



Downtown
Seattle
Association

Third Avenue Vision

A Road of Possibilities



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A Letter from the Third Avenue Task Force Co-Chairs:

Tens of thousands of people travel Third Avenue every day. They rely on it to get to work, meet friends and colleagues, shop in downtown, attend doctors appointments and visit cultural venues.

Very few of us choose to spend any free time on Third Avenue, though. The sheer number of vehicles, weaving traffic and bleak pedestrian environment discourage recreational activity.

We believe there is a better way. We can move more people faster along this central transit corridor without sacrificing the pedestrian or rider experience. Seattle is a world-class city, and we can build the Third Avenue it deserves.

That’s why DSA championed a year-long visioning process to determine four design scenarios reimagining a thriving, vibrant Third Avenue. Over the course of this project, we convened hundreds of stakeholders, engaged building owners, businesses, residents, elected leaders and government agencies.

We explored a variety of solutions for transportation, urban design and management. We also examined ways the private sector can contribute through retail uses and storefront repairs, and where public-private partnerships could play a role in public space activation and enhanced maintenance.

This report details our research and extensive discussions. Each of the four scenarios are outlined, showcasing their streetscape features, transportation strategies and collective advantages and disadvantages.

We are proud to offer this vision for a flourishing Third Avenue and believe it delivers on Seattle’s promise to be an equitable, welcoming and modern city. We invite you to join our coalition, make your voice heard and shape the future of Third Avenue.

Thank you,



Kathy O’Kelley
Hines
VP of Property Management

Sabrina Villanueva
Clise Properties Inc
Property Manager

This vision was completed in collaboration with:



“ Third Avenue is the hardest working transit street in the nation. By aligning our public and private partners on a shared vision, we’re aiming to turn this critical corridor running through the heart of downtown into a vibrant urban experience, befitting our great city. ”

Jon Scholes
Downtown Seattle Association
President & CEO



Setting the Stage

In 2018, Third Avenue carried approximately 52,000 transit riders per day.

Seattle, Washington ▼



THE GATEWAY TO DOWNTOWN SEATTLE

Third Avenue is a critical north-south transportation route in downtown Seattle. It is a busy gateway to downtown, carrying approximately 52,000 transit riders per day. For a variety of reasons, significant sections of the corridor feel unwelcoming and unsafe. Over the past decade, several planning efforts have yielded incremental improvements, but the underlying challenges remain the same.

UNPRECEDENTED GROWTH

Meanwhile, Seattle leads the country in population growth and development activity. In 2016, the Seattle City Council adopted a Comprehensive Plan that estimated Seattle’s 2016 population of 686,800 would grow by 120,000 over the next 20 years. In fact, actual growth trends have shattered expectations as Seattle has added approximately one-third of those estimated new residents in just the past two years. At the current growth rate, Seattle will reach its 2035 growth estimate by 2022 – that’s 13 years ahead of schedule. And in 2018, for the third year in a row, Seattle had more cranes than any other city in the nation (65 total). That’s 25 more than second place, Chicago.



Seattle, Washington ▼

At the current growth rate, Seattle will reach its 2035 growth estimate by 2022 – that’s 13 years ahead of schedule. This impacts transit riders and congestion on Third Avenue.

Understanding the implications of growth on mobility, DSA, along with the Downtown Transportation Alliance and partners at the City of Seattle, King County and Sound Transit, founded Commute Seattle to work with local businesses to encourage would-be car commuters to use more efficient means of transportation. Since Commute Seattle was founded in 2005, drive-alone car trips are down, and Seattle leads the nation in transit ridership. In 2017, Seattle logged more new transit trips per capita than any other city (2.5 million total) and grew transit ridership by a rate of 2.3 percent. Today, even as record numbers of workers come into downtown each day from around the region, only 25 percent of them commute alone by car.

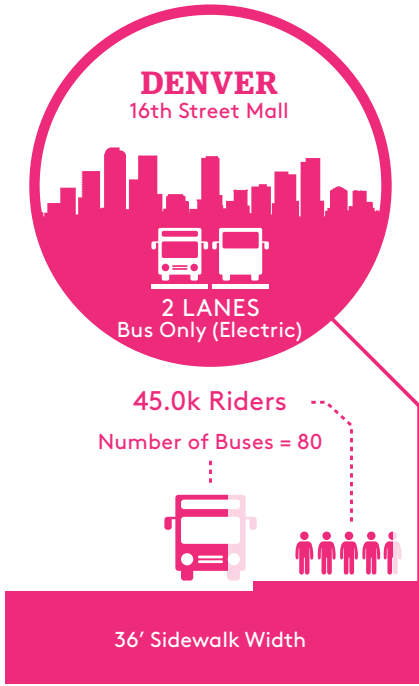
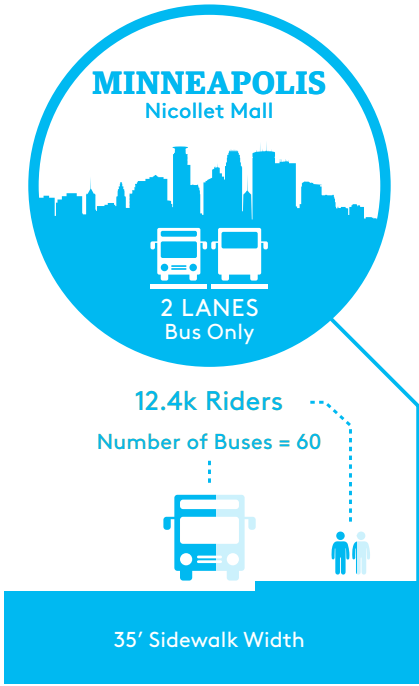
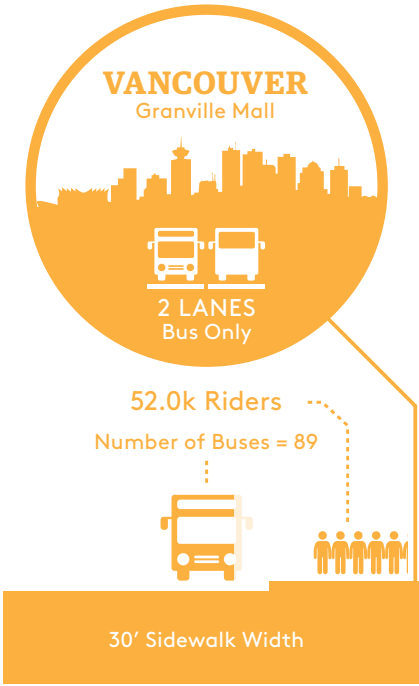
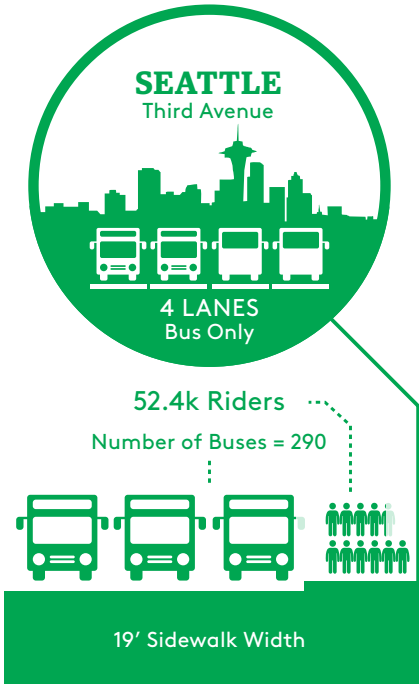


Third Avenue carries over 290 buses per peak hour—more than any other transit street in the U.S. or Canada.

HIGH BUS VOLUMES

Third Avenue carries 290 buses per hour during the busiest parts of the day—more than any other transit street in the nation. Almost every King County Metro bus connecting Seattle’s neighborhoods with downtown uses Third Avenue. Its four-lane, two-way configuration allows buses to pass one another

as they weave between stops and traffic. This "skip-stop" operation allows many different bus routes to use Third Avenue at rush hour. However, the volume of buses, the cumulative number of bus stops, and the frequency of passing vehicles creates a complicated web of traffic that can greatly exacerbate congestion and delays through the center city.



Number of Riders
Daily On-boardings

Number of Buses
Per P.M. Peak Hour

SEATTLE	52,400	290	Third Avenue
VANCOUVER	52,000	89	Granville Mall
MINNEAPOLIS	12,400	60	Nicollet Mall
DENVER	45,000	80	16th Street Mall
SAN FRANCISCO	40,000	170	Market Street
NEW YORK CITY	115,000	150	5th Avenue
LOS ANGELES	55,000	72	Wilshire Corridor

LOW-PERFORMANCE PLACE

At the same time, the current volume of transit activity negatively impacts the pedestrian experience and, indirectly, the vitality of adjacent businesses. A recent corridor study by the City of Seattle and King County identifies these issues by looking at the corridor in three primary zones: Belltown, Business District and Pioneer Square. While these zones vary from one another, they share underlying characteristics:

- A lack of public or private open spaces. At peak hour, composite activity creates an overcrowded public realm
- High pedestrian volumes and long bus queues, with little discretionary staying or lingering
- Deferred infrastructure maintenance and prevalence of street furniture in disrepair
- Blank walls or façades that lack engagement
- A hardscape environment dominated by concrete and little color
- A high volume of office towers with underutilized lobbies

These characteristics create a business climate that discourages investment, indirectly contributing to inactive or worn-out frontages.

Source: Third Avenue Transit Corridor Improvement Project, City of Seattle Department of Transportation & King County Metro, November 2014



“ As office tenants at Third and Pine, we witness on a daily basis the immense role this intersection plays as the “major lifeline of Seattle.” We see commuters, business folks, ferry riders, tourists, cruise goers, shoppers and lunch crowds all culminate on Third and Pine. We also witness the desperate need to improve the infrastructure, safety and cleanliness of Third Avenue. ”

Zahoor Ahmed
R.C. Hedreen Co.
CFO & VP Hotel Operations
DSA Board Chair



Third and Pine ▲



Third and Virginia ▲



Third and Seneca ▲



Third and Pike ▲



Third and James ▲



Third and Union ▲



A Better Third Avenue



Credit: Bruce Forster Photography

Cities similar to Seattle in size and character have tackled this challenge by raising the bar for a quality transit experience.

RAISING THE BAR

The increase in Seattle transit ridership is great news, but it raises the stakes for keeping pace with expansion. In many cities, transit has lost ground amidst growing rideshare options and declining transit conditions. Despite a growing population, New York City is experiencing declining ridership due to underinvestment, vehicle overcrowding and competing transit alternatives. In 2013, customers of New York's Metropolitan Transit Authority began exploring more comfortable options when buses and trains no longer met their needs and expectations.

Cities similar to Seattle in size and character have tackled this challenge by raising the bar for a quality transit experience. Denver, Colorado; Portland, Oregon; Vancouver, B.C.; and Minneapolis, Minnesota have made iterative investments, improving the pedestrian experience as they maximize efficiency. These cities treat major transit corridors as iconic pedestrian streets as well, programming and activating them so people will stroll and linger.

A corridor for everyone will maintain transit capacity while serving the diverse needs of pedestrians, business owners and residents.

A SOLUTION FOR TODAY'S DOWNTOWN

Third Avenue is the most critical north-south transportation corridor through downtown, carrying more than 52,000 riders into and out of the center city every day. Currently, most routes travel the entire length of the corridor

regardless of ridership, creating a particularly bloated network in the center of downtown. The saturation of buses snarls traffic and creates jams of weaving vehicles. Crowds, noise and exhaust contribute to an overwhelming and undesirable street environment.

Bus congestion also impacts the retail experience. Property owners

cite challenges leasing their storefronts due to the negative street conditions. Long lines of buses obscure storefronts and conceal undesirable activities. While retail opportunities look good on paper, prospective businesses are often deterred after on-site visits.

Other parts of downtown are experiencing a ground-floor business revival. Competitive office markets are motivating property owners to repurpose lobbies and banks into tenant amenities like coffee shops and restaurants. Third Avenue lags behind this trend and suffers from an overabundance of static office lobbies, government and institutional uses.

In addition, narrow sidewalks mean even the most ambitious business and property owners are unable to actively program the sidewalk. One business, which located at Third and Pine in fall 2018, said it sought to put a sidewalk café in front of their store, but were denied a sidewalk permit due to bus stops and space constraints.

Future solutions must take the pedestrian and retail environment into account while maintaining the transit ridership that exists through downtown today. Downtown deserves a transit system that meets our current needs.

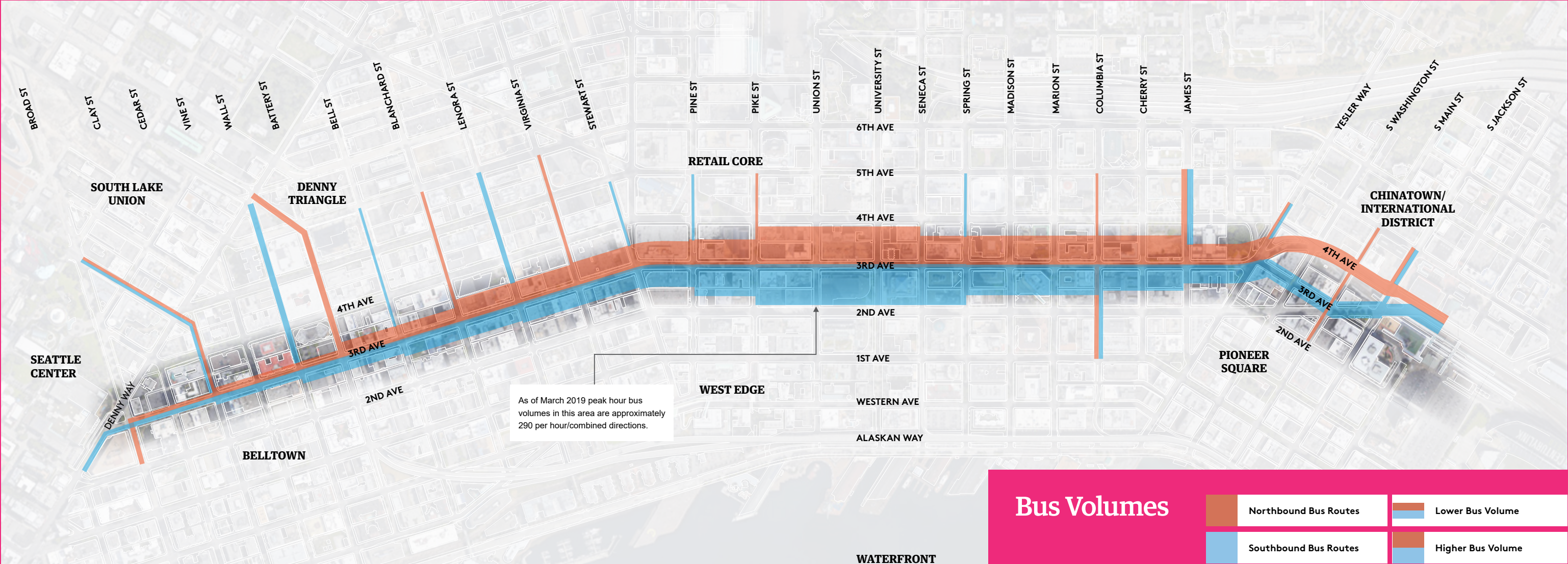
In fact, Seattle's transit system is already evolving. With the opening of new light rail stations in the

coming years, regional bus riders currently arriving on Second and Fourth avenues will have a better way to commute into downtown and bus volumes are expected to decline.

Assuming baseline conditions, volumes on Third Avenue will drop from about 290 buses in 2018 to 200 in 2035. More dramatic decreases will occur on Second and Fourth avenues, which are expected to go from moving 250 buses combined to around 75 buses. Overall, bus volumes in downtown will decline from about 600 buses per peak hour today to roughly 300 buses at peak hour on First through Fifth avenues. This opens a new opportunity to rebalance the network and rethink bus operations.

Generally, a future transit network through downtown must:

- Foster a public realm that serves transit riders, tourists, residents and employees
- Maintain or expand transit capacity through downtown to support growing ridership
- Rebalance the use of right-of-way space by finding an equilibrium between mobility, access and place
- Thoughtfully deploy bus routes to accommodate as many people as efficiently as possible while minimizing the negative impacts to pedestrians



Convening local stakeholders to set a new vision

PLANNING A GREAT STREET

In 2017, public and private leaders considered various solutions for accommodating more bus passengers in downtown as a part of One Center City. Chief among those solutions was adding buses to surface streets, as well as improving the function, user experience and perception of bus corridors. Again and again, downtown users expressed frustration with the conditions on Third Avenue. Everyone agreed there was room for improvement.

In 2018, the Downtown Seattle Association engaged more than 70 business owners, property owners, residents and government agencies to chart a new vision for Third Avenue. Prior to setting a vision, this group conducted a comprehensive assessment of key issues at play. They identified quick wins, as well as potential changes to ensure Third Avenue could be a great street for everyone. This task force provided input to shape a plan for improving experiences along the corridor from Denny Way to Jackson Street.

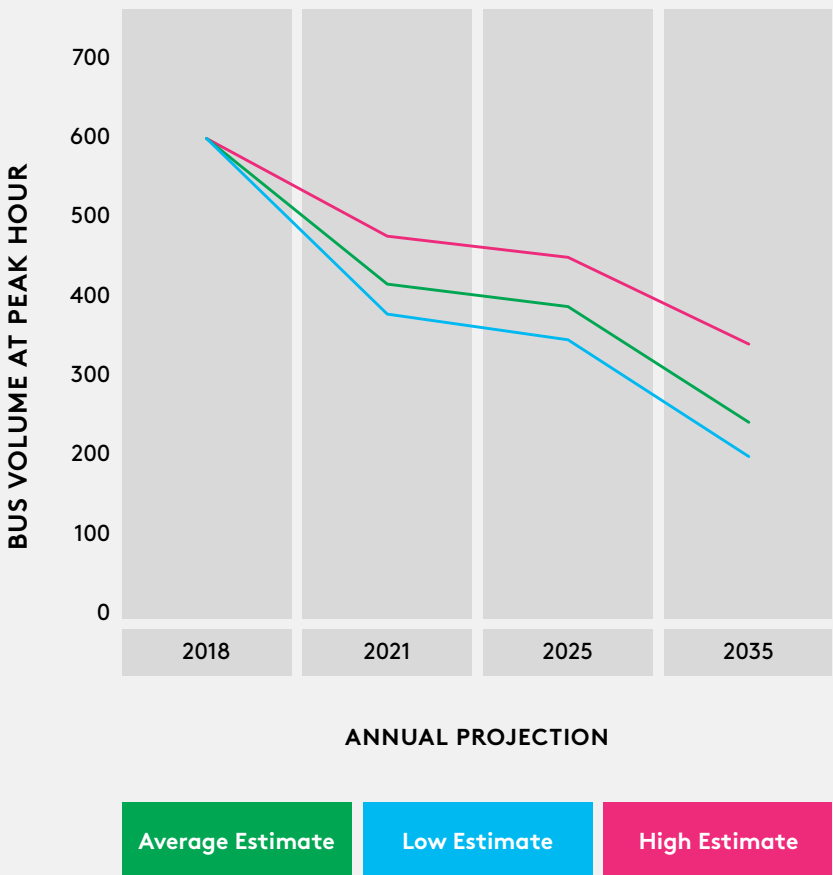
This plan establishes a vision for a future Third Avenue that:

- Is an iconic transit and pedestrian corridor with an enhanced level of maintenance and care
- Reflects a thoughtful approach to transit, optimizing bus volumes through the center of the corridor
- Increases space for pedestrians and people waiting for buses
- Is activated by businesses and programming to attract pedestrians and encourage them to stroll and linger
- Utilizes existing public assets to their full potential, including Pine Street Plaza, City Hall Park, Jackson Hub (Union and King Street Stations) and Bell Street Park

Total Potential Transit Volume Changes

Today through 2035

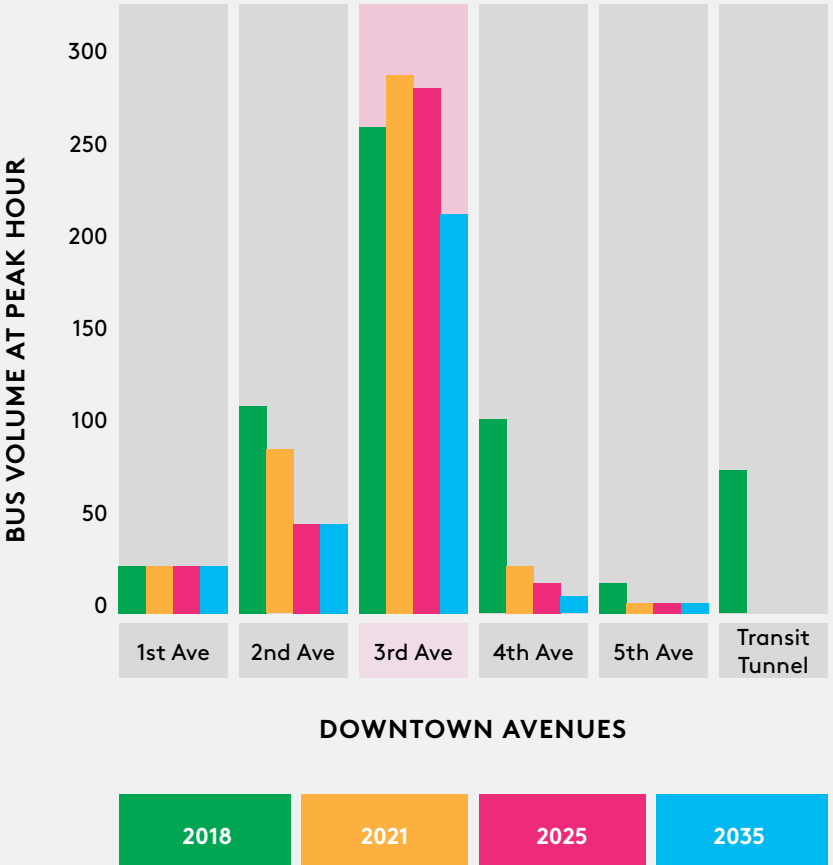
- Total downtown Seattle transit volumes (two-way)
- Ranges of truncation and transit services growth assumptions



Changes to Downtown Transit Volumes by Corridor

Today through 2035

- P.M. peak hour transit volume through downtown corridors (First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth avenues)
- Based on potential route truncations with Link extensions
- Assumes growth of RapidRide



The projected volumes will vary based on final planning of route restructures with Link Light Rail extensions.
Source: Fehr & Peers, 2018

DSA assembled Third Avenue stakeholders to craft an enduring strategy.

A VISION BUILT ON COLLABORATION

DSA hired ZGF Architects, Fehr & Peers, and ELS Architecture and Urban Design to design a vision for improving the street’s urban design, transportation, private property, retail, parks and public spaces, and management and stewardship. Many partners came together to craft this collective vision, including government agency staff, businesses,

residents and property owners. The work was funded and completed by DSA in collaboration with the Downtown Transportation Alliance and with advisory input from the Third Avenue Vision Task Force and the inter-agency Third Avenue Quick Wins Task Force. DSA also engaged stakeholders through one-on-one briefings and neighborhood meetings. Overall, hundreds of stakeholders weighed in throughout the visioning process.

Seattle, Washington ▾





Credit: Scott Dressel Martin

Denver, Colorado ▲

PEER CITIES, PEER SOLUTIONS

Throughout the process, DSA and its partners looked to peer cities to inspire a different approach. However, Third Avenue is unique, carrying approximately 290 buses per peak hour (the most of any street in the nation), while carrying fewer passengers per bus.

DSA conducted a study of 16 of the busiest transit streets in the country. Of these, Denver, Colorado; Portland, Oregon; Vancouver, B.C.; and Minneapolis, Minnesota provided the best comparable examples. Each of these streets serves the heart of downtown and is surrounded by high-density development. In each, the case study street is the primary transit corridor, but is not the only bus corridor through downtown.

Key characteristics are as follows:

- **Civic Pedestrian Transit Corridors:** 16th Street Mall, Nicollet Mall, Portland Transit Mall, and Granville Mall were all reimagined as civic pedestrian-transit malls in the 1960s and 1970s. Since then, each street has undergone a second transformation to maintain its appeal as a place for people. Every renovation involved both public and private funding to different degrees.
- **People First:** Each street exhibits people-first design through enhanced crosswalks, curbless streets, special paving and surface treatments. All case study streets have wider sidewalks of up to 32 feet (Third Avenue is only 17-23 feet wide). This space prioritizes people and allows multiple functions to take place at once. In Vancouver, city politicians reinforced the design by allowing jaywalking across the bus street.

- **High-Quality Aesthetic and Appearance:** Transit facilities like these demand quality materials both to connote importance and to sustain additional wear-and-tear. These streets all have unique designs that symbolize importance and embody local character.
- **Optimal Bus Capacity:** Each city has optimized transit capacity to make the best use of limited right-of-way. In the case of Portland, this meant replacing some buses with light rail to alleviate the peak bus volumes. The Portland Transit Mall and Third Avenue have alternating bus route group stops with buses passing each other between stops. Denver's 16th Street and Minneapolis' Nicollet Mall use platooning buses that do not pass one another. This affects the amount of required lanes.

- **Activation and Placemaking:** Each street creatively leverages public space to create a positive association between the transit corridor and community. Minneapolis and Portland host farmers markets, Portland programs abutting Pioneer Courthouse Square, Vancouver closes the street for evening festivities, and Denver activates the transit hubs on both ends of the mall. The 2018 Superbowl, hosted in Minneapolis, used Nicollet Mall to kick off the event.
- **Dedicated Management and Maintenance:** All five downtowns have business improvement districts or associations that harness private and public dollars; promote business recruitment and storefront improvements; manage events and activities; and provide enhanced security on their respective streets. Nicollet Mall, 16th Street Mall, Portland Transit Mall and Granville Mall have corridor-specific, enhanced maintenance and upkeep. Third Avenue receives no additional funding for its function as a transit facility.
- **Share the Load:** All example streets share the transit load with other parallel or crossing streets so as not to overburden one street with noise or traffic impacts. Portland's Transit Mall, Denver's 16th Street, and Minneapolis' Nicollet Mall keep an upper limit on volumes to maintain pedestrian retail viability.

These learnings provide an opportunity to reconsider Third Avenue as part of a 21st Century transit network that efficiently transports people around the city and region.

**MORE PEDESTRIAN SPACE
FOR A VIBRANT AVENUE**

Research shows Third Avenue has relatively little sidewalk space compared to peer streets. Approximately 45 percent of its right-of-way is developed for pedestrians, while other transit streets provide no less than 55 percent of their right-of-way to pedestrians and up to 70 percent. All of these peer streets carry

fewer buses and have less waiting passengers than Third Avenue. This only further exacerbates the pedestrian congestion on sidewalks.

To better understand sidewalk conditions on Third Avenue, ZGF conducted a pedestrian flow analysis. Generally, Third Avenue sidewalks crowd at peak hours and flow reasonably well during non-peak hours. However, sidewalk conditions are dramatically

complicated by transit waiting, boarding and alighting. The stacking of bus stopping positions, the lack of a defined waiting zone near the curb within and around an extended passenger shelter, and the crush of alighting and boarding passengers all create a gauntlet through which pedestrians must attempt to pass. At peak periods, this activity results in a constricted through-zone, akin to more narrow sidewalks around downtown. In certain locations,

small gatherings of people further encroach into the pedestrian through-zone. Some people report avoiding Third Avenue altogether due to the lack of personal space and unclear pedestrian pathways. This puts storefront retailers at a clear disadvantage from competitors on adjacent streets.

Good urban streets, at their best, serve multiple circulation modes with a degree of equity while

also providing a positive setting for commercial activity. With the adjacent high density and mix of uses on Third Avenue, comfortable access to and from business entrances (such as the ability to occupy a modest frontage space for dining outside or window shopping) are reasonable expectations for an active urban street.

When
pedestrians
feel prioritized,
more people
are likely to
spend more
time outside.



Credit: Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association



How Streets Work for People

Pedestrian Analysis 1

Existing condition where there is no bus stop

These diagrams illustrate how current conditions on Third Avenue compromise both the pedestrian and transit passenger experience through poor organization and inadequate sidewalk widths.

The first illustration shows a generic example of functional sidewalk zones for a 22' sidewalk, consistent with Third Avenue, but without transit activity. This illustration validates that 22' sidewalks work for general urban sidewalks without transit activity.



**AVAILABLE WALKING ZONE
GENERIC 22' SIDEWALK**

PEAK PEDESTRIAN FLOW
2,880 peds./hour/12' through-zone

LEVEL OF SERVICE
Open Flow: 360 peds./hour/12' through-zone
Unimpeded: 900 peds./hour/12' through-zone
Impeded: 2,880 peds./hour/12' through-zone

Merchant Zone

Pedestrian Through-Zone

Furnishing Zone

Pedestrian Analysis 2

Existing condition where there is a bus stop / bus waiting

On certain parts of Third Avenue, the effective pedestrian through-zone is as little as 5'-7' at peak hour, creating discomfort for many pedestrians. Crowds of waiting

transit passengers and groups of stationary pedestrians around certain storefronts constrain the walking zone. These conditions contribute to a dysfunctional pedestrian environment.



EFFECTIVE WALKING ZONE
THIRD AVENUE

PEAK PEDESTRIAN FLOW
1,200 peds./hour/5' through-zone

LEVEL OF SERVICE
Open Flow: 150 peds./hour/5' through-zone
Unimpeded: 375 peds./hour/5' through-zone
Impeded: 1,200 peds./hour/5' through-zone

Merchant Zone
Pedestrian Through-Zone
Furnishing Zone
Transit Waiting/Boarding Zone

Pedestrian Alternative 1

Proposed condition with a compact transitway or a Couplet

This shows how extra sidewalk width and better design organization can accommodate all activities.

This condition would be associated with three bus lanes on Third Avenue. Note the available merchant zone space.



RECOMMENDED WALKING ZONE
THIRD AVENUE, 3-LANE
SCENARIO

PEAK PEDESTRIAN FLOW
3,000 peds./hour/12.5' through-zone

LEVEL OF SERVICE
Open Flow: 375 peds./hour/12.5' through-zone
Unimpeded: 938 peds./hour/12.5' through-zone
Impeded: 3,000 peds./hour/12.5' through-zone

Merchant Zone
Pedestrian Through-Zone
Furnishing Zone
Transit Waiting/Boarding Zone
Boarding/Alighting Curb

Pedestrian Alternative 2

Proposed condition with a transit shuttle and hub

This shows how even greater sidewalk space could create optimum functional zones within a 33’ width. This condition would be associated with two bus lanes

on Third Avenue (transit shuttle and hub concept). This sidewalk width is similar to successful transit streets in other cities.



RECOMMENDED WALKING ZONE
THIRD AVENUE, 2-LANE
SCENARIO

PEAK PEDESTRIAN FLOW
3,600 peds./hour/15’ through-zone

LEVEL OF SERVICE
Open Flow: 450 peds./hour/15’ through-zone
Unimpeded: 1,125 peds./hour/15’ through-zone
Impeded: 3,600 peds./hour/15’ through-zone

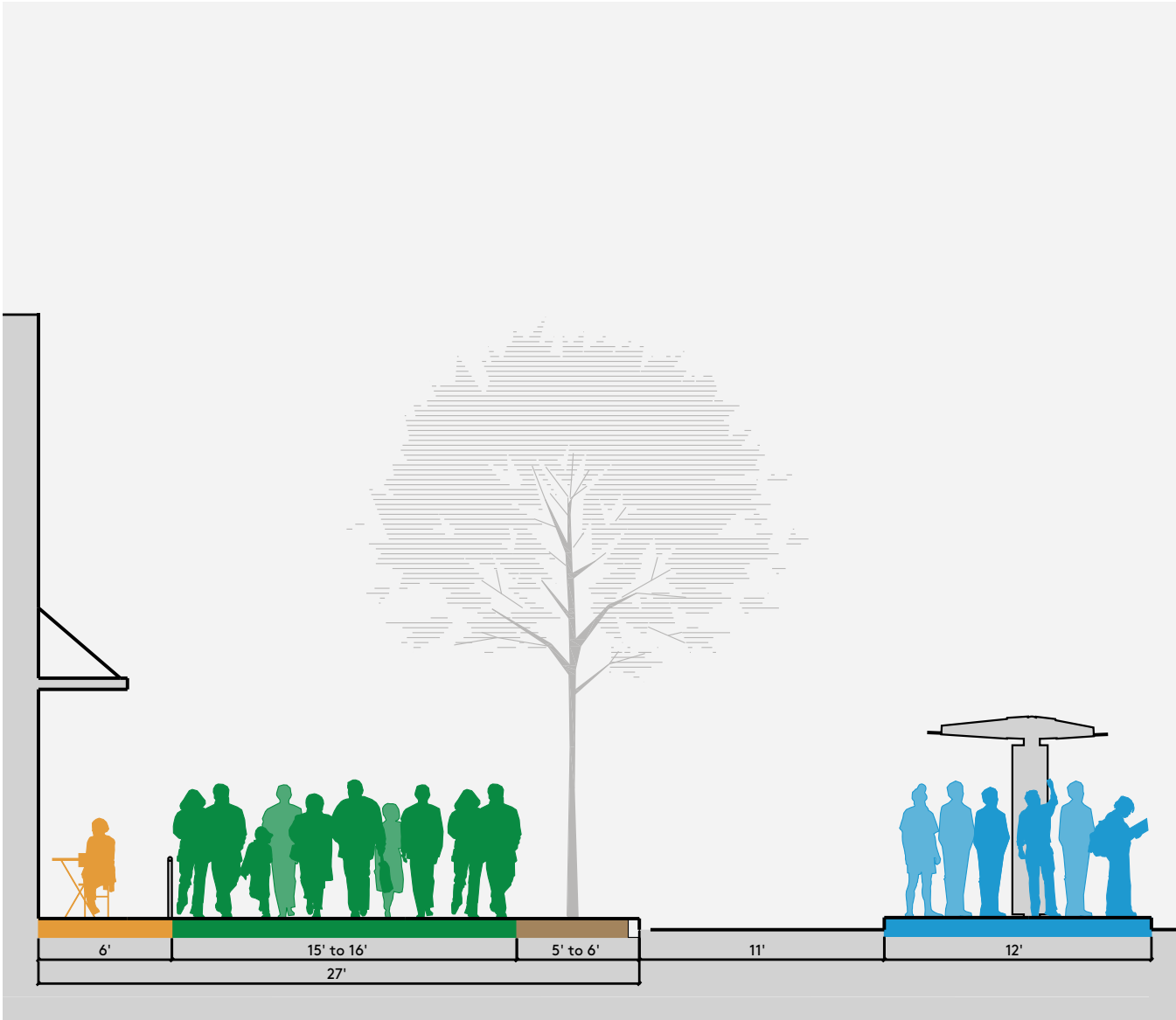
Merchant Zone
Pedestrian Through-Zone
Furnishing Zone
Transit Waiting/Boarding Zone
Boarding/Alighting Curb

Pedestrian Alternative 3

Proposed condition with a median transitway

This diagram shows how creating a transit boarding zone in a center median would give more space to pedestrians and create a clear zone

for people to walk. This scheme also means that people waiting for buses will not be covering storefront windows or blocking building entrances.

