



America 250 – Colorado 150 Commission

May 12, 2025

Sent via email: katie.roach@state.co.us

Re: Proposed Lincoln Street Overpass

Dear Commissioners,

Historic Denver supports the efforts to commemorate Colorado's 150th and the nation's 250th anniversaries, marking a unique moment in our state and nation's history. Since 1970, for over one-third of our state's existence, Historic Denver has worked to promote and protect Denver's historic places and the stories they tell. During that time, our efforts have saved many of Denver's irreplaceable cultural touchpoints, including the former home of Margaret "Molly" Brown, the 9th Street Historic Park on Auraria Campus, the former home of Dr. Justina Ford and, most recently, 1962 Market St., site of famed jazz bar El Chapultepec. We welcome change and believe that with sympathetic design and under the right circumstances, preservation and progress go hand in hand.

It is in this spirit, and on behalf of the organization's board of trustees, that I must write to you about Historic Denver's opposition to the proposal to create a raised walkway across Lincoln Street. We urge the Commission to consider alternative commemorative interventions — interpretive art, temporary installations, and at-grade enhancements to pedestrian, cyclist, and vehicle safety — that honor Colorado's history without altering one of its most symbolic civic spaces.

Our opposition is based on the points set out below, with key phrases of quotations emphasized in bold:

1. There are many locations where a curving and architecturally innovative bridge may be appropriate. Glossy brochures of tourist resorts often feature images of elevated walkways meandering through forest canopies, allowing visitors to admire impressive rainforest settings. Likewise, many zoological parks across the country include curving walkways designed to allow visitors the opportunity to appreciate the animals below. These settings are quite different from the formal urban composition of Civic Center Park, Veteran's Memorial Park, and the grounds of the State Capitol – collectively known as Denver Civic Center Historic District.
2. History Colorado describes the Historic District as an "American expression of Beaux-Arts classicism derived from historic motifs of ancient Greek and Roman architecture as translated by architects trained at the influential École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. **Other attributes of the style include order, balance, symmetry, axial site planning, the juxtaposition of art and architecture, and logical progression through spaces.**" The proposed structure contradicts these principles, and we do not believe the design is compatible with key attributes of the Historic District.
3. The Civic Center, including the Capitol grounds and Veterans Memorial Park, was designated as a National Historic Landmark by the U.S. Department of the Interior in 2012, and the [approved description](#) of the National Historic Landmark states the following:
 - a. "Despite its lengthy evolution, the center reflects a continuum of progressive thought about civic betterment, regional character, and public architecture, **while stylistically adhering to overriding principles of formal order, symmetrical balance, and neoclassical expression.**" The sinuous nature

of the proposed overpass is incompatible with the design of the park as it has evolved over the past 135 years.

- b. Of the grounds of the State Capitol, the federally approved description notes that “Set high on the hill facing the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains, the west front of the statehouse was developed as the primary elevation and today provides spectacular views over the city to the mountain peaks beyond. Schuetze designed the grounds on the west side as open terraces and sloping lawns that would **allow stately views of the State Capitol from various points in the city while at the same time providing open vistas towards the Front Range.**” Images of the proposed raised walkway clearly illustrate that views of the State Capitol will be irrevocably changed and obscured from prominent vantage points.
 - c. Of Lincoln Park, now Veterans Memorial Park, the description notes that “In 1895 at the same time he was designing the Capitol grounds, Reinhard Schuetze was making plans for a public park on the block directly west. **This enabled him to envision a design that would spatially and visually extend the Capitol grounds beyond the base of the hill.**” The proposed overpass does not support this visual and spatial connectivity, rather it asserts a dominant presence that disrupts overall continuity.
4. Adopted by the City and County of Denver in 2009, the document “[Denver’s Civic Center Design Guidelines](#)” includes the grounds of the State Capitol and Veterans Memorial Park within the “Area of Influence.” The document describes the following:
- a. “The Park’s iconic ensemble of neoclassical architecture and its formal alignment along primary and secondary axes are key characteristics of Beaux Arts design. Height limitations, preservation of the grand view of Colorado’s Front Range and the careful balance of open space and structure **also reflect the Movement’s commitment to proportion, harmony, symmetry and scale.**” The proposed raised walkway is not in keeping with these defining characteristics of Civic Center Park.
 - b. Section V-b1-2 provides the guideline “**Ensure new improvements are compatible with the Park’s architectural and historical significance.**” The sinuous and asymmetrical nature of the proposed overpass is at odds with the formality and symmetry of the grounds of the State Capitol and Veterans Memorial Park and is not compatible with Civic Center’s architectural and historical significance.
 - c. Figure 6 on page 21 illustrates key pedestrian routes across Lincoln Street and Broadway at Colfax Avenue, 14th Avenue, and at the foot of the State Capitol western steps. Section V-b2 Standard 1 notes: “Respect Civic Center’s Beaux Arts composition by **improving and strengthening those pedestrian routes that support and define this composition.**” This is reiterated in Standard 2 and 4. The curving raised walkway does not respect the Beaux Arts composition and actively works against this established precedent.
 - d. Figure 7 on page 23 illustrates key areas of pedestrian connectivity at street-level intersections. Section V-b3 Guideline 1 notes: “Encourage the development of pedestrian-oriented streets on streets adjacent to Civic Center. These streets are Colfax Avenue, 14th Avenue and Bannock Street, as illustrated in medium blue on the Diagram. **Lincoln and Broadway should also be pedestrian friendly streets, illustrated in light blue on the Diagram.**” Creating a raised pedestrian walkway over Lincoln Street will not support the creation of a pedestrian-oriented street; rather, the concept of vertically separating pedestrians that came to prominence in the 1960s has been shown to increase vehicle speeds.
5. In August 2019, the State published the [Colorado State Capitol Grounds Cultural Landscape Report](#), which established a “framework to guide the preservation, stewardship, and treatment of Capitol Grounds and Lincoln Park for current and future generations.” The report describes the following:
- a. Of the west lawn of the State Capitol, described as “Brown’s Bluff,” the report notes: “**Preserve the topography of Brown’s Bluff.** Limit modifications to those needed to establish positive drainage away

