Above the Trinity River, Playing and Talking and Eating and Sitting on a Bridge Meant for Cars

First there was a Better Block; then, a Better Boulevard; then, just yesterday, a Better Bridge. Of all the efforts to temporarily transform a piece of the city into something other than what it is, yesterday's brief installation atop the Cedar Crest Bridge, which connects Oak Cliff to South Dallas (where it turns into Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard), was the most simple -- no kids' activities, no pop-up shops. There was the requisite food truck (SsahmBBQ), but not much else: donated seating, potted plants, chess tables, a bird's-nest "bandshell" made by Wanda Dye's UTA architectural students, a sax man wandering the scene.

But in some ways, it was the most successful, because this installation -- again, a collaboration between Jason Roberts and Andrew Howard and the city, this time with HNTB and Halff Associations along for the ride -- shut down traffic an entire half of a bridge over the Great Trinity Forest and the river itself. Organizers didn't need to schlep out shade coverings; the canopy provided its own; the crowd was a mix of young and old, black and white, bike riders and a man riding a horse; and there was no need for entertainment save for the graciously provided binoculars spread across the span of bridge occupied by the event. The boy and Brother Bill Holston, there to offer info about the nature scenes beneath, spent a long while trying to decipher the word spray-painted on the truck sunk into the Trinity: "Dirk" or, um, something else?

Council members who strolled the scene -- Dwaine Caraway, Pauline Medrano, Carolyn Davis, Linda Koop, Angela Hunt -- were enamored of the project; they envisioned block parties, concerts, using it as a space to bridge the gap, as it were, between neighborhoods that simply drive past each other without a second glance. They spoke of the opportunities for economic development as the base of the bridge, from both directions, and of how this reminded them of Austin -- something, you know, scenic.

Hunt demanded of Halff and HNTB folks: "Why can't we do this now?" And why must it cost millions to shut down half a little-used bridge? Word is, at the council's retreat on Friday there was one common grumble: Engineers are holding impeding progress when it comes to the so-called quick wins along the Trinity (and elsewhere, for that matter). But Halff's Lenny Hughes insisted to Hunt: "My time line to make this happen is one year." A HNTB rep said: More like a year and a half, maybe two. Hunt, who can't figure out why it would take more than a month and a half, said she'd hold them to that.

The Continental's hike-and-bike makeover is due to begin shortly after the Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge opens in March; at least, that was the last thing we heard -- I'll double-check in the morning. But perched next to Calatrava's bridge, the Continental won't have the the scenic views provided by the Cedar Crest Bridge -- trees, river, sunken truck. An old friend from New York -- Matt Zoller Seitz, maybe you've heard of him -- stopped by yesterday, quite the pleasant surprise. And I asked him: "Does this remind you of anything?" He said: The High Line, a little bit. Which is exactly what Roberts and Howard and Dye were going for.