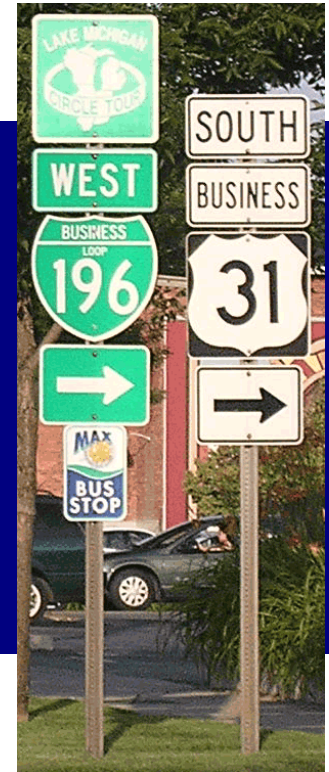


Retain Holland's Business Routes

Holland AM Rotary

Presented by Christopher Bessert

Wednesday, August 18, 2004



Retain Holland's Business Routes

- **About the Presenter**
- **History of Holland Area Highway Transportation**
- **The Problem at Hand**
- **One Solution: The Turnback**
- **Turnback Pros and Cons**
- **Other Solutions**



About the Presenter

- **Christopher J. Bessert**
- **Former Holland resident, currently residing in Byron Center**
- **Student of ground transportation networks and cartography**
- **Career: Geographic Information System Specialist at Grand Valley Metropolitan Council in Grand Rapids**
- **Maintain various transportation networks for GIS users**
- **Work hand-in-hand with urban planners**
- **Personal website: www.michiganhighways.org**

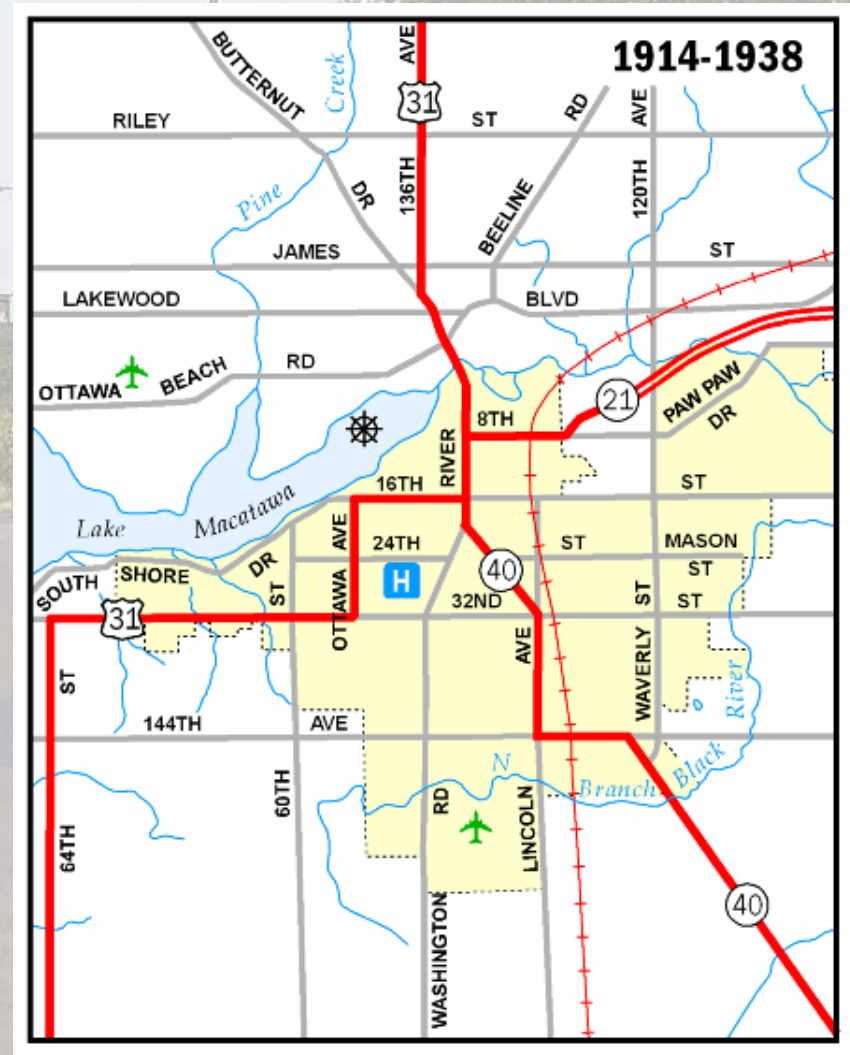
Brief History of Highways in Holland

- **1914-1938: The Early Years**
- **1938-1950: Before the Bypass**
- **1950-1955: Northside Bypass**
- **1955-1963: Holland Bypass complete, Business Route debuts**
- **1963-1971: Benton Harbor-Holland Freeway complete**
- **1971-1973: One-Way & Downtown Realignment**
- **1973-1994: Gerald R. Ford Freeway complete, second Business Route debuts**
- **1994-2004: The Transfers Begin**



