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Contact: Anthony Puglisi
973-621-2542
Lauren Shears
973-621-1590

ESSEX COUNTY EXECUTIVE DIVINCENZO ANNOUNCES PLANS TO ENHANCE SAFETY AND DRAINAGE ALONG SOUTH ORANGE AVENUE

Federally funded, $30 Million Project to Reshape Roadway through Essex County South Mountain Reservation

Essex County, NJ – On Monday, April 14th, Essex County Executive Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr. announced plans for the largest road improvement project undertaken by Essex County in the last generation – the $30 million reconstruction of South Orange Avenue to flatten the curves in the road, enhance motor vehicle safety and storm drainage, and make the road meet modern traffic design standards. The two-year, federally-funded project focuses on the two-mile stretch of South Orange Avenue that passes through Essex County South Mountain Reservation.

Work on the project began earlier in April and is scheduled to continue for the next two years. During construction, one lane of traffic will be maintained in both directions; lane closures are not anticipated.

"The public relies on our network of County roads to travel to work, school and conduct their daily lives, and South Orange Avenue is a major east-west thoroughfare. While stretch of road through Essex County South Mountain Reservation offers some picturesque views, the sharp turns and lack of shoulders on the side of the road create hazardous driving conditions and are prone to flooding," DiVincenzo said. "The Federal Highway Administration identified this section of South Orange Avenue as being dangerous over a decade ago and we are pleased that federal money was made available to make these improvements," he added.

Elected officials who attended the press conference voiced their support of the project:

"We have to do what is necessary to improve the safety conditions on our roads, and this project will do just that. The County Executive has placed a lot of attention on making this area a destination and improve the road conditions will make coming here more attractive," Assemblyman Thomas Giblin said. "An added plus of this project is the jobs that will be created for the construction trades, who have been hurting over the last several years because of the difficult economy," he added.

"This road is always closed at the beginning of very storm because the conditions become so compromised," Sheriff Armando Fontoura said. "The work being done here is critical and crucial to the safety of our motorists," he pointed out.

"I reside in the area, so I know how important this project is," Freeholder Vice President Patricia Sebold said. "This stretch of roadway has always been a problem and we all knew it needed to be changed. I am so thrilled that we have reached the day when the changes will be made," she added.

"Everyone who drives along the S-curves knows the road could be safer. Public safety is our number one goal, and the goal of this project is to improve the road," Freeholder Leonard Luciano said.

The Federal Highway Administration identified the 1.6-mile section of South Orange Avenue between the intersection of Brookside Drive/Cherry Lane in Millburn to the intersection with Harding Drive in South Orange as being deficient as many as 10 years ago. The road in that area floods regularly and, as a result, is usually closed to traffic during inclement weather. In addition, the sharp curves in the road and the lack of a shoulder result in limited sight lines, and make entering and exiting existing turnoff areas very difficult and dangerous.

A variety of improvements will be made to South Orange Avenue to enhance safety and drainage, as well as promote access to the reservation and its system of trails. They include the following:

- The roadway will be re-aligned to reduce the sharpness of the curves.
- The roadway will be widened so that a shoulder can be created in the eastbound direction.
- Traffic signal equipment at the intersections of Brookside Drive/Cherry Lane in Millburn and Glenview Road in South Orange will be modernized.
- Retention swales along the side of the road will be constructed to address flooding and reduce water runoff from the road into the reservation.
- Guide rails and lighting will be installed to enhance safety. The new lights will include traditional overhead cobra-head street lights and decorative gas-lamp style lamps.
- A new pedestrian bridge over the roadway near the Girl Scout Camp and an existing pedestrian and equine bridge will be reconstructed. The two bridges will be designed with stone facing to complement the natural area of the reservation.
- Turnoff and parking areas will be upgraded to improve sight lines and make it easier to exit and enter the roadway. This will enhance access to walking trails that start or pass by these parking areas.
- More than 3,600 trees and additional landscaping will be planted to replace the 430 trees that were cut down. In addition, areas in the reservation that were affected by Hurricane Sandy will be replanted.

“My administration has focused our attention on preserving and expanding our open space inventory throughout Essex County. While the roadway construction will have an environmental impact, we are mitigating this by planting thousands of new trees, addressing water run off by improving road drainage and accelerating regrowth of areas damaged by Superstorm Sandy with new landscape and plantings,” the County Executive pointed out.

French and Parrello Associates, Consulting Engineers, from Wall, NJ, received a $1.6 million contract to design the roadway improvements. New Prince Concrete Construction from Hackensack was awarded a publicly bid contract for 25,915,389.50 to perform the construction. The Essex County Public Works Department is monitoring the project to ensure delays are avoided. Funding for the project is being provided by a federal transportation grant.