from Capitol Building.” The introduction of a raised walkway will significantly change the topography of the west lawn.

- b. Figure 4.2. illustrates “significant views” that should be protected. Section 3a states: “**Preserve and repair prominent views to State Capitol Building.** Prominent views are from the intersections of Broadway/East Colfax Avenue, Lincoln Street/East Colfax Avenue, Sherman Street/East Colfax Avenue, and along the Civic Axis at Broadway/Grant Street.” Views to and from the State Capitol, particularly from the identified corner of Broadway and East Colfax will be damaged by the overpass.
 - c. Section 6 notes: “Ensure new features are compatible with the historic setting. **Ensure new features are subordinate to and compatible with the mass, scale, form, and character of the study area.** Ensure new features respect the established spatial organization and do not diminish or obstruct views.” The raised walkway will not be subordinate to or compatible with existing characteristics of the west lawn.
6. Presented images illustrate the jarring difference in scale between the Colorado State Capitol Grounds Cultural Landscape Report obelisk and the proposed overpass, leading to the obelisk and nearby memorials to Colorado’s fallen heroes becoming visually overwhelmed by the proposed structure. Indeed, the plan is to displace the monumental statue of Medal of Honor winner Joe P. Martinez to make way for the raised walkway’s base.
 7. Functionally, the raised walkway does not follow natural pedestrian desire lines. Pedestrians seeking to cross Lincoln Street are required to deviate from Colfax Avenue and take a considerably longer route rather than continuing straight and utilizing the at-grade crossing. We therefore question whether the bridge will be utilized by the vast majority of pedestrians, who will continue to utilize the at-grade crossings at Colfax and 14th Avenues. Indeed, many urban pedestrian bridges, once common in cities such as Minneapolis and Cincinnati, have since been dismantled due to underuse, safety issues, and their negative effect on street-level vitality.
 8. The west lawn of the State Capitol is the gathering point for many civic protests, and we have concerns about banners being hung from the overpass above Lincoln Street, creating a vehicular safety issue. This location also creates an opportunity for antisocial behavior which could cause injury to those beneath the overpass.
 9. With multiple major projects already underway, including the 16th Street Mall reconstruction, Colfax Bus Rapid Transit, and Greek Theater upgrades, this additional disruption risks compounding construction fatigue and weakening public trust and engagement in a space that should symbolize civic unity and permanence.

We do not believe the proposed overpass aligns with federal guidelines, city policy, nor the State’s own Cultural Landscape Report. We offer this information in the spirit of partnership and seek to ensure that proposals at Denver’s Civic Center are in keeping with established policy frameworks. Historic Denver remains committed to collaboration and welcomes continued dialogue as this process moves forward.

Sincerely,



John Deffenbaugh
President & CEO, Historic Denver

CC:

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