STABLECOINS, PRIVATE EQUITY, AND THE COMING RESET IN PAYMENTS

CROSS-BORDER SETTLEMENT | REAL-TIME PAYMENTS | PROGRAMMABLE MONEY | COMPLIANCE & TRUST | STRATEGIC PE OPPORTUNITY

Stablecoins, Private Equity, and the Coming Reset in Payments

Executive summary

The hypothesis mostly holds, but only in a specific way: **payments is primed for major change at the infrastructure and cross-border settlement layer, not for an immediate wholesale replacement of mainstream consumer card payments.** Global payments is already enormous and still growing, with McKinsey estimating a $2.4 trillion revenue pool by 2023, growth to roughly $3.1 trillion by 2028, and continued resilience in the 2025 report despite slower 2024 growth. Meanwhile, stablecoins grew rapidly through 2025, reaching roughly $300 billion in market capitalization by September 2025 according to Federal Reserve research, with private forecasts now ranging from about **$500 billion by 2028** on the skeptical end to **$1.2 trillion by 2028** and **$1.9 trillion by 2030** in more bullish cases. That gap in forecasts is the first sign that disruption is plausible, but not pre-ordained. [1]

Stablecoins are strongest where legacy payments is weakest: **cross-border treasury, payouts, merchant settlement, intercompany transfers, remittances, and 24/7 programmable B2B workflows.** Their technical advantages are real: 24/7 availability, near-real-time settlement, native programmability, multichain portability, and the ability to avoid some card-interchange layers entirely. Stripe says stablecoin payments volume doubled to around **$400 billion in 2025**, with about **60% estimated as B2B**, and notes that for some businesses stablecoin transaction fees are about half those of other methods. Worldpay, Visa, Mastercard, Stripe, PayPal, Fiserv, and BVNK have all moved from rhetoric into live products, pilots, or acquisitions. [2]

The skeptical case is also strong. **Today's stablecoin market is still overwhelmingly dollarized and still heavily tied to crypto trading and on-chain liquidity rather than everyday retail commerce.** BIS argues stablecoins fall short as a main monetary foundation because they fail key tests of singleness, elasticity, and integrity; the Bank of England says non-systemic stablecoins are still predominantly used for cryptoasset trading; FATF warns that most illicit on-chain activity now involves stablecoins; and stablecoin transactions typically lack the dispute rights, reversibility, and fraud recourse that card systems built over decades. In other words, stablecoins are not "better cards." They are a different monetary rail with different trade-offs. [3]

For private equity, the highest-confidence conclusion is narrower than the hype. **PE is more obviously positioned to reshape payments through infrastructure ownership than through direct bets on stablecoin issuers alone.** Large sponsor-backed payments deals remain active, including GTCR's rapid value creation and exit in Worldpay and Advent's take-private of Nuvei. By contrast, "stablecoin infrastructure" is still more often strategic- or venture-funded than classic buyout-funded, although that is starting to change as Mastercard agreed to acquire BVNK and Visa invested in it. The likely PE sweet spot is not speculative token bets, but stakes in **compliance, custody, orchestration,**

settlement middleware, FX/liquidity tools, payout platforms, and issuer/acquirer software that can sit across both fiat and stablecoin rails. [4]

My bottom line is therefore two-part. **Yes, payments is primed for major change. No, that does not mean the card networks are about to be disintermediated at scale.** Over the next three to five years, the most likely outcome is a hybrid model: stablecoins gain share in settlement, cross-border flows, payouts, and treasury; incumbents adapt by turning themselves into orchestration, identity, compliance, and acceptance layers on top of multiple forms of money. The disruptive question is not "stablecoins or cards?" It is "which firms control routing, compliance, acceptance, liquidity, and customer touchpoints when money becomes programmable and multi-rail?" [5]

Why payments looks vulnerable to change

Global payments is large enough that even modest share shifts matter. McKinsey estimated that the industry handled **3.4 trillion transactions**, **$1.8 quadrillion in value**, and **$2.4 trillion in revenue** in 2023, and expected the revenue pool to reach about **$3.1 trillion by 2028**. In its 2025 report, McKinsey said payments revenue grew about **7% annually from 2019 to 2024** even though 2024 growth slowed to **4%**, reinforcing that this is both a huge base and a still-growing one. Visa alone reported **$14.2 trillion** in payments volume and **257.5 billion** processed transactions in fiscal 2025. Mastercard reported **$10.6 trillion** of gross dollar volume in 2025. American Express reported **$1.55 trillion** of billed business for 2024, and Discover Global Network says customers spent nearly **$622 billion** across Discover, Diners Club, and PULSE in 2024. These figures explain why even incremental rail substitution matters. [6]

