

Veterans Memorial Bridge & Subway History

The World's Largest... At the time of its completion in 1917, the Veterans Memorial Bridge (originally known as the Detroit-Superior) was hailed as the world's largest double-deck reinforced concrete bridge.

The 3,112 foot long structure links Detroit and Superior Avenues over the flats of the Cuyahoga River Valley in Downtown Cleveland. It consists of 12 concrete arches, varying in size from 58 to 174 feet, and an overhead steel arch span that is 591 feet long and 196 feet tall. Clearance for river vessels is 96 feet.

CONSTRUCTION

Started in the fall of 1912, the bridge was constructed from 9,385,000 pounds of reinforcing steel and 8,500,000 pounds of structural steel for the steel arch. When the last section of trusses in the river span was erected, the two halves (each 290 feet long and weighing 2,000 tons) lined up within an eighth of an inch. Total cost of the construction was \$5,407,000. Designers included County Engineers A.B. Lea, Frank R. Lander and W.A. Stinchcomb, original developer of the Cleveland Metroparks.



TWO DECKS

By 1930, the upper deck, opened to automobile traffic on Thanksgiving Day 1917, carried an average daily traffic volume of 70,000 vehicles. The lower deck, opened on Christmas Day 1917, held four streetcar tracks. On the west side, streetcars entered and exited the bridge through tunnels beneath West 25th Street and Detroit Avenue. To the east, just off Public Square, a tunnel system containing four tracks (two in each direction) ran down the center of Superior Avenue.



HISTORICAL NOTES

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974, the bridge has been compared to the Queen Maria-Pia Bridge over the Douro River in Oporto, Portugal (1877) and the Garabit Viaduct over the Truyere River in France (1886), both designed by Gustav Eiffel. Because of America's involvement in World War I, the bridge was not officially dedicated until its 70th Anniversary in 1988. On Veterans Day 1989, it was renamed the Veterans Memorial Bridge.



WHAT'S NEXT?

With support from a \$7 million federal grant through the USDOT's Reconnecting Communities & Neighborhoods program, Cuyahoga County is working closely with key partners to advance the bicycle and pedestrian concept identified in the 2013 Detroit-Superior Bridge Project: Connectivity Plan through detailed design. Grant activity includes technical analysis and ongoing public engagement, including short term activations of the lower deck.

BELOW THE SURFACE

The "Subway" contained six station areas, four restrooms, an electrical control center and pedestrian tunnels that provided access from one side of the Subway to the other beneath the tracks. The Subway served as a major hub for commuter transportation until the discontinuation of streetcar service on January 24, 1954. In 1957, a study concluded that the old streetcar area was unsuitable for automobile traffic. Over the years, many ideas about commercial development and a new streetcar system were discussed but never initiated.



REHABILITATION

To improve travel across the bridge, the upper deck was replaced and widened from four to six lanes. The project was built from 1967 to 1969 and involved the construction of cantilever deck supports to hold two new outside lanes and sidewalks. Total cost of this work was \$7,378,000. From 1995 to 1997 the bridge was closed for a \$50,000,000 rehabilitation project. Improvements included replacement of the upper deck, repair and replacement of steel members, restoration of deteriorated concrete, removal and replacement of sections of the lower deck.



