



MIDTOWN CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENTS

Denali Street Area – Benson Blvd To Tudor Rd

FINAL CONCEPT REPORT

JANUARY 2018 | PM&E PROJECT NO. 16-28

PREPARED FOR: Municipality Of Anchorage
Project Management & Engineering Department
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INTRODUCTION

The Midtown Corridor Improvements, Denali Street Area Project intends to upgrade Denali Street, from Benson Boulevard to Tudor Road, and 36th Avenue, from A Street to Old Seward Highway, to accommodate all users and all modes including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motor vehicles.

The project will evaluate existing corridor conditions, define problems that are obstacles to non-motorized and motorized travel and determine feasible solutions to improve the Midtown area transportation network. The goals and objectives of the project include the following:

Denali Street Goals:

- Expand transportation options
- Promote livability
- Improve maintainability
- Complement mixed-use development

Denali Street Objectives:

- Reallocate space for bicycles and pedestrians
- Enhance the streetscape to promote walking
- Calm traffic to improve safety
- Maintain business accessibility and parking
- Provide adequate snow storage

36th Avenue Goals:

- Maintain mobility
- Extend service life
- Enhance connectivity
- Improve maintainability

36th Avenue Objectives:

- Reduce intersection delay
- Resurface the roadway and upgrade ADA facilities
- Widen existing sidewalks for better connectivity to area trails
- Remove obstructions from sidewalk

The first phase of the project is the Concept/Planning phase, using the Municipality of Anchorage's (MOA) Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) Policy. The CSS Policy provides guidance to involve project stakeholders in defining the issues and problems to be solved. The Concept Report documents the public process and issues identified by stakeholders that need to be solved during the alternative development phase at the Design Study Report level.

BACKGROUND

A goal for this project is to integrate a complete street typology to improve mobility and safety for all modes as well as reduce conflicts between motorized and non-motorized traffic. Complete streets are context-sensitive facilities inclusive of all types of users. Within City Center Districts, such as Midtown Anchorage, they typically include wider sidewalks, bicycle facilities, enhanced transit facilities where feasible, landscaping, improved crossings and traffic calming features.

AREA CONTEXT

Land use in the project area is predominantly commercial, along with park and civic use. The strategy to develop into a City Center is supported by the 2040 Land Use Plan Map (see Guiding Documents to follow), which identifies a future mixed use high density residential development on Denali Street near 40th Avenue to balance the existing commercial land-use environment. Revitalizing the public infrastructure will encourage more public use of the corridor and its public spaces as well as private investment in properties in the project area. See Figure 1 Project Area and Land Use Context.

The Loussac Library and Cuddy Family Midtown Park are two civic destinations in the area accessible from Denali Street and 36th Avenue. These destinations contribute to the character of the area and are major community assets. To further capitalize on these destinations in the identified Midtown City Center, area roadways need to complement and support the expected mix of users and move towards a complete streets typology.

