

# City Sends Broadway ‘Complete Street’ Concept to VIA

by Robert Rivard  
March, 28 2014



A preliminary sketch of a redesign for Broadway Street as presented to VIA by the City of San Antonio.

Imagine Broadway as San Antonio’s showcase surface street, a leafy, tree-lined boulevard bustling with local residents, retail activity, and people on foot, pedaling bikes, and hopping off and on frequently passing streetcars. Vehicles would flow along the center two lanes with parking on both sides of the street buffering cyclists and pedestrians from motorized traffic.

Such a 21st century “complete street” transformation of Broadway is on the drawing boards and close to becoming reality. City of San Antonio officials have presented VIA planners working on Phase One of the Modern Streetcar project with a conceptual redesign of Broadway (see rendering above). City officials are recommending that VIA adopt the design.

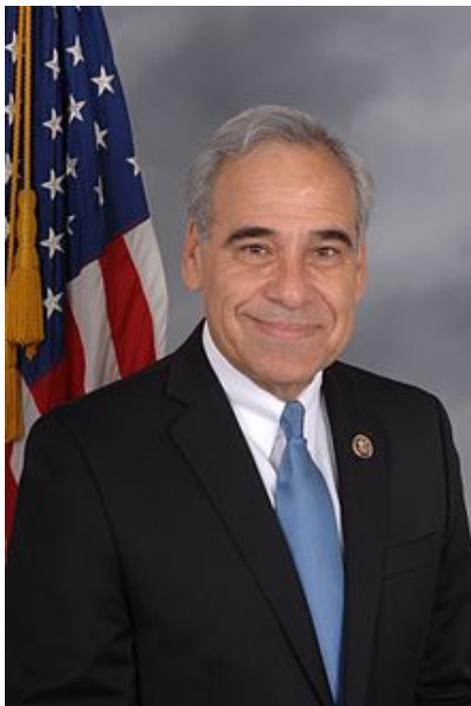
“The recommended cross-section for Broadway embraces the complete street concept and considers pedestrians, cyclists, parking opportunities, transit-riders and drivers,” said Lori Houston, director of the **Center City Development Office**. “The City recognizes that multi-modal transportation options are key to making Broadway a destination corridor and as such we worked to find a solution that maximized the available right of way and accommodated all users.”



*Lori Houston, director of the Center City Development Office. Photo by Al Rendon.*

The VIA board was meeting Thursday to consider vehicle designs and choices for its **Modern Streetcar project**.

Charles Gonzalez, VIA’s chief of public engagement, said transportation officials were enthusiastic about the city’s design.



*Former Texas Congressman and VIA’s Chief of Public Engagement Charlie Gonzalez*

“The complete street concept is something that VIA supports, big-time, because it really takes into account all modes of mobility and livability,” Gonzalez said.

“Streetcars and public transit in general are a key component. Discussions have been going on for some time with the city of San Antonio and the goal we share is to get the biggest bang for our dollar. This is the time for partnerships. This has to be a collaborative effort that includes all sectors.”

The city's conceptual rendering was shared at a Wednesday meeting organized by **Centro San Antonio**, the downtown non-profit that seeks to accelerate public-private center city development projects.

“Centro views modern streetcar as a transformative project that will contribute to the revitalization of neighborhoods along the route,” said Pat DiGiovanni, Centro's CEO. “A well-designed right-of-way, extending curb to curb, is one key ingredient to streetcar's success. We welcomed the opportunity to bring VIA, the City and the private sector together for discussions that we believe will lead to a quality design for Broadway and other portions of the Phase 1 route. It's the type of collaborative role that Centro was created to play.”

Private sector developers who have seen the conceptual rendering were enthusiastic about the city's comprehensive proposal that would accommodate moving and parked vehicles, northbound and southbound streetcars and protected cycling and pedestrian spaces. Tree plantings also would change the character of Broadway and provide a protective buffer between bipedal and vehicular traffic. The challenge is converting a 19th century street that was widened and redesigned at least once in the mid-20th century to serve as a 21st century thoroughfare.

“As a native San Antonian, I remember when the stretch of Broadway from downtown to Hildebrand seemed like the epicenter of San Antonio. It bustled with energy and commerce and was lined with iconic places like the Butter Krust bakery, Playland Park, Pearl Brewery, La Louisianne, Napel's, Christie's and a string of shiny auto dealerships,” said Bill Shown, the **Pearl's** managing director of real estate. “As our city expanded outward over time this part of Broadway became less important and less energetic, and longstanding businesses began shutting down or moving away. For most people the area became a place to travel through, not a place to travel to.

“That is all changing now,” Shown said. “There is a nationwide trend toward urban living, and people across a broad spectrum of ages and income levels are choosing to live in central city areas. San Antonio is in the early stages of this

shift, with major development activity happening along Broadway and in Southtown.”

