

MAYOR'S URBAN DESIGN AWARDS

5th Street Underpass

URBAN FRAGMENTS

In June 2022, the completed redesign of the 5th Street Underpass transformed a commuter through-way into an extraordinary experience. As an Urban Fragment, the underpass enhancements not only create a highly functional passage that enables and encourages human-powered movement, it also has become a compelling, rich place for surrounding communities.

Positive contribution to the public realm

Based on extensive stakeholder engagement, the project design responded to the need for the underpass to feel safe and beautiful for Calgary's active citizens, while also continuing to promote active forms of transportation, such as walking and cycling. For context, the underpass connects roughly 6,500 pedestrians and nearly 1,200 cyclists between the Beltline communities and downtown Calgary every day.

The underpass is no longer just transportation infrastructure. With an upgraded, dedicated bike lane that connects to Calgary's greater cycling network, an integrated public art piece, and new landscaping, the 5th Street Underpass now serves the community as an immersive, linear park experience.

Design excellence & Innovation and uniqueness of the element

The design of the 5th Street Underpass seamlessly integrates functionality, user experience, and beauty.

A public art piece—*Below Before Between*—provides a physical separation between the bike and pedestrian lanes and enriches the underpass experience through animation and storytelling. As commuters travel this subterranean path between the Bow and Elbow Rivers, the artist wanted to connect them to the rich geological and hydrological histories that live under Calgary's modern infrastructure. The details in the piece bring to life Calgary's unique relationship to water, past, present and future. Key details of the artwork include:

Walls: A fossilized ripple stone supplied by the Rundle Rock (Kamenka) Quarry was used to create molds for the precast concrete wall—a nod to the area's rich geological history as a prehistoric inland sea.

Eskers: Undulating steel forms, in a hue reminiscent of mountain lakes, reference the glacial history of the region and the iconic geomorphological features that formed as meltwaters receded. These eskers create a sinuous edge that can take on various functions in the multi-modal transportation corridor—they can be guard rails, snow clearing guides, and direct stormwater. Illuminated from within, the esker's dynamic lighting effects are not only beautiful, they give a sense of safety for pedestrians.

In addition to the art piece, **native trees and prairie grasses** soften and bring life to the space. The plants create a park-like experience through the interplay of shadows, rustling leaves, and seasonal change. These living elements also introduce a variety of ecological services in a highly urban

environment—sound buffering, stormwater management, mitigation of the urban heat island effect, and enhancing biodiversity in Calgary's core.

Each intentional detail creates a singular moment on the journey, no matter your speed. The comfort of safety. Thought-provoking art. Or a simple brush with beauty.