

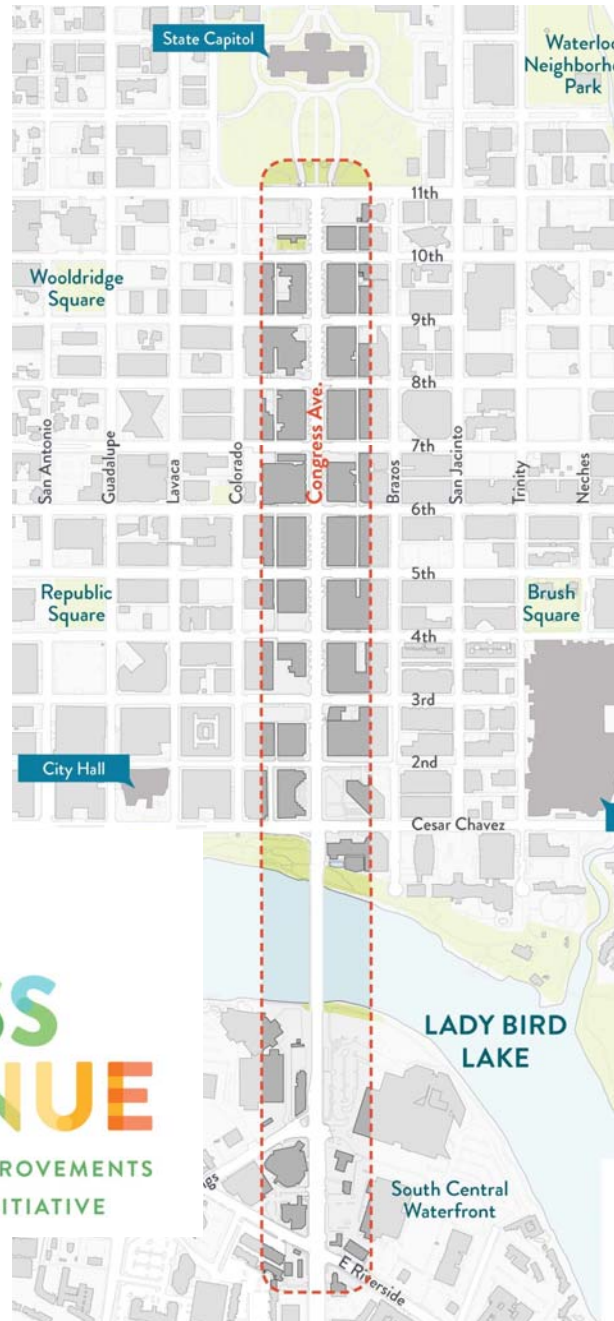
Our CONGRESS AVENUE

STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS —
URBAN DESIGN INITIATIVE

Downtown Commission August 16, 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**



Our CONGRESS AVENUE

STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS
URBAN DESIGN INITIATIVE

VISION

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.

VALUES

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.

2015-2016

Set Project
Direction

2016-2017

Select & Contract
Consultant

SPRING 2017

Project Survey

SUMMER 2017

Stakeholder
Focus Groups

FALL 2017

Design Concept
Development

LATE 2017

Draft Project
Report

EARLY 2018

Final Project
Report

P1

P2

P3

P4

P5

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



DRAFT

DRAFT

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



DRAFT

DRAFT

Online

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

131
Online Cards

572
OurCongressAve Responses



DRAFT

DRAFT

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



Total Public Input Received

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



DRAFT

SOCIAL EQUITY

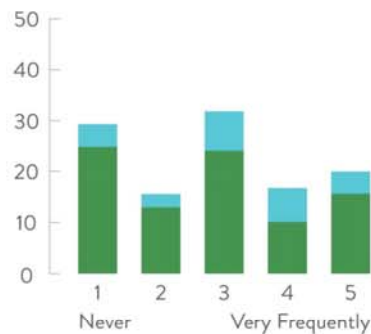
A significant portion of respondents report **accessibility challenges** along the Avenue, as well as an opportunity to **make it more welcoming to minorities**.

Do you or someone you know ever experience difficulties physically navigating Congress Avenue?

25 Card Responses
88 Online Responses

2.5

Average

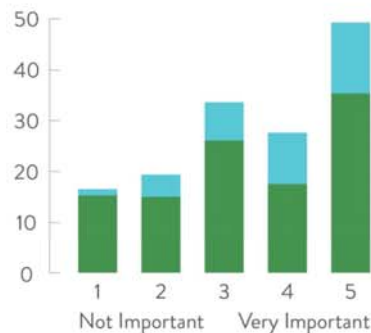


How important is it for Congress Avenue to provide economic opportunities (i.e. jobs) for people of limited education attainment?

37 Card Responses
109 Online Responses

3.2

Average

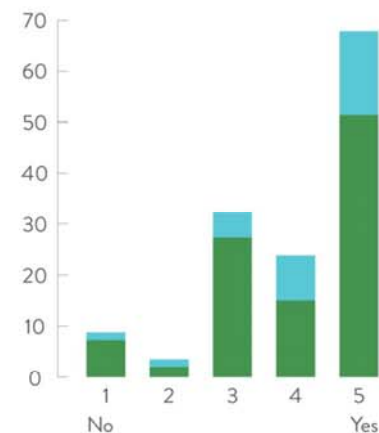


Do you think Congress Avenue can be made more welcoming to racial and other minorities?

33 Card Responses
104 Online Responses

3.8

Average

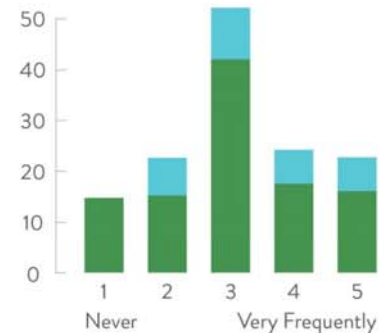


How often do you take advantage of free events along Congress Avenue?

32 Card Responses
108 Online Responses

2.8

Average



DRAFT

DRAFT

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

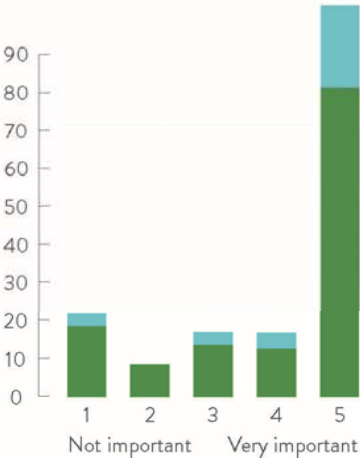


How important is creating a better environment for walking and biking along the renewed Congress Avenue?

32 Card Responses
134 Online Responses

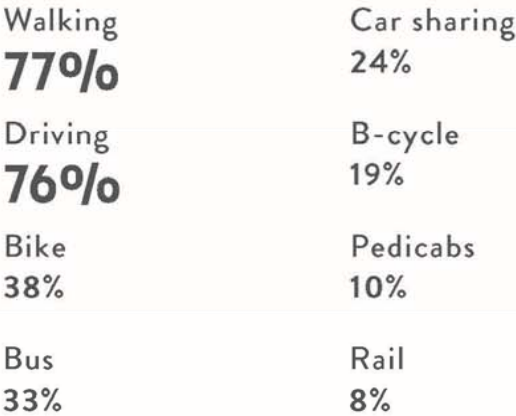
3.7

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 park 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.

DRAFT

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. ”

DRAFT

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**

DRAFT

“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...

