Beyond the Loop was a Planning and Environmental Linkages study to explore the future of the Buck O’Neil Bridge and the Interstate 70 North Loop. The objective was to identify reasonable strategies to improve multimodal connectivity, safe travel and traffic flow on the US-169 corridor and improve connections to and around downtown on the adjacent stretch of I-70. The study considered the following issues — not just traffic flow across the Missouri River but also transportation improvements to improve connections to surrounding areas. Beyond the Loop determined and documented a purpose and need statement and then identified, screened and documented reasonable alternatives for future National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) studies on various corridors.
**Needs and Goals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs</th>
<th>Goals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve physical conditions</td>
<td>Improve transportation choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that existing and new transportation assets in the Study Area better serve the region and are maintained in a state of good repair.</td>
<td>Provide viable, accessible, multimodal transportation options.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Optimize system performance</td>
<td>Improve economic vitality and placemaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage the operations of the existing transportation facilities to achieve reliable and efficient performance.</td>
<td>Improve transportation and land-use linkages in the Study Area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improve safety and security</td>
<td>Improve sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify reasonable improvements to ensure the safety and security of the affected area.</td>
<td>Protect and enhance the region’s natural, cultural, and social resources. Explore ways to mitigate the adverse impacts of the existing system and proposed alternatives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Purpose and Need**

The study team developed a purpose and need statement for the study built on the policy framework identified in Transportation Outlook 2040, the region’s Metropolitan Transportation Plan. The purpose and need statement guided the process of screening and evaluating identified strategies, and it may also be carried forward into future NEPA work in the various corridors which were part of this study.
Reasonable Alternatives

This study produced a set of reasonable alternatives for five corridors — the Missouri River Bridge and interchange, the Charles B. Wheeler Downtown Airport, Missouri Route 9, the West Bottoms and the I-70 North Loop. These alternatives garnered varying levels of consensus and support.

- **Area A - Missouri River Bridge and interchange**: Strategies for this corridor included rehabilitation of the existing bridge and construction of a new bridge with three alignment options. The study team and public expressed strong support around replacing the bridge on a parallel or western-offset alignment.

- **Area C – Charles B. Wheeler Downtown Airport**: This set of strategies included half diamond and button-hook interchanges in several combinations to improve safety and access to the airport.

- **Area E - Missouri Route 9**: These strategies focused on bringing all or part of Missouri Route 9 back down to grade to reconnect the River Market and Columbus Park neighborhoods. Strong support emerged for strategies to bring all of Route 9 to grade.

- **Area D - West Bottoms**: This set of strategies focused on connections to the West Bottoms from Kansas City, Missouri through various interchange options at I-70 and Wyoming Street.

- **Area B - I-70 North Loop**: Strategies in this area included reuse of the existing Interstate with ramp consolidation; compressing the footprint of the Interstate to the north, south or centered; and removing and reclassifying the Interstate as part of the local street network. The last alternative proved controversial; the UG requested this alternative be removed due to potential added delay for some trips through the downtown loop. The Study Management Team ultimately decided to retain this particular alternative as reasonable due to public support, potential for economic development and the ability to provide improved connectivity between the central business district, the River Market and the Columbus Park neighborhood. The report formally documents this objection and indicates that these concerns will need to be fully understood and addressed, if and when this particular project moves forward into a future NEPA study.

A full list and description of all considered alternatives can be found in published study documents at marc.org/beyondtheloop
Process
At the onset of the study, the team collected data to gain a thorough understanding of transportation patterns. This was followed by the development of traffic models to support alternatives evaluation.

The study included a robust public stakeholder engagement process. Multiple briefings on this study were held before a large number of government and other organizations throughout the duration of the study. Public workshops and online engagements also informed the study.

A Technical Advisory Group of agency staff from throughout the region participated and provided input into the study. A Study Management Team of staff representing MARC, KCMO, the UG, MoDOT and KDOT provided direction to the consultant team regarding study recommendations.

Next Steps
The sequence of further study for future implementation of considered alternatives is as follows:

1. Missouri River Bridge and Airport connection alternatives.
2. MO Route 9 alternatives.
3. West Bottoms alternatives.
4. I-70/North Loop alternatives.

MoDOT and KCMO have launched an environmental assessment study to further evaluate replacement options for the Buck O’Neil Bridge.

All of the alternatives proposed by the study for the various corridors will require additional analysis before implementation. Some of these alternatives may also require amendments to Transportation Outlook 2040 or future regional transportation plan updates.

Visit marc.org/beyondtheloop to find additional information, including final draft documents.