

= Interstate 476 =

Interstate 476 (I @-@ 476) is a 132 @.@ 1 @-@ mile (212 @.@ 59 km) auxiliary Interstate Highway in the U.S. state of Pennsylvania designated between Interstate 95 near Chester and Interstate 81 near Scranton , serving as the primary north ? south Interstate corridor through eastern Pennsylvania . It consists of both the 20 @-@ mile (32 @.@ 19 km) Mid @-@ County Expressway , locally referred to as the " Blue Route " (although no signs exist with that designation) , through the suburban Philadelphia @-@ area counties of Delaware and Montgomery , and the 110 @.@ 6 @-@ mile (177 @.@ 99 km) Northeast Extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike connecting the Philadelphia metropolitan area with the Lehigh Valley , the Poconos , and the Wyoming Valley . The Blue Route passes through suburban areas , while the Northeast Extension predominantly runs through rural areas of mountains and farmland , with development closer to Philadelphia and in the Lehigh Valley and the Wyoming Valley . I @-@ 476 intersects many major roads including Interstate 76 (the Schuylkill Expressway) in West Conshohocken , Interstate 276 (the Pennsylvania Turnpike) in Plymouth Meeting , U.S. Route 22 near Allentown , and Interstate 80 near Hickory Run State Park .

While proposed as early as 1929 , the construction of the Mid @-@ County Expressway through did not begin until 1967 and was not completed until 1991 due to massive community and environmental opposition during the freeway revolts of the 1960s and 1970s , leading The Philadelphia Inquirer to dub it " the most costly , most bitterly opposed highway in Pennsylvania history . " In order to get the route through Delaware County , it was built with many environmental compromises such as a parkway design and four lanes south of the Pennsylvania Route 3 interchange . The Mid @-@ County Expressway received its " Blue Route " nickname from the chosen route through Delaware County on planning maps on which it was differentiated from the other proposed routes by its color .

Following the completion of the Mid @-@ County Expressway , in 1996 the Interstate 476 designation was extended to include the entire length of the existing Northeast Extension , replacing PA 9 . The Northeast Extension was built between 1955 and 1957 and was originally projected to continue past Clarks Summit to the New York border ; however , I @-@ 81 was built between these two points instead . Since the extension , I @-@ 476 has been the longest auxiliary Interstate Highway in the United States . In fact , it is longer than some mainline interstates such as Interstate 83 in Maryland and Pennsylvania , Interstate 99 in Pennsylvania , Interstate 12 in Louisiana , Interstate 19 in Arizona , Interstate 97 in Maryland , and Interstate 2 in Texas . Additionally , its numbering is unusual since auxiliary interstates beginning in even numbers are typically bypasses or loops rather than spurs . I @-@ 476 may be surpassed by Interstate 369 in Texas if I @-@ 369 is extended to the Gulf of Mexico .

= = Route description = =

= = = Blue Route = = =

The portion of Interstate 476 between Interstate 95 and Interstate 276 runs north ? south through Delaware and Montgomery Counties and is officially known as the Mid @-@ County Expressway and the Veterans Memorial Highway , as well as by the nickname the " Blue Route " . The road 's southern terminus is at a junction with Interstate 95 near Chester , a city southwest of Philadelphia , near Philadelphia International Airport . Heading north , the road immediately narrows to a four @-@ lane parkway north of Exit 1 , MacDade Boulevard . It winds through the western Philadelphia suburbs of Wallingford and Swarthmore , where I @-@ 476 comes to an interchange with Baltimore Pike . From here , the freeway continues north to Springfield , where it meets U.S. Route 1 at a three @-@ level diamond interchange .

Past US 1 , I @-@ 476 continues through wooded suburban areas and interchanges with Pennsylvania Route 3 in Broomall , where it widens to six lanes . The route continues to Radnor

Township , on the Main Line , where it interchanges with U.S. Route 30 . Stone monuments , including a large stone cairn atop a hill and a large crushed @-@ stone image of a mythological griffin on a hillside , were constructed at the Route 30 interchange to commemorate Radnor 's history as part of the Welsh Tract . Proceeding northward , the route enters Montgomery County and comes to an interchange with Interstate 76 (Schuylkill Expressway) at West Conshohocken . After crossing the Schuylkill River on the Pearl Harbor Memorial Bridge , the freeway heads into Plymouth Township , where it interchanges with Ridge Pike and Germantown Pike before coming to the Mid @-@ County Interchange with the Pennsylvania Turnpike in Plymouth Meeting . The entire length of the Blue Route is designated the Blue Route Scenic Byway , a Pennsylvania Scenic Byway .

