

CONGRESS AVENUE URBAN DESIGN INITIATIVE

Downtown Commission

Wednesday June 21, 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 and Public Works Department
- Jorge Rousselin & Jill Amezcua, Urban Design Division, Planning Department
- Javi Gonzalez, 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 10 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



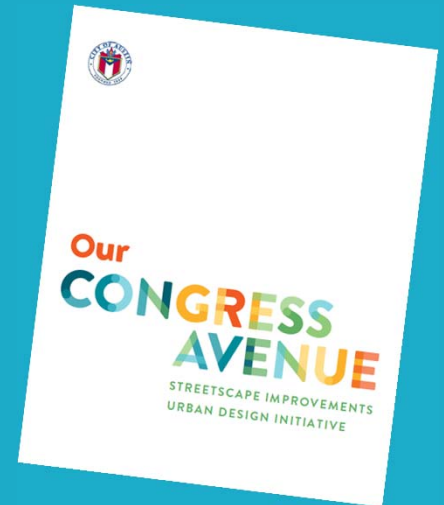
Our CONGRESS AVENUE

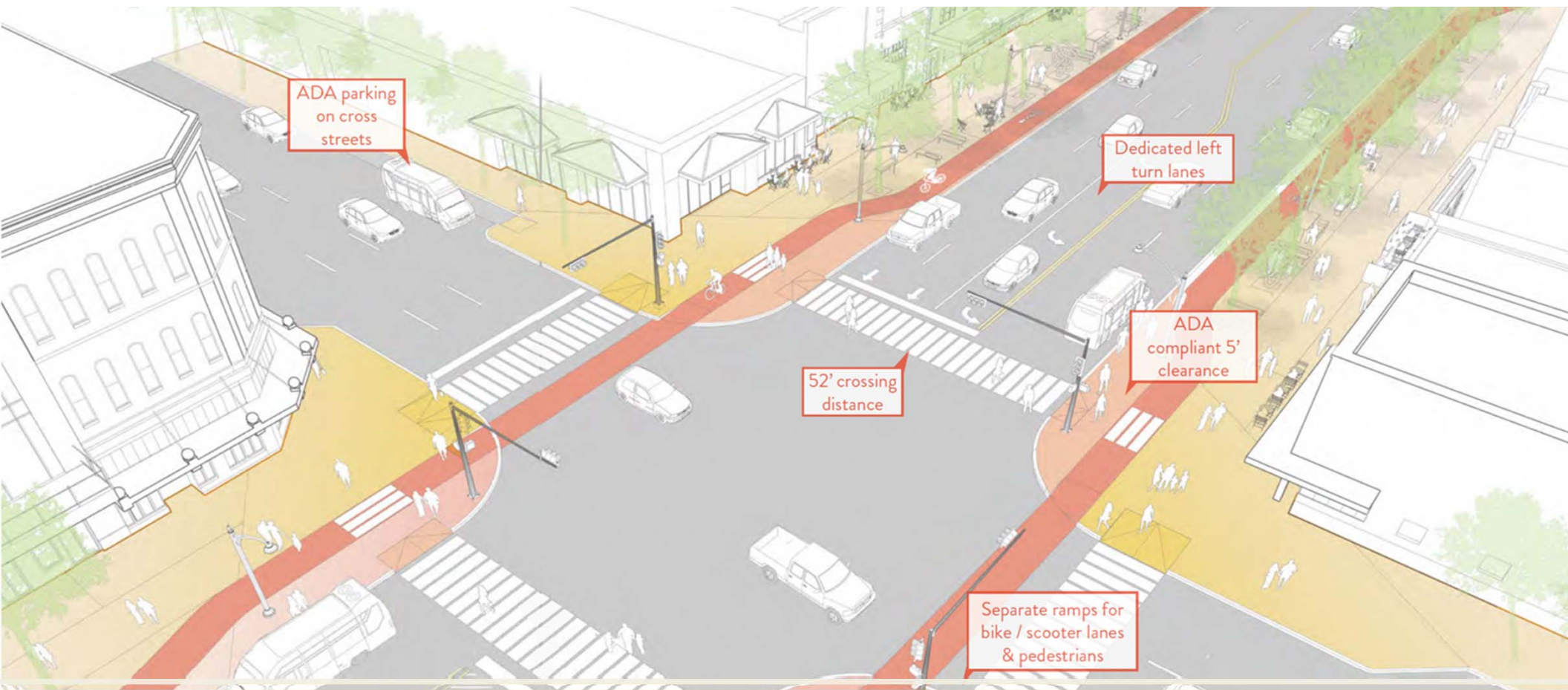
is a great Texas people place
historic and commercial
Austin where people
and create a

