



**Cultural Arts & Marketing
Department of Economic & Workforce Development**

ITEM VII AGENDA REPORT

To: Public Art Advisory Committee
Attn: Kevin Chen and Judy Moran, Co-chairs
From: Steven Huss, Cultural Arts Manager
Date: August 4, 2014
RE: Public Hearing on I-880/Broadway Underpass Public Art Project and Potential Alterations, Modifications or Development of the Project

The I-880/Broadway Underpass is currently the focus of much attention and effort toward ongoing maintenance and long-term improvements. Within this context, the Public Art Advisory Committee's charge is to determine goals for the existing art project.

At its public hearing on August 4, the PAAC will review the art project's history as well as recent improvements to the underpass, consider future options for the existing artwork, and address its general maintenance. Potential alterations, modifications or development of the existing project will be assessed, pending availability of funds. To the extent feasible, the lead artist will be consulted on any changes to the art project.

As background for the PAAC's review and discussion, a brief history of the project is recapped below.

Historical Overview

- The notion of an art project in the Broadway Underpass began in 1996 as part of a master plan to illuminate Broadway through public art¹. Merchants and City officials were concerned that the Broadway Underpass was perceived as dark, foreboding and unsafe. The goal of the public art improvement project was to increase two-way pedestrian flow and improve the experience of motorists between downtown and Jack London Square by creating a sense of safety and a brighter, better-lit, more inviting underpass environment.
- A Request for Submissions was issued in 1999 for a \$250,000 public art commission that would address the entire underpass space. 23 applications were received. A seven-member selection panel, with technical advisory members, selected five artists/artist teams to develop design proposals. The semi-finalists were Seyed Alavi, Milton Komisar, Michael Muscardini, John Roloff, and the Team of Five.

¹ *REDISCOVERING BROADWAY: A Public Art Master Plan*, 1996, City of Oakland Public Art Program

- After thorough review of the design proposals, the panel recommended the proposal by the Team of Five, a group of young Oakland-based artists and architects, with lead artist Nick Gomez. The PAAC and the Cultural Affairs Commission (CAC) found the proposal to be novel, creative and whimsical, while addressing functional needs in innovative ways. The Team of Five proposal was approved by the PAAC on December 6, 1999, by the CAC on January 24, 2000, and by the Oakland Redevelopment Agency/City Council on April 18, 2000.
- Project description from June 30, 2003 staff report to PAAC: *... the project endeavors to use the materials of transportation to transform the underpass space into a virtual room where the pedestrian experiences relief from the darkness and heaviness of the superstructure, without discounting its significance and presence. The design of the project includes the molding of the sidewalk on both sides of the street, with rubber tiles and poured-in-place rubber, to create an undulating walking surface. The existing chain link fence will be set back and in front of it, a series of standard freeway guardrails will be positioned, bent and patterned to create a semi-transparent wall that reflects more ambient light into the space and adds an element of playfulness and design to the “barrier” between the pedestrian and the adjacent parking lots. A pattern of small (1/2”) chainlink mesh will be strategically affixed in places along the backside of the guardrails to hinder climbing while articulating a subtle visual pattern. The massive columns of the freeway structure will be painted red, and uplit, and additional lighting will be provided at the column tops to project more light into the overall space. Finally, a light sculpture will be recessed into the channel of the freeway structure overhead. Its lights will respond to the traffic on the freeway by placing photosensors that will send a pulse of light with each passing car.*
- As stated above, the key components of Team of Five’s design were:
 - 1) A tiered metal sculpture using freeway guardrails,
 - 2) The existing I-880 support columns painted red,
 - 3) Uplighting on the columns with additional lighting on the column tops,
 - 4) A rubberized, undulating sidewalk surface, and
 - 5) A kinetic light sculpture crossing Broadway on the underside of the freeway structure.
- Contract negotiations with the Team of Five were prolonged due to a variety of factors. Ultimately, in May 2002, it was agreed that the artist team would provide design only. A contract with the Team of Five in the amount of \$32,615 was executed in May 2002. The scope included design of the project and development of plans, sections and elevation drawings.
- Further delays were caused by the increase in materials costs over the years, and additional management and engineering expenses, against an established budget of \$250,000.
- Certain elements of the proposal presented challenges, for reasons of cost, practicality, agency regulations and policy issues. In a letter dated October 27, 2003, the Team of Five proposed removal of the light sculpture from the project scope due to the cost implications. They also proposed elimination of the “rolling sidewalk” in favor of a flat walk, to save the

high expense of this element. They added “we feel confident that the project can be built with roughly the same character as originally proposed.”

