Improved transportation conditions for the Monongahela River Valley (Mon Valley) have long been a goal of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Initial expressway planning in the 1960s was to serve the Mon Valley’s world-ranked industries of steel, coal and coke production. With the economic decline of the Mon Valley in the late 1970s and 1980s, the planning efforts were refocused with the intent that better highway access and mobility would help redevelopment efforts in the area. PA Act 61 of 1985 and Act 26 of 1991 elevated the priority of developing the Mon/Fayette Expressway and Southern Beltway projects.

The latest development for these projects came in 2013 with the passage of a state law that helped increase available funding. The transportation-funding law known as Act 89 provided a new funding stream needed progress on the next stages of the Mon/Fayette Expressway and Southern Beltway projects.

The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission (PTC) followed environmental and planning regulations established under the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Section 404 of the Federal Clean Water Act, and other federal and state laws in developing the Mon/Fayette Expressway and Southern Beltway projects. These regulations mandate that major transportation projects be developed in an environmentally sensitive manner that addresses input from the public and environmental resource agencies. As a result, a full range of alternatives (including no-build, transit, roadway upgrades and new highways) were considered. Environmental clearances (Records of Decision) have been obtained for all seven Mon/Fayette Expressway and Southern Beltway projects.

Completion of the Mon/Fayette Expressway and Southern Beltway projects will create about 98 miles of new limited-access highways south and west of Pittsburgh in Allegheny, Washington and Fayette counties.

A computer rendering of the finished Southern Beltway Interchange with U.S. Route 22 (the beltway runs horizontally).
The proposed, 30-mile, limited-access highway known as the Southern Beltway is located between Interstate 376 near the Pittsburgh International Airport and the Mon/Fayette Expressway (Turnpike 43) near Finleyville, PA. The Southern Beltway—a tolled, four-lane facility—consists of three independent but interconnected projects that have different project needs, schedules and funding opportunities. The three project area extend from Interstate 376 to U.S. Route 22; Route 22 to Interstate 79, and from I-79 to the Mon/Fayette Expressway.

I-376 TO U.S. ROUTE 22
OPEN TO TRAFFIC – OCTOBER, 2006

The Southern Beltway I-376 to Route 22 Project, also known as the Findlay Connector, was the first section to be constructed and opened to traffic in October, 2006. This project begins at the existing Pittsburgh International Airport (PAA) Midfield Terminal Interchange on I-376. It then proceeds southward 6 miles to an interchange with Route 22 between the existing Bavington and PA Route 980 interchanges. This project provides quicker access to the PIA and reduces traffic volumes on US 22 and I-376. The total project cost was $236 million.

U.S. ROUTE 22 TO I-79

The Route 22 to I-79 project begins at the southern terminus of the Findlay Connector at the Route 22 Interchange and proceeds 13 miles southeast to an interchange with I-79 at a local connection at Morganza Road near the Allegheny/Washington County line. In 2014, construction was started on the bridges that will carry the Southern Beltway over Route 22. The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission (PTC) is acquiring the right-of-way required to permit construction of the entire project. The construction of the first mainline section (2 mile) for the project is scheduled for late 2016 with completion of the entire project scheduled for 2020. The PTC was able to advance the Route 22 to I-79 project in the spring of 2016, as part of a boost in funding from Act 89—a transportation-funding law passed in the fall of 2013. Total project cost is estimated to be $670 million.

I-79 TO THE MON/FAYETTE EXPRESSWAY

This project begins with the interchange at I-79 near the Allegheny/Washington County line and proceeds approximately 12.5 miles eastward to a new interchange with the Mon/Fayette Expressway near Finleyville. The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the project was approved in December, 2004. Design was started in 2004 but halted in 2009 due to lack of funding. Act 89 has provided funding allowing for a restart of the project. The project described in the EIS starts at an interchange with PA Route 51 in Jefferson Hills Borough and proceeds northward crossing the Monongahela River near Duquesne. At the Monongahela River, the project splits into two legs; one leg proceeds northeast to an interchange with Interstate 376/Parkway East near Monroeville, the other leg proceeds west along the north shore of the river to an interchange with I-376, near Bates Street in Pittsburgh. Available funding provided by Act 89 requires a significant reduction in the project cost and the Turnpike Commission has eliminated the west leg of the original project to reduce costs and residential and business displacements. Reevaluation of the EIS is proceeding to determine the consequences of reducing the scope of the original project. When all environmental issues are satisfied, the Turnpike Commission intends to proceed with final design of the amended project.

SOUTHERN BELTWAY

- 1-376 to U.S. 22 (I-80 5/49) Open to Traffic
- U.S. 22 to I-79 (I-80 5/48) Final Design
- I-79 to Mon/Fayette (I-80 5/49) Environmental Study Complete

MON/FAYETTE EXPRESSWAY

- I-68 to Turnpike 43 (I-80 9/46) Open to Traffic
- I-70 to PA-51 (I-80 5/49) Final Design
- PA-51 to Pittsburgh (I-80 12/06) Open to Traffic

The project from PA Route 51 to I-376 is the largest and most expensive of the Mon/Fayette and Southern Beltway projects. The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for this project was approved in December, 2004. Design was started in 2004 but halted in 2009 due to lack of funding. Act 89 has provided funding allowing for a restart of the project. The project described in the EIS starts at an interchange with PA Route 51 in Jefferson Hills Borough and proceeds northward crossing the Monongahela River near Duquesne. At the Monongahela River, the project splits into two legs; one leg proceeds northeast to an interchange with Interstate 376/Parkway East near Monroeville, the other leg proceeds west along the north shore of the river to an interchange with I-376, near Bates Street in Pittsburgh. Available funding provided by Act 89 requires a significant reduction in the project cost and the Turnpike Commission has eliminated the west leg of the original project to reduce costs and residential and business displacements. Reevaluation of the EIS is proceeding to determine the consequences of reducing the scope of the original project. When all environmental issues are satisfied, the Turnpike Commission intends to proceed with final design of the amended project.

SOUTHERN BELTWAY PROJECTS

I-70 TO PA ROUTE 51
OPEN TO TRAFFIC – APRIL, 2002

This project extends from an interchange with Interstate 70, near Speers, Washington County and generally parallels the Monongahela River for 17 miles to the interchange at Route 51 in Jefferson Hills Borough, Allegheny County. The roadway opened to traffic in April, 2002 with a total project cost of $643 million.

UNIONTOWN TO BROWNSVILLE AREA
OPEN TO TRAFFIC – JULY, 2012

This project begins with an interchange at U.S. Route 119 north of Uniontown, Fayette County and proceeds northwest 15 miles to an interchange with PA Route 88 in Centerville Borough, Washington County. The project was constructed in two phases. Phase I of this project, from Route 51 to the Brownsville Connector, broke ground in the spring of 2006 and opened to traffic in October, 2008. In addition, an interchange with Route 51 and Route 119 was opened in December, 2010. Phase II construction extends the mainline near U.S. Route 46 across the Monongahela River linking Route 88 with Turnpike 43. Phase II of this $862 million project opened to traffic in July, 2012.

I-68 TO PA TURNPIKE 43
OPEN TO TRAFFIC – MARCH, 2000

This project, also known as the Mason-Dixon Link, begins with an interchange at Interstate 68 east of Morgantown, WV. It then proceeds north four miles to join the Pennsylvania section of the Expressway, which is nearly eight miles long. It ends with an interchange at Big Six Road and Turnpike 43 near Fairchance. The Pennsylvania section, north of Gans Road, had a total project cost of approximately $157 million and opened to traffic in March, 2000. The West Virginia section is nearly four miles long and opened to traffic in July, 2011.