

June 15, 2009

Good Morning to All,

Where are we, and where are we going? A question asked on many family trips by our children. I vaguely remember something from junior high school about the Appalachian Thruway; I think it must have been some forty years ago. Today we stand on the doorway of completion of the Pennsylvania section. It has been a long and arduous task to get here, with many problems surfacing along the way. To finish we must keep our eyes on the goal. The next phase will most likely be the piece connecting I-80 to U.S. 220 at Salona. The completion, in my opinion, of this extended and long overdue project will help the MPO attain the goals of the Project Ranking Committee.

As some of you may know, I was at one time an elected official in the Township of Marion. I served on quite a few committees in regards to the I-99 corridor project. My commitment and concern being primarily how this project would affect the safety of our township residents and the intermingling of various modes of transportation. All of us that worked on these projects were stakeholders and through the conflict and then consensus of individual goals and needs for our respective communities we concluded: the high-speed and local access interchanges were both viable necessities to promote safety and security, and preserve the existing landscape.

High-speed vehicular traffic on Jacksonville road is promoted by the current interchange system. Vehicles (drivers) traveling home shoot straight through the interchange and north on route 26. Some people miss the westbound entrance ramp to I-80, as it is not in a very visible location. As we pass the interchange the vehicle speed must ultimately and hopefully automatically shift from 65 to the local road speed of 45. Something many of us don't do as we mull over the day and head home. The current speed of 45 mph on Jacksonville road is adequate for safe travel. Many days one knows whom the person traveling at the posted speed limit is just by the number of cars following behind them, *it is a daily observable phenomenon*. The local interchange will give commuters, travelers, and shoppers a cooling off area. They will exit I-80 and come to a stop sign. If they have made a wrong choice here they may still continue forward and reenter I-80. Many of the truck incidents referred to by residents and elected officials are the result of truck drivers missing this entrance ramp necessitating the need for them to turn around in someone's driveway, or a local roadway. All the accidents I can think of involving trucks were the result of missing the I-80 westbound ramp and the driver looking for a place to turnaround. If not they would proceed following the sign to Route 26, stop once again, and proceed in the direction they are going. Two stop signs to reset their speed to the current posted speed limits. The group working on this project hoped this would alleviate some of the challenges concerning travel speeds.

Other safety issues concern the mix of vehicles using the local roads: school buses, triaxles, tractor-trailers, (local deliveries and pick ups consist of milk products, ag products, and forestry products as well as large dump trailers for aggregate), construction

vehicles, recreational vehicles, personal vehicles, and Amish buggies. This is a narrow road compared to many but it is adequate at the posted speed limit, and if the vehicle operators use common courtesy towards others, safe travel is possible. One goal was preserving the quiet and solitude of the neighborhoods of Spring and Walker Township and Bellefonte borough from an influx of truck traffic trying to access I-80 or I-99, via Forest Avenue or Musser Lane, and route 550, as well as reducing the chances of a traffic bottleneck on the very road from which the Bellefonte area school buses access the Middle and High School parking areas. Moving vehicles as quickly and seamlessly onto a four-lane highway system as possible would be an important safety issue, as well as, allowing a separation in that entrance from commuter traffic at the high-speed interchange. The reconnection of Jacksonville road and the new connection between Forest Avenue, Musser Lane and Jacksonville Road will allow for travel to be maintained for local traffic to and from Bellefonte.

This safety issue is directly related to preservation of the existing transportation system. The improvements for Route 26, planned by PennDot will enhance and provide for the more efficient flow of traffic and heighten visibility along the route 26 corridor to its termination point at state route 150. This has become and will continue to be a major transportation route for people moving between Lock Haven, Williamsport and State College, until the completion of the I-80/I-99 junction at Lock Haven.

The above considerations will greatly enhance the existing road network. Preservation and maintenance are vitally linked to this, in both economical highway development and cost efficiency of maintenance methods. Wear and tear of the roadways by heavy loads will be reduced as larger vehicles move themselves on to the interstate system. Look at your own communities, has traffic on 220 decreased? Has traffic on old 322 decreased? And how about route 26 through Pleasant Gap? Pass through traffic drops on local roads when safer and multi-lane roads come into use for passer bys.

