



Agenda Item No. 2

To: Building and Operating Committee/Committee of the Whole
Meeting of January 27, 2005

From: Kary H. Witt, Deputy General Manager, Bridge Division
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Subject: **STAFF PRESENTATION REGARDING HISTORY OF DISTRICT
ACTIVITIES RELATIVE TO GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE SUICIDE
DETERRENT SYSTEMS**

Recommendation

The following report is provided for information purposes only. Staff is preparing a draft plan of action regarding next steps on this project concept for Committee consideration at their February 24, 2005, meeting.

Summary

Over the years, the Bridge District's Board of Directors has investigated and ultimately made several decisions relative to suicide deterrent systems at the Golden Gate Bridge. Given the high profile of this issue in recent press and community conversations, staff is presenting an overview of the history of District efforts in this area and of the systems in place today. This overview is intended to provide the newer members of the Golden Gate Bridge Board with a synopsis of past efforts on this difficult issue. Staff is currently developing a draft plan of action regarding next steps on this project concept for Committee consideration at their February 24, 2005, meeting.

Physical Deterrent Systems:

Development of physical suicide deterrent systems dates back several decades. In the 1970s, the District hired an architectural firm to study and evaluate 18 alternatives. Three proposals were developed for further study and models constructed of these alternatives for additional evaluation. Numerous public meetings were held to discuss the alternatives. Ultimately, the Board decided to not proceed with any of the alternatives. Figure 1 presents a sketch of the alternative that was deemed to be the most promising at that time.

At approximately this same time, the District Board of Directors adopted a list of criteria for use in evaluating physical suicide deterrent systems. They determined that any deterrent system must satisfy all of the following criteria:

- Cannot cause safety or nuisance hazards to pedestrian or Bridge personnel
- Must be totally effective as a barrier
- Cannot bar pedestrian traffic
- Weight can not be beyond established allowable limits
- Cannot cause excessive maintenance problems
- Aerodynamics (Wind Stability) can not be beyond established allowable limits

Later this criteria was expanded to acknowledge that environmental law requires a consideration of the following criteria:

- Historical and architectural considerations
- Visual and aesthetic impacts
- Cost effectiveness

In the early 1990s, the Board authorized the selection of three eminent local architects to serve on an Architectural Advisory Panel to assist the District in reviewing possible physical suicide deterrents. In the mid-1990s, the Architectural Advisory Panel used the Board's criteria to evaluate a proprietary system known as Z-Clip. The system was comprised of 11-foot curved stantions spaced at 100-foot intervals supporting 3/16-inch diameter horizontal tensioned wires spaced four inches apart. The Z-Clips connected the horizontal wires at an approximately six-foot spacing. Access gates for maintenance purposes would be provided at the existing belvederes. A sketch of the system appears at the end of this report in Figure 2.

The Board authorized the development and construction of a Z-Clip system prototype, which was erected at the Bridge in June 1998 for testing purposes. The District hired a market research firm, David Binder Research, to assess the systems effectiveness as a deterrent. Most individuals from the public sampling found the system a difficult fence to climb and a difficult system to "squeeze through". The Z-Clip system, however, did not satisfy the adopted Board criteria with respect to being "totally effective" as a deterrent.

The Architectural Review Panel met several times and reviewed the prototype that had been constructed. The Architectural Review Panel recommended that a different approach should be pursued that would provide an effective deterrent to suicides while minimizing visual impact and preserving the aesthetic and historic integrity of the Bridge.

Ultimately, the Board rejected the Z-Clip system because it did not meet the criteria for effectiveness and for visual impact.

Other Deterrent Systems:

Closed-Circuit Television Surveillance - In the 1960s, closed-circuit television cameras were installed at the Bridge towers to remotely monitor traffic conditions. As a result of security system upgrades in the mid 1990's and again following September 11, 2001, a large number of additional cameras have been installed in other locations on and around the Bridge. This network of cameras provides detailed surveillance of the Bridge sidewalks. These cameras are

monitored 24 hours per day and have helped identify potential suicides and direct intervention personnel.

Emergency Telephones - In 1993 the District, in cooperation with San Francisco Suicide Prevention Inc., upgraded the emergency "call-box" telephone system on the Bridge sidewalks to accommodate suicide prevention and crisis intervention calls. New phones were installed to expand the coverage area and the system was modified to allow the Sergeant's Office to instantly connect callers to trained suicide prevention counselors at the San Francisco Suicide Prevention's crisis line. Signs on the phones were also updated to indicate that they could be used for crisis counseling purposes. There are a total of 15 emergency telephones on the Bridge sidewalks. They are used both by potentially suicidal persons seeking assistance and by members of the public who wish to alert authorities to persons they have spotted on the sidewalk. In recent years, the proliferation of cellular telephones has also increased the incidence of reporting by the general public.

Public Safety Patrols - In 1996, a Public Safety Patrol was initiated on the Bridge sidewalks with suicide prevention as one of its primary objectives. Under this program, the District's existing Bridge Patrol program was re-oriented with an emphasis on patrolling the Bridge east sidewalk. The initial patrols were performed on foot and by scooter. In 1999, the Board of Directors authorized the formation of a bicycle unit within the Bridge Patrol ranks. Today, the majority of sidewalk patrolling is done on bicycles. In December, 2001, as a result of heightened security concerns, the Board authorized the addition of 12 Bridge Patrol Officers to the Bridge's security force. These new officers are trained in suicide prevention and intervention. In early 2003, the California Highway Patrol (CHP) deployed its own bicycle patrol officers on the Golden Gate Bridge, increasing law enforcement coverage even further.

