

Athens Downtown Archaeological and Cultural Promenade

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INTRODUCTION

Athens encompasses numerous iconic and UNESCO world heritage sites, which are coupled with a large number of cultural and archaeological points of interest worthwhile visiting within the limited time usually available to the average visitor who comes to experience the contemporary city, along with its marvelous heritage.

A large number of these points of interest are concentrated in downtown Athens within walking distance of each other. The challenge of visiting the overwhelming number of venues and sites is compounded by the unfavorable caused by the limited connectivity among the sites. The route of this is found in the lack of continuity between the optimum connecting paths and the inappropriate layout, as well as in the high number of deficiencies found throughout the pedestrian walkway network of the city.

The city of Athens and particularly the downtown area, deserves a more drastic approach for enhancing walkability and active mobility, compatible with its unique past and vigorous present, bridging harmoniously the historical and the contemporary Athenian civilizations.

PREVIOUS EFFORTS

A special purpose legal entity was established in 1995 with the goal of achieving the ambitious Program of the Athens Archaeological Sites' Unification Scheme.

The implementation plan of the Unification Scheme had originally been scheduled for execution over a ten-year period. Despite the extension of the Program for another 10-year period, the Scheme had in fact been interrupted in 2014, a victim of the fallout of the severe financial crisis, which emerged in Greece as of 2009.

In addition to the 2009 financial crisis, a major factor for the interruption of the plan have been the perceived insurmountable obstacles posed by the disruption of continuity associated with multiple transverse at-grade crossings of heavily loaded primary arterials of Athens downtown.

EXISTING PEDESTRIAN CROSSING OF AMALIAS AVE.



ATHENS DOWNTOWN ARTERIAL NETWORK



The most important and coherent part of the Unification Scheme implemented prior to its abrupt interruption in 2014 has been the 800 m. long full pedestrianization of Dionysiou Areopagitou Ave., running along the foothill of Acropolis, coupled with its 1500 m. long north-west branch that joins the major archaeological site of Keramikos.

This ample size spinal pedestrian zone provides pedestrian access to some of the world famous and UNESCO world heritage archaeological and cultural points of interest, to include:

- The ancient Acropolis of Athens, including the Parthenon, which is a world- wide renowned top architectural creation of mankind and symbol of the city of Athens
- The Odeon of Herodes Atticus, a 4,500 seat Roman theater, located at the southwest slope of the Acropolis hill
- The new Acropolis Museum, considered one of the top archaeological museums in the world, dedicated merely to archaeological findings of Acropolis, exceeding two million visitors annually
- The 25,000 spectator ancient theatre of Dionysus Eleuthereus built in the late 6th century BC and the adjacent Asklepios Sanctuary
- The Plaka old town, at the north-east slope of Acropolis hill

THE STEPS FORWARD (1 OF 2)

Looking to the future, of primary importance is the extension of the existing spinal pedestrian walkway at the foothill of the Acropolis up to the monumental Panathenaic marble Stadium, aiming at serving heavy pedestrian flows and being functional, inclusive, safe and free of any vehicular conflict. Such development needs to be coupled with the development of a comprehensive walkway network throughout Athens downtown, radiating from selected nodes along the spinal and appropriately configured and treated to provide priority and enhanced quality of service to the pedestrian flows.

THE STEPS FORWARD (2 OF 2)

The extension of the spinal to the east needs to be appropriately configured to accommodate the intense pedestrian flows oriented towards :

- The temple of Olympian Zeus built in the 6th century BC and finally completed by the Roman emperor Hadrian in the early 2nd century AD comprising 104 columns
- The 18 m. high Roman Emperor's Hadrian Arch made of Pentelic marble, built in the 2nd century AD as a gate to the Olympian Zeus temple
- The Delphinus Apollo sanctuary foundations
- The temple of Kronos and Rhea, built in the 5th century BC
- The Zappeion Megaron and gardens, built in the late 19th century to serve the revival of the Olympic Games and currently hosting numerous events, exhibitions and conferences annually
- The Royal Palace, a neoclassical building constructed between 1836 and 1847 as the original residence of the royal family, currently housing the Parliament of the Hellenic Republic and the tomb of the Unknown Soldier
- The Presidential Mansion and gardens being the official residence of the President of the Hellenic Republic. It served as the Royal Palace, designed by the famous architect Ernst Ziller
- The National Garden
- The Panathenaic marble stadium, built by the end of 19th century to host the first modern Olympic Games of 1896 and ever since serving as the ending point of the original Marathon Race. Currently numerous civic activities are organized yearly
- The Basil and Elise Goulandris Foundation fine arts museum completed in October 2018. The museum collection focuses on modern and contemporary art.

