

Allegheny Tunnel Transportation Improvement Project

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHY IS THE PROJECT NEEDED?

The project needs were established in 1997 and re-assessed in 2010. A project need equates to an issue or problem identified for a particular project. Five needs are established for this project:

- **Transportation Demand:** The current and future transportation demands on the tunnel and its approaches result in unacceptable Levels of Service (LOS) and traffic congestion.
- **Existing Geometric Constraints:** Some geometric features of the tunnel and its approaches do not meet current highway design standards with respect to lane width, termination of truck climbing lane, horizontal curvature, and sight distance.
- **Accident Rates:** The accident rate for the tunnel and its approaches is higher than statewide average for similar facilities.
- **Tunnel Conditions:** Both the eastbound and westbound tunnels are in need of major rehabilitation.
- **System Linkage and Continuity** (continuous travel without required exiting): System linkage and continuity on the turnpike is currently disrupted due to the fact that certain hazardous materials are not permitted through the Allegheny Tunnel (diversion of hazmat haulers to local roads).

WHAT PHASE IS THE PROJECT IN?

The Allegheny Tunnel Transportation Improvement Project is currently in the study (alternatives analysis) phase.

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF THE STUDY?

The goal of the study is to identify a preferred alternative to move forward in the design process.

WHAT TYPES OF ALTERNATIVES WERE EVALUATED?

Three project corridors (brown, yellow and gray) have been evaluated. Each corridor consisted of one open cut (bypass) alternative and one tunnel alternative. The preferred alternative for the project is the Gray Cut.

WHAT DID THE STUDY EVALUATE?

- Accident data
- Agency input
- Cultural resources
- Design criteria
- Emergency response routes
- Hazardous materials
- Mitigation options
- Natural resources
- Noise impacts
- Permit needs
- Project purpose and need
- Public input
- Roadway data
- Social resources
- Traffic impacts
- Utility locations
- Weather

WHO IS THE PROJECT TEAM STUDY TEAM?

- The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission – Project Owner
- L.R. Kimball – Project Prime Consultant (Engineering & Environmental Design Lead)
- Gannett Fleming – Sub-consultant to L.R. Kimball (Tunnel, Noise and Geotechnical Support)
- Paul C. Rizzo Associates – Sub-consultant to L.R. Kimball (Tunnel Support)
- Heberling Associates, Inc. – Sub-consultant to L.R. Kimball (Cultural Resource Management)
- Bat Conservation and Management, Inc. – Sub-consultant to L.R. Kimball (Specialty Wildlife Consultant)

HOW CAN I KEEP INFORMED OF THE STUDY'S PROGRESS?

The project website will be updated frequently. Visit www.paturnpike.com then click "Major Design and Construction Projects" to learn more.



PUBLIC Plans Display



Quality Inn & Conference Center
Somerset, PA

January 16, 2020
6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Allegheny Tunnel History and Project Origin

The Allegheny Tunnel is located in Allegheny and Stonycreek Townships, Somerset County along the Pennsylvania Turnpike (I-70 / 76), a limited access highway, approximately 13 miles east of the Somerset Interchange (Exit #110).

The current westbound Allegheny Tunnel was constructed between 1938 and 1940 and was part of the 160 mile long "Original Section" of the PA Turnpike, which opened Oct. 1, 1940. Initially, the Allegheny Tunnel had just one tube and accommodated bidirectional traffic. Vehicles would merge from two lanes down to one as they entered.

The first stretch of the PA Turnpike was largely designed to follow the abandoned South Penn Railroad right-of-way. The original South Penn tunnel through the Allegheny Mountain, which was never completed, is located immediately adjacent to, and north of, the existing Turnpike tunnel.

As a result of growing traffic and congestion, a second tube was built in 1965. The new tunnel - located south of and adjoining the original - was constructed to carry two lanes of traffic in the eastbound direction. At the same time, the original westbound tunnel was refurbished and modernized.

In the late 1960's, congestion again became an issue at the westbound approach due to steep grades, curves and the absence of a truck-climbing lane. In response, the PA Turnpike Commission (PTC) added a third westbound lane between New Baltimore and the eastern portal of the Allegheny Tunnel with the right lane designated as a truck-climbing lane.

