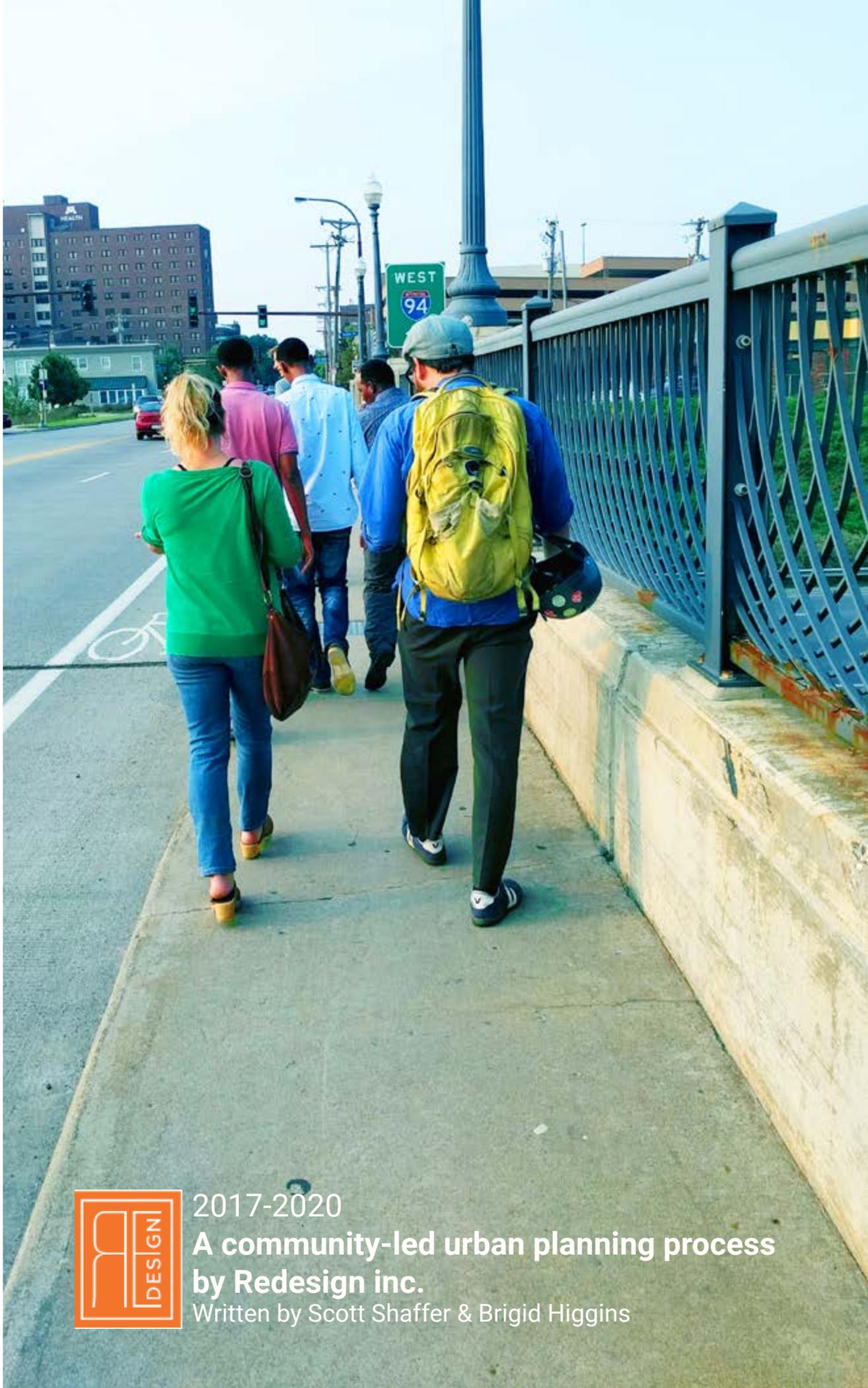


# Reconnecting Neighborhoods



2017-2020

A community-led urban planning process  
by Redesign inc.

Written by Scott Shaffer & Brigid Higgins

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## Introduction

Reconnecting Neighborhoods was a community-initiated process to plan improvements to the crossings of Interstate 94 between Seward and the West Bank in Minneapolis. The primary goals of the project were:

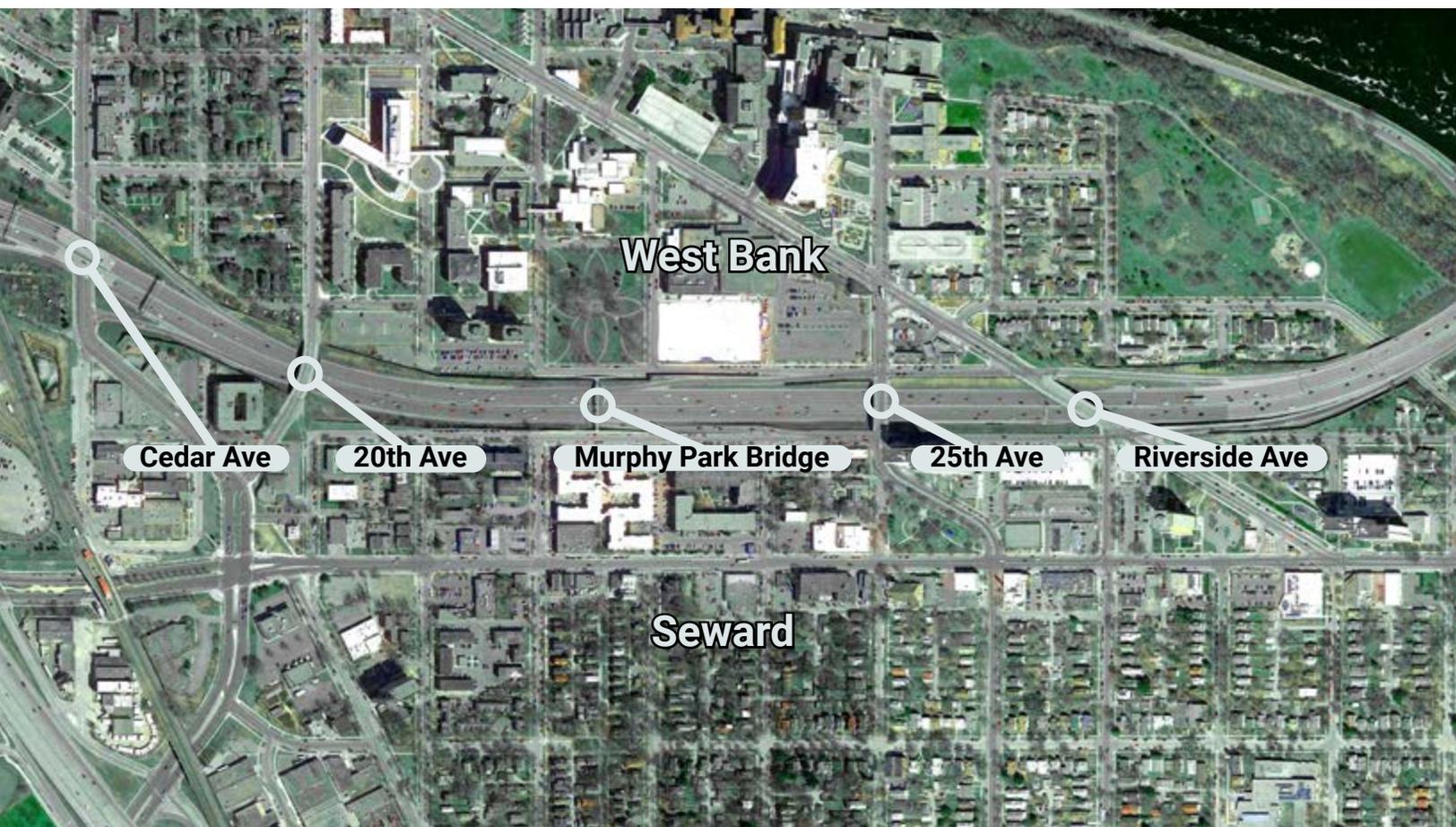
- to increase safety and comfort for street users of all modes, all ages, and all abilities,
- to connect people to destinations including workplaces, schools, and daily needs,
- to improve coordination between government agencies with abutting and intersecting jurisdictions, and
- to engage historically under-represented groups.

Reconnecting Neighborhoods was a local complement to the regional Rethinking I-94 project that the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) has been conducting since 2016. The potential reconstruction of the freeway offers a historic opportunity to repair the connections between Seward and the West Bank.

**Scope and context.** Reconnecting Neighborhoods focuses on five crossings of I-94:

- **Cedar Avenue**
- **20th Avenue**
- **Murphy Park pedestrian and bicycle bridge**
- **25th Avenue**
- **Riverside Avenue**

**Figure 1** Aerial photograph of Seward and the West Bank showing the crossings of Interstate 94.





Seward Redesign and community partners made it a priority to design improvements for these crossings so that they serve the community's needs for safe and comfortable places to walk and bike. The study area has high rates of walking and biking, and even more people could have sustainable and healthy transportation options if the streets were designed to prioritize the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users. Addressing these community concerns has numerous benefits: improved bicycle and pedestrian access to destinations, reduced traffic and pollution, improved safety for all modes, increased vitality for local business, and improved public health.

When I-94 was built in the 1960s, it removed homes and institutions and disconnected neighborhoods. More than fifty years later, the freeway is reaching the end of its useful life, and MnDOT is planning a large construction project along I-94 from downtown Minneapolis to downtown Saint Paul. The community in Seward and the West Bank reached out to agency partners to take advantage of this unique opportunity to address long-standing concerns by reconnecting neighborhoods that were divided by the freeway.

**Partners and process.** A wide range of partners participated in this planning. The project was initiated by Seward Redesign, a non-profit community development corporation that has worked with the community for 50 years. Minneapolis Public Works, Hennepin County Public Works, and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) attended monthly management committee meetings, shared information, and reviewed and advised the technical development of conceptual designs. Representatives of several community groups and institutions participated in the process: Seward Neighborhood Group, Seward Civic and Commerce Association, Seward Towers Corporation, West Bank Business Association, West Bank Community Development Corporation, Augsburg University, and Fairview Health Services. Funding was provided by the Bush Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, the Metropolitan Council, Seward Towers Corporation, and Seward Redesign. Alta Planning + Design provided technical consulting services.

**Planning context.** Addressing community concerns requires cooperation between different levels of government. Street ownership is fragmented between different agencies, but the agencies’ policies are unified in support of pedestrians and cyclists. The City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, and MnDOT each manage different parts of the transportation network connecting Seward and the West Bank, as shown below in *Table 1*.

*Table 1*

Steward	Infrastructure
Minnesota Department of Transportation	I-94, freeway overpasses, entrance and exit ramps
Hennepin County Public Works	Cedar Ave, Franklin Ave, 26th Ave (south of Franklin Ave)
City of Minneapolis Public Works	Riverside Ave, 20th Ave, 25th/26th Ave (north of Franklin)

Although the transportation network in the study area has a patchwork of one-way movements, turn prohibitions, and missing walkway connections, the policy goals of the agencies are unified. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that “all new facilities built by public entities must be accessible to and usable by people with disabilities.” In addition, the City, the County, and MnDOT have each adopted complete streets policies, and plans for bicycling and walking. These policy documents commit to building streets that prioritize the needs of vulnerable street users and to accommodate people with disabilities. To this end, the agencies have pledged to employ flexible and innovative engineering to design context-sensitive solutions. The City’s small-area plans, and the Minneapolis 2040 Comprehensive Plan advance these goals as well. The various plans and policies, and their points of agreement, are summarized in *Table 2* below. They are also discussed in more detail in the plan analysis appendix.

*Table 2*

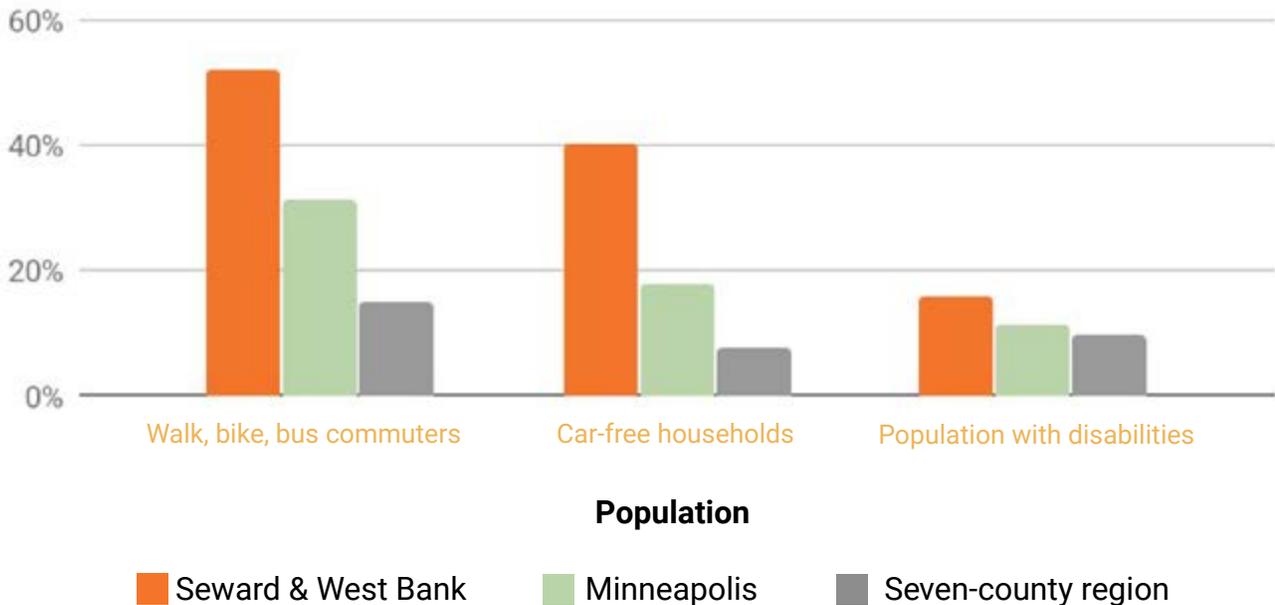
Agency	Relevant plans and policies	Common Goals
Minnesota Department of Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-<a href="#">Minnesota Walks</a></li> <li>-<a href="#">Statewide Bicycle System Plan</a></li> <li>-<a href="#">Complete Streets</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Complete streets</li> <li>-Fewer deaths and serious injuries from crashes</li> </ul>
Hennepin County Public Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-<a href="#">Pedestrian Plan</a></li> <li>-<a href="#">2040 Mobility Plan</a></li> <li>-<a href="#">2040 Bicycle Transportation Plan</a></li> <li>-<a href="#">Complete Streets Policy</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Streets designed for people of all ages and abilities</li> <li>-Support for people walking, biking, rolling, and taking transit</li> <li>-Commitment to public participation and engagement</li> </ul>
City of Minneapolis Public Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-<a href="#">Pedestrian Master Plan</a></li> <li>-<a href="#">Bicycle Master Plan</a></li> <li>-<a href="#">Complete Streets Policy</a></li> <li>-<a href="#">Vision Zero Minneapolis</a></li> <li>-<a href="#">Franklin-Cedar/Riverside Area Master Plan</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Context-sensitive solutions</li> <li>-Innovative design</li> <li>-Improved public health</li> </ul>

**Community characteristics.** Seward and the West Bank are central neighborhoods with high-density housing, commercial corridors, educational institutions, health care centers, and green space. They are near two regional job centers: downtown Minneapolis and the University of

Minnesota. Partially because of this land use context, Seward and West Bank residents often walk, bike, and take transit. Driving is much less popular in the study area than it is across the city as a whole: less than half of workers use a car to commute, and 40 percent of households do not own a car. *Figure 2* compares the transportation characteristics of Seward and the West Bank to the City of Minneapolis and the seven-county metropolitan region.

**Getting Around the Neighborhood**  
 2013-2017 American Community Survey Estimates

*Figure 2*



## Community Priorities

**Values.** The Seward and West Bank neighborhoods want a balanced transportation network that accommodates safe, comfortable travel for all residents and visitors. This includes people with disabilities, and the growing aging population. Building streets that prioritize people walking, biking, and using wheelchairs will provide many benefits to residents and visitors: fewer injuries and deaths caused by crashes, lower rates of chronic illness like asthma, diabetes, and heart disease, and enhanced economic vitality along commercial corridors. MnDOT’s Rethinking I-94 project allows for the opportunity to improve the connections between Seward and the West Bank that the freeway separated.

**Practical solutions.** The measures that would further these goals are well-understood. There are a number of examples of bridges and crossings that include positive elements outside the study area. These can be looked to as examples and include the Franklin Mississippi River Bridge and the Franklin/20th Avenue protected bikeways. Pedestrian safety and comfort is enhanced by widening sidewalks, creating a buffer between sidewalks and motorized traffic, and extending curbs at intersections. In the winter, snow removed from the street and sidewalks can accumulate in this new buffer zone, instead of constricting the sidewalks to an uncomfortable or impassable width. Building protected bike lanes and filling gaps in bicycle networks are reliable ways to prioritize the interests of people riding bikes. These interventions reduce the frequency

of crashes, and by calming traffic speeds, reduce the severity of crashes that do occur. When implemented appropriately, these improvements are inexpensive and provide a reasonable and predictable movement of motor vehicles, including the buses and trucks that serve the residents and businesses in the neighborhoods.

## Issues and Opportunities

**Existing conditions.** The land-use patterns in Seward and the West Bank – apartment towers, commercial corridors, and institutions like Augsburg University, the University of Minnesota, and Fairview Health Services – make it a natural place to walk and bike. Workers in the area commute by walking, biking, and transit at a higher rate than the city as a whole, and households are much less likely to own a car. Community members have been expressing their desire for better walking and biking facilities for decades. These community needs are validated by Alta’s existing conditions memorandum (see appendix), which lists the street design deficiencies in detail. The overarching themes are that the sidewalks and bike lanes are too narrow and lack buffer from motorized traffic, the pedestrian crossings are too long and dangerous, and need to be more visible and accessible.

