

NE 65th St Vision Zero 60% Design Review

Andres Salomon
dilinger@queued.net

As of November 2017, the NE 65th Vision Zero Project is at 60% design. While the current design will be an improvement for people biking, there are a number of serious safety concerns for people walking and biking that remain unaddressed. We appreciate SDOT's willingness to make improvements to the corridor, and highly encourage SDOT to give more serious consideration to community concerns.

Issues

1) The most glaring issue with the current design is **the lack of safety improvements east of 20th Ave NE**. Regardless of what Seattle's Bicycle Master Plan says, people desperately want to bike and walk along this corridor. Here's a video that Oralea White created of pedestrians struggling to cross the street at NE 65th St & 21st Ave NE:

<https://twitter.com/OraleaW/status/939172722088615936>

We highly encourage every SDOT employee who is working on the design of this project to watch the video, and consider how street design changes (narrowing lanes, traffic calming, painting crosswalks, raised crosswalks, adding curb bulbs, adding bike lanes, installing RRFB or pedestrian half-signals, etc) can make the pedestrian experience safer and more comfortable. Leaving this road configuration hostile to pedestrians is unacceptable. Also note that people want to bike to and through the business district. NE 65th is much less steep than NE 68th, which is why in 2015 we built a temporary pop-up protected bike lane in the westbound (uphill) direction between 21st and 20th Ave NE on 65th:

<https://twitter.com/NEGreenways/status/644950411036659712>

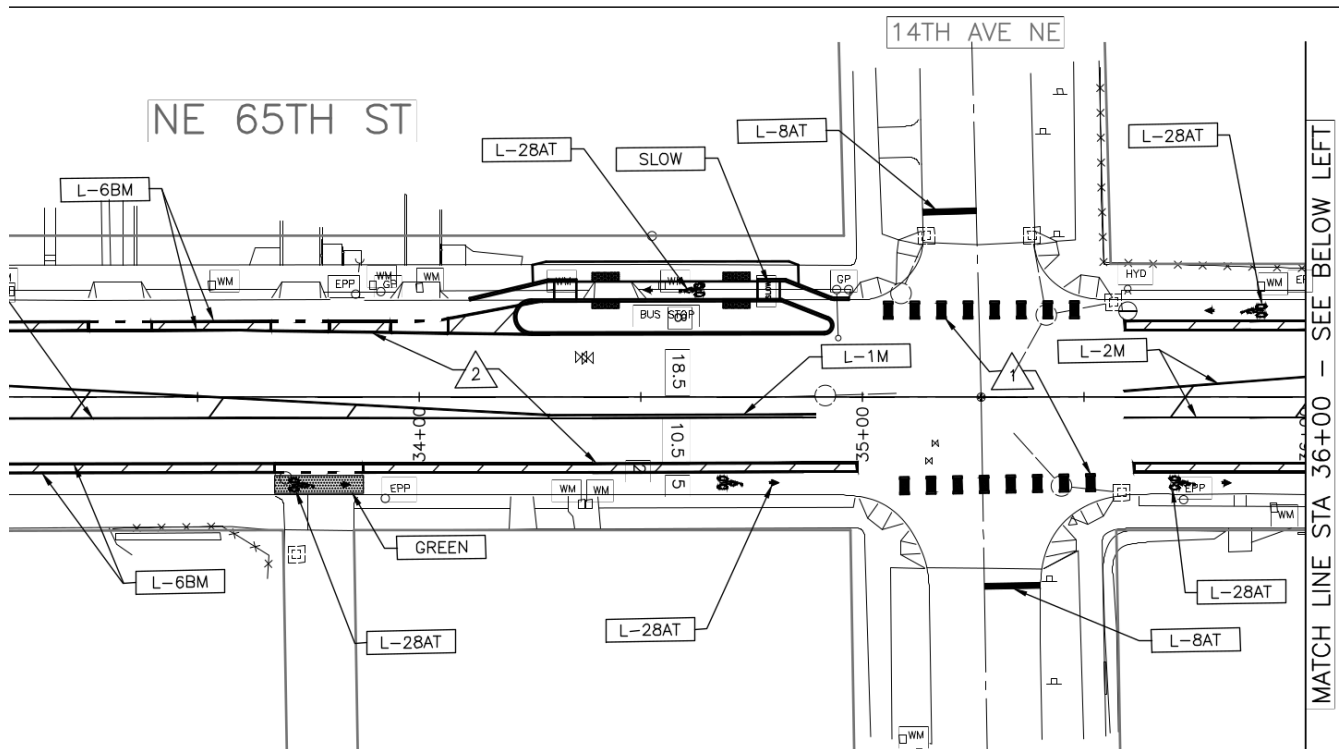
Please consider making safety improvements for all modes east of 20th Ave NE on NE 65th.

Additionally, it's not clear how people on bikes are supposed to get to a greenway on NE 68th from bike lanes on NE 65th at 20th Ave NE.