Another benefit of the local access interchange it would ease the following, weight restrictions on local roads, rerouting and detours around the high speed interchange should there ever be another whiteout accident like a few years ago, as well as allowing access from three different directions if there would be a catastrophic accident in the neighbor hood of the I-99 /I-80 interface. Milesburg, Bellefonte, Pleasant Gap, Walker, and Howard Emergency response teams would have direct routes there and back to any one of the following hospitals: Lock Haven, Centre Community, or the Altoona trauma center. Something we should also think about is a set aside of some ground to serve as a ride share area or even a future CATA Bus Stop, near the local access point. If the opportunity presents itself we should probably grab the chance while it still exists..

I worked on the new zoning for our township, and with the Nittany Valley Joint Planning Commission, on the first regional zoning effort. Some assumptions were made as we progressed. The highest density residential zone is located closest to the current interchange; and extends up to the proposed local access interchange, beyond that the density levels decrease and regulations more cordial to the farming community exist.

Many farmers in the area were concerned that they retain the right to subdivide their ground much like many of the farmers in Walker Township. Development pressure in the township has been on the increase for the last thirty years and unfortunately, in my opinion, the township will continue to see continued residential growth, adding to the transportation demands placed on our roadways, as well as, environmental pressures on our limestone valley. The quarries in our area yield high quality limestone, I imagine there is at least thirty years of reserves there still. Local road improvement and access issues will remain into the foreseeable future, where it concerns the movement of local aggregates, farm and forest products, and new residents commuting to and from their workplaces and zoning will change as new pressures for these resources grow in the future. Zoning and resource management will likely remain in a state of flux in the future as new pressures and demands confront our elected officials. Comprehensive plans are typically reevaluated every ten years to assess their value? Are they working, and do they currently reflect the values of the current residents. Try as we may, we, as community leaders, try to be proactive, and not reactive to the needs of the residents, environment, and neighboring communities, as they change and different visions of the future collide. The A-18 and B-18 projects appear to be consistent with zoning and growth issues in our region.

Let's move on to the environment and economic issues. I have not noticed any air quality issues in my lifetime in this valley; I-80 has been here as long as I have lived here. However, the smell of the manure tanks on a couple of the neighboring farms has irked some residents. The water table in my personal well has fallen as development has occurred, most likely due to the lowering of the water table. But water is still flowing and remains as a high quality resource in the township. Environmentally the park and ride lot at the local access point would be a plus if local residents would use it, and it was economically feasible for CATA to provide.

Efficient management and operation, and integration and connectivity; the local interchange will accomplish this when the Lock Haven to Salona portion of I-99/220 connection is completed. I am reminded of the slogan "Think globally act locally." As planners we must do this; look down the road as far as we can, look for the point of convergence, reach out as far as we can to the local communities that surround us. And ask, "May we do this? It will be better for us all in the long run." Wishful thinking on my part I suppose, considering the need for immediate satisfaction in the world today.

Economic considerations, last but not least. This project would sustain all of the economic objectives listed on the criteria handout. As a past board member of the Lion Country Visitors and Convention Bureau, we endorsed the project before you. It addressed the North South routes of the traveling public and way to share the Happy Valley experience with others around the Northeast Region. The economic energy and vitality of the community, region, and Penn State is one of the many reasons the economic recession has not hit us so hard. I am only able to conclude, that this will be an asset for the area and the whole of the Appalachian Corridor by linking resources, industry and tourism together in a more fuel conservative way. What does the future hold? Who knows? But let's not paint ourselves into the corner of hindsight, and say we

should have done this then, when the land was available, the engineering was done, stimulus money was available, and we could plan around the infrastructure.

In conclusion, I agree with the technical board that the time is now and as quoted in last week's paper, "We should not move backwards on this project."

There will always be naysayers.

The sky will always be falling.

The boy will continue to cry wolf.

We must continue to move forward our ears bent to listen to the engineers, the vast body of transportation planners. I thank you for allowing me to express my concerns. I urge all elected officials to listen to the builders and designers to avoid any new perils and bring I-99 /I-80 portion of this project to a conclusion.

John R. "Rick" Dillon
2481 Jacksonville Road
Bellefonte, Pa. 16823