



## DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING

### RECOMMENDATION REPORT

#### City Planning Commission

**Date:** October 27, 2016  
**Time:** After 8:30 A.M.\*  
**Place:** Van Nuys City Hall  
Council Chamber, 2nd Floor  
14410 Sylvan Street  
Van Nuys, CA 91401

**Case No.:** N/A  
**CEQA No.:** N/A  
**Plan Area:** Citywide  
**Certified NC:** All  
**GPLU:** All  
**Zones:** All  
**Public Hearing:** N/A  
**Appeal Status:** N/A  
**Expiration Date:** N/A

**PROPOSAL:** Approval of an Advisory Notice to Applicants of projects that include a pedestrian bridge or tunnel crossing a public right of way, as directed by the City Planning Commission.

The attached Advisory Notice is not a new policy, plan or guideline; rather it is an informational document for the purpose of calling attention to existing adopted goals, objectives, policies and programs in the City's General Plan that address the design of pedestrian bridges and tunnels. The Notice includes standard project conditions and project design features commonly applied to such projects that could help improve the pedestrian orientation of projects and ensure that all new projects contribute to an enhanced pedestrian environment.

**REQUESTED ACTION:**

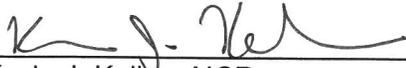
1. **Endorse** the Advisory Notice to Applicants related to Pedestrian Bridges and Tunnels, attached as Exhibit A;
2. **Instruct** the Department of City Planning to initiate updates to the Downtown Design Guide and Citywide Design Guide to address the above topics, as outlined in the subject staff report.
3. **Direct** staff to study the feasibility of future Zoning Code amendments, including requiring discretionary review for projects that propose pedestrian bridges and tunnels.

#### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

1. **Endorse** the Advisory Notice to Applicants related to Pedestrian Bridges and Tunnels, attached as Exhibit A;

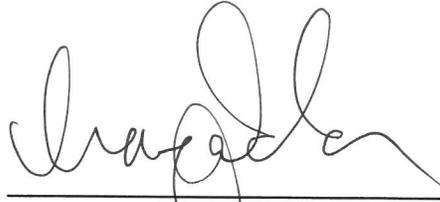
2. **Instruct** the Department of City Planning to initiate updates to the Downtown Design Guide and Citywide Design Guide to address the above topic, as outlined in the subject staff report.
3. **Direct** staff to study the feasibility of future Zoning Code amendments, including requiring discretionary review for projects that propose pedestrian bridges and tunnels.

VINCENT P. BERTONI, AICP  
Director of Planning



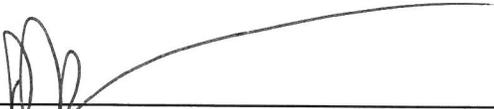
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Craig Weber  
Principal City Planner



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Patricia A. Diefenderfer, AICP  
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City Planner

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## **SUMMARY**

Along with efforts being made Citywide to address pedestrian safety and the quality of our public realm, the City Planning Commission has, in recent years, taken an increased interest in ensuring that projects that include pedestrian bridges and tunnels contribute to the walkability of the public realm.

The Proposed Advisory Notice serves to advise applicants of discretionary land use requests of the Commission's concerns with respect to the potential detrimental effect pedestrian bridges and tunnels can have on the pedestrian environment. The Advisory Notice includes project design alternatives for projects that include these facilities, as well as criteria for considering their appropriateness, which are identified below.

The Advisory Notice provides further guidance on implementation of existing General Plan Policies so that required Findings of consistency with the General Plan can be made, when discretionary requests are being evaluated, and to improve the design outcomes of projects.

Many of the recommended approaches included in this report have previously been proposed by staff in project review and have been presented to the City Planning Commission. This Advisory Notice simply articulates the approaches and standard practices applied by the Department of City Planning, which, if integrated into project design from initial design phases, will implement a variety of adopted policies which aim to foster a pedestrian friendly environment and enhance the character and quality of neighborhoods.

In addition to subject Advisory Notice, future actions may also establish additional regulations and specific review procedures for the consideration of projects that include pedestrian bridges and tunnels. Additional future modifications to City regulations and procedures have been identified in this Staff Report for the consideration of the Commission. Further developing these identified regulatory strategies would help ensure high quality design of buildings.

## **BACKGROUND**

The development of the Advisory Notice arose from the need to establish further policy direction and guidance regarding the evaluation and design review of pedestrian bridges<sup>1</sup> and tunnels that cross a public right of way.