2) **The bus stop island design is problematic.**

TYPICAL SECTION AT BUS ISLAND

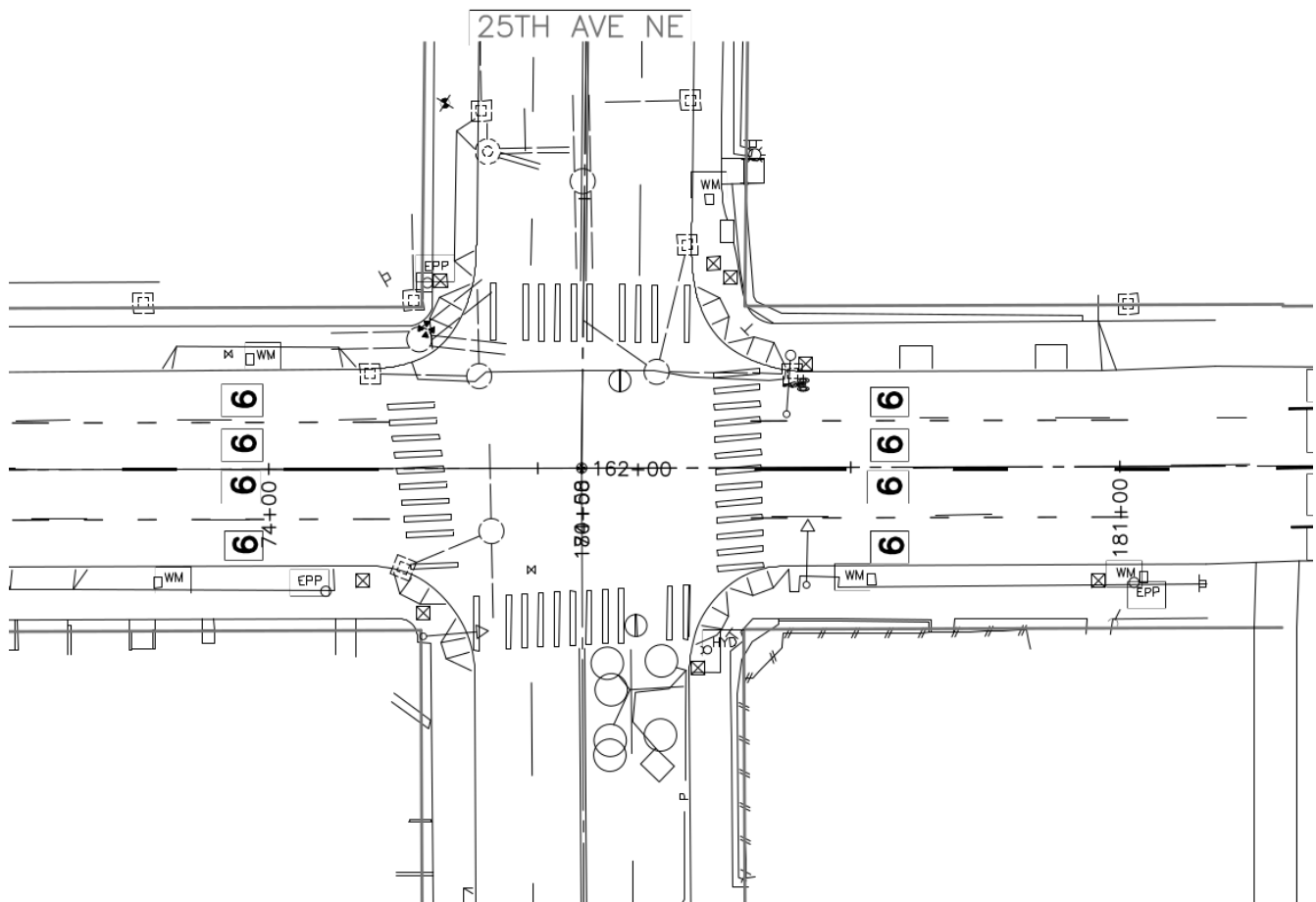
NTS



This bus island design clearly gives priority to moving car traffic, at the expense of safety for pedestrians, bicycles, and transit users. In-lane bus stops would result in more efficient transit flow, as well as safer outcomes for people crossing the street. Stopped buses act as a form of traffic calming (which is why it is so easy to cross and bike on University Way, for example, despite a lack of crossing signals, crosswalks, or bike lanes). A 4-foot-wide bike lane is substandard, and dangerous next to a 4-foot-wide sidewalk. We can expect large amounts of pedestrian traffic mere blocks away from a light rail station; 4 feet is simply not wide enough. In addition, Seattle's own Right Of Way Improvements Manual dictates that sidewalks should be 6 feet wide, with a minimum width of 5 feet for point obstructions: http://www.seattle.gov/rowmanual/manual/4_11.asp

Removing the bus passing lane would result in plenty of space for a normal width bike lane and 6+ foot sidewalk.

3) Left-turn pockets are needed for drivers turning left onto 25th Ave NE.



If left turn pockets are undesirable, then please consider curb bulbs to improve pedestrian safety, slow down turning drivers, and increase driver predictability.

4) **Right-turn restrictions are needed at 20th Ave NE & NE 65th.** Due to a slight curve and a hill, sight lines at this intersection are particularly bad. Drivers turning right-on-red onto westbound NE 65th are forced to creep out past the crosswalk. This blocks both the curb ramp and the crosswalk, and will also block the proposed bike lane. Here's an example (again, from Oralea White) of a right-turning driver blocking the ramp, which also blocks a woman with a stroller from crossing:

