

Cost of corridor signs: \$500,000

WEST LAFAYETTE (AP) — It could cost as much as \$500,000 to put up new signs declaring the Columbus-to-Pittsburgh corridor as state Route 161 between Columbus and Interstate 77, and the money isn't in the state coffers.

That was the word from Ohio Department of Transportation officials during Friday's meeting of the Columbus-to-Pittsburgh Corridor Committee Friday at the Raven's Glenn Winery.

The committee has been seeking giving the highway corridor a single route number to make it more mar-

ketable and easier to describe. The committee is seeking a four-lane link from Pittsburgh to Columbus that uses segments of a number of existing highways, including U.S. Route 22 through Steubenville and Weirton and U.S. Route 250 through the Tappan Lake region of Harrison County. The sign cost includes putting up large overhead signs on segments of the highway that already have been upgraded to freeway standards.

Tony Guida of Steubenville, who represents Jefferson County on the committee, suggested looking into alternatives beyond putting up large

highway signs.

Not only is money an issue, but there are questions about what to call any routes east of I-77 that are part of the corridor. West of I-77, most of the highway already is a four-lane expressway.

Greg Gurney of ODOT District 11 said the highway could be known as state Route 161, but a determination on the 28-mile section connecting across Harrison County won't be made until a study is completed sometime next year. ODOT is completing the economic development portion of the study, to present to the study consultants within the

next two or three weeks.

A presentation on tourism assets of the corridor was made by Wendy Zucal, director of the Dennison Railroad Depot Museum, and Tiffany Gerber, tourism and group tour manager for the Tuscarawas County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The tourism committee of the corridor group has created the theme of "There's More to Explore on the Corridor" for marketing efforts. They have developed a road show to use in visiting all areas of the corridor, including a presentation

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in Jefferson County in the near future. Gerber said the tourism committee is wrestling with how far into Pennsylvania the tourism marketing effort should go.

A four-phase marketing plan and timeline was set, including:

- Development of a Web portal with links to all tourism entities and rack cards to be placed on tourism brochure racks along the corridor. A marketing firm is to be selected by Nov. 15 to create a logo and brand, design a map and put together the Web portal, which would be a "pay to participate" opportunity for tourism destinations

along the corridor.

- Develop a tourism corridor map, also in "pay to participate" style.

- Maintain a calendar of events on the corridor Web site and a link to discoverohio.com.

- Launch a major marketing effort including advertising and travel shows.

The marketing plan would run through 2011.

Dan Greathouse, chairman of the Top of West Virginia Convention and Visitors Bureau, attended the meeting and offered to host a road show stop at Mountaineer Casino, Race-track and Resort.

The corridor committee elected Ed Looman, executive director of the Progress Alliance economic development organization from Jefferson County, and T.J. Justice, executive director of the Coshocton County Port Authority, as co-chairmen for 2010-2011.

Looman said, "Since becoming involved with the committee and collecting data from local businesses and industries regarding the economic impact of this project, I have come to realize what the completion of this corridor can mean to Jefferson County. In addition, it has been encouraging to see

the regional cooperation this project has generated. I am a firm believer in taking a regional approach to problems and future growth and this committee is a shining example of the good that can be generated when folks come together to support a cause."

Looman added that the corridor is an opportunity to grow tourism in Jefferson County.

"It is exciting to see what the tourism committee has planned and again, how folks from different counties are coming together to market the corridor as a destination point," he said.