Art Commission Application

Three Sisters Bridges Interpretive Signage

Conceptual Review

Project Location:
600-700 block of Fort Duquesne Boulevard
Neighborhood: Central Business District

Applicant(s):
Allegheny County Bridge Operations and Technical Services
Michael Baker International

Project Duration: Permanent
Has this project come before Art Commission before? No
If yes, when? n/a
RCO District: Yes
Development Activities Meeting: Upcoming, before Final Review
Statement of Intent

The Three Rivers Heritage Trail currently includes one interpretive sign on the Three Sisters Bridges, which is mounted on the railing on the north side of Fort Duquesne Boulevard, about 50 feet southwest of the Seventh Street Bridge (Figures 1-3; Photos 1 and 2). In June 2021, Michael Baker International Inc., a consultant for Allegheny County, met with PennDOT and FOR at the site of the existing sign to determine preferences for sign number, location, format/size, and mounting options. PennDOT and FOR reached consensus on the following project details, which are hereby being submitted to the Art Commission for Conceptual Review prior to proceeding with development of individual signs:

- Three (3) individual signs will be constructed, 24 by 24 inches in size.
- The proposed signs will be mounted to the top rail of the Fort Duquesne Boulevard railing, using similar hardware to the existing sign (Photo 3).
- The proposed signs will be fiberglass-embedded type, similar to the existing sign.
- Sign frames will be constructed of riveted aluminum angles, similar to the existing sign, following the Three Rivers Heritage Trail sign standards developed by Bally Design, Inc.
- Sign One is proposed to be located immediately southwest of the existing Three Sisters Bridges sign (Photo 4).
- Signs Two and Three are proposed to be located side-by-side along on Fort Duquesne Boulevard about 190 feet northeast of the approach to Seventh Street Bridge (Photos 5 and 6).

The upper walkway along the north side of Fort Duquesne Boulevard was selected as the preferred location because it provides adequate vistas of all three bridges, is not subject to flooding, and has a high volume of traffic.
Organizational Statement
Allegheny County, in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) District 11-0, and with funding provided by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), is rehabilitating the Three Sisters Bridges (i.e., Sixth, Seventh, and Ninth Street Bridges), which connect downtown Pittsburgh with the North Side. Over the past five years, rehabilitation of the Seventh and Ninth Street Bridge has been completed, and rehabilitation of the Sixth Street Bridge will begin soon. Pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the FHWA, in consultation with the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO), determined that the rehabilitation project will have an adverse effect on the Sixth and Ninth Street Bridges. In order to resolve adverse effects, a Programmatic Agreement between the FHWA and the PA SHPO was executed August 1, 2017. One of the mitigation stipulations in this agreement requires Allegheny County to develop, manufacture, and install up to three (3) interpretive signs, which highlight the history and significance of the Three Sisters Bridges and changes that have occurred as a result of this rehabilitation projects. This agreement also requires Allegheny County to consult with Friends of the Riverfront (FOR) and the City of Pittsburgh Art Commission to determine the number, design, and placement of the three signs. Once feedback on sign number and location is received from FOR and the Art Commission, Allegheny County will then develop draft signs and provide FHWA, PA SHPO, and Section 106 consulting parties on opportunity to comment on the sign content and proposed location. Allegheny County will address comments from these parties, if any, and then present the revised signs and location plan to the Art Commission for final approval.
Figure 1: Site Plan.
Figure 2: Proposed Sign Locations and Configuration.
Three Rivers Heritage Trail

The Three Sisters Bridges

The three identical bridges spanning the Allegheny River are the only known example of a triple set of bridges constructed side-by-side across a major river. They were built between 1926 and 1928 when the War Department ruled that bridges over Pittsburgh's rivers had to be high enough not to interfere with river commerce in steel, coal, and war materials during times of war.

Their design is unique. They are self-anchoring suspension bridges—standing firmly on piers in the river and extending tall girders out to meet the banks—but they are not anchored to the land. Their rigid eyebar chains are suspended from central towers and fastened to the ends of giant girders that hold up the roadway.

In 1926 the City Art Commission influenced the designs of the first bridge, the Seventh Street Bridge, which was based on a rare example in Cologne, Germany. Pittsburgh's American Bridge Company built the bridge. The design reflected the Art Deco architectural style of the period. Within two years, identical spans were erected at Ninth and Sixth Streets.

In 1928, the American Institute of Steel Construction voted the Sixth Street Bridge, now called the Roberto Clemente Bridge, the "most beautiful bridge" built in America that year. The Three Sisters are listed on the National Register of Historic Places for their significant engineering and technology.

