



**Briefing  
CITY OF AUSTIN  
RECOMMENDATION FOR COUNCIL ACTION**

**AGENDA ITEM NO.: 49  
AGENDA DATE: Thu 09/01/2005  
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**SUBJECT POSTING:** Presentation and approval of a resolution relating to the configuration of Riverside Drive within Town Lake Park, the award of a contract to reconstruct Riverside Drive, and the conversion of the one- way portion of Cesar Chavez to two-way traffic flow.

**COA STAFF AT MEETING:** Sondra Creighton, Director, Public Works Department, 974-7175

**DESCRIPTION:**

**DEPARTMENT:** CMO / Agenda Office

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**Riverside Reconstruction:**

Council has passed several resolutions over the last 6 years considering the reconfiguration of Riverside Drive through Town Lake Park.

On July 29, 1999, Council approved the Town Lake Master Plan, which included the discussion to close Riverside Drive through a portion of Town Lake Park. Council took no action at that time to reduce or close Riverside Drive.

On December 2, 2002, Council approved the following resolutions regarding Riverside:

- **Part I:** "reduce the width of Riverside Drive to one lane in each direction in the vicinity of Town Lake Park"
- **Part II:** Continue to develop alternatives that would make viable the removal of Riverside Drive as an at-grade roadway through Town Lake Park. (Riverside Drive shall not be permanently closed through the Park until such time as alternatives are implemented to mitigate the Riverside Drive's lost traffic capacity.)

On August 4, 2005, City Council approved a resolution directing the City Manager to present a briefing to Council regarding the current cost estimate for the construction of Town Lake Park and the impact of reducing Riverside Drive where it passes through the park to two lanes, giving particular attention to the addition of density in the downtown area, the conversion of Cesar Chavez to two-way and future traffic flow on Barton Springs Road, Lamar Boulevard, and South First Street.

Public Works Department added to the scope of the Cesar Chavez Conversion study, the additional modeling work to test mitigation measures for the closure of Riverside Drive through Town Lake Park. The modeling done for the Cesar Chavez Conversion options incorporated the narrowed (one lane each way) Riverside Drive configuration, developed by the Town Lake Park stakeholder group, in conjunction with Parks staff.



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• **Riverside Closure Recommendations:**

Riverside Closure through Town Lake Park:

- To date, based on the results of this study, City Staff does not recommend the closure of Riverside Drive through Town Lake Park. In order to mitigate the impact of traffic congestion, additional lanes would have to be added on nearby arterials. This would require acquisition of right-of-way and condemnation of property, which would be cost prohibitive.

Riverside Reduction from 4 to 2 lanes:

- Current proposal is to reduce approximately 1,000 feet of Riverside Drive, in the middle of Town Lake Park, from four lanes to two lanes. In compliance with the December 2002 resolution, the construction work to narrow Riverside is included as a bid alternate in the RCA for construction contract award for the Riverside Drive and Barton Springs Road Street Reconstruction and Utility Adjustment Project. The bid cost to construct the narrowed Riverside Drive through Town Lake Park is \$1,351,445.89.

Riverside Reduction from 4 to 2 lanes - Concerns:

- During recent meetings with the Palmer Events Center and the Long Center, their respective staffs have informed Public Works Department staff of the special event operational needs of the venues that could be adversely affected by the reduction of Riverside Drive. Impacts from simultaneous events in these venues could draw 10,000-12,000 people. Children's symphony events could require the staging of up to 150 buses at a time. At this time, no operational plan has been developed to address these peak events. Public Works Department staff is concerned that the decision to narrow Riverside Drive is premature until these venues are functional and operational needs can be fully assessed. An Event Management Plan is essential to ensure coordination and access to Park Activities, Long Center and Palmer Special Events Center.
- Riverside Drive is a major response route for Fire and Emergency Medical Services.
- Traffic flow in the one-lane segment could be halted if there are traffic accidents or disabled vehicles.
- Delays at the intersections could occur as vehicles shift into the merge lane prior to proceeding westbound through the Barton Springs intersection. This is termed "lane imbalance."



Riverside Drive Recommendations:

- Public Works Department staff recommends implementation of pedestrian safety improvements along Riverside Drive through Town Lake Park, regardless of whether the road is reduced to two lanes or remains at four:
  - Establish a regulatory speed limit of 30 mph
  - Install a 20 mph speed zone with flashing lights for special events, as is done in Zilker Park
  - Install enhanced crosswalks with in-pavement lights
  - Allow closure of Riverside Drive on weekends

Cesar Chavez Conversion

On July 29, 2004, City Council passed a resolution which directed “the City Manager to determine the best way to convert the five-block long one-way segment of Cesar Chavez to a two-way segment; and to determine the cost.”

In the fall of 2004, staff, working with Halff Associates and WHM Engineering developed a scope of work including traffic modeling, and identification of urban design enhancement opportunities to find the best option to convert Cesar Chavez to two-way traffic. The consultant team performed extensive data collection to determine base conditions for the roadway design and traffic flow.

In the spring of 2005, while design work was underway, staff and consultants began meeting with city Boards & Commissions, Downtown Austin Alliance Streetscape and Transportation Subcommittee, Downtown Austin Neighborhood Association and the public, to brief them on the scope of the study. This included the property owners directly affected by the considered changes.

Summer 2005, staff and consultants presented the results of the study and staff recommendations on the best way to convert traffic, including urban design concepts. Again this included property owners directly affected by the proposed changes.

This also included the following Boards and Commissions:

- On 8/15/05 Urban Transportation Commission recommended implementation of Option #2, with urban design improvements.
- On 8/17/05 Downtown Commission endorsed Option #2 creating Cesar Chavez as a two-way street and encouraging the consideration of a planted median, taking into consideration the loss of parkland.
- On 8/18/05 Downtown Austin Alliance Streetscape and Transportation Subcommittee recommended support of the two-way traffic concept for Cesar Chavez, exploring the



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- feasibility of a landscaped median.
- On 8/22/05 Design Commission recommended support of the two-way conversion concept with conditions.
  - On 8/23/05 Parks Board recommended support of option #2, exploring the feasibility of landscaped median, and the request to the extent excess funding is available, extend the urban design improvements to the west.
  - On 8/24/05 Public open house
  - On 8/24/05 project web page, including on-line survey, launched to public.
- **Incorporating public input, staff's recommendation is Option 2: Additional Turn Lanes that incorporates:**
    - Provide 2 through lanes in each direction
    - Provide single left turn bay at Congress
    - Prohibit left turns from Cesar Chavez south onto Guadalupe
    - Remove on-street uses between Brazos and Colorado (loss of 14 on-street parking spaces and a taxi stand)
    - Provide dual left turn bays for eastbound at Lavaca, and Brazos
    - Acquire some parkland (for wide sidewalks and trees; added lane width between Guadalupe and Lavaca and for the right turn bays; 1/4 acre for road, 1/3 acre sidewalk/plaza)
    - The estimated construction cost for this option is \$3,940,000, including \$1.7 million for urban design concepts illustrated in the presentation material. Available funding for design, engineering and construction is \$5,400,000, including \$2,400,000 in federal funding.
    - Based on input from the public process the following recommendations for the next phase of design are:
      - Staff and consultants will consider incorporating a landscaped median extending from Colorado to the future alignment of Nueces, and
      - Staff and consultants will refine the urban design plans, and involve representatives from various downtown groups.