<https://twitter.com/OraleaW/status/915977331180630017>

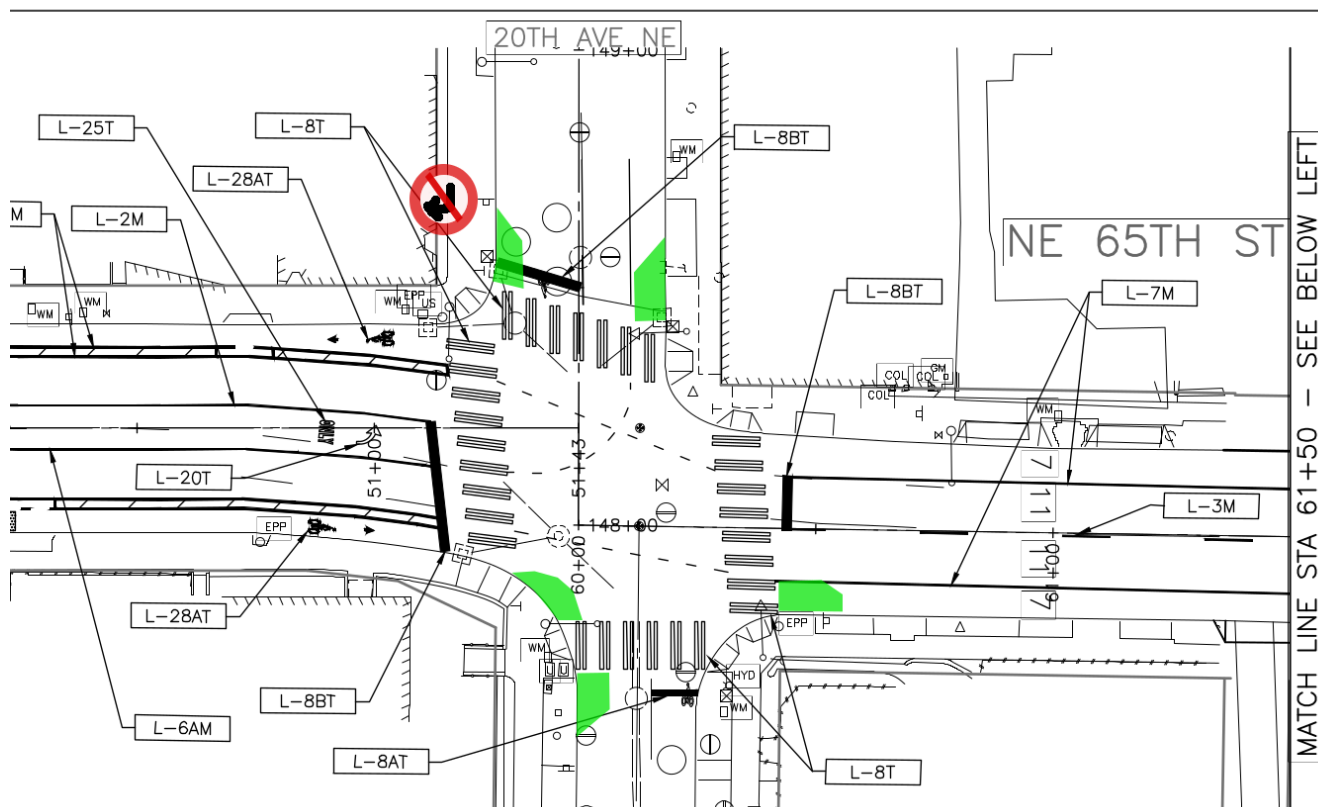
Here's additional examples showing where the proposed bike lane would either be blocked by turning cars, or will have pedestrians walking in it to get around the blocked crosswalk:

<https://twitter.com/OraleaW/status/923585759331811328>

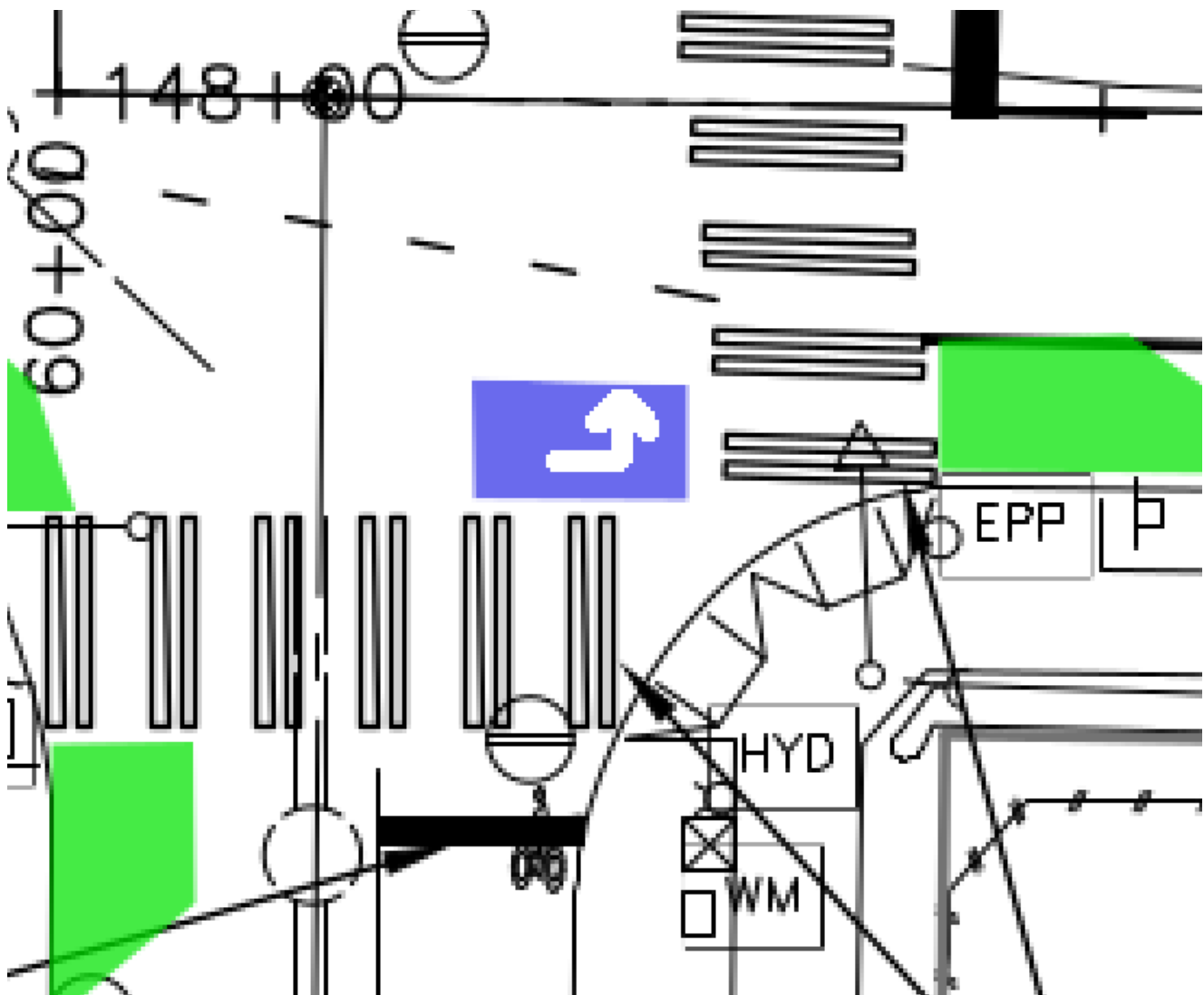
<https://twitter.com/OraleaW/status/864145831275880448>

