

Our
CONGRESS AVENUE

**STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS —
URBAN DESIGN INITIATIVE**

PAC AUG 7, 2017

Congress Ave – Urban Design Initiative

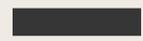
- **The City of Austin in partnership with the Downtown Austin Alliance**
- **A continuation of years of effort since the 1970s plan**
- **Building on numerous studies, plans and City objectives**
- **This Initiative began in 2015, consultant engaged in March 2017, planning acceptance in Spring 2018**
- **Tonya Swartzendruber – Planning & Zoning,
David Taylor – PWD**

P1

Over one hundred fifty residents, employees, visitors and friends joined the City, the DAA, and the design team to “walk the Avenue” (laid out in colorful tape across the floor) and to engage in lively discussions about the future of this urban corridor.

161

Attendees



517

Comment
Cards



P2

The second public event was held at various locations along Congress Avenue on June 2-3, 2017.

180

Attendees

248

Comment Cards

48

Street Section Models



Online

Online engagement extended outreach to many Austonians who were unable to attend a physical event.

131

Online Cards

572

OurCongressAve
Responses



Total Public Input Received

- Online surveys - Thematic (139) and Map-based (530)
- P1 - Attendees (161) and Comment Cards (16 cards x 36 ea)
- P2 - Comment Cards (248) and section models (33)
- P2 - Email addresses recorded (180)
- Focus groups (24)

Comment Cards

ECONOMICS

The recently adopted South Central Waterfront Vision Plan proposes several million square feet of new development around South Congress Avenue over the coming years, including a mix of residential, office, retail, and hotel uses.

CULTURE & HISTORY

There are 46 locally designated landmarked buildings that front the Avenue, four of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places—the State Capitol Building, the Southwestern Telephone Telegraph Building, the Paramount Theatre, and the Lundberg Bakery. In addition, the entire Congress Avenue is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

517

Question cards received

ENVIRONMENT

Ann W. Richards Convention Center hosts the world's largest urban bat colony of 1.5 million Mexican free-tailed bats. These bat friends eat from 10,000 to 20,000 pounds of insects, including agricultural pests and mosquitoes a night!

MOBILITY & CONNECTIVITY

13% of people who live downtown walk or bike to work, compared to **4%** in all of Austin.



MOBILITY & CONNECTIVITY

There is strong consensus that a **better walking and biking** environment is important. At the same time, **driving remains an important way** for people to get to and around the Avenue.

Where do you park if you drive to Congress Avenue?

32 Card Responses
127 Online Responses



Do you use Congress Avenue to cross the Lake by bike? Or to access the Butler Hike and Bike Trail?

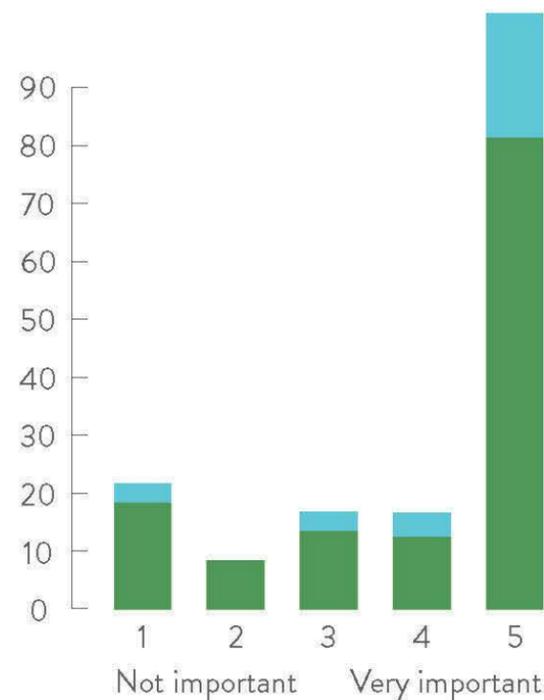
33 Card Responses
131 Online Responses



How important is creating a better environment for walking and biking along the renewed Congress Avenue?