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."

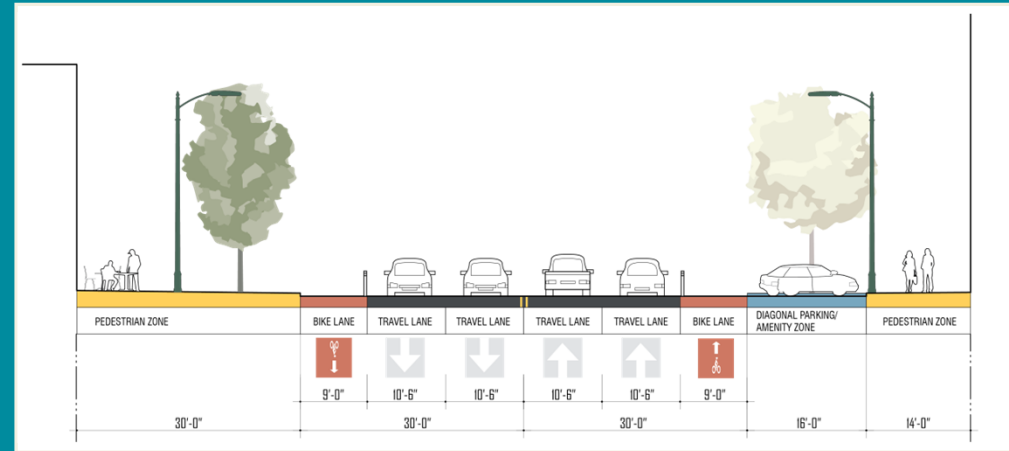
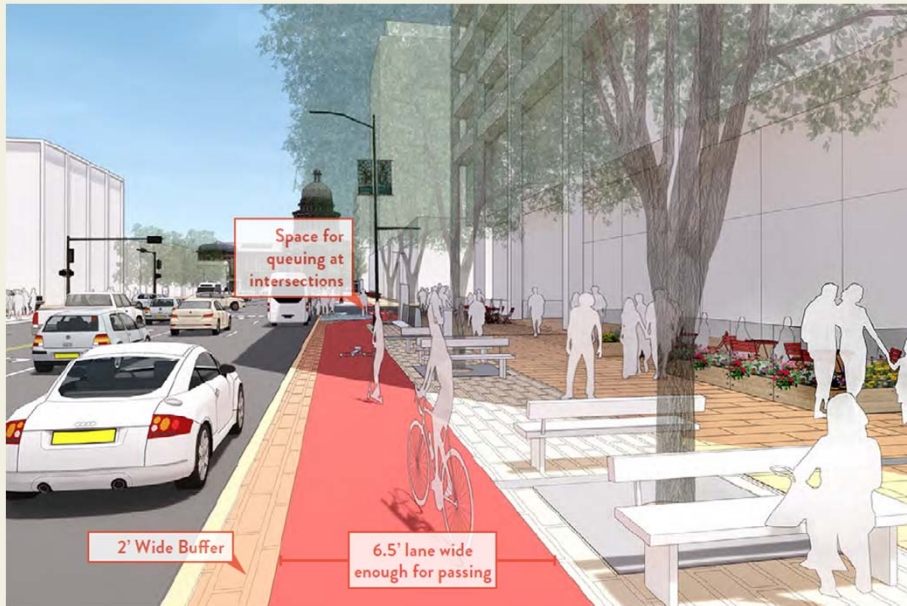




