everyone who travels through Gap knows: Be patient and allow some extra time.

The intersection of Routes 30 and 41 is notorious for daily traffic backups. Never good, the jams grow worse in summer and toward the weekend.

On a recent Friday around 1:45 p.m., eastbound vehicles on Route 30 were stopped for more than a mile. The line stretched all the way to Brackbill Road, where Urban Outfitters' mammoth e-commerce fulfillment center is taking shape.

PennDOT says the changes will give the intersection and reroute westbound traffic onto a short bypass running through farmland north of town.

The two-year, $10.5 million project will get underway after winter, though some preliminary work could occur late this year. PennDOT says the changes

Maximum Overdrive
Why are so many trucks in Gap anyway?

Why do so many tractor-trailers pass through Gap? In large part, it's because of the port in Wilmington, Delaware. Central Pennsylvania is a major distribution hub, and the shortest way to get there from Wilmington is up Route 41 and onto Route 30.

You can tell when a banana boat has docked in Wilmington by the trucks passing through Gap later that day, Gap Diner regular Dan Kauffman said.

Jim Germain owns the Manetta-based trucking company Jagtrux, which transports bulk materials for construction and manufacturing.

Jagtrux runs about 10 trips a day to and from Wilmington, passing through Gap on the way.

“We try to avoid the area as much as possible during rush hour,” Germain said. But it's not always possible. The next best route uses Route 222, the turnpike and Route 100.

That adds 40 miles, plus tolls, he said.

Shippers will only pay for the shortest route, and “we can't absorb the difference in cost” to take the long way, he said.

Jagtrux drivers try to hit Gap at off-peak times, mostly evening and early morning, he said. But sometimes, the schedule doesn’t work out.

“We try to grin and bear it,” he said.

Frank Campbell is vice president of S&H Express' H&F Campbell division, another trucking outfit. He said his firm has eight to 10 trucks a day bringing bananas and other produce out of Wilmington to Harrisburg for distribution into Pennsylvania and New York.

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He said his firm has eight to 10 trucks a day bringing bananas and other produce out of Wilmington to Harrisburg for distribution into Pennsylvania and New York.

The worst stretch for trucks to travel is between Gap and Lancaster, Campbell said.

“I'd applaud anything PennDOT can do to alleviate the congestion,” he said.

—Tim Stuhldreher

PennDOT project
Starting next year, PennDOT is going to build the “Gap Bottleneck Improvement Project.” It will widen the intersection and reroute westbound traffic onto a short bypass running through farmland north of town.

The two-year, $10.5 million project will get underway after winter, though some preliminary work could occur late this year. PennDOT says the changes

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A horse-driven ride on Rt. 30
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PennDOT uses eminent domain
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will give the intersection at least two decades of normal function, allowing traffic to move at "posted speeds" without unusual delays.

“We did a lot of traffic analysis for this job,” said Mike Lagano, PennDOT project manager.

The agency has wanted to address the intersection's problems for years, he said. The transportation bill passed last year made the money to do it available.

Many locals are skeptical.

"I don’t see where it’s going to

Please see BOTTLENECK, page A5
Bottleneck: Gap intersection

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help much," said Dan Kauf­
man, a Lukens Steel retiree
who lives in nearby Atglen.

A lot of roads

For such a small place, Gap is a junction for a lot of roads. Besides Routes 30 and 41, you have 897, 741 and 772.

Gap has been a crossroads since colonial times. And believe it or not, traffic tie-ups predate the automobile.

In the 17th century, Native Americans traversed the Great Minquas Trail through the area, taking beaver pelts to Philadelphia to trade.

That path evolved into the Great Conestoga Road, later the Lancaster Turnpike, predecessors to Route 30.

Route 41, too, follows a route that has been well-traveled for hundreds of years, said Leona Baker, president of the Historical Society of Salisbury Township.

In the early 1800s, more than 1,000 Conestoga wagons a day traveled the turnpike in summer, historians say.

