

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)
Interstate 81 Avoca to Scranton Reconstruction Project
Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties

GENERAL INFORMATION

Q1. What is the purpose of the project?

A1. The purpose of the project is to provide a safe and efficient transportation system on I-81 from Avoca to Scranton for both local and regional traffic by addressing deteriorating roadway and structure components, resolving roadway and structure geometric deficiencies, reducing future congestion in the 2055 design year to operate at level of service (LOS) D or better¹ during peak times, improving safety, and enhancing mobility.

Q2. What type of improvements are anticipated?

A2. PennDOT's proposed work in the project area includes reconstructing and widening the highway to three lanes in each direction. The new roadway will include three 12-foot travel lanes and two 12-foot shoulders in each direction. The existing median area will be used to accommodate the widened footprint of the paved roadway. As the road is reconstructed and widened, the project will also address the remaining project needs by improving roadway geometry and the interchanges along the corridor.

Q3. What is the current project status?

A3. The project is currently in the preliminary engineering phase. PennDOT is refining the roadway designs, coordinating with agencies, and obtaining NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) clearance for the project. The project will move into final design in 2025 with construction anticipated to start in 2028.

Q4. What section(s) of I-81 does this project include?

A4. The total project length is about seven miles and begins near the Avoca Interchange, Exit 178, and ends just north of the President Biden Expressway, above Exit 185. The highway mainline, bridges, and ramps will be reconstructed between Exits 178, 180 (the Moosic Interchange), 182 (the Davis Street Interchange), and 184 and 185 (River Street and the President Biden Expressway, respectively).

TRAFFIC

Q5. How much traffic is currently travelling on Interstate 81 in the project area? How much is the traffic anticipated to increase in the future?

A5. The current (2023) highest Average Daily Traffic (ADT) on Interstate 81 between Avoca to Scranton is about 87,700 vehicles. The ADT in the general project area is expected to grow by 10.5% by 2055 to 96,900 vehicles.

¹ 1 The recommended LOS design guideline for urban freeways is LOS C or D according to A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets, 6th Edition (AASHTO 2011).



Q6. Why only widen the highway to three lanes?

A6. As part of the preliminary design phase, PennDOT studied the number and types of vehicles and how they move through the project area in the 2055 design year. Three lanes are sufficient to resolve the identified issues related to congestion and mobility.

Q7. Does this project change the current location of the exits on the highway?

A7. Exits on I-81 in the project area will be from the right lane of the highway mainline in both the northbound and southbound directions.

Q8. Won't the existing traffic issues on I-81 be solved by the new Scranton Beltway Project in Clarks Summit?

A8. The Scranton Beltway Project and this project are two distinct and separate projects, each with their own goals, funding sources, project teams, and design schedules. The Scranton Beltway Project is led by the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission (PTC) and plans to link PennDOT's Interstate 81 and the Turnpike's Northeast Extension—Interstate 476—in the Scranton area to form highway-speed connections that will enable motorists to seamlessly drive from interstate to interstate in northbound and southbound directions. Although the Beltway will provide a new connection that should disperse traffic on I-81 to I-476, the travel demand modeling data show that travel patterns on adjacent or adjoining roadways will also shift to utilize the freed capacity on I-81.

Q9. How will the improvements at the Moosic Interchange impact local traffic, particularly Route 11?

A9. Route 11 will be modified to accommodate the planned improvements at the Moosic Interchange and growing traffic volumes in the Borough. Anticipated changes to Route 11 include street widening and signal and intersection upgrades.

Q10. Will this project impact travel routes for the residents of East Mountain?

A10. PennDOT understands the importance of the I-81 River Street interchange to the residents of East Mountain and therefore will maintain two of the three existing interchange access points. The southbound on-ramp and northbound off-ramp will still be located at River Street. However, in order to accommodate other necessary improvements in the area, the current northbound on-ramp will be eliminated and a new northbound on-ramp will be accessible from Meadow Avenue and Moosic Street.