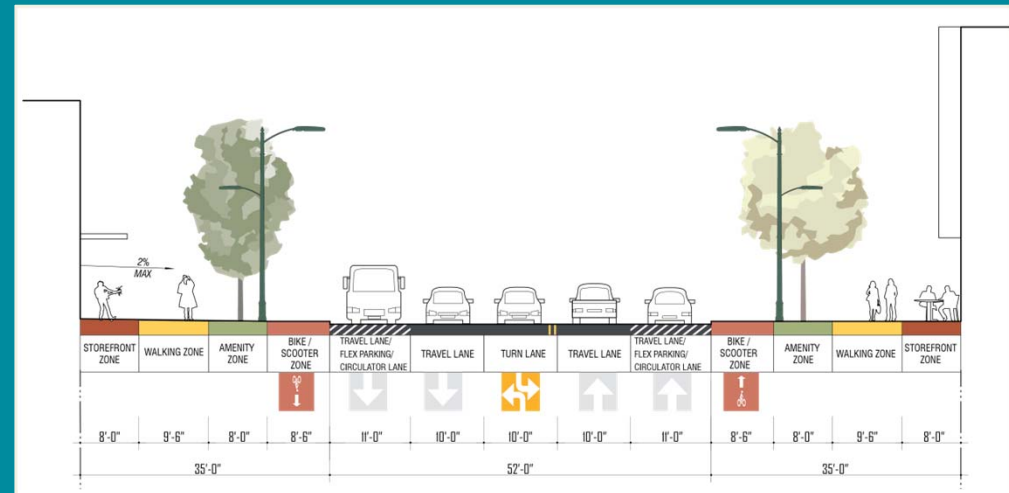
BALANCE THE AVENUE

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"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."

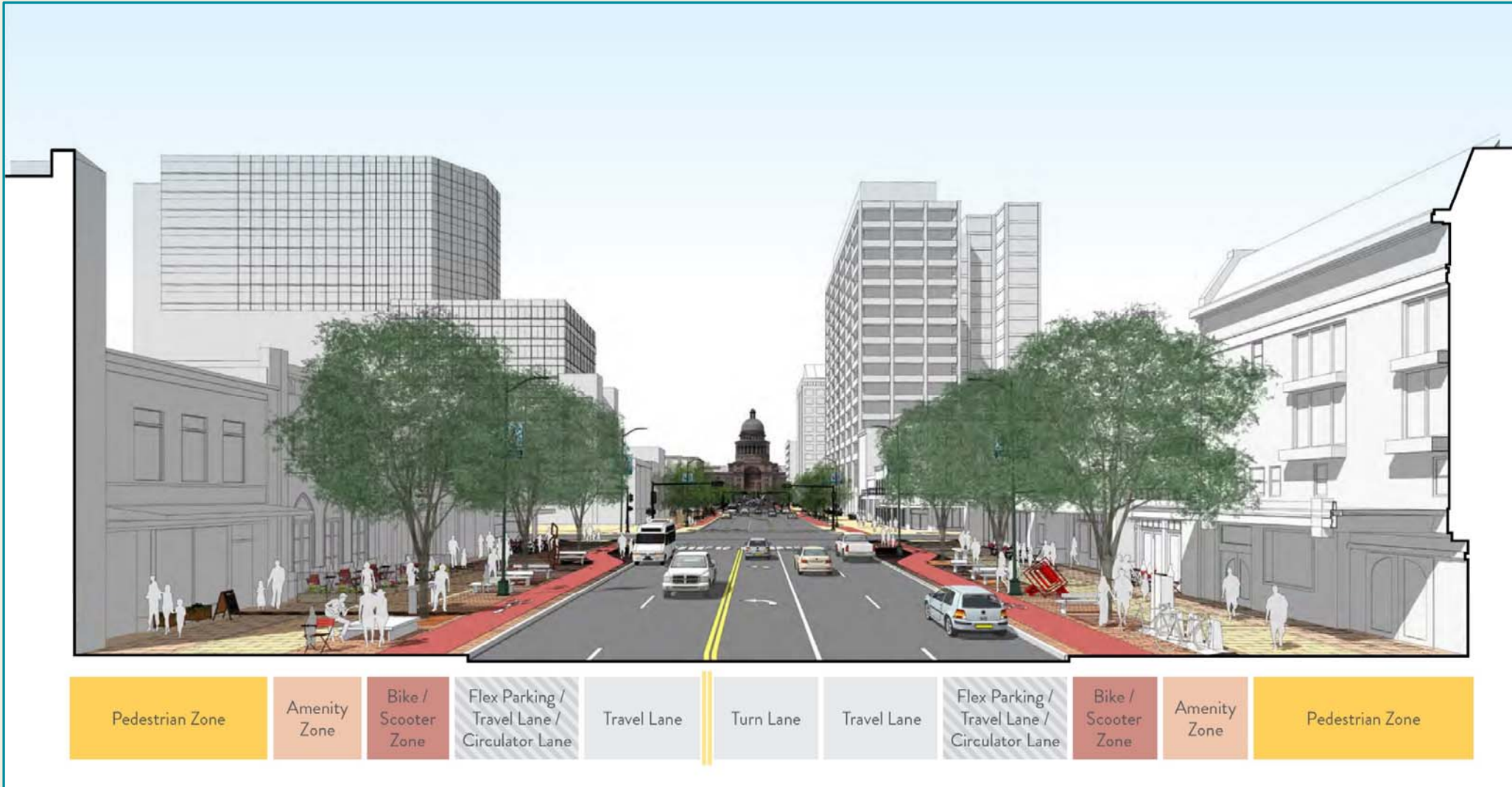


Typical Existing Street Section (was 6 lanes, interim 4 lanes)



Vision Plan: Typical Street Section (5 Vehicle Lanes)

