

CONGRESS AVENUE URBAN DESIGN INITIATIVE

*Environmental
Commission Briefing*

Wednesday March 1, 2023



AGENDA

1. Introductions
2. About the Congress Avenue Urban Design Vision Plan
3. Vision Plan: Key Concepts
 - Balance the Avenue
 - Design Concepts & Placemaking
 - Bridge
 - Green Gateways
 - Interpretive and Public Art Elements
4. Current Scope & Next Steps
5. Questions & Discussion





PROJECT TEAM

CITY OF AUSTIN

- Laura Dierenfield & Nathan Wilkes, Active Transportation and Street Design, Austin Transportation Department
- Jorge Rousselin & Jill Amezcua, Urban Design Division, Housing & Planning Department
- Craig McColloch, Project Manager

DOWNTOWN AUSTIN ALLIANCE LEAD

- Amalia Carmona, AIA

HDR CONSULTANT TEAM

- Benedict Patrick, Project Manager; Lee Frieberg, Project Professional; Sri Koneru, Roadway Lead (HDR)
- Jana McCann, FAIA, Lead Architect (McCann Adams Studio)



CONGRESS AVENUE URBAN DESIGN INITIATIVE

- A partnership of the City of Austin and the Downtown Austin Alliance (DAA).
- Encompasses Congress Avenue (11th 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 Project Team is about 7 months into an 18-month process.

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

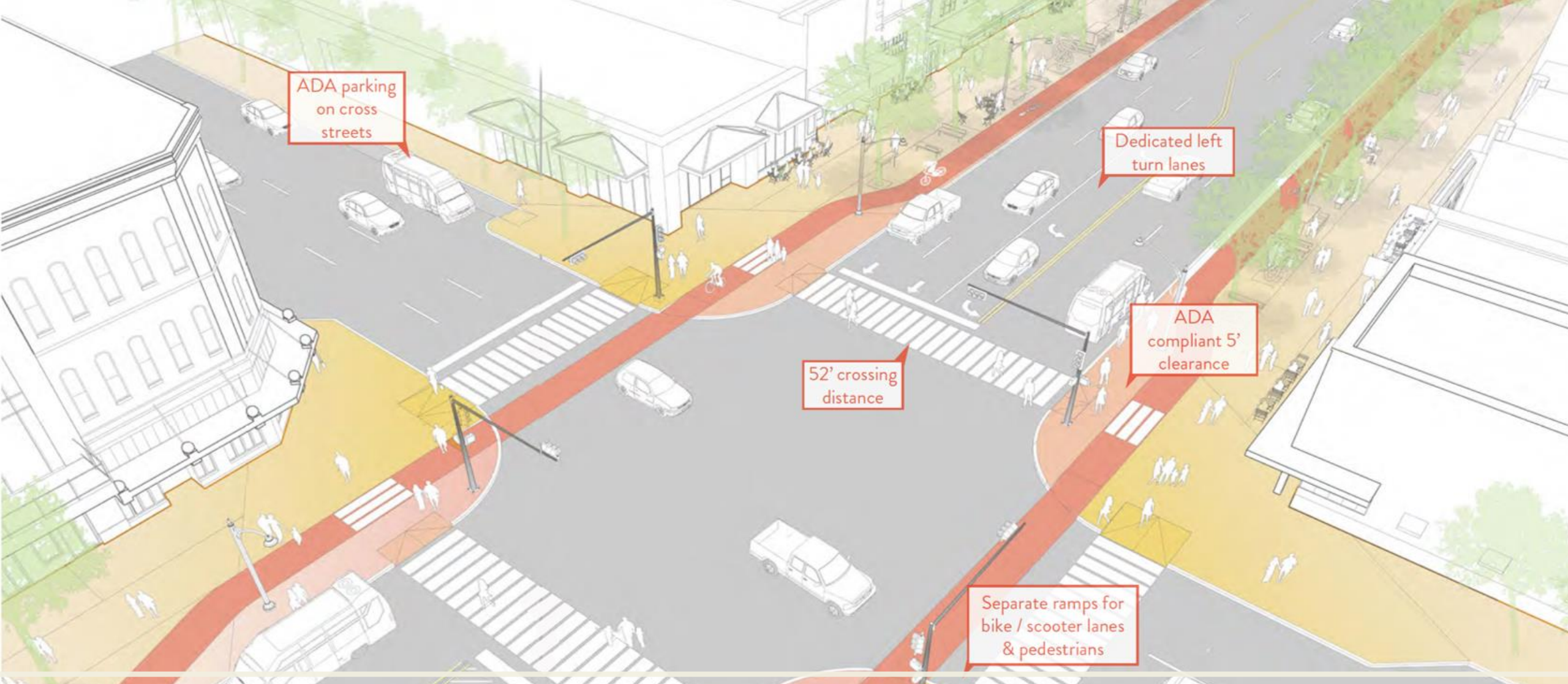
is a great Texas people place
historic and commercial
Austin where people
and create a

OVERVIEW OF THE VISION PLAN

"Congress Avenue, often called the "Main Street of Texas," is one of the most iconic, historic and lively streets in Austin. The Congress Avenue Urban Design Initiative (CAUDI) envisions a transformative urban design, placemaking, and implementation strategy for Congress Avenue between Riverside Dr. and 11th St."

"The goal of this effort is to create a **multifunctional complete street** with a **dynamic public realm** that contributes to Downtown Austin's evolution as a sustainable mixed-use downtown and supports Austin's identity as a unique and iconic cultural city."

