

**Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
Engineering District 4-0
Interstate 81, Luzerne County
(MPMS#115097)
City of Wilkes-Barre
Partnership 81 Project**

Project Information

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) invites the public to an online plan display regarding the Partnership 81 project, which extends from Hanover Township to Wilkes-Barre Township in Luzerne County, to evaluate improvements along the 7.5-mile corridor of Interstate 81 (I-81). The project will encompass work between milepost 161.2 north of the Nuangola exit and exit 168, Highland Park Boulevard. The current alignments of I-81 in the northbound and southbound directions split or separate between milepost 164 and 166.5 creating multiple connections with Route 29 and Route 309. The project will improve connections with these roadways, eliminate travel movements that do not meet current criteria, and increase capacity to accommodate future traffic growth. Once the design is set, the project will be advertised as a Public Private Partnership (P3) for the final design, construction, and financing phase of work. This long-term funding approach allows the private sector to assume a share of the risk in terms of financing and construction. There is no tolling anticipated to be included as part of this project.

PennDOT is currently performing preliminary engineering and gaining environmental clearance to improve I-81 through the project area to meet regional and local traffic needs by providing an improved roadway network that reduces congestion and modernizes the design.

The purpose of the project is to improve I-81 from milepost 161.2 to approximately one mile north of Exit 168 (Highland Park Boulevard) to meet regional traffic and local needs, as well as support the Primary Highway Freight System (PHFS) and interstate travel within the northeastern United States, by providing a transportation facility that reduces congestion, improves highway geometry, and addresses mobility issues.

Environmental

The Partnership 81 Project is currently in the preliminary engineering phase which includes the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) environmental review process. The NEPA process involves the identification of natural, cultural, and socioeconomic resources present in the project area and the evaluation of impacts, avoidance measures, and mitigation for those resources. Resources of concern in the Partnership 81 Project study area include threatened and endangered bat species, streams, wetlands, 4(f) resources, State Game Lands, State Forest, above-ground historic resources, parks and recreation areas, hazardous waste sites, residential and commercial structure displacements, and environmental justice populations. The findings of the environmental studies completed are available for public review and comment online and at the in-person public open house held July 26, 2022.

Utilities and Right-of-Way

Coordination with all utilities throughout the project area will be conducted during the preliminary engineering phase. Anticipated utilities that could be impacted by the project include gas, electric, communications, water, and sewer. Determination of right-of-way needs will be completed during the preliminary engineering and environmental studies phase of the project.

Maintenance and Protection of Traffic

During construction, traffic could be maintained by several different options that include:

- Two lanes of traffic in each direction along I-81 will be maintained during construction.
- Short term detours and lane closures along the non-interstate roadways within the project area may be necessary during construction.

Schedule

The project is currently in the preliminary design phase, and construction is not expected to begin before 2025 subject to all approvals, environmental clearances, and funding availability.

Contact

If there are any questions or concerns related to the project, contact Stephen Sartori, Project Manager, at (570) 235-2964, or email at c-ssartori@pa.gov.