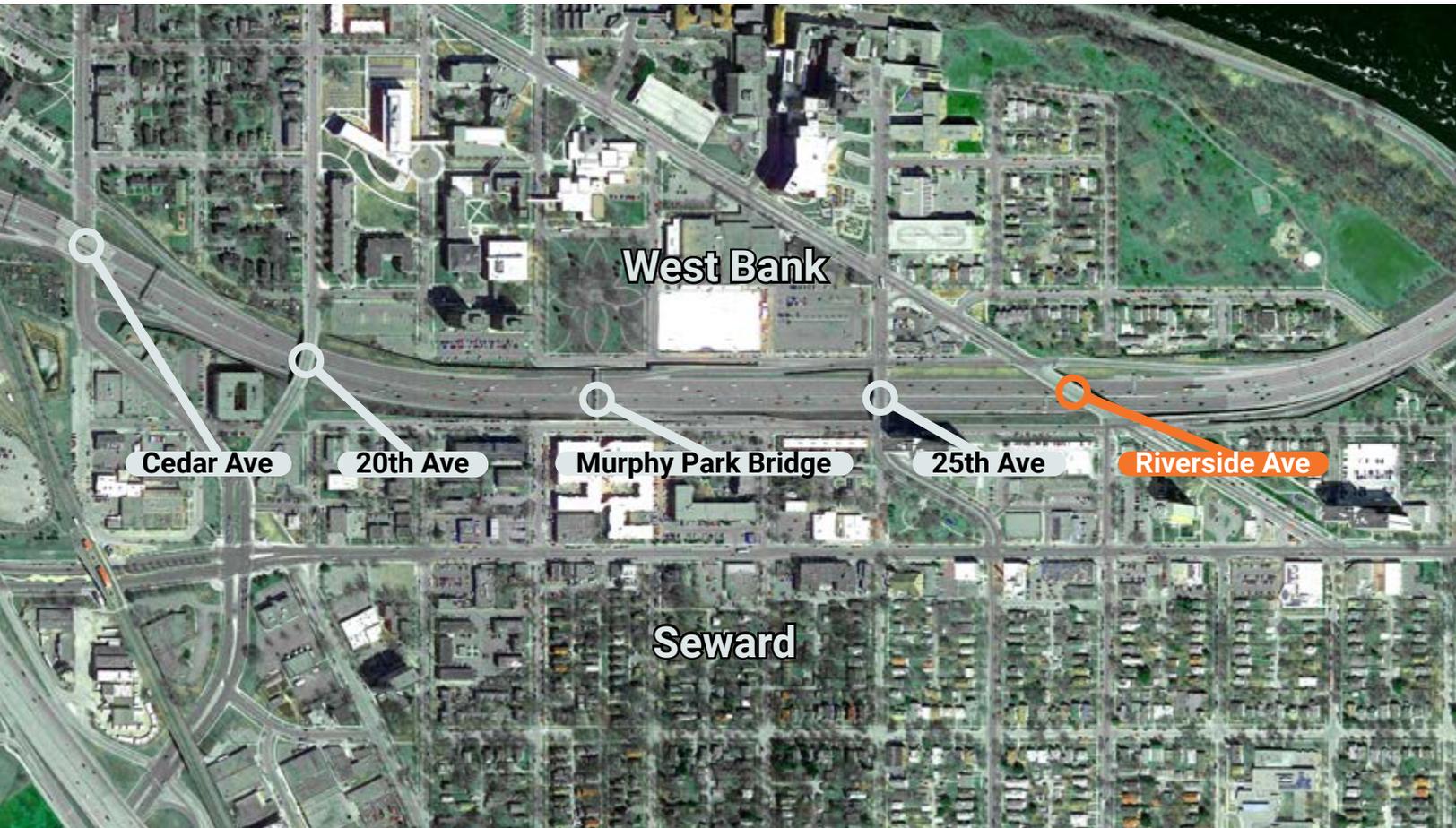


**Figure 3** Limited visibility and steep ramps at Murphy Park Pedestrian Bridge



**Figure 4** Narrow sidewalks and bike lanes adjacent to traffic on 25th Avenue bridge

## Reconnecting Neighborhoods: Riverside Ave Crossing



**Context.** The Riverside Avenue crossing passes the University of Minnesota Medical Center on the West Bank and apartment towers in Seward before terminating at the Seward Community Co-op. The street on either side of the freeway was reconstructed in 2011 with bike lanes, turn lanes, and wider, buffered sidewalks.

**Existing conditions and deficiencies.** The skew of Riverside Avenue results in long crossings for pedestrians and poor sightlines for all users. The sidewalks are narrow and adjacent to vehicle traffic, and the bike lanes do not have buffers or physical separation from traffic. The bridge over the freeway was built in 1962, remodeled in 2011, and MnDOT's latest inventory report notes deterioration and unsound repairs of the substructure.

**Near-term recommendations.** Most opportunities for low-cost improvements of this crossing have already been taken: pedestrian-scale lighting, high-visibility crosswalk striping, and accessible pedestrian signals. No further near-term improvements are recommended.

**Long-term recommendations.** Long-term improvements should be coordinated with future connections to transit enhancements along the freeway. When the bridge over the freeway is rebuilt, it should be widened to make room for a separated space for walking and biking buffered, ideally by planters. To avoid maintenance problems, these planters should not be embedded in the structure of the bridge.

