

CITY OF AUSTIN

# CONGRESS AVENUE URBAN DESIGN INITIATIVE:

## BRIEFING

November 16, 2022

City of Austin  
Historic Landmark Commission  
**Architectural Review  
Committee Presentation**



*This image from the 2011 Downtown Austin Plan illustrates the centrality of the "Main Street of Texas," Congress Avenue.*



# PURPOSE OF TODAY'S BRIEFING

- Familiarize you with the Congress Avenue Urban Design Initiative Project
- Discuss the historic designations and design components in development, including options for structures on the Ann W Richards Congress Ave Bridge
- Solicit your thoughts about the appropriateness of the design directions presented



1913 Postcard View  
of the Avenue (AHC  
C02001)



The 1910 original  
bridge was 50'-wide  
and carried a trolley  
line. In 1980 the  
bridge was  
substantially  
widened, and the  
above-deck features  
lighting and  
guardrails were  
changed to more  
highway-type  
elements.

# INTRODUCTION & KEY PARTNERS

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## CITY OF AUSTIN (OWNER)

- Craig McColloch, Project Manager (Austin Public Works - PWD)
- Laura Dierenfield and Nathan Wilkes (Sponsoring Department: Austin Transportation Department - ATD)
- Jorge Rousselin, Urban Design Division Manager (Housing & Planning)

## TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP

- Stakeholder representatives from City departments and other agencies

## DOWNTOWN AUSTIN ALLIANCE

- Amalia Carmona

## HDR CONSULTANT TEAM (here today)

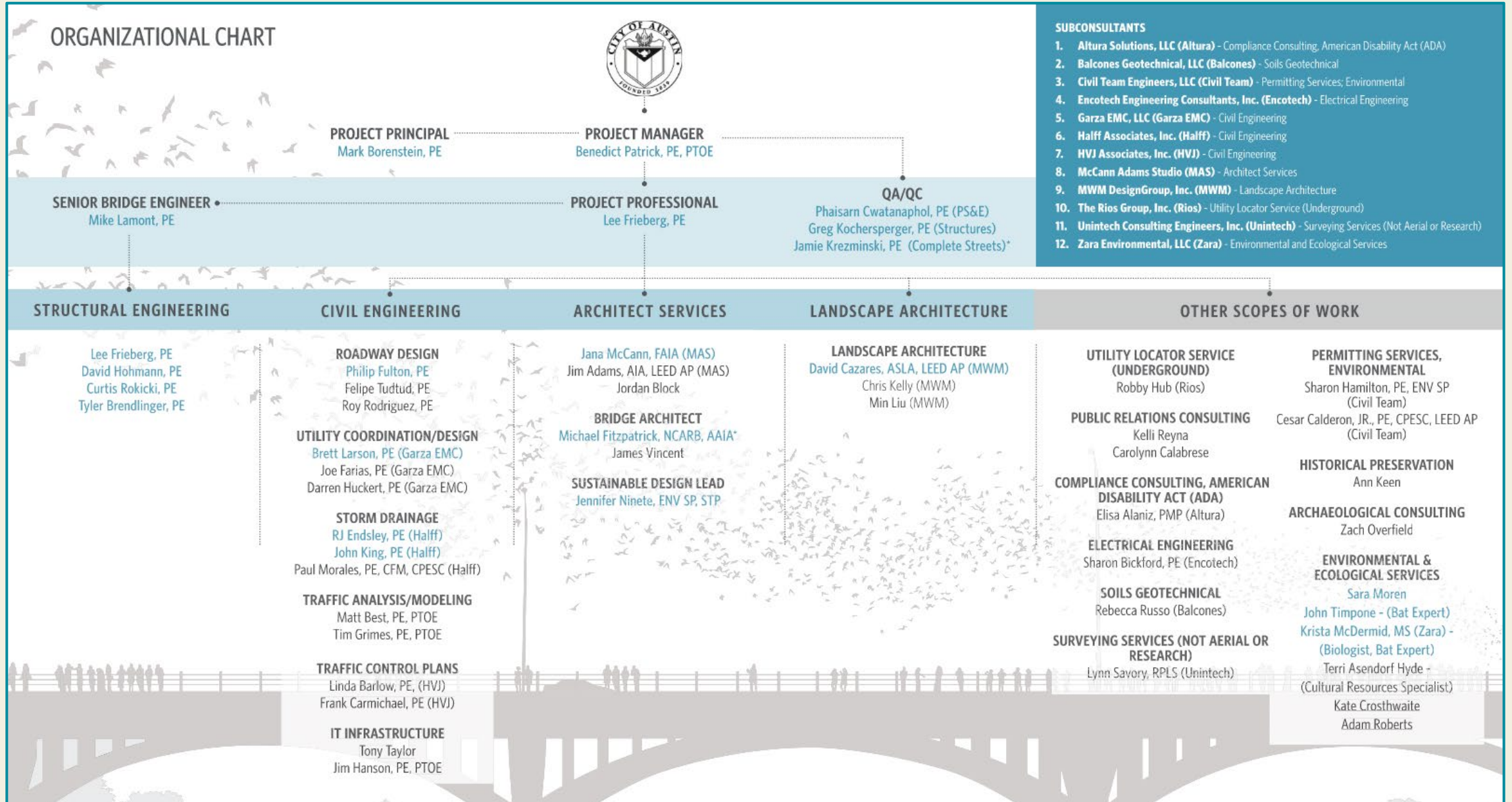
- Benedict Patrick, Project Manager; Lee Frieberg, Project Professional (HDR); Terri Asendorf Hyde, Historic Resources (HDR)
- Jana McCann, FAIA, Lead Architect (McCann Adams Studio)