The City's guiding policy document, the General Plan Framework Element, identifies the City's intent to encourage well designed buildings that provide a safe, secure, and attractive public realm. Additionally, the Mobility Plan 2035, the Mayor's Vision Zero plan, the Department of City Planning's Walkability Checklist, and LADOT's Great Streets Strategic Plan City all recognize the need for improving and enhancing pedestrian environment, and pedestrian safety. Numerous City policies require projects to incorporate pedestrian oriented urban design features and consider pedestrian facilities that contribute to the safety and vitality of pedestrian environments and the public realm. While there is considerable policy direction related to the quality of the pedestrian experience as it relates to urban design, there is little direct guidance on how pedestrian bridges and tunnels should be evaluated. This Advisory Notice clarifies how these City polices apply to pedestrian bridges and tunnels.

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<sup>1</sup> A pedestrian bridge or skyway can be defined as an elevated pedestrian walkway designed to connect buildings crossing over a public right of way, without requiring users to use the street level to gain access to the buildings.

Staff recommends that the City Planning Commission endorse the proposed Advisory Notice. In addition, Department staff has also recommended future follow-up actions that will provide further guidance and regulatory measures regarding pedestrian bridges and tunnels. The follow-up actions include an update of existing guidelines, in the near term, and, in the longer term, exploring additional regulations and review procedures for approval of pedestrian bridges in the future through the re:codeLA project, the update to the City's Zoning Code. Those future actions are described in greater detail below.

## **DISCUSSION**

While pedestrian bridges and tunnels can serve as an important connection between buildings and uses, unless designed in with the experience of the pedestrian in mind, they can detract from the pedestrian environment and consequently the vitality of public streets. Given the City's increasing focus on urban design and its careful consideration of each project's contribution to the pedestrian environment, the Commission has outlined the following concerns regarding the appropriateness and the design of pedestrian bridges and tunnels.

### *Pedestrian Bridges and Tunnels May Not Contribute to a Safe and Vibrant Street Environment*

An active and inviting street environment is fundamental to promoting security and the perception of safe streets. Foot traffic and pedestrian activity can support businesses, particularly traditional shop front, Main Street development patterns that contribute to the health of the local economy.

While pedestrian bridges and tunnels are often built to provide a convenient, safe, and direct line of access for pedestrians, they can ultimately detract from the pedestrian experience and have a detrimental effect on the City's public streets. Providing an alternative path of travel that is elevated above the street or below grade removes people from sidewalks, the primary pedestrian pathways, and results in reduced foot traffic. Reducing the amount of foot traffic and removing "eyes on the street" can be a detriment to these conditions which contribute to the long-term health and economic vitality of the City's communities.

Additionally, pedestrian bridges can cast shadows on sidewalks or create a tunnel effect on streets. These effects can create inhospitable and unsafe pedestrian environments at the street level.

### *Pedestrian Bridges and Tunnels May Not Encourage Active Transportation*

As the City strives to achieve its multimodal goals and promote walkability, it is important to recognize that every trip, regardless of mode, begin and ends with a pedestrian trip. Understanding the needs and characteristics of pedestrians and factors that affect pedestrian travel is important when considering the urban design of projects and the pedestrian facilities they contribute to the built environment. Project design and street activation can play a significant role in influencing people's travel behaviors and determining their mode of travel.

### *Technical Challenges and Access Issues Associated With Implementing Pedestrian Tunnels*

Tunnels are often proposed as an alternative pedestrian path for freeways crossings, or other high-speed, high-volume arterial streets. However, they are generally difficult to build and can create conflicts with below-grade infrastructure and utilities. Moreover, tunnels can be difficult to design in conformance with ADA access requirements, which would be a requirement since they are typically fully in the public right-of-way and must meet contemporary accessibility

standards. Other considerations for the appropriateness and design of tunnels must include safety, lighting, and drainage issues.

Specific guidance on the location and design of pedestrian bridges and tunnels will help ensure, when deemed necessary and appropriate, that such elements positively contribute to the public realm and general pedestrian safety. Without careful design, these facilities can create unsafe conditions by being unlit, hidden from public view, and with blind corners.

These connections are generally appropriate when connecting publicly-accessible buildings and uses, addressing issues of topography, providing a connection over large and otherwise impassible pieces of infrastructure, connecting hospital and similar institutional uses, or safety connecting school uses. When a pedestrian bridge or tunnel is deemed appropriate and necessary to the function of a project, a common sense approach must be taken regarding its design and connection to existing infrastructure and buildings. This would include design consideration of the visual impacts to the street; lighting; visual connection between surrounding buildings, the public realm, and the bridge or tunnel; long-term care and maintenance of the facility; and improvements around the facility that can lessen any potential negative impacts.

## **POTENTIAL FUTURE ACTIONS**

Additional future modifications to City regulations, processes, and design guidelines have been identified as a means to provide additional tools for evaluating the appropriateness of pedestrian bridges and tunnels that cross the public right of way and establishing design standards that would be applicable to these project elements in the future.

The Department recommends that updates to the Citywide Design Guide, the Downtown Design Guide, and other design documents be explored; that a discretionary review process for the approval of pedestrian bridges and tunnels be explored; and standards for pedestrian bridges and tunnels be considered in the update to the City's zoning code through the re:code LA project.

### **A. Near Term Updates**

#### *Updates to Citywide & Downtown Design Guide*

The Department recommends that updates be explored to the Citywide Design Guide and Downtown Design Guide to include the following suggested language for review of pedestrian bridges:

“All pedestrian activity shall be accommodated on public sidewalks and pedestrian-priority alleys, rather than pedestrian bridges, unless permitted by the Director of Planning in consultation with Cultural Affairs and the Department of Public Works. If provided, pedestrian bridges shall be designed to provide public benefits that lessen the impact to the pedestrian realm”

Further, the update could include the locational and design criteria contained in the proposed Advisory Notice.

### **B. Long Term – Future Regulatory Options**

#### *Process and Procedures Related to Pedestrian Bridges*

The Department is currently updating the City's Zoning Code through the re:codeLA project. As a part of that effort, land use processes and procedures are being updated and streamlined. Currently, pedestrian bridges are not specifically subject to a discretionary review process. The Department recommends studying the feasibility of establishing a discretionary review procedure for pedestrian bridges and tunnels, and that the locational design criteria identified in the proposed Advisory Notice be embedded within that process.

## **CONCLUSION**

The City Planning Commission has expressed concern about the potential effects of pedestrian bridges and tunnels on the built environment and has asked staff to draft the subject Advisory Notice to provide direct guidance on how to evaluate projects which include pedestrian bridges or tunnels. Staff recommends that the Commission endorse this proposed Advisory Notice as an early notice to property owners and developers so as to make them aware of the policy considerations from the earliest stages of a project, providing useful, upfront guidance that can help address these key issues while providing greater clarity for applicants.

Staff has also proposed some near and long term follow-up actions to provide further regulations and establish a formal review process for projects that incorporate pedestrian bridges or tunnels. Those actions include updating adopted Citywide and Downtown design guidelines and longer term efforts to develop additional regulations through amendments to the Zoning Code and Community Plans Updates, particularly the current update of the Downtown Community Plans.

**DEPARTMENT OF  
CITY PLANNING**

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**EXHIBIT A**

**[DRAFT] ADVISORY NOTICE RELATIVE TO PEDESTRIAN BRIDGES AND TUNNELS**

TO: APPLICANTS FOR PROJECTS THAT INCLUDE A PROPOSED PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE OR TUNNEL CROSSING A PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY

FROM: THE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

EFFECTIVE DATE: [TO BE DETERMINED]

**APPLICABILITY AND INTENT OF THIS ADVISORY NOTICE**

This notice serves to advise applicants of discretionary land use requests of the Commission's concerns with respect to the potential impact pedestrian bridges and tunnels can have on the pedestrian environment. Project design alternatives for projects that include such elements, as well as criteria for considering the appropriateness of these elements have been identified below.

**STANDARD CRITERIA AND DESIGN ALTERNATIVES TO CONSIDER**

When pedestrian bridges or tunnels are proposed as part of a discretionary project, the City has an opportunity to lessen the detrimental effects these elements can have on the public realm. The City may impose Conditions of Approval addressing the following aspects of pedestrian bridges or tunnels:

1. Appropriate location;
2. Appropriate design features; and
3. Operation and maintenance requirements.

Incorporating the following standard criteria can further enable decision makers of discretionary requests to evaluate the merits of a pedestrian bridge in order to make required Findings of consistency with existing policies in the City's adopted General Plan. A first set of criteria can be employed to determine whether a pedestrian bridge or tunnel is appropriate for the proposed site. If it is determined that a pedestrian bridge or tunnel is appropriate, a second set of criteria can be used to evaluate the design merits of the project.

**1. Locational Criteria**

The City Planning Commission advises applicants with projects that propose pedestrian bridges or tunnels that the following locational criteria will be considered as part of the evaluation process to determine if such an element is appropriate for the site:

- Is the bridge or tunnel required to provide publicly accessible pathways between public or publicly used buildings?
- Is the bridge or tunnel required to address physical constraints such as grade changes? Is the bridge or tunnel required to create pedestrian connections over large infrastructure such as freeways?
- Is the bridge or tunnel required to link hospital, institutional, and similar uses?
- Is the bridge or tunnel required to provide secure and safe access between schools and similar uses?
- Does the bridge or tunnel not interfere with existing or planned utilities or infrastructure?

## 2. **Design Criteria**

The City Planning Commission advises applicants with projects that include pedestrian bridges or tunnels that the following design criteria will be considered as part of the evaluation process:

- Is the bridge or tunnel designed to be architecturally integrated with the design of the buildings they connect?
- Is the bridge or tunnel constructed with non-solid, transparent materials to limit visual impact?
- Is the bridge or tunnel built at an appropriate height and width and with a minimal footprint so as to minimize impact on the street below?
- Does the bridge provide exterior lighting under and adjacent to the pedestrian bridge to enhance the pedestrian environment and safety?
- Is the bridge free of commercial signage?
- Does the bridge limit the impact of support structures in the public rights-of-way?
- Does the bridge or tunnel, if accessible to the public, provide clear visual connections to adjacent buildings and streets?
- Does the bridge or tunnel include a maintenance and security program at the expense of the applicant?
- Does the bridge or tunnel include improvements to the areas immediately under and around that minimize potential impacts such as:
  - Streetscape enhancements of the affected public right-of-way or other public rights-of-way abutting the property, with special attention paid to any streets identified as primary or pedestrian priority streets?
  - Publicly accessible open spaces?
  - Expanded sidewalks?
  - Pedestrian connections?
  - Enhanced landscaping?
  - Street furniture?
  - Public art?
  - Wayfinding improvements?

## **EXISTING ADOPTED POLICIES**

The City's General Plan contains policies addressing the pedestrian experience, which can be impacted by pedestrian bridges and tunnels. Below are a selection of policies that will be implemented with this Advisory Notice as they directly relate to the placement of pedestrian bridges above the public right-of-way or tunnels below public City streets:

## **General Plan Framework Element**

*Objective 5.5: Enhance the livability of all neighborhoods by upgrading the quality of development and improving the quality of the public realm.*

*Policy 5.5.3: Formulate and adopt building and site design standards and guidelines to raise the quality of design Citywide.*

*Objective 5.8: Reinforce or encourage the establishment of a strong pedestrian orientation in designated neighborhood districts, community centers, and pedestrian-oriented subareas within regional centers, so that these districts and centers can serve as a focus of activity for the surrounding community and a focus for investment in the community.*

*Policy 5.9.1: Facilitate observation and natural surveillance through improved development standards which provide for common areas, adequate lighting, clear definition of outdoor spaces, attractive fencing, use of landscaping as a natural barrier, secure storage areas, good visual connections between residential, commercial, or public environments and grouping activity functions such as child care or recreation areas.*

*Policy 5.9.2: Encourage mixed-use development which provides for activity and natural surveillance after commercial business hours through the development of ground floor retail uses and sidewalk cafes. Mixed-use should also be enhanced by locating community facilities such as libraries, cultural facilities or police substations, on the ground floor of such building, where feasible.*

## **Mobility Plan 2035**

*Policy 2.3: Recognize walking as a component of every trip, and ensure high- quality pedestrian access in all site planning and public right-of-way modifications to provide a safe and comfortable walking environment.*

## **Walkability Checklist**

*Objective: Support ease of pedestrian movement and enrich the quality of public realm by providing appropriate connections and street furnishing in the public right of way.*

*Objective: Pedestrian safety is the primary concern in designing and managing street crossings. Crossings that are safe, easy to use, and well-marked support active, pedestrian-friendly environments and link both sides of the street physically and visually.*

*Goal: Maintain the character of a pedestrian friendly street.*

## **BACKGROUND**

The development of the Advisory Notice arose from the need to establish further policy direction and guidance regarding the evaluation and design review of pedestrian bridges and tunnels that cross a public right of way.

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realm. Additionally, the Mobility Plan 2035, the Mayor's Vision Zero plan, the Department of City Planning's Walkability Checklist, and LADOT's Great Streets Strategic Plan City all recognize the need for improving and enhancing pedestrian environment, and pedestrian safety. Numerous City policies require projects to incorporate pedestrian oriented urban design features and consider pedestrian facilities that contribute to the safety and vitality of pedestrian environments and the public realm. While there is considerable policy direction related to the quality of the pedestrian experience as it relates to urban design, there is little direct guidance on how pedestrian bridges and tunnels should be evaluated. This Advisory Notice clarifies how these City policies apply to pedestrian bridges and tunnels.