STAFF RECOMMENDATION

NCPC File No. 6265

LINCOLN MEMORIAL
LINCOLN MEMORIAL CIRCLE SECURITY IMPROVEMENTS, EAST SIDE – BARRIER LOCATION
WASHINGTON, DC

Submission by the National Park Service

March 31, 2005

Abstract

The National Park Service has submitted revised concept plans for a proposed vehicle barrier on the east (Mall) side of the Lincoln Memorial. The proposed bollards would form a straight line in the cartway of the Lincoln Memorial Circle, outside the original granite sidewalk, and would return at the center of each plinth at the base of the memorial's staircase. In addition, the retaining walls previously approved for the north, west, and south side of the memorial circle would be extended forward toward both ramps and would continue along the back edges of the ramps.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of concept design, pursuant to 40 U.S.C. §8722(d) and Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act (40 U.S.C. §8722(b)(1))) as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.44(38.40) 41573.

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves:

- The placement of a bollard line in the cartway of Lincoln Memorial Circle, at the inner edge of the circle near the base of the memorial stairs.

- The extension of the retaining walls toward the ramps and their continuation along the back of the ramps as generally shown in Scheme 2A of the submitted revised concept.

Recommends that the National Park Service, in its further study and development of the concept (which may include further site mock-ups and viewshed analyses), provide designs for the following elements of the proposal:

- The precise placement of the bollard line in relation to the granite curb edge;
- The placement of the return of the bollard line in relation to the plinths at the base of the staircase;
- The design and spacing of the bollards;
- The pavement material and layout in the former cartway of Memorial Circle.

Notes that:

- Prior to any subsequent submission of the project for Commission review, the National Park Service should respond to any substantive comments from the public on the environmental effects of the proposal and accomplish a completed NEPA review of the revised proposal in conformance with the Commission's requirements.
- The Section 106 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) dated October 31, 2003 stipulates that the bollard line "be placed at the outer edge of the plaza and circle on the east side of the Memorial" and that the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office has concluded that the MOA must be amended or other steps taken to resolve the disagreement or conclude the review process.

* * *

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site

The Lincoln Memorial was sited by the McMillan Commission and designed by one of Charles McKim's protégés, architect Henry Bacon. Built between 1914 and 1922, the national memorial to President Lincoln is the western terminus of the extended Mall and the focal point of West Potomac Park. The Reflecting Pool, Rainbow Pool, steps, and walkways were designed by Bacon, who collaborated closely with Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. Olmsted had been a member of the McMillan Commission and was sitting as the landscape architect on the Commission of Fine Arts during that time. Olmsted later served as a member of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission from 1926 to 1932.

Background and Previous Commission Action

The current submission by the National Park Service (NPS) is a component of a larger improvement project at the Lincoln Memorial that includes roadway and sidewalk reconstruction; the installation of vehicle barriers around the memorial, including a 35-inch retaining wall around the inner edge of Memorial Circle; and the construction of two concession buildings to improve visitor services. The other components of the project were approved by the Commission in December 2003, February 2004, and January 2005.

In July 2002, for the east side vehicle barrier, the Commission approved a barrier location (often referred to as the "landscape" solution) that consisted of bollards and retaining walls below Memorial Circle at the Reflecting Pool level.

In December 2003, NPS subsequently changed its preferred barrier location and submitted a bollard line at the outer edge of Memorial Circle. The Commission did not approve this location, and instead took the following action related to the current submission:

- Disapproved the proposed improvements to the east side of the Lincoln Memorial Circle.

- Recommended, for the east side of the Lincoln Memorial Circle that the National Park Service develop an alternative that minimizes the visibility and extent of the unbroken line of bollards.

