

APPENDIX A

PUBLIC ART PLAN

I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Public Art Objectives

Public art can contribute to the success of the Metropolitan Branch Trail in several ways:

- Public art can attract people to the trail and make their experience of using the trail more rewarding.
- Public art can be a mechanism for involving civic and community organizations in designing the trail, thereby making it more of an asset to the neighborhoods it connects.
- Public art can be a tool for addressing broad design issues, such as wayfinding, identity and continuity, which are identified in the concept plan.
- Public art can enhance the trail's image and stature as a new public space—for bike riders and pedestrians; for commuters, casual users and the surrounding community.

Background on Public Art Planning for the Metropolitan Branch Trail

The Washington Area Bicyclists Association and trail planners have begun exploring the possibilities for public art along the trail through grants from the National Millennium Trails program / National Endowment for the Arts, and the Fannie Mae Foundation / National Parks Foundation.

Efforts have focused on creating an “Arts Garden” along 8th Street NE in the Brookland community. A final design for the project has been completed, and construction will be funded by DDOT as part of trail construction along the 8th Street corridor. The design organizes the development of the project into two phases. The first phase will involve creating a “plaza” in the project site and installing directional and interpretive signage. The “plaza” work will be done by DDOT and the signage will be developed paid for using grant funding.

The second phase will include seating, walkways and planters. A request was submitted to the DC Recreational Trails Advisory Committee to fund this phase of the work in 2005. WABA is seeking partners to execute this phase of the project.

Organizations involved in this planning so far include WABA, Dance Space, the National Park Service Rivers and Trails program, and the Presidents Committee on the Arts and Humanities.

II. PROJECT TYPES

Public Art Themes and Strands

It is important that public art that is commissioned along the trail, or incorporated into the trail design, have a special relevance or connection to the trail. One way to accomplish this is by focusing on general themes or approaches for public art, several of which will be particularly appropriate along the Metropolitan Branch Trail:

- Art that relates to the way that people experience the trail, particularly projects that create special places that are of value to both trail users and the community.
- Art that enhances functional and infrastructure elements, such as signage, pavement treatments, landscaping and lighting.
- Art that enhances the identity of the trail as a continual corridor and part of a regional network.
- Art that differentiates the character of the trail as it passes through different communities, each with its own identity.
- Art that interprets and celebrates the history of the trail corridor.

A general discussion of these themes follows. Specific opportunities are discussed in chapters of the concept plan, and are mapped in the accompanying “Public Art and Civic Design Sketchbook,” attached to this plan as Tab 1.

Implementation Notes

There are several general categories of public art projects that will be developed along the Metropolitan Branch Trail:

- Works commissioned in conjunction with the construction of the Metropolitan Branch Trail. These will be funded by DDOT through set-asides from overall project funds. The implementation can be managed by DDOT directly or by the District of Columbia Commission on the Arts and Humanities.
- Works commissioned independently of the trail, and retrofitted into landscapes or infrastructure. These would be funded from external sources and will be managed by entities other than DDOT, such as DCCA, community arts groups, Cultural Tourism D.C., etc.
- Temporary works, such as performances and events. These would be funded from external sources and will be managed by entities other than DDOT, such as DCCA or community arts groups.
- Works commissioned independently of the trail, and incorporated into new development along the trail. Though there is no formal public art requirement for private development

in the District of Columbia, we would urge the agencies involved with development (D.C. Office of Planning, WMATA for joint development projects) to consider how public art might satisfy objectives for creating good design and good public spaces.

Specific opportunities are discussed in the chapters of this concept plan, and summarized in the public art sketchbook in the appendix.

III. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT TYPES

This section discusses the types of projects that can be planned under each theme. Tab 2 provides a preliminary tabulation of potential projects by type and location to serve as a starting point for the development of art projects along the MBT.

Art that Relates to User Experience on the Trail

The first art public theme for the Metropolitan Branch Trail involves projects that relate to the way that people experience the trail, particularly projects that create special places that are value to both trail users and the community. This theme includes several categories of projects.

- **Thresholds and gateways** are places of passage where people move from one place to another. These include places where people enter or leave the trail, places that mark transitions between different areas of the city, or places where the character of the trail or the surrounding landscape changes. At these locations, art might mark the location of a transition, highlight the contrast between places, signal a gateway, or be incorporated into information elements that provide guidance to trail users.
- **Flows and channels** are places of motion, where the primary activity is moving along the trail or passing through a place, and where there are no connections on or off the trail, or no places to stop. These include segments such as the grade along Blair Road as the trail approaches Takoma from the south, or the stretch between Fort Totten and Catholic University that passes between the rail corridor and active heavy industrial activities.
- In places like these, art can celebrate trail users' sense of movement and motion. Projects could include kinetic devices, optical effects, dynamic shapes, or bright and shifting colors. Art projects can be designed to intrigue people using the trail or viewing it from afar.
- **Pausing places and waysides** are special locations along the trail where people might stop. These could include resting places or oases; viewing places or vantage points; welcome centers, transitions or gateways; or gathering places like parks, plazas and gardens.