# Existing Conditions and Deficiencies: Riverside Ave



Long crossing distances

Non-ADA curb ramps

Unprotected bike lanes

Obstructed sightlines

Non-ADA pedestrian curb ramps

Obstructed sightlines

Narrow sidewalks adjacent to traffic

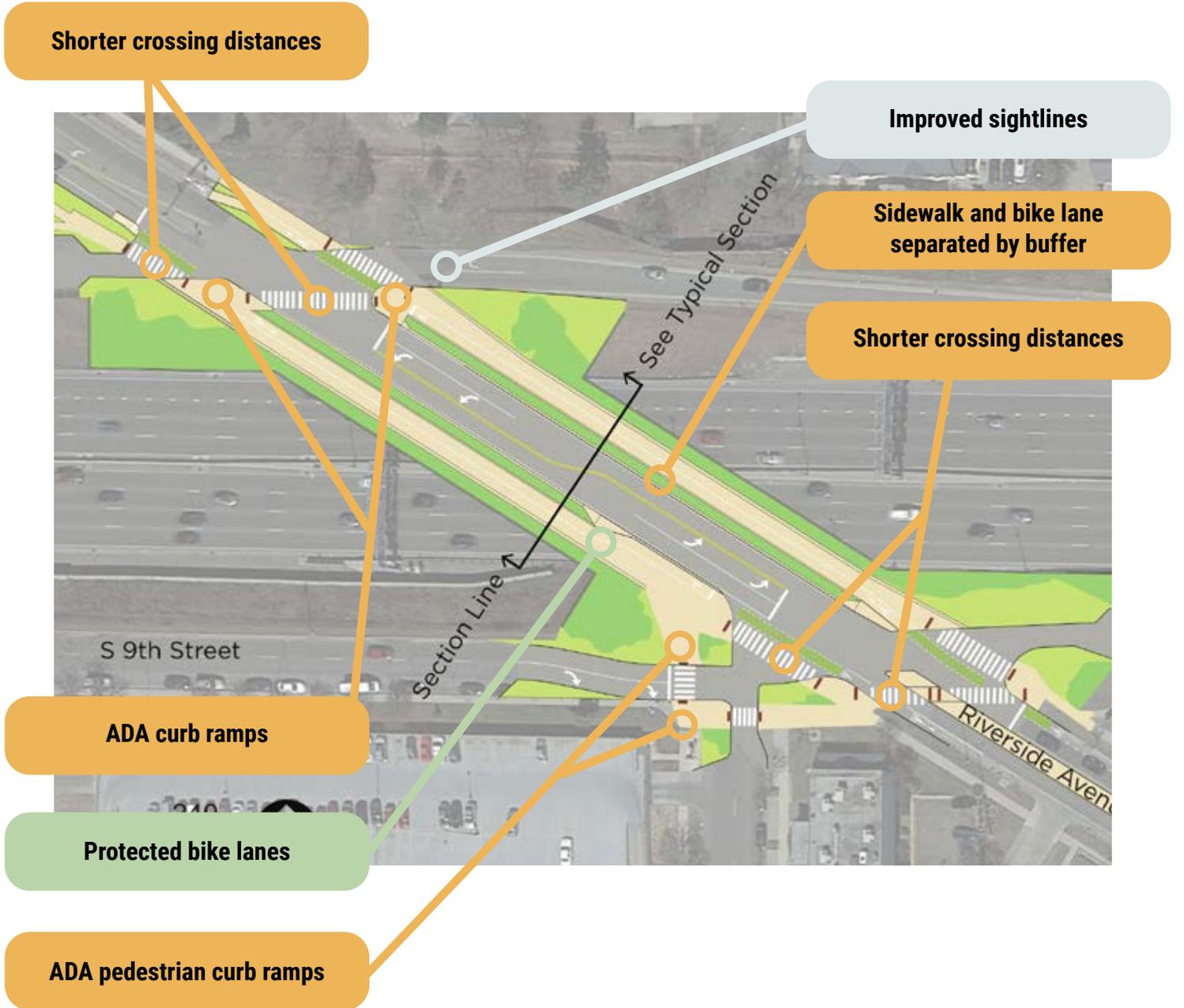
Conflicts between bikes and right turns

Long crossing distances

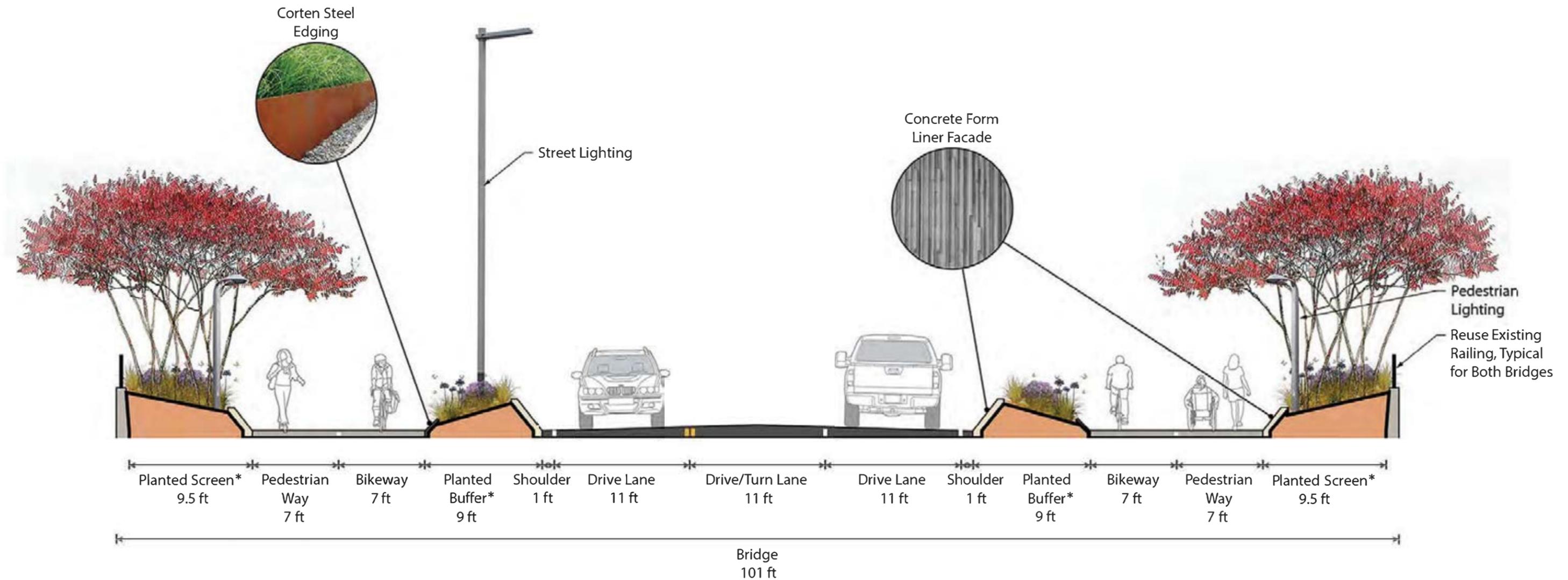


**Total Right of Way: 62'**

# Long-Term Recommendations: Riverside Ave

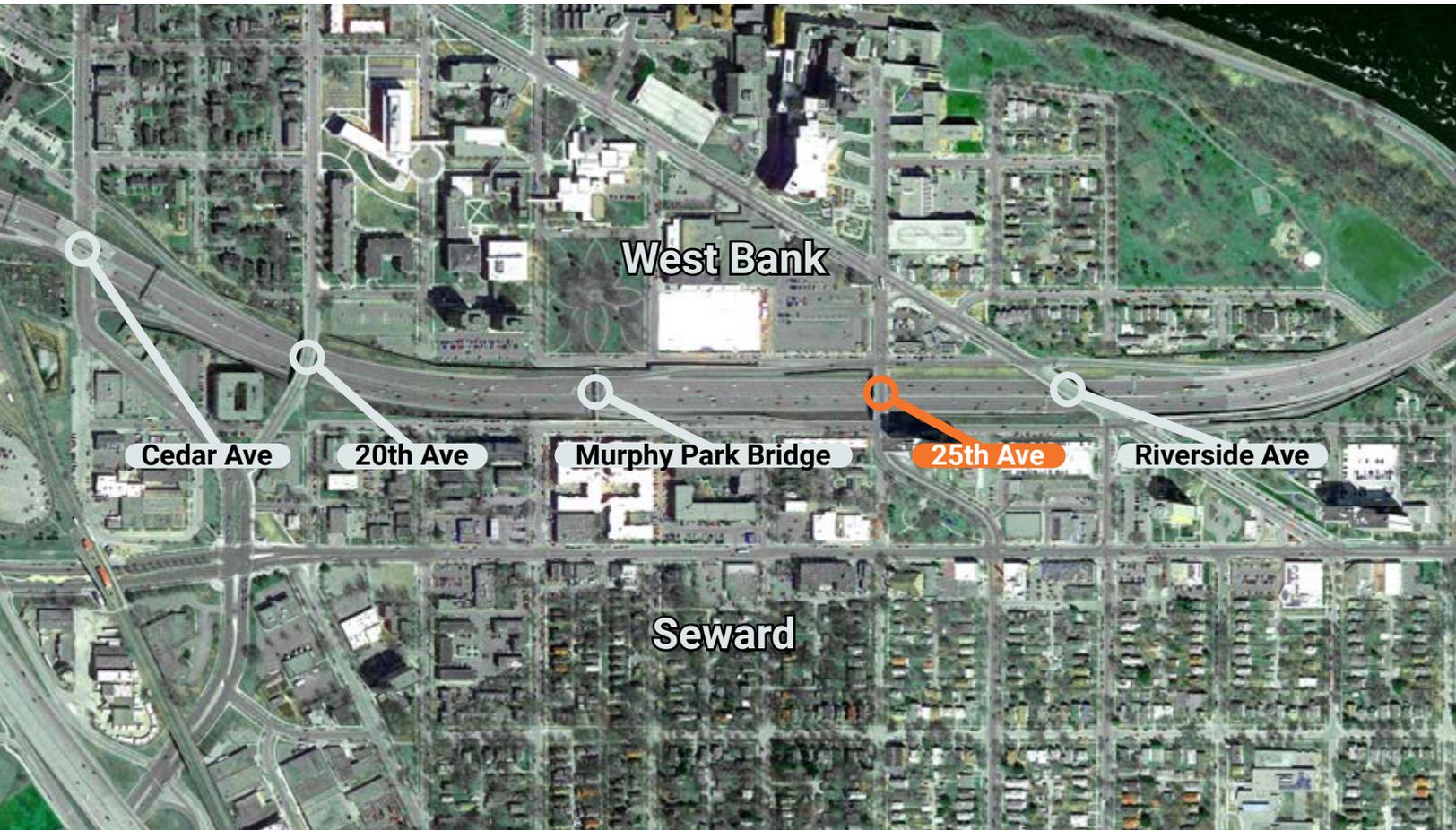


# Long-Term Recommendations: Riverside Ave



Typical Section for Riverside Ave Bridge over I-94  
Looking North

## Reconnecting Neighborhoods: 25th Ave Crossing



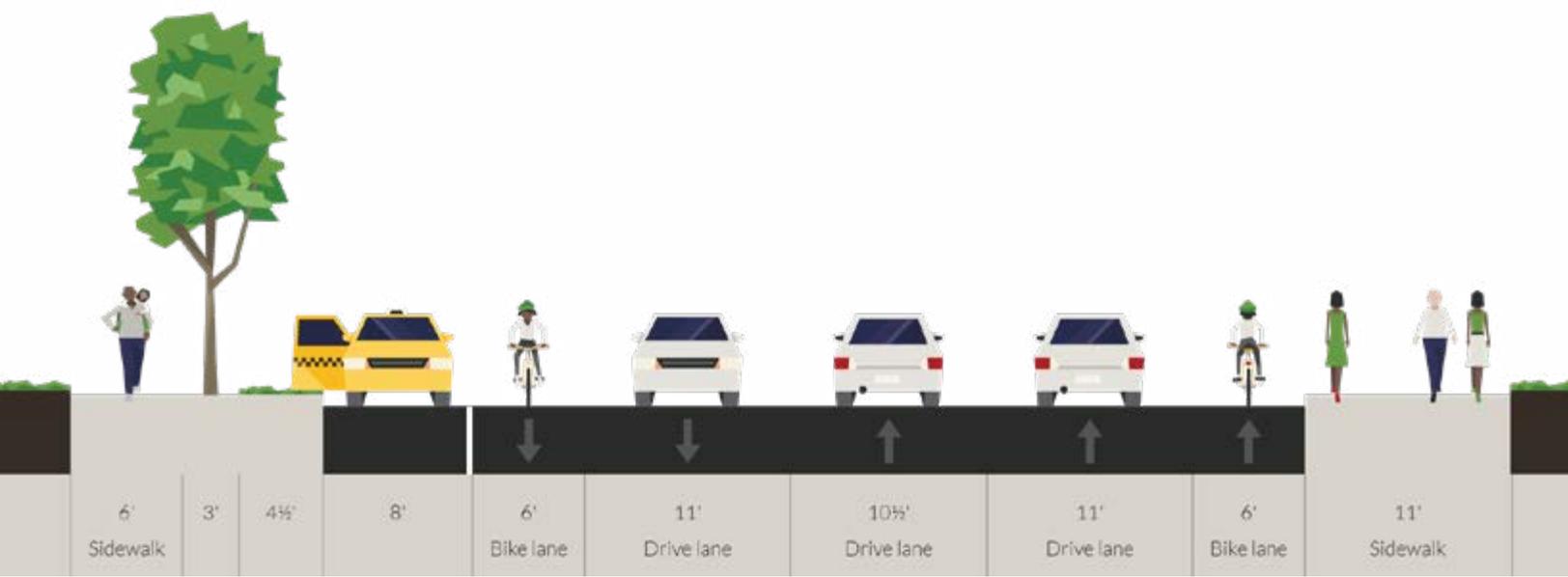
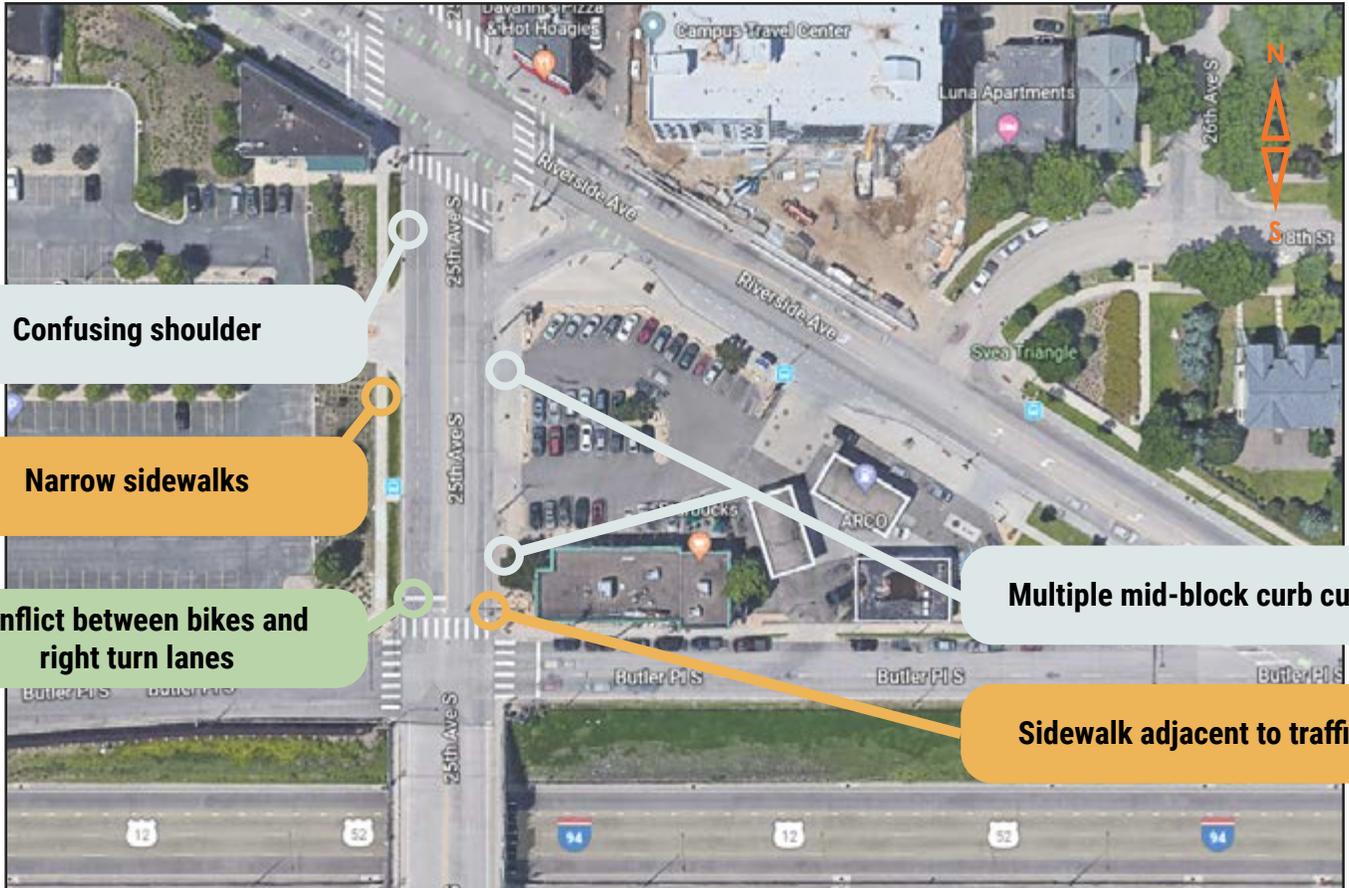
**Context.** The 25th Avenue crossing serves many destinations. It is a gateway to downtown Seward, the University of Minnesota Medical Center, Augsburg University, and provides access to and from I-94. South of the freeway, it becomes 26th Avenue and curves between Seward Tower West, a 320-unit low-income apartment building, and the Tower's green space, Triangle Park. The bridge over the freeway is a MnDOT asset, and 26th Avenue south of Franklin is a county road. The rest of the segment is a municipal state-aid street.

**Existing conditions and deficiencies.** For pedestrians, narrow sidewalks adjacent to traffic, frequent curb cuts, and non-ADA crosswalks and pedestrian signals are the greatest problems. For bicyclists, the gap in the bike lane south of the freeway is a problem. Excessively-wide travel lanes, lack of turn lanes, poor sightlines, and mid-block curb cuts create confusion and danger for drivers.

**Near-term recommendations.** Lanes should be restriped to standard widths. Bike lanes should be striped where they do not currently exist and upgraded with buffers or physical protection where possible. An enhanced mid-block crossing from Seward Tower West to Triangle Park should be built for the safety of residents and visitors. A mid-block crossing was built by Minneapolis Public Works in December 2019.

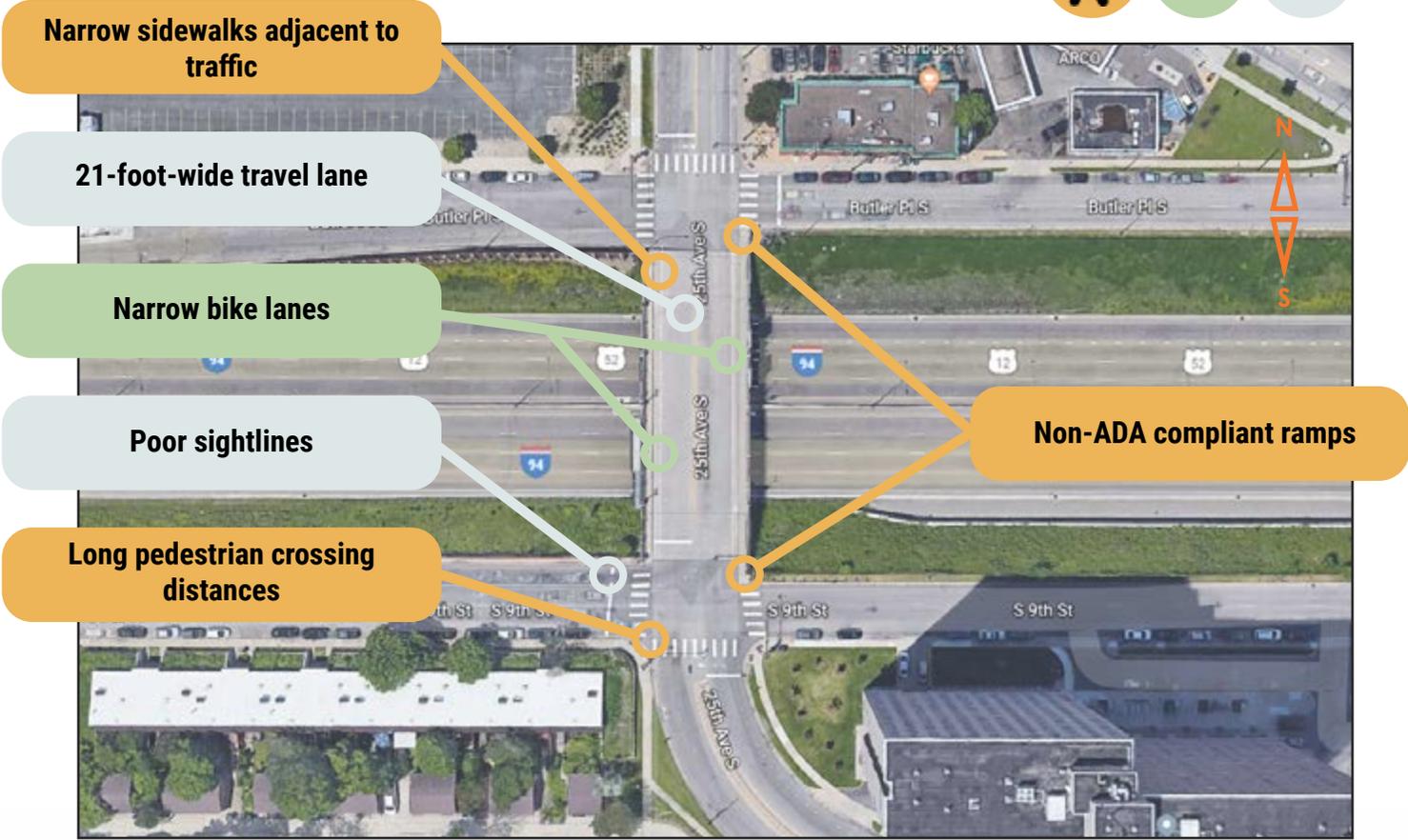
**Long-term recommendations.** Long-term improvements should be coordinated with construction work along the freeway trench. When the bridge over the freeway is rebuilt, it should be widened to make room for left turn lanes and a separated space for walking and biking buffered by planters.

# Existing Conditions and Deficiencies: 25th Ave (Northern Section)



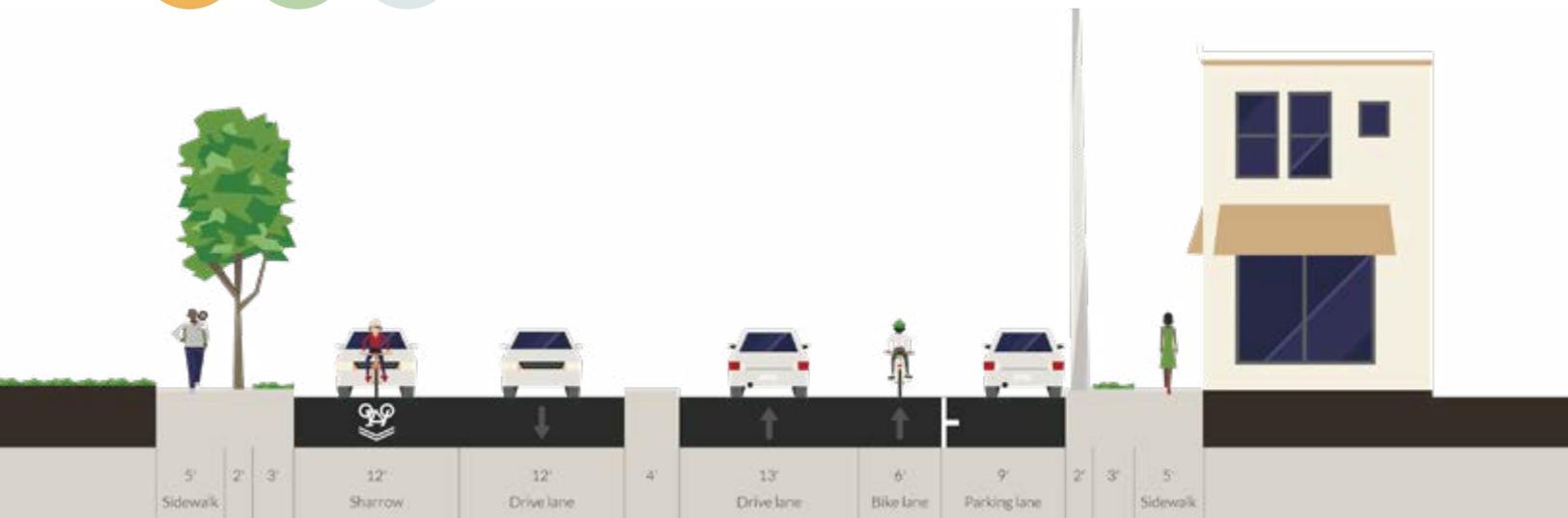
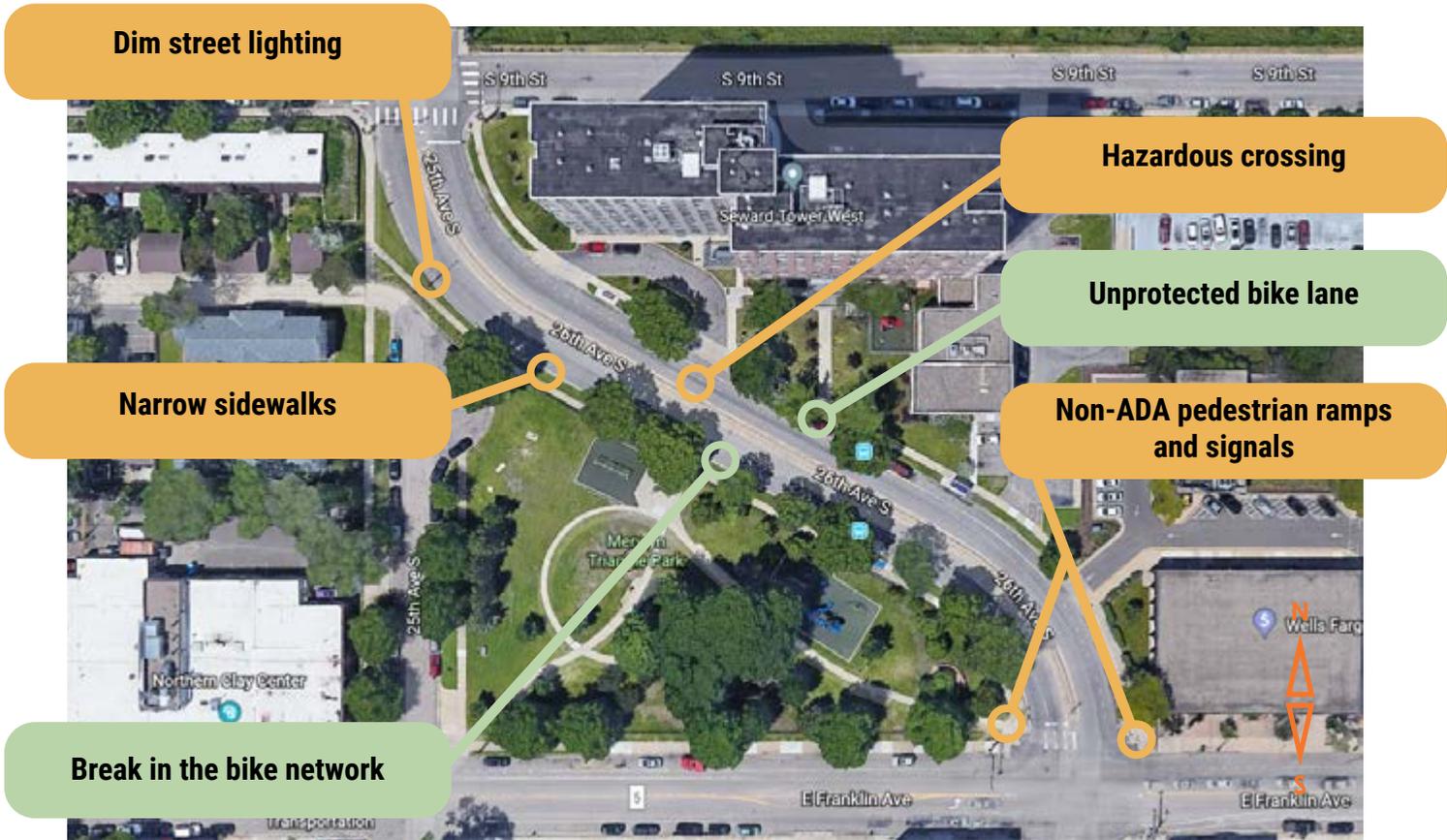
**Total Right of Way: 77'**

