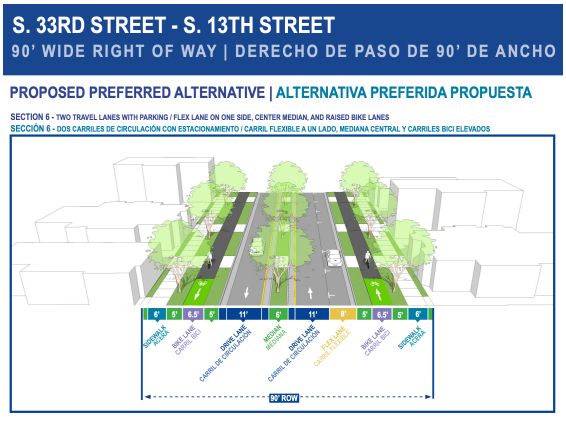
How National Avenue's Redesign Benefits Everyone

June 2023

This is a detailed guide to some of the proposed design elements for National Avenue. There is an image of each design element as well as a description of how the element benefits people who bike, walk, and drive. Thank you to City of Milwaukee Department of Public Works staff for the images included here, and to all project staff at the City and State for their dedicated and impressive efforts.

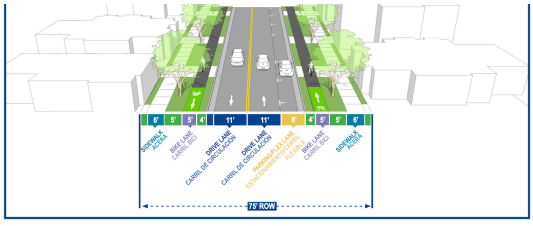
Design Elements

Raised protected bike lane

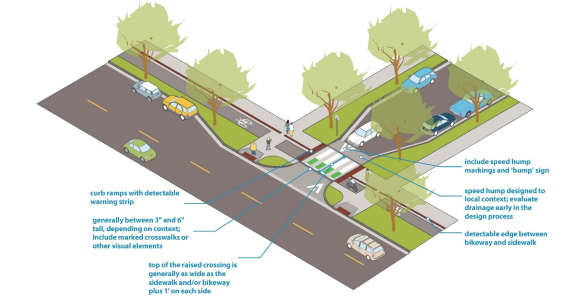


A raised protected bike lane means that people riding bikes will have a separate place to ride along the entire corridor (39th-1st Streets). Initial designs show that bike facilities will be separated from vehicle traffic with a buffer and separated from pedestrians with greenery and trees.

- **People biking:** Currently there are no bike facilities on National Avenue. A raised protected bike lane would encourage many more people to bike, as the design is significantly safer and more comfortable than traditional on-street painted bike lanes.
- **People walking:** Many people who bike on National today use the very narrow sidewalks. The new design will eliminate or reduce most conflicts. Pedestrians will also be further buffered from vehicle traffic.
- **People driving:** In the current condition, drivers must be aware of people biking either in the roadway or along the sidewalk. This design reduces conflicts.



Raised crosswalks



Raised crosswalks would be along many of the intersecting side streets. The crosswalk will be raised to sidewalk height. Raised crosswalks will not be on National itself.

- **People biking:** Cyclists using the raised bike lane will be able to continue at bike lane level. This makes for a more comfortable ride (less bumpy), in addition to safety improvements.
- **People walking:** Pedestrians, especially those using mobility devices and strollers, will benefit from the ability to continue walking and rolling at the same level as the sidewalk.
- **People driving:** Drivers are likely to slow when turning in this design, helping them see other road users and reduce crashes.

26th Street Crossing

The area near National and 27th St is very dangerous for people walking. The area has senior living, a pharmacy, and other drivers of pedestrian traffic. 26th Street will also tentatively be a Bike Boulevard. The project team has proposed to eliminate left turns from 26th Street by using diverters on National to help pedestrians access destinations in this area.

- **People biking:** Improvements on 26th Street will create a safer biking environment. Cyclists will be able to cross National using cut-outs.
- **People walking:** Pedestrians can cross National and not fear left-turn conflicts.
- **People driving:** Drivers will experience less complex and dangerous conflicts with left turns eliminated. Drivers will be able to complete turns at other intersections.

Bike Boulevard Intersections

The City plans to build bike boulevards on streets such as South 21st, 26th, and 37th Streets. Bike boulevards include traffic calming along residential roads. Intersections with National will be built with these future improvements in mind.

- **People biking and walking:** Cyclists using the boulevards will find it easier to cross National with improvements like diverters. People walking benefit from shorter crossing distances and fewer vehicle conflicts.
- **People driving:** People driving on National benefit from calmer intersections, where they can more safely move through the intersection.

