

MAYO'S ISLAND HISTORY

View of Mayo's Island from Manchester, 1852 | VALENTINE RICHMOND HISTORY CENTER
 INSET *View of Mayo's Island, photographed by Mathew Brady c. 1863* | U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Mayo's Island is strategically located at the convergence of the fall zone and tidewater sections of the James River. Since 1788 bridges have connected Hull and 14th Streets, replacing an earlier ferry crossing near the island. The ferocity of the James River, industrialization, and bridge construction have all combined to shape the modern footprint of the island.

MAYO'S ISLAND Mayo's Island began as two islands: Tollhouse Island to the west and Confluence Island to the east. The two islands were merged and expanded by fill and alluvial deposits to create Mayo's Island's present form. The Tollhouse Island section contained the tollhouse and a wooded grove used for picnics, barbeques, fishing, and quoits (a cross between bocce and horseshoes) matches. The island is subject to severe flooding, and was completely submerged during a flood in 1936.

MAYO BRIDGE The Mayo family of Richmond obtained a charter to construct and operate a toll bridge across the river in 1785. The first Mayo Bridge opened in 1788, and it was the first span across the James River. Floods in 1790, 1802, 1813, 1835, 1847, and 1877, and the 1865 Evacuation Fire ended the service of successor bridges. A term of the consolidation agreement between Manchester and Richmond in 1910 required a new bridge to connect Hull and 14th Streets. The resulting Mayo Bridge was completed in 1913. It is a filled concrete arch structure reminiscent of arched bridges in Paris and London, a majestic bridge form that became popular for concrete bridges in the United States.

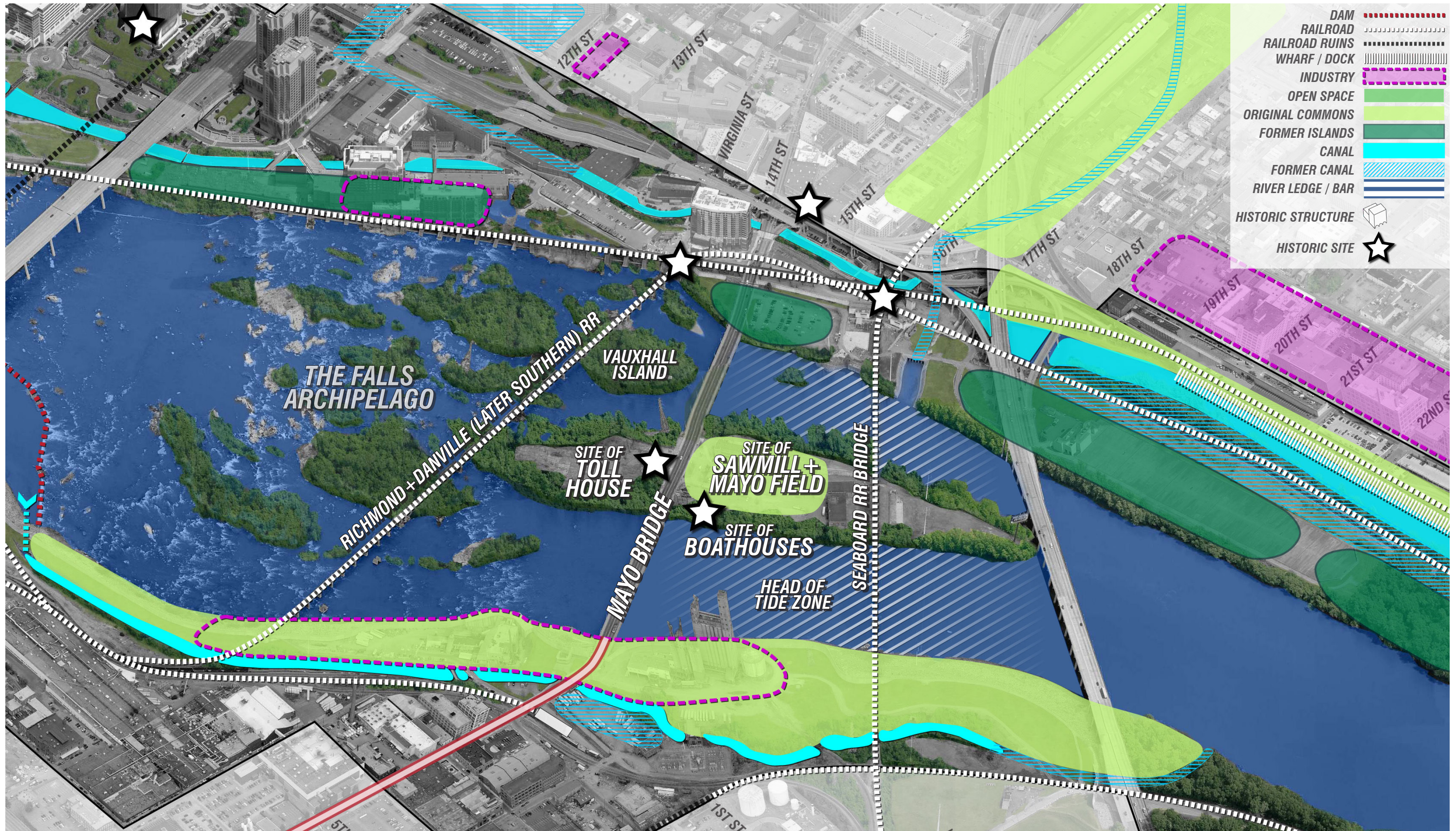
SAWMILL AND MAYO FIELD A sawmill occupied the eastern end of the island for much of the nineteenth century. Following its closing, the island became a private recreation facility known as City Park. The centerpiece of the park was Mayo Field, a baseball stadium that was in use until around 1940.

BOATHOUSES In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, boating for recreation and commercial fishing was widespread in the tidewater section of the James. Following the founding of the Virginia Boat Club in 1875, competitive shell rowing became popular on the tidewater. By 1895, the club and the Richmond YMCA constructed Philadelphia-style boathouses on the south side of the island.

RAILROAD BRIDGES The Southern Railroad Bridge incorporates material from several earlier bridge construction projects, including the 1850 Richmond and Danville Bridge and the concrete in-fill sections that date to around 1910. The Seaboard Airline Railroad connected to Tampa, Florida in 1905, and the surviving steel truss bridge dates from that time.

VAUXHALL ISLAND Vauxhall Island is named for Vauxhall Gardens, the great pleasure garden of eighteenth century London. Richmond's Vauxhall pleasure grounds operated on the island in the nineteenth century. Patrons could access the island on a footbridge from Mayo's Bridge and enjoy barbeque, a barroom, a shuffleboard court, fishing, and other amusements.

THE FALLS ARCHIPELAGO A unique archipelago of islands is adjacent to Mayo's and Vauxhall Islands, and includes Bailey's Island, Burton's Land, Creek Island, Devil's Kitchen, Shad Island, Sharp's Island, Terrapin Island, and many unnamed islets. A variety of activities took place on the islands, including commercial fishing operations during the spring shad runs, summer all-male skinny dipping excursions in the rapids and pools, and granite quarrying for construction of bridge piers and retaining walls.



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MAYO'S ISLAND

“CENTRAL RIVERFRONT PARK” 16 ACRES

Mayo's Island sits at the center of the Richmond Riverfront, positioned mid-river and bisected by Mayo Bridge, that connects it to the north and south banks. The island itself has incrementally grown in all dimensions, the result of man-made additions and flood effects that transformed the island from riparian land to recreational and eventually industrial use. The 1890 F.W. Beers map identifies the island as “Island Park,” with recreational use that continued into the 20th century, before the impact of severe flood events.

