



GENERAL PLAN REFERRAL

September 28, 2022

Case No.: 2022-008878GPR
Block/Lot No.: Upper Great Highway between Lincoln and Sloat
Project Sponsor: City and County of San Francisco, Recreation and Parks Dept
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Recommended By: 
AnMarie Rddgets, Director of Citywide Policy for
Rich Hillis, Director of Planning

Recommendation: Finding the project, on balance, is **in conformity** with the General Plan

Project Description

The Great Highway Pilot project will transition the current temporary status of “car-free” Great Highway during specified times into a permanent designation. The project would create a car-free bicycle and pedestrian promenade on weekends, holidays, and a portion of Fridays by restricting private vehicle access to the Upper Great Highway between Lincoln Way and Sloat Boulevard (2.0 miles). When closed, the roadway will be available to pedestrians, bicyclists, maintenance vehicles, permitted vehicles, and emergency vehicles. The roadway will continue to operate as a four-lane vehicular roadway on weekdays from Monday to the Friday closure time. This Pilot is proposed as a three-year study to enable more recreational use and data gathering that could inform future actions.

The Great Highway has been under the jurisdiction of the Recreation and Park Commission since the 1870s. In March 2020, the roadway was closed to private vehicles by the RPD General Manager (GM) under an emergency ordinance. This was in response to the COVID-19-related shelter-in-place order to provide people more space to recreate outdoors while social distancing. Ultimately, the road was incorporated into part of the Slow Streets initiative, which continues as a temporary emergency response while San Francisco remains under a [State-of-Emergency](#) amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In August 2021, the GM issued a directive reopening the

Upper Great Highway to private vehicles weekdays starting Monday at 6:00am through Friday at 12:00pm. This pilot will maintain these hours of closure and will begin upon legislative approval of the private vehicle restrictions by the SF BOS (anticipated Fall 2022) and end on December 31, 2025.

The re-purposing of the Great Highway during the previous closures has resulted in surge in walking and bicycling along the Great Highway, breaking the record for daily visits three times and setting a record at 11,661 people accessing the promenade in a single day.

Please see attachment A for project description narrative.

Environmental Review

On 9/28/2022, the project was determined to be statutorily exempt from the CEQA per Public Resources Code section 21080.25 (Planning Case No. 2022-007356ENV).

General Plan Compliance and Basis for Recommendation

As described below, the temporary closure of the Great Highway between Lincoln and Sloat is consistent with the Eight Priority Policies of Planning Code Section 101.1 and is, on balance, in conformity with the Objectives and Policies of the General Plan.

RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

OBJECTIVE 1

ENSURE A WELL-MAINTAINED, HIGHLY UTILIZED, AND INTEGRATED OPEN SPACE SYSTEM.

POLICY 1.1

Encourage the dynamic and flexible use of existing open spaces and promote a variety of recreation and open space uses, where appropriate.

The continued closure of the Great Highway maintains the transformation of a high-speed auto thoroughfare (45 mph speed limit) into a dynamic, inviting promenade with an intimate relationship with Ocean Beach that does not otherwise exist. The project maintains car-free usage during peak recreational times and accommodates a large volume of residents and visitors with for a range of recreational opportunities.

POLICY 1.5

Prioritize the better utilization of McLaren Park, Ocean Beach, the Southeastern Waterfront and other underutilized significant open spaces.

Ocean Beach is one of the city's great open spaces but is currently underutilized. Opening the Great Highway to pedestrians and bicycles on a pilot basis improves the physical and experiential link between the city and beach, encouraging more activity and utilization of an immense public amenity.

POLICY 1.10

Ensure that open space is safe and secure for the City's entire population.

Keeping the Great Highway open to pedestrians and cyclists during peak recreational hours will reduce the risk of injury that would otherwise result from walking across four lanes of traffic to reach the beach. Additionally, the large number of visitors that the closure attracts fosters a safer environment by making pedestrians more visible and therefore more anticipated user of the roadway. Emergency vehicles will continue to have access to the roadway while closed to autos.

OBJECTIVE 2

INCREASE RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE TO MEET THE LONG-TERM NEEDS OF THE CITY AND BAY REGION

POLICY 2.2

Provide and promote a balanced recreation system which offers a variety of high quality recreational opportunities for all San Franciscans.

Ocean Beach is the closest major open space for much of the west side of the city. When the Great Highway is dedicated to fast-moving vehicular traffic, a barrier is created between the communities and beach. The project will greatly improve this connection.

POLICY 2.4

Support the development of signature public open spaces along the shoreline.

The permanent closure creates a type of open space that does not currently exist in the city. The project provides a vast, paved promenade enabling a wide range of recreational opportunities and furthers the city's goal of creating continuous open spaces along the ocean.

OBJECTIVE 3

IMPROVE ACCESS AND CONNECTIVITY TO OPEN SPACE.

POLICY 3.1

Creatively develop existing publicly-owned rights-of-way and streets into open space.

The Great Highway closure is a milestone in furthering the city's goals to use city owned streets as open space. The need to create additional open space to accommodate social distancing during the pandemic identified a larger opportunity to capture public roadway as an amenity for residents and visitors. The closure demonstrated a demand beyond the original intent for dynamic new type of open space.

POLICY 3.2

Establish and implement a network of Green Connections that increases access to parks, open spaces, and the waterfront.

The closure provides a crucial pedestrian and cycling linkage between the Golden Gate Park and the extensive coastal open space to the south.

POLICY 3.4

Encourage non-auto modes of transportation – transit, bicycle and pedestrian access—to and from open spaces while reducing automobile traffic and parking in public open spaces.

The opening up of the roadway to pedestrians and cyclists will substantially encourage non-auto modes of transportation. San Francisco has a transit first policy emphasizing the importance of providing and prioritizing transportation via transit, walking, and bicycling for all trips in the City including to parks and open spaces. The Project would open up walking and cycling along one of the city’s biggest open spaces. The current Great Highway endangers pedestrians, limits access to open space, and endangers plant and animal life.

TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT

OBJECTIVE 1

MEET THE NEEDS OF ALL RESIDENTS AND VISITORS FOR SAFE, CONVENIENT AND INEXPENSIVE TRAVEL WITHIN SAN FRANCISCO AND BETWEEN THE CITY AND OTHER PARTS OF THE REGION WHILE MAINTAINING THE HIGH QUALITY LIVING ENVIRONMENT OF THE BAY AREA.

POLICY 1.2

Ensure the safety and comfort of pedestrians throughout the city.

The project improves pedestrian safety and comfort by eliminating the need for individuals to cross four lanes of high-speed traffic to reach Ocean Beach during closure hours.

OBJECTIVE 2

USE THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM AS A MEANS FOR GUIDING DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENT.

POLICY 2.2

Reduce pollution, noise, and energy consumption.

By promoting cycling and walking over auto use during the closure the project will reduce pollution, noise, and energy consumption, however, by maintaining automobile use the peak commute hours the project does not advance this policy as much as a complete transition would.

POLICY 2.4

Organize the transportation system to reinforce community identity, improve linkages among interrelated activities and provide focus for community activities.

OBJECTIVE 10

DEVELOP AND EMPLOY METHODS OF MEASURING THE PERFORMANCE OF THE CITY'S TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM THAT RESPOND TO ITS MULTI-MODAL NATURE.

POLICY 10.1

Assess the performance of the city's transportation system by measuring the movement of people and goods rather than merely the movement of vehicles.

The pilot will examine how the Upper Great Highway between Lincoln Way and Sloat Boulevard is used by pedestrians, bicyclists, vehicles, and other modes during the pilot period. The pilot does not propose any changes to traffic management or parking. The pilot will collect promenade user data, conduct public outreach, and will conduct network analysis of the broader circulation system to inform recommendations for future use of the Upper Great Highway. The pilot is proposed from late 2022 through December 2025 to provide a comparison of the data both before and after the Great Highway Extension is permanently closed as part of the Ocean Beach Climate Change Adaptation Project (estimated in 2024). Data collection will begin in 2023 and continue during the length of the pilot. The schedule and frequency of data collection is to be determined. The data will be used by the supervisor and RPD to develop recommendations for the use of the Upper Great Highway after the pilot is finished, based on a combination of how well used the promenade is and what effects it might have on neighboring streets.

OBJECTIVE 12

DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT PROGRAMS IN THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS, WHICH WILL SUPPORT CONGESTION MANAGEMENT AND AIR QUALITY OBJECTIVES, MAINTAIN MOBILITY AND ENHANCE BUSINESS VITALITY AT MINIMUM COST.

POLICY 12.1

Develop and implement strategies which provide incentives for individuals to use public transit, ridesharing, bicycling and walking to the best advantage, thereby reducing the number of single occupant auto trips.

The pilot project does not directly advance this policy as it avoids disruptions to automobile traffic during peak commute hours. However, as a pilot project, that includes an assessment phase, information gained from this pilot may be used to inform more transformative designs, policies and outcomes in the future.

OBJECTIVE 18

ACHIEVE STREET SAFETY FOR ALL

POLICY 18.1

Prioritize safety in decision making regarding transportation choices and ensure safe mobility options for all in line with the City's commitment to eliminate traffic fatalities and severe injuries.

San Francisco adopted Vision Zero in 2014, a policy that commits us to ending traffic fatalities. "Vision Zero San Francisco commits city agencies to build better and safer streets, educate the public on traffic safety, enforce traffic laws, and adopt policy changes that save lives." This project supports this goal by separating cyclists and

pedestrians from automobiles, eliminating potential conflicts during closure. Care should be given to ensure that safety is prioritized during during commute hours as well as during hours of closure to vehicular traffic.

OBJECTIVE 19

ESTABLISH A STREET HIERARCHY SYSTEM IN WHICH THE FUNCTION AND DESIGN OF EACH STRET ARE CONSISTENT WITH THE CHARATER AND USE OF ADJACENT LAND.

Table 3, “Guide to the Vehicle Circulation Plan” under Objective 19 describes the design policy for the Great Highway: “The design capacity of this road should be reduced substantially to correspond with its recreational function; emphasis to be on slow pleasure traffic, bicycles and safe pedestrian crossings.” The pilot program will further the goal of enabling the Great Highway to meet its recreational function and test the right-of-way uses and configuration proposed for the pilot period.

POLICY 19.1

Wherever feasible, divert through automobile and commercial traffic from residential neighborhoods onto major and secondary arterials, and limit major arterials to nonresidential streets wherever possible.

While partial closure of the subject segment of the Great Highway represents taking intermittent reductions of a major road facility for vehicles, it intermittently opens the same facility for other non-vehicular users, and thereby providing recreational and other benefits to those users as described throughout this General Plan Referral. Moreover, in addressing the need to limit through traffic on nearby residential streets, the City implemented a series of traffic calming measures in 2020 and 2021 which were delivered to improve safety conditions for all users and to encourage traffic to use other high-capacity arterials, such as Lincoln Way, Sunset Boulevard and Sloat Boulevard.

POLICY 19.5

Mitigate and reduce the impacts of automobile traffic around parks and along shoreline recreation areas.

Closing the segment of the Great Highway between Sloat and Lincoln to vehicular traffic on a pilot basis will reduce the impacts of auto traffic to pedestrians and bicyclists.

OBJECTIVE 29

ENSURE THAT BICYCLES CAN BE USED SAFELY AND CONVENIENTLY AS A PRIMARY MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION, AS WELL AS FOR RECREATIONAL PURPOSES.