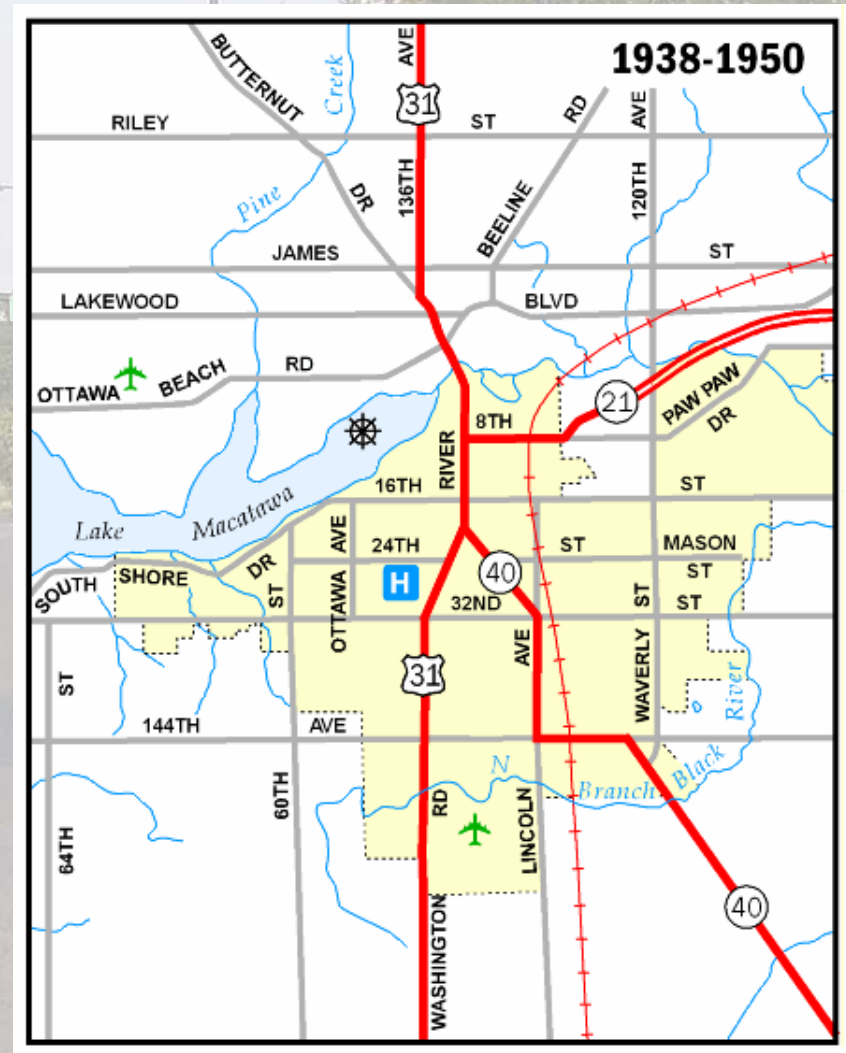
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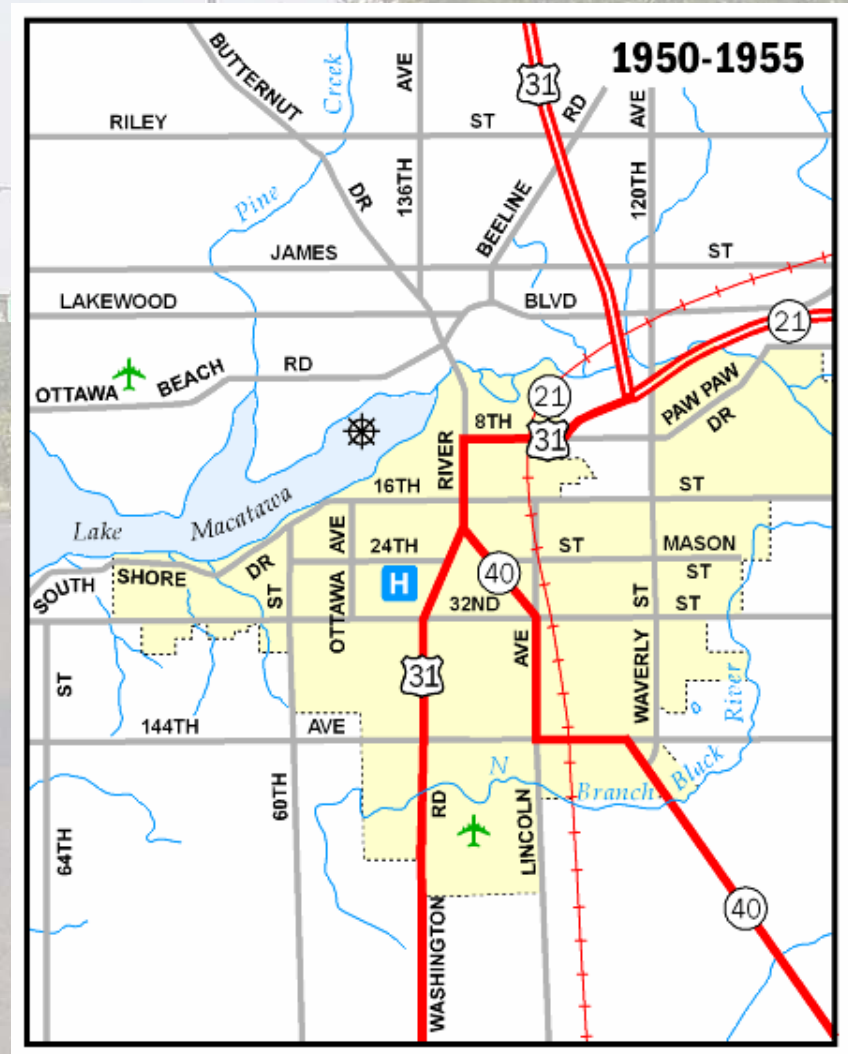
Brief History of Highways in Holland

