

RETHINKING THE CENTRAL CAMPUS TRANSIT CENTER (CCTC)

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Introduction

When you think of public art, what do you see? Do you picture big pieces of metal contorted in interesting ways? Or maybe symbols of a city's past immortalized in bronze? Do these art pieces bring you joy? How about a public space, maybe even a bus station? In its most basic structure, a bus station is a public space where you can wait for the bus, and as a public space, thousands of people pass through it every day. What if this experience of passing through the public bus station felt like experiencing a work of art; transported you and calmed you down? Currently the Central Campus Transit Center (CCTC) is cold, stark, and informationless, but I aimed to reimagine the space as both a bus station, and an immersive art space designed to be calming and social.

My history with the CCTC is as long as I have considered myself to be a student of this school. As soon as you start to learn the campus, especially if you have a major on the north campus, the buses are vital to getting there. During orientation, if your major is on the North Campus you must take a blue bus to get there. After this first trek, you may not need to leave North Campus, and most people have to take those buses every day to get from one class to another. This thoroughly public and immensely used space is vital to the bridging of the campuses.

However, the difference between Public and private space is never as black and white as the term lets on. The CCTC may be labeled as public, but is designed to discourage certain

people from using it and only encourage certain time limits of use. These restraints can mold a public space to a more privatized space, catered only to the crowd intended.

I want to create a calming and accessible public art space within the CCTC while simultaneously improving its efficiency and safety. This redesign project included ethnographic research of the space in the form of interviewing the people who use and pass through the space, and research about this space and spaces like it. This led to understanding and redesigning with the main problems of the CCTC and surrounding areas in mind before changing the space to be more experience-based. I focused on giving people the opportunity to rest and take in the moment and surrounding area while waiting for the bus. This would make the bus stop not only efficient, also a means of meditation and stress-relief, a public art piece everyone can utilize and enjoy. This paper will cover the areas of study I looked to for research and projects I used as inspiration, methods of conducting interviews and learning about the space, and how both of these areas influenced my creative process finishing with the final result.

Contextual Discussion

What is the CCTC

The CCTC is the main transit station for this part of Ann arbor. Ann Arbor is a bountiful educational city, home to the number one public research university as well as to the people who work and commute here. This variety contributes to the city's diverse population, including a variety of socio-economic classes, backgrounds, and ethnicities. The transit system is a crucial

way for people to have equal access to all that Ann Arbor has to offer without being fully dependent on a car that only a few can afford.

Since the CCTC is used by all walks of life it should show that variety in how it is designed, with the understanding that people from various countries and cultures come to this university and use this center. Instead, only recently was the name of the transit center changed from CC Little to CCTC. This was a major issue that should have been corrected long ago since it was named after a known supporter of eugenics Clarence C. Little¹, a practice of trying to change the human population by controlled breeding to have more “desirable traits”². The name change is a good start to mending history’s mistakes, but rather than only correcting their already problematic naming, the university should take steps towards actually mending the space’s problems as well.

What is a bus station and what can it be?

Every space is politicized. The way space is designed and built informs who that space is meant for and how they want people to use that space. Deviance from the original use and development of another use becomes obvious when alterations are made by the people who use it themselves. When many people over time share the same new uses of the space, the intentions

¹ “Regents to Discuss renaming the Clarence Cook Little Building: U-M LSA Earth and Environmental Sciences,” LSA, accessed April 22, 2020, https://lsa.umich.edu/earth/news-events/all-news/search-news/r_egents-to-discuss-renaming-the-clarence-cook-little-building.html)

² “Eugenics,” Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster), accessed April 24, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eugenics>)

start to show.³ When a new pathway on the grass forms while a sidewalk is very close by, the people using the space are going through obstacles the designers did not foresee.

