

# Proposed Exit 12 on I-81 could cost \$26M

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The state and federal highway transportation departments have approved the location for Interstate 81 Exit 12.

The big obstacle is getting the money, an estimated \$26 million within 20 years.

Guilford Township supervisors have asked U.S. Rep. Bill Shuster, R-Hollidaysburg, for his support in obtaining an initial \$12.8 million from the federal government to get the ball rolling.

The amount would pay for the construction of southbound on- and off-ramps at Guilford Springs Road as well as preliminary engineering, environmental clearance, final design, rights-of-way and the relocation of utilities.

"It is certainly no fabrication to say that Guilford Township and PennDOT has no means to fund this project, particularly considering the current economy," Chairman Greg Cook said in the Jan. 13 letter to Shuster. "If the federal government is serious about retaining existing construction jobs, creating new jobs and creating a more safe and more efficient road system, the funding of the project should be imperative."

An exit south of Chambersburg has been a serious concept for a quarter century, predating the proliferation of big box warehouses, Guilford's industrial zoning of the area and development of the nearby CSX rail/truck terminal.

Opponents of an exit at Walker Road lobbied 20 years ago for a southern interchange instead the eventual Exit 17. Their reason - increasing truck traffic - holds true today.

"The problem is still there regardless," Cook told a reporter on Wednesday. "We need to get tractor trailers on the interstate more quickly and more efficiently. If the federal government is interested in keeping people working, this is a no-brainer. New clients and landowners want to know when the interchange is coming."

"We are to the point where it needs to be added to the TIP (transportation improvement plan) and the long range transportation plan," said Robert Thomas, a Franklin County commissioner who also chairs the Rural Planning Organization. "The hope is to have it identified as a project. The logic presented to us is: It's more likely to be funded if it's a small project. If you open the door by doing the southbound side, you'll be more likely to get something done. You get half of it done today and half tomorrow."

Thomas said the money is not likely to come from the annual federal allocation to the RPO. The RPO decides where to spend the money on repairs to state highways and bridges across the county. Once getting more than \$20 million a year, the allocation is expected to dwindle to \$13.4 million in 2014.

"If the federal government cannot find a way to fund the project, then there'll be no project," Cook said.

A federal earmark paid for the \$481,197 feasibility and point-of-access study.

That was before the climate changed in Washington, D.C. Legislators have been keeping their distance from pet projects.

L. Michael Ross, president of the Franklin County Area Development Corp., said he hopes the new federal transportation bill could include the I-81 Exit 12 project.

"Here's where we run into the issue: Is this an earmark?" Ross said. "If you look at the projects, we're not going to build any roads because they're all earmarks."

Shuster, a member of the House transportation committee, acquired the earmark for Exit 12 feasibility study (full study is published below).

"He's been aware of the project for years," Thomas said. "I'm sure the letter from Guilford will put it back on the radar screen."

To back the project, Shuster will likely use his bully pulpit, not a legislative appropriation.

The House transportation committee on Friday marked up its portion of a five-year reauthorization of the nation's transportation act.

"The last transportation act had 500 earmarks. The one we're working on has zero," Shuster spokesman Jeff Urbanchuk said. "The bill conforms to the House Republican ban on earmarks. We still want to know what's going on so we can still work with our partners to make sure that the federal money can get to the places where it's most needed."

The nation's transportation system has been living on six-month extensions of federal funding for years. The latest full reauthorization was SAFE-TEA-LU in 2005.

"We need significant investment in our infrastructure," Urbanchuk said. "We have to do it in a way that's responsible with the taxpayer's dollar, and make sure the states have the flexibility and make sure the federal government doesn't take an overzealous role."

The intent is to give the states the option of how to spend federal dollars, he said. The American Energy and Infrastructure Job Act, "the largest reform to our

transportation system since the Interstate Highway Act of 1956," would streamline the current 15-year permitting process to eight years. Instead of lobbying the congressman, local leaders may have to take their project to the governor.

The project would go to the local RPO, then to the state to be placed on the 12-year plan, according to Urbanchuk.

A project first qualifies as a candidate for the TIP, then when funding is made available, it can be placed on the TIP, according to PennDOT spokesman Michael Crochunis.

PennDOT's focus has been to maintain deteriorating bridges and an aging interstate highway system.

