

Corridor still many years away

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STEUBENVILLE — The Columbus-to-Pittsburgh corridor is not dead, but will require years more of work to justify its completion.

That was the consensus at a stakeholders meeting held Tuesday at the Ohio Depart-

ment of Transportation District 11 office in New Philadelphia about a feasibility study by Gannett-Fleming for construction of part of the corridor.

That part, a four-lane expressway linking from U.S. Route 36 at Newcomerstown to U.S. Route 22 at Cadiz, is not favored for immediate

action in the feasibility study, which will be released in final form by the end of the year. However, according to Ed Looman, Progress Alliance executive director and co-chairman of the Columbus-to-Pittsburgh Corridor committee, the mood at the stakeholders meeting wasn't one of defeat.

"All attending agreed the project and the entire corridor effort is a good idea," Looman said. "The challenge now facing the committee is looking at the completed study and determining the next steps. We were encouraged to keep fighting, not to

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see this as an end to the idea, just the end of the study. There also was talk of perhaps shifting attention to the Hopedale to Cadiz segment."

The corridor, as envisioned by government, community and economic development leaders in a seven-county strip from Franklin to Jefferson County, involves completing a four-lane expressway from Interstate 270 northeast of Columbus at New Albany to the Veterans Memorial Bridge at the Ohio River. The route already is mostly four-lane highways, including state Routes 161 and 16 and parts of U.S. Routes 36 and 250, as well as U.S. Route 22. There is a roughly three-mile segment from Hopedale to Cadiz on Route 22 that is still two lanes.

In addition, the Route 250 segment across Harrison County is two lanes between Cadiz and Newcomerstown, as well as a two-lane portion of state Route 16 in Coshocton County.

Looman said Greg Gurney, ODOT District 11 planning administrator, said that the corridor projects are tied because of the limited money available for new road projects. Looman said Gurney said as each of the segments currently in the hopper is completed, including the Cherry Valley interchange in Licking County and the Coshocton-area highway segment, pressure will build for the next parts of the project.

He said Gurney cautioned that the project has to offset its cost and environmental and other impacts with defined needs. The state won't justify spending money for a long highway segment at nearly \$1 billion

that would only carry 10,000 cars a day.

"In essence, the state and the federal government don't have the money to do a 'build it and they will come' type project," Looman said.

Realtor Anthony Guida has been leading the charge locally for the study and for getting the 28-mile Harrison County segment completed, to link Pittsburgh and Columbus across the Steubenville-Weirton area. He asked if the traffic modeling used by ODOT to form load projections for the road included the completed airport connector from Bavington to the Pittsburgh International Airport. ODOT officials said the computer model did not include that road. Guida also said the model has to somehow consider what the future could be if the highway were built in terms of reasons to build along the corridor, which would, in turn, generate more traffic.

The idea of putting a toll on the segment was considered, Looman said, and was found to be capable of bringing in just \$2 million annually in tolls in 2035, with an initial \$1 million a year in revenue beginning in 2015, assuming the highway could be built. Looman said with a \$1 billion project cost, the tolls were found lacking as a way to pay for the highway.

Economically, the report says the road would create just 55 new jobs statewide and add \$16.24 million to the state's economy, again compared with a \$1 billion project cost.

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