- The Public Works Agency (PWA) Construction Management Division was contracted to manage the development of the bid package, obtain permits from internal and outside agencies (including CalTrans, BART, PG&E, Traffic Engineering, Electrical Services, ADA Compliance, and Street Maintenance), put the project out for competitive bid, and manage the construction to completion.
- Construction documents based on the Team of Five specifications were prepared by PWA, then reviewed and found “fully acceptable to the Team of Five” (per letter from the team).
- The construction project was bid out with items 1 through 3 as the ‘base bid’ package, and items 4 and 5 as alternates. Note that the awarded construction contract included only items 1 through 3.
- The Public Art Program allocated additional funds to the project. On July 20, 2004, the City Council/Oakland Redevelopment Agency approved a not-to-exceed budget of \$385,000, and authorized PWA to negotiate a contract, which it did, awarding the construction contract to local firm Ray’s Electric. Notice to Proceed was given on September 27, 2004. The final adjusted contract amount was \$308,282. Public Art staff maintained oversight of the project and approved construction invoices.
- Installation was completed in late summer 2005 by the contractor Ray’s Electric, overseen by the Project Delivery division of PWA.
- Over time, the uplights at the base of the columns have been vandalized or broken down due to environmental conditions; most of the fixtures are now gone. Unintentionally, the sculptural guardrails provided extended perching space for the existing pigeon population at the site and the guardrails have become splattered with droppings. A section of guardrail sculpture was damaged by a car in 2011 (though it has since been repaired). Trash collects behind the sculpture foundation posts. Also, there is considerable concern that the sculpture project created contained, secluded spaces for the homeless to hide and sleep in.
- In 2011-12, Oakland Redevelopment Agency (ORA) staff identified key blighted “hotspots” in Oakland and chose several locations to fast-track for improvements. The Broadway Underpass was one of the sites chosen. At that time, Public Art staff contacted artist team leader Nick Gomez and discussed potential improvements to the artwork project, such as new supplementary lighting. ORA staff led a parallel effort to develop new signage and wayfinding for the sides of the bridge overpass. However, with the elimination of Redevelopment, staff was reduced, funds were lost, and the improvement projects were put on hold.
- Efforts to improve the underpass have accelerated recently with the engagement of the new Jack London Improvement District, interest from the Jack London District Association, and new leadership at Visit Oakland (formerly the Oakland Convention & Visitors Bureau). On

April 30, 2014, City Councilmember Lynette McElhaney hosted a town hall meeting to hear community concerns, and to work toward a shared vision and identify potential components of an improved underpass. On June 19, the JLID led a walking tour of the underpass, and followed this up on July 16 with a community workshop to explore potential solutions and visions for the underpass. Meanwhile, the Public Art Program has re-engaged lead artist Nick Gomez in the collaborative effort toward solutions.

- New lighting has been installed in the underpass. PWA is providing routine clean-up of the underpass area with trash collection and monthly steam cleaning. JLID Ambassadors also help to clean and maintain the underpass.

As part of a broad-based City and community partnership, the PAAC and the Public Art Program are participating in the makeover of the I-880/Broadway Underpass. The PAAC's initial and key responsibility is to exercise prudent stewardship over the existing artwork and to make a determination regarding its future.

