

\$89 Million Done, \$475 Million To Go

It's been a productive two years for Lehigh Valley road construction crews who have completed more than \$89 million worth of road, bridge and transit projects, while continuing another more than quarter-billion dollars in new projects along some of the region's busiest roadways.

Done are major projects that include the \$30.4 million rehabilitation of the Fahy Bridge, the \$5 million replacement of the Lynn Avenue Bridge and the \$6.4 million resurfacing of Center Street – all in Bethlehem -- and the \$7 million job to replace the Cedar Crest Boulevard Bridge over the Little Cedar Creek in Allentown.

Bigger projects that remain underway include \$101 million for the Lehigh River Bridge along Route 22, the \$40 million replacement of the Coplay/Northampton Bridge and the \$31 million rehabilitation of the Tilghman Street Bridge in Allentown. While the Lehigh River Bridge is expected to be completed this fall, the Coplay/Northampton Bridge is scheduled for completion in 2020 and Tilghman Street is expected to be done in 2021.

Virtually all of the projects remain on or ahead of schedule said Brian Hite, Senior Planning Technician for LVPC, the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Lehigh Valley.

"You can see that a lot has been done and a lot is underway, so buckle up because we're going to move fast," Hite said before presenting his Transportation Improvement Program progress report last week during the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission meeting, and then again Wednesday before the Lehigh Valley Transportation Study, the body that approves transportation funding for the region..

State legislators in 2013 approved Act 89, which included a measure to raise the gas tax more than 25 cents per gallon over four years, pumping tens of millions into the transportation program for Lehigh and Northampton counties. Overall, roughly 80% of the transportation money from the federal Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, and 20% comes from Act 89.

The money was spent on projects by entities that include PennDOT, Lehigh County, Northampton County, LANta, municipal governments and other transportation system operators such as Norfolk Southern Railway.

Other projects completed over the past two years were:

- The purchase of 24 compressed natural gas LANta buses and 31 LANtaVans, at a cost of \$14.2 million.
- Route 29 Bridge over Indian Creek in Upper Milford Township, costing \$4 million.
- Rehabilitation of the Trout Creek Bridge in Washington Township, Lehigh County, costing \$2.7 million.
- Replacement of the Kromer Road Bridge over Route 33 in Plainfield Township, costing \$2.5 million.
- Signal upgrades along Schoenersville Road, at a cost of \$2.4 million.
- Rehabilitation of the Third Street Bridge over the Bushkill Creek in Easton, costing \$2.3 million.
- Pedestrian safety improvements at Routes 248 and 946 in Lehigh Township, costing \$2.1 million.
- Repairs to the Station Avenue Bridge in Coopersburg, costing \$1.8 million
- Replacement of the Limeport Pike Bridge in Lower Milford Township, costing \$1.8 million.
- Rehabilitation of the Friedens Road Bridge in Lehigh Township, costing \$1.3 million.
- Accessibility improvements along the Victory Park sidewalk in Slatington, costing \$130,569.
- Richmond Road culvert replacement in Lower Mount Bethel Township, costing \$104,000.
- Freeway Service Patrols, costing \$775,000.

A slate of 20 projects totaling more than \$291 million of investment are still under construction as part of the current four-year, \$534 million TIP that runs through 2022. Included among them is:

- \$21.3 million to reconstruct Route 100 in Upper Macungie Township.
- \$19.3 million to build a roundabout intersection at Routes 222 and 863 and Schantz Road in Upper Macungie Township.
- \$13.6 million to rebuild the Chestnut Street Bridge over the Reading Railroad in Upper Milford Township.
- \$9.6 million to replace the Wire Mill Bridge over the Little Lehigh Creek in Allentown.
- \$5 million to widen Airport Road from Race Street to Route 22.
- \$4 million to convert one-way streets to two ways in downtown Easton.
- \$3 million to install a median barrier along Route 33 through Northampton County.
- \$1.3 million to install a median barrier along Route 22 through Upper and Lower Macungie Township.

Another \$184 million in projects, including \$70 million to rebuild the Route 309 and Tilghman Street interchange, nearly \$20 million to replace the Cementon Bridge and \$35 million to widen Route 22, remains to be started in the coming years.

The progress report comes as the Planning Commission drafts FutureLV: The Regional Plan, which will include the region's 25-year Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The updated transportation plan is scheduled to be adopted in October. A project must be on the LRTP to get program money on the TIP.

The current full 2019-2022 TIP, with estimated costs and schedules for more than 100 project, is available at <http://lvpc.org/tip.html>