Art projects would respond to the specific nature of the place. They could serve as symbols or place markers, or could be incorporated into the design of an element that is integral to the place, but they would always focus on creating places that have civic stature, serving trail users and the community alike. Some of these projects might be developed through a participatory process.

- **Points of reference** are places that are visually prominent and serve as landmarks along the route—elements that people might use as meeting places, or to make a mental note of the distance they have traveled along the trail.

In some cases, a “point of reference” could be an existing element that is memorable because of its architecture or engineering, its industrial or vernacular nature, or its historic value. Points of reference could also include gateways or focal points that mark important locations and are identity elements for a community. New points of reference might be incorporated into community gathering spaces or focal points along the trail. More than other art projects, these should be unique, one-of-a-kind efforts.

Trail Identity

The second art theme for the Metropolitan Branch Trail involves projects that strengthen the corridor’s identity as a continuous place, and its identity as a place that is part of a larger regional network. There are several types of projects that could explore this theme.

- **Infrastructure elements**, such as retaining walls, underpasses, fences and transportation-related structures, are one of the most consistent aspects of the visual aspects of the trail. These elements can be turned into a canvas for civic design and public art.

Existing structures could be retrofitted with many kinds of art projects—wall mounted sculptures, murals, kinetic elements, light–shadow projects, scrims or screens, and projections, to name a few. Projects like these can turn mundane elements of the cityscape into visual assets. They can also be an effective location for community-based projects.

New infrastructure elements, such as the bridges being proposed for the area of the Rhode Island Avenue Metrorail station and the crossing of Piney Branch Road, and the underpass being considered for Monroe Street, also hold potential for art projects. These opportunities are discussed in a subsequent section.

- **Industrial elements**, particularly those related to warehousing, transportation, construction and the processing and storage of raw materials, are another consistent aspect of the trail’s visual character. Artists could be encouraged to develop projects that relate closely to these elements. They could be asked to work with ideas of motion; bright, bold colors; or large-scale structures fabricated from durable materials. In addition, existing industrial sculptures, whether functioning or relics, could be embellished with paint, screens, light or other non-intrusive art projects.
- **Color** can be a powerful tool for creating a unified visual identity for a trail, particularly one like the Metropolitan Branch Trail, whose visual character changes dramatically from section to section. One color might be chosen to repeat itself in elements along the trail and act as an easily recognizable trail blaze. Alternatively, repeated color sequences, such as a spectrum or semaphore pattern, might be integrated into elements like bollards, signs, panels, flags or banners that might ornament fences, walls or poles.
- **Shapes** can also provide a visual language for the trail. The overall path of the Metropolitan Branch Trail is a gentle arc, but in some places the trail will make dramatic

curves—as it runs along the hillside at Fort Totten, for example. The sense of movement along the trail can be celebrated by using curves or swoops as a theme. Dynamic shapes could be incorporated into infrastructure, landscape or trail contours, and surface materials; or echoed in the language of sculpture.

Functional Elements

A third art theme for the Metropolitan Branch Trail involves functional elements, or trail-related infrastructure or amenities. Involving artists in the design of these elements would create an artistic presence along the length of the trail.

- **Signage, pavement, lighting, bollards and landscape treatments** are recurring elements that not only serve important safety and operational functions but also can be designed to give a unique identity to a trail. Elements like these are often designed by artists or by collaborative teams of designers that include artists. General considerations for these elements are outlined in this chapter of the concept plan.
- **New bridges, underpasses, ramps, fences and retaining walls**, which are important for providing a clear alignment for the trail, will generally be designed on an individual basis. Elements of this infrastructure, such as surfaces, colors or railings, could also be designed by artists or collaborative teams of designers. General opportunities for these elements are described in the “Public Art Sketchbook” appendix to these plans, and specific locations for opportunities are identified elsewhere.
- **Trail amenities—such as seating, mileage markers, drinking fountains, bike racks and informational signage**—will be important to the user experience of the trail. These could be designed by artists or collaborative teams.
- **Traditionally, trail blazes** are recurring markers that identify the path of a trail through the landscape. Urban bike trails can reinterpret this tradition in a way that is both whimsical and functional. Some cities have commissioned artists to create families of sculptures or signage that marks the progression of a trail, others commission a range of artists to create their own interpretations of a common theme. These blazes not only let trail users know they are on the right track, but also add to the image of the place.