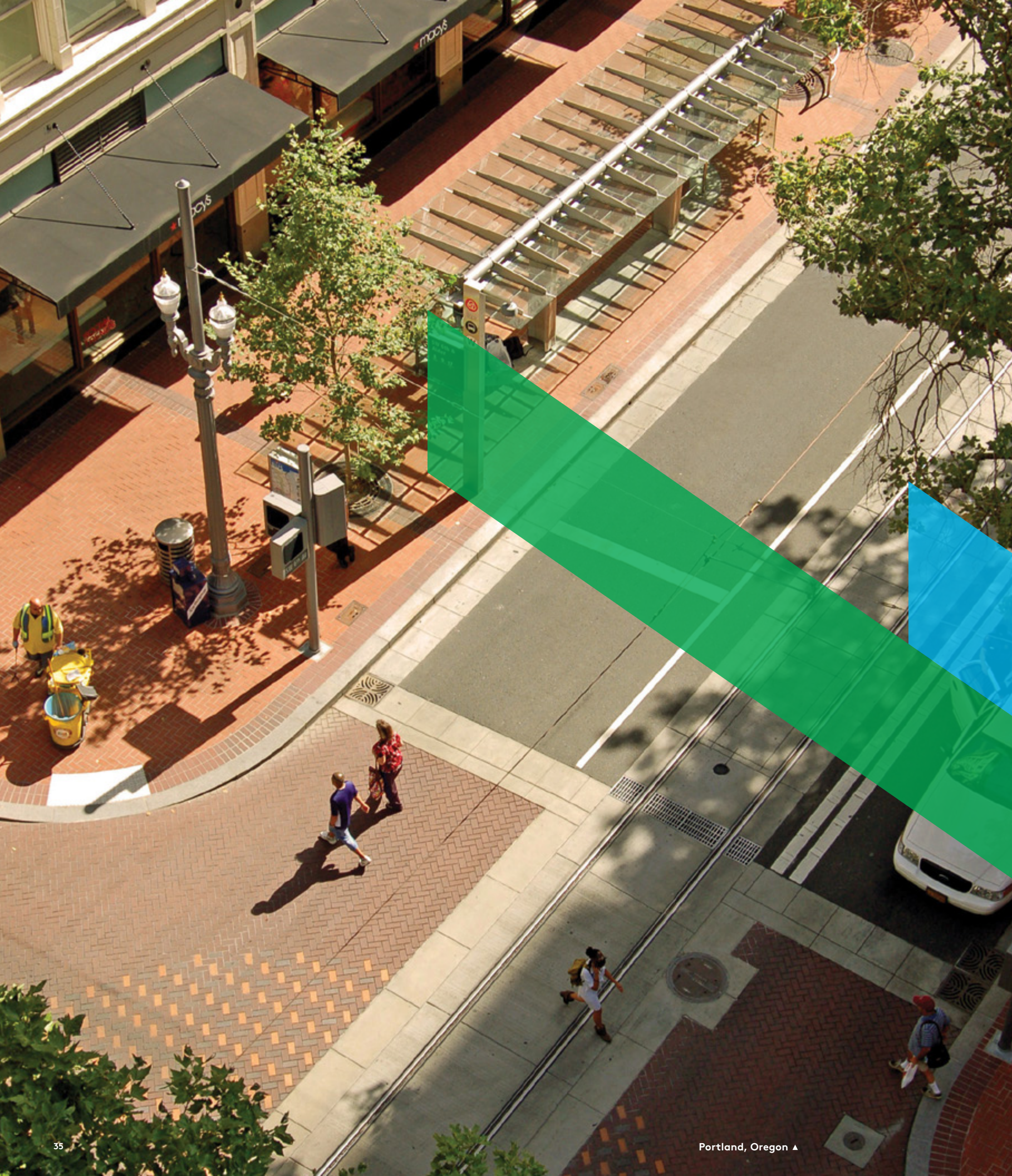


RECOMMENDED WALKING ZONE
THIRD AVENUE, MEDIAN 2-LANE
SCENARIO

PEAK PEDESTRIAN FLOW
3,600 peds./hour/15’ through-zone

LEVEL OF SERVICE
Open Flow: 450 peds./hour/15’ through-zone
Unimpeded: 1,125 peds./hour/15’ through-zone
Impeded: 3,600 peds./hour/15’ through-zone

Merchant Zone
Pedestrian Through-Zone
Furnishing Zone
Transit Waiting/Boarding Zone
Boarding/Alighting Curb



Strategies for Success



Seattle, Washington ▲

Only some of the challenges with Third Avenue can be overcome through reallocation of street space. In order to make Third Avenue an inviting pedestrian corridor, the City of Seattle, King County and other partners must

look at Third Avenue through five distinct lenses: **urban design, transportation, private property and retail, parks and public spaces, and management and stewardship.**

Strategies for Urban Design

Third Avenue will be reimagined as a distinct, dynamic urban corridor to create a high-quality public realm, following four design principles.

Create an Iconic Design Aesthetic

Reimagine Third Avenue as an iconic corridor where workers, residents, tourists and others arrive in a dynamic, inviting place, incorporating high-quality materials and design to connote its importance as a primary north-south corridor.

Minimize Clutter

Optimize openness and visibility to storefronts and adjacent open spaces, and integrate transit waiting/boarding without crowding storefronts or obstructing clearance zones. Remove broken and redundant infrastructure.

Minneapolis, Minnesota ▾



Utilize Placemaking

Incorporate color, light, art and greenery to energize and humanize the corridor while creating a positive sense of place. Placemaking helps people relate to their environment by making them feel welcome and creating memorable moments.

Develop a Legible Connection

Enhance east-west connections to adjacent streets and neighborhoods, and invite people to use Third Avenue as a corridor of choice to move between Pioneer Square, the central office and retail core, Belltown and Seattle Center.



Credit: Kurt Moses Photography



Credit: Bruce Forster Photography

Portland, Oregon ▲

Strategies for Transportation

Third Avenue will continue to be downtown’s gateway arrival and departure point for transit—at and below-grade—complemented by a pedestrian environment that is safe and welcoming to transit riders, residents, visitors and employees at all hours of the day. Solutions should balance the use of the street by increasing pedestrian space to support city life.

Enhance Transit Amenities and Waiting Areas

Create delightful and welcoming places for transit riders to wait. Reduce friction between pedestrians and transit waiting areas by maximizing pedestrian space and through-zones.

Minimize Construction Impacts

Focus capital improvements along Third Avenue as much as possible and minimize construction disruption on adjacent streets.

Recognize that Bus Riders are Pedestrians

Prioritize solutions that balance pedestrian and transit needs by implementing a design with one bus lane in each direction.

Expand Transit System

Prepare for additional pedestrians arriving from the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel as the light rail system expands by prioritizing additional sidewalk space.

Build on Existing Plans

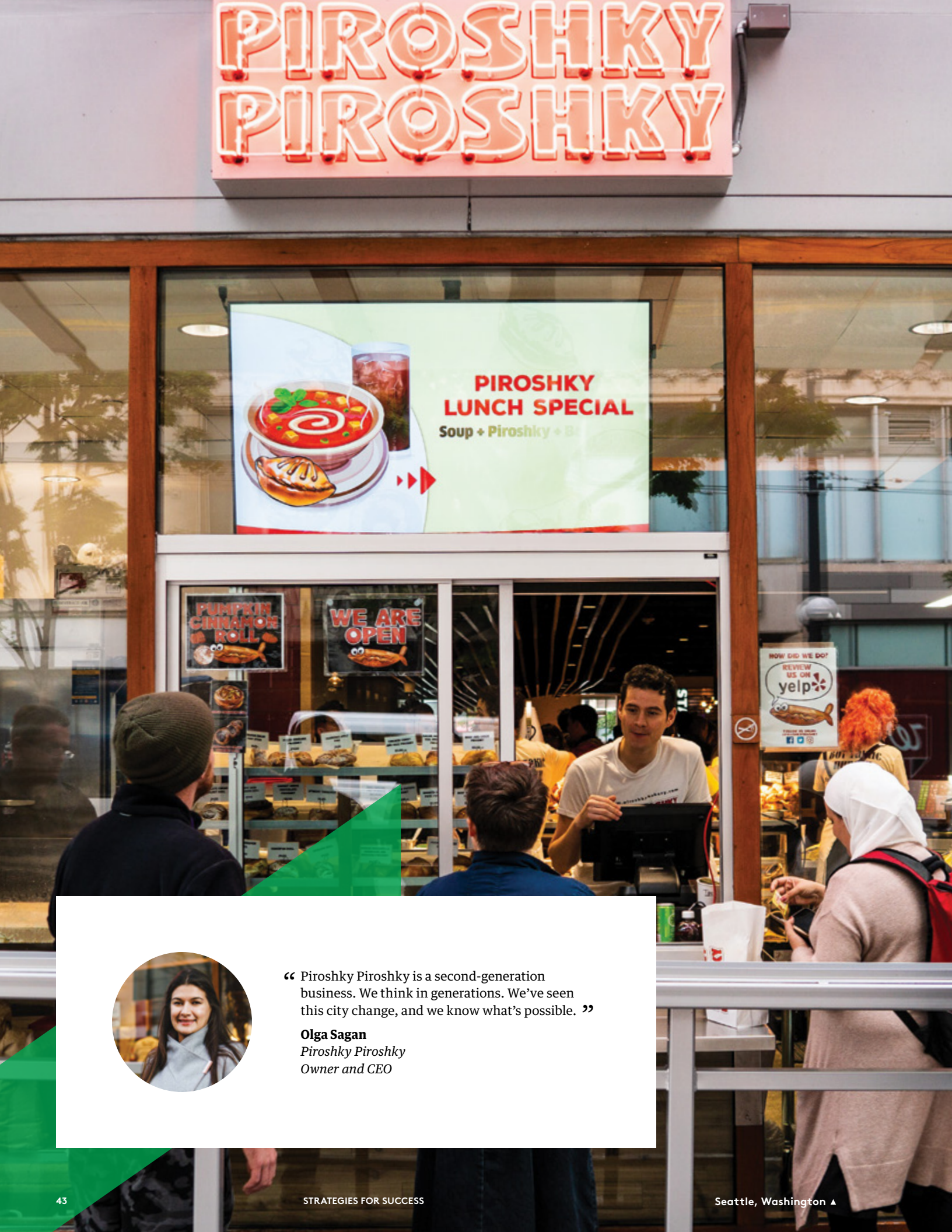
Assume baseline conditions for 2025–2035, including projects proposed through the One Center City Near Term plan and the Center City Bicycle Master Plan.

Optimize Transportation Options

Support and celebrate the city’s growing transit ridership while allowing other uses along the corridor to thrive. Optimize operations to meet increasing transit service demands while improving the pedestrian experience. Bus volumes could also be reorganized between Second, Third and Fourth avenues in 2024 when more regional routes are truncated at light rail stops and streamlined through downtown.

Mitigate Environmental Impacts

Expedite electric bus conversion to reduce exhaust and noise. Design the corridor to maximize boarding speeds for transit riders and diminish idling time for buses.



Strategies for Private Property and Retail

A successful pedestrian corridor must foster active ground-floor uses and create positive street life at all hours of the day. Together, implementation of these strategies would make Third Avenue a place where people want to spend time.

Enhance Sidewalks and Streetscapes

Create sidewalks that are comfortably scaled to promote leisurely strolling. Develop wider sidewalks to reduce pedestrian friction and improve sightlines. Declutter the sidewalk and replace bus shelters for a minimalist shelter design. Add greenery to the corridor.

Improve Sidewalk Organization

Sidewalks are used for many activities: walking, sitting at sidewalk cafés, or waiting for a bus. There must be space for each of these activities to thrive. Create designated spaces for waiting transit riders so that bus queues do not hinder business activities or passing pedestrians.

Leverage Catalyst Sites and Anchors

Focus energy in parts of the corridor that have new development and are positioned for change. Provide a common understanding for future developments to ensure they relate to and interact with activity on the sidewalk. Where possible, incorporate private development opportunities to improve the pedestrian experience.

Foster Transit-Oriented Retail

Certain uses are better suited to the transit nature of the corridor. Cultivate retail for transit riders (e.g., grab-and-go, impulse buys). Part of this effort is making sure businesses are open when transit riders and other users are present. An assessment of current business hours showed most venues are closed by 5 p.m.

Celebrate Storefronts and Entrances

Retail storefronts can animate a building’s façade with color, lighting, transparency and activation. Food and beverage, fashion service and fitness are all types of ground-floor uses that make streets enjoyable.

Enhance Signage

Quality signage reflects a quality retailer. Dimensional letters or well-lit signs add dynamism. Encourage personality expression through size, font, color and material.

Encourage Awnings and Canopies

Building elements like awnings and canopies enhance the pedestrian experience. They can be integral to the building’s architectural treatment, made of steel and glass, or they can be appendages added onto the building. When designed together, architecturally integrated awnings and canopies extend the retail brand to the building itself.

Improve Lighting

Retail lighting attracts the interest and attention of potential customers. The most successful applications convey the retailer’s brand at a variety of scales for both pedestrians and riders on passing buses.

Activate Sidewalks

Connect with property owners to activate their ground floors and improve storefronts. Identify businesses with interest in adding outdoor amenities and make it easier for them to create engaging sidewalk spaces and cafés.

Reinvigorate Blank Walls

Small retail storefronts can fit in tight spaces to activate long expanses of blank walls. Public art installations can also help add color to the street scene. Greenery and green walls can be used to soften the hardscape environment.



“ Piroshky Piroshky is a second-generation business. We think in generations. We’ve seen this city change, and we know what’s possible. ”

Olga Sagan
Piroshky Piroshky
Owner and CEO

Strategies for Parks and Public Spaces

Third Avenue will benefit from leveraging, activating and managing existing parks and plazas to create public-serving destinations and activities that engage a wide range of people for more hours of the day. Make parks and open spaces destinations for positive city life.

Foster Public Life

Recreation and leisure space is an important part of a healthy streetscape. Leverage existing park space by adding activation, programming and management. Where public space is sparse, consider recapturing underutilized streets and plazas to foster positive public life.

Blur the Line Between Public and Private

Public life does not stop at a property line. Flex the line between public and private, where possible, to spill life out of buildings and into the streets. Reconsider the use of privately-owned public spaces (POPS) and explore partnerships for improved design and activation.

Activate in-between Spaces

Not every positive experience happens in a park or sidewalk café. Utilize small, in-between spaces downtown to surprise and delight. Use art and placemaking to create a welcoming environment along the way.

Reconsider Adjacent Uses

The ground-floor uses around parks and public spaces help set the tone for an area. Restaurants and retail can infuse activity into an area and give people more reasons to pass through. Encourage stewardship from adjacent properties at Bell Street Park and City Hall Park and promote the need for consumer-facing businesses that induce foot traffic.

Seattle, Washington ▼



“ I was the property manager of the Seaboard Building right before DSA partnered with the City to activate Westlake Park. That was a tough area, but with this partnership and the support and investment from the neighborhood, eventually things changed for the better. Third and Pine has the same potential. ”

Ashanti Bitar
Unico Properties
Property Manager

Strategies for Management and Stewardship

Third Avenue’s success as a great street will be secured by thoughtful, intentional and coordinated care, management and maintenance.

Find Common Ground

Challenging work requires strong consensus. Set a common vision across government agencies and the private sector and set benchmarks for success.

Work with the End in Mind

Once there is consensus for change, identify opportunities to make visible change, through incremental, near-term steps and monumental, long-term moves.

Align Resources

Many public projects and private developments are already underway and intersect with this area. Leverage concurrent investments to improve conditions along the corridor.

Design a Management Scheme that Works

Peer cities around the U.S. and Canada offer alternative models for managing streets as transit facilities. Look to peer cities to identify a unique stewardship and maintenance model for Third Avenue.

Create Continuity

Several agencies own assets in the street, but the corridor lacks a standard of care. Mend fractured ownership and ensure high-quality maintenance over time.



“ The consistency of maintenance and stewardship on Third Avenue are vital when it comes to taking care of already crowded sidewalks. The most-traveled corridor in the city deserves the utmost investment and attention. ”

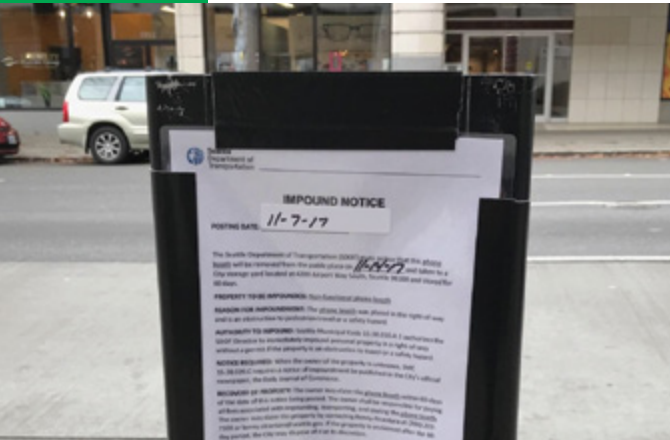
Bobby McRay
Metropolitan Improvement District
Clean Team Ambassador

Quick Wins for Third Avenue

Concurrent with the visioning process, DSA convened monthly meetings in 2018 with entities responsible for the cleaning, maintenance and care of Third Avenue. This “Quick Wins” team tackled repair of broken infrastructure, clutter removal and improvements to inter-agency management.

Successes include:

- ✓ Removal of dysfunctional phone booths
- ✓ Fixing broken transit screens
- ✓ Filling in tree pits with rubberized material to improve safety and cleanliness
- ✓ Repairing or removing dysfunctional newspaper stands
- ✓ Removing an unused bus supervisor kiosk in front of the post office
- ✓ Focusing targeted cleaning at bus stops and at transit tunnel entrances
- ✓ Enhancing and coordinating sanitation
- ✓ Removing leftover cones and parking signs
- ✓ Removing graffiti
- ✓ Repairing dysfunctional globe lighting
- ✓ Enhancing public realm maintenance
- ✓ Trimming trees
- ✓ Activating Pine Street Plaza and City Hall Park
- ✓ Relocating problematic bus stop at Third and James



Future Scenarios



The quality of the pedestrian experience suffers from the lack of sidewalk space, the expanse of the street and the number of buses traveling along Third Avenue.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Though Third Avenue faces many challenges, one thing is clear: the quality of the pedestrian experience suffers from a lack of sidewalk space, the expanse of the street and its sheer volume of bus traffic. The design team was charged with brainstorming new ways to rebalance the corridor. They developed four options, guided by the approaches of peer cities like Portland, Oregon; Denver, Colorado; Vancouver, B.C. and Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Each option requires optimizing traffic so more people can move through the corridor with fewer buses. Optimizing traffic also mitigates negative environmental impacts like noise, pollution and barriers to sightline. All options suggest existing, constrained sidewalks should be widened to accommodate a variety of uses in addition to bus queuing. Two options suggest a three-lane street and two suggest a two-lane street. Each option impacts surrounding streets, sometimes requiring Second or Fourth avenues to operate differently than today.



