



Residents review massive project to improve I-295, I-76, Route 42 interchange



By [Jason Laday/South Jersey Times](#)

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[BELLMAWR](#) — It's about time.

That was the general consensus from those who attended an informal information session Thursday night regarding the [long-planned overhaul of the notoriously tangled 295/42/76 highway interchange](#), a project decades in the making that is now finally set to begin.

"Thank God they're finally doing it," said Mary Corbett, a Mount Ephraim resident who stated she maneuvers the interchange regularly. "That whole interchange is extremely dangerous, with the crossover traffic at the off- and on-ramps. It's very dangerous."

However, she, like many others, noted that the \$800 million, eight-year project is far from perfect.

"They're still not addressing the fact that you can't get to 42 South from 295 North, or 42 North from 295 South," said Corbett. "There's so much tractor trailer traffic on the local roads, especially on Black Horse Pike, but that's not part of this project."

That's actually part of a different project, set to begin in 2016, according to John McCleerey, NJ Department of Transportation project manager for the 295/42/76 interchange plan.

Dubbed the 295/42 "Missing Moves" project, the separate plan would construct the absent on- and off- ramps, better connecting the state highway to the interstate, McCleerey said. It is slated for completion in 2018.

The larger, 295/42/76 project, called "Direct Connection" and set to finish in 2021, aims to enhance safety and reduce traffic congestion at the interchange — the busiest in the region — by building an I-295 overpass over Route 42 and I-76, making it possible for 295 to continue through the area unbroken.

At present, the I-295, I-76 and Route 42 interchange does not provide a direct connection for I-295 through traffic. The existing situation requires motorists to reduce speed in both directions of I-295 to safely negotiate ramps with 35 mph speed limits, while at the same time competing with drivers entering from Route 42 and I-76.

"This is long overdue — I'm just floored it's going to take eight years," said Dave Fennimore, from Haddonfield. "I really don't think it should take eight years."

"When you extend projects like this for so long, it's going to be not only inconvenient but also dangerous for people out there."

According to McCleerey, the time line is based on funding availability, as well as a desire to break the project up into "separate, reasonable" steps.

"You have to fund \$800 million over time," he said. "Even if we had unlimited funds, the best we would be able to do is five or six years."

The project is split into four contracts, one of which has already been awarded to PKF Mark III Inc., based Roselle. PKF had submitted the low bid of approximately \$160 million for their part of the project.

While the project promises to improve the lot of motorists who make their way through the area, some neighbors who live near interchange have been weary about what the new overpass and ramps will mean for their properties.

"One version of the plan they had completely took out our street, but they didn't go for that version," said Robert Black, who was sizing up an NJDOT map of the planned interchange work with his wife, Rosemarie. The Mount Ephraim couple's home is located just adjacent to I-295.

"The whole neighborhood is trying to figure out what's going on," he added.

Larry Wagner, from Bellmawr, and his wife have a mausoleum reserved at St. Mary's Cemetery, and the new interchange project means their final resting place will be in the shadow of the new overpass.

It doesn't seem to concern him, though.

"This project is necessary," he said. "There are so many accidents there, and 42 where it hits 295 is a disaster area. The traffic has outgrown the roads at this point."

He added: "It doesn't bother me. Someone always going to be inconvenienced at some point. That's just how it is."

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