Skybridges

Policy
where we stand
Advocacy is a major component of the work Feet First does. These policy papers, prepared by our Policy Committee, convey Feet First’s position on key issues of interest to increase safe and easy ways for people to choose to go by foot.

Mission
who we are - what we do
Feet First promotes walkable communities and envisions people walking every day for their health, transportation, environment, community, and pleasure.

background
Largely a legacy of the 1960s and ‘70s, skybridges are employed throughout many cities in the United States. They were built in an era when convenience and insulation from nature and densely populated urban centers were the great American goals. They were especially popular in cold-winter Midwestern cities such as St. Paul, Des Moines, and Detroit. In St. Paul, as many as 90 percent of shops downtown are on the second story. However, many places have discovered that these structures deprive urban dwellers of the richness of the city, and many cities such as Baltimore and Cincinnati are removing them.

Unlike other cities, Seattle has built very few skybridges. The city adopted an ordinance in 1982 which prohibited blocking vistas or reducing street traffic. If anyone wants to build a skybridge, the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) will conduct a public review and permitting process, and the Department of Planning and Development will evaluate the proposed project in regards to its goals and policies.

SDOT has a Skybridge Permit Checklist to be used by an applicant.
before submitting a skybridge application. Criteria include:
horizontal and vertical clearance, and structural adequacy;
potential conflict with utilities, lighting, or traffic control;
view blockage and reduction of natural light; interference
with existing streetscape; impact on pedestrian activity;
projected skybridge use; access to public transit; effect
on commerce and enjoyment of neighboring land use;
availability of reasonable alternative; effect on traffic and
pedestrian safety; accessibility for elderly and handicapped;
major topographic barriers to pedestrian circulation;
adverse street conditions; and how the proposal is in the
public interest.

why it matters to walking
There are many concerns regarding skybridges, and
Feet First believes they should only be allowed in rare
circumstances because of their frequently negative impacts
on walkability. Feet First encourages concerned citizens
to review and comment on proposed skybridges, and for
other cities to review Seattle’s criteria and consider similar
processes.

resources
City of Seattle skybridge permitting process: