

13th Street: A MidTown-Uptown Connector for Transportation, People and Business

2018-1-26

Current Conditions

- 13th Street configuration
 - Viaduct, 5th-10th Avenues: 7 lanes (6 travel lanes, one center turn lane)
 - 10th-13th Avenues: 5 lanes (4 travel lanes, 1 center turn lane)
- 20,000 +/- cars per day
- Less than 700 vehicles per hour of traffic demand, for base and test days; Capacity of one lane is 900 to 1,000 vehicles per hour.
- 61% of properties facing 13th Street between 10th and 13th Avenues are vacant or underutilized
 - 72,157 SF of commercial space/44,294 SF vacant
- Speed limit 35 mph, yet current configuration and lane width encourage speeding
 - 20% of vehicles travel 10mph or more over speed limit
 - Less than 1% speeding 10+mph over the limit during pilot test period
- Need for safer, more comfortable pedestrian connection and crossing
- 13th Street is the most prominent connection between a revitalized and energized Uptown/Riverfront, and MidTown's neighborhoods, parks and commercial nodes. Yet the connection is wide, fast and presently unattractive for business and all modes of transportation.

Why consider change? Why now?

- The Georgia Department of Transportation was scheduled to resurface SR80/Spur 22— roughly Macon Road from I-185, down the Buena Vista-13th Street hill then west on 13th Street to 5th Ave—in the spring of 2017. Before resurfacing as it has “always been,” GDOT and City engineers studied the route and agreed to test measures that would maintain traffic flow, while calming speeds to make the streets safer for all. This afforded a once-in-a-generation opportunity to critically assess an important connection for pedestrians, bicyclists, drivers, and business and property owners—and to look toward incorporating best practices that are making cities nationwide more livable, attractive and competitive places.
- From May 10-27, 2017, 13th Street was lined with barrels to test a reduction of two lanes along the route from 5th Avenue to 13th Avenue. The test was undertaken at NO COST to the City. Local non-profits and businesses partnered to provide programming during the test period to raise awareness.
- Data from the GDOT, citizen surveys and City staff gathered pre-test and during the test period recorded a negligible difference in travel times. Traffic slowed to the posted speed limit, yet travel times did not dramatically change.

Based on the data, the travel time difference was negligible; however, we do recommend that signal timing be modified once a permanent striping change is made to ensure that congestion is lessened as much as possible.

Tyler Peek, P.E. GDOT District Three

- There is growing evidence that planning our largest public spaces—our streets—for all forms of transportation is an essential element of a city's ability to *attract and retain talent*. Healthy streets benefit citizens of all ages, and help regenerate business in disinvested commercial districts.
- Business and property on 13th Street have languished for decades. For the Core Communities (MidTown and Uptown) to continue to thrive, we need an attractive connector that links Columbus' in-town neighborhoods, natural and commercial assets. There is unrealized investment potential in this area that can contribute to the city's fiscal health and to a more thriving, livable place for its citizens.

This section of 13th Street lies between the two most financially productive neighborhoods in Columbus, [MidTown and Uptown]. The underutilized private property along 13th therefore has some of the largest upside potential in the city due to the difference in value between where they are now and where they could be.

Jim Kumon, Executive Director, Incremental Development Alliance

If we are going to bring business back, we need to generate some on-street parking again.

Trey Carmack, 13th Street stakeholder

Commercial division manager, Coldwell Banker Commercial Real Estate

What's the big picture?

Columbus 2025 is the holistic community and economic development strategy guided by a vision of increasing prosperity, reducing poverty and improving quality of life. A revitalized 13th Street connector reflects several goal areas within the plan, including “Vibrant and Connected Places” and “Targeted Economic Growth.” Other recent public and/or private initiatives focus on incremental economic development and the quality of our connections: the City’s 2014 acceptance of a **Complete Streets** policy; the **Dragonfly Trail** network; the **Incremental Development Alliance**’s work to help renew small-scale in-town redevelopment; and the Knight Cities Challenge award-winning **Minimum Grid Plan**. All seek to expand on the success of Uptown and riverfront revitalization, places we look to as local models in which quality of place and attractive connections are key drivers for economic development.

Next steps

- Reducing lanes on 13th Street during the resurfacing of SR 80/Spur 22 may be a first step toward an economically viable, attractive connector that links our in-town MidTown neighborhoods, businesses and schools with the entertainment, businesses and riverfront of Uptown. Because it would be part of a GDOT project, THERE IS NO COST TO THE CITY OF COLUMBUS.
- Based upon test results and current data, the complete street lane conversion of 13th Street from 5th Avenue to 13th Avenue is recommended by both the GDOT and the City Planning and Engineering departments. GDOT requires concurrence with the recommendation from City Council to proceed.
- MidTown, Inc., in partnership with Jackson-Burgin Development and The Carmack Company, engaged **Rick Hall** (Hall Planning & Engineering) to help analyze and create a long-term vision for the 13th Street connection. Mr. Hall was recommended for his unique perspective and experience as a planner and registered, practicing engineer, particularly with a similar route (Gaines Street) in Tallahassee that was “dieted” and experienced dramatic subsequent investment and redevelopment. This study was undertaken at no cost to the City of Columbus.

An undesirable option

- Leave 13th Street as it is and continue to see disinvestment and declining properties between 13th and 10th Avenues.

Recommendations to spur economic growth and create an inviting place for residents and visitors for 13th Street from 10th to 13th Avenues:

Phase 1] Convert outside lanes to parking; potentially angle on south, parallel on north
Rehab sidewalks & the crosswalks [zebra striping]

Phase 2] Rework lighting, signal arms, median, trees; Narrowing the pavement helps manage speeds
For the 13th Street Viaduct] Take the outside lanes out of service to improve walkability

Recommendations are supported by Columbus 2025, Uptown Columbus, Inc., and MidTown, Inc.