FORT WASHINGTON WAY
SUBCORRIDOR ANALYSIS

PROBLEM STATEMENT

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Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 PROBLEM STATEMENT .................................................. 1
  1.1 TRANSPORTATION ISSUES ........................................ 1
  1.2 COMMUNITY ISSUES ................................................ 2

2.0 GUIDING CONSIDERATIONS ........................................... 3

3.0 STUDY AREA DESCRIPTION ......................................... 4
  3.1 LOCATION ........................................................... 4
  3.2 LAND USE ........................................................... 4
  3.3 AFFECTED JURISDICTIONS AND SYSTEM LINKAGE ............... 4

4.0 BACKGROUND .......................................................... 7
  4.1 RELATIONSHIP TO I-71 CORRIDOR STUDY ....................... 7
  4.2 RELATIONSHIP TO CITY AND COUNTY PLANS .................... 7
  4.3 RELATIONSHIP TO THE OHIO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION .................. 7
  4.4 PROJECT STATUS .................................................... 7

5.0 FACILITY DESCRIPTION ............................................ 9
  5.1 ROADWAY ........................................................... 9
  5.2 PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS ....................................... 9
  5.3 BICYCLE CONNECTIONS ........................................... 9

6.0 FORT WASHINGTON WAY DEFICIENCIES ............................ 11

7.0 PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS .......................................... 12
  7.1 OHIO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION ......................... 12
  7.2 HAMILTON COUNTY ............................................... 12
  7.3 CITY OF CINCINNATI .............................................. 12
  7.4 BRENT SPENCE BRIDGE ........................................... 12
  7.5 ROEBLING SUSPENSION BRIDGE .................................. 13

8.0 RELATIONSHIP TO I-71 CORRIDOR ALTERNATIVES ................ 14
  8.1 RELATIONSHIP TO I-71 CORRIDOR STUDY ALTERNATIVES ........ 14
    8.1.1 Alternatives which Reroute I-71 .......................... 14
    8.1.2 New Transit Bridge ......................................... 14

9.0 COST/FUNDING ....................................................... 15

10.0 PLANNING CONTEXT ................................................ 16

APPENDIX
  Study Goals
  Reconfiguration Objectives
  Evaluation Criteria
1.0 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Fort Washington Way, originally called the Third Street Distributor, was constructed in the early 1960s, prior to the development of the Riverfront Stadium and the Coliseum. Approximately 30 acres were needed for the roadway and interchanges.

When originally designed, it was expected to carry 100,000 vehicles per day by 1975. In June of 1995, it carried over 139,000 vehicles per day and served several transportation functions:

- Gateway into downtown Cincinnati;
- High-speed distributor;
- Covington/Newport bypass from I-71/I-75 and I-471; and
- Through traffic interstate transecting the downtown area.

When Fort Washington Way was constructed, the area now occupied by the Riverfront Coliseum, Riverfront Stadium, and the surface parking area north of the Ohio River was filled with older retail, commercial, and light industrial uses.

Fort Washington Way, as a result of the historical development/location, increased travel demands and current roadway standards, presents both transportation and community issues, which need to be addressed.

1.1 TRANSPORTATION ISSUES

Fort Washington Way does not meet current geometric design standards. Specific problem areas are:

- Lack of lane continuity.
- Inadequate weaving distances.
- Inadequate access spacing.
- Access design of left entrances and exits do not meet standards.
- Inadequate driver decision distance.

All of which compromise safety.

Fort Washington Way no longer adequately serves travel demands because:

- The facility is overly complex. Drivers are faced with too many choices.
- It does not provide well-defined access by motor vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians to and from the Cincinnati CBD, the riverfronts, and bridges into northern Kentucky that relate to Fort Washington Way (i.e., Central and Roebling Suspension bridges).
- The multiple functions co-existing on Fort Washington Way have compromised its ability to serve the through-traffic function of I-71.
- The Brent Spence Bridge is operating over capacity.
- The Central Bridge is underutilized.
- Interchanges are inadequate.

In addition, the design life of the pavement has been exceeded.

