

I. PROJECT INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY

This report documents the alternatives analysis and detailed study work completed to date for the West Dover Connector project. The purpose of the West Dover Connector project is to improve mobility across the Norfolk Southern Railroad for all modes of travel to and from the west side of Dover, reduce congestion at key intersections in the study area, improve connectivity of the roadway network for through and local travel, reduce through traffic volume on local streets and within historic districts, and improve safety including emergency service access.

A. PROJECT HISTORY

Various descriptions of a West Dover Connector (or Saulsbury Road extension to New Burton Road) have been part of the City of Dover's comprehensive plans dating back to the 1960s and continuing to the present.

The most recent 2008 City of Dover Comprehensive Plan (adopted February 9, 2009 with final November 23, 2009 amendments) supports the West Dover Connector as a recommendation under the plan's third goal of "Develop and Expand Alternate Modes of Transportation". The Safety Advisory and Transportation Committee of the Dover City Council identified the extension of Saulsbury Road as its number one priority on its list of unfunded transportation projects to be studied in calendar year 2003 and it has remained on this priority list over time. In 2010, the Committee identified the West Dover Connector project on its list of priorities for top transportation projects. The Dover/Kent County MPO's Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), adopted in January 28, 2009, identified the West Dover Connector project as a Committed Project with completion by 2020 and the project is contained in the MPO's current 2011 – 2014 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and is shown as a Committed Project.

A West Dover Connector (or extension of Saulsbury Road) would be a connector roadway extending south from the current southern terminus of Saulsbury Road at the intersection of Saulsbury Road and North Street. The current development of the Eden Hill Farm provides an opportunity to identify and preserve the right-of-way for portions of a West Dover Connector (extension of Saulsbury Road) that may be otherwise lost, if alternatives are not examined.

B. PROJECT PROCESS

To involve community members and stakeholders early in the project development process, a "Listening Tour" was conducted, which involved interviews of nearly 100 individuals to understand community issues and concerns. Following the "Listening Tour" interviews, a public workshop was held in January 2004 that presented background information on traffic trends and land development activities in the study area as well as common concerns and issues raised during the Listening Tour. From these activities, the Delaware Department of Transportation (DeIDOT) convened a community Working Group of nearly 40 members to provide advice to DeIDOT regarding potential transportation improvements to connect Saulsbury Road to New Burton Road and to US Route 13. The Working Group's role in the project development process has been to assist DeIDOT by providing input, making suggestions, reviewing alternatives, narrowing the range of alternatives, recommending alternatives for detailed study, and recommending a preferred alternative. The Working Group was one element of an extensive public and inter-agency involvement process. Eight meetings of the Working Group were held.

A second public workshop, held in November 2004, presented information on existing and future levels of service for the study area intersections; projections of population, households and employment; environmental screening maps; and maps depicting the concepts developed through the Working Group process. Through the workshop, DeIDOT sought public comment on these concepts as well as any new ideas. A third public workshop was held on January 11, 2006 at which the alternatives retained for detailed study were presented and public comments were gathered. A fourth public workshop was held on September 28, 2010 to present the DeIDOT preferred alternative for public review and comment.

In addition to major public involvement, the project development process also includes significant interaction with federal and state resource protection agencies. To date, eight meetings have been held with representatives from the following agencies:

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control
 - Wetlands and Subaqueous Lands Section
 - Delaware Coastal Program
- Delaware State Historic Preservation Office
- Delaware Department of Agriculture

Additional detail regarding the public and agency involvement process can be found in Chapter VI.

C. STUDY AREA

The study area is defined by North Street to the north, State Street and US Route 13 to the east, Route 15 (Southern Boulevard) and Route 10 (Camden Wyoming Avenue) in Wyoming and Camden to the south and Route 15 (Wyoming Mill Road) to the west. Figure I-1 shows the study area. The legend for the base map that underlies Figure I-1 and many other graphics in this report is shown below.



