

THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF ART

March 8, 2016

Dear Fellow Citizen:

In an effort to optimize the remarkable opportunity Albuquerque currently has to create a state-of-the art, maximally functional Albuquerque Rapid Transit (ART) system, the following observations and recommendations are offered for your consideration and for consideration by Albuquerque's Mayor, City Council and Transit Department.

The current ART design fails to adequately address several important contemporary planning principles commonly identified as key success criteria for modern urban transit systems. When properly incorporated, these design elements become major contributors to economic development, innovation and community vitality, in addition to facilitating efficient transportation for citizens and tourists throughout the community.

In his March 7, 2016 ABQ Journal Op-Ed, "*Transit is Only Part of Process*", Rob Dickson points out that in order for ART to comply with Albuquerque's "Complete Streets Ordinance" it must be designed to assure that "walking, cycling, riding ART and driving are equally safe and convenient." City Councilor Isaac Benton reinforced the importance of ART's compliance in a recent letter to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The City needs to demonstrate how ART will comply. Failing to do so sub-optimizes ART's potential contribution and the use of \$119 million taxpayer dollars.

Extensive analysis of the ART Plan has been undertaken by a number of Albuquerque citizens and City leaders over the last months revealing significant problems with the ART design. Some of the most meaningful and objective analysis of the current ART Plan has been guided by one of the Country's important urban designers, Emeritus Professor Paul Lusk. Prof. Lusk has worked on urban design projects in a number of major US cities, in addition to having an intimate knowledge of our community and its challenges. He authored the first Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Comprehensive Plan in the early 1970's and has continued to work as an urban design professional in New Mexico for over 40 years.

Prof. Lusk has identified several design problems with the current ART design, the most fundamental of which is:

- ART's dedicated center double bus lane design cannot be adequately accommodated in certain historically sensitive sections of Central Avenue. The existing width ("Right-of-Way") of Central Ave in these areas is simply too narrow to utilize this "one size fits all" approach to the entire Central Avenue corridor.

Sections A & B below identify how this design problem will impact our community in addition to recommending design modifications that need to be made to the current ART Plan. The problems and recommendations described below were identified in writing and at a meeting last year with the ABQ Transit Department and subsequently with other City officials, along with detailed sketches and renderings prepared by Prof. Lusk and others. Unfortunately, detailed ART Plans were not available to the public until late 2015, well beyond the period during which the City was conducting some public input meetings. Thus the public was precluded from engaging in more than conceptual conversations regarding the 'intent' of the ART design.

A. UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF "SQUEEZING" A DEDICATED CENTER DOUBLE BUS LANE DESIGN INTO CERTAIN SECTIONS OF CENTRAL AVENUE:

In an attempt to make ART "fit" into narrower sections of the Central Avenue corridor, the City's design consultants had to make certain design compromises that produce several undesirable consequences including:

- **The squeezing** of automobile traffic lanes, bus lanes, bike lanes, rumble strips, trees, landscaping & sidewalks into a street corridor that is not wide enough to adequately accommodate this design, (See Figure 1 of Attached diagrams)
- **Reduction of the dedicated ART bus lanes** to single, bi-directional lanes for both east and westbound buses, for 1 ½ miles of the total ART corridor, thereby requiring one bus to wait until the approaching bus passes, causing a probable increase rather than a reduction in total transit travel time across town, one of ART’s stated objectives, (See Figure 2)
- **Elimination of +/- 194 parking spaces**, many in dense retail clusters of small, local businesses, (See Figure 3)
- **Removal of +/- 217 mature trees**, 40 of them in the short distance between Bryn Mawr and Adams in Nob Hill, plus removal of additional mature landscape, (See Figure 4)
- **Addition of 10 new traffic signals**, for a total of 43 signals on the entire Central Avenue route, and increasing the number of phases to accommodate the new ‘bus-thru-first’ phase plus a separate “safe pedestrian crossing” phase for each of these signals, thereby likely causing further delay of ART buses, (See Figure 6)
- **Significantly more difficult access** to Central Avenue & side street businesses and services due to elimination of +/- 241 left turns from side streets, parking lots, as well as both east and westbound lanes. (See Figure 7),
- **Delays for all traffic** in the single-lane, mixed-traffic lanes. e.g. When other ABQRide local buses stop, with no bus-bay to load or discharge passengers and bicycles in the single traffic lane, and
- **Compromised emergency** vehicle access.

Based on the current ART design, as well as presentations made at recent public meetings, it appears that City officials may not have recognized the above problems and their adverse consequences.

ART represents a once in a lifetime opportunity to significantly enhance the walkability and beauty of historically significant sections of Route 66, one of Albuquerque’s most valuable assets. It is important that we maximize this opportunity to enhance ART’s design to address the above issues which can be accomplished via relatively easy design modifications that would not only make ART more functional, more beautiful and more innovative, but potentially could simultaneously reduce construction costs associated with the current design as well. If we are going to spend \$119 million taxpayer dollars on a major transit system upgrade, shouldn’t we be optimizing the full potential of this remarkable opportunity?

