

## Corridor Project Remains on Target

By Margaret Gibbons  
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COURTHOUSE — Gov. Ed Rendell's proposal to lease the Pennsylvania Turnpike will not impact the proposed Lafayette Street Corridor project in Norristown, according to Montgomery County Transportation Planning Chief Leo D. Bagley.

The construction of a new electronic Norristown interchange on the turnpike is a major part of the transportation project that many believe is vital in providing the economic spark needed for the revitalization of Norristown's downtown business district.

The county already has secured a commitment of \$75 million from the state Turnpike Commission, which included the interchange in its capital program.

Rendell told county officials all prior capital funding commitments will be honored if the turnpike is leased.

And Monday, in announcing he has secured a \$12.8-million binding bid from a private investment firm for a proposed 75-year turnpike lease, the governor said any "new operator will ensure implementation of the current 10-year capital investment plan for the roadway."

Also, if the county opts to move forward with its proposed innovative method of financing a large part of the remaining portion of the \$160-million Lafayette Street project with a user fee added to the toll at the interchange, the private firm leasing the turnpike would be cooperative, said Bagley.

"The governor, who supports our idea, said that would be one of the issues negotiated in any lease agreement," said Bagley.

The county solicitor's office is currently investigating whether the county can add a 50-cent to one-dollar surcharge to the toll for those using the proposed Norristown interchange. The funds generated by the user fee would be used to pay back some \$48 million that the county would borrow for the project to offset the loss in state revenue that the county had been counting on for the project.

In addition to the new interchange, the Lafayette Street project calls for the rebuilding of the current Lafayette Street, extending it to the new interchange and the reconstruction or improvements on Ridge Pike, Conshohocken Road, Diamond Avenue and Fairfield Road and Lucetta Street.

The governor's proposal to lease the turnpike still must pass muster with the state legislature.

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