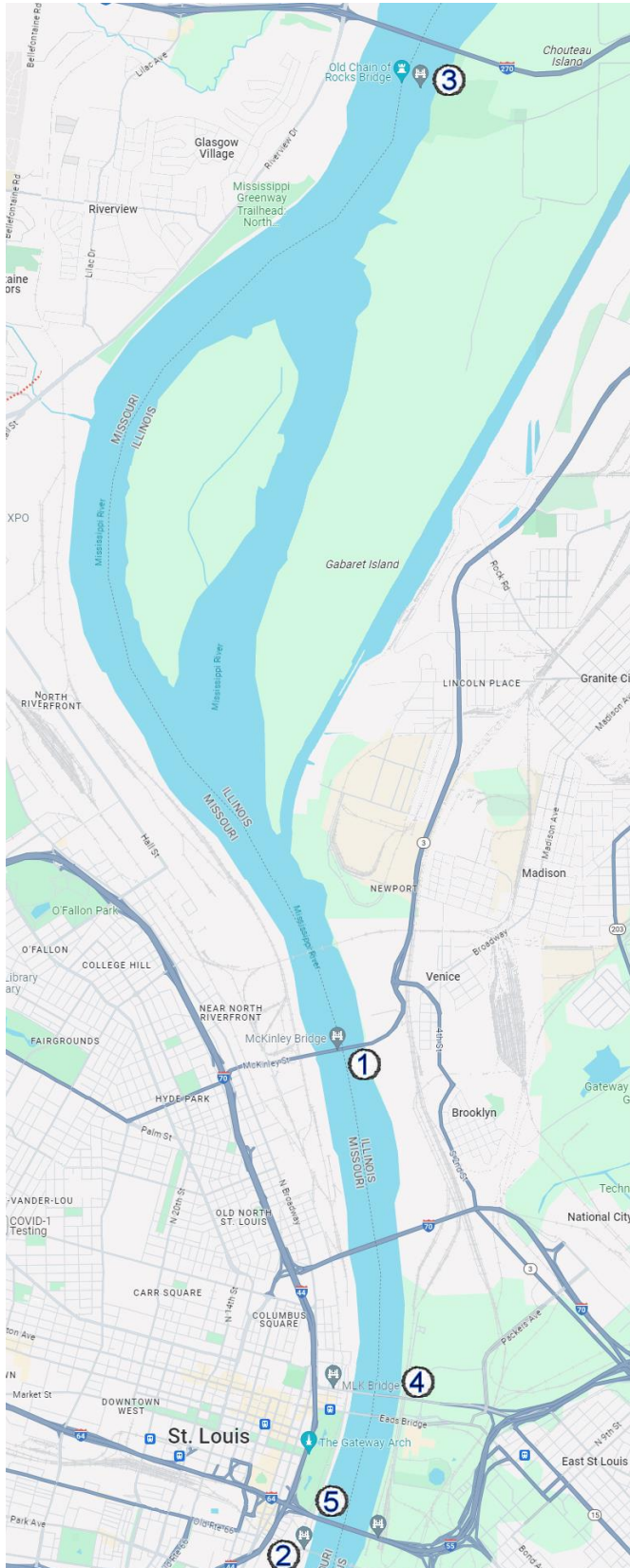


The Bridges of Madison (and St. Clair) County



Route 66 entered Missouri from Illinois by a variety of alignments. While the alignments themselves are numerous (and can be confusing) on either side of the river, we are taking a look at the five bridges that crossed the Mississippi carrying US 66 traffic over the years. Some of these carried both mainline US 66 and various alternate 66 routings. Of the following, only the MacArthur bridge is completely closed to vehicular traffic, as arranged trips across the Chain of Rocks Bridge are available with special permits as of the time of this writing; the remaining three bridges are fully operational. All five of the bridges connect to either of the two counties, Madison or St. Clair, in Illinois.

The numbers for each bridge indicate the order in which the bridges served as mainline US 66. Those numbers also correlate to the numbers on the overview map. Three of the five bridges still carry traffic, while one only carries rail traffic and the other is closed to vehicular traffic.

The Poplar Street Bridge is now used to carry the traffic of I-55 across the river. I-55 was the final alignment of US 66 until its ultimate decommissioning, which took place in Illinois in 1977.

There are multiple other bridges crossing the Mississippi into St. Louis that were never used to carry Route 66 traffic. Among these is the Eads Bridge, the oldest existing bridge over the Mississippi River. It was initiated in 1867 and opened in 1874 and is a marvel itself. At the time of its construction, it was regarded by many as the Eighth Wonder of the World. The Eads is located just south of the MLK Bridge, which was the fourth bridge used by Route 66 to cross the Mississippi.

We'll now take a look at those five bridges...

Madison County

1. McKinley Bridge (1926-1929, 1929-1936 as Optional 66)

Steel truss bridge of about 4,162'; connects Venice, Illinois to northern portions of St. Louis, Missouri
Built by the Illinois Traction electric interurban railroad from 1907-1910.



Opened in 1910, this was the first bridge in St. Louis to carry Route 66 traffic over the Mississippi River. The bridge shared its roadway with railroad traffic until 1978, with the rails running down the center of the bridge. In 2001, long after the bridge ceased to carry Route 66 traffic, it was closed due to deterioration. However, the bridge once again carries traffic, having been open to vehicles after rehabilitation in 2007. Trivia: the bridge was *not* named after the U.S. President, but after its builder, William B. McKinley.

3. Chain of Rocks Bridge (1935-1955, 1955-1966 as Bypass 66)

Cantilever through-truss, total length about 5,353 feet'; connects Madison, Illinois to St. Louis, Missouri
Built by the Chain-of-Rocks and Kingshighway Bridge Company from 1927-1929.



Supplanting the McKinley and MacArthur Bridges, this is one of the more famous bridges along the entire route, owing to its unique bend in the middle. Originally a toll bridge, tolls were removed in 1966. The bridge was closed in 1970, following the construction of the New Chain of Rocks Bridge, part of I-270. The bridge is now open primarily as a pedestrian and bike path running from Chouteau Island in Illinois to St. Louis in Missouri. The Illinois approach includes a bridge over the Chain of Rocks Canal that has been altered to one-lane of traffic; it was a two-lane bridge when the road was still US 66. The bridge is visible to the south from I-270.

St. Clair County

2. St. Louis Municipal/MacArthur Bridge (1929-1935, 1935-1955 as City Route 66)

Truss bridge of about 18,261'; connects East St. Louis, Illinois to St. Louis, Missouri

Built by the City of St. Louis; initiated in 1909, completed in 1917.



Originally opened to automobile traffic in 1917, rails were competed on the lower deck in 1928. Known the “Free Bridge,” as it had no tolls (although they were instituted in 1932). The bridge was closed to non-rail traffic in 1981 and now serves only as a railroad crossing. The bridge was renamed in 1942 in honor of General Douglas MacArthur. When completed, it was the largest double-deck steel bridge in the world and remains the longest bridge in Missouri. This bridge is visible just to the south

of the Poplar Street Bridge. Trivia: nicknamed “Death’s diving board” due to a number of cars driving off the area where the road swerved to meet the bridge, a drop of about 100’.

4. Veterans Memorial/MLK Bridge (1955-1969)

Cantilever truss bridge of about 4,000'; connects East St. Louis, Illinois to St. Louis, Missouri

Built by the City of East St. Louis as a toll bridge in 1951.



Built to relieve congestion on the MacArthur bridge, it was renamed after Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. Tolls removed in 1987. The bridge was closed for some time in the late 1980s, reopening in 1989. The bridge was again closed briefly in 2009 to address safety issues, reconfiguring the lanes of traffic. In 2018 the bridge was once again closed to re-deck, resurface, and repaint the bridge, with the bridge reopening in 2020. This bridge is just to the north of the Eads Bridge.

5. Bernard F. Dickmann/Congressman William L. Clay Sr./Poplar Street Bridge (1969-1979)

A 647-foot-long deck girder bridge; connects East St. Louis, Illinois to St. Louis, Missouri

Construction initiated in 1959; cooperative effort by the states of Illinois and Missouri.



Completed in 1967, this is the final bridge used by US 66 to cross the Mississippi River. This bridge is currently used by Route 66’s replacement, I-55. The bridge is of a more modern design than its predecessors and is void of the trusses and similar superstructure seen on those other bridges. As those who have traveled on this portion of the highway can attest, this is a very busy bridge and is the second most heavily used bridge on the Mississippi.