# Existing Conditions and Deficiencies: 25th Ave (Bridge)



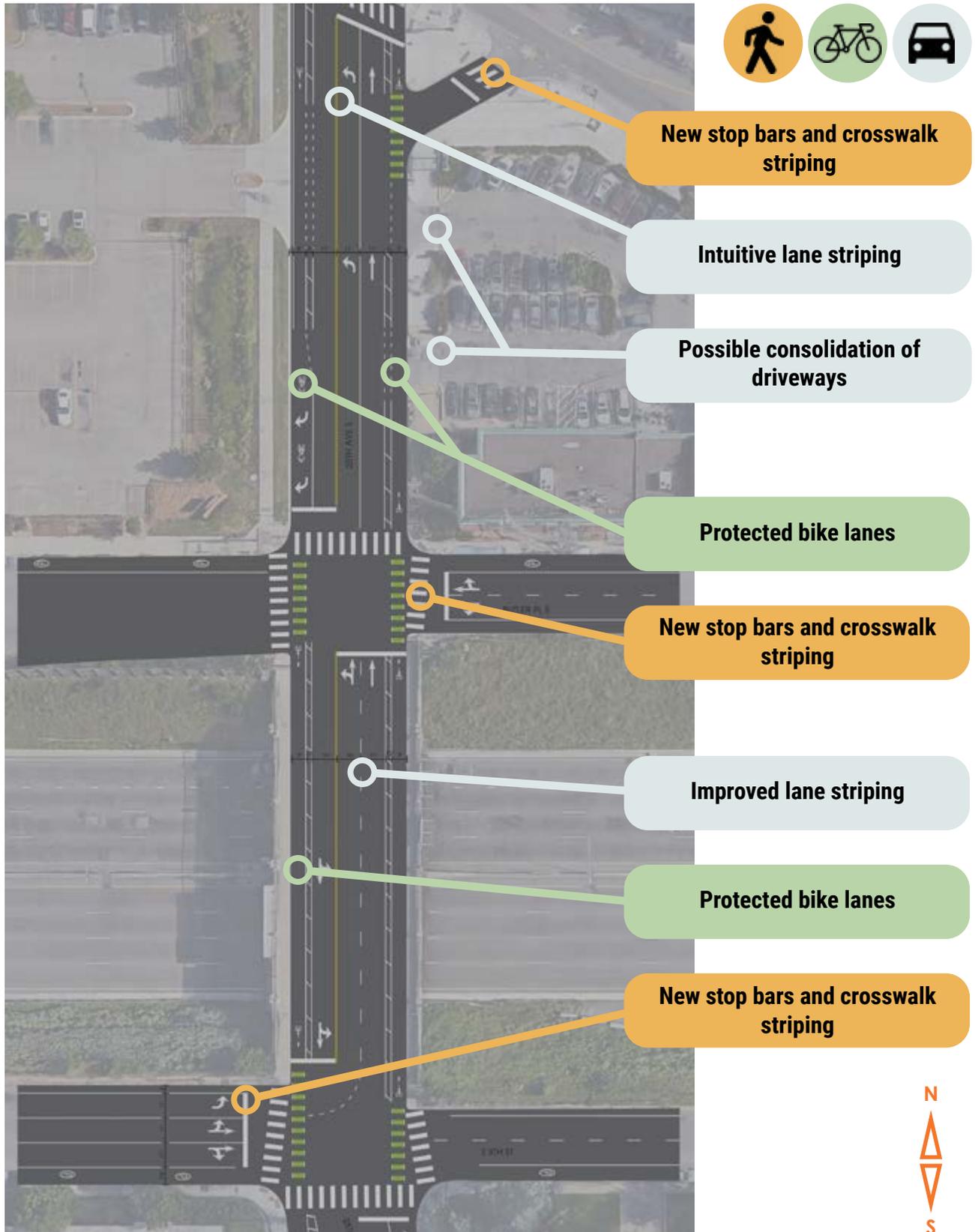
**Total Right of Way: 62'**

# Existing Conditions and Deficiencies: 25th/26th Ave (S-Curve)

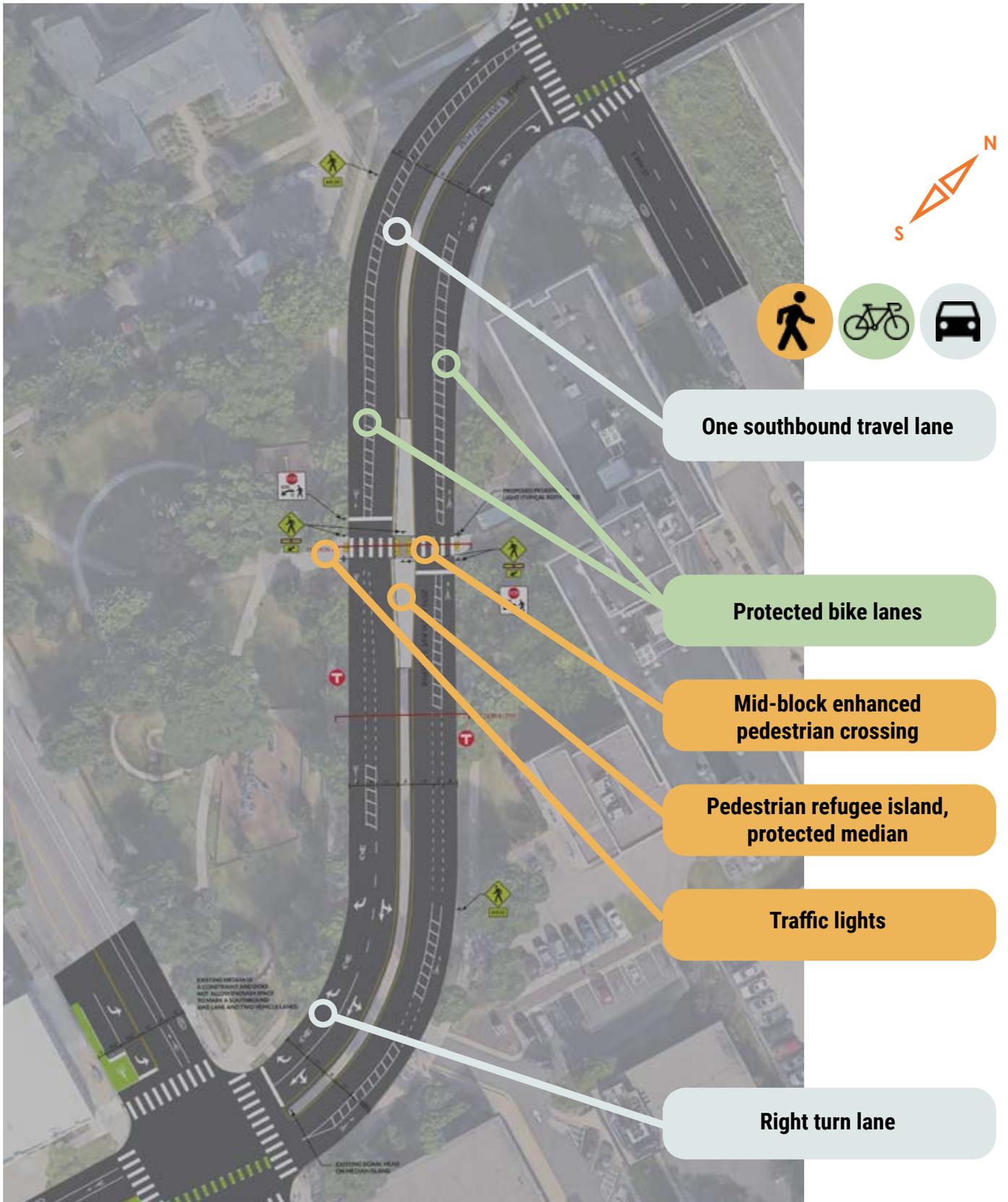


**Total Right of Way: 76'**

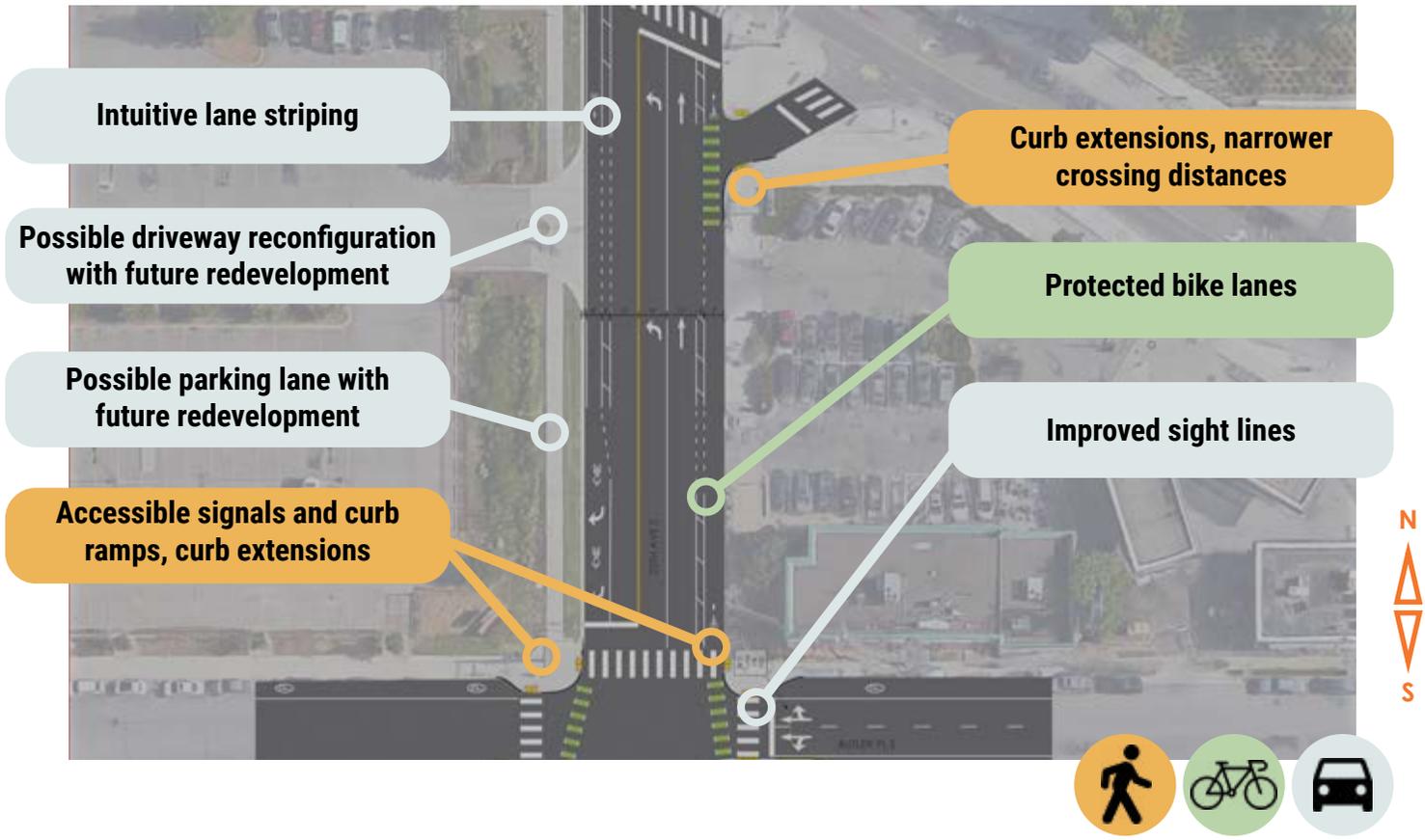
# Near-Term Recommendations: 25th Ave (Northern Section)



# Near-Term Recommendations: 25th/26th Ave (S-Curve)

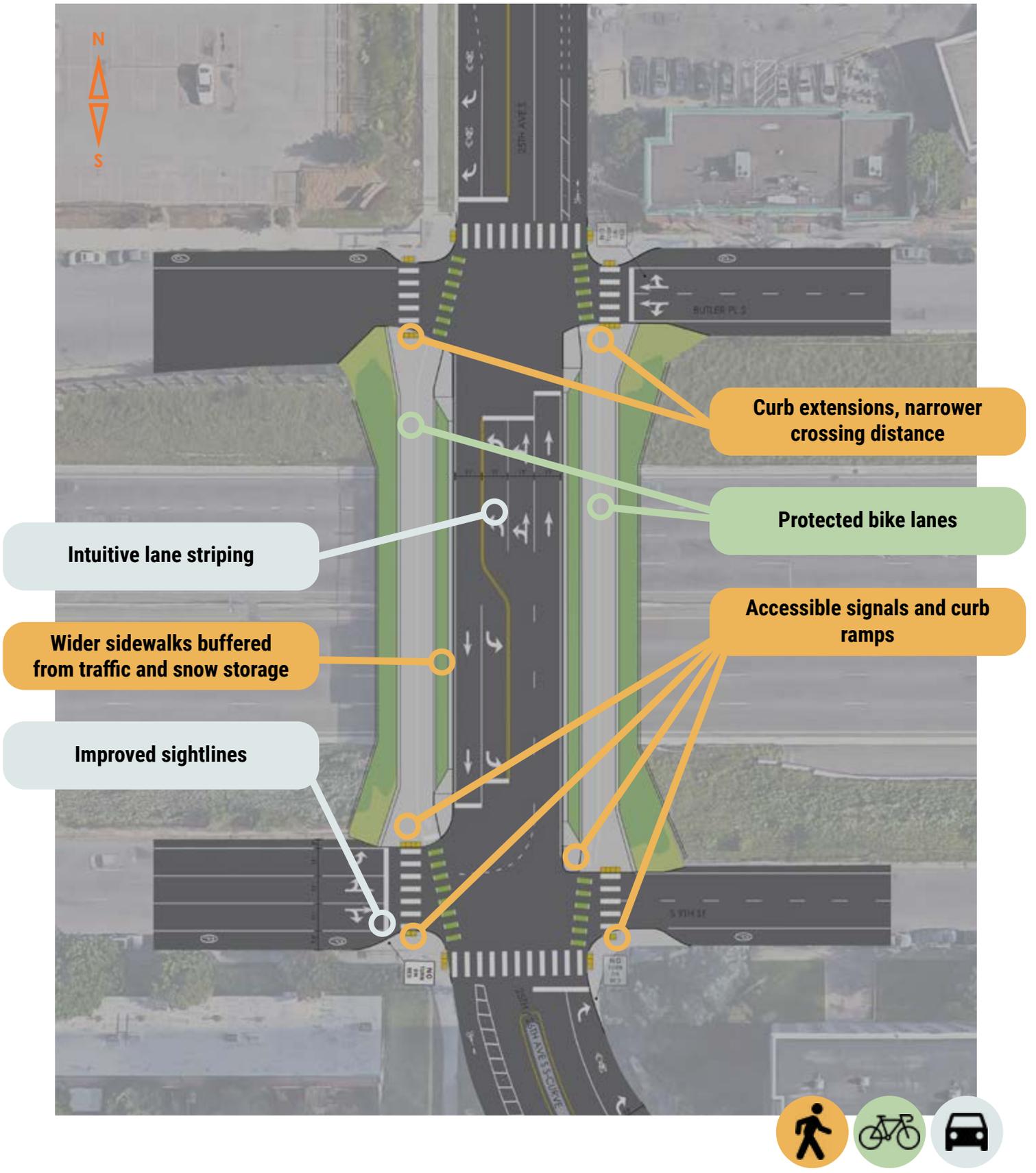


# Long-Term Recommendations: 25th Ave (Northern Section)

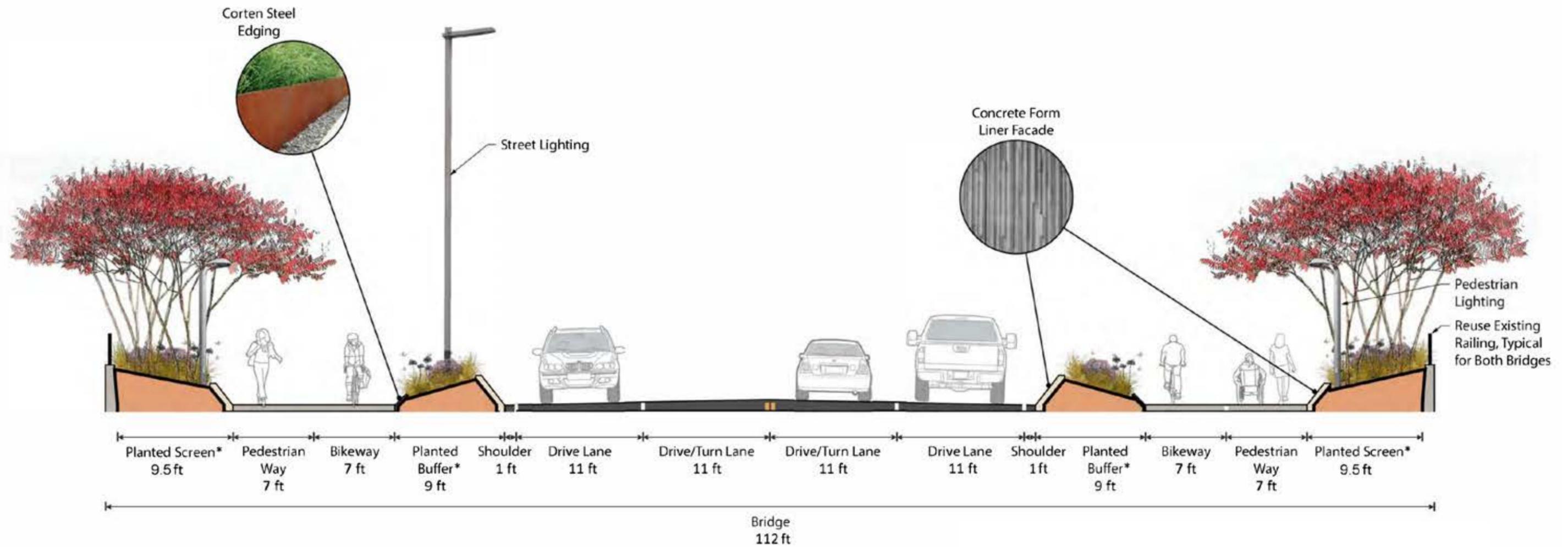


**Total Right of Way: 77'**

# Long-Term Recommendations: 25th Ave (Bridge)



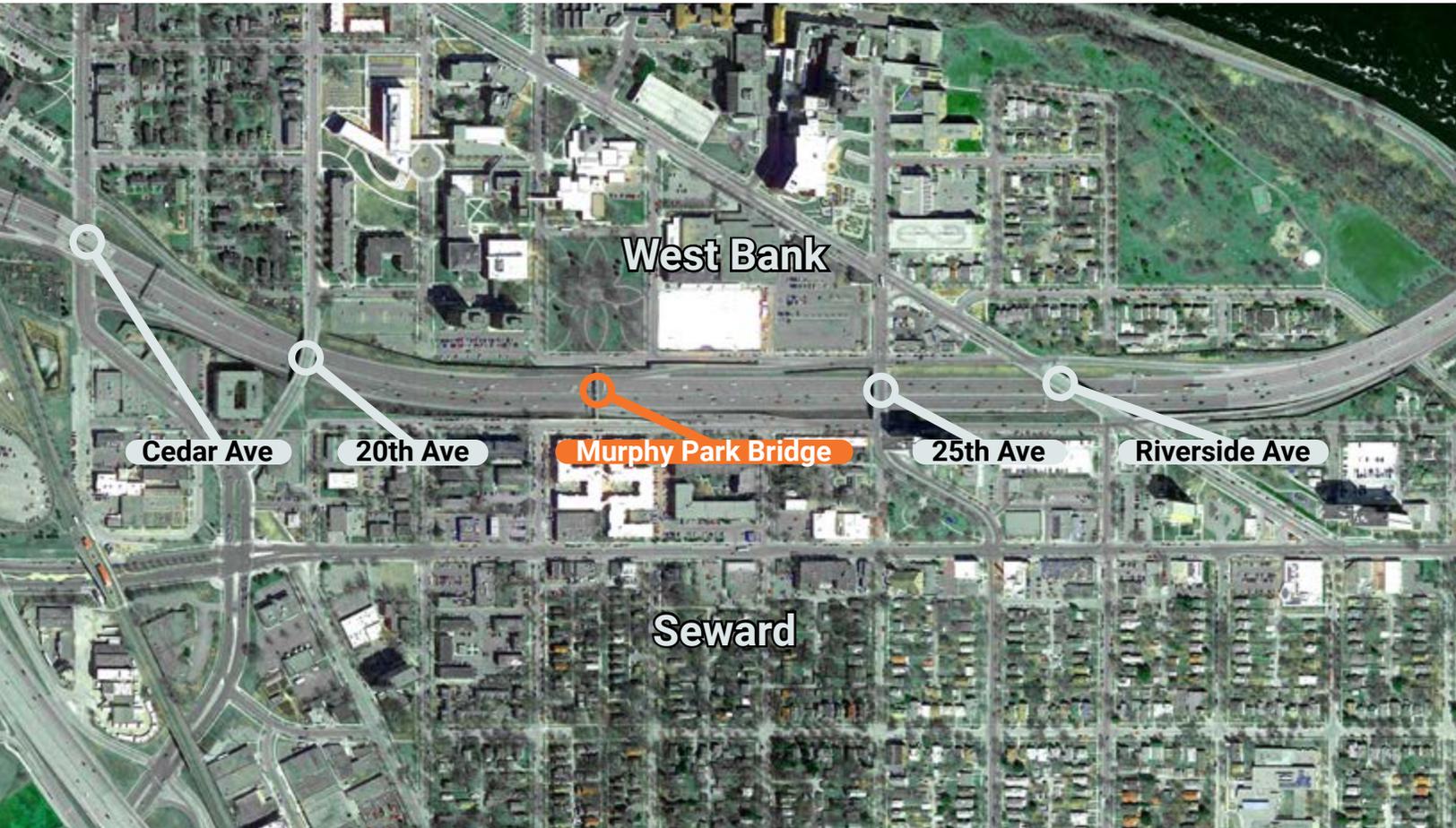
### Long-Term Recommendations: 25th Ave (Bridge)



Typical Section for 25th Avenue S Bridge over I-94  
Looking North



## Reconnecting Neighborhoods: Murphy Park Bridge Crossing



**Context.** The Murphy Park bicycle and pedestrian bridge crosses I-94 between 22nd and 23rd Avenues. Augsburg and Murphy Park lie to the north of the bridge, and the Franklin Avenue business corridor and apartment buildings lie just south of the bridge. One of the apartments, Seward Square, is Section 8 low-income housing for people with disabilities.

**Existing conditions and deficiencies.** The ramps of the 1962 bridge are steeper than ADA requirements, and are inaccessible to many people who use mobility devices. MnDOT rates the bridge's accessibility as "poor." The bridge deck has about 8 feet of space framed by chain link fences. The bridge lacks screening or buffering from the freeway below. The sharp corners are hazardous for bicyclists. The mid-block alignment of the bridge and lack of lighting limits visibility for users of the bridge and for businesses on Franklin Avenue that are only 300 feet away. The bridge itself has lower clearance than regulation. During the course of the study, the bridge was hit and damaged by a truck.