Stablecoins are still small relative to the full payments system, but they are now large enough to be strategically relevant. Federal Reserve researchers wrote that stablecoins grew about **50% in 2025** and that market capitalization had reached about **$300 billion** by September 2025. CoinGecko estimated sector market cap at about **$301.7 billion** as of March 31, 2026 and about **$309 billion** in late June 2026. Circle reported **$73.6 billion** of USDC in circulation as of June 25, 2026. BIS research says roughly **98%** of stablecoin value is USD-denominated; CoinGecko's Asia stablecoin overview put the share at about **99%**. That means the real current story is not "many national currency stablecoins." It is "the export of dollar liquidity through crypto-native rails." [7]

The most important skeptical point is that **not all on-chain stablecoin volume is payment volume**. Visa's on-chain analytics show adjusted stablecoin volume and transactions growing, but the largest labeled category for 2024 adjusted volume remained centralized exchange activity. Stripe's 2025 annual update similarly separated "stablecoin payments volume" from much larger transfer volumes, putting payments volume around **$400 billion** in 2025. That is meaningful, but it is not yet comparable to the broad consumer card ecosystem. This distinction matters because many bullish claims implicitly assume that all stablecoin transfer growth translates into real-economy payment displacement. It does not. [8]

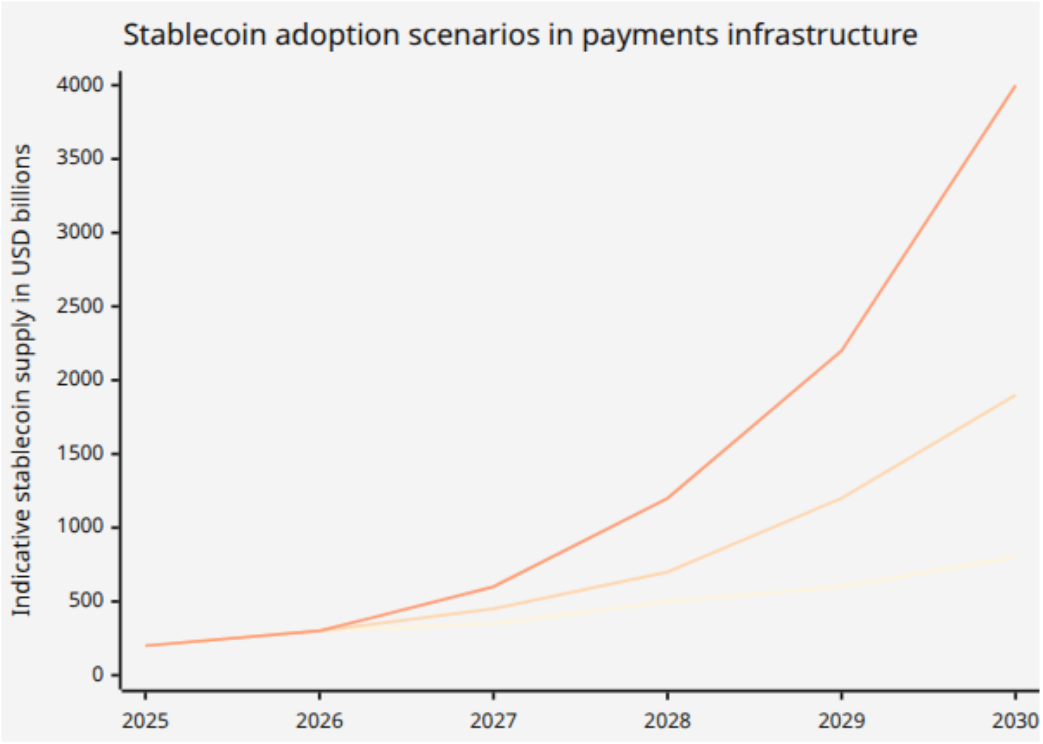
Forecast dispersion confirms both opportunity and uncertainty. Coinbase Institutional forecast stablecoins at **$1.2 trillion by 2028**. Citigroup revised its **2030 base case to $1.9 trillion** and its bull case to **$4.0 trillion**. By contrast, J.P. Morgan's more skeptical view, reported by Reuters, cut expectations to around **$500 billion by 2028** on the grounds that real-world adoption remains limited and fragmented. The right reading is not that one forecast must be correct. It is that **regulatory clarity and product-market fit are improving, but the slope of adoption is still highly contingent on actual enterprise and consumer use—not on crypto market enthusiasm alone.** [9]

The PE angle reinforces the same point. Public data on "private equity investment in payments and stablecoin infrastructure" as a discrete category is incomplete, but broader private-capital activity has recovered: McKinsey's 2026 private markets report says fundraising and deployment reached new highs in 2025, while Preqin reported global private-equity fundraising of **$507 billion in Q1–Q3 2025**. Within fintech, Capstone said payments led equity financing activity and that global payments growth capital raised was up **36.3% year over year to $9.2 billion YTD 2025**. That does not prove a stablecoin buyout boom. It does show that capital is already chasing payment modernization, and stablecoin infrastructure is increasingly part of that theme. [10]

A synthesized adoption picture

The chart below is an analytical synthesis, not a single-source forecast. It combines current market size, forecast ranges, regulatory milestones, and the fact that payment-specific stablecoin usage is still much smaller than total transfer volume. The key message is that the likely adoption path is **fast in B2B/cross-border niches, slower in mainstream retail acceptance**. [11]

Figure 1 Stablecoin Adoption Scenarios



What stablecoins change technically

Stablecoins improve four things that matter economically: **speed, operating hours, programmability, and asset portability**. Unlike traditional merchant settlement processes that usually depend on banking cutoffs, intermediaries, and delayed batch settlement, stablecoins can move on public blockchains continuously. BIS's Project Dynamo noted that stablecoins, tokenized deposits, and CBDCs can enable straight-through processing and end-to-end instant settlement, including payment-versus-payment and delivery-versus-payment use cases. Circle's cross-chain tools allow native 1:1 movement of USDC across blockchains through burn-and-mint rather than wrapped bridge pools; Circle also says CCTP V2 can settle secure cross-chain USDC transfers in seconds. These are not cosmetic improvements. They remove reconciliation steps that legacy rails often treat as unavoidable. [12]

Settlement speed, however, is not the same as settlement quality. On Ethereum, "true" proof-of-stake finality comes later than initial inclusion, and Ethereum's own documentation still distinguishes fast confirmations from full finality. Solana's documentation similarly explains that a transaction is finalized only when its block becomes a root. In practice, this means enterprises usually define their own confirmation

thresholds for risk purposes. So the honest comparison is not "instant stablecoins" versus "slow legacy." It is "**faster technical finality on a 24/7 rail, but with chain-specific operational risk policies that enterprises still have to design.**" [13]

Programmability is the deeper structural change. Stablecoins can be embedded in workflows for conditional disbursement, dynamic FX, escrow, subscription logic, treasury sweeps, and machine-to-machine payments. BIS explicitly highlights programmable settlement as a meaningful advantage of tokenized money. Mastercard's Multi-Token Network markets programmable payments as a core feature, and Stripe is now offering digital-asset accounts, stablecoin balances, stablecoin payments, subscription support, and even tools to launch a stablecoin. That matters because programmable settlement shifts value from the payment authorization event to the **workflow around money movement**, which is exactly where infrastructure software and PE-backed middleware can capture economics. [14]

Custody is both a strength and a weakness. Stablecoins are bearer-like assets capable of self-custody, which means merchants and enterprises can hold them directly without relying on the same chain of depositories and settlement banks. Circle describes USDC as capable of self-custody, and the OCC has repeatedly confirmed that national banks may provide crypto-asset custody services and may engage in certain stablecoin-related activities. But self-custody also moves key-management, wallet-security, and operational-loss risk onto the holder or service provider. In stablecoins, the freedom to cut intermediaries is inseparable from the burden of replacing them with wallet controls, policy engines, and recovery processes. [15]

Interoperability remains simultaneously a feature and a fragility. Circle's CCTP is a real improvement over wrapped-token bridges, and MAS's Project Guardian has emphasized open and interoperable digital asset networks. Yet BIS and MAS both continue to warn about fragmentation across DLT markets and infrastructures. In operational terms, "multi-chain" often means more vendor dependency, more chain-selection risk, more monitoring, and more compliance decision points. Stablecoins are interoperable enough to be useful, but not yet standardized enough to be frictionless across institutions, wallets, chains, regulators, and accounting systems. [16]

