

C E N T E R C I T Y R E P O R T S :

Benjamin Franklin Parkway, 2001–2005

Recent Accomplishments, New Opportunities



The Benjamin Franklin Parkway was fully illuminated in July 2004 as the first step in an effort to activate and animate Philadelphia's 1.1-mile cultural boulevard.

The Benjamin Franklin Parkway is the setting for many of the region's premier cultural, educational and civic institutions that attract over 2.8 million visitors annually.¹ Along the Parkway, schoolchildren learn archeology, astronomy, ecology and technology. High school and college students sketch sculptures, conduct research and bike along this mile-long boulevard to Fairmount Park. Domestic and international travelers appreciate fine art, fine dining and luxury hotels with extraordinary views.

With the relocation of the Barnes Foundation near the Philadelphia Museum of Art (PMA) and adjacent to the Rodin Museum, the Parkway will host one of the most extraordinary ensembles of 19th- and 20th-century French art. The dramatic expansion of the nearby Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts has more than doubled this area's offering of fine American art. PMA will open its new Perelman Building in 2007, the Free Library plans to break ground on its major new addition to the Central Library in 2006, and still other museums are possible.

Despite this extraordinary progress, the Parkway feels too much like a highway that is crowded at rush hour, but devoid of people and activity through much of the day and evening. Unsafe pedestrian crossings and an environment of asphalt isolates cultural institutions, discourages casual strolling and impulse visits, and constrains the Parkway from realizing its full educational and economic potential.



The extraordinarily diverse and intimate galleries of the Barnes Foundation will be recreated in a new setting on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway.



Moshe Safdie's atrium design for an expanded public library provides generous views of the Parkway.

¹ Seventy-seven percent of visitors to the Parkway come from outside the city, contributing \$358.6 million annually in economic activity; 59 percent of the jobs at Parkway institutions are held by Philadelphia residents.

To prompt the process of transformation, the Center City District — with support from The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania — has installed hundreds of new pedestrian and vehicular lights, illuminated 12 major monuments and sculptures and dramatically lit the facades of nine civic buildings from City Hall to the Philadelphia Museum of Art.² With support from the William Penn Foundation, legal crosswalks have been installed along the Parkway's diagonal, enabling easy access to Swann Fountain in Logan Square. New interpretive and directional signs are in the works.

But to enable this 1.1-mile cultural corridor to realize its full potential, the William Penn Foundation in 2002 funded Central Philadelphia Development Corporation (CPDC) to work in partnership with Parkway institutions, the Parkway Council Foundation, the Fairmount Park Commission, other city agencies and civic associations to develop a new framework for animation and growth.³

