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## Continued support for corridor initiative urged by Padgett

By BRIAN GADD

Staff Writer

ZANESVILLE - State Sen. Joy Padgett spoke to local officials Friday on the importance of continuing to support the Columbus to Pittsburgh corridor initiative.

And Muskingum County Commissioner Brian Hill said he would be in favor of working with regional partners to develop an industrial park along Ohio 16 if it helped keep the corridor in line for funding.

Padgett told members of the Muskingum County Transportation Improvement District board that the Ohio Department of Transportation's business plan is currently being discussed by state legislators, at the request of ODOT Director James Beasley.

One of the long-term plans is for the Ohio 161 improvements from Columbus into Licking County to carryover to improvements on Ohio 16, providing a macro-corridor from Columbus to Pittsburgh.

Rick Platt, director of the Newark-Heath Licking County Port Authority, has already offered testimony on the corridor project, and Coshocton County Port Authority Director T.J. Justice is scheduled to testify before a transportation committee Tuesday.

"If we don't grab ahold of this issue and really work on this, we could see this money go to the Cleveland area or Columbus," Padgett said. "Other projects around the state, God only knows when they are going to be funding those."

Padgett said as of now, the ODOT plan does not allow any funding to be funneled to what are termed Tier II projects. Only those designated as Tier I are currently being funded.

"When Mr. Platt was up there, he asked what it would take to become a Tier I," she said. "Well, I'm going to introduce an amendment to the amendment, so they can't do that anymore."

Hill asked Padgett if a regional effort to develop an industrial park somewhere along the corridor could help get state support for the project, and she said that would be a good idea.

"This is something that would benefit Coshocton, Muskingum, Licking and Guernsey counties and some of the other counties in the group," Hill explained.

He said he intended to strike up conversations with officials in those counties to gauge their interest.

Longaberger will host the corridor group's next working session April 25, Padgett said.

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