



Streets

The street is where it all comes together. People, cars, and bicycles all converge on this essential path to get to them where they want to go - home, school, work, park or grocery store. Sometimes the point of the trip is improved physical health or a social connection. Whatever the goal, the user should be able to enjoy the ride or walk just as much as the destination.

To allow the user to enjoy the trip, no matter how they choose to take it, is a key component in achieving the vision set forth by the Decatur CTP. That means supporting people's ability to choose how they travel by providing good quality facilities that are safe, comfortable and efficient. Creating these facilities on long-established streets, as in Decatur's case, is challenging. It requires a different mindset from past planning efforts – away from the car. It becomes necessary to rethink existing street space and how it is distributed among modes of travel.

This element presents in detail recommended improvements to selected intersections and corridors that “level the playing field”, so to speak, among cars, people and bicycles. The recommendations suggest ways to improve safety, access and mobility for all users. In some cases, the auto is asked to make a few sacrifices.

The intent is not to punish the car, but rather to create a multi-modal, integrated system that works well for everyone. Such a system can convey many benefits, including reduced automobile traffic congestion, improved air quality and viable opportunities for active travel.

As the reader will see, the CTP does not propose the acquisition or construction of substantial new right-of-way. Rather it seeks to use existing rights-of-way more efficiently. In essence, it is about sharing existing space more effectively through the evolution of complete streets.

This element and its recommendations are the heart of the CTP. Essentially, the Streets are where Decatur shows its true commitment to create a transportation system that promotes health, safety, mobility and access. The concepts presented here incorporate pieces of each of the other elements – pedestrian, bicycle, and transit - and tie them into a comprehensive package.

“ The Streets are where Decatur shows its true commitment to create a transportation system that promotes health, safety, mobility and access. ”

Complete Streets in Decatur

Like most of the nation's roadways, streets in Decatur were developed with the auto in mind. Despite this car-centric form, the street network is the primary infrastructure for all means of travel. Both the limited availability and high price of land have left little opportunity to widen or construct new roadways to accommodate non-auto facilities. Decatur must now focus on reorganizing existing space to provide safe and attractive access and use for a variety of transportation modes and purposes.

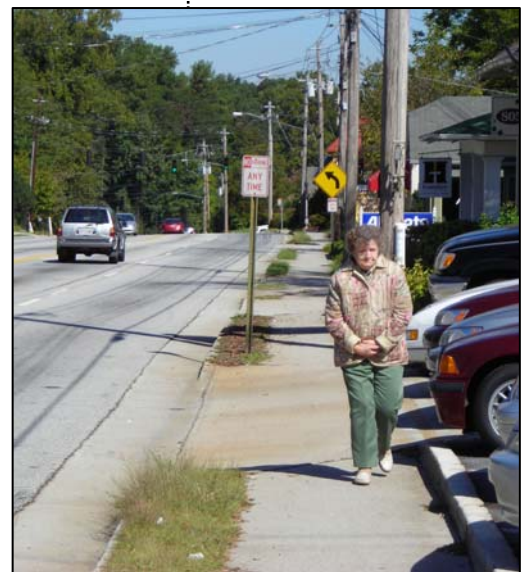
This approach encompasses thinking beyond the edge of pavement to the sidewalk, the buildings and everything in between. It represents a shift in focus from the movement of vehicles to the movement of people by balancing the use of "street space" between cars, buses, trucks, bikes and pedestrians. It redefines the entire "corridor" as public space. A complete street also takes into account the scale and character of the setting, which varies considerably across Decatur, and incorporates that into the design.

As part of the CTP, five intersections and seven corridors around Decatur were chosen by City staff and the Commissioners for special study. The locations were selected due to their key locations, feedback from the public, and specific issues. The studies examined and identified the improvements necessary to transform these key areas into complete streets.

Both street corridors and intersections were also considered for their implications for community health. The intersection improvements were one of the four primary topics of the Pathways to a Healthy Decatur Workshop. The comments at the workshop focused on ensuring that all users could navigate the intersections; therefore, improvements should focus on accommodations for pedestrians, cyclists and people with physical mobility limitations (including children and older adults). Workshop participants also expressed concern about overall traffic safety, especially vehicle speeds.

As you will see in the specific sections on each intersection and street corridor, the recommendations involve narrowing travel lanes and street sections, reducing the number of automobile travel lanes, widening sidewalks, improving crosswalks, enhancing pedestrian signals and providing amenities for non-motorized travel, all while maintaining vehicular movement. These improvements can have important health consequences, like reduced crash rates and a more appealing bike and pedestrian environment, which may not only increase physical activity levels, but also increase the mobility of people with physical limitations.

The scientific literature supports these recommendations. For example, a 2001 study of street characteristics and crash rates found that of the 10 variables tested, street width



was by far the most significant determinant of crash rates (Nolan 2001, 2003; Swift, nd, as referenced in Ewing et al, 2006). Furthermore, a body of evidence suggests that vehicle operating speeds decline as lanes and street sections narrow (Farouki and Nixon 1976, Heimbach et al 1983, Clark 1985, Harwood 1990, Gattis and Watts 1999, Fitzpatrick et al 2001, Gattis 2001). A literature review sponsored by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that pedestrian have a five percent chance of fatal injury when hit by a car traveling 20 mph or less. This risk increases to 40 percent at vehicle speed of 30 mph and nearly 100 percent at 50 mph or more (Leaf and Preusser 1999).

Furthermore, several studies have found that fast vehicle speeds are associated with a reduction in physical activity levels as people become uncomfortable with the real or perceived safety risks associated with biking or walking in such areas (Bauman and Bull 2007).

The following descriptions and drawings represent the recommendations of the CTP in an effort to assist the City in meeting its vision of a future transportation system, therefore creating complete streets and encouraging active living lifestyles for its residents.

Intersections

The following section details each of the five intersections selected by the City of Decatur. Specifically noted is the opportunity each presents, the need and purpose for the improvements, the problems addressed with the recommendations, and the recommendations themselves. A graphical depiction follows each of the descriptions.

1. Clairemont Avenue and Commerce Drive Gateway Intersection

Opportunity:

This crossroads-type intersection is a gateway to downtown Decatur. A conversion to complete streets would remove a critical barrier to active travel for residents of neighborhoods to the north and northwest of downtown.

Need and Purpose:

To increase the number of people walking and bicycling along Clairemont and Commerce, in particular, to increase the frequency of people walking to and from downtown and neighborhoods to the north and northwest of downtown. The bicycle and pedestrian improvements are consistent with the Pedestrian and Bicycle system improvement maps presented elsewhere in this Plan.

Problems Addressed with the Recommendations:

The intersection is too big and intimidating for most pedestrians. In particular, the sidewalk on the northeast corner is very small and does not meet the minimum requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Commerce Drive is not a “complete



street” because it does not sufficiently accommodate bike and pedestrian travel modes. There is excess automobile capacity on the south and west legs of the intersection, as was identified in the LOS analysis. Residents living north and northwest of downtown are not likely to walk across this intersection unless they must, although the LOS analysis identified a significant unmet demand for both walking and biking routes through this intersection.

Recommendations:

Although designated as U.S. Highway 23, Clairemont at Commerce is a gateway to downtown Decatur. As such, the pedestrian and bicycle level of service should be on par or better than the vehicular LOS. The recommendation is to widen sidewalks on all four corners, widen the width of crosswalks, install countdown signals for pedestrians, implement traffic signal timing changes to reduce pedestrian delay, and change the traffic lanes as shown in Figure 6-1.

The curb-to-curb width on Clairemont today is 50 feet south of Commerce, increasing to 62 feet north of the intersection. It is recommended that the width of Clairemont be reduced to 43 feet south of, and 56 feet north of the intersection.

On the northeast corner of the intersection, it is recommended to widen the Clairemont and Commerce sidewalks where they join. Rebuild the curb return radius to 35 feet to facilitate 5 mph turns by very large (50-foot wheelbase) trucks. Provide ADA-compliant sidewalk design such that at least five feet of flat-top sidewalk is provided around the retaining wall that now hugs the corner. Exclusive of the five foot wide flat-top, provide ADA-compliant wheelchair ramps in each direction aligning directly with each crosswalk.

On Commerce, narrow the traffic lanes by one foot each (from 12 to 11 feet) and change the westbound curb lane from a shared through/right-turn lane to an exclusive (mandatory) right-turn lane.

