

**Public Testimony of Rick Platt to the
Ohio Senate Highways and Transportation Committee
concerning ODOT Business Plan
Tuesday, April 8, 2008**

Ohio Congressman Zack Space said it well, "There's no greater economic stimulus than a highway."

If our Great State isn't careful, the hoped turnaround of Ohio could become a 360 degree experience--the sensation of turning around without, in the end, actually moving in any different direction.

What concerns me most about the future of transportation in Ohio is that it appears entirely possible under ODOT's business plan that come 2015, all Ohio would have accomplished is to spend billions to rebuild a few miles of highways that already exist. Ohio's ability to compete economically would still be heading the same direction. That's not the stimulus for a turnaround of our economy.

Through my testimony to the Committee today, I want to take the buzzwords among the strategies found in ODOT's well-thought out business plan and put some real-life experience to those words.

I have the perspective as someone who has lived in urban Ohio, suburban Ohio, and rural Ohio. I've made my home in white collar Ohio and blue collar Ohio. I am known to many on this committee because I've been to your districts. I know Ohio if for no other reason than I've driven its various highways many times over. I also know economic development from 20 years working deals in Ohio.

It's from this experience and knowledge that I contend that finishing the key projects remaining to get finished in Ohio, many of which are located in suburban and rural communities, needs to be a part of the ODOT business plan if Ohio is to experience a true turnaround.

I am a member of a coalition of seven counties representing the region from the Capitol to the Ohio River. We are collectively advocating completing the 160-mile Columbus-Pittsburgh Corridor. Only four key projects remain and as little as \$500 million in investment. The urban aspects of this corridor are complete. It's now time to finish this important corridor to help stimulate the turnaround of Ohio.

These are my thoughts about taking ODOT's words and turning them into more than just a sensation of turning around Ohio.

Buzzword #1: Urban Revitalization

Increased deployment of smart highway congestion and traffic flow information technologies need time to work. The Waterfront line in Cleveland and proposed streetcar systems in Columbus and Cincinnati should be given time to work as well. Why spend \$100's of millions to solve people-moving transit wants and then, before you can see the results, spend billions on top of that adding to the problem with more highway lanes?

Where's the urban revitalization in adding a couple more lanes to an state highway system that already includes dozens of highway lanes in these cities?

Greater urban revitalization is achieved by focusing on connecting up urban markets in a way that creates synergy between those markets. Columbus and Pittsburgh, today, are connected via a small tunnel in Wheeling, WV. The urban revitalization of Ohio is greatest when connecting markets like this, and others, that are economically disconnected.

Buzzword #2: Cost-Benefit

Where's the cost-benefit ratio greater, starting over from scratch or finishing what you started? Seven counties, including two of the nation's strong economic markets—Pittsburgh and Columbus--along with urban and rural communities along the corridor route benefit from finishing the last 25% of the corridor for, even by the most pessimistic estimates, for less than doing just one or two miles of the projects conceived in Columbus or Cleveland.

Buzzword #3: Economic Development

Economic development in Ohio for the past 50 years has included development on sites in suburban and rural communities not part of the 3 C's counties. The recent *Site Selection* Governor's award, not unlike ones in prior years, included 374 projects in the "Other Ohio" areas—76% of the total. Without continuous improvement and finishing what was started, the turnaround of Ohio in the next seven years will be without one of its strengths for the past 50 years—suburban, exurban, and rural growth.

Economic development is best defined as creating an environment where people are willing to risk capital. Thus, a measure of economic development should include industrial park capacity so that the state build's highways where capital investment will, and indeed can, follow.

Buzzword #4: Multi-Modal

Multi-modal shouldn't be merely defined as solutions to people moving different ways. It's multi-modal freight that will turnaround Ohio. Ohio can improve our companies' ability to compete globally by improving highway access to those ways to move goods via air, rail, and water transportation modes.

The State of Ohio owns a freight rail line along the Columbus-Pittsburgh Corridor that is, in part, the reason some of the communities like Coshocton, Dresden, and Newark, even exist. That rail line has lacked a highway mode as the best way to realize its potential. In the real world of the last 50 plus years, which is where the communities that beat us for big deals are finding investors, you need access via not only rail, water, and airport, but highway, to compete.

Cooperation is the last buzzword. One of the barriers to achieving ODOT's ability to begin to work on the highway projects it needs in order to turnaround Ohio is, apparently, a clause in last year's transportation budget.

I don't care if the General Assembly intended one thing and ODOT interpreted another. I urge the Senate and ODOT to work together to advance projects that will improve our economic competitiveness by bringing true revitalization to our cities (including suburban and rural ones), has a cost-benefit analysis that makes economic sense, embraces freight's multi-modal transportation needs, and, most of all, ensures all of Ohio benefits from ODOT's strategic highway investments.