CHALLENGES FOR THE EXTENSION OF THE SPINAL PROMENADE

A gap in critical attention of the Unification Scheme of the archaeological sites has been the underestimation of possibilities offered by significant elevation variations of the natural relief among the sites of the Unification Scheme that could lead to an effective and realistic solution to the problem presented.

The Athens downtown natural terrain relief is presented in the following map of the city of Athens prepared by J.A. Kaupert by the end of the 19th century, under an assignment by the German Archaeological Institute, reflecting with remarkable detail the relief variability among the monuments. Besides the clearly presented hills, riverbeds are also clearly shown, the entirety of which are currently artificially covered with hydraulic structures, constructed to create on top of them the space needed for the development of the Athens downtown arterial network.

A number of technical options for surmounting the challenging traffic barriers that are inherent to the dense downtown arterial network, which cross transversely the east-west desired configuration of the spinal promenade, are applicable for the completion of the original ambitious Archaeological Sites Unification Scheme.

ATHENS DOWNTOWN NATURAL TERRAIN RELIEF

ATHEN mit UMGEBUNG

aufgenommen und gezeichnet von J.A.Kaupert 1875; herausgegeben vom Kaiserl. deutschen archäologischen Institute.
(Mit Nachträgen bis 1877.)



EVALUATION CRITERIA AMONG ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS FOR THE SPINAL PROMENADE

Alternative options have been evaluated using multicriteria analysis based on New European Bauhaus values of **aesthetics** (quality of experience and style beyond functionality), **sustainability** (from climate goals to circularity, zero pollution, biodiversity) and **inclusion** (from valuing diversity and equality for all to securing accessibility and affordability), in brief **Beautiful, Sustainable, Together**.

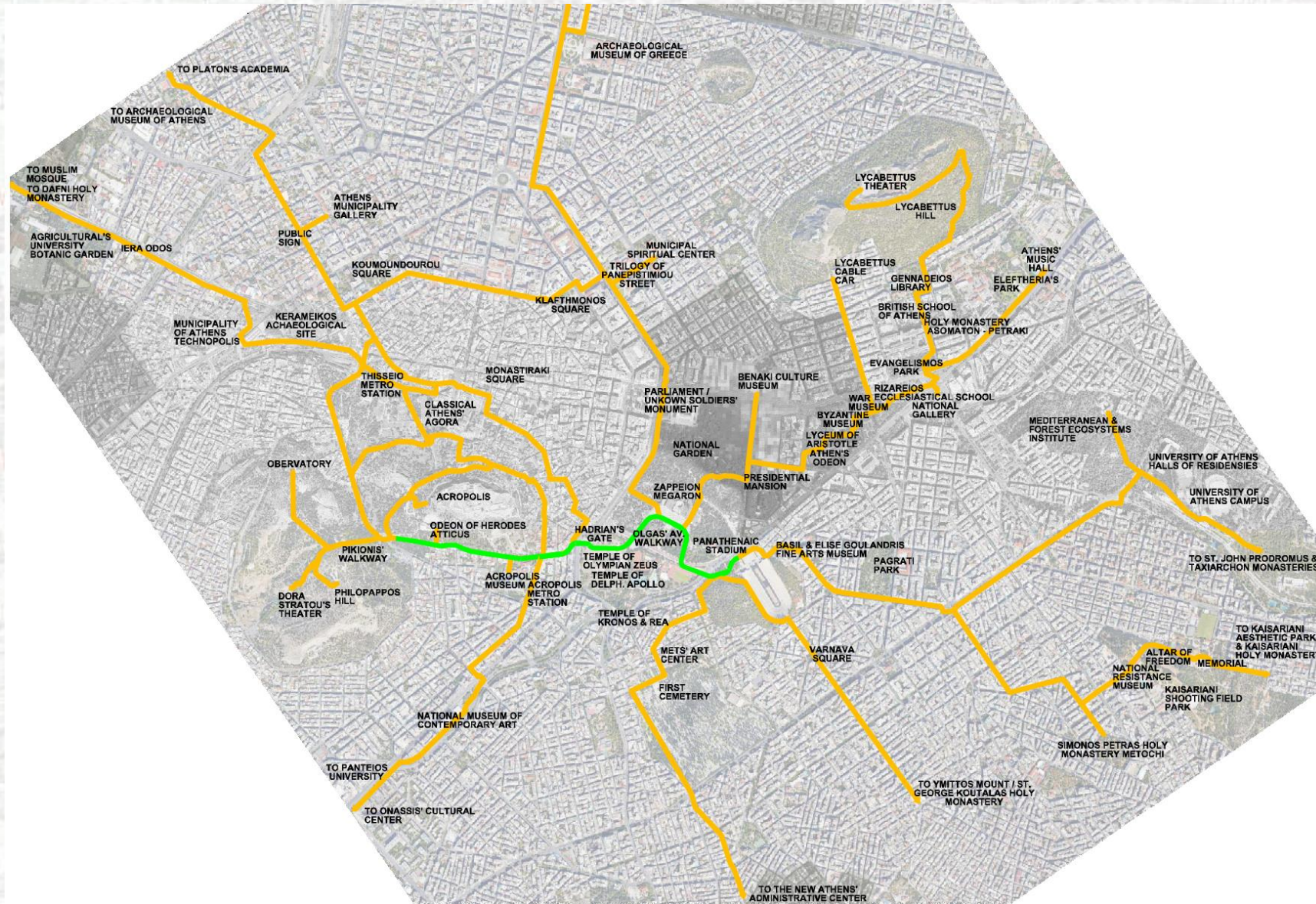
Criteria considered, among others, are:

