

August 18, 2025

Tucker Ferguson
District Engineer, Austin District
Texas Department of Transportation

Dear Mr. Ferguson,

As I-35 Cap Ex Central moves forward, Austinites are focusing on the fine-grained details that will impact the built environment for generations to come. The frontage roads, boulevards, bridges, and the East Avenue Trail envisioned for this project are all elements which interact with the fabric of the city. * We have been thinking through these elements, looking at how areas allocated to human activity can be best utilized to create a safe, welcoming, comfortable, and accessible environment.

We wanted to take the opportunity to share these thoughts with you and your team, so that they may be incorporated into the designs for frontage roads, boulevards, bridges, and the East Avenue Trail. We know that working together to address these fine-grained elements is critical to creating a project that TxDOT, the City of Austin, Travis County and Austinites can be proud of.

We have reviewed the [City of Austin Urban Transportation Commission Recommendations](#) (March 2025) with which we agree. We have also enlisted the help of professional urban designers to introduce trees and propose modest reconfigurations of the bicycle and pedestrian paths. The recommendations below (based on TxDOT's segment schematics posted 8/05/2025) include cross-sectional diagrams showing the new TxDOT Design, along with an improved version that achieves our and the City's goals of shaded pathways and medians.

1. Trees on Bridges

We appreciate the new TxDOT design standards that require 30 feet back-of-curb for shared use paths and planting zones on bridges. We understand from one of the studies that the City's engineering consultant provided, that inserting full-depth tree planters is entirely feasible, as these may be inserted between the structural girders of the bridge. It is important to achieve enough depth and volume of soil to sustain healthy shade trees. Living trees, and the shade they provide, will be critical for comfort and air quality on bridges. Please ensure that all bridges have trees, spaced 20 to 25 feet apart, to create a continuous shade canopy.

2. Create Space for Trees

By moving the Shared Use Path (SUP) to the edge of the right-of-way (ROW) line, as the City of Austin allows in the Central Business District, and placing a tree/landscape zone at the curbside, people walking and biking are then located in a much safer area of the right-of-way, i.e., further from the curb edge, and protected by the trees. The space required for the two-foot maintenance zone shown in the TxDOT Design can then be allocated to the tree-planting zone at the curbside. Even in very constrained areas, this would yield a 12-foot-wide SUP and an eight-foot-wide open tree-planting zone. In less constrained areas there is room for a 14 ft. SUP. Utilities may be located under the now wider SUP, so a continuous and utility-free trench for tree roots is maintained. Please ensure that all frontage roads, boulevards, medians, and the East Avenue Trail have trees, spaced from 20 to 25 feet apart to create a continuous shade canopy.

Trees should also be planted in the median of all boulevards.

3. Managed Parking

Many large US cities efficiently use boulevards by allowing parking in the outside travel lane during off-peak hours. Providing such managed travel and parking lanes would provide adjacent parking for visitors on nights and weekends and improve access to activities on the future caps. The added parking would also increase safety for people who are using the caps and SUPs. As in many cities, the outside lanes are marked for the hours when parking is allowed. Tow trucks are typically used to clear out any vehicles that are parked illegally during hours marked as “no parking.”

4. Remove “Free-Rights” between the Frontage Road and Boulevard on to City Streets

Free-rights (sometimes referred to as slip lanes) allow a higher-speed turn that is especially dangerous for people walking, biking, and rolling. The City of Austin has been actively removing these from our streets, while still allowing for curb radii appropriate for trucks and buses.

5. Safe Speeds

Several years ago, TxDOT agreed to design any frontage roads and boulevards in this segment to 35 mph. This public commitment was for design speed, not simply posted speed limits. We appreciate that commitment but also acknowledge that in a complex urban environment 30 mph would be safer for everyone, especially vulnerable road users.

It is worth noting that the boulevards are very wide and will take a long time to cross on foot. Therefore, we recommend pedestrian refuge islands at each boulevard crossing so that a person walking can safely stop at the median and wait to cross the remainder of the street, as needed.

Safe streets, which reduce fatalities and serious injuries, are a goal of both the City of Austin and TxDOT.

6. Lane Widths to Support Design Speed

We appreciate that most lane widths are 11 feet wide. However, the outside lanes, and sometimes inside lanes, are shown as 12 ft. 6 in. We recommend that all lanes be 11 ft. wide, and the extra 1 ft. 6 in. be moved behind the curb. This treatment would have many positive impacts, including: reinforcing design speeds appropriate for the urban environment, increasing the width of SUPs and planting areas, and reducing crossing distances for people walking, biking, and rolling.

7. Clear Zones

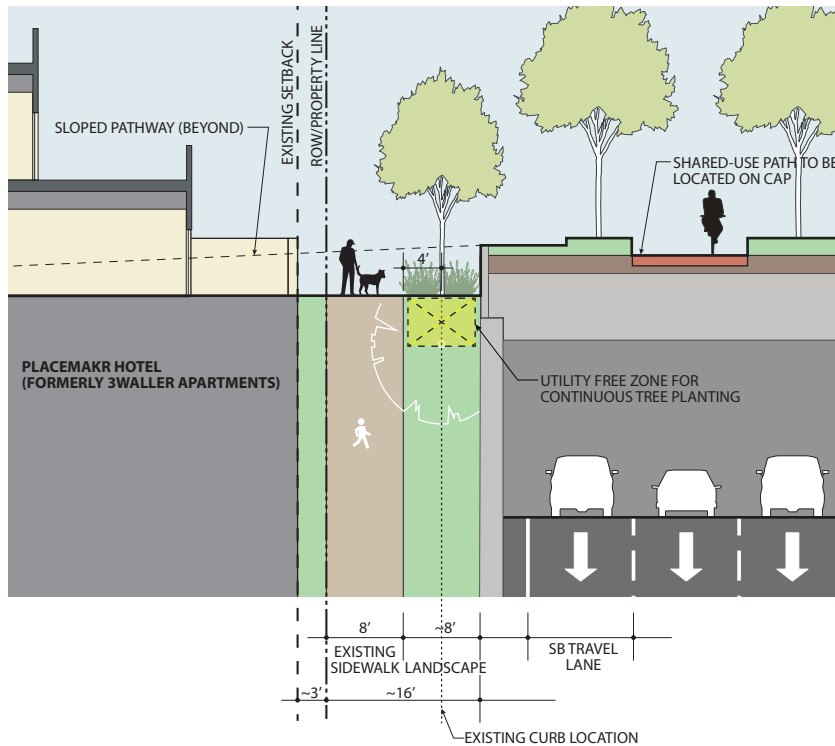
Clear Zones are defined as: “The unobstructed, traversable area provided beyond the edge of the through traveled way for the recovery of errant vehicles”. When Shared Use Paths (SUPs) are placed within clear zones it endangers the lives of vulnerable road users. Where clear zones may be required, we hope that your team will ensure that SUPs are outside of clear zones and trees are placed between the curb and those SUPs, providing both shade and added protection from moving vehicles.

Many years of work from your team, other agencies, and the public have gone into the Cap Ex Central project. We are excited to continue to work together and would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you and your team at your earliest convenience to discuss options to further improve the project.

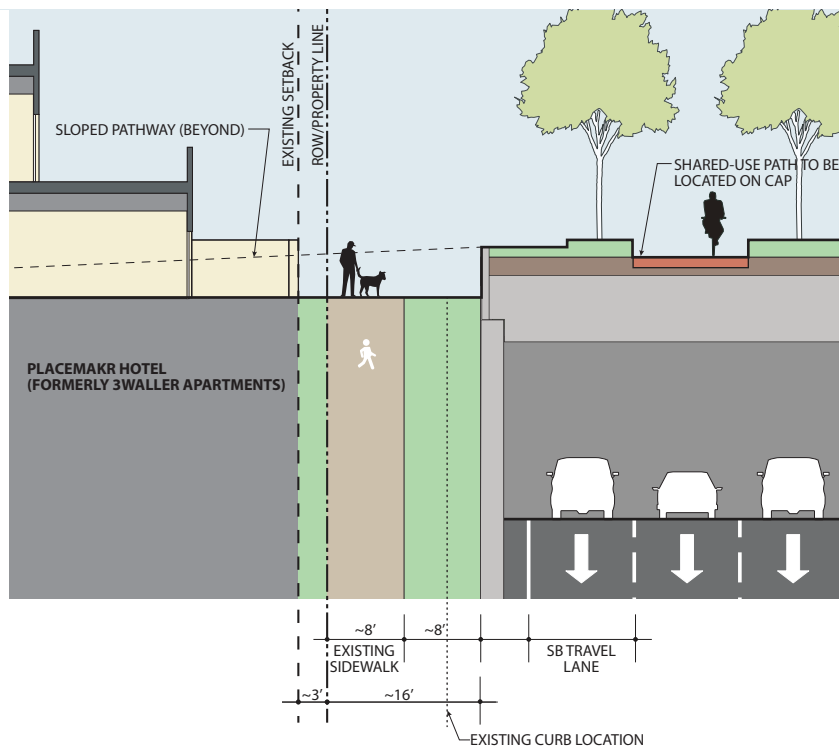
Sincerely,

* TxDOT's frontage roads are pulled together, with a center median, to create a boulevard downtown, from Cesar Chavez to 8th Street (west side), and adjacent to UT Austin, from 15th Street to Dean Keeton (east side). TxDOT's schematic designs, posted 8-5-2025, are located here: [I-35 Capital Express Central Project](#).

[Organizations and Logos]



Improved Design Concept



TxDOT Design

I-35 CapEx Central Project

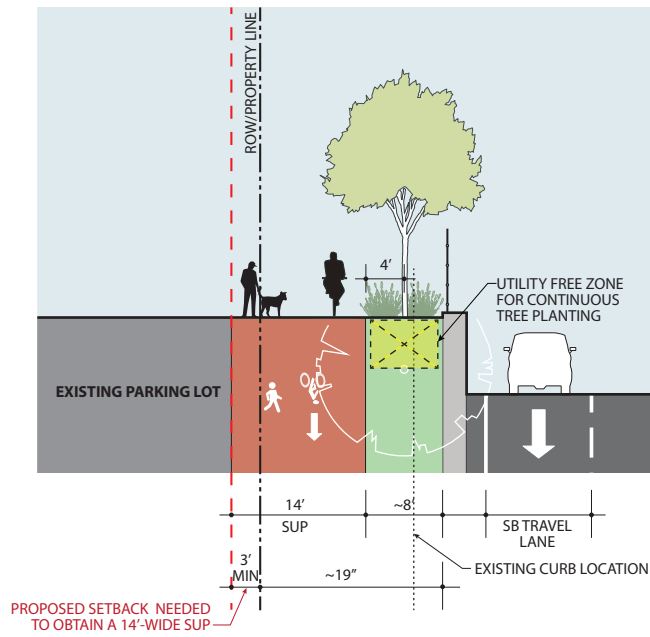
Cross-Section of West Edge of ROW between E 3rd St & E 4th St, Looking North

DRAFT 8.18.2025

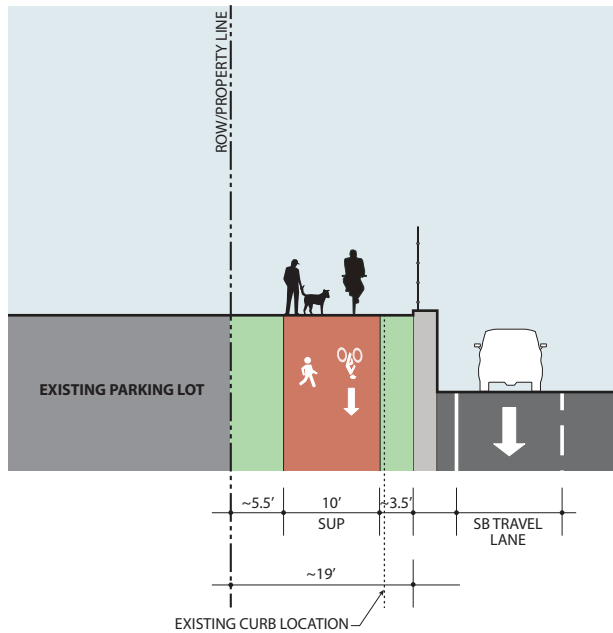


Notes:

- The TxDOT Design is a cross-sectional depiction of the plan view roll-plots of the 8.5.2025 Design, as posted on the [txdot.gov/mymobility35/projects/capex-central.html](https://www.txdot.gov/mymobility35/projects/capex-central.html) website. As no cross-sections or elevational information were provided, this cross-section is conceptual only.
- A minimum Utility Free Zone of 7' wide X 5' deep is required to allow for shade trees to be planted in a continuous trench, per the Concept Tree Planting Detail found at the end of this package. It is critical to ensure that no underground utilities are located within this zone.
- Trees planted in a continuous trench each require a minimum soil volume of 750 cu ft. Individually-planted trees require a min. soil volume of 1,000 cu ft.