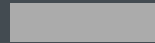
”

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

”

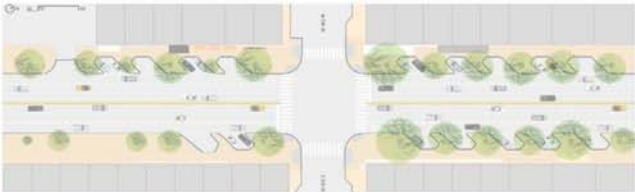
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Street Model Activity



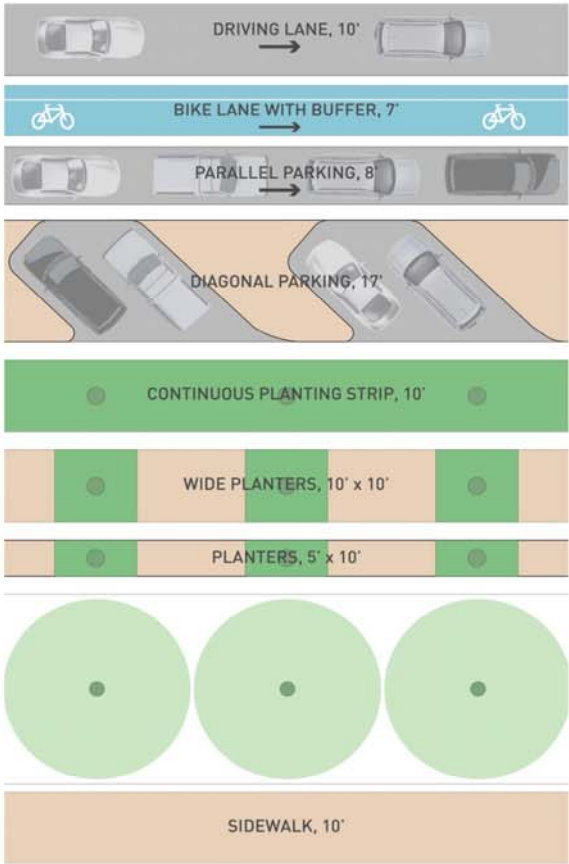
STREET MODEL

Model Base, Existing Street:

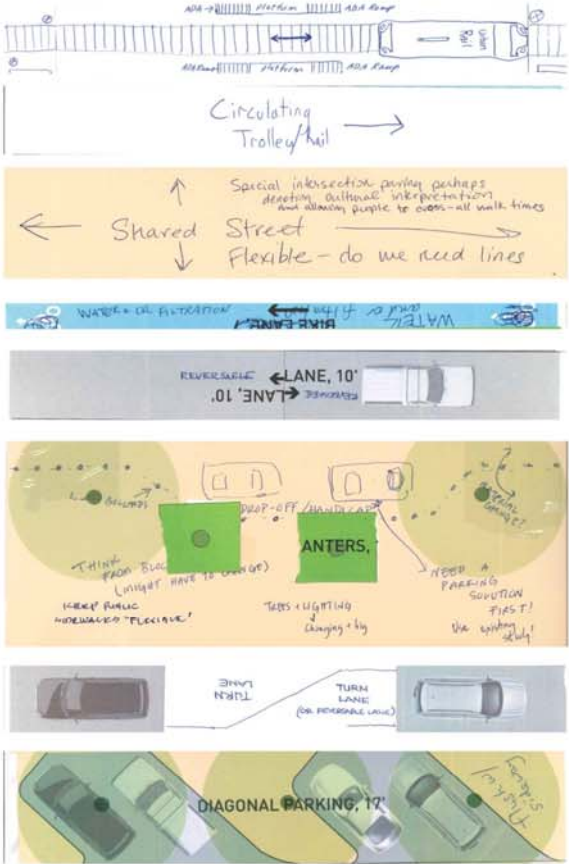


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Parts Provided:



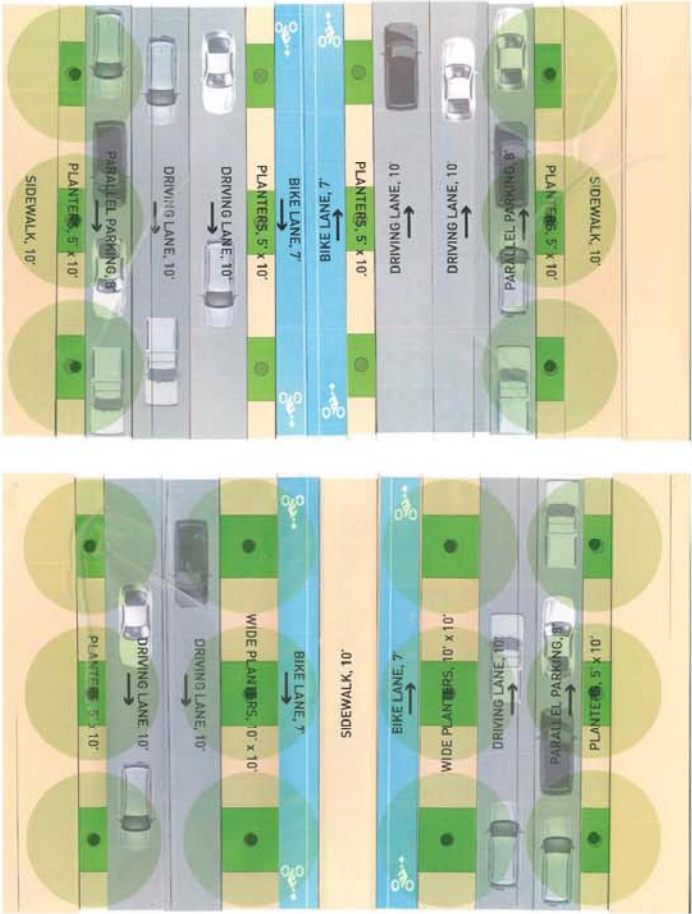
Parts Made by Participants:



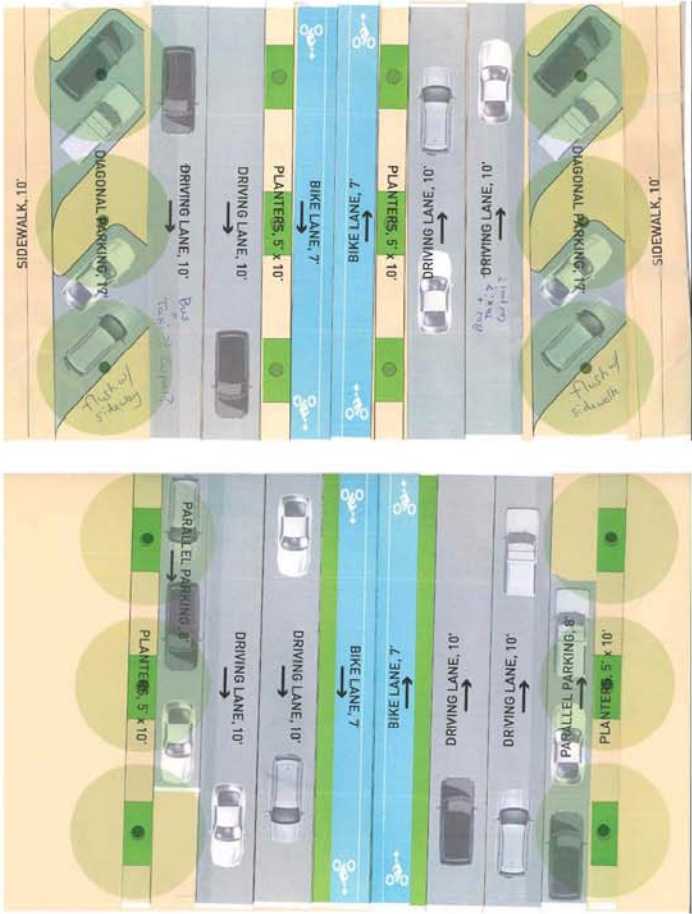
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STREET MODEL

Sample solutions prioritizing a bicycle median.

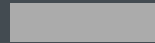


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Task 1 Report - Overview



CONGRESS AVENUE INTRODUCTION

The Congress Avenue Streetscape Improvements - Urban Design Initiative is a joint effort **undertaken by the City of Austin and the Downtown Austin Alliance**. The study is part of a years-long effort to re-imagine Congress Avenue as a human-centric place and a pre-eminent civic destination, which has already produced a guiding vision and a set of values related to Character, Function, and Management.

This study focuses on the 1.25 mile stretch of Congress Avenue from the Capitol to the intersection with Riverside Drive, and will result in a comprehensive urban design vision, mobility plan, design standards/guidelines, regulatory recommendations, and a management and implementation strategy.

Community voices will be a key driving force in the shaping of these final products.



PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE GROUND FLOOR USES

Congress Avenue is animated by retail, cultural, and other active ground level uses that contribute to a vibrant pedestrian environment. However, the distribution of these uses is uneven.

Ground floor conditions reveal the extent to which Congress Avenue is animated by retail, cultural, and other active uses that engage with pedestrians on the street level. An exemplary concentration of these uses can be found, for example, between 7th and 8th streets, where small, frequent retail storefronts and the theaters combine to create a stimulating urban experience.

Such experience is however interrupted in several places by vacancies, gaps in the street wall, or the large, inactive facades of post-war office blocks; examples of this include the west side of the 800 block, the east side of the 400 block, and the blocks near the Capitol.