ENVIRONMENTAL**Q11. What is the impact to the Gravity Railroad or other areas of local historical significance in the project area?**

A11. PennDOT is aware of the Gravity Railroad and does not anticipate any impacts at this time. Additional environmental studies and agency coordination are planned for the next phase



of this project. Any identified impacts to sensitive historical resources will be presented in the NEPA clearance document that is prepared for the project. Mitigation measures to protect the Gravity Railroad and other historical resources will be developed if needed.

Q12. How will highway stormwater and runoff be managed in this project?

A12. Plans for managing stormwater will follow highway design standards and environmental regulations. PennDOT is aware of the stormwater drainage issues along the highway corridor. Additional coordination with local officials, neighbors, and stakeholder groups may occur in the next design phase to investigate or discuss specific stormwater management concerns. The Design team is also coordinating with the City of Scranton regarding their stormwater management study for East Mountain.

Q13. Are there impacts to sensitive environmental resources?

A13. There are no impacts to sensitive environmental resources—like wetlands and threatened and endangered species—anticipated at this time. Additional environmental studies and agency coordination are planned for the next phase of this project. Any identified impacts to sensitive environmental resources will be presented in the NEPA clearance document prepared for the project.

Q14. Are there impacts to socio-economic resources?

A14. There are no impacts to sensitive socio-economic resources—like environmental justice communities, special population groups, and community features like parks—anticipated at this time. Additional studies and agency coordination are planned for the next phase of this project. Any identified impacts to socio-economic resources will be presented in the NEPA clearance document prepared for the project.

Q15. How are Native American Tribes and Nations engaged with the project?

A15. Federal and State law requires PennDOT to consult with federally and state-recognized Native American Tribes and Nations on transportation projects that may affect culturally sensitive or important places, objects or archaeological sites. PennDOT maintains a staff of cultural resource professionals (CRPs) who manage communications with Tribes and Nations in the project area pursuant to [Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act](#) and its implementing regulations at [36 CFR Part 800](#).

NOISE

Q16. Will sound barriers or other noise abatement methods be installed?

A16. A preliminary noise study analysis will be completed in the next step of the design work. If Federal and State noise abatement criteria are met, then noise walls will be recommended as part of the project. In those areas that satisfy the criteria—where abatement is “warranted, reasonable, and feasible”—local residents and businesses will be contacted for their input and



preferences. For general information about PennDOT's noise study process and "warranted, reasonable, and feasible" abatement criteria, please visit our website "[Sound Decisions About Highway Noise Abatement](#)" (PDF) publication.

Q17. Where will the noise walls be located?

A17. The decision of whether noise-sensitive areas qualify for noise walls will be made in the final design phase, after the noise study analysis is complete. Residents or owners of noise-impacted property will have the opportunity to share their concerns and questions with the Design team at a noise-focused meeting and/or by phone, email, and questionnaires or ballots. The property owner or resident will be asked to decide for or against a sound wall and their preference for the noise wall texture and color.

Q18. Can truck braking be prohibited or restricted on I-81?

A18. In this section of roadway, an engine-brake retarder prohibition is not allowed. In order to prohibit engine brake retarders, the roadway must not be a limited access facility or a ramp exiting from a highway with a posted speed or 85th percentile speed of 55 mph or greater. I-81 is a limited access facility with exit ramps.

PERSONAL PROPERTY AND RIGHT-OF-WAY**Q19. What is right-of-way?**

A19. Right-of-way includes the easement or land purchased by PennDOT on which a highway is built, as well as shoulder, plus any additional area needed for highway purposes. [Contact your local office](#) within PennDOT District 4 to find out what the right-of-way is for a specific location.

Q20. Will any residents be displaced?

A20. Early studies for this project did not identify any residential properties or structures that will be displaced. Final steps to identify any displaced properties or land acquisitions will begin at the completion of the environmental clearance and preliminary engineering phase of the project in 2024. If and when necessary, PennDOT will work with any affected property owners to discuss the right-of-way acquisition process as well as fair market value for each impacted property. For additional information regarding the right-of-way acquisition and relocation processes, please contact refer to the department's [Relocation Assistance Guide](#) (PDF) and "[When Your Land Is Needed for Transportation Purposes](#)" publication (PDF). Use of the median area to widen the roadway will minimize right-of-way needs for construction of the project.

