

# Route 5 Rock Stabilization Project 'On Schedule,' Road To Reopen in 2 Weeks

*The short, winding highway connecting Fort Lee and Edgewater has been closed since early August*

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By Erik Wander (Open Post)

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A spokesman for the [New Jersey Department of Transportation](#) (NJDOT) said Tuesday that the \$3.8 million project to remove and stabilize loose rock along a three-tenths of a mile stretch of highway between Fort Lee and Edgewater is running on schedule, with [Route 5, which has been closed in both directions since early August](#), expected to reopen in about two weeks.

After about a month of partial closures and detours on Route 5 between the Fort Lee Pump Station and Undercliff Ave., the road closed completely on Aug. 8, as rock-scaling operations began along the western edge of the road bordered by a steep rock cliff.

“Recent rock fall incidents have occurred along the cliff resulting in complete closures of the roadway,” NJDOT officials said in a statement announcing the project and planned closure in early July. “Stabilization measures, including scaling of loose rock, installation of shotcrete mortar, wire netting and rock dowels and the removal of vegetation will help stabilize the rock slope and lessen the potential hazards of falling rock.”

NJDOT spokesman Tim Greeley said the project is progressing the way officials had hoped, and that he doesn’t foresee any delays or extensions of the closure and resulting detours.

“As of right now, that work is continuing, and it’s on track,” Greeley said. “We’re looking at probably two weeks or so from now to have it reopened. Everything is going well. We’ve had a bit of rain recently, but we [don’t] foresee any change to the schedule or any sort of extension of that closure. We seem to be right on schedule and where we need to be to get the highway reopened in early September.”

The road is closed not only to traffic at all times during the work, but also to

pedestrians for the same reason—safety, according to Greeley. He said in fact that some unknowing pedestrians have tried to start walking the route but had to be turned away, forcing NJDOT to put up additional signage saying the sidewalk is also closed and the transportation department's contractor to place flaggers at both ends.

The complete closure was deemed necessary, after more than a year of planning and consultation with both boroughs, Greeley said, calling the closures “a safety measure, both for the actual contractor employees who are doing the rock-scaling, as well as the motoring public.”

"Rock scaling involves having those guys actually repelling up and down the rock face itself, removing loose rock and installing rock dowels and so on," he said. "So due to the sort of geography of the area and the winding nature of Route 5, it became necessary for us to enact this closure to get that work done."

As for the “recent rock fall incidents” referred to in NJDOT’s initial release, Greeley clarified that the last incident of any magnitude occurred in May 2010, when the state had to close the highway “for a few hours” because of rock that had fallen onto the road, but that to his knowledge, there haven’t been any serious accidents or incidents in recent memory involving motorists or pedestrians. However he said several other “minor incidents where rock fragments have fallen onto or close to the highway” have also occurred in the past, prompting NJDOT to close the highway temporarily in one direction to clear it.

“But with the rock outcroppings as they currently exist, the potential is there that something could fall and potentially cause some type of accident,” Greeley

said. “Just because it hasn’t happened doesn’t mean it wouldn’t happen, and we wanted to get out there and do everything we can; take these preventive measures now so that we can ensure that it won’t happen. It’s more of the potential for something more large-scale to happen that we wanted to mitigate.”

Until Route 5 reopens—most likely the first week of September—drivers and pedestrians who normally use the winding highway to get from Fort Lee to Edgewater and points south essentially have two choices: take Palisade Ave. to Main St. in Fort Lee, and then travel south on River Rd., or take Palisade Ave. toward Cliffside Park and make a left on Gorge Rd., which meets up with River Rd. near City Place in Edgewater.