

# National Avenue Master Plan

Presenting a Vision for Corridor Land Use, Mobility, and Urban Design



CITY OF SAN DIEGO

## SUMMARY REPORT

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PREPARED FOR  
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Grant Program

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# table of contents

i. executive summary	1
ii. acknowledgements	3
iii. location and purpose of plan	5
iv. existing conditions	7
v. context and goals	11
vi. land use and mobility recommendations	13
vii. implementation	21



# i. executive summary

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This corridor master plan addresses the segment of National Avenue that extends from Interstate (I)-5 eastward to 43rd Street in the southern portion of the Southeastern San Diego Community Planning Area. The mix of land uses and densities in this master plan has been proposed to create “welcoming” corridor that enhances connectivity to residential areas, schools, parks, recreation, shopping and other commercial activities. This master plan has been developed in coordination and concurrently with the Southeastern San Diego Community Plan Update (CPU). Overall recommendations and graphics of the National Avenue Master Plan will be incorporated in the updated Community Plan.

Existing land uses are generally small-lot residential, commercial, and industrial uses, plus a community shopping center (Otto Plaza) and an industrial park. Institutional uses include one school on National Avenue, with several schools, a library, and community center nearby. Vacant and underutilized parcels occur along the corridor, primarily west of SR-15. There is no park land in the plan area, but the corridor crosses Chollas Creek, which presents an opportunity for future trails and open space.

One of the major issues along the National Avenue corridor is the need to improve the safety

and the experience of pedestrians and bicyclists. For example there are is sizable pedestrian circulation across National Avenue. Many of these crossings occur at intersections that are not signalized and without stop signs. Several blocs are without consistent street trees and do not proved shade or protection from the elements.

No air quality or noise impacts from stationary sources were identified, although many existing land uses can potentially exceed air quality or noise standards. In addition, no significant unavoidable traffic noise or air quality impacts were identified along the National Avenue corridor. Many properties within the Project Area have been identified as hazardous materials sites; these cases are either closed or have no reported releases.

A variety of City plans and programs apply to the corridor, including the San Diego General Plan, Southeastern San Diego Community Plan, Chollas Creek Enhancement Program, and Chollas Creek South Branch Implementation Program. The existing 1987 Community Plan, which provides a framework to guide development in the Southeastern San Diego community, is currently being updated. Stakeholder input from the Southeastern San Diego CPU process highlighted the desire

## I. executive summary

for increased transit service, bicycle facilities, safe pedestrian facilities, traffic calming, and narrowing roadways.

The National Avenue Corridor land use mix will:

- Maintains the existing feel of small block, high density, human scale development
- Allows for a compatible range of neighborhood and community serving retail uses mixed with residential uses
- Complements nearby institutional facilities, especially schools, library, and community center
- Improves recreation and trail opportunities
- The National Avenue Corridor will promote mobility improvements to:
  - Enhance the safety and efficiency of moving pedestrians, bicyclists, transit, and vehicles
  - Encourage walking and bicycling with safe and enjoyable facilities
  - Provide safer access to transit

This plan recommends improving pedestrian and bicycle usage and safety on National Avenue. Detailed recommendations include re-striping the street to remove the center turn lane along each mid-block, keep left turn pockets at certain intersections, and add Class II bike lanes; removing on-street parking near intersections; adding high-visibility crosswalks to all intersections; and supplementing existing street lights with additional lighting to provide uniform corridor lighting.

Future community improvements will be funded by new development and through the City's Capital Improvement Program. Other funding can include state and federal sources (Community Development Block Grants, Low Income Housing Tax Credits, Proposition 1C Funds, Caltrans Active Transportation Program), local (Infrastructure Financing Districts, City of San Diego General Fund, developer incentives), and property owner funds (Development Impact Fees, Developer Exactions, Business Improvement Districts).

Potential barriers to implementation of the recommendations include: concerns about increased densities and loss of industrial businesses; displacement of residents and small businesses; potential traffic impacts and removal of on-street parking; long-term maintenance of improvements; and attracting new investment. Possible implementation strategies include: community engagement; incorporate benefits of traffic calming / integrate Complete Streets in environmental review criteria; foster assessment districts; and enhance development opportunities through public-private partnerships.

