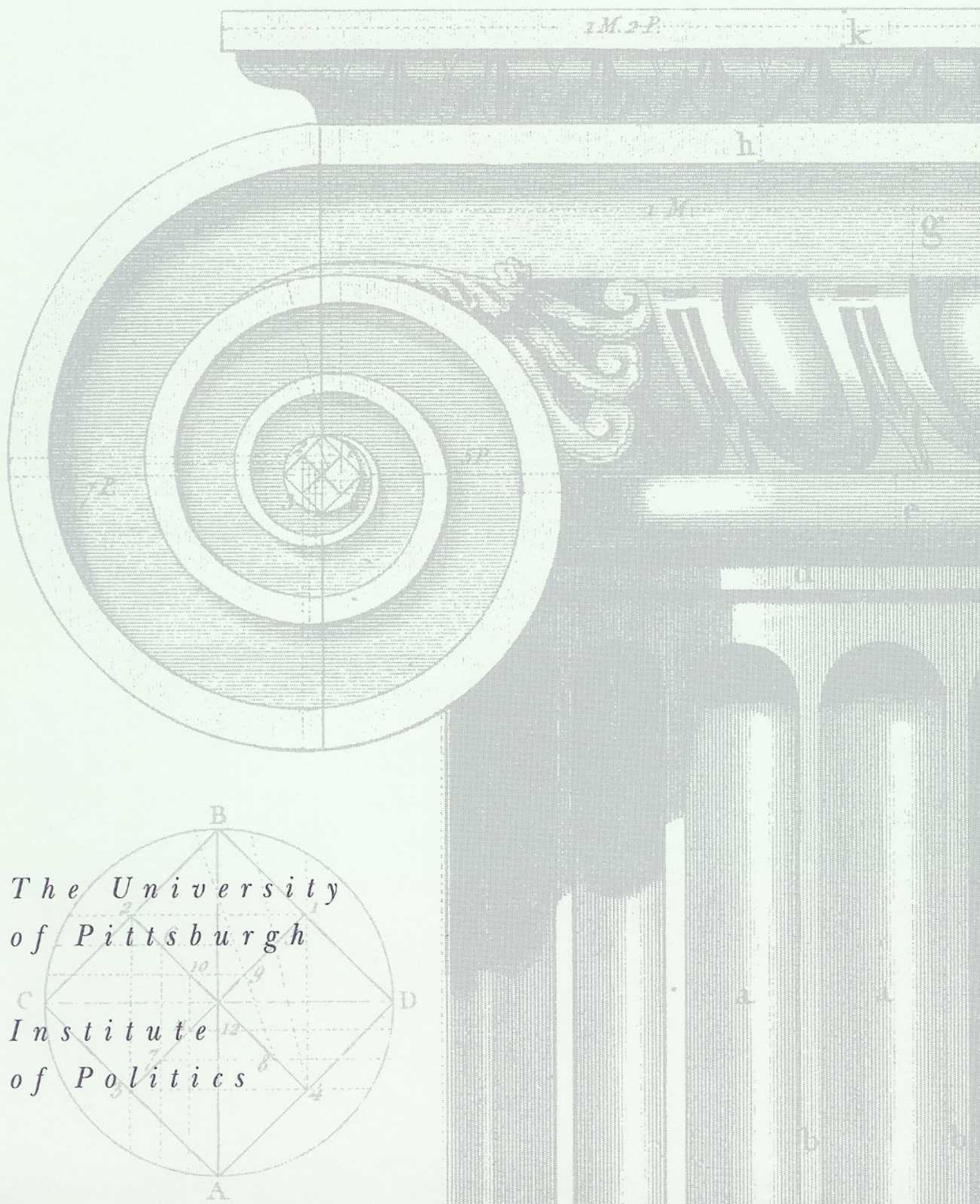


I s s u e s

ISTEA: A DIFFERENT KIND OF HIGHWAY ACT

Clarke M. Thomas



*The University
of Pittsburgh*

*Institute
of Politics*

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INTRODUCTION

The new Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) constitutes a revolution in American transportation financing because it takes into account so many more environmental factors than ever in the past. Therefore, its importance for Southwestern Pennsylvania, with its non-attainment areas in terms of air pollution, cannot be overestimated.

ISTEA also places more power in the hands of metropolitan planning organizations. The relevant MPO for this part of the state is the Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission.

Chapter 1 of this Issues paper describes the political and economic factors involved in this new approach, concentrating on Southwestern Pennsylvania. Maps of projects affected by ISTEA stipulations and financing appear on pages 6-10.

A detailed outline of the 1991 ISTEA legislation itself comes in Chapter 2.

The opportunities that environmentalists and planners see in ISTEA are outlined in Chapter 3. These include so-called "enhancements," a category that includes bikeways, hiking trails, and historic preservation projects. A list of enhancements already selected for Western Pennsylvania accompanies Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 is a "David and Goliath" discussion of the forces in tension within the ISTEA context, with comments from officials ranging from "ISTEA's flexibility makes it a planner's dream" to "ISTEA is the Grinch that stole Christmas."

Some observations concerning ISTEA round out the discussion.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS ISTEA?

ISTEA is an acronym for the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, a massive national road, bridge, and transit measure passed by the Congress in 1991 and signed into law by President George Bush. To the delight of punsters, it is being named “ice tea.”

ISTEA called for \$151 billion in spending over a six-year period. Of that, Pennsylvania’s share would be about \$8 billion, with Southwestern Pennsylvania’s portion somewhere around \$1.9 billion. (So far, however, actual appropriations have been considerably below that authorization.)

But ISTEA is different from the ordinary highway bill passed in previous sessions of Congress. The major difference is that it is tied to the federal Clean Air Act of 1971, the 1977 amendments to that act, and particularly the 1990 version of the law. Here are some of the other differences that flow from this “combination” of goals:

1. Unlike earlier federal laws, which detailed exactly what projects they would pay for, ISTEA provides flexibility in spending.

2. That means that funds can be switched back and forth between roads and mass transit, for example.

3. But, first, metropolitan areas such as Southwestern Pennsylvania must develop a long-range transportation plan. No plan, no money.

4. While ISTEA provides a number of guidelines, the thrust of the act is that the plans for each region must be consensus plans. That is, they must reflect the common goals of a larger number of “stakeholders” than ever—not just state and local governments, but businesses, commuters, environmental groups, and interested citizens.

However, in Pennsylvania everything must fit in with the 12-year planning process mandated by the state legislature and run by PennDOT.

What this is *supposed* to mean is that no longer will the state highway departments—the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) in our case—be the only decision maker.

That role will now be shared in a much larger way with the metropolitan planning organizations. The MPO for the six-county Greater Pittsburgh area is the Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission (SPRPC).

Also, under ISTEA, mass transit



presumably will have a bigger seat at the pie-cutting table, rather than always being junior to highway interests.

Finally, because ISTEA takes into account the federal Clean Air Act, including its 1990 amendments, environmental groups see this as a way to accomplish some of their goals:

- Stemming air pollution by more emphasis on mass transit, rather than building more highways. Also, fostering alternative forms of transportation through bikeways and walkways.
- Stricter land-use regulations to control urban sprawl, which has been a factor in increasing the use of automobiles and the consequent magnification of air pollution.

Add all these factors together, and one can see ramifications for Southwestern Pennsylvania and its 2.3 million residents in relation to:

- Specific highway proposals, such as the Mon Valley Expressway and the Southern Beltway from the Monongahela Valley to Interstate 79 and the Greater Pittsburgh International Airport; new access routes from Downtown Pittsburgh to the Greater Pittsburgh International Airport, including a busway; magnetic levitation (Maglev) pro-

posals.

(When Pittsburgh city planners in February 1993 unveiled a plan for an elevated riverfront park on the Monongahela River near downtown, they emphasized that it would have to fit in with ISTEA regulations. The park would be designed to tie in with a new bridge from downtown to the Wabash Tunnel through Mt. Washington, part of a 7.2-mile, \$200-million busway project to Carnegie planned by the Port Authority Transit (PAT) of Allegheny County.)

- The fact that some of these projects may be barred—or greatly altered—by the environmental (i.e., air-pollution) requirements embodied in the ISTEA philosophy.
- Also part of the new equation are fiscal constraints built into ISTEA. Proponents of a particular project must show where the money is coming from, rather than just adding it to a “wish list.”
- What will this mean for economic revival hopes in, say, the Mon Valley? If people aren’t where the jobs are (such as the airport area), how do you connect them and still meet ISTEA requirements?

In short, how will ISTEA’s stipulations affect economic growth and development? That’s a prime concern



these days of most elected officials, especially those who consider new roads the key.

Not surprisingly, the advent of ISTEA has set off a titanic power struggle. While the prime actors talk harmony and cooperation, the possibility of changes in the way things have been done for decades is mobilizing forces with opposing viewpoints. For instance:

How much power will PennDOT really relinquish to MPOs such as the SPRPC?

SPRPC under Executive Director Robert Kochanowki is rapidly building a staff of young, trained professionals, many of whom couldn't have been recruited if they didn't feel this is where the action is going to be.

But the board of directors of SPRPC includes county officials who are convinced that such projects as the Mon Valley Expressway are absolutely necessary for the revival of their regions. Will board and staff pull in the same direction as the ramifications of ISTEA become evident?

Moreover, ISTEA or not, strains between Pittsburgh and the Mon Valley counties over the proposed Mon Valley Expressway have surfaced of late. Mon Valley groups want the expressway to come directly into the city,

tying in with the Parkway East. Planners for the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County want the "gateway" to be farther south, with traffic fanning along different existing routes (Highways 51, 837 and 48) into Pittsburgh.