On Clairemont, the east sidewalk is now ten feet, located at the back of the curb. It is recommended this sidewalk width be increased to fifteen feet in the first block north of Commerce Drive. If possible, close the driveway on the east side of Clairemont just north of Commerce; serving the adjacent business instead from Williams Street and provide one 12-foot wide northbound lane plus a two-foot curb-and-gutter. In addition, the City should consider a hardy species of flowering trees further north to create a nice gateway treatment into downtown.

The cross-section of Clairemont Avenue north of Commerce is now 70 feet between curbs and 86 feet between the backs of sidewalks. It is recommended that this cross-section remain within the 86 feet, but that the street width be reduced to 56 feet with three lanes southbound and one lane northbound. Two foot curb-and-gutters would be provided on both sides of the street. Within the median, the width of curbs is included in the six-foot wide space.

To facilitate traffic flow for southbound left-turn movements, consider creating a double-cycle phasing scheme so that the southbound left-turn lane is given a green light twice during each signal cycle. During peak periods, this may truncate the southbound vehicle queue, causing motorists to wait through a red phase. However, truncating the queue will give Commerce Avenue time to accommodate the traffic which now backs-up from the red light at Church and Commerce.

Summary of Recommendations:

Reduce the number of traffic lanes as follows:

- Southbound Clairemont Avenue: eliminate separate right-turn lane and share with through lane. Rebuild curb on west side of Clairemont north of Commerce.
- Northbound Clairemont Avenue: eliminate separate right-turn lane and share with through lane. Rebuild curb on east side of Clairemont south of Commerce.
- Eastbound Commerce Drive: restripe to convert curb lane into on-street parking and a striped bicycle lane. Change from two through to one through lane.
- Westbound Commerce Drive: restripe to share the left- and through-lane and convert curb lane into separate right-turn lane. Change from two through to one through lane.

All approaches:

- install bicycle-sensitive traffic signal detectors

All corners:

- Lower the height of pedestrian signal heads and add countdown signals.
- Rebuild wheelchair ramps as needed to comply with ADA.
- Restripe all crossings to provide high-visibility and/or special paving surfaces.
- Add benches, trash receptacles, street trees, wayfinding signs, pedestrian-level lighting, public art, and other streetscape amenities as appropriate.

Northeast corner:

- Build a bulb-out eight feet into Clairemont Avenue to create ADA-compliant sidewalk.
- Relocate signal pole to the back of the sidewalk.
- Restripe Clairemont Avenue to provide one northbound and three southbound lanes.

Northwest corner:

- Eliminate the free right-turn and the triangular-shaped concrete island.
- Southeast corner: widen the sidewalk along east side of Clairemont Avenue to add street trees. Remove bollard.

Commerce (south side) east of Clairemont:

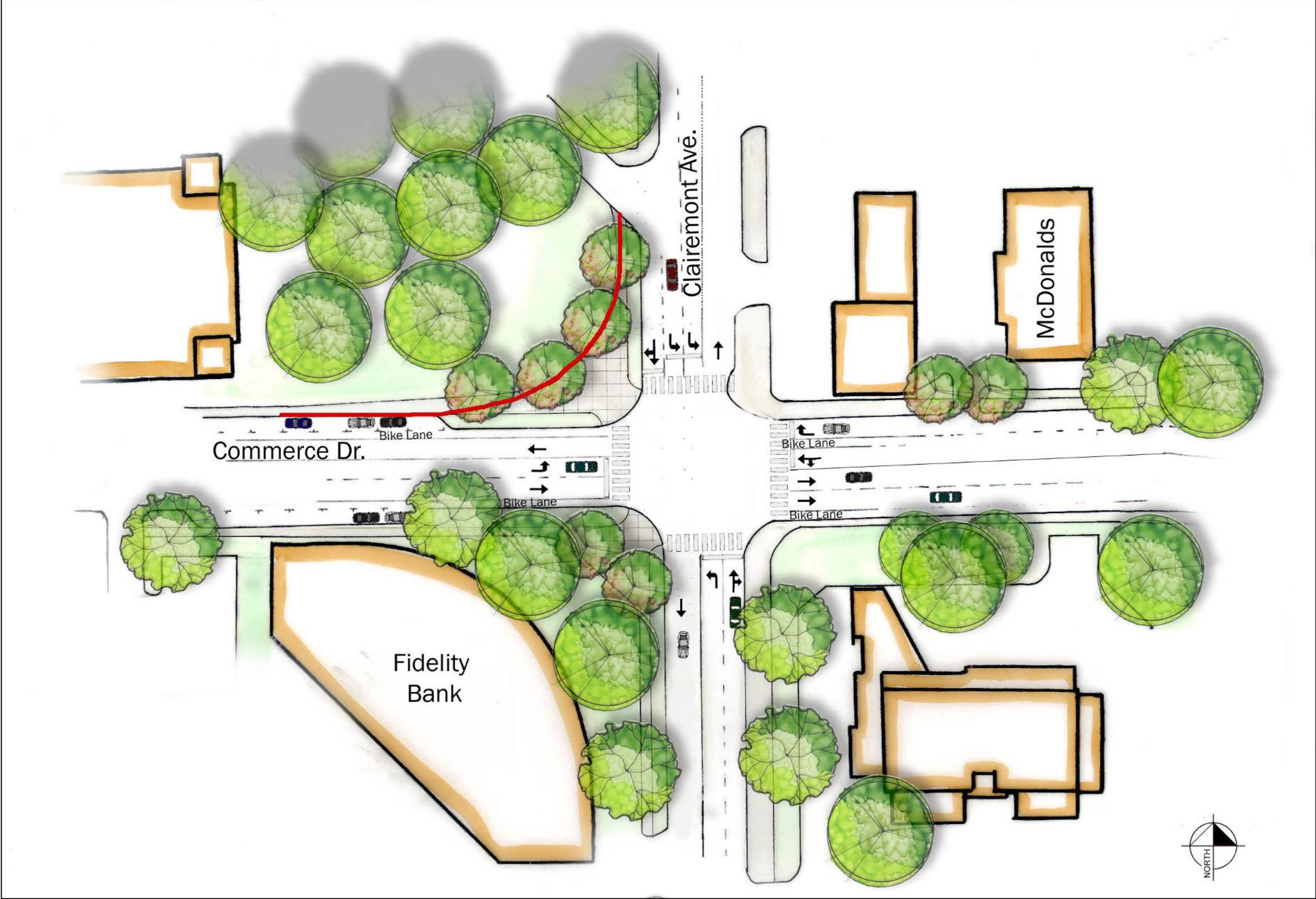
- Work with Bank of America to obtain permission to build a parallel sidewalk at the top of the berm, meandering the walkway around established equipment and mature trees and shrubs.

The effect of the recommended intersection and road diet would be to shorten the crossings significantly. Today, if a pedestrian were to cross all four legs of the intersection without delay from the traffic signal, it would take about 90 seconds to traverse 330 feet. In contrast, the recommended changes depicted in Figure 6-1 would take only 65 seconds to traverse 230 feet. Combined with recommended traffic signal timing changes, the change should create a dramatic improvement for pedestrians.

Table 6-1 Pedestrian Crossing Distance and Time – Clairemont and Commerce

Street Crossing	Side of Street	Current crossing distance (in feet)	Recommended Crossing Distance (in feet)	Change in Distance (in feet)	Change in Time (in secs)
Clairemont	North	100	65	35	10
Clairemont	South	60	50	10	3
Commerce	East	65	55	10	3
Commerce	West	105	60	45	13
Total – 4 legs		330 feet	230 feet	100 feet	29 secs

Figure 6-1 Commerce Drive and Clairemont Avenue Proposed Recommendations



2. Church Street and Commerce Drive Gateway Intersection

Opportunity:

This crossroads-type intersection is a gateway to downtown Decatur. A conversion to complete streets would transform the way residents and visitors travel to and from neighborhoods to the north of downtown.

Need and Purpose:

To increase the number of people walking and bicycling along Church Street and Commerce Drive, in particular, to increase the frequency of people walking to and from downtown and neighborhoods to the north of downtown. The pedestrian and bicycle improvements are consistent with the Pedestrian and Bicycle system improvement maps presented elsewhere in this Plan.

Problems Addressed with the Recommendations:

The intersection is too big and intimidating for most pedestrians. Church Street and Commerce Drive are not “complete streets” because they do not include facilities for pedestrians and cyclists. There is excess automobile capacity on all but the west leg of the intersection, as identified in the LOS analysis. Residents living north of downtown are not likely to walk here unless they must, although the LOS analysis identified a significant unmet demand for both walking and biking routes through this intersection.