A redesigned Broadway featuring streetcars and protected bike lanes and walkways would establish a greater sense of place and community, and likely would spur even greater development along the Broadway corridor and over to the nearby [Museum Reach of the San Antonio River](#), collectively known as [River North](#) .



*No tamalada would be complete without music. San Antonio celebrates the Tamales! Holiday Festival at the Pearl Brewery. Photo courtesy of atpearl.com.*

The area has seen, conservatively estimating, hundreds of millions of dollars in private sector investment since Kit Goldsbury and Silver Ventures bought the vacant Pearl Brewery in 2001 and welcomed its first tenants in 2006. The rebirth of the Pearl set off a development boom that has yet to slow, bringing more than 1,000 new residents into the Pearl and surrounding blocks. There are now more than a dozen restaurants at or near the Pearl along with numerous bars, coffee shops, and retail businesses.

More than 500 more multifamily units are under construction or in the planning phase nearby. The former Butter Krust bread factory has been converted to Class A office space and is now home to the corporate offices of **C.H. Guenther & Sons**. The **Children's Museum** is under construction farther north on Broadway, and the recently expanded **Witte Museum** is developing additional plans to grow and modernize.

“It’s critical to think of Broadway as a ‘gateway street’ into downtown and, therefore, important to embrace the ‘great streets’ concept,” said Ed Cross, a commercial real estate broker and multifamily project developer. “This would slow down the traffic all along Broadway and help make it a destination, a place people want to live and visit.”

VIA planners are now preparing an environmental study of Phase One of the Modern Streetcar project, which will run north and south on Broadway from Josephine Street to César Chávez Boulevard. That study should be completed by the fall when engineering studies will start. Construction is expected to start in late 2015 and finish in 2017.

## Streetcar Station Stops

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Example of Streetcar Station Stops on Broadway



Existing VIA Bus Stop

Critics of the line have suggested it would be more successful if it ran from the busy Broadway-Hildebrand Avenue intersection south through Southtown to the

Blue Star. Officials say there is no way to extend the line and stay within the budget. Even now, unsecured federal funding and some level of private sector financial support will be necessary to complete the Broadway line.

“If we want to see this area of town reach its full potential, now is the time for the City, County, CPS, SAWS and VIA to step up and make major infrastructure investments in the area to support and encourage revitalization and investment,” Shown said. “That will include increasing utility capacity and replacing aging utility lines to accommodate future development. Bury the power and telecommunication lines along Broadway and change Broadway into a world-class complete street. These smart, long-term investments would capitalize on current momentum and help create an irresistible vibrant urban core and pay dividends for years to come.”

## Concept 2 – Street Visualization



*One of several design options VIA is considering for the Modern Streetcar Project. Download more [here](#).*

The conceptual renderings were given to VIA just as city and transportation officials gathered in Fort Worth for the [Texas Trails and Active Transportation \(TTAT\) Conference](#), co-produced by the [Texas Trails Network](#) and [BikeTexas](#).

“Broadway is the target corridor for almost everything,” said Julia Murphy, special projects manager for the City of San Antonio’s Office of Sustainability, at the TTAT Conference. “It falls into all kinds of transportation plans,” including the [Bicycle Master Plan](#) and VIA’s Modern Streetcar route. San Antonio does have a complete street ordinance, but we’ve yet to see a street that truly embodies all the elements of a “complete street.”

The ordinance doesn’t technically require all streets to be “complete,” or accommodate all forms of transportation, rather it requires the *consideration* of bike lanes, wide sidewalks, etc. From the ordinance:

*“To achieve Complete Streets, all new construction and full reconstruction of City roadways (including public/private partnerships) will be planned, designed, constructed, and maintained to maximize the benefits to all users; with respect to the land use context; and with regard to the availability of right-of-way and cost.”*