CONGRESS AVENUE CROSS-SECTION PER VISION PLAN

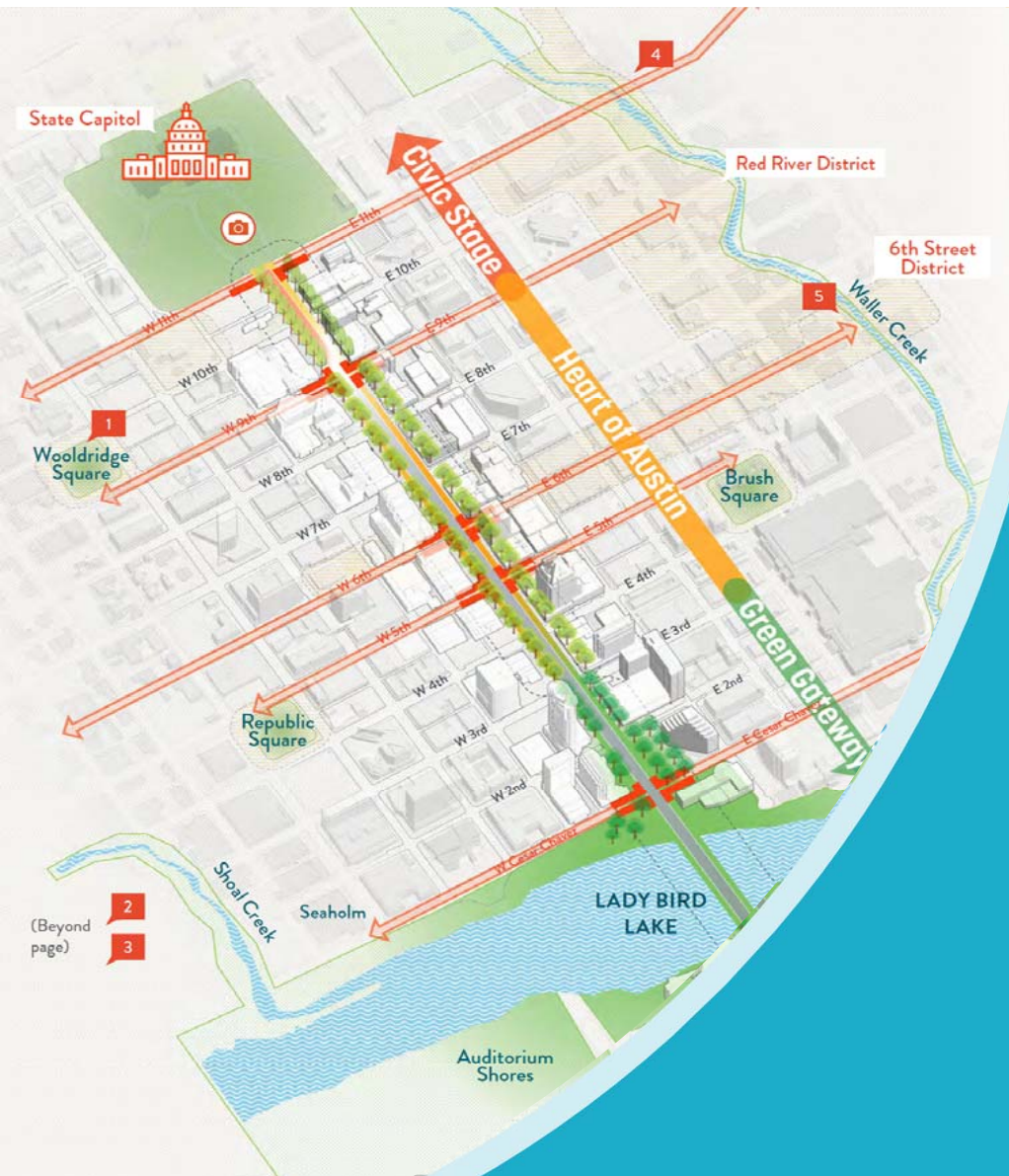




View of Avenue at 100 Congress Ave, looking north toward 2nd St intersection



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.





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.”

