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April 4, 2018

TIP Tops \$500 million

Route 22 will lead a long list of road projects to be done, 57 bridges will be rehabilitated and more than 100 LANTA buses are to be replaced as part of a four-year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) unveiled Wednesday before the Lehigh Valley Transportation Study (LVTS).

The \$534 million plan is a \$76 million increase over the current TIP, as some of the region's busiest roadways and bridges are slated for improvement.

The plan touches most every corner of Northampton and Lehigh counties, including more than \$80 million of work along Route 309, but widening and improving portions of Route 22 remains a focal point that will cost nearly \$50 million over the next four years. More than \$30 million is allocated to complete the widening from the Lehigh River Bridge to MacArthur Road by 2020, and begin the design, engineering and right-of-way acquisition for the rest of the roadway between 15th Street and Airport Road. Another \$19 million is to be spent on a series of resurfacing and restoration projects from the Interstate 78 split to 15th Street in Lehigh County and from 25th Street to Route 512 in Northampton County.

"As demand on the Lehigh Valley's infrastructure grows, continued investment in the transportation system is imperative," said Becky Bradley, Executive Director of the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission and Secretary of the LVTS. "We are proud to be able to increase funding to enhance mobility, maintain assets and improve safety."

The TIP funding is generally 80% federal and 20% state, with some occasional local matching funds. In this region, the program is administered by the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.

The full TIP funds 58 road projects, 57 bridge projects, several railroad improvements and a mass transit operation that gives 5.6 million rides a year. While some of those projects include elements that improve pedestrian and bicycle safety, trail and alternative transportation projects are often funded out of other pots of money.

Overall, \$244.3 million is allocated for roadway projects, \$144 million is slated to repair or replace bridges and \$145.8 is scheduled to fund LANTA.

“We are very excited about the new Transportation Improvement Program,” said PennDOT District 5 Executive Michael W. Rebert. “This investment of over a half billion dollars in Lehigh Valley infrastructure will benefit tourism, commerce, and the everyday commuter.”

The Transportation Improvement Program is a constantly evolving plan that changes as project costs and schedules adjust. However, the plan is what’s known as fiscally constrained. In other words, because the pot of money is limited, when costs increase for one project, the money often has to come from another, just as savings on a particular project can be moved into one that needs more money. Because the four-year plan is updated every two years, the final two years of one plan serves as the first two years of the next plan.

Spending for other key projects in the plan includes:

- \$65.6 million to reconstruct the Route 309 interchange at Tilghman Street, and replace the Route 22 bridge over Route 309. Construction is scheduled to begin in 2021.
- \$23.2 million to replace 33 LANTA diesel buses with hybrid diesel-electric or compressed natural gas buses, and replace 76 diesel LANTA vans with gasoline vehicles over the next four years.
- \$14.1 million to resurface Route 309 from Walbert Avenue to Shankweiler Road and reconstruct the Route 309 intersection at Orefield Road. Construction to begin in 2021.
- \$12.1 million to finish a \$33.5 million project to replace the Coplay-Northampton Bridge, which is under construction and scheduled for completion in 2020.
- \$17.1 million to begin replacement of the Cementon Bridge. Construction is scheduled for 2020, after the Coplay-Northampton Bridge reopens.
- \$11.3 million to reconstruct the intersection at Route 222 and Schantz Road in Upper Macungie Township and replace two bridges. The new intersection will be the first roundabout in the region. Construction is expected to begin in 2019.
- \$7.1 million to improve safety on Race Street in downtown Catasauqua, and convert one-way portions of Front and Second streets to two-way streets.
- \$6.6 million to improve safety and rehabilitate a section of Route 145 through South Allentown. Construction is scheduled to begin in 2020.
- \$5.8 million to reconstruct Linden Street in Bethlehem, from Washington Street to Elizabeth Avenue. Construction is set for 2022.
- \$5 million to help fund \$35 million in road projects - primarily funded by FedEx Ground - to widen Airport Road as part of the \$335 million project to build a FedEx Ground Plan in Allen Township. Construction has started and is schedule to be complete in 2020.
- \$5.4 million to realign Route 248 through Bath. Construction is scheduled for 2020.

- \$4.1 million to replace the Water Street Bridge over Saucon Creek in Hellertown in 2019.
- \$3.2 million to improve safety and conditions at nine railroad crossings in Lehigh and Northampton counties.
- \$2.7 million for preliminary design to build a bridge and ramps to reduce congestion at the Route 309 interchange in Center Valley.
- \$2 million to convert four one-way streets to two-way streets in Easton's central business district. Construction is set to begin in 2021.

"The increased funding allowed us to add 42 new projects to the plan," said Michael Donchez, LVPC Senior Transportation Planner. "Some will repair small, structurally deficit or functionally obsolete bridges, and some are projects on high use roads."

The Transportation Improvement Program remains a draft that could go through some alternations before it becomes final. Public comment on the plan begins April 23, with passage expected in June. The new plan goes into effect October 1.