Bus stations are a static and constant social space, one of the few truly public spaces. Bus stations, when it comes down to the very core of what they are and what they're meant to do, are places that give people a place to wait for the bus. I looked at the 2015 *Design Guidelines for the Building of Bus Stations* in Fort Collins, Colorado for reference and was simultaneously astonished and comforted by knowing what a bus station of even a fraction of the CCTC size should have. "The type IV (Station Stop) has; electronic next bus sign, bus times/ route map, windscreen, enhanced paving, ADA space, tactile warning strip, bicycle racks, location signage, and finally trash/recycling receptacle."⁽³²⁾⁴ Bus stations are meant to help people yet so often they're made to help people for a limited amount of time, uncomfortably nudging them along. Bus stations have the possibility and even the opportunity to help those in need more than for 10 minutes. This space is one of the few spaces that is intended to be truly public, maybe this is why these spaces are designed so carelessly, or rather carefully, only the care goes into the ones that people pay for and making sure those who use it don't want to stay.

Even though it is made for all people that use the bus, bus stations often try to deter the people that need it for longer periods of time. When discussing this problem with a professor at stamps, he said that designers made the chairs this way on purpose. To think that designers would personally design these spaces with the intention of being hostile to the people who would use them baffled me. This technique, popularly called hostile architecture, is used specifically to deter populations like the homeless, who also live in Ann Arbor, and who might want to sit more

³ Harley F. Etienne)

⁴ "Type IV Station Stop," *Transfort Bus Stop Design Standard Guidelines*, 2015, p. 32)

comfortably longer. Design can be used like laws, governing how people should use things and giving them boundaries on what they cannot do.

According to a recent article on the matter of hostile architecture called, *Hostile Urban Architecture: A Critical Discussion of the Seemingly Offensive Art of Keeping People Away* by Persson de Fine Licht⁵, more and more are we seeing hostile benches in public spaces, designed to be very uncomfortable to sleep on. These benches have many names, “anti-hobo benches, bum-proof benches, and Camden benches”(p29), all have a main purpose of being impossible to sleep on by being too slippery or a strange angle or having arm rests in between. The main goal of these additions is to keep homeless people away and by doing that keeping the poverty divide out of mind. “Making our urban environment hostile breeds hardness and isolation. It makes life a little uglier for all of us.” (p31)

In order to design for the people who use the space, you must get to know them and what they want and need to enjoy the space as such. Understanding the people who will use the structure is more important than just designing the structure itself, if the people who use the preexisting structure find the old design easier to use then the designer did a poor job. Designers in the past have looked to ethnographies to determine what the people want and how to improve it.

Some people that took their space into their own hands and made it better for all are the students of Parsons Design school, who designed outdoors lounging seats for a pre existing space.⁶ This was a beneficial challenge for all who were involved, since the area can now be used

⁵ Persson de Fine Licht, Karl. 2017. *Hostile urban architecture a critical discussion of the seemingly offensive art of keeping people away*. Etikk I Praksis. 27-44.

⁶ "Parsons School of Design Street Seats 2019 Returns with Its Pop-Up Public Seating Space." *US Official News*, May 31, 2019. *Gale OneFile: News* (accessed April 24, 2020).

by more people for longer periods of time. Like these students I want to help redesign a space used by all so more people can feel comfortable in the space, thus making the space more efficient and safer for all.

When looking at architecture we must consider how everyone feels when entering the space. In the classic book *Empathy, Form and Space*, Adolf von Hildebrand says, “Our relation to space finds its direct expression in architecture, which evokes a definite spatial feeling instead of the mere idea of the possibility of movement in space.”⁷ His comments on architecture remind me of statements on art, guiding the viewer to the feelings and emotions the architect wants them to feel. Wouldn't we best serve the people who would use the space if we designed for them all rather than against all and especially against a few?

Bus stations as a constant installation

In the book *Artificial Hells: The Politics of Spectatorship*, the focus of the book is participatory art which is an art where the viewer can participate and becomes part of the art. This book focuses on the broad topic of participatory art and how it is an umbrella term for any type of art that you can participate in, not just art that is meant to help the people that participate, but mainly give people an experience. Social engagement art is an area underneath that art with a focus on helping people⁸. Since the area of participation art is so broad it is very important to limit the scope from “can you participate with the art” to “not only can you participate, does this

<https://link-gale-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/apps/doc/A587417921/STND?u=umuser&sid=STND&xid=5ea4d9b9>.

