

Mon Valley Transportation Backbone Requires Spine

By Howard Carpenter

The Mon/Fayette Expressway (MFE) gathering of legislators and business leaders at Dan Onorato's invitation (January 11, 2008, Regional Enterprise Tower) implies growing recognition the long-awaited transportation system must be completed. As a business executive of 40 years developing and managing manufacturing and distribution facilities in numerous states, I cannot imagine a greater imperative in the Mon Valley. For this region to survive, let alone expand, it must be completed.

Consider the criteria used by businesses contemplating relocation (read: investment) to this region (or any area). When I've prospected regions and evaluated potential return and risk, an examination includes—but is not limited to—taxation, labor market, education, and regulatory challenges. Though weighted differently, all are important. None however, are more crucial than a transportation network promising accelerated access to and from markets. If lacking, mediocrity was inevitable, failure a heightened risk.

Today's "just-in-time" and "best price possible" global marketplace demands an efficient road system limiting circuitous routes, congestion, and railroad crossings. It must have quick access to interstates or limited access highways. If not, the resulting time lost in moving goods and people is cost and capital is ill afforded. It's why I chose locations in Dallas, TX, Elizabethtown, PA, South Boston, VA, etc., while rejecting others.

Hamstrung by challenges further compromising competitive capability ensures this Valley will not attract business, nor will it encourage many existing ones to expand. Failure may prompt further relocation from the area.

Our region cannot tarry much longer. The Economic Development Department, in its 2005 Economic Development Strategy, referred to the MFE as the transportation "backbone" in revitalizing the Mon Valley.

Some state we should forego this and focus on existing roads and bridges. Yes, the work should be done. However, if the MFE is not quickly completed, we might not want to bother, for we're likely to be an economic ghost town.

Chief Executive Onorato displayed admirable spine in sponsoring the January meeting. It's time for more backbone from the region's leaders. It's beyond time to build the road.