Recommendations:

Although vehicular speeds are high on Church Street, it functions as a gateway to downtown Decatur. As such, the pedestrian and bicycle level of service should be on par or better than the vehicular LOS. The recommendation is to widen sidewalks on all four corners, widen the width of crosswalks, install countdown signals for pedestrians, implement traffic signal timing changes to reduce pedestrian delay, and change the traffic lanes as shown in Figure ____.

The curb-to-curb width on Church Street today is 60 feet south of Commerce, increasing to 75 feet immediately north of the intersection and then narrowing to 52 feet north of the McDonald's property. It is recommended that the width of Church be reduced to a consistent 45 feet at the crosswalks north and south of the intersection, widening out to 52 feet beyond the crosswalks. This accommodates parking on the east side, bicycle lanes in both directions, one left-turn lane and one through lane in each direction.

Summary of Recommendations:

Reduce the number of traffic lanes as follows:

Southbound Church Street:

- Eliminate one through lane and the separate right-turn lane so four lanes become two lanes.
- Restripe to add an on-street bicycle lane.
- Continue the one through lane south of the intersection so two lanes becomes one lane.

- Add an on-street bike lane, ending at Ponce de Leon Avenue.

Northbound Church Street:

- Eliminate one through lane.
- Restripe to add on-street parking and a bicycle lane on the east side of Church Street.
- Create a shared through and right-turn lane northbound.
- Continue the single through lane on the north side of the intersection and restripe the north side to provide on-street parking on the east side of Church Street and an on-street bike lane.

Eastbound Commerce Drive:

- Convert the curb lane into an exclusive right-turn lane, leaving just one through lane.
- Westbound Commerce Drive: restripe to convert the curb lane into on-street parking and an on-street bicycle lane, leaving one through lane.

All approaches:

- install bicycle-sensitive traffic signal detectors

All corners:

- lower the height of pedestrian signal heads and add countdown signals.
- Rebuild wheelchair ramps as needed to comply with ADA.
- Restripe all crossings to provide high-visibility and/or special paving surfaces.
- Add benches, trash receptacles, street trees, wayfinding signs, pedestrian-level lighting, public art, and other streetscape amenities as appropriate.

Northeast corner:

- Build bulb-outs into both streets to shorten pedestrian crossing distances and shadow new on-street parking spaces created on the north side of Commerce Drive and the east side of Church Street.
- Leave six feet of clear asphalt for bicyclists to safely pass the curbed bulb-outs.

Northwest corner:

- Build bulb-outs into both streets to shorten crossings and shadow on-street parking on the north side of Commerce Drive and the west side of Church Street.
- Leave six feet of clear asphalt for bicyclists.

Southeast corner:

- Build bulb-outs into both streets to shorten crossings and shadow on-street parking on the south side of Commerce Drive and the east side of Church Street.
- Leave six feet of clearance for bicyclists to safely pass the curbed bulb-outs.

Southwest corner:

- Build a bulb-out into Church Street but not into Commerce Drive.

Commerce (south side) west of Church Street:

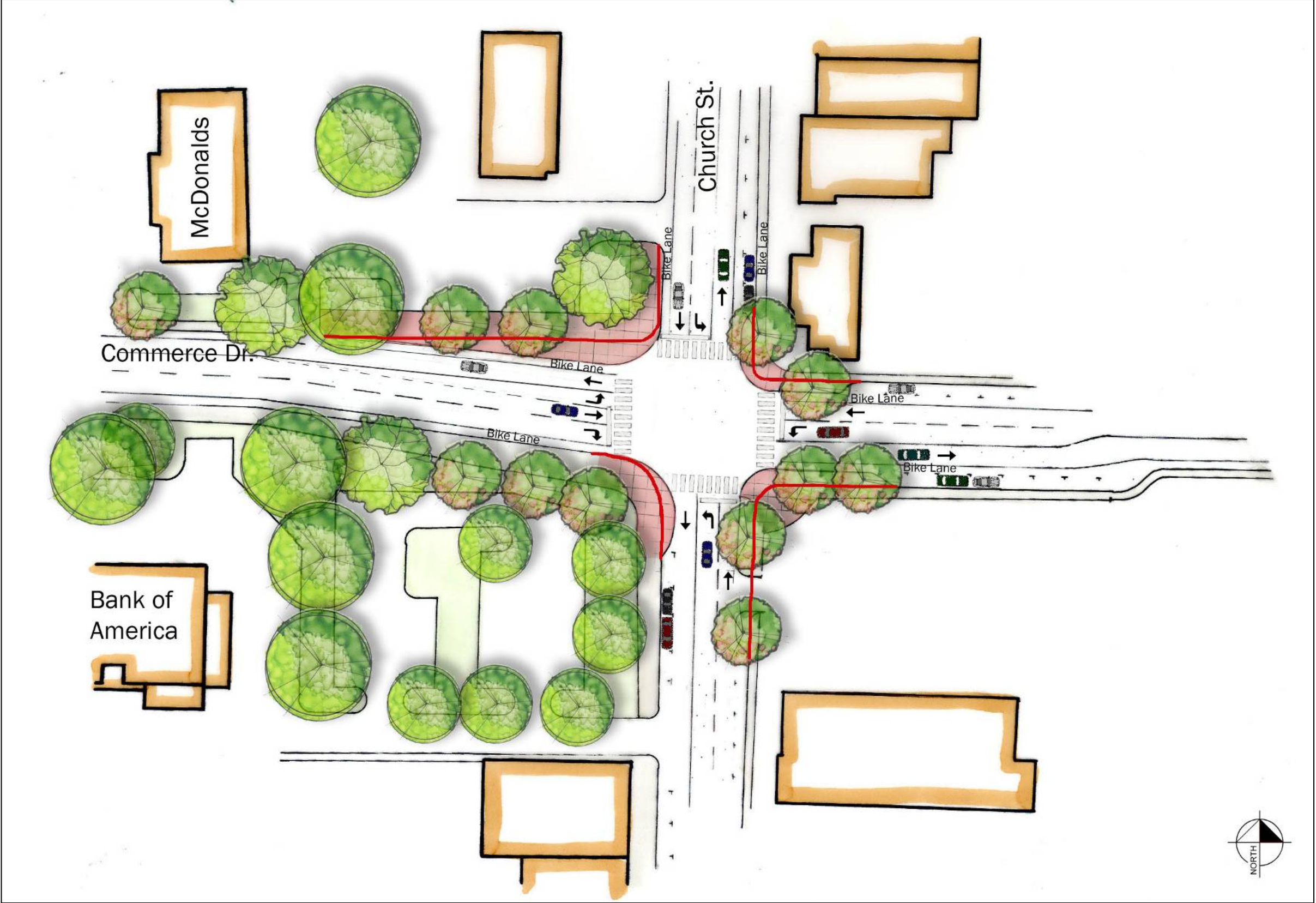
- Continue the parallel sidewalk at the top of the berm adjacent to the Bank of America parking lot.
- Connect with the sidewalks and new bulb-out on the southwest corner of the intersection of Church Street and Commerce Drive.

The effect of the recommended intersection and road diet would be to shorten the crossings significantly. Today, if a pedestrian were to cross all four legs of the intersection without delay from the traffic signal, it would take about 75 seconds to traverse 270 feet. In contrast, the recommended changes depicted in Figure 6-2 would take only 55 seconds to traverse 190 feet. Combined with recommended traffic signal timing changes, the change should create a dramatic improvement for pedestrians.

Table 6-2 Pedestrian Crossing Distance and Time – Church and Commerce

Street Crossing	Side of Street	Current crossing distance (in feet)	Recommended Crossing Distance (in feet)	Change in Distance (in feet)	Change in Time (in secs)
Church	North	75	45	30	8
Church	South	60	45	15	3
Commerce	East	60	55	5	1
Commerce	West	75	45	30	8
Total – 4 legs		330 feet	190 feet	80 feet	20 secs

Figure 6.2 Commerce Drive and Church Street Proposed Recommendations



3. South Candler Street at College Avenue, CSX Railroad Tracks, Howard Avenue and Trinity Place

Opportunity:

This busy intersection is greatly influenced by the presence of the railroad tracks, not just due to the frequency of train crossings but due to the complexity of traffic signal phasing that creates safer operations during train crossings. The tracks, however, are a barrier between north and south Decatur. Opportunities exist to improve travel across and parallel to the tracks. This would transform the way residents and visitors travel to and from neighborhoods to the south and southeast of downtown.

