

The Problem with PennDot

by
Raymond E. Muth

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The Kiski Valley Expressway is being thwarted by a web of bureaucracy so confusing that even the bureaucrats don't understand where, when and how to cut through the suffocating entanglement. But most of all, they have no real concept of how important this roadway is to the safety and economic vibrancy of the Kiski Valley relative to the other projects being considered throughout Pennsylvania.

On January 25th the StrongLand Chamber of Commerce met with members of PennDot and Representative Joe Petrarca to discuss where things were with this important issue. First the good news: The StrongLand Chamber is unyielding and relentless in pursuit of this important highway. Its membership has been committed to this project for many years. Although frustrated with the lack of progress, StrongLand refuses to be denied.

In addition, Joe Petrarca, Jr., like his father has stood firmly in the corner of the project's development. Joe has been responsive and receptive to meetings arranged by the Chamber throughout his term in office. He sits on the transportation committee and his support is vital to the project's realization. The support of the Westmoreland and Armstrong County Commissioners has been consistently good. Senators Hart and Stapleton and Representative Van Horne have also been important allies.

Now the bad news: PennDot has more reasons for the lack of progress than I can count. The five gentlemen that represented PennDot at the meeting were gracious, sincere and accommodating. I have no doubt they felt our pain. But one got the impression that these poor fellows were overwhelmed by voluminous paperwork. They looked whipped if you want my opinion. They looked like guys that were never allowed to make a decision without consulting 100 other people first. The word "consensus" kept coming up. They wanted "consensus" before they made any decision. How many business leaders wait for consensus before making a decision? PennDot management is hamstrung.

We were told that there are now 13 proposals on the table for consideration of the Kiski Valley corridor. Can you imagine 13 ways to get from Weinel's crossroads to Route 28? Does a straight line come to mind? What in the world is going on over there? Could one of the options be to consider a chunnel under the Allegheny river? Come on guys. This is totally absurd.

If that wasn't discouraging enough PennDot told us that a series of studies had to be performed by every environmental group ever imagined including a 5-7 year wetland study bombshell. Is Pennsylvania a great state or what? If Governor Ridge ever needed a paradigm of bureaucratic nonsense, the Kiski Valley non-Expressway would be a classic.

On another front, I spoke to Mr. Amore about his residential development the day after the news article appeared in the VND. I sensed that he was an excellent businessman during the course of a good conversation. As you may recall, Mr. Amore is building a development that would supposedly bisect the Expressway corridor. Mr. Amore told me that PennDot had no clue where the Expressway would go. I had no idea how intuitive Mr. Amore's premonition was.

The most serious question is what kind of terrible accident has to occur on route 356 before PennDot wakes up and gets off its assurance that this stymied process is necessary. There may not be a more dangerous road in Pennsylvania.

There is a secondary issue that is almost always overlooked. Think accessible transportation is an important key to economic development? One only has to look at the economic boom that occurred in Cranberry Township and its surrounding communities after the completion of I-279. The success of those businesses out there had nothing to do with economic development groups. It had everything to do with one road.

I believe we have a good Governor who is trying to eliminate the bureaucratic barriers that hinder progress in Pennsylvania. The Kiski Valley Expressway is only going to happen with a credible, resourceful and persistent voice. The StrongLand Chamber is that voice. It is a Herculean task that lies ahead. The fight has only begun.



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