

A 10,000-foot view of Louisville shows our lopsided growth

A satellite image of metro Louisville reveals an unflattering photo. Looking down from 10,000 feet, we appear to be an inefficient, unbalanced community.

Below the Ohio River, there is a heavily populated urban district. Above the river is a large open area within five minutes of downtown. To the east, sprawl spreads toward the Oldham and Shelby county lines. Yet, the northeast quadrant is rural countryside.

Thus, in less than a five-mile radius from Fourth and Main streets, there are contrasting dense and sparse environments that represent a dysfunctional development pattern.

Compared with the nearby cities of Indianapolis, Cincinnati and Nashville, Louisville has not grown in a productive manner. Instead of spreading out in an orderly shape as our neighbors have, we are more lopsided and bottom-heavy.

This asymmetrical composition creates undesirable consequences, such as a congested road network and costly-to-maintain utility infrastructure.

In short, Louisville from 10,000 feet is not a pretty picture.

The culprit: lack of cross-river mobility

The obvious reason for this geographic disparity is the lack of cross-river mobility.

Cincinnati has seven bridges, which facilitate a vibrant urban region. And its downtown has remained strong and healthy. Another river city, Pittsburgh, likewise has numerous bridges to maintain a cohesive layout.

To borrowing an overused adage, “less is more” in achieving quality of life and economic success.

Compactness has many positive aspects, including: more transportation alternatives, increased property values, energy savings and more tax dollars spent on priority civic investments instead of maintaining spread-out public infrastructure.

To be competitive in the 21st century, Louisville should incorporate not only sustainable principles, but also “lean” methods such as those pioneered by Toyota.

Eliminating waste (such as minimizing commute times) and increasing productivity (such as with



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creative-infill developments closer to downtown) are key goals in this strategy.

If, like Indianapolis or Nashville, we were centrally located in one state, this rational process would have taken place naturally.

Unfortunately, though, a lack of cross-river connections has circumvented this reasoning and actually accelerated disproportionate sprawl along the Interstate 71 and Interstate 64 corridors.

It also has fostered an “us-versus-them” parochial attitude instead of a global perspective of “we are all in this together.”

Local-access bridges can stimulate neighborhood stabilization and strengthen metro Louisville’s long-term viability.

Local-access bridges would reverse the trend

Louisville does not need to keep waiting for the Ohio River Bridges Project to reverse this detrimental trend. We can build several local-access bridges — independent from

the federal interstate highways — in the southwest section of the county as well as between Portland and New Albany and perhaps upriver near Zorn Avenue.

These are financially feasible now within current fiscal restrictions.

Local-access bridges can stimulate neighborhood stabilization and strengthen metro Louisville’s long-term viability.

Along with innovative improvements such as Jeffersonville’s proposed canal project, Park Hill’s revitalization, and a possible mass-transit loop from downtown to Portland to Southern Indiana and back to downtown, Louisville can attain what the late Owsley Brown envisioned for the city, valuing quality over quantity.

Balancing economic growth across the entire metro spectrum will make Louisville a more attractive place to be for residents and visitors — even when viewed from outer space!

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