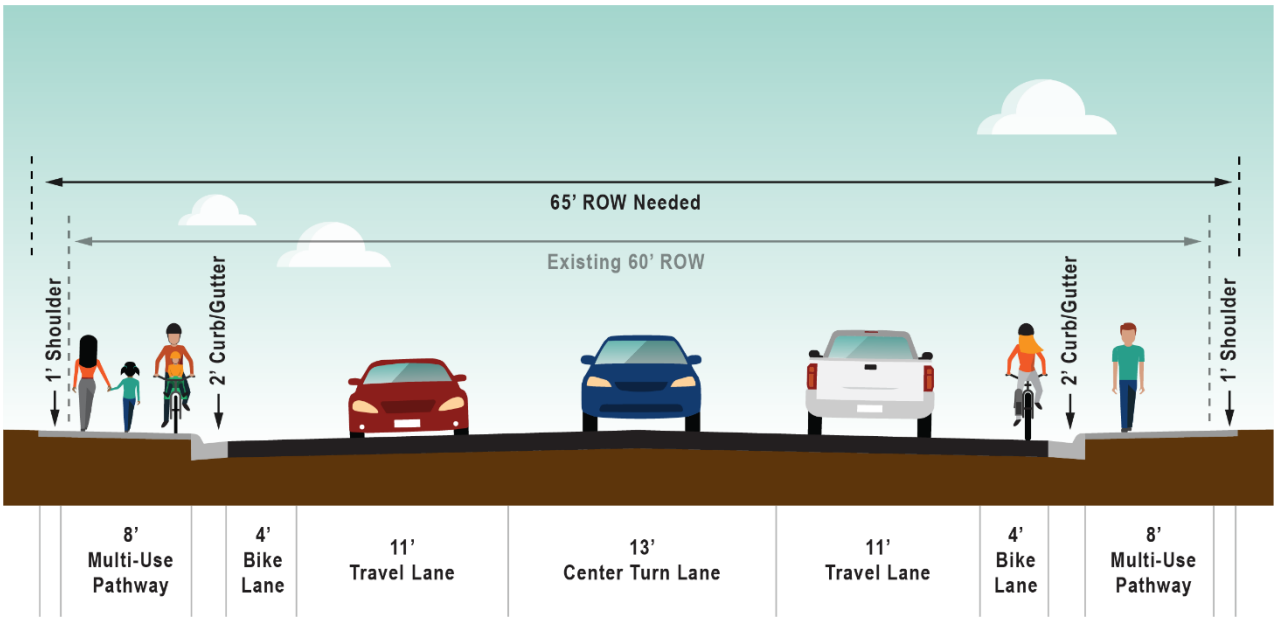
SPENARD
MINNESOTA–BENSON

Frequently Asked Questions
March 2023

AMATS: Spenard Road Rehabilitation Minnesota Drive to Benson Boulevard Project

Typical Section

What will the road look like?
The selected typical section is shown below.



How does a three-lane typical section handle traffic compared to a four-lane typical section?
Research indicates a three-lane roadway can handle similar traffic volumes to a four-lane roadway (up to 20,000 vehicles per day), with a comparable or even improved level of service. This was observed following the completion of the "road diet" reconstruction on Arctic Boulevard, and the project team expects a similar outcome following construction of this project. Current volumes on the corridor are approximately half of the upper limit for three lane facilities.

Does a "road diet" lead to fewer cars using the road?
Road diets seek to improve safety by creating more space for non-motorized travel and to accommodate vehicular movements such as turning, acceleration, and deceleration. If properly designed, traffic does not divert to other streets because the corridor will be safer and more comfortable for a broad range of users.

Center Left Turn Lane

Are center left turn lanes safe?
Center turn lanes are commonly used on roadways throughout the United States and are a frequent element of many streets within the Anchorage Bowl. These turn lane features are used to reduce rear-end, head-on, and turning related crashes occurring on two-lane roads.

What is the width of the center left turn lane on this segment of Spenard Road?
The MOA Planning and Zoning Commission approved typical section has a 13-foot center left turn lane. This is below the minimum MOA Design Criteria dimension of 14 feet; however, it has been shown to be effectively implemented on the adjacent section of Spenard Road between Benson Boulevard and Hillcrest Drive and provides route continuity for this half mile section.