## ii. acknowledgements

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The Euclid Avenue Gateway Master Plan has been funded by a Caltrans Transportation Planning Grant for Environmental Justice. This Plan has benefited from participation by the residents and Encanto Neighborhoods Community Planning Group members who participated in meetings and workshops, providing valuable feedback and input to help shape the study area's future. The City's Planning, Neighborhoods & Economic Development staff for this project include:

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# iii. location and purpose of plan

The National Avenue Master Plan focuses on a 1.8-mile segment of National Avenue between Interstate 5 (I-5) and 43rd Street in the Southeastern San Diego Community Planning Area (Figure 1). This plan emphasizes land use, mobility, and urban design. It proposes an updated mix of land uses and building densities, and recommends balancing the needs of all travel modes along the corridor to improve connectivity with residential areas, schools, parks, recreation, shopping, and other commercial activities. Urban design recommendations enhance National Avenue’s “Main Street” character, with streetscape improvements and more community gathering places.

This plan’s recommendations are illustrated in urban design concepts for the following five focus areas:

1. Community-serving commercial uses near 30th Street
2. Conversion of the industrial park west of State Route 15 into park and recreation uses
3. Potential update of the Otto Plaza shopping center, between 35th and 36th Streets
4. Residential uses between 37th and 41st Streets
5. Possible new development between 41st and 43rd Streets

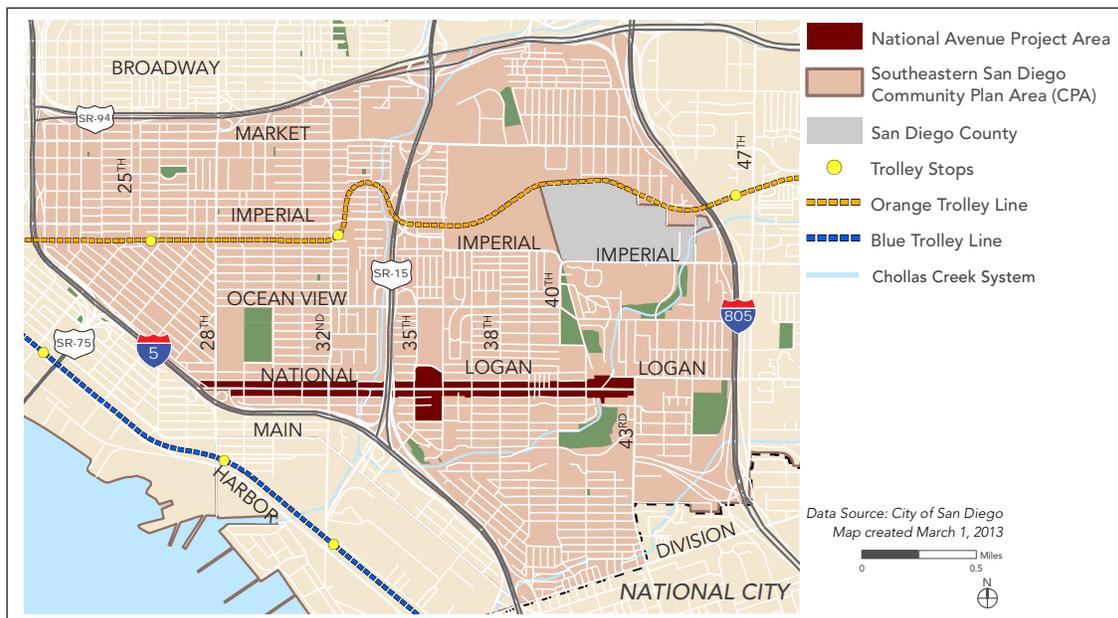


Figure 1: Location of National Avenue project area



## iv. existing conditions

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### LAND USES

National Avenue passes through the Logan Heights neighborhood from I-5 to SR-15. SR-15 traverses National Avenue with four overhead crossings, and could be considered as the dividing line between two distinct corridors. Existing land uses and zoning emphasize commercial uses on National Avenue west of SR-15, and residential uses east of SR-15. Two branches of Chollas Creek flow under National Avenue; the main branch crosses west of SR-15, and the south branch crosses west of 43rd Street. National Avenue is in the 100-year flood zone of Chollas Creek in both of these locations.

