

Highway project study to move forward

By **LEE MORRISON, T-R Business Editor**

A feasibility study – initially funded in 2005 – should begin soon regarding improved highways from Newcomerstown to Cadiz.

U.S. Rep. Zack Space, D-Dover, said Friday that after months of negotiations with local, state and federal officials, he – with the help of state representatives from the region – was able to get the Ohio Department of Transportation to agree to use the \$500,000 in federal funds initially appropriated in 2005 to pay for the feasibility study.

In January 2005, ODOT designated the area from New Philadelphia to Steubenville and included Newcomerstown to Uhrichsville as Macro Highway Corridor 23. After analysis of statewide traffic patterns and projected traffic growth, ODOT approved the designation for Rts. 36, 22 and 250 in Tuscarawas, Harrison and Jefferson counties from I-77 to the Ohio-West Virginia state line at Steubenville. ODOT officials said such corridors are “highways with statewide significance that provide connectivity to population and employment centers in Ohio and the nation by accommodating desired movements of” people and goods.

However, because of changes in the way ODOT determines its priorities for highway projects, the corridor no longer was on the front burner.

“My feeling is that the money was allocated specifically for that, and should be used,” Space said. “We would love to see the corridor built, but it has a very hefty price tag. We know it’s not something that will be immediate, but perhaps could happen in the future.

“Of a more immediate value is that the information compiled in the study can stimulate economic development in the region. For instance, they do traffic counts, which are the types of things that business and industry leaders look at when they determine where they’re going to locate. The results from this study will produce economic development benefits.”

"We anticipate swift movement on this," he said.

The proposed highway would help connect eastern Ohio with the rapidly expanding Pittsburgh area.

The long-term goal is to provide primarily four-lane highways from Columbus to Pittsburgh. It will not come cheap, as estimates in 2005 climbed into the \$300 million range to connect Cadiz to Newcomerstown alone. And, that's without studies to determine how much land is needed, environmental impact and the specific route – all of which would help pinpoint the final numbers.

In 2005, ODOT considered the following as key objectives for Corridor 23:

- Create a parallel route for passengers and freight between central Ohio and the Greater Pittsburgh area due to projected traffic growth on I-70.
- Provide improved mobility of freight through transportation access to rail and water ports, particularly along the Ohio River.
- Improve safety along the Corridor, specifically along U.S. 250 in Harrison County.
- Provide improved access to Tappan Lake and other recreational areas in the region.