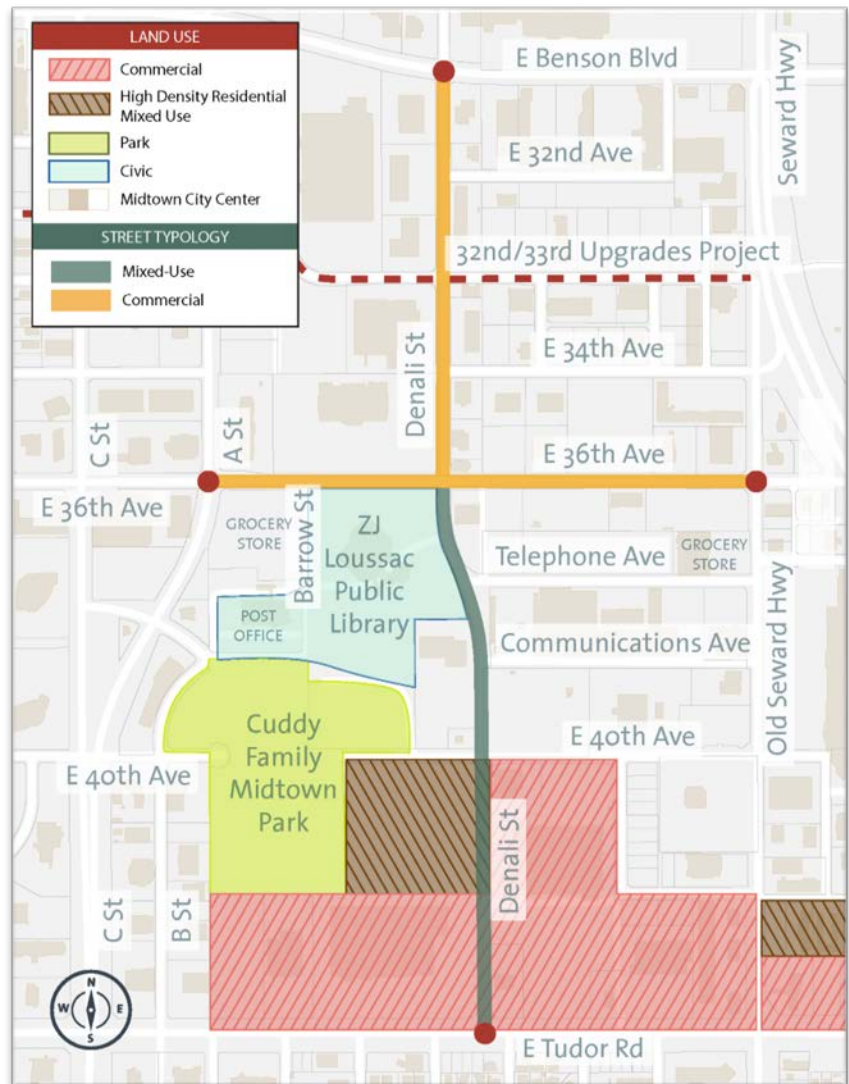


FIGURE 1. PROJECT AREA AND LAND USE CONTEXT

EXISTING CONDITIONS

DENALI STREET – TUDOR ROAD TO 36TH AVENUE

This 2,600-foot four-lane section of Denali Street between Tudor Road (to the south) and 36th Avenue (to the north) was originally constructed in the 1980s. Lowe's, Home Depot, Denali Alaskan Federal Credit Union, KTUU Channel 2, Alaska Communications Systems (ACS), and other commercial properties are major destinations along this section of Denali Street. Civic destinations include the Loussac Library, Cuddy Family Midtown Park and the Midtown Post Office. The former Federal U.S. Archives property has direct access from Denali Street near 40th Avenue and is designated as future high density residential mixed use in the adopted 2040 Land Use Plan Map. There are 5-foot attached sidewalks on both sides of the street. There are currently no shoulders or separate bicycle facilities. Bicyclists often use the travel lanes to move within this section of Denali Street.



FIGURE 2. DENALI STREET AND LOWE'S, LOOKING NORTH

A large number of vehicles turn from Home Depot and Lowe's onto Denali Street from four separate driveways. The last major improvement project completed along the route was a 2003 resurfacing effort.

Bus stops will no longer be serviced as a part of the People Mover Improved Transit System changes.

DENALI STREET AND 40TH AVENUE INTERSECTION

A striped "ladder" style pedestrian crossing allows bicyclists and pedestrians to cross Denali Street at 40th Avenue. A high volume of pedestrians reportedly travel the 40th Avenue corridor between destinations on Old Seward Highway (University Center, New Sagaya, etc.) and Cuddy Family Midtown Park.

To cross Denali, Pedestrians cross four travel lanes and contend with a high volume of turning movements between Denali Street and 40th Avenue. Thirty crashes have occurred at this intersection from 2010 to 2014, including 19 right-angle (T-bone) crashes, one of which resulted in a fatality.



