



From skyscrapers to streets: Navigating the landscape of New York City sidewalk bridges

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Looking around Manhattan it seems as though there is a sidewalk bridge (or scaffolding) on every block. To make them as safe and unobtrusive as possible in the largest, most populated and walked city in the world, takes legal know-how, financial finesse, skillful efficiency and above all, industry experience.

The laws regarding inspection and maintenance of building façades in N.Y.C. were adapted as a result of a number of pedestrian injuries back in the 1980s. Since then, buildings taller than six stories must have façades professionally inspected every five years. The scope of the project - ranging from minor restoration to complete rebuild - is dictated by what lies under the current façade, which is often unknown.

Structural engineers, who conduct inspections by looking at the building from an observation point through binoculars, identify any areas of concern. From there, a sidewalk bridge is installed if the building is found to be in a state of deterioration. This is defined by N.Y.C.'s Department of Buildings (DOB) code, and usually means there is a large degree of concern that portions of the façade may fall off. Painstaking calculations are then done based on a linear foot basis to determine budget. The biggest budgetary contingency is what potentially lies underneath the current façade. As a result, the allotted budget can often be drained. Since the inspection process is so frequent, most building owners have a capital investment budget in place to draw upon for this very situation. A team of portfolio managers, architects, engineers and property managers develop a comprehensive and prioritized repair schedule. This collective group will decide which repairs are absolutely necessary immediately and what can be addressed in the future, whether short or long-term

To ensure the safety of pedestrians around the construction zone, there are specific regulations regarding the lighting, structure and how far the bridge must extend. Whether a sidewalk bridge is one or two stories is often determined by the ground floor of the building; a retail component for a building will usually require a two-story bridge and can be configured with signage and little impediment to foot traffic. The DOB requires that the bridges extend 20 feet beyond the area of construction, even if that means encroaching on another building's property. As if all of this was not complex enough, zoning regulations must be adhered to as well. Additionally, the multitude of logistics needed to be coordinated in large-scale restorations, like where to store 50,000 bricks and the unpredictability of weather, are significant.

In a city that never sleeps, the project team needs to be sensitive to its surroundings - both commercial and residential. There needs to be a mutually agreed upon environment conducive to business (or sleep, if the building is residential) made for at least a portion of the day.

Cassidy Turley managed the façade restoration of 360 Lexington Ave. - a commercial building with a hotel across the street. Our team came up with a work schedule to meet the needs of the building

tenants as well as being sensitive to the hotel guests. The heaviest work was conducted from 12 to 7 p.m. to accommodate the geography of the surrounding buildings so tenants would have predictable quiet times.

In this situation, as with many others throughout the city, staying on schedule can be challenging as adding additional hours to the day is not an option. This is where preparation of a realistic project schedule, with built-in delays for things like weather, material deliveries and other mishaps have the biggest impact. With so many unpredictable factors like these that affect timing and schedule, an experienced team creating a practical and reasonable schedule is the best solution.

Next time you see a sidewalk bridge, rather than just feeling inconvenienced, you can now understand the intricacies of planning that go into every aspect of a facade restoration.

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