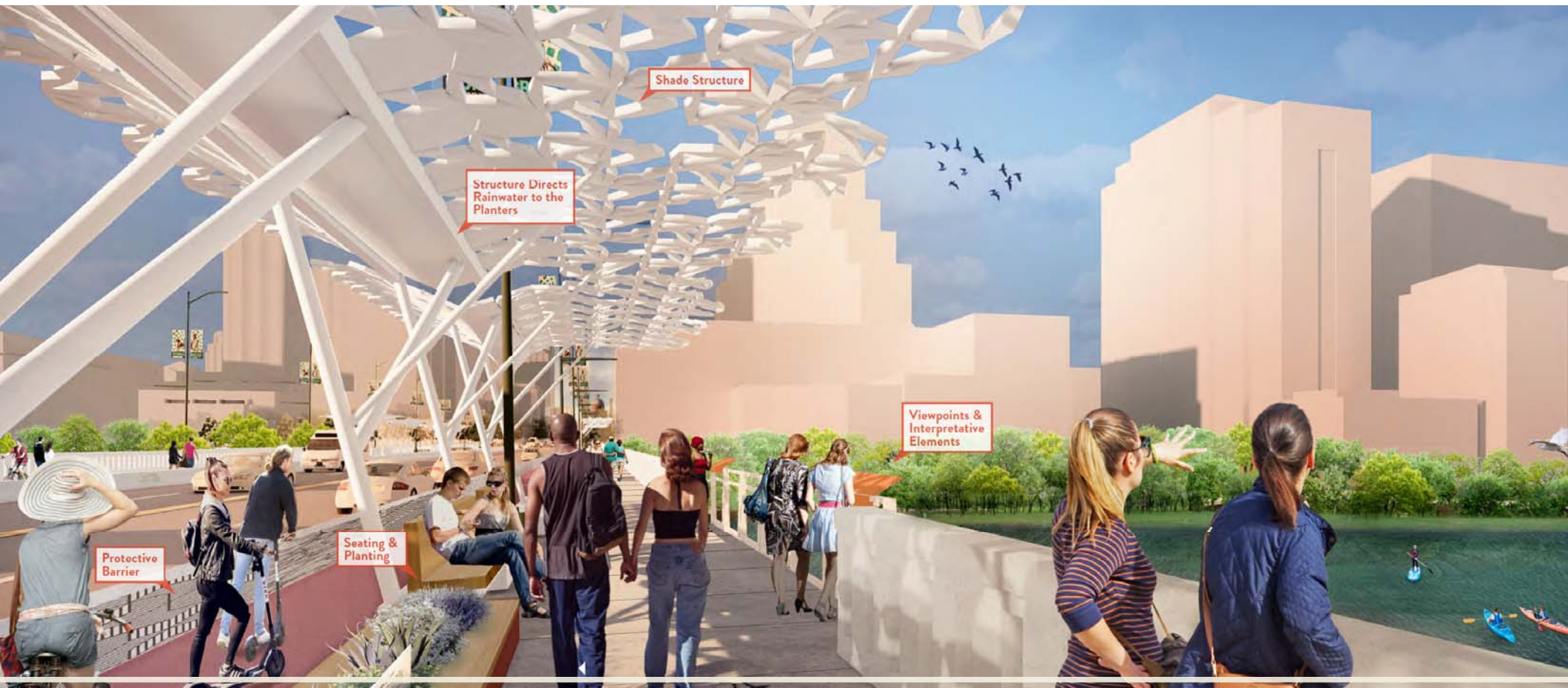
Key elements in the pedestrian realm:

- 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





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





A GATEWAY AND GATHERING PLACE

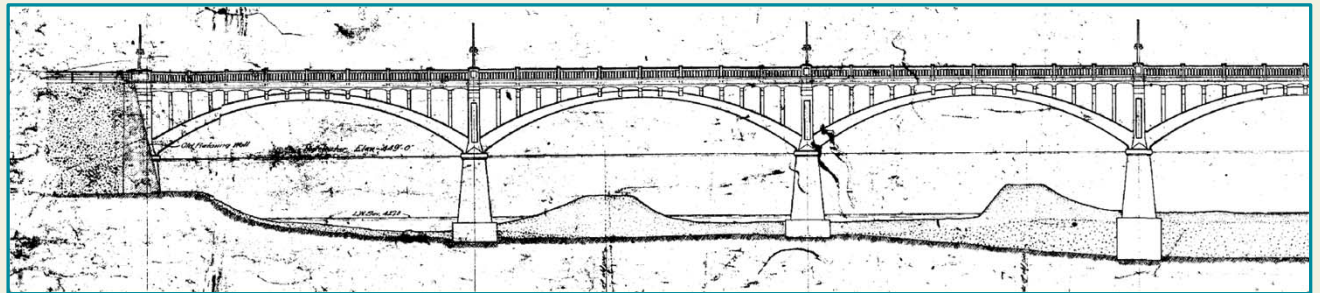
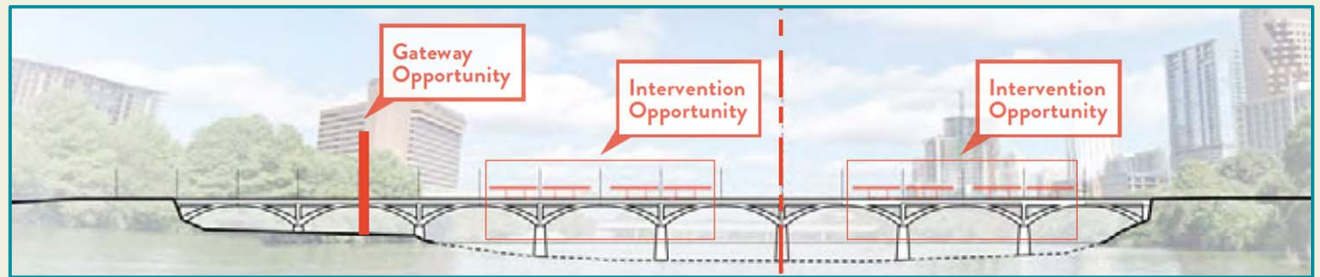
"The reconstruction of the roadway across the bridge brings an opportunity for design interventions that reinforce the history, the rhythm and character of the bridge as an iconic gateway into Downtown Austin, provide shelter and movement to break up the crossing, and to provide places for gathering."