- **1938-1950: Before the Bypass**



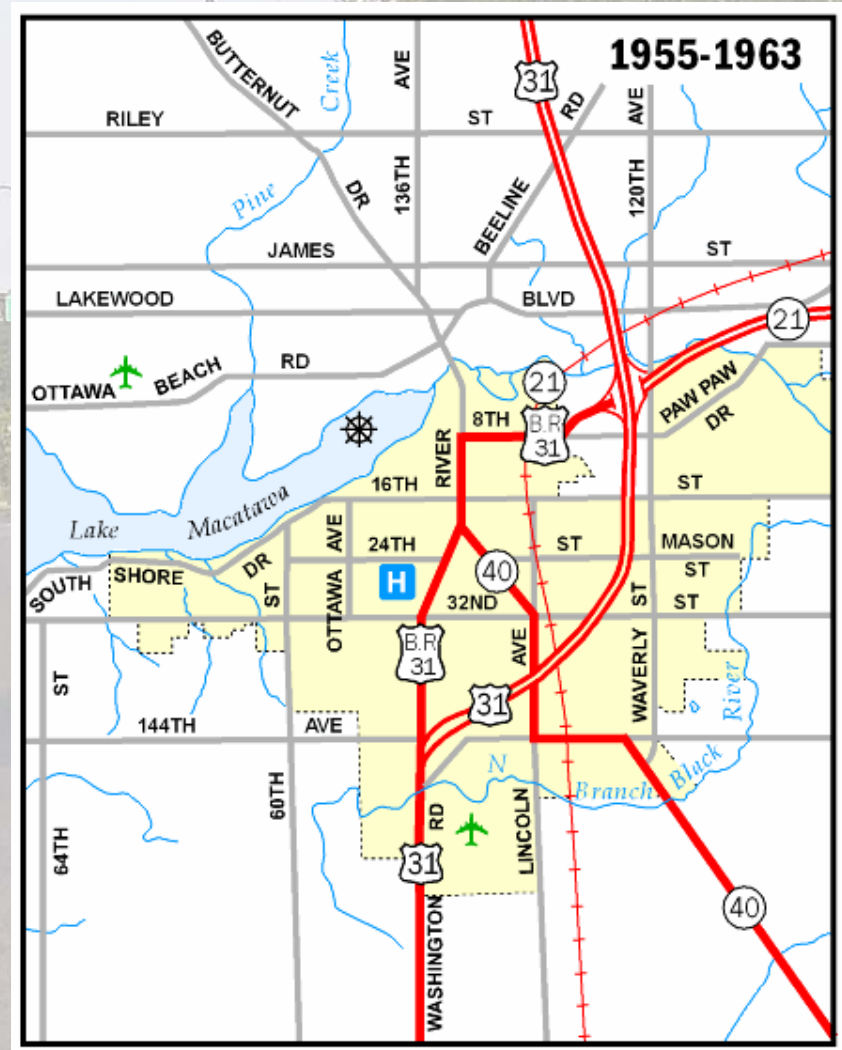
Brief History of Highways in Holland

- **1950-1955: Northside Bypass**