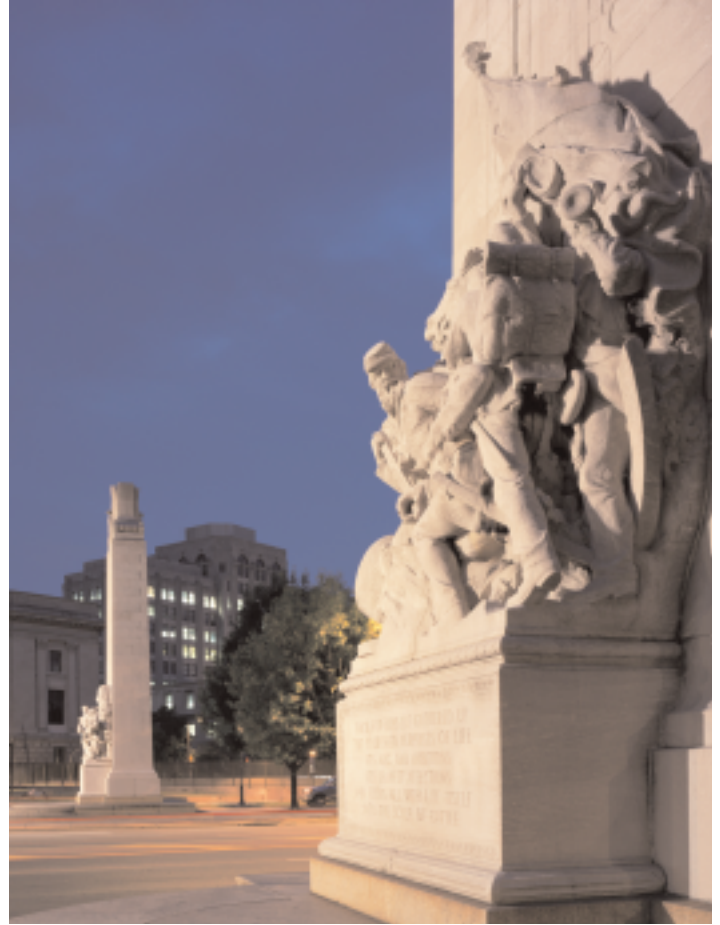
In early 2003 CPDC hosted a design charrette to answer a fundamental question: *What type of place do we want to create?* Looking back at early plans for the Parkway and learning from models as diverse as the Champs Elysées in Paris, the Passeig de Gràcia in Barcelona, Forest Park in St. Louis, Balboa Park in San Diego, Commonwealth Avenue in Boston and Ocean Parkway in Brooklyn, a consensus emerged that the Parkway should advance as an *animated cultural campus*. Though carrying high volumes of cars, the Parkway must become less a highway and more of a place. As the setting for major cultural, educational and civic institutions, the Parkway requires unifying, high-quality, well-maintained landscaping, signs and common architectural elements. But as the University of Pennsylvania has demonstrated in the last decade, a vibrant campus contains not only trees and gardens, but restaurants, cafes and a diversity of uses that animate public spaces with strolling pedestrians both day and night.

With these recommendations as a point of departure, the Olin Partnership, Brown & Keener, KSK Transport and Urban Engineers worked with Parkway stakeholders for over a year.



² Vehicular and pedestrian lights were designed by Cope Linder Associates and Grenald Waldron Associates. Facade and statue lighting was created by The Lighting Practice.

³ Key stakeholders are: Academy of Natural Sciences, Franklin Institute, Philadelphia Free Library, Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul, Four Seasons Hotel, Moore College of Art and Design, Rodin Museum, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Logan Square Neighborhood Association, the Philadelphian Apartment House, Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and the Fairmount Park Commission.



This page: The facades of nine civic buildings, including City Hall, were permanently illuminated, along with 12 sculptures and monuments.

Opposite page: With support from The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Center City District removed vintage 1969 light poles and installed 226 pedestrian fixtures and 132 roadway fixtures, while providing attractive new ways to identify international flags.





Mayor Reyburn and other city leaders pose with a 1911 model of the Parkway. Most early plans for the Parkway envisioned many more cultural institutions. As late as 1935, when all today's institutions were in place, a Philadelphia City Planning Commission report described the Parkway as only half complete. But the Depression and post-war suburbanization put an end to this vision of a dense cultural boulevard. Today, with renewed momentum in Center City, we have an opportunity to realize a 21st-century version of this dream.



Cafés, restaurants and other retail uses have helped animate the campus of the University of Pennsylvania at the new University Square on 36th Street, attracting more students and faculty and animating sidewalks into the evening hours.



The Fairmount Park Commission has enjoyed remarkable success at nearby Lloyd Hall where rowers, joggers and bicyclists can now relax at an outdoor café.

Ultimately, the design team suggested four goals:

Goal #1: Achieve a better balance between pedestrians and vehicles while improving access to cultural institutions.

Parkway designer Jacques Greber envisioned a Parkway where strolling pedestrians and cars could co-exist. But as the volume of vehicles increased exponentially beginning in the 1920s, the Parkway was continually altered to facilitate high-speed movement.

Some traffic calming has already been achieved with the \$1.5 million reconfiguration of Logan Square crosswalks. Other

measures proposed include concentrating vehicular traffic in the center lanes between Logan Square and Eakin's Oval to allow easier pedestrian movements on the side service roads; creating an expanded, dedicated lane for bicyclists and rollerbladers; and restoring Eakin's Oval to its original configuration, allowing pedestrians to cross legally from the Washington Monument to the steps of the Art Museum. This substantial change would repay the investment by creating two new, four-acre parcels and a place for underground parking.



