

Corridor plans move forward

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By PAUL GIANNAMORE

Business editor

WEST LAFAYETTE — The Columbus-to-Pittsburgh Corridor Committee will continue its work toward an eventual four-lane link across Eastern Ohio, though a feasibility study to be released by year's end is not favorable.

The committee met Friday

morning at Ravens Glen Winery for the first time since a draft summary of the report by Gannett Fleming for the Ohio Department of Transportation was made available by ODOT. The study said there's no data suggesting the 28-mile link from Cadiz to Newcomerstown, which would be the last major expressway part of the corri-

dor to be built, would benefit the state's economy, traveler safety or improve glaring engineering deficiencies that otherwise can't be fixed. The consultants did say, however, that there is a case to be made eventually for a completed expressway link between the two major metropolitan areas.

Ed Looman, executive director of Jefferson County's

Progress Alliance public-private economic development group, is co-chairman of the steering committee for the corridor. His co-chair is Mike Jacoby of the Muskingum County Port Authority, a former Progress Alliance direc-

tor.

Looman said Friday's corri-

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dor committee meeting focused on the next steps, including setting up a meeting for January with newly elected state and federal legislators along the corridor, which stretches from Franklin to Jefferson counties; as well as preparing a list of questions and issues to take to ODOT when it holds a meeting Nov. 30 in New Philadelphia to finalize the Gannett Fleming report.

Among those questions, Looman said, is whether the state transportation modeling system that contends traffic wouldn't use the route includes the Findlay Connector to the Pittsburgh International Airport from U.S. Route 22 in Western Pennsylvania. Looman said that highway opened in 2006 and may not have been part of the modeling system from an earlier date.

Ken Engstrom, a staffer for U.S. Rep. Zack Space, D-Dover, who lost his re-election bid Nov. 2, encouraged the corridor committee to keep up its work. Engstrom is a former ODOT district spokesman and he noted that all major highway projects have ups and downs over a very long term before construction begins.

The public has an opportunity to help the push for the highway to be included in Ohio's long-range plans, according to Sandie Mapel, director of the Licking County Area Transportation Study. By visiting the Ohio Department of Transportation website and checking onto the GoOhio tab, there is a comment section where area residents can express support for the Columbus-to-Pittsburgh corridor.

Looman said state representative-elect Lou Gentile suggested the group needs to recognize that having the study done puts the highway corridor further along than it was several years

HIGHWAY SUPPORT:

■ To show support for inclusion of the completion of the Columbus-to-Pittsburgh corridor in the state of Ohio's long-range transportation plans, visit www.dot.state.oh.us and click on the GoOhio link. The GoOhio page includes a comment section where supporters can express their views on the need to complete the four-lane expressway system from Columbus to U.S. Route 22 at Cadiz, where it comes to Steubenville and heads to Pittsburgh. A 28-mile link from New Comerstown to Cadiz is one of the last major pieces of that corridor to be turned into a four-lane highway.

ago and suggested the group continue pushing and building upon each step toward the highway. Gentile also suggested the group could look to having the highway placed on the Appalachian corridor development system for its long-term highway construction program.

Mapel reported on the highway numbering issue. The route as it exists now is several state and U.S. routes between I-270 in Columbus and the Veterans Memorial Bridge in Ohio. ODOT has said it would be cost-prohibitive to overlay the Route 161 designation across the corridor's already existing routes with new signs.

The tourism subcommittee has provided good regionalization, Looman said, and has developed a new website, www.TriStateRoadTrip.com, as well as a new motto for the corridor's tourist attractions, from Steubenville to Columbus: "Your destination to meet the nicest people."

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