



MEMO

TO: Mary-Ellen Walsh, AZ State Historic Preservation Office
FROM: Michael Kyne, M.A.
SUBJECT: Milton Road Underpass Retaining Wall - Downtown Mile
DATE: July 16, 2024

The City of Flagstaff (City) proposes to reconstruct the existing Milton Road BNSF Underpass (Underpass) to facilitate other projects within the “Downtown Mile”. The existing Underpass consists of a two-span steel girder structure allowing two lanes to cross underneath the BNSF right-of-way northbound and southbound, as well as an original retaining wall.

An underpass near this location was originally constructed in the mid-1930s as part of the realignment of US Route 66, but it was replaced in c. 1957 and moved slightly south to its current location. To accommodate the Underpass relocation, the original retaining wall was maintained but altered, with the Underpass abutment moved to its new location and a new wall panel added in the location of the previous abutment.

The proposed project will replace both the existing c. 1957 Underpass and the altered mid-1930s retaining wall. In determining the project’s potential to affect cultural resources, an individual meeting the Secretary of the Interior’s Professional Qualifications Standards reviewed relevant materials including a historic photograph of the Underpass and retaining wall from the June 1936 Arizona Department of Transportation periodical, Arizona Highways, and as-built drawings for the c. 1957 bridge replacement. The c. 1936 photograph demonstrates clear differences between the original and current Underpass. Whereas the current Underpass is very simple with a strictly utilitarian design, the original included prominent columns, with a vertical expression providing visual balance to the horizontal span of the Underpass. The original configuration also included an arched walkway adjacent to the retaining wall, which has since been replaced by the current sidewalk and modified with a safety wall/railing. The visual characteristics of the retaining wall remain largely unchanged from the c. 1936 photograph; however, the c. 1957 as-built drawings show the relocation of the abutment to its current location and installation of a new wall panel.

While the retaining wall’s design aesthetic follows that of the original Underpass, it lost that association when the Underpass was replaced c. 1957. The qualified professional found that both the current Underpass and retaining wall lack individual significance under the National Register of Historic Places Criteria for Evaluation. Nonetheless, because of its historic association with Route 66, the City proposes sympathetic replacements, with material, texture, and massing to be generally consistent with the existing. A series of interpretive panels are also being considered for installation along the proposed new retaining wall.



A Historic Property Inventory Form for the retaining wall is attached for your consideration. We look forward to your review and concurrence with our findings.

Michael Kyne, M.A.
Lead Consultant, Architectural Historian