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FHWA's FONSI is first step in opening up city's waterfront

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The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) recently issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Improvements to I-195/Taunton Ave./Warren Ave. Interchange project. At first glance, this sentence holds little emphasis on the finding's impacts on economic development in the city of East Providence. The finding, however, opens the door for moving forward with a transportation design alternative that will dramatically improve access to the city's waterfront and have a profound impact on property development in the areas surrounding the interchange. For the past three and one half years, the city has been working with the RI Department of Transportation and the FHWA to bring this critical highway improvement project to fruition. Senator Jack Reed and former senator Lincoln Chafee were instrumental in securing funding for the first phases of this project which will provide new access to the redeveloping East Providence Waterfront District and provide new connections to Interstate I-195 and relieve the severe congestion that has existed in central East Providence for decades. The FHWA approval of the Environmental Assessment will allow final design of the project to commence and the city of East Providence is hopeful that construction of the project will begin in 2010. The I-195 Interchange at Taunton Ave. represents the primary western transportation gateway to the city and since its construction in the 1960s, there have been several missing exit and entrance movements that have made access to the city at this location a challenge. This is most evident for travelers attempting to access the interchange from I-195 East or those wishing to travel East on I-195 from this interchange. The Waterfront Dr. 2 alternative, which has been selected within the study as the preferred alternative, will seek to establish these connections and improve the efficiency of this interchange significantly. The Completed Environmental Assessment (EA), which was released in September 2007, is available for review on the following websites:

<http://www.dot.state.ri.us/engineering/Proj/195TaunWarr/EnvironmentalAssessment.pdf>

<http://www.eastprovidenceri.net>

<http://www.eastprovidencewaterfront.com>.

Other transportation projects in the area, including, the Waterfront Dr./Dexter Rd. connector and the already completed Waterfront Dr./Warren Ave. connector are also an integral part of the city's overall objective of providing efficient vehicular access to critical redevelopment areas of the city. It is anticipated that these transportation infrastructure projects will promote the development and re-use of hundreds of acres of vacant and underutilized land on the waterfront of East Providence generating hundreds of jobs and millions of dollars in tax revenue.

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