



April 5, 2009

Highway completion is top priority

The completion of the four-lane highway connecting Columbus to Pittsburgh remains Coshocton County's top priority.

And for good reason.

Once finished, it may open a new fiscal door to our county.

The highway, which is partially completed, is to be done in five segments. One future section includes expanding 10 miles of Ohio 16 to four lanes between Dresden and Coshocton.

A driving force behind the push to develop the local portion of the highway is T.J. Justice, executive director of the Coshocton County Port Authority. Justice also is co-chairman of the Columbus-Pittsburgh Corridor Steering Committee, the group dedicated to finding the hundreds of millions of dollars needed for this project.

Justice rightfully believes, as many do, the expansion of Ohio 16 will help drive new businesses and jobs to our county. As with any infrastructure project these days, funding is an obstacle.

Local officials were deeply disappointed that the state did not use federal stimulus dollars to finance the expansion project. Instead, \$2.7 million was allocated to repave about 10 miles of Ohio 16 between Coshocton and Dresden.

Justice says the committee may ask the Ohio Department of Transportation to use the money instead to help pay for the cost of an environmental impact study on the expansion.

Perhaps the influx of federal money for other highway projects will help move the Ohio 16 expansion closer to the top of the state's "to-do" list. It will take a concerted effort of officials from Columbus to Steubenville to persuade ODOT and Gov. Ted Strickland of the vital need for this highway.

There is no reason to doubt the Ohio 16 expansion can breathe new life into Coshocton. Justice's office can offer businesses incentives to locate here, the recreational and educational opportunities here are unmatched by other communities our size, the heritage and historical significance of Coshocton is appealing, property is procurable and the work ethic of our residents is paramount.

We are less than 30 miles from Interstates 70 and 77. Easier access to interstates means easier access to Coshocton. That means growth and jobs.