The story

The 1963 construction of Interstate 5 bisected San Diego’s largest Mexican American neighborhood, now known as Barrio Logan. In 1969, the Coronado Bay Bridge opened, further devastating the neighborhood. When the state began construction of a California Highway Patrol (CHP) substation under the bridge where the City had promised residents a neighborhood park, the Chicano community exploded in protest and physically occupied the site forcing construction to stop. As a result of the protest and subsequent negotiations, the CHP station was relocated and “Chicano Park” was created in the space beneath the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge approach ramps. Today, the 7.4 acre park contains a rare assemblage of 49 brightly painted murals considered the works of masters of Chicano Movement muralism, painted on the bridge’s columns and abutments in the 1970s and ’80s. These works of art commemorate the struggle of Chicanos throughout history and the community protest and park takeover on April 22, 1970. Though not yet 50 years in age, the park and its murals are listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a site of exceptional significance.

The project

By the late 1990s, the brightly painted murals were deteriorating and in need of attention. Individual artists had been repairing damaged murals, personally paying for most of the costs. Although some local grants were provided, these artists’ efforts to restore and preserve the murals were in need of additional funding. In 1999, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), the agency that owns the bridges, applied for and, in 2002, received a $1.6 million grant for the restoration of 18 of the murals. Federal funds came from the Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA) Transportation Enhancement (TE) program, a program to improve the transportation experience through grants for activities related to surface transportation.

The 106 process

The FHWA, the federal agency funding this project, was responsible for conducting

Photos: Above, Chicano Park Take-Over (photo by Todd Stands, courtesy California SHPO); Right, celebrating Chicano Park Day (photos courtesy Chicano Park Steering Committee)
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