

# Route 80 Eastbound Retaining Wall Replacement Project - Public Information Center

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DELAWARE WATER GAP - I-80 DWG Projects Now Total \$193 Million with a Seven-Year Construction Phase, Without Fully Addressing S-Curve Design and Safety Issues.

The New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) has scheduled a public information session regarding their I-80 Eastbound (EB) Retaining Wall Replacement Project. The meeting will take place on September 26th, from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m., at Knowlton Elementary School, located at 80 US-46, Delaware, NJ 07833. This meeting will be in a display format, similar to the 2019 Open House held in Blairstown.

We strongly encourage everyone to attend every NJDOT meeting, ask questions, and submit comments representing their perspective, in addition to supporting the requests for a full EIS for every project and a full consideration of all long term I80/611 Corridor solutions such as a tunnel, straightening the S-Curve, and bypasses

From our perspective, this project is essentially an extension of the contentious I-80 Westbound (WB) Rockfall Mitigation Project. Instead of responsibly broadening the rockfall mitigation scope to include retaining wall repairs, NJDOT has initiated a separate, overblown \$97 million, multi-year project. Records reveal that this contract was approved without adequate studies to determine its necessity. Rather than repairing the eleven retaining wall panels in poor or critical condition, NJDOT intends to replace all 49 panels, including 38 that are in satisfactory condition. They justify this by stating the current wall does not meet modern standards, yet they fail to address the more pressing safety and substandard design elements that contribute to the high crash rates in the corridor.

Plans shown to local officials suggest NJDOT intends to extend the entire retaining wall 7-10 feet down the bank of the river and make it taller with NO National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

We suspect part of the undisclosed justification is actually to address inadequacies of the rockfall mitigation project traffic plan. In 2019 we applied NJDOT plan to , AutoCAD. It showed that two tractor-trailers would not be able to pass side-by-side safely when workers create a 15-foot work zone by shrinking the lanes and shifting them toward the retaining wall. NJDOT's proposed solution relies on signage to instruct truckers to use one lane and a suggested I-78 Diversion Route that redirects I-80 traffic onto I-78 via I-287 in Parsippany, NJ and SR33 in Bartonsville, PA.

Since 2020, our federal and state legislators, county and local governments, organizations and hundreds of public comments, have requested NJDOT conduct a full NEPA EIS for the rockfall mitigation project and a comprehensive study of all traffic, safety, mobility, and congestion issues from Exit 4 – Columbia/Portland to the Delaware Water Gap. These requests emphasize the aging condition of the S-curve retaining wall, the design flaws, drainage issues, concerns about the deteriorating PA-611 detour route, and NJDOT's own geotechnical engineer's warning about the lack of a suitable detour route.

Despite these efforts, NJDOT has failed to act upon these requests. PA-611 has been closed for nearly two years due to a rockfall event, and the I-80 retaining wall has been under emergency repair since 2020. Construction and closure traffic has caused immeasurable economic and lifestyle disruptions, secondary crashes impacts and emergency services disruptions. In addition, there have been two deaths in this corridor since 2020.

What began in 2011 as a reasonable \$4.5 million, 9-month rockfall mitigation project has ballooned into an \$87 million, 5-year boondoggle. Meanwhile, this new I-80 EB Retaining Wall Replacement Project, which started in 2020 following the emergency erosion hole repair, was initially estimated at \$56 million. It has ballooned into its own \$96 million multiyear boondoggle. In total, these I-80 Delaware Water Gap projects exceed \$193 million, span seven years, yet do not begin to address many of the critical safety and design deficiencies.

Records show that before NJDOT changed the scope of the rockfall project behind closed doors in 2013, there were no geological studies to justify it, and they had not studied the existing condition of the retaining wall. It was only after the public and a I80/611 DWG Coalition construction expert pointed out the wall's deterioration in 2020 that NJDOT began repairs. We now realize clogged, crushed, and cracked drainage pipes and separated joints known to NJDOT in 2011 have contributed to the deterioration of the eleven wall panels at issue. Drainage issues have long plagued this one mile section of the I-80 S-Curve, where NJDOT's own 15-year study shows over 367 of the 633 crashes note wet roads, ponding, ice, and other water-related hazards in the crash reports – 58%!

We continue to support and advocate for necessary emergency repairs to restore all six lanes of the I-80/611 Delaware Water Gap Corridor. While we do not contest the need for rockfall mitigation and retaining wall repairs, we do believe NJDOT's proposed plans are neither rational nor considerate of the potential harm to local communities and the environment.

Here are links to all the comments submitted by Warren County, and Knowlton and Hardwick Townships in Feb/March 2023, July 2023, March 2024 and June 2024. NJDOT requests comments be submitted at: <https://i-80eb-retaining-wall-replacement-project.com/contact-us/>



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