Economics and industry structure

The cleanest economic argument for stablecoins is simple: **they can bypass interchange when used natively.** In card systems, interchange is one component of the merchant discount rate set by the acquirer. Mastercard states this explicitly. In U.S. debit, the Federal Reserve's Regulation II cap for covered issuers remains **$0.21 plus 0.05%** plus a possible **$0.01** fraud adjustment, and the Fed reported average debit interchange around **$0.24** for covered single-message transactions in 2023. In the EU, consumer interchange is capped at **0.2%** for debit and **0.3%** for credit. None of those economics inherently apply when a merchant accepts a stablecoin directly to a wallet or via a PSP that settles on-chain. [17]

But the counterpoint is crucial: **stablecoins do not eliminate payment costs; they recompose them.** Merchants still face network fees, wallet and custody costs, PSP spreads, compliance costs, off-ramp costs, FX spreads, treasury controls, and risk tooling. Stripe says stablecoin transfers often cost only pennies in network fees and that some AI businesses see transaction fees about half those of other methods, but that is not the same as saying "stablecoin acceptance is nearly free." The likely medium-term outcome is lower variable transaction cost on certain flows, paired with higher spend on software, compliance, and treasury orchestration. That is precisely why the business model prize may shift from networks to middleware. [18]

Routing also changes. In cards, routing is governed by network rules, acquirer relationships, and issuer acceptance. In stablecoins, routing becomes a multi-dimensional choice among issuer, chain, wallet, compliance path, liquidity source, and fiat exit rail. That is a more open architecture, but it can also be a more complicated one. Firms like Bridge, BVNK, and Fiserv are trying to solve that by becoming **orchestrators**, not just processors. Stripe's Open Issuance product lets firms launch their own stablecoin and plug into a shared liquidity network; BVNK markets payment orchestration and compliance across fiat and stablecoin; Fiserv is positioning FIUSD as a bank-friendly digital dollar that sits inside existing banking and payment systems. In other words, the route from "cheap on-chain settlement" to "commercially usable payment rail" typically runs through a new intermediary class. [19]

The card networks' roles therefore change more than disappear. Visa and Mastercard are visibly repositioning as **multi-rail acceptance, settlement, tokenization, identity, and compliance networks**. Visa expanded stablecoin settlement support in 2025; Mastercard launched end-to-end stablecoin acceptance capabilities, joined the Global Dollar Network, partnered with Fiserv on FIUSD, partnered with SoFi on SoFiUSD, and agreed to acquire BVNK. Worldpay, as a large acquirer/platform, has moved from USDC merchant settlement to Visa pilots to BVNK-powered stablecoin payouts. These actions imply that incumbents do not view stablecoins as a sideshow. They view them as a new settlement layer that still needs scale distribution, merchants, fraud systems, and compliance rails. [20]

American Express and Discover are structurally different. AmEx's closed-loop model has historically monetized premium customer relationships, lending, rewards, and merchant service economics, making it less directly exposed to pure interchange compression than a four-party network. Discover—now part of Capital One—remains one of the few U.S.-based vertically integrated network assets; Capital One explicitly described Discover Global Network as "rare and valuable," while Discover Global Network emphasizes its 378+ million cards, 185+ countries, and nearly $622 billion of 2024 spend. That suggests any stablecoin pressure on these models will run primarily through merchant acceptance, rewards economics, and deposit/treasury strategy rather than through the exact same vectors as Visa and Mastercard. [21]

