



From fossils to football traffic

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Lewistown Narrows project generates high level of public interest

Traffic moving on the new westbound lanes, above the wall

From fossil finds to having to be sensitive to football traffic, the Route 22/322 Lewistown Narrows project (www.pennidot2.com) is one of the largest and most interesting in the Commonwealth.

The 10-mile long Lewistown Narrows highway is being built in three sections, two of which are complete. The final section now under construction is the second largest project ever awarded by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT). Only a portion of Route 202 in Montgomery County was larger, at a bid of \$104.86 million versus \$104.36 million.

The Lewistown Narrows isn't only important to create another modern four-lane link between Harrisburg and State College, but will provide the additional lanes and the needed shoulders on this narrow section of the 100 mile corridor. The official detour is nearly 70 miles long, making accidents and traffic jams in the

Narrows, a special headache for all travelers.

Started in 2004 and to be completed in 2008, the final Narrows construction section is 75 percent complete. The new highway is a complex design that minimizes excavation, addresses flood problems and provides for stability in the talus slope that extends along much of this 6.5 mile portion of the roadway.

Rocky terrain is so crucial to the project's design and construction that the Narrows was kicked off with a "rock breaking" event, instead of the typical "ground breaking" ceremony.

Special efforts are made to avoid construction-related delays during peak weekday traffic travel times or special event

traffic, such as fans headed to Penn State home football games, and to disseminate traffic information. In fact, each fall the project team has a media briefing to show infrequent Narrows travelers, like some football fans from Harrisburg or Lancaster, the progress of the project. The project team hopes that if travelers know what to expect, drivers may be less likely to rubberneck and delay traffic or rear-end the vehicle in front of them.

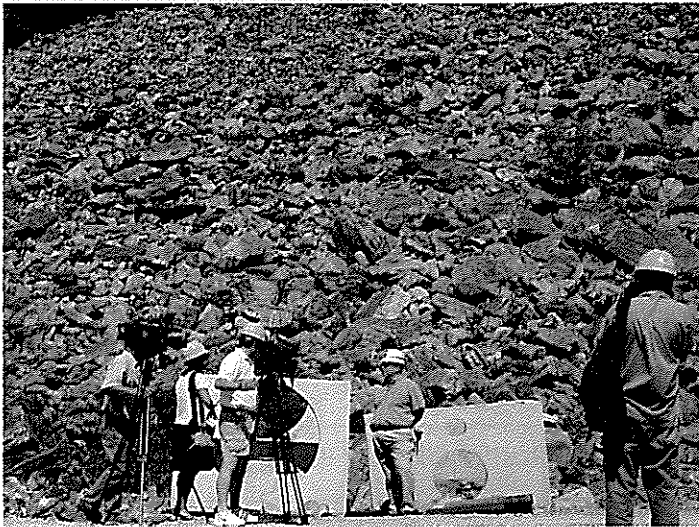
These construction changes were dramatic for travelers in the fall of 2006. About three miles of mechanically-stabilized-earth walls loomed as high as 25 feet above the lanes being used by traffic. One wall alone is two-miles long. These walls separate the lanes along the river, which will be the new eastbound lanes, from the westbound lanes that are elevated above the river-edge lanes.

There also is a special beauty in the project that cannot be seen while driving

"Narrows" continued p. 13



Fossils found in the "Narrows"



PennDOT Project Manager Chris Statish being interviewed in front of the talus slope

"Narrows" continued p. 11

through. The excavation of the Narrows and the nearby Northern Lewistown Bypass project has revealed fascinating fossils, the remains of prehistoric organic material, such as scallops and coral that can be viewed on the Web site, www.penndot2.com. It's hard to imagine, but 400 million years ago the Narrows was an ancient sea that today is ridges of sandstone and valleys of limestone.

Construction in the Narrows goes on year-round. With 135,000 cubic yards of concrete to be used, which is equal to 12,000 truck loads of concrete, the project has its own on-site concrete plant to be as efficient as possible in getting the concrete to each pour site.

One eastbound lane and one westbound lane of traffic are maintained throughout the project. Traffic patterns shift as portions of highway are complete and construction focuses on another area. Currently, both east and westbound traffic are using newly-constructed westbound lanes through a portion of the project, and the focus has turned to building the permanent eastbound highway. Already, miles of walls along the Juniata River have been built to edge those lanes.

The total cost of all three Narrows sections is \$134 million. More background and information, including traffic alerts, are on www.penndot2.com.

Walsh Construction is the primary contractor and Maguire Group, Inc. is providing construction management services for the PennDOT District 2-0 project. ■

This article was originally published in the special Engineer Week supplement of the Harrisburg, PA Patriot News newspaper on February 20, 2007. Ben LaParne, P.E. is Assistant District Executive for Construction, PennDOT District 2-0.