Need and Purpose:

To increase the number of people walking and bicycling along the “Path”, Trinity Place, and South Candler Street, to increase the frequency of people walking to and from downtown and neighborhoods to the south and southeast of downtown. The bicycle and pedestrian improvements are consistent with the Pedestrian and Bicycle system improvement maps presented elsewhere in this Plan.



Problems Addressed with the Recommendations:

The intersection is too complex and intimidating for most pedestrians and bicyclists. In particular, the “Path” on the northwest corner is circuitous in that three street crossings are required just to avoid the most obvious direct crossing of Trinity Place parallel to the railroad tracks. Some crossings do not meet the minimum requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. None of these are “complete streets” as they do not include adequate facilities for pedestrians and cyclists.

The left-turn movement across the railroad tracks from northbound Candler Street to westbound Howard Avenue is problematic and contributes to a vehicular crash history that is higher than at any other intersection in Decatur. Residents living south and southeast of downtown are not likely to walk across this intersection unless they must.

Recommendations:

Recommendations for this intersection are organized by roadway and issue topic.

Southbound Trinity Place:

- Maintain two approach lanes with the curb lane serving as a shared through and right-turn lane to West Howard Avenue and then College Avenue.

Northbound North Candler Street:

- Convert the 50-foot long section of North Candler Street between Trinity Place and East Howard Avenue from a one-way street to a pedestrian plaza connecting the current Depot plaza with the triangular-shaped tree-shaded island. This will double the size of the plaza and include significant shaded space that is now lacking.

Eastbound College Avenue: no change

Westbound College Avenue:

- Install “No Right Turn on Red” signs on the north side of College Avenue approaching the intersection and rebuild the radius to encourage slower speed turns. This lane provides queuing space for right-turn vehicles, which is particularly important during train crossings.

Northbound South Candler Street:

- Work with Agnes Scott College to obtain permission to widen on the west side of South Candler Drive so that one additional northbound through lane can be created on approach and through the intersection. The second through lane would continue across the railroad tracks and end at Church Street.

West Howard Avenue:

- To improve public safety, prohibit the northbound left-turn movement that is now permitted from Trinity Place to westbound West Howard Avenue.
- Build a raised-curb island in the center of Trinity Place if needed to reduce violations of the “no left turn” law.
- Westbound West Howard Avenue would be accessed via right-turns from Trinity Place and from the south end of Church Street.
- Consider converting West Howard Avenue to two-way traffic flow between the Dairy Queen site (but not Trinity Place) and property on the east side of McDonough Street (but not McDonough Street itself).
- To avoid conflicts on West Howard Avenue at Trinity Place (east end) and McDonough Street (west end) build mini cul-de-sacs to turn traffic around.
- Alternatively, negotiate with property owners at the ends of both streets (i.e. Dairy Queen) to permit public u-turns on private property. The preliminary site plan for Dairy Queen shows a drive-through aisle that could serve as a u-turn.

East Howard Avenue: no change

“Path” Approaches:

- The recommended route for the “Path” through this intersection from west to east is to stop at Trinity Place and wait for new bicycle-sensitive detectors (or push button for pedestrians) to change the traffic signal to a “WALK” symbol and then cross 45 feet of pavement (equivalent to four lanes of traffic stopped in both directions) joining the Depot Plaza through which the “Path” will travel on a direct “signed” route. The reverse trip along the “Path” from east to west simply follows the same route in reverse. The recommended route cuts the existing route in half across this intersection and reduces the number of street crossings from four to just one. The remaining street crossing (across Trinity Place, parallel to the railroad tracks) will be conducted under traffic signal control. During the “Path” crossing phase all traffic except east-west traffic movements along College Avenue will be stopped.

All approaches:

- Install bicycle-sensitive traffic signal detectors

All corners:

- Lower the height of pedestrian signal heads and add countdown signals.
- Rebuild wheelchair ramps as needed to comply with ADA.
- Restripe all crossings to provide high-visibility and/or special paving surfaces.
- Add benches, trash receptacles, street trees, wayfinding signs, pedestrian-level lighting, public art, and other streetscape amenities as appropriate.

Northwest corner:

- Build a bulb-out into the north side of West Howard Avenue to create an ADA-compliant sidewalk.
- Build a flat or smooth-grade sidewalk on both sides of Trinity Place / South Candler Street with rubberized inserts into the railroad tracks.
- As necessary to gain Federal Railroad Administration approval, install pedestrian gates.

Figure 6-3 South Candler Street at College Avenue, CSX Railroad Tracks, Howard Avenue and Trinity Place Proposed Recommendations



4. McDonough Street at College Avenue, CSX Railroad Tracks, and Howard Avenue

Opportunity:

This busy intersection is greatly influenced by the presence of the railroad tracks and the proximity of Decatur High School. The complexity of traffic signal phases that creates safer operations during train crossings adds to traveler confusion and delay. During school start and end times each day, two adult crossing guards are posted at this intersection. The tracks are a barrier between north and south Decatur. Opportunities exist to improve travel across and parallel to the tracks. This would transform the way residents and visitors travel to and from neighborhoods south of downtown.



Need and Purpose:

To increase the number of people walking and bicycling along the “Path”, McDonough Street, and Howard Avenue, to increase the frequency of people walking to and from downtown and neighborhoods south of downtown. The bicycle and pedestrian improvements are consistent with the Pedestrian and Bicycle system improvement maps presented elsewhere in this Plan.

Problems Addressed with the Recommendations:

The intersection is too complex and intimidating for most pedestrians and bicyclists. In particular, the “Path” on the northwest and northeast corners can be confusing to first-time visitors. Some crossings do not meet the minimum requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. None of these are “complete streets” as they do not include adequate facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists.

The left-turn movement across the railroad tracks from northbound McDonough Street to westbound Howard Avenue is problematic and contributes to a vehicular crash history that is higher than most other intersections in Decatur. Residents living south of downtown are not likely to walk across this intersection unless they must.

Recommendations:

Recommendations for this intersection are organized by roadway and issue topic.

Southbound McDonough Street:

- Replace the painted striped-out median with a raised-curb island that provides pedestrian refuge. Surface treatment options include plantings and/or hardscape pavers. Monolithic concrete should be avoided as should suburban-looking grass.

Northbound McDonough Street: no change.

Eastbound College Avenue: no change

Westbound College Avenue:

- Install “No Right Turn on Red” signs on the north side of College Avenue approaching the intersection and rebuild the radius to encourage slower speed turns. Unlike the

intersection at South Candler Street, there isn't an exclusive right-turn lane here to provide queuing space for right-turn vehicles, which is particularly important during train crossings.

- Work with CSX Transportation (railroad) and the Federal Railroad Administration to consider paving a new right-turn lane here.

West Howard Avenue:

- To improve public safety, prohibit the northbound left-turn movement that is now permitted from McDonough Street to westbound West Howard Avenue.
- Build a raised-curb island in the center of McDonough Street if needed to reduce violations of the "no left turn" law.

Decatur High School Parking:

- To mitigate the impact of prohibiting northbound left-turn movements onto Howard Avenue, consider restriping McDonough Street from the southernmost Decatur High School drive circle to the Chick-Fil-A driveway / County building driveway to provide the following typical cross-section:
- One 12-foot wide travel lane in each direction
- Diagonal parking on both sides of the street (18-foot stall depth)
- Double yellow centerline
- Intermittent bulb-outs interrupting the diagonal parking with mature street trees and a mid-block crosswalk. The trees should be planted so as to not block views of the historic Courthouse at the north end of McDonough Street.

"Path" Approaches:

- The route for the "Path" through this intersection from west to east is to stop at McDonough Street and wait for new bicycle-sensitive detectors (or push button for pedestrians) to change the traffic signal to a "WALK" symbol and then cross 36 feet of pavement (equivalent to three lanes of traffic stopped in both directions) with a raised-curb median in the middle.

All approaches:

- Install bicycle-sensitive traffic signal detectors

All corners:

- Lower the height of pedestrian signal heads and add countdown signals. Rebuild wheelchair ramps as needed to comply with ADA.
- Restripe all crossings to provide high-visibility and/or special paving surfaces.
- Add benches, trash receptacles, street trees, wayfinding signs, pedestrian-level lighting, public art, and other streetscape amenities as appropriate.