FIGURE 3. DENALI STREET AND 40TH AVENUE INTERSECTION, LOOKING SOUTH

DENALI STREET – 36TH AVENUE TO BENSON BOULEVARD

This 1,900-foot segment serves adjacent commercial properties Cinemark Century 16, Johnson Tire Service, Table 6 Restaurant, and others. This section is a four lane facility with a two-way left turn lane in the center and no shoulders. Denali Street widens to accommodate a right turn pocket at the intersection of Benson Boulevard and 36th Avenue.

5-foot wide attached sidewalks on both sides of Denali Street do not provide separation between pedestrians and vehicle travel lanes. Bicycle facilities are not present, and the route is only partially ADA accessible.

Several commercial approaches along this segment are very wide, with limited parking available. One property accommodates parking using twenty feet between the building and sidewalk. Parked vehicles often drive on or park on the sidewalk, blocking pedestrian access.

The intersections of Denali Street with E 36th Avenue, E 33rd Avenue/Calais Drive, and E Benson Boulevard are signalized. E 33rd Avenue/Calais Drive, along with W 32nd Avenue, are being analyzed concurrently for non-motorized improvements, as discussed further in the *Adjacent Ongoing Projects* section below.

Active transit facilities within this segment consist of one People Mover Bus Stop near the intersection of Benson Boulevard and Denali Street.



FIGURE 4. DENALI STREET AND 36TH AVENUE INTERSECTION, LOOKING EAST



FIGURE 5. DENALI STREET NORTH OF 36TH AVENUE, LOOKING NORTH

36TH AVENUE – A STREET TO DENALI STREET

This segment carries the highest traffic volumes of any segment in the project. It is a four lane median-divided facility with widening for left turn pockets onto Barrow Street and Denali Street.

36th Avenue widens for a right turn pocket at A Street. Natural Pantry, Cinemark Century 16, Loussac Library, and the post office are all major destinations accessible from this segment.

Attached 6 to 8-foot wide asphalt sidewalks exist on both sides of 36th Avenue. A sidewalk along Barrow Street is provided for library patrons.



FIGURE 6. 36TH AVENUE AT BARROW STREET, LOOKING WEST

Vehicles entering the Natural Pantry parking lot from Barrow Street often back-up from Barrow Street onto 36th Avenue. This also backs up vehicles turning south onto Barrow Street from 36th Avenue. Pedestrians cross 36th Avenue at Barrow Street to access Natural Pantry, the Post Office, the Loussac Library, and other area destinations.

An existing bus stop in front of the Loussac Library will be removed in October 2017 as a part of the People Mover Improved Transit System changes.

36TH AVENUE – DENALI STREET TO OLD SEWARD HIGHWAY

This segment is a four lane median-divided facility, with left turn pockets at Denali Street, the ACS/Pita Pit commercial property, and at the intersection with Old Seward Highway. There are no right turn pockets. Major accesses include Denali Alaskan FCU, Kuukpik Corporation, Stuart Title Company, McDonald's, Keller Williams Alaska Group, ACS, and other commercial properties.

An attached five to eight foot sidewalk or asphalt pathway on each side accommodates pedestrians and bicyclists. Many obstructions to pedestrians exist in the sidewalk – light poles, power transmission line poles, and other objects.

Old signal equipment at the Old Seward Highway and 36th Avenue intersection may benefit from upgrades.



