

Background: The U.S. Capitol and its stately dome have become the international symbols of our representative democracy. As the nation has grown in size and complexity, the Capitol has responded with architectural additions and technological advances.

As the number of visitors to the Capitol has grown from 1 million in 1970 to 3 million in 2000, Congress recognized the need for better visitor amenities and accessibility, improved provisions for safety and security, and better opportunities for citizens to learn about their Congress and their Capitol.

Responding to these needs, Congress directed the Architect of the Capitol to design and construct a new visitor center that would welcome visitors to the Capitol in an atmosphere of free and open access. Since its inception, the design for the Capitol Visitor Center has been guided by four fundamental goals:

- 1. Security** – The Visitor Center will provide a secure public environment in which to welcome and manage a large number of visitors while protecting the Capitol Building and its occupants.
- 2. Visitor Education** – The Visitor Center will establish and present lively and informative programs on the workings and history of the Congress, the legislative process, and the architecture of the Capitol.
- 3. Visitor Comfort** – The Visitor Center will provide the amenities, comfort, and convenience for visitors appropriate to the world’s most recognizable symbol of representative democracy and one of the nation’s most visited tourist destinations. In addition, all its spaces and resources will be fully accessible to persons with disabilities.
- 4. Functional Improvements** – The Visitor Center will respond to the physical limitations of the Capitol by providing modern, efficient facilities for such functions as truck loading and deliveries, improved connections to the Senate and House office buildings, and improvements to vertical circulation, including new elevators.

Capitol Visitor Center Facts:

- The Visitor Center encompasses 580,000 square feet on three levels below ground and includes 170,000 square feet for House and Senate expansion space. It is an area roughly three quarters the size of the Capitol.
- The project footprint covers 5 acres (approximately 193,000 square feet), larger than the footprint of the Capitol.
- Excavation required the removal of 60,000 truckloads of soil (600,000 cubic yards).
- The structure is supported by 135 steel columns and 50 concrete columns. Steel columns weigh as much as 20 tons each.
- A 27-inch-thick roof deck is being capped with 200,000 8-inch granite pavers that match the historic Frederick Law Olmsted hardscape features, such as rose-colored granite fountains and seatwalls.
- Inside, the CVC will feature:
 - a **Great Hall**, which will include information and ticketing desks, and provide a spacious area where visitors can gather while viewing the Capitol Dome through grand skylights;
 - a large **Exhibition Gallery** that will tell the dual story of the Congress and the Capitol;
 - two **Orientation Theaters**, which will present a specially-produced introductory film that will prepare visitors for their tour of the Capitol;
 - a new **Dining Facility** with a capacity for 550 people;
 - two **gift shops**, which will sell Capitol, House and Senate souvenirs;
 - 26 restrooms, including 10 “family” restrooms, and
 - a 1,000-linear-foot, two-lane **truck tunnel** that moves all truck loading and delivery activities below ground.



Artist's rendering of the entrance to the Capitol Visitor Center

- **Historic Preservation:** The CVC design has, to the extent possible, preserved the historic East Capitol Grounds designed in 1874 by renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, who also designed Central Park in New York City. More trees will be planted than will be removed and the grand views of the Capitol Dome will be restored along gently sloping and curving pathways leading visitors graciously to the CVC entrances. All of the historic “hardscape” features, including lanterns, fountains and retaining walls were carefully removed before construction began. Each landscape element will be returned to its original location and all fountains and lanterns will become fully operational. In addition, a full time tree preservation contractor has been hired to monitor and care for trees throughout construction. A total of 85 new trees will replace the 68 trees that were removed for construction.
- **Schedule:** Although originally expected to be completed in December 2005, unforeseen site conditions during utility relocation and excavation, and more than \$140 million in additional work prompted by the events of 9/11, combined to delay the CVC completion for approximately ten months. However, the western half of the East Front Plaza (the roof of the CVC) was completed in time to support the inauguration in January of 2005. The current overall schedule shows the completion of all construction activities related to the visitor facilities in the summer of 2007. Fire and life safety commissioning will take five to six months to complete, with the expected finish date to be in the fall of 2008. Expansion space for the House and Senate will also be completed at that time.
- **Budget:** The overall project budget is **\$548 million**. That includes a base budget of \$265 million for the core visitor center facility, which includes a new truck tunnel and other functional improvements inside the Capitol; \$38.5 million for security enhancements (added after 9/11); \$70 million added in November 2001 to complete the build-out and finishes in House and Senate expansion space, and \$33 million added in April 2003 for other security improvements. In September 2003, Congress appropriated \$48 million to accommodate all of the ancillary costs associated with executing the more than **\$140 million in new construction work added after 9/11**, including additional management costs, increases in security requirements and additional contingencies. These funds also covered additional costs incurred during the pre-construction phase of the project and delays related to unforeseen conditions and utility relocation efforts. Congress has appropriated additional funds to cover AOC administration and construction management fees, design and construction administration, CVC exhibits, additional contingency, technical security, equipment purchases, and anticipated delay costs for the Sequence 2 contract as a result of the 10-month delay in the Sequence 1 contract.



This aerial photo of the Capitol Visitor Center project site was taken Wednesday, March 14, 2007. The CVC construction is nearing completion with most of the interior work now encompassing the installation of finishes such as stone, carpeting, millwork, fabric panels, bronze elements and light fixtures. Most of the landscaping will occur later this spring and summer while interior building systems are tested and commissioned.