Figure 6-4 McDonough Street at College Avenue, CSX Railroad Tracks, and Howard Avenue Proposed Recommendations



5. Atlanta Avenue at College Avenue, CSX Railroad Tracks, Howard Avenue, and Olympic Place

Opportunity:

This busy intersection is greatly influenced by the presence of the railroad tracks, not just due to the frequency of train crossings but due to the complexity of slotted traffic lanes and multi-signal phasing that creates safer operations during train crossings. The tracks, however, are a barrier between north and south Decatur. Opportunities exist to improve travel across and parallel to the tracks. This would transform the way residents and visitors travel to and from neighborhoods to the south and southwest of downtown.

Need and Purpose:

To increase the number of people walking and bicycling along the “Path”, Atlanta Avenue, Howard Avenue and College Avenue; to increase the frequency of people walking to and from downtown and neighborhoods to the south and southwest of downtown. The bicycle and pedestrian improvements are consistent with the Pedestrian and Bicycle system improvement maps presented elsewhere in this Plan.

Problems Addressed with the Recommendations:

The intersection is too large, complex and intimidating for most pedestrians and bicyclists. In particular, the “Path” on the northwest corner is circuitous in that two street crossings are required. Some crossings do not meet the minimum requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. None of these are “complete streets” as they do not include adequate facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists.

The crossover movement across the railroad tracks from westbound College Avenue to westbound Howard Avenue is confusing in that the shortest path often results in the longest delays since traffic signals are not present to control Howard Avenue, however, if a hard right-turn is made across the railroad tracks then a traffic signal is available to cross Howard Avenue. Residents living south and southwest of downtown are not likely to walk across this intersection unless they must.

Recommendations:

The overall plan for this intersection is to reduce the “footprint” of the intersection considerably by creating two conventional type intersections (one at Howard Avenue and the other at College Avenue/Olympic Place).

A summary of the recommendations by roadway follows:

Westbound Howard Avenue:

- Convert the inside through lane to a left-turn only lane, leaving just one through lane. Consider making the through lane a continuous flow lane (unencumbered by traffic signals), however to facilitate pedestrian crossings a signal may be needed that is only actuated by a pedestrian pushing a button to cross. In this case, westbound Howard Avenue traffic would be stopped by a signal. A second westbound lane on Howard Avenue would serve the northbound left-turn movement.

Eastbound Howard Avenue:

- The two existing eastbound approach lanes would be converted to one through lane and a separate right-turn only lane.

Railroad Crossing:

- The width of pavement crossing the tracks would be narrowed due to the change in angle of the crossing.
- Build a flat or smooth-grade sidewalk on both sides of Atlanta Avenue with rubberized inserts into the railroad tracks.
- As necessary to gain Federal Railroad Administration approval, install pedestrian gates.

Atlanta Avenue:

- Instead of the present split into two branches, Atlanta Avenue would cross the tracks perpendicular to the direction of train travel with four travel lanes; two each northbound and southbound. One lane in each direction would serve left-turning traffic while the other would serve through and right-turns. A left-turn bay on College Avenue would be created for traffic destined for Olympic Place.

Atlanta Avenue north of Howard Avenue:

- Remove traffic signals due to close proximity to new signals at the Atlanta Avenue railroad crossing intersection.

College Avenue:

- An exclusive right-turn lane would be created on westbound College Avenue approaching Atlanta Avenue. This would serve queued vehicles waiting to turn right during a train crossing.

“Path” Approaches:

- The recommended route for the “Path” through this intersection from west to east is to stop at Atlanta Avenue and wait for new bicycle-sensitive detectors (or push button for pedestrians) to change the traffic signal to a “WALK” symbol and then cross 50 feet of pavement (equivalent to four lanes of traffic stopped in both directions). The reverse trip along the “Path” from east to west simply follows the same route in reverse. The recommended route cuts the existing route distance across this intersection and reduces the number of street crossings from two to just one. The street crossing (across Atlanta Avenue, parallel to the railroad tracks) will be conducted under traffic signal control. During the “Path” crossing phase all traffic except east-west traffic movements along College Avenue and Howard Avenue will be stopped.

All approaches:

- Install bicycle-sensitive traffic signal detectors

All corners:

- Lower the height of pedestrian signal heads and add countdown signals.
- Rebuild wheelchair ramps as needed to comply with ADA.
- Restripe all crossings to provide high-visibility and/or special paving surfaces.
- Add benches, trash receptacles, street trees, wayfinding signs, pedestrian-level lighting, public art, and other streetscape amenities as appropriate.

Figure 6-5 Atlanta Avenue at College Avenue, CSX Railroad Tracks, Howard Avenue, and Olympic Place



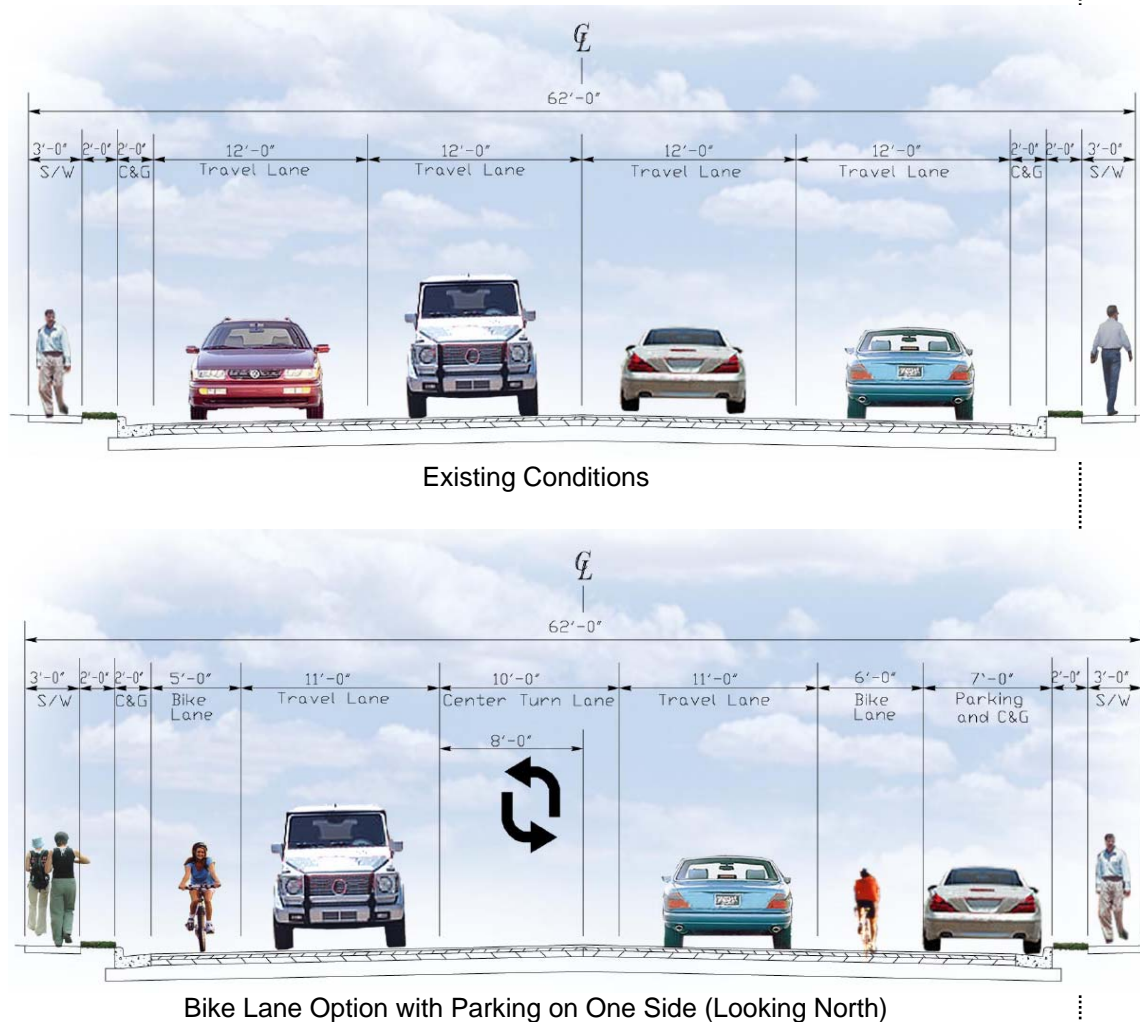
Corridor Recommendations

The corridor recommendations detailed below are to be used in concert with the recommendations to the intersections noted in the previous section.

Church Street

As discussed in the previous intersection improvements sections, recommendations to Church Street include rebuilding the street from the north side of Commerce to the northern city limit, reducing the number of lanes and redesigning the street to promote slower speeds (25 to 35 mph). The recommended typical cross section is shown in Figure 6.6.