- ✓ Attractivity features of the classical monuments and of the cultural sites to be connected under the Unification Scheme
- ✓ Public transport system interface, particularly with fixed rail modes (metro / tramway)
- ✓ Sustainable and socially inclusive development of the transport system, fostering impaired persons mobility
- ✓ Promotion of walkability and active mobility in downtown Athens
- ✓ Harmonious adaptation to the urban landscape
- ✓ Respect of archaeological sites' sensitive environment

SPINAL PROMENADE LAYOUT WITH NINE NODES AND VIEWING / RESTING AREAS



PROPOSED COMPREHENSIVE SPINAL PROMENADE AND SPIDER-SHAPED WALKWAY NETWORK OF DOWNTOWN ATHENS



PROPOSED COMPREHENSIVE SPINAL PROMENADE AND SPIDER-SHAPED WALKWAY NETWORK OF DOWNTOWN ATHENS

The option selected and proposed for implementation is comprised of the following features:

- A 1.9 kms long spinal promenade, encompassing existing and new walkway segments, the latter ones being partially at-grade at segments without transverse crossings and partially grade-separated, to completely avoid interference with vehicular traffic
- Nine nodes along the spinal promenade, appropriately located and configured to create a comprehensive spider-shaped walkway network of downtown Athens, by means of radiating walkway corridors, with new segments along with existing walkway segments, providing adequate connectivity to/from numerous sites worthwhile visiting, thus serving as a bridge between the historical and the contemporary Athenian civilizations.
- Each of these nodes encompasses the following features
 - ✓ Shaded intermediate stops for relaxation
 - ✓ Meeting points and waiting zones for pedestrians walking along the spinal and/or diverging/converging to/from the nodes
 - ✓ Info-kiosks providing digital info (QR codes), as well as mapping presentations for connectivity with the public transport network and for all the points of interest accessed through the spider shaped walkway network of downtown Athens
 - ✓ Drinking water fountains as well as sanitary facilities