Figure 3: Existing Three Sisters Bridges sign on the Three Rivers Heritage Trail.
Photo 1: View of existing Three Sisters Bridges sign, facing north, with Seventh Street Bridge in background.
Photo 2: View of existing Three Sisters Bridges sign, facing northwest, with approach to Seventh Street Bridge in the background. The first of the three proposed signs will be installed to the immediate left of the existing sign.
Photo 3: Detail of existing riveted aluminum sign frame and galvanized steel mounting hardware consisting of a gusset and locking band.
Photo 4: Overview of location of the first proposed sign (Location A in site plan and location map), to the immediate left of the existing sign. View facing west along Fort Duquesne Boulevard sidewalk, with Sixth Street Bridge in background.
Photo 5: Overview of location of the second and third proposed signs (Location B on site plan and location map), to the immediate southwest (left) of the light pole. View facing northeast along Fort Duquesne Boulevard sidewalk, with Ninth Street Bridge approach in background.
Photo 6: Detail of proposed location for the second and third signs, facing northeast.
City of Pittsburgh

Department of Mobility & Infrastructure

City-County Building

January 25, 2022

City of Pittsburgh Art Commission
Public Art & Civil Design Division
200 Ross Street
Civic Building, Fourth Floor
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

RE: THREE SISTER BRIDGES
Interpretive Signage
Letter of Support

Dear Commission Member:

The City of Pittsburgh’s Department of Mobility and Infrastructure (DOMI) is in strong support of the proposed Three Sister Bridges Interpretive Signage project. These bridges consist of the Roberto Clemente, Andy Warhol, and Rachel Carson Bridges.

We believe that the proposed project/design will highlight the Three Sister Bridges.

Our organization and the City of Pittsburgh Art Commission have a history of collaboration and we are looking forward to this project.

The City of Pittsburgh’s Department of Mobility and Infrastructure fully supports the proposed project.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Skalican
Deputy Director

JS/ms

cc: Stephen Shadle/ Jeff Skalican/ Eric Setzler/ File
January 20, 2022

City of Pittsburgh Art Commission
Public Art & Civil Design Division
200 Ross Street
Civic Building, Fourth Floor
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Re: Three Sister Bridges Interpretive Signage
Fort Duquesne Boulevard, Pittsburgh, PA
Letter of Support

Dear Commission Member:

This letter comes in support of proposed interpretive signage to be installed on Fort Duquesne Boulevard in connection with the rehabilitation of the Three Sister Bridges. These bridges are the Roberto Clemente (Sixth Street), the Andy Warhol (Seventh Street), and the Rachel Carson (Ninth Street) Bridges.

Over the past five years, rehabilitation of the Seventh and Ninth Street Bridge has been completed, and work on the Sixth Street Bridge will begin soon. Pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the FHWA, in consultation with the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO), determined that the rehabilitation projects will have an adverse effect on the Sixth and Ninth Street Bridges. To resolve the adverse effects, a Programmatic Agreement between the FHWA and the PA SHPO was executed August 1, 2017. One of the mitigation stipulations in this agreement requires Allegheny County to develop, manufacture, and install up to three (3) interpretive signs, which highlight the history and significance of the Three Sisters Bridges and changes that have occurred because of the rehabilitation projects. This agreement also requires Allegheny County to consult with Friends of the Riverfront (FOR) and the City of Pittsburgh Art Commission to determine the number, design, and placement of the three signs. Once feedback on sign number and location is received from FOR and the Art Commission, Allegheny County will develop draft signs and provide FHWA, PA SHPO, and Section 106 consulting parties on opportunity to comment on the sign content and proposed location. Allegheny County will address comments from these parties, if any, and then present the revised signs and location plan to the Art Commission for final approval.

Allegheny County is proud of our recent rehabilitation efforts to keep these landmark bridges in a state of good repair, and we heartily endorse the placement of the proposed signs. Please feel free to contact me at 412-350-6671 should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Richard L. Connors, P.E., PMP
Manager, Bridge Operations and Technical Services

RLC/rlc
cc: File/J. Belfast (MBI)
BRDG-22-0010
Dear Pittsburgh Art Commission,

Friends of the Riverfront writes to express our support for Allegheny County’s plan to install interpretive signage along the Allegheny Overlook.

We met on-site with project representatives to review locations for the new signage and we support the proposed locations. The style of the proposed signs also matches the interpretive sign Friends installed along the Overlook at Ft. Duquesne Boulevard and 7th Street. This is the same sign style used in the 40+ other interpretive signs along the Three Rivers Heritage Trail.

For over 30 years, Friends of the Riverfront has worked to protect and restore the Pittsburgh region’s rivers and riverfronts after decades of legacy pollution. Our mission is to expand, connect and enhance the Three Rivers Heritage Trail which now encompasses over 33 miles of urban and suburban riverfront trails along both banks of the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio Rivers. We assist river communities in building and stewarding trails that support economic, environmental, and health benefits for the Pittsburgh region.

Sincerely,

Kelsey Ripper
Executive Director
**Budget**

The overall budget for sign development and production is $26,287. This figure includes direct costs of $6,550.69 for sign printing, frame and mounting hardware fabrication, and consultation with stakeholders as well as $19,736 in labor costs for design and consultation with stakeholders. Allegheny County and PennDOT/FHWA have not budgeted any project funds for the future maintenance of this signage. It is hoped that FOR will provide for future sign maintenance as the custodian for the Three Rivers Heritage Trail. Preliminary discussions with FOR indicated that it may wish to seek sponsors to assist with future maintenance costs. To date, Allegheny County has not executed a maintenance agreement with FOR.