



MONMOUTH COUNTY
Local Preliminary Engineering Phase for
Monmouth County Route 537 Corridor Roadway Improvements
between Sentinel Road and U.S. Rt. 9 Interchange
Township of Freehold, Monmouth County, NJ

Public Information Center (PIC) Meeting – September 19, 2017

WRITTEN PUBLIC COMMENTS RECEIVED AND PROJECT TEAM RESPONSES

Note: The public comments are in italic followed by the project team responses

PIC COMMENT #1

I request reconsideration of the proposed realignment of Stillwells Corner Road and Route 537 – for the purpose of enabling the existing office use (and related parking) on Lot 25 in Block 70 (400 West Main Street) to continue. I request that the proposed taking be divided between parcels on each side of the two roadways, so that the impact on Lot 25 will be mitigated.

The proposed alignments for Stillwells Corner Road and County Route 537 (CR 537) follow the existing roadway configuration. The proposed widening along all approaches to the intersection of CR 537 and Stillwells Corner Road/Wemrock Road is needed to accommodate the additional thru, left and right turn lanes, which are required to adequately process today's and future traffic volumes through the intersection. The proposed widening along CR 537 is fairly evenly distributed between both sides of the roadway. Similarly, widening along Wemrock Road and Stillwells Corner Road is proposed on both sides. Said widening impacts all properties; however, the extent of those impacts varies. In case of the 400 West Main St. property, the widening negatively affects the property's existing parking by reducing the available parking to the back of the property. In addition, the required number of lanes and their proposed assignment (dual left turn lanes, two thru lanes and a dedicated right turn lane) prohibit access to the property from Stillwells Corner Road. A new driveway on CR 537 (an alternate access to the property) could not be provided due to its proximity to the intersection and the associated safety concerns. Even if the driveway could be accommodated, left turn movements in and out of the driveway would be prohibited (the driveway would be right-in and right-out only), which would severely restrict access to the property. It should be noted that should the widening occur only on the west side of Stillwells Corner Road closing off of the driveway on Stillwells Corner Road would still be required and an alternate driveway would be not be feasible on CR 537. As the suggested widening on the west side would not mitigate impacts to the subject property but more severely affect Moore's Tavern property (Lot 21 in Block 85.11) along Stillwells Corner Road and Walgreens in Mounts Corner Shopping Center (Lot 13 in Block 86) along Wemrock Road, it was not pursued as a viable option.

PIC COMMENT #2

As you may know, a CVS is scheduled to be built next to the TD Bank. Myself and my neighbors – on Redwood Lane- are always worried about traffic on our street. Over time it became a shortcut (speedway) for cars to avoid the light at Moore's Tavern or to beat the light crossing over Route 537 to Raintree Center.

The existing traffic signal at the County Route 537 (CR 537) and Redwood Lane intersection will be revised - slightly widened along Redwood Lane approach to accommodate installation of a dedicated left

turn lane to mitigate volumes generated by the CVS. CVS driveway will have a restricted access from CR 537 (left in, right-in and right-out). Full access to the site will be provided from Redwood Lane via a new driveway just south the existing driveway to the TD bank.

Under this project, the intersection of CR 537 and Stillwells Corner Road/Wemrock Road) will be reconstructed and widened to accommodate current and future (2035) traffic volumes; therefore, the need to bypass it will be diminished.

PIC COMMENT #3

The proposed improvements to the Route 537 corridor have our support. Specifically, the addition of the sidewalks and bike lanes is something we feel is necessary for both increased ability to use modes of transportation like walking and biking, but also to improve the visibility and safety for pedestrians, bike riders and walkers. Collectively, these factors can work to improve the health and safety of all who travel on the Route 537 corridor. We strongly encourage the addition of visual cues, including striped cross walks, electronic walk signals, pedestrian and bike signs, which can assist all users in feeling safe using the Route 537 corridor.

The proposed design accommodates bike traffic through wider (15 foot) wide outside (by the curb) lanes. Sidewalks are proposed along both sides of CR 537 to promote/accommodate walking. All recommended visual cues have been considered in this phase, and will be reviewed and finalized in the next phase – Final Design Phase and discussed/shared with the public in a future Public Information Center (PIC) for this project. Your support provided for this project is welcomed and appreciated.

