

# Shellpot Bridge Is Getting Back on Track

Rail distribution opportunities will soon grow at the Port of Wilmington with the scheduled rehabilitation of the Shellpot Bridge, which crosses the Christina River, west of the I-495 bridge, near the Port.

Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) and Norfolk Southern Corporation (NSC) have joined forces this year to repair the 115-year-old bridge. The \$13.5 million restoration project will allow freight cars to run directly to the Port of Wilmington and will enable passenger trains to run between Wilmington and Dover.

The Shellpot Bridge is a swing-style railroad bridge originally constructed on timber piers in 1888. Conrail discontinued service over the bridge in December 1994 when the bridge foundation could no longer support heavy freight trains. Since then, freight trains have had to use Amtrak's busy

Northeast Corridor rails through the Wilmington Train Station.

Reopening the Shellpot Bridge to freight traffic will provide the Port and neighboring industrial sites with greater flexibility for scheduling inbound and outbound train service. Customers of NSC at the Port and on the Delmarva Peninsula can expect improved service when the bridge is operational again since it will allow local shifting of NSC's cars and faster access to its rail.

The State of Delaware and DelDOT, who are funding the restoration project, will be reimbursed over a 20-year period by collecting tolls from NSC for rail cars that cross the bridge. Computerized devices, similar to E-Z Pass transponders on toll roads and bridges, will be used to count cars as they cross the bridge. The Shellpot Bridge will be the first railroad toll bridge in the U.S with annual payment terms.

Roy Kirchner, president of AutoPort, Inc., believes that the renewed operation of the Shellpot Bridge will benefit his company. "Based on the fact that trains will operate without the restrictions they currently have, users of rail will enjoy shorter transit times for their freight," he explained. Currently, freight trains sharing Amtrak's Northeast Corridor can only operate during the off-peak hours of 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.

AutoPort receives automobiles from GM manufacturing plants from throughout the United States and from the Honda manufacturing plant in Marysville, Ohio. The opening of the rail bridge will make access to the AutoPort facility easier.

To date, two sections of the 242-foot movable swing span have been removed and hauled to the NSC facility for reconstruction. Remaining construction includes rebuilding the bridge decking, pier caps that support the bridge, and the Christina Avenue rail crossing to improve traffic flow. Rehabilitation is scheduled for completion by March 31, 2004.

"I am very excited about the restoration project and the great economic impact it will have on businesses operating in and out of the Port of Wilmington and the neighboring industrial parks," said Nathan Hayward III, Delaware's Secretary of Transportation and Chairman of the Diamond State Port Corporation Board of Directors.