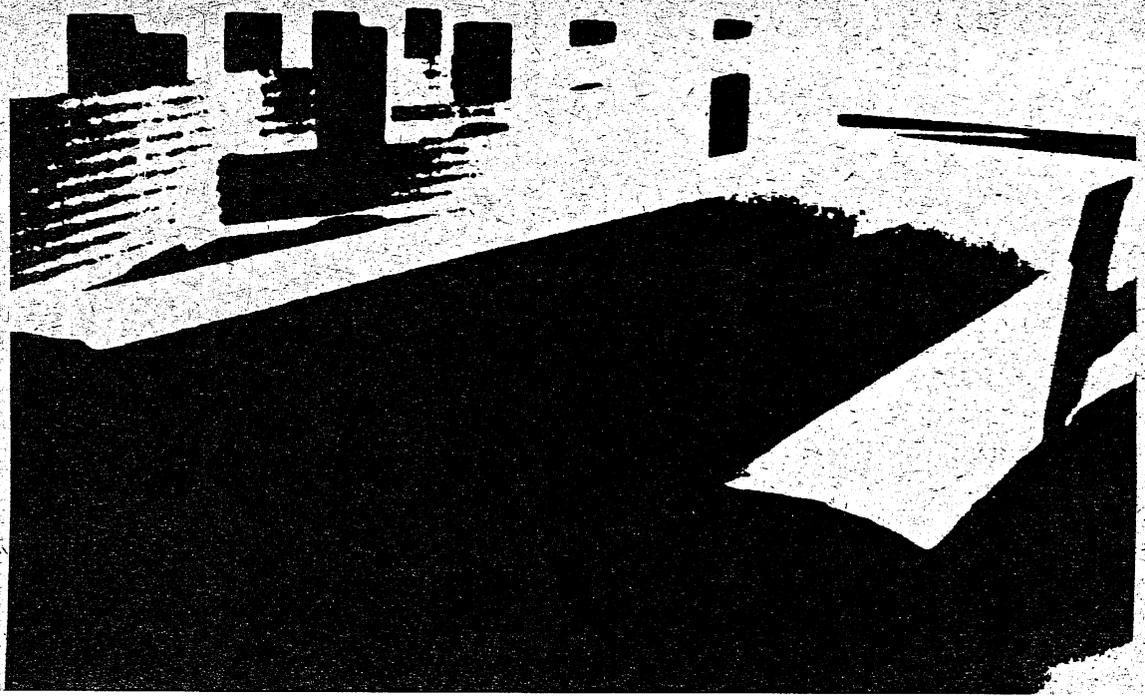


team of

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• **October 27, 1999**

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ONE.

Our collaboration in the I-880 overpass competition stems from a desire to become involved in projects that bring about positive environmental impact. In understanding the context of this project as a gateway for the city of Oakland, we recognize that the freeway's presence within the urban fabric represents an inevitable and undeniable component of the city's landscape. Imposing and massive, the highway displaces itself upon the city by dividing it and dictating its own order upon it.

Nevertheless, a close study of the I-880 overpass as it rises above Broadway Street, presents itself as a natural choice for a gateway. Although the highway's abrupt crossing severs the continuity between the vital areas of the waterfront and downtown Oakland, as a mediating threshold, a gateway at the I-880 overpass, best represents a critical link capable of weaving these divided realms.

Although the underpass experiences a large amount of pedestrian traffic, the space under the highway is unavoidably a product of car culture. The freeway prescribes the rules of the space—the car sets the scale and the pace. The existing 18 foot sidewalk is there to distance the pedestrian from the vehicle, and provides perhaps the only discernible sense of security in an otherwise unforgiving environment. The forest of columns, the thick concrete slab above, the colossal turning radius of the ramps, the soot collected on all surfaces, are indicative of a place that responds exclusively to vehicular traffic. One cannot help but recognize that the pedestrian experience in this space is decidedly oppressive. Pedestrians cannot help but quicken their pace when traversing the overpass. Nothing within its footprint relates to or responds to the scale or the sensitivities of the pedestrian.

In analyzing the context of the project, however, we felt that the incorrect approach would be to overlook the space's innate qualities that define its very nature. A solution that would be as transcendent as it would be compatible with the given site, needed to understand and acknowledge the inherent character of the overpass. Hence, rather than divide the auto and the pedestrian experience within the overpass, we decided to use the juxtaposition of these two elements as an opportunity rather than as a limitation. To us, the strength of the project would be derived from a complementary relationship between vehicle and pedestrian—the spectacle of one could and should ultimately reinforce the other. Our challenge would be to harness the spectacle of this concurrent existence.

The guiding metaphor for our project came in the form of a ripple of water. In looking closely at the site, one cannot help but notice that the underpass flows with its own streams and tidal rhythms—evening reflections and daytime shadows, the roll of tire treads on asphalt in the mornings and during rush hour, the movement of pedestrians at different times of day. If the landscape of Oakland were a surface of water, our project would be like a pebble dropped at the intersection of Broadway and I-880. Our intent is to define this intersection as a virtual room—a place where the straight, undifferentiated flows of traffic are altered from their course, and the experience in traversing it is uniquely delimited.

