

# I-81 construction stretches to 2010

By JESSICA WEBER  
STAFF WRITER  
JLW5506@PSU.EDU

Orange Signs. Orange Cones. Reflectors hitting the light and workers in bright yellow vests. These are the colors of construction. There are several construction projects planned for the Harrisburg area in November that are going to affect commuters.

According to Pat Kelly of PennDOT there is only one month of construction time left before winter. One major project just starting is the reconstruction of the George Wade Bridge. The construction will take place on a stretch of I-81 in Cumberland County, Susquehanna Township, and Harrisburg. There will be three lanes open going northbound and southbound including an express lane. This construction will cause some delays and will be completed by May 2012.

On I-81 going northbound and southbound from exit 48 in South Middleton Twp. to the George

Wade Bridge in East Pennsboro Township there will be some concrete patching and paving. This may result in shifting traffic patterns and temporary lane restrictions which could cause delays until July 2010 - the expected completion date according to the PennDOT website.

Also, on PA 441 in Middletown there will be some paving going both directions so drivers can expect shifting traffic patterns and temporary lane constrictions. The construction will stretch for 2.06 miles. PennDOT stated that this project is supposed to be completed by this December.

For commuters the construction should not cause too many delays. For student and commuter Austin Rhoads, it takes twenty five minutes to commute to campus and the construction could be a hassle, "Road construction is really annoying and gets old real quick but it needs to get done especially around here," Rhoads says. With a slight delay and another month the roads should be clear of all those colors of construction.

# New software helps avoid 'overloads' on finals week

By ALLISON MILLS  
ASSISTANT EDITOR  
MXA932@PSU.EDU

Penn State Harrisburg changed its system of scheduling final exams this semester from the old matrix method to match University Park's method. Most Penn State campuses now use the software Infosilem for generating final exam schedules, but many other colleges still use a matrix system, according to PSH Registrar, Margaret Boman.

"[The change] was all about service," said Boman. Students and professors can now access their personalized final exam schedules through eLion.

Another advantage of the new scheduling system is that only classes giving final exams will be scheduled. Approximately 340 courses were scheduled for finals this semester. "As part of the program, we needed to know who was offering finals and who wasn't so we're able to schedule just the space that's in use during final exam week. In the past, we

sort of assumed that everyone was giving a final, and so all space was in use," said Boman.

Boman said the new method is a lot clearer and easier to understand. Interpreting the schedule composed by the matrix system confused students and even some professors, she said. Now, however, students and professors only need to log into eLion to view their schedules.

All went smoothly with the new software until the time came to upload the schedule into eLion. To do so, said Boman, the schedule is sent to University Park through a pass-through file. When University Park updated their final exam schedule, no one cleared the pass-through file, so PSH courses were grouped with UP courses, which resulted in multiple locations for PSH finals. This issue was resolved as of Thursday, Oct. 15.

Despite the new system, which Boman predicted will decrease the number of problems in the future, students still had conflicts. Boman said only a handful of direct conflicts, or having

exams scheduled for the same time, needed to be resolved. The registrar's office also resolved about 40 overload conflicts, or having three exams scheduled in back-to-back time slots. The period to resolve an overload conflict ended on Oct. 18, but students may still request a resolution by contacting the registrar's office, located in Swatara Building.

The biggest complaint with the new system is having classes scheduled on a day other than the days the class meets, said Boman. But the system is set up this way to avoid overload conflicts, said Boman.

Another disadvantage of switching to the Infosilem is that the final exam schedule will not be ready until after the drop/add period, or about five weeks into the semester. With the matrix system, the schedule was available at the start of classes.

Boman was pleased overall with the switch. "A final exam schedule sounds a lot more simple than it is," she explained. But overall it should reduce conflicts and confusion, she said

# Philly transit strike a tough sell in down economy

By KATHY MATHESON  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

Even in the best of times, waking up to a surprise transit strike is like a bad dream come true. When the sudden walkout comes during an economic downturn, it becomes more like a public relations nightmare.