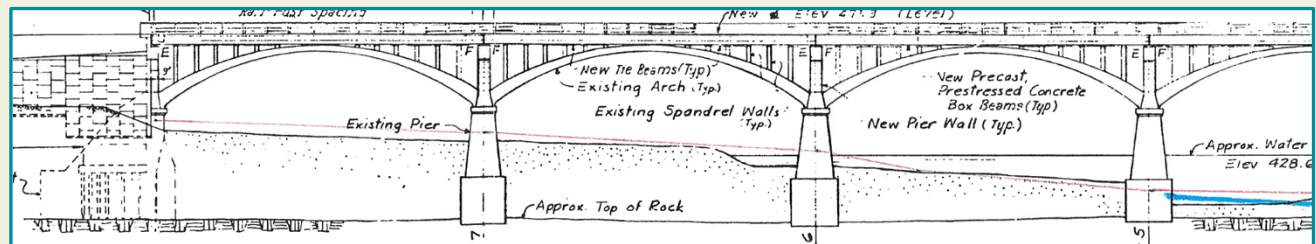
RESPECTING THE 1910 ARCHES

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.



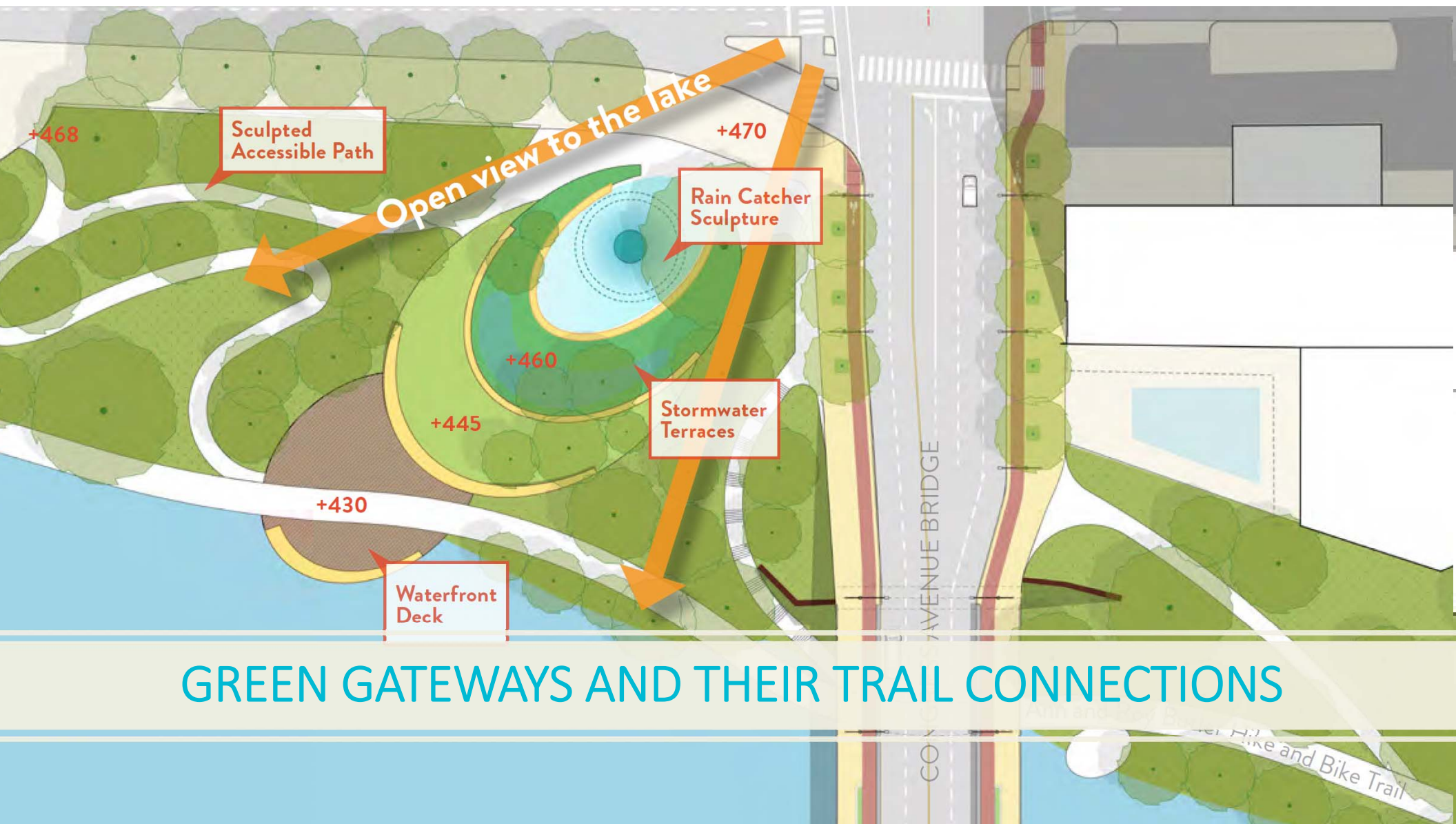
Comparison of 1910 Bridge elevation (above) with 1980 widened bridge (below)



PRELIMINARY DESIGN RENDERINGS



View of bridge, looking north toward Cesar Chavez St intersection