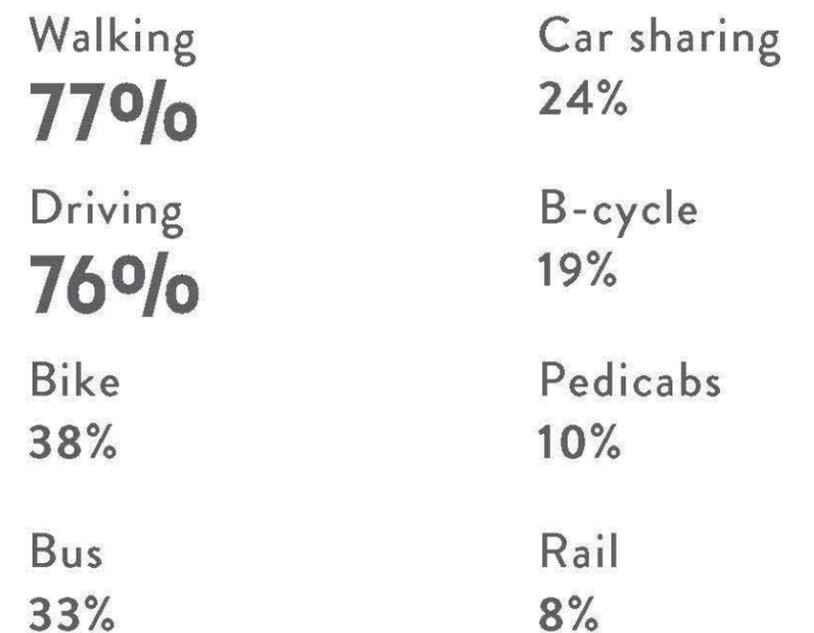
32 Card Responses
134 Online Responses

3.7 Average



Which transportation options do you use to get to and around Congress Avenue?

33 Card Responses
136 Online Responses



MOBILITY & CONNECTIVITY

Where do you park if you drive to Congress Ave?

- On-street Parking
- Surface Parking
- Private Parking
- Nearby Garages

How do you think we can improve parking in Downtown?

- add garages
- add the trolleys
- take parks off Congress
- ~~add bike to~~ walk to downtown

Where do you park if you drive to Congress Ave?

- On-street Parking
 - Surface Parking
 - Private Parking
 - Nearby Garages
- I work downtown

How do you think we can improve parking in Downtown?

Increase price of on-street parking & decrease price of off-street parking. People circling & looking for on-street parking is a problem.

What's your idea for improving walking and biking along and around Congress Avenue?

“Another **pedestrian/bicycle bridge**, yet with more greenery and seating. It can double as **bat viewing bridge**.”

What are your ideas for making it easier for cyclists to Cross Lady Bird Lake and access the Butler Hike and Bike trail along the lake?

“**Consistent. Bike. Lanes.**”

“**Dedicated bike lanes**—it is freakin' scary to share that right lane with cars”

If you wanted to use one of these options, do you know where to find the information? If not, where do you wish you could find it?

“...I wish the City had an **easy to use app** with all the information easily accessible. For a tech city, we sure do not seem to use it.”

Focus Groups

In-depth focus group conversations took place with over a hundred stakeholders across diverse interest groups.

19

Focus Groups

103

Focus Group Attendees



Erratic Physical Environment

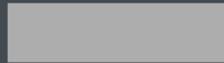
- Lack of a **cohesive, consistent** physical environment
- Creates problems from **safety, identity and mobility** standpoints
- Feels like Congress Avenue **lacks a solid vision**
- **Irregular** physical terrain—changes in cross slopes, crossing indicators, and lighting
- Lack of **cohesion with amenities**: public art, green space, signage
- Large breaks in what could/should be a **comfortable walking environment**

“There are variations in the direction of the accessible route...More **uninterrupted straight/linear routes** would be ideal.

