

## **The Kiski Valley in 2025**

by  
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The date is May 18, 2025. Hov lanes are now a playful euphemism for hovercraft lanes. Programmable, personal battery-powered hovercrafts have begun to replace the automobile as the transit of choice. The once desolate Kiski River is now a major thoroughfare. Holographic traffic lights and median strips keep traffic flowing quickly, orderly and best of all computerized and accident-free.

Western Pennsylvania which once had a notorious reputation for potholes has now become the envy of the nation with its many waterways becoming natural hovercraft corridors. Pittsburgh's three rivers have become the new parkway. People can make the trek from Apollo to Pittsburgh in twenty minutes making this once small town a very desirable place to live.

But this date is significant for another reason. Governor Joe Petrarca who has spent a life time dedicated to the completion of the Kiski Valley Expressway is about to finally see his dream realized. It is a bittersweet day for Joe and his constituency. As he cuts the ribbon, he realizes that 50 years of struggle for hope, growth, opportunity and safety has left him with a new highway that is obsolete due to hovercraft technology.

The year is 1997. As a member of the StrongLand Chamber of Commerce I rise early, drive to Harrisburg to visit area legislators and then drive back. It's not an easy trip. I have 101 other things to do. I would almost do anything rather than drive the Turnpike and visit Harrisburg. But because of the critical importance to this area of getting the Kiski Valley Expressway back on PennDOT's 12 year plan, many members like myself visit our legislators twice during the year.

I once thought macroeconomics was the most confusing subject I had ever tackled because no two teachers could ever agree on what the economy was doing. No one could agree because no one understood it. But macroeconomics pales in comparison with tackling the thorny issues of how to get a deplorable bridge fixed or how to build a road in Pennsylvania. No one understands it.

For starters, you have to get on PennDOT's 12 year plan, SPRPC's 20 year plan which has to be part of TIP's four year plan and it has to follow the federal guidelines of ISTEA's plan. If you are dropped off any one of these plans in any one year for any arbitrary reason, your bridge or road is history. But there are additional roadblocks. Pennsylvania environmental law requires you to spend millions to be sure your proposal doesn't disturb anything of historical importance like the ancient meteor crater that destroyed the dinosaurs.

In addition, you have to be sure your project is a priority of local politicians. You have to make sure you say the right things and you can't get the wrong people upset because despite the road's obvious importance, politics is politics.

Do you consider PennDOT to be run effectively? I posed this question to a prominent state Senator whose district was outside the Kiski Valley. The answer was an unhesitant "no". Well why not? Why is the tail wagging the dog? Why doesn't the legislature have a handle on PennDOT and all these other acronyms? Why would people in the Kiski Valley vote for a sales tax for a new stadium in Pittsburgh when we can't get a road to the stadium?

We've had a stadium task-force propose a new baseball stadium on the North Shore. We've had a county task-force develop Compac 21. Why not a transportation task-force which which among other things might recommend the privatization of PennDOT?

Pennsylvania is filled with high-quality, talented people for such a task-force. Allegheny Township Supervisor John Frammel is a great example. Not only is Mr. Frammel a born-again proponent of the Kiski Valley Expressway, he is a skilled strategic planner with an accomplished business track record outside the Harrisburg bureaucracy.

The legislature should call for an efficiency study of PA transportation. Like business, government agencies need to look ahead. Otherwise new transit opportunities like hovercrafts may be stymied by our preoccupation with the stumbling blocks that have always been.



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