These transportation issues and potential improvements need to be considered in relation to the I-71 Corridor Study, as well as coordinated with the Eastern Corridor Study.
1.2 COMMUNITY ISSUES

The community issues can be summarized as follows:

- Fort Washington Way, as it is currently designed, is a visual and physical barrier between the Cincinnati CBD and the riverfront.
- Inadequate motor vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian access or linkages between the Cincinnati CBD and the riverfront are due, in part, to Fort Washington Way.
- Consideration should be given to other transportation modes, particularly mass transit, to serve the full spectrum of community transportation needs.
- Fort Washington Way's location and design constrains the ability to more fully develop the Cincinnati and Kentucky riverfronts.
- Too much land is devoted to transportation in proportion to the available land.

Fort Washington Way carries I-71, connecting with the Brent Spence Bridge and I-75, bringing I-71 into northern Kentucky. I-71 is the subject of the current Major Investment Study (MIS) for the corridor between Paramount Kings Island near Mason, Ohio; Florence, Kentucky; and the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport. The Brent Spence Bridge also is a specific focus of the I-71 Corridor Study, as it carries both I-71 and I-75 traffic over the Ohio River at the western end of Fort Washington Way. Both the Brent Spence Bridge and the northern Kentucky section of I-71/I-75 are congested, fed by traffic coming in part from Fort Washington Way.

The analysis of Fort Washington Way is being undertaken to identify potential solutions to both the transportation problems in the Fort Washington Way segment of the I-71 Corridor, and the community issues faced by the City of Cincinnati.
2.0 GUIDING CONSIDERATIONS

The following considerations guide the development of alternatives for Fort Washington Way:

- Provide high quality access to and egress from the Central Business District from the Interstate System.

  Meet the regional transportation system’s current and future needs. Maintain and/or improve capacity of the system.
  - Interstate/long distance trips on the national freeway system;
  - Regional/corridor trips within the metropolitan area; and
  - Local trips.

- Better connect both downtowns with the riverfront and each other. Facilitate:
  - Integration of urban design;
  - Land access and, therefore, economic development;
  - Reclaiming land, including air rights, for development;
  - Community access to major public facilities to be located on the riverfront; and
  - Recreational and pedestrian access to the Cincinnati and northern Kentucky riverfronts as an extension of downtown, as well as vehicular access.

- Accomplish the above goals consistent with the needs and recommendations of the I-71 Corridor Study. Consideration in particular:
  - Maintaining and improving access, particularly good linkage to all bridges;
  - Impacts on the Brent Spence Bridge;
  - Transportation capacity needs for the I-71 Corridor; and
  - Regional needs for intermodal transportation connections.

- Coordination with the Eastern Corridor Study.

- Maintain and/or improve access to and egress from the Central Riverfront area and the interstate system.

- Minimize construction time and disruption to the extent possible.
  - Must be adaptable to stage or interim construction implementation.

- Coordination with location and design of new stadiums and access to them.

- While a “No Build” option exists in regard to alternatives, in reality, a “No Build” option does not exist because of the need for reconstruction in place if Fort Washington Way is to remain.

- Implementation costs must be economically within resources.
3.0 STUDY AREA DESCRIPTION

3.1 LOCATION

Fort Washington Way is located at the southern edge of downtown Cincinnati, just north of the Ohio River, in Hamilton County, Ohio (Figure 1). The Ohio River forms the boundary between the state of Ohio and commonwealth of Kentucky. Fort Washington Way carries I-71 in a depressed roadway to its juncture with I-75 at the Brent Spence Bridge, thence south across the river and into Kentucky. Fort Washington Way is constructed at flood level, and is protected from the rest of the floodplain extending south to the river by a floodwall, which also serves as the south wall of the east-west “trench” forming Fort Washington Way.

Fort Washington Way is approximately one mile long. However, the direct influence area of Fort Washington Way extends a much greater distance, as illustrated on Figure 2 and considered the study area for this analysis. The study area extends into Kentucky, and encompasses much of the northern portion of the City of Covington, directly across the river from the Cincinnati CBD.

The name “Fort Washington Way,” originally titled “The Third Street Distributor,” dates from the 1950’s, when the remains of a structure marking the location of Fort Washington, a revolutionary War era fortification, were found at the eastern end during construction.

3.2 LAND USE

Fort Washington Way marks the boundary between the Cincinnati CBD to the north and the under used riverfront to the south. The current stadium and surrounding parking structures are located on the riverfront land east of the Roebling Suspension Bridge. West of the Roebling Suspension Bridge, older warehouse structures and surface parking lots fill most of the land extending west to the Brent Spence Bridge. The riverfront area is slated for intensive redevelopment, with a mixture of sports stadiums, commercial, and recreational facilities.

