throughout the region. Students come from all states in the union, and 120 different countries, which brings diversity to Wabash and the Loop.

**Key Opportunity:** The energy of the students and educational institutions along Wabash are critical to promoting entrepreneurship and a maker district on Wabash Avenue.



*Millennium Park contains many cultural amenities such as Cloud Gate, Pritzker Pavilion, and the Crown Fountain.*



*DePaul University is one of the many educational institutions located along Wabash Avenue.*



## 2.8 Visitors & Lodging

Currently, Wabash Avenue is home to the Hotel Monaco, the Palmer House Hilton, and the recently renovated Silversmith Hotel. Additionally, a Virgin Hotel is under construction on Wabash Avenue at Lake Street (opening in 2015). Other boutique hotels are located near the north end of Wabash Avenue on surrounding streets, including theWit and Hard Rock hotels. The concentration of boutique hotels on and near Wabash Avenue specialize in personal service. They attract a younger and hipper clientele who are drawn to the surrounding arts and cultural venues and Wabash's urban feel.

The overall hotel occupancy rate for Chicago in 2012 was 75.2%, and Choose Chicago has a goal of attracting 50 million annual visitors to Chicago by 2020.

**Key Opportunity:** Wabash Avenue has the opportunity to position itself as a unique, boutique hotel district.



*The Hotel Monaco and new Virgin Hotel anchor the east end of Wabash at Wacker Drive.*



*The Silversmith Hotel is located at Wabash and Madison, and has recently completed a multimillion dollar renovation of the entire hotel.*



*The Virgin Hotel opens in 2015 and will contain a number of new, trendy restaurants and other amenities.*

## III. Major Transportation Investments

### 3.1 New Washington/Wabash 'L' Station

CDOT is constructing a new 'L' station at Wabash Avenue and Washington Street. The new station will be a consolidation of the existing 'L' stations at Madison and Randolph, which will be demolished. The construction will take approximately 18 months and is scheduled to begin in March 2015. The new station will be the first ADA accessible station on the east side of the Loop. The station has a clean, modern look to it, and is made of glass with white pillars and overhead beams that undulate in a wave-like pattern. The new station will serve as a transformational project for Wabash Avenue and could be a catalyst for streamlining other streetscape elements.

The effects of the new 'L' station on the street, and impacted properties and businesses, requires careful consideration going forward. CLA will be an advocate for businesses on Wabash Avenue during construction, when Wabash Avenue will be closed between Washington and Madison Streets for 18 months.

*The renderings below, left and right, depict the new Washington/Wabash 'L' station.*



*The map above shows the locations of the new BRT and 'L' stations.*







*The rendering above shows the potential street section for BRT on Madison Street. The bus only lane on the right is painted red, and the raised platform will allow for level boarding.*

### 3.2 Central Loop BRT

Central Loop BRT will be completed by the end of 2015, with construction beginning early in the year. The BRT routes head eastbound on Washington Street and westbound on Madison Street in the Loop. The buses will have dedicated lanes, advanced traffic signals and stations with level boarding.

Three stations will be constructed adjacent to Wabash Avenue. On Washington Street, stations will be constructed east and west of Wabash, on the south side of Washington. On Madison Street, the station will be built east of Wabash Avenue on the north side of the street.

The construction of the 'L' station and the BRT stations will affect merchants on Wabash Avenue, particularly those located within Jeweler's Row. The lengthy construction periods for these two projects will also make accessing this area difficult.

CLA advocated for construction and station designs that ensure customers coming to Wabash have acceptable pedestrian access to the street, as well sufficient valet services and parking. CLA also advocated for maintaining righthand turns off of Washington Street onto Wabash Avenue.







## IV. Planning Process & Principles

Wabash Avenue is a unique street in Chicago's Loop, with a multitude of businesses, institutions, hotels, residential, and transportation uses. Wabash Avenue serves different stakeholders, each with distinct visions for how Wabash Avenue should be transformed. The purpose of the charettes and workshops was to tease out a collective vision and implementation plan for the street. A wide variety of participants attended the charettes, and CLA also partnered with Civic ArtWorks to create an online participation component to support the Transforming Wabash process.

### Charettes:

#### Charette #1: Initial Brainstorming

November 13th, 2013

#### Charette #2: Moving Ideas Forward

January 9th, 2014

#### Charette #3: Final Presentation

September 12th, 2014

### Technical Workshops:

#### Lighting

March 28th, 2014

#### Transportation

April 25th, 2014

#### Urban Design

April 30th, 2014

#### Marketing

May 22nd, 2014

A core planning team consisting of CLA staff members and expert partners met regularly before and during the charette and workshops.

### 4.1 Planning Principles

Urban environments today are more than just groupings of buildings and streets. Modern urban environments cater to their hyper-connected citizens. Participants in the Transforming Wabash process were challenged to think of the street as a hybrid platform of place, user, technology, and information. With this as background, a set of guiding principles for the Transforming Wabash process was developed, and participants were challenged to think of Wabash Avenue as a....

*Place* for innovative urban experiences, that will help build...

*Connections* between citizens, the city, and its institutions, to ultimately create a...

*Destination* that will entice, engage, and excite citizens to craft new relationships with their city.



*The image above is in the north end of Wabash, and demonstrates how a cafe and some greenery contributes to placemaking along the corridor.*



*Pictured above are participants at the first two charettes held at CannonDesign.*

### 4.2 Planning Process

#### Charette #1 – Initial Brainstorming November 9th, 2013

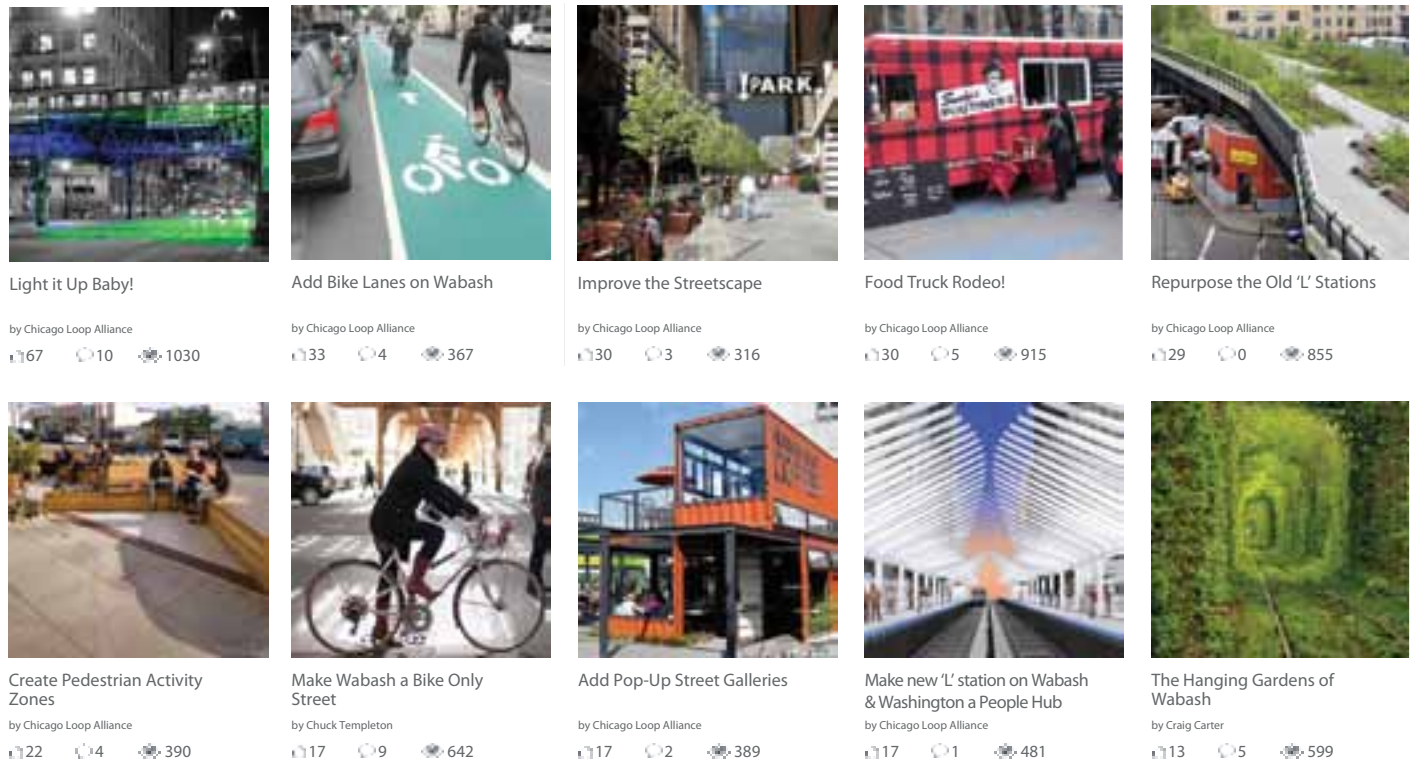
Participants were asked to think of big, wild, transformational ideas for Wabash Avenue. This was a chance to be imaginative, and not be bound by budgets. The participants were divided into the following groups for the breakout sessions: Transportation, Marketing, Connections, Placemaking, Education, High Performing Urban Experience, Tourism, and Living.