In addition, a pedestrian was killed at this intersection this year. The community made a recommendation to restrict right-on-red turns, and to add a curb bulb to help with compliance (as well as giving pedestrians more safe space).

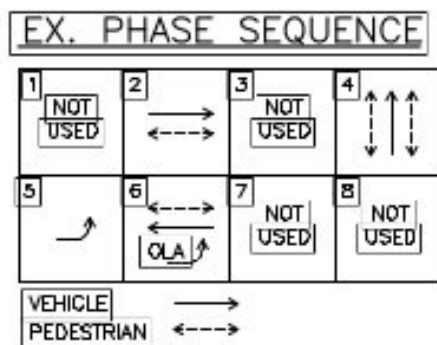
There are numerous opportunities to improve safety here. I've illustrated example curb bulb locations in green below, and an upside-down "no right on red" sign to mark the needed right turn restriction. Please consider narrowing the crossing distances for pedestrians.

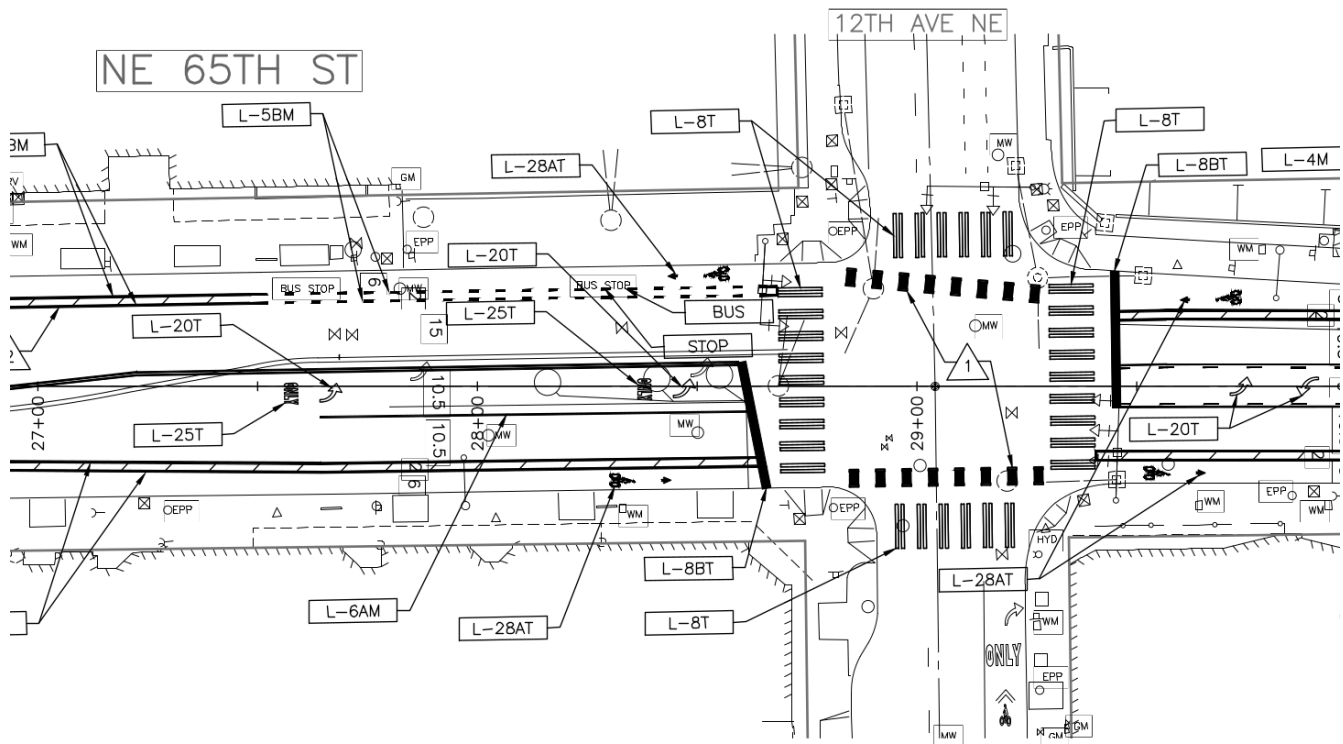


As an aside, the southeast curb bulb in this picture creates a safe space for eastbound cyclists to make a two-stage left turn onto 20th Ave NE. A potential enhancement (in purple) is below.