3.3 AFFECTED JURISDICTIONS AND SYSTEM LINKAGE

Fort Washington Way lies within the City of Cincinnati, in Hamilton County, Ohio. However, it carries interstate, regional, and corridor traffic as well as local traffic, and thus affects many other jurisdictions. As part of the interstate freeway system, I-71 carries traffic between Columbus and Cincinnati, Ohio; Cincinnati and Louisville, Kentucky; and between points north and south of those cities.

The cities of Covington and Newport, Kentucky also are impacted by Fort Washington Way. Though Covington and Newport lie south of the Ohio River, Fort Washington Way provides their residents with the only high-speed east-west route across their downtowns.

Both the Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA) and the Transit Authority of Northern Kentucky (TANK) use Fort Washington Way for several express bus routes, and TANK uses its access points to reach the Dixie Terminal and downtown Cincinnati.
FIGURE 2
STUDY AREA MAP
4.0 BACKGROUND

4.1 RELATIONSHIP TO I-71 CORRIDOR STUDY

The Fort Washington Way Subcorridor Analysis is a subcorridor within the I-71 Corridor Study. It is being conducted using a separate process from the I-71 Corridor Study, but concurrently with and mindful of the I-71 Corridor Study to allow timely decisions on the larger study. Both studies are being conducted by the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI), the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Cincinnati metropolitan area. Both studies follow federal guidelines for evaluating major transportation investments.

4.2 RELATIONSHIP TO CITY AND COUNTY PLANS

The City of Cincinnati is responsible for influencing many community issues, including those related to the transportation system. The City has identified a need to explore the potential for reconnecting downtown Cincinnati with the riverfront. Improved connections would enable land access and economic development for major civic facilities such as the new stadiums, and adjacent mixed use development. Cincinnati’s downtown business community has taken the lead in coordinating the Fort Washington Way issues with the I-71 Transportation Corridor Study. The City has zoning and permitting authority for land development issues and local streets in the Fort Washington Way area. Because of Ohio’s home rule provisions, the City also has approval authority over changes to I-71 and U.S. 50 in Fort Washington Way.

The voters of Hamilton County approved new public funding for two new sports stadiums in March 1996. Hamilton County, the funding agency for these new public facilities, will manage the site selection process and build and operate the facilities in cooperation with the City of Cincinnati.

Both the City of Cincinnati and Hamilton County are members of the I-71 Oversight Committee and the Fort Washington Way Subcommittee which guides the development of both the I-71 Corridor Study and the Fort Washington Way Subcorridor analysis.

4.3 RELATIONSHIP TO THE OHIO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) has jurisdiction over the interstate system in Ohio, in conjunction with municipal approvals under the State’s home rule provisions. ODOT is responsible for the construction, maintenance, operation and safety of Ohio’s interstates under guidelines set forth by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Potential impacts on I-71 and other state highways which might result from suggested changes to I-71 on Fort Washington Way are the responsibility and concern of ODOT and FHWA.

ODOT is a member of the I-71 Oversight Committee and the Fort Washington Way Subcommittee.

4.4 PROJECT STATUS

The Fort Washington Way Subcorridor analysis is being conducted concurrently with the I-71 Corridor Study. The Fort Washington Way evaluation is projected to be complete in December 1996, and become

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part of the recommended strategy for the I-71 Corridor Study, which is scheduled for completion in early 1997.

Participation by affected jurisdictions and other parties will be accomplished through the Fort Washington Way Subcommittee within the I-71 Corridor Oversight Committee, which meets monthly. Public participation also will be accomplished through the public involvement program of the I-71 Study and separate activities.
5.0 FACILITY DESCRIPTION

5.1 ROADWAY

Fort Washington Way is a controlled-access, grade-separated freeway passing through downtown Cincinnati, between Pete Rose Way and Third Street. Its primary functions are to accommodate through traffic on I-71 and U.S. 50, and to serve as a collector/distributor facility for the local street system and the Roebling Suspension Bridge. Within Fort Washington Way, I-71 is classified as an Interstate Freeway. U.S. 50 is classified as a principal arterial.