SCHEMATIC LAYOUT OF THE PROPOSED COMPREHENSIVE SPINAL PROMENADE AND SPIDER-SHAPED WALKWAY NETWORK OF DOWNTOWN ATHENS

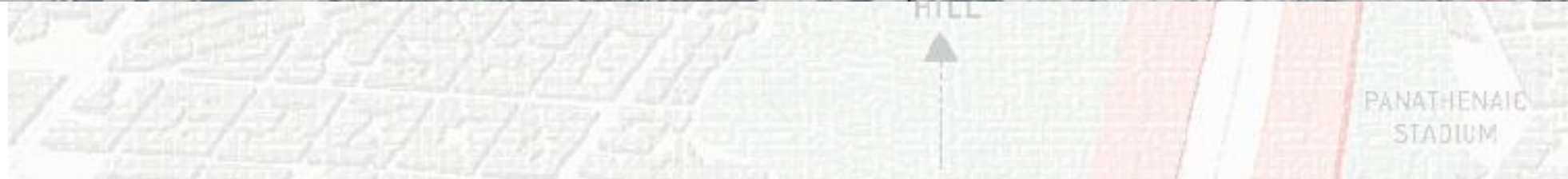
The diagram illustrates a proposed urban infrastructure project in downtown Athens, centered around a 'spinal promenade' and a 'spider-shaped walkway network'. The map is color-coded to show different directions and zones:

- Red (North):** Leads towards Plato's Academia, the Archaeological Museum of Greece, and the Athens Municipality Gallery.
- Blue (West):** Leads towards Dafni Holy Monastery, the Agricultural University Botanic Garden, and the Municipality of Athens Technopolis.
- Green (Center):** Connects the central area, including the Acropolis, the National Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Panathenaic Stadium.
- Yellow (South):** Leads towards Onassis' Cultural Center and Panteios University.
- Orange (East):** Leads towards the University of Athens Campus, St. John Prodromos & Taxiarchon Monasteries, and the Kaisariani Aesthetic Park.

Key landmarks and institutions labeled on the map include:

- Acropolis
- National Museum of Contemporary Art
- Panathenaic Stadium
- Acropolis Museum
- Temple of Olympian Zeus
- Temple of Delphinios Apollo
- Temple of Kronos & Rea
- Benaki Culture Museum
- National Gallery
- War Museum
- Byzantine Museum
- Parliament / Unknown Soldiers' Monument
- Triology of Panepistimou Street
- Klaphthmonos Square
- Monastiraki Square
- Koumoundourou Square
- Athens Municipality Gallery
- Public Sign
- Iera Odos
- Municipality of Athens Technopolis
- Kerameikos Archaeological Site
- Thisseio Metro Station
- Classical Athens' Agora
- Observatory
- Dora Stratou's Theater
- Philopappos Hill
- Pradon's Walkway
- Cothon of Herodes Atticus
- Hadrian's Gate
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BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE SPINAL PROMENADE LOOKING TO THE WEST



BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE SPINAL PROMENADE LOOKING TO THE NORTH



FUNCTIONAL AND GEOMETRICAL FEATURES OF THE PROPOSED SPINAL PROMENADE

- Uninterrupted pedestrian flows throughout the spinal promenade, safe and free from vehicular traffic conflicts, avoiding all at-grade vehicular flow crossings.
- Adequately shaded corridor both at the nodal points, as well as along the intermediate segments
- The vertical profile of the whole spinal promenade is mobility impaired persons friendly, maintaining all longitudinal inclinations lower than the internationally applicable standards, in compliance with the NEB value of inclusion.
- A dedicated corridor for a two-way circulation of wheeled chairs for disabled persons or baby strollers within the width of the spinal promenade serves as well the NEB value of inclusion
- Direct and easy access of the spinal promenade to the metro station of Acropolis, as well as indirect access to the metro stations of Monastiraki, Thissio, Syntagma and Evangelismos, through the walkway network radiating from the spinal promenade
- Direct and easy access to the tramway corridor No 1, crossing transversely the spinal promenade
- Direct and easy interface with bus transit corridors running along two major arterials, crossing transversely the spinal promenade

