

I-295/I-76/Route 42 Direct Connection

Camden and Gloucester Counties

www.state.nj.us/transportation/works/studies/rt295

Project Update

The Process

The New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) believes it is vitally important for the public to be informed about the project development and alternatives analysis process and to provide input. In subsequent quarterly newsletter issues, we will provide our readers with summary explanations of the process and project status as we move through the various project phases.

On July 24, 2003, the NJDOT conducted a Public Information Center (PIC) to present the 26 initial alignment alternatives that were developed through the scoping phase of the alternatives analysis process. This activity, required in the National Environmental Policy Act for all federally funded projects, represents several months of environmental and engineering analysis of these alternatives. The rationale used in determining the selection of alternatives for further analysis - the short-list - will be to select specific alternatives that have relatively lower impacts to both the built and natural environment.

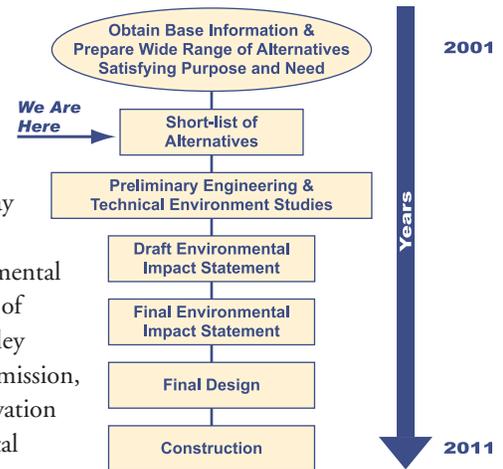
The short-listing process employs impact criteria to analyze and evaluate each alternative. These same criteria will be used in the Preliminary Engineering and Technical Environmental Studies as each short-listed alternative is studied further. They are:

- Right of way: residential, commercial & community facilities (cemeteries, churches, schools and parks)
- Wetlands: tidal, non-tidal
- Socioeconomics
- Noise
- Air
- Visual/contextual impacts
- Constructibility
- Maintenance and operation
- Comparison of estimated construction cost
- Compliance with design criteria
- Floodplains
- Archaeological resources
- Historic architecture

Since July, the NJDOT has conducted Agency Coordination Meetings with the Federal Highway Administration, NJ Department of Environmental Protection, Army Corps of Engineers, Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, NJ State Historic Preservation Office, US Environmental Protection Agency, Delaware River Basin Commission, US Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine and Fishery Service to review the alternatives and obtain their recommendations on alternatives for further study. These agencies are an integral part of the funding and permitting process which will allow the project to advance to the design and construction phases.

Workshops were conducted with the NJDOT in-house staff, Agency Coordination Members (ACM) and the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) (the stakeholders.) A consensus was reached on recommendations for alternatives to be carried through the Environmental Impact Statement process.

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Mark Your Calendars

Public Information Center

January 28, 2004
3 pm to 8 pm
formal presentations at 4 pm & 7 pm
Bellmawr Ballroom
29 Lewis Avenue
Bellmawr, NJ

Please plan to attend the meeting at a time that is convenient for you. If you have any questions, or if you are physically challenged and require assistance, please contact the Office of Community Relations (see page 4).

Project Update

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Next Steps

Based upon the input we have received from these groups, we will conduct a Partnering Session with the stakeholders in early January, 2004 to confirm a consensus on the recommended alternatives that will be

presented at the PIC on January 28, 2004. Following input from the PIC, NJDOT will be prepared to advance the short-listed alternatives into the Preliminary Engineering and Technical Environmental Studies phase.

Community Involvement and Outreach Activities

The New Jersey Department of Transportation believes that a partnership with the community is critical for a successful outcome of the I-295/I-76/Route 42 project and to the region's mobility. There have been several meetings held over the last six months with the residents, businesses, agencies and public officials providing important feedback and suggestions. They are summarized below.

Public Information Center

On July 24, 2003, NJDOT held a PIC session to brief and solicit input from the residents and stakeholders regarding the 26 alternatives being assessed to determine those that will be considered for further study. The project team explained the federal and state requirements driving the process.

An equally important part of the meeting agenda was to garner resident participation through verbal and written comments about the project. It was important to learn what issues are of greatest concern. Some of the concerns were possible impacts to the following: St. Mary's Cemetery in Bellmawr, portions of the Bellmawr Park Mutual Housing Corporation, Shining Star Park in Mt. Ephraim and possible disruption to communities during construction.

Residents provided information during the PIC. Subsequent input received through the project's website were incorporated into the alternatives. Every effort is being made to minimize and/or avoid impacts to the communities as a whole and especially to individual residents.

The next PIC is planned for January 28, 2004 to discuss the short-list of alternatives.

Local Officials Briefing

On November 5, 2003, local officials were informed about the initial short-listed alternatives. Officials from the study area communities- Bellmawr, Mount Ephraim, Gloucester City, Camden and Gloucester counties participated.

Community Advisory Committee

The CAC was formed to represent the various interests of residents and businesses. In addition to individual residents, members include the Automobile Association of America, Bellmawr Park Mutual Housing Corporation, Korman Interstate Business Park, Senior Citizen Associations from Bellmawr, Mt. Ephraim and Gloucester City and the Diocese of Camden. The alternatives were presented and discussed at the CAC's fourth meeting on November 25, 2003. Valuable comments, suggestions and recommendations on alternatives for further consideration and study were received. The committee also appointed five local residents to participate as the CAC representatives in the upcoming January Partnering Session.

