



Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia

Planning Commission



UDC 2025-20	Conceptual Review	Meeting Date: 7/15/2025
Applicant/Petitioner	Yongping Wang / Department of Public Works	
Project Description	UDC 2025-20 CONCEPT Location, Character, Extent review for the reconstruction of the bridge over CSX on Arthur Ashe Blvd., located between Norfolk Street and Boulevard West.	
Project Location		
Address: Arthur Ashe Boulevard over CSX		
Property Owner: City Of Richmond Department of Public Works		
High-Level Details: A Concept proposal for the replacement of the existing Arthur Ashe Boulevard Bridge over CSX.		
UDC Recommendation	UDC recommends approval with conditions.	
Staff Contact	Ray Roakes, Raymond.Roakes@rva.gov	
Public Outreach/ Previous Reviews	No Previous Review Outreach detailed in Applicant Report.	
Conditions for Approval	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Final details on outdoor lighting be sensitive to light pollution or dark-skies compliant. 2. Inclusion of permeable hardscape materials where appropriate and as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines. 3. The re-use of existing materials onsite should be incorporated with the design plans, where feasible. 	

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. A maintenance plan be submitted during the Final UDC review phase to include landscaping, sustainability features, public spaces. 5. The Applicant incorporate public art, where feasible.
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Findings of Fact

Site Description	<p>The project site is located on Arthur Ashe Boulevard, between Norfolk Street and Boulevard West. The site is located just south of the Diamond and extends over CSX tracks.</p> <p>Scotts Addition is located to the South. An adjacent project was approved by the UDC for CONCEPT in June of 2024 to provide a path from Broad Street, through the Science Museum and Movieland Property, adjacent to the Arthur Ashe Bridge.</p>
Scope of Review	The project is subject to Location, Character, and Extent review under Section 17.07 and design recommendations under Section 17.05 of the Richmond City Charter.
Prior Approvals	N/A
Project Description	<p><u>The Applicant States:</u></p> <p><i>“The Arthur Ashe Boulevard Bridge replacement project proposes to replace an existing multimodal bridge structure in the City of Richmond, Virginia (RVA), that provides a critical connection over the CSX Transportation, Inc. (CSXT) railroad... The existing bridge is structurally deficient... Arthur Ashe Boulevard (Route 161) provides an important link between the urban and commercial centers of the City to the regional transportation network, including interstate highways I-95 and I-64.”</i></p> <p><i>“Arthur Ashe Boulevard is an urban principal arterial on the National Highway System (NHS) that carries an annual average daily traffic volume of 26,000 vehicles traffic daily. The current bridge structure ...supports four traffic lanes and existing sidewalks in both directions. The regional 2020 Greater RVA Transit Vision Plan identifies the roadway as part of the route for enhanced transit and a future expanded high frequency bus network. The roadway also carries high volumes of pedestrians and bicycles through commercial and mixed-use areas, much of which are planned for redevelopment.”</i></p> <p><i>“The design team worked to balance the need to throughput of vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists with the desire for placemaking and to deliver a unique and attractive structure. Two vehicular traffic lanes in each direction will be provided, along with a Shared Use Path on the west side of the structure and a wide sidewalk on the east side of the structure. Benches and canopies are added to add to the placemaking of the area.”</i></p> <p><i>“The pedestrian facilities will include new concrete sidewalks and street trees that lead from the Diamond District and Scott’s Addition to the new bridge. Pedestrian overlooks will be placed on both sides of the approach to the bridge allowing users to pull out of the main sidewalk for a respite. The overlooks will have custom benches and planter that will be oriented to views of the Diamond District and Scott’s Addition.”</i></p> <p><i>“Benches will be integrated into the concrete planters and will orient users to views of the surrounding cityscape. Overhead metal shade structures will provide opportunities for shade along the bridge walkways. The design of the shade structures will have an industrial character recalling the history of industry in the area. In the evening the shade structures will be highlighted with integral LED lighting. The focal point of the bridge will be the central overhead gateway that spans the width of the bridge. Like the shade structures the design of the gateway</i></p>

will have an industrial character with a framed opening that can hold signage as determined by the city.”

Staff Review:

The project includes significant pedestrian and bicycle improvements to a stretch of road that was previously industrial in character and lacking in amenities that reflect the area’s growth, both south in Scotts Addition and north with the Diamond and adjacent redevelopment.

Master Plan

The Master Plan shows Arthur Ashe as a Great Street with enhanced transit. Great Streets call for enhanced pedestrian and bicycle amenities along with an elevated aesthetic design.

The Master Plan future connections map shows a connection, south to north, across the CSX tracks, for pedestrians and bicycles. The map also shows this connection integrating with the path project approved for CONCEPT by the UDC in June of 2025 that connects Broad Street to the Diamond District via the Science Museum and Movieland Property. The proposed bridge is intended to be that connection, with a future phase making the further connection between the proposed path and the bridge. The significant grade difference between the bridge and Movieland path make it difficult to make the connection, necessitating a separate project.