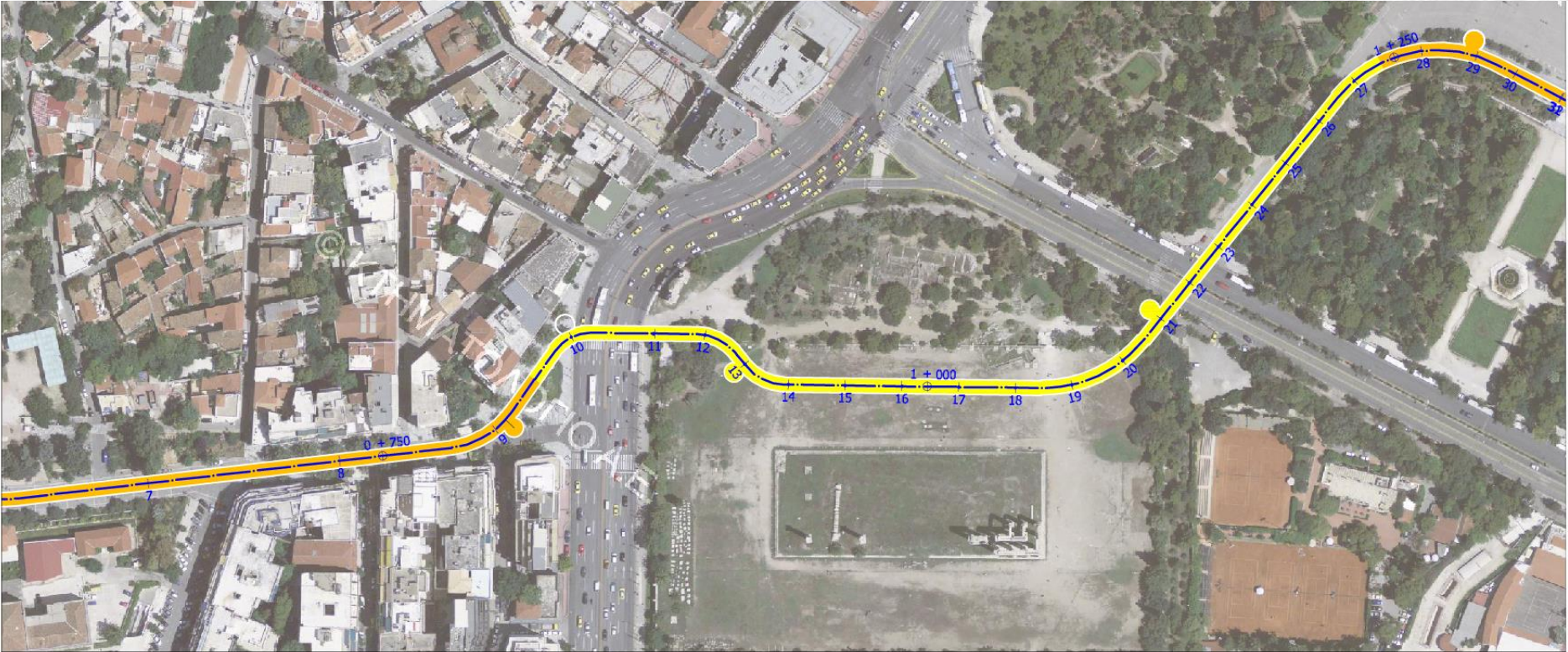
FUNCTIONAL AND GEOMETRICAL FEATURES OF THE PROPOSED SPINAL PROMENADE



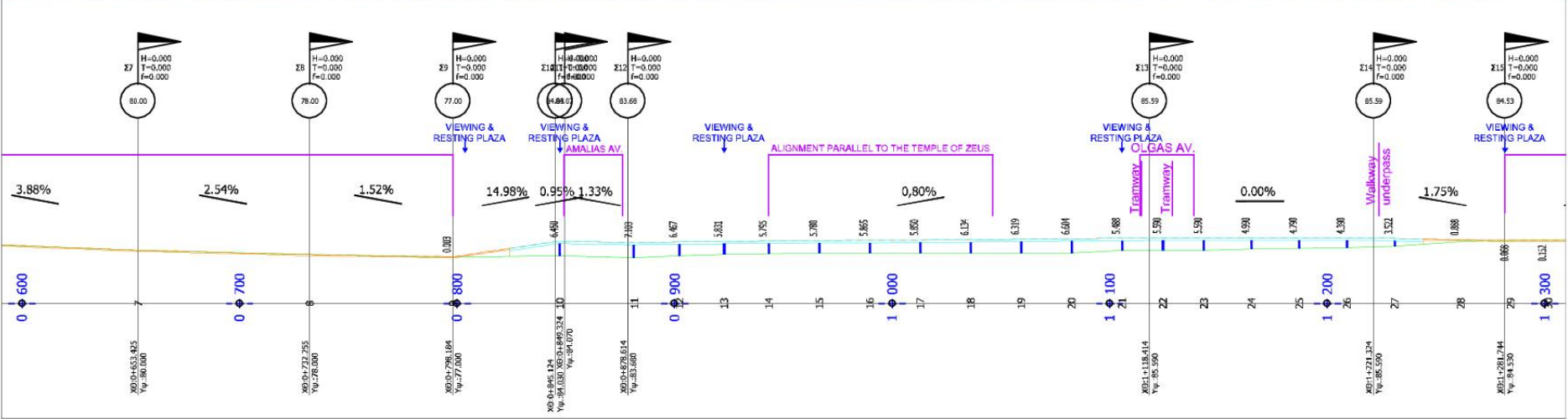
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FUNCTIONAL AND GEOMETRICAL FEATURES OF THE PROPOSED SPINAL PROMENADE