#### Charette #2 – Moving Ideas Forward January 9th, 2014

At the second Charette there were several break-out groups. Five visions for the street emerged; polls were added to the Civic ArtWorks website to obtain refined information on the ideas. The polls asked the public to weigh in on issues such as the most important streetscape improvements, whether trees should be planted along Wabash Avenue, and which part of the street (buildings, 'L' track, or intersections) is most suitable for lighting installations.



## Transforming Wabash - Online Engagement by Civic ArtWorks

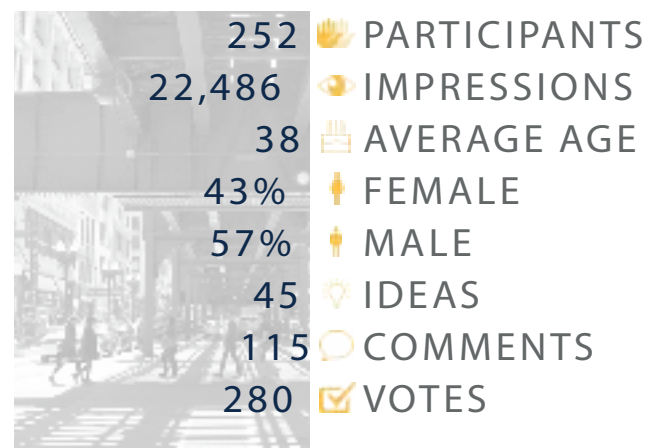


Above are the ten idea cards with the most votes and views on the Transforming Wabash website.

In order to engage a broader audience, CLA worked with Civic ArtWorks to create an online platform for testing the ideas that came out of the charettes.

Although the charettes were well attended, it was important to get feedback from the public, and capture the views of stakeholders that were not present at the charettes. The ideas generated at the charettes were put on the CivicArtWorks site as 'idea cards,' where people could vote for the ideas and add comments. The public could also add new ideas to the Wabash online site.

Many Chicago area residents viewed and contributed to the CivicArtWorks site, participating in the exciting dialogue on how to improve Wabash Avenue.



The graphic above summarizes the participation on the Transforming Wabash site. In total, there were over 22,000 views of the site, and 252 people created new ideas, voted or added comments.

### Technical Workshops

The online engagement on the Civic ArtWorks site generated ideas from small to grand on how to transform Wabash Avenue. To assess the feasibility of these ideas, CLA held four technical workshops. Field experts and Wabash Avenue stakeholders were tasked with evaluating the ideas, and identifying the implementable projects that could have the greatest impact on Wabash Avenue.

### Lighting

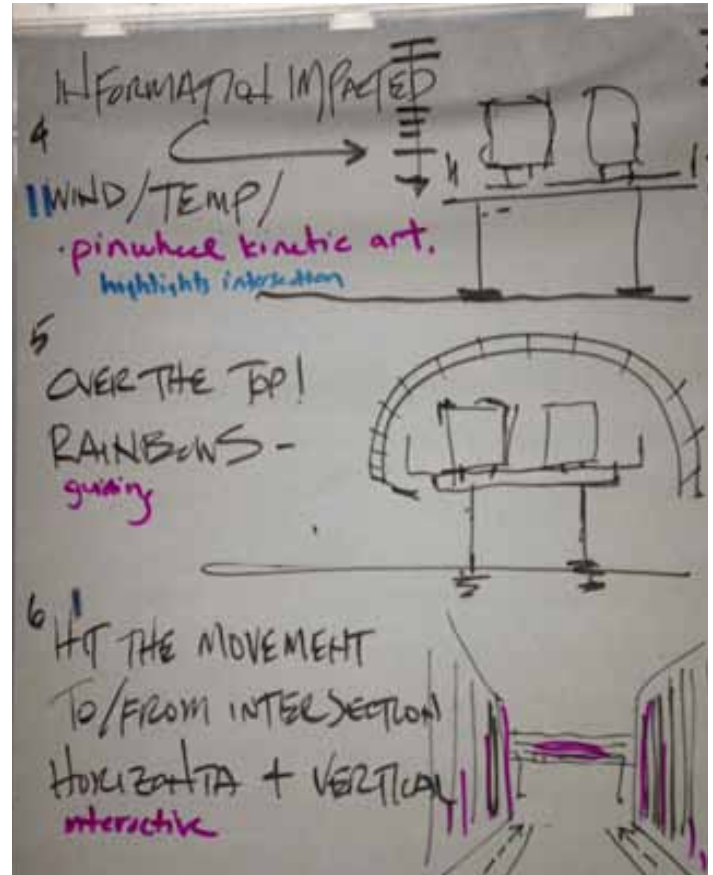
Lighting installations could be a dramatic and impactful addition to Wabash Avenue. Lighting engineers, architects, designers and CLA staff weighed in on various lighting schemes for Wabash at the workshop. Participants clustered possibilities into categories, which included lighting cross streets to lead people to Wabash Avenue from Millennium Park, daytime lighting options, using the new 'L' station as a focal point for lighting, illuminating the crosswalks, and lighting either the CTA train cars or 'L' tracks. Other inventive ideas emerged as well, such as covering the 'L' columns in LED Legos and using light installations that creatively convey information such as wind speed or train arrivals and departures.

It was emphasized that sustainability should be considered when picking a lighting feature. Lighting technology evolves quickly, and it would be a mistake to invest in a lighting feature that may be outdated in a few years. Additionally, an operation and maintenance plan must be part of any big installation.

The group emphasized that using the new 'L' station between Washington and Madison as a focal point for the lighting and/or lighting intersections could be impactful ways to draw people to Wabash Avenue.

### Transportation

The group focused on evaluating Wabash Avenue as "complete street," including safety, throughput, modal hierarchy, and placemaking. The group discussed interventions that could make the street better for pedestrians, cyclists, and automobiles.



The picture above shows various ideas from the lighting workshop.

The intersections were identified as opportunities, to make them safer with better lighting, but to also make them focal points along Wabash Avenue. Pedestrian bump-outs could shorten crossing distances and offer micro-opportunities for placemaking.

The group emphasized preserving the functional nature of Wabash with its loading zones and parking, but with enhancements to make it safer and cater to pedestrians traveling on or through the street.



### Urban Design

The new 'L' station could be dedicated to Jewelers Row and have a spectacular lighting installation. Beyond Jewelers Row, design interventions could be used to improve other parts of Wabash Avenue. The group characterized the northern part of the street as a hotel district, yet it also has a few parking structures that make the sidewalk uninviting. The northern end of the street could be improved to draw pedestrians down Wabash Avenue, along with lighting installations at the new 'L' station. South of Jewelers Row there are many educational institutions. This area of Wabash could be improved with elements of interest such as showcasing student work on the street.

The group also assessed the state of the planters on Wabash Avenue and suggested considering different solutions for the 85 planters along Wabash. For example, a suggestion offered was to build stages over some of the planters for mini-art installations or performances in the south end of the street in the institutional district. The group felt it was important to maintain the planters in the retail district to the north. Additionally, there was discussion of highlighting the modern and classic architecture found on Wabash Avenue, along with cleaning up Adams Street as it is the main connection to the Art Institute of Chicago and other cultural assets. Finally, participants suggested that the increasing rents for office space in River North and 1871 may also make Wabash attractive as a place for start-ups, and that the lower cost of entry on Wabash Avenue should be promoted.

### Marketing

The participants brainstormed possible identities and campaigns for Wabash Avenue that could be used to encompass the recommendations from the other workshops. It was imperative to create a marketing and programming plan that would be appealing to all of Wabash's different users, while highlighting the 'L' as it makes Wabash a truly authentic Chicago street.

After much discussion of the different districts on Wabash, the various stakeholders, and demographics on the street, the group settled on a theme: "Elevate Wabash" or "Get Elevated." The slogan is a play on the elevated train, and also speaks to the fact that Wabash has a lower cost of entry than other Loop streets. Wabash Avenue could be the place start your business, rent or buy your first downtown condo, or to elevate yourself, your business, and your career. The "Elevate Wabash" tagline is customizable and can refer to the many unique aspects of Wabash Avenue.