FIGURE 7. 36TH AVENUE SIDEWALK, LOOKING EAST

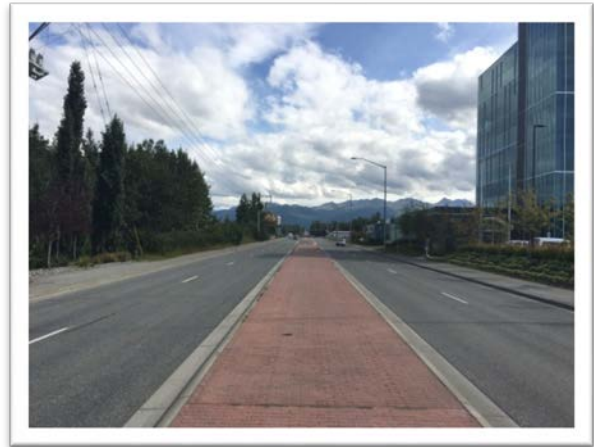


FIGURE 8. 36TH AVENUE MEDIAN, LOOKING EAST

ADJACENT ONGOING PROJECTS

The concurrent *W 32nd Avenue and E 33rd Avenue Upgrades – Arctic Boulevard to Old Seward Highway Project* (PM&E Project No. 16-29) intersects this project at Denali Street and 33rd Avenue. The W 32nd and E 33rd Avenue Upgrades project is working to enhance the safety and accessibility for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists by implementing Complete Streets design standards and is funded through the Design Study Report (DSR) phase.

The DOT&PF Midtown Traffic Congestion Relief Project is currently in the planning phase. It will provide plans for future improvements to the intersection of the New Seward Highway and 36th Avenue, as a part of a larger planning effort for the New Seward Highway between Tudor Road and 20th Avenue.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT SUMMARY

Public involvement efforts were planned and conducted using the MOA’s CSS Policy as a guideline. Public outreach was conducted from the initial phase of the project by engaging, informing and educating affected public stakeholders, agencies and elected officials.

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF AGENCIES

Agencies	
MOA Traffic Division	MOA Public Transportation
MOA Project Management & Engineering (PM&E)	Anchorage Police Department (APD)
MOA Community Development and Planning	Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility (AWWU)
AMATS Transportation Planning	Alaska DOT&PF Traffic Safety and Highway Design
MOA Non-Motorized Transportation	ENSTAR Gas Company
MOA Office of Economic & Community Development (OEDC) (Vision Zero)	GCI Cable
Mayor Berkowitz’s Office	Municipal Light and Power (ML&P)
MOA Street Maintenance	Alaska Communications Systems (ACS)
MOA Right-of-Way	Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC)

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDERS

General Stakeholders	
Adjacent residents and property owners	Bicycle related businesses
Adjacent commercial businesses	Spenard Community Council
Bicycle and Trail organizations	Bike Anchorage
Midtown Community Council	Representative Harriet Drummond’s Office
District 4 (Midtown Anchorage) Assembly – Dick Traini & Felix Rivera	

TABLE 3. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Method/Tools	Dates
Project Website (www.MidtownImprovementsDenali.com)	June 21, 2017
Joint Agency Stakeholder Meeting and Presentation	August 9, 2017
Midtown Community Council Presentation	September 13, 2017
Post Card Mailer & E-Newsletter Invite to Open House	September 18, 2017
Federation of Community Councils E-notice Invite to Open House	September 27, 2017
Door to Door Outreach to Businesses, Property Owners, Employees	September 18, 2017
Open House at Stewart Title Company on 36 th Avenue	October 5, 2017
Open House Concepts and Materials Posting	October 10, 2017
Planning & Zoning Commission Appearance	December 4, 2017
Project Website Updates	Ongoing
Individual Stakeholder Phone Calls and Emails	Ongoing

The Draft Concept Report went before the Planning & Zoning Commission (PZC) on December 4th, 2017. The PZC reviewed the project as an informational item on the agenda and expressed support for the project. Despite the lack of specified facilities in the Anchorage Bicycle Plan, commissioners agreed that there is a logical need and opportunity for pedestrian and bicycle improvements on Denali Street and 36th Avenue. Commissioners recognized and openly appreciated the project’s multi-modal inclusive purpose and how it is supporting the longer-term vision of revitalizing the Midtown area.

For a summary of the public involvement materials and summaries of the agency scoping meeting, public open house, and minutes from the Planning & Zoning Commission appearance, please see [Appendix A Public Involvement Summary](#).

ISSUES IDENTIFIED

The following issues, concerns, or desires have been identified to be addressed based on input from residents, user groups, Community Councils, agencies, elected officials, the public open house, and from data gathering and research efforts:

PEDESTRIAN ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility has been identified as a challenge throughout the corridor. Sidewalk widths vary and are as narrow as 5 feet wide, often times blocked by utility poles and other obstructions. There is no separation between the sidewalks and traveled way. Much of the route is not compliant with current Americans with

Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. The Loussac Library has requested direct pedestrian access from 36th Avenue.

LACK OF BICYCLE FACILITIES

Bicycle users along the route are constrained by narrow sidewalks and a lack of shoulders or bike lanes. Denali Street and 36th Avenue do not provide connectivity between known bicycle routes adjacent to the study area (see Figure 9 below).

Possible project extensions have been identified and recommended by stakeholders. Extending the project north to Fireweed Avenue would provide connectivity to the Chester Creek Trail by way of a bike-friendly on street route on Eagle Street. Extending the project west to A Street would connect to the C Street pathway. Expanding the project limits will be reviewed, but is not currently funded.

Narrow sidewalk widths limit bicyclists' ability to maneuver around pedestrians and obstacles such as utility poles. Bicyclists have been observed to switch back and forth from the sidewalk to the roadway travel lanes in order to pass by slower pedestrians. Crossing of signalized intersections can be a challenge for bike users, as parallel curb ramps may not allow bicyclists sufficient room for maneuvering or queuing before crossing.

PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS

Pedestrian crossing volumes were collected at side streets intersecting Denali Street and 36th Avenue. Between 7:00 AM and 5:45 PM, forty-eight pedestrians crossed Denali Street at 40th Avenue. Fifty-one pedestrians crossed 36th Avenue at Barrow Street during the same time period. Both unsignalized intersections provide no advanced warning for approaching motorists.

At all other unsignalized pedestrian crossings within the project, hourly volumes were measured to be less than twenty pedestrians per hour. Throughout the project area, pedestrians have been observed to illegally cross mid-block. Additional pedestrian crossing counts are available in [Appendix B Traffic Analysis Memo](#).

SIGHT DISTANCE & VEHICLE SPEEDS

Vegetation and/or private improvements obscure motorists' sight distance for turning movements and visibility of pedestrians and bicyclists. This has been identified as an issue at the intersection of Denali Street with Telephone Avenue, 34th Avenue, 32nd Avenue, and the Home Depot and Lowe's approaches.

At the Northeast corner of the 36th Avenue and Denali Street intersection, private landscaping constrains the sidewalk width. Along Denali Street north of 36th Avenue, landscaping can encroach onto the sidewalk, limiting the usable space for pedestrians and bicyclists, especially during peak usage hours.

The observed 85th percentile speed along Denali Street from Tudor Road to 36th Avenue was 41 MPH for the fastest segment, 6 MPH higher than the posted speed limit. Speeds along this segment have been reported as a safety concern by the public. Observed 85th percentile speeds on 36th Avenue vary from 38 MPH to 42 MPH and are more consistent with the posted speed limit of 40 MPH.

DRAINAGE & ROAD SURFACE DETERIORATION

Localized flooding issues have been identified at the northwest corner of the 36th Avenue and Denali Street intersection. Overall project road surface condition is below average, with deterioration of the wearing course.

CRASH RATES

Crash history was studied for the years 2010 to 2014. During this time period, two fatal crashes occurred: one pedestrian crash on Denali Street between Northern Lights Boulevard and Benson Boulevard and one right angle (T-bone) crash at the intersection of 40th Avenue and Denali Street.

Westbound traffic on 36th Avenue at the Denali Street intersection commonly sees rear end and sideswipe type of crashes. Eastbound 36th Avenue left turning traffic commonly conflicts with westbound 36th Avenue traffic.

