



# Downtown seen as less active because attractions are spread over wide area

By [Tom Daykin](#) of the Journal Sentinel  
May 15, 2015

Downtown Milwaukee has a lot of attractions compared with similar cities, but it's seen as less active because those event venues, restaurants, museums and other facilities are spread out over a large area.

That's according to a new study on how downtown's entertainment scene compares with Kansas City, Cincinnati, Indianapolis and other cities.

The study was conducted by Hunden Strategic Partners and commissioned by the Greater Milwaukee Committee and the Milwaukee Downtown Business Improvement District. The committee is a nonprofit civic group funded by businesses and other members, and the nonprofit district represents downtown businesses and is funded by assessments on downtown commercial properties.

Hunden, based in Chicago, was asked to compare downtown Milwaukee with 10 similar cities at a time when a possible new Milwaukee Bucks arena is being considered.

Downtown Milwaukee is "fairly comparable" to those other downtowns based on the number and size of event facilities and theaters, museums, restaurants and historic buildings, the study said.

"However, because its downtown is so geographically large, it can be perceived as not as active as other cities with the same number of assets within a smaller area," the study concluded.

So, "visitors do not necessarily feel like there is a large hub of activity, but rather multiple spread-out smaller nodes of bars, restaurants and entertainment options," it said.

Also, downtown has fewer hotel rooms, restaurants and bars and less convention space than most of its peer cities, the study said. Those comparable cities have an average metro population of 2.1 million, compared with the metro Milwaukee population of 1.6 million.

Downtown Milwaukee's strengths include a strong cluster of live performance venues, which should be strongly promoted, it said.

Also Milwaukee, for its size, has a wide variety of boutique historical and "cutting edge hip hotels of all sizes."

Weaknesses include an "undersized" convention center and number of nearby hotel rooms, far fewer restaurants at all price levels compared with Milwaukee's peers, and a lack of restaurants in the area immediately around the Wisconsin Center convention facility and BMO Harris Bradley Center.

There also is a lack of connections among downtown's active areas, the report said.

"Due to the large physical area taken up by downtown, Milwaukee's nodes of dining and nightlife activity are fairly spread out and there is no easy way to experience them all without using a car," it said.

The recently approved downtown streetcar "is a great start" to solving that problem, the report said.

An ongoing effort to redevelop the city-owned parking lot at N. 4th St. and W. Wisconsin Ave., just south of the Wisconsin Center, has raised similar issues about [downtown's west side](#).

*The report will be presented at a Public Policy Forum [luncheon event](#) from 11:45 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Monday at the Intercontinental Milwaukee, 139 E. Kilbourn Ave. For information, contact Therese Schneider, [tschneider@publicpolicyforum.org](mailto:tschneider@publicpolicyforum.org) or (414) 276-8240, Ext. 3.*

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.jsonline.com/business/downtown-seen-as-less-active-because-attractions-are-spread-over-wide-area-b99498771z1-303813461.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.