

Humanizing Infrastructure: Design for the Replacement of I-95

Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, District 6-0

Planning and Environmental Linkages for Livability, Sustainability, and Public Health; Public and Educational Planning, Training, and Outreach

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT's) reconstruction of the I-95 Girard Avenue Interchange in the City of Philadelphia demonstrates inspirational commitment to meeting local community and environmental needs that are often challenging to accommodate in major highway construction projects. PennDOT partnered with the Delaware River Waterfront Corporation (DRWC) and received funding from the William Penn Foundation to design welcoming underpasses, multimodal accommodations, and green spaces through and around the I-95 Interchange that had previously separated Philadelphia's river wards from the Delaware River waterfront. Project elements include 10-foot wide sidewalks, bike paths, upgraded trolley tracks and stops, and improved pedestrian crossings, as well as LED lighting, green stormwater infrastructure, and clear sound barriers to maintain Delaware River views from the neighborhoods. The partners also incorporated public art in the highway underpasses to reflect the local history of indigenous Lenape Native Americans. Construction on the first two phases is nearly complete, and construction of the third phase is underway.



(PennDOT)

I-95 Interchange during construction

The Humanizing Infrastructure project exemplifies planning and environmental linkages through its early consideration of Federal and State highway design and environmental clearance processes and its innovative use of those processes to incorporate context-sensitive solutions that benefit the local community. For instance, by designing the project landscaping to both filter stormwater and soften the appearance of the highway structure in residents'

backyards, project partners ensured that green spaces will be preserved due to environmental permitting requirements for regular maintenance of the stormwater facilities. The project also represents the first use of the City's new green stormwater infrastructure requirements for a large-scale infrastructure project.

PennDOT and DRWC showed impressive leadership in public outreach and community involvement as well. PennDOT created a Sustainable Action Committee made up of community groups, businesses, nonprofits, and public agencies to identify relevant, appropriate, and affordable waterfront and community projects. Regular staff attendance at community events presented additional opportunities for community input, while "near neighbor" meetings with residents in walking distance of specific improvements dramatically increased participation by community members and facilitated attendance by residents without cars. These dedicated and successful efforts to involve the community in the project planning process resulted in many street-level benefits that have enhanced the neighborhoods' livability as well as led to innovative maintenance solutions involving leasing and maintenance agreements with other public agencies, community groups, and private property owners. Overall, PennDOT's I-95 reconstruction acts as a best practice example for linking the planning and environmental review processes and involving the community in large infrastructure projects.

For more information:

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