

# Public Intersections

Integrating transit and public space into a single infrastructure through a community design process.

***Bus rapid transit corridors placed along New Orleans' neutral grounds will provide efficient transit the city sorely needs, while a design process sensitive to community engagement will ensure the valued space currently there is not erased.***

Robust transit is essential to an urban area's success; investment in systems carries with it economic returns and non-monetary benefits such as lowered congestion, pollution, and simpler movement for residents. In New Orleans specifically, job access depends greatly on public transit; one in five residents don't have access to a car, which greatly reduces the number jobs available to them. New Orleans' high water table prevents the development of a subway system; therefore the city is somewhat limited to ground transit bound to the will of the traffic around it.

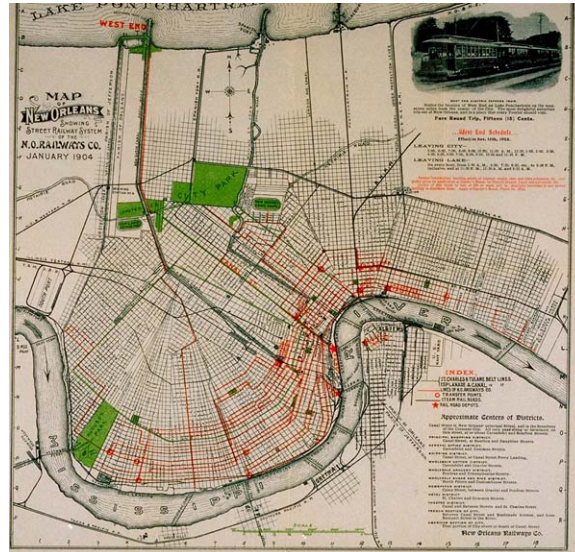
New Orleans is also home to a very unique form of public space. Neutral grounds, known elsewhere as medians, are treasured green spaces throughout the city. While efficient public transportation, in the form of bus rapid transit, can be placed along their lengths, it must not replace the valued space already there. Through a design process that values community input, an infrastructure can be developed that will provide enhanced programming of the neutral ground as well effective transit.

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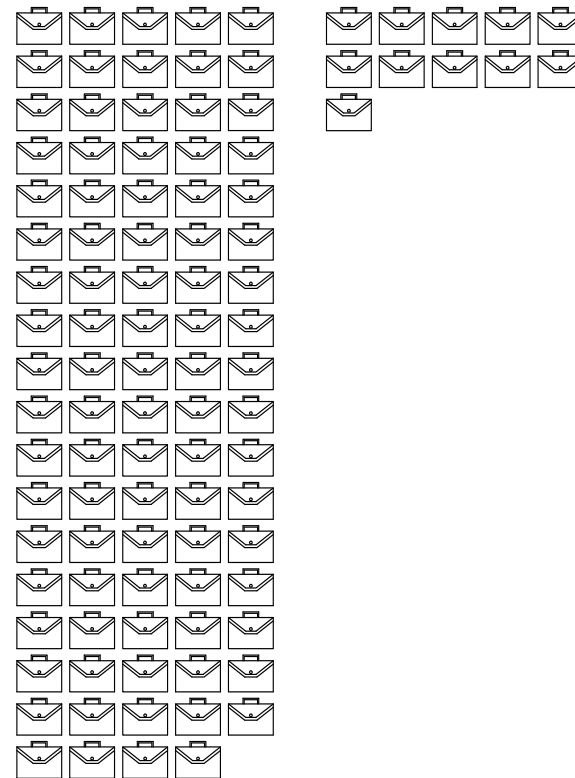
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Canal St. neutral ground, 1895. (old-new-orleans.com)



New Orleans Streetcars, 1904. (Louisiana State Museum)



For every 89 jobs available in the New Orleans region by car, only 11 are available by transit. (Author; data from Ride New Orleans)

In 1835, the New Orleans and Carrollton Railroad Company constructed a rail line between New Orleans and the then-distinct town of Carrollton. The new tracks followed the curvature of the Mississippi River as they passed through the farmland and plantations that separated the two. In the following decades, loud, fiery steam power carried both passengers and freight down the line through the Louisiana heat. As New Orleans expanded, eventually annexing Carrollton, the intolerable steam engines were replaced by horse drawn streetcars. In 1891, when electric power lines were approved for the route, the line was renamed for the street it occupied. The St. Charles streetcar is now the oldest continually operating passenger street railway in the world (NORTA).

Streetcars became “the lifeblood of the city.” By the 1920s, around 225 miles of track ran through New Orleans. However, the heyday was not to last, as buses began to be implemented in the 1940s and 50s. With lower operating costs, greater flexibility, and modern appeal, by 1964 they took the place of every streetcar route, save for the original St. Charles line (NORTA). Bus transit, while not as romantic as streetcars, is effective, and the New Orleans Regional Transit authority offered myriad routes throughout the city. However, since the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, service has been drastically reduced, and residents are paying the price (Ride New Orleans).

The population of New Orleans has recovered to nearly 90% of its pre-Katrina levels, yet transit has not. Before Katrina, 80% of bus and streetcar lines had wait times of less than 30 minutes during peak hours, while as of 2015 only 43% of routes offered the same service. This has large consequences for riders; if buses only come once every hour, a trip to work can quickly balloon into a frustratingly long ordeal. Furthermore, the total number of bus and streetcar trips offered weekly by NORTA has declined by 55% from before the hurricane to 2015. When that is split up between streetcars and buses, a huge disparity becomes apparent. The city today offers more streetcar service than it did before the storm, yet only a paltry 35% of bus trips per week have been reinstated. This huge investment in streetcars is extremely problematic, as streetcar infrastructure is expensive to install, and once installed, not adaptable to a city’s shifting needs. Perhaps more importantly, the money spent providing highly localized streetcar service could have been spent providing much broader benefits to much more residents. For instance, crossing parish lines using public transit is especially difficult, creating onerous obstacles for inter-parish commuters. All in all, the recovery of transit in New Orleans has been incomplete, and its efforts misplaced (Ride New Orleans).

Beyond the gross transit recovery figures, the specifics of where transit has been restored are grim, playing along racial and economic lines. Even when controlling for population changes after Katrina, communities of color, low-income neighborhoods, and areas with less vehicle access are more likely to have had less transit service rebuilt between 2005 and 2012. This is hugely important, and also reflects a larger problem that poor transit exacerbates: job access. Those residents without access to a car can only access 11% of the region’s jobs in 30 minutes using transit; the number jumps to 89% when a vehicle is available. One in five New Orleans residents doesn’t have access to a car, making this disparity crushing, and the restoration of efficient transit even more important (Ride New Orleans).

The city should not merely aim towards restoring the service decimated by Katrina, but for more. Increased transit creates economic benefits for the areas it serves. It is estimated that for every \$10 million investment in transit services, there is a \$32 million increase in business sales. Household benefits are also notable, with transit riders saving around \$1,400 a year in gas. If a family can get rid of a car altogether, the benefits increase greatly, to over \$6,000 a year saved. Benefits are not limited to transit users, however, as an effective system reduces airborne pollution and congestion, creating a better city for all (APTA).

## Space For Transit

New Orleans has the space to install a modern, effective transit system. Most of New Orleans’ large streets are home to wide medians, or “neutral grounds,” as they are called in the city. These spaces gained their name from the divisive history of New Orleans, when separate ethnic neighborhoods detested each other so much they began to “semi-jokingly” refer to the median as if it were a strip of land between two armies (Campanella, Scott). Today, neutral grounds are not only an integral part of the city’s history, but are treasured green spaces used and maintained by many residents (Friedman). It is an amenity that is truly accessible to all residents of the city, yet it could become more.



The city's busiest bus routes (Author; data from NORTA and Louisiana Weekly)

- 94 - Broad
- 39 - Tulane
- 88 - St. Claude/Jackson Barracks
- 91 - Jackson/Esplanade
- 11 - Magazine



Neutral Grounds  
 Top: South Claiborne Avenue  
 Middle: St. Charles Avenue  
 Bottom: Napoleon Avenue

Placing transit in the neutral grounds presents a great paradox for a designer. While something of value is undoubtedly being created for the people of the city, something historic and vital to New Orleans' identity is being changed. The question becomes clear: how can public transit and treasured green space coexist in one infrastructure? This offers a fascinating architectural investigation; the combination of two public goods, with their various programmatic requirements, can create exciting spatial sequences and a desperately needed public good.

The neutral grounds in New Orleans, while fantastic assets, have also not lived up to their potential as public spaces. Streetcar tracks occasionally run down them, taking up their entire width (Campanella). Where there are no streetcars, the neutral ground is rarely imbued with program, leaving large swaths of New Orleans' green space to play an idle part in the city bustling around them. The desire to occupy this space can be seen on St. Charles Avenue, where joggers have worn meandering dirt paths into the grass along the rails. It can be seen on Esplanade Avenue, where a strolling path has been beaten beneath the live oaks, and it can be seen along South Claiborne Avenue, where locals sit on milk crates in the shade of young trees. New Orleanians are already occupying this space; it should acknowledge that and respond to their needs.

## A Modern Solution

New Orleans may be famous for its streetcars, but it is aching for modern transit. A subway system would not work in New Orleans due to the high water table, so whatever is built must be above ground. Given the correct infrastructure, bus systems can be extremely efficient, require less investment, and possess more flexibility than streetcars (Vincent, NORTA). Bus systems with these characteristics fall under the categories of bus rapid transit (BRT) and rapid bus. The main difference between these two is that BRT runs its vehicles along dedicated traffic lanes. Without having to compete for space with cars, a punctual, high-speed network can be created. Areas employing rapid bus do not necessarily have dedicated lanes, but other forms of bus priority are present, including bus-only lanes during peak transit times, traffic signal priority, and offboard payment. While implementing new bus infrastructure is expensive, the U.S. federal government runs two incentive programs, Small Starts and New Starts, which offer substantial funding for the construction of efficient transit systems (Vincent).

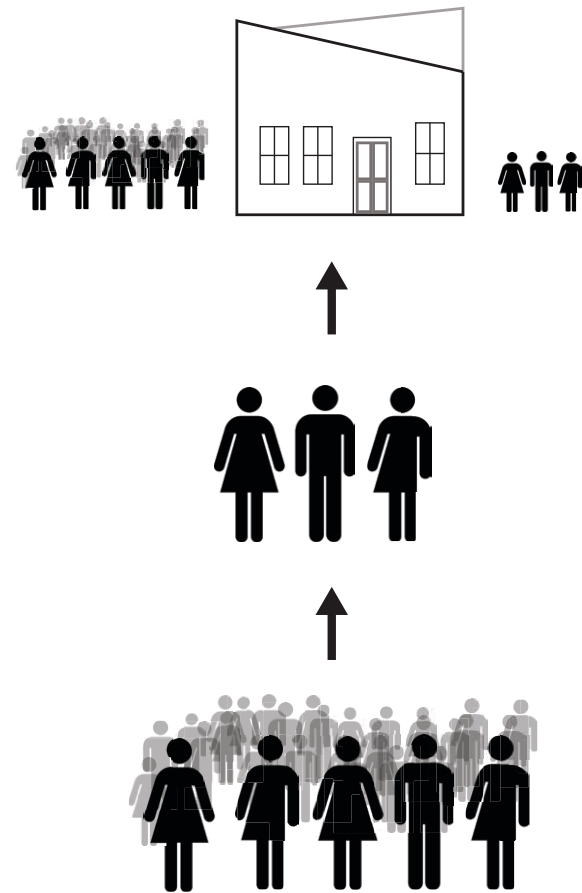
In 2012, a large analysis of New Orleans area transit was completed. Part of the analysis evaluated four separate existing bus lines, or combinations of bus lines, with regards to implementing a BRT system along them; the report highlighted two of them as having high potential as BRT corridors. One was the combination of the E3 Jefferson Highway & 16 Claiborne route, while the other was a combination of the 94 Broad and 24 Napoleon routes (Regional Planning Commission).

The first, and most famous, BRT system resides in Curitiba, Brazil. The city began building the network in 1974, and since then, it has grown tremendously. Dedicated bus lanes run down the middle of major roads in the city, offering express travel. High-volume buses with many doors keep loading and unloading times to a minimum. Its stations, which take the form of large glass tubes, are architectural icons that also do their job exceedingly well. Offboard payment is achieved through an attendant accepting payment at a turnstile, and the station is raised off the ground to allow level boarding onto the buses. Perhaps more importantly, the tubes offer riders shelter from the elements and places to sit (Reed).

## Existing Intersections

The notion of public space and transit coexisting in an infrastructure is not unheard of. Two recent projects in Barcelona exemplify this relationship: the Gran Via redevelopment, and the installation of a metro line in the city's Zona Franca. Both projects use an existing corridor in the city and retrofit it with a public transit while creating public spaces for the residents along the route (Per & Arpa).

The Gran Via is a busy expressway that runs through a residential neighborhood, and for years it filled the area with loud traffic noise and local pollution. The redesign implemented in 2007 by Arriola & Fiol Arquitectes and Miralles Tagliabre FMBT began by placing more emphasis on pedestrians than drivers. The designers built up cantilevered local roads 3.5 meters over each side of the main roadway, and placed sound barriers along their edges, reducing noise and local pollution. Below the elevated local routes, to one side of the major road, tram lines were placed, to the other side, parking areas. Above this, on the new ground level, public space exists for the neighborhood in the form of a long series of plazas containing both paved and green space. Furniture changes from plaza to plaza, offering unique settings, and sculptural water features create pleasant public areas. Pedestrian bridges cross the large road every 100 meters, in alignment with the city grid, ensuring it no longer creates a barrier within the area. The Gran Via is a comprehensive look at how transit and public space can create one infrastructure (Per & Arpa).