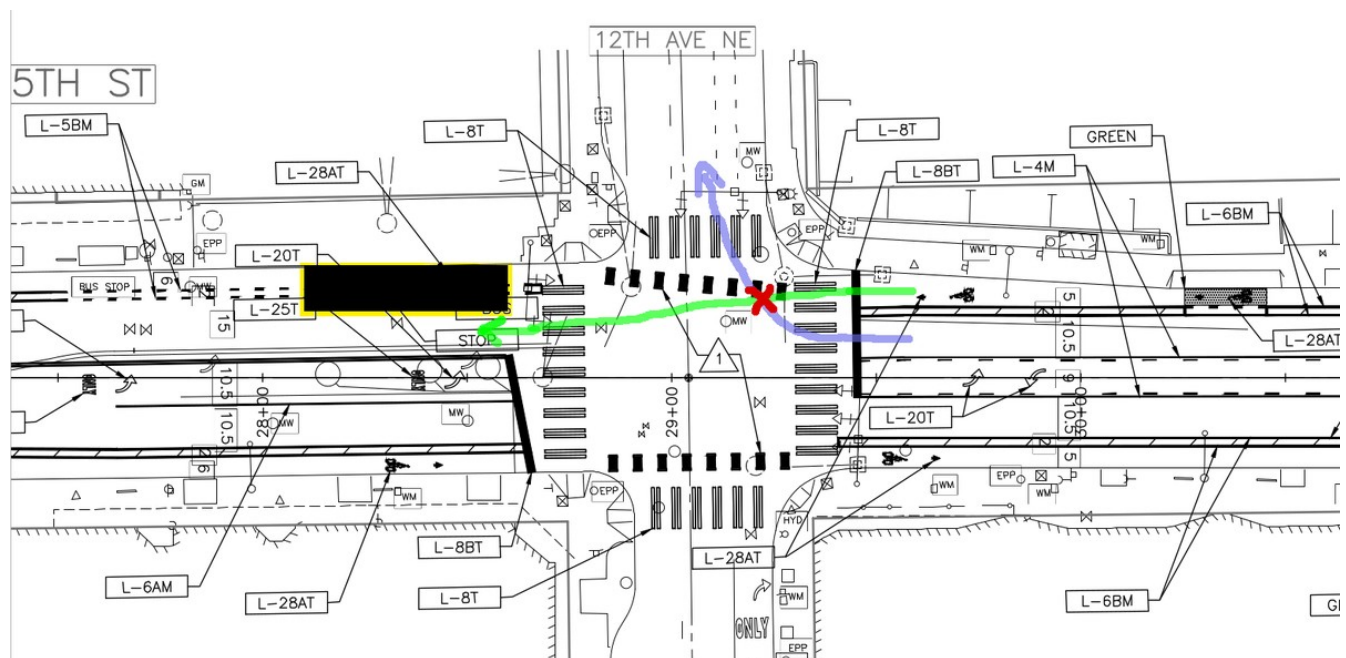


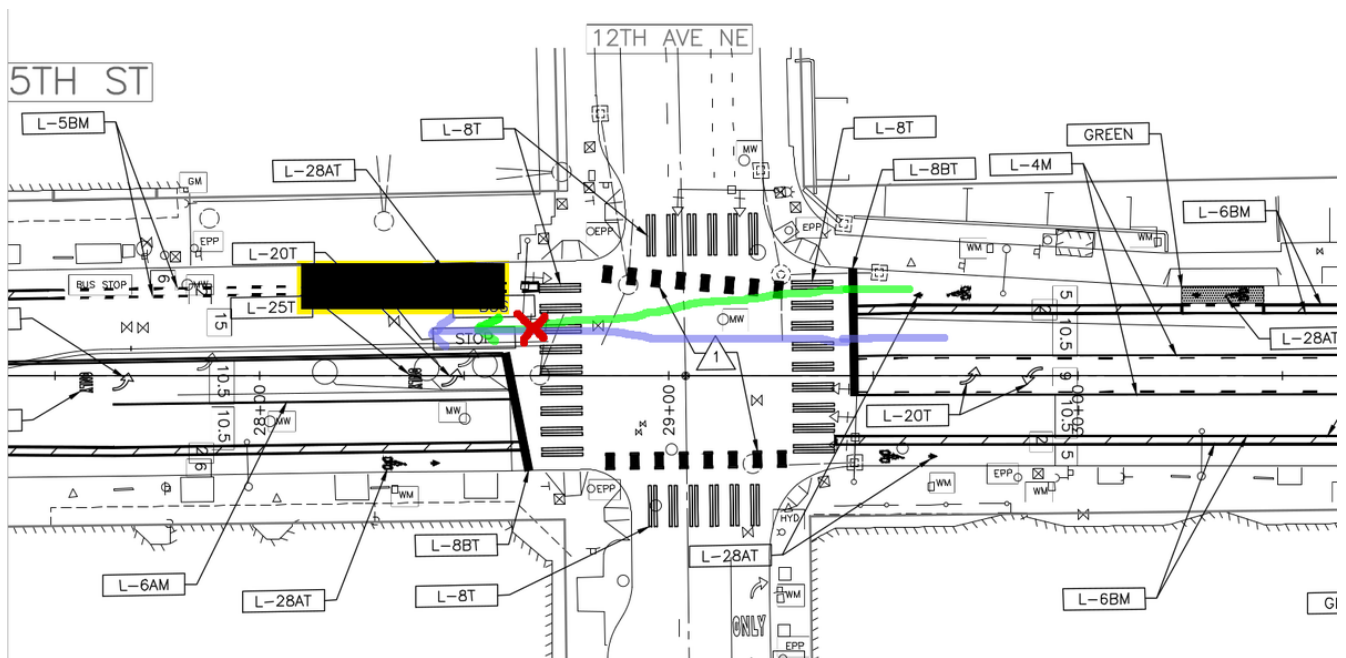
5) The bus stop at 12th Ave NE should have a proper island rather than conflicting with the bike lane, and the left turn signal phase (onto 12th) should not overlap with oncoming traffic.



