

powered by feet first



feet first policy

taking a stance to advance walkability

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Feet First policies

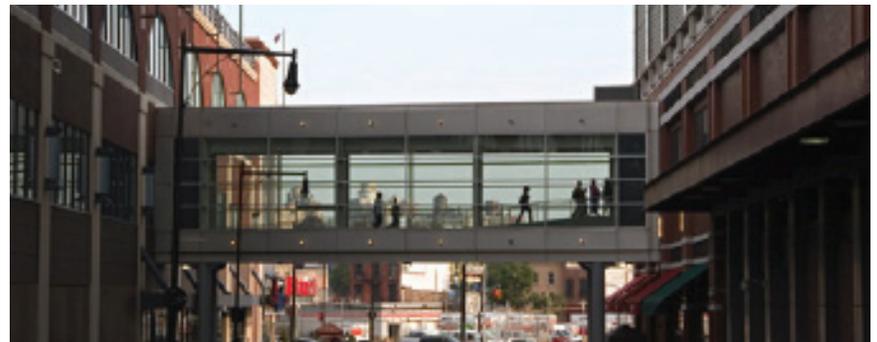
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Skybridges

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.



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

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.



feet first
promoting walkable communities



Skybridges

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 the impact of skybridges on an area. Skybridges remove walking activity from the street, which decreases visibility of the streetscape and impairs visibility of street-level retail. They also contribute to social inequity by creating semipublic crossing of public space, leaving the street level to those who are economically or socially disadvantaged. And presence of skybridges can block urban views and cast shadows which create a security risk to people walking at street level. However, skybridges can also provide safe and reasonable transport between buildings which may be necessary in cities with harsh weather conditions or between wings of a hospital to maintain hygiene.

feet first position

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:

www.seattle.gov/transportation/cams/cam2207.pdf

Photo courtesy of Tom Giebel

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