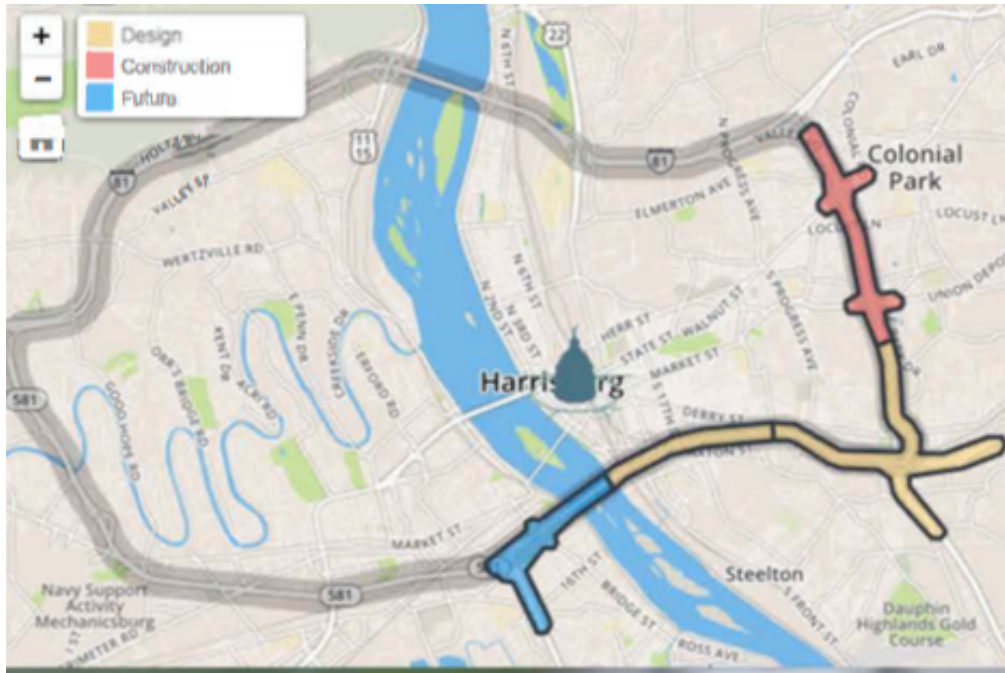


Modern Multimodal Pathway or Great Wall of Harrisburg? Part 2 Jim Buckheit



The Interstate 83 portion of the Harrisburg Beltway is undergoing a decade-long, billion-dollar plus, rebuilding process. Last month I wrote about work already underway from the I-81/83 split to Union Deposit Road. I also discussed preliminary plans for a new Derry Street interchange. This month I'll briefly discuss other aspects of the planned Derry Street interchange and the preliminary design for the project from Eisenhower Interchange to the Susquehanna River.

With Derry Street serving as an important bicycling route in and out of Harrisburg to Hummelstown and Hershey the impact of the proposed changes has the potential to turn an marginally safe biking route into a heavily traveled, major roadway unsafe for cyclists.

Plans call for Derry Street to become a direct interchange to and from I-83 using a type of interchange called the Single Point Urban Interchange (SPUI). In addition, the Derry Street SPUI will also handle traffic both entering and exiting from U.S. 322 and I-283. If that wasn't enough to stress traffic load on Derry Street two additional changes on either side of the SPUI will bring additional traffic onto Derry Street through the new interchange.

Preliminary plans call for Paxton Street, east of the Eisenhower Interchange (near Penhar Drive), to be extended north to intersect with Derry Street across from East Park Drive, forming a new, 4-way intersection. To the west of the SPUI and west of St. Catherine Laboure Church, 40th Street intersects Derry Street. Currently 40th Street runs into the I-83 service road that runs up to the Harrisburg Mall. Plans call

for 40th Street to be moved slightly to the west where it currently intersects with Derry Street and for 40th Street to cross over I-83 on a new overpass that intersects with Paxton Street.

Preliminary plans call for sidewalks and wide berms on the overpass and along the newly constructed 40th street and Paxton Street Extension. These new roadways will likely create additional traffic flow on Derry Street as commuters and shoppers use 40th and Paxton Street Extension to access I-83 at the Derry Street interchange.

The most complex and costly part of the project is the complete redesign and construction of a new Eisenhower Interchange. Obviously we don't ride bicycles on I-83, I-283 or 322 through this interchange so this will not impact cycling. But since we all drive it will make the interchange much more efficient and safe for motor vehicles.

Section 3, the final section of the I-83 reconstruction project to be planned and constructed, runs from 29th Street to the Susquehanna River. Construction of Section 3 is to be completed by 2030. Preliminary plans call for the overpasses at 13th, 19th and 29th streets over both the widened I-83 and adjacent Norfolk-Southern tracks to include sidewalks and wide berms that will accommodate cyclists.

Likewise plans call for the 17th Street underpass will be widened to include sidewalks and berms. Paxton Street between 13th and 17th Streets will be realigned to improve safety.

The current 13th Street interchange will be closed and a new interchange constructed at Cameron Street. Preliminary plans call for Cameron Street to include sidewalks and bike lanes through the new interchange.

Preliminary plans also call for significant improvements along the Harrisburg Greenbelt where it crosses I-83 at both City Park Drive and South Front Street that include restrooms and other improvements to the parklands.

You may have read how the City of Harrisburg has expressed serious concerns about the preliminary design planned for the section of the roadway that runs through the city, which would be as wide as 12 traffic lanes. City leaders are engaging their own engineering firm to design an alternative to the preliminary design proposed by PennDOT.

Designers of the I-83 Beltway project heard early on in project planning from advocates for the Harrisburg Greenbelt. As stated on the "Bike/Ped" tab on www.I-83beltway.com "Both bicycle and pedestrian movements are a key component of improving connections across I-83 and the railroad... This was a common discussion point at most of the stakeholder meetings held over the past year and a half and confirmed Project Need #4 for both projects: Existing Local Roadway Network Impedes North/South Mobility." Unfortunately for those of use who bicycle on local

roads heading east/west to and from Harrisburg were not represented at the early stakeholder meetings, so concerns about east/west mobility have not been properly addressed.

We should applaud PennDOT District 8 for addressing mobility issues by including wide berms and sidewalks on planned over- and under-passes from the Susquehanna River to the new 40th Street overpass. We also appreciate their willingness to improve the design of the Derry Street interchange to improve bicyclist and pedestrian safety. Unfortunately, other than representatives of the Greenbelt, area bicyclist advocates were not invited to the one open public meeting or to any private meetings to discuss the needs or concerns of area cyclists. This serves as an important lesson that area bicyclists must remain vigilant and pay close attention to announcements of public meetings held by PennDOT, or its engineering firm partners, to ensure the interests of cyclists are represented and expressed.

Such an opportunity will take place on May 30 from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. in Hearing Room 1 at the Keystone Building, 400 North Street, Harrisburg, when the updated version of Pennsylvania's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan is outlined. Visit the PennDOT website and click on "Bike Routes & Safety" for more information and to register. Information is also available there about how you may also watch the presentation via the internet.