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Restoration of 30th St. Station's exterior to start soon



Construction on the west end of Amtrak's 30th Street Station continues, but the arrival of the \$60 million funding from Congress for the planned exterior restoration of the limestone facade of the 80-year-old neoclassical building is unclear. (ED HILLE / Staff Photographer)

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Just as construction barriers are about to come down on the west side of 30th Street Station, workers are getting ready to erect scaffolding around most of the landmark rail station.

New 10-foot-high canopies will be in place for years to protect pedestrians during a planned restoration of the limestone facade of the 80-year-old neo-classical building.

Amtrak will put up the scaffolding now, but the \$60 million restoration won't start until Amtrak gets the money from Congress, and there is no indication when that might happen.

"It will be about a two-year project once we get the funding," said Amtrak spokesman Craig Schulz on Thursday. "We're pretty optimistic that we'll at least get started in the near future."

The massive station at the edge of West Philadelphia "needs the attention and it deserves the attention," Schulz said. He compared the project to the restoration work on City Hall that kept parts of that Center City landmark wrapped in scaffolding for years.

The station, Amtrak's third-busiest, was opened in 1933 by the Pennsylvania Railroad. It handles 120 Amtrak trains, 960 SEPTA trains, and 26 NJTransit trains each weekday, and more than four million Amtrak passengers went through the station last year.

The restoration of the exterior will include repair of the limestone, cleaning the facade, and waterproofing.

The canopies - posts with "debris panels" on top - will be installed atop concrete barriers along the Market and Arch Street sidewalks and at the east and west entrances to the station, said Pat McAndrew of Superior Scaffold Services of Philadelphia, which will do the work.

The station will remain "totally accessible" to pedestrians during the work, McAndrew said.

The \$2 million canopy installation will start in a few weeks and is expected to be completed by the end of September, Schulz said.

Frequent train rider and transit advocate Andy Sharpe of Philadelphia said that while the scaffolding "promises to be an eyesore, it will be a somewhat temporary inconvenience for a greater good."

"Amtrak, SEPTA, and Atlantic City Line commuters are used to dealing with an eyesore with the West Plaza renovations. If anything, the scaffolding won't be as obtrusive," Sharpe said.

For nearly a year, the west entrance to the station has been blocked by construction to remake the pedestrian and parking plaza there.

The surface work there is to be completed by Thanksgiving, allowing the west entrance to be reopened, although underground work will continue for another year.

That \$30 million Amtrak project has involved replacing deteriorated structural columns, beams, and surface decking of the under-street parking facility beneath the station.