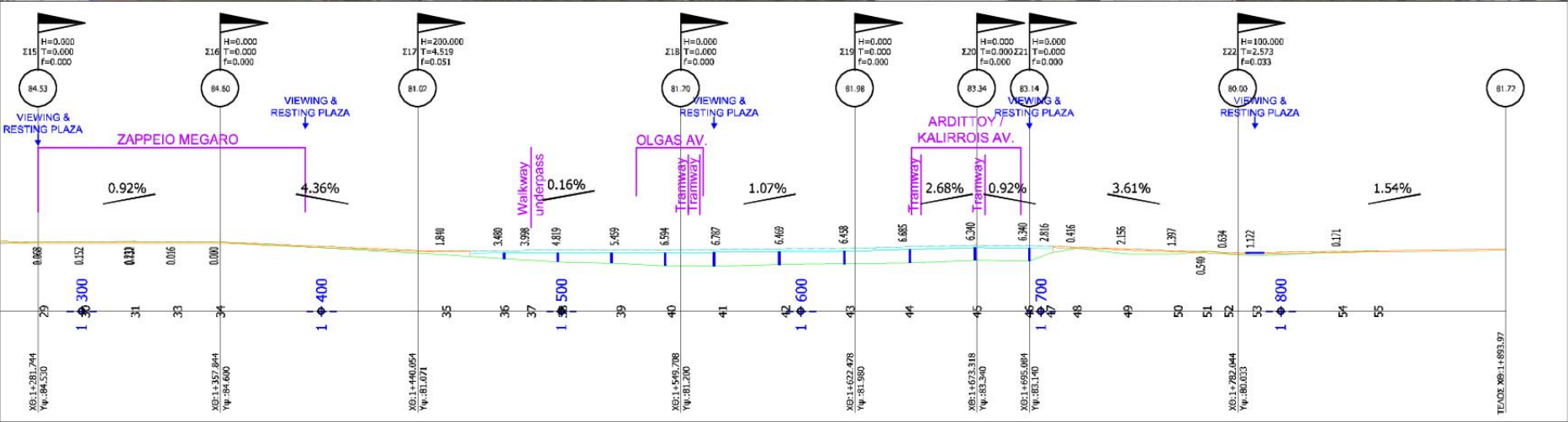
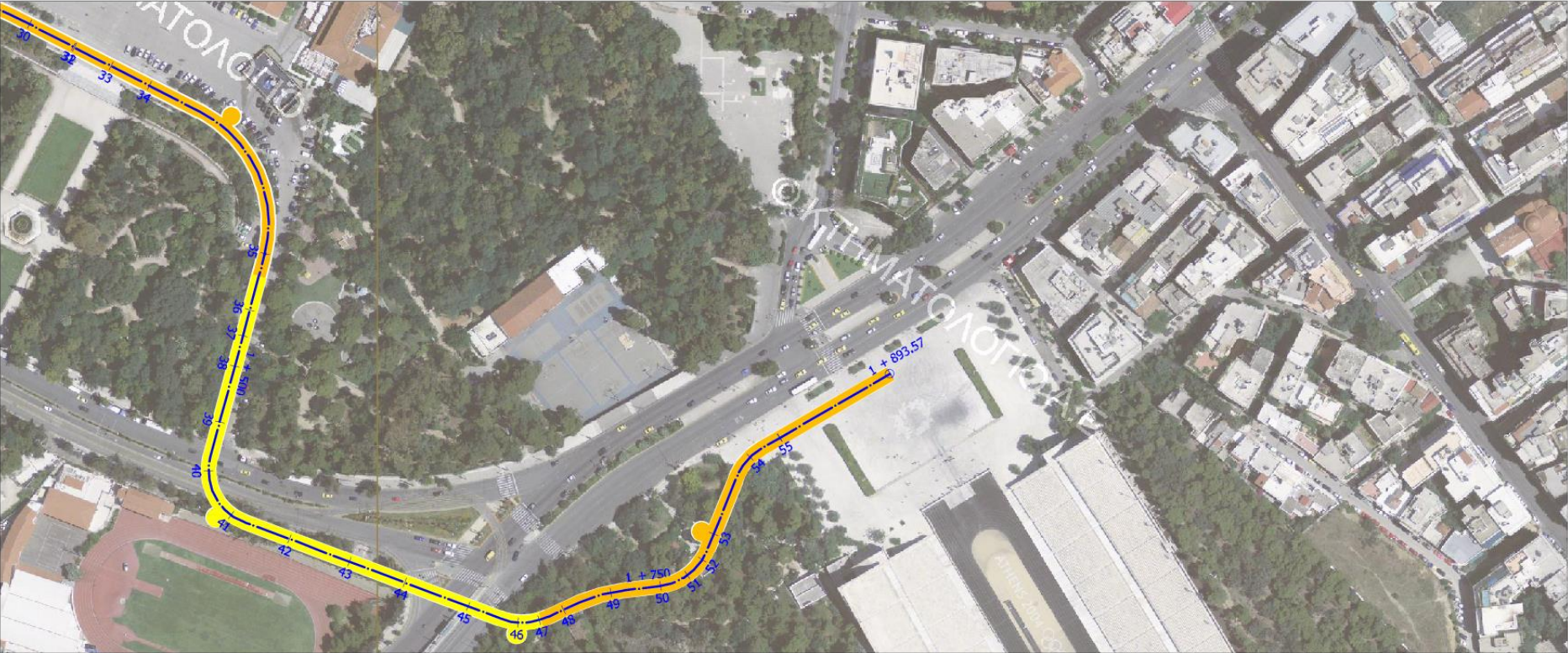