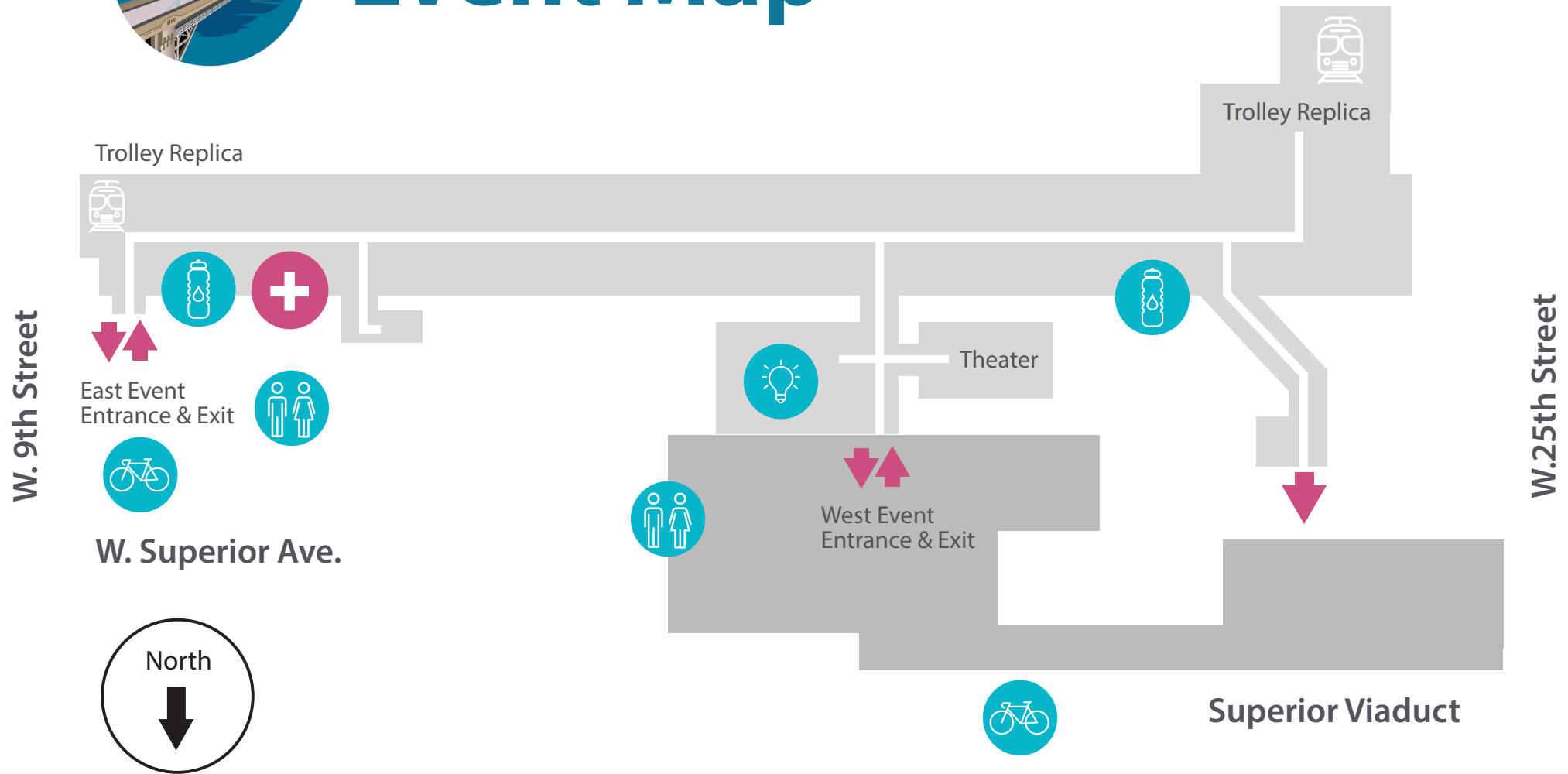
RECENT HISTORY

In 2003, Cuyahoga County Commissioners approved bicycle and pedestrian improvements to the bridge, expanding sidewalk space and adding a shared use path along the north side of the bridge. While consistently closed, Cuyahoga County intermittently opened the lower deck for public tours, highlighting the history of the bridge. In 2013, the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA) published "The Detroit-Superior Bridge Project: Connectivity Plan," demonstrating what the opening of the lower level of the bridge for bicycle and pedestrian traffic would look like on a regular basis.





Event Map



MAP KEY



First Aid



Restroom



Engagement Station and Family Activities



Water Station



Bicycle Parking



Cuyahoga County