

Frequently Asked Questions: US 340 Rock Slide Repair Project Detour

A section of US 340 near Harpers Ferry will be closed to traffic for 90 days beginning Tuesday, Sept. 12, 2023, for an extensive safety project to remove rock and debris from a mountain high above US 340 where it hugs the Shenandoah River. West Virginia Division of Highways (WVDOH) Chief Engineer of Development Jason Foster, P.E., answers some questions related to the project:

WHY THIS TIME OF YEAR?

WVDOH spoke with a group of local elected officials, who worked with business bureaus and others to determine which 90-day time frame would have the least impact locally. WVDOH said only that it would require a 90-day closure; local officials selected which 90 days. The closure will be for 90 days, but the total duration of the work will last more than that. The complete 90-day closure is necessary due to the nature of the work.

WHY IS THIS PROJECT NECESSARY?

This section of US 340 between the Shenandoah River Bridge and the Virginia state line has a history of rock falls. Some of these rocks are massive rocks weighing tons apiece that have come down suddenly and unexpectedly. Our goal with this project is to remove the loose rocks; do everything we can to scale off anything that may fall uncontrolled, and control those falls, recover the rocks, remove them from the area, and then put up a matting, essentially, that will cover the rocks to reduce the potential for them to fall.

This, in its core, is a safety project, even though the elements to correct it are geotechnical. This is a two-lane road. It's very narrow.

There's not a lot of recovery area. If the rocks fall, you can't go to a median or anywhere else. It's right through the National Park Service. It has the steep cut face on one side, and then the river on the other. So it's a very difficult area to even have a road, and, with the road there, we need to reduce this potential for the rockslides and falls to occur.

WHY MUST THE ROAD BE COMPLETELY CLOSED?

The inherent nature of the work would make it unsafe for the traveling public to be part of the work zone, in any manner. It's a two-lane road, not four-lane, so there's no room to protect the public, and some of these rocks are unpredictable, even while we're trying to bring them down in a controlled manner.

The compound of that question is, could we just pause the traffic? And the answer there is, if something unexpected would happen we could be faced with an immediate and unexpected road closure and have to reroute people at that time. The idea behind this closure for 90 days is, it gives the contractor unrestricted access to perform the work in as short an amount of time as



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possible, without conflicts with the public being in the area to pose risks to them. Overall, this is the safest option, and the most predictable option for everybody using the road.

WHAT IS THE DETOUR ROUTE?

The detour uses West Virginia Route 9, Virginia Route 9, and Virginia 671 to return to 340 on the Virginia side. We have done upgrades at the signalized intersection in Virginia. We've worked with VDOT (the Virginia Department of Transportation) to do what we could within the right-of-way. We've retimed the signals, we've changed the configuration so that the traffic congestion will be minimized.

There will be delays. It will be inconvenient. But we have worked with Virginia to facilitate, as best they would allow us to, that intersection and movements through it.

IS THERE SOMEWHERE THE PUBLIC CAN GO TO GET MORE INFORMATION?

There is. us340harpersferry.com is a website that just gives updates for this project. The detour maps are shown. There's a lot of good information there.