These planners fear not only hopelessly choking the Parkway East in the Hazelwood/Oakland area but destroying neighborhoods on the way in. City officials, in particular, say they don't want a repetition of the East Valley Expressway (now I-579), which cut through several North Side neighborhoods for a trafficway that benefits commuters and the suburbs more than the city itself.

The various groups involved now are working on a compromise solution of highways flanking the Monongahela River. (See chapter 4.)

As mentioned above, mass-transit and environmental groups see an opportunity to bend the system to be more congenial to their interests. They will be alert to be sure this opportunity doesn't slip away. (It must be borne in mind that PennDOT also has been responsible for mass-transit; it is improper to characterize it as interested solely in highways.)

For that reason, environmental and kindred groups nationally have estab-



lished a watchdog group, the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP), to monitor what governmental agencies at the national and local levels do with ISTEA. Their spokespersons say they have learned from experience that just having a law on the books doesn't mean it automatically works. STPP has made contact with environmental groups in Pennsylvania, meaning that there will be avenues for citizen pressure backing some of the idealistic features of ISTEA.

One hopeful sign is that Pennsylvania through PennDOT has agreed to collaborate with STPP as one of eight "model" states to seek to establish a healthy working relationship.

The Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC) is in the forefront of the effort in the Keystone State, which included a two-day seminar in Pittsburgh in January 1993. (For PEC's views of ISTEA, see Chapter 3.)

In short, ISTEA is setting the stage for a major battle over whether some of the most cherished aspects of American life will have to change—the automobile culture, suburban sprawl, and the consequent penchant for building more and more roads. Can we get people out of single-occupancy cars and into high-occupancy arrange-

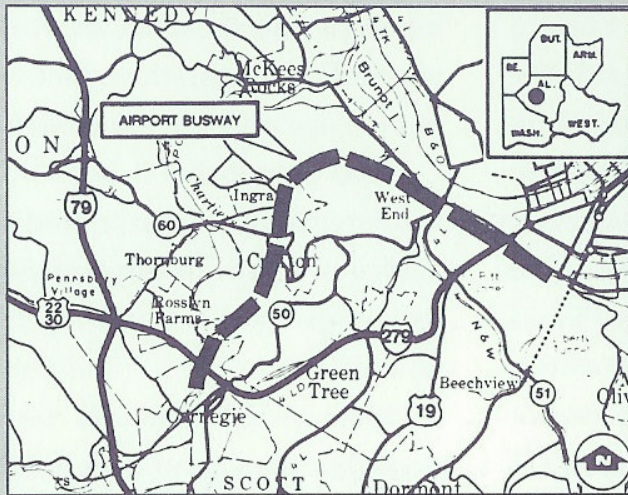
ments or onto buses? Can we do that and still connect the places where people live with the available jobs?

And even if that is possible in Allegheny County with its tradition of mass transit, how about sprawling metropolises such as Los Angeles and Miami?

How will ISTEA fit with the indications that the Clinton administration will turn to bolstering the infrastructure (meaning highways in most cases) as a way to jump-start the economy? How will this correlate with the environmental emphases espoused by some elements of the Clinton administration—Vice President Albert Gore, Jr., for example?

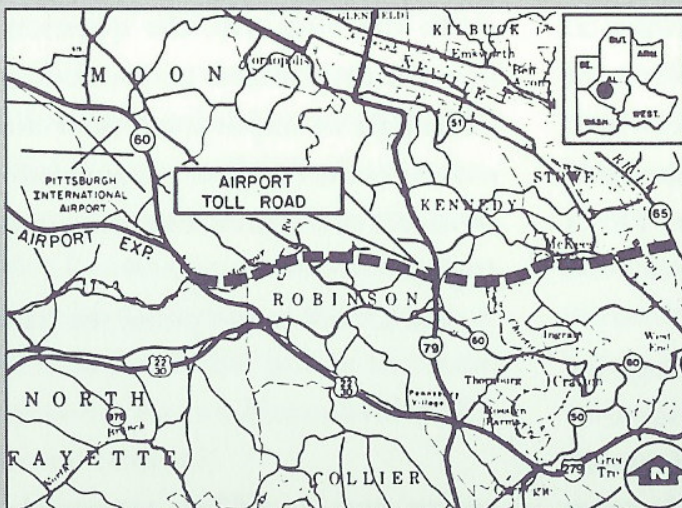
In the long run, the question is how Pennsylvanians, and Americans, will juggle in importance their automobile-culture "rights" as against their clean-air or other environmental "rights."

ISTEA will be no polite tea party.



AIRPORT BUSWAY

An 8-mile, \$250-million project to construct a combined busway and high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane from downtown Pittsburgh to Carnegie. It would involve a new bridge over the Monongahela to connect to the Wabash tunnel through Mt. Washington and abandoned rail rights of way thereafter. ISTEA would earmark \$49.3 million for this project, the first phase on a eventual busway all the way to the Greater Pittsburgh International Airport.



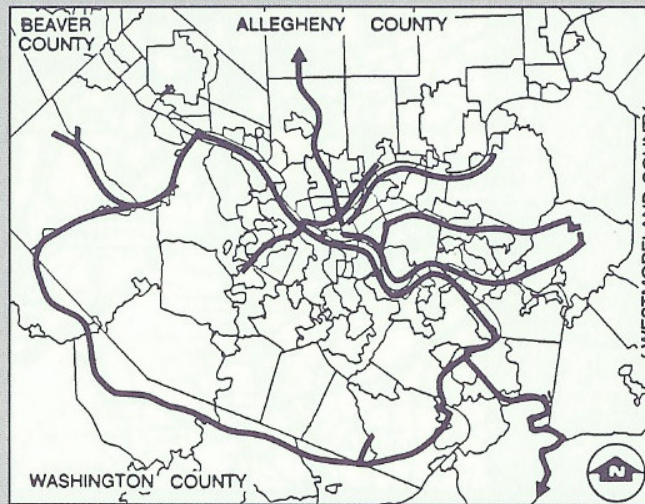
AIRPORT TOLL ROAD

This would be an 8-mile, \$200-million link between Route 65 in the McKees Rocks neighborhood to the new Airport (Southern) Expressway near where it links to the Parkway West. By bypassing such bottlenecks into Downtown Pittsburgh as the Fort Pitt Tunnel, it would double the expressway capacity of the corridor. Making it a toll facility would provide revenue both for its capital costs and maintenance expenses.



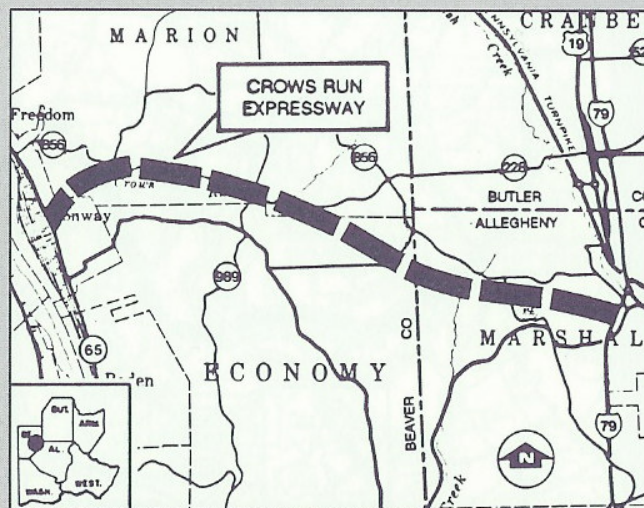
REGIONAL BIKEWAY SYSTEM

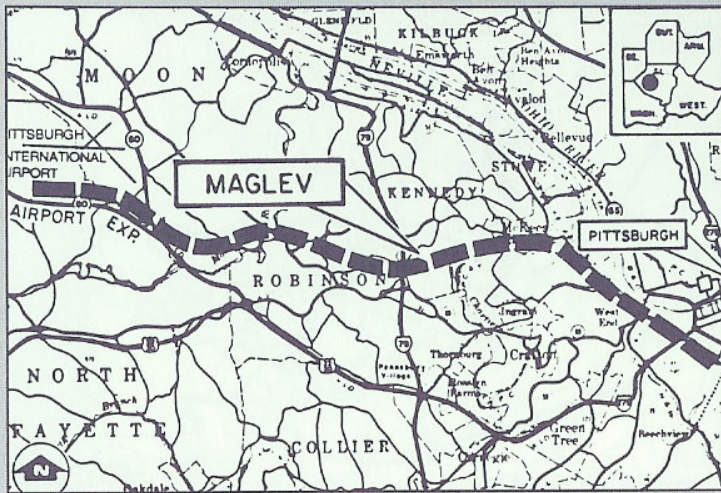
The Allegheny County Department of Planning has proposed a 160-mile \$8-million bikeway system that would include nine commuter bikeways and two more recreational in nature. They would be eligible for the 10 percent of the money in the Federal Surface Transportation Program, a funding program of ISTEA, that is required for so-called "enhancement" projects.



