

Former Minneapolis freeway ramp to reopen for cyclists and pedestrians

An initial plan to include vehicles on the connection between Cedar-Riverside and downtown spurred backlash from some residents.

By Eric Roper (<http://www.startribune.com/eric-roper/62906482/>) Star Tribune |

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A former freeway ramp between downtown Minneapolis and the Cedar-Riverside area will be converted next year into a crossing for pedestrians and bicycles, likely the first conversion of its kind in the city.

The layout approved by the City Council's transportation committee Tuesday marks a departure from a prior proposal, which would have included vehicle lanes reconnecting Cedar-Riverside directly with the downtown Minneapolis street grid. That plan spurred backlash from West Bank residents concerned about introducing traffic to an area bustling with pedestrians from high-rise apartment buildings.

The "Samatar Crossing" project, named after former school board member Hussein Samatar, who died in 2013, was one of the last priorities of outgoing Mayor R.T. Rybak. The roadway was the 5th Street exit ramp from westbound Interstate 94 until a new bridge and ramp were constructed in conjunction with U.S. Bank Stadium.

Project manager Steven Hay said the reconfiguration, expected to cost about \$2 million, will likely begin in June and take three or four months. In addition to the sidewalk and bike path crossing over the freeway, the project includes the conversion of one block of S. 5th Street on the downtown side into a two-way street. The bridge will also accommodate emergency vehicles.

"The layout that we brought forward reflects the desires of the community — there's strong support for this pedestrian and bicycle connection," Hay said.

Council Member Abdi Warsame, whose ward includes the Cedar-Riverside area, said the project will be a "beautiful addition to our city."

"I'm thrilled," Warsame said. "It's been a long time coming. It's a project that we've worked on since I got sworn in."

A traffic study forecast that 1,000 to 3,000 cars would have crossed the bridge every day if vehicular traffic were allowed — about four cars per minute during peak hours.

The new bicycle and pedestrian path will run parallel with the Hiawatha trail, but enters downtown about a block south on 11th Avenue S.

The layout favoring pedestrians and cyclists was decided after numerous community meetings about the project, said Dan Collison, executive director of the East Town Business Partnership, a business group. Collison said concerns about pedestrian safety in the Cedar-Riverside area ultimately led to the final plan.

"There were more concerns about vehicular traffic flowing into that side, perhaps from stadium activity or just downtown people who were either lost or looking for a quick exit," Collison said.

The layout must still be approved by the full City Council at a vote expected next month.



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