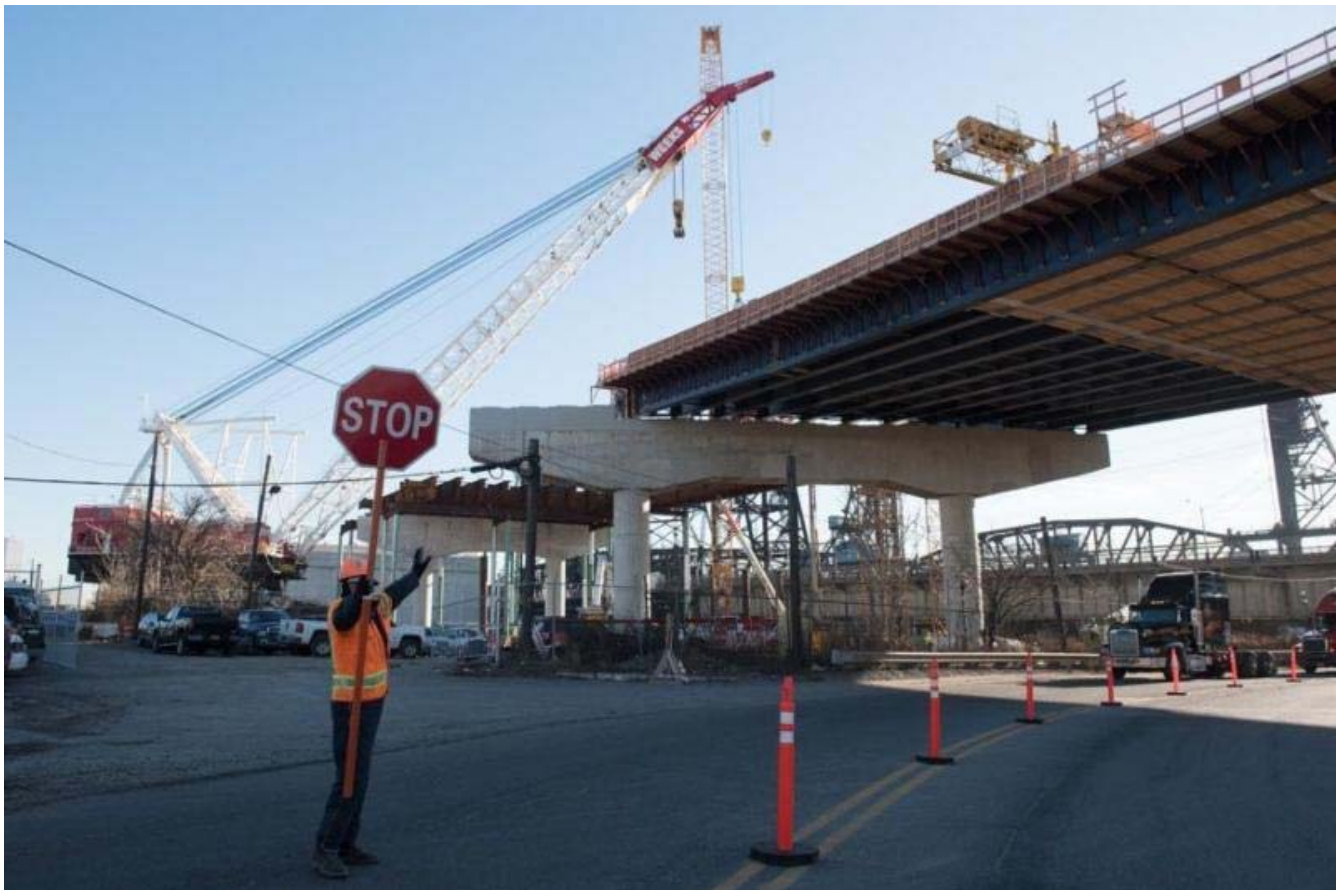




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NEW JERSEY...MAKING CONNECTIONS NEW BIKE, WALKING TRAIL WOULD LINK N.J.'S 2 LARGEST CITIES



When the \$480 million reconstruction of the Wittpenn Bridge is complete, the wider span is expected to improve traffic along the busy stretch between Kearny and Jersey City. The rebuilt bridge will also serve as a vital component of a new biking and walking trail connecting Jersey City and Newark.

"We saw an opportunity with the new WittPenn Bridge," said Cynci Steiner, executive director of the Bike & Walk Coalition. "And now that that project is well underway, connections are needed on both sides, so that the investment by NJDOT in bike and pedestrian access on that crossing is fully



realized."

The bridge over the Hackensack river is scheduled for completion in 2022 and will include bike and walking lanes. That addition will allow the bridge to connect to a Hudson-Essex trail network and help complete the Garden State's leg of the East Coast Greenway, a 3,000-mile bike and walking trail from Maine to Florida.



Department of Transportation spokesman, Stephen Schapiro, said the DOT and the Bike & Walk Coalition have the same vision for the Hudson-Essex trail, known as the Meadowlands Connector, and the East Coast Greenway.

"The general route of the ECG traverses northern and central New Jersey, connecting the Hudson River Waterfront in Jersey City to the Delaware River in Trenton, with connections to the Delaware River Heritage Trail and Camden," Schapiro said in an email.

"Twenty percent of New Jersey's population lives within five miles of the proposed Meadowlands Connector, which will provide the first shared use path/multi-modal connection between Newark and Jersey City."

The new Wittpenn, he added, is "definitely part of the plan."

The proposed Meadowlands Connector trail will also fit into the September 11th National Memorial Trail, a path that links the World Trade Center site, the Pentagon, and the Flight 93 National Memorial in Stony Creek, Pa., near Shanksville.

The connector is envisioned to start from the Hudson River Waterfront somewhere near the Jersey City-Hoboken border, with access to and from the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail line and the PATH system and Manhattan ferries.

The trail would make its way across the Meadowlands and the Passaic River into Essex County to two locations in Newark: one in the city's rapidly redeveloping downtown section, and the other at Branchbrook Park.

The park is the site of a 19th reservoir that once served as a cycling velodrome, and is currently the venue for the Locarelli & Castaldi Branchbrook Spring Series race, held every year in March.

Over the next six months, DOT planners will identify roads and paths for the route.

Essex County Freeholder Brendan Gill, a Bike & Walk Coalition board member, said the Greenway Connector will serve as "a linear park," providing a safe place to walk and ride, for commuters and

people exercising or just having fun.

Gill said the project would be particularly valuable for residents of Newark, Bloomfield and Belleville, who don't have many options for walking or pedaling free of cars and trucks.

"The greenway will provide these communities with safe, off-road access by foot or by bike," he said.

By: Steve Strunsky - New Jersey Star Ledger



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