



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
CITY OF CHICAGO



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

November 30, 2012

**CONTACT:**

Mayor's Press Office

312.744.3334

[press@cityofchicago.org](mailto:press@cityofchicago.org)

Office of the Governor

312.814.3158

[grant.klinzman@illinois.gov](mailto:grant.klinzman@illinois.gov)

**NEWLY RECONSTRUCTED WACKER DRIVE OPENS FOR TRAFFIC**

*Modernized Wacker and Congress Interchange are Now Safer  
and More Efficient for Vehicles and Pedestrians*

Mayor Rahm Emanuel, U.S. Senator Dick Durbin, U.S. Department of Transportation Deputy Secretary John Porcari and Illinois Governor Pat Quinn today celebrated the opening of the newly reconstructed Wacker Drive and Congress Parkway Interchange, a major thoroughfare for Chicago commuters through the heart of downtown. The historic project will dramatically benefit motorists and pedestrians through less congestion, easier navigation and faster, safer travel enabled by state-of-the-art engineering and technology.

“Wacker Drive is an important thoroughfare for tens of thousands of motorists and pedestrians, as well as a key economic driver for the businesses and office towers which rely on its double-decker roadways for access and transportation options,” said Mayor Emanuel. “By modernizing and investing in our infrastructure, we are investing in our future and an improved quality of life for Chicagoans.”

The \$303 million project created or supported 3,100 jobs and was completed on time and on budget. It completes the modernization of historic Lower and Upper Wacker Drive from Randolph Street to Congress Boulevard, and reconfigures the busy Congress Parkway Interchange.



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
CITY OF CHICAGO



“Lower Wacker Drive is the 8th wonder of the world,” Governor Quinn said. “We put thousands of people back to work building the new Wacker Drive, which is part of Daniel Burnham’s vision for a vibrant downtown. This 21st century reconstruction project will reduce congestion, improve the environment and make drivers through downtown Chicago happy for the next century.”

The project was managed by the Chicago Department of Transportation and funded by the State of Illinois through the Governor’s 2009 “Jump Start” Capital Improvement Program and the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Highway Bridge Program. The total project cost was \$303 million with \$240 million being reimbursed by the federal government, \$60 million from the state of Illinois Jump Start program, and \$3 million from the City of Chicago.

“The U.S. Department of Transportation was proud to provide \$240 million in federal funds to complete the Wacker Drive project, which created good construction jobs and strengthened economic growth and competitiveness for Chicago,” said Deputy Secretary Porcari. “President Obama called for an America built to last, and this project is a great example as it will help move traffic more efficiently, shorten commute times and ensure goods move more efficiently around Chicago.”

Wider roadways and bridges, safer merging ramps, pedestrian “islands”, reconfigured traffic signals, and better lighting and ventilation in Lower Wacker are key features of the renovation. The revitalization of Wacker Drive will now make it easier to navigate and relieve congestion in Chicago’s Loop. The east-west section of Wacker Drive was renovated in 2001.

“Wacker Drive emerges from this reconstruction a safer, more convenient route for drivers traveling through downtown Chicago. Those who live and work in the city will now enjoy lighter traffic in the Loop, easier access to Congress Parkway and I-290, and a brighter, greener Lower Wacker, said Senator Durbin. “I worked to secure over \$80 million in federal support for Wacker Drive’s reconstruction, and I am pleased to see that investment pay off. Those of us who have missed the ease of using the full length of Lower Wacker to cut through the city during construction season have cause to celebrate today.”

Upper Wacker Drive is now significantly improved from Randolph to Congress. Ramps to Lower Wacker Drive at Jackson, Adams and Washington were removed and replaced with landscaped medians. In addition to the medians, Upper Wacker Drive is now outfitted with



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
CITY OF CHICAGO



sidewalk planters and decorative light fixtures. The ramp at Monroe was removed and replaced with a new one-way ramp to Lower Wacker Drive.

Lower Wacker has a series of improvements from Randolph to Congress. The deteriorated viaduct structure built in the 1950s was replaced, lifting the vertical clearance by more than one foot. New lighting improves visibility and new ventilation equipment improves air quality. The service drive and through lanes on Lower Wacker are also separated, alleviating congestion and expediting traffic.

The Congress Parkway Interchange reconfiguration improves traffic safety and creates new green space. Improvements included moving the eastbound Congress exit ramp at Franklin below ground and moving the Lower Wacker Drive entrance ramp onto westbound Congress below ground.

Traffic improvements include removing the Franklin ramp onto westbound Congress. This eliminated the double-merge with the Lower Wacker Drive ramp onto westbound Congress. Additionally, the Lower Wacker ramp now has a longer merge lane.

The Wacker Drive project also incorporated a number of environmentally sustainable elements and practices. The Congress Parkway Interchange reconstruction created three acres of new green space with a park area between Franklin and Wells. The City plans to plant meadow grass, upright deciduous trees, flowering trees, evergreen trees, deciduous shade trees, perennials and shrubs in this area, which will be publicly accessible.

Additional green space will be created at Upper Wacker Drive by replacing ramps to Lower Wacker at Jackson, Adams and Washington with landscaped medians.

Other sustainable elements include: LED traffic signals, which are much more energy efficient than incandescent bulbs and longer-lasting; a stormwater management system designed to direct storm runoff into the combined sewer system instead of the Chicago River; and the extensive use of recycled steel and concrete in construction.

# # #