“...in Chicago very big plant beds are used, incorporating high soil volumes, **high plant cover** for the area, while still allowing for cafes, and for **people to move** around...

“Congress Avenue should have a **contemporary** streetscape and timeless, high-level, **state-of the art civic design**.

Task 1 Report - Transportation & Mobility



MOBILITY & CONNECTIONS

Many plans and reports have been developed for areas ranging in scale from the region, to the county, to the city, and to downtown-specific reports. A previous Congress Avenue strategic report led to the current project. These plans, reports, and the data included in them should inform the work of the Congress Avenue Design Initiative. The Transportation Planning Context section of the Appendix summarizes the following plans and identifies the most pertinent information that will be included in the ultimate Mobility Report.

- Austin Strategic Mobility Plan 2025
- Austin Metropolitan Area Transportation Plan
- Connections 2025
- Downtown Austin Plan
- Downtown Austin Alliance Downtown Parking Strategy
- Briefing Book 2040
- Regional Transportation Plan 2045
- Regional Active Transportation Plan



TRANSIT ROUTES

At present, **Congress Avenue itself does not carry any regular capMetro routes.** Austin's primary north-south transit corridor utilizes the Lavaca-Guadalupe pair and the First Street Bridge. Regular bus service intersects with Congress at 4th, 5th, 8th and 11th Streets.

Because it is interrupted at the Capitol, Congress Avenue is unlikely to play a more major role in the city's bus system. The design process can proceed on the assumption that no features associated with significant volumes of bus traffic (such as dedicated bus lanes) will need to be accommodated on Congress Avenue.

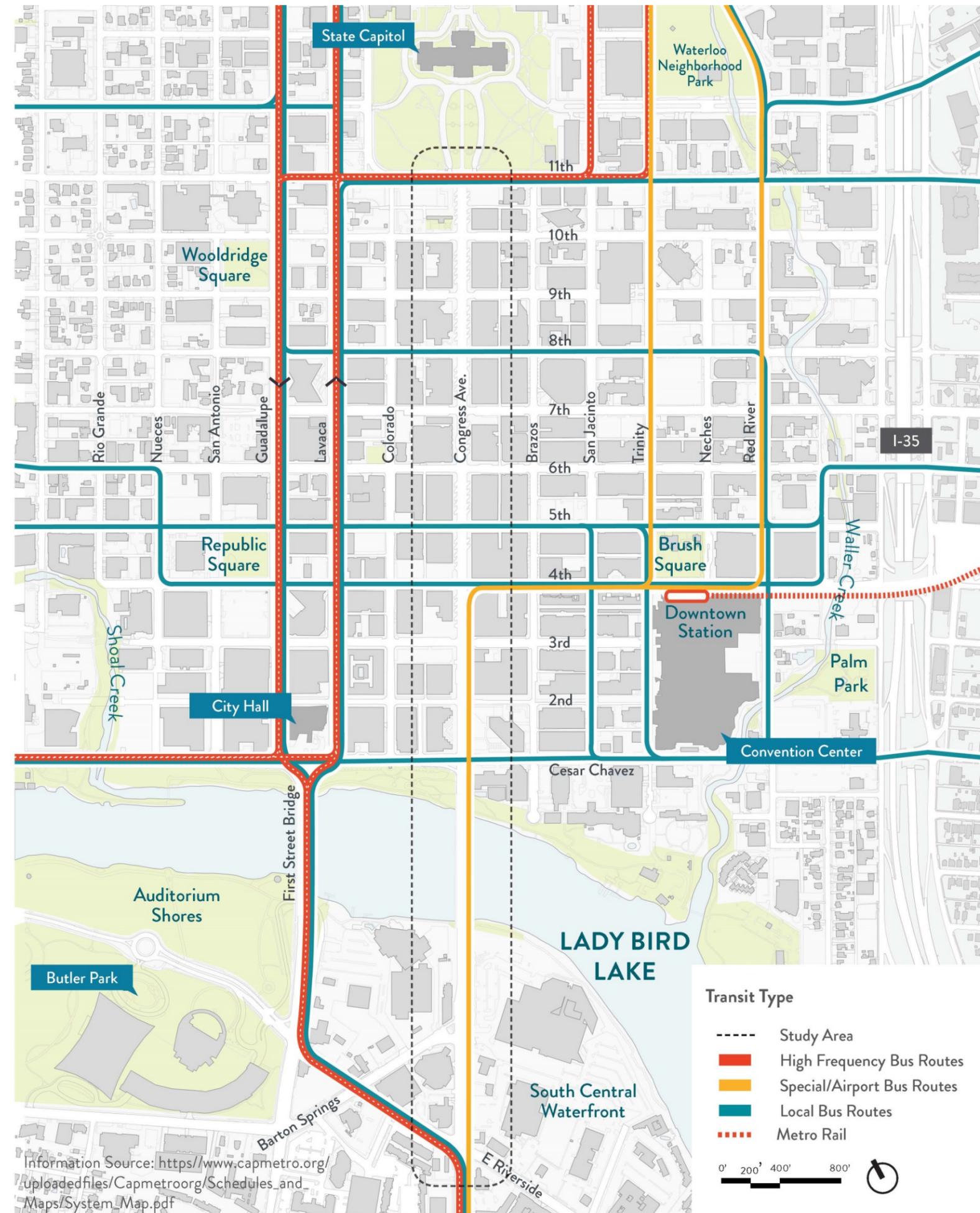
Plans for light rail in Austin are in limbo; in any case, Congress Avenue does not appear to be part of them. The Lavaca-Guadalupe corridor is a more appropriate alignment than Congress Avenue.