*Pictured above are ideas from the urban design workshop.*





### Charette 3 - September 12th, 2014

At the final charette, a suite of recommendations for Wabash were presented. CLA staff and partners took the information from the previous charettes, technical workshops, and online engagement, and honed the ideas into implementable, phased recommendations. The recommendations were framed as “**layers of transformation**” to emphasize that while the proposed improvements complement each other, they can also be viewed as stand-alone projects that can be prioritized based on available funding. The recommendations were grouped into the following categories:

- Wabash Districts
- Pedestrian Experience
- Multimodal Transportation
- Lighting
- Economic Development

At the charette, the audience was asked to weigh in after each section, and provide confirmation on whether the recommendations made sense. The feedback gathered was incorporated in the Transforming Wabash recommendations, which are in the following section of the report.



*Above is a picture from the final charette at CannonDesign*





## V. Vision

### TRANSFORMING WABASH LAYERS OF TRANSFORMATION

EXCITING MIXED USE DISTRICTS  
VIBRANT PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE  
MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION  
INNOVATIVE STREET LIGHTING  
ENERGIZED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



### Vision:

Wabash Avenue in the Loop is the quintessential Chicago street filled with local businesses, shops and innovative companies. With a unique blend of historic architecture and modern amenities, Wabash invites visitors to engage in a sensory story of Chicago. Its proximity to Millennium Park and State Street makes it the gateway to an authentic Chicago experience day, night and weekends.

The Wabash Avenue experience will be elevated by highlighting and improving Wabash's mixed use districts, the pedestrian experience, transportation along Wabash, and street lighting, creating new opportunities for economic development.

## VI. Recommendations

### 6.1 Wabash Mixed Use Districts

**Goal:** *Utilize the distinct Wabash districts to advance economic development, and organize investment on Wabash Avenue.*

#### **Hotel & Night Life District - Wacker Drive to**

**Lake Street:** Promote and emphasize the Wabash area boutique hotels, unique nightlife amenities and personal service. Focus on this district first while new 'L' station is under construction. Promote Wabash Avenue and concentration of boutique hotels including Hotel Monaco, theWit Hotel, The Hard Rock Hotel, Silversmith, Palmer House Hilton, and the new Virgin Hotel.

#### **Retail District - Randolph Street to Monroe Street:**

The Retail District is anchored by Jewelers Row and Macy's Department store. Recruit complementary destination retail and promote the personal retail experience, which includes custom-made jewelry, high fashion and high-end personal shopping services.

**Maker Districts:** Promote a Maker District on the east side of Wabash Avenue from Madison Street to Monroe Street in conjunction with SAIC. This Maker District will be focused on fashion, 3D printing,

graphic design and fine art, utilizing the second and third floors of the historic building stock.

A second Maker District should be promoted on the west side of Wabash Avenue from Monroe Street to Adams Street, attracting maker companies such as architecture and interior design firms.

#### **Art Street – Adam Street from State Street to**

**Michigan:** Promote Adams Street as an Art Street to connect to the Art Institute of Chicago from State Street. Activate the street through reuse of unmaintained planters, streetscape cleaning and beautifying, and target arts and arts-related tenants for first and second floor storefronts.

#### **University District – South of Jackson Street:**

There is a concentration of universities and colleges south of Jackson Street on Wabash Avenue. Open tracts of land (parking lots) also offer development opportunities. The education institutions at the south end of Wabash Avenue need to have a greater presence on the street, and this can be accomplished through bringing media, performance, and the culinary arts into vacant spaces along the entire length of Wabash Avenue. Institutions can promote these spaces as entrepreneurial opportunities for their students in pop-up, temporary or market rate spaces.

#### *What is a Maker District?*

A maker district is a collection of businesses that are typically technology based extensions of the do-it-yourself movement. Typical interests are in engineer-oriented pursuits such as electronics, robotics, and 3-D printing. The Maker movement also includes traditional activities such as metal and wood working, arts & crafts, calligraphy, film making, computer programming, gaming, fashion, graphic design, and unique applications of technologies encouraging invention and proto-typing. A key requirement for a maker district is an evident economic network of forward-thinking property owners, makers, and support services that emphasize learning through doing and promote an open and social environment. Work spaces need to be open, collaborative and sharing.



WABASH MIXED USE DISTRICTS  
Diverse Amenities



# WABASH MIXED USE DISTRICTS

## Diverse Tenants

### HOTEL / NIGHTLIFE

THE WIT  
HARD ROCK HOTEL  
WYNDHAM GRAND CHICAGO  
CLUB QUARTERS  
THE RIVER  
HOTEL MONACO  
THE VIRGIN

### RETAIL + JEWELRY

MACY'S  
TARGET  
WABASH JEWELER'S MALL  
MICHAEL-KAGAN'S JEWELERS  
TERANZ BOUTIQUE  
MON AMI JEWELRY  
PRUDENTIAL GEM & JEWELRY  
HP JEWELERS  
IMPERIAL JEWELRY CO  
WEDDING BANDS & CO  
WATSON H JEWELRY  
C A JEWELERS  
DIAMONDS ON WABASH  
LANE BRYANT  
STERLING JEWELERS  
BRIGHT STAR JEWELRY & ANTIQUE

### MAKER DISTRICT

JEWELER'S ROW  
DESIGNS BY ROSA

### ART STREET

ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO  
CHICAGO SYMPHONY CENTER

### HIGHER EDUCATION

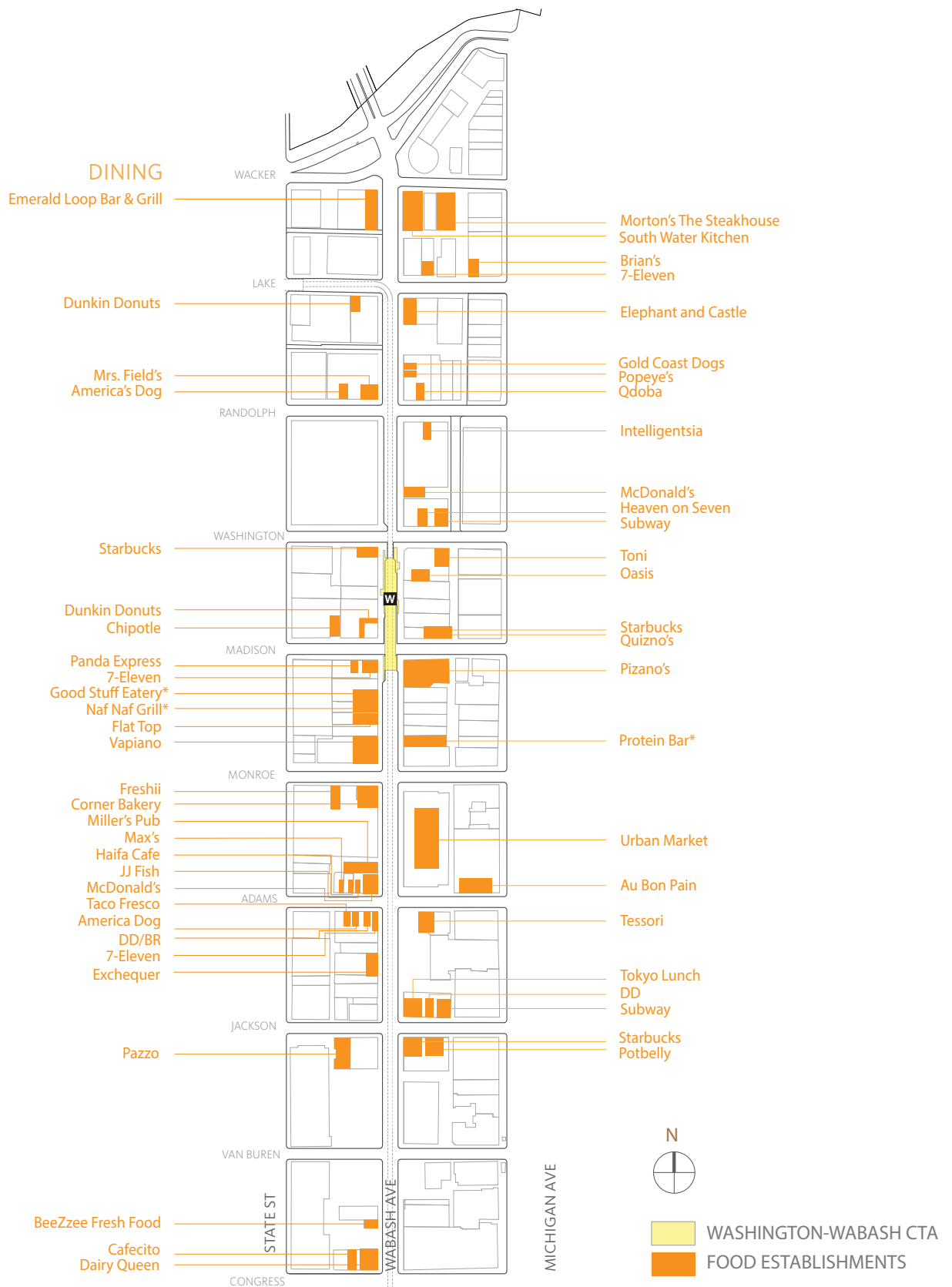
SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE  
COLUMBIA COLLEGE  
DEPAUL UNIVERSITY  
ROBERT MORRIS UNIVERSITY  
ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY  
NATIONAL LOUIS UNIVERSITY  
AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ART  
HENRY GEORGE  
GOODMAN SCHOOL OF DRAMA





# WABASH MIXED USE DISTRICTS

## Food and Dining



## 6.2 Pedestrian Experience

**Goal:** Make Wabash an interesting, pleasant, and safe place to be a pedestrian by maintaining a clean, attractive streetscape, and improving the east-west connections to draw people in from Millennium Park and the Art Institute of Chicago. Celebrate and promote iconic buildings and landmarks that already exist on Wabash Avenue.

**Use a phased approach to provide clean & safe services to Wabash Avenue.**

*Phase 1:* In the short term, CLA will begin providing clean & safe services on Wabash to the buildings between Washington and Adams, which are included in the current State Street SSA. These blocks will act as a pilot project to demonstrate the impact that coordinated maintenance and landscaping can have on Wabash Avenue.

*Phase 2:* In the next two to five years, CLA will collect voluntary funds from interested building owners to coordinate cleaning and beautification services on select areas of Wabash. Building owners can increase their purchasing power through this model, which will allow for these services to be obtained at a lower per unit cost.

*Phase 3:* In the long term, CLA will explore the creation of an SSA on Wabash with building owner support to provide enhanced clean and safe services, landscaping and beautification, marketing, and coordination of new public and private development.



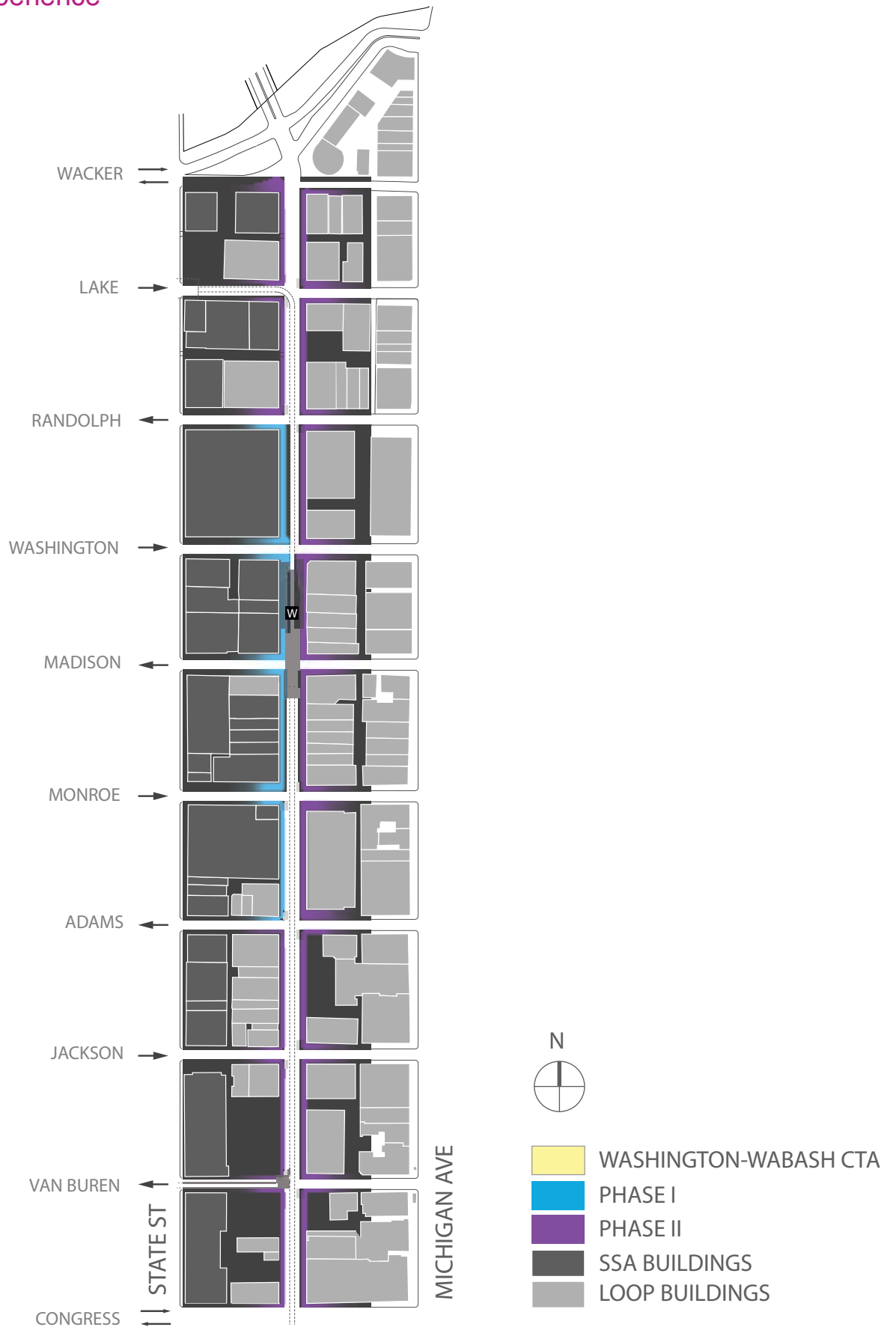
*An unmaintained planter on Wabash Avenue.*



*The Wabash Avenue sidewalk and road are stained with dirt and pigeon droppings. An SSA could provide basic cleaning and beautification services to greatly improve the Wabash Avenue streetscape experience.*



## Pedestrian Experience Clean & Safe



**Enhance and repurpose planters in strategic**

**locations:** Enhance landscape plantings north of Monroe in the Wabash retail and hotel districts. Select planters in the Maker or University Districts in the south end of the street should be repurposed as performance stages, pop-up businesses or seating. These repurposed planters will offer opportunities for placemaking, and will be a welcome change on the street if no coordinated landscaping plan is implemented.

**Install pedestrian bump-outs to shorten crossing distances, increase safety for pedestrians at intersections, and add micro-opportunities for placemaking.** Bump-outs, or curb extensions, are traffic calming measures that extend the sidewalk in order to shorten crossing distances, and give pedestrians more visibility when they may be blocked by parked cars to oncoming traffic. Bump-outs should be installed on alternating corners, opposite from the turn lane along Wabash. Pedestrians spill out in the street behind the 'L' columns when crossing Wabash Avenue, and the bump-outs will give them a safe place to stand, while also forcing drivers to turn if they entered the turn lane. Bump-outs can be painted in the first iteration for proof of concept, but eventually they should be extensions of the sidewalk and installed with curbs.

**Improve pedestrian safety from Lake Street to Randolph Street on Wabash Avenue:** Cars entering and exiting multiple parking garages in this area drive on the sidewalk, and causing conflicts with pedestrians. Utilize interventions such as bollards, planters, paint and signage to guide cars entering/exiting the parking lots, and increase pedestrian awareness of these garages.

*Right is a picture of a parking garage on the east side of Wabash Avenue. Cars enter and exit the garage and cross the sidewalk, with no indication to pedestrians.*



*Above is a well-maintained, attractive planter on Wabash in the retail district.*

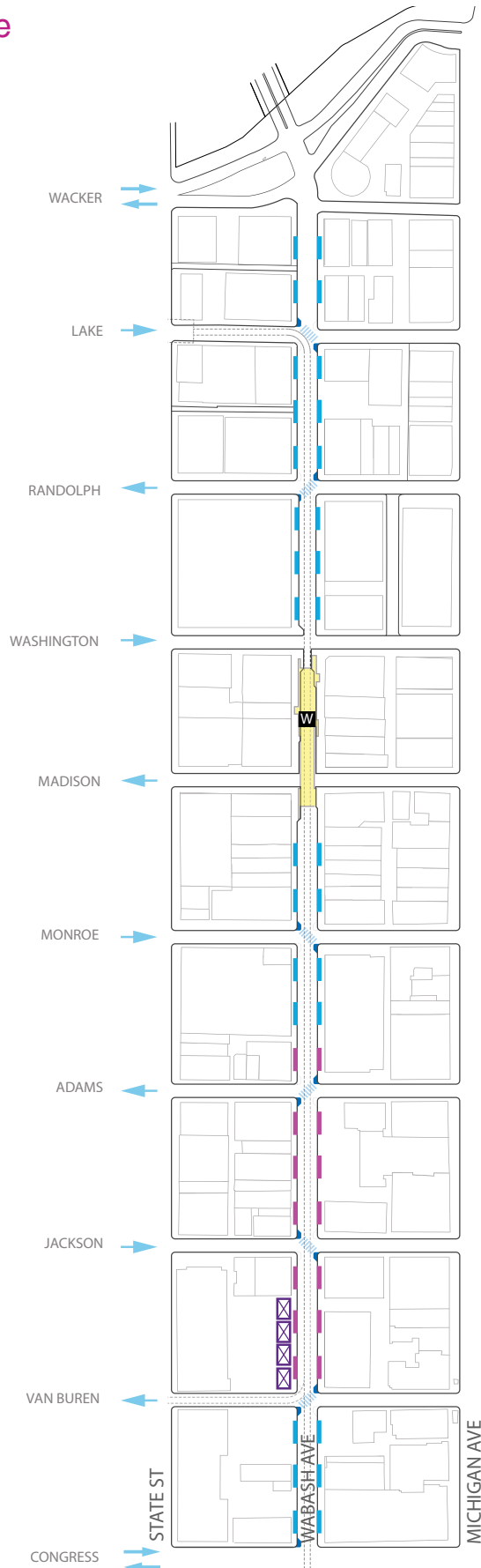


*The rendering shows a possible reuse of a planter as seating. Further study is needed to decide which planters on Wabash are viable for reuse.*

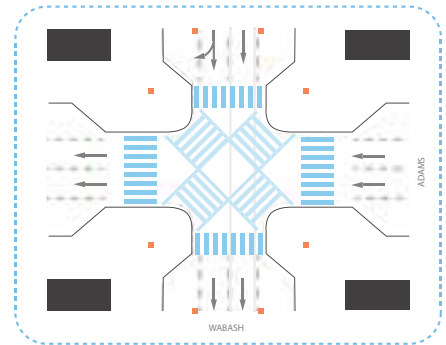




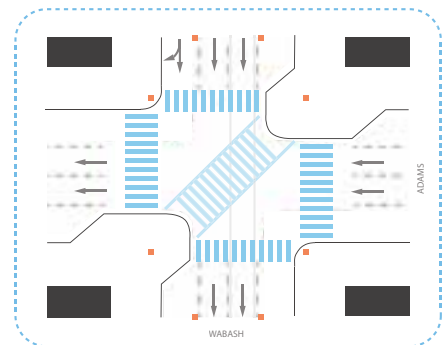
## Pedestrian Experience Street Furniture



### SIDEWALK BUMPOUT OPTIONS








### 4-WAY CROSSING



### 2-WAY CROSSING



-  WASHINGTON-WABASH CTA
-  POP-UP RETAIL
-  CURB BUMPOUTS + CROSSING
-  REPURPOSED PLANTER
-  ENHANCED PLANTER

**Celebrate and promote the numerous landmarks and destinations markers that exist on, or are visible from, Wabash Avenue:** Landmarks include the Trump Tower at the north end of the street, the Cultural Center, Pritzker Pavilion, the Art Institute of Chicago, and newly planned Route 66 Plaza at Wabash and Adams. The modern and historic architecture on Wabash is also an asset, and should be highlighted in marketing materials. Below and right are select Wabash landmarks and destination markers.



*The Trump Tower gives Wabash Avenue a grand terminated vista at the north end. Below, the Pritzker Pavilion creates another great view from Wabash and Washington.*



**Enhance the pedestrian experience at Michigan Avenue Intersections that connect to Millennium Park and the Art Institute:** The intersections on Michigan Avenue from Washington to Adams must be enhanced to accommodate growing visitor traffic to and from Millennium Park and the Art Institute of Chicago. These intersections are also view corridors into the Loop should be improved to draw Millennium Park visitors into the Loop. The removal of the Madison 'L' station, along with the new 'L' station at Washington and Wabash will significantly improve these view corridors, but additional creative, enticing interventions are also needed.

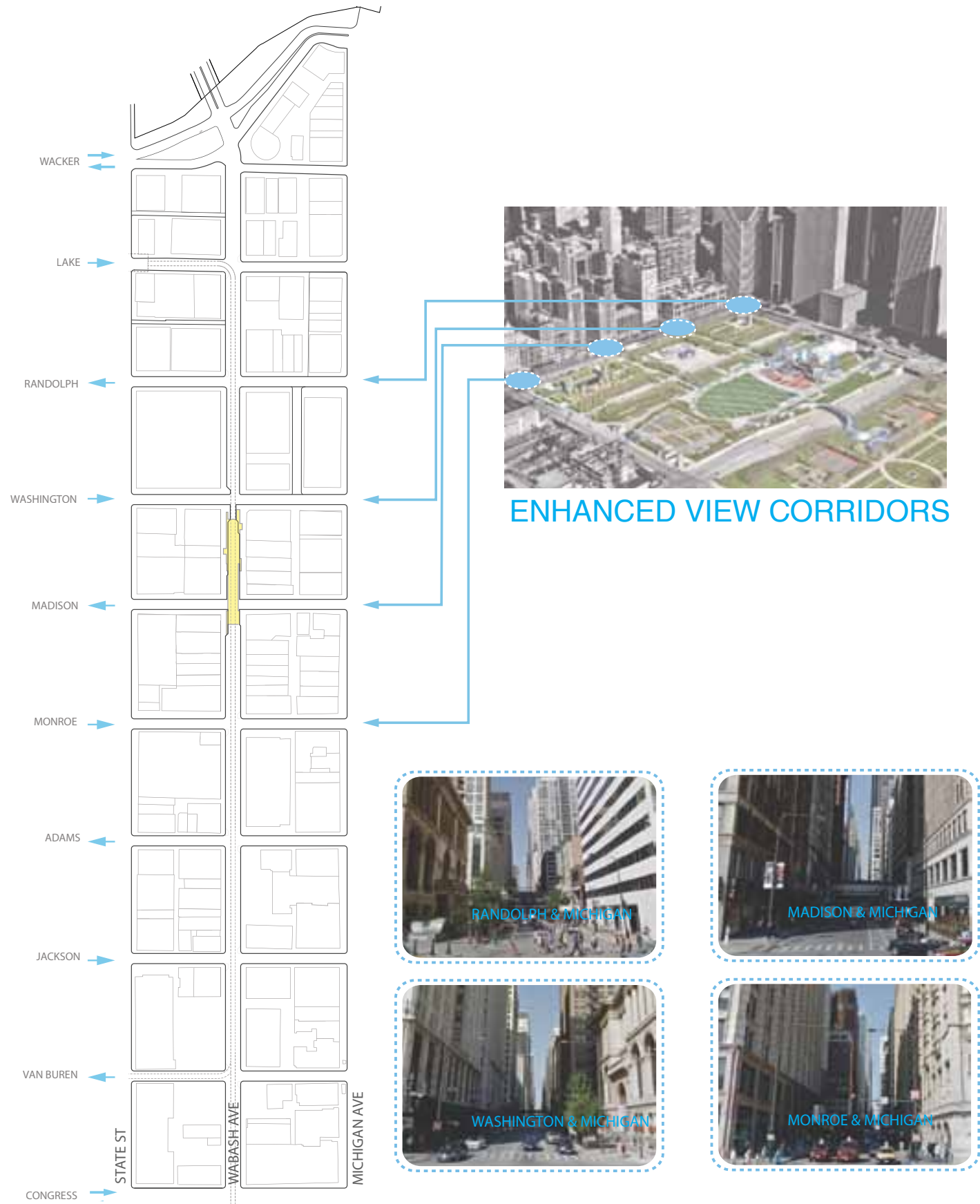


*The Art Institute of Chicago at Michigan Avenue and Adams Street is above. Below is a rendering of the proposed Chicago Symphony Orchestra's Route 66 Plaza at Wabash and Adams.*





Pedestrian Experience  
Connections & View Corridors



## VI. Recommendations



The WAC has several murals by well-known street artists, and students. Top left is mural by Shepard Fairey, bottom left is a mural by Cleon Peterson. The top right mural is by Retna, and the bottom right is by a Columbia College student.



### Improve connections south to the Wabash

**Arts Corridor (WAC):** The WAC is a collection of institutions, murals, gallery spaces, and businesses that has its main artery located on Wabash from Van Buren Street to Polk Street. The connections to WAC should be strengthened to extend south on Wabash, and activate the inert blocks south of Jackson Street.

At Wabash Avenue and Van Buren Street, there are eight building facades framing the intersection due to the surface parking lots. These facades could be used for a dynamic collection of huge murals by world renowned artists. The mural installations would activate the intersection and create a compelling destination and gateway to south Wabash. Columbia College is a key stakeholder of WAC, and CLA has relationship with the Columbia that could be utilized to transform the area around Wabash Avenue and Van Buren Street.

### Create a maker nightlife zone in the surface parking lots in the south end of Wabash using brightly colored containers and murals:

Containers can be used for pop-up bars, handmade goods or local restaurants, or for nearby institutions to showcase student work. The container village will add a destination to the south end of the street and serve as an anchor. The container district will draw the maker theme south, and connect to, or collaborate with the WAC.