PIC COMMENT #4

We would like our patients and staff to be able to continue making a legal left turn out of our parking lot at 680 West Main Street onto Route 537/West Main Street.

All ingress and egress movements currently permitted at the driveway, including left turns from/to County Route 537, will remain unchanged under the proposed improvements.

PIC COMMENT #5

Day School, carwash & storage facility on Schlechtweg Way rely heavily on existing westbound left turn into property. RT 537 improvements propose to eliminate the left turn into site.

The existing left turn movements from CR 537 westbound will be eliminated under the proposed improvements. Access to the site from CR 537 westbound will be available via Gibson Place/Castranova Way/Walmart Drive and Sam's Club access road to Schlechtweg Way. The County and the Township are exploring other viable access options to Schlechtweg Way.

PIC COMMENT #6

Eliminate Proposed Basin #4 and consolidate it into Proposed Basin #3. Allow the entire parcel on which Basin #4 is proposed to remain in current ownership.

Basin #4 cannot be combined with Basin #3 (and therefore eliminated from Lot 36.02) because each basin manages the stormwater runoff from unique (i.e. separate) drainage area and associated storm sewer pipe

network. The stormwater flows from one drainage area/pipe network cannot be added to different pipe network/drainage area. Therefore Basin #4 must remain in that vicinity in order to manage the increase in stormwater runoff within its own drainage area.

PIC COMMENT #7

The first issue is the bridge that goes over Route 33. I understand this is owned by the state of New Jersey and not Monmouth County. The many issues I raised before still exist and without involving the state is just going to lead to multi-million dollar project that is incomplete in scope and effectiveness for the corridor. It is disturbing to hear that you now plan to add a sidewalk to the west bound side of this same bridge with crosswalks for pedestrian traffic in the existing on and off ramps. This is just adding to the danger around the bridge. A side walk already exists on the east bound side so pedestrian traffic should be limited to one side only. If you continue the project and do not address the bridge widening and add an access ramp for traffic from Route 33 East and back onto Route 33 West and not just merely re-striping the lanes of traffic it is imperative that large signs are erected to direct traffic to the hidden entrance of Castranova Way so that traffic may cross over 537 to Wal-Mart Drive and into Longhorn Steakhouse and Olive Garden. This point of the roadway is coming off the bridge and is highly congested.

Again with the lack of bridge improvement there is a very large amount of traffic is using Wemrock Road through residential areas, soccer fields, and the school. Many vehicles daily are illegally turning and using the school access road to get to Castranova Way and Wal-Mart Drive. As I have stated prior this road should be permanently closed.

Also as stated prior is our extreme opposition to the extra bus stop lane with the possibility of a structure in front of the two restaurants, Longhorn Steakhouse and Olive Garden. This bus stop may already exist as a courtesy stop only but we do not want it expanded or encourage additional use. It promotes a large amount of foot traffic directly through the two restaurant properties as people are shopping at Wal-Mart or Sam's Club. This foot traffic goes through and damages our landscaping daily as well as finds ~~us~~ the property owners/operators cleaning up shopping garbage and empty shopping carts in both the parking lots and the landscape. The direct route from the bus stop to Wal-Mart is through our properties. If the bus stop is going to remain in the project move it west to the other side of the Intersection at Wal-Mart Drive in front of the Chase Bank. This would serve two purposes. First it would be before the traffic light where traffic would be slowing already and not accelerating to speed after the traffic light. Second the side walk that is currently there serves as a natural direct route to Wal-Mart and would not promote foot traffic through any business property.

Currently, the existing sidewalk on the south side of the County Route 537 bridge over NJ Route 33 is not accessible to pedestrians because said sidewalk terminates on either side of the bridge. There is evidence of pedestrian activity with worn pathways on both sides of County Route 537 at both approaches to the bridge. The proposed improvements incorporate sidewalks at every approach along with pedestrian access on the northside of the bridge to provide connectivity through and along both sides of the corridor and ease of navigation by pedestrians without the need to cross the busy corridor. Adequate signage and striping will be placed on County Route 537 and the ramps to advise motorists of the crossing pedestrians.

Any improvements to the County Route 537 and NJ Route 33 interchange, which is under the jurisdiction of the State and not the County, require approval of the NJDOT and a separate funding source. Therefore, a Problem Statement Form was submitted in March 2014 to NJDOT outlining the concerns associated with bridge and interchange and request to include the proposed improvements such as construction of the missing ramps at the interchange in their Capital Improvement Program.