Jacques Greber's 1918 sketch suggested a place where car and pedestrians could co-exist.



The dramatic increase in both the volume and velocity of cars beginning in the 1920s has created a major challenge for pedestrians, prompting a daily "run for art."



Traffic counts suggest that the Parkway has more lanes of asphalt than required. By concentrating traffic in the center and widening the flanking green spaces to accommodate walkers and bicycle riders, traffic in the outer lanes can be calmed.



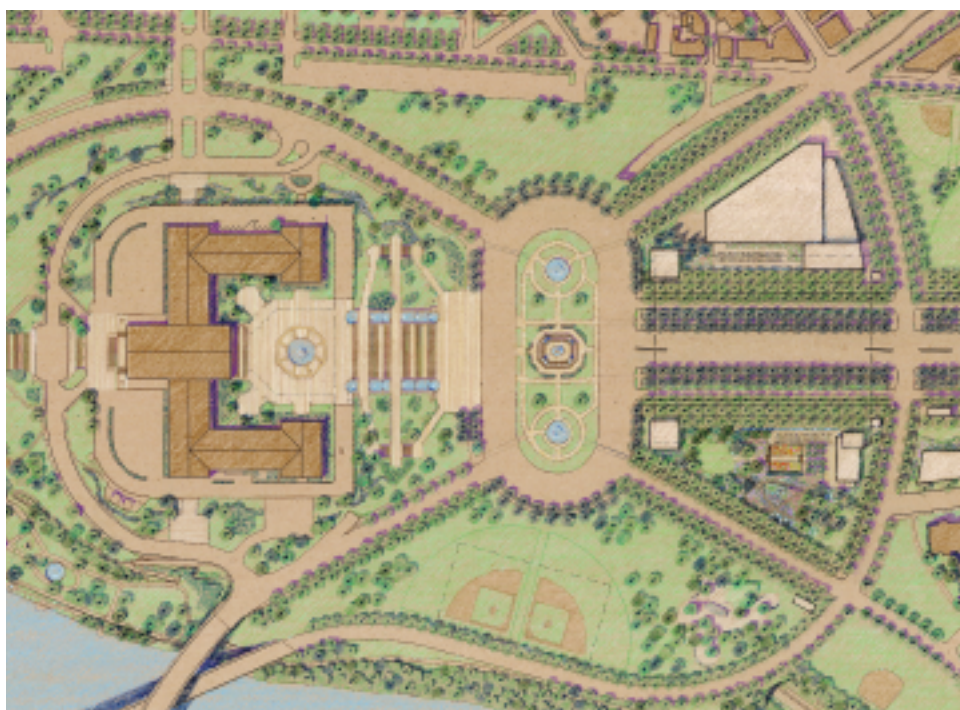
By widening the center green areas, the outer roads are reduced from three to two moving lanes. If needed, parking could be prohibited in these outer lanes during rush hour, but overall the goal is to concentrate high-speed movements in the center and to restore the primacy of pedestrians on the outer edges close to new cultural institutions.



Greber's original plan for Eakin's Oval was shaped quite differently than the current scheme and provided two parcels on which he envisioned new civic buildings. This plan was constructed in 1918 and remained in place until 1965.



To accommodate high-speed traffic from the Schuylkill Expressway and river drives, Eakin's Oval was altered in 1965 to function more like a traffic circle. Many pedestrians attempt to cross over the southeast side of the circle where no legal walkway exists. Similarly, many choose to run from the Washington Monument to the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



To restore Greber's original oval, West River Drive can be diverted to a new river road adjacent to Schuylkill River Park and connected to a restored "Crescent Drive" at the eastern end of the oval area. By removing a large volume of traffic from the oval itself, a legal signalized crossing can be created in front of the Art Museum and new space is provided for an underground garage and for additional cultural institutions. To the south of the oval, new playing fields can join the proposed skateboard park.