B. DESIGN MODIFICATION RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:*

- **Continuation of the dedicated center double bus lane design** in the wider, eastern & western sections of Central Ave,
- **Extension of the curbside design**, as is shown in the Downtown portions of the ART design, through the narrower portions of Central Ave., from Lomas Blvd. to 8th St., and in the historically pedestrian and business oriented sections from Broadway to near San Mateo Blvd. (including Nob Hill), using the same ART buses equipped with electronic signal priority controls for rapid in-and-out of bus-bays,
- **Significant widening of most sidewalks**, beyond what is shown in the current ART design, especially in these narrower sections of Central Ave. thereby substantially improving “walkability” and overall aesthetics,
- **Preservation of +/- 194 parking spaces** currently targeted to be eliminated between Old Town and Washington St.,
- **Preservation of +/- 217 mature trees** and landscaping currently targeted for elimination, and planting of additional trees & landscaping in the now-widened sidewalks,
- **Resolution of at least some of the compliance issues** with Albuquerque’s “Complete Streets Ordinance” (e.g. improvement & expansion of sidewalk widths, maintenance of on-street parking, retention of adequate vehicular lane widths & traffic flow---including pull-over space in most single-lane sections for emergency vehicle bypass, and increasing connections with existing ABQRide buses),
- **Resolution of at least some of the concerns** expressed by Central Avenue business owners & others, (e.g. easier access & parking)
- **Enhanced economic vitality** in currently challenged districts by relocating bus stations closer to major arterial intersections to facilitate N/S bus-route passenger connections, and
- **Safety improvements** resulting from increasing curbside access (for at least half of all bus passengers) vs. requiring passengers to cross (at least half of Central Avenue) to get to & from the center bus lanes.

*See attached 3-way comparison sketches illustrating the **current** street design, the **proposed** ART street design & **recommended** design modifications in two locations.

C. AND “WHAT IF” THE CITY WERE JUST A BIT MORE CREATIVE IN DESIGNING ART? FOR EXAMPLE, “WHAT IF” ART WAS DESIGNED TO:

- **Feature Historic Route 66** as its predominant theme, and distinguish it from future ART Rapid Transit corridors in Albuquerque, thereby enhancing, in this first corridor, a key component of Albuquerque’s cultural identity?
- **Be an integral component of Albuquerque’s “Innovate ABQ”** initiative? (e.g. Pursuing innovative design elements such as high-efficiency, low-operating-cost electric buses, potentially powered by Albuquerque-based photovoltaic arrays, similar to examples previously submitted to the Transit Department, & Planning for soon-to-be autonomous driving vehicles.)
- **Expand the current partial-grid transit system** into a simplified N/S grid that is conceptually clear to bus patrons, and is intentionally designed to address environmental and social justice inadequacies of the present system similar to the effort currently underway in Houston?
- **Be so exciting, safe and beautiful** that, in addition to being a highly functional public transit system, tourists would choose to take ART for a ride around Albuquerque, perhaps even an overnight stay, prior to heading to Santa Fe?
- **Include a “Cultural Center Loop”** that transported tourists and citizens to key cultural sites, unique to Albuquerque, such as the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, the National Hispanic Cultural Center, Old Town, our unique and outstanding museums, and the nationally acclaimed ABQ Bio Park and Rio Grande Botanic Garden?
- **Include an iconic and memorable “Gateway” ART station** and welcoming entrance to Albuquerque from the East at Tramway and from the West at Unser? (See attached rendering, Example #3) NOTE: This assumes that there would be a cost savings as a result of implementing the simplified, less utility-disrupting, curbside design recommended above in some sections of Central Ave. (See attached cross-section examples) The extension of ART from Louisiana to Tramway and from Coors to Unser would create a “complete” ART Transit corridor, and a clear basis to allow economically sound decisions regarding station locations and appropriate development decisions at key station locations. As presently designed, starting at Coors on the West and Louisiana on the East, the “complete system design” seems unclear, deterring sound development location decisions. It would be prudent to extend ART even if there were no significant cost savings from the recommended design modifications.
- **Include other features such as:** 21st Century electric-bus design, enhanced sidewalks allowing space for café tables, planters, appropriately-scaled trees, and street furniture buffered by full parking-bay spaces that are so attractive that it becomes the preferred means of local transportation for a whole new cadre of citizens, thereby overcoming the historic cultural resistance to riding a bus in Albuquerque?
- **Be an integral part of a long term comprehensive Metropolitan Area Transit Plan** to avoid potential future costly retrofits?

The above findings & recommendations are offered in the spirit of helping the City optimize our prospects for the most functional & attractive rapid bus transit system possible. Many fellow citizens have been working diligently to improve ART’s design and its impact on our community. I am requesting that the City seriously consider incorporating the recommendations above into the final ART Plan.

Sincerely,
David E. Vogel
Albuquerque Citizen

WHY A.R.T. WILL LIKELY NOT MEET STATED GOALS

If built as designed, ART likely will not meet some primary components of Mayor Berry’s vision and the goals stated in the ART Plan, e.g. faster ride times & more predictable stop times. The basic problem arises from imposing a “one size fits all” design in right-of-ways that vary from 70 feet in Downtown to 100 feet in other areas. As presently designed, several historic neighborhoods along Central Avenue would be negatively impacted by changes in various aspects of the streetscape such as parking, bicycle lanes and trees. The following maps show where the right-of-way variations and other problems occur and how these negatively impact Central Avenue.

