

The Six Road Project

by
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Valley News Dispatch 9/27/98 - Community Columnist

For years the StrongLand Chamber had been pushing to make the Kiski Valley Expressway a reality. We often made grueling one-day trips to Washington, D.C. and Harrisburg to meet with government officials. We organized rallies and letter-writing campaigns. We made calls to PennDot and the SPRPC on a continuous basis. We held public forums with legislators. We even met with the VND editorial board on a couple occasions to enlist their support. Despite our hard-fought efforts, we simply could not muster the political clout to make it happen.

After many years of frustration, we evaluated our strategy early in 1998. The question was not what road we wanted to build but rather why we were trying to build the road. What were we trying to accomplish with our support of the expressway? Were we supporting a project to connect to route 28? Were we trying to find a faster way to commute to Pittsburgh? Our membership indicated getting to Pittsburgh and route 28 were both important to them.

If that was the case, which of the many different routes that PennDot had studied and proposed was the expressway? Would a new bridge in the Freeport area be built for example? Even PennDot did not have those answers.

Thus we had to ask ourselves some new questions. Were there better ways of approaching the transportation needs of our membership? Could we look beyond our weary battle scars and be open to new ideas for the area.

The choice was as follows: StrongLand had the opportunity to become part of an expanded six road agenda that had a legitimate shot of making positive progress for the Kiski Valley. Or StrongLand could sit on the sidelines watching a five road project struggle to occur while we continued to struggle in obscurity for the expressway. \$6 million in federal funding had already been approved for the connector bridge and the route 28 interchange. That part of the program was going to happen with or without the StrongLand Chamber's help. However the two sides needed each other to move forward.

With the encouragement of County Commissioners Scahill and Balya, we forged an alliance with the Alle-Kiski Coalition which included a four-lane route 356 to route 28 as part of a new six road program. It also included a four lane route 56 to route 366. In other words, the Kiski Valley Expressway was now part of an expanded approach that included additional transportation benefits to the Kiski Valley.

For the six road program to succeed, it was important that the coalition remained united. We purposely stopped using the name Kiski Valley Expressway. We could not have a connector bridge faction and a Kiski Valley Expressway faction. We had to be one. If the

group began to fracture, everything would fly apart. Thus we became the Alle-Kiski Regional Transportation Project.

After our decision, I received many calls from concerned citizens. Most had never seen the six road program or had been given misinformation. Many were quite satisfied when they saw the approach we had taken. Others expressed dismay that we were "abandoning the Kiski Valley Expressway" as though we were abandoning the Kiski Valley. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Feelings of abandonment should have been directed at those who did not support StrongLand's efforts during our many years of disappointment.

Those on the StrongLand Board do their best as volunteers to represent members who are concerned about economic development, safety and the quality of life in our area. We at the StrongLand Chamber are staunch advocates of the hard-working citizenry of the Kiski Valley.

Few can dispute that the Kiski Valley has often been ignored. But those years of disappointment and resentment do nothing for us at the transportation table today. We can't allow prejudices between communities to raise its ugly head. We can't take cheap shots at each other. We have to use our heads to do the right thing. I believe the six road program is our best chance. Let's move forward.



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