

# City of Philadelphia



Council of the City of Philadelphia  
Office of the Chief Clerk  
Room 402, City Hall  
Philadelphia

(Resolution No. 260044)

## RESOLUTION

Expressing the City Council's priorities for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's 95 Revive Project from Center City to South Philadelphia

WHEREAS, Interstate 95, or I-95, is the sixth-longest interstate in the country, spanning from Miami to the U.S.-Canada border in Maine; and

WHEREAS, The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) is planning for the full reconstruction of I-95, or the Delaware Expressway, between Spring Garden Street in Center City Philadelphia, and the Girard Point Bridge in South Philadelphia as part of its 95 Revive Project, impacting the Philadelphia neighborhoods of Old City, Society Hill, Queen Village, Pennsport, and Whitman; and

WHEREAS, According to public outreach materials shared by consultant AECOM, all alternatives in the planning study would widen I-95 from six to eight lanes between the Walt Whitman Bridge and South Broad Street, as well as consider a massive expansion of the Walt Whitman Bridge interchange for direct movements; and

WHEREAS, Senator Nikil Saval and Representative Elizabeth Fiedler released a joint statement on January 31, 2024 opposing "any expansion of I-95 that would bring more high-speed traffic, noise and air pollution, or reduce green space," reflecting significant community and public concern over the PennDOT project, and the highway itself; and

WHEREAS, Construction on the Philadelphia portion of I-95 first began in 1959. Despite heavy local opposition, the highway plowed through hundreds of homes in South Philadelphia, Center City, and the River wards, severing the City of Philadelphia from the Delaware River for much of its length; and

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## *RESOLUTION NO. 260044 continued*

WHEREAS, The Society Hill neighborhood managed to limit the damage to their community by burying I-95 below grade along their portion of the interstate. Further efforts to connect I-95 to a crosstown expressway running along South Street were defeated by community opposition in the 1960s; and

WHEREAS, Since its construction, I-95 has brought numerous challenges to Philadelphia communities, including traffic congestion, air and noise pollution, which can lead to higher rates of heart disease and childhood asthma, from hundreds of thousands of cars and trucks that pass daily; and

WHEREAS, I-95 has created a concrete barrier to the Delaware River waterfront, blighting the gateway to Philadelphia. Access to greenspace and the waterfront is disproportionately lower in South Philadelphia neighborhoods abutting the highway compared to Center City neighborhoods such as Society Hill, a division which the proposed widening would further exacerbate; and

WHEREAS, The proposed expansion will directly degrade the lives of children in South Philly through the elimination of the Southeast Youth Athletic Association fields and the Rizzo Rink, depriving them of a valuable source of recreation and enjoyment; and

WHEREAS, According to data from PennDOT, traffic volumes drop by 50 percent south of the Ben Franklin Bridge, further questioning the necessity of reconstructing and widening this portion of the highway; and

WHEREAS, Modern transportation planning consensus holds that adding highway lanes leads to more traffic, not less, inducing more car trips and adding congestion. Reducing the width of the travel lanes, or converting them into multimodal boulevards, would incentivize modal shift away from car traffic, and there is a stronger argument for burying or removing I-95 through Philadelphia entirely than expanding its lanes; and

WHEREAS, Peer cities such as Seattle, San Francisco, and Boston have gained significant health, economic, and social benefits from the removal or burial of waterfront highways. Other cities, such as Rochester and Milwaukee, have replaced urban freeways with local streets and new community development; and

WHEREAS, The construction of I-95 in Philadelphia eliminated tens of thousands of homes. The removal or burial of the highway would provide hundreds of acres of developable land. Repurposing that land underneath the existing I-95 right-of-way into new housing and businesses has the potential to grow the Philadelphia tax base and add new affordable housing units and job opportunities in a city that badly needs it; and

WHEREAS, An expected criticism of a potential removal of I-95 would be questions about traffic diversion onto Philadelphia streets, yet the Bureau of Transportation Statistics found that “freight can travel around Philadelphia on the New Jersey Turnpike and I-295 without significant additions to distances traveled”; and

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*RESOLUTION NO. 260044 continued*

WHEREAS, The expansion of I-95 is unwanted in communities located near the highway. Local civic associations released their “I-95 Reconstruction Project: Community Issues & Opportunities” report in January 2025, finding that “any short-term plans as part of the structural repairs should not preclude more significant changes in the future, i.e. the eventual downsizing, removal or repurposing of the freeway”; and

WHEREAS, I-95 is at the end of its 50-year lifespan. It would need to be almost entirely reconstructed at significant taxpayer expense to ensure it could stand for another fifty years. Rather than double down on more highway widening, the City and Commonwealth could come together to identify a solution to the highway that rights a historical wrong while preserving communities, the environment, and access to the Delaware River waterfront; and

RESOLVED, That City Council strongly opposes the reconstruction and widening of I-95 from Center City to South Philadelphia and rejects any roadway expansion or any right of way expansion within its boundaries; and

FURTHER RESOLVED, That City Council calls on DVRPC and PennDOT to study the economic, public health, and environmental impacts of removing I-95 as part of the 95 Revive Central to South Philadelphia Planning Study, and to study the same impacts of a burial of the highway; and

FURTHER RESOLVED, That City Council calls on the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) to adopt a rule that requires sponsor agencies to prove that transportation projects will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in order to be included in the Long-Range Plan or the Transportation Improvement Program; and

FURTHER RESOLVED, That City Council calls on Philadelphia’s Harrisburg delegation to advocate for PennDOT to move its Engineering District 6 headquarters from King of Prussia to the City of Philadelphia; now therefore be it

FINALLY RESOLVED, That all future decisions about the future of I-95 should be made with robust community engagement and in partnership with surrounding residents and businesses, and that City Council supports all efforts to improve transparency and community engagement in the I-95 Project process.

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*RESOLUTION NO. 260044 continued*

CERTIFICATION: This is a true and correct copy of the original Resolution, Adopted by the Council of the City of Philadelphia on the fifth day of February, 2025.

Kenyatta Johnson  
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Elizabeth McCollum  
CHIEF CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Introduced by: Councilmember Squilla

Sponsored by: Council President Johnson, Councilmembers Squilla, Thomas and O'Rourke