

## Opinion

# HUSKEY: A partnership made in heaven

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Editor

Most everyone has a partner.

They don't necessarily have to be of the human kind, but most people do partner up at some point in their lives.

I found a great partner.

While it took a good portion of my life to find the perfect partner, there are some partnerships that can be forged in short order, if both sides are willing.

Public-private partnerships will be absolutely necessary in the future if we expect to pull off projects without raising taxes every time a bridge needs to be replaced, or a slip ramp needs to be built.

State Sen. John Rafferty has proposed a bill that would allow for the creation of public-private partnerships, which would open the door for the private sector to join forces with the commonwealth on transportation and infrastructure projects.

I was speaking with John — he said I could call him John — recently and I told him there was a rumor floating around that he was responsible for putting the kibosh on the Lafayette Street Corridor Project.

As head of the Senate Transportation Committee John wields a lot of power, but, he said, he doesn't wield that kind of power.

He said the slip ramp, which is a major component of the Lafayette Street Corridor Project, was struck down by the Turnpike Commission. That makes sense. The slip ramp would come off the Turnpike after all. Now I don't know all the ins and outs of the transportation committee, and I'm not as naïve as some people might think, but having someone of Sen. Rafferty's stature on board with the project certainly wouldn't hurt things.

For those of you who don't know, there has been a project on the books for at least a dozen years that would connect Lafayette Street in Norristown with the Pennsylvania Turnpike at the east end of the street.

In fact, I can remember actually covering a meeting at the Citizens Bank building more than a dozen years ago where the whole, beautiful plan was laid out.

There was going to be a Norristown exit off the Turnpike. I know, you might be saying to yourself there already is a Norristown exit off the Turnpike, but we've been down this road before.

The Norristown exit off the Turnpike drops people off in Plymouth. If you weren't from around here, it is highly doubtful you could even find Norristown from the Norristown exit.

What a great plan, I thought oh those many years ago.

Here it is 2011, and I'm now writing a column about partnerships because, in reality, that's probably the only way the exit will ever be built.

I guess without bringing the right partner to the dance, though, you really can't cut a rug.

Of course, back then, public-private partnerships weren't really the "in" thing. I don't even know if they were the thing at all.

But let's travel down this highway a little longer, shall we?

What's wrong with asking private companies that will most likely make a killing if the exit ramp were ever to get built to kick in some bucks for the project?

I'm thinking, but I'm not coming up with a lot.

I could ask my partner when I get home, but that would be too late for this column.

If a public-private bill ever reaches the floor of the Senate, and then the House, I'm hoping every member of the state legislature partners up and votes in favor.

This is the future.

If it's not, then we're simply looking at never-ending taxation for any project that must get done. Wait a minute. We have that now, don't we?

So why not try something new for a change?

A venture like the Lafayette Street Corridor Project would benefit the entire region. The Turnpike would actually make money off the project.

In fact, it was the only one of the three projects that were scrapped last year that was a money-maker. So if local business leaders get together and realize the potential a

Norristown exit off the Turnpike could have for the local economy, they just might want to invest, right?

I think the state has to throw a little perfume on to entice a few new beaus, like perhaps a little return on investment.

Partners aren't easy to come by, so if an entrepreneur or two is willing to step forward to take a chance on a new relationship, both sides should be willing to put forth some commitment. Without commitment it's really easy for one side to walk away.

So I'm going to take you back now to a column I wrote some time ago.

Imagine yourself traveling along the Turnpike when you just have to take a break, so you pull off at the next exit.

There's a big, sweeping ramp that curves right onto a huge boulevard that's lined with massive antique lamp posts. Within a short distance there are shops on either side of the road, and you spot a coffee shop. Exactly what you need to break the travel doldrums, so you pull over and park. After sitting at a sidewalk table sipping your coffee for a few minutes you decide to take a walk to stretch your legs.

Within a few minutes you find yourself standing in a large piazza with a band playing at one end and street performers at the other.

You realize you have to get back on the road, so as you're walking back to your car you gather flyers from each of the stores and restaurants along the way, knowing you'll be back soon.

Now, imagine you just spent the break in the afternoon in Norristown.

It could happen.

And next time, bring your partner with you.