**Near-term recommendations.** Since the accident, the bridge has been replaced with a temporary structure, allowing for use until long-term improvements are implemented. There are few opportunities for quick, low-cost improvements, and the long-term solutions below should be prioritized.

**Long-term recommendations.** The community has three main desires for a new pedestrian bridge: alignment with 22nd Avenue South (half a block west of the existing bridge), ramps that are accessible and inviting to people of all ages and abilities, and a deck that is wide and screened from freeway traffic below.

# Existing Conditions and Deficiencies: Murphy Park Bridge

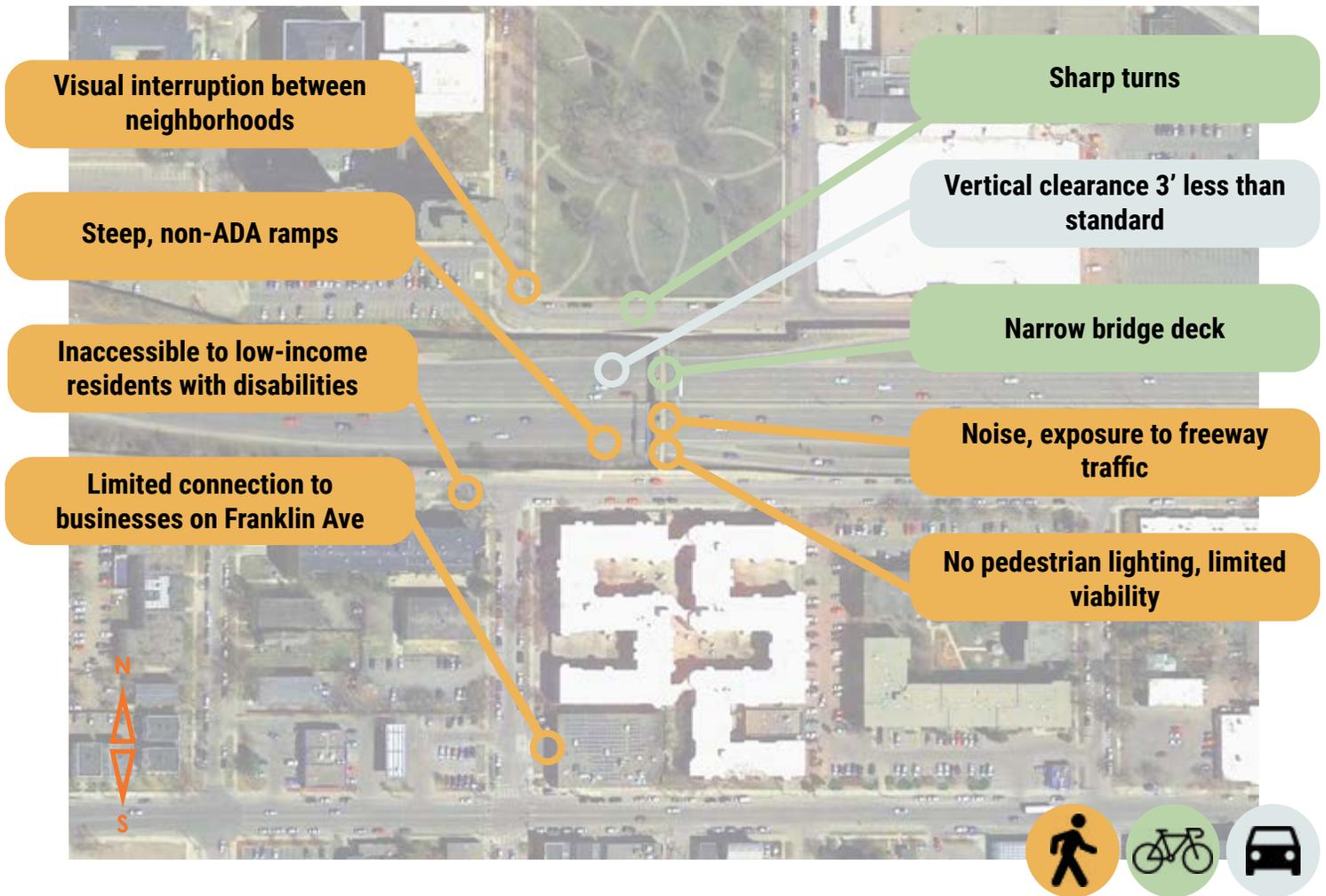


Figure 5 Non ADA compliant ramp system on South end

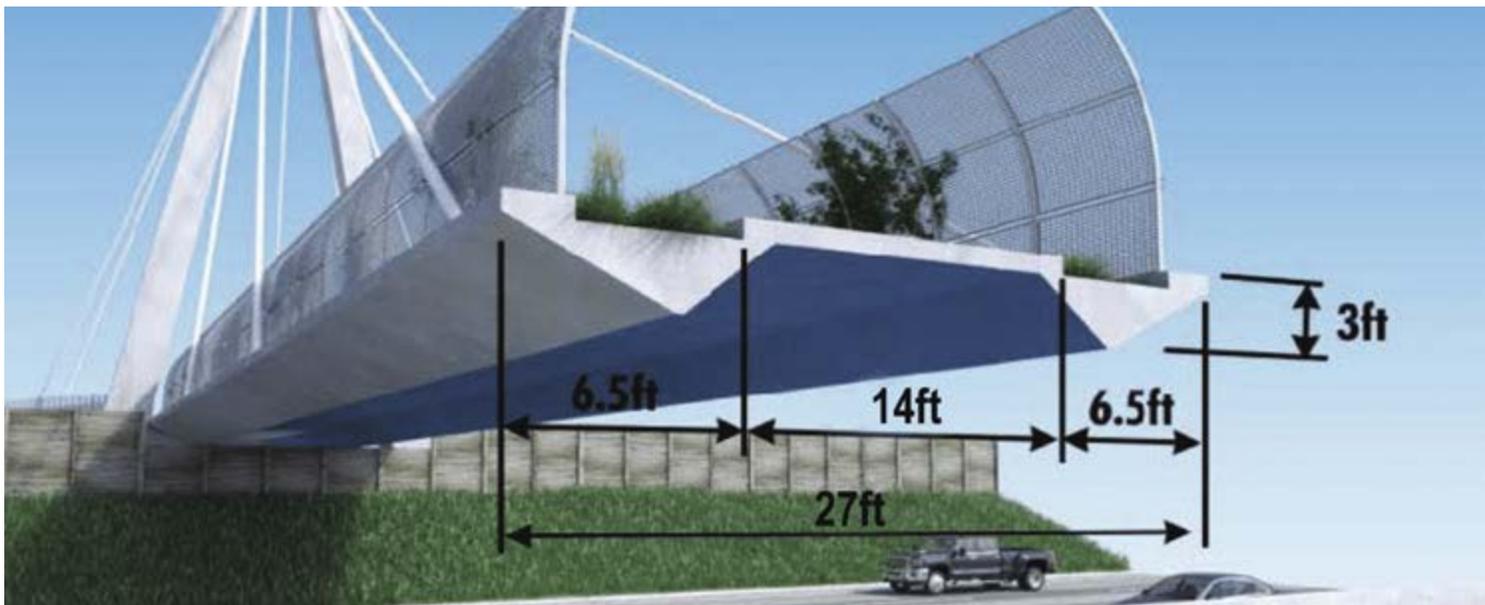
## Long-Term Concepts: Murphy Park Bridge

From 2014-2015 Augsburg and Redesign hosted a public design process to engage community members and develop aspirational concepts for the Murphy Park Bridge. The process produced the conceptual renderings below and identified key community priorities including:

- ADA accessible walkways
- Public gathering space
- A welcoming connection to Murphy Square Park
- Alignment with 22nd Avenue S.
- Planting buffers to shield pedestrians from highway noise

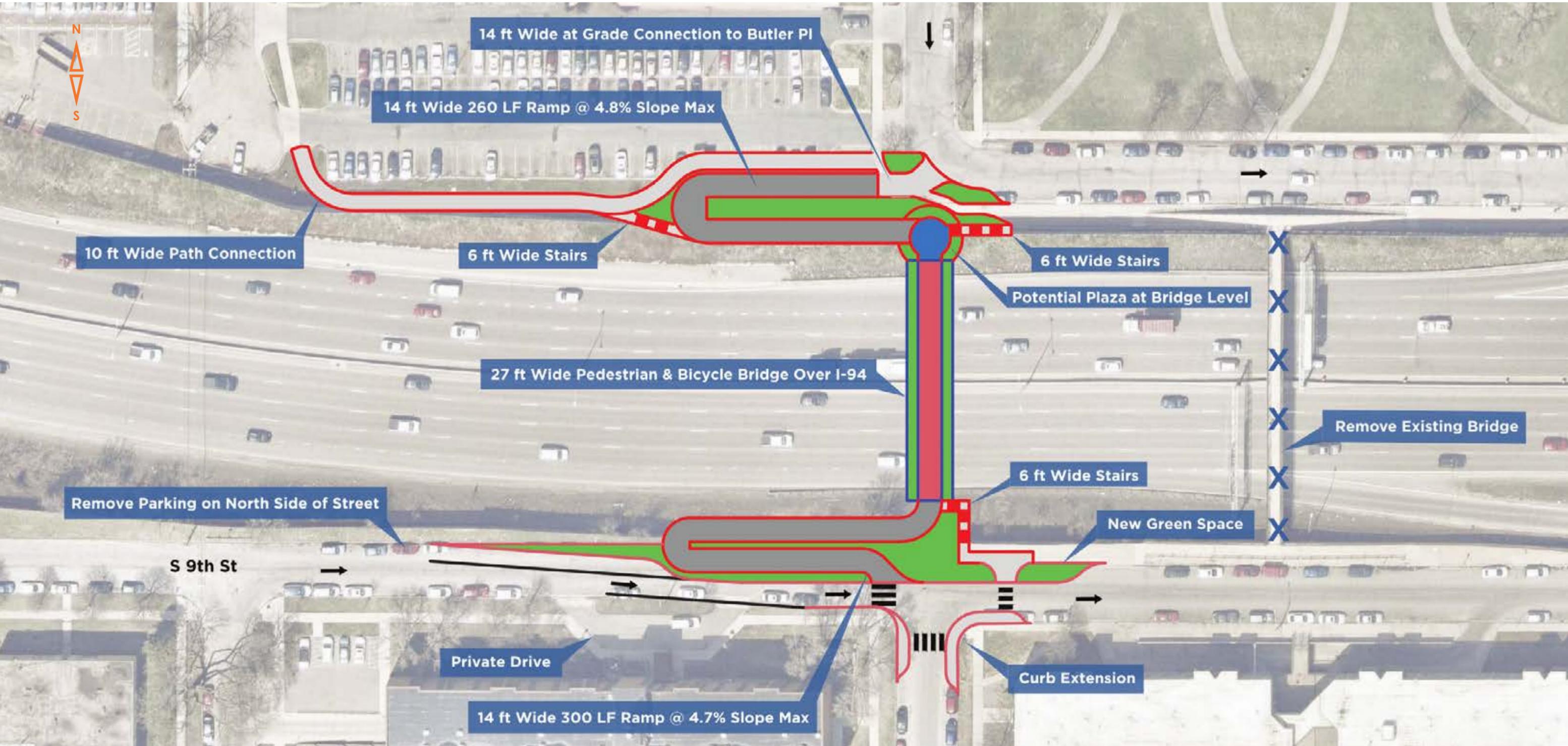


**Figure 6** Aerial Rendering of ADA accessible spiral ramp concept

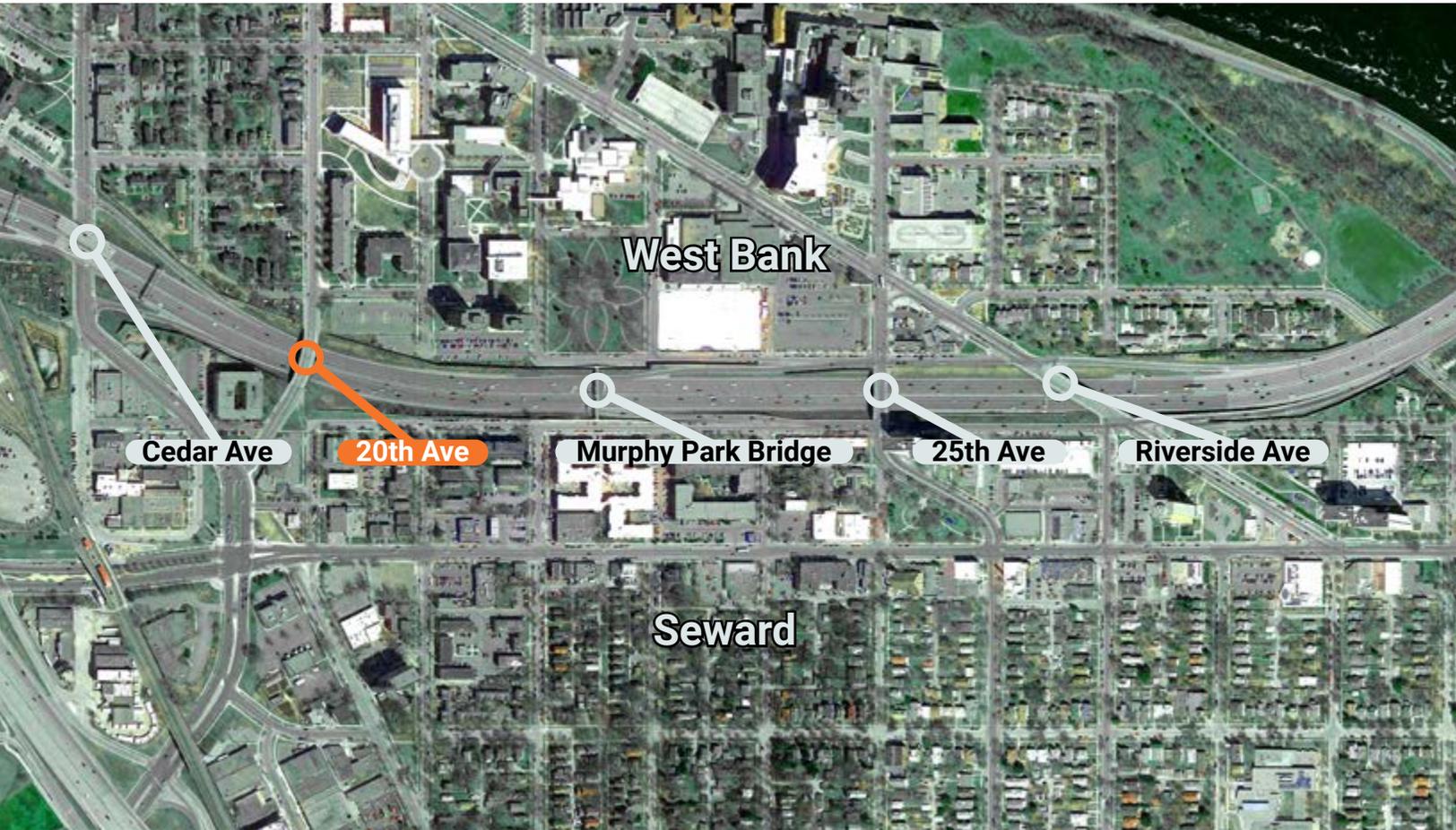


**Figure 7** Rendering of plant-screened pedestrian crossing concept

### Long-Term Concepts: Murphy Park Bridge



## Reconnecting Neighborhoods: 20th Ave Crossing



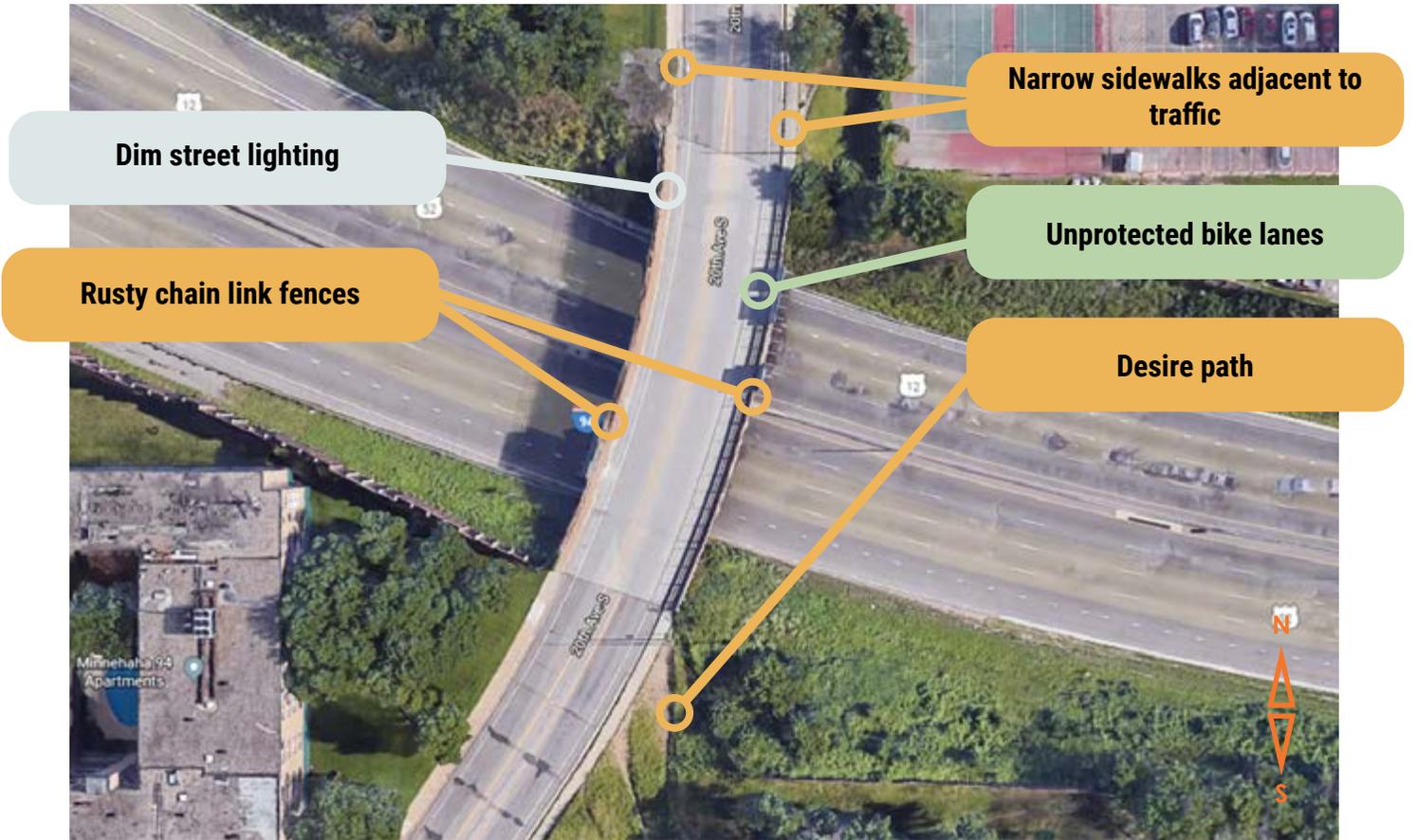
**Context.** The 20th Avenue crossing runs past Augsburg University in the West Bank and serves the western end of the Franklin Avenue commercial corridor in Seward. The street is a bike route, and has bike lanes that connect Seward to the University of Minnesota.