Public interest design begins when the needs of the community are brought to a design team, which starts a feedback dialogue between the two, resulting in a project that works for all. (Author)

There is another project in Barcelona that is a model for integrating transit and public space to create a highly functional urban asset. Designed by Pepita Teixidor and built in 2007, this project is located on Street A in the city's Zona Franca. It consists of an elevated metro line and ground-level pathways for pedestrians, cyclists, and skateboarders that run along a grass median. Street A, while now mainly surrounded by industry, is expected to blossom into a more active part of the city, and transit, along with interactive public space, needed to be provided for the new residents. Elevated metro lines were placed along the edges of the road's generous median, maintaining a visual connection across the street and not blocking out light, as some elevated rail systems can do. The first floor of each of the four metro stations is clad in glass, further minimizing ground-level impact. The pedestrian path running between metro routes is striped a bold black and yellow pattern, intentionally reminiscent of a tailor's measure, and is meant to encourage physical activity. Red and orange paths reserved for bikes and skateboards undulate the length of the corridor. Rest areas with furniture are located every 25 meters, and the large spaces available at roundabout intersections are also utilized (Per & Arpa).

The solutions devised for these two projects offer different lessons for a similar intervention in New Orleans. Street A translates particularly well for two reasons: the street's wide median is utilized to its full potential, and the project is entirely above ground. These two aspects will be essential to the design of a transit and public space infrastructure in New Orleans. Street A shows that a transit system can be raised over an existing green space while not rendering it largely unpleasant; it also exhibits that preserving ground-level public space can be accomplished without digging. Gran Via is an important example of a rigorous sectional organization of motor, pedestrian, and transit routes that work together to serve the public's mobility needs while not precluding green space along a large urban corridor. The regular crossings that prevent the corridor from splitting a neighborhood in half are also essential (Per & Arpa).

## A Bottom-Up Approach

When creating any public good, it is essential to consider what may seem implicit: what is truly good for the public? Building any large public space demands a designer truly understand the area they are designing for. A well-intentioned project is useless if it does not respond to the needs of the residents. The implementation of a sweeping transit and green space project in one of New Orleans most hallowed areas affects thousands of people; their voices must be heard in the design process. Public Interest Design (PID) is a methodology by which those voices can be heard. Rather than giving deference to the whims of the privileged and powerful, it demands designers continuously receive feedback from those who will be affected by a project. This results in a public good that achieves what it set out to do: benefit the public. A New Orleans infrastructure of public transit and space must be designed through PID process.

The design of infrastructure will be influenced by community input. This can be accomplished by reaching out to organizations that are doing similar work in New Orleans, such as Ride New Orleans, a transit advocacy nonprofit, and Parkway Partners, who work with green space in the city. Feedback can also be sought out in the simplest of ways: riding the bus and asking questions, or talking to residents relaxing on the neutral ground. In 2015, another Tulane Architecture thesis solicited community input in its process. The thesis, written by John David Scott, worked together with those experienced in community outreach to devise effective engagement strategies. This is another way to ensure meaningful community input (Scott).



11th Street Bridge shows rich programming and green space. (Washington Post)

A large public space can have detrimental effects on a neighborhood if it is not carefully considered. The 11th Street Bridge Park in Washington, D.C. is one large work that is making sure its construction will not inadvertently harm those it is hoping to benefit. The park, to be constructed on unused bridge piers in the Anacostia River, will connect two areas that have been economically and socially divided since the 1960s: the affluent Capitol Hill neighborhood, and the lower-income, predominantly black neighborhood of Anacostia (O'Connell, City-data). This puts the lower-income, black residents at risk of being displaced as wealthier people follow the new development across the river and into their neighborhood. Designers foresaw this, however, citing the High Line in New York as an example of a real estate explosion. Project leaders therefore worked with locals to design solutions that will prevent displacement and help residents receive benefits from the park's construction. These include a land trust that buys vacant and blighted lots for future use, a local business consortium, and the hiring of locals for both the construction and continuing operation of the park. Grant money has been given to the park for the express purpose of creating "home buyers' club" on less affluent side of the river (O'Connell).

The surrounding social and economic circumstances of an architectural project are important, yet in the case of the 11th St. Bridge Park, the formal qualities of the architecture were also decided upon by residents. A competition held for the design of the park was the result of innumerable community meetings, so that the architects were designing directly to the community's needs. When project leaders received proposals back from the competition, residents were in the room, influencing the future of their neighborhood. In the end, a design by OMA and Olin was chosen by residents and experts. The scheme functions as a multi-level linear park, doubling as a promenade and a collection of disparate program elements including a boat launch, plaza, vegetable garden, and environmental learning center (O'Connell). By including the community in all parts of the design process, the project leaders sought to reach a design that works for all. Furthermore, by designing entities that will fight displacement of the residents after the design's completion, they are ensuring the community surrounding the intervention will receive long-term benefits from it.

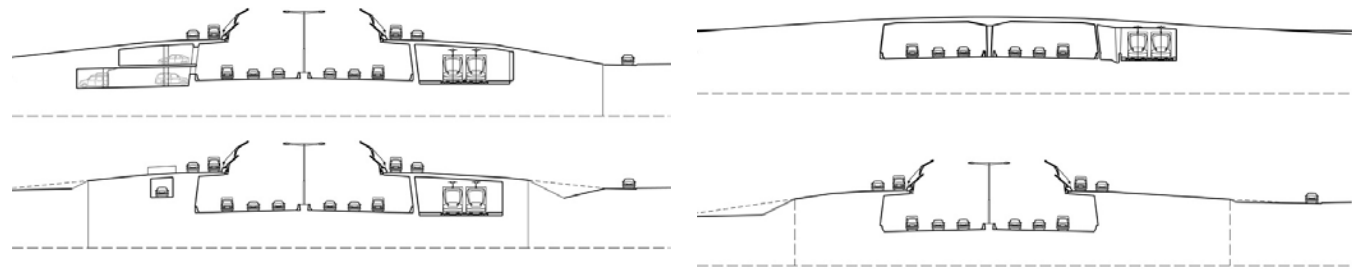
New Orleans desperately needs a more functional transit system, which would benefit the city economically, socially, and environmentally. While the neutral grounds of New Orleans offer the space to implement effective transit corridors, they are treasured, historic areas of the city. The design of an infrastructure that contains both public transit and public space will offer the residents of New Orleans both increased mobility and a programmatic revisioning of the neutral grounds. By learning from previous successful infrastructures and by designing with a bottom-up approach, the infrastructure will provide vital public goods for the city.

# Gran Vía

Barcelona, 2007

Arriola & Fiol Arquitectes, Miralles Tagliabre FMBT

The Gran Vía, a large motorway in Barcelona, Spain, cuts through a residential neighborhood, presenting a problem of loud traffic and air pollution. This corridor improvement cantilevers parallel local roads 2.5 m over the larger expressway, thus limiting noise and local pollution. Sound barriers have also been erected to minimize the detriment to the neighborhood. The space under the cantilever is utilized for a tram line as well as car parking. On the surface, the land between the local roads and the residential fabric has been converted into plazas with green space and water features. To maintain local connectivity across the expansive corridor, pedestrian bridges are located every 100m. (Per, Arpa)



Sections along the Gran Vía. (Arriola & Fiol Arquitectes)



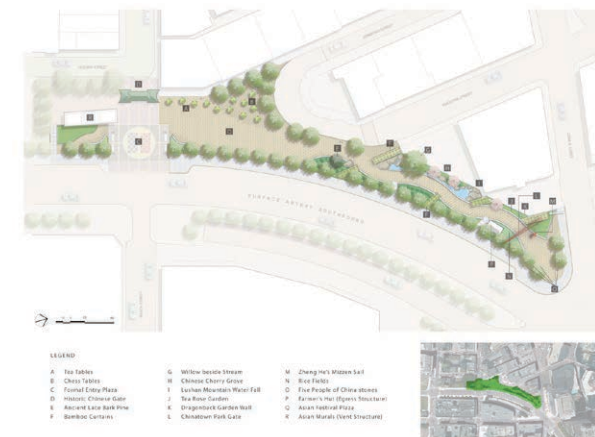
Overview of the Gran Vía. (Arriola & Fiol Arquitectes)

# Boston Central Artery

Boston, 2007

Various Architects

For much of the 20th century, Interstate 93 ran elevated through the heart of Boston, separating downtown from the oceanfront and taking up valuable space within the city. The solution, nicknamed “The Big Dig,” was to create a tunnel for the interstate that runs parallel beneath its existing route, therefore freeing up surface level space for local traffic and public amenities. This complicated project has rekindled access to the ocean, spurred real estate growth, and created public parks along its length. Chinatown Park, shown below, responds to the Asian community it serves, providing ample space for festivals, celebrations, and daily activities. (Per, Arpa; Flint)



Chinatown Park plan. (CRJA-IBI Group)



Chinatown Park. (CRJA-IBI Group)



Before (left) and after (right) overviews of the Boston Central Artery. (The Boston Globe)



# Claiborne Avenue Expressway

New Orleans, 1968

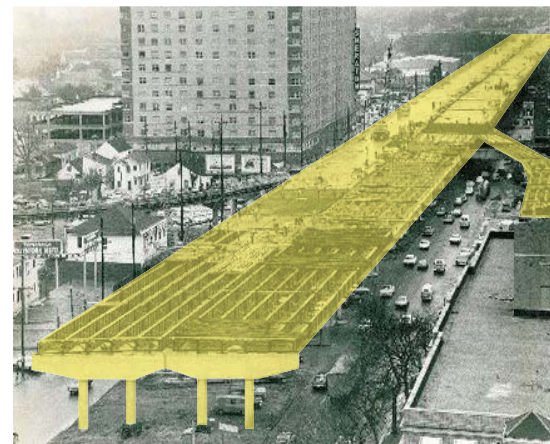
Lucrative federal subsidies during the mid-20th century encouraged the construction of interstates, the idea being that greater connectivity to city centers would bring greater prosperity. While interstates have surely provided fantastic benefits, their engagements with urban fabric have often proved horrific; the elevated I-10, built over North Claiborne Avenue, is a shining, or rather dull, example of what can go wrong.

North Claiborne Avenue was not merely a main street to the African-American community that surrounded it, owned its stores, and walked along it. It was a beloved public space, with a gigantic neutral ground that was home to over 200 oak trees. Black Mardi Gras took place there; children grew up playing in the dappled light cast by the oaks. The construction of the interstate eviscerated the space. Close to 500 homes were removed, dozens of businesses shuttered, and the sublime oaks were ripped up and moved elsewhere.

At the same time as the Claiborne Avenue Expressway was proposed, a similar project, the Riverfront Expressway, was defeated after an organized resistance by white French Quarter residents prevented it from separating the historic district from the riverfront. The black residents of Treme, the neighborhood the Expressway runs through, did not have the political power to prevent its construction; the I-10 exists today as a reminder of New Orleans' racist disregard for its own residents. (AIA; Kaplan-Levenson; Times-Picayune)



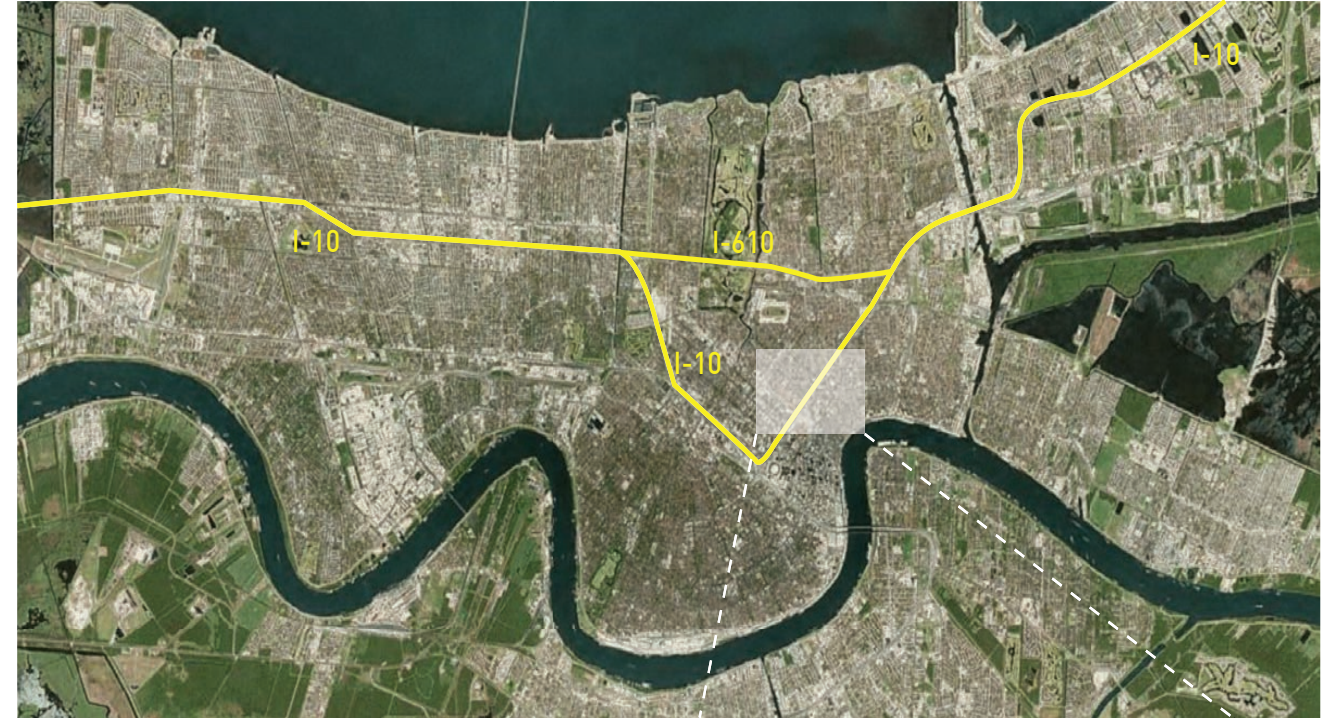
North Claiborne neutral ground before construction. (WWNO)



The interstate, here encroaching, strips the neighborhood of valued space, replacing it with something that will only be used by outsiders. (The Times-Picayune, diagram by author)



Under the Claiborne Avenue Expressway. (WWNO)



Google, diagram by author



Social functions still occur under the overpass. (New Orleans and Me)



Google, diagram by author

# Zona Franca Street A

Barcelona, 2007  
Pepita Teixidor

This project in Barcelona combines new metro viaducts above with green space below, creating an infrastructure of combined transit and public space. The surrounding area, while currently industrial, is expected to become more residential in the coming years, so creating a versatile corridor to serve those new residents became essential.

