

I-80 Retaining Wall “Replacement” Project Delayed, Scuba Diving in the DWG

By Tara Mezzanotte / I-80/611 DWG Coalition -Founder

Three updates below:

Holiday crashes and mission reminders: 7+ crashes and no solution in site.

Warren County received word the I-80 BE Retaining Wall Project is delayed until 2026....it needs more reviews. We did this! Thank you!

Scuba divers hit the historic DWG train wreck - picked up by BRCTV 13 and DelawareCurrents.org

1. Holiday Crash Update and Some Reminders:

We had 7+ crashes or vehicle fire events over the holiday on I-80 Exit 4 to the DWG Toll Plaza. Most were secondary to traffic backups. Here is the post from yesterday's 3+ events between 12:30-3:30:

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/nxWctmTTXfgfHN17/>

This highlights the critical importance of ensuring that any construction along I-80 in the Delaware Water Gap (DWG) region is thoroughly studied, well-justified, and supported by evidence showing that the chosen project alternative is the least impactful on both the traveling public and the surrounding environment.

The current lack of adequate shoulders means even minor incidents, like fender benders, often result in backups stretching three or more miles. These traffic jams spill over into nearby communities, including Columbia, Portland, Delaware Water Gap Borough, Upper Mount Bethel, Smithfield Township, East Stroudsburg, Stroudsburg Borough, and Stroud Township. Such backups create life-threatening delays for emergency services, impacting both response times and hospital transport times, while significantly disrupting the daily lives of those who rely on the I-80/611 DWG Corridor.

The strain on local volunteer fire and rescue departments is significant. Instead of spending time with their families and friends, these dedicated volunteers are frequently pulled away to handle highway incidents along the I-80/611 DWG area. This diverts vital resources away from residents and businesses within their communities.

Since 2020, multiple towns and counties have urged NJDOT to undertake a comprehensive study addressing all the safety, mobility, and congestion issues along I-80 from Exit 4 to the DWG Bridge. Such a study would enable the development of a well-planned, multi-phased, long-term solution. However, NJDOT has not initiated this process. Instead, their 2011 \$□

The current proposal involves expanding I-80 eastbound, significantly reducing the already narrow riverbank, and excavating 15-30 feet into Mount Tammany to install three rows of fences and a 60-foot-tall berm along the boulder slope. Alarming, this plan also includes the removal of the existing stacked-stone “rockslide barrier,” which has effectively prevented rocks from reaching the road in much of the area where the NJDOT claims rockfalls are a major issue.

The only clear benefit when complete is we will have a shoulder I80EB in the S-Curve, improved curve radius, and improved sight distance. It will not have addressed a single deficiency WB where most of the crashed do occur, does not address the seven sub standard exit and entrance ramps in the half mile section, does not add traveling lanes, and more.

So, we stick with this until a full I-80 Rockfall Mitigation EIS is initiated, the EIS considers the retaining wall project, and NJDOT initiates the I-80 Exit 4 to DWG study requested.

2. I-80EB Retaining Wall Project delayed for more reviews:

Here is our FB post about it: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/19gjghodpCLaxfB9/>

Here is □

Here is what we posted about it:

The I-80 EB Retaining Wall Replacement Project delayed until 2026.

Our NJ and PA town, county, state and fed elects, agencies and Tribal Nations have been asking all the right questions and it shows NJDOT missed a few key issues - again! Please thank your reps!

Here is what the delay notice sent to Warren County said:

This schedule adjustment reflects the additional time necessary to complete preliminary engineering, including: environmental clearances, NEPA documentation, Section 106 Coordination, coordination with the National Park Service.

Here is Warren County's Response:

Warren County has no objection to delaying construction of the project from FFY 25 to FFY 26. We do want to reiterate previous comments and requests submitted by Warren County, Knowlton Township, and Hardwick Township to the NJDOT regarding the project. [Bold added] They were provided in comments we sent to the Chair of the NJTPA in a letter dated August 22, 2023 and attached. Those comments are summarized briefly below:

NJTPA facilitate an in person with the NJDOT with officials from Warren County, Knowlton Twp and Hardwick Twp to address outstanding questions and comments about the project and to better understand the process.

The retaining wall replacement project is a symptom of a greater traffic problem through the Gap. NJTPA should initiate an I-80 Corridor Study to address transportation and safety issues through the Delaware Water Gap by analyzing the region as a whole. At a minimum, agencies that need to be involved in the study should include, NJDOT, PennDOT, DRJTBC, Monroe County, LVPC, NJTransit, Warren County, Knowlton Twp, Hardwick Township.

Due to the complexity of environmental, historic, safety, and traffic issues through this section of I-80 it is requested that the I-80 Rockfall project be reprogrammed into concept development. As currently presented, the rockfall project is dependent on the I- 80 Retaining Wall Replacement Project being constructed. As such, the rockfall mitigation project should be reevaluated.

3.Scuba divers hit the historic DWG train wreck - picked up by BRCTV 13 and DelawareCurrents.org

Hikers, anglers, boaters/rafters/tubers, train and car travelers, rock climbers.... And scuba divers - who knew! We all love our DWG for different reasons and wish to ensure any construction is necessary, well studied and respects her natural magnificence.

Scuba Diving a Train Wreck in the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area - BRCTV13

Divers explore nearly 50-year-old train wreck in the Delaware River - DelawareCurrents.org

Here our November 9th scuba FB Posts that had over 57K views and 100+ shares. It has some very interesting photos of the dramatic train wreck in the 1970's: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/NPTUnarZWSzUBmAZ/>

Here is the post with their very cool video of the November 18th dive: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/8rGx8ypDo2w1XWYy9/>

