



Reconfiguration of Thomas Circle



Pedestrian and Bicycle
Information Center

Problem

In the 1950s as vehicular traffic increased in and out of Washington D.C., Thomas Circle was redesigned to better accommodate automobiles. This new design limited the connectivity to other streets and created a hostile environment for pedestrian and bicyclists.

Background

Thomas Circle is a historic landmark located at a major city hub in the old city of Washington D.C. The mid-century design changes not only created a dangerous environment for pedestrians and bicyclists but also prevented access to the green space and historic statue of General George Thomas at the center of the Circle.

Solution

In 2005, Washington D.C., in cooperation and support with the National Park Service, Federal Highway Administration and the State Historic Preservation Officer, decided to reconfigure the Circle with the original historic vision. The redesign enhances the surrounding environment for human activities by addressing several needs related to accessibility, safety, historic perseverance and recreation.

The project restored the Circle to its original formation, preserving the historic character of the site, while at the same time integrating critical improvements to ensure safe and efficient travel for drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians. The redesign improves accessibility for pedestrians by adding numerous pedestrian crossings connecting the Circle to the surrounding communities. A unique bike lane design surrounding Thomas Circle encourages bicycling as a viable transportation option to and around the center city. The design also includes pedestrian access to the green space and statue at the center of the Circle, which created new opportunities for recreation.

The restoration of the site to its original design creates new and exciting opportunities for recreation in and around the Circle, including, for the first time ever, access to the green space at the center of the Circle. By improving access for residents, commuters, and visitors, the project facilitates important interactions that strengthen the cohesiveness of the urban environment.



Thomas Circle before renovation.



Thomas Circle after improvements.

The design approach for the restoration of the Thomas Circle was distinctive in its emphasis on pedestrian accessibility and streetscape that promotes greater connectivity among the surrounding communities and D.C.'s central business district. The project set a significant precedent for future transportation planning and design projects. The emphasis

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that was once placed on improving the streets for vehicular traffic is now refocused on implementing context sensitive solutions to connect people to Washington D.C.'s diverse communities and historic resources.

Results

The reconfiguration of Thomas Circle benefits the city in numerous ways. Discussions at neighborhood advisory meetings and in press coverage, in both local and national newspapers, have showed that public opinion of the area has greatly improved. Today, pedestrians and bicyclists are commonplace in and around the Circle. The design changes minimize unsafe interactions between vehicles and non-motorized traffic. Pedestrians are thriving in the area and taking advantage of the newly accessible green space for picnics, sunbathing, and a simple shortcut across the circle. The site's improved connectivity with the surrounding communities enables easier access to existing destination along Washington D.C.'s main corridors and creates new opportunities for development.

Cost

The cost of this project was \$5.6 million.

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For more information, please visit the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center Web site at www.walkinginfo.org.