The design process began as a pursuit of the ideal section for the street. The metro viaducts are two separate structures, allowing much light into the space below. This area is a long strip of green space within which a pedestrian path and wandering bikes paths stretch. Every 25 meters, there are rest areas with furniture. Safer roundabout intersections were also installed, and harbor more green space within their boundaries. The presence of an elevated metro necessitated 4 multi-level stations for pedestrians to reach the transit stops. These could have interrupted the promenade below, but the first level is clad in glass to maintain the continuous experience. (Per, Arpa)

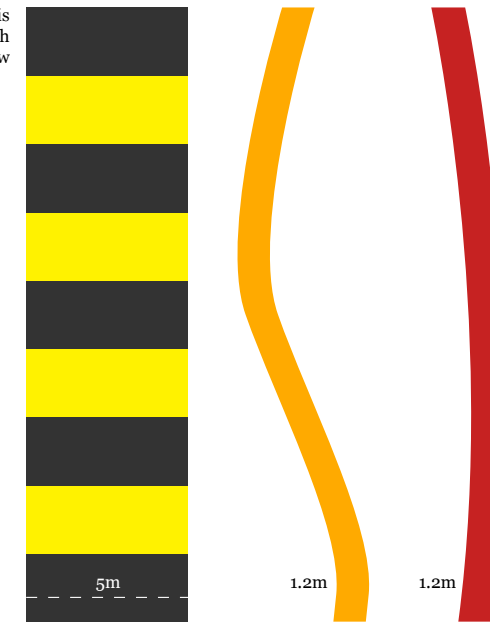


Strolling along the pedestrian path. (El Periódico)

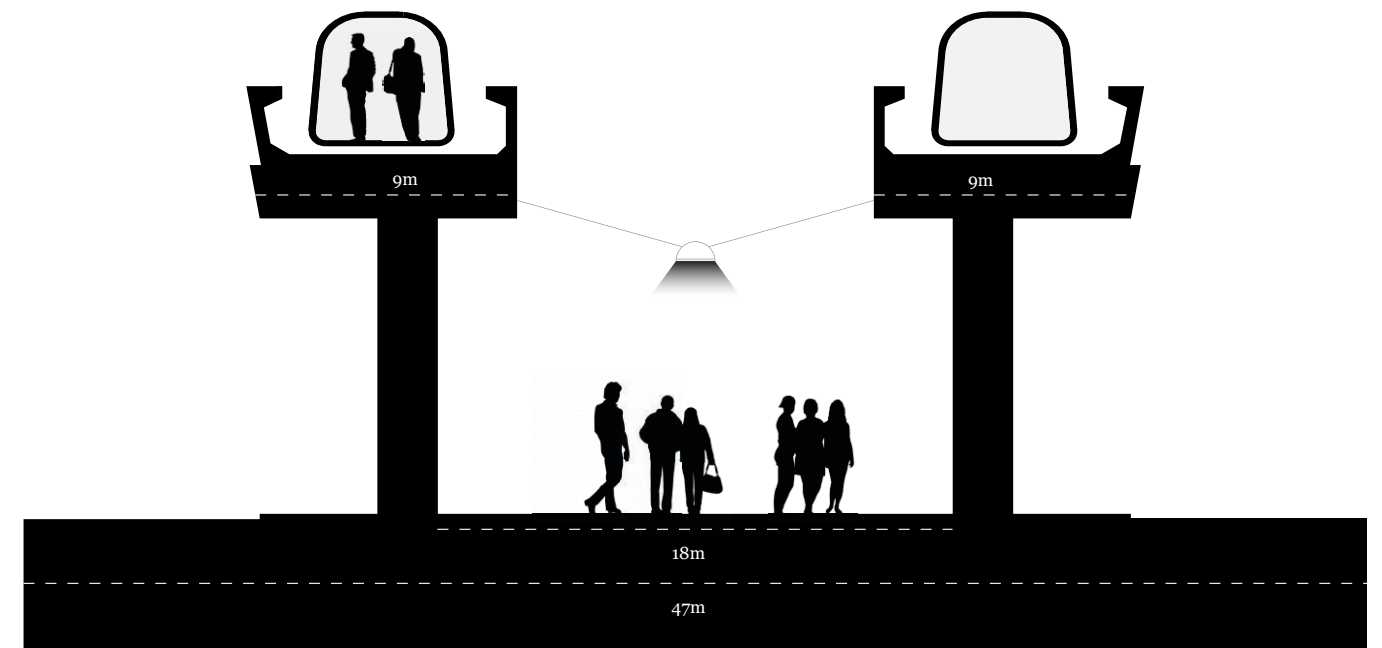


Roundabout intersections on Street A contain large green spaces. The street is still under construction in this image. (Pacadar)

Pedestrian path is colored like a Spanish tape measure to show distance covered.



Two brightly-colored paths denote paths for biking and skating. These paths wind freely along the route through green areas.



Diagrams by author.

# Curitiba Rede Integrada de Transport

Curitiba, Brazil, 1974  
Jaime Lerner

The Curitiba bus rapid transit (BRT) system, with its iconic stations and efficiency, set the precedent for similar implementations around the world. However, it was not always meant to be.

During the 1960s, Curitiba was planning on adapting its city center for heavy car usage, similar to what Brasilia had just done. In 1971, an architect named Jaime Lerner became mayor, and instead aggressively pursued an effective public transit system. After negotiating an agreement for bus operators to pay for some of the project, the system ended up costing 50 times less than what a rail system would have. That was only the first of many advances made in Curitiba. By 1993, 1.5 million passengers a day were accommodated, and the system was beginning to slow down. To solve this, onboard payment was replaced by offboard payment, which eliminated buses having to wait for payment. This also eliminated transfer stations, as one payment allowed a passenger to travel anywhere in the entire system.

The iconic glass tubular bus stations are highly functional as well. They are raised off the ground the same height as the buses to facilitate quick loading and unloading, and they also provide dedicated entry and exit doors, to prevent any extra waiting time. (Reed)



Offboard payment keeps the system on schedule. (The Guardian)

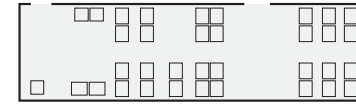


The tubular glass stations are icons of the city. (The Guardian)



Curitiba BRT overview. (Wikipedia)

## Large Buses

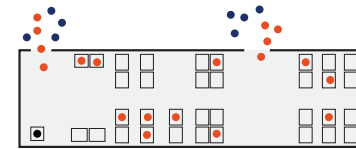


Standard city bus

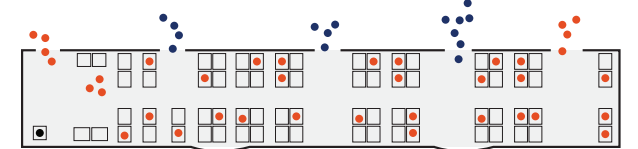


Bi-articulated bus can hold 270 passengers.

## Dedicated Entry/Exit

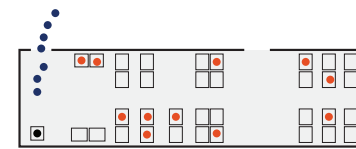


Passengers must wait to board.

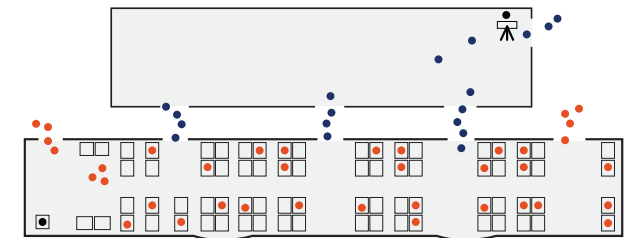


Multiple doors allow for quick stops.

## Offboard payment

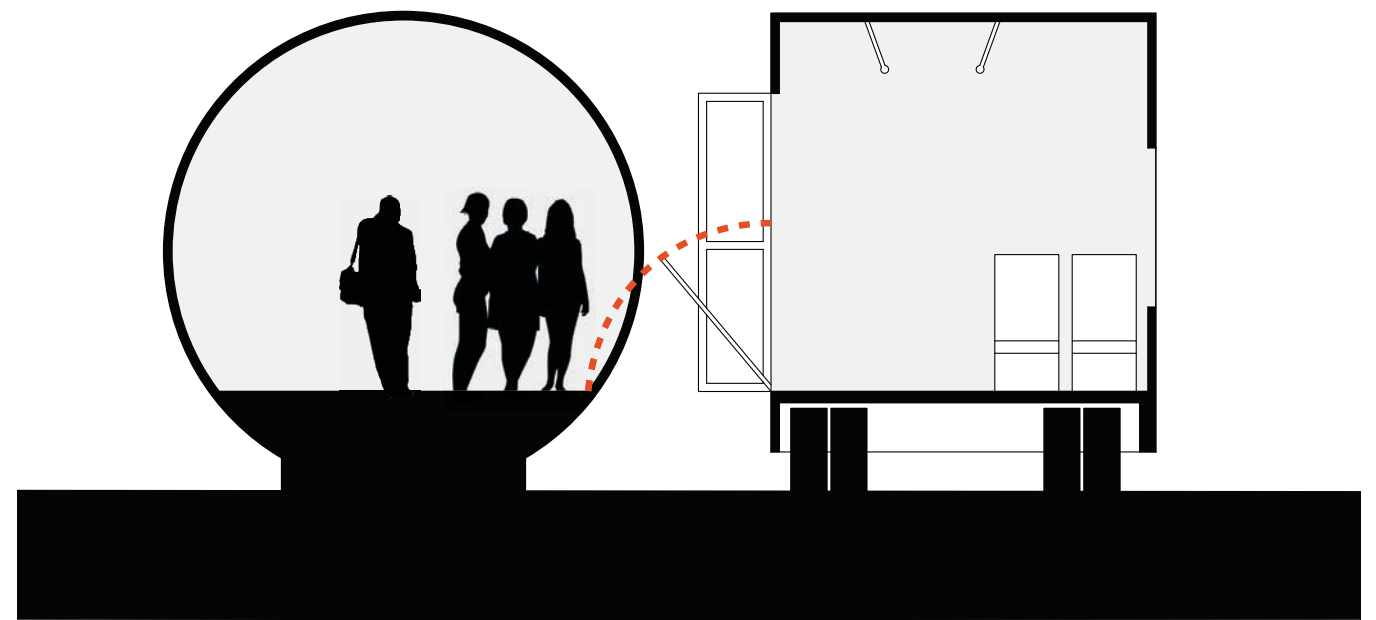


Bus must wait while fares are paid.



Turnstile payment in station keeps buses on schedule.

## Shelter and On-Level Boarding



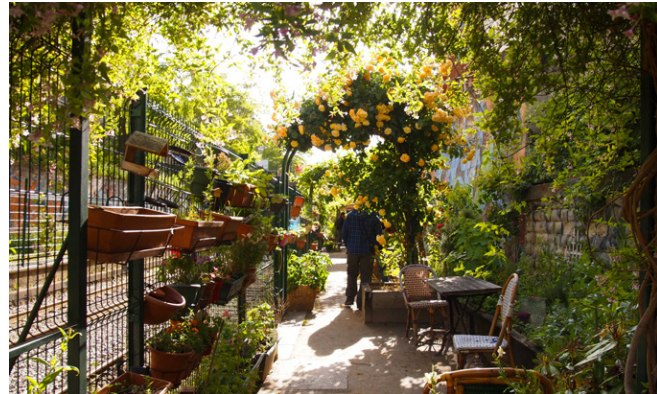
Diagrams by author.

# Petite Ceinture

Paris, 1851-Present  
Community Intervention

The Petite Ceinture, or “Little Ring,” began as a rail line that ran around Paris in 1851, connecting the then-disparate surrounding area. However, as Paris grew, the railway withered; by 1934 it was mostly abandoned, and by 1993 it was completely unused. Now it supports wildlife, the homeless, and a seemingly infinite canvas for graffiti artists.