Overhead signs will be placed along County Route 537 westbound in advance of and at the interchange to direct vehicles to Walmart Drive via Gibson Place.

The signal operation at County Route 537 and Stillwells Corner Road/Wemrock Road intersection will be improved under the corridor improvements. This will help address the high traffic volumes and congestion on all approaches to the intersection including Wemrock Road approach carrying traffic from NJ Route 33 eastbound destined to County Route 537 westbound.

The school driveway on Wemrock Road is restricted to school traffic only. Driveway improvements under this project include updating the island and curb opening to physically restrict access to and out of the property to right in and right out movements only. The County does not have jurisdiction over Wemrock Road which is the Freehold Township roadway nor access roadway which originates at Wemrock Road.

The proposed bus turnout on County Route 537 eastbound located on the east side of Walmart Drive (far side of the intersection) will provide a safer operation of the bus stopping at the bus stop. This bus stop will remain a courtesy bus stop and there are no plans to change the existing courtesy stop to a designated bus stop. The distance between the Sam's Club driveway and Walmart Drive is insufficient to accommodate the bus turnout. In addition, far side bus turnouts are preferred; near side bus turnouts create conflicts with right turning traffic, may obscure pedestrian view of oncoming traffic, and may obscure a driver's view of signs, traffic control devices and pedestrians at the intersection. Bus turnout location and shelter has not been finalized in this phase of the project, but will be reviewed with NJ Transit and Township of Freehold in Final Design phase.

PIC COMMENT #8

Is this major work to County Route 537 and Wemrock Road/Stillwells Road really needed? This project proposes major widening of all of the roadways for traffic that may not exist if the intersection of Business Route 33 and Wemrock Road is constructed prior to County Route 537.

A. Business Route 33 and Wemrock Road (also along a NJ Transit route) is a major traffic problem in the area. Wemrock Road backs up to Highway Route 33 for much of the day, even after the NJDOT made operational improvements to the signalization of the intersection.

1. Does the traffic at the intersection of County Route 537 and Wemrock Road/Stillwells Road improve after the construction of the planned Business Route 33 and Wemrock Road project? The Intersection improvement sign was removed over a decade ago; but, the traffic problems still exists.

3. Does making other intersections improvements at other locations and other small changes to the area (like driveway changes) in the area decrease the traffic at the intersections along County Route 537?

B. Does the traffic decrease with the construction of a freight line/commuter rail line that has also been discussed in the past decade?

Sidewalks

A. Along County Route 537 (west of CentraState and east of Wemrock Road); Wemrock Road;

and TB Bank side of Iron Bridge Road

Sidewalk needs to be added:

1. *Along County Route 537, especially west of CentraState (both sides of the roadway)*
 2. *On the public school side of Wemrock Road from Hutchinson Road (which is a designated NJ Transit bus stop) to County Route 537. The presentation boards at the public information center did not include sidewalk along this side of the roadway.*
- B. *Making the area more "pedestrian friendly" in the hopes of reducing local traffic for people making shorter trips.*
1. *Extension of a paved walking path from in front of the US Post Office to CentraState Hospital (which is a NJ Transit bus stop).*
 2. *Pedestrian paved walking path from Victoria Court (off of Joda Drive) in Wyndham to the Verizon driveway to the back parking lot for CentraState Hospital (which is a NJ Transit bus stop). There is a cafe and gym in the closest building to the Verizon driveway off of the CentraState parking lot.*

Utilities

- A. *While the Federal Highway Administration is in town, is it possible for them to begin looking at removing the utility poles along County Route 537 and placing the utilities underground.*
1. *The residential communities in the area like Raintree have underground utilities.*
 2. *Underground utilities would make the area more resilient during major storm events.*

Drainage

- A. *I support the use of drainage basins along County Route 537 to eliminate any possible roadway drainage problems that may occur with the additional roadway pavement with this project.*

Access Revocation by Monmouth County for smaller properties along County Route 537