Figure 6-6 Church Street Typical Sections

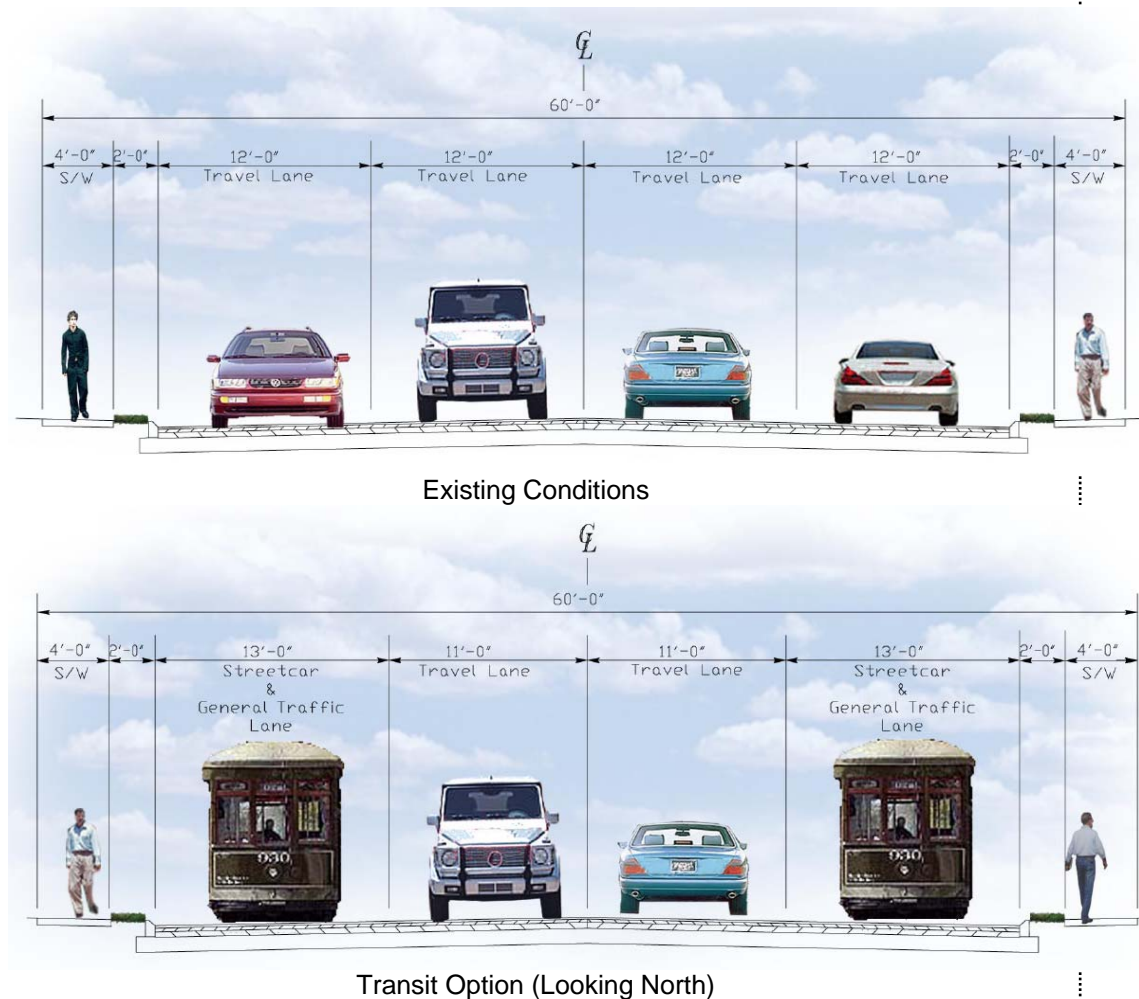


Clairemont Avenue

In the near term, conduct a study of enhanced transit service between Emory and downtown Decatur along Clairemont Avenue. Make improvements to bus stops and coordinate traffic signal timing including consideration of signal preemption for buses. In the long-term, with increases in ridership, consider transforming to a higher-frequency and higher level of transit service by investing in guideway (rails imbedded in pavement) and/or greatly enhanced stops.

Improved sidewalk facilities can be created in two steps. Step one is to improve bus stops within the existing right-of-way and enhance transit travel times and passenger amenities. A longer term project is to obtain private easements to widen sidewalks on private property as adjacent property owners request rezoning.

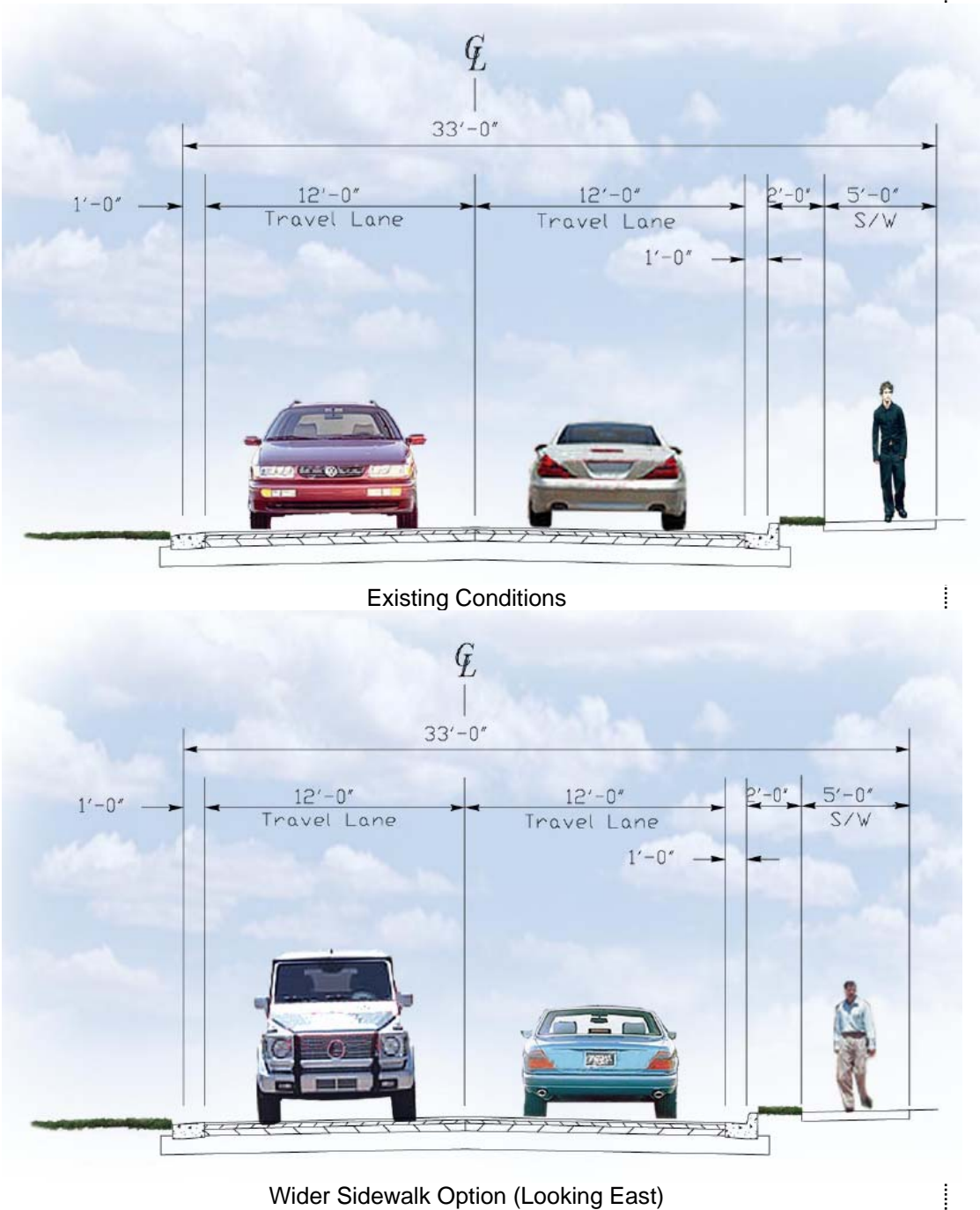
Figure 6-7 Clairemont Avenue (North of Commerce) Typical Sections



College Avenue

For College Avenue it is recommended to retime signals to minimize the number of stops for traffic traveling through the corridor on College Avenue. The following typical section details an option for a wider sidewalk installation.