Public Event #2 in 2018 had activations and pop-up events along the Avenue demonstrating potential streetscape design elements.



# THE HDR CONSULTANT TEAM





# CONGRESS URBAN DESIGN INITIATIVE

- A partnership of the City of Austin and the Downtown Austin Alliance (DAA).
- Encompasses Congress Avenue (11<sup>th</sup> St to Riverside Dr), ~1.2 miles in length.
- The guiding document is the Vision Plan formed through a community process between 2017-2019.
- Initial design and construction funding was allocated through the City's 2020 Active Transportation & Safety Bond.
- Phase 1 will complete **30% design** plans for the entire Project Limits and an initial construction phase.
- The Design Team is about 5 months into an 18-month process.





# THE CONGRESS AVENUE URBAN DESIGN INITIATIVE VISION PLAN

## VISION & VALUES

### SOCIAL EQUITY

Ensure a welcoming,  
accessible, and  
representative space

### MOBILITY & CONNECTIVITY

Balance mobility options  
along Congress Avenue

### CULTURE & HISTORY

Enhance Congress Avenue  
as a historic and cultural  
destination

### ECONOMICS

Amplify the economic  
strength and diversity of  
Congress Avenue

### ENVIRONMENT

Celebrate biodiversity  
and urban habitat in  
a functional, resilient  
streetscape design



**Our CONGRESS AVENUE**  
is a great Texas people place - the cultural,  
historic and commercial spine of downtown  
Austin where people come to **share, celebrate**  
and **create a bright future.**

The Vision will be achieved and  
maintained through loyalty to a set of  
Values related to Character, Function  
and Management. A great street  
needs to do many things well but a  
street asked to perform too many  
tasks is likely to perform none of

them well. Our efforts to achieve the  
Congress Avenue Vision will adhere to  
these Values that will guide what we  
ask of the Avenue and how we direct  
our work.



# HISTORIC RESOURCES: FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL COMPLIANCE

NRHP-Listed Historic Districts and contributing properties:

