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The future is bright for East Providence's Henderson Parkway - by Roberto DaSilva

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Roberto DaSilva

The city of East Providence recently received the good news that the R.I. Department of Transportation (RIDOT) has been awarded a \$25 million grant for phase two of the ongoing Henderson Bridge reconstruction project. Funding is from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) program.

Originally constructed in the 1960s, the Henderson Bridge is one of only two crucial connections between the cities of East Providence and Providence. The bridge was designed as part of a larger regional highway project that was never completed. Therefore, the bridge and its extension east to Broadway (known as the Henderson Expwy.) were designed to be far wider than necessary, with highway-like entrance and exit ramps, and few accommodations for pedestrians. This excessive infrastructure occupied a large piece of the city's waterfront, as well as a wide swath of land between the bridge and Broadway. The state is nearing completion of phase one, which includes the reconstruction of the Henderson Bridge with improved connections to the local roadway system. The new bridge, which includes a separated shared-use path, was opened to traffic in 2023.

Phase two of this project represents much more than a simple road replacement. The grant will allow the transformation of the existing Henderson Expwy. into the "Henderson Parkway," a road for all users with lower speeds, and a separate, shared-use path for non-motorized transit. Expressway ramps will be replaced with at-grade intersections. New bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure will offer improved connections to the East Bay Bike Path and the Blackstone River Bikeway, which serve thousands each year. Together, these improvements will improve safety for all users, better connect neighborhoods, and provide more transportation options. Furthermore, this project will reconnect neighborhoods that have been divided by the six-lane highway.

Another major benefit of this project is that the right-sizing of the Henderson Expwy. into the Henderson Pkwy. will uncover acres of land for reuse. While the future of this state owned land has yet to be determined, there is exciting potential for new economic activity, housing (including affordable units), improved storm water management, riverfront public access, and area beautification. This redesign also ties into related local planning projects that are currently underway. These include a Citywide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, which will investigate adding non-motorized transportation connections throughout the community, and a "Safe Streets For All plan." This plan, led by RIPTA, will look at ways to improve transportation safety in East Providence and several other communities.

The city appreciates this investment by the state of Rhode Island and the federal government and sees this project as an extension of the ongoing transformation of its waterfront and surrounding areas. While many details must still be established over the next few years, the city looks forward to working with the state of Rhode Island on these improvements that benefit our community.

Roberto DaSilva is the mayor of the city of East Providence, R.I.

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