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## CITYSPACE

### Not Yet Within Reach



**Map quest: The Ben Franklin Parkway could play an integral role in connecting Philadelphia's tourist attractions with visitor accessibility in mind.** Photo By:

Michael T. Regan

## Philadelphia's sights need to be easier for outsiders to see.

by Alan Greenberger

In preparation for a research seminar that I will be leading this spring at the University of Pennsylvania, we gathered a variety of statistics on major American cities. We were searching for cities that are comparable to Philadelphia so that we could methodically examine the way in which "comparable" cities make decisions about design and planning policy.

Here is the sobering news: The cities most comparable to Philadelphia—as measured by things like population, density, growth, wealth and poverty, ethnic diversity and education—are Baltimore, Detroit, Cleveland, St. Louis, Milwaukee and Chicago.

Except for Chicago, it's not exactly a list of cities on anyone's hit parade of cities on the move. The good news is that places like Boston and Seattle are not far off.

What this cursory analysis tells us is that Philadelphia teeters on the brink of a higher greatness. While we are certainly not in the category of "world city," the bar is rising, and we can set ourselves apart as an important destination for immigrants, young people looking for an exciting place to live and work, and, yes, more tourism.

Tourism is an interesting phenomenon, especially when the majority of tourists are here to see how great we were, not how great we are. This is the classic trap of history, especially the practical American kind that created important ideas but did not create objects of extraordinary beauty. This is the tourism of obligation: "It's important for the children to see where the Constitution was written."

I don't mean to take our history lightly. I love working in and wandering the streets where Franklin, Jefferson, Washington and Adams changed the world. But the ability to absorb, reflect and create meaning out of this reality in the course of a day is limited, even for the most astute tourist.

We have rightly struggled to find ways to keep tourists here overnight, but to do so, we have to offer more than history. We also have to offer a contemporary city that is so full of life, culture and beauty that to not stay over would feel like a lost opportunity—and to feel that before getting here, not afterwards when the bus is leaving for Washington.

The Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation understands this and has developed promotional material and ad campaigns designed to reveal the assets that we have. It appears by all measures to be working and is certainly coinciding with one of the greatest residential booms in Center City history (Philadelphia's downtown residential population is only exceeded by that of Chicago and New York).

Having the destinations for visitors is certainly necessary. We have them, and more are in the works. Creating compelling links between them, however, is the key. Visitors are strangers in town. There is nothing more daunting to a visitor than the belief that the great tourist opportunities require complicated or unpleasant journeys to reach them.

During planning with the Center City District on this very subject, we noted numerous signs of trouble: the hotel concierge that can't conjure up a good way to tell visitors how to walk from the Convention Center; the beautiful but ultimately lifeless Benjamin Franklin Parkway; the gauntlet of getting from Old City to Penn's Landing; the magnificent but unfindable splendor of Fairmount Park.

We took a list of the major tourist destinations in town and plotted them on a map of the city. What we found was both obvious and stunning: Starting on the Camden waterfront and stretching all the way to the Mann Center some four miles away, a single line connects destinations that currently attract nearly 10 million people a year—an impressive number by any city's standard. At the same time, the links between them were consistently weak.

Try this yourself: start at Camden's Adventure Aquarium and picture how to get from there to Penn's Landing, then Old City and Independence Park, then the Convention Center and Avenue of the Arts, then the Parkway museums, then




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... of the Please Touch Museum and finally to the Mann Center. Ask  
... and navigate this route. Picture the difficulties on the route: crossing the  
... Street East, circumnavigating City Hall, traversing the Parkway, crossing  
... it at night.

On the flip side, imagine a city in which this trip is a pleasure: interesting conveyances when walking is not practical, lively streets filled with people, a sense of safety and a sense of wonder. It's not a pipe dream, and in my next article, I will address how we can make this happen.

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