Employee Training - All Golden Gate Bridge security personnel as well as several ironworker staff who have volunteered to assist in suicide rescue activities, have received special training from San Francisco Suicide Prevention, Inc. In 2004, the District, CHP, and the U.S. Park Police jointly sponsored an intensive full-day training session on crisis intervention and suicide prevention. This course was attended by more than 120 law enforcement officers, District security and ironworker personnel. The course was conducted by a nationally renowned expert in the field of crisis intervention and by personnel from San Francisco Suicide Prevention, Inc.

In conclusion, staff is actively working to develop a draft potential plan of action regarding the next steps on this project concept for Building and Operating Committee discussion and consideration at the February 24, 2005, meeting. This draft plan of action will provide an overview of steps to be taken as part of any further examination of a physical suicide deterrent system and the potential budget and timeframe impacts associated with undertaking this project.

Fiscal Impact

There is no fiscal impact relative to this informational report.

Attachments

Figure 1

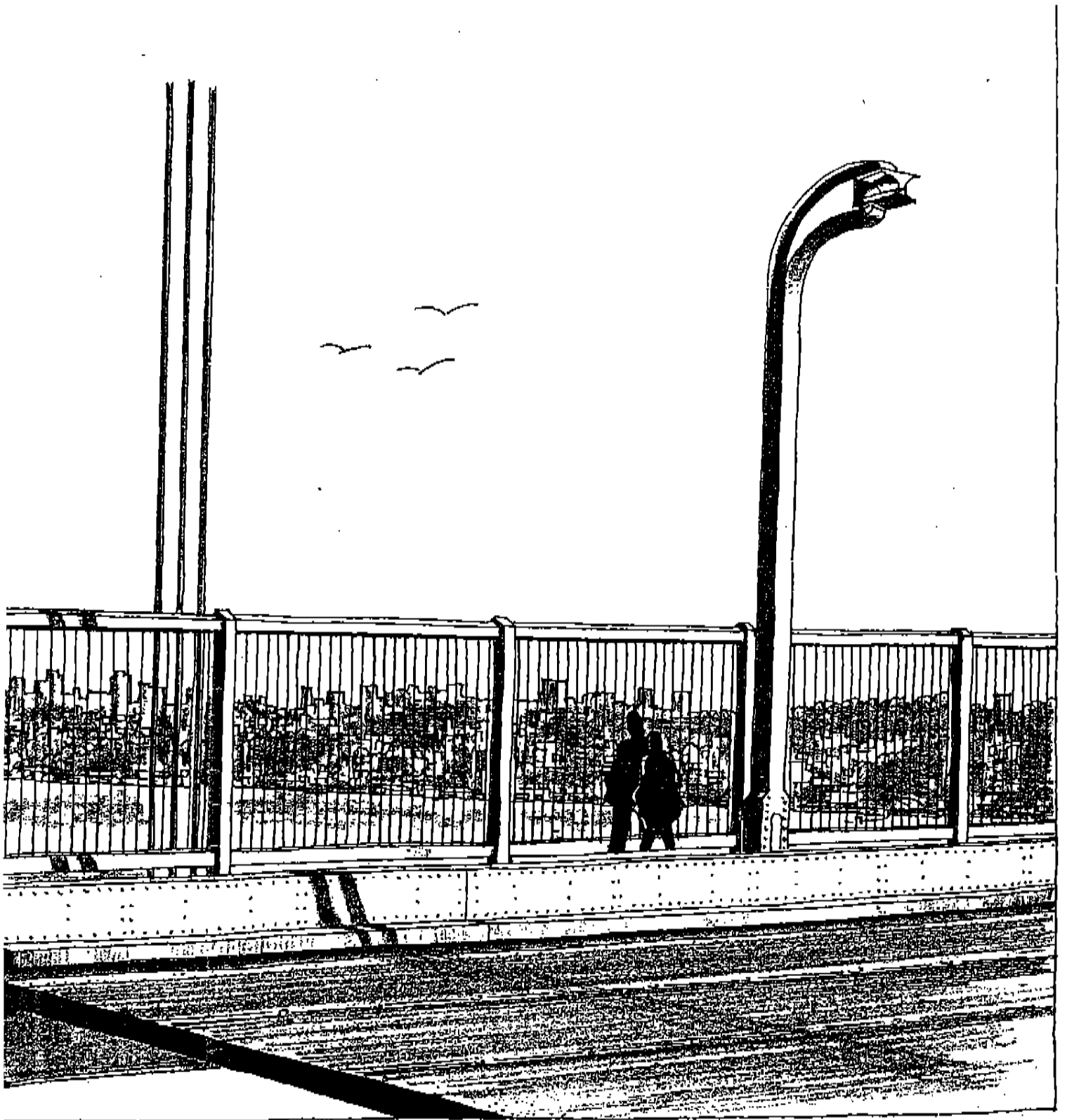


Figure 2