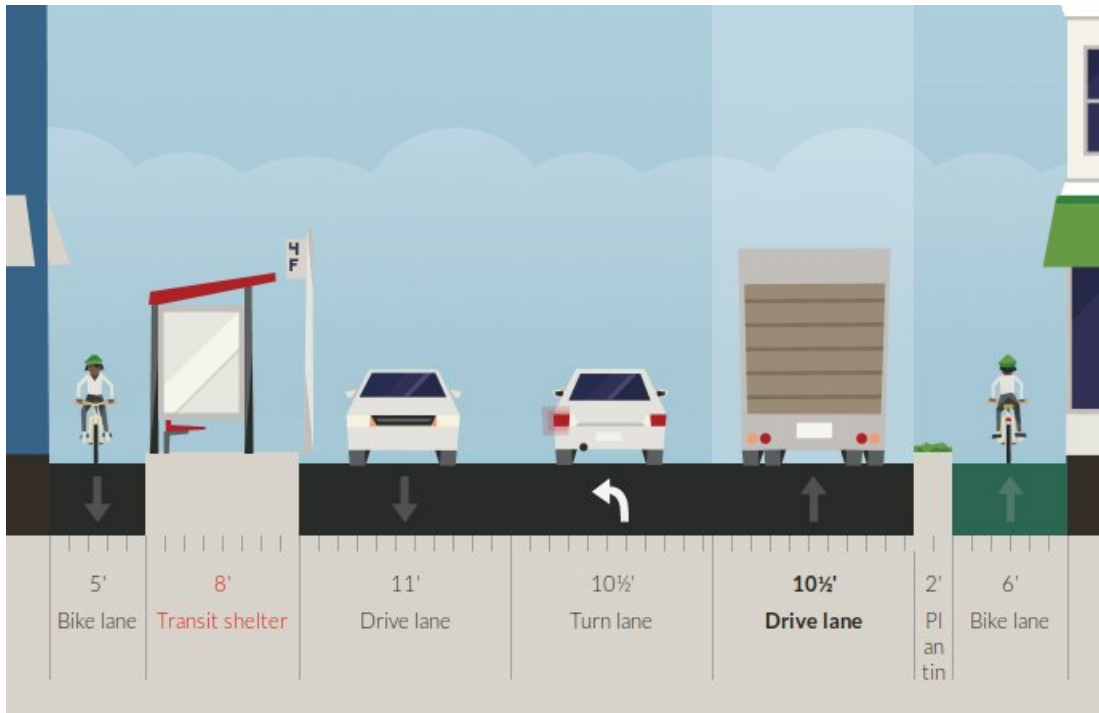


The current signal phase sequence at 12th Ave NE has an overlapping (“OLA”) left turn phase (#6 in the above phase sequence), where the left turn arrow blinks yellow. I’ve seen this confuse left-turning drivers who think that they have the right of way (because they misunderstand what a blinking yellow turn arrow means – for example, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-S64VaCOKY>). At the same time, the lack of bus island means there are three separate conflict risks for westbound cyclists; a left hook, a right hook, and being hit from behind while passing a stopped bus.

