

Los Angeles Department of City Planning

RECOMMENDATION REPORT

CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION

CASE NO.: CHC-2007-4658-HCM

HEARING DATE: November 1, 2007
TIME: 10:00 AM
PLACE: City Hall, Room 1010
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA
90012

Location: Crossing the Los Angeles River on 6th
Street between S. Boyle Ave. and Mateo St.
Council District: 14
Community Plan Area: Boyle Heights/
Central City North
Area Planning Commission: East Los Angeles/
Central
Neighborhood Council: Boyle Heights/Historic
Cultural
Legal Description: Bridge #53C1880

PROJECT: Historic-Cultural Monument Application for the
SIXTH STREET BRIDGE

REQUEST: Declare the property a Historic-Cultural Monument

APPLICANT: Cultural Heritage Commission

OWNER: City of Los Angeles

RECOMMENDATION **That the Cultural Heritage Commission:**

1. **Declare** the structure a Historic-Cultural Monument per Los Angeles Administrative Code Chapter 9, Division 22, Article 1, Section 22.171.7
2. **Adopt** the report findings.

S. GAIL GOLDBERG, AICP
Director of Planning

[SIGNED ORIGINAL IN FILE]

Ken Bernstein, Manager
Office of Historic Resources

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Lambert M. Giessinger, Preservation Architect
Office of Historic Resources

Prepared by:

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FINDINGS

1. The structure “embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction” as an example of Art Deco-Streamline Moderne style monumental bridge design.
2. The structure is associated with a master builder, designer, or architect, as a work by Merrill Butler, Engineer of Bridges and Structures for the City of Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering from 1923-1961.
3. The structure reflects “the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, State or community” for its association with the development of the City of Los Angeles and the history of the Los Angeles River.

SUMMARY

Built in 1932, this reinforced concrete T-beam/steel arched bridge exhibits character-defining features of Art Deco-Streamline Moderne monumental bridge design. Located on Sixth Street as it crosses the Los Angeles River between Boyle Heights and Downtown Los Angeles, the subject structure rests on several T-beam vertical piers with three larger vertical piers at its center where it crosses the Los Angeles River. Two massive 150-foot wide, asymmetrical steel through-arch spans originate at the center pier and terminate at the deck level. Two pairs of 40-foot high monumental pylons with fluted and zig-zag design are located on both approaches to the Sixth Street Bridge. A single non-structural mid-size pylon with rounded balustrade and landscaping is located on the intersection of Sixth Street and Boyle Avenue as a decorative prelude to the bridge entrance (a parallel decorative structure is now missing). The deck of the bridge exhibits a sculpted concrete railing with incised stepped rounded arches. Low-height pylons support rounded electroliers with geometric and floral designs. Four pairs of octagonal light fixtures with geometric and floral designs are located in the middle section of the deck.

The proposed Sixth Street Bridge historic monument was designed by Merrill Butler, Engineer of Bridges and Structures for the City of Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering along with Louis Huot and Louis Blume. At nearly 4,000 feet (2/3rds of a mile long), the subject structure was the largest and longest bridge constructed on the Los Angeles River and the largest concrete bridge built in Los Angeles.

The subject structure forms part of a monumental bridge building program dating from 1909-1932 that oversaw the construction of several bridges across the Los Angeles River. While addressing the transportation needs of the growing metropolis in the early 20th century, these bridges also embodied the values of the City Beautiful Movement which sought to beautify urban areas with Beaux-Arts style architectural design and planning for public buildings, structures, and infrastructure. The Sixth Street Bridge was the culmination of this effort to construct concrete bridges on a monumental scale and design, through its sheer enormous size and length and its attention to architectural detail. The Sixth Street Bridge was also the first bridge in Los Angeles to move beyond the Beaux-Arts and Period Revival design aesthetic, moving away from literal references to Classical styles to sparser and more streamlined designs. As the first bridge in Los Angeles to incorporate Moderne and Art Deco design elements, the subject structure greatly influenced future bridge design in Los Angeles. Nearly all bridges built by the City of Los Angeles after 1932 would be constructed in Moderne styles with many, like the West Boulevard Bridge in Mid-City (1933) and the Gaffey Street Bridge in San Pedro (1935), using decorative elements directly lifted from the Sixth Street Bridge.

Alterations include the removal of two pairs of massive central piers and the addition of contemporary street lighting to the subject structure's electroliers.

The Sixth Street Bridge was determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places by the Caltrans Historic Bridge Inventory in 1986 and the Caltrans Statewide Historic Bridge Survey Update in 2004.

CRITERIA

The criterion is the Cultural Heritage Ordinance which defines a historical or cultural monument as any site (including significant trees or other plant life located thereon) building or structure of particular historic or cultural significance to the City of Los Angeles, such as historic structures or sites in which the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, State or community is reflected or exemplified, or which are identified with historic personages or with important events in the main currents of national, State or local history or which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction, or a notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual genius influenced his age.

DISCUSSION

The Sixth Street Bridge structure successfully meets three of the specified Historic-Cultural Monument criteria: 1) "embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction," 2) reflects "the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, State or community," and 3) is associated with a master builder, designer, or architect. As a bridge designed in the Art-Deco-Streamline Moderne style by a master engineer and reflective of the history and development of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles River, the property qualifies for designation as a Historic-Cultural Monument based on these criteria.

The subject structure forms part of one of the largest and most architecturally significant groupings of historic bridges in the State of California and the United States. The Sixth Street Bridge is also recognized for its thematic relationship to other Los Angeles River bridges from the 1909-1932 time period. Like other pre-WWII bridges spanning the Los Angeles River, the subject structure was constructed of concrete in response to the unpopularity of metal truss bridges; utilized funds from the Viaduct Bond Act of 1923; used new engineering and technical innovations for bridge construction; incorporated monumental design elements, reflecting the values and objectives of the City Beautiful Movement; involved the leadership of Merrill Butler and his team of architects and engineers with the City of Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering; and engaged the City of Los Angeles Municipal Arts Commission to oversee the aesthetic and artistic merits of all bridges in the City of Los Angeles.

BACKGROUND

At its meeting of September 6, 2007, the Cultural Heritage Commission moved to consider Historic-Cultural Monument designation of the subject structure as part of a motion encompassing thirteen Los Angeles River bridges. On October 18, 2007, the Cultural Heritage Commission toured the subject structure.