

Viaduct Greenway: A Rails-to-Trail Conversion RAISE Grant

APPENDIX A. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

SUBMITTED BY CENTER CITY DISTRICT

Executive Summary

The Viaduct Greenway is a major brownfield remediation project in Philadelphia, PA that will create 6.8-acres of new park space with a .6-mile active transportation trail connecting vulnerable neighborhoods with the city's jobs, education, and healthcare core. This project is a partnership between the Center City District, a municipal authority serving downtown, and the City of Philadelphia, and is part of a long-sought desire to link populations north of Center City to daily destinations downtown with reliable, affordable, and safer transportation options. The Greenway will intersect with other planned connectors, such as the Spring Garden Greenway (part of the East Coast Greenway) and the Chinatown Stitch, which has received federal support through the USDOT Reconnecting Communities Program. The project will promote equitable development, spur economic growth, and improve environmental and health outcomes.

The primary goal of this project is to establish an end-to-end trail along the Greenway, with land banked for future phases of amenities as funding becomes available.

The Viaduct Greenway is Phase II of what is now known as The Rail Park. Phase I, shown in green in Figure 1, was an \$11 million rail-to-trail conversion completed in 2018 with private and state funding. The two phases will connect to offer a no-cost, no-emissions transportation option between census tracts in persistent poverty and destinations such as schools, the SEPTA Broad Street subway line, and the Reading Terminal Market, a major destination to the south for affordable fresh food. Travelers along the Viaduct Greenway will avoid more than half a



Figure 1 The Rail Park (Phase I) in green and The Viaduct

mile of high-injury roadway, where bike lanes are intermittent at best, and where ADA sidewalk ramps are often blocked or in disrepair.

The Viaduct Greenway intersects the neighborhoods of East Poplar, West Poplar, Callowhill, and Chinatown North in the Lower North Philadelphia section of the city). The project enjoys broad support from diverse community groups and elected officials, including Pennsylvania Governor Shapiro. A RAISE Grant award will catalyze state and private funding and will allow Center City District to develop this abandoned former railroad into a public amenity.

A1. Project Description

The requested RAISE Grant funding amount is \$24,000,000 for The Viaduct Greenway: A Rails-to-Trail Conversion.

Beginning at Vine Street between 11th and 12th Streets, the project will construct a greenway that extends northeast to a termination at Fairmount Avenue between 8th and 9th Streets. It will pass over Pearl Street, Wood Street, Carlton Street, Callowhill Street, Noble Street, Hamilton Street, Buttonwood Street, Nectarine Street, Spring Garden Street, and Green via fifteen stone, steel, or concrete bridges. The new greenway will be .6 miles long and cover 6.8 acres of elevated land.

With exception for where it spans surface streets, the viaduct is built on fill from Vine Street to Spring Garden Street where it continues along steel bridges until returning to fill at Green Street through to Fairmount Avenue. It is actually two side-by-side structures, making it 60' wide. Some of the surface street tunnels are as long as 133". The parcel includes ancillary property just outside of the steel structure and concrete retaining walls which may be used to create entry points. Rather than complete the trail in sections, this phase of The Viaduct Greenway will create a macadam path for the whole length with minimal amenities, land banking sections for future development. Phase one will include the trail, fencing, lighting, benches, and wayfinding signage. This phase will address undercarriage and surface street concerns by waterproofing stone and concrete bridges, painting and sealing steel structures, re-paving deteriorated sidewalks, and installing lighting.



Figure 2 The Reading Viaduct footprint starting at Vine Street and heading northeast to Fairmount Avenue

A2. Project history

The Viaduct Greenway is the second phase of the redevelopment of a spine of elevated abandoned rail line that spans over three miles across the city.

This project carries forward the positive momentum created by Phase I as well as planned adjacent bicycle and pedestrian safety projects such as the Spring Garden Greenway and Chinatown Stitch. It builds upon more than a decade of multimodal improvements made by the City of Philadelphia along nearby surface streets as part of their Vision Zero plan and equitable neighborhood investments.

In 2011, a coalition of groups led by CCD, which had the internal capacity to fundraise and oversee such a transformative project, aspired to transform the abandoned Reading Railroad Viaduct into a new public park. They focused on the western spur of the viaduct, then owned by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA). The completed linear park was named The Rail Park and is now owned and maintained by the city's Department of Parks and Recreation. It is an example of how private capacity can multiply the City's quality public spaces. At 1.6 of a mile long, Phase I is not in and of itself a transportation corridor, but will integrate with The Viaduct Greenway to fill gaps in the existing transportation network.

The property to be developed is currently owned by Reading International. It was originally owned by the Reading Railroad Company which went bankrupt in the 1970's. Operating rail rights were conveyed to Conrail, who then formally extinguished those rights in 1983. Having been constructed in the 19th century, it predates the City plan and has no tax ID number in the City of Philadelphia Office of Property Assessment database. None of its 6.8 acres has ever been taxed. After years of stalled negotiations, the opportunity to expand The Rail Park with Phase II came suddenly with a renewed interest by the company in the summer of 2023 to offload the property. CCD moved quickly to get City Council to take action and in December 2023 legislation was passed that enables the City to take ownership of the property by donation, sale, or condemnation. CCD signed a development agreement with the City that allows CCD to fundraise for, design, and oversee construction of the Viaduct Greenway. Upon transfer of title, the City will enter into a lease with CCD, thus establishing site control with the project owner, enabling CCD to pursue funding.