Existing land uses (Figures 2 and 3) are generally small-lot residential, commercial, and industrial uses, plus a community shopping center (Otto Plaza) and an industrial park. Institutional uses include one school on National Avenue, with several schools, a library, and community center nearby. Vacant and underutilized parcels occur along the corridor, primarily west of SR-15.

The National Avenue corridor exhibits several key assets that future improvements can complement. These include a fairly fine-grain mix of uses including neighborhood-serving retail and Otto Square Shopping Center, plus existing sidewalks along most of the corridor. Existing assets also

include nearby institutional uses, primarily schools. These include Logan Elementary, King Chavez Academy of Excellence, Rodriguez Elementary, Emerson/Bandini Elementary, and Baker Elementary. These are supplemented by other public facilities, such as the Logan Heights and Mountain View Beckworth Libraries, Neighborhood House Association, and San Diego City College's Educational Cultural Complex. In addition, several religious facilities are located along National Avenue, including Community of Praise Baptist Church, Community Baptist Church, Victory Outreach Church, and Nu-Way Christian Ministries.

There is no park land in the plan area, but the corridor crosses Chollas Creek (Figure 4), which presents an opportunity for future trails and open space. Open space and recreation assets consist of Chollas Creek, which is a heavily altered drainage channel that has the potential to become an outstanding environmental and recreational resource for the community, providing opportunities for walking, biking, and much needed park land. In the vicinity of National Avenue, the 2002 Chollas Creek Enhancement Program calls for trails along the south branch of Chollas Creek south of National Avenue. The Project Area also is near Memorial Park, Mountain View Park and Community

## I. existing conditions

Center, Southcrest Park and Recreation Center, and the Willie Henderson Sports Complex.

### MOBILITY

West of 28th Street, National Avenue today is a busy four-lane roadway, and east of 28th Street it is a two-lane roadway with a center left turn lane (Figure 2) and on-street parking that provides about 440 parking spaces. No bike lanes exist here (Figure 5). MTS bus route 11 serves the corridor about every 15 minutes on weekdays and 30 minutes on

weekends; several of the busiest stops lack amenities. For pedestrians, sidewalks are present on both sides of the street. Street crossings are challenging at the intersections lacking traffic controls on National Avenue, and safety and comfort would be improved with additional lighting.

One of the major issues along the National Avenue corridor is the need to improve the safety and experience of pedestrians and bicyclists. Collisions involving pedestrians and bicyclists have occurred at



Figure 2: Roadway and land uses near 36th Street



Figure 3: Pedestrians crossing Euclid at Hilltop



Figure 4: View of Chollas Creek



Figure 5: Bicyclist avoids riding in the street

most of the street intersections along the corridor. Key findings of the mobility assessment include the following:

- All of the existing roadway segments along National Avenue are operating at acceptable LOS C, with the exception of the segment between 28th Street and I-5 Northbound Ramps operating at unacceptable LOS F.
- All of the study intersections are operating at acceptable LOS D or better during both the AM and PM peak hour, with the exception of the two-way stop controlled intersection of 41st Street and National Avenue which operates at substandard LOS E during the PM peak hour.
- The single transit route, Route 11, has 10 bus stops in the eastbound direction (typically 600-800 feet apart) and 12 bus stops in the westbound direction (typically 600-1500 feet apart) . Transit service is rated as fair to good for segments providing a bus stop.
- Bicycle facilities in the Project Area generally operate at levels rated as acceptable and fair during both the AM and PM peak hour, with the exception of the eastbound National Avenue segment between 28th Street and the I-5 NB ramps, which operates at LOS E during the PM peak hour. Although some cyclists share the lane with vehicles, some cyclists were observed riding on the sidewalk, which is illegal and a danger to pedestrians.
- Although the pedestrian experience is generally rated as good, crossings of National Avenue at selected locations was observed to be a challenge for some pedestrians (for example the speed of vehicles downhill street segments and intersections without traffic signals or stop signs).