Incumbent versus stablecoin-native economics

Table 1 Incumbents vs Stablecoin Native Econonics

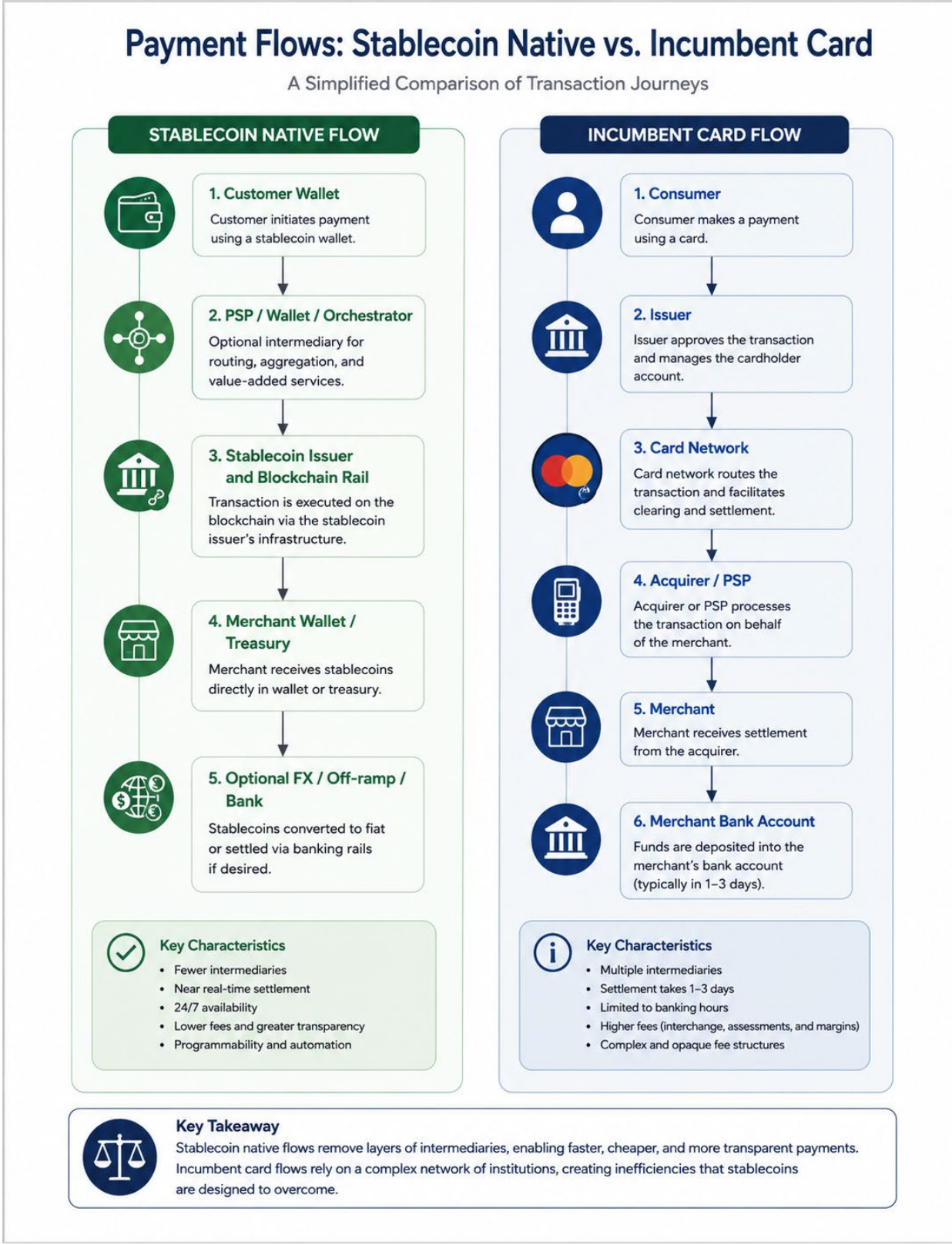
Dimension	Incumbent card model	Stablecoin-native model	Implication
Core merchant fee logic	MDR set by acquirer; interchange is one component. Mastercard states interchange is part of MDR. [22]	No native interchange if merchant accepts stablecoin directly; instead network fees, PSP spreads, custody/off-ramp/compliance costs. [18]	Fee pool shifts from network economics toward software/compliance/liquidity economics
U.S. debit baseline	Covered debit interchange capped at $0.21 + 0.05% + possible $0.01 fraud adjustment; average covered single-message fee about $0.24. [23]	Stablecoin transfer fees often pennies, but total stack depends on PSP and off-ramp. [18]	Strongest cost advantage in low-margin, cross-border, payout-heavy use cases
Settlement timing	Merchant funding often next day or later depending on acquirer and bank processes	24/7 blockchain settlement, often near real time, though enterprise confirmation policies vary by chain. [24]	Working-capital and treasury benefit is real
Chargebacks and disputes	Mature dispute and chargeback regime	Stripe says stablecoin payments do not create chargebacks; Circle says on-chain transfers are irreversible. [25]	Lower fraud-dispute leakage for some merchants, but weaker consumer recourse

Dimension	Incumbent card model	Stablecoin-native model	Implication
Fraud and consumer protection	Mature network protections, issuer controls, and regulatory familiarity	Finality reduces some reversal fraud, but mis-send, wallet compromise, bridge, and custody losses can be permanent. [26]	Risk shifts from card fraud to operational/custody risk
Control over routing	Network/acquirer/issuer rulebooks dominate	Merchant/PSP can choose chain, issuer, wallet, compliance path, and exit rail. [27]	More flexibility, but also more integration complexity

Funds flow

The core structural difference is where settlement occurs and who controls the balance sheet carrying the payment in flight. The diagram below simplifies the two models.