CROWS RUN EXPRESSWAY

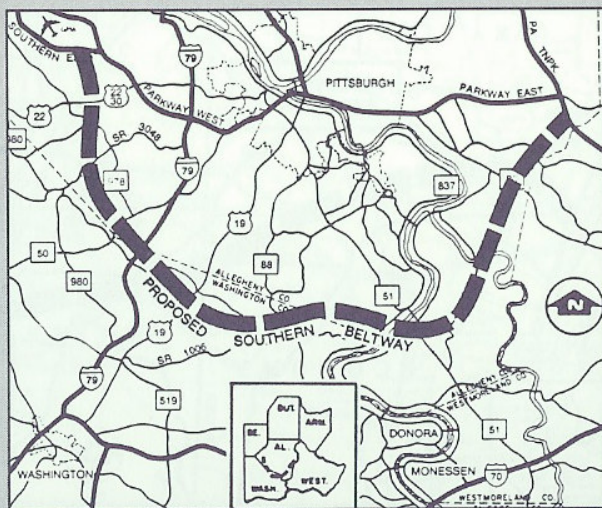
A \$100-million, 9-mile highway to connect the Beaver and Ohio Valleys, with their declining industry, with the thriving Cranberry Township area where I-79, I-279, and the Pennsylvania Turnpike mesh. This would be a companion in an easterly direction to the Beaver Valley Expressway, which already connects that hard-hit region with another economic sparkplug, the Greater Pittsburgh International Airport.





MAGLEV

A 19-mile, \$500-million experimental project to test the feasibility of MAGLEV (short for magnetic levitation), linking downtown and the airport. Magnetic force is used to lift the train just above the guideway and provide forward propulsion.



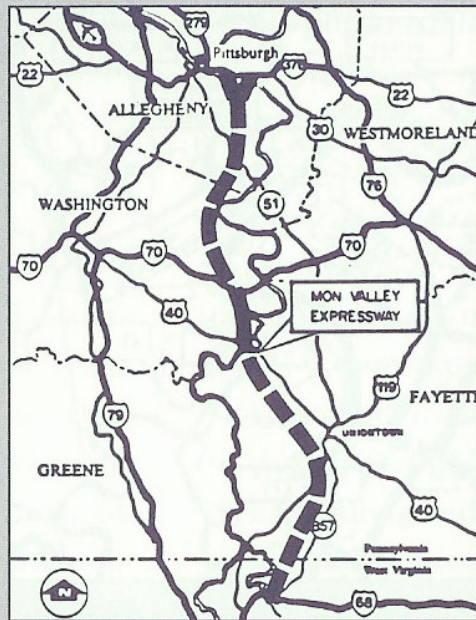
SOUTHERN BELTWAY

A \$900-million project to connect the Pennsylvania Turnpike near Monroeville to the proposed Mon Valley Expressway. The Beltway would (1) distribute traffic both eastward and westward from the proposed Mon Valley Expressway, (2) provide improved access between the turnpike and the airport, and (3) provide a bypass to the Parkways East and West. **Note:** Planners say an alternative would be to build only the western portion, linking the Mon Valley Expressway and the airport, at a cost of \$500 million.



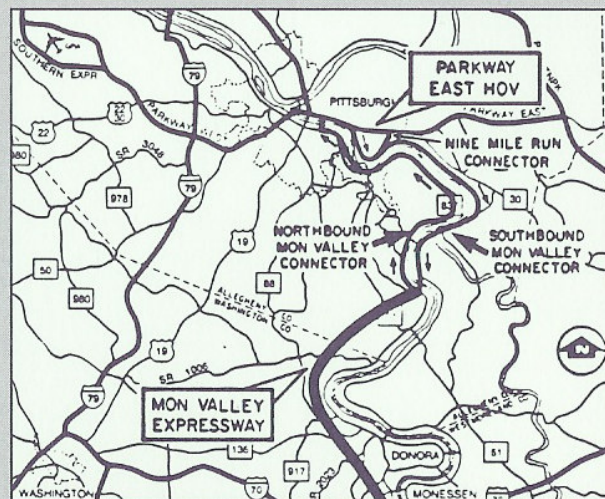
MON/FAYETTE EXPRESSWAY

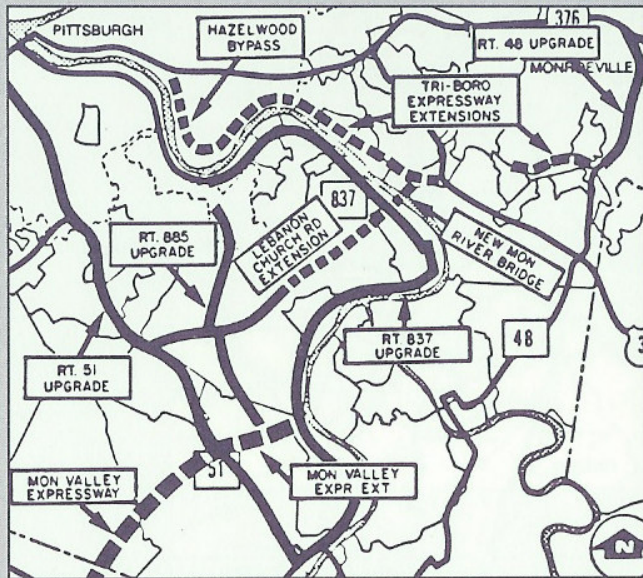
Colloquially known as the Mon Valley Expressway, this is a \$1.5 billion project to run from Morgantown, West Virginia, northward past Uniontown and paralleling the Monongahela River to Pittsburgh. A sum of \$14 million in ISTEA federal funding is earmarked for this project, called a key to revitalizing the Mid-Mon Valley. Also, the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission has been authorized by the state legislature to pursue this project.



MON/FAYETTE EXPRESSWAY AND PARKWAY EAST HOV

Another alternative for the northernmost section of the Mon Valley Expressway would splice that highway at Glassport into a northbound and a southbound connector along opposite sides of the Monongahela River into Downtown Pittsburgh. Part of this plan would be to convert a portion of the Parkway East in the vicinity of the Squirrel Hill Tunnel as a reversible HOV (High Occupancy Vehicle) facility. The purpose is to avoid dumping more traffic onto the already congested Parkway East. No cost estimate on this alternative has been made.





MON/FAYETTE ARTERIAL UPGRADE SYSTEM

A substitute plan for the northernmost section of the Mon Valley Expressway, this system would end the expressway near Glassport. Traffic would then funnel into Pittsburgh along upgraded state Highways 51, 837, and 885. The plan, proposed by the Allegheny County Department of Planning, would include (1) a major park-and-ride facility at the Glassport terminus; (2) extend Lebanon Church Road across the Monongahela River; (3) extend the Tri-boro Expressway and construct the Hazelwood Bypass of the Squirrel Hill Tunnel on the Parkway East. While no cost estimate has been made, the plan presumably would lower the cost of the Mon Valley Expressway and avoid as much land consumption.



CHAPTER 2

THE NEW BREW

Call ISTEA the right response to a “dual challenge.” That quick way to tag the new Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) comes from Thomas Larson, director of the Federal Highway Administration. Larson is well known in Pennsylvania as the former Penn State professor who shaped up PennDOT during the Thornburgh administration.

In a booklet about ISTEA, Larson describes one challenge as the threat to the nation’s mobility created by “gridlock and the absence or inadequate condition of needed facilities.”

The other challenge comes from “legitimate environmental concerns about the impact of transportation improvements.”

Congress in 1990 passed the Clean Air Act Amendments (CAAA). Larson notes: “Because emissions from motor vehicles contribute to air pollution, transportation officials must make a commitment to programs and projects that will achieve national air quality goals.”

But CAAA did not provide money

for this purpose. That’s where ISTEA, passed in 1991, comes in. “The ISTEA complements the CAAA by providing funding and the flexibility to use it in ways that will help us improve air quality through the development of a sound, intermodal transportation program,” Larson explains.

Larson points to the toughest nut in “dual challenge” in this way: “But ISTEA funding and changes in transportation patterns alone cannot solve the problem. Emissions reductions from transportation infrastructure investments are small.

“Greater mobile source emission reductions, particularly in the more serious nonattainment areas, will have to come from reducing the use of the automobile for all trips, including non-work trips. Consequently, state and local elected officials will need to have the political will to make the tough decisions that will be necessary to adopt and implement the kinds of transportation control measure that will reduce the use of the single-occupant vehicle.”

In short-hand, the dual challenge is to find ways to reduce the “lone ranger” use of automobiles for each and every errand.

Here’s how ISTEA proposes to go about meeting the dual challenge:



Funding Flexibility

ISTEA retains programs from previous transportation legislation for bridges and interstate maintenance of highways, with only slight modifications. But ISTEA restructures the federal-aid highway program by creating two broad funding categories:

- **The Surface Transportation Program.** The largest program in ISTEA, it is funded at \$23.9 billion over six years. The federal matching share will be 80 percent. Highly flexible, it will provide broad discretion for state and local government to fund a wide variety of activities that could contribute to cleaner air. Examples: Highway and transit capital projects, carpool projects, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, planning, and research and development.
- **The National Highway System.** Funded at \$21 billion over six years—with an 80 percent federal share. Its purpose is to focus resources on roads that are most important to interstate travel and national defense; roads that connect with other modes of transportation, and roads essential for international

commerce. (The states may transfer 50 percent of these funds to the Surface Transportation Program without federal approval, and 100 percent if the U.S. Secretary of Transportation approves.)

- **Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program.** Funded at \$6 billion over six years—with an 80 percent federal share. These program funds may be used for transportation projects, such as transit, likely to help attain air quality standards in ozone and carbon monoxide in nonattainment areas.
- **Transit.** Funded at \$16.1 billion over six years—with an 80 percent federal share. This money may be switched to highway projects in areas with a population of over 200,000, demonstrating that flexibility is not a one-way street in favor of transit. But there are three “ifs”:
 - Requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act are met.
 - The metropolitan planning organization approves.
 - There is a balanced local approach to funding highways and transit.



