

Executive Summary

This Environmental Assessment (EA) reports the results of the potential environmental impacts of the proposed Wilmington Riverfront Transportation Infrastructure Project (formerly known as the South Market Street Redevelopment Project). The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), as lead Federal agency; the City of Wilmington, Delaware, as project sponsor and joint lead agency; and in partnership with the Riverfront Development Corporation (RDC), are preparing an EA for the Wilmington Riverfront Transportation Infrastructure Project (Project) in Wilmington, Delaware in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended (42 United States Code [U.S.C.] 4321, *et seq.*), Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500 – 1508), FHWA regulations implementing NEPA (23 CFR 771.119), and applicable Federal, state, and local laws and regulations. The City of Wilmington is a recipient of Federal funds through a U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) Fiscal Year 2021 Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grant.

The Project is located in Wilmington, New Castle County, Delaware, along the east Christina riverbank. The Project's study area extends east from the Christina River to South Market Street and is bound on the north by the Christina River and on the south by Judy Johnson Drive (formerly New Sweden Street). The Project is proposed to replicate the City's street grid characteristic of the North Market Street corridor, north of the Christina River within the South Market Street Riverfront East area. Refer to **Figure 1**.

The Project study area has a shipping and manufacturing, industrial, and brownfields land use history and is marshy and largely inaccessible with significant elevation differences that has created a mud flat condition along the northern and western edges of the Project study area. South Market Street, the eastern project border, is a one-way, four-lane arterial road that extends 0.57 mile along the study area.

The purpose of the Project is to provide transportation infrastructure to further the connectivity of the riverfront area and provide multi-modal resources. The needs for the Project are the following:

- An expanded road network branching from South Market Street west into the project area;
- Pedestrian and cyclist accommodation on new roadways and a new set of pedestrian and bicycle pathways that connect to the existing network of pathways surrounding the site along the Christina riverbank; and
- Rehabilitate and create effective stormwater management.

A No Build and a Build Alternative were considered in this EA. The No Build Alternative represents current conditions and a baseline with which to compare the Build Alternative. The No Build

Alternative does not meet the purpose and need for this project; however, the No Build Alternative is retained for evaluation purposes.

The Build Alternative proposes to construct transportation improvements, including: replication of the Wilmington street grid; a Riverwalk; new pedestrian and cyclist accommodations that connect to the existing network pathways; repair of the existing bulkhead; construction of a new bulkhead; additional drainage outfalls and tide control valves; and at least 18 inches of clean fill beneath the proposed transportation improvements.

This EA presents the socioeconomic, cultural, natural, and other environmental resources in the Project study area, the anticipated effects to those resources, and measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate unavoidable effects to those resources. The EA presents a comparative analysis between the No Build and Build Alternative so that interested citizens, elected officials, and other stakeholders can assess the potential social, cultural, and natural environmental effects from the Project. These effects can be both beneficial and negative, as well as direct, indirect, and cumulative over time (**Chapter V, Table 12**). Refer to **Table ES-1** for a comparison summary of potential direct effects between the No Build and Build Alternative.

Beneficial direct effects of the transportation infrastructure improvements include creation of a road network south of the Christina River, continuity of intersection type and spacing, provision of key access points into and around the area for all users, improved accessibility for all users, improved drainage conditions, and protection against 100-year flood events. In addition, the Project improvements also include a new Riverwalk, open space, and an American with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible pedestrian and cyclist accommodations on new roadways. These proposed improvements have the potential to provide community benefits by improving mobility and offering new, convenient options for accessing jobs, local economic destinations, and regional transit services.

Table ES-1: No Build and Build Alternative Resource Direct Effects Comparison

Comparison Factor	No Build	Build Alternative
Land Use and Zoning	No change	13.6 acres converted to infrastructure and open space; 42 acres converted to mixed use
Businesses, Economy, and Employment	No change	1 business displacement; approximately 200 construction-related jobs
Neighborhoods and Community Facilities	No effect	Improved community benefits and mobility
Demographics	No effect	There are currently no residential uses and limited employment opportunities within the Project study area. The infrastructure improvements proposed with the Build Alternative are anticipated to have direct effects on demographic characteristics.
Environmental Justice	No effect	No disproportionately high or adverse effect to the environmental justice population
Hazardous Materials	No effect	3 low-risk sites; 17 moderate risk sites; 4 high-risk sites

Comparison Factor	No Build	Build Alternative
Noise	No effect	24 residential noise-sensitive land uses would be impacted by traffic-generated noise
Air Quality	No effect	Project meets all applicable air quality requirements
Greenhouse Gas and Climate Change	No effect	Increase in GHG emissions from construction, operational, and maintenance activities
Historical Structures	No effect	No adverse effect
Archaeology	No effect	Potential adverse effect
Wetlands and Waters	No effect	Impacts to Federal- and state-regulated features
Watersheds and Surface Water	No effect	Impacts a drainage area of 0.03 square mile and increases the amount of impervious surface area within the watershed
Groundwater and Hydrology	No effect	Project could add additional sources of groundwater contamination from roadway runoff
Floodplains	No effect	Encroachment because the Project is contained entirely within the 100-year floodplain
Vegetation, Terrestrial Habitat, and Terrestrial Wildlife	No effect	Impacts to edge species; no substantial impacts to wildlife habitat
Rare, Threatened, and Endangered (RTE) Species	No effect	No adverse effect on the ESA-listed species
Aquatic Biota	No effect	Impacts to aquatic biota and natural habitat
Section 4(f) and Section 6(f) Properties	Not applicable	Creation of a Riverwalk and multiple public green spaces and parks

This EA document will be available for public review and comment on April 1, 2024 on the project website (<https://www.riverfronteastconnect.com/>) and hard copies will be available at the following locations in the Project study area: Neighborhood House (1218 B St, Wilmington, DE 19801), Chase Center on the Riverfront (815 Shipyard Dr, Wilmington, DE 19801), and MSK Community Center (1009 Sycamore St, Wilmington, DE 19805).

Refer to the Project website (<https://www.riverfronteastconnect.com/>) for the latest Project information. Once the comment period is over, the comments will be reviewed, and all applicable comments and responses will be incorporated accordingly into a Final EA. If FHWA determines that there are no significant impacts, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) would be issued and made available to the public.