Figure 2 Stablecoin Native vs Card Payment Flows



Regulation and compliance boundaries

The United States is meaningfully more permissive than it was two years ago, but it is not "lightly regulated." Federal Reserve researchers note that in **July 2025** Congress passed the **GENIUS Act**, establishing a federal framework for payment stablecoins. The law requires backing with relatively safe assets such as deposits, short-term Treasuries, and balances at a Federal Reserve Bank, and it prohibits direct interest payments by issuers. Treasury's April 2026 proposal would treat permitted payment stablecoin issuers as financial institutions for Bank Secrecy Act purposes and impose AML/CFT and sanctions obligations. The SEC's April 2025 staff statement said a narrow class of "Covered Stablecoins" designed for one-for-one minting and redemption in USD are generally not offered or sold as securities, while the OCC has reaffirmed that banks may provide crypto custody and engage in certain stablecoin activities subject to supervision. The U.S. picture has therefore shifted from "uncertain legality" to "regulated payment instrument with bank-like compliance obligations." [28]

The EU is stricter and more prescriptive. ESMA said in January 2025 that national authorities were expected to ensure compliance regarding non-compliant stablecoins under MiCA by no later than the end of Q1 2025. EBA supervision now includes quarterly reporting, significance assessments, and public registers for issuers of asset-referenced and e-money tokens. ECB officials argue that European stablecoins are legally required to hold a meaningful share of reserves as bank deposits—**at least 30%**, rising to **60% for significant stablecoins**—which improves liquidity but may make issuance less profitable and can create bank-contagion channels. MiCA is therefore not just a disclosure regime. It is a prudential and operational regime that pushes Europe toward a more bank-linked stablecoin model. [29]

The United Kingdom is moving more deliberately. The FCA consulted on stablecoin issuance and crypto custody in 2025, says the full new cryptoasset regime is expected to commence on **25 October 2027**, and elevated stablecoin payments as a 2026 priority. The FCA launched a dedicated stablecoin sandbox cohort in late 2025 and selected four firms, with testing starting in Q1 2026. The Bank of England's June 2026 policy statement says it intends to finalize its Code of Practice for systemic sterling stablecoins by the end of 2026 and continue supporting materials in 2027. The UK signal is clear: policymakers want innovation, but only inside a staged framework with consumer protection, systemic standards, and strong supervision. [30]

Asia is not one regime; it is several important tests. Hong Kong's stablecoin regime took effect on **1 August 2025**, making fiat-referenced stablecoin issuance licensable, and the HKMA granted licences to two issuers in April 2026. Singapore finalized its framework earlier, requiring reserve backing in low-risk highly liquid assets and redemption at par within five business days for regulated stablecoins. Japan amended the Payment Services Act in 2025 and moved to implement related public notices in 2026, while also applying travel-rule style information obligations to stablecoin transfers. The implication for multinational payment businesses is straightforward: **stablecoins are becoming more**

legal, but more local. Regulatory arbitrage will narrow. Compliance architecture will matter more, not less. [31]

AML, sanctions, and illicit finance remain the biggest scaling constraint to open-wallet payments. FATF's June 2025 update warned that most on-chain illicit activity now involves stablecoins and that mass adoption could amplify risks where Travel Rule implementation remains uneven. FATF also reported that the number of jurisdictions implementing the Travel Rule increased from **65 in 2024 to 85 in 2025**, but gaps remain. Treasury has warned that tokenized money and payments can challenge conventional AML/CFT screening because transfers may occur without the involvement of a financial institution at every step. This is the compliance paradox: stablecoins scale best as permissionless bearer assets, but mainstream adoption scales best when they are wrapped in permissioned controls. [32]

Private equity, incumbents, and the real-world playbook

Private equity has clear evidence of conviction in payments, but only partial proof of conviction in stablecoin infrastructure itself. The best-documented recent PE-backed payments deals are large and traditional: **GTCR's Worldpay investment** culminated in a **$24.25 billion** sale to Global Payments announced in April 2025, and **Advent's Nuvei take-private** valued Nuvei at about **$6.3 billion**, completing in November 2024. These are not niche transactions. They show sponsors still believe payments infrastructure is a durable, improvable asset class. [33]

Stablecoin infrastructure, by contrast, has been funded more through venture and strategic channels, though the strategic moves are becoming large enough to matter for PE-style thinking. BVNK raised a **$50 million Series B** in December 2024, then added Visa as an investor in 2025, then agreed to join Mastercard in 2026. Stripe acquired Bridge in February 2025 and then rapidly expanded stablecoin balances, issuance, merchant acceptance with Shopify, and embedded stablecoin wallet infrastructure with Deel and others. This is a strong signal that the "picks and shovels" layer—wallets, orchestration, issuance APIs, payouts, treasury tooling—has become strategically valuable before it has become a mature buyout category. [34]

The best case study for convergence is Worldpay. Worldpay says it began offering merchants direct USDC settlement in select geographies in 2022, completed a Visa pilot in 2023 to receive funds more quickly, and announced BVNK-enabled near-instant global stablecoin payouts in 2025 across more than **180 markets**. That sequence matters. It shows the migration path many incumbents likely prefer: **first settlement optimization, then payouts, then broader multi-rail orchestration**. Stablecoins may therefore enter large payment platforms through the back office before they visibly change checkout. [35]

Mastercard is the clearest case of an incumbent trying to preserve its role by broadening it. In 2025 it announced end-to-end stablecoin capabilities from wallets to checkout, said its Multi-Token Network could enable real-time payments and redemptions around tokenized assets, joined Paxos' Global Dollar Network, partnered with Fiserv to enable merchants to

settle in FIUSD, and added SoFiUSD support in 2026. The message is not that Mastercard expects stablecoins to kill networks. It expects future payment networks to include stablecoins as one settlement form among several. [36]

Visa's posture is similar. Visa began USDC settlement work earlier, expanded support in 2025 to more stablecoins, chains, and use cases, and worked with Worldpay, Nuvei, and later BVNK to connect stablecoins with merchant and Visa Direct flows. Visa's annual report still shows massive scale in its core business, so its stablecoin strategy reads less like a defensive retreat and more like a deliberate attempt to own the **interoperability layer** across money forms. [37]

Fiserv's FIUSD is important for a different reason: it is a bank-distribution thesis, not a crypto-native one. Fiserv positions FIUSD as a trusted digital dollar for financial institutions, explicitly designed to fit into existing banking and payment systems and operate on 24/7 infrastructure. Mastercard's partnership with Fiserv shows how a conventional payments processor and a card network can repackage stablecoins as infrastructure for banks, not just as alternative money outside banking. That could blunt some disintermediation while still moving economics away from pure interchange. [38]

Representative deals and pilots

Table 2 Deals and Pilots

Type	Example	What it shows
PE-backed payments buyout	GTCR / Worldpay, sale announced at $24.25B in 2025 [39]	Sponsors still see very large value-creation potential in payments platforms
PE-backed payments take-private	Advent / Nuvei at about $6.3B EV [40]	Merchant acquirers remain sponsor-relevant despite margin pressure
Strategic acquisition of stablecoin infrastructure	Mastercard / BVNK agreement in 2026 [41]	Stablecoin middleware has become strategic enough for major-network M&A
Venture plus strategic capital	BVNK Series B and Visa investment [42]	Stablecoin infra is graduating from early-stage to strategic relevance
Incumbent settlement pilot	Visa / Worldpay / Nuvei USDC settlement initiatives [43]	Stablecoins first win in merchant settlement and cross-border money movement
Platform distribution	Stripe / Bridge / Shopify / Deel [44]	Stablecoins scale fastest when hidden behind familiar PSP interfaces

Type	Example	What it shows
Bank-oriented issuance	Fiserv / FIUSD and Mastercard partnership [45]	Stablecoins can be adopted as bank tech, not only as crypto-native money

Timelines, barriers, and downside cases

The most likely timeline is uneven, with **infrastructure adoption ahead of consumer adoption**. In the U.S., the GENIUS Act and Treasury's 2026 rulemaking materially improve the near-term environment for payment stablecoins; in the EU, MiCA is already live; in Hong Kong, licensing is live; in the UK, sandbox testing is underway but the full regime is still building toward 2027. That makes **2026–2028** the window for real scaling in treasury, payouts, remittances, and settlement, while **mass retail wallet acceptance at merchant checkout** is more likely a **2028+** story and may remain limited absent compelling consumer incentives. [46]

The timeline below is again a synthesis of current milestones rather than a single-source forecast.

Figure 3 Convergence of Stablecoins, Private Equity, and Payments Innovation

The strongest barriers are not technical. They are **commercial, regulatory, and behavioral**. Most consumers do not want wallet management, private-key risk, tax complexity, or weaker recourse. Most merchants do not want extra treasury complexity unless the savings are large and easy to realize. Most regulated enterprises will not move core payment flows until AML, sanctions, accounting, and legal finality are operationally clear. FATF's warnings on illicit finance and the UK/EU emphasis on supervision show that more regulation will enable adoption only if firms can implement it cleanly. The importance of orchestration vendors and regulated wrappers is therefore likely to increase rather than disappear. [47]

There are also genuine failure scenarios. A reserve-quality scare or depegging event could sharply slow institutional adoption; ECB officials explicitly note run risk and the mismatch between 24/7 stablecoin settlement and reserve assets that still settle on T+1 or T+2. A major bridge, wallet, or smart-contract failure could reset merchant confidence. Regulators could push the market toward heavily permissioned, bank-linked stablecoins that preserve most existing economics and remove much of the disruption story. Or incumbents could absorb the technology so effectively that stablecoins become an invisible settlement optimization rather than a new market structure. Those are all plausible, not remote, scenarios. [48]

A final downside is substitution from **other modern rails**, not just a failure of stablecoins themselves. BIS Project Nexus is working to connect domestic instant payment systems for faster and cheaper cross-border payments, and BIS Project Agorá is exploring tokenized wholesale cross-border payments using central and commercial bank money rather than public stablecoins. ECB officials also argue that innovation in retail payments does not depend only on stablecoins. If instant-payment networks, tokenized deposits, and central-bank-backed settlement solutions improve quickly, public stablecoins may win far less share than current enthusiasts assume. [49]

Stress-test scenarios

Table 3 Stress Test Scenarios

Scenario	What happens	Who wins	Who loses
Controlled hybrid adoption	Stablecoins scale in B2B settlement, payouts, and treasury; cards remain dominant in consumer checkout	Visa, Mastercard, Stripe, Worldpay, BVNK-like middleware, compliance software	Legacy processors that depend on high friction and slow settlement
Aggressive disintermediation	Large merchants and platforms adopt native stablecoin acceptance and	Wallet providers, issuer/orchestrator stacks, treasury software, merchants with global flows	Parts of interchange-sensitive acquiring economics

Scenario	What happens	Who wins	Who loses
	self-custody or low-cost orchestration		
Compliance-heavy re-intermediation	Regulation pushes stablecoin use into bank-issued or heavily permissioned formats	Banks, Fiserv-like platforms, incumbent networks, enterprise software vendors	Crypto-native players relying on lightly intermediated flows
Confidence shock	Depeg, reserve run, major hack, or sanctions failure slows adoption materially	Card networks, RTP systems, tokenized deposit models	Stablecoin issuers, unregulated wallet flows, overvalued infra bets

Bottom line

The most rigorous answer is not “stablecoins will replace cards,” and it is not “nothing will change.” The stronger conclusion is this:

Payments is entering a period of real architectural change because stablecoins make settlement programmable, continuous, and more portable—and because large incumbents and sponsors now treat that capability as strategically important. [50]

The disruption is most credible in cross-border and B2B flows first. If the question is where stablecoins can win on economics today, the answer is merchant settlement, global payouts, remittances, treasury, and intercompany money movement—not broad consumer POS switchover. [51]

Private equity’s best risk-adjusted opportunity is likely the infrastructure layer around stablecoins, not naked exposure to issuers alone. Compliance, custody, wallet controls, FX/liquidity, routing, and settlement middleware are where value pools are forming and where fragmentation creates room for roll-ups and platform strategies. [52]

The biggest mistake would be to frame this as a binary fight between public-chain money and incumbent networks. Visa, Mastercard, processors, banks, and PE-backed platforms are already adapting. The contest is increasingly about who owns the layer that enterprises trust to decide: which rail to use, which wallet to credit, how to screen the transfer, how to hedge the FX, how to settle, and how to reconcile. In a multi-rail future, the strategic control point shifts from the card swipe itself to the orchestration stack around money movement. [53]

Open questions and limitations

Public data is strong on card-network volumes, regulatory frameworks, and announced deals, but weaker on one item the market cares about: **a clean global dataset isolating private-equity investment specifically in "payments plus stablecoin infrastructure."** The private-market evidence here is therefore best read as a combination of disclosed deal values, sponsor-backed payments transactions, and strategic/venture funding in stablecoin middleware rather than as a single authoritative market-size number. [54]

The second limitation is definitional. "Stablecoin volume" can mean supply, total on-chain transfer volume, adjusted transfer volume, or real payment volume. Those measures differ materially, and bullish narratives often blur them. Where possible, this report separates them; where the market itself does not, numbers should be treated with caution. [55]

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