Improved Design Concept



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I-35 CapEx Central Project

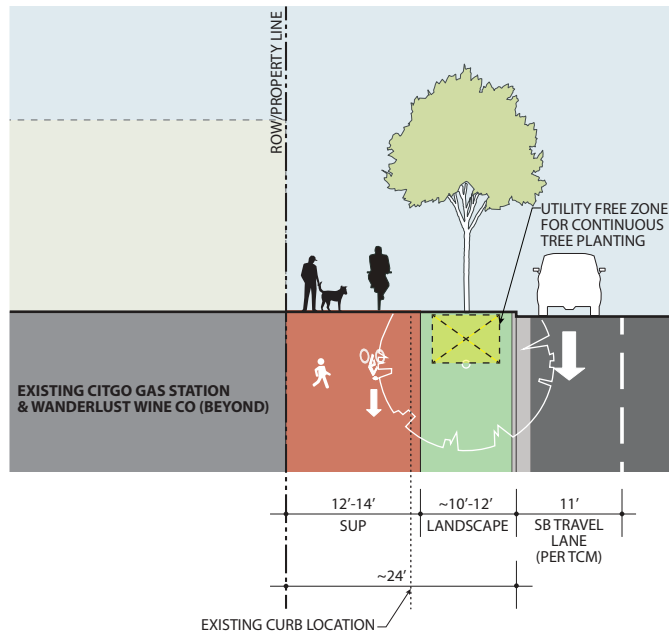
Cross-Section of West Edge of ROW between E 4th St & E 5th St, Looking North

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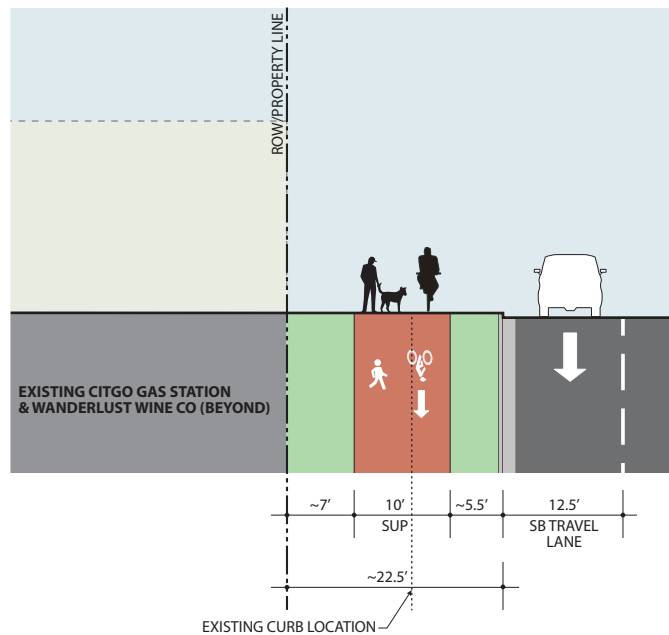


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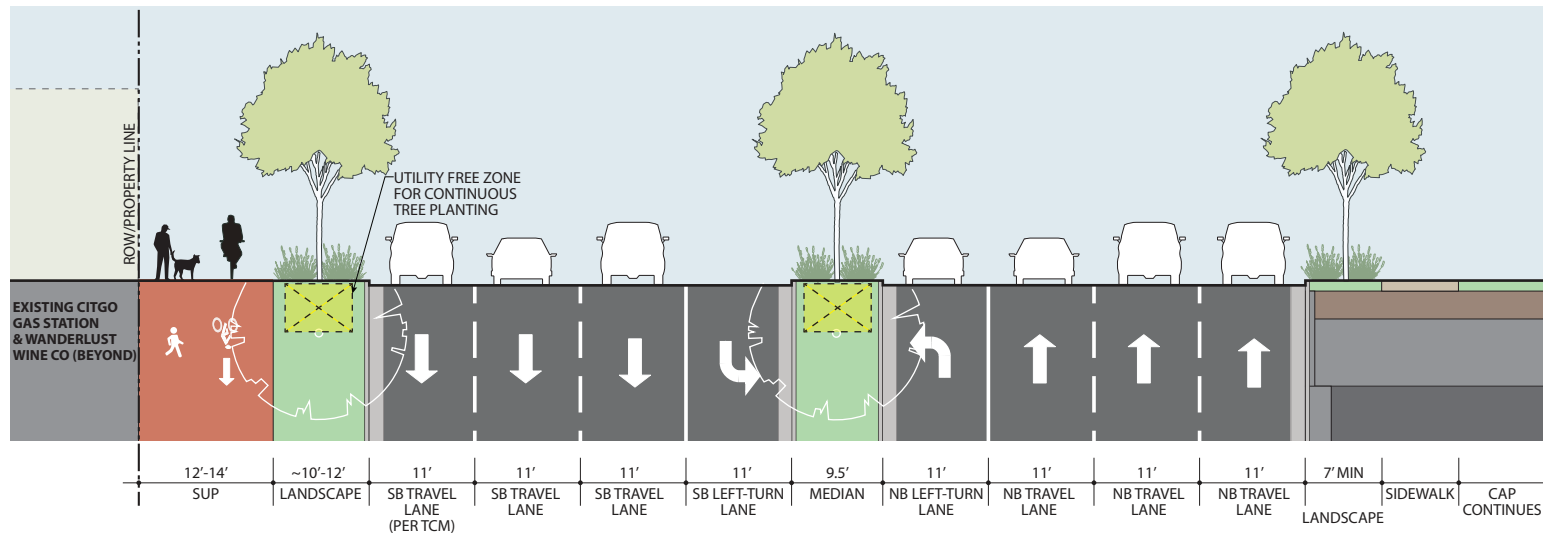
Cross-Section of West Edge of ROW between E 6th St & E 7th St, Looking North

