

WOODROW WILSON BRIDGE REPLACEMENT
RELOCATION OF WOODROW WILSON MEMORIAL MEDALLIONS
City of Alexandria, Virginia and Prince George's County, Maryland

Report to the Federal Highway Administration

April 4, 2002

Abstract

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has requested that the Commission review the relocation of the Woodrow Wilson Memorial Medallions affecting the final bridge design plans previously approved by the Commission. The review and approval of preliminary and final site development plans for the Medallion relocation will enable the FHWA to proceed with work to construct the replacement Woodrow Wilson Bridge. The current schedule calls for the outer loop of the new bridge to be completed by 2005. To accommodate this schedule, highway officials would like to begin constructing the outer loop bridge structure for the crossing in the third-quarter of 2002. Final design of the Medallion features include plans for a vertical column at both the Virginia and Maryland bridge abutments. The design, as proposed, maintains the grace and beauty appropriate to this memorial bridge, which will now be identified by the refurbished medallions at their new locations.

Authority

Pursuant to Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act of 1952, as amended (40 USC 71d).

Commission Action

The Commission:

- **Approves** the preliminary and final site development plans for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Memorial Medallions, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 3206.00(38.00)-41000; and
- **Requests** the FHWA, in the preparation of subsequent plan submissions for ancillary elements of the project, to:

- Provide design information on the visual graphics and signage that is to be utilized at Potomac River Waterfront Community Park.
- Develop the two remaining amenity areas (Jones Point Park and Potomac River Waterfront Community Park), with a high standard of design for all light fixtures, site furniture, pavements and structures.

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BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has submitted preliminary and final design plans for the relocation of the Woodrow Wilson Memorial Medallions onto the Replacement Bridge (Wilson Bridge). The Wilson Bridge carries Interstate 95/Interstate 495, the Capital Beltway, across the Potomac River. The bridge replacement and related highway improvements extend from Telegraph Road on the west to Maryland Route 210 (Indian Head Highway) on the east. The new bridge as designed will be 6,075 feet long and consist of twin parallel structures, one measuring 124 feet wide and the other measuring 110 feet wide.

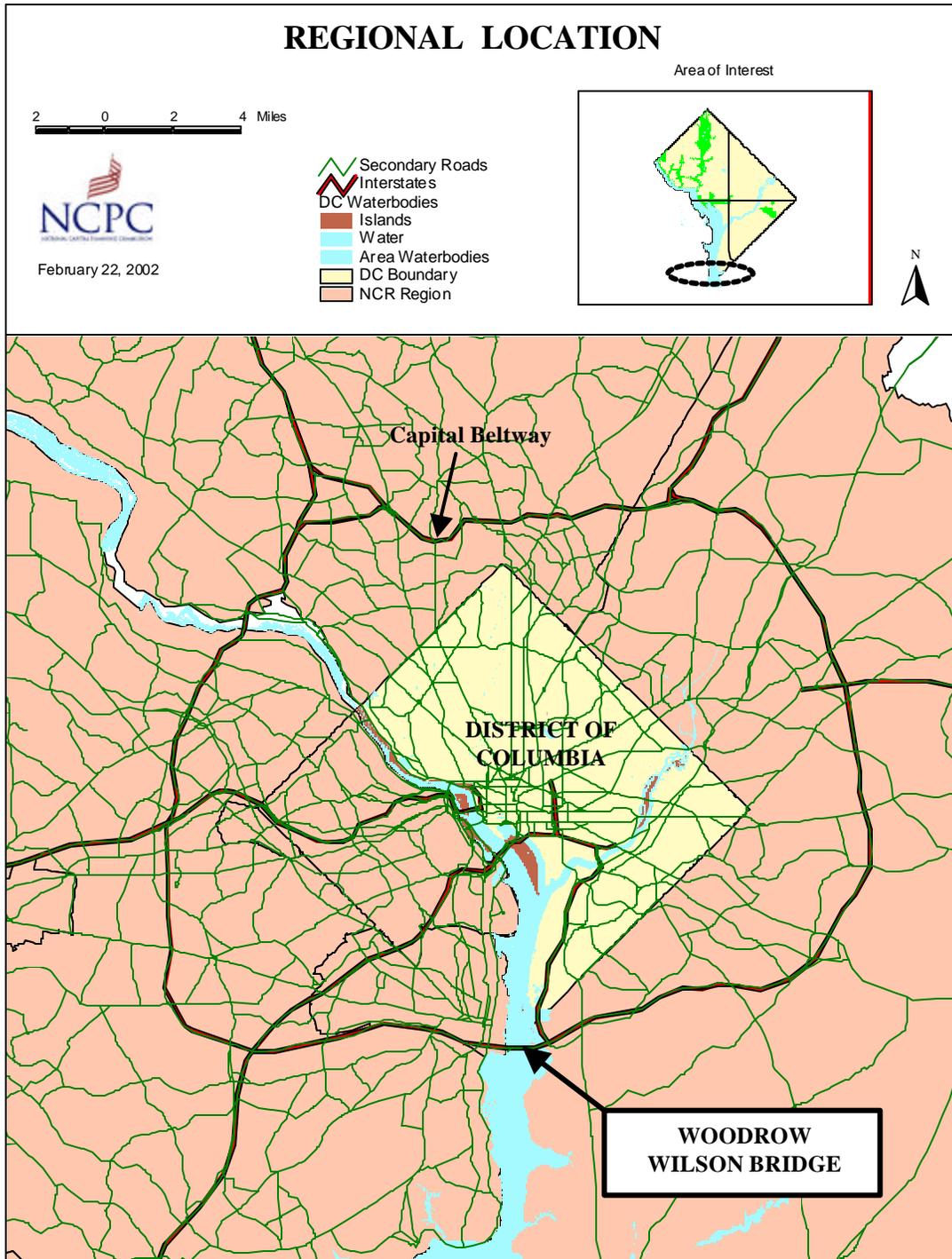


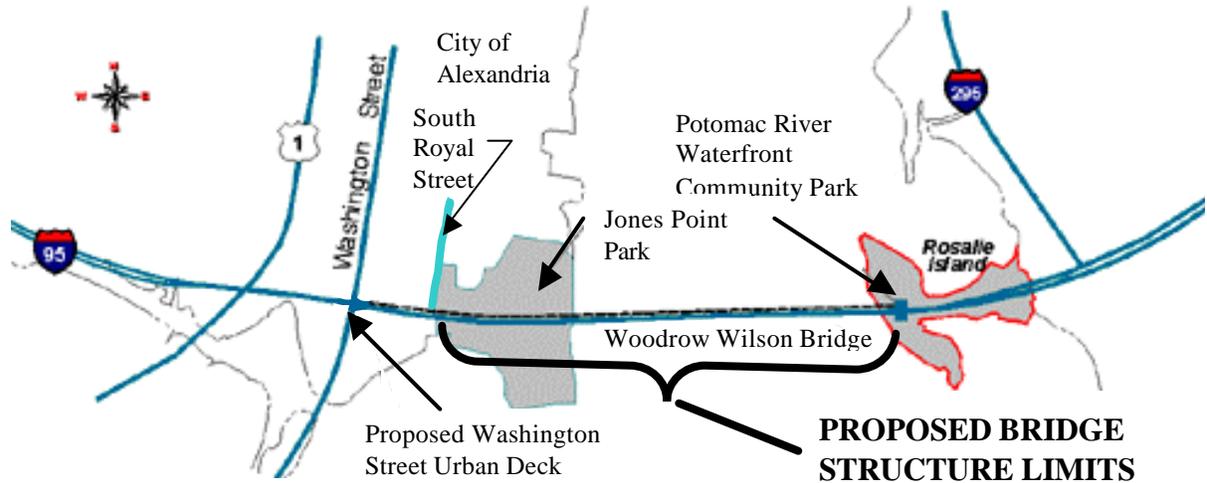
Originally constructed as a national memorial bridge to former President Woodrow Wilson, our 28th President, the current six-lane bridge was opened to traffic in 1964 and featured an original circular metal medallion at the east and west ends of the existing bridge operator's tower.

AERIAL VIEW OF EXISTING WOODROW WILSON BRIDGE

According to the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS), construction of the new bridge will occur in stages, with the most immediate being:

- Start of the construction access, dredging, and foundations in the Potomac River—by fall 2000. This work was completed ahead of schedule.
- Begin the construction of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge (outer loop) superstructure—by early fall 2002. The current submitted plans for the medallions address this stage of the project.



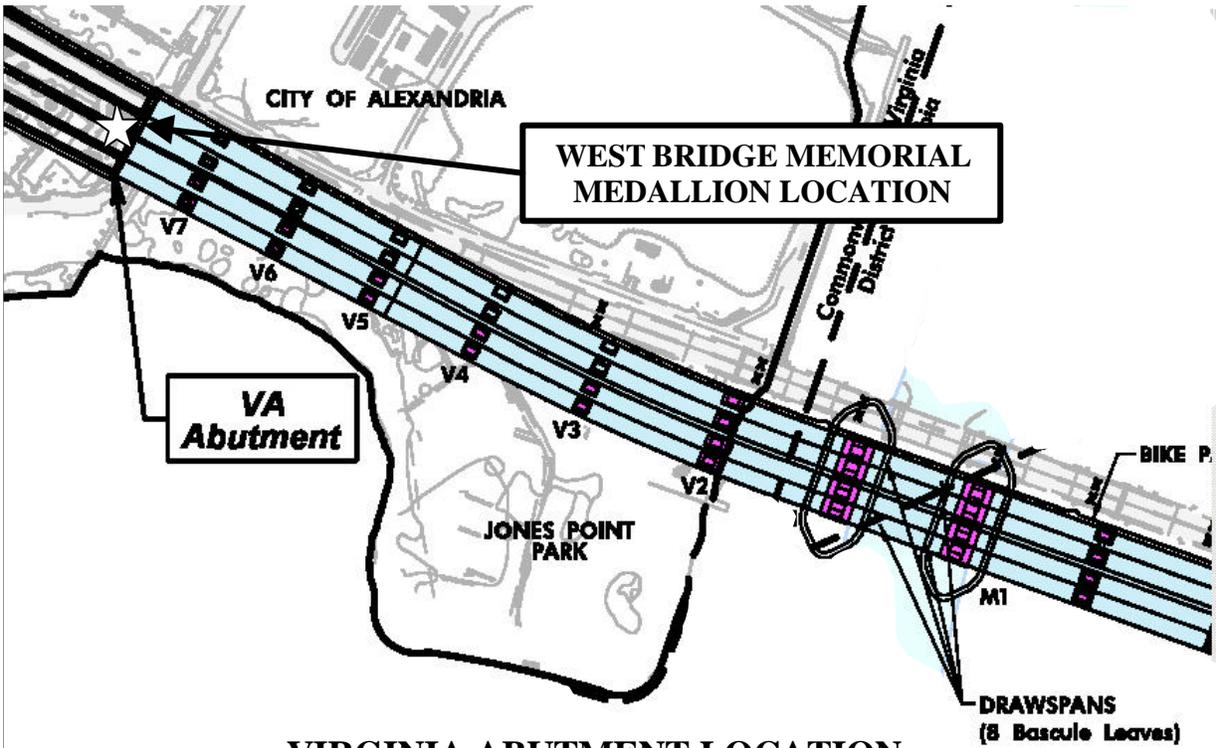


GENERAL PLAN OF WOODROW WILSON BRIDGE AND ASSOCIATED PROJECT ELEMENTS

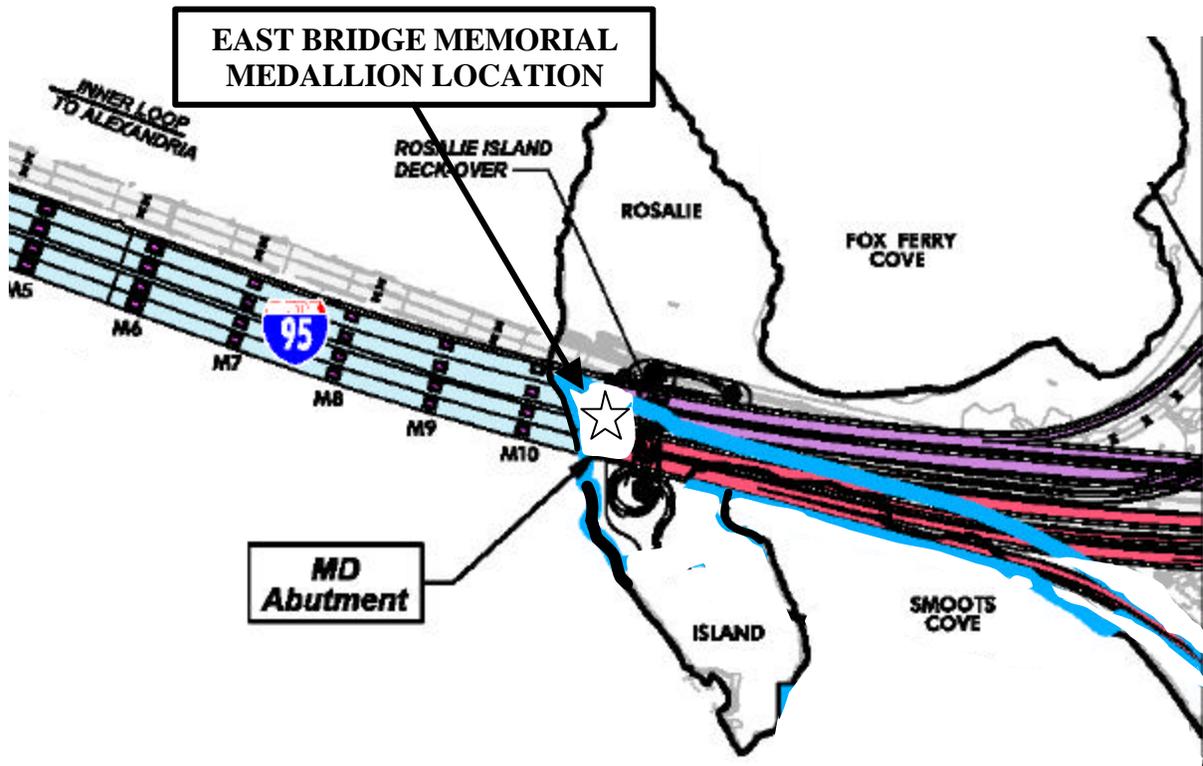
FHWA's submission involves the preliminary and final plans for the relocation of the existing Woodrow Wilson Memorial Medallions and a new supporting structure (pylon) to be located on the bridge structure at both the Virginia and Maryland bridge abutments. Possibly by early fall 2002, the FHWA expects to award contracts related to construction of the main structure of the new bridge that will include the medallions and their supporting columns.

The proposed relocation of the medallions involves:

- Construction of a 25-foot vertical column, which supports the six-foot diameter metal medallion. The intent is to prominently display the original circular pendant (initially dedicated in 1964) while complementing the forms of the new main bridge. Federal and state highway officials, in consultation with the National Park Service, have identified the location of the medallions.
- The aesthetic program for the medallions is governed by their size, installation technique, and the structural integrity of the supporting element.



VIRGINIA ABUTMENT LOCATION



MARYLAND ABUTMENT LOCATION

As previously approved, the signs and railings on the bridge are a consistent height. The result is a coherent horizontal and vertical vocabulary of support structures, with predominant curved edges appearing at the profile end.

The proposed medallions and the supporting columns feature themes of this vocabulary using:

- Similar height
- Large, dark massing to draw attention
- Angular geometry to provide contrast and appeal

The final design of the medallions' pylon structure involves the following:

- Each structure is an equilateral triangle in plan view.
- The side of the structure, with the medallion, is oriented toward oncoming traffic at a 30-degree angle.
- The finish of each pylon is a combination of a thermal finish black-granite stone surface with contrasting polished edges.
- The metal medallions within the black field of stone will feature the words, "Woodrow Wilson Memorial Bridge" as an inscription in the stone, and will be gilded with gold leaf to provide contrast for legibility.
- Each pylon will have an angled top and will be illuminated on the medallion face with metal halide light-fixtures mounted in the back of the traffic barriers.



WEST MEMORIAL MEDALLION PYLON AS VIEWED LEAVING VIRGINIA

The final site development plan submission consists of:

- The final redesign for the replacement bridge abutments that would function to support the ten-lane crossing, with two additional lanes that can serve as High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes in the future, and will ultimately provide the location for the placement of Metrorail.
- The final design of the two separate pylons, including the stone cladding material and final inscriptions.

The submitted plans do not include final project drawings for Jones Point Park in Virginia or the Potomac River Waterfront Community Park at Rosalie Island in Maryland. These project elements, which are affected by the design and construction of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Replacement, will be submitted individually as their final details are completed in the future.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

The Commission has reviewed the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Replacement project at several stages.

April 8 1999: The Commission approved design concepts for the replacement Woodrow Wilson Bridge project.

August 3, 2000: The Commission approved preliminary site and building plans and final foundation and Phase I dredging plans for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Replacement.

March 1, 2001: The Commission approved preliminary site and building plans for the urban deck overpass at Washington Street; improvements to Jones Point Park in Alexandria, VA; and development of the new Potomac River Waterfront Community Park at Rosalie Island in Prince George's County, Maryland. Elements excepted from this approval were the gateway sentinel elements at Potomac River Waterfront Community Park, which were understood to have been deleted from the project; and the restroom/maintenance buildings at Jones Point Park and Potomac River Waterfront Community Park, which were approved in concept only.

August 2, 2001: The Commission approved final building plans for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Replacement.

November 1, 2001: The Commission approved revised preliminary and final site and building plans for the urban deck overpass at Washington Street in Alexandria, Virginia.

CONSULTATION

FHWA and its consultants have coordinated the submitted final site development plans for the Memorial Medallions with local jurisdictional governments and state agencies. The FHWA continued its coordination efforts with the various stakeholder advisory subcommittees, which provided valued input into the medallion location process. Additionally, in early October 2001,

FHWA met with NCPC staff to review information on the various memorial medallion column designs being considered for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Replacement project.

EVALUATION

The staff recommends approval of the preliminary and final site development plans for the relocation of the Woodrow Wilson Memorial Medallions. The design successfully balances the bridge's monumental aspirations by incorporating the triangular obelisk-like shape into the vocabulary of the span as a counterpoint. Its classical vertical proportion is highlighted by its clean geometry, which differs with the curving forms of the bridge itself. It is this contrast that makes the presence of the element visible to drivers as they speed by with fleeting glimpses. The stark geometry is also a defining statement from a distance, making it apparent that something different is being called-out at the gateway point where land and bridge meet. The thermal finish will prevent brilliant reflections of vehicle headlights, but because of the large crystal black granite, retains a depth of color providing contrast with the large metal medallion.

FHWA's efforts have resulted in a coordinated physical feature identifying the official title of the bridge itself with the medallion and black pylon design. The plans and construction materials are of the highest quality and the architectural detailing contributes to the monumental character of the final medallion placement.



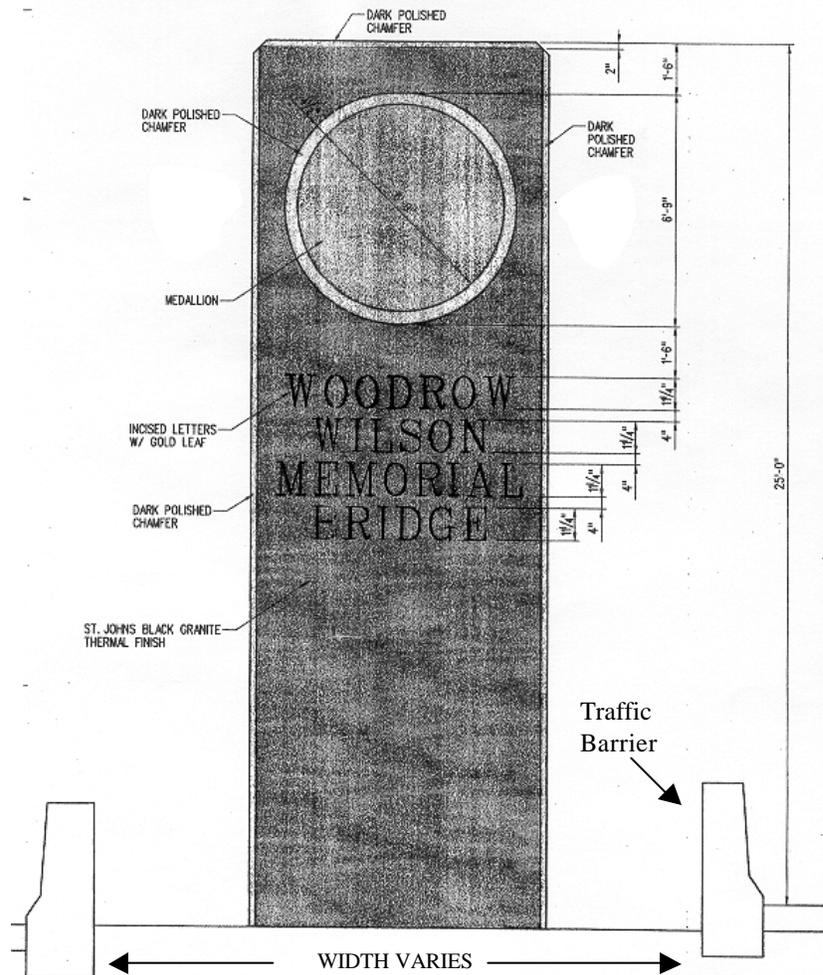
CONFORMANCE

National Historic Preservation Act

A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the proposed Woodrow Wilson Bridge Replacement was signed in October and November of 1997. The signatories were FHWA (the lead agency), NPS, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the State Historic Preservation Offices for Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. The signatories and other parties are continuing to consult on specific aspects of the project as they are developed. The City of Alexandria and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) are continuing to be active participants in review of the project (including those aspects pursuant to the MOA).

The Design Review Working Group (DRWG), composed of the signatories and affected local jurisdictions and chaired by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, meets regularly to review plans developed by the project team and has commented on the medallion relocation.

The future and continuing development of plans for connections through and across Rosalie Island and for the community park are the subjects of ongoing review by representatives of the DRWG from the Maryland Historical Trust, M-NCPPC, and Prince George's County.



**MEMORIAL MEDALLION PYLON
ELEVATION**

National Environmental Policy Act

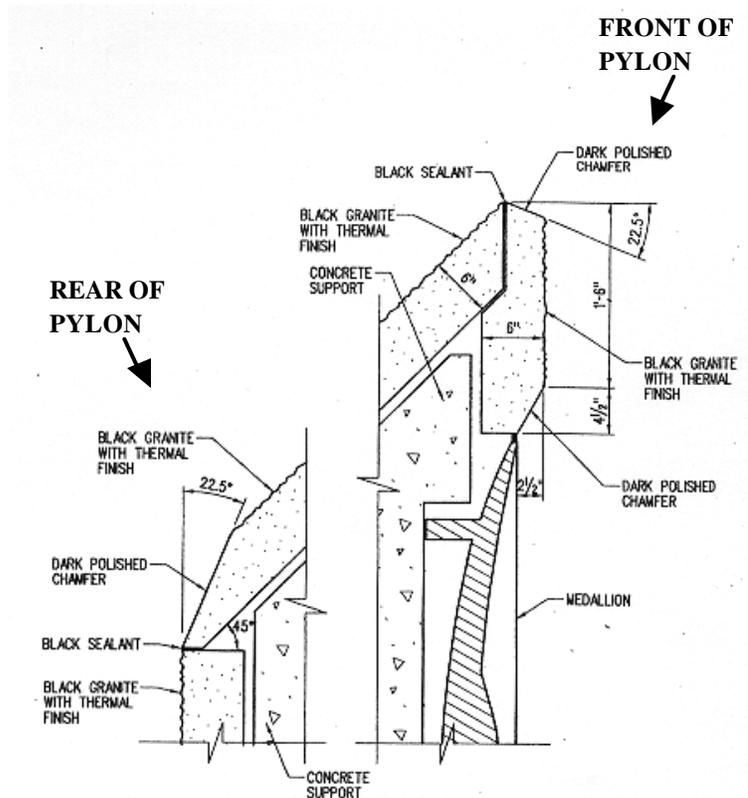
Pursuant to the regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the FHWA prepared a Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS) and Record of Decision for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge project. These documents were prepared in April and June 2000, respectively.

On June 16, 2000, NCPC issued its own FEIS which adopted the FHWA FSEIS relating to NCPC's authority for review and approval of this proposed action. The purpose of the FEIS was to identify potential environmental impacts, as defined by CEQ regulations, resulting from the Woodrow Wilson Bridge project. The FEIS examined alternatives to the proposed action and the impacts of those alternatives. The FEIS also addressed mitigation of adverse resulting effects from the alternatives. NCPC elected to adopt the existing April 2000 FSEIS pursuant to Section 1506.3 of the CEQ regulations. This adoption was accomplished through staff review and approval of the FHWA document. The FEIS was available to the public for review more than thirty days before Commission action.

The submitted preliminary and final memorial medallion site development plans are in conformance with all decisions arrived at and documented in the NEPA process.

Federal Capital Improvements Program

The Woodrow Wilson Bridge Replacement project is included in the Federal Capital Improvements Program Fiscal Years 2002 – 2007, adopted by the Commission on July 3, 2001. The total project cost in the currently identified program is \$2 billion.



**MEDALLION PYLON
ENLARGED TOP VERTICAL
SECTION**

Comprehensive Plan

The proposed relocation of the Memorial Medallions and the revised abutment would minimally affect the Potomac shoreline, floodplain, and wetlands. The policy in the Environment Element of the Comprehensive Plan applicable to these impacts specify:

- If construction in a Floodplain is necessary, (1) the site should be returned as close as possible to its natural contours; (2) Floodplain fill should be minimized; (3) grading requirements should be minimized; and (4) free natural drainage should be preserved.

A policy contained in the Parks, Open Space and Natural Features Element apply to shoreline protection and state:

- Natural shoreline areas in the National Capital Open Space System should be retained in their natural condition or be appropriately landscaped for a distance of 150 to 200 feet from the water's edge, if possible.

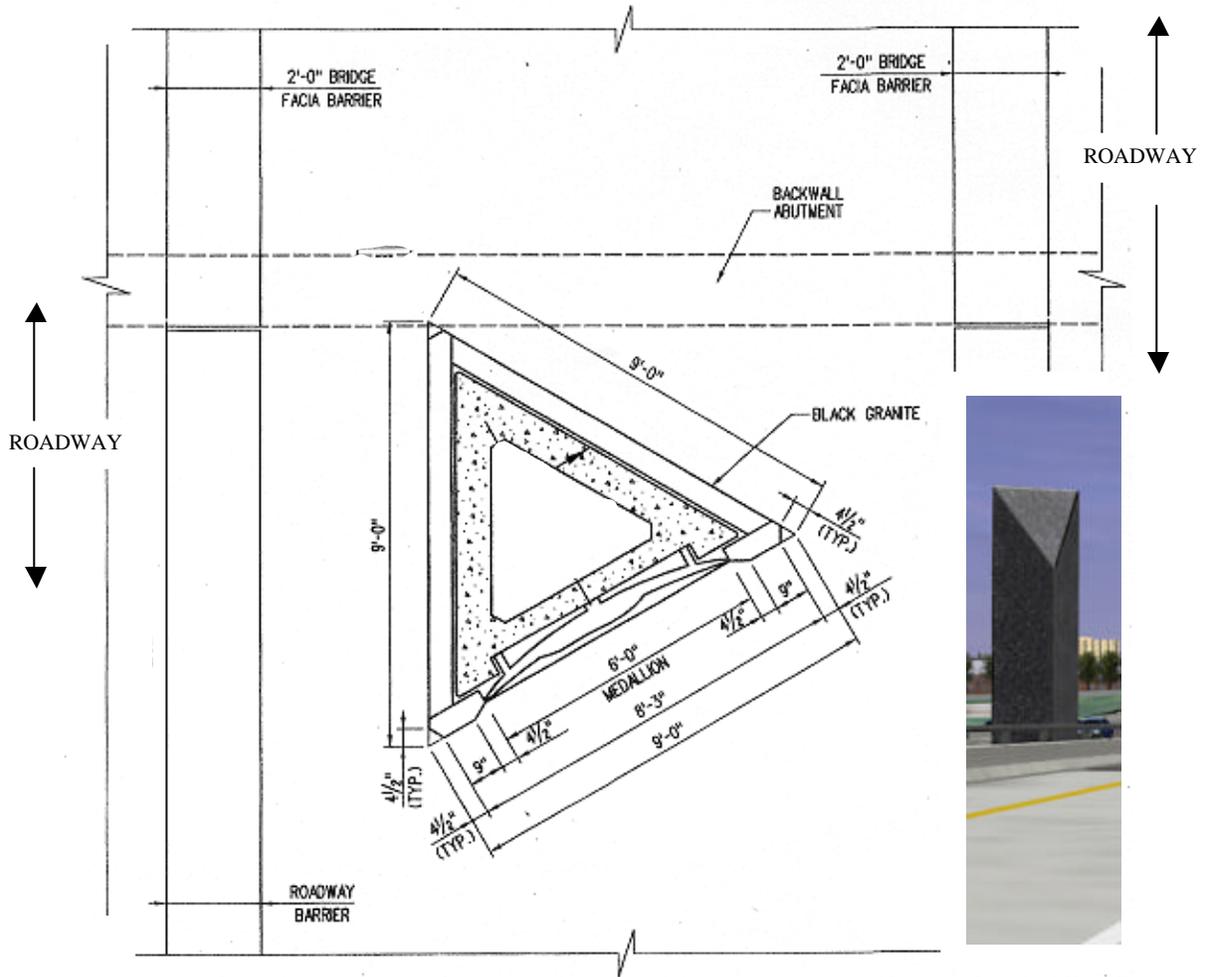
Two additional policies relating to bridge design and the protection and enhancement of Gateways also apply:

- Bridges over rivers and streams should be designed to retain the natural continuity of waterways, shorelines and valleys. Whenever possible, bridges and their approaches should enhance the sense of arrival, gateway or transitional qualities inherent in river crossings.
- Roadways in the Interstate Highway System are important Gateways used by Visitors and should be maintained in a manner which protects and enhances their landscape character and quality, gives attention to scenic views from the road, and provides informative signs to assist Visitors. Advertising signs and bordering development should be carefully controlled to avoid adverse visual impacts.

The medallions' relocation effort involves a historic marker in the Alexandria Historic District. An applicable policy in the Preservation and Historic Features Element specifies:

- New construction on Historic Landmarks or in Historic Districts should be compatible with the historical architectural character and cultural heritage of the landmark or districts. In design, height, proportion, mass, configuration, building materials, texture, color and location, new construction should complement these valuable features of the landmark or district, particularly features in the immediate vicinity to which the new construction will be visually related.

All aspects of the preliminary and final site development plans for the Woodrow Wilson Memorial Medallions demonstrate consistency with the above policies of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital.



**PLAN SECTION VIEW OF MEMORIAL MEDALLION PYLON with
BACK-VIEW INSET**