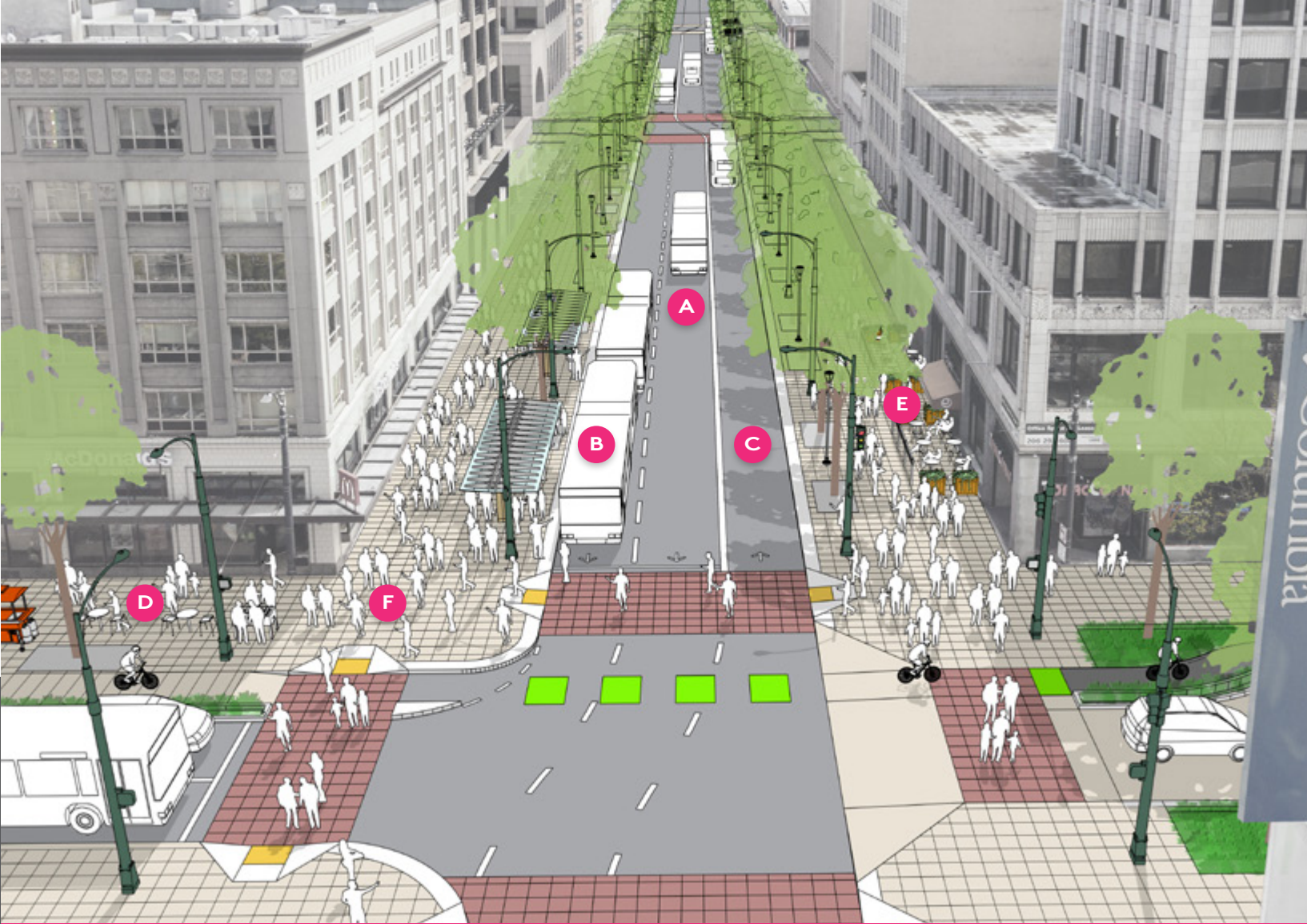
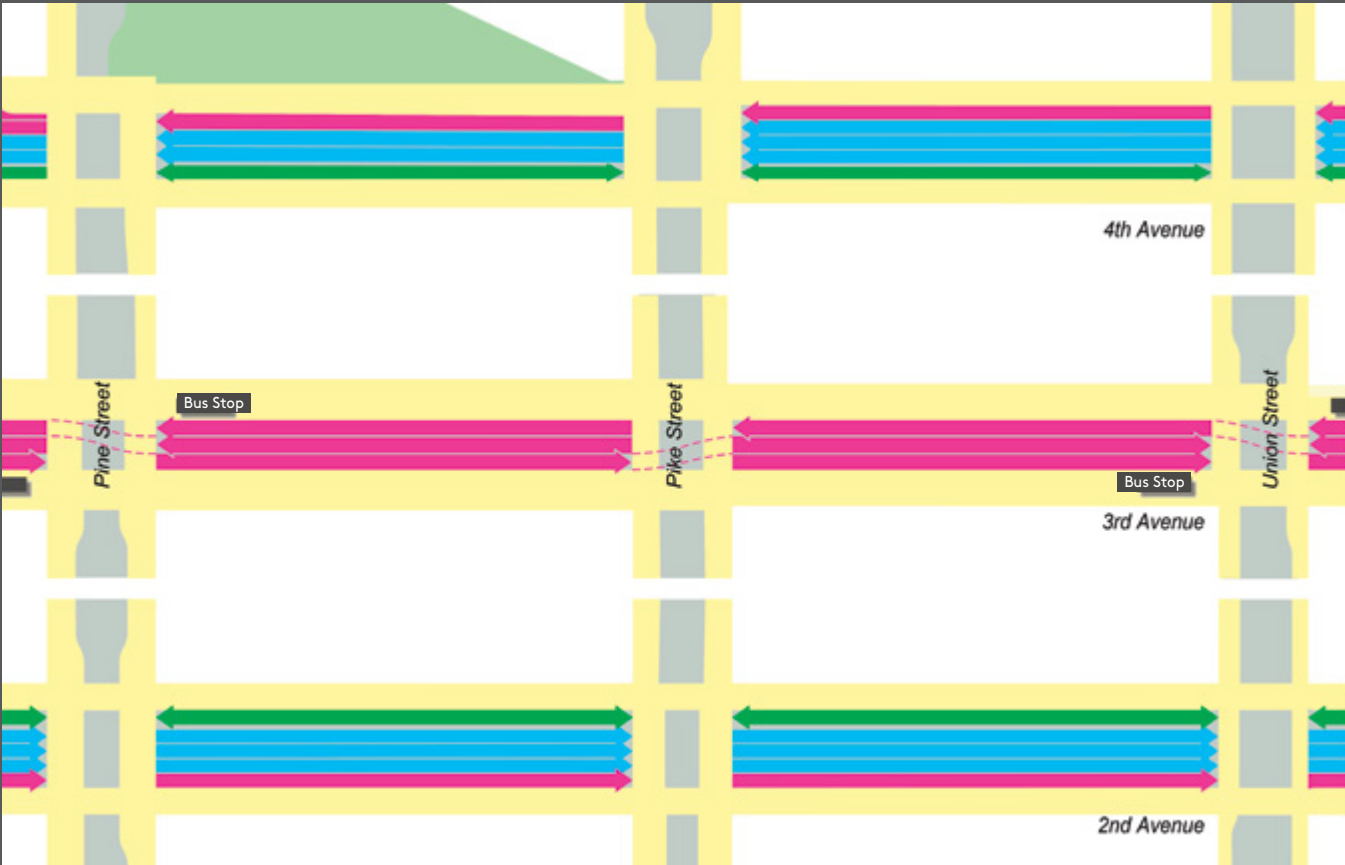
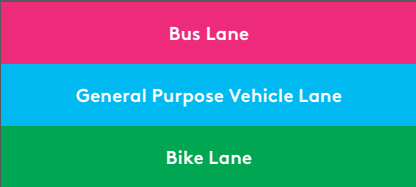
Compact Transitway

Optimizing bus volumes to a three-lane transit street

This option considers Third Avenue as three lanes dedicated to transit. The street would alternate between two northbound lanes and one southbound lane, and one northbound lane and two southbound lanes. There would

be no shelters or stops where only one lane serves a particular direction. Buses would stop along the routes where two lanes are provided, and the second lane would allow buses to weave past one another. Space formerly dedicated to buses would be redistributed to pedestrians as sidewalk space.

A three-lane transitway would retain current traffic operations on Second and Fourth avenues.



Map Key

- A Bus passing lane at alternating stopping blocks; assumes lower bus volumes on Third Avenue
- B Bus stop block/northbound
- C Bus through-lane (no southbound stops this block)
- D Pike Pine Renaissance: Act One concept shown on Pine Street
- E Potential retail and public realm activation
- F 27'-28' sidewalks

Opportunities

- Creates additional sidewalk and pedestrian space to balance the needs of the street
- Provides a larger pedestrian zone to accommodate transit riders and pulls people away from storefronts
- Allows for fewer buses, which reduces noise and exhaust for pedestrians
- Reduces chaos of bus weaving at bus stops

Challenges

- Requires optimization of bus volume to allow for less bus weaving
- Demands careful safety considerations
- Requires that street access for emergency vehicles remains a priority
- Creates fewer lanes, meaning fewer opportunities for buses to pass in case of breakdowns

Median Transitway

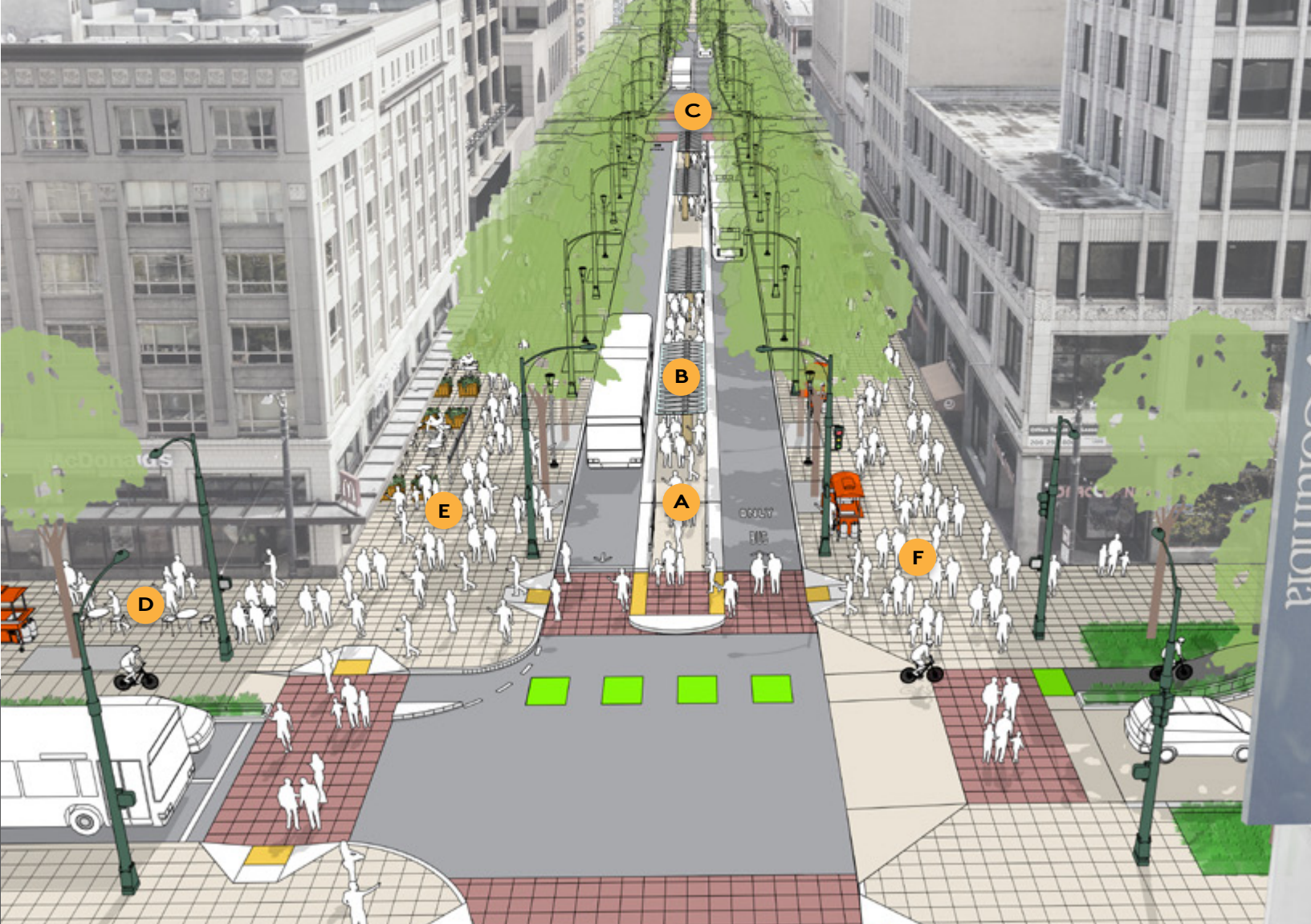
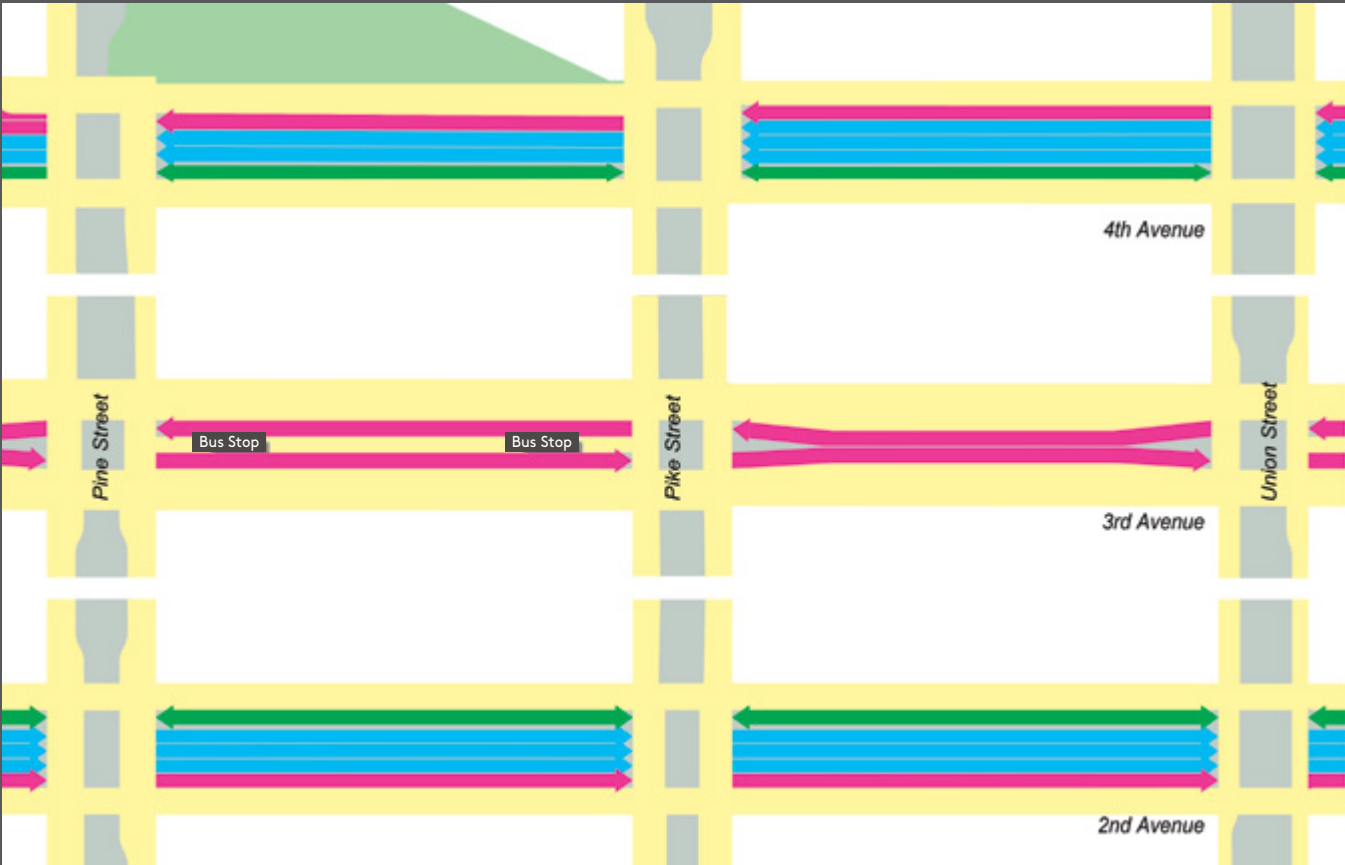
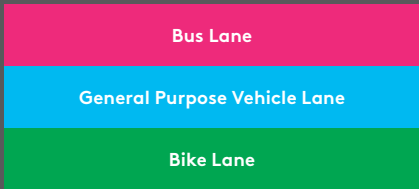
Taking advantage of wide sidewalks by adding a transit median

Under this scenario, transit riders queue on a center median and load on the left side of the bus.

The bus would run as a shuttle service, avoiding the need for a set schedule. The bus network would be reconfigured to optimize capacity and minimize the number of buses driving the entire corridor. It would likely require at least one north

and one south hub for riders to transfer between routes. A two-lane configuration means more space for pedestrians, and center-loading operations would not obstruct pedestrian zones or café seating.

A median transitway would retain current traffic operations on Second and Fourth avenues.



Map Key

- A** Transit waiting in median platform; assumes lower bus volumes on Third Avenue
- B** Bus stop block/northbound and southbound; every other block
- C** Non-stop block; every other block
- D** Pike Pine Renaissance: Act One concept shown on Pine Street
- E** Potential retail and public realm activation
- F** 27'-28' sidewalks

Opportunities

- Accommodates for more pedestrian clear space and pulls transit riders away from storefronts
- Eliminates redundant routing through downtown
- Moves fewer buses, thereby reduces noise and exhaust
- Reduces chaos of bus weaving at bus stops
- Creates a legible streetscape for pedestrians and transit riders
- Maximizes space for other amenities like sidewalk cafés and programming
- Center median provides refuge for crossing pedestrians and creates the perception that the street is narrow

Challenges

- Requires new bus fleet with dual side boarding
- Eliminates “skip-stop” capability
- Requires traffic officers to reroute traffic when buses break down, stalling the system (similar to combined train/bus tunnel operations)
- Requires pedestrians to cross lanes of traffic to reach bus stop
- Demands accurate passenger forecasting so median is an appropriate size
- Creates a less resilient pathway (the single northbound/southbound lane)
- Means that trolley routes cannot move to Second or Fourth avenues without major modifications

