



Department of Transportation

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Subject: Mineral Point Road Widened Sidewalk
East West Bus Rapid Transit Project

Background

Madison's East West Bus Rapid Transit project extends 15 miles from Junction Road through East Washington Ave and onto East Spring Dr. About 2.5 miles of this BRT line travels on Mineral Point Road from the Beltline to Whitney Way. Currently Mineral Point Road has an established bikeway in the shared bike/bus lane as well as established sidewalks on the north and south sides.

The existing shared bus/bike lane is a deficient facility.

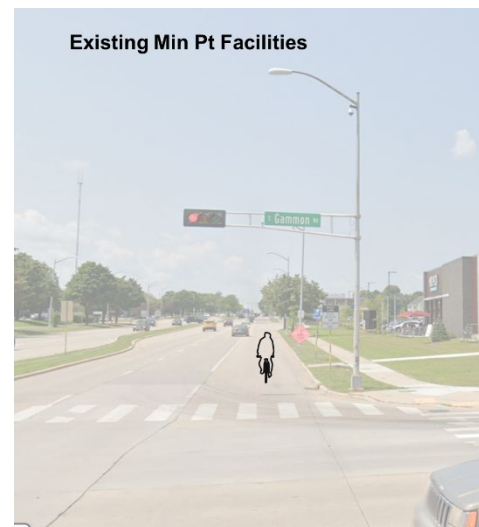
- There is no physical separation from a cyclist and a city street carrying over 30,000 vehicles per day.
- The cyclist must share/navigate around buses and turning vehicles.
- It is not an "All Ages and Abilities" facility – suitable for both children and elderly to use.

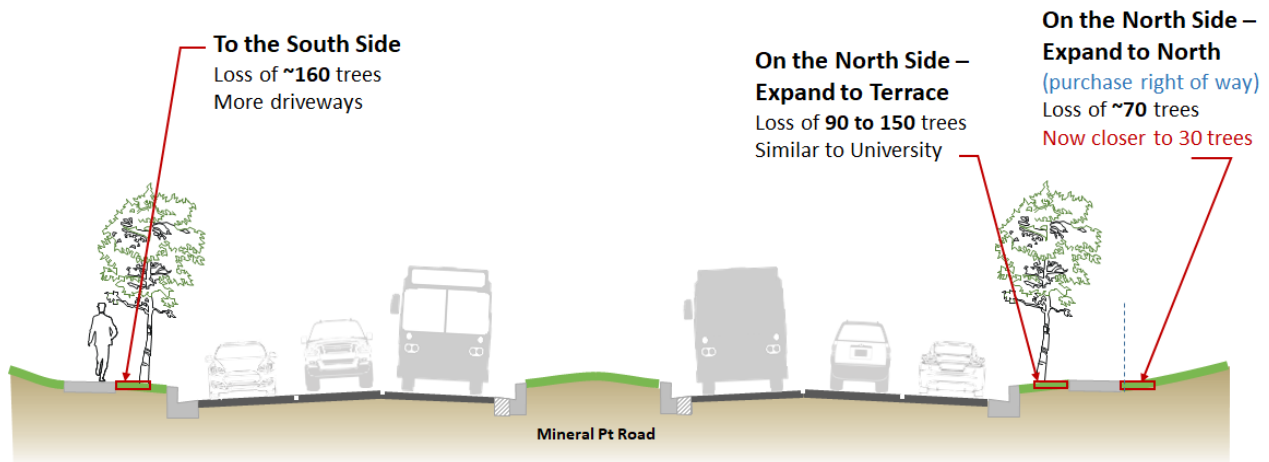
In the past 5 years there have been numerous bicycle crashes. Summer of 2022 was the most recent bicycle fatality resulting from this deficient facility. Most recently there was a bus/bicycle collision in October of 2023 – highlighting the challenges associated with a lane shared by buses, bikes, and right turning vehicles.

Adding to the complexity of the situation is the placement of the dedicated bus lane. The East West Bus Rapid Project determined that BRT should be center running for operational and efficiency reasons. The locally preferred alternative relocated the dedicated bus lane from side running (near the curb) to center running (near the median). Because center running bicycle facilities are extremely rare and do not conform to driver expectancy, the project incorporated a separate bicycle facility.

The BRT project proposes to accommodate cyclists through widening the sidewalk on the north side of Mineral Point Road. This accommodation is very similar to what has been provided on the north side of University Ave. This treatment provides a protected facility with a curb for both pedestrians and cyclists which conforms to All Ages and Abilities criteria.

Early in the project development process, several locations were evaluated for placement of the widened sidewalk, illustrated by the following graphic.





