

## A BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE

A soaring suspension bridge, Jerusalem's new urban landmark, serves as an eloquent prologue to a sweeping makeover planned for the Holy City. Designed by virtuoso Spanish engineer and architect Santiago Calatrava, the Bridge of Strings floats effortlessly above a busy intersection at the entrance to the city. Though it's currently open only to pedestrians, a new light rail is expected to begin traversing it in about two years.

With its 66 cables hanging from a 118-metre mast and its facing of white steel, Jerusalem stone and glass, the bridge is a radical departure from Jerusalem's traditional urban landscape. And locals are not quite sure what to make of it just yet. Vaguely evocative of David's biblical harp, it has garnered much praise from the local design community, and has even drawn comparisons to the Eiffel Tower. But critics have opposed its location as too confining, and questioned its iconic nature, even calling it an attempt to "force a symbol on the public."

The physical embodiment of the city fathers' new vision of progress and modernity, the bridge is part of an ambitious plan to revitalize Jerusalem's historical city centre. The scheme involves closing off the main commercial thoroughfare, Jaffa Road, to traffic and turning it over to pedestrians and the light rail. An existing network of pedestrian streets will be expanded, open squares built, trees planted and public transport routes developed around the city. At the moment, however, the light rail is well over budget and several years behind schedule, and traffic chaos has become a daily reality.

Meanwhile, a local green coalition is gaining momentum after defeating plans to build on Jerusalem's remaining untouched hills last year. It's expected to win seats on the city council this fall, and is already discussing ways to leverage the new mass transit system into a more sustainable future for the city. Yael Hammerman, a prominent landscape architect and local environmental activist, sees the bridge as a mostly positive element in this grander vision: "Calatrava's design may not blend perfectly with the historical cityscape," she says, "but the moves toward good public transport and reclamation of the public space from cars are significant steps in making Jerusalem a better and more sustainable city."

JESSE FOX



**Above:** The Bridge of Strings, Santiago Calatrava's latest oeuvre, performs a symbolic and practical role in ushering in a new light rail transportation system in Jerusalem. **Left:** Both praised and criticized for its iconic stature, the bridge is made of white steel, Jerusalem stone and glass, with 66 cables strung from a 118-metre-tall mast.