A community organization has re-purposed part of the railway, creating what is known as the Jardins du Ruisseau (garden of the creek). It contains a small garden with a chicken shed and beehives, as well as a bar and seating area. This public space exists at a small, intimate scale, in contrast to some larger corridor. Looking at these intimate spaces is important to make sure a large scheme does not lose touch with the human scale. Interestingly, the same community organization, Association Sauvegarde Petite Ceinture, would like to repurpose the rail lines into functioning public transit lines. (Hossenally)



Shaded seating area. (carnet-aux-petites-choses.fr)



Public space overtaking disused train platforms. (The Guardian)

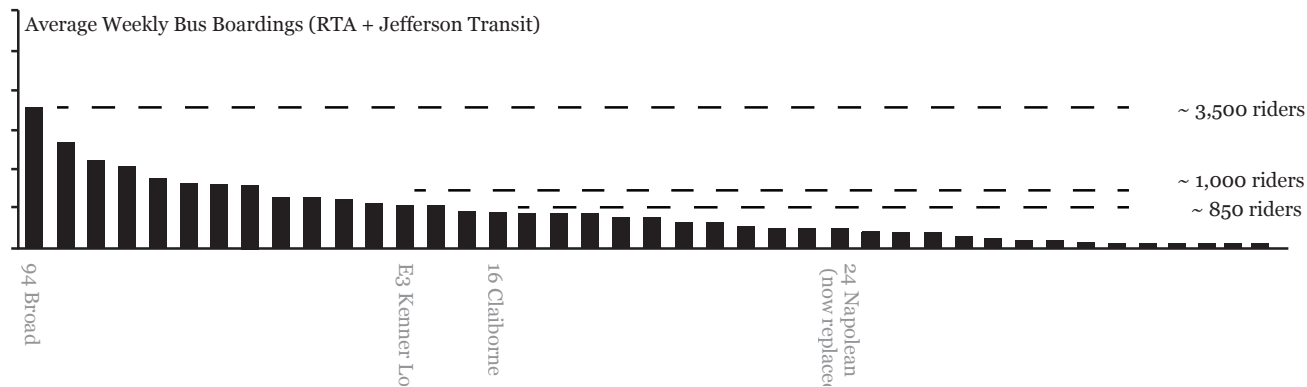
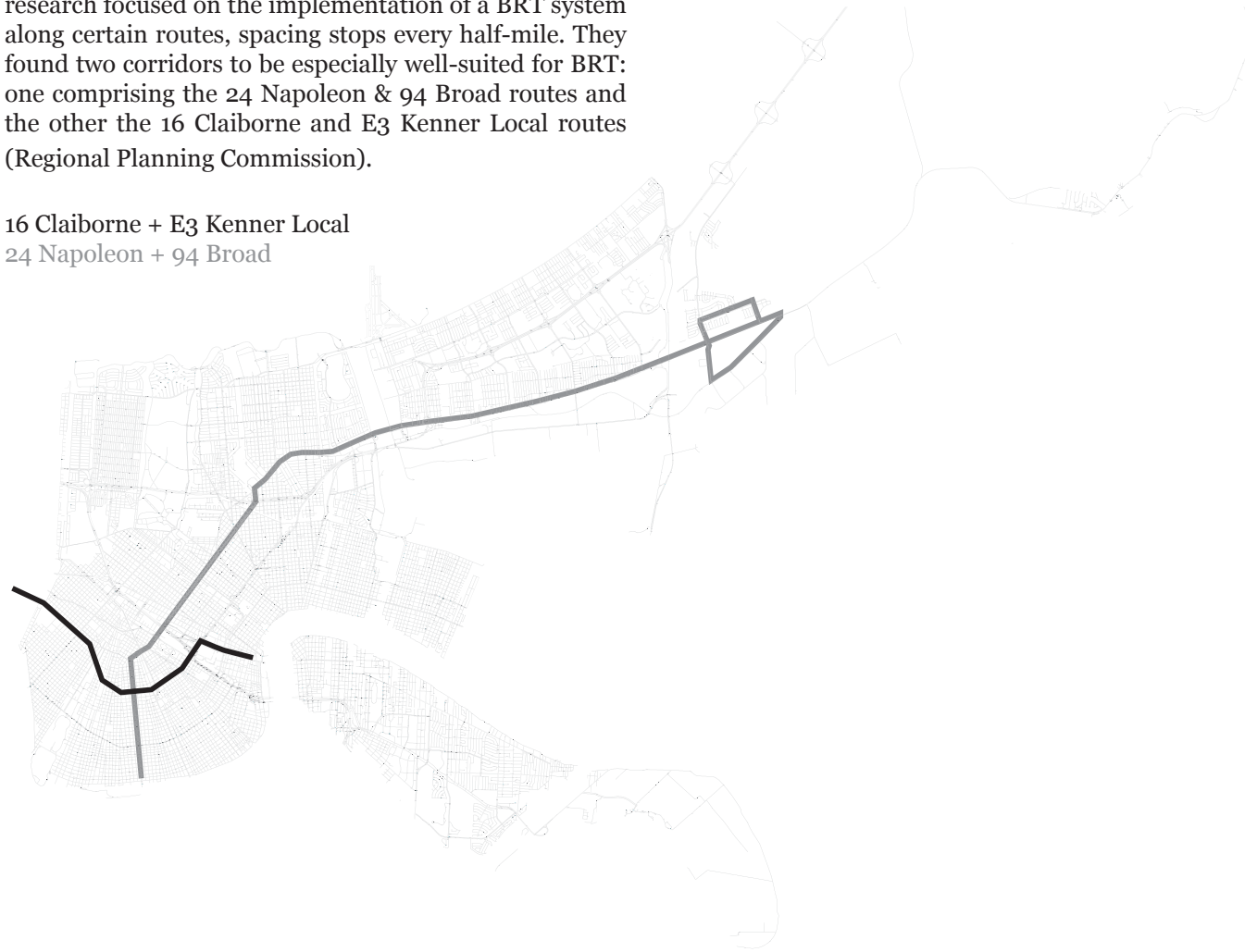


Occupation of abandoned train tracks.(carnet-aux-petites-choses.fr)

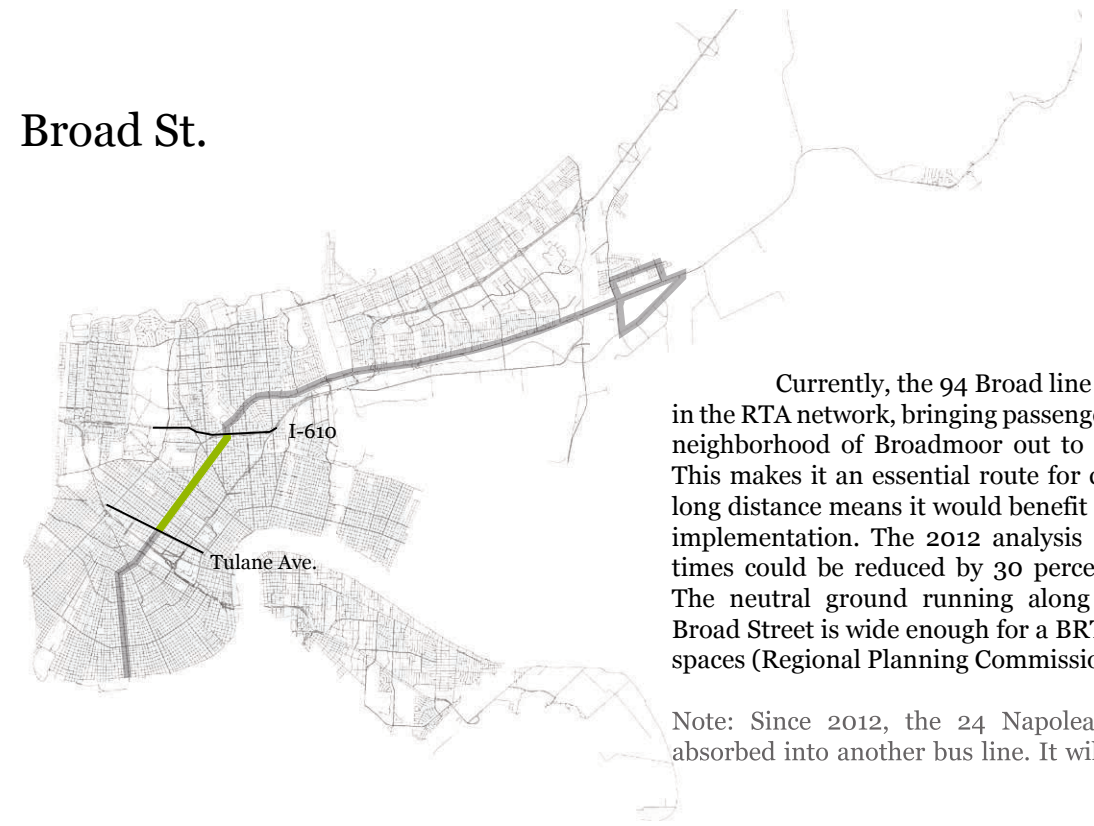
# Site Selection & Analysis

Combining the public space of neutral grounds with the efficiency of bus rapid transit (BRT) cannot occur within any corridor in New Orleans. The neutral ground itself must be wide enough to function as a public space, as well as fit bus lanes. More importantly, the corridor must have a legitimate need for BRT. That is to say, BRT would provide benefits for that route which other solutions, such as more frequent buses, could not. In 2012, consultants Nelson/Nygaard conducted a comprehensive analysis of the New Orleans regional transit system. Part of their research focused on the implementation of a BRT system along certain routes, spacing stops every half-mile. They found two corridors to be especially well-suited for BRT: one comprising the 24 Napoleon & 94 Broad routes and the other the 16 Claiborne and E3 Kenner Local routes (Regional Planning Commission).

16 Claiborne + E3 Kenner Local  
24 Napoleon + 94 Broad



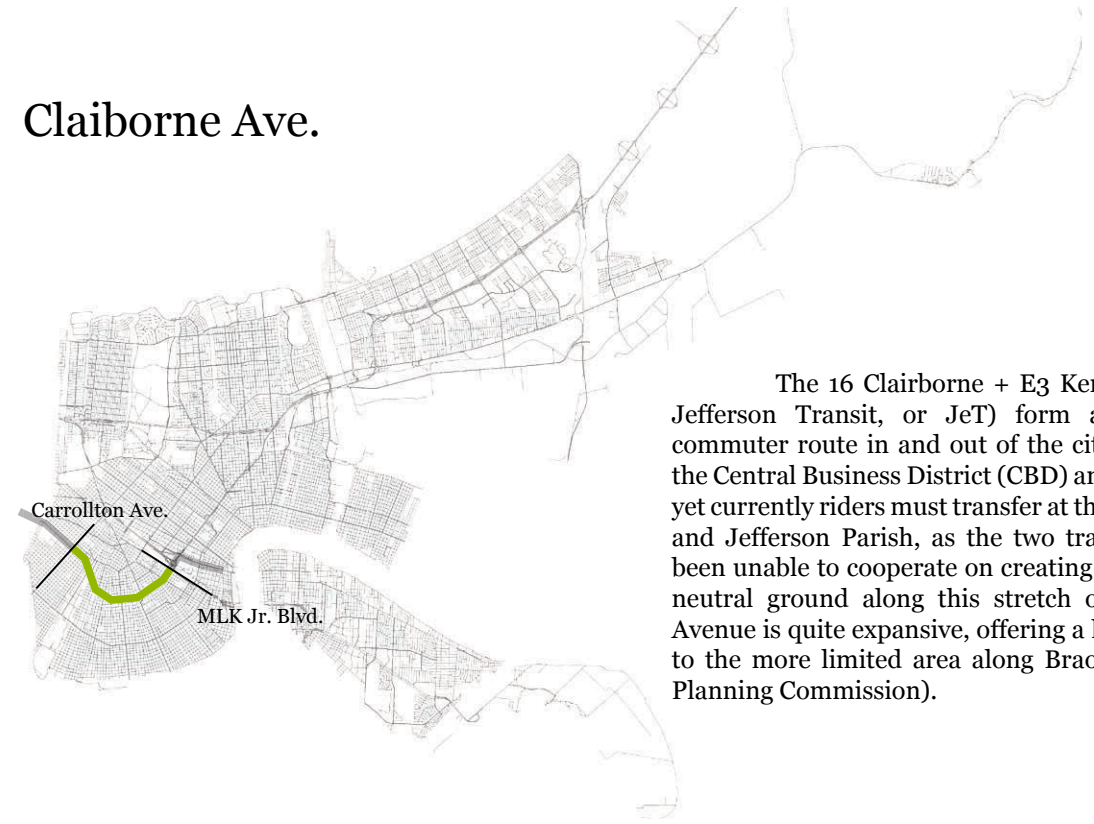
## Broad St.



Currently, the 94 Broad line is the busiest route in the RTA network, bringing passengers from the central neighborhood of Broadmoor out to New Orleans East. This makes it an essential route for commuters, and its long distance means it would benefit greatly from a BRT implementation. The 2012 analysis estimates that trip times could be reduced by 30 percent, or 20 minutes. The neutral ground running along North and South Broad Street is wide enough for a BRT and simple urban spaces (Regional Planning Commission).

Note: Since 2012, the 24 Napoleon route has been absorbed into another bus line. It will be absorbed here

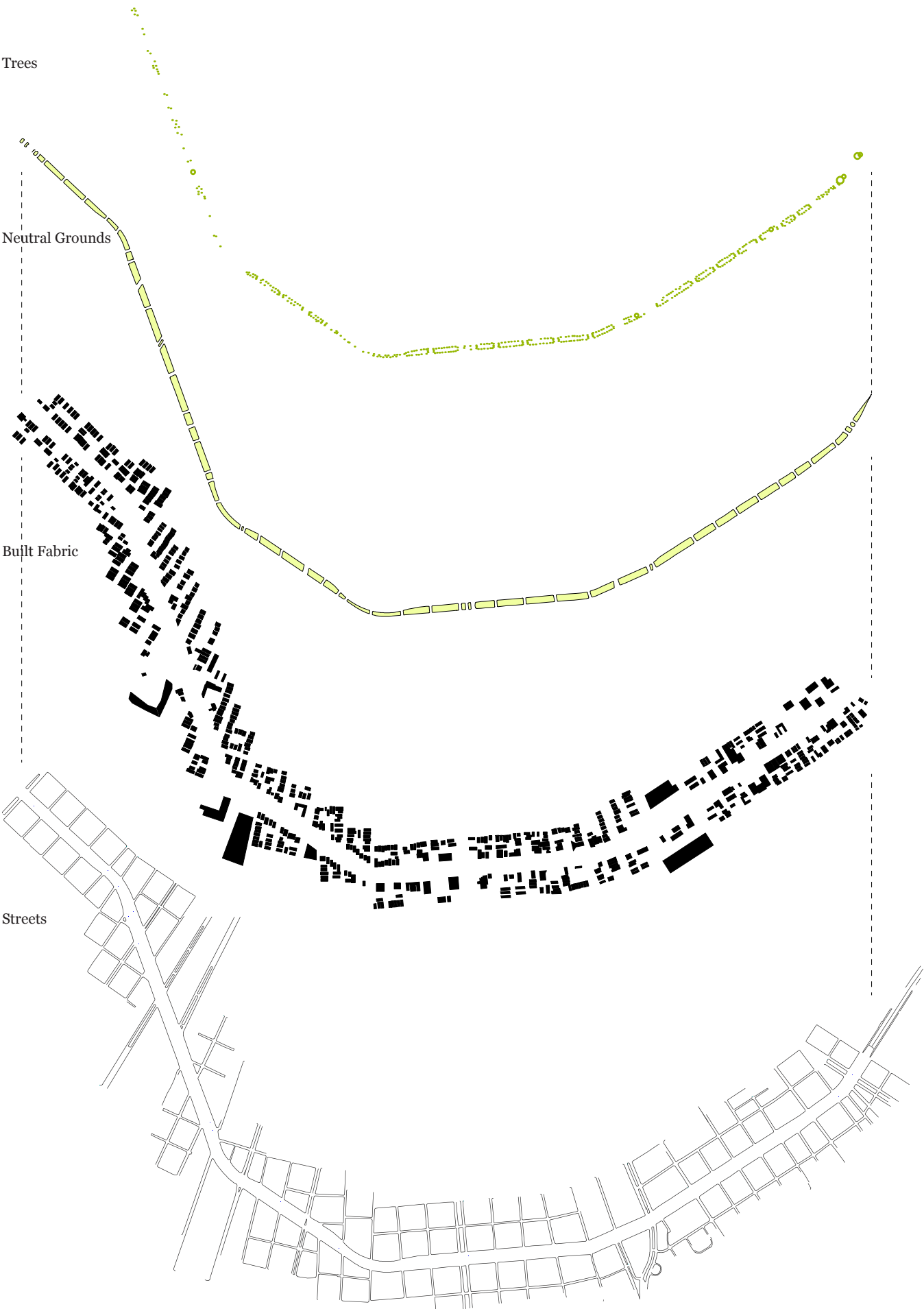
## Claiborne Ave.



