

Highway 112 Revitalization



MURP Capstone | Spring 2022

Client: Town of Center

Prepared by: Tiffany Tran

Highway 112 Revitalization

Prepared by

Tiffany Tran

Master of Urban and Regional Planning
Candidate
University of Colorado, Denver

CU Denver Advisor

Ken Schroepfel, AICP

Prepared for

Town of Center

294 S. Worth Street
Center, CO 81125

Town of Center Staff

Brian Luhan | Town Manager
Keith Brockhurst | Economic Development Coordinator

Capstone Project submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Urban and Regional Planning, College of Architecture and Planning, University of Colorado Denver.

Submitted: May 12, 2022



Master of Urban and Regional Planning
COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **DENVER**

Introduction and Problem statement

The Town of Center is a 553-acre Statutory town located in southwest Colorado approximately four hours from Denver. Situated in both Saguache and Rio Grande County, this 2,200 population town has faced stagnant development and disinvestment over the past several decades. Serving as their second main street, commercial uses primarily lie along Highway 112 running east-west. Worth Street serves as Center's business district which intersects Highway 112. Though the town has faced historic stagnation, six vacant properties in the commercial district have been purchased and have begun development. New developments include a pottery barn, tie-dye shop, theater, and innovation hub for high school students. Center also has plans for mixed-use housing development north of 1st Street past the business district.

Since 2018, one goal of the Town's economic development plan has been to bring more visitors into town. With future development plans in mind, Highway 112 acting as one of the main points of access to Center majorly lacks placemaking characteristics that would indicate a business district is nearby. The lack of sidewalks forces seasonal migrant workers to walk along this main street arterial in an unsafe manner to cross over pass the business district. As Highway 112 serves as a thoroughfare to pass through Center and access businesses, the Town of Center has observed issues of speeding, though the posted speed limit is 35 mph. In addition to this, the lack of adequate signage along Highway 112 causes Worth Street to be hidden, leaving a lost opportunity for economic business. As the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) owns Highway 112, transforming this arterial creates a placemaking opportunity to create a more pedestrian-friendly environment and promote economic growth for Center.

Through this plan, the Town of Center will receive recommendations to revitalize Highway 112 to bring forth to CDOT and future potential investors. The development of this plan will be created with consideration of the following goals:

- **Transform Highway 112 into a revitalized arterial focused on improving safety conditions**
- **Attract economic growth through placemaking tactics**
- **Create a distinctive gateway to attract visitors to the business district**

Background Research

Originally, main streets provided access to important amenities. With changing development patterns that shifted towards auto-dependent uses, the shift prioritized access to mobility which is the current main function of highways. This caused the function of that highway to take precedence over the main street function in situations with a road serving as both. Prioritizing mobility over accessibility can result in high speeds due to the difference in street design. Through trial and error, it is recognized that both accessibility and mobility must be balanced in this given circumstance.

The key to properly maintaining a main street is to remember that it is a place, in addition to just a thoroughfare. The skeletal foundation of cities has traditionally developed into an over-reliance on automotive transport where pedestrians as the main importance of the street, become lost.

Good placemaking allows an opportunity for people to create social bonds and build resilient communities to create a sense of belonging and identity. As safety is one of the most important aspects of a highway, designing the space must prioritize pedestrians once it is shared with a main street. Good design prioritizes safety by increasing awareness by adding features such as high visibility crosswalks, curb extensions, medians, or refuge islands. Drivers are given a reason to slow down if there are attractive features along the street increasing safety for all users of the street.

Land use, buildings, public spaces, and landscaping elements shape the built environment of space. Streets must be designed inclusively for all ages from 8-80 that are also accessible for all users to create a vibrant community. Through placemaking opportunities, tactics that enhance public spaces draw more interaction to main streets.

By maintaining the rural character of each small town and understanding that while it may be a slow process, understanding that streets are a place in addition to a thoroughfare changes the perception of how designers approach interventions.