= = = Northeast Extension = = =

Beyond the Mid @-@ County Interchange , Interstate 476 enters the Pennsylvania Turnpike system , interchanging with Interstate 276 and continuing north as the Northeast Extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike . The route continues through the Philadelphia suburbs interchanging with Pennsylvania Route 63 near Lansdale . Past this interchange , the route enters a more rural setting of woods and farms , crossing into Bucks County and coming to an interchange with Pennsylvania Route 663 near Quakertown . The Northeast Extension continues into Lehigh County , part of the Lehigh Valley metropolitan area , past the PA 663 interchange . Here , it interchanges with U.S. 22 (Lehigh Valley Thruway) near Allentown , which offers an indirect connection to Pennsylvania Route 309 and Interstate 78 .

North of Allentown , the route runs through more farmland before passing under the Blue Mountain in the Lehigh Tunnel and entering Carbon County in the Poconos . Here , I @-@ 476 crosses over the Lehigh River and interchanges with U.S. 209 near Lehighton . Continuing through mountainous areas , it has an E @-@ ZPass @-@ only exit for Pennsylvania Route 903 and cuts through Hickory Run State Park before interchanging with Interstate 80 and Pennsylvania Route 940 just to the north of the state park . The route continues through mountainous terrain , heading into Luzerne County and coming to an interchange with Pennsylvania Route 115 in Bear Creek that provides access to nearby Wilkes @-@ Barre . The route comes to a toll barrier near Pittston that marks the northern end of the toll ticket system in the Northeast Extension . A short distance later , an interchange with Pennsylvania Route 315 provides indirect access to Interstate 81 and Scranton . Past this interchange , I @-@ 476 enters Lackawanna County and crosses built @-@ up areas of the Wyoming Valley as it skirts around Scranton , with a mainline toll plaza and an exit to Keyser Avenue . North of Scranton in Clarks Summit , the route comes to a hairpin curve and ends at an interchange with connections to Interstate 81 , U.S. Route 6 and U.S. Route 11 . US 6 joins the turnpike for less than a quarter mile to connect between I @-@ 81 and US 11 . As this is north of the Clarks Summit toll plaza , no toll is collected on this short segment .

= = Tolls = =

The Northeast Extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike uses the ticket system method of tolling between the Mid @-@ County and Wyoming Valley toll plazas along with the mainline Pennsylvania Turnpike . With the ticket system , a motorist receives a ticket upon entering the turnpike at an interchange and pays the fare and surrenders the ticket upon exiting . If a motorist loses the ticket , the turnpike charges the highest fare to the exit where the motorist leaves . Mainline toll plazas are also located at Keyser Avenue and Clarks Summit , charging a flat rate . There are no tolls on exit ramps between Wyoming Valley and Clarks Summit . E @-@ ZPass is accepted at all toll plazas . As of 2016 , it costs a passenger vehicle \$ 11 @. @ 40 to travel the length of the Northeast Extension between Mid @-@ County and Wyoming Valley using cash and \$ 8 @. @ 06 using E @-@ ZPass . The Keyser Avenue and Clarks Summit toll plazas cost \$ 1 @. @ 35 using cash and \$ 0 @. @ 76 using E @-@ ZPass for passenger vehicles .

The tickets along the Northeast Extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike were originally handed out by person . In 1987 , machines started to replace humans in distributing tickets . In 1990 , an

electronic toll collection system was proposed for the Pennsylvania Turnpike , where a motorist would create an account and use an electronic device that would be read from an electronic tollbooth . The motorist would be billed later . The multi @-@ state electronic tolling system , which was to be called E @-@ ZPass , was planned to be implemented by 1998 . The planned installation date was later pushed back to 2000 . On December 2 , 2000 , E @-@ ZPass debuted along the Northeast Extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike between Mid @-@ County and Lehigh Valley . On December 15 , 2001 , E @-@ ZPass was extended to include the entire length of the Northeast Extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike . Commercial vehicles were allowed to start using E @-@ ZPass on December 14 , 2002 .