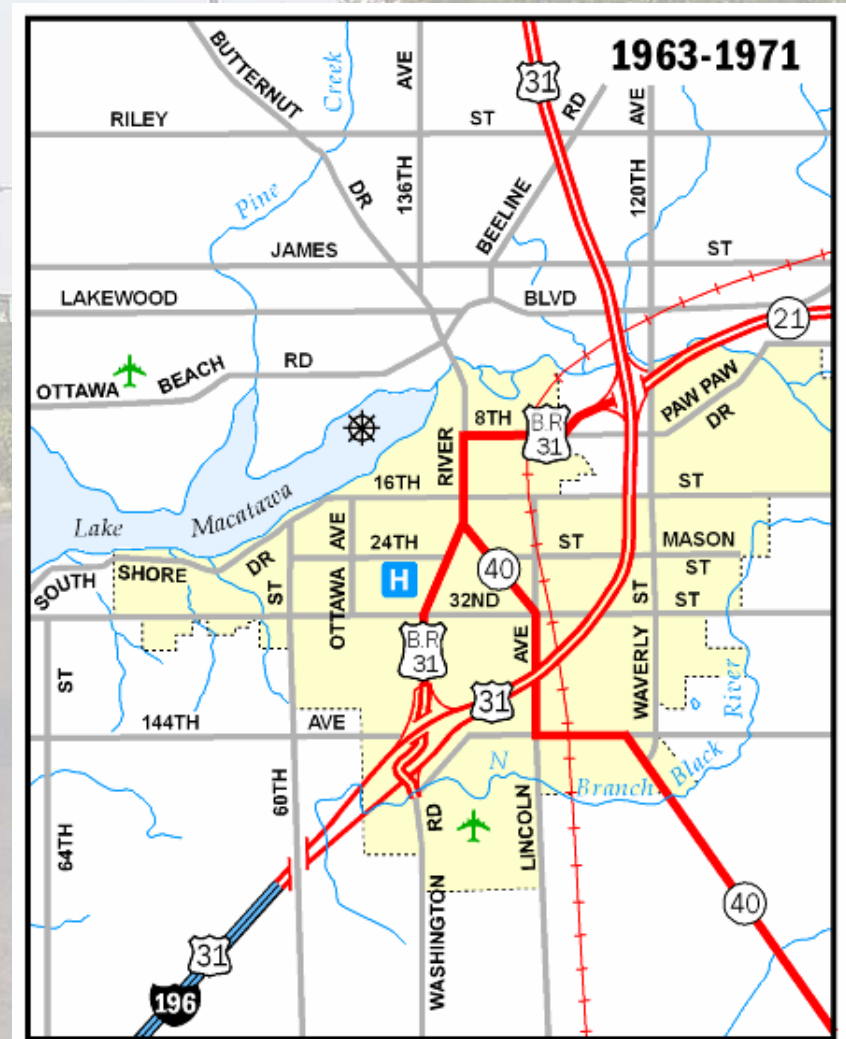
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- **1955–1963: Holland Bypass complete, Business Route debuts**



