



U.S. COURTHOUSE  
Huntsville, AL

# GSA's Design Excellence Program

A PROVEN METHOD FOR DELIVERING  
EXCEPTIONAL PUBLIC ARCHITECTURE

Chuck Hardy, GSA Chief Architect  
Andrew Bywater, GSA Deputy Chief Architect



U.S. Department of Transportation  
Beautifying Transportation  
Infrastructure Council

# A Public Legacy

The places we build express  
how we value public service



Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center  
Washington, DC

# The Design Excellence Program

A national program established in 1994 to enhance the quality of public architecture and encourage new approaches through:

Simplifying the evaluation process

Engaging private-sector design professionals (peers) in the evaluation of proposals

Holding peer reviews of proposed design concepts



Mariposa Land Port of Entry  
Nogales, AZ

# Making Federal Architecture Beautiful Again

Executive Order 14344

Recognizable civic character

Respect for regional heritage

Beauty alongside function and lasting value





# The site and its community

Public input and the experience of place belong in the brief

50 United Nations Plaza, San Francisco, California

# The Right Design Team

Capability to realize the public ambition

The two-stage architect-engineer selection process

## Stage I: Portfolio Review

- Lead designer portfolio
- A/E firm portfolio
- Lead Designer's Statement

## Stage II: Interview – 3 firms

- Strength of the team
- Project strategy





# Independent Peer Review

Expert attention while choices remain open

- **Concept comparison**
  - First Peer Review – 3 Concepts to 1
  - Second Peer Review – Refinement
- **Independent critique and refinement**
  - Ensures a focus on holistic design quality
  - Peers are private-sector advisors with no vested interest in the project
- **A documented response**



# Tuscaloosa

A classical civic presence with contemporary public functions

U.S. Federal Building and Courthouse, Alabama / HBRA Architects



# Mobile

Regional material gives a national institution a local presence

U.S. Courthouse, Alabama / Hartman-Cox Architects



# Huntsville

Classical order accommodates the demands of a modern courthouse

U.S. Courthouse, Alabama / Fentress Architects



# Charlotte

A historic civic front with room for a new generation of service

Charles R. Jonas U.S. Courthouse, North Carolina / Robert A.M. Stern Architects



Historic view

Contemporary view

# Preserving Our Architectural Legacy

Renewing great public buildings for continued public service

Alexander Hamilton U.S. Custom House, New York



# The next generation: Chattanooga

A classical concept for a future federal courthouse

Tennessee / GSA concept released June 2026 / Rendering, subject to change

# Quality through delivery

The approved concept remains the reference point

**01** Design development  
Technical coordination and cost discipline

**02** Construction  
Continuity of design intent and risk review

**03** Occupancy  
Commissioning and lessons for the next project





# A shared GSA and DOT experience

Mission requirements shape the whole project

John A. Volpe National Transportation Systems Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts / Skidmore, Owings & Merrill Architects

# The public experience of movement

A coherent arrival at every scale



Columbus Land Port of Entry, New Mexico



San Ysidro Land Port of Entry, California

# An opportunity for the Council

Possible recommendations for DOT consideration

- 01 A civic design brief  
Public aspirations and local character, defined early
- 02 Independent review at key decisions

- 03 Learning from completed work  
Public experience, maintenance, and enduring quality



What should the next  
generation of public  
places say about us?