POLICY 29.1

Expand and improve access for bicycles on city streets and develop a well-marked, comprehensive system of bike routes in San Francisco.

The project greatly expands bicycle access on the west side of the city and combined with other routes creates a more comprehensive cycling network.

POLICY 29.9

Identify and expand recreational bicycling opportunities.

The project creates an expansive ocean-front cycling and pedestrian promenade during peak recreational hours that does not exist in the city.

OBJECTIVE 31

CITY GOVERNMENT SHOULD PLAY A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN INCREASING BICYCLE USE.

POLICY 31.1

Consider the needs of bicycling and the improvement of bicycle accommodations in all city decisions.

The proposed three-year pilot study continues the re-use of the roadway as public open space that originated from a need to provide for safe, physically distant exercise during the city emergency that subsequently became part of the Slow Streets Program.

POLICY 31.4

Encourage non-cyclists to become cyclists and encourage cyclists to ride more often.

The Great Highway closure allows for new cyclists or those that may not be comfortable riding on city streets the opportunity to enjoy an extensive ride without the concern for conflict with automobiles. These new riders may subsequently incorporate cycling into their daily routing as part of commuting or recreation. It also encourages existing cyclists to take advantage of closure to ride more often.

WESTERN SHORELINE AREA PLAN

OBJECTIVE 3

ENHANCE THE RECREATIONAL CONNECTION BETWEEN GOLDEN GATE PARK AND THE BEACH FRONTAGE.

POLICY 3.1

Strengthen the visual and physical connection between the park and beach. Emphasize the naturalistic landscape qualities of the western end of the park for visitor use. When possible eliminate the Richmond-Sunset sewer treatment facilities.

The project will add gates or other physical control devices and signage/ paint to direct vehicular, pedestrian and bike traffic at Lincoln Way and Sloat Boulevard, improving the connection between Golden Gate Park and Ocean Beach.

Planning Code Section 101 Findings

Planning Code Section 101.1 establishes Eight Priority Policies and requires review of discretionary approvals and permits for consistency with said policies. The Project is found to be consistent with the Eight Priority Policies as set forth in Planning Code Section 101.1 for the following reasons:

1. That existing neighborhood-serving retail uses be preserved and enhanced and future opportunities for resident employment in and ownership of such businesses enhanced;

The proposed changes would not remove existing retail uses or impact future opportunities for resident employment. Increased bicycle and pedestrian activity as a result of the improvements is expected to increase patronage of local businesses relative to private vehicles passing-through.

2. That existing housing and neighborhood character be conserved and protected in order to preserve the cultural and economic diversity of our neighborhoods;

The proposed changes would not change the existing housing and neighborhood character surrounding the Upper Great Highway because the Project's physical changes are limited in nature and do not substantially change the appearance the roadway.

3. That the City's supply of affordable housing be preserved and enhanced;

The proposed changes would not affect the supply of affordable housing surrounding the Upper Great Highway or in the City because the Project would not negatively impact, remove, or prevent construction of affordable housing.

4. That commuter traffic not impede MUNI transit service or overburden our streets or neighborhood parking;

The proposed changes would not impede Muni transit service as they would not reroute or introduce any obstructions to existing Muni service to the area. The project would not result in the removal of any parking spaces.

5. That a diverse economic base be maintained by protecting our industrial and service sectors from displacement due to commercial office development, and that future opportunities for resident employment and ownership in these sectors be enhanced;

The proposed changes would not affect the industrial or service sectors because there is no proposal for, or inducement of, commercial office development associated with the Project.

6. That the City achieve the greatest possible preparedness to protect against injury and loss of life in an earthquake;

The proposed changes would not negatively impact the City's preparedness in the event of an earthquake. The Project may create additional safe spaces to reconvene post-earthquake.

7. That the landmarks and historic buildings be preserved;

There are no identified landmark or historic buildings affected by the Project.

8. That our parks and open space and their access to sunlight and vistas be protected from development;

The Project would not impede access to sunlight or vistas. The Project would increase the opportunity for visitors to gain access to sunlight and vistas in the vicinity by increasing the area available for outdoor

recreation.

Recommendation: Finding the project, on balance, is in conformity with the General Plan

Attachment A: Great Highway Project Information

Pilot Project Summary

The Great Highway project would implement a pilot program to create a car-free bicycle and pedestrian promenade on weekends, holidays, and a portion of Fridays by restricting private vehicle access to the Upper Great Highway between Lincoln Way and Sloat Boulevard (2.0 miles). When closed to private vehicles, the roadway would become a separated right-of-way promenade for the exclusive use of pedestrians, bicyclists, emergency vehicles, and other permitted vehicles¹. The roadway would continue to operate as a four-lane vehicular roadway on weekdays from Monday to the Friday closure time.

- Promenade: Friday afternoons (exact time of private vehicular closure to be determined) to Monday at 6:00am, plus holidays
- Vehicular Roadway: Monday 6:00am to Friday closure time

At the time the roadway is closed to private motor vehicles, the roadway would become a bicycle and pedestrian promenade used for active transportation modes, including bicycles, walkers, runners, scooter riders, skateboarders, and motorized wheelchairs, etc.

The location of the project is shown in Map 1.

Approval Action and Pilot Period

The San Francisco Board of Supervisors approval of legislation for the pilot (board file number 220875) would constitute the Approval Action for the project for the purposes of CEQA, pursuant to San Francisco Administrative Code section 31.04(h). The pilot would begin upon such legislative approval, which is anticipated Fall 2022 and would end on December 31, 2025, unless extended by ordinance. The project would include data collection during this pilot period, as described below.