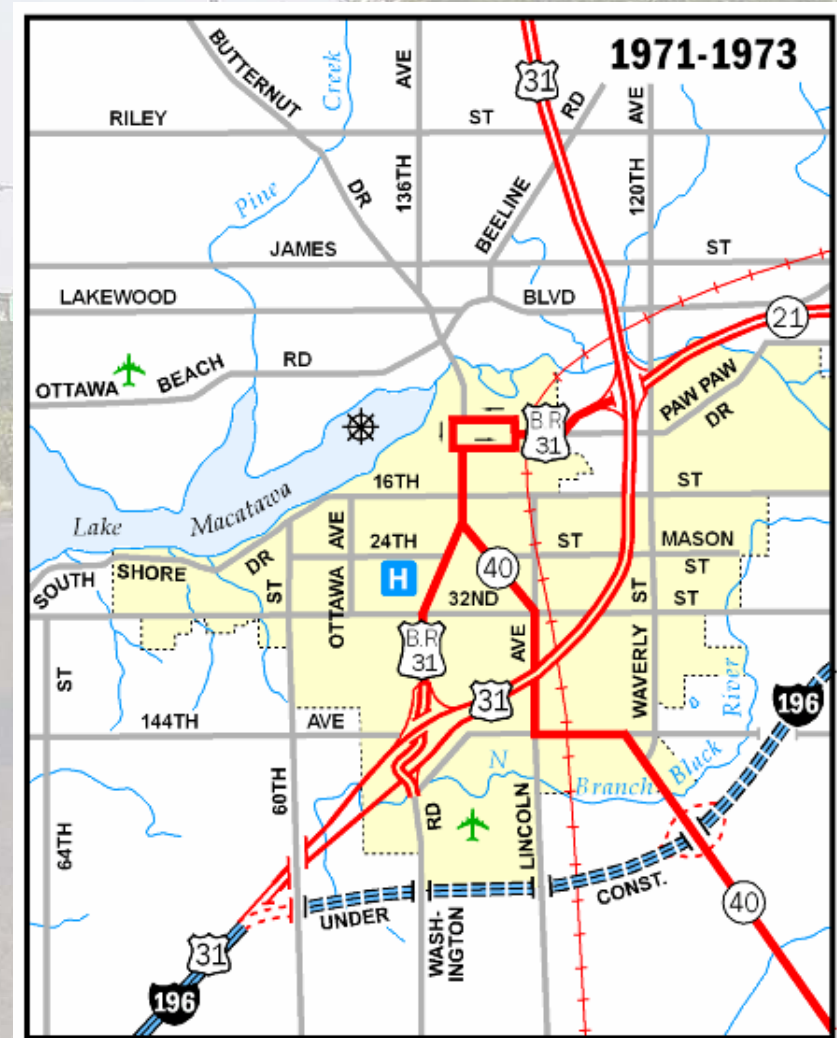
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- **1963–1971: Benton Harbor-Holland Freeway complete**



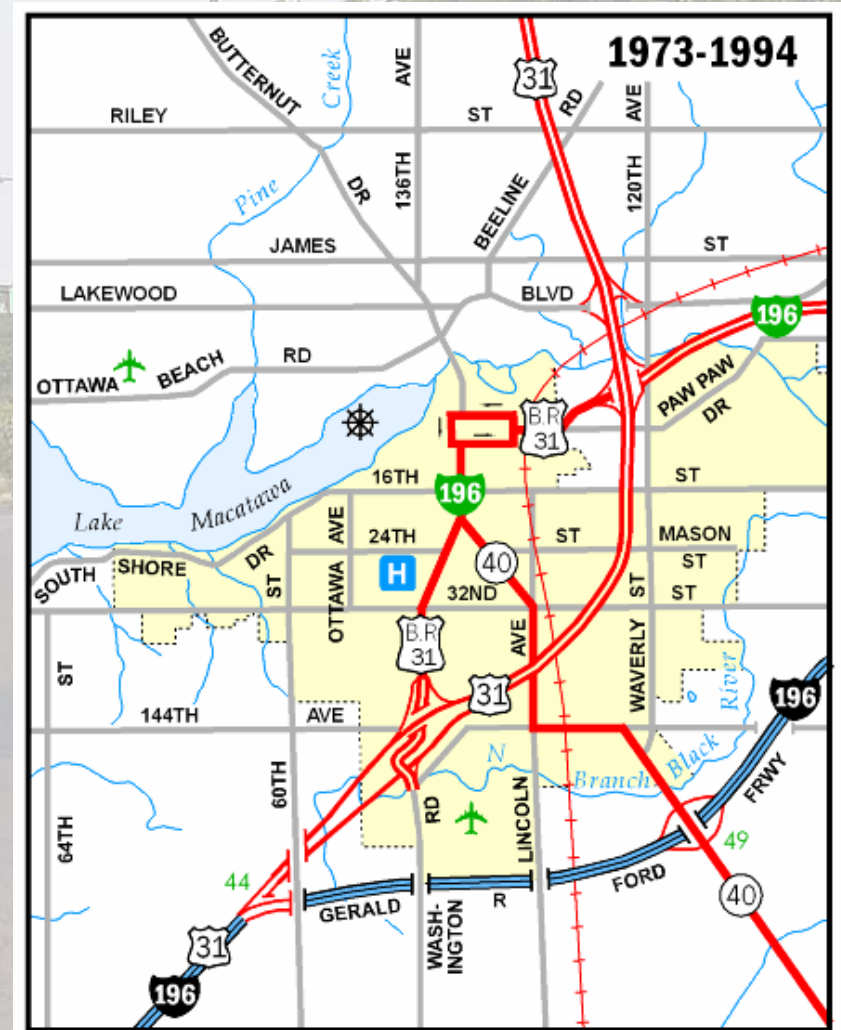
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- **1971-1973: One-Way & Downtown Realignment**