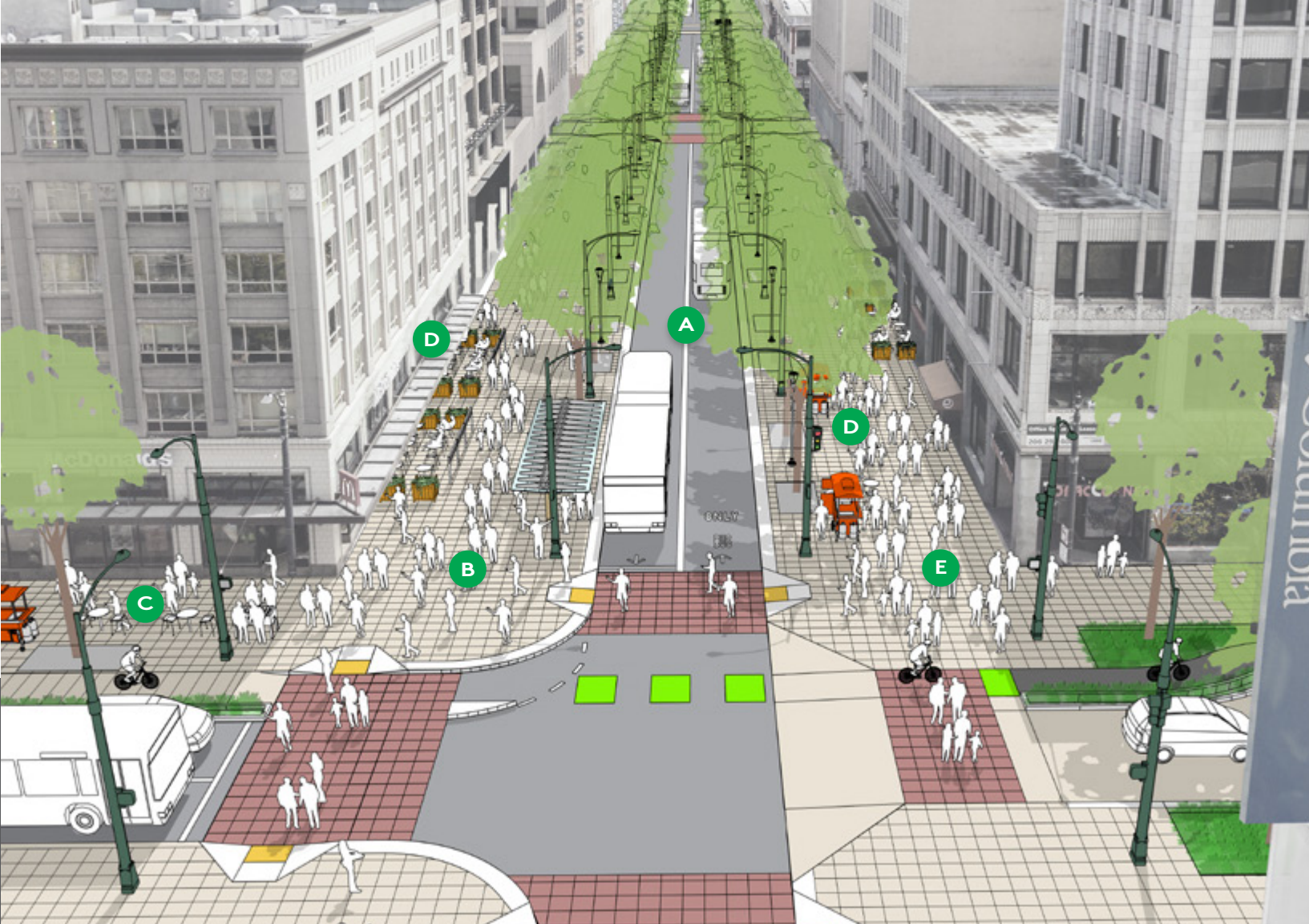
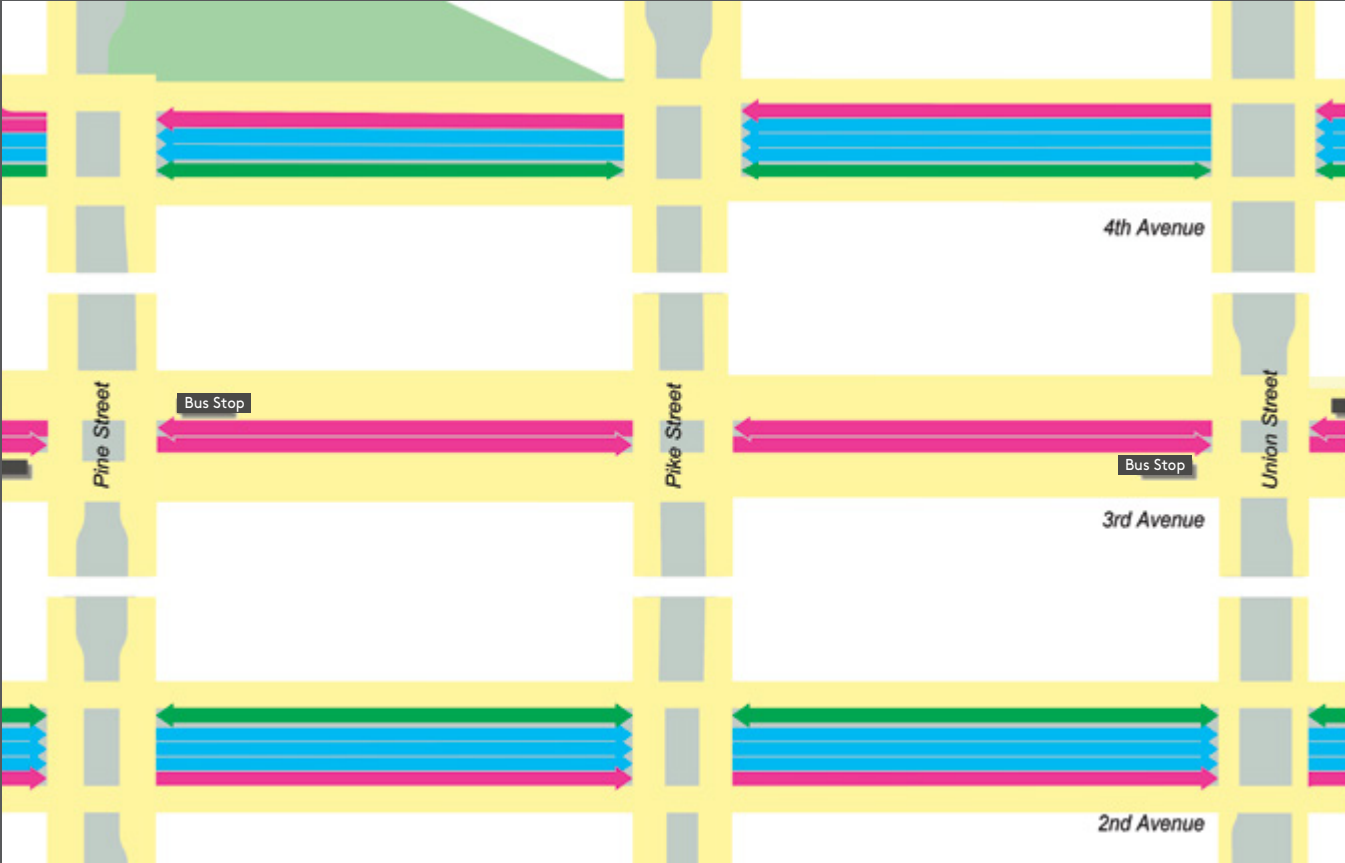
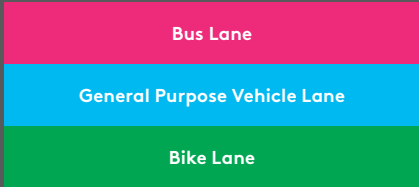
Transit Shuttle and Hub

Transfers at north and south hubs allow for a shuttle route through downtown, running every 90 seconds.

Similar to the median transitway option, bus volumes would be optimized for a two-lane

configuration. Buses would load on the right-hand side of the bus as they currently do today. This model closely resembles the 16th Street Mall in Denver, where a single shuttle bus arrives every 90 seconds.

A transit shuttle and hub system would retain current traffic operations on Second and Fourth avenues.



Map Key

- A** Bus lanes – two way; assumes transfer to shuttle at downtown hubs
- B** Shuttle bus stops – every other block/northbound and southbound
- C** Pike Pine Renaissance: Act One concept shown on Pine Street
- D** Potential retail and public realm activation
- E** 32'-33' sidewalks

Opportunities

- Ensures a bus is always on the way as regular single shuttle services all passengers
- Eliminates redundant routing through downtown
- Removes the need for bus shelters and declutters the sidewalk
- Provides additional pedestrian space to balance the needs of the street
- Reduces noise and exhaust with fewer buses
- Reduces chaos of bus weaving at bus stops

Challenges

- Requires transfers at the edge of downtown
- Demands significant investment in transit hubs

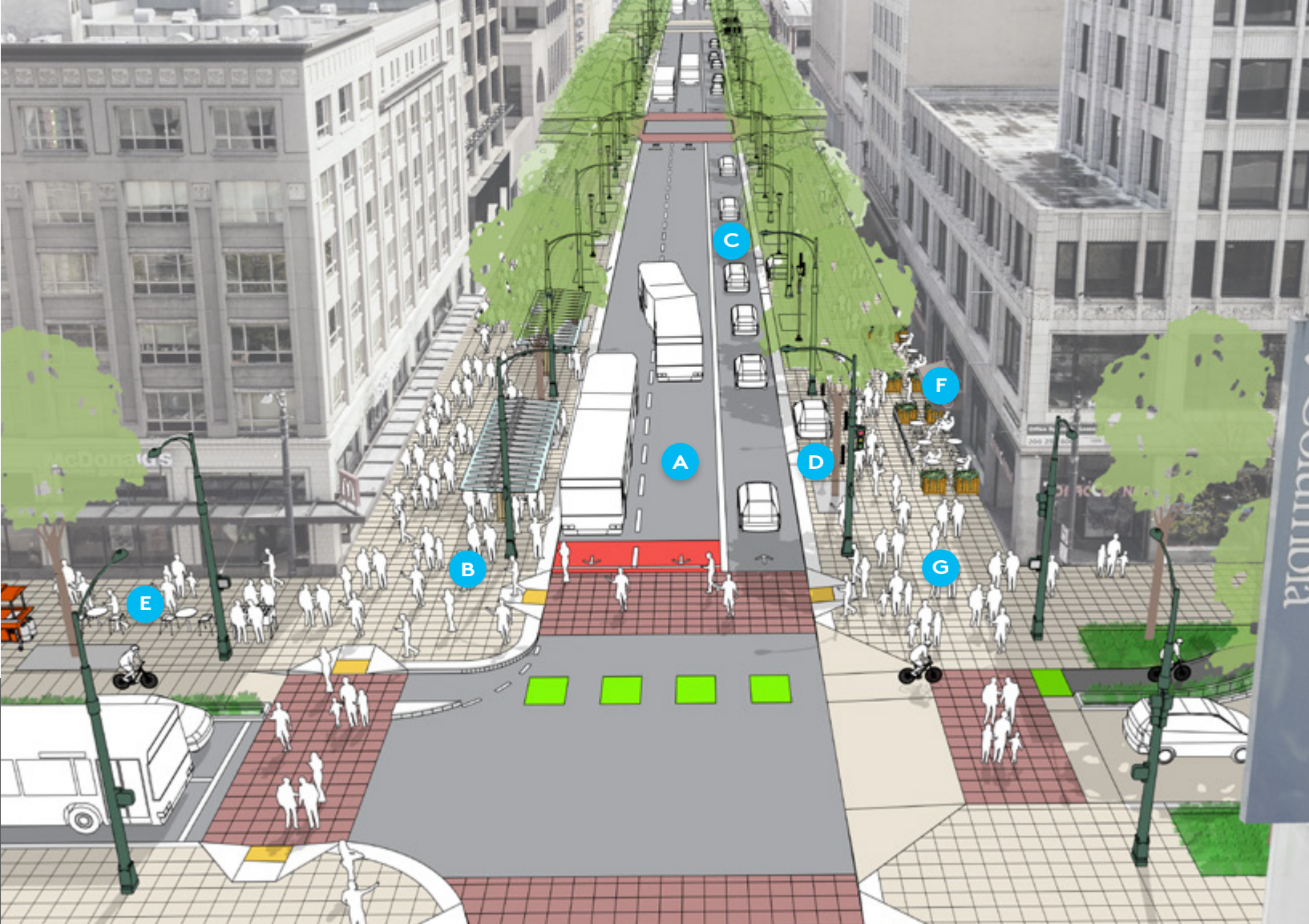
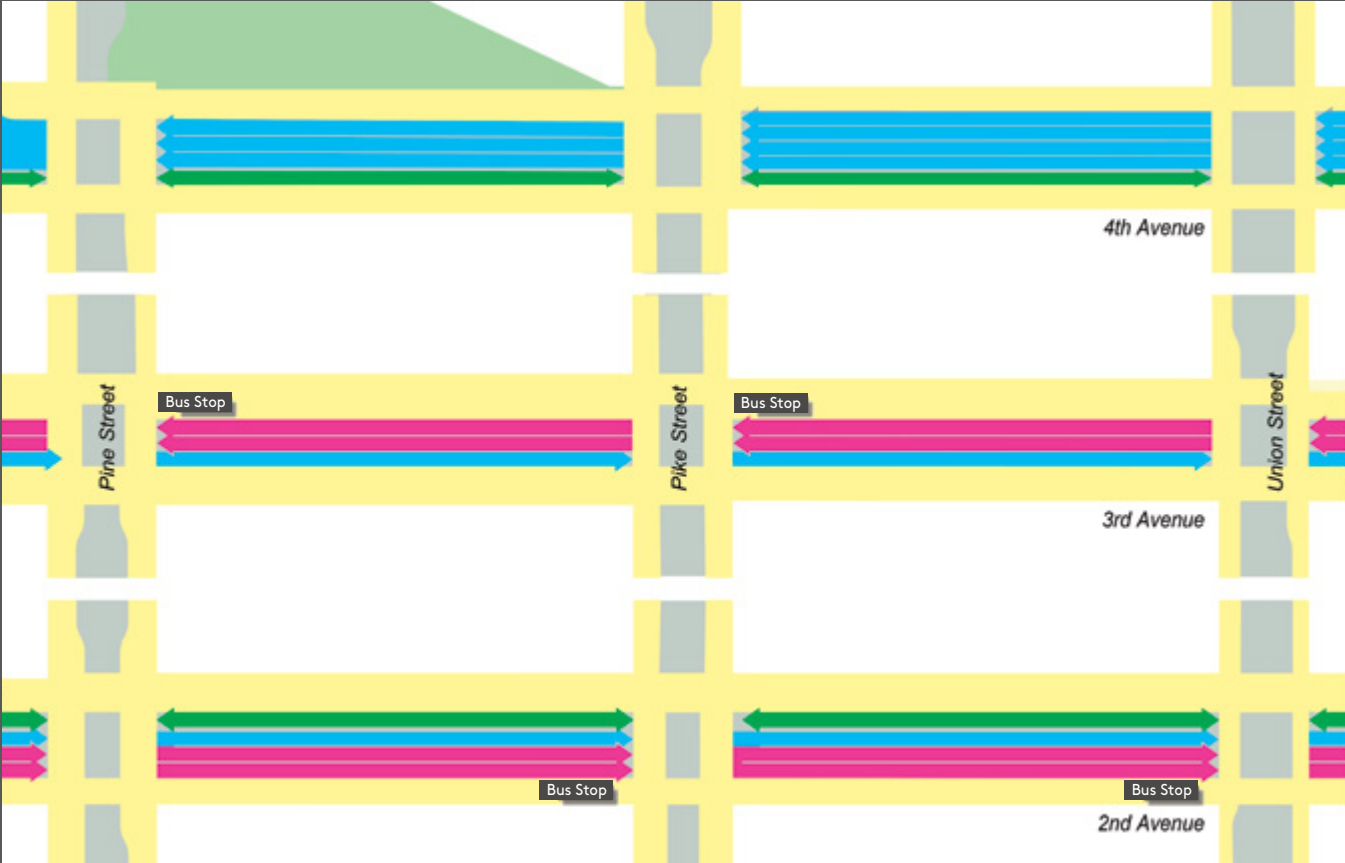
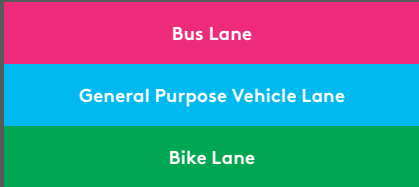
Transit Couplet

Using two streets to share the bus volumes through downtown while maintaining access for cars on Third Avenue.

This option would make Third Avenue a couplet with either Second or Fourth avenues. Third Avenue would run one direction, shown

here as northbound, and a parallel street would carry southbound traffic. This unique option allows one general-purpose traffic lane. It appears to offer the most spaces for buses—four lanes overall for the couplet—versus two or three offered in the other options.

A transit couplet would require additional bus capacity on either Second or Fourth avenue.



Map Key

- A** Bus lanes (passing and stopping); assumes a transit couplet with Second Avenue
- B** Bus stop/northbound - one side of street, every other block; southbound on Second Avenue
- C** General-purpose traffic lane
- D** Flex zone sidewalk parking - short term
- E** Pike Pine Renaissance: Act One concept shown on Pine Street
- F** Potential retail and public realm activation
- G** 27'-28' sidewalks

Opportunities

- Reduces the burden of one street carrying the majority of north/south bus traffic
- May allow the greatest number of buses of the four scenarios
- Reduces the mix of cars and transit vehicles traveling in different directions, resulting in less congestion
- Reduces noise and exhaust for pedestrians
- Alleviates the chaos of bus weaving at stops

Challenges

- Requires reconstruction of two streets
- Reduces opportunities for buses to pass in case of breakdowns (fewer lanes)



Third and Pike Street

Third Avenue should be a welcoming retail experience with buildings that foster public life.

This image shows what it would feel like in the compact transitway scenario. Eliminating one lane of traffic would allow for 27' sidewalks and more room for businesses to take advantage of flexible sidewalk space. Open transit shelters provide

maximum sidewalk flexibility and allow pedestrians to walk where needed. Private investment in building renovations has the potential to engage passerby and invite them inside.



Third and Pine Street

At crowded intersections, Third Avenue should have wide sidewalks and vibrant businesses that allow people to stay and enjoy downtown.

This image shows how a median transitway would open up sidewalk space for pedestrians and uses that encourage people to linger. Sidewalk cafés or restaurant lines could exist in concert with transit queuing, which would happen on the center median. No matter which side of the street, only one lane of traffic separates the pedestrian from the opposite sidewalk. This creates the perception that the street is narrow and belongs to people first.



Third at King County Courthouse

City Hall Park should create a center of gravity at the south end of downtown through park space and positive retail uses.

In a future where Third Avenue is part of a two-street configuration, Third Avenue would form a transit couplet with either Second or Fourth avenue. Bus volumes are optimized in this scenario and their impacts to pedestrians are minimized since the load is shared between two streets. Activating existing public spaces, like City Hall Park, and lining them with complementary uses, like restaurants, retail and hotels, is critical to creating a hospitable environment for all people.



Next Steps to Realize the Vision

Implementing the strategies for success is only possible if the City, County and their partners achieve three key goals: consistent ownership, a shared consensus for change and leveraging other investments.

CREATE CONSISTENT OWNERSHIP

Many similar transit-pedestrian streets around the country, including the peer streets studied here, created special districts that address specific needs not easily met by typical city maintenance protocols or budgets. These activities include:

- Extra cleaning and care of special materials and amenities
- More frequent cleaning of the sidewalk paving
- Business support, marketing and recruitment
- Event and activity programming
- Extra security
- Ambassador services for visitors

Examples:

- Portland Mall Management Inc.
- Downtown Denver Partnership
- Minneapolis Downtown Council
- Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association

BUILD CONSENSUS

A common vision is critical to success. This document outlines opportunities, but more work is necessary to build consensus around one specific concept. The work ahead includes:

- Introducing and funding a technical transportation study for further evaluation of alternative design scenarios listed in this document

- Determining a preferred approach with targeted physical and operational assumptions for future milestones, especially as regional high-capacity transit is implemented
- Leveraging improvements with associated intersecting public projects that implement the vision
- Evaluating funding opportunities for transit facility improvements

LEVERAGE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INVESTMENTS

The street environment won’t change overnight. The public sector must harness private sector investment occurring at key nodes along the street and partner with intersecting civic projects.

As of fall 2018, there were about \$500 million of open development permits along the corridor. New residential and office towers will add workers and residents in nearly 1,597 new units along the corridor. This activity will have tremendous impact on the street and health of nearby businesses. This energy must not be wasted. The City and its partners can harness these private investments by:

- Supporting new development and redevelopment by ensuring new buildings embrace quality design and active storefronts
- Where possible, agreeing on and implementing new streetscape and public realm improvements with development
- Phasing in major public transportation improvements early to jump-start Third Avenue's transformation. For example, prioritize Third Avenue for electric buses to mitigate pollution and noise
- Focusing special investments around key pedestrian nodes where change is already occurring



Future Opportunities

Many developments and investments are already planned for Third Avenue and the buildings that call it home. Together these investments can create change.