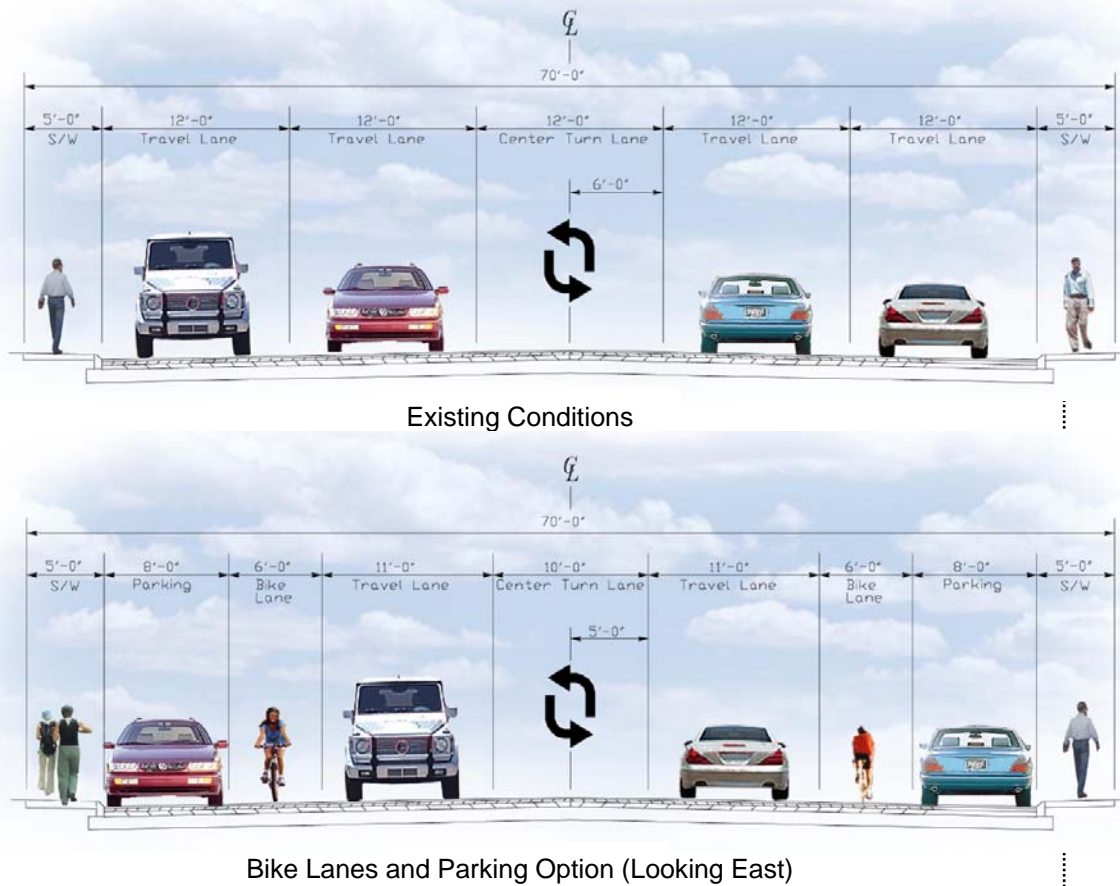
Figure 6-8 College Avenue (West of McDonough) Typical Sections



Commerce Drive

For Commerce, it is recommended to rebuild the street from West Howard Avenue through downtown to South Columbia Drive; reduce the number of lanes and redesign the street to promote slower speeds (25 to 30 mph). The recommended typical cross section is shown in Figure X.X. Careful attention is needed in the section between Clairemont Avenue and Church Street due to the high volume of automobile traffic.

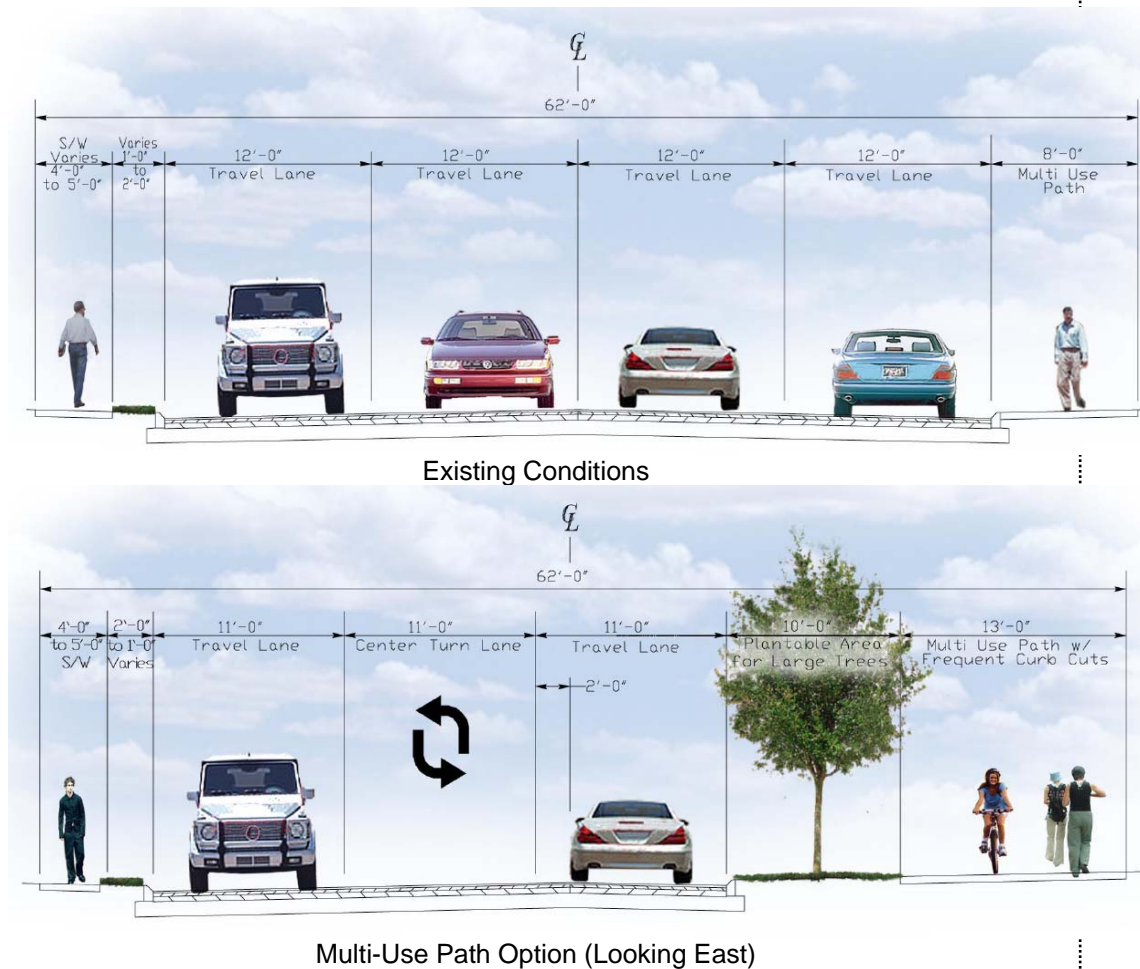
Figure 6-9 Commerce Drive (West Ponce to Clairemont) Typical Sections



Howard Avenue

For Howard Avenue, it is recommended to rebuild the street from Decatur High School parking lot to the western city limit, reduce the number of travel lanes and redesign the street to promote more access, and slower vehicular speeds, and increase walking and bicycling on the “Path” by widening the path and adding large street trees between the “Path” and Howard Avenue.

