

WHEN ENGINEERING MEETS PUBLIC OPINION: Rethinking Who Leads the Conversation

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9/15/26

CHALLENGE

- 85-year-old roadway undergoing reconstruction and modernization – ORT, total recon, demo
- Projects generate concerns about eminent domain, noise, environment, and traffic disruptions
- Without a consistent message; small groups of opponents shape the narrative
- Communication processes relied more heavily on engineering processes



'We don't want it' Strong opposition voiced against Turnpike project to cut mountain

by Stoker Wieczorek | Thu, September 26, 2024 at 10:33 PM

Updated Fri, September 27, 2024 at 11:55 AM



When communications are driven by technical processes instead of stakeholder needs, information gaps allow others to shape the narrative.



If you aren't talking about you someone else will.



Grow your sphere of influence through information share and partnership.



Get ahead, be proactive, don't wonder...act.

ACTION

- Build a proactive, benefits-driven message.
- Active listening to residents and impacted parties; understand and answer the intent of inquiries
- Sentiment tracking
- Consistent communications; tailored for the audience
- Expanded outreach beyond directly impacted residents
- Build relationships before construction begins - Proactive media and social strategy



The Allegheny Mountain Realignment Project

The Allegheny Mountain Realignment Project aims to modernize a key section of the Pennsylvania Turnpike in Somerset County, replacing the Allegheny Tunnel, which is deteriorating and is increasingly challenging to maintain, with a new seven-lane road to meet today's mobility and safety standards.

The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission (PA Turnpike) has been evaluating this project and working with the community for more than 20 years.

After evaluating several options, including rehabilitation of the current tunnel, replacing the tunnel proved to be the safest and most cost-effective solution. The project is now in preliminary engineering and design, with ongoing data collection and public input through 2028.

Why It Matters: This segment has a crash rate roughly three times higher than similar segments statewide due to the constraints of narrow shoulders and limited medians, and its successful completion would reduce long-standing operational constraints, support growing freight demands, and enhance traveler experience.

The Allegheny Mountain Realignment Project reflects a proactive effort to bring aging transportation infrastructure up to 21st-century standards – improving safety, efficiency, and economic connectivity across a critical east-west corridor.

Key Benefits

Enhanced Safety

Reduces crashes, improves incident response times, and enhances safety for motorists, first responders and highway workers by realigning the road and improving its design.

Improved Mobility and Reduced Congestion

Builds a modern alignment, additional travel lanes and a dedicated truck climbing lane to ease congestion caused by capacity limits at the existing tunnel – especially important in high-use and peak travel periods.

Economic and Freight Efficiency

Removes hazardous-material detours onto local roads, reducing community impacts, improving freight mobility and supporting regional commerce.

Long-Term Infrastructure Sustainability

Addresses aging tunnels nearing the end of their useful life by providing a strategic, long-term infrastructure solution that avoids costly, disruptive maintenance and short-term fixes.



Strategic communications build trust and strengthen project outcomes.

OUTCOMES

- Communications is part of project delivery
- More consistent, customer-focused messaging
- Telling our story in the media and on digital
- Better prepared elected officials and community partners to answer constituent questions
- Building relationships before projects begin



Effective communications begin long before construction starts.

February 19, 2026

Travel

Maintenance & Construction

The Allegheny Mountain Realignment Project: Enhancing Safety, Access and Mobility



PRINCIPLES IN ACTION



Early communication builds trust before the project starts.



Customized communications increase understanding among **diverse audiences**.



Transparency reduces uncertainty and **misinformation**.

Questions?