This data is taken directly from the ART Project plan drawings and compared to 2014 aerial photos of Central Avenue for the length of the Project.

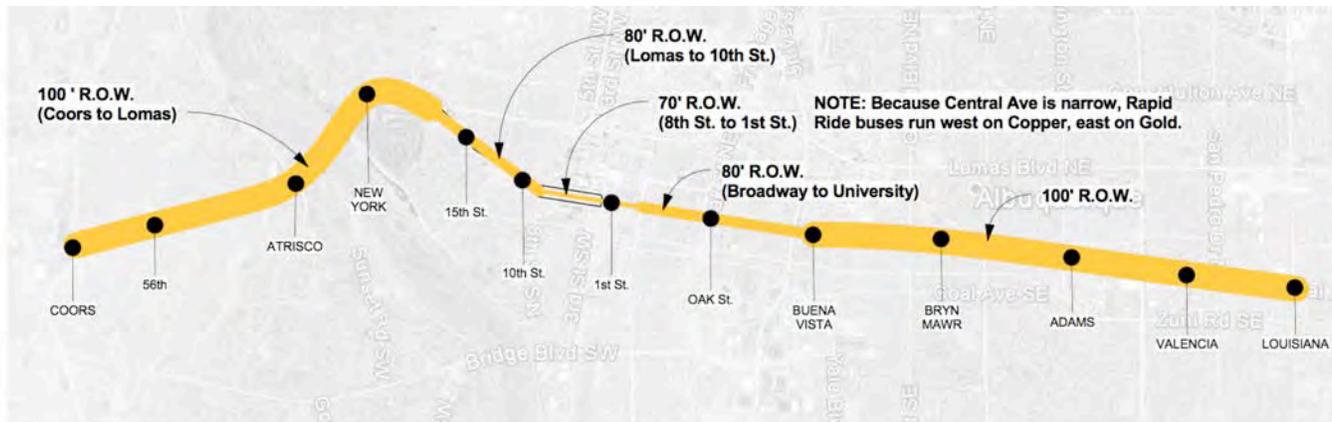


Figure 1 RIGHT OF WAY: Existing right of way width changes along Central Avenue.



Figure 2 REVERSIBLE LANES: Areas where the ART buses will be restricted to a single lane for both eastbound and westbound service. This presents scheduling problems with potential delays if a westbound bus would have to wait for the eastbound bus to pass before proceeding, and vice versa.

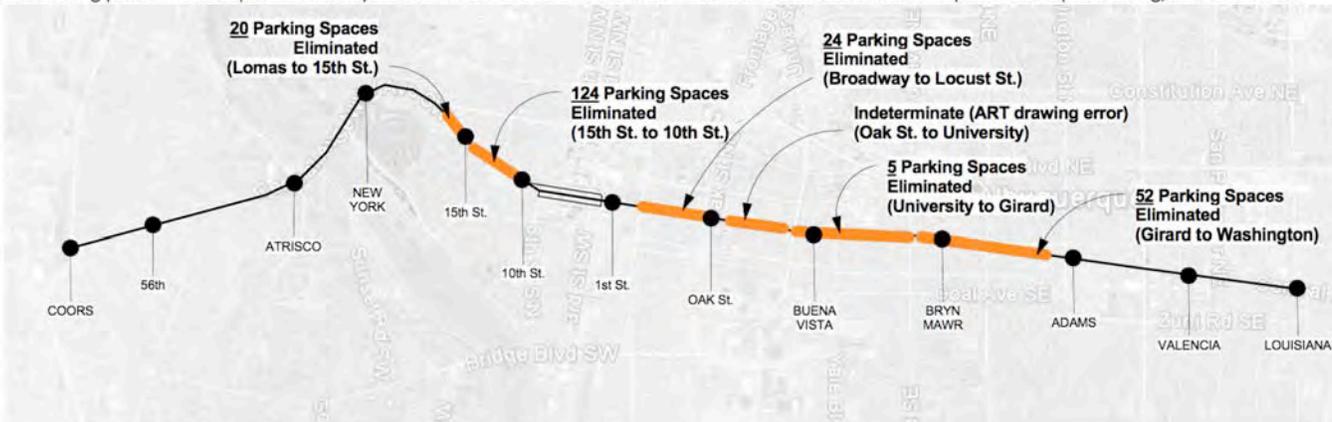


Figure 3 PARKING SPACES: 194 parking spaces would be lost as a consequence of ART.

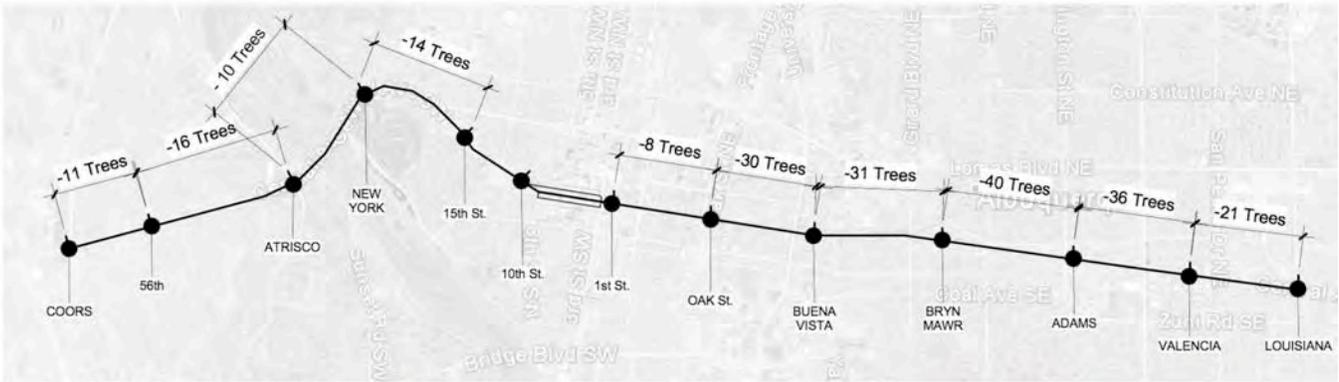


Figure 4 TREES: Approximately 217 existing mature trees would be cut down to accommodate ART.

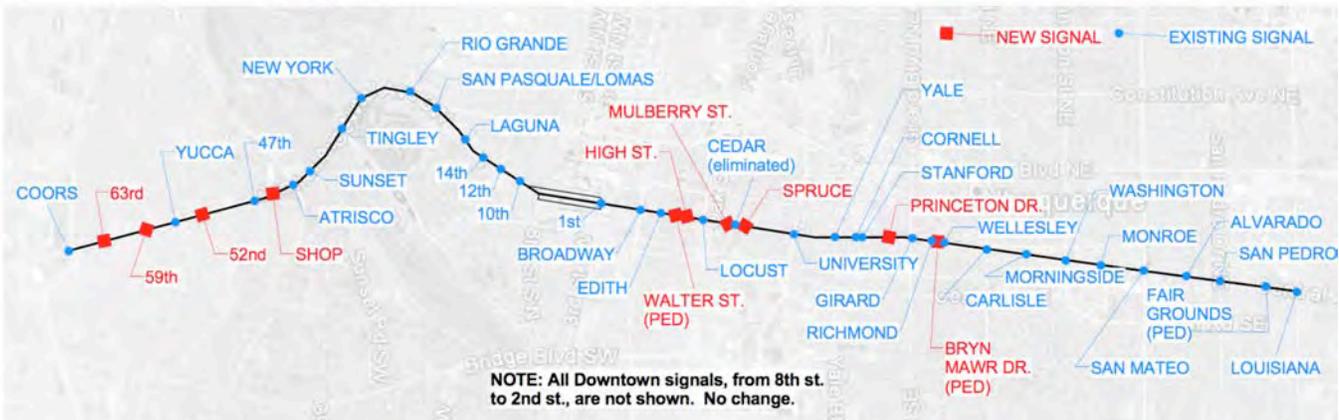


Figure 6 TRAFFIC SIGNALS: From the ART Project plan drawings, 10 new traffic signals would be added to the 32 signals that currently exist on Central Avenue for a total of 42 signals on the 9-mile total Project length.

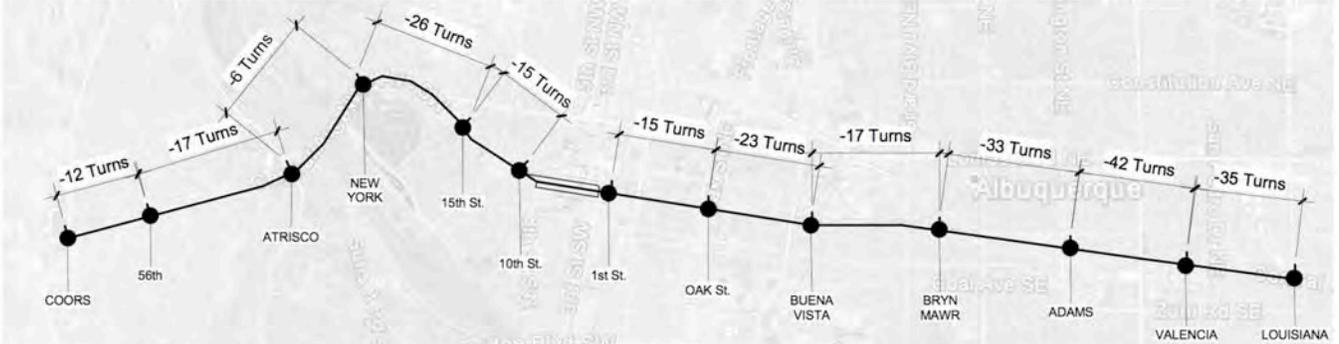


Figure 7 LEFT TURNS: Approximately 241 left turns would be lost, which would severely restrict business accessibility on Central Avenue. This number includes left turns for westbound and eastbound traffic.

