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The LINK celebrates new milestones with artistic identity

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On a sunny morning in May the newly transformed skyline for Providence, Rhode Island began to take shape, as dignitaries, community representatives, artists and the 195 Redevelopment Commission marked milestones for the development of The LINK.

The 19 acres of developable land and 8 acres of parks that are part of The LINK were reclaimed with the relocation of a portion of 195. The land aches around Providence's downtown, abuts the river and links east to west, neighborhoods to the city's urban core, and workplaces to residences.

Art exhibits are now in place on five of The LINK's parcels - highlighting Rhode Island's deep and unique creative community. These interim exhibits enliven and energize the land as the 195 Redevelopment Commission reviews the first round of submissions for mixed-use development. (The land can support over 3 million new s/f of building, which would increase the city's urban core by over 30%.)

At the foot of an art exhibit featuring a community of brightly colored bird houses, the dignitaries gathered to begin a trolley ride tour of The LINK. Four-foot weather balloons marked each parcel - color coded to delineate waterfront, parks, college hill, innovation, and research and development possibilities.

History was made when the trolley taking the event attendees from east to west traveled, for the first time in six decades, on newly rejoined roads that had been dissected by the original highway construction in the 1950s. The newly joined tree-lined streets and wide sidewalks provide a clear vista from Providence's west end to the downtown and are framed by more outdoor art exhibits (look for the floating ornamental grasses, a gazing garden, and a multi-faceted jewel-like sculpture). These roads will be linking neighborhoods, the hospital and a broad range of businesses to the city's urban core and set the stage for the growth of the single largest piece of undeveloped property in Providence. RI Department of Transportation director Michael Lewis said, "The vitality of our economy and our transportation system are closely tied; the work we are doing throughout the footprint of the old I-195 will not only help to reconnect neighborhoods once cut off by a maze of highway but also to better position our state and our capital city to compete in a global marketplace." Federal, state and local officials continue to work as partners with the private sector to maximize potential for The LINK. The transformation has drawn national attention, and has been highlighted in the Wall Street Journal as "a move watched by planners and other cities contemplating the future of their aging expressways."

We are encouraged by the first round of proposals that we have received for development of The LINK's parcels. The development concepts range from a sliver of land to a combination of parcels and are equally distributed between the East and West sides of The LINK. The response indicates recognition for the great potential of the land and the opportunity it presents for economic development and job creation in Rhode Island.

"I am confident this is going to be hot real estate," said governor Chafee. "City, state and federal officials along with colleges, universities and the private sector are all working together to realize the potential of this valuable land."

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