

Miami Takes a Big Step Toward Walkability

The city wants to convert car-friendly Biscayne Boulevard into pedestrian-friendly Biscayne Green.

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Courtesy Miami Downtown Development Authority

For all its sunshine, Miami doesn't have the best reputation as a walkable city. A recent [Smart Growth America ranking](#) of walkable urbanism among the 30 largest U.S. metros listed Miami 23rd, just behind Detroit. But Miami's potential is much brighter—ranked 4th on the same report's "future" walkability list—and a new project to transform a major downtown corridor takes a strong step in that direction.

The project, called Biscayne Green, involves a near-total makeover of a

six-block stretch of Biscayne Boulevard (from SE 1st Street to NE 5th Street, for those keeping score at home). It's being advanced by the [Miami Downtown Development Authority](#), which recently detailed the changes in an application to the Florida DOT. Early indications suggest the state is on board with the plan, according to [Miami Today](#):

“As state transportation partners, we find the DDA’s vision to be pedestrian friendly, aesthetically pleasing and in line with the department’s Complete Streets vision,” said Gus Pego, secretary for the state road department’s District Six, which encompasses Miami-Dade and Monroe counties, via email.

The current Biscayne Boulevard is great for drivers and not so great for everyone else in downtown Miami. There are no bike lanes. The center medians are really wide surface parking lots. Pedestrians wishing to go from one side to the other must walk 188 feet across eight lanes of traffic. The DDA application, provided to CityLab, describes the current street as having "little aesthetic value or curb appeal."

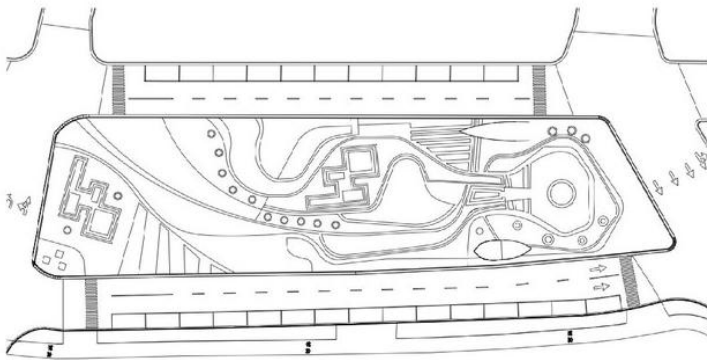
Here's how the street looks today:



The existing Biscayne Boulevard is very car-friendly. (Courtesy Miami Downtown Development Authority)

DDA writes that the new plan would transform Biscayne "from an autocentric use to a pedestrian use." The new boulevard would slim down from eight lanes to six during rush-hour and four at other times, with the curbside rush-hour lanes becoming street parking. The median would go from parking lots to fairly extravagant mini parks. Cyclists would enjoy a two-way protected bike lane on one side of the street.

The greatest benefit would go to pedestrians. Crossing the street would become just two 30-foot journeys, relieved by the park space halfway. Here's a look at one proposed section of the overhaul, from above:



Courtesy Miami Downtown Development Authority

And here's a far more colorful [video rendering](#):



DDA estimates the cost of the project at upwards of \$85.6 million.

The Biscayne Green plans are far from perfect. They do call for the number of surface spaces to be halved, from about 400 in the median lots to about 200 along the curb. But they also consider adding an underground parking lot with a capacity of 357 more spaces—which, when combined with the street spots, would result in a relative gain of about 150 spots over existing conditions.

The glut of parking is likely a [peace offering to local businesses](#), but by encouraging more people to drive to the area it threatens the very spirit of walkability the project hopes to embrace. A better plan might turn the street parking into a dedicated transit lane and push all the parking into an underground lot.

There's still time for such details to change, and even in its current state, the Biscayne Green plans reflect an understanding of how the city can improve its street network. If Miami is to become one of the most walkable cities in the country, it's projects like this that will get it there.