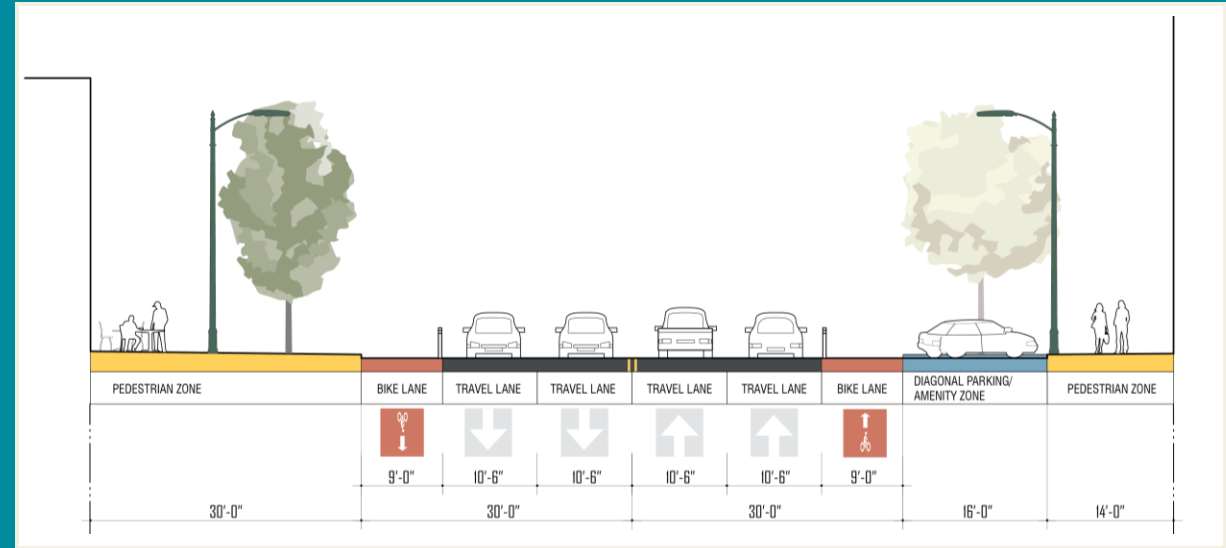




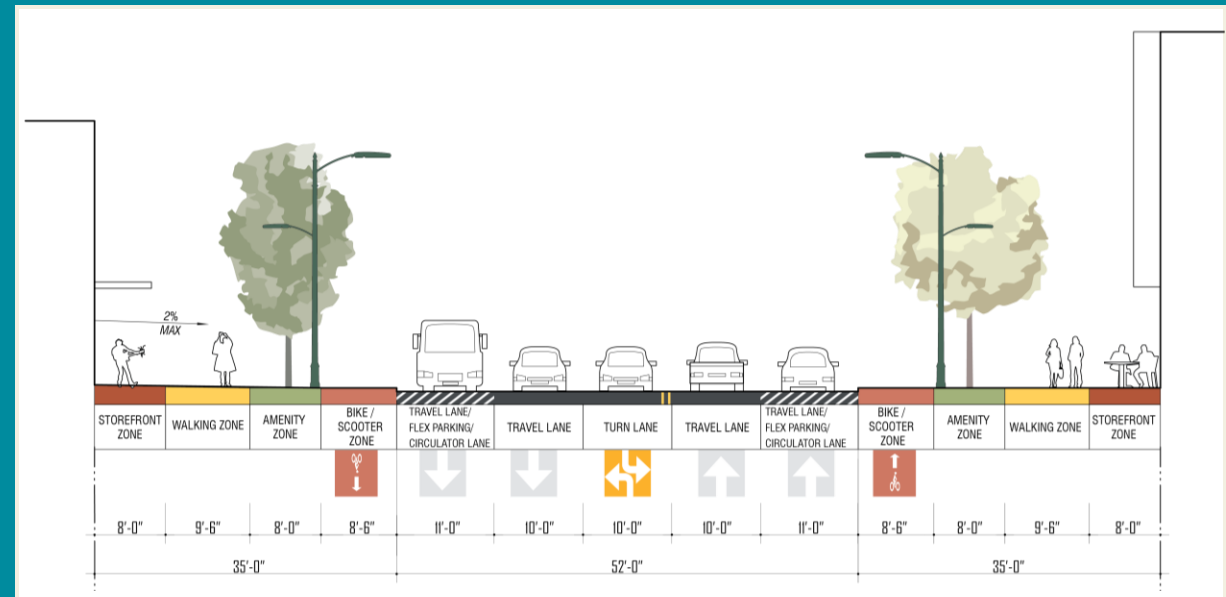
BALANCE THE AVENUE

BALANCE THE AVENUE

"The Avenue's current configuration heavily favors vehicles at the expense of pedestrian activity. The recommendations in this section lay the foundation **for a more balanced distribution of space that accommodates a variety of mobility options** and creates more space for pedestrian activities."