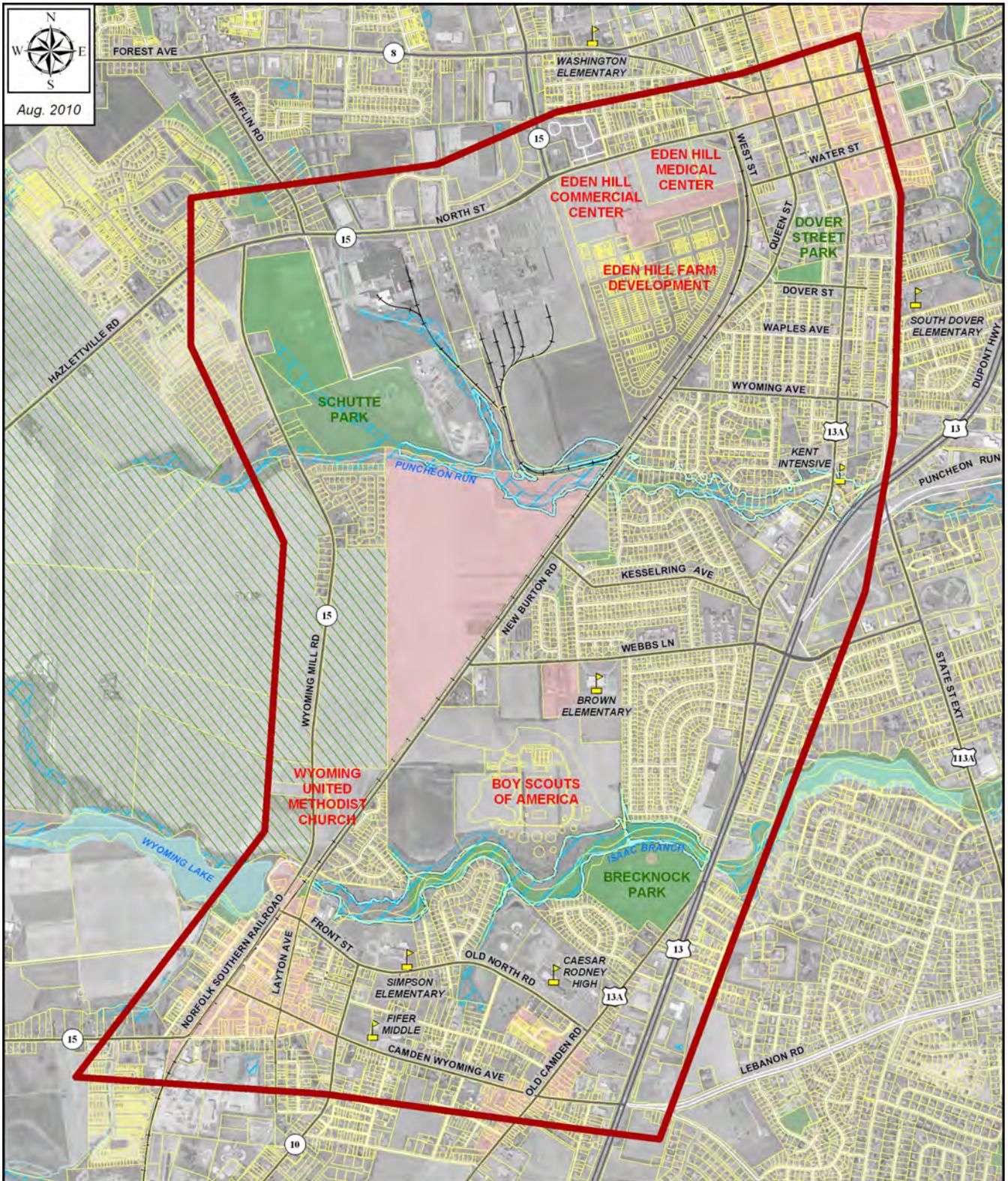


Figure I-1: West Dover Connector Study Area

D. RELATIONSHIP TO EDEN HILL FARM

The Eden Hill Farm is bounded by North Street to the north, an industrial complex to the west, New Burton Road and West Street to the east, and the spurs of the Delmarva Secondary Railroad to the south. Eden Hill Farm is currently under development according to a Master Plan which calls for mixed use, including residential, office and commercial uses and parklands.

DeIDOT has been an active participant in the development of the Master Plan. The General Assembly appropriated, through three different Bond bills, funds for planning and the acquisition of 30 acres of the Eden Hill Farm, including the farmstead. On November 22, 2004, DeIDOT completed the purchase of the 30 acres. In addition to the house, buildings and immediately surrounding land, DeIDOT also purchased the two tree-lined allees running north and east from the house. These actions help preserve the historic and agricultural character and setting of the farmhouse and its viewshed. The farmhouse, buildings and the allees are no longer under threat of direct impact from development.