Opportunities to improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety, along with the appearance of the National Avenue Corridor, include the following:

- Traffic-calming improvements throughout the corridor (e.g., bulbouts with tree plantings)
- Designation of formal bicycle facilities (e.g., class II bike lanes and bicycle parking)
- Improving safety for pedestrians crossing National Avenue (e.g., bulbouts and high visibility crosswalks)
- Ensuring ADA-compliant facilities (e.g., curb ramps and high visibility crosswalks)
- Improving amenities at bus stops along National Avenue (e.g., benches, shelter, and signage)
- Providing more shade trees along sidewalks, to supplement existing trees and have more continuous shade for pedestrians

## ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

No air quality or noise impacts from stationary sources were identified. Numerous existing sites were identified as having a potential to exceed both air and noise significance thresholds based upon their currently approved use. In addition, no significant unavoidable traffic noise or air quality impacts were identified along the National Avenue corridor. Many properties within the Project Area have been identified as hazardous materials sites; these cases all are either closed or have no reported releases. However, it should be noted that for cases reported as closed, standards for closure have varied over the years, and may not meet current standards of Federal, State and Local agencies responsible for regulating hazardous waste sites. If redevelopment

## I. existing conditions

of a closed release case property is proposed, additional research into the unauthorized release case should be performed.

### PLANNING POLICIES

A variety of City plans and programs apply to the corridor, including the San Diego General Plan, Southeastern San Diego Community Plan, Chollas Creek Enhancement Program, and Chollas Creek South Branch Implementation Program. The 2008 San Diego General Plan provides goals and objectives for the entire City, and is built around the “City of Villages” strategy, which “focuses growth into mixed-use activity centers that are pedestrian-friendly districts linked to an improved regional transit system.” The Southeastern San Diego Community Plan, which provides a framework to guide development in the Southeastern community, was originally adopted by City Council in 1969, updated in 1987, and is currently being updated again.

The Chollas Creek Enhancement Program was adopted in 2002 and provides detailed policies, funding strategies, and a phasing plan to guide the plan’s implementation. The Enhancement Program envisions a linear park along multiple creek branches, bicycle and pedestrian linkages, return to a natural state where feasible, and development that is integrated with the creek and accessible open space to create attractive sustainable spaces. Recommendations for Segment 7 of Chollas Creek South Branch, which crosses under National Avenue near 43rd Street/Logan Avenue, include an Arts Project addressing hydrology, flood safety, and environmental enhancement at the undercrossing. Upstream of the National Avenue crossing, stream reconstruction is proposed, and downstream of

National Avenue habitat enhancement/restoration or management actions are proposed.

### STAKEHOLDER ISSUES

Stakeholder input from the Southeastern San Diego Community Plan Update process highlighted the desire for increased transit service, bicycle facilities, safe pedestrian facilities, and traffic calming. Needs for improved sidewalks (repairs and construction where missing) and more street lighting, especially around bus stops were noted. Most participants mentioned that streets in the planning areas are in disrepair, making the area seem neglected and contributing to actual or perceived crime. Biking was identified as dangerous and bike lanes and routes as lacking. Typical freeway intersections have vehicle favored free moving right turn lanes; this often created unsafe crossings for pedestrians and bicyclists.

The desire for freeway crossings to be pedestrian friendly was expressed, which relates to the SR-15 overpasses along National Avenue being addressed in this master plan. Several stakeholders suggested that some of the wider streets in commercial areas and around schools be narrowed to reduce vehicle speeds and make walking safer. Development opportunities were primarily identified along commercial and mixed-use corridors, including National Avenue and 35th Street. Suggestions to address needed park space include the potential for closing off certain streets in the summer for community events, and widening sidewalks and curbs to create gathering space along the street. Also related to National Avenue were comments that cleaning up and otherwise improving Chollas Creek, to better connect communities.

# v. context and goals

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## **PLANNING CONTEXT**

This master plan has been developed in coordination and concurrently with the Southeastern San Diego Community Plan Update (CPU). Overall recommendations and graphics of the National Avenue Master Plan will be incorporated in the updated Community Plan. The National Avenue plan has utilized the proposed land use from the community plan update. The build out examples are based on the community plan, land use and zoning anticipated for adoption early 2015. The public outreach involved in this effort included ongoing meetings with the Southeastern San Diego Community Planning Group between March and December of 2013, pop-up outreach (efforts at trolley stops, YMCA, library, Sherman Heights Community Center, and soap box derby race), and two community workshops in 2013.

