

Manager: Mild weather speeds Corridor Project

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If the mild winter turns into a normal spring, the Broad Street Corridor Project should be back on schedule, according to its manager.

Pat Fritsky, construction manager for the project for the state Department of Transportation, told those who attended a Downtown Committee meeting at the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce on Tuesday morning that the mild, virtually snowless winter has allowed construction crews to do more work on the project than anticipated.

"We are absolutely loving this weather. We haven't shut down yet," Fritsky said. "We've been able to just about complete the drainage work on the Terrace, which we got behind on because of the wet spring and the hurricane we got hit with last year.

"In front of the (Hazleton) shopping center, all of the drainage work is completed on one side. We moved up toward Pine Street and out toward Cedar and Poplar with the drainage crews, doing the lateral tie-ins, manholes and inlets off to the side."

Fritsky said crews also have been filling in vaults underneath Broad Street, to speed up concrete work when it resumes in the spring - because filling in the vaults is time-consuming.

"They're like (building) an abutment for a bridge," Fritsky said. "We have to dig down, and to pour our own footer. Before we build a wall on top of the footer, we have to get minimum strengths on the concrete, and get those test results back. That's why they'll pour the concrete, and then they'll go someplace else for two or three weeks. Then they come back and build the wall, but we won't let them backfill until they get the tests from the (concrete for) the wall."

Similar protocol had to be followed for the removal of a 500-gallon tank near Broad and Locust streets when one was found there in December, she said.

One major vault workers will be looking at in early March are the former comfort stations underneath Broad Street, Fritsky said.

She said the Greater Hazleton Historical Society wants to do a full review of those vaults with a video camera system.

Same schedule

Fritsky said Slusser Brothers Trucking and Excavating Co., which is building the project, will follow the original schedule but use additional crews.

"The game plan is to continue exactly where we left off," Fritsky said. "We'll go to Pine and Cedar on the south side, then flip over (to the north side of the street) and do the main downtown section at the same time. We'll be downtown between July through November. We will be working in and around Funfest and the car cruise."

Another crew will be working simultaneously in West Hazleton, Fritsky said.

"In the spring, they will begin on the other (north) side in West Hazleton, and work up that side," Fritsky said. "They will concentrate on doing widening work at the intersection at Washington Avenue, where we took a home down on the corner.

"All the way up to Monroe (Avenue) should be complete by July to get us back on track."

Some new streetlights have been installed in West Hazleton so "people can kinda get a feel for what the final product will look like -how clean, trim and open things look," she said. "We've been getting very good feedback."

Fritsky said crews will also be doing the north side of Broad in the Terrace section, but promised to remove concrete barriers from the area of the Greater Hazleton rail-trail in time for National Trails Day on June 9, when there will a picnic at the trail.

"Our goal is by the end of this construction season, to be back on schedule, to where we would have been at the end of this construction season," she said. "The only thing that scares me is if we get another wet spring."

Fritsky explained why the work cannot be done when it rains.

"When you open up the existing ground and there is a lot of water sitting there, it makes everything saturated," Fritsky said. "We won't let them build a new roadway on top of saturated soil."

One option, she said, is to let the ground air-dry, which only works if it is not continuously raining.

"The other option is to take out the wet material and bring in new, dry material, which is very, very costly, and we do not have in our budget," she said.

"We are expecting rain (in the spring) but we are hoping it stays at a more normal level."

Fritsky said sidewalk and concrete work will follow the same schedule, but won't begin until spring fully blooms - in late March or early April.

"Temperature is very critical with sidewalks," she said. "They are only 4 inches thick. Concrete needs heat to cure. Rock salt is not good for a sidewalk, especially a new sidewalk. You're better off with your calcium-based materials."

Fritsky said the final road will be built up so people can open car doors onto sidewalks.

Curbs were built high to allow space for the buildup of new road, she said.

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