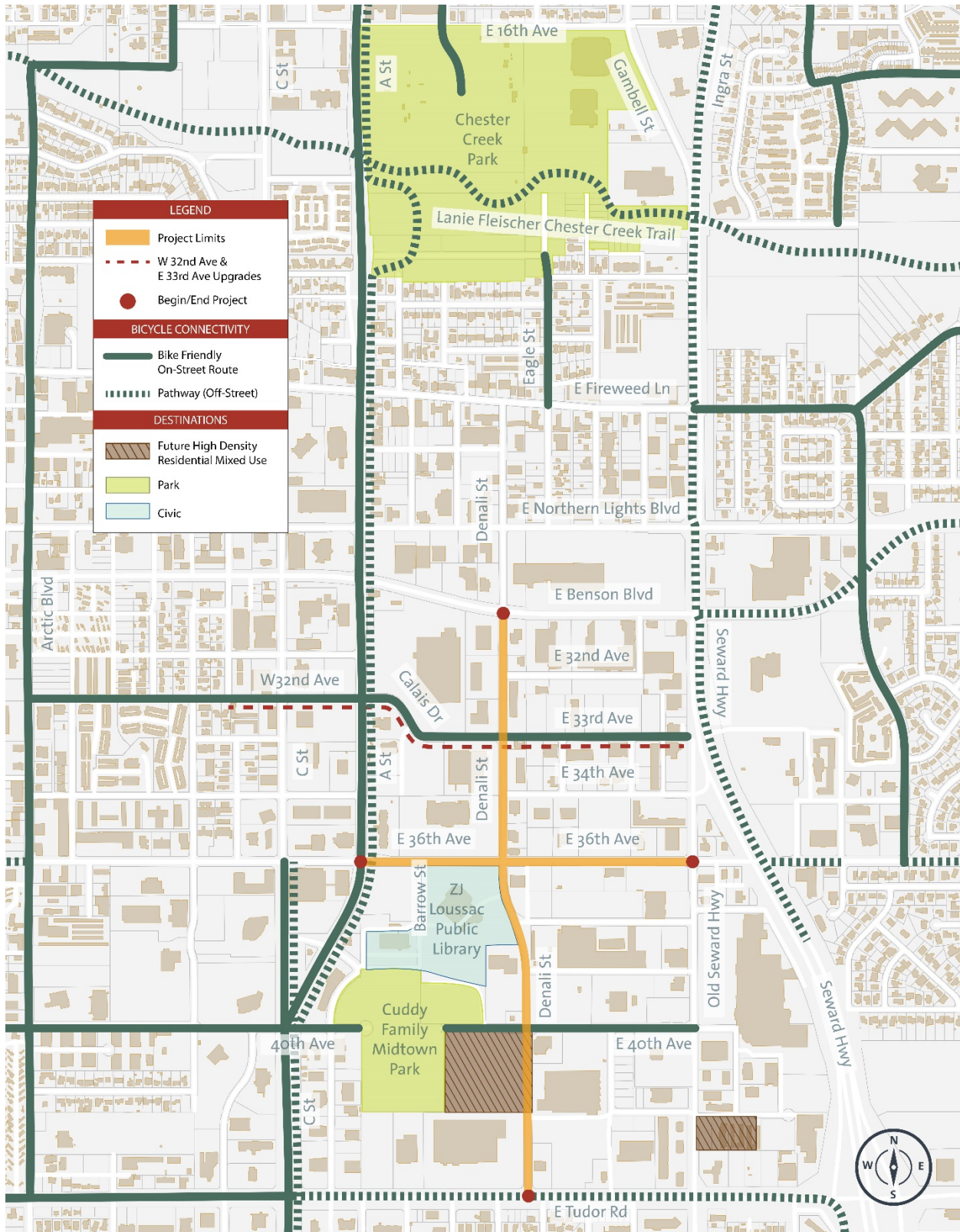


FIGURE 9. BICYCLE ROUTE CONNECTIVITY MAP

Crash rates from years 2010 to 2014 are statistically above average for:

- Denali Street - Northern Lights Boulevard to Benson Boulevard
- Denali Street - 40th Avenue to Tudor Road
- Intersection of Denali Street & Northern Lights Boulevard
- Intersection of Denali Street and 40th Avenue
- Intersection of 36th Avenue and C Street.