Federal Matching Ratio

There is parity between highway and transit matching ratios for most programs, both receiving an 80 percent federal match, to eliminate bias caused by unequal ability (usually on the part of transit) to leverage state and local funds.

Increased Funding Levels

To respond to the expanded requirements for transportation air quality, ISTEA provides added federal funding which can be used for transportation projects to that end.

- **Highway Funds.** ISTEA provides a \$120.8 billion highway program over six years.
- **Mass Transit Funds.** A total of \$31.5 billion over six years, with an 80 percent federal share for capital programs and 50 percent for operating expenses.
- **Metropolitan Planning Funds.** These are increased from two sources. From the Federal Highway Administration, they are doubled. Example: To \$117 million in fiscal year '92 from \$47 million in FY91. And from the Federal Transit Administration, they are increased by 25 percent. Example: To \$45 mil-

lion in FY'92 from \$35 million in FY '91.

Note: There are 14 metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) in Pennsylvania, with the Southwestern Regional Planning Commission in Pittsburgh and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission in Philadelphia being the dominant ones.

- **Highway Planning and Research Funds.** These are increased to 2 percent from a 1.5 percent slice of the major program funds.
- **Transit Planning and Research Funds.** Planning and research will be funded at 3 percent of the total amount of transit funding provided. A total of \$945 million is authorized over six years—with \$420 million to be used for planning grants to metropolitan planning agencies.

Strengthened Planning Process

- **Planning emphasis.** ISTEA increased the emphasis on multimodal considerations; land use and development decisions; and attacking transportation-related air quality problems.
- **Planning boundaries.** These must cover not only the urbanized area but also the area expected to be-



come urbanized within the 20-year planning forecast period.

In air-quality nonattainment areas, the planning boundaries are expanded to include anything in the “doughnut” shaped area around a metropolis that may be outside the urbanized planning boundaries.

Note: In Southwestern Pennsylvania the planning boundaries and the air-quality area do not coincide. That’s because Fayette County, which is part of the seven-county nonattainment area around Pittsburgh, has chosen not to be included in the six-county region covered by the appropriate MPO—the Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission.

ISTEA may mean that Fayette County has a choice. Either it can join the SPRPC and thus take a direct part in influencing its future. Or it can leave itself under the jurisdiction of the state—specifically, PennDOT—in relation to ISTEA.

- **Transportation Management Areas.** Urbanized areas over 200,000 in population are to be designated as transportation management areas (TMAs). Such areas must include congestion management systems “that provide for effective management of new and existing transportation facilities through the use of

travel demand reduction and operational management strategies.”

For TMAs classified as nonattainment areas for ozone and carbon monoxide, federal funds may *not* be programmed for any highway or transit project that will result in a significant increase in carrying capacity for single-occupant vehicles, unless the project is part of an approved congestion management system.

The two paragraphs above could lead to as much controversy in Southwestern Pennsylvania as anything in ISTEA. Southwestern Pennsylvania must cut its ozone pollution by at least 15 percent. Therefore, for example: Would the proposed Mon Valley Expressway be barred because it results in a significant increase in single-occupant vehicular traffic? Or would it be considered a tool for congestion management if it included, say, a busway or an HOV (high occupancy vehicle) lane?

And would a Southern Beltway connecting the Mon Valley and the Greater Pittsburgh International Airport, running roughly along the Allegheny-Washington county line, be able to fit the bill at all? At the least, ISTEA requirements would



give wealthy suburbanites in Peters, Upper St. Clair, and other municipalities along the proposed route a legal basis for challenging an alignment through their neighborhoods.

However, ISTEA calls for a total-system approach, rather a project-by-project analysis. That is, either of these projects might pass muster if the region as a whole were able to cut its air pollution—from industrial as well as traffic sources.

Monitoring apparently will be done by computer models, rather than actual monitors scattered about the region. The explanation is that this is necessary to provide a proper parallel to computerized studies of pollution in the 1987-89 period.

Of course, both the Mon Valley Expressway and the Southern Beltway proposals also face economic tests as well, on grounds they are costly big-ticket items that will gobble up money from other highway needs in the region. What could happen is that ISTEA could mask the economic knife, therefore becoming the fall guy if the proposals fall through for fiscal reasons.

- **Abbreviated plans and programs for certain areas.** These are possible for areas under 200,000 in

population which meet attainment standards for ozone and carbon monoxide. But they may *not* be prescribed in such areas if they are nonattainment.

- **Statewide Planning Process.** Each state must have a statewide planning process, coordinated with the development of the activities of metropolitan planning organizations within the state.
- **Documentation.** Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) must:
 - Consider the effects of *all* transportation projects within the metropolitan area, regardless of funding source.
 - Provide a reasonable opportunity for public comment on the long-range plans and transportation improvement programs.
 - Require financial plans to demonstrate how the various plans can be implemented with anticipated revenues. Presumably, that means no pie-in-the-sky programs to build first and figure out the payment later.



Operating Versus Capital Improvements

ISTEA gives federal funding preference to certain operational improvements over capital investments on the Interstate System. Thus the federal funding share for the Interstate System jumps to a 90 percent matching ratio from 80 percent for operational improvements such as high-occupancy vehicle lanes, carpool projects, signing and signal improvements, positive guidance systems, and freeway management. That is, anything other than general purpose lanes for single-vehicle use.

In this category could come what are called Intelligent Vehicle Highway Systems (IVHS), techniques to manage existing roads better, rather than building more roads. Examples: Ramp metering. Low-wattage AM radio systems to give timely information to drivers as to how to get around quicker. Systems for getting wrecking crews to accident sites quicker to clear the roadway. And in the future, there may be more Buck Rogers-type of installations, such as electronic systems imbedded in highways so that the driver could go on “automatic pilot,” so to speak.

Better Funding for Improving Transit Equipment

As with the item just above, federal funding can jump to a 90 percent matching ratio for bringing transit equipment up to snuff to help the region meet Clean Air Act standards. Example: Retrofitting buses to run cleaner.

Congestion Pricing Pilot Program

This is a fancy title for imposing toll systems that would charge motorists at the busiest times of the day on the most congested, heavily traveled roads—but not at slack times. (In Pittsburgh, there has been talk of establishing such a toll road to the airport.)

Fixed-Guideway Systems

This provision of ISTEA could be useful for light-rail-vehicle and trolley systems. It might be a key to building the so-called Spine Line, a system between Downtown and Oakland that could include a subway for part of the distance. Numerous restrictions on money for these systems are included in the act.

Although not specifically mentioned in the Federal Highway Admin-



istration booklet, there is one other provision in ISTEA of considerable interest in Southwestern Pennsylvania—the National Magnetic Levitation Prototype Development Program, or Maglev for short.

MAGLEV

ISTEA calls for Maglev in this way: “It is the policy of the United States to establish in the shortest time practicable a United States designed and constructed magnetic levitation transportation technology capable of operating along federal-aid highway rights-of-way, as part of a national transportation system of the United States.”

Section 1036 of the act goes on to describe the competitive process from requests for proposals through awarding of contracts and licensing.

Of particular importance to Pittsburgh is the subsection called “Factors to be considered in selection.” It includes two that would seem to be tailor-made for Pittsburgh, or at least items that would not stymie its hopes for a Maglev facility between downtown and the Greater Pittsburgh International Airport.

For instance, there is factor ii: “The total length of guideway shall be at least 19 miles and allow significant

full-speed operation between stops.”

And factor viii reads: “The project shall be intermodal in nature, connecting a major metropolitan area with an airport, port, passenger rail station, or other transportation mode.”

While this chapter has dealt in particular with the transportation side of the picture, quite as important is the ecological aspect. For environmentalists see in ISTEA the possibility of a real breakthrough for their “green” goals. We now turn to what could be called a view of ISTEA through green-colored glasses.



CHAPTER 3

ISTEA THROUGH GREEN-COLORED GLASSES

For environmentalists, ISTEA promises a brand-new era, constituting “a significant break from previous transportation policies.” That phrase comes from a document prepared by the Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC), which goes on to say:

“As its name implies, this act is truly intermodal in nature. The primary goal of ISTEA is to move people efficiently, rather than moving private cars quickly.

“Instead of encouraging only the construction of new highways, ISTEA calls for a more diversified system of transportation. Mass transit, bicycle transportation, and pedestrian walkways are highly encouraged as alternate forms of transportation.”

PEC is an environmental education association with lobbying functions, which includes as members numerous environmental groups, schools and individuals. It has offices in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Wilkes-Barre.

Its document on ISTEA—as good an example of the “greens” viewpoint as any—continues: “This emphasis on

a more diverse system of transit is a direct response to the Clean Air Act of 1990 and increasing congestion in urban areas. ISTEA is intended by Congress to be a vehicle to help states and urban areas comply with clean air legislation.

“By discouraging transportation investments which will increase congestion and encouraging less polluting modes of transportation, ISTEA should aid cities in meeting Clean Air Act requirements. This emphasis on alternative, less polluting forms of transportation will not entail reduced mobility for people. Rather, its emphasis on a diverse system of transit along with the maintenance of our current system of roads and highways should succeed in reducing traffic congestion and creating a more efficient transportation system,” the document contends.

