

The Plaza Road Diet (Bike Lane) Update

On May 31 the Charlotte Department of Transportation (CDOT) debuted their traffic calming design for The Plaza. It focused on 7 design attributes. They include:

1) Four to two lane reduction with a protected bike lane.

The CDOT design team made a great effort to learn from the May 2017 separated bike lane demonstration project. Through observation during the demonstration project, reviewing feedback gathered from the community, and analysis of collected data, CDOT recognized opportunity to improve safety on The Plaza by implementing this two lane conversion. The effect of this street conversion will have automobile traffic calming benefits, offer a dedicated protected bicycle facility, and provide pedestrians greater separation from automobile traffic. Although CDOT proposes to re-purpose a lane of traffic in each direction throughout the majority of the project, we recognize the need to maintain vehicular capacity at both the Central Avenue and Parkwood Avenue intersections with The Plaza. As such, CDOT will be making provisions at these intersections to benefit intersection traffic operations.

2) Installation of new crosswalks.

Currently there are limited pedestrian crossing opportunities along The Plaza. CDOT proposes to enhance the crossings at the existing Belvedere Avenue signal and add new crossings at two other locations. The first new location will be at Hamorton Place. This intersection's proximity to growing commercial and retail destinations along Central Avenue make it ideal for a crosswalk. CDOT recommends pedestrian enhancements that includes new curb ramps, a median refuge island, crosswalk markings, signage, and Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacons (RRF). The second location is tentatively at Chestnut Avenue. It is roughly the mid-point of The Plaza. This crosswalk would only consist of new curb ramps, a median refuge island, and signage.

3) Improved Central/The Plaza intersection and Connectivity to the Business district.

CDOT recommends modifications at the Central Avenue intersection. CDOT recognizes that this intersection has opportunity for improvement. First, CDOT will re-stripe the intersection to maintain the same number of vehicular lanes, but make the lanes 'skinnier' to be able to create new bike lanes. The cyclist will then be able to either merge into vehicular traffic or stay in the bike lane and enter a new bike ramp completely separate from vehicular traffic. Those who use the bike ramps will then cross the intersection using a Leading Pedestrian Interval (LPI) signal phase. A LPI typically gives pedestrians a 3–7 second head start when entering an intersection with a corresponding green signal in the same direction of travel. Additionally, CDOT will shave approximately 80 feet off of the center median to add more queuing for the southbound left turn lane. This will improve traffic flow.

4) New and Improved Signage will be installed.

There will be new signs added to enhance the new pedestrian and bicycle accommodations. CDOT will also assess the condition and placement of existing signs. They will make adjustments as necessary.

5) Install new intersection Curb Sections.

CDOT plans to add small concrete curbed islands which would introduce a vertical element to bike lane buffers and tighten the geometry at side road intersections. These curb extensions would visually and physically narrow the roadway, to tighten intersection curb radii and encourage slower vehicular turning speeds. In other words, it will force motorist to slow down by taking wider turns away from the bike lane.

6) Installation of new vertical buffers.

Along with the curb extensions, CDOT plans to implement vertical elements within the painted bike buffers. The exact location and arrangement of vertical elements is yet to be determined. Although challenges exist due to the numerous driveways and the need to allow access for city and other service providers, strategic placement of the buffers adds protection for the bike lane.

7) Improved Parkwood/The Plaza intersection.

At the Parkwood Avenue intersection, the southbound lanes of The Plaza will be reallocated to one vehicular travelled lane and one buffered bike lane (similar to the rest of the project). The northbound lanes will receive a slightly different treatment. The bike lane will end approximately 350 feet from the intersection. The cyclist will be able to either merge into vehicular traffic or use a new bike ramp to enter a new widened sidewalk / multi-use path, which will lead to intersection improvements associated with the Parkwood Avenue project.

It is an exciting time for Plaza Midwood residents. In a short period of time we will see a dramatic change for the better for one of our most iconic streets. We hope that will set the trend for further improvement on Central and connecting intersections.

Access the visual design at <http://charlottenc.gov/Projects/Pages/ThePlazaStreetConversion.aspx>

CDOT and PMNA is looking for your feedback. This is our neighborhood and your voice matters. Please use the above link to provide feedback.