Segment Character

There are several segments of the Metropolitan Branch Trail corridor that have a distinct identity. As a counterpoint to the overall trail design, these segments could be regarded as “linear galleries” for art projects that respond to the special nature of the communities, urban fabric or landscapes they are passing through.

- **In Takoma**, the trail will branch into two routes. The trail will not only be a path for commuters, but also an important community resource—a loop that connects civic places, provides a route for casual riding, and serves as a starting point for longer trips. Art projects could be related so that they form a narrative or family, literally or visually, as one travels the loop; art projects could be related to places that are important to the community as well as trail riders.

- **In Brookland**, the trail passes near a number of community, civic and cultural resources, including the Brookland neighborhood center and arts cluster, Catholic University of America, and nearby schools and recreation centers. In this area, public art should celebrate the community’s spirit of creativity and provide clear links to resources that are nearby but not directly on the trail. Fanciful, colorful art in open spaces, as well as an overlay of incidental “art on the street” projects and event-related art should make this an exciting, ever-changing place for biking and walking. Special trail blazes at important community locations, such as schools and recreation center, could signal the presence of the trail a block or two away.
- **Fort Totten**. The segment of trail starting at the Fort Totten Metro station and heading north to the Blair Road/Community Gardens site will follow streets that run along wooded parkland and, for several blocks, through residential neighborhoods. Art projects here must be respectful of the areas through which the trail is passing, especially those administered by the National Park Service, which has their own stringent guidelines. Art projects could be integrated into trail elements on public roadways (such as the materials of the trail, its edges and any waysides located in this area), and as the more general concept encompassing interpretive signage and natural themes, considered for NPS lands. It could also be integrated into other elements such as benches or informational signage located here. To the extent that individual art projects are located here, they should be smaller scale and easily visible or accessible from the trail to create a sense of discovery, surprise and intimacy. Approaches might involve using and re-interpreting naturalistic materials, or creating a series of signs to provide archaeological interpretation for this historic location.
- **CSX Corridor**. The segment of the trail between Franklin Street and New York Avenue is dramatic and in transition. Once a branch of Tiber Creek and more recently a CSX rail yard, it is now a flat meadow that offers long vistas and dramatic juxtapositions of scale and movement.
- This segment, currently bracketed by a rail line on one side and light-industrial operations on the other, is isolated and littered with industrial and railroad artifacts. A sculpture garden or large-scale environmental art could be located here; projects might be assembled from found objects scavenged from the railroad corridor; retaining walls, building facades and fences might be turned into surfaces for art projects as well.
- Over time, as redevelopment occurs along this corridor, the trail could play an enhanced role. Connections to and from the trail, especially to Metro stations, will become important. The trail could be an important connection between office buildings, and a recreation resource for residents and office workers. Gateway elements, gathering places and identity markers can make the trail an attractive presence for the emerging residential and business community.
- **Union Station**. Long a terminus for rail travelers traveling north, west and south, Union Station is now the hub of rapidly transforming area of the city. It is also a major transition point for the Met Branch Trail, marking its passage into the Monumental Core and National Mall, and it will be the location of a major bicycle-oriented facility. From Union Station north, public art can both provide marking for the trail route; anchor gathering places that serve bicyclists, residents, office workers and visitors alike; and offer interpretation of the public agencies (such as the Supreme Court, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the Government Printing Office) that are located in this

area. Like in Takoma, the trail travels along two branches, which could be envisioned as a loop.

Interpretive Strands

There are numerous opportunities for illustrating and celebrating some milestones of the city's industrial, commercial, and cultural development; the rich history of the railroads, both passenger and freight; the historic neighborhoods along the trail; and the various cultures represented by the residents of those neighborhoods. These opportunities can be organized into two main categories: place history and transportation history.

One interpretive strand would consider the cultural, social and developmental history of the places that the trail intersects. There are several neighborhoods and specific locations that would be considered, as well as several sites where the general pattern of the city could be interpreted. Art projects could include a trail-length system of interpretive markers (such as panels, pylons or medallions) or special monuments associated with aspects of the corridor's history. Special focus could be given to interpretive markers for areas like Brookland or Union Station that have a particularly dense history.

Another strand would consider the role the corridor plays in regional transportation. A system of interpretive markers or individual commemorative art projects could explore different layers of transportation history—early trails and roads; passenger and freight railroad history; freeway proposals and citizen backlash; Metrorail, Amtrak and commuter rail; and the new bike trail. Some of the projects could be located in places specific to historical events, others could be spaced in between to create a rhythm of experience.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION NOTES

The implementation of public art projects generally involves coordination among entities that bring several types of resources to the table: site control, funding, aesthetic approval, expertise in commissioning and installing projects.

Site Control

The alignment of the Metropolitan Branch Trail passes through or adjacent to properties under the jurisdiction of numerous public agencies (most notably the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), WMATA, the National Park Service, and the District Department of Parks and Recreation) as well as properties owned by institutions or private landowners. As specific sites are given more serious consideration for art projects, the agency, institution or individual that owns the property should be contacted in regard to permission, liability and maintenance requirements.

Funding

Usually, the funds available specifically for public art are limited, and public art projects proceed because they can be “piggybacked” onto some other capital project. That will be the case for

projects along the MBT, most of which will be funded by federal transportation funds and matching funds from the District of Columbia. DDOT, which is managing the project, has said that construction funding can potentially support art projects related to the trail. Art elements that could be funded through DDOT as part of the trail construction process include:

- elements of pedestrian bridges and ramps, such as railings;
- new retaining walls, particularly surfaces and tops;
- identity signs that mark the path of the trail (these can be self-standing or integrated with existing street signage);
- trail markers; lighting; trail surfaces, including inlays, edging and treatments at street crossings;
- benches or landscaping at waysides or rest stops; trailhead elements, such as bollards; screening and fencing.

The District of Columbia Commission on Arts and Humanities can provide funding for public art projects, as well as trail-related events and exhibitions, through its regular programming and competitive grants processes. Categories that could conceivably support trail related projects are “Community Arts Projects,” “Small Projects Program,” “Artist Fellowships,” and general operating support.

Aesthetic Approval

The Metropolitan Branch Trail passes through properties under the jurisdiction of a number of other public agencies that have existing aesthetic protocols, particularly the National Park Service and the Architect of the Capitol. In addition, aesthetic and capital improvements sponsored by the Government of the District of Columbia are, as a matter of course, subject to review by the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission. These entities should be contacted at the earliest appropriate moment to secure recommendations and guidance for the public art program.

Projects undertaken by DCCAHA through its community arts programs involve an intensively collaborative community process, in which local communities are involved in site selection, artist selection and identifying themes and concepts for projects.

Implementation Expertise

DDOT and DCCAHA are establishing a track record of collaboration on the implementation of art projects. In essence, DCCAHA can act as a project manager for the art component of a DDOT infrastructure project, managing artist selection, design, fabrication and installation. In these situations, DCCAHA can modify its normally intensive community process.

For community interpretive signage, DDOT has contracted with Cultural Tourism D.C., which operates primarily through a program that works intensively with communities to develop the research, texts and imagery that is used for neighborhood interpretive signage. Since a project of this nature might be impractical for the seven-mile-long MBT, DDOT could consider

contracting a signage and cultural interpretation consultant to develop an interpretive strategy for the trail.

V. NEXT STEPS

This concept plan identifies overall directions for public art, potential locations for projects, and opportunities and constraints for implementation. Additional, more detailed planning should occur before initiating specific projects.

Public Art Projects

Future planning for the Metropolitan Branch Trail will occur at two levels. As funding is secured for future segments, specific designs will be developed, reviewed through a community process, and prepared for construction. In addition, additional design of functional elements such as signage, lighting, access controls and trail configurations will occur at a system-wide level.

An artist or art consultant should be hired to participate on the planning teams at both these levels. In planning system-wide elements, an artist could collaborate with engineers, landscape designers and graphic designers to identify opportunities for artistic intervention. It is important that these discussions occur at the earliest possible stages of the design process, so that the design team can benefit as much as possible from the guidance of the artist, and so that opportunities for artistic intervention are not foreclosed on. The specific artistic interventions could be designed by the participating artist, or through a call for proposals to other artists in the community and region.

Similarly, artists should be engaged to work on the detailed plans for future trail segments. At best, an artist or art consultant should work with the planning team as a liaison to the local community, initiating an iterative discussion about potential locations and themes for arts projects, and about the possibilities for community involvement in developing art projects.

Interpretive Signage

As part of the future study and of corridor-wide elements, DDOT should commission a system of interpretive signage. A signage consultant should be responsible for developing historical research that examines the themes describe above, narrative texts and imagery, and a graphic design approach.

Some neighborhoods along the trail, such as Brookland, could be appropriate participants in the Cultural Tourism D.C. Neighborhood Heritage Trail signage system. Future planning teams should encourage Cultural Tourism D.C. and Brookland community leaders to develop a basis for collaboration on neighborhood heritage trail and signage system, which could include points along the Metropolitan Branch Trail.

Technical Committee

Future planning teams should convene, from time to time, an informal technical committee to monitor progress of art projects along the trail and provide guidance to the project team. This committee should include representatives of DDOT, DCCAH, WMATA, Cultural Tourism D.C., DC OP, WABA, Downtown D.C. BID, and arts education and presenting arts organizations.