Mayo's Island is strategically located to serve communities on both the north and south sides of the River as a premier regional public open space. Mayo's Island is both the largest and most vehicular-accessible of all the islands; additionally, it is adjacent to the habitat-rich archipelago of smaller islands immediately upriver. The island should be acquired for public use as open space, consistent with recommendations in the 2009 Downtown Master Plan, that envisioned Mayo's Island as the centerpiece of the Riverfront. The island could provide a distinct open space that provides walking and biking trails, multiple watercraft launches, an exploratory green landscape, play areas, an event lawn, and restored riparian overlooks upriver and downriver. Existing parking lots could be reused adjacent to the road, and a plaza with concessions and recreational equipment rentals could offer support for a variety of programs. The rehabilitation of Mayo Bridge should integrate with this anticipated revitalization of Mayo's Island, in support of this anticipated active, pedestrian landscape. The Plan recommends that 14th Street as it crosses the island be reconfigured to calm traffic speed and accommodate the anticipated foot and bike traffic crossing the street from one side of the island to the other. The acquisition and transformation of Mayo's Island into public open space is a priority for protecting the integrity of the James River as an accessible landscape, reflective of Richmond's rich natural and cultural legacy: Mayo's Island becomes the ‘green jewel’ of the Richmond Riverfront.

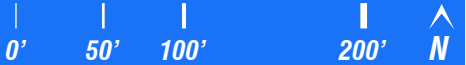
Current uses include surface parking rental, recycling transfer, and artist loft rental. The majority of the site is paved with impervious concrete and asphalt. Future development of this privately-owned island is constrained by three significant factors: flooding, infrastructure, and utilities. The general topographic elevation of the island is lower than the 100-year flood, making redevelopment extremely difficult from a regulatory standpoint. Historically, the island has endured multiple catastrophic floods resulting in immersion and the total loss of various structures. Additionally, the 1994 floodwall on either bank of the James is likely to amplify the flooding impact at Mayo's Island; the former wide breadth of the river at this location is now constrained between two floodwalls, concentrating floodwaters. Any redevelopment of commercially-viable structures requires a secondary emergency vehicle egress route to either bank of the river, at an elevation higher than the 100-year flood. While any new egress bridge would be a significant cost, it would also have to surmount the height of the floodwalls that protect the City from a 280-year flood event. The absence of any detectable link to the City sanitary sewer system is the third constraint. Written records and site investigations have shown no evidence of a functioning sanitary sewer system; therefore island structures do not currently conform to regulatory health and building codes. The cost of addressing all three constraints, particularly the implied public funding of significant infrastructure improvements to solve the constraints, leads the City to focus on acquisition rather than private development.



MAYO'S ISLAND



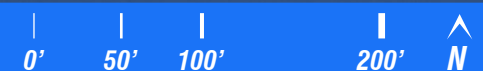
MAYO'S ISLAND: SHORT-TERM PLAN



Acquisition of Mayo's Island would provide for a range of short-term public access opportunities. Nature trail circuits along the island perimeter offer upriver views to the rapids. Multiple ramps down to the water edge accommodate watercraft launch and recovery, as well as easy pedestrian access down to the water sheet. Several hundred existing parking spaces could provide temporary event venues, including farmer or flea markets, food festivals, or skate competitions. Existing buildings should be closed and secured short term, awaiting final removal. The downriver end is already a green lawn, immediately usable for informal play. The 2015 World Cycling Championships could use the island for preparation, staging, and support logistics, with ample vehicular parking, as well as grandstand viewing of the race crossing the River.