Typical Existing Street Section (was 6 lanes, interim 4 lanes)



Vision Plan: Typical Street Section (5 Vehicle Lanes)

CONGRESS AVENUE CROSS-SECTION PER VISION PLAN



Pedestrian Zone	Amenity Zone	Bike / Scooter Zone	Flex Parking / Travel Lane / Circulator Lane	Travel Lane	Turn Lane	Travel Lane	Flex Parking / Travel Lane / Circulator Lane	Bike / Scooter Zone	Amenity Zone	Pedestrian Zone
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View of Avenue at 100 Congress Ave, looking north toward 2nd St intersection



DESIGN CONCEPTS AND PLACEMAKING

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- **The Civic Stage** (9th St. to 11th St.) – a threshold to the Capitol and a backdrop for festivals and civic events.
- **The Heart of Austin** (3rd St. to 9th St.) – where cafes, restaurants, stores, museums, and theaters showcase the beating heart of Austin at its best.
- **The Green Gateway** (3rd St. to Riverside Dr.) – where the environmental and recreational assets of Lady Bird Lake extend into the city along Congress Avenue both north and south of the lake.
- **The Bridge** – the iconic entry to downtown and destination where pedestrians, cyclists, vehicles, and bats move alongside one another.



The Avenue should have certain consistent placemaking treatments -such as trees, while other elements may vary.

The following are the "consistent" elements:

- Maintain a consistent tree line from Cesar Chavez to 11th St - the National Register Historic District (NRHD)
- Place streetlighting poles in line with trees
- Use same pavers for the Storefront and Walking zones, and a smaller, permeable paver for the Amenity Zone.

TREES: DEVELOPING AN AVENUE-SPECIFIC TREE PLAN

Our Team is working closely with the City Arborist, Watershed Protection, Public Works, Development Services Division, utility providers and others to develop a tree planting, preservation & mitigation strategy that is specific to the Avenue.

Recommendation: Relocate all existing, healthy trees to nearby parkland, so that all new trees may be of the desired species and be planted using soil cells



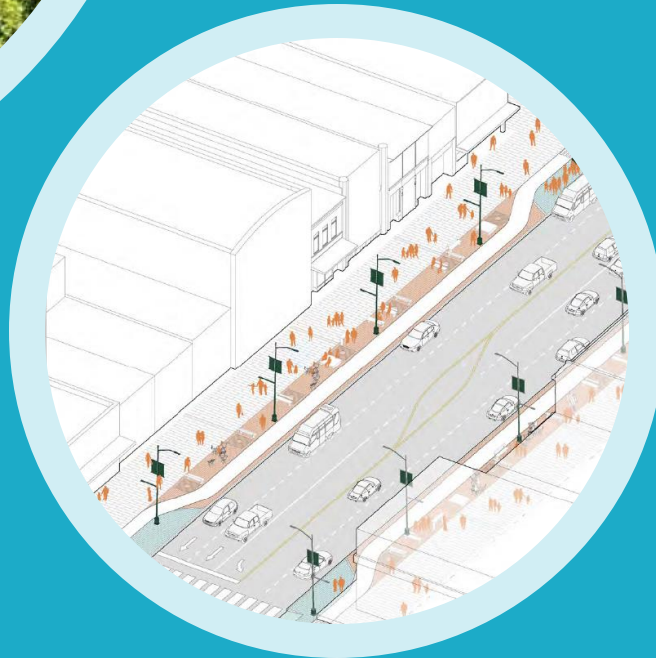


View of Old Bakery, looking north toward 11th St intersection

LIGHTING

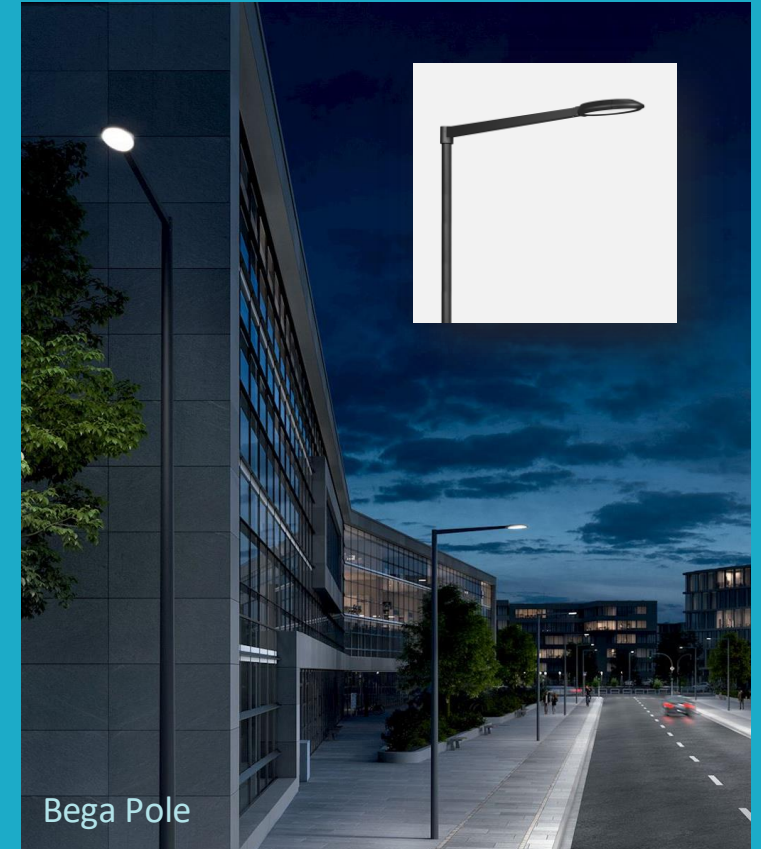
“The lighting along Congress Avenue should reinforce both the **history and contemporary dynamism** of the Avenue.”