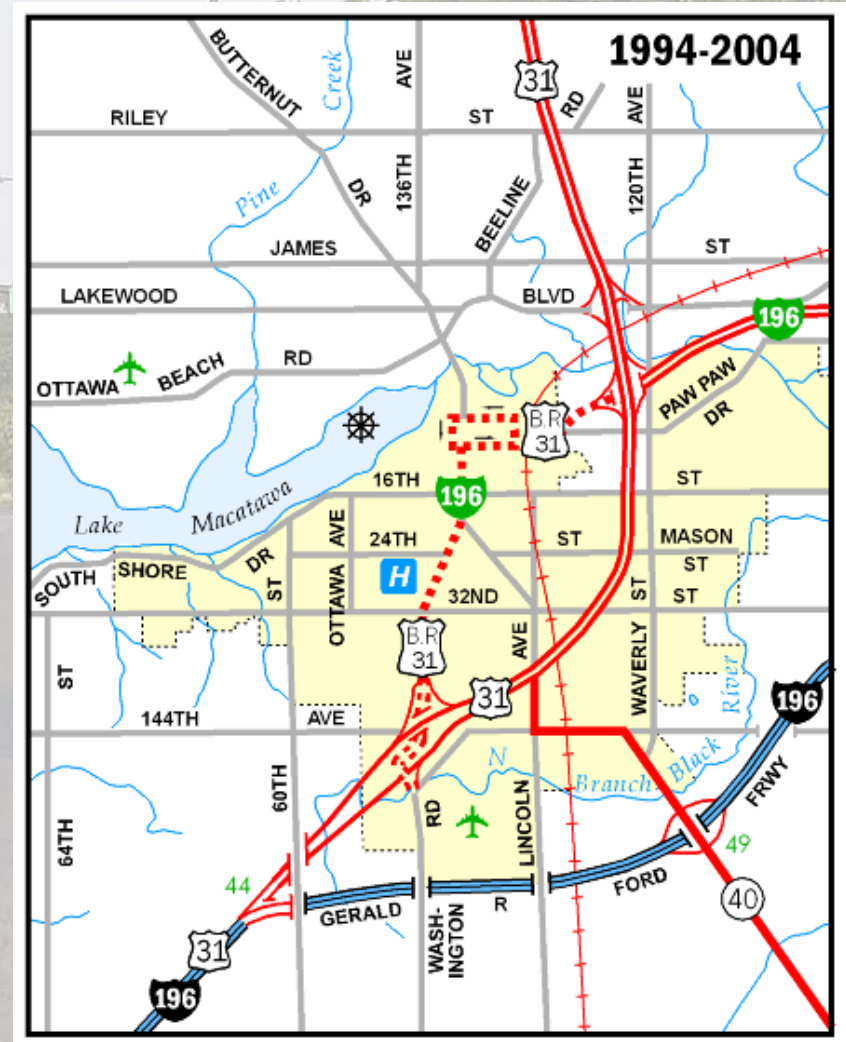
Brief History of Highways in Holland

- **1973–1994: Gerald R. Ford Frwy complete, BL I-196 debuts**



Brief History of Highways in Holland

- **1994-2004: The Transfers Begin**



The Problem at Hand

- **Successful downtown central business district**
- **Perceived lack of convenient parking**
- **Need to keep downtown vibrant and bustling**
- **Northside retail explosion continues unabated, Westshore Mall troubles notwithstanding**
- **Downtown needs to compete harder in stressful economic times**
- **The better downtown does, the worse parking problem may become**

The Problem at Hand

- **Downtown perception needs to remain pleasant**
- **Easy to access, easy to park**
 - Get in, get out
 - Park at the door, like big-box competition
- **Holland difficult to get through as is, even with signed route**
 - One-way streets efficiently move traffic through downtown, but may be confusing to tourists and casual visitors
 - Lake Macatawa and Lake Michigan present additional natural “challenges” to getting through the city
- **Poor state maintenance in some areas in past years gives MDOT a black-eye.**
- **Very difficult problem to solve!**