Corner Restaurant



Royal Blue Grocery

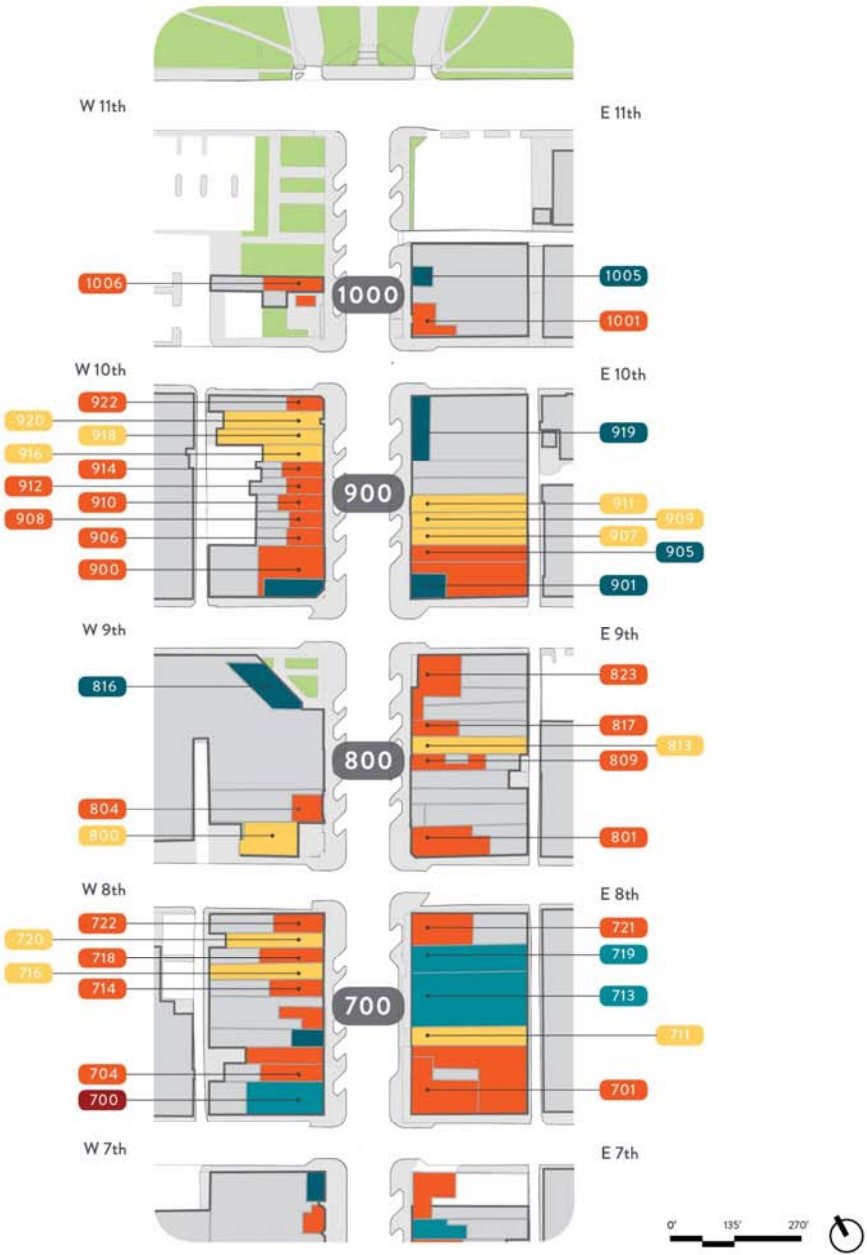
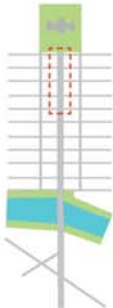


FIRST FLOOR TENANTS

Block 1000	1006	Old Bakery & Emporium	1005	1005 Congress Ave lobby
			1001	Starbucks Coffee
Block 900	922	Quizno's	919	Plains Capital Bank
	920	Vacant	911	Vacant
	918	Vacant	909	Vacant
	916	Vacant	907	Vacant
	914	Lavazza	905	Nelsen Partners
	912	Consuela	901	Texas Public Policy Foundation
	910	Consuela Creative HQ		
	908	Quattro Gatti		
	906	Planet Subs		
	900	Prosperity Bank		
Block 800	816	816 Congress Ave Lobby	823	7-Eleven
	804	Caffe Medici	817	United States Postal Service
	800	Vacant	813	Vacant
			809	Subway
			801	Chipotle
Block 700	722	Kruger's Diamond Jewelers	721	Co-Lab Projects
	720	Vacant	719	State Theatre
	718	The Townsend Austin	713	Paramount Theatre
	716	Vacant	711	Vacant
	714	Stars in Your Eyes	701	Roaring Fork
	704	The Hatbox		
	700	The Contemporary Austin		

First Floor Use

- Retail / F & B / Service
- Hotel/Office Lobby
- Vacant Property
- Cultural Use



GROUND FLOOR USE

Many of the fine grain buildings and historic structures along Congress Avenue north of 7th Street include restaurants, theaters, and cafes to make this part of Congress Avenue accessible and busy day and night. The epicenter of activity occurs at the corner of 7th and Congress Avenue. Here, the Contemporary Austin has a transparent ground floor that affords view of current exhibitions, and across the street The Intercontinental Stephen F. Austin Hotel has a ground floor bar and entrance just around the corner. A few doors to the north is Congress Avenue's premier night life venues, the Capitol Theatre and the State Theatre, both with entries directly on the Avenue itself.

Retail tenants include older staples of Austin's downtown such as Krugers Jewelry, and such recent additions such as the Lavazza Cafe, and Medici coffee. While the 800 block of the Avenue can feel less than welcome in terms of scale and ground floor uses (7 Eleven, Post office, and the recessed plaza at 9th street) the historic grain and texture of the Avenue is strongest in the 900 block, extending north to the site of the Old Bakery at the footsteps of the Capitol.

Several vacancies in the smaller historic buildings in the 900 block and the lack of ground floor uses in the 1000 block, leave this part of the Avenue feeling deserted on weekends and evenings throughout the year.

Ground Floor Use

- Congress Avenue Corridor
- Retail / F & B / Service
- Hotel / Office Lobby
- Cultural Use
- Vacant Property

