

GARDEN ARTERY: SEAMLESS STREETSCAPE

“The Region has been overlaid with a complex series of transportation methods, each with its own rate of movement and its own system of perception attached. Up to the present, each of these systems has been thought of separately, just as, at the beginning of each new period of architecture, the building is conceived of as separate from the ground... All these movement systems must be thought of simultaneously if the region is to produce the impression of a coherent whole.”

“Peripheral to the most intense civic core, the separation of the pedestrian and the vehicular movement system can be achieved on the same ground plane. As the designer moves into the core itself, the separation can only be achieved in the third dimension, by the establishment of multiple overlapping planes of movement at different levels.”

-Edmund Bacon, *Design of Cities*

Edmund Bacon's plan for Penn Center successfully recognized the components of a rich urban environment. All of the infrastructure seems to be there, but the place doesn't work. There are the obvious problems: the orientations of office buildings, the lack of visual connection with the concourse, the lack of light in the Plaza and Concourse.

Would Bacon's original plan, if carried through more thoroughly, have improved the quality of these spaces and engendered a thriving urban environment? Would more glass, more openings, and more escalators have solved what appears to be a schism between the grade Level of the Plaza and the Concourse?

Or is the problem at Penn Center more severe? Is there more than one layer of isolation? Are the gaps deeper?

Upon investigation a steep hierarchy of space ordering is revealed. Office towers take light from the Public Plaza, the Public Plaza isolated is from Streetscape, and Retail is below and separate from everything.

This project proposes that all of the components of a rich urban environment already exist on the site of Penn Center but in an overly disconnected manner. In keeping with Edmund Bacon's fascination with systems of movement, simultaneity, and freedom; modifications to the architecture of the site will provide fluid visual and circulatory connections. This is to occur without altering the existing layers of infrastructure: commercial, pedestrian, car, shopping concourse, and train.

In order to create a pedestrian friendly environment on the site, Bacon's Plan for Penn Center called for the isolation of various movement patterns in the "third dimension." He did this by pulling vehicular and train traffic above, below, and around the planes on which pedestrians are to circulate. Bacon is able to achieve pedestrian spaces which foster free, organic movement through space. However, these planes of movement remain isolated from one another in the third dimension. The use of glass atriums, open courtyards, and vertical circulation punctures are unable to bridge the schism between the sectional levels on the site.

Using continuous sloping surface connections between the existing Plaza and Concourse levels, this proposal merges the street level plaza space with a system of ramps and nested park/plaza platforms. The existing slab of the plaza is pulled and trimmed to provide site lines for vehicular traffic at street level. The strands of pedestrian, bike, vehicular circulation are pulled down, into and around and out of the existing Plaza. The various systems of movement weave and negotiate one another sectionally to create an intertwined, three dimensional system of movement with out rules or boundaries.

Additionally, the existing tunnel system on site is viewed as an opportunity to create a seamless cyclist and pedestrian movement system through downtown Philadelphia which bypasses crossroads and avoids the messy ring-road around City Hall. The existing tunnel network is historically linked with the now defunct and overgrown Reading terminal viaduct, which runs north and west connecting Penn Center to diverse neighborhoods of Philadelphia including West Philadelphia, the Art Museum, North Philadelphia, and Northern Liberties. We propose reconnecting the broken fragments of this train line, much of which remains intact. A new stream of bicycle traffic will thereby be diverted through the site.

Additionally, the wild and overgrown nature of the Reading Viaduct will be preserved and extended along the new bike-way, to create a strand of Green Space running into and through the city.

This new system of movement and visual connectivity, in conjunction the redirection of various strands of traffic through the site, will create a rich and active urban environment at both the Plaza and Concourse levels of the site. A fluid streetscape capable of supporting diverse retail and commercial interests within the existing infrastructure will emerge.

Philadelphia does not simply need more open space, it needs active, green, urban, public, space. This can only occur within a thriving public streetscape.

GARDEN ARTERY : SEAMLESS STREETSCAPE

PENN CENTER: A BRIEF HISTORY

Trains in the city ran on elevated tracks and stopped at two major locations, Broad Street Station and Reading Terminal. These stations were within blocks of one another, but there was no direct connection.



Center City train tracks were moved underground, connected, and combined with an underground pedestrian concourse. The elevated tracks were demolished with the exception of The Reading Viaduct which was left standing and has now been reclaimed by nature.



The evolved Reading Viaduct feeds back into the city in the form of a nature walk, a pedestrian path, and a cycling trail. Penn Center becomes a worthy destination along this revised viaduct, benefiting from the enhanced connections to the area and within itself.



STREETScape STRATEGIES



EXISTING CONDITION - Sunken Plaza



Nested Condition



Nested with Pedestrian Connection



Full Height Elevated Park