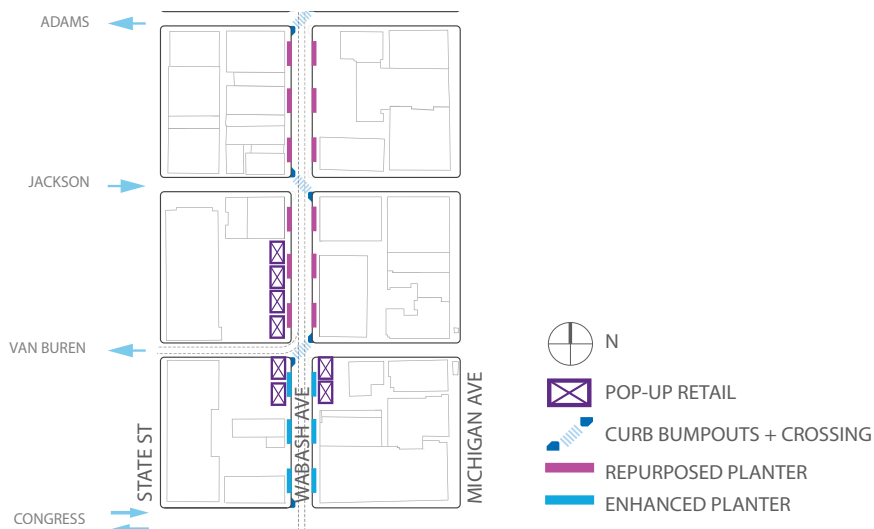


An example of a container being used for retail.





Above are pictures showing renderings of murals on select building facades at Wabash and Van Buren. There are surface parking lots located on three corners at this intersection, which leaves large building facades open. Murals could be an effective way to add interest to this part of Wabash, connect the WAC, and provide a perfect backdrop for a maker container district.





*Two cars can be seen turning right on Wabash Avenue from different lanes. The 'L' columns and unclear pavement markings make the traffic flow erratic at times.*



*There is a bike lane on Wells Street in the Loop under the 'L' tracks, setting a precedent for installing one on Wabash Avenue.*

### 6.3 Multimodal Transportation

**Goal:** Improve Wabash Avenue for all transportation modes. Utilize principles of “complete streets,” which include throughput, safety, modal hierarchy, and placemaking.

**Improve lane striping and markings to ensure turn lanes are clearly marked on the pavement outside of the 'L' columns:** The location of the 'L' columns and the unclear pavement markings at intersections make it difficult for drivers to tell what lane they are supposed to be in when turning off from Wabash Avenue. Clearly marked pavement striping, along with effective signage, will assist in rationalizing turn movements. Pavement marking improvements should be made in tandem with the sidewalk bump-outs, in order to increase safety for pedestrians and vehicles at Wabash intersections.

**Increase bike parking on Wabash Avenue:** Install multi-story bike parking structures or bike parking corrals in the south and north ends of Wabash Avenue in the surface parking lots/parking garages. Bikes are often seen locked to the planters on Wabash Avenue, especially in front of SAIC and other institutions, and the large student population on Wabash warrants additional bike parking facilities.

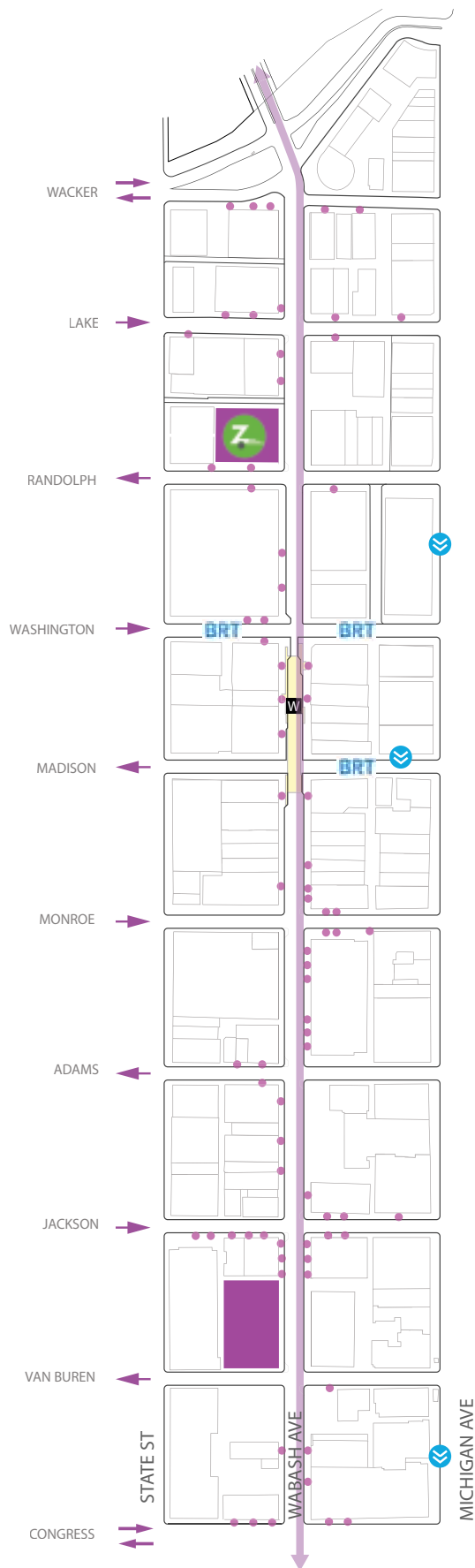
**Use pavement markings and signs to designate a shared lane for bikes within the 'L' columns:** A shared bike lane along with signage on the inside of the 'L' columns will indicate to cyclists where they should be positioned while traveling on Wabash Avenue. This intervention will also increase awareness of cyclists to drivers, letting them know that they must share a travel lane with cyclists. Wells Street has the 'L' running above it, and it has a shared bike lane and signage, providing a precedence for a shared bike lane on Wabash Avenue.

**Maintain throughput of the two travel lanes for vehicles:** Wabash Avenue is a southbound street with two lanes, and is part of the network of one-way streets in the Loop. Ensuring that cars can move through the street efficiently and safely will help preserve the traffic signal coordination of the downtown grid. Additionally, Wabash Avenue has many loading and valet zones, and these must be maintained for the businesses in the district.



# Multimodal Transportation

## A Complete Street



- N
- WASHINGTON-WABASH CTA
- SHARED BIKE LANE
- PROPOSED BIKE GARAGE
- 85 EXISTING BIKE RACKS
- DIVY STATIONS
- BRT BRT STATIONS
- ZIPCAR

## 6.4 Lighting

**Goal:** *Install spectacular lighting along Wabash to highlight the new 'L' station, intersections, historic facades, and the 'L' tracks.*

**Install a special lighting feature emanating from the new 'L' station:** The new 'L' station will become the focal point of Wabash Avenue, and this should be emphasized by a lighting feature to draw people to the new 'L' station and Wabash Avenue. The lighting will also increase safety around the station, as the 'L' tracks make Wabash dark at night.

