



New Route 22 bridge to open this fall

After more than a year of driving through construction along Route 22, Lehigh Valley motorists will soon get a chance to drive on a newly-minted bridge across the Lehigh River.

Mike Rebert, district executive of the state Department of Transportation District 5-0, reported earlier this month that the eastbound lanes of the new Lehigh River Bridge are on schedule and expected to be open for traffic by late fall.

“This is the biggest project we have going in the Lehigh Valley,” Rebert told the Lehigh Valley Transportation Study Coordinating Committee. “It sets the stage for the overall widening of Route 22.”

The \$22.5 million Route 22 bridge replacement is part of a \$240 million to \$280 million, decade-long project to widen Route 22 between 15th Street and Route 378. While the project is designed to widen the four-lane highway to six lanes, some of the new lanes will serve as extended

exit and entrance ramps that stretch between MacArthur Road and Fullerton Avenue.

“This widening has been a priority for the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission and the community in general for nearly two decades,” said Becky Bradley, executive director of the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission. “Route 22 is our Main Street. It’s vital to our quality of life and our economy, so it’s important that we take care of it.”

Before the roughly 90,000 motorists who travel Route 22 daily get visions of whizzing along the new bridge at 10 mph over the speed limit on their way to Christmas shopping this year, they should know that the westbound lanes of the existing bridge aren’t scheduled to be replaced until 2019 or 2020. That means all four east and westbound lanes of traffic will be narrowed and taken across the new eastbound bridge until the new westbound bridge is open. That could cause minor delays during peak traffic hours, said PennDOT spokesman Ron Young.

The new bridge is part of a construction phase that includes the rebuilding of the exit and entrance ramps at Fullerton Avenue and the removal of the Fifth Street Bridge across Route 22 in Whitehall Township. That bridge will be replaced, but construction for that won’t begin until at least 2022, Young said.