Metro Rail



Capital Metro Bus



BIKE ROUTES

Though Congress Avenue falls into the Medium Comfort category for cycling, **there are no dedicated lanes or protection for cyclists**-only sharrows. Similarly, there are no intersection bicycle accommodations such as bike-actuated signals or green boxes. Despite the lack of bicycle infrastructure, there is a large cyclist presence along the corridor, as well as many B-cycle locations on or just off Congress.

The Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge crossing is intimidating for cyclists-its 6-lane cross-section and uninterrupted length encourage high vehicular speeds.

The prevalence of one-way streets throughout the downtown makes east-west bike travel circuitous.

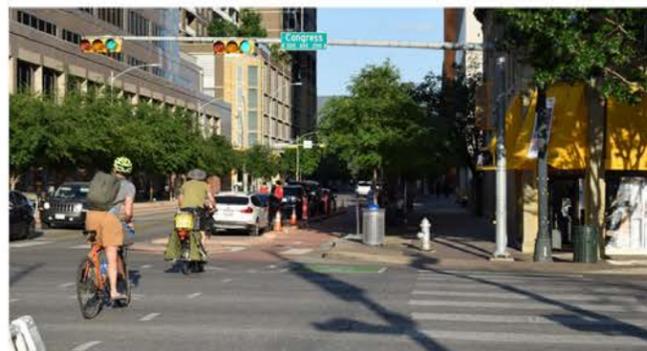
The angled parking present on Congress Avenue has advantages and disadvantages for bikes: dooring danger is eliminated, but backing out of spaces is a hazard.



