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Our opinion

Strickland's 'We'll see' not enough

Gov. Ted Strickland is taking a politically safe path when it comes to discussing the potential completion of the Columbus-to-Pittsburgh highway corridor as a new freeway network.

The state of Ohio already has most of the more than 120 miles of highway completed. Four-lane divided highways traverse much of the area from New Albany, along Interstate 270 in the northeast of Columbus to the Ohio River at Steubenville. One large notable exception is a four-lane east-west link across Harrison County.

A feasibility study is pending on that section, with expected recommendations to come late this year. A steering committee that has been working on the completion and improvement of all segments of the corridor, including representatives from seven counties and many levels of government and the private sector, is hearing the study may recommend something less than building more highway.

It's a difficult environment, to be sure, amid dwindling highway budgets and with a seeming anti-highway attitude settling in at the national government level when it comes to transportation funding.

Thus, Strickland's answer to a question about commitment to the highway across Harrison County earlier this week was a politically safe one.

Essentially, Strickland said he would support whatever the study recommends.

That is the easy answer to a question about government spending during a campaign season and we'll take the governor at having made an honest answer. We would agree that spending should not be for make-work projects that serve no one.

However, we would note that there was a time only 20 years ago when U.S. Route 22 ended in surface streets east of Weirton and west of Wintersville. It took decades of keeping the political pressure up to push for construction of the highway around Weirton and Steubenville as well as the Veterans Memorial Bridge.

Is there anyone in the Steubenville-Weirton area who would wish the area had acquiesced when the politically correct answer to construction of that highway was a "we'll see" statement?

We'd bet the thousands of motorists a day who use the highway and bridge wouldn't number in that wish.

The Columbus-to-Pittsburgh corridor, with not only the Harrison County segment but also work that remains to be done in Coshocton County and west of Newark, will require years of diligence.

The feasibility study will be one step, and its answer still doesn't rule out finding more justification for the road.