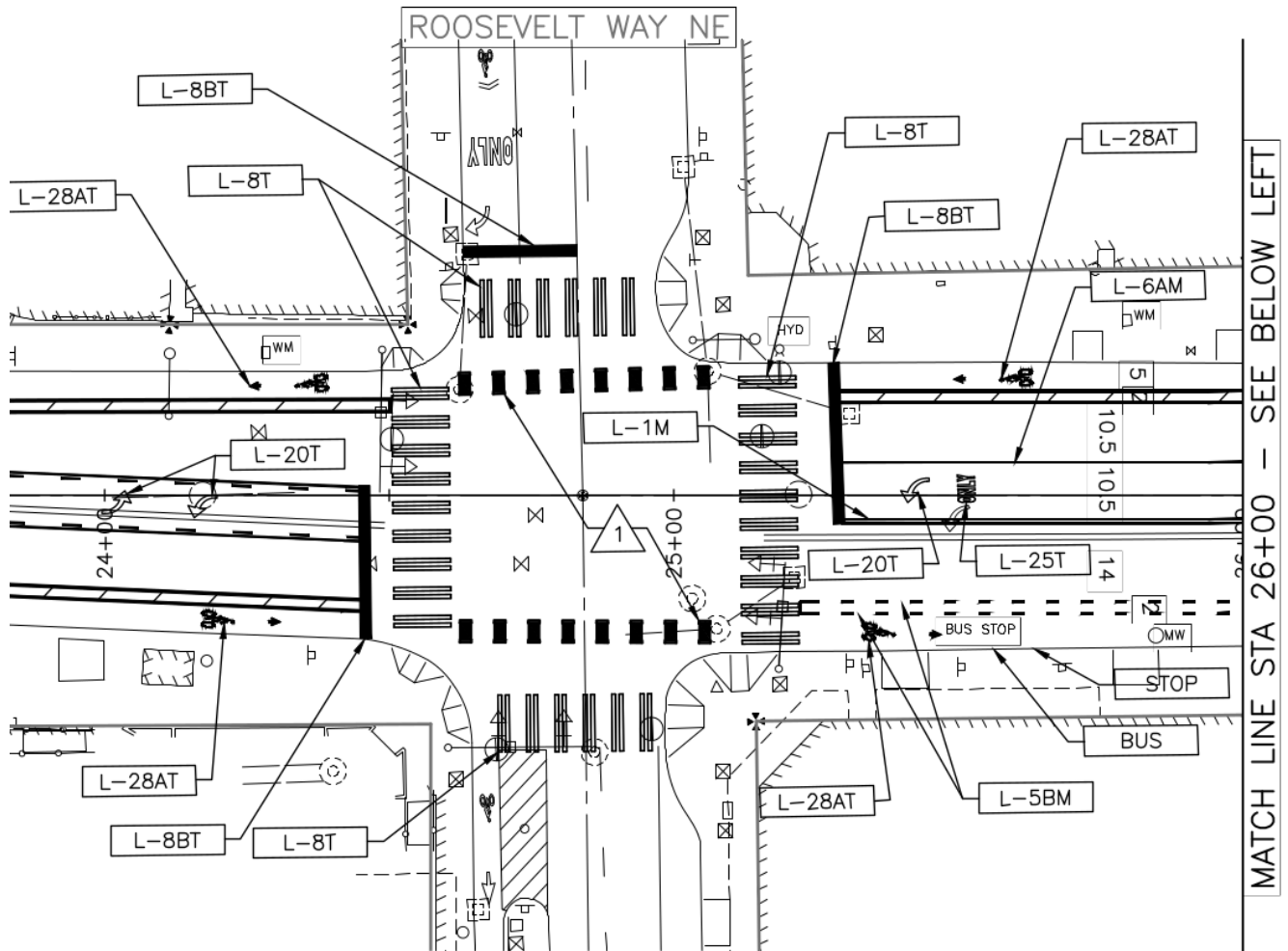




There appears to be enough space for that, given the proposed westbound 15 foot lane, 2 foot buffer, and 6 foot bike lane.



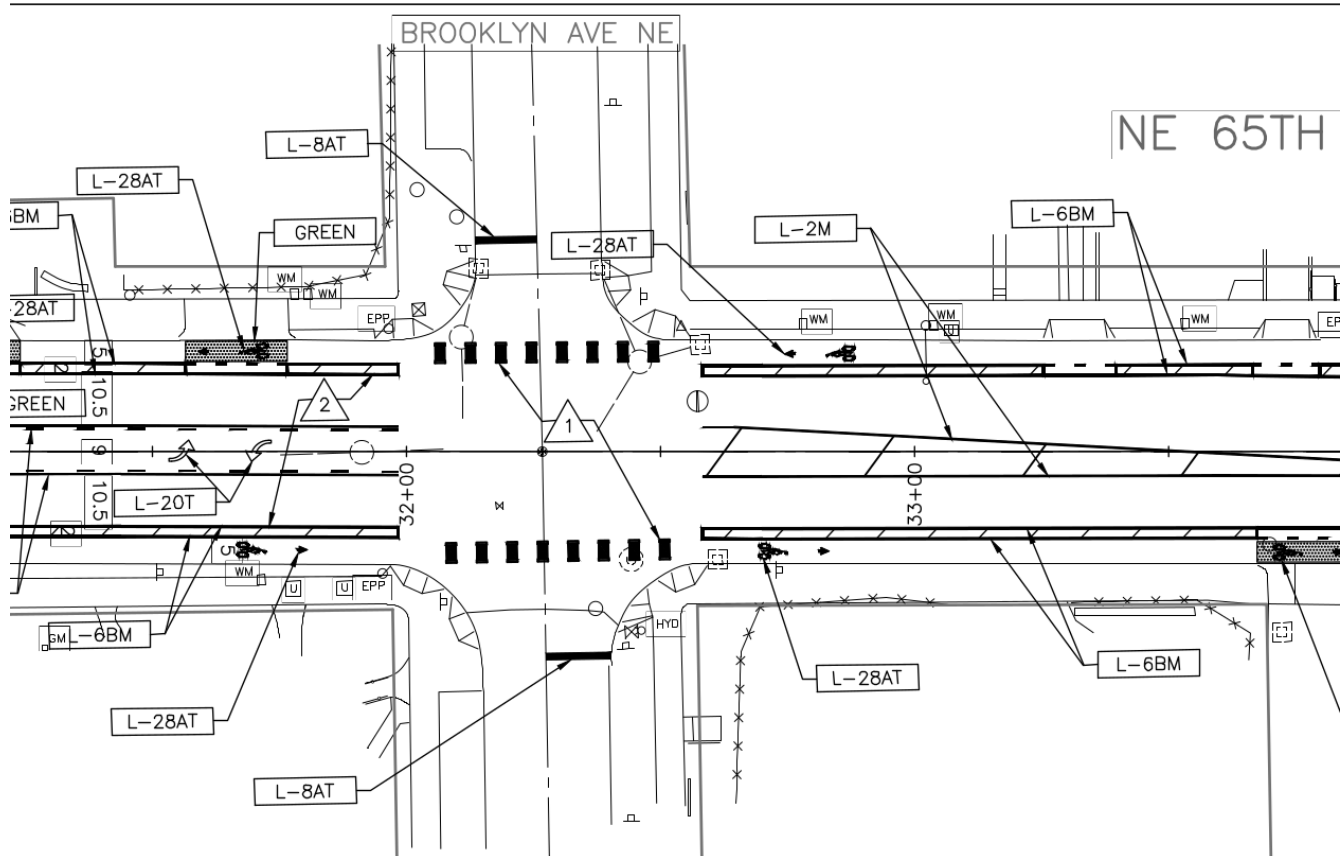
6) The same bus stop issue that exists above is also a problem at Roosevelt & NE 65th.