- Preserve key element of district character
- Enhance the pedestrian experience
- Conform to dark-skies standards
- Use of continuous lighting, extending across the Bridge to create a uniform cadence and consistent experience along the Avenue.



STREET AND PEDESTRIAN LIGHTING

- The light poles must support banners, cameras, wayfinding signage: what else?
- There are at least 3 options to consider:
 - Retrofit existing 1980s light pole and add a lower arm with a pedestrian fixture, per the Vision Plan;
 - Introduce historically-accurate replicas of light poles and fixtures actually used on Congress Avenue, similar to those on E 6th St; and
 - Remove all 1980s pole and Bridge poles, and install new, contemporary and more minimalist light poles and luminaires that are capable of advanced features.



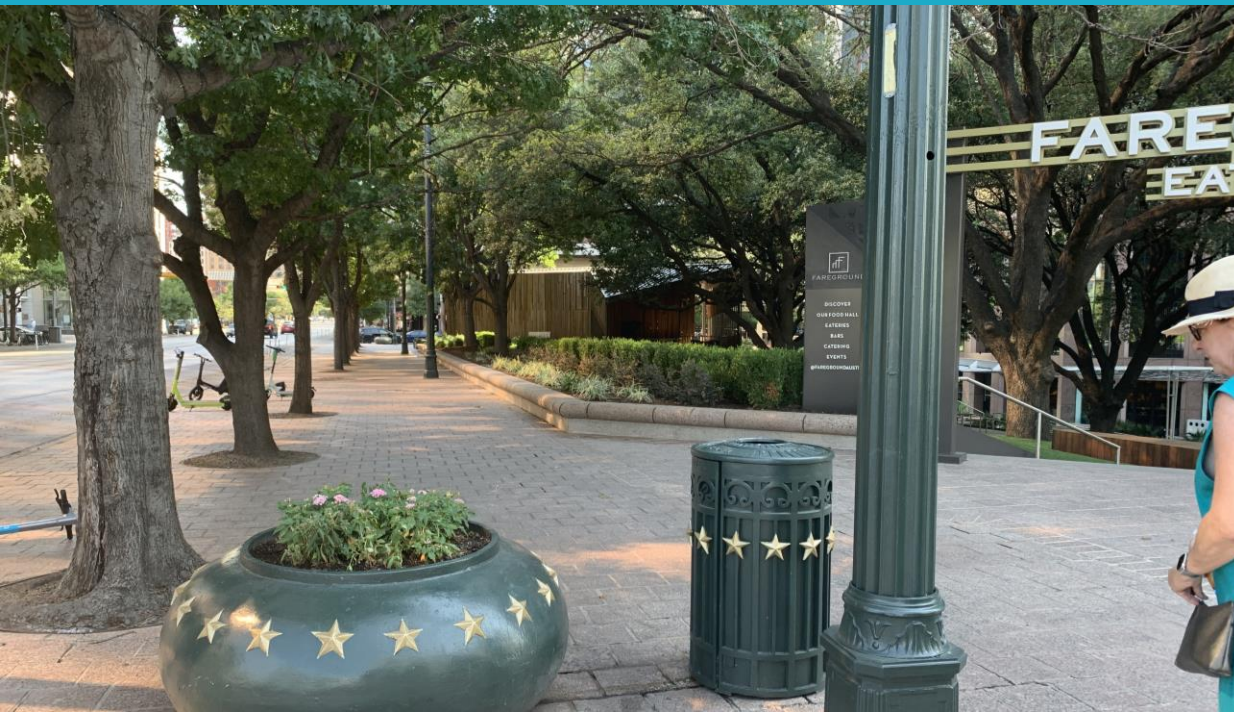


SEATING & FURNISHINGS

“A diverse mix of seating types and amenities...should enable people to meet, eat, work, perform, and tell stories on the Avenue in unique ways.”

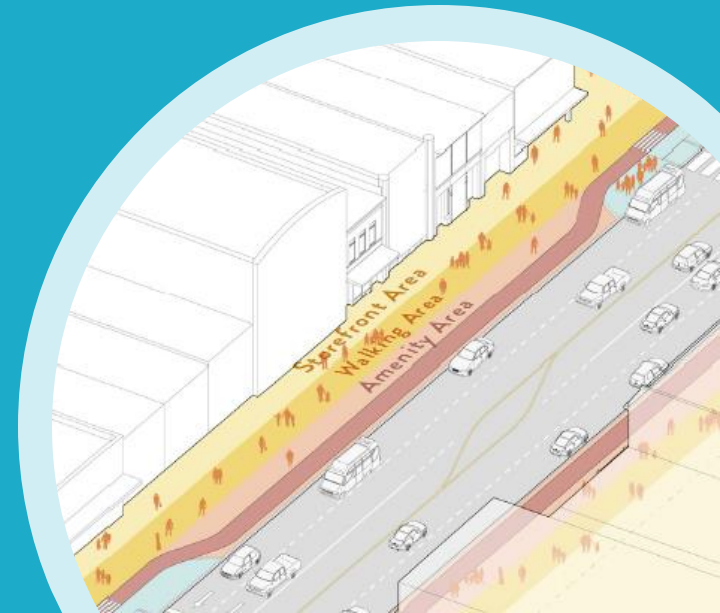
Key elements in the pedestrian realm:

- Public Wi-Fi
- Parking for bikes, scooters
- A mix of removable seating and furnishings in the Civic Stage area and fixed options in the Heart of Austin area
- Space for local art, interpretive elements
- Wayfinding and signage elements
- Drinking fountains
- Public restrooms



