

TESTIMONY OF T.J. JUSTICE
OHIO SENATE HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
IN CONSIDERATION OF THE OHIO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
BUSINESS PLAN
APRIL 15, 2008

Good morning, my name is T.J. Justice and I am Executive Director of the Coshocton Port Authority. I testify today not only in that capacity but also as co-chairman of the recently formed Columbus - Pittsburgh corridor committee which is a bi-partisan group of stakeholders stretching along the corridor from Franklin County here in Central Ohio to Jefferson County on the Ohio River. This is a committee that includes public and private members on its steering committee and views itself as a partner with the administration - not an adversary. Fellow co-chair Dave Brenner of State Farm Insurance in Newark and I intend to lead this team in a way that envelopes our communities and businesses along the corridor using all reasonable and appropriate means to attain our goals. We illustrate the unity of one purpose and that is to complete the 160-mile corridor.

I am also the former Director of the Governor's Office of Appalachia and one who entered public service under the wing of State Senator John Carey and with the motto of legendary Governor Jim Rhodes and House Speaker Vern Riffe both of which understood and acted upon the need to invest state and federal dollars throughout this great state so that both urban and rural areas have an opportunity to benefit from state investments. I am here today to offer my comments with regard to the Ohio Department of Transportation's business plan which has been submitted to this committee by Director Jim Beasley. Director Beasley has stated that if a community does not have a metropolitan planning organization standing behind its cause, then an organized and consistent message needs to be articulated. This is the very reason the Columbus - Pittsburgh corridor committee has been formed given the fact that the majority of the participating counties are not represented by a metropolitan planning organization.

The late Governor Rhodes had a vision which brought about construction of the James A. Rhodes Appalachian Highway that cut through the Appalachian region connecting I-270 in Cincinnati to a connector in Belpre, Ohio which wrapped into I-77. That vision and that investment by the State of Ohio has brought about more than 15,000 jobs in Clermont County, Brown County (where Director Beasley resides and previously served as the county engineer), on up to Pike County where the U.S. Enrichment Corporation is investing \$1.2 billion to launch the American Centrifuge Technology plant and create 500 new, high paying jobs. This continues over to Jackson County – (where Governor Rhodes was born and reared in the small village of Coalton) which today has more than 2500 jobs in the frozen food manufacturing businesses at General Mills in Wellston and Luigino's in Jackson.

I share this because in my review of the ODOT business plan, it is very evident that an emphasis is being placed on urban traffic congestion in trying to manage rapid growth. As a native of Cincinnati where my family still resides, I do not feel the State of Ohio should be burdened with addressing urban sprawl in a way that negatively affects its responsibility to fairly distribute tax dollars to nurture a transportation system statewide.

Somehow, somehow - from the Gilligan administration and to Rhodes and Celeste, Voinovich and Taft - state highway dollars allowed major corridors with regional impact to be completed or enhanced in a way that both urban and rural areas realized benefit. This plan does not do that. This plan makes a long term commitment, through 2015, to address only a handful of transportation major construction projects in a narrowly defined geographic area.

I don't want to see potential economic development projects pushed to our neighboring states due to a transportation plan that does not call for the completion of corridor gaps including the Columbus - Pittsburgh corridor, which in the case of the county that I represent, includes nothing more than an 8-mile gap of two lane highway that otherwise is already four lanes from northeastern Franklin County to I-77 at Newcomerstown in Tuscarawas County.

Completing a corridor like Ohio 16 connects communities in a way that not only meets the eye. It opens up college students for safer and quicker access to the new \$4 million Coshocton Campus and OSU's Newark campus not to mention the main campus here in Columbus. It also strengthens regional collaborations and downtown redevelopment efforts similar to what is being undertaken in Newark which is now also reaching out to Coshocton, Zanesville and others for a regional downtown revitalization effort. It's all encompassing and all the more reason for a statewide transportation plan that blends the needs of the rural areas to the metropolitan population centers. It also represents an alternative route to I-70 which is often the scene of terrible traffic accidents due to congestion which delays the movement of commerce and at times compromises public safety.

My purpose in being here today is to provide a snapshot of previous transportation plans from both Republican and Democratic administrations and legislative bodies that effectively improved Ohio's transportation system concurrently in both the urban and rural areas. Last week, Mr. Platt from the Heath-Newark-Licking County Port Authority stated that he has worked and resided in white and blue collar towns and in both metropolitan and rural communities. I too am of the same mold having been born and raised in suburban Cincinnati but having lived the past 19 years in Appalachian Ohio in both Jackson and Coshocton Counties. As members of this committee, you each have a responsibility to put forward policies and budgets that reflect the interests of all 88 counties in Ohio. That challenge is monumental.

My advocacy today represents an interest that the ODOT business plan be revised to reflect the needs of all of Ohio. The highway corridor that I represent today includes major employers such as the Longaberger Basket Company headquarters in Newark and its manufacturing plant near Dresden with 1200 workers, AK Steel and Altra Biofuels brand new \$115 million ethanol plant in Coshocton, the new Avon distribution center in Zanesville where 500 workers will be employed among countless others. It is because of this corridor that major companies such as these have been able to invest, create jobs and manufacture domestic products.

This plan must take into account not only I-71 through Hamilton County or the interstate system near the Great Lakes but also U.S. 33 through Athens County and Ohio 16 through Muskingum and Coshocton Counties (as an illustration to delineate the needs of different regions in the state).

I suggest that this plan be revised in a way that challenges ODOT to advance each stage of its Tier 2 projects while completing its Tier 1 projects. I am happy to assist the state in detailing that in a way that accommodates both the urban areas where my roots are and the rural areas where my heart now is. Thank you for providing me an opportunity to testify today - I appreciate the commitment and service that you provide to every Ohioan.