Greater Scotts Addition Master Plan Node

The Master Plan Greater Scotts Addition Node calls for *“series of open spaces and a transportation network that support families and aging-in-place...”* and *“Visitors to Greater Scott’s Addition have the option to safely arrive by foot, bike, transit, or car...”*

Next steps are listed as *“Great Streets: Transform N. Ashe Boulevard and Hermitage Road into Great Streets, featuring buildings addressing the street, underground utilities, street trees, lighting, enhanced transit, and other amenities.”*

The plan also calls for a *“landmark bridge over the CSX tracks connecting the crescent park and development on the north side to the Pulse Corridor.”*

The Master Plan intended this “Landmark Bridge” to be separate from the Arthur Ashe Blvd bridge, but it was decided as part of the Diamond District project that the separate bridge would not be pursued. The Arthur Ashe Blvd Bridge becomes the only near-term opportunity to make that connection and create a landmark bridge.

UDC Guidelines

The Guidelines state *“It is the priority of the UDC to support all modes of transportation, giving deference to pedestrians and vulnerable transportation users...”* and *“Streetscape elements, such as street trees, street lighting, and seating should be used to encourage pedestrian activity.”*

Staff Analysis

The Master Plan calls for a landmark bridge with north/south pedestrian and bicycle connections – which the project is proposed to provide.

The connection to the Science Museum/Movieland path is a priority and the proposed project is intended to tie in with a future phase.

For bicycle users, the sidewalk is intended to be wide enough to be considered a shared use path. This may be revised to include protected bicycle lanes in a final application.

A “Landmark” piece is proposed above the bridge and travel lanes. This structure consists of industrial beams reflecting other elements on the bridge. This structure could include various forms of signage or art. The structure will be able to be seen from a fair distance away along Arthur Ashe Blvd, creating a visually interesting terminating vista.

Shade is proposed to be provided on the bridge by a series of shade structures.

Planters are proposed along the length of the bridge to separate pedestrians from vehicle travel. Seating is proposed along the planters that take advantage of the views from the bridge and shade structures.

Pedestrian lighting is proposed to be provided by a series of vertical elements equally spaced along the bridge. This lighting could include various elements such as internally lit poles where the light shines through a stylized design. It could also include color changing elements.

Improvements leading up to the bridge are proposed and include landscaping, lighting, and sidewalk replacement.

Staff suggests the proposed improvements create a “Great Street” and facilitate multimodal travel as called for by the Master Plan.

The following is a rendering that shows the proposed view from a vehicle using the bridge.



Staff suggests that the stand-alone vertical elements on the sides may make the structure appear unfinished. The use of the same element (dark metal beam roughly the same size) throughout the design may make the structure appear monotonous. Staff suggests that the design needs a greater hierarchy in elements as well as further attention to the stand-alone vertical elements, perhaps something overhead tying everything together. This could be an opportunity to introduce an interesting design element that not only brings the poles together but the entire bridge.

Staff further suggests that the “Landmark” overhead element may not be quite fully formed yet and needs further consideration. The element has the same dimensions as a sign structure on the interstate highway system. With signage installed -unless very stylized- it will appear as such, which would reduce the effectiveness of the “Landmark” character.

Staff strongly supports the provision of high-quality pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, additional landscaping, landmark design elements, potential for color changing lighting, shade, seating, and consideration of allowing users to enjoy the views from the bridge.

With the considerations mentioned above, Staff would not oppose continuing this item to the August UDC meeting after a strong discussion at the July meeting to provide guidance to the Applicant. With that said, with strong direction from the UDC, this item could be approved with conditions to indicate what the Applicant needs to accomplish with a future FINAL submission. Staff does note timeline issues with grant funding and the deficient structure of the bridge.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends approval with the following conditions:

1. Staff recommends submission of a planting and maintenance plan at Final Review.
2. Staff recommends specifications for any built structures, site features, and / or furnishings be included in for Final Review.
3. Staff recommends that final outdoor lighting details minimize light pollution or follow dark-sky compliance.
4. Staff recommends the Applicant incorporate public art, where feasible.

UDC Review

The UDC discussed bike infrastructure, pedestrian access to the bridge, location of shade structures, bridge and lane cross sections, pedestrian lighting rhythm,

Concern was expressed for using wood materials for and efficacy of the provision of benches, the approach for vehicle users and the visual impact of the design elements, the deconstructed nature of the elements on the side of the bridge, the design of the gateway element,

UDC Recommendation

UDC recommended approval with conditions.

The UDC also recommended formation of a subcommittee to assist the Applicant in addressing any remaining design questions in preparations for FINAL submission. Committee Member Gemmer and Van Inwegen were selected.

Recommended Conditions:

1. Final details on outdoor lighting be sensitive to light pollution or dark-skies compliant.
2. Inclusion of permeable hardscape materials where appropriate and as suggested by the Urban Design Guidelines.
3. The re-use of existing materials onsite should be incorporated with the design plans, where feasible.
4. A maintenance plan be submitted during the Final UDC review phase to include landscaping, sustainability features, public spaces.
5. The Applicant incorporate public art, where feasible.

Urban Design Guidelines and Master Plan

See Staff Analysis above.