

REHABILITATION PROJECT

T P S REVIEW

Pedestrian Bridges

The Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings recommend locating new additions so that character defining features are not obscured, damaged, or destroyed.

Pedestrian bridges, skywalks, or pedways between buildings are recent features in some downtown areas. They are constructed because of certain perceived advantages: they place the pedestrian above the automobile traffic in the street and provide protection from inclement weather. At the same time, they pose certain very real problems to historic buildings and districts that must be considered in the review of Historic Preservation Certification Applications.

Preservation Issues

Pedestrian bridges are inappropriate and incompatible attachments to significant elevations of certified historic structures. By floating above the street (and sometimes over other historic buildings), and by intersecting building facades, pedestrian bridges are dramatic and conspicuous additions to historic buildings and historic districts, because they obstruct the traditional views of the building and streetscape. They also frequently cause the destruction of significant historic fabric.

Even if pedestrian bridges are located on secondary elevations and are attached in ways that minimize loss of historic fabric, generally they are not consistent with the historic character of certified historic structures or registered historic districts. Moreover, insertion of pedestrian bridges into upper floors of historic buildings can also reorder interior plans and significant interior spaces, when primary access to the building is transferred away from the ground floor.

Administrative Issues

Although a pedestrian bridge may, in some cases, extend outside the historic district or in other cases, be conceived, constructed or financed by a second party, it is usually within the scope of National Park Service review as Department of the Interior regulations state in 36 CFR Part 67.6(b): "A rehabilitation project for certification purposes encompasses all work on the interior and exterior of the certified historic structures(s) and its setting and environment, as determined by the Secretary, as well as related demolition, new construction or rehabilitation work which may affect the historic qualities, integrity or site, landscape features, and environment of the certified historic structures(s)."

Similarly, State or local agreements or mandates requiring the construction of pedestrian bridges do not normally have bearing on the NPS scope of review. Such agreements are similar in effect to a State or local regulation or code; Department of the Interior regulations state that the Secretary's Standards for Rehabilitation take precedence over other regulations and codes in determining whether the rehabilitation project is consistent with the historic character of the property and, where applicable, the district in which it is located. 36 CFR 67(d).

An exception would be a pedestrian bridge clearly constructed prior to the development of rehabilitation plans for the certified historic structure; in cases of pre-existing bridges, the scope of review does not extend to the impact of the bridge on the historic structure.

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