

I. INTRODUCTION

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A. Purpose of Study

This Environmental Assessment/Individual Section 4(f) Evaluation (EA) has been prepared to identify and evaluate the potential social, economic, and environmental impacts of the proposed University Heights Connector Project in the City of Newark, Essex County, New Jersey. This EA has been prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as implemented by the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR 1500 et seq.) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Procedures (23 CFR 771) and pursuant to 42 USC 4332(2)(c), 16 USC 470(f) of the Department of Transportation Act (49 USC 303 and 23 USC 138).

This EA is supported by technical studies for air quality, socioeconomics and land use, hazardous waste, archaeology, and historic architecture, all of which have been prepared separate from this document during the early environmental screening process.

The proposed University Heights Connector Project (Proposed Project) is classified as a Class III action pursuant to 23 CFR 771.117, for which the level of significance of environmental impacts has not been determined, and for which further study is required.

The purpose of this EA is as follows:

- To identify and resolve any uncertainty as to whether an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be required for the proposed project (40 CFR 1508.9(a)(1), and determine the applicability of a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) (23 CFR 771.119) (23 CFR 771.121);
- To provide sufficient information to serve as a record for environmental approvals and consultations as required by law;
- To identify the potential for environmental impacts to the natural and built environment as a result of the construction and operation of the proposed project; and
- To present these findings for public input.

B. Project Setting

The proposed project is located in the central part of the City of Newark, and provides access from the regional highway system to the city's Central Ward, including University Heights and Science Park neighborhoods (see Figure I-1). The project corridor provides direct access to the University Heights area and the Roseville neighborhood, and indirect access to the Central Business District (CBD) and other portions of the City from Route I-280. Considered part of the Roseville neighborhood in Newark's Central Ward, the project area contains a mix of low to medium density residential properties comprised mostly of two to four unit structures, as well as service and retail commercial, institutional, and light industrial properties. Several multifamily structures are located throughout the project area, including two high-rise structures on the south side of West Market Street. A significant number of the residential structures are old and in need of repair, and many lots have been cleared. In addition, several dilapidated and abandoned residential structures are scattered throughout the project area. There are plans to construct low-density residences within the project area by the private sector. The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey is located to the southeast of the project corridor.

The project area is served by the Sussex Avenue Elementary School, the Newark Christian Academy, the Bethany Christian Academy, and the Saint Vincent Academy; all located near the project corridor.

Central Avenue and West Market Street, which cross the project corridor, provide a mix of retail commercial services to the community as well as access to the Newark CBD and neighborhoods to the west of the project area.