## **LAND USE GOALS**

The National Avenue Corridor will provide a mix of land uses that:

- Maintains the existing feel of small block, high density, human scale development

- Allows for a compatible range of neighborhood and community serving retail uses mixed with residential uses
- Complements and supports nearby institutional facilities, especially schools, library, and community center
- Improves recreation and trail opportunities

## **MOBILITY GOALS**

The National Avenue Corridor will promote mobility improvements to:

- Enhance the safety and efficiency of moving pedestrians, bicyclists, transit, and vehicles
- Encourage walking and bicycling with safe and enjoyable facilities
- Provide safer access to transit



# vi. land use and mobility recommendations

## LAND USE RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommended land uses are shown in Figure 6 “Proposed land use map”. These designations allow mixed uses that provide more community serving retail and additional housing.

- Residential – Medium: Provides for both single-family and multi-family housing within a density range of 15-29 dwelling units per acre. This land use is consistent with the land use/density currently in place.
- Neighborhood Commercial: Provides local convenience shopping, civic uses, and services serving an approximately three-mile radius. Housing may be allowed within a mixed-use setting.

- Community Commercial: Provides for retail, service, civic, and office uses serving within 3 to 6 miles. Multi-family residential uses may be added to enhance the viability of commercial uses.
- Light Industrial: Allows various industrial uses in addition to uses allowed in Business Park areas. This area could be converted to public park in the future.
- Institutional: Provides for public facilities. This is consistent with the current use (Emerson-Bandini Elementary School).

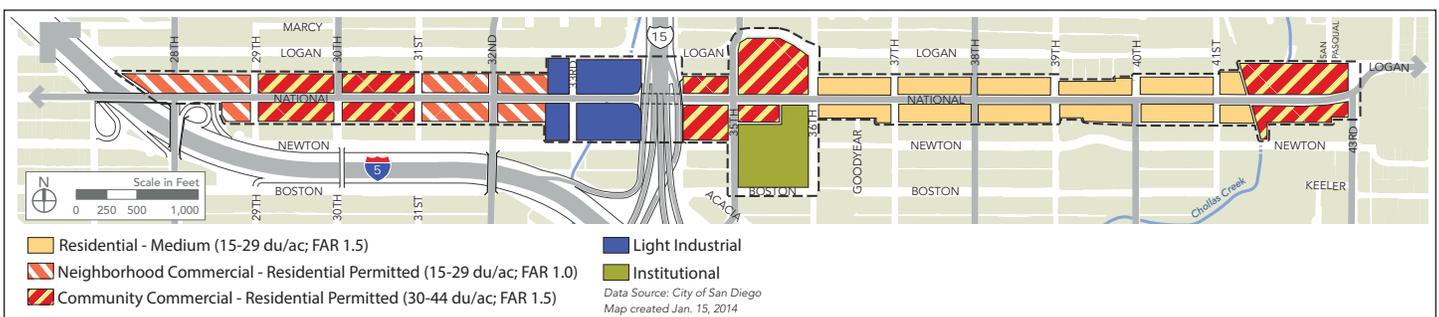


Figure 6: Proposed land use map

### MOBILITY RECOMMENDATIONS<sup>1</sup>

This plan recommends adding Class II bike lanes on National Avenue and improving pedestrian safety. These changes fit within the existing right-of-way (Figure 7). Traffic calming and pedestrian crosswalk improvements may necessitate the construction of new curb extensions/bulbouts. Detailed recommendations (Figures 8 and 9) include:

- Re-stripe the street to remove the center turn lanes between left turn pockets at certain intersections, and add Class II bike lanes.
- Remove on-street parking near intersections, to accommodate bike lanes and left turn pockets. This would remove approximately 25% of the parking spaces on National Avenue. This will result in the loss of 98 stalls or an average 3.3 stalls per block per side. New development will provide off-street parking to accommodate their demand.

- Install traffic signals at 31st and 41st Streets
- Add high-visibility crosswalks to intersections where warranted, and install curb extensions at unsignalized intersections where left turn pockets can be removed.
- Install pedestrian countdown signal heads for crosswalks at 30th Street, and for other signalized intersections as they are improved in the future.
- Install ADA-compliant curb ramps on National Avenue at the following intersections: 29th Street, 31st Street through 33rd Street, and 36th Street through 43rd Street.
- Supplement existing street lights with additional lighting to meet City standards, illuminate crosswalks, and provide uniform pedestrian lighting.