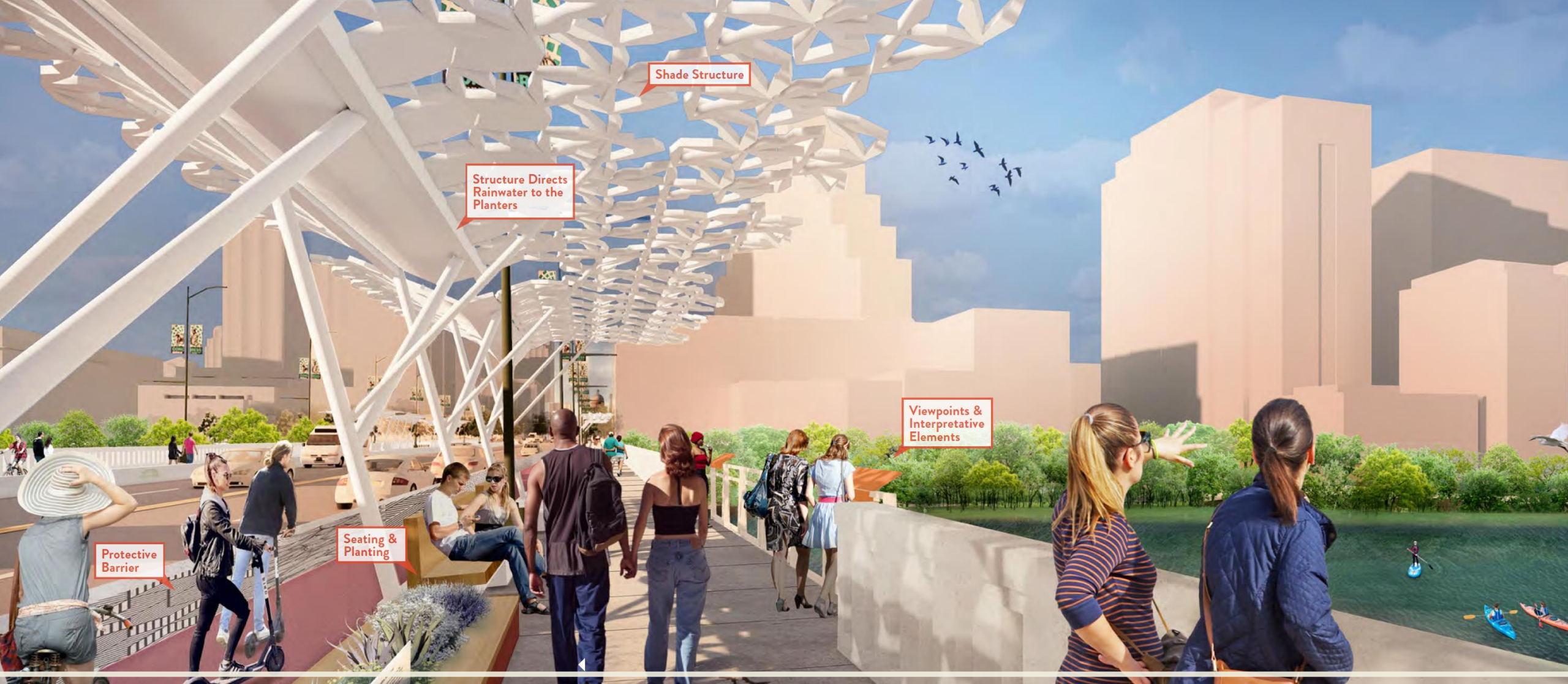
AMENITIES

- The **Storefront Zones** may be designed and furnished by individual property or business owners, per the Vision Plan
- Should individual businesses (and cultural spaces) also be allowed to furnish their adjacent **Amenity Zones**? (i.e., with either café tables or bench and bar, small performance stages, temporary art exhibitions, etc.)
- Or should the **Amenity Zones** be guided by a family and brand of furnishings that could be associated with this segment of the Avenue?
- Could Heart of Austin-specific furnishings be an opportunity for artists and artisans to design and fabricate these?