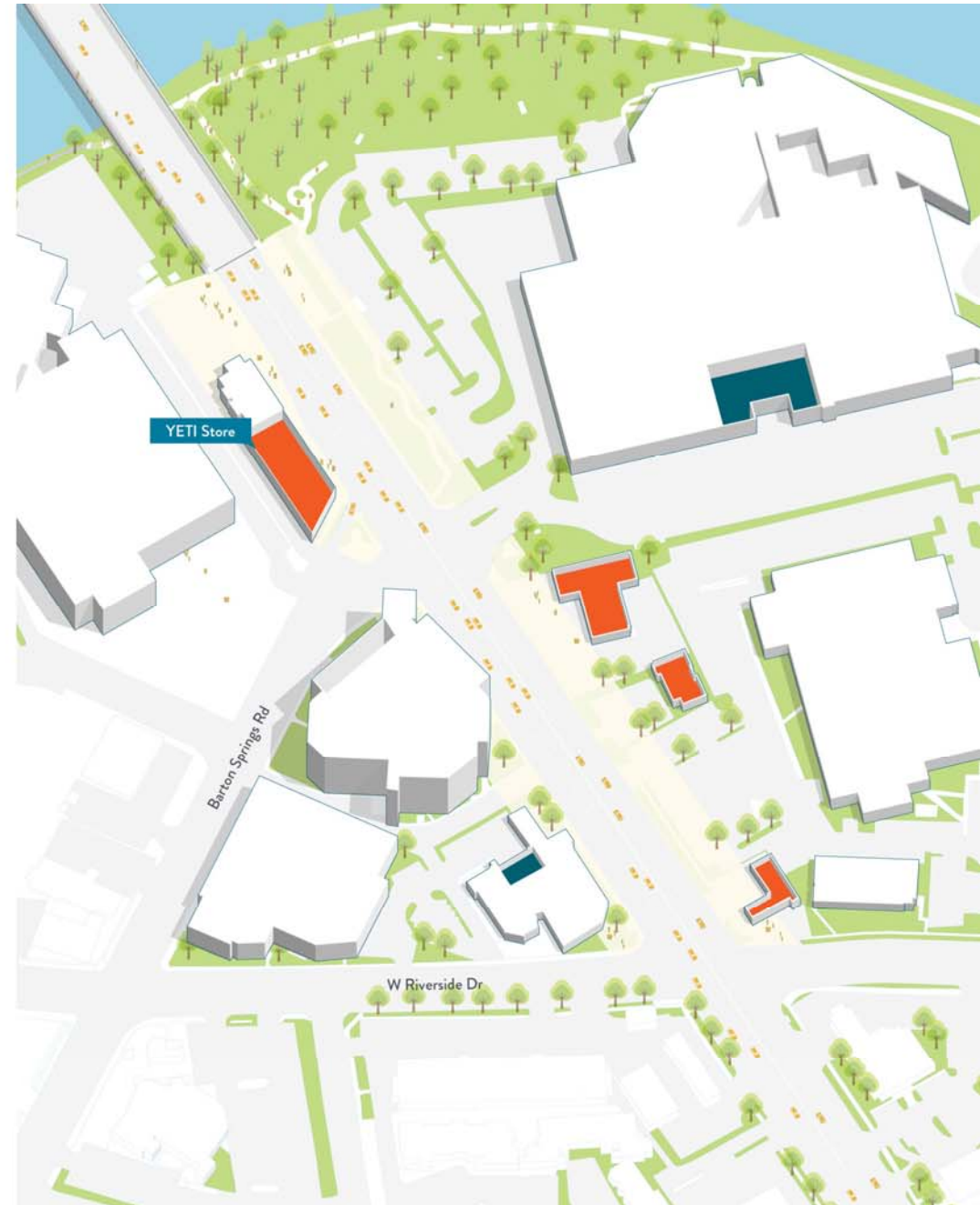


GROUND FLOOR USE

Active ground floor uses are limited south of the Lake along Congress Avenue. With the exception of the recently renovated YETI retail store and bar, ground floor uses are limited to auto-oriented businesses such as Bridgestone Auto and Howdy Donuts. The Embassy Suites Hotel has a building lobby oriented to Barton Springs Road, away from Congress Avenue. The Austin American-Stateman building, the Department of Transportation Building, and the Hyatt Regency are pulled back from Congress by large setbacks, diminishing their positive impact on the pedestrian realm.

Ground Floor Use

- Congress Avenue Corridor
- Retail / F & B / Service
- Hotel / Office Lobby
- Cultural Use
- Vacant Property



URBAN FORM

Successive waves of development have produced several kinds of characteristic urban forms along Congress Avenue. The historic buildings, generally low-rises between 2-3 stories, are frequently interrupted by post-war mid-rises and high-rises, some with and some without setbacks that acknowledge Congress Avenue's historical scale. Recent high-rise development such as the Austonian and the JW Marriott have large, mid-rise podiums, whose scale establishes a new datum along Congress Avenue.



KEY DESTINATIONS

Congress Avenue is at the center of any visitor's itinerary in Austin, connecting many of the city's key destinations. However, these connections are not always clear or explicit.

Along the Avenue itself is a significant concentration of cultural institutions (The Contemporary, Mexic-Arte Museum, Paramount Theatre, State Theatre), "must-see" landmarks such as the bat watching at Congress Avenue Bridge, and many retail and dining establishments. Congress Avenue is also at the geographic nexus between other destination areas and points of interest, such as the 2nd Street District, the 6th Street District, the Capitol, and the Convention Center.

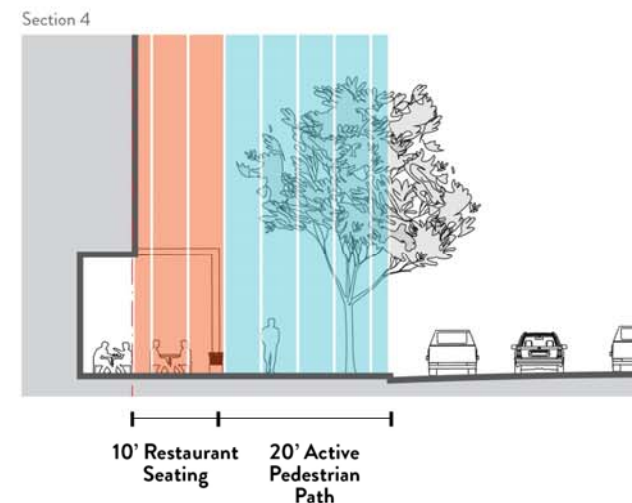
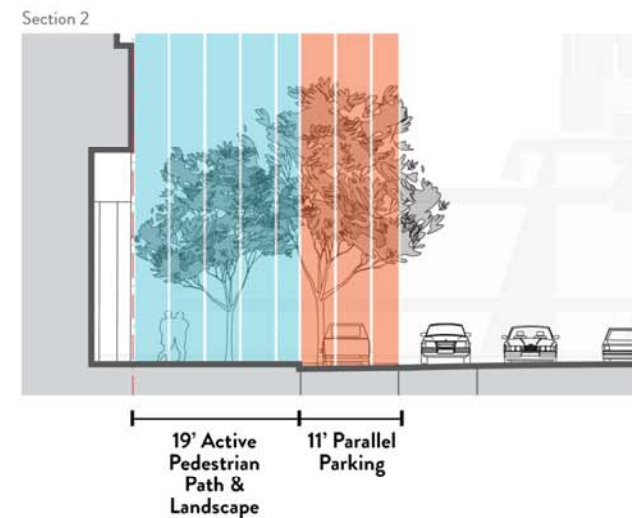
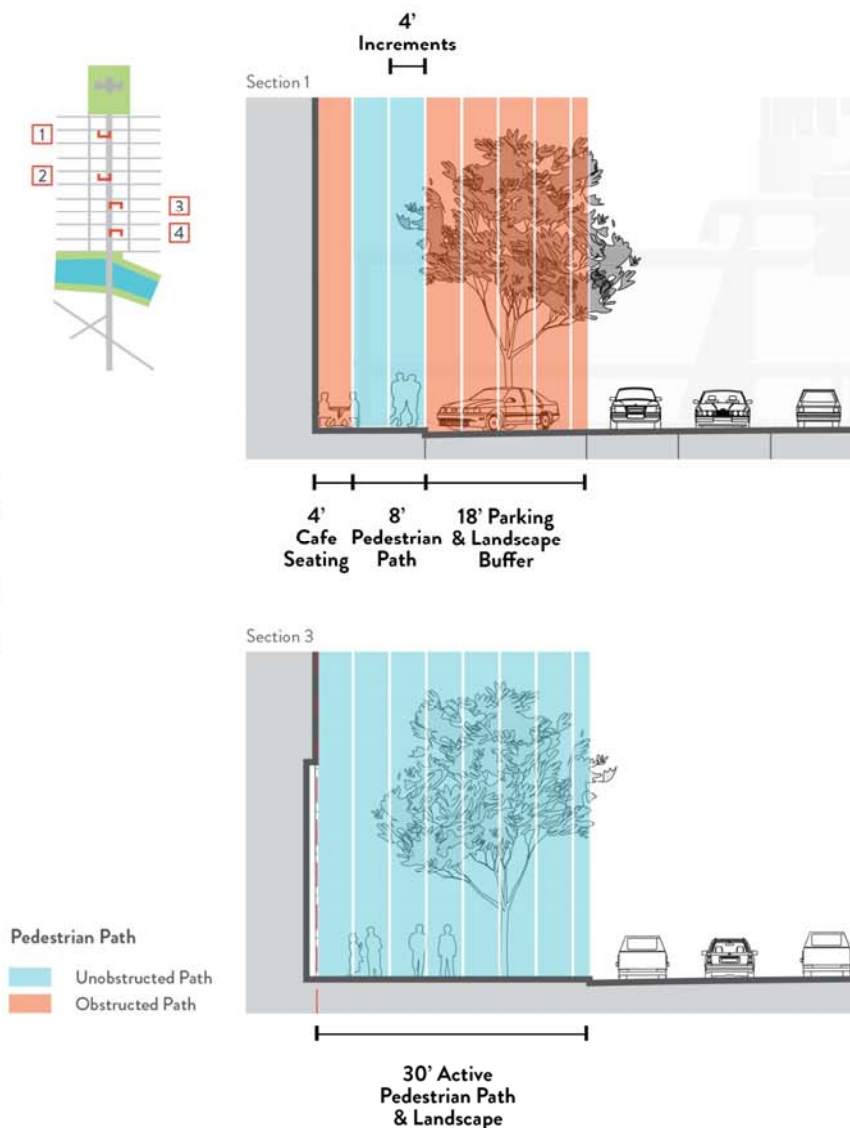
For all its centrality, however, Congress Avenue's connections to these assets are not always clear or explicit. This project presents a major opportunity to better connect the Avenue to its nearby districts and landmarks, both physically and experientially, as well to elevate the prominence of the cultural and retail assets along the Avenue itself.



