

# Montco transportation authority proposed

Published: Sunday, September 05, 2010

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COURTHOUSE — The Montgomery County Commissioners proposed forming a Montgomery County Transportation Authority to streamline the Lafayette Street Corridor project and future property acquisition and condemnations.

Currently, second-class counties, which include Montgomery, Bucks, Delaware, Allegheny and Berks, do not have condemnation power under state law, according to Solicitor Barry Miller.

“Right now, the county does not enjoy that power,” he said.

Miller was unsure whether the counties were purposely or inadvertently left out of the state law.

The vote, which the commissioners unanimously approved, expresses officials’ intention to form the authority. A public hearing on the plan will be held at 10 a.m. on Oct. 13 at the beginning of a scheduled commissioners meeting.

A nine-member board would be appointed to work exclusively on transportation improvement issues, which would not include mass transit.

The planned authority should also expedite condemnation for future projects.

“We own a lot of roads in Montgomery County, and an authority would help with easements and right-of-ways,” said county planner Leo Bagley.

Given the uncertain economic times, Montgomery County planners yanked a planned November 2009 referendum on a \$150 million transportation program.

However, officials are considering putting the proposed county transportation authority on the referendum in November 2011.

The \$125 million Lafayette Street corridor extension to the Pennsylvania Turnpike and the reconstruction, which is intended to revitalize Norristown, is slated to begin next year.

Construction of the four-lane road connection from Lafayette and Ford streets to Conshohocken Road is scheduled in 2011 and 2012, according to the county Planning Commission.

Ridge Pike intersection construction at Diamond Avenue and at a new “connector road” to the Lafayette extension would be completed in 2013 and 2014. Widening and rebuilding the existing Lafayette Street from Barbadoes to Ford streets in Norristown would be completed in 2015 and 2016.

The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission will build the EZ-pass toll plaza and entrance and exit ramps on the turnpike between 2014 and 2017.