Figure 7: Illustrative concept with right-of-way dimensions

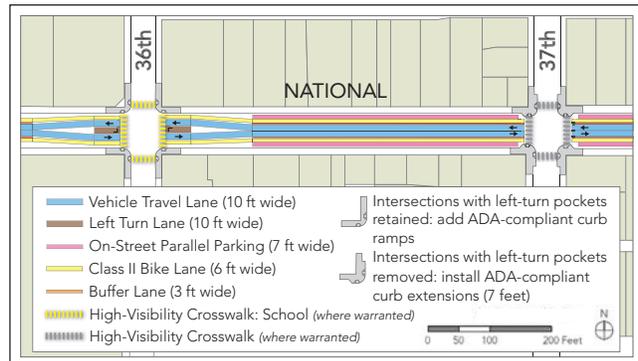


Figure 8: Mobility Concept Detail Enlargement

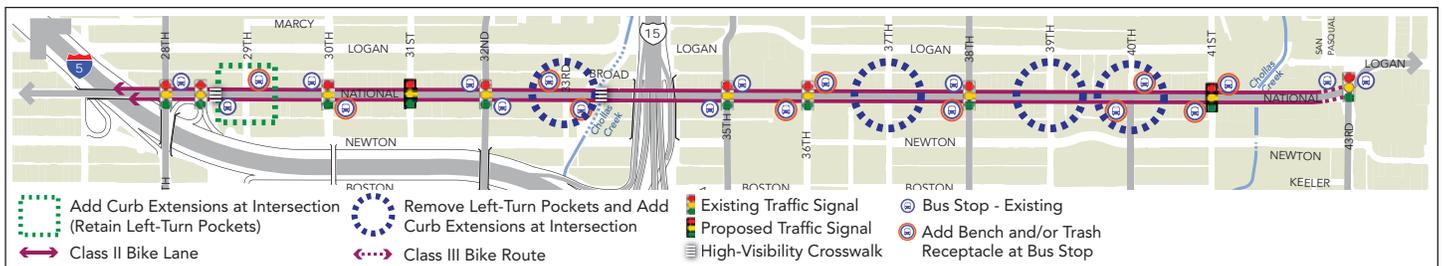


Figure 9: Mobility Concept Diagram: Final improvement will be finalized based on applicable warrants and other design considerations.

<sup>1</sup> See National Avenue Corridor Master Plan: Future Multi-Modal Conditions Report, prepared by Fehr & Peers as part of the National Avenue Master Plan, for additional details and analysis of the mobility recommendations

**NATIONAL AVENUE FOCUS AREAS AND URBAN DESIGN CONCEPTS**

The five focus areas shown in figure 10 illustrate a variety of future land uses and development intensities along the National Avenue corridor. The graphics are conceptual only, and are not formal development proposals. Any proposed

development and public improvements must be approved by the City of San Diego. The graphics illustrate urban design guidelines in the Southeastern San Diego CPU. Street furnishings are shown as examples; see Figure 11 for an example of street furniture placement.