Project Background

The Great Highway has been under the jurisdiction of the Recreation and Park Commission since the 1870s. The Upper Great Highway is a four-lane vehicular roadway. There are existing swing gates located at the intersection of Sloat Boulevard and Upper Great Highway to block the northbound lanes and at the intersection of Lincoln Way and Upper Great Highway to block the southbound lanes. The gates are closed when excessive amounts of sand blown onto the road make it unsafe for car travel. An existing multi-use pathway located within the median between the Upper and Lower Great Highway is used by walkers and cyclists. An existing dirt pathway located west of the Upper Great Highway along Ocean Beach is used by walkers.

In April 2020, the roadway was closed to private vehicles by the Recreation and Parks Department (RPD) General Manager under an emergency action. This was in response to the COVID-19-related shelter-in-

¹ Examples of permitted vehicles include official City, State, or federal vehicles being used to perform official City, State, or federal business (e.g., sand removal), intra-park shuttle busses, paratransit vans, and others as defined by the legislation.

place order to provide people more space outdoors while social distancing. In August 2021, the General Manager issued a directive reopening the Upper Great Highway to private vehicles weekdays starting Monday at 6:00am through Friday at 12:00pm, excluding holidays.

The Great Highway extension south of Sloat Boulevard is currently open to vehicular traffic; however, this stretch is planned to be permanently closed to vehicular traffic in 2024 as part of the Ocean Beach Climate Change Adaptation Project (Planning Department case number 2019-020115ENV).

The San Francisco County Transportation Authority conducted a “Great Highway Concepts Evaluation Report” (September 2022) for the long-term future of the Upper Great Highway. This pilot would be an extension of that report and would support pedestrian and bicyclist usage based on an evaluation in the report.²

Pilot Physical Changes:

To create a protected bicycle and pedestrian promenade on weekends and holidays, the project would install new swing gates with road closure signage on Upper Great Highway to restrict private vehicle access. The existing swing gates may be modified for reuse with this project, or removed and replaced.

At the intersection with Sloat Boulevard and Upper Great Highway, the project would install swing gates at the entry of the northbound lanes. The new swing gates would be arranged in a chicane layout (i.e., staggered and on opposite sides of the roadway) at the exit of the south-bound lanes.

At the intersection with Lincoln Way and Upper Great Highway, there are two options being considered, a chicane and the median pass through. With the “chicane” option, the project would install new gates in a chicane layout at the exit of the south-bound lanes. With the “median pass through” option, the project would install swing at the entry of the southbound lanes and about 100 feet south of the exit of the northbound lanes. The project would install a paved segment in the median between the north and southbound lanes just north of the new gates in the northbound lanes. The median pass through would also include hatching in the newly paved median, delineators along the east side, a pair of double yellow lines on each side of median, and thru arrows on the northbound approach to the intersection. The project may install red rectangular pavement markers along the outside of crosswalk facing the intersection. See Existing and Proposed illustrations of the two intersections, attached.

The chicane and median would allow emergency vehicles and other permitted vehicles to access the western-most lanes of the roadway without needing to stop and open the gates. This would allow emergency vehicles to better respond to calls from Ocean Beach and would support the continued safe recreational use of Ocean Beach while enhancing the safe recreational use of the roadway by pedestrians and bicyclists during private vehicular closure times.

² For example, section 2.2 of the report evaluates the bicycle and pedestrian usage of five different concepts for the Great Highway. The section identifies a four-lane roadway for vehicles projected to have the lowest bicycle and pedestrian usage of the concepts (which is pre-COVID-19 conditions), and a timed promenade (which is this pilot) having a medium amount of bicycle and pedestrian usage, or more bicycle and pedestrian usage than a four-lane roadway. https://www.sfcta.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/SFCTA_Great-Highway-Evaluation-Report_2021-07-13_FINAL_a.pdf.

The project would maintain vehicle access on the Great Highway north of Lincoln Way, along the Lower Great Highway, and other areas (e.g., throughout the Sunset District). The project would not change the existing multi-use pathway within the median between the Upper and Lower Great Highway or the dirt path west of Upper Great Highway along Ocean Beach.

Pilot Data Collection

Throughout the duration of the pilot program, RPD and San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) staff would collect and publicly report data on pedestrian and cyclist usage and vehicular traffic on the Upper Great Highway and surrounding streets at regular intervals. The pilot does not propose any changes to traffic management (e.g., changing traffic signal timings) or parking. The pilot would collect data on promenade users (detailed list below), conduct public outreach, and conduct network analysis of the broader circulation system to inform recommendations for the future use of the Upper Great Highway, including consideration of data collected because of permanent closure of vehicular traffic on the Great Highway extension south as part of the Ocean Beach Climate Change Adaptation Project (anticipated in 2024). Data collection would include:

