





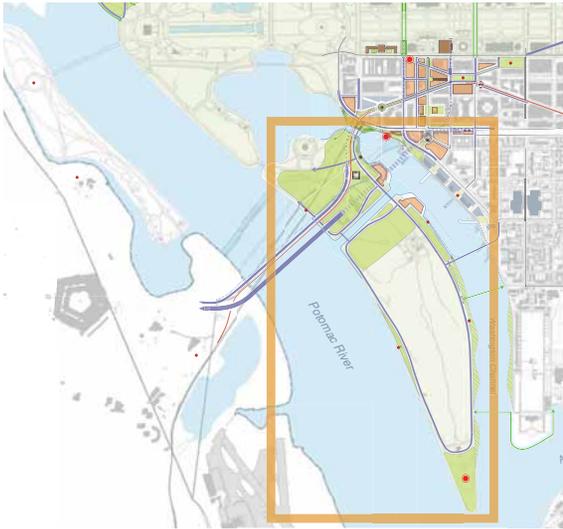
Enhancing the Waterfront Experience

POTOMAC PARK

Potomac Park can be reimagined as a unique Washington destination: a prestigious location extending from the National Mall, a setting of extraordinary beauty and sweeping waterfront vistas, an opportunity for active uses and peaceful solitude, a resource with extensive acreage for multiple uses, and a shoreline that showcases environmental stewardship.

Located at the edge of a dense urban center, Potomac Park should be an easily accessible place that provides opportunities for water-oriented recreation, commemoration, and celebration in a setting that preserves the scenic landscape. The park offers great potential to relieve pressure on the historic and fragile open space of the National Mall, a vulnerable resource that is increasingly overburdened with demands for large public gatherings, active sport fields, everyday recreation, and new memorials.

Potomac Park and its shoreline should offer a range of activities for the enjoyment of all. Some areas should accommodate festivals, concerts, and competitive recreational activities, while other areas should be quiet and pastoral to support picnics under a tree, paddling on the river, and other leisure pastimes. The park should be connected with the region and with local neighborhoods.



Context

Potomac Park is a relatively recent addition to Washington; in the early years of the city it was an area of tidal marshes. As upstream forests were cut and agricultural activity increased, the Potomac River deposited greater amounts of silt around the developing city. Eventually this stagnant muddy area, “the Potomac Flats,” became a breeding ground for disease-bearing mosquitoes and a significant barrier to maritime commerce.

In the 1880s, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredged the river, reopening it to navigation and creating two tracts of land totaling more than 600 acres. The southern portion was an island called East Potomac Park and the northern portion was an extension of the National Mall called West Potomac Park. A Tidal Basin with gates was constructed between these two tracts to regulate tides in the newly created channel.

Congress dedicated East Potomac Park in 1897 and ordered that it be “forever held and used as a park for the recreation and pleasure of the people.” Improvements to the park eventually followed, including cherry trees, a perimeter roadway, and a golf course. By 1925, the entire park was used for recreation purposes. Congress strengthened its support for the park’s use as a place for recreation and leisure when it prohibited museums in the park in 2001.

As reclaimed land, East Potomac Park is slowly sinking and its seawalls are crumbling. A 1950s hydrology study found that the island had sunk three and a half feet since it was first created. Today, high tides and flooding frequently submerge the seawalls, and approximately 80 percent of the park lies within the 100-year floodplain.

Nearly 275 of the island’s 330 acres are used for recreation. Three public golf courses that offer

convenient, affordable play occupy about 65 percent of the park. The clubhouse and adjacent public swimming pool have limited capacity, and the tennis courts draw 11,000 players annually. About 15 acres of open green space occupy the southern tip of the park. A walkway follows the perimeter of the park along the water. Ohio Drive, which parallels the walk, provides vehicular access and is used by recreational bicyclists, runners, and skaters.

The park is currently accessible only from the northern end of the island, an area choked by bridge and road infrastructure. There is no bus or train service, and even boat movement around the park is problematic. Boats traveling from the head of the Washington Channel to Georgetown are required to travel around Hains Point, a trip that can take as long as an hour. There is no place to access the park by boat and no place to launch a canoe or kayak. Paddling around the island from Georgetown can take almost a full day.

Five bridges constructed before 1970 cross the Potomac River and the park: three four-lane vehicular bridges, a Metrorail bridge, and an older railroad bridge. The tangled maze of infrastructure not only makes it difficult for pedestrians, motorists, and bicyclists to reach the park, but it also hems in the Jefferson Memorial, denying it a suitably dignified setting.

