

Commissioners kick off second phase of Lafayette Street extension project

By Dan Clark, The Times Herald

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County, State federal and local officials break ground on phase 2 of the Lafayette Street expansion project during a ceremony in Plymouth Wednesday, April 8, 2015. Gene Walsh — The Times Herald

NORRISTOWN >> The first phase has been completed, and now the second phase of a road project that will eventually connect Norristown to the Pennsylvania Turnpike will begin.

Despite the cold on Wednesday, the Montgomery County commissioners broke ground on the \$12.9 million second phase of the project, which will extend Lafayette Street to Diamond Avenue in Plymouth Township. The second phase will also reconstruct and widen Diamond Avenue from the Pennsylvania Turnpike bridge to the Norristown border at Ross Street.

“Many of us were here together months ago when we kicked off phase one of the Lafayette Street extension project. Today we’re here to talk about ramping up phase two of the Lafayette Street extension project,” commissioners’ Chairman Josh Shapiro told a crowd of county employees and local officials involved in the project.

Shapiro told the group that they will begin to see traffic slow down as the second phase makes its way through its expected completion date of spring 2017, but he added there will not be detours on Ridge Pike in Plymouth Township.

“We’re not just making it easier for people to travel. We’re making it safer,” Shapiro said.

The second phase will also widen Ridge Pike “to four or five lanes” from the Norristown line to the bridge over the turnpike.

The first phase of the project involved extending Lafayette Street from Ford Street to Conshohocken Road.

“What a game changer this is for Norristown,” commissioners’ Vice Chairwoman Valerie Arkoosh said. “I’m so thrilled to be able to remind everyone that we invested \$14.2 million in this community to complete phase one.”

Commissioner Bruce Castor told the crowd that the project shows that different levels of government, from the local to the county and from the state to the federal, can work together.

“There are an awful lot of things that go on behind the scenes, behind the curtain, that nobody gets to see until you’re actually in them,” Castor said. “The public should be proud of their elected officials, or their appointed officials, and the engineers and the architects and all of the many, many pieces that had to be fitted together in order to make this a reality.”

The sentiment was echoed by Norristown Municipal Administrator Crandall Jones.

“What I’ve seen in the last 20 months has just been exceptional in terms of partnership and collaboration,” Jones said.

He also thanked the commissioners for sharing the vision of Norristown council members.

“We’re really excited about it,” he said. “We’re getting a lot of interest already in what’s happening in Norristown.”

Plymouth Township Council Chairman Sheldon Simpson said the project will also help Plymouth Township, aside from revitalizing Norristown.

“This has been a great undertaking,” Simpson said on Thursday. “Conshohocken Road will be a game changer in the next 10 years or so. We’re looking forward to economic growth in Plymouth.”

The third phase of the project, which is slated to begin in 2017, will widen Lafayette Street to four lanes. It also includes rebuilding the drop-off area of the Norristown Transportation Center and connect the Schuylkill River Trail to the Chester County Trail at DeKalb and Lafayette Streets.

The ultimate goal of the \$85 million project (PennDOT) is threefold: to decongest traffic coming into Norristown from the turnpike, to make Norristown more accessible from the turnpike in the hope that it will revitalize the municipality and to improve the quality of life in and around Norristown.

The project is 80 percent funded by the federal government and 20 percent funded by the county. Allan A. Myers was the contractor for the first phase of the project. J.D. Eckman is the contractor for the second phase, and the contract for the third phase has not been awarded yet.