On November 24 , 2004 , the day before Thanksgiving , 2 @,@ 000 Teamsters Union employees went on strike , after contract negotiations failed . This was the first strike in the history of the roadway . As this is usually one of the busiest traffic days in the United States , to avoid traffic jams , tolls were waived for the rest of the day . Starting on November 25 , turnpike management personnel collected flat @-@ rate passenger tolls of \$ 2 and commercial tolls of \$ 15 from cash customers on the ticketed system , while E @-@ ZPass customers were charged the lesser of the actual toll or the same flat rates . The strike ended after seven days when both sides reached an agreement on November 30 . Normal toll collection resumed December 1 .

The turnpike commission announced plans to consider eliminating manned toll booths in favor of all @-@ electronic tolls . With this , tolls will be paid using either E @-@ ZPass or credit cards . Drivers unable to pay by either of these methods will be billed in the mail using license plate recognition ; an additional surcharge will be applied . In addition to E @-@ ZPass , the turnpike commission offered other automated options to pay for tolls such as using a prepaid account that utilizes license plate recognition . McCormick Taylor and Wilbur Smith Associates have been hired to conduct a feasibility study on converting the road to all @-@ electronic tolls .

On March 6 , 2012 , the turnpike commission announced that it was going forward with an all @-@ electronic tolling plan . Such a plan will take at least five years to implement to allow time for equipment to be installed and the reconfiguration of ramps . It will save the turnpike commission \$ 65 million a year on labor costs by eliminating toll collectors . The plans call for a 76 % surcharge for motorists who do not have E @-@ ZPass that are billed by mail . This surcharge could raise the toll for someone without E @-@ ZPass to \$ 53 @.@ 10 to travel the entire turnpike .

= = Services = =

= = = Emergency assistance and information = = =

The Northeast Extension has a callbox every mile for its entire length . Motorists may also dial * 11 on their mobile phones . First responder services are available to all turnpike customers via the State Farm Safety Patrol program . The safety patrol program , which is free , looks for disabled motorists , debris , and accidents along the roadway and provides assistance . The patrol service is available 24 hours every day of the year . Each patrol vehicle covers a 20 @-@ to @-@ 25 @-@ mile (32 to 40 km) stretch of the turnpike . Towing services are available from authorized service garages located near the highway . Pennsylvania State Police Troop T patrols the Pennsylvania Turnpike Northeast Extension . It has headquarters in Highspire and a substation at Pocono .

The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission broadcasts current roadway , traffic , and weather conditions via " Highway Advisory Radio " transmitters at each exit . Broadcasts are available on AM 1640 and can be received approximately two miles away from each exit . Motorists can also receive alerts and information via the internet , mobile phone , a hotline , and message boards at service plazas through the Turnpike Roadway Information Program (TRIP) .

= = = Service plazas = = =

The Northeast Extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike has 2 service plazas . The service plazas

offer various fast food restaurants such as Burger King , Roy Rogers , Famous Famiglia Pizzeria , Auntie Anne 's , Hershey 's Ice Cream , and Starbucks , and a gift shop . Each service plaza also has a Sunoco gas station and an A @-@ Plus convenience store . Other amenities are available such as an ATM , pay phone , picnic areas , restrooms , tourist information , and Wi @-@ Fi . The Allentown plaza contains a seasonal farmers market .

In 2006 , HMSHost was awarded a contract to reconstruct the service plazas along the turnpike . The reconstruction of the service plazas , which is to cost \$ 150 million , will include a food court layout and modernized restrooms . Sunoco will continue to operate the gas stations at the renovated service plazas . The Allentown service plaza was rebuilt between September 2007 and May 2008 while the Hickory Run service plaza was rebuilt between January 2009 and November 2010 .

= = History = =

= = = Mid @-@ County Expressway = = =

Originally planned as far back as 1929 , the Mid @-@ County Expressway was later proposed by the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission as the " Chester Extension " of the Pennsylvania Turnpike in 1954 . After the advent of the Interstate Highway System , the project was transferred to the Pennsylvania Department of Highways to be built as part of the system , designating it first as Interstate 495 , and later as Interstate 480 , as I @-@ 76 was designated as I @-@ 80S at the time . The present @-@ day I @-@ 476 designation was assigned on February 6 , 1964 when I @-@ 80S was renumbered as I @-@ 76 .