The northern portion of the island includes 25 acres occupied by the regional headquarters of the National Park Service, a park maintenance yard, an administrative unit of the U.S. Park Police, and the Tourmobile’s office and bus maintenance facilities. Overall, approximately one quarter of the park is consumed by bridges, roads, offices, parking lots, and maintenance yards. As a result, less than one tenth of the island is available for recreation other than golf.



Aerial view of Potomac Park.



The *Framework Plan* proposal for Potomac Park.

Key Improvements

- A. Develop Potomac Harbor** along both sides of the Washington Channel with active uses, visitor services, an expanded marina, and a wider land bridge.
- B. Connect Potomac Park with the City** by providing multiple linkages that improve access for visitors arriving by foot, bicycle, boat, car, Metro and water taxi.
- C. Reprogram Potomac Park for Sustainable Recreation** by offering a range of activities and naturalized areas connected to a continuous waterfront trail.
- D. Create a Festival Grounds at the Jefferson Memorial** to relieve pressure on the National Mall and allow for a range of events and uses.



Develop Potomac Harbor

Near Washington's city center, an area located at the northern rim of the Washington Channel can become a dynamic new destination at the water's edge, offering active engagement with the waterfront on both sides of the channel. Complementary development, along the Southwest Waterfront and Potomac Park, combined with improved connections at the tidal basin inlet and new bridges to Potomac Park can create a walkable loop linking a variety of waterfront experiences along a proposed area called Potomac Harbor.

Along the eastern bank of the channel, the Southwest Waterfront is poised for a dramatic transformation. The city's plan for a 47-acre waterfront development will include residences, hotels, cultural and education spaces, neighborhood retail, a marina, parks, and a waterfront promenade.

On Potomac Park, across the channel, new low-scale development would build on the vitality created at the mixed-use Southwest Waterfront. Designed to

be consistent with the park-like setting in size and character, the new pavilions could include the National Mall and Memorials Parks offices, enhanced visitor services, outdoor cafes, and a concentration of recreational development, including both water-oriented and year around indoor activities.

Places to rent boats and kayaks, and indoor facilities for rock climbing, roller skating, and other sports and ancillary uses would expand the recreation opportunities within Potomac Park. These facilities could be constructed on piers along the park's edge to minimize the impact on the floodplain and to animate the channel edge.

The intent is to create a basin surrounded by activity so that the upper Washington Channel can become a place of even greater appeal and significance for visitors and residents alike. With proximity to the National Mall, venues for entertainment, year-round recreation, waterfront commemoration, and dockage for maritime events, Potomac Harbor can become a unique destination within the nation's capital.

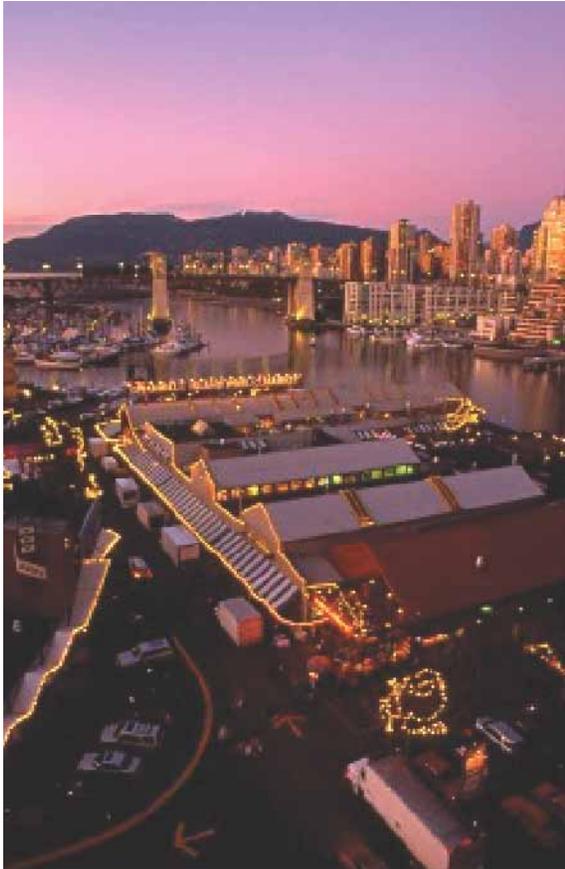
EXPANDED LAND BRIDGE Widening the sliver of land at the north end of the channel would improve pedestrian and vehicular mobility between the city and the park. The wider connection would provide greater separation between roadways, pathways and railroad infrastructure, creating a more inviting entrance to the park. Pedestrians can now enter the park only along a narrow Tidal Basin walk or from an unpleasant walk beneath the I-395 bridge. The land bridge would allow for a gracious waterfront promenade that could become a new gateway. An integral part of the proposed development, the promenade would help extend the character and experience of the National Mall and the new Southwest Waterfront into Potomac Park.



Aerial view of the Southwest Waterfront and Washington Channel.



Potomac Harbor can become a unique destination for water-oriented recreation in the nation's capital, complementing the proposed urban mixed-use neighborhood north of the channel.



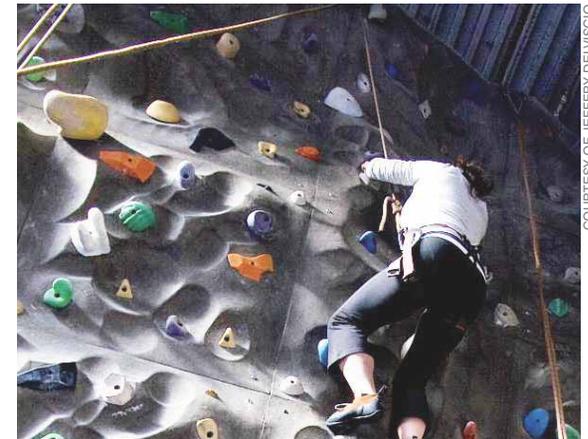
COURTESY OF DESTINATION360.COM

Appropriately scaled waterfront pavilions can activate a waterfront.



COURTESY OF KEN REGULAR

Impromptu performances create enjoyable and memorable experiences. (Baltimore, MD).



COURTESY OF JEFFERY DELVISCIO

Waterfront pavilions can provide places for specialized recreational activities. (Chelsea Piers, NY)



NPFC/OFA, ILLUSTRATION BY EDRAW

Widening the land area between the Tidal Basin and Washington Channel and tunneling the highway will improve the linkage between Potomac Park and the city and create a unique place for marine activities at Potomac Harbor.



EDRAW

Current view of the north end of the Washington Channel, looking southwest toward the Francis Case Memorial Bridge.

Connect Potomac Park with the City

Potomac Park should be an easily accessible destination with multiple linkages for people arriving by foot, bicycle, boat, water taxi, Metrorail, or car.

A NEW CANAL Currently, boat traffic to the marina at the Southwest Waterfront must navigate around Hains Point and motor up the channel through two miles of a -wake zone. A new canal in the vicinity of Buckeye Drive, approximately 2,000 feet in length and more than 200 feet in width, would connect the Washington Channel with the Potomac River, creating a signature feature in the landscape of the park and serving as a ceremonial and practical maritime gateway to the Southwest Waterfront. With this canal, boat traffic would no longer be required to go around Hains Point, significantly reducing travel time to and from the marina. Water taxis could use the canal to reduce passenger vehicle use by providing links between Potomac Park, the Southwest Waterfront, the Nationals Ballpark, Alexandria, Georgetown, and other destinations. Reducing marine traffic on the channel would also allow natural areas to be reclaimed.

NEW CHANNEL CROSSINGS The new canal would eliminate the need for high bridges over the channel to accommodate sailboats and taller ships. As a result, the three proposed channel bridges could remain low and pedestrian-friendly. At 6th Street, SW, a small two-lane bridge with sidewalks would provide a vehicular and pedestrian connection between the active area of the park and the urban activities of the Southwest Waterfront and M Street. At P Street, a new pedestrian-only bridge would provide access to the quiet, bucolic portion of the park. Near Hains Point, a new boardwalk across the channel and in the river around Fort McNair would connect to the Anacostia Riverwalk. These bridges should be designed as attractive features and destinations themselves.



1. Expand the land bridge at the Tidal Basin outlet to increase access to Potomac Park.
2. Construct a canal between the Washington Channel and the Potomac River to improve boat access to the Southwest Waterfront and allow multiple connections between Potomac Park and the city.
3. Provide a two-lane vehicular and pedestrian bridge at 6th Street and pedestrian-only bridges at P Street and Hains Point.
4. Develop a waterfront esplanade and reclaim wetland habitat along portions of the park shoreline.
5. Establish waterfront memorial sites, including a site for a preeminent memorial at Hains Point.
6. Redesign the public golf course as a model of sustainable practices, expand the clubhouse, and provide additional, more-passive recreation opportunities on the southern portion of the island.



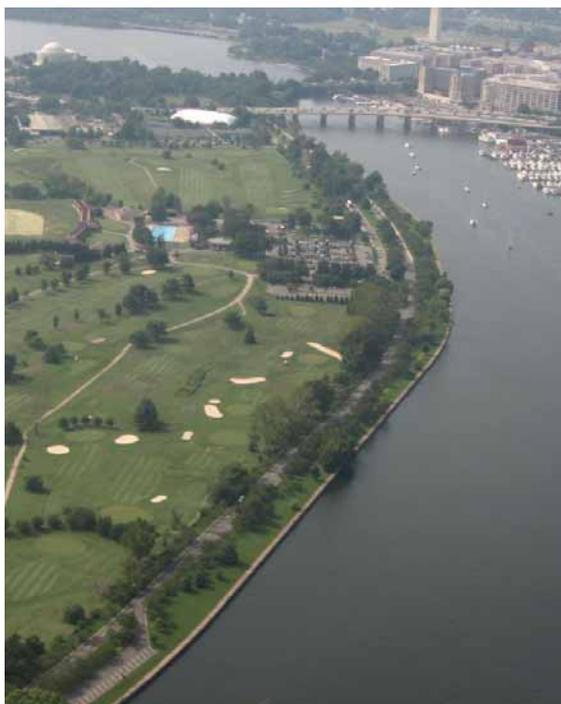
COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Plan for East Potomac Park, 1916



COURTESY OF DC PUBLIC LIBRARY, WASHINGTON POST, STAR COLLECTION

Potomac Park was newly created from fill of the dredged tidal marshes in the late 19th Century; Long Bridge (14th Street Bridge) initially traversed the Park.



COURTESY OF KENNETH LUND

Bird's-eye view of the golf course along the Washington Channel.

1916 Potomac Park Plan

Improving access and recreational opportunities in Potomac Park has been on the drawing board for nearly a century. Many of the ideas that appear in the *Framework Plan* are also found in a 1916 plan prepared by Colonel William W. Harts of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. The Harts plan recommended extending the city's streetcar lines into the north portion of the park to improve access, and suggested creating a canal from the Washington Channel to the Potomac River. Colonel Harts saw the canal as a way of separating "the quiet from the noisy sports." He proposed playing fields and courts of all types, a golf course, bathing pools, and a parade ground.

The 1916 plan included a formal landscape at the extreme north end of the park, today the location of the Jefferson Memorial. At the south end of the park, the plan proposed a memorial garden at Hains Point to take advantage of its magnificent setting at the confluence of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers.

Reprogram Potomac Park for Sustainable Recreation

The waterfront at Potomac Park should support the natural ecology of the Washington Channel and the Potomac River, thereby improving the regional watershed and providing opportunities for ecological education. The calm and quiet natural areas at the southern end of the park would also serve as a pleasant counterpoint to the animated, urban experience of the new Southwest Waterfront.

THE WATER'S EDGE Potomac Park's seawalls have subsided over the years from erosion and tidal fluctuation and pose a significant threat to public safety. The *Framework Plan* recommends varying treatments for the seawalls along the Potomac River and the Washington Channel.



Potomac Park seawall is sinking and needs repairs.



Current conflicts exist among pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles.

The sinking seawalls and walkway along the Potomac River edge of the park should be reconstructed, raised, and widened to reduce the impact of periodic flooding and to create a pleasant and welcoming esplanade. The scenic beauty of the esplanade would enhance the setting of future memorials and could be enjoyed by those choosing to stroll, fish, read, or picnic. More active users, such as bikers and skaters, could enjoy the waterfront views and breezes along a parallel path. In addition, a slight realignment of a portion of Ohio Drive along the Potomac River would allow a segment of the linear park to be expanded to create a water-oriented open space, and support uses such as restrooms and food service.

With a canal through Potomac Park available to redirect the majority of maritime traffic, a sustainable solution to reinforcing the crumbling seawalls could be

implemented within the Washington Channel. The seawalls along the southern portion of the park could be stabilized with native vegetation, wetlands, infill earth removed during canal construction, and rock as a bioengineered shoreline. These natural alternatives would be more cost-effective than reconstructing the seawalls and would improve water quality, mitigate flooding in outlying areas, and create new habitat for plants and wildlife.

Along the southern end of the Washington Channel, the esplanade should be designed as a boardwalk through the new marshy riparian edge. The boardwalk could also extend across the water at an appropriate distance from the shoreline around Fort McNair to connect Hains Point to the Anacostia Riverwalk. This connection would significantly reduce the number of boats traveling near Fort McNair and close the



A beautiful esplanade along Potomac Park's shoreline could offer places for commemoration and recreation.

gap along the Riverwalk, allowing for a system of uninterrupted trails, boardwalks, and waterfront promenades now being developed from Georgetown to the U.S. National Arboretum. This boardwalk should be designed to accommodate an appropriate security setback at Fort McNair for pedestrians.

NEW MEMORIALS With its sweeping open spaces and water views, Potomac Park could provide excellent settings for several new memorials ranging in size and scope. Hains Point at the southern tip of the park is one of the island's most promising commemorative sites. In addition, several other important locations along the esplanade and shoreline could accommodate small- and medium-scale memorials designed to respond to the park's environmental conditions. These memorial sites will become especially desirable when Potomac Park

is linked to the rest of the city by enhanced transit, water taxi, and pedestrian connections, in addition to new visitor services, a renewed park landscape, and its own unique identity.

SUSTAINABILITY AND RECREATION To protect the environment, new development along the channel must not contribute to the existing flooding potential or negatively affect aquatic habitats. In addition, new maritime programming and water-oriented recreation activities should conform to Washington's Green Marina Guidelines and other applicable regulations.

The relocation of administrative and maintenance facilities from Potomac Park would reduce the impervious surface area within the park, which would improve water quality and mitigate flooding.

Specific to sustainable recreation, the public golf courses should be showcases of innovative sustainability practices in water quality, wildlife habitat, and operations. The golf courses could be redesigned to maximize efficiency and to enhance the golf experience. This new layout, necessary to accommodate the canal's most efficient routing, can also allow for a new active recreation area north of the practice range. The clubhouse and pool complex could be expanded to include recreational equipment rental and a new community facility. This facility, designed to take full advantage of views toward the river, the golf course, the Washington Monument, and the Jefferson Memorial, could offer programmed recreation, such as arts and crafts, dance classes, and sports instruction, environmental education, and meeting space.



NCPCCFA ILLUSTRATION BY EDRAW

New pedestrian bridges across the channel will connect the park to the city's southern neighborhoods, and reclaiming wetlands can help improve water quality, mitigate flooding, and offer areas for reconnecting with nature.



EDAW

Current view of seawall sidewalk, looking north along the Washington Channel toward the Southwest Waterfront.



COURTESY OF MAGDALENA KRASICKA

Multi-purpose lawns allow for public gatherings, active recreation, and relaxation. (Central Park Sheeps Meadow, NYC).

Create a Festival Grounds at the Jefferson Memorial

The National Mall, the nation’s preeminent public space, hosts many national celebrations such as the Cherry Blossom Festival and the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, as well as special events and public demonstrations of various sizes. These events, which can draw tens of thousands of people, sometimes for weeks at a time, present maintenance challenges and limit other activities for the duration of the respective event.

The National Mall is the most popular visitor destination in the nation’s capital and the central open space of a living city. Pressure can be taken off the National Mall by developing a Festival Green to the south of the Jefferson Memorial as a new national civic space connected to the Mall. This Festival Green could accommodate special events and provide additional space for larger festivals, demonstrations, and other activities.

In addition to relieving pressure on the National Mall, the Festival Green would enhance the setting

for the Jefferson Memorial, restore the beauty of the romantic park landscape, and provide recreation space. The lawn would accommodate space for pick-up games and tournaments of all kinds. This flexible area can efficiently provide for both active recreation and civic events. With the Jefferson Memorial and the Washington Monument as a dramatic backdrop, this 25- to 35-acre outdoor gathering area could become a new landmark in Washington’s monumental landscape and one of America’s great symbolic settings recognized throughout the world.

Currently, the space proposed for the new Festival Green is consumed by a complex network of bridges and parking, as well as the regional headquarters of the National Park Service. Three highway bridges, one Metrorail bridge, and one railroad bridge cross into Washington just south of the Jefferson Memorial. The combined infrastructure of these crossings intrudes upon the Jefferson Memorial landscape and Potomac Park. When, at the end of the useful life of these bridges, it makes more sense to replace rather than continue to repair them, the new bridges

could be relocated to improve the setting of the Jefferson Memorial and create the ceremonial space of the Festival Green. At that point, the National Park Service’s regional headquarters could be relocated to a more suitable part of the city, and the maintenance facilities could be relocated between the newly aligned highway and rail bridges in an area screened from view.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE The Potomac River crossings include a complex series of vehicular, Metrorail, and railroad bridges. The three vehicular bridges cross the Potomac River and enter Potomac Park, where a series of ramps interweave to connect them to the 14th Street and Francis Case Memorial Bridges across the Washington Channel. The Metrorail bridge crosses the river, enters a tunnel within the park, and continues under the channel. The rail line traverses the Potomac River on the Long Bridge, runs through the park on earthen berms, passes over the channel, and heads northeast along Maryland Avenue.

The *Framework Plan* proposes that these five bridges across the Potomac River be replaced with two



EDAW

Current view of Jefferson Memorial, looking north from an existing parking lot.



COURTESY OF DC GOVERNMENT

Bird’s-eye view of highways and rail lines that sever the Jefferson Memorial from Potomac Park.



NCPC/CFA ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL MCCANN

The proposed Jefferson Memorial Festival Green could be an easily accessible multi-purpose space with a magnificent setting for public gatherings and recreation.

vehicular bridges, one rail bridge, and a Metrorail tunnel, all to the south of their current locations. One of the vehicular bridges would serve local traffic to downtown Washington, while the second would serve interstate traffic headed to other parts of the city and beyond.

The local bridge would land in Potomac Park as a boulevard and become part of the local road network. It would then cross under the Tidal Basin near the Washington Channel, emerging at the foot of 14th Street, north of Maine Avenue. This alignment would allow cars to access Ohio Drive within Potomac Park and find a direct route to 15th Street, F Street, and Maine Avenue. It would merge into the grid of the city north of the Washington Channel along 14th Street.

The I-395 interstate bridge would enter a tunnel within Potomac Park and travel under the Washington Channel. The realigned route would reverse the directions of 9th and 12th Streets to utilize existing tunnels under the National Mall. Its northbound lanes would connect to the existing 9th

Street tunnel and the existing Southeast-Southwest Freeway beneath the 10th Street overlook. The existing 12th Street tunnel would feed into the bridge's southbound lanes.

The replacement rail bridge would cross over the park parallel to the local vehicular crossing, connecting to the existing rail alignment at the western terminus of Maryland Avenue. The Metrorail bridge would be replaced with a tunnel under the Potomac River. Some of the infrastructure for such a tunnel is already in place, built by the Washington Area Metropolitan Transit Authority when the system was constructed in anticipation of replacing the bridge.

Consolidating, realigning, and tunneling the bridges and associated infrastructure would have numerous benefits. Most importantly, the new bridges would create space for the Festival Green, eliminate the vehicular bottleneck at the north end of the island, and improve pedestrian safety and access to Potomac Park. It would also support the cultural and mixed-use destinations proposed

for the 10th Street Overlook and the Southwest Waterfront, provide a suitable terminus for a new F Street corridor, and allow for the establishment of an overlook park and pedestrian connection between Maryland Avenue and 14th Street. In addition, the existing rail bridge, which is a contributing historic resource, could potentially become available for conversion to pedestrian and bicycle use.

Eventually, a new Metro station should be introduced near the Jefferson Memorial to provide transit access to Potomac Park and the Southwest Waterfront, encourage the use of public transportation, and reduce the number of passenger vehicles entering the park. This new Metro station would also serve multiple destinations near the Tidal Basin, including the Thomas Jefferson, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorials. To make the station possible, the Metrorail tracks would need to be moved below ground. This would also remove what is now a significant visual and physical intrusion into Potomac Park.



Proposed tunnels that will allow creation of the Jefferson Memorial Festival Green and connect Potomac Park to the National Mall.

1. Consolidate, tunnel, and realign the three vehicular bridges that cross the park.
2. Reconstruct the rail line parallel to the vehicular bridges.
3. Construct a Metrorail tunnel under the Potomac River and build a new Potomac Park Metro station.
4. Create multi-purpose open space for events and recreation.



Illustration of proposed street-level by improvements.