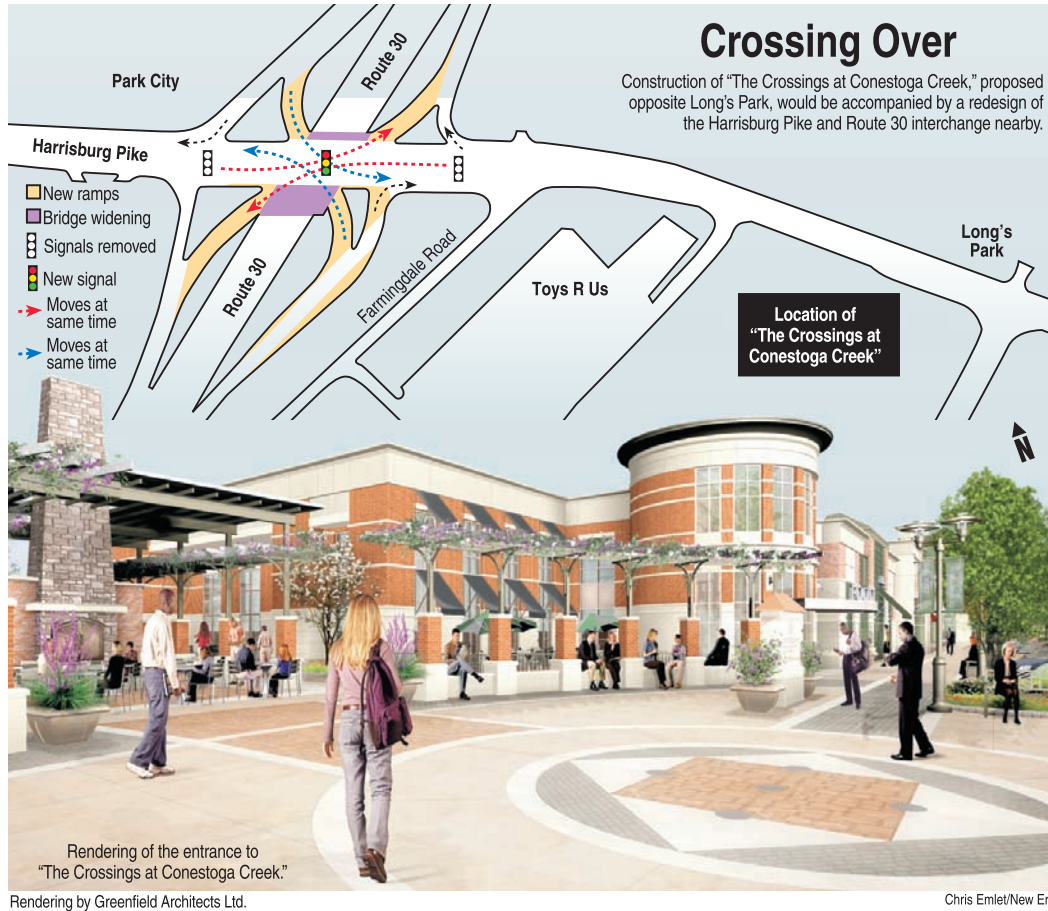


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UNCLOGGING an ARTERY



\$25M roadwork plan designed to ease Harrisburg Pike traffic flow past proposed shopping center near Long's Park.

By TIM MEKEEL / New Era Staff Writer

It's not an issue of how many.

It's an issue of how quickly, says High Real Estate Group.

Although its proposed Harrisburg Pike shopping center will cause a sharp rise in traffic, High is offering a package of road upgrades that it says will make traffic on that strained roadway flow better than it does today.

Much better.

Not only will its \$25 million road plan offset the impact of "The Crossings at Conestoga Creek," it also will negate congestion that otherwise will get worse and worse, due to other development in the area, High spokesmen say.

In a recent presentation to the Manheim Township planning commission, High officials said weekday evening rush-hour traffic

on Harrisburg Pike now waits 95 seconds on average to cross Route 30.

In 2029, without "The Crossings" and the road work that would come with it, High predicts the average wait will worsen to 183 seconds — about twice as long — due to overall growth in the area.

But with "The Crossings" and the accompanying road work, that wait will be slashed to 29 seconds.

That's about a third of the current wait and a sixth of the future wait.

"The focus isn't so much on how many cars as it is, how long does it take the cars to use the road system?" said Steve Evans, managing director of High's retail division.

The already burdened Harrisburg Pike is destined for more strain, whether or not "The Crossings" comes, High says.

About 2,300 vehicles now travel the road during the average weekday rush-hour. That volume will climb to about 2,700 by 2020 without "The Crossings," according to High's traffic study.

With "The Crossings," though, it would jump to about 3,500.

But Evans said, "It doesn't matter if it's a hundred cars or a million cars, if you've got the right system to handle them."

High unveiled "The Crossings" in March 2006, a \$100 million project proposed on a 90-acre industrially zoned farm opposite Long's Park, but at that time the roadwork plan was less specific.

Evans and Ben Bamford, High's senior development manager, in an interview with the New Era this week, described how the road plan and its funding have been fleshed out since then.



