



**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**

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**Washington, DC 20515**

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June 7, 2007

**SUMMARY OF SUBJECT MATTER**

**TO:** Members of the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management

**FROM:** Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management Staff

**SUBJECT:** Oversight Hearing on "What Visitors Can Expect at the Capitol Visitors Center: Transportation, Access, Security and Visuals"

**PURPOSE**

The Subcommittee will meet on Friday, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007, at 10 a.m. in room 2167 Rayburn House Office Building to receive testimony from a panel of government officials, including the Acting Architect of the Capitol ("AOC"), the Chief of the Capitol Police, D.C. Government officials, and trade associations on "What Visitors Can Expect at the Capitol Visitors Center: Transportation, Access, Security and Visuals." The panels will provide testimony on the operational and management plans for the new Capitol Visitors Center ("CVC").

**BACKGROUND**

The Architect of the Capitol is responsible to the United States Congress for the maintenance, operation, development, and preservation of the United States Capitol Complex, which includes the Capitol, congressional office buildings, Library of Congress buildings, the Supreme Court building, the U.S. Botanic Garden, the Capitol Power Plant, and other facilities. The Subcommittee has jurisdiction over the Capitol building and the Senate and House office buildings.

**Capitol Visitors Center**

As originally conceived, the United States Capitol was never intended to be able to accommodate the throngs of visitors that visit the U.S. Capitol annually. Today, over three million

people visit the Capitol on an annual basis. In addition, since the birth of our Nation, the number of Representatives in Congress has increased as the nation has grown. This increase, along with the resulting increase in staff, has created a need for additional space in the Capitol. In 1991, Congress provided funds for the conceptual design and planning of a Capitol Visitors Center. In 1993, the Capitol Preservation Commission allocated funds to carry the conceptual study into an actual design document.

The Capitol Visitors Center project gained momentum with the tragic shooting of Capitol Police Officers John Gibson and Jacob Chestnut in 1998.<sup>1</sup> On July 24, 1998, Russell Weston, Jr. burst through a security checkpoint entrance on the eastern front of the Capitol and opened fire, killing the two Capitol Police officers and wounding several others. Soon after the shooting, Congress appropriated \$100 million for a visitor's center to increase security within the Capitol, and to provide a safer environment for visitors awaiting tours of the Capitol. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and the subsequent discovery of anthrax in congressional office buildings in October 2001 highlighted concerns regarding the potential vulnerabilities of the Capitol and the need for improved security on Capitol Hill. These developments influenced congressional discussions concerning the necessity of spending money on the center.<sup>2</sup>

The new CVC is expected to be completed in the fall of 2008. There will be 170,000 square feet of office space for the House and Senate, a main Exhibition Hall, a Visitor Center Auditorium, a gift shop, and other amenities. In total the CVC will have 580,000 square feet of space. The CVC is expected to provide space for visiting constituents of Members of Congress, as well as provide office space for several Congressional Committees. The CVC is the largest project in the Capitol's 212-year history and the planned space is approximately three quarters the size of the Capitol itself. The CVC is expected to significantly improve the screening of delivery vehicles that move tons of equipment, food, and other material into and out of the Capitol every day.<sup>3</sup> The entire facility is located underground on the east side of the Capitol so as not to detract from the appearance of the Capitol and of the grounds designed by Frederick Law Olmsted in 1874.<sup>4</sup>

## Construction History

The CVC project has been beset with cost overruns. Although design plans for the Capitol Visitors Center began before the deaths of two Capitol Police officers, radical changes were made to the original design once the shooting took place and still more after the terrorist acts of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Congress initially appropriated a \$100 million for the project but the CVC is expected to cost well over \$500 million.

According to Government Accountability Office ("GAO"), since construction started, there have been 180 design changes and 80 contract modifications.<sup>5</sup> Most of the added costs were outside or largely outside the AOC's control. Approximately \$147 million of the cost increase has been due

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<sup>1</sup> "Gunman Shoots His Way Into Capitol; Two Officers Killed, Suspect Captured." Washington Post, July 25, 1998, Martin Weil, A1.

<sup>2</sup> Congressional Research Service RL31121 -- The Capitol Visitor Center: An Overview, Updated April 25, 2007, Stephen W. Stathis.

<sup>3</sup> Congressional Research Service RL31121 -- The Capitol Visitor Center: An Overview, Updated April 25, 2007, Stephen W. Stathis.

<sup>4</sup> Architect of the Capitol, *Capitol Visitor Center Overview*, Spring 2007, <http://www.aoc.gov/cvc/index.cfm>

<sup>5</sup> Capitol Visitor Center: Update on Status of Project's Schedule and Cost. GAO-06-665T. April 27, 2006.

to changes in the project's scope, many of which were made for security enhancements following September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and the anthrax incident. Congress added the House and Senate expansion spaces and the Library of Congress tunnel to the project's scope after the original project cost estimate had been developed. In addition, the Department of Defense recommended and funded an air filtration system for the facility.<sup>6</sup> The delays in construction and subsequent change orders have caused the opening date of the CVC to be pushed back several times.

## Operational Plans

Until this point, operational and transportation plans for the new Capitol Visitors Center have been uncertain. Recent news reports indicate that Capitol Police officials plan to prevent tour buses from having access to the eastern part of First Street, which runs in front of the Library Congress and Supreme Court.<sup>7</sup> Preventing tour bus access to First Street, which was originally envisioned as the drop off point for visitors, could prove to be problematic in allowing public access to the CVC. If tour buses are not allowed to drop off visitors in front of the CVC, there is also the possibility of congestion in residential neighborhoods surrounding the Capitol complex. As early as 2003, the GAO highlighted problems with the AOC being able to identify and address operational concerns and requirements of the public areas of the CVC, such as the gift shop, cafeteria, exhibitions and theater.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to those concerns, the Subcommittee will examine transportation plans, building security, and general access. The Subcommittee is interested in how the AOC plans to staff the new visitors center, how it will provide security to both the Capitol and its visitors, and the details of the operational plan for the CVC when it opens in 2008.

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<sup>6</sup> Capitol Visitor Center: Priority Attention Needed to Manage Schedules and Contracts. GAO-05-714T. May 17, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> *Roll Call*, Bus Ban Coming to Hill: Plan May Affect Access to CVC, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2007. John McArdle.

<sup>8</sup> Capitol Visitor Center: Current Status of Schedule and Estimated Cost. GAO-03-1014T. July 15, 2003.

WITNESS LIST

PANEL I

**Mr. Stephen T. Ayers, AIA**  
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**Mr. Emeka C. Moneme**  
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PANEL III

**Mr. Marshall E. Purnell, FAIA**  
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The American Institute of Architects  
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