Goal #2: Design and program public spaces with exhibits and events sponsored by cultural institutions to achieve a higher level of use and animation. Significant gaps in amenities and activity levels render much of this boulevard lifeless and inhospitable to pedestrians. As institutions bring art, sculpture and events outside, the Parkway will provide a constantly engaging experience with a variety of small-scale, street-related activities — cafes, bookstalls, children’s play areas, information and ticket booths, interpretative panels, programmed or impromptu performances. The activities and attractions can be spaced so the next one is never more than a minute’s walk away.

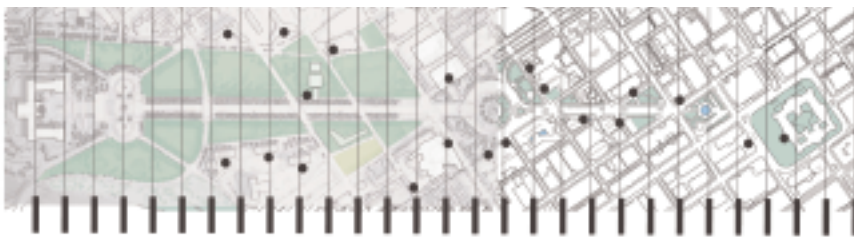


Animating the walkways in front of the Franklin Institute.



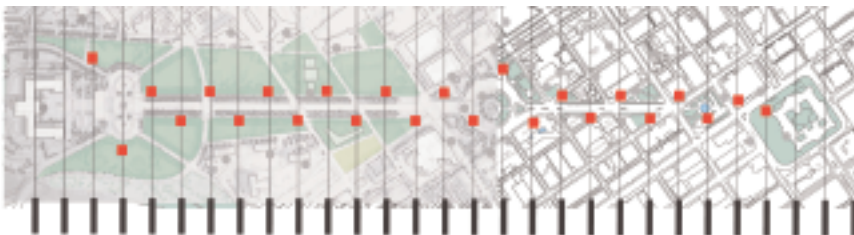
In a five-minute walk (the radii of the circles above) pedestrians too often experience only monotonous empty spaces.

POINTS OF INTEREST



One-minute walking intervals along the Parkway shown with entrances to major existing buildings. West of Logan Square, there are few generators of activity along the Parkway’s edge.

PROPOSED



Pedestrians on the Parkway should be continually surprised and engaged by an activity every minute: the entrance to a new cultural institution, café seating, new interpretive panels and installations of outdoor art.

Goal #3: Determine appropriate level and location for new developments and provide for the management of open spaces. With the Barnes Foundation relocated to the current site of the Youth Study Center on the 2000 block of the Parkway, and the Calder Museum intended for the southeast corner of 21st and the Parkway, an institution-per-block rhythm will be established. But the edges of the existing playing fields and the front doors of all cultural institutions can be activated by new amenities and activities. Newly created parcels at Eakin's Oval can be programmed with public gardens, sculptures, and additional institutions. With the reconfiguration of Eakin's Oval, new playing fields can activate the river's edge along Schuylkill River Park. At some point, the Family Court building on Logan Square can be converted to a new cultural or civic use.

The Parkway is one of the few main streets in Philadelphia that was planned as a whole and important design precepts have been firmly established. For example, continuity should be reinforced by using similar setbacks, materials and cornice lines, even if the architecture is distinctly modern. While respecting setbacks and view corridors, all buildings should engage and activate the street and new opportunities should be explored for residential development.

A single, well-funded management entity for the Parkway should ensure quality development in the future, while also assuming responsibility for public space management, maintenance, events production, marketing and promotion. The City and Fairmount Park Commission should work to reduce the number of large-scale events that actually prevent visits to institutions, even as they overwhelm the Parkway with crowds, barricades and portable toilets and fill adjacent neighborhoods with illegally parked cars.



Between Logan Square and Eakin's Oval, buildings should be set back the same distance as the gates that frame Rodin's sculpture of *The Thinker*. But cafés can activate open spaces, as in these two views in front of a new home for the Barnes Foundation.