Can the center left turn lane be reduced even more to accommodate additional non-motorized facilities?
Further reduction of the center left turn lane is being considered to minimize right-of-way (ROW) impacts and provide additional space for roadway signs, lighting, green infrastructure, and other amenities. The design widths for the non-motorized facilities meet the standards for those facilities and have been selected through the context sensitive design process for implementation.
As a federally funded project, ROW acquisitions are required to follow the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Act. The project's authority to acquire ROW for the project is limited to ROW necessary by adopted standards. Since ROW is required for the project corridor, space cannot be relocated to the bike lane by reducing other roadway feature widths.

Speed

What is the difference between design speed and speed limit? Is the project team considering a reduced speed limit?
Design speed is a selected speed used to determine various geometric design features of the roadway. The design speed for this class of roadway is 45 mph. Some design features such as curvature, superelevation, and sight distance are directly related to design speed. Other features such as widths of lanes and shoulders are not directly related to design speed. This is a rehabilitation project, which means the project scope does not include changes to curvature, superelevation, or sight distance.

The project team is consulting with MOA on determining the procedures for selecting or changing speed limits. MOA is considering design decisions and a posted speed limit that reduce the project corridor speed. The pre- and post-construction speed data of the northern section of Spenard Road from Hillcrest Drive to Northern Lights Boulevard shows an approximate 5 mph speed reduction indicating that a 30 mph posted speed limit is likely achievable for the design corridor.

The team plans to research additional design measures that could help the corridor achieve speeds closer to 25 mph. However, there are many factors to consider within a context sensitive design process and any features would need to be assessed through that multi-factor lens. Therefore, potential speed limit options that MOA Traffic is still considering for the project corridor include 25 or 30 mph.

Non-Motorized Facilities

Why does the typical section propose on-street bike lanes rather than integrating a bike lane on the sidewalk?

- This project evaluated facilities for a wide range of cyclists, from those who may prefer a sidewalk or path to confident riders looking to quickly get across town alongside traffic.

- Bike lanes adjacent to the street can make cyclists more visible to drivers, reduce the potential for pedestrian conflicts, and allow for uninterrupted travel at higher speeds.

- The selected alternative provides both an 8-foot multi-use path and a 5.5-foot (4-foot paved) on-street bike lane. By having both facilities, cyclists can choose their preferred path based on their ability and other factors, such as road conditions.

How is the design process considering facilities that meet the needs for all corridor users?

- Improving safety of all corridor users, including active transportation users, is one of the primary goals of this project.

- This project is following the Municipality of Anchorage's (MOA) Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) process. A key element of the CSS process is considering the needs of all users and all modes.

Will bicycle lanes extend through the 36th Avenue/Spenard Road intersection to Minnesota Drive?
Yes. The bike lane on the north side of Spenard Road will transition off the road to the multi-use pathway as it approaches the Minnesota Drive intersection. The scope and limits of the project prohibit cross section improvements west of Minnesota Drive, which would be necessary to extend the bike lane through Minnesota Drive. This project does not prohibit extending the westbound bike lane through Minnesota Drive with a future project.

Were protected bike lanes considered?
Protected bike lanes were considered and dismissed during the alternatives analysis phase due to the following reasons:

- They do not meet design standards and guidelines within the available ROW.
- They would cause a significant increase in maintenance costs.
- They are not consistent with the recently upgraded segment of Spenard Road between Benson Boulevard and Hillcrest Drive.
- The number of driveways and breaks required in the barrier would render protected bike lanes ineffective.

How does this project fit with the AMATS Non-motorized Plan?
The AMATS Non-motorized Plan calls for a separated bike lane or shared use path as the preferred bikeway for urban facilities for all speeds on roadways with Spenard' s traffic volume. The selected alternative provides a shared use pathway on both sides of the corridor. The pathway is separated from traffic by the curb and gutter and on street bike lane between the pathway and travel lane.

