

CONGRESS BAT DECKS

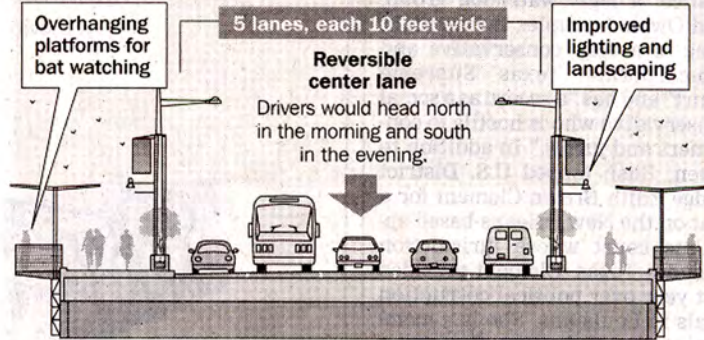
In 2001, the City of Austin sought the help of Black + Vernooy in creating a preliminary streetscape redesign for the Congress Avenue Bridge. The commissioned rendering illustrates improved safety for pedestrians, community cyclists and the crowds of tourists and locals who gather in the evenings to watch the Mexican freetail bats stream out from under the bridge. The Bridge serves not only as a symbolic connection between North and South Austin, but also as a physical link between two of the city's most rapidly growing areas: Downtown Central Business District and the South Congress Retail District.

Design strategies for the Bridge's redevelopment incorporate a variety of elements that will increase pedestrian visibility and safety, as well as enhance the qualities of the site that make it a public destination. Proposed widened sidewalks (expanded from nine feet to thirteen feet) with a three foot buffer of trees and shrubs will provide a barrier between pedestrians and the speeding traffic on Congress. Waist-high railings, constructed to increase the safety of bat watchers, especially small children, as well as lowered pedestrian-lighting, will improve the visibility of the area. Translucent shade structures are proposed to provide shade for the pedestrians, runners, and bikers that frequently cross the bridge to access downtown, South Congress, and the hike and bike trail that encircles Town Lake.

A new look for Congress Ave. bridge

The City of Austin likely will apply for a federal grant to revamp the Congress Avenue bridge, erasing one lane and adding barriers between traffic and sidewalks. The city will also consider keeping all traffic lanes as they are now and adding sidewalk improvements in the existing space.

This diagram illustrates one proposal:



Source: City of Austin

Linda Scott/American-Statesman

