# Brazil's new highway sparks controversy ahead of COP30 summit



A major infrastructure project is currently underway in Brazil, as the state government constructs a new four-lane highway, named Avenida Liberdade, across approximately eight miles of protected Amazon rainforest. This road is being built in anticipation of the COP30 climate summit, which is set to take place in Belém in November and is expected to attract over 50,000 attendees, including world leaders.

The project has drawn substantial criticism from locals and conservationists alike, who argue that the environmental consequences of this deforestation undermine the summit's objective of addressing climate change. The highway is intended to facilitate traffic to the city, but the destruction of rainforest also raises concerns regarding biodiversity and the carbon absorption capacity of the Amazon, critical components in the fight against global warming. Drone footage has already revealed the extent of the disruption, with heavy machinery visible as it clears vast tracks of lush greenery.

Claudio Verequete, a local resident who lives approximately 200 metres from the highway's path, expressed his dismay at the destruction of his community's natural resources. “Everything was destroyed,” he told the BBC. “Our harvest has already been cut down. We no longer have that income to support our family.” Verequete has not received any compensation from the state for the loss of his açaí harvest, which he depended upon for his livelihood. He voiced fears that the improved access from the new highway could lead to further encroachment by business interests into protected areas. “Where are we going to go?" he asked, highlighting the precarious situation of those residing near the highway, as it will not provide them with the mobility benefits the government suggests.

The highway's construction comes at a time when the Amazon is already facing many environmental challenges, including record low water levels in the Amazon River and devastating wildfires that have swept across various regions. Meanwhile, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has defended the highway and the forthcoming summit, stating that COP30 will focus on the needs of the Amazon itself rather than merely discussing environmental issues. He remarked that this is “a COP in the Amazon, not a COP about the Amazon.”

Infrastructure Secretary Adler Silveira described the highway as a necessary “important mobility intervention” that is part of a broader initiative to modernise Belém’s infrastructure ahead of the climate conference. The project also includes plans for wildlife crossings, bike lanes, and solar lighting, though critics remain sceptical about its true sustainability. New hotels and a port redevelopment are being implemented to accommodate increased visitors, along with substantial federal investment into transportation capacity.

Academic and veterinary professional Prof Silvia Sardinha voiced her concerns regarding the impact of the highway on local wildlife. She highlighted that the deforestation reduces the areas available for species to live and breed, making it more challenging to rehabilitate injured wildlife in a setting disrupted by human infrastructure.

The state government of Pará had initially proposed the Avenida Liberdade project in 2012 but postponed it due to environmental concerns. However, the recent push for development has revived not only this highway but also numerous infrastructure projects associated with COP30. Local voice in the discourse surrounding these developments is notably absent, as concerns from those living in the Amazon appear to be overshadowed by larger governmental agendas.

As the summit approaches, observers will be closely watching to see how the ongoing construction impacts both the environment and the local communities living in and around the Amazon rainforest, which is known as the world's richest biological reservoir.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://thehilltoponline.com/2024/01/16/lawmakers-in-brazil-pass-legislation-to-pave-a-highway-through-the-amazon-rainforest/> - This article discusses another major highway project in the Amazon, highlighting concerns about deforestation and environmental impacts, which parallels the concerns raised about the Avenida Liberdade project.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazon_rainforest> - This Wikipedia page provides background information on the Amazon rainforest, including its role in biodiversity and carbon absorption, which are critical components in the fight against global warming.
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-64536975> - This BBC article discusses the environmental challenges facing the Amazon, such as wildfires and deforestation, which are relevant to the context of the Avenida Liberdade project.
* <https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/chapter/summary-for-policymakers/> - The IPCC report highlights the importance of preserving natural ecosystems like the Amazon for mitigating climate change, which aligns with the concerns about the highway's environmental impact.
* <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/cop30> - This UN page provides information about the COP30 climate summit, which is mentioned in the article as a reason for the highway's construction.
* <https://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/deforestation-and-habitat-loss> - This World Wildlife Fund page discusses the impacts of deforestation on biodiversity and ecosystems, which are concerns raised by the construction of the Avenida Liberdade highway.