

## Hurricane-Damaged Route 2 Reopens to Traffic

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CHARLEMONT, Mass. — Route 2 reopened to traffic on Thursday morning to the great relief of residents and travelers of the historic Mohawk Trail.

The opening comes nearly 3 1/2 months since Hurricane Irene caused massive damage affecting roadways, bridges, riverbanks and slopes that made the major east-west connector impassable.

On Sept. 30, Transportation Secretary Richard A. Davey stood near a section of collapsed road and pledged the highway would open by Dec. 15 - as ordered by Gov. Deval Patrick. Department of Transportation crews and contractors have been working 24/7 for nearly three months to make it happen.

"This is what government does best, with the private sector, with the contractors, with the men and women who worked their tails off the last 90 days to get this road open ... I am proud of you," said Davey on Thursday morning as trucks roared by the newly reconstructed parking area near Mohawk Trail State Forest. But he also confided that "it's amazing when you get a deadline what you can do with a deadline ... We told [the governor] we would get it done not only for the administration but for the people that use Route 2 every day."

Local officials hadn't quite believed that the work could be done that fast. "People were saying it was going to be two years maybe for Route 2. It was just unbelievable the devastation, said state Rep. Paul Mark, D-Peru.

"It's almost surreal to see that this work has been accomplished in such a short period of time," said North Adams Mayor Richard Alcombright, who thanked District 1 Highway Director Peter Niles and his crew. "All you guys out there with the yellow coats and the white hats, contractors that have worked so hard here, you've done a fabulous job."



**MassDOT Secretary Richard A. Davey announced the opening of Route 2 at a newly renovated turn off near Mohawk State Forest. There was a ribbon but the ceremony wasn't held because of the rain and traffic. At left, guys in the yellow coats.**

The Berkshires suffered some \$35 million in damages because of Irene; the cost of reconstructing six miles of Route 2 cost \$23 million. The road's closure has had a major affect on transportation, businesses, residents and the tourist industry, especially during fall foliage season.

It also cut off parts of the small towns along the highway, forcing long detours for residents and travelers.



**Restoration of the flood control walls and riverbanks along the Cold River will continue into the spring.**

"The residents are very excited and happy to have it back open," said Florida Town Administrator Christine Dobbert. Motorists had been detouring along winding Whitcomb Hill Road, raising maintenance costs, and some families found their children cut off from school in Charlemont. "We have a couple of businesses that will definitely be happy to see if sales will come back up again, hopefully."

Hawley Selectman Richard G. Desmarais praised MassDOT for making swift repairs in his small town.

"In circumstances like this, you have to throw all caution to the wind and do the job," said the Navy veteran, who said he supplied workers with coffee in appreciation. "They worked their butts off."

MassDOT officials could not think of another project that could compare in mobilization, manpower and completion to the Route 2 project, which would normally have taken an entire construction season.

"We had multiple agencies [involved]," said Highway Administrator Frank DePaola. "What would have normally taken us four months [to prepare] was reduced to a matter of a few weeks and contractors were set to work immediately after in the beginning of October."

Bidding time that takes months was done in nine days; transportation and environmental officials worked together to get Cold River restoration on track. Crews worked 12-hour shifts (with only one shift off during the Halloween snowstorm) and have been living here for months.

"We are literally standing on a site that was washed away in the storm and has now been successfully rebuilt," said DePaola.

The work isn't complete; restoration of the concrete flood-control walls will continue into April and final repairs will be completed in the spring. Among some upgrades will be larger breakdown lanes along the rebuilt flood control.

Northern Construction, ET&L Corp., J.H. Maxymillion and R. Bates & Sons rebuilt major slopes, reconstructed large swaths of road, made drainage upgrades, constructed new

retaining walls and reinforced slopes that protect the bridge connecting Savoy and Florida.

State Rep. Gailanne Cariddi, D-North Adams, said the reopening affected her as "Route 2 driver."

"It's really going to put my travel route back to normal and I know it's going to do the same for hundreds of people in the First Berkshire District. ...

"So thank you, thank you, thank you."



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