**Existing conditions and deficiencies.** Pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers are poorly served by the dim street lighting along the crossing. The narrow crosswalks adjacent to traffic are uncomfortable for people walking, and in winter can be impassable for people using wheelchairs. The rusty chain link fences on the bridge are unpleasant to walk along, and the bike lanes are not protected from traffic. MnDOT's asset map and program schedule recommends that the 1966 bridge be replaced between 2022 and 2027.

**Near-term recommendations.** The City of Minneapolis plans to install a two-way protected bikeway on 20th Avenue as part of their U of M Protected Bikeways Project by the end of 2019. Improved pedestrian-scale lighting and fencing materials should be installed when practical. Building a pedestrian connection that continues along 20th Avenue south of the bridge should be coordinated with an enhanced pedestrian crossing of Franklin Avenue at 20th Avenue.

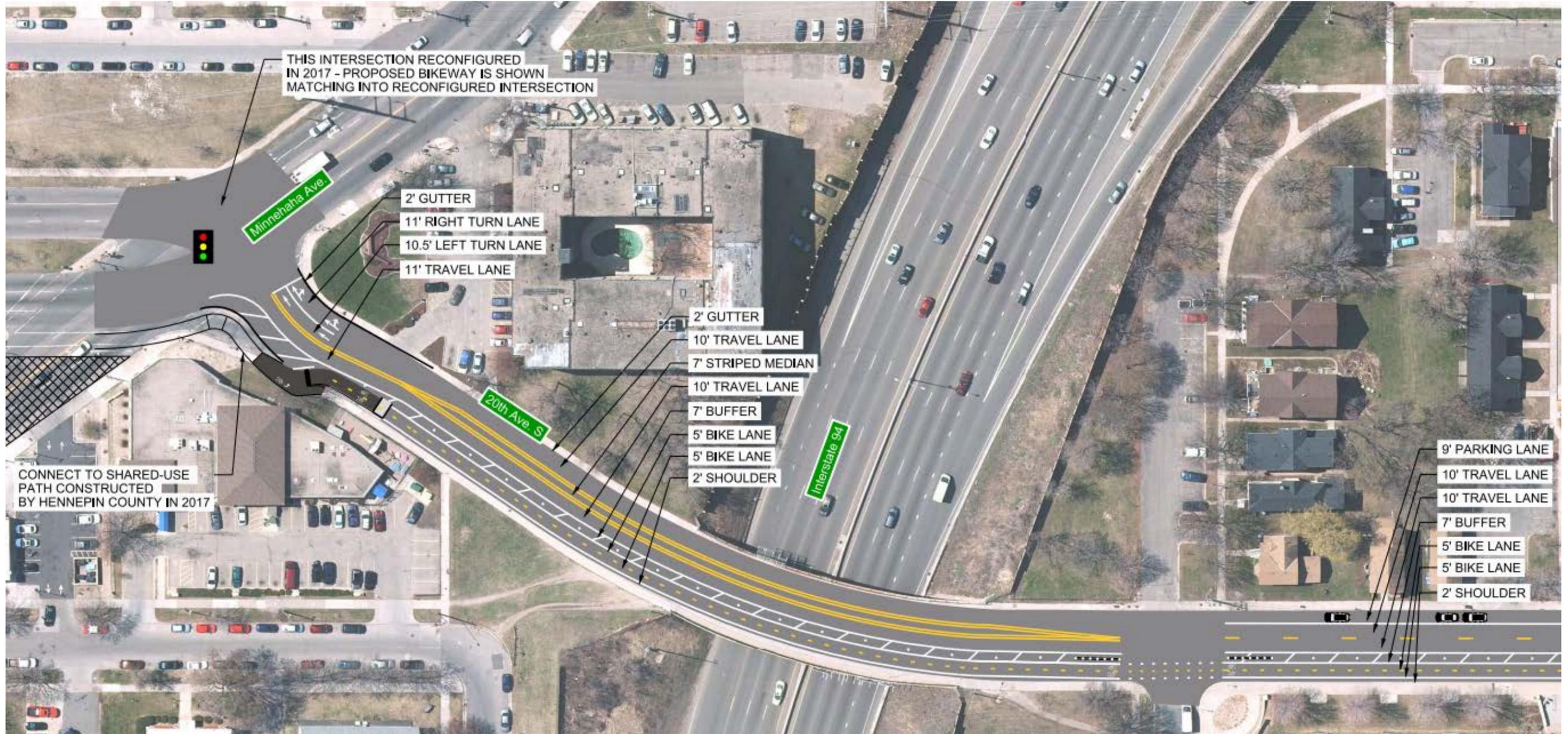
**Long-term recommendations.** Long-term improvements should be coordinated with construction work along the freeway trench. When the bridge over the freeway is rebuilt, it should be widened slightly to make room for wider sidewalk on the west side, and a separated space for walking and biking buffered by planters on the east side. This design would make the protected bikeway permanent.

# Existing Conditions and Deficiencies: 20th Ave

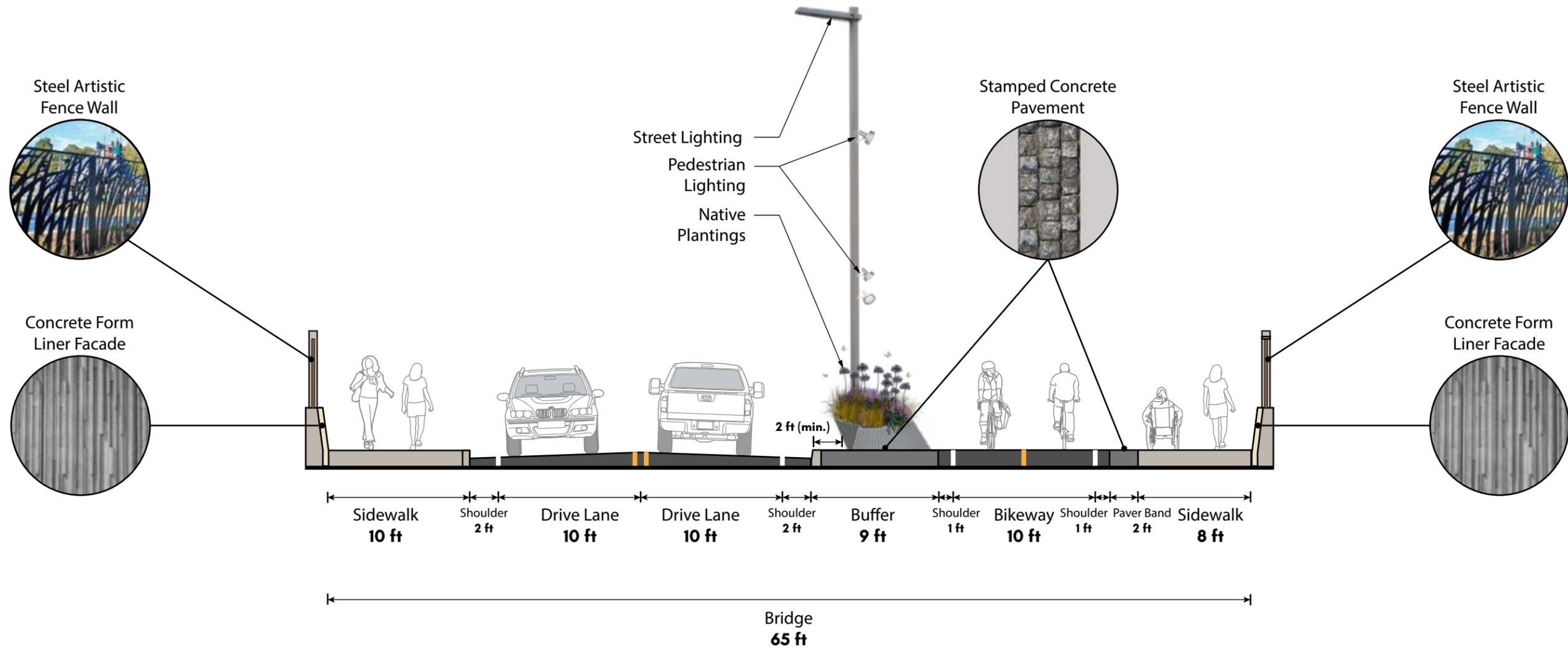


**Total Right of Way: 58'**

### Near-Term Recommendations: 20th Ave



### Long-Term Recommendations: 20th Ave

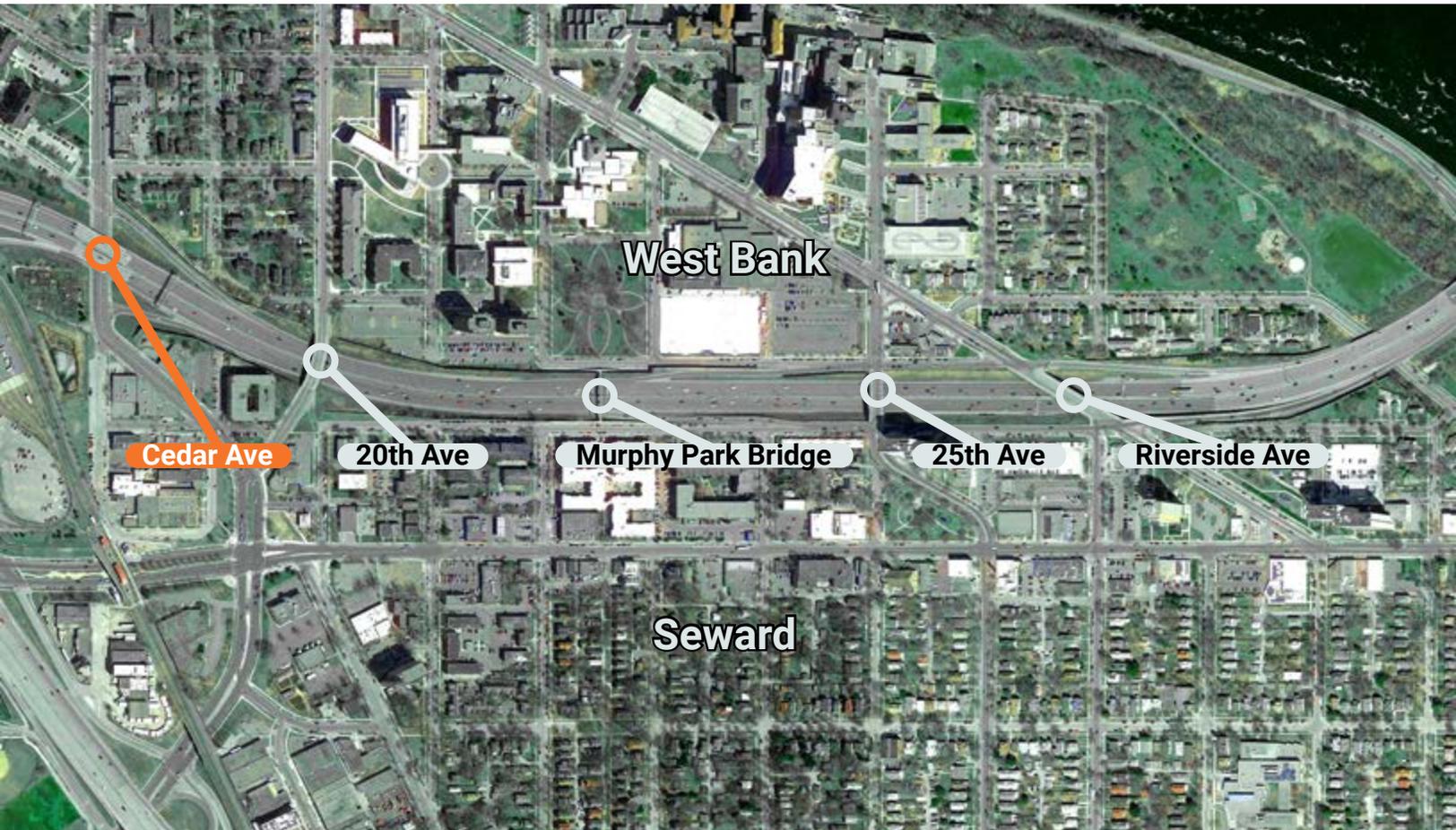


# Typical Section for 20th Avenue S Bridge over I-94

Looking North  
Draft February 5, 2019



## Reconnecting Neighborhoods: Cedar Ave Crossing



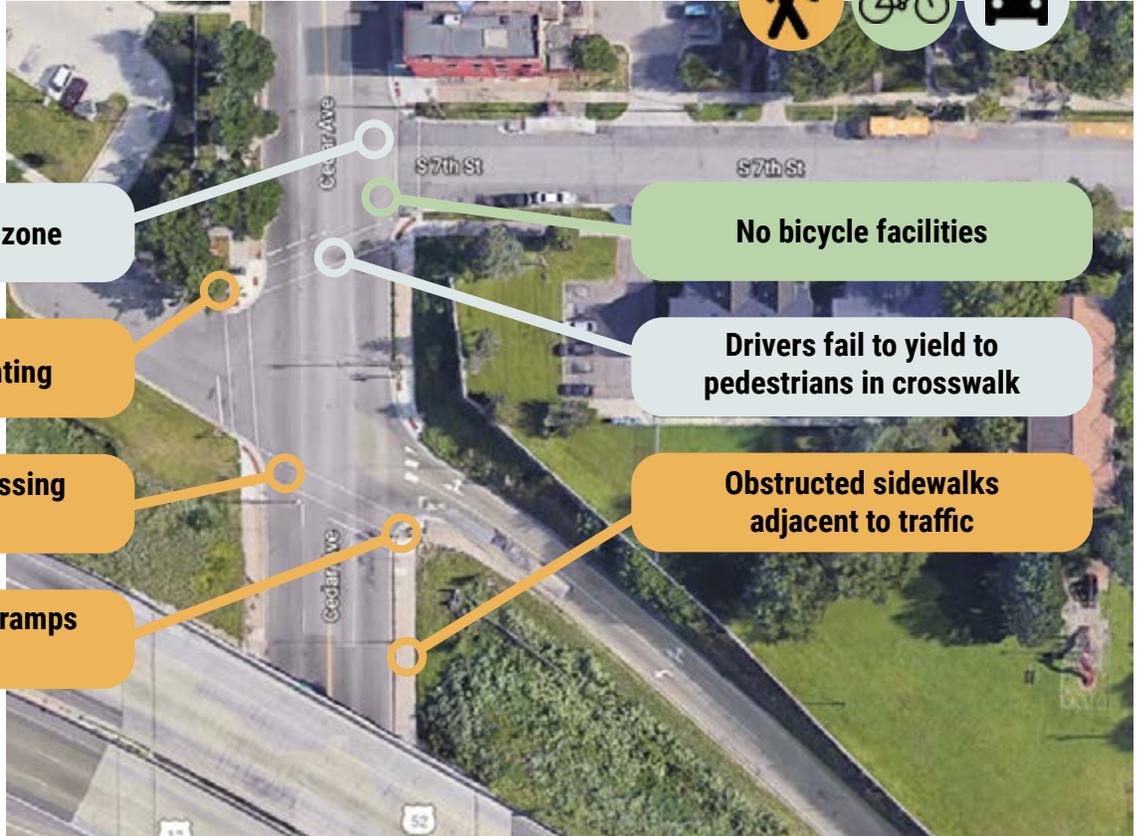
**Context.** The Cedar Avenue crossing runs through the West Bank's main commercial corridor and is adjacent to high-rise residential towers of Riverside Plaza and Cedars High. Cedar connects to I-94 by an eastbound on-ramp and a westbound off-ramp. North of the study area, Cedar connects with I-35 W, and south of the study area, it connects with Hiawatha Avenue. In 2014, the City of Minneapolis and Hennepin County expanded sidewalks along Cedar Avenue from Riverside Avenue to about 6th Street, and converted it from four lanes to three lanes.

**Existing conditions and deficiencies.** Pedestrians complain of drivers failing to yield as they cross Cedar. The lane drop for northbound Cedar results in a dangerous merging zone. The dimly-lit sidewalks are obstructed by utility poles and bridge piers, and are often adjacent to traffic. There is a gap in the sidewalk network approaching the Franklin Avenue LRT station, across from Max-It Pawn. For drivers headed to the I-94 on-ramp, there is no left-turn lane, and sightlines are limited.

**Near-term recommendations.** Crosswalks across Cedar Avenue should be striped. Pedestrian signals should be upgraded or replaced so that they comply with ADA. Pedestrian-scale lighting should be installed. Cedar's recent 4-to-3 lane conversion should be extended further south.

**Long-term recommendations.** When the Cedar Avenue underpass is due for reconstruction, it should be redesigned with wider sidewalks, better lighting, more visibility, and buffers between pedestrians and traffic.

