

**Privatize Roads**  
by  
**Raymond E. Muth**

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Manufacturing companies originate or move from one location to the other without giving much consideration to the area telephone company involved. Telephone systems are generally assumed to be stable everywhere. Conversely, transportation systems weigh a heavy influence on where a company locates. Manufacturing companies exist where ship, rail or road access is good and dependable to its markets.

With the advent of the Internet age, our already huge dependence on our telephone infrastructure has grown exponentially. It might be argued that our telecommunications infrastructure has become even more important to business and the general public than our transportation infrastructure.

While we often like to complain about our respective telephone companies, we probably have the best telecommunications infrastructure in the world. Here's a sampling why: Telephone companies have owners. They are financially self-supporting. They operate to common standards to make interconnection simpler. And if you have a problem with your phone, you will likely have someone at your home or business within hours to repair it.

Like any business, telephone companies must meet their demand. Newer technology such as fiber optics must first be strategically placed where demand, studies, statistics and common sense prevail.

Contrast our telephone infrastructure with the system that is Pennsylvania's highway infrastructure. Somewhere along the line it was decided that the transportation system was a public good that should be financed and operated by the public sector. In other words, we have a system where studies, statistics and common sense rarely prevail. In fact, almost all that matters is political power.

Do you think if our telephone system was driven by the government today, residents and businesses in places like the Kiski Valley would be getting the shaft? I do. Imagine if small towns had to beg, plead and schmooze politicians to have an adequate phone system the way we have to campaign for various road projects.

So why have we fallen into the trap of believing that our transportation system must be owned, maintained (if you can call it that) and operated by political decision makers? Because it's always been that way? Wouldn't our highways be better handled by private companies? Could it be any worse? Why is privatizing highways something never considered?

Congressman Bud Shuster, chairman of the House Transportation Committee is currently

getting ripped in the press for giving people in his district a free pass on the PA Turnpike. He also has been criticized in the past for channeling millions of federal dollars into his district to build highways which would be better served in other parts of the country, particularly Western PA.

But reality is that anyone would be crazy not to want Bud Shuster as his/her congressman. Is it any wonder he is running unopposed? He is the master of his craft. If he represented our region, the Kiski Valley Expressway, the Alle-Kiski Connector bridge and a northern beltway around Pittsburgh would've been constructed long ago. So considerable is Rep. Shuster's influence that Rep. Ron Klink made an impassioned speech to the Alle-Kiski Connector group several months ago, promising a Bud Shuster helicopter flight over the area.

The problem with transportation is not Bud Shuster. The problem is the system. It's an antiquated, feudal mode of operation. It's government. It's inefficient. It stinks. Highway transportation is big business and that's precisely why the government should not be involved. Rep. Shuster has done us all a favor by exposing the inevitable problems of any government system including the political cronyism that exists with the PA Turnpike Commission.

There are various models around the world of privatized road networks. Some early attempts have failed only to be bailed out by the government. Other recent systems have been quite successful. If we allowed private firms to finance new highways in Pennsylvania, roads would be built where they are needed. There are a variety of methods for pricing including technology employed in other countries and some states allowing a card to be scanned when passing through a tollgate that charges a users account.

Let's take the politics out of Pennsylvania transportation. Let's explore the privatization option for any new highway projects.



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