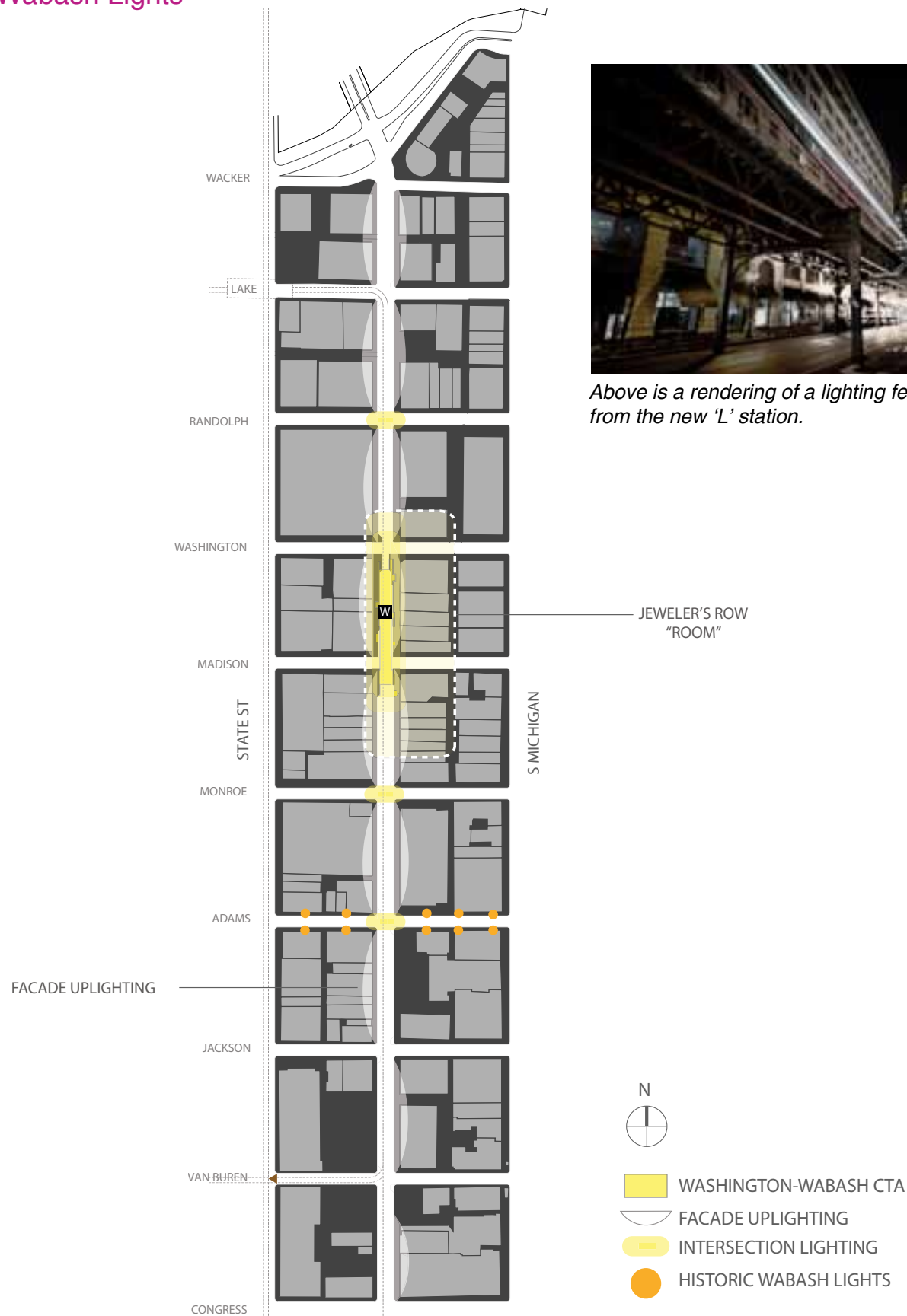
**Install vintage lighting on Wabash cross streets:** The existing vintage style street lamps add charm to Wabash Avenue, and the installation of vintage street lamps on the Wabash's cross streets will strengthen the visual east-west connections. The installation of vintage lampposts should initially be focused on Washington, Madison, Monroe and Adams, adjacent to Wabash, replacing the cobra street lights that are currently exist. Adams Street is the proposed "art street connector" and installing vintage street lamps here would be particularly impactful.

**Use up-lighting to highlight historic facades on Wabash:** Up-lighting should be used to highlight the first through third floors of the historic building facades on Wabash. This will enhance the view of the buildings from the street and 'L' and activate the second and third stories in the buildings on Wabash at night.

*Top right is a picture of the vintage street lights on Wabash Avenue. The middle picture shows the vintage lights that were recently installed on Jackson Street in front of the new Infinite Chicago student apartments. The bottom picture shows Adams Street with cobra lights. Adams, along with other cross streets would be greatly improved if Wabash's vintage lighting was continued as it was on Jackson Street.*



# Street Lighting Wabash Lights



Above is a rendering of a lighting feature emanating from the new 'L' station.



## *The Wabash Lights*



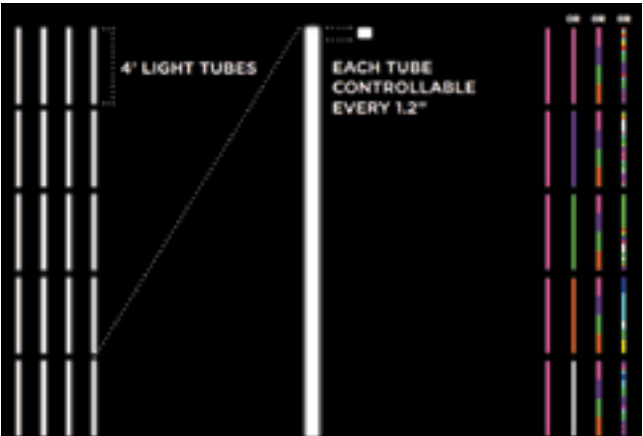
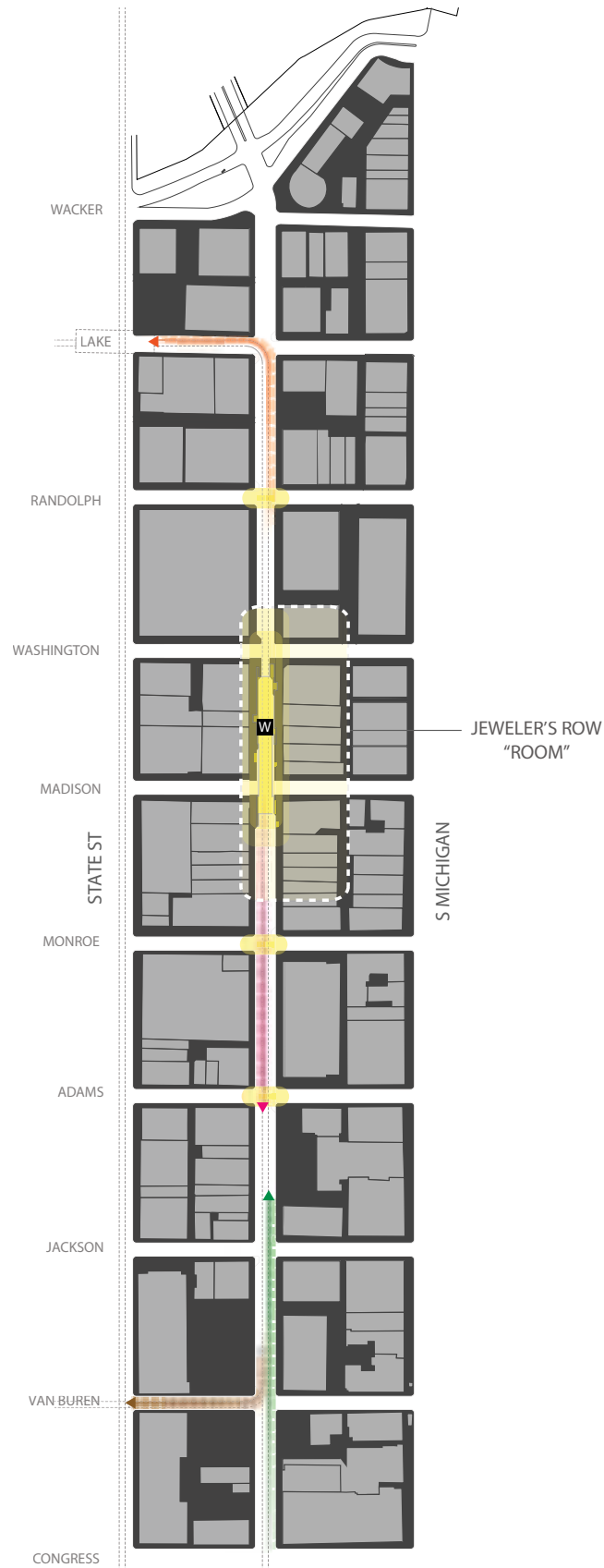
*The images above, and right, were created by the Wabash Lights Project - [TheWabashLights.tumblr.com](http://TheWabashLights.tumblr.com)*

**Install a lighting feature running along the entire length of the ‘L’:** Throughout the Transforming Wabash process, the idea of a kinetic, interactive lighting installation has come up again and again. Lighting the ‘L’ was the idea that received the most votes on the Civic ArtWorks website as well. There is a group in Chicago called the Wabash Lights, that is currently developing a lighting installation for Wabash. The vision of the Wabash Lights is to install kinetic, LED lights on the underside of the ‘L’. The group has developed a prototype and is currently looking for funding. CLA will promote the project going forward, as this is a primary recommendation that has come out of the Transforming Wabash initiative.

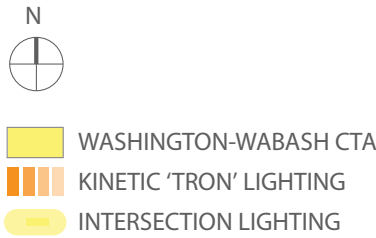
Besides being a spectacular lighting feature, the Wabash Lights will also be an interactive, public art piece. Each 1.2 inches of the LED lights will be programmable, making it possible to customize an incredible range of colored-light patterns. The lights could be programmable through an online platform, available to the public. This project redefines public art, as the public becomes the ‘makers’ of the Wabash lights. The user-powered concept of the Wabash Lights project fits perfectly with the maker theme of Transforming Wabash.

The Wabash Lights project will be installed from Monroe to Adams in the first stage, but it is the goal of the project creators to extend the installation along the entire length of the ‘L’.

# Street Lighting Wabash Lights



The images above are from the Wabash Lights Project, and illustrates how the lighting installation for Wabash would be programmable on a fine-grained scale. Each 1.2 inches of lighting would be controlled individually on a web platform accessible to the general public.