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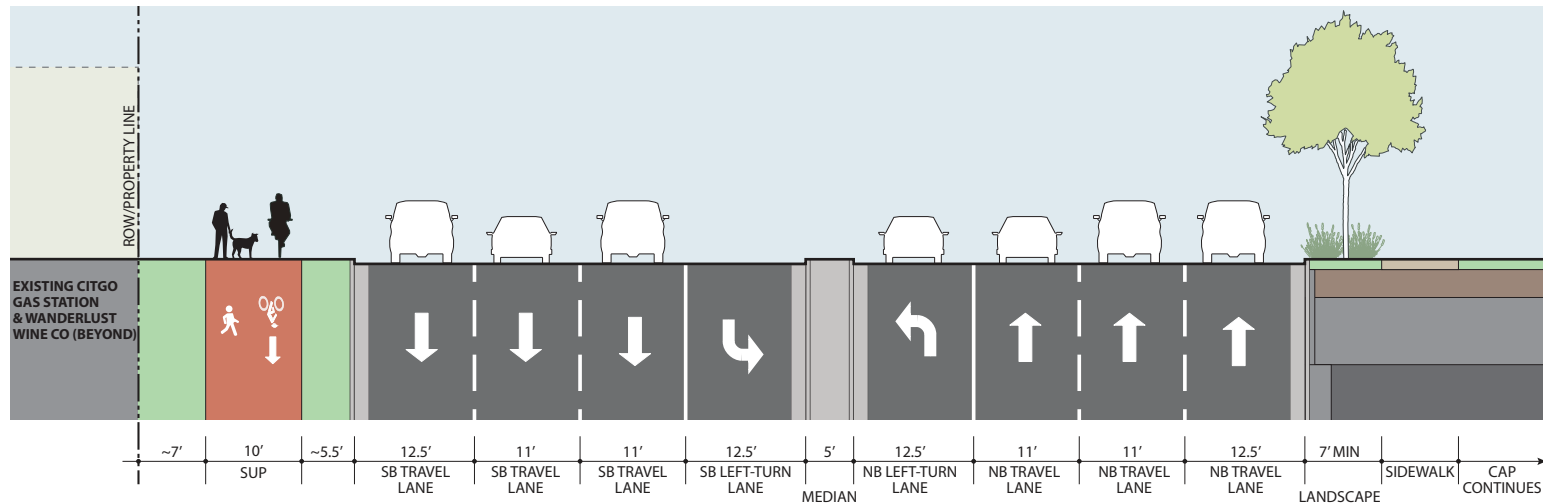


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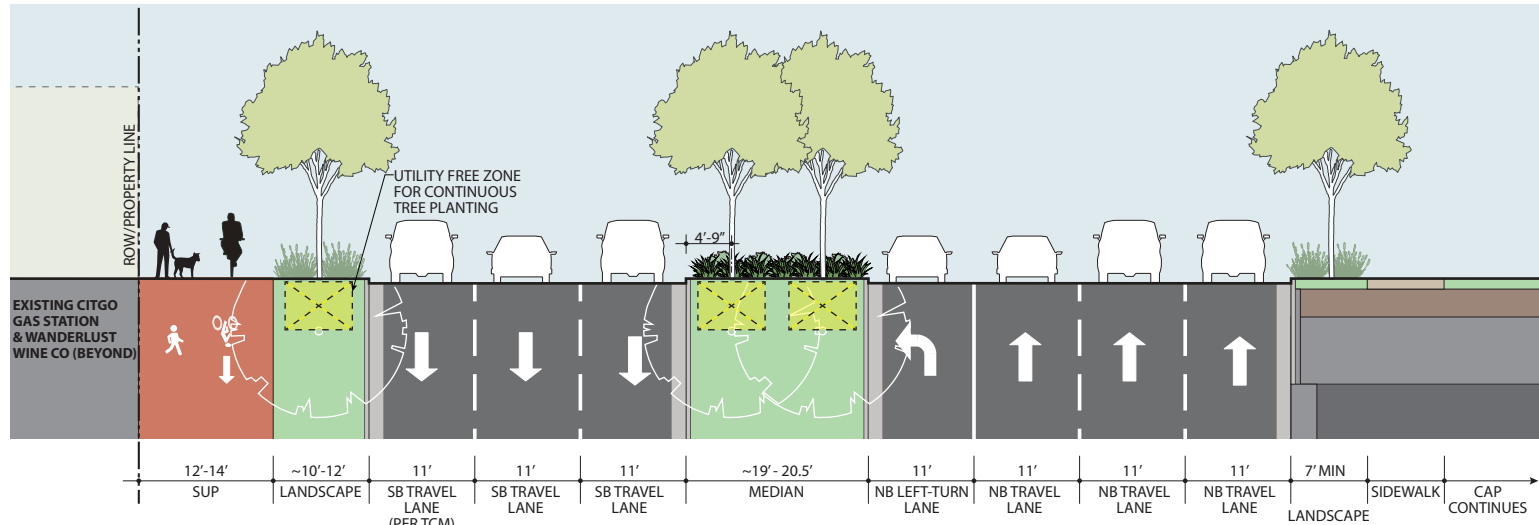
Cross-Section of Frontage Road between E 6th St & E 7th St at Mid-Block, Looking North

