

## DOT shares plan to ease flooding on Route 40, one of AC's main evacuation routes

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WEST ATLANTIC CITY— The road elevation of a one-mile stretch of a Black Horse Pike looks like a kiddie roller coaster.

It rises, then falls, then rises again, ever so slightly, according to Department of Transportation blueprints.

On Tuesday, the state agency shared details of its \$27.5 million project to lift that section of the Black Horse Pike to the same height in order to ease flooding there, as dozens of people packed inside the West Atlantic City firehouse listened on.

"All those low points that are catching water, they're all going to be brought up to the same elevation," said Steve Arbiz, of WSP USA, the design consultant hired by the state.

About eight times a year, one of the main evacuation routes out of Atlantic City floods, halting traffic and shutting businesses along a portion of the low-lying Route 40 causeway. The new plan, officials say, will reduce flood events to twice a year.

The project aims to lift Route 40 from Naples Avenue to Bayport Drive by two-and-a-half feet, including sidewalks. State officials say construction will begin in 2022 and be complete by 2025.

"When we raise it, we want to raise it for good," Arbiz said. "To get it to last for years... It's complicated to build, but in the end, it's going to look like the same road."

The project will also address drainage issues, which contribute to the slow retreat of flood water from the pike.

A new outfall pipe will be installed on Venice Avenue, where residents say the current infrastructure is not well maintained and clogs easily. The new tube will be six inches wider, and will include a flap that stops water from spewing back out during severe flooding.

New storm drains will be installed along the road too, the state said.

Previous plans for Route 40 tried to address these problems, but were unsuccessful. A controversial \$6.4 million DOT project completed in 1999 to install three pipes on the road didn't fix drainage issues, residents at the time complained.

Egg Harbor Township Mayor Paul Hodson said officials should also consider a pump station in West Atlantic City, citing ones that have been installed at Fishermen's Park in Atlantic City.

"Hopefully (the DOT) got the message that there is a drainage and water issue," Hodson said. "Hopefully they can cure the problem."

Raising a road is an expensive and complicated feat, and has only been taken on in New Jersey in a few places.

First, crews on the pike will excavate three feet of soil below the current pavement and replace it with lightweight fill and fresh pavement. The current soil is too soft to build on top of and would sink otherwise, Arbiz said.

In Cape May County, a similar project on a smaller stretch of Sea Isle Boulevard in Sea Isle City has taken about years to complete. There, the road was being lifted by four feet, but there are fewer developments along the construction site.

"It's a complicated construction method," Arbiz said.

Some raised concerns over the impact the work could have on businesses and traffic during busy, summer months.

The DOT said the two westbound lanes will remain open throughout construction, but eastbound traffic could be reduced to one lane at times.

"The intention is to get the contractor in and out of here as fast as possible... It's challenging, they're going to need to get a lot of folks out there," Arbiz said.