The 16 Clairborne + E3 Kenner Local (part of Jefferson Transit, or JeT) form another important commuter route in and out of the city. It accesses both the Central Business District (CBD) and Jefferson Parish, yet currently riders must transfer at the border of Orleans and Jefferson Parish, as the two transit agencies have been unable to cooperate on creating a single route. The neutral ground along this stretch of South Claiborne Avenue is quite expansive, offering a larger counterpoint to the more limited area along Broad Street (Regional Planning Commission).

# South Claiborne Ave.

The chosen corridor for the 16 Claiborne route offers a very large neutral ground that can accommodate both bus traffic and green space with ease. The neutral ground reaches 80 feet wide along many parts of the route, and is well used by community members during both summer and winter. Considerations to take into account are the 25-foot-wide canal that runs under the neutral ground, as well as the existing trees that have been planted along the road already.

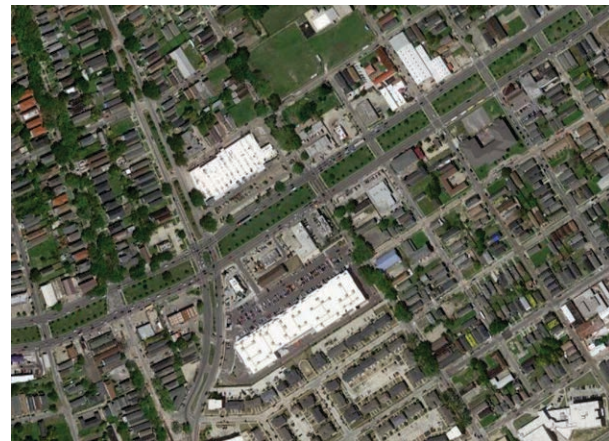


# Engagement

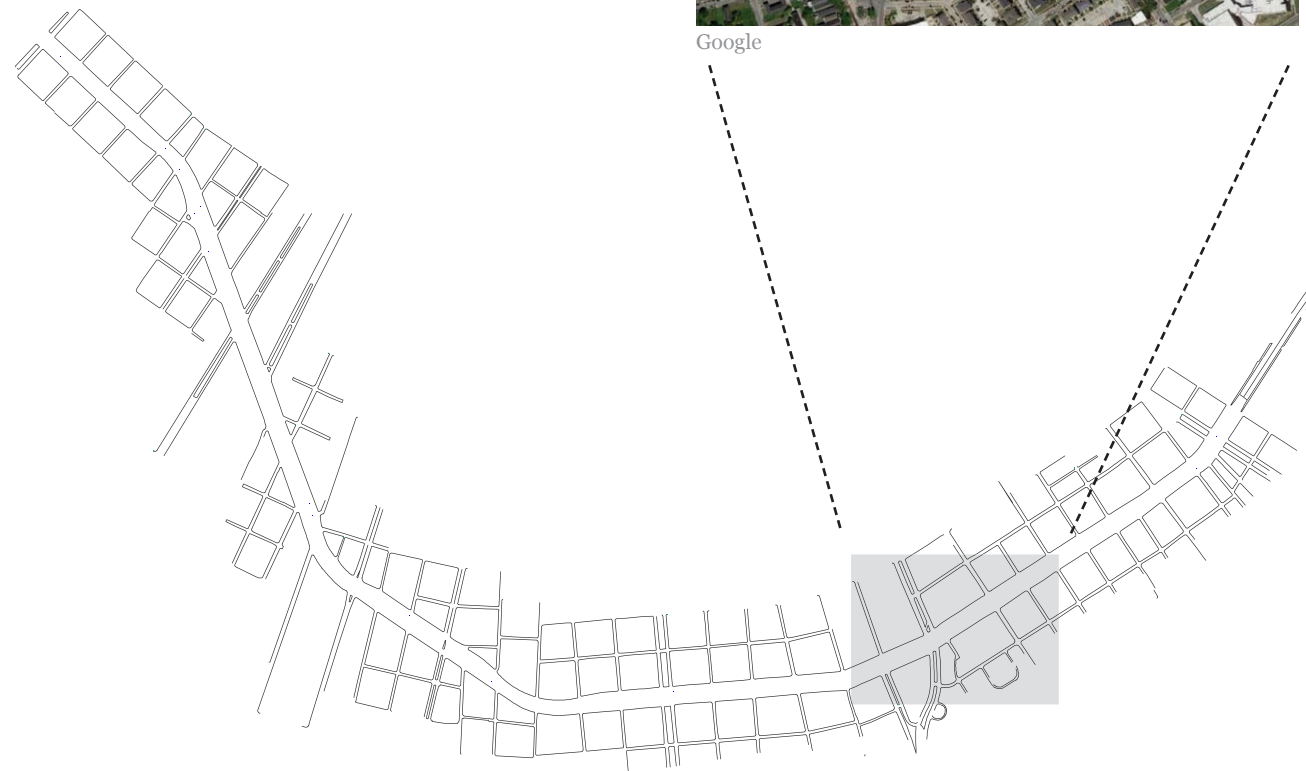
The selected engagement location in the Claiborne corridor was outside of a shopping area located at the intersection of S. Clairborne Ave. and Toledano St. A simple survey of passerby was conducted, with efforts to start conversations about the neutral grounds as public space. Major takeaways are discussed to the right.



Google



Google



## Safety

When discussing the neutral ground as public space, many participants expressed concerns over the safety of such a plan. While occupying the neutral ground offers many opportunities for new green space in the city, if residents do not feel safe using them, the plan will fail. One participant suggested guardrails along the neutral ground, while others noted the neutral grounds' importance as an area of safe street crossing. These aspects will be carefully considered during the design semester.

## Mardi Gras

The neutral ground's use during Mardi Gras and second line parades was raised during engagement, and it was discussed how it serves an important function as a gathering place during the carnival season. The design will have to take into account this important usage, while acknowledging its temporary nature and making sure the space functions year-round.

## Specific Programming

A common desire for the neutral grounds was the creation of activity-specific areas. This is in line with the previous analysis of the 11th Street Bridge Park, and raises exciting programming possibilities. Suggested activity areas included those for ball sports, board games, and picnics (barbecue pits were also suggested). It was also noted that when people are out using the neutral ground, local stores benefit, and that the neutral ground provides safe access to these stores.

## Desirable Destination

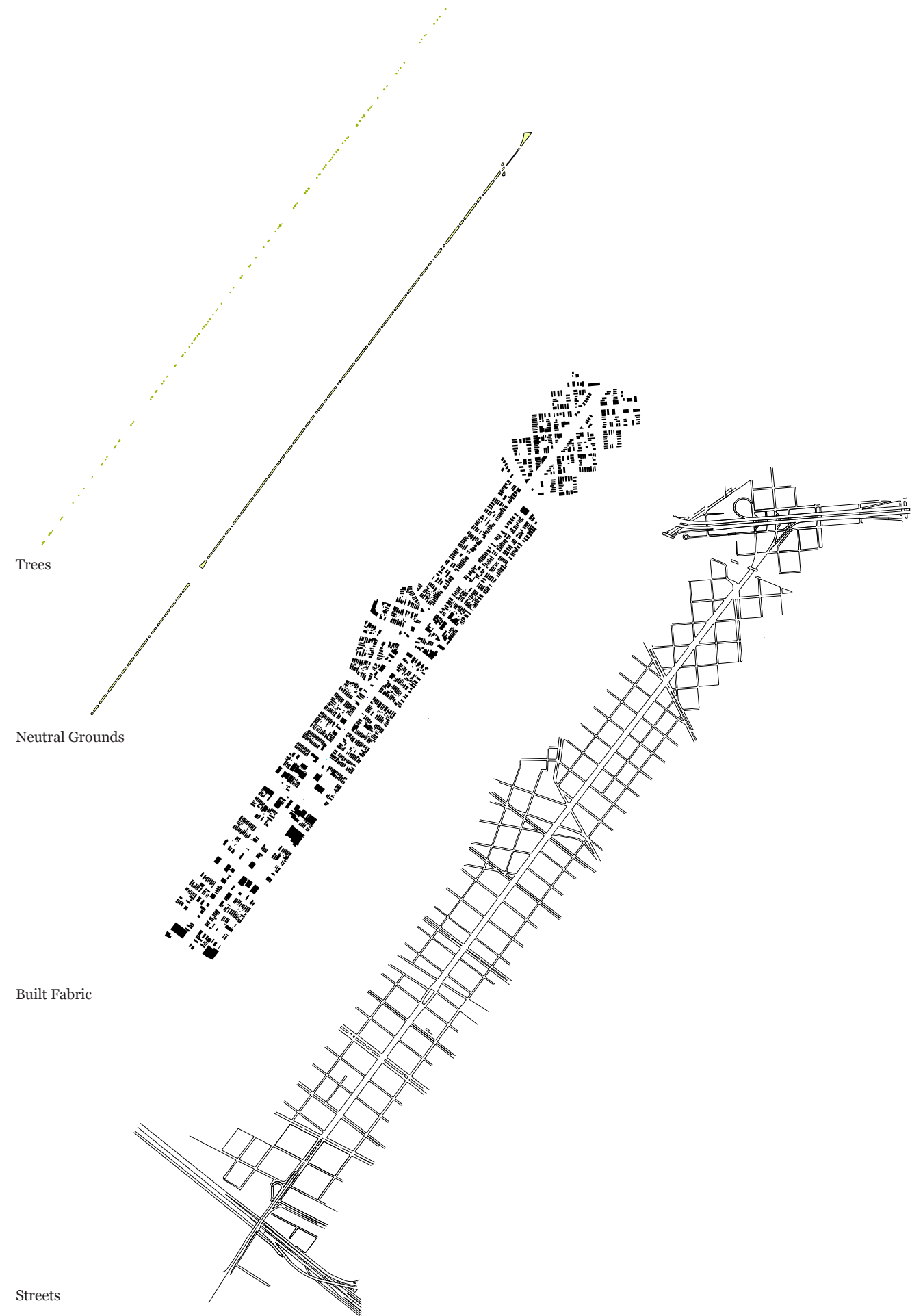
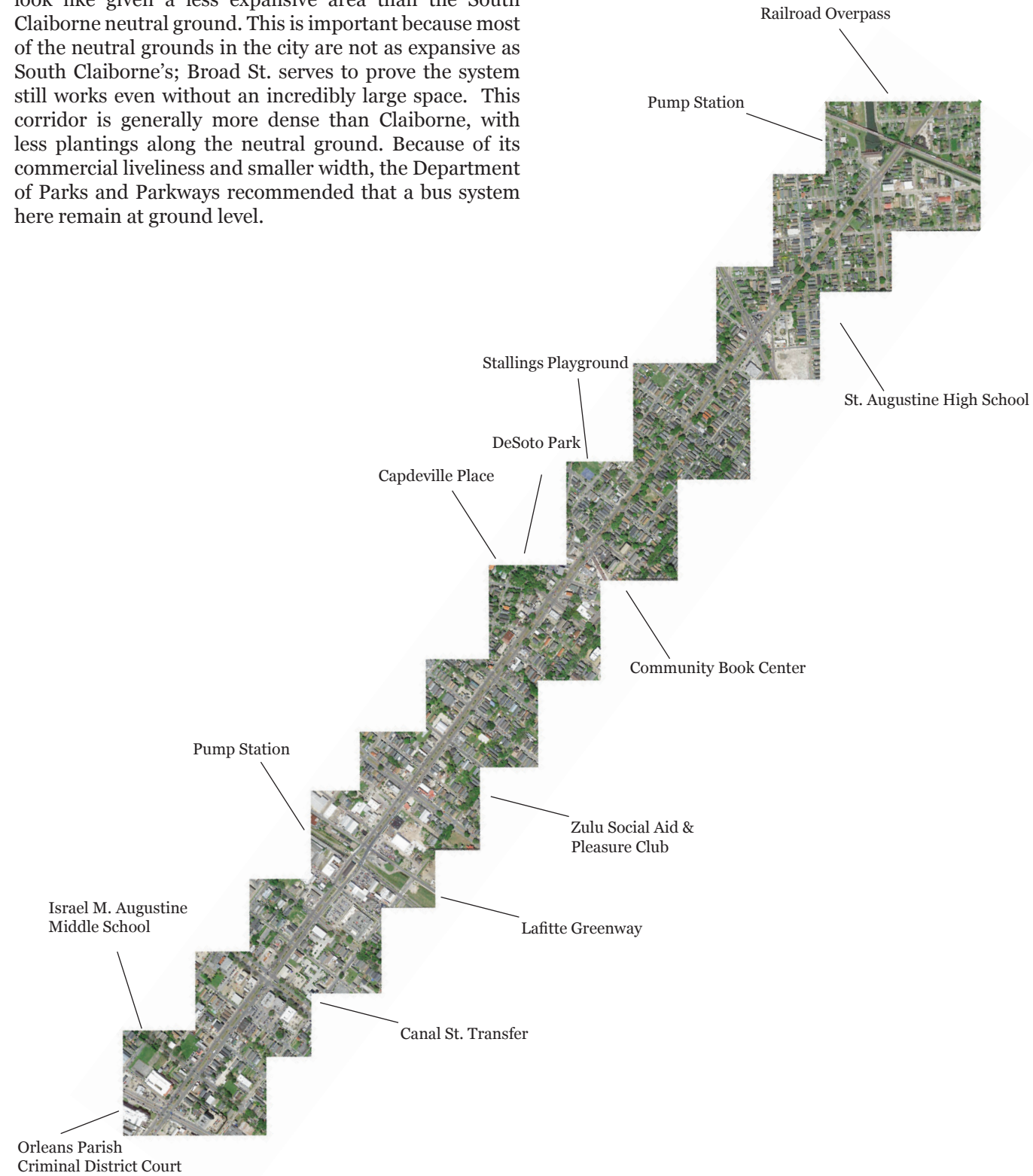
Also mentioned was the need for the neutral ground to be kept as a desirable area for all residents. While keeping the space clean was important to people, many participants specifically mentioned the presence of drug users and drunks that continually inhabit the neutral ground, saying that the space was not intended for that use.

