
E STREET, BETWEEN 15TH AND 17TH STREETS, NW
IMPROVEMENTS RELATED TO RESTORATION OF WESTBOUND TRAFFIC

Report to the Federal Highway Administration

December 2, 1999

Abstract

The Federal Highway Administration has submitted preliminary and final site development plans for improvements to E Street, between 15th and 17th Streets, NW. The improvements are related to the restoration of westbound traffic on E Street. Westbound traffic was restricted in May of 1995 due to security concerns. The proposed project consists of reopening E Street to westbound traffic to relieve traffic congestion in the area.

Authority

Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act of 1952, as amended (40 U.S.C. 71(e)).

Commission Action

The Commission **approves**, pending completion of the Section 106 process, the preliminary and final site development plans for the improvements related to the restoration of westbound traffic on E Street, between 15th and 17th Streets, NW, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.31(38.00)-40729, except for the pedestrian area paving materials and the associated bollard line configuration between West Executive Drive and South Executive Drive.

* * *

BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has submitted preliminary and final site development plans for improvements to E Street, between 15th and 17th Streets, NW. The improvements are related to the restoration of westbound traffic on E Street. Westbound traffic was restricted in May of 1995 due to security concerns. The proposed project consists of reopening E Street to westbound traffic to relieve traffic congestion in the area.

Site

- E Street is classified as a Principal Arterial in the District's official functional classification of streets and highways.
- The E Street right-of-way, between 15th and 17th Streets, NW, separates Sherman Park, the south lawn of the White House, and the First Division Monument from the Ellipse.
- E Street provides east-west access across the city and connects to the Whitehurst Freeway and the Roosevelt Bridge (I-66) via the E Street Expressway—two primary approach routes from the west.
- The project area also includes a section of 17th Street, NW between E and F Streets, NW. Seventeenth Street is the western boundary of President's Park which includes the Old Executive Office Building, the Treasury Building, Lafayette Park, the Ellipse, Sherman Park, and the First Division Monument.
- Prior to the 1995 restriction of traffic, two-way traffic was allowed on this section of E Street.
- Currently westbound traffic is restricted at 15th Street, diverting the bulk of the traffic north to I (eye) and K Streets that can accommodate westbound movements.

Development

Proposed Traffic Route

- Reopen westbound traffic on E Street, between 15th and 17th Street.
- Divert traffic north along northbound 17th Street to westbound New York Avenue.
- Provide a storage lane for left turns onto westbound New York Avenue, which merges into westbound E Street.

Related Improvements

The proposed project improvements related to the restoration of westbound traffic on E Street include the following:

Improvements within President's Park.

- Reduce length and width of existing E Street median.
- Remove traffic island and eliminate parking spaces on E Street between 17th Street and South Executive Drive.
- Remove existing temporary barriers on E Street.
- Install a limited number of traffic signs along E Street.

Improvements on D.C. Department of Public Works right-of-way.

- Add right turn lane for southbound 17th Street between New York Avenue and F Street.
- Re-stripe traffic lanes on 17th Street and New York Avenue.
- Optimize traffic signals in the project area.
- Adjust pedestrian crossing signal at 17th Street and New York Avenue right turn lane.
- Install a limited number of traffic signs within the project area.

EVALUATION

Staff recommends the approval of the preliminary and final site development plans for the improvements to E Street, between 15th and 17th Streets, NW.

- The reopening of E Street removes a significant barrier to westbound traffic across a significant portion of downtown Washington.
- The project will improve the traffic flow, circulation, and help to ease traffic congestion in the area.
- The project will provide better cross-town access from the Whitehurst Freeway and Roosevelt Bridge, two major access points to the city.
- The raised paving block area between E Street and the existing sidewalk should be of the same construction materials as the existing sidewalk. The addition of another paver is inappropriate. Paving materials should be submitted for review and approval.
- The project proposal is to connect the existing bollard line and the barriers proposed as part of the south side barrier project with two short runs of bollards. Staff is aware of the recommendations made by the Commission of Fine Arts to move the existing bollards along the north edge of Executive Drive to the proposed curb line of E Street. In this regard, staff believes that relocating the bollards can better define the pedestrian space, improve the continuity of the perimeter barrier, and minimize the potential impact to traffic.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on November 10, 1999, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been

coordinated with all agencies participating. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the General Services Administration; Department of Housing and Community Development; Department of Public Works; the National Park Service (NPS); and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Commission of Fine Arts

The Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) approved plans for the project on November 18, 1999, with the recommendation that the bollards at the edge of the White House South Lawn be moved closer to E Street to allow more pedestrian circulation. The CFA letter of approval has not been issued.

Public Coordination

Public meetings were held on July 9, 1998, December 16, 1998, and October 5, 1999. The meeting provided an opportunity for interested individuals and groups to solicit information and provide comments on the proposed project.

Agency Coordination

Consultation and coordination has occurred with numerous agencies during the development of the project alternatives and preparation of the environmental assessment and final project plans. These consultations were initiated at an early stage and are ongoing.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

The proposed road improvements are not inconsistent with the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*. The proposed project would restore westbound E Street traffic by reopening the existing westbound section of E Street between 15th and 17th Street, NW. Public vehicular access to this portion of E Street was restricted in 1995 due to security considerations.

National Environmental Policy Act

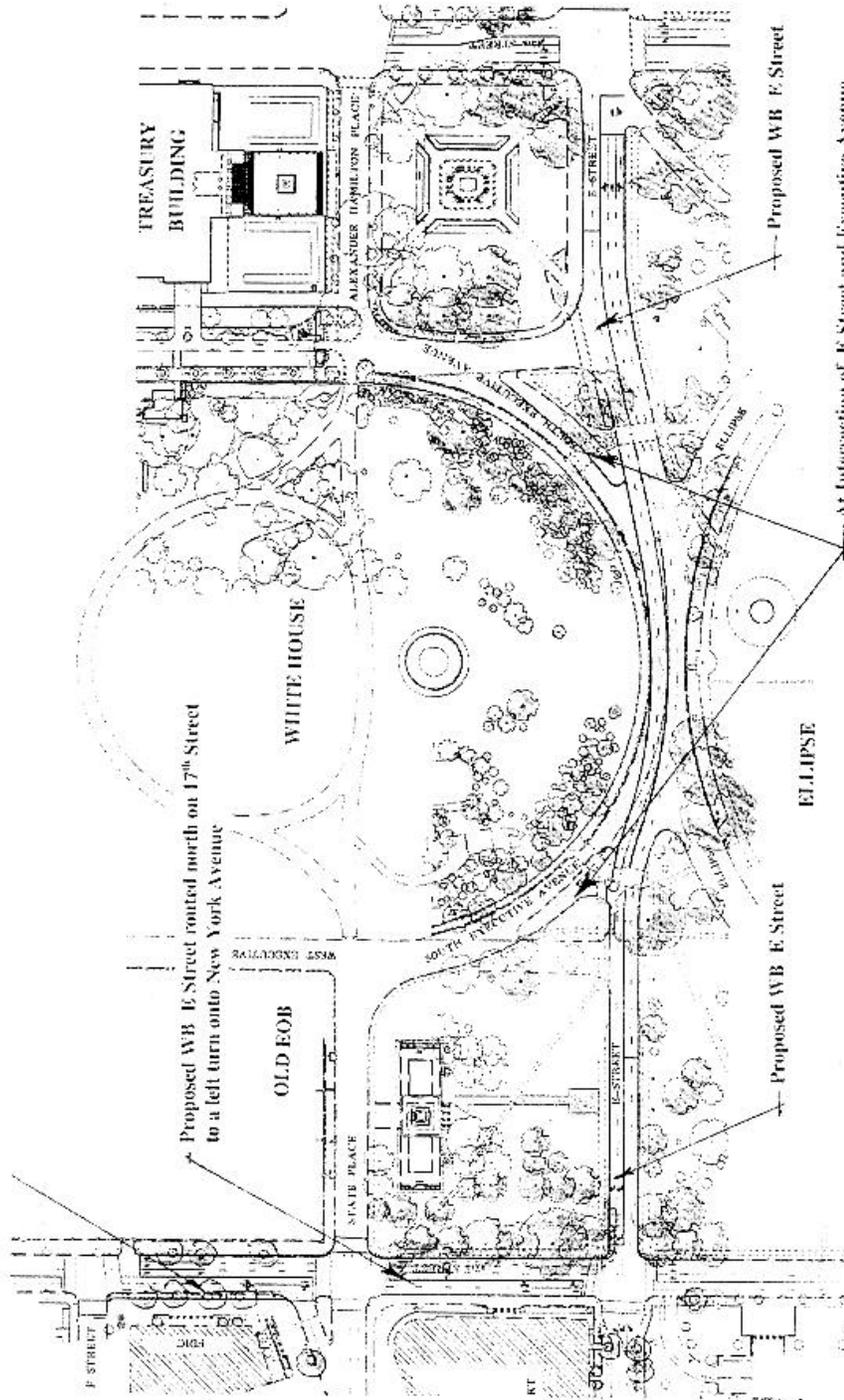
- Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act an Environmental Assessment (EA) by FHWA, the District of Columbia Department of Public Works, and the National Park Service in September 1999.
- Three alternatives have been evaluated in the EA. These options include the No Action Alternative, Alternative C involving 17th Street, and Alternative D, utilizing 18th Street. Each of the alternatives are addressed in the context of effects on natural resources, air and noise, urban systems, public services, cultural resources, transportation, and socioeconomic attributes. The analysis also includes a comparison of the plans with the objectives of the Commission's *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*.

- Re-establishment of westbound traffic in the E Street corridor is significant and will accommodate over 13,000 vehicle trips per day in the westbound lanes of E Street. The proposed re-opening of the westbound movement of traffic will not generate traffic volumes in excess of those anticipated under previous conditions prior to the westbound traffic restrictions.
- A Finding of No Significant Impact was completed by the FHWA for the E Street project in November 1999.

National Historic Preservation Act

FHWA and NPS have consulted extensively with the DC State Historic Preservation Office and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation throughout the development of this proposal. The proposed alterations were determined to be *not adverse* to the historic setting. Section 106 review is expected to be completed shortly. The extension of the pedestrian area is a positive feature of the E Street scheme. The design of the adjacent area north of E Street has been developed through consultation with all the parties to ensure that the distinctive curved street plan around the South Lawn is retained and not diminished.

SITE PLAN



At Intersection of E Street and Executive Avenue
Increase size of curbed island, decrease width of Executive Avenue, provide raised granite curb adjacent to north edge of WB E Street and appropriate paving, curbs, and bollards as approved by NCPC, SHPO, CEA, NPS, and USFS in this area.