

ODOT visits; We hope it is listening

It is encouraging to see that the Ohio Department of Transportation did not forget about the Jefferson County area once the U.S. Route 22 bypass was completed.

It would be easy to consider any claim that ODOT has forgotten about the area as an unfair statement when one looks at the highway miles lined with orange barrels this fall.

State Route 7 through Toronto is undergoing a major and needed safety upgrade. And ODOT has completed work on the Franklin Street connector in Toronto, though the work hasn't met satisfaction of local officials.

And ODOT continues to work with the city of Steubenville on widening Sunset Boulevard between Linduff Avenue and Brady Circle East.

But there are other, major, issues regarding highways still out there.

One of them is a newer project for the area: the widening of state Route 43 between the Jefferson County industrial park off county Road 43 and the Route 43 exit of the Route 22 bypass.

The widening is viewed as a necessity by planners as a key to unlock development of the acreage at the industrial park. If light manufacturing and distribution centers are to move into the industrial park, clear highway access beyond a two-lane state highway will be needed.

Factor in the recent discussions of a major retail center being studied for the area immediately north of the Route 22-Route 43 interchange, and the need for highway expansion in that area becomes even greater.

ODOT's District 11 deputy director, Myron Pakush, took his first official tour of Jefferson County on Tuesday.

Pakush was named District 11 director in August. He oversees planning, design, construction and maintenance in seven counties in Eastern Ohio, including Jefferson.

On his visit, he toured the Route 43 area and saw Lovers

Lane, which Steubenville officials have long proposed for widening to improve access to the Fort Steuben Mall and to potential development sites in territory beyond Lovers Lane that was annexed last year.

We welcome Pakush's input and hope he can help guide the area's economic development as a highway official can.

We also hope Pakush keeps the U.S. Route 250 project, to link the four-lane Route 22 expressway across Harrison County from Cadiz to Interstate 70 near St. Clairsville.

A modern transportation system will do much to improve the area's economic viability.

As of now, Route 22 provides easy access around Steubenville and from the Steubenville-Weirton area to Pittsburgh. But the four-lane highway still ends at Cadiz.

What Jefferson — and Harrison — county needs is a way to tap into the heavy traffic that makes its way east and west across Ohio on I-70.

Specifically, the area has long needed to provide that shortcut for westbound and eastbound traffic from the Columbus area to and from Pittsburgh.

There was a feeling in some corners that when the bypass was completed that development would occur almost automatically.

We have learned as a region that some groundwork needed to be completed to coincide with the completion of the highway network to bring development into reality.

The groundwork is being completed now with the industrial park. The area's groundwork would be nearly completed with widening of Route 43.

But imagine what would happen with a connection between major markets cutting right across Jefferson and Harrison counties.

While not an automatic proposition, development certainly would become an easier sell for local economic development groups.

We hope Pakush is aware and can carry the area's concerns to Columbus as needed.

The Herald-Star

Established June 7, 1806

401 Herald Square, Steubenville, Ohio 43952

(740) 283-4711

Christopher Doyle
Publisher

Frank Robinson
Managing Editor

FRIDAY, OCT. 22, 1999