

Corridor panel discusses fund repayment

By KAY SEDGMER 9-20-08
Special to the Herald-Star

CADIZ — Without a quorum, the Columbus-Pittsburgh Corridor Committee was unable to handle any formal business but did discuss rules regarding the repayment of federal funds

during a meeting Friday at Harrison Community Hospital.

The committee was organized in July 2007 and began with a mission to promote the construction of a four-lane, 160-mile corridor that would serve as a direct link between Columbus and Pittsburgh.

That group has grown to dozens of interested parties in seven counties stretching from Steubenville to Columbus.

In the ensuing months, the group has, with the help of interested state legislators, pushed a change in state law governing how the Ohio

Department of Transportation pays for projects, helped push for release of the \$500,000 federal allotment for the study of a highway from Cadiz to Newcomerstown and attracted attention along the corridor.

See **CORRIDOR** Page 7A ↔

SATURDAY, SEPT. 20, 2008

Corridor

Continued from Page 1A

The group wants to see the 28-mile link between Cadiz and Newcomerstown built, as well as improving a stretch of state Route 16 between Dresden and Coshocton to a four-lane highway. Also, an interchange in Licking County at Cherry Valley on state Route 16 must be designed and built. Also on the list is completing the four-lane U.S. Route 22 through Harrison County. A couple of miles between the Jewett interchange and Cadiz are still two lanes.

State Sen. Jason Wilson, D-Columbiana, on Friday shared his thoughts on the importance of the corridor.

As a member of the Ohio Highway and Transportation Committee he said he's heard many comments on the state level that echoed those made during the meeting.

"Eastern Ohio will benefit for the corridor," he said. "There's no question that private and public partners will be needed for the project to move ahead. Creative financing is also a factor."

He noted Lt. Gov. Lee Fisher was in eastern Ohio Friday.

"When he comes to Wellsville today I've asked him to travel Route 22 so he will be familiar with the area we are talking about," Wilson said. "Most people don't realize the importance of Route 22 and its economic future. We know that Interstate 70 is nearing its capacity for traffic. We are not reinventing the wheel. This is really just common sense, and it can be done."

Co-Chairman David Brenner of Newark provided clarification on the repayment of federal

funds rules relating to the project.

He and fellow co-chairman, T.J. Justice, have been in talks with representatives from the Ohio Department of Transportation and although earmarked funds are required to be reimbursed to the federal government with a 10-year window, he said he believes there is a possibility for continuance of the project.

"This is not a deal killer," he said of correspondence requiring fund reimbursement to the federal government. "We are looking for the things that can help our friends at ODOT with financing. We are talking about ideas and resources."

Harrison County Commissioner Bill Host asked if the funds would need to be repaid on a local level, and Brenner said in the past only one project required repayment and the state handled it because the local money wasn't available.

Brenner also noted the repayment matter is a clause put into an agreement by ODOT and is not part of the federal earmark.

In reference to the matter, Brenner and Justice have scheduled a meeting with Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland's Chief of Staff John Haseley.

"It's important we maintain a presence in front of the Strickland administration," said Justice.

The next meeting of the committee is to be held at 10 a.m. Friday at Raven's Glenn Winery on U.S. Route 36 near West Lafayette. Open to the public, the meeting will feature a legislative candidates' forum.