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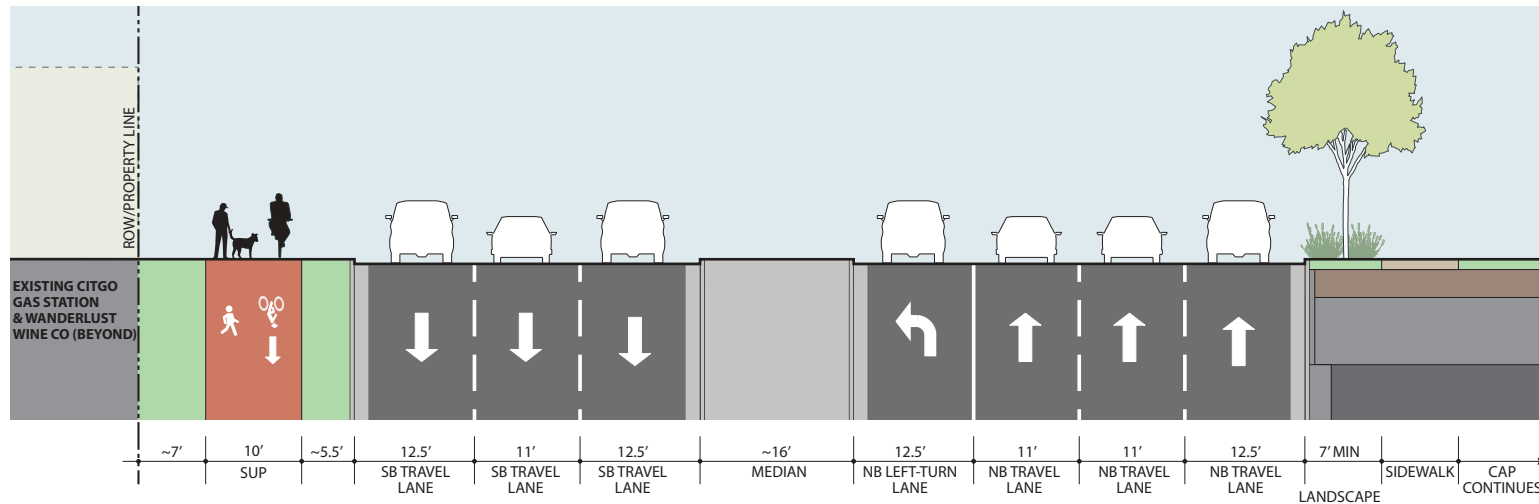
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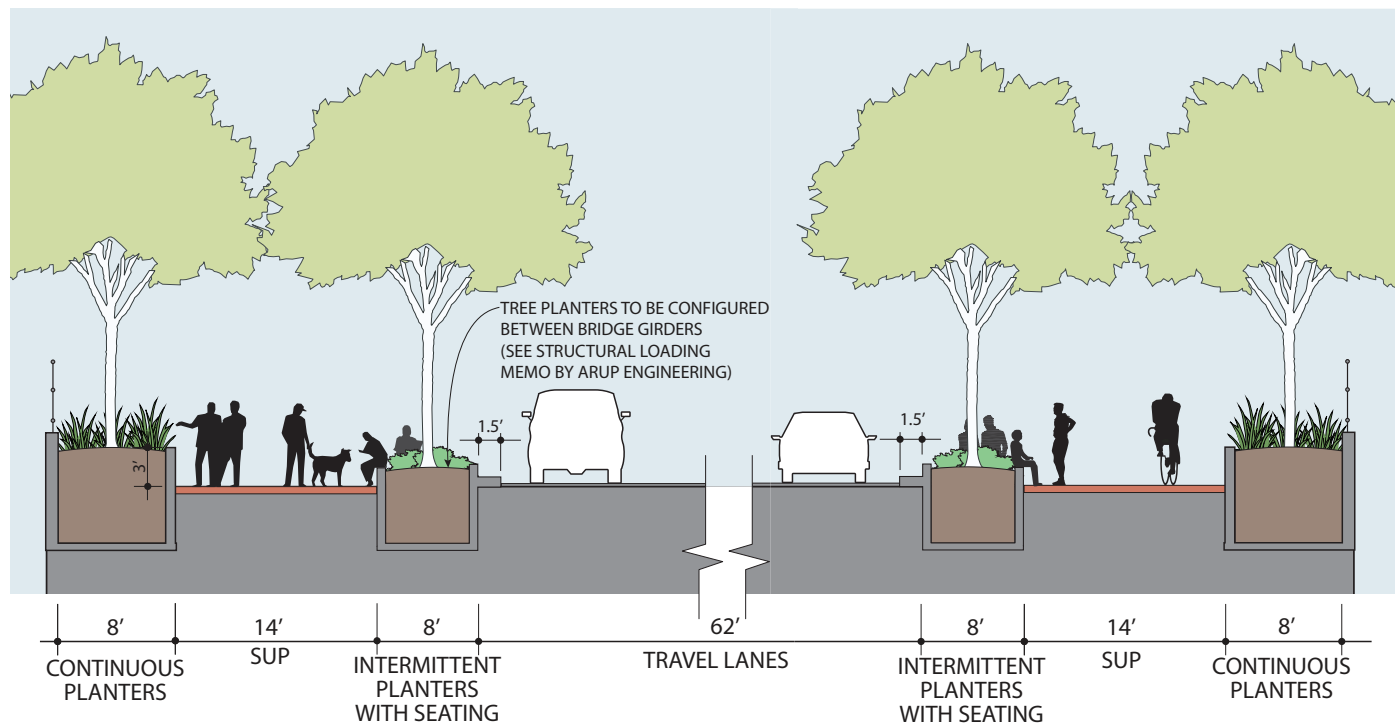
Cross-Section of Frontage Road between E 6th St & E 7th St at Intersection, Looking North

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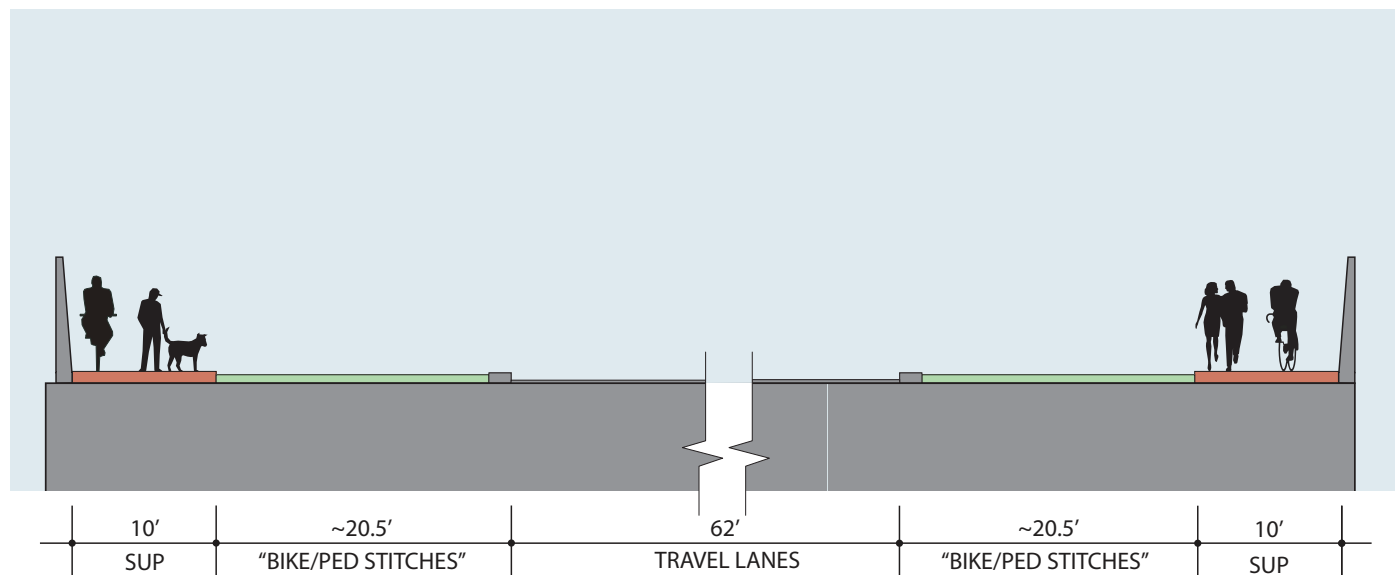
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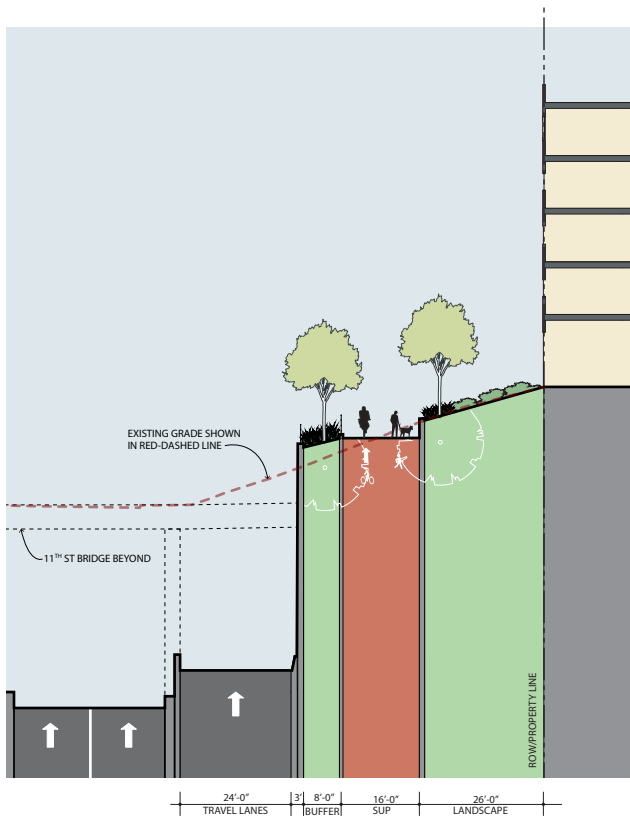
Cross-Section through E Cesar Chavez St Bridge, Looking West