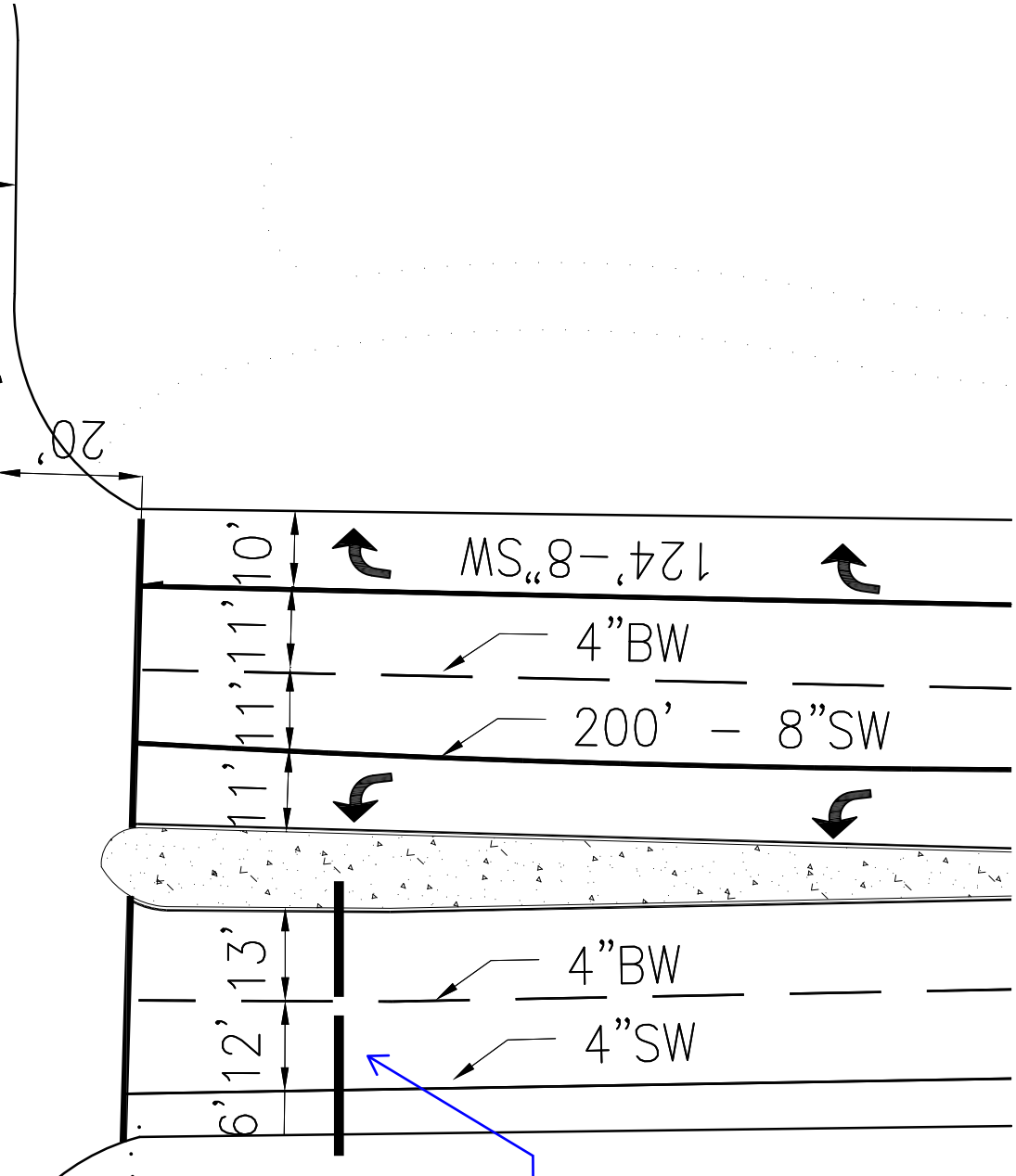
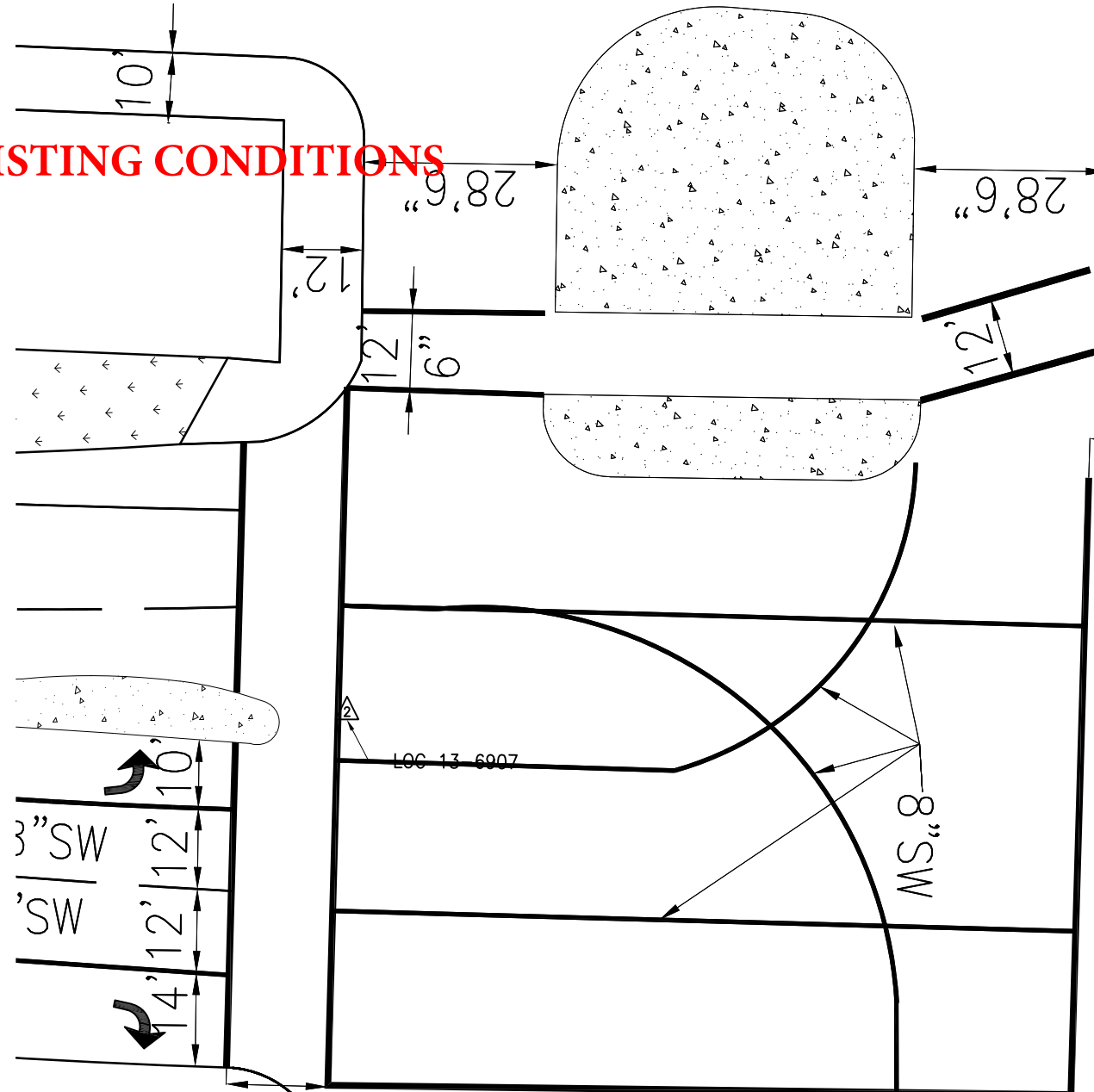
1. Vehicular traffic counts, speeds, travel times, and turning movements using tube counts, video counts, and/or disaggregated cellular data along the Great Highway and nearby intersections and side streets.
2. Bicycle counts using tube counts, video counts, infrared counters, and/or disaggregated cellular data along the Great Highway and nearby intersections and side streets.
3. Pedestrian and other mode counts using video counts, infrared counters, observation, and/or disaggregated cellular data along the Great Highway and nearby intersections.
4. Length of stay by all modes using cellular data, intercept surveys, and/or public life study methodology.
5. Design efficacy and safety assessing whether vehicles are yielding to pedestrians and pedestrians and bicyclists are complying with traffic signals using video data and/or observation.
6. Surveys of non-motorized users and drivers; solicit suggestions from all users; solicit user demographics.