Medium Comfort Roads



B-Cycle Station



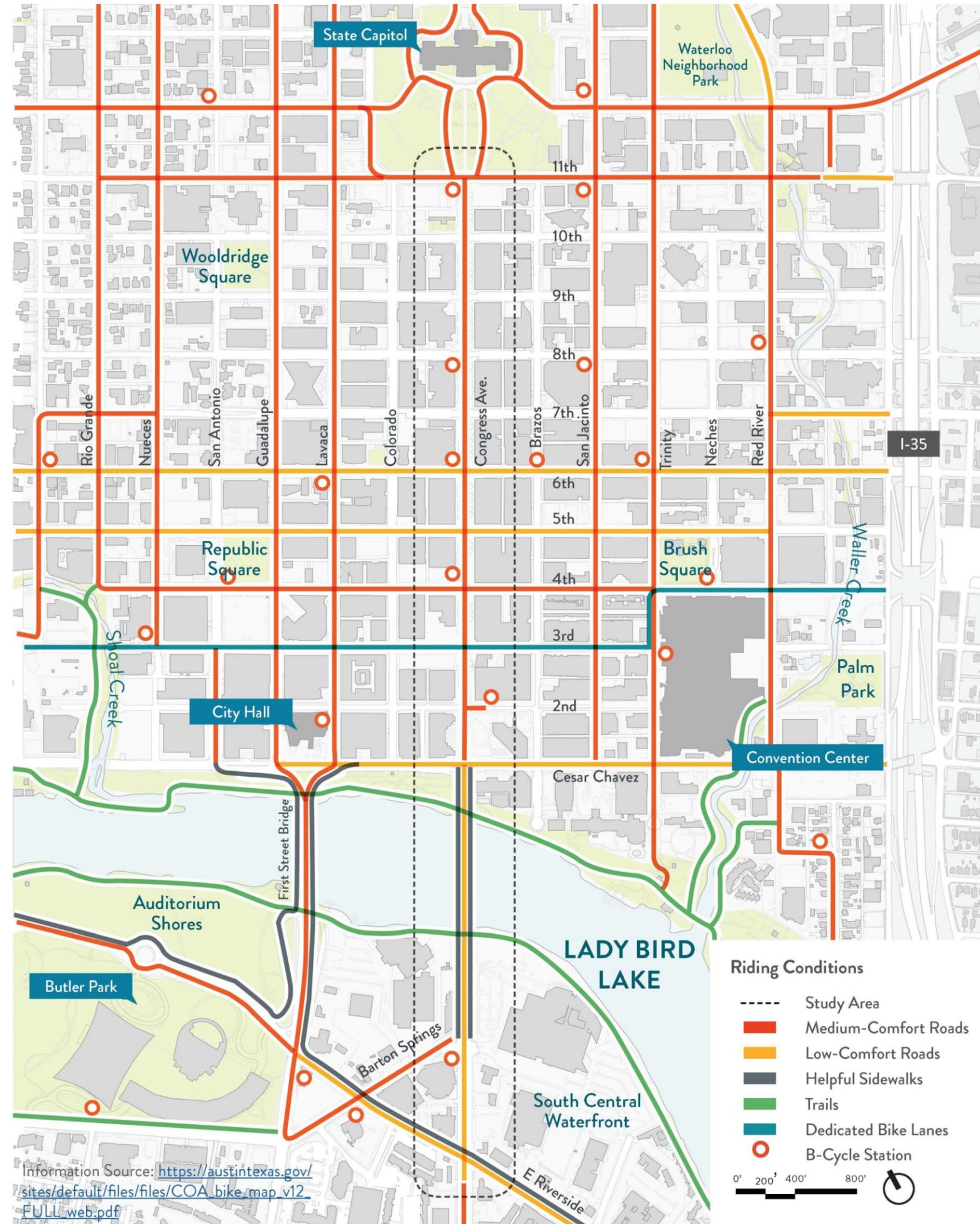
Dedicated Bike Lanes on 3rd Street



Bicycle Trails
DRAFT



Helpful Sidewalks



KEY CONNECTIONS & MAJOR ROUTES

There is a large pedestrian presence along the corridor. Crosswalks are often encroached upon by right turning traffic. Not all signals have leading pedestrian intervals.

Despite the lack of bicycle infrastructure along Congress – lanes, bike-responsive signals – **there is a large cyclist presence along the corridor, and many B-cycle locations.**

No regular bus routes run along Congress, utilizing Lavaca/Guadalupe instead. A number of Cap Metro routes cross Congress on east-west streets.

