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Our opinion

Committee must continue cooperation

Gov.-elect John Kasich is rightly rejecting federal funding that would require state matching spending on a dubious high-speed rail corridor, citing the state's budget nightmare as a reason not to spend on extra, and unnecessary, projects now.

He also had said he wouldn't spend money on the 28-mile Columbus-to-Pittsburgh corridor highway link from New Comerstown to Cadiz if a feasibility study wasn't favorable.

It's not going to be favorable, if a draft now circulating is the final report.

We agree it's not the time to spend the money.

Nor is it time for the highway committee to give up.

Highways are a long-term, often contentious battle. Ask the people who pushed for decades, dating back to the 1950s, to get a major four-lane highway constructed into Appalachian Ohio. There are major segments, stretching from Dayton to Chillicothe and over to Athens now, but it wasn't without decades of sticking together and working hard.

Our area knows that U.S. Route 22 has been an expressway from Cadiz to Pittsburgh now for nearly 20 years. Prior to that, it spent decades as a highway from Cadiz to Steubenville, and one from Pittsburgh to Cove Road in Weirton. It took constant area pressure, politics, attention and discussion to keep the highway on the table for federal and state highway departments.

Now, the 28 miles from New Comerstown to Cadiz would link Route 22 into a nearly complete network of four-lane expressway miles from Columbus that could provide a diversion and alternate for traffic on I-70.

The corridor study that is circulating now bases traffic projections on statewide modeling that ranges 25 years into the future, though we would be left wondering how such a model can account for the infinite variables in economics, politics and sheer human behavior that will shape Ohio for the next quarter century.

Assumptions have to be made for such models to work, and we hope the assumption isn't that Eastern Ohio will not grow and develop for decades to come. We know too many people working far too hard, including business owners and investors, to live with that assumption.

No, the conditions today don't bode well for construction of new miles of highway in Ohio. Indeed, ODOT is pressed against the wall just to maintain what the state already has. No, we don't think the corridor can be built at any time soon.

But the area cannot give up on planning for its future. To do so is to give up on a spirit of hope, growth and success.

We support the committee continuing to cooperate, regionally, with hopes that sometime in some decade down the road, we'll be able to drive to Columbus easily from the Ohio Valley without using I-70.