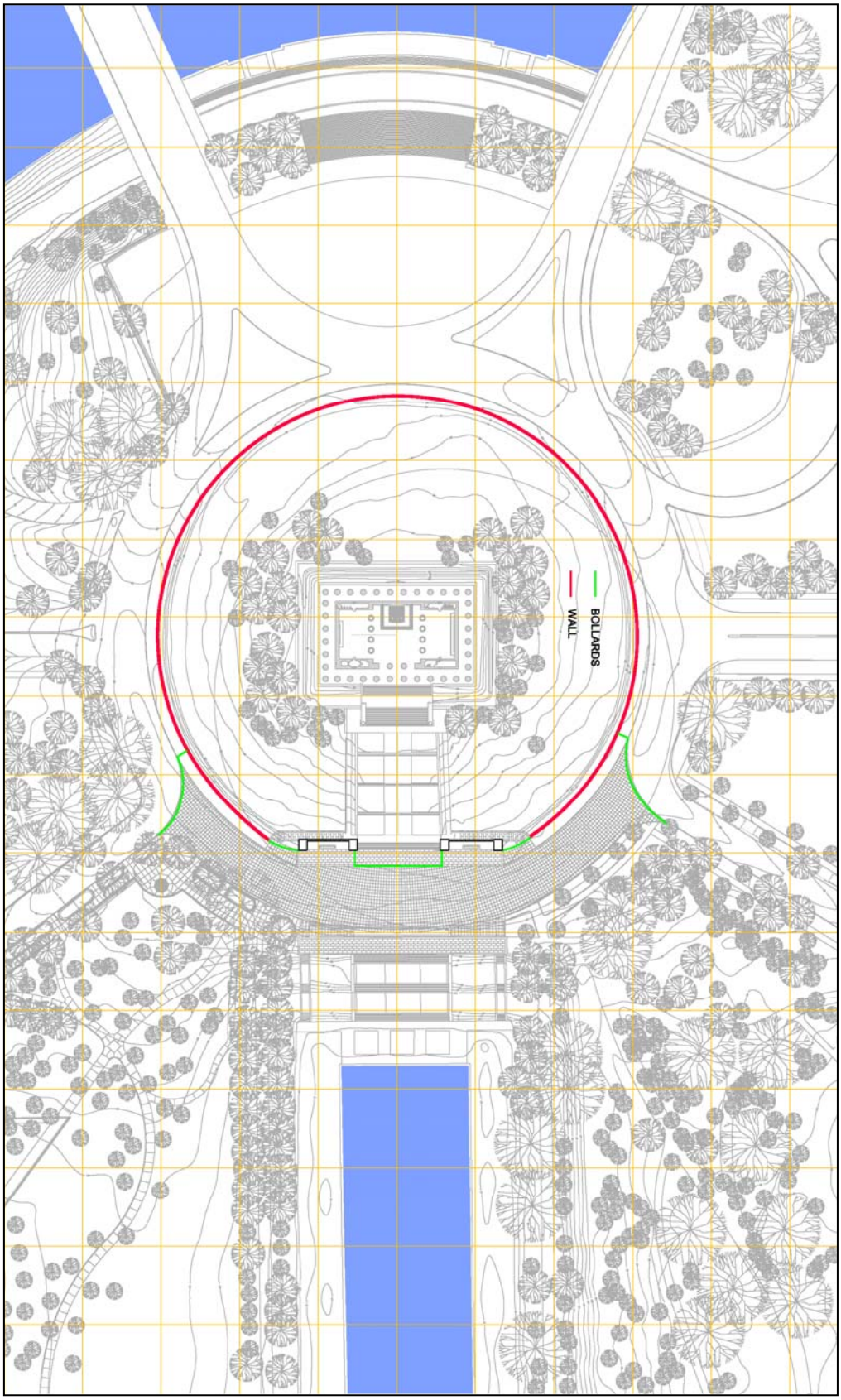
- Recommended a plaza, of granite or other stone material, similar to the plaza design approved by the Commission for the base of the Washington Monument.

In January 2005, the Commission gave final approval to the food concession buildings.

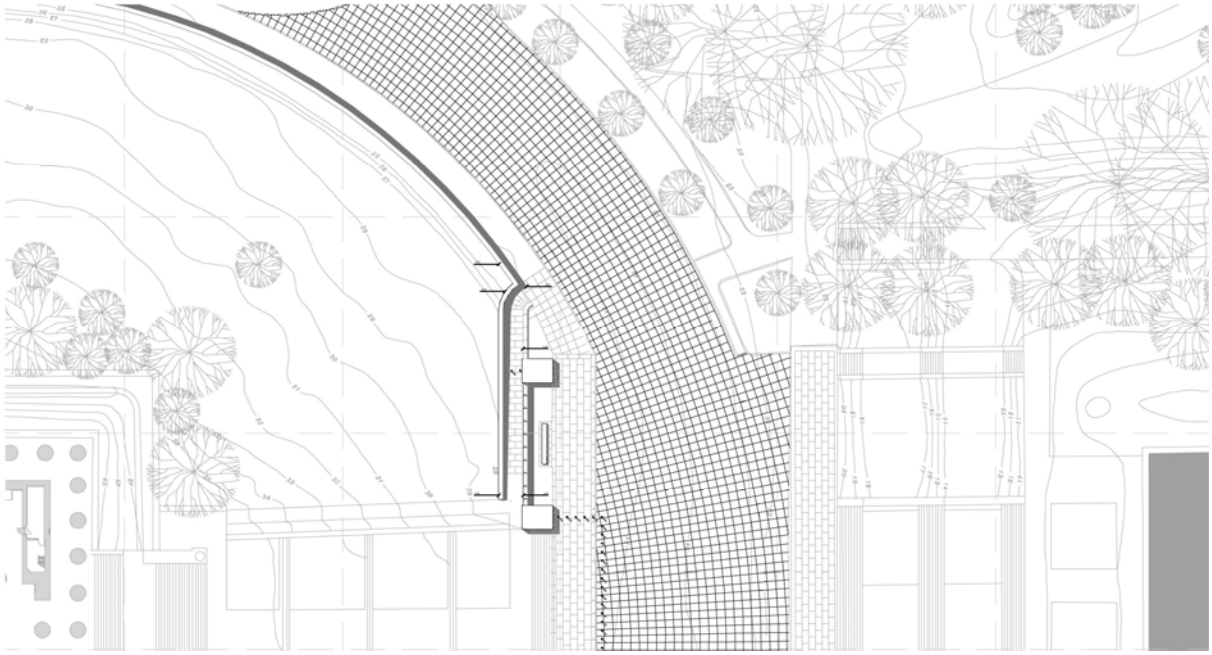
NPS made a submission to the Commission last month, but withdrew it in lieu of a site visit for Commissioners, which occurred on March 3. NPS made the current submission on March 17, 2005 as a result of the Commission of Fine Arts action that day.

Proposal

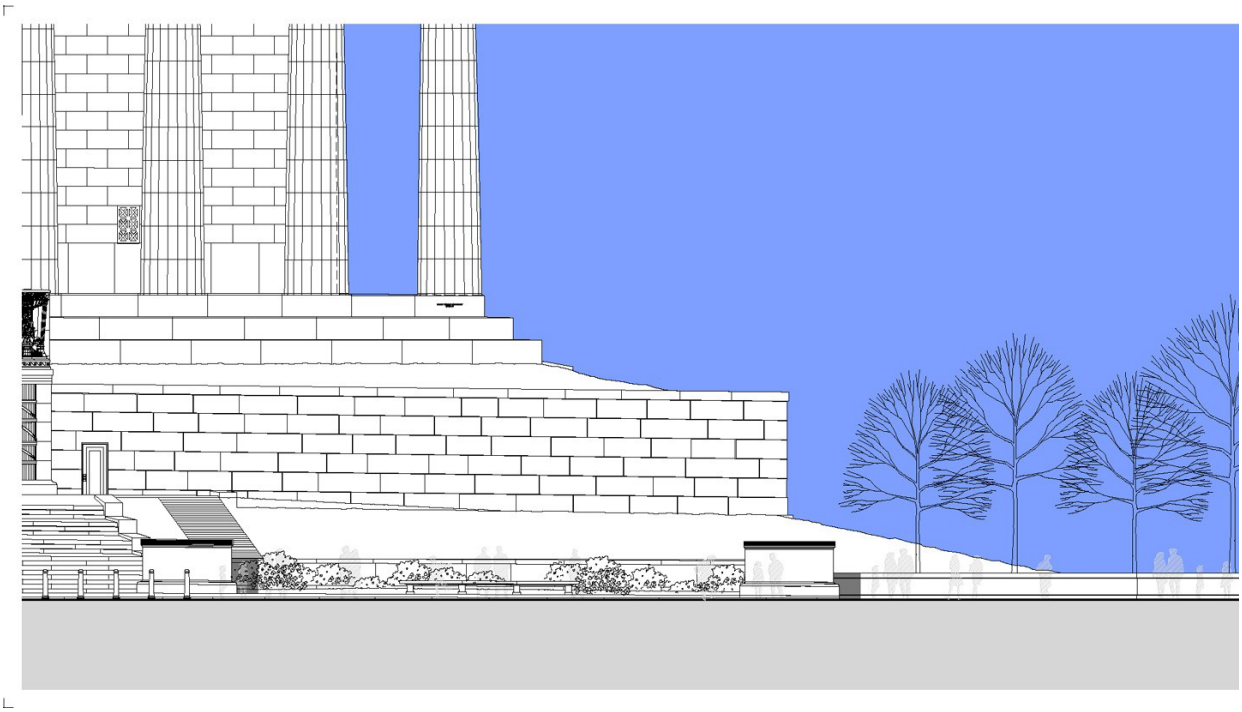
The current revised concept proposal includes a bollard line at the inner edge of Lincoln Memorial Circle that returns on each side to the middle of the plinths at the base of the memorial staircase; several options for retaining walls that extend forward to meet the handicapped ramps and continue along the sides of the ramps; three suggested bollard designs; and a proposed surface of 4 foot by 4 foot concrete pavers in the former cartway of Lincoln Memorial Circle.

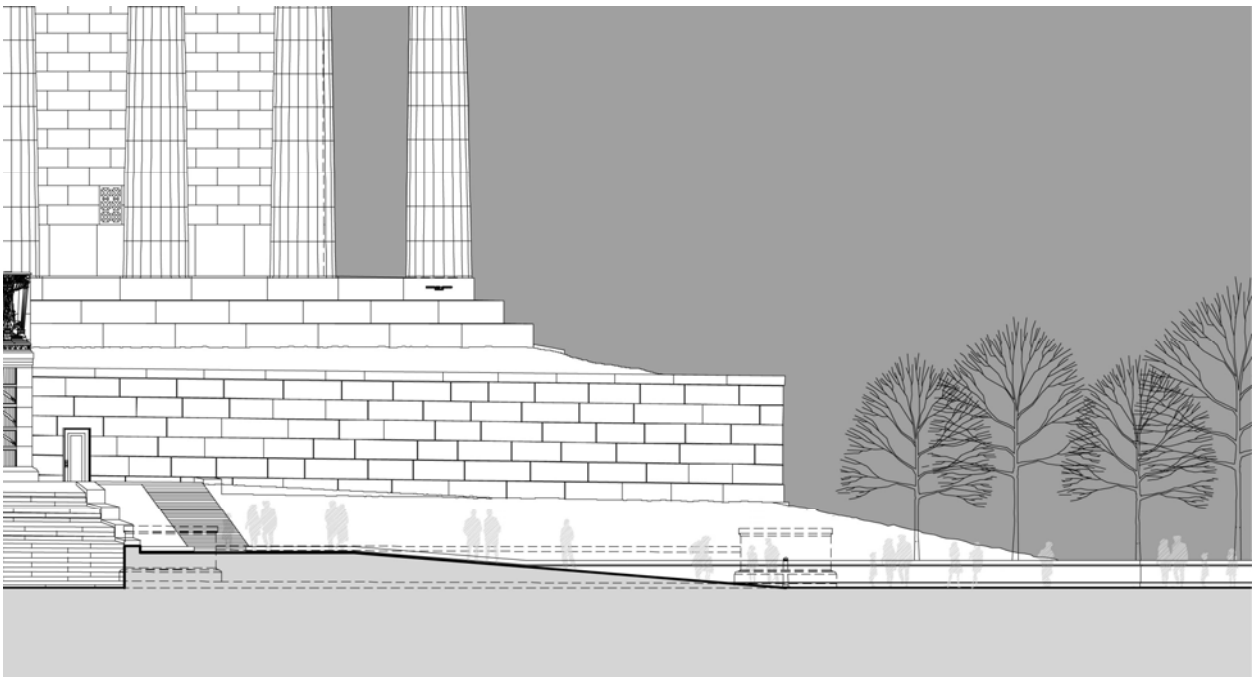


Proposed barrier line around the Lincoln Memorial



In the recommended scheme, the retaining wall would continue along the inner side of the ramps (the side closer to the memorial) at the same even height and gradually “die” as the ramp rises.





Elevations showing the extension of the new security retaining wall now under construction around the Circle and its return along the inner edge of the ramp, all behind the original plinth blocks and connecting retaining.

The two pairs of plinths flanking the monumental staircase are rectilinear in form and austere in character. Each pair also flanks a bench and simple landscaping. The granite sidewalk and the edge of the Lincoln Memorial Circle cartway are in the foreground of the photograph.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Although the National Mall and West Potomac Park have been altered many times in the last century, the formal setting of the Lincoln Memorial at the western terminus of the east-west axis of the Mall is recognized and protected as a consummate architectural and landscape design statement about our national democratic principles. Because of the importance of the continuous landscape design and the vista along this east-west axis, the insertion of a vertical barrier--especially a north-south barrier line that *physically*, *visually*, and *symbolically* cuts across the axis--reduces the openness of the site, is incompatible with the design, intrudes into the vista, and is antithetical to the symbolic meaning of the Mall axis.

NPS has determined that a vehicle can approach the memorial from West Potomac Park and that a vehicle barrier is necessary to protect the memorial and visitors to it. The location and design of such a barrier is the problem that NPS, the Commission, and other parties have been studying for the past several years. Three locations have been studied: the inner edge of Memorial Circle,

the outer edge of Memorial Circle, and the "landscape solution". All three proposed solutions would strongly and negatively affect the memorial's setting and the National Mall's axis.

The "inner circle" placement of the bollards on the east side of the Lincoln Memorial has been advocated by Commission staff for two years as the location least intrusive on the Mall vista from the memorial chamber and the one that best preserves the openness of the iconic east-west vista. *But the staff has always acknowledged that the close-in location is not a panacea. Not only does it have its own visual and physical impacts, but it heightens the necessity of the best-possible design and placement of the security elements because of their proximity to the memorial.* In particular, staff recommends that the following elements be studied further (and alternatives proposed) before they can be endorsed:

- The bollard design and form as viewed against the backdrop of the memorial columns, and in relation to the austere, rectilinear plinths and foreground elements.

- The precise placement of the bollard line in relation to the curb of the granite sidewalk, and the returns of the line in relation to the plinths on either side of the staircase. This should be studied in concert with additional bollard designs.

- The cartway pavement material as well as its scale (not only in relation to the character of the elements at the base of the memorial staircase, but in relation to the design and spacing of the bollards) and if a different, special material should be used in the axial approach to the memorial staircase.

Given the slower speed of any vehicle that could potentially climb the stairs from the Reflecting Pool, staff recommends that NPS restudy the bollard spacing requirements. NPS is using a requirement of spacing bollards at 4 feet on center (measured from the structural cores of adjacent bollards). Staff believes that the bollards could be placed farther apart. Each single bollard is designed and installed to stop a vehicle moving at a fast rate of speed. In light of the actual slower traveling speed of any vehicle that reached the plaza, staff recommends that NPS study a wider spacing in order to reduce the number of bollards, limit the negative effect of the barrier in front of the memorial, and improve the experience for pedestrians.

Staff acknowledges the effort NPS has made to date in trying to find consensus on the bollard location and notes that the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office continues to have strong objections to the "inner circle" location. Once the barrier location is established, the necessary fine design of security elements in relation to each other and to the memorial can proceed, with the goal of preserving to the greatest extent possible the character and attributes of the memorial setting, the historic building fabric, and the visitor experience.

The staff recommends that the retaining wall extensions continue at the same height as the portion of the wall now under construction, turn at the inner ends of both ramps and continue at the same height along the inside or rear of the ramps until they die into the slope. All review agencies appear to be in agreement about this approach. NPS and its design team are studying the site conditions and will provide more detailed information at the next phase of Commission review.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The following are the applicable policies in the *Preservation and Historic Features Element* of the Comprehensive Plan:

National Capital Image

1. Express the dignity befitting the image of the federal government in the national capital.

5. Protect and enhance the vistas and views, both natural and designed, that are an integral part of the national capital's image.

Stewardship of Historic Properties

5. Identify and protect both the significant historic design integrity and the use of historic landscapes and open spaces.

The Historic Plan of Washington, DC

2. Promote continuity in the historic design framework of the nation's capital by protecting and enhancing the elements, views, and principles of the L'Enfant Plan.

5. Protect the reservations that contain historic landscapes and features from incompatible changes or incursions.

Federal Capital Improvements Plan

NPS submitted a budget estimate of $6.3 million for a vehicular barrier system around the perimeter of the Lincoln Memorial in spring 2002 for FY 2003.

National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan

The proposed security barrier for the Lincoln Memorial in the *Urban Design and Security Plan* indicates a retaining wall around the north, west, and south sides of the inner edge of Lincoln Memorial Circle, as also shown in the current submission. The current submission deviates from the *Plan*'s barrier line on the east side of the memorial, which extended the line down the lower steps to the level of the Reflecting Pool. This lower barrier line was submitted with the July 2002 concept submission, but has since been reassessed by NPS in favor of the current submission. Staff acknowledges that security elements shown in the *Plan* are schematic only and are subject to further analysis as design development proceeds for individual projects.

National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA)

The current submission, as a concept design proposal, does not require the Commission to complete its NEPA determination at this stage of project review. NPS will act as the lead federal agency for any environmental review and will update its previous environmental conclusions regarding the action. NPS should respond to any substantive comments on the environmental effects of the proposal prior to submission of the preliminary phase of the project for Commission review.

Staffs emphasizes that NPS must determine the findings of its environmental review and develop a conclusion and mitigation of any adverse impacts from the revised design plan.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

Architecture, landscape, topography, and location combine to create the Lincoln Memorial as the western terminus of the National Mall and the centerpiece of West Potomac Park. The memorial and its setting are of high historic significance and designed to be seen and experienced as a whole, creating a symbolic and commemorative landscape setting for the Lincoln Memorial within the spacious precinct of West Potomac Park and the Mall itself, and extending westward across the Memorial Bridge to Arlington National Cemetery.

The memorial itself, the circle, and the series of steps and turf and stone terraces leading to the memorial from the level of the Mall at the Reflecting Pool form a significant historic designed landscape that deliberately evokes through calibrated levels of ascendance a reverence for Lincoln as the savior of the Union. In addition, however, the site is heavily visited and over the years the Park Service has incorporated alterations for handicapped accessibility, visitor services, and construction for temporary events. Lincoln Circle used to be a true traffic circle, and even though the eastern portion has been closed to general traffic since 1976, the rest of the circle continues to serve as a commuter route for traffic entering and leaving the District of Columbia via Memorial Bridge.

NPS initiated consultation with the D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer (DC SHPO) and with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) on July 1, 2002, determining that the proposed security alterations and the loss of the roadway in the eastern portion of the traffic circle would have an adverse effect on the National Register qualities of the Lincoln Memorial. The consultation has included both of the above agencies, as well as NCPC staff and public groups and individuals such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Committee of 100, the National Coalition to Save Our Mall, and the ANC representative.

NPS executed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) on October 31, 2004 with the DC SHPO and the ACHP. All the parties have been operating under the MOA in the ongoing consideration of a barrier line for the east side of the Lincoln Memorial. However, the MOA stipulates that the bollard line “be placed at the outer edge of the plaza and circle on the east side of the Memorial.” The DC SHPO has informed NPS that the current MOA does not address the change in the barrier location to the inner circle edge and that the MOA will need to be amended or other steps taken pursuant to MOA provisions.

Consultation on the east side security measures resumed in October 2004 after a hiatus of ten months. NPS held the most recent meeting on March 24, 2005, at which the current proposal was discussed. Discussion focused on how to advance the ramp design, as well as the DC SHPO's disagreement with the inner circle bollard line.

CONSULTATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the outer circle proposal on February 9, 2005. The Committee forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies represented, except the District of Columbia Office of Planning. The representative for DCOP withheld coordination because of outstanding 106 issues. The participating agencies were: NCPC; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. The inner circle proposal was submitted to NCPC on March 17, 2005.

Commission of Fine Arts

The Commission's official letter will be provided to the Commissioners after it is released.

The Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) considered the security design for the east side of the memorial at its most recent meeting on March 17, 2005, following a site visit to witness a bollard mock-up. The deeply divided and concerned commission voted 3-2-1 to approve the "inner circle" line, including its returned ends, stating that it was the shortest and simplest line. They also endorsed the extension of the retaining walls and their return along the rear side of the handicapped ramps, but asked for further study.

They did not endorse other aspects of the submission, including the proposed bollard designs and concrete pavement, and have asked for alternatives to study.