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Justice requests ODOT revise its business plan

Staff Reports

COLUMBUS - Coshocton Port Authority Executive Director T.J. Justice had the opportunity Tuesday to testify before the Ohio Senate Highways and Transportation Committee and state a case that would change the Ohio Department of Transportation's business plan.

Justice also serves as co-chairman of the recently formed Columbus-Pittsburgh Corridor Committee, group of public and private individuals who represent sections along a corridor stretching from Franklin County to Jefferson County on the Ohio River.

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Justice talked of previous highway projects through Appalachian Ohio that brought more than 15,000 jobs to the area.

"I share this because in my review of the ODOT business plan, it is very evident that an emphasis is being placed on urban traffic congestion in trying to manage rapid growth," he told the committee. "As a native of Cincinnati where my family still resides, I do not feel the State of Ohio should be

burdened with addressing urban sprawl in a way that negatively affects its responsibility to fairly distribute tax dollars to nurture a transportation system statewide."

ODOT needs to invest state and federal dollars so that both urban and rural areas have an opportunity to benefit from state investments, Justice said.

In the past state highway dollars allowed major corridors with regional impact to be completed or enhanced in a way that both urban and rural areas realized benefit, he said.

"This plan does not do that," Justice said. "This plan makes a long term commitment, through 2015, to address only a handful of transportation major construction projects in a narrowly defined geographic area."

A transportation plan that doesn't call for completion of corridor gaps could push potential economic development projects to neighboring states, according to Justice.

In the case of Coshocton County, there is an eight-mile gap that if completed would provide a four-lane highway from northeastern Franklin County to I-77 in Tuscarawas County.

"As members of this committee, you each have a responsibility to put forward policies and budgets that reflect the interests of all 88 counties in Ohio," he said. "That challenge is monumental. My advocacy today represents an interest that the ODOT business plan be revised to reflect the needs of all of Ohio."

He suggested the plan be revised so that each of ODOT's projects currently in a Tier 2 stage be advanced and Tier 1 projects be completed, and offered assistance with details to accommodate both urban areas and rural areas.



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Coshocton Port Authority Director T.J. Justice testifies before the Ohio Senate Highways and Transportation Committee Wednesday in Columbus regarding the Ohio Department of Transportation's current business plan.

Meanwhile, ODOT released a statement Tuesday that allows citizens to join in a first-of-its-kind "Transportation Conversation" to determine the state's needs for transportation of the future.

The Ohio 21st Century Transportation Priorities Task Force was named with a mix of industry experts and state leaders from areas such as Cleveland, Columbus, Toledo, Montgomery County, Dublin, Parma, and Cincinnati.

Unlike previous statewide planning efforts, the task force will explore how the state will balance the movement of people and freight, promote safety and reduce congestion, create jobs and encourage responsible growth, connecting highways to rail, aviation, water ports and transit, according to Beasley.

The task force will also identify the fairest ways to finance Ohio's future transportation system, finding new funding tools for state and local governments, and innovative ways to partner with the private sector, according to ODOT's statement.

The task force will gather public input at a series of open meetings across the state, and also invites Ohioans to join the conversation by submitting their ideas and opinions online at TransportationForTomorrow.ohio.gov.

The Ohio 21st Century Transportation Priorities Task Force will convene its inaugural meeting May 7 at ODOT's Central Office in Columbus. Details about the meeting, the complete list of task force members, and updates on meeting times and locations can also be found at TransportationForTomorrow.ohio.gov.

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