

## Modern Multimodal Pathway or Great Wall of Harrisburg? Part 1 Jim Buckheit



The Interstate 83 portion of the Harrisburg Beltway is undergoing a decade-long, billion-dollar plus, rebuilding process. 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. City leaders are concerned that increased traffic will flood local city streets and adversely impact the quality of life of its residents (see [The Burg News](#)).

Due to the scale and complexity of the project it is divided into several segments. The first, which is currently under construction, extends from the I-81/I-83 interchange to Union Deposit Road. The roadway will be widened to three travel lanes in each direction. It also includes numerous safety improvements along intersecting roads that include widened berms, extended sidewalks and pedestrian crossing signals on the overpasses along Route 22 and Union Deposit Road. This segment is slated for completion by 2022.

This segment crosses several area roads that are regularly used by bicyclists. These include Valley Road, Locust Lane and Londonderry Rd/Schoolhouse Lane. New highway overpasses are currently under construction along these roads. These new overpasses will create what are essentially tunnels more than 8-highway lanes in length (6 travel lanes, median & berms). We can only hope the design for these overpasses include lighting, berms and sidewalks inside these underpasses that permit safe passage under I-83 by bicyclists and pedestrians.

Also of concern are the Route 22 and Union Deposit Road interchanges and the roadway design on either side of the interchanges. Both roadways currently lack berms and sidewalks on the east side of the I-83 overpasses, making biking and

walking along these sections extremely hazardous. While new sidewalks are planned along these sections there are no plans to add berms or bike lanes on either road. This is a huge missed opportunity by PennDOT District 8 to make bicycling a safe option through these areas that are both densely populated and have numerous retail and professional services. Motor vehicle travel and limited public transit appear to be the only viable travel options through these important corridors unless accommodations are quickly made.

Currently in the preliminary design phase are Segments 2 and 3 of the I-83 project. Segment 2 extends from Union Deposit Road to 29<sup>th</sup> Street. In Segment 2 preliminary plans call for a total redesign of the Derry Street/322/Eisenhower Blvd. interchange and the Eisenhower Interchange. Both are much needed and massive, expensive, undertakings that pose extraordinary engineering challenges.

In Segment 2 the most significant issue for cyclists concerns the preliminary design for the new Derry Street Interchange. Derry Street is the primary bicycle route between the City of Harrisburg and Hummelstown/Hershey area (see [Dauphin County Bicycle Transportation Map](#)). Preliminary plans call for a Single Point Urban Interchange (SPUI). This would be the first SPUI in this region. SPUIs provide several advantages requiring a smaller footprint than other designs and moving large volumes of vehicles through one intersection using just 3 traffic signal phases. They also reduce the number of potential conflict points helping to minimize vehicle crashes.

Several club members reached out to PennDOT District 8 to share concerns about the proposed design for the Derry Street interchange. The Senior Project Engineer contacted each and carefully listened to expressed concerns. Soon thereafter a new “Bike/Ped” tab was added to the project website and a video from the Virginia Department of Transportation was added that shows a SPUI with bike lanes and sidewalks. The website says these are now included in the preliminary design for the interchange. Their responsiveness and willingness to promptly address our concerns is recognized, applauded and very much appreciated.

Concerns remain about the fundamental design, even with bike lanes, of the SPUI. It is widely recognized that SPUIs are not considered safe or efficient for use by bicycles or pedestrians. With Derry Street serving such an important role in the regional bicycle transportation network it is critical that the design of the new I-83 Interchange serves to enhance, not detract from the safety of those who need or want to travel by foot or bicycle.

In part 2, next month, I'll write a bit more about Derry Street and share good news about how PennDOT is planning to improve bicycle and pedestrian access and safety when crossing I-83 from 40<sup>th</sup> street to the Susquehanna River.

In the mean time you can sign up to receive updates from the I-83 beltway project, submit comments and learn more about the project at [I-83 Beltway Project](#).