

I have been hearing and reading harsh criticism to a transportation improvement project in the west end of Steubenville, OH. This project, nearly six years in planning and engineering, is the first phase of completing meaningful long-term improvements to Lovers Lane Road. The second phase, with engineering and property acquisition underway, is the reconstruction of the Sunset Boulevard intersection. This project is the culmination of a 7 to 10 year plan initiated by City Engineer Mike Dolak and approved by Steubenville City Council: reconstruct Washington Street and John Scott Highway, and resurface University/Brady Boulevard and the Lovers Lane Connector. All using federal transportation funding sub-allocated through BHJ from the Ohio Department of Transportation and matching funds from the City of Steubenville.

We at BHJ do not plan or stop funding a project based on a premonition that a Mall or a big box store closes down, or when a company shuts a steel factory. With the Ohio DOT as its partner, BHJ bases project selection on functional classification (typically off-system arterials), pavement condition, traffic volume and truck classification, as well as crash analysis. BHJ also considers pedestrian and bicycle connectivity where appropriate. Above all, BHJ avoids lapsing federal dollars and works to leverage those dollars with other fund sources when necessary. Finally, BHJ selects local projects based on the sponsor government's ability to provide the local match and the wherewithal to deliver the project to construction. A typical timeline for project delivery, planning, environmental and detail design engineering, to construction, depending on complexity, is 5 to 7 years.

As you may be aware, infrastructure planning such as transportation improvements is quickly transitioning into a performance-based process. With the repeal of earmarks at the federal level and stretched capital resources at the state level, it is no longer viable to call upon our federal and state representatives to solve our problems locally. The State Departments of Transportation are challenging us, the MPO collectively, to prioritize our selection of projects based upon not a perceived need but a "real" need. If we locally keep shifting our priorities, the planning process will cease to exist and we will accomplish nothing. We must be in position to pave and rebuild existing roadways and bridges instead of increasing capacity to our roads. Public Private Partnerships and Toll Roads will not repair landslides and road slips. Tax credits and increased license plate fees

alone will not pave our roads and repair our bridges. Our federal and state officials and partners must seek an increase or a different formula to the excise fuel tax.

This brings us to decision to build the Wellsburg Bridge, in the making since 1995. If the MPO, you as the elected officials and interested citizens, not Mike Paprocki or any other staff person at BHJ, were unable to build consensus, the Wellsburg Bridge would not be reality. No one arrived at this decision in a vacuum. At the conclusion of several public meetings and two major study reports, the Bridge Advisory Committee unanimously accepted the findings of the reports. The MPO adopted the Bridge Advisory's recommendations, at that time prefaced the resolution to accept the findings of the Bridge Study and the location of the Wellsburg Bridge with urgency that the West Virginia DOT take aggressive action to care for and maintain the Market Street Bridge indefinitely. The Ohio DOT also agreed to build better access to the Veterans Memorial Bridge in anticipation of the Market Street Bridge closing sometime in the future. There was never a vote to "blow up", or "demolish" the Market Street Bridge, the MPO officials at that time prioritized the region's overall needs and accepted the findings of Ohio River Bridge studies. Further, there were no agreements made that the owner of the Market Street Bridge, the West Virginia Department of Transportation would convert the bridge into a pedestrian/bikeway once the Market Bridge closes to vehicular traffic.

However, to this end, I have asked the new administration at West Virginia DOT if the department still plans to close the Market Street Bridge once the new bridge is open to traffic. In addition, I have also asked if the Market Street is to close, that the department offer funding for a feasibility study to review the cost of bridge conversion, the long-term costs of maintaining the bridge, and future alternatives for bridge ownership and responsibility. The cost of the study at this point is not determined and will likely require as much as a 20% match from the BHJ governments interested in keeping the Market Street Bridge open. I am also seeking funds for a feasibility study with estimated costs and preliminary designs based on sound engineering principles, to construct a trail connection parallel to US Route 22 and West Virginia State Route 2 connecting the Panhandle Trail in Weirton to Brooke Pioneer Trail in Wellsburg.