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## North Avenue Bridge

<b>Address:</b>	Lake Shore Drive near North Ave. (1600 N.)
<b>Date:</b>	1938-1940
<b>Architect:</b>	Ralph H. Burke, the reknowned transportation planner and engineer who also designed the master plan of O'Hare International Airport
<b>Style:</b>	Modern
<b>CHRS Rating:</b>	Not rated

### Overview:

The North Avenue Pedestrian Bridge was considered a triumph of engineering and design when first constructed in 1938. It possesses the unique characteristic of having a very long span with no central support, affording a minimum of visual obstruction to motorists on Lake Shore Drive. The stunning impression from a distance is that of a long, low, and graceful arch linked by an overhead grid of crossed steel beams. Suspended from many vertical cables is the pedestrian roadway. However, because this once-revolutionary bridge does not meet modern accessibility requirements, its future could be doomed.

### History:

In the 1930's, Chicago created a transportation breakthrough with the completion of a major portion of the grade-separated Lake Shore Drive, one of the first modern expressways built in the heart of a major city. To match that breakthrough, the city sought to create a series of bridges over this roadway to allow pedestrian access to the lakefront.

The most striking of these bridges was constructed at the southern end of Lincoln Park near North Avenue. It became known as the North Avenue Pedestrian Bridge. It is technically a three-hinged arch, because the arch has a specific curvature and points of support at each end. This type of arch allowed for a very long unbroken span, which allowed the bridge to avoid the need for any vertical supports over the wide span of Lake Shore Drive.

The seating of each arch terminus was another groundbreaking part of the design. This also facilitated the two goals of having a long unbroken span while at the same time keeping the bridge height low. Esthetically, the graceful long arches and clean, modern lines make the bridge inherently linked to an era of streamlined and occasionally futuristic design that spread all over the world during the next decade.

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The bridge was considered so impressive that it was featured a few years after its construction in an exhibit of modern architecture and design that was held at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York City. For the past 66 years, this bridge has been a familiar sight to Chicagoans and visitors alike. This bridge also helps to tell the story of Chicago and its contribution to the age of modern design. Considering that it was designed and built in 1938, it was incredibly progressive for its time and it still looks as fresh and modern as the day it was built.

#### **Threat:**

In 2003, city officials and the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) determined that the North Avenue Pedestrian Bridge was non-compliant with federal accessibility standards. Since then, plans have been underway to replace the bridge with a larger bridge that meets these accessibility standards. This replacement was incorporated into a plan to build five new bridges that would improve pedestrian access to the lakefront. These bridges would be located on both the North Side and South Side.

A 2005 design competition, won by PSA-Dewberry of Peoria, Illinois, calls for a sweeping curvilinear design. However, they did not recommend preservation of the historic bridge.

In March 2006, CDOT spokesman Brian Steele (source: Skyline/Sun-Times News Group) stated that obtaining funding for preliminary design, engineering, and construction was still several years away and would cost between \$5 million and \$20 million. "Part of our process for all large scale projects is to gather public comment. All of these ideas related to preservation of the bridge will be part of any discussion with the community and are (discussions) that the city is committed to having."

Steele also stated that public forums would be held to get input on the existing bridge when the process gets further underway. "Whether we build around it, or whether to demolish it, it's too early to have these specific discussions," Steele said. "But right now the intention is to replace it."

#### **Recommendation:**

Preservation Chicago recommends that the North Avenue Pedestrian Bridge be preserved in its entirety. If the bridge is deemed unsuitable for modification to the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act, then these standards can be met by the construction of a new bridge. However, the construction of a new bridge should proceed with preservation of the North Avenue Pedestrian Bridge. In fact, there are many examples around our nation where an historic bridge has been preserved and kept adjacent to a replacement bridge. The same can be done with the North Avenue Pedestrian Bridge. If we make the correct choice to preserve it, it will continue to enhance our city with its historical significance and grace.

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