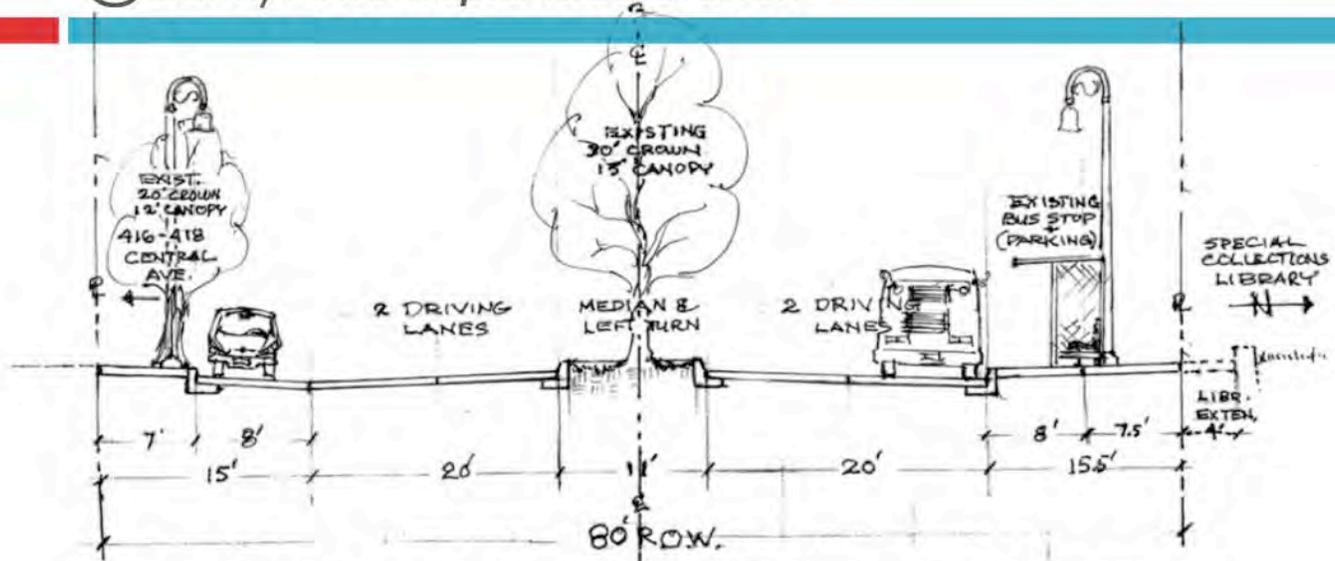


Figure 7 RECOMMENDED DESIGN CONFIGURATION: From Lomas to San Mateo, use same ART Rapid Transit buses, sidewalk access, retains all medians, keeps most of parking, expands pedestrian area. Money saved can extend ART to Unser and Tramway within present budget.

Existing Condition

EDO

@ Edith/Arno Rapid Ride Station

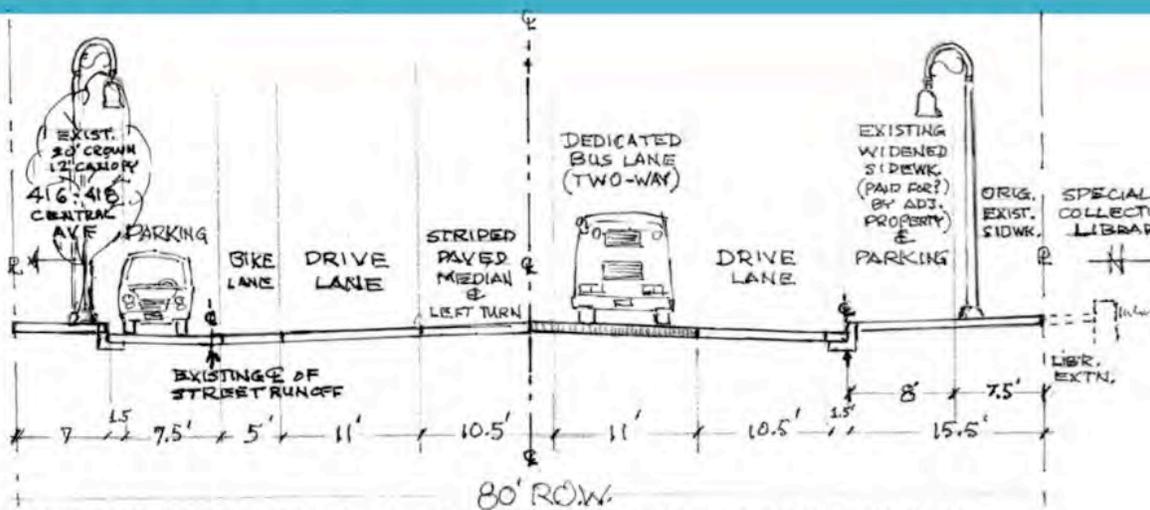


RAPID RIDE AND RT 66 BUSES PRESENTLY STOP IN FRONT OF THE SPECIAL COLLECTIONS LIBRARY

ART Project (as designed)