Fort Washington Way begins at the I-71/I-75 interchange on the west edge of downtown Cincinnati, with direct connections to I-75, U.S. 50 west, and the Brent Spence Bridge (I-71/I-75 south). The eastern end is located near the I-71 tunnel under Lytle Park, where U.S. 50 diverges from I-71 and provides access to and from several local streets:

- Eastbound Fort Washington Way:
  - Exit to Pete Rose Way
  - Exit to Vine Street and Roebling Suspension Bridge
  - Entrance from Race Street
  - Exit to Main Street
  - Entrance from Walnut Street
  - Entrance form Main Street and Roebling Suspension Bridge

- Westbound Fort Washington Way:
  - Exit to Vine Street and Roebling Suspension Bridge
  - Entrance from Sycamore Street
  - Exit to Elm Street
  - Entrance from Walnut Street and Roebling suspension Bridge

There are three lanes in each direction to accommodate through traffic on Fort Washington Way. Auxiliary lanes are provided at a limited number of locations. Like many urban freeways that were designed and constructed several decades ago, Fort Washington Way is not entirely consistent with current highway design standards and guidelines (i.e., weaving sections, left-hand ramps, shoulder widths). As a result, roadway capacity and traffic safety is adversely affected, particularly as traffic volumes exceed the design values.

5.2 PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS

Other than the large pedestrian bridge serving the existing stadium parking structure, few sidewalks and walkways exist for downtown office workers who walk to work from parking facilities located between Fort Washington Way and the Ohio River. Pedestrians cross Fort Washington Way using narrow sidewalks and street shoulders, frequently on curves of the local street network as it crosses Fort Washington Way. Many of these informal but heavily used pedestrian crossing are at locations with poor sight distances for both pedestrian and drivers.

5.3 BICYCLE CONNECTIONS

No official bike paths cross Fort Washington Way to access the riverfront from downtown streets. Informal bicycle traffic uses street lanes and shoulders
Third Street, Pete Rose Way, and Mehring Way are the only current access routes for bicycles to, from, and along the riverfront.
6.0 FORT WASHINGTON WAY DEFICIENCIES

Fort Washington Way is a transportation facility originally designed for one function, which has been expanded over the years to accommodate multiple functions. These functions now include, along with I-71 through-trips, U.S. 50 traffic connecting to Columbia Parkway, and local access to the Cincinnati CBD, stadium, riverfront, and Roebling Suspension Bridge. As the number of functions multiplied, the design compromises to accommodate each function resulted in a facility with significant shortcomings. These deficiencies are summarized below.

As stated in Section 1.0, Fort Washington Way was designed to carry 100,000 vehicles per day. In June of 1995, it carried over 139,000 vehicles per day, and operated at Level of Service (LOS) E during the afternoon peak period. In 2020, it is projected to carry increased traffic and operate at LOS F during the afternoon peak.

Fort Washington Way does not meet current roadway geometric design standards, compromising safety in the following areas:

- Lane continuity - the mainlines of I-71 enter the west end of Fort Washington Way on the right and on the east end I-71 exits on the left, U.S. 50 on the right;
- Weaving distances are not adequate;
- Access spacing is not adequate; and
- Access design is not adequate - left entrances and exits do not meet standards.

Because the facility is overly complex, drivers are faced with too many choices and too little distance in which to make them. The multiple functions co-existing in Fort Washington Way have compromised the ability to serve the through-traffic function of I-71. It does not provide well-defined access to and from the Cincinnati CBD, the riverfront, and bridges into northern Kentucky. The Brent Spence Bridge is operating over capacity while the Central Bridge is underutilized; in addition, interchanges are inadequate. Lastly, the design life of the pavement has been exceeded.
7.0 PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS

7.1 OHIO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) has planned to rehabilitate and upgrade Fort Washington Way during the years 1998 and 1999. ODOT’s plans affect the portion of I-71 between the approaches to the Brent Spence Bridge and the portals of the Lytle Park Tunnel, a distance of 0.78 miles. The plans also include a 1.7 mile segment of U.S. 50 extending east from I-71. Planned improvements include:

- I-71 pavement and shoulders will be replaced with rigid (plain concrete) pavement;
- U.S. 50 pavement will be overlaid with an unbonded concrete overlay; and
- Fifteen structures (Fourteen bridges and one sidehill structure) will be repaired and rehabilitated.

7.2 HAMILTON COUNTY

In March of 1996, Hamilton County voters passed a sales tax to fund two new stadiums in Hamilton County. While specific locations for the stadiums have not yet been established, one or both of the new facilities are anticipated to be built on the central riverfront, between the river and Fort Washington Way.

