

Montgomery County Funds Impact Study

By Margaret Gibbons
The Times Herald
7/17/08

COURTHOUSE - Montgomery County is going to get updated traffic projections and impacts for the proposed Lafayette Street Corridor project in Norristown's downtown business district.

The commissioners have awarded a \$75,000 contract to the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission to put together this information.

The county will pay \$15,000 out of its own pocket for the new numbers while the remaining \$60,000 will come from federal funds earmarked for the project.

The last traffic modeling, which also was performed by the DVRPC, was done in 2004 during the preliminary design work. The project is now moving into the final design phase.

In addition to projections, traffic modeling also determines the impact of the project on other intersections and provides recommendations on where traffic lights and turning lanes are needed.

"It's really an impact study of a new use of a road," explained Commissioners Chairman James R. Matthews.

The new traffic projections will be of particular importance if the county seeks to borrow funds to finance the project, according to Commissioner Joseph M. Hoeffel III.

"You have to have up-to-date numbers on the amount of traffic that will be generated particularly if you intend to use revenues from the proposed interchange to pay back the money," said Hoeffel.

The proposed Lafayette Street project, which many officials believe is key to the revitalization of Norristown, includes the construction of a new electronic toll interchange on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. The toll would link with a Lafayette Street that would be extended beyond Ford Street to the new toll.

The project would also include the rebuilding of the current Lafayette Street, pedestrian improvements along that roadway as well as improvements on Ridge Pike, Conshohocken Road, Diamond Avenue and Fairfield Road and Lucetta Street.

The county has secured a \$75-million commitment from the state Turnpike Commission for interchange. The county had been willing to put up an additional \$17 million in county funds for construction of the approximate \$160-million project while relying on the state for the remainder of the funds.

Advised that there would be no money coming from the state, the county has proposed borrowing the money to finance the project.

The county has proposed paying off this debt by adding a fee of 50 cents to one dollar to the toll for motorists using the new interchange.

The county now is exploring the legality and feasibility of this financing proposal.

If the county goes forward with this financial approach, Gov. Ed Rendell has pledged to scrape together \$10 million in state funds to help out.

This would mean that the county would have to borrow some \$48-million-plus for the project.

Margaret Gibbons can be reached at mgibbons@timesherald.com or 610-272-2501 ext. 216.

©The Times Herald 2008