Judging by this overview, environmentalists particularly welcome what they consider ISTEA’s placing metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) on a more equal footing with state highway departments. (For the Pittsburgh area, the relevant agencies are the Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission (SPRPC) and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation



(PennDOT).) The reasoning in the PEC thesis:

"In the past, MPOs were primarily a technical advisor to state DOTs. The state would present a proposed transportation system to the MPO and ask for advice on the impact of the proposed system. The report from the MPOs would then be taken into consideration by the state. This top-down transportation policy gave little, if any power to MPOs. ISTEA, however, places MPOs on equal footing with the states. Instead of being just an advisory body, MPOs are now in a decision-making position."

The elements of ISTEA that the environmentalists see as strengthening the hands of the MPOs include the following:

- **Fewer program categories.** In the past, federal "policies demanded that a large percentage of the funding go towards the construction of new highways. State and local governments were unable to transfer these highway funds to other forms of transportation. ISTEA, however, has broken with this tradition."
- **Emphasis on achieving air quality objectives.** "Congress intends to appropriate \$1 billion annually over the next six years to be targeted to transportation projects intended to

'ENHANCEMENT' PROJECTS

An important new element that ISTEA brings into transportation planning is the concept of "enhancement" projects. These are bicycle trails, pedestrian walks, and other programs that preserve or improve natural and cultural resources.

Under ISTEA stipulations, at least 10 percent of highway funds must go for the "enhancement" category. Environmental and other organizations with a stake in the matter must be involved in the planning. In turn, sponsoring organizations must provide at least 20 percent of the total funds.

In Pennsylvania, an advisory committee established by PennDOT sorted through 421 proposals that would cost \$217 million. The committee selected 44 projects for a total cost of \$20 million.

State Transportation Secretary Howard Yerusolim was quite commendatory of the group as doing a difficult task in record time, offering a good basis for future cooperation between governmental agencies and citizens groups that on occasion have been adversarial in the past.

Here is a list of the projects approved for Pittsburgh and Allegheny County:

- **\$1.06 million for the North Hills Bikeway, a 19-mile pedestrian and biking trail from downtown to the Cranberry Mall.**
- **\$1 million for the Montour Trail, a**



mitigate traffic congestion and improve quality in the nation's nonattainment areas for ozone and carbon monoxide."

- **Deemphasis on the use of federal funds to expand highway capacity designed for single occupancy vehicles.** "ISTEA places restrictions on the use of federal funds to build additional traffic lanes that have the effect of discouraging carpooling, ridesharing, and the use of transit." For instance, under the new Interstate Highway Program, federal interstate funds cannot be used to build lanes that would be used only by single-occupancy vehicles. Rather, they can be used "only to provide new lanes that are limited in peak travel periods to use by HOVs [high-occupancy vehicles]."
- **Greater recognition of transit.** Various categories of funds are directly available for transit, or can be switched to it.
- **Emphasis on transportation enhancement activities.** This aspect particularly appeals to many environmentalists because they see ISTEA creating special project opportunities for the following:
 - Facilities for pedestrians (walkways) and bicyclists (bike paths),

especially within urban areas with poor air quality. Landscaping and other scenic beautification.

- Acquisition of scenic easements and historic sites.
- Scenic or historic highway programs.
- Rehabilitation and operation of historic transportation buildings.
- Preservation of abandoned railway corridors and their use as pedestrian and bicycle trails.
- Control and removal of outdoor advertising.
- Archaeological planning and research in support of transportation activities.
- Mitigation of water pollution from highway runoff.

Environmentalists see the key leverage for these projects in ISTEA's requirement that each state must obligate at least 10 percent of its allocation of monies in the Surface Transportation Program category to these so-called enhancement activities.

- **Greater recognition of the unity of metropolitan areas.** "The old legislation pertained to the geographic limits of the urbanized areas as defined by the U.S. census every 10 years. ISTEA recognizes the need to carry out that planning process



over large geographic areas, including, at a minimum, the areas expected to be urbanized over the next 20 years. Importantly, in air quality nonattainment areas for ozone and carbon monoxide, the planning process must extend to at least the boundaries of the nonattainment areas.”

- **Emphasis on relating projects to plans.** “ISTEA requires that project funding relate directly to recommendations emanating from metropolitan transportation planning. States must complete transportation plans on a statewide basis and relate funding decision to those plans. While county and local governments have considerable flexibility in the use of Surface Transportation Planning money, ISTEA requires that all projects, even pedestrian and bicycle trails, must be identified and programmed through the metropolitan process.”

What does all this mean for Pennsylvania, in the view of environmentalists?

First, environmentalists everywhere are keying on the importance in the ISTEA framework of the Clean Air Act Amendments passed by the Congress in 1990. The Pennsylvania Environmental Council document

55-mile biking and walking trail along an abandoned rail line in Allegheny and Washington Counties.

- **\$340,000 for the Allegheny River segment of the Three Rivers Heritage Trail, a 5-mile pedestrian trail from the West End Bridge to Millvale and from the 40th Street Bridge along the North Shore.**

- **\$280,000 to buy easements and construct a 4.2-mile segment near McKeesport of the Youghiogheny River Trail Bikeway from McKeesport to Connellsville.**

- **\$45,000 to construct the Riverwalk at Station Square, a 1.1-mile pedestrian and bicycle trail along the south side of the Monongahela.**

- **\$12,000 to beautify the parking lot and entrance to the Pittsburgh Zoo.**

Projects elsewhere in Western Pennsylvania:

- **\$2.1 million to rehabilitate the Greensburg Train Station.**

- **\$2.08 million to build a 1.5-mile Youghiogheny River Rail-Trail and to renovate three bridges near Ohiopyle State Park, all in Fayette County.**

- **\$548,0090 to rehabilitate the Waterwork's Ferry Dock at Presque Isle State Park in Erie County.**

- **\$500,000 for the State Transportation Department to remove 509 non-conforming signs on certain designated scenic corridors in the state.**

- **\$320,000 to build the 21-mile Butler-Freeport Community Trail through Butler and Armstrong Counties.**

- **\$360,000 to build the Johnstown Riverswalk Project in Cambria County—a 17-mile pedestrian and**



explains this thinking: "This law . . . will fundamentally change the metropolitan transportation and planning process in the more than 100 nonattainment areas at this time. For the first time, the object of attaining federal air quality standards for ozone, carbon monoxide, and the small particulates will become the critical, and in some cases, the controlling factor in making transportation investment decisions."

Take Pittsburgh. Now classified as "a moderate ozone nonattainment area," it must reach attainment status within six years after the passage of the law—1997, in other words.

It is this aspect of ISTEA that is clouding the future for new highways such as the Mon Valley Expressway. Environmentalists ask: "How can you build a major new addition to air pollution when our levels already are too high?" Highway enthusiasts, in response, are likely to argue that, in addition to the economic development argument, such high-speed roads may pollute less than the stop-and-go traffic of such arteries as State Highways 51 and 837.

Philadelphia, classified as a severe nonattainment area, is given more leeway, with 2005 its target date to reach attainment status.

But there is one more new aspect in the recent laws of importance to Pennsylvania. The Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 established a Northeast Ozone Transport Region—which includes Pennsylvania—that imposes further requirements regardless of any local attainment classification.

These requirements include:

- an enhanced vehicle inspection/maintenance program in metropolitan areas over 100,000 (thus applying to Pittsburgh and Philadelphia)
- regulations on service stations to control vehicle-refueling emissions.

Environmentalists hope to key on these aspects of ISTEA to achieve some of the long-term goals they see as crucial for the American society. As one environmentalist put it, "We have to change the way we manage the land. How do we want to use the land? In the most economically sound way? Then you plan the land use that way."

Here is the heart of the agenda for many environmentalists—that suburban sprawl and the connecting highways that make it possible constitute a wasteful use of resources, including



the augmentation of pollution.

And it is not just hard-core environmentalists who make that point. Pittsburgh's Jack Wagner, no hardline "green," contends it is eminently wasteful to spend taxpayers' money providing new road and utility connections to far flung suburban areas when there already are those facilities available in the urban municipalities of the region, including the old mill towns. Wagner is president of the Pittsburgh City Council and vice chairman of the SPRPC commission.

Don Carter, a Pittsburgh architect, says: "Let's reinforce local economies, rather than greenfield ventures to which we have to build highways."

Out of these concepts, flow calls for changing land-use policies. At present in Pennsylvania, zoning—a major key to any land-use policy—remains in the hands of local municipalities. Counties have planning departments, but don't have the real decision-making power.

At an SPRPC-sponsored conference on ISTEA, held in December, 1992, at Nemacolin Woodlands in Fayette County, one participant said, "We can't allow local municipalities to make land-use decisions in a vacuum."

Another participant said that even politically conservative municipalities

bicycle trail from Riverside to Johnstown and to the Johnstown Flood National Memorial.

• **\$174,600 to restore or replace 80 cast-iron mile markers along U.S. 409 in Fayette County as part of the National Road Heritage Park Historic Milemarkers project in Somerset, Fayette, and Washington Counties.**

• **\$160,000 to relocate the ticket office at the Johnstown passenger station to permit use of the station waiting room.**

• **\$120,000 to restore a double-arch stone bridge in Buffalo Township, Washington County, as part of the National Road Heritage Park "S" bridge restoration project in Fayette and Washington Counties.**

in South Central Pennsylvania, worried about the Baltimore-Washington, DC, sprawl heading their way, are beginning to wonder if the present each-municipality-for-itself approach will be sufficient to preserve their cherished way of life.

One particular example of the results of local land-use "decisions in a vacuum" is the commercial strip zoning along highways. Architect Carter pointed to the deterioration of commercial properties along State Highway 51 in the South Hills as an example of the sad results of the present



piecemeal system.

Paul Flora, a regional economist with Pittsburgh National Corp., said during the Nemaquin discussion period, "We're told that the land-use concept is dead. We have to get over that."

State Representative Pat Carone of Mars points up another concern for areas surrounding fast-growing hubs like Cranberry Township, in her Butler County legislative district. She is concerned over the lack of mass transit, including the possibility that Lincoln Lines may abandon the service it offers into Pittsburgh along State Highway 8.

Carone said that many young people from her area with low-paying jobs in Pittsburgh cannot stay at home and commute because of the lack of mass transit. Therefore, they have to devote more of their income to renting in Pittsburgh.

It is obvious, too, that the lack of mass transit is an inhibiting factor for Pittsburghers who might want to commute by bus to the jobs developing in Cranberry.

Another participant argued that in order to persuade all parts of a region to support the "hot spots" of economic growth—such as the Greater Pittsburgh International Airport—in

fairness there needed to be some form of tax-based sharing. The Minneapolis region has instituted a system whereby a portion of the added tax potential in economically expanded regions is spread to the "left-behind" areas.

PNC's Flora, coming from a metropolitan-planning background in Virginia before he got into banking, believes this region could revitalize itself and its older communities with environmentally sound measures.

For example, in a post-Nemaquin interview, Flora suggested that Pittsburgh corporations place some of their back-office operations in outlying communities, including former milltowns. The formation of a region-wide fiber-optic network linking Pittsburgh and smaller communities could encourage that process, Flora said.

Another step would be using rail lines for a high-speed network so that people could live in Johnstown, say, and work in Greensburg or Pittsburgh, and vice versa.

"I'd like to see such a network connecting the central business districts of places like Johnstown, Uniontown, Morgantown. And have land-use controls so that you would have a green belt around the cities to make them pleasant places in which to



live," Flora said.

Not the least of the benefits would be that people might be able to live in their hometowns and work there, or commute easily to jobs in bigger centers such as Pittsburgh. Conversely, those who wished to live in the large urban centers might be able to commute—without clogging the highways—to jobs in outlying centers.

Flora, who is on a task force on governance recently formed by the Citizens League of Southwestern Pennsylvania, notes that many towns were dying even before the steel industry collapsed. "Pennsylvania is 60 years behind in governance and planning," Flora said.

Although many municipalities are too small really to be practical, Flora goes against the conventional wisdom of many planners by saying, "Let them exist." But, he adds, "They need to be incorporated into larger thinking and not be allowed to block it."

Returning to the theme of land-use planning, Flora concluded, "Who is it you hear saying it is dead? The politicians. So it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy."

The point to be made is that the advent of ISTEA is bringing into the arena some fresh ideas about making compatible the goals of economic de-

velopment, the environment, and quality of life.

The Pennsylvania Environmental Council document embodying the expectations of environmentalists—which they will be diligently watchdogging through the Surface Transportation Policy Project described in Chapter 1—concludes as it began with the statement:

"Clearly, ISTEA is a significant break from earlier transportation policies. ISTEA's primary goal is the efficient mobility of people, rather than the mobility of private cars."

But how will that work out in practice in the give-and-take of transportation politics? On that point, views of Pennsylvania and Pittsburgh "players" in the "game" vary considerably. We turn now to examine a wide assortment of opinions.



CHAPTER 4

Is ISTEA “DRINKABLE”?

It would be easy to depict the upcoming struggles over implementing ISTEA as a David and Goliath scenario.

In this rendering, Goliath is PennDOT—powerful, entrenched, backed by highway contractors, real estate developers, and county and municipal officials intent on building ever more roads.

David is the 14 Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) scattered around Pennsylvania—so frail that they have been called the “mezzanine” layer of government, that is, betwixt and between the better-known, established agencies.

Further, for Southwestern Pennsylvania the scenario would pit “Goliath” Howard Yerusolim against “David” Robert Kochanowski. Yerusolim as state secretary of Transportation heads PennDOT and sits on the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission. Kochanowski heads the Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission (SPRPC), the MPO for Pittsburgh and six surrounding counties.

In personal terms, the analogy doesn’t quite work. Both on the surface are courteous, mild-mannered men—at least not the lung-bursting CEO types one envisions as heading major enterprises. Both are determined men, occasioning debate among their acquaintances as to how flexible they are. That’s because both are professionals used to fighting the kind of bureaucratic turf battles inevitable with so far-reaching a piece of legislation as ISTEA.

Besides, the battle lines are not as simple as “strong” versus “weak.” On each side is a mixed bag of support.

For one instance, on the “David” side you find the environmentalists and the backers of mass transit, seeing ISTEA and its riveting to the federal Clean Air Act as the best chance in decades to implement their goals. And Pennsylvania’s MPOs have the backing of a national organization, the Surface Transportation Planning Project (STPP), composed of major environmental organizations ready to go to court if necessary to make sure that ISTEA doesn’t get too watered down.

STPP held a planning conference in Pittsburgh in January, where the size of the overflow attendance of 315 people from Michigan, Ohio, Penn-



sylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia surprised the sponsors.

But the “David” contingent is not all of one mind.

For example, take a comment from Frank R. Mascara, chairman of the SPRPC’s transportation plan policy committee:

“ISTEA is the Grinch that stole Christmas. It tries to kill our hopes by saying that new highways are a thing of the past.”

Mascara, as chairman of the Washington County Board of Commissioners, is an active proponent of both the Mon Valley Expressway from West Virginia through Uniontown to Pittsburgh and the Southern Beltway to link the Monongahela Valley to the Greater Pittsburgh International Airport. Mascara urges: “Don’t let the fiscal restraint idea stop us.”

It should be noted that another county commissioner with a higher SPRPC role also wants a major new road, but a different one from Mascara. Richard F. Vidmer, chairman of SPRPC, thinks that the first emphasis should be on the Southern Beltway, rather than the Mon Valley Expressway. Vidmer, who is chair of the Westmoreland County Board of Commissioners, wants to link the Latrobe and Greensburg areas more firmly to

the Airport through a Beltway bypass of the Parkway and Downtown Pittsburgh. He sees this also of direct benefit to the Mon Valley.

Some environmentalists worry that Kochanowski’s background is in highway planning, and that, moreover, SPRPC traditionally has not been interested in land use and similar concerns of theirs.

Just how much lobbying clout the environmentalists have is another question. Ray Reaves, Allegheny County planning director, said wryly from experience: “Bikers would rather ride than write.”

William Millar as executive director of the Port Authority Transit (PAT) of Allegheny County is a strong backer of ISTEA because of its emphasis on mass transit. But he worries about two aspects:

One is that the planning can become overelaborate. The other is that environmentalists may go to the courts too soon and too often.

In either case, if the works are gummed up, the public may become impatient and demand that ISTEA be scrapped.

“Congress can pass a law saying that water will run uphill, but so what? Congress hasn’t had much luck passing legislation that ultimately ran



against the public will, with Prohibition being the most obvious example," Millar said.

So Kochanowski has divisions and cautionary counsel within his own ranks as he faces the "Goliath" of PennDOT.

At one point last year, Tom Foerster, chairman of the Allegheny County Board of Commissioners, became so concerned over the growing turf battle between SPRPC and PennDOT that he threatened to establish a new MPO consisting of Allegheny County only. Reportedly, at that point, a chastened SPRPC became more conciliatory toward PennDOT.

On the other side, matters are not that simple either. Even though PennDOT has the ultimate leverage that ISTEA funds will pass through its hands, officials realize the changed landscape ISTEA provides for environmentalists and other citizens' groups.

Yerusalim in an interview in his Harrisburg office gave an example to back his assertion that attitudes toward environmentalism have altered. "As a young highway engineer in the 1970s, I watched our agency fight the new NEPA [National Environmental Policy Act] standards over the Saucon

Park in Lehigh County. PennDOT wanted to run Interstate 78 through the park in spite of NEPA regulations designed to protect such parks. That cost us 11 years in completing that route." The eventual solution was elevating I-78 over Bethlehem's 124-acre Saucon City Park.

The lessons learned in that and similar battles clearly have prompted avowals by Yerusalim and other PennDOT officials that they intend to cooperate fully with the MPOs and environmentalists in implementing ISTEA.

Some environmentalists remain skeptical. But it is significant that PennDOT has agreed to be one of the eight "model" states working directly with the STPP group.

On one point there is general agreement—that ISTEA has changed the transportation landscape.

Yerusalim calls it one of the three major transportation transitions in American history. First, the building of canals and then railroads in the 19th Century. Second, the building of the Interstate Defense Highway system, starting under President Eisenhower in 1956. "Note that word, 'Defense,'" Yerusalim said. "That came from Eisenhower's experience in



learning how long it took him as an officer in the 1930s to move a command of troops across the United States by road."

And, third, ISTEA. "We are in a new era," Yerusalim said. "With the interstate system virtually complete, we now need to turn in the direction of finding better ways to move people and goods *and* have a better environment," Yerusalim said.

Yerusalim's director for planning, Larry King, in a separate interview was emphatic: "If anybody says ISTEA isn't change in capital letters—CHANGE—they are not being realistic." King represents PennDOT on the major MPOS such as SPRPC and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission in the Philadelphia area.

King said that one major advantage in Pennsylvania is that there has always been a good working relationship between PennDOT and the MPOs. "And, speaking of your region, the SPRPC staff is first rate."

As to relations with environmentalists, King said that PennDOT's experience with the STPP group has been positive. But, he added, "There are others who want to tell us how to run our business."