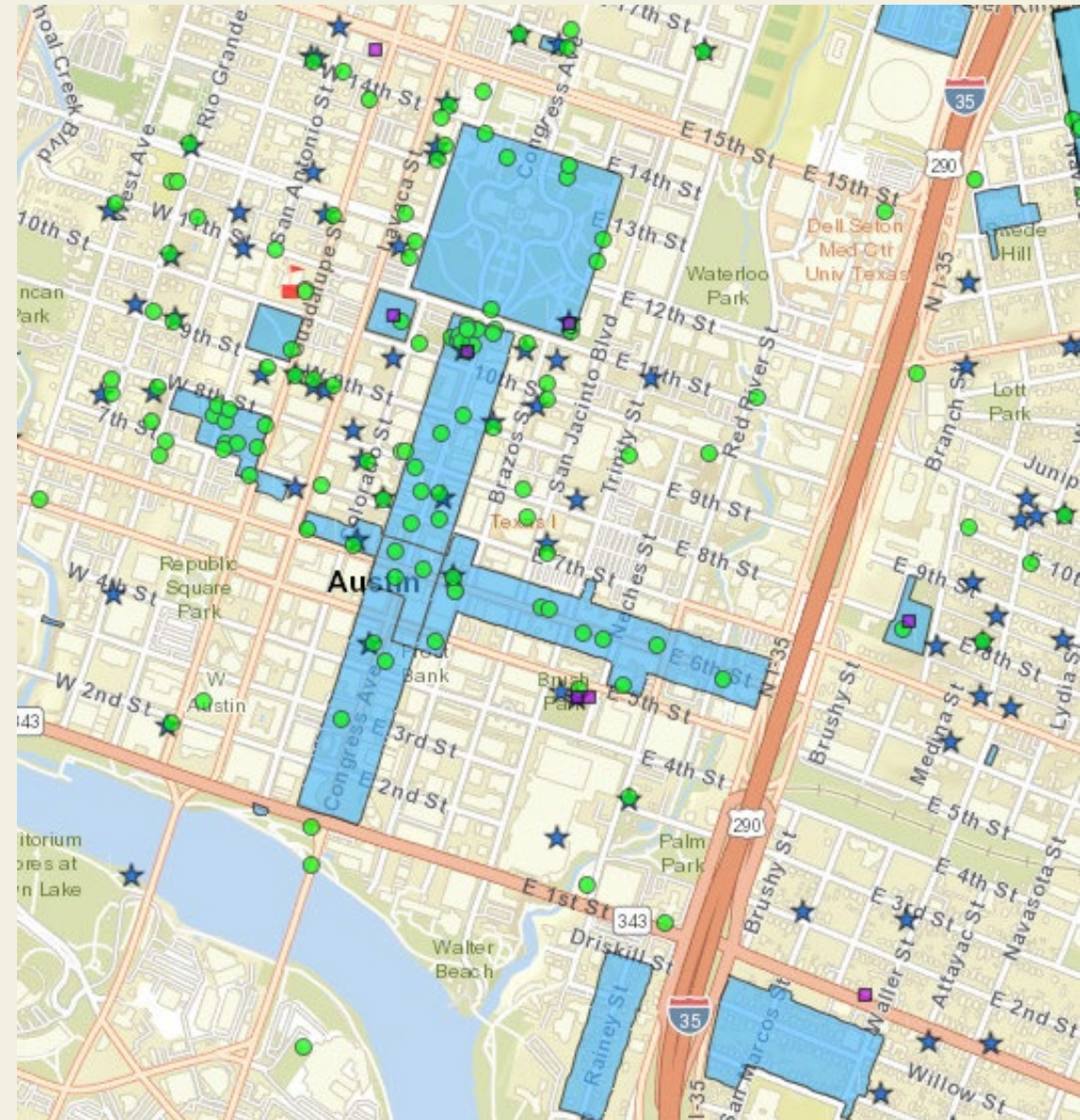
- **Congress Avenue Historic District**
- **Sixth Street Historic District**

*(The City's Historic Design Standards (Sites and Streetscapes section) will be applied to both HDs. The Congress Ave HD also has a building step-back code regulation for new development.)*

NRHP-Eligible Resources:

- **Congress Avenue Bridge**

*(The Secretary of the Interior Standards should be applied, as well as the Texas Historical Commission's (THC) Streetscape Guidelines for Historic Commercial Districts.)*

