

May 2025

Georgia Capitol

Environmental Effects Report

Proposed Pedestrian Bridge Connecting Historic Capitol to new Legislative Office Building

Introduction

The proposed project at the Georgia State Capitol building, the pedestrian bridge connecting the historic Capitol to the new Legislative Office Building, will result in visual and physical changes to the historic building and site. The State Capitol Building is one of the most recognized and important buildings in the state. Any proposed changes to the building are of great importance to the public. This document provides a review of the proposed project to construct a pedestrian bridge between the historic Capitol building and a new Legislative Office Building under construction on the north side of Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive utilizing the regulatory framework that is applicable to a public project of this type.

Regulatory Framework

Environmental Policy in the Georgia Code is covered under Title 12: Chapter 16: Article 1. The Legislative Findings state that “State agencies should conduct their affairs with an awareness that they are stewards of the air, land, water, plants, animals, and environmental, **historical and cultural resources.**” Projects which may adversely effect the quality of the environment require the preparation of an Environmental Effects Report which includes, but is not limited to, a discussion of:

- 1) The environmental impact of the proposed governmental action;
- 2) Alternatives to the proposed governmental action;
- 3) Any adverse environmental effects which cannot be avoided if the proposed governmental action is undertaken;
- 4) Mitigation measures proposed to avoid or minimize the adverse impact of the proposed governmental action;
- 5) The relationship between the value of the short-term uses of the environment involved in the proposed governmental action and the maintenance and enhancement of its long-term value;
- 6) The effect of the proposed governmental action on the quality and quantity of water supply;
- 7) The effect of the proposed governmental action on energy use or energy production; and
- 8) Any beneficial aspects of the proposed governmental action, both short-term and long-term, and its economic advantages and disadvantages.

Project Description

The proposed project is to construct an enclosed pedestrian bridge connecting the historic Georgia Capitol Building with a new Legislative Office Building (LOB) to be constructed to the north of the Capitol, across Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive. The new LOB will house offices and meeting space for the State Legislature and provide space for Legislators to meet with constituents and members of the public. The proposed pedestrian bridge will be one level above grade as it crosses MLK, Jr. Drive, connecting to the Capitol on the third level, the location of the historic chambers and other key meeting spaces. The pedestrian bridge will provide a safe and secure connector between the buildings, provide efficiency in the daily work of State government, and allow for some functions to be removed from historic areas of the State Capitol.

Environmental Setting

The location of the proposed project includes historic Capitol Square and the surrounding urban landscape. Capitol Square is located in the downtown Atlanta neighborhood, occupying an entire city block bounded by Washington Street SW, MLK Jr. Drive, Piedmont Avenue SE, and Capitol Square SW.

The Georgia State Capitol Building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on 13 May 1970. The designation includes the Capitol Building and all of Capitol Square. On 17 November 1973 the Capitol Building itself was identified as a National Historic Landmark, the highest designation for a historic property in the United States.

The Area of Potential Effect (APE) for this project includes all of Capitol Square and the streetscape surrounding the square.

Environmental Effects of the Proposed Action

The nomination forms for the Georgia State Capitol building to both the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and the National Historic Landmark (NHL) programs, completed in 1970, include limited specific detail identifying the reasons that the Georgia Capitol Building should be listed. Section 8 of the NRHP form includes a list of possible “Areas of Significance” for a nominee, of which six are identified for the Capitol building:

- Architecture
- Education
- Landscape Architecture
- Political
- History
- State Capitol

NRHP application forms developed in the years after the Capitol Building was listed identify four categories for evaluation that would potentially make a building or site eligible for listing on the National Register:

- A. Association with significant events
- B. Association with significant persons
- C. Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction
- D. Have or may yield important information in prehistory or history

The Capitol Building is clearly eligible under the first three. This assessment will focus on the third, which addresses the design, massing, and materials of the building. The character defining features of the building exterior include:

- The freestanding massing of the building, separated from surrounding buildings by the open space of Capitol Square and public streets on all four sides.
- The generally symmetrical massing of the building around the East-West axis.
- Unobstructed views of all four facades.
- Access at all four facades, although the primary entry at the West façade is clearly identified with monumental stairs and a pedimented portico.
- The classical detailing of the exterior limestone with a two-level rusticated base topped by a two-story upper section that is decorated with a monumental order of pilasters and columns, supporting a full entablature.
- The north façade of the building, facing MLK, Jr. Drive, is composed of a central five-bay section with arched windows which demarcate the multi-story volume of the historic State Library. The arched windows are flanked by monumental, Composite order pilasters. This central section is flanked by two, three-bay components which are slightly recessed from the central section. Each bay in these end components includes two punched windows. The windows in the two end bays are flanked by monumental pilasters matching the central section of the façade.