⁷ Adolf von Hildebrand, “The Problem of Form in the Fine Arts,” in *Empathy Form and Space* (The Getty Center for The History of Art and The Humanities, 1873), p. 269)

⁸ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012))

help/benefit the people who participate with the piece?”. The entirety of the broad field is interesting since it has cross-sections with urban planning, architecture, sociology, and economics, so limiting the focus to social engagement art actually expands the bridge between art and social work the stronger, more important connection.

Since bus stations are public spaces, they have the wonderful opportunity of being more than just a space to go from one place to another, but also a new kind of public art meant for all to experience. When looking at how participatory art can be highlighted as an important bridge between art and experience, we are reminded that the experience can be the art. When thinking about experiences as art, the art now has a platform to better everyone who participates and giving everyone an opportunity to understand and interact with this public art in a way that public art tends to lack.

Since anyone can participate in it, the bus station on central campus not only acts as a bridge from central campus to north campus, it can also metaphorically bridge the two campuses by exposing the users of the space to art, architecture, audio and other sensory aspects of experience.

Social engagement art is participatory art that helps people while they participate.⁹ Participatory art that is on the cusp of being social work is more commonly known as social engagement art. This art has the intention to bring people together and better their experiences between one another. A Great example of an artist who utilized this type of art is Rick Lowe. Rick Lowe inserted himself into a neighborhood for 12 years making sure he understood the needs of the people in the area, gaining information and trust of those people, all the while

⁹ Socially Engaged Practice, Tate.org Accessed April 21, 2018.

building relationships and becoming an active community member. He then set out to make Project Row Houses¹⁰, which in the end became a project funded and built by bigger corporations and community members, bridging a tangible gap between the two. The project became a neighborhood of houses, ever expanding and always helping the community by acting as a gallery for local artists, houses for artists in residence, houses for single mothers and more. This work can continue without Rick Lowe's presence and has had an immeasurable positive impact on their community thus far. My thinking is why can't our bus station offer a little bit of the comfort that Rick Lowe was able to bring to his community?

Methodology

Observations

Before designing anything, I wanted to make sure I understood the space well enough personally, so that my redesign would be beneficial and not accidentally worse. The positives and negatives of the space can be listed as such; the bus arrival time sign doesn't work and only apologizes for the inconvenience. This apology cannot be accepted since it has been this way for an entire semester. Next we have the digital map to track the buses. These maps have also been down for a while leaving sad monoliths scattered throughout the CCTC. The seats at the CCTC can be considered Camden seats¹¹, intentionally made to have a crescent curve that cuts off circulation, a backing of glass which is usually very cold, arm rests that act more as seat dividers, and finally 8 seats to a tiny enclosed space, deterring people from using any seat next to someone

¹⁰ "Project Row Houses," Project Row Houses, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://projectrowhouses.org/>)

¹¹ Persson de Fine Licht, Karl., pg.27-44

they don't know. When I wait for the bus to take me up north, it is comically far from any sheltering structure, nor any sign saying where the bus will stop. These are my personal observations, yet I wondered if others shared my qualms.

Ethnographic Research

Since others use the space as well I wanted to make sure their views and opinions were also accounted for. To do this I conducted on site interviews using the *Helsinki Design Lab Ethnography Field Guide*¹² as a guide to structure my questions while making sure I don't ask leading questions, and therefore taint the data. This was important in making sure that I was actually addressing their needs and not just making up the aspects I think the space requires. This limited my idealizing of the project and made me realize the basic things that are not addressed that should be at the top of the list to make the space more efficient.

My friend and I conducted 10 individual interviews with people at the CCTC. I recruited a friend so one of us can write their answers down while the other kept the questions going and audibly recorded their response. As suggested by my Professor Young Park, writing down the interviewee's responses made them more interested in giving their opinions since it showed we cared what they had to say. We found that 7 out of 10 people wanted working accurate arrival signs. We interviewed a bus driver and they said "a stop light on the crosswalk, so the buses could get through." A person called attention to the roof not "extend[ing] over the entire space." and 2 students would like heating. Interviewing a variety of people was necessary since the

¹² "Helsinki Design Lab Ethnography Field guide." *Helsinki Design Lab*. Accessed October 20, 2019.

people who walk along the crosswalk might think it works well, while the bus waits for long periods of time to be let through.

Domain Expert Interviews

I looked to architecture, urban planning and art/design professors for guidance on how to bring all of the new areas of study together. I made sure to ask all of these professions since the inclusion of all fields was important in the final product. When I first thought about doing this project I talked to a professor of urban planning named Harley Etienne who suggested I focused on how I can physically make the space more interactive through structure and form, rather than relying on technology. I then talked to the professor who took my class to Japan for our study abroad, Robert Platt, about implementing some aspects of Japanese architecture I adored such as making the space calming to bring more happiness to their users. He suggested I look at how light is used. With that in mind I realized I wanted to make the roof the main calming factor, and was guided to the graduate architecture side of the school. There professor Mick Kennedy opened my eyes to heating techniques using hot water, and cooling techniques of opening wall length windows, all while showing me how I can make the roof diffuse light while also utilizing natural light by referencing Renzo Piano. Finally I talked to Professor Roland Graf who heavily suggested that I use the measurements of the space to make sure my designs would actually be able to fit. All of this feedback was very helpful in prototyping my designs.

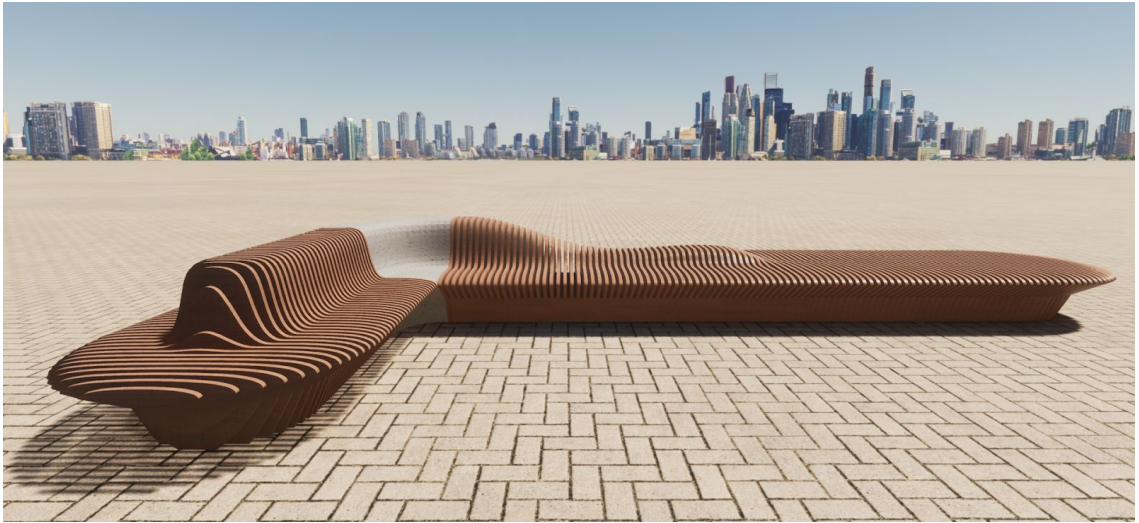
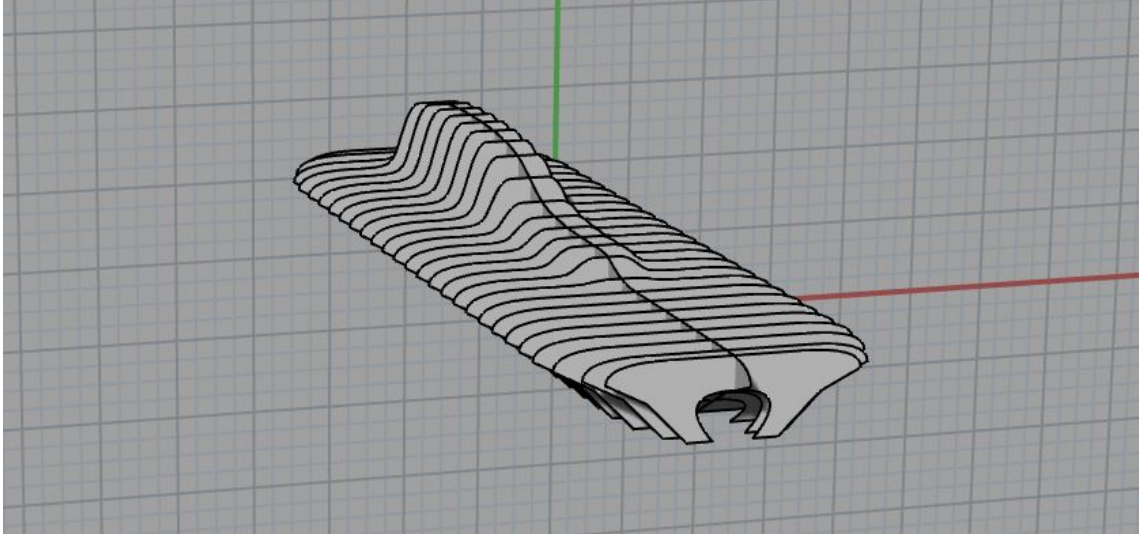
Prototyping + Creative Work

From the observations, ethnography and interviews I decided what I wanted in my design. I aimed to design inclusive and inviting seating while creating a roof that extends over the entire area while also acting as an art piece. The entire space would not be heated, but there

would be a hot water pipe going across the back of the structure. The space would be sectioned off into specific stalls and also inform the users when the bus will get to the station and which stall the bus will stop at through informational signs, allowing those who were there first, to get on first. Information will be both visible and audible, while also accommodating those who cannot see by playing various ambient sounds throughout the space so you will know where you are in the space. An announcer also tells the station when the bus will be arriving and where. The roof will allow soft light, but also cool with shade. Finally the walls will have large jalousie windows which can be opened in the warmer months.

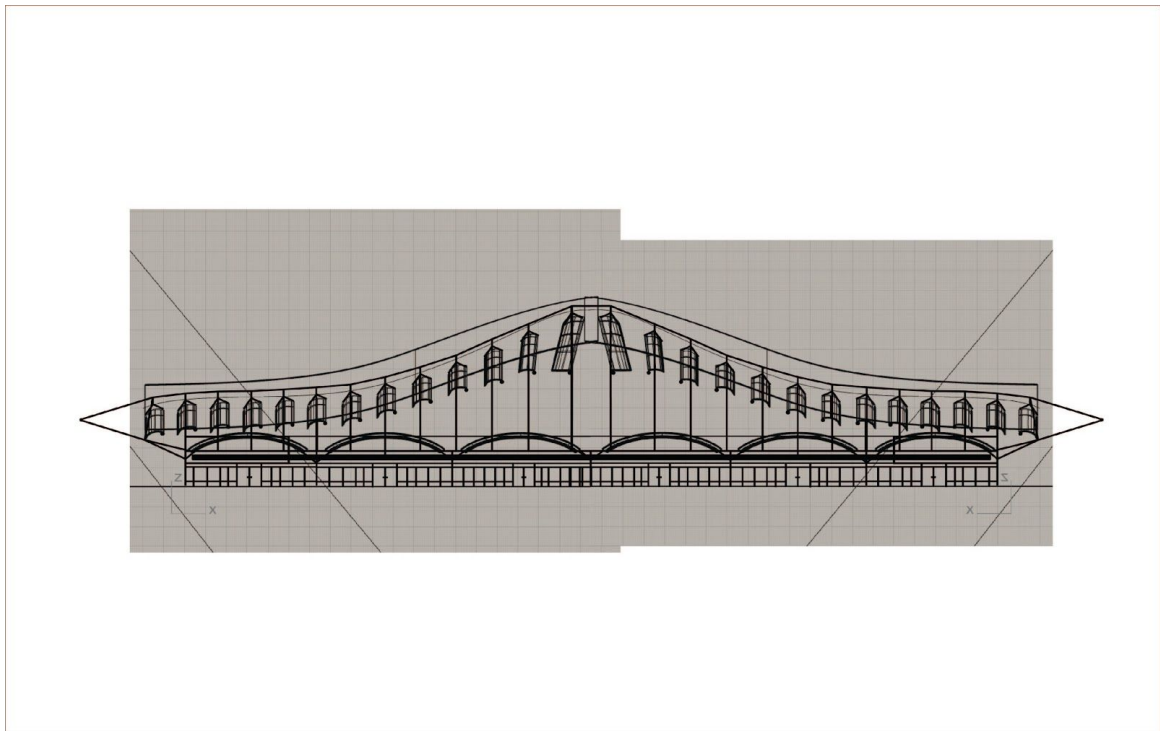
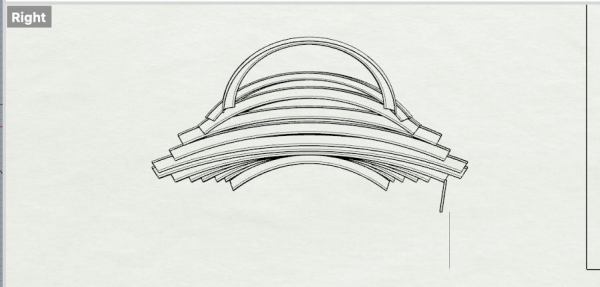
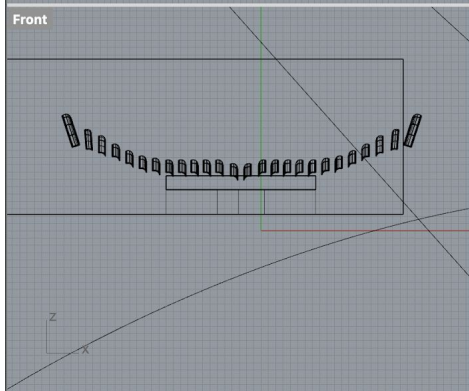
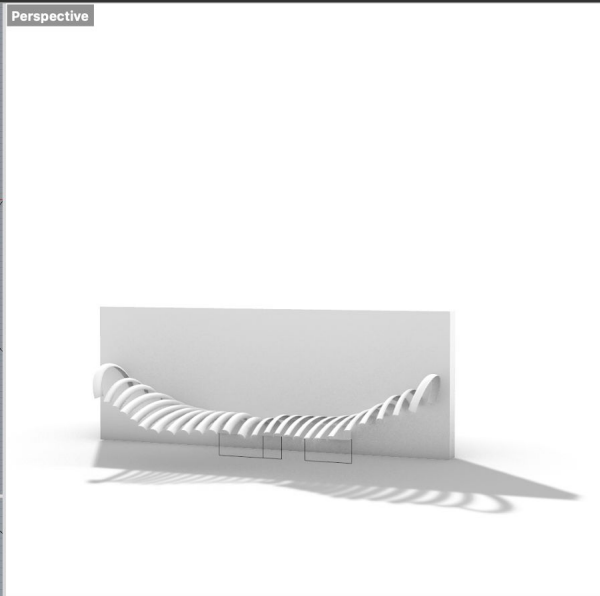
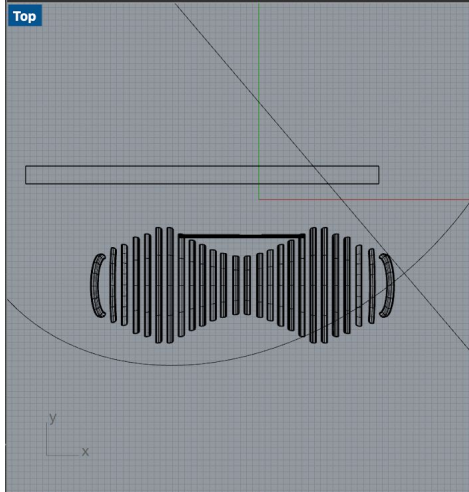
I looked to *Parsons School of Design Street Seats 2019* in particular because Parsons happens to be located in a place that has very similar weather patterns and also sees scorching hot days as well as freezing cold snow. Knowing this I did a material study based on the materials they used for their outdoor seating, noting the keen choice of a natural material, red oak, that doesn't get too hot in the sun nor too cold during the winter, unlike the steel we have now. I then chose to use this material for my seating as well.

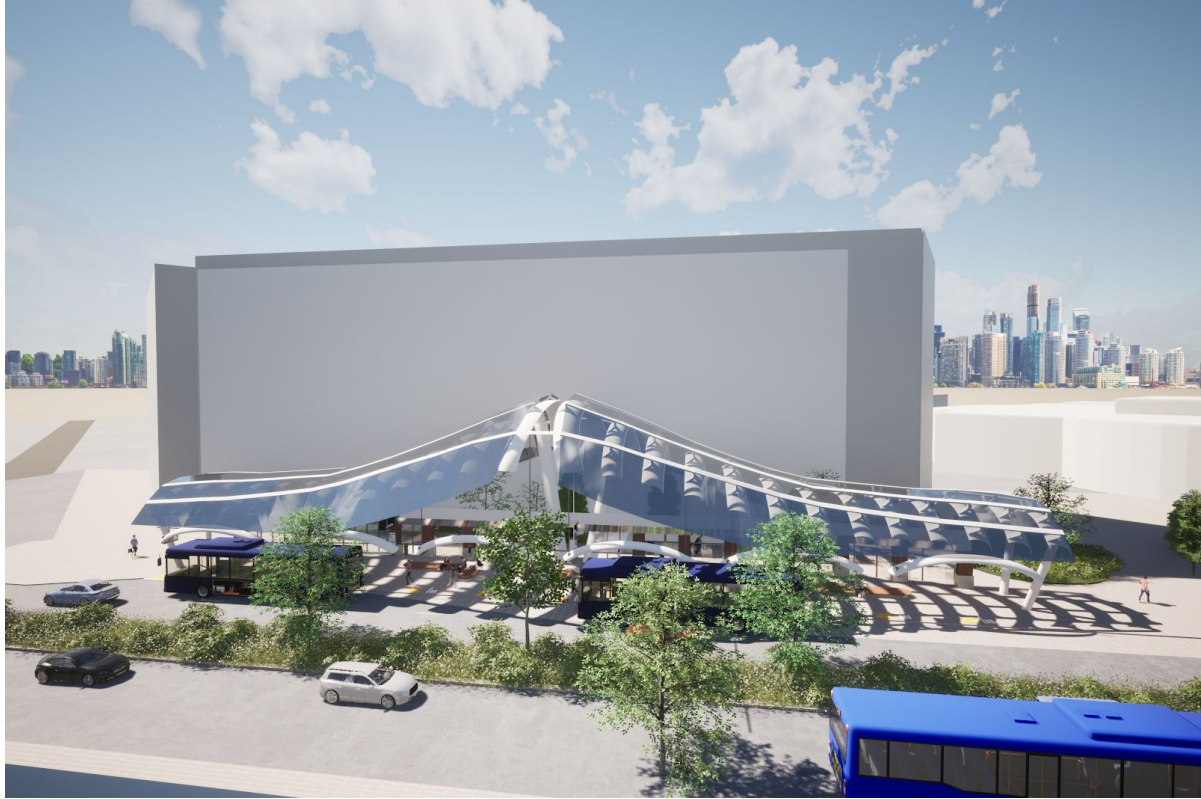
Starting from sketches, I then made a seating design in rhino and laser cutted it on cardboard. I started off with a straight design and made iterations that curve to invite users to choose what level of interactivity with others they would like.



From top to bottom: rhino model, cardboard model, final rendered model.

For the station I wanted a natural shape while opening the space. I started in rhino and went back to illustrator to sketch, finishing in rhino and rendering in Twinmotion.





<https://vimeo.com/manage/408628327/general>

The station opened up in the middle as shown from top to bottom which is the final rendering. I also made a video with the audible traits made by my friend Sam Burck.

Conclusion

We as designers and artists have a distinct opportunity to enrich others' experiences with our creations, and for me a bus stop is a great place to start. This space shows that art can reach others in more ways by combining and collaborating with varying fields of study. Together we can focus on those who matter most, the people who use it everyday.

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