Will this project include crosswalks between signals?
Unsignalized crossings will be included on this project. The location and design of crossings and median refuge islands are currently being developed.

Will bicycle detection loops at the 36th Avenue/Spenard Road intersection be incorporated in this project?
The project will incorporate radar detection for vehicles and bicycles at the 36th Avenue/Spenard Road intersection.

The previous section of Spenard Road rehabilitation had limited width for bicycle lanes (three and a half feet). What kind of feedback has there been from bicyclists on the safety of these slightly narrower bicycle lanes, and could this be a solution in the current project as well?
Feedback from users is generally that a narrower bicycle lane is preferable to no bicycle lane at all. The current design is incorporating wider 5.5-foot wide (4-foot paved) on-street bicycle lanes on this segment.

Transit

How will this project improve transit facilities within the corridor?
The project team is working with MOA Transit to coordinate on design improvements to existing transit locations.

Minnesota Drive Intersection

Can you modify the project scope to extend to the west side of Minnesota Drive at the southern end of the corridor? Minnesota Drive in its current condition is a barrier to active transportation that unnecessarily dissects the neighborhood and encourages unsafe jaywalking.
In 2022 AMATS authorized an extension of the project scope to include nominal changes to the intersection of Minnesota Drive and Spenard Road. These changes allow Spenard Road to be converted to a three-lane typical section with bike lanes and multi-use path from Benson Boulevard to Minnesota Drive.

Improved east-west connectivity is needed for non-motorized travelers moving through Midtown from west-side trails to Midtown and UMed districts. Can this project incorporate a bridge or tunnel over or under Minnesota Drive?
Improvements to Minnesota Drive are outside the scope of this project, however the project team is currently evaluating alternatives on Spenard Road that seek to improve the safety of pedestrian and bicyclists within the project corridor.

Federal Funding vs MOA Funding and Implications for Design/Amenities

What can be accomplished using federal funding. How does this compare to the previous Spenard Road project that rehabilitated the roadway between Hillcrest Drive to Benson Boulevard?
Federal funding precludes the use of funds for improvements on private property. Some of the elements of the previous phase of work, including walls and landscaping features that extend to the front of the commercial properties in the corridor will not be able to be included in this project because of federal funding constraints. This may also restrict parking area improvements. Individuals, community organizations or local government can fund additional features beyond the edge of the public ROW.

Is the federal funding for this project secured? What does the funding process entail?
There are several "gateways" the project must pass through to receive federal funding. Currently, the project has completed the environmental design and permitting stage and received authorization to advance to detailed design. Following that stage of design, the project will receive funding to acquire ROW needed for the project to be constructed.

Maintenance

Is maintenance a consideration in project design? Who is responsible for maintaining the roads and sidewalks? In winter, the sidewalks along this section of Spenard Road are frequently so full of snow from snowplows or adjacent businesses that they're not passable, which creates a safety issue for pedestrians.
The MOA owns, operates, and maintains the Spenard Road corridor and will continue to do so following completion of this project. The DOT&PF is coordinating with MOA maintenance staff as part of the project design to ensure maintenance needs are considered. Funding for maintenance is an ongoing challenge for both the Municipality and the State.

Neighborhood Connectivity

How will this project connect with other roadway and development projects on Chugach Way, West 30th Avenue, and West 32nd/33rd Avenue? Will those facilities accommodate people with disabilities?
The MOA and DOT&PF anticipate that Spenard Road project design will provide smooth transitions between the corridor and side streets and that corridor facilities will be ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant.

Miscellaneous

How will this project deal with curb cut-outs? These create safety issues, particularly in winter when business owner's clear driveway snow onto the sidewalk after the MOA has already cleared the sidewalk.
Just like the last two phases of the Spenard Road Rehabilitation, one of the possible outcomes will be an overall reduction of curb cuts as a safety improvement within the corridor.

What about the MOA "1% for Art" policy – will that be applied to this project?
We have a commitment through a non-federal funding source to meet the "1% for Art" funding contribution, which will be a part of this project. The MOA will be managing the mechanism that will incorporate the art and DOT&PF will be closely coordinating with the MOA on this element of the project.