1. Widening the sidewalk on the south side of Mineral Point Rd appeared to impact more terrace trees, up to 160 trees. The south side has more intensive commercial uses with West Towne Mall and associated outlots, which could cause the widened sidewalk to experience more motor vehicle turning movements. Additionally, there are fewer residences and schools on the south side of Mineral Point Rd, providing more limited utility to school age youth.
2. Widening the sidewalk on the north side of Mineral Point Rd, into the terrace, would impact from 90 to 150 trees. The north side appears to have less intensive land uses, and the path would cross several areas with fewer driveways (Sunset Memory Gardens, Memorial High School, Nautilus Park/Drainage way, Garner Park). This could cause a sidewalk on the north side to experience fewer motor vehicle turning movements. Additionally, there are numerous residences and several schools on the north side of Mineral Point Road, with few continuous east-west neighborhood streets. A widened sidewalk on the north side of Mineral Point Road provides a residence to school connection without students having to cross Mineral Point Road twice.
3. Widening the sidewalk on the north side of Mineral Point Rd, north of the existing sidewalk, would require purchasing right of way but would reduce tree impacts. During the planning stage it was estimated that a widened sidewalk to the north would impact about 70 trees. With design refinements, that number has now been reduced to between 30 and 40 trees. A widened sidewalk in this location has similar advantages as the other north side location, traveling across less intensive land uses such as Sunset Memory Gardens, Memorial High School, Nautilus Park/Drainage Way, and Garner Park. It also provides similar connectivity between residences and schools for area students.

While the third alternative has the significant added cost and complexity of purchasing right of way, it was included in the Locally Preferred Alternative and Project plans because it had fewer overall impacts and better connectivity. This north side widened sidewalk is part of the City's negotiated agreement with the Federal Transit Administration and is part of the environmental document for the full East-West BRT project.

The Mineral Point Road Widened Sidewalk project is the last of three construction projects and is scheduled for 2024 construction. The scheduling of this project allowed the time needed to acquire right of way prior to bidding the project. The Project Plat and Relocation Order that are needed to begin right of way acquisition were approved by the Board of Public Works in May of 2023. Approval of geometry, plans, and bid package are scheduled for Transportation Commission November 8, 2023; Board of Public Works November 22, 2023; and Common Council December 5, 2023.

Recent Coordination and Controversy

Premature tree markings, neighborhood list serves, and media articles have recently drawn attention to the Mineral

Point Road Sidewalk Widening project and the loss of trees. While this attention resulted from some out-of-date plans and occurred prior to schedule, it did prompt staff attention and coordination to reduce tree impacts. This has resulted in the following refinements to the plan, which is part of the geometry and plans being proposed for approval.

Trees Removed

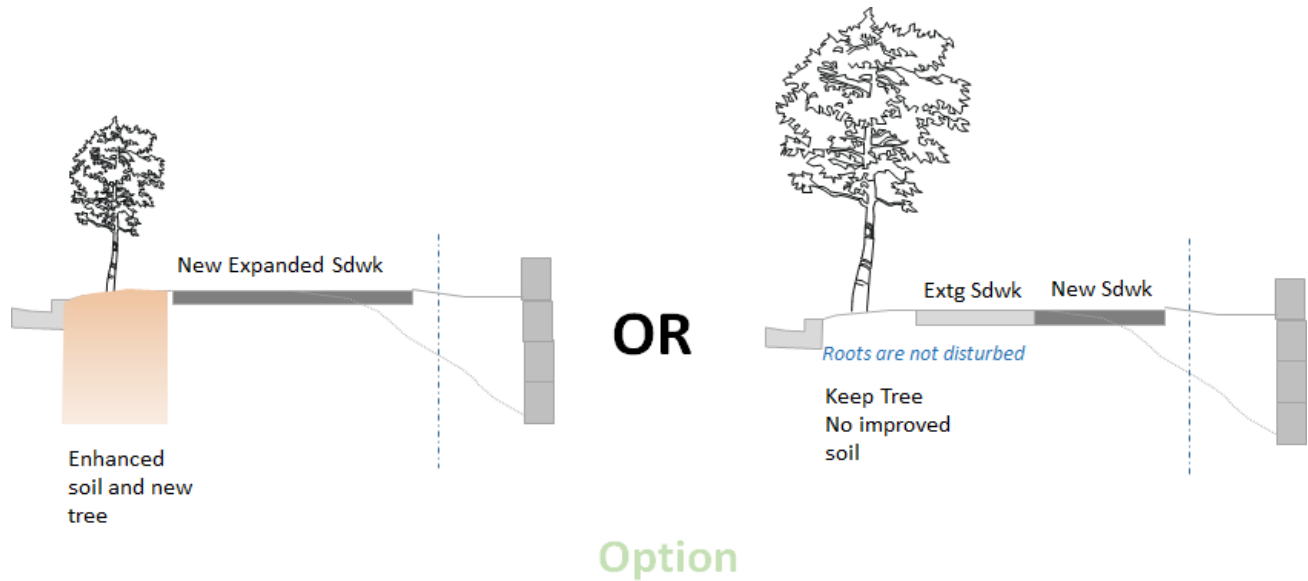
- 28 trees are proposed for removal, which amounts to roughly 11 trees per mile. Of these, 2 are 20 inches in diameter or above, 8 are between 12 and 20 inches, and 18 are 12 inches or below.
- Mitigation measures include removing a westbound bus travel lane near Garner Park for about 1000 feet to further reduce impacts
- Roughly 85% of the terrace trees on Mineral Point Road will be preserved.
- Reasons for tree removal include:
 - 11 trees removed at intersections to address sight distance issues as well as providing pedestrian/bike staging areas.
 - 2 trees removed at culverts.
 - 12 trees removed due to steep slopes.
 - 3 trees removed for other reasons (typically proximity to buildings/property lines)
- All removed trees will be replaced with a complementing species to promote intra-block tree diversity and canopy goals. The replacements will seek to be near the removal locations.



