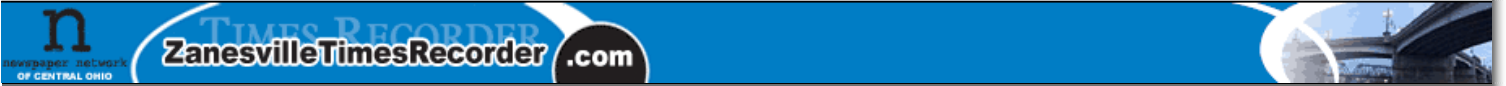


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## Action sought on Columbus-Pittsburgh corridor

By KATHIE DICKERSON  
Staff Writer

NEWCOMERSTOWN - About 40 miles of highway has residents of seven Ohio counties ready to take their cause all the way to the top.

"If it's true there's strength in numbers, then I think this room demonstrates a lot of strength," said Rick Platt, executive director of the Heath-Newark-Licking County Port Authority.

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He facilitated a Friday morning meeting of about 50 people from the seven-county region through which the routes dubbed the Columbus-Pittsburgh corridor pass. Those gathered at the Hampton Inn in Newcomerstown were members of the recently formed Columbus-Pittsburgh Corridor Committee. Its mission is to plot a course to complete four-lane highways stretching 160



Padgett

[Zoom Photo](#)



Nolder

[Zoom Photo](#)

miles from Columbus to Pittsburgh.

Part of that path travels through Coshocton County and includes a remaining two-lane stretch of Ohio 16 from near Dresden to Coshocton.

Several Coshocton County officials attended the meeting and believe the four-lane expansion is important to bringing jobs to the area.

"Infrastructure is one of the important issues that drives the quality of life," said Dane Shyrook, Coshocton County Commissioner. "It's important to jobs, travel, that people be able to reach the Columbus and Pittsburgh areas."

It's also important to economic development, said Larry Stahl, Coshocton County Commissioner

"It's important that Columbus and Pittsburgh can reach us easily," Stahl said.

Legislators from the state level representing the seven counties - Coshocton, Franklin, Harrison, Jefferson, Licking, Muskingum and Tuscarawas - were on hand to give the committee advice on what it can do to make its voice heard.

Sen. Joy Padgett said the world is run by people who show up, and it's important committee members keep showing up.

"I think sometimes they think we'll just go away," she said.

She currently serves as vice chair on the Senate Transportation Committee, and said the budget legislation passed this summer did not address tier 2 Transportation Review Advisory Council projects, which would include the Coshocton County four-lane expansion.

At the end of August Ohio Department of Transportation representatives told local officials the completion of the macro corridor had been put on hold and might not be done until 2014. The explanation was an amendment to the state's transportation budget that work should only continue on projects on TRAC's tier one level.

Representatives of ODOT cited less gas tax being collected and rising cost of

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construction materials as a couple of reasons projects are being put on hold, Padgett said.

Tony Guida, a member of the Jefferson County Port Authority Board, shared a concern about a project ODOT put on hold that had funding in place. Federal dollars in the amount of \$550,000 were earmarked for a feasibility study to examine a four-lane extension to run from U.S. 36 near Uhrichsville, by passing U.S. 250 around Tappan Lake to U.S. 22.

State Rep. Alan Sayre and Padgett agreed that without the feasibility study the project wouldn't get done.

Guida said in July, days before the county was going to make an official announcement a consultant had been hired in, officials were notified the project had been put on hold. Padgett and Sayre said they would look into the matter, that the state doesn't want to lose the federal dollars that can only be used for specific projects.

"I think we all know the benefits, not just for our area," Guida said. "I've come to the realization we're not going to get anywhere unless we come together as a group."

Others who attended the meeting agreed.

Doug Smith, Licking County Commissioner, said he thought it would be beneficial to connect with a similar Pennsylvania group.

"We need to look at the big picture and what other projects bring to the entire corridor," he said. "We need to keep in the back of our minds what happens in Coshocton or in Cadiz has an impact on us. Improving the four-lane will bring opportunities for all of our counties."

Jerry Nolder, executive director of the Zanesville-Muskingum County Port Authority, said what happens with the corridor will affect economic development in east central Ohio for years to come.

"We want to get behind this," he said. "This is one of the brightest projects to happen in this part of the state for several years."

Padgett recommended those in attendance encourage city and village councils and county commissioners to pass resolutions in support of the project and forward that information on to the state level.

Businesses that have freight traffic should write letters to explain how the completed four-lane expansion will benefit them, she added.

"These are all things that you can do locally that will send a very clear message to the government and people like us," she said.

Coshocton resident Paul Prater of American Electric Power has already agreed to facilitate a business letter campaign, Platt said.

T.J. Justice, Coshocton Port Authority executive director, distributed copies of a rough draft of by-laws for the Columbus-Pittsburgh Corridor Committee that included forming a steering committee and establishing dues to help cover the costs of meetings, mailings and other expenses.

The committee is in the process of developing a Web site and voted on a logo Friday.


Platt said a bus tour would be a good idea, perhaps something that started in Steubenville and picked up committee members along the route.

"We could see these projects first hand and end up in Columbus," he said.

The next meeting was set for 10 a.m. Friday, Nov. 16, with the location to be announced.

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This is a great idea.