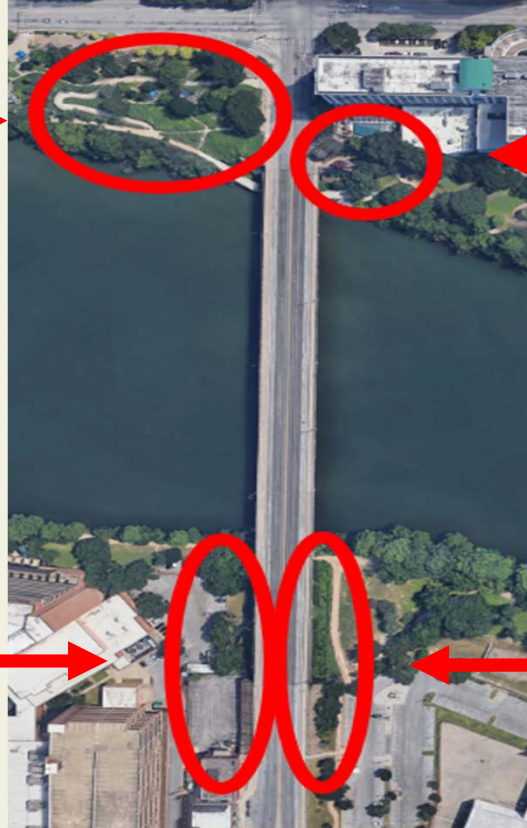
GREEN GATEWAYS AND THEIR TRAIL CONNECTIONS

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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

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“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