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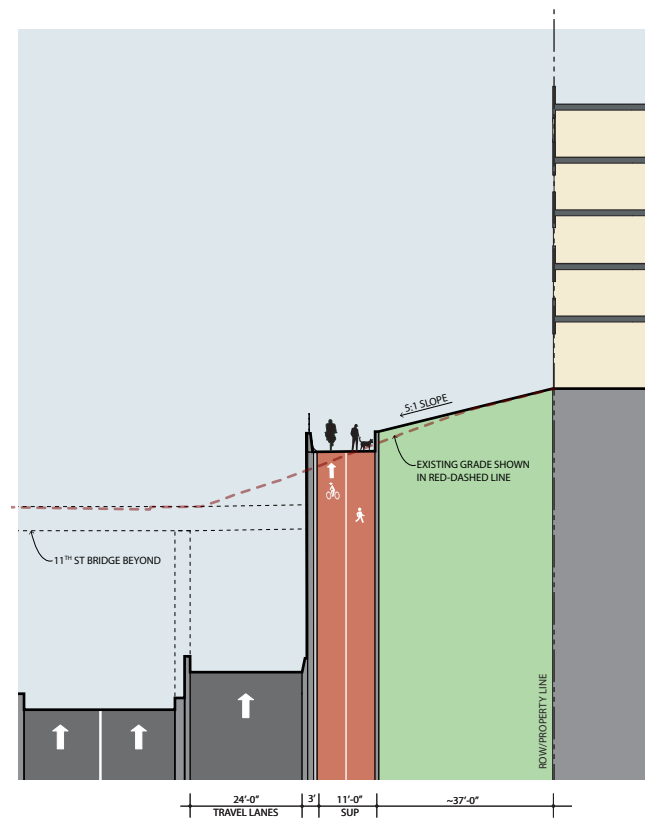
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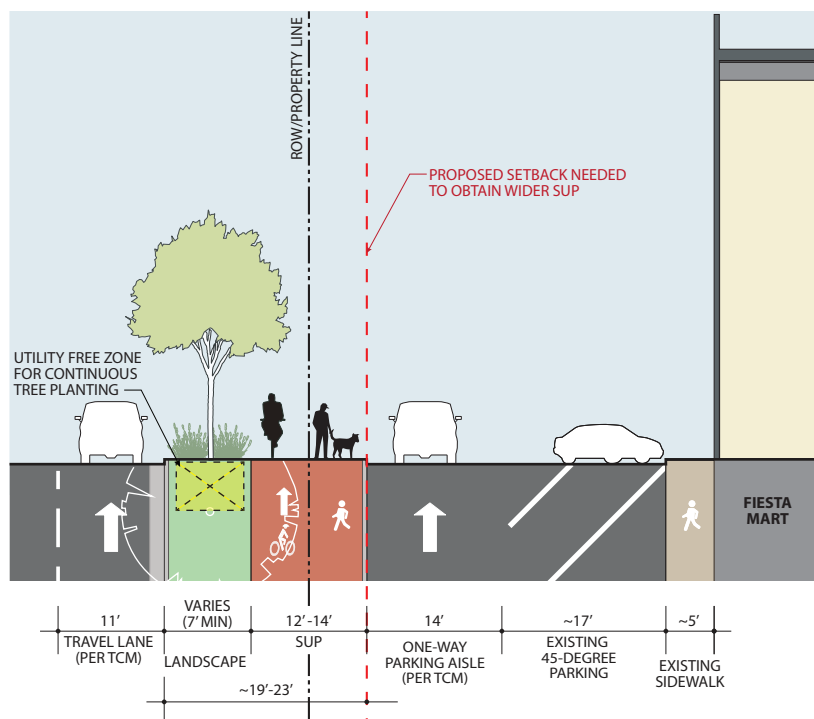
Cross-Section of East Avenue Trail at E 10 St, Looking North