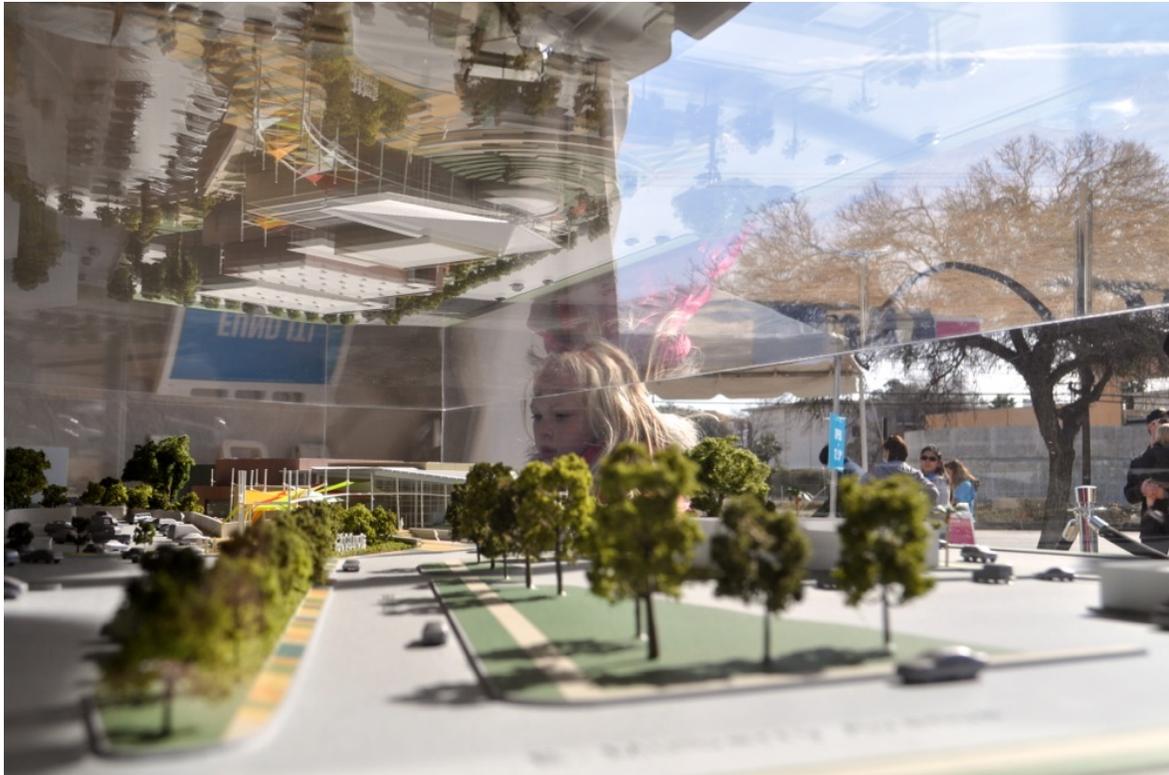
Houston Street comes close with its wide sidewalks, landscaping, and human-scale signage and design, Murphy said, but it’s not a route any novice cyclist would navigate, especially during rush hour.

This ambitious approach to the redevelopment of Broadway signifies the City’s start to tackle major projects in the vein of bicycle connectivity. With much of the “low hanging fruit” of striping lanes and signage already plucked, it’s time for the more visible and more complicated projects to start coming before the public and City Council for review.

[Read more: [The High-Hanging Fruit: Broadway’s Complete Street Potential](#)]

“There are a lot of stakeholders on Broadway,” Murphy said. Users include residents, commercial business, commuters, visitors that travel mainly by car – but foot and bike traffic from The Pearl, the San Antonio Museum of Art, new bars

and restaurants and the coming-soon San Antonio Children’s Museum/Do Seum could easily justify further development of the “**Broadway Reach**,” a cultural corridor.



*A young girl peers over Lake/Flato Architects’ model of the future Do Seum (San Antonio Children’s Museum). Photo by Iris Dimmick.*

Ideas and projects just like the Broadway Street redesign are being shared this week at the TTAT Conference. The timing couldn’t be better for these representatives to spread the word of San Antonio’s achievements (B-cycle, Síclovia, and the Museum and Mission Reaches) while absorbing lessons learned from what’s being tried in other communities.

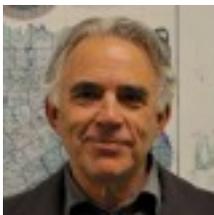
“The city of San Antonio can be very proud when this cycle track (on Broadway) is implemented,” said **BikeTexas Executive Director Robin Stallings** at the conference. “Great cities like Chicago and New York are a bit ahead of us, but this is a step toward the separated bike lane network that will put San Antonio up there with the best.”

More than 70 sessions with expert speakers and hundreds of attendees – policy makers, planning officials, avid riders, and other stakeholders – over three days makes downtown Fort Worth the place to be for bike advocacy and planning. San Antonio is well represented.



Murphy, who is also on the board of the Texas Trails Network and [Texas Bike Advisory Committee](#), is in Fort Worth with fellow city representatives Brandon Ross, [Parks and Recreation](#) special projects manager; Allison Blazosky, [San Antonio-Bexar County Metropolitan Planning Organization](#) bicycle/pedestrian transportation planner; Matthew Driffill, [SARA](#) recreation superintendent; John Osten, senior urban planner for the City; Krista Sherwood with the National Park Service in San Antonio; Katherine Velasquez of the [Active Living Council of San Antonio](#); Timothy Mulry, senior planner of [Sustainable Transportation for the City](#) and Justin Moore, league cycling instructor at [Streetwise San Antonio](#).

“This (conference) has been so reinvigorating for us,” Murphy said between sessions. “It’s energizing and we feel reaffirmed that we’re heading in the right direction.”



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