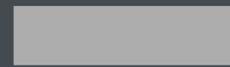
Despite its car-oriented design, Congress connects many popular local and tourist destinations and serves pedestrians and cyclist



Schedule

- **“P3 Prep” PDF mailer emailed to public – week of August 21**
 - **What we heard**
 - **Vision & Values 2.0**
 - **Updated opportunities & constraints**
 - **Design option vignettes in preparation for P3**
- **P3 - September 26 – 27**
- **Second public comment period closes - October 20**

Street Model Activity



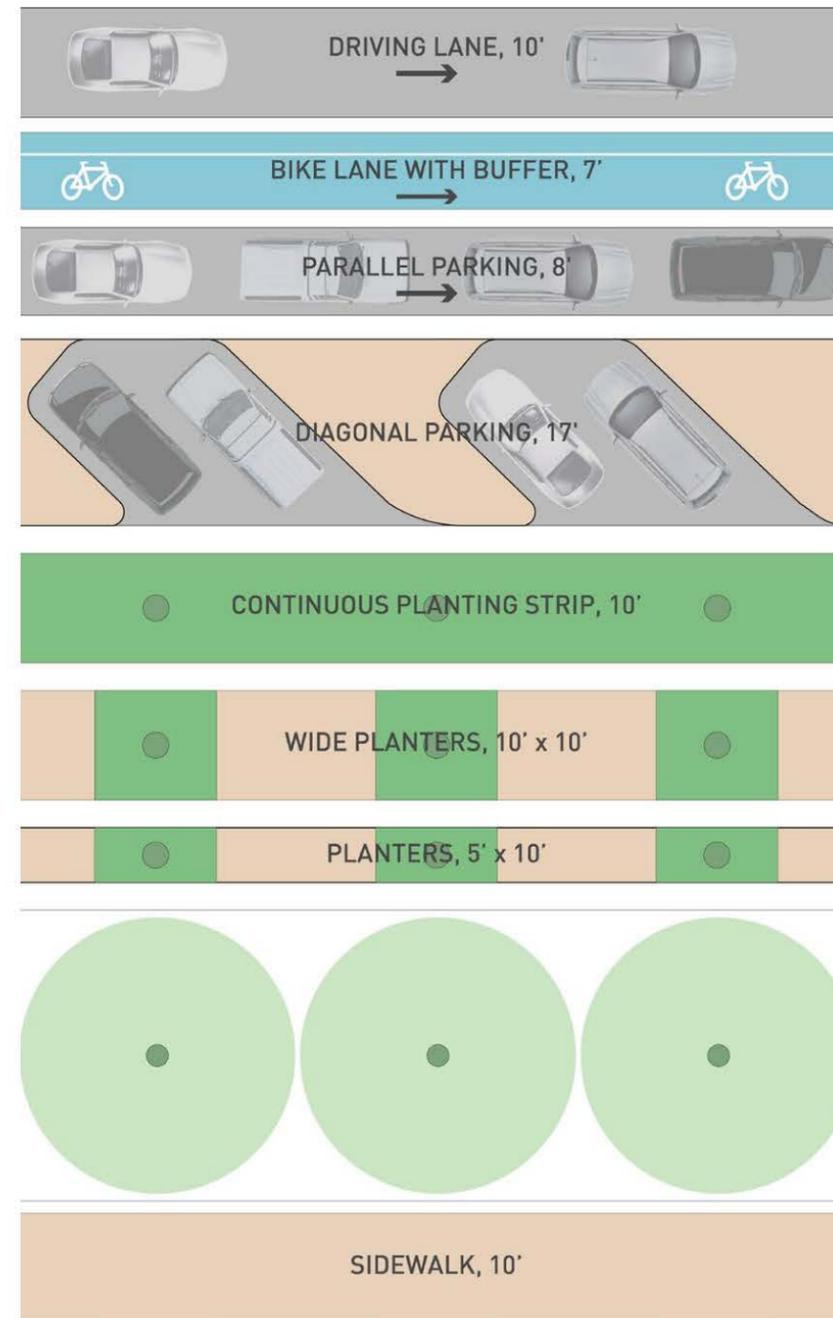
STREET MODEL

Model Base, Existing Street:

