

South Capitol Street

Urban Design Study



The National Capital Planning Commission
The District of Columbia Office of Planning

January 2003

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Chan Krieger & Associates
Architecture & Urban Design

Economic Research Associates (ERA)
Economic Development

January 2003

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

Great city streets are the very measure of urbanity. They are the stage for city life, the place of public contact, and the intersection where commercial enterprise and civic aspiration combine. The Champs Elysees in Paris, Commonwealth Avenue in Boston, and Unter den Linden in Berlin all demonstrate how cohesive and dynamic streets define and animate the life of their cities.

South Capitol Street can be such a place. This one-mile stretch from the U.S. Capitol to a magnificent waterfront terminus on the Anacostia River has all the potential to rival the great urban boulevards of the world. With bold vision and creative leadership, South Capitol can be reborn as a vibrant city street for Washington residents and as a National Capital destination for all Americans. We envision the Corridor as a bustling mix of shops, offices, hotels, apartments, civic art, and open space. Where the street meets the river could be the site of a major civic feature such as a museum or memorial and offer additional attractions such as restaurants, concerts, marinas and waterfront entertainment.

This South Capitol Street and Urban Design Study was a cooperative effort between the District's Office of Planning and the National Capital Planning Commission. It provides fundamental information regarding design, open space, and land use that will be used in a larger effort, the South Capitol Street/Gateway Improvement Study funded by Congress and now underway.

Today we have an unparalleled opportunity to reclaim South Capitol Street by advancing a daring but achievable vision for one of America's most symbolically significant places. We look forward to collaborating with all stakeholders as we work to make South Capitol Street a place that reflects the vitality of the city and the strength and beauty of the nation.

Patricia E. Gallagher, AICP
Executive Director
National Capital Planning Commission

Andrew Altman
Director
D.C. Office of Planning



Steps to transform an unsatisfactory approach to the Nation's Capital into a distinguished new cultural, residential and business address, anchored by a great urban boulevard

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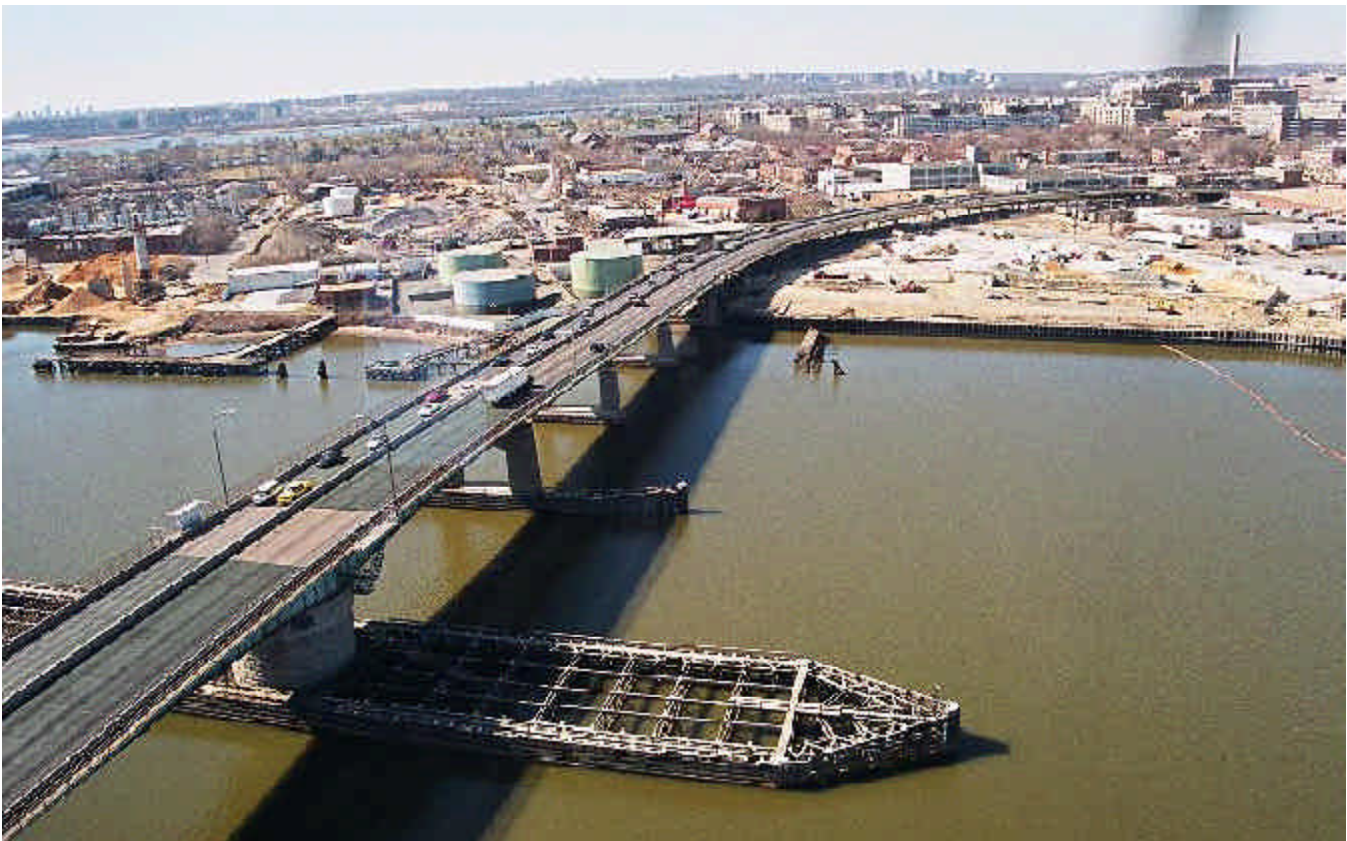
Executive Summary

Statement of the Problem

The South Capitol Street Urban Design Study outlines recommendations necessary to bring substantial change to this important corridor in the Nation's Capital. There is a tremendous gap between the prominent stature that this corridor aspires to and deserves to be, and its present condition.

As one of the four great axes extending from the Capitol, South Capitol Street connects to the Suitland Parkway to provide visitors, area residents, commuters, and nationally important guests arriving at Andrews Air Force Base their first view of the Nation's Capital. This ceremonial role contrasts sharply with the current state of the corridor: both the roadway and the Frederick Douglass Bridge are in need of repair, sidewalks are minimal and unshaded, automobile-oriented uses and poorly maintained properties predominate, and high quality open spaces are all but nonexistent. In the adjacent neighborhoods, high speed traffic, channelized lanes, and the lack of signalized intersections make South Capitol Street a deterrent to investment and decreases the quality of life in the city.

Undertaking the revitalization of the South Capitol Street corridor must be done with a view towards its role as a new growth corridor for the District. In conjunction with the efforts underway to improve the Southwest Waterfront, the Southeast Federal Center, the Navy Yard and, indeed, the entire Anacostia River realm, this study points the way to the South Capitol Street Corridor becoming a great new business, cultural and residential address for the Nation's Capital.



The Frederick Douglass Bridge spanning the Anacostia River: a great gateway opportunity