\$500M of private investment in new development and property renovations



King County Civic Master Plan process that looks at County assets and development potential in south downtown



\$30M in pedestrian improvements on Pike and Pine streets, intersecting Third Avenue



1,545 new residential units by 2021



Funded activation for City Hall Park in 2019



ORCA readers installed on Third Avenue in 2019 to allow for all-door boarding and reduce bus idling



“ A highly active, pedestrian-friendly Third Avenue will be good for DESC’s highly vulnerable clients. Too often our clients must navigate areas occupied by people who engage in unlawful or unwanted behaviors that take advantage of vulnerable populations. ”

Daniel Malone
Downtown Emergency Service Center
Executive Director



Credit: Downtown Denver Partnership

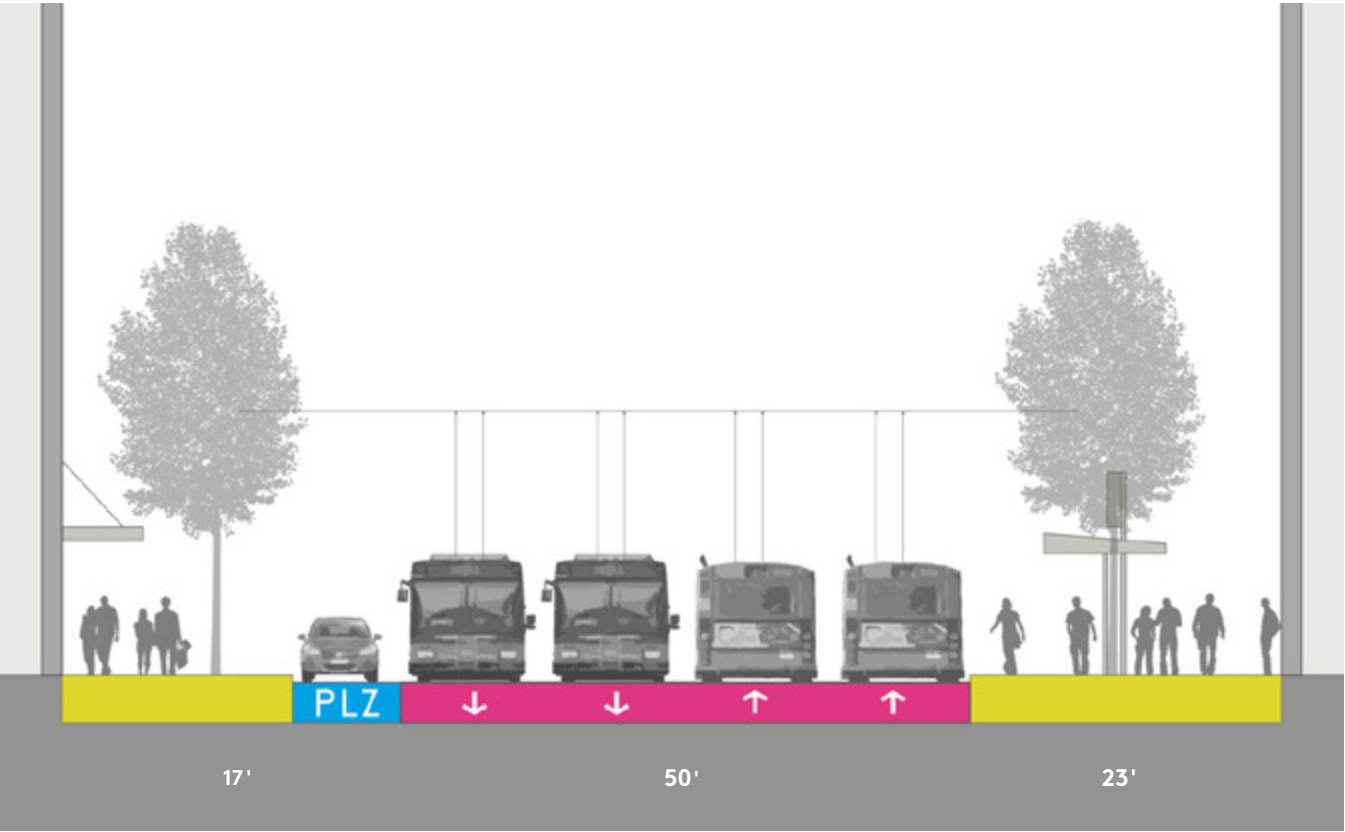
Other cities around the country have worked for decades designing transit streets that are both functional and comfortable for pedestrians.

Case Studies from Peer Cities

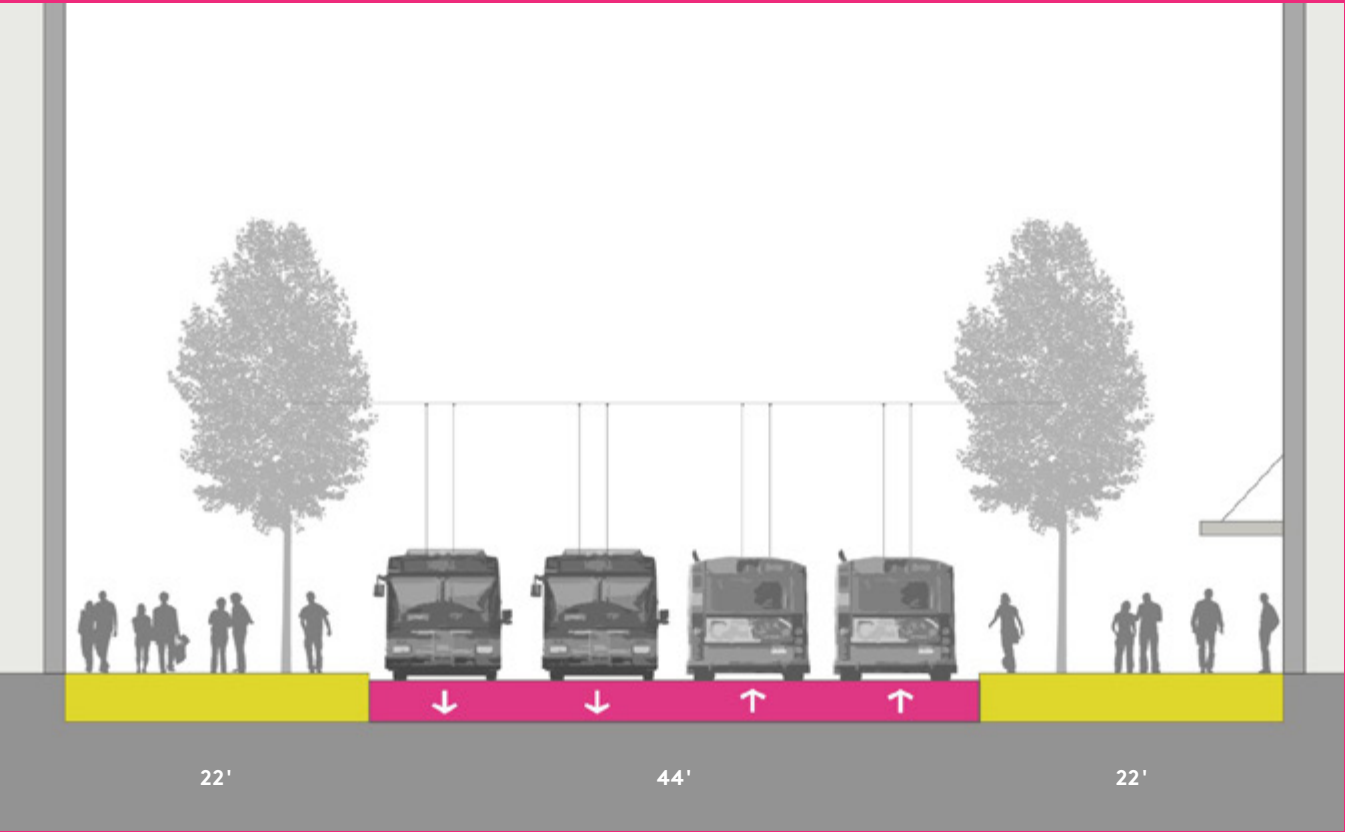
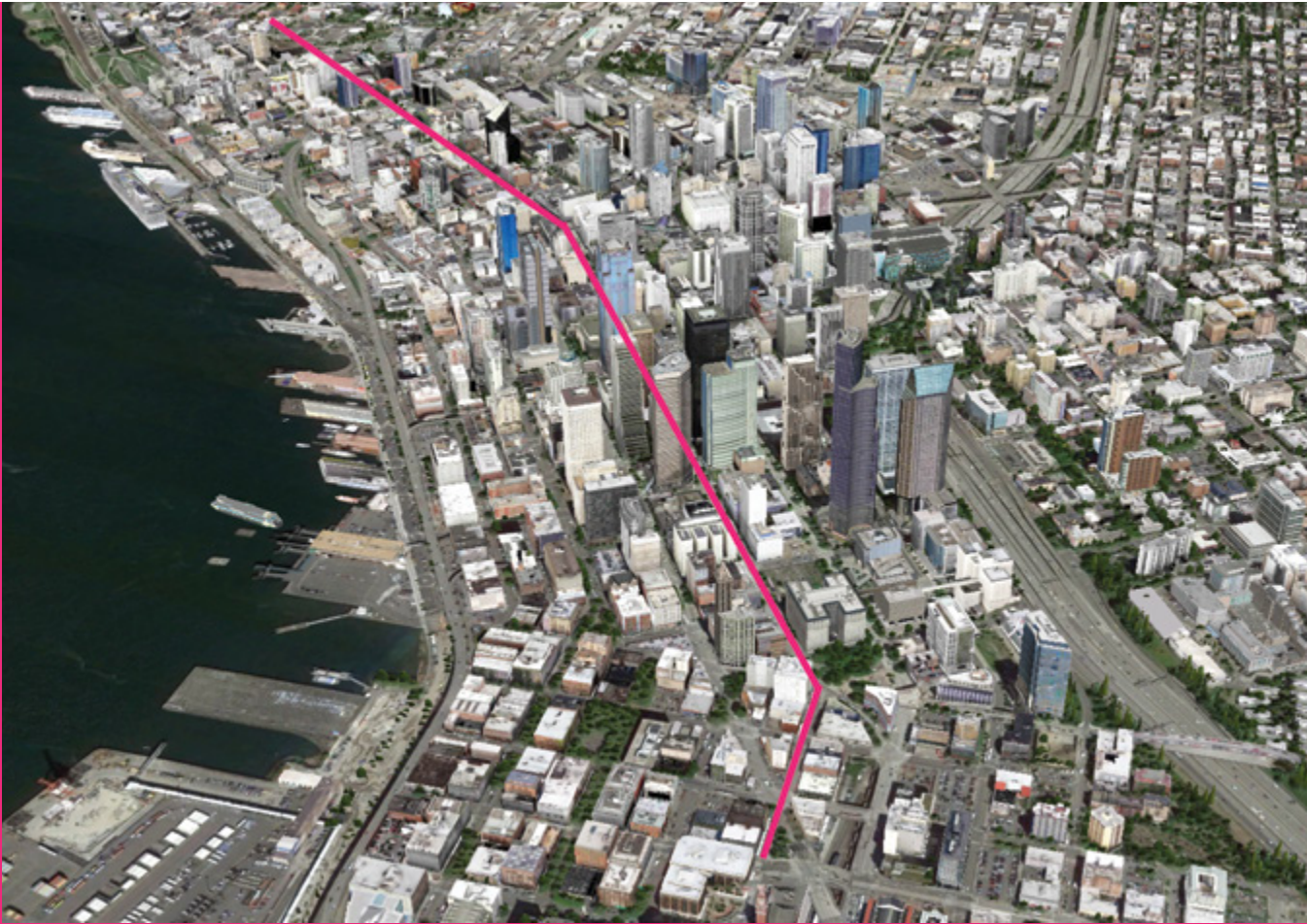
Alternative concepts for Third Avenue did not develop in a vacuum. Other cities around the country have worked for decades designing transit streets that are both functional and comfortable for pedestrians. DSA and the consultant team studied models used in Denver, Colorado; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Portland, Oregon, and Vancouver, B.C. to inspire the vision for Third Avenue. This section contains the findings of that study.

Seattle's Third Avenue

<p>Urban Design</p> <p>1.7 miles, 26 blocks, 240'-360' block lengths, up to 90' right-of-way</p>	<p>Private Properties and Retail</p> <p>Corridor dominated by office buildings, lobbies and government buildings</p>	<p>Management and Stewardship</p> <p>Downtown Seattle Association provides limited programming and placemaking</p>
<p>Transportation</p> <p>290 buses per hour; 52,000 passengers per day, "skip-stop" operations and bus passing</p>	<p>Parks and Public Space</p> <p>Lacking significant space</p>	



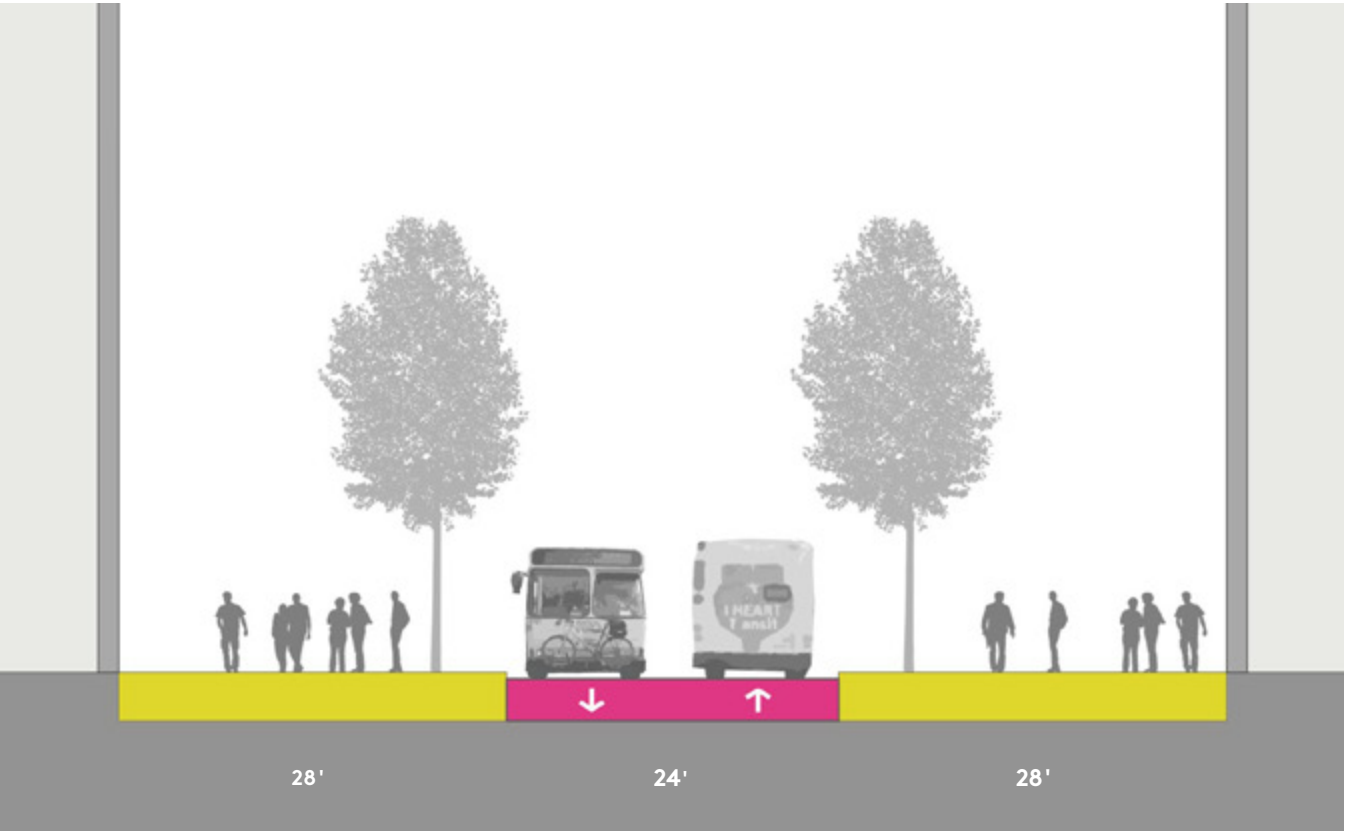
Third and Bell/Battery ▲



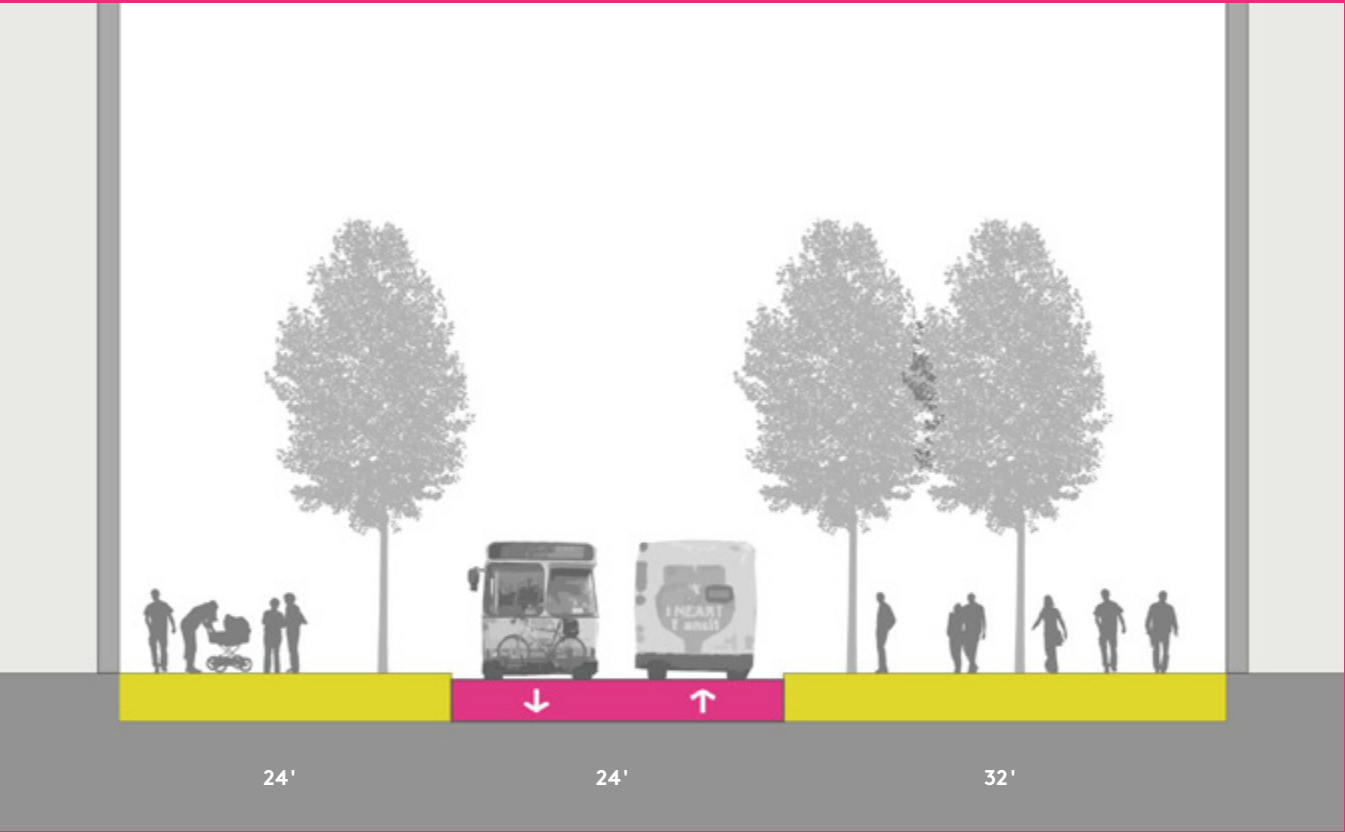
Third and Pike/Pine ▲

Denver's 16th Street Mall

Urban Design 0.86 miles, 12.5 blocks, 266' block lengths, 80' right-of-way	Private Properties and Retail Lively restaurant and retail uses; sidewalk cafés	Management and Stewardship Downtown Denver Business Improvement District
Transportation 80 shuttle buses per hour; 45,000 passengers per day, stops every block, no bus passing	Parks and Public Space Active programming and placemaking	<i>Note: Sections and dimensions shown are part of an adopted plan for reconstruction.</i>