Team Leader:

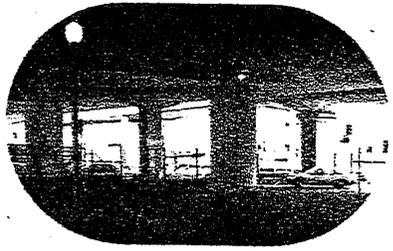
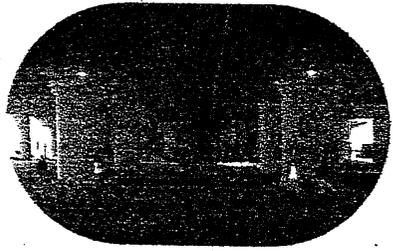
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TWO.

The first component of this virtual room is the molding of the walking path. We interrupt the otherwise straight path of the pedestrian and introduce a change that definitively modulates the walking experience. The gentle undulation of the ground plane becomes the first component of our intervention. By providing a change in the existing grade through the use of an undulating ramp on either side of Broadway, the overpass registers in the mind of the passerby because he or she must negotiate a walkway that subtly rises and falls. Much like a ripple of water whose surface rises and falls relative to the adjacent water level, the pedestrian's path rises and falls in relation to the street level.

The second component of our virtual room is the placement of a visual boundary to define the edges of the space. Although we feel that it is necessary to establish the limits of our intervention through the use of a type of "barrier" in the space below the overpass, it needs to be textural and unique in its composition. The use of sculptural walls would not only serve to identify the threshold of the gateway, but they would become a part of the spectacle of a transformed overpass by reducing the massive scale of the overpass's supporting structure while responding to the traffic (both pedestrian and vehicular). Rather than occlude the spaces behind them, the textural walls would additionally be semi-transparent—their overall feeling would be one of lightness.

Thirdly, in an attempt to reduce the vast expanse of dark ceiling beneath the overpass, it is imperative to introduce movement and light into the static mass aloft. To accomplish this, we propose the placement of a very delicate light sculpture in the recessed channel

that divides the overhead. The juxtaposition of an elegantly crafted filigree of lights and its supporting structure cleanly mounted from the overhead, hopes to dissolve the heaviness of the superstructure and add to the magic of a virtual room where the ground plane, the walls, and the overhead have all been carefully articulated. Much like the wake of a ship through an expanse of water, the light sculpture traverses an extended concrete surface whose oppressiveness is otherwise inescapable.

THREE.

The strength of the gateway we are proposing comes from the use of materials that are "natural" to the context of the highway. In using the highway's own vocabulary in constructing the I-880 gateway, not only do we transform the space we are changing, but we transform the common reading of urban materials whose nature is for the most part accepted as a given. Hence, we chose recycled rubber sheets as the material with which to cover the undulating ramps on either side of Broadway. On a strictly visual level, the granulated black finish of the rubber sheets (commonly used in children's playgrounds), closely resembles that of asphalt. On a tactile level, however, their feel is starkly different. The supple, forgiving quality of rubber underfoot is bound to be a most welcome transition from the hardness of adjacent asphalt. A by-product of the car, recycled rubber additionally finds its poetic adaptation in a gateway whose one of many aims is to transform the dominance of the car into a positively engaging relationship with the pedestrian.

Team of Five

Jeff Burris / Architect

Peggy Chung / Furniture Designer

Nick Gomez / Architect

Steve Jones / Graphic Designer

Roberto Royira / Landscape Architect



The second component of the gateway consisting of semi-transparent, sculptural walls flanking Broadway, employs lengths of reflective highway rail material in an arrangement that weaves into and around the forest of columns, above and around the passersby. Strictly used as vehicular barriers, the rail material's common function is that of containment and obstruction of traffic flow. In our proposal, we choose to transform its use to that of an ever-changing reflective canvas that adapts to the rhythm of the space's traffic shifts—a rippling wall capable of dematerializing the massiveness of the supporting structure by weaving into it. The varying lengths of zinc-coated metal will reflect the shapes of passersby as much as the lights of vehicle headlamps, turn signals, and brake lights during different times of day.

Lastly, the light sculpture suspended in the recessed channel of the overhead, will consist of a bank of lights that responds to the flow of traffic above the highway. Timed with two motion sensors (one at the beginning and one at the end of the overpass above), the lights will flow across the ceiling below in synchrony with the traffic that is unseen from below the overpass. The light structure registers the changing rhythms of the overpass. Through its timed relationship with the movement of traffic above the highway, the impenetrable nature of the concrete overhead is pierced and rendered transparent, adding to the spectacle of a space whose transformed nature reflects and magnifies the innate qualities of an ever-changing gateway.

