

Funding identified for Lafayette Street-turnpike interchange in Norristown

By Brendan Wills, The Times Herald

January 12, 2015

NORRISTOWN>> Funding in the amount of \$45 million needed to build a new interchange to connect the Pennsylvania Turnpike with the Lafayette Street extension project in Norristown has been found, according to an announcement Wednesday from the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission.

Construction on the Lafayette Street extension project started on Aug. 12, 2013, with the goal of reducing traffic congestion in Norristown. The extension will be completed in three stages, taking Lafayette Street from Plymouth Township into Norristown and eventually to the turnpike.

The interchange is expected to not only relieve congestion on the turnpike, but also make downtown Norristown more accessible, according to turnpike and Montgomery County commissioners.

“County commissioners had a vision about revitalizing the county seat; they took a number of proactive steps to bring this vision to fruition, and they’re to be commended for their leadership,” said PennDOT Secretary Barry Schoch in a release from the Turnpike Commission. “They worked together to identify sites for a new turnpike connection while fairly balancing the project costs with benefits in terms of economic development and congestion relief. The option they selected accomplishes these objectives while controlling construction costs.”

When the interchange was initially proposed, cost of construction was estimated at \$70 million, and in 2011, the turnpike commission dropped the plan from its capital budget. Wednesday’s press release did not specify whether \$45 million was sufficient to complete the project, or where any additional funding, if needed, would be found.

The interchange will be located at mile marker 331, between the Valley Forge and Norristown interchanges, the third and 11th busiest interchanges in the state which combined see more than 87,000 vehicles per day.

The funding for the interchange is available in large part due Act 89, the transportation-funding bill that was past about a year ago, according to the release.

“It is truly exciting to have reached this point after a decade of work, because this project is so critical to Plymouth Township, Norristown and Montgomery County,” said Josh Shapiro, chairman of the Montgomery County Commissioners, in the release. “This is a game changer as it will be a key part of revitalizing Norristown, improving access to both municipalities, increasing smooth traffic flow and reducing congestion on Ridge Pike and Main Street.”

“The county can advance the project to final design sooner thanks to new revenues from Act 89,” Schoch said in the release. “And the motorists who fund our transportation system — whether by taxes, fees or tolls — get some comfort knowing their investment in infrastructure is actively and directly supporting economic growth.”

The release said turnpike officials estimate the construction of the interchange could start as early as 2018, with possible completion by 2020.