Raised Intersection

At 4th and National, the project team is pursuing a very exciting pilot of a raised intersection on a state highway (thus a sample photo – the real design will be different). In this pilot (approved by the Federal Highway Administration), the entire intersection would be raised to the height of the sidewalks. This intersection is near several schools and has a history of pedestrian and bike crashes.

People biking and walking: Drivers will slow as they approach the raised crosswalk. This helps to improve yielding and reduce crashes.

People driving: Drivers will have to slow to comfortably enter the intersection. By slowing, drivers will have a better field of vision to see pedestrians crossing. Crashes that occur at lower speeds are likely to have reduced injuries or impacts including for people in cars.

Trees and Streetscape

Throughout the corridor, trees and streetscaping will be added. Much of National Avenue currently has very little greenery. In addition to benefiting people traveling on the roadway, trees and greenery help to reduce flooding and stormwater overflow.

- **People biking and biking:** Trees provide shade, which can reduce temperatures significantly. They also help drivers to go more slowly, providing a safer road for all.
- **People driving:** Trees can help drivers drive more safely. Sometimes there is a misunderstanding that trees near roads are dangerous. This can be true in a very rural context, but in urban (including downtowns of smaller towns) contexts, landscaping can help reduce driver speeds. Drivers also benefit from shade and beauty after they park their cars and walk on the street.

Reduced Travel Lanes (1st

From 1st to 33rd Streets, vehicle lanes will be reduced

through 33rd Streets)

from two lanes in each direction to one lane in each direction, including a dedicated turn lane at many intersections.

- **People biking and walking:** Raised bike facilities and improved pedestrian facilities are possible due to the lane reduction. A lane reduction also benefits cyclists crossing intersections, as there are fewer lanes to cross.
- **People driving:** Traffic moving longer distances through this corridor to further destinations will be encouraged to utilize I-94 instead of National Avenue, which reduces through-traffic from the neighborhood. Reckless driving is much more difficult, which keeps all drivers and their passengers safer.

Western end (33rd through 39th Streets)

The proposed design for the western end of the project, until the I-94 project is complete.

The proposed design for the western end of the project, after I-94 project completion.

From 33rd to 39th Streets, the project team is proposing to maintain 4 vehicle lanes until the I-94 project is complete. Following that project, the goal is to reduce the lanes to one in each direction with a third lane for turning.

While the benefits of reduced lanes will remain the same, there are some concerns to maintaining lanes that users should be aware of. Cyclists and pedestrians will find it more dangerous to cross 4 lanes of traffic. Drivers will find that reckless and speeding cars will be able to more easily use the two lanes. However, the road's footprint will be reduced, so it will be safer than the current state.

Understanding construction projects

Transportation construction projects can be confusing and highly technical. Here are some of the most-asked questions we've heard:

- **What is a "locally preferred alternative"? Why do I see other options listed?**
  - This is the high-level design that the project team is recommending. You might see alternative or 'also considered" designs. Usually the locally preferred alternative is closest to what actually is built, but this requires support from the public and stakeholders.
- **What is the timeline for these projects?**
  - Major construction projects are selected often years in advance. Months, or even years, of engineering reviews and stakeholder meetings often take place before any public meetings occur.
- **Who is in charge?**
  - It depends, but all projects are a collaboration. If a project is along a state highway, WisDOT is often closely involved as they are responsible for ensuring that the design also works for needs like freight. However, the state provides funding for many projects, so even on a city or town-managed road, the state is likely to be involved. Localities play an important role in the design and funding of projects (they often have to provide financial matches when receiving federal and state grants), so local policies and interest in designing safer streets matters.
- **What about car parking?**
  - Many of these projects provide a parking study. National Avenue and the intersecting side streets had extremely low parking utilization rates. This means that re-allocating some space from parking is a better use of the public road. This allows benefits like trees, protected bike facilities, wider sidewalks, dedicated loading zones, and dedicated accessible parking for people with disabilities.
- **What about traffic congestion?**
  - There is often a misconception that removal of some traffic lanes may create major gridlock. However, rather than the number of lanes, intersections are often the bottleneck for moving vehicles. With reduced travel lanes, safety improves, speeds often go down, and level of service increases for other modes of transportation. If our goal is to save lives, aiming for a high 'level of service" (vehicles flowing through quickly) on roads with homes and businesses is a mistake. Some level of congestion (not necessarily gridlock!) is a good thing for a bustling, successful, and safe business corridor and neighborhood. We know that foot traffic is great for business.