## Kid-Friendly Areas

The ability to bring children the neutral ground was also an important response received during the Claiborne engagement session. This piece of feedback works well with other aspects discussed; sports areas can serve as gathering areas for youth, and safe crossings will reassure parents.

# Broad St.

Broad Street's smaller neutral ground, which maintains a 25-foot width along the chosen area, will show what a combination BRT/neutral ground would look like given a less expansive area than the South Claiborne neutral ground. This is important because most of the neutral grounds in the city are not as expansive as South Claiborne's; Broad St. serves to prove the system still works even without an incredibly large space. This corridor is generally more dense than Claiborne, with less plantings along the neutral ground. Because of its commercial liveliness and smaller width, the Department of Parks and Parkways recommended that a bus system here remain at ground level.



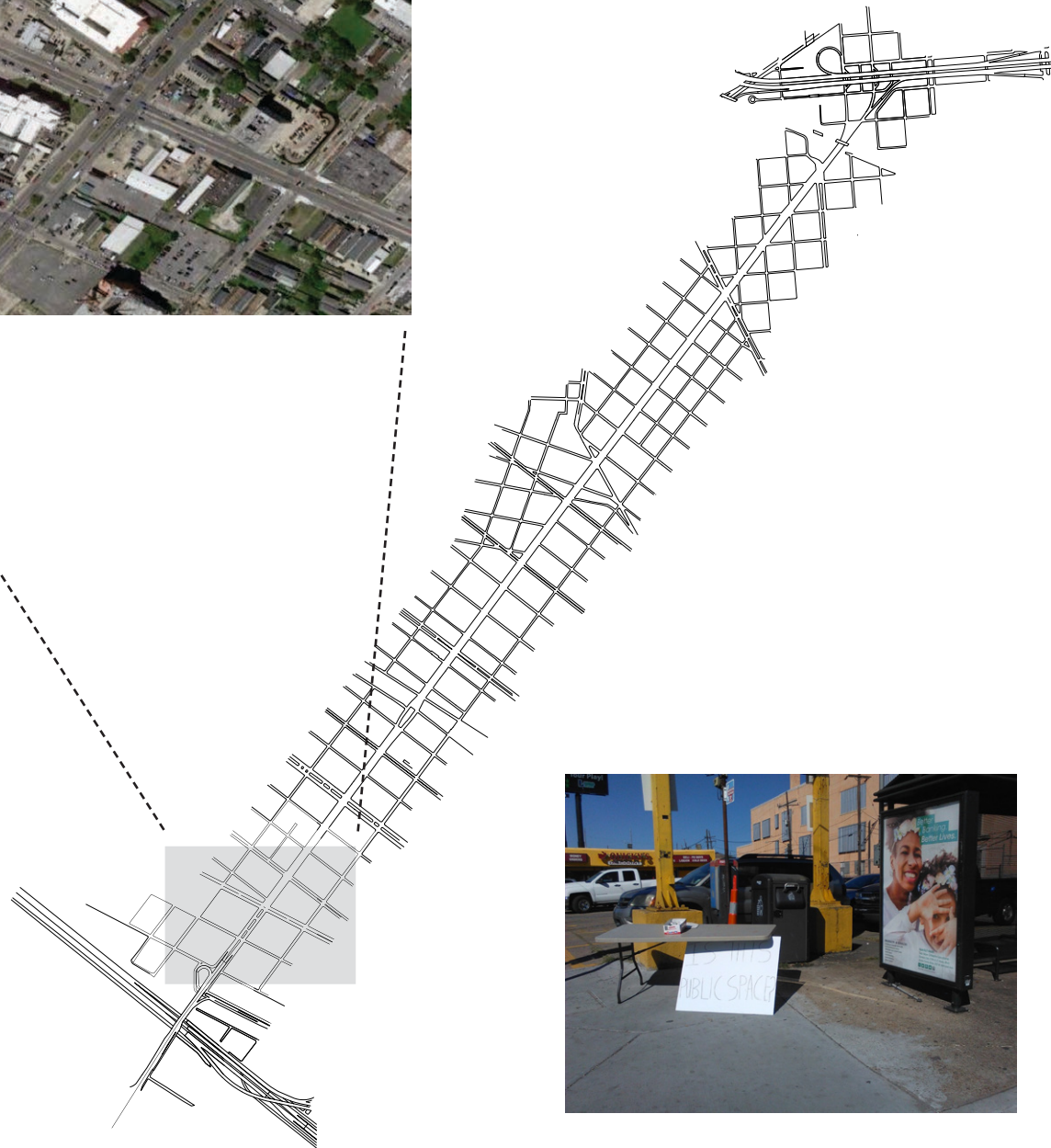


# Engagement

Engagement for the Broad St. corridor took place at the intersection of Broad St. and Tulane Ave. This busy intersection ensured a large group of participants. Another advantage of this location was that it is a bus stop for the 94 Broad route; some of the participants in the session were transit riders, making the feedback received all the more valuable. Major takeaways are shown on the next page.



Google



## Walking Path

One of the most common possible public uses discussed was the ability to walk along the neutral ground. This use as a promenade will have to be examined in detail during the design semester, as mixing a pedestrian walkway with a high-speed bus line carries with it inherent risks.

## Mardi Gras

The Broad St. neutral ground, just as its counterpart on Claiborne Ave., was noted as being used heavily during Mardi Gras. While the Claiborne Ave. neutral ground offers expansive space for gatherings, the addition of bus lanes onto the Broad St. neutral ground will highly limit the available area for revelers, necessitating a high sensitive approach to the Broad St. scheme.

## Neighborhood Scenery

The most simple usage of the neutral ground was also one of the most common uses discussed: the neutral ground as a beautification area. This was almost always mentioned together with a desire to inhabit the scenic area; people want the scenery to not only be seen from a car, they want to spend time in it.

## Gathering Areas

Along with a desire to experience scenic areas, many participants expressed a desire to use the neutral ground as a gathering area. Some simply wanted benches, while others wanted there to be picnic and barbecue areas; these basic areas will be achievable along the more modest Broad St. corridor.

## Parking

Maintaining public space along Broad St. while inserting a BRT system requires the removal of on-street parking. While some residents expressed an interest in being able to park on the neutral ground, new developments in urban planning have shown that reduced emphasis on parking leaves areas safer and cleaner. That said, community input should not be ignored, and this desire for parking will be taken into account during the design process.

# Interview One

## Department of Parks and Parkways

Ann E. Macdonald  
Daniel W. McElmurray, PLA  
Hailey Bowen, PLA, ASLA

This group is in charge of the design and maintenance of New Orleans’ public green spaces, including neutral grounds. Learning from their past experiences was important. They had a very pragmatic eye towards building on the neutral ground, and their input raised new questions and exciting possibilities for the design of a transit corridor. Major takeaways from our discussion included:

### Low-Maintenance Design

The design group repeatedly emphasized the need for any new public infrastructure to require as little maintenance as possible. They advised to design as if there would be no money allocated for maintenance of the project. This has large implications, bringing durable materials and landscapes to the fore of the design process.

### End-Goal Focus

Because new urban infrastructures will be affect many people for many years to come, it is important do design backwards. By establishing an end goal and working towards it, one can ensure that a design does not stray from a larger, long-term vision. “What do you want in 20 years?”

### Tree-Planting Initiative

New Orleans is currently in the midst of an effort to reach 50% city-wide canopy coverage by the year 2030. The city lost 50,000 trees due to Hurricane Katrina, and this push for trees is entrenched as part of the city’s master plan. The neutral grounds, as large green spaces, are playing a part in recovering this lost tree canopy.

### Existing Local Infrastructures

The Planning and Design division was very helpful in bringing attention to existing infrastructure that a new transit corridor would have to take into account. The major insight here was the presence of underground canals beneath the neutral grounds of both Claiborne Ave. and Broad St. No large trees can be planted on top of these canals, which limits planting areas, especially on Broad Street’s narrow neutral ground. It was also recommended to exclusively run buses at ground-level along Broad Street, due to its vibrant commercial activity.

### Program Brainstorming

This meeting also produced some general program ideas, as well as pragmatic essentials necessary for any successful public space. Proposed program elements included paths for walking and biking, coffeeshops, snoball stands, as well as areas for picnics and food trucks. Suggested public space essentials were adequate lighting, trash cans, and bathrooms. These seemingly mundane additions make enjoyable space possible.

# Interview Two

## Sue Mobley of Small City Center

Sue Mobley is the Community Engagement Manager at the Small City Center (formerly the Tulane City Center), the community outreach arm of the Tulane School of Architecture. Her expertise in receiving meaningful input from community members aided in devising effective feedback tools that were appropriate for a thesis project. Our conversation helped develop the following ideas:

### Engagement Locations

Choosing the right location for feedback efforts is important. For the Broad St. corridor, Sue recommended the bustling intersection of Broad St. and Tulane Ave. For the Claiborne Ave. corridor, she advised to seek feedback at the shopping areas near the intersection of Claiborne Ave. and Toledano St.

### Open-Ended Approach

Sue suggested an open-ended, conversational strategy, with the conversation starter, “Is this public space?” Participants can then consider what makes the neutral grounds public space or prevents them from acting as such. The value here comes in the follow-up questions of “Why?” and “What would make it public space?” This user input will dictate useful strategies and programming.

### Observing

One approach stressed in our talk was the simple act of observing. By spending time at both corridors during different times of the day, discoveries about usage would come about, making possible the implementation of a scheme that is sensitive to the area it is occupying.

### Alternative Programming

One of the most promising ideas discussed was realistic programming for both of the corridors. Programming along Broad St. should focus on connecting the existing commercial fabric. Claiborne offers rich possibilities, for use, however, in areas where the neutral grounds are not already used or where the user group does not exist, programming could focus on other uses. This could include planted areas that help clean the soil and air.

### Healing a Past Scar

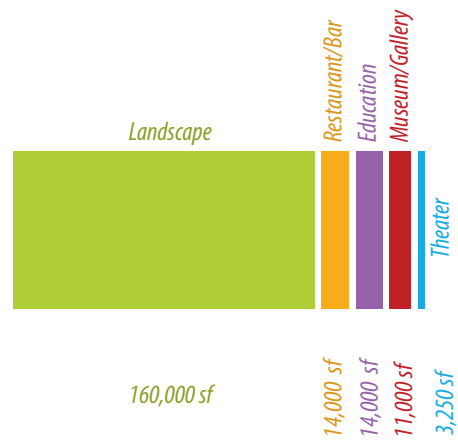
The evisceration the North Claiborne neutral ground by the I-10 overpass is a continuing, shameful chapter in New Orleans’ history. Redeveloping the South Claiborne neutral ground offers the opportunity to remediate, at least somewhat, that tragedy. Dedicating a large portion of the neutral ground as a grove of live oaks will act as both a symbolic gesture and a grand public space.

# 11th Street Bridge Park

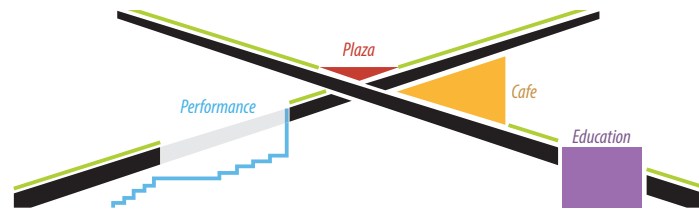
Washington, D.C., under construction  
OMA/OLIN

This project is a linear public space that connects two neighborhoods of Washington, D.C. that have been separated since the 1960s. Though the park does not contain transportation, it establishes a highly rigorous integration of open public green space and public amenities along a linear corridor. Building on top of old bridge foundations, ramps slope up from each bank, with program elements tucked in the space created.

Beyond programmatic design, 11th Street Bridge Park is also an example of how public space should function within a community. The design competition brief was sent out only after many community meetings and the final design was chosen by a combined group of experts and community members. The design team and residents are also working on measures to counteract gentrification, such as employing local workers for construction and maintenance of the project, a community land trust, and a local business consortium. (Washington Post)



Program Elements (OMA), redrawn by author



Program Elements (OMA), redrawn by author



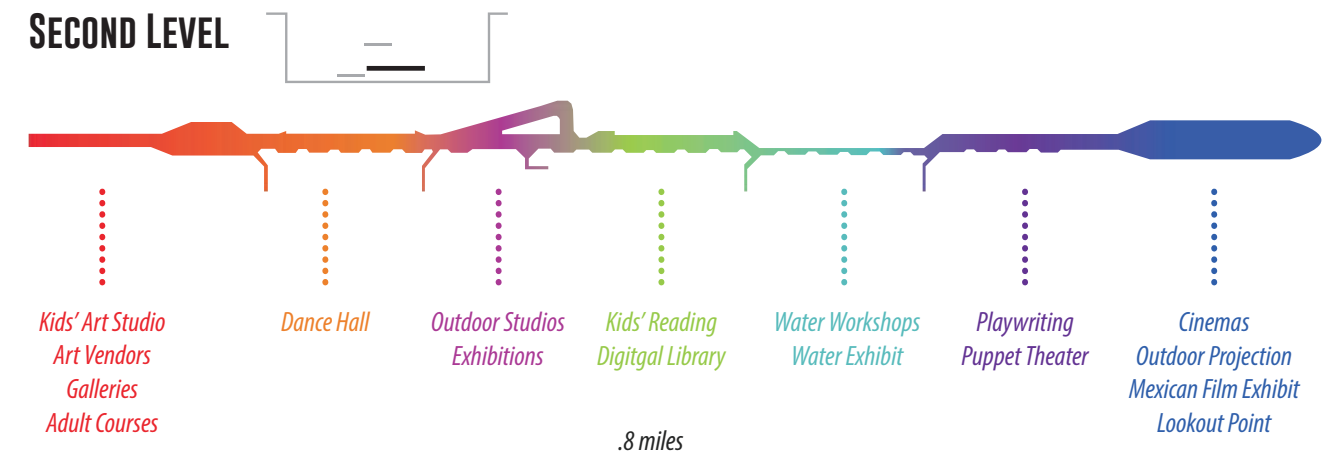
Overview Rendering (The Washington Post)

# Corridor Chapultepec

Mexico City, 2017  
FR-EE

The Corridor Chapultepec is a major rethinking of a large, historic corridor in Mexico City. The current street is a high-speed artery, not conducive to active street life for pedestrians and other vehicles besides cars. With that in mind, a scheme was developed that deemphasizes the individual automobile in favor of transit and pedestrians. Car lanes were pushed to the side, allowing for increased green space, as well as public plazas. Lanes for bicycles, skateboards, wheelchairs, and scooters will be built as well.

The main pedestrian walkway is elevated over the large road, allowing people to once again meander along the street. Also present along the upper level are retail areas. Along the middle level, “cultural programming” is planned that offers galleries, exhibitions, and arts classes. (ArchDaily)



Program relationships (FR-EE), redrawn by author



Rendering showing bus transit and public space. (ArchDaily)

# Neutral Grounds

New Orleans, LA, U.S.A.

Working within an existing space and attempting to enhance it demands examination of the current existing program. The neutral grounds in New Orleans are used differently throughout the city. Some areas, such as Esplanade Avenue near the French Quarter, are heavily planted, with a walking path beaten into the green space. The broad neutral ground on St. Claude Avenue is often used for parking, while parts of the Canal Street neutral ground are completely paved for streetcar traffic.

The desire for the neutral grounds to be more than they currently are is evident in their informal usage, which can be seen on both St. Charles Avenue and South Claiborne Avenue. Along St. Charles, where streetcars run down the grassy expanse, jogging paths have been worn between the rails; on South Claiborne, people sit in groups under the shade of trees, escaping the New Orleans heat while still enjoying the outdoors.



St. Charles Ave. neutral ground, by author (Image: Google)



St. Charles Ave. jogging path, by author (Image: Jon Bell)



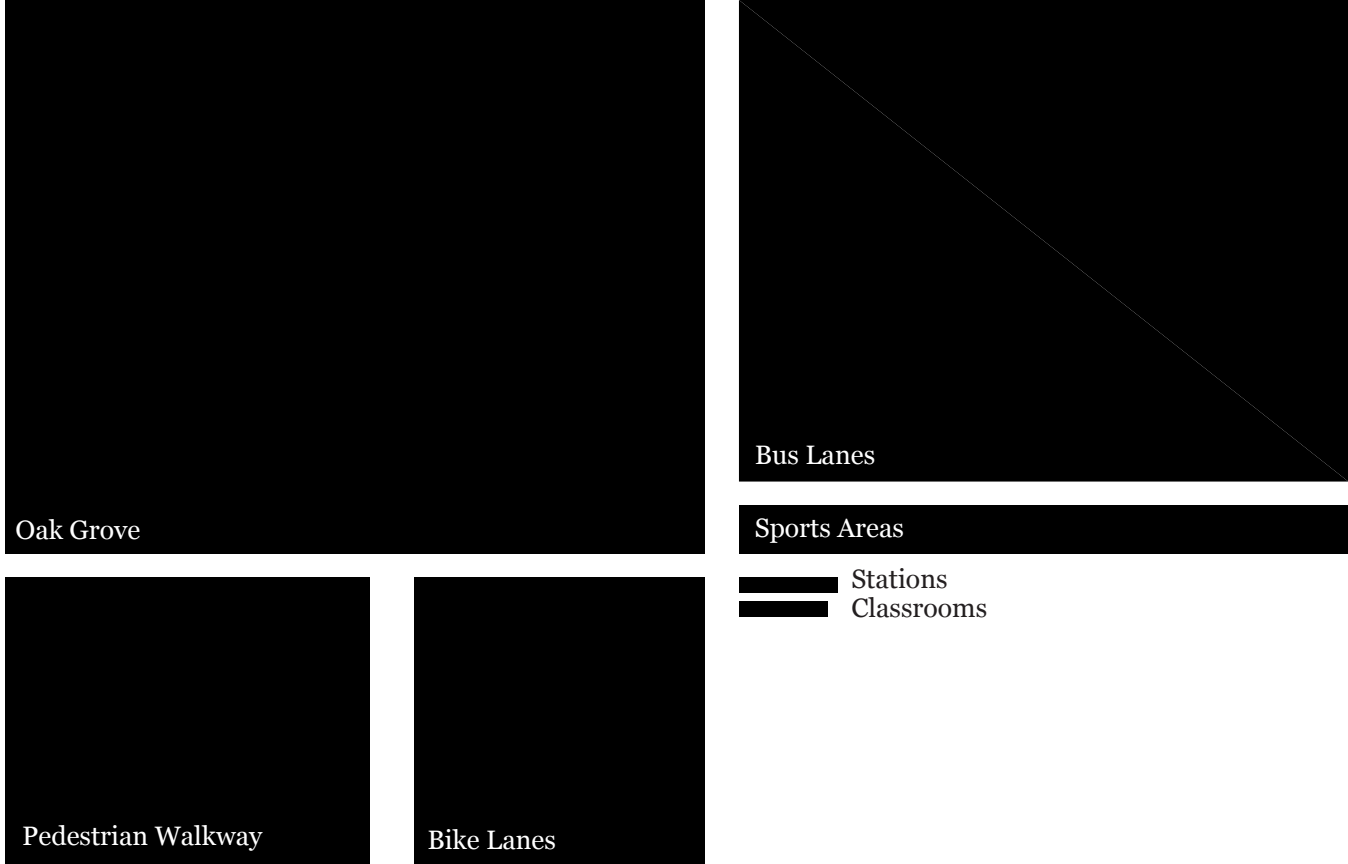
St. Roch Street neutral ground. (Information of New Orleans)

# South Claiborne Ave.

Due to the large amount of space available on this corridor’s neutral ground, the program of the site can become more specialized and varied. Like the 11th Street Bridge Park, rich linear programming can exist along Claiborne Ave. Large tree plantings both along a green corridor and linear bayou walkway will work towards the city’s goal of reaching 50% tree canopy cover by 2030. Bus and bike lane widths were determined by multiplying the required width by the length of the corridor, 2.6 miles. Feedback from a canvassing effort helped to generate some of the program.

| Element              | Area (sf) | Quantity | Total Area (sf) |
|----------------------|-----------|----------|-----------------|
| Tree Plantings/Swamp | 506,880   | 1        | 506,880         |
| Bus Lane             | 192,192   | 2        | 384,384         |
| Pedestrian Walkway   | 137,280   | 1        | 137,280         |
| Bike Lane            | 54,912    | 2        | 109,824         |
| Sports Areas         | 40,000    | 1        | 40,000          |
| Stations             | 200       | 10       | 2,000           |
| Classrooms           | 600       | 3        | 1,800           |

**Total** 1,182,168 sf



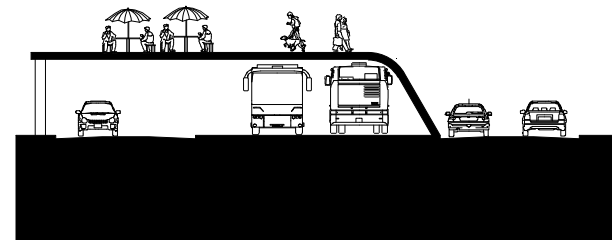
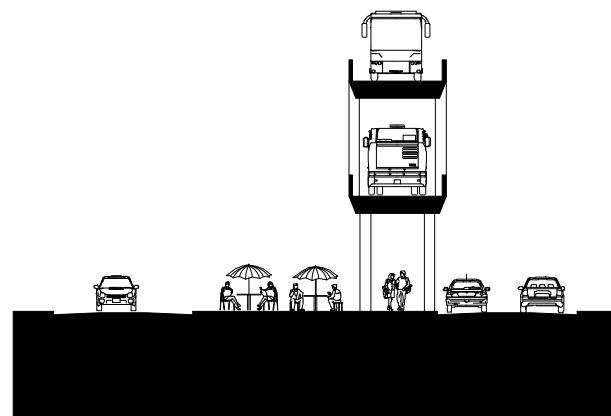
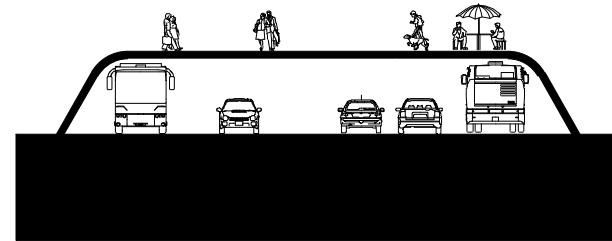
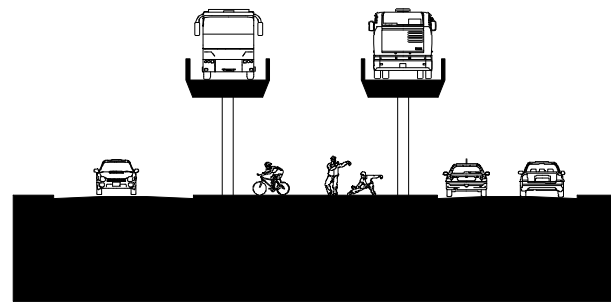
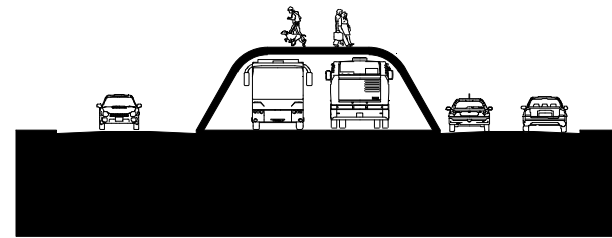
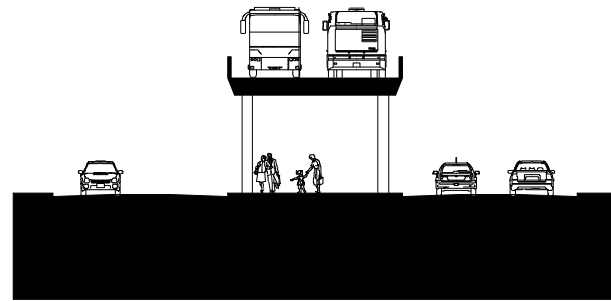
# Broad St.

The programming along the Broad St. corridor is a study in efficient use of vehicular and public space. The focus along this route is to maintain the commercial corridor, while providing concise green public space. By eliminating on-street parking along Broad St., space is created for a BRT system, as well as enough room for bike lanes, stations, and green space along the neutral ground. European cities have been reducing their focus on parking accommodations, and have reaped the benefits of increased road safety, cleaner air, and reduced traffic congestion. New Orleans should do the same. Square footages for the bus and bike lanes were determined by multiplying the required width by the length of the corridor, 2.4 miles. (LA Times)

| Element      | Area (sf) | Quantity | Total Area (sf) |
|--------------|-----------|----------|-----------------|
| Bus Lane     | 177,408   | 2        | 354,816         |
| Bike Lane    | 50,688    | 2        | 101,376         |
| Public Space | 61,330    | 1        | 61,330          |
| Stations     | 200       | 10       | 2,000           |

