

Pa. Gov. Wolf touts infrastructure projects at Lafayette Street extension, Norristown



Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf speaks upcoming construction projects in the Philadelphia region at East Lafayette and Ford streets in Norristown Tuesday, May 30, 2017. Gary Puleo — digital first media

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NORRISTOWN>> Gov. Tom Wolf spent much of a drizzly afternoon the day after Memorial Day hanging out on a street corner in the East End of Norristown.

Not just any corner, mind you.

This was the intersection of East Lafayette and Ford streets, in the heart of the \$95 million Lafayette Street extension project, where Wolf highlighted for a small crowd — including PennDOT workers; state Rep. Tim Briggs, D-149; state Rep. Matt Bradford, D-70; and Montgomery County Commissioners Valerie Arkoosh and Joseph Gale — more than \$550 million in highway and bridge improvements that will be started or bid across the Philadelphia region during the 2017 construction season.

“This was a great excuse for a get-together,” Wolf said. “It’s an announcement on what we’re doing to improve our infrastructure in this area, but I’ve been privileged to go around the commonwealth and talk about all the great things we’re doing to make our infrastructure better. Obviously we want to have good roads and easy access to places,” he added. “But this is something that gets to the heart of who we are as Pennsylvania. We’re the Keystone State and our economy really thrives and depends on really good infrastructure.”

Wolf recalled how dependable thoroughfares were essential to the success of his kitchen cabinet design business at one time.

“My company sold kitchen cabinet building products in 32 states, but we were headquartered here in Pennsylvania, and if we didn’t have a good infrastructure I would have to take a longer time to get my products to the customers,” he said. “If bridges weren’t up to standard I’d have to take a detour around those bridges and that would add cost to the delivery of those products, which would add cost to the price of products. And if we didn’t have good infrastructure, sooner or later I would want to move my business somewhere else. This is a magnet for healthy businesses. We need to make sure that our bridges are not substandard and that our roads are everything they ought to be.”

Among the construction projects set to begin are a \$278 million revamp of a large section of Interstate 95 in Philadelphia, Wolf noted.

“We also have traffic and safety improvements to US 1 in Bucks County; an \$81 million revamp of the I-95 Betsy Ross ramps in the Adams Avenue connector; \$62.6 million widening of Route 322 in Delaware County and a \$26.4 million repair of the Route 202 bridges that cross over the Amtrak tracks in Chester County. Those are important things to this region,” Wolf said, explaining that \$2.2 billion had been allocated for construction overall.

“The infusion of additional funding through Act 89 has allowed us to move critical projects into construction that will help extend the service life of our highways and bridges, improve safety and strengthen our infrastructure for future generations,” PennDOT District 6 Executive Kenneth M. McClain added.

The three-phase Lafayette Street project is funded 80 percent by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and 20 percent by Montgomery County, according to a press release, which further noted that Montgomery County initiated the project and manages it in partnership with PennDOT and the FHWA.

The first phase, which extended Lafayette Street past its former limit at Ford Street into Plymouth Township, finished construction in early 2015. The second phase, completed in December 2016, improved local roads in preparation for the eventual interchange and includes widening Ridge Pike between Ross Street and School Lane; realigning, rebuilding, and signaling Fairfield Road and Diamond Avenue; and connecting the extended Lafayette Street with Diamond Avenue.

The third phase, estimated at \$25 million, is on schedule to be bid this fall, with construction expected to begin in the spring of 2018 and will widen and rebuild the

existing Lafayette Street in downtown Norristown. The work is also expected to improve mobility for bicyclists and pedestrians by installing a pedestrian crossing at the Norristown Transportation Center and connecting the Schuylkill River Trail and the Chester Valley Trail at DeKalb and Lafayette streets.

“The folks who are making this happen are your neighbors,” Wolf said. “They’re doing this for you, and when you go through these construction zones, please be careful. Slow down. Do them a favor. They’re making Pennsylvania better for all of us and they need our help and support. The best way we can support them is by keeping them safe.”

For more information on projects occurring or being bid this year, visit www.projects.penndot.gov.