

**Interstate 81, Section 361 Northbound
Over Norfolk Southern RR and Black Creek
Bridge Replacement Project
West Hazleton Borough, Luzerne County, PA**



Plans Display Information Sheet

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation is proposing the replacement of the Interstate 81 (I-81), Section 361 northbound bridge over Norfolk Southern Railroad (NSRR) and Black Creek in West Hazleton Borough, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. The existing bridge is a steel I-beam bridge with overall structure length of 468'. The existing structure has components in poor condition and does not meet current design standards.

The purpose of the project is to provide a sustainable travel way/crossing which meets current design standards, to provide a safe and efficient highway system for motorists.

Environmental

Land use/cover within the immediate project area primarily consists of forested land, utility corridors, and commercial development. The NSRR line generally runs west to east at the northern end of the I-81 Section 361 bridge. A cleared utility corridor for an electricity transmission line parallels I-81 on the eastern side of the roadway, within the northern and central portions of the project area. Topography within the immediate project vicinity is variable and features moderate to steep hillslopes.

Natural Resources

Eight streams and six wetlands are located within the project area. Impacts to project area streams and wetlands will be minimized and avoided when possible. Impacts will be permitted through the proper Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP) and United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) permits.

Threatened and Endangered Species coordination was performed for this project and resulted in an avoidance measure for a species under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Tree removal cannot be conducted from May 15 to August 15 of any calendar year. PennDOT agreed with the avoidance measure and as a result, no further coordination with the USFWS is required.

No bicycle/pedestrian or other unique facilities are located within the project area.

Cultural Resources: Above Ground Historic Resources

The NSRR (the former Lehigh Valley RR) rail line is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places; however, the project will have no impact to the railroad.

Cultural Resources: Archaeological Resources

Because the proposed stormwater basins will be located outside the exiting transportation right-of-way an archaeological investigation was required. An archaeological survey of the project area was conducted in the fall of 2023. Based on the findings of this survey, there are no archaeological resources present within the project area.

Section 4(f) Resources

Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act of 1966 stipulates that the Federal Highway Administration and other Department of Transportation agencies cannot approve the use of land from publicly owned parks, recreational areas, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, or public and private historical sites unless there are no prudent and feasible alternatives to using those resources, and the proposed project plans include all possible planning to minimize harm to the property or the project has a de minimis impact on the property.

Section 4(f) resources are present within the project corridor and include the National Register of Historic Places (NHRP) eligible Norfolk Southern Railroad (former Lehigh Valley Railroad) which runs west to east at the northern end of the I-81 Section 361 bridge. PennDOT determined that the project will have no effect on the historic resource. Because this project will not impact the features and attributes of the resource, PennDOT considers Section 4(f) to be Non-Applicable/ No Use to the resource. A Section 4(f) Non Use/Non-Applicability Checklist will be completed for the project.

Please provide any comments or feedback regarding the project corridor Section 4(f) Resource on the project comment form or to PennDOT Consultant Project Manager, Kelley Sartori, P.E., at 570.335.9244 or c-kesartor@pa.gov.

Utilities

Overhead utilities (electric) and below ground (gas) are present within the project area. Impacts to project area utilities are not anticipated. Relocation of any utility facilities will be completed in accordance with current Department procedures.

Right-of-Way

Permanent Right-of-way and Temporary Construction Easements (TCEs) are required for construction access and for installation and maintenance of the proposed stormwater management facilities.

Proposed Construction

The project involves the following main improvements:

- Replacement of the bridge with widening to provide the required lane and shoulder widths and maintain two-lanes of traffic during all stages of traffic control. Additionally, the vertical alignment of the bridge will be raised to accommodate the new structure depth and to meet the Norfolk Southern Railroad requested underclearance of 23'-6".
- Construction of stormwater management facilities and associated maintenance access roads in the southeast, southwest, and northwest quadrants surrounding the bridge.

Traffic Control Measures

Anticipated Traffic Impacts During Construction

- Short-term overnight closures of I-81 NB from 8:00 PM to 5:00 AM will be required. Traffic will be detoured using SR 0924 (CANDO Expressway) and SR 0093 (East Broad Street/North Broad Street/Susquehanna Boulevard). The detour is approximately 6.0 miles in length through Hazle Township, the City of Hazleton, West Hazleton Borough, and Sugarloaf Township.
- Temporary short-term on-street parking restrictions will be required along the north side of East Broad Street between Diamond Avenue and N 2nd Street, in the City of Hazleton, during the detour (noted above) to facilitate left truck turning movements from SR 0924 onto East Broad Street.

It is anticipated that construction will begin in the summer of 2026.

Contact

If you have questions, please contact the PennDOT Consultant Project Manager, Kelley Sartori, P.E., at 570.335.9244 or c-kesartor@pa.gov.

Thank you for your interest in this important project.