For a more detailed summary of crashes, see Attachment B Traffic Analysis Memo.

STREET MAINTENANCE AND SNOW STORAGE

Temporary snow storage is lacking on both 36th Avenue and Denali Street, and is generally scarce throughout Midtown Anchorage. MOA Street Maintenance has asked for more temporary snow storage options. Wider vegetative buffers and marked shoulders are options for temporary snow storage. During the winter months, sidewalks are often buried in snow plowed off the road, further limiting dedicated pedestrian space.

UTILITIES AND STREET LIGHTING

Ongoing coordination with Municipal Light and Power (ML&P) will determine the scope of any facility upgrades to occur concurrently with this project. Anchorage Water & Wastewater (AWWU) has indicated sufficient water supply in the area but will review and consider spot replacements of older pipes ready for upgrades. GCI will likely relocate any aerial services into underground conduits and duct systems.

High-pressure sodium (HPS) street lighting exists along segments of Denali Street and 36th Avenue. If the project requires relocation of these lights, upgrading to light emitting diode (LED) style of street lights will be considered.

The attached pathway on the north side of 36th Avenue has several utility poles directly within the travel path for pedestrians. The pathway on the south side has light poles within the travel path for pedestrians. Both obstructions impede pedestrian movement and are a hazard for all users.



FIGURE 10. OBSTRUCTION IN SIDEWALK ON 36TH AVENUE

HOMELESS POPULATION

Issues with the homeless population were consistently at the forefront of discussions with stakeholders. These issues cause security concerns for business owners and can make area users feel unsafe.

PROJECT SUMMARY TABLE

MOA PM&E MIDTOWN CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENTS, DENALI STREET AREA: BENSON BOULEVARD TO TUDOR ROAD CSS TRANSPORTATION PROJECT SUMMARY TABLE	
Municipality of Anchorage	Project No. 16-28 Project Manager: Russell Oswald, PE, LS Project Administrator: Melinda Tsu, PE Design Consultant: R&M Consultants, Inc.
Road Ownership	The Municipality of Anchorage owns and maintains Denali Street and 36 th Avenue
Problems Identified to be Solved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedestrian and roadway facilities are in need of repair or replacement • Non-motorized and motorized transportation network is imbalanced in favor of vehicles • Connectivity and walkability need to be improved
Known Issues	Right-Of-Way (ROW) constraints, snow storage, obstructed pedestrian routes/facilities, intersection delays, business access, poor non-motorized connectivity
Community Councils	Midtown Community Council
House District	District 18: Representative Harriet Drummond
Senate District	District I: Senator Berta Gardner
Assembly Districts	District 4, Midtown: Dick Traini and Felix Rivera
Anchorage School District Schools	Rogers Park Elementary, North Star Elementary, Romig Middle, Central Middle, West High
Parks	Cuddy Family Midtown Park
MOA Grid Map	SW1731 and SW1631
Zoning	Adjacent Zoning Districts: General Business District (B-3), Public Lands and Institutions (PLI), Mixed Residential (R-3)
Utilities	Fully serviced for all utilities: ACS, ML&P, ENSTAR, GCI and AWWU