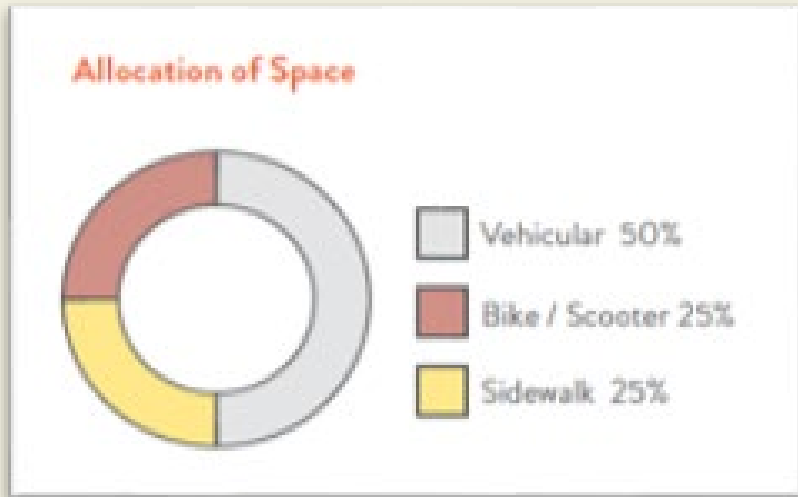
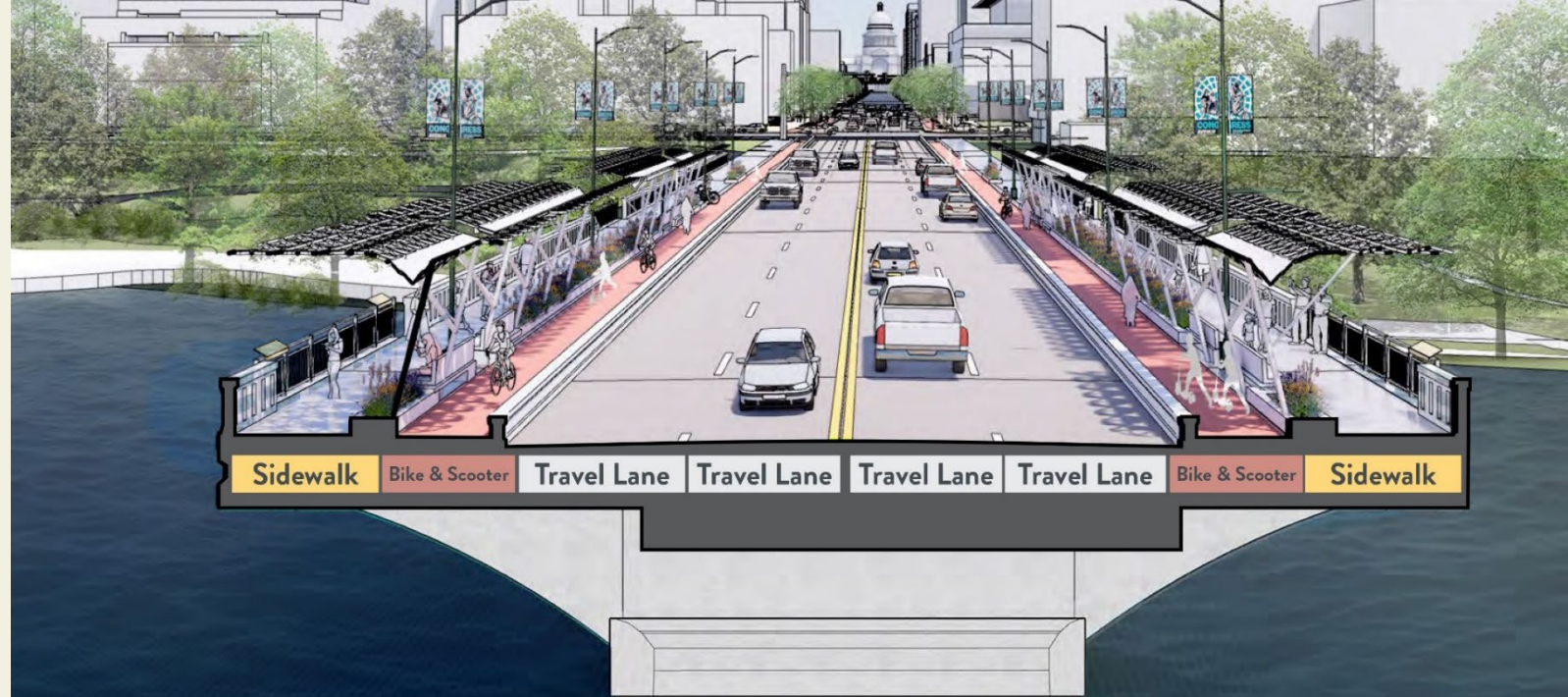


From the THC **Historic Sites Atlas** showing both HDs and individually-listed or NRHP eligible structures.



