

PRESS & JOURNAL

Amtrak station work still set for 2020; track relocation being done; opening possible in 2 years

by Dan Miller
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Track relocation work, such as the railroad bridge passing over Wood Street where this equipment is staged, is crucial before construction of the new Amtrak station can begin. The relocation work is proceeding as scheduled, PennDOT tells the Press & Journal.

STAFF PHOTO BY DAN MILLER



Construction of the new Amtrak train station in Middletown is still set to start sometime in 2020. All of a sudden, that's not far off.

Work leading up to the new station on West Main Street is progressing as scheduled, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation officials tell the Press & Journal.

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The new station will be ready to open to the public in 2021 or 2022, consistent with the timetable previously announced by PennDOT, they said, although there has been little activity at the site in many months. Grass is growing high in the fenced-off area where the station will be located, in between the paved parking lot areas.

Track relocation work that must be done before station construction can begin is proceeding as planned and on schedule, said PennDOT spokeswoman Ashley Schoch.

Norfolk Southern has its contractors on site. Amtrak is scheduled to begin moving its track after Norfolk Southern is done.

Middletown borough staff recently met with a PennDOT engineer to go over electric utility design requirements for the new station, borough Manager Ken Klinepeter told the Press & Journal.

However, there will be no overhead pedestrian bridge over West Main Street — Route 230.

The original plan called for building the overhead bridge to connect Penn State Harrisburg on the north side of West Main with the new train station, and with the extended Emaus Street pathway to downtown that is also part of the train station project.

But the estimated \$7 million cost to build the bridge was deemed too expensive.

Instead, PennDOT has proposed ground enhancements to West Main Street aimed at making it easier for pedestrians and bicyclists to cross the street.

“We have developed some conceptual design improvements for pedestrians crossing Route 230” that include crosswalks, pedestrian lighting, and advanced pedestrian crossing signage, Schoch said. “PennDOT is working through the final design and approvals for these improvements.”

Schoch did not say when these pedestrian improvements will be put in place along West Main Street, but that “construction phasing for the station and all associated improvements will be developed in the upcoming months.”

PennDOT also reported nothing new regarding plans to find a private developer to partner with PennDOT on the train station project, under the state’s public-private-partnership “P3” program.

In early 2017, PennDOT announced that Keystone Connections, a private development group, was interested in partnering with PennDOT and being responsible for any commercial development to be associated with the new train station.

As stated previously by PennDOT, that can include anything from retail establishments to a new hotel, as long as the station property provides at least 400 parking spaces.

But Keystone Connections withdrew from the station plan in late 2018, saying according to PennDOT that “revenues generated by potential commercial development and parking fees” would not be enough to support development costs and to fund ongoing operating and maintenance expenses.

“At this time, there is no active P3 initiative; however (PennDOT) will reconsider a potential P3 at future phases,” Schoch said.

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Jenny Granger, PennDOT's manager of the Middletown train station project, told borough council last November that it might be easier for PennDOT to attract a new P3 partner once definitive "signs of construction" are clearly evident on the train station property.

PennDOT has budgeted \$32 million to support the new Middletown train station.

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