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195 Commission hard hat tour showcases subterranean work

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An extensive and ambitious effort is underway under the ground in downtown. The effort is to prepare for development of the land reclaimed after the relocation of I-195. The subterranean work is taking place in trenches and in the streets as parcels, some without street access, others without electricity, are re-linked to the city from which they'd been cut off for almost 60 years.

The extraordinary effort involves coordination and collaboration of public and private entities as utilities, including electric, gas, water and cable, are layered in trenches, and roads and sidewalks are constructed atop. Crews are finding pipes that date back to the 1800s, and careful environmental consideration must be given to containing soil that still bears evidence of the city's industrial base.

"This work is essential to readying the land for development," said 195 Redevelopment Commission chair Colin Kane. "The level of commitment and collaboration by public and private entities is enabling us to move with considerable speed for a project of this size. As we look at the work in these trenches, and the great work being done, I'd like to thank all of our partners for their efforts."

Among those who are working on the project are R.I. Department of Transportation, Providence Department of Public Works, RI Department of Environmental Management, the Narragansett Bay Commission, Coastal Resource Management Council, National Grid, Cox and Verizon.

"When complete, this work will enable us to offer pad ready sites to developers and businesses," said 195 Redevelopment Commission executive director Jan Brodie. "Our work today will create a quicker path to new development, giving the 195 sites a great competitive edge over other northeast urban areas."

The underground work is part of an initiative to transform 20 acres of new land within Providence. The parcels run in an arch around the riverfront and downtown and eventually 2.6 miles of new streets will be constructed along with new sidewalks and utilities.

"To successfully compete in a global economy, Rhode Island must have a sound transportation system," RIDOT director Michael Lewis said. "This system is inextricably linked to our economic vitality and the quality of life of Rhode Islanders. This project, in particular, will go a long way in making our capital city more attractive to new business and to people looking to make Rhode Island their home."

The mission of the 195 Redevelopment Commission is to encourage economic development that will attract high quality developers and businesses that will bring with them jobs and urban revitalization.

"National Grid is proud to be part of the advance planning and work on this project that is so vital to economic development of the city and the entire state," said John Isberg, National Grids Director of Community & Customer Management.

National Grid is installing to the 18,000 ft. of underground electric cable, and over 11,000 ft of new

or upgraded gas mains. When complete the pad ready sites will also have access to state-of -the-art broadband infrastructure.

"Cox Communications recognized the importance of the I-195 corridor to Providence and to our state's economic future early in this process. For this reason, we were first to commit to installing nearly a mile of conduit infrastructure," said John Wolfe, SVP and GM, Cox Communications. "Every business that occupies this site will find world class broadband at their doorstep and have access to a full suite of telecommunications products."

The I-195 Redevelopment District Commission was created in late 2011 to serve as the responsible authority for the sale, marketing and oversight of the 20 acres made available in downtown Providence as a result of the relocation of Interstate 195. The property offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to knit together the parts of the city formerly divided by highway and to create a dynamic center in the Providence for people to work, live and recreate.

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