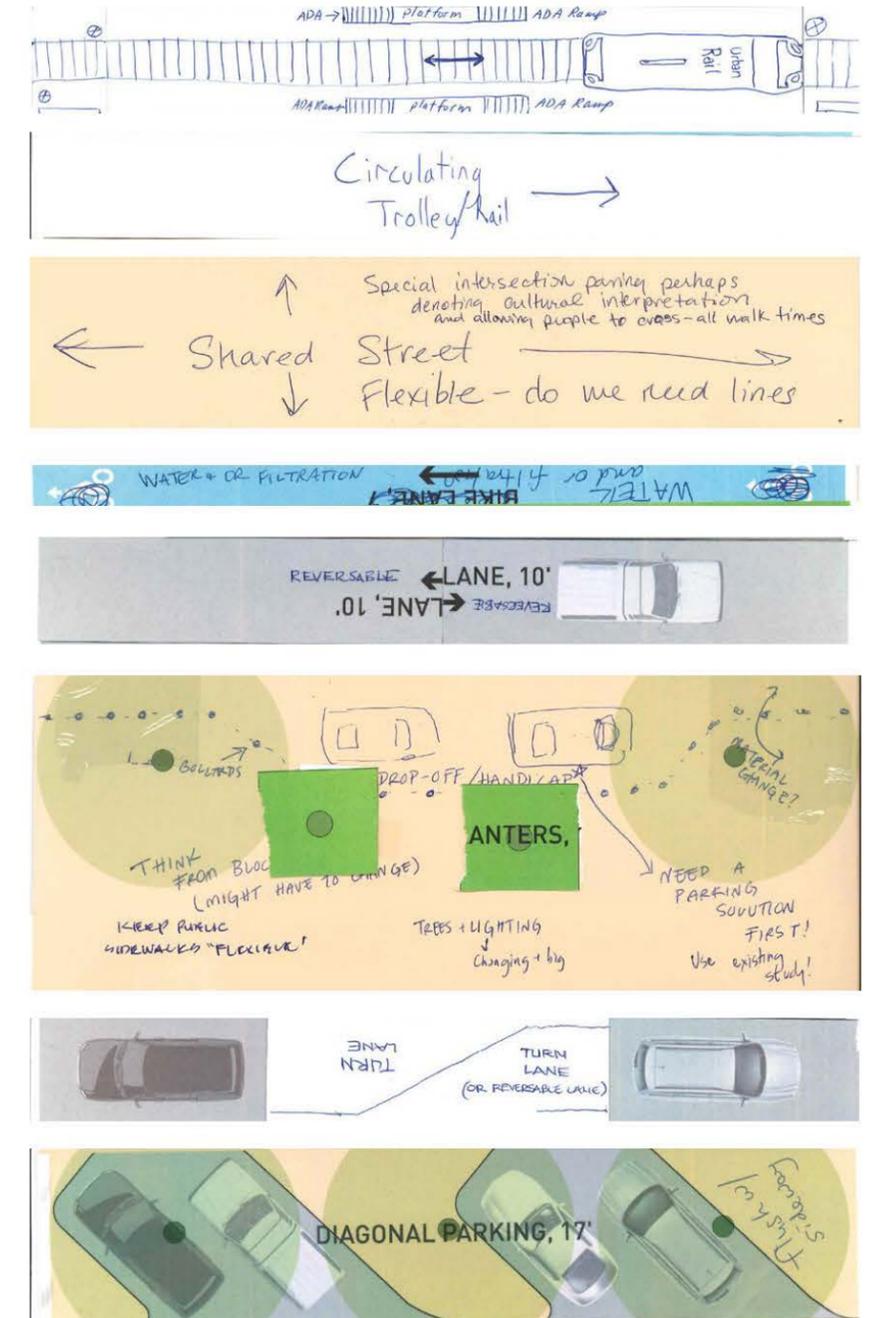


DRAFT

Parts Provided:



Parts Made by Participants:



DRAFT