The Master Plan shows the extension of Saulsbury Road from its current terminus at the traffic signal on North Street extending south through the Eden Hill Farm, where it proceeds to a proposed terminus at a roundabout. DeIDOT has requested a 150-foot-wide reservation of this land for future transportation purposes (pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular).

The State of Delaware also acquired approximately 91 acres located in the southern portion of the Eden Hill Farm property along the north side of Puncheon Run.

The development of the Eden Hill Farm property presents an opportunity for DeIDOT to consider developing a transportation corridor from the proposed terminus at the roundabout to points farther south. This corridor could improve connectivity across the Norfolk Southern Railroad, reduce traffic congestion, improve system linkage and continuity, improve emergency service accessibility, and address safety issues.

The demonstration of need for the West Dover Connector has not factored in the development of the Eden Hill Farm; they are two separate initiatives. The purpose and need of the West Dover Connector indicates that it can be advanced independently of the Eden Hill Farm development. The West Dover Connector was initiated concurrently with development planning for the Eden Hill Farm so as not to preclude options for right-of-way for a new transportation corridor.

E. DOVER TRANSIT CENTER

A multi-modal Dover Transit Center is currently being constructed at the intersection of Water and Queen Streets in Dover. DART First State's existing transfer center along Water Street in Dover will be relocated to this site in December 2010. The Center is located in the northeast corner of the West Dover Connector study area. The Dover Transit Center will create an intermodal hub for transit service in Dover and provide a consolidated facility for DART First State's public transit service, paratransit service, private interstate motor coach services, and local taxi services. Space on the approximately five-acre site has been reserved for a 30,000 square office building to include passenger waiting space, ticket sales, and amenities. DeIDOT is soliciting Proposal and Qualifications Statements from entities interested in providing design/build, finance, operate, and maintain services for Phase II of the Dover Transit Center, which includes the office building.

DeIDOT, the Dover/Kent County MPO, the City of Dover and the Downtown Dover Partnership hope that the new Dover Transit Center will be a catalyst for the redevelopment of the area surrounding the facility. Charettes were recently held in September 2010 with businesses and residents to discuss future development and redevelopment opportunities. The Dover Transit Center will enhance multimodal travel in the City of Dover and in the West Dover Connector study area and facilitate the use of alternative modes of transportation thus supporting federal, state and community livability initiatives.

F. LIVABILITY INITIATIVE

In 2009 the White House Office of Urban Affairs was created to coordinate federal investment around six Principles of Livability implemented through initiatives of the U.S Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Transportation (USDOT) and the Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). Each agency brings particular expertise that can help improve communities in the United States. The six Principles of Livability include:

1. Provide more transportation choices
2. Promote equitable, affordable housing
3. Enhance economic competitiveness
4. Support existing communities
5. Coordinate policies and leverage investment
6. Value communities and neighborhoods

Through a partnership agreement, HUD, USDOT and USEPA are working together to integrate housing, transportation, water infrastructure and land use planning and investment through planning grants to metropolitan areas which are provided to localities to implement livability programs. One of the key goals of the livability initiative is to support sustainable growth by targeting development in locations that already have infrastructure and by offering increased transportation choices. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is undertaking many activities in support of USDOT. FHWA actions are targeted toward enhancing the quality and location of transportation facilities in order to increase access to jobs, affordable housing, quality schools, and safe streets. The West Dover Connector project is consistent with these national livability principles, goals and initiatives. All the alternatives for the new roadway will connect employment to residential areas in the City of Dover thus increasing access to jobs and other opportunities within an existing community. Future growth in Dover will be supported by the West Dover Connector which will accommodate the increased travel associated with development and redevelopment. In addition, the West Dover Connector alternatives provide increased transportation choices by including facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians as well as motor vehicles.

G. METHODOLOGY

The alternatives analysis adhered to specific guidance and standards for engineering and planning practice as recognized by DeIDOT:

- 2004 American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets, 5th Edition;
- DeIDOT Road Design Manual, July 2009;
- DeIDOT's adopted statewide travel demand model; and,

- Guidance on environmental streamlining adopted by the Mid-Atlantic Transportation and Environmental Task Force (MATE).

A list of references and agencies consulted during the alternatives analysis is provided in Appendix C.