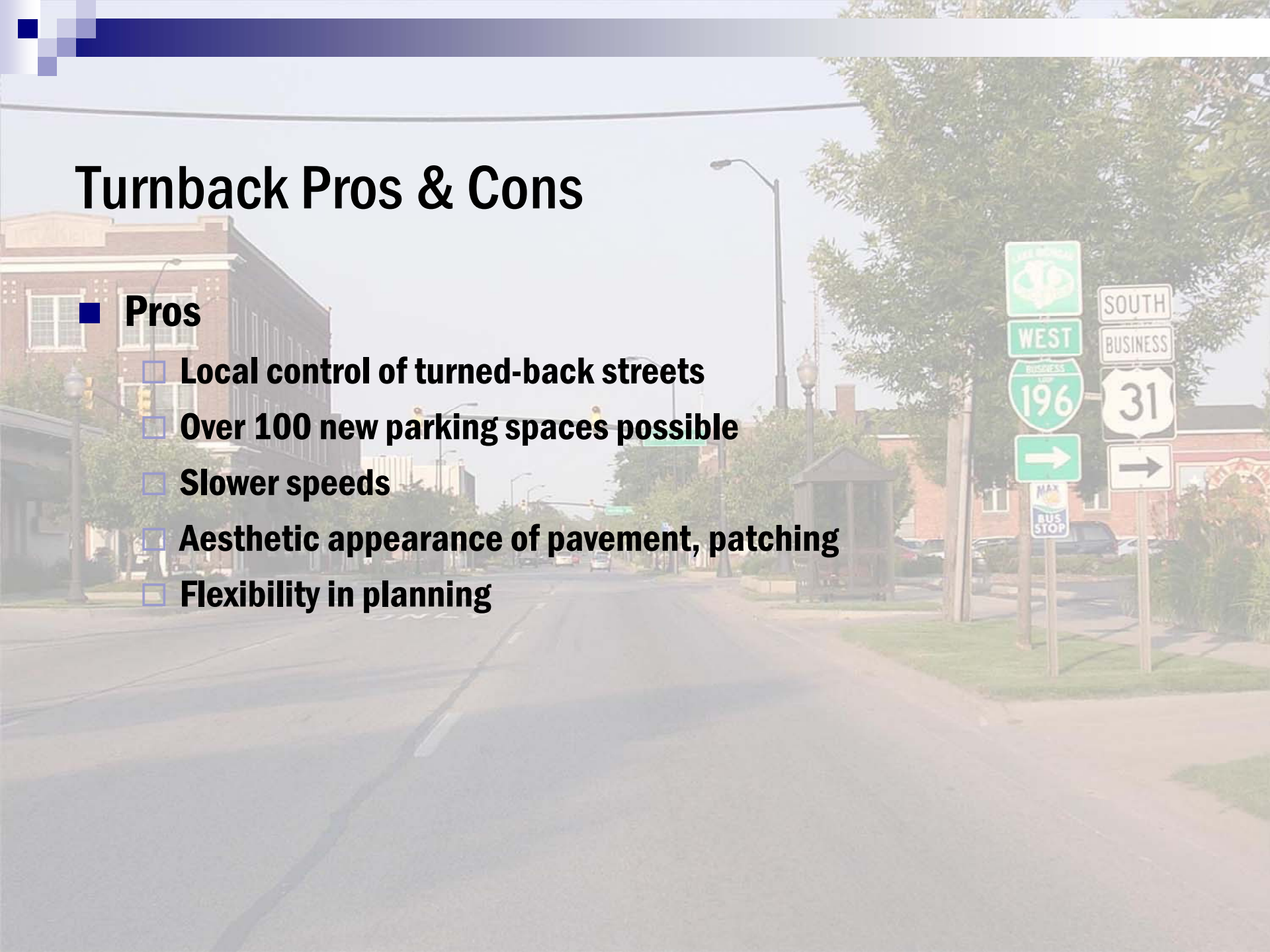
One Solution: The Turnback

- **City of Holland and MDOT at odds for years**
 - **City says three through traffic lanes unnecessary**
 - **MDOT states traffic volume levels support three lanes**
 - **City desires slow traffic**
 - **MDOT tasked with maintaining smooth traffic flow**
 - **City desires pedestrian friendly downtown**
 - **MDOT looks to efficient movement of people and traffic through the city**
 - **MDOT also allowed quality of Business Routes slide for many years**
- **Solution: MDOT to turnback most of Business Route to City**

Turnback Pros & Cons

■ Pros

- Local control of turned-back streets
- Over 100 new parking spaces possible
- Slower speeds
- Aesthetic appearance of pavement, patching
- Flexibility in planning



