

FHWA's Livable Communities Case Study Series

The Christina River Crossing—Emphasizing Livability in the Project Development and Environmental Review Process

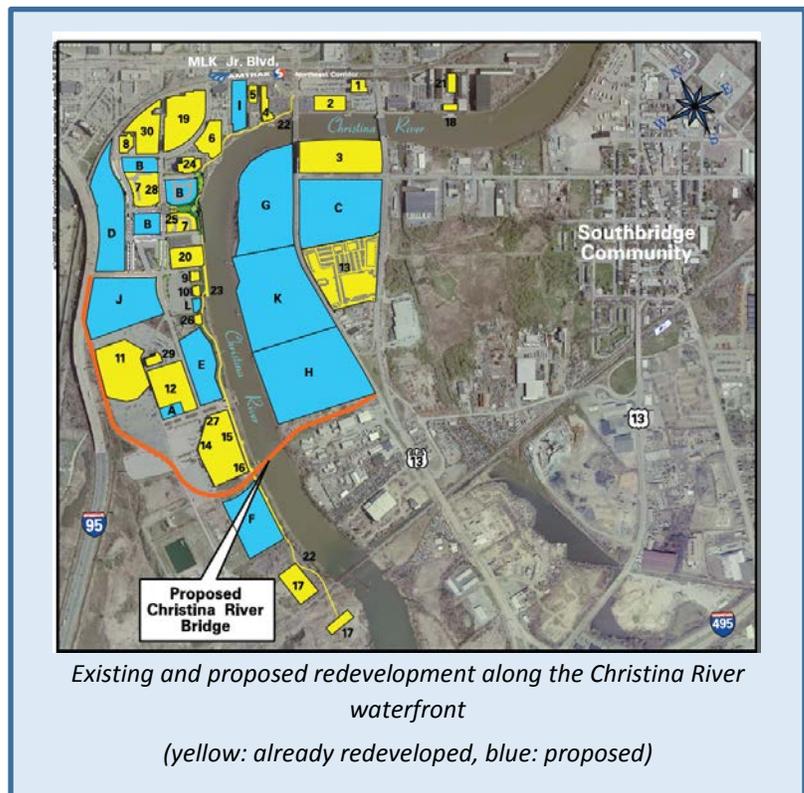
Challenge—Improving Access to and Supporting Redevelopment along the Christina River

Since the mid-1990s, Wilmington, Delaware has been working to redevelop its waterfront, transforming the area from brownfields and declining industrial uses to a multiuse district. Completed and proposed projects include a river walk, wildlife refuge, museum, minor league baseball field, convention center, retail, and residences. Supporting these efforts, public entities have invested over \$200 million and private entities have invested over \$600 million in the area.¹ Federal investments include Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) support for brownfields cleanup and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding for affordable housing.

What is missing is a direct and convenient connection between the neighborhoods and developments on both sides of the Christina River. The area needs a way to connect activities on both sides of the river, improving access to jobs and other regional destinations.

Solution—Developing a Comprehensive Bridge Project and Integrating Livability into the NEPA Process

The Christina River Bridge project² provides that link; the two-lane bridge with pedestrian and bicycle facilities will connect to major routes such as Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd, US 13, I-495, and I-95. Originally envisioned as a new interchange off I-95, the project has evolved to support redevelopment and connects the neighborhoods of Browntown and Southbridge to better job opportunities. These two neighborhoods generally have lower incomes, higher immigrant and non-white populations³, and contaminated former industrial sites.



¹ <http://www.riverfrontwilm.com/uploads/pdfs/RDC-economic-impact.pdf>

² <http://www.deldot.gov/information/projects/crb/index.shtml>

³ Executive Order 12898 on environmental justice directs Federal agencies to consider the impacts of programs and activities on minority and low-income populations, and to ensure the participation of these populations in decisions that affect their communities.

Creating more livable communities through transportation choices



As part of project scoping, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Delaware/Maryland (DelMar) Division Office discussed the Partnership for Sustainable Communities,⁴ and the livability principles that guide its collaboration. Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) staff, recognizing the connection, used the principles in the Purpose and Need chapter of the Environmental Assessment.⁵ This project is a unique example of integrating livability into the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. The needs include:

- **Support Planned Economic Development:** The new crossing will integrate redevelopment efforts on both sides of the Christina River and enhance access to employment, entertainment, and recreational opportunities.
- **Enhance Livability and Sustainable Communities:** The new bridge will improve walkability by providing a more direct route across the river, and will enhance access for two environmental justice communities.
- **Provide Greater System Linkages:** The new connection will reduce travel distances from approximately two miles to one-half mile, also reducing downtown traffic congestion and emergency response times.
- **Improve Community Mobility and Multimodal Access:** In addition to the only direct pedestrian access, the bridge will offer more options for bus circulation. The design will accommodate existing waterway uses.
- **Relieve Congestion:** The new east-west route across the Christina River provides drivers with more direct connections to US 13, I-95, and I-495, thereby relieving congestion.

DelDOT also held meetings and a site visit with regional and national staff from DOT, HUD, and EPA. Partner coordination resulted in a better bridge design, as well as opportunities to leverage other investments in the area.

Funding—Opportunities to Leverage and Attract Additional Funds

In 2005, Federal transportation legislation provided \$20 million for “Wilmington Riverfront Access and Street Grid Redesign.” In the scoping process, DelDOT decided to focus the Christina River Bridge project on connecting redevelopment efforts and enhancing livability. Through the livability focus, DelDOT was awarded additional funding for efforts to complement the bridge project. In 2011, DelDOT received \$521,000 from the FHWA Transportation, Community, and System Preservation Program (TCSP) for improvements along Garashes Lane to connect the Christina River Bridge to the Southbridge neighborhood. The improvements connected a low-income residential neighborhood in an old industrial area with the bridge, jobs, and the only nearby grocery store. HUD has plans for major area investments by adding housing and improving existing units.

Results

Incorporating livability principles and coordinating with other partners has improved the Christina River Bridge project while strengthening other investments in the area. The Environmental Assessment was approved in 2012. DelDOT plans to acquire right-of-way for the Christina River Bridge project in 2013 and begin initial construction in 2014 and 2015. The success of this project has encouraged DelDOT to continue to work with other partners and seek ways to incorporate livability principles into future projects.

⁴ On June 16, 2009, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) joined together to help communities nationwide improve access to affordable housing, increase transportation options, and lower transportation costs while protecting the environment. <http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov/index.html>

⁵ www.deldot.gov/information/projects/crb/ea.shtml

