



Last week, I went to the open house for the project to [transform Front Street at Union Station](#), in conjunction with the massive renovation of Union Station that is getting underway.

From a pedestrian point of view, the [plan presented](#) (PDF) is very exciting. Its primary purpose is to not only create a better, more pedestrian-oriented area for the very large number of pedestrians who enter and leave the station each day, but prepare it for an expected doubling of pedestrian activity over the next 10-15 years. The plan takes advantage of the fact that the area needs to be dug up for the Union Station project anyway, so just returning it to its previous, uninspiring state would still cost a lot of money -- better to spend that money on a transformation.

The sidewalks will be significantly widened by reducing the vehicle lanes from four to two, and the intersections will become much safer and easier to use. But the most innovative element is at the center of the block, at the main entrance to the station, where the road will be narrowed and made into a "tabletop" flush with the sidewalk, making it a zone where pedestrian mid-block crossings will be the priority. There will be a flush "median" space marked in the middle where pedestrians can wait, so they can cross one lane at a time (it is also a space cars and bikes can use in case a lane is blocked).

I only noted a couple of issues for pedestrians that needed consideration. First, there is not enough space for street vendors - only two spaces are assigned. This area lacks storefronts on the street to serve the large pedestrian traffic and animate the space, and street vendors could help to fill this gap. There are a few areas where they could be added. I certainly agree, however, with the planners' desire for any street vendor stands to have better presentation than usual.

The second issue is the fact that the sharrows provided for cyclists disappear in the narrow central space. Given that it's flush with the sidewalk and only separated from the sidewalk by bollards, that means that inevitably some (probably many) cyclists would cycle on the sidewalk, which could be dangerous for both them and pedestrians. One possible solution might be to have the sharrows in the middle of the lane, indicating it should be shared -- traffic will likely be slow in this section anyway, so that should not overly inconvenience motorists. (There are other cyclist issues too, such as lack of bike parking, but cyclists have already been [commenting on these](#)).