Hamilton County has just begun to develop a site plan for the stadiums and an access plan to address vehicular and pedestrian access to the new facilities. Apart of the Fort Washington Way Subcorridor Analysis is to address the issue of access to the new stadiums.

7.3 CITY OF CINCINNATI

Both the City of Cincinnati and downtown business representatives are very interested in improving the downtown riverfront. Connections between the riverfront and the Cincinnati CBD are constrained by the physical and visual barrier formed by Fort Washington Way. Redevelopment options for the central riverfront also are constrained with the current design of Fort Washington Way by the lack of adequate access, making reinvestment to encourage economic development more difficult.

The City’s plans for the Fort Washington Way area are currently under development, and focus on strengthening and extending the local street network to support redevelopment between Fort Washington Way and the river.

One downtown business group, Downtown Cincinnati, Inc. (DCI), also is working on a conceptual plan to advise the city and county as they plan for the redevelopment of the central riverfront area. DCI’s initial conceptual plan, which is evolving, incorporates a variety of public and private uses. Included at the conceptual level are suggestions for stadiums; multimodal transit facility; aquarium; mixed-use office and small retail space; open space; pedestrian facilities; and parking.

7.4 BRENT SPENCE BRIDGE

The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) has responsibility for the Brent Spence Bridge, which connects to the west end of Fort Washington Way and carries both I-71 and I-75 across the Ohio River into Kentucky. The Brent Spence Bridge also is the subject for improving its capacity.

Any changes to the west end of Fort Washington Way which affect I-71 will affect the Bridge, a major structure itself and a defining element of the Cincinnati and Covington riverfronts. The KYTC serves on
the Fort Washington Way Oversight Subcommittee to provide coordination with the Fort Washington Way issues.

7.5 ROEBLING SUSPENSION BRIDGE

Though not directly connected to Fort Washington Way, access to the historic Roebling Suspension Bridge is provided by connections over Fort Washington Way. Changes to Fort Washington Way are likely to affect this significant connection between the cities of Cincinnati and Covington, which is also a defining element of the riverfronts of both cities. TANK buses also use the Roebling Suspension Bridge as their gateway into downtown Cincinnati a destination for many TANK riders.

All parties involved consider the Roebling Suspension Bridge to be a significant community resource to be preserved and protected for its transportation function, historic value, visual attraction, and landmark status. planned improvements include deck rehabilitation (currently underway) and continued maintenance and preservation.
8.0 RELATIONSHIP TO I-71 CORRIDOR ALTERNATIVES

8.1 RELATIONSHIP TO I-71 CORRIDOR STUDY ALTERNATIVES.

8.1.1 Alternatives which Reroute I-71

Two of the alternatives under consideration in Phase II of the I-71 Corridor Study include changes to the I-71 freeway facility in Fort Washington Way. Under one of the highway widening alternatives and one of the High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) alternatives, Fort Washington Way would be closed to I-71 traffic. Under these alternatives, I-71 traffic would be rerouted onto I-275 and I-471 in Kentucky.

The Phase II screening for the I-71 Corridor Study will take place on August 7, 1996. Should the alternatives which remove I-71 from Fort Washington Way remain under consideration for the balance of the I-71 Corridor Study, their impacts will be incorporated into and become part of the Fort Washington Way Subcorridor Analysis.

8.1.2 New Transit Bridge

Several of the alternatives in the I-71 Corridor Study include a new bridge across the Ohio River, linking Cincinnati and Covington on an alignment between Race and Madison Streets. Should any of these alternatives remain following the early August screening noted above, the impacts of a new bridge crossing will be incorporated into the Fort Washington Way Subcorridor Study.
9.0 COST/FUNDING

The Fort Washington Way Subcorridor Analysis is funded by OKI, in cooperation with the City of Cincinnati, which is providing the local match.

The cost to construct the final alternatives to be evaluated as part of the Fort Washington Way Subcorridor Analysis will be estimated at a conceptual level, to allow for compassion between alternatives. The alternatives will include a “No Build” or baseline option, to permit comparisons to current conditions.

The alternative recommended at the conclusion of the Fort Washington Way Subcorridor Analysis will be provided to the City of Cincinnati, which requested this analysis. The City will decide to move forward with the recommendations. Future phases include Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), preliminary engineering, final environmental approvals, design, and funding commitments. Funding for implementation is likely to come from a variety of sources including federal, state, and local sources.
10.0 PLANNING CONTEXT

The Fort Washington Way Subcorridor Analysis is being conducted as a Major Investment Study (MIS). It is anticipated to be completed in December 1996, with findings and recommendations made in early 1997. Figure 3 illustrates generalized steps in the project development and implementation process. As illustrated, the Fort Washington Way Analysis is still very early in the overall process.