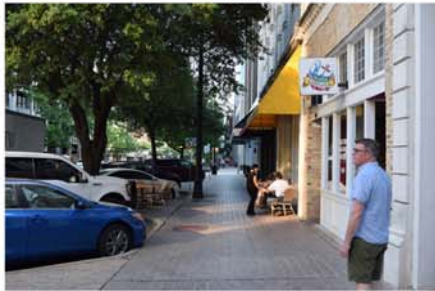
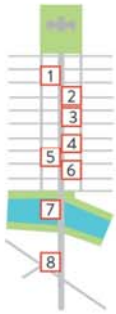
PEDESTRIAN PATH & ACTIVITY ZONE

The pedestrian zone along Congress Avenue winds through a variety of conditions along its length, as shown by these illustrative sections of typical conditions. Section 1 and 2 shows where the pedestrian zone shares right-of-way width with (angled-in or parallel) on-street parking. At its narrowest, the pedestrian zone is constrained to 12', with further reductions in the width of the potential travel path by sidewalk furnishings, lighting, and the cafe zone. This poses potential mobility challenges, especially in areas with high pedestrian activities, and for people in wheelchairs.

Where on-street parking doesn't exist, pedestrians enjoy a much greater amount of sidewalk space, up to 30' in width. Section 3 illustrates this, and section 4 shows yet another permutation with a 10' cafe zone along the back of the curb. While much more generous towards pedestrians, these sidewalk spaces sometimes lack clear definition in terms of their various functional zones, with light poles and street trees sometimes in the middle of the direct pedestrian travel path.



PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE



- 1 The pedestrian zone width is limited to 12' by the presence of angled-in on-street parking, and the path of pedestrian travel is further limited by sidewalk cafes and street lights.



- 2 The 18' width for the pedestrian zone in front of the State Theatre is potentially insufficient for serving the high pedestrian volumes.



- 3 Pedestrian travel path is constrained by the "parklet" sidewalk cafes.



- 4 There is generous 30' wide pedestrian zone in front of the Austonian. However, pedestrian path of travel is obstructed by the placement of street lights.



- 5 Congress Avenue will need to consider emerging forms of curbside use, such as food trucks and pick-up/drop-off areas for transportation network companies.



- 6 The sidewalk is shared between 20' of pedestrian zone and 10' of back-of-curb cafe zone. The placement of street trees and furnishings is consistent, creating a smooth, unobstructed path of travel for pedestrians.



- 7 The sidewalks along Congress Avenue is relatively narrow and devoid of pedestrian amenities.



- 8 South of Lady Bird Lake, Congress Avenue takes on an auto-centric character, with a narrow pedestrian zone and few pedestrian amenities.

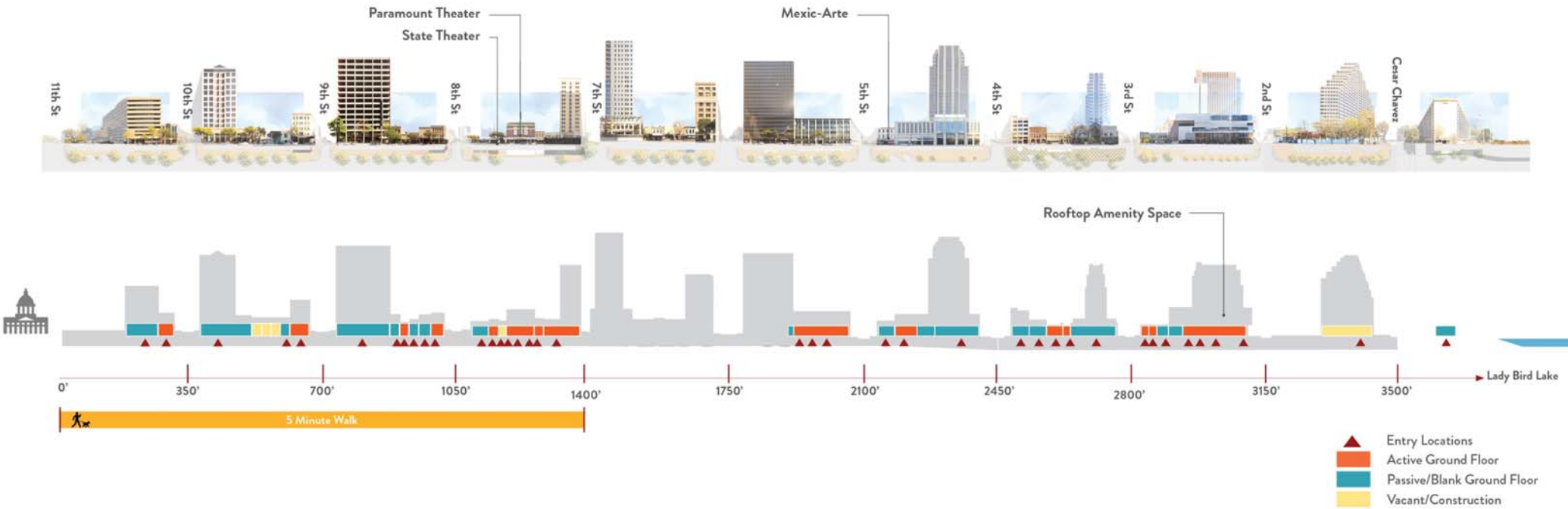
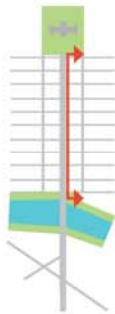
BUILDING ELEVATIONS 11TH TO CESAR CHAVEZ - EAST

The buildings along Congress Avenue represent a microcosm of American architecture, ranging from the 1880s to the present day. Such a mixture of styles--from Green revival to Chicago School and beyond--as well as a mixture of heights and age exist on almost every block.

The ground level conditions of these buildings, in terms of their level of activation and "cadence" or frequency of storefronts, produce different

characters and experiences at the street level. The greatest concentration of activities, for example, is on the blocks between 5th and 8th streets, where there are active uses and frequent building entries.

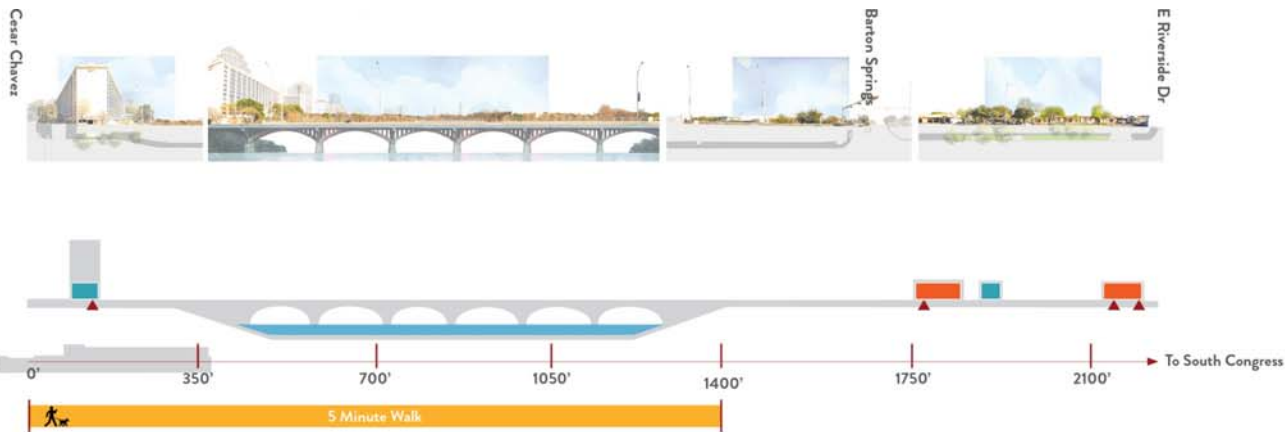
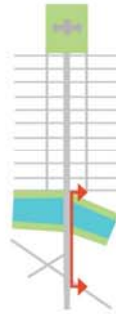
By contrast, the blocks adjacent to the Capitol are characterized by large, inactive facades particularly to the east side between 9th and 10th streets.