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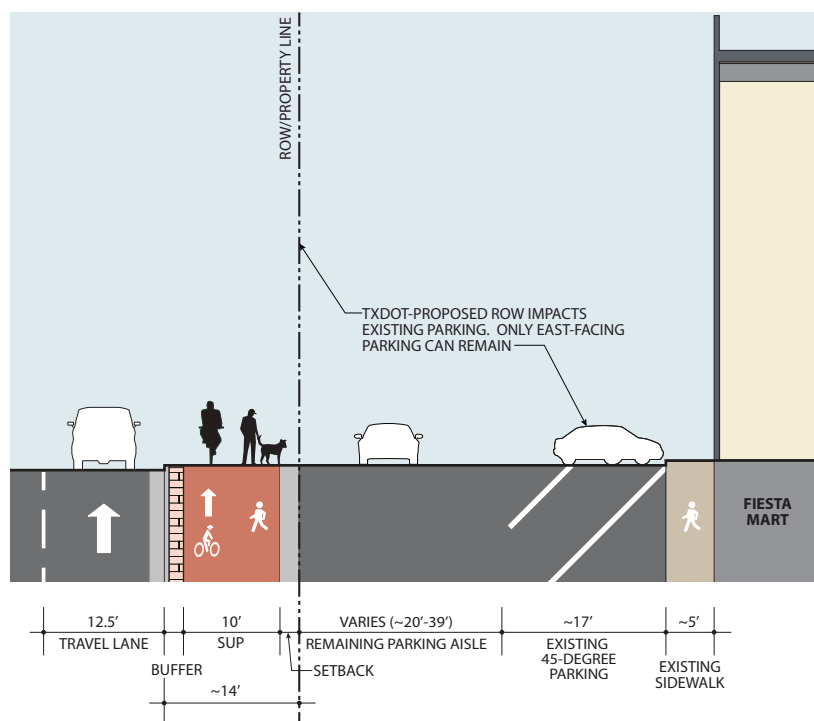
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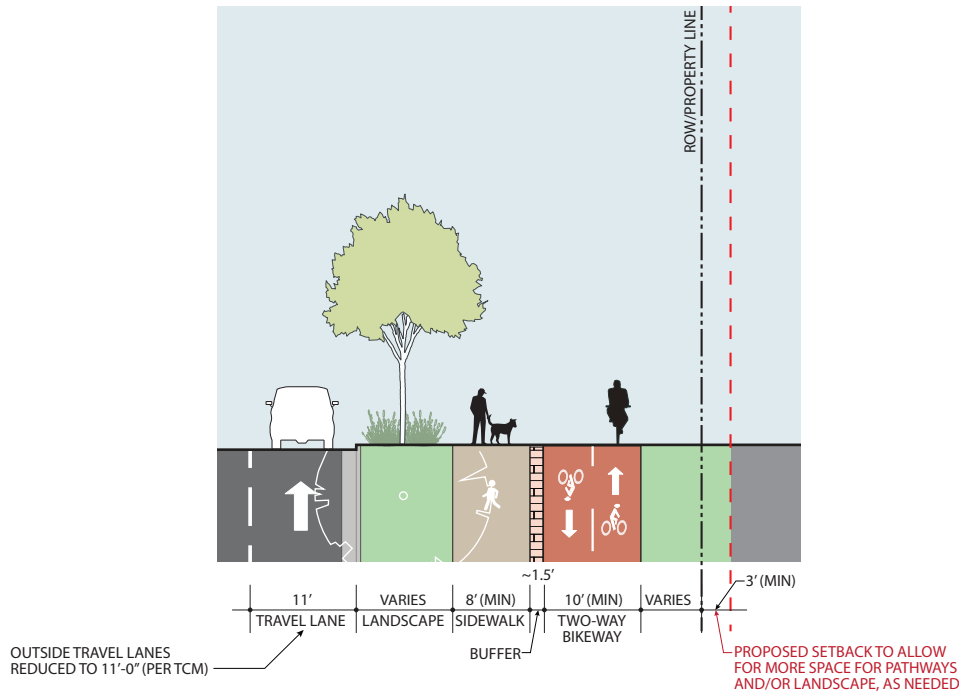
Cross-Section of East Avenue Trail at Fiesta Mart / E 40th St, Looking North

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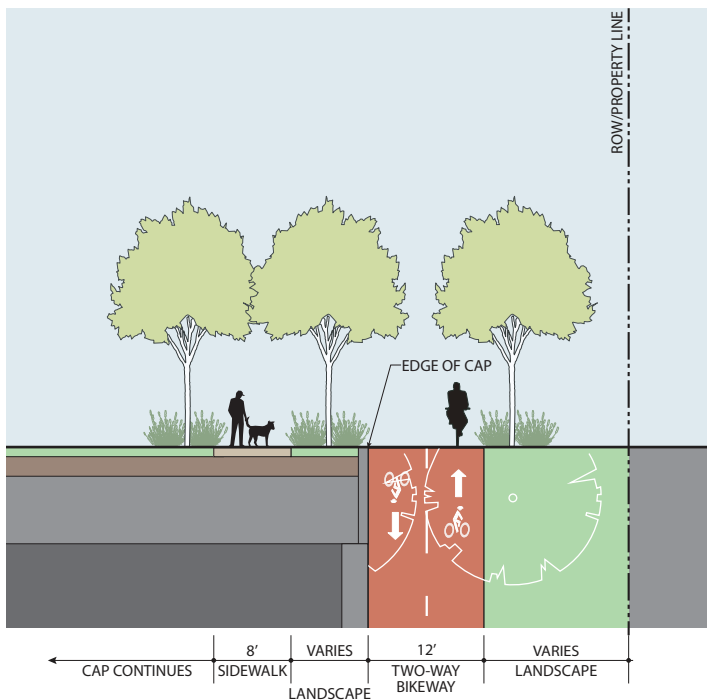
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Constrained Condition, Looking North (Example: Between E 13th St & E 14th St)



Unconstrained Condition, Looking North (Example: Between E 5th St and E 6th St at Cap)

I-35 CapEx Central Project

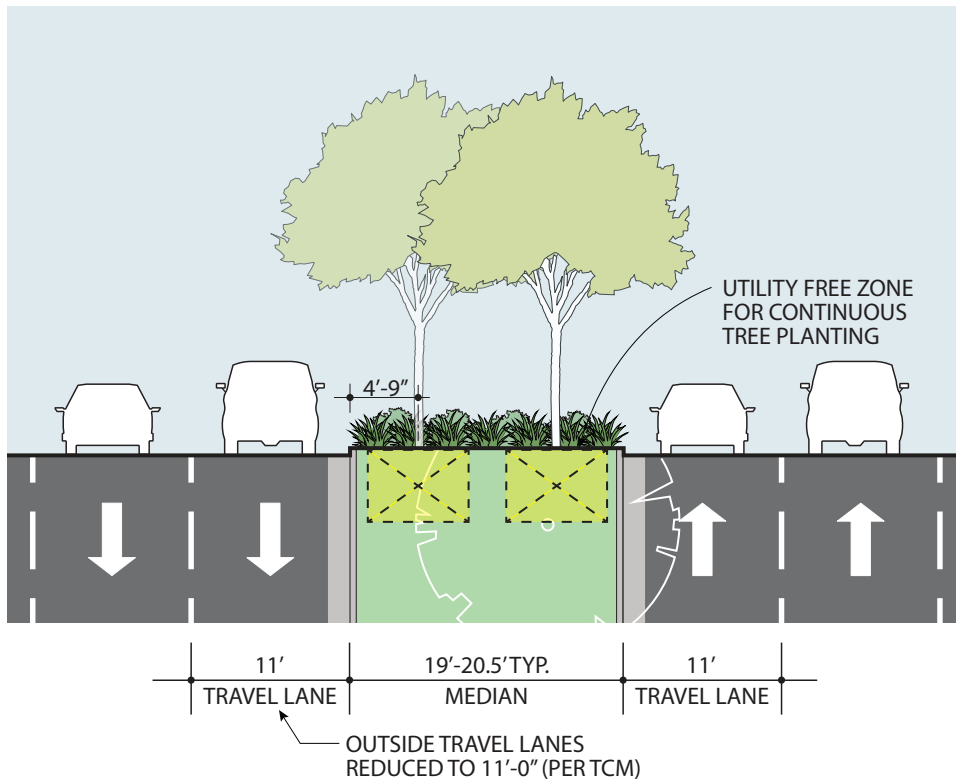
Cross-Sections of East Avenue Trail Concept