RPD and SFMTA would determine exact locations for data collection after the San Francisco Board of Supervisors approval of the pilot.

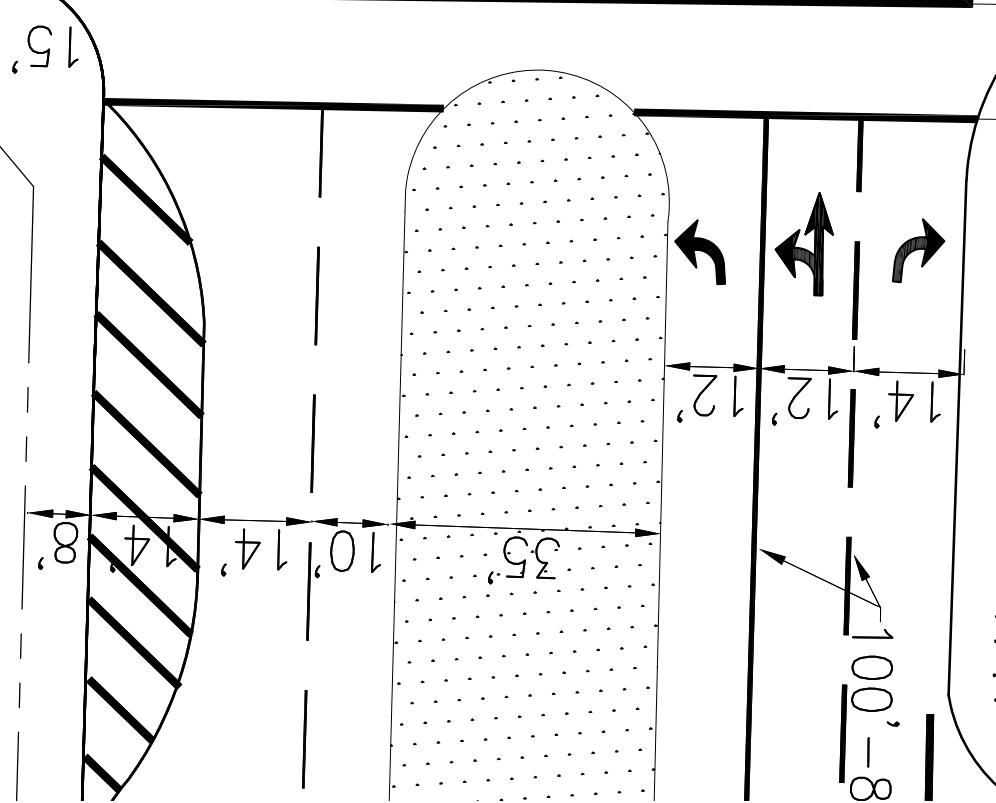
Map 1: Great Highway Project Location



EXISTING CONDITIONS