Regional Projects in the Works

Many inquiries have been received about the need for improvements to other highways in the region. We will reserve this section for updates on other projects in the region that will also enhance mobility, help alleviate congestion and improve air quality and safety for the traveling public.

• I-295 "Missing Moves", Bellmawr and Deptford

NJDOT is currently in the final phase of design to provide the missing moves between I-295 and Route 42. The connector ramps cross three abandoned landfills for access to both highways northbound and southbound, south of the main interchange. Construction is anticipated to start 2005.

• Route 168 and Benigno Boulevard, Bellmawr

This project will involve improvements at the intersection of Benigno Boulevard and Route 168 and is currently in the Feasibility Assessment Phase.

All projects are subject to funding availability.

Frequently Asked Questions About the Direct Connection

We are listening! Every issue will provide our readers with responses to questions and comments we have received from you, your neighbors and the motoring public.

Will the I-295 Direct Connection project solve the lack of connections with Route 42 north and southbound?

Answer: No, that is not the purpose and need of the Direct Connection project. However, the lack of connections will be solved through a separate New Jersey Department of Transportation project called The I-295/Route 42 Missing Moves Project, which is currently moving into the final design phase with construction anticipated 2005.

Is there a transit alternative for this project?

Answer: Transit alternatives were considered during the Transportation Investment Study Phase, which recommended three separate projects: (1) I-295/I-76/Route 42 Interchange Improvements (2) improved transit options (3) a new interchange at the NJ Turnpike and Route 42.

The Delaware River Port Authority is currently undertaking a study called the Route 55 Corridor Study, which is evaluating various rail corridor alternatives to extend the PATCO system. The NJ Turnpike is currently studying the possibility of a new exit on their roadway. It is important to note that the addition of a new NJ Turnpike exit or additional transit options does not negate the need for improvements to the I-295/I-76/Route 42 Interchange.

How can I make my concerns known about the project?

Answer: We welcome and encourage input from all the residents. The contact information can be found on page 4.

What is the project status? When will it be built?

Answer: We are completing the alternatives short-listing, which is narrowing alternatives from the initial 26 to approximately less than 5 alternatives. This process will assess at a preliminary level all the socio-economic and environmental impacts, constructibility and right of way impacts of the project. The next phase is Preliminary Engineering & Technical Environmental Studies and will be completed in approximately 2005. The NJDOT will present the short-list of alternatives at an upcoming Public Information Center, scheduled for January 28, 2004. The construction is planned for 2008-2011.

How are you going to address the traffic on our local streets during construction? It's going to be disruptive to the communities.

Answer: We understand your concern about possible disruptions

during the construction phase. Every effort will be made to minimize them and maintain the existing number of through lanes on I-295/I-76/Route 42 during construction. A traffic mitigation plan will be developed for the project to minimize disruption to the local community and local streets may be improved by either temporary or permanent solutions to help alleviate congestion.

Is this project going to help prevent all those accidents at the Al Jo's Curve?

Answer: Yes. Our latest 2002 accident and emergency response data shows that there were 439 incidents responded to by the local communities within the interchange. This is four times the state average, based upon NJDOT's 2001 data, including 60 truck accidents at the Al Jo's Curve.

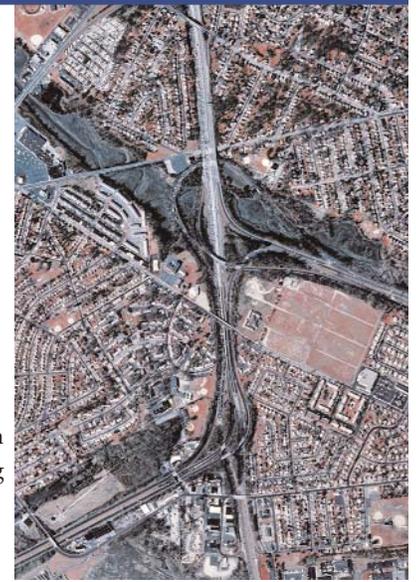
More than 225,000 motorists pass through this interchange daily. A redesigned interchange will eliminate the need for through traffic to slow down to 35 mph to safely negotiate the ramps and will also eliminate the traffic weaves between the I-295 thru traffic and I-76 and Route 42 traffic. These proposed improvements will significantly reduce congestion and improve highway safety. An additional benefit will be lower emergency response costs to the communities.

Are you going to improve all those merge lane problems? It's very dangerous trying to merge across six lanes of rush hour traffic.

Answer: The I-295 roadway will be provided with a direct connection through the interchange, designed to current freeway standards without the need for I-295 through traffic to merge with other traffic from I-76 and Route 42.

Will a new interchange be built at Route 42 and the NJ Turnpike as part of The Direct Connection Project?

Answer: The NJ Turnpike Authority has recently begun a study to evaluate the feasibility of such an interchange. The purpose and need of our project is to reduce traffic congestion and accidents within the I-295/I-76/Route 42 Interchange. Their study will concentrate on the benefits/impacts of an additional interchange at the Turnpike and Route 42.



Source: NJDEP Bureau of Geographic Information and Analysis, Current aerial of I-295/I-76/Route 42 Interchange

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Trenton, NJ 08625

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Source: Dewberry, Existing conditions at I-295/I-76/Route 42 Interchange



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Get Involved!

Here's How You Can Contact Us:



Call

Patricia Feliciano, NJDOT Office of Community Relations
(609) 530-2110



Write

NJDOT- Office of Community Relations
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Visit Us on the Web

<http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/works/studies/rt295>