Adverse Environmental Effects and Mitigation Measures

Assessment of Adverse Effects

An adverse effect is defined in Section 106 of the NHPA.

An adverse effect is found when an undertaking may alter, directly or indirectly, any of the characteristics of a historic property that qualify the property for inclusion in the National Register in a manner that would diminish the integrity of the property's location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, or association.

The design action under review in this analysis is the proposed pedestrian bridge connection linking the Capitol Building to the new Legislative Office Building (LOB) located on the north side of Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive. A pedestrian link between the two buildings is critical for the safe, secure, and efficient

operations of the Georgia state government. The new LOB will include office space for the legislators, committee meeting rooms, and support spaces. As legislators, executive branch members, staff, and the public move back and forth from the Capitol to the LOB it is critical that the pathway be safe, secure, and as efficient as possible. Construction of the LOB will also result in the relocation of functions in the Capitol providing the opportunity to reclaim the historic State Library space.

The preferred option, the pedestrian bridge, was selected as best resolving the need to create a safe and secure connection between the two buildings for use by the Legislators, Executive Branch, staff and the public. The pedestrian bridge will connect the third floor of the Capitol with the third floor of the LOB. The third floor of the Capitol is the level of the historic Senate and House Chambers and the space that was historically occupied by the State Library.

This design action will have an adverse effect on the historic property for the following reasons:

- The bridge alters the freestanding condition of the Capitol Building.
- The bridge will partially obstruct the view of the north façade.
- The Capitol's symmetrical layout when viewing the primary West façade is compromised.

Connecting the bridge to the Capitol Building will require removal of historic building fabric including windows and limestone.

Resolution of Adverse Effects

The resolution process looks to develop and evaluate alternatives or modifications to the undertaking that could **avoid, minimize, or mitigate** adverse effects on the historic property.

Avoidance

Avoidance was evaluated during the Preliminary Design process by studying two options, a tunnel, and an upgraded crosswalk, which would have eliminated or significantly reduced the physical and visual impact of the connector. As outlined above, the bridge was identified as the preferred option because it provided a safe and secure connection, avoided potential subsurface construction issues, and connected the buildings at an optimal third floor location.

Minimization

Minimization of the effect of the new bridge includes:

- The bridge will connect to the Capitol at the window openings located between the central part of the elevation and the end bay at the north end of the façade. The width of the bridge has been developed to provide the space required to accommodate pedestrian flow between the buildings and minimize the impact to decorative stone elements on the façade.
- The visual impact of the bridge when viewing the primary (west) façade of the building is reduced by connecting to the Capitol away from the northeast corner of the north façade.
- The design limits the removal of historic building fabric as much as possible. The connection will require the removal of two wood windows. The floor of the bridge will align with the third floor

of the Capitol requiring removal of the masonry knee wall under each of the windows. The area of masonry that will be removed at each window is approximately 3 feet high and 6 feet wide.

- The floor, walls, and roof of the bridge will be connected to the historic building around the window openings. This will require connections at both flat masonry and decorative moldings. Wherever possible the historic material will be left in place and the new construction developed to accommodate the profiles. Where historic limestone must be removed to create a sound and waterproof connection the historic material will be carefully removed, salvaged, and stored for future use if the bridge is removed and the exterior wall restored.
- While the exterior walls of the Capitol are mass, load-bearing masonry, placing the full weight of the bridge on the historic masonry would require structural modifications to the historic construction. A freestanding pier will support the bridge avoiding structural changes to the historic masonry construction. The concrete pier will be located approximately 9'-0" away from the north façade of the Capitol and clad in limestone panels matching the stone of the Capitol. The pier is approximately 5'-0" wide and 3'-6" deep. The width matches the spacing of the windows in the ground floor of the Capitol, avoiding obstructing views from these windows.
- The cladding of the bridge is primarily glass, with some opaque panels fabricated from a lightweight material with an exterior surface finished to visually blend with the limestone of the Capitol. The panels will have a textured finish and will be colored with the historic limestone used as the model. Blind reveal joints on the panels will also be utilized to mimic the masonry joints in the adjacent limestone. Similar panels have been utilized on the repair and restoration of historic buildings to replace damaged or lost elements.
- The new construction is reversible. If at a future date the bridge connection is no longer required, it can be removed and the impacted window openings restored to the historic condition.

Mitigation

- The building will be fully documented using laser scanning technology prior to the start of construction and a record of this documentation will be placed in the State archives.
- Photographic and drawing documentation will be gathered where historic material is removed. This information will be assembled in a report and placed in the State archives for potential use in the future the window opening is restored.
- The construction of the new LOB and the pedestrian bridge connection facilitate the relocation of functions and staff from the Capitol to the LOB. This will allow for restoration of the historic State Library, located on the north side of the third floor of the Capitol, at the location where the pedestrian bridge will intersect the historic Capitol building. Starting in the 1950s the historic library space has been subdivided into numerous small office spaces with added mezzanine levels. The reclaimed State Library will serve as the entry point to the Capitol for visitors and staff arriving from the new Legislative Office Building.

Alternatives to the Proposed Action

During the preliminary design process three options for connecting the two buildings were studied. The options are outlined in the *Capitol/ CLOB Space Utilization Assessment* report dated January 15, 2024.

- Upgraded grade crosswalks
- A tunnel under the street
- A bridge elevated over MLK, Jr. Drive

Pedestrian traffic at grade between the Capitol and the new LOB would cross Martin Luther King, Jr., Drive, a primary vehicular link between the nearby interstate highways and downtown. MLK, Jr. Drive is signaled at Piedmont Avenue to the east and Washington Street to the west. The direct path between the Capitol and the LOB would be mid-block, crossing a heavily trafficked roadway posing significant safety concerns for staff and visitors as well as accessibility challenges. This option would also require staff and visitors to exit one secure building, walk outside through an unsecured area, and enter a separate secure building, posing security and screening challenges. At present the secure, accessible public entrance to the Capitol is on the south side of the building, the opposite side from MLK Jr. Drive. The efficiency of this option is poor, requiring visitors to go through security protocols multiple times during a single visit.

A tunnel connecting the buildings under MLK, Jr. Drive would connect the buildings at or below the basement level. The tunnel would encounter buried utilities under the road and adjacent to the Capitol, requiring the tunnel to be designed to avoid the utilities or for the utilities to be relocated. The exterior walls of the historic Capitol are very thick, load bearing masonry construction. The tunnel would either need to be constructed deep enough to go under the foundations or the foundations modified to allow the tunnel to pass through. Past excavations around the Capitol have also encountered subsurface rock formations. Inside the buildings multiple elevators would be required to efficiently connect the tunnel to the assembly levels of the buildings, primarily the third floors. In addition to the additional cost for these elevators the insertion of these elements in the Capitol would impact program space including offices and require the removal of multiple floors of historic material.

Benefit Statement

The primary benefit of the proposed action, construction of the pedestrian bridge connecting the historic State Capitol and the new Legislative Office Building will be to create a safe and secure connection between two buildings that will house the critical functions of the state legislature and executive branches. This connection will maximize the efficiency of the day-to-day operations of the state government, particularly when the state legislature is in session.

A secondary benefit of the proposed action is the relocation of program from historic spaces in the State Capitol to the new LOB. This relocation creates the opportunity to reclaim the historic State Library, located on the third and fourth floors on the north side of the Capitol. This monumental space, comparable decoratively to the House and Senate Chambers, was lost starting in the 1950s after the State Library was relocated and the space assigned to new uses. This resulted in the space being subdivided into smaller spaces. The project will remove all of the infill construction, preserve surviving decorative features, and restore missing elements.

Other Issues

The proposed pedestrian bridge will have no impact on the quality and quantity of water supply and will have no impact on energy use or energy production.