Since the construction of the new eastbound tunnel and the refurbishing of the original in 1965, the Allegheny Tunnels and approaches have continued to be improved and modernized. These improvements include: lighting and vent control work; portal facade and signing work; tunnel lighting work; and installation of high mast lighting. In addition, in 1987 and 1988 both tunnels underwent major rehabilitation. An inspection conducted by the PTC in 1995 and 1996 revealed that the tunnels were rapidly deteriorating and once again in need of major rehabilitation. Cosmetic repairs were completed in 2012.

The Allegheny Tunnel Transportation Improvement Project was initiated by the PTC in 1996 as a result of increasing concerns regarding:

- traffic congestion;
- the frequency and severity of accidents in and near the tunnel;
- the physical and structural conditions of the tunnel; and
- the rerouting of hazardous materials (currently prohibited in the tunnels) onto local roadways.

Five project needs were established in 1997, and several alternatives were developed based on those needs and the numerous environmental studies conducted in the following years. The project was then placed on hold in 2001. After nine years it was re-initiated in 2010.

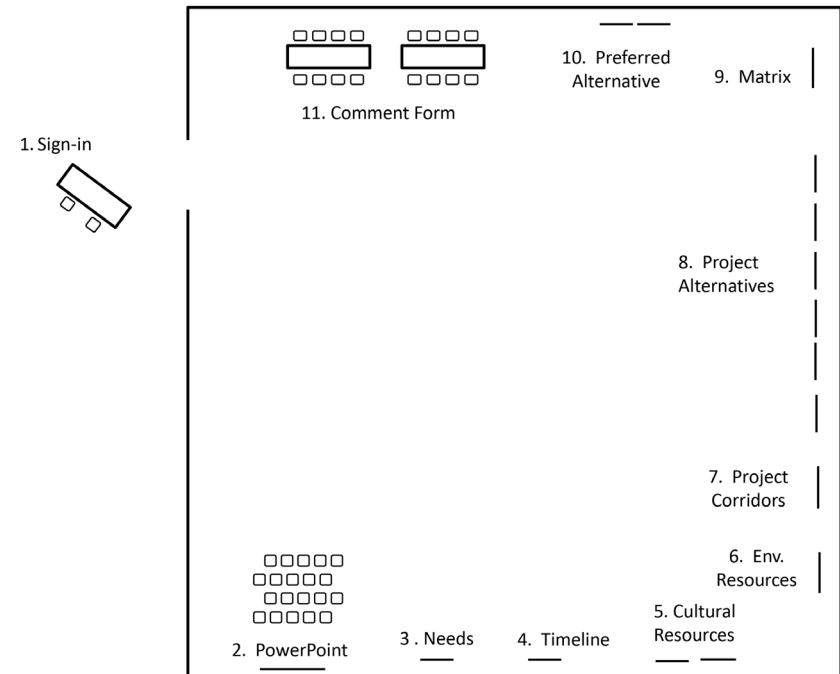
When the project resumed, the project needs were re-evaluated, alternatives were added, and environmental studies were conducted and updated. Six alternatives were evaluated. They included the Brown Cut Alternative, Brown Tunnel Alternative, Yellow Cut Alternative, and Yellow Tunnel Alternative each located north of the existing tunnel and the Gray Cut Alternative and Gray Tunnel Alternative located south of the existing tunnel. Each alternative was evaluated with regards to environmental impact, engineering criteria, cost and public and agency input. The Gray Cut Alternative has been selected as the Project Preferred Alternative as it best balances the environmental, engineering, operational, cost, and safety considerations that are components of this Project.

NEXT STEPS

After gathering input about the proposed alternatives from the public and permitting agencies, the Turnpike will complete the Environmental Document in Winter 2020. This document will be advertised as available for public review for a 30-day period, in which time public comments will be gathered. The commission will then proceed with the Section 404 permitting of the Gray Cut Alternative while moving forward in the design process.

ANTICIPATED TIMEFRAME

The design and permitting effort will proceed with anticipated submission of the Section 404 permit in 2020. Final design is expected to begin early 2021 and could take up to four years. Upon final permit issuances (both federal and state) and completion of design, construction could take anywhere from four to six years depending on funding and many other factors.



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