EDO

@ Edith/Arno location

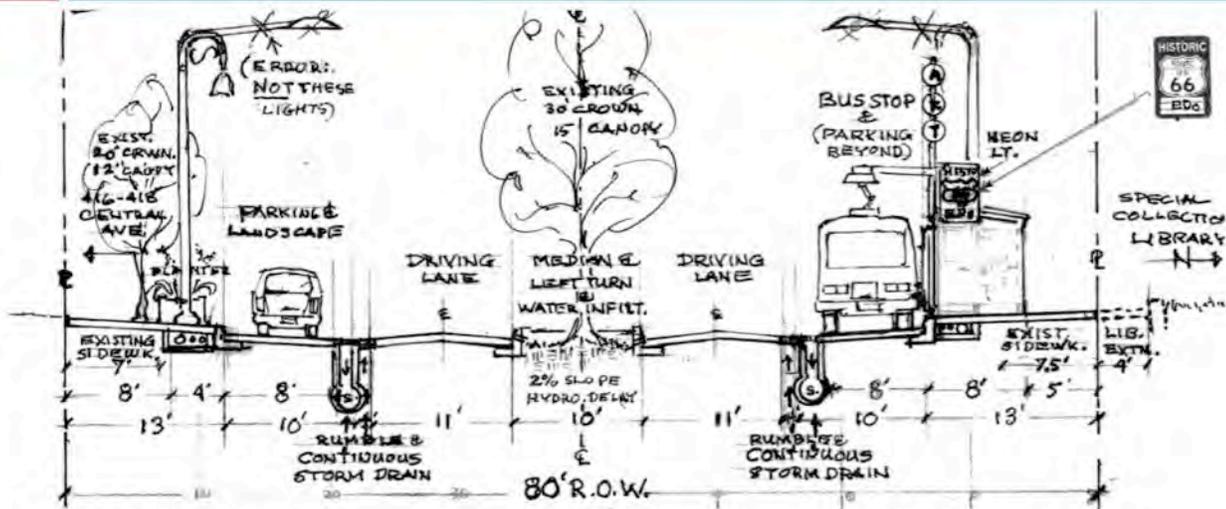


ALL EXISTING TREES WILL BE REMOVED. THERE IS NO PROVISION FOR WIDER SIDEWALKS OR STREETSCAPE ELEMENTS. SINGLE EAST AND WESTBOUND LANES WILL ACCOMMODATE RT 66 BUSES AND ALL OTHER VEHICLES. DIESEL BUSES ARE INDICATED.

Proposed

@ Edith Station

EDO

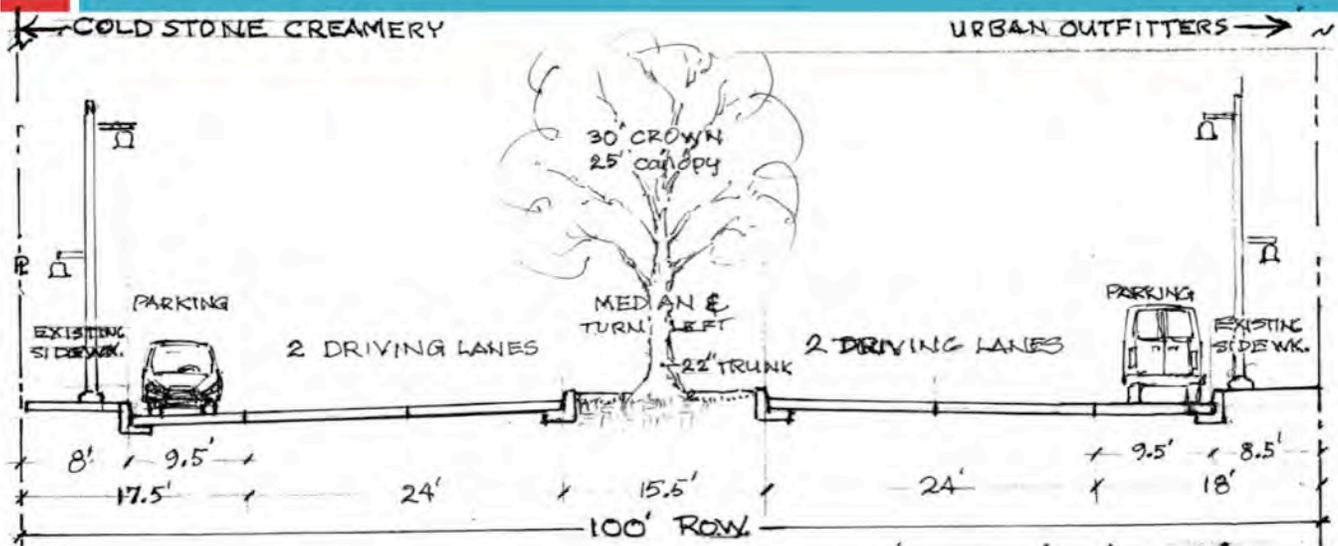


CONCERNED CITIZEN'S PROPOSAL SHOWS THE SAME INTERSECTION WITH LANDSCAPE AND TREES DEFINING THE CHARACTER AND PEDESTRIAN NATURE OF THE DISTRICT. EXISTING STORM INLETS MAY NOT HANDLE INCREASED RUN OFF OF ART DESIGN. ELECTRIC BUSES ARE INDICATED.