# Existing Conditions and Deficiencies: Cedar Ave (Northern Section)



Dangerous merging zone

No bicycle facilities

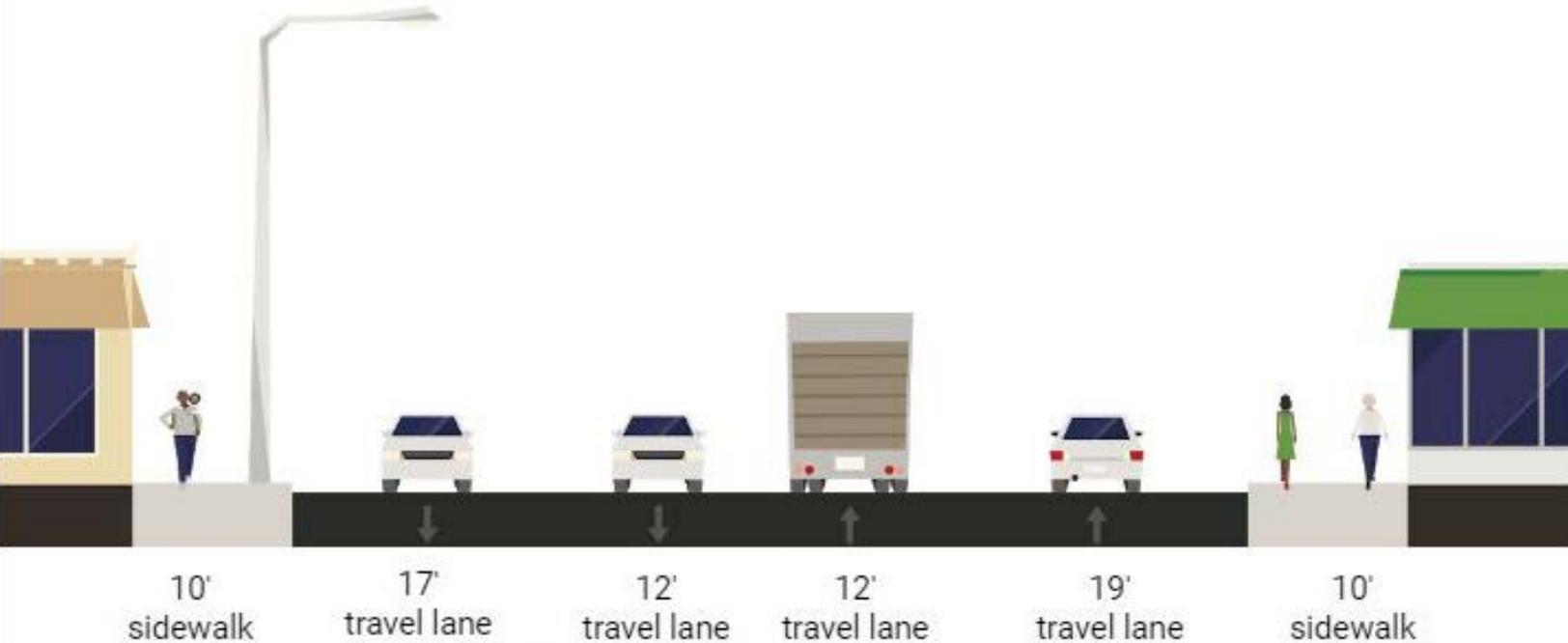
Dim pedestrian lighting

Drivers fail to yield to pedestrians in crosswalk

Long pedestrian crossing distances

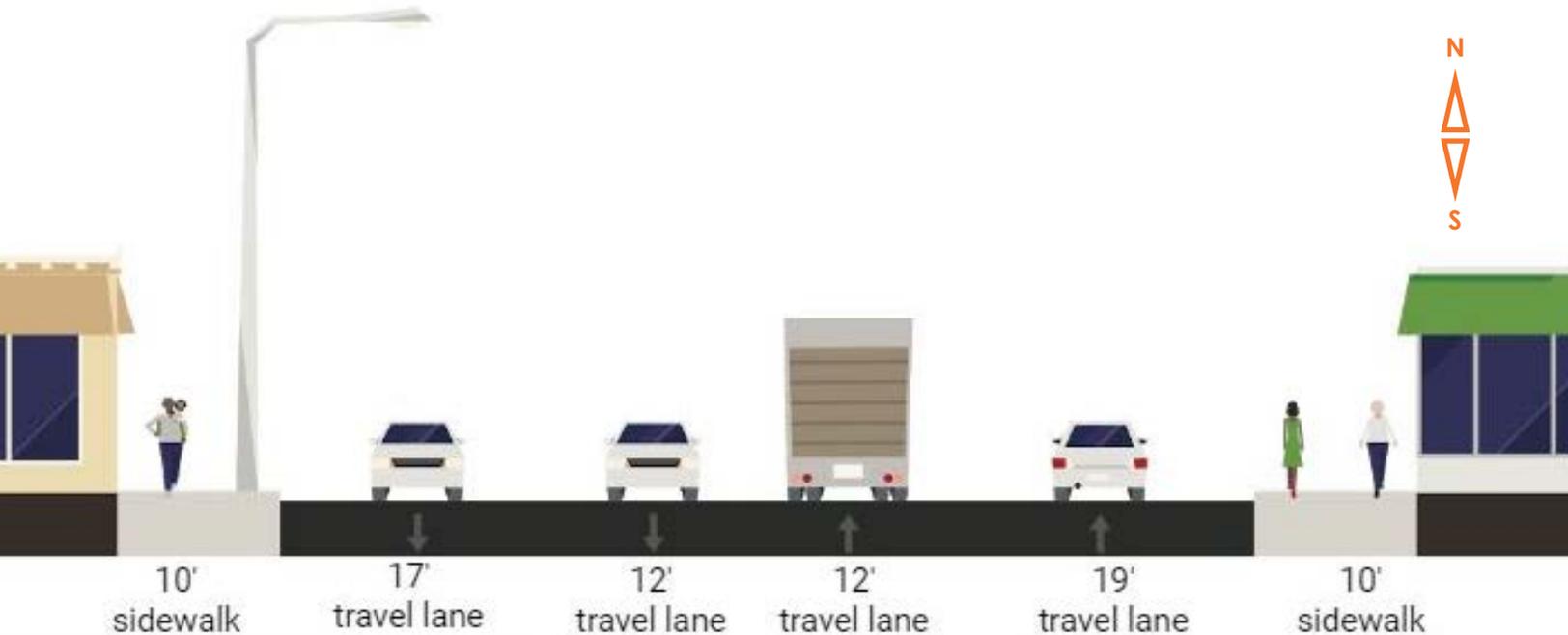
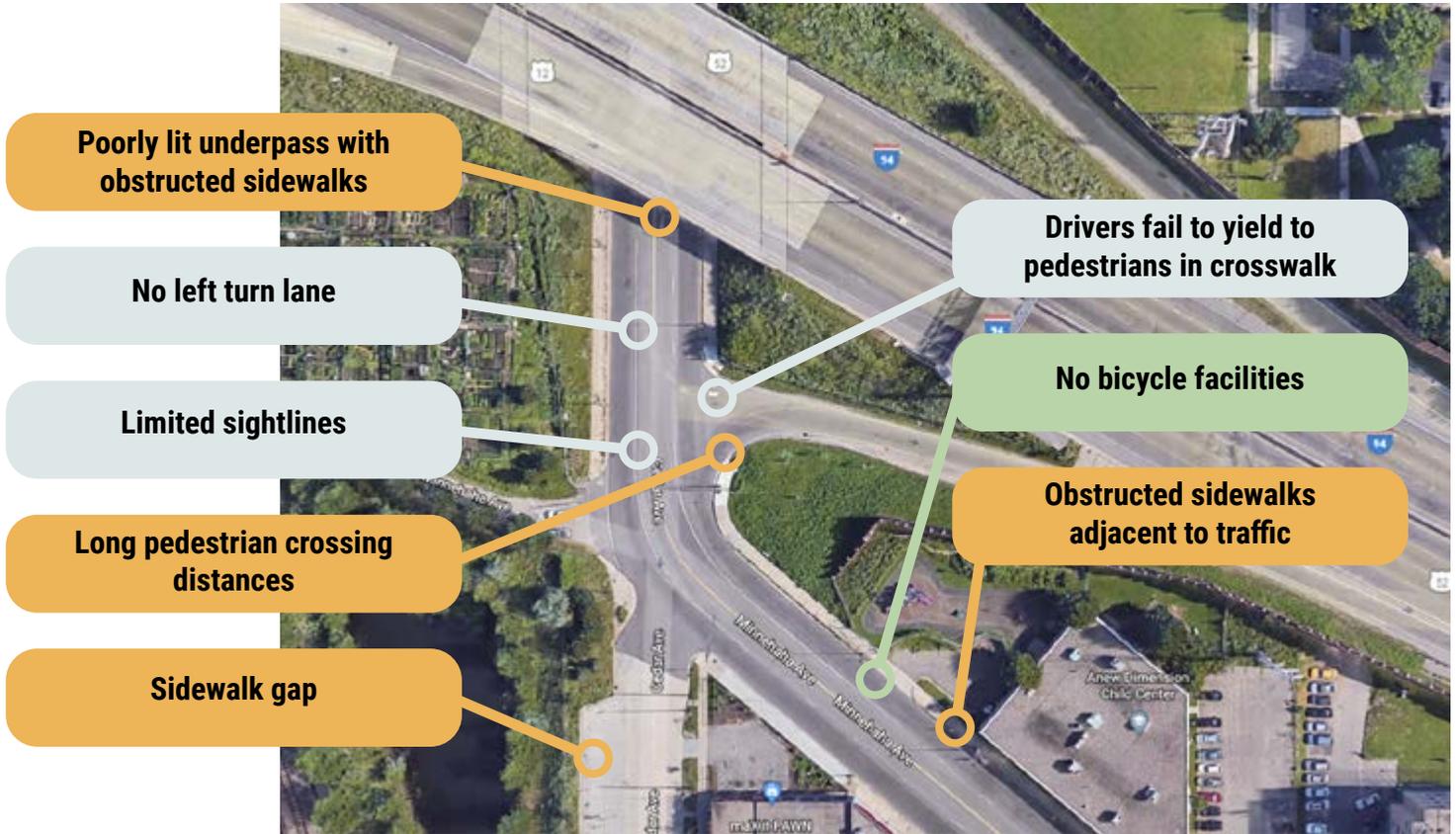
Obstructed sidewalks adjacent to traffic

Non-ADA pedestrian ramps and signals



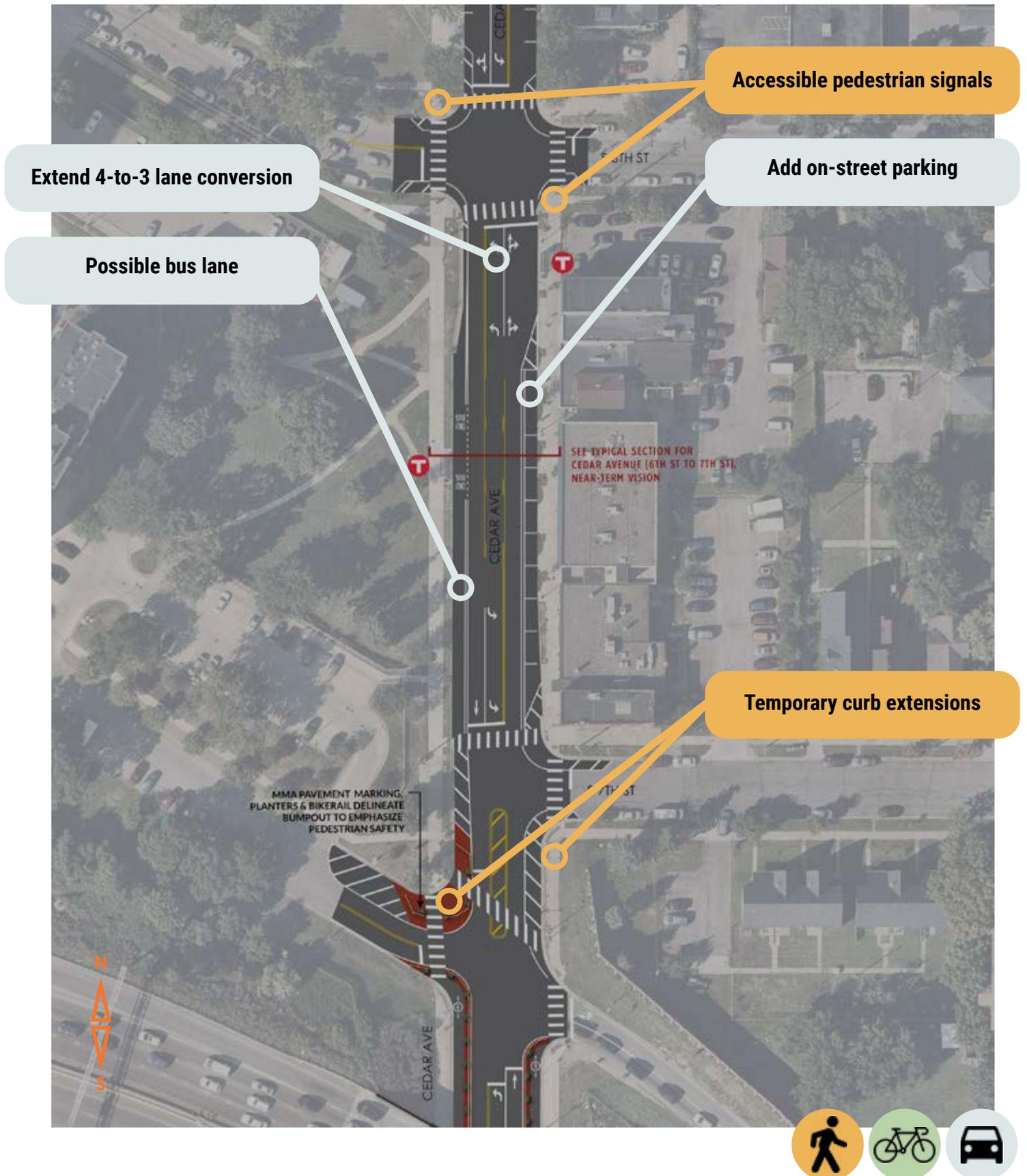
**Total Right of Way: 80'**

# Existing Conditions and Deficiencies: Cedar Ave (Southern Section)

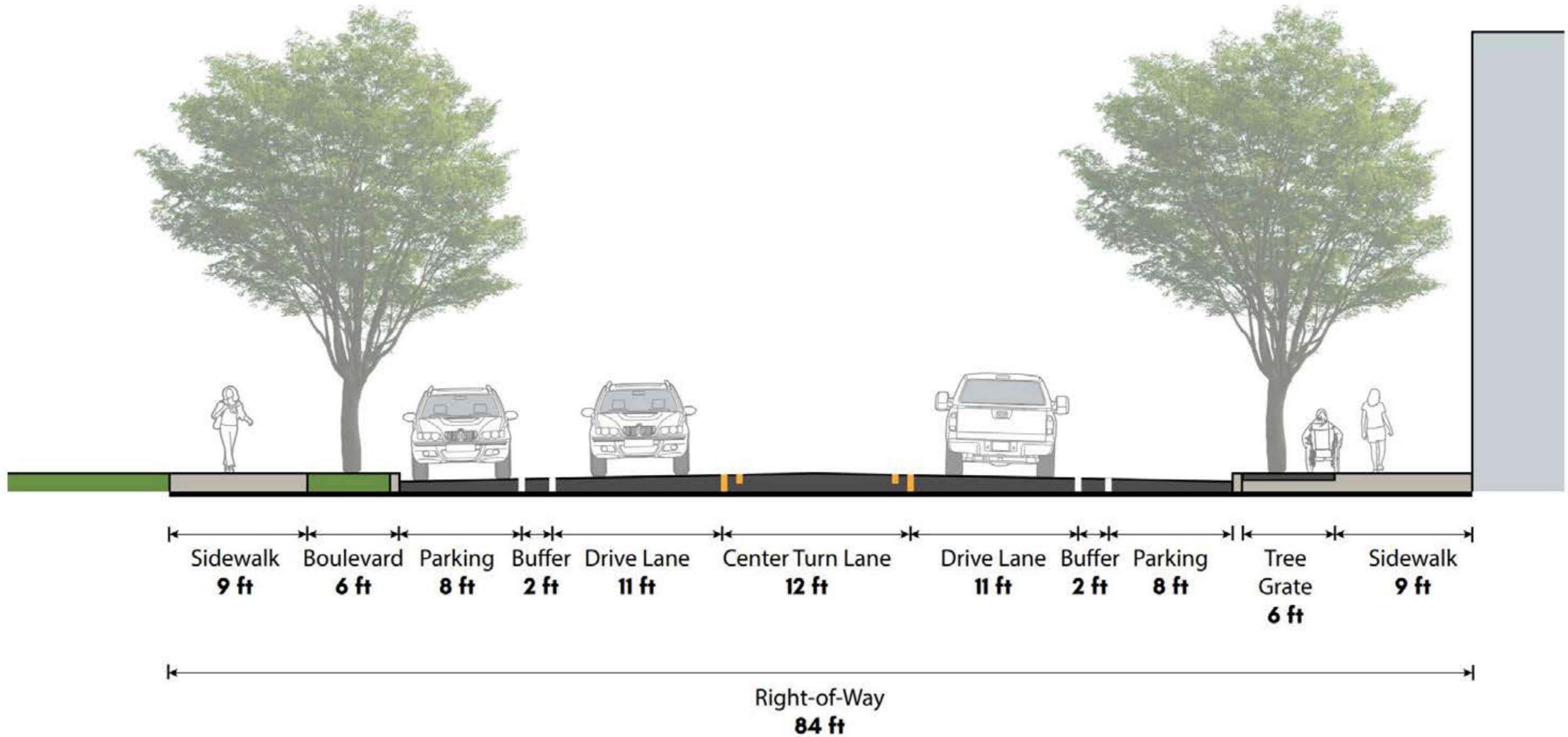


**Total Right of Way: 80'**

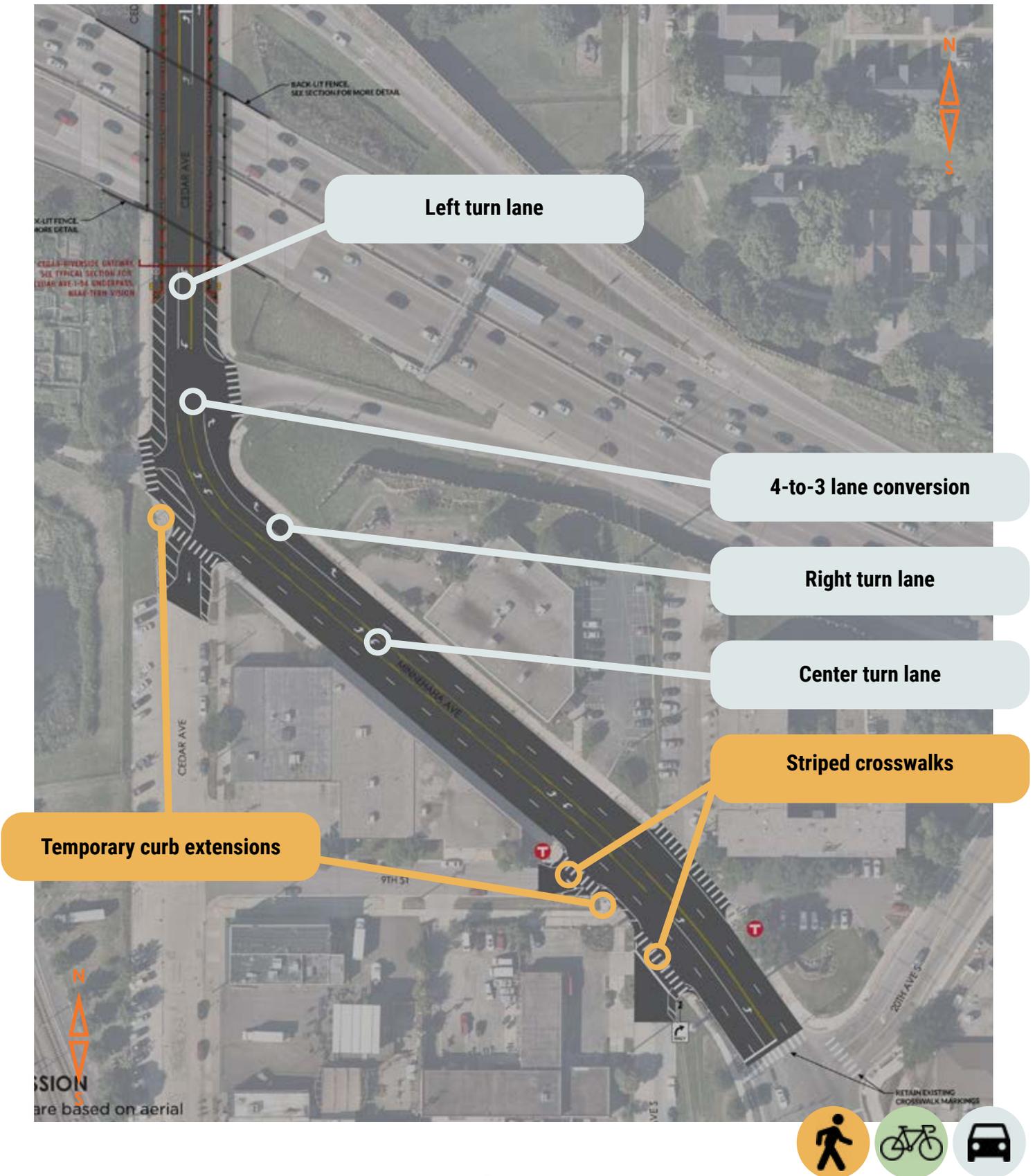
# Near-Term Recommendations: Cedar Ave (Northern Section)



