



Background on East Medical Center Drive Bridge

Revised January 31, 2023

The problem

This bridge needs to be rebuilt because it is deteriorating. City and U-M officials worked with a consultant to design a new bridge. Unfortunately, the design that was developed would have made things worse for the many bikers and walkers who use this bridge every day, because it would have narrowed the west sidewalk and added a vehicle lane. The design would narrow the west sidewalk from 10.5' to 8' and widen the east sidewalk from 10.5' to 13'.

The sidewalk need

The west sidewalk needs instead to be widened to about 15' to make room for bidirectional bike lanes and a pedestrian lane (see map below). This sidewalk is a key link to the Border-to-Border Trail and in the proposed Campus-to-Campus Bikeway, because, via the trail loop under the bridge, it connects the valley trail system to West Medical Center Drive, which provides the best way for cyclists to negotiate the hill to and from Central Campus. (The east sidewalk does not serve that purpose.) The design proposed by the consultant contradicted the policies of both the city and U-M to improve walkability and bikeability to address climate and safety issues.

The trail loop need

The consultant also reported that the planned trail loop under the bridge (see map below) could not be built yet because of MDOT concerns that the trail would intrude 4' into the roughly 100' railroad right-of-way. But since there would be bridge abutments between the trail and the railroad, a bit of fencing up to the abutments should address any MDOT concerns. The trail loop will connect to the west sidewalk to allow people to avoid a surface crossing of busy East Medical.

Walk Bike Washtenaw (WBW) observations

Because of the heavy vehicle traffic to and from the hospital, WBW believes that on-street bike lanes here would not be suitable for an "all ages and abilities" facility. But since narrow sidewalks are problematic for cyclists and walkers to share, a wide west sidewalk with bidirectional bike lanes and a pedestrian lane would allow safe and comfortable travel. WBW has taken no position on the planned addition of a vehicle lane to the bridge and believes that that should be decided on its merits. But WBW believes that if the bridge can be widened to accommodate cars, it should be improved to help walkers and cyclists. And while WBW has no problem with widening the east sidewalk if that is desired, WBW objects to doing so by reducing the width of the west sidewalk. There has been a suggestion to add barriers between the sidewalk and the road; WBW would support that if it does not reduce sidewalk space.

Cost information

City staff have said that widening the west sidewalk from 10.5' to about 15' would require an additional support beam below the bridge. Preliminary cost estimates for this vary from \$500,000 to \$2 million. The cost for the whole bridge is estimated to be about \$10 million. The U-M has committed to pay the portion due to the added vehicle lane and to split evenly with the city the remaining cost. There is also a tentative cost-share arrangement for additional bridge widening.



Map of needed improvements at East Medical Center Drive bridge