FIGURE 3

Project Development and Implementation Steps

- System Planning
- Major Investment Study
  (Fort Washington Way Subcorridor Analysis)
- Select Locally Preferred Alternative
- Update the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (TIP)
- Draft EIS/Preliminary Engineering/Final EIS
- Final Design
- Construction
- Operation

At the conclusion of the MIS process, the Fort Washington Subcommittee will make recommendations to the I-71 Oversight Committee regarding the selection of a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). Stakeholder and public meetings will be held to review the findings and recommendations.

If a build alternative is selected for implementation, a lengthy approval process still remains. Initially, the process could include preliminary engineering and the analysis and preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS). Additional processes, depending on the LPA selected, may be required. For example, if an interchange “change” is included in the recommendation, there will need to be an Access Modification Justification prepared, which is a complex and lengthy process in itself.
APPENDIX
FORT WASHINGTON WAY SUBCORRIDOR ANALYSIS STUDY GOALS

1. Provide comparable overall access to the Cincinnati CBD from I-71, I-471, Covington and Newport Riverfronts.

2. Maintain safe, efficient operation and capacity for Interstate trips.

3. Maintain safe, efficient operation and capacity for regional/corridor trips.

4. Maintain safe, efficient operation and capacity for local/short distance trips.

5. Better connect the downtowns and Cincinnati, Covington and Newport riverfronts.

6. Improve linkage to underutilized central riverfront bridges.

7. Facilitate land access to the riverfront.

8. Provide community access from both sides of river to major riverfront public facilities/stadiums.

9. Provide recreational and pedestrian access to the Cincinnati, Covington and Newport riverfronts.

10. Incorporate intermodal transportation connections proposed in I-71 Corridor Study.

11. Reclaim land and/or air rights for development.

12. Stage/phase construction to minimize disruption and maximize financial feasibility.
FORT WASHINGTON WAY RECONFIGURATION OBJECTIVES

Alternative 3 involves reconstructing I-71 in the FWW corridor. Since the design life of urban freeways is on the order of 40 to 50 years, it is imperative that a new Fort Washington Way be configured with the most current design features to assure safe and efficient operation, with adequate CBD and riverfront access, into the next century.

To achieve the goals summarized above, the following objectives are recommended:

**I-71 Design Issues:**
1. Provide lane continuity for the I-71 mainline.
2. Provide a sufficient number of through lanes to adequately accommodate design year traffic forecasts.
3. Eliminate non-standard freeway design features such as left hand entrances and exits.
4. Provide adequate weaving, merging, diverging areas.
5. Provide adequate decision sight distances.

**Community Development Issues:**
5. Provide comparable overall access to Cincinnati CBD and riverfront.
6. Provide adequate connections to existing arterial street system.
7. Support redevelopment efforts for Cincinnati riverfront.
8. Improve connections to underutilized bridges.
9. Encourage diversions from overutilized bridges.
10. Improve visual and pedestrian linkages between CBD and both riverfronts.
11. Reclaim land for riverfront development.
FORT WASHINGTON WAY EVALUATION CRITERIA

I-71 Lane Continuity

I-71 Mainline Capacity

I-71 Standard Design Features

Traffic Safety Considerations:
- Decision Sight Distance
- Adequate Weave, Merge, Diverge Distances

Adequate CBD Access: Connections to Arterial Streets

Traffic Impacts on:
- I-71
- US 50
- FWW Ramps
- Cincinnati CBD Arterial Street Network
- Other I-71 and I-75 Interchanges
- Existing/proposed stadium parking access roads
- I-471 Bridge
- Brent Spence Bridge

Adequate Riverfront Access

Adequate Stadium Access: Existing and Proposed

Linkage to Underused Bridges

Diversion from Overused Bridges

Visual Linkage between Cincinnati CBD and Riverfronts

Pedestrian Linkage between both CBDs and Riverfronts

Opportunity to Reclaim Land/Air Rights

Compatibility with I-71 transit options and alignments

Cost

Opportunity to Phase Construction/Meet Year 2000 New Stadium Opening Access Requirements