

The Kiski Valley Expressway

by

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If you have a business in the Vandergrift or Apollo area and a prospective customer wants to visit your shop, can you give directions from Pittsburgh in 100 words or less? Perhaps the ensuing confusion makes the Kiski Valley quaint but it is a tremendous economic disadvantage.

Good transportation is a critical component to economic prosperity and from the deplorable, bombed-out Apollo bridge to the empty promises of the Kiski Valley Expressway, this area has been treated like an unwanted mongrel dog for too long. Its an absolute embarrassment to bring people from out of town across hither and thither, only to find a dangerous route 356 and a deplorable bridge in Apollo that third world countries would barely tolerate. I sometimes ask myself, "does the Kiski Valley get anything for being part of the state of Pennsylvania?"

To her credit, Kathy Starr, the incoming Chairperson of the StrongLand Chamber of Commerce has made the Kiski Valley Expressway the top priority under her watch. As is typical for Kathy, she has taken the lead through example. She has agreed to focus her energies in the next year serving on Allegheny Township's long-range planning committee. And now she is expecting other chamber members to follow suit.

My orders are to gather area legislators in one room to decide whether we finally put up or shut up. Its not an impossibility for one reason: we have excellent legislators who can make it happen. Tim Pesci, Terry Van Horne and Joe Petrarca have enough on the ball to understand the Expressway's importance to our region. Senator Stapleton and Senator Hart are two of the most powerful members in the Senate. They too understand the impact good transportation would bring to the valley. Getting united on one plan will be tricky but not unattainable. We either get consensus with genuine commitment or we languish in hither and thither.

In addition, StrongLand's government relations committee has met with the Allegheny Valley Chamber and the New Kensington Chamber to discuss some issues this past summer. It is my hope that we can garner their support on this important regional project.

There are some that contend that people should relocate their businesses if they don't like the transportation we currently enjoy. Unfortunately that is precisely what is happening. Worse, many businesses never start here because of the terrible transportation problem. For example, I know of a computer company President who lives in our area who would love to relocate his business in the Kiski Valley but cannot because transportation for his customers from Pittsburgh is out of the question.

The StrongLand Chamber made their annual pilgrimage to Harrisburg this November. While there, the gas tax increase was not passed. This supposedly rang the death knell for all new road projects. However, something very troubling began to surface. There was a feeling that the legislature did not pass the gas tax because some are losing confidence in PennDot. When legislators are not exactly sure why some projects go and others do not, something is wrong.

PennDot has been telling us over & over again that Pennsylvania has to maintain more road miles than all the New England states combined. What does that have to do with anything? The climate and topography of Pennsylvania are challenging. So what. Does Massachusetts scream that Pennsylvania doesn't have to deal with coastal erosion problems as justification for their inability to stem the tide?

Kathy Starr has chosen to draw the line in the sand. Like route 356, the road she has chosen is windy, difficult and hazardous. Kathy's success will largely be measured by her ability to motivate others to get involved with the cause. Can she succeed? Its a long shot but I wouldn't be surprised.

This cause is the proverbial ball game for the StrongLand Chamber. We do not have to accept the way things are. The Kiski Valley doesn't deserve to be treated like an unwanted mongrel dog. Kathy has set the agenda. Its time for the those of us interested in economic progress, safety and quality of life to make it happen.



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