



## I-295, Route 42 interchange project breaks ground



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

on March 11, 2013 at 4:57 PM, updated March 11, 2013 at 7:58 PM

[BELLMAWR](#) — Monday marked the ceremonial start of what will be close to nine long years of construction at the interchange of I-295, Route 42 and I-76, and a push to improve safety and congestion at the long-bemoaned interchange.

At a formal groundbreaking ceremony under the shadow of the sound wall along Route 42, just where I-295 weaves across the state highway, Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno stressed that while “progress doesn’t happen without some pain,” the project will significantly improve travel in the area, as well as the quality of life of local residents and businesses.

“In the line going from Boston all the way down to Washington, D.C., the biggest hiccup in what is essentially a straight line is right where we’re standing,” said Guadagno, calling the gap in I-295 a “weird factoid.”

“This will close the gap these businesses and other drivers have to get through,” she added. “Also, it provides a more direct route to Atlantic City and the Jersey shore, which is important especially after [Hurricane] Sandy.”

New Jersey Department of Transportation Commissioner Jim Simpson said pre-construction work will begin by the end of the month, with the area around the interchange becoming an official construction zone next week.

The first of four contracts for the project, awarded to PKM Mark III for \$160 million, is scheduled to stretch well into 2015 and cover the construction of 10 new bridges, a new ramp going from Route 42 north onto I-295 north, a new drainage system at Market Street under I-76 and other improvements.

“[The interchange] currently poses serious safety and mobility concerns that affect business, recreation, commuting and vacation,” said Simpson, who previously served as administrator for the Federal Transit Administration under former President George W. Bush. “I don’t know too many other places in the country where you have to exit an interstate onto a local road in order to get back onto the interstate.”

Approximately 250,000 vehicles pass through the four points of the interchange every day, according to NJDOT statistics.

The vehicle crash rate at the intersection is seven times the state average.

Set to finish in 2021, the Direct Connect project will see the construction of an I-295 overpass over Route 42 and I-76, making it possible for 295 to continue through the area unbroken.

According to Simpson, all travel lanes will remain open throughout construction, and drivers will be able to see improvements to the intersection within 18 months.

“New Jersey is one of the most densely-populated states in the country — the only way for this to work is for lanes to remain open to traffic,” he said. “Eighteen months from now, you’ll already begin to see improvements to Route 42 and I-76.

“It will not get worse — it will get better. That’s the takeaway.”

In a statement released Monday, Senate President Steve Sweeney called the groundbreaking the culmination of “many years and the effort of countless people.”

“One of the state’s greatest traffic nightmares and worst congested spots is going to be receiving a gigantic and sorely needed makeover,” read the statement. “The direct connection between these major roadways is going to ease the way to work and the way home for thousands of drivers.”

A separate project, set to begin in 2016 and called “Missing Moves,” will aim to solve another long-time gripe of area motorists — the inability to drive directly from 42 South to 295 North, or to 42 North from 295 South.

For Bellmawr Mayor Frank Filipek, the projects mean the chance are developing the landfill currently nestled against the southwest corner of the I-295/Route 42 interchange.

Charles Gallub, of Bellmawr Waterfront Development LLC, said the interchange project would offer “optimal access” from all directions.

“In the long-term, my hope is to get redevelopment at the landfill — that’s my biggest concern,” said Filipek. “We’ve been fighting for years to be able to do that. We’re talking what could be thousands of jobs there.”

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