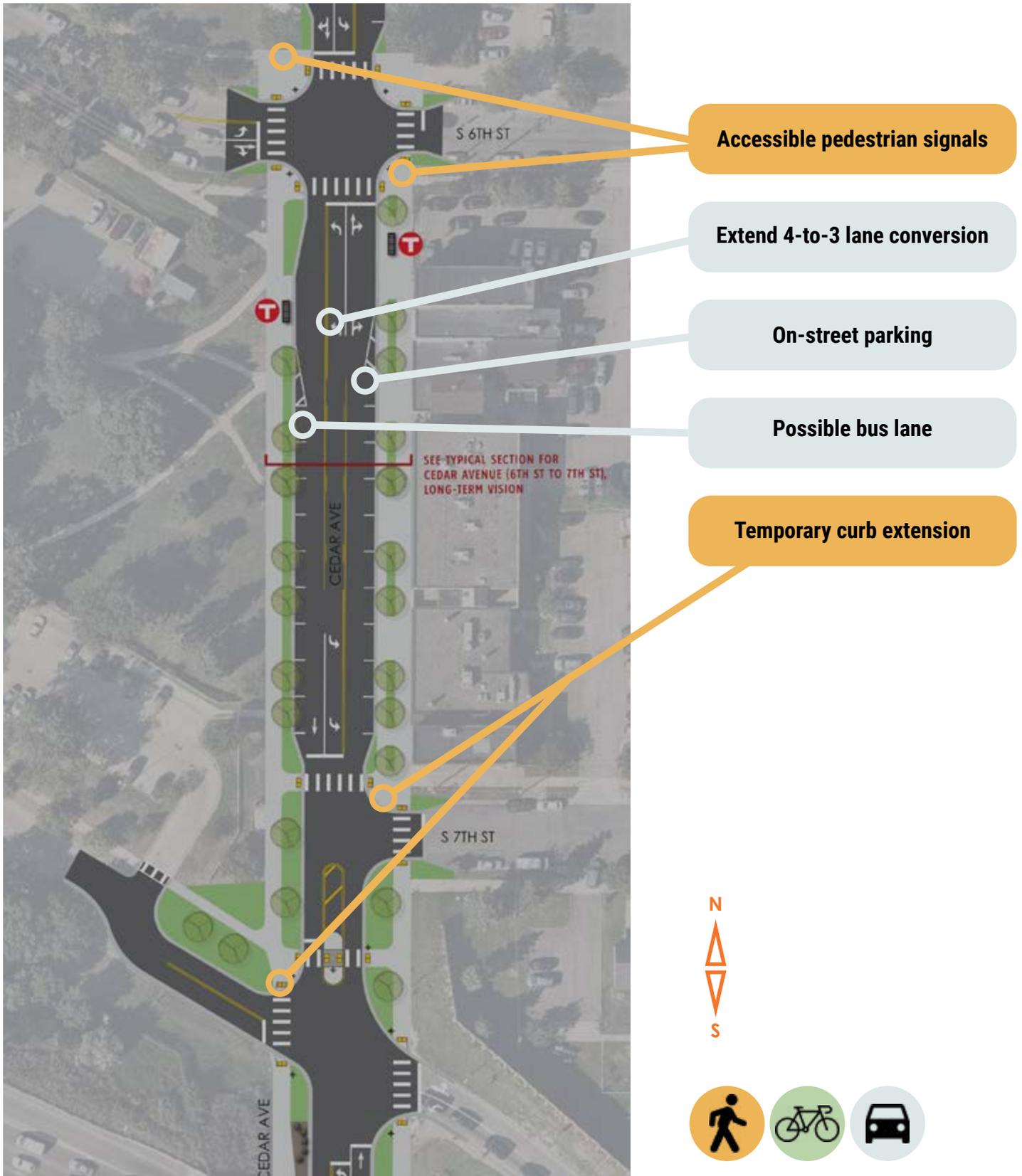
### Near-Term Recommendations: Cedar Ave (Northern Section)



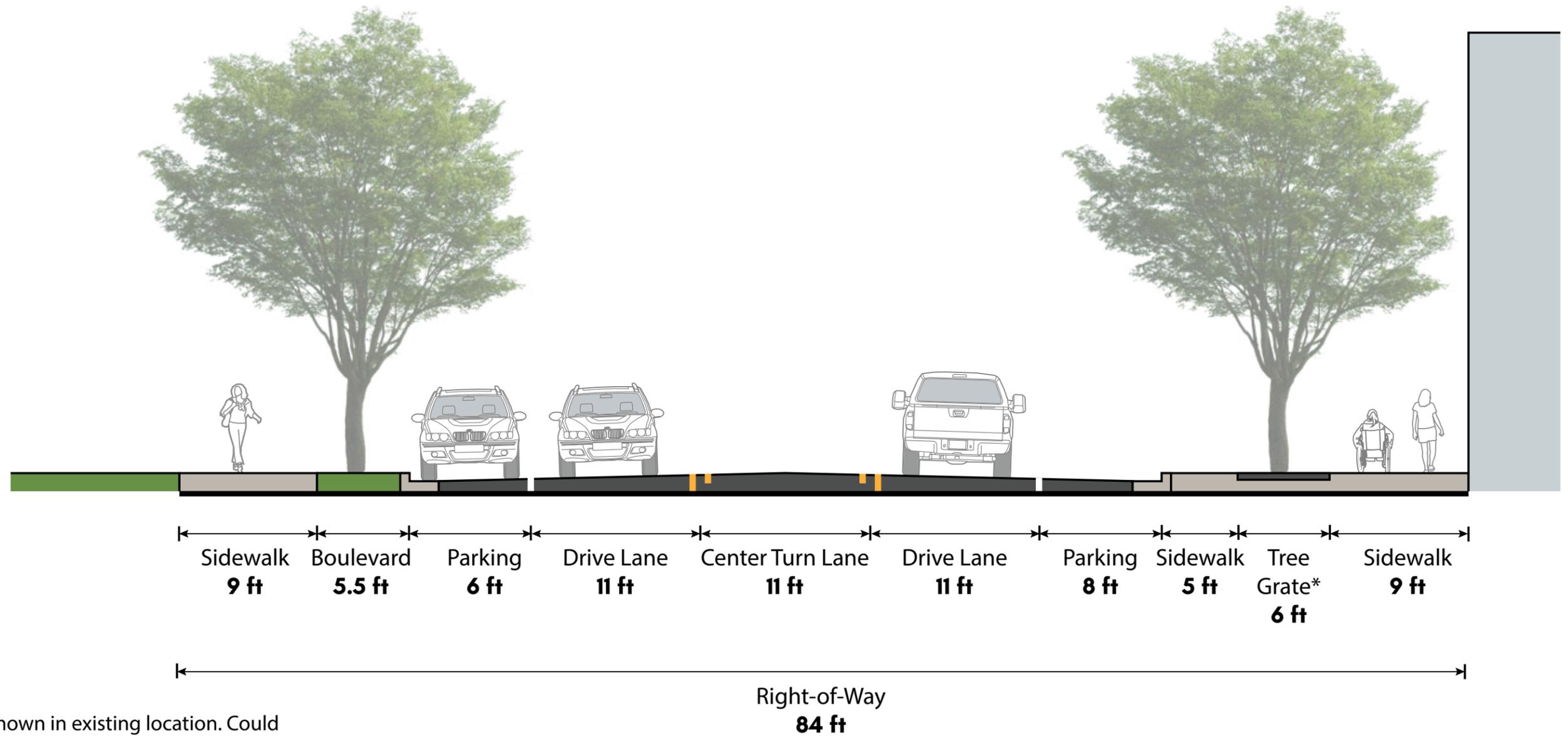
# Near-Term Recommendations: Cedar Ave (Southern Section)



# Long-Term Recommendations: Cedar Ave (Northern Section)

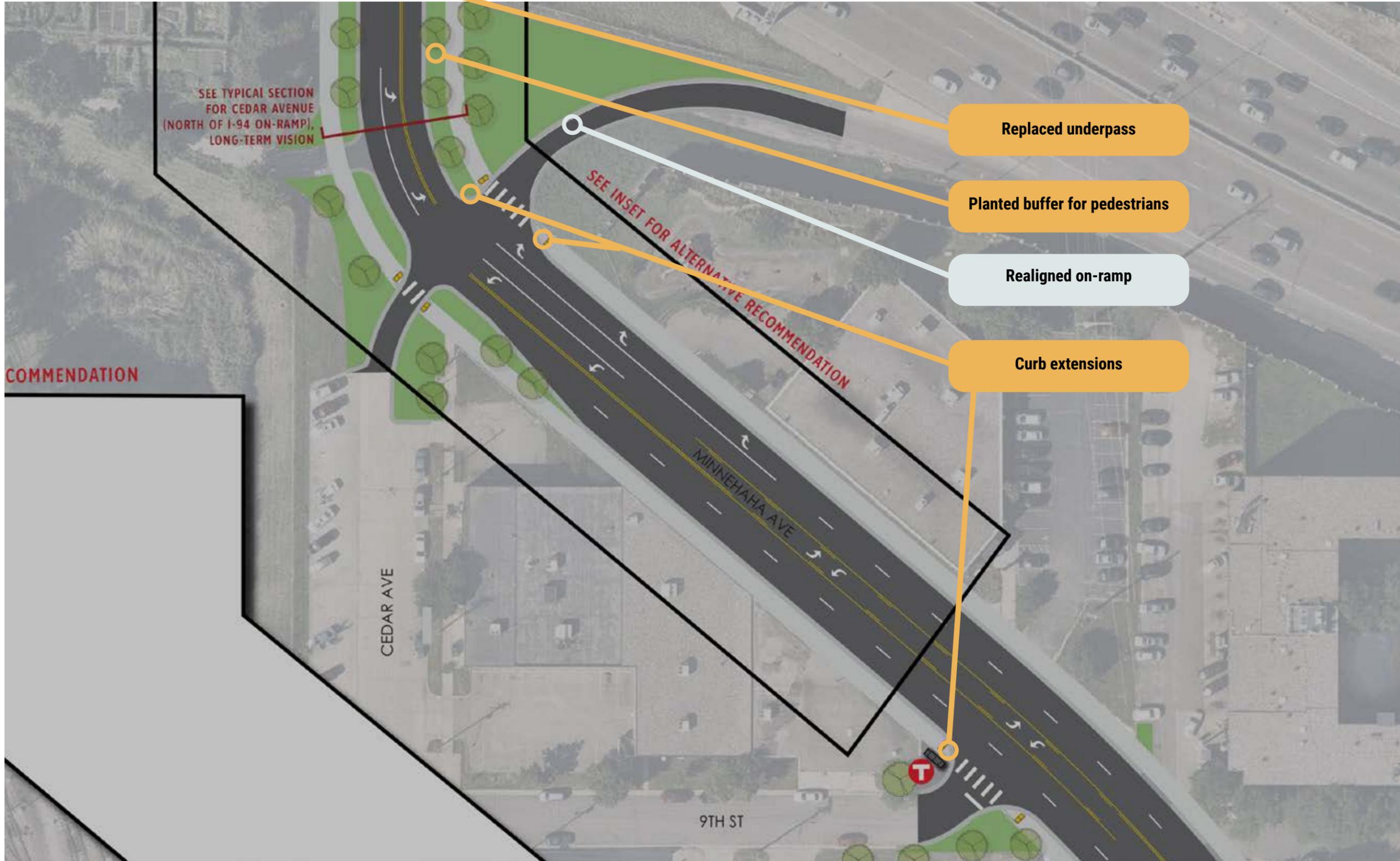


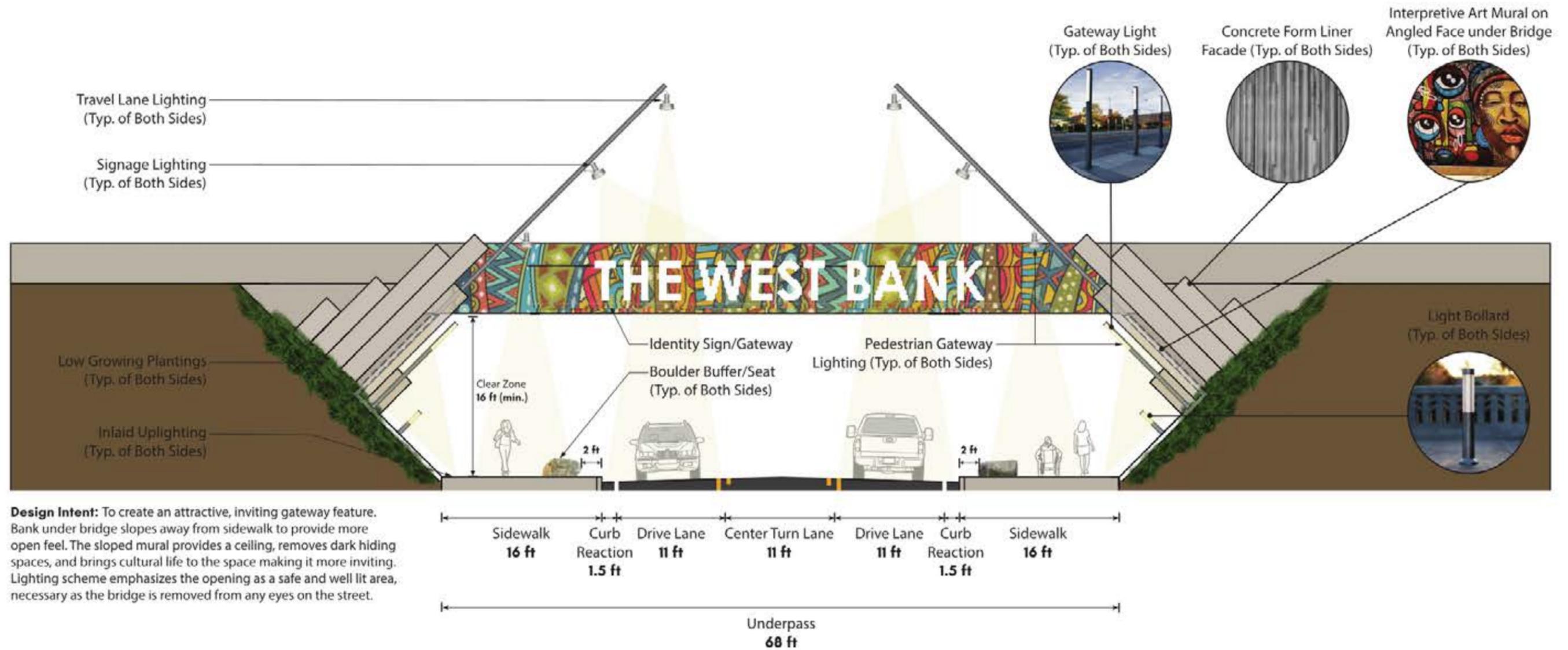
# Long-Term Recommendations: Cedar Ave (Northern Section)



**\*Note:** Tree shown in existing location. Could relocate tree grate curbside to allow for 14 ft clear sidewalk.

# Long-Term Recommendations: Cedar Ave (Southern Section)





Typical Section for Cedar Ave I-94 Underpass

## Implementation

The following table shows improvements and time frames agreed upon by members of the management committee.

Crossing	Improvements	Time frame	Lead Agency
Cedar	Wider sidewalks, improved visibility and safety at underpass (with major	2040+	MnDOT
Cedar	4-3 conversion, temporary curb extensions, enhanced	2030+	County
Cedar	Bike trail connection from Franklin Ave to the Hiawatha Trail at East 22nd Street	2020	County
20th Ave	Bollard-protected bikeway	2019	City
20th Ave	Curb-protected bikeway, planters, wider sidewalks (with bridge reconstruction)	2027	City and MnDOT
Murphy Park Bridge	Replaced bridge aligned with 22nd Ave, wider bridge, accessible ramps	2024	MnDOT
25th Ave	Mid-block pedestrian crossing with lights and refuge island, protected bike lanes	2020	City
25th Ave	Curb extensions, accessible pedestrian signals at Franklin Ave	2020	City and County
25th Ave	Curb extensions, accessible pedestrian signals at 9th Street and Butler Place	2020	City and MnDOT
25th Ave	Wider sidewalks, protected bike lanes, improved lane striping (with bridge	2030+	MnDOT
25th Ave	Improved lane striping	2020	City
Riverside	Wider sidewalks, protected bike lanes, planted buffer (with bridge reconstruction)	2030	MnDOT

## List of Exhibits and Appendices

and relevant conclusions for the main body of the report

### *Exhibit A*

- A** Community engagement summary

### *Appendices*

- 1** 24th Ped Bridge: MnDOT's plans for 24th Street bridge over I-35W (under construction)
- 95** 1985 Seward Bulletin article about pedestrian deaths near 26th and Franklin
- 96** Alta's Existing Conditions Memo: Traffic counts and general crash history analysis
- 106** Alta's Multimodal Memo: Land use context supportive of walking and biking trips. Potential changes to the street, including 4-3 conversion for Cedar Ave
- 135** Alta's space reallocation Memo: Quick and cheap things to do to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety.
- 151** Alliant Engineering traffic study: Mid-block crossing would work
- 164** MnDOT bridge inspection reports on 20th Ave, 25th Ave, Cedar Ave, Footbridge, and Riverside. Riverside is in rough shape. Bridges built in the 1960s.
- 193** MnDOT Rethinking I-94 appendix t1, asset conditions map. 20th Ave should be replaced soon.
- 214** MnDOT Rethinking I-94 appendix t11, freeway connections study. WB I-94 to NB I-35W (and SB 35W to EB I-94) won't happen because not many people would use it.