

Point project nears completion

By Dillon Davis

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A project six years in the making, the City of Delaware's work at The Point is nearing the finish line after 2025 brought considerable progress to the site.

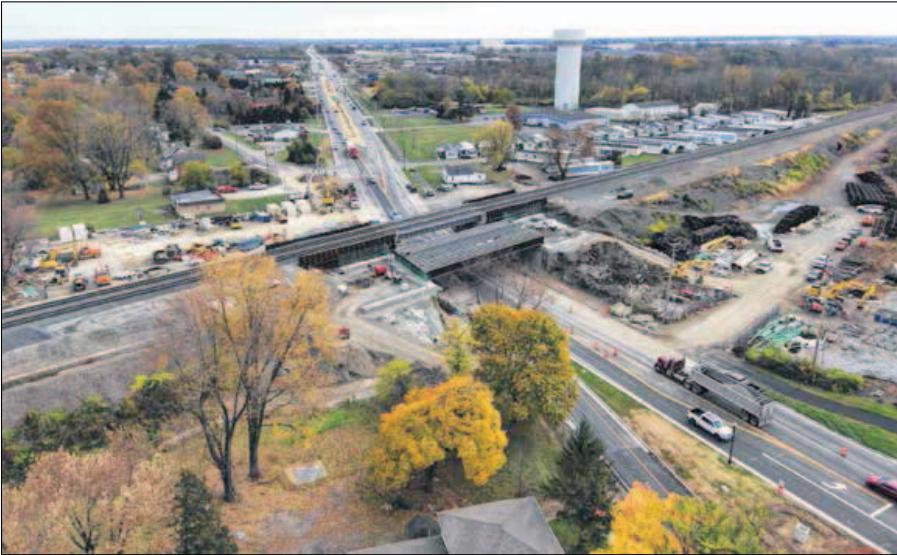
Design work for the project kicked off in 2018 and was completed four years later, sending the project out to bid in January 2023. Sitework began in April 2023, beginning a more than three-year process to bring needed relief to the congestion issues that have long plagued Delaware.

The entire scope of the project includes increasing the number of lanes beneath the Norfolk Southern Railroad bridge, as well as adding a multi-use path on the north side of routes 36/37 extending to the state Route 521 intersection, and a sidewalk along the north side of routes 36/37 extending east to Bowtown Road.

Other improvements include dual approach lanes west of the bridge, which will allow more traffic through the signal on each green light, and intersection improvements at Bowtown Road and state Route 521, including additional turn lanes.

"From a magnitude standpoint, I think it's been described as the largest infrastructure project in the city's history, certainly from a dollars standpoint," City Engineer Jonathan Owen said. "Definitely on the transportation network, it's our largest project ever. If I had to summarize it, the impact is that it is going to improve travel times and foster economic development for trucking and commerce that pass through the area to get into downtown Delaware and between U.S. Route 23 and Interstate 71."

The project is estimated to cost \$44.36 million upon completion in August, with the City contributing \$5.61 million. The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission will have accounted for \$20.74 million of the funding, and the remainder is coming from the state's TRAC and Safety programs, a U.S. Community Projects Grant, and the state's Urban Resurfacing Program.



Courtesy | City of Delaware
An aerial view of the construction taking place at The Point (U.S. Route 36/state Route 37) intersection on the east side of the city of Delaware.

Initially, the estimated project cost was \$23 million, of which \$5.9 million was to come from the City. After engineering design began, the projected cost rose to nearly \$33 million, with the City being responsible for just over \$6.28 million. By the time the design was completed, the final estimate had risen to over \$45 million, with over \$8 million being funded by the City, due to inflation stemming from the COVID pandemic and costs higher than expected for the railroad work.

The City successfully pursued additional grant funding before going to bid to make up the funding shortfall and reduce the amount of direct City funding to \$5.61 million.

"It increased quite a bit," Owen said of the fluctuating cost projections. "As a project develops, you have a conceptual estimate even before you start engineering. Once you get into engineering, you actually start to get some detailed cost estimates. Those are when you actually start getting accurate numbers. We did see a fair amount of increase right as the design was getting finished and before we went to bid, which was kind of in that inflationary period at the tail end of COVID. We did have to get some more funding lined up."

Prior to 2025, the temporary railroad bridge was constructed while the old railroad bridge had been demolished. This past year, Owen said all project components east of the railroad bridge were completed, including road reconstruction, additional turn lanes, and the addition of a raised median.

Near the end of last year, the intersection improvements at state Route 521 were completed.

"Everything east to Bowtown Road is complete except for the final asphalt surfacing, which will go on at the very end. So that was one of the big accomplishments," Owen said.

Another big milestone for the project in 2025 was the installation of the steel girders for the permanent railroad bridge, which was done in October. Work on completing the railroad bridge continues into this year.

Last year also saw the full closure of Central Avenue for 30 days in August and into September to accommodate roadway widening work on the north half of William Street at the Central Avenue intersection.

As for what's left, the permanent bridge is still being constructed, with the Norfolk Southern Railroad tentatively scheduled to switch the tracks from the temporary bridge to the permanent bridge in April.

"That will allow for the temporary bridge to be removed, and then for the rest of the road widening underneath the bridge to be completed," Owen said. "Right now, until the rail traffic is switched to the permanent bridge, there's not enough width underneath. The temporary bridge isn't wide enough to do all the road work. As soon as the rail traffic is switched over and the temporary bridge is removed, then the last remaining railroad work can take place in the railroad right-of-way, which will widen the road and create the new travel and turn lanes and the sidewalk and shared-use paths."

Owen said a second closure of Central Avenue is also planned this year to complete additional improvements along that road. Included in the project is a full-width and full-depth reconstruction of Central Avenue up to East Street.

Owen joined the City in 2017 as a project engineer before becoming the deputy city engineer in 2022. At that time, he became involved with The Point project and took over management as the final funding was secured and the project moved into construction.

While always expected to be a challenging project for a variety of reasons, Owen said

the process has been relatively smooth with the exception of some early delays in receiving railroad approvals, which caused the completion date for the project to shift from last fall to this August.

"It set back the timing of getting that temporary bridge installed, and then that snowballed and pushed everything else out because certain things couldn't take place until that bridge was installed," he said.

Having overseen the project since it went to construction, Owen said it's "pretty exciting" to close in on the final stages and inch closer to realizing the full scope of the plan.

"I think the reason it's exciting for the city and for the broader region is that it's been a known project that's needed to happen for a number of years, and the old railroad bridge that caused the constraint with only being able to fit two lanes of traffic underneath, that had been in place for approximately 100 years," Owen said. "My expectation is that the infrastructure that we're installing out there should be able to have its own 100-year lifespan on it. My hope is that what we're seeing take shape out there will be in place for decades and decades, certainly the rest of my career and beyond. Hopefully, it will serve the community well and bring a notable improvement in everybody's commute."

Owen added that the improvements should also bring about a significant increase in safety.

"We're decreasing congestion, which has a safety benefit to the traveling public," he said. "And we're substantially increasing the safety of pedestrians, whether they're walking to and from work or the grocery store, or recreationally. This project is going to vastly improve that with the shared-use path all the way out to state Route 521 and, on the opposite side of the road, connecting the Central Avenue sidewalk system over to Bowtown Road. That's going to be a big improvement as well."

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