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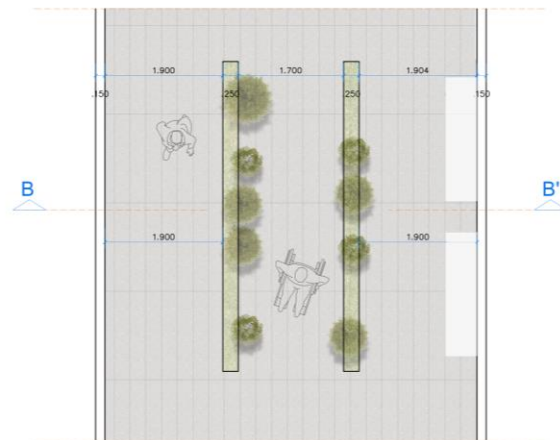
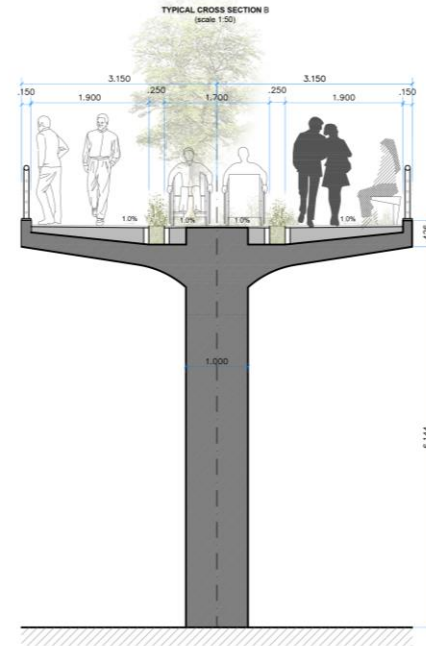


FUNCTIONAL AND GEOMETRICAL FEATURES OF THE PROPOSED SPINAL PROMENADE

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FUNCTIONAL AND GEOMETRICAL FEATURES OF THE PROPOSED SPINAL PROMENADE



CONCLUSION

Although ambitious, the proposed Athens Downtown Archaeological and Cultural Promenade, comprising the spinal promenade and the associated radial walkway corridors may introduce a radically different and highly attractive active mobility system for Athens downtown, introducing a new era for the visitors of the city, compatible and worthy to its unique classical heritage and vigorousness of its contemporary civilization, in addition to the convenience offered to the Athenians and the local population.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!