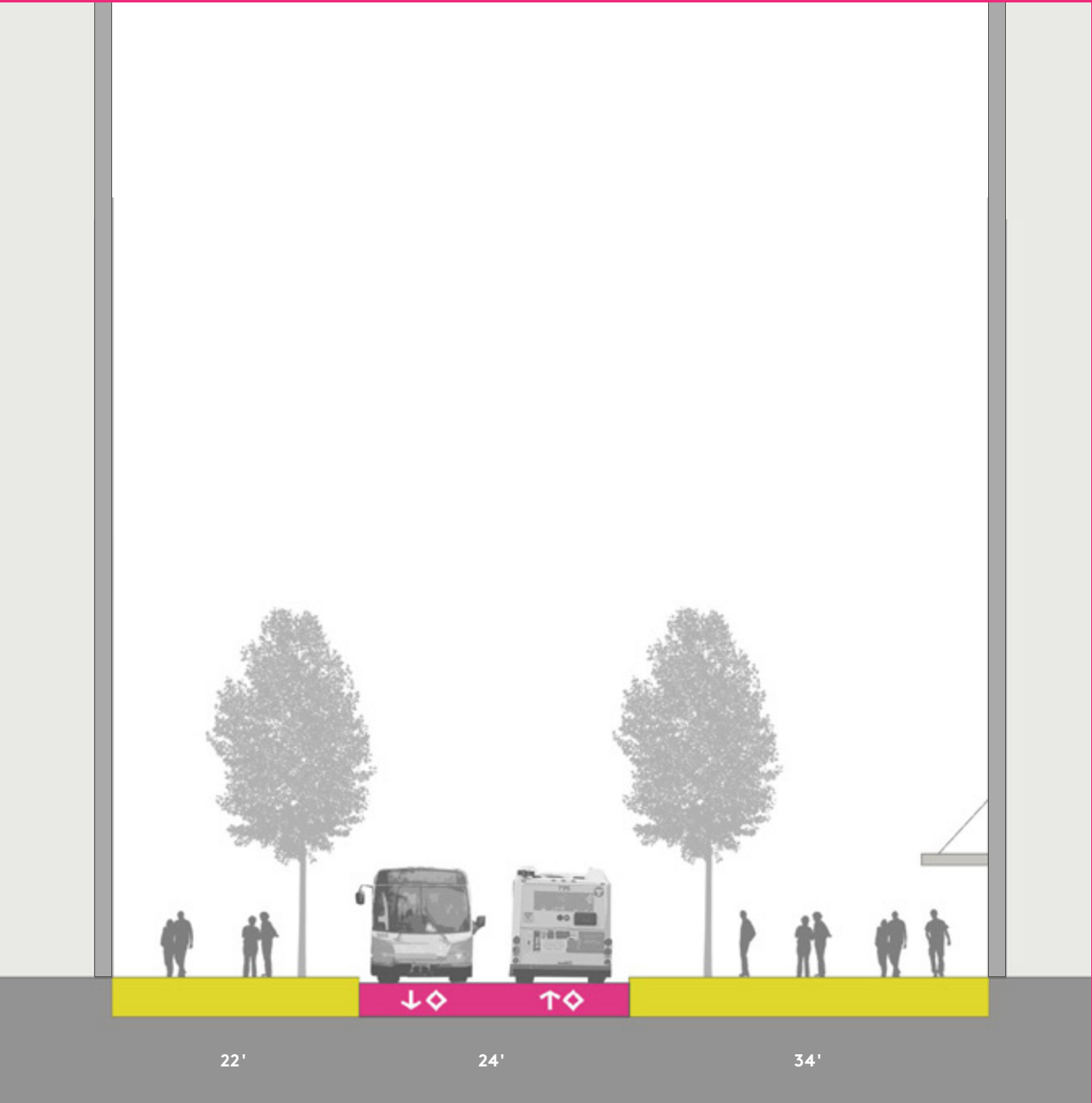
Denver - North ▲



Denver - South ▲

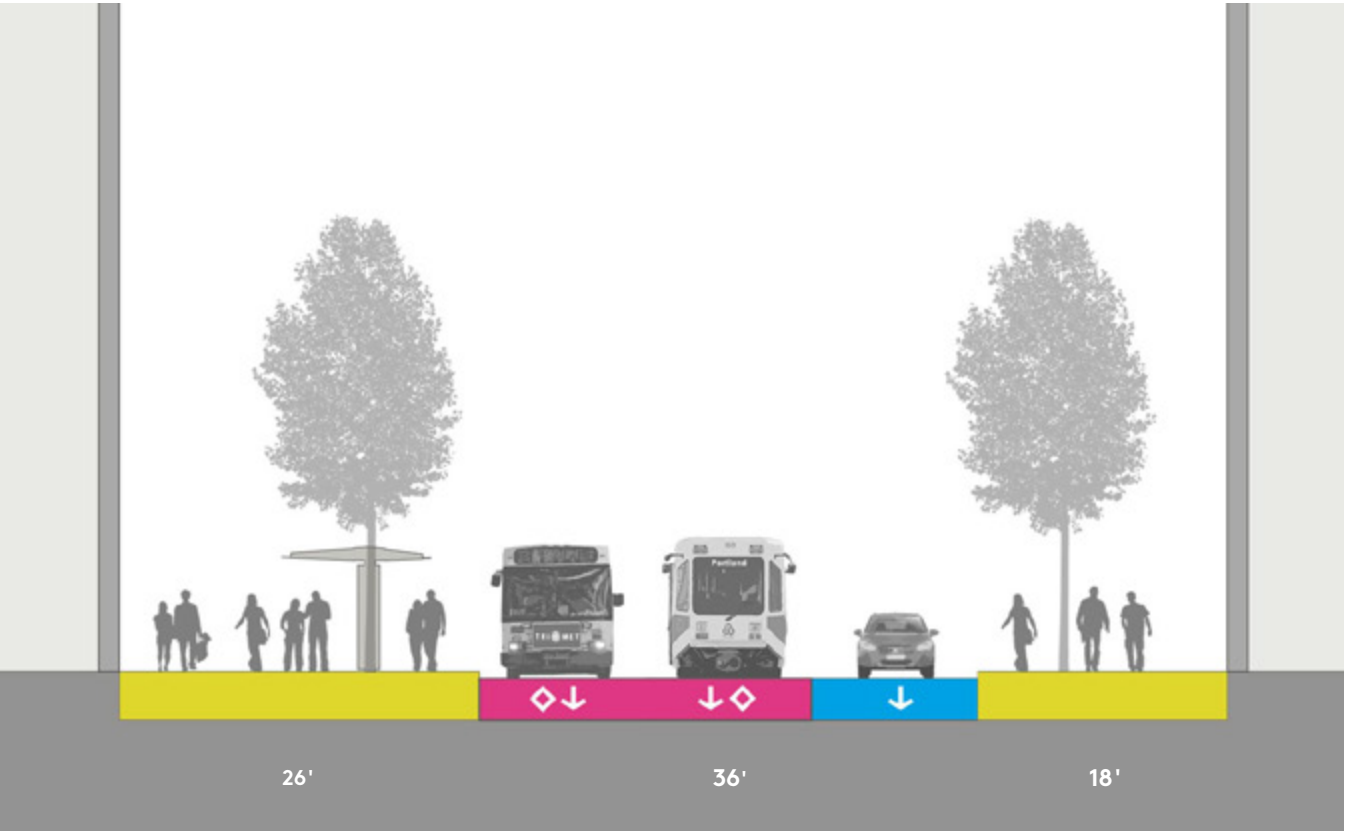
Minneapolis' Nicollet Mall

Urban Design 0.95 miles, 12 blocks, 322-350' block lengths, 80' right-of-way	Private Properties and Retail Lively restaurant and retail uses; sidewalk cafés	Management and Stewardship Downtown Council and Business Improvement District
Transportation 120 buses per hour; 12,500 passengers per day, no bus passing	Parks and Public Space Active programming and placemaking, farmers markets	

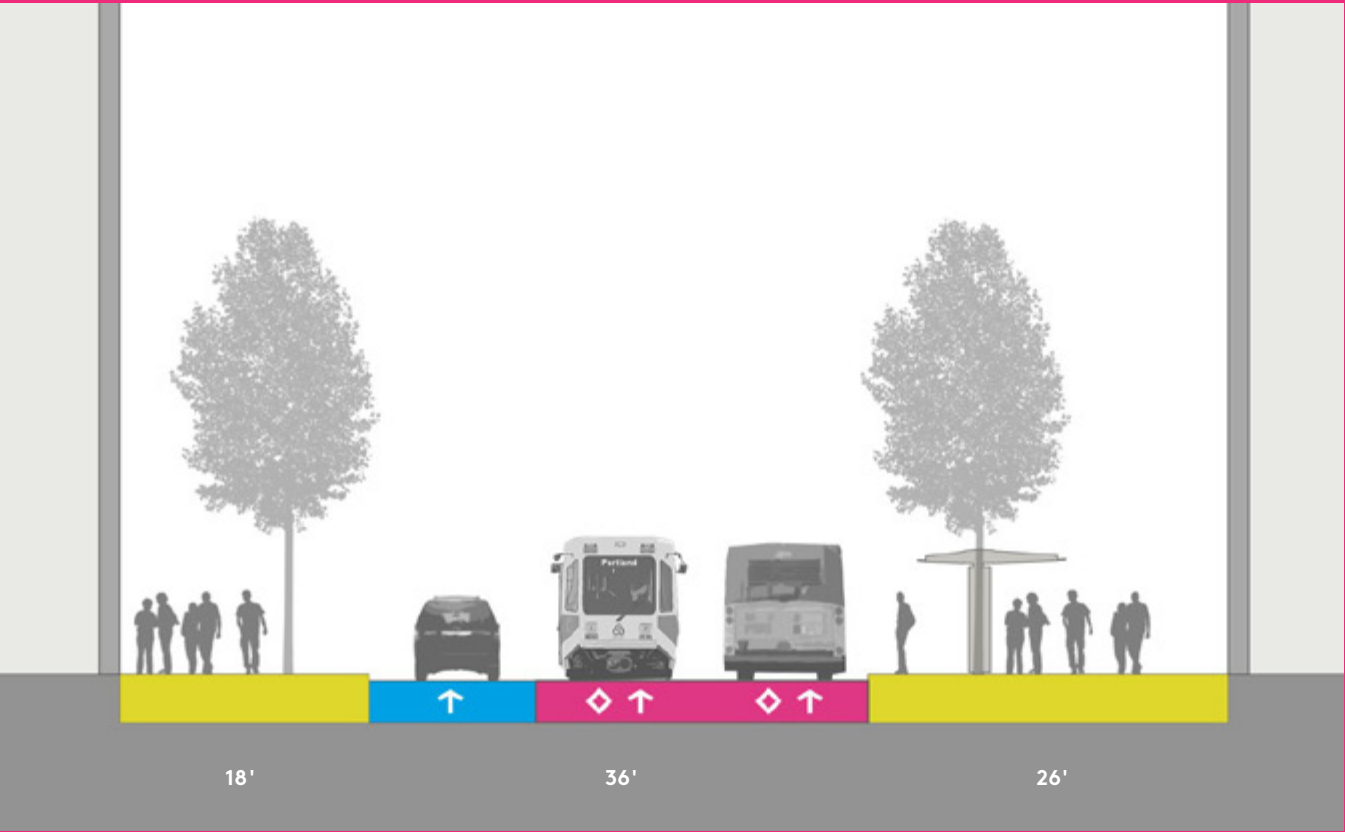
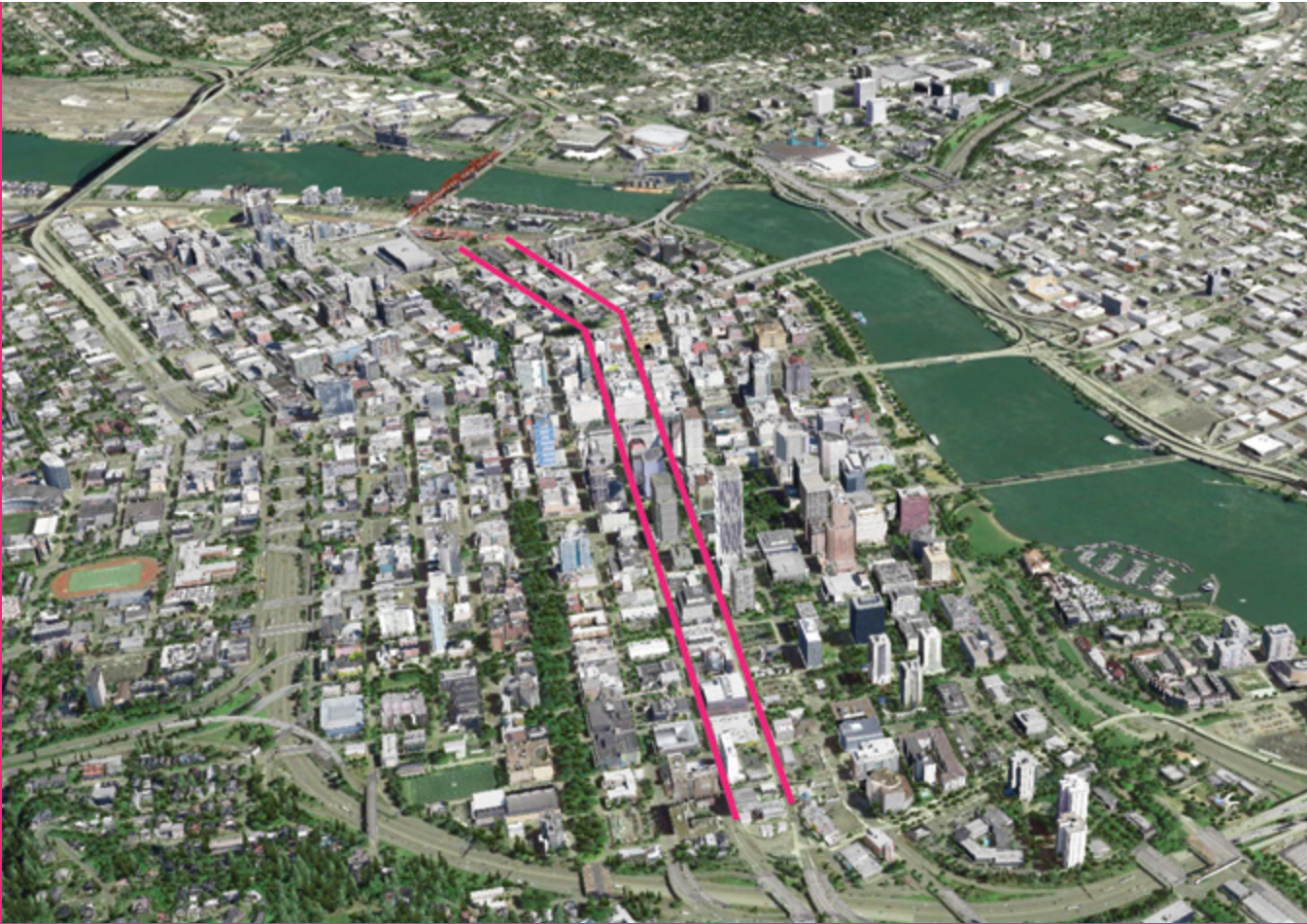


Portland's Transit Mall

<p>Urban Design</p> <p>1.4 miles, 28 blocks, 200’ block lengths, two 60’-80’ rights-of-way</p>	<p>Private Properties and Retail</p> <p>Variable retail, restaurant uses and government buildings</p>	<p>Management and Stewardship</p> <p>Downtown Portland Business Alliance and Business Improvement District</p>
<p>Transportation</p> <p>120 buses per hour, 12 light-rail trains per hour; 33,000 passengers per day, “skip-stop” and bus-passing operations</p>	<p>Parks and Public Space</p> <p>Programming and placemaking, farmers market</p>	



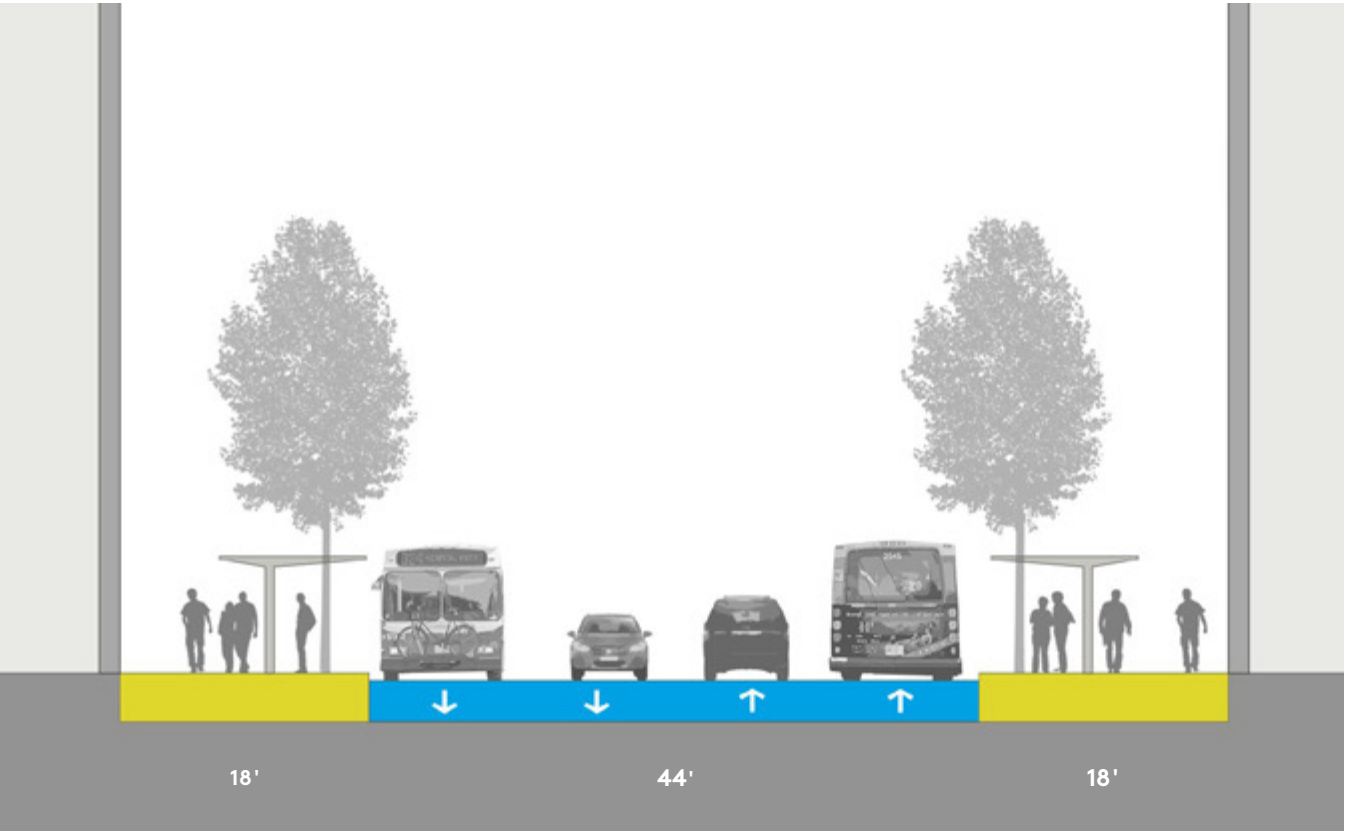
Portland - 5th Avenue ▲



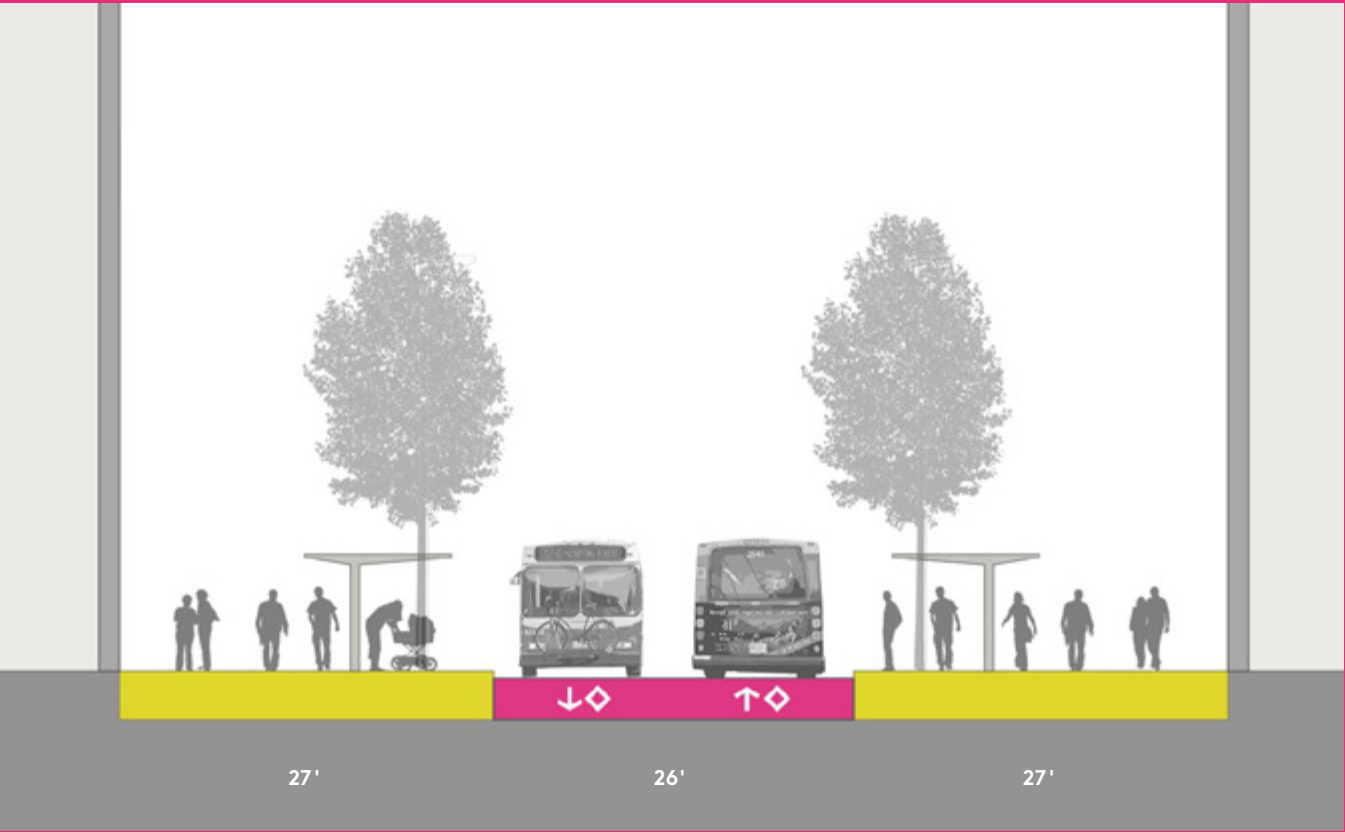
Portland - 6th Avenue ▲

Vancouver's Granville Mall

Urban Design 0.94 miles, 10 blocks, approx. 465' +/- block lengths, 80' right-of-way	Private Properties and Retail Lively retail, restaurants, nightlife and entertainment uses	Management and Stewardship Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association
Transportation 142 buses per hour, 85,700 passengers per day, no bus passing	Parks and Public Space Active programming and placemaking	



Vancouver - Granville ▲



Vancouver - Granville North ▲



We can do this

SETTING THE TABLE FOR SUCCESS

These case studies reveal five key takeaways as we think about improving Seattle's Third Avenue:

- Consistent vision between partners is necessary to achieve and measure success. Unlike its peer cities, Seattle lacks a vision to guide improvements on Third Avenue.
- Coordinated maintenance is critical to maintaining a healthy street environment. In Seattle, scattered responsibilities between multiple organizations and property owners lead to poor street and sidewalk conditions. Other cities created single entities to champion maintenance along key transit corridors.
- Enforcement is not enough. Positive spaces require positive activities. Adjacent buildings must provide uses that spur constructive activity.
- Timing is everything. Changes to the street must evolve in tandem with the development that surrounds it.
- Complex problems deserve complex solutions. We must use all available tools to make an impact.



“ Third Avenue is a prime thoroughfare for Seattle visitors and lies at the confluence of hotels, attractions, cultural offerings and restaurants. It’s important that we re-envision Third Avenue as both a transit corridor and a welcoming pedestrian promenade. ”

Tom Norwalk
Visit Seattle
President & CEO

A History of Third Avenue

Looking south onto Third Avenue ►
from Pike Street.

Circa 1909

Credit: University of Washington
Libraries Special Collections



For more than a century, Third Avenue has been a major thoroughfare for transportation and commerce in downtown. It also lays claim as one of the city’s historical civic and cultural corridors—home to the city’s first schools, its second fire station, and a host of beloved theaters.

1853
Arthur Denny, Carson Boren, and Dr. David S. Maynard file the first plats for Seattle, establishing the Pioneer Square district and downtown core street grid, including Third Avenue as we know it today.

1853
The cross streets for the first plat run from Jefferson to Spring streets with the second and third plats including the cross streets that run from Spring to Pine streets.

1870
Seattle’s second school opens at Third Avenue and Madison Street, operating as Central School until 1883. Down the street, the North School opens in 1873 at Third Avenue and Pine Street, the current site of Macy’s. The school closed in 1887.

1876
The Seattle School District purchases two lots from William Bell to build and open the Bell Town School at Third Avenue and Vine Street. This is the first school north of Pine Street.



▲ Students from North School, located at Third Avenue and Pine Street.
Circa 1887
Credit: Seattle Public Schools District Archives

1890
Washington Hotel opens on Third Avenue between Virginia and Stewart streets. The hotel opened only briefly to host President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903. It was demolished around 1906 during the Denny Regrade.

1892
The City of Seattle is served by 48 miles of streetcar and 22 miles of cable cars.



▲ Third Avenue Theatre (formerly Cordray’s Theatre), on the northeast corner of Third Avenue and Madison Street.
Circa 1898
Credit: MOHAI, Anders B. Wilse Collection.

1900
Theaters spring up along Third Avenue. The Grand Opera House is constructed at Third Avenue and Cherry Street in 1900. It operates as a theater until 1923, when the building is remodeled into a parking garage.

1900
The city’s second fire department opens at the northeast corner of Third Avenue and Pine Street, replacing the North School.



▲ Fire Station #2 at its original location, on the northeast corner of Third Avenue and Pine Street.
Circa 1890
Credit: Seattle Public Library

1906
The Third Avenue Theatre, previously located at Third Avenue and Madison Street, is relocated to a former Methodist Church at Third Avenue and Pine Street.

1906
Streetcar tracks are extended throughout Third Avenue upon the Denny Regrade.

1911
Civil engineer Virgil Bogue’s “Plan for Seattle” recommends a cut-and-cover tunnel for transit on Third Avenue to connect downtown with a new civic area. The plan was abandoned in 1912.



▲ Third Avenue looking south from Madison during regrade work.
March 28, 1907
Credit: Seattle Municipal Archives

1911
The Coliseum Theatre at the southeast corner of Third Avenue and James Street shutter, and the building is demolished.

1915
The Pantages Theatre opens on the corner of Third Avenue and University Street. Operating as a vaudeville and film theater until 1936, when it reopens as the Palomar. It sees appearances from music legends, including Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington and Frank Sinatra. It is replaced in 1966 with a parking garage.



▲ Pantages Theatre, on the northeast corner of Third Avenue and University Street.
Circa 1917
Credit: University of Washington Libraries Special Collections

1918
In the City Engineer Annual report, R.H. Thompson claims that the city’s growth will someday require the construction of a subway on Third Avenue and the development of two transit transfer hubs — one at the north end of the city and another at the south end.

1920
City Engineer Arthur H. Dimock publishes a plan for rail transit in a cut-and-cover tunnel under Third Avenue from Virginia Street to Yesler Way.

1920
The Winter Garden Theatre is constructed. Located on Third Avenue and Pike Street, it is built to screen motion picture films. It is converted to an adult film theater in 1979. The building still stands, but the original exterior is greatly altered and none of the original interior remains.



▲ Winter Garden Theatre, located at Third Avenue and Pike Street.
Circa 1932
Credit: University of Washington Libraries Special Collections

1926
Seattle City Planning Commission proposes its own rapid transit system with an elevated line on Western Avenue and a cut-and-cover tunnel on Third Avenue from Pike Street to Yesler Way.



▲ Third Avenue facing north from Cherry Street.
April 21, 1930
Credit: Seattle Municipal Archives



▲ Birds eye view of the intersection of Third Avenue and Pike Street.
October 28, 1936
Credit: Seattle Municipal Archives

1937
Seattle voters reject the “Beeler Plan” to replace street rail with trackless trolleys and motor buses.

1941
Streetcars end service on Third Avenue after Seattle Municipal Railway folds under financial pressures created by mandated nickel fares and a state supreme court ban on transit subsidies. Automobiles, trolley buses and diesel buses become the predominant form of transit. Tracks are removed on Third Avenue two years later.



▲ The Capitol Theatre, once part of the Telenews circuit, on Third Avenue facing south from Pine Street.
Circa 1942
Credit: Seattle Public Library



▲ Removal of the tracks on Third Avenue near University Street.
June 8, 1943
Credit: Seattle Municipal Archives

1968
The Forward Thrust Initiative for rail and mass transit fails.



▲ Seattle’s Third Avenue looking down between Stewart and Pine streets.
Circa 1960’s
Credit: Max R. Jensen

1970
Voters reject Forward Thrust for a second time, many blame a weak economy for its defeat. Federal funding of \$880 million (more than \$4.6 billion in 2017 dollars) is passed from Seattle to Atlanta to build that city’s MARTA light-rail system.

1972
Metro Transit, a new countywide bus system, is approved by voters. Funding comes from a sales tax increase of 0.3 percent.



▲ Riders board the bus on Third Avenue.
Circa 1960-1980
Credit: Seattle Municipal Archives

1976
The Federal Urban Mass Transit Association denies Seattle’s application for rail transit planning, but approves funds for Portland’s MAX system. The following year, Metro commits to an aggressive all-bus strategy.



▲ Pedestrians walk along Third Avenue near Union Street.
Circa 1960-1980
Credit: Seattle Municipal Archives

1978
In order to reduce surface street congestion, Metro Transit commissions a study to examine the construction of a bus tunnel under Third Avenue. The estimated price tag is \$450 million.

1979
Metro’s downtown advisory committee endorses development of a Third Avenue transit mall with peripheral terminals, and future construction of a tunnel for electric trolleys or “dual-mode” diesel/ electric buses. That fall, the City of Seattle approves development of the project.

Early 1980s

With support from Mayor Charley Royer, Metro Transit planners embark on a plan for establishing a north and south hub in downtown for quieter electric buses to run between these terminals. Although opposed by Eastside leaders, the number of buses operating downtown would be reduced allowing service to be faster while keeping suburban buses on schedule.

1983

The final plan for five-station tunnel under Third Avenue (bored) and Pine Street (cut-and-cover) with dual-mode buses is approved. The plan includes converting Third Avenue into a landscaped transit mall. The streetscape elements are never carried out.



▲ The Downtown Seattle Woolworth's store, located at Third Avenue and Pike Street
May 27th, 1986
Credit: Steve Morgan

1987

Boring for downtown transit tunnel begins. Stations on Third Avenue are constructed through a cut-and-cover approach.



▲ Removing dirt from a hole for a soldier pile on Third Avenue near Yesler Way.
April 30, 1987
Credit: MOHAI, Seattle Post-Intelligencer Collection

1990

The downtown transit tunnel opens for regular service under Third Avenue.



▲ Metro bus in tunnel.
Circa 1980s-1990s
Credit: King County Office of Information Resource Management Printing and Graphic Arts photographs. Series 1147, Box 1, Folder 27.



▲ Third Avenue tunnel entrance at University Street Station.
April 1990
Credit: King County Office of Information Resource Management Printing and Graphic Arts photographs. Series 1147, Box 1, Folder 25.

1998

The “Metro 2000” long-range planning process begins, intended to meet high-capacity transit demands with two-seat ride options and rail system.

2005

The tunnel closes for two years to allow tracks to be laid to accommodate light rail. Local businesses agree to put buses on Third Avenue and make it a temporary transit street, under the conditions that buses will go back in the tunnel after construction is complete.

2006

As conditions degrade on Third Avenue, the DSA and a group of local business owners begin meeting to develop plans for cleaning and maintaining the corridor.

2007

The City decides to keep buses on Third Avenue beyond tunnel construction. Businesses voice concern that this change will have negative impacts on the street conditions. A one-year pilot is initiated. Individual property owners on Third Avenue agree to pay the DSA-managed Metropolitan Improvement District (MID) for additional cleaning services in front of their buildings.

2012

A memorandum is signed between DSA, the City of Seattle, and King County Metro for additional services, cleaning and maintenance along Third Avenue. The memorandum outlines the plans for streetscape improvements and capital investments, off-board fare payment kiosks, lighting, enhanced sidewalk

cleaning, additional trash removal, and regular performance reports. The mayor creates, and later disbands, a task force to oversee this work.

2014

The City and Metro complete the Third Avenue Transit Corridor Improvement Project. The plan outlines promising urban design solutions for sidewalk furniture, surface treatments, signage, bus shelters and lighting. It does not consider fundamental changes to bus operations, right-of-way allocation or pedestrian prioritization. Minor upgrades are made between Pike and Stewart streets, based on the recommendations. Improvements include rolling curbs for goods delivery and new treatment for painted red curbs.

2015

The City of Seattle and the Seattle Police Department conduct the “9½ Block Strategy,” an attempt to improve safety in the areas surrounding Third Avenue and Pine Street. The process is met with mixed public opinion. Some bus shelters are removed and some bus stops are repositioned to reduce crowding.

2017

The One Center City planning effort considers an additional north/south transit street through downtown. Businesses, property owners and some users of Third Avenue object on the basis that Third Avenue is problematic. The Downtown Transportation Alliance agrees to a new visioning process for Third Avenue.

2018

The City extends Third Avenue transit-only hours from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. every day to relieve bus congestion.

2019

Metro brings bus service out of the tunnel resulting in more than 20 buses an hour being added to Third Avenue bringing the peak-hour total to nearly 300 buses per hour traveling through the corridor.

Seattle’s rich theater history graced the city’s stages dating back from the pioneer days in the mid 1800s to the roaring 1920s. From the first makeshift performance hall in the Yesler Mill cookhouse, the entertainment scene eventually found a home on Third Avenue with the opening of the Grand Opera House. The theater scene continued to grow throughout the corridor with the addition of Cordray’s Theatre, Pantages Theatre, Winter Garden Theatre, Embassy Theatre and others.



▲ Seattle Theatre, on the southeast corner of Third Avenue and Cherry Street.
Circa 1892 -1915
Credit: University of Washington Libraries Special Collections



▲ Third Avenue Theatre (formerly Cordray's Theatre), on the northeast corner of Third Avenue and Madison Street.
Circa 1892
Credit: Seattle Public Library



▲ Seattle's Grand Opera House in 1905 located at Third Avenue and Cherry Street.
Circa 1905
Credit: Seattle Public Library



▲ The Embassy Theatre's Third Avenue entrance facing north from Union Street.
Circa 1947
Credit: Paul Dorpat and Jean Sherrard "Seattle Now & Then" website

A special thank you to the many partners that came together to craft this collective vision for Third Avenue including government agency staff, businesses, residents and property owners. The work was funded and completed by DSA in partnership with the Downtown Transportation Alliance and advisory input from the Third Avenue Vision Task Force and Third Avenue Quick Wins Task Force.

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