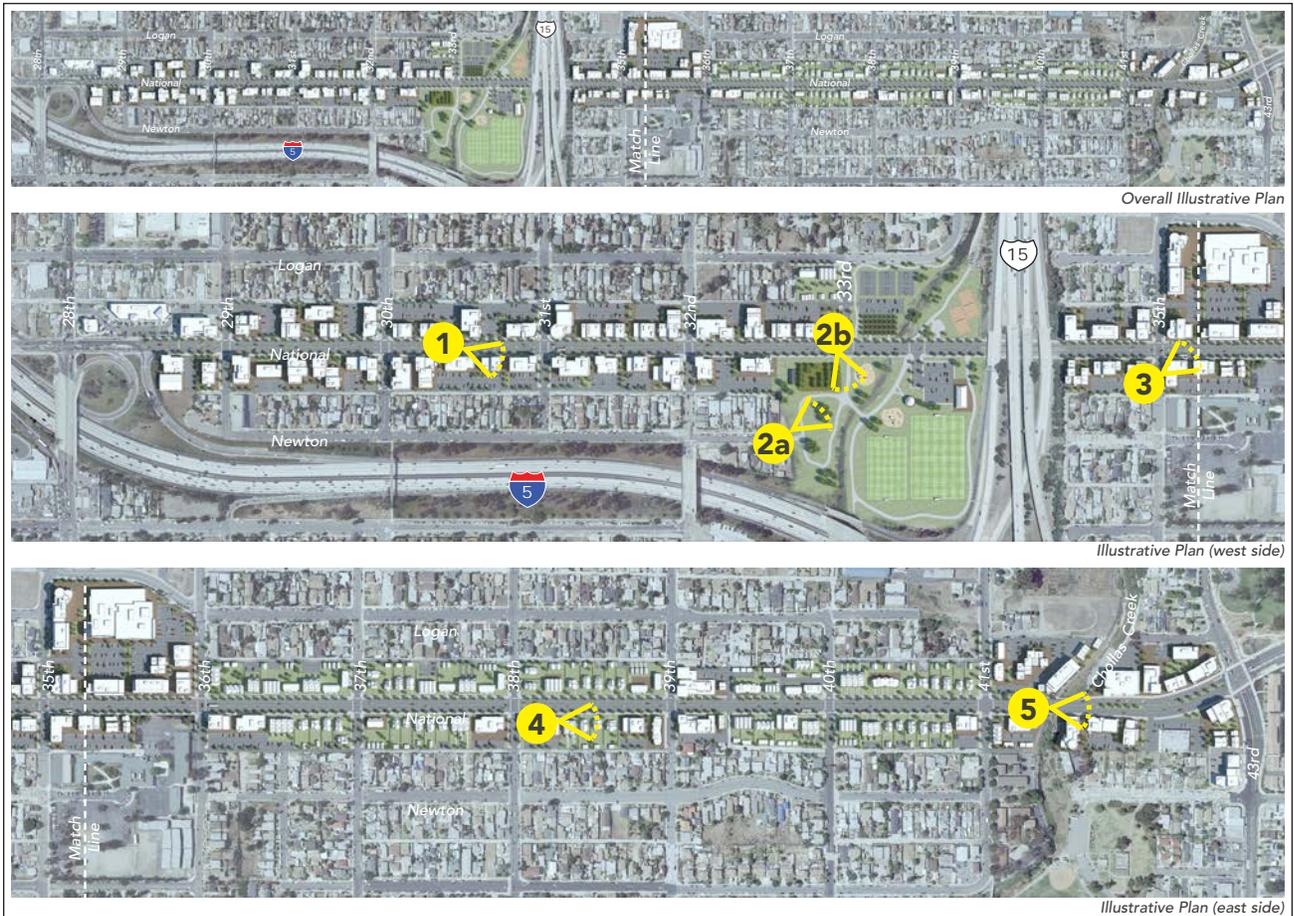


Figure 10: Illustrative plan showing location of focus areas to be described further



Figure 11: Example of street furniture placement in San Diego

vi. land use and mobility recommendations

**FOCUS AREA #1 (31ST AND NATIONAL)**

- Provides mixed commercial and residential uses in neighborhood context.
- Plaza offers a community gathering space to activate the public realm.

- Pedestrian amenities include street furnishings, more lighting, and added landscape plantings.



Figure 12: Focus Area 1 - Bird's-eye concept



Figure 13: Focus Area 1 - Existing view east toward 31st Street (left) and conceptual street view (right)

Proposed improvements include the following:

- Street trees and lighting
- High visibility crosswalks
- Class II bike lanes
- Street Furniture (e.g., benches, and bike racks)

**FOCUS AREA #2 (33RD AND NATIONAL)**

- Shows possible conversion of industrial land use to public park space.
- Possible park amenities include sports fields and courts, picnic and play areas, community

garden, and access to Chollas Creek trail. The public and the recreation council will fully participate in visioning uses and designing a general development park plan.



Figure 14: Focus Area 2 - Existing view east from Newton Avenue (left) and conceptual view from Newton Avenue (right)



Figure 15: Focus Area 2 - Existing view southeast from 33rd Street (left) and conceptual street view (right)

Proposed improvements include the following:

- Regional park
- Chollas Creek restoration
- Street trees and lighting
- High visibility crosswalks
- Class II bike lanes
- Street Furniture (e.g., benches, bike racks, trails)

vi. land use and mobility recommendations

**FOCUS AREA #3 (35TH AND NATIONAL)**

- Shows additional new mixed-use commercial development possible at the Otto Plaza.