Example of trees preserved

Trees Proposed for Replacement with Better Soil Conditions

East of Randolph Drive (Sta 93+00) there is a series of 8 terrace trees, consisting mostly of 7” to 12” Norway Maples in front of a strip mall. The trees are of marginal health. It is technically possible for the widened sidewalk project to preserve these by maintaining the existing sidewalk in-place and adding another 5-foot sidewalk directly to the north. Forestry staff believe that both the project and the future tree canopy could benefit from fully removing the trees, improving soil conditions and replanting the trees with a different variety. With this option, the project would have a widened sidewalk without a center joint and the improved soil conditions would provide healthier trees with more canopy potential in a few years. This option is illustrated in the following graphic. While it is possible to save these trees, project staff and Forestry recommend replacing these trees with an improved soil terrace to produce better trees and canopy.



Areas Proposed for 5-foot Sidewalk

An 8 to 10 foot width is desired for a facility that accommodates multiple types of users, such as pedestrians, cyclists, strollers, wheel chairs, etc. Typical traveling widths for these users ranges from 2.5 to 4 feet, and they will need to be able to pass each other on this widened sidewalk. However, in discussions with multiple stakeholders, the project is proposing to maintain the existing 5-foot sidewalk at four locations, for a total of 800 feet in length, to preserve 16 trees ranging between 8” and 22” in diameter. The following table discusses the reduced sidewalk locations with narrative regarding the situation.

	Landmark	Length of 5' Sidewalk	Trees Saved	Narrative
Sta 89+00	Kwik Trip	150	3 (18”, 20”, and 15” Honey Locust)	This location abuts the Kwik Trip drive isle. Acquisition from Kwik Trip, and/or reducing driveways, would be difficult and affect their delivery vehicles.
Sta 134+50	Clock Tower	100	2 (22” and 8” Honey Locust)	This location is directly adjacent to a slope next to a parking lot. Widening is not possible without purchasing additional right of way which could include parking damages.
Sta 136+20	Clock Tower	100	2 (2x20” Honey Locust)	This location is directly adjacent to a slope next to a parking lot. Widening is not possible without purchasing additional right of way which would include parking damages.
Sta 155+00	Nautilus Park/Drainage Way	325	7 (3x12” and 4x15”-16” Honey Locust)	This section of sidewalk is adjacent to a sloped recently constructed detention pond, listed as a park/Section 4f resource in the BRT Environmental Document. The trees being preserved by this narrowing are healthy 12” to 16” Honey Locust trees of good health. Because this land is owned by the city, a future city project could conceivably widen the sidewalk.

	Landmark	Length of 5' Sidewalk	Trees Saved	Narrative
Sta 158+50	Isle of View Apts	125	2 (2x19" Honey Locust)	This section is in front of an apartment complex parking lot and directly east of the Nautilus Park sidewalk section. If in the near future the Nautilus Park sidewalk was widened, there would be value in having this section already widened. There would be parking damages associated with widening the sidewalk to the north inside of the Apartment Parking lot. For this section the most feasible option would be to widen the sidewalk into the terrace, which would remove the two trees.

Recommendation

City staff recommend the following actions:

- That the geometry, plans, and specifications be approved for bid and contracting that incorporate:
 - Maintaining the 5-foot sidewalk for 800 feet at four separate locations.
 - Replacing the 8 trees east of Randolph St with new trees and improved soil conditions.
- That city staff conduct more detailed analysis for a widened sidewalk near the Nautilus Park/Drainage Way.
- That city staff look for opportunities to address the 3 other sections of 5-foot sidewalk, perhaps through the City's bikeways program, and/or as redevelopment of the sites occurs