View of N Congress Ave, looking north toward 6th St intersection



Shade Structure

Structure Directs
Rainwater to the
Planters

Viewpoints &
Interpretative
Elements

Protective
Barrier

Seating &
Planting

ANN W. RICHARDS CONGRESS AVENUE BRIDGE OPTIONS

Elements

1,500,000
BATS
CALL THE
CONGRESS

A GATEWAY AND GATHERING PLACE

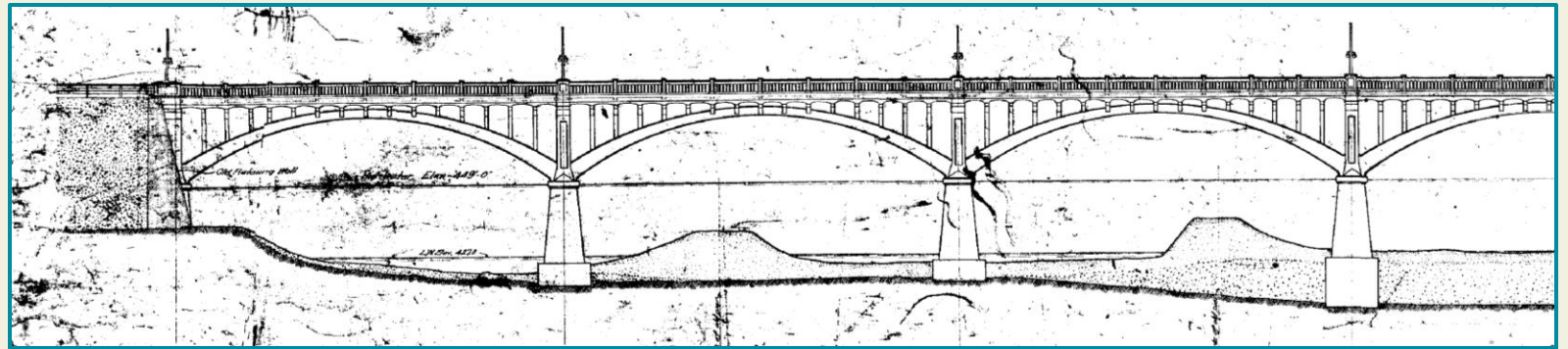
"The reconstruction of the roadway across the bridge brings an opportunity for design interventions that reinforce the history, the rhythm and character of the bridge as an iconic gateway into Downtown Austin, provide shelter and movement to break up the crossing, and to provide places for gathering."



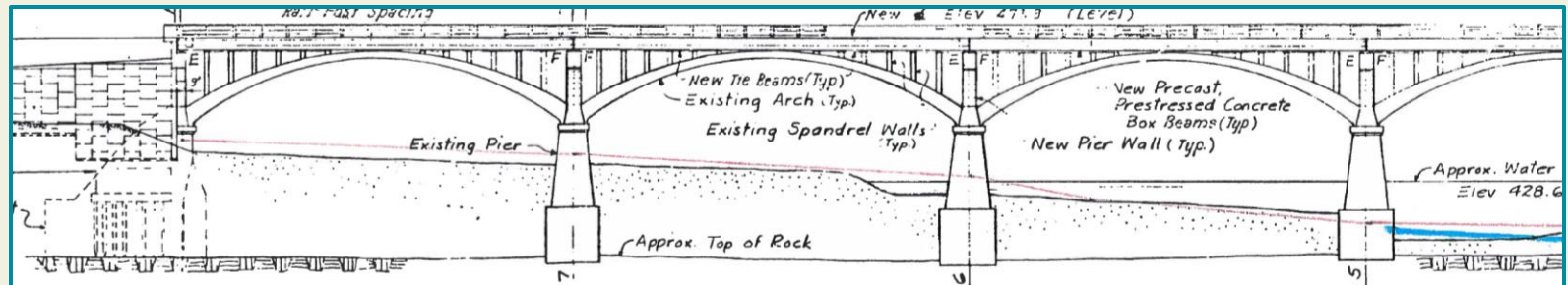
RESPECTING THE 1910 ARCHES

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.

We propose that any new canopies, lighting poles and outlooks reinforce the strong structural expression of the 1910 Bridge.



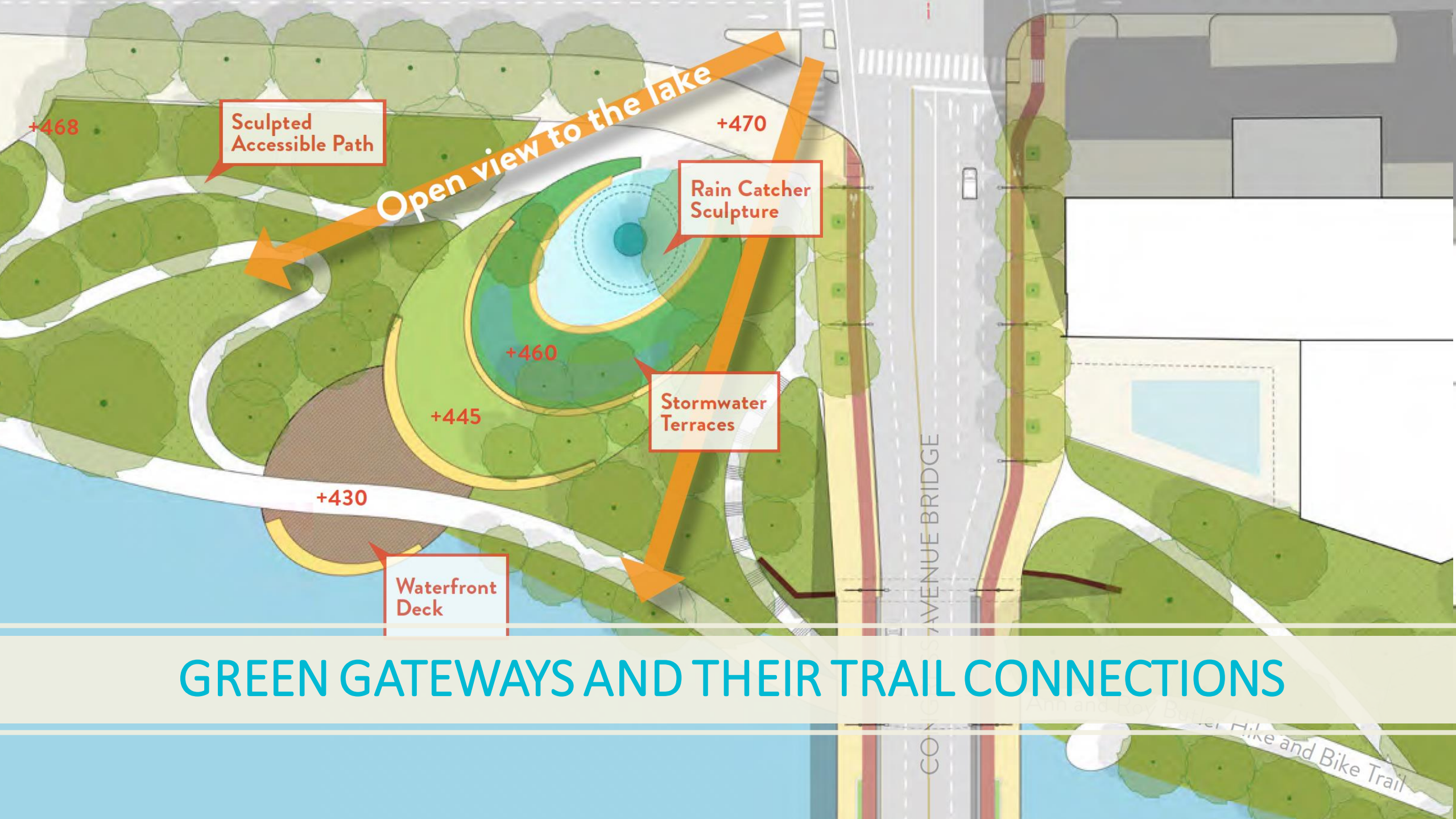
Comparison of 1910 Bridge elevation (above) with 1980 widened bridge (below)



