



Paul Giannamore

**HIGHWAY TALK** – Tom Bayuzik, executive director of Progress Alliance, makes a point as local businessman Jody Glaub listens during a meeting of the Columbus-to-Pittsburgh Corridor Committee at Ravens Glen Winery and Restaurant in West Lafayette Friday morning.

## Highway group is gaining ground

By **PAUL GIANNAMORE**

Business editor 11-17-07

COSHOCTON. — A meeting with Gov. Ted Strickland's chief of staff, John Haseley, in December could shed new light on the status of some parts of the Columbus-to-Pittsburgh four-lane highway corridor.

The corridor committee met Friday morning at the Ravens Glen Winery and Restaurant on U.S. Route 36 in West Lafayette to continue developing plans to advance highway projects that will complete a four-lane link

See **HIGHWAY** Page 8A ↪

between Columbus and Pittsburgh.

State Sen. Joy Padgett, R-Coshocton, said she met Thursday with Haseley and he suggested an early December meeting to gather more information about the corridor.

Officials from seven counties, including Harrison and Jefferson, which lie along the corridor, have begun to formalize a committee to push completion of the four-lane corridor.

So far, as independent projects taking years, without recognizing significance as an I-70 alternative, the state has completed a series of highway improvements, including the recently finished I-270/state Route 161 interchange northeast of Columbus and making portions of Route 161, state Route 16 and U.S. Route 36 into expressways. There are about 28 miles of highway completed to link the road network to the U.S. Route 22 expressway in Harrison County.

Economic development officials from the counties believe the completion of the four-lane network could open Eastern Ohio to new economic opportunities.

Padgett said the Ohio Department of Transportation

## THE CORRIDOR:

The Columbus-to-Pittsburgh Corridor Committee includes officials and business representatives from Jefferson, Harrison, Tuscarawas, Coshocton, Muskingum, Licking and Franklin counties seeking state completion of a four-lane link through those counties that would provide direct access between the two major cities.

- There are major portions of the highway network that already have seen improvement, including a recently completed major renovation and upgrade to the I-270/state Route 116 interchange northeast of Columbus, as well as four-lane portions of Route 116 and state Route 16, U.S. Route 36 and U.S. Route 22. A 28-mile link between the end of Route 36 and Route 22 at Cadiz is all that remains to be completed, as well as a three-mile stretch of Route 22 east of Cadiz.

- Federal money has been set aside to study the link between Newcomerstown and Cadiz, but the Ohio Department of Transportation has put the study on hold.

- The total corridor is 160 miles long, and the remaining mileage represents 25 percent of the highway to be completed.

- The committee is patterning itself after one that took about 40 years to push for completion of the U.S. Route 35 expressway across the southern part of Ohio, from Dayton to Gallipolis.

is misreading the Legislature's intent in the state biennial budget to mean the state shouldn't spend any money on projects that already aren't committed to construction.

She distributed a portion of the budget bill that says ODOT shouldn't undertake other major new construction projects until selected construction has taken place in accordance with recommendations made a year ago by the Transportation Review Advisory Council. There is no men-

tion about spending for planning or other activities.

Jefferson County's delegation to the highway committee, led by Realtor Anthony Guida, remains upset that the state stopped a study for a four-lane link from Newcomerstown to Cadiz even though the money has been set aside in the federal budget.

Padgett said she would introduce language, if necessary, to clarify what the legislators meant in the highway budget, but first said she

wants to meet with Haseley.

"I want to run this as far up the political food chain as we can possibly get," she said.

Coshocton County officials are concerned the ODOT budget interpretation has stopped right-of-way acquisition and design on the completion of the four-lane portion of state Route 16 in Coshocton and Muskingum counties, according to T.J. Justice, executive director of the Coshocton Port Authority.

Justice suggested the seven counties pass resolutions recognizing the committee and supporting the Columbus-to-Pittsburgh corridor, as well as having resolutions passed by every municipality and township along the route. Paul Prater of American Electric Power will be soliciting separate letters of support from businesses along the route.

He suggested the letters not be form letters, but individual letters of support from businesses that could benefit from the highway. He said the letters should include information about the number of trucks the business uses that could benefit from the highway, the number of employees, the improvement to safety a four-lane network of high-

ways represents, as well as the potential for future business growth. Prater said businesses beyond the corridor, such as those from across Franklin County, the Northern Panhandle of West Virginia and over into Western Pennsylvania could benefit from the route and should be asked for support.

Tom Bayuzik, executive director of the Progress Alliance economic development organization in Jefferson County, suggested contact be made with Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell and West Virginia Gov. Joe Manchin III, because both of their states will benefit if the highway network is completed.

The group agreed to first seek the government resolutions to present to Strickland after a future bus tour of the highway corridor, with the business letters to follow separately after that.

The group also agreed with Justice's suggestion that the counties each appoint two members to serve as the steering committee for the highway corridor group, and that bylaws for the organization would be adopted once that group is put together.

He wants the group patterned after a successful

effort that stuck together for decades to see the completion of a four-lane U.S. Route 35 across the southern tier of the state. Padgett and Rick Platt, director of the Licking County Port Authority, said not having a single highway number for the Columbus-to-Pittsburgh corridor makes it tough to discuss.

Padgett said state officials don't understand how a route involving several state and U.S. highways represents an economic development corridor. Platt suggested a more formal name will be needed in the future, though he stopped short of saying the highway names would need to be changed to one route, in recognition that it would be tough to find agreement on the route number.

Bayuzik said, "We should use Ohio's own verbiage and tell them to help us help you 'turn around Ohio.'"

Harrison County Commissioner Phil Madzia said he would try to take first lady Frances Strickland on a tour of the highway area when she visits the county in December.

(Giannamore can be contacted at [pgiannamore@heraldstaronline.com](mailto:pgiannamore@heraldstaronline.com).)