Q21. How will the project construction impact access to my property?

A21. The selected Contractor will be required to maintain local access to affected businesses and/or residences during construction. Standard notifications and coordination will be conducted directly with those property or business owners or residents.



SCHEDULE AND COST

Q22. When is construction expected to start and how long will it take?

A22. Based on the time required to complete environmental studies, engineering design, right-of-way acquisitions, and permitting, PennDOT anticipates that construction will begin in 2028. However, a construction schedule or estimate has not yet been developed.

Q23. Can this project schedule be fast-tracked or move more quickly?

A23. Many of the tasks that are covered in the later design phase may take place at the same time, which may improve the project delivery schedule. PennDOT will make every effort to advance the design through to construction in a timely manner.

Q24. Will I still be able to drive on I-81 during construction?

A24. Yes, motorists will still be permitted access to the highway during construction. Two lanes of traffic will be maintained on the highway mainline in both directions during the construction phase and most ramps are expected to remain open. Detours will be provided when ramps are to be closed for limited periods of time during construction.

Q25. How much will this project cost?

A25. The cost of the project is subject to change as the design is refined and the cost of construction fluctuates. The current estimated cost is between \$500 and \$600 million.

Q26. How much of the project cost is for the additional lanes and the interchange improvements?

A26. The interchange improvements account for almost 85% of the total cost. The interchange costs include the additional lanes on I-81 through the interchange areas as well as improvements to the adjacent side roads. The improvements to the I-81 mainline beyond the interchange areas make up about 15% of the total cost. These improvements include reconstruction of the existing pavement and widening for additional lanes.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Q27. How can I provide a comment or feedback on the project?

A27. Public input is vital to the success of any transportation project. To provide comments or feedback on this project, send an email to i81reconstruction@aecom.com.

Q28. Will there be any public meetings in the future?

A28. A public open house and plans display for this project was held in February 2023. PennDOT will continue to meet with the public and stakeholder groups, such as emergency service providers, local officials, municipalities, and neighbors, as necessary during final design.



to keep them informed of the project progress and address their concerns, particularly regarding the stormwater management, noise impact assessments, or property access.

Q29. How can I learn more about the project?

A29. The project webpage contains a variety of information about the proposed roadway design plans, environmental resources, traffic studies, and schedule and costs. You can view a virtual rendering of the plans and see the public meeting presentation materials on PennDOT's project webpage here: <http://bit.ly/I81Reconstruction>.

CONTACT**Q30. Who is involved in this project?**

A30. PennDOT (District 4), in partnership with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), is working with the project Design team, which is led by AECOM and comprised of multiple consulting firms, and federal, state, and local agencies who have regulatory or jurisdictional authority and/or who oversee resources in the project area. A full list of the agencies involved in the project is available upon request.

Q31. Who can I contact if I have a question about this project?

A31. Please contact Sue Williams PennDOT District 4 Project Manager, or Neil Shemo, PE, Consultant Project Manager, at i81reconstruction@aecom.com.

Q32. I have a question about another interstate roadway project in the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre region. Who should I contact?

A32. PennDOT (District 4) and the PTC have several other interstate projects in construction or design phases. The contact details for these projects are listed below (and may be subject to change).

*PTC – Scranton Beltway Project
Clarks Summit/Wyoming Valley Connections*
Mark Raup, PE, Project Manager
mraup@paturnpike.com or (717) 831-7249

*PennDOT – I-81 Reconstruction Project
Section 316, Ashley to Arena**
Stephen Sartori, PE, Project Manager
c-ssartori@pa.gov or (570) 235-2964
*formerly known as Partnership 81

PennDOT – I-81 Mill/Fill Project
Carmen Dipietro, Project Manager
cdipietro@pa.gov or (570) 267-4797

*PennDOT – SR 84-282 Twin Bridge
Replacement Project*
Carmen Dipietro, Project Manager
cdipietro@pa.gov or (570) 267-4797



*PennDOT – I-81 Pavement
Replacement Project, Section 230*
R. Robert Morrison, PE, Project Manager
c-robmorri@pa.gov (215) 922-8081 ext 1642

Thank you for your interest in this important project!