PRELIMINARY DESIGN RENDERINGS



View of bridge, looking north toward Cesar Chavez St intersection



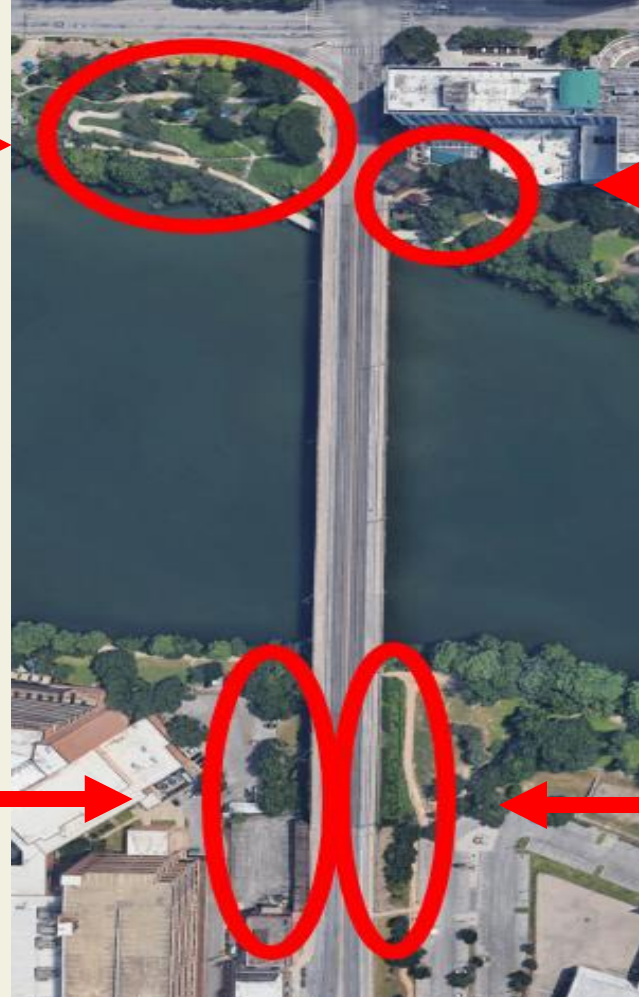
GREEN GATEWAYS AND THEIR TRAIL CONNECTIONS

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The connections from each of the four corners of the bridge down to the Butler Trail and Lady Bird Lake parkland all need improvement. Only the NW corner has an accessible path from street to Trail.



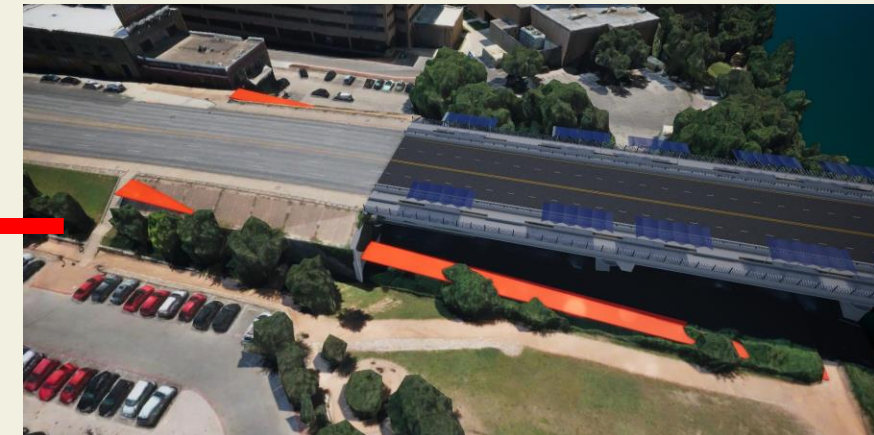
NW corner at Cesar Chavez St.



NE corner at Cesar Chavez St.



SW corner at Riverside Dr.



SE corner at Riverside Dr.



