



**JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS  
KENNDY CENTER EXPANSION CONNECTION PROJECT AND  
TRANSFER OF JURISDICTION**

2700 F Street, NW  
Washington, DC

**June 21, 2016**

Finding of No Significant Impact

Pursuant to Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act, the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR, Parts 1500-1508), and the National Capital Planning Commission's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures, I have evaluated the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (Kennedy Center) pedestrian and bicycle connection between it and the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail; the transfer of jurisdiction of land from the National Park Service (NPS) to the Kennedy Center located in Northwest, Washington, DC, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 23.00(38.00)44371; and the Kennedy Center Expansion Connection Project environmental assessment (EA) prepared by the National Capital Planning Commission and the National Park Service. Based on the foregoing, I have determined that Alternative C and the transfer of jurisdiction will not have a significant impact on the human environment.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed project is to provide a safe pedestrian and bicycle connection between the Kennedy Center and the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail. Further, the project will improve access and create a public waterfront link to and from the Kennedy Center expansion, the Potomac River waterfront, the National Mall, and the surrounding vicinity.

The project is needed because there is no direct access to and from the Kennedy Center to the east, or southeastward to the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail, the National Mall, and the Potomac River. The only pedestrian/bicycle access from the Potomac riverfront to the Kennedy Center is provided by a series of crosswalks across F Street NW and the RCPP, approximately 0.25 miles north of the south parking garage. This lack of a direct and convenient path not only limits visitors' access to both NPS and Kennedy Center amenities, but also creates a disconnect between the Kennedy Center, which is the United States' living memorial to President John F. Kennedy, and those other presidential memorials found within the National Mall. In addition, Theodore Roosevelt Island, which is administered by the George Washington Memorial Parkway park unit of NPS, is located directly across from the Kennedy Center on the western edge of the Potomac River. Creating a more direct and convenient link will benefit visitors to the Kennedy Center, the National Mall, the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail, and the Potomac River waterfront by

providing a convenient and logical pedestrian/bicycle connection and expanded interpretation opportunities of the area's presidential memorials.

### Proposed Action

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (Kennedy Center) is proposing a direct pedestrian and bicycle connection between the Kennedy Center expansion and the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail. The project falls within the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway (RCPP), which is under the jurisdiction of National Mall and Memorial Parks (NAMA), a unit of the National Park System administered by the National Park Service (NPS). The Kennedy Center is requesting special use permits (SUP) from NAMA for construction access from the RCPP and a transfer of jurisdiction of a portion of NPS administered property and certain air rights to the Kennedy Center.

**Alternative C: Bridge Access with Ramp and Stairs** - The Bridge Access with Ramp and Stairs Alternative is the selected alternative and it proposes to connect the Kennedy Center Expansion Project and the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail via a bridge that will span the northbound and southbound lanes of the RCPP and will be accessed from the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail by both a ramp and stairs. The connection will be a steel structure, and the bridge component will measure approximately 9.5-feet wide and be ADA-compliant for use by pedestrians, including persons with disabilities, and also by bicyclists. The Kennedy Center will develop policies for bicycle usage, which will include dismounting and walking bicycles on the bridge and ramp. The Kennedy Center is also considering the installation of a bicycle trough for the stairs that will allow bicyclists to walk their bicycles up and down the stairs. Under this alternative, a section of the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail will be rerouted and three trail spurs will be added to connect the trail with the landing of the stair at the south end of the ramp, the ramp landing, and the landing of the north stair. The trail spurs will provide a transition area where the stairs and ramp meet to provide sufficient space to minimize user conflicts. Small-scale features, including a bench and a bicycle rack, will be added along the trail in the vicinity of the bridge. One tree will be removed for the construction of the ramp, and a replacement tree will be planted near the location of the original.

Pathways are currently under construction for the Kennedy Center Expansion that will connect the Kennedy Center to the I-66/Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge path on the east side of the Kennedy Center and the proposed bridge on the west side of the Kennedy Center. Signage may be incorporated to define the route through the expansion area. The Kennedy Center will develop policies for bicycle usage while pedestrians are present.

**Transfer of Jurisdiction:** The transfer of jurisdiction of land from the National Park Service to the Kennedy Center will only minimally impact the land and will be beneficial to visitors with improved access between the trail network, the National Mall and the Kennedy Center.

### Other Alternatives Evaluated

In addition to the selected alternative described above, the EA analyzed the following alternatives: 1) Alternative A: No Action; 2) Alternative B: At Grade Crossing; 3) Alternative D: Bridge Access with Ramp and Elevator; and 4) Alternative E: River Terrace Access.

**Alternative A: No Action** - this alternative would include the continuation of the existing conditions, operations, and maintenance of the Kennedy Center, including construction of the planned and NCPC-approved Kennedy Center expansion project, which includes three land-based pavilions located south of the existing facility. This alternative also includes the continuation of the existing conditions, operations, and maintenance of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail.

**Alternative B: At Grade Crossing** - Alternative B would provide an at-grade street crossing of RCPP from the Kennedy Center to the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail (pursuant to Public Law 107-224) that would traverse the northbound and southbound lanes of the RCPP. A crosswalk would be provided that would allow pedestrians and bicycles to cross the RCPP safely. Under this alternative, the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail would remain in its current location, and no trees would be removed or relocated. Two trail spurs would be added to connect the at-grade crossing with the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail. Small-scale features, including a bench and a bicycle rack, would be added along the trail in the vicinity of the crossing. Because the slope of the land between the RCPP and the Kennedy Center expansion area is too steep and too narrow to accommodate an accessible ramp on the east side of the RCPP, bicyclists would be required to go through the Kennedy Center parking garage to make the connection to the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail. Bicyclists would enter the parking garage along the east side of the Kennedy Center either from the existing pedestrian/bicycle route that parallels 25th Street NW or from the expansion area. Once entering the garage, bicyclists would continue through the garage to connect with the at-grade crossing at the RCPP. Under this alternative there would be no dedicated bicycle route through the garage due to space limitations. Appropriate signage, including painted markings on floor of the garage, would be used to inform motorists of the shared use of the garage with bicyclists. The portion of the parking garage that would be utilized by bicyclists would be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Pedestrians would be able to use the elevator in the River Pavilion during performances to access the at-grade crossing. At other times pedestrians would utilize the parking garage to gain access to the at-grade connection.

Alternative B was not selected because it would not provide as safe an access as the selected alternative.

**Alternative D: Bridge Access with Ramp and Elevator** – The Bridge Access with Ramp and Elevator Alternative proposes to connect the Kennedy Center Expansion Project and the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail via a bridge that would span the northbound and southbound lanes of the RCPP and would be accessed from the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail by both a ramp and an elevator. The connection would be a steel structure, and the bridge component would measure approximately 11-feet wide and be ADA-compliant for use by pedestrians, including persons with disabilities, and also by bicyclists. Under this alternative, a section of the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail would be rerouted and three trail spurs would be added to connect the trail with the landing of the stair at the south end of the ramp, the ramp landing, and the elevator threshold. The trail spurs would provide a transition area where the stairs and ramp meet to provide sufficient space to minimize user conflicts. The Kennedy Center would develop policies for bicycle usage on the bridge and ramps, which would include dismounting and walking bicycles on the bridge and ramp. The Kennedy Center is also considering the installation of a bicycle trough for the stairs that would allow bicyclists to walk their bicycles up and down the stairs. Small-scale

features, including a bench and a bicycle rack, would be added along the trail in the vicinity of the bridge. One tree would be removed for the construction of the ramp, and a replacement tree would be planted near the location of the original.

Pathways are currently under construction for the Kennedy Center Expansion that would connect the Kennedy Center to the I-66/Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge path on the east side of the Kennedy Center and the proposed bridge on the west side of the Kennedy Center. Signage may be incorporated to define the route through the expansion area. The Kennedy Center would develop policies for bicycle usage while pedestrians are present.

Alternative D was not chosen because the elevator would create a greater visual intrusion to and from the Kennedy Center.

**Alternative E: River Terrace Access** - Alternative E includes a pair of curved staircases with integrated elevators that would provide pedestrian and bicycle access from the Kennedy Center to the Potomac riverfront. Portions of the existing terrace wall and planter structure would be removed and 20-foot wide platforms would be constructed to extend approximately 16 feet over the southbound lanes of the RCPP. Each platform would be centered on the existing terrace fountains and the entrances to the Hall of Nations and the Hall of States and connect to a staircase and hydraulic elevator. At the bottom of the stairs and elevator structures, a landscaped plaza of approximately 13,100 square feet would be constructed of asphalt, concrete, or pavers. The plaza would provide unimpeded accessibility to the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail and the Potomac riverfront. In order to alert Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail users to the plaza approach, the segment of trail in front of the Kennedy Center would be resurfaced with a material unique from the surrounding trail and the new plaza. Alternative E would not provide dedicated bicycle access through the Kennedy Center, but a pedestrian/bicycle path would be created through the expansion area on the south end of the Kennedy Center and would connect with the terrace. The Kennedy Center would develop policies for bicycle usage on the terrace, which would include dismounting and walking bicycles across the terrace. The Kennedy Center is also considering the installation of a bicycle trough that would allow bicyclists to walk their bicycles up and down the stairs. Bicyclists could also utilize the proposed elevator in order to access the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail.

Signage may also be incorporated to further alert trail users to the approaching plaza. A new landscape design would include plantings that would enhance the appearance of the plaza and blend in with surrounding vegetation. With the implementation of Alternative E, the majority of construction activities and the location of permanent structures would be within the 32-foot clear space between the RCPP and the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail.

Alternative E was not selected because this alternative would be more impactful to historic resources, as it is the only alternative to physically alter the Kennedy Center itself and alter views and vistas to and from the Kennedy Center.

#### Standard for evaluation

Under NEPA, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations, and NCPC Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures, an EA is sufficient and an

Environmental Impact Statement need not be prepared if the EA supports the finding that the major federal action will not significantly affect the human environment. The EA for this project was prepared in accordance with this standard.

### Potential Impacts

Floodplains, cultural resources, traffic and transportation and visitor use will experience adverse impacts as a result of the preferred alternative. However, no significant impacts were identified that will require analysis in an EIS. Mitigation to address impacts on affected resources is summarized as follows:

Floodplains: The preferred alternative will result in short-term and long-term negligible adverse impacts to floodplains due to ground disturbance during construction and placement of the ramp and bridge supports on the floodplain. Issuance of a SUP by NPS for construction access to implement the selected alternative may result in non-measurable adverse impacts to floodplains due to ground disturbance and vegetation removal during construction. NPS prepared a Floodplain Statement of Findings (SOF) pursuant to NPS Director's Order 77-2: Floodplain Management. Based upon the findings in the SOF, the selected alternative will create additional obstructions within the floodplain; however, the obstructions will not noticeably impact the water surface level during a flood event. A slight decrease in the capacity of the floodplain to store floodwaters will occur, as well as a slight decrease in infiltration. However, due to the limited capacity of the floodplain in its current condition, these alterations will not result in a measurable adverse impact. The addition of structures under the selected alternative will result in very little change to the ability of the floodplain to convey floodwaters and will not contribute to flooding. The selected alternative will not increase the risk associated with flooding for the 100-year event.

Cultural Resources: Numerous cultural resources are located within the project area or adjacent to it and have been included in the defined Area of Potential Effects (APE), ranging from cultural landscapes, individually listed historic structure and buildings, historic sites, and historic districts. Four cultural landscapes, three historic buildings and structures, one historic site, and four historic districts are within the official APE, all of which are enumerated in Chapter Three of the EA. The selected alternative, including the transfer of jurisdiction and certain air rights, will result in adverse impacts to cultural resources within the APE. Under the selected alternative, the pedestrian/bicycle connection will interrupt existing panoramic views from the South and West Terraces of the Kennedy Center. The pedestrian/bicycle connection will have an adverse impact on certain contributing resources of the RCPP, including the roadway and the network of trails. The pedestrian/bicycle connection will also block panoramic views of the Potomac River and Theodore Roosevelt Island from sections of the RCPP and trail.

The selected alternative will visually interrupt views and vistas of some of the historic properties. The selected alternative will minimally interrupt the 360-degree panoramic view from the Kennedy Center's Roof Terrace. The bridge and ramp will interrupt and distract from existing views of the Potomac River and Theodore Roosevelt Island from the RCPP and the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail. The bridge and ramp will also be minimally visible from the west end of the Arlington Memorial Bridge. The trail spurs and re-routing of the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail will change the Network of Trails, which is a contributing element of the RCPP. Through consultation, the pedestrian/bicycle access between the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail and

the Expansion Project has been adjusted to minimize potential effects on historic properties, and entails:

- removal of all translucent glass rails and refinement of the cable rails,
- removal of the north stairs, and
- refinement of the night lighting.

NCPC and NPS have coordinated the findings of the EA with the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Office (DC SHPO) and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR) in accordance with Section 106 of the NHPA through the preparation of an Assessment of Effects report. To mitigate the adverse effect, the Kennedy Center, NCPC and NPS have developed an MOA with stakeholders to further identify mitigation appropriate for the project. The agreed upon mitigation is for the Kennedy Center to provide \$45,000 to NPS that will be used to develop a cultural landscape report for this portion of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. The MOA was signed on June 17, 2016.

Issuance of a permit by NPS for temporary construction access will have visual adverse impacts to RCPP, however, once construction is complete, the area will be restored to its original condition.

Traffic and Transportation: The selected alternative will result in short-term adverse impacts to traffic and transportation because of construction-related delays to build the pedestrian/bicycle connection. However, the selected alternative would increase long-term pedestrian and bicycle connectivity without impacting vehicular traffic on the RCPP. The bridge would minimize the conflict between pedestrians/bicyclists and vehicles. These enhancements would outweigh the short-term adverse impacts that would occur to the transportation network during construction.

Visitor Use and Experience: The overall visitor experience will be enhanced because a new direct connection between the Kennedy Center, the National Mall, the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail, and the Potomac River waterfront will be created. The selected alternative will provide a safer and enhanced visitor experience. These enhancements will outweigh the short-term adverse impacts that will occur to visitors during construction.

*//Original Signed//*

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Marcel C. Acosta  
Executive Director