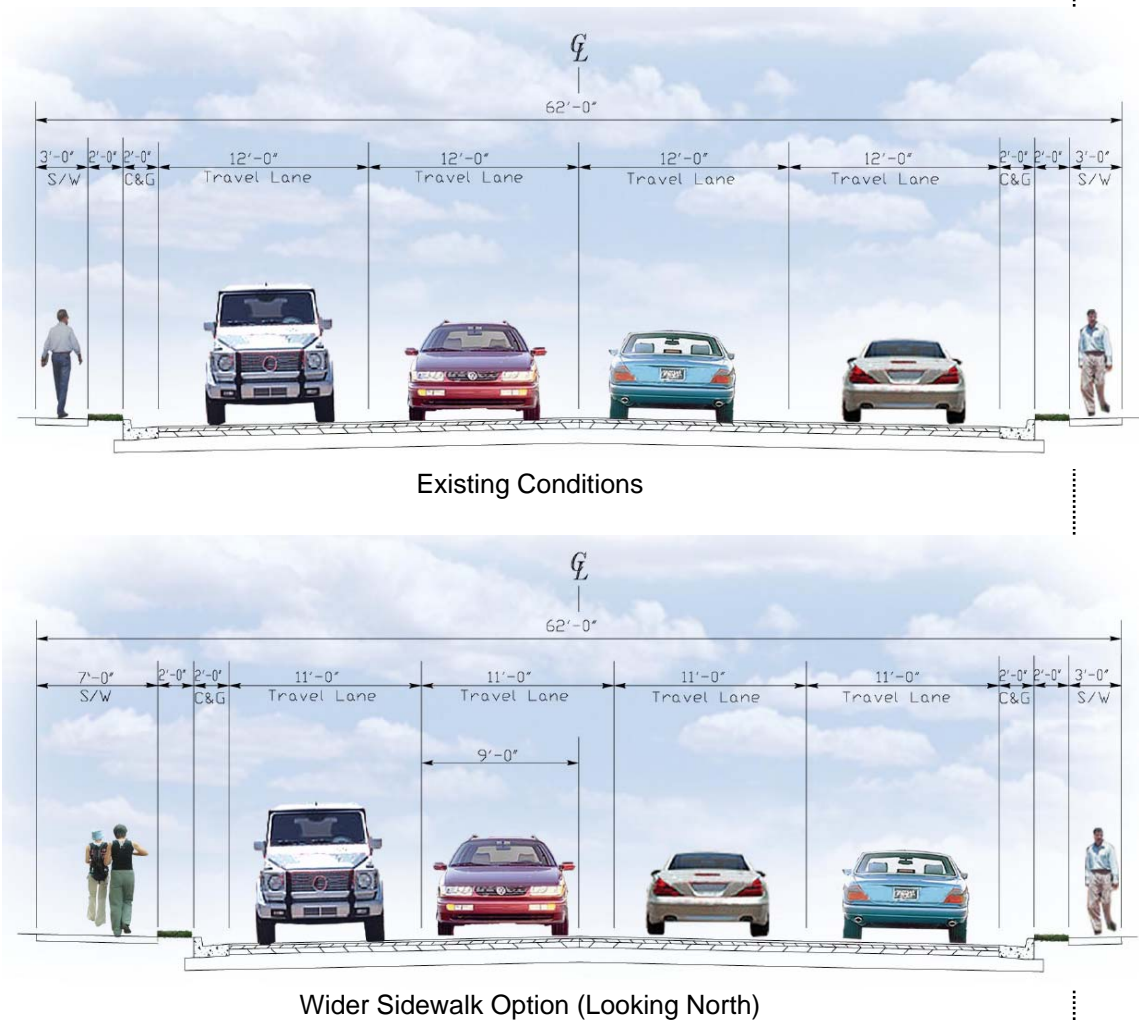
Figure 6-10 Howard Avenue (West of Decatur High School) Typical Sections



Scott Boulevard

Recommendation for Scott Boulevard is to widen the sidewalk on the northwest side of Scott Boulevard in sections designated as “Safe Routes to School” by acquiring easements from adjacent property owners.

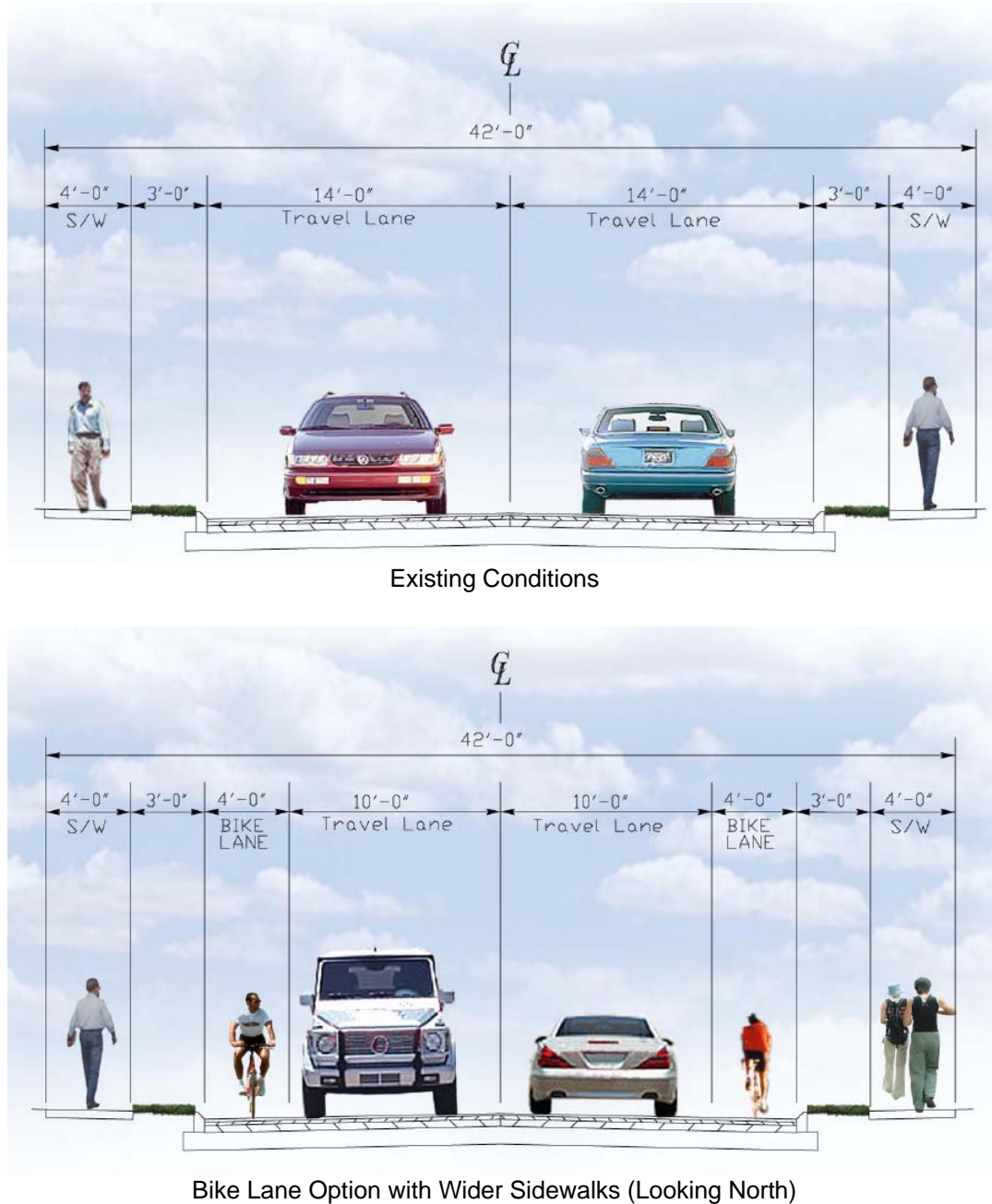
Figure 6-11 Scott Boulevard Typical Sections



South Candler Street -

For this corridor, it is recommended to restripe the street to narrow the two 14-foot wide lanes to 10-feet each and include four-foot wide bicycle lanes on both sides of the street. As noted in Intersections section, it is also recommended to initiate contact with Agnes Scott College to seek approval to widen the west side of South Candler Street south of College Avenue to add one more approach lane.

Figure 6-12 South Candler Street Typical Sections



In addition to the seven corridors the project team was contracted to examine, recommendations for several additional corridors are included below.

North McDonough Street

- Rebuild the street from College Avenue to West Trinity Place.
- Reduce the number of travel lanes and redesign the parking to provide over 100 new diagonal parking spaces on both sides of McDonough Street between the southernmost Decatur High School circular drive and the existing entrances to Chick-Fil-A (east side) and County building (west side).
- Provide one travel lane in each direction with no median.
- The existing curbs can be retained.
- Sidewalk and streetscape improvements are recommended.
- The new parking can be used to replace the existing Decatur High School parking lot which should be closed for traffic reasons (safety of left-turns across the railroad tracks) and could be torn up and replaced with a grassy field or student plaza area.



Ponce de Leon Avenue

- Rebuild the street west of Water Street and in spot locations such as at the intersection with Commerce Avenue.
- Add bicycle lanes and enhance pedestrian crossings west of West Trinity Place.

South Columbia Drive

- Build a multi-use path on one side of South Columbia Drive between College Avenue and Columbia Presbyterian Seminary to enhance pedestrian and bicycle safety and increase usage.

West Trinity Place

- Restripe the street between McDonough Avenue and the western city limit near Scott Boulevard to add bicycle lanes in each direction.