SPRPC's Kochanowski calls ISTEA "a real revolution in decision mak-

ing—an experiment in regional governance—not just in Southwestern Pennsylvania but throughout the nation." Often called "Coke" from the pronunciation of the first syllable of his name, Kochanowski (third syllable rhymes with "how") co-chaired the committee of the National Association of Regional Councils that helped draft ISTEA back in 1991.

Kochanowski is philosophical about the reaction in some quarters. "It's about what we expected. There's a disbelief by some officials who say, 'We're elected; we decide.'"

The SPRPC official said, "We have built a good road system across the country. But the trouble is that people now can't get to work on time. We've lost mobility in the urban regions and, moreover, we've lost urban air quality and therefore urban quality."

The key factors, Kochanowski said, are:

- There must be an equal focus on the region's economy and on air quality.
- There must be a 15 percent reduction in volatile air pollutants by 1996. "Some of that will come from a reduction in stationary sources [such as industry], but there's just going to have to be some reduction in travel."



- Fiscal restraint is built into ISTEA.

"You've got to show where the money is coming from to build a new facility. No more BS list." Kochanowski noted that a making a new road to the airport a toll facility would fit the "fiscal restraint" category.

PAT's Millar said: "Those who think in terms of business-as-usual will be disappointed. ISTEA has the framework for bringing new people to the table. In the past, if you hung in long enough you could always get your highway built. ISTEA says that is no longer true. Perseverance is not enough. A project must "be realistic about money. Adhere to air-quality requirements. Be sensitive to *all* the needs of a community. Therefore," Millar concludes, "some roads and some transit systems won't be built."

Ray Reaves, Allegheny County planning director, put it this way: "We really are having to face up to the question: What is the purpose of our transportation system?"

Jane Downing, director of planning for the City of Pittsburgh, assesses ISTEA this way: "The flexibility in it is a planner's dream. But it also becomes a real nightmare in using that flexibility because we don't have the framework of a history of making regional planning decisions."

Under the surface is a concern by Pittsburgh and Allegheny County officials that, because of the makeup of the board of SPRPC, they may suffer in comparison to the past. George Whitmer, executive secretary for the mayor of Pittsburgh, noted that each of the six counties has three representatives (and the City of Pittsburgh three), although Allegheny County is four times as large as any. That means that at pie-cutting time the "doughnut" can outvote the "hole" every time.

"To everyone's credit, that has not been an issue up to now," Whitmer added.

A particular example of the tension rising between the "doughnut" and the "hole" is the routing of the Mon Valley Expressway.

The region to the south has wanted the expressway to hook directly into the Parkway East, roughly in the Hazelwood area. Its spokespersons bitterly reject—as a callous disregard of the plight of the Mon Valley—the idea put forward by some officials in Allegheny County that the northern tollgate should be somewhere in the Glassport area, with traffic then fed through upgraded routes such as State Highways 51, 837, and 88, and, to the east through State 48. To these Mon Valley leaders, that would defeat the



whole purpose of a direct connection to Pittsburgh.

But Planning Director Downing thinks it is folly to dump another 45,000 cars a day directly onto the 52,000 vehicles already using the Parkway East inbound into Downtown Pittsburgh. "You'd save 15 minutes using the toll road from the south and then hit the Parkway and lose all of your traffic savings and more with the backup line clear to Churchill. Moreover, people would begin taking alternate routes, such as Braddock Avenue, impacting city streets."

Downing hastens to add, "Of course, we want people to get to town—hospitals, shopping. But we want to achieve it without a negative impact on the city."

In a search for a compromise, planners have come up with a plan to run one-way traffic lanes on each side of the Monongahela River to make that direct connection from the Valley to the Pittsburgh core.

Even that concept has yet to be tested in terms of the communities it may jostle, such as tiny Duck Hollow on the Mon in the Squirrel Hill area. Downing herself recalled that the late Mayor Richard Caliguiri continually warned, "Don't tear our neighborhoods apart."

And in a session on the subject, Pittsburgh Councilman Dan Onorato recalled the turmoil on the North Side caused by the building of the East Street Valley Highway (now Interstate 279). He said neighborhoods there were sacrificed, yet North Siders have been shortchanged on access ramps to and from that throughway.

At the STPP conference in January, a persistent question from the floor was whether the Turnpike Authority was open to any alternative consultant studies that would take into account neighborhood anxieties.

Clearly, there are those who are counting on ISTEA either to derail the Mon Valley Expressway, or at least shape it more to their satisfaction.

Similarly, the proposed Southern Beltway is a bone of contention. Pittsburgh officials frankly see its bypass characteristic as a greater threat to the wellbeing of the core area than the Mon Valley Expressway.

And opposition is rising in municipalities along the Allegheny-Washington county line. Not surprisingly, officials of each county would like the 20,000-cars-a-day road and its consequent development to be on their side of the line. But their constituents don't always agree.

For example, Peters Township in



Washington County at a meeting attended by 1,000 citizens enlisted 350 volunteers to serve on committees studying the legal, financing, engineering, historical, environmental, and public relations aspects of the proposed alignment. Moreover, the township in 1992 appropriated \$60,000 in general fund money for the work of those committees for the fight, of which \$47,000 was spent for engineering and legal studies. The township budgeted another \$150,000 for 1993—something that angers their neighbor municipalities along the Mon. “How can they justify using tax money for that?” one Mon Valley official testily asked.

Michael Silvestri, Peters Township manager, said that although a lawsuit against PennDOT or the Turnpike Commission was contemplated, the situation now may have been resolved in a February 1993 meeting with the Turnpike Commission. The commission agreed to push the alignment closer to the township’s southern border, and perhaps as far south as into North Strabane and Nottingham Townships. “Our major contention is that the highway should be closer to the township borders, not splitting the township in half,” Silvestri said.

However, some backers of the

Beltway have concerns that if the alignment is too closely parallel to Interstate 70, it may not fly.

Meanwhile, in the northern part of the region, opposition is rising in Allegheny County’s Marshall Township to the routing of the Crow’s Run Expressway from Interstate 79 in their municipality to State Highway 65 on the Ohio River at Conway. Marshall citizens there want it pushed farther north into Butler County.

The Crows Run Road itself may be an interesting test of ISTEA. It is a “special project road” mandated by Congress—that is, inserted into a region regardless of that region’s plans. Former Congressman Joe Kolter is given the credit for this one.

Kochanowski points out that there are 13 of what he calls “pork-barrel” roads designated by Congress for this region—“more than in any other part of the country.” The question is whether the likes of Crows Run will stand muster under the more rigorous standards of ISTEA.

In the past, so long as the extra money was forthcoming, officials didn’t mind having these roads “jammed” down their throats. Now when every new highway counts against a region’s pollution and fiscal-constraints totals under ISTEA, even the



“nailed-down” projects may get a long, second look.

As Kochanowski points out, the funding to meet everything on the various “wish lists” for this region now on SPRPC’s desk total around \$10 billion. The amount available between now and 1996, including projected ISTEA money, is only about \$2 billion.

Something will have to give. Add in a comment by PAT’s Millar: “Do we trust our future to the highway engineers... or to something broader? You can’t build yourself out of highway congestion.”

And you see the potential impact of ISTEA on highway-builders’ “field of dreams.”

At this point, however, a San Francisco survey has given highway backers a set of “cake-and-eat-it-too” hopes.

Thomas Larson, head of the federal Highway Administration, in one of his final weekly reports as an outgoing Bush administration official listed what he called a number of “facts” to offset “myths.” His “Fact No. 3” reads: “Massive shifts in transportation, highway versus transit, for example, will not by themselves achieve air quality goals.”

Larson then cited the experience of the San Francisco Bay Area’s Metro-

politan Transportation Commission (MTC) as follows:

In the MTC region an \$11 billion investment overwhelmingly concentrated on new HOV [high occupancy vehicle] facilities (to the tune of 380 lane miles); new transit lines, and local arterial improvements resulted in a reduction in CO [carbon monoxide] of—0.9% and in ROG [reactive organic gases, a key component of smog] of—.08%. MTC’s 1992 plan showed little variation in emissions between huge transit and huge highway investment, Larson reported.

Note: One problem cited with mass transit is that to make it work in the sprawling suburbs, there have to be park-and-ride arrangements. Highway backers say that the pollution caused by all the cold starts in those parking lots obliterates all the “savings” from transit.

Larson in his report contends: “Those who know me and those who have followed this weekly series of communications these past four years know that I care deeply about the environment and clean air. I commute by transit, favor biking and walking, and enjoy both. I have pushed hard to make the values of our April 1990 Environmental Policy Statement a day-to-day part of our lives, not just lofty ideas.



"But I am also the federal highway administrator and am acutely aware of our country's dependence on highways, our need for mobility. I share Harvard Professor Marc Roberts' belief that we in government must be 'straight' with the American people. As he pointed out . . . one reason confidence in our government and our nation's strength has been eroded is that lawmakers, policy makers, and agencies, all with the most laudable objectives, create or cater to unrealistic and simplistic expectations about programs and policies," Larson wrote.

His "facts" list:

Fact 1. Americans want both improved mobility and cleaner air.

Fact 2. Air pollution is not worsening. Larson cites a federal Environmental Protection Agency news release of Oct. 19, 1992, announcing that its 19th annual urban air quality trends report shows "continuing progress in reducing six major pollutants over the 10-year period 1982-91."

Fact 3. Described above.