The road received its nickname from a 1958 location report indicating various proposed geographic configurations of an expressway through Delaware County with lines of various colors on a map . The " blue route " through the Crum Creek valley won out over other contenders , which included a more easterly " red route " and " yellow route " and a more westerly " green route " .

As one of the most controversial Interstate Highways in Pennsylvania , construction of I @-@ 476 began in 1967 , but was not completed until 1991 between MacDade Boulevard (Exit 1) and Interstate 76 (Exit 16) , and until 1992 between Germantown Pike east / Chemical Road (Exit 19) and Interstate 276 / Pennsylvania Turnpike (Exit 20) , due to litigation between the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and several communities in the road 's path over environmental concerns . However , the section of Interstate 476 (south end of I @-@ 476) between I @-@ 95 and MacDade Blvd . (Exit 1) was opened in 1987 , but signage labeled it as a route " To MacDade Blvd " until 1991 when I @-@ 476 / The Blue Route was opened between Exits 1 and 16 , and connected with the short existing section of roadway dating back to 1979 from Exit 16 @-@ Exit 19 .

An agreement in 1985 led to many environmental compromises in the road 's design , including a downsized four @-@ lane design south of Pennsylvania Route 3 , ramp meters , and federal scenic route status , prohibiting the erection of advertisement billboards along the entire freeway portion . While the redesigned highway was largely well @-@ received , the constriction to four lanes has led to bottleneck conditions in the area , and many communities that originally opposed the road have now called for its widening . The Philadelphia Inquirer dubbed I @-@ 476 " the most costly , most bitterly opposed highway in Pennsylvania history " due to the decades of opposition it garnered .

The road is currently undergoing a complete rehabilitation project , including paving , bridge repair , and ramp maintenance of the entire length of the freeway between Interstate 95 and the Pennsylvania Turnpike .

The section between I @-@ 95 and I @-@ 76 was completed in 2007 and the section between I @-@ 76 and I @-@ 276 was completed in the end of 2011 .

= = = Northeast Extension history = = =

In 1953 , an extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike from the mainline near Philadelphia north

through Northeastern Pennsylvania to the New York border near Binghamton was proposed . Groundbreaking for the Northeastern Extension occurred on March 25 , 1954 in White Haven , with Governor John S. Fine and commission chairman Thomas J. Evans present . The Northeast Extension was planned to run from the mainline Pennsylvania Turnpike in Plymouth Meeting north to a temporary terminus at Scranton . In April 1954 , \$ 233 million in bonds were issued to build the Northeastern Extension along with the Delaware River Bridge on the mainline Pennsylvania Turnpike . The Northeast Extension was built with a 4 @-@ foot (1 @. @ 2 m) median in order to save money . Due to the mountainous terrain it passed through , a large amount of earthwork was necessary to build the road along with the construction of large bridges . Among the bridges built was the 1 @, @ 632 @-@ foot @-@ long (497 m) Clark 's Summit Bridge over US 6 / US 11 , which was the tallest bridge on the Pennsylvania Turnpike system at 135 feet (41 m) . The Northeast Extension also included the two @-@ lane Lehigh Tunnel through Blue Mountain . The tunnel was originally going to be named for commission chairman Evans , but was changed when he was convicted of conspiracy to defraud the commission of \$ 19 million (equal to \$ 134 @, @ 839 @, @ 321 today) .

The roadway opened between Plymouth Meeting and the Lehigh Valley interchange near Allentown on November 23 , 1955 . The highway was extended north to Emerald on December 28 , 1955 . The Northeast Extension was opened between Emerald and Wyoming Valley on April 1 , 1957 . The entire length of the Northeast Extension was finished on November 7 , 1957 with the completion of the northernmost part between Wyoming Valley and Scranton . The part of the Northeast Extension between Scranton and the New York border would not be built as part of the Pennsylvania Turnpike system but rather the Interstate Highway System as I @-@ 81 . At the northern terminus , the Northeast Extension narrowed to two lanes along the northbound off @-@ ramp at Scranton to come to its northern terminus , with an abandoned short spur of the mainline heading north . A pair of trumpet interchanges were built to connect the Northeast Extension and I @-@ 81 . In 1980 , the roadway would be designated PA 9 .