- A. *Quality of life Issue for the handful of residents along County Route 537*
1. *The area has really changed in the past 20 years, and there is a significant increase in traffic along County Route 537.*
 2. *The area's grocery store is now in the Raintree shopping center with the closure of Pathmark at Route 9 and Schank Road. The Raintree shopping center constructed an addition to the existing grocery store more than a decade ago, increasing the size of the grocery store at Raintree.*
 3. *There is now a second shopping center at the Intersection of County Route 537 and Wemrock Road with a Walgreens.*
 4. *There is a Walmart and a BJ's across the street from the residences. In Freehold Township, the western side of Route 9 shopping centers were removed from Route 9 and are now on County Route 537.*
 5. *This section of County Route 537 is the shopping district for the western side of Freehold Township. Accessing the businesses in this area is important. It is sometimes faster to walk to Walgreens than it is to drive. The traffic can be that bad at times.*

- B. *For the properties west of CentraState along Country Route 537, consolidating the egress of the properties to a shared driveway exiting into the CentraState parking or Iron Bridge Road.*
- 1. Vehicles would access County Route 537 at a traffic signal controlling the access onto Route 537.*
 - 2. Allow vehicles exiting the properties a right turn only option onto County Route 537.*

Wemrock Road intersection

- A. Major improvements to the intersection of CR 537 and Stillwells Corner Road/Wemrock Road including construction of a brand new traffic signal and roadway reconstruction are needed to address the existing traffic safety and operational deficiencies at this intersection. These improvements will accommodate existing and increasing future traffic along both corridors within the project limits to help decrease the overall congestion and delays at the intersection and along the CR 537 corridor. The proposed widening of Wemrock Rd will increase needed capacity of the approach and the intersection to improve safety and traffic flow through the intersection and along CR 537 corridor. Any potential future improvements at the Business Route 33 and Wemrock Road signalized intersection, located approximately 1.5 miles from this project limits would have to be independently undertaken by NJDOT with cooperation with the Township of Freehold, and would not have a direct effect on the traffic operations at the CR 537 and Wemrock Rd intersection.

The proposed improvements along CR 537 Corridor within the project limits include all intersections. Those improvements will not reduce the traffic at the intersections and/or along the corridor, and neither will the revisions to the existing access to the existing business as traffic destined to those businesses would traverse CR 537 to reach the revised access or alternate access at CR 537 or a side street if feasible.

- B. An impact of a potential freight/commuter rail line in the area was not considered during the project's Concept Development phase completed in 2013 and the Preliminary Phase currently under way, because there are no plans for said line.

Sidewalks

- A. The sidewalk network within the project limits will be upgraded to provide an ADA compliant continuous facility for pedestrians on both sides of CR 537 corridor. The existing sidewalk along the west side of Wemrock Road from Hutchinson Drive/Raintree access driveway to County Route 537 will remain. A new sidewalk along the east side of Wemrock Road is not considered because the project limit is at Flintlock Rd which is approximately 400 feet south of the existing sidewalk along the east side of Wemrock Road.
- B. A proposed walking path or sidewalk network to connect CentraState to US Post Office and Juba Drive (via Victoria Court) is not part of this project. The scope of work is connectivity within the County Route 537 footprint and provide access to adjacent commercial and residential properties. The hospital and the internal roadway system is owned and maintained by CentraState and the County does not have jurisdiction to make those improvements.

Utilities

- A. Utility companies are responsible for their facility relocations and they determine whether relocation of the existing above ground utilities to the underground is feasible. However, we will recommend placing facilities underground but ultimately it will be the utility companies' decision.

Access Revocation by Monmouth County for smaller properties along County Route 537

A. Quality of life Issue for the handful of residents along County Route 537

The extent of the proposed improvements to address current and future traffic conditions at the intersection of CR 537 and Stillwells Corner Road/Wemrock Road and the CR 537 corridor necessitate total taking of the residential properties located on the north side of CR 537 east of Wemrock Rd. All those residential properties are scheduled for acquisition by the County during the Final Design phase of the project. As part of the full acquisition of the properties, the existing residents will receive assistance in relocating to a new location in accordance with the State and Federal law requirements. Relocation of the residents will address current quality of life issue associated with current traffic conditions, proximity of the dwellings to the roadway and difficult access to the properties.

The proposed improvements will minimize delays and shorten the travel time.

B. For the properties west of CentraState along Country Route 537, consolidating the egress of the properties to a shared driveway exiting into the CentraState parking or Iron Bridge Road.

Consolidation of the access along CR 537 to/from the private properties is outside the scope of this project.