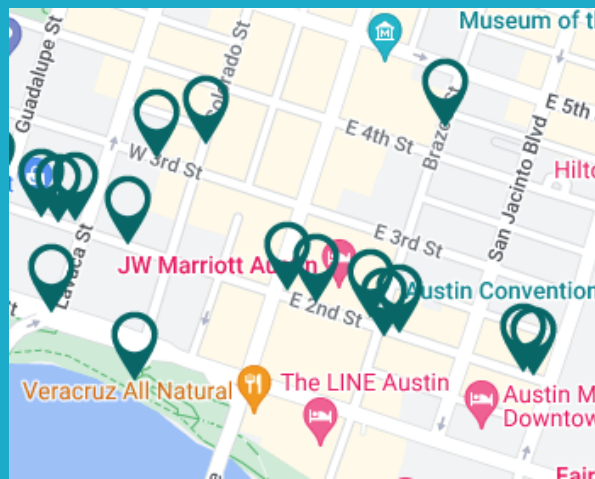
INTERPRETIVE AND PUBLIC ART ELEMENTS

INTERPRETIVE & PUBLIC ART ELEMENTS

“Spaces for art and interpretive elements will be carved out of the amenity zone to tell the Avenue’s rich history and express the vibrance of Austin today.”

Possible approaches:

- Hire an artist to establish a key theme and then select individual artists to interpret this theme
- Or set aside funding for Art In Public Places that evolves more organically and opportunistically



VIBRANT CROSSINGS

- 11th Street
- 9th Street
- 6th Street
- 5th Street
- Cesar Chavez Street
- Riverside Drive

“Congress Avenue is linked to many historic points of interest and major cultural corridors around Austin by way of its cross- streets...revealed at key intersections, or “vibrant crossings,”At these intersections, interpretive elements, public art, and a distinctive palate of streetscape materials communicate the diverse historic and contemporary narratives of Austin.”



NEXT STEPS

- Initial Design (Underway)
 - Environmental Analysis
 - Traffic Analysis
 - Street and Bridge Design
 - Lighting, Hardscape, Landscape
 - Utility Analysis
- Community Engagement
 - First meeting anticipated in May
- Finalize 30% Design
- Advance early phase of the project to construction based on available funding



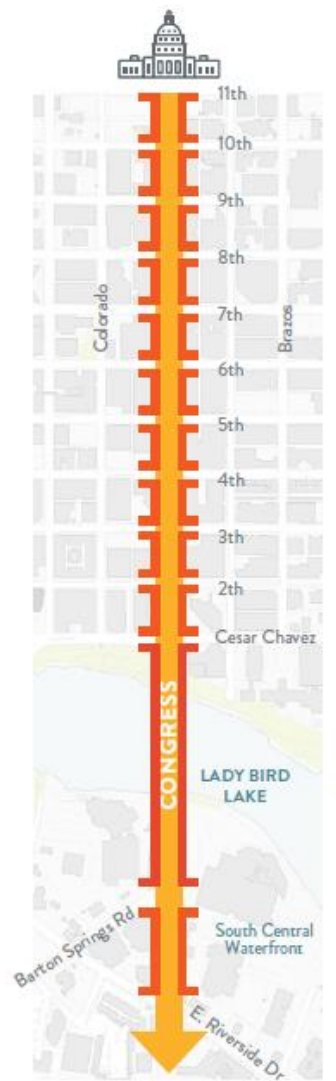
Phase 1A: Green Gateways
Reconstruction of Ann Richards Congress Ave Bridge as a four lane roadway with raised cycle track and pedestrian amenities. Bridge landings and trail connections improved in coordination with South Central Waterfront Development.



Phase 1B: Multimodal Avenue
Reconstruction of intersections at Riverside Drive, Barton Springs Road, and Cesar Chavez Street. Full reconstruction of roadway from Riverside Drive to 4th Street. Maintain protected bike and scooter lane north of 4th Street.



Phase 2: Heart of Austin
Full reconstruction of roadway, cycle track and streetscape improvements from 4th Street to 9th Street.



Phase 3: Civic Stage
Full reconstruction of roadway, cycle track and streetscape improvements from 9th Street to Texas Capitol.

THE HDR CONSULTANT TEAM

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LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
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HISTORICAL PRESERVATION
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ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSULTING
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John Timpone - (Bat Expert)
Krista McDermid, MS (Zara) - (Biologist, Bat Expert)

Terri Asendorf Hyde - (Cultural Resources Specialist)
Kate Crosthwaite
Adam Roberts

SUBCONSULTANTS

1. **Altura Solutions, LLC (Altura)** - Compliance Consulting, American Disability Act (ADA)
2. **Balcones Geotechnical, LLC (Balcones)** - Soils Geotechnical
3. **Civil Team Engineers, LLC (Civil Team)** - Permitting Services; Environmental
4. **Encotech Engineering Consultants, Inc. (Encotech)** - Electrical Engineering
5. **Garza EMC, LLC (Garza EMC)** - Civil Engineering
6. **Halff Associates, Inc. (Halff)** - Civil Engineering
7. **HVJ Associates, Inc. (HVJ)** - Civil Engineering
8. **McCann Adams Studio (MAS)** - Architect Services
9. **MWM DesignGroup, Inc. (MWM)** - Landscape Architecture
10. **The Rios Group, Inc. (Rios)** - Utility Locator Service (Underground)
11. **Unintech Consulting Engineers, Inc. (Unintech)** - Surveying Services (Not Aerial or Research)
12. **Zara Environmental, LLC (Zara)** - Environmental and Ecological Services



QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION