

Conclusions

From its inception, the Kennedy Center has struggled to develop a physical setting befitting its mission. Compromises made in the early 1960's to accommodate the Inner Loop Freeway and lower building costs have created access and safety problems that affect the millions of visitors and patrons who enjoy the Center's rich offerings.

In the past year, an extensive effort has been undertaken to identify ways to overcome these problems. This report has identified and described potential improvements, estimated their costs, and identified an approach for implementing them, should they be pursued.

The concepts presented in this report have many advantages and their potential contribution to the landscape of the District's West End is compelling. Yet they must be considered in a realistic light. The plaza over the Potomac Freeway, first brought to attention in the National Capital Planning Commission's Legacy Plan (1997), is a costly proposition. Furthermore, care must be taken in its design to ensure that it does not become a magnet for urban woes in an empty and unattractive landscape. But the strong design review process and intense interest, demonstrated by stakeholders and the surrounding community during the past year, should ensure that design concerns are adequately addressed. The plaza is central to integrating the Center with its surroundings and creating safe pedestrian, bicycle, transit, and automobile ties.



Additional traffic safety and congestion issues would be addressed by improvements to intersections with the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway north and south of the Center. For safety reasons, these less costly improvements merit implementation as soon as possible. They would markedly reduce congestion around the Center near performance times.

The center sector improvements would also vastly improve the safety and enjoyment of those who walk and bicycle in the vicinity. Steps from the Center's terrace to the riverfront would restore an important aspect of the building's original design and create a new entrance to the memorial. Sidewalks from the plaza would provide connections to the Mall and surrounding areas, which would redress unsafe makeshift paths across an Interstate highway.



The design concepts presented by this study offer a rare opportunity to create a vibrant space in the heart of the District's Monumental Core. With proper care and oversight, they can transform the area, eliminate many undesirable conditions, improve public safety, and enhance our nation's commitment to the performing arts.