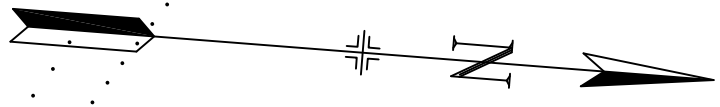


**SLOAT
BOULEVARD**

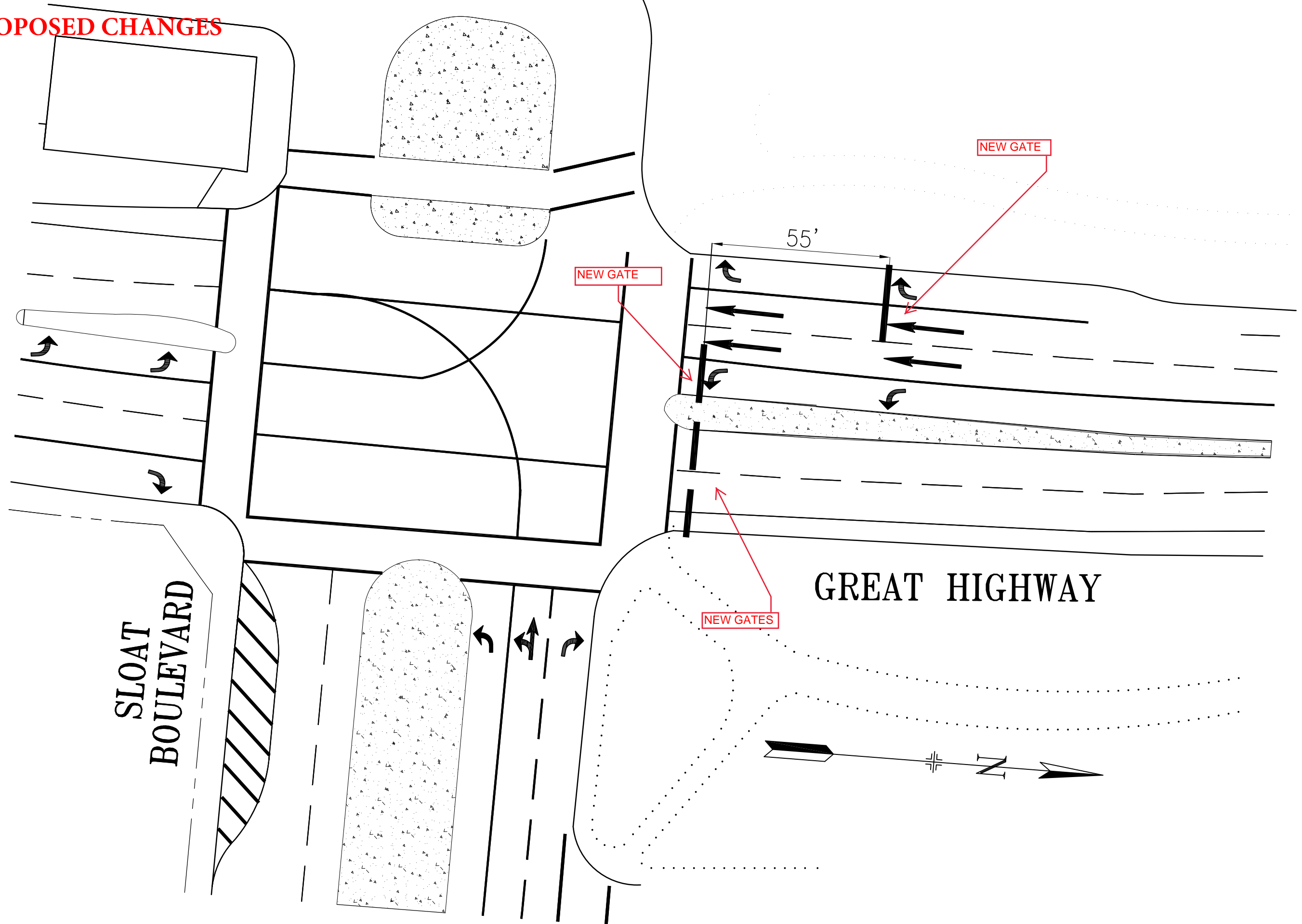


EXISTING GATES

GREAT HIGHWAY



PROPOSED CHANGES



SLOAT
BOULEVARD

GREAT HIGHWAY

NEW GATE

NEW GATE

NEW GATES

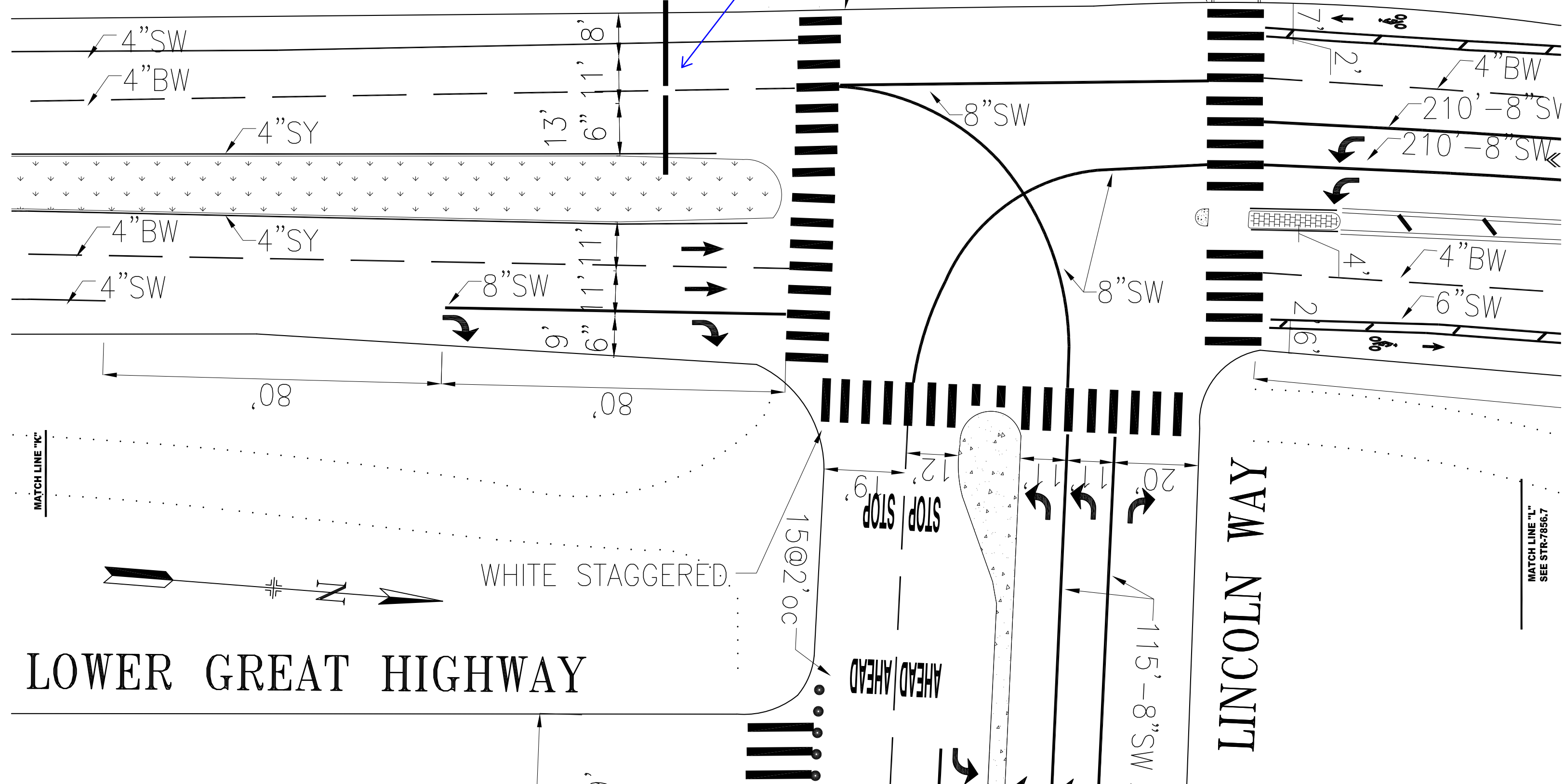
55'