Pennsylvania's allocation in the latest TEA would average \$1.5 billion a year, compared to the annual average of \$1.4 billion from TEA 2005. TEA 2005 had been forecast to give \$1.6 billion a year to Pennsylvania transportation.

Urbanchuk said the state would get \$7.6 billion from 2012 through 2016 in the American Energy and Infrastructure Job Act. Other committees must mark up their sections of the bill before it goes to the House floor, hopefully in March.

"How long it will take to get the money is anybody's guess," Ross said, but the project can stand on its merits. The project addresses traffic safety as well as economic development.

"I think this is a project that will make its way through the process and eventually receive funding." Ross said.

The option of not building the exit could lead to long waits on U.S. 11 at Orchard Drive and Pa. 914, according to the study. The do-nothing option becomes more expensive than building an exit because relieving the additional traffic would one day require widening U.S. 11 to five lanes between Orchard Road and Pa. 914.

The exit at Guilford Springs Road is "the most logical thing to do," Cook said. It would move traffic more efficiently and make the road system safer. Chambersburg's most recent I-81 interchange was controversial. It took Exit 17 more than 20 years to make its way through the approval process. Local communities fought over the location of the interchange.

That not the case with Exit 12, which "enjoys broad support at the local level," according to Ross. The Borough of Chambersburg, Hamilton Township supervisors and the Franklin County Career and Technology Center are among the supporters.

"I know of no backdoors in this one, and I would not do that," Cook said. "We've been working on this a number of years."

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About the new exit

The first phase of an Interstate 81 interchange south of Chambersburg calls for constructing southbound access ramps at Guilford Springs Road. The option would involve the construction of a southbound off-ramp and on-ramp in the northwest quadrant of Guilford Springs Road and I-81. It would not include a full interchange with northbound ramps or widening of the Guilford Springs Road Bridge over I-81.

The following intersections would be improved:

- Orchard Drive and Molly Pitcher Highway (U.S. 11)
- Wayne Avenue (Pa. 316) and Kriner Road
- Kriner Road and WCN Drive
- Guilford Springs Road and Molly Pitcher Highway (U.S. 11)
- Guilford Springs Road and WCN Drive
- Guilford Springs Road and the proposed I-81 southbound ramp intersection
- Swamp Fox Road (Pa. 914) and Molly Pitcher Highway (U.S. 11)
- Swamp Fox Road (Pa. 914) and I-81 ramp intersections at the Marion Interchange (2)
- Swamp Fox Road (Pa. 914) and the proposed Marion Connector roadway

A two-lane connector road would extend from Archer Drive to Swamp Fox Road (Pa. 914), paralleling the Norfolk Southern railroad. The Marion Connector would accommodate development that has yet to occur in the southern section of the commercial / industrial area between U.S. 11 and I-81, thus is considered a future project.

The at-grade Norfolk Southern Rail crossings would be closed at Lighthouse Road, Overcash Road, Alleman Road and Third Street. In a future phase, northbound ramps would be built.

The feasibility study explains the two-step process: "Improvements should reflect the need to address existing problems into the short-term future and to be built upon as traffic demands manifest themselves. This smart approach avoids the diminishing returns associated with speculative over-building to address projected

needs into the distant future. The key is to address the transportation issues in a cost-effective and community sensitive manner."

#### Exit 12 timeline

January 1987 - Congress appropriates \$5.2 million for a Chambersburg interchange on Interstate 81.

June 1989 - PennDOT proposes five possible exit sites: two south of Chambersburg - Guilford Springs Road, and Kriner Road - and three to the north - Woodstock Road, Walker Road and south of the Walker Road bridge.

June 1990 - Options at Guilford Springs and Woodstock roads are eliminated.

May 1994 - PennDOT announces its choice for an Exit 7 site at Walker Road.

1994 to 2003 - The proposed Walker Road location for Exit 17, formerly Exit 7, survives legal challenges over preserving the historical landscape and condemning farmland in ag security areas.

2000 - The Franklin County comprehensive plan calls for an exit between exits 10 and 14.

October 2005 - Exit 17 opens at Walker Road.

October 2006 - Rep. Bill Shuster secures funding to for a study that would pick the best site for an exit south of Chambersburg.

September 2007 - CSX truck/rail terminal opens on Kriner Road adjacent to I-81 south of Chambersburg.

December 2010 - Point of access study picks Guilford Springs Road for Exit 12.

December 2011 - Both PennDOT and the U.S. Federal Highway Administration approve the Exit 12 concept