Existing Condition

Nob Hill

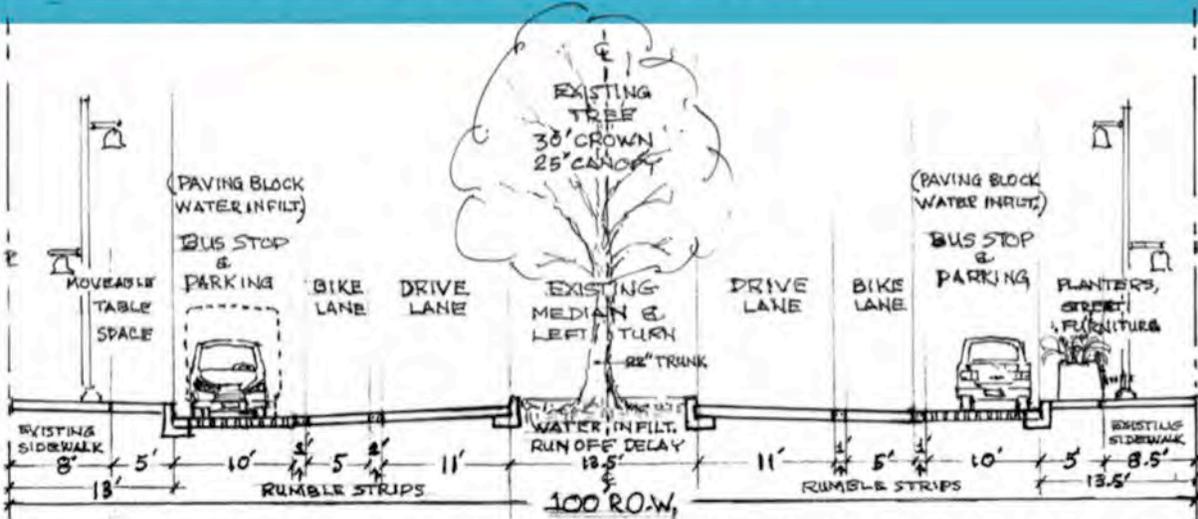
@ Bryn Mawr/Wellesley Location



Proposed

Nob Hill

Electric Buses/Wider Sidewalk Access

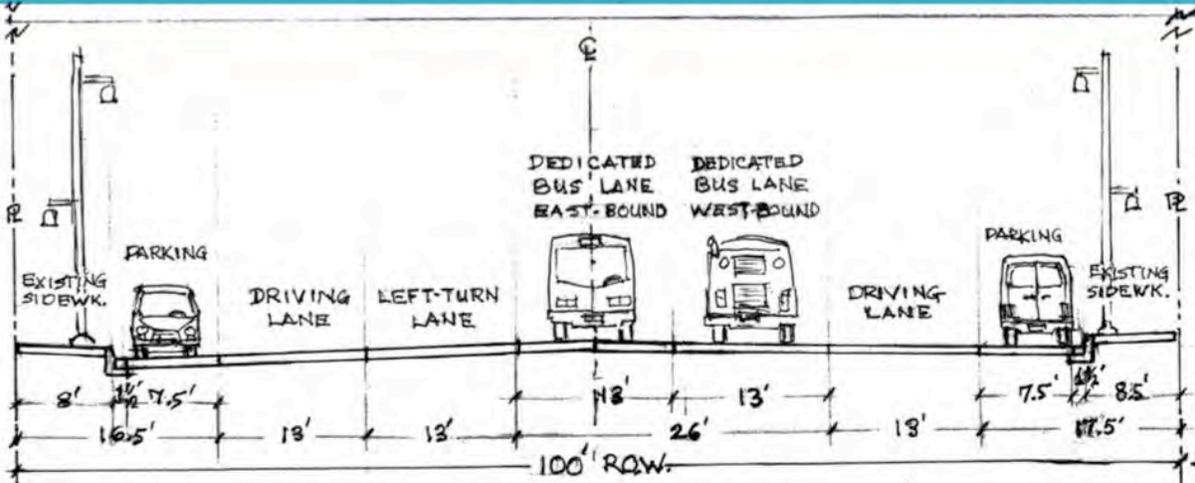


CONCERNED CITIZEN'S PROPOSED DESIGN FOR NOB HILL SHOWS WATER RUN OFF VOLUME AND VELOCITY REDUCED. BIKE LANES CAN BE USED BY VEHICLES IN SINGLE LANE TO ALLOW EMERGENCY RESPONDERS TO PASS. LANDSCAPE DEFINES THE SHOPPING AND PEDESTRIAN CHARACTER OF THE DISTRICT. ELECTRIC BUSES ARE INDICATED.