Harrisburg Pike under this railroad bridge would be widened to four lanes as part of proposed roadwork for “The Crossings” shopping center.

Though still in the conceptual stage, the plan’s new elements would occur along 1.4 miles of Harrisburg Pike from Plaza Boulevard to Dillerville Road and President Avenue.

The work would include:

Widening Harrisburg Pike as it passes under the Norfolk Southern railroad bridge to four lanes from two.

Widening Harrisburg Pike from that bridge, going westward past the project site, to four lanes from two.

Adding turning lanes, medians and a pedestrian crosswalk, and improving the traffic signal at the main entrance for “The Crossings,” opposite the main entrance to Long’s Park.

Widening Farmingdale Road from Harrisburg Pike to a side entrance to “The Crossings” and adding a southbound left-turn lane into that entrance.

Adding turning lanes and improving the traffic signals at the intersection of Harrisburg Pike with Dillerville Road and President Avenue.

Improving traffic signals on Harrisburg Pike at Plaza Boulevard, at the entrance to Park City (opposite La-Z-Boy), at the entrance to Toys R Us and at the entrance to the waste authority transfer station.

Several key aspects are the same as a year ago, though, as High continues through the township approval process toward a targeted opening in fall 2010.

“The Crossings” would be the county’s first “lifestyle” center, with a mix of small specialty and larger stores, plus restaurants and entertainment among its 120 tenants. They’d be arranged on both sides of a “main street” boulevard.

The open-air center, resembling the commercial district of a small town, would measure up to 650,000 square feet, making it the second-largest center in the county.

Yet “The Crossings” would be built at the Deisley farm only if the roadwork plan gets approved and funded, because Harrisburg Pike already is severely congested, says High.

“It’s a significant project for High. But it’s also a significant project for the community,” said Bamford.

Some 2,000 jobs, \$2 million in annual property tax revenue, various environmental improvements and the extensive road upgrades are tied

to “The Crossings,” he noted.

Evans emphasized that “The Crossings” would provide the spark for roadwork that’s badly needed already, years before the center could open.

In contrast, if the industrially zoned farmland were to become a factory or distribution center, it’s “highly unlikely” that its developer would tackle such a sweeping upgrade of the road system, said Evans.

“Ultimately, this type of improvement has to occur. If this project won’t be the catalyst for it, what will be?” he asked.

The centerpiece of the roadwork, as it was a year ago, continues to be the reconfiguration of the frequently clogged Harrisburg Pike bridge and its ramps leading on and off Route 30.

Traffic lights at each end of the bridge would be replaced by a single light in the center, as part of a “single point urban interchange” — only the second in Pennsylvania.

New two-lane ramps for traffic exiting Route 30 and making left turns onto Harrisburg Pike would go across a widened bridge and curve past each other, allowing their vehicles to flow at the same time.

In similar fashion, traffic making left turns off Harrisburg Pike to go down onto Route 30 would use new two-lane ramps. This traffic off Harrisburg Pike would flow at the same time, too.

By adding lanes and having more lanes move at the same time, traffic would proceed on, off and across the bridge in a fraction of the current pace, according to High.

The Harrisburg Pike bridge was improved just six years ago. In 2000 and 2001, it was rebuilt as part of the \$45.7 million reconstruction of Route 30 between Rohrerstown Road and Manheim Pike.

To pay for the new roadwork, High envisions using what Bamford called “a layercake of funding.”

High would contribute \$5 million up front, to finance design work. High also would seek \$10 million from the governor’s discretionary fund and federal transportation appropriations.

The Manheim Township

General Authority has agreed to raise \$10 million in tax-exempt financing, to be repaid by sales and wage taxes from tenants at “The Crossings.”

This financing would be raised through the state Department of Economic and Community Development’s Infrastructure & Facilities Improvement Program.

Other municipalities have used this program, at High’s request, to help fund roadwork around High shopping centers in Harrisburg and York.

Evans and Bamford also emphasized the environmental work that High would perform as part of developing “The Crossings.”

In cooperation with the Little Conestoga Watershed Alliance, an interpretative trail would be built along the Little Conestoga Creek, which winds through the western edge of the tract.

Its banks, as well as the banks of an unnamed tributary that winds across the eastern edge of the property, would be cleaned up and strengthened by the planting of native vegetation.

Besides that work, High would preserve wetlands on the site. In total, more than a fourth of the site would stay in a natural state.

The Deisley farmhouse, which dates to 1799, would be saved, too. It might become an information center for the interpretative trail, a restaurant or something else, High says.

Since unveiling plans for “The Crossings,” High has been working through a multi-step approval process.

In November, the township agreed to amend its zoning ordinance to allow a planned commercial development such as “The Crossings” as a conditional use on tracts that are zoned I-1 industrial (i.e., the Deisley farm) or B-4 business.

High now is before the planners, seeking to have “The Crossings” approved as a conditional use. The planners are set to continue reviewing High’s application on April 18. The township commissioners are expected to vote on the issue May 7.

If “The Crossings” is approved as a conditional use, then High will return to the township for approval of land development plans for it.



This drawing shows the “main street” of “The Crossings” at Conestoga Creek.”