A café at the southeast corner of Logan Square can provide a gathering place for art students, local residents and workers, and for families with children between visits to the Parkway's museums.

Goal #4: Address parking and transportation issues. Existing parking is scattered, often hard to find and poorly maintained. Workers rather than visitors monopolize metered, on-street spaces. An enhanced cultural campus should provide a “park-once” environment. New parking facilities should serve multiple institutions to encourage walking and should be placed underground or tucked behind new buildings to preserve the view corridor between City Hall and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

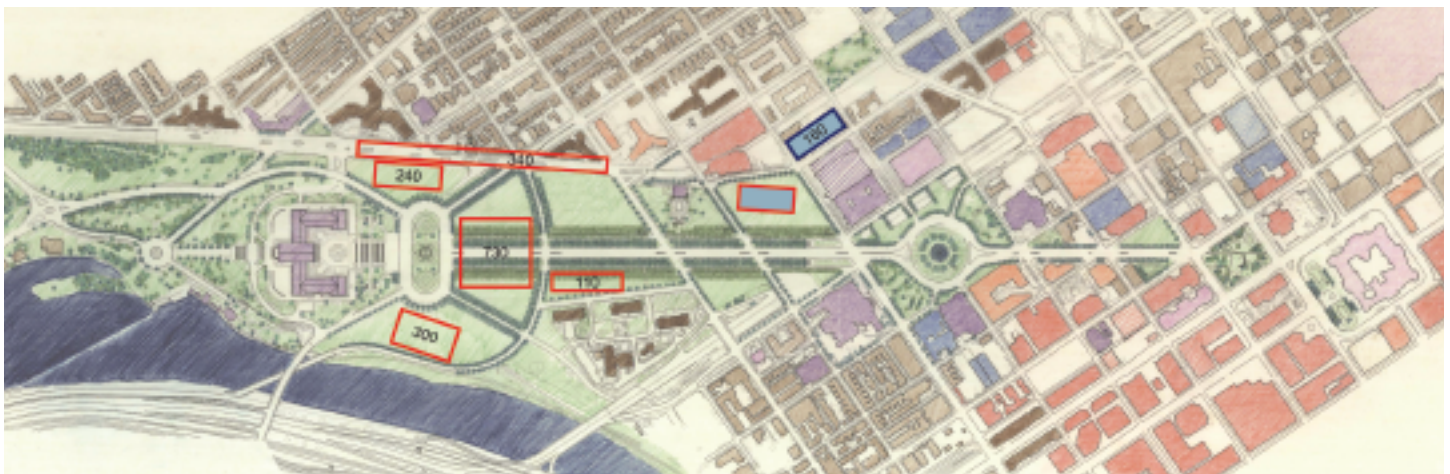
The Parkway is underserved by public transit. In the near term, the PHLASH can shuttle visitors among Parkway institutions, the Independence Visitor Center, regional rail stations and other stops throughout Center City. In the longer term, inexpensive, high-frequency transit service is needed along the Parkway to serve visitors, residents and commuters.

A century after it was conceived as the setting for major cultural institutions and nearly 70 years since the last civic building was completed, the Benjamin Franklin Parkway is poised for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to emerge as an animated, walkable cultural campus that will be one of Philadelphia’s great destinations.

The relocation of the Barnes Foundation to the Parkway should prompt a high-level, collaborative effort involving cultural institutions, significant property owners, major foundations, the Fairmount Park Commission, city and state government, civic, neighborhood and business groups.

It was exactly such an ambitious civic venture that led to the start of construction on the Parkway in 1908. In the last several years, much effort has been devoted to shaping a broad consensus around a new vision for the Parkway.

Now is the moment to insure a high-quality, coordinated effort to reanimate the Parkway for its second hundred years.



A diagram of potential locations for parking. Facilities should not be built at all these locations, but by strategically placing a few garages along the length of the Parkway, visitors can be encouraged to park once and then walk to other destinations.



Parkway Planning Team and Funders:

Olin Partnership; Brown & Keener; KSK Transport; Urban Engineers; The Pew Charitable Trusts; The William Penn Foundation

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