BUILDING ELEVATIONS

CESAR CHAVEZ TO RIVERSIDE DRIVE - EAST

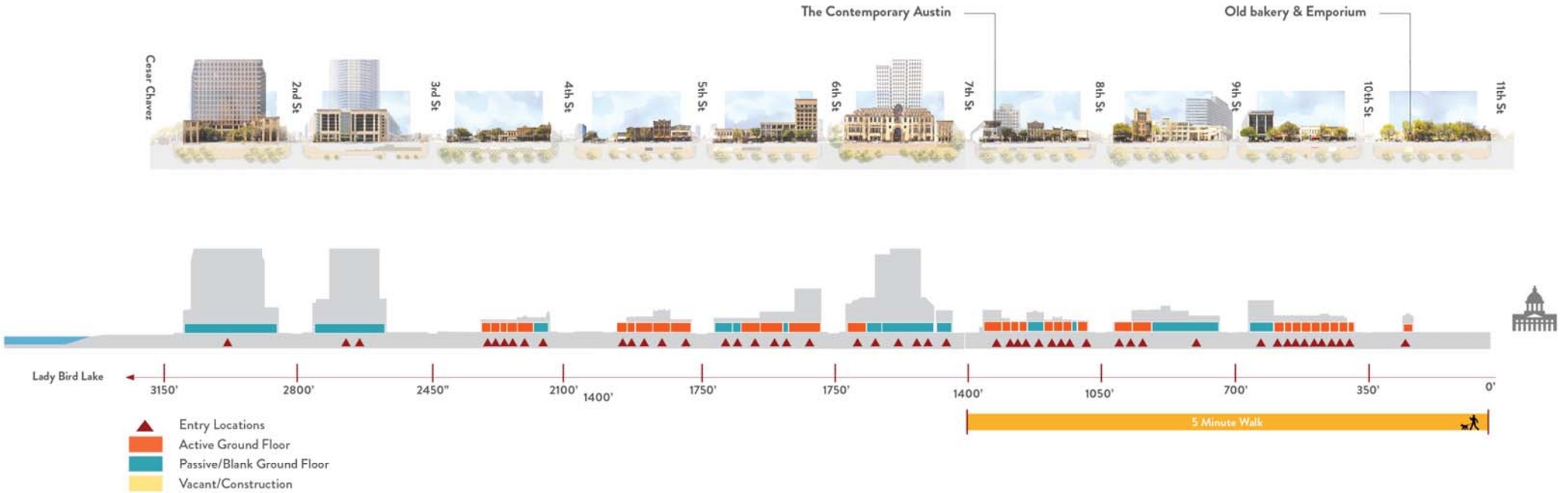
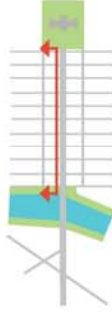
Many small commercial buildings line the Avenue as Congress crosses Lady Bird Lake and extends farther south to Riverside Drive. With the exception of the Austin American-Statesman Building, the architecture is largely unremarkable in style, lacks scale and does not engage with the sidewalk or street. It is a vehicular landscape dominated by cars and roadway.



- ▲ Entry Locations
- Active Ground Floor
- Passive/Blank Ground Floor
- Vacant/Construction

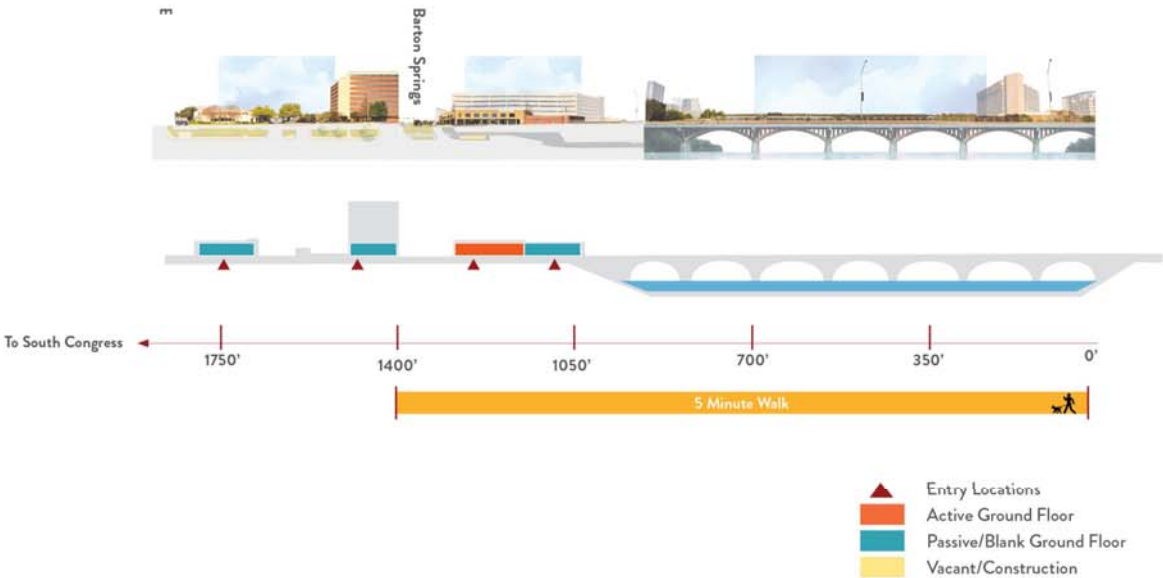
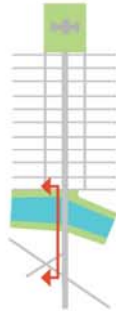
BUILDING ELEVATIONS CESAR CHAVEZ TO 11TH - WEST

Many of the most significant buildings are located north of 3rd Street on the west side of Congress Avenue. Here many landmarked buildings and smaller scale commercial storefronts create an intimate and varied pedestrian environment. The difference in the number of building entries per block is striking if you compare blocks south of 3rd Street with those north of 7th Street on the west side of Congress Avenue.



BUILDING ELEVATIONS EAST RIVERSIDE TO CESAR CHAVEZ - WEST

South of Lady Bird Johnson Lake are a few notable commercial buildings that line Congress Avenue. With the opening of a retail store at the intersection of Congress Avenue and Barton Springs Road. The YETI store creates a welcoming and shaded porch at the edge of the street. The remainder of the buildings along this stretch of Congress Avenue are largely set back from the street edge and have entries that are difficult to access.



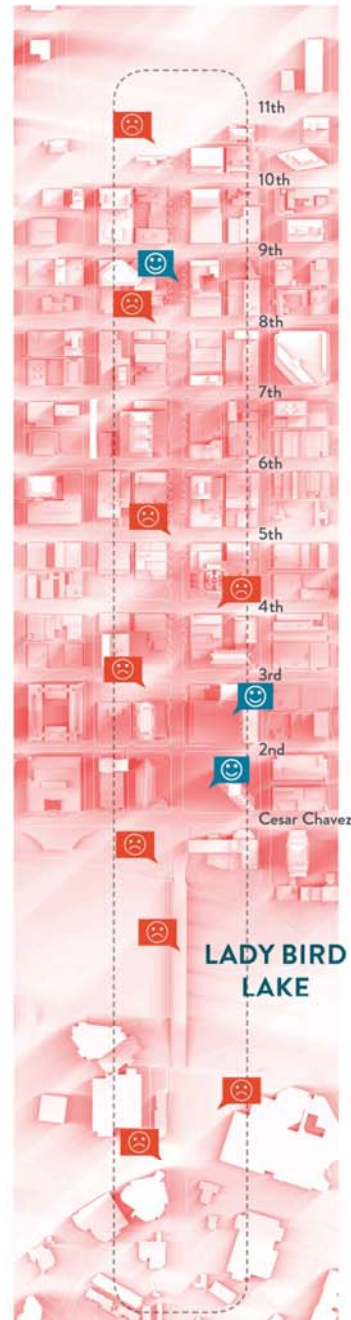
SHADOW ANALYSIS - SUMMER

The summer shadow and sun analysis diagram represents the Congress Avenue corridor that receives the most amount of sun and shadow during a peak summer week (June 18 - June 24). Austin reaches an average high of 97°F during the summer months, making the pedestrian environment extremely harsh when in direct sun exposure.

Congress Avenue north (North of Lady Bird Lake) receives an even mix of sun and shade exposure. The built out blocks, consistent building to building dimensions, mature tree canopy, and varying building heights provide a shaded environment along the majority of the sidewalks.

The main exposure to the summer sun comes at roadway intersections and at surface parking lots. The Congress Avenue Bridge and Congress Avenue South (South of Lady Bird Lake) are severely exposed during the peak summer months.