# THE VISION PLAN: "BALANCE THE AVENUE"

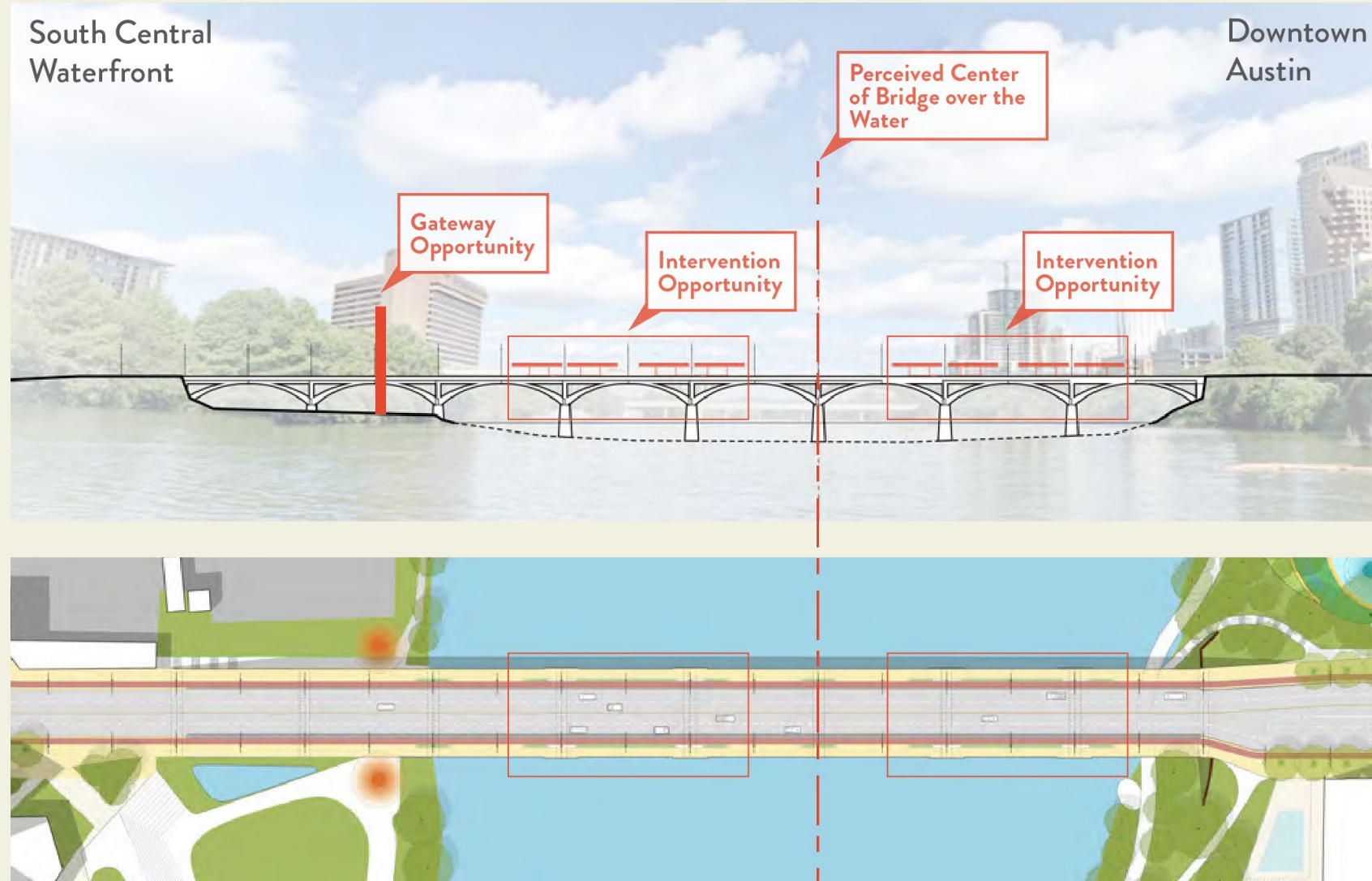
The Vision Plan laid the foundation **"for a more balanced distribution of space that accommodates a variety of mobility options and creates more space for pedestrian activities."**





# THE BRIDGE, PER THE VISION PLAN

"...create a stronger connection to Downtown Austin for all modes of travel and **include elements that strengthen the bridge's identity and improve safety and comfort....**"