Turnback Pros & Cons

■ Cons

- **Loss of major tourism route: Lake Michigan Circle Tour**
 - **Casual tourists follow Circle Tour route/signs faithfully**
 - **People unfamiliar with area reluctant to diverge from signed Circle Tour route to explore unsigned, unmarked, unmapped route**
 - **Holland's economy increasingly dependent on tourism dollars**
- **Loss of TWO signed routes from TWO different interstate highways**
 - **Smaller communities clamor for just one signed Business Route off a single bypassing highway**
 - **Holland is blessed with TWO signed Business Routes off TWO major highways**

Turnback Pros & Cons

■ Cons (cont'd)

- **Loss of mapped route on millions of free state transportation maps printed and given out each year**
 - **“Nice, wide red line” on maps disappears**
 - **Similar route markings on commercially-produced maps disappear as well**
- **Requires additional \$165,000 annually from city coffers for maintenance**
- **Loss of state trunkline maintenance contract dollars**
- **Additional trunkline transfers to come in the future**
 - **Washington Avenue from 32nd St southerly to US-31**
 - **Chicago Drive from Fairbanks/Eighth easterly to US-31**

Turnback Pros & Cons

■ Cons (cont'd)

- Discourages tourists from “taking the plunge” by getting off mainline highways to explore the city
- Locally-posted downtown “trailblazer” signage do not complete the route for visitors and tourists back to mainline highways
 - Local signage, while attractive, are often less-visible than the properly-sized, optimally-placed, reflective state trunkline signage
- Loss of “channelizing” routes bringing visitors in via selected streets
 - Gateway planning easier when concentrated on just two or three routes
 - Less cost in signs and directional information, most is already in place
 - Additional signing would be necessary to direct visitors to other attractions, such as Windmill Island

Turnback Pros & Cons

- **Cons (cont'd)**

- **What tourists and casual visitors will see on state maps**



Turnback Pros & Cons

- **Cons (cont'd)**

- **What tourists and casual visitors will see from the bypass**



Before



After

Turnback Pros & Cons

- **Cons (cont'd)**

- **What tourists and casual visitors will see from the bypass**



Before



After

Turnback Pros & Cons

■ Cons (cont'd)

□ Lack of balance between City and Metropolitan area concerns

- City wants all traffic to slow down and encourage pedestrian travel
- MDOT wants to move traffic smoothly and efficiently through the city
- Too much of either of these throws equilibrium out of balance
 - Being overly “highway-centric” may kill off downtown
 - Need attractive, shaded sidewalks, ample crosswalks and reasonable speeds to reassure pedestrians it is safe to walk downtown
 - Being overly “pedestrian-centric” in our automobile-oriented culture may kill off downtown
 - People may think it is too difficult to get to and through downtown and it is just easier to shop at the big box retailers on the Northside

Other Solutions

- **Transfer only “west end” of downtown loop**
 - **Seventh and Ninth Sts west of River Ave to City**
 - **Pine Ave between Seventh and Ninth Sts to City**
 - **River Ave between Seventh and Ninth Sts to State**
 - **Four additional blocks of city-controlled streets for parking**
 - **Gives city area in front of new police station**
 - **Reduces three turns for southbound traffic to one**



Other Solutions

- **City Leaders petition Governor Granholm for assistance**
 - **Ask Governor to force MDOT to explore more context-sensitive designs for downtown streets**
 - **Downtown Business Loops ought not be considered as high-volume alternatives to highway bypasses**
 - **“Cool Cities” initiative**
 - **Governor wants to encourage strong cities and downtowns to retain and attract young talent to Michigan**
 - **Governor can encourage MDOT to work more closely with Cities’ priorities**
 - **Remove third lane for trial run and analyze scientific results**

Other Solutions

■ Education

- Discourage or prohibit employee parking in so-called “Gold Zone” on Eighth Street
- Businesses lose \$30,000 each year when employees park in “Gold Zone”
- “There is plenty of parking downtown. We just need to convey to people that the space doesn’t need to be directly outside of where they’re going. We have created a walkable downtown.” – Phil Meyer, City of Holland Planning & Development Manager
- Encourage/challenge local residents to “find a better spot” to park downtown that is still close to their shopping/dining destination, leaving more “obvious” spaces for tourists and casual visitors

Other Solutions

■ Downtown “Office Tax”

- Use revenues to construct a parking structure
- Tax non-retail businesses
- Allow downtown employees to park for free or
- Charge employees nominal monthly parking fees for premium “covered parking” spaces – nice in inclement weather, winter, etc.
- Could be located one or two blocks north of downtown

Conclusion

- **Problem exists**
- **Turnback solution chosen**
- **Turnback may have unintended side-effects**
- **Other solutions (or mix of solutions) exist**