Shadow Analysis



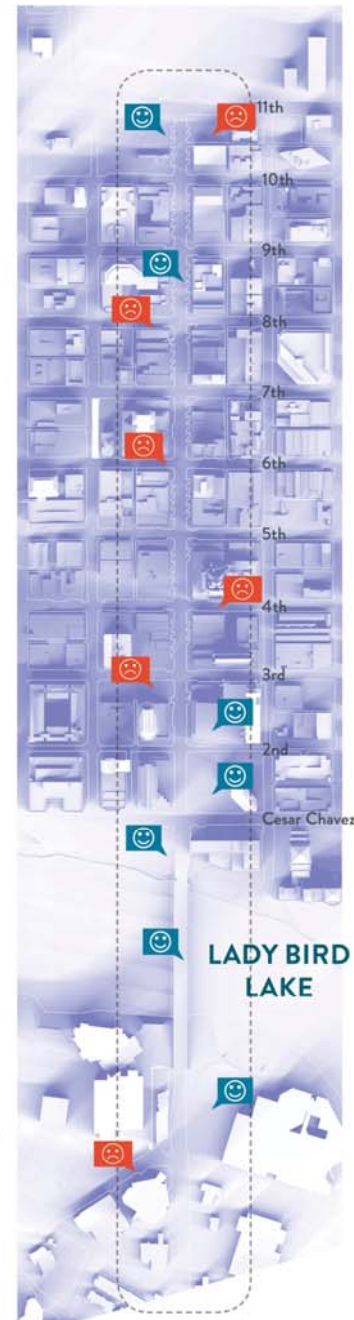
SHADOW ANALYSIS - WINTER

The winter shadow and sun analysis diagram represents the Congress Avenue corridor that receives the most amount of sun and shadow during a peak winter week (December 18 - December 24). Austin reaches an average low of 42°F during the peak winter months.

The public realm and building facades that are north facing along Congress Avenue receive the least amount of direct sun exposure. This is due to the building heights and orientation. The sidewalks along Congress Avenue receive an equal mix of sun and shade exposure.

The JW Marriott rooftop and the Fareground Plaza are good examples of optimal comfort spaces as they are well shaded in the summer months, while receiving generous sun exposure during the winter.

Shadow Analysis



TREE SURVEY

The initial tree survey was sponsored by the Downtown Austin Alliance and conducted by Unitech Consulting Engineers in February, 2016. Additional information and photographs were provided in March of 2017, by the The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.

Overall, most trees are in decent health, and, of those in poor health, most suffer damage due to lack of maintenance (such as lack of tree grate cutting and loosening of holiday lights). The most prominent species are Shumard and Southern Live Oaks, which have dense canopies that block views of the Capitol Complex from the sidewalk.

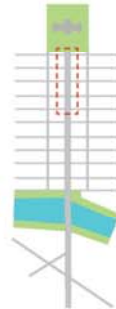


Street trees adjacent to old oaks

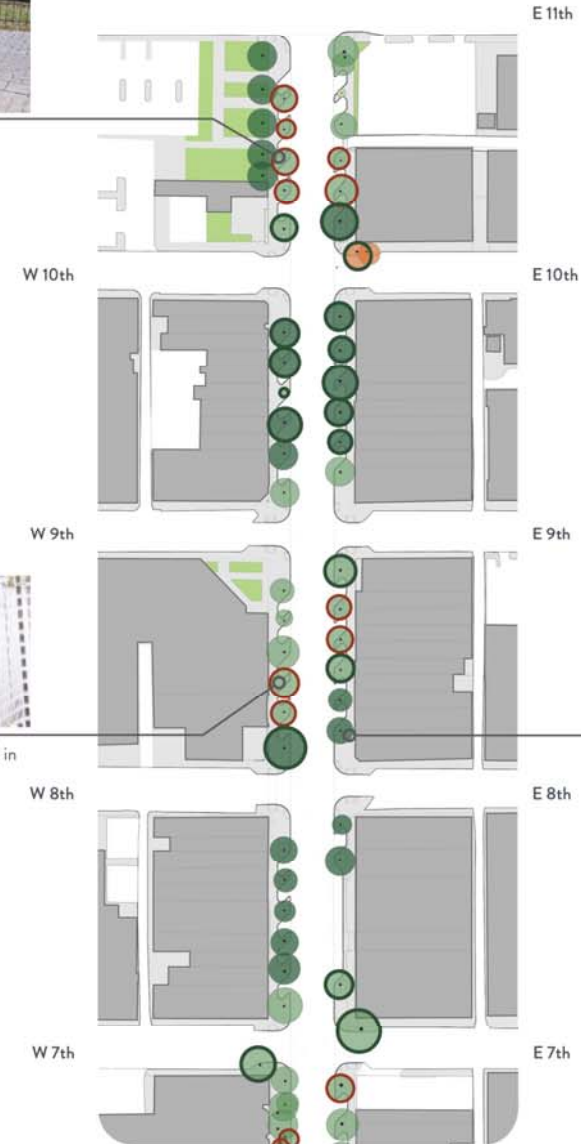


Consistent street planting, typical throughout Congress

- | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| • Quercus fusiformis
Live Oak | • Fraxinus velutina
Arizona Ash | • Taxodium distichum
Bald Cypress |
| • Quercus virginiana
Southern Live Oak | • Quercus polymorpha
Monterrey Oak | ○ Condition - Good |
| • Quercus muehlenbergii
Chinquapin Oak | • Ilex Vomitoria
Yaupon | ○ Condition - Fair |
| • Quercus shumardii
Shumard Oak | • Ulmus Crassifolia
Cedar Elm | ○ Condition - Bad |



Wounds on trunk



E 11th



Bluejay spotted in this area

E 10th



Canopy in good condition

E 9th



Seven grackle nests in this tree!

E 8th

E 7th



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.