Two pedestrians have been killed here in the past few years; one by a driver turning east onto 65th from Roosevelt. SDOT responded by putting flex posts to hopefully slow down turning drivers. However, with this 60% design left-turning drivers will not only have to watch out for crossing pedestrians, they'll also have to watch for cyclists who are going around a stopped bus. **This intersection needs to have a proper bus island.** The bus island will have the beneficial effect of narrowing the roadway and slowing down turning drivers. With the opening of the light rail and additional traffic, this is especially crucial. **There also should not be a blinking yellow turn signal/overlapping signal phase.**

Potential Improvements

7) Locations that don't need center turn lanes could instead get proper pedestrian refuge islands. For example, **the east side of the intersection of Brooklyn & NE 65th should really have a refuge island.** The west side of the intersection could also have an island.

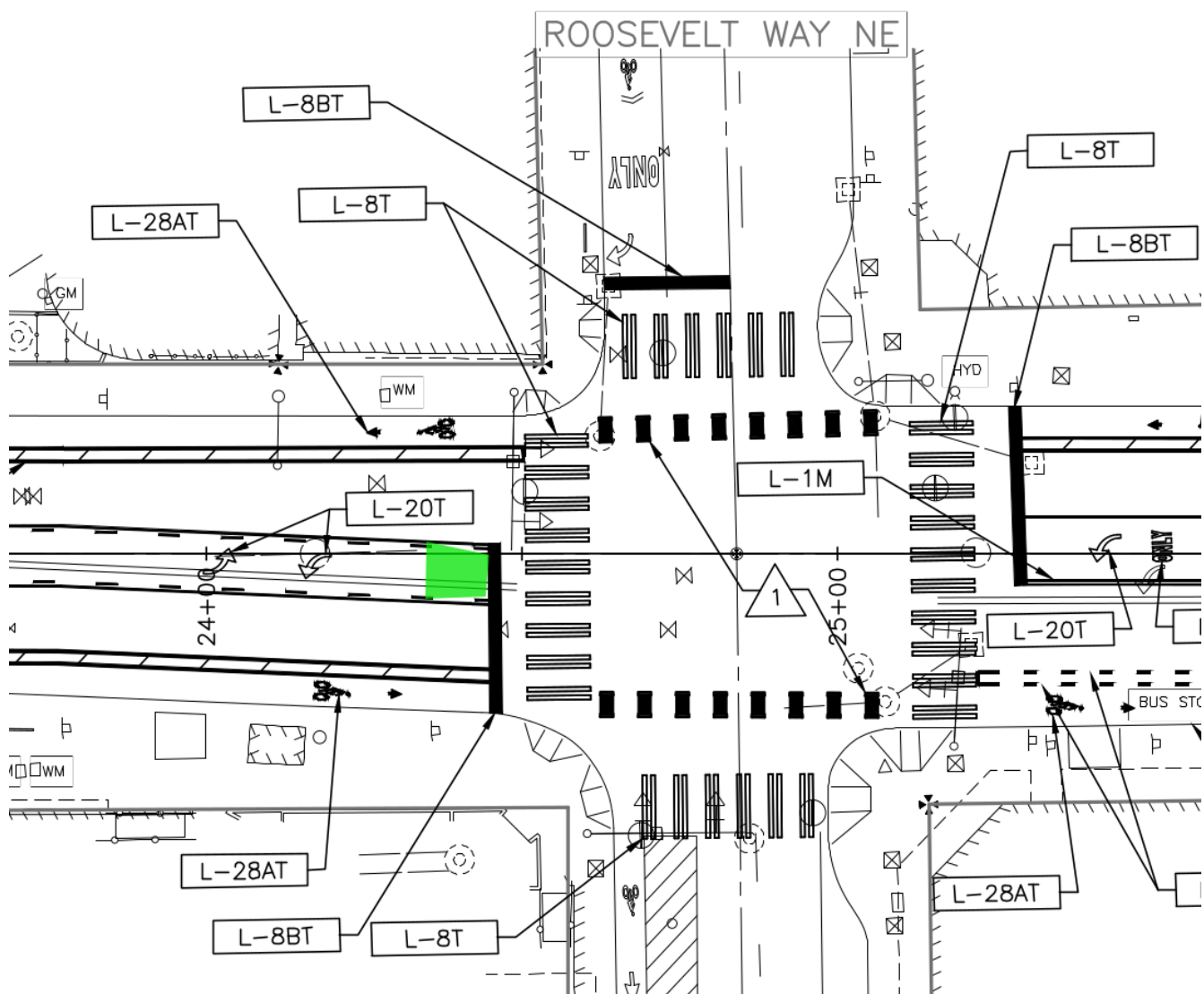


Currently, even SDOT's own employees sometimes don't yield to pedestrians trying to cross NE 65th at Brooklyn:

<https://twitter.com/OraleaW/status/823929618839150592>

This is blocks from a future light rail station, and in front of Roosevelt High School. We need to ensure that people can safely cross the street.

8) Intersections with one-way streets, such as Roosevelt & NE 65th, provide another opportunity for pedestrian refuge islands. In this case, the west side of the intersection is not used for turning. An example pedestrian island is in green below. A mountable curb apron for larger trucks might be appropriate in this location, but any kind of island would be a huge improvement.



9) If possible, use a 3 foot buffer for the protected bike lane instead of 2 feet. The benefits are two-fold; cyclists feel more comfortable (since they are further away from fast-moving car and truck traffic), and pedestrians who are crossing the street have a larger space for refuge while they wait for vehicles to stop.

