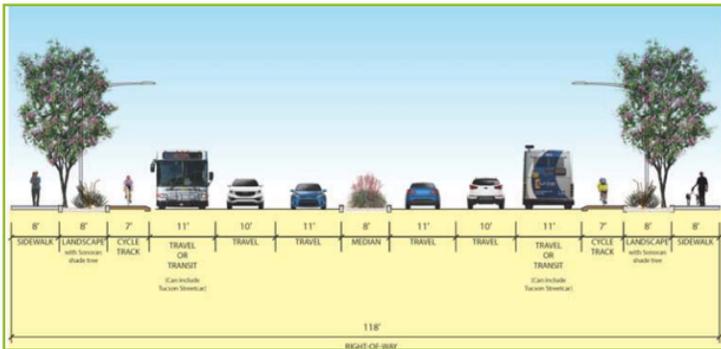




Broadway Boulevard: It Needs to Work for Everyone!

Bob Carroll • published in the May 2015 issue

In 2006, Pima County voters approved the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) and the Plan to improve or create roads, bridges, bike paths and bus pullouts over the next 20 years. But one project—widening Broadway Blvd between Euclid and Country Club—has struggled to move forward.



6-Lane/4+2T Lanes (side Bus Rapid Transit or Streetcar) 118' Right-of-Way

The RTA Plan called for widening Broadway to eight vehicle lanes, as well as provisions for bicycles and pedestrians, all of which would require 150 feet. The cost of the project was expected to be \$71 million to buy property, demolish buildings and build the new roadway.

The first delay was focused on whether or not there was a need for eight vehicle lanes, which was based upon 1987 growth projects for Tucson, which have proven to be overstated. At this point, that issue appears to be resolved and the eight lane section is no longer in discussion.

Last October, the Tucson City Council voted 5–2 to move forward with design of a six-lane section which includes two mixed travel/transit lanes. This required only a 118' right-of-way but provided six lanes for traffic/transit as well as a 7' raised bicycle track, an eight foot roadside landscape strip and an 8' pedestrian walkway.

So you would think that the rest is easy, right? Well it has been anything but that.

City staff began working with their professional engineering and planning consultants to determine a final alignment that would minimize impacts to adjacent properties and therefore minimize the cost of right-of-way acquisition for the Tucson taxpayers. Approximately 60 days ago, the City showed the proposed alignment to the Broadway Citizens Task Force.

While the Task Force had previously approved project goals that included items such as: improving the visual character of the street; maintaining and improving the provision of affordable, efficient, and sustainable transportation choices including transit; supporting and improving economic vitality along the Boulevard; and improving environmental sustainability in Tucson—their sole response to the City's alignment was that the alignment needed to be revised and narrowed where necessary to attempt to miss every building along the corridor.

And so for the last 60 days, members of the Broadway Coalition have taken it upon themselves to create a new alignment to attempt to save every last building—if possible. In some areas this has resulted in narrowed pedestrian ways and the elimination of the roadside landscape strip. While the new alignment reduces the impact to buildings from 37 to ten, it doesn't necessarily accomplish what the Task Force had hoped for. While the new alignment may not touch as many buildings, it actually increases the total number of affected properties, many of which

may still need to be acquired by the City due to loss of access or elimination of parking. The fact that the new alignment impacts less buildings but will result in higher right-of-way acquisition cost can be attributed to design being prepared by a group who doesn't fully understand the intricacies of road design or the ramifications of their actions.

And when it comes right down to it, I think it is time to breathe some new life into this corridor. To be entirely honest, much of the corridor is lined with tired 1950/60's strip retail that is inconsistent with vibrant city centers. Do you remember what University Avenue looked like before the Marshall Foundation created Main Gate, which is now a regional destination? If we want this corridor to be an extension of the downtown walkable business and entertainment district, we need to create some new venues to attract patrons. Wouldn't it be great if we could make room along Broadway to have a Rincon Market, which would be a gathering place for neighboring residents? And what happened to the concept of promoting transit? Remember Imagine Greater Tucson—a region-wide planning exercise, in which the entire region said that we needed to reduce sprawl by increasing density along major corridors to support transit?

The corridor alignment we have created is a result of putting building preservation above all else. Above attractive landscaped corridors that will encourage pedestrian traffic. Above opportunities for redevelopment that will create a new, exciting life along the corridor. Above the development of the corridor with density that would support future transit. And finally above the poor Tucson drivers, stuck in traffic, that are still waiting for the roadway improvements that were approved by the voters back in 2006.

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