When it first opened , traffic on the Northeast Extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike was light . By the 1970s , traffic along the roadway would increase with the completion of the connecting I @-@ 80 and the rising popularity of the Poconos as a vacation destination . As a result , the two @-@ lane Lehigh Tunnel faced serious congestion . Plans were made to either bypass the tunnel or add a second tube . The turnpike commission decided it would build a second tunnel as the cost was lower than building a bypass . In 1988 , a \$ 37 million contract was awarded to build the second tube . Groundbreaking for the tunnel took place on February 14 , 1989 , with Governor Robert P. Casey in attendance . Excavation of the new tunnel began in July of that year . Construction of the second tube utilized the New Austrian Tunnelling method , which reduced the cost of the tunnel by \$ 5 to \$ 6 million . It was the first tunnel in the United States to use this construction method . The second tube at Lehigh Tunnel opened on November 22 , 1991 , with Governor Casey in attendance leading a line of antique cars . Construction of the tunnel cost \$ 45 million . The new tube is used for southbound traffic while the original tube carries northbound traffic . The newer tunnel is wider , higher , and brighter than the original .

On February 1 , 1995 , the Keyser Avenue interchange near Scranton was slated to open at a cost of \$ 22 @. @ 4 million . Construction of this interchange also involved constructing a new mainline flat @-@ rate toll barrier near the new interchange .

On November 1 , 1996 , the Northeast Extension was added to the Interstate Highway System as an extension of I @-@ 476 , replacing the PA 9 designation along the road . The addition of the second tube at the Lehigh Tunnel along with new guardrails and line striping was necessary for the toll road to become an Interstate . It was hoped that the Interstate designation would bring economic development and tourism to the areas served by the roadway . This extension resulted in I @-@ 476 surpassing the 120 @-@ mile (190 km) I @-@ 495 in Massachusetts as the longest auxiliary Interstate Highway .

In 2007 , the turnpike commission announced plans to widen the Northeast Extension to six lanes between Mid @-@ County and Lansdale . In January 2008 , work began on the replacement of two bridges over the Northeast Extension to accommodate the widened highway . The widening was

originally expected to be complete in 2013 ; however , construction fell a year behind schedule . Construction on the southern section of the widening project between Mid @-@ County and Lansdale began in January 2011 was finished in October 2014 while work on the northern portion started in May 2014 and will be finished by the end of 2016 . Following the completion of widening this section , the portion of the roadway from Lansdale to Quakertown will be widened to six lanes . In spring 2013 , replacement of bridges began between mileposts 31 and 38 , with work on the actual widening to begin in fall 2016 .

In 1990 , plans were made to build an interchange at PA 903 in Carbon County . A bill authorizing construction of this interchange was signed into law by Governor Casey in July of that year . Plans for this interchange were cancelled by the turnpike commission in 1995 . In 2006 , plans for an interchange at PA 903 were resurrected , with the proposed interchange to be all @-@ electronic , in that it will only accept E @-@ ZPass . Construction on the \$ 23 million interchange began in the middle of 2008 . The interchange opened to traffic on June 30 , 2015 .

On April 28 , 2016 , plans were announced for a " Scranton Beltway " to use I @-@ 476 as a bypass for I @-@ 81 around the heavily congested segment through Scranton and its suburbs . The turnpike between the two I @-@ 81 interchanges carries an average of 10 @,@ 000 vehicles per day vs. 70 @,@ 000 on the parallel segment of I @-@ 81 . This project will build two high @-@ speed connections between I @-@ 476 and I @-@ 81 : one south of Scranton in Dupont and one north of Scranton in South Abington Township . Tolls on the connections will be paid with E @-@ ZPass or toll @-@ by @-@ plate . Construction on this project , which is expected to cost \$ 160 million , could begin as soon as 2021 .

= = Exit list = =

The old exit numbers (31 and upward) on the turnpike Northeast Extension were a continuation of old exit numbers 1 through 30 on the east @-@ west turnpike . On the east @-@ west turnpike , the interchange with I @-@ 476 was old exit 25A because it was between old exits 25 and 26 on the east ? west turnpike .