

# Worried about crossing Front, Myrtle on foot? Experts are looking for solutions.



The difficulty — and perceived danger — of crossing Front Street, pictured here, and Myrtle Street in Downtown Boise has spurred an effort to change the layout of the corridor, which is part of the state of Idaho's highway system. **Darin Oswald** [doswald@IdahoStatesman.com](mailto:doswald@IdahoStatesman.com)

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Let's say you work in a Downtown Boise office — somewhere near the corner of Eighth and Main streets. On a nice day, you might like to walk the half-mile to the Boise River Greenbelt to eat lunch next to the river.

For a lot of people, though, having to cross Front and Myrtle streets on foot would be a deterrent. Each street is five lanes across. Whether the cars are speeding or not, pedestrians feel like they're going too fast for comfort. Some of the sidewalks are narrow and poorly buffered from traffic. Several of the building

fronts you pass aren't very interesting to look at or in — diminishing the pleasure you'll take in that 10-minute walk to and from the river.

So maybe you stay in your office, eat lunch at your desk instead of getting some fresh air. Just like that, your office has become a less enjoyable place to work than it could be.

This scenario is one of many reasons the city of Boise and other public and private organizations have [fretted over Myrtle and Front](#) — especially in recent years.

As an east-west corridor for car traffic, the Front-Myrtle “couplet” is effective. It moves thousands of cars into, out of and through Downtown every day, most of them in a fairly efficient manner.

But it is a big barrier to north-south traffic, especially people on foot or bicycle. That's why Capital City Development Corporation, Boise's urban renewal agency, commissioned a study on Front and Myrtle. Executive director John Brunelle said Wednesday that the agency [received the completed study](#), conducted by transportation consultant Sam Schwartz, in mid-November. The agency's board hasn't had time to take a position on its recommendations, Brunelle said.

A host of interested organizations, including the city of Boise, Idaho Transportation Department, Ada County Highway District and the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho, contributed to it.

The study was first [reported by BoiseDev.com](#).

The trick is to make those roads easier to cross without ruining their value as an east-west connection. The study's preferred alternative suggests a series of geometric changes, most notably a reduction in the number of lanes on certain stretches, such as Front Street between Ninth and 13th; and all of Myrtle between 11th Street and Broadway Avenue.

The preferred alternative also suggests adding a few on-street parking spaces, streetscapes and sidewalk extensions that shorten crossing distances for pedestrians and cyclists.

Some of these suggestions could take years to implement. Some likely will never happen. The study is meant as more of a first stab at ways the Front-Myrtle dilemma might be solved.

Some improvements, such as sidewalk extensions, are already under way or at least could take place within the next year, said City Council President Elaine Clegg, who's an expert in land-use and transportation planning.

One complication is the fact that Front and Myrtle are part of the Hwy. 20-Hwy. 26 corridor, so they're managed by the ITD. Urban planning is unusual for ITD, which oversees mostly rural highways.

Nevertheless, the department wants to be part of a balanced solution for Front and Myrtle, spokesman Vince Trimboli said Thursday.

"And that's the right balance between the driving public and pedestrians, the bikers and everybody that uses that corridor," Trimboli said.