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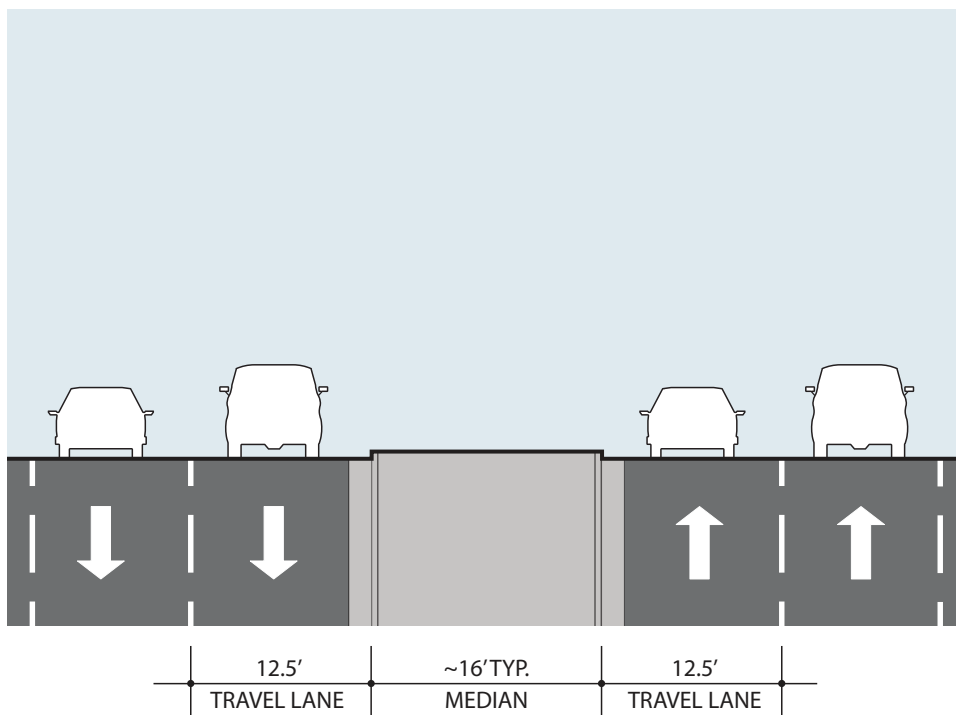
Notes:

- East Avenue Trail cross-sections are based on the Our Future 35 Vision Plan, dated November 2024.
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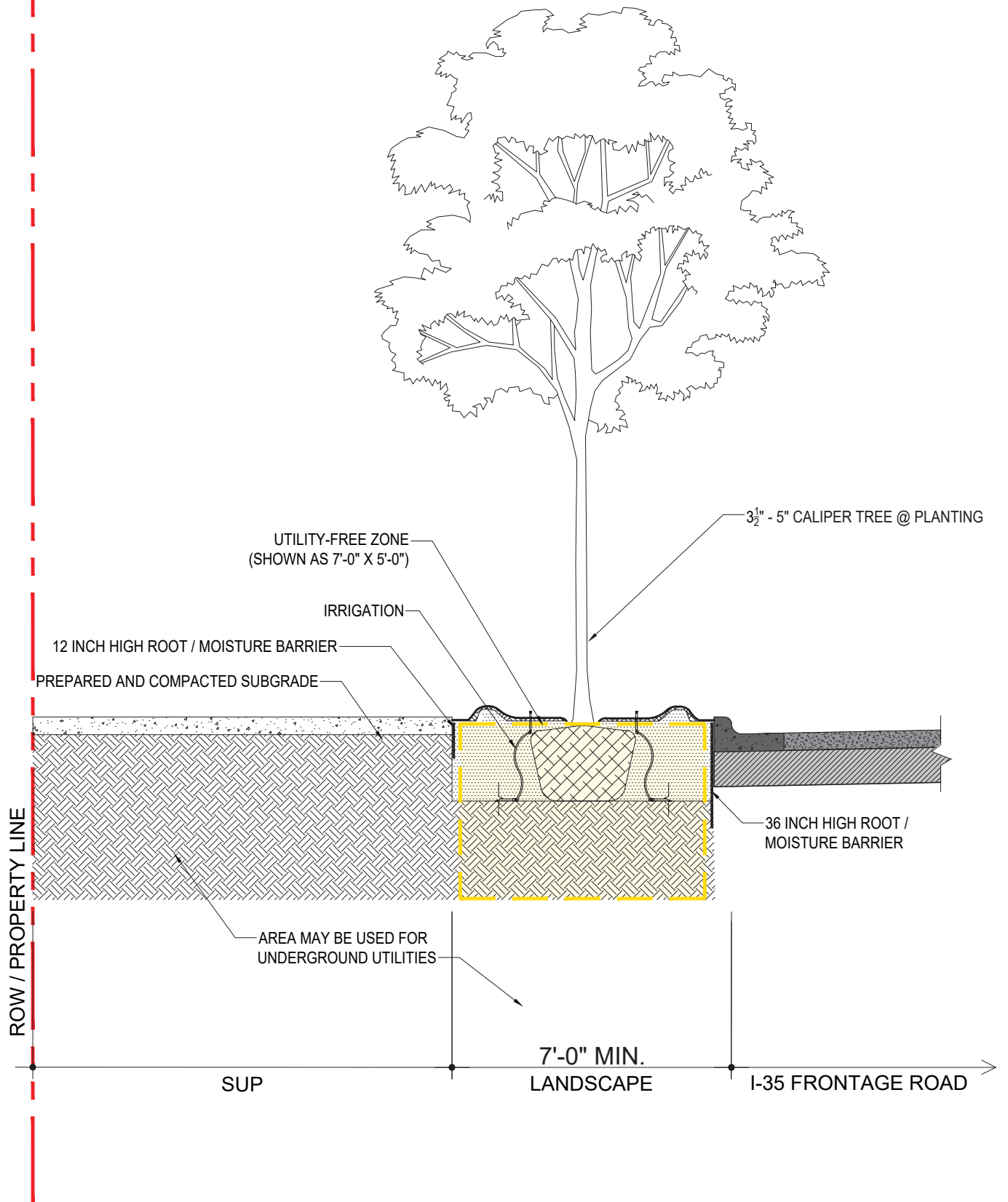
Cross-Section through Median at Frontage Road, Looking North

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Concept Tree Planting Detail in Open Planting Trench, Looking North

I-35 CapEx Project
Draft 08.18.2025