EXISTING CONDITIONS

GREAT HIGHWAY

EXISTING GATES

WHITE STAGGERED
CONTINENTAL



LOWER GREAT HIGHWAY

LINCOLN WAY

MATCH LINE "K"

MATCH LINE "L"
SEE STR-7856.7

PROPOSED CHANGES

GREAT HIGHWAY

NEW GATES

NEW GATES

55'

45'

RECTANGULAR PAVEMENT MARKERS

NEW 8" YELLOW CROSS HATCHING INSIDE DOUBLE YELLOW LINES

2 NEW THRU ARROWS

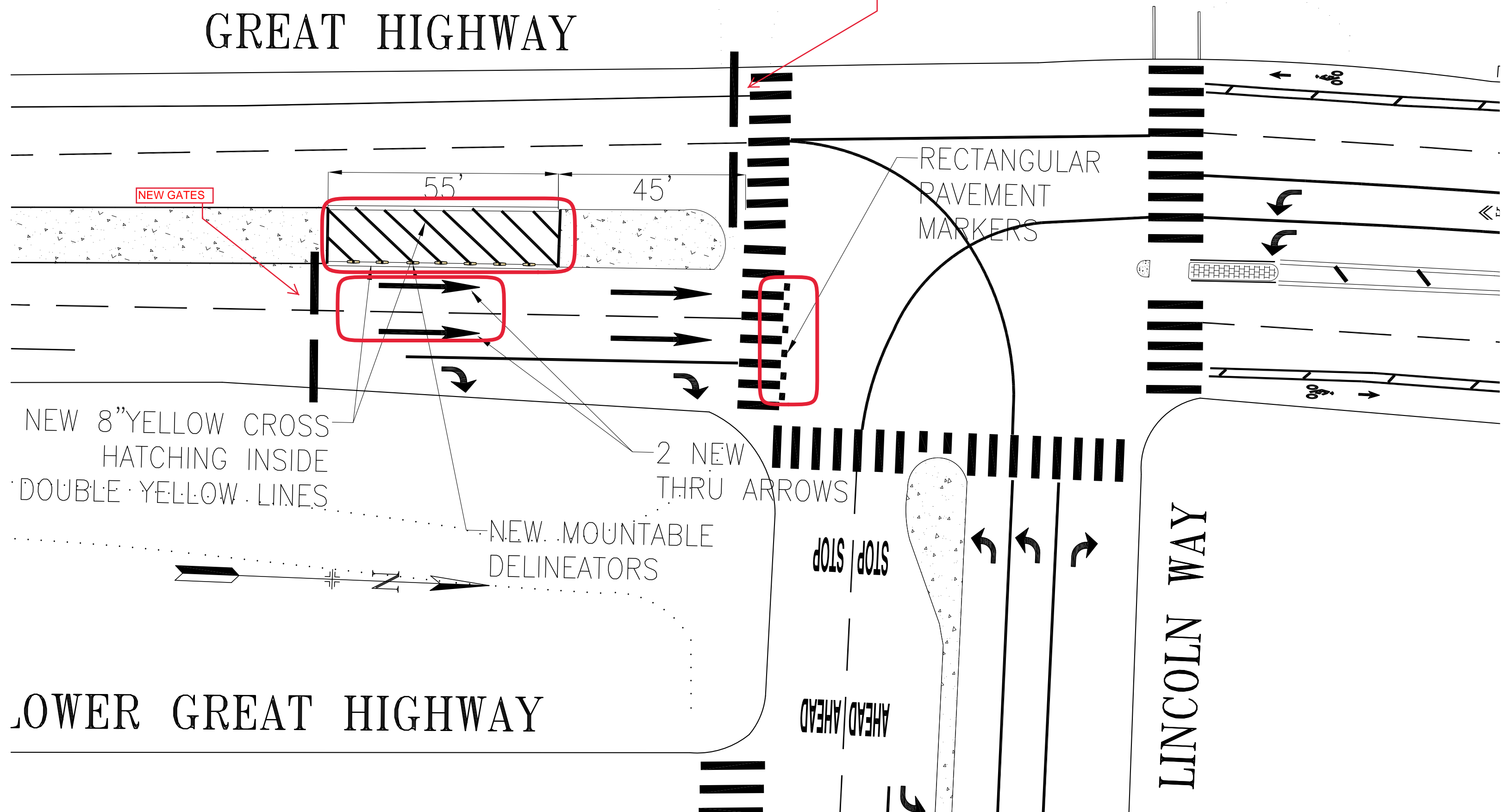
NEW MOUNTABLE DELINEATORS

STOP / STOP

AHEAD / AHEAD

LINCOLN WAY

LOWER GREAT HIGHWAY



GREAT HIGHWAY AT SLOAT BOULEVARD (looking north)



GREAT HIGHWAY AT LINCOLN WAY (looking south)