**Total** 519,552 sf



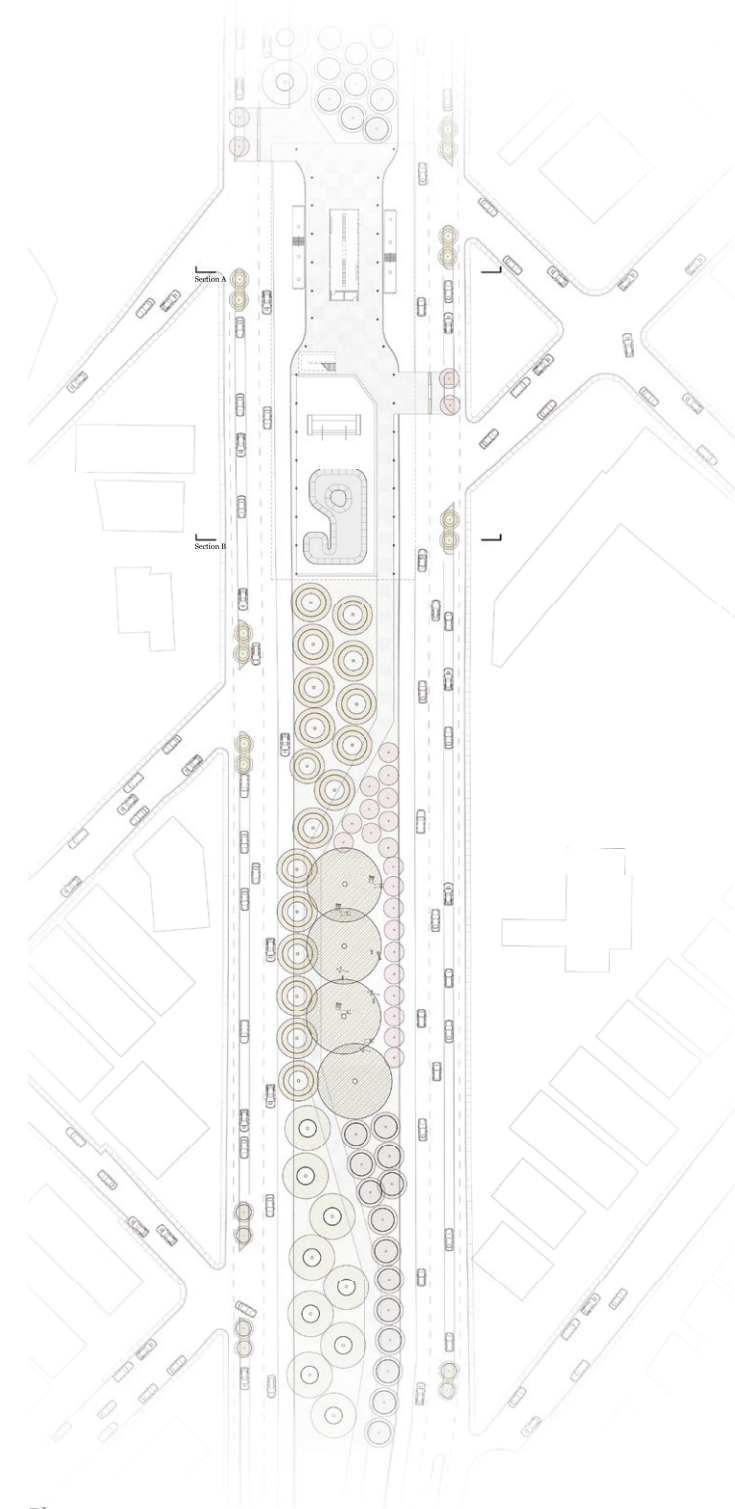
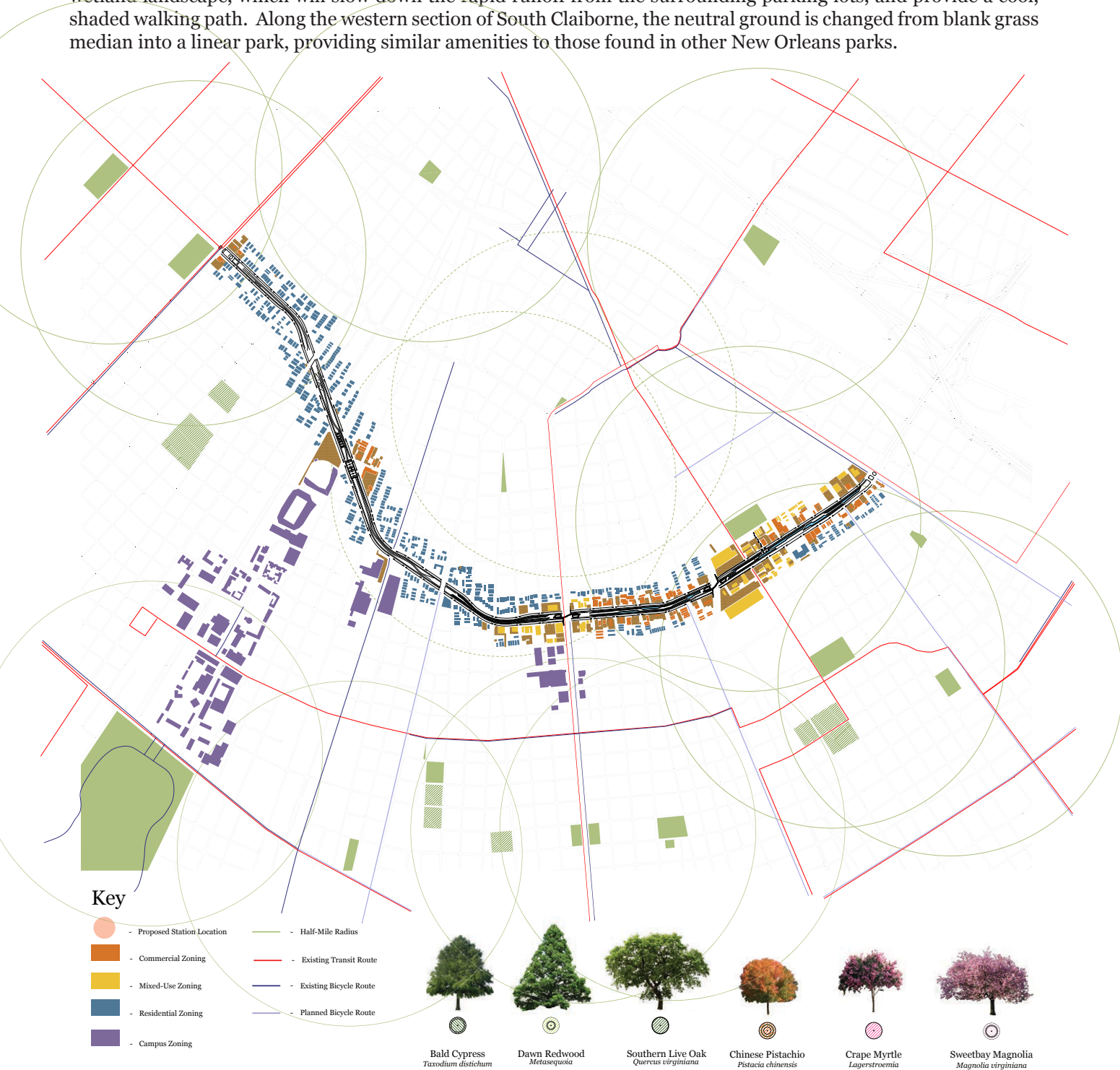


Possible Program Relationships

# Design

Design concentrated on the South Claiborne Corridor, and focused specifically on three diagrams extracted from the context surrounding the South Claiborne corridor: Parking Lot Area, Accessible Green Space, and Zoning. These revealed a stark divide between the west and east sides of the corridor. On the east, commercial and mixed-use zoning districts have created a built fabric heavy with parking lots, while the neighborhoods along the western side of the corridor lack meaningful access to large green spaces.

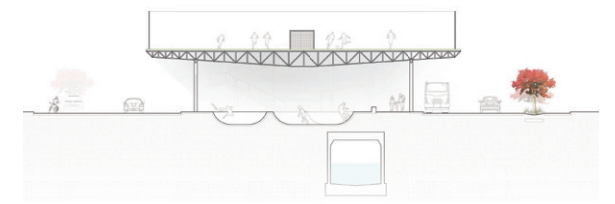
Programming placed inside the neutral ground can work against the identified problems. On the eastern side, an existing drainage canal running underneath the neutral ground is opened up and turned into a walkable wetland landscape, which will slow down the rapid runoff from the surrounding parking lots, and provide a cool, shaded walking path. Along the western section of South Claiborne, the neutral ground is changed from blank grass median into a linear park, providing similar amenities to those found in other New Orleans parks.



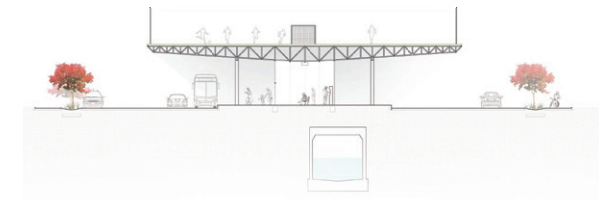
Plan



Axonometric View



Section C



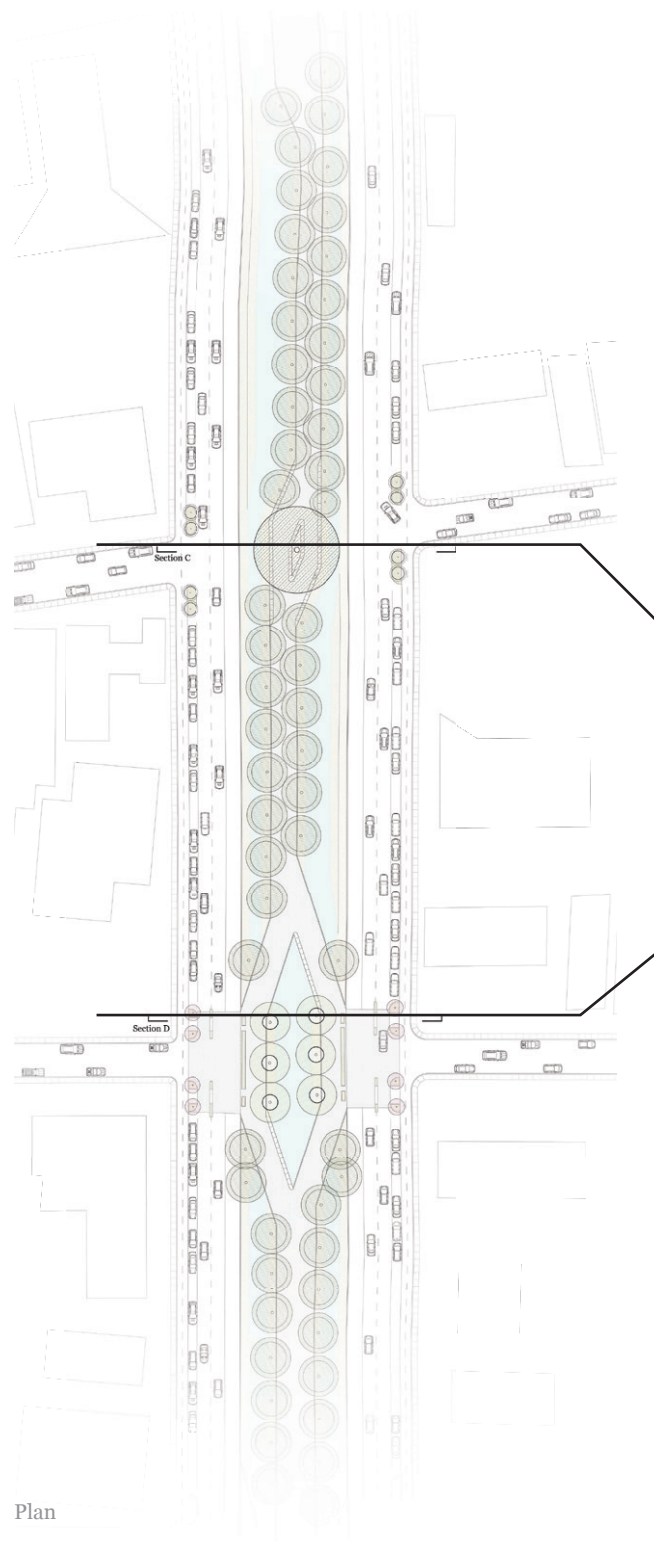
Section D



Model

## Claiborne Greenline

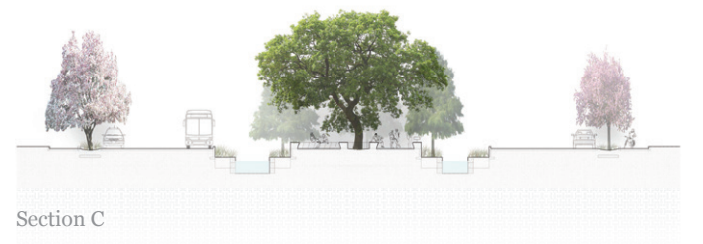
The western half of the South Claiborne corridor neutral ground provided programmed and open green space that is currently lacking. Many of the surrounding areas do not have a park within a half-mile radius. Some of the areas that do only have access to minuscule parks. Open green space and shaded areas are present. Programming is in accordance to community feedback, including a walking path, picnic, and grill areas. Soccer fields are suspended over the neutral ground to reach the required dimensions. A shaded skatepark lies beneath.



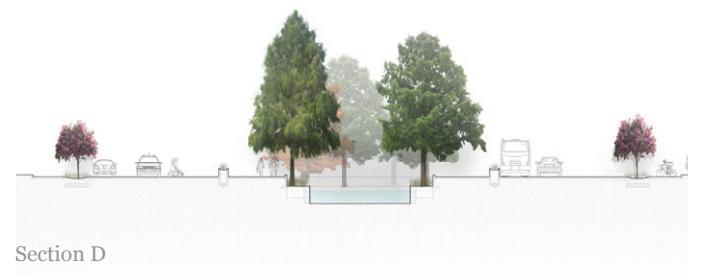
Plan



Axonometric View



Section C



Section D



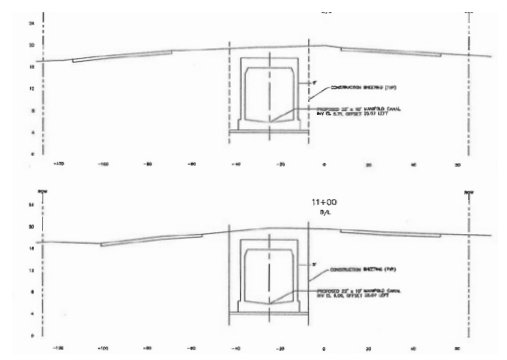
Model



Intersection Bridge Continuing Bayou Walkway



Claiborne Canal, c. 1960s



Current Underground Canal

# Claiborne Wetland

The eastern half of the South Claiborne corridor neutral ground works against the urban heat island effect and contaminated runoff from the surrounding commercial area. Terraced wetlands are created from existing drainage canals. Major intersections are bridged across to create a continuous linear space, while crossings to the neutral ground are paved with cobblestones to slow drivers.



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