MAYO'S ISLAND: LONG-TERM PLAN



Mayo's Island would be transformed from a predominantly paved parking lot with decaying buildings to an island landscape inviting exploration. Pedestrian and bike trails would traverse the island, maximizing access along the river and across the island, intersecting with a diversity of programmatic activities. From open lawns for informal play to integrated play environments, the transformed Mayo's Island would offer opportunities for play, bike and skate rental, as well as passive gardens, within an iconic 21st-century landscape capitalizing on its position in the middle of the river. The intersection of Mayo Bridge with Mayo's Island can be detailed as a speed table, or benched travel way, effectively calming speeding

bridge traffic most days, while on rare occasions allowing the bridge to be closed for civic events. At 16-acres, Mayo's Island is more than twice as large as Brown's Island, and positioned squarely in the middle of the James River. A publicly-owned Mayo's Island would allow ample space for a new Richmond landscape type: an exploratory, green landscape capable of hosting events and festivals, a dynamic hybrid landscape that does not exist along the Richmond Riverfront.



MAYO'S ISLAND

0' 50' 100'



MAYO'S ISLAND: VIEWED FROM THE SOUTH BANK, MAYO'S ISLAND BECOMES THE 'GREEN JEWEL' IN THE RICHMOND RIVERFRONT



MAYO'S ISLAND **UPRIVER**



MAYO'S ISLAND **DOWNRIVER**



MAYO'S ISLAND: EXPLORATORY LANDSCAPE

The fundamental anticipated change to Mayo's Island is the replacement of existing vehicular pavements with permeable lawn and vegetation. The perimeter tree cover would be left virtually intact as a mature shade canopy enclosing an exploratory landscape of non-linear recreational path circuits reinforced by drifts of trees. Each circuit is defined by enclosing landform topography, drifts of trees, and singular, interactive art installations. The objective is to create a green landscape with a diversity of experiences that must be discovered on foot or wheel. Each circuit would have a central open space suitable for informal play, or formalized event activities.

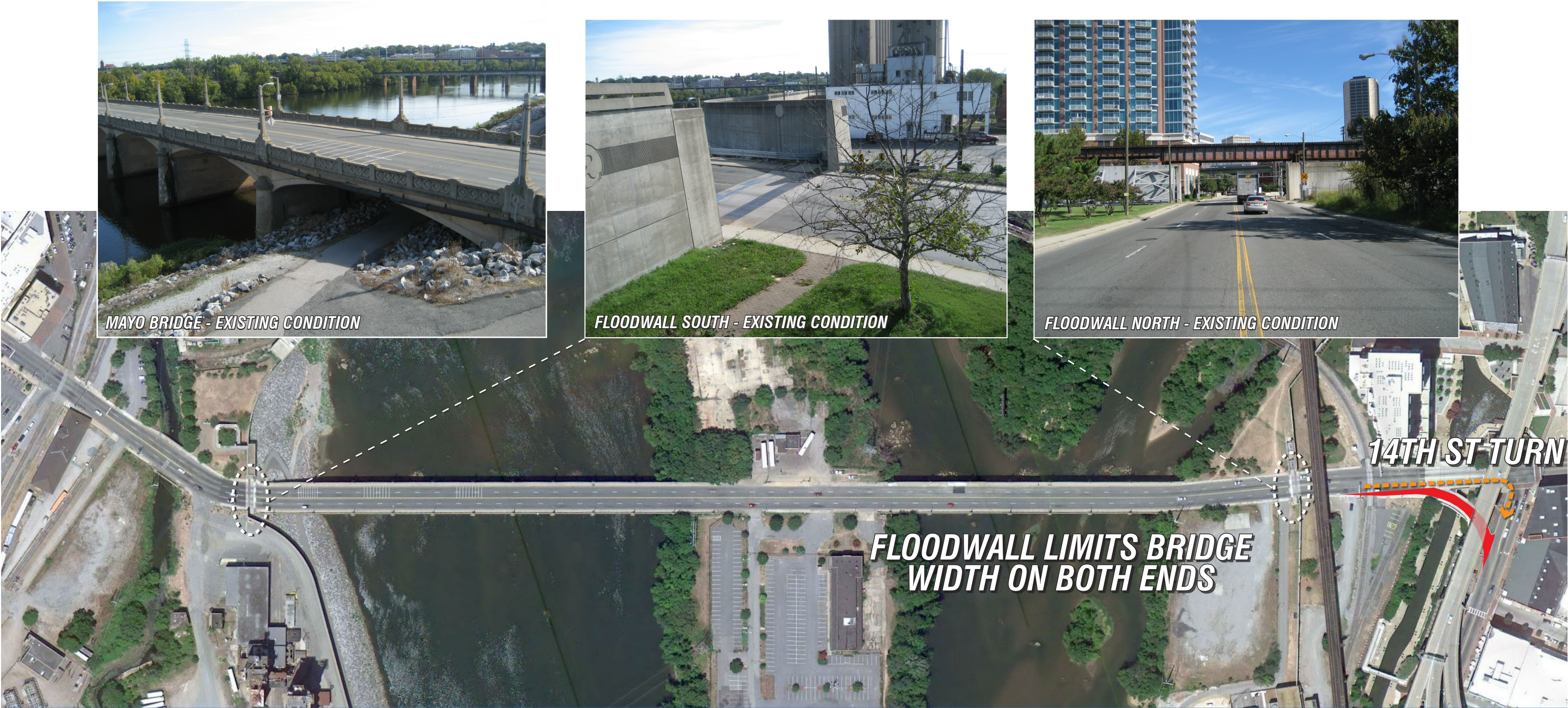
PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE CROSSING
CONNECT MAYO'S ISLAND TO CHAPEL ISLAND / SHOCKOE BOTTOM
BIKE ACCESS
DOWNRIVER+UPRIVER VIEWS