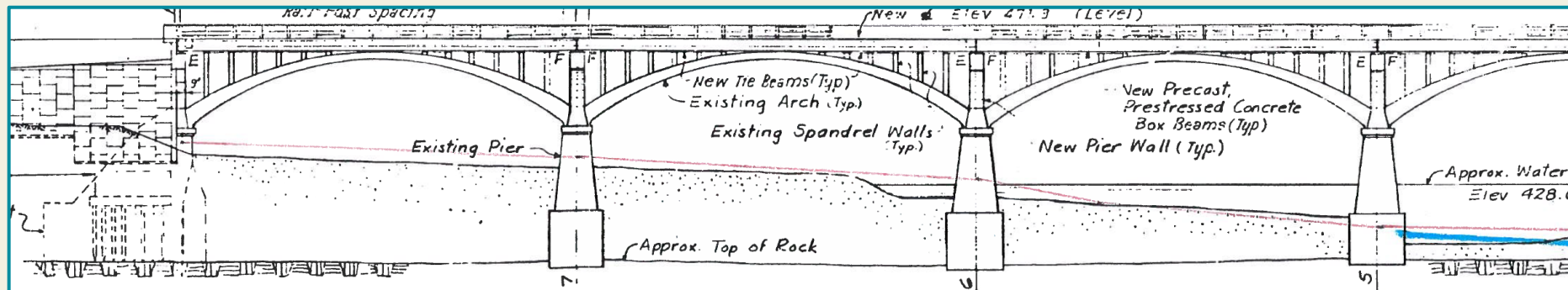
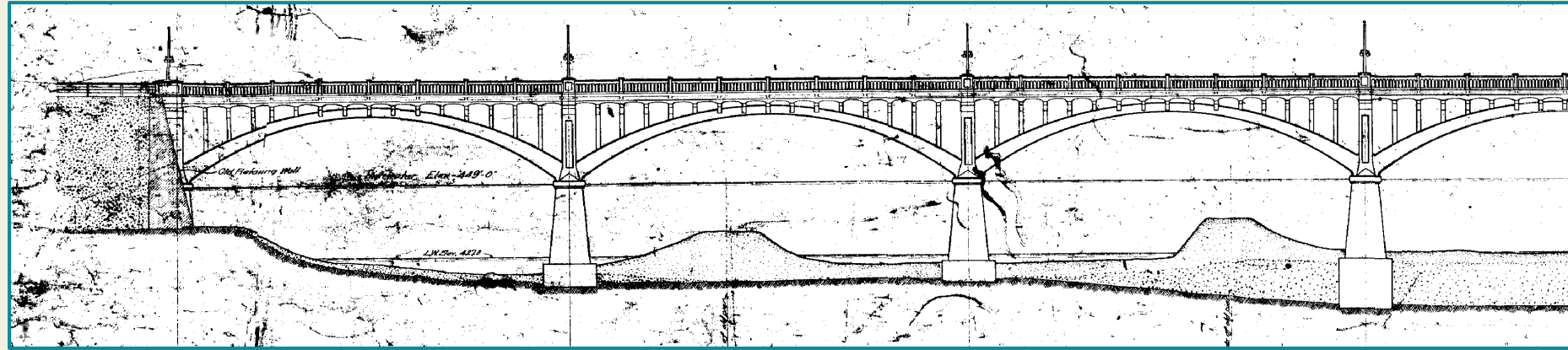
The Vision Plan proposes locations for both gateway and intervention opportunities.



# THE BRIDGE – RESPECTING THE 1910 ARCHES

The elegant and historic concrete arches and buttressed piers of the original bridge remain a strong architectural expression when viewed from the river itself or the parkland areas of both shores.

**Any new canopies, lighting poles and outlooks should reinforce the strong structural expression of the 1910 bridge.**



Comparison of the 1910 bridge elevation (above) to the 1980 widened bridge (below)