- Illustrates Community Plan urban design recommendations, including a defined pedestrian zone with furnishings and trees, street-facing storefronts, and visually interesting buildings.



Figure 16: Focus Area 3 - Bird's-eye concept

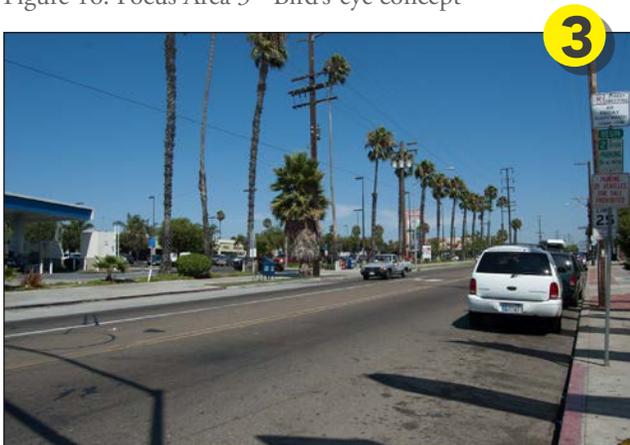


Figure 17: Focus Area 3 - Existing view east from 35th Street (left) and conceptual street view (right)

Proposed improvements include the following:

- Street trees and lighting
- High visibility crosswalks
- Class II bike lanes
- Street Furniture (e.g., benches, and bike racks)

**FOCUS AREA #4 (38TH AND NATIONAL)**

Illustrates how new housing could be integrated in existing medium-density residential area.

- Shows added streetscape improvements and new bike lanes.



Figure 18: Focus Area 4 - Bird's-eye concept

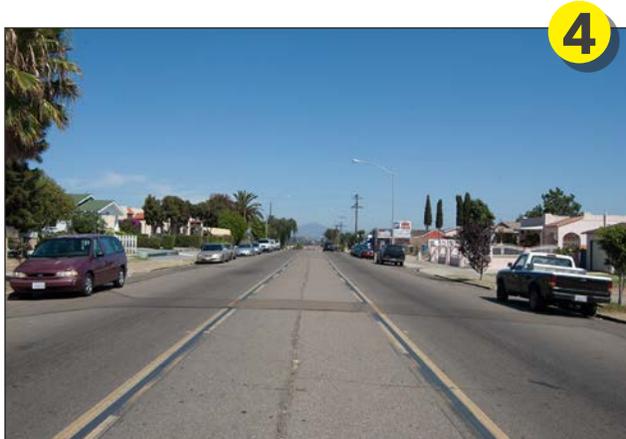


Figure 19: Focus Area 4 - Existing view east near 38th Street (left) and conceptual street view (right), from center of street



Figure 20: Focus Area 4 - Existing view east near 38th Street (left) and conceptual street view (right), from sidewalk

Proposed improvements include the following:

- Street trees and lighting
- Class II bike lanes

vi. land use and mobility recommendations

**FOCUS AREA #5 (41ST AND NATIONAL)**

- Creates a mixed-use gateway to National Avenue at 43rd Street, near schools, library, parks, and community center.
- Shows public plaza fronting Chollas Creek, with future trail along the creek.



Figure 21: Focus Area 5 - Bird's-eye concept



Figure 22: Focus Area 5 - Existing view east near 41st Street (left) and conceptual street view (right), from center of street

Proposed improvements include the following:

- Urban Plaza
- Street trees and lighting
- High visibility crosswalks
- Class II bike lanes
- Street Furniture (e.g., benches, bike racks, trails)

## vii. implementation

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The corridor is anticipated to be an area of change within the concurrent Southeastern San Diego Community Plan Update. Land use and zoning can be derived from the new plan while detailed mobility and urban design components will be based on the look of this National Avenue Master Plan. Future community improvements may be funded by development and through the City's Capital Improvement Program. Other funding can include state and

federal sources (Community Development Block Grants, Low Income Housing Tax Credits, Proposition 1C Funds, Caltrans Active Transportation Program), regional (including SANDAG Smart Growth Incentive Program), local (Infrastructure Financing Districts, City of San Diego General Fund, developer incentives), and property owner funds (Development Impact Fees, Developer Exactions, Business Improvement Districts).