

BOSTON CIVIC DESIGN COMMISSION

GUIDELINES FOR PEDESTRIAN BRIDGES BETWEEN BUILDINGS

I. GENERAL STATEMENT

Pedestrian bridges above streets are rarely acceptable in Boston because they take activity and vitality away from the street, create shadows, block views, reduce ambient light and privatize the public space. The area above streets is a public resource that should not be appropriated for public use. In the past, the BCDC has never approved proposals for pedestrian bridges over major streets. It is unlikely that so strong a case could be made in the future as to cause a change in this precedent.

II. SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

A. PROGRAMMATIC FUNCTION

1. Bridges are acceptable: *only* when they accommodate crucial and necessary pedestrian movement that cannot be handled at grade or below grade, for example, the movement of hospital in-patients from bedrooms to operating rooms; and *only* when their use does not diminish the current or potential level of pedestrian activity in the public realm, including the sidewalks and pedestrian-oriented retail and other uses in the vicinity. They are not acceptable when they are intended for convenience or administrative reasons or when they would divert pedestrian traffic that would normally occur on the street.
2. Bridges may be acceptable when they are used to resolve conflicts between pedestrian and vehicular movement that are unusually serious or life-threatening and *cannot* be resolved in any other way.
3. Bridges may be acceptable where they provide accessibility for physically challenged people that cannot be provided in another way.
4. Bridges or bridge-like extensions may be acceptable when there is a *quid pro quo*: the removal of a bridge from a more significant location than the one proposed, and the provision of public benefits which add more activity to the street than the bridge or building extension takes away.

B. LOCATION

The BCDC will address the issue of bridge location only after determining that a bridge connection is, in fact, justified for programmatic and functional reasons. Then bridges may be acceptable:

1. above alleys in certain circumstances,
2. above secondary streets under extraordinary circumstances, but
3. not over wide streets, parks or streets of civic importance.

The Commission also discourages networks of bridges connecting multiple buildings.

C. DESIGN

Pedestrian bridges that are acceptable because of their function and location must conform to specific design criteria. To be deemed acceptable, a pedestrian bridge should:

1. be not more than one level high to minimize visual impacts;
2. be located high above the street (at least 40 feet) also to minimize visual impacts;
3. be located as far as possible from intersecting streets or an intersection;
4. be level as it crosses the street;
5. meet the building walls at right angles in section and plan, where applicable, to reinforce the street grid and existing significant (i.e., orthogonal in a standard grid) relationship of streets and buildings;
6. be composed, whether a bridge or a building extension, to be clearly expressive of these criteria while also being expressive of its own nature, and exert by its own existence a positive contribution to the public domain;
7. not interrupt significant views and vistas;
8. have no negative impacts on historic resources;
9. not appear to divide residential communities;
10. not appear to privatize public space;
11. be as narrow as possible to accommodate pedestrian passage only and not other uses, except as vital to public program functions;
12. have the minimum amount of structure below the bridge or extension;
13. not infringe upon sidewalks below or adjacent to the bridge;
14. be expressed architecturally as a bridge or span, not merely a building occupying space in the sky and, by extension, the street below, to clearly delineate the element as not being private but part of the public realm;
15. be as transparent as possible;
16. be attractively designed on the visible undersurface;
17. be well lit so as not to darken or lessen the pedestrian experience of passing below, day or night;
18. be accompanied by public realm improvements (both in programming and in physical betterments) which not only mitigate against any negative effects, but also contribute strongly to the creation of an animated, engaging public streetscape;
19. have *no* negative impact on the desirability, activity, safety, or convenience of the street-level pedestrian environment, and,
20. avoid the use of heavy, opaque or dark materials like masonry or tinted glass.