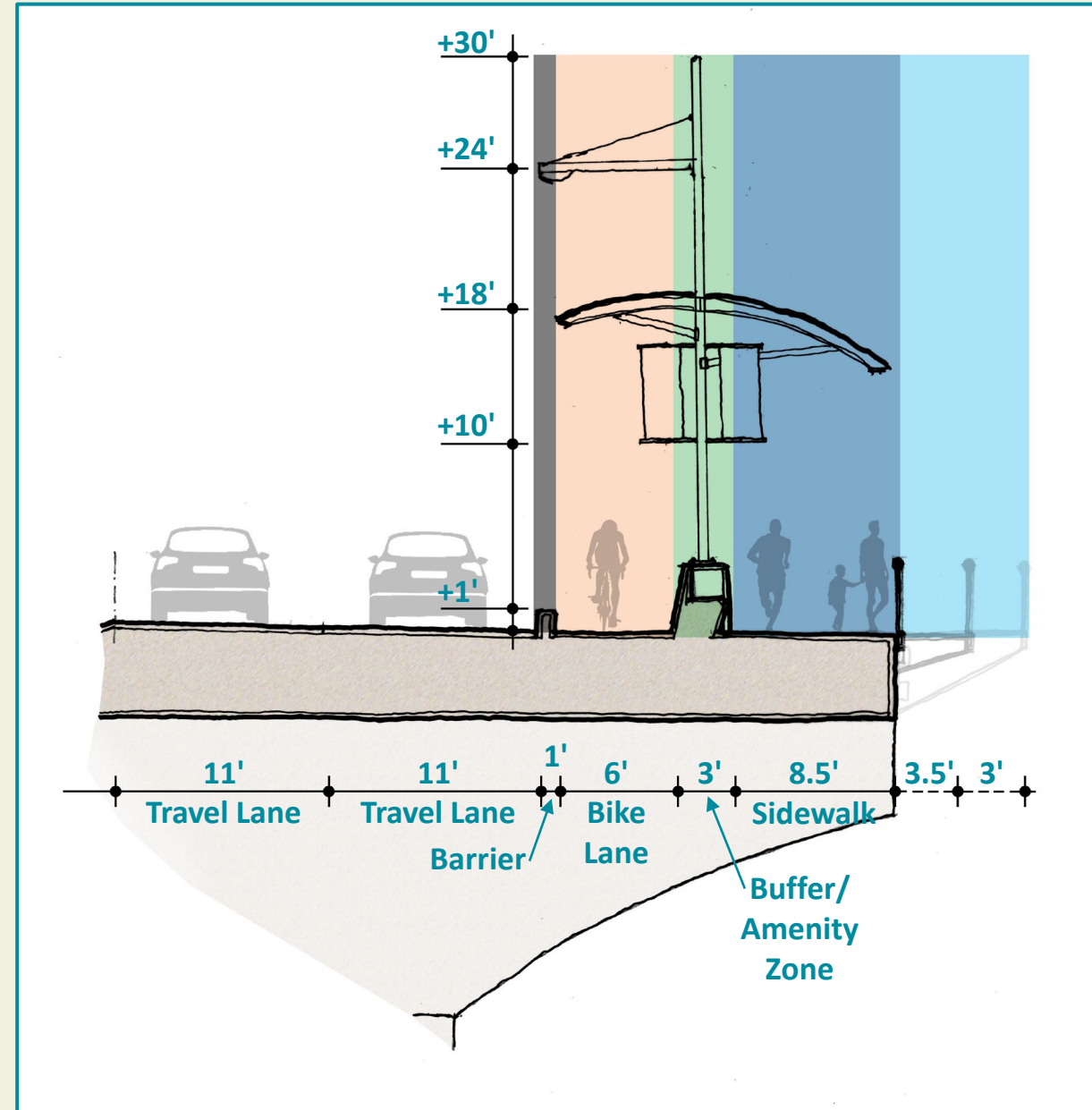


# BRIDGE CANOPIES AND OVERLOOKS

## Design Considerations

1. Consider the impact of any structures in terms of scale: human, lake and city.
2. The canopy design should frame the gateway view to Downtown and signal the importance of the “Main Street of Texas”.
3. Canopies should be located at the pedestrian overlook(s) and should provide shade for pedestrians and bikes/scooters.
4. Any new, vertical structure must remain clear of the Capitol View Corridor #6.

