

PROPOSED ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS TO TABLE MOUNTAIN CABLEWAY LOWER STATION, ERF 3666 ORANJEZICHT – DESCRIPTION AND MOTIVATION

1. Background

The Table Mountain Aerial Cableway buildings were designed by Lance Elsworth (1891-1971) of Walgate & Elsworth Architects and constructed between 1927 and 1929. The Lower Station, with its distinct Art Deco elements, has maintained its industrial language, despite numerous alterations over time in response to increased visitor numbers and the need for amenities, administration and shelter from the elements.



The Lower Station in 1965



The Lower Station in 2015. Note the timber and steel pergolas along the sidewalk and the standing ramp.

In 1997, a major upgrade of the Upper and Lower Stations was undertaken by MLH Architects & Planners, with provision for larger gondolas, administrative facilities, souvenir shops and restaurants.

Between 2008 and 2012 several shade pergolas were added - above the ticket office and access ramp of the Lower Station, above the kiosks and along the sidewalk opposite Tafelberg Road – with heritage and building plan approvals obtained for each. All of these have a consistent, visually permeably aesthetic, with steel columns and frames and timber slats, distinguishing them from the ‘solid’, wall-dominated buildings.

Table Mountain forms part of the Cape Floral Region Protected Areas serial World Heritage Site, which was inscribed on the World Heritage List by UNESCO in 2004.

2. Statutory Context

Table Mountain is a proclaimed Provincial Heritage Site and in terms of s27 of the NHRA, a permit is required for any building alterations. The Table Mountain is also an identified Grade I heritage site, but not proclaimed as a National Heritage Site yet. Hence, in terms of a Memorandum of Agreement between the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) and Heritage Western Cape (HWC), SAHRA is a commenting authority and HWC is the permitting authority. For permit applications, comment must also be invited from the Heritage Resources Section of the City of Cape Town and, if applicable, from the registered local conservation body.

3. Current Proposals

It is proposed to make three minor alterations to the Lower Station Building, so as to provide shade and to extend the ticket office and kiosk. These interventions are indicated on the attached building plans by MLH Architects & Planners and described on the next page:



A 2015 aerial photo of Lower Station, with the three project sites circled in yellow. (Source: City of Cape Town)

Project A: Level 3 canopy at the service area

This unenclosed sheet metal canopy, 13m² in extent, will be tucked behind the existing generator, against the east tower and will provide shade for food delivery trolleys awaiting transport to the Upper Station.

Due to the high demand for food and refreshments at Upper Station, especially during peak season, there is a regular flow of trolleys from Lower Station to Upper Station and hoists have recently been approved and installed to take the closed trolleys from Level 1 to Level 3 and then from Level 3 to Level 4, where they are loaded into the cable cars. There is however limited storage capacity within the Lower Station building and food trolleys often have to wait in the sun before they can be loaded.

The height of the proposed canopy has been carefully co-ordinated so as not to distract from the punctured east elevation of the main building, and this slim steel structure will be visually unobtrusive, as part of this overall side service platform area and will not be visible from the front of the building.



Lower Station from the east, with the location of the proposed canopy over the existing bridge circled in yellow.

Project B: Pergola at the Level 2 viewing deck

Whilst every effort is being made to reduce the need for queuing and to provide shading for visitors along the Tafelberg Road sidewalk, at the ticket office and up the standing ramp into the Lower Station building, there is also a need to provide shelter from the sun on the north-facing, semi-circular balcony, where visitors wait to board the cable cars.

A cluster of sun umbrellas has been installed on this balcony in an effort to provide shade, but it is not very effective, is not weather resistant and causes visual clutter.

It is proposed to install a low steel and timber pergola over this semi-circular space, centred between the two towers, which will match the existing dark steel and timber pergola above the standing ramp on the right. The leading edge will follow the curve of the balcony below.

In order to maintain the landmark status and symmetry of the original Lower Station building, which is at a different angle than the Administration Wing, there will be a break between the standing ramp pergola and the new pergola.



View of the Level 2 balcony from above, with visitors queuing in the sun before ascending to Level 3, where they will board the cable cars. The proposed pergola will have the same construction materials and finishing as the existing pergola structures.



Lower Station from Tafelberg Road, with the proposed pergola circled in yellow.

Project C: Level 1 kiosk and ticket office extension

It is proposed to remove the curved, recessed, ground floor corner of the 1997 Administration Wing and bring the corner forward, so that the new aluminium stacking door will line up with the aluminium sliding door on the first floor above. This will extend the existing ticket office by 9m² and the kiosk by 5m², while architecturally simplifying the corner of this building.

By continuing the same aluminium shopfront detailing seen on this corner on the floor above, to the ground, the integrity of this highly prominent corner is increased and extended down. The façade will remain articulated through the change of materials, i.e. the original colonnade will still be expressed in terms of its finish, and the new infill walls will contrast these columns. The existing I-beam frame and the freestanding pergolas will remain.



The corner of the Administration Wing, with the location of the recessed ticket office and kiosk circled in yellow on the left, with more detail shown on the right. The new corner door will align with the existing I-beam above.