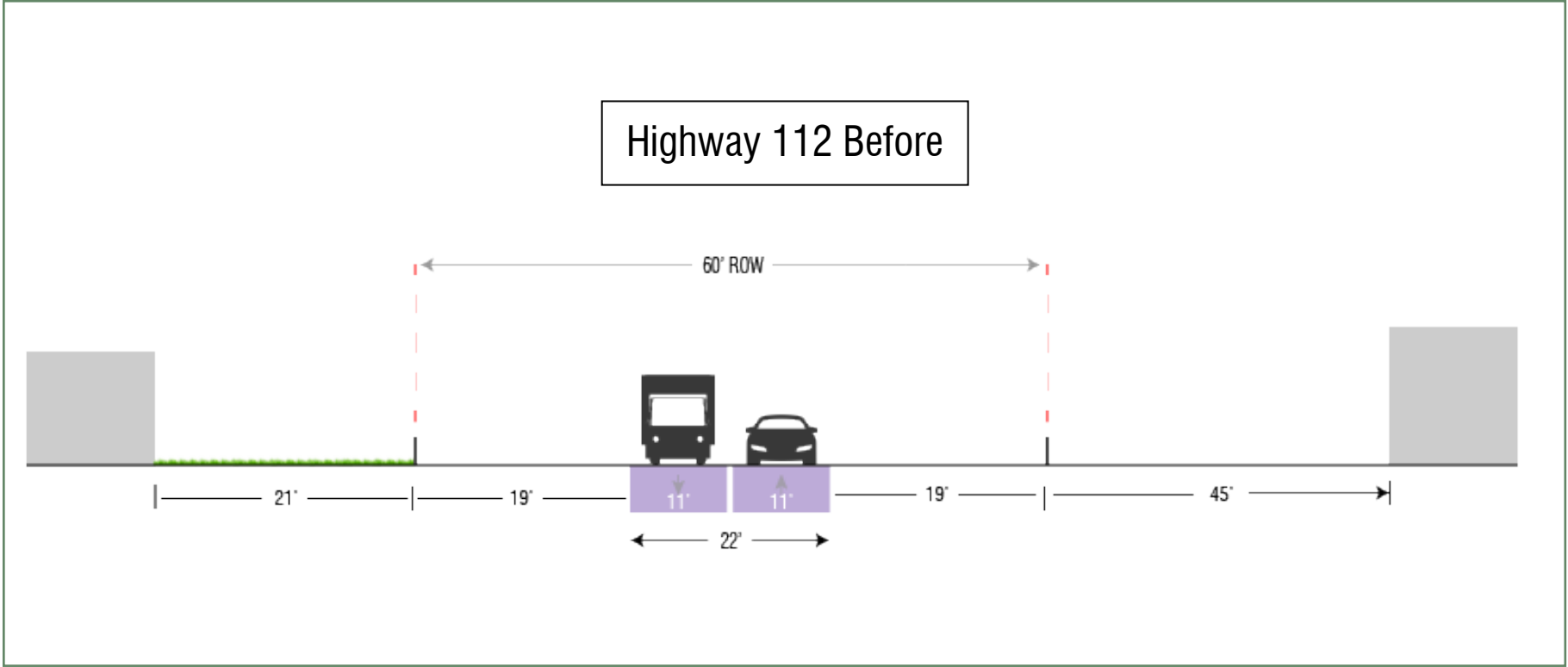
Methodology

Due to limited resources, research will be analyzed through open data sources accessed online and directly given by the client in addition to initial background research of academic literature and case studies. This project uses a mixed-methods approach involving analysis through existing conditions analysis as well as a site visit.

An initial site visit will be conducted to analyze existing conditions along Highway 112 from Torres Street to Adams Street. A route will be taken from the business district along Worth Street to Highway 112 to mimic a pedestrian/visitor's typical route and provide an understanding of the normal walking conditions. Walking along Highway 112 will inform the typical conditions of how seasonal migrant workers who stay behind Jones Oil gas station traverse along the road. Additionally, a handheld speed radar will be used to observe speeding behavior along Highway 112 as speeding has been brought up as an issue.

In addition to the site visit, other sources will be utilized such as land use data, demographic information including age, race, and economics provided either by County Assessors or the U.S. Census bureau. Traffic count will inform the highway's automobile frequency which may influence the types of traffic calming measure designs.

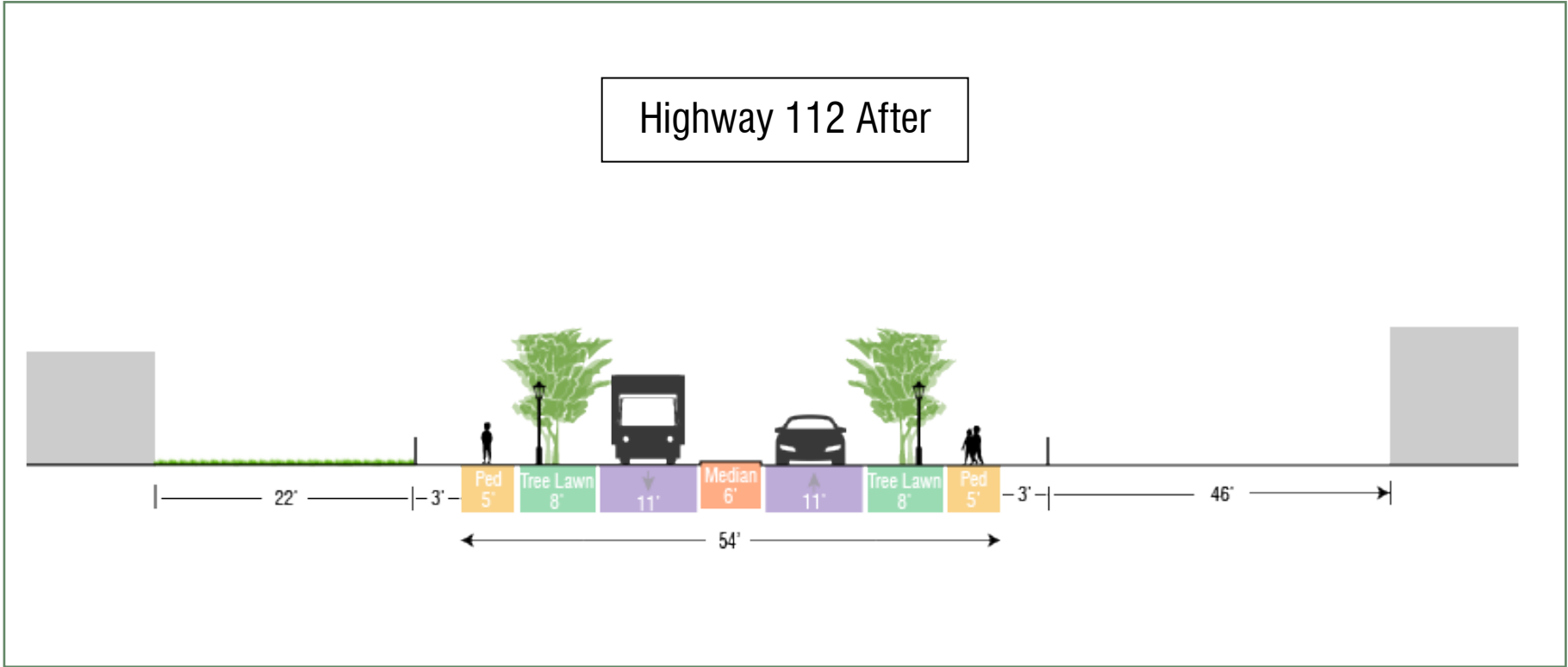
Highway 112 Before



Existing Conditions

An existing conditions analysis and site visit revealed the need for intervention along Highway 112 for a safer pedestrian-oriented environment. Speeds were recorded as high as 55 mph as traffic sped past the three-quarter-mile stretch. The lack of crosswalks and sidewalks show how auto-centric the streets have been designed. Current signage along Highway 112 is inadequate and is not eye-catching to pull visitors into Worth Street’s business district. Center’s urban form is sporadic which has not allowed the town to properly create a distinctive character along Highway 112 as it has developed. Commercial and residential development along Highway 112 has a need for pedestrian infrastructure and can act as a catalyst for future development and investment. Though future development along this stretch is uncertain, analyses still revealed an opportunity for placemaking and streetscape improvement, particularly at the intersection of Highway 112 and Worth Street.

Highway 112 After



Recommendations

This report provided recommendations for streetscape improvements including new gateway signage to direct visitors to Center’s business district and arrival to the Town of Center, the addition of sidewalks, an amenity zone that includes planters and tree lawns, a landscaped median acting as a traffic calming measure, and high visibility crosswalks at vulnerable intersections. The provided recommendations are to catalyze the interest of more investment toward streets that prioritize pedestrian safety while still accommodating traffic through this main street highway,

Conclusion

With implemented recommendations, Highway 112 conditions are improved providing a better sense of place for both pedestrians and automobile users. Applying placemaking tactics allows the space to create a foundation as the area may change and grow over time. Subtle additions such as gateway signage and banners assist in developing a character for the corridor which can continue once the

innovation hub has completed development. Though there are still large and inconsistent setbacks, providing an allée and tree planters helps provide a sense of enclosure for pedestrians and doubles as a traffic calming measure. Creating a sense of place for community members along Highway 112 allows the town to move towards its goal to increase economic activity and growth along as they see continued development along Worth Street and future potential development along this road.