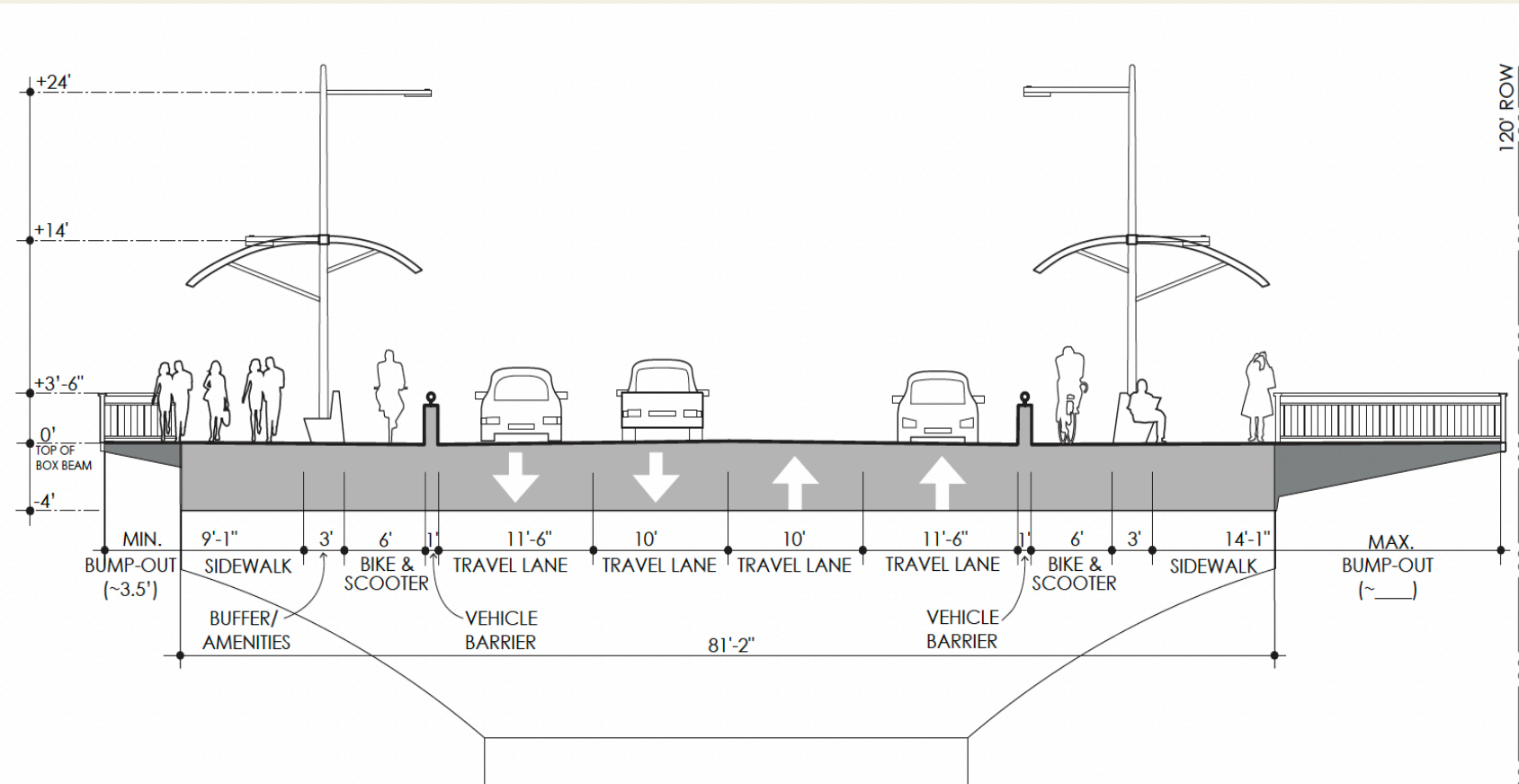
(The CVC #6 viewpoint starts at the center of the intersection of Live Oak St @ S Congress Ave, and its lower plane cuts at ~150' above the existing bridge deck.)





# BRIDGE CANOPIES & OVERLOOK IDEAS

We will study how we can expand the pedestrian space of the bridge, by adding a modest cantilevered extension that could be implemented on both sides of the bridge continuously, and/or by adding up to an 18'-wide extension to create one or more overlooks.



Cross-section of bridge showing both 18'-wide and 4'-wide cantilevered extension options that will be studied.



# BRIDGE CANOPIES & OVERLOOK IDEAS

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# "CONSISTENT" ELEMENTS

We propose the following elements be consistent:

- Maintain consistent **street tree** alignment.
- Maintain consistent **street light pole** alignment.
- Use same larger-format **pavers** in Storefront and Walking zones, and smaller permeable pavers in Amenity Zone.
- Employ the already-designed Downtown **wayfinding** system.



*Street trees help to establish the space of the street and the building frontage zones, and also frame views to the Capitol, as illustrated by the tree lines on Pennsylvania Ave in Washington DC.*



# LIGHTING

The location of lighting poles will likely be changing for both the Avenue and the bridge.

There are at least 3 options for poles and luminaires to consider:

- Retrofit existing, green 1980s light pole and add a lower arm with a pedestrian fixture, per the Vision Plan (recommended by Vision Plan, but retrofit *not* recommended by Austin Energy);
- Relocate 1980s pole and add new ped pole light in between street lighting poles; and
- Remove 1980s pole and bridge poles, and install new, contemporary poles with both roadway and ped luminaires that create a signature statement and are capable of advanced features.





# SEATING & FURNISHINGS



Since the mid-1980s streetscape renovation, the above family of furnishings was selected: the above bench, planter, litter bin, and streetlight – all the same dark green color.

Since then, a wide array of furnishings along Congress Avenue have been installed, including the "Great Streets" bench (right), which disrupts the branding shown above.

**Should the Project re-brand all the key furnishings so there is a consistent identity?**





# QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

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