There would be backups in Gap as the wagons waited to pay rolls.

After World War II, cars became an indispensable part of life for most Ameri­cans. The upsurge in driving strained existing road capacity everywhere.

In Lancaster County, tourism boomed, bringing a fresh surge of vehicles every summer.

As far back as 1962, in a special series headlined "Lancaster's Greatest Need: A Network of Superhigh­ways," the New Era newspa­per called for an interstate-caliber thoroughway in the Route 30 corridor.

Several other arteries the paper called for have since been built: Route 263, Route 222, Route 30 westbound into York County.

But Route 30 in eastern Lancaster County — which the series said "must be improved" — remains a local road, narrowing to one lane in each direction east of Route 896, not that different from what it was half a century ago.

39,800 vehicles

Today, 24,500 vehicles pass through Gap on Route 30 on an average day, and 15,300 on Route 41, for a total of 39,800.

That's 36 times the local township population of 1,120.

PennDOT expects those numbers to increase to 30,300 and 22,100, respectively, by 2038, meaning an average of 53,400 vehicles a day will burden an already stressed intersection.

Just widening the two roads wouldn't fix things, said Lapano, the PennDOT Project manager.

That's because a lot of the problem has to do with the left turn vehicles must make to get from Route 41 northbound to Route 30 westbound.

Penny said: PennDOT is building wider shoulders than usual, to make things easier for buggies.

Chronic gridlock

Without changes, the intersection's future is one of chronic gridlock, PennDOT said.

The agency has presented the plan at public meetings.

Local residents expressed concerns about the project and more than a little skepticism that it would work.

Business owners worry that the shift to one-way roads will cost them customers.

Some locals say building an overpass is the way to go. PennDOT considered that idea, but rejected it because it would be much more expensive and would require taking more adjacent property, spokesman Greg Penny said.

Kaufman, the retired Lukens Steel employee, often has coffee at the Gap Diner with a buddy, Bob Clark.

Clark, 82, believes PennDOT's plan will work: "It's got to relieve that bottle­neck."

Kaufman disagrees.

The project adds two traf­
Dan Kauffman, left, and Bob Clark enjoy coffee at the Gap Diner. Clark thinks PennDOT’s bottleneck improvement plan will work, Kauffman is more skeptical.

Said Baker, the Historical Society president: “Most of us do not see how the proposed changes will really make the traffic flow better when we factor in all the stoplights.”

And what happens when Urban Outfitters’ 1 million-square-foot fulfillment center starts operating?

It will have 500 employees, rising to as many as 1,500 during peak season, and trucks taking online orders directly to customers up and down the East Coast.

“They're going to add a lot more traffic,” Kauffman said.

County planners have said the fulfillment center could raise the area’s daily vehicle count by up to 2,670 cars and trucks: a little more than one-tenth the current daily average.

“The added traffic falls within the ‘background growth’ projections PennDOT used to assess how much additional capacity the intersection needs, Lapano said.

PennDOT crafted the bottleneck project well before Urban Outfitters announced its new facility.

The company has said traffic most days will be lower than the county’s estimate.

It says it will use mostly small UPS-style package trucks, dispatching them throughout the day.

Houck said it would make sense for Urban Outfitters to stagger work shifts, both for traffic reasons and to keep order fulfillment running smoothly.

Urban Outfitters did not respond to requests for comment for this article.

‘Better than nothing’

Houck, the Salisbury Township supervisor, said he’s seen proposals for bypasses and other road improvements in Lancaster County come and go since his boyhood. He’s now 70.

PennDOT’s plan for the bottleneck might not be ideal, he said. But given how tightly buildings in Gap hem in the existing right of way, “it might be the only solution,” he said.

Everyone agrees something has to be done, Houck said.

“Something’s better than nothing,” he said.
Tractor-trailers pass a horse-and-buggy traveling east on Route 30, near Route 41 in Gap.