ART Project (as designed)

Nob Hill

@ Bryn Mawr/Wellesley Section



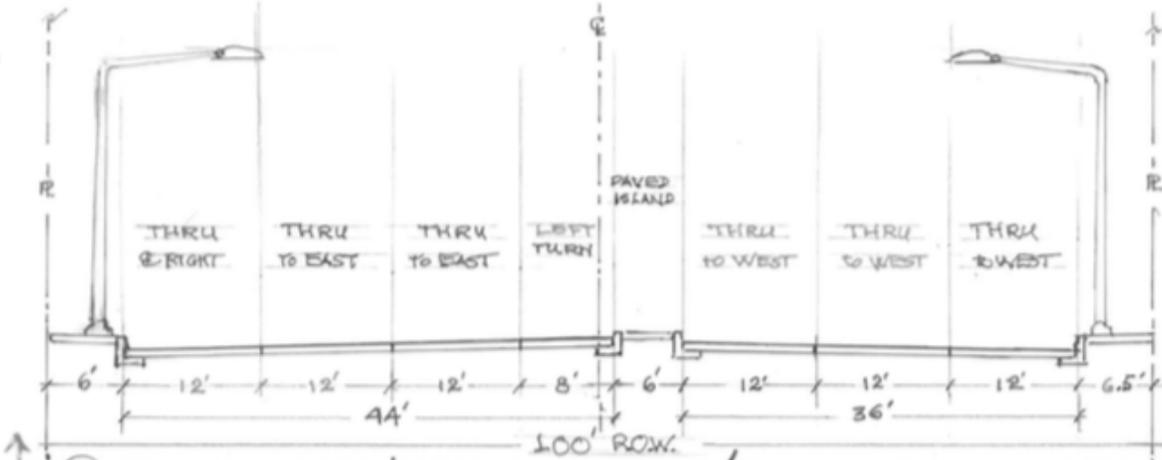
ALL MEDIAN TREES ARE REMOVED WITH NO LANDSCAPE SUBSTITUTIONS SHOWN. (THIS IS THROUGHOUT MOST OF NOB HILL). NO BIKE LANES ARE SHOWN. SIDEWALKS ARE NOT WIDENED EXCEPT FOR A FEW BLOCKS WEST OF SAN MATEO. NO SPACE FOR EMERGENCY RESPONDERS IS PROVIDED. INCREASED CAPACITY FOR WATER DRAINAGE/RUN OFF IS NOT SHOWN. DIESEL BUSES ARE INDICATED.

xc 3/9/16

CENTRAL AVE. - Compared Sections

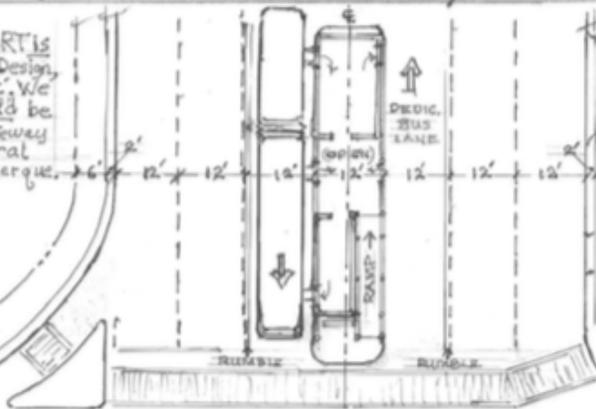
Example: Tramway (or Unser), Gateway to Albuquerque

3) Tramway Blvd. Intersection - New Transit Station



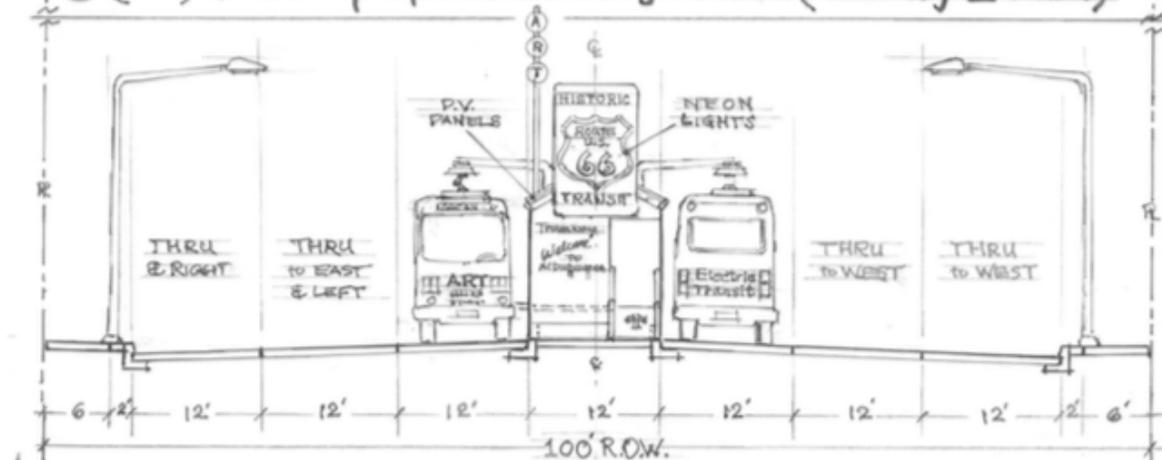
T Existing Condition @ Central/Tramway Intersection

We believe that ART is a long-term Urban Design, not just a Transit. We propose that it could be the Welcoming Gateway to the rich cultural diversity of Albuquerque.



We also believe that the cost savings by using the C.C.G. sections in 1 & 2 could allow extending the dedicated Center-Lane portion to Tramway & Unser.

T (C.C.G.) Plan of proposed Gateway Station (Tramway or Unser)



T (C.C.G.) Proposed Gateway Transit Station & Welcome

Concerned Citizens Group 3/1/16