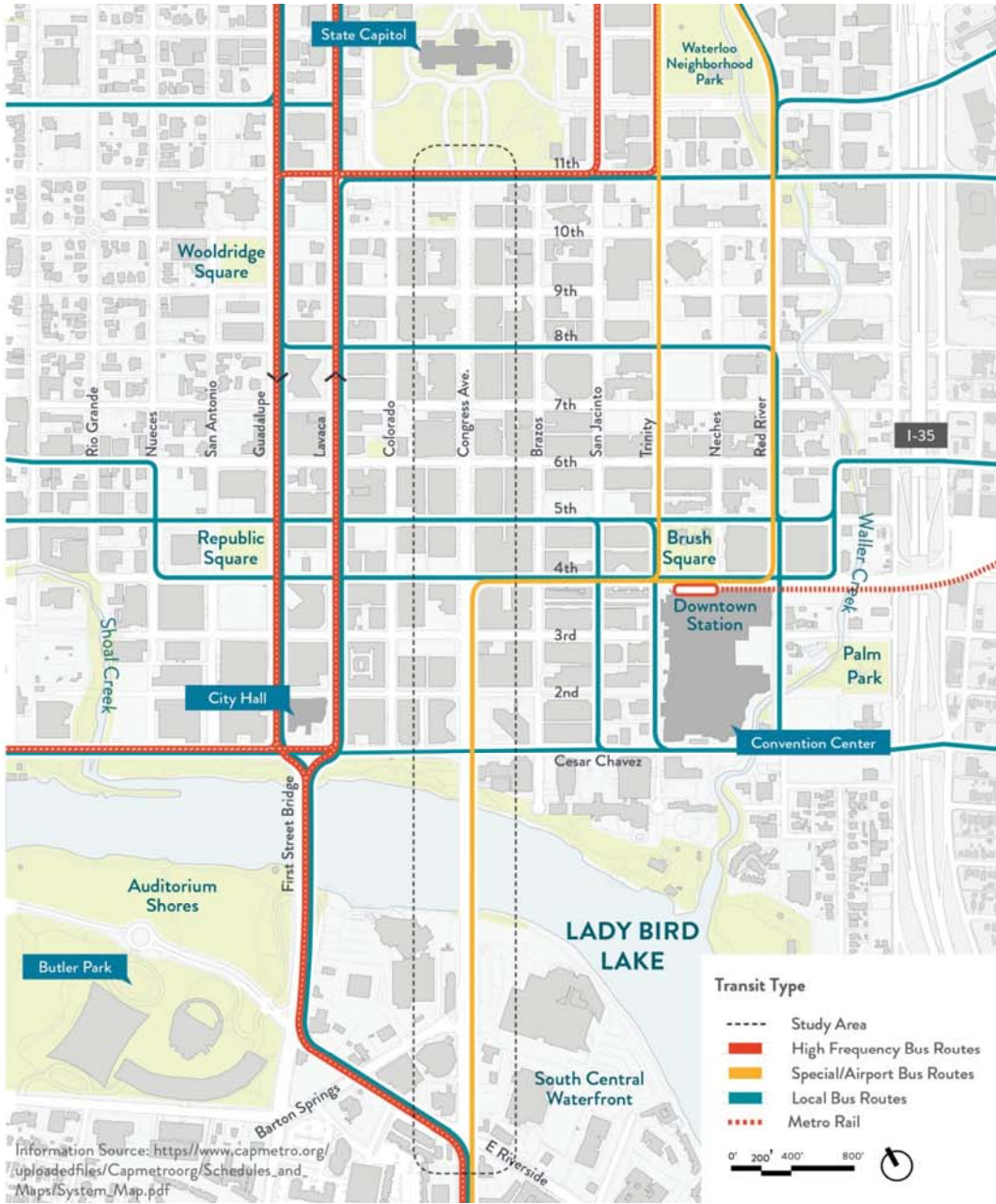


Metro Rail



Capital Metro Bus

DRAFT



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



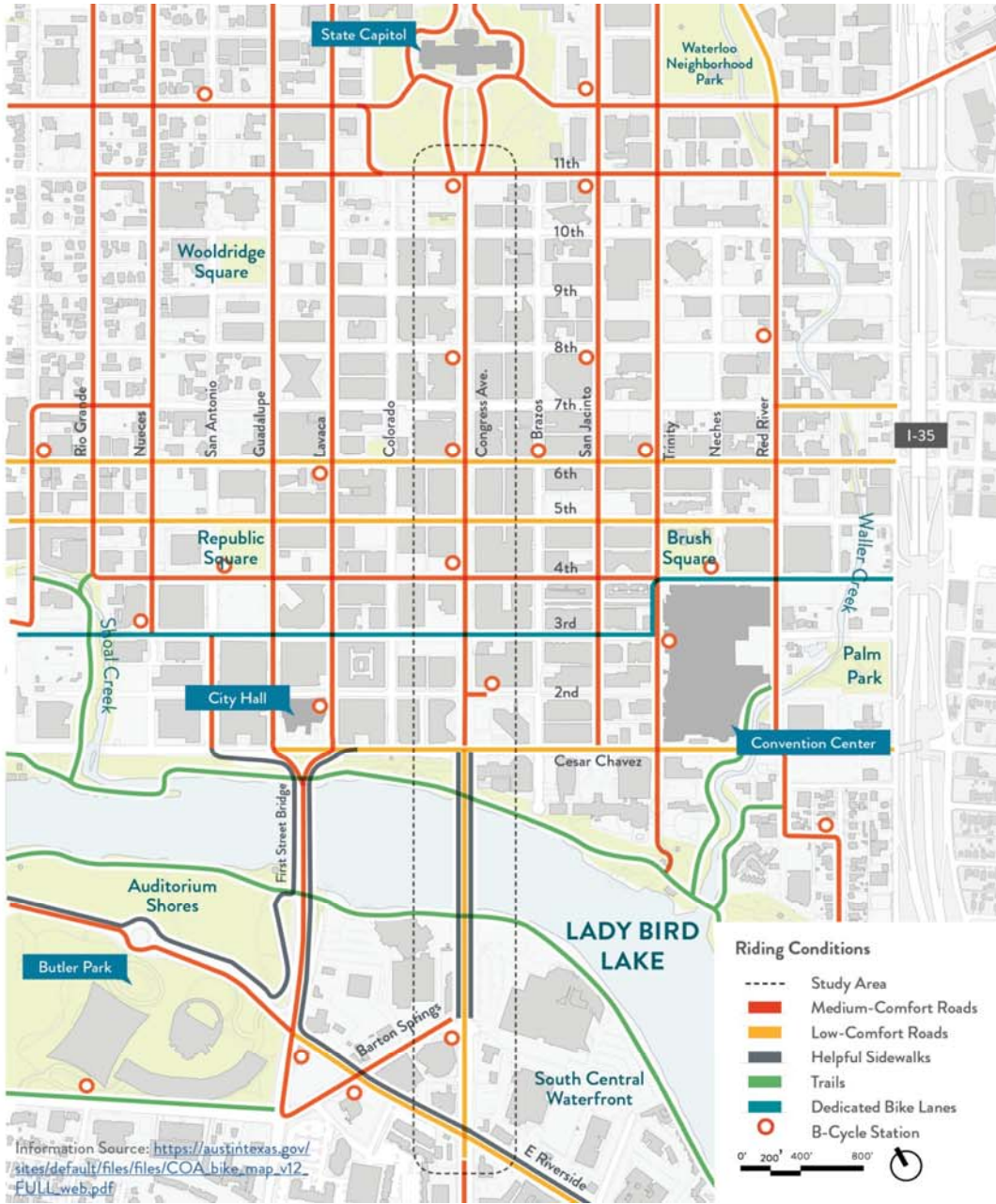
Dedicated Bike Lanes on 3rd Street



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



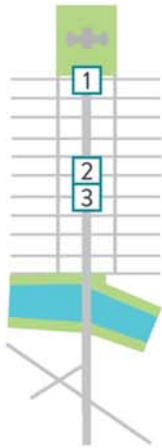
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INTERSECTIONS - NORTH SECTION

Level of Service (LOS) Criteria

LOS	Delay in Seconds	
A	<10	Acceptable
B	>10 and <20	
C	>20 and <35	
D	>35 and <55	
E	>55 and <80	Unacceptable
F	>80	

LOS of D is categorized as acceptable by the City of Austin



Key Map

11th Street

Northbound traffic splits evenly east and west. Pedestrian crossings from the Capitol may also affect calculations of delay. Generally, vehicular traffic is light and congestion is minimal.

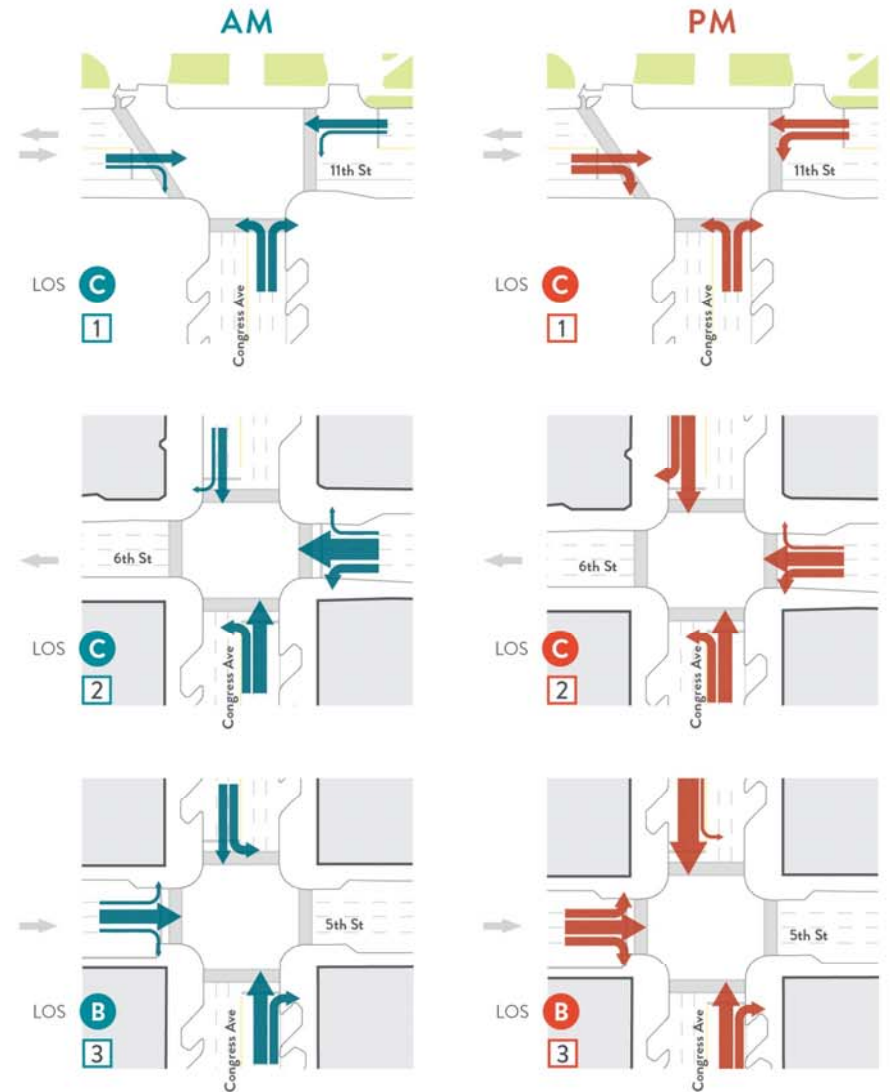
5th & 6th Streets

Both intersections operate well. North of 6th Street toward the Capitol, traffic becomes much lighter. Pedestrian traffic at both intersections is heaviest in the PM peak period between 4th and 7th Streets, generated by nearby office buildings. Conflicts arise between pedestrians and vehicles, particularly right-turning ones. No leading pedestrian intervals are provided

Intersection Traffic Volume



Peak Hour Traffic Volumes



Schedule

- **P3 Announcement – end of August**
- **P3 – Late September**
 - **What we heard**
 - **Vision & Values 2.0**
 - **Updated opportunities & constraints**
 - **Design option vignettes in preparation for P3**
- **Second public comment period closes – Late October**