The Philadelphia transit system's largest union went on strike early Tuesday over wage, pension and health care issues, stalling the city's bus, subway and trolley operations and forcing thousands of commuters to find other ways to get to work — and to Election Day polls.

"I think they have a lot of nerve to ask for more money in this economy," said Robert Washington, of west Philadelphia, who relied on his bicycle to get to his office job downtown. "There are people who don't have jobs who would love to have one of their jobs. It's arrogant."

The sudden strike by Transport Workers Union Local 234 all but crippled the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation

Authority, which averages more than 928,000 trips each weekday. No new negotiations were scheduled Tuesday.

Labor experts agree that a walkout over wages in a down economy is a hard sell. Striking transit workers may have a tough time earning the sympathy of passengers who are losing their own jobs and taking salary cuts, said Harley Shaiken, a labor studies professor at the University of California-Berkeley.

"For public employees during a tough recession, it's more difficult, but not impossible, to gain broader support," Shaiken said. "The key is convincing people that your victory benefits them rather than comes at their expense."

Gov. Ed Rendell, who helped mediate negotiations for the past four days, was stunned when the union walked out on a proposed deal that included an 11.5 percent wage increase over five years.

Given the recession, layoffs and salary freezes in other sectors, Rendell said SEPTA's offer was "sensational."

"It's just an excellent contract in the context of the times," he said. "It was, in my judgment, nuts

to walk out. I think the SEPTA workers would have jumped at this."

Several messages left with the union by The Associated Press seeking further comment on the negotiations were not returned Tuesday.

As recently as Monday evening, union officials had given no walkout deadline as talks continued. So early morning commuters on Tuesday were bewildered and frustrated by locked subway stations and vacant bus stops.

"Everybody hates SEPTA, and this is why," said Ranisha Allen, who said she had no option but to count on the kindness of car-owning neighbors to get her to work from her north Philadelphia home. "These people go on strike and they don't think about people they hurt, people who can't get to work, kids who can't get to school."

Willie Brown, the local's president, said workers decided to strike at 3 a.m. Tuesday after both sides agreed that they had gone as far as they could in negotiations.

Generally speaking, management can afford to be tougher in an

economic downturn in part because more labor is available, said Robert Trumble, director of the Virginia Labor Studies Center at Virginia Commonwealth University.

At the same time, he said, workers are more determined to hang on to what they have and tend to look more critically at things like income distribution.

Philadelphia did avoid a black eye over the weekend after the union, which represents more than 5,000 SEPTA drivers, operators and mechanics, held off on its threat to strike while the city hosted three World Series games. The subway ferries thousands of fans to the baseball stadium.

But coming as it did on Election Day, there were complaints that voters scrambling to find alternate transportation would be left with no time to cast ballots. A judge turned down a request to keep polls open an hour later.

Wednesday will be another test as the Philadelphia public schools, which were closed for Election Day, reopen. On an average weekday, about 54,000 public and parochial students take SEPTA to school.

"Our expectations are for students and employees to do their best to come to school," district spokesman Fernando Gallard said. "We're just hoping for the best here."

The strike also affects buses that serve the suburbs in Bucks, Montgomery and Chester counties. Regional rail service is still operating, but trains were delayed as they experienced larger-than-normal crowds.

Union workers, who earn an average of \$52,000 a year, are seeking an annual 4 percent wage hike and want to keep the current 1 percent contribution they make toward the cost of their health care coverage. They have been without a contract since March.

SEPTA was offering an 11.5 percent wage increase over five years, with a \$1,250 signing bonus in the first year, and increases in workers' pensions, SEPTA spokesman Richard Maloney said.

"We're very anxious to get back to the bargaining table, ASAP," Maloney said. "We haven't heard back from them."

A 2005 SEPTA strike lasted seven days, while a 1998 transit strike lasted for 40 days.