EXISTING

MAYO'S ISLAND TO CHAPEL ISLAND PED BRIDGE

A pedestrian suspension bridge could be retrofitted to hang from the bottom of the I-95 James River Bridge, connecting the downriver tip of Mayo's Island to Chapel Island, 17th Street, and potentially up to the Main Street Station in Shockoe Bottom. The objective is to provide a pedestrian-only alternative to accessing Mayo's Island from multiple points other than 14th Street. The concept borrows from the successful pedestrian bridge precedent suspended beneath the Lee Bridge, connecting to Belle Isle.



MAYO BRIDGE N >

The 1913 Mayo Bridge is the last remaining historic bridge crossing the James River in Richmond. A 2011 analysis and feasibility study has proposed multiple alternatives for the bridge in need of either significant rehabilitation or near total reconstruction. The Mayo Bridge/14th St (U.S. Route 360) is part of the National Highway System. The following guiding principles for the review of the design options available to the City will be followed before any final recommendations are made. Any rehabilitation or reconstruction of the Mayo Bridge will:

- Maintain the historically accurate architectural appearance of the existing Mayo Bridge.
- Implement historically accurate architectural lighting fixtures for the Bridge.
- Install wider sidewalks to accommodate pedestrians and other activities (e.g., fishing, sightseeing, etc.)

- Safely accommodate all forms of transportation across the bridge including:
 - Pedestrians and bicycles
 - Vehicular traffic
 - Existing public transit and potential future transit options
- Use the existing access doors in the flood wall
- Provide access to Mayo Island

There will be opportunities for continued dialogue and input with the public, the Planning Commission, and the State and Federal oversight agencies before any recommendation is made prior to the start of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process which must be followed.



14TH ST + MAYO BRIDGE APPROACH N >

Northbound vehicular traffic leaving the Mayo Bridge has the option of continuing north on 14th Street or bearing right into a turn with a yield sign onto Dock Street. The effect is to keep downriver-bound traffic moving smoothly without delay. A consequence is a difficult pedestrian environment where pedestrians must cross the descending turn mid-curve. The Plan recommendation is to further evaluate either closing the right-hand turn; requiring all traffic to negotiate the signalized intersection at 14th and Dock Street; to significantly reconfigure the existing crosswalk; or employ other measures to enforce slower vehicular speeds along the descending curve, and increase driver awareness of the pedestrian crossings.