## 6.5 Economic Development

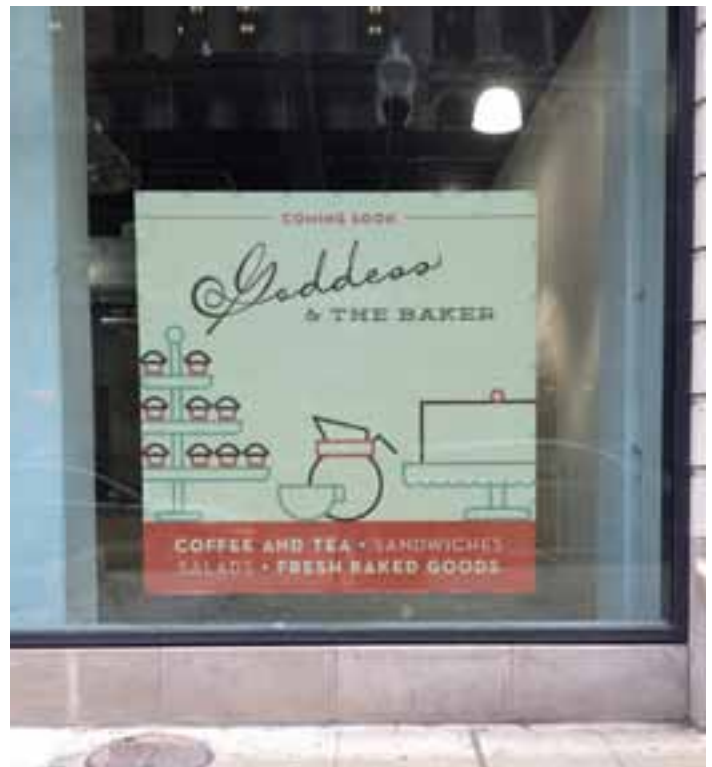
**Goal:** Utilize recommended physical improvements to Wabash as a catalyst for spurring economic development.

**Brand and promote Wabash as a maker street:** Create a Wabash marketing campaign that highlights assets such as Jeweler's Row, local restaurants, boutique hotels and personalized service, fashion and fine art, and the handicraft of the 'L' itself, to continue to attract makers to the street. Use wayfinding signs to attract tourists and residents to the assets on the street. The Maker Street campaign should also be used to attract technology, arts & crafts, and design startups to Wabash.

**Promote vacant upper floors and lower rent rates on Wabash to attract new businesses, startups, and makers:** Work with building owners, and institutions on the street such as SAIC, to promote the idea of converting vacant office spaces into maker studios, or installing fiber optic internet and other amenities necessary for startups. Track vacancies to easily connect businesses looking for space, and contact 1871 and other incubators to facilitate filling vacancies.

**Consider implementing vertical zoning or various incentives to attract businesses to Wabash upper floors:** Coordinate business development and recruitment services to fill vacancies on upper floors of Wabash. Work closely with the City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development to develop zoning or other incentives that can be used to energize the maker districts on Wabash and continue to attract unique businesses and companies to Wabash Avenue.

*Top right is the Garland Building which has office condos available for rent. Bottom right is a previously vacant storefront that has a new bakery opening in it.*





# Economic Development Existing Wabash Tenants

## CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

CHICAGO OPERA THEATER  
JOFFREY BALLET CHICAGO  
CHICAGO CULTURAL CENTER  
CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

## MAKER STREET

JEWELER'S ROW  
DESIGNS BY ROSA

## ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN

GENSLER CHICAGO  
HELLMUTH, OBATA & KASSABAUM  
VOA ARCHITECTS  
GOETTSCH PARTNERS  
JGMA ARCHITECTS  
IA INTERIOR ARCHITECTS

## CREATIVE EDUCATION

ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO SHARP BUILDING  
DEPAUL COMPUTER & DIGITAL MEDIA CENTER  
ROBERT MORRIS COLLEGE OF CULINARY ARTS  
ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY AUDITORIUM THEATER

## MUSEUM

SULLIVAN GALLERIES  
PRITZKER MILITARY





## VII. Implementation & Timeline

This section contains implementation tables with estimates for costs and time frames for the Transforming Wabash recommendations. Many recommendations are inexpensive, and can be implemented immediately to jump-start the transformation process. As mentioned previously, the recommendations are to be seen as 'layers of transformation,' and can be implemented as stand-alone projects based on funding availability. The tables also outline potential partners for each recommendation.

General timelines and cost are provided for each recommendation, using the following classification system:

Timeline	Cost
Short: 0-2 years	Low: <\$50,000
Medium: 2-5 years	Medium: \$50,000 - \$500,000
Long: 5-10 years	High: >\$500,000

Following are implementation tables for each recommendation area, districts, pedestrian experience, transportation, lighting and economic development.

### District Recommendations

Action	Timeline	Cost	Partners
Promote and enhance Wabash districts which include hotel, retail, maker, and university districts.	Short	Low	CLA, Wabash Stakeholders
Promote Adams Street as an Art Street to connect the Art Institute of Chicago to Wabash Avenue and the Loop.	Medium	Medium	CLA, Art Institute of Chicago, Wabash Stakeholders



## Pedestrian Recommendations

Action	Timeline	Cost	Partners
SSA Implementation - Phase I CLA immediately begins to provide clean and safe services to Wabash buildings within the current SSA from Adams to Randolph Streets.	Short	Low	CLA
SSA Implementation - Phase II Voluntary funds are collected from interested building owners to participate in a coordinated cleaning and beautification services program.	Medium	Medium	CLA, Wabash Stakeholders
SSA Implementation - Phase III Explore the value of an SSA to coordinate cleaning and beautification services, development, and marketing along Wabash Avenue.	Long	High	CLA, Wabash Stakeholders, City of Chicago
Install painted pedestrian bump-outs at alternating Wabash corners to increase pedestrian safety.	Short	Low	CLA, CDOT
Enhance planters in the hotel and retail districts on Wabash Avenue.	Short	Medium	CLA, CDOT, Wabash Stakeholders, Landscaping Experts
Repurpose select planters in the Wabash university district or near the Adams Art Street.	Medium	Medium	CLA, CDOT, Wabash Stakeholders
Improve pedestrian safety on Wabash between Lake and Randolph, where parking garages conflict with sidewalks.	Medium	Medium	CLA, CDOT, Wabash Stakeholders
Create a maker container district at Wabash and Van Buren.	Medium	Medium	CLA, SAIC, Columbia College, WAC, Wabash Stakeholders
Improve connections to WAC through painting murals on the blank building facades at Van Buren and Wabash.	Short	Medium	CLA, WAC Wabash Stakeholders
Enhance the pedestrian experience at Michigan Avenue interesections from Randolph to Adams to draw visitors to Wabash and into the Loop.	Medium	Medium	CLA, CDOT Wabash Stakeholders, City of Chicago

## Transportation Recommendations

Action	Timeline	Cost	Partners
Organize and coordinate construction mitigation services on behalf of Wabash merchants and coordinate with CDOT on the BRT and 'L' station construction.	Short	Low	CLA, CDOT, Wabash Stakeholders
Improve lane striping and markings to ensure turn lanes are clearly marked on the pavement outside of the 'L' columns.	Short	Medium	CLA, CDOT
Use pavement markings and signs to designate a shared lane for bikes within the 'L' columns.	Medium	Low	CLA, CDOT
Increase bike parking on Wabash Avenue in the north and south ends with bike parking corrals or multi-level parking structures.	Short	Medium	CLA, CDOT, Wabash Stakeholders
Maintain throughput in the two travel lanes, also maintaining the valet and loading zones for businesses on Wabash.	Short	Low	CLA, CDOT

## Lighting Recommendations

Action	Timeline	Cost	Partners
Install a special lighting feature emanating from the new 'L' station the focal point of Wabash Avenue.	Medium	High	CLA, CDOT, CTA, Wabash Lights Project
Install a kinetic lighting feature running along the entire length the 'L'.	Long	High	CLA, CDOT, CTA, Wabash Lights Project
Install vintage lighting on Wabash cross streets, focusing on Adams to Washington first.	Short	Medium	CLA, CDOT, Wabash Stakeholders
Use up-lighting to highlight historic facades along Wabash Avenue.	Long	High	CLA, Wabash Stakeholders, Landmarks, City of Chicago

## Economic Development Recommendations

Action	Timeline	Cost	Partners
Brand and Promote Wabash as a maker street. Use wayfinding and a marketing campaign to highlight the assets on the street and attract more startups.	Short	Medium	CLA, Wabash Stakeholders
Promote vacant upper floors and lower rent rates on Wabash to attract new businesses, startups, and makers.	Short	Low	CLA, Wabash Stakeholders, Real Estate Professionals, Property Owners
Consider implementing vertical zoning or various incentives to attract businesses to Wabash upper floors.	Medium	Medium	CLA, Wabash Stakeholders, Startups, City of Chicago



## VIII. Sources

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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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