Roadway Information	
Right-Of-Way Widths (Approximate)	Denali Street: varies from 70 feet to 80 feet. 36 th Avenue: varies from 70 feet to 95 feet.
2015 Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT)	Denali Street: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tudor Road to 36th Avenue - 5,187 to 6,028 • 36th Avenue to Benson Boulevard – 9,491 to 9,849 36 th Avenue: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Street to Denali Street – 16,378 • Denali Street to Old Seward Highway – 15,298
Crash Data	Crash rates from years 2010 to 2014 are statistically above average for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denali Street - Northern Lights Boulevard to Benson Boulevard • Denali Street - 40th Avenue to Tudor Road • Intersection of Denali Street & Northern Lights Boulevard • Intersection of Denali Street and 40th Avenue • Intersection of 36th Avenue and C Street. From 2010 to 2014, 15 crashes involved bicyclists and 18 involved pedestrians within the project study area.
Speed Studies	Posted Speed Limits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denali Street: 35 MPH • 36th Avenue: 40 MPH Observed 85 th Percentile Speeds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denali Street: 35 MPH to 41 MPH • 36th Avenue: 38 MPH to 42 MPH
MOA People Mover Transit Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Route System no longer services Denali Street or 36th Avenue. • Closest routes: A Street, Benson Boulevard, Northern Lights Boulevard, and Tudor Road.
Walking and Bicycle Routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5-foot attached sidewalks exist on both sides of Denali Street and 36th Avenue; not all are ADA compliant • No designated bicycle routes • No separate bicycle facilities

Funding, Source and Schedule	
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$750,000 Anchorage Roads and Drainage Service Area (ARDSA) bond funds for design study only • No design or construction funding
Schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction date is TBD
Guiding Plans	
Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), 2012 and Interim MTP, 2016	<p>Recommended 2035 MTP Road Projects, Short Term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 36th Avenue Access Management - Spenard Road to Denali Street: access management treatments to improve access and circulation <p>Recommended 2035 MTP Non-Motorized Projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Midtown east-west routes (reconnaissance study): Study (Area C) – investigate the feasibility of constructing bicycle facilities through Midtown
Official Street and Highways Plan, 2014	Denali Street and 36 th Avenue are both classified as Minor Arterials which usually have 2-4 lanes, 80' ROW width minimum and 10,000-20,000 AADT
Anchorage Bowl 2020 Comprehensive Plan	<p>Policy #23: Major Employment Centers exist at the downtown, Midtown and U-Med areas. Characteristics are as follows: B) promotion of compact, mixed commercial/office development where businesses are close enough to walk between. F) a pedestrian-oriented environment including expanded sidewalks, crosswalks, street furniture, bus shelters, and landscaping.</p> <p>Policy #37: Design, construct, and maintain roadways of right-of-ways to accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, the disabled, automobiles, and trucks where appropriate.</p> <p>Policy #45: Connect local activity centers, such as neighborhood schools and community centers with parks, sports fields, greenbelts and trails, where feasible</p>
Anchorage 2040 Land Use Plan Map	Majority of the corridor is designated as City Center, uses south of 36 th Avenue uses include Community Facility or Institution, Park or Natural Area, Compact Mixed-Use Residential – High Density, and Commercial Corridor in addition to City Center

Guiding Plans Continued	
Anchorage Bicycle Plan, 2010	No proposed improvements are identified along Denali Street or 36 th Avenue, however we believe Denali Street would be more appropriate than the ABP recommended Old Seward Hwy for bike facilities
Anchorage Pedestrian Plan, 2007	No specific recommendations along Denali Street or 36 th Avenue but does recommend improvements along intersection roadways, including a pedestrian connection between Denali Street and A Street north of the Century 16 Theater
Anchorage Bowl Park, Natural Resource and Recreational Facility Plan, 2006	Cuddy Family Midtown Park, a Community Use Park, is adjacent to and is accessed by Denali Street, south of 36 th Avenue and Loussac Library. No changes in use or purpose of the park are planned, only continued upgrades and maintenance to improve community use.
Wetlands Management Plan, 2013	No identified wetlands are within the project area.
AWWU Water Master Plan/CIP Projects	Water main extension from Downtown to Kincaid reservoir via A Street alignment. The Midtown Corridor project will not impact the water main extension project