Fact 4. Investment in transportation control measures (TCMs) will not make a significant difference in air quality, but can reduce congestion. Larson said that "many environmental groups are particularly supportive of TCMs, such as employer-trip reduc-

tion programs, auto disincentives, congestion pricing, and bike/pedestrian programs, as part of a major shift away from highways.

"Nevertheless, the data coming from university researchers and metropolitan planning organizations provides convincing evidence that the impact of TCMs on emission is so small, less than 1 percent, as to be below the accuracy of our measuring ability."

Larson then goes on to make what some might term a concession: "Happily, even though evidence indicates TCMs won't have a significant impact on air quality, we need to consider them for their benefits in reducing congestion and improving mobility."

Fact 5. Increased auto travel need not worsen air quality.

Larson's reasoning:

"As a result of federal requirements, most cars emit very small amounts of pollution. Most auto emissions—60 percent—come from just 10 percent of the cars, the 'gross polluters.' Some suggest we buy replacements for those 20 percent gross polluters as a cost-effective way to improve air quality."

The federal administrator's newsletter then listed such assets in this battle as (1) EPA's enhanced inspec-



tion and maintenance program; (2) reformulated gasoline; (3) oxygenated fuels; (4) vapor recovery devices; (5) new tailpipe standards; (6) the phasing out of pre-1980 automobiles; and (7) the promise of new internal combustion engines. He concluded that all of these hold promise that most cities should be able to meet the requirements with room to spare.

Environmentalists are not so sure. Brian Hill of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council holds that these various measures well may enable cities and regions to meet initial standards (such as the 1996 deadlines for Southwestern Pennsylvania) but not the 3-percent-per-year reduction standards after that. After you have used up the available remedies, he asks, what is left to meet tighter standards in the face of ever mounting vehicle traffic?

For the time being, however, it seems that there can be a congruence of opinion and effort around two of the elements listed by Larson. At least, PennDOT administrator Howard Yerusolim thinks so.

One point of agreement is that of the need to relieve congestion. Even though Yerusolim believes the environmentalists are barking up the

wrong tree in pushing mass transit and the so-called enhancements as ways to cut pollution, he agrees with them that there is a need to reduce the congestion that is clogging road systems.

There may be differences of opinion as to the best ways to do that, but clearly it is a common goal for all the groups involved.

Note: One argument used by those pushing for limited-access highways, including toll roads, is the assumption that they create less pollution than stop-and-go on such stoplight-beset roads as State Highways 51 and 88. Yerusolim said that, for example, computer models have shown that the "build scenario" for the Mon Valley Expressway is about the same in pollution terms as the "don't build" scenario.

The other common ground is the idea of improving motor-vehicle emission equipment and inspections. Yerusolim believes that the implementation of the new tailpipe standards coupled with new inspection techniques will do more to alleviate pollution than many people believe. On the latter, he is referring to two elements:

(1) Requirements that older cars come up to the standard they had when they were manufactured. A car built with a catalytic converter must have it in new-model shape; one that



never had one is, of course, exempt.

(2) State inspections that will require an emissions test—via a dynamometer—while the car is on the road, rather than while at rest, as at present.

In his Harrisburg interview, Yerusalim, in asserting there could be cooperation not confrontation, said ISTEA itself strikes a balance between those dedicated to past practices and those with what he called “a social agenda.”

Yerusalim said he was particularly impressed with the ability of the ecology-oriented advisory committee on transportation to act quickly and ably in choosing “enhancement” projects for the coming two years. Contrary to some predictions, he said, the group chose 44 “enhancement” projects for \$20 million from among 421 applications that would have required \$217 million. (See box, page 19.)

This is not to say that all is quiet on the environmental front. There remains a suspicion of PennDOT’s motives, often reflecting the anti-establishment attitudes of some citizens and citizens’ groups who feel they’ve been short-circuited in the past.

At a recent strategy session, one participant said, “The state departments of transportation always said

they have a good public process. But people think it is rotten. Citizens on those advisory committees never have a chance to vote where it counts . . . before the decisions have been made. We’ve got to make sure that this changes under ISTEA.”

Another environmentalist asserted, “We have to change the way we manage the land. How do we want to use the land? In the most economically sound way? Then you plan the land use that way.”

Here is the heart of the agenda for many environmentalists—that suburban sprawl and the connecting highways that make it possible constitute a wasteful use of resources, including the augmentation of pollution.

Allegheny County Planning Director Reaves thinks that public hearings by themselves are no longer the answer. “Different interest groups get up and read their speeches, and that’s the end of that. An agency then can go back and do what it wanted to all along, but able to claim the matter was aired publicly,” Reaves said.

The answer that Reaves proposes is what he calls “workshops,” where representatives of different groups sit around a table and hold real discussions in which not only are opinions aired but solutions and compromises



can be bargained on the spot.

Robert Zapsic, planning director for Beaver County, worries that even under the best of circumstances “trickle-down cooperation” often doesn’t work. “When a project gets to the local level, there are many ways to submarine the best of intentions. You get the same old politics!”

Another example of interesting thinking comes from Vijai Singh, vice provost of the University of Pittsburgh. Singh, also director of the University Center for Social and Urban Research at Pitt, makes two major points:

First, “Shouldn’t we be thinking of what we *don’t* need in the way of infrastructure? Are we trying to maintain too much? Are there some bridges, roads and buildings that should be scrapped?”

While this might sound bizarre to some, Singh said, it might free money for constructing and maintaining infrastructure items that really are needed for the future.

Second, Singh believes the region dare not abandon its emphasis on manufacturing, including heavy industry. Jobs in that field are the only real way to keep up the level of income for the region. High-tech, of course, is important, the Pitt official said. But

industrial jobs are the key.

Therefore, Singh went on: “We should be thinking of what this region will need during the next 10, 15, 25 years to enhance that objective.”

If ISTEA is not the ultimate vehicle for such planning, its importance clearly cannot be discounted.

One facet of ISTEA about which all are concerned is that of federal funding.

ISTEA and all its concepts are all very fine, but they’ll mean little unless Congress comes through with the money promised. *Note: Congress must first authorize the spending of money, but the amount of money in the next step—the appropriations bills—is what really counts.*

PennDOT’s Yerusalim said that despite the greater-than-ever amounts listed in the ISTEA legislation, “there hasn’t been any increase in actual appropriations.”

For instance, \$20.3 billion was authorized for the first year, but Congress appropriated only \$18 billion.

That meant that Pennsylvania got the same \$700 million as the year before, instead of the \$900 million expected—a \$200 million “shortfall” in terms of expectations.

PAT’s Millar said that for all the talk about ISTEA’s helping transit, the



appropriation for fiscal '93 is that same as for fiscal '92. "We may have to adjust people's expectations if this is the pattern," Millar noted.

In a real sense, even ISTEA doesn't measure up to the past. In the 1980-81 year, the last under President Carter, PAT received \$15.8 million for operating functions. "Today we receive \$8.7 million. So even if ISTEA were fully appropriated, we wouldn't be back to that Carter-era figure," Millar said.

For another comparison: In the late '70s, highway got two federal dollars for every one transit dollar. Now the ratio in favor of highways has grown to 4 1/2 to 1.

Moreover, Millar notes that the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials says at least \$45 billion a year is needed for highway investment. "So the money available doesn't come near the need. And they talk about flexibility and transferring money. But if there is only \$18 billion available for highways, won't the resistance to transfers be very high? Obviously, if a lot more money were thrown into the pot, it would make it much easier to talk about transfers," Millar said.

Likewise, the hopes of environmentalists, bicyclists, and hikers of big dollops of "enhancement" money will de-

pend upon how forthcoming Congress is in actually appropriating the promised money for ISTEA.

It goes without saying that the less money that is available the more potential acrimony and battles among the various factions now brought to the table by ISTEA.



CHAPTER 5

SOME OBSERVATIONS

ISTEA offers the best opportunity in decades for a cooperative effort among all the forces interested in transportation in its many ramifications.

It also has the potential for infighting and law suits that will cripple the state and the region. Each of the numerous sides has weapons with which to fight and damage the others.

Environmentalists and other interest groups have on their side a growing realization on the part of the public and of the powers-that-be of the importance of enhancing the quality of life. Moreover, they can file law-suits—as they have done in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut—to force compliance with ISTEA stipulations.

More than ever, they will be able to muster resistance in neighborhoods both urban and rural to superhighways that knife through willy-nilly. But if their advocacy and litigation gums up the works too much in a motorized culture, they risk a legislative backlash.

The Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), such as the Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Plan-

ning Commission (SPRPC), have power, responsibility, and financing as never before. But they, too, will have to go beyond their transportation-only responsibility and fixation of the past. Moreover, they still will receive their funding through the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), required to fit with the 12-year state transportation plans mandated by the Pennsylvania legislature.

PennDOT remains in a powerful position—the 800-pound gorilla in some worried minds—but subject to more power-sharing than ever before. It and its construction-industry and development-minded backers need to realize that there are growing questions about whether ever more roads are the answer even in a society as motorized as ours.

A common cause around which all can unite is that of enhancing the quality of life for all. The challenge for Southwestern Pennsylvanians is through ISTEA to leave our region a better place for our children and our children's children to live in the 21st century.

Obviously, for some, “a better quality of life” means a particular connector road to job centers, for others a bikeway, for others more mass transit,



for still others less congestion, for others less motor traffic, period. And all these objectives constrained in a fiscal framework where no one can have it all.

Talk of the need to cooperate and compromise is a cliché, irksome to hear. But that is democracy, and it is the only way to avoid disaster under ISTEA.

The point is that we either can be scorpions in a bottle or follow the pattern of bees in a beehive capably working together.

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