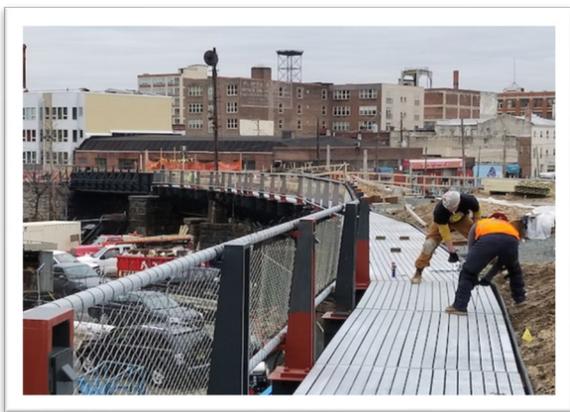


Figure 3 Phase I construction

The rekindling of this project has fortuitously coincided with once-in-a-generation federal funding opportunities that align perfectly with the project goals. CCD has wasted no time gearing up with a fast-track schedule. With much of the pre-planning activities complete, CCD intends to be ready to bid the project for construction in early 2025. CCD was once again delighted to work with Urban Engineers and Studio Bryan Haynes on developing conceptual designs that have been instrumental in communicating this project's potential to community groups, elected officials, and

potential funders. This team possesses deep, unparalleled experience with this complex structure dating to 2011 when they designed Phase I.

While Urban/Haynes develop schematic drawings, which will further clarify where ADA accessibility is possible and where costs can be saved, a consultant will begin work on meaningful community engagement across the affected communities. As a major new public park, the Greenway will draw visitors eager to explore the city from the vantage point of an elevated byway. The Greenway will change the story for North Central Philadelphia from one of abandonment and neglect to one of transformation and evolution. It will become a place that connects people, their cultures, and their futures.



Figure 4 Left: the unimproved viaduct at Spring Garden Street; Right: conceptual design of improvements

A3. Project location and community context

The Viaduct Greenway is located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in the County of Philadelphia, and within the urbanized Greater Philadelphia area. The project spans three neighborhoods just north of Center City (East Poplar, West Poplar, Callowhill/Chinatown North) within census 131 and 376 (Figure 5). Both census tracts 131 and 376 are Areas of Persistent Poverty, as are the



Figure 5 Census 131 tract above and 376 below

adjacent impacted tracts 2, 132, and 141. Census tract 131 is a Historically Disadvantaged Community. The viaduct is in between the bustling Broad Street commercial corridor to the west and booming East Callowhill and Northern Liberties to the east, much denser areas with commensurate economic activity such as shops, restaurants, and grocery stores.

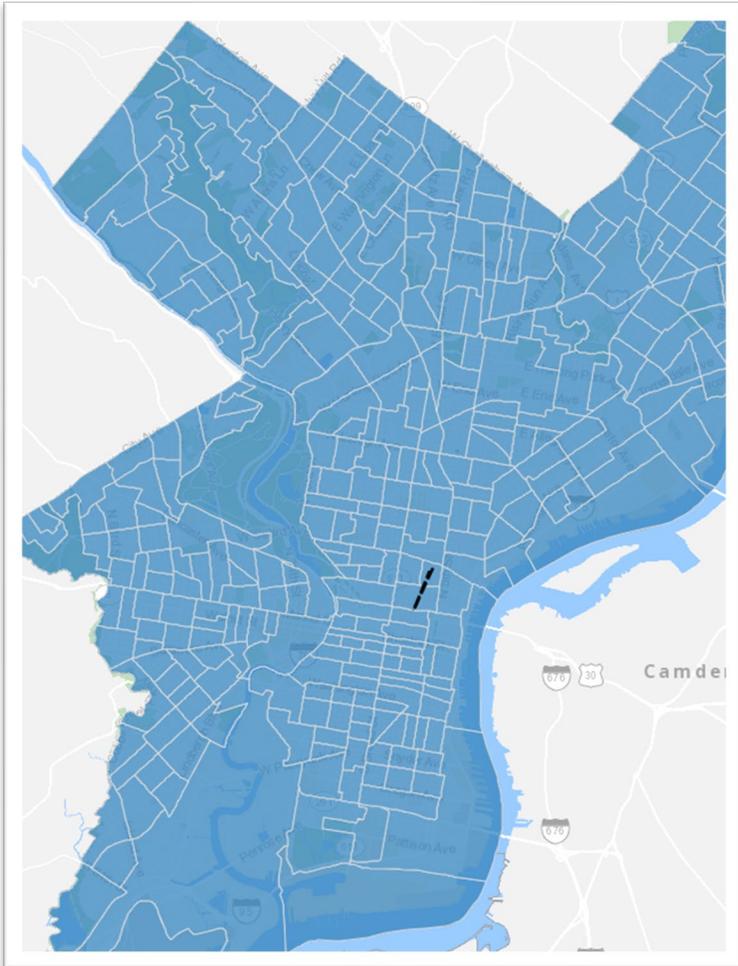


Figure 7 The project in context of the City of Philadelphia



Figure 6 Orange and yellow indicate high rates of poverty, while blue indicates higher wealth. Via City of Philadelphia Stress Index